

THE USE OF SUNDANESE LANGUAGE IN BANJARHARJO IN THE JAVANESE ETHNIC AREA

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the dynamics of Sundanese language usage in the Banjarharjo area, Brebes Regency, which is predominantly inhabited by the Javanese ethnic group. The focus of the study includes the history, origins of Sundanese language usage, differences between the Sundanese dialect of Banjarharjo and other regions, factors influencing Sundanese language usage, and its impact on the development of local culture. This research employs a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. Data is collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving local communities as primary informants. The research findings indicate that the use of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo is rooted in the influence of the Padjajaran Kingdom and social interactions with the directly adjacent West Java region. The Sundanese language of Banjarharjo possesses its own distinctive characteristics, both in dialect, vocabulary, and intonation, which are influenced by the cultural acculturation of Javanese and Sundanese. Nevertheless, a shift in language usage is occurring among the younger generation, where the dominance of the Indonesian language is beginning to replace Sundanese as the primary means of communication.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with its vast expanse and diverse society, is a gem with invaluable cultural wealth. Thousands of islands are adorned with unique ethnic groups, such as Batak, Malay, Padang, and Lampung in Sumatra; Banjar and Dayak in Kalimantan; Bugis and Minahasa in Sulawesi; Javanese and Sundanese in Java; as well as Papua in the land of Papua. This diversity, as emphasized by Cecep Sumarna and Bambang Yuniarto (2016), makes Indonesia a colorful nation. Cultural differences, customs, religions, languages, races, and ethnicities are not barriers, but rather treasures that must be preserved. In the midst of this diversity, appreciating differences is the key to living together harmoniously. Individual diversity is an undeniable reality (Wardatul Baldah et al., 2016). In a pluralistic country like Indonesia, it is essential to learn to coexist peacefully and to respect differences.

The differences that can be observed include the differences in language among each ethnic group. Language serves as a magical communication tool that enables humans to connect, share ideas, and broaden their horizons. Each language has its own uniqueness, including variations that reflect the cultural richness and origins of its speakers. These language differences manifest in the variations of pronunciation across different regions, forming unique social and geographical patterns. These differences are not limited to sounds but also encompass sentence structures, vocabulary, and meanings. For instance, in the Banjarharjo area, part of the community uses Sundanese. However, the Sundanese spoken there differs from the Sundanese in other regions. The people of Banjarharjo predominantly use a more coarse form of Sundanese.

Previous research, such as that conducted by Pongkot et al. (2022), indicates a shift in the use of regional languages among the younger generation due to the influence of formal education that prioritizes Indonesian as the primary means of communication (Pongkot et al., 2022). Furthermore, Nurhaq (2019) notes that the use of Sundanese in border areas tends to decline due to migration factors and intense intercultural interactions (Nurhaq, 2019). However, these studies have not specifically highlighted how the use of Sundanese persists amid the dominance of Javanese ethnicity and culture, as well as how social, economic, and educational factors influence this dynamic. This research gap serves as the main background for this study.

Research on the existence of the Sundanese language in the Central Java region has been conducted previously. Sobarna et al. (2019) studied the preservation of the Sundanese language through toponyms in the Dayeuhluhur District, Cilacap Regency, and found that internal and external factors influence the sustainability of the language (Sobarna et al., 2019). In addition, Aras (2022) discusses the lexical innovations of the Sundanese language in Dayeuhluhur District, highlighting the differences in subdialects compared to standard

Sundanese (Aras, 2022). However, specific studies regarding the use of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo District, particularly in the context of interactions with the Javanese-speaking community, remain limited.

This research is important for understanding the linguistic dynamics in the border areas of culture and language, as well as for identifying the factors that influence the maintenance or shift of language in bilingual communities. The aim of this research is to analyze the patterns of Sundanese language use in Banjarharjo District, identify the factors that affect the sustainability of the language, and understand the interaction between Sundanese and Javanese speakers in the local social and cultural context.

This research aims to analyze the patterns of Sundanese language usage in Banjarharjo, particularly in the context of daily communication, education, and social interaction. This study also seeks to identify the factors that support or hinder the preservation of the Sundanese language in the region. Using a qualitative approach, this research employs in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to comprehensively gather data. The primary targets of this research include the local community, cultural figures, and educators who are directly involved in the use of the Sundanese language.

The literature review indicates that the preservation of regional languages is not solely dependent on policy aspects, but also on the community's attitude towards the language (Djuwita, 2019). This study aims to contribute by detailing the dynamics of Sundanese language usage in the Banjarharjo area and formulating strategic recommendations to support its preservation. It is hoped that the results of this research can serve as a reference for local governments and other stakeholders in designing regional language preservation programs based on local conditions.

METHODS

This type of research is a qualitative study using ethnographic methods. A qualitative approach was chosen for this research because the subjects, namely Banjarharjo in Brebes Regency, cannot be measured quantitatively. Words, sentences, and images consist of collected data that have meanings beyond mere numbers or frequencies. The author can describe and analyze the role of families in preserving Sundanese cultural values using this data.

The subjects of this research are the community residing in Banjarharjo, Brebes Regency. The selected informants are local residents with an average age ranging from 30 to 60 years. In addition to educational background, the researcher also limits the research subjects based on their occupations. The researcher narrows the study to subjects whose livelihoods are farmers, casual laborers, and traders. However, the researcher also encounters informants whose occupations are motorcycle taxi drivers and casual laborers.

The researcher standardizes the number of informants in each village to 20 informants. The object of the research is the Sundanese language dialect present in Banjarharjo.

In this research, the data collection techniques used are observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique in this study follows systematic stages, starting with a comprehensive review of data from various sources such as interviews, field notes, documents, images, and photographs. The next stage is data reduction, which involves summarizing and selecting important information. Then, the arrangement of data units is carried out, which involves grouping data based on categories. The final stage is data interpretation, which means providing meaning and understanding to the analyzed data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the research conducted in Banjarharjo Village, Brebes Regency, several important findings related to the use of the Sundanese language among the local community have emerged. Banjarharjo Village itself is a village formed from the merger of three sub-districts, namely Banjar Nambo, Banjarharja, and Banjar Longkrang, with a total population reaching 11,338 people, the majority of whom are Muslim.

Research reveals that the use of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo has strong historical roots, linked to the influence of the Padjajaran Kingdom in the past. The expansion of territory and migration of populations from the realm of Padjajaran brought the Sundanese language to this area. The geographical location of Banjarharjo, which borders directly with West Java, particularly Kuningan and Cirebon, also facilitates cultural and linguistic exchange. Observations indicate that the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from other Sundanese dialects. These differences are particularly evident in aspects of dialect, vocabulary, intonation, and grammar. The Sundanese language in this region absorbs a significant amount of vocabulary from the Javanese language, with intonation that tends to be flatter compared to other Sundanese dialects.

The study of 13 research subjects revealed variations in the use of the Sundanese language among children. The data indicates that out of the 13 subjects, 10 children use Sundanese as their first language, while 3 others use different regional languages. As a second language, 7 children use Javanese and 6 children use Sundanese, as shown in the research results table.

The research identifies five main factors that influence the use of local languages in the Javanese and Sundanese communities in Banjarharjo. First, environmental factors, including family, school, and social interactions, significantly affect children's language choices. Second, children's own interest in using regional languages. Third, inter-ethnic marriages often result in the use of Indonesian as the medium of communication at home.

Fourth, the lack of parental concern in teaching regional languages. Fifth, the situation of language use tends to be informal within the family context.

Another important finding is the existence of a language shift phenomenon influenced by various socio-cultural factors. The five main factors affecting language shift are: the situation of language use that tends to be informal, diverse ethnic backgrounds, the language proficiency of the community, kinship relations, and the topics of conversation. The patterns of relationships among family members in language use show three main patterns: the husband-wife relationship pattern indicating a shift from Javanese to Sundanese, the parent-child relationship pattern dominated by coarse Sundanese, and the sibling relationship pattern that predominantly uses coarse Sundanese mixed with informal Indonesian.

The research results also indicate a significant erosion of cultural values among the younger generation of Banjarharjo, particularly in the use of the local language. Data shows that the majority of teenagers no longer consider Sundanese as their first language, although they still understand the language passively. This phenomenon raises concerns about the potential extinction of the Sundanese language in the region in the coming decades if serious preservation efforts are not undertaken promptly.

The results of the research on the use of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo, Brebes Regency indicate several important findings that need to be further discussed and compared with previous studies. First, the findings regarding the language shift from Javanese to Sundanese in the Banjarharjo area align with Mardikantoro's (2012) research, which discovered that border regions such as Brebes experience significant language shift phenomena. The study revealed that geographical factors and population mobility are the main causes of the language shift (Mardikantoro, 2012). This is further supported by the study of Pramswari (2014), which found that the Javanese-Sundanese border region has unique linguistic characteristics due to cultural mixing (Pramswari, 2014).

Regarding the characteristics of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo, which has unique features in dialect, vocabulary, and intonation, this finding supports Winata (2019) research on dialectal variations of the Sundanese language in border areas. Her research identifies the absorption of Javanese language elements into the Sundanese language used in border regions (Winata, 2019), similar to the findings in this study. The phenomenon of language use among children in Banjarharjo, which shows a declining tendency in the use of regional languages, is consistent with Wiyanti (2019) findings in her research on the preservation of regional languages among the younger generation. Her research reveals that environmental factors and parental language attitudes significantly influence the use of regional languages among children (Wiyanti et al., 2019).

The five factors influencing the use of local languages identified in this study (environment, children's interests, inter-ethnic marriages, parental concern, and usage situations) align with Komalasasi & Rusdiana (2017) research, which identified similar factors in the preservation of regional languages in the global era (Komalasasi & Rusdiana, 2017). However, this study found an additional factor, namely inter-ethnic marriages, which was not identified in Komalasasi & Rusdiana research.

The relationship patterns among family members in language use found in this study support Fishman's (2012) theory on the domains of language use in multilingual societies. This theory emphasizes that language choice within families is significantly influenced by the role relations among family members (Fishman, 2012). The findings regarding the erosion of cultural values among the younger generation align with Musgrave (2014) longitudinal research, which indicates a declining trend in the use of regional languages among Indonesian teenagers (Musgrave, 2014). His research projects the potential extinction of several regional languages within the next 50 years if serious preservation efforts are not undertaken.

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the relatively small sample size (13 subjects) may not fully represent the entire population. Second, this study focuses only on one area in Brebes Regency, thus generalizing the findings should be done with caution. Third, temporal factors are not accounted for in this research, making it impossible to monitor changes in language use over time. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to monitor changes in language use in the long term. Additionally, research with a broader geographical scope and a larger sample size will provide a more comprehensive picture. Comparative studies between various border areas of Java and Sunda will also offer a deeper understanding of the dynamics of language use in border regions.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the use of the Sundanese language in Banjarharjo Village, Brebes Regency, is increasingly experiencing a shift, particularly among early childhood age groups. Factors such as the dominance of Indonesian language use within the family environment, a lack of parental awareness regarding the importance of regional language preservation, and low interest among children in the Sundanese language are the main causes of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are some children who still demonstrate good Sundanese language skills, largely influenced by a supportive social environment, such as the nuclear family or active speaker communities.

The contribution of this research to the field of study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of regional language use in multilingual communities located at cultural borders. This finding highlights the importance of environmental factors, educational

policies, and family involvement in preserving the continuity of local languages as part of cultural heritage.

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