

Linguistic Inequality in Urban Jember: The Dominance of Javanese and the Marginalization of Madurese

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dominance of the Javanese language in urban Jember, East Java, and its implications for social dynamics and cultural identity. Despite the presence of significant Madurese-speaking communities, Javanese has emerged as the dominant language in public and social interactions, reflecting underlying societal hierarchies. Using Paulo Freire's theory of oppression, this research explores how linguistic hegemony marginalizes minority languages, pressuring non-Javanese speakers to conform for social acceptance. Employing a quantitative methodology, data were gathered through structured surveys of Jember residents. The results of the study clearly show how language power and social class are connected. 72.7% of people regularly use Javanese when they talk to each other every day, and 86.4% of them say that speaking Javanese helps them to make better connections with other people and is very important for their social life. However, this dominance imposes assimilation pressures, evidenced by 81.8% of participants feeling the need to adjust their language to fit majority norms. The study further examines Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, which explains how Javanese holds cultural and social significance, making it a tool for reinforcing linguistic hierarchies. These dynamics lead to the marginalization of Madurese speakers, aligning with Freire's notion of internalized oppression, where minority groups adopt the norms of dominant cultures to avoid exclusion. By highlighting these patterns, the research underscores the need to address the inequities embedded in language use and advocates for measures to preserve linguistic diversity. This study contributes to understanding how language reflects broader cultural power structures and shape's identity in multi-ethnic communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a critical component of cultural identity and social interaction, shaping the ways individuals and communities navigate power dynamics (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Across diverse societies, the elevation of one language over others dictates the terms of public engagement and social mobility. When a dominant language emerges as the standard medium in multi-ethnic spaces, it inevitably creates a linguistic hierarchy. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasize these dynamic highlights the mechanics of cultural hegemony, illustrating

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how minority language speakers are often marginalized and pressured to conform to dominant linguistic norms to secure social acceptance.

Jember represents a unique urban space where two major cultures, Javanese and Madurese, meet and interact intensely. (Suaedi *et al.*, 2025) Despite a significant population of Madurese speakers, the Javanese language is gradually establishing itself as the dominant language in public spaces. This dominance does not occur in a vacuum. As emphasized by Kamaruzzaman and Iché (2024), language is not only a neutral means of communication, but also a crucial instrument of power that regulates relations between groups and marginalizes minorities, thus creating inequalities in access to resources and social opportunities. Furthermore, the conceptual study by Wilmot *et al.* (2023) demonstrates that language is a source of the formation of Otherness, where minority groups are vulnerable to social exclusion in the public sphere because their linguistic competence is constantly evaluated and used as the basis for the formation of in-groups and out-groups. In daily interactions in Jember, the dominance of the Javanese language functions as a tool of this exclusion, forcing the Madurese minority to adapt or risk being excluded from the communal community.

To analyze these oppressive linguistic power relations, this study draws on Paulo Freire's framework of critical pedagogy (2018). The relevance of Freire's theory is emphasized by Mayo (2022), who highlights that systems of oppression consolidate their dominance through cultural invasion and organized control over the lives of minority communities. To break free from this domination, Williams (2019) underscores the importance of Freire's concept of *conscientização* (critical consciousness), which requires oppressed groups to reject the conceptions of reality and values imposed by their oppressors. From a philosophical perspective, Guilherme (2017) also notes that Freire's work offers a crucial foundation for intercultural ethics theory to analyze phenomena of cultural diversity, identity, and language practices (linguaging). This framework is particularly apt for analyzing phenomena in Jember, where non-Javanese speakers ultimately internalize the values of the majority group by suppressing their own mother tongue in order to gain social acceptance.

Various studies have examined the dynamics of language shift and linguistic hegemony across different parts of the world. On the international level, research by Baranova and Fedorova (2020) in a Russian metropolitan city found that aggressive norms of monolingualism, rooted in the Soviet era, still strongly dominate the public sphere, marginalizing the language varieties of migrant groups. A similar clash was found by Han and Wu (2020) in Guangzhou, China, where a monoglot linguistic regime often conflicts with the reality of the society's multiculturalism. Furthermore, Zheng and Mei (2020) demonstrated that socioeconomic status influences how middle-class families in urban China plan their children's language education (English).

In Indonesia, linguistic dominance often takes the form of vertical hegemony. Prayoga and Khatimah (2019) highlight how urban communities in specific areas have begun to position English as superior to Indonesian as a symbol of the upper-middle-class lifestyle. Meanwhile, the threat to regional languages due to the penetration of the national language is documented in Andriyanti's (2019) research, which found that the majority of Javanese teenagers in Yogyakarta now claim Indonesian as their first language. A shift in adolescents' attitudes is also observed by Wulandari *et al.* (2025) and Fitriati *et al.* (2025), who reveal that young people feel more comfortable using the Ngoko register and Indonesian, but avoid using Krama because they are afraid of making mistakes and consider it too complex. This phenomenon of assimilation also occurs among urban nomads. Manik *et al.* (2023) found that

Javanese migrants in Sumbul are gradually abandoning their mother tongue and switching to Indonesian or Batak Toba to adapt to their work environment. Despite this threat, Rohmadi *et al.* (2023) advocate for the importance of socio--pragmatic studies in spoken discourse to preserve the Javanese language as a cultural identity heritage in major cities. More specifically in Jember, a sociolinguistic study by Hasan *et al.* (2024) captures the phenomenon of diglossia among elementary school students, where Indonesian dominates the academic sphere, while Javanese and Madurese are used alternately through code-switching in informal settings.

Although studies ranging from Baranova and Fedorova (2020) to Hasan *et al.* (2024) have provided a broad sociolinguistic landscape, there remains a fundamental gap in analysis. International and national research to date has been overly focused on vertical conflicts: global languages versus national languages, state languages versus immigrant languages, or national languages versus a single regional language. Very few studies have critically examined horizontal linguistic conflicts – namely, the struggle for dominance and hegemony between two equal regional languages coexisting within the same urban landscape.

This is where the novelty of this research lies. Initiating a shift in focus beyond a simple mapping of diglossia, this study uses Freire's critical pedagogy as an analytical tool in the realm of everyday sociolinguistics. This research seeks to understand the factors contributing to the prominence of Javanese in urban Jember and its impact on minority language communities. By analyzing historical, social, and political influences, the study explores how linguistic hierarchies shape social interactions and cultural inclusion. The findings aim to shed light on the mechanisms of linguistic hegemony and offer insights into preserving linguistic diversity in multi-ethnic societies.

METHOD

This research adopts a quantitative approach, as it focuses on analyzing numerical data rather than words. Quantitative research is a form of research that relies on the methods of natural sciences, which produces numerical data and hard facts (Lim, 2024). It means that quantitative research is research that focuses on numerical or statistical data. In this point quantitative data is operated by analysing the collected data. Quantitative research, as described by Lim (2024), is grounded in the methodologies of the natural sciences, producing numerical data and objective facts. By emphasizing measurements and statistical or computational techniques, quantitative research aims to uncover patterns and relationships that can be generalized within the context studied.

The research was conducted in the urban area of Jember, East Java, a region characterized by a high intensity of cultural and linguistic contact, particularly between the Javanese and Madurese ethnic groups. The participants consisted of 31 residents living in urban Jember who actively engage in daily public and social interactions. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure the inclusion of individuals who regularly navigate the local linguistic landscape, encompassing both dominant language users and minority language speakers. While the sample size is exploratory, it provides preliminary quantitative insights into the urban sociolinguistic behaviors of the community.

Data collection was carried out using a structured online survey administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to capture specific sociolinguistic variables: the frequency of Javanese language use in daily interactions, the perceived degree of social pressure to assimilate linguistically, the comfort levels of using non-Javanese languages in

public spheres, and the perceptions of social hierarchies related to language proficiency. The survey instrument utilized a closed-ended format with a Likert-type scale (e.g., Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely, Never) to precisely quantify the intensity of the respondents' experiences and attitudes.

The collected numerical data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Survey responses were coded, aggregated, and tabulated to calculate the exact frequencies and percentages for each category. These statistical results were then visually represented through pie charts to provide clear, accessible empirical evidence of the linguistic trends within the community. In the final analytical stage, these descriptive statistics were theoretically interpreted using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy framework and related sociolinguistic theories to systematically explain the underlying power dynamics, marginalization, and internalized oppression operating within Jember's social interactions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This chapter connects the survey findings to the theories discussed in, exploring how the use of Javanese as the dominant language in urban Jember reflects social and cultural power dynamics. It examines how language impacts social inclusion and influences interactions and status. Data for this research is collected through structured surveys targeted at individuals living in Jember who regularly experience and participate in the use of the local language. The surveys are designed to capture various aspects of language usage, and preference for local language over other languages. By focusing on residents, the study aims to gather authentic insights into how language is used in daily interactions, and social settings.

Table 1. Audience response of the media from google form

Category	Data	Conclusion
Use Majority Language (Javanese)	72.7% regularly use Javanese, with 15.9% always and 56.8% frequently using it.	Javanese is the dominant language in daily social interactions.
Social Pressure to Use Javanese	70.4% feel some level of social pressure to use Javanese.	Significant social pressure exists, influencing language use.
Comfort Using Other Languages	93.2% feel comfortable using non-Javanese languages, while 6.8% feel discomfort.	Most are comfortable using other languages, but a minority experience unease.
Social Acceptance for Javanese Speakers	75% believe Javanese speakers are more accepted socially.	Javanese speakers are perceived to have higher social acceptance.
Networking Advantages for Javanese Speakers	86.4% think Javanese speakers have an advantage in networking.	Speaking Javanese is seen as beneficial for building social networks.
Need to Adjust Language	81.8% feel the need to adjust their language use to fit in.	There is a strong need to conform linguistically to social norms.

This section analyzes the quantitative findings of the survey, beginning with a breakdown of the frequency of Javanese language use in public spaces. Based on Table 1 and Question 1 regarding the Distribution of Javanese Language Use in Urban Jember, Javanese has been shown to absolutely dominate daily social interactions in the urban area of Jember. The data indicates that 72.7% of respondents routinely use Javanese, with 15.9% using it constantly (always) and 56.8% using it frequently. These statistics are not just linguistic usage statistics, but a demographic representation that the Javanese language has become the *de facto* lingua franca setting the standard for public communication in the city. This confirms that minority speakers are forced to face the linguistic barrier of the majority in nearly every communal activity.

This dominance in usage directly correlates with the distribution of social privilege, as found in Question 4, Social acceptance rates based on fluency in Javanese, and Question 5, Perceived networking advantages of Javanese speakers in urban Jember. The survey recorded that 75% of respondents believe Javanese speakers receive significantly better social acceptance in the community. More significantly, the results of Question 5 show that 86.4% of respondents consider fluency in Javanese to provide significant advantages in building social and professional networks (networking). Interpretation of these two sets of data confirms that the Javanese language has transformed from a means of communication into social capital; it functions as an unwritten prerequisite that largely determines whether an individual will be included in the community's social network or, conversely, excluded.

As a logical consequence of this privilege, assimilation pressures can be seen in the results of Question 6, Frequency of linguistic adaptation among minority language speakers, and Question 7, Comparison of Javanese and Madurese language use in informal settings. The majority of respondents (81.8%) openly acknowledged that they felt the need to consciously adapt or alter the language they use to align with majority norms when in social settings. This adaptive need is reinforced by the perception of some respondents, can be seen at Table 1, who view the majority language as the "standard" language or the "better" language in interactions. These quantitative findings provide empirical evidence of the strength of symbolic power operating in Jember society, where residents reflexively subordinate their authentic identities and alter their linguistic behavior to conform to the language holding hegemonic power.

Although the demands for adaptation are very high, a cross-analysis between the level of pressure recorded in Question 2 and the level of comfort in Question 3 reveals a complex sociological phenomenon. On one hand, 70.4% of respondents felt social pressure to speak Javanese in social settings, see Table 1. On the other hand, 93.2% of respondents claimed they still felt comfortable using languages other than Javanese, and only a small fraction (6.8%) explicitly expressed discomfort in Question 3 and Table 1. This situation indicates that the existing assimilation pressure has been internalized to such an extent that the community no longer perceives it as pressure or a threat that disrupts their comfort, but rather regards it as a social norm. Respondents view this linguistic adjustment as a reasonable compromise for the sake of harmonious interaction, which in turn actually paves the way for the weakening of minority languages, such as Madurese, without any significant resistance in the public sphere.

Linguistic Hegemony and Social Dynamics

From the survey data, it is evident that Javanese is the most widely used language in urban Jember. As per the responses, 15.9% of the respondents said they use Javanese all the time in their interactions; 56.8% said they use it often. This indicates that an overwhelming 72.7% of the respondents regularly apply Javanese in various social situations. This finding demonstrates that the dominant language functions as a tangible sociolinguistic asset, a concept supported by Kamaruzzaman and Iché (2024), who argue that language serves as a crucial tool of power to reinforce social structures and regulate relations within society. Additional support to this idea is given by the fact that the Javanese language acts as a tool of differentiation. Social and professional contacts, which are vital in the community for employment and social opportunities, privilege the users of the Javanese language and therefore render them a worthy position in society. This phenomenon aligns with the observations of Prayoga and Khatimah (2019) regarding urban societies, where mastery of a dominant language symbolizes prestige and promises better socioeconomic standards. Consequently, language does not only serve as a tool for conveying information but also acts as a strict gatekeeper for social inclusion. The necessity of fluency in Javanese is, therefore, pertinent not simply in terms of communication, but as a mechanism to acquire social advantages and avoid the marginalization and exclusion processes highlighted by Wilmot *et al.* (2023).

In this paper, the case of Javanese, people's constant presence in public and social life shows how language is changed due to society's pressure. Individuals may not opt for Javanese as an option but they have to because it is believed that only in this way can you get the message across and blend in. From this cultural expectation one can derive how social relations work and the impact that social relationships seem to exert on language usage. The demand for submission for a standard way of speaking can be best understood with the help of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire that shows how the oppressors manage to shape the oppressed into accepting their values. : Thus, the pressure in the social and linguistic domain also creates a situation that reverses Freire's process of oppressed people regarding themselves as inferior in order to survive the violence of the oppressors: non-Javanese speakers, especially the ones belonging to the Madurese ethnic group, are forced to speak Javanese. Similarly, as Freire problematizes the 'banking' approach to education through which critical thinking is constrained and domination perpetuated, so does the societal approach to Javanese which silences the minority language users, forcing them not only to deny the need their first languages but also subdue and dominate the majority language.

In addition, Freire's power and oppression theory also gives some light to how Javanese speaking became a tool to oppress non-Javanese speakers. Discussing Jember, the linguistic landscape reflects an educational experience that reproduces the 'banking' model, in which language is not open for discussion. Instead, we see that Javanese is the standard language which many people adhere to and those who do not are suggested to be these others. These obligations to join the culture of the language for status show that there is still a commanding structure within society. As with Freire's *conscientização* (critical consciousness), those participants who can identify the oppression in this linguistic hierarchy may be motivated to change it. This is so much the case, however, that for the many who make use of these norms, they are no longer mere passive accomplices; they actually contribute to the construction of 'Javanese as the major language.' It is, therefore, this dynamic in the employment of language

that leads to the concretization of the fact that language serves a function in cultural repression in which the minority's resistance to the dominant language is not just rebellion against personal decision but against prevailing culture.

Social Pressure and Assimilation

Another theme derived from the survey is social pressure to use Javanese; These respondents stated that they do feel some degree of social pressure to speak Javanese even if it is not their first language, with 70,4% agreeing with the statement. 20% of participants confirmed this pressure as 'frequent' and the overwhelming 54.5% considered it 'rare' pressure. This concurs with Paulo Freire's argument of how people become oppressors to themselves, in that they become subdued in a way by the oppressors besides emulating them in all ways to gain social acceptance.

Also, some of the respondents complained that they felt awkward to use languages other than Indonesian and this includes Madurese in the public domain. For instance, 93.2% of the participants said they were very comfortable using a language other than the Javanese language, meaning 6,8% respondents feel uneasy while speaking another language. This tension demonstrates how the assumption of language norms occurs through regular social processes that force members of minority languages to adjust. In the long run, this social pressure helps to lead to the shrinking of the functions and usage of minority languages which accords with Darder's cultural hegemony whereby the dominant groups ensure that the rest of the society's languages and our language, in this case, are devalued.

People speak Javanese due to the fear of being ridiculed or scorned by the people in the community since it acts as an influential means of enforcing linguistic and cultural hegemony. In the long run this creates pressure towards the assimilation of ethnic language with the former so commoners may gradually drop their dialects in preference for Javanese. The change in usage of language can be regarded as acculturation where the superior culture in the public domain sets the standard and expectancy in the cultural enclave. The process described by Freire shows that the oppressed or the minority such as the non-Javanese speakers, conform to the norms of the oppressor in characteristics thus affecting the assimilation cycle. In doing so, they maintain and perpetuate the high culture /low culture binary that seeks to reinforce and maintain the Javanese speakers in power. This internalized pressure may also bring about the decline in cultural values where language is used and is a symbol of identification, history and tradition. In the process of becoming socially accepted, people shift from using the marginalized languages, such as Madurese. Consequently, this leads to the eventual loss of the Javanese community's linguistic identity.

Another interesting response was the occasional apprehension felt by a number of respondents when using languages other than Javanese in public places. This shows that it is not only external pressures exerted by society that control the languages used by a given society but rather such pressures have been internalized by that society. Although it is less prevalent than in previously mentioned cases, this unease demonstrates how far society has ingrained these norms into interactions. Cultural hegemony theory as articulated by Darder familiarises us with the fact that such discomfort is brought about by cultural practices of the dominant group being enforced and integrated into institutional cultures. As one language, the language used by the mainstream group Javanese, for example Javanese is accepted and recognized as standard language more and more, while the use of the other language is seen as more negative and abnormal. This linguistic prejudice is not only a mirror of existing

sociolinguist disparity but also actually reinforces such prejudice; the minorities who do not set appropriate linguistic pace are likely to be abandoned or labelled as 'undesirable'. Combined with this over time, decreases the number of those who use Javanese and increases the number of other languages on the periphery, which leads to the linguistic and cultural leveling and strengthening of the social hegemony of the dominant ethnic group.

Language and Social Hierarchies

The data also revealed how language mediates people's social rank and ability to become accepted members of a community. Seventy five percent of respondents concur that those who have mastery of the Javanese language will be more acceptable and have higher levels of acceptance in the community. On the other hand, 86,4% of participants opined that Javanese speakers have a social benefit in as much as creating social relations or social capital. These perceptions stress that language plays a very important role in individuals' social promotion and social integration reminding people to stay in certain ranks in society that are predetermined for them.

The intersection of language and social hierarchy is further emphasized by how people in Jember adapt to their social context regarding language and behavior. The prestige associated with Javanese means that non-Javanese speakers are often willing to learn and use it, even at the expense of their native language background. According to the survey, 81.8% of participants reported experiencing pressure to shift their language to match majority norms. This adaptation underscores how hardwired these social expectations are, echoing findings by Prayoga and Khatimah (2019), who observed that urban societies often elevate a dominant language, such as English in *Jabodetabek*, as a symbol of prestige and higher social class, which inherently weakens the position of other languages in the public sphere. In Jember, Javanese functions similarly, reestablishing a hierarchical architecture that accords its speakers a higher status compared to those who use languages like Madurese.

The survey also depicts how language enhances the fabrication and reinforcement of social domination and subordination patterns. This is because 75% of the respondents when asked their views on acceptance of Javanese speakers in the society, noted that the language gives them more acceptance and respect within the community. Over and above the fact that it is a tool through which people communicate, it is also an instrument of identification with the 'guilty' group, which also possesses cultural and social capital. This creates a situation where non-Javanese speakers, especially those from the Madurese community, face a stark choice: either switch to Javanese to gain socially acceptable social status or be omitted from the list of social interactions and promising opportunities. This in the process creates a positive feedback loop where passivity of the language 'makes' it the language of power, and subsequently, power 'makes' Javanese the language to master. It shows the sociolinguistic factor, where one feels forced to stop speaking one's own dialect or language and begin using Javanese in order to gain acceptance and be promoted.

Furthermore, analyzing these social pressures reveals how deeply language behaviors, cognition, and identities are incorporated into routine societal practices. The prestige of Javanese inherently changes how people behave and perceive others, creating a sharp divide where linguistic competence is evaluated. This dynamic aligns with Wilmot *et al.* (2023), who argue that language is a primary source of "Otherness," driving marginalization processes where individuals are excluded based on their linguistic repertoire. The survey finding that 81.8% of respondents feel the need to change their language to conform to normative

perceptions demonstrates the severe impact of this social expectation. This linguistic adaptation is not merely a change in code, but an assimilation of the values carried by the dominant group. As Kamaruzzaman and Iché (2024) assert, the selective use of language by dominant groups serves as a critical tool to reinforce power structures and suppress minorities, causing inequality in access to social opportunities. Consequently, this internalization forms a system where Javanese continues to uphold a social hierarchy that subjugates users of other languages, acting as both a mirror and a weapon of power that ultimately reduces the cultural diversity of the region.

Discussion

Linguistic Hegemony and the Commercialization of the Javanese Language in the Jember Public Sphere

Survey results indicate that 72.7% of respondents routinely use Javanese in their daily social interactions, establishing it as the most dominant language in the urban areas of Jember. This widespread usage transcends the language's basic function as a mere tool of communication, clearly representing a structured linguistic hierarchy within a multiethnic society.

This finding aligns with the argument by Kamaruzzaman and Iché (2024), who affirm that language is a crucial instrument for reinforcing power structures, regulating interpersonal relations, and suppressing and marginalizing minority groups. By establishing Javanese as the primary mode of communication, the existing social structure demands that minorities follow the norms of the majority, showing that language has become a tool for societal domination.

This dominance of the Javanese language directly transforms into sociolinguistic capital that provides concrete advantages for its speakers. According to the data, 86.4% of participants believe that Javanese speakers have an advantage in building networks (*networking*), and 75% feel that fluency in this language is directly proportional to the level of social acceptance. This phenomenon of language capitalization reminds one of the findings of Prayoga and Khatimah (2019) in the *Jabodetabek* urban area, where the use of the dominant language, in this case English, is represented as a symbol of prestige that promises higher socioeconomic standards and a better social position. In Jember, the Javanese language operates through a similar mechanism; it functions as a "social status" that requires every individual to master it in order to secure their social hierarchy and mobility.

As a result of this capitalization, public spaces in Jember continuously produce cycles of social inclusion and exclusion. When proficiency in Javanese becomes an unwritten requirement for integration, this triggers a process of *Othering*, as posited by Wilmot *et al.* (2023), in which individuals or minority groups experience marginalization and exclusion due to evaluations of their linguistic competence. Madura speakers who are unable or unwilling to adapt to using Javanese face a high risk of being categorized as *out-groups* in both communal and professional interactions. These dynamic forces non-Javanese speakers into a dilemma, where their mother tongue is no longer viewed as a source of pride but rather as a cause of social disadvantage.

This pressure to assimilate manifests aggressively, forming an informal linguistic regime that controls how Jember residents interact. This practice shares a similar pattern with what was found by Baranova and Fedorova (2020) in Russian megacities, where a deeply rooted monolingual normative orientation seeks to strictly control public spaces despite an

increasingly diverse population. Although a previous study by Hasan *et al.* (2024) noted the existence of diglossia in Jember – where Indonesian is used in schools and regional languages (Javanese/Madurese) in informal settings – survey data in this study reveal a new fact: within the informal sphere itself, a sharp horizontal conflict occurs. Javanese hegemony silences the Madurese language, creating a single-language regime that contradicts the reality of Jember's diverse society.

To sum up the findings, social pressure to assimilate, by 70.4% of respondents, poses a serious threat to the vitality of minority languages and accelerates language shift. This forced adaptation process aligns with the findings of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) regarding migrants who are compelled to abandon their mother tongue to adapt to the majority environment and the demands of the workforce. Furthermore, as warned by Norton and Toohey (2011) and echoed by Andriyanti (2019) that when society perceives a language as no longer holding social value, this weakens intergenerational language transmission. The continued pressures of assimilation in Jember, if left unresolved, will not only sustain inequality but also risk erasing the region's linguistic diversity and cultural identity.

Horizontal Hegemony and Internalized Linguistic Oppression in the Jember Public Sphere

The focus of this study fundamentally fills a gap left by global sociolinguistic research, which generally highlights only the vertical clash between state language policies and foreign speakers or immigrants. For example, Baranova and Fedorova (2020) examined how aggressive monolingualism norms in Russian megalopolises, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, marginalize and clash with the realities of migration. The dynamics of language conflict are also captured by Han and Wu (2020) in Guangzhou, China, where a monoglot regime with a Mandarin script policy continues to clash with the reality of a society that practices Cantonese and English. Unlike these studies, which focus on the macro-policy and state levels, this research in Jember shifts the focus of analysis to the local level, demonstrating that linguistic hegemony is not always driven by the state apparatus, but rather by fellow local ethnic groups holding communal cultural dominance.

Furthermore, discourse on linguistic dominance and class stratification often gets trapped in narratives of the superiority of global (foreign) languages. Zheng and Mei (2020) demonstrate how socioeconomic status in urban China strongly determines how parents invest family capital in their children's English proficiency. This pattern of capitalization aligns with the findings of Prayoga and Khatimah (2019) in Indonesia, who revealed that urban residents of *Jabodetabek* consciously position English as a symbol of the upper-middle class and a sophisticated lifestyle, which gradually weakens the position of the Indonesian language. This study expands that discourse by offering a new point of view on how capitalisation and linguistic oppression are not only driven by global languages but are also effectively practiced by a dominant regional language (Javanese) that holds greater social value than other regional languages (such as Madurese).

Domestically, studies on regional language shifts almost exclusively position Javanese as an endangered language and a "victim" of national language dominance. Andriyanti (2019) reveals a massive shift in identity in Yogyakarta, where the majority of Javanese adolescents now claim Indonesian as their mother tongue due to the weakening of intergenerational transmission. This critical condition is confirmed by the findings of Fitriati *et al.* (2025) and Wulandari *et al.* (2025), who consistently found a resistance among the younger generation

to practicing the formal Javanese register *Krama* due to fear of making mistakes, leading them to prefer *Ngoko* or Indonesian for the sake of convenience. This study in Jember focuses on reversing that analytical lens, arguing that rather than being a language under threat, Javanese in this region actually occupies the position of a hegemonic agent and “oppressor” that threatens the survival of surrounding minority languages.

The spatial dimensions and social adaptation in this study also complement the literature on language survival in the context of migration and multiethnic urbanization. Manik et al. (2023) previously highlighted the nomadic Javanese migrants in Sumbul who are gradually abandoning their mother tongue in favor of Indonesian or Batak Toba to survive in the workplace, while Rohmadi et al. (2023) intensively examined strategic efforts to preserve Javanese oral discourse amidst the urbanization of major cities. The case of Jember presents a different reality. Although Hasan et al. (2024) identified a process of diglossia in Jember’s elementary schools – where children fluidly engage in *code-switching* between Javanese and Madurese in play settings – this study demonstrates that such fluid tolerance solidifies at the adult community level, where such relationships are supplanted by the absolute dominance of Javanese speakers.

To explain this anomaly of horizontal dominance, this study goes beyond purely sociolinguistic description by borrowing a critical framework of power. Kamaruzzaman and Iché (2024) sharply articulate that linguistic dominance in society inherently creates exclusive social structures, regulates power relations, and oppresses minority groups. This line of thought reinforces the argument by Wilmot et al. (2023), who assert that linguistic competence is the primary source of *Otherness* that facilitates the process of *in-group* and *out-group* exclusion across various social and professional spheres. By applying these concepts to the subject of the Madurese language in Jember, this study fills an academic gap by demonstrating that *out-group* labeling and segregation need not stem from racial differences or foreign languages, but rather from the repression of ethnically related neighbors.

The most fundamental contribution distinguishing this study from all previous research is the innovative application of Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy theory to the realm of “street sociolinguistics.” Drawing on Mayo (2022), oppression must be viewed as institutional cultural invasion and colonialism that permeates language practices in postcolonial spaces. Findings in Jember provide empirical evidence of this invasion. This is supported by Williams’ (2019) interpretation of Freire’s theory of *conscientização*, wherein oppressed communities are often deceived by the oppressor’s superiority, leading them to reject their own reality in order to embrace the existence of the majority. The survey in this study (in which a vast majority of non-Javanese respondents consciously adapted their language) demonstrates the tangible operation of internalized oppression.

As a conclusion to this comparative literature analysis, the research in Jember presents a new analytical framework for the issue of multiculturalism. Guilherme (2017) states that Freire’s works are a crucial foundation for the formation of an intercultural ethics theory responsive to cultural identity and linguistic dynamics (*linguaging*). By exploring horizontal linguistic hegemony between the Javanese and Madurese ethnic groups, this study not only challenges the outdated dogma that linguistic threats are always vertical in nature but also establishes an essential foundation for intercultural ethics. This research fills a gap by advocating for the deconstruction of language practices to liberate minority groups from the internalized psychological and sociological pressures within modern urban society.

CONCLUSION

This study does more than just list the statistics that show the Javanese language is more popular in urban Jember. It also looks at the small, everyday ways that one culture can have more influence than another in a society where there are many different ethnic groups. Interpretation of the findings through the lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy reveals the pervasive use of Javanese to be not a natural sociolinguistic consensus, but a constructed linguistic hierarchy that acts as an instrument of power. The significant social pressure and networking advantages linked to being fluent in Javanese force minority speakers, particularly the Madurese, to experience internalised oppression. In their pursuit of social acceptance and mobility, these minorities are forced to suppress their native language, illustrating how everyday language practices can be exploited to dictate social inclusion and reproduce structural inequality.

This research is important because it looks at how people use language in their day-to-day lives. While previous studies have mostly examined vertical linguistic conflicts, such as the threat posed by global languages like English or national languages like Indonesian to local dialects, this study emphasizes the phenomenon of horizontal linguistic hegemony, which has been largely overlooked. It shows that the suppression of linguistic diversity does not only come from big-level state policies or globalisation, but also happens at the community level between two indigenous languages that coexist. In this particular instance, Jember serves as a significant case study, where a regional language (Javanese), which is often depicted as endangered or subjugated in other urban contexts, in fact functions as the dominant oppressor towards a neighbouring minority language.

The most important part of the study is its call to critically reevaluate how society perceives and practices language in shared urban spaces. The Madurese language's gradual disappearance from Jember's public sphere is a symptom of broader social exclusionary practices that demand intervention. In order to prevent the irreversible loss of linguistic heritage, it is crucial to foster critical consciousness among both dominant and minority groups, challenging the prevalent prejudice that associates minority languages with social disadvantage. So, this research is basically saying that we should mix intercultural ethics with how we talk to each other every day. It's all about understanding that if we want to have proper harmony and justice in our multi-ethnic communities, we can't just force people to speak the same language. We've got to be fair and celebrate the different languages that people speak.

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