

## Understanding Public Notices in English at Public Places

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### Abstract

Getting people to be more aware of something is one of many functions of public notices at public places. By reading the public notices, people are expected to do what it is instructed, understand what its intended. However, public notices which are written in English might become another problem. Pontianak, Indonesia is the example of the country which is not using English as the first language. People who live in Pontianak city, Indonesia may experience the moment when they are hardly to understand the meaning of the public notices in English. The research is conducted by using survey which consists of some questions that the respondents need to answer. The respondents are at the range of 15-45 years old. The data collected shows that the most respondents are able to understand the public notices that are written in English. They do not have problem in reading or defining the meaning of the statements used in public notices. Moreover, they have some efforts in finding the meaning of new words. The respondents also admit that they are interested in learning English. In the end, it can be concluded that the respondents do not have problem in understanding the public notices in English.

**Keywords:** Public Notice, Public Place, Understanding Language

### Introduction

Learning language especially learning English language in Indonesia has become one of the compulsory lessons for students to learn. Learning English is a compulsory lesson to learn even for the primary level (Istiqomah, 2016). Indonesia seems to realize the importance of learning English starting from the first level (primary level). From there, it becomes a starting point for Indonesia to admit that English is important to learn. The language is learned from the primary and it is kept being learned until the next stages. This results people would get used to seeing English anytime and anywhere.

Besides English has been widely used around the world for it is an international language, there is no doubt that people in the world would learn English as to ease their jobs. Nishanti (2018) stated that there is at least one from five people in the world can understand English. Meanwhile, English is treated as means of communication which is used in business as well. People who are looking for jobs and have skills of using English, active or passive, would have more benefits compared to those who are not able to use English. Rini (2014) mentioned that those who are able to use English would have bigger chance to be hired, and they might get higher payment as well.

Learning language could be learned formally or informally. Language that is learned at schools can be included into formal. Meanwhile, the language that is learned outside schools can be included into informal. Some examples of informal learnings such as learning through some social medias (facebook, Instagram, and others) can really support the language learning (Aladjem & Jou, 2016).

Others can learn English informally from the way that we might not realize it. This can occur not only on students who might have learned it in different way, but to people in general as well. People who are not learning English formally, they could learn language by looking, reading, seeing words, phrases in English in public notices in some public places, such as banks, restaurants, cafes, and other places. Unconsciously, the words or phrases in English that are found in those places would keep repeated and would somehow rise a curiosity of the real meaning of the words or phrases used.

It is believed that people are social creatures which means people love gathering with some other people. People love hanging out with friends, relatives, and families. Yet, it has become one of the basic needs of humans. Then, to be able to hang out or gather with those people, a comfortable place is required. A place where people can sit, have a drink, eat, and discuss something freely. The place where people would get the feeling of joy and serenity can be obtained (Sepe, 2017).

People also need to work to fulfil what they need. Sometimes, they need to go to some places that they need to visit as their working place. There, they can work, discuss, and exchange some information or any.

The language (English) which is used in public notices in public places are designed in such a way to attract the people to read. Notices, warnings, labels, names, even some expressions are written in English in colors (Oktavianus, 2019). They are made in such a way that people would be easy to find, see, and get interested to see what it is written.

However, the words written on notices, warnings, labels, names, and some other expressions in English have risen a phenomenon whether people understand the written or not. This has come to the writer's attention that if they understand the written words, if they know how to read the words, if they are curious with the words and search the meaning in the dictionary or not.

This research is to analyze the people's understanding toward the English language in public places.

## **Literature Review**

### **Public Places**

Zhang & He (2019) suggest a concept of public space which does not refer to a 'place' in physical form. They defined public space to a gathering of some individuals that discuss a collective of common interests and issues (Iveson in Zhang & He, 2019). However, when the public space refers to a physical form, generally, public places would be defined as the places where people have different or similar needs or motives gather at a certain place (Oktavianus, 2019). It could be the place where people are required to go with different intention. Some examples of public places or public spaces are restaurants, shopping malls, banks, restaurants, public parks, and some other places where people could visit. According to Speranza (2013), public spaces deal with the connection between the urban structures and the use of the spaces. Speranza (2013) mentioned that there are three characteristics related to public spaces namely: (1) physical features, (2) shape and size, and 3) distribution and behavior.

Apart of it, these places which could be like what have been mentioned above, including garden and parks could give a positive contribution to life (Nasution & Zahrah, 2016). Nasution & Zahrah (2016) mentioned that even the design of public space (public open space) has been taken seriously that may include accessibility, facility, and natural elements.

Moreover, the use of public spaces seems to be more that they are meant to. Public spaces could be the places for people to do the various activities, therefore, the public spaces should be able to accommodate the activities that people might do there (Nasution & Zahrah, 2016).

Types of public spaces are divided into three big categories (Parysek 2011 cited in Mantey & Kępkowicz, 2018) namely public, semipublic, and private. Semipublic spaces are the places that could be accessed by specific people under the certain conditions or time. Examples of this public spaces usually include indoor places: museums, swimming pools, malls, churches, schools, banks, government offices, etc.

Meanwhile, public spaces do not need to be further explained when it comes to compare to semipublic places. Public parks could be a great example of it since people usually could visit anytime. Although, there are some restrictions related to the time they are allowed to visit.

Private as the last category is very clear category. It is non-public place that not everyone is allowed to visit. It is owned by a person or an organization. Sometimes, this place could be visited but in limited circumstances (Mantey & Kępkowicz, 2018).

### **Public Notices**

Public notices could be found or seen anywhere. It is usually easily to be seen, noticed, found in names of shops, schools, praying places, restaurants, menus, or warning signs (Maina, 2019). Public notices in Indonesia could be written either in Bahasa or English. Public notices are words to inform, instruct, or to express to people who read. Notices can be included into a text type.

On recent days, along with the rapid growing of internet users, notices are also found in websites, official internet sources or any sites (Dolganichev, 2022). However, apart from the rapid growing of internet users, some people are also exposed to public notice when they are at public places such as parks, gardens, zoos, shopping centers, malls, cinemas, banks, restaurants, and others.

Learning to understand public notices would be beneficial. According to Yagcioglu (2018), learning the definition of public notices and signs would make people become more aware of rules and announcements. In brief, public notices are important. It is something unconscious that public notices have become the part of our life.

As have been mentioned before public notices could be easily found almost anywhere (which usually take place at public place). The function of public notices itself comes when people need instructions to act (Dubrovskaya, 2012). It becomes clear that people would always need public notices to tell, to inform, what they need to act toward something.

Dubrovskaya (2012) categorizes public notices into several types; (1) Instruction proper, an instruction with less emotion used. (at a restaurant) Pay before leaving; (2) Warnings, as usually written in (at a train) CAUTION Keep your arms, legs, and head inside the train until it stops. Limbs are difficult to replace; (3) Prohibitions, is probably the most public notice seen No smoking area; (4) Requests (at a cinema) We ask you not record – it is piracy; (5) Informative notices, This property is locked due to the regulation.

Some public notices found in Indonesia are as what have been categorized above. Those public notices are easily found at many public places. People who are doing transaction at banks, visiting shopping centers, eating at restaurants, visiting zoos, would see those public notices. Therefore, it is no exaggeration if public notices have become an inseparable part of Indonesians' life.

### **English Language Used in Public Notices**

English is a global language, regarded as an international language, used by almost 1,500 million people around the world (Lauder, 2008). According to Lauder (2008), from 1,500 million people, there are around 329 million people who are using English as their first language. 430 million people who are using English as their second language. Lastly, around

750 million people are using English although English is considered to be a foreign language. One of countries which puts English as a foreign language is Indonesia (Lauder, 2008)

Despite of its status as a foreign language, English has been regarded as a compulsory subject to learn (Lauder, 2008). It is regulated and it is also a part of the curriculum stating that English is learned from the first year of Junior. In the next step, primary level also could have English in the subject (Lauder, 2008).

Furthermore, Lauder (2008) also points out that English could be possibly used as a medium of instruction. It is supported by the statement stated by Deputy of Chairman of Commission X DPR, Rully Chairul Anwar that using English as the instruction is allowed (as cited in Alrajafi, 2021).

Moreover, English has given a great impact on education and economy as well (Alrajafi, 2021). Alrajafi (2021) furthermore mentions that by mastering English, it would somehow increase the economy. This may become one of the reasons that looking at those public notices in English are very easy to find at almost everywhere, especially the places such as shops, parks, malls, etc.

Therefore, it is not a surprising to see that English is used in almost all aspects of life in Indonesia.



Figure 1. A public notice in one of the shops at one of the shopping malls in Indonesia



Figure 2. A public notice in one of the factory outlets

## Methods

To answer the phenomenon, a survey is held. Survey is a tool to collect a data (Glasow, 2005). Survey is considered to be a tool to gather information about the characteristics, actions, and opinions (Pinsonneault and Kraemer, 1993 cited in Julie, 2015) of the intended samples. The population is represented by the parents or siblings of the students at one of the private schools in Pontianak, Indonesia.

As to gather the data, the participants were given a set of questionnaires through their children or siblings. The children who are studying at one of the private schools, are asked to share to their parents or their siblings. The questionnaires contain a set of questions (10 multiple choices

and 5 short essays). The questionnaires are made in the form of Google Form. The respondents complete up the form and submit the form back which later would be analyzed. The questions that consist of 10 multiple choice questions ask about how often the respondents go, the places they visit, how often they see or find the public notices, if they understand the notices written, if they are curious with the meaning, and if they are interested in learning English.

Meanwhile the other five short-essay questions ask some definitions of English statements that are usually found in public notices (at some public places such as restaurants, shopping centers, and modern-markets).

## **Results and Discussion**

After gathering and analyzing the data, the total of the respondents who take part in completing the questionnaire are 58 respondents. The 58 respondents are varied from teenagers to the elderly (siblings and parents).

The data analysis for each question can be seen as the following; (1) 51.7% of respondents admit that they sometimes go out. 29.3% of respondents confirm that they seldom to go out. 17.2% of respondents who often go out. It means that there are around 1.8% who always go out. It shows that the respondents admit that they still go out, but they do not do it frequently; (2) Modern market (or commonly called as supermarket) is the most preferable place to go which takes 58.6% of respondents. Banks, schools, or government offices are at the most second place to visit which takes 44.8%. Malls and restaurants take 32.8% and 29.3% respectively. Meanwhile recreation or tourist attraction places (beaches, jungles, camps, pools, etc.) and traditional markets are at the same percentage of respondents which are 20.7%. From the percentage, it clearly seen that the most visiting place is the modern markets. The respondents prefer to go out when they have something to buy for their daily needs. Another reason why they chose to go modern markets over the traditional ones might because of the places are more comfortable to visit and provide almost anything they need; (3) When the respondents visit the public places, they would be aware to see the public notices. 37.9% of respondents confirm that they sometimes see the public notices. 32.8% of respondents admit that they often see. 22.4% of respondents are seldom to see the public notices. Never and always become the least chosen by the respondents and they have the same percentage. It means that the respondents see or look at the public notices whether they are aware or not when they visit the public places; (4) While visiting public spaces, around 46.6% of the respondents confirm that the public notices are seldom written in English. 31% of respondents state that the public notices they sometimes find out are written in English. Then, 17.2% of the respondents often see the public notices written in English. Although, there are 46.6% of respondents saying that are seldom to see the public notices in English, but it does not mean that English is not used at all. 31% and 17.2% state that the respondents sometimes and often, it means English is quite often to be used in public notices; (5) A positive response shown by the respondents by saying 67.2% quite understand what is written in English. 8.6% of respondents confirm that they really understand. Meanwhile, there are 19% and 5.2% of respondents who do not really understand and do not understand at all respectively. It is a great point that the respondents seem to understand what are written in public notices in English. They do not seem to have any difficulties in understanding the instruction or the messages in public notices; (6) 75.9% of respondents confirm that they quite know how to spell or read the English terms or words used in public notices. Meanwhile, there are only 24.1% of respondents admit that they are not so sure to spell or read the words. It also shows a good thing since the respondents also know how to read it correctly. At least, it can help them later in practicing English with the real native speakers; (7) 44.8% of the respondents think that the words or instructions used in public notices are quite necessary to be translated into Bahasa (or written in Bahasa). 39.7% of respondents think that the public notices which are in English must be translated into Bahasa. Only 15.5% of respondents think that the public

notices are not really needed to be translated into Bahasa. It shows the contrast with the previous responds. Somehow, the respondents still think that the public notices should be translated into Bahasa; (8) The respondents tend to be quite curious with what the public notices mean (65.5%). 27.6% of respondents confirm that they are really curious the meaning. Small percentage for those who are less curious and not curious at all respectively; (9) When the respondents are curious with what the public notices mean, they (75.9%) would google the meaning or find it out by using the dictionary application. 27.6% of respondents would prefer to guess the meaning. 25.9% of respondents choose to ask somebody else (friends or officers). And the rest (1%) would do nothing; (10) Lastly, 82.8% of respondents are interested to learn English. In contrast, 17.2% of respondents are not. This occurs when they are aware the use and the importance of English especially in this modern era; (11) Starting from number 11 to 15, the respondents were asked to write down the definition of certain statements used in public notices. The respondents were asked to write down the meaning of store Entry Policy. Most of the answers are correct although the respondents are quite varied in choosing the words to describe the meaning. It is less than 5% of respondents who defined the statement wrong; (12) The respondents were asked to define the meaning of start from IDR 159,000. Even though, the words used by the respondents in defining the statement are quite varied, all respondents' answers are correct. The chosen words used are still connected to the intended definition; (13) Customer Services is the next statement that the respondents needed to define the meaning. The statement also gains the perfect definition with some different words used to define. It is probably the statement has been acknowledged by most people. It is also probably one of the easiest public notices to find at public places; (14) The next statement is usually found in restaurants, especially the restaurants which usually serve the food hot. Sometimes, these restaurants would use hot pans to put the food and let the consumers to stir and add any seasoning they want. Sizzling hot is the statement, and the respondents know the definition. There is less than 5% of respondents who answered it wrong or left it blank; (15) Most of the respondents also defined the statement simply irresistible correctly. There is only less than 5% of respondents who defined the statement wrong. There is only 1% that chose to leave it blank.

According to the data, the respondents show that they have the ability of English. The respondents can understand and read what is written in the public notices.

The research is aimed to seek how far Pontianak citizens in understanding the public notices in English. As the data collected, it shows that the respondents have good English skill which enables them to understand the public notices which are written in English. They could understand what is written by defining the statements stated.

Most respondents confirm that they go out (51.7% for those who sometimes, 29.3% for those who seldom, 17.2% for those who often, and 1.8% who always). From the percentage drawn, the respondents still spend some time outside by going out somewhere although they do not go out frequently. It might be because the situation which is still in the pandemic of COVID-19, the respondents seem to limit their activity outside. Although, the situation has got much better, but the respondents seem to be careful and choose not to go out a lot. However, there is none of the respondents choose never. This strengthens the fact that the respondents still go out.

The place the respondents visit is mostly the modern market (supermarkets, mini markets). Easy, comfortable, and practical might be the reasons why they choose to go there. They could buy their daily needs at the place in short time. Banks, schools, government offices are the next place to visit. This might be the respondents have their own interest to go such places. The respondents also admit that they visit malls and restaurants for quite some time. This might be for releasing the stress and enjoying the time. This also happens when they visit some recreational places.

Undeniable, visiting the public places would become something relaxing. Window shopping would become one of the activities done by the respondents while they are walking or visiting the public places, especially like shopping malls. Having something to eat, would also release the stress, and to enjoy the life for sure. While doing that, the respondents would see the public notices whether they are aware or not. Although they do not mean to see the public notices, the eyes would somehow look and see the public notices. However, it seems like there is a little portion of the respondents who seem to be never see the public notices.

Those respondents who confirm that they see the public notices (unconsciously or not), they are aware that the public notices they see are written in English. It means that English has been used in public notices. It might be to attract the attention to read in which the respondents are mostly at the age of 15-25. It means that the respondents are quite young, and they have got used to be exposed with the use of English in their life.

With those ages (15-25), no wonder that the respondents could understand the public notices that are written in English. Some of them are still active students (senior high or college students). In fact, other group of respondents (below 35 years old) are still considered they understand which probably the result of what they had been studying before. They had been exposed English when they were studying. The respondents who admit that they do not understand English at all is only 5.2%. The small percentage that shows a very small number of respondents might belong to the group of 36 to 45 years old.

The big percentage of the respondents that admit they could understand the public notices in English is also followed by the ability of reading. The respondents are quite sure that they could read the statements well. The range of age from 15 – 35 is the age that have been exposed by English. They might have read, watched, and listened a lot in English. Therefore, it is no wonder that they could understand and read as well.

However, although the respondents mostly admit that they could understand English, they prefer to have public notices in national language (Bahasa Indonesia). This is contrast to the respondents' ability in understanding English. To conclude the situation, it might happen due to the respondents' are in range from teenagers to adults (15 – 35 years old) that makes them feel easier to understand and read in Bahasa even though they are capable of understanding and reading English.

Curiosity can mean something good especially for those who read and do not understand the meaning of what they are reading. This occurs toward the respondents who are mostly curious on what the public notices mean. This is probably for those who do not understand what stated in public notices. It shows a low percentage of the respondents who are not curious of the meaning.

“Googling” has become one of the ways to find out the meaning of what the public notices mean. Using online dictionary application is also the option besides using google in finding out the meaning. Meanwhile, there is also a small number of respondents (27.6%) who prefer to guess the meaning. This is something amazing related to the ability of language. Other respondents prefer to ask somebody else to get the meaning. Although there is 1% of respondents who are not curious and do nothing to get the meaning.

Despite all the responses given, the respondents admit that they are interested in learning English. Although, some respondents still prefer to have public notices in Bahasa, they realize that English is important to learn. Not to mention that English has made them aware that by having or learning English, it would somehow guarantee their future (Alrajafi, 2021).

## Conclusion

This research is conducted with a survey to know how far the respondents understand the public notices in English. The positive responses are shown by admitting that they understand the notices written in English. The respondents also show that they could read which proves that they know English quite well. This research is merely to find out the how far the citizens of Pontianak, Indonesia in understanding the public notices in English. The data shows various responses on the reaction of the respondents. Most of respondents admit that they know or understand English. Even some of them do not know, they have shown a big effort by trying to get the meaning by googling, using the dictionary application, or asking somebody else.

Understanding English which are used in public notices would be something beneficial. The respondents will not get missed in reading the public notices if they are overseas or at the countries that use English as their first language. Another benefit, those who understand public notices in English, it means they have been one step ahead. If those respondents are the one who run a business (like having a café or a restaurant), it would give them some advantages since people who are coming from those English-speaking countries, will understand directly which would make them feel more comfortable. However, concerning that Indonesia is still regarding English as a foreign language, it makes not all Indonesian people can fully understand the language. Translation at public notices might be needed. We might follow what some other countries have been doing to help in understanding the public notices in English. At some countries that do not belong to English-speaking countries, they put the translation right below the English statements in public notices. It would help those people who are having a hard time to understand the public notices. It would also make people get to understand the meaning more without having to guess which may lead to the misinterpretation of the statement. Moreover, by conducting the research, it is expected that the people could understand the meaning of public notices in English. It is not merely to understand the meaning, but the people would also learn the get the meaning and learn English as well. It might be another good way in learning English besides going or attending a formal school to learn English.

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