

Linguistic Reflections of Cultural Ethics: Social Assistance Discourse in Surakarta

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Abstract

This ethnolinguistic study explores the cultural, moral, and socio-political dimensions of social assistance discourse among citizens of Surakarta, Indonesia. Critical to addressing economic inequality, social assistance programs are examined through linguistic analysis of discourse digitally ethnographically observed from January to March 2024, coinciding with increased political activity surrounding the presidential election. Data are drawn from social media discussions, which reveal the complex interaction between Javanese cultural values and contemporary socio-political realities in shaping perceptions of social assistance distribution. The results show that people in Surakarta view social assistance as a political ploy that exploits people's daily living conditions and ultimately violates moral values. The combination of Javanese and Indonesian terms reflects ethical considerations and community expectations of fairness and integrity in the distribution of social assistance. An analysis of cultural meanings identified three cultural interpretations: the politicization of social assistance, economic dependence in everyday life, and moral judgments embedded in the ethical framework of Javanese culture. Governments must adopt culturally sensitive policies integrating local moral frameworks into aid distribution strategies, promoting transparency and accountability. By understanding the dynamics of these different languages and cultures, policymakers can design more compelling, ethically grounded social assistance initiatives that align with the values of the community in Surakarta and its surrounding areas.

Keywords: *Ethnolinguistics; Bansos; Cultural values; Socio-political; Presidential Election*

INTRODUCTION

Social assistance (*Bantuan Sosial, Bansos*) in Indonesia refers to various government programs designed to aid low-income families, vulnerable groups, and individuals facing economic hardship. These programs include cash assistance, food aid, education subsidies, healthcare support, and other welfare initiatives. *Bansos* programs are considered essential in Indonesia due to its large population and significant socioeconomic disparities (Harsono et al., 2024). The primary objectives of these initiatives are to reduce poverty, improve living standards, and address inequality by ensuring that basic needs are met for those most in need. However, the distribution and management of social assistance programs face numerous challenges, including corruption, inefficiency, and politicization, raising concerns about their effectiveness and equity (Launa & Lusianawati, 2021; Noerkaisar, 2021).

Regarding the politicization of social assistance, issues revolve around allegations of its misuse for political gain, particularly in relation to the 2024 presidential election. Observations indicate that state institutions may be exploited to support specific candidates, with social assistance programs originally intended for public welfare being leveraged to influence electoral outcomes (Jebadu, 2024; Pebrianto & Dahlan, 2024). This has led to calls for monitoring and suspending the distribution of social assistance during election periods to prevent such manipulations.

Since early 2024, former President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has been directly involved in distributing social assistance and handing out T-shirts and land certificates in Central Java and Yogyakarta. These actions have been interpreted as bolstering the electoral prospects of elected Prabowo-Gibran while diminishing those of Ganjar-Mahfud (Mardatila, 2024). Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) hold strategic significance for former President Jokowi, as reflected in an Indonesian Political Indicator survey conducted from January 10-16, 2024, which reported that 89.8% of respondents from these regions expressed satisfaction with his performance—the highest approval

rating nationwide. This is particularly relevant given that Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, is running as the vice-presidential candidate number 2. Thus, Jokowi's prominent political influence in Central Java and Yogyakarta intersects with the voter base of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP). A focal point of this political intersection is Surakarta, Jokowi's birthplace, underscoring its political significance. These events have sparked public commentary and reactions from the people of Surakarta, reflecting their social representation of the ongoing political dynamics.

Such representations of social values demonstrate how communities collectively construct and share understandings of social phenomena. The people of Surakarta are likely to hold collective perceptions and narratives regarding Jokowi's political maneuvers and their implications. These perceptions can influence public opinion, thereby shaping the broader political landscape. Furthermore, the public response in Surakarta can serve as a microcosm of national sentiments toward Jokowi's political strategies, offering insights into how social assistance is perceived during election periods. From a linguistic perspective, such socio-cultural responses can be analyzed through the lens of ethnolinguistics.

Ethnolinguistics, also known as linguistic anthropology, examines how language and culture intersect within social groups, influencing identity and collective behavior (Abdullah, 2013; Duranti, 2011; Foley, 2015). Social assistance programs distributed during elections carry linguistic and cultural markers that vary across Indonesian communities. The language used in social assistance discourse—such as comments or messages—reflects the cultural identity and specific values of different ethnolinguistic groups, shaping perceptions of social and political values. Additionally, the government's approach to social assistance policies reflects diverse socio-cultural perspectives on public welfare. Thus, ethnolinguistic diversity plays a crucial role in determining the acceptance and effectiveness of social assistance initiatives during elections and influencing cultural values within Indonesia's complex socio-political landscape.

In the context of Indonesia's elections, ethnolinguistics serves as an exploratory tool for analyzing how lexical units—both words and phrases related to social assistance—reflect and shape cultural identity and political perceptions in Surakarta. The circulation of linguistic units in social assistance discourse within public discussions functions as linguistic markers that resonate with public perceptions of these programs. For instance, terms such as *bantuan* 'assistance', *subsidi* 'subsidy', and *kebutuhan pokok* 'basic necessities' carry cultural connotations that reflect the values and preferences of the Surakarta community. Linguistic framing that considers both lexical and cultural meanings illustrates how social assistance programs are perceived and influences public attitudes toward the intricate relationship between language, culture, and Indonesia's socio-political landscape, particularly in Surakarta. Moreover, the linguistic framing of social assistance in Surakarta is deeply tied to ideological and political influences, particularly in the 2024 presidential election, where key lexical choices shape public trust and political narratives. The fusion of Javanese and Indonesian linguistic elements highlights tensions between traditional moral expectations of fairness and the strategic use of aid as a political tool, reflecting broader power dynamics and electoral strategies in contemporary Indonesia.

Over time, studies on linguistic-cultural units have explored various societal contexts, including metaphor representation (Pradita & Jendriadi, 2024), traditional cultural rituals (Lestari et al., 2022), livelihoods and daily life aspects (Hestiyana, 2021; Lalira, 2022; Mahendra et al., 2021; Mardikantoro & Siroj, 2019; Wardani, 2020), and the arts (Prasetyo & Setiawati, 2021). These studies have extensively examined cultural and linguistic units within diverse linguistic communities. However, research gaps remain regarding specific lexical units representing societal dynamics in Indonesia's political context. The exploration of how linguistic choices—such as political terminology used in social assistance programs during elections—strategically function in political discourse remains limited. Therefore, this article investigates how lexical units related to social assistance play a strategic role in political discourse, their impact on public engagement in political identity

formation, and their contribution to shaping social discourse within Indonesia's dynamic socio-political environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an ethnolinguistic approach with a descriptive-qualitative design, utilizing participatory observation to collect data through direct engagement, recording, and documentation. The participatory observation method was chosen over in-depth interviews or corpus analysis because it allows for a more naturalistic examination of linguistic patterns in their social context, capturing how social assistance (*bansos*) discourse unfolds dynamically in public discussions. While in-depth interviews provide structured responses and corpus analysis focuses on textual patterns at a large scale, participatory observation offers insight into real-time discourse, enabling researchers to understand both explicit and implicit meanings in the interaction of language, culture, and socio-political realities (Sibarani, 2004).

Unlike traditional participatory observations that involve physical interactions, this study adapts the method to digital ethnography by observing discourse on social media platforms where discussions about *bansos* are actively shaped by public opinion. A key methodological consideration in this study is that lexical data in digital ethnography do not always function in the same way as in direct spoken interactions. In online discourse, certain lexical items can already reflect the direction of a conversation because they appear in response to news articles, social media posts, or political statements regarding *bansos*. The structure of digital discourse allows for linguistic meaning to be inferred from explicit sentence construction and its association with external references. For instance, when users comment on a viral news post about *bansos*, their words often presuppose shared knowledge of the discussed political or economic controversy. Thus, the interactional context in digital ethnography is embedded in the broader socio-political narratives circulating in media rather than in direct conversational exchanges. The data sources for this research consist of the people of Surakarta who actively contribute to the linguistic

discourse on social assistance (*bansos*) on social media. The study focuses on the period from January to March 2024, during which President Joko Widodo's distribution of social assistance was widely reported and criticized for allegedly undermining the democratic electoral process by favoring a particular presidential candidate.

To ensure data reliability, social media posts were collected using purposive sampling, focusing on discussions in public forums, comment sections of news articles, and widely shared posts that reflect societal views on *bansos*. The filtering process involved identifying posts containing key lexical items relevant to social assistance and excluding content from automated accounts or politically motivated campaigns to maintain authenticity in linguistic analysis.

The analysis used the distributional method to examine the lexical and cultural meanings of the identified terms. The analytical technique employed was the Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA) method, which involves classifying the lexical items into word and phrase categories. ICA was chosen over semantic analysis or critical discourse analysis (CDA) because this study focuses on the structural composition of key linguistic units rather than broader ideological narratives. While CDA would be more suitable for examining power dynamics in discourse, ICA is more effective in capturing how lexical choices reflect cultural and moral perceptions of social assistance. The lexical meanings are determined based on definitions provided in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), while the cultural interpretations are derived from information obtained through informants and relevant documents.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The analysis of lexical units related to social assistance (*bansos*) in the Surakarta community reveals variations in their linguistic forms, specifically words and phrases. A total of 21 linguistic units associated with the lexicon of *bansos* were identified, comprising 13 words and eight phrases. The following section presents a detailed discussion of these findings, including their lexical and cultural meanings.

Lexical Meanings of Linguistic Units Related to the *Bansos* Lexicon

The 13 lexical units categorized as words are further classified into nine nouns, three adjectives, and one verb. Among the nine nouns, three are abbreviations. Additionally, one word in the dataset is in Javanese. The data is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Linguistic Units in Word Form Related to the *Bansos* Lexicon in the Surakarta Community

No.	Word	Form	Lexical Meaning
1.	<i>pilpres</i>	Noun (abbreviation)	Presidential election
2.	<i>pemilu</i>	Noun (abbreviation)	General election
3.	<i>sembako</i>	Noun (abbreviation)	Nine basic necessities (nine essential items defined by the Minister of Industry and Trade in 1998)
4.	<i>bantuan</i>	Noun	Goods used for assistance; help; support: he received ~ a loan from the bank
5.	<i>kebutuhan</i>	Noun	Something needed; a necessity
6.	<i>kampanye</i>	Noun	Activities carried out by political organizations or candidates competing for positions in parliament, etc., to gain voter support
7.	<i>amplop</i>	Noun	Bribe money: journalists should not accept ~
8.	<i>pembodohan</i>	Noun	The process, method, or act of making someone ignorant
9.	<i>ekonomi</i>	Noun	Household (organization, state) financial affairs
10.	<i>miskin</i>	Adjective	Lacking wealth; in poverty (earning very low income): students engage in social activities to help the ~

No. Word	Form	Lexical Meaning
11. <i>haram</i>	Adjective	Forbidden by law; illegal
12. <i>percuma</i>	Adjective	Useless (in terms of results, etc.); in vain: working hard is -- if there is no appropriate reward
13. <i>ngapusi</i>	Verb (Javanese)	To lie to; to deceive: he has often ~ me

Based on the table above, linguistic units in word form can be classified by their grammatical category and morphological structure. Morphologically, words can be categorized as monomorphemic or polymorphemic. Monomorphemic words consist of a single free morpheme that can stand alone, while polymorphemic words contain more than one morpheme, usually a free morpheme combined with a bound morpheme.

From this classification, it is evident that most of the identified words are monomorphemic, with a total of 8 words: *pilpres*, *pemilu*, *sembako*, *kampanye*, *amplop*, *ekonomi*, *miskin*, *haram*, and *percuma*. Meanwhile, 4 words are polymorphemic: *bantuan*, *kebutuhan*, *pembodohan*, and *ngapusi* ('to deceive'). In addition to words, linguistic units related to the *bansos* lexicon in the Surakarta community also include eight phrases. Notably, three of these phrases are in Javanese, which is more frequent than the Javanese words identified in the previous section. These phrases and their categorical structures and lexical meanings are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Linguistic Units in Phrase Form Related to the *Bansos* Lexicon in the Surakarta Community

No. Phrase	Categorical Structure	Lexical Meaning
1. <i>politik uang</i>	N + N	Politics that use money as a tool of influence
2. <i>data tidak sesuai</i>	N + ADV + ADJ	Information (on <i>bansos</i> recipients) that is inaccurate

No. Phrase	Categorical Structure	Lexical Meaning
3. <i>ora tau entuk</i> (Javanese)	ADV + ADJ + V	Never received (<i>bansos</i>)
4. <i>orang itu-itu saja</i>	N + PRON + ADV	(<i>Bansos</i> recipients are) the same people repeatedly
5. <i>perangkat desa</i>	N + N	A set of village administrative tools consisting of the village secretariat, hamlet heads, etc.
6. <i>tidak tepat sasaran</i>	ADV + ADJ + N	(<i>Bansos</i> recipient data is) inaccurate
7. <i>ora ngarep</i> (Javanese)	ADV + V	Not expecting (to receive <i>bansos</i>)
8. <i>ora mutu</i> (Javanese)	ADV + ADJ	(The <i>bansos</i> distribution process is considered) of low quality

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that these phrases exhibit various syntactic structures, including noun phrases, verb phrases, and adverbial phrases. These phrases are not limited to two-word structures but also include three-word constructions. Among the eight identified phrase-based linguistic units, at least seven different syntactic structures were observed: **N + N**, **N + ADV + ADJ**, **ADV + ADJ + V**, **N + PRON + ADV**, **ADV + ADJ + N**, **ADV + V**, and **ADV + ADJ**.

Cultural Meanings of Linguistic Units Related to the *Bansos* Lexicon

To understand the cultural meanings embedded in the lingual units surrounding the lexical item *bansos*, it is essential to consider cultural values, particularly Javanese culture in the context of Surakarta. Additionally, situational context significantly determines the accurate interpretation of these data. Based on the collected data, the lingual units surrounding *bansos* can be culturally categorized into three main areas: political processes, everyday life, and morality. The classification of these data is presented in the following table:

Table 3. Representation of Cultural Meanings Surrounding the Lexical Item *Bansos* in Surakarta Community

Political Processes	Everyday Life	Morality
<i>pilpres</i> ‘presidential election’, <i>pemilu</i> ‘general election’, <i>kampanye</i> ‘campaign’, <i>politik uang</i> ‘money politics’, <i>amplop</i> ‘envelope’, <i>perangkat desa</i> ‘village officials’	<i>bantuan</i> ‘assistance’, <i>sembako</i> ‘basic necessities’, <i>misikin</i> ‘poverty’, <i>kebutuhan</i> ‘needs’, <i>ekonomi</i> ‘economy’	<i>data tidak sesuai</i> ‘inaccurate data’, <i>pembodohan</i> ‘deception’, <i>ngapusi</i> (‘to deceive’), <i>haram</i> ‘forbidden’, <i>ora tau entuk</i> (‘never received’), <i>orang itu-itu saja</i> ‘the same people’, <i>tidak tepat sasaran</i> ‘misallocation’, <i>percuma</i> ‘useless’, <i>ora ngarep</i> (‘not hoping’), <i>ra mutu</i> (‘low quality’)

By categorizing the findings as outlined in the table, the cultural meanings can be comprehensively elaborated, showing interconnections in constructing the cultural situation represented through the lingual units surrounding *bansos* in Surakarta.

The emergence of these three categories represents the cultural cognition of Surakarta community regarding *bansos*. First, the data reveal cultural meanings associated with political processes, as seen in expressions such as *pilpres* ‘presidential election’, *pemilu* ‘general election’, *kampanye* ‘campaign’, *politik uang* ‘money politics’, *amplop* ‘envelope’, and *perangkat desa* ‘village officials’. Culturally, based on this finding, *bansos* is perceived as a strategic tool for political maneuvering, particularly in relation to presidential elections, through money politics, envelope distribution, and the involvement of village officials. These terms are not merely political jargon but are deeply ingrained in cultural cognition. The public has symbolically linked *bansos* with political activities, reflecting how political maneuvers are experienced and understood in everyday life.

Historically, in many societies, political campaigns often involve direct material incentives to secure votes. The persistence of terms such as ‘money

politics' and 'envelope' indicates a historical continuity where *bansos* has been misused as a political instrument. This phenomenon aligns with the practice of clientelism in politics, where politicians offer material benefits in exchange for political support. The term *perangkat desa* 'village officials' highlights issues of trust and legitimacy in the distribution of social assistance. Surakarta community perceives social assistance as more legitimate and effective when facilitated by local figures they recognize, reinforcing the connection between *bansos* and local political structures. In regions with significant economic disparities, social assistance becomes a crucial means of survival for many. The link between *bansos* and political campaigns indicates that during election periods, people believe in an increased flow of resources as candidates seek to gain support. This belief makes election periods synonymous with economic relief, leading to the emergence of political process-related lexicons within social assistance. This economic factor is closely related to the second category of cultural meaning: everyday life.

The second category of cultural meaning is associated with expressions representing everyday life, including *bantuan* 'assistance', *sembako* 'basic necessities', *miskin* 'poverty', *kebutuhan* 'needs', and *ekonomi* 'economy'. Social assistance, in the form of services and basic needs, is crucial for the daily survival of impoverished communities in Surakarta. Consequently, it becomes a powerful tool for political influence. Politicians and candidates exploit this dependency by offering social assistance as a means to garner votes. A fundamentally socioeconomic issue is thus politicized. This dependency makes recipients more vulnerable to political influence. Individuals relying heavily on assistance to meet their basic needs are more likely to support political entities that promise or provide such aid. This creates a cycle where socioeconomic vulnerability is manipulated for political gain.

The politicization of social assistance can erode trust in both the political system and aid programs themselves. When aid is perceived as a tool of political

manipulation rather than a sincere effort to address poverty and need, public trust in governmental and non-governmental organizations gradually declines. Socioeconomic conditions significantly impact voter behavior. In areas afflicted by poverty, voters may prioritize material benefits over long-term political considerations. This pragmatic approach to voting perpetuates the cycle of politicization as political actors continue to use social assistance as a strategic political tool. Over time, this politicization exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities, as resources are allocated based on political loyalty rather than actual need, perpetuating poverty and dependency by failing to address the root causes of socioeconomic issues.

Lastly, the people of Surakarta perceive *bansos* as closely tied to morality. As outlined in the two previous categories, *bansos* is portrayed as a politicized issue in Surakarta. This perception does not escape the moral scrutiny of Surakarta community, which adheres strongly to Javanese cultural values. The data reflecting moral-cultural meanings include expressions such as *data tidak sesuai* 'inaccurate data', *pembodohan* 'deception', *ngapusi* 'to deceive', *haram* 'forbidden', *ora tau entuk* 'never received', *orang itu-itu saja* 'the same people', *tidak tepat sasaran* 'misallocation', *percuma* 'useless', *ora ngarep* 'not hoping', and *ra mutu* 'low quality'. Among the three cultural meaning categories discussed, morality has the highest number of linguistic expressions, indicating that moral values are highly regarded by Surakarta community, which upholds strong Javanese traditions.

The interpretation of *bansos* concerning morality within Surakarta community reveals a profound cultural dimension influenced by Javanese ethical values and social considerations. Javanese culture emphasizes ethical behavior, communal harmony, and social responsibility. The moral lexicons found in the data, such as *ngapusi* 'to deceive', *haram* 'forbidden', and *tidak tepat sasaran* 'misallocation', reflect deeply rooted cultural values that prioritize honesty, justice, and the appropriate use of resources. The persistence of these moral expressions in

the context of social assistance suggests that Surakarta community continues to uphold traditional values. The importance of morality in Javanese culture is reinforced through language, which serves as a medium for transmitting and maintaining ethical standards across generations.

As previously discussed, the link between social assistance and political processes creates a context in which the moral implications of these political practices are understood. Public awareness of the politicization of aid leads to moral evaluations of fairness and integrity in aid distribution. Expressions such as *ora tau entuk* 'never received', *orang itu-itu saja* 'the same people', *percuma* 'useless', *ora ngarep* 'not hoping', and *ra mutu* 'low quality' convey strong criticism of perceived misuse or mismanagement of social assistance. These expressions articulate moral condemnation of deceptive, unjust, or ineffective practices, aligning with broader cultural critiques of unethical behavior.

To sum up, in the period surrounding elections, the people of Surakarta associate *bansos* with political processes, everyday life, and morality. These three cultural dimensions suggest that *bansos* is perceived as a political strategy that exploits the everyday socioeconomic conditions of community, ultimately touching upon moral values. The strong moral stance reflects the expectations of Surakarta community for accountability and transparency in the distribution of social assistance. They anticipate that aid will be distributed fairly and ethically, in line with Javanese cultural values. Upholding moral standards in social assistance distribution is deemed crucial for maintaining social cohesion, as ethical violations in aid distribution can lead to social discord, disrupting the highly valued communal harmony in Javanese culture.

Therefore, the use of Javanese and Indonesian terms in social assistance discourse plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of fairness, integrity, and political motives behind aid distribution. Javanese linguistic expressions, often carrying deep ethical and philosophical connotations, reinforce expectations of

proper conduct and justice, making deviations from these norms more conspicuous and subject to moral scrutiny. Meanwhile, Indonesian terms, which are more bureaucratic and policy-driven, frame *bansos* within the realm of state governance, potentially detaching it from local ethical considerations. The interplay between these linguistic elements creates a dual-layered perception: while Indonesian terminology lends an official and regulatory tone, Javanese expressions embed *bansos* within community-based moral judgments. Consequently, the presence of both languages amplifies public sensitivity to perceived fairness and political maneuvering, as linguistic choices either affirm or challenge the legitimacy of aid distribution practices.

Representation of Surakarta's Cultural Insights Through Linguistic Units in Social Assistance Discourse

An analysis of linguistic units surrounding the lexicon of social assistance within the Surakarta community reveals insights into their cultural cognition, particularly the interrelation between socio-political processes and moral values. These findings, categorized into nouns, adjectives, and verbs, as well as monomorphemic and polymorphemic structures, underscore the complexity and richness of the linguistic landscape in this context. The linguistic phenomena present in the social assistance lexicon of Surakarta are shaped by intricate interactions among cultural heritage, socio-political realities, economic conditions, and Javanese societal dynamics (Irawanto et al., 2011). Javanese alongside Indonesian terms indicate deep cultural roots and the integration of traditional values into the linguistic representation of social assistance discourse in Surakarta. Most words are monomorphemic, highlighting their simplicity and directness in conveying essential concepts (Steady et al., 2022). The prevalence of Javanese phrases further emphasizes the cultural meanings and moral scrutiny embedded in these expressions.

The integration of moral terms within the social assistance lexicon reflects the strong ethical considerations of the Surakarta community. Terms encapsulating profound moral judgments regarding the fairness and integrity of social assistance distribution are deeply rooted in Javanese cultural values, demonstrating the community's commitment to upholding ethical standards in navigating socio-political challenges (Suprpto et al., 2024). These findings suggest that social assistance is not merely a socioeconomic issue but also a moral and cultural concern. Javanese culture significantly emphasizes ethical conduct and social responsibility (Andriyanto et al., 2022; Magnis-Suseno, 1997). This cultural backdrop influences the language used by the Surakarta community, integrating moral evaluations into everyday discourse. Javanese moral values have been passed down across generations (Abdullah, 2016), ensuring that contemporary linguistic expressions continue to reflect traditional ethical concerns, particularly in the context of social assistance.

The connection between social assistance and political processes has heightened awareness and sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of aid distribution. Village officials, regarded as community leaders, are expected to adhere to ethical standards. Any deviation from these standards, such as perceived unfair or corrupt practices, is immediately condemned through strong moral criticism, particularly as suspicions of corruption and politicization of social assistance grow (Jebadu, 2024; Launa & Lusianawati, 2021; Noerkaisar, 2021; Pebrianto & Dahlan, 2024). Dependence on social assistance for basic needs such as food and shelter underscores its importance in daily life. However, this economic dependency also exacerbates administrative mismanagement or corruption in aid distribution, which is morally condemned when carried out by irresponsible parties. Such issues directly impact the well-being of vulnerable groups (Aminudin & Hadiningrum, 2019; Aryani & Zuber, 2017; Diaz, 2023; Nurjanah et al., 2019; Parameswari Widarukmi & Daryono Soebagiyo, 2015).

The language used by the Surakarta community encapsulates their lived experiences, ethical expectations, and critical perspectives on social assistance, shaped by contemporary political realities and enduring cultural values. This linguistic phenomenon underscores the need for policymakers and practitioners to consider cultural and moral dimensions when designing and implementing social assistance programs. A deeper understanding of cultural contexts can lead to more effective and ethical policies that align with the values and needs of the community (Rizal, 2020; Zustiyanoro, 2024).

Accordingly, to enhance transparency and public trust, policymakers can integrate ethnolinguistic insights by adopting culturally resonant communication strategies and ensuring that aid distribution aligns with local ethical norms. The use of Javanese linguistic expressions that emphasize fairness, social harmony, and mutual respect can foster a sense of moral responsibility and accountability in aid programs. Additionally, framing official communication to reflect community expectations—such as using culturally appropriate terminology and engaging with local leaders—can help bridge the gap between policy intentions and public perceptions. By incorporating linguistic and cultural considerations into social assistance discourse, policymakers can create more transparent, community-driven initiatives that reduce skepticism toward government aid and reinforce social cohesion and trust in public institutions.

CONCLUSION

This ethnolinguistic study of social assistance discourse among Surakarta residents reveals an interaction encompassing cultural, moral, and socio-political dimensions. The findings highlight the deep integration of Javanese cultural values into discussions on social assistance, where moral evaluations and ethical expectations significantly shape public perceptions of aid distribution, particularly during election periods, which are widely viewed by the community as politically

charged. Javanese terms alongside Indonesian, reflect a fusion of traditional values with contemporary socio-political realities, emphasizing ethical considerations and societal expectations.

The policymakers must adopt a culturally sensitive approach that aligns social assistance programs with the local moral framework and community values. Accountability and transparency mechanisms in aid distribution processes are crucial for building public trust and ensuring fairness. By integrating social and cultural understanding into policy development, the government can design more inclusive and effective social assistance programs that are contextually relevant and uphold ethical standards.

The ethnolinguistic approach used in this study provides a deeper understanding of how language functions as a medium through which culture and political identity are constructed and negotiated in Indonesia's socio-political landscape. This study uncovers how language reinforces collective identities, social hierarchies, and power dynamics within political discourse by examining how linguistic choices shape and reflect public attitudes toward social assistance. The interplay between Javanese and Indonesian terms in aid discussions demonstrates how cultural heritage influences political perceptions and illustrates how political actors strategically employ language to legitimize or challenge existing policies. This approach sheds light on the socio-political significance of linguistic framing. It offers broader insights into how language serves as a vehicle for ideological expression and identity formation in an evolving democratic society.

This study is limited to data from social media and interviews, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives, and its focus on a specific region restricts its generalizability beyond Surakarta. A key limitation of using social media discourse as a primary data source for studying cultural and moral perceptions of social assistance is the potential for representational bias, as online discussions often amplify certain demographic groups while excluding others with limited

digital access or different offline linguistic practices. Additionally, social media interactions are shaped by trends, political polarization, and algorithmic filtering, which can distort the authenticity of cultural evaluations and moral judgments within the broader community. The performative nature of online discourse further complicates interpretation, as users may strategically frame their language to align with dominant public sentiments or ideological positions rather than express genuine cultural perspectives. Future research could employ a broader range of methodologies to capture a more extensive demographic perspective and explore long-term changes in linguistic patterns and cultural interpretations within the context of social assistance.

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