

The Linguistic Landscape of Brunei Darussalam: Minority Languages and the Threshold of Literacy

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Abstract

This article looks at the role and meaning of street signs in Brunei Darussalam, a Southeast Asian country, with a focus on minority languages. The linguistic landscape of one of the main streets in the capital of Brunei, Bandar Seri Begawan, has been analyzed. What is immediately noticeable is a high level of diversity, with three languages in common use (Malay, English and, to a lesser extent, Chinese), written in three different scripts (Roman, Arabic and Chinese characters). Minority languages other than Chinese, on the other hand, are absent from the linguistic landscape. This is due to various factors, including the low status of the languages, the absence of literary traditions and the lack of literacy of their speakers. The presence of Chinese, conversely, can be attributed to factors such as the high prestige of the language, its literary tradition, its usefulness and its being used in its many varieties by millions of people in the world, both in countries where it is the official language and in countries where it is not. English, on the other hand, plays a very interesting role as a language *super partes*, accepted and fostered by both the people and the government.

Introduction

Research on the language of signs dates back to the 1970's (Backhaus, 2007, p. 12; Spolsky, 2009, pp. 26–27), but it is only since the publication of Landry and Bourhis's seminal paper in 1997 that it has become an important branch of sociolinguistics, drawing increasingly more attention on the part of sociolinguists and other academics in different countries. The definition Landry and Bourhis give of the linguistic landscape is the following:

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. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25)

Research on the linguistic landscape can give insights into the status and the level of prestige that languages enjoy rather than how they are used in a given territory. In the words of Landry and Bourhis:

The predominance of one language on public signs relative to other languages can reflect the relative power and status of competing language groups. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25)

In cases where one or more of these languages enjoy some degree of official status, such research can also give insights into the actual policies of the state or region and the will to promote the recognized language/s, particularly in the case of official signs. In this respect, considering the case when one or more of these officially recognized languages are minority or regional languages, Landry and Bourhis wrote:

Given that it is the dominant language group that can most effectively control the state apparatus regulating the language on public signs, one can consider the relative position of competing languages in the linguistic landscape as a measure of how the

dominant group treats the linguistic minorities inhabiting the given territory. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 29)

Research on the linguistic landscape is now starting to become conspicuous, particularly with regards to Europe and Asia. However, Southeast Asia has been hardly touched by such research, with only two articles published to date: one on the linguistic landscape in Bangkok, Thailand (Huebner, 2006), and one based on the research I carried out in Brunei in 2009 (Coluzzi, 2012a). The latter compares the linguistic landscape in Italy and Brunei, focusing on the national language policy of the two states. This is the second article based on my research in Brunei Darussalam.

This paper focuses on two main issues: the presence of minority languages, and the reasons for their inclusion in or exclusion from the linguistic landscape both in top-down or official and bottom-up or non-official signs. The peculiar position of English as a sort of neutral, *super partes* language is also briefly discussed.

The article begins with a general outline of Brunei and its linguistic repertoire, followed by a description of the methodology and results of the research carried out, with particular emphasis on the cases where a minority language has been used. The second part of the article includes a discussion of the results, focusing on the possible reasons to account for the conspicuous presence of one of these minority languages (Chinese) and the total absence of all the other indigenous minority languages.

Background Information

Brunei Darussalam is an Islamic sultanate of 5,765 km² situated in the north of the island of Borneo facing the South China Sea. In addition to the official language, Standard Malay, English, and the languages of recent immigrant workers, at least eleven minority languages are spoken in the country by the local population (Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Tutong, Belait, Dusun, Bisaya, Murut (Lun Bawang), Iban, Penan, Mukah and Chinese), and this does not count the different varieties of Chinese spoken together with Mandarin (Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainanese, Teochew, Foochow) (Martin, 1995, 1996, 1998). Almost all of the minority languages spoken in Brunei are low varieties in a diglossic situation in relation to Standard Malay and English, the high varieties. None of them enjoy official status.

Bandar Seri Begawan is the capital of the country and the administrative centre of the Brunei-Muara District. It is situated in the northern part of the country and has a population of about 27,000. The two historical languages of the district where it is located are Brunei Malay and Kedayan, both linguistically very close. However, since Bandar Seri Begawan is the capital and the largest town in Brunei, members of all the ethnic groups present in the country are found in it, including the Chinese, plus a large immigrant/expatriate population. English has had a presence as the language of administration of the British protectorate since 1888, and as the most important language together with Malay since independence on 1 January 1984.

Methodology

This paper looks at the linguistic landscape in the capital of Brunei. The data were collected employing the same methodology used in Italy for a previous article (Coluzzi 2009), with some minor adjustments. The methodology is based on that adopted by Cenoz and Gorter for their research on the linguistic landscape in the Basque Country and Friesland (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). They selected one street approximately 600 metres in length in the central shopping area of Donostia/San Sebastián and one in

Ljouwert/Leeuwarden. They took a total of 975 digital pictures of all the texts they found on the streets. With regards to shops and other businesses:

Each establishment but not each sign was the unit of analysis, that is, it was considered 'one single sign' for the analysis. [...] This decision is based on the fact that all the signs in one establishment, even if they are in different languages, [...] belong to a larger whole instead of being clearly separate. (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006: 71)



Figure 1 An official sign, with Jawi script at the top and English below

For the current research, one of the main streets in the centre of Bandar Seri Begawan, Jalan Sultan (about 750 metres long), was selected. This particular street was chosen because it appeared to be the only one in the town centre to feature a high density of shops and businesses (along its southern end) but also a significant number of public buildings and public signs (such as the signs shown in Figures 1 and 2). Like in the study by Cenoz and Gorter (2006), each shop was considered as one unit of analysis. This means that if any writings in a shop were in a different language from the rest, the shop was considered a bilingual/multilingual unit of analysis. The same obviously applied for smaller units of analysis, like posters, street signs and water outlets. In Brunei some shops contain more than one establishment or business. In this case, each establishment was counted as one unit of analysis, even though they were physically located in the same premises.



Figure 2 An official sign with Malay in Roman script followed by English

Unlike Cenoz and Gorter, digital pictures were only taken of multilingual signs, signs where minority/regional languages were used and signs containing the Jawi script, whether this transliterated Malay or other languages. Jawi is the Arabic-derived alphabet that was used to write Malay until the 19th century when the Roman script was introduced and gradually took over. By the use of diacritic dots, it can express six sounds that are not found in Arabic. Nowadays it is mainly used in Malaysia and Indonesia in Islamic religious contexts, but it can also be seen in the linguistic landscape of more conservative areas in Malaysia while being official in Brunei.

All the other items were counted just as monolingual Malay, English or another language. All signs in the street were included in the analysis, even signs behind or on shop windows as long as they were big enough to be easily readable from the outside. These included temporary signs like job offers. However, repeated signs, banners or posters were counted only once. Posters and stickers were also included as long as they were complete and easily readable.

Results

Along Jalan Sultan in Bandar Seri Begawan, 102 units of analysis were counted during the field research carried out between September and October 2009. 21 units are in Standard Malay only (with or without Jawi), 64 are multilingual, and 17 are monolingual in English. These results are shown in Table 1.

Languages	Units
Standard Malay only	21 (20.5%)
More than one language	64 (62.7%)
English only	17 (16.6%)

Table 1 Units of analysis in Standard Malay and other languages in Brunei

Of the 64 multilingual units of analysis, 63 contain Malay, whether written in Jawi and/or Roman scripts, all of them include English, 19 have Chinese written in Chinese characters and only 4 include other languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian in one unit of analysis, and French, Thai and Arabic in one unit of analysis each). These results are shown in Table 2.

Language	Units
Standard Malay	63 (61.7%)
English	64 (62.7%)
Chinese	19 (18.6%)
Other languages	4 (3.9%)

Table 2 Language use in the multilingual units of analysis

If to these multilingual units of analysis we add those containing the Jawi script (so far counted only as Malay) and those monolingual in English, we get the following results: Jawi is found in 67 units of analysis (in most cases to transcribe Malay, but in some cases to transcribe names from other languages as well), Malay in Roman script occurs in 67 units, English in 81 units, Chinese in 19 units, and other languages in 4 units. These results are shown in Table 3.

Language	Units
Jawi	67 (65.6%)
Malay (Roman script)	67 (65.6%)
English	81 (79.4%)
Chinese	19 (18.6%)
Other languages	4 (3.9%)

Table 3 Language use in the multilingual units of analysis including Jawi, also including the monolingual units in English

If we now consider only individual bilingual or multilingual signs (more than one of which may be found in each unit of analysis), a total of 103 signs were counted, and the results are shown in Table 4. The transliteration/translation into Jawi of the original sentence in Malay or English is always duplicating or homophonic (the translation reflects the original text closely). An example sign in both Jawi and Roman scripts and also English is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3 A sign with Malay in both Jawi and Roman scripts and English

30 signs were counted having Chinese written on them (out of 19 units of analysis). Most of the translations between English and Chinese are also homophonic, though a few signs provide some extra information in one of the languages. Five complementary or polyphonic (mutual translation or transliteration from one script to another not available) signs were also counted (Backhaus, 2007, pp. 90–99).

Language	Number
Chinese (with or without other languages)	30
Jawi and English	27
Malay in Roman script and English	23
Jawi, Malay and English	22
Jawi, Malay, English and Chinese	15
Other languages	4

Table 4 Number of individual bilingual or multilingual signs (out of a total of 103)

If we consider the order in which they appear, the most common order is Jawi on top (written in a size twice as big as the Roman script), Malay next and then English, or, in the case of businesses owned by Chinese, Jawi on top, then Malay, Chinese and finally English. If the sign does not have Jawi, then normally Malay comes first. Clearly Jawi dominates the LL, both for the sheer number of signs containing it and for its prominent position and size, in public but even more in private signs. This is because of official regulations on its use in the linguistic landscape. In fact, a circular from the Office of the Prime Minister issued on the 19 of July 1988 (n. 21/1988) states:

In compliance with the speech delivered by His Majesty Haji Hassan al-Bolkiah, Sultan of Brunei, it is hereby declared that all Ministries and Departments should observe and enforce the use of the Jawi script in addition to the Roman script on signs on Government buildings and on private businesses, including name signs, letterheads, notice boards, posters, advertisements, banners, names and street signs and so forth. The Jawi script must be twice as big as the Roman script and should be placed on top. (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2009, p. 19. Translated from the Malay by P. Coluzzi)

Finally, we can consider official and unofficial signs, summarised in Table 5. There are 24 units of analysis with official signs. In these official units of analysis, Jawi is used in 9 units, Malay in Roman script is used in 16 units, and English is used in 16 units. Chinese and other languages do not occur on any of the 24 official units of analysis.

There are 78 units of analysis with unofficial signs (mostly private enterprises). Of these, 58 contain Jawi, 51 contain Malay in Roman script, 65 contain English, 19 contain Chinese characters, and 4 include other languages.

Language	Official	Unofficial	Total
Jawi	9 (8.8%)	58 (56.8%)	67 (65.6%)
Malay (Roman script)	16 (15.6%)	51 (50.0%)	67 (65.6%)
English	16 (15.6%)	65 (63.7%)	81 (79.4%)
Chinese	–	19 (18.6%)	19 (18.6%)
Other languages	–	4 (3.9%)	4 (3.9%)

Table 5 Breakdown of the languages (separating Malay in Jawi and Roman scripts) used in the 24 official and 78 unofficial units of analysis

Signs in the Minority Languages of Brunei

As the results show, none of the indigenous Austronesian minority languages are present in any of the signs. However, Chinese appears in many unofficial units of analysis, where 30 individual signs were recorded using Chinese (29.1% of the total number of individual bilingual/multilingual signs), in almost all cases accompanied by a complete and accurate translation/transliteration in Malay and/or English (homophonic signs). In only two cases the signs were mixed (the Chinese version provided more information than the Malay or English one), and one case was polyphonic (a letter in Chinese requesting a sales assistant posted on one shop window had the names of the owners and the address at the bottom written in English/Malay). In most of the cases these signs contain the name of the shop/owner and a description of the type of business (pharmacy, goldsmith, optic, restaurant, etc.). What is interesting is that only one sign featured the simplified characters used in China, all the others being written using the traditional characters. Another sign of the traditionalism of the Chinese community in Brunei (at least of the older generation) is also evident in the fact that seven of the signs had the characters written from right to left, a way of writing considered now rather old-fashioned. Finally the transliterations from Chinese into English reveal that all the Chinese names come from the South of China (Hokkien, Cantonese, etc.), which reflects the ethnic origins of Chinese Bruneians and the Chinese dialects they speak. It was also interesting to notice that the Malay version in almost all signs containing a Chinese name translated that name literally into Malay, unlike the English version of the Chinese writing. This means that, for example, *Sing Lee* is translated as *kemenangan*, literally meaning ‘victory’, i.e. the meaning of the Chinese characters, while *Teek Onn* is translated as *aman bahagia*, ‘peaceful and happy’. This is probably to keep the Malay version ‘pure’ and totally Malay looking, whether in Roman script or Jawi. It is probably for the same reason that the Jawi version of some international trade names is a literal translation as well. An example in Jalan Sultan is ‘Pizza Hut’, translated as ‘pondok pizza’ in Malay/Jawi (‘pondok’ in Malay means ‘hut’, see Figure 4).



Figure 4 The Pizza Hut sign in both Jawi and English

Figures 5 and 6 show two examples of the signs containing Chinese that were recorded: figure 5 reads *Shèng Lì yáng fú* in Mandarin, meaning ‘Sing Lee taylor’, ‘kedai jahit kemenangan’ in Malay (as explained above *kemenangan* is the literal translation of Sing Lee), whereas figure 6 reads *lǚdì měifà měiróngyuàn*, translation of the English ‘Lady Fine hair and beauty salon’, with the interesting transcription of ‘Lady’ as *lǚdì*, with the first character meaning ‘beautiful, fine’; the Malay version again is a literal translation from English: ‘salun rambut elok dan kecantikan perempuan’.



Figure 5 The sign outside a tailor’s shop, in Malay in both Jawi and Roman scripts, Chinese and finally English



Figure 6 The sign outside a beauty salon in Malay in both Jawi and Roman scripts, followed by English and finally Chinese characters

Discussion

The data provided in the previous section show that the linguistic landscape in Brunei is diverse, with the great majority of units of analysis (78.6%) displaying more than one language. In addition to that, the linguistic landscape of Brunei is multigraphic with three scripts in common use (Jawi, Roman and Chinese), adding to the impression of high diversity.

Another thing immediately obvious to any observer is the ubiquity of English, found in as many as 79.4% of all units of analysis. With regards to minority languages, the only one showing a high level of visibility in unofficial signs is Chinese. All the other local Austronesian languages are totally invisible in the linguistic landscape.

As Landry and Bourhis (1997) and many others after them have rightly stated, the linguistic landscape hardly ever reflects the ethnolinguistic composition of the local population. Instead, it reflects the prestige enjoyed by the different languages and/or the language policy of the state/region where they are spoken:

The linguistic landscape may act as the most observable and immediate index of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 29)

Clearly Standard Malay, as the official language of the country, enjoys a status not equaled by any other language, partly thanks to official language policies that support this language vigorously, through public use and regulations like the above-mentioned that require shopkeepers to display Jawi on the main signs in their shops and businesses.

Chinese is in a way an anomaly – it is not recognized as a minority language but it still enjoys enough prestige to be used in the linguistic landscape extensively. Its percentage presence is actually higher than the percentage of Chinese (whether full citizens or permanent residents) living in Brunei, and there would probably be even more if recent regulations had not provided for only Jawi and Roman characters to appear on the

main signs of shops in urban areas. Those signs containing Chinese that I recorded had evidently been placed before those regulations came into effect.

The high visibility of Chinese and the absence of the other minority languages from the linguistic landscape, in spite of the fact that some of them, like Kedayan, Iban or Murut, are still spoken by a relatively large part of the population (see Martin, 1995; Coluzzi, 2010), can be explained in different ways. First, most of these local Austronesian languages have never been used as written media, so they are seen as oral languages related to a past that many want to leave behind. Second, they do not enjoy any kind of support and most of the people are not really aware of the language shift that is taking place. Indeed, if no protective and promoting measures are taken, most of these languages will eventually be squeezed out by Malay and English.

With regards to Chinese, the main reason for its large presence in the linguistic landscape of Brunei is its high prestige among the Chinese, who, in spite of their number, are the economically strongest and most entrepreneurial ethnic group in the country with a high ethnolinguistic vitality (see Dunseath, 1996). Finally, Chinese Mandarin is now the most widely spoken and one of the most important languages in the world, used in countless publications in mainland China and abroad, with one of the most ancient literatures. Mandarin is also taught in a few Chinese schools in Brunei and as an elective subject at the University of Brunei Darussalam, and the new educational system SPN21 has also made provisions for its introduction as an elective subject from year seven to year ten of compulsory education (Curriculum Development Department, 2009). In addition, written Chinese uses ideograms and not a phonetic alphabet, which allows it to be understood by the large number of speakers of the ‘dialects’ of Chinese who live in Brunei. Even though southern varieties of Chinese, such as Hokkien or Cantonese, which are quite different from Mandarin, are not normally written down, when they are written they generally use the same characters as Mandarin.

The other language that plays an important role in the written and spoken repertoire of Brunei is English, the international language *par excellence*, the language of globalization, modernity and glamour. Almost 80% of all units of analysis along Jalan Sultan contain English, and some quite extensively. Various factors account for this remarkable presence, which is actually almost the same as that of Standard Malay, the official language. Three main reasons can be suggested. The first one is obviously historical: Brunei was a British protectorate until as late as 1983, so English was the language of administration and power at that time. The second one is the same reason that English has become so popular all over the world: ‘English brings up images of modernity and a sense of being fashionable’ (Bogatto and Hélot, 2010, p. 286). The third one, clearly related to the other two, may be actually the most important: English in Brunei is perceived as more useful and prestigious than even Malay by most people in Brunei (see Ozóg, 1996; Coluzzi, 2012b). Standard Malay, in fact, is only used in one out of the three daily newspapers published in Brunei, the other two being in English, the vast majority of books in bookstores are in English, and those few in Malay are often just love stories or religious books. In education Standard Malay occupies an important position only in the first three years of primary school, and then the subjects taught in English increase in number to overcome those taught in Malay, until one enters the main University in the country where the main language of instruction is English for most programmes. Clearly Malay is not as important as English in the country – basically if one wants to get a degree and a good job in the private sector, one has to speak good English. However, Standard Malay still fulfills an identity function, but only partially, as most of the people normally speak Brunei Malay and/or one of the other minority languages.

However, it is interesting to observe that the prominence that English is given in Brunei by public institutions is covert: English is not official, and it rarely comes first or is

the most visible language in signs. Yet it is everywhere. It is in the streets, on television, in the newspapers, and in the education system to a larger extent than Standard Malay. On the other hand public support for Standard Malay is clearly overt: not only are there regulations for its use (one of which has been already pointed out), but one can even find billboards in the streets and inside buildings urging people to use Malay! One can find three different billboards with these messages:

- 1) Bahasa Melayu bahasa rasmi Negara ('Malay is the official language of the country') (See Figure 7)
- 2) Utamakan Bahasa Melayu ('Make Malay your priority')
- 3) Gunakan Bahasa Melayu ('Use Malay')



Figure 7 An official sign using both the Jawi and Roman scripts, exhorting people to prioritize Malay

This situation does not differ much from the one in Israel, for example, where Hebrew is the official language strongly supported by the state, even though English enjoys high prestige and is widely used in the linguistic landscape (see for example Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Unlike in Brunei, however, Arabic, which is a minority language in Israel, is official.

In Ethiopia we find a similar situation, where English ‘is used as a *de facto* second language [...], despite the fact that it is not a vestige of a colonial past’ (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009, p. 193). However, again unlike in Brunei, the local minority languages in Ethiopia have been officially recognized as well.

In addition to this, in Brunei there is the strong presence of Jawi. Whereas Malay in general indexes Malayness, Jawi indexes Islam, the official religion in Brunei which is strongly supported by the State and its Islamic Monarchy. Some analogies can be found here with the use of traditional or simplified Chinese characters in Taipei, where the use of one or the other for the same language has clear political overtones (see Curtin, 2009). What is interesting to notice here is that whether people actually read Jawi or not does not really matter, as its sheer presence recalls the official religion and the Monarchy. In fact, as Kallen and Ní Dhonnacha have convincingly explained (2010, p. 21), ‘writing systems themselves introduce choices that generate meanings independently of the message content.’ The Arabic script is historically related to the Qur’an, and it is seen that way by most people, whether Muslims or not. Obviously, Chinese characters, too, generate meanings that go beyond the message content, but they may be given more varied interpretations by non-Chinese viewers. Inevitably:

When the messages are meant for knowledgeable public, meaning people who know the language concerned, the strategy is to make the link to the community visible through the shop front sign or one of its component. (Bogatto & Hélot, 2010, p. 287)

In short, it could be stated that signs written with non-Roman scripts are always ‘polysemous – imparting different messages to different viewers’ (Leeman & Modan, 2010, p. 195).

In the next section the issues that have been put forward here will be discussed within the framework of the Bruneian linguistic repertoire and Spolsky and Cooper’s theory on the languages that tend to be used in the linguistic landscape (Spolsky, 2009).

The Linguistic Repertoire of Brunei and the Threshold of Literacy

On the basis of what has been discussed in the previous section, the sociolinguistic situation in Brunei in relation to the users of the various languages forming the linguistic repertoire and the symbolic functions of the languages can be schematized as in Table 6.

Poles forming the nation	Languages used and their main symbolic functions
the government (top-down)	Standard Malay in Roman characters (nationalism) Standard Malay in Jawi characters (Islam, the monarchy) [Arabic] (Islam) English (modernity, tourism)
the people (bottom-up)	Chinese (identity for the Chinese) [Standard Malay] (communication with the Malay speaking world)
<i>threshold of literacy/writing</i>	English (modernity, economic opportunities) Brunei Malay (identity) Minority languages (local identity)

Table 6 The Bruneian linguistic repertoire

On the left-hand side are the two poles forming the nation, the government and the people. On the right are the languages forming the Bruneian linguistic repertoire. Those that are used and supported by the government, whether overtly or covertly, have been

placed above, those that are used and supported by the people have been placed below. The marginal varieties are shown in square brackets, whereas the main symbolic functions of all these languages (even though ‘tourism’ and ‘communication with the Malay speaking world’ are more informational than symbolic) have been put into round brackets. The horizontal dotted line corresponds to the threshold of literacy/writing, meaning that the languages below it are not normally written. Obviously the use of a language and the prestige attributed to it by the people tend to be strongly influenced by official usage through a top-down mechanism of hegemony.

There are two varieties shared by both the government and the people: Malay (whether Standard or Brunei) and English, whereas Chinese is strongly supported by the Chinese community. These are the languages that tend to be used in the linguistic landscape – those supported by the government in top-down signs, those supported by the people in bottom-up signs. Languages that are below the literacy/writing threshold are never found in the linguistic landscape: people cannot write or read them and, partly because of this, they enjoy low prestige and only prestigious varieties appear in the linguistic landscape. And this seems to apply to Brunei and probably all other countries in the world. It is interesting to notice that Standard Malay does not have really any major function for the people of Brunei. It is mostly used passively to understand official sources of information or those from other Malay/Indonesian speaking countries, like books, newspapers, films, songs, etc. If we treat Standard Malay and Brunei Malay as two different varieties and consider that the first is a marginal variety among the population, it can be seen that really the only language shared and supported by both the Government and the population in Brunei is English. This is another reason that accounts for its large presence in the Bruneian linguistic landscape.

Spolsky and Cooper’s three relevant conditions regarding the choice of languages employed in the linguistic landscape (Spolsky, 2009, P. 33) are highly relevant to the presence or absence of minority languages in the linguistic landscape of Brunei. Following the first condition, most initiators and sign-makers write their signs in the language they know, which clearly applies to both Malay and Chinese. Even though many people know their local language, they are most likely illiterate in it considering the lack of a writing code and its absence in the education system. Following Spolsky and Cooper’s second condition, these initiators and sign-makers write in the languages that can be understood by the people that are expected to read the signs – a significant proportion of Chinese people in Brunei can read Chinese, whereas for the same reasons as for the first condition people speaking local languages cannot read their own language or would find it awkward to do so, as they do not expect to find it in writing. Finally, following the third condition they write in languages with which they wish to be identified. This condition evidently applies to Malay, English and Chinese, but not to the groups speaking other minority languages, who are more likely to identify with languages of high prestige like Malay or English, and not with languages of low prestige such as the local ones.

Conclusions

Apart from Chinese, minority languages in Brunei have no visibility and play a very marginal role beyond the family and the small community. Chinese enjoys prestige, which is why it has a strong presence in the linguistic landscape, in spite of lack of official encouragement. English, on the other hand, plays the role of a language *super partes*: ‘a neutral linguistic resource’ as Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p. 25) remark regarding the linguistic landscape in Israel. As long as its position on signs is not too prominent, then it can be used and even encouraged without endangering national unity and identity. English in the linguistic landscape is both informational and symbolic: while retaining its aura of a

prestigious and international language, it is used to convey different kinds of information, to tourists and also to locals, all of whom can speak English albeit with different levels of proficiency. And since it nearly always appears together with Malay, we might assume an educational purpose as well: passers-by can improve their knowledge of English by looking at the linguistic landscape (see Cenoz and Gorter, 2008). This kind of educational purpose is probably there for Jawi as well, as this is in most cases accompanied by Malay written in Roman characters or English. The presence of English is so strong in Brunei that, many fear, it is slowly ‘minoritizing’ Malay, whose overall presence and visibility are slowly shrinking in spite of support on the part of the government (see Coluzzi, 2011).

If minority languages had a notable presence in the linguistic landscape, this would help to raise their status and maintain them. As Cenoz and Gorter (2006) have written:

The linguistic landscape contributes to the construction of the sociolinguistic context because people process the visual information that comes to them, and the language in which signs are written can certainly influence their perception of the status of the different languages and even affect their own linguistic behaviour. The linguistic landscape or part of the linguistic landscape can have an influence on language use. (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, p. 68)

However, for this to be achieved, minority languages in Brunei need to have a literary status. In other words, they need to be part of the school curriculum, so that their speakers can learn how to read and write them. Therefore languages that are not written need to be standardized and a writing system must be devised for them (corpus planning). As far as Chinese is concerned, a good way to show respect for the linguistic rights of the minority who speak it would be to use it in at least some official signs as well as its occurrence on unofficial signs.

Obviously research on the linguistic landscape based on one street only is necessarily limited and more research in other areas of the country needs to be carried out to confirm the inferences made here. This may be a starting point for the possible development and implementation of language policies for the protection of minority languages that recognize the importance of their presence in the linguistic landscape for their future maintenance and development.

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