

Sociolinguistic Study on the Use of Regional Languages for Students of the Indonesian Language Study Program

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A B S T R A C T

Regional languages play a significant role in preserving cultural identity and remain widely used in multilingual communities, including higher education settings. Although Indonesian functions as the official language in academic communication, regional languages continue to be actively employed by students in both academic and non-academic interactions. However, studies examining regional language use among university students from a sociolinguistic perspective remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to describe the forms of regional language use among students of the Indonesian Language Education Study Program at Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University of Bengkulu and identify the factors influencing their language choices. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach within a sociolinguistic framework. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and recordings of students' natural conversations and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that regional language use remains dominant, particularly in informal interactions, and is manifested through code-mixing, code-switching, language interference, and local dialect variation. These linguistic practices are influenced by ethnic background, social solidarity, environmental habits, cultural identity, and communicative comfort. The study highlights the importance of maintaining regional languages while strengthening positive attitudes toward the appropriate use of Indonesian in academic contexts.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistics, Regional Language, Students, Code-Mixing, Code-Switching.*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multilingual country that has a very high diversity of languages. In addition to Indonesian as the national language, there are hundreds of regional languages spoken by people in various regions of the archipelago. The diversity of languages reflects the nation's cultural richness as well as the social identity of the Indonesian people. In daily life, most people use regional languages as their first language and Indonesian as their second language used in inter-regional communication and in various formal activities. This condition makes Indonesia one of the interesting countries to study from a sociolinguistic perspective because it shows the intensive interaction between various languages in people's lives (Chaer & Agustina, 2020).

Indonesian has a position as a national language as well as a state language that functions as a tool for unifying the nation, the language of instruction for education, the language of government administration, and an official means of communication in various fields of life. On the other hand, regional languages still have an important function as cultural identity, regional symbols, and communication media in the family environment and local communities. The two languages complement each other in the lives of the Indonesian people so that the existence of regional languages is maintained as part of the preservation of local culture and wisdom (Nababan, 2020).

The phenomenon of using more than one language can also be found in the college environment. Although Indonesian is used as the official language in academic activities,

students still use the regional language in daily interactions, especially in informal situations. Universities inhabited by students from various ethnic and regional backgrounds are a space for very dynamic language contact. In these situations, regional languages are often used as a form of social solidarity, a marker of group identity, and a means of communication that is considered more familiar and comfortable. As a result, various linguistic symptoms such as code mixing, code switching, and language interference often appear in communication between students (Suprapti, 2023).

This phenomenon is part of a sociolinguistic study that studies the relationship between language and society as well as various social factors that influence the use of language. In sociolinguistic studies, the use of language is influenced by various aspects, such as cultural background, social environment, age, education level, and the identity of the speaker. Therefore, the language variations that emerge in the university environment are important objects of study to understand the dynamics of language use in a multilingual society (Chaer & Agustina, 2020). In addition, a multilingual society allows speakers to use more than one language according to the communication situation faced (Kridalaksana, 2021).

Students of the Indonesian Language Study Program at Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu come from various regions in Bengkulu Province and outside the region. The diversity of backgrounds creates an academic environment that is rich in language variations so that interactions between students often involve alternating use of Indonesian and regional languages. In daily communication practices, students not only use Indonesian as an academic language, but also use regional languages in various informal situations that reflect their respective cultural identities (Lika et al., 2024).

The use of regional languages by students is manifested in various forms, such as code mixing, code switching, the use of certain dialects, and the insertion of regional language elements into Indonesian speech. This phenomenon shows that regional languages still have a strong function as a communication medium as well as a symbol of social closeness in the university environment. On the other hand, the use of regional languages also shows the existence of linguistic dynamics influenced by social relationships, communication contexts, and the cultural background of the speakers (Chaer & Agustina, 2020; Nababan, 2020).

A number of previous studies have shown that the use of regional languages in the student environment is still quite dominant and influenced by social and cultural factors. Research by Lika et al. (2024) shows that the language variation of students is influenced by the social and cultural environment of the campus. Meanwhile, Suprapti (2023) explained that regional languages still have an important role in building closeness, social solidarity, and facilitating communication between students. However, research that specifically examines the use of regional languages by students of the Indonesian Language Study Program at Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu is still relatively limited, so further research is needed.

The limitations of previous research show that there is a need to study more deeply the form of regional language use and the factors that affect it in the academic environment. The study is not only important in the development of sociolinguistic science, but also provides an overview of the dynamics of language use among students living in a multilingual society. The results of the research are expected to be able to enrich the study of students' language behavior as well as become a basis in efforts to maintain a balance between the use of Indonesian as an academic language and the preservation of regional languages as a cultural identity.

Based on this description, this study aims to describe the forms of use of regional languages by students of the Indonesian Language Study Program, Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu and analyze the factors that affect its use in social interaction in the campus environment. This research is expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic studies, especially regarding the use of regional languages in the university environment, as well as a consideration in strengthening the good and correct use of

Indonesian without neglecting the function of regional languages as part of the cultural identity of the Indonesian people.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to describe the phenomenon of students' regional language use in depth and contextual so that it can provide a comprehensive picture of the form of regional language use and the factors that affect it in academic and non-academic life (Sugiyono, 2021). The research was carried out at the Indonesian Language Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Tadris, Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu. This research was conducted in the January-March 2025 period. The selection of the research location is based on the diversity of students' language backgrounds which allows multilingual interaction in the campus environment.

The research subjects consisted of 20 active students of the Indonesian Language Study Program in semesters III, V, and VII. The informants were selected purposively by considering the representation of students from various regions in Bengkulu Province, such as Bengkulu City, Rejang Lebong, Kepahiang, Seluma, South Bengkulu, Mukomuko, and Kaur, as well as several students from outside Bengkulu Province. The diversity of regional origins is seen as able to provide relevant data on the use of regional languages in student interaction.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, documentation, and recording of student speech. Observations were carried out to directly observe the use of student language in various communication situations in the campus environment, both in academic and non-academic activities (Moleong, 2021). The interview was conducted to obtain information about the reasons, motivations, and factors that affect the use of regional languages in student communication. Documentation is used to complete the research data, while speech recording is carried out on student conversations that are relevant to the focus of the research.

The research instruments include observation guidelines, interview guidelines, recording devices, and field notes. The instrument is used to help researchers obtain data systematically and in-depth in accordance with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2021). The data was analyzed using an interactive analysis technique proposed by Miles et al. (2019), which included three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This technique is used so that the data obtained can be analyzed systematically so as to produce findings that are in accordance with the focus of the research. The validity of the data is carried out through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, while technical triangulation is carried out by comparing data from observations, interviews, documentation, and speech recording. This step was taken to increase the validity and credibility of research data (Moleong, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Student Regional Language Use

The results of the study show that students of the Indonesian Language Study Program of the Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University Bengkulu are still actively using regional languages in daily communication, especially in informal situations such as conversations in the canteen, campus yards, and student organization activities. The regional languages used include Rejang, Serawai, Bengkulu Malay, and Javanese. These findings show that the diversity of students' language backgrounds creates a multilingual situation that allows for a wide variety of language use in social interactions.

The most dominant form of regional language use is code mixing and code switching. Students often mix elements of regional languages into Indonesian speech, such as the use of the words *idak*, *apo*, and *kagek* in everyday conversation. In addition, students also change the code by adjusting the language used based on the opponent and communication situation. For

example, students use Indonesian when communicating with lecturers, but switch to regional languages when interacting with peers.

The findings can be explained through Fishman's sociolinguistic theory which states that language choice is strongly influenced by the domains of language use, such as family, education, work, and social associations. In the context of this study, Indonesian is more predominantly used in the formal academic domain, while regional languages are used in the domain of friendship and informal communication. Thus, the use of different languages in each situation indicates the adjustment of language based on its social function.

These findings are also in line with Holmes' theory that language selection is influenced by participants, topics of conversation, and communication settings. Students tend to choose regional languages when talking to friends who have the same ethnic background because they are considered more familiar and comfortable. On the other hand, Indonesian is used in formal situations because it has prestige value and is considered in accordance with academic norms.

From the perspective of Chaer & Agustina (2020), the phenomenon of code mixing and code switching is a common symptom in bilingual or multilingual societies. The presence of two or more languages in the campus environment causes students to have the ability to change languages according to communication needs. Meanwhile, the SPEAKING theory put forward by Hymes shows that the use of language is influenced by elements of the speech situation, such as speech participants, communication goals, place, and interaction norms. Therefore, the variation in language use found in this study is a form of student adaptation to different communication contexts.

The findings of this study are in line with the research of Lika et al. (2024) which shows that the variation in student language use is influenced by the social and cultural environment of the campus. The results of this study also support the findings of Suprapti (2023) who stated that code mixing and code switching are still often found in student interactions due to intense language contact. In addition, Yuningsih (2022) research shows that the use of regional languages functions as a marker of group solidarity and a means of building social closeness between students.

Factors Causing the Use of Regional Languages

The results of the study show that the use of regional languages is influenced by several factors, namely cultural background, social solidarity, environmental habits, cultural identity, and communication comfort. Students who come from the same area tend to use the regional language as the main means of communication when interacting with fellow speakers. According to Fishman in (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012), language serves not only as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of group identity. Therefore, the use of regional languages by students can be understood as an effort to maintain cultural identity in the midst of a heterogeneous academic environment. Regional languages are a marker of membership in certain social groups so that their use is maintained even though students are in a university environment.

This view is reinforced by Holmes who states that language has a social function to show closeness, solidarity, and interpersonal relationships. In this study, students admitted that they were more comfortable using the local language when talking to friends from the same area. Regional languages create a more relaxed, familiar, and informal communication atmosphere than the use of Indonesian (Basri et al., 2023). In addition, Hymes' theory explains that language behavior is influenced by the social norms that apply in the speaking community. Students who have been used to using regional languages in the family and community environment since childhood tend to maintain this habit when entering the world of higher education. Thus, the use of regional languages is not only influenced by linguistic factors, but also by social and cultural factors inherent in the speakers.

The findings of this study are in line with the research of Yuningsih (2022) who found that social solidarity is the main factor in the use of regional languages among students. The

results of this study also support the research of Lika, et al. (2024) which show that the cultural background and social environment of the campus play an important role in determining students' language choices in communication.

Impact of Regional Language Use

The use of regional languages has a positive and negative impact on the academic life of students. The positive impact found is the maintenance of the existence of regional languages as part of local cultural identity. Through the use of regional languages in daily communication, students indirectly contribute to the preservation of their regional language and culture (Kibar et al., 2023).

In Fishman's perspective, the preservation of regional languages is an important part of efforts to maintain the ethnic identity and cultural sustainability of a community group. The more often a regional language is used in daily life, the greater the chance that the language will survive in the midst of globalization and the dominance of national languages.

On the other hand, this study also found that there is interference in regional languages on the use of formal Indonesian. Some students still bring elements of phonology, vocabulary, and regional language structure when speaking using Indonesian in academic situations. This finding is in accordance with the opinion of Chaer & Agustina (2020) who stated that intense language contact can cause interference, namely the entry of elements of the first language into the second language used by the speaker. According to Holmes (Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin et al., 2016), interference is a common phenomenon in bilingual societies because speakers use more than one language system at the same time. In this study, interference was seen in certain pronunciations, word choices, and sentence structures that were still influenced by regional languages. Nevertheless, the phenomenon cannot be viewed as completely negative as it is a natural consequence of the life of a multilingual society.

This finding is in line with the research of Zahra et al. (2025) who found that students still experience interference from regional languages when using Indonesian in academic presentations and discussions. However, the results of this study also support Fishman and Hymes' view that linguistic diversity is a cultural asset that reflects the social identity of the community. Therefore, the use of regional languages needs to be seen as part of the linguistic wealth that must be maintained, while the ability to use Indonesian formally still needs to be strengthened in the academic environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the use of regional languages is still an important part of the communication of students of the Indonesian Language Study Program, Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University, Bengkulu. This use appears in the form of code mixing, code switching, and language interference influenced by social and cultural factors, such as regional identity, group solidarity, and language habits. This research shows that regional languages not only function as a means of communication, but also as a means of maintaining local identity and culture in the university environment. On the other hand, the findings of the study indicate the need to strengthen the use of Indonesian language in formal academic contexts. The contribution of this research lies in providing an empirical picture of the practice of using students' regional languages in the campus environment and enriching sociolinguistic studies on the relationship between language choice, social identity, and academic life.

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