

Errors of Written English on the Outdoor Signs in Kupang City, Indonesia: Linguistic Landscape Approach

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Abstract

English is an international language familiar to everyone, relating to various social aspects. It can be found and easily seen or read in public spaces, such as on billboards or banners, and business names, such as shops, hotels, restaurants, transportation, and others. English is used in varied lingual forms and even the possibility of writing and grammatical errors. This research deals with the written English on outdoor signs in Kupang City, focusing on language errors and their causing factors. This research applied a qualitative analysis to explore the type of language errors found in written English in the outdoor signs, the outdoor signs that contain written English language errors, and the factors that cause language errors. The data for this study are the outdoor signs in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia that contain language errors in written English. All data are collected using photographic techniques using a digital camera. The next step is to transcribe the written English containing language errors and analyze the data qualitatively. The result of the study shows that the main errors are due to the spelling system, namely, deleting a sound and replacing the English sound with Indonesian. The analysis of the language errors also revealed that they are caused by English language competence and supported by the interference of the author or sign producers' first language. This study may contribute significantly, especially for language learners, since English on outdoor signs can be used as authentic material for learning and English teaching and learning in schools.

Keywords: Language Error; Outdoor Signs; Public Space; Written English; Language Learning

Abstrak

Bahasa Inggris merupakan bahasa internasional dan telah diakrabi semua orang dalam berbagai aspek sosial. Saat ini, bahasa Inggris dapat ditemukan dan dengan mudah dilihat atau dibaca di ruang publik, seperti pada papan reklame atau spanduk, serta nama-nama usaha, seperti toko, hotel, restoran, transportasi, dan lain-lain. Bahasa Inggris digunakan dalam berbagai bentuk lingual bahkan sering terdapat kesalahan penulisan dan tata bahasa. Penelitian ini menelusuri tulisan berbahasa Inggris pada tanda-tanda luar ruangan di Kota Kupang, dengan fokus pada kesalahan bahasa dan faktor penyebabnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi jenis kesalahan bahasa yang ditemukan dalam bahasa Inggris yang tertulis pada tanda-tanda luar ruangan, tanda-tanda luar ruangan yang mengandung kesalahan bahasa Inggris tertulis, dan faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kesalahan bahasa. Data untuk penelitian ini adalah tanda-tanda luar ruangan di Kota Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia. Semua data dikumpulkan menggunakan metode pengamatan dan dokumentasi dengan teknik fotografi menggunakan kamera digital. Langkah selanjutnya adalah menuliskan kembali bahasa Inggris yang mengandung kesalahan bahasa dan menganalisis data secara kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan utama terdapat pada sistem ejaan, yaitu penghilangan bunyi bahasa Inggris dan penggantian bunyi bahasa Inggris dengan bahasa Indonesia. Analisis kesalahan bahasa

juga mengungkapkan bahwa kesalahan tersebut disebabkan oleh kompetensi bahasa Inggris dan didukung oleh interferensi bahasa pertama penulis atau pembuat tanda. Penelitian ini dapat memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan, terutama bagi pembelajar bahasa, karena bahasa Inggris pada tanda-tanda luar ruangan dapat digunakan sebagai bahan ajar autentik untuk pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di sekolah.

Kata Kunci: Kesalahan Bahasa; Tanda-Tanda Luar Ruangan; Ruang Publik; Bahasa Inggris Tertulis; Pembelajaran Bahasa

Introduction

The status of English in Indonesia is a critical foreign language. This can be proven by the policy that includes English as one of the compulsory subjects in schools from high school to university. Several preschool and elementary institutions have been enacted as mandatory subjects or the language of instruction. The use of English in schools is intended to strengthen and improve the mastery and competence of the community or graduates so that they can compete in the global era. This policy is because English has become a language that is familiar to all people.

Currently, English is not only found in various literature or textbooks at school but is easily seen and read in public spaces. The existence of English in public spaces can be read on outdoor signs, such as billboards or banners, and business names, such as shops, hotels, restaurants, transportation, and others (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020; Purnanto et al., 2021; Yibu & Junjie, 2021; Beeh et al., 2022; Mansoor et al., 2023). English on outdoor signs is used in big and small-scale businesses, such as *laundry, bakery, catering, tailors, travel, service, electronics*, and others. The existence of a language in public spaces is proof of the strength and dominance of that language (Benu et al., 2023; Sudarmanto et al., 2023). English appears in varied lingual forms, and even the possibility of writing and grammatical errors is unavoidable.

Language error is defined as ineffective language use. Meanwhile, the process of identifying the frequency, kind, causes, and effects of poor language use is known as error analysis (James, 2013; Phuong, 2022). James also explained that the ineffectiveness of the language can be seen in four categories: grammaticality, acceptability, correctness, strangeness, and infelicity. Regarding language learning, Pawlak (2014) said that the most popular way to assess language error is by comparing learner utterances with those produced by native speakers. It may imply that a language error deviates from the standard language. This mistake results from the speaker or writer's inability to understand the language's pattern accurately. Language error is also known as performance errors, and it is caused by physical conditions that the writer experiences, such as physical exhaustion, sleepiness, forgetfulness, emotional strain, and rushing through work (Moiden & Liaw, 2021).

Language errors are deviations or errors in saying or writing something that violates or does not follow the language's rules (James, 2013; Pawlak, 2014). The error is seen as a problem and embezzlement in the learning process, and this feature distinguishes the mistake (Yıldız & Çetin, 2020). A mistake is an action that displays a lack of established principles and norms in linguistics. However, the error denotes the learner's reaction or behaviors that differ from the expected conduct and the reaction. Language errors can occur accidentally because the user is not aware of them. So, a language error is related to one's understanding or language competence (Phuong, 2022). Language errors can occur orally and in writing at the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics levels. Relating second language learning, Touchie (1986) said that it is inter-lingual errors, namely mistakes made due to the native language's influence.

Transfer or interference errors are other names for inter-lingual errors. Touchie also explained that the inter-lingual and developmental factors are simplifications, overgeneralization, hypercorrection, faulty teaching, fossilization, avoidance, inadequate learning, and false concepts. Language errors may occur because of the interference of the mother tongue, violation of grammatical rules, and inter-lingual and developmental factors (Moiden & Liaw, 2021).

The definition above mentioned that language errors can occur in speaking or writing. However, this paper is focused on written form, namely the written English language found on public signs in public spaces in Kupang City, Indonesia. Based on this focus, the definition of language error in this writing is a writing error produced by the sign makers in writing the public signs such as the name of the product, name of business, information, and advertisement.

Language errors in public spaces are caused by several factors, such as improper teaching of English and the lack of understanding of English users towards the language they use (Alamsari et al., 2018; Sisilda et al., 2021). As Atikah (2020) found in Cirebon, spelling errors include using letters, writing words, punctuation marks, and writing absorption elements. Errors also occur in writing phrase structures, as found by (Anggraini & Setyawan, 2021) in Ngunut village, Tulungagung Regency. Grammatical errors were found by Ariani and Artawa (2021) in researching the translation of public signs in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. This is caused by the inappropriate implementation of translation procedures and the translator's lack of understanding of the target language's grammar. Errors in this translation were also found by Mohebbi and Firoozkahi (2021) in the city of Teheran, Iran, as the most frequent and most common language errors compared to other errors.

The previous studies on the language error on the public signs, among others, related to the bilingual and multilingual signs in Teheran (Mohebbi & Firoozkahi, 2021), English errors found on the outdoor advertising signs in Bandung City (Alamsari et al., 2018) and Tulung Agung (Anggraini & Setyawan, 2021), error analysis of English on the public signs in Palangkaraya (Sisilda et al., 2021). These studies revealed spelling, word choice, grammatical, and word order errors. (2021) also studied language errors but focused on the grammatical errors of translation in public signs in Ubud, Bali.

The previous studies above show that the error found on public signs can be analyzed from various aspects. The previous studies were done specifically to the type, such as the grammatical errors, or the unit analysis, such as bilingual and multilingual or advertising signs. This study's type of language error is seen from its linguistic form based on the framework-free theoretical description (Haspelmath, 2012). This paper also briefly discussed the impact of language errors on the public signs toward language learning.

This research discusses English language errors found in outdoor signs of public spaces in Kupang City, Indonesia. The discussion of this article covered the type of language errors found in written English in the outdoor signs, the outdoor signs that contain written English language errors, and the factors that cause language errors. Error analysis starts by recognizing the errors in written English found in the outdoor signs. The findings of this research can be used in second and foreign language instruction because error analysis is a crucial component of learning second and foreign languages as well as practical linguistics. Concerning language, language learning, and language education, applied linguistics strives to address these challenges and issues while simultaneously attempting to provide solutions. Error analysis gives a thorough comprehension of the language acquisition process.

Methods

This is a qualitative research that was used to analyze the English language errors and the factors that caused the errors. This qualitative study focuses more on in-depth observation and documentation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research was conducted in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The data are the outdoor signs with English language errors displayed along the city's main roads. All the data used in this study are primary, meaning they were gathered straight from the primary source. Every outdoor sign within a designated observation area served as a data source for this investigation. The word "sign," a written text found in a particular location, is used in this study to define the linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2018). Temporary or mobile signs, like those found in newspapers, magazines, and brochures, are not counted as data. Similarly, entries about vehicles parked in or through the observation area were not included in the count. Both the public (top-down) and private (bottom-up) signs, including: (1) street signs; (2) advertising signs; (3) warning notices and prohibitions; (4) building names of shops, restaurants, and other commercial establishments; (5) business name boards; (6) information signs (time, instructions); (7) religious signs; (8) graffiti; and (9) writings on inscriptions or monuments. The methods of observation and documentation were used to collect data. Researchers use the observation method to use all significant roads designated as samples. This method enables researchers to better understand the state of the linguistic landscape along the predetermined locus of study. Meanwhile, it involves taking pictures of every written language sign in the observation area and compiling these documents. Photographic documentation is the method employed. This photographic technique uses a cell phone camera and a digital camera. In addition, the gathered photo data is sorted and filtered to eliminate information that does not fit predefined standards. The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach. Grammarly software and the English Oxford Dictionary are used to detect the errors and examine the suspected words. Grammarly is a comprehensive writing tool. Grammarly corrects grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure problems, misused words, typos, and more (<https://www.grammarly.com/grammar-check>). The Online Oxford Learner's Dictionary also confirms spelling and pronunciation (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>). The next step is analyzing the data using the error analysis method, which documents the errors that appear in the learner's language, determines whether they are systematic, and explains what caused them. The error analysis on written English on the outdoor sign consists of two steps: identifying all errors and then explaining or discussing the error.

Results and Discussion

The use of English in today's public space certainly has reasons, mainly economic factors and the development of English as a global language. Even so, there are still writing errors in its spelling and grammatical rules. Language errors are mostly found on the signboard explaining the products or services. For example, information about a product offered by a salon, motor or car service shop, and others. These errors are written very clearly and read by everyone or passersby. Not all the English written on a signboard are errors, but only a word or two. This may be caused by the writer not being familiar with the word. A writer who is not familiar with that word makes errors in writing. Writing errors are mostly related to spelling, capitalization, and pronunciation, also known as mechanical errors. Phuong (2022) explained that spelling errors, which consist of substituting a misspelled spelling with the correct spelling, can be seen as cognitive errors related to incorrect spelling of certain words or forgetting or misunderstanding.

Figure 1 shows the language error with two errors: sound deletion and replacement. It is seen that there is a deletion of the sound /e/ in *power stering* that should be written correct English as *power steering*. Meanwhile, there is a replacement of /c/ → /k/ in the word *injektion* that should be written *injection* as the correct English. Other words that are found in incorrect English form are *londri*, *bodi*, and *sperpart* that should be written *laundry*, *body*, and *spare part*. Some words are part of a phrase or compound word that contain errors, such as *foto in foto copy* and *system in security sistem*.



Figure 1. Sample of Language Error in Written English Found on Outdoor Signs in Public Spaces

Inconsistent English spelling rules lead to unavoidable spelling mistakes by the author or the sign producer. Those mistakes will disappear only when one becomes more aware of the rules and more familiar with correct spelling through reading. This kind of error can be eliminated by looking at the writing in the dictionary and asking for corrections from friends, tutors, or spelling checkers to identify or confirm the writing.

1. English Language Errors

Data obtained shows that language errors mainly involve spelling systems. It means that this language error analyzed here deals with the deletion, replacement, addition, or reverse of the word's letters. Spelling here is the correct order of the letters in a word. The English spelling system is often confusing. English learners try very hard to learn to use it to a very high level of accuracy, not only non-native English learners but also most people raised with English. For a non-native speaker, such mastery usually involves much confusion and frustration. Part of the problem is that English spelling looks deceptively similar to other languages that use the same alphabet but in a much more consistent way. Such proficiency typically includes a lot of confusion and frustration for a non-native speaker. One of the issues is that English spelling superficially resembles other alphabet-using languages but with far more regularity. Data for this study are the written language found on outdoor signs in public spaces.

a. Sound deletion

The data shows that deleting a sound in a word is one of the types of language errors found on outdoor signs. The deletion occurred to the vowel of the last sound of a word and the silent sound, while the deletion of a consonant is to the silent sound and the double consonant sound. This study shows that the spelling pattern of the writer follows the pronunciation pattern, which indicates the strong correlation between English word articulation and how the writer spelled the word. The writer or the sign producers do not pay attention to the word, for example, *tubeless*, which is written as *tubles*.

Table 1. Sample of Language Error of Sound Deletion

Sound deleted	Written sign	Correct English
e	spar	spare part
t	prin; soflens.	print; soft lens
e, s	tubles	tubeless
s, e	accesoris	accessories
k	bloboard	block board

So, when someone hears a word and must write it down, they must confirm the dictionary or ask for the right word. It seems that the writer does not know about the word and is just guessing it, so they make an error in writing or spelling it.



Figure 2 (a-b). Samples of Sound Deletion in A Word as A Language Error

Figures 2 (a-b) above show the sound deletion of the word that resulted in a spelling error. In Figure 2, *soflens* is incorrect because it should be written as *soft lens* and pronounced as /sɒft lenz/. So, there is a deletion of the sound /t/. A volunteer asked to pronounce the word sound as /sɒf lenz/ that the sound /t/ is silent. This case in Figure 2 is the same as in Figure 3. The word is written *tubles*, and the correct word must be *tubeless* /tju:bləs/, meaning a wheel with no inner tube. Looking at how the word is written, there is a deletion of the sounds /e/ and /s/, both silent sounds. The silent sounds in English are various, whether in the middle or at the end of the word; for example, the *piece* is pronounced as /pi:s/, and *love* is pronounced as /lʌv/. Another example is *happiness*, which is pronounced as /'hæpinəs/. The word *tubles*, as shown in Figure 2, is written how it is pronounced. There is an Indonesian interference with the English pronunciation of this word. Besides the Indonesian interference, the lack of knowledge of English words also caused the errors. The sign maker did not know or was unaware of the double consonants in English words. The sound deletion, in this case, both vowel and consonant, is due to the lack of knowledge or unconsciousness of the rules of English.

b. Sound replacement

Another language error that occurred in the outdoor signs in the public spaces is the replacement. It is a way of replacing a sound or letter with others. It is found that there are several sounds replacement, for example, *foto* for a *photo* in *foto copy*, *bodi* for *body* in *bodi repair*, and *injektion* for *injection*.

Table 2. Sample of The Sound Replacement

No	Written sign	Correct English
y → i	bodi; sistem; londri	body, system, laundry
c → k	injektion, electric, creambath	injection, electric, Cream bath
ph → f	Foto	Photo,

a → e	scen; celluler, sper; manicure	scan; cellular; spare part; manicure
au → o	londri	laundry

The substitution is mostly for vowels instead of consonants. Indonesian language and English knowledge play an essential role in these errors. For example, the word photo is pronounced as /'fəʊtəʊ/ which is similar to the Indonesian word and pronunciation of *foto*. This is also supported by the knowledge or the English competence of the writer or the sign producers.



Figure 3. Samples of Sound Replacement

The replacement exists for both consonants and vowels. The author or the sign producer did not know or understand the English spelling rules. The misspelling of a word is also led by the understanding that the sound is the same as the Indonesian language. In this case, it can be said that the author's first language also causes the language error. Many language errors are caused by the generalization of the grammatical structure of the author or sign producers' mother tongue and its influence on the target language. Various grammatical, lexical, and even target-language-specific restrictions are disregarded by sign producers when they translate many native-language structures into the target language when learning a second language. The influence of the sign producers' L1 on English, as expressed in the outdoor sign, is seen in the English compound.

Figure 4 shows that the name board of the shop is *marketcelluler Kupang*. The language error is not only on replacing the sound /a/ to /e/ for the word *cellular* become *celluler*, but also the structure of the word order pattern. The pattern of the English compound is right-headed, while the Indonesian language is a left-headed compound. So, the correct structure of the name must be written as *cellular market*, not the other way around, as seen on the name board. So, it is clear that this mistake results from the author or the sign producer's inability to master the English language's rules correctly.



Figure 4. Sample of Grammatical Error of Compound

Another grammatical error in written English on the outdoor sign is the use of possessive marker (s). Using apostrophes after a noun function to show possession (Benu, 2019). As in the figures below in the outdoor sign, this marker cannot be contextually interpreted as possessive but is more likely a plural marker. Using the possessive marker in the words gent's and bag's is considered a mistake or a grammatical error because the formula is NP's N, for example, Norci's bag or Alfret's shoes. The writer must have misunderstood using the apostrophe s as a plural marker. The writing on the name board can be read as Yuni Salon for ladies and gents. If the 's in gent's is interpreted as a possessive marker, then the word ladies should also contain the same marker as ladies' or lady's.



(a)



(b)

Figure 5 (a-b). Samples of the Use of Possessive Marker “ ‘s”

It is the same case in Figure 5 (a-b), written as bag's and fashion. It must also be considered a plural marker because another board below, written in Indonesia, said that menjual tas dan pakaian (selling bags and clothes/fashion). A *possessive marker* in English grammar shows ownership, measurement, or source in addition to the -'s ending. This marker can be substituted with or if the possessor is inanimate, for example, the arm of the chair.

2. The factor Causing Language Errors

The use of English in public spaces today certainly has reasons, mainly economic factors and the development of English as a global language. The strength of these factors encourages the use of the language to the point that it impacts writing errors, both in the spelling system and grammar rules (Mohebbi & Firoozkahi, 2021; Ali et al., 2023). Language errors are found on public signs in Kupang City that explain the products or services provided. For example, information about a product offered by salons and auto shops. These errors are written very clearly and are read by everyone or passersby. This may be because the writer needs to familiarize themselves with the word and make mistakes when writing it. Writing errors are mostly related to spelling, capitalization, and pronunciation, also known as mechanical errors. Phuong (2022) explained that replacing an incorrect spelling with the correct spelling can cause cognitive errors due to misspelling certain words or forgetting or misunderstanding. These grammatical errors in

English on public signs would like to emphasize the weak English language competence. However, the existence of English as an international language put it in a position of higher prestige than national or local languages. In this context, English indicates modernity and prestige, so in business, using English attracts more consumers. This aligns with research by Ariani and Artawa (2021), which emphasizes that errors can occur due to the dominance of interference from one language over another. In this case, it is the dominance of Indonesian over English.

3. Impact on Language learning

Reading the signage for a business, store, advertisement, restaurant, or food stand menu can help someone learn new words. Considering the English texts found in these media as potential sources of input for learning a second language because students encounter texts in public settings, their learning is typically incidental. It means that anyone can use the language present in public spaces as a free resource for learning English (Gorter et al., 2021). Using language's instructional role, general language integration can support practice-based, teacher-led, student-centered English learning patterns and enhance students' language proficiency. Public spaces are full of English, which can help students learn more and develop their vocabulary, pragmatic competence, multimodal literacy, grasp of grammatical features, and social awareness. Despite some doubtful opinions, teachers can understand the benefits of utilizing language in public settings in their future instruction.

Language on public signs can have an impact on language learning. As mentioned, using English in public spaces is a possible alternative authentic source for learning English in the classroom. A new learner who is unavoidable can take what is written in the public space and use it as something genuine. This requires intervention from various parties to eliminate the mistakes so far. It will be positive when teachers can design a helpful learning strategy, such as asking students to identify grammatical errors. It will force students to find and learn the correct English words. Students found the task more meaningful and exciting than the usual learning procedure. Meanwhile, the errors found on the public sign will have a negative impact on self-learners. Of course, more research is needed to confirm the effectiveness of language use in public spaces and its advantages as an English teaching tool, especially for English language learners in Kupang City.

Conclusion

English has become an international language that is not only used in spoken but can be seen everywhere around us. It has psychologically influenced people to use it to symbolize modernity or pride, especially in business, when promoting their products. Besides, the spread of English all over the city provides a benefit for language learners to use it as authentic material for learning. Unfortunately, data from this study revealed language errors, especially in the spelling system, namely deletion and replacement of the sound. The error is caused by an inter-lingual factor, namely the influence of their first language, and an intra-lingual factor, namely the incomplete understanding of the sign producers about English and the learning context. Interlingual communication is considered to be the main factor that causes the error. This is because the analysis shows that the writing, due to the spelling system, follows the Indonesian rules. The English language errors, as found on the public signs in Kupang City, are primarily brought on by under differentiation, incomplete learning, and ignorance of rule restrictions. There are situations when a form or construction is used in one context and then applied to others where it should not be. The tendency to overgeneralize stems from either incomplete education or a deficiency in the English language. Thus, English is hampered by the grammatical rules of Indonesian as the native tongue.

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