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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Subordination of Indonesian language in contemporary Javanese pop music

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the subordination of Indonesian in the lyrics of contemporary Javanese pop songs by Denny Caknan. Employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the study traces three dimensions, namely text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice, through lyric data from the nine most popular songs and an examination of their circulation on TikTok. At the textual level, Indonesian is found to be reduced to affective lexicon marking emotional peaks, to lose its own grammatical authority through Javanese morphological and syntactic hybridization, and to be selected according to rhyme requirements rather than meaning alone. At the level of discourse practice, all twenty-three units of Indonesian insertion in the corpus were found to be reproduced by TikTok users, distributed fairly evenly across song structures, with the highest circulation found in content themed around longing and loss. At the sociocultural level, these findings indicate a reversal of the sociolinguistic hierarchy, using regional languages, that historically and politically occupied subordinate positions now dominate the main narrative, while Indonesian is reduced to a commercial instrument for expanding market reach across ethnic boundaries. This pattern differs from findings on language commodification in global popular music, which generally position dominant languages as insertions that add market value. The study concludes that digital platform capitalism has transformed the function of Indonesian from a symbol of national integration into a pragmatic commodification tool in the contemporary regional music industry.
Keywords: Indonesian language; language subordination; linguistic commodification; Critical Discourse Analysis; Javanese pop music.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital technological infrastructure has fundamentally transformed patterns of entertainment distribution and consumption (Van Dijck, 2020). This transformation is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the infrastructure innovation pillar that expands access to information technology globally (Unwin & Unwin, 2017). During the conventional broadcasting era, geographical boundaries and centralized media control constrained the circulation of cultural products. Today, algorithms on social media platforms have eroded these boundaries: content-distribution systems respond to individual user preferences, enabling local entertainment products to reach audiences beyond their original demographic. This condition has also driven structural changes in the contemporary music entertainment industry landscape (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

In response to this shift, critical music studies can no longer be limited to audio aspects alone. The study of songs has expanded from musicology, the sociology of music, and ethnomusicology (Bonsu, 2025; Born, 2022; Onanuga & Akingbe, 2020) to language studies, popular culture, and discourse (Kreyer, 2015). Contemporary pop-song lyrics have developed from mere entertainment commodities into texts that also negotiate identity and represent power relations in digital public spaces. In multiethnic societies, regional pop music widely circulated on social media offers a relevant analytical lens for examining how identity narratives are constructed in the commercial entertainment industry (Heller, 2003). Through this lens, researchers can observe how sociolinguistic power inequalities are reproduced, commodified, and exchanged as cultural representations.

Competition and commodification between local and dominant languages is not a phenomenon exclusive to Indonesia. Sociolinguistic studies of the K-pop, Latin pop, and African music industries show similar patterns (Jin & Ryoo, 2014; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2018; Picone, 2024) dominant languages (e.g., English) are deliberately reduced to commercially supportive elements in particular lyric sections, while the main narrative continues to use the local language to preserve the authenticity of its artistic value. This pattern confirms that the entertainment industry tends to position dominant languages as tools for expanding market reach rather than as the narrative's core (Androutsopoulos, 2010). However, sociolinguistic and cultural studies in Indonesia have rarely examined the reverse: most studies still position Indonesian as the dominant language, with regional languages

occupying marginal positions because of national hegemony (Risky & Sari, 2024; Widiyono, 2013).

In digital spaces, discourse is no longer produced and distributed passively. The entertainment ecosystem's shift to digital platforms is driven by algorithms that simultaneously shape and dismantle previously established power structures (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube erase conventional boundaries between creators and audiences. Audiences are now free to rework song texts, for example through *jedag-jedug* trends, CapCut video templates, and share or repost features referred to as produsage (production and usage) (Burgess & Green, 2018). People no longer merely listen to songs but also reproduce their forms. This shift requires musical works to adapt to algorithms in order to remain relevant to the public.

This shift in consumption patterns ultimately produces a shift in language hegemony, with the national language beginning to lose its primary function as a formal symbol of nationhood. In contemporary regional pop music, Indonesian is more often commodified and its value reduced as a means of expanding market reach, rather than being presented as a marker of national identity. Nevertheless, existing studies have not critically examined this practice, and this gap is what the present study seeks to address.

Within Indonesia's digital music-industry landscape, contemporary Javanese pop music provides a relevant arena for observing this phenomenon. For instance, Denny Caknan, one of the genre's leading singers, is a central figure and a pioneer of Javanese musicians in the post-Didi Kempot era. His presence not only sustains regional music but also shifts its consumer demographics. Whereas Javanese-language music was previously associated with older listeners, Denny Caknan's work has successfully captured the younger generation, who constitute major consumers of social media. This condition makes his works representative objects for examining how the local music industry operates and competes at the national level.

Research examining the linguistic dimensions of Denny Caknan's works has been conducted, but its analytical framework remains limited. For example, one study uses the same Fairclough CDA approach to map Javanese-Indonesian diglossic patterns in Denny Caknan's lyrics, identifying forms of high-low (H-L) variety switching and the social, industrial, and digital factors influencing them (Salsabila, 2026). Although valuable as a map of linguistic forms, that study remains at a descriptive-classificatory level that explains the forms and triggering factors of diglossia without framing them as a matter of power relations between languages (Heller, 2007) and without treating digital circulation data as empirical

evidence of the commercial value of these language patterns (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013). Other studies in macro-linguistics have likewise generally focused on romanticism, representations of masculinity, and the preservation of Javanese culture, rather than examining regional songwriters' purposes in using national-language vocabulary as an instrument of commodification (Coupland, 2003; Febrindasari et al., 2025).

Furthermore, historically, Indonesian became the principal language at the national level. Through a series of state policies, this language was used as a symbol of integration that united cultural diversity. This approach placed Indonesian at the highest level of the hierarchy above regional languages (Heryanto, 1995). The national language held full authority in formal communication, while regional languages were restricted to domestic interaction and the preservation of local community traditions (Zein, 2020). This power structure shaped how society understood the value and role of language before the digital economy emerged.

The expansion of the internet and the digital economy has changed how language is used, positioning it as a commodity with exchange value in commercial markets (Kelly-Holmes, 2019). Heller reinforces this argument, arguing that late capitalism drives language commodification through two often competing orientations: language as a technical skill (language-as-skill) and language as a marker of identity (language-as-identity) (Heller, 2010). As a technical skill, language is subject to standard industrial management practices, while as identity, it provides authenticity value to products in specific markets. The tension between standardization and variability, and between prestige and authenticity, provides a theoretical framework for explaining how a high-status language can be functionally downgraded to serve a language that represents local authenticity (Petrovic & Yazan, 2021).

In the context of contemporary Javanese pop music, the concept of indexicality that juxtaposes authenticity and anonymity clarifies why regional language assumes the primary role (Woolard, 2016). Indonesian operates as an anonymous and standardized language, making it widely intelligible and enabling it to function as a bridge for communication across ethnic groups. In contrast, Javanese carries indexical value that represents the authenticity of local working-class identity (Goebel, 2010). This functional division of roles reduces Indonesian to a purely technical skill, whose arrangement must comply with the rhymes, affixation, and rhythms of regional music. Songwriters use the national language merely as an ornament that triggers emotion, while Javanese controls the narrative authority and authenticity of the work.

The pattern of language use in Javanese pop music offers a theoretical position distinct from studies of language mixing in the global music sphere. Various studies of language commodification in K-pop and Nigerian hip-hop show a unidirectional pattern of blending (Jin & Ryoo, 2014; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2018). In these international cases, the globally dominant language (English) is inserted into local languages to add cosmopolitan market value and expand international market reach. In contrast, Javanese pop music reverses the linguistic hierarchy commonly assumed. A regional language structurally positioned at the margins can subordinate a politically more dominant national language (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019. This characteristic underscores the study's contribution by showing how regional industrial capital operates by exploiting the language of the center to expand markets.

Based on this gap in the literature, this study aims to identify and unpack the ideological discourse in Denny Caknan's song lyrics. Specifically, the study analyzes how contemporary Javanese pop music positions Indonesians as subordinate to Javanese people. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the study investigates three dimensions: textual order, discourse-production practices, and sociocultural practices. Through these three dimensions, the study argues that inserting Indonesian into local pop lyrics is not a form of national integration, but a language-commodification strategy to expand market reach across cultural and geographical boundaries.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative design based on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (Fairclough, 2023), combined with an analysis of digital circulation traces (KhosraviNik, 2023). Fairclough's approach was selected to examine how language operates through three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices. Meanwhile, quantitative content-distribution analysis was applied to trace and validate the text's dissemination within the social-media ecosystem. Integrating these two approaches provides a measurable framework for tracing how digital users mechanically reproduce lyric structures. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive framework for tracing how lyric structures are reproduced and consumed by digital users (Salmons, 2015).

The data population was sourced from Denny Caknan's official YouTube channel. Sampling was conducted in two stages. First, the 16 music videos with the highest number of views as of 20 September 2026 were identified as the base population. Second, purposive sampling was applied with the inclusion criterion that Indonesian lexicon or phrases be

present within the predominantly Javanese main lyrics. Based on these criteria, nine songs were selected as the research corpus: Kartoyono Medot Janji, Cundamani, Sugeng Dalu, Satru, Los Dol, Wirang, Negoro Angin, Widodari, and Sigar.

The extraction process from these nine songs yielded 23 data units consisting of Indonesian words or clauses. In this study, affective lexicon operationally refers to words belonging to word classes related to feelings or emotions (nouns, verbs, or emotional adjectives), which served as the main classification indicator at the textual-analysis stage (Zappavigna, 2018). Each data unit was then identified by its position within the song's musical structure. The position categories were divided into three main sections: verse (introductory stanza), pre-chorus (transitional bridge), and chorus (core section) (Machin, 2010). This mapping helped identify patterns in the placement of Indonesian lexicon within Javanese-language texts.

The level of reuse of each data unit was traced on TikTok. Clauses containing Indonesian elements were entered as search keywords. The data were then filtered by the highest levels of interaction and manually validated by comparing them with the official audio and visual text displayed on screen. Based on the tracing of 23 data units from nine songs, all units (100%) were identified as having been extracted and reused by TikTok users as independent audio. The interaction range across the 23 units indicates high circulation, with the lowest number of views at 157,000 and the highest at 18.9 million. We then mapped each unit's interaction distribution by lexicon position within the song structure verse, pre-chorus, and chorus to identify the correlation between lyric position and discourse circulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Affective Indonesian Lexicon in Javanese Song Narratives

The data show that words or phrases referring to emotional conditions tend to appear in Indonesian, even when the clauses containing them are entirely in Javanese.

As explained in the Methods section, affective lexicon in this study refers to words belonging to word classes associated with feelings or emotions, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives, which serve as the main criterion for filtering textual data. Across the 23 data units identified in nine songs, several data points show a recurring pattern: Indonesian lexicon tends to appear precisely where the Javanese lyrics convey the peak emotional burden, rather than being distributed evenly throughout the text. The following four data

points represent this pattern, each showing variations in syntactic function and the semantic considerations behind choosing Indonesian lexicon over available Javanese equivalents.

"Sambat belas raono 'perhatian'" (Kartoyono Medot Janji)
I keep complaining, but there is no 'attention'

In the clause sambat belas raono 'perhatian' or 'attention', the lexicon perhatian appears as a noun naming something the speaker desires. Javanese verbal equivalents such as digatekke express the act of paying attention, so choosing perhatian shifts this experience from an action performed by another party to an explicitly named concept or object of attention.

"Aku wis ora gagas 'kata luka'" (Sugeng Dalu)
I no longer think about 'words of pain'

In Aku wis ora gagas 'kata luka' or words of pain (Sugeng Dalu), the expression kata luka appears as a nominal construction that condenses the experience of pain into a concept that can be explicitly named. This nominal form differs from an expression describing a process or action because it treats the emotional experience as an entity that becomes the object of the speaker's thought. This analysis is consistent with research on the Indonesian emotion lexicon showing that emotional experiences can be categorized and represented through lexical choices with different degrees of specificity.

"Lungamu dadi 'traumaku'" (Wirang)
Your leaving became my trauma

This data can be interpreted to mean that the word 'traumaku' or my trauma, produced through double affixation between the Indonesian lexicon "trauma" and the Javanese possessive "-ku", functions as a nominal predicate summarizing the psychological consequence of the lover's departure. If common Javanese equivalents such as "kelaran" or "loro ati" were used, the nuance would be more poetic and traditional. The choice of the word 'trauma' instead suggests an attempt by the speaker to borrow a modern psychological register to give a more "clinical" weight to the suffering.

"Tandane iku ora 'rindu'" (Los Dol)
The sign is that it is not longing

The use of rindu or longing (poetic) rather than kangen or missing (conversational) indicates that Indonesian is not present because it lacks a Javanese equivalent. Instead, Indonesian is selected even though a Javanese equivalent is available. Thus, the presence of Indonesian lexicon in the unit can be read as a stylistic and discursive choice rather than a need to fill a lexical gap.

The four data points reveal a consistent pattern: Indonesian affective lexicon always occurs at the closing or reinforcing point of a complaint proposition, functioning as a label

for heightened emotion. This pattern can be read as a form of linguistic accommodation in which key emotional lexicon is shifted into the national language; the text lowers comprehension barriers for audiences outside Javanese-speaking communities while simultaneously constructing a more universal emotional point of connection.

Based on the overall analysis above, it can be concluded that Indonesian in this corpus is not used as a language of narration, but as a "peak of feeling" lexicon deliberately selected for its semantic clarity to a broad audience. This function underscores an unequal division of linguistic labor: Javanese constructs the story and event context, while Indonesian is given only limited space to mark the most crucial emotional points so that they can be understood across cultures.

Javanization of Indonesian

After the previous subsection showed Indonesian as a lexical marker of emotional conditions, the next finding traces how this lexicon is treated grammatically once it enters Javanese-language lines. The corpus data show that Indonesian words or phrases are not necessarily accompanied by adherence to their own morphological and syntactic rules. Instead, these rules are often overridden to maintain the flexibility of the surrounding Javanese structure. The following three data points illustrate this pattern in greater detail, each highlighting a specific instance where Indonesian rules are disregarded.

The Javanization of Indonesian is evident when Indonesian lexical elements are used in Javanese constructions but their forms are adjusted to Javanese morphological patterns.

"Dengan gampange' sampean ninggal sayang" (Sigar)
How easily you left me, my dear.

The element *gampang* or easy is a lexicon also used in Indonesian, but in the lyric its form becomes gampange through the addition of the element -e. This addition shows that the Indonesian element is not retained in its original form but integrated into the Javanese morphological system. Thus, gampange is more appropriately understood as an Indonesian lexeme that undergoes Javanese morphological adjustment than as an independent Indonesian form.

"Tipise 'pertahanan atimu'" (Sigar)
Your heart's defenses are fragile.

The word *tipis,* or thin, in this context, fragile, is an Indonesian lexeme used with Javanese elements in a single construction, but it appears as tipise. The addition of -e shows that the

Indonesian lexical element follows the bound-form formation pattern used in Javanese. In this context, Javanization does not mean that all Indonesian elements become Javanese; rather, the inserted Indonesian element receives a Javanese morphological marker (Arkida & Sawardi, 2025). This data shows that the boundary between the two languages is visible not only in vocabulary choice but also in word formation.

"Jelas 'kubutuh' atimu" (Kartoyono Medot Janji)
Clearly, I need your heart.

The Indonesian proclitic "ku-" is indeed attached to the verb "butuh" or need according to its word-formation rules. However, if standard Indonesian syntactic rules were followed, the sentence should read "aku butuh hatimu", with the subject "aku" explicitly present before the verb. In this lyric, the subject is omitted, following the Javanese pattern, so the pro-cliticized verb combines directly with the possessive noun "atimu" without an overt subject. The Indonesian syntactic rule requiring a subject is therefore overridden to preserve the flexibility of Javanese sentence structure.

The three data points show that the hybridity in this corpus is not merely a matter of lexical mixing but of grammatical subordination. Indonesian loses authority over its own rules of word formation and arrangement once it enters the framework of Javanese lyrics; it is allowed only to contribute basic diction to expand audience reach, while Javanese grammar takes over its morphological and syntactic rules.

Stylistic Engineering

If the preceding analysis showed that Indonesian is subordinated at the level of meaning and grammar, the next finding demonstrates that this subordination also operates at the level of sound. Several data points in the corpus indicate that the selection of Indonesian words in certain lines is determined not solely by semantic needs but also by the need to maintain rhyme and assonance patterns with the surrounding Javanese lines. The following three data points were selected to illustrate this pattern in greater detail, each showing how phonological considerations also determine which lexicon is retained in Indonesian and which is instead absorbed into the Javanese structure.

The data found in the songs show that the selection of Indonesian lexicon in several lines is driven not only by semantic needs but also by sound requirements, particularly the need to maintain rhyme harmony with the surrounding Javanese lines.

Sinten sing sambat kulo niki kuat
Ning pas we ninggal lungo
Wektune mboten tepat' (sigar)
Who says that I am strong?

But when you left me
The timing was not right.

This excerpt suggests that the word ‘tepat’ or right was chosen to align its final /at/ sound with the preceding line, “Sinten sing sambat kulo niki kuat”, which ends with “kuat”. If the writer selected a more common Javanese equivalent such as “trep” or “pas” to convey the meaning of “tepat”, the established /at/ rhyme pattern would be broken. The selection of the Indonesian word is therefore specifically guided by sound requirements rather than by the absence of a Javanese equivalent.

Mbiyen wis tak wanti-wanti, ojo sampek lali
Tapi kenyataanya 'pergi' (Kartoyono Medot Janji)
I warned you before, do not forget
But in reality, you left.

This excerpt suggests that the word ‘pergi’, or ‘left’, is chosen to maintain the continuity of the /i/ rhyme that characterizes this song, as seen in the word “janji”, which appears repeatedly throughout the lyrics, including in the song title. The Javanese equivalent for ‘pergi’, namely “lunga”, ends in the vowel /a/ and would disrupt the /i/ assonance pattern. The selection of the Indonesian lexicon in this line thus shows that sound considerations can override the tendency to preserve Javanese integrity within a single line.

... yen mantan nakokno kabarmu
Tandane iku ora rindu
Nanging kangen kringet bareng awakmu (Los Dol)
If your ex asks how you are doing
That means it is not longing
But [they] miss being intimate with you

This data excerpt can be interpreted to mean that the word ‘kabarmu’, a combination of the Indonesian lexicon “kabar” and the Javanese possessive “-mu”, is placed at the end of the line to form a rhyme with the following line, “Tandane iku ora rindu”, which also ends in the vowel sound /u/. This line shows that rhyme is achieved not only through selecting a complete Indonesian word but also through morphological hybrids that still produce the required final sound.

These three data points show that inserting Indonesian in this corpus also functions as a musical-linguistic instrument, rather than merely a carrier of meaning. In some cases, Indonesian words are selected precisely because their Javanese equivalents would disrupt an established sound pattern, while in other cases Indonesian words are morphologically fused with Javanese affixes in order to remain compliant with rhyme requirements. This pattern shows that the authority of Indonesian in the corpus is subordinated not only at the

level of meaning and grammar, as discussed in the previous subsection, but also at the level of sound: national lexicon appears and persists in the lyrics insofar as it can serve the musical-aesthetic needs of Javanese.

Discourse Practice: Digital Circulation of Javanese Music

Tracing the 23 data units containing Indonesian lexicon shows that all of them (100%) have been extracted and reused by TikTok users as independent audio. This extraction mechanism operates through the platform's sound-page feature, where short lyric excerpts are separated from the original song structure and embedded as background audio in short videos created by users. In other words, text units that were originally bound to the complete narrative of a song become standalone sound objects, detached from the narrative context that originally surrounded them.

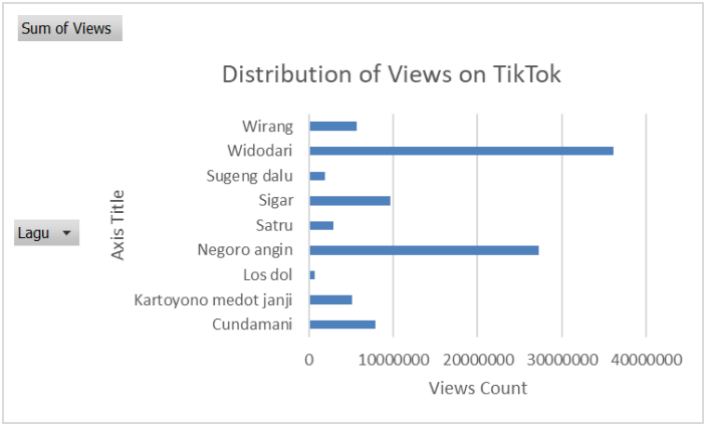


Figure 1. Distribution View on TikTok

The circulation range across these 23 data units is broad but consistently shows high engagement figures. At the lowest point, the lyric excerpt from the refrain of Sigar ("Genah njobo njerone... Tipise pertahanan atimu") recorded 157,000 views and 25,000 likes. At its peak, the verse excerpt from Negoro Angin ("Mabur dhuwur melayang-layang / Terbang di atas awan / Ingin melepas rindu, Sayang") reached 18.9 million views and 1.7 million likes—more than 100 times that of Sigar. This broad range indicates that circulation is not uniform across the corpus, but none of the data units failed to cross the minimum threshold of reproduction by digital audiences.

In a small number of cases, the reproduction mechanism did not stop at use as sound alone but developed into ready-to-use visual templates. Lyric excerpts from Sugeng Dalu ("Aku wis ora gagas kata luka") and Kartoyono Medot Janji ("Sing jelas aku mikir kedepane") were identified as having been turned into CapCut templates, namely built-in video formats that allow other users to insert personal photographs or clips into predetermined transition patterns and music. This distinction is important: for units that "only" become sound,

reproduction still requires some creative effort from users (selecting their own visuals), whereas for units that become CapCut templates, the reproduction process is almost entirely automated. The same line can be replicated by thousands of users with minimal visual variation, meaning that the lyric excerpt functions as a template for content production rather than merely as listening material.

This pattern reveals a shift in discourse practice: the boundary between text consumption and production becomes blurred. Within Fairclough's framework, the discourse-practice dimension encompasses how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed (Fairclough, 2023). The data in this study show that consumption (listening to a song) and production (creating derivative videos) occur almost simultaneously and become intertwined. Users no longer act merely as passive listeners but also as agents who distribute these hybrid lyric texts through their respective social networks.

Nevertheless, the high circulation figures across all data units need to be interpreted cautiously. The nine songs constituting the research corpus are works with the highest view counts on Denny Caknan's official channel, meaning that some of the high circulation may reflect the overall popularity of the songs rather than the appeal of the inserted Indonesian lexicon alone. This study has not compared the circulation of hybrid lines with fully Javanese lines from the same songs, so claims regarding the specific contribution of Indonesian to virality remain indicative and require further testing in future research.

Despite these limitations, the one-hundred-percent consistency of extraction across all 23 data units still indicates something significant: these hybrid lexicons are structurally "ready to use" for the platform's content-production machinery, whether through independent sound channels or visual templates. The following subsection further examines this pattern by mapping whether lyric position within the song structure also determines circulation level.

Discourse Practice: Correlation between Lyric Position and Circulation Level

Across the 23 identified data units, Indonesian lexicon positions within the musical structure fall into three categories: 12 units in the verse, 5 units in the pre-chorus, and 6 units in the chorus/refrain. The verse most often accommodates Indonesian insertions, although the difference from the combined pre-chorus and chorus (11 units) is small; these insertions are distributed fairly evenly throughout the song structure. This distribution is nevertheless interesting because it differs from the conventional assumption that important

elements of a song, including memorable “key” words, appear in the chorus as the song’s structural peak: in this corpus, the chorus is not the position with the most insertions.

Circulation data show that structural position is not directly proportional to interaction levels. In the pre-chorus, the lyric excerpt from Widodari ("Ku pernah terjatuh / Ku pernah ditinggalkan") recorded 15.6 million views, a figure far exceeding the average chorus unit in the corpus. Meanwhile, the highest circulation overall was found in the verse section, namely in Negoro Angin with 18.9 million views. In the chorus itself, the unit with the highest circulation is Cundamani ("Sayang, titip ragaku") with 7.9 million views—a significant figure, but still below the highest unit from both the verse and pre-chorus. This pattern confirms that the conventional climactic position (chorus) is not an absolute prerequisite for high circulation of a hybrid lyric excerpt.

Further examination shows that the units with the highest circulation at each structural position (Negoro Angin in the verse, Widodari in the pre-chorus, and Cundamani in the chorus) share a common feature: all three contain Indonesian lexicon or phrases explicitly expressing longing or loss (“melepas rindu”, “pernah ditinggalkan”, “titip ragaku”). This shared affective theme suggests that the emotional content of Indonesian lexicon may matter more for circulation levels than structural position alone. In other words, the lyric's location in the song appears to interact with the type of semantic content it carries rather than functioning independently as a single variable.

Nevertheless, this interpretation needs to be read with the same caution as in the previous subsection. The number of units in each position category is unbalanced (12 verse units compared with 5 pre-chorus units), so direct comparisons between positions risk being biased by unequal sample sizes. The five pre-chorus units, for example, are too few to conclude that this position is generally superior to others; the 15.6 million views for Widodari may be more appropriately read as a notable case (outlier) rather than as a consistent positional pattern. A larger corpus with a more balanced proportion of positions is required in future research to test whether this pattern persists statistically.

Overall, the findings show that discourse practices surrounding this corpus are driven by the interaction between musical structure, affective content, and the platform’s algorithmic logic, rather than by any single factor alone (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Indonesian lexicon, however small its textual proportion, occupies a structurally strategic position in the TikTok circulation ecosystem: it persists not because of national authority, but because it adapts to the emotional and algorithmic needs of digital audiences.

Sociocultural Analysis

Language Commodification in the Algorithmic Era

Within the sociocultural-practice framework, texts are positioned as products of the social and economic conditions of their time. The finding that Indonesian-language lyric excerpts circulate massively in digital media cannot be viewed merely as an entertainment trend. This phenomenon constitutes evidence of language commodification, in which national-language lexicon loses its primary function as a unifying identity and becomes a commercial commodity (Kelly-Holmes, 2019). Content visibility on digital platforms is strongly influenced by engagement signals and patterns of user interaction. To meet the demands of this system, this pattern can be read as a strategy for reaching users outside the territory of Javanese speakers.

In practice, Indonesian is not treated the same as Javanese. The national lexicon functions as a trigger that makes local works more readily accepted by algorithmic recommendation systems. This pattern shows that language choices in the contemporary regional pop-music industry are not driven by national sentiment but follow the logic of the digital economy: the national language is used insofar as it helps expand market reach and the market value of the work.

Subordination of Indonesian in the Local Music Industry

Traditionally, sociolinguistic literature has placed Indonesian at the top of the hierarchy as the principal means of communication in public spaces and mass media, with its use standardized to ensure smooth interaction across ethnic groups (Zein, 2020). This shift pushed regional languages into private domains or limited communities, establishing the national language as Indonesia's primary medium of communication.

This dominance resulted from state policies in previous decades. During the New Order, the government tightly controlled broadcasting infrastructure and directed pop cultural products to use the national language in support of political integration, so that the distribution of regional-language musical works was heavily restricted on national radio and television in order to suppress regionalist sentiment (Sen & Hill, 2007). As a result, Indonesian dominated the production channels of popular Nusantara music.

The production practices of contemporary Javanese pop music instead show a pattern that runs counter to this historical record. Denny Caknan’s lyric data show Javanese

operating as the main narrative structure: the overall story, the presentation of conflict, and the resolution of problems are constructed through regional-language vocabulary. Javanese is no longer peripheral; instead, it dominates lyrics circulating at the national level. Within this lyric structure, Indonesian occupies a narrow space, appearing only as fragments of short phrases or clauses that shift its function to a mere additional element. Songwriters adjust this vocabulary to the needs of the musical arrangement, often placing it at the end of lines to complete the vowel-rhyme pattern of Javanese.

This shift in proportion and placement represents the structural subordination of Indonesian within the text. The songwriter selects its lexicon, no longer determined by its national status; lyric-writing decisions follow commercial calculations in the digital market rather than national authority. This pattern confirms a reversal of the power relationship between the languages: Indonesian appears only when the Javanese narrative requires affective assistance for listeners outside the region, functioning as a support mechanism for expanding the work's acceptability. These findings show that sociolinguistic hierarchies can shift when regional cultural products acquire high economic value.

The Commodification of 'Lara Ati'

Sadness and heartbreak are recurring themes in the songs analyzed, but they do not stop at their expressive function within the text. When lyric excerpts containing experiences of loss, longing, and lara ati are separated from the complete song and reused as audio in digital content, these affective experiences take on a new function as material that users can produce, circulate, and consume. Thus, what circulates is not only the song as a musical product but also the representation of sadness contained within it. This pattern is consistent with research showing that expressions of sadness in Indonesian users' interactions on Instagram can become content that is consumed, shared, and generates value through digital engagement (Hidayati & Agoro, 2024).

In the research corpus, this process can be seen in the reuse of lyric excerpts as sound and short-video material. Lexicon such as "traumaku," "bertahan," and "perhatian" not only conveys emotional experiences in the song narrative but also provides expressions that can be detached from the story context and used to represent users' own experiences. When a lyric excerpt can be placed in a video about loss, a relationship that has ended, or a personal experience, the emotional experience originally situated in the song text becomes a replicable form of expression. Thus, commodification in this context does not mean that "sadness" is literally sold as a commodity, but rather that the representation of sadness

acquires circulation value and economic value through digital content-production and consumption systems.

This process also shows a shift in the listener's position. Listeners do not merely receive sadness as a meaning offered by the song; they can take a particular excerpt, place it into a video, and connect it to personal experiences. Research on the commodification of sadness on social media shows that users' emotional expressions can become part of activities that increase interaction and content visibility. In this corpus, a similar mechanism appears when lyric excerpts containing expressions of lara ati are repeatedly used as sound. Users therefore act both as consumers and as reproducers of emotional representations already available in the song.

At this point, Indonesian plays an important role in the commodification process. Indonesian lexicon such as "traumaku," "perhatian," and "bertahan" provides expressions that can be reused without retaining the full narrative context in Javanese. When a lyric excerpt can be understood and placed in various user-experience contexts, these linguistic elements help make emotional experiences easier to transfer from songs to digital content. However, this function should be understood as a possibility offered by the linguistic form, not as evidence that the language choice directly causes high circulation. The relationship between language choice and circulation needs to be interpreted alongside other factors such as song popularity, lyric position, musical form, and platform-distribution mechanisms.

Thus, lara ati in this corpus can be understood as a form of cultural experience that acquires additional value when it enters the economy of digital circulation. Sadness continues to have an emotional function for listeners, but its representation also becomes part of content production, user interaction, and platform distribution. In this sense, commodification does not erase sadness's expressive function but adds economic and circulation functions. This shift shows how affective experiences constructed through songs can move from personal expression into cultural forms that can be repeatedly used and circulated.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, this process shows that emotional meaning in songs does not stop at the textual level. The meaning changes when it is reproduced through digital practices and placed within a platform environment that relies on visibility, engagement, and content circulation. Therefore, lara ati can be understood not only as a musical theme but also as a form of affect that acquires circulation value in the digital cultural economy. Indonesia's position in this process matters because several

Indonesian lexicons function as components of emotional excerpts that can be transferred from song narratives into various forms of digital content. Thus, the commodification identified in this study occurs primarily in the representation of sadness and its circulation practices, rather than in sadness as a psychological experience itself.

Discussion and Implications: Mapping the Nusantara Commodification Landscape

The findings on the reversal of linguistic hegemony in the Javanese pop industry open broader space to examine other regional entertainment industries in Indonesia. The collapse of the broadcasting monopoly due to digital platforms gives regional musicians greater freedom to reformulate their own cultural identities. Given Indonesia's high ethnic diversity and the vitality of local cultures, similar patterns of language commodification are likely to occur outside Java as well.

The reversal of structural function in this corpus aligns with findings from other sociolinguistic contexts that show how languages with higher social status can occupy structural rather than narrative positions in local-language popular music. In a study of Cantopop in Hong Kong, the insertion of English into Cantonese-language lyrics was found not merely to signal Western cultural dominance but to adapt to the text's structural needs, particularly rhyme patterns, markers of song-structure boundaries, and the construction of alternative singer identities (CHAN, 2009). A subsequent study of television-drama theme songs in Hong Kong from 2009–2018 found a similar pattern, with the additional function of strengthening the emotional content of the text (Ng, 2021). This parallel indicates that the phenomenon whereby a high-status language is reduced to structural and affective elements rather than serving as the main driver of the narrative is not unique to the Javanese pop-music industry, but is also observed in other linguistic and cultural contexts that are historically very different from Indonesia.

Several limitations of this study warrant acknowledgment before generalizing its findings are generalized. The research corpus draws on a single musician, Denny Caknan, so the patterns identified may reflect the musician's personal style rather than norms applicable to the Javanese pop industry as a whole. The corpus size, nine songs and twenty-three data units, is also relatively small, and the TikTok circulation metrics used provide a snapshot at a particular point in time rather than stable longitudinal data. The study also covers only the Ngoko variety; it does not address interactions between Indonesian and the Krama variety, which carries different social meanings.

These limitations also open a new research agenda concerning how regional pop-music industries in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Bali, and eastern Indonesia position the national language in their contemporary works. Future research needs to examine whether industry actors in these regions adopt similar adaptations, and whether inserting Indonesian lexicon outside Java also functions merely as a communication bridge to reaching the national-scale digital market.

At the textual and social-practice levels, future studies need to examine sentence structure, the imposition of local affixation, and the limits of the role of national lexicon in other regional pop genres. The algorithmic circulation of works from outside Java should also be evaluated to determine whether cross-ethnic audiences reproduce content at a level as high as that found for Javanese-language songs.

Finally, the theme of suffering (lara ati) that dominates the placement of emotional Indonesian vocabulary in this corpus deserves further investigation, particularly to determine whether such melancholic narratives are characteristic of Javanese music or have become a general pattern of regional music commodification in Indonesia. Comparative cross-regional studies would ultimately clarify how the political economy of language operates under digital platform capitalism in a developing country.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of Indonesian in contemporary Javanese pop music operates purely as an instrumental tactic. At the textual-technical level, the national language is engineered through stylistic adjustment, the imposition of local affixation, and the restriction of diction to the affective domain so that it fully conforms to the rhyme patterns and structure of Javanese. At the level of discourse practice, this linguistic engineering is driven by the production demands and consumption model of the digital era. Indonesian lexicon is deliberately placed at song climaxes to facilitate the needs of cross-ethnic audiences in reproducing short-form visual derivative content on social-media platforms such as TikTok and CapCut. This reality gives rise to new production behavior within the local music industry, in which lyric creation is specifically designed as algorithmic bait to accelerate commodity circulation beyond its cultural-territorial boundaries.

This algorithm-based industrial behavior ultimately shifts and marginalizes Indonesian's position of Indonesian within the contemporary cultural landscape. Whereas the national language previously held hegemonic authority over regional art forms, it now

undergoes structural subordination under peripheral cultural capital. Indonesian no longer functions as the primary structure for conveying messages but is reduced to a supplementary commodification tool. The shifting hierarchy of the majority language within regional pop texts demonstrates that sociolinguistic hierarchy is no longer determined by the ideological policies of the state but is instead fully controlled by the economic pragmatism of the digital market.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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