

**MAPPING THE VIRTUAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF
GEOTAGGED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION HUB: CIREBON
PRUJAKAN STATION IN THE VIRTUAL LENS**

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Abstract

Linguistics landscape as the study of the identity of a region based on the public signs used in the area has reached its development to the level of virtual linguistic landscape. Virtual linguistic landscape investigates the visibility of language in the virtual world as the linguistic landscape in the physical world does. Virtual linguistic landscape, however, doesn't always represent the physical environment but provides a new space for language interaction with more dynamic situations. This article attempts to explore the virtual linguistic landscape using a virtual geographic tag Cirebon Prujakan Station on Instagram. Adopting the concept of public signage Laundry & Bourhis (1997) and identifying individual identity based on membership categorisation (Waring, 2017), this study illustrates the proposed approach in a case study covering 100 posts with captions tagging Cirebon Prujakan Station. The main findings show a multilingual environment in the geotagged Cirebon Prujakan Station with Indonesian as the dominant language. It indicates the power of the Indonesian language in the virtual environment. Other than that, English is found to be the second most visible language used by a body of individuals who pass through Cirebon Prujakan Station. The analysis also reveals that social identity based on membership categorisation is constructed in the virtual geotag of Cirebon Prujakan Station mostly using hashtags that show individual self-representation.

Keywords: identity, language, virtual landscape linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most flexible and pervasive identity builders whose use can be seen in public spaces. The language used in public spaces can reflect the identity of the community inhabiting a particular area. In this case, the linguistic landscape plays an important role in examining the identity of a region based on the signs of the community used. The linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and position of language on public and commercial signs in a particular area (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Based on the definition, the linguistics landscape can describe the dominant language in a region and reflect how the community and policymakers position the language as an identity that makes a particular geographic area have different characteristics from other regions.

The close relationship between linguistic landscape and geographical boundaries provides a new perspective regarding the use of language in public spaces that needs further investigation. Recently, technological developments have made it easy for humans to cross geographical boundaries. The development of digital communication and interaction technology has created a new environment where language for communication and identity construction can occur. The digital environment provides a

new space for people to show their identities, as they show their identities in public spaces in the physical world (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). This leads to the development of the linguistic landscape into a virtual linguistic landscape, where cyberspace is also considered a public space where language as an identity can interact.

Analogous to the physical linguistic landscapes, Virtual Linguistic Landscapes depict linguistic communities and mark the status of languages within the power relations expressed among the linguistic choices that coexist in virtual communities (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). This shows that the virtual linguistic landscape attempts to answer how the virtual community uses language through digital media. Early conceptualisations of the virtual linguistic landscape argued that virtual environments can innovatively package and reposition languages in an open universe with new interactive possibilities, thus creating a linguistic ecology that does not represent the physical world (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). Based on the statement, virtual linguistic landscapes will be able to be performed to explore language as an identity marker of a community in the virtual world in a certain context.

In this regard, Ivkovic and Lotherington (2009) explained the concept of virtual linguistic landscapes in various Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 applications and environments. In their study, Ivkovic and Lotherington (2009) found that, despite being grounded in the same concept of multilingual interaction, Virtual Linguistic Landscapes and Physical Linguistic Landscapes exhibit distinct characteristics. Furthermore, research on virtual linguistic landscapes in Web 3.0 environments such as Twitter and Instagram has been conducted by Blackwood (2019) and McMonagle (2023). Blackwood (2019) used Instagram to explore the approach to self-representation on social media from a multilingual and multimodality perspective. The research data was specified based on posts that tagged the physical location of Orly Airport on the Instagram platform. Besides, McMonagle (2023) analysed tweets about the European Day of Languages collected using hashtags to explore the visibility and superiority of the languages used in the corpus. The study shows the presence of a multilingual community in the virtual environment with English as the most visible language, thus indicating the virtual community in the context studied as part of global citizens. In addition, Blackwood's (2019) study provides an overview of how virtual communities passing through Orly airport show their identities as confident, experienced, open-to-culture travellers, and use branded and high-value goods.

Based on the development of virtual linguistic landscape studies as previously mentioned, this study attempts to explore the use and visibility of language as a construction of identity through Instagram captions tagging the location of Cirebon Prujakan Station. Instagram as a platform that allows its users to share content consisting of visuals and text becomes a space that also represents the identity of its users as seen from how language is used in that space. This study limits the context of virtual space to the geotag (geographic tag) of Cirebon Prujakan Station on Instagram so that only content uploaded by tagging the location of Cirebon Prujakan Station is examined. A geotag on Instagram functions to inform the audience where the images shared by users were taken. A study by Chan et al., (2022) states that most Instagram users tag their photos or videos while travelling. It indicates the development of linguistic landscape studies in a particular geographical area that is physically available and represented through digital space.

The geotag of Cirebon Prujakan Station was selected because it is one of the major stations including Cirebon Operation Area III. Built on the route connecting Semarang and Cirebon, Cirebon Prujakan Station has played a major role since the colonial era as a solution to the transportation crisis of the Dutch East Indies which had 27 sugar factories throughout its network (Lutfianti & Wahid, 2023). Its major role since the colonial era made Cirebon Prujakan Station designated as a Cultural Heritage Station Building Based on the Decree of the Minister of Culture and Tourism No: PM.58/PW.007/MKP/2010. This has implications for the role of Cirebon Prujakan Station as one of the cultural heritages that need to be preserved. Moreover, Cirebon Operation Area III experiences a significant annual growth in passenger traffic. At least in the first semester of 2024, 1.9 million

passengers were recorded as passing through the route where Prujakan Station served at least 211,863 passengers. As a significant transportation hub on the island of Java, Cirebon Prujakan Station has the potential to have a diversity of language use. Thus, choosing the geographic tag of Cirebon Prujakan Station is crucial for research, as it allows for an analysis of the language and identity interactions occurring virtually on Instagram.

Building on the previously discussed background, this article seeks to answer how languages are used in Instagram captions by individuals who tag Cirebon Prujakan Station on the platform. Using language grouping analysis in landscape linguistics by Landry and Bourhis (1997), this study aims to explore the visibility of language uploaded using the Cirebon Prujakan Station geotag on Instagram. In addition, language analysis as a marker of social identity based on Waring (2018) is used to detect how a group of individuals who tagged the Cirebon Prujakan Station geographic tag on Instagram represent themselves in the virtual world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 From physical to virtual linguistics landscape

Linguistic landscape (hereinafter referred to as LL) according to Landry and Bourhis (1997) refers to the visibility and position of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. The study of linguistic landscape is an applied linguistic study that intersects with the concepts of other disciplines such as sociolinguistics, multilingualism, language policy, cultural geography, semiotics, literature, education, and social psychology (Erikha, 2018). In the current sociolinguistic discourse, Ivkovic and Lotherington (2009) synthesise the definition of linguistic landscape especially in the context of language policy and language planning, as a study used to characterise and analyse multilingual signs in public spaces and their role in defining the socio-political and sociolinguistic character of a particular area.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) divided the core functions of linguistic landscapes into two main categories which are informational functions and symbolic functions. The informational function presents the linguistic landscape as a distinctive marker of a geographical area inhabited by a particular language community. In addition, the consistent use of one language in the linguistic landscape of an area can contribute to the clarity of language boundaries between adjacent language groups in a particular geographical area (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). This confirms that a specific language usage in an area becomes a marker that distinguishes one language community from others in an adjacent area.

Furthermore, the basic function of linguistic landscape as a symbolic function is related to the perception that the language of a language community has value and status compared to other languages in the sociolinguistic environment (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The predominant language in a region indicates that the language holds authority and influence within its community of speakers. The presence or absence of rival languages in a particular linguistic domain can symbolize the strength or weakness of competing ethnolinguistic groups in the intergroup environment (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). It indicates that the language usage in a particular space presents a social identity, and serves as symbol of power for its speakers.

The use of language that reflects the dominance of a group of speakers in a region allows space for other languages to be used as a minority. In other words, the language used in a region is not linguistically homogeneous (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Therefore, Landry and Bourhis (1997) group public signs of language into unilingual (one language), bilingual (two languages), and multilingual (multilingual). The comparison between the diversity of these language groups can reflect the relative power and status of competing language groups (Bourhis, 1992 in Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Similar to the LL theory proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), the Virtual Linguistic Landscape aims to depict the visibility and position of language from the virtual environment as linguistic landscape

describes the linguistic landscape in the physical environment. However, there are differences between LL and LLV that make LLV in certain cases considered not to represent the physical environment. Biro (2018) put forward four differences between LL and LLV, namely 1) if LL is based on the physical geographic environment, LLV is a virtual world that occurs with computer mediation, 2) LL reflects the language situation in the real world while LLV does not always reflect the language situation in the real world, 3) signage in LL is usually more permanent and stable while LLV is temporary, dynamic, renewable, and generally low cost, and 4) in LL speakers interact within spatial boundaries while LLV is delocalised and anyone from anywhere (who has internet access) can enter and be involved in it.

LLV refers to the increasing breadth of multilingual interaction because it can be associated with the diversity of languages “out there” or with certain user groups with the linguistic resources they have, while multilingual discourse can also be characterised by language translation, code-switching, or code-mixing (Biro, 2018). If code-switching refers to the phenomenon of inserting or mixing words, phrases and sentences from two codes in the same speech event in different sentences, code-mixing involves the insertion or mixing of various linguistic units, namely morphemes, words, phrases and clauses from two different grammatical systems or subsystems in the same sentence and speech situation (Tay, 1989). Those phenomena tend to occur in a multilingual environment to support their communicative strategy and as a stage of language learning (Anastassiou, 2017).

2.2 *Social identity*

In examining the identity expressed through language, one of the analytical tools that can be applied is social identity. Social identity refers to aspects of identity that show specific relationships in social roles, groups, and institutional positions (Waring, 2018). Gee (2000) as cited in Waring (2018) describes social identity as comprising two forms: institutional identity, which pertains to an individual's social role, such as holding the title of professor, and affinity identity, which relates to one's experiences within a specific group, like being a fan of a community. In line with this, Zimmerman (1998) in Waring (2018) uses the term situated identity to refer to a particular identity formed in a specific institutional context such as teachers and students or doctors and patients.

In negotiating social identity, membership categorisation analysis contributes to understanding how identity might be used in an interaction to achieve certain goals (Waring, 2018). The central concept of membership categorisation analysis is membership categorisation device (from now on referred to as MCD) which refers to a set of membership categories matched by the application of its rules, in which categories are classifications of social types that may be used to describe a person (Waring, 2018). There are several types of MCD presented by Waring (2018), namely 1) Pn-adequate MCD such as age and gender, 2) Organization, which consists of team-types such as football teams and families, positioned categories such as babies, teenagers, adults, and standard relationship couples such as husband and wife, teacher-student, and so on.

METHOD

1.1. Sample

This study collected data from Instagram. In total, there were 100 posts uploaded by 92 unique users between the 1st of August 2023 and the 18th of November 2023. In this research, the collected data were chosen using the filter feature on Instagram which makes it possible to collect the top and most recent data. The data were specified with the geotag location Stasiun Cirebon Prujakan. By doing so, the uploaded posts with captions we gathered are restricted to the top 100 and latest posts appearing in the Instagram geotag search for Cirebon Prujakan station. The selection of the research location is based on

its status as one of the most significant hub transportation connecting the railway route along Java island and its significance as a historical cultural heritage building in Cirebon, making Pujakan Station more significant in the virtual realm.

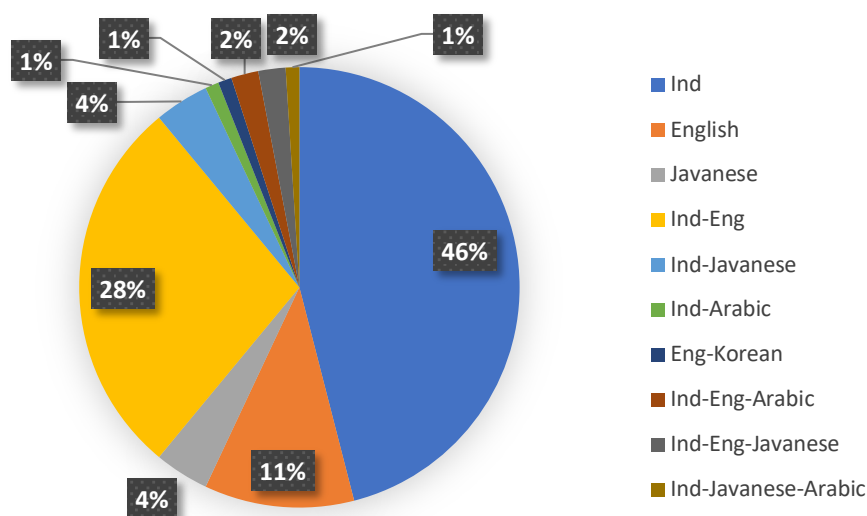
1.2. Procedures

A qualitative descriptive approach was used to determine how visibility and language use can construct social identity on Instagram posts of individuals who tag their posts with the Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram. The data in this study are presented using a pie chart showing the percentage of language variations used by Instagram users who tag Cirebon Pujakan Station between August 1, 2023 and November 18, 2023. First, the data were collected using the top and most recent filter based on the geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station. The data were taken using a snapshot tool available on the device. Second, the collected data are classified using the theory of Landry and Bourhis (1997) which divides language in public signs into unilingual, bilingual, and multilingual. Afterwards, the classified data are analysed based on the language variations used. For the analysis, the results of the classified data are described in detail to determine the social identity of the individual user.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms used by Indonesian citizens. A World Population Report indicates that there are currently around 9.2 million Instagram users, making Instagram the most used social media platform among Indonesian citizens. Among the features provided by Instagram, the geotag and hashtag features can help travellers personalise their trip experiences (Krisna et al., 2019). Using the specific geotag of Cirebon Pujakan Station, this study identified language variation among people who tagged Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram. The analysis revealed that users who tagged Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram used multiple languages in their captions. It indicates that multilingualism appears in the virtual environment of Cirebon Pujakan Station.

Based on language grouping in public signage (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), the composition of language use in Instagram captions tagging Cirebon Pujakan Station is divided into 61% unilingual, 34% bilingual, and 5% used more than two languages (multilingual). Based on the result, it seems that unilingualism is still dominant compared to others. It denotes that most people tagging Cirebon Pujakan Station in the virtual environment use one language to represent their identity. After further identification, we found five languages competing in the virtual space of Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram. As the main result, Indonesian became the predominant language used by people who tagged Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram. Diagram 1 shows the top five languages and how each of the languages contributes to multilingualism in the virtual linguistics landscape of Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram.



<Diagram 1> Languages used in Instagram captions tagging Cirebon Pujakan Station

Diagram 1 shows Indonesian (Ind) as the most common language used in the captions. At least 46% of Instagram users exclusively used the Indonesian language in their captions and hashtags. This result shows that the Indonesian language holds a significant role in communication among Instagram users in the virtual linguistic landscape of the geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station. Furthermore, the Indonesian language seems to be gaining most of the visibility due to its role as the unifying language in Indonesia. Besides the dominance of unilingualism using Indonesian, bilingualism using Indonesian (Ind) and English (Eng) also contributes to the use of Indonesian as the predominant language in the virtual geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station. It indicates that the Indonesian language enjoys its power even in the virtual environment.

Another language significantly competing in the virtual space of geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station on Instagram is English (Eng). English overtook Javanese in the use of unilingualism in the captions as the second most common language used by the users. It assumes that the dominance of English results from its role as the international language. In contrast, while English became the second most common language used in this research, English tends to be the most visible language found in virtual linguistic landscapes according to many other studies abroad (Hiippala et al. 2019; McMonagle, 2023). This finding indicates that the Indonesian language continues to maintain its power as the national language, but English could serve as a future challenge for the Indonesian language in a local geotag of a virtual linguistic landscape. The use of English by people passing through Cirebon Pujakan Station may be a sign of a language shift that is taking place to become part of a multilingual identity on the ground that mobility may lead to a language shift to new languages, and possibly through that process, as one scenario, to cosmopolitan, multifaceted, and multilingual or syncretic (hybrid) identities (Duff, 2015).

Furthermore, the finding also shows that Javanese are less likely to be chosen to communicate in a virtual space. Despite the position of Javanese as the largest local language on the island of Java, it gained less visibility in the virtual linguistic landscape of geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station. Only 4% of Instagram captions are written entirely in Javanese, while 4% are combined with Indonesian, and another 2% with Indonesian and English. This finding might correlate to the language attitude of Instagram users towards the local language. For example, the research of Rokhman et al. (2022) found that the Banyumas Javanese language started to be abandoned in social media even though the speakers are originally from Banyumas, Central Java. However, the relatively low proportion of Javanese in the virtual linguistic landscape of geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station may not necessarily represent the language attitudes

towards Javanese in real life. It can be seen from the study by Vander Klok (2019) that the Low Javanese variation (Ngoko) is presently in a stable diglossic position with the Indonesian language. However, this finding indicates that Javanese as the local language doesn't appear to represent the identity of people passing through Cirebon Pujakan Station. This condition is aligned with the research conducted by Maseko and Siziba (2023) which suggested that language practice in cyberspace tends to valorise English and devalue indigenous languages.

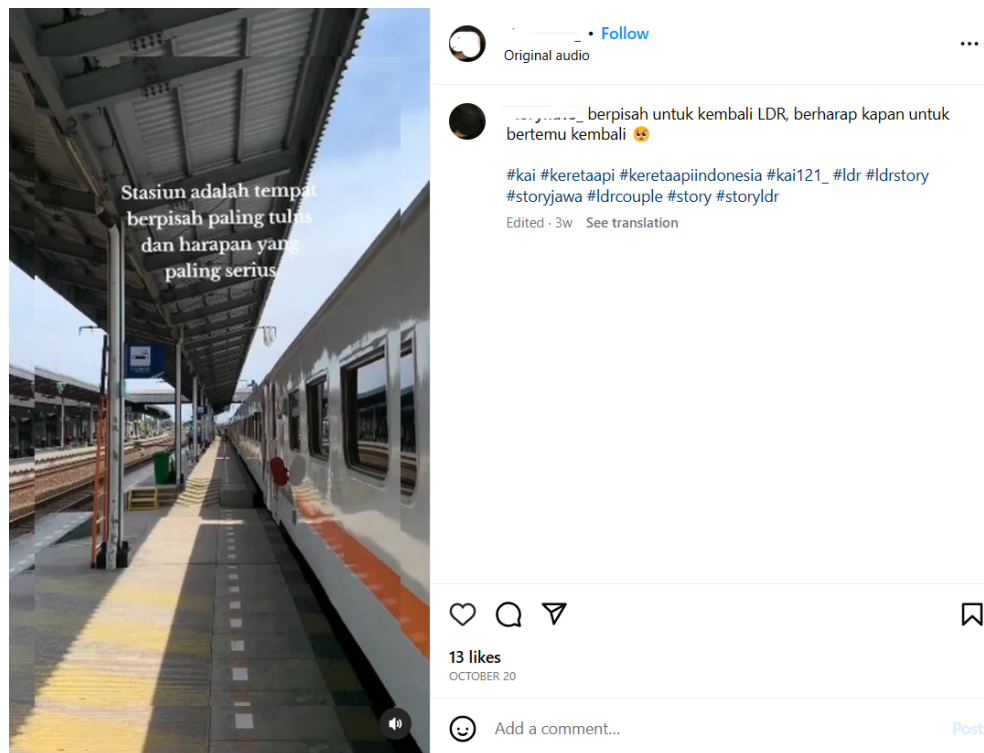
Other languages contesting in the geotag of Cirebon Pujakan Station are Arabic and Korean. However, the representations tend to be very low. In addition, the languages are also used only in bilingual and multilingual captions, and none of unilingual Arabic and Korean is found in the data. Furthermore, there is no significant script competition among the captions because this study only found one Arabic script while none of the Korean captions is written in Hangul script. The Arabic captions found in this study are limited to the use of Arabic terms related to educational subjects taught in an Islamic school to show the OP's identity as an Islamic school student, such as *muthola'aah* (drilling), *tarikh Islam* (history of Islam), and the use of Arabic script to show the original text of a hadith. Meanwhile, Korean is expressed only by a familiar vocabulary like *gwenchana*, which means 'it's ok'. The occurrence of the Korean language in a local virtual geotag affirms that the online environment is a significant place to shape K-pop fans' language practice due to a growing trend of Korean waves (Yannuar & Nazarudin, 2024). However, this finding indicates that although Arabic and Korean contribute to the richness of language diversity in the virtual linguistics landscape of the geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station, their usage is limited and they do not seem to be significant languages competing in the virtual space of Cirebon Pujakan Station.

Furthermore, the language diversity that appeared in the virtual linguistic landscape of the geotag Cirebon Pujakan Station not only represents the richness of multilingualism but also exhibits a collective identity of Instagram users who post their moment tagging Cirebon Pujakan Station. Besides language usage, hashtag utilisation plays a significant role in social identity constructions in the virtual linguistic landscape. This study found that 44% of people who tagged Cirebon Pujakan Station attempted to express their social identity using written captions including hashtags. The most common social identities that can be identified in the captions are their social identity as railfans, Muslims, travellers, and migrants. Most users expressed their social identity as railfans using hashtags such as #railfans, and #railfanindonesia. However, identities like Muslims, travellers, and migrants can often be recognised through the expressions used in the captions.

Figure 1 is an example of bilingualism using the Indonesian language and English in which the social identity can be identified in its captions and hashtags. The OP in Figure 1 wrote the caption bilingually through code-mixing. Code-mixing became the most common strategy used by Instagram users who tagged Cirebon Pujakan Station. Most of the code-mixing strategy that appeared in the captions is insertion. They tend to insert a word or a phrase using English in a sentence as shown in the caption below.

Caption: *berpisah untuk kembali LDR, berharap kapan untuk bertemu kembali* (parting to be LDR again, hoping when to meet again)

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<Figure 1> Bilingualism in the Instagram caption

Figure 1 illustrates how the OP employed a bilingual strategy to reflect their language preferences and social identity. The sentence in the caption is almost entirely written in the Indonesian language. However, instead of using the Indonesian language, the OP tried to use the English phrase 'LDR', which refers to 'Long Distance Relationship' to express the situation. The use of the acronym 'LDR' was possibly chosen by the OP because it is a familiar term used by the targeted audience. Additionally, the term 'LDR' may be perceived as more prestigious than its Indonesian equivalent, *Hubungan Jarak Jauh*. It correlates with the studies stating that people who use code-mixing in social media tend to show their prestige (Nuraeni & Farid, 2018; Zalukhu et al., 2021). Moreover, LDR is featured not only in the captions but also in the use of hashtags. English-language hashtags are widely used, even by individuals who may not identify as 'English speakers' in terms of their understanding and ability to use the language proficiently (Blackwood, 2019). Besides, the selected linguistic forms and codes link to other social networks, physical locales, and varieties of language, some more prestigious than others, and thus adapted to when necessary (Duff, 2015). Therefore, it might be the strategy of Instagram users to gain more engagement as we can see that an English-language hashtag such as #ldr is used in over 2.8 million Instagram posts.

Besides, the social identity of the OP in Figure 1 can be revealed through the situation expressed in the captions and hashtags. The OP wrote about how their relationship is separated by distance through the term LDR. The experience of being separated by a long distance is often related to the situation in which his/her partner lives in a place that is considered far away from one another. It indicates that one of them is possibly a person who moves away from his/her region to find better living conditions such as to work or study. This social identity is likely to emerge in a transportation hub due to its role as a place where migrants begin, end, or pause their mobility. Therefore, the captions and hashtags may reflect the OP's identity as a migrant. This finding suggests that language usage has a significant potential to reflect and express social identity on Instagram.

The diversity of language choices in the virtual space of Cirebon Prujakan Station implies its identity as a multilingual environmental transportation hub. It is a place where language interactions are built to communicate the travel experience of the community by engaging them as global citizens virtually. This is proven by the occurrence of multiple languages used in the captions reflecting the multilingual nature of the space. In addition, the dominance of the Indonesian language represents that the citizens who tagged Cirebon Prujakan Station have a positive attitude toward the Indonesian language. Other than that, code-switching and code-mixing in the captions allow users to blend the local traditions with broader national and international influences, reflecting the multicultural interactions facilitated by the virtual geotag of Cirebon Prujakan Station. However, the limited of Javanese as the local language in Cirebon may be associated with the statement that all local languages are vulnerable to linguistic endangerment due to pressure from global and national languages, making language shifts and changes in Indonesia's future unavoidable (Yannuar & Nazarudin, 2024).

The analysis undertaken in this study has revealed that language usage in Instagram captions could be the object of a virtual linguistics landscape that represents how a geotag of a physical location could be seen through the virtual lens. The mapping of linguistics in the virtual geotag Instagram of Cirebon Prujakan Station revealed the existence of multilingualism although the dominance of the Indonesian language is evident in this study. The results of this study may not resonate with other virtual linguistic landscapes (Hiippala, 2019; Blackwood, 2019) that proposed the dominance of English. However, the results of this study may reflect the functions of Cirebon Prujakan Station as the local transportation hub highlighting the power of the Indonesian language as the unifying language in Indonesia. Furthermore, the current analysis was constrained by a limited dataset, which could be more thorough if a larger amount of data were included. Moreover, gathering data at different times, such as during a holiday season, may yield different results. Despite the limitations, the results of this study suggest that other local geotags on Instagram potentially hold much sociolinguistics inquiry that may forest the richness of virtual linguistic landscapes in Indonesia.

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