

# Written English at Public Spaces in Padang: A Communication Tool or A Branding Language?

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined whether written English serves as a communication tool or a branding language in Padang. The study focuses on English as a communication tool and branding language, its structural features as a branding language, and the motives for using it in this capacity. This study uses a qualitative, quantitative, and Linguistic Landscape approach. The Data for this study are the use and placement of English in public spaces in Padang, including on public roads, markets, malls, hotels, cafes, the names of business units, tourist attractions, and other strategic places. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to 94 respondents to gather their views on the role of English as a branding language. Written English posted or used in public spaces, as mentioned above, was photographed. Data analysis was conducted using the intralingual-extralingual method. The results of this study indicate that written English in public spaces in Padang primarily serves as branding language. When compared with Indonesian and Minangkabau, English and Minangkabau are more likely to convey information. Except for places like hotels and educational institutions, especially universities, English serves as both a branding language and a means of conveying information.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English at this time has become a global language. This language no longer belongs to any particular country. The world speaks English. English has become the lingua franca of international exchanges (Bruye I-Olmedo et al, 2009). English is used in the inner, outer, and expanding circles (Kachru, 1985; Rohma, 2005). Indonesia is grouped into an expanding circle of English use. As an expanding circle, English is still considered a foreign language. However, English plays a vital role in almost all people's activities in Indonesia, in general, and in Padang in particular.

The linguistic situation in an area can be portrayed through a linguistic landscape approach. Linguistic Landscape (LL) is defined as 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 and Bourhis (1997: 25). In term of language situation, from a linguistic landscape perspective, the current linguistic

landscape in Padang is coloured by local languages, Indonesian, and foreign languages. The dominant local language is Minangkabau. The dominant foreign language today is English. Written English plays a vital and dynamic role in today's public spaces (Oktavianus, 2020; 2022). The language agency has also expressed its stance on these three language groups through the slogans: *Utamakan Bahasa Indonesia*; *Lestarikan Bahasa Daerah*; and *Pelajari Bahasa Asing* (Prioritize Indonesian; Preserve Regional Languages; and Learn Foreign Languages).

In Padang, the reality of the use of Indonesian, regional languages, and foreign languages in public spaces does not always align with the slogan above. In some places, only English is used. In others, code-mixing of Indonesian and English is used. Code-mixing among Indonesian, Minangkabau, and foreign languages is used. However, field observations indicate that English is more dominant than the national and local languages.

In Padang, for example, if written English is code-mixed with Indonesian or Minangkabau, the roles of the two languages may differ. English may function as a branding language, while Indonesian and Minangkabau serve as information delivery. Indonesian and the Minangkabau language are the mother tongues of the Padang people and are easier to understand and use in communication. Code-mixed between the Minangkabau language and English can be seen in the following example.



(Fig. 1. Solok Rajo Coffee in Padang.  
(Source: Doc. Oktavianus, 2025).

The placement of English in the image above is certainly worth examining, and it raises many questions from a linguistic perspective. Do the lingual forms *Est. 2012* and *Coffee For People And Earth* serve solely as information or merely as branding language? The capitalization of the prepositions "For" and "And" at the beginning of the word should be changed to "for" and "and" from a prescriptive linguistic perspective. If we consider *Est. 2012* and *Coffee For People And Earth* solely as branding language, the next question is to formulate scientific reasons why these linguistic forms are considered branding language only. We also need to examine whether the presence of foreign languages will strengthen or weaken local languages and Indonesian. The above questions disturb our thoughts or allow us to examine more deeply the position of English as a branding language today. English is present in every corner of Padang. Indeed, the motives behind the choice of English as a branding language deserve our attention as

linguists, as they contribute to the development of linguistic studies aimed at building human character and civilization.

Language researchers have conducted studies on the role and position of written English in public spaces. However, these studies have focused more on linguistic landscape analysis. Their relationship to English's role as a branding language has received little attention. The role of English as a branding language in Padang has not even been identified. In Bali, for example, three languages are used predominantly in public spaces: Balinese, Indonesian, and English. Among these languages, English dominates communication in public spaces (Artawa et al., 2023). However, this study has not explained explicitly whether the dominance of English in communication systems in public spaces in Bali is also part of branding language. In Kuta Village, even the Balinese language is marginalized (Artawa et al, 2020). This is because Kuta is one of Bali's tourism destinations. Tourists speak English to locals, and locals also speak their own style of English to their guests.

An identical phenomenon of language use to the language situation in Bali can also be observed in Aceh. Research on tourist hubs in Aceh found that English dominates shop names (Sari et al., 2024). This research reveals that English is a marker of modernity, Indonesian is a bridge for national communication, and local languages are markers of cultural identity. This study also does not clarify whether the role of English as a branding language encompasses its role as a branding language.

In Padang, written English in public spaces helps improve learners' English competency (Oktavianus et al., 2025). The results of the study conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches show that English learners benefit from the placement of written English in public spaces. This study also does not explicitly discuss the role of English as a branding language.

Referring to the previous studies mentioned above and examining the use of written English in public spaces in Padang, many linguistic aspects warrant further study. These aspects include the role of English as the branding language, the structure of English in relation to other languages in public spaces, and the motives to use English as the branding language. Therefore, the linguistic problems related to this research topic can be formulated as follows:

1. Does English in public spaces in Padang serve solely as a means of communication or as a branding language?
2. What is the structure of English as a branding language when placed alongside Indonesian and Minangkabau?
3. If English serves as a branding language, what are the motives for using English as a branding language?

The three research questions above are expected to address the role of English as a branding language in Padang.

A scientific work of this kind aims to formulate scientific principles to address and overcome the phenomena of language use. In this regard, this research aims, among other things, to (1) examine and reveal the role of English as a branding language: (2)

examine and formulate the structure of English as a branding language if English is placed alongside Indonesian and Minangkabau; (3) examine and reveal the motives for using English as a branding language currently used.

Three important aspects in formulating a science are the ontological aspect, namely the nature of what is studied; the epistemological aspect, namely the method of study; and the axiological aspect, namely the benefits or contribution of the study to the welfare of the community. This study can provide theoretical benefits for the development of science, especially in linguistics across all its aspects. The practical benefits of this study include the ability of language users in public spaces to use written language well and wisely. Even more important is the ability to manage the use of the three groups of languages (local, national, and foreign) wisely while maintaining the sustainability of national and local languages.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted qualitatively, using an ethnographic approach guided by Neuman's (1997) framework. The research was conducted emically to understand the nature of English as a branding language comprehensively. This research also aimed to interpret the forms of English used as a branding language.

The data for this study are written English used in and displayed in public spaces in Padang, such as on public roads, markets, schools, places of worship, and on the brands and labels of various products attached to various media. In the context of using English as a branding language in English graphic design, the placement of Indonesian, Minangkabau, or other regional languages is considered part of the data context. English as a branding language can be easily identified by its context of use and placement. The research procedure comprises three main stages: data collection, data analysis, and reporting of research results.

The data for this study were collected using participatory observation and non-participatory observation methods, which in linguistics are called *Metode Simak Bebas Libat Cakap* and *Metode Simak Libat Cakap* (Sudaryanto, 2018). The technique used was photography, which captured various forms and variations of written English in public spaces. Data collection was also conducted through note-taking techniques focused on the use of written English in public spaces. Data on aspects of written English as a branding language were also collected through a questionnaire sent to 100 respondents via Google Forms. A total of 94 of them completed the questionnaire.

Data analysis was conducted using Pragmatic Identity Methods (Sudaryanto, 2018) and by considering intra-lingual and extra-lingual context (Mahsun, 2005). The data analysis techniques used were comparison and description of language use. These techniques were used to ensure and reveal the rules of English as a branding language. The results of data analysis are presented narratively, describing the linguistic rules of English as a branding language.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 English as a Tool of Communication or as a Branding Language?

In Indonesia, English is learned from an early age. In some schools, English is even taught from elementary school to university. English is a compulsory subject in Junior and senior High School and at the university. Making English a compulsory subject is

expected to have a positive impact on English development in Indonesia, especially in Padang. Although English remains a foreign language in Indonesia, exposure to this language is already widespread across physical and online public spaces, electronic media, and social media. Everyday speech tends to use code-mixing with English. The use of written English in public spaces is also mixed with Indonesian and the local language (Minangkabau language). Based on the collected data, respondents' understanding of written English in public spaces in Padang is shown in the following figure.

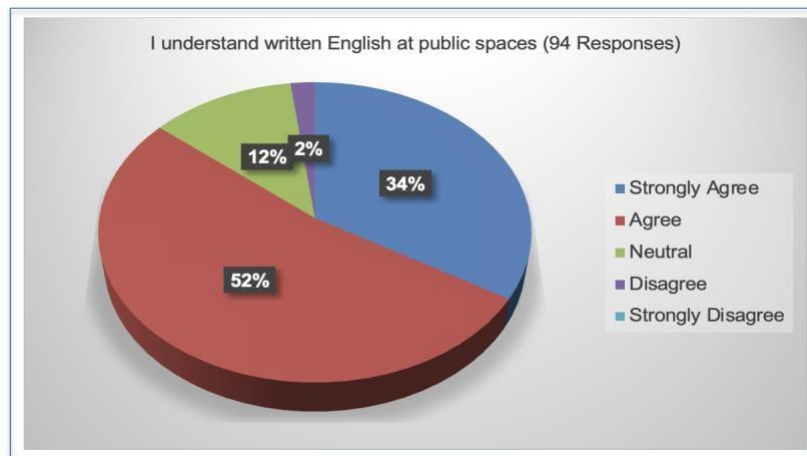


Fig 1. Respondents' understanding of written English in public spaces

A survey of 94 respondents, using a questionnaire submitted via Google Forms, showed that 34% strongly agreed they understood written English and 52% agreed they understood English. Another 12% stated they were neutral, and 2% stated they did not understand English. In the Indonesian context, understanding English is certainly not the same as understanding English like a native speaker. These figures indicate that English is not a strange language to people, though it is still considered a foreign language.

Regarding language skills, understanding a language is not enough; the ability to speak it is also crucial. In Indonesia, English is still considered a foreign language. The use of spoken English in public spaces is not as widespread as in Malaysia and Singapore. Spoken English is used only by certain groups, including English students and lecturers. In universities, English departments use English as the language of instruction. However, the learning process is not entirely in English. To reinforce the delivery of learning materials in areas that require attention, Indonesian and even local languages are used. Regarding English language proficiency in Padang, the following table shows the results.

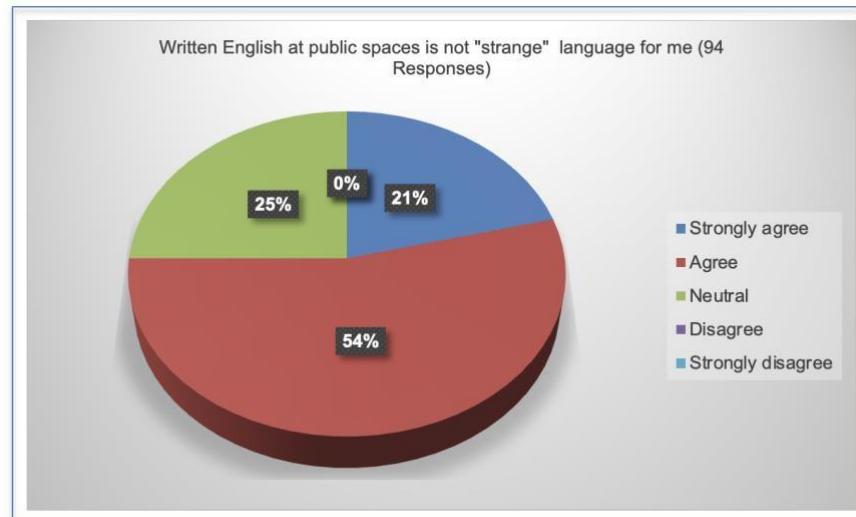


Fig. 2: Respondents' perception of written English in public spaces

Figure 2 shows that as many as 21% of the respondents stated English is not a strongly strange language for them. As many as 50% of respondents agreed that English is not a strange language to them, and 25% were neutral. These statistics indicate that the respondents are familiar with written English in public spaces. As written English is not a strange language to the public, it may serve a flexible function. English serves as a branding language in Indonesia's tourism by enhancing appeal and promoting effective communication (Pratiwi, 2023). It allows local communities to practice language skills, improve service quality, and ultimately contribute to tourism growth through better engagement with international visitors. People's perceptions of English are shown in the following diagram.

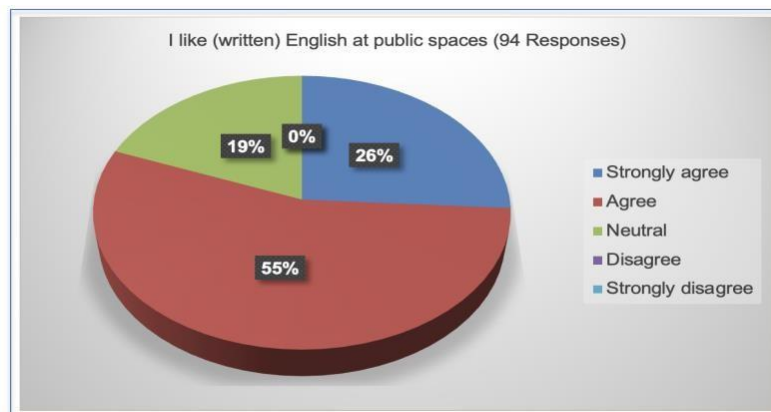


Fig 3. Perception of English

From the figure 3 above, a total of 26% of respondents stated that they strongly prefer written English in public spaces. 55% of respondents stated they prefer written English in public spaces. Overall, 81% of respondents strongly prefer written English in public spaces. This figure demonstrates the public's positive acceptance of English in public spaces.

The positive attitude toward written English in Padang is reflected in the respondents' responses in the figures. 1-3 above lead us to view English as a branding

language. Branding language is the use of language by companies, business units, or individuals to build identity, connect with audiences, and consistently convey values, personality, and promises across all communications to shape perception and recognition. Respondents' responses supported it, as shown in the following figure.

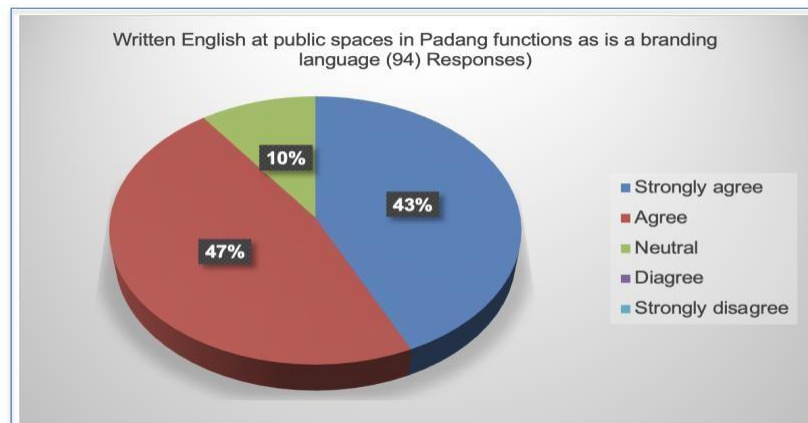


Fig 4. English as a branding language in public spaces

As shown in Figure 4, a total of 43% of respondents strongly agree that written English in public spaces functions as branding language. A total of 47 % agree that English is a branding language. Thus, 90% of respondents said that written English in Padang is used as branding language. Field observations support this finding. In general, people do not communicate actively in spoken English, though written English is readily available everywhere in the city. These findings indicate a gap between mastery of written and spoken English. English language learning in Indonesia has not been entirely successful. Learning methods (see Hicks, 2025), low student motivation to learn English, and inappropriate methods (see Mustofa, 2025) are among the factors contributing to the lack of success of English learning. This phenomenon was also observed in Padang (Oktavianus et al., 2025).

English as a branding language in public spaces in Padang is evident in the predominant use of English for business names and labels, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. English as Names and Labels of Business Units in Padang

No	Written English in Public Spaces as Branding Language
(1)	Brotherhood Hair Stylist Cut
(2)	Vaporate Store
(3)	Pay here
(4)	Meeting Room
(5)	My Underwear
(6)	Sunset Beach Café
(7)	Greenland Store
(8)	Beauty Women Sky
(9)	Restaurant
(10)	Work Space

The names and labels in the data (1-10) can still be translated into Indonesian. However, the business owners use English to create modernity. This is one way to build a positive image by using English to brand their business. Through Pragmatic Identity Methods, or linguistic and nonlinguistic contest tests, we can prove that if the owners of the business use labels and names in Indonesian, those names and labels will not function as branding language. The names and labels in Indonesian will serve only an informational function.

## 2. The Landscape of English at Public Places in Padang

Padang, West Sumatra, is home to ethnic groups from nearly every part of Indonesia, including the Minangkabau, Acehnese, Malay, Batak, Javanese, Balinese, Sasak, Bugis, Nias, Madurese, and others. However, the dominant ethnic group is the Minangkabau. Each of these ethnic groups naturally has its own regional language. However, the dominant ethnic group is the Minangkabau. Therefore, the dominant regional language is also Minangkabau. Furthermore, Indonesian, as the national language, serves as a means of communication that unites these diverse ethnic groups. Regarding the presence of English in Padang, code-mixing between Indonesian and English is common in public spaces. Respondents' opinions about code-mixing between Indonesian and English indicate that 28% strongly prefer it. 41% stated that they prefer code-mixing between Indonesian and English, as shown in the figure below.

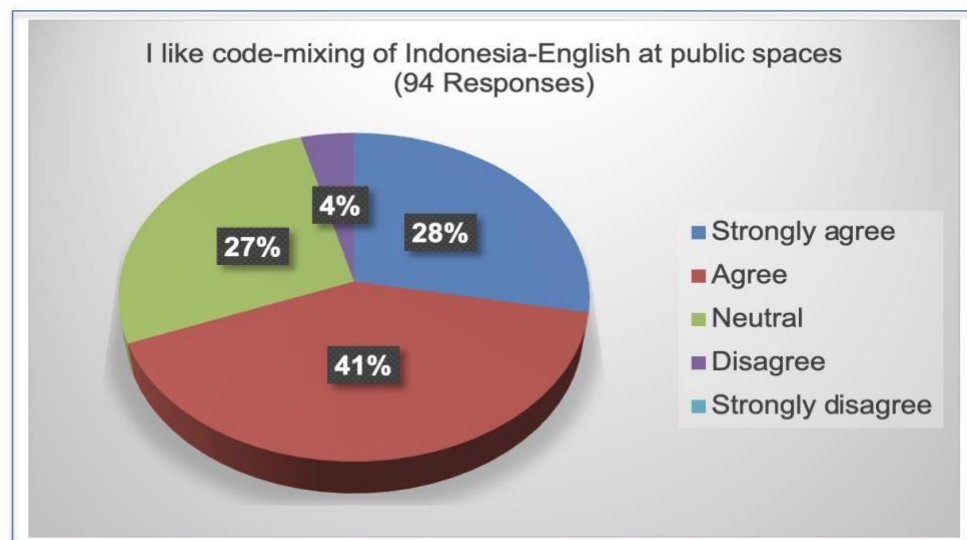


Fig 5. Code-mixing between Indonesian and English in public spaces

Code-mixing between Indonesian and English is common in Padang. The high frequency of Indonesian language use and the need to adopt English to create a modern impression tend to lead to code-mixing between English and Indonesian. Phrases and word structures are also diverse and do not generally follow the rules of formal grammar. It is one of the characteristics of language structure in public spaces. In general, it does not address the difficulties of understanding and receiving the message. Contexts help the addressee. Below are examples of code-mixing between written Indonesian and English in public spaces.

Table 2. Code-mixing of written Indonesian-English in Public Spaces

No	Code-mixing of Indonesian English in Public Spaces.
(1)	Mutiara Elsa Ice Cream
(2)	Toko Samudera: Central Furniture
(3)	Padang Raya Furniture
(4)	Goedang Wallpaper
(5)	Queen Muslim
(6)	Digital Printing. Percetakan.
(7)	Jeruk Baby
(8)	Seafood Bakar
(9)	Djoeragan Stick
(10)	Gubuk Coffee

The data (1-10) in Table 2 appear irregular. Users of this business unit sometimes place Indonesian before English and sometimes place English before Indonesian. This indicates that the structure of written language code-mixing in public spaces is highly dynamic. It is a style of language created to demonstrate uniqueness and attract visitors' attention.

The Minangkabau language is also displayed in public spaces in Padang, such as in the names of laundries, shops, cafes, and product advertisements. Minangkabau is even mixed with English, as shown in the following figure.

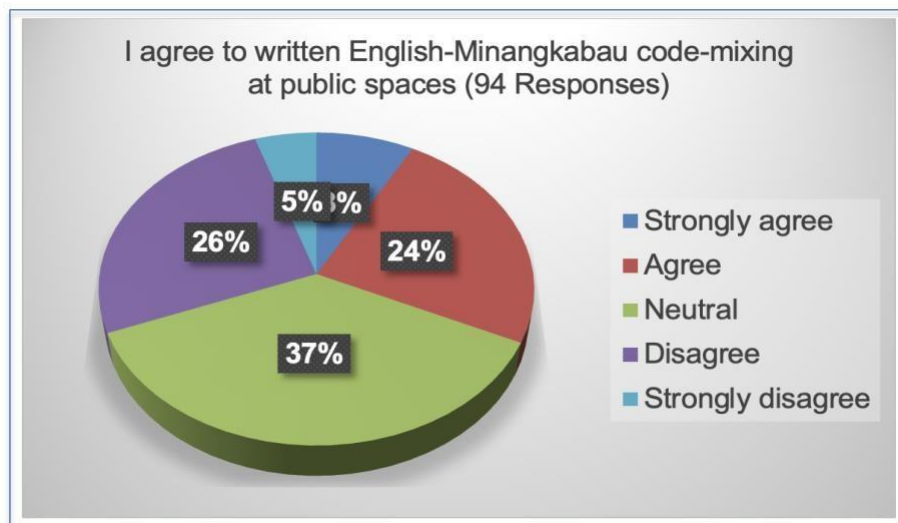


Fig 6. Respondents' perception of the written English Minangkabau code-mixing

As shown in Figure 6, only 32% of respondents favored using a Minangkabau-English mix in public spaces. Those who disagreed numbered 26%. This figure indicates that Minangkabau is less frequently used alongside English. Based on field observations, the

use of written Minangkabau in public spaces is productive. Some examples are shown in the following table.

Table 3. Code-mixing of written Minangkabau-English-Indonesian

No	Code-mixing of written Minangkabau-English-Indonesian
(1)	Rang Awak
(2)	Uda Gold
(3)	Minang Tobacco
(4)	Palito Law Firm
(5)	Marawa Fashion
(6)	Taraso Lamaknyo. Original Kebab. Black Kebab
(7)	Minang Express
(8)	Padang Thrift Shop

Code-mixing between Indonesian and Minangkabau may lead to a complex linguistic landscape. Numerous outdoor signs contribute to the complex linguistic landscape (See Maharani et al, 2025). Then, though in an area, the landscape of language consists of foreign language (English), national, and local languages; each has its own role. Local language remains vital for showing and expressing local identity (See Purnawati et al., 2025).

### 3. The motive of using English as a Branding Language

Regarding the motives for using written English in public spaces in relation to business, the three key concepts asked were building product image, exclusivity, and global identity. The answers obtained are shown in the following image.

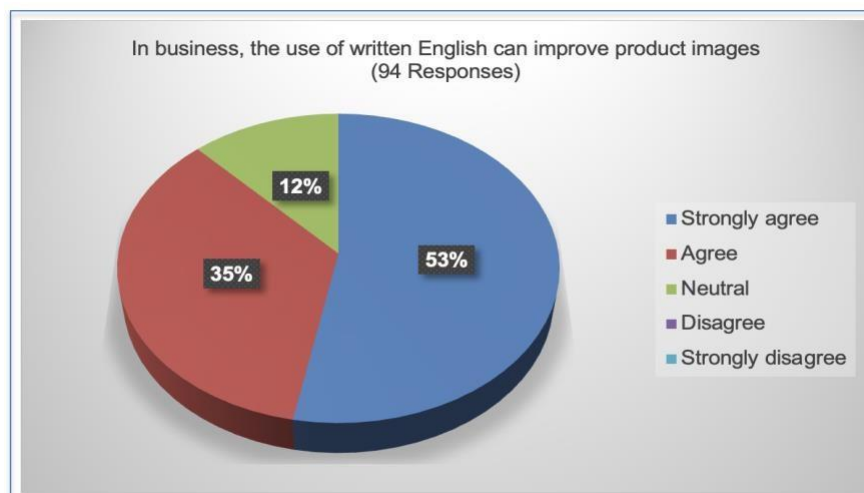


Fig 7. The motives for using English as the branding language

As shown in Figure 7, we can see that 53% of respondents strongly agree that English can enhance a product's image. 35% agree that English can enhance a product's image. These figures demonstrate that English functions as a branding language. The use of English also conveys a sense of exclusivity, as seen in the following image.

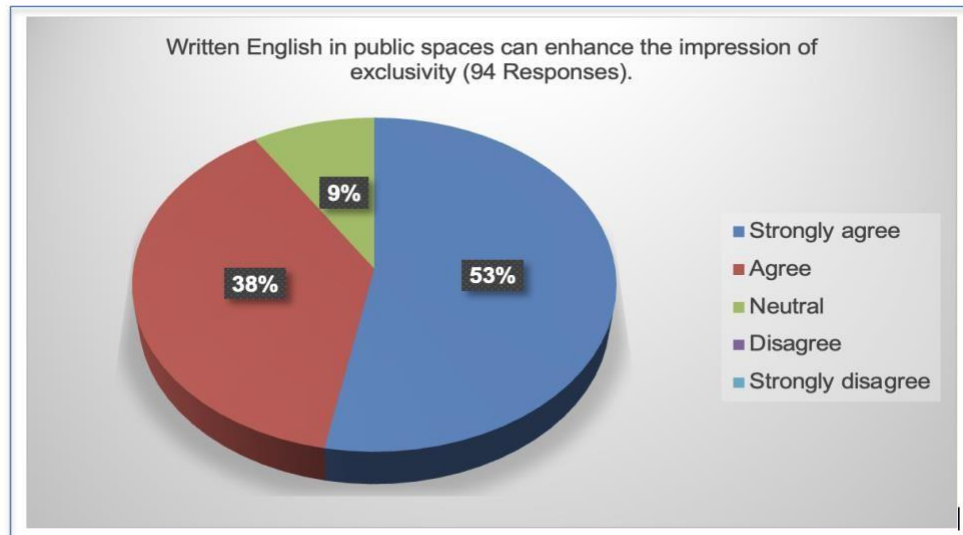


Fig 8. Written English in public spaces is a symbol of exclusivity

As shown in Figure 8 above, English is a marker of exclusivity. A total of 53% of respondents strongly agreed that English is a marker of exclusivity. As many as 38% of respondents agreed that English is a marker of exclusivity. Thus, English serves as a branding language. This statement is also supported by respondents' views on English as a global identity, as shown in the following figure.

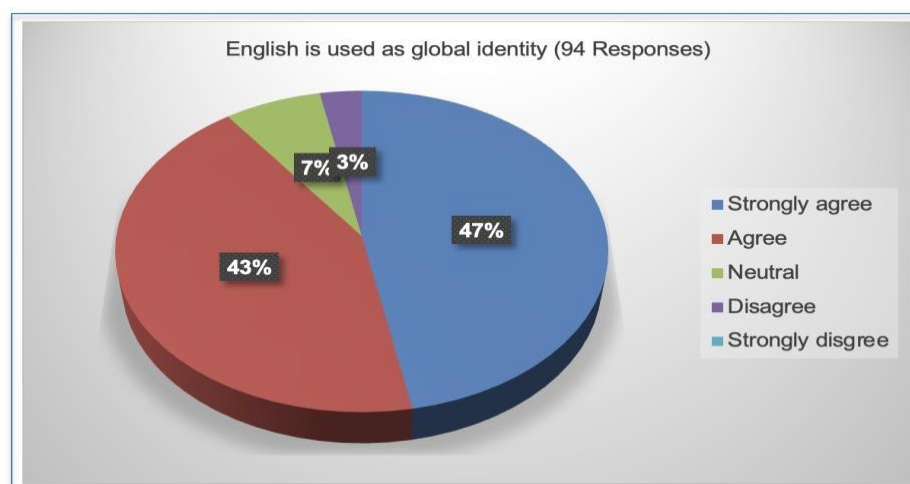


Fig 9. English is a symbol of global identity

Based on the statistics in the figure above, the motive for using English as a marker of global identity also received a positive response from respondents. 47% of respondents strongly agreed that English is a marker of global identity. 43% of respondents agreed that English is a marker of global identity. The combination of these two figures indicates

that English is a language marker of global identity, at 90%. Global identity is related to social status and social identity. Language is the marker of social identity (Crystal, 2003; Istika, 2024).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the overall data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, English in public spaces in Padang City serves as a branding language, especially in certain places and in various business activities. As a means of communication, only Indonesian and Minangkabau are sufficient. The code-mixing of English and Indonesian in public spaces received a positive response from respondents. However, the mix of English and Minangkabau received a less positive response. The motives for using English in public spaces for business purposes are threefold: building product image, exclusivity, and global identity.

#### IMPLICATION

The results of this study have two implications. First, strengthening English language proficiency must be continuously pursued, as the trend toward using English as a branding language is growing. Second, efforts to balance the use of English, Indonesian, and Minangkabau, especially for Minangkabau speakers, must be ongoing to ensure that mastery of these languages goes hand in hand, strengthening local, national, and global identities.

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#### Competing Interests

We (the authors of this article) declare that we have no competing interests among us and the journal in writing this article."

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#### Authors' Contribution

*Oktavianus Oktavianus* formulated the idea, wrote a proposal, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the draft of the article. *Yusmalinda* and *Dian Purnama Sari* wrote the research instruments, collected the data, and analyzed it. *Ferdinal Ferdinal* analyzed the data and wrote some parts of the articles. *Mita Handayani* collected the data.

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