

## Assessing the Vulnerability of the Betawi Language: A Multidisciplinary Approach toward Preservation amidst Rapid Urbanization

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### **Abstract:**

*The Betawi language, which is the indigenous language of the original inhabitants of Jakarta, is currently in a precarious state due to rapid advancements and changes within the city's social and cultural landscape. This creates an urgent need for robust and effective strategies to conserve this linguistic heritage. The concern is rooted in the fear that the extinction of the Betawi language would result in the failure to transmit valuable Betawi traditions, technology, cultural norms, and customs to subsequent generations. Such a loss would signify the decay of a rich and unique civilization. This study is designed to assess the current health and vitality of the Betawi language, drawing upon the disciplines of Social Semiotics, Demography, and Sociology for its methodological framework. Rather than relying exclusively on quantitative data, this research employs a qualitative approach to capture the subtleties, nuances, and specific preferences related to the language's use and significance. The study's findings point out that the Betawi language is in an even more vulnerable state now than it has been in the past, and this decline has severe ramifications for the Betawi community. Despite these challenges, educational interventions show promise to aid in the preservation of the language. Going forward, it is imperative to develop a well-rounded strategy for the preservation of the Betawi language that involves collaboration from a variety of stakeholders across different sectors.*

### **Keywords:**

*betawi; language; assessing; vulnerability; preservation; urbanization*

## **I. Introduction**

Language serves as a vital medium for transmitting messages from a speaker to a listener. According to Siregar (2021), the essence of any linguistic process hinges on the ability to relay messages both effectively and efficiently in the most optimal manner possible. Alwasilah (1989, p. 9) further elaborates that language is a complex system of symbols that allows humans to interact and communicate their feelings, ideas, and desires to one another. Both the Indonesian language (known as Bahasa Indonesia or BI) and various regional languages (Bahasa Daerah or BD) are integral elements of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. This is reflected in Chapter XV Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution, which designates Indonesian as the state language and regional languages as important means of communication within various communities.

The language landscape is ever-evolving, subject to influences from multiple sectors including science, technology, politics, and economics. Such rapid progress invariably leads to cross-pollination between different languages. Language, as a crucial aspect of any culture, is not immune to these interchanges. For instance, vocabularies are often open systems, adapting and absorbing from one another.

One regional language that epitomizes this dynamic nature is the Betawi language. Originating from Jakarta, the language has historical significance and unique influences from Malay, Javanese, Chinese, and Dutch languages. It is spoken predominantly by individuals native to the Jakarta area, characterized by its distinct accent and lexicon that diverge considerably from standard Indonesian. Examples include words like "cencaluk" meaning salted fish, "contang" for glass, and "abang" denoting an older brother. Tracing its roots to the Malay language spoken in the northern part of Java Island, Betawi developed alongside the historical progression of Batavia (now Jakarta), established in the 17th century by the Dutch as a hub for the spice trade.

During the Dutch colonial era, Batavia evolved as a melting pot of diverse cultures Chinese, Malay, Arab, and European which had a lasting impact on the development of the Betawi language. Moreover, other Javanese coastal languages like Sundanese, Banten, and Cirebon have also influenced Betawi. With Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Indonesian language was formalized as the national and official language, leading to a decline in the everyday usage of Betawi in favor of Indonesian and English, although it is still prevalent among native speakers.

The Betawi language holds significant historical and cultural value, prompting various stakeholders, including local communities and governmental bodies, to actively engage in its preservation. Despite not being the official language or part of formal education, Betawi remains in use in daily communications in Jakarta and its surrounding areas. Unfortunately, due to urbanization and economic pressures, native Betawi speakers is increasingly migrating to other regions, thereby reducing the number of active users of the language.

This research was specifically carried out in the East Jakarta area, focusing on the Dukuh sub-district in the Kramat Jati sub-district. Participants were divided into four age categories: 6-12 years, 12-18 years, 18-40 years, and 40-75 years. Given the language's declining use and the migration of native speakers, the study provides important insights for any future preservation efforts.

Based on the background that has been described, the questions in this study, namely:

1. What is the actual condition of the Betawi language?
2. What is the current status of the Betawi language?

In general, the writing carried out by the author in this study is specifically intended to:

1. Describe the current form of the Betawi language.
2. Determine the current status of the Betawi language.

This research is expected to help preserve Betawi culture, especially Betawi language. This allows the younger generation in the Betawi tribe to understand, learn, and use the Betawi language properly and correctly. There are big expectation with this research is that the Betawi tribe can prevent their language from becoming extinct.

Betawi language has quite broad and profound benefits for linguistic science. Some of the things I do know are the study of dialect variation, linguistic development, social functioning, language maintenance, and linguistic community. Therefore, research on Betawi language does not only focus on preserving Betawi language and culture. Thus, the importance of providing insight and developing theory and research in linguistic science as a whole.

There are several advantages that I know and are very significant for the Betawi community related to the research I have made, including cultural maintenance and preservation, then linguistic understanding, educational development, communication of economic and tourism potential, and many others. But it is undeniable that losses in society must also exist. These losses are limited resources, changes and extinction of languages, especially Betawi languages, issues of cultural sensitivity, linguistic flexibility, and linguistic characteristics. However, these shortcomings do not limit the author to continue researching Betawi culture, especially the Betawi language. Although research on the Betawi language has valuable benefits as well as significant disadvantages, keep in mind that research must be carried out with the consent of the community being studied.

## II. Review of Literature

Language is a phonetic symbol system that people use to communicate, cooperate, and identify themselves (Kridalaksana (1993: 21) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (1997: 77). Language serves as an intricate system of communication, primarily used by humans to exchange ideas, information, and messages. It remains the principal medium through which we engage with one another, whether that communication takes place orally, through written text, or even via signs and symbols. More than just a means of communication, language also acts as a mirror reflecting a society's history, culture, collective knowledge, and intellectual thought. It enables us to not only communicate but also to gain new knowledge, articulate our feelings and thoughts, and establish social connections.

When we delve into the intricacies of language, we can categorize it into six essential dimensions. Firstly, language is distinctly human. While animals do communicate through sounds and behaviors, only humans utilize a symbol-based system to communicate, setting us apart from other species due to our unique cognitive abilities. Secondly, language is learned rather than instinctual. Echoing Aristotle's views, language is a skill children acquire from their surroundings, primarily influenced by parental teachings. Thirdly, language is systematic, meaning it adheres to a specific set of grammatical rules that dictate its structure. Fourthly, language is arbitrary in nature; humans voluntarily choose certain sounds and arrange them in particular sequences to create meaning. Fifthly, language is symbolic, comprising a range of arbitrary symbols that correspond to specific spoken sounds. Lastly, language is analogical, consisting of circuits and systems that interconnect to form a coherent whole.

Communication, as defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, is the act of transmitting information between individuals using a system of symbols, signs, or actions. Language and communication are inherently interwoven. Through language, whether oral or written, we can share a broad range of ideas, perspectives, opinions, and emotions. The ultimate goal of language is to facilitate complex and abstract thought processes. However, communication barriers may arise due to linguistic differences, making it crucial to adopt strategies to ensure seamless interaction. These strategies could include careful phrasing, the use of universally understood terminology, maintaining ongoing dialogues, proactive communication, straightforward language, managing anxiety, and skill enhancement.

Specifically considering the Betawi language, it serves as a cultural emblem of the indigenous people of Jakarta. Despite the capital city's rapid modernization, many cultural festivals preserve the essence of the native Betawi culture. This unique tribe has features distinct from other Indonesian ethnic groups, notably its regional language. The Betawi language has roots tracing back to the 10th century and has been influenced by Portuguese since the 16th

century. Initially spoken by native Jakartans, the language borrowed heavily from Malay, which also serves as the foundation of the Indonesian language. This linguistic closeness makes it easy to interchange between Betawi and Indonesian, so much so that Betawi is often considered a dialect of Indonesian. The primary differentiators are usually in the pronunciation of specific words that don't have direct equivalents in either language. Betawi's phonetic peculiarities—like the pronunciation of 'e' in certain words are influenced by a myriad of languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Javanese, and Sundanese.

### **III. Research Method**

The mixed-method approach, utilizing triangulation and a multidisciplinary perspective, serves as a robust research framework designed for the comprehensive, detailed, and precise gathering of data or information. As noted by Creswell, this research approach is a synergistic amalgamation of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Sugiyono further elaborates that mixed-methods research integrates these diverse research methodologies within a single study to procure comprehensive, credible, and objective insights. Cited in literature from 2012, Sugiyono also elaborates in his 2015 work that data triangulation is a technique for data collection which melds a variety of available data types and sources. The process also incorporates a myriad of research methods and taps into numerous academic disciplines. This method employs cross-examination techniques to harvest the requisite data or information, which is then enriched by merging it with data collected through alternative research techniques like interviews, observations, or surveys. Therefore, this approach is capable of yielding an expansive and intricately nuanced understanding of a given topic or issue.

#### **3.1 Primary Data**

Primary data is data obtained directly from the source by researchers through direct data collection, such as interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The primary data in question are people who have been interviewed and also from filling out questionnaires. In addition, the author also analyzes the status of the Betawi language which is almost endangered.

#### **3.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data is assistance data that has been collected by other people or certain institutions and is publicly available, such as library materials, literature, previous research, books, and as a reference source that discusses endangered languages.

Data collection techniques use documentation, namely by collecting information from written or visual sources related to this research. The data obtained are also supported by primary data and secondary data. Documentation techniques can be in the form of video and audio of people who have been interviewed.

#### **3.3 Data Retrieval Techniques**

Data analysis is a data collection technique that aims to organize, sort, categorize and categorize various problems to be solved.

### **IV. Result and Discussion**

Everyone knows that Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia. Jakarta is an area inhabited by residents from various regions in Indonesia. Migrants (migrants) to Jakarta are on average young people who are looking for work (Susilo Wirtono, 2009). The language of communication that exists in this community is not the same as Betawi language but is more influenced by a term that

often arises from the use of communication tools (Ahmad Subarman, 2006). Therefore, Indonesian is the main language of social communication in the city of Jakarta, so immigrants use Indonesian more often than the Betawi language itself. Migrant communities also have different indigenous cultures and languages, making it difficult for them to understand and use Betawi language in everyday life. Thus, factors of modernization, urbanization, and the influence of mass media make Indonesian or other regional languages more dominant than Betawi language in social communication in the city of Jakarta (Lestari, Sariningsih, 2017).

Ethnomethodology is an approach to sociology. American sociologist Emmanuel Schegloff developed discourse analysis as a method for studying how people use language in social interactions and how social meaning is constructed through such linguistic activity. Ethnomethodology refers to the way people study social activities and understand their underlying meanings in everyday life. Ethnomethodology emphasizes how people create an understanding of their social world through habitual and repetitive activities such as speaking, writing, reading, and technology.

Thus, ethnomethodology is concerned with how people apply implicit rules and principles in their social interactions, how social meaning is constructed through verbal activity and social practice, and how our people can conclude that ethnomethodology studies how we create and understand social reality in our daily lives. Ethnomethodology also emphasizes the importance of discourse analysis to understand the social implications of social interaction and language activity.

The data obtained by the researchers came from interviews and filling out questionnaires. Of course, the data that researchers are looking for is the Betawi language. Researchers selected respondents from the ages of 6 to 48 years.

**Table 1.** Data on the use of Betawi language in everyday life

**Penggunaan Bahasa**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BMB	3	,5	,5	,5
	BMB > BI	40	6,9	6,9	7,5
	BMB = BI	164	28,4	28,4	35,9
	BMB < BI	59	10,2	10,2	46,1
	BI	311	53,9	53,9	100,0
	Total	577	100,0	100,0	

The table presented above offers insights into the utilization of the Betawi language, also known as Betawi Malay (BMB), in day-to-day activities. To streamline the process of data collection and facilitate easier questionnaire completion for the respondents, researchers have employed a coding system. The following codes have been established: BMB represents Betawi Malay, BMB > BI indicates that Betawi Malay is more frequently used than Indonesian, BMB = BI suggests that both languages are used equally, BMB < BI signifies that Betawi Malay is less frequently used than Indonesian, and BI stands for the use of Indonesian language alone.

A close analysis of the data encapsulated in the table reveals some noteworthy observations. Quantitative evidence demonstrates that Betawi Malay is less prevalently employed in various settings—including offices, schools, and homes—compared to Indonesian. This observation is substantiated by a point tally of 311, which translates to a percentage of 53.9% indicating the rate at which Betawi Malay is used relative to Indonesian. When this data is visually depicted in the form of a diagram, the comparison between the two languages becomes even more apparent.

Furthermore, the researcher asked questions related to activities related to the Betawi language. The calculation results can be seen in the table below.

**Table 2.** Use of Betawi Language in Activities  
**Kegiatan Bahasa**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Sangat Sering	6	4,0	4,0	4,0
Sering	42	28,0	28,0	32,0
Jarang	69	46,0	46,0	78,0
Hampir Tidak Pernah	8	5,3	5,3	83,3
Tidak Pernah	25	16,7	16,7	100,0
Total	150	100,0	100,0	

The table showcased above represents the outcome of an in-depth analysis focused on the frequency of usage of the Betawi language, also known as Betawi Malay (BMB), across a wide array of social activities. These activities span a variety of culturally significant events such as weddings, birth ceremonies, seven-month rituals, religious recitations, artistic performances, and even extend to the realm of literature, including the reading of novels and short stories. To enrich the scope of the study, researchers have also issued questionnaires specifically targeting activities that incorporate elements of Betawi culture. This is crucial because language serves not just as a mere system of communication but is also an integral, and perhaps the most essential, component of a cultural system.

Upon a thorough examination of the table, it becomes evident that the Betawi language, or Betawi Malay, is infrequently employed in these diverse activities. This is quantitatively illustrated by a point count of 69, which corresponds to a rather modest percentage of 46%. One plausible explanation for this reduced usage could be the impact of modernization and the infiltration of global cultures into Indonesia. As Indonesia progresses, it has increasingly become an adopter of a wide range of global trends. This, unfortunately, has the potential to dilute or even overshadow the indigenous Betawi culture. The significance of this trend becomes especially conspicuous when the data is represented visually in the diagram that follows.

Furthermore, researchers also provided questionnaires about the attitude of Betawi Language or Betawi Malay (BMB), starting from the position, and ability to ease of use. Respondents give answers according to how they feel and are natural. Researchers calculate the results of the questionnaire in the table below.

**Table 3.** Betawi Language Attitude

**Sikap Bahasa**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sangat Setuju	49	16,3	16,3	16,3
	Setuju	96	31,9	31,9	48,2
	Biasa Saja	107	35,5	35,5	83,7
	Tidak Setuju	45	15,0	15,0	98,7
	Sangat Tidak Setuju	4	1,3	1,3	100,0
	Total	301	100,0	100,0	

The table displayed above is an analytical outcome evaluating the overall attitude towards the Betawi Language, also known as Betawi Malay (BMB). It reveals that the perception of the Betawi language's significance, both culturally and functionally, is rather mediocre. This is evidenced by the language scoring 107 points, which translates to a percentage of 35.5%. However, a closer look at the data shows that the point difference between those who view the language as 'ordinary' and those who 'agree' with its importance is a mere 11 points. Hence, one can also interpret this to mean that there's still a recognition of the language's existence and its cultural positioning. The corresponding diagram further elucidates this point.

Subsequent tables provide an impact analysis and the results of Betawi language training gathered from interviews. These tables highlight five key issues related to the endangerment of the Betawi language, such as the loss of vocabulary, erosion of cultural identity, intergenerational communication barriers, challenges in imparting knowledge to younger generations, and a decrease in Betawi-related business activities. Conversely, seven points are mentioned as measures taken for language preservation, including hosting cultural events, live broadcast documentation, integration into school curriculums, everyday usage, government-sponsored language events, the development of Betawi language translation websites, and community involvement.

According to some interview respondents, the Betawi culture is an invaluable ancestral legacy that merits preservation. They argue that future generations should recognize Betawi's unique and irreplaceable cultural heritage. Yet, there are skeptics who question the effectiveness of preservation efforts. Their skepticism often stems from the dilution of Betawi culture due to immigration and a lack of clarity from elders on what precisely constitutes Betawi culture. Despite this, a majority still believes that the culture can be preserved, citing the existence of Betawi Cultural Villages as a beacon of hope for cultural revitalization.

From the above discussion, it's evident that while most people claim familiarity with Betawi culture, their actual knowledge seems to be lacking. Often, their understanding is restricted to artistic expressions, overlooking the broader cultural systems, ideal forms, and social norms that constitute the essence of Betawi culture. Constraints such as inadequate funding and the absence of mandated cultural norms further contribute to the scarcity of traditional Betawi arts and practices.

Ideally, the Betawi language should not only be widely spoken but also integrated into educational curricula to ensure its transmission to future generations. However, due to ineffective coordination with Betawi cultural organizations, current efforts to incorporate the language into educational systems have been less than ideal. This is despite the DKI Jakarta

Government having enacted regional regulations aimed at preserving Betawi culture, including its language and literature (Saputra & Siregar, 2023).

Language is not just a communication system; it's the bedrock of cultural identity. Though Betawi language activities still occur, and the language is considered a variant of Malay and a Jakarta dialect, its prominence seems to be waning over time. Even though the language is geographically situated at the heart of the nation, it is often relegated to specialized contexts like art forms, including shadow puppetry and 'lenong' performances.

By the data obtained by the researcher, the actual condition of the Betawi language is considered ordinary. Respondents said this was because they felt that the existence of Betawi Language or Betawi Malay (BMB) was not so important compared to Indonesian which had become the mother tongue or staple language in everyday life. In addition, Betawi Language or Betawi Malay (BMB) is also rarely spoken by elders. This can cause damage to the next generation because they do not get any lessons related to the Betawi language.

In addition, the actual condition of the Betawi language is no longer used by speakers. If we look at the current era, many do not want to admit that they are Betawi people. They also chose customs that were more "glamorous" than Betawi customs. They think that traditional customs are no longer good or cool in their time.

Currently, the condition of the Betawi language is experiencing an 'endangered' phase, you could also say the Betawi language has begun to disappear. This statement is evidenced in Table 1. data on the use of Betawi language in everyday life. The calculation results show that Betawi Language or Betawi Malay (BMB) is less used than Indonesian. This must be responded to immediately, so as not to overdo it.

In addition, this statement is also corroborated by the calculation results in Table 2. Betawi Language Activities. The table above shows that the use of Betawi language is rarely used in everyday life. This is what makes Betawi Language in the 'endangered' phase. How could it not? In the past, Betawi language was a traditional language that was once the mother tongue for the indigenous people of Batavia or Jakarta, because of the many technologies that entered, and the development of globalization currents, resulting in Betawi language no longer being a mother tongue. Currently, most Jakarta residents only use the Betawi dialect, without using the original language.

More sensitive and dangerous things are also shown in the results of the questionnaire calculation. We can see in Table number 3 related to language attitudes. Respondents gave many 'ordinary' answers. This means that they do not consider Betawi language important, only limited to traditional languages that are introduced to the next generation, not taught and instilled for the next generation. This should immediately get a good response to overcome it all. Starting from education and social interaction. Education can be taught first in each home, whether taught by Grandpa, Grandma, Father, Mom, Brother, Om, Aunt, and others. In addition, the government must immediately conduct Betawi or Betawi Malay regional language learning.

The capacity for meaningful social interaction across generations be it children, adolescents, or other age groups hinges on a foundational understanding of the Betawi language. This educational journey towards language proficiency is not something that can be rushed; rather, it necessitates a methodical, step-by-step approach. Given the backdrop of our modern era, teeming with an amalgam of cultures, it's crucial to strike a harmonious balance between



preserving traditional languages and adapting to new cultural influences. Researchers contend that the safeguarding of the Betawi language can be efficiently executed with the concerted support from families and appropriate governmental policies and initiatives.

The language serves as a vital facet of Betawi's rich cultural tapestry. To lose the language would be to lose an irreplaceable cultural heritage, a repository of the community's history, traditions, belief systems, and values. The extinction of regional languages such as Betawi not only results in the loss of linguistic diversity but also eradicates a wealth of cultural knowledge and practices. The Betawi language is much more than a mere communication tool; it is the very identity of the Betawi people. Its disappearance would leave the native speakers disoriented, depriving them of their unique identity, thereby making it harder for them to assimilate into communities with different linguistic backgrounds.

Beyond mere communication, the Betawi language serves as the custodian of the community's traditional wisdom. It is the vessel through which knowledge about traditional wedding ceremonies, rites of passage like circumcision, culinary traditions, folklore, and local customs is transferred from one generation to the next. Should the language fall into oblivion, it would cut the lifeline to these reservoirs of cultural wisdom, leading to a rupture in the continuity of local traditions. Moreover, the language plays a vital role in facilitating intergenerational communication. It serves as the conduit through which values, morals, and life lessons are passed down within families and the broader community. Language extinction would therefore sever this crucial link between generations, resulting in a societal disconnect and the irrevocable loss of invaluable wisdom.

In summary, the Betawi culture is in a precarious state, teetering on the brink of endangerment. Counteracting the looming threat of language extinction requires a multi-faceted strategy aimed at its preservation, promotion, and revitalization. This would involve the integration of the language into educational curricula, providing robust support to language communities, meticulous documentation of the language, and the implementation of policies that specifically target its preservation and restoration.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive research that has been conducted, the findings reveal a rather disconcerting trend regarding the usage of the Betawi language within the community; it is considerably far from being the prevailing or dominant language. One alarming aspect of this decline manifests in the sparse utilization of native Betawi vocabulary. The limited range of words used from the language's rich lexicon clearly indicates that speakers are not fully leveraging the depth of native terminology available to them. Additionally, there are noticeable issues within the syntactic structure of the language as used by the current population. This confusion in sentence construction not only detracts from the richness of the language but also muddies the waters for anyone trying to understand or learn it.

Moreover, the study also brings to light instances of semantic distortions in the use of the Betawi language. These distortions add another layer of complexity to an already precarious situation, making the accurate construction and understanding of the language even more challenging. These syntactic and semantic irregularities collectively contribute to a dilution of the language's clarity and efficacy.

The deteriorating state of the Betawi language is especially disheartening when we consider its waning appeal among younger generations. The loss of youthful adherents poses a significant obstacle to the intergenerational transmission of the language, along with the rich ethnic and cultural data it encapsulates. To put this in a more standardized context, this grim situation can be classified as a '7d status' according to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), an authoritative scale used to evaluate the vitality or endangerment level of languages.

Given these findings, it becomes abundantly clear that immediate, special, and intensive measures are urgently needed to rescue the Betawi language from the brink of extinction. The community members and linguistic practitioners who are vested in the preservation of the language have a monumental role to play. However, their efforts can only reach full fruition if they are backed, endorsed, and actively participated in by governmental bodies. It's imperative for the government to engage in partnerships with these community actors to ensure that any language preservation program is not only implemented but is also effective and successful in achieving its aims.

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