



The Use and Mastery of Javanese Language among the New Generation

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Abstract

This paper explores the use and mastery of the Javanese language among the new generation of the Sarawak Javanese community in Malaysia. The Sarawak's Javanese community, descended from Javanese migrants who settled in Sarawak, represents a unique linguistic and cultural group within the region. The research aims to investigate the current status of the Javanese language among the Sarawak Javanese new generation and understand the factors that influence its usage and proficiency. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, is employed to gather the data. This study used purposive sampling technique, involving Javanese community groups in several major settlement locations in the State of Sarawak, Malaysia. The findings reveal that the use of Javanese among the Sarawak Javanese new generation is influenced by various factors such as family background, community dynamics, educational exposure, socio-economic factors, and the influence of dominant languages such as Malay and English. While certain factors contribute to language proficiency, there are also barriers that need to be addressed. The findings also highlight the importance of community support, educational initiatives, and the preservation of cultural identity to ensure the continued use and mastery of the Javanese language among the Sarawak Javanese new generation.

Keywords: Javanese language, Javanese community, language preservation, Javanese youths

1. Introduction

According to research, Javanese had migrated from Indonesia to Malaysia in 1880 (Mohd Hasrul Yushairi and Zamzuri, 2019). They were brought in by the British to be agricultural labourers particularly in coconut and palms farms. In Peninsula Malaysia, Javanese were recorded migrating to Selangor first, followed by Johor and Perak or known as west coast Malaysia. In Sarawak, Javanese came to Kuching areas in the 1900s. The migration of Javanese to Malaysia whether in Peninsula or Sarawak has changed many aspects of people in this region in terms of cultural, custom, socio-economy and language. According to a study by Noriah Mohamad (2001) in Nurul Aznina and Sharifah Raihan (2017), Javanese language is a subfamily of Hipronesia from Polinesia Malay language. She further stated that record has shown that the ancient Javanese language was first used in Sukabumi inscriptions in 804 AD. Nurul Aznina and Sharifah Raihan (2017) documented that there are a lot of Javanese speakers in Peninsula Malaysia, especially in the west coast states like Johor, Selangor, and Perak. As for Sarawak, not much study has been done and there is no record on the numbers of Javanese speakers this region has. Mohd Hasrul Yushairi and Zamzuri (2019) in their research on Javanese language proficiency among Javanese youth in Batu Pahat, they found that the majority of the Javanese youths were incompetent to speak Javanese, and this is mostly influenced by their environment. This has raised a concern as preservation of a native language should start within its own ethnic community.

The research aims to investigate the current status of the Javanese language among the Sarawak's Javanese new generation or youths and understand the factors that influence its usage and proficiency. It is imperative to examine and explore this status as the preservation of the language will determine the continuity of traditional language, which is also part of its culture and heritage.



2. Literature review

Javanese Community in Malaysia and Javanese Language

Language is a communication tool used by individuals to socially interact and relate to one another and according to Mukramah et al. (2022) language enables individuals or groups to strengthen the relationships. For the Javanese community, Javanese language is fundamental to the life of this community, and it is recognised as one of the intangible cultural heritages of the community (Mastika, 2022). Looking at the history of Javanese migration into Malaysia, up to the 1960s, Javanese people who migrated from Indonesia had travelled to a lot of locations, with Malaysia receiving the most significant number and most of them were forced labourers sent to the different regions (Linda and Teuku Reza, 2021). Nonetheless, most migrated Javanese were able to assimilate well within the Malay community in Malaysia due to the Malay language which has played an essential role in the assimilation of the Javanese among the Malaysian communities. Linguistically, in terms of vowels and consonants, the structure of Malay language is similar to Javanese language (Tamrin, 1987). In addition to these similarities, Malay language had also become one of the subjects taught in school in Java Island and the language was also used by the government officials to communicate with the natives during the Dutch colonisation (Henderson, 1970).

Looking at the numbers of migrated Indonesians into Malaysia, the Javanese communities are among the largest among the communities who had migrated from Indonesia, compared to the other migrated Indonesian communities. In Malaysia, Javanese is one of the minority languages and Javanese language belongs to the Austronesian family (Mastika, 2022). In general, most Malaysians are able to speak more than one language (bilinguals) as Malaysians consist of multi races and ethnicities communities, and each has its own unique languages and dialects. As a result, it is common for Malaysians to code switch in their spoken communication, and this includes the Javanese community. In bilingual communities all over the world, speakers frequently switch from one language to another to meet communication demands and this phenomenon of alternation between languages is known as code-switching (Aisha et al., 2018). According to Mohamad Subakir (1998) and Muhammad Firdaus and Normahdiah (2014), the most common language to code switch will be the minority language and the language used will be Malay and such occurrence often transpires in Malaysian spoken domains. Javanese speakers who are the minority often code switch from language to language, such as Javanese to Malay and from Malay to Javanese. Although the community consists of Javanese, the spoken language uttered is not necessarily Javanese language (Muhammad Firdaus and Normahdiah, 2014).

Challenges and Issues of Javanese Language in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there are many Javanese communities who have spoken the Javanese language in their daily communication. According to Karim and Maslida (2015), the type of language that is commonly used in Malaysia is the type of Javanese ngoko ('bahasa kasar'). Although Javanese is still spoken, its use is decreasing and one of the factors in the less frequent usage of the Javanese language is due to the influence of the Malay language. Malay is the national and official language in Malaysia, and this has influenced the Javanese community to speak Malay regularly. Karim and Maslida (2015) reveal that most Javanese from the third generation have not used Javanese in their oral interactions as they prefer Malay as their medium of interaction. In Sarawak's context, the language commonly used by the young generation of the Javanese community is Sarawak Malay. To add, Lily El Ferawati Rofil et al. (2015) also reiterate that Malay language that functions as a national and official language might have influenced the Javanese community to change into using Malay in their spoken interaction.

Furthermore, Firdaus and Normahdiah (2014) who conducted research in Sekinchan, Selangor, indicate that the young people of Javanese descent aged 6 to 12 years and 13 to 18 years were the least users of the Javanese language. This group is also more likely to change the code from Javanese to Malay language. However, Karim and Maslida (2015) reveal that the use of the Javanese language for young people of 19 to 25 years old, especially young people who have continued their studies at Institutions of Higher Education and career individuals seemed to be higher. In addition to the age factor, the identity factor also becomes one of the reasons why Javanese choose to use Malay compared to Javanese (Mohamad Subakir, 1998). Subakir further explains that the Javanese use Malay language because they want to be known as Malay. It is perceived that the use of the Javanese language is often associated with village people, farmers, and the non-educated, while the Malay language is associated with modernisation. Notably, most Javanese individuals, regardless of gender, under the age of 50 and below have developed a negative attitude towards the Javanese language.



Javanese Language and Younger Generations

Norhuda et al. (2022) affirm that Sarawak is more ethnically heterogeneous, and the choice of language is more complex in which it affects the language patterns. As a result, it is common for Sarawakians to have the ability to speak two or more languages and sometimes, it is necessary to mix or switch between languages and dialects to accommodate the speakers from other ethnic groups. Younger generations from the Javanese community are seen to mix and switch Javanese language with other languages like Bahasa Melayu which is commonly spoken in Malaysia.

Reviewing Mastika's study in 2022, it is found that most of the younger generations are less likely to use the Javanese language in their daily life due to the lack of exposure at school and home, and they are too shy to speak the Javanese language. In the same study, there are also groups of people who only understand a few Javanese words ('bahasa kasar') but they are not able to understand the whole context. Moreover, most of the younger generation do not fully comprehend 'bahasa kasar' in Javanese language today. This causes the young generation in Malaysia to be less familiar with the Javanese language. Consequently, it is vital to necessitate more exposure on the importance of preserving the Javanese mother tongue among the younger Javanese so that the Javanese language can be used and spoken frequently and continuously. If the language is not practiced in their daily life, the Javanese community in Malaysia might face language extinction. To overcome this problem, relevant mechanisms need to be implemented among the Javanese community and some of the recommendations are to encourage the use of Javanese language at home and form a Javanese language club in social media (Karim and Maslida, 2015).

Karim and Maslida (2015) further indicate that Javanese language in social media is used more frequently in conversation and sometimes, alternated with the use of languages other than Javanese language, in which the respondents are observed to be practicing both languages. It is reported that the Javanese language is commonly to be used interchangeably with the Malay language. The use of social media and apps as communication medium such as What Apps, are seen to help increase and preserve the Javanese language especially among the younger generation. Therefore, this strategy of using social media is seen as vital to encourage the use of Javanese language among Javanese youths.

3. Research Methodology

The chosen research methodology for this study is a mixed-method approach, which combines both qualitative interview and quantitative surveys to collect the data. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select the participants. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives. The targeted Javanese communities come from various major settlement locations within the State of Sarawak, Malaysia. By using this sampling, the study can focus on the specific population groups that are relevant to the study and will likely provide valuable insights. The qualitative interviews were conducted with the members of the Javanese community groups in Sarawak using open-ended questions. The respondents of the study are the leaders of the Javanese community for each major population location of the Javanese community around the Kuching Division in Sarawak as well as the members of the Sarawak Javanese Community Association. A total of 12 participants were involved in the interview process. Some previous scholarly articles have also suggested that the recommended minimum number of data to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study is 12 participants (Clarke and Braun, 2013, Fugard and Potts, 2014, and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006).

For quantitative survey, it involves structured questionnaires to gather structured data on the respondents' demographics, educational exposure, socio-economic factors, and proficiency levels in Javanese language that can be statistically analysed. A total of 88 responses were received through the survey form that was distributed online. The combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys allows this paper to have a more comprehensive understanding on the Javanese community groups, mainly Javanese language in Sarawak.



4. Findings

From the analysis, Table 1.0 indicates the Respondents' Backgrounds with a total of 44.6% were male respondents while 55.4% were female respondents. Most of them come from Kampung Sri Arjuna Java, Kampung Haji Baki, Kampung Jalan Burong Lilin, Kampung Kolong, Kampung Semenggok and Kampung Sungai Bandong.

Gender	
Male	44.6%
Female	55.4%
Age	
Below 19 years	13.1%
20 – 29 years	31%
30 – 39 years	23.8%
40 – 49 years	27.4%
50 years and above	4.7%

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Profile

Table 2 analysis shows the language usage attitude and it was found that most of the Javanese youths speak Javanese when they communicate with their family and when their parents speak Javanese at home in their daily conversation.

Language Usage Attitude	Frequency				
	1	2	3	4	5
I frequently use a Javanese accent in daily conversation	7	12	13	15	36
I frequently communicate in Javanese with my family	9	10	12	12	40
I frequently communicate in Javanese with my friend	11	17	14	17	24
My parents use Javanese dialect at home	13	16	16	11	43

(1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Always 5=Frequent)

Table 2: Language Usage Attitude

Table 3 shows that quite a number of the younger generations are able to speak Javanese in their daily conversations with their family members (12 for always and 40 for frequent) and it is perceived that they have gained solid support from their respective family members, especially when their parents speak Javanese at home. Mastery of the Javanese language can be improved through continuous interaction in the language, either at home or with friends, outside of home.

Language Identity	Frequency				
	1	2	3	4	5
Java language is a difficult to learn	15	34	23	6	2
I show a deep interest to learn Java language	0	2	14	32	35
I feel lack of confident when speaking Java language	30	26	16	10	1
I need to improve my Java language	6	5	21	28	23
My family encourages me to speak Java language	3	2	18	23	37
Practicing my mother tongue make me close to self-identity	2	2	15	31	33
Overall, I feel proud of my Javanese identity when I speak Java	1	0	14	24	44

(1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5= Strongly agree)

Table 3: Language Identity

The proficiency level of the Javanese language among the new generation is demonstrated in Table 4, where it reveals that many respondents are proficient (30 for proficient and 13 for expert) in understanding Javanese when communicating and are generally competent in the language (28 respondents). In terms of writing and reading Javanese, most respondents only have an intermediate level. On a positive note, most of the respondents have gained a sense of pride as parts of the Javanese descents, especially when they can speak the language (having full supports from family members) and indicates the youths' self-identity as parts of Javanese community.



Proficiency level	Frequency				
	1	2	3	4	5
How well do you understand Java language when others communicate with you	9	16	15	30	13
How well do you have a good command of Java language?	10	14	28	19	12
How well do you read and write the Java language?	22	29	16	16	0

(1=Beginner · 2=Intermediate · 3=Competent · 4= Proficient · 5=Expert)

Table 4: **Proficiency level**

To add, the data from the interviews conducted have shown that most of the respondents' use of the Javanese language is influenced by their daily interactions, as well as the influence of the use of Malay and English in the school syllabus. Besides, their social interactions with schoolmates, colleagues, social media sites and others could also impact their use of Javanese language. Most of the respondents have suggested that Javanese language learning class should be organised, besides gaining full supports from the community of Javanese. Supports can be gained through collaborations among the Sarawak's Javanese Organisation and villages in organising more Javanese cultural events to promote Javanese culture and language effectively.

5. Discussion

From the finding, it is revealed that the language spoken within the family plays a crucial role in language acquisition. If Javanese is the primary language spoken at home, individuals are more likely to develop proficiency in Javanese. Another factor will be community dynamics on which the language environment in the community also affects language mastery. If Javanese language is widely spoken and used in daily interactions, the youths are more likely to become fluent in the language through regular exposure and practice. Educational exposure can significantly impact language proficiency. If Javanese language courses are offered, individuals have more opportunities to learn and develop their skills in the language. Besides that, socio-economic factors, such as access to resources and opportunities, can affect language mastery. Individuals from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have better access to educational resources and exposure to the Javanese language, giving them an advantage in acquiring proficiency. The influence of dominant languages like Malay and English can also impact Javanese language mastery. If these languages are more widely used and prioritized in various domains, individuals may prioritize learning and using them over Javanese, leading to a potential decline in Javanese proficiency.

A supportive community also can create an environment where the Javanese language is valued and encouraged. Community initiatives, such as language revitalization programs, cultural events, and language immersion activities, can foster pride and appreciation for the Javanese language. This support can motivate individuals to learn and use the language, ensuring its continuity across generations. Educational institutions can also play a vital role in language preservation by offering short language courses, and promoting cultural exchange programs, educational initiatives can enhance language proficiency and create opportunities for language practice and development. Preserving cultural identity, traditions, and values help maintain the significance and relevance of the Javanese language. Therefore, efforts such as documenting Javanese literature, music, and art forms, and promoting cultural events and celebrations will contribute to the overall preservation of the Javanese language as a living and dynamic part of the community's cultural heritage. The use of social media can also be an integral strategy to preserve Javanese language, specifically among the younger generation as social media is the trend today.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to note that the factors discussed in this paper can influence the Javanese language usage among the younger Javanese communities in Sarawak. Besides, individual's motivation, dedication, and personal effort also can play significant roles in language acquisition, proficiency, and Javanese language preservation. By emphasizing community support, educational initiatives, and cultural preservation via various mediums and platforms, stakeholders can work together to ensure the continuity, relevancy, and vitality of the Javanese language that could benefit the Sarawak's Javanese communities.

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