



Language Contestation In Garuda Wisnu Kencana Tourism Area

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Abstract

This study investigates language contestation in the linguistic landscape of Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK), a cultural tourism destination in Bali that serves both local and international visitors. The research aims to identify the types of signs in GWK and to analyze how Balinese, Indonesian, and English are represented and contested. Using a descriptive qualitative method with observation and photography, 168 signs were documented across three zones: Street Theatre (71), Kencana Souvenir (51), and Commercial Strip (46) during May–June 2025. The findings show that commercial signs (37.5%) and notice signs (36.3%) dominate, followed by name signs (19%) and mixed signs (7.1%). English is the most visible language, appearing in 43.5% of monolingual signs and frequently in bilingual Indonesian–English signs (41.7%). Indonesian is mainly used in regulatory signs, while Balinese functions symbolically with minimal monolingual presence. Zone-based variations reveal that Kencana Souvenir is strongly English-dominant, Commercial Strip highlights Indonesian in regulatory functions, and Street Theatre shows a more balanced distribution. The study concludes that tourism-driven commercialization shapes linguistic hierarchies and calls for signage policies that strengthen the visibility of local language and cultural identity.

Keywords: *Linguistic Landscape; Language Contestation; Multilingualism; Tourism; Bali.*

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INTRODUCTION

Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) Cultural Park, one of Bali's major tourism icons, is located in Jimbaran, Badung. The park is anchored by the monumental Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue, which was inaugurated by Indonesian President Joko Widodo (commonly known as Jokowi) on 22 September 2018 after nearly three decades of development (Asdhiana, 2018). The statue and surrounding complex occupy approximately 60 hectares and the monument itself reaches about 121 meters in height, making it one of the world's largest statues (Kapela, 2018). The inauguration carried cultural and political significance, consolidating the statue's role as a symbol of national pride (Sastrawan, 2019). In addition to the statue, GWK offers performances, gardens, and various entertainment facilities (Octaviani & Kesuma, 2024).

As a tourism area, GWK is designed to showcase Balinese culture in the form of recreational tourism. The park's facilities are strategically organized to create a rich tourism experience for both domestic and international visitors, making GWK a suitable research site. This study focuses on three main zones within the park: the Street Theatre, the Commercial Strip, and the Kencana Souvenir shop. The Street Theatre serves as the main entrance and promenade, featuring cultural performances, retail stalls, and dining areas. The Commercial Strip contains a concentration of restaurants, cafés, and souvenir shops, reflecting the commercial character of the park. The Kencana Souvenir shop offers curated merchandise and Balinese handicrafts, representing the symbolic dimension of cultural branding. Together, these zones capture GWK's cultural, commercial, and symbolic functions.

GWK's significance as a tourism destination is further supported by its role as a space for cultural preservation and global engagement. The park regularly hosts traditional Balinese performances, art exhibitions, and international events, positioning itself as a bridge between local heritage and global tourism. This dual purpose is represented in its infrastructure, signage, and services, all of which reflect an intentional blending of Balinese cultural elements with global tourism standards.

Despite being one of Bali's landmark, Garuda Wisnu Kencana has received little attention from linguistic research, particularly within the framework of linguistic landscape (LL). Previous studies on GWK have focused on tourism, architecture, or business (Verheijen & Putra, 2019; Ardhiati, 2017; Octaviani & Kesuma, 2024; Marta & Karolina, 2022; Asmara et al., 2024). Yet, as an iconic tourism site that attracts thousands of domestic and international visitors daily, GWK is linguistically significant because it must accommodate diverse audiences through its signage. While LL studies in Indonesia have examined other tourism spaces, such as shopping malls in Jakarta or historical sites in Bandung (Wahyuni & Purnomo, 2023; Azzahro et al., 2025), GWK remains an underexplored site. Investigating its signage is therefore essential to understand how different languages are displayed, prioritized, and contested in a cultural and tourism environment.

In this view, public signs become arenas where languages compete for visibility and authority, shaped not only by the communicative needs of visitors but also by market demands and power dynamics. The English language, for example, is used in these spaces not to benefit local people, but because it is commercially necessary for tourism and global visitors. This creates a tension between the symbolic presence of local languages, such as Balinese or Indonesian, and the practical, commercial function of English.

Thus, this research presents two research questions: (1) What are the types of public signs in Garuda Wisnu Kencana tourism area? and (2) How does language contestation manifest in the public space of Garuda Wisnu Kencana? Based on these research questions, this study aims to explore the types of public signs with various uses, and to investigate the contestation of local,

national, and international languages in GWK in relation to ideology and identity. In this paper, we show the linguistic dynamics at the iconic tourism site in Bali.

Theoretical Framework

In tourism destinations such as GWK, signage functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of cultural identity and power relations. The linguistic landscape (LL), defined as the visible display of languages in public spaces (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), offers insights into the relationship between language, identity, and power. In multilingual environments, signs do not simply inform but they also symbolize which languages and, by extension, which communities are dominant or marginalized (Gorter, 2006). This process can be understood through the concept of language contestation, where languages compete for authority and space in the public sphere (Shohamy, 2012; Edwards, 2009). This contest is particularly evident in tourism, where local languages often coexist with or are challenged by English as a global lingua franca (Agha, 2007). Given GWK's dual role as a site of Balinese cultural heritage and an international tourist attraction, it offers a unique setting to examine how Balinese, Indonesian, and English interact and contested through public signage.

Studies at other sacred and tourist sites in Indonesia have demonstrated this clearly. For example, research at the Batukau temple in Bali found that the local Balinese script is treated as symbolic, while Indonesian and English are used for practical, informational purposes (Mulyawan et al., 2022). Similarly, at Borobudur Temple, the national language (Indonesian) and the global language (English) dominate the public signs, leading to the marginalization of the local Javanese language and script (K. Artawa et al., 2023). Given GWK's dual role as a site of Balinese cultural heritage and an international tourist attraction, it offers a unique setting to examine how Balinese, Indonesian, and English interact and contested through public signage.

The study draws on linguistic landscape research to examine how languages interact in public signage. Previous studies have shown that signage in tourism spaces often reflects the need to serve both local and international audiences. For instance, Diana et al. (2022) found that object labels in the Keraton Sumenep Museum primarily used Indonesian to accommodate local visitors, while English appeared secondarily for foreign tourists. Such findings underscore how language use in tourism spaces reflects not only communication needs but also broader questions of visibility and audience orientation.

In a tourism destination as dynamic as GWK, where multiple cultural, national, and commercial interests intersect, the use of language in public signage is not merely about providing information, it also reflects deeper sociocultural and economic hierarchies. Benu et al. (2023) conceptualize language contestation as the phenomenon where the dominance of a language gradually shifts due to the increasing presence of previously marginalized languages, often driven by socio-economic factors.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the linguistic landscape (LL) of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) Tourism Area in Bali, Indonesia. A qualitative design was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of language use in public spaces, focusing on the meanings and symbolic roles of signs rather than on numerical patterns alone (Merriam, 2009). This approach is particularly suited for exploring language contestation, as it allows for the examination of how different languages interact, compete, and negotiate visibility in a multilingual environment.

This study adopts the definition of linguistic landscape proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) as the visibility and salience of languages on public signage. The signs were categorized using Mulyawan's (2023) classification of sign types, while Shohamy's (2012) idea of language contestation was used as the main perspective for interpreting how languages compete for space and authority in GWK.

This study examines language contestation in the Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) Tourism Area by exploring how different languages appear and compete for attention in public signs. In this research, contestation refers to a language's visibility, as indicated by placement, font size, and frequency within signs (Shohamy, 2012). The focus is limited to publicly visible signs within GWK (e.g., commercial boards, information signs, banners, and promotional materials). Each sign is treated as one unit of analysis, following the principle that even signs carrying the same message are considered separate units when placed in different locations. By looking at these signs, the study aims to show how English, Indonesian, and Balinese are used together and how their roles differ in the tourism setting of GWK.

Research Site

Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) is a 60-hectare cultural park in Jimbaran, Bali, that combines monumental architecture, cultural shows, shopping areas, and dining facilities. The site draws both domestic and international tourists, making it a linguistically diverse space. For this study, three areas within GWK were chosen: (1) Street Theatre, the main entrance area with heavy visitor traffic, retail shops, and cultural displays; (2) Commercial Strip, a row of restaurants, cafes, and souvenirs shops; and (3) Kencana Souvenir, a large gift shop selling Balinese themed products and exclusive GWK merchandise. These areas were purposively selected because they represent high tourist activity, contain different types of signs (name sign, notice sign, and commercial sign, and mix sign), and bring together both cultural and commercial activities. This variety makes them ideal for examining how languages appear and interact in GWK's tourism landscape.



Figure 1 Map of Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park

Instrument

A digital camera was used for photographing and capturing images of public signs in written languages that align with the research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using the observation method with the support of a photography technique. Observation, as defined by Gorman and Clayton (2005), involves the structured recording of observable phenomena in their natural setting, while Kothari (2004) emphasizes its role in allowing the researcher to gather information directly rather than relying on participant responses. Following this approach, the researcher conducted direct observation during May and June 2025 and photographed all visible signs in the three study areas. Photography was selected as the primary tool because it preserves the spatial and visual context of signage, which is essential in LL research (Erikha, 2018). This study followed the “one single sign” principle introduced by Cenoz and Gorter (2006), which treats each individual sign as a unit of analysis. All signs were photographed using a digital camera, ensuring the authenticity of the data. Field notes were also recorded to document each sign’s location, condition, and placement.

A total of 168 signs were documented during data collection, consisting of 46 signs from the Commercial Strip, 71 from Street Theatre, and 51 from Kencana Souvenir. The signs included notice boards, information boards, direction signs, commercial boards, and place signs.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed in three stages. First, each sign was classified using Mulyawan’s (2023) typology, which distinguishes four categories: name sign, notice sign, commercial sign, and mix sign. Second, the languages used on each sign were identified and their level of dominance was determined. A language was considered dominant if it appeared in larger font size, occupied a more noticeable position, or occurred more frequently within the sign. Other

languages were noted as secondary when they served a supporting or decorative role. Contestation was then examined through these visibility features (placement, font size, and frequency), following Shohamy’s (2012) concept of language contestation.

To ensure reliability, all photographs and field notes were reviewed at the end of each data collection session to check for completeness and accuracy. Any unclear or unreadable signs were revisited and re-photographed where possible. The classification process was conducted carefully and reviewed twice to minimize subjective bias. As GWK is a public tourism site, formal permission for data collection was not required beyond the purchase of an entry ticket. Only publicly visible signs were photographed, and no personal or sensitive information was included in the dataset. This study is limited to three areas within GWK (Street Theatre, Commercial Strip, and Kencana Souvenir) and to signs documented during May–June 2025. The findings therefore reflect the linguistic landscape of that specific time and place and may not capture variations occurring in other parts of the park or at different times.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of **168 signs** were documented across the three purposively selected research areas within the Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) cultural park. As shown in **Table 1**, the Street Theatre served as the primary data source with 71 signs (42.3%), followed by the Kencana Souvenir shop with 51 signs (30.3%), and the Commercial Strip with 46 signs (27.4%). This distribution reflects the high volume of visitor activity and the density of signage in these key zones.

Table 1. Signs Distribution Across Areas

Research Area	Count	Percentage
Street Theatre	71	42.3%
Kencana Souvenir	51	30.3%
Commercial Strip	46	27.4%
TOTAL	168	100%

The analysis of all 168 signs revealed that the overall linguistic landscape of GWK is dominated by two main categories: **commercial signs** and **notice signs**. As detailed in **Table 2**, commercial signs represent the largest category with 63 signs (37.5%), followed closely by notice signs with 61 (36.3%). Name signs appear less frequently with 32 signs (19.0%), while mixed-function signs are the smallest group with 12 (7.1%). This finding is consistent with GWK’s dual function as both a heavily commercialized tourism site and a highly regulated public space. The high proportion of commercial and notice signs indicates that the park’s signage system is designed primarily for promotional and regulatory communication rather than for symbolic place-naming. Meanwhile, the relatively smaller share of name signs reflects that fixed place identifiers (e.g., building names) are less numerous compared to the ongoing production of promotional and regulatory boards. The small proportion of mix signs suggests that most signage in GWK has a clear, single purpose, either to sell or to inform, rather than combining functions.

Table 2. Sign Types

Sign Types	Total Data Amount	Percentage
Commercial sign	63	37.5%

Notice sign	61	36.3%
Name sign	31	19%
Mix sign	13	7.1%
TOTAL	168	100%

A more detailed analysis reveals a distinct distribution of sign types across each research area, highlighting the unique purpose of each zone. As shown in **Table 3**, the **Commercial Strip** was dominated by **notice signs** (26), while only five commercial signs were found. This finding is interesting as it shows that even in an area designated for commerce, the need for management to regulate visitor behavior and provide directions remains a priority. In contrast, the **Kencana Souvenir** shop was heavily dominated by **commercial signs** (33), reflecting its core function as a commercial space. The **Street Theatre** showed a more balanced distribution, with a high concentration of both commercial signs (25) and notice signs (25), reflecting its role as a mixed-use space for cultural performances, retail, and public transit. This difference across areas shows that the linguistic landscape used at GWK is not the same everywhere, but has a variety of different function and characteristics across a space.

Table 3. Distribution of Classified Signs Across Areas

Sign Type	Street Theatre	Kencana Souvenir	Commercial Strip	Total Data/ Percentage
Commercial sign	25	33	5	63 (37.5%)
Notice sign	25	10	26	61 (36.3%)
Name sign	14	7	10	31 (19%)
Mix sign	7	1	5	13 (7.1%)
TOTAL	71 (42.3%)	51 (30.3%)	46 (27.4%)	168 (100%)

Figure 2. Commercial Sign

Commercial signs in GWK, despite variations in grammatical form, all function to promote



Figure 2 A



Figure 2 B



Figure 2 C

products and services to visitors. As seen in the provided examples, these signs are designed to

convey a clear commercial intent. The "Bundling Promo" sign in the Street Theatre and the "Limited Items Promo" sign in the Kencana Souvenir shop both function to persuade consumers to make a purchase by highlighting special offers and new products. Similarly, the "Jendela Bali" sign, located in the Commercial Strip, promotes a restaurant by providing information about its services and menu. This consistency in purpose demonstrates that commercial signs are a key part of GWK's linguistic landscape, serving as functional tools for economic activity and visitor engagement.

Figure 2. Notice Sign

Notice signs are a key part of GWK's linguistic landscape, serving to regulate visitor



Figure 3 A

Figure 3 B

Figure 3 C

behavior and provide essential non-commercial information. In the provided examples, these signs are designed to convey a clear, direct message to the public. The bilingual sign with the phrases "Dilarang Menginjak Rumput" and "Do Not Step on the Grass" functions to manage visitor conduct. Similarly, the monolingual English sign "CCTV CAMERA IN USE" and the bilingual sign "Mohon Membuang Sampah Pada Tempatnya" and "Please Do Not Litter" both serve to ensure safety and maintain the park's environment. This consistency in purpose demonstrates that notice signs are a key part of GWK's management, serving as functional tools for ensuring order for all visitors.

Figure 3. Name Sign



Figure 4 A

Figure 4 B

Figure 4 C

The three Name Signs, "5 Lima Art Cafe & Gallery," "Kencana Souvenir," and "Amphitheater" provide clear examples of how signs function as identity markers within GWK. The signs, each located in a different area of the park, serve to identify the name and purpose of a specific building or place. As per the classification by Mulyawan (2023), their primary function is

to provide factual, fixed information for navigation. This demonstrates how Name Signs contribute to the visual and linguistic landscape by making specific locations easily recognizable to visitors. Figure 4. Mix Sign

Mixed-function signs, though the least common type, are characterized by their



combination of different communicative purposes. As seen in the provided examples, these signs blend identity-marking with promotional content. The "Kencana Photo Studio" sign, for instance, identifies the business while also using a persuasive tagline to attract customers. Similarly, the "Balinese Egg Painting Exhibition" sign functions as both an identity marker for the event and an informational tool, explaining the exhibition's content. Lastly, the "Beranda" restaurant sign combines a fixed name with a commercial description of its service, demonstrating a dual role. This mixture of functions shows that in a dynamic space like GWK, some signs must serve multiple purposes to effectively communicate with visitors.

Language Contestation

As presented in the Results, the linguistic landscape of GWK is a dynamic and contested space, where the visual presence of different languages reflects the park’s complex identity. The findings show a clear, uneven relationship between English, Indonesian, and Balinese, with each language competing for communicative power and symbolic representation.

The analysis reveals a hierarchy of dominance tied to visual prominence such as font size, placement, and frequency. English appears most frequently, particularly in monolingual commercial signage, establishing it as the primary language for engaging with a global audience. Indonesian appears most strongly in notice and bilingual signs, maintaining its role as the national language and ensuring accessibility for local visitors. Balinese, while present, serves primarily a symbolic function, representing cultural authenticity rather than practical communication.

Table 4. Language presence and combinations

Type	Language	Number	%
Monolingual	Indonesian	3	1.79%
	English	73	43.45%
	Balinese	1	0.60%
Bilingual	Indonesian-English	70	41.67%
	English-Japanese	1	0.60%
	English-Balinese	3	1.79%
	English-Italian	1	0.60%
Multilingual	English-Indonesian-Balinese	4	2.38%
	English-Indonesian-Italian	1	0.60%
	English-Japanese-Korean	1	0.60%
	English-Indonesian-Korean	1	0.60%

	English-Indonesian-Mandarin	2	1.19%
	English-Indonesian-Japanese	2	1.19%
	English-Indonesian-Japanese-Korean	1	0.60%
	English-Indonesian-Balinese-Mandarin	1	0.60%
	Indonesian-English-Japanese-Mandarin	3	1.79%
Total		168	(100%)

The monolingual landscape at GWK is heavily dominated by English, particularly in commercial contexts such as product promotions and service boards (see Figure 2A–B; Figure 3B; Figure 5C). This reflects English’s role as the *de facto* language of global tourism, enabling international visitors to easily access key information without relying on translation. The dominance of English-only signage also suggests that businesses prioritize global visibility over local inclusivity, positioning their products within an international rather than domestic market frame. By contrast, monolingual Indonesian signs are extremely limited, often appearing only in regulatory contexts where legal authority must be signaled to a local audience. The single monolingual Balinese sign observed underscores its role as symbolic rather than communicative, intended more as a cultural marker than as a tool of interaction. These patterns reveal how monolingual signs function as a direct indicator of linguistic prestige: English for economic power, Indonesian for official authority, and Balinese for symbolic authenticity.

The contestation between English and Indonesian is most intense within the bilingual signs, which represent a large portion of the park's signage. While English often wins the battle for dominance here, Indonesian consistently puts up a significant fight (see Figure 3A, 3C). However, Indonesian frequently contests this dominance. On many signs, it appears in a size and placement that is either equal to or slightly smaller than English, maintaining a strong, authoritative presence (see Figure 4A-B). In some cases, as seen in the Beranda restaurant sign, Indonesian takes the primary position as the name of the establishment, while English provides the detailed commercial description below it. These intricate dynamic highlights that while English is the language of global commerce, Indonesian remains a vital contender that signifies national identity and cultural authenticity.

Multilingual signs, though a small minority, add a further dimension to GWK’s linguistic landscape. These include combinations of three or more languages such as Balinese, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Mandarin, alongside English and Indonesian (see Figure 5A–B). Their communicative role is not primarily functional, visitors are unlikely to rely on these signs for detailed information, but symbolic. Their presence is a gesture of welcome to specific international tourist groups, but they are not a significant part of the park's primary communicative strategy. They reinforce the park's identity as a destination that acknowledges a diverse, global audience.

These patterns vary across GWK's three main areas, showing how linguistic choices are made for each zone. In the Street Theatre, the contest is balanced, with English dominating on monolingual signs but sharing equal visibility with Indonesian on bilingual signs, fitting its dual role for both locals and tourists. In the Commercial Strip, Indonesian is more visible on bilingual signs for local food and goods, emphasizing a sense of authenticity within this commercial zone.

In the Kencana Souvenir shop, however, English is highly dominant on almost all signs, which clearly shows this area's focus on international visitors.

The linguistic landscape of GWK is a powerful symbol of its complex identity. It is not simply a passive reflection of Bali's multilingualism but an active battleground where English and Indonesian compete for visual and communicative authority. This ongoing contestation ultimately defines the park as a place that is at once deeply rooted in its national and cultural heritage while simultaneously and strategically open to the world.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of 168 signs at GWK reveals that commercial and notice signs are the most dominant types, reflecting the site's commercial orientation as well as managerial regulation. English emerges as the most prominent language, appearing both as monolingual and as a key element of bilingual signage, while Indonesian is primarily visible in regulatory and notice signs, and Balinese plays a largely symbolic role with very limited monolingual presence. The contestation between these languages is visible in the hierarchy of font size, placement, and frequency: English prevails in commercial visibility, Indonesian asserts authority in regulatory contexts, and Balinese serves as a cultural identity marker. Patterns also differ across zones: Kencana Souvenir is highly internationalized and English-dominant, Commercial Strip shows stronger use of Indonesian in regulation, and Street Theatre presents a more balanced language distribution. These findings have both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, they suggest the need for GWK management and local businesses to enforce bilingual standards (Indonesian–English), increase the presence of Balinese language and script, and ensure more inclusive visual representation of languages. Theoretically, the study demonstrates how tourism-driven commercialization shapes linguistic hierarchies in public spaces. Nevertheless, this research is limited to three zones and a short observation period; future studies should expand the coverage, adopt longitudinal methods, and incorporate interviews with visitors and management to provide deeper insight into language policy and its impact on visitor experience.

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