Reading visual design of outdoor signs in Kuta (A case study of multimodal linguistic landscapes)

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Abstract: This is a case study of linguistic landscapes (LL) with multimodal approach, which aimed at analysing the visual grammar of commercial outdoor sign. LL is a study of signs in public space. These signs include all traffic signs, billboards, site names, and advertisements. Multimodal approach is a new concept of analysis that analyses signs from three aspects, and it is representation, interaction and composition. The data in this study is classified as a secondary data that randomly chosen from author previous research. There were three outdoor billboard signs chosen to represent all proposed LL types in Kuta Village. The results showed that representations of actors in outdoor signs are all salience. Their representations are not merely as an icon of human but also a figure, a symbol, or a voice index as replacement of callout statement. In terms of interaction processes, all actors act as the salience of demand and/or offering information, service and product with objective attitudes. For composition processes, the salience are all centred with various information value position and yet they are non-linear text framing. All text stand independently with the same ideal and real information as the producers intended to be.

1. Introduction

The term Linguistic Landscape (LL) was first introduced by Landry and Bourhis in their paper entitled "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study" on March 1997. They mentioned that LL is the visibility and salience of language in public space in certain territory (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p.
Furthermore, they gave some examples to the LL such as traffic signs, billboards or any commercial signs, street name, and buildings names (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

In the last two decades, the discussion on LL had become a new trend among researchers. LL is the use of written language in public sphere (Ben-Rafael, 2006, p. 14, 2009, p. 40; Coulmas, 2009, p. 14; Gorter, 2006, p. 2), including all signs of announcement from public or private institution in a certain given location. Furthermore, Ben-Rafael (2006, p. 27) underlines the significance of LL study which points out patterns representing different ways in which society cope with the use of signs within certain region.
On the other hand, Landry and Bourhis (1997, pp. 25–28) stated that LL has two main functions: informational and symbolic. Informational function is the function of LL as an outdoor media to share information to the public, which includes government information (non-commercial sign).
and private information in terms of advertisement (commercial sign). Non-commercial sign is a sign made by charitable organization or government that provides information or motivation to the viewer without any profit orientation. Commercial sign, on the other hand, is a sign made by producers to promote their product to the public with profit orientation (Mulyawan, 2016, p. 392).

The visual representation of outdoor advertisement is very unique and highly influenced by the motivation and intended meaning of the sign maker. One of the most obvious intentions of making an advertisement is to draw audience intention to the product advertised with a final goal of purchasing the product. Kress (2010, p. 10) stated that there are three main principles in sign making: (1) signs are made to a certain motivated form and meaning; (2) the motivation of sign maker; (3) the use of certain available resources to certain region. In terms of available resources, outdoor signs material are divided into local (vernacular) designs and modern designs. Local designs are signs by stones, timber, log, or wood as their material, while modern designs are signs by other materials such as plastic, qualibright, iron or stainless (Mulyawan, 2019, p. 47).

One example of the popular outdoor advertisement is an outdoor billboard sign. Outdoor billboard advertisement is a LL sign that is usually made specifically to a certain area with a certain target audience. It is usually placed on the main road, which made it visible from around a hundred meters away. The big size and eye catching design made this advertisement an interesting subject to be analysed, especially to discover the intended meaning that sign maker wishes to transfer to the audience of a certain area.

Kress and Van Leuuwen (2006, p.1) proposed a new concept of analysis that could comprehend the full intended meaning of a sign that is highly influenced by regional social cultural background. This concept is known as the grammar of visual design. This approach of analysis is also widely known as a multimodal analysis. This study tries to analyse the meaning of a certain LL in certain given territory – in this case is outdoor billboard signs – by using this multimodal approach.
... visual ‘grammar’ will describe the way in which depicted elements—people, places and things—combine in visual ‘statements’ of greater or lesser complexity and extension. (Kress & Van Leuuwen, 2006, p. 1)

2. Grammar of visual design

Kress and Van Leuuwen (2006) introduce the theory and concept of reading a visual object (aka. sign/image) through its grammar. They use the term grammar as the core of the visual analysis to intensify the formal notion in the process of reading the visual image, which consist of three main parts: representation, interaction and composition.

The first part is representational processes. Representational processes are divided into two categories as narrative and conceptual. Narrative processes “serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements” (Kress & Van Leuuwen, 2006, p. 59). Through narrative reading, the message of the action made by all actor/character involved in the image will be unfolded. These messages include all actions made by the human figures in the image, their size, position, placement, statement, as well as implied message on the background and setting of the image. On the other hand, conceptual processes serve to unfold the participant to be “more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning” (Kress & Van Leuuwen, 2006, pp. 79–107). Conceptual reading reveals the relation among characters involved in the image, as well as their status and positioning.

Second part is interaction processes. Interaction processes refers to the “interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image” (Kress & Van Leuuwen, 2006, pp. 114–153). This means that through interaction reading, the intended meaning or message prepared by the producer in the image is revealed. This meaning or message involved demands or offers of a product and target audiences, consumers, viewers of different age, gender, and ethnic.

Lastly, composition processes refer to “the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into meaningful whole” (Kress & Van Leuuwen, 2006, pp. 175–214). This process reveals the overall meaning and message of the image that involved all aspect as one image presentation such as information value, salience and framing.

3. Material and method

Kuta is an international village located in Badung Regency Bali. As one the famous tourist destinations in the world, the landscapes of Kuta have dramatic changes for the last four decades. These changes include global networking, global transfer and interflow in technology, economy, social, political, cultural, and learning areas; international alliances and competitions; international collaboration and exchange; global village; multi-cultural integration; and the use of international standards and benchmarks or known as globalization effect (Cheng, 2000).

Kothari (2004, p. 113) stated that a case study research is a limited analysis of a social unit, a person, a family, an institution, a cultural group, or an event in certain society of certain region. This study is a case study of multimodal LL by which the analysis was limited to certain type of LL as proposed by Mulyawan (2017). The data of this study is secondary data that have been collected by Mulyawan (2017). Outdoor signs were divided into commercial and non-commercial sign. Furthermore, commercial outdoor signs were divided into commercial service and commercial product.

In this case study, one data of billboard sign from each category were randomly chosen and qualitatively analysed to represent the overall type of outdoors signs. The analysis was made based on the visual reading image theory proposed by Kress and Van Leuuwen (2006). Those data were billboards signs of (1) non-commercial sign of Health Campaign, (2) commercial sign of BCA services, and (3) commercial sign of Bintang Beer.
4. Reading visual image of billboard outdoor sign
Health Campaign is considered to be a non-commercial outdoor sign which aimed to educate and inform all women, to regularly checkup their reproductive organ. BCA service sign is a sign of commercial service that provide financial services to public and Bintang Beer sign is a commercial sign that sale beer product.

4.1. Representation processes analysis

In terms of narrative representation, Health Campaign sign uses a figure of a female reproduction organ since it is a campaign on reproductive organ cancer (cervix cancer). As for BCA sign, the narrative element is a verbal sign of “Get Your Cash”. This verbal sign is considered to be a narrative representation as it serves an index of statement or callout, which is uttered by an anonymous character. Unlike the other two signs, the narrative element of Bintang Beer sign is two adult couples who cherish their moment on a beach.

Based on their position, all action processes of the characters, figures, or index are the salience of the signs. Their salience position is proven by how they were presented in the biggest portion in the signs.

In terms of reactional processes, all saliences show transactional process by which they clearly represent the item being informed or sold. In Health Campaign sign, the figure is clearly stated and confirmed the phenomenon being informed, that it is a female reproduction organ cancer (cervix cancer). As for BCA sign, the index callout (verbal statement) clearly stated the service being advertised, that it is a cash advance withdrawal facility. On the other hand, the adults’ couples of Bintang Beer sign are both reactors and phenomenon of the product being advertised.

As for the circumstance background, the red background in Health Campaign is an indication that the issue of the campaign is serious and deadly. The dominant blue and white colour of BCA sign is a representation of the true colour of BCA Bank. Lastly, the small frothed beach waves in Bintang Beer sign denote that “Bintang Beer” is an enjoyable drink.
Conceptually, both Health Campaign sign and BCA sign show a natural clasificational processes. On the other hand, the male actors of Bintang beer sign are naturally the superordinate actors in the sign. In terms of attributive possession, all of them are the carriers of the signs. The figure of female reproduction organ, callout speech index and actors’ clothing, all became the possessive attributive.

4.2. Interaction processes analysis

Interaction processes is the intended meaning made by the producer of the sign to the audience or viewer of the sign. Both Health Campaign sign and BCA sign stand as an information point – not as demand action – which offer information and services being advertised. In contrast, the actors’ of Bintang Beer sign are in demand position, which they gave the information of their need to “Bintang Beer”; the product being advertised.

As for social relation, it is clearly stated that both Health Campaign sign and BCA sign showed public distance social relation, since there are no human icons in the signs. Their relations are open to all people as strangers. But, all actors of Bintang Beer sign were in state of “close personal distance”, and it can be identified by their “in touch closed position”.

The attitude interaction of all signs is considered to be an “objective attitude” by which the signs have deliberately exposed all information needed for the product or service being advertised. In Health Campaign sign, the verbal statement above and below the figure of female reproduction organ clearly stated the information of “Pap Smear” (clinical operative term) will surely detect the treat of cervical cancer. As for BCA sign, the “ATM BCA” logo with the support of 4 (four) foreign translations of “Automated Teller Machines” is considered to be an open indication that the information of the service is globally spread. On the other hand, in Bintang Beer sign, the information of the product being advertised is not only informed by the actors but also from the verbal sign that clearly states “Indonesia’s Favorite Beer” and “I ★ Bali”.

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4.3. Composition processes analysis
In terms of composition processes, all outdoor signs use centre salience positioning. As for the information value, both Health Campaign sign and Bintang beer sign use “top bottom and centre” position, whereas BCA sign uses “top and side” value information position.

All the information present in all outdoor signs was categorized as “ideal” and “real” information with non-linear text framing. This framing is necessary because most outdoor signs especially billboards are placed high up in public spaces, so that the information is not as sequential but effective and yet simple in appearance.

These non-linear framing are shown in all outdoor signs. There are short verbal statements on top and below of the figure of female reproduction organ in Health Campaign sign. The statements are considered to be information of fact that is useful to all women.

“PAPSMEAR MELINGUNGI WANITA DARI KANKER LEHER RAHIM”
(Papsmear protects woman from cervix cancer)
“Lakukan Pemeriksaan Berkala 1 Tahun Sekali”
(Do a regular checking once a year)

The statements of “Automated Teller Machines” in BCA sign are translated into 4 (four) languages, i.e. Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Korean, and can also be read as non-linear text, since all texts indicate the same meaning. These statements are also factual, as all cards from those country are accepted.

Whereas for Bintang beer sign, on top of the sign there is statement ‘I ★ Bali’, which becomes the “idealism” of the added information which has inclusive meaning “I Love Bintang and I Love Bali”. This meaning is analogically drawn from the universal symbol “I ♥ U”, in this case “♥” is replaced by ‘★’ and “U” replaced by “Bali”. On the bottom side, there is a statement “Indonesia’s Favorite Beer” ending with product logo or icon. This bottom statement refers to “a claim” of real information that Bintang Beer is one of “Indonesia’s Favorite Beer”. Both text stood independently and support the same fact of Bintang beer.

5. Conclusion
Based on the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that narratively the actors of an outdoor signs were not merely an icon of human but also a figure, a symbol, or a voice index as replacement of callout statement. All outdoor signs showed transactional processes by which they all offer information, service or product, but not all actors act as reactors and phenomenon. Conceptually, all outdoor signs with human actors showed superordinate/subordinate analytical processes with/or without possessive attributive. Outdoor signs with symbol or index showed neutral analytical processes. In terms of interaction processes, all outdoor signs signaled demand and offer information, service and product with an objective attitude. As for composition processes, the salience were all centred with various information value positions and yet they were non-linear text framing. All texts stood independently with the same ideal and real information as the producers intended to be.
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