

## **Secrecy, Power, and Solidarity in Prison Code Language: A Phenomenological Analysis of Female Inmates in Tangerang Womens Correctional Facility**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents the findings of a phenomenological inquiry exploring the life experiences of inmates in the Tangerang Women's Correctional Facility in using coded language to maintain secrecy, power, and solidarity. Contrary to the traditional view of prisons as static institutions, this study conceptualizes the prison environment as a networked micro-society where language functions as the primary infrastructure for social cohesion. Utilizing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment and Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, data are collected through in-depth interviews with ten inmates and five correctional officers. The study discovered communication patterns where inmates actively used coded language to survive, thrive, and maintain social cohesion within the correctional facility. The study also identified specific warning systems, such as a coded greeting that function as counter-surveillance tactics to maintain women's autonomy in prison, against internal and external control. Furthermore, power is revealed to be negotiated rather than absolute, mediated through inmate team leaders using numerical codes to disclose the high-level authority. By using this coded language, inmates create a strong sense of community and support, turning the sadness of being locked up into a shared

strength. This study proves that prison coded language is more than just a way to hide secrets. It is how inmates hold onto their dignity, maintain solidarity, and keep peace in a place where they have no power. The study concludes that secrecy, power, and solidarity are deeply intertwined in prison life. Further study should expand this phenomenology and explore other's correctional facilities to compare.

*Keywords:* *Carceral Communication; Collective Resilience; Informal Authority; Interactional Order; Social Cohesion*

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past two decades, prison studies have shifted from viewing prisons solely as repressive institutions to understanding them as complex social spaces in which identities are negotiated, solidarities are formed, and power is reproduced through everyday practices (Crewe, 2009; Drake et al., 2015). Despite this development, communication practices, particularly coded language, remain predominantly framed as linguistic phenomena or elements of criminal subculture. Most existing studies conceptualize prison argot primarily as a tool of concealment, enabling inmates to evade surveillance, conduct illicit exchanges, and signal group membership (Moshe & Einat, 2019; Pereira et al., 2025).

While this perspective highlights the strategic function of language, it tends to overlook its broader social role. In highly controlled environments, communication may also operate as a mechanism through which inmates build relationships, maintain order, and sustain collective life. Studies on prison social organization have shown that interactional practices are central to the formation of informal governance and social cohesion, yet coded language itself is rarely examined as a structured communicative system that underpins these processes. This limitation is further compounded by the dominance of Anglo-American and European scholarship, with relatively limited empirical contributions from Southeast Asia. Existing studies on prison communication and argot are largely based on Western institutional settings, which differ in cultural norms, gender relations, and institutional practices.

The Indonesian context, shaped by collectivist social norms and distinct institutional histories, provides an important site for extending these discussions. Rather than positioning this context merely as empirical novelty, this study engages it as a setting through which existing theories of prison communication can be re-examined and potentially re-specified. At the same time, research on women's prisons has expanded but remains largely focused on trauma, victimization, and gendered penal experiences

(Owen, 1998; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). While these studies highlight important dimensions of incarceration, less attention has been given to communication as a structured social practice within women's prison environments. Prior research suggests that women's prisons often develop pseudo-familial networks, emotional solidarities, and informal governance systems, indicating that communication may play a central role in sustaining these dynamics.

However, the role of coded language in mediating these processes remains underexplored. Importantly, this study does not claim the absence of phenomenological approaches in prison research. Rather, it identifies a more specific gap: the limited application of phenomenological analysis to examine coded communication as a lived and embodied practice that mediates secrecy, power, and solidarity simultaneously. Existing studies tend to analyze these dimensions separately, focusing either on surveillance and control or on social cohesion, without fully examining how they are interconnected through everyday communicative practices.

To address this gap, this study adopts a phenomenological approach to examine coded language practices in Class IIA Tangerang Women's Prison. Theoretically, it integrates the structural analysis of disciplinary power developed by Michel Foucault with the phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which emphasizes lived and embodied experience. Rather than treating these perspectives as contradictory, this study positions them as analytically complementary: Foucauldian analysis explains how institutional surveillance structures the conditions of communication, while phenomenology captures how such conditions are experienced, negotiated, and reproduced in everyday interaction. This multi-level perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of communication as both structured and lived.

By addressing these questions, this study makes several contributions. First, it reconceptualizes coded language as a form of social infrastructure that supports cohesion and relational order, rather than merely a tool of concealment. Second, it provides empirical evidence from an underrepresented Indonesian women's prison context, thereby extending predominantly Western-centered prison communication research. Third, it advances a theoretical integration between structural power analysis and phenomenological approaches, offering a more nuanced framework for understanding communication in constrained social environments. Through this approach, coded language is understood not simply as slang, but as a dynamic communicative system through which inmates negotiate meaning, maintain dignity, and sustain collective life under conditions of constraint.

## 2. Method

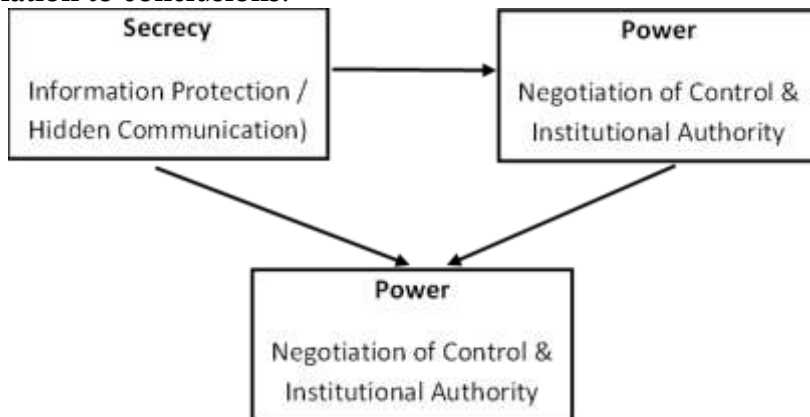
This study employs a qualitative design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of coded communication among incarcerated women at the Tangerang Class IIA Women's Correctional Facility, Indonesia, a site selected for its relevance in capturing gendered prison dynamics within a structured institutional setting. Data were collected between November and December 2025 through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants representing both inmate and institutional perspectives. The inmate group consisted of ten women with varied sentence lengths and social roles, including a senior inmate serving over ten years for a narcotics offense who acts as a *tamping* (block leader), a 56-year-old inmate serving a narcotics-related sentence who functions as a religious mentor ("Mama"), inmates serving medium-term sentences for corruption-related offenses, and several newer inmates with shorter sentences. The institutional group included five correctional officers with varying roles and years of experience, including *pembina* and *keamanan* officers. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Internal Review Board of Universitas Pelita Harapan (Ref: 029/IRB-UPH/III/2026), and all participants were anonymized, with informed consent secured prior to interviews. In total, fifteen participants (N=15) were included in this study.

Data collection was conducted face-to-face within the facility, with researchers emphasizing the academic and confidential nature of the study to establish rapport. Interview questions were designed to explore the use, meaning, and functions of coded language, particularly in relation to secrecy, power negotiation, and solidarity. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using a phenomenological orientation, involving stages of open coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns and meanings. The analysis was guided by the study's conceptual framework, enabling an interpretive understanding of how coded language operates as a lived communicative practice within a constrained and surveilled social environment.

This study proposes a multilevel conceptual framework that positions coded language as a dynamic communicative system operating across interconnected dimensions of secrecy, power, and solidarity within a surveilled prison environment. At the macro level, drawing on Michel Foucault, prison communication is shaped by institutional surveillance and disciplinary control, which constrain visibility and regulate interaction. Within this context, coded language emerges as a tactical response that enables inmates to protect information and carve out limited

spaces of autonomy (secrecy). At the meso level, informed by social cohesion theory, coded communication functions as a mechanism for negotiating power relations and organizing social life through informal norms, trust, and collective identity (power and solidarity). At the micro level, guided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, communication is understood as an embodied and lived experience, where meaning is constructed through everyday interactions and intersubjective relations. Integrating these perspectives, coded language operates through a cyclical process, Secrecy–Power–Solidarity, in which the protection of information enables power negotiation, which in turn fosters solidarity, and this solidarity reinforces the continued use of coded communication. This dynamic cycle sustains social cohesion and collective resilience within a constrained and highly regulated institutional environment.

To clarify the stages of the research process, a detailed research flowchart is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the steps from problem formulation to conclusions.



**Figure 1.** Research Flow Diagram

### 3. Results

The findings of this study are organized around three interrelated analytical dimensions: Secrecy, Power, and Solidarity. These dimensions are not treated as discrete categories but as overlapping communicative practices that together constitute the prison’s social order.

#### 3.1 *Secrecy: Lived Practices of Concealment and Discretion*

Secrecy operates as the initial node within the communicative cycle, emerging through a collective anticipation of surveillance. Rather than manifesting as explicit concealment strategies, secrecy is experienced as an embodied and immediate awareness shared intersubjectively among

inmates. This reflects a phenomenological condition in which communication is pre-reflective, aligning with Merleau-Ponty's notion of lived experience where meaning is constituted prior to conscious articulation.

### *3.1.1 Denial, Normalization, and the Phenomenology of "No Codes"*

#### 3.1.1.1 Performing Transparency

Across interviews, participants consistently denied the existence of coded or secret communication. Statements emphasizing normalcy and safety were repeatedly articulated when discussing potential concealment practices. This denial should not be interpreted merely as deception; rather, it reflects an adaptive response to a surveilled environment in which speech is inherently exposed. Such expressions function as a form of "public transcript," a performative compliance that safeguards both individual and collective interests. The insistence on transparency illustrates an embodied awareness that communication is never neutral but always situated within a field of observation. Consequently, denial becomes a strategic and experiential mode of navigating institutional visibility.

#### 3.1.1.2 Secrecy as Tacit Knowledge

Despite the absence of explicit acknowledgment, secrecy persists through tacit linguistic practices and shared situational understandings. These forms of communication do not rely on formalized codes but instead operate through implicit recognition and contextual cues. This aligns with phenomenological perspectives on pre-reflective knowledge, where individuals "know how" without articulating "what" is known. Institutional actors further confirm that secrecy is not structured as a fixed argot but emerges as situational signaling. Thus, secrecy is better understood not as deliberate concealment, but as communicative anticipation, a collective sensitivity to the institutional gaze.

### *3.1.2 Acoustic Secrecy and Embodied Warning Systems*

#### 3.1.2.1 Sound as Collective Signal

A prominent manifestation of secrecy appears in the form of acoustic signaling. Phrases that ostensibly convey politeness simultaneously function as collective alerts. These utterances operate as dual-layered speech acts: maintaining surface-level compliance while transmitting underlying warnings. From a Foucauldian perspective, this practice reconfigures panoptic surveillance. Rather than internalizing observation in silence, inmates externalize it through sound, effectively rendering surveillance perceptible and shared. This phenomenon may be conceptualized as a form of acoustic counter-surveillance.

#### 3.1.2.2 Embodied Regulation Under Surveillance

Acoustic signals are immediately followed by coordinated bodily adjustments, including the concealment of objects and the regulation of physical appearance. Secrecy, therefore, extends beyond linguistic expression and is enacted through corporeal practices. In this context, the body becomes the primary medium through which meaning is produced and regulated. These repetitive, coordinated actions constitute an embodied grammar of secrecy, shaped by shared vulnerability and continuous exposure to institutional control.

### **3.2 *Power: Negotiated Authority in a Carceral Micro-Society***

Power within the prison context does not operate as a unidirectional imposition but as a negotiated and relational field. Institutional authority and inmate-based regulation intersect, producing a layered structure of control in which power is simultaneously imposed, mediated, and internalized. This configuration reflects a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality, where governance is enacted not only through formal hierarchies but also through delegated and self-regulating practices.

#### **3.2.1 *Institutional Power and Numerical Language***

##### **3.2.1.1 Depersonalizing Authority through Numerical Codes**

Institutional authority is consistently referenced through numerical designations such as 0-1 (Kalapas) and 0-2 (KPLP). This abstraction transforms authority from a personal attribute into a positional function, effectively depersonalizing power and reinforcing its structural character. The use of numerical codes reflects a disciplinary logic in which authority is detached from individual identity and embedded within institutional roles. Such linguistic practices not only simplify reference but also reproduce the impersonal nature of bureaucratic control. In this sense, power becomes less about who exercises it and more about the position from which it is enacted.

#### **3.2.2 *Power as Relational Regency***

##### **3.2.2.1 The Tamping as Mediator of Control**

Power is not confined to vertical relations between officers and inmates but is also exercised horizontally through inmate leadership structures. The *tamping*, as block-level inmate leaders, play a central role in regulating daily conduct, enforcing rules, and maintaining order. This delegated authority positions the tamping as mediators between institutional expectations and communal life. Their role exemplifies a form of distributed governance, where disciplinary practices are enacted internally rather than imposed externally. Institutional actors themselves acknowledge this reliance, indicating that control is often preemptively maintained through inmate-led regulation.

##### **3.2.2.2 Power as Relational Legitimacy**

Importantly, the authority exercised by tamping is framed not as coercive domination but as a form of collective care. Disciplinary actions are justified through their contribution to order, safety, and mutual well-being. This reframing shifts the meaning of power from repression to responsibility. Such dynamics align with the concept of “soft power,” where compliance is achieved through relational legitimacy rather than overt force. Authority is sustained because it is perceived as necessary and beneficial, not merely because it is imposed. Consequently, power within this micro-society operates through a balance of control, trust, and shared interest.

### **3.3 *Solidarity: Communication as Social Glue***

Solidarity is the outcome and stabilizer of this process. Shared vocabulary, redistribution of goods, and emotional labor (e.g., *Mama* figures) convert secrecy and power negotiation into belonging and trust. Communication thus becomes the primary infrastructure through which inmates transform incarceration from isolation into community.

#### **3.3.1 *Lexical Solidarity and Shared World-Making***

##### **3.3.1.1 *Everyday Terms as Collective Identity***

A central dimension of solidarity is constituted through the emergence of a shared lexical system that organizes everyday experience. Terms such as *cadong* (food rations), *keong* (locked in cell), *korpre* (helper exempt from chores), and *mencok* (weed-pulling punishment) function as collectively recognized linguistic resources through which inmates interpret their environment. These terms do not merely describe reality; they actively produce it. Through this shared vocabulary, inmates co-construct a meaningful social world that renders confinement intelligible and emotionally manageable. The metaphorical quality embedded in expressions such as *keong* illustrates how language encodes embodied experience, transforming abstract conditions of restriction into shared, relatable imagery. In this sense, lexical practices serve as markers of collective identity, delineating boundaries of belonging while simultaneously mitigating alienation. Participation in this linguistic system signifies inclusion within the inmate community, reinforcing solidarity through shared meaning-making processes

#### **3.3.2 *Emotional and Economic Solidarity***

##### **3.3.2.1 *Rituals of Care and Redistribution***

Solidarity is further materialized through routine practices of care and resource sharing. The circulation of everyday necessities, such as food, hygiene products, and financial contributions, constitutes an informal system of redistribution that sustains communal life. These practices are structured and recurrent, reflecting a ritualized form of mutual aid.

Contributions during moments of bereavement, including coordinated financial support through digital platforms, demonstrate how solidarity adapts to contemporary, networked conditions. Micro-transactions, in this context, are not merely economic exchanges but symbolic acts that reinforce collective bonds and shared responsibility.

### 3.3.2.2 Pseudo-Familial Roles and Emotional Labor

Emotional solidarity is sustained through the emergence of pseudo-familial roles within the inmate community. Certain individuals assume caregiving positions, providing guidance, emotional support, and conflict mediation. This emotional labor compensates for the absence of familial structures and reconfigures the prison as a relational community. Such dynamics align with existing scholarship on women's prisons, where care-based relationships function as key mechanisms of resilience and social cohesion. Here, solidarity is not only institutional or structural but deeply affective, rooted in sustained interpersonal engagement.

### 3.4 The Phenomenology of Coded Communication: Beyond Criminality

The linguistic landscape of the correctional facility reveals a fundamental tension between explicit denial and implicit practice. Inmates consistently reject the notion that their communication involves "codes," emphasizing instead the normality, safety, and transparency of their interactions. This denial reflects not merely a strategic response to surveillance, but also a rejection of the stigma associated with criminal conspiracies, where coded language is typically linked to illicit intent. However, closer analysis reveals the presence of a distinctive communicative system that structures daily life. Rather than formalized or secretive codes, this system operates through tacit, context-dependent expressions embedded in everyday interaction. Inmates do not perceive this linguistic repertoire as *kode kriminal*, but as an ordinary extension of their lived reality.

From a phenomenological perspective, this distinction is crucial. Communication emerges not as a deliberate construction but as an embodied practice rooted in shared experience. In line with Merleau-Ponty's framework, meaning is generated pre-reflectively; individuals speak from within their world rather than about it. As a result, the boundary between "language" and "code" becomes blurred. This finding challenges conventional assumptions that equate coded communication in prisons with deviance or concealment. Instead, the communicative system observed here functions as a mechanism for sense-making, dignity preservation, and social cohesion. It enables inmates to navigate

institutional constraints while maintaining a shared world that is intelligible, livable, and collectively sustained.

### 3.5 The Lexicon of Confinement: *Cadong*, *Keong*, and *Korpre*

Contrary to the assumption that prison codes exist primarily for illicit transactions, the data suggest that the coded language at Tangerang serves largely administrative, practical, and existential functions. Incarcerated women have innovated a set of terms to navigate their spatial and temporal reality – a shared lexicon that names everyday roles, routines, and sanctions in prison. These terms are not used to conceal nefarious activity, but to give meaning to the regimented life of the facility. Table 1 presents selected examples of this argot, as recounted by participants:

**Table 1:** Selected prison code terms used at Tangerang, based on interview data (2025)

Term (Original)	Literal Meaning	Usage in Prison Context
<i>Cadong</i>	( <i>n.</i> ) food ration, mess hall (origin uncertain)	Daily meal portions or the dining area of the prison. Inmates universally use <i>Cadong</i> to refer to their scheduled food rations or the place where meals are distributed.
<i>Keong</i>	( <i>n.</i> ) snail	Status of being locked down in one’s cell. Implies a state of immobilization – as a snail retreats into its shell.
<i>Korpre</i>	( <i>adj./n.</i> ) possibly from <i>korve</i> (Dutch/Indonesian for chore)	An inmate helper is exempt from menial duty. <i>Korpre</i> refers to prisoners who assist staff or perform extra chores and in exchange are freed from the regular cleaning <i>piket</i> rotations. It denotes a semi-privileged role in the prison’s labor structure.
<i>Mencok</i>	( <i>v.</i> ) (slang, origin unclear)	To pull weeds as a form of discipline. Used as an informal punishment enforced by senior inmates (tamping).
<b>0-1, 0-2</b>	( <i>code</i> ) zero-one, zero-two	Numeric codes for ranking officers. <i>0-1</i> designates the Prison Head ( <i>Kalapas</i> ), and <i>0-2</i> the Head

Term (Original)	Literal Meaning	Usage in Prison Context
<i>Ada Ibunya</i>	(phrase) Ma'am is here	of Security ( <i>KPLP</i> ). These codes are used among inmates to refer to authorities. A coded warning call announcing that a guard or officer is approaching. Often delivered as a polite greeting (e.g., <i>Siang, Bu!</i> – Good afternoon, Ma'am) loud enough for all to hear. Signals others immediately manage themselves and hide any prohibited items.

*Source: Author's data analysis based on interview transcripts (November–December 2025).*

This shared vocabulary was consistently observed across interviews, revealing a patterned distinction between ordinary and institutionalized meanings. As one inmate noted, everyday objects retain their conventional labels, while roles, conditions, and routines are expressed through specialized terms. This selective differentiation is not incidental. Retaining standard labels for objects mirrors official discourse and minimizes suspicion, whereas the re-signification of roles and experiences enables inmates to encode their lived realities without overtly deviating from normative language. Terms such as *keong* (being locked inside the cell) and *korpre* (inmates exempt from duties due to assigned roles) exemplify how linguistic practices condense institutional conditions into shared symbolic forms. These expressions are not arbitrary slang but collectively stabilized references that allow inmates to navigate and communicate their position within the prison structure.

Crucially, much of this vocabulary maps directly onto the regimented rhythms of carceral life. The term *cadong* universally refers to food distribution, encapsulating the repetitive and regulated nature of institutional feeding routines. Similarly, *mencok* encodes a disciplinary practice that is both physical and normative. These terms do not merely label activities; they embed the temporal and bodily structures of prison life into language itself. From a phenomenological perspective, such linguistic practices can be understood as forms of embodied meaning. Language here does not stand apart from experience but emerges through it. In line with Merleau-Ponty's framework, speech becomes a mode of inhabiting the world, where meaning is constituted through lived engagement rather than

abstract representation. By adopting this lexicon, inmates internalize and reproduce the rhythms, constraints, and power relations of the institution within their communicative practices.

At the same time, this shared vocabulary functions as a boundary-making device. Its meanings are immediately intelligible within the inmate community yet remain partially opaque to outsiders. A term such as *cadong* or *mencok* carries experiential weight that cannot be fully grasped without direct participation in the routines it signifies. In this way, the lexicon of confinement transforms an otherwise alienating environment into a collectively navigable reality, providing inmates with symbolic resources to sustain normalcy, coherence, and social belonging under conditions of constraint.

### **3.6 Acoustic Panopticism: The Code of Warning**

Despite explicit denials of clandestine codes, inmates openly acknowledge the presence of a structured auditory warning system designed to manage institutional surveillance. Rather than concealing communication, this system operates through strategic audibility. In doing so, inmates reconfigure the asymmetry of the panoptic gaze by rendering authority perceptible through sound. From a Foucauldian perspective, the classical panopticon functions through uncertainty, where surveillance is effective precisely because it is invisible and unverifiable. In contrast, the practices observed here invert this logic. The approach of authority figures is immediately announced through loud, performative utterances such as “*Siang, Bu!*” or “*Ada Ibunya!*”. While these expressions appear as routine gestures of politeness, they simultaneously function as collective alerts.

This dual-layered communication constitutes what may be understood as *acoustic counter-surveillance*. The greeting operates as a double-voiced act: overtly deferential, yet covertly directive. It signals inmates to regulate their bodies and environment, adjusting clothing, concealing prohibited items, and restoring visible order, before direct observation occurs. Importantly, this signaling is neither hidden nor whispered; its effectiveness lies precisely in its public, normalized form. Institutional actors themselves recognize and implicitly accommodate this practice. Officers acknowledge that inmate leaders often initiate these warnings, enabling compliance to occur preemptively without direct intervention. This reflects a broader dynamic in which surveillance is partially redistributed and internalized, aligning with theories of governmentality and delegated control.

At a micro-sociological level, these acoustic practices create a functional “buffer zone” between inmate life and institutional scrutiny. Drawing on Goffman’s distinction between frontstage and backstage, the

warning system enables the temporary preservation of a backstage space in which minor deviations and personal expressions can exist. This space is not permanent but continuously negotiated, emerging in the brief interval between the signal and the arrival of authority. Simultaneously, the collective enactment of these warnings reinforces social cohesion. The act of alerting others, concealing infractions, and coordinating compliance fosters mutual responsibility and trust. In this sense, acoustic signaling operates not only as a tactical response to surveillance but also as a mechanism of solidarity.

Thus, coded communication in this context cannot be reduced to concealment or deviance. Instead, it functions as a relational practice that mediates power, enabling inmates to subtly negotiate the terms of their visibility. Compliance is achieved, but it is temporally and collectively orchestrated, illustrating how control within carceral settings is both imposed and actively managed from within. (Moshe & Einat, 2019; Pereira et al., 2025)

**Table 2.** Empirical Theme Matrix: Secrecy, Power, and Solidarity in Prison Code Language (Tangerang Women’s Facility)

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Empirical Indicators (Field Evidence)</b>	<b>Code Terms / Practices</b>	<b>Phenomenological Meaning (Lived Experience)</b>	<b>Analytical Link (Framework)</b>
<b>Secrecy</b>	<b>Performative denial of codes</b>	Inmates repeatedly assert there are no codes, safe, harmonious, rejecting film-like prison stereotypes	<i>Gak ada kode</i>	<i>Safety through speech:</i> denial becomes a protective narrative under surveillance	Hidden transcript/ impression management (Scott; Goffman) + carceral surveillance (Foucault)
<b>Secrecy</b>	<b>Acoustic warning as counter-surveillance</b>	Loud, polite greetings operate as alerts; officers	<i>Ada Ibunya, Siang, Bu</i>	<i>Embodied anticipation:</i> alert triggers immediate bodily adjustment	Panopticon inversion/ making watcher visible (Foucault) +

Focus	Sub-Theme	Empirical Indicators (Field Evidence)	Code Terms / Practices	Phenomenological Meaning (Lived Experience)	Analytical Link (Framework)
		also recognize warning behavior		(tidy, cover, hide items)	embodiment of fear/alertness (Merleau-Ponty)
Secrecy	Micro-contraband concealment (minor infractions)	Hiding mirrors/metal spoons before checks; tidying up when officers approach	<i>Rapihin</i> , <i>hiding kaca</i> , <i>sendok besi</i>	<i>Backstage survival</i> : protecting small autonomy within regulated space	Discipline + compliance performance (Foucault; Goffman)
Power	Institutional authority mapped as code	Numeric labels index hierarchy and risk when authorities come	0–1 ( <i>Kalapas</i> ), 0–2 (KPLP)	<i>Power becomes speakable</i> : naming authority indirectly reduces tension	Institutional discourse & ranking (Foucault)
Power	<i>Tamping</i> as internal governance	<i>Tamping</i> enforces routines, cleanliness, quiet hours; sanctions for noncompliance	<i>Tamping blok</i> , <i>jam tenang</i> , <i>mencok</i>	<i>Order as lived stability</i> : internal discipline produces predictability	Governmentality/ delegated discipline (Foucault) + negotiated order (Crewe)
Power	Peer correction and seniority	New inmates are quiet, afraid of	<i>Sopan</i> , <i>itu ibunya</i>	<i>Intersubjectivity of hierarchy</i> : respect is	Micro-power relations (Foucault) + intersubjectiv

Focus	Sub-Theme	Empirical Indicators (Field Evidence)	Code Terms / Practices	Phenomenological Meaning (Lived Experience)	Analytical Link (Framework)
	<b>dynamic s</b>	seniors; seniors correct disrespect to officers		socially taught and embodied	ity (Merleau-Ponty)
<b>Solida rity</b>	<b>Lexicon as shared world-making</b>	Shared terms structure daily life, routines, roles; language distinguishes inside/outside	<i>Cadong, Keong, Korpre, mencok</i>	<i>Common reality:</i> terms become anchors for navigating confinement	Social glue / symbolic resources (social cohesion theory) + embodiment (Merleau-Ponty)
<b>Solida rity</b>	<b>Mutual aid &amp; resource redistribution</b>	Sharing, collective support during bereavement, pads shared	<i>Rinso, Brizzi urunan, pembalut</i>	<i>Care as practice:</i> solidarity enacted through material exchange	Bonding cohesion/reciprocity (Putnam; Portes)
<b>Solida rity</b>	<b>Pseudo-familial emotional support</b>	Bestie, <i>Mama</i> role; seniors become counselors; bonding via worship/learning	<i>Bestie, Mama, ngaji/kajian routines</i>	<i>Belonging:</i> emotional labor compensates for family separation	Women's prison relational culture (Owen; Chamberlen) + cohesion

Source: Author's data analysis based on interview transcripts (November–December 2025).

### 0-1 and Ibunya: Mapping Power

The linguistic construction of power within the prison is articulated through a combination of numerical and relational designators. Institutional authorities are systematically referenced using numerical codes, 0-1 for the Head of the Prison (Kalapas) and 0-2 for the Head of Security (KPLP), while relational terms such as Ibu (Ma'am) are employed in direct, performative interaction. Together, these forms of address illustrate how authority is simultaneously abstracted and personalized within everyday communication. The use of numerical codes depersonalizes power, reducing individuals to functional positions within the institutional hierarchy. This abstraction aligns with disciplinary logic in which authority is embedded in roles rather than persons. In contrast, the term Ibu operates as a relational marker that reintroduces a socially recognizable form of respect, allowing inmates to engage authority through culturally normative expressions.

Crucially, these linguistic practices function as a mediating mechanism between surveillance and inmate life. As acknowledged by correctional staff, performative greetings, often initiated by the *tamping*, serve as coded signals prompting inmates to regulate their appearance and behavior in anticipation of inspection. While overtly compliant, these utterances simultaneously operate as a form of internal coordination, enabling inmates to manage the timing and visibility of their conformity. This dynamic reflects the emergence of a communicative "buffer zone" in which institutional expectations and inmate practices intersect. The greeting, though seemingly innocuous, constitutes a double-layered act that both affirms authority and facilitates a degree of collective autonomy. In this sense, inmates produce a form of counter-discourse that does not directly challenge power but subtly reshapes its operation.

From the institutional perspective, this practice is tacitly recognized and, to some extent, accommodated. Officers are aware that such greetings function as signals rather than purely expressions of respect. However, the continuation of this practice is enabled by its functional utility: it preemptively generates compliance, reducing the need for direct enforcement. By the time authority figures arrive, order has already been restored. This mutual accommodation highlights the negotiated nature of power within the prison context. Rather than operating as a rigid, top-down imposition, authority is co-produced through interactions between institutional actors and inmates. The coded language of 0-1, 0-2, and *Ibunya* thus exemplifies how communication becomes a site where power is not only exercised but also subtly redistributed and managed.

**Table 3.** Code Language Inventory by Function (Secrecy–Power–Solidarity)

<b>Code / Phrase</b>	<b>Literal Meaning</b>	<b>Primary Function</b>	<b>Focus Category</b>	<b>Typical Context of Use</b>	<b>Example Interpretive Meaning</b>
<i>“Ada Ibunya”</i>	“Mother is here.”	Warning signal	Secrecy/Power	Officer approaching; control/inspection	Collective readiness; perform compliance while preserving small privacy
<i>“Siang, Bu”</i> (loud)	“Good afternoon, Ma’am.”	Polite alarm	Secrecy	Corridor/entry to block	Dual-layer speech: respect + alert
<b>0–1</b>	“zero-one”	Authority label	Power	When <i>Kalapas</i> appears/controlling	Makes power discussable without direct naming
<b>0–2</b>	“zero-two”	Authority label	Power	Block enforcement/discipline escalation	Signals the “harder” enforcement tier
<i>Tamping</i>	inmate trustee leader	Internal governance	Power	Managing block routines	Peer discipline as stability
<i>Cadong</i>	food ration/meal	Routine marker	Solidarity	Daily meals/distribution	Shared rhythm: food as collective time
<i>Keong</i>	snail	Status label	Solidarity	Locked in a cell/confinement	Embodied metaphor for immobilization

<b>Code / Phrase</b>	<b>Literal Meaning</b>	<b>Primary Function</b>	<b>Focus Category</b>	<b>Typical Context of Use</b>	<b>Example Interpretive Meaning</b>
<i>Korpre</i>	helper role	Role label	Solidarity/Power	Task assignment	Social position; exemption economy
<i>Mencok</i>	weeding	Sanction label	Power	Minor punishment by tamping	Internal correction without officers

*Source: Author's data analysis based on interview transcripts (November–December 2025).*

### 3.7 Solidarity and Hierarchy in the Networked Micro-Society

The prison environment functions as a networked micro-society where social cohesion is enforced through a mix of strict internal hierarchy and intense emotional solidarity. On one hand, there is a clear stratification among inmates that ensures order and conformity; on the other hand, there is a pervasive ethos of togetherness - the women consistently refer to one another as family and even besties, emphasizing bonds of friendship and sisterhood. In conceptualizing the prison as a networked society (Crewe, 2014; Moran, 2013) We see that these women have developed what Fontes (2023) calls a carceral community, complete with social strata and mutual obligations. Cohesion is achieved not by the absence of conflict or difference, but by managing differences through communication and shared norms. The prison's formal authority structure (officers over inmates) is mirrored and in some ways modulated by an informal inmate authority structure, which both relieves tension with staff and fosters group unity from within.

**Table 4.** Secrecy–Power–Solidarity Pathway Model (From Signal to Cohesion)

<b>Trigger Event</b>	<b>Communicative Act (Code Practice)</b>	<b>Immediate Behavioral Response</b>	<b>Power Effect</b>	<b>Solidarity Effect</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Officer approaches the block	<i>Ada Ibunya</i> / loud greeting	Hide minor contrabanda	Reduces direct confrontation	Builds mutual reliance	Secrecy becomes collective

		nd; tidy; dress properly	ion; anticipates discipline	(everyone protects everyone)	coordination
Minor rule violation in the block	<i>Tamping</i> reprimand / <i>mencok</i>	Compliance; restore order	Peer enforcement stabilizes the block	Group safety prioritized over individual defiance	Governance is an internalized relationship
Emotional crisis (bereavement)	<i>Urunan via Brizzi</i> ; shared goods	Material support; ritual comfort	Softens the pains of imprisonment	Reinforces belonging and reciprocity	Cohesion is maintained through the care economy
Routine deprivation (no phone freedom)	Shared Wartel knowledge/schedule talk	Normalize constraints	Institutional limits accepted	Shared suffering becomes a social bond	“Networked micro-society” sustains itself

Source: Author’s data analysis based on interview transcripts (November–December 2025).

### 3.8 The Role of the *Tamping*: Disciplinary and Caretaker

Power within the prison is not confined to vertical relations between officers and inmates but is also enacted horizontally through inmate-led governance. The *tamping*, as a senior inmate entrusted with block-level responsibility, occupies a pivotal position in this internal structure of control. Acting as both disciplinarian and mediator, the *tamping* regulates daily conduct, enforces institutional norms, and maintains order within the inmate community. The authority exercised by the *tamping* is sufficiently recognized to enable direct disciplinary action. Practices such as enforcing cleanliness standards, regulating quiet hours, and assigning corrective tasks, such as *mencok* (weed-pulling punishment), illustrate how institutional rules are operationalized at the peer level. Importantly, this authority is not framed solely as coercive enforcement but as a necessary mechanism for sustaining discipline and collective well-being.

This form of internal governance reflects a process of delegated discipline, in which institutional control is partially redistributed to inmate actors. In Foucauldian terms, it exemplifies the diffusion of power through micro-level practices, where regulation becomes embedded within everyday interactions rather than imposed exclusively from above. The tamping thus embodies a hybrid role, simultaneously representing institutional authority and maintaining relational proximity with fellow inmates. Crucially, this dual position allows discipline to be reframed as care. The enforcement of rules is justified not through punishment alone but through its contribution to order, safety, and predictability within the shared environment. By internalizing and reproducing institutional expectations, inmates reduce the likelihood of direct intervention by correctional staff, thereby minimizing friction and potential conflict.

As a result, horizontal power operates as a stabilizing mechanism within the carceral micro-society. It reinforces compliance while sustaining social cohesion, demonstrating that governance in this context is not merely imposed but actively co-produced through everyday practices of regulation, negotiation, and mutual responsibility.

### **3.9 Economic and Emotional Solidarity**

Solidarity within the prison is further consolidated through intertwined practices of economic redistribution and emotional interdependence. Inmates frequently articulate their relationships using familial idioms, such as “family” or “besties”, yet these expressions are not merely symbolic. They are grounded in structured, recurring practices of mutual support that sustain everyday life under conditions of constraint. At the material level, solidarity is enacted through informal systems of redistribution. Inmates with greater financial resources routinely share essential goods, such as food, detergent, and water, with those who have less. These exchanges are not ad hoc but patterned, reflecting a moral economy in which reciprocity and collective responsibility are expected. Contributions during moments of crisis, including coordinated financial support through digital payment systems, further demonstrate how solidarity is institutionalized within daily practice. Such micro-level transactions operate simultaneously as economic support and as symbolic reaffirmations of belonging.

At the affective level, solidarity is reinforced through the emergence of pseudo-familial relationships. The absence of biological family structures is partially compensated for by the formation of emotionally supportive roles within the inmate community. Certain individuals assume caregiving positions, providing counsel, mediation, and psychological support to others. This emotional labor plays a critical role in stabilizing

social relations, offering inmates a sense of continuity, recognition, and care in an otherwise depersonalizing environment. These dynamics align with classical accounts of imprisonment that emphasize the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958), particularly the deprivation of meaningful social ties. However, the findings here extend this perspective by demonstrating how inmates actively reconstruct relational networks to mitigate such deprivation. The prison, therefore, cannot be understood solely as a site of punishment; it also functions as a space in which alternative forms of community are produced and sustained. In this context, economic and emotional solidarity operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions of collective life. Material support strengthens interpersonal bonds, while emotional attachment legitimizes and sustains practices of redistribution. Together, they form a resilient social infrastructure that enables inmates to navigate institutional constraints while preserving a sense of dignity, belonging, and shared humanity.

#### **4 Discussion**

This discussion reinforces the central finding that prison code language cannot be reduced to a mere tool of concealment; rather, it operates as a foundational social infrastructure that enables the production and maintenance of cohesion among inmates. Unlike earlier assumptions that position coded communication as deviant or purely oppositional, the findings highlight its constructive role in organizing everyday life under conditions of constraint. Language, in this context, becomes a medium through which inmates collectively interpret, structure, and stabilize their lived reality. As such, communication does not simply reflect social order but actively participates in its creation, transforming the prison into a socially navigable environment.

The notion of secrecy as a “productive paradox” further complicates conventional understandings of hidden communication. Practices such as acoustic warning systems demonstrate that concealment is not always achieved through silence, but through the strategic use of sound. This shifts the analytical focus from visibility to audibility, challenging dominant surveillance frameworks that emphasize visual control. The concept of acoustic counter-surveillance introduced in this study extends existing discussions by showing how inmates appropriate sound as a collective resource to negotiate institutional power. In doing so, these practices not only facilitate protection from surveillance but also strengthen interpersonal trust and solidarity within the inmate community.

The dual structure of governance identified in the findings provides a nuanced perspective on power relations within the prison. Formal

authority, represented by institutional actors such as the prison warden, coexists with informal systems of regulation embodied by inmate leaders (tamping). This hybrid configuration illustrates that power is not solely imposed from above but is continuously negotiated through everyday interactions. Peer-based enforcement mechanisms function simultaneously as forms of discipline and care, contributing to social stability while reducing the need for direct institutional intervention. However, this arrangement also raises critical questions regarding the reproduction of informal hierarchies and the potential for unregulated forms of control within inmate-led structures.

At the methodological level, the study acknowledges the presence of a performative narrative, as indicated by the consistent denial of illicit practices and conflict among participants. This suggests that expressions of harmony may be partially shaped by strategic self-presentation within the research context. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution, recognizing the possibility that the data reflects both lived experience and socially constructed narratives. Future research would benefit from adopting comparative and longitudinal designs to capture variations across different institutional settings, including gendered environments and diverse configurations of power.

In comparison with previous studies, this research marks a significant shift in analytical focus. Earlier scholarship has largely framed prison code language as a form of resistance against institutional authority or as an element of deviant subculture. In contrast, the present study emphasizes its role as a mechanism of social production, through which inmates construct meaning, sustain solidarity, and manage daily life. This perspective expands existing theoretical frameworks by integrating phenomenological insights, demonstrating that even within highly restrictive environments, individuals remain active agents in shaping their social world. Consequently, the prison emerges not only as a site of discipline but also as a dynamic space of ongoing social and communicative production.

## **5 Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that prison code language extends far beyond a mechanism of concealment; it constitutes a foundational infrastructure through which social cohesion is produced and sustained within a constrained carceral environment. Rather than functioning as an illicit argot, the communicative system observed operates as a shared semiotic framework that enables inmates to transform the alienating conditions of imprisonment into a collectively intelligible and navigable

reality. Through this process, the prison is reinterpreted not solely as a punitive institution, but as a lived social space in which meaning, routine, and belonging are actively constructed.

Secrecy emerges as a productive paradox. While ostensibly linked to concealment, practices such as acoustic warning systems enable inmates to collectively regulate visibility, creating temporary “backstage” spaces in which minor infractions and personal identities can be preserved. These practices exemplify what this study conceptualizes as *acoustic counter-surveillance*, where audibility, rather than invisibility, becomes a strategic resource for negotiating institutional power. In turn, such shared practices foster trust and reinforce solidarity, which is further sustained through a *moral economy of confinement* characterized by resource-sharing and collective care.

The findings also reveal a dual structure of governance. Formal authority, represented by institutional actors such as *0-1* (Kalapas), operates alongside informal, inmate-led regulation embodied by the *tamping*. This configuration illustrates that power within the prison is not merely imposed from above but is continuously negotiated and co-produced through everyday practices. Peer enforcement, framed as both discipline and care, stabilizes social order while reducing the need for direct institutional intervention. In this sense, the prison functions as a micro-society governed through a hybrid model of hierarchical authority and horizontal regulation.

At the same time, the consistent denial of illicit codes and conflict suggests the presence of a performative narrative shaped by the research context. This indicates the need for methodological caution, as expressions of harmony may partially reflect strategic self-presentation. Future research should therefore adopt comparative and longitudinal approaches to further examine how communicative practices evolve across different institutional settings and over time, particularly in contexts where gendered dynamics or power hierarchies may differ.

Theoretically, this study contributes to Communication Studies and Sociology by advancing a phenomenological understanding of coded communication as an embodied and relational practice. By introducing concepts such as *acoustic counter-surveillance* and the *moral economy of confinement*, it extends existing frameworks of panopticism and total institutions, demonstrating that even under conditions of extreme constraint, language remains a central medium through which individuals negotiate power, sustain solidarity, and reclaim agency. Ultimately, the prison emerges not only as a site of discipline but as a space of ongoing

social production, where shared meaning becomes a vital resource for collective survival.

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