

Linguistic Complexity of Bali's Tourism Actors: The Perspectives of Translanguaging and Language Ideologies

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Abstract: It is widely known that international tourist destinations, such as Bali, serve as sites where multiple languages co-exist. This linguistic diversity has shaped how local people (speakers) use language in their interactions. However, research on language, in Bali's tourism context, has treated languages as separate entities. Therefore, this study explored Balinese tourism actors' experiences and perspectives of their language practice in relation to language ideologies. This study is qualitative in nature, adopting semi-structured interviews with Balinese tourism actors for data collection. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This study identified two key findings: (1) translanguaging as an economic and cultural bridge; and (2) translanguaging as a sign of openness. The findings suggest that multilingualism serves as a resource for meaning making, which contradicts the monolingual perspective that sees languages as separate. This study concludes with implications and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: translanguaging; language ideologies; tourism and globalization; cultural identity; language practices; Bali

1. Introduction

It is widely known that Bali is the most popular tourist destination in Indonesia, with millions of local and international visitors visiting the island each year. This has made Bali a linguistically and culturally rich island where Balinese, Indonesian, and English languages interact every day (Bonafix & Manara, 2016). This language diversity has created a unique linguistic landscape where local and global languages co-exist (Artawa, Paramarta, et al., 2023; Purnawati et al., 2025). This, of course, has influenced Balinese linguistic and cultural

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interactions and identities. This dynamic linguistic practice relates to Balinese speakers' use of their language resources across different domains within the rapidly globalizing society, e.g., family, religious ceremonies, tourism sites, and public spaces. Simply put, the increasing prominence of English and Indonesian, particularly in tourism sites, has led to dynamics on how Balinese speakers perceive and navigate their local language alongside other languages.

Language is used across various domains, with the Balinese language predominantly being used in familial relationships (Adnyani & Suwastini, 2023) and religious ceremonies to show intimacy and spirituality. Indonesian and English dominate public and commercial spaces (Purnawati et al., 2025). However, recent studies also showed that Balinese has gained popularity in public spaces (Mulyawan, 2021), which reflects cultural identity maintenance while adapting to the demands of the growing tourist population as practical communication needs and socio-economic development (Purnawati et al., 2025). In this sense, the Balinese language was used commercially to enhance cultural authenticity. This also implies that Balinese speakers strategically drew on their language resources from their bi/multilingual linguistic repertoires. This relates to translanguaging, a term which was initially used to describe language alternation in a bilingual school in the Welsh context, e.g., reading in Welsh and then speaking in English or vice versa (García & Wei, 2014). The conceptualization of translanguaging itself has now expanded both as a “fixed language approach” and a “fluid languaging approach”. In the context of tourist sites in Bali, this language practice refers to the “fluid languaging approach,” emphasizing speakers' fluid language practices using different semiotic signs they draw on from their full linguistic repertoires (Bonacina-pugh et al., 2021, pp. 442–450). As well as referring to specific language practices, translanguaging can now also refer to a theory of language (see Li Wei, 2018).

Despite these translanguaging practices, studies have found linguistic hierarchies in tourist spaces: English on top, followed by Indonesian and Balinese (Mulyawan, 2021). These studies have been based the idea of languages as discrete entities (Mulyawan et al., 2022; Paramarta et al., 2022). In another context, this separatist perspective of language revealed that the Balinese language also had the adaptability to articulate modern pop-cultural topics (Putra, 2018). These social practices are closely related to language ideologies that inform how speakers use language in everyday interactions, e.g., religious ceremonies, political debate, and tour guiding (Gal, 2023).

Therefore, this study focused on how Balinese speakers in the context of the tourism industry perceived their language practices in relation to their ideologies as they strategically and fluidly moved across Balinese, Indonesian, and English languages. We framed these Balinese speakers' language ideologies

as multiple (Kroskrity, 2004), and we explored how these ideologies were articulated in their everyday linguistic interactions. We aimed to address the following research question: How do Balinese speakers perceive their language practices in everyday interactions in the context of tourism?

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Translanguaging*

Translanguaging, a term that initially emerged in bilingual education (Garcia, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014; MacSwan, 2017), refers to “language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems..., but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages” (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 2). This way of understanding language allows analysts to more clearly understand how speakers move fluidly between languages to communicate, negotiate identity, and resist linguistic hierarchies (García & Wei, 2014). Unlike the traditional concept of code-switching, which assumes distinct language boundaries, translanguaging acknowledges the speaker's entire linguistic repertoire as an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011; Fang et al., 2022; Liu & Fang, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant to Bali, where languages co-exist, e.g., Indonesian, English, and Balinese languages (Bonafix & Manara, 2016). This implies that translanguaging is a tool for identity negotiation in bi/multilingual spaces (Canagarajah, 2011), where speakers use their language resources to creatively and critically make meaning (Li, 2011).

Scholars in the Indonesian context have now begun to see translanguaging as a dynamic and flexible way in which languages co-exist in various settings. Most studies focused on educational settings (see Emilia & Hamied, 2022; Rasman, 2018; Sinaga & Putrawan, 2024). In settings outside education, translanguaging has been studied in communication conducted on podcasts involving public figures in Indonesia, communication on the Nessie Judge YouTube channel, and K-Pop fan YouTube channels. (Alifa & Degaf, 2024; Menghuan et al., 2024; Permadi et al., 2023; Shalihah, 2024). However, these studies are still limited to identifying only types and functions of translanguaging. This scholarship has opened an opportunity for this study, as little is known about how Balinese speakers perceived their use of language in the context of tourism.

This suggests that language is a social practice, and its conceptualization has now shifted away from the hegemony of monolingualism. To clearly distinguish it from the traditional definition of bilingualism, translanguaging is defined as “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds”. Today, language has become more complex, and translanguaging is increasingly a preferred mode of

communication for bi/multilinguals (García, 2009, p. 42). Our understanding builds on this definition of bilingualism, where a bi/multilingual is no longer defined as two monolinguals in one individual. In this view, languages are not treated as separate entities but as involving repertoires of social practices for meaning making in communicative settings. While we used named languages such as English, Indonesian, or Balinese, which are traditionally viewed as distinct languages, our goal was simply to make our explanation easier to follow.

2.2 Language Ideologies

Scholars have increasingly used the notion of language ideologies to investigate speakers' beliefs and perceptions about their language practices (Kroskrity, 2004; Martínez et al., 2015). Ideologies shape how individuals use and perceive language while signaling their relationships to broader historical or institutional practices (Kiramba, 2018). Language ideologies refer to "beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds" (Kroskrity, 2004, p. 498). Central to the scholarship of language ideologies is the idea that language ideologies are viewed as multiple (Kroskrity, 2004): language ideologies (plural) rather than ideology (singular) (Martínez et al., 2015).

Studies on language ideologies that are relevant to this study are those that focus on how ideologies have shaped speakers' use of language. Bunk (2024) found that standard language ideologies influenced bilingual German speakers, leading them to adopt more formal linguistic markers in formal settings to align with societal expectations. This relates to tensions between ideologies as found by Yazan (2019). His experiences as a bilingual language educator highlighted tensions between linguistic ideologies and personal identity formation in professional spaces. Further evidence in another context as found by Truan (2024) challenged the traditional focus on native-speakerism in language ideological research, arguing that multilingual speakers should be central to discussions on linguistic legitimacy and expertise. Meanwhile, Soler and Zabrodska (2017) revealed that parents (Spanish-Estonian families) actively shaped their children's linguistic environments through strategic language choices and maintenance practices.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study method to explore language practices and ideologies of Balinese tourism actors. A case study approach is suitable as it focuses on a bounded system (Cresswell, 2009), allowing for an in-depth exploration of real-world multilingual communication in tourism settings. Rather than seeking broad generalization, this study aimed for contextual

insights that contribute to a theoretical understanding of translinguaging in the tourism context. Case study research is characterized by rich, detailed data collection (Mills & Gay, 2016).

3.1 *Setting and Participants*

This research took place in Bali, Indonesia, particularly in Kuta, Ubud, and Denpasar - three important tourist destinations. These sites were chosen as they are tourist hubs, they consist of tourism-based businesses, and there is significant common multilingual communication in these locations (Artawa, Mulyanah, et al., 2023; Malini et al., 2018). Kuta is well known for its beach tourism, which is known for international visitors (Sumadi, 2016); Ubud is a cultural epicenter for tourists interested in the arts and traditions of Bali (MacRae, 2016), and Denpasar is the capital city and the hub of business and the hospitality industry (Prajnawrdhi et al., 2015). Therefore, these areas are considered a rich linguistic ecology, where tourism actors get opportunities to interact with tourists from varying linguistic backgrounds. These areas provide ready contexts for exploring tourism actors' language practices in relation to their language ideologies.

Participants for this study were intentionally chosen due to their active participation in tourism industries and their multilingual language competencies. In total, ten Balinese tourism actors were recruited from various occupations (Table 1). The participants included hoteliers, tour guides, traditional craft sellers, and restaurant attendants. They represented a range of tourism occupations that interact with both international and domestic tourists. They were all first-language speakers of Balinese and competent in Indonesian (the national language) and English (as a dominant international language in the Balinese tourist scene).

Table 1. Research participants

No	Participant group	Age range	Language resources	Number
1	Tour guide	25-50	Indonesian, Balinese, English	3
2	Hotelier	30-60	Indonesian, Balinese, English	3
3	Traditional craft seller	16-25	Indonesian, Balinese, English	2
4	Restaurant attendant	25-50	Indonesian, Balinese, English	2
	Total number of participants			10

3.2 *Data collection*

The researchers collected data through semi-structured interviews. This type of interview offered us a deep understanding of participants' configurations and experiences concerning their language practices (Brinkmann & Kvale,

2018). All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The interviews focused on questions about language during tourism interactions, including what languages they used in various contexts, their explanations and justifications for switching between languages, their struggles with communicating across multiple languages, and their understanding of how language defines their professional and cultural identity. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to naturally elaborate on their experiences in depth (Wakelin et al., 2024).

3.3 Data analysis

The collected data was transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) in a series of steps: data familiarization, generating initial codes, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, writing up. Data familiarization consisted of repeated listening to the audio-recorded interviews and reading the transcripts to gain a detailed and accurate understanding of the participants' experiences. We generated initial codes by identifying their views that were described through repeated patterns in their responses.

The themes identified in the data were revised through a continual review to confirm that the described elements reflected the data. The final stage of the thematic analysis process involved defining, naming, and integrating themes back into the informed findings of the study and subsequently organizing the findings into a coherent narrative form.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This section presents key results of our research question, "How do Balinese speakers perceive their language practices in everyday interactions in the context of tourism?". Our data analysis identified two major themes: (1) translanguaging as an economic and cultural bridge and (2) translanguaging as a sign of openness.

4.1.1 Translanguaging as an economic and cultural bridge

The first key finding highlights the use of translanguaging as a means for economic livelihood and a pathway to cultural identity. The use Balinese phrases was described as a way to reconcile their local identity and the economy. Through a strategic and dynamic translanguaging practices (through the use of named languages, e.g., Balinese, Indonesian, English, and other foreign languages), the Balinese fulfill economic imperatives, attracting customers, completing sales, and offering the best service possible, while also (re)asserting



Figure 1. Translanguaging practices in Seminyak (Photo: Darma Putra)

Hotel employees and tour guides also illustrated their experience of a cross-linguistic connection as a means to provide the best services possible, while simultaneously expressing culture:

“Kami dianjurkan menggunakan ungkapan-ungkapan bahasa Bali saat menyapa tamu, tapi di luar itu, di tempat kerja kami diharapkan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris atau bahasa Indonesia. Bahasa Bali adalah bagian dari ‘pengalaman Bali’—tapi tak diperlukan untuk bisnis” (Interview, 35-year-old hotelier, Ubud).

“We are encouraged to use Balinese phrases when greeting guests, but beyond that, our workplace expects us to communicate in English or Indonesian. Balinese is part of the ‘Bali experience’ —but it is not needed for business” (Interview, 35-year-old hotelier, Ubud).

This statement emphasized the use of multilingual stance within the tourism context. Balinese greetings were used as a kind of cultural politeness and a means to improve the apparent authenticity of a visitor's experience. This use of language aligned with the commodification of cultural identity, where Balinese phrases were strategically presented to meet visitor expectations of local hospitality.

Besides the economic benefits, translanguaging served as a cultural bridge, facilitating tourism actors in negotiating and navigating their identities

in multicultural interactions. Traditional markets such as Pasar Badung in Denpasar and Ubud Art Market provided further evidence of strategic translanguaging. A market vendor explained:

“Jika saya bertemu dengan wisatawan asing, saya menyapa mereka dengan bahasa Inggris, tapi saya mungkin mengucapkan ‘Matur Suksma’ [Terima kasih] supaya percakapan rasanya lebih personal. Ketika bicara dalam bahasa Bali menghadapi pembeli lokal, itu membangun rasa percaya” (Interview, 42-year-old craft seller, Denpasar).

“If I see a foreign tourist, I greet them in English, but I might say ‘Matur Suksma’ [Thank you (Balinese)] to make the exchange feel more personal. When I speak Balinese with local buyers, it builds trust” (Interview, 42-year-old craft seller, Denpasar).

This statement illustrated that market vendors used adaptive and fluid language practices, adjusting their ways of using language based on the buyers: use of Balinese with local customers to foster trust, use of Indonesian with domestic tourists who might not understand Balinese, and use of English (sometimes mixed with Balinese terms) with foreign tourists to enhance cultural appeal.

This finding indicated that translanguaging was perceived by the Balinese tourism actors as a way to bridge the economic and cultural dimensions. Participants leveraged their language resources, facilitating their survival in a competitive industry while maintaining their cultural connections and bonds to the land. In this way, language served as an economic instrument for trade and a means for cultural exchange and identity negotiation.

4.1.2 *Translanguaging as a sign of openness*

The second key finding indicates Balinese tourism actors' receptiveness to linguistic diversity. Instead of adhering to a rigid, monolingual attitude, participants displayed flexible and inclusive language use. They viewed translanguaging as a practical necessity in the tourism sector and as a demonstration of their openness to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds. This openness can be seen in their acceptance of various languages in their daily exchanges with others and their eagerness to learn new language forms from tourists. A tour guide in Kuta shared his experience of using multiple languages when interacting with tourists:

"Saya sering campur-campur bahasa. Misal ya, kalau tamu dari Prancis, saya pakai campuran Inggris dan sedikit Prancis kalau bisa. Kalau dari Jepang, saya coba pakai beberapa kata Jepang juga. Biasanya mereka senang kalau kita berusaha pakai bahasa mereka" (Interview, 35-year-old tour guide, Kuta).

"I often mix languages. For example, if the guests are from France, I mix English and a little French if I can. If they are from Japan, I will also try to use some Japanese words. They usually appreciate it when we try to use their language" (Interview, 35-year-old tour guide, Kuta).

The statement demonstrated the use of translanguaging to establish rapport with tourists. The Balinese tourism actors incorporated some words and expressions from tourists' languages to show cultural sensitivity and acknowledge linguistic diversity, fostering an inclusive interaction. Likewise, a Kuta restaurant server described using some degree of translanguaging as a way to establish a friendly and welcoming interaction:

"Saya sering menyapa turis asing dengan berbagai bahasa, dan tidak jarang menyapa mereka dengan bahasa Bali. Gitu juga pas menjelaskan beberapa hal yang mereka tanya, saya memakai berbagai kosakata dari berbagai bahasa tergantung konteks, supaya lebih akrab. Bahkan terkadang dengan tambahan gestur tertentu" (Interview, 32-year-old restaurant attendant, Kuta).

"I often greet foreign tourists in various languages and often greet them in Balinese. Likewise, in explaining some of the things they ask, I use various words from various languages depending on the context, to be more familiar. Sometimes even with the addition of certain gestures" (Interview, 32-year-old restaurant attendant, Kuta).

This response demonstrated the flexibility of translanguaging practices in the tourism context. Rather than using a dominant language, tourism actors used all their language resources for meaning making and to make sense of those commonalities, showing a willingness to engage in communicative practices across languages.

This finding underscored the notion that translanguaging was not a one-way but a reciprocal exchange. Translanguaging was not merely a communication strategy but a manifestation of receptiveness to new experiences, adaptability, and the promotion of inclusive interaction. They built rapport by engaging through multilingual exchanges to connect with international tourists while expanding their linguistic and cultural knowledge.

4.2 Discussion

First, this study identified translanguaging as an economic and cultural bridge in the tourism context of Bali. The tourism actors employed translanguaging in a strategic way to navigate the competitive market, keeping their economic survival while simultaneously preserving their identity. In this regard, language served as both a medium of cultural exchange and an economic tool, employed dynamically and strategically rather than as a one-way process.

This finding is supported by the findings of previous linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociological theorists who have emphasized the fluidity of language use among multilingual communities and the potential for language to shape social and economic relationships. Translanguaging in the Balinese tourism industry reflects García and Wei's (2014) framework that presents translanguaging as a flexible language practice that maximizes the communicative resources of the speaker. In a high-contact zone like Bali, where tourism is a leading economic practice, translanguaging creates fluidity between locals and international visitors. In contradistinction to a more traditional view of seeing languages as separate systems, translanguaging allows tourism actors to move between languages to meet their economic needs (Figure 2). This finding is also in line with Canagarajah's (2011) assertion that multilingual speakers strategically use their repertoires in order to achieve new economic opportunities and social mobility.



Figure 2. Translanguaging practices in Ubud (Photo: Darma Putra)

Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital is informative from the sociological perspective of how language functions as a resource in the tourism

sector. Balinese tourism actors leverage their multi-linguistic capabilities to entice customers, establish rapport, and gain favorable business arrangements. Their ability to translanguage can be understood as symbolic capital contributing to their ability to act in the economy while further establishing their identity as cultural ambassadors. As shown in this study, the tourism actors used multiple languages in their interactions, demonstrating how linguistic resources assist in gaining social and economic capital. Further to this, the cultural role of translanguageing can further be explained through Pennycook's (2010) idea of language as a social practice.

Through the strategic use of Balinese, Indonesian, English, and (an) other foreign language(s), Balinese tourism actors employed translanguageing as a language practice that facilitated communication and expressed cultural identity. Linguistic choices facilitated the balancing of economic capacity and cultural legitimacy while showing translanguageing as a bridge between tradition and globalization. The use of translanguageing in the tourism context also showed that the demands of the growing tourist population include practical communication needs and socio-economic development (Purnawati et al., 2025).

The second significant finding indicated that translanguageing represented openness and inclusiveness. This finding is in line with previous studies conducted by Li (2022) and Kacsur (2024), who found that translanguageing represents an inclusive approach to language use that challenges traditional monolingual ideologies and promotes linguistic equity. The integrated nature of multilingual communication allowed speakers to draw from their entire linguistic repertoire (Mateus, 2014).

This also aligns with Blommaert's (2015) notion of sociolinguistic superdiversity, highlighting that globalized societies are characterized by increasingly complex and often messy language use. Rather than entering into interactions relying on a rigid linguistic code, Balinese tourism actors demonstrated a flexible and adaptable stance. The sense of openness highlighted in this study is similar to Gumperz's (1982) concept of linguistic accommodation, in which speakers modify their language practices to meet the expectations of other speakers to promote social cohesion. The tourism actors' eagerness to use multiple languages and learn new expressions from tourists implied a high degree of linguistic flexibility regarding their linguistic dispositions, which supported their ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships.

Further to this, the hospitality industry not only includes services but also requires an emotional connection and cultural understanding (Lashley, 2015). This finding further confirmed this argument that tourism actors demonstrated openness to being bi/multilingual as a resource for enhancing tourists'

experience. This is consistent with previous work in tourism and language use that recognizes that shifting the language in which interactions are undertaken is important for creating a welcoming environment for international tourists (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011).

5. Conclusion

Our study has shed light on how tourism actors in Bali's tourism context perceived their language experiences. We found key commonalities in their experiences with language ideologies: (1) translanguaging as an economic and cultural bridge, and (2) translanguaging as a marker of openness. These findings suggest that their experiences evidenced a shared ideology of translanguaging as a beneficial practice in the tourism context.

This work is grounded in a specific context, hence constraining the applicability of its findings to other contexts. However, our findings suggest the significance of understanding different ideologies experienced by tourism actors in relation to their language practices in the tourism context. We, however, did not analyze how these experiences evolve over time. Ideologies are dynamic, and future work could investigate how and why their experiences with language ideologies change.

Further to this, while we focused on the perceptions, we did not extend the analysis to include the Balinese tourism actors' use of language to understand how individual tourism actors draw on their full linguistic repertoires. This space is worth further investigation to gain a holistic understanding of how individuals use their language resources in the tourism context, as well as in other contexts.

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