

## **Negotiating Language Policy in Tourist Spaces: A Linguistic Landscape Study of Bilingual Warning Signs in Bali**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates the bilingual warning signs found along Kuta and Legian beaches in Bali, Indonesia. It is within the framework of linguistic landscape (LL) analysis. The study aims to examine language policy—specifically the mandatory use of Indonesian language in public sign—interacts with the communicative needs of a globally diverse tourist population. Employing a qualitative research design, the study analyzed 33 bilingual signs through documentation and content analysis. It focuses on language positioning, institutional authorship, and semiotic features. Drawing on the theories of emplacement and indexicality by Scollon and Scollon (2003), the findings reveal a varied landscape. While some signs comply with national regulations by prioritizing Indonesian language, others, particularly those by private entities or tourism-sensitive authorities, prioritize English to accommodate international audiences. The study highlights the pragmatic tension between top-down language policies and bottom-up communicative practices in multilingual public spaces. It further illustrates that the visibility and hierarchy of languages on sign are influenced not only by legal frameworks, but also by spatial function and sociolinguistic context. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions in sociolinguistics, language policy, and semiotics. It shows bilingual public sign that serves as a site of negotiation between national identity and global communicability in tourism-driven environments.

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### **Introduction**

Public informational sign is an essential component of communication in contemporary society. These signs serve to convey specific messages to the public. It includes guidance, services, reminders, and warnings. While traditionally implemented by governmental institutions, the spread of tourism and privatization of public spaces have seen an increasing involvement of private entities in the installation of such signage (Moore et al., 2020; Shohamy et al., 2010; Vivas-Peraza, 2020). Among the many types of public signs, warning signs play a crucial role in ensuring public safety. It is especially in high-risk or rapidly changing environments.

The presence of these signs is closely tied to linguistic practices. Language becomes the primary vehicle for the transmission of warnings. In multilingual settings such as tourism destinations, these signs are often bilingual. It raises important questions about language policy, visibility, and prioritization (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Linguistic Landscape (LL) studies have provided a robust framework for examining languages that are displayed in public spaces. It emphasizes the semiotic dimensions of written texts in physical environments. Defined by Scollon and Scollon (2003), LL refers to the use of language on public signage such as road signs, billboards, place names, shop signs, and public institution markers. These visual linguistic displays are not merely functional, but deeply embedded within the socio-political and cultural contexts in which they are situated. As such, public signage, particularly bilingual warning signs, offers a valuable site for examining the intersection of language policy, social identity, and communicative practices in specific location (Andron, 2016; Karlander, 2016; Leimgruber, 2020). In tourism area like Bali, where global and local languages coexist, such signs illustrate the complexities of state-mandated language regulations and practical communication needs.

The coastal areas of Kuta and Legian present a unique case for examining bilingual warning signage. Both are globally renowned as tourist destinations in Bali, Indonesia. These areas are characterized by a high influx of international tourists who engage in recreational activities such as swimming and surfing. Due to the unpredictable and potentially dangerous coastal conditions, local authorities and private stakeholders have installed numerous warning signs along the beaches. These signs are intended to alert visitors to possible hazards and to provide safety guidance. However, a closer inspection reveals variations in language use. It ranges from monolingual signs in either Indonesian or English to bilingual signs with differing priorities in language placement. These variations suggest inconsistencies in language policy implementation and raise critical questions regarding the semiotic prioritization of languages in public sign within multilingual tourist environments (*Jdih.Baliprov.Go.Id*, 2018; Wulansari, 2020; Yendra & Artawa, 2020).

The broader issue is the tension between the national language policy. It mandates the use of Indonesian language in public domains and the practical need for effective communication with a predominantly international audience. While Indonesia's legal framework, including the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 24 of 2009, and Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2019, clearly stipulates the primacy of Indonesian language in public communication as for public signs (*Jdih.Baliprov.Go.Id*, 2018; Pemerintah & In, 2021; Pramana, 2018). The reality on the ground reflects a more flexible and conflicting practice. On one hand, there are signs where Indonesian language is placed prominently as conforming to official regulations. On the other, many signs prioritize English which presumably for the sake of communicative efficiency and accessibility to foreign tourists. This divergence underscores the necessity of reconciling formal language policies with the socio-linguistic demands of globally oriented spaces such as tourist beaches (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009; Modan, 2018; Vivas-Peraza, 2020).

To address the issue, the current study investigates bilingual warning signs along the beaches of Kuta and Legian. It also examines the extent to which language policy is reflected in their linguistic design. The analysis focuses on the variation in

language use, the order of language appearance, and the identity of sign producers — whether governmental or private (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Shohamy et al., 2010). The study identifies patterns in language prioritization and explores these patterns align with or diverge from official language policies. Drawing on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) theory of emplacement and place semiotics, as well as the concept of indexicality, the research considers on spatial, political, and communicative factors inform linguistic choices in public sign.

Several previous studies have laid the groundwork for examining LL from various perspectives. Amos (2016), in his study of Chinatown in Liverpool, explored ethnic identity is constructed and maintained through multilingual signage. It applied theories of emplacement and semiotic space. His work illustrates on linguistic features of signs in contributing to the delineation of cultural territories within urban landscapes. Similarly, Vivas-Peraza (2020) investigated the presence of English in the public sign of Hat Yai, Thailand. It highlights the interplay of local language policies and global linguistic practices. His analysis of monolingual and multilingual signs demonstrated the functional and symbolic roles of English in a border-region economy. Another notable study by Leimgruber (2020) analyzed the LL of St. Catherine Street in Montreal. It reveals the coexistence of global multilingualism, local bilingualism, and official monolingualism. It focuses on strong emphasis of French that dominance despite a diverse linguistic environment. Finally, Manan et al. (2015) mapped the LL of Kuala Lumpur, emphasizing the influence of political, economic, and identity factors in shaping multilingual sign. These studies collectively provide a comparative framework for understanding linguistic landscapes that manifest in different socio-political contexts. While prior linguistic landscape research has examined multilingual signage in ethnic enclaves, urban streetscapes, and border regions, these studies predominantly focus on commercial or cultural identity markers, with limited attention to functional safety signage. None have specifically addressed bilingual warning signs in coastal tourist zones where national language policy intersects with global communicative needs. This study fills that gap by analyzing bilingual warning signs along Bali's Kuta and Legian beaches, highlighting how top-down Indonesian language regulations and bottom-up tourism-driven practices negotiate spatial, semiotic, and policy constraints in a high-stakes safety communication context — a domain underexplored in existing LL scholarship.

The present study contributes to the growing body of literature by focusing on a specific and underexplored aspect of the linguistic landscape that is bilingual warning signs in coastal tourist areas. Unlike the aforementioned studies which often center on commercial sign or urban ethnic enclaves, there is no research in the functional and regulatory dimensions of safety sign. It seeks to understand language policies that are enacted at the level of individual sign placement and design. This focus offers significant scholarly and practical value. Academically, it expands linguistic landscape research by addressing a functional and regulatory domain—bilingual safety signage—that remains underexplored, thereby enriching theoretical discussions on the interplay between policy, semiotics, and spatial context. Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers, local authorities, and tourism stakeholders on balancing national language regulations with the communicative needs of diverse audiences in high-risk environments. By revealing how language choices on safety signs are negotiated in tourism-driven spaces, the research informs strategies for enhancing public safety communication, fostering

compliance with language policy, and promoting inclusive, effective multilingual signage in global tourism contexts.

The novelty of the study lies in its examination of warning signs as a reflection of both geopolitical regulation and communicative pragmatism within a tourism-driven public space. The scope of the research is geographically limited to the Kuta and Legian beaches. However, its implications extend to broader discussions on language policy enforcement, visual semiotics, and multilingual communication in globalized public spaces.

## **Literature Review**

Research on language policy and linguistic landscapes has demonstrated the complex interplay between ideology, identity, and power across diverse contexts. Permana and Rohmah (2024) critiques English-only ideologies and argues for translingual practices as more equitable approaches to policy with situating language use within broader sociopolitical structures. In a related vein, Hadiati (2021) illustrates that English housing names encode cultural heritage and social stratification. It shows that everyday linguistic practices reflect larger policy orientations. Expanding the scope, Kurniadi and Ismail (2023) reconceptualize linguistic landscape analysis as a critical framework that not only documents language presence, but also interrogates power relations and ideological constructions. The perspective aligns with Rahmi's (2016) historical analysis of Indonesian language policy, which reveals the central role of Bahasa Indonesia in nation-building while marginalizing local languages. At the local level, Sahril et al. (2019) highlights the multilingual landscape of Medan, where Indonesian, local, and foreign languages coexist. It is reflecting negotiations of identity and symbolic power in urban spaces. Similarly, Wulansari (2020) demonstrates Bali's tourism-driven landscape that prioritizes English and foreign languages. Thereby, it accommodates language for economic purposes while raising concerns about the preservation of local identity. Together, these studies emphasize the significance of linguistic landscapes and language policies as sites where ideological, cultural, and economic forces converge, shaping both national narratives and local identities.

## **Methods**

The study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate bilingual warning signs along Kuta and Legian beaches in Bali, Indonesia. It focuses on language variation and its alignment with national language policies. The primary data comprised public sign categorized as warning signs. The signs are predominantly displayed in two languages, Indonesian and English. These signs convey safety-related messages concerning beach activities. It is particularly swimming and coastal safety measures. Data collection was conducted through a documentation method. It involved systematic photographic recording of bilingual warning signs situated along both beaches. Supporting techniques included cataloguing and selection of relevant visual data. Photos that did not contain warning messages were excluded from the dataset. In total, 53 signs were recorded, with 33 identified as bilingual, providing the primary corpus for analysis.

The analysis process involved content-based qualitative methods. It was aimed to describe the linguistic and semiotic features of the warning signs. The study utilized indexicality within the framework of linguistic landscape (LL) studies as proposed by

Scollon and Scollon (2003). It was to interpret language choice and placement that reflect socio-political positioning and spatial identity. Signs were examined based on their linguistic structure, the sequence of language display (i.e., which language was given prominence), and the institutional affiliation of the sign producer, whether governmental or private. Special attention was given to the geopolitics of language positioning. It is such as the prioritization of Indonesian language or English and its correlation with official language regulations.

In addition to indexical analysis, the study also incorporated translation theory to evaluate the equivalence and acceptability of the English renderings in relation to their Indonesian counterparts. Since the data consisted of bilingual signs, translation strategies and accuracy were assessed to understand the effectiveness of the intended messages that were conveyed to non-Indonesian speakers. For example, applying Scollon and Scollon's (2003) theory of emplacement and indexicality to Figure 1.1, the warning *Mandilah selalu di antara dua bendera merah kuning* is positioned at the top in Indonesian, with the English equivalent placed directly below. In terms of emplacement, this spatial arrangement foregrounds the national language in accordance with Presidential Regulation No. 63/2019, thereby indexing the authority of state regulation in a public safety context. The subsequent placement of English reflects a secondary but essential communicative layer, indexing the multilingual reality of a high-tourism beach environment. The semiotic hierarchy—through positioning, font size, and sequential order—demonstrates how spatial and visual design choices mediate between top-down policy mandates and bottom-up communicative needs, thus illustrating the negotiation of meaning in a tourism-driven multilingual landscape.

Furthermore, the positioning of languages within the signs was critically analyzed to determine whether they complied with Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2019. It mandates the use of Indonesian language in public information displays. Variations in font size, color, and textual prominence were also considered. These visual elements contribute to the semiotic weight of each language and signal implicit communicative hierarchies in public signage.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The analysis of bilingual warning signs along Kuta and Legian beaches revealed significant variation in language use, positioning, and institutional affiliation. A total of eight representative signs were selected from the broader dataset of 33 bilingual signs. These signs were systematically categorized into two groups based on the type of institution responsible for their installation: (1) government-affiliated or official institutions, and (2) private or non-governmental entities. The classification enabled a clearer understanding of language policy that is reflected in the linguistic landscape across different institutional contexts.

The first group consists of five bilingual warning signs produced by governmental or official institutions. It includes the Badung Regency Government, the traditional village administration (Desa Adat Legian), and the beach safety organization Balawista. In three of the five signs (figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), Indonesian language is placed in the top position and followed by English. The arrangement reflects compliance with Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2019 which mandates the use of Indonesian language in public sign located in public spaces. For instance, figure 1.1 displays the warning *Mandilah selalu di antara dua bendera merah kuning* (Always

swim between the red and yellow flags) prominently in Indonesian and with its English equivalent placed below. Similarly, figure 1.2 provides detailed safety instructions first in Indonesian and then in English. Figure 1.3 features a warning in Indonesian printed on a safety flag. These signs exemplify alignment with national language policy and demonstrate the symbolic authority of the state through linguistic positioning (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3

Conversely, the remaining two signs in this category (figures 1.4 and 1.5) prioritize English over Indonesian language. Figure 1.4 which is issued by Desa Adat Legian and figure 1.5 that is presumably created by Balawista display English text in the uppermost position. The reversal may reflect a pragmatic shift in language choice. It emphasizes communicative effectiveness with international tourists in the multilingual and tourism-heavy context of Kuta and Legian beaches. Although these signs originate from official institutions, the prioritization of English suggests a degree of flexibility in interpreting or applying national language policy when international communication is at stake. As Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Moore et al. (2020) argue, the emplacement of language in signs is often governed by the geopolitical and semiotic logic of the space where the signs are situated.



Figure 1.4



Figure 1.5

The second group includes three bilingual warning signs installed by private or non-governmental entities. Two of these signs (figures 2.1 and 2.2) were erected by construction contractors during ongoing beach revitalization projects. In both cases, English is placed first and followed by Indonesian language. The layout indicates a clear preference for English based on the assumption that international visitors are the primary audience. Furthermore, the visual hierarchy, such as font size, color contrast, and iconography, reinforces English as the dominant language. Thus, it

reflects a commercial and audience-centered approach rather than strict adherence to national language policy. Scollon and Scollon (2003) emphasize that private sign often reflects bottom-up communicative strategies shaped by immediate social and economic considerations rather than regulatory frameworks.



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

The third private-sector sign (figure 2.3) differs from the others in which it places Indonesian language before English. The sign which promotes beach cleanliness features the message *Hormati pantai kami, buanglah sampah dan puntung rokok pada tempatnya* (respect our beach, dispose of your trash and cigarette butts properly) as the primary text. Notably, the sign includes icons and visual cues. It is such as a figure throwing waste into a bin to enhance comprehension. The use of Indonesian language as the primary language in this instance may reflect a commitment to civic messaging aimed at local beachgoers. It is perhaps an intention by the private sponsor to align with government regulations. The coexistence of textual and visual semiotics in the sign supports Scollon and Scollon's (2003) claim that signs derive meaning not only from linguistic content, but also from their semiotic design and placement.



Figure 2.3

The results indicate that language positioning in bilingual warning signs across Kuta and Legian beaches is influenced by institutional affiliation, communicative intent, and contextual factors such as audience composition and spatial function. While government-related signs generally align with official language policy. It is exceptions arise in tourism-sensitive contexts. Private entities tend to prioritize communicative efficacy over regulatory compliance although instances of policy

adherence do occur. These findings demonstrate the dynamic interplay between policy, practice, and place in the formation of the linguistic landscape.

## Discussion

The findings of the study reveal a complex interplay between national language policy, local communicative needs, and spatial semiotics within the linguistic landscape (LL) of Kuta and Legian beaches. While Indonesian law, particularly Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2019, mandates the use of Indonesian language in all public sign, including those installed in public areas, actual practices on the ground show a significant degree of variation in language prioritization. The variation is observable in both governmental and private sector sign. It suggests a slightly different negotiation between regulatory frameworks and functional communication strategies in multilingual tourism contexts (*Jdih.Baliprov.Go.Id*, 2018; Pemerintah & In, 2021).

Signs produced by government-affiliated institutions demonstrate both compliance with and deviation from official language policy. The placement of Indonesian language at the top of the sign, as seen in figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.4, clearly aligns with the regulatory requirements. It reinforces the state's authority and the symbolic value of the national language (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). These signs serve not only an informative function, but also a semiotic one. It asserts the state's presence through linguistic prioritization. However, other signs such as figures 1.3 and 1.5 reverse the order. It places English as the primary language. This inconsistency illustrates what Leimgruber (Leimgruber, 2020) refers to as the coexistence of 'global multilingualism' with 'official monolingualism'. Global pressures particularly in tourism zones prompt deviations from top-down language policies in favor of bottom-up communicative strategies.

The tendency to prioritize English is especially pronounced in signs established by private entities. In figures 2.1 and 2.2, English does not appear only at the top of the sign, but is also visually emphasized through font size and color contrast. It thereby reinforces its communicative dominance. This is consistent with findings by Vivas- Peraza (2020), who observed that English often serves both symbolic and informative roles in the LL of tourism-intensive areas, such as Hat Yai, Thailand. These signs suggest that English as a global lingua franca is used to maximize accessibility and comprehension for international visitors. It is often at the expense of alignment with national language policy. Such prioritization reflects a functionalist approach to communication (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009; Dunlevy, 2012). The effectiveness of message transmission is privileged over regulatory adherence.

Interestingly, not all private signs follow this trend. Figure 2.3, for example, demonstrates the use of Indonesian language as the primary language in a beach cleanliness message. This anomaly may indicate a more civic-minded orientation by the sign producer or an intentional alignment with governmental language expectations. It is also possible that the communicative intent to focus on environmental behavior rather than immediate safety targets of predominantly local audience (Gonçalves, 2012; Matras & Gaiser, 2020). The use of pictorial icons further supports the notion that LL signs function within a semiotic system. It goes beyond written language alone (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). The integration of visual elements enhances message salience and cross-linguistic comprehension particularly in contexts where diverse audiences must quickly interpret warnings or instructions.

The variations identified in the study also resonate with the findings of Manan et al. (2015). It explored the LL of Kuala Lumpur and emphasized language choice that is often shaped by sociopolitical, economic, and identity-based considerations. In the case of Kuta and Legian, the dominance of English in some signs can be understood as a reflection of the economic imperative to cater to international tourism. It plays a central role in the local economy. As such, language in sign is not merely a reflection of linguistic regulation, but a strategic response to the spatial and economic context in which the signs are placed. This is aligned with the theory of emplacement by Scollon and Scollon (2003). It emphasizes that the meaning and function of linguistic signs are inextricably tied to their physical and social locations.

Moreover, the observed inconsistencies in sign, especially among governmental signs, raise critical questions about policy implementation and enforcement. While the legal framework is clear, the absence of uniform application suggests either a lack of regulatory oversight or a pragmatic compassion in areas of high tourist activity. It parallels to findings from Montreal's St. Catherine Street, where Leimgruber (2020) documented similar tensions between language policy and commercial or practical pressures in multilingual urban environments.

Overall, the bilingual warning signs along Kuta and Legian beaches illustrate the fluid and contested nature of language policy in practice. The LL in these areas reflects not only the legal mandates of the state, but also the communicative realities of tourism-driven public spaces (Ardhian & Soemarlam, 2018; Sahril et al., 2019; Wulansari, 2020). The strategic use of English underlines its role as a global medium of communication. Meanwhile, the selective adherence to Indonesian language points to an ongoing negotiation between national identity, legal obligation, and economic pragmatism (Modan, 2018). These findings affirm the need to view linguistic landscapes not as static reflections of top-down policy, but as dynamic arenas. It is the language use that is shaped by intersecting social, political, and spatial forces.

## Conclusion

The study has explored the linguistic landscape of bilingual warning signs along Kuta and Legian beaches in Bali. It reveals a dynamic interaction between formal language policy and the communicative demands of a globalized tourism setting. The findings demonstrate that while some sign, especially those installed by government agencies, complies with Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2019 by prioritizing Indonesian language, other signs, including those produced by both governmental and private institutions, place English in the dominant position. The variation suggests that practical concerns such as comprehensibility for international audiences and spatial function often take precedence over strict policy adherence.

These inconsistencies reflect broader tensions between top-down language regulation and bottom-up communicative practices in public spaces. In line with Scollon and Scollon's (2003) theory of emplacement and indexicality, the placement and linguistic choices in sign are shaped not only by legal mandates, but also by the semiotic function of space, the intended audience, and socio-economic considerations. The presence of English in prioritized positions on warning signs indicates a shift toward global multilingualism in public communication globally renowned tourist destinations in Bali. It echoes findings in other multilingual cities (Leimgruber, 2020; Manan et al., 2015; Vivas-Peraza, 2020). Yet, signs that uphold Indonesian language as the primary language reveal a parallel adherence to national identity and civic responsibility.

The research contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on linguistic landscape studies by focusing specifically on bilingual warning sign in coastal public spaces. The area remains underexplored in language research. It highlights the importance of considering geopolitical, visual, and functional dimensions in analyzing public signage. It is particularly in tourism-dominated contexts. Future research could expand on the study by examining longitudinal changes in sign as policy enforcement evolves or by comparing coastal LL practices with those in urban centers or heritage sites. Further interdisciplinary inquiry, combining sociolinguistics, translation studies, and visual semiotics, may yield deeper insights into language policies that are negotiated, reinterpreted, and transformed in everyday material environments.

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