

Inherence of Indonesian Identity in The Foreign Language Point of View

Inherensi Identitas Indonesia dalam Sudut Pandang Bahasa Asing

Joseph Matthew Hiwakari^{1*}, Chanelle Anjanette²

English Language Education, Indonesian Catholic University of Atma Jaya¹

Psychology, Indonesian Catholic University of Atma Jaya²

joseph.202303510010@student.atmajaya.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a country with a rich tapestry of culture. Each culture represents a group of people in a specific region, and each region speaks using their own native language. In this multilingual context, international languages play an important role in facilitating communication between local communities and visitors from other countries. An utmost importance in this case is the use of international language. International travelers in most tourism sites in Indonesia, such as Bali, Yogyakarta, or Labuan Bajo, tend to speak using either English or Chinese language to interact with local sellers or accommodation workers. Other tourists, on the other hand, use Indonesian language in purchasing items from locals or simply for asking directions in order to gain new soft skills and have a better proximity among each other. This paper aims to analyze the role of foreign languages in shaping individuals' perspectives and supporting cross-cultural communication, while also contributing to the preservation of local cultures and traditions so that they can continue to be experienced by future generations.

Keywords: *Language; Linguistics; Culture; Indonesian; English*

INTISARI

Indonesia dikenal sebagai negara dengan keberagaman budaya dan bahasa yang sangat kaya. Berbagai komunitas di berbagai wilayah mempertahankan tradisi, adat istiadat, serta bahasa daerah yang menjadi identitas budaya masing-masing. Dalam konteks masyarakat yang multibahasa tersebut, keberadaan bahasa internasional memiliki peran penting sebagai sarana komunikasi antara masyarakat lokal dan wisatawan mancanegara. Penggunaan bahasa internasional memungkinkan wisatawan untuk berinteraksi dengan masyarakat setempat, memahami praktik budaya lokal, serta berpartisipasi dengan hormat pada aktivitas sosial. Di berbagai destinasi wisata populer di Indonesia, seperti Bali, Yogyakarta, dan Labuan Bajo, wisatawan internasional umumnya menggunakan bahasa Inggris atau Mandarin ketika berkomunikasi kepada pedagang lokal, pemandu wisata, maupun pekerja di sektor akomodasi. Di sisi lain, sebagian wisatawan juga mencoba menggunakan bahasa Indonesia ketika melakukan transaksi atau menanyakan arah, yang secara tidak langsung dapat menciptakan kedekatan sosial antara wisatawan dan masyarakat lokal sekaligus memperkaya pengalaman budaya para pengunjung. Berdasarkan latar belakang tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran bahasa asing dalam memfasilitasi interaksi lintas budaya serta membentuk perspektif individu dalam memahami konteks budaya yang berbeda. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menyoroti bagaimana penggunaan bahasa dalam interaksi wisata dapat mendukung pertukaran budaya yang lebih bermakna serta meningkatkan kesadaran dan apresiasi terhadap budaya dan tradisi lokal sehingga tetap lestari dan dapat diwariskan kepada generasi mendatang.

Kata kunci: *Bahasa, Linguistik, Budaya, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Inggris*

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a dominant global language in education, business, tourism, and intercultural communication. In multilingual countries such as Indonesia, the presence of English plays a particularly complex role, as it interacts with national and local languages within diverse urban contexts. While Bahasa Indonesia functions as the national language and various local languages serve as markers of ethnic identity, English increasingly operates as a bridge language in professional and tourism-related settings. This has situated as a daily dynamic, which influences the raise of important questions regarding how foreign language usage shapes communication practices and reflects urban identity in major Indonesian cities.

Indonesia is home to hundreds of local languages and culturally diverse communities. Major cities such as Jakarta, Denpasar, Surabaya, and Bandung represent different sociolinguistic environments shaped by varying degrees of urbanization, tourism exposure, and economic development. In tourism-oriented regions, especially those frequently visited by international travelers, English is often used as a practical tool for interaction between local communities and foreign visitors. In contrast, cities with lower levels of international tourism exposure may demonstrate different patterns of English usage. These differences suggest that English usage is not uniform across Indonesian urban contexts.

Previous studies have examined English usage in tourism settings and its impact on communication practices (Widani, 2019; Safitri et al., 2023). Other research has discussed language shift and preference in multilingual Indonesian societies (Bonafix & Manara, 2016). However, limited research has comparatively analyzed the extent of English usage across multiple major Indonesian cities using quantitative data. There remains a gap in understanding how levels of tourism exposure and urban characteristics influence English language presence in everyday communication.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the degree of English usage in selected major Indonesian cities and to analyze how such usage reflects urban communication patterns within multilingual settings. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent is English used in major Indonesian cities?
2. How does tourism exposure influence patterns of English usage in these cities?
3. What implications do these patterns have for understanding urban linguistic practices in Indonesia?

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to discussions on language, tourism, and urban communication in Indonesia by providing empirical data from multiple cities. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature, followed by an explanation of the research methodology, presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design to examine English usage across selected major Indonesian cities. The research is conceptually grounded in the framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2007), which views English as a practical communication tool used among speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. In multilingual contexts such as Indonesia, English functions not as a replacement for local languages but as a bridge language in intercultural and professional interactions.

Additionally, this study draws upon Kachru's (1985) model of World Englishes, which categorizes countries into Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles. Indonesia belongs to the Expanding Circle, where English is used primarily as a foreign language but increasingly plays a significant role in education, business, and tourism sectors. This framework helps explain why English usage may vary across urban areas depending on socio-economic exposure.

Furthermore, the study is informed by perspectives on language and urban identity, particularly in multilingual environments where language choice reflects social positioning and communicative needs. In tourism-oriented cities, English usage may symbolize global connectivity and economic participation rather than linguistic dominance.

Participants

A total of 71 respondents participated in this study. Participants originated from Jakarta and Tangerang Raya, Denpasar, Bandung and Sumedang, and Surabaya. These cities were selected based on their urban status and differing levels of tourism exposure, which were hypothesized to influence English usage patterns. Meanwhile, the respondents included high school students, undergraduate students, graduates, and working professionals, providing a range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

Sampling Technique

This study employed convenience sampling. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms over a three-week period (20 November–11 December 2023). Participation was voluntary, and respondents accessed the survey link through academic and social media networks.

Research Instrument

The instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire containing close-ended questions designed to measure various indicators, such as exposure to English education, English use in academic settings, English use in social interaction, English use in tourism-related communication, and visibility of English in public and digital platforms.

In addition, the questionnaire was designed to operationalize English usage as communicative practice within urban multilingual settings, aligning with the ELF and World Englishes perspectives.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, primarily percentage-based comparisons across cities. The analysis aimed to identify patterns of English usage and to interpret them in relation to tourism exposure and urban characteristics, consistent with the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed that their data would be used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

English Usage in Jakarta and Tangerang

The findings indicate that English usage in Jakarta and Tangerang is relatively high. All respondents reported having received formal or informal English education. Approximately 80% stated that English is frequently used in educational settings, while 67% reported using English in social interactions. A significant majority (93%) indicated that English plays an important role in facilitating communication between local communities and foreign tourists. Furthermore, 87% of respondents acknowledged the importance of English in business contexts, and 93% observed its presence across digital platforms and public communication channels.

These findings suggest that English functions as a practical communication tool in Indonesia's primary urban agglomeration, where exposure to international business and tourism is substantial.

English Usage in Denpasar

Denpasar demonstrates the highest percentage of English usage among the surveyed cities. Nearly all respondents reported as active user of English across educational, social, tourism, and business domains. English usage in social interactions reached 100%, while business-related usage also showed extremely high prevalence (100%). The overall percentage of English usage in Denpasar reached approximately 97%.

This result reflects Denpasar's strong tourism orientation, where daily interaction with international visitor requires functional English proficiency.

English Usage in Surabaya

This East Java Province capital reported something interesting. All respondents stated that they had received formal and self-based education of the language in the city. However, despite this reported exposure to English education, the frequency of English usage in everyday communication appears comparatively limited. Only a minority of respondents indicated regular use of English in school and social interactions, suggesting that English may function more as an academic subject than as a dominant communicative medium in daily life.

Nevertheless, respondents unanimously acknowledged the importance of English in tourism-related communication, particularly in facilitating interaction between local residents and foreign visitors. A considerable proportion also recognized its relevance in business and professional contexts, as well as its visibility across digital and governmental platforms.

Overall, while Surabaya demonstrates institutional support for English education, the findings suggest that the language is primarily activated in specific functional domains—such as tourism and business—rather than embedded in routine interpersonal communication. This pattern indicates that English in Surabaya operates pragmatically, responding to situational demands rather than serving as a pervasive social language.

English Usage in Bandung and Sumedang

This West Java urban agglomeration demonstrates a moderate level of English usage compared to the other surveyed cities. All respondents reported having received formal or self-directed English education, indicating widespread exposure to the language within the region. A substantial proportion of participants also acknowledged the use of English in educational settings, suggesting that English maintains a strong presence within institutional environments.

However, the use of English in informal social interaction appears considerably limited. Only a small proportion of respondents reported frequent use of English in daily interpersonal communication, indicating that the language is not deeply embedded in routine social practices. In contrast, respondents widely recognized the importance of English in tourism-related communication, particularly in facilitating interaction with international visitors. A majority also identified English as relevant in business contexts and observable across digital and governmental platforms.

Overall, these findings suggest that English in Bandung and Sumedang functions predominantly within formal, professional, and tourism-related domains rather than as a primary medium of everyday social interaction. The pattern reflects a context in which English holds institutional and economic value, while local and national languages continue to dominate informal communicative spaces.

Comparison Between Each City

A comparative analysis of the surveyed cities reveals distinct patterns in English usage across different urban contexts. Among the four regions examined, Denpasar demonstrates the highest overall percentage of English usage, followed by Jakarta and Tangerang Raya, Bandung and Sumedang, and finally Surabaya.

Denpasar's significantly higher percentage suggests a strong correlation between tourism intensity and English usage. As an internationally recognized tourist destination, Denpasar requires frequent interaction between local residents and foreign visitors. This consistent exposure appears to normalize the functional use of English across multiple domains, including social, educational, and professional settings.

Jakarta and Tangerang Raya also exhibit high levels of English usage is influenced by their status as Indonesia's primary economic and administrative centers. In this metropolitan agglomeration, English appears closely associated with business, higher education, and digital communication. However, compared to Denpasar, its used in informal social interaction is slightly less dominant.

Bandung and Sumedang demonstrate moderate levels of English usage. While English maintains a strong presence within educational and professional environments, its used in informal social contexts remains limited. This pattern suggests that English functions more as institutional capital rather than as an everyday communicative norm.

Surabaya records the lowest overall percentage among the surveyed cities. Although respondents acknowledge the importance of English in tourism and business, its use in school and social settings is comparatively lower. This finding indicates that urban size alone does not necessarily correspond to higher English usage; rather, economic orientation and international exposure are more influential factors.

Overall, the comparison highlights that English usage in Indonesian cities is shaped not merely by demographic scale but by tourism exposure, economic structure, and patterns of global engagement. Cities with stronger international interaction demonstrate higher levels of English integration across communicative domains.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the extent of English usage across selected major Indonesian cities and analyzed how tourism exposure and urban characteristics influence communicative practices. The findings reveal that English usage varies significantly among cities, with Denpasar demonstrating the highest level of integration, followed by Jakarta and Tangerang Raya, Bandung and Sumedang, and Surabaya.

The results indicate that tourism intensity and international engagement play a more decisive role in shaping English usage than urban size alone. In cities with strong tourism orientation, English functions as a practical communicative bridge in daily interaction. In contrast, in cities with lower international exposure, English tends to remain concentrated within formal educational and professional domains.

These findings suggest that English in Indonesia primarily operates as a functional tool within multilingual urban environments rather than as a replacement for national or local languages. Its presence reflects patterns of economic participation and global connectivity while coexisting with Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages.

However, this study is limited by the relatively small number of respondents in certain cities, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research may expand the sample size, include additional cities, and employ mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into the relationship between English usage and urban sociolinguistic dynamics.

Suggestion for Future Authors

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of investigation by involving a larger and more representative sample across different regions in Indonesia. Given the relatively limited number of respondents in several cities within this study, broader data collection would provide more statistically robust and generalizable findings regarding patterns of English usage.

Subsequent studies may also incorporate mixed-method approaches, such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic observation, to capture more nuanced insights into how English is negotiated in daily interaction. While this study primarily relies on survey data, qualitative exploration could reveal deeper sociolinguistic dynamics, including attitudes, identity construction, and language choice motivations.

In addition, future research could examine the interaction between English, Bahasa Indonesia, and local languages in greater detail, particularly in tourism-driven cities. Investigating whether English functions as a complementary communicative tool or gradually influences local linguistic practices would contribute to broader discussions on language sustainability and multilingual ecology in Indonesia.

Finally, comparative studies involving non-tourism-oriented cities or rural areas may provide valuable contrasts, helping to clarify whether international exposure remains the most significant factor shaping English usage across diverse sociocultural environments.

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