

An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in English Public Signage of TransJakarta

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates grammatical errors in English public signage displayed in the TransJakarta transportation system, aiming to identify, classify, and interpret linguistic inaccuracies and explore their sociolinguistic implications within Jakarta's multilingual context. The research is motivated by the increasing visibility of English in Indonesia's public spaces and the importance of linguistic accuracy in shaping Jakarta's international image. Using a *qualitative descriptive approach*, the data were collected through direct observation and documentation of twelve bilingual signs at bus stops and inside buses. The analysis applied grammatical and sociolinguistic frameworks to examine article use, determiner choice, and sentence structure accuracy. Findings reveal frequent errors, particularly *article omission*, *determiner misuse*, and *sentence structure omission*, mostly caused by literal translation from Bahasa Indonesia. These errors not only hinder clarity but also reflect institutional unawareness of English grammatical conventions. Improving linguistic accuracy in public signage contributes to inclusivity, enhances institutional credibility, and strengthens Jakarta's global linguistic identity and visibility.

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Introduction

English functions as a global *lingua franca* and plays a vital role in multilingual cities such as Jakarta. In public communication, especially in transportation systems like TransJakarta, English is used to assist international visitors and symbolize modernity and progress. Similar patterns of English use in other Southeast Asian cities demonstrate how language visibility reflects social modernization and tourism-oriented development ([Lim & Tan, 2020](#)). This also corresponds to sociolinguistic trends observed in Indonesian public signage, where English reflects both modernization and identity ([Prayuda, 2020](#)). This phenomenon reflects a broader global trend where English functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a symbol of prestige, cosmopolitanism, and social inclusion in

public spaces ([Lee, 2020](#); [Lim & Tan, 2020](#)). However, many English signs in TransJakarta display grammatical inaccuracies that obscure meaning and reduce communicative effectiveness. These linguistic flaws are not trivial; they represent institutional awareness and the quality of language management. Prior studies ([Ariani & Artawa, 2021](#); [Wulandari & Harida, 2021](#)) found that grammatical errors often result from literal translation without structural adjustment to English syntax. [Hodgson and Harris \(2021\)](#) emphasize that grammatical precision in public communication reflects professionalism and institutional credibility. Similar grammatical inaccuracies were also documented in Indonesian tourism signage, where literal translation frequently caused semantic distortion ([Mashudi, Rahma, & Syafiq, 2022](#)). Similar concerns about institutional language accuracy were also raised in prior linguistic studies, emphasizing that grammatical precision contributes directly to institutional credibility and communicative effectiveness ([Wulandari & Harida, 2021](#); [Hodgson & Harris, 2021](#)). Meanwhile, the growing influence of digital translation tools ([Lu et al., 2023](#); [Warregh, 2025](#)) may normalize informal grammatical forms in official contexts, highlighting the need for consistent language standards in institutional settings. Recent computational linguistics research also shows that digital tools can both improve and distort grammatical consistency in formal translation, depending on their contextual accuracy and data quality ([Qin, 2022](#); [Zhong & Yue, 2022](#); [Wang et al., 2024](#)). [Carter and McCarthy \(2021\)](#) note that article and determiner use is fundamental for grammatical coherence, while [Nenotek et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that public signs form part of a linguistic landscape that embodies social values, identity, and policy. Hence, errors on public signage not only reflect language interference but also reveal sociocultural dynamics in how English is perceived and practiced in Indonesia. Despite earlier studies in Bali and Kupang ([Ariani & Artawa, 2022](#); [Nenotek et al., 2024](#)), limited research has focused on institutional bilingual signage in Jakarta. Comparable findings were also reported by [Sukaesih \(2024\)](#), who analyzed translation errors in Jakarta's integrated transport system and observed similar verb misformations in English signage. Therefore, this study aims to (1) identify and classify grammatical errors in TransJakarta's English signage, (2) analyze their linguistic causes, and (3) interpret their sociolinguistic implications within the linguistic landscape framework. The findings are expected to contribute to applied linguistics and translation studies by offering practical recommendations for improving public language use.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore grammatical errors in English signage within the TransJakarta system. According to [Ariani and Artawa \(2021\)](#),

qualitative descriptive methods are appropriate for analyzing linguistic phenomena in natural contexts, as they allow for in-depth interpretation of textual and contextual data. This approach is further supported by [Marunevich et al. \(2021\)](#), who demonstrate that visual mapping techniques such as mind mapping can enhance data categorization and comprehension in linguistic research. Data were collected through field observation and photographic documentation at selected bus stops and buses. Twelve English-language signs were analyzed using grammatical frameworks by Carter and [McCarthy \(2021\)](#), focusing on article usage, determiners, and sentence structure. The data were classified based on the typology by [Ariani and Artawa \(2022\)](#): omission, misinformation, and structural inaccuracy. The analysis followed three steps: (1) identifying errors, (2) classifying types, and (3) interpreting sociolinguistic implications using Nenotek's (2024) linguistic landscape framework. Mind mapping ([Marunevich et al., 2021](#)) was used to visualize error patterns. The selection of twelve samples was based on visibility, accessibility, and frequency of use within the TransJakarta network. Following the framework of qualitative text-based analysis in linguistic landscape research, this study emphasizes contextual interpretation of written data, aligning with recent insights on multilingual public communication and cultural representation ([Alaudinova, 2023](#); [Hossain, 2022](#)). Although the study is qualitative, it acknowledges the potential of AI-based grammatical verification ([Qin, 2022](#); [Wang et al., 2024](#)) as a complementary tool for future research in public language management. Further developments in document-level grammatical error correction have also expanded this interdisciplinary relationship, bridging manual linguistic analysis with automated grammar-checking models ([Bryant et al., 2023](#); Yuan & Bryant, 2021).

Findings and Discussion

Out of twelve signage samples, seven contained grammatical errors, categorized into **article omission**, **determiner misuse**, and **sentence structure omission**. This finding supports grammatical theories emphasizing that article and determiner use plays a crucial role in expressing definiteness and specificity in English syntax ([Ariani & Artawa, 2022](#); [McCarthy, 2021](#)). Article omission frequently occurred in phrases such as "Emergency Valve" and "Emergency Glass Hammer," where the absence of the article *an* leads to ambiguity. Since Indonesian lacks *an* article system, such omissions stem from direct translation interference. Determiner misuse appeared in examples such as "Emergency Procedure Guide," where *the* definite article *the* was omitted, weakening referential

precision. Sentence structure omission was evident in “Automatic Door Warning” and “Please Offer Your Seat,” which lack verbs or complements, forming incomplete clauses.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these errors illustrate how institutional translation practices mirror broader patterns of linguistic awareness. Such patterns are consistent with findings by [Rahmawati and Kusuma \(2023\)](#), who identified similar grammatical inconsistencies in Indonesian formal communication. As [Nenotek \(2024\)](#) notes, public signage reflects a city’s linguistic identity. Hence, such inaccuracies undermine Jakarta’s image as a professional and globally engaged city. Across all error categories, the persistence of omission and misuse patterns suggests a systemic lack of grammatical verification in institutional translation processes. This reflects surface-level bilingualism, where English is used symbolically for prestige rather than communicative precision. This pattern reflects broader linguistic tendencies found in Indonesian public communication, where contextual inference often replaces grammatical completeness ([Nenotek et al., 2024](#)). These findings reinforce the need for institutional language planning that prioritizes communicative precision over symbolic prestige, ensuring that public English use reflects linguistic competence rather than status signaling ([Tan, 2024](#)). Addressing this issue requires institutional collaboration with linguists and translators to ensure both linguistic accuracy and public credibility. To provide a clearer understanding of how these grammatical issues manifest in practice, the following section categorizes and analyzes the identified errors based on grammatical typology.

A. Analysis of Grammatical Errors by Category

The data obtained were compared with grammatical standards outlined by [Carter and McCarthy \(2021\)](#) and error typologies observed in similar studies across Indonesia ([Ariani & Artawa, 2022](#); [Sukaesih, 2024](#)). These comparisons strengthen the contextual understanding of the data presented below.

Table 1. Analysis of Grammatical Errors in TransJakarta’s English Public Signs

No.	English Translation (Text from Sticker)	Type of Error	Correct Form	Explanation
1.	“Special Room”	Word Choice (Not Grammatical)	“Private Room” or “Reserved Room”	The word ‘ <i>Special</i> ’ is inappropriate in formal English context.
2.	“Do Not Litter”	-	-	Grammatically correct.
3.	“Prohibited Activities”	Incomplete Noun Phrase	“No Prohibited Activities Allowed”	Missing verb phrase to form a complete clause.
4.	“Automatic Door Warning”	Sentence Structure (No Verb)	“Caution: Automatic Door”	Lacks predicate, forming an incomplete sentence.

No.	English Translation (Text from Sticker)	Type of Error	Correct Form	Explanation
5.	"Watch Your Step"	-	-	Grammatically correct.
6.	"Watch Out for the Door"	-	-	Grammatically correct.
7.	"Emergency Valve"	Article Omission	"An Emergency Valve"	Missing article <i>an</i> before singular noun.
8.	"Emergency Glass Hammer"	Article Omission	"An Emergency Glass Hammer"	Missing article <i>an</i> before countable noun.
9.	"Emergency Procedure Guide"	Determiner Error	"The Emergency Procedure Guide"	Requires definite article <i>the</i> for specific object.
10.	"Please Offer Your Seat"	Sentence Structure (Incomplete)	"Please Offer Your Seat to Priority Passengers"	Incomplete clause; lacks object of action.
11.	"Women's Space"	-	-	Grammatically correct.
12.	"Do Not Lean"	-	-	Grammatically correct.

Source: Adapted from [Carter & McCarthy \(2021\)](#).

These findings correspond to previous research in other contexts. For instance, [Wulandari and Harida \(2021\)](#) identified frequent omissions and misformations among student essays, while [Prayuda \(2020\)](#) highlighted similar literal translation influences in Indonesian–English sentence structures. From a technological viewpoint, contextual data augmentation techniques ([Wang et al., 2024](#)) and confrontation-learning models ([Zhong & Yue, 2022](#)) are increasingly used to automate grammar correction, offering potential tools for institutional applications such as signage verification.

Conclusion

This study concludes that TransJakarta's English signage fulfills communicative functions but lacks grammatical accuracy. Out of twelve observed signs, seven exhibited significant errors, mainly **article omission**, **determiner misuse**, and **sentence structure omission**, caused by Indonesian interference and insufficient grammatical review. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, these errors reflect limited institutional attention to linguistic verification, which affects public perception of credibility and professionalism. Since *linguistic landscapes* serve as visual representations of cultural and institutional identity, improving grammatical accuracy will enhance both communication clarity and Jakarta's international reputation. This study is limited to a small corpus of TransJakarta signage; future research could expand to other cities or digital public communication contexts to provide broader linguistic insights.

Grammatical inaccuracies in public signage reveal systemic gaps in Indonesia's language management and translation policy. Institutions need standardized bilingual communication guidelines, quality assurance mechanisms, and periodic linguistic audits. The integration of AI-based grammar correction systems ([Qin, 2022](#); [Zhong & Yue, 2022](#)) with human expertise can provide scalable, efficient, and reliable linguistic quality control across public services. Strengthening such frameworks ensures Indonesia's readiness for effective global communication and cultural representation.

Public institutions should collaborate with linguists and certified translators to standardize bilingual signage, conduct regular training for staff on English grammar and translation practices, and integrate AI-assisted proofreading systems to support linguistic verification. These measures will enhance grammatical accuracy, reflect professional language management, and promote Indonesia's linguistic readiness in global communication. However, this study is limited by its small dataset and focus on a single institutional context, which may not represent broader linguistic practices across Indonesia. Future research could expand the scope by examining public signage in multiple cities or integrating automated grammatical analysis to validate cross-context patterns to capture contextual variations across local settings ([Mashudi, Rahma, & Syafiq, 2022](#)). As recent language policy studies emphasize, maintaining grammatical consistency across public communication reinforces linguistic identity and institutional credibility ([Tan, 2024](#)).

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