

Urbanization and Dialect Decline in Indonesia: A Study of Intergenerational Language Shift and Policy Gaps

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ABSTRACT: Urbanization has reshaped Indonesia's linguistic landscape, especially in major cities where Bahasa Indonesia (BI) increasingly replaces local dialects. This study examines how urbanization, generational change, and policy frameworks affect dialect use in urban Indonesia. Drawing on data from the 2020 Long Form Census, generational language use statistics, and comparative policy analysis, this research contrasts low usage urban provinces like Jakarta and Kepulauan Riau with dialect stronghold regions such as Bali and Yogyakarta. The methodology combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights, including census based trends in dialect use across generations and detailed case studies of local policy environments. Key findings reveal that urban centers with limited institutional support experience significant dialect erosion, especially among younger cohorts. In Jakarta, only 0.5% of residents use local dialects with neighbors, while Bali and Yogyakarta report over 85%. Generational data further demonstrate a steep decline in dialect usage, with Post Gen Z exhibiting the lowest rates. These results underscore that dialect decline is not a deterministic consequence of national language policy but is strongly mediated by regional planning, cultural engagement, and community agency. Regions with proactive policies like Bali's Pergub 80/2018 have successfully maintained dialect vitality through curriculum inclusion and public media usage. In conclusion, urban dialect preservation requires an integrative policy framework that balances national cohesion with local linguistic rights. Digital media, youth engagement, and community led initiatives are essential to reversing intergenerational language loss. This study contributes to sociolinguistic literature by highlighting the critical role of local governance and intergenerational dynamics in shaping linguistic resilience.

Keywords: Urbanization, Dialect Shift, Intergenerational Transmission, Language Policy, Sociolinguistics, Indonesia, Language Revitalization.



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INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has transformed the sociolinguistic landscape of Southeast Asia, notably in Indonesia. The shift from rural to urban living has increased interethnic interaction and

encouraged the widespread adoption of Bahasa Indonesia (BI). In urban centers such as Jakarta and Kepulauan Riau, migration has facilitated encounters between diverse linguistic communities, fostering a new communication ecology characterized by multilingualism, code switching, and hybrid language practices (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019; Suwignyo, 2021). While these trends illustrate the dynamic nature of urban linguistic environments, they also underscore tensions between national language integration and the erosion of local dialect vitality (Fauveaud, 2016).

The institutionalization of BI stems from Indonesia's post-independence efforts to build a cohesive national identity. The early decades following independence saw the formulation of language policies aimed at reducing the colonial imprint of Dutch and Japanese, thereby elevating BI as a lingua franca across ethnolinguistic boundaries (Nuraini et al., 2023). These foundational policies prioritized the use of BI in education, governance, and public discourse, with the strategic aim of fostering unity amidst diversity. Over time, the policy framework has evolved to acknowledge the country's rich multilingual landscape. Recent orientations in language policy advocate for the integration of local dialects in educational contexts, reflecting a broader commitment to multilingualism and cultural preservation (Zein et al., 2020).

This dual emphasis is encapsulated in Law No. 24/2009, which codifies the status of BI while simultaneously mandating the protection and promotion of regional languages. Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution establishes BI as the language of the state, but Law 24/2009 expands this mandate by advocating for the inclusion of local languages in educational curricula and cultural programming (Liddicoat & Kirkpatrick, 2020). The law's bilingual vision seeks to reconcile the unifying role of BI with the preservation of Indonesia's diverse linguistic heritage. However, the degree to which this policy has been effectively implemented varies across regions, with urban centers typically exhibiting weaker enforcement mechanisms and lower institutional support for dialect preservation (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019).

In metropolitan areas, BI's dominance has complex sociolinguistic effects, influencing identity, education, and media use. BI is often perceived as a symbol of modernity, social mobility, and educational attainment, particularly among younger generations (Hapsari et al., 2020; Padawangi, 2022). Consequently, urban youth frequently adopt BI as their primary language, while relegating local dialects to the private or ceremonial domain, if at all. This shift is further reinforced by educational institutions, mass media, and digital platforms that predominantly operate in BI. The result is a linguistic environment where code switching and hybrid forms emerge, but where local dialects risk marginalization (Salim et al., 2019; Zen, 2017). The transition is often intergenerational, with dialects declining in vitality as younger speakers fail to acquire or regularly use them (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019).

Despite these trends, local dialects continue to serve as potent markers of identity, particularly within specific cultural or regional communities. In urban settings, dialect use may function as a means of asserting heritage or distinguishing in group affiliations (Liddicoat & Kirkpatrick, 2020). In rural areas, dialects often anchor a more stable sense of linguistic identity, buffered from the rapid transformations wrought by urbanization and globalization (Sagart, 2022). The ongoing

negotiation between BI and local dialects thus reflects broader tensions in Indonesian society concerning cultural continuity, identity politics, and national cohesion.

At the international level, several frameworks advocate for the preservation of linguistic diversity in multilingual states. Instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity emphasize the importance of safeguarding minority languages as a matter of cultural and human rights (Suwignyo, 2023). These frameworks underscore the need for inclusive language policies that support multilingual education and community based revitalization initiatives. Additionally, global programs such as the Endangered Languages Project and efforts by SIL International have provided tools and platforms for documenting and sustaining endangered languages, including those in Indonesia (Maliphol, 2022). While these frameworks provide normative guidance, their effectiveness depends largely on local implementation and community engagement (Zen, 2017; Salim et al., 2019).

In light of the above, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which urbanization influences intergenerational dialect shift in Indonesia's metropolitan centers. It focuses on contrasting cases Jakarta and Kepulauan Riau, where dialect use is in decline, with regions such as Bali and Yogyakarta, where local dialects continue to thrive. The analysis draws on demographic data, policy documents, and sociolinguistic literature to examine how institutional and community factors mediate the relationship between national policy and local language vitality. The central hypothesis is that dialect loss in urban areas is not an inevitable outcome of national standardization, but rather the result of local policy inaction and shifting sociolinguistic values. The study contributes to ongoing debates on language planning in multilingual societies, emphasizing the need for regionally responsive strategies that balance national unity with cultural and linguistic diversity.

METHOD

This study adopts a mixed method research design, integrating quantitative demographic data with qualitative insights to examine intergenerational dialect shift in Indonesian metropolitan contexts. The methodology is structured around three key components: census data analysis, generational cohort tracking, and qualitative case studies. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of how urbanization interacts with language policy and sociocultural change to shape linguistic practices.

Quantitative Framework and Data Sources

The primary quantitative data source for this study is the 2020 Population Census (Long Form) conducted by Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), which includes language use indicators for individuals aged five and above. The dataset provides province level responses on the use of local dialects in both familial and public interactions particularly, communication with neighbors and within

households. These indicators are crucial for measuring the vitality of dialect use in everyday life, offering a proxy for language shift or maintenance.

The census data are complemented by national generational statistics from GoodStats (2024), which detail language use by demographic cohorts: Pre Boomers, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, and Post Gen Z. These statistics are valuable for tracing intergenerational language transmission patterns and assessing the sustainability of dialect usage over time.

To ensure analytical rigor, stratified sampling techniques have been applied in the BPS surveys, allowing for representativeness across provinces, age groups, and socio economic strata (Templin et al., 2016). Moreover, multilevel modeling is recommended for identifying correlations between dialect use and socio demographic variables such as education, income, and migration patterns (Lee & Way, 2016). These techniques enable a more nuanced understanding of how language use varies not just across space but also within populations.

Generational Cohort Analysis

A generational framework is employed to explore intergenerational language transmission. This involves tracking language use behaviors within age specific cohorts to determine whether younger generations maintain or diverge from their elders' linguistic practices. Such an approach is crucial in assessing whether dialect use is declining or being sustained across familial lines (Eising et al., 2022).

Data from household based language practices are analyzed to explore parent–child language patterns, offering insights into the mechanisms of language maintenance or shift. Additionally, the cohort method permits examination of how broader sociopolitical developments, such as curriculum reform or urban integration policies, influence generational language choices (Casanova, 2022). Longitudinal elements, where available, enhance this analysis by revealing temporal trends in language vitality (Cemalcılar et al., 2018).

Qualitative Inquiry: Urban Case Study of Jakarta

To contextualize the quantitative data, this study incorporates qualitative research focused on Jakarta and its native Betawi dialect. A range of qualitative methods ethnographic observation, in depth interviews, and focus group discussions are used to capture how urban residents perceive and engage with local dialects in the context of rapid urbanization (Rothenberg et al., 2020).

Ethnographic fieldwork enables immersion in communities where dialect use is either declining or hybridizing, offering rich accounts of day to day language practices. In depth interviews with multiple generations within Betawi speaking households help reveal intergenerational differences in attitudes toward dialect preservation. Life history interviews allow for deeper exploration of linguistic identity formation over time (Tisizi, 2022). These narrative based approaches highlight the emotional and symbolic dimensions of dialect use, which are often overlooked in purely statistical analyses (Forsyth, 2024).

Narrative analysis interprets interview data to identify key themes such as cultural pride, language prestige, marginalization, and identity negotiation. This method captures the lived experiences of speakers navigating between local dialects and BI, offering insights into the sociocultural undercurrents shaping language choices.

Data Synthesis and Triangulation

The research combines findings from the quantitative and qualitative components using methodological triangulation. Quantitative indicators of dialect use are cross referenced with qualitative perceptions of language prestige and identity, ensuring that interpretations are both empirically grounded and socially contextualized. This integrative approach allows for comprehensive analysis of dialect vitality, especially within the complex socio political and cultural framework of Indonesian metropolitan areas.

In sum, the methodology is designed to capture both the measurable decline of dialect use and the deeper sociocultural reasons behind it. By combining statistical modeling, generational cohort analysis, and immersive qualitative techniques, the study provides a robust basis for understanding how urbanization and policy environments interact to shape intergenerational language dynamics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study based on census data, generational usage trends, and regional policy comparisons. It is organized into three sections: (1) spatial and sociological trends in dialect use in urban centers, (2) generational patterns of dialect transmission, and (3) the role of local policies in shaping dialect vitality.

Dialect Use in Urban Centers

Census data from the 2020 Long Form (SP2020) show significant regional differences in dialect use between urbanized and culturally resilient provinces. In DKI Jakarta, only 0.5% of residents reported using a local dialect (primarily Betawi) with neighbors, while Kepulauan Riau reported 23.9%, Bali 86.6%, and DIY Yogyakarta 88.3%. These figures indicate the severe erosion of local dialects in urbanized regions.

The spatial distribution of dialect vitality reflects broader geographic, sociopolitical, and cultural dynamics. In urban Jakarta, dialect use is largely confined to ethnically homogenous neighborhoods with deep historical roots (Byrd & Brown, 2021). However, widespread internal migration dilutes these localized practices, as migrants from other provinces adopt Bahasa Indonesia as a *lingua franca* (Cornips, 2020).

In Kepulauan Riau, the proximity to Malaysia and strong Malay cultural ties have resulted in hybrid dialect forms where local Malay dialects intermix with Bahasa Indonesia, demonstrating a unique bilingual dynamic that reflects both regional and national identities (Thakkar et al., 2022).

Socioeconomic status further influences public dialect usage. Higher status urban communities tend to prefer Bahasa Indonesia due to its perceived prestige and association with education and career advancement (Nguyen et al., 2016). Public services, schools, and local governance predominantly use BI, which marginalizes dialects (BALOYI & Jongh, 2019).

Nevertheless, cultural events and festivals can sustain dialect use by reinforcing social identity and collective memory. In areas where local cultural practices are preserved, dialect usage remains more robust (Byrd & Brown, 2021).

International comparisons show similar urban dialect erosion in global cities like Paris and London, where standard language dominance, migration, and digital media contribute to the decline of minority languages (Cornips, 2020). Media plays a pivotal role; community based radio and television can either promote or suppress dialects, depending on content and audience (Byrd & Brown, 2021; Thakkar et al., 2022).

Intergenerational Decline

National level data demonstrate a clear intergenerational decline in home based dialect use:

Generation	% Using Dialect at Home
Pre Boomer	85.2%
Baby Boomer	80.3%
Gen X	75.2%
Millennials	72.3%
Gen Z	69.9%
Post Gen Z	61.7%

The decline reflects not only demographic transition but also shifting societal norms. Younger urban cohorts increasingly adopt BI as their primary language due to mobility, exposure to mass media, and peer group influence (Boutzoukas et al., 2021).

Language behavior among Generation Z and Post Gen Z is heavily shaped by peer socialization. Local dialects are often deemed obsolete or lacking in social utility, especially in peer driven contexts like school and social media (Coma et al., 2022). Online communication platforms further intensify this shift by privileging standardized forms for wider intelligibility.

Family language policies play a decisive role. Households that prioritize local dialect usage foster stronger linguistic continuity and cultural affiliation (Wang & Han, 2023). However, many urban families favor BI or English due to their perceived utility in education and employment, inadvertently contributing to dialect erosion (Coma et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, community driven revitalization initiatives provide hopeful counterexamples. In both urban and rural contexts, programs such as cultural festivals, school based dialect instruction,

and local storytelling events have proven effective in re establishing generational language transmission (Gorgels et al., 2024).

Policy Comparison

The effectiveness of dialect preservation often depends on the presence of targeted local policies. Robust policies typically provide legal recognition for dialects, mandate curriculum inclusion, fund language programs, and support cultural events (Coma et al., 2022; Wang & Han, 2023).

In Indonesia, provincial responses vary. Bali has implemented Pergub 80/2018, which mandates the use of Balinese in education, media, and official functions. Since its enactment, the regulation has correlated with increased dialect visibility and revitalization efforts, including school curricula and public signage in Balinese (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019).

In contrast, Jakarta lacks any comparable legal framework for the Betawi dialect. The absence of curricular integration, public media support, and community funding has led to a sharp decline in Betawi usage, particularly among youth.

Curriculum mandates have a particularly strong impact. Where dialects are included in primary education as seen in parts of Bali students develop greater linguistic confidence and cultural pride (Wang & Han, 2023). The integration of local dialects into school materials fosters early familiarity and affirms linguistic diversity as an educational asset.

Successful programs globally and domestically often employ bilingual models, acknowledging both national and local identities (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). These approaches are critical for reconciling Indonesia's national cohesion goals with its rich linguistic mosaic.

The findings of this study affirm that dialect attrition in urban Indonesia is not merely a result of national language policy but arises from a broader socio cultural and policy environment in which language prestige, generational change, and institutional absence interact. DKI Jakarta, with the lowest proportion of dialect use among the provinces studied, epitomizes this shift. Meanwhile, Bali and DIY illustrate how policy presence and community initiatives can mitigate these trends.

Sociolinguistic theory offers insight into the dynamics at play. Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital suggests that speakers align with languages that confer social advantage (Li et al., 2024). In urban Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia enjoys high symbolic capital, associated with education, media, and socio economic advancement. Consequently, local dialects are often devalued, leading to shifts in language use as individuals adapt to the dominant linguistic marketplace (Ariely, 2024).

Social network theory (Milroy) further supports the observed trends: language practices are embedded in social relations, and urban residents often realign their speech patterns to reflect their peer groups or desired affiliations (Putjata, 2021). In Jakarta and Kepri, youth prioritize Bahasa Indonesia or English in social media and education, contributing to the erosion of local dialects. Indexicality theory deepens this analysis by showing how certain dialects come to signify outdatedness or lack of prestige, further diminishing their everyday use (Fitriawati & Datang, 2023).

This interaction of prestige and policy or the absence thereof renders urban dialects vulnerable. Yet, it also identifies potential sites for revitalization. Integrating urban language planning with cultural preservation requires holistic strategies. This includes embedding local dialects into public life through signage, media, and school curricula, while also promoting community based cultural events (Boström, 2021; Meighan, 2023). Such measures must involve local stakeholders to ensure cultural relevance.

Digital platforms are now key tools for revitalization. Through social media and online storytelling, young people can reconnect with local dialects in formats that suit their interests and identity (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Creative content like memes and TikTok videos can reposition dialects as relevant and ‘cool,’ countering perceptions of obsolescence. Online forums also facilitate intergenerational dialogue, connecting elders and youth in documenting and sharing dialect knowledge (Spotti et al., 2019).

However, relying solely on top down policy interventions is insufficient. Government regulations must be paired with bottom up engagement. The case of Bali’s Pergub 80/2018 demonstrates that effective policy includes legal recognition, curricular integration, and media mandates but its success is contingent on local participation. In contrast, Jakarta’s policy vacuum illustrates the risks of disconnection between government initiatives and community needs (Saravanapavan & Yamaji, 2018).

Top down approaches often overlook local complexities and may inadvertently prioritize monolingualism (Sorescu-Marinković & Salamurović, 2022). Communities may resist imposed solutions that fail to respect their linguistic hierarchies or ignore grassroots realities (Azyyati, 2023). Thus, a dual track approach blending national policy support with community agency is essential for long term sustainability (Das et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the sociolinguistic landscape in urban Indonesia is shaped by a complex interplay of prestige, policy, generational transmission, and cultural relevance. Dialect shift is not inevitable. Rather, it is responsive to targeted interventions that elevate local languages’ visibility, utility, and symbolic value. Digital platforms, youth culture, and inclusive planning are promising avenues through which urban dialects can be revitalized.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the decline of local dialects in Indonesia’s urban areas results not only from national language policy but also from the absence of strong local interventions. Using census data and intergenerational analysis, it is evident that urban centers such as Jakarta and Kepulauan Riau experience sharp reductions in dialect use, particularly among younger generations, while regions like Bali and Yogyakarta maintain linguistic vitality through active policy measures. The findings highlight that responsive local governance, family language practices, and digital engagement are pivotal in sustaining dialect transmission and identity continuity.

To ensure linguistic resilience amid rapid urbanization, policy efforts must move beyond symbolic acknowledgment toward practical integration of dialects in education, media, and community

activities. Strengthening collaboration between government and local stakeholders supported by youth-oriented digital initiatives can transform cities from spaces of language loss into centers of cultural renewal. Through these strategies, Indonesia can uphold both national cohesion and its rich linguistic diversity.

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