



The Commodification of Language in the Tourism Linguistic Landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: A Preliminary Report



David Samuel Latupeirissa¹, Asihlya Sandu²

Article history:

Received: 23/ 08/ 2026; Accepted: 09/ 10/ 2026; Displayed Online: 10/ 10/ 2026; Published: 30/12/ 2026

Keywords

Linguistic landscape;

Language commodification;

Linguistic capital;

Tourism discourse;

Semiotic;

Abstract

This preliminary report develops an analytical framework for examining how language is represented and potentially valued in the tourism linguistic landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. It addresses three questions: (1) which languages and language combinations are visible in selected tourism-related signs, and what communicative functions do they perform; (2) how are these languages arranged through visual and spatial design; and (3) how might these patterns be interpreted in relation to commercial representation, linguistic capital, and local-language inclusion? The proposed study adopts a qualitative descriptive-critical design based on photographic documentation and contextual observation of signs in selected public and commercial settings. Each sign will be documented by location, sign type, language composition, communicative function, visual prominence, and commercial context. Analysis will combine linguistic landscape research with Heller's account of language commodification, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and Blommaert's semiotic landscape perspective. Because fieldwork and systematic coding have not yet been completed, this report does not present empirical findings or claims about actual commercial outcomes. Instead, it specifies a transparent procedure for moving from observable sign features to context-sensitive interpretation. The framework is intended to support future empirical research on language, tourism, symbolic value, and linguistic inclusion in eastern Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Tourism is not only an economic activity involving travel, accommodation, and the consumption of natural or cultural attractions; it is also a communicative environment in which places, services, and identities are represented to different audiences. Business names, transport notices, menus, advertisements, and public information boards contribute to a destination's linguistic landscape. These signs make languages visible in particular locations and for particular

¹ Politeknik Negeri Kupang, Indonesia. Email: Latupeirissadavid1@gmail.com

² Politeknik Negeri Kupang, Indonesia

purposes. Their study can therefore reveal not only what information is made available but also how tourism spaces are publicly represented.

Linguistic landscape research provides a foundation for examining this relationship. Landry and Bourhis (1997) distinguish the informational function of signs from their symbolic function: signs guide people and communicate practical information, while also contributing to perceptions of which languages and communities are publicly recognized. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) further situate public language within broader relationships among space, identity, policy, and power. These perspectives support an analysis of signs as situated social objects rather than as isolated texts.

In tourism settings, language choices may respond to the needs of audiences with different linguistic backgrounds. English, for example, may facilitate communication with international visitors, while Indonesian may serve broader national communication and local languages may express community identity or place-based meanings. These functions can overlap. However, the presence of a language does not by itself establish the motivation behind its use or the value it receives in a commercial setting.

Heller's (2010) account of language commodification provides a way to investigate when linguistic resources become implicated in market-oriented activity. A language may be used to convey information, but it may also contribute to the identity or differentiation of a service. Such a possibility must be demonstrated through the sign's function and context rather than inferred from language choice alone.

Bourdieu's (1991) account of linguistic and symbolic power adds a further dimension by explaining that the value of linguistic resources depends on the social market in which they circulate and the recognition they receive. Blommaert's (2013) semiotic landscape perspective also emphasizes that meaning is produced through the interaction of language, visual design, material form, and spatial placement. Together, these approaches make it possible to investigate linguistic choice, visual prominence, and possible commercial meanings without assuming that a fixed hierarchy already exists.

Labuan Bajo, in East Nusa Tenggara, offers a context in which these questions can be examined in tourism-related public and commercial spaces. The study focuses on visible signs in selected locations, such as transport-related areas, tourism streets, and accommodation or food-service settings. These locations may differ in audience, communicative purpose, and commercial function; consequently, language patterns should be interpreted in relation to the setting in which each sign appears.

The research problem is that a descriptive inventory of languages, although necessary, cannot by itself explain how language is visually organized or how it may become associated with commercial and symbolic value. Conversely, a critical interpretation that is not grounded in systematic documentation risks attributing intentions or ideologies that the signs do not establish. The study therefore links observable features of signage to interpretation through explicit coding categories and a cautious, context-sensitive analytical procedure.

The study is guided by three research questions: (1) Which languages and language combinations appear in the selected tourism-related signs, and what communicative functions do they perform? (2) How are languages visually organized through placement, size, typography, colour, imagery, and spatial context? (3) How can these linguistic and semiotic patterns be interpreted in relation to possible commodification, linguistic capital, commercial representation, and the visibility of local languages? The third question concerns interpretation of signs, not a direct measurement of revenue or business performance.

These questions establish a clear progression from description to interpretation. The first question requires identifying language composition and communicative function; the second requires systematic observation of visual and spatial features; and the third requires interpreting those observations through the selected theoretical perspectives while considering alternative explanations. The use of English will not automatically be coded as commodification, visual prominence will not automatically be treated as prestige, and low visibility will not automatically be taken as evidence of marginalization.

Accordingly, the study has three objectives. First, it will document the languages, language combinations, sign types, and communicative functions found in the selected sample. Second, it will analyse how linguistic elements are visually and spatially arranged. Third, it will interpret these patterns in relation to language commodification, linguistic capital, commercial representation, and local-language inclusion. The theoretical contribution lies in integrating linguistic landscape research, Heller's account of commodification, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and Blommaert's semiotic landscape perspective within a single analytical sequence.

The study's empirical contribution is necessarily provisional at this stage. It establishes a context-specific framework for examining tourism-related signs in Labuan Bajo, rather than claiming to represent the destination's entire linguistic landscape or to demonstrate an established hierarchy among languages. Its practical relevance lies in the questions it may help local authorities and tourism operators consider when balancing visitor accessibility with the public recognition of local linguistic resources.

Because the fieldwork and systematic coding have not yet been completed, this manuscript is presented as a preliminary report. The discussion that follows therefore develops the analytical dimensions through which the future data will be interpreted; it should not be read as a report of findings already established in the field.

2. Materials and Method

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive-critical design. As this manuscript is a preliminary report and fieldwork has not yet been completed, the procedures described here constitute the planned protocol rather than a description of completed data collection. The design combines systematic description of visible signs with contextual and visual-semiotic interpretation. This approach corresponds to the three research questions: language composition and function are documented first, visual organization is examined second, and possible commercial or symbolic meanings are interpreted only after the observable features have been established.

The planned dataset will consist of approximately 50–150 visual items selected purposively from tourism-related public and commercial spaces in Labuan Bajo. The proposed coverage includes transport-related areas, tourism streets, and accommodation, restaurant, or other visitor-service settings. The final sample size will depend on access, the diversity of sign types, and the ability to document each item clearly. The sample is intended to support qualitative comparison, not statistical generalization to every sign in Labuan Bajo. Inclusion criteria will be visible text in a tourism-related public or commercial setting and sufficient image quality to identify the linguistic and visual features. Duplicate photographs of the same sign will be consolidated, while separate signs belonging to one establishment will be recorded as distinct items when they perform different communicative functions.

For each item, the researcher will record a sign identifier, date and location of documentation, setting or business type, sign function, language or languages present, text content where legible, and relevant contextual notes. Language identification will distinguish Indonesian, English, identifiable local languages, and multilingual combinations. If a local-language item cannot be identified confidently, it will be marked as uncertain rather than assigned to a language without adequate evidence. The sign, rather than each individual word,

*The Commodification of Language in the Tourism Linguistic
Landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: A Preliminary Report
(David Samuel Latupeirissa & Asihlya Sandu)*

will serve as the primary unit of analysis; language occurrences within each sign will be recorded separately to avoid conflating sign counts with language counts.

Visual-semiotic coding will record the relative placement of languages, approximate differences in text size, typography, colour contrast, spatial prominence, the relationship between text and images, and whether the sign is primarily informational, directional, regulatory, identity-oriented, or promotional. These features will be described using a consistent coding sheet. Visual prominence will not be treated as a direct measure of prestige: readability, viewing distance, regulatory requirements, available space, and the practical function of a sign will be considered as alternative explanations.

The analysis will proceed in three stages. First, descriptive coding will summarize the distribution of languages, multilingual combinations, sign types, and communicative functions. Second, cross-case comparison will examine whether language choices and visual arrangements vary across settings and sign functions. Third, critical interpretation will relate recurring patterns to the theoretical framework: linguistic landscape theory will guide interpretation of informational and symbolic functions; Heller's (2010) concept will inform analysis of possible commodification; Bourdieu's (1991) concept will guide discussion of context-dependent linguistic value; and Blommaert's (2013) perspective will inform interpretation of visual and spatial organization. Interpretive claims will be linked to specific sign features and contextual evidence.

Photographs and contextual observation can establish what is visible and where it appears, but they cannot independently establish sign producers' intentions, audience responses, or economic outcomes. Accordingly, the study will not infer that a language increases revenue, attracts particular customers, or marginalizes a community on the basis of signage alone. If feasible, interviews with business operators or other relevant stakeholders may be used as supplementary evidence; any such interviews will be reported only if actually conducted. A coding guide and review of a subset of items by a second reader, where feasible, will be used to improve consistency. The analysis will maintain a distinction between direct observations, plausible interpretations, and claims requiring additional evidence.

3. Analytical Framework and Discussion

3.1. Linguistic Landscape as a Site of Commercial Representation

This section develops the analytical framework that will be applied to the planned dataset. Since fieldwork and systematic coding have not yet been completed, the examples and propositions below illustrate how the data may be interpreted; they are not empirical findings about the actual distribution or value of languages in Labuan Bajo. The discussion is organized around the research questions: public representation and communicative function (RQ1), visual and spatial organization (RQ2), and possible commodification, linguistic capital, and local-language inclusion (RQ3). The framework requires each interpretation to be grounded in documented signs and their contexts.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) establish the importance of linguistic landscape through two interrelated functions: the informational function and the symbolic function. Informationally, public signs communicate the linguistic characteristics of a territory and help individuals navigate its physical and institutional environment. Symbolically, the visibility of particular languages may influence perceptions of the status, legitimacy, and social presence of the

communities associated with them. These functions are especially relevant to tourism destinations, where signs address audiences with different linguistic backgrounds, communicative expectations, and relationships to the place in which they appear. A sign can therefore perform an immediate practical task while simultaneously contributing to a broader representation of the destination as local, national, international, traditional, modern, or commercially sophisticated.

The informational and symbolic dimensions of linguistic landscapes should not, however, be treated as mutually exclusive categories. A multilingual sign at a port, for example, may facilitate access to transportation information while also representing the destination as accessible to international visitors. Similarly, the use of a local language in a business name may identify a commercial establishment while communicating a connection to local culture and geographical identity. In both cases, linguistic choices have practical consequences and symbolic implications. Their relative importance depends on the communicative situation, the audiences involved, and the social meanings attributed to the languages and expressions displayed.

Shohamy and Gorter (2009) extend the significance of linguistic landscape research by situating public language within broader questions of social organization, language policy, identity, and power. From this perspective, signs are not neutral reflections of the languages spoken by a population. They are also outcomes of decisions about what should be displayed, which languages should receive visibility, and how public space should be organized linguistically. These decisions may be made by business owners, public institutions, advertising agencies, property developers, or other actors who possess different resources and priorities. Consequently, the linguistic landscape can reveal aspects of language practices that are not necessarily captured by official language policies or demographic descriptions.

For Labuan Bajo, this distinction is particularly important because the linguistic landscape must be interpreted within the context of a tourism-oriented economy. The commercial use of language may be shaped by the anticipated needs of visitors, the services offered by businesses, institutional communication requirements, and perceptions of what constitutes an attractive tourism environment. These factors can influence which languages are selected and how they are visually presented. Nevertheless, the presence of a language on a sign does not necessarily correspond directly to its frequency of use in everyday conversation. The language visible in a restaurant advertisement, for example, may reflect a marketing decision rather than the actual linguistic practices of the restaurant's employees or customers.

A rigorous analysis must therefore distinguish between the *language of public representation* and the *language of social interaction*. The former concerns which linguistic resources are made visible in public space; the latter concerns how people actually communicate in particular situations. Although these dimensions may influence each other, they are not identical. A destination may display English prominently to accommodate international visitors while relying extensively on Indonesian and local languages in everyday interactions. Conversely, a language may be widely spoken within a community but remain relatively inconspicuous in commercial signage. Such discrepancies are analytically significant because they may reveal differences between the languages valued for public representation and those that sustain everyday social relationships.

The spatial organization of Labuan Bajo's tourism environment also provides a basis for comparative interpretation. The port area, major tourism-related streets, and hotel and restaurant districts represent different communicative environments. The port is associated with arrival, departure, transportation, and the movement of visitors. Commercial streets may emphasize visibility, competition, and the promotion of services. Hotels and restaurants, meanwhile, must communicate information about accommodation, food, amenities, prices, and customer experiences. These different functions may produce different patterns of language use even within the same destination.

Accordingly, the analysis should examine not only which languages occur but also the communicative purposes they serve in specific locations. A language that predominates in promotional materials may not predominate in regulatory signs or practical information displays. Likewise, a language used primarily for business names may carry different symbolic implications from one used for detailed customer instructions. Comparing these functions makes it possible to identify whether linguistic choices are primarily informational, promotional, identity-oriented, or associated with several purposes simultaneously.

The commercial representation of language also raises questions about agency. The linguistic landscape is produced through decisions made by actors who have different levels of control over public visibility. Large hotels, established tourism operators, and institutions may possess greater financial resources for designing signs and maintaining prominent commercial displays than small businesses or community-based enterprises. These differences may influence the scale, quality, and visibility of linguistic representation. However, such inequalities should be treated as empirical questions rather than assumed characteristics of Labuan Bajo. Establishing their significance would require evidence concerning the distribution of signs, the types of businesses represented, and the relationship between commercial resources and visual prominence.

The analytical significance of this perspective lies in its capacity to connect observable linguistic features with the social organization of tourism space. Rather than interpreting public signs as isolated textual objects, the study treats them as situated communicative practices embedded in economic relationships. The linguistic landscape consequently becomes a site for investigating how a tourism destination is represented, how businesses communicate with different audiences, and how languages acquire different degrees of public visibility. This approach provides the descriptive and conceptual foundation for examining language commodification in the subsequent sections.

3.2. Language Commodification and the Tourism Economy

Language commodification provides a theoretical framework for understanding how linguistic resources may acquire economic value when they become integrated into market-oriented activities. Heller (2010) situates the commodification of language within broader transformations in which linguistic and cultural resources increasingly become relevant to the production and consumption of goods and services. Under these conditions, language is not valued exclusively for its capacity to facilitate communication. It may also be valued for the identities, experiences, and social associations that it helps construct. Language can therefore function simultaneously as a communicative medium, a cultural resource, and a potential component of commercial differentiation.

Tourism provides a particularly relevant setting for examining this process because tourism businesses must communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Their services may be directed toward domestic visitors, international tourists, local residents, or combinations of these groups. Language selection can consequently become part of a broader strategy for making services accessible, communicating professional competence, establishing a recognizable identity, and attracting particular audiences. In this context, linguistic resources may be incorporated into the commercial presentation of a destination or business.

English is especially relevant to this discussion because of its widespread use in international communication and its association, in many commercial contexts, with global mobility and

international accessibility. Its presence on tourism signage may help visitors interpret information, identify services, and navigate unfamiliar environments. At the same time, English may carry symbolic associations that extend beyond its informational function. A business name, slogan, or promotional message in English may contribute to an image of international orientation, cosmopolitanism, or participation in global tourism networks.

These possibilities must be distinguished analytically. The communicative use of English does not automatically constitute commodification, nor does the use of Indonesian or a local language necessarily imply an absence of commercial intent. Any language may become a commercial resource when its selection and presentation are connected to the perceived needs, preferences, or identities of a target audience. English is therefore an important object of investigation, but it should not be treated as the only language capable of acquiring exchange value. Indonesian may serve as a resource for addressing domestic tourists and communicating national accessibility, while local languages may contribute to cultural distinctiveness, place branding, or the representation of locally grounded experiences.

The central issue is thus not simply whether English is present but how linguistic resources are incorporated into commercial practices. An English-language safety notice may primarily reflect the need to communicate essential information to international visitors. A restaurant's English-language menu may similarly respond to practical customer requirements. By contrast, an English business name accompanied by promotional imagery and identity-oriented slogans may warrant investigation as a possible instance in which language contributes to branding and market differentiation. Even in this latter case, the interpretation remains provisional unless supported by additional evidence concerning the sign's function, context, or producer's intentions.

A useful distinction can be established between communicative commodification, symbolic commodification, and commercial branding. Communicative commodification concerns the use of linguistic resources to make services accessible to customers whose language preferences are commercially relevant. Symbolic commodification concerns the potential economic value attached to the meanings and associations of a language, such as internationality, authenticity, exclusivity, or cultural distinction. Commercial branding concerns the deliberate incorporation of linguistic choices into the recognizable identity of a business, service, or destination. These categories are analytical distinctions rather than mutually exclusive processes. A single sign may provide practical information, project a particular identity, and contribute to commercial differentiation at the same time.

This distinction is valuable because commodification can occur through the combined operation of language and other commercial resources. A business name may be linguistically simple but acquire significance through typography, imagery, location, and the services with which it is associated. Similarly, a local-language expression may be incorporated into a tourism brand to communicate cultural specificity. In such a case, the language may become commercially valuable precisely because it is associated with a place or community. Commodification should therefore not be understood as a process confined to global languages or as a straightforward opposition between English and local languages.

Nevertheless, the commodification of linguistic resources can produce tensions. When language is selected primarily according to its perceived market value, communicative priorities may become intertwined with commercial hierarchies. Some linguistic resources may be treated as more desirable for attracting customers, while others may receive less attention in formal commercial representation. Such differentiation may affect which languages are visible in public space and the kinds of identities associated with them. The resulting hierarchy, if demonstrated empirically, would reveal how tourism markets can influence the public valuation of language.

In Labuan Bajo, these questions are relevant to the relationship between tourism development and the representation of linguistic diversity. The research should investigate whether particular languages are disproportionately associated with specific commercial

*The Commodification of Language in the Tourism Linguistic
Landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: A Preliminary Report
(David Samuel Latupeirissa & Asihlya Sandu)*

functions, whether their use varies across business types, and whether visual design reinforces distinctions among linguistic resources. It should also consider practical explanations for language selection, including the need to communicate essential information, the intended composition of the customer base, and the communicative conventions of particular industries.

Methodologically, the concept of commodification requires careful operationalization. The presence of a language on a commercial sign is an observable fact, whereas the claim that the language has been selected because of its economic value is an interpretation. Evidence of commodification becomes more persuasive when several indicators converge: the commercial function of the sign, the positioning of the language within a promotional message, the association between linguistic and visual branding, and contextual information about the intended audience. Interviews with business operators could provide additional evidence about language-selection decisions, although participants' explanations should also be interpreted in relation to their specific circumstances.

This approach prevents the analysis from reducing multilingual practices to commercial motives alone. It also allows the research to examine the relationship between language and economic value without assuming that every instance of language use produces profit or that every linguistic choice is strategically calculated. Language commodification is best treated as a socially situated process whose mechanisms and consequences must be established through empirical investigation.

3.3. Linguistic Capital and Unequal Symbolic Value

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital provides a framework for examining how languages and linguistic practices acquire different forms of social recognition and value. From this perspective, linguistic resources do not possess an identical value across all contexts. Their significance depends on the social conditions under which they are produced, recognized, and rewarded. The same language may be advantageous in one communicative environment but less relevant in another, while the perceived value of a particular linguistic form may depend on the institutional authority, social position, and expectations associated with its use.

This theoretical perspective is especially relevant to tourism because commercial communication takes place within a differentiated linguistic market. Businesses do not address a single, homogeneous audience. They may communicate with international visitors, domestic tourists, local residents, institutional representatives, and employees whose linguistic resources and expectations differ. Language selection therefore takes place within a context in which some linguistic resources may be more useful or prestigious for particular purposes than others.

English may possess considerable practical value in communication with international visitors. In some contexts, it may also be associated with global accessibility, professional service, or cosmopolitan identity. These associations can contribute to its symbolic value in the tourism market. Indonesian, meanwhile, may be particularly relevant to communication with domestic visitors and to the representation of national accessibility. Local languages may carry forms of cultural and social value that are important for community interaction, local identity, and the representation of place-specific experiences.

These values should not be treated as fixed or mutually exclusive. A language can have communicative value without possessing high symbolic prestige, and a language associated with strong local identity may also become commercially valuable when businesses incorporate it into

cultural tourism experiences. Linguistic capital is therefore relational: its value depends on the particular market, audience, and social context in which a linguistic resource is used.

Applied to the linguistic landscape of Labuan Bajo, Bourdieu's framework raises questions about how linguistic resources are visually differentiated. The research can investigate whether some languages occupy more prominent positions, appear in larger lettering, receive more space, or are associated with more prestigious commercial environments. It can also examine whether language choices differ between large commercial establishments and smaller local businesses. These observations may help identify patterns in the public recognition of languages, although the relationship between visual representation and symbolic value must be established through contextual interpretation.

An important methodological distinction concerns the difference between linguistic frequency, visual prominence, and symbolic value. Linguistic frequency refers to how often a language appears within the documented sample. Visual prominence concerns the degree of attention a language receives through its placement, size, contrast, and relationship to other elements. Symbolic value refers to the social meanings and forms of recognition associated with the language in a particular context. These dimensions may be related, but none can be used as a direct substitute for the others.

For example, a language may appear on relatively few signs yet occupy highly visible positions on major commercial displays. Another language may appear frequently in smaller signs but receive less visual emphasis within multilingual arrangements. Neither pattern alone establishes which language possesses greater symbolic capital. To make such a claim, the analysis must consider the function of the signs, the identities they construct, the audiences they address, and, where possible, the interpretations of sign producers and viewers.

The concept of linguistic capital also draws attention to the unequal capacity of social actors to make their linguistic resources visible. Businesses with greater financial resources may have more opportunities to commission professionally designed signs, select prominent locations, and maintain a consistent commercial identity. Smaller enterprises may operate under different constraints. These differences could influence the public visibility of languages, but they should not be interpreted automatically as evidence of linguistic discrimination. Economic resources, physical location, business objectives, and regulatory requirements may all contribute to differences in signage.

The relevant question is therefore whether linguistic representation reflects broader patterns of unequal recognition and, if so, how those patterns operate. A critical analysis should distinguish between the unequal visibility of languages, the unequal resources available to sign producers, and the unequal social valuation of the languages themselves. These phenomena may intersect, but they require different forms of evidence.

Another important distinction concerns symbolic capital and economic returns. A language may contribute to a business's public identity without generating measurable financial benefits. Conversely, a language may be selected for straightforward communicative reasons without carrying substantial prestige. Establishing a causal relationship between language choice and business performance would require evidence beyond signage, potentially including customer responses, business interviews, or commercial indicators.

The value of Bourdieu's framework lies in making these distinctions analytically visible. Rather than treating language choice as a neutral preference, it directs attention to the conditions under which particular linguistic resources become advantageous, recognizable, or prestigious. For Labuan Bajo, this perspective can help explain how the tourism linguistic landscape may reflect differentiated linguistic values while remaining attentive to the contextual evidence required to substantiate such interpretations.

3.4. Semiotic Organization and the Meaning of Visual Prominence

*The Commodification of Language in the Tourism Linguistic
Landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: A Preliminary Report
(David Samuel Latupeirissa & Asihlya Sandu)*

The linguistic landscape is inherently multimodal. Public signs communicate through verbal language as well as typography, colour, layout, imagery, spatial placement, and material form. Blommaert (2013) emphasizes the importance of interpreting linguistic signs within their social and spatial environments, where visible expressions acquire meaning through their relationships with other signs, physical locations, and broader social processes. This perspective makes it possible to examine tourism signage as a coordinated semiotic resource rather than a collection of written texts.

In commercial environments, the organization of visual elements can influence how information is noticed, interpreted, and associated with a particular business or destination. Text size may affect readability and attention; colour can create visual contrast or brand recognition; typography may communicate formality, informality, tradition, or modernity; and images can connect a service to particular landscapes, activities, or cultural associations. Language operates within this broader system of representation, meaning that its communicative and symbolic effects cannot always be understood independently of its visual presentation.

For the study of Labuan Bajo, this perspective is important because linguistic differences may be reinforced, moderated, or reconfigured through visual design. A multilingual sign may present Indonesian and English in similar sizes and positions, suggesting a relatively balanced approach to communication. Alternatively, one language may appear as the principal headline while another is confined to smaller explanatory text. Such an arrangement may indicate a functional division between languages, with one attracting attention and the other providing supplementary information. Whether it also reflects a hierarchy of symbolic value requires additional interpretation.

The relative position of languages can be particularly informative. A language placed at the top of a sign or within its main visual field may attract more immediate attention than one placed at the bottom or along the margins. Similarly, a language displayed in a contrasting colour or integrated into a prominent brand name may have greater visual salience than another language presented in smaller, less distinctive text. These characteristics can be documented systematically and compared across different sign types.

However, visual prominence is not a transparent measure of ideological preference. The most prominent text may identify the name of a business, display a price, communicate a safety instruction, or provide information required by regulations. Font size and placement may also reflect the physical dimensions of a sign, viewing distance, architectural constraints, or established design conventions. A critical interpretation must therefore distinguish the observed visual arrangement from the explanation offered for that arrangement.

The analysis should also consider the relationship between language and imagery. Tourism advertisements may combine linguistic expressions with photographs of landscapes, accommodation facilities, food, recreational activities, or cultural practices. These elements work together to construct a representation of the destination or service. An English-language slogan accompanied by images of an attractive landscape, for example, may position the experience within an international tourism discourse. A local-language expression accompanied by culturally specific imagery may emphasize place-based identity. These are possible interpretations rather than predetermined meanings; the actual significance of a sign depends on its content and context.

Materiality and spatial placement provide further analytical dimensions. A large permanent sign attached to a hotel entrance has a different relationship to public space from a temporary promotional banner or a small menu displayed inside a restaurant. Permanent signs may

contribute to the stable identification of a business, whereas temporary signs may respond to seasonal promotions, events, or changing commercial priorities. Their differences can affect both visibility and the temporal character of linguistic representation.

The spatial relationship between signs also matters. A single multilingual sign may display a carefully organized language hierarchy, while a street containing separate monolingual signs may produce a different overall pattern of visibility. The analysis should therefore examine individual signs and their wider surroundings. This approach can reveal whether linguistic resources are integrated within the same displays or distributed across different physical and commercial spaces.

To strengthen analytical consistency, the study should establish a systematic protocol for recording visual features. Relevant indicators include the relative size of linguistic elements, their position within the sign, the proportion of space allocated to each language, colour contrast, typographic differentiation, and the relationship between verbal text and imagery. These indicators need not be reduced to a single numerical score. Their purpose is to make visual interpretation transparent, comparable, and open to verification.

The combination of linguistic and visual analysis ultimately enables the study to examine how meaning is produced through the coordinated use of semiotic resources. It also guards against a purely text-based interpretation of language commodification. Commercial value may be communicated not through language alone but through the way linguistic expressions are embedded in a wider visual identity. This multimodal perspective is therefore essential for investigating how tourism businesses and institutions construct public representations of accessibility, prestige, local identity, and commercial appeal.

3.5. Local Languages, Linguistic Inclusion, and Tourism Development

The commodification of language in tourism raises an important question concerning the relationship between economic development and linguistic inclusion. Tourism businesses may prioritize linguistic resources that they perceive as useful for communicating with visitors or promoting services. At the same time, local languages can express community identity, cultural knowledge, social relationships, and connections to place. The challenge is to understand how these different values are represented within tourism-oriented public spaces and whether commercial priorities influence the visibility of local linguistic resources.

The visibility of a language on public signs is not equivalent to its vitality within a community. A local language may be widely used in family life, community interaction, cultural activities, and informal commerce while appearing relatively infrequently on formal tourism signage. Conversely, a language may be prominently displayed for promotional purposes without being widely used in everyday interaction. Linguistic landscape analysis must therefore distinguish the public representation of language from the broader patterns of language use and transmission.

This distinction is particularly important when examining the possible marginalization of local languages. If a language appears infrequently in the documented sample, the finding can establish limited visibility within that sample, provided that the sampling process is clearly reported. It cannot, by itself, establish that the language is socially marginalized, declining, or excluded from the local economy. Such conclusions require additional evidence concerning language practices, institutional decisions, community attitudes, and the experiences of local speakers.

The concept of marginalization should consequently be operationalized through observable and contextual indicators. Potential indicators include the absence of local languages from particular types of public information, their restricted use to decorative or supplementary functions, their consistently subordinate visual placement, or differences in how they are represented across comparable commercial settings. None of these indicators independently

proves marginalization. Their significance depends on the wider linguistic environment and the reasons underlying the observed patterns.

The distinction between instrumental and symbolic inclusion is also relevant. Instrumental inclusion concerns whether linguistic resources enable different audiences to access information and services. Symbolic inclusion concerns whether languages and the communities associated with them receive meaningful public recognition. A sign may support instrumental inclusion by providing information in English and Indonesian, yet provide little representation of local linguistic identity. Conversely, a sign may display a local-language expression prominently as part of a cultural identity while providing limited practical information for visitors unfamiliar with that language.

A comprehensive assessment of linguistic inclusion should therefore consider both dimensions. It should ask which audiences can access essential information and how different linguistic communities are represented in public space. In tourism settings, these objectives may be complementary rather than contradictory. Multilingual communication can improve accessibility while allowing local linguistic resources to remain visible in appropriate contexts.

Local languages may also acquire commercial value through their association with cultural distinctiveness and place-based identity. A locally grounded expression used in a business name, cultural display, or tourism promotion may distinguish an establishment from more standardized commercial identities. This possibility complicates a simple opposition between global and local languages. A local language may be underrepresented in some contexts yet deliberately incorporated into branding in others. Its commercial use may create opportunities for recognition, but it may also selectively represent culture according to market expectations.

The latter possibility requires careful interpretation. When linguistic and cultural resources are incorporated into tourism products, the representation of local identity may be shaped by the expectations of visitors and commercial actors. Certain expressions or cultural references may be emphasized because they are perceived as recognizable or attractive, while other aspects of local linguistic life remain less visible. Whether such selective representation occurs in Labuan Bajo must be established through the data rather than assumed in advance.

The role of local communities is therefore important. Interviews with local residents, business operators, cultural practitioners, and relevant institutions could provide insight into how languages are selected, understood, and valued. Such evidence could help determine whether local-language signs are perceived primarily as practical communication, cultural representation, commercial branding, or a combination of these functions. It could also clarify whether business decisions are influenced by customer expectations, community preferences, institutional guidelines, or available resources.

From a policy perspective, the findings may inform approaches to tourism communication that recognize linguistic diversity without imposing impractical requirements on every sign. Public information systems may prioritize clarity, accessibility, and safety, while commercial signs may allow greater flexibility in expressing business identity. Local-language visibility could be encouraged through context-sensitive practices, including place names, cultural interpretation, community information, and locally grounded tourism narratives where appropriate.

Such recommendations should be based on empirical evidence and developed with relevant stakeholders. Linguistic inclusion is not achieved simply by adding local words to signs; it also requires attention to accuracy, context, community preferences, and the meanings attributed to the language by its speakers. The objective should be to recognize local languages as meaningful

social resources rather than treating them exclusively as decorative elements or marketing instruments.

Ultimately, the relationship between tourism and linguistic diversity should not be framed as an unavoidable choice between economic development and cultural preservation. Tourism can create pressures that privilege certain languages, but it can also create opportunities for local linguistic resources to gain wider recognition. The task of critical linguistic landscape research is to identify the conditions under which these different outcomes emerge and to provide evidence that supports more inclusive decisions about public communication.

3.6. Theoretical Integration and Original Contribution

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating linguistic landscape research, language commodification, linguistic capital, and semiotic landscape analysis into a unified framework for investigating tourism-related language practices. Each perspective addresses a different analytical dimension, but their combination provides a more comprehensive account of how linguistic resources are represented and potentially valued within commercial public spaces.

Linguistic landscape research establishes the empirical foundation by identifying the languages visible on signs, the locations in which they occur, and the communicative functions they perform. Landry and Bourhis (1997) provide the distinction between informational and symbolic functions, while Shohamy and Gorter (2009) situate linguistic visibility within wider questions of language, identity, and social organization. These perspectives enable the researcher to describe the distribution of linguistic resources without reducing signs to isolated textual units.

Heller's (2010) theory of language commodification adds an economic dimension by directing attention to the conditions under which linguistic resources become incorporated into market-oriented activity. It allows the researcher to ask whether language is used primarily to communicate information, to construct a commercially attractive identity, or to perform several functions simultaneously. Crucially, this framework requires an investigation of the relationship between linguistic representation and economic practices rather than an assumption that all commercial language use constitutes commodification.

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital introduces the question of differential recognition and value. It helps explain why particular languages may be perceived as advantageous within specific markets and how their value depends on the social conditions under which they are used. In the present study, this perspective informs the analysis of linguistic prominence, commercial distinction, and potential inequalities in the public recognition of languages.

Blommaert's (2013) semiotic landscape approach complements these frameworks by emphasizing the multimodal and spatial dimensions of representation. It directs attention to how language interacts with typography, colour, imagery, layout, and physical placement. Through this perspective, the analysis can examine how commercial meanings are constructed through coordinated semiotic resources rather than through language alone.

The integration of these perspectives produces a multilevel analytical model comprising four interconnected dimensions. First, linguistic selection and distribution. This dimension identifies the languages and linguistic forms used in public space. It examines which languages appear, where they occur, and what communicative functions they perform. Second, semiotic organization and spatial visibility. This dimension investigates how languages are arranged and differentiated through visual design and physical placement. It considers the relationship between linguistic prominence, commercial context, and the organization of public space.

Third, symbolic and potential economic valuation. This dimension examines whether linguistic choices are associated with particular forms of accessibility, prestige, cultural

distinction, or market positioning. It distinguishes the observable representation of language from claims about its economic consequences.

Fourth, ideological and social interpretation. This dimension considers how the observed patterns may reflect broader understandings of globalization, tourism development, linguistic hierarchy, local identity, and inclusion. Interpretations at this level must be supported by evidence from the preceding dimensions and, where available, supplementary contextual data.

These dimensions can be represented conceptually as follows: Linguistic resources → Semiotic and spatial representation → Symbolic and potential economic valuation → Ideological and social implications. The sequence is analytical rather than strictly linear. Ideological assumptions and market expectations may influence linguistic selection from the beginning, while the meanings attributed to a sign may change according to its audience and setting. The model should therefore be understood as a framework for organizing relationships among different forms of evidence, not as a causal chain in which every stage necessarily produces the next.

This distinction is central to the study's methodological integrity. A language's visual prominence does not prove that it possesses greater economic value, and its commercial use does not establish that it generates measurable profit. Likewise, the limited visibility of a local language does not independently demonstrate social marginalization. Each interpretation requires an appropriate evidential basis.

The integration also clarifies the relationship between the study's empirical and theoretical contributions. Empirically, the research will document linguistic and semiotic patterns in selected tourism-related spaces in Labuan Bajo. Theoretically, it will use those patterns to investigate how public linguistic representation may intersect with commercial value and symbolic power. The contribution is therefore not simply the identification of languages in a relatively underexamined location, but the development of a context-sensitive approach to interpreting the economic and ideological dimensions of their visibility.

The geographical focus is significant because it brings an Indonesian tourism destination into wider discussions of linguistic globalization. Research on linguistic landscapes can contribute to international scholarship when it demonstrates how established theoretical concepts operate in specific contexts and when it identifies contextual factors that complicate existing assumptions. Labuan Bajo provides an opportunity to investigate these questions in a tourism environment where local identity, national communication, and international orientation may intersect.

However, geographical novelty alone is insufficient to establish a strong scholarly contribution. The study's originality must ultimately be demonstrated through the empirical material, the precision of its analytical procedures, and the quality of its engagement with relevant literature. Its strongest contribution will emerge if the data reveal patterns that deepen understanding of how language is represented and valued in tourism settings, including patterns that challenge rather than merely confirm expectations concerning English, commercial prestige, and local-language visibility.

3.7. Methodological Limitations and Directions for Empirical Validation

The proposed research design provides a framework for investigating language commodification in Labuan Bajo, but several methodological limitations must be addressed to ensure that the conclusions remain proportionate to the evidence. These limitations concern sampling, interpretation, the relationship between visible signs and social practices, and the

assessment of economic consequences. Addressing them explicitly will strengthen the study's reliability and clarify its contribution to critical sociolinguistics.

The first limitation concerns sample size and representativeness. A collection of 50–150 visual items may provide sufficient material for an exploratory qualitative analysis, particularly when the objective is to examine recurring patterns and interpret selected cases in depth. However, this range does not automatically guarantee representative coverage of Labuan Bajo's entire linguistic landscape. The adequacy of the sample depends on the spatial distribution of data collection, the range of sign types included, the diversity of commercial settings, and the criteria used to select individual items.

Purposive sampling is appropriate when the study seeks to capture variation in linguistic and visual practices rather than estimate population parameters. Nevertheless, the researcher should document the sampling procedure carefully, identify the locations covered, and explain the criteria for including or excluding signs. If the data are collected primarily from prominent tourism corridors or established businesses, the resulting analysis should be described as an account of those settings rather than as a comprehensive representation of the entire destination.

A related issue concerns the unit of analysis. A single business may display several signs, while a single sign may contain multiple languages, slogans, and visual elements. Counting each language occurrence, each sign, and each business as equivalent units can produce different results. The study should therefore distinguish between the sign as a physical object, the linguistic item as a unit of analysis, and the business or institution as a producer of signage. Clear definitions are essential for preventing misleading comparisons.

The second limitation concerns the interpretation of linguistic and visual evidence. Photographs provide direct evidence of visible language and design, but they offer only limited access to the motivations of sign producers or the interpretations of audiences. An English business name may be intended to communicate international orientation, but it may also reflect personal preference, established branding conventions, or the influence of an external designer. Similarly, a local-language expression may be selected for cultural significance, familiarity, commercial distinction, or several reasons simultaneously.

The researcher must therefore avoid inferring intention solely from the appearance of a sign. Where possible, interviews with business operators, sign designers, or institutional representatives can help clarify the considerations underlying language selection. Such interviews should be treated as complementary evidence rather than definitive explanations. Participants may provide retrospective accounts, offer socially desirable responses, or describe only part of the decision-making process. Their statements should consequently be compared with the visual and contextual evidence.

The third limitation concerns the operationalization of linguistic dominance and visual prominence. These concepts are related but analytically distinct. Dominance may refer to the relative frequency of a language across a sample, its distribution across sign types, or its prominence within individual signs. Visual prominence concerns the attention a language receives through design and placement. Without explicit definitions, the term *dominance* risks becoming an imprecise label for several different phenomena.

A more rigorous analysis should establish separate indicators for linguistic frequency, sign-level language combinations, and visual hierarchy. For example, the researcher could record whether a sign is monolingual or multilingual, identify the relative order of languages, document differences in font size and placement, and note the proportion of the display occupied by each linguistic component where this can be assessed consistently. Qualitative descriptions may be sufficient for the study's interpretive goals, although any numerical comparisons should be based on clearly defined coding rules.

The reliability of these judgments can be improved through a coding manual and the review of a subset of the material by an independent researcher. Ambiguous cases should be

documented, and revisions to coding decisions should be recorded. These procedures help distinguish systematic patterns from individual interpretive preferences.

The fourth limitation concerns the relationship between public representation and everyday language practices. Linguistic landscape data reveal what is visible in a particular place and time, not the full range of languages spoken by its inhabitants. The absence of a local language from tourism signage may indicate limited representation in that setting, but it does not establish that the language is unimportant in community life or that its speakers experience discrimination. Likewise, the presence of English on signs does not necessarily demonstrate that English is the dominant language of everyday interaction.

This limitation can be addressed through contextual observation and, where feasible, supplementary interviews with local residents and tourism stakeholders. These methods can provide information about language use, perceptions of linguistic prestige, and the meanings attached to particular signs. Nevertheless, the study should maintain a clear distinction between evidence about visible representation and evidence about broader sociolinguistic conditions.

The fifth limitation concerns the inference of economic effects. The study's theoretical framework identifies ways in which linguistic resources may acquire symbolic and commercial value, but photographs alone cannot demonstrate that a language choice increases revenue, attracts more customers, or improves business performance. Such claims involve causal relationships that require additional forms of evidence.

Future research could investigate these relationships through interviews with business operators, surveys of visitor perceptions, or comparative studies of commercial communication and customer responses. Research involving business-performance indicators would require appropriate access to reliable data and a design capable of addressing alternative explanations. Until such evidence is available, the present study should discuss economic value as a potential interpretation of linguistic practices rather than as a measured outcome.

The sixth limitation concerns the temporal character of the linguistic landscape. Signs can change in response to business openings and closures, seasonal tourism, advertising campaigns, renovations, and shifts in institutional communication. A single fieldwork period captures the visible environment at a particular moment. It cannot establish whether observed patterns are stable, increasing, or declining over time.

Longitudinal documentation could address this issue by revisiting selected locations and recording changes in sign composition, language choice, and visual design. Such research could reveal whether linguistic representation responds to changing tourism conditions or whether particular patterns persist across different periods. It could also distinguish temporary promotional practices from more established forms of commercial communication.

Finally, the interpretation of local-language visibility requires contextual sensitivity. Local languages should not be treated as homogeneous categories or as inherently opposed to global languages. The linguistic resources associated with a destination may be internally diverse, and different communities may assign different meanings to the same expression. Accurate identification, appropriate contextualization, and consultation with knowledgeable speakers may therefore be necessary when interpreting local-language items.

These limitations define a research agenda rather than undermine the value of the proposed study. They clarify the difference between what the data can directly establish, what can be inferred through theoretical interpretation, and what requires additional investigation. By maintaining these distinctions, the study can offer a credible account of linguistic representation

in Labuan Bajo while providing a foundation for broader research on language commodification, tourism, and linguistic inclusion.

In methodological terms, the most defensible approach is to treat the linguistic landscape as a source of evidence about public representation and as a starting point for investigating the social and economic processes associated with it. The study's conclusions should emerge from the documented patterns, the consistency of the analytical procedures, and the strength of the contextual evidence. Such an approach will allow the research to contribute to critical sociolinguistics without overstating the explanatory power of signage alone.

4. Conclusion

This manuscript presents a preliminary analytical framework for examining the commodification of language in the tourism linguistic landscape of Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. It addresses the need to connect the description of visible languages with systematic analysis of sign function, visual organization, and the possible symbolic or commercial meanings of linguistic choices. The study combines linguistic landscape research with Heller's account of language commodification, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and Blommaert's semiotic landscape perspective.

The planned qualitative descriptive-critical design aligns the research questions with the data and procedures: signs will be documented photographically and contextually; languages, sign functions, and visual features will be coded; and patterns will then be interpreted through the four theoretical perspectives. This sequence is intended to reduce the gap between description and critical interpretation and to make clear which claims arise directly from the visual data and which remain theoretical interpretations.

The proposed contribution is to move beyond a simple inventory of languages and establish a transparent method for investigating how linguistic choices are visually represented and may become associated with commercial positioning, symbolic value, and local identity. The three research questions provide the organizing structure for this analysis, while the coding protocol identifies the evidence required to address each question.

Because fieldwork and systematic coding have not yet been completed, this report does not establish which languages are most frequent or visually prominent, whether any language is marginalized, or whether particular language choices produce commercial benefits. These questions can only be addressed after the proposed data have been collected and analysed. Any claim about business performance or audience response would require supplementary evidence beyond photographs and contextual observation.

The next stage is therefore empirical implementation of the protocol, followed by a revision of the discussion so that each subsection engages directly with observed patterns and representative sign examples. In this form, the study can provide a context-sensitive account of language and tourism in eastern Indonesia while remaining cautious about causal claims and attentive to the relationship between visitor accessibility and recognition of local linguistic resources.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the *TIJOSSW* for providing a valuable platform for scholarly communication and academic contribution. We also appreciate the editors and reviewers for their time, attention, and constructive feedback, which help strengthen the quality of academic publications.

References

- Blommaert, J. (2013). Ethnography, superdiversity and linguistic landscapes: Chronicles of complexity. *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090419>
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Heller, M. (2010). The commodification of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 39, 101–114. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104951>
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X970161002>
- Shohamy, E., & Gorter, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*. Routledge.