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Symbolic Functions of Graffiti in Padang City of Indonesia: Critical Linguistic Landscape Studies

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ABSTRACT

This study concerned with language in written form that is visible as graffiti in the Padang city, Indonesia landscape. The mushroomed of graffiti in Padang city landscapes increasingly has been a growing problem in society. Even local government as the official authority has created some task to prohibit graffiti, but a new graffiti has always been emerging in public space. Therefore graffiti has been considered a crime. It is interesting to explore graffiti in Padang city landscapes from other perspectives, particularly the symbolic functions of graffiti. The study uses qualitative approaches by applying Critical Discourse Analysis. The result shows that graffiti in Padang city landscapes accomplished two principal symbolic functions; first graffiti as a medium of demonstration in which providing space for marginalized expression with the opportunity to voice controversial ideas publically; second graffiti as social critics in which providing input into the public discourse that is not concerned by other conventional media.

I. INTRODUCTION

Padang is the capital city of West Sumatra province, Indonesia. The city located on the west coast of Sumatra Island until 2010 recorded as a city has received 'Adipura' award 17 times, which is an award for cities in Indonesia that have succeeded in cleaning and managing the urban environment. Since 2016 the community shocked by the appearance of graffiti in public spaces. Even though the Padang city government had erased the graffiti, then a new one appeared again. The government emphasizes the graffiti is vandalism that ruins the beauty of the city. Indeed, the government has issued to give legal sanctions for those found to create graffiti on public facilities. However, it seems that the efforts made by the government have not been successful yet.

Some of Padang's community members believe

that the graffiti is a work of 'prankster artists who do not have jobs'. Base on the previous study conducted, Reeve (2017) has concluded that graffiti in Padang is an urban art cultural movement that influenced by global culture. It is not a new issue, and it is already global and happening all over the world. On other perspectives, graffiti in Padang city public space is part of the linguistic landscape (LL) has known as public signs, the scene where the public space is symbolically constructed by various language signs (Artawa & Sartini, 2019; Gorter, 2018; Hernández et al., 2017; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Thongtong, 2016). Graffiti in Padang city is bottom-up or nonofficial signs which often display more linguistic diversity and less regulated, or can be said as "freedom of speech rights" (Dixon, 2015). Surely, all these signs communicated a basic informational function.

Furthermore, even signs of LL such graffiti in

Padang city have an informative function to the reader. Besides, signs also have a symbolic function that represents an ideology. The symbolic function of the LL sign is the implicit messages within a language in which these signs are written. There is a deeper meaning below the surface. It's mean that symbolic functions are more ways than to communicate information. Beside represent linguistics function, signs also have social, cultural, political, and economic means (Dixson, 2015). The symbolic function also indicates significant symbolic meaning to the public in a territory; therefore, the signs of LL may be considered as a powerful mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and hence also of expressing creating identity (Kotze, 2010). Some aspects denote symbolic functions, such as culture, identity, power relations, and language status (Dagenais et al., 2015).

It seems LL signs such graffiti in Padang city have symbolic markers that express the status and power which working within semiotic modes of social positioning and power relations (Torkington, 2009; Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The signs can be considered to reflect the relative power, particularly those signs produced by the marginalized and to give way into the power relations in social communities, and also to contribute to the discursive construction within sociolinguistic context (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). The producer of graffiti in Padang city may thus be acting based on their ideological orientations. The graffiti in Padang city contribute to enhance the hegemonic ideologies by resembling a social representation. It can be assumed that graffiti in Padang city as part of a linguistic landscape bigger than just urban art culture trends; maybe there something it wants to convey. As stated as "all signs are equally subject to critical reading, for no sign is innocent" (Kress, 1993). It means linguistic signs in public spaces one of the subjects of critical reading because there are no signs without an intention. As Van Leeuwen (1993) mentioned, "no matter how ideologically innocent signs may seem, they may, in fact, be forceful instruments in the reproduction of the social world in which they form part of the landscape".

Based on the discussion above, the current research focuses on the symbolic function of signs in Padang's graffiti.

II. METHODS

This study designed qualitatively by combining basic investigation methods of linguistic landscape (LL) studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA) studies, called critical linguistic landscape (CLL) studies (Yendra, 2020). It is a new alternative concept move from the inclination of mostly first researches of LL to apply quantitative approach which usually only focus on calculating and analyzing signs in a particular region of a city based on the use of language and the producer of the sign (Blackwood, 2015; Moriarty, 2014) to reveal the hierarchy of linguistic devices in multilingual contexts (Roig-Marín, 2016; Durk Gorter, 2018); to determine about the peoples who reside in a region, what ideologies are used, which languages have dominance and renown, and which are marginalized (Edelman, 2014; Lamarre, 2014; Papen, 2012). Therefore, this CLL concept broader than LL concept in applying a quantitative approach, which just only the documentation of signs. The CCL concept moves beyond descriptive and distributional approaches, whereas local historical and symbolic means are used to recognize the distinctions of the given context. It is because the LL is understood herein as a place where language, along with semiotic devices, involves in symbolic construction. Hence, the qualitative aspect should include a critical approach to LL such CDA.

In collected the data, observation is done while photographing the graffiti in Padang city as much as possible with cell phone cameras. The photographs were taken more than 500 photos and saved to a computer in digital image format, even though there are repeating photos with the same object. Graffiti in public space communicates messages which often have a deeper meaning than what is seen on the surface, so that interview also conducted as complementary data. The interview focused on social cognition toward language sign Padang's graffiti by using the snowball technique. Its support the claim discourse, as a social practice, is both socially conditioned and socially constitutive (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In this way, the Padang's graffiti might be contributing to the reinforcing of hegemonic ideologies by the reproduction of particular social representations, and it may also reveal something about the social identities of the place in which it is embedded.

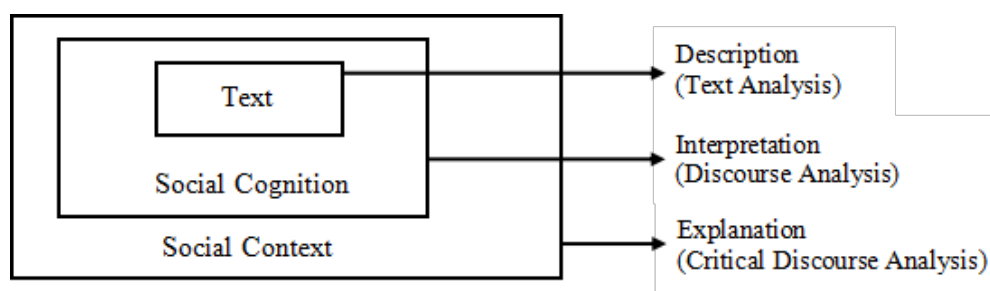


Figure 1. CDA analysis Model
(Adopted from Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2001)

In data analysis, this study specifically focuses on language in written form that is visible as graffiti in Padang city public space, which purposes exploring the symbolic functions, particularly the discursive construction through linguistic code preference. Three paradigms had been applied in exploring the symbolic function of graffiti in this study: *firstly*, the Positive-empirical paradigm: focused on analyzing the form of the language in which the sign as a text. *Secondly*, constructive paradigm: focused on analyzing the meaning of signs as discursive construction in which is a representation of social cognition. *Thirdly*, critical paradigm: focused on exploring discursive construction through linguistic code preference, and how it related to social context includes social knowledge and social power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2001). Figure 1 shows in which the Analysis Model is used.

On the dimension of the text, the sign on graffiti is described as a linguistic structure. On the dimension of social cognition, the meaning of the signs is interpreted base on social cognition and discourse production process. The last, on the dimension of social context, the constellations of the sign and the social context is explained as a discursive construction, as social cognition includes social knowledge and social power.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kind of graffiti in Padang city landscape

Graffiti in this study defined as writings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on the city wall or other surface in a public space as part of linguistic landscapes. On other terms, it is sometimes known as a mural, street art, or wall writing. In Padang city, graffiti has various forms that are

produced by various social groups of people and serve several social needs expressing in different social interests. On some creation of graffiti, the producers mentioned a nickname, referred to as a tag or signature, sometimes the tag only created independently of the existence of graffiti. While on some other, the producers not mentioned their signature as anonymous. Therefore, graffiti in Padang city landscapes could be distinguished into a signature and anonymous graffiti.

Most of the signatures graffiti widespread in Padang city landscape is a creation as an appreciable work of art such as graffiti and mural street art (ex. Picture 1 and 2). It is a decorative expression of the picture and writing that requires artistic skill and understanding of art painting. Still, this kind of signature graffiti has labeling both vandalism and artistic expression of art within it. Following (Dabbour, 2017), accepting graffiti in the art word implies that if graffiti is in its proper place, it becomes acceptable and even profitable. However, inversely graffiti in the city public space is a crime since it sometimes challenges hegemony and those who have authority over the public city space. This duality created a dichotomy of meanings of scribbling that stemmed from the notion of space.



Fig. 2. Sample of Street Art graffiti



Fig. 3. Sample of Street Art Mural

The different of signature graffiti, anonymous graffiti seems simpler and mostly just a written scratch-made spontaneously by producers in a flash, without concerning any artistical aspect (ex. Figure 3 and 4). The anonymity of this scribbling might afford the producers to challenge the normative values of the setting without risking caught in the act and get an impeachment; “hit and run” (Johnston, 2006) might be proper words to describe the occurrences of these anonymous graffiti in Padang city landscapes.



Fig. 4. Sample of anonymous scribbling 1



Picture 4. Sample of anonymous scribbling 2

There are some distinctions between signature and anonymous scribbling, but both kinds of scribbling mostly carry a special oppositional message in it

that conveys within the language signs, such as sentences, phrases, and words. Generally, it uses simple rhetoric and images to make the audience easier to catch and remember the messages.

Generalized base on contents or topics within linguistic code preference is found, graffiti in Padang city landscapes are classified thematically into: (1) polices theme, (2) investor theme, (3) corruptor theme, (4) save Gunung Talang theme, and (5) other certain themes. From all these themes, the most frequent theme repeatedly found in many ways and in many different places in Padang city is graffiti, which is signing “#Save Gunung Talang”. Sometimes these signs are created signatory but mostly created anonymously. Table 1 shows several samples of linguistic preferences that appear through graffiti in Padang city landscape thematically.

Symbolic function of scribbling in Padang city landscapes

Padang's graffiti as social critics

The perception of graffiti related to crime and vandalism is a basic reason for assessing bad attitudes towards such actions. The basic motivation that drives to leave writing somewhere, including graffiti in public spaces, is human nature, as a quote “If you put a pen into any child’s hand, naturally, he’ll go to the wall” (Reiss, 2008). This quote assumes graffiti is a part of individual desire or need to involve and relate to society as an effort to acknowledge or call attention to the mass system. This involvement provides an opportunity to be part of the conversation that takes place in public spaces, especially for those who have little or no voice in the community. According to Chaffee (2014), graffiti in public space is a type of democratic in which there is universal access and a barometer that register the spectrum of thinking, playing and intricate role in ordering space, establishing and communicating codes of behavior, values, and beliefs, participating in the cultural reproduction. As Kress (1993) noted as “Ideological construction of space”.

The meaning of signs contained Padang’s graffiti is an expression conveyed with a form of curse and satire. For example, the use of the word *Anjing* (‘dog’) in graffiti (see Table 1). Semantically, ‘dog’ are representations of four-legged mammals,

Table 1. Amount of samples of linguistic preferences of graffiti in Padang city landscapes

Themes	Linguistic Preferences	Transliterations
Polices	<i>Polisi anjing</i>	You are dog (police)/ fuck the police
	<i>Rajin Baca jadi pandai, malas baca jadi polisi</i>	Reading much to be smart, Less reading to be a police
	<i>Semangat pak polisi, pelanggaran sama dengan uang</i>	Don't give up mister police, our mistakes is money for you
	<i>Jangan bangga jadi anjing; polisi anjing</i>	Don't be proud to be a dog; Fuck the police
	<i>Polisi Anjiang</i>	Fuck the police (Minangkabau Language)
Investor	<i>Indonesia Menangis; investor</i>	Indonesia is crying; investor
	<i>Tanah lahan bermain anak investor</i>	Place for children investor to play
	<i>Akal busuk investor</i>	Investor's cruel intention
	<i>Kami tidak menjual tanah kepada investor manapun</i>	We are not sale out land to any investor
	<i>Go green; go green; pantek</i>	Go green; go green; fuck
Corruptor	<i>Gantung koruptor biar kering</i>	Hang the corruptor until dry
	<i>Indonesia bersih dari koruptor!! fuck</i>	Indonesia cleans (has no/ without) corruptor!! fuck
	<i>Lenyapkan koruptor, bankit rakyatku, sejahtera negeriku</i>	Vanished corruptor, growing up my peoples, prosperous my nation
	<i>Ayo pemuda bangun gerakan Indonesia bersih dari koruptor</i>	Come on guys make Indonesia without corruptor
	<i>Awasi dan laporkan koruptor</i>	Watch over and report the corruptor
#Save Gunung Talang	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; hati-hati tertipu</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; be careful of delusion
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; tolak proyek geothermal</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; refused geothermal project
	<i>May day #Save Gunung Talang</i>	May day #Save Talang Mountain
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang dari proyek geothermal</i>	#Save Talang Mountain from geothermal project
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; Selamatkan Gunung Talang</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; (translation in Indonesia language)
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; Sumbar tolak geothermal</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; Sumbar (West Sumatera province) refused the geothermal
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; say no to geothermal</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; say no to geothermal
	<i>#Save Gunung Talang; tolong, tolong, tolong</i>	#Save Talang Mountain; help, help, help

but Indonesia's cultural repertoire full of diction related to animals, including a dog. For Indonesian readers, expressions that use animal names tend to be vulgar and have negative connotations. The negative implications of 'dog' are often related to other signs syntactically that can be interpreted differently. There are various reasons related to the negative connotation of 'dog', although dogs have more value and tend to be loyal to anyone who gives them food. The opportunistic loyalty

gives a negative connotation to a dog. On another aspect, dogs have their theological roots with Islam as the majority religion in Padang. Dogs are conceptual metaphors that more often symbolize uncleanness and humiliation. Therefore, a graffiti signed "*anjing kota Padang*" shows that the author uses graffiti to express anger, curse, resentment or disappointment.

For another example, the phrase "*tanah lahan*

bermain anak investor” as one main discourse on Padang’s graffiti (Figure 1). Literally, the phrase meaning ‘place for children to play’. When word *anak* (‘children’) had crossed out changed by word *investor*, the meaning of the phrase coerced to change into ‘place for the investor to play’. The sign shown in Picture 1 is conveying that underlined messages would create discursive construction with deep information. The place is not a free public space anymore. It has become a private and commercial place. As a discursive construction, it is a creative way of communicating with the general public since the message was conveyed in figurative form, as an ironic social commentary or satire. It can serve as a powerful means of reaching the public to raise awareness of investment issues and probably was demoralizing for a city administration.

Relates to social context, the *investor* had perceived badly as social cognition among societies in Padang city. This assumption can be proved with appearing a number of graffiti in public space talks about investor (see Table 1), such as “*Indonesia Menangis; investor*”, “*Kami tidak menjual tanah kepada investor manapun*”, “*akal busuk investor*”, and “*Go green; go green; pantek*”. Those samples writing give a portrayal that the investment issue in Padang city has been view as a growing problem in society. The phrase “*Indonesia Menangis*” meaning ‘Indonesia is crying’ give presupposition that Indonesian peoples suffer because of bad investment and they refuse or exclusions investor from talking which is shown by crossed the lexical investor (*investor*). The phrase “*kami tidak menjual tanah kepada investor manapun*” meaning ‘we not sale our land to any investor’ gives presupposition that investor issue has trying to take resident land. The phrase “*akal busuk investor*” meaning ‘cruel investor intention’ give presupposition that investment issue does not give a good impact to resident economically. The phrase “*Go green; go green; pantek*” meaning ‘Go green; go green; fuck’ is the angry expression to the investor. In short, the discursive construction of oppressed identity is realized linguistically through the actual signs of these graffiti.

The exploration confirms that graffiti in public space is a medium of social criticism that contains ideas or value as a reflection of the social

conditions and public concern. The dialectical process between critics and graffiti in Padang’s public spaces is more than evident with various individuals or communities who use urban space as a public forum, referred to as minor or small media. Graffiti in public spaces is another potential form of communication that provides open or more subtle social messages as expressions of ‘social power’ to controlled societies. It is important when formal forms of communication are not possible contrary to ‘hegemonic power’. Relates to what Van Dijk (2001) the ways in creating discourse to consolidate power as social control: *firstly*, access to specific forms of discourse as a power resource; *secondly*, do some action to influence people’s minds, knowledge or opinions; and *thirdly*, find the discourse may at least indirectly control people’s actions as persuasion and manipulation. In those ways, the group will have power if they can control the actions and thoughts of other groups.

Padang’s graffiti as a protest

As we mentioned before, graffiti in Padang’s public spaces communicates messages. From various topics in Padang’s graffiti (see table 1), we are interested in investigating more specific topics about “*Gunung Talang*” because the mountain is not even in Padang’s territory. Mount Talang is in the Solok region, a district in West Sumatra near Padang. Initially, we assumed graffiti on the topic of Mount Talang in Padang’s public spaces was the distribution of graffiti from Solok. But, after we observed in Solok, we did not find any graffiti on the topic of Mount Talang in Solok itself. We began to ask: what’s wrong with Mount Talang, and what is the connection with Padang’s graffiti?

Based on information from several Solok community members, in early 2016 the West Sumatra government, together with several private companies, built a megaproject that utilizes geothermal energy from Mount Talang. However, the project was rejected by peoples who lived around Mount Talang. They consider the geothermal project has damaged the environment, which has an economic impact on the peoples there who live as farmers. Eventually, local residents conducted some of these demonstrations and blocked geothermal project activities. In response to the actions, the government was officially allowed to use military force to restore the demonstrators directly. In short,

this “geothermal war” has been a long epic story between the local and the government since the geothermal project has begun. The question is; what to do with graffiti in Padang? To answer this question, we began to investigate information and messages contained in Padang’s graffiti.

From several data, graffiti with the topic of Mount Talang mostly uses the phrase “#Save Gunung Talang” (for example, see Picture 3). Expression such “#Save Gunung Talang” on any graffiti intertextually seems to be linked to and produced collectively. However, looking further into each writing style and linguistic form, it seems that different producers created the graffiti. It might be said that people gathering around the same cause and common objective can establish a discursive partnership, despite being unaware of each other. The decentralized aspect of graffiti enables individuals to act separately but simultaneously. The graffiti allows a variety of positions as “is a synchronic activity conducted by a range of uncoordinated actors at different points in time” (Hanauer, 2011), and relatively straight forward and shared by anyone. The use of symbol “#” (hash-tag) in with the linguistic sign gives some nuance that the sign has to be concerned by the audiences. It might be some code of social cognition to influence audient, to support, or hopefully, they (audiences) will share it. Just like a symbol used to make engagements “link to link” in the computer application program (web/ internet). It is an example of micro bottom-up politics hoping to influence the public. Why in Padang? Even in Solok itself where Mount Talang is located, there is no such graffiti like this.

Moving on from the last question, we assume that graffiti on the topic of Mount Talang in Padang is a protest because Padang is the capital city of West Sumatera, the center of Government and parliaments. So, it makes sense that turning to graffiti in the public spaces as a means of resistance occurs after more conventional ways of protest fail to bring change. Although the production process of graffiti is mostly spontaneous and anonymous, the outcome might be expected to be noticeable in which to attracting and presupposing an audience. It is an expressive resistance tactic that challenges power relations where the aim is to influence public opinion, policy, or government decision making. Therefore, this graffiti acts like a large-scale

demonstration in the urban landscape that appears presupposing that Mount Talang in Solok district is “in danger” and must be saved. Such conditions can be asserted that it is not easy for marginalized resistance to survive and struggle on their own, so their struggle requires non-involvement to be encouraged and to be involved by sending messages through graffiti. In this way, Padang’s graffiti can function as an abstract of protest ideas and constitutes a form of expression that wants to be heard.

Padang’s graffiti is a micro-level “bottom-up” of marginal voice, which may create the ability to challenge the state and other powerful actors. Padang’s graffiti also provides instruments in creating a discourse that transmits sociopolitical messages. Through graffiti, marginal voices have the opportunity to make statements and be heard about social problems that they cannot formally convey informal media. It is a strong form of marginal communication functions as an expression of thought, as a sociopolitical struggle, as the agent of power, and as a resistance to the power authority, which is a non-responsive government. The spreading of phrase such as “#Save Gunung Talang” in Padang’s public spaces give a portrayal that the graffiti used as a medium of protest.

V. CONCLUSION

This study specifically focuses on language in written form that is visible as graffiti in Padang city public space, which purposes exploring the symbolic functions, particularly the discursive construction through linguistic code preference. The massively spreading of graffiti in Padang city of Indonesia landscapes became a new phenomenon and increasingly growing problem in society since it is perceived as a crime. Even the official authority had been created special task to combat those graffiti. However, the effort to prohibit act has failed since a new graffiti has always been emerging to fulfill city landscapes. This scribbling act provides a unique insight into society and contributes to the discursive construction through linguistic code preference in Padang city landscapes.

In conclusion, graffiti in Padang city landscapes at least accomplished two principal symbolic functions, including: *first*, graffiti as social

critics in which providing input into the public discourse of ideas that are not concerned by other common media. *Second*, graffiti as a medium of demonstration in which providing space for marginalized expression with the opportunity to publically voice controversial ideas. Therefore, the signs of LL appear on graffiti in Padang city landscapes to be valuable since linguistic

preference, including code choice in public spaces as a broader representation of social cognitions. Linguistic signs of LL in public spaces be symbolic markers of status and marginalized power. Moreover, linguistic signs of the LL provide insight into the social practices and ideological orientations of the community.

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