

## DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE LASEM CHINATOWN AREA

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**Abstract:** Lasem Chinatown is widely recognized as a multicultural space that has united Javanese, Chinese, and Arab communities for centuries. This interaction has shaped diverse linguistic practices, including Indonesian, Javanese, Mandarin, and Arabic. This study aims to describe the dynamics of language attitudes toward these four languages within the context of diglossia. A descriptive qualitative approach was used. Data were collected through interviews with five respondents, field observations, and supporting sources of both direct and online documentation. The researcher became the main instrument assisted by interview guide and observation notes. Data were analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the Lasem Chinatown community exhibits positive attitudes toward Indonesian and Javanese, which are used in formal and everyday communication. Conversely, Mandarin has experienced language shift, as it is no longer actively used in social interactions and remains largely symbolic. Meanwhile, Arabic, particularly at the Kauman Islamic boarding school, exhibits positive attitudes in the religious sphere. This suggests that the use of Arabic in the boarding school reflects the continuity of Islamic tradition rather than the presence of Arab ethnicity. Thus, these dynamics highlight the clear functional distribution of languages.

**Keywords:** *Language attitudes; Indonesian; Javanese; Mandarin; Arabic; multilingual society; Lasem Chinatown*

### INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary tool humans use for social interaction and reflects the identity of a society (Amin, 2020). Its use is related to the formation of attitudes toward language. These attitudes are closely related to the speaker's perspective, judgment, and behavioral tendencies. This relationship is referred to as language attitude (Dragojevic et al., 2021).

The dynamics of language attitudes in multilingual societies are much more complex than in other groups. In multilingual societies, language attitudes reflect the complex relationship between language and identity (Novara et al., 2021; Suaedi et al., 2025; Woo & Giles, 2017). This happens because speaker's often use more than one language in social situations so that language attitudes influence the choice of language to represent the speaker's identity. Indirectly, this situation also requires speakers to assess the social value, prestige, and function of each language. These assessments result in positive and negative attitudes. Positive attitudes refer to speakers' tendencies to

appreciate and use language enthusiastically, while negative attitudes involve avoiding, rejecting, and belittling a language (Misnadin & Yuliawati, 2023). These attitudes include cognitive, affective, and conative aspects as important indicators for understanding, assessing, and interpreting the speech group's perspective on language (Amin, 2020; Putra & Tustiawati, 2024).

Community life in Lasem's Chinatown area reflects a multilingual, ethnically diverse society. This area was formed through long-standing interactions between various ethnicities, including Javanese, Chinese, and Arab. Centuries of cultural acculturation have resulted in a pluralistic linguistic environment. In everyday life, the people of Lasem use Javanese and Indonesian as their primary languages. Mandarin and elements of Arabic are used in limited situations.

Each language has its own function and position, depending on the community's assessment and attitudes toward it. Languages actively used in communication tend to be maintained by the community,

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while languages with limited use are prone to shift. Language shift occurs when speakers choose a language deemed more practical and relevant for communication, thus limiting other languages to specific domains (Winda et al., 2025). In the context of Lasem Chinatown, this condition can be seen in the community's dominant use of Indonesian and Javanese in daily communication. Meanwhile, the use of Mandarin tends to be limited because it is no longer used as a means of communication, and Arabic is used predominantly in religious domains.

Furthermore, this situation will also create a mismatch between attitudes toward language and language behavior (Muslihin, 2023). Language will still be recognized for its cultural value, but it will no longer be used as an active communication tool, thus tending to remain in its symbolic function. This mismatch between attitudes and language use reflects the dynamics of attitudes toward language, where language values, functions, and practices are strongly influenced by the social context and the speaker's communication needs (Negara et al., 2025; Patimah et al., 2023). This dynamic indicates that language attitudes cannot be understood separately from language use practices alone, but rather need to be examined in relation to the speaker's language choices.

Many studies on language attitudes have been conducted in Indonesia, particularly in the context of multilingual societies, demonstrating the relationship between language attitudes and language choice. Rusmawaty (2024) demonstrated that the attitudes and language choices of multilingual speakers in the Mulawarman University environment resulted in the adoption of the dominant language, the preservation of linguistic heritage, and the emergence of hybrid linguistic practices. Furthermore, Misnadin and Yuliawati (2023) found that Madurese communities exhibit varying attitudes toward linguistic diversity, which impacts their language choice. Other findings suggest that positive attitudes toward Indonesian and foreign languages are often associated with educational and

occupational demands, while the preference for regional languages tends to be limited in use because they are often positioned as symbols of intergenerational inheritance (Putra & Tustiawati, 2024; Uswatunnisa et al., 2025).

However, studies specifically examining the dynamics of language attitudes in multiethnic communities like Lasem's Chinatown are still relatively limited. Previous research has focused on historical and cultural aspects, such as the study of Lasem's Chinatown as a multicultural space demonstrating social integration (Astuti & Gunawan, 2025). Furthermore, other studies have explored Lasem's maritime history, which played a significant role in fostering the acculturation of Javanese, Chinese, and Arab cultures through trade interactions and the spread of Islam along the north coast of Java (Pratama et al., 2023; Qurtuby, 2026).

Lasem's Chinatown has been widely studied from a historical and cultural perspective. However, no study has focused on linguistic aspects. Yet, language is a medium of social interaction that reflects intergroup identities in multilingual environments. Based on this, a study of the dynamics of language attitudes in the Lasem Chinatown area is needed to examine and describe the dynamics of language attitudes in the Lasem Chinatown area towards Indonesian, Javanese, Mandarin, and Arabic. By formulating these objectives, this study is expected to provide a clear picture of the dynamics of language attitudes in the Lasem Chinatown area and as an effort to fill the gaps in previous studies and contribute to the development of sociolinguistic studies in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Approach**

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meanings, perspectives, and linguistic practices that emerge based on natural situations without any treatment or

manipulation of variables (Fadli, 2021). This research is descriptive in nature because it focuses on explaining and describing the dynamics of language attitudes occurring in the Lasem Chinatown area. Therefore, this approach is highly relevant for describing the phenomenon of language attitude dynamics interpretively and systematically.

### **Data Sources**

Qualitative data sources are characterized by two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data originates from observations and interviews, while secondary data is obtained from documents or supporting information from the primary data (Malahati et al., 2023). In this study, primary data were obtained through unstructured interviews (WTT) and participant observation. Interviews were conducted directly with five informants from various social backgrounds in the Lasem Chinatown area.

Meanwhile, secondary data included visual documents, including photos and videos. Photographic data were obtained through direct observation, the results of which were coded as images (G-1), (G-2), and so on. The data included photos of Mandarin script on old Chinese houses in Lasem Chinatown and landscape photos of other buildings containing linguistic data. These data help demonstrate the presence of language within the linguistic landscape of the Lasem Chinatown community.

Video data were obtained from YouTube and coded as online documentation (DD-1), (DD-2), and so on. In this study, videos from the YouTube accounts of Klenteng Lasem and Lawang Songo Lasem were used as supporting data. The selection of these YouTube videos was based on several considerations: 1) relevance to the context of the community being studied; 2) the video's ability to represent language practices naturally; and 3) the credibility of the source (derived from a credible source, such as a community channel or cultural documentation). The use of these videos served as a form of data enrichment to strengthen the interpretation of the observed language practices.

### **Respondent Selection Technique**

Respondents in this study were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria: all respondents were from the community in Lasem's Chinatown area, actively involved in social interactions that give rise to linguistic practices in various domains, and willing to provide the information required for the study.

Respondents came from various social backgrounds representing various domains of language use: 1) the neighborhood association (RT) head in Mahbong Hamlet, a member of the Chinese community (N1); 2) a minimarket cashier (N2); 3) an administrator at the Kauman Islamic Boarding School (N3); 4) the head of the students at the Kauman Islamic Boarding School (N4); and 5) the caretaker of the Gie Yong Bio Temple (N5).

First, respondent N1 is a 73-year-old male of Chinese ethnicity who serves as the RT head in Lasem's Chinatown area. N1 has lived in the area for a long time and is active in social interactions in the community, thus providing a historical perspective as well as insight into linguistic practices in everyday life. N1 has a background in using Indonesian and Javanese, and some exposure to Mandarin in a cultural context. Second, N2 is a man in his 20s who works as a minimarket cashier in the research area. Respondents have a background in using both Indonesian and Javanese. Third, N3 is a female administrator of the Kauman Islamic Boarding School, aged around 25, who is active in educational and religious activities, using Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic in religious contexts. Fourth, N4 is a 23-year-old woman who serves as the head of the female students and has a background in using Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic in religious contexts. Finally, respondent N5 is a caretaker of the Gie Yong Bio Temple, aged around 40, who is actively involved in religious activities and interacts with temple visitors. N5 has a background in using Indonesian, Javanese, and some Mandarin in the form of cultural symbols.

This diversity of backgrounds

allowed the researcher to obtain data from the social, economic, religious, and cultural spheres. Individuals who were not actively involved in community social interactions and were unwilling to provide information were excluded from this study. Thus, the selection of respondents is expected to be able to provide relevant and in-depth data.

### **Research Instruments**

According to Sugiyono (2022), the primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher themselves, assisted by interview guide and observation notes. As the primary instrument, the researcher plays a crucial role in collecting, processing, and interpreting data. The interview guide was developed to gather information about the language used by respondents, their perceptions of Indonesian, Javanese, Mandarin, and Arabic, and their functions in various domains. The instruments used in this study were independently developed by the researcher, tailored to the research needs. Other supporting instruments include: 1) a device for recording interviews; 2) field notes; and 3) visual documentation. After the development stage, the instruments were validated by the supervisor to enhance the research's credibility.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using triangulation techniques to obtain comprehensive data from diverse sources. First, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews face-to-face with each respondent. This technique was chosen because it is more flexible and allows the researcher to follow the flow of the conversation, resulting in more natural data (Waruwu, 2024). Interviews lasted 3-10 minutes, focusing on the respondents' linguistic background, language preferences, and perceptions and views on each language in Lasem Chinatown. All interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent and conducted at a mutually agreed-upon time to ensure the respondents' comfort during the interview process. After data collection, the data was transcribed. The researcher coded the transcripts as Pn, while the interviewees were coded N1, and so on, depending on the

number of interviewees, as explained in the previous subsection.

Field observations were also conducted to identify language use in community interactions, as well as the presence of Mandarin script in old Chinese houses and the use of Arabic script in the Kauman Islamic Boarding School building. Documentation was conducted by collecting visual evidence from photographs of old buildings in Lasem Chinatown and reviewing online documentation from YouTube videos. Data collection through triangulation allows researchers to increase the credibility and validity of the data (Sugiyono, 2022). This data collection was carried out until data saturation was reached, or no new information emerged from the data collection process (Himam et al., 2026). In its implementation, this study adhered to ethical research principles, including: 1) obtaining informant consent; 2) maintaining confidentiality through a coding system; and 3) using data solely for academic purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis adapted the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Hendriyanto et al., 2024). Data reduction was used to summarize important data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documentation. This activity also included grouping and sorting the data. After reduction, the data were presented systematically through descriptive narratives. Next, conclusions were drawn through a verification process until consistent and credible findings were obtained. To ensure data accuracy, researchers double-checked the data obtained through repeated reading and comparison.

### **Researcher's Position**

The researcher recognizes that in qualitative research, the researcher's position as the primary instrument has the potential to influence the data collection process, particularly interview data. Therefore, the researcher strives to minimize this influence by maintaining neutrality and avoiding leading questions. Furthermore, the data

obtained is reviewed through repeated readings to ensure the interpretations align with the interviewee's intent.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lasem's Chinatown area is a place where Chinese, Arab, and Javanese ethnicities come together in one social space. The presence of these diverse ethnicities stems from Lasem's success as a maritime trade route throughout the archipelago (Wijaya et al., 2025). This long-standing interaction, which has developed over centuries, has shaped dynamic linguistic practices across diverse domains. This makes Lasem Chinatown a relevant context for examining the dynamics of community language attitudes in a multilingual environment. Research data shows that community language choices follow social patterns related to interethnic communication, interaction context, and communication function. Indonesian tends to emerge in cross-group interactions, Javanese is predominantly used in everyday communication, while Mandarin and Arabic are used more limitedly in cultural and religious domains. These patterns of use reflect community language attitudes toward each of the languages that coexist in Lasem Chinatown.

The analysis of language attitudes in this study uses Lambert (1967) framework, which explains language attitudes from a social psychology perspective, encompassing three aspects: cognitive (beliefs or knowledge in the thought process), affective (evaluations of like or dislike), and conative (behavioral or action tendencies). These three aspects form a unity that influences how speakers understand, evaluate, and use language in everyday communication. This concept is used as the primary framework in analyzing the research data. Meanwhile, Garvin and Mathiot's framework in (Sariasih et al., 2023), which includes language loyalty, language pride, and awareness of the norm, is used as a supporting framework to deepen the interpretation of the language attitudes found. Thus, both frameworks are seen as conceptually aligned and have

complementary analytical functions in examining the dynamics of language attitudes in the Lasem Chinatown area.

Based on the results of data analysis, the language attitudes of the community towards Indonesian, Javanese, Mandarin, and Arabic show different characters according to the social function of each language which is classified as a diglossia condition. Ubaidillah and Prasetyoningsih (2023) explain that diglossia is the use of two or more language varieties within a particular social group. These language varieties also have social functions that adapt to the preferences of their speakers. The following description presents findings on language attitudes in stages according to the languages used by the local community.

### The Language Attitudes of Lasem Chinatown Community Towards Indonesian

Indonesian occupies a central position in the linguistic practices of the Lasem Chinatown community. It is frequently used when communicating with other ethnic groups. This dominance indicates that Indonesian is perceived as a shared language that connects one group with another within a single social space. This is evident in the following interview excerpt (WTT-N1).

*“Kalau ngumpul-ngumpul, ya, pakai bahasa Indonesia. Enggak pernah politik-politikan. Enggak ada urusan itu. Di sini ada pertemuan setiap bulan, ketemu di tempat yang bergantian didampingi Kapolres dan pejabat. Jadi, enggak pernah ada demo-demo. Kalau ada masalah, ya, diselesaikan baik-baik.”*

‘When we get together, we use Indonesian. We never talk about politics. There’s no such thing. We have monthly meetings here, held at alternating locations, accompanied by the police chief and other officials. So, there are never any demonstrations. If there are problems, they're resolved amicably.’

A deeper look reveals that the speaker's cognitive dimension perceives Indonesian as a neutral language that does not favor any ethnic identity, including specific political interests. On the affective

dimension, the utterance demonstrates widespread acceptance of Indonesian. The speaker uses Indonesian casually without appearing stiff. This indicates that Indonesian has become a shared everyday language. Meanwhile, the behavioral tendency to use Indonesian when interacting with other ethnicities also demonstrates a stable and consistent conative aspect. This condition indicates a strong normative awareness. The community understands that Indonesian is a unifying language used in interethnic interactions. At the same time, loyalty and pride in Indonesian as a shared language of communication are also evident, maintained in daily life. Based on these indicators, the Lasem Chinatown community demonstrates a positive attitude toward Indonesian, as evident in the speakers' perceptions, feelings, and behavior.

The strengthening of positive attitudes towards the Indonesian language is also evident in the use of Indonesian name identities in the lives of the Chinese community in Lasem Chinatown. This is reflected in the following interview excerpt (WTT-N1).

*"Nama Tionghoa saya itu 'Marga I'. Tapi, enggak banyak yang tahu. Orang-orang tahunya, ya, saya Semar gitu aja. Zaman Soeharto dulu kan banyak yang disuruh pakai nama Indonesia. Jadi, saya pilih Semar."*

'My Chinese name is 'Marga I'. But not many people know that. People just know me as Semar. During the Soeharto era, many people were told to use Indonesian names. So, I chose Semar.'

Cognitively, the speaker understands the historical background of the use of Indonesian names among Chinese communities, which is related to past political policies. There is no apparent rejection of the identity of Indonesian names in the utterance. Indonesian names are accepted as part of the speaker's social identity. This also indicates the speaker's behavioral tendency to maintain their Indonesian names in public interactions. This phenomenon is related to loyalty and pride in

language, reflected in the continued use of Indonesian identity in everyday social practices. Indonesian exists as a shared identity that indicates social acceptance of Chinese communities in the multi-ethnic environment of Lasem. Furthermore, awareness of norms is also reflected in the use of names that are in accordance with social policies or norms at that time. This finding aligns with Sopiah (2017), who stated that the new order's assimilation policy encouraged the use of Indonesian identities, including name changes, among Chinese communities. This policy aimed to establish a unified national identity solidarity and reduce the expression of ethnic identity in the public sphere. In the current era, the use of Indonesian names is no longer interpreted as political pressure, but has become a social identity that lives in everyday interactions.

In the economic sphere, Indonesian is often used in buying and selling interactions in supermarkets or modern markets. Cognitively, Indonesian is perceived as the primary language that can be used with anyone. This is reflected in the interview excerpt (WTT-N2).

Pn: *Kak, berapa?*

'How much is this, Bro?'

N2: *4.500, ini silakan.*

'4.500, here you go.'

Pn: *Bisa pakai kartu?*

'Can I use a card?'

N2: *Bisa, Kak, sebentar.*

'Yes, Sis, just a moment.'

Pn: *Oke.*

'Okay.'

N2: *Ini, ya, Kak, terima kasih, selamat berbelanja kembali.*

'Here you go, Sis. Thank you and come back soon.'

This utterance is associated with politeness and professionalism between sellers and buyers, without diminishing friendliness. The use of the greeting 'sis' and the expressions 'thank you' and 'come back soon' also demonstrate a positive attitude (affective) and an effort to maintain a smooth interaction (conative). This condition embodies loyalty to language and pride in

using it. Furthermore, this utterance reflects an awareness of language norms, as seen in the use of polite language and adherence to communication norms in public spaces.

**The Language Attitude of Lasem Chinatown Community towards Javanese Kauman Islamic Boarding School** stands in the heart of Lasem's Chinatown, a socially dominated area of the Chinese community. Despite this, Javanese is the primary language used in internal communication within the boarding school. The *Krama* (Javanese: formal register) style is consistently used because it is understood to emphasize the hierarchy of politeness and social relations within the boarding school tradition. In daily interactions, students are accustomed to using polite and respectful language, such as the polite expression “*nggih*” (Javanese: yes). This use reflects the internalization of the values of respect for teachers and humility, which are characteristic of boarding school culture (Rohmah et al., 2026). This linguistic practice reinforces the position of Javanese *krama* as the most appropriate variety for everyday interactions at the Kauman Lasem Islamic Boarding School. This is evident in the following interview excerpt (WTT-N3).

Pn: *Teng mriki niku, Mbak, ngajine kitab-kitab Nahwu Salafiyah?*

‘Here, Ma'am, do you study *Salafiyah Nahwu* books?’

N3: *Nggih, sonten kaleh dalu. Kan nak enjing niku sekolah formal.*

‘Yes, during the day and evening. In the morning, there's formal school.’

Pn: *Mboten wonten diniyahe?*

‘Isn't there Islamic school?’

N3: *Diniyahe niku sonten wau.*

‘Islamic school this afternoon.’

Pn: *Nggih, diwajibake semua?*

‘Yes, it's mandatory for everyone?’

N3: *Semua wajib.*

‘Everyone is mandatory.’

Pn: *Bakda sekolah formal, nggih?*

‘After formal school, right?’

N3: *Setengah tigonan, ben wonten waktu istirahat, kan jam setunggal mpun wangsul lare-lare, dados jam*

*setunggal ngantos setengah tigo nembe mulai maca nulis, mengke dalu nggih wonten maos kitab-kitab.*

‘At 3:30 p.m., so there's a break. The children go home at 1:00, so they start reading and writing at 1:30. In the evening, they also read Islamic books.’

From a cognitive perspective, speakers understand the practical use of Javanese. From an affective perspective, fluent use of the *krama* variety indicates a comfort level with Javanese. Meanwhile, from a conative perspective, the continued use of the language is evident. This situation reflects an awareness of language norms expressed through the speakers language choices within the context of Islamic boarding school culture. This finding is in line with Sholihah et al (2024) which shows that a positive attitude towards Javanese is also reflected through the use of varieties that are in accordance with social norms while also showing loyalty and pride in the language which is reflected in the continuity of its use.

The practice of using Javanese as the language of internal communication at Islamic boarding schools is also evident in the teaching of Islamic texts. This is evident in the following interview excerpt (WTT-N4).

Pn: *Kalau misal ada ngaos kitab, kemudian apa ngaji kaleh Gus Zaim misale, terus pembelajaran niku ngangge bahasa Arab nopo mboten, Mbak? Apa pakai bahasa Jawa kaleh bahasa Indonesia sarasan?*

‘If there's a Quran study group or recitation with Gus Zaim, is the lesson in Arabic, Miss? Is it only Javanese and Indonesian?’

N4: *Bahasa Indonesia kaleh krama inggil. ‘Indonesian and krama inggil (Javanese formal).’*

Pn: *Kalau bahasa Arab itu kitab teng Quran mawon, berarti mboten dipakai sehari-hari, maksudnya wonten mata pelajaran bahasa Arab? ‘If Arabic is only used in the Quran, does that mean it's not used in*

everyday? Does that mean there's an Arabic language course?'

N4: *Kalau mata pelajaran masuknya di sekolah, ya, Mbak.*

'Arabic is a subject at school.'

Pn: *Untuk keterangan dari kitab itu memakai bahasa Arab atau bahasa Jawa?*

'For the explanations of the book, is it in Arabic or Javanese?'

N4: *Pakai bahasa Jawa pegon.*

'They use *pegon* Javanese.'

Pn: *Kalau di sekolahnya, Mbak?*

'What about at school, Miss?'

N4: *Kalau di sekolah nggih sami pakai Arab Jawa pegon, alhamdulillah di sini semua sudah diselaraskan pakai Arab pegon. Jadi, enggak bisa kayak pondok-pondok di daerah Jabar yang maknanya pakai bahasa Indonesia. Kalau di sini bahasa Arab maknanya pakai krama inggil.*

'At school, they use Arabic *pegon* Javanese. Thankfully, here everything has been harmonized with *pegon* Arabic. So, it's not like the Islamic boarding schools in West Java where the meanings are in Indonesian. In here, the meaning for Arabic is *krama inggil* (in Javanese formal).'

Based on the above speech, the *krama inggil* style is used in the explanation and interpretation of the books at the Kauman Islamic Boarding School. Arabic remains the source of the text, but the understanding of the content is conveyed through Javanese. In the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, the speakers understand and believe that Javanese is the most appropriate and polite language for explaining the teachings of the Islamic boarding school, and its consistent use indicates its function as the main language in pedagogical communication between *kiai* (senior teachers) and *santri* (students). This demonstrates a positive attitude towards Javanese, manifested in loyalty and pride in using it. And awareness of language norms is reflected in the standardized use of Javanese

*pegon* in learning the books. This indicates the existence of linguistic rules that are agreed upon and followed within the Islamic boarding school environment. Furthermore, the speech data also strengthens the finding that Javanese holds the second highest position after Indonesian within the Kauman Lasem Islamic boarding school.

### **The Language Attitude of Lasem Chinatown Community towards Mandarin**

The ethnic and religious diversity in Lasem's Chinatown area creates distinct language functions and positions. Indonesian and Javanese are used as communicative languages, while Mandarin is present in limited functions related to religious practices and cultural symbols. Mandarin terms are often used in activities related to temple events. For example, in the selection of the altar leader (*Locu*) at the Cu An Kiong Temple, as seen in a video on the Klenteng Lasem YouTube account. At the opening of the *Locu* election, the administrator delivered the following speech (DD-1).

"Selamat datang dan terima kasih atas kehadiran Bapak-Bapak dan Ibu-Ibu di Cu An Kiong, Klenteng Dasun, dalam rangka mengikuti acara **Kwak Wi Locu** tahun 2572–2573 atau 2021–2022. Pertama-tama, kami ucapkan, karena saat ini masih dalam suasana **Sincia, Sin Cun Kiong Hie, Ban Hokben Giok Ban Sun** kepada Bapak-Bapak dan Ibu-Ibu semuanya. Kami di sini selaku pengurus mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Bapak-bapak dan Ibu-Ibu semuanya atas kehadirannya dan waktu yang ditempatkannya. Berikut, kami bacakan calon *Locu* tahun 2572–2573 atau 2021–2022. Yang pertama Tjoa Tji Ang Hong, kedua Ir. Rudy Hartono, ketiga Tjoo Boen Hong, keempat The Thiam Bing dan kelima Tjioe Kiem Liong. Berikutnya calon **Tohwee** tahun 2572–2573 atau 2021–2022 Bapak Liem Tjong Bing, Slamet Firman Setiawan, Tjhie Djwie Tok, Tio Gwan Tjwan, Edy Mulyono, Tjoa Tjiwan Hoo. Demikian calon *Locu* dan *Tohwee*, kita langsung aja memasuki acara yang kita nantikan yaitu pemilihan *Locu* pertama."

‘Welcome and thank you for your presence at Cu An Kiong, Dasun Temple, in order to attend the *Kwak Wi Locu* event for 2572–2573 or 2021–2022. First of all, we would like to say, because we are currently still in the atmosphere of *Sincia, Sin Cun Kiong Hie, Ban Hokben Giok Ban Sun* to all of you. We here as the management would like to thank all of you for your presence and your time. We will we read out the candidates for *Locu* for 2572–2573 or 2021–2022. The first is Tjoa Tji Ang Hong, second is Ir. Rudy Hartono, third is Tjoo Boen Hong, fourth is The Thiam Bing and fifth is Tjioe Kiem Liong. Next is the candidate for *Tohwee* for 2572–2573 or 2021–2022, Mr. Liem Tiong Bing, Slamet Firman Setiawan, Tjhie Djwie Tok, Tio Gwan Tjwan, Edy Mulyono, and Tjoa Tjiwan Hoo. So, those are the *Locu* and *Tohwee* candidates. Let’s get straight to the event we’ve been waiting for: the first *Locu* election.’

Mandarin or Hokkien terms such as *Sincia* and *Sin Cun Kiong Hie* emerged amidst the dominance of Indonesian in ritual speeches which also referred to the traditional position of *Locu* (a term for someone who devotes himself to caring for the altar of the gods in a temple for one year).

The existence of these terms indicates that Mandarin still holds cultural and religious value in the religious practices of the Lasem Chinese community. Mandarin is no longer used in daily communication; it exists only for religious purposes or as a cultural symbol. Mandarin is maintained through ritual terms in temples, understood as a legacy of ancestral traditions, although not all members of the group are able to read and understand it. This is evident in the following interview with the caretaker of the Gie Yong Bio temple (WTT-N5).

Pn: *Kalau ini kan, kalau dilihat, tulisan Mandarinnya banyak banget, ya, itu tuh untuk hiasan?*

‘If you look at this, there’s a lot of Mandarin writing, right? Is that for decoration?’

N5: *Untuk ibadah.*  
‘For worship.’

Pn: *Jadi, pakai bahasa Mandarin atau gimana, Bu?*

‘So, do you use Mandarin or what, Ma'am?’

N5: *Ya, ini kan tulisannya susah. Kalau yang bisa baca, ya, ada. Biasanya orang Semarang itu bisa. Itu semua pakai Mandarin.*

‘Yes, this writing is difficult. Some people still can read it, usually Semarang people. All writing use Mandarin.’

Pn: *Kalau ibadah juga mereka pakai ini, Bu? Mandarin juga atau bagaimana?*

‘They also use this for worship, Ma'am? Mandarin or else?’

N5: *Iya, pakai Mandarin juga.*

‘Yes, they use Mandarin too.’

On the other hand, communication in Lasem’s Chinatown area is entirely in Indonesian or Javanese, while Mandarin is no longer used in daily life. This is evident in the following statement from a Chinese source (WTT-N1).

Pn: *Kalau Mandarin, biasanya dipakai untuk ibadah atau kegiatan keagamaan enggak, Pak?*

‘Is Mandarin usually used for worship or religious activities, Sir?’

N1: *Enggak. Sama sekali, enggak ada. Kalau ngobrol di warung pakai bahasa Indonesia atau Jawa. Mandarin enggak ada sama sekali, satu pun enggak ada.*

‘No. Absolutely not. When we chat at food stalls, we use Indonesian or Javanese. There’s no Mandarin at all.’

Pn: *Kalau tulisan Mandarin, Pak, masih ada enggak di rumah-rumah Tionghoa?*

‘Are there still any Mandarin scripts in Chinese homes, Sir?’

N1: *Masih ada, tapi, ya, enggak tahu artinya. Wong tinggalannya orang kuno-kuno itu. Saya sendiri lahir tahun 1953, jadi RT 71 sampai sekarang. Sudah lama tinggal di sini.*  
‘Yes, but they don’t know the meaning. They’re left behind by those ancient people. I was born in

1953, so I live in RT 71. I've lived here for a long time.'

Pn: *Berarti orang tua juga asli sini?*

'So, your parents are also from here?'

N1: *Iya. Mama saya asli sini. Rumahnya di Bulu, Dungmundu. Mama saya asli situ.*

'Yes. My mother is from here. Her house is in Bulu, Dungmundu. My mother is from there.'

Pn: *Kalau dilihat kan ini, Pak, banyak orang Cina, siapa tau masih banyak yang menggunakan Mandarin?*

'If you look at this, Sir, there are a lot of Chinese people. Who might, still speak Mandarin?'

N1: *Ndak ada, di sini.*

'No, there aren't any here.'

Pn: *Misal di Semarang itu banyak anak Tionghoa yang masih belajar Mandarin. Di sini ada enggak, Pak?*

'For example, in Semarang, there are many Chinese children still learning Mandarin. Are there any here, Sir?'

N1: *Belum ada. Kalau di kota banyak sekolah Mandarin. Dulu waktu saya kecil, sebelum tahun 60-an, memang ada guru Mandarin. Tapi, sekarang enggak ada sama sekali.*

'Not yet. There are many Mandarin schools in the city. When I was little, before the 1960s, there were Mandarin teachers. But now, there aren't any at all.'

Pn: *Berarti sudah berbaur dengan bahasa Jawa, ya, Pak?*

'So, it's become integrated with Javanese, Sir?'

N1: *Iya, di sini sudah berbaur. Anak-anak muda kebanyakan juga pergi ke luar kota. Orang tua, ya, tinggal di sini, buat masa tua aja.*

'Yes, it's integrated here. Most young people also go out of town. The elderly, well, stay here, just for their old age.'

Based on the interviews, it is clear that Mandarin is no longer used in daily communication. The Chinese community in

Lasem Chinatown has completely switched to Javanese or Indonesian for social interaction. Mandarin remains only in ancient scripts, the meaning of which is incomprehensible to the current generation. The last Mandarin lessons took place before the 1960s, and since then, there has been no further transmission of the language to the next generation. The decline of Mandarin in Lasem Chinatown is due to the strong assimilation process with Javanese and Indonesian, as well as the absence of young speakers due to migration out of the region. As a result, intergenerational transmission has been interrupted, and Mandarin survives only as a cultural symbol on ancient artifacts.

Although Mandarin is no longer spoken in Lasem's Chinatown area, Mandarin characters can still be found on old buildings, testifying to the language's past existence. These characters are typically found on the doors of old Chinese homes, particularly in the form of prayers affixed or carved on the facades.



Figure 1. Old Chinese Script Carvings in an Old Chinese House (G-1)

The image features Chinese characters on the door leaf. The text on the left reads *fú lù*, while the text on the right reads *chāng róng*. Overall, the characters convey the hope for good fortune and prosperity.



Figure 2. Mandarin Characters Above the Door of an Old Chinese House (G-2)

The sign above the door reads *cí xīn shàn dé*, which means ‘a heart full of love and noble virtue’. This expression reflects moral teachings that emphasize compassion and virtue as a guide to life, so that its placement above the door contains the hope that the residents of the house will always do good and bring goodness to the environment.

Apart from containing prayers, Chinese houses in Lasem Chinatown also contain the identity of the owners family.



Figure 3. Identity of Chinese Homeowners in Mandarin (G-3)

The image bears the inscription *Oei Eng Tjo*, meaning ‘Oei family ancestral home’. This inscription serves as a marker of the homeowners family identity and their connection to the ancestral line. Thus, the Mandarin script on old buildings in Lasem's Chinatown area symbolizes culturally inherited moral values and kinship identity.

Overall, the dynamics of Mandarin Chinese attitudes in Lasem Chinatown demonstrate a symbolic pattern. Within the cognitive, affective, and conative frameworks, the community still understands that Mandarin Chinese script embodies moral values and family identity and is viewed as an important part of ancestral traditions. However, the Chinese community in the region lacks behavioral incentives to use or

pass it on. This condition reflects low language loyalty, limited pride in the language, which is merely symbolic, and a weakening awareness of norms regarding Mandarin.

These findings indicate that Mandarin has shifted from a language of communication to a symbol of Chinese identity in the neighborhood. In sociolinguistic studies, this situation is categorized as language shift. According to Fishman in Alyami (2023), language shift occurs due to the absence of active use and intergenerational inheritance, resulting in its function narrowing or being limited to certain domains. This condition differs from language maintenance, which is characterized by the continued active use of the language and has not yet reached the stage of language death because Mandarin remains present as a cultural symbol. Thus, these findings indicate that Mandarin in Lasem Chinatown is in a phase of language shift leading to the loss of its communicative function in the lives of Chinese communities.

### **The Language Attitude of Lasem Chinatown Community Towards Arabic**

Historically, the Lasem people recognized the presence of Arab descendants as part of a multi-ethnic dynamic. However, this group has long since blended with the local population through intermarriage, so that they no longer appear as a separate ethnic community (Atabik, 2016; Hadi, 2020; Wajdi & Muslihin, 2020). In this context, the use of Arabic in the Kauman Islamic boarding school environment does not represent Arab ethnic identity, but rather reflects the practice of Arabic language use within the pesantren. This use is evident in the limited Arabic language learning practices within the religious education sector. This can be seen in the following interview excerpt (WTT-N4).

Pn: *Kalau mata pelajaran bahasa Arab, Mbak?*

‘What about Arabic, Miss?’

N4: *Kalau mata pelajaran bahasa Arab di sini lebih menekankan ke muhaddasah, kayak dialog pakai*

*bahasa Arab.*

‘Arabic emphasizes *muhaddasah*, like dialogue in Arabic.’

Pn: *Berarti dibiasakan, ya, Mbak? Maksudnya waktu mata pelajaran bahasa Arab?*

‘So you get used to it, right? You mean during Arabic class?’

N4: *Cuma waktu mata pelajaran aja sih, Mbak, kalau di sini.*

‘Only during class, Miss.’

The quote demonstrates that Arabic is used closely within the context of *muhaddasah* (conversation or dialogue) learning to improve students’ practical communication skills. Furthermore, this use of Arabic is evident in routine religious study activities at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque. Arabic is used during the opening of the regular religious study session with Gus Din, which begins with a prayer recitation, as seen in the Lawang Songo Lasem YouTube video (DD-2).

*“Alhamdulillah rabbil alamin. Wasalatu wassalamu ala sayyidil mursalin wa ala alihi wa ashabihi ajmain. Amma ba'd. Qalal musonifu rahimahullahu taala wa nafaana bihi wabumihi wa amadana biasorhi fidaro amin. Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.”*

‘All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all worlds. May blessings and peace be upon the Messengers, and upon his family and all his companions. To proceed: the author may Allah Have Mercy upon him said, and may we and you benefit from his knowledge and may He support us with its explanation in this abode. In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.’

The use of Arabic in this context demonstrates a function related to the religious realm. Cognitively and affectively, the community understands Arabic as a language of prayer, whose status must be respected in worship. However, conatively, its use is maintained only in Arabic language learning practices and routine religious studies. This reflects a clear awareness of norms regarding the use of Arabic in certain contexts and a form of religious pride in the language. Nevertheless, loyalty to Arabic

tends to be limited to communication practices.

Apart from being used in learning and religious studies, the presence of Arabic is also visible in the visual landscape of Islamic boarding schools.



Figure 4. Kauman Islamic Boarding School Nameplate (G-4)

The photo shows the signboard of the Kauman Lasem Islamic Boarding School, which features Arabic script at the top. The Arabic script is placed as the topmost and dominant element, while the name of the boarding school in Latin letters is located below it. This arrangement demonstrates that Arabic script has primary symbolic value as a marker of Islamic identity. From a linguistic attitude perspective, this reflects the cognitive aspect of the boarding school community in viewing Arabic as the language of religious knowledge. Affectively, the use of Arabic script in the institution’s visual identity demonstrates respect and pride for the Arabic language, which is a core part of the boarding school tradition. From a conative perspective, the placement of Arabic on public signage demonstrates a clear tendency to maintain and display the language in the socio-religious space. This practice also demonstrates loyalty to Arabic as it serves as the institution’s official identity. This pride is manifested in the main facade of the boarding school, and awareness of norms is evident in the Arabic language used as a distinctive marker of Islamic educational institutions. Thus, the Arabic-scripted signboard serves as a marker that emphasizes the Kauman Lasem Islamic Boarding School as a space of education and boarding school tradition.

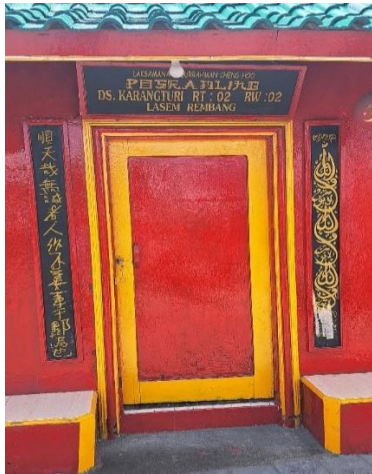


Figure 5. Kauman Islamic Boarding School Patrol Post with Its Distinctive Script (G-5)

In contrast to the formal Islamic boarding school sign, the image depicts a Chinese-style Islamic guard post with a theme of Admiral Cheng Hoo, built by Gus Zaim, the founder of the Islamic boarding school. While the building is painted red, typical of Chinese ornamentation, it features vertical Arabic calligraphy on the sides of the door, along with the name of the Muslim figure Cheng Hoo written above. The presence of this Arabic script symbolizes interfaith harmony in the area. The calligraphy, placed to the right and left of the door, serves as symbolic protection and the sanctity of the space.

Cognitively, the community understands Arabic script as a legitimate symbol of Islam and holds religious significance, even though the building is Chinese-style. Affectively, the use of calligraphy on the guard posts reflects respect for Islamic history in Lasem, particularly the figure of Cheng Hoo, who symbolizes the intersection of Islam and China. From a conative perspective, the selection and maintenance of Arabic script on buildings demonstrates the community's continued tendency to display Islamic identity through the Arabic language. This practice demonstrates loyalty to Arabic as a symbol of Islam. Pride also emerges from the use of Arabic calligraphy as a primary ornament. Meanwhile, awareness of linguistic norms is reflected in the community's understanding

of the context in which Arabic is used as a symbol of religiosity, appropriately placed within specific social spaces.

Comparatively, the two images demonstrate the spectrum of Arabic language functions at the Kauman Islamic Boarding School in Lasem. On the boarding school's sign, Arabic serves as the identity of the educational institution, actively transmitting Arabic through learning. Meanwhile, in the Cheng Hoo guard post building, Arabic represents the cultural-religious identity and the long history of Chinese-Muslim interaction in Lasem. Both images place Arabic in strategic positions, such as above and beside the door. This signifies the high symbolic importance of Arabic within the community space.

The analysis of the two images shows that Arabic in Kauman Lasem serves as a distinctive Islamic boarding school identity. In addition to its presence in the learning spaces, Arabic also lives in the visual landscape of the Islamic boarding school. This can broaden the image of the Kauman Lasem area as a student environment rooted in Islamic tradition. The preservation of Arabic script in these various spaces reflects the community's positive attitude toward Arabic, both in terms of knowledge, appreciation, and a tendency to preserve it. Thus, Arabic in the Kauman Lasem Islamic Boarding School lives as a religious symbol and a distinctive cultural identity of the Islamic boarding school.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that each language in Lasem's Chinatown area has a social function that is classified as diglossia. This is closely related to the hierarchy of upper-middle (High) and lower social classes (Low). According to Hanafi (2017), the H variety is used in formal situations, while the L variety is used in informal and non-formal situations. In this case, Indonesian occupies the H hierarchy because of its function as the national language and its use for inter-ethnic communication needs. Arabic also occupies the H position in the formal and sacred religious realm. Meanwhile, Javanese

functions as the L variety in more informal daily interactions. In certain contexts, such as interpreting scriptures, Javanese is indeed used in formal situations (education), but only as an explanatory language to help understand Arabic texts that are the main source of learning. Therefore, its position remains as a low variety. Unlike the previous three languages, Mandarin cannot be categorized as an H or L variety within the diglossia framework because it is no longer used in communication practices or domains of use. Furthermore, findings on the dynamics of language attitudes reveal a layered pattern, with Indonesian and Javanese viewed positively, while Mandarin has undergone language shift and only maintained its symbolic significance. Conversely, Arabic exhibits positive attitudes and retention in the religious sphere.

## CONCLUSION

The dynamics of language attitudes in Lasem's Chinatown area demonstrate a clear diglossia based on the social domains and functions of each language. Indonesian holds the highest position as the language of interethnic communication, followed by Javanese as the language of internal communication within communities and Islamic boarding schools, which foster social closeness and high politeness. Public attitudes toward Indonesian and Javanese are generally positive, as they are understood, accepted, and consistently used in daily interactions.

Conversely, Mandarin in Lasem's Chinatown demonstrates a language shift, as it is no longer used in Chinese social interactions and remains only for symbolic purposes in Chinese temples and relics of old buildings. Unlike Mandarin, Arabic at the Kauman Islamic Boarding School exhibits a positive attitude in the religious sphere. This confirms that the use of Arabic in Islamic boarding schools does not represent the presence of Arab ethnicity in Lasem, but rather reflects the continuity of Islamic traditions typical of Islamic boarding schools. However, this study has limitations,

particularly in the discussion of Javanese, which is primarily sourced from the context of Islamic boarding schools, thus not fully representing its use in the broader community. Furthermore, this study is limited to a single research location and utilizes secondary data sources from online media. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of locations and social contexts to obtain a more comprehensive picture. For local communities, the results of this study are expected to provide a reflection on maintaining and managing linguistic diversity as part of their socio-cultural identity.

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