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Constructing Japaneseness in Selected Japanese-Themed Restaurants in Surabaya: A Multimodal Linguistic Landscape Study

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Abstract Commercial dining spaces in large cities increasingly serve as arenas for transnational cultural representation through language, visual elements, materiality, and spatial arrangement. This study examines the construction of Japaneseness in the multimodal linguistic landscape of Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya, Indonesia. Using a descriptive exploratory qualitative design, the study analyzed 36 multimodal semiotic ensembles from six purposively selected restaurant cases. The analysis drew on linguistic landscape, multimodal visual grammar, and cultural representation theory. The findings showed that Japaneseness was produced through Japanese scripts, culinary terms, cultural icons, interior materials, menu design, guidance signs, and spatial arrangement. Japanese scripts and culinary terms indexed cultural association, whereas Indonesian and English supported informational access. Three representational patterns were identified, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage. These patterns demonstrate the role of restaurants in constructing selected images of transnational culture within urban consumption spaces. This study shows that Japaneseness is selectively constructed through commercial signs and spatial dining practices.

Keywords: *Multimodal linguistic landscape, Japaneseness, Cultural representation, Japanese-themed restaurants, Surabaya*

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1. Introduction

Urban consumption in Indonesian cities displays transnational cultural identity through linguistic and visual signs in commercial spaces. From the perspective of linguistic landscape (LL), signs in public and commercial spaces carry informational and symbolic functions. These signs help customers identify services while also marking the identity, cultural values, and social position of a place. LL studies show that signs in public spaces play a role in shaping identity, cultural values, and social position. Tafrijiyah et al. (2024) found multilingual practices in bakery names in Yogyakarta. Artawa et al. (2023) showed the combination of Balinese, Indonesian, and English on restaurant signs in Ubud. Sariah et al. (2023) explained the image of modernity

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in the hotel landscape of Karawang through the dominance of English. Wijaya et al. (2026) examined the formation of socio-cultural identity through linguistic and visual signs in the tourism landscape of Canggu. Together, these studies show that commercial and tourism-oriented signs in Indonesia mediate language choice, cultural identity, and images of modernity in public space.

Within the Indonesian context of commercial signage, Japanese-themed restaurants represent a particularly salient case of transnational cultural identity construction. Japanese-themed restaurants have developed in this context through Japanese cuisine, popular culture, global brands, and urban lifestyles. The development of Japanese-themed restaurants associates Japan with modernity, order, aesthetics, and distinctive dining experiences (Majid et al., 2023; Pujiono & Barus, 2023). This phenomenon is evident in Surabaya, a metropolitan city in eastern Indonesia. Japanese-themed restaurants in the city tend to represent "Japan" through written language, visual imagery, ornaments, interiors, and spatial signs (Thi et al., 2022). While previous studies have mainly addressed language choice, multilingual visibility, and public identity in general commercial or tourism-oriented spaces, a specific focus on Japanese-themed restaurants as urban dining spaces that construct Japaneseness through language, scripts, iconography, materiality, and spatial arrangement remains limited. This gap is important because Japanese-themed restaurants not only display Japanese words or cultural symbols but also combine linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources into a multimodal dining environment.

This study conceptualizes Japaneseness as a cultural image of Japan that is constructed through recurring semiotic choices in restaurant spaces. From an operational point of view, Japaneseness in this study includes written texts, culinary vocabulary, iconography, interior elements, and spatial planning that make the image of Japan recognizable in the customer experience. Japanese-themed restaurants use written resources such as kanji and romaji (Akamatsu et al., 2022; Hayakawa et al., 2022; Kataoka et al., 2024; Song et al., 2022). In commercial spaces, these written elements are combined with images, layouts, lighting, interior materials, and customer guidance signs. This combination forms a multimodal whole that makes the image of Japan recognizable and valuable to customers.

Therefore, this study aims to explain the construction of Japaneseness in the multimodal linguistic landscape of six selected Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya, using a corpus of 36 multimodal semiotic ensembles. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources used to represent Japaneseness, examine the informational and symbolic functions of these resources, and interpret the recurring representational patterns through which Japaneseness is constructed in urban dining spaces. The novelty of this study lies in its reading of Japanese-themed restaurants as multimodal linguistic landscape sites that bring together informational functions, symbolic functions, visual organization, and cultural representation within a single analytical framework.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Linguistic Landscape in Commercial Dining Spaces

Studies of language in public spaces position signs as important resources for reading the relationship between language, identity, and social space. LL refers to the display of language in public and commercial spaces (Al-athwary, 2022; Benu et al., 2023; Mansoor et al., 2023; Sheng & Buchanan, 2022). In LL studies, signs are understood as indicators of information. Landry and Bourhis (1997) distinguish two functions of signs, namely informational and symbolic functions. Informational functions help the public identify places, services, products, rules, directions, and offers. Symbolic functions represent identity, prestige, belonging, and social position. In the context of restaurants, visual signs not only convey business information but also establish culinary identity, market orientation, and social significance (Song et al., 2022). Broader Indonesian language studies also show that language practices can support meaning-making, identity expression, and public interpretation (Cahyo et al., 2025; Mulyono et al., 2026).

LL studies in Indonesia show that commercial and tourism-oriented signs mediate language choice, identity, and images of place. Restaurant signs, bakery signs, hotel landscapes, and tourism signage have been examined as spaces where language and visual signs construct commercial identity, modernity, and socio-cultural visibility (Artawa et al., 2023; Sariah et al., 2023; Tafrijiyah et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2026). These studies provide an empirical basis for examining Japanese-themed restaurants as commercial LL spaces. Therefore, LL is used in this study as an initial lens to read the ways in which Japanese-themed restaurants perform informational and symbolic functions through scripts, images, colors, objects, and spatial markers.

2.2. The Multimodal Expansion of Linguistic Landscape

Recent studies consider restaurant signage as a multimodal entity that blends language, visuals, materiality, and spatial positioning to shape the customer experience. In restaurant contexts, signs are rarely limited to written language. Restaurant outdoor signs can communicate social and commercial meanings through the combination of linguistic and visual resources (Song et al., 2022). This supports the reading of restaurant landscapes as multimodal environments. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) offer a framework for visual and multimodal analysis through three interrelated dimensions, namely representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. The representational dimension interprets the objects, symbols, actions, and cultural scenes shown in the signs. The interactive dimension interprets the ways in which signs position viewers and customers through visual distance, viewpoint, orientation, and forms of engagement. The compositional dimension analyzes the arrangement, clarity, framing, salience, and information value of semiotic resources. In this study, these three dimensions are used to examine the ways in which scripts, culinary terms, icons, materials, color schemes, and spatial settings are organized as multimodal resources in Japanese-themed restaurants.

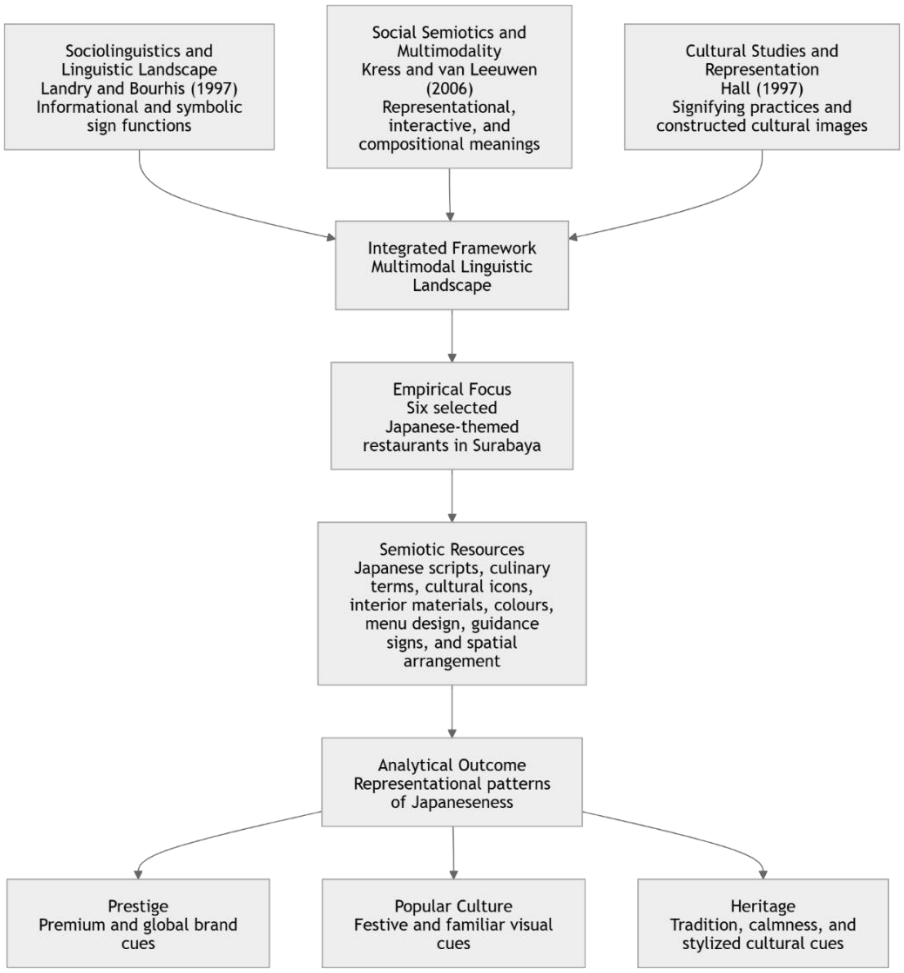
2.3. Cultural Representation and Japaneseness as a Constructed Image

Drawing on the theory of representation, cultural representation is understood as the production of meaning through signifying practices in specific social and cultural contexts (Hall, 1997). Representation is not just a reproduction of existing cultural reality. Language, images, objects, and spatial settings are selected and arranged to make specific cultural meanings recognizable. Empirical studies on Japanese-themed spaces show that Japanese cultural images are often constructed through selected culinary, linguistic, visual, and spatial resources (Majid et al., 2023; Pujiono & Barus, 2023; Thi et al., 2022). These studies support the view that Japaneseness in commercial spaces is a selected representation produced for local consumers. In this study, Japaneseness refers to the image of Japanese culture constructed in restaurant spaces through recurring semiotic resources, including Japanese scripts, culinary terms, cultural icons, interior materials, color schemes, tableware, menu design, brand signboards, and spatial planning. These resources construct selected images of Japan for urban consumers in Surabaya, including images of prestige, popular culture, heritage, modernity, and global connectivity. This conceptual position avoids considering restaurant signs as direct evidence of authentic or complete Japanese culture.

2.4. Integrated Analytical Framework

This study integrates LL, multimodal analysis, and cultural representation theory. The three frameworks are integrated hierarchically and complementarily rather than being treated as separate analytical tools. LL is used to identify the informational and symbolic functions of signs. Multimodal visual grammar is then used to examine the ways in which linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources organize representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Cultural representation theory interprets the ways in which recurring combinations of these resources construct selected images of Japaneseness for urban consumers in Surabaya. Through this integration, the analysis moves from identifying sign functions to examining multimodal organization and finally to interpreting the representational patterns of Japaneseness, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage. The framework in Figure 1 guides the analysis of semiotic resources and patterns of Japaneseness representation in six Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya.

Figure 1
Operational Analytical Framework for Examining Japaneseness in a Multimodal Linguistic Landscape



3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a descriptive exploratory qualitative design with a multimodal LL approach. This approach was used to read written language, visuals, materiality, and spatial arrangement as socio-cultural texts in Japanese-themed restaurants. The analysis combined three complementary frameworks. Landry and Bourhis's (1997) framework was used to identify the informational and symbolic functions of signs. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar was used to read representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Hall's (1997) theory of representation was used to interpret Japaneseness as a cultural image constructed through recurring semiotic choices.

3.2. Location, Corpus, and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted in Surabaya and involved six Japanese-themed restaurant cases selected purposively through a non-random sampling procedure. The number of six restaurant cases was chosen to balance variation, analytical depth, and practical feasibility. Together with six focal ensembles from each case, this scope provided a manageable corpus for identifying recurring patterns of Japaneseness without claiming statistical representativeness. The selection of the restaurants was based on the availability of varied publicly visible semiotic resources, such as signage, menus, interiors, cultural icons, instructional signs, and spatial arrangement, as summarized in Table 1. This sampling strategy was intended to provide analytical depth in examining the construction of Japaneseness rather than to represent all Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya. The selection of restaurants with visible and

varied semiotic resources foregrounded more explicit forms of Japaneseness than restaurants with fewer displayed resources. Outlet size was not used as a sampling criterion. The restaurants were not selected because of their business scale or number of branches, but because they provided stable, publicly visible, and verifiable semiotic resources relevant to the analysis of Japaneseness. The fact that several selected restaurants belonged to restaurant chains was treated as a contextual characteristic rather than a sampling criterion. Table 1 presents the selected restaurant cases, observed sites, verification sources, and the rationale for including each restaurant in the corpus.

Table 1
Observed Restaurant Cases and Rationale for Sample Selection

Restaurant brand	Observed site(s)	Identified outlets in Surabaya	Verification source	Rationale for selection
Ramen Ippudo	Pakuwon Mall	1	Official website, mall directory	Exterior signage, distinctive interior, and strong visual signs.
Kyoushi Authentic Teppanyaki	Pakuwon Mall	1	Google Maps, official Instagram	Dense cultural symbols and a live-cooking-based dining space.
Shaburi and Kintan Buffet	Galaxy Mall 3, Tunjungan Plaza 5	3	Official website, Google Maps	Premium branding and clear instructional signs.
Okinawa Sushi	Galaxy Mall 3, Pakuwon Mall	3	Official website, official Instagram	Heritage cues, spatial calmness, and Japanese aesthetics.
Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ	Galaxy Mall, Tunjungan Plaza 4	3	Official website, Google Maps	Global branding, multilingual signs, and a modern image of Japan.
Marugame Udon	Jl. Raya Darmo, stand-alone outlet	6	Official website, Google Maps	Culinary heritage signage and systematic guidance for the dining flow.

In each restaurant case, six focal multimodal semiotic ensembles were selected based on variations in location, function, and medium. The final corpus consisted of 36 multimodal semiotic ensembles. A multimodal semiotic ensemble refers to a bounded analytical unit anchored by at least one publicly visible linguistic sign and examined together with co-present visual, material, and spatial resources that contribute to the construction of Japaneseness. Its boundary was determined by linguistic anchor, spatial proximity, communicative function, and relevance to the customer-facing experience. Thus, an exterior brand sign, menu display, guidance board, interior wall display, or culturally themed seating area was treated as a separate ensemble when it performed a distinct function.

The six focal ensembles from each restaurant case were selected to ensure comparable coverage across restaurant spaces, including exterior identity signs, menu or product information, interior cultural imagery, service or guidance signs, brand or promotional displays, and material-spatial arrangements. The final corpus was selected from the photographs taken during observation after excluding duplicated, blurred, unstable, non-public, purely decorative items without a linguistic anchor, and items not directly related to the Japanese theme.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data Collection

The data were collected through non-participant observation and high-resolution visual documentation in the exterior and interior areas of the restaurants. Each focal multimodal semiotic ensemble was photographed and recorded using a documentation sheet covering language choice, script type, sign location, visual salience, material cues, spatial context, and customer orientation. The data included ensembles anchored by stable and publicly visible linguistic signs associated with the Japanese theme.

Co-present visual, material, and spatial resources were documented only when they contributed to the interpretation of Japaneseness. Material and spatial notes were retained only when they supported the interpretation of prestige, popular culture, and heritage.

Ethical attention was given to photographic documentation. The documentation focused on publicly visible signs, menus, interior objects, and spatial arrangements rather than customers or staff. Identifiable individuals were not intentionally photographed; if they appeared incidentally, the images were excluded from presentation or anonymized through blurring. The photographs were used only for academic analysis, and the documentation process did not interfere with restaurant services or customer activities.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, each multimodal semiotic ensemble was coded based on its informational function, symbolic function, or a combination of both. Second, each ensemble was analyzed through representational, interactive, and compositional meanings by considering cultural objects, symbols, viewpoint, visual distance, layout, salience, framing, and information value. Third, the combination of scripts, icons, materials, colors, and spatial arrangement was interpreted to explain the construction of Japaneseness. Fourth, a cross-location synthesis was conducted to identify recurring representational patterns, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis was addressed using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For credibility, the coding records and interpretations were reviewed collaboratively by three researchers with expertise in linguistic landscape, multimodal analysis, and Japanese language and culture by comparing them with the original photographs and documentation sheets. The review covered the entire corpus of 36 ensembles and focused on the consistency of ensemble boundaries, coding of informational and symbolic functions, interpretation of multimodal meanings, and classification of the three representational patterns. Differences in interpretation were resolved through consensus discussion by returning to the original photographs and the agreed analytical criteria. No statistical inter-rater agreement was claimed because the study adopted an interpretive qualitative design. Transferability was supported through contextual descriptions of the research sites, selected corpus, and analytical scope. Dependability was maintained through consistent analytical procedures and documented coding decisions. Confirmability was supported by retaining the photographs, documentation sheets, and coding records as an audit trail.

4. Results

The analysis of 36 multimodal semiotic ensembles across six selected Japanese-themed restaurant cases in Surabaya showed that Japaneseness was constructed through the coordinated use of language, scripts, cultural imagery, material features, and spatial organization. The restaurants did not use these resources in identical ways. Their signs and co-present resources organized images of Japan through three recurring patterns, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage. The prestige pattern emphasized premium branding, modern service, and global connectivity. The popular culture pattern emphasized visual density, festive atmosphere, and familiar decorative icons. The heritage pattern emphasized culinary tradition, stylized cultural references, calmness, and spatial order.

4.1. Prestige-Oriented Japaneseness

Prestige-oriented Japaneseness was most prominent at Ramen Ippudo, Shaburi and Kintan Buffet, and Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ. These restaurants placed glowing signs in the foreground, used legible brand names, provided multilingual product information, adopted organized interior styles, and displayed service resources that associated dining experiences with quality, efficiency, and broader market recognition. While all three restaurants shared this pattern, each built prestige through a different combination of linguistic and multimodal resources. Therefore, the comparison focuses on the ways in which prestige was differentiated through legacy references, technical information, and global brand connectivity.

Ramen Ippudo connected prestige with selected heritage references. The six observed multimodal semiotic ensembles consisted of external signage, interior design, menu displays, table resources, cultural decorations, and customer guidance signs. Figure 2 presents a visual resource in which premium branding and heritage-oriented signals are combined within the restaurant space.

Figure 2

Visual Ecosystem of Ramen Ippudo Restaurant in Surabaya.



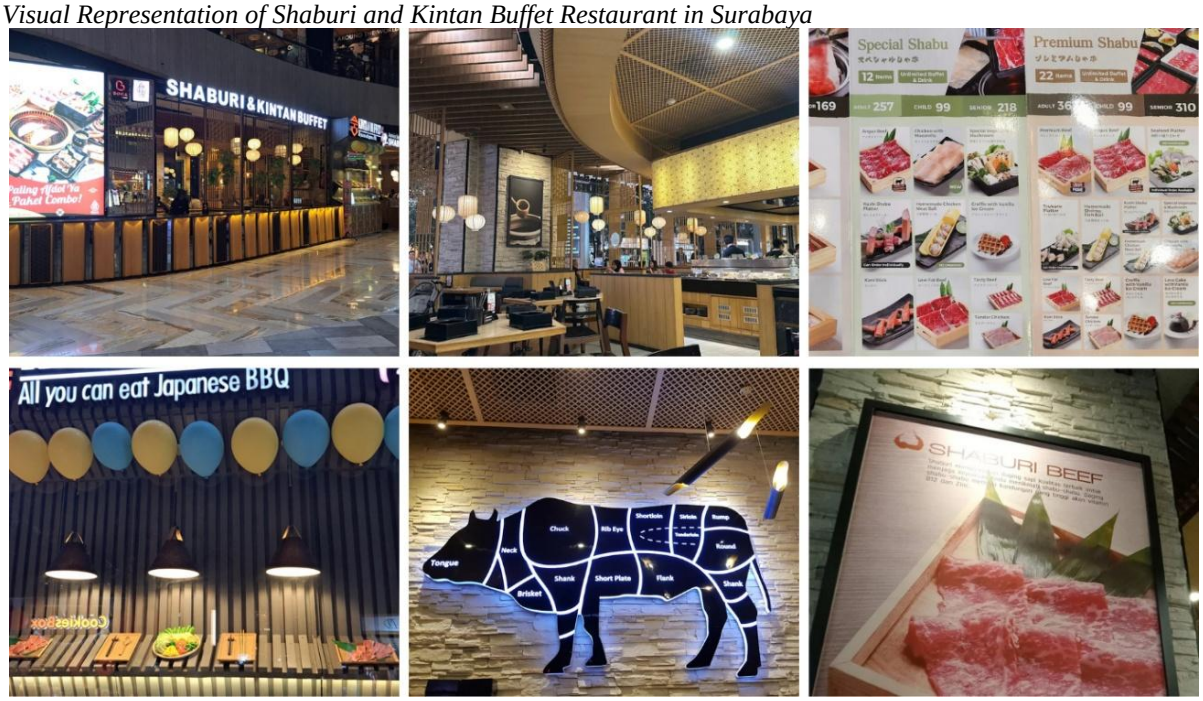
Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the restaurant signboard, interior design elements, menu display, table resources, Japanese cultural symbols, and customer guidance sign.

Figure 2 shows that the illuminated romaji sign “RAMEN IPPUDO” was the most prominent façade element through its size, lighting, and placement. The brand identified the restaurant branch and indexed the image of globally oriented Japanese cuisine. In terms of the LL function, the sign performed an informational function by identifying the restaurant and a symbolic function by associating the space with Japanese culinary prestige. The menu combined Japanese, English, and Indonesian. Indonesian supported access to product information, the Japanese fostered cultural associations, and the English projected a globally accessible dining context. Inside the restaurant, wooden grilles, red noren curtains, and ukiyo-e references added a heritage-oriented register to the premium brand image. Table signs and QR codes connected food consumption with digital convenience. The guide on ramen eating practices introduced a teaching dimension to the dining experience. In visual grammar terms, the brand name, noren, wooden grilles, ukiyo-e references, menus, QR codes, and guidance signs produce representational, interactive, and compositional meanings through Japanese-related imagery, customer orientation, and salient spatial arrangement. These resources extended the informational function through service guidance and the symbolic function through curated heritage references. External nameboards provided initial recognition, menus enabled customer choice, and table-based resources maintained the Japanese theme during dining. Thus, Ramen Ippudo presented Japaneseness through a prestige-oriented image that was visually supported by stylized references to cultural tradition.

While Ramen Ippudo associated prestige with selected heritage references, Shaburi and Kintan Buffet developed prestige through visual style, product quality, and technical information. The six observed multimodal semiotic ensembles included external signage, interior elements, menus, service terms, meat cut diagrams, and information on quality and nutrition. Figure 3 shows the ways in which external branding, internal settings, and food-related information worked together to create a quality-oriented dining image.

Figure 3

Visual Representation of Shaburi and Kintan Buffet Restaurant in Surabaya



Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the exterior signboard, interior elements, menu display, service information, meat-cut diagram, and quality or nutrition information board.

Figure 3 shows that the luminous sign "SHABURI & KINTAN BUFFET" dominated the façade through its size, lighting, and position. The wooden interior, warm lighting, and orderly layout maintained a luxurious atmosphere. A menu featuring fresh ingredients and the phrase "All You Can Eat Japanese BBQ" informed customers about the product and service format. Meat cut diagrams and quality and nutrition information boards added a technical layer to the restaurant image. These resources presented food selection as a practice informed by freshness, classification, and quality standards. In visual grammar terms, the façade sign, wooden interior, menu display, service wording, meat-cut diagram, and quality information produced representational meaning through premium food imagery. Interactive and compositional meanings emerged through customer-oriented information and orderly spatial arrangement. The signage functioned symbolically by positioning the brand within a premium Japanese-themed atmosphere. Menus, diagrams, and information boards functioned informatively by describing the available services and food attributes. At these outlets, prestige was built through restrained visual design and dining performance as an organized, quality-oriented experience.

In contrast to Shaburi and Kintan Buffet, which attributed prestige to technical food information and spatial arrangement, Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ emphasized prestige through global connectivity and commercial standardization. Six multimodal semiotic ensembles were observed, including external signage, interior arrangement, menu display, buffet information, a world map of international branches, and wagyu-related information. Figure 4 shows that the "Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ" sign incorporated the brand name, logo, Japanese-related visual elements, lighting, and large typography. This sign positioned the restaurant as a Japanese cuisine brand with a strong international orientation. Promotional menus, buffet information, and an "All You Can Eat" board gave customers direct access to service options. Japanese elements maintained cultural associations, while Indonesian and English improved readability for customers. The international branch map placed the Surabaya outlet within a wider brand network. Wagyu information boards supported the image of culinary quality and product knowledge. In visual grammar terms, the brand sign and supporting resources produce representational meaning through global brand identity and culinary quality. Interactive and compositional meanings emerged through service-oriented information, customer guidance, and the salient arrangement of brand, menu, and product-knowledge resources. In terms of the LL function, the brand sign and Japanese-related visual elements worked symbolically, while promotional menus, buffet information, and wagyu boards

worked informatively by guiding customers through available products and services. In this restaurant, Japaneseness was constructed as an image of global, accessible, and commercially established cuisine.

Figure 4

Visualization of the Global Identity of Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ Restaurant in Surabaya



Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the exterior signboard, interior arrangement, menu display, buffet information, international branch map, and wagyu information board.

Taken together, the three restaurants constructed prestige-oriented Japaneseness through related but different semiotic strategies. Ramen Ippudo combined premium brand visibility with heritage-oriented references and digital service resources. Shaburi and Kintan Buffet attributed prestige to restrained spatial arrangement, freshness, and technical information about food quality. Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ attributed prestige to international brand circulation, promotional accessibility, and standardized culinary knowledge. At all three restaurants, external signage created initial recognition, while menus, service information, and interior resources extended the premium image into customer choice and dining practice.

The comparison also shows that prestige did not come from branding alone. Interior design, customer guidance, menu language, technical information, and spatial placement shaped the ways in which each restaurant presented Japaneseness as a premium dining experience. Ramen Ippudo framed its prestige through a combination of global branding and stylized heritage. Shaburi and Kintan Buffet constructed prestige through controlled space and quality-oriented information. Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ framed prestige through global connectivity and standardized commercial service. Thus, the same representational pattern was realized through different configurations of linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources.

4.2. Popular-Culture-Oriented Japaneseness

Popular-culture-oriented Japaneseness was most clearly observed in Kyoushi Authentic Teppanyaki. The six observed multimodal semiotic ensembles consisted of external signage, interior decoration, menu displays, cultural icons, spatial settings, and customer-facing signage. In contrast to the controlled and prestige-oriented presentations found in other restaurants, Kyoushi relied on visual density, bright colors, decorative motifs, and a vibrant interior environment. These resources made Japaneseness a recognizable cultural image in the Surabaya culinary scene. Figure 5 presents the external and internal resources through which Kyoushi Authentic Teppanyaki built a popular-culture-oriented image of Japan.

Figure 5

Visual Landscape of Kyoushi Authentic Teppanyaki Restaurant in Surabaya



Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the exterior signboard, interior spatial setting, menu display, murals and collage posters, maneki-neko and koi ornament, and customer-facing signage.

Figure 5 shows that the exterior sign "KYOUSHI AUTHENTIC TEPPANYAKI" served as a starting point for identification through text, lighting, and a distinctive red-and-white visual expression. The Japanese-style restaurant signage established a symbolic identity, while English and Indonesian menu information supported access to food options and services. Meanwhile, Japanese culinary vocabulary maintained a themed dining atmosphere and symbolic connection with Japan. Inside the restaurant, murals and posters became the main resources for expressing Japaneseness through popular and entertainment-oriented imagery. Striking lanterns and a red palette added to the festive atmosphere. The maneki-neko and koi motifs supported Japan-related imagery. These resources worked together to create an active dining environment through color, visuals, and spatial engagement. In visual grammar terms, murals, posters, lanterns, maneki-neko, koi motifs, and the red palette produced representational meaning through popular and festive Japanese-related imagery. Interactive and compositional meanings emerged through visual density, customer-facing decoration, and the salient arrangement of colors and cultural icons.

The popular-culture-oriented pattern was formed through the accumulation of linguistic, visual, decorative, and spatial resources in customer-facing areas. The illuminated restaurant name sign established a visible and energetic Japanese-themed restaurant identity. English and Indonesian menu information provided practical access to food options, while Japanese culinary terms strengthened the symbolic association with Japanese dining. Murals and collage posters foregrounded Japaneseness through a contemporary visual entertainment register. Lanterns, the red palette, red noren, maneki-neko, and koi motifs strengthened the festive atmosphere and cultural familiarity of the interior. The arrangement of decorative resources in customer-facing areas made visual engagement central to the experience of the restaurant space.

This pattern shows that popular-culture-oriented Japaneseness was produced through cumulative visual engagement rather than a single dominant sign. External signage provided initial recognition, while menus connected symbolic association with practical access to culinary information. Murals and collage posters functioned as the main resources for expressing Japaneseness through visual entertainment. Lanterns, the red palette, noren, and decorative icons shaped the cultural tone of the interior. Unlike the controlled premium register found in prestige-oriented restaurants, Kyoushi constructed Japaneseness by intensifying visual density and presenting an entertainment-oriented image of Japan in the dining context.

4.3. Heritage-Oriented Japaneseness

Heritage-oriented Japaneseness was most evident in Okinawa Sushi and Marugame Udon, while supporting heritage cues also appeared in Ramen Ippudo. This pattern developed through Japanese culinary terms, decorative scripts, wooden materials, calligraphy, noren, sakura motifs, koi imagery, ukiyo-e references, and organized spatial arrangements. These resources were not treated as direct evidence of cultural authenticity but were interpreted as selected references that formed a heritage-oriented image of Japan in commercial restaurant spaces.

Okinawa Sushi combined heritage references with an elegant and luxurious atmosphere. The six observed multimodal semiotic ensembles consisted of external signage, interior design, menu display, cultural decoration, seating arrangement, and brand display. Figure 6 presents linguistic, visual, and material resources through which Okinawa Sushi combined heritage-oriented imagery with an elegant restaurant ambiance.

Figure 6

Visual Composition of Okinawa Sushi Restaurant in Surabaya



Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the exterior signboard, interior seating area, menu display, calligraphic tableware, koi motif, and brand display.

Figure 6 shows that the illuminated romaji sign “OKINAWA SUSHI” served as the visual anchor of the entrance area through its size, lighting, and placement. The romaji name enhanced the visual readability of the restaurant brand, while the logo and accompanying design supported its association with Japan. The sign therefore performed an informational function by identifying the restaurant and a symbolic function by positioning the space within a Japanese-themed culinary setting. Inside the restaurant, the light wooden interior, sakura ornaments, Japanese script on the menu, calligraphic decoration, and circular koi motif created a calm and visually refined atmosphere. Maroon menu covers and luminous signage added a prestige-oriented register to the dining atmosphere. Koi motifs became prominent interior resources, while calligraphic decorations brought Japan-related visual references into the dining room. In visual grammar terms, the romaji sign, Japanese script, menu design, calligraphic tableware, koi motif, and light wooden interior produce representational meaning through stylized heritage imagery. Interactive and compositional meanings emerged through visual readability, calm spatial orientation, and the balanced arrangement of signage, menu design, seating area, and cultural decoration. As such, Okinawa Sushi constructed heritage-oriented Japaneseness through curated cultural references combined with premium refinement and visual elegance.

While Okinawa Sushi combined heritage-oriented imagery with subtlety and prestige, Marugame Udon emphasized culinary heritage, simplicity, accessibility, and organized service. The six observed multimodal semiotic ensembles consisted of external name signs, interior resources, menu displays, decorative scripts, cultural imagery, and customer guidance signs. Figure 7 presents linguistic, visual, and spatial resources through which Marugame Udon connected Japanese culinary heritage with accessible menu information and an organized service flow.

Figure 7

Visual Landscape of Marugame Udon Restaurant in Surabaya



Note. The panels show, from top left to bottom right, the exterior name sign, interior resources, menu display, decorative scripts, cultural imagery, and customer guidance signs.

Figure 7 shows that the "MARUGAME UDON" sign identified the restaurant through its legible brand name and the Japanese culinary term "udon." The menu combined Japanese culinary terms with explanations that provided accessible information for food selection. In this setting, language connected symbolic culinary association with practical customer orientation. Wooden panels, decorative Japanese scripts, and a ukiyo-e-style mural with sakura references supported the heritage-oriented atmosphere of the restaurant. Guidance boards and service markers controlled the self-service flow and structured customer movement through food selection and dining procedures. In visual grammar terms, representational meaning was produced through culinary naming, wooden materials, decorative scripts, and ukiyo-e-style imagery. Interactive and compositional meanings emerged through accessible menu explanations, self-service guidance, and ordered spatial flow. Thus, Marugame Udon constructed heritage-oriented Japaneseness through the relationship between culinary naming, stylized cultural imagery, and organized spatial arrangement.

Supporting heritage cues also appeared in Ramen Ippudo through the red noren curtains, wood textures, and ukiyo-e references described in the prestige-oriented section. Their presence suggested that heritage could function as a supporting register rather than as the restaurant's dominant orientation. At Ramen Ippudo, these cues reinforced the premium brand environment. At Okinawa Sushi, heritage cues were combined with subtlety and prestige. At Marugame Udon, heritage cues were more directly related to culinary tradition and spatial design.

Taken together, Okinawa Sushi, Marugame Udon, and Ramen Ippudo showed different emphases in constructing heritage-oriented Japaneseness. Okinawa Sushi constructed heritage through calm material

design, selected cultural imagery, and premium visual styling. Its illuminated romaji sign, Japanese scripts on the menu, sakura ornaments, calligraphy, and koi motif supported both restaurant identification and symbolic association with Japan. Marugame Udon constructed heritage through culinary tradition, accessible information, and organized spatial practice. Its brand sign, the culinary term "udon," menu explanations, wooden panels, decorative scripts, ukiyo-e-style mural, sakura motifs, and guidance boards connected Japanese culinary naming with customer orientation and service flow. Ramen Ippudo used red noren, wooden latticework, and ukiyo-e references as supporting heritage cues within a predominantly prestige-oriented restaurant space.

These differences show that heritage-oriented Japaneseness was built through different semiotic emphases rather than through a single fixed expression. Okinawa Sushi emphasized heritage through calm material design, refined visuals, and premium styling. Marugame Udon connected heritage with culinary naming, accessible menu information, and organized service flow. Ramen Ippudo used heritage references mainly to support its prestige-oriented brand image. Heritage, therefore, functioned as a flexible register shaped by the visual organization and dining orientation of each restaurant.

The heritage-oriented pattern accentuated the image of Japan in the dining space through diverse semiotic resources. At Okinawa Sushi, signage, menu design, calligraphy, and koi motifs created a refined and visually controlled interior. At Marugame Udon, menus, signage, wooden panels, and self-service sequences incorporated cultural elements into practical customer service and food selection. In Ramen Ippudo, references to noren curtains, wooden lattices, and ukiyo-e enriched an image composed primarily through prestige. In all these cases, heritage cues were not isolated decorative elements. Their representational value emerged through their relationship with linguistic information, material design, and spatial organization.

4.4. Synthesis of Representational Patterns of Japaneseness

A cross-pattern comparison showed that the six observed restaurants did not build Japaneseness through a uniform combination of semiotic resources. Instead, each restaurant organized linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources according to a dominant representational pattern and, in some cases, a supporting orientation. Japanese scripts and culinary terms signified cultural associations, while Indonesian and English supported access to product and service information. Cultural icons, menu design, color palettes, lighting, materials, and signage extended this association into a visual and spatial dining experience. This comparison identified three interrelated representational patterns, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage. Table 2 consolidates the dominant and supporting representational patterns, main semiotic resources, LL functions, and representational interpretations identified across the six restaurant cases.

Table 2
Consolidated Patterns of Japaneseness Representation across the Observed Restaurants

Restaurant Case	Dominant Pattern	Main Semiotic Resources	LL Function	Representational Interpretation
Ramen Ippudo	Prestige with heritage cues	Brand romaji, trilingual menu, QR code, guidance sign, red noren, wooden latticework, and ukiyo-e reference	Informational and symbolic	Prestige-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through premium brand visibility supported by curated heritage references and contemporary service resources.
Kyoushi Authentic Teppanyaki	Popular culture	Japanese culinary terms, English and Indonesian menu information, lanterns, murals, collage posters, red palette, maneki-neko, koi, and noren	Informational and symbolic	Popular-culture-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through visual density, festive atmosphere, and entertainment-oriented cultural familiarity.

Shaburi and Kintan Buffet	Prestige with quality-oriented cues	Brand marker, service wording, English technical labels, premium façade, wooden interior, meat-cut diagram, and nutrition information	Informational and symbolic	Prestige-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through spatial control, food quality, and technical food knowledge.
Okinawa Sushi	Heritage with prestige cues	Romaji brand name, Japanese scripts on menus and decorative elements, light wood, sakura, maroon menu cover, calligraphy, and koi motif	Informational and symbolic	Heritage-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through calm material design, refined cultural imagery, and premium visual styling.
Gyu-Kaku Japanese BBQ	Prestige with global-connectivity cues	Brand name, multilingual menu, wagyu information, international branch map, buffet information, and modern interior	Informational and symbolic	Prestige-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through international brand circulation, commercial accessibility, and standardized culinary knowledge.
Marugame Udon	Heritage with accessibility cues	Culinary name, Japanese terms with local explanations, wooden panels, self-service flow, ukiyo-e-style mural, and guidance boards	Informational and symbolic	Heritage-oriented Japaneseness was constructed through culinary tradition, accessible information, and organized spatial practice.

Table 2 shows that Japaneseness was not represented as a single fixed cultural image across the observed restaurants. Each restaurant selected and organized semiotic resources according to its commercial positioning and dining orientation. Prestige, popular culture, and heritage functioned as interrelated representational patterns rather than separate categories. Prestige emphasized premium value, quality, efficiency, and wider brand recognition. Popular culture emphasized visual density, entertainment, and cultural familiarity. Heritage emphasized stylized tradition, calmness, culinary knowledge, and organized spatial practice. These patterns also overlapped when heritage cues supported premium positioning or when accessible information strengthened cultural recognition. In the observed corpus, Japaneseness emerged as a selected cultural image arranged to be recognizable and consumable in Surabaya's urban dining spaces rather than as a complete representation of Japanese culture.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explain the construction of Japaneseness in the multimodal linguistic landscape of selected Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya. The findings showed that Japaneseness emerged through the coordinated use of Japanese scripts, culinary terms, multilingual information, cultural imagery, interior materials, and spatial organization. The analysis identified three recurring representational patterns, namely prestige, popular culture, and heritage. Each pattern organized a particular image of Japan within the urban dining experience.

Interpreted through Landry and Bourhis (1997) distinction between informational and symbolic functions, restaurant signs simultaneously performed both functions. Indonesian and English supported access to menu information and service guides, while Japanese scripts and culinary terms contributed to the cultural positioning of the restaurant space. Artawa et al. (2023) reported that restaurant signage in Ubud combines local, national, and international languages for commercial communication and cultural visibility. The present findings extend this empirical context by showing that multilingual resources in Japanese-themed restaurants also operate in conjunction with visual forms, material design,

and spatial organization in constructing Japaneseness. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) categories of representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, these resources can be read as multimodal arrangements that organize cultural imagery, customer orientation, and the visual hierarchy of the dining space.

Hall's (1997) theory of representation provides a conceptual basis for interpreting these patterns as constructions of meaning rather than reflections of fixed cultural realities. In this study, Japaneseness emerged as a selected cultural image constructed in commercial restaurant spaces in Surabaya. The prestige pattern associated Japan with premium value, order, and global connectivity. This interpretation is comparable to Sariah et al. (2023), who found that commercial hospitality signage can build an image of modernity through language choices and visual presentations. Popular culture patterns highlighted vivid and visually familiar images, while heritage patterns evoked stylized connections with tradition. Wijaya et al. (2026) similarly showed that linguistic and visual signs contribute to the production of socio-cultural identities in commercial tourism spaces. Thus, the three patterns in this study represent a market-oriented construction of Japaneseness rather than a complete representation of Japanese cultural life.

The commercial reception of Japaneseness in these restaurant spaces can also be interpreted through Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, particularly the collectivism dimension. Hofstede explains that collectivist cultures tend to value group belonging, shared practices, and socially coordinated forms of participation. In this study, several Japanese-themed restaurants represented Japaneseness through buffet systems, BBQ practices, self-service flows, menu information, and guidance signs that organized customer participation in dining procedures. These semiotic and spatial resources display Japanese cultural references and make Japanese-themed dining compatible with Indonesian urban consumers, for whom eating together is a familiar social practice. In this sense, Hofstede's framework provides a supporting explanation for the commercial relevance of Japaneseness in Surabaya without treating national cultural values as the main object of analysis. However, this interpretation is used only as a contextual lens, as the present study analyzes semiotic representation rather than measuring national cultural values.

Across the corpus, the relationship between sign functions and multimodal organization showed that Japaneseness was produced through layered semiotic arrangements rather than through language choice alone. Japanese scripts and culinary terms established a cultural association, while Indonesian and English expanded informational access to products, services, and dining procedures. Visual salience, façade signs, menu displays, cultural imagery, materials, colors, and spatial composition further differentiated the representational patterns of prestige, popular culture, and heritage. In this sense, linguistic, visual, material, and spatial resources worked together to make Japaneseness recognizable, consumable, and commercially meaningful in Surabaya's urban dining spaces.

These findings offer both theoretical and practical implications. At the theoretical level, this study extends previous LL research in Indonesia, which has largely examined language choice, multilingual visibility, commercial identity, modernity, and tourism identity, by focusing on Japanese-themed restaurants as multimodal urban dining spaces. The study fills the gap in research on Japaneseness by showing how written language, visual resources, material design, and spatial organization jointly construct selected images of Japan in commercial restaurant settings. The main analytical contribution lies in identifying prestige, popular culture, and heritage as recurring representational patterns that connect LL functions, visual grammar, and cultural representation. This analytical linkage clarifies how transnational cultural imagery becomes recognizable and commercially meaningful in local urban restaurant spaces. On a practical level, the findings show that restaurant signage, menus, interior elements, and guidance systems contribute to the branding and spatial positioning of themed dining environments. Therefore, cultural imagery requires careful use because repetitive commercial signs can simplify complex cultural meanings into marketable imagery.

This research has limitations that determine the scope of its analysis. The corpus includes six purposively selected restaurant cases and 36 multimodal semiotic ensembles in Surabaya. The sampling strategy prioritized restaurant spaces with visible and diverse semiotic resources to support depth of analysis rather than statistical representativeness. This choice may foreground more explicit

constructions of Japaneseness. Therefore, these findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all Japanese-themed restaurants in Surabaya or Indonesia. Future studies may examine customer interpretations, management decisions, digital promotional materials, or cross-city comparisons to clarify the ways in which Japanese images are produced and received in Indonesian commercial spaces.

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It should be stated that AI tools were used solely to improve grammar, clarity, and language expression. All conceptual arguments, analyses, data recovery processes, and final editorial decisions are entirely the authors' responsibility. No AI-generated data, evidence, or references were used, and all outputs were reviewed to ensure scholarly integrity.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Declaration

This study did not involve human participants or sensitive personal data and, therefore, did not require formal ethics approval. The photographic documentation focused on publicly visible signs, menus, interior objects, and spatial arrangements in customer-facing restaurant areas. No formal written consent from restaurant management was obtained because the study did not document private areas, staff, or customer interviews, or identifiable personal data. When required by restaurant policy, verbal permission was requested before photographing publicly visible materials.

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