
LANGUAGE CODES IN MULTILINGUAL FAMILY TO REPRESENT THE CHILDREN'S IDENTITY

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ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan kode bahasa dalam sebuah keluarga multibahasa Jawa-Mbojo untuk memahami bagaimana kode bahasa merepresentasikan identitas anak. Dalam keluarga multibahasa, pencampuran kode (*code-mixing*), peralihan kode (*code-switching*), serta strategi bahasa yang diterapkan orang tua berperan penting dalam membentuk identitas budaya, sosial, dan linguistik anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kode bahasa yang digunakan oleh setiap anggota keluarga, mengidentifikasi strategi yang diterapkan orang tua, serta menjelaskan bagaimana penggunaan bahasa berkontribusi terhadap identitas anak dalam ranah rumah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif etnografis dengan teknik observasi non-partisipatif dan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap orang tua dan dua anak multibahasa di Malang, Jawa Timur, yang dianalisis menggunakan model analisis data Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana (2014). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keluarga menggunakan bahasa Indonesia, Inggris, Jawa, dan Mbojo secara fleksibel melalui dua belas peristiwa pencampuran dan peralihan kode, delapan strategi Family Language Policy dan One Parent One Language, serta enam representasi identitas berupa rasa memiliki, afiliasi budaya, dan relasi kuasa. Kode bahasa terbukti bukan sekadar alat komunikasi, melainkan simbol warisan budaya, solidaritas keluarga, dan identitas sosial anak dalam konteks multibahasa.

Kata kunci: kode bahasa; keluarga multibahasa; identitas anak; pencampuran kode; peralihan kode

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the use of language codes in a Javanese-Mbojo multilingual family to understand how such codes represent children's identity. In multilingual families, code-mixing, code-switching, and the language strategies applied by parents play a significant role in shaping children's cultural, social, and linguistic identity. This study aims to examine the language codes used by each family member, to identify the strategies implemented by parents, and to explain how language use in the family contributes to children's identity within the home domain. This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach through non-participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with the parents and two multilingual children in Malang, East Java, analyzed using the interactive data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The findings show that the family flexibly used Indonesian, English, Javanese, and Mbojo across twelve instances of code-mixing and code-switching, eight strategies of Family Language Policy and One Parent One Language, and six representations of identity involving belonging, cultural affiliation, and power relations. Language codes were found to function not merely as communication tools but as symbols of cultural heritage, family solidarity, and children's social identity within a multilingual context.

Keywords: language codes; multilingual family; children's identity; code-mixing; code-switching

INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism is a common phenomenon in today's society, in which individuals or families own and use more than one language in everyday communication (Wei, 2000). While the term "bilingual" mainly refers to a person who speaks two languages, many individuals across Asian and African nations speak three or more languages interchangeably, including local, national, and foreign languages. Fishman (1991) argues that the home is the primary setting for language socialization,

where family members first learn a language, become effective communicators, and develop attitudes toward various languages. As parents bring their own linguistic repertoires into daily interactions, language contact naturally arises, creating a multilingual home setting in which family members use different languages depending on interlocutor, context, and communicative purpose. Consequently, language use in multilingual homes is dynamic rather than fixed, and it strongly influences how languages are transmitted across generations, shaping children's cultural identity, sense of

belonging, and linguistic competence from an early age.

This study focuses on a Javanese-Mbojo multilingual family, a distinctive case in which Mbojo functions as a minority language with limited transmission (Mataraw & Adriansyah, 2023), while Javanese remains widely spoken with high cultural value (Wahyuni, 2024). This contrast creates a unique multilingual environment in which a nationally dominant ethnic language and a less-transmitted minority language coexist in the same home setting. Therefore, it is possible to uncover features of family language policy that may be missed in studies of more linguistically balanced or international intermarriage families through an analysis at how parents manage the use, preservation, and transmission of these unequal-status languages. Indonesian serves as the national language for formal and academic communication, while English is increasingly present through schooling, media, and technology. This coexistence of languages with different social status leads to continuous negotiation of language use within the family domain, positioning the family as the primary site of children's multilingual and identity development.

Several previous studies have examined language use in multilingual families. Widiawati (2024) found that English became the dominant home language in an Indonesian-British family due to consistent parental interaction, while Peter et al. (2024) revealed that Malay remained dominant over Melanau in interracial Malaysian families because of its status as the national language. Rahmadani (2023) demonstrated that code-switching among children of mixed-marriage families functions strategically to express emotion and negotiate meaning rather than signalling language loss, and Zuraida et al. (2020) showed that Japanese and Balinese speakers select languages based on social hierarchy and situational formality to achieve social harmony. Ismail et al. (2024) further found that Sundanese-French families preserved heritage languages such as Sundanese and Indonesian alongside French and English according to communicative needs. However, these studies mainly examine multilingual families formed through international intermarriage, leaving

interethnic multilingual families within a single country, such as the Javanese-Mbojo family in this study, largely unexplored. Investigating how such interethnic language codes function in the home domain offers new insight into how national, local, and global languages interact to shape children's identity.

Several key concepts underpin this study. Language codes are understood as socially structured principles that govern communication and meaning; Bernstein (2003) distinguishes between elaborated codes, which are explicit and context-independent, and restricted codes, which rely on shared implicit understanding, arguing that family relations largely determine children's access to these codes. Within this framework, code-mixing refers to the incorporation of linguistic elements from two or more languages into a single utterance, which Muysken (2000) classifies into insertion, the embedding of a word or phrase from one language into the grammatical frame of another; alternation, a genuine shift between the lexicon and grammar of two languages within an utterance; and congruent lexicalization, in which two languages share a largely similar grammatical structure. Code-switching, meanwhile, is defined by Wardhaugh (2015) as the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation, distinguished into situational code-switching, triggered by a change of participant, setting, or topic, and metaphorical code-switching, which occurs within the same situation to convey social meanings such as intimacy, authority, or solidarity. At the family level, Spolsky (2006, 2004) defines a multilingual family as a family unit in which more than one language is regularly used and negotiated, shaped by three components of Family Language Policy: language practice, language ideology, and language management, while Piller (2001) describes One Parent One Language (OPOL) as a strategy in which each parent consistently uses a distinct language with the children to support balanced bilingual development.

This study utilizes Holmes's (2013) sociolinguistic framework, which explains that language use in multilingual communities is systematically influenced by participants, setting, topic, and function rather than occurring

randomly. It is further supported by Muysken's (2000) typology of code-mixing, Wardhaugh's (2015) concept of code-switching, Spolsky's (2006, 2004) Family Language Policy, Piller's (2001) One Parent One Language strategy, and Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural approach to identity, which frames identity as a dynamic and relational process constructed through language use rather than a fixed characteristic. Based on this background, this study addresses three research questions: (1) what language codes are used by each family member in the home domain of multilingual family interactions; (2) what strategies are implemented by parents in daily family interactions; and (3) how does language use in the multilingual family contribute to children's identity. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the language codes used by family members, to identify parental strategies, and to explain how language use represents children's identity, contributing theoretically to sociolinguistic and family language policy studies and practically to parents' awareness of balanced multilingual practices at home. Moreover, unlike the international intermarriage contexts commonly examined as mentioned in previous study by Ismail et al. (2024), the Javanese-Mbojo family in this study represents an interethnic multilingual context within Indonesia, where different regional languages coexist with Indonesian as the national language. This combination provides a unique sociolinguistics perspective because Javanese has a strong cultural and social presence in East Java, while Mbojo is a minority regional language associated with Bima community. Therefore, the family's language practices involve not only the negotiation of different ethnic and cultural identities but also the use of a minority language within a predominantly Javanese speaking environment. The presence of Indonesian and English further expands the family's linguistic repertoire.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach following Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which aims to understand how people interpret experiences, construct meaning, and interact within their social worlds through prolonged engagement,

participant observation, and in-depth interviews. This approach was considered suitable because it allows the researcher to capture naturalistic data on language codes as they naturally occur within daily family conversation, rather than relying on numerical measurement.

The subjects of this study were a set of parents and two multilingual children who actively use Indonesian, English, Javanese, and Mbojo in their daily interactions. The parents and close relatives, including a grandmother and an aunt, served as the main informants who shape the children's linguistic environment. The study focused on a single family to allow in-depth, contextualized exploration and was situated in the home domain in Malang, East Java, which provided an authentic setting for observing natural multilingual practice.

The data consisted of naturally occurring conversations between family members and their interlocutors in the home domain, as well as data from semi-structured interviews with the parents. Data were collected through non-participatory observation for two months, during which the researcher recorded language use through note-taking and voice recording without participating in the conversation, and through semi-structured interviews conducted online via Zoom in March 2026, which explored the strategies behind the family's language choices.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data condensation involved selecting utterances relevant to the research objectives, reducing utterances that did not reflect the children's identity strategies, and grouping the remaining data according to the four languages used, namely Indonesian, English, Javanese, and Mbojo. The utterance reduction process was conducted to ensure that only data relevant to the research objectives were analyzed. Utterances were excluded when they did not provide evidence of the children's language use, language choices, or identity representation strategies. After this reduction, the remaining relevant utterances were grouped according to the four languages used by the family, namely Indonesian, English, Javanese, and Mbojo that analyzed based on their language patterns and contribution to the representation of children's identity. Data display was carried out by

organizing the condensed data into analytical tables covering language codes used by family members, strategies implemented by parents, and language use in relation to identity representation, following the theoretical aspects of Muysken (2000) for code-mixing, Wardhaugh (2015) for code-switching, Spolsky (2006, 2004) and Piller (2001) for parental strategy, and Bucholtz and Hall (2005) for identity representation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by identifying recurring patterns across the observation and interview data and interpreting their relation to family interaction and children's identity construction, which were then cross-checked against the relevant theories to ensure the credibility of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions: the language codes used by family members, the strategies implemented by parents, and the representation of children's identity through language use. The findings are compared with the theoretical framework and previous studies to determine the extent to which they support or extend earlier research.

1. Language Codes Used by Family Members

The observation data revealed twelve occurrences of language codes in daily family interaction, consisting of eight instances of code-mixing (five insertions and four alternations) and three instances of metaphorical code-switching, as summarized in Table 1. No instances of congruent lexicalization or situational code-switching were found.

Table 1 Types of language Codes

Types of Language Codes	Subtype	Total
Code-mixing	Insertion	5
	Alternation	4
	Congruent lexicalization	0
Code-switching	Situational	0
	Metaphorical	3
Total		12

Source: Non-participatory observation data, processed by the researcher (2026).

Following Muysken's (2000) typology, insertion was the most frequent type of code-mixing, in which a word or phrase from one language was embedded into the grammatical structure of another without altering the sentence construction. For instance, Child A initiated a conversation in Indonesian, "Dek, minta tolong ambilin drawing book ku dong di rak buku" (Little brother, could you please get my drawing book on the bookshelf), inserting the English term drawing book instead of the Indonesian buku gambar, while in another utterance the child combined Indonesian, English, and Javanese elements in a single sentence, "Loh! not yang ini, yo opo seh?" (Loh! not this one, how dare you?). Similarly, the father inserted the English word playground and apple into otherwise Indonesian utterances when introducing vocabulary to the children, showing that insertional code-mixing functioned both as a natural communicative habit and as an informal strategy to familiarize children with English vocabulary.

Alternation code-mixing, in which speakers shift between linguistic structures while maintaining the flow of interaction, occurred when a grandmother switched to Javanese to express familiarity and emotional closeness, and when siblings alternated between Indonesian and Javanese within the same exchange. These findings align with Bloch (2024), who found that switching to a heritage language reflects parental attitudes and emotional attachment, and with Ismail et al. (2024), who identified code-mixing as a natural communication strategy among multilingual family members. No congruent lexicalization was found, indicating that the family rarely blended the grammatical structures of different languages; this contrasts with Alalloh (2023), who found congruent mixing among peers in an English dormitory, suggesting that family interaction at home tends to preserve Indonesian as the single dominant grammatical structure while inserting lexical items from other languages.

Regarding code-switching, Wardhaugh (2015) distinguishes between situational and metaphorical types; only metaphorical code-switching was found in this study. This is evident in the mother's utterance "Jangan lama-lama, mai ngaha" (Don't take too long, let's eat),

which begins in Indonesian and switches to Mbojo within the same sentence, and in the father's utterance "Wis mangan durung?" (Have you eaten yet?) in Javanese, to which the child replied in Indonesian. In all cases, the children's responses remained largely in Indonesian, while parents actively incorporated Javanese or Mbojo, indicating that the switch was not triggered by a change of setting, participant, or topic but instead functioned symbolically to express familiarity, emotional closeness, and cultural identity, consistent with Sakura (2023) and Zuraida et al. (2020). The absence of situational code-switching confirms that changes in language use within this family are not determined by formal shifts in social situations but by communicative and affective purposes. This study aligned with previous study that characterizes multilingual family language use as adaptable and reliant on communication goals rather than being solely influenced by shift in social contexts. This result supports Wardhaugh's (2015) distinction between situational code-switching and language changes carried on by shifts in participants, context, or subject. Due to a change in social circumstances, family members in the current study typically remained in the same home environment and did not systematically switch languages. Rather, communicative goals such as expressing familiarity, emphasizing meaning, or assisting children in their learning that influenced language choices. The Family Language Policy perspective, which sees family language practices as dynamic and influenced by the family's interactional needs, is further supported by this study. Consequently, an absence of situational code-switching adds to the scope of literature by showing that language switching within the home domain can happen mainly for interpersonal and communicative purposes rather than as a direct reaction to changes in social situations in a Javanese-Mbojo multilingual family.

This finding also provide evidence that the limited transmission of Mbojo mentioned in the introduction is reflected in the family's daily language practices. Mbojo appeared less frequently than Indonesian, Javanese, and English that indicate its minority status may influence its transmission within the home domain. Nevertheless, Mbojo was part of the family's multilingual repertoire, it was not used as the primary language for everyday

communication. This suggests that the presence of a minority language in a multilingual family does not necessarily guarantee its regular transmission to children. The parents' language practices also contributed to communicative purposes and familiarity. There is no specific parental strategy was identified that consistently required or encouraged the children to use Mbojo in everyday conversations. Therefore, the findings suggest that Mbojo was maintained as part of the children's linguistic repertoire, but its transmission remained limited because it was not systematically reinforced through regular family interaction.

2. Strategies Implemented by Parents

Table 2 presents the distribution of parental language strategies identified from the interview data.

Table 2 Parents Strategies

Strategy	Total
One Parent One Language (OPOL)	1
Family Language Policy	5
Language Practice	–
Family Language Policy	1
Language Ideology	–
Family Language Policy	1
Language Management	–

Source: Semi-structured interview data, processed by the researcher (2026).

The interview data revealed eight language strategies applied by the parents, consisting of one instance of One Parent One Language (OPOL) and seven instances of Family Language Policy (FLP), the latter comprising five language-practice, one language-ideology, and one language-management instance. Rather than adhering to Piller's (2001) OPOL model in which each parent consistently uses a single designated language, the father was found to introduce Indonesian, English, and Javanese interchangeably, as reflected in the statement "Biasanya kalau sama ayahnya ya campur

bahasa Indonesia sama Jawa” (Usually, when they're with their father, they mix Indonesian and Javanese). This indicates that OPOL is applied flexibly rather than through strict language separation, supporting Holmes's (2013) view that language use in multilingual families is shaped more by context than by rigid rules, and aligning with Verhagen et al. (2022), who found that OPOL can still support bilingual development even when applied adaptively.

Within Spolsky's (2006, 2004) three components of FLP, language practice emerged as the most prominent, shown in statements such as “Kadang full pakai bahasa Indonesia, tapi ada diselipin bahasa Jawa juga, menyesuaikan situasi” (Sometimes we speak fully in Indonesian, but Javanese is inserted too, depending on the situation), and in the aunt's habitual use of English with the children. This situational and adjustable use of language is consistent with Qaralleh et al. (2025) and Oktavia (2024), who found that multilingual households favor flexible practice over rigid language separation. Language ideology was reflected in the mother's belief that Indonesian is easier to understand and more acceptable for daily communication, consistent with Santosa (2024), while language management appeared in the father's deliberate use of Javanese to express emotion, aligning with Kurniawan et al. (2025) regarding the influence of home social settings on language choice. Overall, these findings suggest that the family consciously and unconsciously combines flexible OPOL-like practice with the three components of FLP to negotiate multilingual communication in daily life.

3. The Representation of Children's Identity

Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005), who conceptualize identity as a dynamic process constructed through language use rather than a fixed characteristic, this study identified six instances of identity representation: one belonging, two cultural affiliation, and three power relations. The statement “tetap bahasa yang dipakai sehari-hari ya bahasa Indonesia” (the language used daily is still Indonesian) reflects belonging, positioning the family within a shared national identity and demonstrating that consistent use of Indonesian symbolically strengthens involvement in the broader Indonesian social community.

Cultural affiliation was represented through the combination of Indonesian and

Javanese in daily interaction, as in “Kebanyakan bahasa Indonesia sih, tapi campur, ya bahasa Jawa juga” (It's mostly Indonesian, but it's a mix, there is Javanese too), which reflects a blended national and ethnic identity, and through the use of Javanese specifically in expressive contexts, as in “biasanya mereka kalau bahasa Jawa itu kalau mengungkapkan ekspresi” (typically, they use Javanese when expressing certain things), which signals emotional closeness and cultural intimacy. These findings are consistent with Fishman (1991), who regards language as one of the strongest markers of ethnic identity and cultural continuity, and with Lawal et al. (2025), who emphasize language as a resource for negotiating identity in social interaction.

Power relations were the most frequently represented identity category, evident in the father's deliberate use of English for vocabulary such as fruits and animals, and in academic contexts, as in “Pas belajar, pas ada pelajaran bahasa Inggris... itu pakai” (When studying, during English lessons... that's when it's used). Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Spolsky (2006, 2004), these practices position the father as an authority figure who regulates children's exposure to a globally prestigious language associated with education and modernity. The use of English and Indonesian also represents power relations because these languages are associated with education, broader communication, and the children's future competitiveness. English, in particular, was introduced through learning activities and vocabulary related to educational contexts, suggesting that parents viewed English as a valuable linguistic resource for their children's future academic and global opportunities. Meanwhile, Indonesian was prioritized for everyday communication because it was considered practical and easily understood by all family members, giving it greater functional power within the household. Power relations were also evident among siblings, as in Child A's directive utterance “Jangan gitu dek! Ngawur iki!” (Don't be like that, little brother! What's wrong with you!), which combines Indonesian and Javanese to assert authority over a younger sibling, showing that power relations operate not only between parents and children but also within children's own interactions. This pattern is consistent with the family's language management strategy, in

which the father intentionally uses Javanese in expressive contexts, as reflected in the statement “biasanya kalau pas ngomelin gitu ya”, indicating that the choice of local language in emotionally charged interaction is not incidental but is a recognized communicative resource within the household, in line with Kurniawan et al. (2025), who found that home social settings shape how local languages are deployed for affective and relational purposes. Moreover, Javanese served more affective and cultural function. The family used Javanese particularly when expressing emotions, familiarity, and closeness, indicating that its value was not primarily based on educational or socioeconomic advantages. Therefore, the family’s multilingual practices demonstrate that language choice is shaped by different forms of value, English and Indonesian provide practical and future-oriented resources, whereas Javanese strengthens interpersonal intimacy and cultural affiliation. Taken together, these findings show that cultural affiliation and power relations were more dominant than belonging in shaping children's identity, indicating that the children primarily used language to negotiate cultural and social relationships within the family rather than to express a singular sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multilingual practice in the Javanese-Mbojo family is closely associated with the implementation of Family Language Policy, in which Indonesian, English, Javanese, and Mbojo are used depending on context, participant, and communicative purpose. Indonesian functions as the dominant language of communication, English appears mainly through lexical insertion in academic contexts, Javanese is frequently used to express emotion, intimacy, and cultural identity, while Mbojo appears less frequently. These practices are realized through code-mixing, particularly insertion and alternation, and through metaphorical code-switching, while the family's One Parent One Language practice remains flexible rather than strictly separated, and its Family Language Policy is reflected through language practice, ideology, and management. Furthermore, children's identity is represented through belonging, cultural affiliation, and power relations, with cultural affiliation and power relations emerging as the most dominant,

indicating that language functions not merely as a communication tool but as a crucial medium for preserving cultural identity and negotiating social relationships among family members.

Based on these conclusions, parents are encouraged to maintain balanced multilingual communication at home to preserve local languages while supporting children's competence in national and foreign languages. Future researchers are encouraged to involve a broader range of participants and family backgrounds, including digital or online communication, to gain richer insight into multilingual family interaction and identity representation. This study is expected to provide insight into the role of parents in shaping communication patterns, language use, and identity development within multilingual families.

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