

LANGUAGES OF POWER AND BELONGINGS: A CASE STUDY OF A PAPUAN STUDENT'S STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY IN A MULTILINGUAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research explores how the variation in language, including practices like code-switching and shifts in dialect, influences the formation of social identities within academic communities characterized by multilingualism. The study focuses on a student from Papua at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW), where language plays a critical role in expressing cultural connections, managing interpersonal dynamics, and navigating power structures. By conducting a qualitative research through interviews and participant observation, the study investigates how the student utilizes his diverse linguistic skills to negotiate his identities and either connect with or distance himself from different social groups. The findings highlight the dual role of language in both including and excluding individuals, which mirrors broader sociocultural power structures. Specifically, the Papuan student employs language strategically to assert his regional identity while also adapting to national and global standards. This research advances our understanding of language variation as a significant sociolinguistic phenomenon and underscores its intricate relationship with identity construction in academic environments. The results offer valuable insights for both the field of sociolinguistics and for understanding how marginalized linguistic communities navigate the challenges of social and academic integration.

Keywords: Identity, code-switching, dialect shifting

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi variasi bahasa seorang mahasiswa dari Papua yang menempuh pendidikan di Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW) yang melakukan praktik alih kode dan pergeseran dialek. Keduanya dieksplorasi dalam pengaruhnya terhadap pembentukan identitas sosial dalam komunitas akademik yang multilingual. Pada domain tersebut, terdapat keunikan dan peran penting bahasa terhadap ekspresi hubungan budaya, dinamika interpersonal, dan struktur kekuasaan. Teknik penelitian dilakukan melalui wawancara dan observasi partisipatif. Kemampuan linguistik yang beragam dari mahasiswa ini diteliti dalam hubungannya dengan negosiasi identitas yang terjadi untuk proses inklusi maupun eksklusi kelompok sosial yang lain. Adapun temuan penelitian berupa peran ganda bahasa dalam proses inklusi dan eksklusi individu yang mencerminkan struktur kekuasaan sosiokultural yang lebih luas. Secara khusus, mahasiswa Papua ini menggunakan bahasa secara strategis untuk menegaskan identitas regionalnya sembari beradaptasi dengan standar nasional dan global. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi untuk menambah pemahaman akan variasi bahasa sebagai fenomena sociolinguistik yang kompleks sebagai pembentuk identitas di lingkungan akademis.

Kata kunci: Identitas, alih kode, pergeseran dialek

INTRODUCTION

Language variation in multilingual communities is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, connected with the construction and negotiation of social identities which Asadolahi & Nushi (2021), Darquennes et al. (2020), and Lai (2019) have discussed in their research. Within academic settings, where individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds converge, language becomes not only a medium for communication but also a marker of cultural affiliation, social distinction, and power relations (Hudley et al., 2020). Sociolinguistic research has long emphasised the role of language variation in signalling social identities, with speakers constantly navigating their linguistic repertoires to align with or differentiate from various groups. The interplay between language and identity in such contexts demands a closer examination, particularly in multilingual environments where code-switching, code-mixing, and dialect shifts are routine (Carstens & Ang, 2019).

Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW), located in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, serves as a microcosm of the country's rich linguistic diversity (Paga, 2024). It provides an ideal setting to explore how speakers from different regions—particularly those from Papua—use their linguistic repertoires to express group membership, assert their identity, and navigate social relationships. This article seeks to explore how speakers in multilingual academic communities use language variation to construct and negotiate their social identities, focusing on a case study of students specifically from Melanesian linguistic backgrounds at UKSW. The study examines how these speakers draw on multiple linguistic resources, including Indonesian, regional Papuan dialects, and English, to interact within different social contexts, whether formal (e.g., classrooms) or informal (e.g., peer groups). In this process, language becomes a powerful tool for inclusion and exclusion, acting as a mirror for broader sociocultural dynamics and power structures.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws on two major sociolinguistic theories: Labovian variationist theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Labovian variationist theory, originating from the work of William Labov (1966), focuses on how linguistic variation is systematically correlated with social factors such as class, ethnicity, and regional identity which can be seen from studies by Bayley (2019), Zhang (2019), and Stratton (2022). This theory has proven foundational in examining how language reflects and reinforces social stratification, providing insights into the role of dialectal and stylistic variation in signalling group affiliation or distinction. Labov's work on linguistic variation, particularly in urban environments, highlights how speakers use language to index their social positioning within a hierarchical structure, with linguistic features acting as markers of identity that correspond to social categories.

Complementing this perspective is Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles (1973), which focuses on how individuals modify their speech in response to their interlocutors. CAT posits that speakers adjust their language use to converge with or diverge from their audience, signalling solidarity or differentiation. This theory is particularly relevant in multilingual contexts, where language choice and variation can function as mechanisms for managing social distance, asserting group membership, or navigating intercultural interactions as shown in various works such as Nguyen & Hamid (2019) and Okamoto (2020). In academic settings, where students from different linguistic and cultural

backgrounds frequently interact, CAT provides a useful lens for understanding how speakers accommodate or resist linguistic norms to assert their identities.

Recent sociolinguistic research has increasingly turned its attention to the complex relationship between language variation and the construction of social identities, especially within multilingual and multicultural environments. Moreno (2020) highlights the importance of pragmatic differences in relational identities among multicultural university students, emphasizing that effective communication in such contexts requires not only linguistic adjustment but also intercultural and cognitive shifts. This study underscores how identity construction is not a static process but a dynamic negotiation shaped by the constant interplay of language and culture. Moreno's work is significant in showing how students must continuously adapt their linguistic resources to navigate the complexities of a multicultural academic setting.

Building on this idea, Bayley & Cameron (2019) contribute further by explaining that language variation is highly systematic and shaped by a combination of linguistic, social, and individual factors. They argue that understanding these variations is crucial for grasping how language change occurs over time, as well as for improving minority language education. This research complements Moreno's findings by adding a structural dimension to the study of language variation. While Moreno (2020) focuses on the pragmatic and intercultural adjustments necessary for identity negotiation, Bayley & Cameron (2019) highlight the systematic nature of language variation, positioning it as an essential tool for better understanding the broader social mechanisms at play. Together, these studies form a cohesive argument that identity in multilingual contexts is both an individual and collective negotiation influenced by diverse linguistic and social forces.

In a more focused examination of the individual's role in identity construction, Benzehaf (2021) explores how multilingual university students perceive themselves as multilingual agents. Benzehaf's study shows that these students experience ongoing identity shifts, often redefining their cultural identities to align with their roles as global, modern, and intercultural citizens. This study extends the work of Moreno (2020) and Bayley & Cameron (2019) by shifting the focus from the external social and linguistic systems to the internal identity processes of multilingual individuals. While Moreno emphasises the need for adaptation to external linguistic and cognitive demands, and Bayley & Cameron explore the systematicity of these variations, Benzehaf provides a more intimate look at how individuals reinterpret their identities in response to their multilingual environments. This redefinition is seen as a personal, yet inherently global, transformation shaped by their continuous engagement with multiple languages and cultures.

In multilingual academic settings, language variation often takes the form of code-switching and code-mixing, allowing speakers to navigate the formal linguistic expectations of educational institutions while maintaining connections to their regional or ethnic identities such as shown in the work of Mujahid Shah et al. (2020) and Dewi et al. (2023). Studies on linguistics suggest that speakers are not simply constrained by their social backgrounds but possess the ability to actively shape their interactions through strategic language use, thereby managing their social positioning within a given community.

In the Indonesian context, the intersection of regional dialects and the national language, *bahasa Indonesia*, provides fertile ground for examining the sociolinguistic processes that govern language variation. Regional dialects such as those spoken in Papua carry strong cultural and ethnic significance, and speakers often engage in dialect-shifting to signal group affiliation or solidarity with their regional peers. However, in academic settings where *bahasa Indonesia* is the

formal medium of instruction, speakers from different ethnic backgrounds may also feel pressure to conform to standardised linguistic norms, leading to a complex negotiation of identity through language. As previous studies have shown, the tension between maintaining one's regional linguistic identity and adapting to national or global linguistic standards is a salient feature of multilingual academic environments (Ding & Goh, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research examining language variation and social identity construction in multilingual contexts, several critical gaps remain. Existing studies, such as those by Moreno (2020), Bayley & Cameron (2019), and Benzehaf (2021), have laid the groundwork by exploring how language use shapes social identities within academic environments. However, these studies tend to focus on broader linguistic communities without delving deeply into the specific experiences of students from distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as those from Papua in Indonesia. Moreover, while the intersection of regional dialects and national languages has been discussed concerning identity construction, there is limited research that specifically examines how speakers navigate multiple linguistic layers—regional dialects, national languages, and global languages like English—in academic contexts where formal and informal interactions require constant linguistic adjustment.

Furthermore, while the theoretical frameworks of Labovian variationist theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) have been applied to general multilingual settings, their combined application in the context of multilingual academic environments, particularly for marginalized linguistic groups such as Papuan students in Indonesia, remains underexplored. This gap underscores the need for a more focused study on how these students, who are often navigating not only academic expectations but also complex power dynamics and regional affiliations, use language to assert their identities and manage their social relations. In addressing these gaps, the following research questions guide this study.

1. How does the Papuan student at UKSW—who is the subject of this study—use language variation, including code-switching and dialect-shifting, to construct and negotiate their social identities within both formal and informal academic settings?
2. What social and linguistic factors influence the choice of language (Indonesian, Papuan dialects, English) in different interactional contexts, and how do these choices reflect broader sociocultural dynamics within the academic community?
3. How does the tension between maintaining regional linguistic identity and conforming to national or global linguistic norms manifest in the everyday language practices of the Papuan student, and what are the implications for their academic and social integration?

This article builds upon these theoretical and empirical foundations to investigate how a male Papuan student at UKSW navigates his linguistic repertoire, engaging in both inner and outer code mixing—switching between Papuan dialects, Indonesian, and English—to assert identity, manage group relations, and respond to different social contexts. By analyzing the student's language use through the dual lenses of Labovian variationist theory and Communication Accommodation Theory, the study aims to uncover the social motivations underlying language variation and to explore how linguistic practices reflect broader patterns of power, solidarity, and distinction in a multilingual academic setting.

The focus on linguistic agency is particularly relevant in this context, as it highlights the participant's role in actively shaping their social interactions through strategic language choices. The study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on language variation and identity

by offering a nuanced understanding of how speakers within multilingual academic environments use language as a tool for both inclusion and differentiation. By examining the case of a Papuan student navigating his multilingual identity in an Indonesian university, this article aims to shed light on the broader sociolinguistic processes at play in multilingual academic communities, where language serves not only as a means of communication but as a key marker of social identity and power dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a sociolinguistic approach to analyze language variation in multilingual academic communities (Asdar, 2018; Syukur, 2019; Cresswell, 2018). The analysis focuses on a single case study derived from a semi-structured interview conducted with a male student at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW), a university known for its diverse student population, representing various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is acceptable to conduct this qualitative research by using one participant as it is sufficient (Subedi, 2021). By adopting a case study methodology, the research aims to provide an in-depth exploration of how speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires to construct social identities, reflecting the broader dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, and power in academic settings.

The participant for this study was purposefully selected due to their multilingual background, which includes fluency in bahasa Indonesia, regional Papuan dialects, and English. The student's linguistic repertoire, reflective of both indigenous languages and broader national and international lingua francas, made them a fitting subject for an exploration of language variation and identity construction in a multilingual context. The selection of a student from Papua also allows for an examination of the social dynamics experienced by speakers from non-dominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds within a predominantly Indonesian-speaking academic environment.

The primary data for this study was collected through a semi-structured interview conducted in bahasa Indonesia and interspersed with code-switching into Papuan dialects and English. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing for in-depth exploration of the participant's language use, while also providing space for the participant to demonstrate linguistic variation in context naturally. The interview focused on the participant's language practices in both formal (classroom) and informal (peer group) settings, probing their motivations for code-switching, their perception of group identity, and their experience of language accommodation.

The interview, lasting approximately 40 minutes, was recorded with the participant's consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcription was reviewed to identify instances of code-switching, code-mixing, and other markers of language variation, with particular attention paid to shifts between different dialects and languages based on context.

The data was analyzed using a combination of Labovian variationist theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Labovian variationist theory, which focuses on the systematic patterns of language variation concerning social variables, provided the foundation for identifying and categorizing instances of language variation in the interview. This theoretical approach allowed the study to examine how the participant's linguistic choices correlated with their social positioning, identity, and group affiliation. In conjunction with Labovian theory,

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was applied to understand the dynamic process through which the participant adjusted their language use in response to their social environment. CAT enabled the analysis to focus on moments of linguistic convergence and divergence, where the participant either aligned their speech to accommodate others or intentionally maintained linguistic distinctions to signal group differentiation.

The analysis followed an inductive coding process, where the interview transcript was reviewed line by line to identify recurring patterns of linguistic behaviour. Each instance of code-switching, code-mixing, and dialect shifting was coded according to its linguistic function (e.g., signalling solidarity, managing politeness, marking social identity). Special attention was paid to the use of inner and outer code-mixing, as well as shifts between formal and informal registers. A thematic analysis was then conducted to uncover the underlying social motivations for the participant's language choices. Key themes that emerged included the following.

1. **Language and Group Affiliation** – exploring how the participant used linguistic variation to signal in-group membership with other Papuan students or to align with national or international norms in more formal contexts. This directly relates to research question number one, as it examines how the Papuan student use language variation, including code-switching and dialect-shifting, to construct and negotiate their social identities in diverse contexts.
2. **Linguistic Convergence and Divergence** – examining how the participant's language choices reflected efforts to either converge with their interlocutors (e.g., by using standard Indonesian) or to diverge in ways that emphasized their regional identity. This connects closely to research question number two, as it investigates the social and linguistic factors influencing these choices and how they reflect broader sociocultural dynamics within the academic community.
3. **Power Dynamics and Linguistic Agency** – analyzing how the participant navigated power relations through language, particularly in academic settings where their dialect was not the dominant linguistic form. This ties into research question number three, as it sheds light on how the Papuan student balance maintaining regional identity with conforming to broader linguistic norms, and the implications for their academic and social integration.

The thematic analysis was supplemented by a detailed examination of individual instances of code-switching and code-mixing, situating these within the theoretical framework to explain how the participant's language use reflected broader sociolinguistic processes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from analyzing language variation and identity construction in a multilingual academic setting, based on a semi-structured interview conducted with a Papuan student at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW). The data reveal how the participant strategically navigates his linguistic repertoire, switching between Indonesian, Papuan dialects, and English, depending on the context and the social dynamics at play. The findings are organized around three key themes: (1) Language Variation and Group Affiliation, (2) Code-Switching as a Tool for Managing Social Identity, and (3) Power Dynamics and Language Accommodation.

Language Variation and Group Affiliation

The first major theme that emerged from the data is the role of language variation in signalling group membership and regional identity. The participant frequently alternates between Papuan dialects and standard Indonesian, particularly when interacting with fellow Papuan students. This practice of dialect-shifting allows the participant to assert their affiliation with a specific regional group while simultaneously navigating the expectations of a broader academic environment.

- (1) *Contohnya dalam suatu kelompok kitong punya satu perkumpulan yang main sama sama. Nah di situ mayoritasnya kitong yang dari papua. Ada ni yang dari luar ikut bergabung dengan kitong punya kelompok bermain. Ketika su asik cerita ngobrol ngobrol begini, kitong reflek pake kitong pu bahasa daerah. (0:22:10)*

(For example, in a group, we have an association to gather together. The majority of the people there are from Papua. However, those from outside Papua also join the association. When we are enjoying our conversation and chatting, we automatically start speaking in our local language.)

For instance, the participant describes how he "sometimes slips into using Papuan dialect" during casual interactions with other Papuan students, even when they attempt to speak in formal Indonesian. This unintentional shift can be understood not as a deliberate assertion of identity but rather as a reflection of deeply ingrained linguistic habits tied to their social and cultural background. While the switch is unconscious, it still serves to reinforce in-group solidarity by signalling shared cultural roots. In this context, the use of the Papuan dialect is not a planned act of identity assertion, but it nevertheless functions as a marker of belonging, revealing the powerful role of language in shaping social interactions. Even though the speaker does not consciously intend to assert their identity, their use of the Papuan dialect aligns them with their peers, fostering a sense of unity. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this form of *inner code mixing* can be seen as a natural outcome of comfortable, informal interactions within a culturally homogeneous group. While the slip may appear accidental, it reflects the underlying linguistic norms of the community, where using the dialect in such settings is expected and reinforces group cohesion.

From the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this behaviour can be understood as a type of *convergence*, where the individual's language unconsciously adapts to the linguistic norms of the in-group. However, the unconscious nature of this switch also introduces a potential form of *divergence* for outsiders who do not share the same linguistic background. While it might not be an intentional act of exclusion, the use of the Papuan dialect can subtly delineate social boundaries, distinguishing between those who are part of the group and those who are not.

- (2) *Jadi dari dong punya penekanan kitong bisa tau oh ini de darimana. Dari Biak kah, dari Serui... (0:12:53)*

(So, from someone's accent, we can tell where they are from. Whether they are from Biak, or from Serui...

In this part of the interview, the participant described how subtle features of language, such as intonation or phonological emphasis, can signal a speaker's regional origin. Specifically, the participant explained that by paying attention to certain stress patterns or *penekanan* (intonation), they can easily identify whether someone is from Biak, Serui, or another part of

Papua. This illustrates the nuanced ways in which inner code mixing—blending Indonesian with specific dialectal features—serves as a linguistic cue for regional identity.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this reflects how regional linguistic markers function as social identity signifiers. Even when the primary language of communication is Indonesian, speakers often retain traces of their local dialects through phonological features. These subtle cues become important tools for signalling in-group identity without overtly switching to a full dialect. This highlights the complexity of language variation, where even small linguistic elements can carry significant social meaning.

The participant's ability to recognize a speaker's regional origin based on intonation also aligns with Labov's variationist theory, which emphasizes how language variation is often closely linked to social factors like region, ethnicity, and identity. In this case, regional dialect markers are embedded in the larger framework of Indonesian speech, functioning as identity markers within a multilingual academic setting.

By maintaining these regional phonological features, the speaker was engaging in a form of *divergence*, emphasizing his cultural and regional background rather than fully conforming to the dominant linguistic norms of standardized Indonesian. This subtle divergence not only preserves the speaker's cultural identity but also signals their belonging to a specific regional group, reinforcing social distinctions within a broader academic community.

(3) *Dari beberapa daerah tertentu itu ada de punya ciri jadi ketika kitong dengar kata akhiran atau awalan yang de gunakan itu kitong tau dong dari mana. (0:13:04)*

(From certain areas, each person has their own distinct characteristics, so when we hear a specific suffix or prefix used by someone, we can tell where that person is from.)

(4) *Dari Papua kitong kayak bagaimana tapi kalau dari... temen temen dari NTT dong lebih ke karmana (0:21:19)*

(From Papua, we say *bagaimana*, but if our friends are from NTT, they tend to say *karmana*.)

In these excerpts, the participant highlights how specific morphological features, such as prefixes or suffixes, as well as certain lexical choices, can reveal a speaker's regional background. For example, the participant noted that from "certain regions," distinct prefixes or suffixes mark a speaker's speech, allowing listeners to immediately identify their origin. Similarly, they compare the Papuan usage of *bagaimana* with the NTT (Nusa Tenggara Timur) equivalent *karmana*, illustrating how lexical variation signals regional identity within Indonesia's vast linguistic landscape.

This observation emphasizes the role of morphological and lexical variation in inner code mixing as powerful tools for social identification. Even within the broader framework of Indonesian, regional linguistic markers remain present and serve as identifiers of one's origin. In these examples, it becomes clear that speakers draw from their local linguistic resources to subtly maintain ties to their regional identities, even when using a shared national language.

From a Labovian variationist theory perspective, these morphological and lexical differences exemplify how regional linguistic features correlate with social identity, much like phonological variation. These regional distinctions are not merely surface-level but deeply embedded in everyday speech, offering a means for speakers to express and signal their origins,

whether consciously or unconsciously. This supports Labov's assertion that linguistic variation often reflects broader social structures, such as ethnicity, region, and community membership.

In terms of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the participant's remarks suggest a form of both *convergence* and *divergence*. In using Indonesian, speakers converge toward the national linguistic norm, facilitating communication across different cultural groups. However, by retaining regional markers such as distinctive prefixes or lexical choices, they diverge from full linguistic assimilation, asserting their regional identities within broader, multilingual interactions. This subtle divergence reinforces in-group affiliations and preserves cultural uniqueness while still enabling cross-cultural dialogue within academic settings.

The comparison between Papuan and NTT speakers further illustrates how even small linguistic elements like the words *bagaimana* and *karmana* can index distinct regional and cultural identities. This variation allows speakers to maintain connections to their local linguistic communities, even in a multicultural environment like Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana (UKSW), where individuals from different linguistic backgrounds coexist.

- (5) Interviewee: *Jadi kitong panggil itu sesuai dengan dong punya panggilan daerah begitu.*
 Interviewer: *Kalau misal sama teman yang dari Jawa tetap begitu juga?*
 Interviewee: *Terkadang kita pakai begitu kalau teman itu sudah dekat begitu, sudah akrab. Itu kita panggilnya sesuai kita punya panggilan contohnya "eh dae ko dari mana". Jadi tidak semua orang bisa kita panggil dae begitu. Orang-orang tertentu, sekalipun dia bukan dari Serui. (0:10:40)*

(Interviewee: So, we call someone according to their place of origin.

Interviewer: What if it's with a friend from Java, do you still do the same?

Interviewee: Sometimes, if we're already close, we call them by a nickname from us, like 'eh 'dae', where are you from?' So, not everyone is called 'dae.' Only certain people, even if they are not from Serui.)

In this excerpt, the participant discussed how terms of address are used to signal the level of familiarity and social closeness within intercultural interactions. They mention that, while they generally use regional terms of address based on the addressee's local background, such as *dae* (a term commonly used in Serui, Papua), these terms are reserved for individuals with whom they have developed a certain level of intimacy. The participant clarified that even when interacting with friends from outside of Serui, they may still use *dae* if the relationship is particularly close. This selective use of regional terms, even with non-Serui speakers, reflects how linguistic practices can transcend geographic boundaries and become markers of in-group solidarity based on personal rapport rather than strict regional affiliation.

This behaviour demonstrates the role of language in constructing social relationships and intimacy. By using *dae* with close friends, regardless of their regional origin, the speaker expands the boundaries of their regional linguistic identity, allowing the term to act as a signifier of familiarity and trust. It reflects how language serves as a flexible tool for negotiating interpersonal dynamics, with speakers drawing from regional linguistic resources to mark varying degrees of social closeness.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this aligns with the concept of identity construction through language, where terms of address and other linguistic markers are used to navigate social hierarchies and express social belonging. In this case, the use of *dae* signals an intimate, in-group relationship while reinforcing the speaker's cultural identity from Serui. However, it is also

evident that such regional terms can be fluid and applied to those outside of the speaker's immediate cultural group, demonstrating the adaptive nature of language in intercultural communication.

In terms of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this can be seen as a form of selective convergence within intercultural interactions. The speaker accommodated their language to reflect the relationship's closeness rather than the addressee's regional background. By using familiar terms like *dae* with non-Serui friends, the speaker converged linguistically to signal solidarity and shared intimacy. However, the restricted use of such terms to only those with whom they share a strong bond introduces an element of divergence, marking a distinction between close friends and more distant acquaintances.

This selective accommodation highlights the complex and nuanced nature of linguistic choices in multilingual and multicultural settings. It also illustrates how language variation functions not only as a marker of regional identity but also as a dynamic tool for managing social relationships, where terms of address evolve based on personal connections and shared experiences. For instance, the participant's natural tendency to "slip" into Papuan dialect during group discussions (e.g., *kitong punya bahasa daerah*) reflects how language operates as a cultural anchor, fostering a sense of regional pride and unity. This finding aligns with Shah et al. (2020), who highlight that code-switching often serves as a mechanism for identity construction in multilingual contexts. Similarly, Dewi et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of regional dialects among Papuan students in maintaining cultural cohesion amidst a linguistically diverse academic environment.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this behavior also aligns with Labov's (1966) variationist theory, where language serves as a marker of social stratification and group identity. The use of Papuan dialects in this context underscores the participants' desire to maintain their linguistic heritage, even within a predominantly Indonesian-speaking academic setting. However, this strategy simultaneously creates implicit boundaries, differentiating "insiders" from "outsiders," as discussed by Moreno (2020) in multicultural academic settings.

Code-switching as a Tool for Managing Social Identity

Code-switching emerged as a central linguistic strategy used by the participant to navigate multiple social identities in the multilingual academic environment. The participant frequently switched between languages—Papuan dialect, Indonesian, and English—depending on the context and the audience. This fluidity in language use allowed the participant to manage social interactions and adapt to the shifting expectations of different groups.

- (6) *Contohnya dalam suatu kelompok kitong punya satu perkumpulan yang main sama sama. Nah disitu mayoritasnya kitong yang dari papua. Ada ni yang dari luar ikut bergabung dengan kitong punya kelompok bermain. Ketika su asik cerita ngobrol ngobrol begini, kitong reflek pake kitong pu bahasa daerah. (0:22:10)*

(For example, in a group, we have an association to gather together. The majority of the people there are from Papua. However, those from outside Papua also join the association. When we are enjoying our conversation and chatting, we automatically start speaking in our local language.)

A particularly salient example of code-switching occurred when the participant reflected on their interactions in a mixed-group setting. The participant highlighted the use of code-switching as a spontaneous and reflexive process in managing social identity within a peer group. He described a situation in which he was interacting with a group of mostly Papuan students, and despite the presence of others from outside the region, the conversation naturally shifted to the use of their local dialect. This unconscious switch to the Papuan dialect, even when members from different cultural backgrounds are involved, reflects how code-switching functions as a marker of group identity and a bridge in communicating interculturally.

The participant's account reveals that language choice is deeply intertwined with group dynamics. When surrounded by fellow Papuans, the use of their regional dialect becomes an instinctive way to reinforce in-group solidarity and create a shared cultural space, even in a broader, multicultural context. Here, code-switching serves as a tool for identity management, allowing speakers to emphasize their regional identity while also distinguishing themselves from outsiders. This type of linguistic behavior aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), where the participant unconsciously converges toward the linguistic norms of their in-group (the Papuan students) while subtly diverging from the non-Papuan members of the group. This divergence is not necessarily intended to exclude the outsiders but rather to reinforce a shared sense of belonging among the Papuan participants, where the local dialect serves as an emblem of cultural cohesion.

Furthermore, the social functions of code-switching in this instance demonstrate how language is used to navigate power dynamics and identity construction in multilingual settings. By reverting to their local dialect in an informal setting, the Papuan student asserted his regional identity within a peer group where cultural diversity is present. It can be seen as a form of linguistic agency, where the act of switching to a regional dialect both affirms his Papuan identity and, perhaps unintentionally, creates a linguistic boundary between those who are part of the cultural in-group and those who are not. This practice, as noted by Shah et al. (2020), highlights the dual function of code-switching as a tool for in-group solidarity and identity differentiation. Moreover, the participant's occasional use of English in academic contexts—particularly when addressing academic topics—reflects a strategic alignment with global linguistic norms, as observed in the work of Ding and Goh (2023).

Power Dynamics and Language Accommodation

The third theme concerns the role of power dynamics in shaping the participant's language use, particularly in formal academic settings.

- (7) *Kadang dosen kayak "Tra usah. Bicara dengan kitong punya dialek saja" (0:17:10)*
(Sometimes, the lecturer says, 'It's okay. Just speak in your original dialect.')

The transcription data offers a critical insight into this dynamic, particularly through the utterance: *Kadang dosen kayak 'Tra usah. Bicara dengan kitong punya dialek saja'* (Sometimes the lecturer says, 'No need. Just speak in our dialect'). This interaction reveals how linguistic choices, especially the encouragement of dialect use in formal settings, become instruments for negotiating power and fostering inclusion.

From the perspective of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this example underscores the lecturer's active role in reducing social distance through linguistic convergence. By inviting students to use their local dialect rather than the standard variety, the lecturer

accommodates the students' linguistic repertoire, potentially levelling the hierarchical gap that typically exists in academic environments. This act of convergence signals an alignment with the students' identities and suggests an effort to empower them by validating their dialect as a legitimate mode of academic discourse. However, this accommodation also reflects a broader negotiation of power, as the lecturer, by virtue of their authority, controls which language variety is sanctioned in the academic space.

The power dynamic at play here is twofold: while the lecturer exercises power by determining that dialect use is permissible, this decision also serves to redistribute power, allowing the student to express his identity more authentically. Yet, this redistribution is not without complexities. Encouraging dialect use may momentarily empower students within the academic setting, but it also raises critical questions about the long-term implications of such accommodation. Outside of this localized context, standardized language varieties continue to hold institutional power, which may ultimately reassert the dominance of linguistic norms that marginalize non-standard dialects. Thus, the lecturer's accommodation, while fostering immediate inclusivity, may simultaneously reinforce larger systemic inequalities.

According to Labov, linguistic variation often reflects broader social hierarchies, with standard language varieties typically associated with prestige and authority, while regional or non-standard varieties are linked to lower social status. The lecturer's decision to accommodate the local dialect in an academic setting challenges this hierarchy by elevating a variety that is usually devalued in formal spaces. In doing so, the lecturer disrupts the expected power relations that prioritize standard language use, signalling a form of resistance against institutional linguistic norms. This mirrors the findings of Dewi et al. (2023), who note that empowering students to use regional dialects can mitigate feelings of marginalization among ethnic minorities.

However, this accommodation also places the lecturer in a position of controlling the terms of linguistic legitimacy. By choosing when and where dialect use is permitted, the lecturer exerts a subtle form of power over the students' linguistic identities. The students' agency in using their dialect is thus mediated through the lecturer's approval, indicating that, while accommodation may soften overt power asymmetries, it does not entirely eliminate them. The power to validate or invalidate language varieties remains in the hands of the authority figure. This tension between empowerment and control echoes Bayley and Cameron's (2019) observation that linguistic accommodation often reinforces existing power hierarchies, even as it promotes inclusivity.

This dynamic reflects a broader tension between linguistic agency and institutional power in multilingual communities. While speakers may have the capacity to shift between linguistic repertoires as a form of identity expression, their agency is often constrained by the dominant norms of the academic environment. The lecturer's accommodation of dialect use can be seen as a temporary concession within a setting where standardized language varieties typically hold sway. This raises important questions about whether such accommodations genuinely empower speakers of non-standard varieties or merely offer momentary relief from a broader system of linguistic inequality.

The findings suggest that language accommodation in academic settings is deeply intertwined with power dynamics. While accommodation can serve as a tool for inclusion and solidarity, it is also a mechanism through which power is exercised, as the authority to determine which linguistic forms are acceptable remains in the hands of those in positions of institutional power. The lecturer's encouragement of dialect use reflects an attempt to foster a more egalitarian

environment, but it also highlights the complexities of balancing linguistic accommodation with the realities of linguistic hegemony.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this study demonstrates how a multilingual speaker in academic communities employs language variation as a crucial tool for constructing and navigating social identities. The findings reveal that the Papuan student uses his linguistic repertoires in flexible and creative ways, depending on the context. In informal settings, switching to Papuan dialects fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity with fellow Papuans, while in formal academic spaces, the use of Indonesian or English helps them meet institutional and global expectations. This delicate balancing act between affirming regional identity and adapting to broader norms reflects the complexities of being part of a diverse, multilingual environment.

Social dynamics also shape these language choices. For instance, regional dialects often signal cultural pride and group membership, but their use can unintentionally exclude outsiders. Meanwhile, lecturers' encouragement to use local dialects in the classroom helps create an inclusive space, even as standardized Indonesian remains the dominant medium in academic discourse. This push and pull between embracing local identity and conforming to national or global norms underscores the broader power dynamics at play in multilingual settings.

The complex tension the Papuan student experiences between maintaining his regional linguistic identity and conforming to broader national or global norms manifests within his everyday language practice. He continuously adapts his linguistic choices based on context. In informal settings, Papuan dialects are often used to assert cultural pride and foster solidarity within their peer group. However, in formal academic contexts, the student strategically shifts to Indonesian or English to align with institutional and global expectations, balancing personal identity with academic demands.

This study is limited by its focus on a single case study, which may not capture the full range of linguistic strategies employed by students from other multilingual or cultural backgrounds. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring comparative studies across different academic institutions or regions, examining how other minority linguistic groups use language to negotiate identity in academic and non-academic contexts. Additionally, further investigation into the role of digital communication in shaping linguistic identities could provide a more comprehensive understanding of language variation in a globalized world.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of examining language and identity in multilingual academic communities. As higher education becomes increasingly global and diverse, understanding how language mediates identity construction will be essential for fostering inclusive and equitable academic environments.

NOTE

We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer who has provided valuable feedbacks to the earlier draft of this paper.

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