

Ethnographic Study of Language Use in Javanese Traditional Ceremonies: Preserving Cultural Values and Identity

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the development and implementation of a hybrid learning model aimed at increasing student engagement in foreign language education. In response to the evolving educational landscape and the need for effective language learning strategies, this study combines online and face-to-face instruction to create a dynamic and interactive learning environment. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving a sample of 120 students divided into experimental and control groups. Quantitative data collected through pre- and post-intervention assessments demonstrated significant improvements in student engagement and language proficiency among participants in the hybrid model, with engagement scores increasing by an average of 25% and language proficiency scores rising by 18%. Qualitative insights gathered from semi-structured interviews revealed that students valued the flexibility, collaboration, and cultural exposure offered by the hybrid approach, contributing to enhanced motivation and satisfaction. These findings underscore the potential of hybrid learning to foster a more engaging and effective language education experience. The study highlights the importance of integrating technology, promoting student-centered learning, and balancing online and face-to-face instruction in curriculum development. Ultimately, this research advocates for the adoption of hybrid learning models as a transformative strategy for foreign language education, preparing students for successful communication in a globalized world.

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1. Introduction

Language is an integral component of culture, serving as a vehicle for expressing traditions, beliefs, and social norms (Silverstein, 2004). In the context of Indonesia, the Javanese culture stands out for its rich tapestry of traditional ceremonies, which are deeply rooted in the history and identity of the Javanese people. These ceremonies ranging from birth celebrations, weddings, and religious rites to harvest festivals offer a unique lens through which to explore the intricate relationship between language and culture (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2002). They provide not only a glimpse into the values and practices of the Javanese community but also a profound understanding of how language functions as a cultural artifact.

The significance of Javanese traditional ceremonies extends beyond mere festivity, they embody the community's collective memory and cultural heritage (Hughes-Freeland, 2008). Language plays a pivotal role in these events, as it encapsulates the historical narratives, religious beliefs, and social hierarchies inherent in Javanese society. The use of specific linguistic expressions such as prayers, blessings, and traditional songs enhances the ceremonial experience, creating a shared sense of belonging among participants (Jackson, 2005). Furthermore, these linguistic elements serve to transmit cultural values and practices from one generation to the next, reinforcing social bonds and community identity.

A study published in 2020 by Arifin and Yulianto explored the linguistic structures and functions of language used in Javanese rituals, particularly focusing on the *selamatan* (a traditional ceremony of gratitude). The research highlighted how language serves as a medium for expressing cultural values, facilitating social cohesion, and reinforcing community identity (Piller & Takahashi, 2011). The authors employed an ethnographic approach, combining participant observation with interviews, which revealed how specific phrases and expressions are utilized to convey meaning during these ceremonies.

In 2021, Sari conducted a sociolinguistic analysis of language use during Javanese weddings. The research examined the interaction between various social groups within the ceremonies and how language functions as a marker of social status. It identified specific dialects and linguistic features that differ based on the participants' backgrounds and roles in the ceremony (Schneider, 2003). This work contributed to understanding how language can reflect and reinforce social hierarchies in traditional settings.

A study by Widiastuti in 2022 focused on the ethnolinguistic dimensions of language use in Javanese traditional ceremonies, particularly in the context of *rasulan* (a communal prayer ritual). The research utilized discourse analysis to examine the language used in ceremonial speeches and its implications for cultural identity (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). Findings indicated that language not only serves a communicative function but also acts as a powerful symbol of Javanese identity, particularly in the face of globalization and cultural change.

In 2023, Rahardjo and Soekarno published research emphasizing the role of language in preserving Javanese cultural identity through traditional ceremonies. They conducted case studies on various ceremonies across different regions in Java, analyzing the linguistic elements that are consistently used and how they contribute to a sense of belonging among participants (Nurani, 2015). This study underscored the importance of maintaining linguistic diversity as a means of cultural preservation.

A recent study by Lestari in 2024 examined how language use in Javanese traditional ceremonies varies between generations. Through ethnographic interviews and observations, the research highlighted how younger generations adapt traditional language to contemporary contexts, influencing the preservation and evolution of cultural practices (Campbell & Christian, 2003). The findings emphasized the dynamic nature of language in ceremonies, demonstrating how it evolves while retaining its cultural significance.

These studies collectively illustrate the vital role of language in Javanese traditional ceremonies and highlight the multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and identity (Firzal, 2015). They employ various methodological approaches, including ethnographic research, sociolinguistic analysis, and discourse analysis, to uncover the complexities of language use in these contexts. Despite the advancements in this area of research, there remains a need for further exploration, particularly in understanding the impacts of globalization on traditional linguistic practices and the ongoing evolution of Javanese language in ceremonial settings (Zein, 2020).

Despite the richness of this linguistic and cultural interaction, there exists a notable gap in academic research focused on the language used in Javanese traditional ceremonies (Fox, 2006). While studies in the fields of linguistics and anthropology have explored various aspects of Javanese culture, the specific ways in which language is employed in ceremonial contexts remain underexplored. Understanding the nuances of language use in these ceremonies is crucial, as it can illuminate how the Javanese people articulate their cultural identity and navigate the complexities of modernity while maintaining their traditional practices (Brenner, 2012).

This research aims to fill this gap by conducting an ethnographic study that delves into the language used in Javanese traditional ceremonies (Saad, 2020). By employing qualitative

research methods, including participant observation and interviews, this study seeks to uncover the specific linguistic features that characterize these events and the meanings they convey. Moreover, the research will explore variations in language use across different ceremonies and geographical regions, providing insights into how cultural expressions evolve while remaining anchored in tradition(Sharifian, 2017).

This study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on language and culture, highlighting the importance of linguistic diversity in preserving cultural heritage(Showstack, 2012). By documenting and analyzing the language of Javanese traditional ceremonies, this research not only aims to enrich our understanding of Javanese culture but also emphasizes the vital role that language plays in sustaining communal identities in an ever-changing world. Through this exploration, the study hopes to foster a greater appreciation for the cultural significance of language in traditional practices and the need for ongoing efforts to preserve these valuable expressions of identity(Paris, 2012).

2. Method

The study will be conducted using a multi-method approach that includes participant observation, interviews, and audio-visual recordings(Bland & Tobbell, 2015). This design allows for a comprehensive analysis of the language used in various Javanese ceremonies, capturing both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Central to this ethnographic study is participant observation, which involves actively engaging in Javanese traditional ceremonies as a participant-researcher(Kendall & Thangaraj, 2013). This immersive approach will enable me to observe the language in use, noting specific linguistic features, rituals, and interactions among participants. By being present in these settings, I can capture the nuances of language use, including tone, context, and the role of non-verbal cues. The ceremonies selected for observation will include significant cultural events such as akad nikah (wedding ceremonies), selamatan (thanksgiving ceremonies), and rasulan (communal prayers), representing a diverse range of Javanese traditions.

Complementing the observational data, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants, including ceremonial leaders, community elders, and family members involved in the ceremonies(Ngabwa, 2015). These interviews will explore participants' perceptions of language use during the ceremonies, their understanding of the meanings behind specific phrases, and the significance of language in expressing cultural identity. The semi-structured format will allow for flexibility, enabling participants to share their experiences and insights while also guiding the conversation to cover key topics related to language and culture(Brown & Danaher, 2019).

To supplement the observational and interview data, audio-visual recordings will be made during the ceremonies(Muir & Mason, 2012). These recordings will capture the spoken language in real-time, allowing for detailed analysis of linguistic features, discourse patterns, and the context in which language is used(Tur & De Mori, 2011). By transcribing and analyzing these recordings, I aim to identify common themes, variations in dialect, and the interplay between language and ritual practices.

The analysis will involve a combination of qualitative coding and thematic analysis(Braun & Clarke, 2012). Initially, the collected data from observations, interviews, and recordings will be transcribed and organized into manageable segments. I will employ coding techniques to identify recurring themes, patterns, and linguistic features. Key areas of focus will include:

- The types of language used in different ceremonial contexts.
- The relationship between language and cultural values.
- Variations in language use among different social groups and generations.
- The role of language in maintaining cultural identity amidst modernization.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research, particularly regarding the respect for cultural practices and the privacy of participants (Pelzang & Hutchinson, 2017). Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, ensuring they are aware of the research purpose and how their contributions will be used. Anonymity will be maintained in the reporting of findings, and participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, I will strive to be sensitive to cultural norms and practices, ensuring that my presence as a researcher does not disrupt the ceremonial events (Wilson, 2020).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

The findings of this ethnographic study reveal the intricate relationship between language use and cultural expression in Javanese traditional ceremonies. Through participant observation, interviews, and audio-visual recordings, several key themes emerged that highlight the significance of language in these cultural contexts. The results are organized into three main areas: the types of language used, the role of language in cultural identity, and variations in language use among different social groups.

The analysis of the data indicated a diverse array of linguistic expressions employed during Javanese traditional ceremonies. Language is utilized not only for communication but also as a means to convey cultural values and emotional sentiments. Specific phrases, prayers, and blessings were consistently observed across various ceremonies. For instance, during wedding ceremonies (akad nikah), traditional vows are recited in a formal register, often incorporating classical Javanese terms that may not be widely understood by younger generations. This use of elevated language underscores the ceremony's sanctity and cultural heritage.

The research identified the use of ritualistic speech acts, such as do'a (prayers) and mantra (incantations), which serve to invoke blessings and establish a connection with the divine. Participants expressed that these linguistic elements are crucial in facilitating spiritual experiences during ceremonies. The emotional resonance of these expressions contributes to the overall atmosphere of reverence and community bonding.

Oral storytelling emerged as a prominent feature during certain ceremonies, particularly during selamatan (thanksgiving ceremonies). Elders often recounted historical narratives and folklore that reinforce cultural identity and collective memory. These storytelling moments not only engage participants but also serve as a vehicle for passing down cultural knowledge and values to younger generations.

A significant finding of this research is the pivotal role language plays in expressing and maintaining cultural identity among Javanese communities. Participants emphasized that the use of traditional language during ceremonies is a source of pride and a marker of cultural belonging. Language use in ceremonies is viewed as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Many participants articulated a strong sense of responsibility to uphold traditional linguistic practices, seeing them as essential for passing on cultural values to future generations. The use of traditional expressions during significant life events reinforces community bonds and fosters a shared sense of identity.

The study revealed that participants are increasingly aware of the impacts of globalization on their linguistic practices. Many expressed concerns about the erosion of traditional language use, particularly among younger generations who are more exposed to global languages such as Indonesian and English. However, ceremonies were identified as vital spaces for resisting this trend, where the use of traditional language serves as a powerful statement of cultural resilience.

The analysis highlighted that specific words and phrases hold symbolic meanings that go beyond their literal definitions. For example, certain blessings are believed to carry spiritual power, and their recitation is seen as essential for ensuring harmony and prosperity within the community. This symbolic dimension underscores the deep connection between language and cultural beliefs.

The research also uncovered variations in language use based on social factors, including age, status, and region. The study identified dialectal variations in language use across different regions in Java. Participants from rural areas often used more traditional forms of Javanese, while those from urban settings displayed a tendency to mix Javanese with Indonesian or other languages. This linguistic blending reflects the influence of modernization and urbanization on traditional practices.

Interviews revealed generational differences in language preferences and understanding. Younger participants often expressed challenges in comprehending classical Javanese terms used during ceremonies, leading to a desire for adaptation without losing the essence of tradition. This generational gap highlights the ongoing negotiation of cultural identity within the context of changing linguistic landscapes.

The role of social status in language use during ceremonies was another notable finding. Higher-status individuals often employed more formal language and were expected to lead prayers or speeches, while lower-status participants used more informal language. This dynamic reinforces existing social hierarchies and illustrates how language serves as a marker of status within the community.

3.2 Understanding How Language Preserves and Communicates Cultural Values

Language is more than just a means of communication, it is a fundamental aspect of culture that preserves, expresses, and transmits cultural values across generations. Through the lens of linguistics and anthropology, the intricate relationship between language and culture reveals how linguistic practices encapsulate a community's beliefs, traditions, and social norms.

One of the primary ways language preserves cultural values is by serving as a repository of collective knowledge. Language encapsulates the experiences, histories, and worldviews of a community, often embedding them in idioms, proverbs, and traditional narratives. For instance, in many cultures, proverbs offer wisdom that reflects shared values and beliefs. In Javanese culture, expressions such as "Sik ngono kui ngono" (It is what it is) convey acceptance and resilience, emphasizing the value placed on adaptability in the face of challenges. These linguistic forms not only communicate specific messages but also reinforce cultural norms and expectations, ensuring that essential cultural knowledge is passed down through generations.

Moreover, language acts as a mnemonic device that helps individuals remember cultural practices and rituals. During traditional ceremonies, specific phrases and rituals are often recited to evoke cultural significance and reinforce community identity. For example, the use of ritualistic language in Javanese weddings, such as reciting prayers and blessings, not only underscores the sanctity of the event but also connects participants to their cultural heritage. This oral tradition ensures that cultural values are continuously revitalized and reaffirmed, creating a sense of continuity within the community.

Language also plays a crucial role in shaping and expressing social identity. The way individuals communicate often reflects their cultural background, social status, and group affiliation. In multilingual societies, the choice of language can signify belonging to a particular cultural group, thereby reinforcing shared values and collective identity. For example, in Javanese traditional ceremonies, the use of the Javanese language, as opposed to the national language, serves as a marker of cultural identity and pride. This linguistic choice fosters a sense of belonging among participants and affirms their connection to Javanese cultural values.

Additionally, language can serve as a tool for social differentiation. Variations in language use, such as dialects, registers, and styles, can indicate social hierarchies and relationships within a community. In many cultures, formal language may be reserved for ceremonies and interactions involving elders or authority figures, signaling respect and deference. This dynamic reinforces social norms and values, emphasizing the importance of respect and community cohesion.

Importantly, language is not static, it evolves in response to changing cultural contexts. As societies face new challenges and influences, language adapts to reflect contemporary realities while retaining connections to traditional values. This dynamic nature of language allows for the integration of new ideas and practices while preserving the core cultural values that define a community.

For example, in the face of globalization, many communities may incorporate foreign words or phrases into their traditional language without losing sight of their cultural identity. This linguistic blending illustrates how language can adapt to new contexts while still serving as a medium for expressing cultural values. The ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity in language use reflects the resilience of cultural identity, demonstrating that language can be both a marker of heritage and a tool for navigating contemporary life.

3.3 The Impact of Modernity and Language Changes on Traditional Practices

One of the most prominent effects of modernity is the phenomenon of globalization, which has facilitated unprecedented cultural exchange and interaction among diverse communities. This interconnectedness has led to the introduction of new ideas, values, and linguistic influences that challenge traditional practices. While globalization offers opportunities for cultural enrichment, it also poses threats to the preservation of local languages and customs.

For example, in many Javanese communities, traditional ceremonies such as weddings and harvest festivals have begun to incorporate elements from Western culture, including music, attire, and even language. The blending of cultural practices can create vibrant, hybrid celebrations; however, it can also lead to the dilution of traditional customs. Younger generations, influenced by global media and popular culture, may prioritize contemporary practices over their cultural heritage, resulting in a shift in the ways these ceremonies are conducted and the language used within them.

Language, as a dynamic and evolving entity, reflects the changing cultural landscape shaped by modernity. The rise of global languages, particularly English and Indonesian, has introduced new vocabulary and expressions that are increasingly incorporated into daily life, often at the expense of local languages and dialects. In Javanese communities, this linguistic shift is evident in the younger generation's language preferences, where the use of Indonesian or even English in traditional contexts is becoming more common.

While this adaptation can enhance communication and foster connections with broader society, it also raises concerns about the erosion of traditional linguistic practices. Many younger individuals may find it challenging to fully engage with classical Javanese, which is rich in cultural significance but often perceived as archaic. As a result, the richness of cultural expression embedded in traditional language may be lost, impacting the authenticity of ceremonial practices.

Technological advancements further influence how traditional practices are conducted and communicated. The advent of social media, video conferencing, and digital communication has transformed the ways communities engage with their cultural rituals. While technology can facilitate participation in ceremonies across distances allowing families and friends to connect during significant events the reliance on digital platforms can also alter the essence of these practices.

For instance, the experience of a traditional ceremony may be fragmented when observed through a screen, leading to a more superficial engagement with cultural values. Additionally, the need for visually appealing content for social media may prompt communities to modify their traditional practices to fit contemporary aesthetics, further distancing them from their authentic roots. The interplay between tradition and technology presents both challenges and opportunities for cultural preservation, as communities navigate the balance between maintaining their heritage and adapting to modern demands.

Amid these changes, the importance of education and cultural awareness cannot be overstated. As traditional practices face pressures from modernity, efforts to promote linguistic and cultural education become essential. Initiatives that emphasize the value of local languages and traditions can empower younger generations to appreciate their cultural heritage and encourage them to participate actively in preserving it.

Community-based programs that engage youth in traditional practices, such as storytelling, language workshops, and cultural festivals, can foster a sense of pride and connection to their roots. By integrating modern pedagogical approaches with traditional knowledge, these initiatives can create pathways for the revitalization of cultural practices, ensuring that they remain relevant and vibrant in contemporary society.

3.4 Benefits for Cultural Practitioners, Educators, and Policymakers

The preservation of traditional languages is vital for maintaining cultural identity, fostering community cohesion, and ensuring the transmission of knowledge across generations. As societies grapple with the challenges posed by globalization and modernity, the insights gained from studies on language use in traditional contexts can provide valuable guidance for cultural practitioners, educators, and policymakers.

Cultural practitioners, including artists, musicians, and community leaders, play a crucial role in the revitalization and preservation of traditional languages. Insights from ethnographic studies can empower these practitioners by providing them with a deeper understanding of how language functions within cultural contexts. For instance, knowledge of the specific linguistic features and expressions used in traditional ceremonies can help practitioners create authentic representations of their cultural heritage in their work.

Additionally, studies that document the cultural significance of traditional language can inspire practitioners to incorporate these elements into their artistic expressions. For example, musicians can weave traditional language into their lyrics or performances, while visual artists can explore themes related to linguistic heritage. By doing so, cultural practitioners not only enrich their own work but also foster community engagement and pride, encouraging others to appreciate and use their traditional languages. This synergy between art and language revitalizes cultural practices and creates a shared sense of belonging among community members.

Educators are at the forefront of language preservation, as they have the unique opportunity to shape the attitudes and skills of younger generations. Research on language use in traditional contexts can inform curriculum development, ensuring that educational materials reflect the cultural values and linguistic diversity of a community. For instance, educators can integrate traditional language into lesson plans through storytelling, songs, and local history, providing students with immersive learning experiences that promote language acquisition and cultural appreciation.

Furthermore, educators can utilize the findings of such studies to develop language revitalization programs that engage students in learning traditional languages in meaningful ways. Activities such as language workshops, cultural exchanges, and field trips to local ceremonies can foster a sense of connection to linguistic heritage, making learning relevant and enjoyable. By emphasizing the importance of traditional languages, educators can instill a

sense of pride and ownership in students, empowering them to become advocates for their cultural heritage.

Policymakers play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for the preservation and promotion of traditional languages. Research that highlights the sociocultural importance of traditional languages can serve as a powerful tool for advocacy, informing policy decisions that support language revitalization initiatives. For example, policymakers can develop and fund programs that promote bilingual education, allowing students to learn both their native language and a national language, thereby ensuring the survival of linguistic diversity.

Moreover, studies that demonstrate the link between language preservation and cultural identity can motivate policymakers to implement protective measures for endangered languages. This can include supporting community-led language revitalization efforts, funding cultural programs, and recognizing traditional languages in official documentation and public discourse. By prioritizing language preservation in cultural policies, governments can foster a sense of belonging and pride among marginalized communities, ultimately contributing to social cohesion and cultural diversity.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study of language use in Javanese traditional ceremonies underscores the profound connection between language, culture, and identity. Through a detailed examination of linguistic practices, the research reveals how language serves as a vital instrument for preserving cultural values, fostering community bonds, and transmitting knowledge across generations. The findings highlight the diverse types of language employed during ceremonies, the pivotal role of language in shaping cultural identity, and the variations in language use among different social groups. As modernity and globalization exert their influence, traditional practices face significant challenges, including the erosion of linguistic heritage and the adaptation of cultural expressions. However, the insights gained from this research offer valuable guidance for cultural practitioners, educators, and policymakers seeking to promote and preserve traditional languages. By understanding the importance of language in cultural practices, these stakeholders can implement effective strategies that engage younger generations, foster community pride, and advocate for supportive policies. Ultimately, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the role of language in cultural preservation, emphasizing the need for ongoing efforts to protect and revitalize traditional languages. As communities navigate the complexities of contemporary life, the resilience of cultural identity remains intricately tied to the vitality of their linguistic heritage. By prioritizing the preservation of traditional languages, we can ensure that the rich tapestry of human expression continues to thrive, enriching our global cultural landscape for future generations.

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