

# Exploring the Linguistic Landscape of Kuching Waterfront to Enhance Arab Tourist Experience: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Abstract

This study investigates the potential of Arabic as a tourism language in Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research examined the current linguistic landscape, including signage, advertisements, and tourist information materials. Findings revealed a significant lack of Arabic language presence, including limited Arabic-language information, insufficient Arabic-speaking staff, and an absence of dedicated Arabic-language tourism packages. A total of 149 valid responses were analysed and the results indicated that language visibility and language comprehensibility play a significant role on tourist satisfaction. This study emphasizes the need for strategic initiatives to integrate Arabic into the tourism sector, such as developing Arabic-language tourism packages, providing language training, raising community awareness, and enhancing the visibility of Arabic language in the tourism landscape. By addressing these issues, Kuching Waterfront can effectively attract Arabic-speaking tourists and enhance its competitiveness in the global tourism market.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language, Destination Competitiveness, Tourism, Tourism Language, Linguistic Landscape

## Introduction

The tourism industry plays a crucial role in the economic development of many regions, including Sarawak, Malaysia (Hussin & Buchmann, 2018). As a prominent sector, tourism entails significant cultural exchange and economic growth as it not only brings in revenue and employment opportunities but also promotes the preservation of local culture and natural resources. While the efforts to attract global visitors have grown significantly in recent years, it is essential to understand the preferences and interests of specific target markets.

Moreover, Linguistic Landscape (LL), in a nutshell, is the visibility of languages in public spaces (Shibliyev, 2019). It is a relatively new field that requires ample study to add to the existing body of literature. Despite the scarcity of literature, a past study linked the terminology “landscape” with “cityscape”, where emphasis is placed on urban settings rather than rural ones. Later, the “scape” element paved the way for a myriad of combinations, depending on the locations on which the research is focused (e.g., roadscares, soundscares, cyberscares, linguascapes). In the jungle of terms used in LL, the model proposed by Ivković (2012:75) represents a clear distinction between physical geography and virtual landscapes (see Figure 1).

Additionally, public signage is crucial in the tourist industry as it shapes visitor experiences, influences perceptions, and encourages sustainable activities in a community. Specifically, a public space sign is a collection of visually represented symbols and graphics intended to facilitate human engagement with public places (Andrijanto, 2018: 225). Public signage is connected to the linguistic scenery of an area and encompasses the language seen in public areas like road signs, billboards, street and place names, shop signs, and informative displays on government buildings, all contributing to the linguistic environment of a specific region or urban area (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25).

While prior research exists on the LL in Kuala Lumpur (Coluzzi & Kitade, 2015; Supramani et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017), there is limited literature to examine the language used in signage and communication within the tourism sector in Sarawak. It is important to use language that is appealing, informative, and culturally sensitive to effectively promote tourism in Sarawak. By incorporating multiple languages, such as English, Malay, and indigenous languages like Iban and Bidayuh, into signage and communication materials, Sarawak can cater to a wider range of tourists and provide a more inclusive and immersive experience. Additionally, language plays a crucial role in creating a positive image of Sarawak as a tourist destination. The use of accurate and compelling language that highlights the unique heritage, resources and attractions of Sarawak can help create a positive impression.

From the observation of the study, there is a distinct lack of Arab language representation in the LL of Sarawak’s tourism sector. This could be due to various factors, such as low number of Arab tourists visiting the region or lack of targeted marketing towards Arab-speaking countries. Thus, to enhance the LL and attract more Arab tourists, it would be beneficial for Sarawak to implement Arabic translations in signage, brochures, and online platforms. Furthermore, the LL should also reflect the importance of indigenous languages in Sarawak tourism industry.

As tourism has become one of the prominent sectors which entails cultural exchange and economic growth, it is essential to understand the preferences and interests of specific target markets. The landscape of a city, therefore, can significantly impact the tourism experience for visitors. This specifically includes the LL which revolves around the visibility of language in public spaces including signage, advertisements, drawings, writings, and other forms of communication. It also portrays the reflection of the city in a glance through its linguistic fabrics, providing insights into the cultural, historical, and ethnic influences of the city and communities.

This study aims to shed light on the LL focusing on the specific case of Kuching Waterfront and its commercial ring areas as an intact opportunity to attract Arab tourists to Kuching, Malaysia. Moreover, this research endeavors to pave the way for broader future research and initiatives that explore the roles of Kuching Waterfront as the strategic tool for destination branding and cross-cultural understanding. This study will also unlock the untapped potential of Kuching Waterfront's LL as a unique opportunity for tourism stakeholders to strategically enhance the presence of diverse array of languages, including Arabic in the signage and communication.

The tourism industry in Sarawak has started to grow steadily especially after the pandemic. Kuching Waterfront is one of the promising tourist attractions in Kuching, and its LL plays a critical role in portraying the uniqueness of Sarawak. However, the potential of attracting Arab tourists to Sarawak and the role of LL of Kuching Waterfront has not been fully explored. Past research has indicated that many Arab tourists may feel comfortable travelling to destinations where their language resources are available. Therefore, exploring the LL of Kuching Waterfront to attract Arab tourist is crucial as it may not be fully equipped to cater to these needs. Hence, there is a need to explore the opportunities and challenges in enhancing the LL to enhance the Arab tourists experience, develop strategies, addressing the challenges, and propose recommendations for tourism stakeholders to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity and enhance the overall tourism experience for Arab tourist in Kuching Waterfront.

## Literature Review

### *Linguistic Landscape*

LL is a common global phenomenon in the tourism agenda. The term itself refers to linguistic objects that denote the public space (Ben-Rafael, 2009). It represents the visualization of a venue with a layout or a product which symbolized and dominated by texts and context which closely related to the cultural identity of a community. Sibarani, et.al (2021) emphasize the need for the LL of tourist guides to have a psychological appeal to which such psychological message can bring strong impact to the tourists. The LL combines text with other contextual elements such as colours, local writings, images, or layout to which it is used to convey information, source of attraction or influence on a shop or business, advertisements or promotions, tourists' spots, or directions. It covers what you visualize on moving transportation such as at the airports and public transport.

Research on the LL in tourism described it as the language of public road signage, promotional billboards, street names, commercial buildings, and shops (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) of which in short, language in the environment, displayed and exposed in public spaces (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Thus, the acceptance of multilingual states or through the dominant element which is text or language (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Kamis et al., 2021). contributes to profitable progress of the area (Negro, 2008), either in pamphlets, banners, signposts, or displayed language at main entrances or building landmarks, shops or business, advertisements, or promotions at the tourists' spots.

The LL is now being imparted on a bigger scale such as mobile, social media and static advertisement media, in an attempt to understand the motive. Simultaneously, with the increasing development of digital communications, the LL has also become dominant in

virtual space (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). It is the language use and visibility of public spaces such as road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the LL of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Shang & Zhao, 2014). It plays a crucial role in shaping the experience of tourists in a destination.

Arab tourism has been identified as a significant source of revenue for many destinations, including Malaysia (Al-Samarrai, 2016). The ability to communicate in and understand the Arabic language among the front office personnel also had a profound effect on their fondness. The Arab tourist market has unique characteristics, including preferences for halal food, prayer facilities, and Arabic language services (Abdelaziz, 2016). Previous research has identified the need for destinations to adapt to the preferences and needs of Arab tourists to enhance their experience (Al-Samarrai, 2016; Abdelaziz, 2016).

#### *Linguistic Preferences of Arab Tourists*

Research has identified language barriers as a critical factor for tourists when planning a trip to a foreign destination (Nagai et al., 2019). Many Arab tourists prefer destinations where they can communicate in their own language (Ekawati et al., 2023). A good command of the host language would definitely make a difference when travelling abroad, as it facilitates onsite social interactions and knowledge transfer (Lu et al., 2021). Such language ability would further help tourists to better immerse themselves into the local community and hence, foster greater opportunities to appreciate the authenticity of the host culture, including the language itself (Nagai et al., 2019).

Futhermore, the LL of a destination can significantly impact the tourism experience for visitors, including Arab tourists. Past studies revealed that ease of communication through familiar languages is a key factor for Arab tourists when choosing a travel destination (Lu et al., 2021; Ekawati et al., 2023).

#### *Language and Tourism*

Language plays a crucial role in the tourism industry as it is the primary tool for communication, marketing, and creating a positive impression of a destination. According to a study, the "language of tourism" encompasses a unique discourse that includes personal accounts by travellers and acts of promotion by the tourism industry (Xiang et al., 2019). This language is characterized by a myriad of representational forms and media such as signages, brochures, highway billboards, TV commercials, travelogues, and visual images, all of which contribute to the linguistic landscape of a tourist destination.

The linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and salience of languages in public spaces, which can significantly impact the tourism experience (Ekawati et al., 2023). Previous research has identified language barriers as a critical issue for tourists when planning a trip to a foreign destination, and some tourists prefer destinations where they can communicate in their own language (Nagai et al., 2019). Language proficiency represents a major communication barrier between cultures, and the language spoken at a destination can be influential in affecting the behaviour of international tourists as well as the quality of their trip (Nagai et al., 2019). The use of multiple languages, including the local language and

English, can enhance the linguistic diversity and inclusivity of a tourist destination, making it more appealing to a wider range of tourists (Lu et al., 2021).

#### *Linguistic Landscape in Malaysia*

The tourism industry in Malaysia has seen significant growth in recent years, with Arab tourists being a notable segment of the market (Ibrahim et al., 2019). A study by Wahid et al. (2019) found that Arab tourists visiting Malaysia face communication challenges due to the lack of Arabic language resources in the tourism industry, particularly in rural areas. This study was further elaborated by Hasmizi et al. (2020) highlighting the tremendous increased of Islamic tourism in Malaysia in particularly with regards to the improvement of HALAL tourism in Malaysia. However, research on the LL of Malaysia, particularly in relation to Arab tourists, is limited.

Imran et. al. (2018) conducted the needs to develop a model of Islamic tourism in Selangor, Malaysia. This earlier study focused on the access to Muslim friendly amenities such as religious buildings, airport facilities, lodging choices and variety HALAL food alternatives (Yan et.al., 2017). Ahmad et. al. (2018) has also analysed the factors for Arab tourists choosing Malaysia, in particularly Selangor as the tourist destination. The findings, however, highlighted a few issues faced by the respondents and one of them was on the lack of Arabic language used in tourism sectors.

Woo and Nora (2020) analysed respondents' behaviours toward multi languages displayed on signboards in Kuala Lumpur International Airport. The LL offers multiple choices of language which include Malay Language, English, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic with standardized size of fonts and as well portraying that all languages are given equal priorities. The study, however, looked into the impacts of using multiple languages to the tourists. Nevertheless, there is no clear approach or strategy being formed to standardize the choice of languages based upon locations and destinations to identify the gaps to these needs. In addition, this research did not integrate its findings towards the impact of language in its LL to encourage Arab tourists to Malaysia.

The display of LL is more apparent in Bukit Bintang area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia as more foreign tourists in general and Middle Eastern tourists in particular travel to this side of Malaysia and settle down temporarily or permanently. Ironically, most signs written solely in Arabic were frequently displayed in the Bukit Bintang area which are directed to gradual increased number of Arabic-speaking tourists and communities in Bukit Bintang (Husin, 2019). Nevertheless, the number of Arab tourists visiting Sarawak is low compared to the famous Bukit Bintang area.

#### *Linguistic Landscape of Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak*

The current linguistic landscape of Kuching Waterfront in Sarawak has been observed to primarily showcase the Malay and English languages. According to Don (2014), Malaysia is a multilingual state with over 138 living languages. However, the LL of Kuching Waterfront appears to emphasize Malay and English, with limited visibility of other languages such as Mandarin, Tamil, or Arabic. The dominance of Malay and English in the LL of Kuching Waterfront can be attributed to Malaysia's language policies and the status of these languages in the country. Notably, the Malay language has historically been the lingua franca

for intergroup communication in Malaysia, even during the colonial era when English was the language of the government. Additionally, English has maintained its presence as a global language and is widely used in various sectors, including tourism.

Nevertheless, the limited representation of other languages, particularly Arabic, in the LL of Kuching Waterfront may present challenges for Arab tourists visiting the area. Past study highlighted the importance of proficiency in multiple languages, including English, Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay, for individuals and the country to navigate the global milieu (Don, 2014). The lack of Arabic language visibility in the LL may hinder Arab tourists' ability to navigate the Kuching Waterfront and access information and services tailored to their needs. Hence, the Sarawak state government has laid plans and aspirations, to upgrade the hotels, beaches and amenities in tourist spots to be Muslim friendly as part of the initiatives to attract Arab tourist to Sarawak. This highlights the need for research on the LL of popular tourist destinations, such as Kuching, based upon its readiness, opportunities, challenges and as well to propose strategies to improve the tourism experience for potential Arab visitors.

### The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is to examine the linguistic landscape of the Kuching, Waterfront in Sarawak, Malaysia, with a specific focus on its impact on Arab tourist experiences.

The framework is based on the following key elements:

1. Language Visibility: The prevalence and visibility of different languages, including Malay, English, Arabic, and other relevant languages, in the Kuching Waterfront's linguistic landscape.
2. Language Comprehensibility: The extent to which the linguistic landscape of the Kuching Waterfront is comprehensible to Arab tourists, considering their language proficiency and needs.

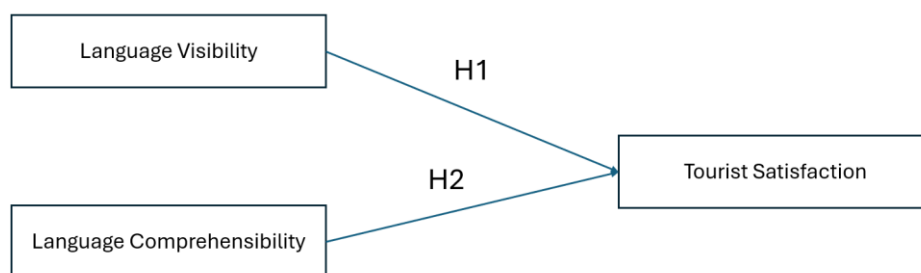


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Linguistic Landscape and Tourist Satisfaction

### *Satisfaction and Linguistic Landscape*

Satisfaction is a crucial factor in tourism, as it can influence the decision to revisit a destination and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Past scholars defined tourist satisfaction as a complex construct that involves the comparison of expectations and perceived performance of a destination (Carvalho & Sheppard, 2021). Furthermore, satisfaction is the overall point of view from the customer by evaluating the service provided to him / her by the establishment (Konar et al., 2016). High satisfaction levels among tourists can lead to positive word-of-mouth, repeat visitation, and increased loyalty to the destination.



The linguistic landscape of a tourist destination can significantly impact tourist satisfaction, as it can affect the ease of navigation, access to information, and overall experience. For example, the availability of signage, brochures, and other materials in multiple languages, including the tourists' native language, can greatly enhance their experience and satisfaction (Ekawati et al., 2023). In addition, the presence of linguistic diversity in the public spaces can foster a sense of inclusivity and openness, making the destination more appealing to a wider range of tourists (Lu et al., 2021).

Tourists, especially independent tourists, are aware of the important effects of foreign language competence on their destination choices and the quality of their trips (Lu et al., 2021). A good command of the host language would definitely make a difference when travelling abroad, as it facilitates onsite social interactions and knowledge transfer. Such language ability would further help tourists to better immerse themselves into the local community and hence, foster greater opportunities to appreciate the authenticity of the host culture, including the language itself (Lu et al., 2021). Thus, the following hypotheses were formed:

*H1: Language visibility is significantly and positively related to tourist satisfaction.*

*H2: Language variety is significantly and positively related to tourist satisfaction.*

*H3: Language function is significantly and positively related to tourist satisfaction.*

*H4: Language quality is significantly and positively related to tourist satisfaction.*

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The research is conducted as part of a pilot project at Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia. It focuses on the LL of the destination and how the presence of multilingual signage at the destination affects the satisfaction of tourists to the destination. A mixed-method approach was used, whereby the qualitative method uses phenomenological method to investigate how individuals or communities perceive certain ideas or occurrences while the quantitative method adopts and adapts questionnaires from past studies. For the quantitative method, it involved data analysis through interpretation and explanation in detail the LL of Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia. The researchers obtained data in the form of 124 photographs and the data includes interview recordings, distinct types of text, and images of tourist guide which further divided into five types, namely (1) welcoming arch or pillars, (2) sign boards of directions, (3) sign boards on buildings or shops, (4) cultural images of local community at the tourist location, and (5) geographical description at the tourist location. The technique of data collections is using observation and semi-structured interviews avoid any bias stemming from their personal experience or informants. The Post-Modern Phenomenon is a subset of qualitative phenomenological research that uses a shared set of hypotheses to investigate a variety of topics (Creswell, 2013). The extent of signs in public places and the translation techniques utilized for multilingual public space sign forms are examined in this study using the post-modern phenomenon method. Observation has been conducted through photographs taken at the identified locations and relevant sources. Additionally, interviews with the communities randomly selected within the areas were to gain opinions and perceptions regarding the LL at Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia, and its functions for visitors.

Non-probability purposive sampling was utilized to select individuals who met specific leadership criteria. This sampling technique enabled the identification of respondents possessing the requisite traits and experiences pertinent to the study. The key informants comprised of international tourists, specifically of Arabic or Middle eastern backgrounds. The decision to focus on these tourists is aligned with efforts to attract and promote Arab tourists to Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak.

### *Sampling Procedures*

This research uses employed a 7-point Likert scale to assess language visibility, language variety, language function, language quality and tourist satisfaction, with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data were collected from foreign tourists of Arabic or Middle eastern origins using non-probability purposive sampling. These tourists were approached and briefed about the intention of the study. After ensuring respondent anonymity and receiving their consent, physical questionnaires were handed out. To mitigate the potential threat of common method bias, several strategies were implemented. Out of 500 distributed questionnaires, 165 were returned (33% response rate). After performing data cleaning via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0, several missing values and straight-lining responses were removed, resulting in the 149 valid responses. Lastly, these entries were analysed using SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2023) to assess the reliability, as well as the convergent and discriminant validity of the data (Henseler et al., 2016).

## **Results and Discussion**

Based on the observations and interviews with the local community, the following results were found:

### *Linguistics Landscape for Tourist Guidance*

The research focussed on the fact that LL skewed tremendously on what could be seen or read by the tourists and to significantly felt them and kept in their memories. These messages are closely related to eye-catching landscapes which are packaged with proper texts and accompanied by elements of colour, fonts, sizes, styles of writings, pictures, landscape models, and others. Moreover, the LL of Kuching Waterfront is basically bonded with its local culture and ethnicities. Below are five (5) main areas denoting the key elements to the Kuching Waterfronts' LL.

#### **(1) Welcome arch or pillar.**

The welcome greetings in the form of pillars on the side of the road and with the written arch can be seen at the Padungan Road where the little Kuching China Town is located, at the entrance of main walking street bazar at Jalan Masjid India and as well the Welcoming Arch at Kuching Waterfont itself. These three main welcoming arches and pillars are used as a welcome greeting and closely related to the local wisdom and cultural tradition. The following two arches are displaying the Chinese and Malay Language as the welcoming arch to the tourists' spot. Both has selected vibrant colours and characters of font that reflects the message or community it presents. This can be seen in the following gates or arch at the welcoming area of Jalan Padungan and Jalan Masjid India. Figures 1 and 2 depict pictures of the welcome arch or pillar which are within the coverage area of study.





Figure 1: Welcome Greetings in Mandarin and Malay at Padungan, Kuching, Sarawak



Figure 2: Welcome Greetings in English at India Street, Kuching, Sarawak

## (2) Sign boards of directions

One of the significant features in LL is the sign boards of directions and this is stretched from tourists' objects, locations or destinations. These can be represented with arrows and combined with the clear writing colours and fonts, either engraved or printed. Such sign boards are displayed in strategic places which can be easily seen and should be clear enough to enhance the tourists experience in following the directions to a particular destination. The signage of directions at Kuching Waterfront using Malay Language and English (as in Figure 3).



Figure 3: Direction board in English and Malay languages

### (3) Sign boards on buildings or shops

The LL at Kuching Waterfront is also coloured by the rows of shops which offer from local souvenirs to variety of food. The hotels, shopping malls and as well as public amenities including prayer areas enhance the tourists experience to Kuching Waterfront and its surroundings. There are variety of fonts and colours used to attract visitors to each shop or mall. Nevertheless, there are less than 20 shops having fonts written in Arabic lettering as described in the few samples in Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7.



Figure 4. Sign boards on shops at Kuching, Sarawak in Malay, English and Arabic



Figure 5: Sign boards on shops at Kuching, Sarawak in Mandarin, English and Arabic



Figure 6: Sign board at Kuching, Sarawak in English, Mandarin, and Jawi



Figure 7: Sign board in English and Hindu languages at Kuching, Sarawak

#### (4) Cultural images or monuments

Kuching Waterfront also offers in its LL, object tourists representing the tradition of local communities. There are engraved objects of the traditional and legendary *perahu tambang* being framed and permanently built in the centre walking areas of Kuching Waterfront. This is packaged with brief explanation of the picture. This initiative engages tourists, can be photographed and sent through online using social media to the wider community both at home and abroad. Along the roads is located the Buddhist Temple, known as Tua Pek Kong Temple at one end and the Mosque at the other end. These



cultural monuments represent the multiracial community of Sarawak. The Tua Pek Kong Temple serves as the focal point for Malaysia Chinese community in Kuching and this leads to the selection of writings used at the temple, which is Chinese characters. At the mosque, it is an element to beautify the place with arabic writings and potray the culture as it relates to the religion.

#### (5) Geographical descriptions

Kuching Waterfront also offers in its LL the map of tourist objects. Such empirical geographic descriptions are displayed in the form of attractive maps packaged with tourist objects and as well brief descriptions to which made easy to the tourists. The centre of attraction is the Darul Hana's bridge (add description), where it colours the landscape by itself especially at night. Adding on, is the beautiful mucical water rhythm where the background music or songs selected ranges from the traditional ethnic songs to the modern and contemporary songs of other countries in the world. Moving a bit further to the centre of India Street area, the Muslim shops plays the Qurannic recitation and songs in Arabic. Based upon the observation, this practise is acceptable by the local community as it relates to the religion.

#### *Tourists Handbook*

Based upon the research surveys, the availability of tourists' handbooks is made easy at the hotel lobbies by locations in terms of pamphlets. However, there are rooms for improvement in particularly to ease the experiences of tourists to go around and as well to seek for directions or bus.

#### *Quantitative Survey*

Furthermore, quantitative research was conducted to analyse in-depth the LL of the tourism industry of Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed. Of the 500, only 165 responses were returned (33% response rate). After screening the data for straightlining responses and missing values, the total number of usable data was 149 responses (29.8%). The response rates of the study are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

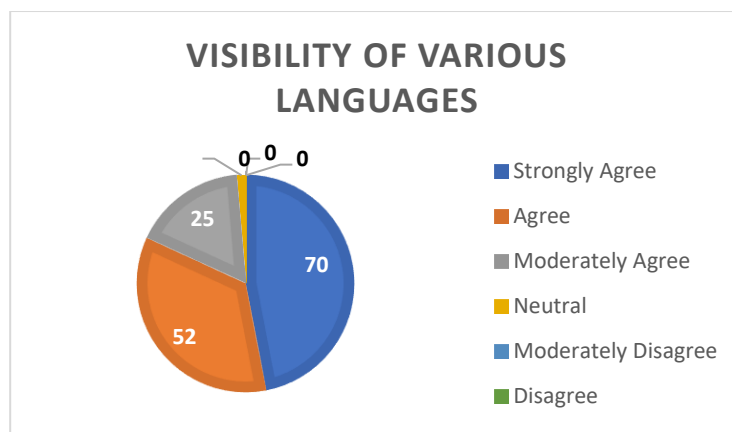
#### *Response rate of this study*

| Item                          | Response (n) | Response Rate (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Questionnaire Returned        | 165          | 33                |
| Questionnaire after Screening | 149          | 29.8              |

Moreover, the breakdown of the quantitative responses is listed out below:

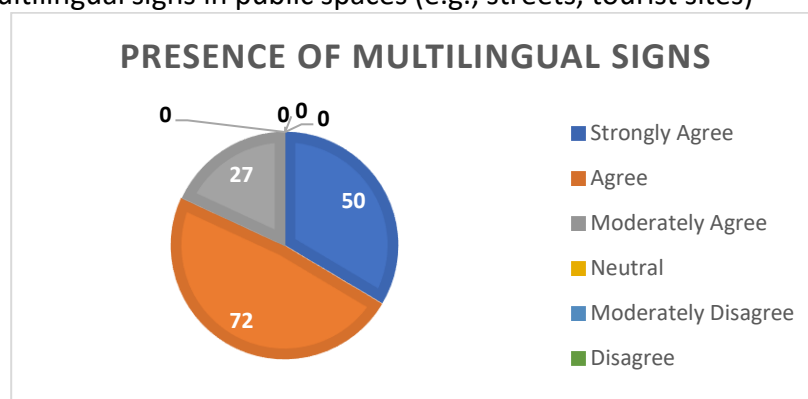
#### *Language Visibility*

1. Different languages were visible during my visit (e.g., English, Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin, Arab)?



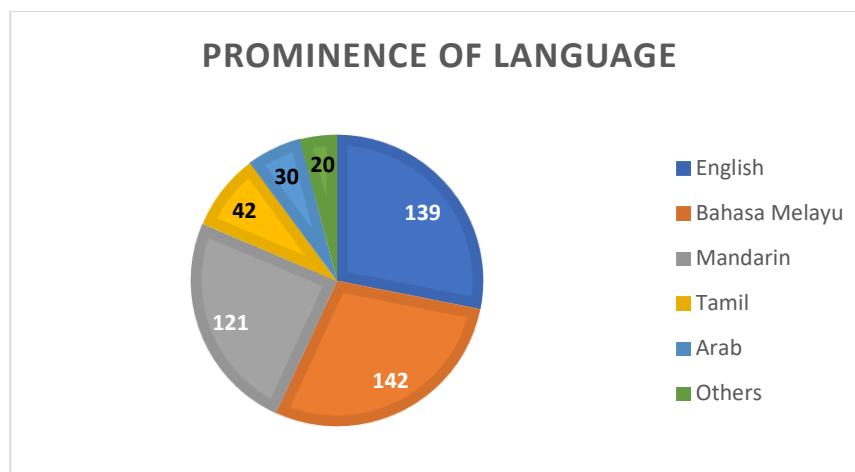
Based on the survey distributed to the tourists at Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, it was found that 70 respondents strongly agree, 52 respondents agree, 25 respondents moderately agree, and two respondents were neutral. This implies that a large majority of the respondents agreed that many languages were visible around Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak, Malaysia (“the Destination” herein).

There were multilingual signs in public spaces (e.g., streets, tourist sites)



The study found that a large portion of respondents agreed that there was a presence of multilingual signages around the Destination (72 respondents), while only 50 respondents strongly agreed that there was a presence of multilingual signs, and 27 respondents moderately agreed to the statement. Based on the findings and interviews, it can be inferred that there is still room for improvement to be more inclusive in terms of language.

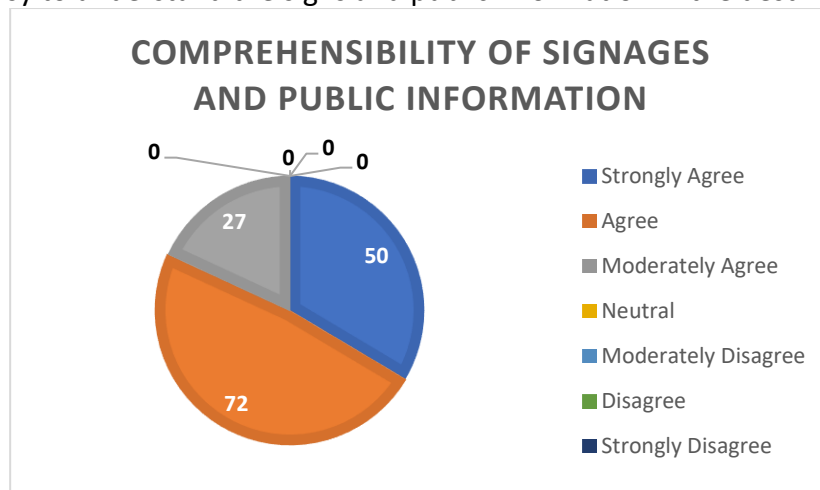
Which languages were most prominently displayed?



In this section, the survey listed a multiple-choice question for respondents to answer. From the findings, it was inferred that most respondents (142 respondents) noted the abundance of Bahasa Melayu signages, 139 respondents noted English language as the second prominent language, followed by Mandarin at 121 respondents, 42 respondents noted seeing Tamil signages, 30 respondents noted identifying Arab signages, while 20 respondents noted seeing other languages. Based on the findings and interview, it was concluded that a vast majority of signages were Bahasa Melayu, English, and Mandarin, while other languages were severely lagging in visibility. While these languages are the three main languages in Sarawak, the Destination can work toward improving inclusivity of other languages, such as Arab.

#### *Language Comprehensibility*

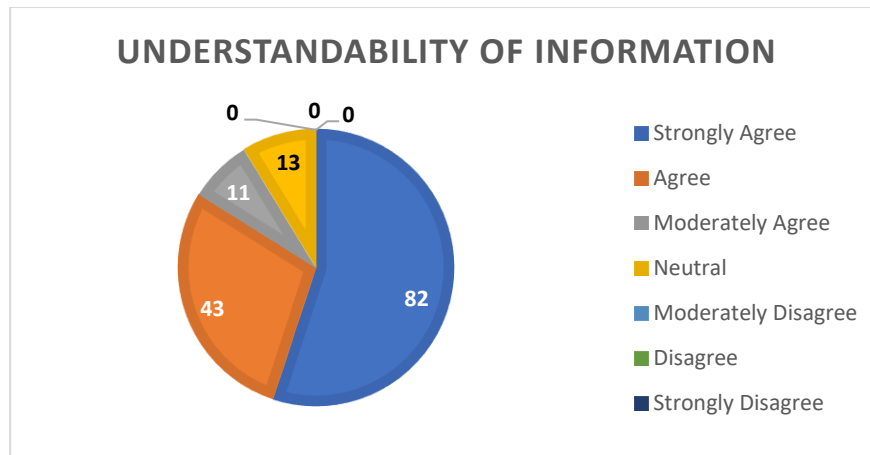
It was easy to understand the signs and public information in the destination



In terms of language comprehensibility, 50 respondents strongly agreed, 72 respondents agreed, and 27 respondents moderately agreed. The findings indicate that the general comprehensibility of the signs and public information readily available at the Destination was easy to understand.

It was easy to understand important information (e.g., directions, safety signs)

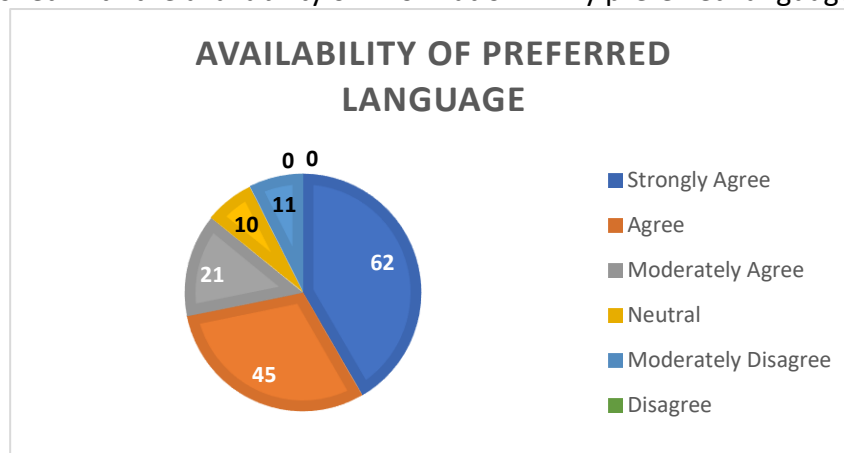




For the ease of understanding information, 82 respondents were found to strongly agree, that it was easy to understand important information, such as directions, safety signs, and information found at information counters. It was also found that 43 respondents agreed, and 11 respondents expressed they moderately agree to that the information displayed at the destination was easy to understand. Surprisingly, 13 respondents were neutral to this statement. Based on the discussion with the respondents, some signages located at the destination were misleading and tend to be hard to understand as the languages were not in their first language.

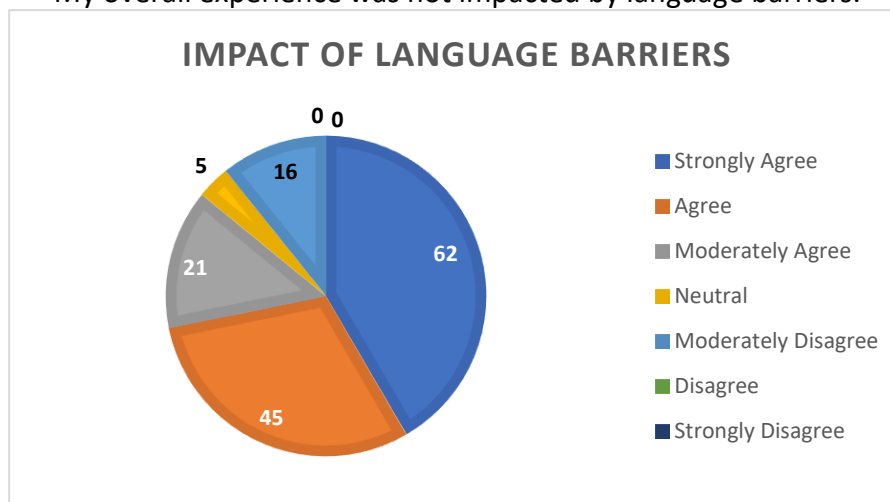
#### *Tourist Satisfaction*

I was satisfied with the availability of information in my preferred language(s).



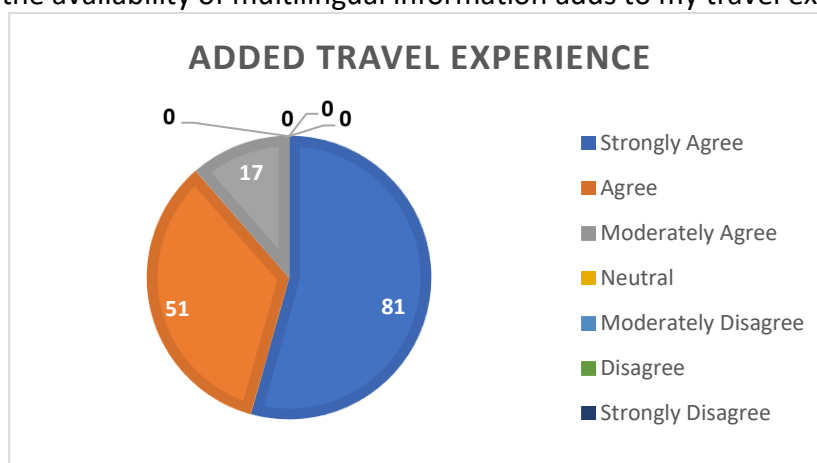
The findings indicate that 62 respondents strongly agree that they were satisfied with the availability of information in their preferred language. 45 respondents were found to agree, while 21 respondents moderately agree. Interestingly, 10 respondents indicated a neutral response, while 11 respondents moderately disagreed that there were signages available in their preferred language. Based on the engagement with them, it was understood that not all languages were available at the destination and that tourists that were not familiar with Bahasa Melayu and English were not able to navigate easily without their smartphones and GPS to assist them.

My overall experience was not impacted by language barriers.



The findings indicate that 62 respondents strongly agree, 45 respondents agree, and 21 respondents moderately agree their overall experience was not impacted by language barriers. However, there were five respondents that were neutral on this, and 16 respondents moderately disagreed. Based on the interview and discussion, these respondents said that it was frustrating not being able to understand the signages and public information while navigating the Destination. It often led them to different places than their intended location. It was also difficult for them to ask for directions from locals as there were language barriers.

I find that the availability of multilingual information adds to my travel experience.



The findings indicate that 81 respondents strongly agree, 51 respondents agree, and 17 respondents moderately agree that the availability of multilingual information adds to their travel experience. Discussions with tourists concluded that having information and signages that are readily available in their preferred language positively adds to their experience.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature highlights the importance of the LL in enhancing the tourism experience for visitors, particularly those from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Research on the LL of Malaysia, particularly concerning Arab tourists, is limited, highlighting the need for further research. The study on exploring the LL of Kuching Waterfront to enhance the Arab tourist experience aims to address this gap in the literature and provide insights for policymakers, businesses, and tourism stakeholders on promoting linguistic diversity and

inclusivity for Arab tourists in Kuching. This study builds on the Arab tourists and travel behaviour to Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak. Firstly, Arab tourists have been identified as a growing market in global tourism, particularly in Malaysia. Research by Jamaludin and Mohamed (2018) showed that Arab tourists have a unique travel behavior, preferences, and expectations. They prefer destinations that cater to their cultural and religious needs and have language resources that facilitate communication.

This study found that the LL of Kuching, Sarawak skewed towards the English language. Several buildings in the area which are also tourist attractions tend to vary in terms of languages and fonts used to relate with religion and culture. For example, the temples use Chinese characters and calligraphies to enrich and enhance the experiences of its tourists and visitors. Islamic characters can also be seen clearly at Mosques and other Muslim outlets. These characters are also used at old shops which have the name of the shops written in Jawi scripts. Additionally, several interviews that were conducted with local communities revealed that there were no preferences towards the language and fonts used in at Kuching Waterfront. They welcome diversities as Sarawak itself has a huge number of different ethnicities and languages. This reveals that language diversity and inclusivity is important to promote intercultural communication and enhance the tourism experience. Studies by Ben-Rafael et al. (2010) and Blackwood (2016) emphasized the need for linguistic diversity and inclusivity in the LL to promote cultural sensitivity and respect towards different languages and cultures.

Nevertheless, there is lack of resources for them to promote the Arabic language in their day-to-day activities either in promotions or displayed items. Moreover, the Arabic knowledge among them is relatively low in terms of communication even though it is widely practiced for religious matters. This indicates that there is a challenge in promoting linguistic diversity and inclusivity which may be due to the lack of resources, infrastructure, and policies to promote linguistic diversity, as well as resistance from locals and businesses to adopt multilingualism. A study by Durán-Medina (2017) highlighted these challenges in the context of linguistic diversity in the tourism industry.

### **Implications of the Study**

The current study found that while the LL of Kuching Waterfront displays a diverse range of languages, including English, Malay, Chinese, and religious scripts, the representation of the Arabic language is limited. This poses challenges for Arab tourists who may face difficulties in navigating the area and accessing information relevant to their cultural and linguistic needs. Thus, it is the role of policymakers and tourism stakeholders to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity. A study by Ben-Rafael et al. (2010) emphasized the need for policies and guidelines to promote linguistic diversity in the LL. Additionally, the involvement of businesses and local communities in promoting linguistic diversity can contribute to a more inclusive tourism experience.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The current study focused on the LL of Kuching Waterfront and its implications for Arab tourists. However, the study is limited in its scope, as it did not consider the perspectives of Arab tourists themselves. Future research could explore the experiences and perceptions of Arab tourists visiting

Kuching Waterfront to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic challenges and opportunities they face. Secondly, the study of the LL focuses solely on the landscape of Kuching Waterfront, Sarawak. It depicts a small portion of the state and country as a whole. However, if the Arab language can be implemented first on a small scale, future research may look into the integration of the Arab language nationwide.

Future research could explore the experiences and perceptions of Arab tourists visiting Kuching Waterfront to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic challenges and opportunities they face. This would provide valuable insights into the specific needs and preferences of Arab tourists, which could inform strategies for enhancing the linguistic landscape and improving the tourism experience. Additionally, future studies could expand the scope of the research to other tourist destinations in Sarawak or even nationwide. This would provide a more holistic understanding of the linguistic landscape, and the challenges faced by Arab tourists in Malaysia.

Moreover, attracting Arab tourists could include collaborations with Arab travel agencies and partnerships with Arab influencers to promote Kuching Waterfront as a tourist destination (Xiang et al., 2019). Future research can look into the effectiveness of these promotional strategies and their impact on the linguistic landscape and Arab tourist experience. The role of tourism agencies and stakeholders to enhance linguistic inclusivity and diversity can also be further explored. Such collaboration would also serve as a stepping stone to conduct longitudinal studies to identify the development and changes over time to offer deeper understanding of the linguistic landscape of tourism destinations.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the linguistic landscape (LL) of Kuching Waterfront and its implications for Arab tourists, highlighting the importance of linguistic inclusivity in tourism. By identifying the limited representation of the Arabic language in the LL, the study underscores the challenges faced by Arab tourists in navigating the area and accessing culturally relevant information. This issue is particularly important in the context of Malaysia's growing tourism industry, where inclusivity and cultural sensitivity are key to attracting and retaining international visitors. The study emphasizes the need for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local businesses to prioritize linguistic diversity, ensuring that all tourists, including Arab visitors, feel welcomed and supported. This not only enhances the tourism experience but also contributes to the economic and cultural vitality of the destination.

The utility of this study extends to its potential to inform practical strategies for improving the linguistic landscape and tourism infrastructure. By addressing the linguistic barriers faced by Arab tourists, the study provides a foundation for developing policies and guidelines that promote multilingualism and inclusivity. For instance, incorporating Arabic signage, providing Arabic-language information materials, and training tourism staff in basic Arabic communication can significantly improve the experience of Arab tourists. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of collaboration between tourism agencies, local communities, and Arab stakeholders, such as travel agencies and influencers, to promote Kuching Waterfront as an inclusive destination. These efforts can serve as a model for other tourist destinations in Sarawak and across Malaysia, fostering a more inclusive and diverse tourism industry.

Finally, the effectiveness of this study is evident in its potential to inspire future research and longitudinal studies on linguistic inclusivity in tourism. By focusing on the perspectives and experiences of Arab tourists, future studies can provide deeper insights into their specific needs and preferences, enabling more targeted and effective strategies. Additionally, expanding the scope of research to other regions and tourist destinations can offer a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic landscape and its impact on tourism. This study serves as a stepping stone for fostering collaboration among stakeholders, promoting linguistic diversity, and enhancing the overall tourism experience. Ultimately, addressing linguistic inclusivity is not only beneficial for Arab tourists but also for the broader tourism industry, as it fosters cultural exchange, economic growth, and a more inclusive global community.

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