

**Solidarity and Power in Linguistic Choice of Tidar University Students'
Interaction**

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ABSTRACT

This study is about linguistic choice made by university students, mainly Tidar University students, when they need to interact with other interlocutors on campus. Accordingly, it aims to investigate the linguistic choice patterns done by Tidar University students. This research is delimited to a social factor in Sociolinguistics, namely participants/addressee, which is further subdivided into two specific aspects, namely solidarity and power. Mixed-method research design is employed through self-reported open-ended questions. There are 198 fifth-semester students from five faculties at Tidar University involved as respondents. To collect the data, self-report questionnaires adapted from Cohn and Ravindranath (2013) were distributed. Then, the results were analysed using Holmes's (2013) framework of social factors. The findings reveal that in high-solidarity interactions, such as with close friends, there are 40,82% students used Javanese. In contrast, when solidarity reduces, like with distant senior students, respondents tend to switch to Bahasa Indonesia or a mix codes (vernacular and Bahasa Indonesia). Distinct from solidarity aspect, when respondents encounter interlocutors with higher perceived power, Bahasa Indonesia becomes the primary choice for interaction and the percentage reaches almost 100%. Conversely, with less than 10% of the respondents utilize Javanese when they interact with cleaning staff and security personnel. Ultimately, results substantiate that the patterns of linguistic choice within a single domain, namely university, can be diverse because of the dynamics of solidarity and power which are implicitly manifested in everyday student interactions on campus.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; Linguistic/Language Choice; Solidarity; Power; University Students

INTRODUCTION

Given the context of a multilingual society, Indonesians tend to master more than one language. Generally, those languages comprise Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, vernacular/regional language(s), and foreign language(s) (Pemerintah RI, 2019). In 2022, the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) documented the number of individuals with proficiency in those languages. The findings indicated that Bahasa Indonesia was not consistently the most widely mastered language among population. While Bahasa Indonesia was the predominant language spoken in the province, such as DKI Jakarta, the survey result shows different in the province like Central Java. In this area, the most dominant language spoken by Indonesian is Javanese, which is regarded as a vernacular language (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022).

Nevertheless, the survey was not likely conducted without considering social factors, as noted in sociolinguistics, such as those encompassing the participants and the setting (Holmes, 2013). In fact, social factors could influence linguistic choices done by individuals (Sodah, 2019). That is the reason individuals often express the same meaning using different languages, which in this context, that refers to language/linguistic choice (Spolsky, 2009).

In the domain of public university, multilingual is obvious. This is simply due the students come from different cultures in Indonesia. Yet, many Indonesian public universities are embedded within communities that mostly utilize vernacular languages (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, 2008), including Tidar University in Magelang, Central Java. In Indonesian public university, it is a mandatory to use the national language. However, in the context of Universitas Tidar, Bahasa Indonesia as a national language exists alongside a strong regional identity as Javanese remains a dominant medium among students, faculty, and administrative staff's interactions. In consequence, linguistic choice among the students is varied. Regarding that condition, this research aims to investigate the patterns of linguistic choice done by university students, mainly in Tidar University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Prior studies about linguistic choice in Indonesia have been identified. Linguistic choice research in multilingual Indonesia is patterned, context-dependent, and shaped by factors ranging from individual anxiety (Rohmah & Lawal, 2026), consumer nationalism (Khazanah et al., 2023), to ethnic diversity at the population level (Pepinsky et al., 2024). While Rohmah & Lawal (2026) examined language use across different domains (home, social environment, campus, classroom), her study collapsed "campus" into a single category, failing to distinguish between interlocutors with different power relationships and social distances. Similarly,

Khazanah et al. (2023) focused exclusively on commercial advertising, such as a non-interactive, one-to-many communication mode, while Pepinsky et al. (2024) operated at a macro-level unable to capture micro-interactive hierarchies. This study addresses this gap by differentiating language choices based on who students are speaking to. This is to introduce variable the hierarchical and relational dynamics of language choice within the same physical setting (campus), which is absent from those former studies.

Existing research has treated "campus" as a homogeneous space, but this study recognizes that universities are institutionally differentiated environments where different staff categories perform distinct roles and may command different linguistic accommodations. Rohmah & Lawal (2026) found that 92% of students spoke Bahasa Indonesia on campus but did not specify *to whom*, yet it is entirely plausible that a student uses English with a lecturer (to practice academic language or show respect), Indonesian with administrative staff (as the formal language of bureaucracy), and Javanese or a local variety with cleaning staff (to establish solidarity or because the staff member has limited Indonesian proficiency). My study captures these potential variations, addressing what Pepinsky et al. (2024) call the need to distinguish "the process of urbanization" from "the state of being urban" by analogy, my study distinguishes the *process of campus interaction* from the *state of being on campus*.

Besides those two gaps, this study implicitly addresses the perceived linguistic repertoire and social status of the interlocutor as a determinant of linguistic choice. This study mainly investigates what Pepinsky et al. (2024) identify as the micro-interactive mechanisms underlying macro-level language shift (something that census data cannot reveal). While Rohmah & Lawal (2026) identified psychological factors influencing language choice, they did not examine how interlocutors moderate these factors. This study fills this gap by treating language choice as fundamentally dialogic and relationally situated, not only a reflection of the speaker's internal state or the physical domain.

Linguistic Choice

Linguistic choice or language choice is a term referred to the speaker's selection of particular language or variety, such as vernaculars, national languages, dialects, and formal or informal registers (Genemo & Genemo, 2021; Jumadi1 et al., 2024). Linguistic choice in a multilingual setting involves some social factors, such as addressee (participants), the settings, the context, and the topic of conversation (Matras, 2009). To be more specific, social factor in this research is just limited to the factor of participants. This is due to the test whether in only one domain or a social space (Spolsky, 2003), i.e. Tidar University, the patterns of linguistic use can be occurred or not. Furthermore, one of social factors that might cause linguistic choice is the participants. are the relationship between the people in the particular situation (solidarity) and how the speaker feels about the person addressed (power) (Holmes, 2013).

Solidarity and Power as Social Dimension

Following Holmes' (2013) concepts about solidarity, this term refers to the level of social closeness. In a multilingual community, solidarity is frequently expressed through language use, signed by selecting vernacular dialects, informal styles, or in-group codes. It influences linguistic choice to minimize social distance, emphasize common ground, and is prevalent among friends, family, and peers. Sometimes, language which is functioned as a media to represent solidarity can foster rapport and group membership. Besides solidarity, power or status is also included into social dimensions posited by Holmes. It reflects hierarchical relationships and influences linguistic choices to construct superiority or subordination.

Interaction in Sociolinguistics Perspective

Within groups, interaction is defined by the dynamic, reciprocal exchange of actions and reactions among individuals across times (Ackerman et al., 2006). In the perspective of sociolinguistics, interaction or commonly mentioned as social interaction, primarily functions not merely for conveying information. More than that, it always involves the connection between society and language (Romaine, 2000). It is grounded in linguistic activity and cultural practices (Raimondi, 2014).

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employs a mixed method research (MMR) approach. The specific design applied in this research is a concurrent Quan + Qual MMR design (Phakiti et al., 2015). In conducting quantitative design, a random sampling method was applied in the selection of respondents. A sample of 198 respondents are involved in this research. All of them are Tidar University students from five different faculties, namely Faculty of Economics (40 students), Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (40 students), Faculty of Agriculture (39 students), Faculty of Engineering (40 students), and Faculty of Political Science (39 students). The sole controlled variable for the sampling method was that participants must be in their fifth semester of study. This criterion was established based on the assumption that respondents, mainly they are from outside Magelang, would have resided in this area for a minimum of two years and it is presumed that students of non-Javanese origin who previously lacked proficiency in Javanese language would have gained sufficient exposure to the language after at least two years of residency. Meanwhile, qualitative method in this research comes from a self-report format with open-ended questions, yielding highly concise answers that frequently omitted further reasons or explanations. Thus, qualitative analysis in this writings is presented aligning with the interpretation of the results of quantitative data analysis.

Instruments and Procedures

In conducting this research, mainly in collecting data, researchers employ self-report questionnaires to gain some information about language used by the university students when they have to interact with other parties in the university. Self-report questionnaire that was used for this research is adapted from Cohn et al 2013 (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2013). Regarding data processing, researchers utilized Google Spreadsheet due to its integration with Google Form that was used during the data collection phase. Besides that, Google Sheets remains a viable platform for performing fundamental statistical computations.

As this study implements a mixed method research, in detail, this research is conducted through several stages, (1) Preparation phase: the team begins by organizing project workflows, allocating tasks, and procuring respondent incentives. Simultaneously, a literature review is conducted to establish a theoretical foundation in language choice, language attitude, and social status; (2) Instrument development: guided by the literature review and Cohn questionnaire, researchers design a digital questionnaire using Google Form platform; (3) Distribution planning: this stage focuses on coordinating with university stakeholders and distributing the survey. The target respondents are students from 5 distinct faculties at Universitas Tidar; (4) Data collection: once gathered, the numerical and textual data are screened and categorized to ensure they align with the analytical criteria established by Holmes (Holmes, 2013); (5) Data processing: after classification, the data are prepared for computation. In this stage, Google Spreadsheet utilized to count basic statistics; (6) Data analysis: in this phase, the team conducts a comprehensive interpretation and analysis of the finalized dataset.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this research, essentially, followed social factor principles stated by Holmes (2013) with delimitation of the participants. This factor was further refined into specific parameters, namely the solidarity between participants and the power relations between speakers. The realization of those parameters is formed through self-report questions asked to the respondents. See the following table.

Table 1. Questions Used to Trace The Patterns of Linguistic Choice

| No. | Patterns of Linguistic Choice across Social Factors |
|-----|---|
| 1. | Social Factor: Participants Main focus: Solidarity Q1. Which language do you use when you interact with close friends or intimate peers? Q2. Which language do you use when you interact with senior students with whom you share a close personal friendship? Q3. Which language do you use when you interact with senior students with whom you have a casual or relatively distant relationship? |

2. Social Factor: Participants

Main focus: Power

Q4. Which language do you use when you interact with lecturer?

Q5. Which language do you use when you interact with administrative staff on campus?

Q6. Which language do you use when you interact with cleaning staff on campus?

Q7. Which language do you use when you interact with campus security personnel?

Adapted from (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2013)

RESULT AND DISUSSION

This section will be divided into two parts. The first part focuses on description and data analysis of linguistic choice patterns in the interaction of university students that consider solidarity aspect, while the second one provides description and data analysis of linguistic choice patterns in the interaction of university students that consider power aspect.

Patterns of Linguistic Choice in The Interaction of University Students by Considering Solidarity Aspect

Linguistic choices made by the respondents, regarded in this context as participants for an indicator within the social factors, will be examined to discern their language use patterns. See the line graph below through Figure 1.

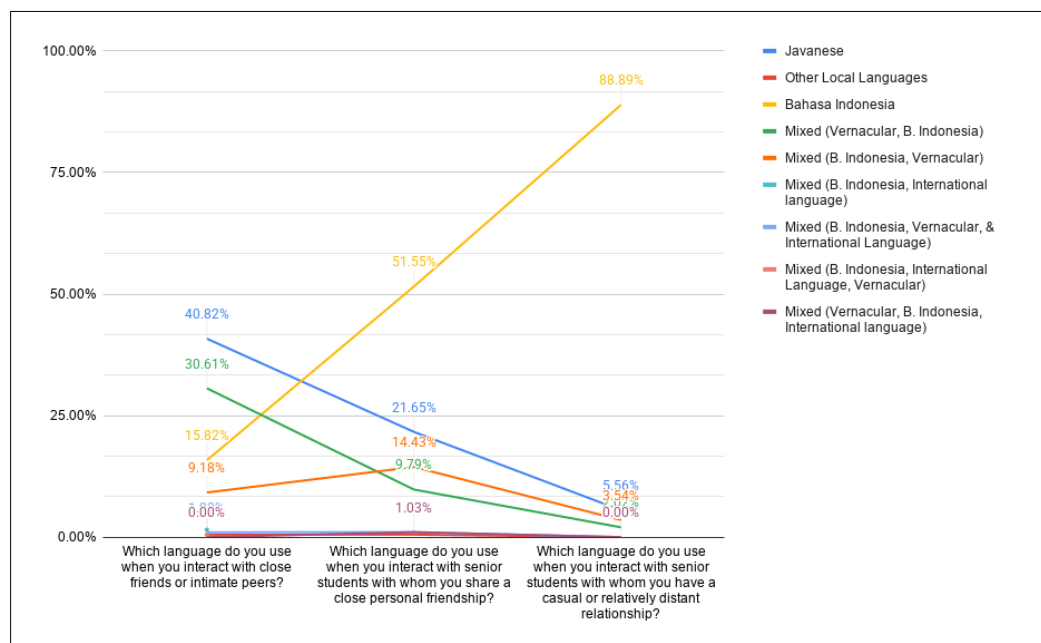


Figure 1. Linguistic Choice Made by Tidar University Students by Considering Solidarity Aspect

Figure 1 shows data about language use among university students in three different social interaction contexts: interactions with close friends or intimate peers, interactions with senior students who share a close friendship, and interactions with senior students where the relationship is casual or more distant. The horizontal axis measures the percentage of language choice, ranging from 0% to 100%. The vertical axis lists nine language categories: Javanese, Other Local Languages, Bahasa Indonesia, and various mixed-language combinations that include vernacular, Bahasa Indonesia, and international languages.

Referring to Figure 1, interactions with close friends or intimate peers are dominated by Javanese. The percentage of respondents who chose Javanese as the medium when they interact with close friends and intimate peers is close to 50% or to be more precise it reaches 40,82%. Additionally, approximately one-third of the total respondents indicated a preference for code-mixing, prioritizing the vernacular language (Javanese) combined with Indonesian. Those empirical evidences imply that linguistic choice pattern used by university students when they need to interact with close friends, Javanese is a language considered to be an effective language. In this context, Bahasa Indonesia is just reported to be used by 15,82% respondents.

By contrast, Bahasa Indonesia is a language that is reported as dominant linguistic choice, namely as many as 51,55% respondents, when they need to interact with senior students who have a casual or distant relationship. Mixed languages with Bahasa Indonesia as the main priority achieved 14,43%. That situation is totally contrast with the previous description. Here, in responding this question, Javanese emerges to be chosen by 21,65% supported by 10,82% respondents who choose mixed languages with Javanese as the most priority language. By seeing that description, it can be interpreted that as the social distance increases, speakers tend to shift away from using only Javanese toward more mixed codes, then Bahasa Indonesia, which may act as a neutral or more formal means of communication.

This dynamic is also apparent from the responds of the third questions, “Which language do you use when you interact with senior students with whom you have a casual or relatively distant relationship?” Bahasa Indonesia reveals to be the most dominant language chosen by university students. The number equals with 88,89%. The choice of Javanese drastically drops up to 5,56% added by 2,02% with respondents who choose mixed languages with Javanese as the main priority. Distant relationship becomes the primary consideration in this linguistic choice situation.

Figure 1 shows that solidarity, which includes feelings of closeness, shared identity, and emotional connection, plays an important role in shaping the language choices of university students. In situations with high solidarity, like among close friends and intimate peers, Javanese is used almost 50% of the time. This supports sociolinguistic theories that suggest vernacular or ethnic languages represent in-group identity, emotional warmth, and social bonds. When solidarity is strong, speakers do not feel the need to switch to a more formal or neutral language like

Bahasa Indonesia. Their shared background allows for smooth and meaningful communication.

When solidarity is still relatively high but the power dynamic shifts, such as with senior students who are also close friends, Javanese remains the main language. However, mixed codes begin to appear. This shows that even in solidary relationships, the presence of seniority creates a slight level of formality or respect. Speakers occasionally mix Javanese with Bahasa Indonesia. Still, the ongoing use of Javanese indicates that solidarity outweighs the hierarchical distance in this context.

In situations with low solidarity, such as casual or distant relationships with senior students, there is a clear shift: Javanese use declines, while the use of mixed codes with Bahasa Indonesia increases significantly. This trend shows that when solidarity is weak, speakers prefer a more neutral language like Bahasa Indonesia or mixed varieties to avoid social risks tied to using Javanese. In Javanese culture, using the wrong speech level (*ngoko* vs. *krama*) with a non-intimate senior could be considered rude. Thus, switching to Bahasa Indonesia or mixed codes becomes a strategy when solidarity is not strong enough to justify using pure vernacular. Overall, the chart highlights that solidarity strongly predicts language choice. Higher solidarity favors Javanese, while lower solidarity leads to a preference for mixed codes or Bahasa Indonesia.

Patterns of Linguistic Choice in The Interaction of University Students by Considering Power Aspect

Figure 2 focuses on the power aspect, presenting language use in hierarchical university contexts involving lecturers, administrative staff, cleaning staff, and campus security personnel. Figure 2 captures the aspects that reflect linguistic choice influenced by power quantitatively, while Figure 3 portrays the detail of language use, Javanese and mixed languages.

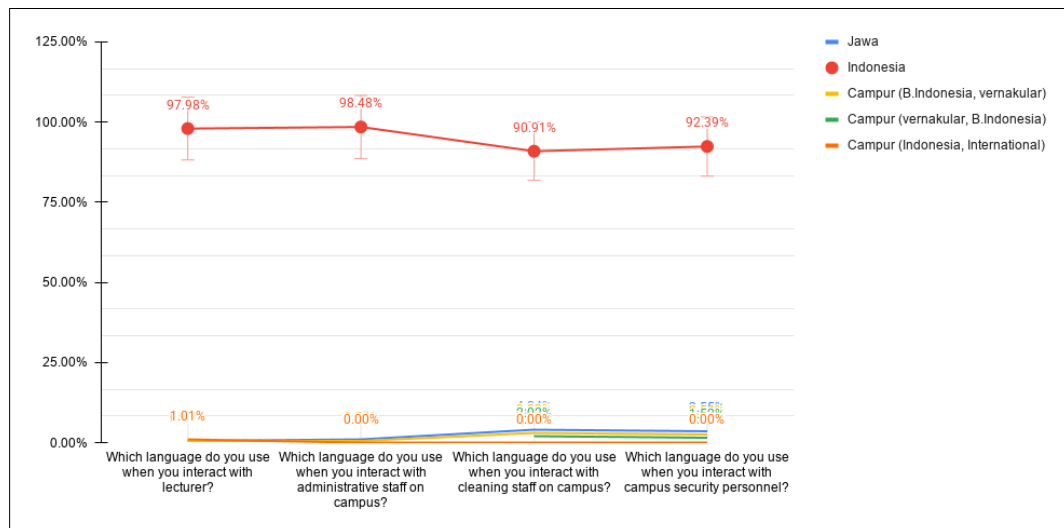


Figure 2. Linguistic Choice Made by Tidar University Students by Considering Power Aspect

In contrast with how solidarity (close friends) was illustrated through the dominant percentage of Javanese used by the students, calculated both from the choice of Javanese only and Javanese as the primary language mixed by Bahasa Indonesia, as shown in Figure 1, Figure 2 shows how power dynamics shape linguistic choices differently. Interacting with lecturers is a position that is believed to have the highest power. Figure 2 shows that Bahasa Indonesia dominates and there is almost no use of pure Javanese. Mixed categories are least represented. This is to say that students see lecturers as authorities who expect formal, neutral and commonly understood language. The most common language for interaction with the administrative staff is Bahasa Indonesia, although mixed vernacular-Indonesian combinations are beginning to be used in small percentages. This indicates a slightly less formal tone than interactions with the lecturers. Furthermore, this similar condition has been occurred when students interact with administrative

staffs on campus. This point may be understood as administrative staffs have equal power with lecturers or considered as interlocutors with high status on campus.

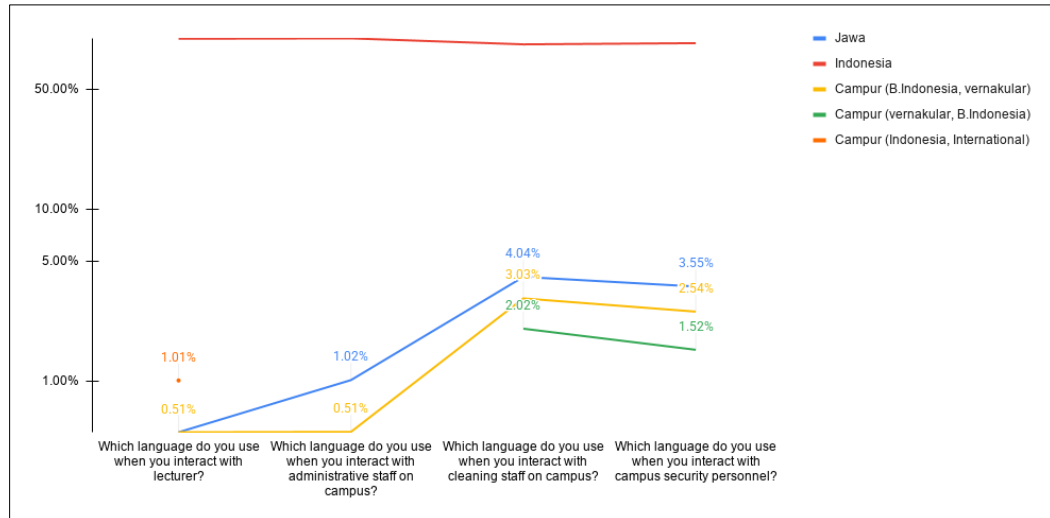


Figure 3. Detail Description of Language Use for Javanese and Mixed Languages to Indicate Power Dynamic

However, as seen in Figure 3, even though Bahasa Indonesia still dominates as a language chosen by Tidar University students when they interact with cleaning staff on campus, the tendency of Javanese use is reported to increase slightly. Such a pattern could be observed through the use of mix of Javanese and Bahasa Indonesia when they talk to these people. This condition could signify that there is lessened assumption from the students about the power had by this group. However, students might do this because they feel more comfortable or because they think the other person will like it.

The students always use Bahasa Indonesia when they talk to their lecturers. This is because lecturers have a lot of power and the students want to show respect. Bahasa Indonesia is a language that is used by everyone in the country. It is like a language that does not offend anyone. The students use it to show that they are professional and polite. The indication of dynamic existence was illustrated through the interaction between the students and cleaning staffs. They mostly use Bahasa Indonesia, even though they also use some Javanese. This is because the cleaning staffs do not have much power as the lecturers or administrative staffs but they still need to be treated with respect. The students use a mix of languages to show that they are being polite but friendly. Another possibility might be because they think these people will prefer to speak Javanese. This can be a problem because it shows that the students are treating people differently based on their job.

There is another way to look at this. The students might use Javanese with the cleaning staff and the security personnel because they see them every day and they become friends. They might use Javanese in the hallways or in the canteen because it is a casual place. This does not mean that the students are being rude it just means

that they are being friendly. The important thing is that the students are very careful about which language they use and when they use it. They are always thinking about how the other person will feel and what they will think. The students use Bahasa Indonesia when they want to show respect to someone who has power. They use Javanese when they are talking to someone who's their friend or who they think will like it. The students are very good at switching between languages. They do it all the time. They are able to balance being friendly and being respectful, at the time.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that university students at Universitas Tidar make language choices based on the balance of solidarity and power. In friendly interactions, like those with close friends, Javanese is used almost exclusively. This use reflects in-group identity and emotional closeness. However, when the sense of solidarity diminishes, such as in conversations with acquaintances or senior students, students start using mixed codes and Bahasa Indonesia as part of their communication strategy. In situations of unequal power, Bahasa Indonesia becomes the main language for showing respect, especially toward lecturers. In contrast, Javanese is used again in interactions with lower-status staff, like cleaners and security personnel. These findings indicate that language choice varies greatly, even on the same campus, depending on the speaker's relationship with the listener and the existing social hierarchy. The study addresses a significant gap in current research by breaking down the "campus" domain into specific categories based on the people involved. This reveals interaction patterns that larger surveys or studies examining entire domains might miss. The findings suggest important implications for language awareness in higher education. Universities should recognize the complex language skills that students use every day. Future research could expand on this work by examining speaker gender, the regional origins of Javanese dialects, or the different speech levels (ngoko vs. krama) used in Javanese. Observational studies could also complement the self-reported data. Ultimately, this study shows that language choice is not just a personal decision but a social practice that plays a vital role in everyday university life in multilingual Indonesia.

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