



# LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES IN DILI

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# What are linguistic landscapes (LLs)?

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- The display of **words** and **images** in signs.
- Multiple forms of **written language** displayed in public spaces.
- Study of LLs is a useful way to understand the **relationships between languages** and **people's language choices**.
- To understand the LL, we also need to understand the **social and cultural context in which a sign is placed**.

# Semiotics: Three ways to look at signs

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<p><b>Icon.</b> A likeness. Sign is closely related to what it represents. An icon can also be a metaphor</p>	 	<p>People and languages can be icons of identity</p>  
<p><b>Index.</b> Sign is related to what it represents - but not directly. Points to something 🖱️</p>	 	<p>Also points to a state of affairs</p> 
<p><b>Symbol.</b> No obvious link with what it represents. We learn what it means over time</p>	 	<p>Symbols have meaning in context</p> 



# Analytical lenses

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- Meaning of signs in place (context):
  - ▣ **Indexicality:** Presence/absence of languages in the LL. Language choices in the LL.
  - ▣ **Social indexicality:** Links between LL and the wider context (historical, social, economic and political).
  - ▣ **Iconicity:** A language can be an icon of nationalism.

# Timorese context: Census 2010

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## National literacy rates for people 15-24 years

Year	Tetum	Indonesian	Portuguese	English	Any of the 4
2010	78.8%	55.6%	39.3%	22.3%	79.1%
2004	68.1%	66.8%	17.2%	10.0%	72.5%

### In Dili District

- ☐ Tetum Dili is L1 for 87.53%
- ☐ Mambae is L1 for 2.5%
- ☐ Makasae is L1 for 1.64%



# Example from 2010. Indexicality and iconicity: Tetum for symbolic purposes

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- Placed at a central traffic intersection.
- Use of cursive script.



## □ **Meaning in place:**

- Direct reference to the attack on JRH.
- Symbolic call for unity.
- *Ita-boot* indexes high status.
- Symbols of nationalism.
- JRH is a national icon.
- The nation is author of the message.

*Sr Presidente, Timor reza  
no hein Ita-boot*

*Mr President, Timor prays and  
waits for you*



# Example from 2010. Indexicality: English for communicative purposes

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- Placed on a busy road.
- Low cost, temporary sign.
- Colloquial Australian English.
- Culture specific services.



- **Meaning in place:**
  - ▣ Indexes presence of English-speaking military personnel, contract workers, consultants, advisors and aid workers.
  - ▣ Transitory establishment , foreign customers with disposable income; literate in English.



# Survey of an urban LL: Colmera (2010)

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What do Dili's  
new street  
names index?



# Why Colmera?

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- Commercial area with small shops and businesses, hotels, government buildings, state-owned facilities and large commercial enterprises.
- Many different signs.
- Opportunity to look at language choices in top-down and bottom-up signs.

# Top down and bottom up signs

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## Top-down

- Names of buildings and facilities, street and traffic regulation signs, government signs, billboards.

Tetum: To'o iha  
ne'e



- National and international corporations, banks and NGOs.



## Bottom up

- Shop and restaurant signs.



Indonesian: Cak Man's city meat  
balls from Malang



English: Customer  
is always right

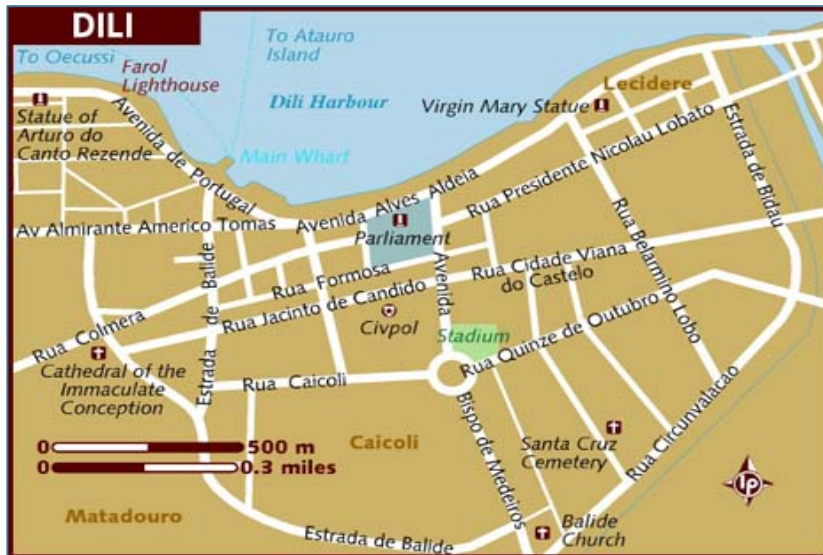
- Small NGOs and businesses (shops, IT specialists, medical services and security firms).



# Top-down signs: Monolingual – Portuguese only

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## Street names (Portuguese)



## Government buildings (Portuguese)



# Top-down signs: Monolingual – Tetum only

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Signs are informational,  
strategically placed



English loans

Just arrived! Credit through BNU  
Laptop and Internet 3G combined \$US25.02/month



and aimed at a local, Tetum-  
knowing audience



Indonesian loan

Want to give prepaid credit to your family?  
Call 121 service. Give prepaid credit.  
It's free



# Top-down signs: Bilingual – Portuguese and Tetum

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- Placed at high business end of town.
- High-cost, technical production. Attention to imagery and colour.
- Use of official languages.
- “Careful” language.
- **Meaning in place:**
  - BNU - Portuguese multinational, big player in T-Leste.
  - Refers back to the crize; looks forward to future; new economic realities; fragile state of economy.

All together for the future of  
Timor





# Top-down signs: Monolingual –Tetum only

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First person pronouns (ha'u, ha'u nia) 🖐️ personalises the message



Law against domestic violence  
Protect me, protect my family

Familiar you (o) 🖐️ speaks directly to young men



Change your behaviour. The way for  
men to reduce violence against women

# Bottom-up signs: Multilingual – Tetum, Portuguese, Indonesian, English

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- Language mixing
- Many loanwords
- Informational: Services and consulting days/times
- Use of pictures (playfulness)
- Index of societal multilingualism
- Multilingual language practices





# Bottom up signs: Multilingual – Language mixing

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Low cost, locally produced sign; direct focus on services offered; uses working languages



Targets local customers; direct focus on product; language mixing

English

Indonesian



Free gift, refrigerator, washing machine, dispenser, electrical plug

Portuguese loan

Indonesian

English



Shop XX  
Clothing for sale

# Language choice in top-down signs

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Languages	Number	Percentage
Portuguese only	21	44
Tetum only	18	36
Portuguese and Tetum (bilingual)	4	8
Portuguese and Tetum (indistinguishable)	2	4
Indonesian only	1	3
Tetum and English	1	3
Portuguese and English	1	2
English and Indonesian	0	0
TOTAL	48	100

# Language choice in bottom-up signs

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Languages	Number	Percentage
English only	52	46
Indonesian and English	20	17
Indonesian only	10	9
Tetum and English	9	8
Tetum only	8	7
Chinese and English	5	4
Portuguese and English	3	3
Portuguese only	3	3
English, Tetum and Indonesian	2	2
Chinese and Indonesian	1	1
TOTAL	113	100



## Language choices in the survey area

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- Not visible: The national languages.
  - ▣ Mambae the largest language group after Tetum-speakers. Dili was their traditional homeland.
- Creative forms of language use.
- Evidence of conscious bilingual practice (top-down signs).
- A variety of multilingual sign types.
- Language mixing (bottom-up signs).
- Did I miss something? What else did you notice?

# References

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