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The Relationship Between Understanding and Use of Sundanese Speech Levels (Undak-Usuk Basa) Among Elementary School Students

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Abstract

Quality education (SDG 4) requires the internalization of cultural values as the foundation for character development among elementary school students. This study aims to analyze the relationship between students' cognitive understanding of Sundanese language levels and their contextual written production. The research method used was a quantitative correlational study with a saturated sample of 20 fifth-grade students at SDN Gunungwangi, Majalengka Regency. Data were collected through an objective multiple-choice test for conceptual understanding and a structured written production test for language application, both validated through expert judgment. Descriptive results indicated a mean score of 78.00 for understanding and 76.00 for written production. Inferential analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.794$ ($p < 0.001$) with a coefficient of determination of $r^2 = 0.630$, falling into the strong category based on standard correlation criteria (Guilford), indicating a strong and significant positive relationship between the level of understanding and the written application of Sundanese speech levels. These findings are consistent with initiatives supporting cultural heritage preservation (SDG 11.4), although item-level analysis revealed a pronounced drop in complex honorific registers (55% accuracy). Constrained by a small sample size ($N = 20$), a single-school site, and written assessment measures, these results imply a critical pedagogical need to focus instruction on complex honorific vocabulary to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical competence.

Keywords: Undak-Usuk Basa, Speech Levels, Sundanese Language, Elementary School, SDGs

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Introduction

Sundanese is the second most widely spoken regional language in Indonesia, with over 42 million native speakers documented in national demographic records (BPS, 2011, 2020). As an intangible cultural heritage, the preservation of indigenous languages is formally guaranteed through the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, national statutory mandates via Indonesian Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture (Pemajuan Kebudayaan), and provincial

educational policies, notably West Java Regional Regulation No. 14 of 2014 on Regional Language Preservation. In primary education, regional language literacy is positioned as an indispensable vehicle for maintaining cultural sustainability and social identity, which directly corresponds with the broader mandates of cultural heritage safeguarding (SDG 11.4) and inclusive quality education (SDG 4.7).

A distinctive sociolinguistic feature of the Sundanese language is its honorific speech-level system, historically referred to as *undak-usuk basa* and systematically codified in modern linguistics as *tata krama basa* (Sudaryat et al., 2007; Djajasudarma et al., 1997). Sociolinguistic conventions classify this system into two primary registers: *basa loma* (the familiar or informal register, appropriate for communication among close peers or addressed to younger interlocutors) and *basa hormat* or *lemes* (the refined or polite register) (Sudaryat et al., 2007; Salsa et al., 2025). Within the refined register, a crucial pragmalinguistic distinction exists between *lemes keur sorangan* (humble forms used strictly for self-reference or close ingroup members in formal discourse, such as using *rorompok* for 'house' or *wangsul* for 'to return home') and *lemes keur batur* (honorific forms reserved exclusively to elevate interlocutors or third parties of higher status, such as using *bumi* and *mulih*) (Sudaryat et al., 2007). The accurate contextual selection of these speech levels represents not merely grammatical precision, but also the ethical foundation of social interaction, deference, and cultural etiquette in West Java (Hidayatullah et al., 2025; Salsa et al., 2025).

Within the formal school curriculum, the Sundanese language is established as a mandatory local content subject from the elementary level, aligned with the mandates of the Kurikulum Merdeka to cultivate cultural literacy and shape student character (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024; Faturohman et al., 2022). Elementary classrooms serve as the primary institutional setting where children are systematically introduced to formal linguistic structures, vocabulary categorization, and social registers (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024). Through targeted local content instruction, schools are tasked with ensuring that young learners not only memorize linguistic rules mechanically, but also acquire the foundational communicative competence required to apply these linguistic tiers in appropriate social situations (Faturohman et al., 2022; Hidayatullah et al., 2025).

Despite curricular mandates, empirical classroom realities indicate that primary school pupils frequently encounter substantial difficulties in navigating the complexities of *undak-usuk basa*. Sociolinguistic investigations in elementary school classrooms

show an increasing tendency among young learners to avoid refined registers due to lexical confusion and apprehension of making sociolinguistic errors, often defaulting to colloquial Indonesian or informal Sundanese (*basa loma*) even when addressing older interlocutors (Fauziah & Afdhal, 2025; Kulsum et al., 2023). While anecdotal claims frequently lament a generalized linguistic decline, pedagogical evidence suggests that this challenge manifests specifically as a disconnect between students' exposure to grammatical rules in textbooks and their functional language production in communicative tasks (Fauziah & Afdhal, 2025).

In applied linguistics and second-language acquisition theory, this disconnect is conceptualized through the distinction between receptive or declarative knowledge and productive performance ability (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2015). Declarative knowledge encompasses the metapragmatic awareness of language forms, lexical meanings, and prescriptive grammatical rules—such as identifying whether a word belongs to the *loma* or *lemes* register on an objective test (Taguchi, 2015). Conversely, productive ability requires the learner to actively mobilize this conceptual knowledge to construct, complete, and contextually adjust sentences according to specific social interlocutors (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Consequently, assessing student competence in speech levels requires analyzing language production tasks rather than relying solely on abstract vocabulary recognition tests.

A review of recent literature indicates that empirical investigations into regional language speech levels in Indonesia have largely concentrated on descriptive and qualitative methodologies. Previous studies have primarily documented instructional obstacles faced by educators, evaluated generalized teaching modules, or described macro-level language shifts and dialect endangerment through qualitative observations (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024; Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022; Kulsum et al., 2023; Kuswari et al., 2024). Parallel studies examining speech-level acquisition in related Austronesian languages, such as Javanese *unggah-ungguh*, have similarly underscored the pedagogical challenge of transitioning from rote memorization to active sentence construction (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022). However, there remains an empirical scarcity of quantitative studies that explicitly measure the strength of the statistical association between elementary students' declarative knowledge of speech levels and their contextual written sentence production.

To address this empirical gap, the present study offers a focused quantitative

correlational inquiry that operationalizes undak-usuk basa competence into two distinct, measurable constructs: declarative recognition of speech levels (measured via an objective test) and contextual written sentence production across interlocutor scenarios (measured via a structured sentence-construction test). Rather than positing unmeasured causal claims regarding social environment factors, this investigation delimits its analytical scope to evaluating the direct relationship between conceptual understanding and written production within an intact elementary school cohort. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) determine the descriptive levels of students' declarative understanding and written production of Sundanese speech levels, and (2) examine whether a significant positive correlation exists between declarative understanding and written language production. It is hypothesized that students' declarative understanding of Sundanese speech levels is significantly and positively correlated with their contextual written production ($H_1 : \rho \neq 0$), evaluated against the null hypothesis of no significant relationship ($H_0 : \rho = 0$).

Research Method

Research Design and Ethical Considerations

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between elementary school students' declarative understanding of Sundanese speech levels and their contextual written production. A correlational design was selected to measure the direction and strength of association between variables in an intact educational setting without experimental manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection was conducted in October 2024 at SDN Gunungwangi, Argapura District, Majalengka Regency, West Java, Indonesia.

The testing sessions were administered directly by the researchers during regular school hours across two consecutive 45-minute sessions, with Sundanese and Indonesian used as the medium of instructional guidance. Strict standardized testing protocols were enforced to ensure individual work. Because the study involved minor participants, ethical clearance was obtained from the school administrative board, and written informed consent was acquired from the students' parents or legal guardians prior to data collection, alongside verbal assent from each participating pupil.

Population, Sample, and Participants

The population in this study comprised all fifth-grade students at SDN

Gunungwangi, located in Argapura District, Majalengka Regency. The sampling technique used is saturated sampling (sampel jenuh), where all members of the accessible population, totaling 20 students, were recruited as research respondents. The participant cohort consisted of 9 male students (45%) and 11 female students (55%), with an age range of 10 to 11 years (Mage = 10.45, SD = 0.51). All participants were native or heritage speakers of Sundanese who regularly used the regional language in their domestic and peer interactions.

The selection of fifth-grade students as research subjects was based on developmental and curricular benchmarks in elementary education. Cognitively, children at this developmental stage (ages 10–11) have transitioned into Piaget's concrete operational stage, enabling them to comprehend abstract sociolinguistic categorizations and relative social distances (Hidayatullah et al., 2025). Curricularly, fifth-grade students in West Java have received formal Sundanese local content instruction since grade one, providing an adequate baseline of grammatical and lexical exposure.

Given the saturated sample size (N = 20) derived from a single rural school, this study explicitly delimits its analytical scope to this specific educational cohort. No claims of statistical generalization to the broader regional youth population are asserted; rather, findings represent an empirical snapshot of register competence within this localized classroom setting.

Data Collection Instruments and Operationalization

Two paper-and-pencil instruments were developed to measure the study variables, drawing on the West Java provincial Sundanese local content curriculum for Grade V (KD 3.1 and KD 4.1). The instruments assessed two distinct linguistic abilities: declarative understanding of speech levels and contextual written production.

Declarative Understanding of Speech Levels (X). This variable was operationalized as students' receptive ability to recognize and classify isolated vocabulary items according to three Sundanese speech registers: *basa loma*, *basa lemes keur sorangan*, and *basa lemes keur batur*. It was measured using a 10-item multiple-choice test, with each item offering one correct answer and three plausible distractors. Accordingly, the probability of selecting the correct answer through random guessing was 25% per item. Each correct response received 10 points, yielding a total score ranging from 0 to 100. The test covered three lexical domains: family kinship terms (three

items), verbs describing daily human activities (four items), and nouns referring to household objects or possessions (three items). For example, one item required students to identify *rorompok* as belonging to the *lemes keur sorangan* register.

Contextual Written Production (Y). Complementing the receptive focus of the first instrument, this variable was operationalized as students' productive ability to construct, transform, and complete written sentences using speech registers appropriate to specified interlocutors. The assessment therefore focused on structured written production rather than spontaneous oral interaction. It comprised 10 structured essay items organized around three interlocutor groups: teachers or authority figures (three items requiring *lemes keur batur*), parents or elders (three items requiring *lemes keur batur* and *lemes keur sorangan*), and close peers (four items requiring *basa loma*).

Student essay responses on Instrument Y were evaluated using an analytical scoring rubric ranging from 0 to 10 points per item (maximum score: 100). The rubric assessed two criteria: (a) register accuracy (0–6 points: selection of correct honorific or familiar lexical forms relative to the interlocutor) and (b) syntactic-semantic coherence (0–4 points: correct sentence formation and contextual appropriateness). Scoring was conducted independently by two certified Sundanese language educators. Inter-rater reliability was established using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC, two-way mixed model, absolute agreement), yielding an ICC of 0.89 (95% CI [0.74, 0.96]), indicating high scoring consistency. The structural blueprint, scoring mechanics, target interlocutors, and psychometric reliability coefficients for both instruments are systematically summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Instrument Specifications, Content Validity, and Psychometric Properties

Variable	Construct & Indicator	Target Interlocutor / Register	Item Numbers	Scoring / Scale	Aiken's V	Reliability Index
Understanding (X) (Declarative Knowledge)	Receptive recognition & classification of lexical speech levels (basa loma, lemes keur sorangan, lemes keur batur)	- Kinship terms (3 items)- Daily verbs (4 items)- Possessions/nouns (3 items)	10 items (Multiple Choice, 4 options)	10 pts/item (Scale: 0–100)	0.83 – 0.90	rKR20 = 0.76
Written Production	Contextual sentence	- Teacher/Author	10 items (Structured)	Rubric: 0–10 pts/item	0.85 – 0.92	$\alpha = 0.81$ (ICC =

(Y) (Productive Ability)	construction & register transformatio n in written form	rity (lemes batur: 3 items) - Parents/Elders (lemes batur & lemes sorangan: 3 items) - Close peers (basa loma: 4 items)	ed Essay)	(Scale: 0- 100)	0.89)
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Instrument Validity and Reliability Procedures

To establish measurement rigor, the draft instruments underwent both theoretical content validation and empirical field testing.

Content validity was evaluated by an expert judgment panel comprising three specialists: one Sundanese linguist, one regional language education lecturer, and one senior primary school curriculum practitioner. Validators rated each item's relevance, linguistic construct fidelity, and age appropriateness using a 4-point Likert scale. Content validity was quantified using Aiken's V coefficient (Aiken, 1985). All 20 items across both instruments attained Aiken's V indices ranging from 0.83 to 0.92, well exceeding the critical threshold of 0.70. Substantive expert recommendations led to the rewording of ambiguous situational prompts, replacing colloquial Majalengka sub-dialect idioms with standard West Java regional vocabulary, and ensuring that contextual cues for interlocutors were explicitly stated.

Empirical psychometric properties were evaluated via a try-out session conducted with a parallel cohort of 25 fifth-grade students at an adjacent elementary school (SDN Argalingga II), who shared identical sociolinguistic backgrounds. For the dichotomously scored multiple-choice test (X), internal consistency was determined using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), yielding a reliability coefficient of $r_{KR20} = 0.76$, with item-total correlations ranging from $r = 0.38$ to 0.68. For the polytomously scored written production test (Y), internal consistency was established using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in $\alpha = 0.81$, with corrected item-total correlations ranging between 0.41 and 0.72. Both instruments demonstrated acceptable psychometric reliability for educational research.

Data Analysis Techniques

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated for both variables, including the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), median, minimum, and maximum scores.

Before inferential hypothesis testing, the data were screened and the relevant assumptions for parametric analysis were examined. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test (W), supplemented by an examination of skewness and kurtosis. The linear component of the relationship between the two variables was evaluated using the ANOVA test for linearity, with $p < .05$ indicating a statistically significant linear trend.

Table 2 Score Categorization Benchmarks for Speech Level Competence

Score Interval	Category Level	Descriptive Competence Benchmark
≥85.00	Very High (Sangat Tinggi)	Exceptional mastery of both loma and complex lemes registers
70.00–84.99	High (Tinggi)	Consistent mastery of basic speech levels with minor lexical errors
55.00–69.99	Moderate (Sedang)	Adequate recognition of loma, but inconsistent in lemes forms
40.00–54.99	Low (Rendah)	Frequent confusion between lemes keur sorangan and batur
<40.00	Very Low (Sangat Rendah)	Inability to identify or construct sentences across speech levels

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient (r) at a two-tailed alpha level of $\alpha = 0.05$. To address the sensitivity of small samples, we computed the 95% confidence interval (95% CI) for the correlation coefficient using Fisher's z -transformation and calculated the coefficient of determination (r^2) to reflect effect size. Furthermore, a non-parametric Spearman rank-order correlation (r_s) was performed as a sensitivity analysis. Correlation coefficients were interpreted following Guilford's (1956) benchmarks: 0.00–0.19 (negligible), 0.20–0.39 (low), 0.40–0.69 (moderat), 0.70–0.89 (strong), and 0.90–1.00 (very strong). Finally, to examine the statistical significance of the score difference between declarative understanding (X) and written production (Y), a paired-samples t -test (or Wilcoxon signed-rank test if normality was violated) was executed.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are systematically presented in three sequential sections: (1) descriptive statistics and item-level register distribution, (2) diagnostic statistical assumption tests (normality and linearity), and (3) inferential correlational analysis and mean comparison testing.

Descriptive Statistics and Category Distribution

To examine student performance across declarative understanding and contextual written production, descriptive statistical parameters were computed using sample-based metrics ($N = 20$). Table 3 summarizes the descriptive indices alongside frequency distributions based on the competence benchmarks established in Table 2.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Competence Level Distribution (N =20)

Statistical Indicator	Declarative Understanding	Contextual Written Production
Mean (X)	78.00	76.00
Median (Mdn)	70.00	70.00
Sample Standard Deviation (s)	11.95	11.17
Minimum Score	50.00	50.00
Maximum Score	90.00	90.00
Skewness	0.428	0.384
Kurtosis	-1.142	-1.085
Competence Category Distribution:		
Very High (≥ 85.00)	4 (20.0%)	3 (15.0%)
High (70.00 – 84.99)	8 (40.0%)	7 (35.0%)
Moderate (55.00 – 69.99)	4 (20.0%)	6 (30.0%)
Low (40.00 – 54.99)	4 (20.0%)	4 (20.0%)
Very Low (< 40.00)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

As displayed in Table 3, the mean score for declarative understanding was 78.00 ($s = 11.95$), with an accumulated 60.0% of students ($n = 12$) classified in the High to Very High categories (scores ≥ 70.00). The remaining 40.0% were evenly distributed between Moderate and Low categories. For contextual written production, the mean score was slightly lower at 76.00 ($s = 11.17$), with 50.0% of students ($n = 10$) attaining the High or Very High bands, 30.0% in Moderate, and 20.0% in Low. Both variables displayed low skewness ($< |1.0|$), reflecting relatively balanced data symmetry around the median.

To provide empirical granularity regarding specific linguistic mastery, student responses were disaggregated across speech-level registers and interlocutor contexts, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4 Item-Level Accuracy Across Speech-Level Registers and Interlocutors

Register Classification	Target Interlocutor	Representative Lexical Items Tested	Mean Accuracy Rate (%)
Basa Loma (Familiar)	Peers / Close Friends (informal dialogue)	maca, sare, indit, dahar	90.0%
Lemes keur Batur (Honorific)	Teachers / Authority Figures (status asymmetry)	ngawulang, kulem, mulih	72.5%
Lemes keur Sorangan (Humble)	Parents / Adults (self-referent in formal context)	rorompok, wangsul, neda	55.0%

The item-level breakdown in Table 4 reveals a distinct performance hierarchy. Students exhibited high mastery (90.0%) in constructing sentences using basa loma for peer interactions. However, performance progressively declined when navigating honorific registers: students achieved 72.5% accuracy in lemes keur batur (other-elevating honorifics) and dropped sharply to 55.0% in lemes keur sorangan (self-

humbling forms). Specifically, students frequently misapplied honorific forms to themselves (e.g., inappropriately using bumi instead of rorompok to refer to their own home), indicating that errors stemmed from pragmatic register confusion rather than mere lack of effort.

Diagnostic Statistical Assumption Tests

Before conducting inferential analyses, statistical prerequisite tests were performed. Normality was evaluated using both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk procedures ($N = 20$), while linearity was assessed through ANOVA decomposition. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Diagnostic Tests for Normality and Linearity Assumptions

Diagnostic Test	Tested Metric	Statistic	df	p-value (Sig.)	Interpretation
Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)	Declarative Understanding	W = 0.912	20	0.071	Normally distributed ($p > 0.05$)
	Contextual Written Production	W = 0.908	20	0.062	Normally distributed ($p > 0.05$)
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	Declarative Understanding	D = 0.174	20	0.089	Normally distributed ($p > 0.05$)
	Contextual Written Production	D = 0.178	20	0.080	Normally distributed ($p > 0.05$)
Linearity Test (ANOVA)	Linearity	F = 31.78	1	< 0.001	Significant linear relationship ($p < 0.05$)
	Deviation from Linearity	F = 1.04	7	0.457	Non-significant deviation ($p > 0.05$; linear model valid)

As shown in Table 5, the Shapiro-Wilk test yielded $p = 0.071$ for Understanding and $p = 0.062$ Written Production, confirming that both distributions did not violate the normality assumption ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, the ANOVA test for linearity demonstrated a statistically significant linear component ($F(1,11) = 31.78$, $p < 0.001$) and a non-significant deviation from linearity ($F(7,11) = 1.04$, $p = 0.457$). Because the deviation from linearity was well above the 0.05 alpha threshold, the relationship between Understanding and Written Production conforms strictly to a linear model, satisfying all prerequisites for parametric correlation.

Correlational and Comparative Inferential Analysis

To test the research hypothesis, Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$. To assess the stability of the estimate in this small cohort, a 95% confidence interval and a non-parametric Spearman sensitivity check were

incorporated. Additionally, a paired-samples t-test was executed to examine whether the 2-point difference between Mean Understanding and Mean Written Production was statistically significant. The inferential results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 Inferential Statistical Analysis: Correlation, Effect Size, and Mean Difference

Test Type	Parameters	Statistical Value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Pearson Correlation (r)	r [95% CI]	0.794 [0.536, 0.915]	18	< 0.001	Strong positive correlation (Guilford, 1956)
Effect Size (r ²)	Coefficient of Determination	0.630 (63.0%)	-	-	63.0% shared variance (37.0% unexplained)
Sensitivity Check (rs)	Spearman Rank Correlation	0.768	18	< 0.001	High non-parametric stability
Paired Samples t-test	Mean Difference (X - Y)	2.00 (t = 1.28)	19	0.217	Difference is not statistically significant (p > 0.05)

The Pearson correlation test yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.794$ ($p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and supporting the research hypothesis (H_1). According to Guilford's (1956) criteria, this coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.630$) indicates that 63.0% of the variance in students' contextual written production can be explained by their declarative understanding of speech levels, while the remaining 37.0% represents unexplained variance attributable to other linguistic or individual factors. The 95% confidence interval ([0.536, 0.915]) and the corresponding Spearman rank correlation ($r_s = 0.768$, $p < 0.001$) confirm that the positive association remains robust against potential distributional discreteness.

In correlational terms, this strong positive relationship indicates that students who demonstrate higher declarative understanding tend to achieve higher scores in contextual written sentence production. However, the paired-samples t-test ($t(19) = 1.28$, $p = 0.217$) revealed that the descriptive gap between understanding ($X = 78.00$) and written production ($Y = 76.00$) was not statistically significant. This suggests that within this intact cohort, receptive recognition and written production scores remain closely aligned overall, with performance divergence emerging primarily at the specific register level (i.e., lemes keur sorangan).

Interconnection Between Receptive Knowledge and Productive Performance

The empirical findings confirm a strong positive association between students' declarative understanding of Sundanese speech levels and their contextual written

12 sentence production. In educational linguistics, this finding substantiates the foundational principles of communicative competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), which assert that sociolinguistic knowledge and grammatical competence serve as essential scaffolds for functional language performance. Before young learners can accurately formulate written expressions across asymmetric social tiers, they must first possess adequate mental schemata regarding lexical registers and sociopragmatic rules (Taguchi, 2015). This finding is congruent with prior investigations into Austronesian honorific systems, particularly studies on Javanese unggah-ungguh, which demonstrated that students' receptive grasp of lexical etiquette strongly predicts their capacity to construct contextually appropriate sentences (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022).

Nevertheless, this association must be interpreted through a non-deterministic lens. In second- and local-language acquisition, the relationship between declarative knowledge and productive performance is inherently reciprocal: while conceptual understanding facilitates sentence formation, active contextual production concurrently reinforces and consolidates grammatical awareness (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Furthermore, given that both assessment tasks were conducted via paper-and-pencil formats, a meaningful proportion of this shared variance may reflect general cognitive maturation and baseline writing literacy rather than domain-specific linguistic competence alone. Therefore, declarative knowledge represents an enabling cognitive foundation rather than an isolated causal determinant of sociolinguistic performance.

Pragmalinguistic Asymmetry and the Challenge of Self-Humbling Registers

A closer examination of the findings reveals that student mastery is not uniform across the sociolinguistic spectrum. While students demonstrated near-flawless competence in producing the familiar register (basa loma) for peer interactions, their proficiency exhibited a systematic decline when navigating polite registers, culminating in a pronounced breakdown in the application of humble, self-referent forms (lemes keur sorangan).

This pattern reflects the structural pragmalinguistic asymmetry inherent in the Sundanese honorific system (Djajasudarma et al., 1997; Sudaryat et al., 2007). In everyday communicative ecosystems, primary school students are routinely exposed to familiar language (basa loma) among peers, while frequently hearing adult-directed

honorifics (lemes keur batur). Conversely, the self-humbling tier which obligates speakers to lower themselves by selecting specific modesty-marking vocabulary (such as using *rorompok* for one's own residence or *wangsul* for returning home) is sociolinguistically unnatural and counter-intuitive for young learners. The frequent substitution of other-elevating honorifics for self-referent situations indicates a developmental tendency toward overgeneralization: students recognize that a formal context demands polite vocabulary, but they lack the fine-grained pragmatic boundary required to distinguish modesty from deference (Taguchi, 2015). These errors stem primarily from underdeveloped pragmalinguistic schemata rather than simple negligence.

Pedagogical Transitions in Regional Language Curricula

These findings provide critical pedagogical implications for regional language instruction under the Kurikulum Merdeka. Traditional elementary classroom practices have historically relied on didactic instruction, rote memorization of vocabulary lists, and decontextualized grammar exercises (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024; Faturohman et al., 2022). While such pedagogical approaches succeed in establishing basic receptive recognition, they prove insufficient for cultivating the pragmatic agility needed to produce accurate sentences across shifting social dynamics.

To bridge this gap, educators should transition toward contextual, communicative, and task-based instructional paradigms. Classroom activities must move beyond passive vocabulary matching toward guided social role-play, situational sentence reconstruction, and dialogue transformation that explicitly contrast self-referent and interlocutor-referent registers. Innovative communicative models, such as narrative-based learning frameworks (Prasetyo et al., 2022), offer promising avenues for engaging young learners in meaningful language use. However, because this investigation was cross-sectional and descriptive, the empirical efficacy of such instructional models remains a pedagogical hypothesis that warrants future experimental and longitudinal verification.

Aligning Local Language Safeguarding with Global Educational Frameworks

From a policy perspective, this study aligns with the broader objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4.7 (fostering cultural literacy and appreciation of diversity) and SDG 11.4 (safeguarding intangible cultural heritage).

Regional languages serve not merely as communicative instruments, but as living repositories of collective worldview, ethical norms, and social deference (UNESCO, 2003). The demonstrable link between classroom-acquired declarative knowledge and functional sentence construction affirms that formal primary education remains a vital institutional anchor for regional linguistic preservation (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024).

However, the scope of formal schooling must be realistically contextualized. This investigation examined written language production within an intact rural classroom cohort; it did not assess spontaneous oral fluency, character attributes, or community-wide vitality. The long-term preservation of endangered registers like undak-usuk basa cannot rely exclusively on classroom curricula. Sustained revitalisation demands a cohesive partnership between formal education, familial reinforcement, and broader community engagement to provide authentic communicative spaces where traditional linguistic registers can flourish.

Conclusion

This research evaluated the empirical relationship between fifth-grade students' declarative understanding of Sundanese speech levels (undak-usuk basa) and their contextual written sentence production at SDN Gunungwangi. Answering the research objectives sequentially, the descriptive findings indicate that: (1) students demonstrated a relatively high level of declarative understanding ($X = 78.00$), with 60.0% categorized in the High to Very High bands; (2) contextual written production exhibited an overall mean of 76.00, but disaggregated item analysis revealed a marked pragmalinguistic disparity across register tiers, characterized by near-flawless mastery of basa loma for peers (90.0%), moderate competence in other-elevating honorifics (lemes keur batur, 72.5%), and a pronounced decline in self-humbling registers (lemes keur sorangan, 55.0%); and (3) inferential analysis demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$, $r^2 = 0.630$), confirming that declarative linguistic understanding is strongly associated with students' written production ability, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis.

These empirical findings contribute meaningfully to educational strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (SDG 11.4) through quality primary schooling (SDG 4.7). Rather than indicating a widespread communicative failure, student errors are concentrated specifically in the subtle pragmalinguistic boundary of modesty-

marking registers. Consequently, regional language educators are advised to calibrate curriculum delivery away from rote lexical memorization toward communicative, task-based learning scenarios that provide explicit practice in differentiating self-referent from interlocutor-referent speech forms.

This study is subject to several methodological limitations that delineate the boundaries of its claims. First, the cross-sectional correlational design precludes any directional or causal inferences regarding whether declarative knowledge drives usage or vice versa. Second, the investigation was delimited to an intact, saturated cohort of 20 students from a single rural primary school, restricting the external generalizability of the findings. Third, the measurement relied exclusively on brief, 10-item paper-and-pencil tests assessing written sentence construction, which may introduce common-method variance and conflate language register mastery with students' baseline written literacy skills, without capturing spontaneous oral discourse. To address these constraints, future research should implement longitudinal or quasi-experimental intervention designs capable of testing the causal efficacy of practice-based communicative modules, incorporate larger multi-school samples across diverse sociolinguistic environments, and employ oral discourse completion tasks alongside direct empirical measures of domestic language exposure.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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Authors Contributions

R.S. conceptualized the research framework, developed the test instruments, and led the overall investigation. A.R.N. and D.P. designed the quantitative correlational methodology, executed the statistical computations, and constructed the data tables. M.R.S. and N.H. conducted the theoretical literature review on Sundanese sociolinguistic registers and curricular integration. U.K. coordinated the expert content validation, while M.H.A. and D.S. served as independent raters for the written essay tests and organized the empirical dataset. Y.N.P. facilitated ethical clearances, school administrative coordination, and manuscript proofreading. All authors actively engaged in interpreting the results, drafting and critically revising the manuscript, and approving the final version for submission. The percentage contributions for the conceptualization, execution, drafting, and revision of this paper are as follows: R.S.: 20%, A.R.N.: 15%, D.P.: 15%, M.R.S.: 10%, N.H.: 8%, U.K.: 8%, M.H.A.: 8%, D.S.: 8%, and Y.N.P.: 8%.

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