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The Linguistic Landscape of Mosques in Indonesia: Materiality and Identity Representation

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Abstract

During its development, mosques in Indonesia have become a potential place with friction and conflict over the struggle for identity and the infiltration of various Islamic ideologies. This article explores the linguistic landscape in connection to the use of architectural materials in community mosques in Malang, Indonesia. The community mosques of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Non-NU were selected to see their strategies in contesting their identities representation. The research findings demonstrate that the materiality in the mosques indicates an attempt to designate the identity of each subculture group. The use of languages displayed in the mosques also delineates each community mosque's efforts to maintain their identity representation from attempts to confiscate the mosque by a particular group or ideology. This study points out that in Indonesia, materiality and linguistic landscape in religious sites (mosques) need to be considered as an effort to anticipate the sociopolitical dynamics that develop in the society.

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1. Introduction

The context of the current study is Islamic place of worship or mosque in Indonesia. Mosques play a strategic role in Indonesian society, the world's largest Muslim population. In each Muslim community, a mosque has a central role as a religious institution and as a place that accommodates social, cultural, and political activities (Ahmed, 2013; Hasan, 2009). These mosques, with their broad functions, is in certain situations prone to friction and conflict. A mosque can potentially be an arena of controversy and an entry into the community of various Islamic views and ideologies. As a religious space, a mosque represents a close relationship among architecture, representation of religious symbols, and the language of sociopolitical dynamics in the society (Wirymartono, 2009). In the Indonesian setting, a mosque is not merely a holy place as for the diversity of Islamic teachings, views, and Islamic subcultures of community. It also renders a political space for certain Islamic groups to assert their authority and show identities (Feillard, 2013). Diverse patterns and strategies of identity representation were raised to demonstrate the characteristics of each community group. This dynamic interaction of various Islamic groups in community mosques eventually led to conflicts of interest, namely the raising issue of seizing the mosques (Baso, 2013; Berita Satu, 2013; Emka, 2011; NU-Online, 2016; Republika, 2013). To prevent possible conflicts in mosques, stakeholders took various efforts to represent the group's identity more explicitly. However, identity representations are pursued through identity affirmation as well as employing identity disaffirmation, which is manifested through alteration, omission, or imitation of the language and architectural elements used (Putrie & Martokusumo, 2020).

From this point, the use of language in mosques is an interesting issue to be further explored, particularly within the linguistic landscape approach. Linguistic landscape relates to linguistic objects that characterize the public space, investigates displayed language in a given area, and generally analyses advertisements, billboards, signage, and other signs in public space. The standard definition used in this field is the one set out in the 1997

canonical article by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who stated “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration” (p. 25). They concern the use in the public sphere of language in its written form. A relation is made to language visible in the specified place (Bourhis & Landry, 2002).

The present study analyzes the use of language in the linguistic landscape of mosques. This study furthermore aims to examine how the language is used to convey messages in representing, negotiating, and affirming communities' identity. Seeing the facts mentioned earlier, it would be a trigger to look at the language used in mosques' signs using linguistic landscape perspective in the Indonesian setting. We also consider the materiality applied in the mosques. We assume that the medium is applied to the language used on display and the message reflected from the display. The significance of medium in the linguistic landscape, namely how the language is represented in the material nature of the sign itself, has attracted attention (Alsaif & Starks, 2019; Cook, 2015; Kasanga, 2014; Plessis, 2010; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009). The medium, such as “blackboards and chalks, monitor screens and pixels, paper and printer's ink, and all the diversity of writing techniques” (Cook, 2015, p. 83), were included in this analysis. In addition, medium types such as “electronic flat-panel displays, LED neon lights, foam boards, electronic message centers, interactive touch screens, inflatable signage, and scrolling banners” (Gorter, 2013, p. 19) have also been incorporated into this study. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to the growing knowledge on the linguistic landscape of religious places in different settings and contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Linguistic Landscape and Religiouscape

The study of the linguistic landscape has attracted many scholars with a great deal of attention (e.g., Adetunji, 2015; Coluzzi, 2016; Harbon & Halimi, 2019; Kasanga, 2014; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2013; Lee, 2019; Nikolaou,

2017). Among them, scholars focus their analysis on the religiouscape and worship, such as what has been done by Woldemariam and Lanza (2012), Coluzzi and Kitade (2015), Kochav (2018), Inya (2019), and Esteron (2021).

Observing the languages displayed in places of worship may be the most accurate indicator of the level of the prestige enjoyed by the various languages found in a multilingual country. An article that discusses linguistic landscape focuses on a particular religion was about signs placed in the Christian church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The linguistic landscape of Addis Abeba is a crossroads for numerous discourses that touch on politics, national identity, modernity, and, of course, power. This study captured a wide range of banners, posters, stickers, and, by extension, other mediated discourses. In this regard, Woldemariam and Lanza (2012) argued that the language landscape serves as a platform for evangelizing, contestation and debate, commodification, and globalization. Coluzzi and Kitade (2015) investigated seven places of worship in Malaysia. Their study found that English, like many other languages, serves as a neutral language that can be used for interethnic communication and offers cultural and occupational opportunities. In the Philippines, English is the dominant language of communication and tourism in the churchscape, while indigenous languages such as Filipino and Pangasinan play a supporting role (Esteron, 2021). Meanwhile, in Israel, signs, posters, stickers, flags, and graffiti are common, where much of everyday life is defined by religious settings. The linguistic landscape of Safed in Israel's Upper Galilee was investigated by Kochav (2018) to determine the features, properties, and boundaries that represent the spectrum of belief in the Orthodox Jewish world. In Nigeria, Inya (2019) focuses her study on the linguistic landscape of religious signboards in Ado Ekiti. It aims to establish the relationship between the languages used on these signboards and the implication for identity, globalization, and culture. The results indicate that English is more prevalent and ubiquitous in the public space than other languages.

Until recently, however, literature explicitly examines the linguistic landscape of mosques has rarely been done. Alsaif and Starks (2019),

for example, explored the use of language displayed in the Holy Grand Mosque of Mecca. The study demonstrates how this religious site comprises multiple domains, each with its own linguistic landscape and preferred display medium. The findings highlight the significance of religious sites as a linguistic landscape, as well as the relevance of considering language and medium. In a contemporary discussion of this matter, Alsaif and Starks (2021) expand their research to examine the language used in the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Their findings illustrate the importance of domains in the study of religious language and semiotic assemblages found in the linguistic landscape.

2.2. Linguistic Landscape, Culture, and Identity

Identity issues have long dominated sociolinguistic study (Rezaei & Bahrami, 2019), and some linguistic landscape studies have looked into how individual and community identities manifest and are contested in the linguistic landscape of contemporary urban areas. The study of identities from the standpoint of the linguistic landscape in a religious space context is intriguing. We consider identity to be performed and so dynamic rather than fixed. Identity is culturally and historically situated, and it is negotiated in contact with other people, groups, and institutional systems (Edu-Buandoh, 2016). Identity is constantly negotiated in and through the linguistic landscape due to its dynamic character. Because all social actors have many identities, researching distinct identities in the linguistic landscape and how they interact and perhaps conflict is an essential focus for understanding the role of language in the linguistic landscape.

In the study of the linguistic landscape of a specific space, language, culture, and identity are inextricably linked. Extending this notion, Schecter (2015) proposes three epistemological approaches that apply in studying language, culture, and identity. They are a social anthropology perspective, focuses on how group boundaries are maintained; a sociocultural perspective studies how individuals and groups maintain their identity and thrive; and a participatory/relational perspective tradition that is "interested in culturally situating

individuals' authentic selves in what they say and do and with whom" (p. 242).

The linguistic landscape of a given public space may change due to people moving into different spaces and forming new identities as a result. Social mobility happens as well, and prestige languages may be used in the linguistic landscape to garner political and socioeconomic benefits. Identity is negotiated in and via semiotic activities, as well as in and through the linguistic landscape.

3. Methodology

This explorative study aims to examine the materiality and identity representations in various aspects manifested in the linguistic landscape of mosques. Displayed languages in mosques' exterior and interior spaces were investigated to describe how and why they are presented in a certain sociopolitical context. The existence of various Islamic organizations or groups within the context of Islamic culture plays a vital role in developing mosques in the country with the immense Muslim majority. Islamic organizations of a more traditional perspective, such as NU, have an active role in various efforts and strategies of Islamic missionaries in Indonesia, as do Islamic organizations of more contemporary perspectives, including Muhammadiyah. One of their missionary activities is to build mosques to form the foundation of Islamic development and education in various areas. Looking at those realities, it is not excessive to understand that the presence of mosques has not only a religious function but also a socially significant role for the Islamic subculture group.

3.1. Materials

Malang Raya, East Java, Indonesia, was chosen as the location of this study. Thirty-one mosques were chosen as research sites in this region. The mosques are situated in three administrative regions of Malang Raya: Kota Malang (<https://malangkota.go.id/>), Kabupaten

Malang (<http://malangkab.go.id/mlg/>), and Kota Batu (<https://batukota.go.id/>). Most of these mosques are community mosques built and maintained mainly by the local communities. Community mosques were chosen as the object of this study because they are comparatively more vulnerable to various sociopolitical changes and challenges due to the diverse interaction of different Islamic groups emerging in society. Hence, a further consideration in determining the object of this study is the factual occurrences of social tensions resulting from the attempt to take over the community mosques by an Islamic group considered a hardliner (Rijal, 2016).

The mosques surveyed in this study are affiliated with Muslim mass organizations, namely NU and Muhammadiyah, since these organizations throughout the time have built many community mosques. We then consider categorizing the mosques into NU and non-NU mosques. The NU mosques are managed and funded by the NU community. Those administered and prospered by other than NU are classified the non-NU mosques. Table 1 outlines the affiliated mosques with the number of images taken.

We collected pictures of signs in a total of 151 from 31 mosques sites, where some pictures contain more than one sign due to their adjacent placements. The photos were taken from outside and inside the mosques. In this regard, our study is different from Coluzzi and Kitade (2015), who only take pictures outside the mosque. We consider it very important to take every single image or sign applied in and outside the mosques for this research. We believe that linguistic elements outside the mosque area (such as the main gate or entrance, the parking area, the toilet) and inside the mosque (the main hall and the *mihrab* area) could help provide a comprehensive description of the mosque's language use and identity representation. In terms of consent, all images taken were given permission by the management authority of the mosques.

Table 1
Distribution of Signs in Mosque Sites in Malang Raya

Affiliation	Mosque	Photographed Items
NU	22	125
Non-NU	9	26
Total	31	151

3.2. Data Analysis

We follow Backhaus (2007) in defining the unit of analysis for this study, i.e., any written text within a spatially definable frame. Therefore, signage such as banners, posters, inscriptions, and plates, regardless of their size and material, were considered (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Leeman & Modan, 2009; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy & Waksman, 2009). We use digital cameras to collect information about the use of language in the surveyed mosques. The photos have been taken from a smartphone using a digital camera. Smartphone cameras are widely used in linguistic landscape research (Siricharoen, 2016). Gorter (2006) pointed out that using digital cameras with sufficient memory enables researchers to take a limitless number of signs. Although using a smartphone

camera is considered handy and straightforward.

The change of medium as one of the strategies used in taking and expropriating the mosque is also investigated in this study. Alsaif & Starks (2019) emphasize the importance of the medium used in mosque linguistic landscape research. The medium referred to any materials attached to and used to frame the language used. The medium can be of two types depending on its material durability: permanent and temporary (Alsaif & Starks, 2019; Cook, 2015). We found materials such as wood, stone, metal, paper, electronic board, and plastic used, attached with languages as shown on the data (Table 2). In addition, we added semi-permanent into the classification.

Table 2

Medium Display of Linguistic Landscape of Mosques in Malang Raya

Sign medium		
Permanent	Semi-permanent	Temporary
writings inscribed on the walls, attached Arabic inscriptions, signboard, stone, metal, <i>bedhug</i> (drum), aluminum, marble	printed paper framed by wood and covered by transparent glass, mass signboard nailed to the wall, fence, or pole	plastic, paper, electronic boards, poster, banner, leaflet

The last step is the categorization of the signs. This step includes elements in mosques such as the location of the sign, the appearance of the sign language, the font size, the colors, the order of mono/bilingual sign languages, the number of sign languages. The characteristics were thus coded and then analyzed.

Monolingual and bilingual signs were found in the surveyed mosques. None of the mosques examined display any multilingual signs. The results indicated that the selected mosques were assumed visited mainly by local Muslim prayers and their neighboring areas. The only foreign language that appeared residing

Indonesian signs used in the mosques is Arabic. This is primarily because Arabic in Islam is considered the sacred language of Islam (Bennet, 2018; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Shah, 2011; Spolsky, 2003; Versteegh, 2014; Yusuf, 2017). In detail, Table 3 depicts the information figure of monolingual and bilingual signs across the mosques. Monolingual signs distributed are mostly in NU affiliated mosques (64), while NU and non-NU mosques shared the same number in bilingual signs with a total of 27.54%. The monolingual signs were displayed in Indonesian. Bilingual signs were displayed in a combination of Indonesian-Arabic or Arabic-Indonesian.

Table 3

Sign Patterns Distribution and their Occurrences

Mosque	Monolingual	Bilingual	Multilingual	Total
NU	64	19	n/a	83
Non-NU	36	19	n/a	55
Total	100 (72.46%)	38 (27.54%)	-	138 (100%)

4. Results

4.1. Materiality: Permanence and Sign-Functional

The materials used to make signs also contribute to their meaning. Therefore, the choice of material has implications for the meaning-making of the sign. As a point of reference for investigating the materiality of the mosque and its representation of identity, this paper takes account of three types of meaning about material signs (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

- (1) Permanence. A high-quality sign made of long-lasting materials permanently added to a building indicates that the texts so created would last the lifetime of the building itself. Texts written in a set and invariable forms are more effective than the incredibly original spray-painted graffiti on the walls. In addition, these materials can indicate that the signs are

durable, long-lasting, or sturdy—for example, iron and aluminum.

- (2) Temporality/newness. Extensions, signs, or notes on more permanent or superimposed signs can often imply temporality. This material is usually attached to a permanent sign to show its dynamic nature and mutability over time, such as plastic, paper, and glass.
- (3) Quality. This material is a sign with the highest durability and production level, which is intended to demonstrate a certain degree of quality of the signs—for example, stone and marble. The application of signs such as stone or marble reflects the consistency of manufacturing, often construed as a more extended planning period and higher production costs.

Types of the medium used in the linguistic landscapes of mosques in Malang Raya are shown in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4
Types of Medium

Affiliation	Banner	Arabic inscription	Electronic board	Information board	Leaflet	Poster	Signboard	Etc.
NU	6	14	3	6	6	2	40	10
Non-NU	4	10	1	4	5	4	23	2
Total	10 (7.14%)	24 (17.14%)	4 (2.86%)	10 (7.14%)	11 (7.86%)	6 (4.28%)	63 (45%)	12 (8.57%)

Arabic inscription is the second most commonly used (17.14 %). In addition, leaflets containing less dominant messages or information appear in both NU and non-NU mosques. Finally, the signboard is the most commonly used medium in mosques. The

function of the signboard displays information about the name and address of the mosque. The use of language in the mosques is also reflected on the electronic screen, which usually provides details about prayer times or other relevant information.

Table 5
Medium Display of Linguistic Landscape of Mosques in Malang Raya

Identities displayed in mosques	
NU	Organization name and logo, calender, prayer schedules, the genealogy of scholars, <i>Ahlus-sunnah wal-Jama'ah</i> (Aswaja), Arabic inscription, prayer
Non-NU	Organization name and logo, poster on prayer manual according to the Prophet's tradition, poster on the invitation of Islamic studies

There are four types of sign-functional systems (Cook, 2013) that emerged from the mosques we surveyed, namely:

- Locating, sign used to indicate the location;

- Informing, sign to supply information;
- Controlling movement and behavior, sign is used to provide behavioral boundaries;
- Service sign, sign used to show services available.

4.1.1. Locating Sign

The signboards of NU and Muhammadiyah mosques are shown in Figure 1. Green is the color foundation that dominates the board on the nameplate of the NU mosque (Figure 1A). At the top part is the Arabic script of NU and its logo. In the middle is the mosque's name, the Jami mosque of Darussalam, written in Indonesian. The information on the mosque location is presented at the bottom line. Figure

1B shows the signboard of a Muhammadiyah mosque dominated by blue. The address and the site of the mosque are written on the bottom. There are no Arabic words on the signboard. However, it is found the name of the mosque is written in Arabic-Indonesian (مسجد نور الهدى MASJID NURUL HUDA) but is placed on a separated board away behind, dominated by the blue background. The signboards of the two mosques are made of aluminum painted with a strong color, which is embedded in the ground.



Figure 1

NU Mosque, Jami mosque Darussalam and Muhammadiyah mosque, Masjid Nurul Huda

4.1.2. Informing Sign

Informing signs in mosques can be categorized into three sign-functional systems.

- Informing sign that shows information of mosques managerial, such as mosques management (Figure 2A), financial report (Figure 2B), and a commemorative plaque of mosque establishment (Figure 10B).
- Informing sign that indicates information about worship guidance, including how to do prayer and *zikr* (Figure 3A), ablution, and information on prayer time.
- Informing sign that shows information related to the Aswaja ideology, such as a picture of the genealogy of Aswaja Islamic scholars chain (Figure 3B) and the genealogy of the Prophet descendent.



Figure 2

Informing Signs in NU and Muhammadiyah Mosques

Semi-permanent materials, in the form of printed paper framed by wood and covered by transparent glass, are generally used for the informing-signs. Similar to locating signs, there is a noteworthy distinction in the use of dominant colors in the medium of the informing

signs between NU and Non-NU mosques. A more prominent green is consistently used by the NU mosques, while Muhammadiyah mosques tend to be blue to identify their uniqueness.



Figure 3
Informing Signs of Mosque Management and Prayer Manual

4.1.3. Controlling Behaviour

Controlling behavior in mosques can be classified into four types.

- Prohibition,
- Suggestion,
- Warning,
- Reminder



Figure 4
Prohibition Signs in Mosques

Figure 4A shows a prohibition sign. This text says not to sleep in the mosque (DILARANG TIDUR DI DALAM MASJID) “sleeping in the mosque is prohibited”. The assertion of the prohibitions is shown in the red printed font on the word “sleep” in the imperative structure. The prohibition is written on a transparent plastic material attached to the mosque wall, dominated by green fonts. The aim is to attract worshippers’ eyes to read.



Figure 4B shows a bilingual controlling behavior sign. This sign is made of transparent plastic material with the Indonesian expression “LANTAI SUCI AWAS LICIN” and literally translated into English below that, “HOLY FLOOR SLIPPERY”. Although the translation in English is not quite accurate, the message the sign wants to suggest is that the congregation should be careful when walking on the mosque floor.



Figure 5
"Be aware" Signs

Figure 5A is a warning-controlling behavior sign made of plywood placed in the front of the mosque entrance. The fonts are surrounded by a dominated green background. It says "HATI-HATI DENGAN BARANG BAWAAN ANDA," which means "watch your belonging!" This signboard is in one of the NU mosques.

Figure 5B shows another example of a warning sign which says, "PENCURI JANGAN COBA-COBA MASUK!" means "Thieves do not try to enter the mosque!" that is placed on a security post in a non-NU mosque. This placard is made of a sheet of iron with black color background around the white fonts.



Figure 6
Religious Text Reminder

Figure 6 is a bilingual reminder as a controlling behavior sign, it consists of Indonesian-Arabic languages. On the top, it is written: *Niat I'tikaf* (intention to perform *i'tikaaf*), then its Arabic part is in the middle presenting the Arabic words: نَوَيْتُ الْأَعْتِكَافَ فِي هَذَا الْمَسْجِدِ تَقَرُّبًا إِلَى اللَّهِ سُنَّةً بِاللَّهِ تَعَالَى. Its translation in Indonesian is given on the bottom: *Saya Niat I'tikaf Didalam*

Masjid ini Untuk Mendekatkan Diri Pada Allah Sunnat Karena Allah Ta'aalaa "I hereby intent to perform i'tikaf in this mosque for the sake of Allah and following his messenger." This sign is placed above the entrance to the mosque, where people pass over into the mosque. This intention text sign is one of the characteristics of NU mosques, because mostly, the Modernist

mosques prefer not to recite the intention in certain manner.

4.1.4. Service Sign

Another sign function that is always present in mosques is the service sign. Figure 7 confirms the example of a service sign for ablution in

Masjid Jami' Daarussalam. Ablution is a must ritual of washing a certain part of the body before performing prayer. The word "TEMPAT WUDLU" (place for ablution) is painted on the wall with a big font size above the mosque name, making it very easy for visitors to read and find the place.



Figure 7
Sign of Place for Ablution

4.2. Identity Representation

The surveyed community mosques in Malang Raya asserted their particular attachment to NU or Muhammadiyah. The distinction lies in the overt or covert nature of the strategy for affirming their identity. The overt identity signs are intended to be recognized by the groups' members and other groups' supporters, as can be defined by their basic features, iconic and general characteristics. In the meantime, the covert identity signs are meant to be identified to a more restricted circle of people or more limited needs. The NU mosques with overt identity affirmations display large-sized organizational symbols written in Arabic نهضة العلماء (literally, "The Awakening of Islamic Scholars") on the main exterior façade, fences, minaret walls, or main gates. This is shown, for

example, in the Mosque of Noor where the symbol of NU is placed on its minaret wall (Figure 8). However, some mosques place the organization's name in a not overtly exposed position. For example, that is in the Great Mosque of An-Nuur (Figure 12), which puts the organization's name in a far less open space under the dome of terrace with a smaller size than the others mosques that display identity affirmation patterns overtly. Organizational symbols are often also placed as architectonic adornments. This placement pattern of iconic ornaments shows the firm authority of the organization or group in the mosques. On the other side, a covert identity affirmation in the NU mosques with some organization signs is also often arranged inside the mosque. On the main exterior building, the ornaments are occasionally disclosed.



Figure 8
Overt Sign Initiated by an NU Mosque

4.2.1. Overt Affirmation

Many NU mosques with overt identity affirmations display large-sized organizational symbols on the main exterior facade, fences, minaret walls, or main gates. This placement pattern of iconographic ornaments shows the firm authority of the organization or group in the mosques. Diverse shapes and scales indicate that individuals or communities initiated these elements. On the contrary, the officially created signs appear identical regardless of their placement in the mosques (Figure 9). Another

difference between individual and official signs lies in their permanence of medium. While the individually initiated signs are primarily permanent, the officially formed signs are semi-permanent. Permanent elements are intended for long-term purposes and are not easily dismantled, although there has been a shift in mosque management in the next few generations. Meanwhile, the use of semi-permanent elements appears to be more based on pragmatic considerations of mass signboard manufacturing, such as practicality, convenience, and availability of funds.



Figure 9

Overt Sign Initiated by the NU and Muhammadiyah Mosques

Similar patterns of identity affirmation were also found in Muhammadiyah mosques. However, in the Muhammadiyah mosques with individually initiated signs, small-sized organizational symbols are used outside and inside the buildings, such as on windows, doors,

and *minbar* (podium). No large-scaled signs were found in the studied mosques of Muhammadiyah. Moreover, both individual and officially initiated signs in Muhammadiyah mosques are mostly semi-permanent elements.



Figure 10

Overt Signs Affirming the NU's School of Thought the Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah and the Use of Permanent Materials

Another identity representation strategy can also be seen in the NU mosques, i.e., the Darul Abror Mosque (Figure 10A). The mosque does not overtly mention NU as an organization in its identity sign. Instead, it mentions *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja), the NU's school of thought, to inform the mosque's affiliation. Apart from being written in Latin script, "Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah" is also written in Arabic script under the mosque's name. This is to emphasize the status of this mosque as an NU-based, even though it does not specifically exhibit its NU-ness. However, the predominant use of green, yellow, and white colors on the identity board strongly indicates the close

cultural relationship of the mosque with NU.

There are also numerous overt signs in prayer schedules, mosques' organizational structures, Aswaja's chains of knowledge transmission, the *zikr* ritual after prayer, and even the mosques' list of donors. Some of the media are permanent (Figure 10B), such as the information listing the names of NU leaders and their roles in the organization. However, most of these signs are semi-permanent and purposely put inside and outside the mosques. Signs in the semi-permanent form are usually made of paper and pieces of wood mounted on a wall or a frame covered with clear glass (Figure 11).



Figure 11

Overt Signs in Various Forms of Semi-Permanent Materials

4.2.2. Covert Affirmation

Some mosques place organizations' names in a not overtly visible position, such as at the Great Mosque of An-Nuur (Figure 12). The symbol of organization is placed in somewhat wide-open available seen under the dome with a smaller size than the other mosques that display overt identity affirmation patterns. In contrast, in NU mosques with a covert identity affirmation, a particular share of the organization's signs is

often positioned in the mosque's interior facade. Conversely, the ornaments in the main exterior facade are rarely exposed. The use of covert signs is reckoned to be recognized by the more limited community, such as the need to demonstrate the legitimacy of mosques' ownership when direct conflict occurs. Despite their covertness, these signs were made as permanent elements of mosques. The durability of the medium is another indication of its significance in conflict prevention.



Figure 12
A Covert Sign of an NU Mosque



Figure 13
Selected Arabic Inscription from NU Mosque Show Aswaja's Appreciation for Certain Aspects in Traditional Islamic Teaching

Another form of the covert sign of identity affirmation is the massive use of Arabic inscriptions as a cultural strategy to state Sunni specific attitudes towards essential aspects of traditional Islamic teachings. For example, one of the Arabic texts is “O my God, You are my purpose and Your pleasure I beg” (*إلهي أنتَ مَقْصُودِي وَرِضَاكَ مَطْلُوبِي*) which is part of the mysticism teaching in Sunni tradition. This expression is placed in front of *mihrab* (the prayer niche in a mosque's *qibla* wall facing Mecca). The text is commonly recited before the performance of the daily prayers (Figure 13). The same applies to the Arabic inscription

of *Khulafaur Rashidin* (the four caliphates), *Asmaul Husna* (the God names), and the four prominent Islamic schools of thought, i.e., Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali. This deed represents a traditionalist view of things rejected by other sects in Islam. However, these elements have become cultural elements that are unique to NU mosques. Moreover, the placement of expressions of Islamic poetry, *zikr* (chanting), and the intention to seclusion (Figure 14) are also part of the uniqueness of the teachings of Islam traditionalists that are not found in modernist-mosques.



Figure 14

Some Islamic Poetry and Prayer Texts in NU Mosques Show the Religious Culture of Aswaja

In non-NU mosques, a different phenomenon can be observed. The use of Quranic inscriptions in calligraphy is rarely used to represent their Islamic group/subculture view and identity. Otherwise, the group's teachings, opinions, and beliefs have mainly been expressed by posters, worship instructions, advices, and information that includes prohibitions (Figure 15). The very little

utilization of Quranic writing in modernist mosques as an instrument for representing views and identity is linked to the idea that Arabic inscription ornament in mosques can reduce the quality of solemn prayers. Therefore, there is a tendency to appear clean from diverse ornamentation and calligraphy, although not completely prohibited.



Figure 15

A Poster on Manual of Ablution According to the Prophet's Tradition in a Non-NU Mosque

5. Discussion

The background of language and material attachment at the NU mosques cannot be separated from various underlying aspects. The following aspects bring about the basis for selecting certain elements that are used to display the identity to the NU. According to NU people, the green color is considered attractive. The color also has something to do with aesthetic preferences among NU supporters. One of the reasons this color is used in many NU mosques refers to the green dome in The Nabawi Mosque, Medina, as a marker for the location of the Prophet's tomb. In addition, through a cultural approach, the choice of green color is carried out to attract attention so that people like to worship at the mosque. According to the Javanese tradition, green means coolness, calmness, pleasantness, and beautiful. In the view of most Muslims, green philosophically is interpreted as peace. Accordingly, applying the green color is a strategy of blending religion and culture, which is used to differentiate the NU mosques from other places of worship.

The use of Arabic inscriptions in mosques has specific concerns. Traditionally, Arabic inscriptions, whether in writing verses of the Quran or otherwise words in the form of prayers, are used to distinguish between places of worship of other religions. The attachment of the NU name in Arabic writing and its logo at mosques also to prevent them from takeovers by a group of people deemed radical. In addition, the attachments of the names of *Khulafaur Rashidin*, *Asmaul Husna*, and Islamic scholars are a form of their affirmation of the Aswaja's teachings as well as to differentiate themselves from other ideologies that rejected the Prophet's companions or the attributes of Allah.

Meanwhile, the aspects underlying the emergence of linguistic elements in modernist mosques (Muhammadiyah) are for specific reasons. Ideologically, Muhammadiyah tends not to decorate their mosques with Arabic inscriptions. They prefer their mosques to appear clean with fewer Arabic inscriptions or less decoration and ornamentation. It is feared that the inscriptions will cause misunderstanding since ordinary people can hardly read the intricate writing, which is prone to

misinterpretation by irresponsible parties. Besides, calligraphy is avoided to maintain the solemnity of the congregational prayers without any distraction from the mosques' spatial ambiance. Another consideration is that the attachment of extensive Arabic inscriptions or calligraphy to the mosque could lead to the misperception that the mosque belongs to NU.

Different perspectives and considerations influenced the signs and language used in both mosques. The differences in this pattern are at least caused by two aspects, namely ideological and local sociopolitical dynamics. Ideologically, they are related to the different characteristics of the two Islamic sub-cultures, where NU and Muhammadiyah have different approaches in looking at some issues related to Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*. Sociopolitically, identity representation is needed at a certain point to give clear signs for each organization's supporters to choose their preferred mosques. These differences were then developed into materiality and other elements of identity representation that made NU mosques look different from Muhammadiyah mosques. Identity representation is also used by both NU and Muhammadiyah to protect their organizational assets.

Along with time, these characteristics become a marker for identity representation of a specific affiliation to the mosques. However, the differences at the level of material and language selection due to differences at the level of thought, view, and approach in certain situations can lead to both open and closed conflict. Conflicts derived from the attempts to represent identity explicitly by one group can occur, especially in the context of community mosques built together or mosques with no historical and legal clarity. In this context, negotiation efforts were taken through covert identity affirmation attempts. Even though the authority of the mosque is held by one group, other groups can still use the mosque comfortably without feeling like outsiders.

On the other hand, in the community mosques with apparent authority, both NU and Non-NU communities show similarity in the tendency to affirm their identity in their mosques explicitly. This illustrates their resistance in facing the similar sociopolitical issue of mosque expropriation attempts by a specific Islamic

group deemed radical. There is also a shared identity between the two groups representing the unity of identity at a broader level. The representation of Islamic teachings in general can be seen in similar ways of presenting the virtue of the mosque's sanctity through written language (prohibition, suggestion, warning, and reminder), both in NU and Non-NU mosques.

Several studies have shown the connection between mosques, politics, and power. For instance, mosques built in Istanbul show a reflection of the legitimacy, influence, and prestige of Turkey's Islamic political movement (Şimşek et al., 2006). In Malaysia, Ismail & Rasdi (2010) demonstrated that the state mosque was influenced by the political ideology in the country. This is in line with the increasing number of new Islamic organizations that seek to instill their influence through mosques. Traditionalist or modernist Islamic organizations initially ran some mosques. However, they were later taken over by a newcomer mass organization. The process of taking over can be in several ways. First, there is a gradual process, namely through the deliberation mechanism of worshipers. There is also a process by providing a daily *imam*, followed by preachers from new religious mass groups. Until then, they replace all the mosque officers with their person. In this case, both the practice of sacred rituals and their Islamic studies are colored by only one type of religious ideology. In short, through the new management of the mosque, several new religious groups are trying to introduce and spread their ideology.

The complexities of identity representation arise when social, cultural, political, and ideological dimensions of society come into contact and compete with each other. More specifically, some issues related to private buildings and public spaces need to be discussed, especially concerning mosque building as one of the architectural places of worship that normatively should be a neutral space and free from political issues (Cesari, 2005; McLoughlin, 2005; Naylor & Ryan, 2002). However, in reality, especially in Indonesia, the identity representation turns out to be very much in contact with various domains. Therefore, in this regard, these mosques have transformed from an architectural building of a neutral place of

worship to a place of negotiations between the different Islamic ideologies. Furthermore, the mosques even became a point of articulation for certain ideological groups (Kusno, 2003). This is further confirmed by Blackwood et al. (2016), who pointed out that,

Identity is culturally and historically situated and is negotiated in interaction with other individuals, collectivities and institutional structures. Due to its dynamic nature, identity is continuously negotiated, also in and through linguistic landscapes. As all social actors have more than one identity, investigating various identities in linguistic landscapes and how they interact and potentially conflict is an important focal point for understanding the role of language in LLs. (p. xvii)

Bilingual signs in the linguistic landscape of mosques, as we found, reveal another function. In this context, Arabic is restricted to the religious sphere use while Indonesian remains the medium of instruction and locality. The Indonesian is used to express profane or shared activities. Therefore, Arabic is used in the context of religious usage. In this sense, both languages share different layers of identity, while Arabic is considered in the frame of religious identity instead of nationality or ethnicity. However, the use of Indonesian in the context of religiosity is found in a few numbers of signs to create a better understanding of the Arabic texts by translating them into Indonesian. This finding shares something in common with a study that has been conducted by Coluzzi and Kitade (2015) and Woo & Nora Riget (2020) in Malaysia. Their study demonstrated the use of language related to identity representation of ethnicity and religiosity. However, this current study differs explicitly regarding the sociopolitical issues dominating the mosques. In the setting of Malaysia, the context is related to ethnicity and multiculturalism, whereas, in this study, the main point is the political dynamics between Islamic sub-cultures and not to do with the locality or ethnicity. Thus, in the Indonesian context, Arabic lies in the religious identity layer and is not an expression of ethnic identity. In this respect, Spolsky (2003) argues the interplay between language and religion of how they interact in places of worship. This study

underpins the importance of bilingualism and multilingualism in language and religion.

One of the uniqueness of using Arabic inscriptions in the form of writing the Quranic verses in mosques is to show an identity representation. The inscriptions of the Quranic verses that are attached in mosques are one strategy to highlight Sunni's teachings. Mosques with Arabic calligraphy or inscriptions can usually be identified as mosques affiliated with NU. The main goal of sculptured calligraphy is to present a distinctive and avowed identity. This sign is essentially permanent, intended to express a long-term status of NU-ness. Not only does the Arabic inscription have an aesthetic and ornamental feature. Its use is also intended to indicate an informing function, differentiating a mosque from others. This finding is dissimilar from Alsaif and Starks (2019) views in their research, who assert that the Arabic inscriptions in the mosque run only as an aesthetic. This means that Arabic writings in mosques do not have any functional meaning. Therefore, the finding of the current research confirms that mosques in Indonesia have another issue that cannot be separated from the nuances of identity politics and the contestation of Islamic ideologies that evolve in society.

Several studies have noted that in places of worship, quite a few buildings are decorated with writings (Jochowitz, 2019; Leeman & Modan, 2009). However, Alsaif and Starks (2019) findings suggest something different. In the Grand Mosque of Mecca, Arabic inscriptions with Quranic verses are plastered on the walls and doors, glass, windows, and even ceilings. According to them, this can bring spiritual nuances to the place as Muslim worship there. This case is not much different from the conditions in the NU mosques, where not only the words of the Quran are attached to the sides of the mosques, but there is also an Arabic inscription with prayers or instructions for worship. This practice also aims to create a religious atmosphere and increase the solemnity of prayer. It is, however, different from the Muhammadiyah mosques, where the method of attaching written verses of the Quran, for example, in the form of calligraphy, is rarely found. In their view, this practice can reduce the value of spirituality and even interfere with worship performances. As a

result, to avoid this issue, their mosques generally do not put Arabic scripts in the form of Quranic verses on their walls. The majority of Muhammadiyah mosques studied here prefer a clean atmosphere within the mosques.

From those mentioned above, applying linguistic landscape study can reveal the underlying sociopolitical motives even in places of worship that are commonly considered neutral and free from worldly matters. The use of medium and language differs according to each mosque's specific sociopolitical context or other places of worship: the materials, placement, permanence, overt-covertness, quantity, direct-indirectness, etc. Understanding the underlying issues through the linguistic landscape can help the religious community be more aware of the potential problems in the future. Thus, it can help them take preventive steps to overcome the issues. Further research can be conducted to explore the relationship between religious identity and ethnic identity through the linguistic landscape of mosques in different contexts and settings.

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