

Language, Power and Identity: Deciphering Language Hegemony through Pierre Bourdieu's Symbolic Power

Bahasa, Kekuasaan, dan Identitas: Sebuah Analisis atas Hegemoni Bahasa melalui Konsep Kekuasaan Simbolik Bourdieu

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Language; Power; Identity; Hegemony.

This study examining language as a complex field of power, rather than merely a neutral means of communication. Every form of language use – whether words, dialects, or accents – contains political, historical, and social connotations that reflect and reinforce power hierarchies. In the era of globalization, the dominance of hegemonic languages such as English, as well as national languages such as Indonesian, has led to the marginalization of minority languages, affecting group identities and shifting cultural landscapes. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the hidden meanings behind language practices and uncovers the power relations involved. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power is used to understand language as a form of social capital that has symbolic value in the structure of society. The analysis compares the context of English hegemony globally and in Indonesia, as well as the position of Indonesian and regional languages in the national sphere. The findings highlight the importance of an additive multilingualism approach in language policy to ensure social justice and equitable distributed linguistic capital. Thus, language is posited not merely as a tool of communication but as a crucial instrument of power in social dynamics.

ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci:

Bahasa; Kekuasaan; Identitas.

Penelitian ini mengkaji bahasa sebagai ranah kekuasaan yang kompleks, bukannya sekadar alat komunikasi netral. Setiap bentuk penggunaan bahasa – baik kata-kata, dialek, maupun aksen – mengandung konotasi politik, historis, dan sosial yang mencerminkan dan memperkuat hierarki kekuasaan. Di era globalisasi sekarang ini, dominasi bahasa-bahasa hegemonik seperti Bahasa Inggris, serta bahasa nasional seperti Indonesia, telah menyebabkan marginalisasi bahasa-bahasa minoritas, yang



berdampak pada identitas kelompok dan mengubah lanskap budaya. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi makna tersembunyi di balik praktik bahasa dan mengungkap hubungan kekuasaan yang terlibat. Teori "symbolic power" Pierre Bourdieu digunakan untuk memahami bahasa sebagai bentuk modal sosial yang memiliki nilai simbolik dalam struktur masyarakat. Analisis membandingkan konteks hegemoni bahasa Inggris secara global dan di Indonesia, serta posisi bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa daerah dalam lingkup nasional. Temuan studi ini menyoroti pentingnya pendekatan multilingualisme aditif dalam kebijakan bahasa untuk memastikan keadilan sosial dan distribusi modal linguistik yang merata. Dengan demikian, bahasa tidak hanya dipandang sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen kekuasaan yang krusial dalam dinamika sosial.

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Language is not just a neutral means of communication, but a complex battleground of power ([Zurriyati et al., 2023](#)). Every word, dialect or accent carries political, historical and social hierarchical baggage. In the context of globalization, the hegemony of certain languages - such as English, Mandarin, or national languages like *Bahasa Indonesia* - has displaced minority languages, changed the cultural landscape, and even reshaped collective identities. This phenomenon does not happen naturally, but through a process of symbolic power ([Bourdieu, 1991](#)), where the dominant language is imposed as a “legitimate” standard that is then internalized by the community until it is considered normal.

How does language hegemony operate as a tool of power, and what impact does it have on cultural identity and spaces of resistance? To answer

this, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, habitus, and linguistic capital becomes a critical lens. [Bourdieu \(1977\)](#) points out that language is not only a means of communication, but also an instrument of domination that reinforces unequal social structures. When a language is considered more “prestigious” or “functional” (for example, English in the academic world, or *Bahasa Indonesia* in the national bureaucracy system), it becomes a tool to affirm the power of the dominant group, while marginalizing the subordinate group.

Historical Context: From Colonialism to Globalization

Language hegemony has deep historical roots, especially in the project of colonialism. In Indonesia, the Dutch implemented a Dutch-based language of instruction policy for the elite, while local languages were deliberately marginalized ([Krämer et al., 2022](#)). After independence, *Bahasa Indonesia*, which was originally a lingua franca, was used as a tool to unify the nation, but it also became a tool of centralization of power that often ignored the diversity of local languages ([Sneddon, 2003](#)). A similar pattern is seen in Africa, where French or English replace local languages as symbols of “modernity”, while mother tongues are considered “primitive” ([Mufwene, S., & Vigouroux, 2008](#); [Adejunmobi, 2004](#)).

In the era of globalization, language hegemony is no longer just political, but also economic ([McElhinny, 2015](#)). English, for example, has become linguistic capital that determines individuals' access to employment, education, and technology ([Ives, 2004](#)). Digital platforms such as Google, X (and other social media platforms), and international scientific journals are also

dominated by English content, creating symbolic violence against languages that are unable to adapt.

Impact on Cultural Identity: Erosion, Shift, and Crisis

Thus, language hegemony has direct consequences on cultural identity. When a dominant language replaces a mother tongue, it is not just the vocabulary that is lost, but the entire system of knowledge, values, and ways of viewing the world attached to it ([Zeng & Yang, 2024](#)). For example: Refined Javanese (*Krama*): The shift in the use of *Krama* among young Javanese reflects the weakening of *unggah-ungguh* (hierarchical politeness) values in Javanese culture ([Errington, 2022](#)). Another example is an Australian Indigenous Language or the death of Aboriginal languages led to the loss of myths, traditional wisdom, and ecological heritage ([Baulch, 2024](#); [Rahman, F., & Muntasir, 2022](#)).

[Bourdieu \(1991\)](#) explains that this process is a form of habitus imperialism—where subordinate groups unconsciously adopt the values of dominant groups. For example, parents in minority communities may prohibit their children from using local languages because they are perceived as “hindering progress”, even though it is the result of internalizing the stigma against their own language.

Resistance: Dismantling Hegemony through Cultural Practices

However, hegemony is never total. In various parts of the world, resistance movements have emerged that utilize language as a tool of resistance.

1. Māori Language Revitalization: New Zealand developed Kōhanga reo, meaning "language nest" in Māori (mother tongue schools), to preserve the Māori language as a form of resistance to British domination ([Fishman, 1991](#)).
2. Literature of Resistance: Writers such as Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o switched from English to Gĩkũyũ to resist the colonial legacy. In Indonesia, regional literature (such as Balinese oral stories) is used to defend local values ([Ndīgĩrĩgĩ, 2018](#); [Ong'ang'a, 2023](#)).
3. Social Media: The hashtag *#BahasaDaerahku* on X or TikTok content in local languages is a strategy for young people to assert identity.

Bourdieu calls these spaces arenas of contestation - where marginalized groups attempt to reclaim symbolic power that has been controlled by dominant groups.

Future Implications: Multilingualism or Homogenization?

The critical question for the future is: Will the world move towards language homogenization, or is there room for equal multilingualism? Policies such as UNESCO's Endangered Languages Programme or Indonesia's Law No. 24/2009 on the Flag, Language and Coat of Arms try to address this challenge. However, without systematic efforts (e.g. bilingual education, protection of local media), minority languages remain vulnerable to extinction ([Rahman, 2020](#); [Septiyana & Margiansyah, 2018](#)).

Language hegemony is a multidimensional phenomenon involving power, identity and resistance. Through Bourdieu's theory, we see how language is not just about words, but also about who has the right to determine

the meaning, values and future of a culture. This paper aims to unpack these power relations, as well as to find openings for emancipatory practices in the midst of globalization.

METHODS

This research utilizes a qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of language hegemony as a social phenomenon full of complexity ([Khan, S. A., & Sajid, 2024](#)). The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the meanings hidden behind language practices, as well as show power relations and cultural dynamics that cannot be measured statistically ([Woolard, 1985](#)). In this context, language is not only understood as a means of communication, but also as an instrument of power that shapes and is influenced by social structures. Through this approach, research is able to explore the historical and social context of certain language domination, as well as open space to understand resistance narratives that emerge as a form of resistance to these dominant structures. Thus, the qualitative approach provides a depth of analysis of how language operates in the realm of everyday life and shapes collective and individual identities.

To strengthen the analytical framework, this research integrates Pierre Bourdieu's Symbolic Power (Bourdieu, 1979:1991:[1989](#)). Bourdieu's theory provides an understanding that language has symbolic value that functions as a form of social capital. In Bourdieu's view, dominant languages such as Indonesian or English are not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of social status that is considered legitimate and of high value in the

social order. The concepts of habitus, linguistic capital, and symbolic violence are used to explain how language domination works subtly but effectively, through the process of internalizing values that are considered normal by society. Minority languages, in this case, often experience marginalization because they do not have the same symbolic value, so they are not recognized as legitimate capital in public spaces and official institutions.

This research compares two contexts of language hegemony, namely English globally, English in Indonesia, *Bahasa Indonesia* in Indonesia and local languages in Indonesia. In Indonesian context, the dominance of *Bahasa Indonesia* over regional languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese is analyzed through education policy (Law No. 24/2009), the shift in the use of mother tongue among the younger generation, and the lack of representation of regional languages in the mainstream media. Meanwhile, at the global level, the hegemony of English over minority languages such as Celtic in Britain or Indigenous languages in America is examined through sociolinguistic literature and international language policies issued by institutions such as UNESCO. This comparison aims to identify similar patterns of hegemony in language preservation and marginalization, as well as uncover resistance strategies that are unique to each region, whether through local policies, community revitalization, or cultural movements. This approach allows for a broader and more contextualized understanding of the dynamics of language domination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis using Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of capital, habitus and symbolic violence, this study reveals the complex dynamics of language hegemony across various layers ([Khan, S. A., & Sajid, 2024](#)). A comparison of the contexts of Indonesian in Indonesia, local languages in Indonesia, English in Indonesia, and English globally shows how power, legitimacy, and symbolic value operate in interconnected yet distinct linguistic markets.

Indonesian Language

Indonesian language (or *Bahasa Indonesia*) plays a dominant and hegemonic role in various aspects of formal life in Indonesia ([Denis et al., 2023](#)). As the national and official language of the country, *Bahasa Indonesia* is widely used in important institutions such as government, public administration, formal education—especially at the secondary level and above—and legislation. In addition, *Bahasa Indonesia* is also the main language in national mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers, as well as in large-scale business communications. Indonesian is not only chosen for practical reasons, but also because its use is a requirement for legitimacy and social access. In other words, proficiency in Indonesian is not merely a means of communication, but a key to participating in important areas of national and state life. Those who do not master *Bahasa Indonesia* adequately risk being systematically excluded or marginalized in social, economic, and political processes at the national level.

Indonesian also functions as widely recognized official capital that can be converted into symbolic and material benefits. Proficiency in using Indonesian “properly and correctly” – which often refers to the standards of Jakarta or the urban elite—is considered an indicator of intelligence, higher education, rationality, and individual progress. Therefore, mastery of Indonesian has become one of the markers of social class and a tool for vertical social mobility. In education, the dominance of *Bahasa Indonesia* reflects a form of symbolic violence, where the state structure, through its curriculum and education policies, imposes *Bahasa Indonesia* as the only legitimate language for science and academic success. As a result, regional languages and other linguistic capitals tend to be considered illegitimate, often belittled or ignored altogether. This not only impacts the marginalization of regional languages but also narrows the space for social participation for those who are not fluent in formal Indonesian.

Since independence, the government's language policies have shaped a national linguistic habitus—a collective awareness and habit in society that Indonesian is the primary language in serious and formal contexts. The younger generation grows up with the assumption that *Bahasa Indonesia* is the only legitimate language for achievement, success, and participation in national life. In this context, *Bahasa Indonesia* creates a sense of belonging for its speakers in formal and national spheres. Indonesian has become a symbol of national integration and unity, and is considered a unifying tool for the nation. However, at the same time, the strengthening of this habitus reinforces a

hierarchical language structure that limits diversity of expression and restricts the cultural values reflected in regional languages.

Although Indonesian holds a hegemonic position in the national system, this dominance is not entirely without challenges. In various regions with strong local language heritage—such as Aceh, Minang, Java, Sunda, Bali—Indonesian often functions as a “mask language” used only in formal contexts, such as schools, administrative matters, or work. Meanwhile, in daily life, within family and community settings, regional languages remain the primary means of communication and expression of local cultural identity. However, the social and economic pressure to master *Bahasa Indonesia* remains high, as proficiency in Indonesian is seen as a crucial requirement for accessing higher education, decent employment, and broader social mobility. The tension between the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* and regional languages reflects the complex dynamics between national and local identities that continue to negotiate in different social spaces.

Local languages in Indonesia are increasingly marginalized in the national linguistic market, which is dominated by *Bahasa Indonesia*. This linguistic market is a symbolic space where the value of languages is determined by institutional and social forces that recognize or reject the legitimacy of certain languages. In the context of modern Indonesia, local languages often lose their symbolic value in areas that are key determinants of social and economic mobility, such as higher education, prestigious formal employment, and the national political and bureaucratic spheres. The exclusive use of local languages in these contexts is often considered unprofessional,

unmodern, or even unpatriotic. Such perceptions create a stigma that regional languages are symbols of backwardness, and therefore unfit for use in spaces associated with progress, sophistication, and national seriousness. This leads speakers of local languages, especially younger generations, to abandon or neglect their mother tongues in order to conform to the dominant language norm, namely *Bahasa Indonesia*.

The Marginalization of Local Languages

Despite its symbolic devaluation at the national level, local languages still hold significant value in various specialized domains and community contexts. Regional languages remain a significant cultural and social asset in the daily lives of local communities. In the realms of custom and religion, for example, mastery of the local language is often an absolute requirement for full participation in traditional ceremonies, regional religious rituals, and traditional performing arts such as *wayang*, dance, or *tembang*. In this context, local languages are not only a means of communication but also a symbol of cultural and spiritual legitimacy. Similarly, in the realm of kinship and local communities, regional languages play an important role in shaping intimacy, a sense of belonging, and collective identity. Communication within families, interactions at traditional markets, and everyday conversations in the surrounding environment take place naturally in local languages, making them a strong social glue.

Additionally, in the realm of local art and pop culture, regional languages serve as a unique and authentic source of expressive richness. Regional music, local comedy performances, oral literature such as *pantun*, folk

tales, or traditional poems, use regional languages as the primary medium to convey meaning, humor, and life values. In this context, local languages have a high cultural appeal, especially for native speakers and even for those from outside the community. However, it is important to note that although local languages have symbolic power in these areas, their value often cannot be directly converted into economic or social capital that is widely recognized outside the local community. In other words, the role of local languages remains highly limited to specific contexts and does not easily serve as a tool for national social mobility.

The limitations of local languages in the national linguistic market create a phenomenon of bicultural linguistic habits in many local communities. This habitus refers to a social habit in which individuals predominantly use local languages in private and community settings, while using *Bahasa Indonesia* (or a mixture of languages) in formal settings such as schools, offices, or public media. In the long term, this dual linguistic pattern poses a challenge to the sustainability of local languages themselves, especially among younger generations. In large cities and urban areas, children who receive formal education are more likely to use *Bahasa Indonesia* or even a mixture with foreign languages such as English, and only a few are able or interested in actively maintaining their regional languages.

This phenomenon leads to the weakening of the mother tongue as a habitus, where the local language is no longer a natural part of their daily lives but is only passively understood or even entirely foreign. This generational gap accelerates the process of language shift, which in the long term could lead to

the extinction of local languages. This is exacerbated by a lack of structural support, such as an inadequate educational curriculum that fails to integrate local languages as part of relevant and enjoyable learning. Yet, the preservation of local languages is not only about linguistic conservation but also concerns the preservation of ways of life, local values, and worldviews inherent in those languages.

Amidst the dominance of Indonesian and the threat of globalization, various resilience strategies have been implemented to preserve the existence of local languages. Some of these include revitalization through local content education, the use of community media, and the development of arts and culture based on regional languages. Although still limited and uneven, these efforts are important as a form of resistance against the process of linguistic marginalization. In some regions, regional language lessons are incorporated into elementary school curricula, and local communities establish media based on local languages, such as community radio stations, YouTube channels, and social media groups, to actively and creatively revive the use of regional languages.

Ironically, global hegemony has opened up new opportunities for certain local languages to acquire new symbolic value. Javanese, Balinese, and several other regional languages, for example, have undergone a form of “cultural commodification,” where they are positioned as symbols of local wisdom, cultural uniqueness, or even traditional exoticism in the tourism industry, cultural products, and regional branding. Regional languages in this context are often simplified or distilled for global market needs but still carry

significant added value in cultural branding. For example, the use of local terms or greetings on product packaging, tourism promotion campaigns, and the representation of local culture on the international stage. Although this form of utilization is sometimes superficial and does not always reflect the reality of the original community, it at least opens up new avenues for discussion regarding the repositioning of local languages amid the dominance of global and national trends.

English as a Highly Prestigious Symbolic Capital

In Indonesia, English has become one of the most prestigious forms of symbolic capital, particularly among urban, educated, and globally oriented communities ([Syafrony, 2024](#)). Proficiency in this language is not merely viewed as a linguistic ability, but is also associated with the image of internationalization, progress, intellectual sophistication, and involvement in the global world. English is understood as the language of cutting-edge science, technology, and global communication, opening access to academic literature, higher education opportunities, and transnational economic networks. Therefore, individuals who are fluent in English are often considered more intelligent, modern, and highly competitive. This language has become a kind of new socio-cultural status symbol, especially in spaces that prioritize global standards and future orientation.

The hegemony of English is most evident in elite, internationally oriented fields, where mastery of the language is almost an absolute prerequisite. First, in high-quality higher education, particularly at the master's and doctoral levels, English serves as the primary medium for academic

literature, scientific publications, and learning processes in various international programs ([Nursanti, E., & Andriyanti, 2021](#)). The best universities in Indonesia and abroad require English proficiency as a basic requirement. Second, in the multinational business sector and technology industry, English is the primary working language, both in internal and external communication. Many large companies and elite startups set English as the standard for professional communication, creating pressure for young professionals to master it to maintain relevance and competitive positioning.

Third, the global creative and media industries, such as music, film, and digital platforms, are also heavily influenced by English-language aesthetics and expression. Indonesian creative professionals seeking to break into the global market often choose to work in English or adopt Anglo-American styles of expression. Finally, high-paying jobs—both in foreign and large national companies—often list English proficiency as a mandatory requirement. In this context, English has become a kind of “golden ticket” to enter the upper economic strata and participate in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

However, access to quality English language education in Indonesia is highly unequal. Access to quality language education, accent training that meets international standards, and the ability to use English fluently in academic and professional contexts still depend heavily on certain economic and cultural capital. Children from affluent families who attend international schools, take expensive courses, or live in environments exposed to global culture have far greater opportunities to achieve high proficiency in this

language. Conversely, those from less affluent backgrounds, living in rural areas, or studying in the regular formal education system often struggle to access the necessary resources.

This situation widens the social linguistic divide, as only a select elite can use English as a means of social mobility. As a result, English reinforces a new social stratification based on language access, where the ability to speak or write English fluently becomes an exclusive form of symbolic capital. In the long term, this can create a new social class that not only excels in economic terms but also holds symbolic control in the realms of education, technology, and business, reinforcing their dominance over strategic resources and opportunities.

Amid the growing dominance of English, tensions have emerged between this language and Indonesian and local languages. In many elite contexts, English is even considered more prestigious than Indonesian, creating additional pressure, especially for the upper-middle class, to pursue proficiency in the language to avoid being left behind. This phenomenon is also gradually shifting attention and resources away from strengthening Indonesian and preserving local languages. Local languages, in this case, are increasingly marginalized because they are not seen as capable of providing the economic and symbolic value that English offers. The excessive focus of language education and training on English has led to the loss of relevance of regional languages, especially among the urban youth.

In this context, we also see the emergence of local varieties such as “Indonesia English” —a form of linguistic adaptation in which English is used

with a mixture of vocabulary, structure, and logic influenced by Bahasa Indonesia and local culture ([Lauder, 2020](#)). Although it has significant practical functions, especially in international communication, this variety is still often considered inferior or less valuable than “international standards” such as British or American English. This local variety reflects cultural adaptation efforts to global domination, but remains trapped in a linguistic value hierarchy that places dominant language forms as the benchmark of superiority ([Zein et al., 2020](#)).

The dominance of English in Indonesia positions it as a highly influential linguistic force, yet simultaneously imposes a significant responsibility in managing national language policies. On one hand, mastery of English does open up enormous opportunities in the context of globalization: access to international higher education, the digital economy, and transnational professional networks. However, on the other hand, if not managed inclusively and fairly, this language will continue to widen the social divide and accelerate the marginalization of national and local languages. A fair and progressive language education policy is needed, one that can integrate the strengthening of English without sacrificing the role and strategic value of Indonesian as the national language and regional languages as the cultural heritage of the nation. Moving forward, the challenge is not only to make English a global communication tool but also to ensure that every citizen has equal access to its benefits without losing their own linguistic and cultural identity.

English on a Global Scale: Neo-Imperial Hegemony and Linguistic Inequality

In the global landscape, English has transformed into a key global asset in various strategic sectors. It has become the de facto lingua franca in international diplomacy, science, technology, aviation, trade, popular entertainment, and digital communication. Mastery of English is now a crucial requirement for both individuals and nations to participate in the mainstream of globalization. In many international forums, official documents, and digital platforms, English appears as the primary language, as if it were the only legitimate and effective medium of global communication. This makes it not merely a tool for communication but also a determinant of access to power, knowledge, and global influence.

However, this dominance is not neutral. The hegemony of English contains global symbolic violence that is neo-imperial in nature. It is promoted as a pragmatic and universal language, but fundamentally reproduces power relations that benefit native-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. In this context, language standards such as “British English” or “American English” are often positioned as the only legitimate, correct, and superior forms, while other varieties (such as World Englishes) are considered non-standard, deviant, or less credible ([Fitria, 2023](#)). Such views obscure the history of colonialism and the economic-political interests behind the global spread of English, while discrediting the linguistic diversity of the world and hindering the legitimacy of other languages.

Among global elites and international professionals, English has become part of their cosmopolitan habitus. It is not merely a tool for communication but also a symbol of global identity and lifestyle associated with higher

education, international mobility, and transnational professional networks ([Loh, 2016](#)). This habit is systematically reproduced by prestigious educational institutions such as Ivy League universities and Oxbridge, multinational corporations, and global media. Fluency in English is a marker of social exclusivity and competitive advantage. Thus, those who master English to a level close to that of native speakers automatically have greater access to global opportunities, strengthening their position in the international social structure.

English has also become a highly profitable global commodity. The English language learning and testing industry – such as ESL courses, TOEFL and IELTS certification, and English-language academic publishing – has grown into a multi-billion-dollar market ([Yuzar & Rahman, 2024](#); [Iqbal, & Zurriyati, 2020](#)). The demand for English proficiency has created a vast industry, from international schools to expensive exam preparation tutoring. However, this situation deepens global linguistic inequality. Developing countries and individuals without access to quality education or intensive training face significant barriers to competing on the international stage. They are often marginalized from global knowledge forums or the international labor market simply due to limitations in their mastery of “standard” English.

In this context, English is not only a symbol of mobility and progress but also a tool of exclusion and symbolic domination. A language that should serve as a bridge has the potential to become a dividing wall that reinforces gaps between nations and social classes. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the hegemony of English is not natural or inevitable, but rather the result of historical dynamics, power, and global economic-political forces. The challenge

ahead is how to build a more inclusive, fair, and diverse linguistic world order without sacrificing access to global communication and knowledge.

Power Relations and Linguistic Market Dynamics

This finding confirms that the dominance of language, both Bahasa Indonesia at the national level and English globally, is not something natural, but rather a product of historical power relations legitimized through institutions such as education and the media. The dominance of English as the national language was established through the ideological apparatus of the post-independence state, which positioned it as a symbol of unity and progress. Meanwhile, the economic and political power of Western countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom after World War II, also positioned English as the language of global progress. This hegemony operates symbolically, concealing traces of power and making language hierarchies appear natural or even desirable.

In this context, people not only use language but also navigate a complex and hierarchical linguistic market. In Indonesia, the linguistic market is divided into several domains: the national market dominated by BI, the local market relying on regional languages, and the elite-global market that places high value on proficiency in British English. The value of a language depends on the domain in which it is used—for example, Javanese may be valuable in a local cultural context, but it has no bargaining power in the multinational job market. Individuals must carefully manage their linguistic capital according to the

needs of each market, something that can only be done by those who have access to certain education and resources.

This power dynamic becomes increasingly evident in the process of converting linguistic capital into economic, social, or educational capital. Mastery of Bahasa Indonesia and English Bahasa Indonesia opens access to formal education, high-paying formal jobs, and extensive social networks. Conversely, regional languages rarely have high conversion value outside their cultural communities. The inability to master the hegemonic language often becomes the main barrier to social mobility, especially for those without access to education or a supportive family environment. This creates a cycle of structural inequality, where dominant groups reproduce their advantages through language mastery.

On the other hand, linguistic habitus – the tendencies and comfort of an individual in using language – also reflects their social position. Children from upper-middle-class families who are accustomed to English at international schools naturally have a very different linguistic habitus from rural children who use local languages daily and are only exposed to English at school. When entering elite or formal settings, individuals from marginalized backgrounds often experience alienation or must make extra efforts to adapt linguistically, such as using code-switching or imitating the dominant accent.

However, linguistic hegemony is never total. There are various forms of resistance and adaptation, both in the use of local languages in public spaces and the emergence of various “World Englishes” such as Indian English or Singaporean English ([Ningsih, N. S., & Rahman, 2023](#)). These varieties are not

only tools of communication but also statements of identity and rejection of native speaker standards. Similarly, multilingualism has become a common survival strategy in Indonesia, where many people must master regional languages, *Bahasa Indonesia*, and Indonesian English to navigate daily life and social mobility. In this context, language policy faces a serious dilemma: how to promote equitable access to *Bahasa Indonesia* and Indonesian English without sacrificing local linguistic diversity? An approach based on Bourdieu's theory suggests that policies should not focus solely on one hegemonic language but instead promote additive multilingualism that enhances the value of all languages and ensures fair access to valuable linguistic capital. This is not merely a matter of communication but also one of social justice and the distribution of power within society.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that language hegemony – whether Indonesian BI at the national level, English BI at the global level, or the pressure of Indonesian English on *Bahasa Indonesia* and local languages in Indonesia – is a concrete manifestation of power relations that operate through mechanisms of capital, habitus, domain, and symbolic violence. No language is inherently hegemonic; such hegemony is constructed, maintained, and contested through social practices, state policies, and global market forces. Indonesian has succeeded in becoming the official capital that legitimizes the state and national mobility, but at the expense of local language space. English operates as the global capital of the elite, opening international doors while deepening inequality. Local

languages persist as the cultural capital of communities and identities, but face significant pressure and limited conversion value.

This dynamic creates a complex and hierarchical linguistic landscape in Indonesia, reflected in individual language habits and strategies. Understanding these mechanisms through Bourdieu's lens is crucial for formulating more equitable, inclusive, and diversity-respecting language policies, while acknowledging the realities of national and global linguistic market forces. The future of Indonesia's linguistic diversity and equitable access depends on the ability to navigate these tensions critically and creatively.

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