



## Meaning Representation and Religious Symbols Occur in *Baiturrahmah* Grand Mosque, Denpasar-Bali

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### Abstract\*

*Apart from being a place of worship, mosques also have cultural elements that can be researched, especially writing in and around them. This study uses the concept of landscape linguistics as a basis for explaining the meaning and symbols of religion including the writings on the Baiturrahmah Great Mosque in Denpasar. The purpose of this study was to determine the meaning and religious symbols behind the writing surrounding the mosque environment. This study used a qualitative methodology, where the writings about the mosque were recorded with a cellphone camera and analysed one by one. The results obtained from this study are not only the meaning displayed by the Baiturrahmah Grand Mosque, but also the religious symbols scattered in the writings around the mosque. Starting from writing the name of the mosque, writing on the place of ablution, writing on a charity box, a notice board, calligraphy in the room, to writing on sandals. All these writings if examined further turned out to have a variety of functions, namely information, promotions, prohibitions, appeals, decorations in the mosque.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Mosque or *Masjid* is a place where Muslims pray. *Masjid* articulated from Arabic (مَسْجِدٌ) means the place for five times prayers. Regardless if it means as a plain to put forehead bow down, then it transforms into مَسْجِدٌ. Literally, *Masjid* (مَسْجِدٌ) means place to bow down. Later, it grows greater until people start to identify *Masjid* as a building for Muslims to pray (Al-Qahthani, 2009).

Islam is a religion brought from Jazeera, Arab to Indonesia. Its arrival then started culture acculturation between the origin and the new one. Although the acculturation between cultures has happened for centuries, yet Islamic principles and cultures are still known on present day. A simple example is about toilet instalment, its instalment is not allowed to be faced into *Qibla*. In addition, mosque must face the *Qibla* or west.

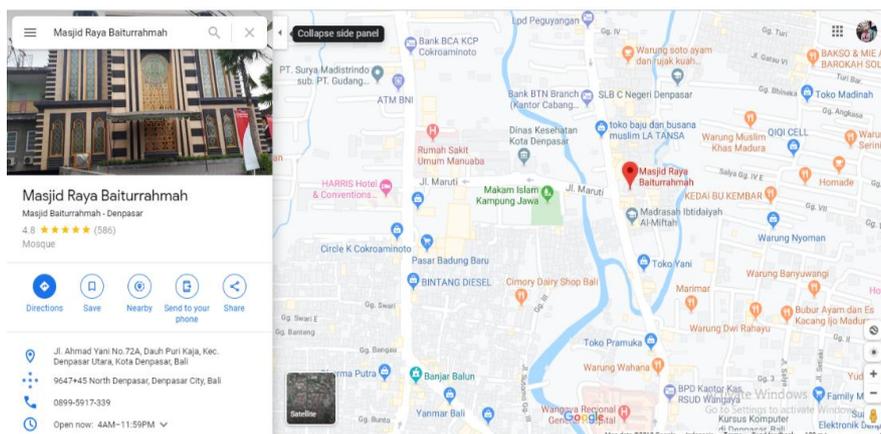


Figure 1 - Location map of the Baiturrahmah Grand Mosque, Denpasar

Exterior writings and symbols occurred along with Baiturrahmah Grand Mosque, Denpasar is the objects of this landscape linguistic study. Specifically, this mosque is in Ahmad Yani No.72A st, Dauh Puri Raja, North Denpasar, Denpasar, Bali.

This relatively span-new study is categorized as landscape linguistic. Landscape Linguistic deals with situations and written facts of a territory, place, and society. Hence, it includes banners, signposts, even posters that using language spread in public places.

## 1.2. Research Problems

This research formulated from several questions on the output of meaning representation and religious symbols in *Baiturrahmah* mosque exteriors. These are the questions; 1) How is the landscape linguistic situation in *Baiturrahmah* mosque? 2) How are the messages delivered through meanings and religious symbols on exterior writings in *Baiturrahmah* mosque?

## 1.3. Theoretical Framework

### 1.3.1. Landscape Linguistic

Landscape linguistic is the presence of language among spaces and places. This study has been in development in recent few years as areas of interest and cooperation between linguists, sociolinguists, sociologists, psychologists, culture geographer and several scientific disciplines (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, & Barni, 2010, p. xi).

Landscape linguistic becomes a method to observe the evolution of urban space. Signs of landscape linguistic appears as an identity of a certain city and nearly “speak the language” to its people one time. Collective identity theory, making progress along in space concept that mostly relevant in landscape linguistic study.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) stated that landscape linguistic is not just a casual information indicator yet it also represents symbols to communicate relativity power and linguistic community’s status in certain locations, Fundamentals of language landscape is to identify special characteristics of certain language community (Bourhis, 1992). Based on function, the writings are meant to deliver information to everyone nearby the mosque. Meanwhile, symbolically those writings belong to a specific community as an identity.

### 1.3.2. Meanings of Public Places Symbol

Meaning also known as semantic in linguistic. Through a proper study, a symbol can be deciphered to gain intentions of its creator. A public place is contrasted with private space, for example, our living room. Moreover, a public place is a place for everyone to share space

between individual or groups (ex: government). Usually, the owner has rights of a place/ objects for its operation (Blommaert, 2013, p.48).

A symbol is indeed very close to social culture, possibly it runs our lives, even humans are known as symbolic being. Thus, not surprisingly if Ernst Cassirer mentions human as being who handles symbols (*animal symbolicum*).

While space can be experienced by human and their senses as a physical response (sense's sensitivity affects the space), thus in another way it can be felt as comfortable, safe, and psychologically. Mentally, space can emerge perceptions in human to handle current space conditions (Wardani, 2010,p.4).

#### 1.4. Research Method

This research prefers qualitative method to conduct, which by collecting visual repertory or pictures of writings occurred in *Baiturrahmah* mosque. All pictures are owned and captured by the author. Photos can be very significant in conducting landscape linguistic research therefore it captures language issue among places, and it can be done easier through phone camera (Puzey, 2016).

Every photo will be observed by using two exterior signs as objects, correspondingly with Landy and Bourhuis (1997) said that informational function gained by studying writings from linguistic aspect; as well as symbolic functions see language through its interactions. The symbolic function also deciphers the message from landscape linguistic facts, a hierarchy of a language, and explains landscape establishment.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Forecourt Writings



Figure 2 - Front view of Baiturrahmah mosque

This picture is taken from the front side of the mosque, which faces *Qibla*. Calligraphy is written there, it says *Allah* in Arabic. Then, the writings of the mosque's name "*Baiturrahmah*" is printed green.

Functionally, "*Baiturrahmah* Mosque" writing aims to tell everyone that the building is *Masjid*/ mosque, a place to pray for Muslims. Symbolically, alphabetical use of "*Baiturrahmah*" is to help people to be able to read that this building is a mosque, even it is not written in Arabic. It also depicts a combination of two languages. Constructed by *Masjid* and *Baiturrahmah* which means "home of blessings" come from Arabic, while *Raya* "besar" is taken from Indonesian. Moreover, green paintings represent the religious symbol. They believe green is Prophet Muhammad SAW's favourite colour.

Equally important, the mosque has calligraphy of *Allah* which put underneath and centred to the writings. Based on its function, calligraphy as decoration to adorn mosque's

exterior. As a symbol, *Allah* calligraphy represents God worshipped by Muslims. It is written in Al-Quran, surah Taha'14 saying “Indeed I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance”.

## 2.2. “Milik Masjid/ Property of Masjid” Writings on Sandals



Figure 3 - Sandals with the words "Belonging to the Mosque"

An epic thing can be seen in the picture above. Sandals are quite different here since “*Milik Masjid*” writings are branded on those sandals. Functionally, those are signs to be noticed that sandals are the mosque’s property, not the private one. Henceforth, they will not be replaced by visitor’s sandals. Those sandals are for internal use only such as restroom needs and taking *wudu* (ablution).

Equally important, those writings are the symbol of Islam which loves hygiene. Wherefore, visitors are instructed to wear sandals to take ablution or restroom purpose to keep them clean. Notably, this is mentioned in Hadith 328 “Cleanliness is next to godliness”.

In essence, it can be articulated that aspects of prayers including cleanliness among bodies, clothes, places, etc. This also can be seen in 5 times prayers that require everyone to be absolutely hygiene.

## 2.3. Asma’ul Husna Writings



Figure 4 - Asma 'ul Husna's writing in the mosque

(Arabic: الأسماء الحسنى, translate. al-asmā' al-ḥusnā) is the etymology of *Asma 'ul Husna* that means magnificent names (Al-Buthoni, 2011). It has been written in Al-Quran, “And the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, therefore call upon Him by them (with His attributes)! Leave who distort (the meanings of) the Names of Allah. They will be required for what they have been doing.” (QS Al-A'raaf:180).

*Al-Husna* means (sublime), in this verse it explains his sublimity is perfection because His names represent values of perfections that have no flaws of all kind (“*al-Qawaa'idul mutsla*” (p. 21) in Al-Buthoni, 2011).

Functionally, *Asma 'ul Husna* writings are purposed for the mosque's interior decoration. They are written in Arabic to preserve its original value. Visitors who are not able to read Arabic will have a problem in understanding those writings. As symbols, they indicate the ethnic Arabian attributes and represent religious value in Islam.

#### 2.4. Ablution Area Writings

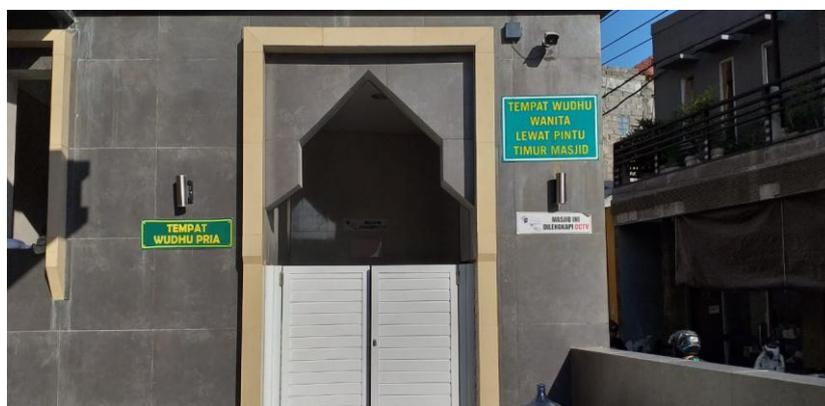


Figure 5 - Male ablution place on the left before entering the mosque

This writing can be found on the left side of the restrooms and ablution area. Men's ablution area is located on the west side of the building, while women's area is on the east side. Both are separated, and for women's ablution area, partitions are installed to make the area more secluded because visitors are likely to losing parts of their clothes to keep it dry.

Functionally, it informs visitors as a sign if a current place is for men/ women's ablution. As a symbol, the writing indicates that men/ women ablution areas are supposed to be separated as it is prohibited to see each other's *aurah* unless it is their *mahram*.

As stated in *Rasulullah shallallahu 'alaihi wasallam's* hadith, Asma bint Abu Bakar once met him with nearly transparent clothes on. Then he looked away and said "Dear Asma, actually a woman if it is already *baligh*, should not be seen from him except this and this", he pointed at his face and both palms (Hadith. Abu Daud 4140, in Al Irwa [6/203]). Maliki and Hanafi also stated if female's *aurah* is their entire body except for face and palms according to the hadith. Otherwise, Hambali and Syafi'i said the *aurah* is the entire body (Purnama, 2019).

## 2.5. Charity Box Writings



Figure 6 - The writing on the charity box

Charity box is usually completely locked and only opens to collect the money from donors. Functionally, the writing aims to persuade everyone to donate for the mosque's parking area establishment. Baiturrahmah mosque is located next to the main road and has no parking lot for visitors' vehicles. Symbolically, the writing represents visitor's sincerity for donating to help the mosque's development.

## 2.6. Announcement Banner



Figure 7 - Signs of notice if there is worship

This type of banner is usually deployed near the mosque in some religious events. The banner is quite modest, even its writing does not represent any exaggeration announcement. Mostly, it informs if there is a religious event conducted nearby.

Based on its function, it aims to give information according to the current religious event and to ask people to take an alternative route due to the event. Example picture above, it appears that the banner can be used as an advertisement media. The banner advertises a product of seasoned flour with various flavour. Because of symbol, the banner represents the tolerance act of a religion that currently conducting their event by taking alternative routes so they will not be bothered.

### 3. Conclusion

Not only the meaning displayed by the Baiturrahmah Grand Mosque, but also the religious symbols scattered in the writings around the mosque. Starting from writing the name of the mosque, writing on the place of ablution, writing on a charity box, a notice board, calligraphy in the room, to writing on sandals. All of these writings if examined further turned out to have a variety of functions, namely information, promotions, prohibitions, appeals, decorations in the mosque.

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