Language Style Variation and Sociocultural Function in the Karang Pendem Community: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates language style variation in everyday social interactions among residents of Karang Pendem, Cakranegara. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research observes and analyzes spontaneous language use in natural settings such as homes, markets, temples, and public gatherings. Data were collected through field observations and detailed note-taking, and analyzed using theories of sociolinguistics, particularly Labov's theory of variation, Holmes' sociopragmatic approach, and Hymes' communicative competence. The findings reveal four dominant categories of style-shifting based on interlocutor: (1) to elders, marked by respectful forms and high Balinese (basa alus); (2) to peers, characterized by informal tone, casual Indonesian, and code-mixing; (3) to strangers or outsiders, involving formal Indonesian and neutral speech; and (4) to children or socially subordinate individuals, featuring directive, simplified language. These shifts are shown to be strategic and culturally encoded, reflecting values such as respect, solidarity, and caution. The study concludes that style-shifting is not merely a linguistic habit but a culturally informed social strategy. Language variation in Karang Pendem operates as a tool for managing relationships, reinforcing social roles, and maintaining community norms. The findings affirm that language style functions both as a medium of expression and as a reflection of deep-rooted sociocultural structures.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of social structure and cultural values. Sociolinguistic variation, especially in language style, is one of the most visible indicators of how individuals navigate their social world. In multilingual communities such as those in Indonesia, the use of different speech styles is deeply rooted in local traditions and social hierarchies. This is particularly evident in Karang Pendem, a neighborhood located in Cakranegara, where residents practice style-shifting to express respect, intimacy, and authority depending on their interlocutor.

The variation in speech style based on social context can be understood through several sociolinguistic frameworks. Labov (2006) emphasized that linguistic variation is not random but structured by social factors such as class, age, and interactional context. His concept of style-

shifting explains how speakers modify their speech consciously or subconsciously in response to the formality or familiarity of a situation. Supporting this, Holmes (2013) classified speech styles into five categories, frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate, which are used selectively based on roles and relationships. In Karang Pendem, these shifts are readily observable when community members alternate between casual Indonesian, formal registers, and basa alus (high Balinese) depending on whether they are speaking to peers, elders, or outsiders.

Furthermore, Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence, particularly his SPEAKING model, highlights the importance of using language appropriately in specific sociocultural contexts. In Karang Pendem, speakers display communicative competence by adjusting their language to fit ceremonial settings, domestic environments, and informal community interactions. This shows that speech style is not only a linguistic tool but also a marker of cultural literacy and social awareness. Additionally, Pangestu (2025) explained how Indonesian ethnic groups, such as the Balinese and Javanese, maintain structured language levels (*basa kasar, madya*, and *alus*) to indicate respect, age, and status. Such levels are not optional but expected, and failure to use the correct form can be considered impolite or inappropriate.

This research aims to fill that gap by exploring the language style dynamics in Karang Pendem, focusing on how style-shifting is used as a social strategy in various communicative contexts. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, relying on field observations to capture how speakers adjust their speech when addressing elders, peers, outsiders, or socially subordinate individuals. Specifically, this study aims: (1) to identify the dominant language styles used in different social situations in Karang Pendem; and (2) to analyze the sociocultural values reflected in the choice of these language styles.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To support this study's theoretical foundation, several previous studies are referenced. Setyawati and Padmadewi (2025) examined bilingual code-switching in Balinese-Indonesian social gatherings, finding that speakers alternate languages based on formality and social roles. Their study, while relevant, focused on interlingual switching, whereas the current study centers on intralanguage stylistic shifts in daily conversation. Sugianto & Hasby (2023) investigated style-shifting among Lombok teenagers speaking Sasak and Indonesian, concluding that style variation was closely tied to identity expression and peer dynamics. However, that study was limited to adolescent interaction and digital platforms, while this research extends across generations and settings. Praminatih (2026) explored caste- and age-based speech differentiation in South Bali, emphasizing traditional register use, but treated these social factors as static. In contrast, the present study emphasizes fluid, responsive speech shifts in real-time interaction. Similarly, Atmawati (2021) examined politeness in Javanese market speech, whereas this study includes broader stylistic choices beyond politeness, such as intonation, sentence structure, and tone across various domains.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at analyzing language style variation in the Karang Pendem community, Cakranegara. The qualitative method is appropriate for sociolinguistic analysis because it enables in-depth exploration of naturally occurring language behavior in its cultural context. The study draws on theories from Labov (2006), Holmes (2013), and Hymes (1972), whose frameworks guide the observation of language variation and contextual speech shifts. The research was conducted from January to April 2025 in Karang Pendem, a neighborhood known for its active use of Balinese, Indonesian, and local registers influenced by age, status, and cultural rituals.

The primary data consist of spontaneous speech from residents during daily activities, including conversations in homes, traditional markets, religious ceremonies, and community spaces. The researcher employed a naturalistic observation technique, focusing on interactions

involving speakers of different generations, statuses, and relationships. Speech events were recorded through fieldnotes taken during real-time interactions without using audio devices, to maintain the authenticity and spontaneity of the speech. Additionally, informal interviews with several speakers were conducted to clarify linguistic choices and the rationale behind style-shifting in various settings.

The data were analyzed using the Miles et al. (2014) interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Selected conversations were transcribed and categorized based on types of language style used, the identity of interlocutors (e.g., elders, peers, children, outsiders), and contextual features influencing speech choices. The analysis was then interpreted through Labov's theory of variation to identify patterns in language shift, Holmes' categorization of speech style to describe the level of formality and social meaning, and Hymes' SPEAKING model to account for setting, participant roles, and communicative intent. Through this framework, the study identifies how language variation in Karang Pendem operates as both a communicative strategy and a reflection of the community's sociocultural norms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal four major types of language style-shifting practiced by speakers in the Karang Pendem community, each determined by the identity of the interlocutor: (1) style-shifting to elders, (2) style-shifting to peers, (3) style-shifting to strangers or outsiders, and (4) style-shifting to children or socially lower individuals. Each category demonstrates strategic sociolinguistic behavior embedded in the community's cultural expectations. These findings affirm the theoretical frameworks of Labov (2006), Holmes (2013), and Hymes (1972), which highlight language variation as a patterned, socially meaningful phenomenon.

Style-Shifting to Elders

The most dominant variation observed was formal speech to elders, which occurred in 12 instances. One example is the utterance

Table 1. Style-Shifting to Elders

No.	Utterance	Setting	Interlocutor
1.	*"Tiang nunas lugraang pesan sareng Bapak…"*	Home	Grandfather
2.	*"Ampura, dados nyidang iraga ngalaksanayang puniki?"*	Temple	Elder priest
3.	*"Matur suksma sanget, Bapak sampun nyarengin tiang."*	Family gathering	Father-in-law
4.	*"Sae pisan, Pak. Nyantosang dumun, nggih?"*	Street corner	Elder neighbor
5.	*"Ngiring sareng titiang ngajeng, Bapak sampun ngajeng?"*	Religious event	Local elder
6.	*"Mugi Bapak rahayu raris mapamit sareng titiang."*	Home visit	Visiting elder
7.	*"Tiang sampun ngantosang sareng ajengan ring bale."*	Temple yard	Religious elder
8.	*"Punapi gatra Bapak sareng keluarga?"*	Public space	Senior acquaintance
9.	*"Titiang rauh maktaang layon ipun, Pak."*	House compound	Funeral elder
10.	*"Angga sampun maktaangang puniki ring ajengan?"*	Family temple	Older cousin
11.	*"Nenten dados nyarengin dados galah niki, Pak."*	Community meeting	Elder male leader
12.	*"Nyak punapi wenten gatra sane dados iraga rembugang, Bapak?"*	Banjar hall	Community elder

"*Matur suksma sanget, Bapak sampun nyarengin tiang.*"
('Thank you very much, sir, for accompanying me.')

In this example, several linguistic markers demonstrate deference. The speaker uses *tiang* (polite 'I'), *matur suksma* (thank you), and *sanget* as an intensifier. The phrase *sampun nyarengin* (already accompanied) is expressed in a formalized structure. These choices align with Labov's theory (2006) that language reflects social structure, where age and status play central roles in shaping linguistic behavior. Holmes (2013) suggests that formal language is employed not only

for distance but as a form of ritual respect in hierarchical cultures. Moreover, according to Hymes' speaking model, the setting (S: family gathering), participants (P: younger to elder), and norms (N: politeness) all influence the chosen form.

This utterance exemplifies how the Karang Pendem community encodes **respect and humility** into speech when addressing older or higher-status individuals. The linguistic features are not merely stylistic but perform a cultural function of maintaining social harmony and reinforcing hierarchy.

Style-Shifting to Peers

In peer-to-peer interactions (10 instances), speakers adopted a relaxed, casual, and often humorous tone. Consider the utterance:

Table 2. Style-Shifting to Peers

No.	Utterance	Setting	Interlocutor
1.	*"Eh, di pasar tadi aku liat si Komang, dia beli lombok."*	Market	Close friend
2.	*"Wani to? Awakmu iso ja ngajak aku lakar bareng?"*	Corner shop	Friend from banjar
3.	*"Haha, entar sore ke bale ya, nonton bareng."*	Public bench	Peer group
4.	*"Pokokne kamu yang traktir, aku udah bokek nih."*	Street food stall	Best friend
5.	*"Sengaja telat, biar sekalian rame bareng masuknya."*	School gate	Classmate
6.	*"Yo wis, nanti kabari aja pas udah ready."*	Phone conversation	Peer (same age)
7.	*"Aduh, kemaren lupa bawa buku, dimarahin guru woy."*	Outside school	Study buddy
8.	*"Aku kira kamu udah pulang, eh ternyata nongkrong sini."*	Alley	Close peer

"Eh, di pasar tadi aku liat si Komang, dia beli lombok."
('Hey, at the market earlier I saw Komang buying chili.')

The use of *aku* (informal 'I'), the verb *liat* (casual for 'see'), and the nickname *si Komang* point to a shared familiarity. This utterance lacks honorifics or mitigation, indicating that the speaker assumes equal status with the listener. The use of localized content (*lombok*) further grounds the utterance in a familiar, informal setting. Holmes (2013) argues that casual speech among peers builds solidarity, while Labov (2006) supports the idea that such variation serves identity formation. The code choice here reflects a mutual in-group status and low formality expectations.

Thus, peer interaction in Karang Pendem reinforces **horizontal social alignment**, emphasizing inclusivity and shared cultural knowledge through informal stylistic features.

Style-Shifting to Strangers or Outsiders

When addressing unfamiliar individuals or outsiders, speakers demonstrated a noticeable shift to formal and standardized Indonesian. One representative utterance is:

Table 3. Style-Shifting to Strangers or Outsiders

No.	Utterance	Setting	Interlocutor
1.	*"Permisi, Bapak dari mana ya? Ada perlu ke rumah ini?"*	Gate/front house	Unknown visitor
2.	*"Maaf, Ibu bisa menunggu sebentar, saya panggilkan orangnya."*	Street front	Unknown female guest
3.	*"Silakan duduk dulu, nanti saya carikan datanya, Pak."*	Community office	Administrative official
4.	*"Mohon maaf, ini wilayah Karang Pendem RT 05, ya."*	Street checkpost	Lost pedestrian
5.	*"Biasanya kegiatan mulai jam delapan pagi, Bu."*	Temple entrance	First-time attendee
6.	*"Sesuai jadwal, acara akan dimulai setelah sambutan ketua."*	Public gathering	Formal audience member

"Permisi, Bapak dari mana ya? Ada perlu ke rumah ini?"
('Excuse me, sir, where are you from? Do you need something at this house?')

This example features the use of *permisi* (excuse me), *Bapak* (sir), and a formal sentence

structure devoid of regional or informal expressions. The tone is cautious and respectful. Holmes (2013) describes this as strategic politeness aimed at avoiding offense and managing social distance. Hymes' framework also applies here, the setting (S: home entrance), participants (P: local speaker to unknown visitor), and norms (N: hospitality and reservation) prompt this form of communication.

This language choice reflects **sociolinguistic accommodation**, where speakers modify their register to reflect uncertainty, politeness, and boundary management in unfamiliar interactions.

Style-Shifting to Children or Inferiors

Finally, speech to children or subordinates reflected directness and instructional tone, with simplified language and softened commands. One notable example is:

Table 4. Style-Shifting to Children or Inferiors

No.	Utterance	Setting	Interlocutor
1.	*"Dek, ayo makan sekarang. Jangan main terus."*	Home	Younger sibling
2.	*"Itu sapunya bawa sini, bersihin dulu ya!"*	Yard	Nephew
3.	*"Kamu ngerti nggak? Jangan bolak-balik masuk rumah."*	Front porch	House help
4.	*"Cepat mandi, nanti Bapak marah loh."*	Living room	Child

"Cepat mandi, nanti Bapak marah loh."
('Go shower quickly, or dad will get mad.')

This utterance is constructed with an imperative verb (*cepat mandi*), and is softened with an emotional consequence (*nanti Bapak marah loh*). The particle *loh* adds a persuasive tone, making the command less harsh. Holmes (2013) notes that such downward communication typically carries both regulatory and relational purposes. The speaker asserts authority while simultaneously expressing concern or care. Labov (2006) would view this as a patterned variation that signals power, while Pangestu (2025) suggests it is part of socialization through language.

Thus, in this category, the speech style functions not just to instruct, but also to guide behavior with emotional resonance, reflecting the speaker's authority and caretaking role.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to identify the types of language styles used in Karang Pendem and to analyze the sociocultural values embedded in their usage. Through qualitative observation and analysis of spontaneous daily conversations, it was found that speakers consistently adjust their speech style based on the identity of their interlocutor. Four dominant categories emerged: speech to elders, which was marked by respectful and honorific forms; speech to peers, which reflected informality and solidarity; speech to strangers or outsiders, which leaned toward neutral and cautious formal Indonesian; and speech to children or socially subordinate individuals, which was directive and emotionally moderated.

These findings affirm that language variation in the Karang Pendem community is governed by strong cultural norms and social expectations. The shifts in speech are not arbitrary but are shaped by social hierarchy, relationship, setting, and communicative goals. The speakers' ability to shift styles fluidly indicates a high level of communicative competence and social awareness. Furthermore, these patterns reinforce local values such as *hormat* (respect), *kebersamaan* (solidarity), *kehati-hatian* (caution), and *pengasuhan* (caregiving).

In sum, language style variation in Karang Pendem operates both as a tool of communication and as a vehicle for performing social roles. The community's linguistic behavior reflects a rich sociolinguistic system in which language functions as an active agent in maintaining cultural identity and social order.

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