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# Whose Language, Whose Space? Power Dynamics in the Linguistic Landscape of Gili Islands in Lombok Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the ideological dimensions of multilingual signage in Gili Trawangan, Lombok, by drawing on Linguistic Landscape (LL) theory and Postcolonial Translation studies as complementary analytical lenses. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, 65 permanent or semi-permanent outdoor signs were photographically documented and systematically analyzed during field observation conducted in September 2025. Supplementary commercial signage from the neighbouring island of Gili Air, observed during February 2026, is introduced as corroborating cross-island evidence. Three analytical dimensions guided the inquiry: the ordering of languages according to their visual prominence, the degree to which the Sasak language achieves meaningful representation in public space, and the extent to which market-oriented reasoning governs commercial language selection. The data reveal a stratified three-tier linguistic order: Indonesian occupies the dominant position on state-issued signs, projecting national administrative authority; English commands the commercial landscape, responding to the demands of an international tourist market; and Sasak, despite being the indigenous language of Lombok, appears only minimally within the documented corpus.. Cross-island evidence from Gili Air confirms that English-only commercial signage is a structural feature of the Gili Islands' tourist economy rather than a site-specific anomaly. By combining Linguistic Landscape and Postcolonial Translation perspectives, the study moves beyond questions of language distribution to examine how translation and language choice participate in the symbolic organization of public space. The study concludes that multilingual signage in the Gili Islands reflects broader interactions among national identity, tourism development, and local linguistic heritage, contributing to ongoing discussions of language visibility, representation, and power in multilingual tourism destinations.

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## 1. Introduction

Situated off the northwestern coast of Lombok, the small island of Gili Trawangan has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past two decades, evolving from a backpacker refuge into one of Southeast Asia's most visited international tourist destinations. Formally gazetted as part of the Gili Matra Marine Tourism Park under Ministerial Decree No. 99/Kpts-II/2001 (Astuti, 2018), the island drew over 650,000 visitors in 2023 alone, the overwhelming majority of them foreign nationals (LombokPost, 2023). This accelerating influx has generated a densely layered multilingual environment in which English, Indonesian, and the indigenous Sasak language appear side by side — or, more precisely, compete for space — on

public signs, commercial boards, institutional plaques, and directional markers throughout the island.

The language or languages that appear on public signs communicate far more than practical information. Landry and Bourhis (1997), whose foundational study established the field of Linguistic Landscape research, demonstrated that the visibility of a language in public space serves a dual function: an informational function concerned with the pragmatics of communication, and a symbolic function through which the relative social standing, legitimacy, and vitality of linguistic communities are publicly projected. In this sense, the question of which language appears first, largest, or most frequently on signs is simultaneously a question about whose identity is recognized and whose is rendered invisible.

This symbolic function acquires additional complexity in economically globalized spaces such as Gili Trawangan. Blommaert (2013) showed that languages such as English command a disproportionate share of symbolic capital in environments structured by international commerce, frequently at the direct cost of local and indigenous tongues. At the same time, the choices that translate a message from one language into another in such environments are never innocent: Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) and Venuti (1995) established that translation practices in public and institutional contexts are shaped by cultural and political hierarchies, and can serve either to bridge or to reinforce unequal relations between languages and their speakers.

Although study in LL in Indonesia has increased significantly in recent years (Hijriati, 2019; Benu et al., 2025; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), Gili Trawangan as a research location has received less focused academic attention. Prior Indonesian research has been focused on metropolitan Mataram or the Kuta Mandalika resort corridor, and the unique dynamics of a tiny island experiencing abnormally high tourist demand have not been studied in depth. This research fills this gap by methodically analysing 65 outdoor multilingual signage gathered around Gili Trawangan. The study seeks to analyse the visual sequencing of languages on public signage as a reflection of the social and institutional power relations operating in the island's multilingual setting, the degree of Sasak participation or marginalisation as an indication of the ethnolinguistic vitality and public recognition of the indigenous community on the island, and whether the language choices of commercial sign producers are ultimately motivated by economic calculation rather than by communicative or cultural considerations.

This study first presents the first comprehensive study of multilingual signage on the Gili Islands, a globally renowned tourist destination that has garnered little academic interest in linguistic landscape studies. Second, it contributes to the Indonesian LL literature by using Postcolonial Translation Theory to analyse public signs and provides a framework to analyse not only the visibility of languages but also the ideological aspects of translation. Third, it provides empirical data to wider issues on language representation, linguistic inequality and the role of indigenous languages in multilingual contexts affected by tourism. Additional data is provided from Gili Air, the less-visited but architecturally similar neighbour of Gili Trawangan, to examine if the patterns seen at Gili Trawangan are representative of the whole island group.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Linguistic Landscape Studies

The conceptual architecture of Linguistic Landscape research rests on the insight, first systematically formalized by Landry and Bourhis (1997), that publicly visible language is a socially meaningful artifact rather than a neutral communicative medium. Their framework established that the choice of language on public signs reflects and reinforces the ethnolinguistic vitality of the communities those languages represent. A language that appears

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prominently and frequently in public space is symbolically validated as a language that matters; one that is absent is symbolically devalued.

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) extended this framework by demonstrating that linguistic landscapes are ideological constructions assembled by actors with heterogeneous motivations and unequal institutional resources. Their distinction between top-down signs — produced by state agencies and formal institutions — and bottom-up signs — generated by private individuals and commercial enterprises — provides a methodological instrument for tracing the ways in which state authority and market forces manifest differently, and sometimes in tension with each other, within the same physical landscape. This distinction proves particularly productive in a context such as the Gili Islands, where government regulatory signs and privately owned commercial boards occupy the same streets but encode very different language ideologies.

Subsequent scholars have enriched this framework in ways directly relevant to the present study. Backhaus (2007), examining multilingual Tokyo, found that globalization pressures systematically elevate English in commercially produced signs. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) argued that the linguistic landscape functions as an ideological stage upon which the politics of language, identity, and social belonging are enacted in visible, material form. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) brought semiotic and spatial analysis to bear on tourism landscapes specifically, showing how such environments commodify local languages and cultures, transforming them into aesthetic resources engineered to fulfill the expectations of international visitors.

The study published in international journals over the last several years has focused on linguistic landscapes in the context of globalisation, mobility and tourism. Based on a recent research done from 2020 to 2025, it was found that tourism-oriented linguistic landscapes are often distinguished by the widespread use of common foreign languages with English being the most popular among them. Rather, local and minority languages tend to have only symbolic or peripheral significance (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2020; Gorter, 2024). Research on multilingual tourist sites has demonstrated that the display of languages is connected to economic objectives, branding tactics and the attitudes of prospective visitors. The results suggest that public signage is important not just as a manifestation of multilingualism but also as a place of contestation for cultural identities and power relations. On the other hand, there are not many studies who use postcolonial translation methodologies in assessing linguistic landscapes, particularly in the setting of Indonesia. This is the gap that drives our inquiry and that already exists.

## 2.2 Postcolonial Translation Studies

Translation is seldom a neutral activity of linguistic equivalence in multilingual public contexts. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) demonstrate that the translation of texts, including public texts, is conditioned by the cultural, political and ideological circumstances in which it takes place. Prior work on translation equivalence in Lombok's public signage has established that bilingual outdoor texts in the region frequently exhibit asymmetrical language treatment, with Indonesian and English privileged over local languages (Baharuddin, 2023a). The translator's choices about what to translate, how to translate it and what not to translate, reflect and reinforce existing relations of power between language communities. This is the foundation for a critical reading of multilingual signals, because the choices made in translation are also assessments of whose voices are heard and whose are muted.

In this sense Venuti’s (1995) theoretical dichotomy between domestication and foreignization is particularly enlightening. Domesticating translation techniques tend to adapt the source message to the traditions and expectations of the target-language audience, and

therefore gain accessibility at the sacrifice of cultural originality. Domestication, in the context of tourism signage, is the process of re-packaging local histories, ecologies and identities in the form easily understood by international visitors. As Cronin (2006) showed in his analysis of translation and identity in tourist spaces, this process always privileges the perspective of the foreign gaze over the integrity of the local voice. Translation is in many situations not so much about communication as about cultural management, making the tourism industry work by reducing local complexity into a consumable form.

The broader regional literature shows that these processes are not exclusive to the Gili Islands. Hijriati (2019) states that the choice of language on business signage in Kuta Mandalika is largely based on audience orientation and economic calculation, where English is the dominant code when the intended audience is foreign visitors. Yusra et al. (2023) observed the prevalence of English and English-inflected naming practices in commercial contexts in Lombok, demonstrating the degree to which the logic of the global market has been internalised in local business communities. Consistent with this, Nugroho and Darmawan (2025) found that indigenous and regional languages were marginally present in Lombok's wider signage landscape, whereas Benu et al. (2025) found similar patterns in Kupang's culinary scene. This indicates that the subordination of local languages in tourism spaces is a systemic pattern across Indonesian destinations.

### 2.3 Complementary Linguistic Landscape and Postcolonial Translation

Linguistic Landscape (LL) studies and Translation Studies have typically evolved as distinct academic traditions, however they deal with closely connected issues of language, representation and power in public space. LL study mainly focuses on the presence, spread and spatial ordering of languages in signs, in order to understand the way language choices reflect social identities, institutional power and language policy (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy et al., 2010). However, LL analysis does not always illuminate the procedures whereby certain languages become apparent and others marginal or absent.

From translation theory, another analytical perspective which emphasises the processes of negotiation, transfer, adaptation or omission of language choices. Translation, from a postcolonial viewpoint, is not a purely technical process of transferring meaning across languages, but also a cultural and ideological activity, which is conditioned by unequal relations of power (Niranjana, 1992; Tymoczko, 2007). Translation choices might make certain audiences, identities and world views more apparent while making others less so. For multilingual signs, this viewpoint enables scholars to investigate not only what languages exist in public space but also the reasons why certain languages are translated, prioritised or left out.

Thus, the combination of the views of LL and Postcolonial Translation allows to go beyond descriptive accounts of language distribution and to get a more critical understanding of the construction of multilingual public spaces. The sign system at tourist sites, where local, national and global players come into contact and interaction, may be seen as a language resource, a translation product, and a symbolic expression of conflicting social interests. The integrated method offers a valuable framework for exploring the link between language visibility, tourist development, cultural representation and linguistic inequality.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology, a design well suited to the interpretive examination of sociolinguistic data gathered in real-world settings. Qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to move beyond the enumeration of language frequencies toward a critical reading of the social meanings encoded in signage choices, attending to the

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ideological and power-laden dimensions that quantitative approaches alone cannot capture. The methodological approach integrates structured content analysis of photographic data with theoretical interpretation grounded in Linguistic Landscape studies and Postcolonial Translation theory.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The main data corpus was obtained on Gili Trawangan in September 2025. Data were collected in a variety of spatial contexts: the island's major commercial street, beachside locations, harbour and ferry facilities, and public institutions that include schools and government offices. Gili Trawangan was selected as the main site of research because it is what methodologists would refer to as an extreme case, a location in which the interaction of global tourism, national governance, and indigenous language community is played out with unusual intensity in a geographically compact setting. The last major corpus consisted of 65 outside permanent or semi-permanent signs, chosen after meticulous observation. To preserve emphasis on durable, publicly observable linguistic activities, ephemeral or interior signs were removed.

Additional photographic documentation was performed on the nearby island of Gili Air, February 2026. This secondary data was not collected using the same structured observation protocol as Gili Trawangan, but the Gili Air signs are used as corroborative comparative evidence to evaluate whether the commercial language patterns documented on Gili Trawangan are present on other islands within the same tourism archipelago. Gili Air has roughly similar social and economic characteristics as Gili Trawangan: both are car-free islands within the Gili Matra Marine Tourism Park; both are sites of major international visitor flows; and both are located within a primarily Sasak-speaking regional setting. Each sign was recorded according to its functional category, agent type, semiotic properties, and the languages present and their relative ordering.

### 3.3 Analytical Procedure

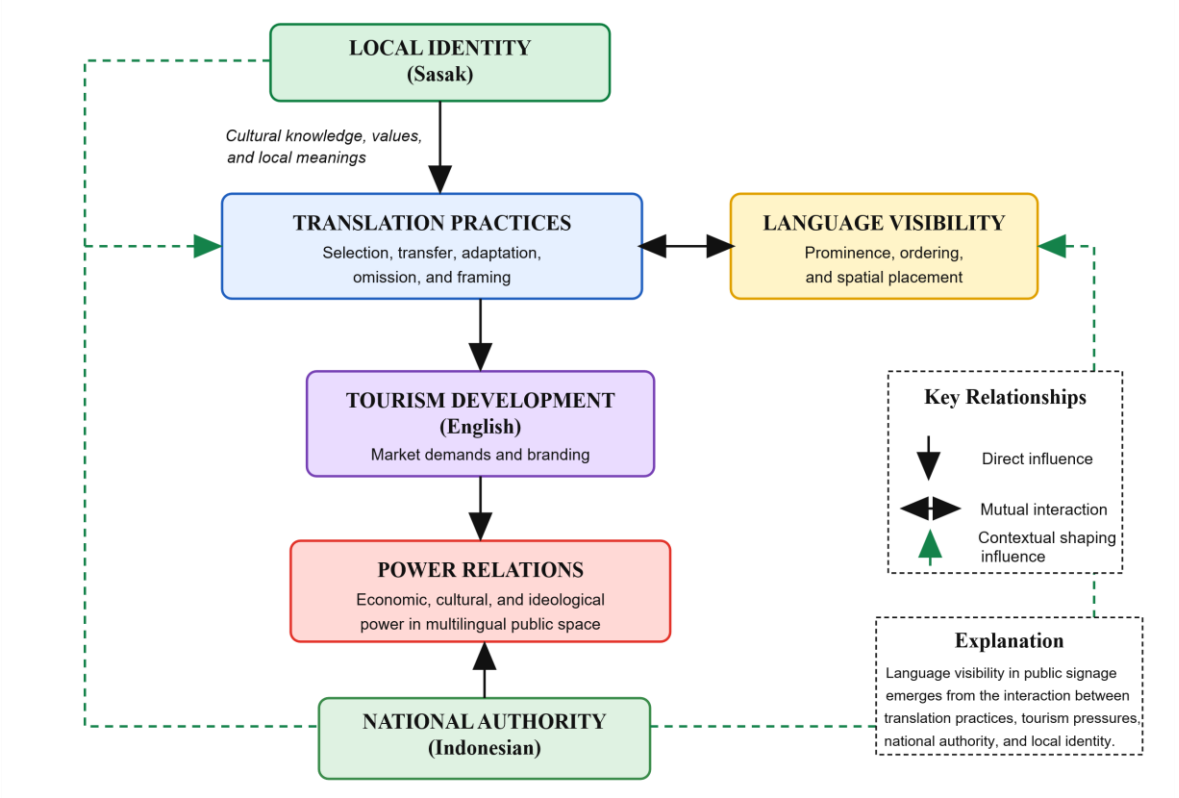
Four different stages were distinguished throughout the study. Initially the signs were classified according to their functional and agent kinds, which formed the basic organisational categories utilised for comparison. In a second stage each symbol was examined in order to establish the hierarchy of language to which it belonged. The visual cues that elevate one language over another were emphasised. The signals include vertical and horizontal positioning, relative text size, and spatial salience. Finally, the techniques of translation were assessed across the whole corpus to find the patterns of literal translation, adaptive or domesticating translation, selective omission and wrong translation. Fourth, the pooled data were examined using the theoretical frameworks given above for this part . The reproducibility of the analysis was assured by consistently applying the classification criteria to all of the source data. Triangulation was used to establish validity by cross comparing photographic evidence with field notes and contextual remarks.

### 3.4 Theoretical Framework

In this paper multilingual signage is conceptualised as the result of interactions among four interconnected dimensions: language visibility, translation processes, tourist development and power relations. Language visibility refers to the prominence and the placement of languages in public signs. The method of translation affects the transmission, adaptation or omission of meanings across languages. Tourism growth brings about economic factors that affect language choice especially the usage of English as a language of worldwide accessibility. These dynamics are embedded in wider power relations between local identity,

national authority and global economic impact. The model implies that language visibility is not a purely linguistic event, but mediated by translation choices and communication techniques for tourists, which are part of the symbolic structuring of public space.

**Figure 1**
*Conceptual Framework of Language Visibility, Translation, Tourism, and Power*




## 4. Findings and Discusion

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 *Quantitative Overview of the Signage Corpus*

Before turning to individual instances, it is essential to provide a general description of the linguistic makeup of the 65 signs collected in Gili Trawangan. Although the research is qualitative, frequency counts provide a better sense of the distribution of languages in the public arena and serve to contextualise the following analysis on language hierarchy, visibility and translation methods.

**Table 1**
*Distribution of Signs by Sign Type*

| Sign Type | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Government / regulatory signage | 16 | 24.6 |
| Commercial / business signage | 20 | 30.8 |
| Tourism / hospitality signage | 13 | 20.0 |
| Informational / directional signage | 15 | 23.1 |
| Religious / cultural signage | 1 | 1.5 |
| Total | 65 | 100 |

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The distribution of sign types shows that commercial and tourism-related signs are the most frequent in the corpus. This is a reflection of the economic nature of Gili Trawangan as an international tourist destination, where public communication is directly related to visitor services, hospitality and commercial activity12.

**Table 2**
*Language Composition of the 65 Signs*

| Language Composition | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Indonesian only | 8 | 12.3 |
| English only | 21 | 32.3 |
| Indonesian–English (Indonesian primary) | 18 | 27.7 |
| English–Indonesian (English primary) | 10 | 15.4 |
| Indonesian–Sasak | 0 | 0.0 |
| Indonesian–English–Sasak | 1 | 1.5 |
| Other combinations | 7 | 10.8 |
| Total | 65 | 100 |

Language composition shows a significant inclination towards bilingual Indonesian–English signs, along with a large amount of English-only business signs. In contrast, Sasak is seldom found, showing that multilingualism on the Gili Islands is more geared toward national and international than local language representation.

**Table 3**
*Dominant Language by Visual Prominence*

| Dominant Language | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) | Main Domain |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indonesian | 24 | 36.9 | Government, regulation, public instruction |
| English | 38 | 58.5 | Commerce, tourism, hospitality |
| Sasak | 1 | 1.5 | Limited / symbolic occurrence |
| Other languages | 2 | 3.1 | Religious or brand-specific contexts |
| Total | 65 | 100 | — |

An analysis of visual prominence also shows that the existence of language is not equivalent to the equality of language. Indonesian dominates governmental and regulatory signs, English dominates commercial communication. Sasak is mostly peripheral and metaphorical. These patterns give quantitative evidence for the hierarchical language order discussed in the following sections.

### 4.1.2 *Hierarchical Language Ordering on Public Signage*

Systematic examination of the 65-sign corpus reveals a patterned and stable language hierarchy that operates consistently across Gili Trawangan's public space, though its specific configuration varies according to the type and institutional origin of each sign. Two dominant patterns account for all but a single data point in the sample: an Indonesian-primary pattern associated with government and institutional production, and an English-primary pattern concentrated in the commercial sector.

Government-produced signage — encompassing regulatory prohibitions, conservation notices, emergency guidance, institutional nameplates, and school identification boards — consistently places Indonesian in the graphically dominant position: at the top of the sign and rendered in a larger or heavier typeface than any accompanying English text. Approximately 43% of the total sample falls within this category. As illustrated in Figure 2, the welcome board of a tourism high school presents its institution name in large, prominent Indonesian text, with no provision for Sasak despite the school's location within a predominantly Sasak-speaking community.

**Figure 2**

*Sign 3 — School Welcome Board (SMA Pariwisata Gili Trawangan): Indonesian Dominant, Sasak Entirely Absent.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Trawangan, September 2025.

This pattern of Indonesian-first bilingual production is especially explicit in emergency and safety signage, where the state communicates its administrative authority through the visual elevation of the national language. Figure 3 presents a tsunami evacuation route sign in which Indonesian (JALUR EVAKUASI) is rendered first and in larger type, with English (EVACUATION ROUTE) appearing as a secondary gloss — a translation serving practical reach without conceding primary visual status. Similar patterns of ideological encoding in bilingual signage have been documented in the religious landscape of Denpasar, where Indonesian-English translations on outdoor boards reflect unequal communicative orientations toward different audience groups (Baharuddin, 2023b).

**Figure 3**

*Sign 19 — Tsunami Evacuation Route Marker: Indonesian in Primary Position, English as Secondary Gloss, Sasak Entirely Absent.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Trawangan, September 2025.

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The commercial sector presents a strikingly divergent picture. Approximately 51% of the documented signs originate from private enterprises, and across this category English functions as the unmarked default, occupying headline positions and often appearing without any Indonesian translation at all. Figure 4 illustrates the extreme end of this pattern: a roadside sign communicating a parking restriction exclusively in English, with no Indonesian text, no Sasak text, and no communicative gesture toward the Indonesian-speaking residents who constitute a significant share of the island's daily population.

**Figure 4**
*Sign 4 — Commercial Parking Restriction: English Only, Indonesian and Sasak Entirely Absent.*




*Note*. Field documentation, Gili Trawangan, September 2025.

A third and highly marginal pattern surfaces in a single sign (Sign 22) in which a Sasak phrase occupies a tertiary position following both Indonesian and English. Rather than disrupting the overall hierarchy, this instance confirms it — a point addressed in detail in Section 4.2. Taken in their totality, the distributional patterns within the corpus map directly onto the social and institutional architecture of the island: government authority is spoken in Indonesian, market logic is expressed in English, and the Sasak-speaking community has no language of its own in the space it inhabits.

### 4.1.3 *The Marginalization and Tokenism of Sasak*

The most consequential finding to emerge from this study is the near-complete erasure of the Sasak language from Gili Trawangan's public signage. With the sole exception of Sign 22 and even that exception is more accurately described as tokenism than genuine inclusion Sasak is absent from every sign in the corpus, regardless of functional type, spatial location, or institutional origin.

The silence of state-produced signs on Sasak is especially revealing. Educational institutions whose entire student and staff body is drawn from Sasak-speaking families communicate exclusively in Indonesian and English on their external signage. Government regulatory boards governing behavioral norms in spaces where Sasak is the community

language make no provision for that language. Even environmental conservation signs in an area whose indigenous custodians are Sasak-speaking people do not deploy Sasak as a communicative resource.

Commercial signs reveal an even more complete exclusion. No private enterprise in the corpus (no hotel, restaurant, tour company, or retail outlet) incorporates Sasak into its external communication. The language of the people whose land and waters underpin the island's tourist economy is entirely invisible in the commercial spaces where that economy is conducted.

Sign 22 (Figure 5) demands extended discussion because it represents not inclusion but its simulation. A large institutional billboard at the harbor presents its waste-management message in three languages: Indonesian at the top in the largest typeface, English in the middle at reduced size, and a brief Sasak phrase (*'Tyang epe dedore, tyang epen tanggungan'* 'My waste is my responsibility') positioned last in the smallest font, where it functions as a visual flourish rather than as a communicative act addressed to a Sasak-speaking audience.

**Figure 5**

*Sign 22 — Harbor Billboard: Indonesian Dominant (Top), English Secondary (Middle), Sasak Token Phrase (Bottom, Smallest Font). The Only Instance of Trilingual Signage in the Corpus.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Trawangan, September 2025.

This configuration exemplifies what postcolonial scholars term *tokenism* the symbolic deployment of a marginalized identity marker in a manner that performs multicultural acknowledgment while leaving the power hierarchy entirely intact (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The Sasak phrase in Sign 22 is formally present but communicatively marginal: it does not address Sasak speakers as a primary audience, it does not accord Sasak visual equality with the languages that precede it, and it does not represent a commitment to Sasak as a genuine medium of institutional communication. Its function is decorative, signaling local flavor to an international audience rather than linguistic respect to an indigenous community.

### 4.1.4 Economic Logic and Commercial Language Selection

The dominance of English in the commercial sector reflects a coherent and self-reinforcing economic rationality. Business proprietors on Gili Trawangan select English as their primary external language because it aligns with the communicative expectations of their target clientele — the international tourist. English is the lingua franca of global tourism networks, the language in which price comparisons are made, booking platforms operate, and

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travel reviews are written. Adopting English in external signage is therefore not a cultural statement but a competitive strategy: it signals accessibility and professionalism to the international traveler and positions the business within the recognizable grammar of global tourism commerce.

This logic operates at every scale of commercial enterprise. Large resort hotels deploy polished English-only signage to communicate an identity of international hospitality. But the same market logic penetrates to the humblest micro-enterprises, where the economic incentive to address the tourist gaze has been internalized even by businesses that serve a mixed local-and-tourist clientele. The environmental information pillars installed along the island's pathways further illustrate this pattern, with English panels designed for greater visual accessibility than their Indonesian counterparts (Figure 6), reflecting the entrenched assumption that the primary reader is an international visitor rather than a community member.

**Figure 6**

*Sign 36 — Environmental Information Pillar: Bilingual Indonesian/English, English Panel Given Visual Prominence, Sasak Entirely Absent.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Trawangan, September 2025.

Supplementary observation on Gili Air corroborates these findings and confirms that English-only commercial signage is not an idiosyncrasy of Gili Trawangan but a structural feature shared across the Gili Islands' tourist economy. Figure 7 presents the promotional board of Unzip Bar on Gili Air's beachfront: the business name, category identifier (Restaurant), and promotional message (WE HAVE WOOD OVEN PIZZA) are all communicated exclusively in English, with no Indonesian text and no Sasak, mirroring precisely the English-only commercial pattern documented in Gili Trawangan's Sign 4 (Figure 4).

**Figure 7**

*Unzip Bar Promotional Board, Gili Air: Entirely English, No Indonesian or Sasak.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Air, February 2026.

The English-only pattern is equally pronounced across different commercial sectors on Gili Air. Figure 8 presents the external advertising board of Pacific Freedive Academy, a professional sport-tourism services provider. Every element of this sign — the promotional tagline (Discover Freediving with us in Paradise!), the service description (Elevate Your Snorkeling Experience with Freediving Skills!), operational details (training schedules, course levels, pricing), and all contact information — is communicated in English alone. Not a single word of Indonesian appears, and Sasak is entirely absent. This confirms that the exclusion of local languages is not confined to informal hospitality signage but extends to the formal business communication of established commercial operators catering to an international clientele.

**Figure 8**

*Pacific Freedive Academy Advertising Board, Gili Air: Entirely English Across All Content Categories Including Operational Details, Pricing, and Contact Information. No Indonesian or Sasak.*




*Note.* Field documentation, Gili Air, February 2026.

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Together, the Gili Air evidence reinforces the core argument: the linguistic erasure of Indonesian and Sasak in commercial public space is a consistent, cross-island response to the economic logic of international tourism. As Blommaert (2013) theorizes, English has become the dominant symbolic capital of the Gili Islands' tourist economy — a linguistic resource that businesses across both islands feel compelled to acquire and display in order to remain competitive. The resulting dynamic is cyclical: widespread English adoption normalizes it as the default mode of tourist-facing communication, exerting continuous pressure on incoming enterprises to conform, and reinforcing English dominance across successive generations of commercial signage.

## 4.2 Discussion

### 4.2.1 State Authority and Market Hegemony as Competing Powers

The linguistic landscape of the Gili Islands is most productively understood not as a unified semiotic environment but as a contested space in which two structurally distinct forms of power operate simultaneously and in partial tension. State power inscribes itself through Indonesian-dominant signage: the language of regulatory signs, school nameplates, government building identifications, and emergency directional boards is Indonesian, asserting the nation's de jure sovereignty over the territory and its population. Market power, by contrast, operates through the pervasive English of the private commercial sector — a power that does not govern through law but through the attractive force of economic logic, commanding the visual field in commercial districts and organizing the mobility and consumption of international tourists.

Cross-island evidence from Gili Air confirms that this division is not an artifact of a single site's particular history but a structural condition of the Gili Islands' tourist economy as a whole. On both islands, without exception, state-produced signs are Indonesian-primary while commercial signs are English-primary. The consistency of this pattern across two geographically distinct sites, documented across two separate periods of fieldwork, substantially strengthens the claim that what is observed in the data reflects a systemic feature of the region's sociolinguistic order rather than local contingency.

But it is important to distinguish between what the corpus directly provides and the bigger inferences that may be drawn from it. The findings empirically show that the language use is evenly divided throughout the indicators given. Indonesian is dominant in official signs, whereas English is dominant in commercial and tourism-related signs. The interpretation of the pattern as a sign of opposing forms of state and market power is a theoretical reading that is motivated by linguistic landscape studies and theories of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). The corpus itself does not tell us the intentions of the sign designers but does provide considerable evidence that the visibility of language on the Gili Islands is structured in ways that closely align with institutional authority and tourism-oriented economic activity.

The coexistence of these two regimes produces a layered semiotic landscape: the stratum of national authority, written in Indonesian, overlays a deeper stratum of global market logic, written in English, while the substrate of local Sasak identity is largely erased from the visible text of public life. The state maintains formal legal authority, as evidenced by the regulatory signs through which it governs public behavior. But the market exerts a more pervasive influence on the daily sensory experience of both islands, dominating the spaces where people eat, sleep, shop, and socialize. Neither power achieves total hegemony; each operates within the domain for which it has the greatest institutional or economic leverage. Sasak occupies no viable domain within either.

### 4.2.2 Translation as an Instrument of Ideological Control

A critical postcolonial reading of translation practices across the corpus reveals that translation in the Gili Islands' public space performs two distinct ideological functions, each corresponding to one of the two power regimes identified above. In regulatory contexts — state-produced safety signs, conservation boards, and institutional directions — translation from Indonesian to English is principally an instrument of compliance management. The purpose is not cultural dialogue but the extension of administrative authority to subjects who do not read Indonesian. English appears in these contexts as a pragmatic supplement, never displacing Indonesian from its position of symbolic primacy. Translation here is a tool of governance: it broadens the reach of rules without conceding their ideological character as expressions of state authority.

In commercial contexts, translation performs a fundamentally different function: it is an instrument of cultural commodification. As Cronin (2006) demonstrated in his analysis of translation in tourist spaces, the rendering of local histories, geographies, and ecological knowledge into English for a tourist audience is a process of selective simplification and aesthetic packaging. The environmental information pillar shown in Figure 6 illustrates this process: complex conservation knowledge about Gili Trawangan's geological history is translated into the accessible idiom of international ecotourism discourse, reframing local nature as a spectacle for the foreign gaze. In Venuti's (1995) terminology, this is a domesticating translation practice, one that brings the local into conformity with the expectations of the global tourist rather than inviting the tourist to encounter the local on its own terms. The professional services signage of Pacific Freedive Academy in Gili Air (Figure 8) extends this point further: even operationally detailed business communication (schedules, prices, contact information) is entirely domesticated into English for an assumed international reader, with no acknowledgment that local Indonesian- or Sasak-speaking audiences exist.

In both registers, translation fails to function as a neutral conduit of meaning. It operates, rather, as a technology of power — sustaining the smooth functioning of the dominant tourist economy, facilitating the regulatory ambitions of the state, and in both cases marginalizing the possibility of a Sasak-language voice in the islands' public discourse.

However, the wider ramifications of such translation processes need to be considered with care. The results do not imply that Sasak is not present in social contact in daily life, or in all spheres of cultural life. Rather, data suggests Sasak has a constrained function in the recorded public signs landscape. From a postcolonial translation perspective, this limited visibility can be interpreted as a sign of unequal access to public representation. But further ethnographic research is needed to understand how these linguistic arrangements are perceived and received by local communities.

### 4.2.3 Sasak Marginalization in Regional and Theoretical Perspective

The near-complete exclusion of Sasak from the Gili Islands' public signage must be situated within a broader comparative context. Hijriati (2019) identified Sasak's presence in Kuta Mandalika's linguistic landscape, though consistently in a subordinate position — a finding that suggests the Gili Trawangan situation represents not an anomaly but an intensification of a regional trend, driven by the more extreme tourism pressure concentrated on the islands. Nugroho and Darmawan (2025) documented the near-invisibility of Sasak across Lombok's wider signage environment, and Benu et al. (2025) found analogous patterns in the displacement of Tetun in the culinary landscape of Kupang City, suggesting that the systematic subordination of indigenous languages in tourism-oriented public space is a structural feature of Indonesian sociolinguistic geography.

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The findings are in line with broader global research on linguistic landscapes for tourist related purposes. Research on multilingual tourist destinations has consistently found that commercial signage is dominated by globally dominant languages, while local or minority languages are used (more) symbolically, often because of historical reasons or in peripheral areas (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Gorter, 2024). The Gili Islands are therefore a prime example of a trend common to many tourist-dependent locations, but the relative scarcity of Sasak in the present corpus reveals a stark disjunction between local language history and the communication needs of international tourism.

In a broader comparative framework, Uwineza and Ndayiragije (2022) documented parallel processes of linguistic erasure in Rwanda, where the presence and absence of languages on public signs reflects the ideological priorities of colonial and postcolonial language policy. Their core insight — that the absence of a language from public signage is itself an ideological act, not a neutral omission — resonates with particular force in the Gili Islands context. The exclusion of Sasak from all but one sign in the primary corpus is not a product of oversight; it is a legible statement about the social value assigned to Sasak identity in the islands' dominant economic and political order. The linguistic landscape does not merely reflect this devaluation — it actively produces and reproduces it for every resident and visitor who moves through public space on either island.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the multilingual signage of the Gili Islands — drawing on primary data from Gili Trawangan and corroborating evidence from Gili Air — constitutes a power-saturated text through which the competing claims of state sovereignty and global market logic are made visually legible, while representations of Sasak linguistic identity receive only limited visibility within the documented public signage environment. Three principal conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

First, the linguistic landscape of the Gili Islands is organized by a clear and stable three-tier hierarchy. Indonesian occupies the apex in state-produced signage, encoding national administrative authority. English commands the commercial domain, serving as the primary language of tourist-facing communication across all business types and scales on both islands. This bipartite dominance structure is visually inscribed through consistent language-ordering conventions that mirror and reinforce the islands' social and institutional power relations.

Second, the Sasak language is subjected to a systematic erasure from public visibility that cannot be characterized as a neutral oversight. With the sole exception of a tokenistic phrase on a single government sign in Gili Trawangan, Sasak is absent from every site in the primary corpus and from the Gili Air signs introduced as comparative evidence — absent from schools whose communities speak it, from regulatory signs that govern its speakers' behavior, and from commercial spaces that profit from the land and waters its speakers have historically stewarded. This limited visibility reflects Sasak's comparatively weak presence in the documented signage corpus and may contribute to the reduced public representation of local linguistic identity. Third, commercial language choice across the Gili Islands is governed by a self-perpetuating economic rationality. Business owners on both Gili Trawangan and Gili Air select English as their primary signage language because it is perceived as the linguistic currency of the international tourism market. The effect of this collective choice is to reinforce and extend English dominance across successive generations of commercial signage, making the language of local identity ever more economically invisible.

While these contributions are noteworthy, a number of limitations should be noted. The research is based on a corpus of 65 indications identified in Gili Trawangan with observational data from Gili Air. While this corpus was adequate to uncover recurrent patterns of language visibility and hierarchy, it cannot represent the complete range of multilingual behaviours across all tourist sites in Lombok. Second, the study is focused on the observable textual and semiotic data of public signs. Consequently, the data illustrate how languages are represented in public space and not how they are utilised, perceived or experienced by residents, business owners and tourists. Third, there were no interviews or ethnographic data gathered. The rationale behind language choice, translation decisions and the style of signage is therefore inferred from the signs themselves and not explicitly validated by the sign manufacturers or local stakeholders. Finally, the data from Gili Air are mainly used as exploratory comparison evidence to contextualise the results from Gili Trawangan. Similar patterns were seen on both islands but a more thorough multi-site study would be required to determine the extent to which these tendencies are typical of the larger tourist environment in Lombok and Indonesia. Further study that combines linguistic landscape analysis with interviews and participant observation and bigger comparative datasets would provide a fuller picture of the link between language visibility, translation methodologies, tourist development and local identity.

The findings have practical importance to language policy of Indonesian tourism attractions. Local and regional governments should create inclusive signage frameworks that would require meaningful visual representation of indigenous languages – not as tokenistic flourishes in third position and smallest font, but as full communicative partners given visual parity with national and international languages. Professionals who translate for tourists should use culturally sensitive tactics and provide context for local information, rather than simplifying it for an international audience. Future research could build on this study by longitudinally observing changes to signage throughout the Gili Islands, cross-site comparison within Indonesian tourist destinations, and qualitative exploration of viewpoints from local signage producers, policymakers, and Sasak-speaking community members.

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