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Negotiating Language and Culture: A Qualitative Study of English Learning in Senggigi's Multicultural Tourism Setting

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana anggota komunitas di kawasan wisata Senggigi, Lombok Barat, menegosiasikan bahasa dan budaya dalam interaksi pariwisata multikultural. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan 24 partisipan yang terdiri atas pedagang lokal, pemandu wisata, staf hotel, dan pelajar bahasa Inggris. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan pencatatan lapangan selama enam bulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa partisipan secara aktif mengembangkan strategi komunikasi lintas budaya, termasuk code-switching, simplifikasi bahasa, dan penggunaan isyarat nonverbal. Pengalaman interkultural terbukti mendorong motivasi belajar bahasa Inggris secara organik dan kontekstual. Tantangan utama yang muncul meliputi hambatan linguistik, kesenjangan budaya, dan keterbatasan akses terhadap pembelajaran formal. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa konteks pariwisata multikultural dapat berfungsi sebagai ruang pembelajaran bahasa yang autentik dan efektif bagi masyarakat lokal.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism stands as one of the most dynamic intercultural arenas where language and culture intersect in complex and often unpredictable ways. In destinations that attract diverse international visitors, the local community is thrust into continuous cross-cultural contact, necessitating rapid adaptation in both communicative and cultural behavior. Senggigi, situated along the northwestern coastline of Lombok Island in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, represents precisely such a setting—a vibrant tourism corridor where Sasak, Balinese, Javanese, and numerous international communities converge on a daily basis (Sulfardin et al., 2024).

The linguistic landscape of Senggigi is particularly compelling. Local residents, many of whom have not undergone formal English instruction beyond the secondary level, are nevertheless expected to communicate effectively with tourists from English-speaking nations, Europe, Australia, and East Asia (Khoiruddin, 2025). This expectation creates a distinctive form of language socialization in which the tourism environment itself becomes an informal classroom. Studies on language learning in naturalistic settings have long acknowledged the role of authentic communicative needs in accelerating second language

acquisition (Lu et al., 2021). However, the specific dynamics of this process within Indonesian rural tourism communities remain underexplored (Permana, 2025).

Culture, too, plays an indispensable role in shaping these interactions. The Sasak community of Lombok possesses distinct cultural values, religious practices predominantly rooted in Islam, and social norms that may diverge significantly from those of Western tourists (Pratama et al., 2024). Navigating these differences demands not only linguistic competence but also a sophisticated form of cultural intelligence (Karimova et al., 2024). Prior research has examined intercultural communication in various tourism contexts (Setiawan, 2023), yet few studies have specifically addressed how marginalized or rural communities negotiate cultural identity while simultaneously engaging in language learning (Abrar & Widiati, 2024).

This study therefore addresses a critical gap by investigating the intersection of language negotiation, cultural adaptation, and English language learning in Senggigi's multicultural tourism context. Guided by sociocultural theory (Lagarense, 2011) and the concept of legitimate peripheral participation(Lave & Wenger, 2001), the research explores how community members construct meaning and develop language competence through daily tourism interactions. The following research questions structure this inquiry: (1) How do Senggigi community members negotiate language and culture in tourism interactions? (2) How do intercultural experiences shape their English learning? (3) What communication strategies are used in multicultural encounters? (4) What challenges and adaptations emerge in cross-cultural communication?

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study design (Armstrong et al., 2019) to explore the lived experiences of community members engaged in tourism-related English language interactions in Senggigi, Lombok. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate given the interpretive and context-dependent nature of language and cultural negotiation phenomena. A case study framework allowed for an in-depth, multi-faceted examination of the bounded context of Senggigi's tourism corridor over an extended fieldwork period.

Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity in occupational roles and levels of English proficiency. A total of 24 participants took part in the study, comprising eight local vendors operating in the Senggigi market area, six licensed tour guides registered with the West Lombok Tourism Office, five front-line hotel staff members from three-star and boutique establishments, and five community English learners enrolled in an informal evening language program. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 52 years old, with varying educational backgrounds from junior secondary to university level. All participants had at least two years of direct engagement with international tourists.

Data were collected through three primary methods over a continuous six-month fieldwork period from January to June 2024. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted individually with all 24 participants. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was recorded with informed consent. Interview protocols centered on participants' experiences communicating with international tourists, their perceptions of English learning, and the cultural challenges they encountered. Second, participant observation was carried out at key sites including the Senggigi central market, a beach-front

tourism strip, two hotel lobbies, and a community language class. Observation sessions were documented through detailed field notes and, where permitted, audio recordings. Third, informal conversational data were gathered through follow-up exchanges with key informants, enriching the primary interview data with more naturalistic communicative episodes.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Member checking was employed to enhance the credibility of findings, with eight participants reviewing summary interpretations. Peer debriefing with two independent researchers in the field of applied linguistics further strengthened the trustworthiness of the analysis. All data were anonymized, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant confidentiality in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines (Ahmed et al., 2025).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of interview transcripts, observational field notes, and informal conversational data yielded four overarching themes: (1) language negotiation strategies in tourism interactions; (2) intercultural experiences as catalysts for English learning; (3) communication strategies in multicultural encounters; and (4) challenges and adaptations in cross-cultural communication. These themes are presented below with supporting participant data.

1. Language Negotiation Strategies in Tourism Interactions

Participants demonstrated a rich repertoire of language negotiation strategies when communicating with international tourists. The most prevalent strategy was code-switching between Bahasa Indonesia, Sasak, and English, often within a single conversational turn. Rudi, a 34-year-old tour guide with five years of experience, described his approach: "Saya campur-campur saja, kadang English, kadang Bahasa, tergantung turisnya bisa ngerti atau tidak. Yang penting mereka senang dan mengerti maksud saya." This reflects a pragmatic orientation toward mutual intelligibility rather than linguistic correctness.

The table below presents the frequency of language negotiation strategies observed across 62 discrete tourism interaction episodes documented during participant observation sessions.

Table 1. Frequency of Language Negotiation Strategies Observed in Tourism Interactions (N = 62 episodes)

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Primary Occupational Group
Code-switching (EN–ID)	38	61.3	Tour guides, vendors
Lexical simplification	31	50.0	Hotel staff, guides
Nonverbal communication	27	43.5	Vendors, learners
Gesture and pointing	24	38.7	All groups
Repetition and rephrasing	22	35.5	Tour guides, hotel staff

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Primary Occupational Group
Use of translation apps	19	30.6	Vendors, learners
Asking for clarification	17	27.4	Learners, hotel staff
Translanguaging	14	22.6	Tour guides

Code-switching emerged as the dominant negotiation strategy, present in 61.3% of all observed episodes. This finding aligns with Rojas (2025) conceptualization of translanguaging as a flexible and socially situated linguistic practice. Hotel staff frequently employed lexical simplification, replacing complex vocabulary with basic equivalents to ensure comprehension (Rojas, 2025). Wayan, a 28-year-old hotel receptionist, explained, "I don't use difficult words. I say 'eat' not 'dine,' 'room' not 'accommodation.' Tourists understand better." Such deliberate linguistic accommodation reflects a sophisticated metalinguistic awareness that developed through repeated transactional encounters.

Nonverbal communication—encompassing facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language—was observed in 43.5% of episodes, often functioning as a primary channel when verbal negotiation broke down. Among vendors in the central market, pointing, holding up fingers to indicate price, and demonstrating product use were commonplace. Siti, a 41-year-old batik vendor, noted, "Kalau mereka tidak mengerti bahasa, saya pakai tangan, pakai muka. Biasanya mereka langsung ngerti." This finding resonates with Kendon's (2004) work on gesture as integral to human communication rather than merely supplementary to speech.

2. Intercultural Experiences as Catalysts for English Learning

A second major theme concerned the ways in which direct intercultural experiences functioned as powerful and often transformative catalysts for English language acquisition. Unlike classroom-based learning, the motivational impetus emerging from tourism encounters was immediate, functional, and deeply personal. Participants consistently reported that successful communication with tourists produced affective rewards—pride, confidence, and a sense of social empowerment—that sustained their learning motivation far more effectively than formal instruction.

The table below summarizes participants' self-reported motivational factors for English learning, categorized by occupational group.

Table 2. Self-Reported Motivational Factors for English Learning by Occupational Group

Motivational Factor	Vendors (n=8)	Guides (n=6)	Hotel Staff (n=5)	Learners (n=5)
Economic gain / better income	8 (100%)	6 (100%)	5 (100%)	4 (80%)
Sense of achievement	6 (75%)	6 (100%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)
Desire to understand tourists' culture	5 (63%)	6 (100%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)
Social recognition from community	7 (88%)	4 (67%)	3 (60%)	3 (60%)
Personal growth and confidence	4 (50%)	5 (83%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
Encouragement from tourists	6 (75%)	5 (83%)	4 (80%)	3 (60%)

Motivational Factor	Vendors (n=8)	Guides (n=6)	Hotel Staff (n=5)	Learners (n=5)
Formal instruction influence	2 (25%)	3 (50%)	3 (60%)	5 (100%)

Economic motivation was unanimously cited across all groups, yet its qualitative texture varied considerably. For vendors, English proficiency was directly linked to the ability to negotiate prices and describe products, translating into measurable daily income differences. Amir, a 39-year-old souvenir seller, recounted, "Dulu saya tidak bisa English, turis pergi begitu saja. Sekarang saya bisa ngobrol, mereka mau beli, mau balik lagi. English itu uang bagi saya." Tour guides, by contrast, articulated a more holistic motivation, linking English mastery to professional identity and the ability to provide culturally rich narratives to tourists.

Particularly noteworthy was the role of what participants termed "tourist encouragement"—spontaneous positive feedback from international visitors that functioned as a powerful form of informal assessment. When tourists expressed appreciation for a guide's explanation or a vendor's conversational effort, participants reported heightened motivation to continue learning. This finding corroborates Gardner's (1985) socioeducational model of motivation, while extending it to informal, workplace-embedded learning contexts. The community English learners additionally highlighted the influence of formal instruction, yet even within this group, classroom learning was consistently subordinated in salience to the daily experiences of tourism interaction.

Participant observation further revealed that several vendors had developed informal learning communities, sharing new English words and phrases encountered during market interactions in WhatsApp groups. These digital learning communities represent an emergent form of collaborative language development that bridges formal and informal learning ecologies. Nita, a 26-year-old learner participant, explained: "Kami ada grup WhatsApp. Kalau ada kata baru dari turis, langsung share ke grup. Besoknya semua sudah tahu." This spontaneous peer-learning network exemplifies the community of practice framework articulated (Pennanen, 2023).

3. Communication Strategies in Multicultural Encounters

The third theme illuminated the specific communication strategies participants employed when navigating multicultural encounters involving tourists from diverse national and cultural backgrounds. Participants demonstrated considerable metacognitive sophistication in their ability to adjust communicative behavior based on perceived nationality, cultural cues, and interactional context. Three primary strategy clusters were identified: accommodation strategies, face-saving strategies, and topic management strategies.

Accommodation strategies, consistent with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991), were the most widely documented. Participants systematically adjusted their speech rate, vocabulary complexity, and interactional style based on their interlocutors' apparent cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Specifically, participants reported speaking more slowly and using shorter sentences with tourists perceived to be non-native English speakers (primarily from East Asia and continental Europe), while adopting a more conversational and idiomatic register with Australian and

British visitors. Kadek, a 31-year-old tour guide, described this calibration process: "Kalau Jepang atau Korea, saya slow down, pakai kata-kata simple. Kalau Australi, saya lebih santai, bisa pakai slang sedikit."

Face-saving strategies were particularly salient in transactional contexts such as price negotiation and complaint handling. Consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, participants employed positive politeness strategies—complimenting tourists, expressing personal interest, and finding common ground—to maintain harmonious interactions even when commercial interests created potential conflict. Hotel staff were especially adept at deploying these strategies, often using indirect language and humor to defuse tense situations. "I never say 'no' directly," explained Hamid, a 33-year-old hotel concierge. "I say 'let me check for you' or 'I will find a better solution.' Direct 'no' makes them feel bad."

Topic management strategies encompassed participants' deliberate selection and steering of conversational topics to navigate cultural sensitivities. Participants identified several topics they had learned, through experience, to avoid or handle with caution: discussions of religion, particularly regarding Islamic practices and their implications for tourist behavior; political commentary; and references to poverty or economic inequality. Tour guides were especially reflective on this dimension, having developed over time a repertoire of culturally appropriate narrative frames for presenting Lombok's social and religious context to international audiences.

Table 3. Communication Strategy Clusters and Representative Examples

Strategy Cluster	Sub-strategy	Participant Group	Example
Accommodation	Speech rate adjustment	Guides, Hotel staff	Slowing speech for Asian tourists
Accommodation	Lexical simplification	All groups	Using 'eat' instead of 'dine'
Accommodation	Register shifting	Guides, vendors	Using slang with Australian visitors
Face-saving	Indirect refusal	Hotel staff	"Let me find a solution" instead of "No"
Face-saving	Positive politeness	Vendors, guides	Complimenting tourists' choices
Face-saving	Humor deployment	Guides	Light humor to defuse complaint
Topic management	Sensitive topic avoidance	Guides	Careful framing of religious norms
Topic management	Cultural narrative framing	Guides	Presenting Sasak culture positively
Topic management	Redirecting questions	All groups	Steering from political to cultural topics

These findings collectively suggest that Senggigi community members have developed a sophisticated, experience-derived pragmatic competence that operates largely beneath the threshold of formal linguistic awareness. This form of tacit communicative knowledge resonates with Polanyi's (1966) concept of tacit knowing and finds applied

linguistic expression in Bialystok's (1990) discussion of proceduralized communicative competence. Crucially, this competence is fundamentally intercultural in nature, exceeding the boundaries of conventional second language acquisition models that privilege structural linguistic development.

4. Challenges and Adaptations in Cross-Cultural Communication

The fourth theme addressed the persistent challenges participants encountered in cross-cultural communication and the adaptive responses they developed over time. Five primary challenge categories emerged from the data: (1) linguistic gaps and misunderstandings, (2) cultural mismatches in behavioral expectations, (3) limited access to formal English learning opportunities, (4) tourist perceptions and stereotyping, and (5) emotional and psychological stress in high-stakes interactions.

Linguistic gaps remained the most frequently cited challenge, with 22 of 24 participants identifying specific instances in which vocabulary limitations or accent-related miscomprehensions had resulted in transactional failures or interpersonal awkwardness. Particularly challenging were technical vocabulary domains: hotel staff encountered difficulties with specialized hospitality terminology, while tour guides struggled with the vocabulary required to explain geological features, historical narratives, and ecological concepts. Several participants described incidents in which mistranslations or imprecise vocabulary had led to tourist dissatisfaction or financial loss.

Cultural mismatches in behavioral expectations constituted the second major challenge category. Tourists' assumptions about service norms, punctuality, personal space, and gender interaction frequently diverged from local Sasak cultural norms, creating situations of mutual misunderstanding. Muslim female participants, in particular, described navigating difficult situations in which male tourists' casual physical contact—handshakes, pats on the shoulder—conflicted with their religious values. These participants had developed adaptive strategies that balanced cultural integrity with professional hospitality, typically involving polite but firm redirection. As Halimah, a 29-year-old female hotel receptionist, explained: "Saya sudah biasa. Saya senyum, saya mundur sedikit, saya alihkan ke hal lain. Mereka biasanya mengerti."

Limited access to formal English learning represented a systemic structural challenge that intersected with the informal learning strategies documented elsewhere in the findings. The majority of non-learner participants had last received formal English instruction in secondary school, with curricula they described as grammar-focused, decontextualized, and poorly aligned with tourism communication needs. Several participants expressed a desire for practical, tourism-specific English training but cited financial constraints, work scheduling conflicts, and geographic distance from language training centers as prohibitive barriers.

Table 4. Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges: Frequency and Adaptive Responses

Challenge Category	Participants Reporting (%)	Frequency Rating*	Adaptive Responses Developed
Linguistic gaps/misunderstandings	22/24 (92%)	High	Translation apps, code-switching, peer learning
Cultural behavioral	19/24 (79%)	Moderate-High	Polite redirection, cultural

Challenge Category	Participants Reporting (%)	Frequency Rating*	Adaptive Responses Developed
mismatches			explanation
Limited formal learning access	20/24 (83%)	High	Informal WhatsApp groups, self-study
Tourist stereotyping/prejudice	14/24 (58%)	Moderate	Professional detachment, humor
Psychological stress/anxiety	16/24 (67%)	Moderate	Peer support, gradual exposure
Accent intelligibility issues	18/24 (75%)	High	Repetition, phonological adjustment
Terminology gaps (technical)	15/24 (63%)	Moderate	Glossary cards, memorization routines

*High = daily occurrence; Moderate-High = several times weekly; Moderate = weekly or situational

Emotional and psychological stress was reported by 16 participants, particularly in relation to high-stakes interactions involving complaints, medical emergencies, or large-scale tour group management. Anxiety about linguistic failure was compounded by fear of social embarrassment in public settings. However, participants who had accumulated greater experience consistently reported reduced anxiety over time, describing a process of gradual habituation and growing self-efficacy. This developmental trajectory mirrors Bandura's (1997) conceptualization of self-efficacy as incrementally constructed through mastery experiences—in this case, repeated successful tourism interactions (Zhou & Hou, 2025).

Notably, several participants identified tourist stereotyping and prejudiced assumptions as a qualitatively distinct challenge that differed from purely linguistic or cultural difficulties. Some described experiences in which tourists had assumed incompetence based on physical appearance or limited English fluency, creating interactions characterized by condescension or impatience. In response, participants had developed strategies of professional detachment and strategic code-switching into more sophisticated English registers to recalibrate tourist expectations. Komang, a 37-year-old senior tour guide, reflected: "Sometimes I use big words on purpose. I want them to know I'm educated, I'm not just a driver. Then they listen more carefully." This performative linguistic strategy represents a sophisticated form of identity negotiation that extends beyond communicative necessity into the realm of social positioning.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study set out to investigate how community members in Senggigi's multicultural tourism corridor negotiate language and culture, and how these processes intersect with English language learning. The findings provide compelling evidence that the tourism context functions as a dynamic and consequential site of informal language acquisition, intercultural competence development, and identity negotiation. The four research questions that structured this inquiry have been substantively addressed.

In response to the first research question, the study demonstrates that language negotiation in Senggigi's tourism context is a sophisticated, multi-modal process involving code-switching, lexical simplification, gesture, technology-mediated communication, and

contextual inferencing. These strategies are not random or intuitive but represent a systematically developed communicative repertoire shaped by years of accumulated tourism experience. Regarding the second research question, intercultural experiences were found to catalyze English learning through multiple motivational pathways—economic, social, psychological, and cultural—that formal instruction alone rarely generates.

With respect to communication strategies in multicultural encounters, the study identifies three primary clusters—accommodation, face-saving, and topic management—that collectively constitute a form of applied pragmatic competence largely absent from formal language curricula. These strategies are intercultural in scope, addressing not only linguistic but also behavioral and relational dimensions of cross-cultural interaction. Finally, in addressing challenges and adaptations, the study reveals a complex landscape of systemic barriers and individual adaptive responses, highlighting both the resilience of community members and the structural inequities that constrain their access to English language development resources.

These findings carry significant implications for English language education policy in Indonesian tourism communities. Tourism-specific English language programs that foreground communicative functionality, cultural intelligence, and pragmatic competence are urgently needed. Such programs should be designed in close collaboration with industry stakeholders and delivered in flexible formats that accommodate the working schedules of tourism sector participants. Additionally, the informal peer-learning networks that community members have organically developed—such as the WhatsApp vocabulary-sharing groups documented in this study—warrant institutional recognition and support as legitimate sites of language learning.

Future research should extend this investigation to other Indonesian tourism destinations to assess the transferability of these findings across different sociocultural and linguistic ecologies. Longitudinal studies tracking individual language development trajectories over multi-year periods would further illuminate the developmental pathways through which informal tourism-based learning contributes to English proficiency gains. Comparative studies examining the differential experiences of women and men in tourism communication contexts would also address an important gender dimension that the present study, while attentive to, was not positioned to explore in full depth.

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