

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES AS MARKERS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract. Regional languages play a strategic role as markers of cultural identity that reflect the characteristics, values, and heritage of a community. This article examines the role of regional languages in maintaining cultural identity in the midst of modernization and globalization that tends to erode linguistic diversity. The type of research used is qualitative descriptive. The data collection technique uses interviews. Data analysis is carried out qualitatively with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the data analysis found that regional languages are not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of pride and social solidarity. Regional languages contain unique expressions of traditions, customs, and life philosophies of each community group. However, social changes and the influence of national and global language dominance have led to a decrease in the use of regional languages in many regions. For this reason, efforts to preserve regional languages through formal education, cultural revitalization, and digital media are important in maintaining cultural identity in the modern era. This article emphasizes that the preservation of regional languages is an important step in maintaining cultural diversity and strengthening national identity

Keywords: Language, Markers, Cultural Identity

Abstrak. Bahasa daerah memegang peranan strategis sebagai penanda identitas budaya yang mencerminkan ciri, nilai, dan warisan suatu masyarakat. Artikel ini mengkaji peran bahasa daerah dalam menjaga identitas budaya di tengah arus modernisasi dan globalisasi yang cenderung mengikis keberagaman bahasa. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara. Analisis data dilakukan secara kualitatif dengan tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil analisis data menemukan bahwa bahasa daerah tidak hanya sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai simbol kebanggaan dan solidaritas sosial. Bahasa daerah mengandung ekspresi tradisi, adat istiadat, dan falsafah hidup yang unik dari setiap kelompok masyarakat. Namun, perubahan sosial dan pengaruh dominasi bahasa nasional dan global telah menyebabkan berkurangnya penggunaan bahasa daerah di banyak daerah. Untuk itu, upaya pelestarian bahasa daerah melalui pendidikan formal, revitalisasi budaya, dan media digital menjadi penting dalam menjaga identitas budaya di era modern. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa pelestarian bahasa daerah merupakan langkah penting dalam menjaga keberagaman budaya dan memperkuat identitas nasional.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa, Penanda, Identitas Budaya

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INTRODUCTION

In its position as the national language, Indonesian functions as a symbol of national pride, national identity, a medium of communication between citizens, between regions, and between cultures, as well as a medium for uniting tribes, cultures, and languages in the archipelago. Conversely, in its position as the state language, Indonesian functions as the official state language, the language of education, a means of national communication, and a means of developing culture, science, and technology (Deanty Rumandang Bulan, 2019).

Language and culture are two inseparable elements in people's lives. Language not only functions as a means of communication but also as a reflection of culture that contains the values, norms, and outlook on life of a community. In the context of ethnic minority communities, language is often a strong marker of cultural identity and an important tool for maintaining ancestral heritage. Culture, on the other hand, encompasses various aspects of life such as arts, traditions, ceremonies, and belief systems that are passed down from generation to generation (Devianty, 2017). In relation to regional languages, the role of this language is very important as a marker of cultural identity. Regional languages reflect the richness of local culture and connect people with their ancestral roots. Regional languages are not only a means of communication, but also a guardian of cultural heritage that contains traditional values, philosophies of life, and community history.

However, in the midst of modernization and globalization, regional languages face major challenges. The influence of foreign cultures and the dominance of national languages often cause a shift in the use of regional languages, especially among the younger generation. Many regional languages are slowly losing their speakers, which can ultimately threaten the sustainability of local culture (Putri, 2024). Language is the main medium in Culture, and Language is a sound symbol used by members of society to interact, cooperate, and identify themselves (Mailani, 2022). Although there are various forms of communication tools, language remains the most important communication tool for the sustainability of culture. It is difficult to imagine if society could live, develop, and carry out cultural activities without language, from waking up to going back to sleep, we always use language. In Indonesia, there are many regional languages that are now threatened with extinction because the younger generation is reluctant to use the language (Effendy, 2014). Language also contains cultural, moral, and ethical values that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, this language is not only a means of communication, but also an important component and marker that helps create cultural identity and enrich the personality of the people who use it.

Therefore, efforts to preserve regional languages are a shared responsibility. This preservation can be done through education, documentation, and the introduction of regional languages into the school curriculum. In addition, revitalizing regional languages through art, media, and technology is also an important strategy to ensure that regional languages remain alive and relevant in the lives of modern society. Thus, regional languages can continue to play a role as a strong marker of cultural identity and as a guardian of Indonesia's cultural wealth.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to explain and understand the interaction between language and culture in ethnic minority communities in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in depth, exploring the meaning and understanding contained in the cultural and social context. Descriptive methods are used to present data in detail and systematically, providing a comprehensive picture of language and cultural interactions among minority groups. The data collection technique uses interviews. Data analysis is carried out qualitatively with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language

Language is a means of communication between members of society in the form of sound symbols produced by the human speech organs. The definition of language includes two areas. First, the sound produced by the speech organs and the meaning or significance implied in the sound current itself. Sound is a vibration that stimulates our hearing organs. Second, the meaning or significance, namely the content contained in the sound current that causes a reaction to what we hear. Furthermore, the sound current is called the speech current (Ritonga, 2012). Language is a verbal tool for communication. Language as an arbitrary sound symbol used by a group of community members to interact and identify themselves. Language is a message conveyed in the form of expression as a means of communication in certain situations in various activities. In this case, expression is related to segmental and suprasegmental elements, both verbal and kinesic, so that a sentence can function as a means of communication with different messages if conveyed with different expressions. This language ability is implemented with the ability to rhetorically, both rhetorically in writing and speaking. Rhetoric in this case is the ability to process language effectively and efficiently in the form of ethos (character or good intentions), pathos (carrying the emotions of the listener or reader), and

logos (logical evidence) so as to influence the reader or listener with the message conveyed through written or oral media (Devitt, 2016).

Language is a complex and unique communication system used by humans to convey ideas, feelings, and information. As a means of communication, language consists of symbols that are mutually agreed upon by the community of users, either in oral, written, or sign form. Language is a means of communication between members of society in the form of sound symbols produced by the human speech organs. This symbol has a certain meaning that is arranged based on certain rules and structures (Devianty, 2017). Language has two main aspects: *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is a language system that is abstract and collective, while *parole* refers to the use of language individually in certain situations. This view shows that language is not just a tool. Language is the result of an innate human ability called the language acquisition device (LAD). In this perspective, every human being is born with the basic ability to understand and produce language (Mailani et al., 2022). Language also has various functions, such as expressive, informative, directive, aesthetic, and phatic functions. These functions show how language is not only used to convey information, but also to build social relationships, express emotions, and create the beauty of communication, but also a cultural system that reflects the mindset of society.

Relationship between Language and Culture

There are several theories regarding the relationship between language and culture. Broadly speaking, these theories can be grouped into two categories, namely stating a subordinate relationship, where language is under the scope of culture, and a coordinative relationship, namely a relationship that is equal to its position of equal height (Putri et al., 2021). Most experts say that culture is the main system, while language is only a subsystem (as discussed regarding the nature of culture above), no one or no one has said otherwise. Related to the coordinative relationship between language and culture, language and culture are two systems that are "attached" to humans because culture is a system that regulates human interaction, while language or culture is a system that functions as a means of sustaining that means (Nugroho, 2015).

Language and culture have a close relationship and influence each other. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a reflection of the culture of a society. In the view of linguistic anthropology, language is considered the main medium that preserves and transmits cultural values from one generation to the next. Language is an expression of culture and has an important role in shaping the way humans view the world. In this theory, Sapir explains that

the language patterns used by a society are greatly influenced by their cultural structure. Which introduces the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or the theory of linguistic relativity. This hypothesis states that language influences the way a person thinks and understands reality (Mailani et al., 2022). Furthermore, that language is not only part of culture, but also functions as a tool to create and reproduce culture. This can be seen from how certain cultural practices are often manifested through the use of language, such as in oral traditions, traditional ceremonies, or other forms of artistic expression. Language is a semiotic system that is integrated with social and cultural systems. The function of language in this context is not only as a means of communication, but also as a social tool that helps humans understand their roles, identities, and relationships in society. From this relationship, it is clear that language and culture are dynamically interrelated. Changes in one aspect often have an impact on other aspects, as seen in globalization, when the influence of new cultures is often followed by the entry of new vocabulary into a language.

The Role of Regional Languages in Cultural Identity

Regional languages as one of the nation's riches function as a means of communication for their supporting communities. In addition to being a means of intra-ethnic communication, regional languages also function as a supporter of the national language, namely Indonesian. Based on this function, regional languages should continue to be fostered and developed in order to strengthen the resilience of the nation's culture (Astawa, 2021). Regional languages should no longer be treated as one of the cultures whose functions can be replaced by the functions of other languages. Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution states, among other things, that regional languages that are well maintained by their speakers will be respected and maintained by the state because these regional languages are part of the living Indonesian culture. The use of regional languages is not only for communication, but also a reflection of collective identity and pride in cultural heritage.

The importance of regional languages and the fear of the extinction of regional languages because language is very closely related to culture so that the two cannot be separated. Because the link between culture and language is so strong, without language our culture will die. When we talk about language, most of what we are talking about is culture. In this context, we can conclude that culture is a combination of patterns that reflect communicative responses to stimuli from the environment. Pattern To understand the implementation of the function of regional languages, we should take a moment to look at point (4) of the function of regional languages which states that regional languages function as a means of supporting regional

culture and the Indonesian language. In relation to the function of the Indonesian language, point (1) states that regional languages function as a supporter of the Indonesian language, and point (3) states that regional languages function as a linguistic source to enrich the Indonesian language. This cultural pattern in turn reflects the same elements in the individual communication behavior carried out by those who were born and raised in that culture (Yunus, 2022).

The special role of a language in the life of society. First, it contains "national language" and "group language". The national language functions as a symbol of national pride, a symbol of national identity, a tool for uniting various ethnic groups with various socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and as a means of communication between regions and cultures. Second, the group language is a language used by a smaller group of a nation, such as an ethnic group or a sub-ethnic region, as a symbol of group identity and a tool for implementing the group's culture (Putri et al., 2021). Therefore, hard work is needed from all parties to revitalize the role of regional languages as the local native language. This responsibility cannot simply be handed over to the government through the language council or whatever.

However, all parties, from the family environment to the local environment, must be able to maintain local wisdom in the form of the regional language. One of the efforts is to provide flexibility in developing regional language development programs. In the future, regional language teaching programs in schools will not only function as intermediary languages and then be replaced with Indonesian (subtractive bilingual), but must also promote education to produce students who, in addition to mastering the national language, are also able to use their mother tongue well (Manurung et al., 2024). Of course, this is only a small part of the efforts that need to be made to revitalize the role of regional languages. There are still many opportunities and other ways for regional languages to become a strength for the Indonesian nation, especially for the regions concerned. In ethnic minority communities, language is often a strong marker for cultural identity and a symbol of resistance to the dominance of the majority culture.

The use of ethnic languages is a way to maintain and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of the group. For example, among the Dayak tribe in Kalimantan, the Dayak language is not only used in daily communication, but also in various traditional ceremonies and religious rituals. In this context, language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a marker that shows the depth and diversity of culture (Katubi, 2010). In addition to being a marker of cultural identity, language also functions as a tool to reduce cultural conflicts in ethnic minority communities. In situations where there is tension between minority and

majority ethnic groups, the use of ethnic languages can be a way to assert cultural rights and affirm the existence of the group. However, language can also be a bridge to facilitate dialogue between different ethnic groups. By respecting and using ethnic languages in interactions between groups, individuals can build understanding and tolerance for cultural diversity.

CONCLUSION

Regional languages play an important role as markers of cultural identity because they reflect the values, traditions, and perspectives of a society. As a medium of communication that is passed down from generation to generation, regional languages reflect unique local wisdom, such as the mindset, customs, and beliefs of the local community. With regional languages, people not only preserve their ancestral heritage, but also strengthen social ties between residents in their communities. In this context, regional languages function as a symbol of pride that strengthens the sense of belonging to the original culture, especially amidst the current of globalization that can erode local cultural identity. However, the role of regional languages as markers of cultural identity is increasingly threatened along with the decreasing number of regional language speakers due to modernization and urbanization. Therefore, there needs to be a preservation effort that involves formal education, cultural activities, and the active use of regional languages in everyday life. Regional languages are not only a means of communication, but also a means to maintain irreplaceable cultural wealth. Through joint efforts between the government, society, and the younger generation, regional languages can continue to live as markers of distinctive cultural identity and remain relevant in the future.

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