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Transpositioning Identity of Indonesian Hospitality Internship Program Students in Hong Kong Hotels

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transpositioning of identity among Indonesian hospitality interns navigating multilingual environments in Hong Kong's global hotel sector, a context that remains underexplored in current research. Recognizing the gap in how young professionals adapt and reposition their linguistic and cultural identities within institutions dominated by linguistic hierarchies and diverse ideologies, the study set out to examine how they transform themselves in such agentive, moment-to-moment shifts in self-positioning. Employing a qualitative narrative inquiry design, data were collected through thematic analysis triangulated by survey data and interviews with four Indonesian interns. The findings reveal that identity transformation in this setting is both strategic and deeply agentive: intern students transition from locally-rooted Indonesian students to global hospitality professionals, transpositioning their identity from Indonesian student to global hospitality professional as well as shaping their identity through continually leveraging English, Mandarin, and other languages as powerful tools for career advancement, adaptive professionalism, and emotional well-being. The implications suggest that hospitality training should focus not only on language proficiency but also on the development of identity-negotiation skills, preparing interns for complex communicative and cultural demands. Future research is recommended to trace the long-term effects of workplace identity transposition, compare outcomes across international service sectors, and integrate longitudinal and quantitative approaches.

Keywords: Identity Transpositioning, Multilingualism, Internship, Hospitality Industry

INTRODUCTION

Every year, hundreds of vocational students leave their home countries to undertake internships abroad. These experiences become complex linguistic and cultural intersections, requiring individuals to navigate diverse communication practices and reframe their identities (Duff, 2019; Peng, Li, & Xu, 2024) as they collaborate with colleagues from different linguistic backgrounds. Multilingualism and identity negotiation have thus become crucial in understanding the experiences of international interns. These interns mirror contemporary society, where, as Bauman (2012) suggests, social structures, including identities, are fluid, unstable, and constantly being reshaped in response to rapidly changing cultural and institutional expectations. The identities that emerge from such interactions depend heavily on the resources available within a given context (Blommaert, 2010). Similarly, Canagarajah (2018) argues that identity is realized through the continuous negotiation of norms, repertoires, and relationships as individuals move across spaces in contexts of mobility, as seen in the International Internship

program. Supporting **this** view, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) emphasize that identity is not a fixed trait but rather something that emerges in interaction, with positionality, defined as the roles and attitudes taken in conversation, being one of the key aspects under analysis.

Increasing scholarly attention has been devoted to the intersection of language learning, identity construction, and multilingual practices (Ali, Sugiharto, & Manara, 2025; Almashour, 2024; Mitchell, 2020; Al-Riyami, 2014; Ou & Gu, 2021; Situmorang, Nugroho, & Recard, 2021). For instance, Ali, Sugiharto, and Manara (2025) employed narrative inquiry to examine identity reformation among Indonesian migrant workers in Kuwait's Kafala system. Almashour (2024) conducted semi-structured interviews with Jordanian graduate students in Canadian universities, uncovering how translanguaging fosters hybrid academic identities. Other studies (Mitchell, 2020) adopt a longitudinal narrative approach to explore multilingual identity among Anglophone graduates, focusing on self-perception rather than high-stakes professional language use. Moreover, Hidayati (2025) provides valuable insights into Indonesian pre-service teachers' identity formation during practicum programs. In addition, Al-Riyami (2014) and Ou and Gu (2021) offer rich poststructuralist analyses of reflective identity positioning in formal learning environments. Situmorang, Nugroho, and Recard (2021) extend the discussion to the context of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) by conducting research at a culturally supportive university in Indonesia, illustrating how linguistic tolerance and shared religious affiliation can foster positive identity construction among participants. All of these studies have yielded important insights into how language mediates identity transformation, particularly in educational and migrant settings, proving that interaction and mobility can give rise to and change identities, closely linked to the positionality, stance, indexicality, and social meaning of language, so that identity is not a status, constantly negotiated in response to linguistic, institutional, and cultural cues.

A significant research gap remains regarding how identity is transpositioned in multilingual international internship settings. Little is known about how young professionals, such as vocational interns, adapt their linguistic repertoires and self-positionings within commercial institutions marked by linguistic hierarchies, institutional ideologies, and cultural diversity. Even though Nuske (2018) findings have previously indicated that students employ multilingual strategies not only for communication but also to negotiate their status, attain recognition, and assert legitimacy in international programs, there still a need to address that gap by applying Li and Lee's (2024) theory of transpositioning, which conceptualizes identity as fluid, strategic, and interactionally negotiated across languages, spaces, and power relations. Unlike static models of investment or retrospective narratives (Ali, Sugiharto, & Manara, 2025; Situmorang, Nugroho, & Recard, 2021), transpositioning emphasizes the moment of analysis in identity positioning in response to communicative and institutional demands. It is highly applicable to vocational settings, such as internships in Hong Kong hotels, where multilingualism is both a skill and a symbol of a professional persona. Some recent scholarship has moved closer to this direction. For example, Cheung and Tai (2025) explored transpositioning in multilingual science classrooms, demonstrating how students adapt discourse styles through semiotic-material engagement. Similarly, Sugiharto (2025) investigated the transposition of identity in the academic writing context, specifically how an Indonesian author constructs voice while responding to blind peer reviewers. While Sugiharto (2025) innovatively applies the concept of transpositioning to academic writing, illustrating how an Indonesian author shifts identity positions in response to reviewer feedback, his study remains situated within the bounded space of textual discourse. However, their focus on disciplinary discourse within educational institutions does not extend to real-life settings, where internship students face daily experiences and challenges that characterize the hospitality industry.

Focusing on Indonesian hospitality interns in Hong Kong, who navigate English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Bahasa Indonesia in multilingual, customer-facing roles, this study explores identity not only as a site of professional learning and reflection but also as a performative negotiation of professions, social roles, cultural background, and authority, within a globalized intern context. In doing so, it also seeks to extend the scope of multilingual and identity studies from educational discourse to the service economy, such as the hotel industry setting, where linguistic fluidity and identity maneuvering are directly tied to institutional expectations, professionalism, self-interest, and life survival.

To address these issues, this study is guided by the research question of how Indonesian hospitality interns shape their transpositioning of identities within Hong Kong's hospitality sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multilingualism in Transnational Workplaces

Multilingualism is the ability to communicate in several languages to express oneself; however, this does not necessarily mean that speakers in that community are on an equal footing or possess native-like proficiency in speech (Gorter, 2007). Two important Latin words, "multi," meaning many, and "lingua," meaning language, are used to characterize multilingualism. As long as members of the community can communicate and understand and in more than

two languages during a discussion, they are deemed multilingual. This capability is advantageous since it could raise the caliber of services rendered. The majority of these services are associated with various businesses, particularly the tourist and hospitality sectors. This fiercely competitive environment creates opportunities for extensive worldwide company endeavors.

Multilingualism in professional environments, particularly in global capitals such as Hong Kong, transcends basic communication; it is a social practice intricately linked to identity and power (Li, 2017). Hotels, functioning as transnational interaction zones, frequently necessitate that employees employ code-switching, translanguaging, and linguistic accommodation to cater to a diverse customer base (Teng and Lixun, 2020). Graddol (2013) asserts that the emergence of English and Mandarin as global lingua francas in Asian business centers has markedly impacted professional relations. Mandarin is progressively regarded as an economic advantage, although English retains its status as the language of professionalism and globalism.

Identity Formation and Transposition

The concept of identity in multilingual contexts is dynamic and performative. Students employed in foreign nations frequently experience transpositioning, in which they adjust or negotiate their identities across diverse cultural and linguistic environments (Zhao, 2020). Indonesian students interning in Hong Kong must navigate the interplay between their national identity, ethnic ties, and professional character, influenced by their proficiency in Mandarin and English. Li and Lee's (2024)'s concept of translanguaging reconceptualizes language use as an integrated, fluid practice rather than a mere alternation between fixed codes (English, Mandarin, Indonesian), allowing speakers to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to create meaning, assert agency, and negotiate identity. Indonesian interns in Hong Kong frequently navigate diverse cultural and linguistic environments, transforming their professional and personal identities to meet the requirements of communication, customer service, and peer engagement. The concept of transpositioning, as articulated in Sugiharto's (2025) examination of identity work in multilingual settings, delineates how individuals modify, alter, or reorganize their identity positions based on the interlocutor, context, or institutional standards. This is particularly pertinent in internship settings as students must reconcile their national identity (Indonesian), their role identity (as interns), and their aspirational professional identity (hospitality worker in a global market). Bauman's (2012) notion of Liquid Modernity provides a macro-sociological framework for comprehending the instability and fluidity of identity in a globalized, mobile environment. In liquid modern communities, identity is not a stable or inherited characteristic but rather a project that is perpetually constructed, negotiated, and frequently disjointed. Interns in global contexts encounter fluidity in their professional responsibilities and language usage. Their self-identity is influenced by temporary employment, international mobility, and the evolving demands of a transnational work environment. Bauman elucidates that "solids are cast once and for all... but fluids do not retain their shape for long," implying that identity in this context is most accurately perceived as fluid, adaptable, and contingent.

Internship programs, particularly those overseas, function as transitional environments where students evolve from learners to professionals. Researchers like [23] have demonstrated that internships foster technical skills, interpersonal abilities, self-awareness, and intercultural competence. Li and Lee's (2024) concept of linguistic entrepreneurship is pertinent, as speakers are progressively required to proactively manage their language competencies to improve employability. The monetization of language supports identity as a marketable commodity rather than an inherent self. Research by Blommaert (2010), Canagarajah (2018), and Bucholtz and Hall (2005) highlights the necessity for multilingual speakers in both digital and in-person environments to consistently navigate and enact their identities in accordance with evolving situations and expectations.

Hong Kong is intrinsically multilingual, with Cantonese, Mandarin, and English occupying prominent positions. The city serves as a distinctive context for examining language hierarchy and linguistic legitimacy (Ingham & Xi, 2003).

Transpositioning in Internship Contexts

Internship experiences abroad frequently serve as transitional environments where identity is redefined and language skills are evaluated. (Hoare, 2006) asserts that transnational education programs compel students to swiftly acclimate to new linguistic standards while confronting self-perception challenges, particularly in English-dominant professional fields. This corresponds with Nuske's (2018) findings, indicating that students employed multilingual strategies not only for communication but also to negotiate their status, attain recognition, and assert legitimacy in international programs, particularly when originating from backgrounds where English or Mandarin was not the primary language.

Research Gap and Study Justification

This study addresses a clear research gap in existing literature by focusing on how identity is transpositioned within multilingual international internship settings, specifically among Indonesian hospitality interns in Hong Kong.

Previous research has predominantly explored identity transformation and multilingual negotiation in educational or migrant contexts, often relying on static models, retrospective narratives, or disciplinary discourse within academic institutions. These approaches do not fully capture the complexity of dynamic, moment-to-moment identity shifts that occur in global professional environments, where linguistic negotiation, institutional ideologies, and cultural diversity intersect directly with workplace demands. Notably, studies such as those by Verusha Ali et al. (2025), Almashour (2024), and Mitchell (2020), have examined identity reformation among migrants and students, while Sugiharto's (2025) recent work applies the concept of transpositioning to academic writing; however, there remains a lack of investigation into vocational and commercial sectors like international hospitality, where multilingualism serves both communicative and symbolic functions in daily service roles.

The justification for this study lies in its novel application of Li and Lee's (2024) transpositioning theory, which conceptualizes identity as fluid, strategic, and interactionally negotiated across languages and power relations, a perspective highly pertinent to interns navigating Hong Kong's linguistically and culturally complex hospitality sector. By analyzing the adaptive processes of Indonesian interns as they negotiate professional, social, and cultural identities, this research extends the scope of multilingual and identity studies from the boundaries of educational discourse to the realities of the service economy. This intersection is crucial, as it reveals how individuals maneuver linguistic capital, assert authority, and construct professional personas in response to real-world challenges, thus filling a critical void in both theoretical and empirical literature. Ultimately, the study not only addresses an understudied aspect of identity formation and transposition in global internships but also contributes valuable insights into how multilingualism is tied to professional survival, advancement, and the evolving landscape of transnational labor markets. However, regardless of the relative novelty of the term, this article seeks to address the following research questions.

(1) How did Indonesian hospitality interns shape their transpositioning of identities as they navigate multilingual, cultural, global, and professional citizenship within Hong Kong's hospitality sector?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology to examine how four Indonesian hospitality interns in Hong Kong manage multilingualism and experience identity transpositioning (Li and Lee, 2024) in their hotel operations jobs.

Research Participant

The research encompassed four Indonesian undergraduate students, aged 21 to 24, presently engaged in internships at hotels in Hong Kong. All four are registered in hospitality or tourism-related academic programs in one of the Indonesian universities. A purposive sample method was employed to select individuals who fulfilled the study's specific criteria: users of English and Mandarin in a professional setting of the hotel operation internship program, speakers of Bahasa Indonesia as their first language, participants had resided in Hong Kong for a minimum of one month at the time of the study to guarantee exposure to language immersion and professional acclimatization and every participant was allocated a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality during the study.

Research Instrument

A concise questionnaire was administered to corroborate and triangulate the qualitative findings. It comprised fundamental demographic inquiries and Likert-scale statements (e.g., "I possess confidence in utilizing Mandarin in a professional setting"). Inquiries on linguistic preferences and self-identity perception. While not the primary data source, the questionnaire aided in contextualizing and reinforcing themes seen in other data.

The principal data gathering approach involved a series of semi-structured interviews conducted remotely via Zoom and WhatsApp. Each interview spanned 30 to 45 minutes, directed by open-ended questions addressing three areas: (1) participants' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, (2) language practices within the internship environment, and (3) identity transformations encountered during communication in several languages. The interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for later study.

Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis

The collected data focuses on qualitative depth while utilizing the survey for contextual triangulation. The core data, consisting of detailed transcripts from the deep narrative inquiry interviews (semi-structured interviews), was processed using thematic analysis, following the rigorous six-phase methodology as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012). This process began by achieving data familiarity, followed by initial coding that focused on specific attributes related to identity negotiation, such as instances of professional misidentification, emotional reactions to language

barriers, and strategic professional communication maneuvers. These codes were systematically grouped into robust, coherent themes (e.g., Language as Boundary, The Professional Persona, and The Negotiated Self). Critically, this qualitative analysis was specifically targeted at explaining the "how" and "why" behind the trends identified in the initial survey data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the findings of this study demonstrate a marked trajectory in how Indonesian hospitality interns undergo identity transpositioning during their internships in Hong Kong's multilingual hotel sector, as evidenced by both the questionnaire and the interviews. The results uncovered the specific ways of transposition across three themes: identity transpositioning from being local to global citizenship, identity transpositioning from an Indonesian student to a Hong Kong intern, and identity transpositioning from student to global hospitality professional. Each will be elaborated as follows:

Identity Transposition from Being Local to Global Citizenship

The data from the questionnaire highlights how identity transpositioning among Indonesian hospitality interns in Hong Kong is experienced and constructed. As we can see, the patterns of transposition of identity reflect heightened confidence and willingness to communicate in English and Mandarin, despite initial insecurities. This is evidenced by high agreement scores on statements described below.

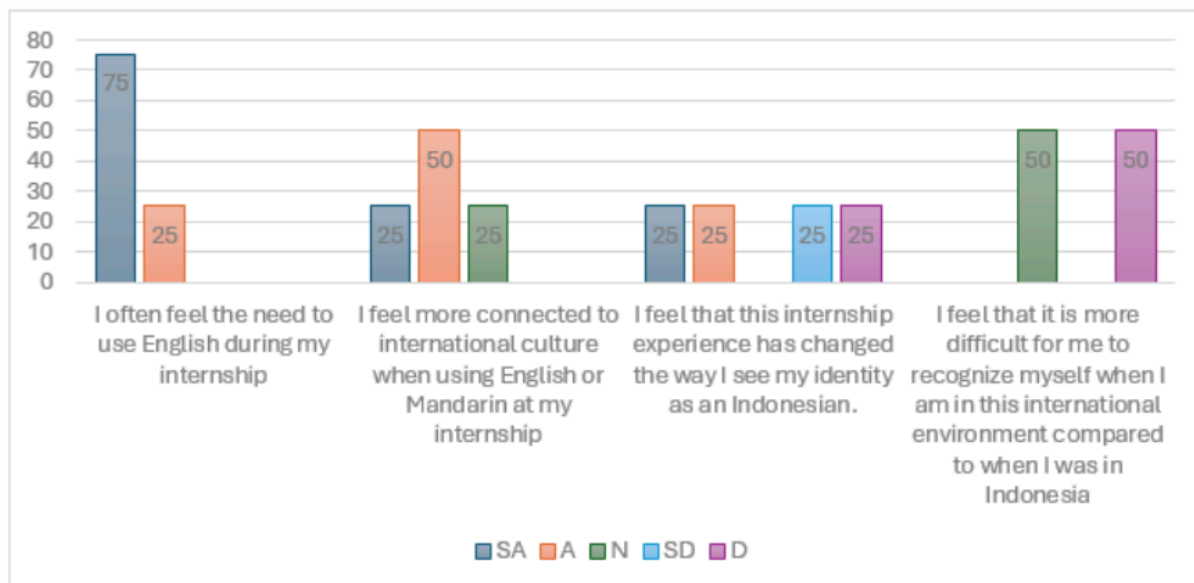


Figure 1. Students' Identity Transposition from Local to Global Citizenship

Note: SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= strongly agree.

Source: Authors' analysed findings, 2025.

Figure 1 shows identity shifts as the intern moves from using primarily Indonesian to functioning multilingually in professional settings, reflecting increased global awareness and adaptability. The transposition of a student's identity from local to global citizenship tells us how a complex yet distinctive pattern of identity negotiation among Indonesian hospitality interns in a transnational context. It indicates that 75% of respondents firmly concur that they frequently feel obligated to utilize English during their internship. This high percentage shows how strong the institutional and communication demands are in international hospitality settings. It also shows a big change from a localized Indonesian language identity to one that fits well with global workplace standards. The necessity to adapt linguistically is not only functional, but it serves as a significant catalyst for identity transformation, as language utilization becomes a pathway to enhanced cultural engagement and professional legitimacy. It signifies that their identity shift taking place through language use.

Additionally, 50% of respondents claim they feel more connected to foreign culture when they speak English or Mandarin at work. This shows that being able to speak a language well is closely linked to feeling like you belong on the world stage. This finding is consistent with theories of symbolic capital, which hold that linguistic proficiency provides access to transnational networks and legitimizes interns' engagement as emerging global citizens. However,

the distribution of responses indicates a significant cognitive and emotional transition, with 25% remaining neutral or less convinced, reflecting persistent ambivalence in fully adopting an international identity. From this finding we can see how a language, if spoken at certain stage and function, can serve as a tool of global belonging.

Half of the respondents reported that the internship affected how they saw themselves as Indonesians, while the other half stated that it was harder for them to recognize themselves in the foreign setting. This shows that identity transposition may both help harm and benefit people. These findings suggest that, whereas multicultural exposure and bilingual requirements advance interns towards global citizenship, the journey is filled with instances of self-alienation and identity negotiation. This duality reflects Bauman's notion of liquid modernity, in which social agents are necessitated to perpetually reconstruct their identities within dynamic and uncertain environments.

The findings show that the path to global citizenship is not straight or consistent; instead, it is marked by both empowerment and intellectual uncertainty. This integration of statistical and theoretical analysis enhances our comprehension of identity transposition in the global service industry and highlights the imperative for additional research into the long-term and emotional aspects of these professional shifts.

Identity Transposition from an Indonesian Student to A Hong Kong Intern

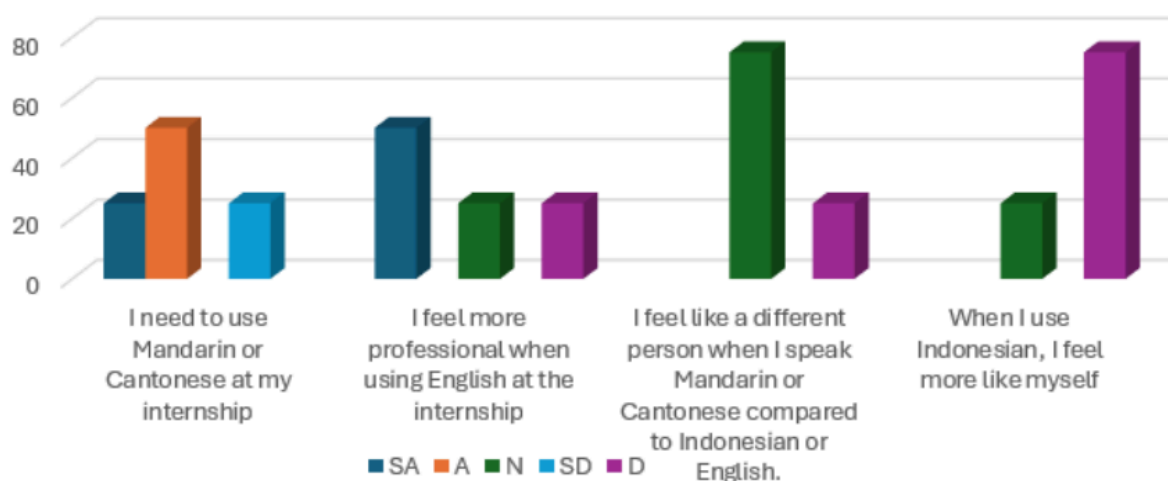


Figure 2. Views of Translinguaging practice in L2 learning

Note: SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= strongly agree

Source: Authors' analysed findings, 2025

Figure 2, which shows the identity Transposition from an Indonesian Student to a Hong Kong Intern, clearly shows how interns change their identities in a multilingual, high-stakes hospitality setting.

The findings show that quite a few of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, such as "I need to use Mandarin or Cantonese at my internship." This shows how strong institutional and client-driven pressures are to learn more than just English. This not only highlights the market-driven need for linguistic flexibility in Hong Kong's hospitality sector but also emphasizes how these practical needs serve as triggers for identity negotiation, reflecting Li and Lee's (2024) theory that identity is shaped through interactions within changing power dynamics and communicative expectations influence multilingual person to use their mother tongue (Listiana and Armelia, 2024).

In terms of the professional status they hold, students claimed that 50 % of them feel more professional when they use English at their internship, which is related to the level of expertise they hold. This received high positive comments, which shows that the interns knew that language choice is full of symbolic capital. In these situations, English is not only the common language, but it is also the language of authority. This makes the intern an aspiring part of the global workforce. This outcome corresponds with the research conducted by Blommaert (2010) and Canagarajah (2018), which illustrates that the complex relationship between language competency, professional status, and agency is attached to them due to an adaptive response and adaptation (Kurniasari, Gunawan, and Utomo, 2022). The affordances of English for enacting professionalism encompass not just functionality but also the manifestation of novel workplace subjectivities.

Point 3 also significantly demonstrates the fact that many participants "feel like a different person" when conversing in Mandarin or Cantonese, as opposed to Indonesian or English, underscoring a phenomenon of identity multiplicity, evidenced by the 75% of participants who acknowledged this sentiment, in response to context,

interlocutor, and institutional expectations. This dynamic exemplifies Bauman's (2012) notion of liquid, which shows that identity negotiation occurs in such mixed-lingual spaces.

When it comes to Indonesian identity, the statement "When I use Indonesian, I feel more like myself" has received significant support, as shown by the fact that 75% of the participants agree with this sentiment. Analytically, the graph shows a sustained emotional and identity connection to the mother tongue. It's important to be able to change one's identity in a globalized world, but the facts show that Bahasa Indonesia is still a major source of validity and psychological comfort. It highlights the primary assumption that, for Indonesian hospitality interns in Hong Kong, identity is not fixed or easily categorized, but is continuously redefine, dynamic, strategic, and shaped by the interplay of pragmatism, ambition, and adaptive standing.

Transpositioning Identity from Indonesian Student to Global Hospitality Professional

Through exposure to international guests and colleagues, the student internalizes their global hospitality values, professional conduct, and cross-cultural confidence. Following is the finding on how students' identity transpositioned within the context of global hospitality professionals through some aspects.

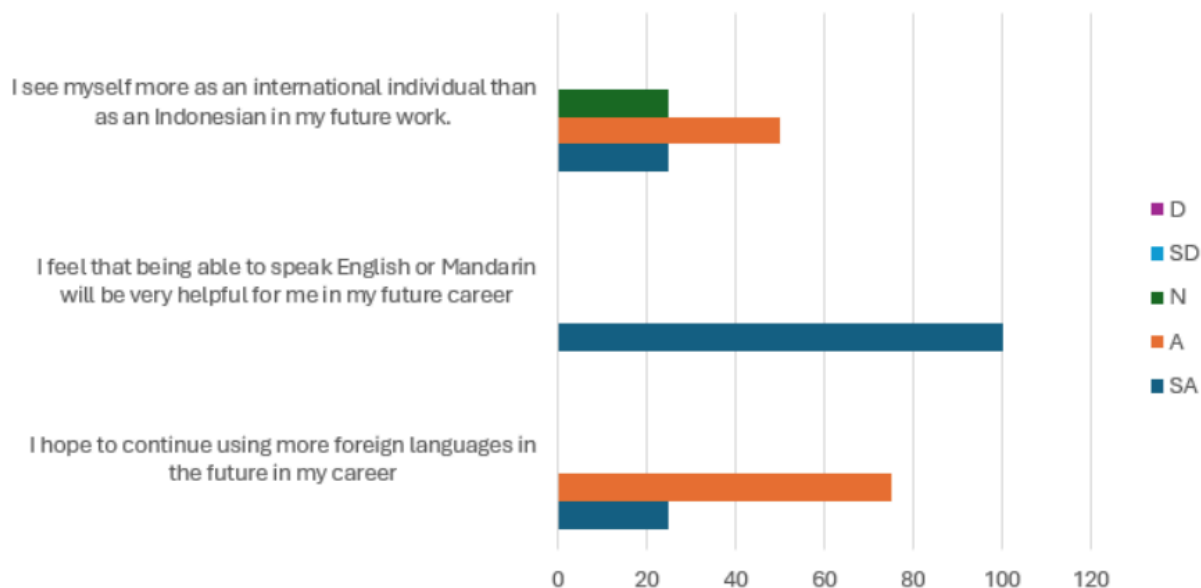


Figure 3. Transpositioning Identity from Indonesian Student to Global Hospitality Professional

Note: SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= strongly agree.

Source: Authors' analysed findings, 2025.

Figure 3 above on Transpositioning Identity from Indonesian Student to Global Hospitality Professional presents essential insights into how multilingual internships facilitate profound identity transformation, transitioning participants from a locally rooted self-concept to a future-oriented, transnational professional identity, taking place in some ways, such as role as global service provider, emotional belonging, career reflection and transformation, and professional quality and conduct. The majority of respondents, or 50 % of them, strongly agree that proficiency in English and Mandarin will be "very helpful" for their future career.

A significant number of participants agree with the statement, "I hope to continue using more foreign languages in the future in my career," indicating that their professional experiences in Hong Kong have not only prepared them for but have also actively motivated the pursuit of multilingualism as a long-term professional asset. The substantial agreement with multilingual future orientation also shows that the participants are able to adapt, as they no longer regard linguistic diversity as a problem, but are able to build professional identities in changing, high-pressure circumstances.

Furthermore, a notable proportion of interns align themselves more as "international individuals than as Indonesians" in the context of their future work. This reflects a marked identity shift from a place-based, nationally framed notion of self toward a hybrid, cosmopolitan positionality. The findings suggest that the global hospitality sector in Hong Kong acts as an environment of transformative identity work, requiring individuals to reposition themselves not only linguistically but in terms of affiliation, goal, and belief.

When asked about the continuation of using more foreign languages in their career, 75 % of them argued that they will do so for their career advancement and global network. This finding does not simply represent pragmatic

adaptation to immediate internship demands, but rather a more profound, future-oriented shift of professional identity. The participants are not only meeting the requirements of their current multilingual workplace, but they are also internalizing the importance of multilingualism as a key component of their long-term career goals. By the end, it signifies a successful transformation from a locally defined Indonesian student identity to an aspiring global hospitality professional. It emphasizes the adaptive and agentic dimensions of identity transposition, demonstrating the interplay of external structural demands and internalized aspirations, and shows the strategic future-building that is becoming the characteristic of transnational professional identity in their field.

How Intern Students Shaped Their Transpositioning of Identities Within Hong Kong's Hospitality Sector

This study's findings describe a process of identity transference that is strongly agentic, strategic, and dependent on the utilization of language resources within a professional context. The way their transpositioning identity changes is influenced by some elements, such as identity transposition from being local to global citizenship, Identity from an Indonesian student to a Hong Kong Intern, and transpositioning identity from an Indonesian student to a global hospitality professional.

Identity Transposition from Being Local to Global Citizenship

The transition of internship program students from being locally identified individuals to global citizens is clearly reflected in the findings we mentioned. This transformation is rooted in the shifting roles of language and identity as students immerse themselves in a multilingual and multicultural environment. This can be seen from the excerpt found below:

Excerpt 1

"What I considered as my identity before going to Hong Kong, I only thought of Indonesians, which means their English is standard, not really good, because I speak Indonesian every day, even with my friends on campus, I also speak Indonesian at home, so I thought, ah, never mind, Indonesian too, it's okay,

I mean, English isn't that important. But when I started my internship, there are many people here who cannot speak Indonesian, so whether I like it or not, the most used communication is now English, so every day I chat in English, even when I chat with Indonesians, I often use English because it has become my daily communication, sometimes, for example" (Steve, Pseudonym)

The above excerpt provides the sudden devaluation of the Indonesian linguistic repertoire and the elevation of English to a compulsory resource. For example, excerpt 1 explicitly states that the pre-internship confidence was predicated on a localized context ("I only thought of Indonesians, which means their English is standard, not really good, because I speak Indonesian every day"). This initial positioning was disrupted immediately upon entering the transnational space: "whether I like it or not, the most used communication is now English." This transition validates the finding that English serves as the stable boundary condition for entry. It is not a choice but a professional requirement that forces the intern to reposition their daily communicative identity.

Excerpt 2

"Before I came to Hong Kong, of course my identity was clear as an Indonesian who always uses Indonesian every day and that is my main language, the language that makes me most confident and besides that, I can also speak English, but usually I still have to think before speaking.....

I believe in myself... I'm right or I'm wrong, the important thing is that I said it."

(Jane (Pseudonym))

The excerpt clearly describes us how her identity change serves as the fundamental point of departure, the pre-transposition anchor, for understanding the profound identity transpositioning experienced by her when living in Hong Kong as an intern student. Her identity changed as a result of linguistic blending. She asserted that upon becoming Indonesian, she primarily utilized Indonesian in her daily life. While the setting is not in Indonesia, what she thinks and says is not Indonesian. This needs to be thought about before expressing in English, highlighting a distinction between local and global linguistic proficiency. Embracing a new cultural setting disrupts and reshapes her identity, consequently initiating the journey toward global citizenship.

The statement of "Before I came to Hong Kong, of course my identity was clear as an Indonesian... [English] usually I still have to think before speaking." This finding corresponds with the identified linguistic concern and supports the theoretical claim that switching languages is a strategic, high-stakes discursive action. The language that previously enabled the "most confident" self (Indonesian) has been replaced with a language that necessitates cognitive friction ("think before speaking"). This empirical evidence enhances Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) positioning theory by illustrating that the enforced rights and responsibilities of the hospitality role promptly alter the value and function of the speaker's complete linguistic repertoire, which requires the transpositioning of the self into a continuous performance mode.

The aspect of transpositioning of identity from being local to global is also captured through the global outlook and aspiration as described in excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 3

...but it makes me more challenged and more creative in communicating in this internship also makes me feel transformed from a student in Indonesia now I am part of this international team and also my identity now feels more diverse because I am used to changing languages according to the situation and also in the future". (Steve, Pseudonym).

The excerpt illustrates that identity transpositioning is an attainable endeavor for achieving social status. The person clearly asserts agency over their transformation. The expression of "it makes me more challenged and more creative in communicating in this internship, also makes me feel transformed from a student in Indonesia, now I am part of this international team" represents a significant act of self-identification, when the intern consciously removes the "student" identity and adopts the more prestigious "international team" role. This corresponds with Bauman's (2012) notion of fluid identity by illustrating the individual's active choice of a new professional identity that corresponds with future ambitions, rather than passively accepting the position assigned by the host institution. The participant asserts that he "now feels more diverse because he is accustomed to changing languages based on the context," as a result, validating the observation that the capacity to navigate through contested linguistic capital (i.e., switching languages) is fundamentally connected to the effective psychological emphasis of a global professional identity. The utilization of language serves as a direct instrument for realizing his global ambitions. Their identity transposition also takes place from Indonesian students to a Hong Kong internship experience. This fluid negotiation reflects (Li and Lee, 2024) which is translanguaging concept, which posits that language use goes beyond rigid classifications and serves as a tool for expressing identity and agency. Similar to Sugiharto's (2025) analysis of identity work, these interns skillfully adjust their positions according to interlocutors and institutional expectations, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the interplay between language and identity in professional contexts. At this point, the language they used is not just a communicative medium but a core component of evolving identity. The student's aspiration to become fluent in multiple languages while valuing his mother tongue demonstrates an emerging awareness of multilingualism as a resource for global integration, belonging, and agency. The participant's role evolves from student to team member in a real hospitality workplace. Such transpositioning is influenced by requiring fast adaptation to new expectations and communication norms, as articulated by the two participants above.

Identity From an Indonesian Student to A Hong Kong Intern

Excerpt 4

"I mean, English isn't that important, but when I started my internship, there were a lot of people here who couldn't possibly speak Indonesian, so whether I wanted to or not, the most used communication now is English, so every day I chat in English, even when I chat with Indonesians, I often end up using English because it's become my daily communication, sometimes, and for example, if I chat with older staff, sometimes they can't speak English either, so I have to use Indonesian and Mandarin.

.....When I chat with older staff, sometimes they can't speak English either, so I have to use Indonesian and Mandarin". (Jane, Pseudonym)

Such a confession shows us how the intern student starts by talking about her original pre-transposition belief ("English isn't that important"), which quickly becomes shattered by the professional reality shown in Hong Kong ("there were a lot of people here who could not possibly speak Indonesian"). This moment signifies the fast adaptation of the local affective basis (Bahasa Indonesia). To fulfill her roles, she is immediately forced to change how she communicates: "So whether I wanted to or not, English is the most common way to communicate now." This view aligns with Canagarajah's (2018) assertion that identity is constructed through the ongoing negotiation of norms. The Hong Kong hotel requires English to be the language of business, which means that the intern must act like an "English-speaking Global Professional." This first decision is not a goal, yet it's a practical step to stay alive that is needed to get the right to do the work, which starts the transpositioning process. This also reinforces the idea that Mandarin is an adaptable tool that may be utilized to fill communication gaps (between the older staff) and maintain work efficiency. The following excerpt also enforces an immediate and complex transpositioning of identity through rapid linguistic adaptation and the new communication norms.

Excerpt 5

"The biggest change in language is that from everyday conversations in Indonesian, we have to use English because it's impossible to chat with Hong Kong people in Indonesian. Honestly, there are many people who can't speak English, especially the older ones. On average, they can't speak English, so they have to use Mandarin. Sometimes, they don't even speak Mandarin very well, so they are forced to... (Samuel, Pseudonym).

The intern student claims that the "biggest change" is that everyone has to switch from Indonesian to English. It's not a choice; it's a requirement because of the new communication norm that states, "it's impossible to chat with Hong Kong people in Indonesian." This finding confirms the fundamental mechanism of identity transpositioning, the swift appreciation of the local linguistic anchor (Bahasa Indonesia) within the professional domain. Furthermore,

the excerpt illustrates that the expected Global Norm (English) is inadequate within specific institutional subgroups (older staff). The change in communication needs a more complicated transposition. The situation allows him to adjust again by switching to Mandarin: "so they have to use Mandarin." This supports the idea that Mandarin is employed as a dynamic repositioning tool and reinforces the theory of Li and Lee (2024) that identity is formed by changing communication expectations. The intern's identity must be sufficiently adaptable to switch from being a worldwide professional, an English-speaking staff member, and a Mandarin-speaking colleague in only a couple of moments. Besides that, adaptation and communication norms, language investment also plays a part in students' intern transpositioning identity. Below is the detail on how her confession can best capture the assertion.

Excerpt 6

"Coincidentally, when I was in Indonesia, I studied Mandarin for 13 years from Kindergarten to High School because the school taught Mandarin" (Jane, Pseudonym).

This long-term language investment is a hidden resource that has a huge impact on her position, agency, and eventual sense of professional identity. Studying Mandarin for thirteen years, from kindergarten to high school, is a major journey that changes and shapes who she is. Such long-term language acquisition is an ongoing process of negotiating one's identity (Blommaert, 2010) in which the learner's sense of self slowly grows beyond the limits of her original cultural and linguistic background. This level of involvement helps her learn Mandarin at a higher level and gain confidence in her language skills. It also makes Mandarin a potent symbol for cultural expression, social belonging, and even job chances in a globalized society. When she sees the strategic return on this long-term investment, the identity shift happens. For example, when English, the primary global language, doesn't meet the needs of all clients or personnel (such as elderly staff members, as indicated in Excerpt 5), she activates her Mandarin skills.

Transpositioning Identity from Indonesian Student to Global Hospitality Professional

The process of transpositioning Identity from Indonesian student to global hospitality professional illustrates a transformation of identity that is not solely based on adaptation, but rather driven by a compelling, future-oriented ambition. It has been observed that an intriguing dynamic among intern students exists, wherein old, localized identities are voluntarily dismantled to construct a self that is conducive to global labor, so as to align with Bauman's (2012) concept of Liquid Modernity.

These intern students are always negotiating when to lean into their national roots and when to adjust to fit a varied, worldwide workplace. They switch between Mandarin, English, and Cantonese all the time. This language shift aligns with Li and Lee (2024)'s idea of translanguaging, which says that language is not only about switching codes, but it's also about mixing and matching all you know to get your point across, make connections, and find discussed in your own home. This case is particularly interesting because Nuske (2018) and others have examined how young professionals navigate identity within multilingual commercial institutions influenced by linguistic hierarchies and institutional ideologies, while Ali, Sugiharto, and Manara (2025) and Almashour (2024) have investigated narrative identity construction in migrant and academic contexts. The current findings highlight a moment-to-moment, strategic identity positioning that closely aligns with Li and Lee's (2024) theory of transpositioning, indicating a transition from static investment or narrative identity models to more interactive, context-dependent interpretations of identity. The internships accentuate that multilingualism transcends mere communication. It is essential for developing a credible professional identity, navigating power dynamics, and promoting survival in transnational service industries. The following excerpt, articulated by the participant, also showcases how, as a developing global professional, one shows signs of linguistic insecurity (especially in English) and expresses growth through practice, aspiration, and self-reflection.

Excerpt 7

"Speaking a foreign language feels more professional... Indonesian is more for joking around." language use" (Steve, Pseudonym)

Excerpt 8

...I'm also learning to speak Cantonese, although sometimes it's still difficult so I often help by using hand gestures" (Samuel, Pseudonym)

Excerpt 7 makes it very clear how the intern student feels like he belongs and shares an identity since he is Indonesian. Just recognizing another Indonesian and responding to them in a language he both speaks can make him feel very comfortable and connected in a new place. This sense of belonging emphasizes the continual negotiation of identity, where national roots serve as a crucial base, even as interns adjust to new cultural and linguistic environments. It embodies the concept of transpositioning identity, wherein the preservation of ties to one's cultural origins functions as a crucial asset for self-identification and emotional health in globalized environments. It specifically matches the research conducted by Ali, Sugiharto, and Manara (2025), which demonstrates that Indonesian migrant workers in Kuwait undergo identity transformation through the interaction of language, shared experiences, and emotional connections among migrant groups. Likewise, the research conducted by Situmorang, Nugroho, and Recard (2021), which investigated English as a Lingua Franca within a

culturally supportive Indonesian university setting, underscores the significance of linguistic tolerance, shared cultural-religious affiliation, and emotional connection for enhancing identity construction and overall well-being. Both studies emphasize that, even in transnational or global contexts, preserving connections to one's home culture through language reinforces identification and offers emotional support, reflecting the sense of belonging and solidarity exposed in the findings.

Excerpt 8, on the other hand, shows a distinct but just as significant part of identity change that is about thinking regarding one's career and growing professionally. In this case, the intern explains how speaking English and other foreign languages makes him feel more professional, while speaking Indonesian is only for casual conversations. Their desire to be memorable interns and to accept the good changes that come with the internship shows that he is actively changing who he is, from student to global hospitality professional. This corresponds with ideas of identity transposition as discussed by Cheung and Tai (2025); Sugiharto (2025), when individuals deliberately modify their language and cultural repertoires to conform to professional roles and market exigencies. From the assertion they articulate, we know that these interns are not just talking to each other; they are building a professional persona that includes language skills, career goals, and the ability to move across the world. This shows how internships are important places for people to rethink their identities and move forward in cross-cultural job markets.

It is in line with Lee and Lee's (2024) and Sugiharto's (2025) notion of translanguaging and linguistic entrepreneurship, which views language use as a proactive strategy for skill development, employability, and identity negotiation in global employment environments. The interns' purposeful decision to use English in professional settings and Indonesian for casual contact exemplifies strategic language direction, which is a crucial aspect of identity transposition. This practical viewpoint is also consistent with Kindsiko (2025), who stated that internship programs are important for promoting technical, interpersonal, and intercultural growth, and that these spaces encourage students to adapt, reflect, and reshape their self-concept as they transition from students to professionals. Furthermore, Simon (2015), Georgakopoulou and Spilioti (2016), and Spilioti (2016) highlight that multilingual speakers in professional and digital settings constantly negotiate and perform their identities in response to shifting communicative, institutional, and market needs. Our findings explicitly support their claim that identity construction is a performative, dynamic activity shaped by the interplay of language, personal ambition, and global job structures.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study finds that identity transpositioning in the transnational hospitality internship is an essential, strategic, and multifaceted process that profoundly transforms the intern from a locally defined student into a Global Citizen. The most notable aspect is that this transposition is driven not by passive adaptation, but by an aspirational economic goal, thus establishing and substantially expanding current ideas of identity and mobility.

The main point is that Bauman's (2012) *Liquid Modernity* and Li and Lee's (2024) *Linguistic Entrepreneurship* perform effectively in tandem. The findings indicate that identity becomes fluid, constantly negotiated and reshaped, as the intern employs their bilingual skills to assert a higher positional status in the highly competitive culture of Hong Kong. This discussion is fundamentally strategic, as seen by the significant proportion of interns intending to utilize foreign languages for future professional progression and global networking. This confirms that young professionals perceive identity as a marketable asset, a viewpoint that extends beyond traditional studies centered on educational contexts and firmly establishes the discourse within the service sector.

Critically, what the authors would like to accentuate is that, as the Professional self grows more flexible, the data shows how important the affective base is, in this case, the lasting emotional link to their L1 (Indonesian). This indicates that the long-term integrity of the transposed global identity relies on the purposeful separation of the self, enabling the fundamental national identity to offer psychological resilience against the significant emotional impact of carrying out the global role. The conclusion is that successful identity transpositioning leads to a multifaceted Self: on the outside, they are professionally adaptable and linguistically entrepreneurial, but on the inside, they are emotionally supported by the stability of their local cultural base.

The implications of these findings suggest an important shift in how they negotiate of identity for young professionals in global hospitality contexts, indicating both practical and theoretical implications. Internship programs in multilingual, transnational settings such as Hong Kong function as transformative environments where interns must strategically adapt and utilize their language skills, progressing from mere adaptation to an active, future-oriented management of identity. This strengthens the notion that hospitality training and internship programs should strategically emphasize the development of both linguistic and identity negotiating competencies, equipping interns to effectively manage not just communicative requirements but also professional reorientation and global mobility. Theoretically, the study expands existing frameworks by demonstrating that identity transposition in business industries is a dynamic, context-sensitive process influenced by immediate workplace pressures, an outcome that challenges the narrative and educational paradigms typical of previous studies.

The study reveals a major gap for future research: although it offers profound insights into the moment-to-moment identity transitions occurring inside hospitality internships, there is a lack of details regarding the long-term consequences of these transitions. Subsequent research must conduct longitudinal analyses to investigate the impact of initial agentive identity negotiation during internships on enduring professional adaptation, career advancement, or emotional well-being. Furthermore, the study encourages comparative analysis of identity work beyond the hotel industry and across various cultural or national contexts, calling for the integration of quantitative measures to enhance comprehension of the elements that affect effective identity transposition within global service sectors.

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