



MULTILINGUALISM AND MEANING-MAKING IN *THE SOEDS CAFÉ* MENU: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how multilingualism and multimodal resources are employed in the menu of *The Soeds Café* to construct meaning, identity, and consumer appeal. Using the framework of Kress & van Leeuwen multimodal discourse analysis and Backhaus linguistic landscape studies, the research examines the interplay between linguistic choices and visual design in shaping the communicative function and branding strategy of the menu. The analysis reveals that English is used symbolically to convey cosmopolitan modernity, while Indonesian reinforces cultural relevance and local authenticity. Each section of the menu presents a curated linguistic and visual identity: the Butter Rice page juxtaposes global dish names with Indonesian flavor profiles, the Cocoa Series highlights regional pride and artisanal appeal, and the Pastas section demonstrates playful hybridity. These findings show that menus serve as performative texts, reflecting broader discourses of globalization, localization, and sociocultural aspiration in public food spaces.

Keywords: *multilingualism; multimodal discourse analysis; linguistic landscape; café menu.*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and multilingual world, the linguistic landscape of public and semi-public spaces reflects complex sociocultural dynamics. The visible use of language in these spaces—on signage, advertisements, and menus—conveys not only information but also ideologies, identities, and power relations (Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy, 2006). One particularly rich and underexplored site within this landscape is the café, where menus operate not merely as utilitarian lists of food and drink but as highly curated semiotic texts. These menus embody deliberate choices in language, typography, imagery, and layout that signal a café's ethos, target audience, and cultural positioning.

Since cafés and restaurants strategically exploit multilingualism and language branding, they have become particularly rich fields for sociolinguistic research. The terms used to refer to foods, characterise tastes, or raise up location and experience are rarely neutral. Rather, they are infused with meanings that reflect specific cultural values and societal goals. For instance, using French or Italian culinary words in Southeast Asian or Anglophone menus frequently conveys international sophistication, whereas using terms from the local language might bolster cultural pride or authenticity (Ferguson, 2010; Piller, 2001).

Scollon and Scollon (2003) claim that the existing discursive practices, including language, influence the experiences and interpretations of places. Menus engage in this spatial dialogue by framing the café as a space for global interaction, cultural mixing, or local grounding. In multilingual settings, the choice to incorporate various languages—

or to switch between them—typically mirrors and addresses the demographic makeup of the clients, expected tourist or expatriate populations, and the perceived social status linked to particular languages. Consequently, a menu composed of both English and the local language, like Indonesian, serves as a communicative tool that caters to language accessibility and reflects cultural connection (Heller, 2003).

Pujolar and Jones (2012) highlight that linguistic behaviors in peripheral areas (like non-global cities or university towns) demonstrate how globalization is interpreted and transformed. In these situations, cafés might practice what is referred to as visible multilingualism—the intentional use of prominent multilingual signage to convey openness, modernity, and diversity, while simultaneously strengthening a sense of community. Consequently, the café menu can be viewed as a type of discursive entrepreneurship (Agha, 2007), in which linguistic and semiotic selections contribute to shaping a brand identity that aligns with global and local values.

To sum up, café menus function not only as a practical interface for ordering food but also as a performative, multimodal document that articulates cultural values, economic aspirations, and social identities. Understanding how menus operate within this broader linguistic landscape allows researchers to uncover the subtle ways in which language mediates consumption, inclusion, and belonging in everyday spaces.

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives: Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS), both of which are instrumental in understanding how meaning is constructed in café menus through the integration of language, visuals, and spatial design.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), offers a framework for analyzing how various semiotic modes—such as language, image, typography, color, and layout—interact to produce meaning. In MDA, each mode contributes to the overall communicative function and can either reinforce or diversify the message. This approach is particularly relevant to the study of café menus, which are not just linguistic texts but visual and spatial artifacts designed to attract, persuade, and position the customer. Kress and van Leeuwen's concept of modal orchestration explains how different visual and textual elements are harmonized to create layered meaning. In recent years, MDA has been increasingly applied to culinary and commercial discourse. Torkildson and Stoller (2020), for instance, analyzed restaurant advertisements and found that imagery and layout reinforced aspirational narratives for consumers. Similarly, Jia and Wang (2023) explored typography and spatial design in multilingual menus in China, revealing how aesthetic choices index class, identity, and global branding. In Indonesia, Mustofa and Hapsari (2022) showed that food blogs use multimodal strategies—including captioning, visual framing, and language mixing—to construct culinary authenticity and desire. These studies collectively demonstrate how multimodal composition in food-related texts functions not just aesthetically but ideologically, shaping consumer perception, cultural affiliation, and emotional resonance.

LLS, as formalized by Backhaus (2007) and further developed by Shohamy and Gorter (2009), examines how written language displayed in public space reflects social identities, power structures, and cultural ideologies. In the context of food culture, LLS helps explain how menus serve as a microcosm of public language use. Menus, though private in function, are publicly visible and often strategically designed to communicate with multilingual audiences. Landry and Bourhis (1997) introduced the idea that language choice in public signage contributes to ethnolinguistic vitality, and this idea has since been extended to restaurant settings. Recent studies have explored the symbolic role of



English in food spaces across Asia. Aboelezz (2020) found that English on menus in Cairo signaled elite status and urban modernity. Lee and Koo (2021) analyzed Korean restaurant menus and showed how English served as a branding device more than a communicative one. In Southeast Asia, Wulandari and Nababan (2023) demonstrated how café signage in Yogyakarta combined Indonesian, Javanese, and English to appeal to young, trend-sensitive consumers. Hult (2019) emphasized that menus form part of the globalized linguistic landscape, blending global and local semiotics in commercial branding. Thus, LLS provides a lens through which to examine how The Soeds Cafe menu reflects the sociolinguistic conditions of a university environment—by incorporating English for its symbolic capital and Indonesian for cultural grounding.

Together, MDA and LLS enable a comprehensive analysis of *The Soeds Cafe* menu as a site of both aesthetic design and sociolinguistic positioning. These frameworks reveal how seemingly mundane texts—such as menus—are in fact curated artifacts that embody cultural narratives, branding strategies, and multilingual identities.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using multimodal discourse analysis and linguistic landscape analysis as its guiding frameworks (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). The focus is on the entire menu of The Soeds Cafe, which includes both food and beverage categories. These menus are treated as semiotic texts where language, visuals, and layout collectively construct meaning and perform social identities. The methodology follows an interpretive paradigm, emphasizing meaning-making from the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and cultural representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The primary data set consists of the complete printed and digital menu of The Soeds Cafe, which include food categories: Western-style dishes (e.g., Creamy Carbonara, Grilled Ribs, Saikoro Beef), Indonesian-inspired items (e.g., Nasi Daun Jeruk, Sambal Geprek), and fusion offerings. Meanwhile, beverages are categorized based on coffee-based drinks (Butterscotch Coffee, Caramel Latte), mocktails, teas, and seasonal specialty drinks. Each menu item is accompanied by design features such as bilingual labels, stylized fonts, icons, spacing, and photographs.

This selection represents a purposeful sampling strategy, often used in discourse analysis, where texts are chosen for their richness and relevance (Titscher et al., 2000; Paltridge, 2012). The unit of analysis includes not only the verbal text (names, descriptions) but also the accompanying visual elements (layout, icons, and image positioning).

Then, the analysis proceeded through three structured stages, each aligned with specific research objectives and theoretical tools:

- (1) Linguistic analysis: this stage focuses on identifying the distribution and functions of English and Indonesian across the menu. This analysis examines code choice, code-switching, and the socio-pragmatic functions of each language (e.g., prestige, familiarity, accessibility). Particular attention is given to whether English is used primarily for branding and symbolic value (Piller, 2001), and Indonesian for clarification or localization.
- (2) Visual and layout analysis: this phase employs principles from multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012) to examine the typography, color palette, layout hierarchy, use of space, and accompanying icons or images. The goal is to identify how visual composition guides reader attention, structures

consumption choices, and indexes certain cultural values (e.g., modernity, authenticity, youthfulness). This step is particularly informed by the concept of visual salience and compositional meaning.

(3) Interpretive synthesis: this final stage synchronizes linguistic and visual data to interpret how the menu participates in branding and identity construction. Drawing from sociolinguistic ethnography (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) and semiotic branding theory (Agha, 2007), this stage seeks to understand how The Soeds Cafe constructs a hybrid identity—combining global consumer aesthetics with localized cultural elements—through strategic multilingual and multimodal design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of selected menu pages from *The Soeds Cafe*, integrating both MDA) and LLS frameworks. Each menu page is treated as a multimodal text and a linguistic artifact where layout, color, typography, imagery, and language intersect to communicate meaning, construct identity, and perform branding. The analysis focuses on how the visual and linguistic elements collaboratively frame the café's position as a culturally hybrid and youth-oriented establishment. Three menus were selected as representatives to depict this issue.

1) Butter Rice with *Daun Jeruk*



figure 1.

Figure 1 demonstrates a highly strategic use of semiotic modes to construct meaning, consumer appeal, and visual salience. Multimodal components and multilingual choices are presented as follows.

a. Typography and Hierarchy:

The phrase “BUTTER RICE” is written in large, bold, uppercase serif font in red, soon catching the viewer’s attention. The contrast in size and color with “with DAUN JERUK” shows a visual hierarchy. Then “Butter Rice” represents the core menu identity (international and familiar) while “Daun Jeruk” (Indonesian for lime leaf) is visually and conceptually subordinate, providing local flavor and authenticity. This exemplifies a modal arrangement in which the intended blended culture is communicated and salience is guided by bold font.

b. Color and Brand Mood:

The red color scheme used for dish names, pricing, and flavor buttons (e.g., *sambal geprek*, *lada hitam*, honey sauce) conveys energy and appetite stimulation,



which is an affective technique often used in food menus. The consistency of color for text and icons supports branding coherence.

c. Image placement and Gaze:

The menu language is grounded in appealing, aspirational food imagery through the use of high-resolution images of the rice bowls at the bottom which are tilted to provide depth and color. To strengthen desire and decision-making, the attention is arranged to move down from the top textual menu to the food images.

d. Icons and Spacing:

Taste selections are displayed as pill-shaped buttons that imitate keyboard buttons in appearance. The buttons are consistently red with a white sans-serif font. This responds to the demands of digitally native consumers by creating a sense of engagement, modernity, and simplicity. Clarity and emphasis are ensured by the purposeful distance between menu items, which makes each dish stand out.

e. Language Choice and Order

All dish names are in **English**: *Roasted Chicken, Crispy Chicken, Grilled Ribs, Saikoro Beef*. This choice suggests not just intelligibility, but aspirational association with global food culture and urban trendiness (Piller, 2001). The use of English here functions symbolically, indexing modernity, international familiarity, and cosmopolitan taste.

f. Cultural Grounding via Indonesian

The only Indonesian phrase in the title, “Daun Jeruk”, is not translated, perhaps because local customers are already familiar with it. This illustrates grounding in culture. A culturally grounded flavour profile is also indicated by the fact that the flavour options, *Sambal Geprek* and *Lada Hitam*, are in Indonesian. They are accompanied by English (Honey Sauce), preserving the multilingual balance.

g. Indexicality and Identity

The menu demonstrated multilingualism where English signifies prestige and modern dining while Indonesian retains authentic, local meaning. This approach fits with *The Soeds Café's* identity as a young-oriented, college-town café that serves both domestic and globally-influenced consumers.

h. Visual-Linguistic Coherence

The absence of full sentences and the preferences for concise, mixed-language labels mirrors digital, fast-paced consumption culture. The layout aligns with semiotic principles found in linguistic landscape where brevity, clarity, and brand signaling outweigh descriptive elaboration.

In conclusion, this menu page is an example of a well-planned linguistic and visual design that serves several discursive purposes, including positioning the brand, enticing, and informing. A multimodal and multilingual brand that combines local familiarity with cosmopolitan aspirations is created by the stylized layout, the strategic use of red and white, and the merging of English and Indonesian. This reinforces the notion that menus, as linguistic landscapes in miniature, are not just functional tools but ideologically loaded texts embedded in the social, cultural, and economic realities of their context.

2) Exotic Cocoa Series

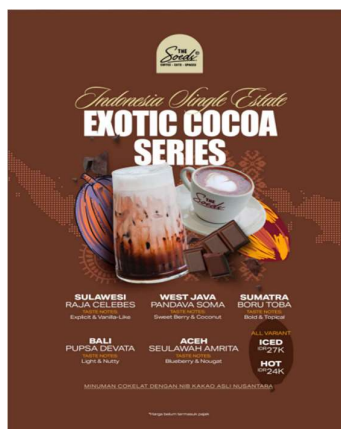


figure 2.

The second menu page portrays one of beverages series of *The Soeds Café*. From this figure, the interpretation is explained as follows.

a. Typography and Emphasis

The title *EXOTIC COCOA SERIES* is presented in large, bold, white uppercase lettering—contrasting starkly with the dark brown background to establish high salience. This typographic dominance immediately signals the importance and exclusivity of the series. The script-style typography of “Indonesia Single Estate” adds a layer of elegance and tradition, creating a visual hierarchy that blends prestige with heritage.

b. Color Palette and Symbolism

The warm brown hues evoke cocoa, earth, and richness—connoting depth, indulgence, and natural origin. The use of orange and golden tones further suggests warmth, luxury, and locality. The brown map of Indonesia in the background serves as a subtle *visual metonym* for origin, rooting the product in national pride.

c. Visual Imagery and Composition

Two images of the cocoa drinks dominate the center, styled in high-resolution photography with milk swirling and foam textures that suggest freshness and craft. Chocolate bars, cacao beans, and a tropical leaf visually reinforce the natural origin theme. The drink names are arranged vertically with region names, taste notes, and consistent formatting, allowing visual rhythm and ease of comparison.

d. Layout and Mode Interaction

Spatial layout adheres to principles of left-to-right downward scanning. Central visuals (drinks) highlight the composition, flanked by text to create informational and aesthetic balance. The *ALL VARIANT* pricing at the bottom right, in yellow and white, visually separates commercial detail from descriptive storytelling, allowing multiple reader paths and layers of engagement

e. Multilingual Presentation

English dominates the menu item labels and descriptors—“*Taste Notes*,” “*Sweet Berry & Coconut*,” “*Bold & Tropical*”—suggesting an orientation toward a cosmopolitan, possibly educated audience familiar with gourmet terminology. This aligns with the concept of *symbolic English* (Lee & Koo, 2021), where English is used not for accessibility but for branding and positioning.

f. Place Branding through Toponyms

Each drink is associated with a specific Indonesian origin: *Sulawesi, Bali, Aceh, Sumatra, West Java*. These toponyms function as *indexical signs* of quality, provenance, and cultural diversity. The product is not just cocoa, but cocoa from *Pandava Soma* or *Boru Toba*, which introduces ethnolinguistic specificity as a marketing device.

g. Bilingual Grounding

While most of the text is in English, the footer features the line “*MINUMAN COKELAT DENGAN NIB KAKAO ASLI NUSANTARA*”, a full sentence in Indonesian. This deliberate shift to the national language serves a grounding function—emphasizing authenticity and local identity for the Indonesian reader while preserving symbolic prestige via English up top. This bilingual layering reinforces the *glocal* identity of the brand.

h. Sociolinguistic Positioning.

The linguistic layering indexes *The Soeds Cafe* as a cultural curator—connecting global cafe aesthetics (via English) with national food heritage (via Indonesian and place-based indexing). This reflects displayed multilingualism aimed at branding rather than communication (Pujolar & Jones, 2012; Aboelezz, 2020; Kholifah et al., 2021).

This menu page offers a carefully curated example of how visual and linguistic choices interact to construct a brand narrative centered on *Indonesian terroir cocoa* with *global sensibilities*. The MDA framework reveals the visual hierarchy and affective appeal, while LLS highlights the sociolinguistic messaging embedded in the language of prestige, provenance, and hybridity. Menus like this one exemplify how semiotic design is deployed to communicate both *taste* and *identity*—not just of the products, but of the café itself as a cultural and culinary storyteller.

3) Pastas

The figure 3 represents western menus *The Soeds café* provide for the consumers.

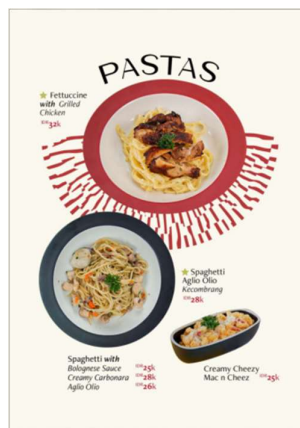


figure 3.

Different from the previous ones, this page uses a clean, minimalist yet vibrant look to draw consumer attention and evoke appetizing appeal.

a. Typography and Visual Emphasis

The word “*PASTAS*” is rendered in large, curving uppercase black letters, centered at the top with ample white space, signaling thematic clarity and simplicity. The font style is modern and minimal, reinforcing a youthful, trendy

brand identity. The italicization of dish names such as *Fettuccine*, *Spaghetti Aglio Olio*, and *Creamy Cheezy Mac n Cheez* contrasts with the regular font used for descriptions, creating clear visual segmentation.

b. Image-Text Alignment

High-resolution images of each pasta item are spatially anchored next to their descriptions, following a circular, flowing layout from top to bottom. This *visual-text proximity* supports consumer understanding and builds visual appetite. The largest image at the top (Fettuccine with Grilled Chicken) draws immediate attention, emphasizing a premium or signature item through size and centrality

c. Color and Visual Coding

Red pricing is consistent with other menu pages, maintaining thematic coherence. The muted cream background allows food colors to pop, directing focus to the product. The red arch graphic adds subtle dynamism, guiding the eye and evoking Italian-themed visual motifs (e.g., red for tomato-based sauces or warmth).

d. Iconography and Branding

Stars next to recommended dishes (e.g., Fettuccine, Aglio Olio) serve as affordances for quick visual cues, guiding the customer toward staff or house recommendations. This subtle use of multimodal resources enhances decision-making while reinforcing product hierarchy.

e. Language Choice

English dominates the menu item titles (*Spaghetti Aglio Olio*, *Creamy Cheezy Mac n Cheez*), aligning with the global food discourse. However, some descriptors reveal a local layer, such as *Kecombrang*, a distinct flora from Banyumas and surrounding areas. This hybrid naming reflects *code mixing* and playful localization, appealing to a culturally attuned, bilingual audience.

f. Prestige and Accessibility

The use of English for Italian dishes like *Fettuccine* and *Bolognese* leverages the global culinary prestige associated with Italian cuisine. However, the informal spellings—like *Cheezy* instead of *Cheesy* and *Mac n Cheez*—position the dishes as accessible, friendly, and perhaps youth-oriented, rather than elite or traditional. This illustrates *semiotic relaxation*—the branding strategy where non-standard forms are used to build a casual or relatable tone (Piller, 2001; Azzahra et al, 2024).

g. Multilingual Layering

While no Indonesian is prominently featured in full sentences, the pricing format (*IDR 25k*, etc.) and informal naming suggest this is aimed at a local audience with some English fluency. This aligns with practices of *displayed bilingualism*, where English is used symbolically to reflect trendiness rather than communicative necessity (Lee & Koo, 2021; Aboelezz, 2020).

h. Spatial Linguistic Identity

This menu visually and linguistically performs the identity of a globally-aware yet culturally grounded café. The mix of English culinary terms, playful word formation, and visually dominant food images situate The Soeds Cafe as both modern and hybrid, catering to young, bilingual Indonesians who value trendiness and localization in equal measure.



The “Pastas” menu page is a stylized, multimodal artifact where language and visuals work hand in hand to construct an identity of *trendy international fusion with local flavor*. It reflects symbolic English use, product hierarchy through image-text alignment, and semiotic strategies tailored to a bilingual consumer base familiar with both Western and Indonesian cultural references. This further confirms that The Soeds Cafe’s menu, as a linguistic and visual landscape, articulates brand identity through subtle multilingual, multimodal, and sociocultural cues.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how café menus, as everyday commercial texts, serve as powerful semiotic spaces where language and visual design converge to reflect and shape cultural identity. By combining multilingual strategies and multimodal aesthetics, *The Soeds Cafe* does more than present food options—it constructs a brand narrative that resonates with modern, bilingual, and culturally dynamic consumers. The findings from three representative menu pages—“Butter Rice with Daun Jeruk,” “Exotic Cocoa Series,” and “Pastas”—reveal a sophisticated interplay of multilingual and multimodal resources that serve both aesthetic and ideological functions. In the “Butter Rice” section, English dish names signal global appeal, while Indonesian flavor options ground the content in local culinary identity. The “Exotic Cocoa Series” constructs regional authenticity and national pride through topographic references and symbolic English usage, all framed by rich visual elements like cocoa beans and traditional motifs. Meanwhile, the “Pastas” page shows playful code-mixing and informal English spelling, blending Italian cuisine with local and youth-oriented branding strategies. Across these examples, the café performs a hybrid cultural identity, strategically combining languages and visual styles to appeal to a cosmopolitan, bilingual audience while affirming its Indonesian roots. This analysis contributes to a growing body of literature that recognizes public textual artifacts—like menus—as meaningful cultural performances that participate in globalization, localization, and identity construction within the linguistic landscape of contemporary Indonesia.

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