



The Role of Indonesian Language in Building National Civilization and Cultural Identity

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of the Indonesian language in shaping social behavior and constructing national civilization within both national and international contexts. The research focuses on understanding language as a symbolic system that constructs values, norms, and collective meanings in social life. Key concepts include language as cultural capital, social behavior as a product of symbolic interaction, and civilization as an institutionalized value system. The study employs a qualitative approach through content analysis of contemporary literature in sociology, anthropology, and sociolinguistics. The scope of analysis covers the functions of the Indonesian language in social, cultural, educational, and cultural diplomacy domains. The main findings reveal that the Indonesian language serves as an integrative mechanism that strengthens social cohesion, shapes collective ethics, and acts as an instrument of soft power in international relations. The primary challenges identified include the marginal position of Indonesian in global discourse and the erosion of symbolic meaning due to digital culture. The study recommends strengthening language policies based on cultural values and promoting Indonesian as a medium for knowledge production and cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: civilization; cultural diplomacy; globalization, Indonesian language; symbol.

Introduction

Cultural movements are essentially expressions of human movement as social beings living within a complex network of relationships. Humans never exist in a cultural vacuum, but are always bound by a structure of values, norms, and symbols that guide how we think, act, and interpret reality (Soekanto, 2019). From a contemporary sociological perspective, culture is understood not simply as a legacy of tradition, but as a dynamic system that continues to transform along with global social, technological, and political changes (Appadurai, 2020). The relationships between individuals that shape society serve as the primary medium through which cultural processes take place, as it is through social interaction that values, meanings, and identities are continually negotiated. Thus, culture functions not only as a social "product" but also as a "process" that both shapes and is shaped by human social practices.

In this context, cultural systems play a fundamental role as a mechanism for organizing human actions and behavior. Cultural systems operate through the process of institutionalization, namely the institutionalization of values, norms, and symbols into relatively stable social structures such as the family, education, religion, and the state. This process allows cultural values to exist not merely as ideas but as practical guidelines that guide daily actions (Berger & Luckmann, 2021). At the same time, institutionalization also contains a power dimension, as not all values are institutionalized neutrally; some values gain stronger legitimacy because they are

supported by certain social authorities. This is where culture functions as a moral system that regulates the boundaries of behavior considered normal, correct, and deviant in society (Bourdieu, n.d.).

Social changes triggered by advances in science, digital technology, and globalization have further strengthened the role of culture as a mechanism of social control. Contemporary society faces a situation where traditional norms clash with new, more fluid, pluralistic, and transnational values. In this context, culture not only serves to maintain order but also serves as an arena for contestation of meaning between old and new values (Castells, 2009). Culture's social control function is manifested through restitutive and repressive sanctions, both formal (state law) and informal (social sanctions, stigma, or ostracism). However, unlike traditional societies, which tend to be homogeneous, modern societies exhibit a plurality of values, which means that cultural control is no longer singular but rather fragmented and contextual (Giddens, 2020).

Within this framework, the value system occupies a central position as the core of culture. Value systems represent the highest normative guidelines that direct how humans should think, feel, and act (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Values are not born naturally, but are constructed through a long historical process and passed down through symbolic mechanisms, particularly language (Duranti, 2020). Language is not merely a means of communication but also the primary medium for internalizing values, as it is through language that humans learn to categorize reality, distinguish between good and bad, and build a collective moral framework. From a modern linguistic anthropological perspective, language is viewed as an "architecture of meaning" that enables cultural values to be translated into social practices (Kroskrity, 2021).

Indonesian, as the national language and symbolic language of unity, plays a strategic role in shaping the value system of Indonesian society. This language functions not only as a means of inter-ethnic communication but also as a vehicle for constructing national identity, social morality, and collective consciousness (Alwasilah, 2020). In a religio-magical context, Indonesian represents how society expresses metaphysical beliefs, relationships with supernatural powers, and sacred symbols that shape the orientation of daily life. Symbolic practices such as prayers, mantras, religious expressions, and mythological narratives demonstrate that language is the primary medium for the articulation of spiritual meaning (Herusatoto, 2003). Without language, this religio-magical dimension would lose its meaningful structure, as symbols cannot be understood outside the sign system that supports them.

However, the dynamics of today's digital society present serious challenges to language's function as a carrier of cultural values. Social media, digital algorithms, and instant culture tend to encourage the use of pragmatic, concise, and often shallow language (Coudry & Mejias, 2019). Language is no longer a medium for reflecting values, but rather a tool for momentary emotional expression or performative identity (Dijck, 2020). This situation raises concerns about the erosion of symbolic meaning in language, particularly related to religious, moral, and cultural values that have long been the foundation of Indonesian culture (Rahman et al., 2022). Recent research shows that the younger generation is increasingly using symbolic expressions rich in cultural meaning, preferring instead a value-neutral global language (O. Prasetyo & Rahman, 2023).

This is where the main research gap in this study lies. Most studies on Indonesian culture still position language as an instrument of communication or national identity, but relatively few have examined language in depth as a mechanism for internalizing religious-magical value systems in the context of contemporary society. Studies of linguistic anthropology in Indonesia tend to focus on the documentation of regional languages, linguistic revitalization, or the analysis of political discourse, while the symbolic dimension of language as a binder of cultural values has not been widely explored theoretically and empirically (Samad et al., 2023). Furthermore, existing research is often descriptive in nature, failing to develop an analytical framework that connects language, value systems, and social change within a coherent conceptual model.

Furthermore, some recent studies still rigidly separate language, culture, and religion, as if they were separate entities. However, in Indonesian social reality, all three are intertwined and form structures of meaning that cannot be understood separately (Hefner, 2020). Religious language, for example, encompasses not only theological aspects but also social values such as solidarity, obedience, and collective morality. In other words, language becomes a space where religious values are translated into everyday cultural practices. The lack of interdisciplinary studies

integrating sociological, linguistic anthropological, and cultural studies perspectives represents a significant theoretical gap in the literature.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to critically analyze the role of the Indonesian language in shaping, reproducing, and transforming the religious-magical value system in contemporary Indonesian culture. This research not only seeks to demonstrate that language reflects cultural values but also emphasizes that language actively constructs social reality through symbols, metaphors, and meaning structures internalized by society (Duranti, 2020). Using a functional linguistic anthropology approach, this study seeks to uncover how language operates as a medium of social control, moral legitimacy, and the formation of collective consciousness (Kroskrity, 2021).

Specifically, the objectives of this research encompass three main aspects. First, to identify symbolic forms in the Indonesian language that represent religious-magical values in social life. Second, to analyze how these linguistic symbols are institutionalized through education, media, and religious practices, thus becoming guidelines for collective behavior. Third, to evaluate the impact of social change and digitalization on the sustainability of language's function as a carrier of cultural values. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Indonesian linguistic anthropology, as well as practical contributions to efforts to preserve cultural values amidst globalization (A. Nugroho & others, 2022).

Ultimately, this research positions Indonesian not merely as a national means of communication, but as the epistemological foundation of culture that mediates human relations with the social, natural, and transcendent worlds. Within this framework, language not only represents reality but also shapes it. Therefore, understanding language means understanding the deepest structures of culture, for it contains the values, morals, and visions of a society's life. With a critical and interdisciplinary approach, this research seeks to bridge the gap in the study of language, values, and social change, thereby enriching the discourse on Indonesian culture in an ever-changing global context.

Method

This research employs content analysis methods on various literature discussing the position of the Indonesian language as a builder of national civilization and social dignity. Sociological and anthropological approaches are applied to uncover the essence of issues related to society and patterns of social, cultural, and economic life. Thus, conclusions are drawn that are more focused on understanding the position of Indonesian as the most fundamental unifying language in building the sustainability of Indonesian civilization and national identity.

From an anthropological perspective, Indonesian can be studied as a cultural phenomenon because it contains a linguistic anthropological dimension that connects language to social structures and societal value systems. Supatra emphasized that language, especially Indonesian, not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a cultural medium that reflects the way of thinking, acting, and interpreting the social reality of a society (Supatra, 2017). In line with this view, Brata stated that Indonesian is a strategic instrument in uniting the nation while strengthening national sovereignty, because this language functions as a national language and even has the potential to become a recognized language in an international context (Brata, 2010).

Furthermore, a linguistic anthropology approach is used to analyze the position of the Indonesian language as a cultural construct. This approach emphasizes the relationship between language and culture, known as anthropolinguistics, studying the variation and use of language in relation to the development of time, differences in communication spaces, kinship systems, the influence of ethnic customs in language, customs, and other cultural patterns of a community group. Thus, language is not only understood as a sign system, but also as a representation of values, norms, and collective identities that exist in society (Darwin et al., 2023). Through this approach, the research seeks to position the Indonesian language as a socio-cultural entity that actively shapes collective consciousness, structures of meaning, and the legitimacy of values in the lives of Indonesian society.

Results and Discussion

Impactful Indonesian

Indonesian exists not only as a sign system that enables people to understand each other, but also as a vital force that fosters the collective intelligence of a cultured society. Through language, humans learn to structure reality, weave experiences into meaning, and transform a previously fragmented life into an orderly and valuable shared consciousness. Indonesian, as the national language, operates not merely in the realm of practical communication but in a deeper symbolic realm, shaping how society interprets the world, manages differences, and formulates shared ideals (Anderson, 2020). From a contemporary sociolinguistic perspective, the national language is understood as a cultural infrastructure that enables the development of a collective imagination of nationhood, solidarity, and social identity (Alwasilah, 2020). Thus, Indonesian is not merely a means of communication, but rather a field where a nation's social, moral, and cultural intelligence is continuously produced.

The most tangible manifestation of the Indonesian language's impact can be seen in its ability to organize the basic elements of culture, particularly in livelihood systems. In everyday life, humans work not only for biological survival but also to affirm their existence as meaningful social beings. The economic system within culture does not stand solely as a mechanism of production and consumption, but rather as a symbolic space where work values, life ethos, and social relations are embedded. Indonesian allows all economic activities, from traditional agriculture to the digital economy, to be formulated within a framework of shared meaning (A. Nugroho & others, 2022). Through language, concepts such as hard work, honesty, mutual cooperation, and prosperity become not only practices but also values passed down across generations (D. Prasetyo et al., 2023). Language provides a moral structure to the economy, so that livelihood activities are not solely material but also contain ethical and cultural dimensions.

In kinship systems, language plays a much more subtle yet crucial role. Kinship is not simply a biological or genealogical relationship, but rather a network of meanings that bind individuals in a sense of belonging. Indonesian allows diverse social relations, whether based on ethnicity, religion, or region, to be formulated in relatively uniform terms, so that differences do not always lead to alienation. Terms such as family, relatives, neighbors, and community refer not only to social structures but also to a sense of togetherness that lives in the collective consciousness. In recent anthropological studies, language is seen as an affective medium that shapes social emotions, because through language, humans learn to feel empathy, compassion, responsibility, and solidarity (Duranti, 2020). In this context, Indonesian serves as a bridge that allows various cultural backgrounds to connect within a broader symbolic kinship structure, namely nationality (Kroskrity, 2021).

Social unity or community is not born solely from shared blood or origins, but from a shared awareness of living together in a shared symbolic space. The Indonesian language shapes this space by providing vocabulary, metaphors, and narratives that enable people to feel part of a unified whole. In everyday life, people living in a region do not automatically form a community if they lack a shared language that binds feelings of pride, love, and attachment to their living space. The Indonesian language fills this void by serving as a medium through which local experiences can be translated into national meaning (Rathmaningrum & Yulianto, 2026). Thus, villages, cities, and regions become not merely geographical spaces, but symbolic spaces where social identities are negotiated.

As a human entity, communities possess a strong sense of collective identity, often accompanied by a tendency to differentiate themselves from other groups. This is where the potential for social conflict often arises, when differences in culture, language, and values are perceived as a threat to group identity (Brass, 2024). However, Indonesian serves as a bridge that mitigates this potential conflict by providing a relatively neutral and inclusive medium of communication. In the context of a multicultural society, the national language enables intergroup dialogue without erasing local identities. Language does not force homogenization, but rather provides a symbolic space for encounter that allows differences to be understood, not contested (Ashraf, 2023). In other words, Indonesian functions as a mechanism for social integration that maintains a balance between plurality and unity.

In small communities such as villages and hamlets, Indonesian also reinforces the values of mutual cooperation, which are at the heart of social life. Mutual assistance in agriculture, household chores, traditional ceremonies, and even disasters occurs not only as a social practice but also as an expression of collective consciousness articulated through language. Language enables the value of solidarity to be translated into a shared narrative, so that mutual assistance is not merely a spontaneous act but a moral obligation that is understood and internalized (Vandeveld, 2024). Recent research shows that language plays a crucial role in building social trust, as it symbolically legitimizes shared values (Kong et al., 2023). Thus, Indonesian not only connects individuals but also fosters social capital that serves as the foundation for community sustainability.

The impact of the Indonesian language is also very evident in the arts, which are the deepest expression of the cultural soul. Art is not merely an aesthetic work, but a medium through which humans express their hopes, anxieties, and aspirations. In the arts, the Indonesian language serves as a bridge between individual experience and collective meaning (Bennett, 2021). Modern Indonesian poetry, songs, theater, and literature demonstrate how the national language can encapsulate a diversity of emotions and experiences into a shared narrative that can be enjoyed across cultures. From a contemporary cultural perspective, art is seen as a reflective space that allows society to reflect on its identity and social change (Heryanto, 2020b). In this context, the Indonesian language is not merely a means of expression, but an epistemic foundation that allows art to function as the voice of the nation's soul.

The beauty of art lies in its ability to unite the diverse within a harmonious meaning. Just as the sounds of drums, flutes, and human voices differ but create a beautiful chorus, so too does the Indonesian language unite diverse ethnicities, religions, races, and worldviews within a single symbolic space. Language becomes a medium where differences are no longer perceived as fragmentation, but rather as richness that enriches the meaning of life. In recent cultural studies, the national language is understood as an aesthetic instrument that enables the symbolic integration of locality and nationality (Dijck, 2020). Thus, the Indonesian language not only shapes culture but also produces social beauty born from the intersection of meanings.

However, amidst the currents of globalization and digitalization, the impact of the Indonesian language faces serious challenges. Social media and instant culture tend to reduce language to a tool of rapid expression lacking in reflection. Symbolic expressions rich in cultural meaning are slowly being replaced by a pragmatic and homogenous global language. This situation has the potential to weaken language's function as a carrier of cultural values and identity (Gunadi et al., 2023). If language loses its symbolic dimension, culture risks losing its epistemic foundation, as values are no longer deeply inherited but only superficially reproduced (Oztok, 2025).

In this context, Indonesian must be understood not merely as a modern means of communication, but as a cultural heritage that requires critical care. Language is not a static entity, but rather a social organism that lives within societal practices. Its meaning can grow, change, and even diminish, depending on how society uses it. Therefore, preserving the impact of Indonesian means preserving society's ability to think reflectively, relate empathetically, and engage in meaningful culture (Duranti, 2020). Ultimately, Indonesian is the heart of national culture, where values, art, solidarity, and identity pulsate in a single, ever-moving rhythm of social life (Kroskrity, 2021).

Human Civilization in Culture

Human civilization is essentially the face of culture manifested in everyday life. Life never exists outside of culture, for every human breath is woven into a web of meaning that is inherited, preserved, and renewed from generation to generation. Culture is not simply a collection of past traditions, but rather a living system that continues to evolve, shaping how humans understand themselves, each other, and the world around them. From a contemporary perspective, culture is understood as a symbolic field where humans collectively produce values, ethics, and life orientations (Appadurai, 2020). Within culture, traditional ideas exist not as historical fossils, but as symbolic energy that continually communicates, addresses each other, and shapes the value systems that serve as the foundation of civilization (Kleden, 2021).

All the resources of the human soul, from reason and feeling to faith, are intertwined in culture and embodied in a collectively agreed-upon social ethic. Culture manifests itself through patterns of language, gestures, and behavior that serve as models for action and mirror how humans interpret reality. In modern cultural anthropology, cultural meaning is not considered inherently inherent in objects or actions, but rather is created through socially agreed-upon symbols (Förster & Skop, 2026). Symbols are at the heart of culture because through them, humans give meaning to experiences, interpret events, and construct horizons of meaning that transcend their biological existence.

Symbols are not merely markers, but rather bridges of meaning that connect the human inner world with the broader social world. Symbols convey something to a person, not only in an informative sense, but also in an existential sense. They become symbols of a state, a guide to understanding, and a stimulus to awareness. In contemporary social semiotic studies, symbols are understood as epistemic devices that enable humans to access realities that are not always directly present, such as values, norms, and metaphysical beliefs (Manheim, 2026). Cultural symbols inherited from ancestors are not merely ornaments of tradition, but archives of collective knowledge embodied in everyday actions, from religious rituals to subtle, unwritten social ethics (Saxena & Yi, 2026).

Symbols, therefore, are the most fundamental characteristic of human civilization. There is no civilization without symbols, because civilization necessitates the human ability to abstract experience into meaning that can be passed on. In wedding ceremonies, for example, symbols such as breaking a jug or urn together are not merely ceremonial, but rather life metaphors that teach that conflict must be faced collectively (Harrop et al., 2025). Here, symbols not only describe reality but also shape mental attitudes and life orientations. Recent research in symbolic anthropology shows that rituals are not merely a means of cultural expression, but also a pedagogical mechanism that shapes a society's moral consciousness (Pramana et al., 2025).

Human civilization evolves along with the development of education, as education is a systematic effort to humanize humans (Gonzalez-Moreno et al., 2023). Education not only transfers technical knowledge but also instills values, shapes character, and directs human potential toward moral maturity. In contemporary educational theory, education is understood as a cultural process that internalizes social norms and builds collective identity (Wheaton et al., 2024). Education becomes a space where culture is consciously reproduced, not simply passively inherited. Through education, humans learn to understand their nature as social beings responsible for themselves and their communities.

In the Indonesian context, Indonesian, as the national language of unity, plays a strategic role in shaping civilization through education. Indonesian is not merely a means of conveying knowledge, but a symbolic medium that unites ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity within a single national horizon of meaning (Mazya et al., 2024). Recent research shows that the national language has a powerful epistemic function, shaping the way of thinking, argumentation patterns, and sense of identity of the younger generation (Alzate & Eugenio, 2025). With Indonesian, knowledge is no longer fragmented within local spaces, but is woven into a collective consciousness of a shared future.

Humans develop attitudes and other forms of behavior through social processes that occur under the influence of the environment, education, and symbolic interactions (Miyamoto, 2023). This is where personal development, citizenship development, cultural development, and even national development emerge. Civilization is not born from technological sophistication alone, but from the quality of its people's character. A civilized society is not only one that masters science and technology, but one that is able to organize its social life based on ethical values, morality, and spirituality (Tegegn, 2024). True civilization is characterized by serenity, comfort, tranquility, and peace born of a collective awareness of human dignity.

Values and norms occupy a central position in the life of civilization. Values serve as normative standards that determine what is considered good, right, and important, while norms are the concrete manifestation of these values in the form of rules of conduct. In modern society, norms are not only repressive but also persuasive, as they operate through the internalization of moral awareness, not simply through sanctions (Natalis, 2026). Humans recognize that violating values and norms will lead to social conflict, as they disrupt the symbolic harmony that sustains communal

life (Maghfirah, 2023). Therefore, norms serve as guidelines for life that direct individual behavior toward collective interests.

Social norms play a significant role in shaping societal identity. They not only regulate behavior but also shape how people perceive themselves as part of a community. Through norms, individuals learn to recognize the boundaries between what is appropriate and inappropriate, between what is socially acceptable and what is socially rejected (Goldberg, 2022). This process occurs through institutionalization and internalization. Institutionalization is the process of social recognition of norms as official guidelines for interactions, while internalization is the process of internalizing norms until they become part of an individual's personality (Wang et al., 2025). At this stage, norms are no longer perceived as external pressures, but as an inner voice that guides actions.

Social values and social norms are closely intertwined in building the structure of civilization. While values serve as an abstract foundation that embodies society's moral ideals, norms serve as practical mechanisms that regulate concrete behavior. This system of values and norms underpins every social interaction, from family relations to political and legal structures (Abdullah et al., 2022). In a civilized society, norms are enforced not only through sanctions but also through a collective awareness of the importance of justice, honesty, and responsibility (F. S. Nugroho et al., 2023). A mature civilization is characterized not by fear of punishment but by a moral commitment to shared values.

In building a civilization, social control is a crucial mechanism for maintaining a balance between stability and change. Social control does not aim to stifle creativity, but rather to guide social dynamics within an ethical framework. The social control system works by reinforcing beliefs in prevailing values, rewarding normative behavior, and fostering a sense of shame as an internal control mechanism (Colling & Ceulemans, 2023). Legal sanctions are still necessary, but not as a primary goal, but rather as a last resort to maintain social order.

Civilization cannot be built without the active participation of society. Society is not the object of development, but rather the subject that determines the direction of its own civilization (Chambers, 2020). In the participatory development paradigm, society is seen as a dynamic actor capable of mobilizing resources, articulating aspirations, and creating change according to its collective needs (Thompson et al., 2016). Participation is not merely physical involvement, but also symbolic and moral involvement in the decision-making process.

Public participation stems from an awareness of social responsibility and a desire to build a shared future. This involvement is voluntary, driven by the belief that social change is a shared need, not an external coercion. Participation can begin within social institutions such as families, schools, religious organizations, and cultural communities. The more intense the social interaction, the stronger the symbolic bonds formed, and the more solid the foundation of civilization (Heryanto, 2020a).

Thus, human civilization in culture is not a static end result, but rather a continuous process woven through symbols, values, norms, education, and social participation. Civilization lives in language, pulsates in education, and blossoms in social ethics (Zhang & Wang, 2023). It grows not only from technological sophistication, but from the depth of meaning that can be shared. It is there that culture finds its dignity as the home of human meaning, and civilization discovers its essence as a long journey toward a more complete humanity.

Indonesian Language and Social Behavior

The Indonesian language and social behavior are two entities that are interconnected in a subtle yet decisive relationship that determines the direction of the nation's civilization. Human behavior is essentially a reflection of the interaction between individuals and their environment, a dialectic involving internal factors such as nature, character, and psychological predisposition, as well as external factors such as the surrounding social, cultural, and institutional structures (Thoha, 2003). From a contemporary social psychology perspective, behavior never exists as a sterile individual phenomenon, but is always embedded in a symbolic context that gives meaning to human actions (T. Robbins et al., 1978). Language, in this context, is not merely a means of communication, but is the primary medium that shapes how humans perceive reality, assess experiences, and negotiate their identities and social interests (Albarracín et al., 2005). Therefore, the position of Indonesian as the

national language is not only politically strategic, but also fundamental culturally and psychosocially in shaping the collective behavior of Indonesian society.

Differences in behavior between individuals are essentially rooted in differences in how they interpret their environment and life experiences. Each individual brings a unique social, economic, and cultural background, resulting in diverse perceptions of norms, values, and social realities (S. P. Robbins & Judge, 2017). However, in a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this diversity of perceptions has the potential to give rise to social fragmentation if not bound by a strong unifying symbol. This is where the Indonesian language plays a profound symbolic role, namely as a shared space where differences are negotiated, harmonized, and transformed into collective consciousness. Indonesian enables the process of intersubjectivity, namely the process of mutual understanding between individuals and groups within a relatively shared horizon of meaning (Habermas, 2021). In other words, Indonesian functions as an epistemological bridge that reduces the potential for social dissonance resulting from differences in cultural backgrounds.

Essentially, human culture is an integral system consisting of will, work, and creativity—three elements that shape the inner and outer structure of human beings in sustaining their lives. The cultural system not only regulates thought patterns but also lifestyles, behaviors, and beliefs, which are manifested in everyday social practices (Sutrisno, 2020). In this context, the Indonesian language serves as the primary vehicle for the articulation of these will, work, and creativity. It serves as a symbolic medium that enables Indonesians to express desires, construct knowledge, and produce meaning collectively. In line with the interpretive view of culture, humans essentially live within a web of meaning that they themselves weave through symbols, signs, and language (Geertz, 2020). This web of meaning shapes the horizon of social consciousness, so that human behavior is never neutral but always laden with values, emotions, ethics, and interests.

In a modern society marked by globalization, the penetration of foreign cultures, and technological disruption, the Indonesian language faces a dual challenge. On the one hand, it must adapt to the dynamics of the times to remain relevant as a tool for scientific, economic, and digital communication. On the other hand, it must maintain its ideological function as a supporter of national identity and collective morality. Indonesian not only regulates how people speak but also shapes how they think and act. Language influences how people judge what is good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, right and wrong (Albarracín et al., 2005). Therefore, maintaining the Indonesian language is essentially maintaining the ecosystem of values that underpins the nation's civilization.

A nation's civilization, in a deeper sense, is not solely measured by material progress, but rather by the quality of social relations established among its citizens. These social relations are created through intense, open communication based on mutual understanding. However, communication can also be a source of social disorganization when it occurs in situations of conflict, symbolic domination, or power imbalance (Castells, 2020). When groups with different cultures interact without a mutually agreed-upon symbolic framework, the potential for conflict increases. In the Indonesian context, the Indonesian language provides this symbolic framework, preventing social interaction from becoming trapped in ethnolinguistic fragmentation and instead moving toward a more inclusive cultural synthesis.

Cooperation is the most essential form of social interaction for the sustainability of society. It enables individuals and groups to pool their energies, interests, and goals in collective action. Without cooperation, society would be trapped in a destructive competitive logic that erodes social solidarity (Putnam, 2020). Indonesian, as the primary medium of communication, enables cooperation across ethnicities, religions, and social classes. It serves as a tool for social coordination and a symbol of trust that fosters a sense of belonging within a national framework. In this context, Indonesian is not merely a technical means of communication but also a moral prerequisite for the formation of a civilized society.

The social structure of society reflects relatively stable patterns of relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions. This structure regulates the distribution of roles, status, and power within society. However, social structures are never mechanical; they are constantly shaped

and reproduced through everyday symbolic interactions (Giddens, 2020). Language, as the primary medium for symbolic interaction, plays a central role in shaping these structures (Sjølie et al., 2022). Through language, humans internalize norms, understand rights and obligations, and negotiate their social identities. Therefore, Indonesian has a structural function in organizing the nation's social life, from the family and educational spheres to the bureaucracy and even the digital public sphere.

Within the framework of contemporary social theory, the sustainability of society is supported by four essential elements: social grouping, social control, social media, and social standards. Social grouping regulates how individuals are placed within the societal structure based on age, gender, occupation, and social status. Social control serves to maintain order through legal systems, ethics, and morality. Social media provides a means of communication and coordination, while social standards serve as a measure of value in assessing human actions (Scott, 2021). Indonesian permeates these four elements as a common thread that binds all social mechanisms. It is present in educational institutions as the language of instruction, in law as the language of norms, in the media as the language of public discourse, and in everyday life as the language of social interaction (Lian et al., 2024).

Language as a social medium cannot be separated from the material tools that support human activity (Avalle et al., 2024). However, unlike physical tools that are instrumental, language has a much deeper symbolic dimension. Language not only transfers information but also shapes social reality. It constructs identity, builds solidarity, and can also give rise to symbolic domination when used exclusively (Bourdieu, n.d.). In the Indonesian context, the inclusive, fair, and ethical use of Indonesian is key to creating a democratic and civilized public sphere. Indonesian enables every citizen, regardless of social background, to participate in national discourse.

Social standards, as a system of values that govern behavior, never exist in a vacuum. They are always instilled, socialized, and reproduced through language. Moral, aesthetic, religious, and ideological values take concrete form through speech, texts, and discourses that exist within society (Fairclough, 2020). In this regard, the Indonesian language serves as a vehicle for transmitting national values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, social justice, and unity. These values are not only taught formally but also internalized through language practices in families, schools, the media, and public spaces (Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi, 2023). Thus, the Indonesian language does not merely reflect social behavior but actively shapes it.

In a broader perspective, the position of Indonesian as the language of national unity and integrity is a symbolic foundation for the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) (Laia, 2023). The diversity of tribes, ethnicities, customs, religions, and traditions is not seen as a threat, but rather as a cultural potential united by language. Indonesian becomes a space for dialogue across differences, where local identities are not eliminated but transformed into national consciousness. From a contemporary sociolinguistic perspective, a living and dynamic national language can strengthen social cohesion while maintaining cultural diversity in a balanced manner (Lin et al., 2026). Therefore, maintaining the existence of Indonesian is not only the responsibility of the state, but also the moral responsibility of all citizens.

Ultimately, the Indonesian language and social behavior form a dialectical relationship that determines the direction of Indonesian civilization. Language shapes behavior, and behavior, in turn, reproduces language (Lu et al., 2025). In this reciprocal relationship, the Indonesian language should not be treated merely as an administrative tool or a formal symbol of statehood, but rather as the heart of culture that brings to life the nation's values, meanings, and collective identity (Chong, 2024). As long as the Indonesian language remains nurtured as an inclusive, reflective, and ethical shared space, Indonesian civilization will continue to grow as a symbolically sovereign, morally dignified, and culturally open civilization.

Indonesian Language and Social Behavior in an International Context

In a global landscape characterized by human mobility, knowledge exchange, and the flow of information across borders, language is no longer merely a means of domestic communication but has become a strategic instrument in cultural diplomacy, international relations, and symbolic struggles between civilizations (Shen et al., 2022). Language, in an international context, functions

as cultural capital that determines a nation's position within the global power structure, as it is through language that a nation represents itself, negotiates its identity, and projects values considered noble to the world community (Al Sharoufi & Al-Kandari, 2025). Thus, Indonesian cannot be understood merely as an internal tool for shaping the nation's social behavior, but also as an external medium that conveys Indonesia's image, ethos, and outlook on life into the international public sphere.

In current globalization theory, interactions between nations are no longer dominated solely by economic and military power, but are increasingly determined by symbolic power operating through language, narrative, and the production of meaning (Guo et al., 2025). Major powers utilize their languages as tools of soft power, namely the ability to influence others through cultural appeal, values, and ideology, rather than through coercion or material domination (Nye, 2021). English, Mandarin, Spanish, French, and Arabic have long been global languages that not only regulate the flow of international communication but also shape symbolic hierarchies in the worlds of science, diplomacy, technology, and culture (Zeng & Yang, 2024). Within this structure, Indonesian occupies a paradoxical position, as on the one hand, it has a very large number of speakers demographically, but on the other hand, it remains relatively marginal in the global communication map (Zein, 2020).

However, it is precisely within this paradox that the strategic potential of the Indonesian language lies. From an international sociolinguistic perspective, a language with a large and stable speaker base has a significant opportunity to develop into an influential regional language if supported by consistent state policies and a productive cultural ecosystem (Spolsky, 2021). Indonesian possesses structural advantages in the form of relatively simple grammar, a vocabulary open to loanwords, and a historical role as a *lingua franca* in Southeast Asia. These advantages make it a potential intercultural *lingua franca* in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the context of cooperation in education, tourism, the creative economy, and cultural diplomacy (Kirkpatrick, 2020).

In the context of international social behavior, language serves as a primary mechanism for shaping a nation's image. A nation's image is constructed not only through political policies or economic performance, but also through narratives produced and distributed in the global space (Marginson, 2022). Language becomes a narrative medium that determines how a nation is understood, interpreted, and assessed by others (Wodak, 2021). Indonesian, when taught to foreign speakers through the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers program, not only transmits linguistic structures but also ways of thinking, communication ethics, patterns of politeness, and social values entrenched in Indonesian society. Thus, Indonesian becomes a vehicle for cultural diplomacy that shapes social behavior across borders in subtle yet profound ways.

Globally, social behavior between nations is increasingly determined by cross-cultural communication skills. Linguistic misunderstandings can easily escalate into symbolic conflict, negative stereotypes, and even political tension (Hall, 2020). In this context, mastery of a country's national language by foreigners creates an empathetic bridge that narrows cultural distances. Indonesian, as a language rich in expressions of politeness, harmony, and collectivity, carries symbolic messages about the social character of the Indonesian people, which prioritizes deliberation, mutual cooperation, and balanced social relations. These values constitute Indonesia's cultural contribution to global civilization, which is currently experiencing a crisis of individualism, identity fragmentation, and ideological polarization (Bauman, 2020).

In the international realm of science, language also determines who has the right to speak and who is heard. The dominance of English in global scientific publications has created an epistemic inequality, where knowledge from non-Western countries is often marginalized or considered inferior (Connell, 2021). In this context, the Indonesian language faces a structural challenge in penetrating the global discourse market without losing its local character. Efforts to internationalize Indonesian do not mean replacing established global languages, but rather creating a space for epistemic dialogue where Indonesian perspectives can be present as subjects, not merely objects of study. Indonesian, if managed strategically, can become an alternative medium for knowledge production that offers a Global South perspective in world discourse (Rakhmani & Sakhiyya, 2024).

The social behavior of Indonesians in facing the international world is also greatly influenced by their language attitudes (Susanto et al., 2024). An inferior attitude towards one's own language will give rise to a cultural mentality that is easily dominated, while a reflective and confident attitude towards the national language will shape social subjects capable of equal dialogue at the global level (Phillipson, 2020). In this regard, Indonesian serves as a psychosocial foundation for the formation of a national personality that is not only open to differences but also strong in identity. Language becomes a tool of symbolic emancipation that allows the Indonesian people to participate in globalization without being trapped in the process of cultural standardization.

Furthermore, in the context of an increasingly digitalized world, language no longer lives solely in spoken conversation or printed text, but also in algorithms, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence (Brüns & Meißner, 2024). Languages that are not present in the global digital space risk being symbolically marginalized and gradually losing generational relevance (Floridi, 2020). Indonesian, with its large number of internet users, has a historic opportunity to become a key language in the global digital ecosystem, provided it is supported by language technology policies, digital corpus development, and creative and high-quality content production. In this context, the social behavior of Indonesia's younger generation in the digital space will significantly determine the future of Indonesian as a language of global civilization.

Ultimately, the position of Indonesian in the international context cannot be separated from the dialectical relationship between national identity and global dynamics. Indonesian does not have to be a world language to be globally meaningful (Putri et al., 2023). Simply by being a language capable of conveying Indonesian humanitarian values into intercivilizational dialogue, it has fulfilled its historical function as a bridge of meaning between locality and universality. In a world increasingly losing its ethical orientation and trapped in utilitarian logic, Indonesian offers an alternative narrative of humanity rooted in togetherness, balance, and politeness (Hutabarat, 2023). It is at this point that Indonesian not only shapes the social behavior of its own nation but also contributes symbolically to shaping the face of world civilization.

Conclusion

This research confirms that Indonesian cannot be understood merely as a technical communication instrument, but rather as an epistemological and symbolic foundation that forms the deepest structure of the nation's civilization. Answering the research questions, the main findings indicate that Indonesian functions as an integrative mechanism that connects individual behavior with collective value systems through the processes of symbolization, internalization of norms, and reproduction of meaning in social interactions. Indonesian not only reflects social reality but actively constructs how society perceives the world, assesses experiences, and forms cultural identities.

Theoretically, this research strengthens the perspective of linguistic anthropology that views language as a medium for shaping social reality, while expanding it by positioning Indonesian as a symbolic capital of civilization that operates across social domains, from kinship, economics, education, to cultural diplomacy. Practically, the implications of this research emphasize the importance of language policies that go beyond normative-administrative aspects, but are directed at strengthening the function of Indonesian as a carrier of moral values, social solidarity, and national ethics, especially amidst the currents of globalization and digitalization. The limitation of this research lies in its approach based on literature analysis, so it has not empirically explored language practices in the field through ethnographic observation or in-depth interviews. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop empirical studies across communities and generations to more concretely map how Indonesian is internalized in the social behavior of contemporary society, especially in the digital space and global context.

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