

EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HUMOR IN THE SURABAYAN DIALECT: A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRAK

Dialek khas Jawa yang dikenal sebagai Bahasa Jawa Surabaya (juga disebut “Basa Suroboyoan”) yang dituturkan terutama di Surabaya, Jawa Timur, merupakan sistem tanda budaya yang dinamis yang berperan penting dalam mengekspresikan identitas, humor, dan interaksi sosial. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menjawab pertanyaan mendasar mengenai Bahasa Jawa Surabaya sebagai sistem semiotika budaya, perannya dalam mengekspresikan identitas, pentingnya humor dalam interaksi sosial, dan bagaimana Bahasa Jawa Surabaya digunakan dalam hubungan sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang berfokus pada analisis semiotika untuk mengamati identitas budaya dan humor Jawa Surabaya. Penelitian yang dipandu analisis interpretatif ini melihat bagaimana bahasa, identitas, dan humor saling mendukung dalam kelompok linguistik ini. Dengan menganalisis ungkapan seperti “Cak” berasal dari “Cacak” (abang atau laki-laki) and Ning (perempuan); “tetek mbengek” (semuanya tanpa kecuali) dan “sak taek dayak” (secara humor menunjukkan kelimpahan), penelitian ini menyoroti kreativitas linguistik yang tertanam dalam ungkapan-ungkapan ini dan implikasi budayanya. Kerangka teori model diadik Saussure dan model triadik Peirce memberikan cara untuk membedah ungkapan-ungkapan ini, membuktikan bagaimana makna ungkapan tidak seperti yang ditafsirkan dan dipahami secara harafiah. Selain itu, perspektif etnolinguistik Philip Riley dan konsep komunitas terbayangan Benedict Anderson yang menekankan bagaimana istilah-istilah dalam Bahasa Jawa Surabaya seperti “iwak” (lauk) dan “embong” (jalan raya) menumbuhkan jati diri di antara para penuturnya. Topik humor memunculkan sejumlah pertanyaan menarik yang relevan dengan semua bidang psikologi. Pernyataan seperti “njekethek,” yang berarti “sesuatu yang sepele,” menunjukkan kejenakaan. Penelitian ini menggabungkan analisis tekstual, wawancara, perspektif etnolinguistik, dan ‘logika’ dari “Komunitas Terbayangan” untuk memahami konteks sosial budaya dari ungkapan-ungkapan tersebut. Temuan dalam penelitian ini tidak hanya berkontribusi pada studi semiotika dan sosiolinguistik, tetapi juga mendukung pelestarian dialek-dialek daerah sebagai warisan budaya yang penting. Dengan mempelajari dan menganalisis ungkapan-ungkapan Bahasa Jawa Surabaya, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengangkat dan melestarikan kekayaan linguistik salah satu dialek daerah yang paling khas di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Dialek Surabaya, Semiotika, Identitas Budaya, Humor dan Bahasa

ABSTRACT

The distinctive Javanese dialect known as Surabayan Javanese (also called “Basa Suroboyoan”) which is spoken primarily in Surabaya, East Java, is a dynamic cultural sign system that plays a significant role in expressing identity, humor, and social interactions. The study’s objective is to answer fundamental issues about Surabayan Javanese as a cultural semiotic system, its role in expressing identity, the significance of humor in social interactions, and how it is used to convey social relationships. This study uses a qualitative method with a focus on semiotic analysis to investigate the cultural identity and humor of Surabayan Javanese. The study, guided by interpretive analysis, looks into how language, identity, and humor interact within this linguistic group. By analyzing expressions such as “Cak” derived from “Cacak” (masculine familiarity) and “Ning” (feminine respectability); “tetek mbengek” (everything without exception) and “sak taek Dayak” (humorously denoting abundance), this research highlights the linguistic creativity embedded in these expressions and their cultural implications. Theoretical frameworks from Saussure’s dyadic model and Peirce’s triadic model provide tools to dissect these idioms, revealing how their meanings extend far beyond literal interpretations. Additionally, Philip Riley’s ethno-linguistic perspective and Benedict Anderson’s

concept of imagined communities underscore how Surabayan terms like iwak (side dish) and embong (main road) foster a shared sense of identity among speakers. The topic of humor raises a host of intriguing questions of relevance to all areas of psychology. Statements such as “njekethek,” which means “something trivial,” indicates humorous element. This research combines textual analysis, interviews, ethnolinguistic perspective, and the ‘logic’ of “Imagined Communities” to understand the socio-cultural contexts of these expressions. The findings not only contribute to semiotic and sociolinguistic studies but also advocate for the preservation of regional dialects as vital cultural heritage. By studying and analyzing Surabayan’s idioms, this research aims to promote and preserve the linguistic richness of one of Indonesia’s most distinctive regional dialects.

Key Words: *Surabayan dialect, Semiotics, Cultural Identity, Humor and Language*

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a profound reflection of a community's culture, identity, and shared experiences. The Surabayan dialect, characterized by its vivid expressions, idiomatic phrases, and unique lexical choices, exemplifies the richness of linguistic diversity within Indonesia. In Surabaya, language goes beyond its functional purpose of communication; it embodies cultural nuances, social behaviors, and a sense of belonging. Expressions like "Cak" derived from "Cacak" (masculine familiarity) and "Ning" (feminine respectability) signify acquaintance and local companionship and are associated with a warm, informal tone that is unique to Surabaya's dialect. Phrases such as *tetek mbengek* and *sak taek dayak* showcase the dialect's playful creativity, transforming seemingly disparate words into expressions that convey exaggerated abundance or inclusivity. Similarly, terms like *pateng pecotot* demonstrate how language adapts to describe visual or physical conditions in a humorous yet precise manner. These linguistic constructs are not mere colloquialisms; they are cultural artifacts that reveal how Surabayans perceive their world and interact socially.

Semiotic theories, such as those by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce, offer valuable tools for analyzing these phrases. Saussure's dyadic model, which distinguishes between the signifier (the form of a word) and the signified (its meaning), provides insights into how Surabayan idioms encode meanings that are far removed from their literal interpretations. For example, *tetek mbengek* (literally "breast and asthma") signifies "everything without exception" in Surabayan culture. According to Peirce (in Suherdiana, 2008:383), for a sign to be effective, it must relate to or represent an object and be understood (for instance, with the aid of a code). Similarly, Peirce's theory (Cobley, P. (Eds.), 2014: 82) of semiotics categorizes signs into three types based on their relationship to what they represent: icon, which resembles the object (e.g., a photograph); index, which has a direct connection or causal relationship with the object (e.g., smoke as an index of fire); and symbol, which relies on convention or agreement for its meaning (e.g., words or traffic signs), enriches the understanding of expressions like *nggapleki*

and *iwak*. The former, used to describe annoyance, functions symbolically within the cultural context, while the latter indexes the unique culinary semantics of Surabaya, where *iwak* transcends its original meaning of "fish" to denote all kinds of *lauk* (side dishes).

Saussure, on the other hand, introduced the idea of the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept it represents), emphasizing the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs. Both frameworks contribute to understanding how humans interpret and communicate meaning through signs. Selatang's view (2020: 61) aligns with these theories by highlighting that human life itself can be seen as a network of signs that provide meaning to individuals and their social environments. Similarly, Subandiyah et al. (2022: 635) extend Peirce's classification, reinforcing that semiotics explores the interaction between signs and their meanings within various contexts, further dividing them into icon, index, and symbol categories. Prijanto (2015:157) also argues that semiotics means signs in literary works. This synthesis demonstrates the dynamic interplay of signs, their interpretations, and their cultural or contextual relevance in human communication and societal structures.

The relationship between language and identity is further illuminated through Philip Riley's ethnolinguistic perspective and Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities. Ethnolinguistics has variously been approached as the study of a group's experience of life as it is organized and expressed through the group's language tools and as a science whose aim is to examine the relationships between a language on the one hand and society and culture on the other. (Riley, 2007: 8) Riley's framework highlights how Surabayan vocabulary differentiates its speakers from other Javanese dialects, fostering a sense of local identity and pride. Words like *iwak* (side dish) and *embong* (main road) become markers of regional belonging, setting Surabayans apart from their counterparts in Yogyakarta or Central Java. The lexicographic revolution ... that languages ... were, ..., the personal property of quite specific groups — their daily speakers and readers - and moreover that these groups, imagined as communities, were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals. (Anderson, 2006:

84). Anderson's theory emphasizes the role of language in building collective identity, evident in how Surabayan terms create a shared linguistic experience that unites its speakers while distinguishing them from outsiders.

Moreover, the humor embedded in phrases like *sak taek dayak* and *njekethek* reflects the cultural importance of wit and exaggeration in Surabayan society. Martin's "Social Psychology of Humor", humor is a ubiquitous form of interaction that occurs in all types of social contexts and takes many different forms. These include canned jokes, amusing personal anecdotes, spontaneous witty comments, ironic observations, puns, teasing, sarcasm, double entendres, and so on. (2007: 116). Drawing from Martin's Psychology of Humor, these expressions illustrate how linguistic creativity fosters social bonds. The playful exaggeration in *sak taek dayak* (literally "a container of Dayak feces") humorously conveys the idea of abundance, resonating with the cultural penchant for hyperbole. Meanwhile, *njekethek*, meaning "something trivial," underscores the dialect's ability to succinctly describe everyday occurrences with a touch of humor.

This research explores the Surabayan dialect through a semiotic lens, focusing on its role in shaping cultural identity, fostering humor, and facilitating social interactions. By analyzing phrases such as *babah* (indifference) and *pateng pecotot* (bursting out), this study aims to uncover the intricate relationships between language, culture, and community in Surabaya. The findings not only contribute to the field of semiotics and sociolinguistics but also underscore the importance of preserving regional languages as living embodiments of cultural heritage.

This study covers numerous fundamental research topics in order to investigate the Surabayan dialect as a semiotic system of cultural identity, social interaction, and humor. How do idiomatic phrases and colloquialisms like *tetek mbengek*, *sak taek dayak*, and *nggapleki* function as semiotic tools that carry cultural meanings beyond their literal interpretations? What roles do signifiers and signifieds play within these expressions when classified as icons, indices, or symbols using Saussure's and Peirce's frameworks? In what ways do linguistic markers such as *iwak* and *embong* contribute to identity formation and

maintenance within the Surabayan community, distinguishing it from other Javanese dialect groups? How do humor and exaggeration in expressions like *sak taek dayak* and *njekethek* foster social cohesion and reflect deeper cultural values when analyzed through Martin's psychology of humor? Lastly, how does documenting and analyzing these idioms support broader efforts in linguistic preservation, emphasizing the Surabayan dialect's importance as cultural heritage and as a resource for sociolinguistic research?

The main objective of this study is to investigate how the Surabayan dialect serves as a semiotic system for reflecting and shaping cultural identity, social interaction, and humor. Using semiotic analysis of idiomatic phrases and colloquialisms, such as *tetek mbengek*, *sak taek dayak*, and *nggapleki*, the study seeks to uncover the linguistic and cultural mechanisms that endow these phrases with unique meanings and social relevance. Using Saussure and Peirce's semiotic frameworks, this study deconstructs the links between signifiers and signifieds, classifying these expressions as icons, indices, or symbols to investigate their hidden cultural meanings beyond literal interpretations. The study also investigates the function of language in identity formation and maintenance, building on Riley's ethnolinguistic perspective and Anderson's concept of imagined communities. Words such as *iwak*, *babah*, *embong* and *njekethek* are analyzed as linguistic markers that differentiate Surabayan speakers from other Javanese dialect communities, fostering a distinct sense of belonging and regional identity.

Martin in his book "The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach." In engaging in humor as social play, participants typically abandon, at least temporarily, any serious conversational goals. Playing off one another, they amuse themselves with the multiple meanings of words and ideas, relating funny anecdotes about incongruous events and experiences, and often using exaggeration, gestures, and facial expressions to maximize the humorous effect. (2007: 124). Applying Martin's psychology of humor, this research examines how wit and hyperbole in expressions like *sak taek dayak* and *njekethek* create social cohesion and reflect underlying cultural values. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the

necessity of preserving linguistic legacy, highlighting the Surabayan dialect's distinctive qualities as an important component of cultural identity. By documenting and evaluating these idioms, the study adds to broader linguistic preservation efforts, underlining the dialect's importance in terms of cultural understanding. These goals expose the Surabayan dialect's rich linguistic and cultural fabric, providing useful insights for contemporary sociolinguistic studies and pushing for the recognition and protection of regional languages as cultural heritage.

Previous semiotic studies on cultural identification have investigated how cultural sign systems including language, symbols, and visual clues help to shape and manifest cultural identity. Scholars have looked into how individuals and cultures use symbols to show cultural membership, frequently navigating between global influences and local traditions. These studies focus on the dynamic interaction of culture and semiotic codes, emphasizing how ongoing semiotic practices in media, communication, and daily encounters affect cultural identity. The semiotic approach offers valuable insights into how cultural meanings are formed, interpreted, and negotiated in a variety of social circumstances.

Heny Subandiyah, Haris Supratno, Resdianto Permata, Fahri, Fithriyah Inda Nur Abida (October 2023) in their "Philological Analysis of the Sundanese Folklore 'Lutung Kasarung'" Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Kampus Lidah Wetan Surabaya, Indonesia, examines Sundanese folklore, particularly "Lutung Kasarung," through a philological lens, focusing on linguistic and cultural elements. It highlights how the structure of the Sundanese language, such as vocabulary and syntax, mirrors the societal values and ethics of Sundanese culture. The study also emphasizes the role of storytelling in preserving cultural norms, such as leadership, wisdom, and beauty. These elements connect directly to the semiotic analysis of cultural expressions, as the language reflects deeper cultural signifiers.

Aan Ramadhansyah Rahayu (September 2019) in his "Local Wisdom Anti-Hoax Values in Sundanese Proverb: A Semiotic Approach", Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Padjadjaran examines anti-hoax values in Sundanese proverbs to preserve their

philosophical significance. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, it analyzes data from the Babasan and Pribahasa Sunda book. Findings reveal proverbs emphasize accuracy in assessing information and honesty, highlighting their relevance in combating misinformation in daily life.

Daniel Krauße in his Master's Thesis "A Description of Surabayan Javanese with Special Reference to its Linguistic Etiquette" (May 2017), University of Newcastle, Australia, investigates the Surabayan Javanese dialect, which is distinguished from other Javanese dialects by distinctive phonological and morphological traits. It investigates the dialect's sociolinguistic characteristics, such as its portrayal in the media, and provides a linguistic review with a focus on etiquette. Unlike Central Javanese, which uses a complex speech-level system similar to Japanese or Korean, Surabayan Javanese has a simpler binary T-V difference, aligning it more with colloquial Indonesian and European languages such as French and German. This shift, which is common among younger speakers, represents a pragmatic adaptation, while older speakers are also adopting it. Despite their pride in their dialect, Surabayan speakers frequently transfer to Bahasa Indonesia in areas where classical speech is dominant.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines the Surabayan dialect using a qualitative methodology that includes semiotic analysis, sociolinguistic views, and cultural studies. The study begins with textual analysis, which examines written and spoken sources such as local literature, and social media posts to discover frequently used idiomatic terms. Interviews and surveys with native Surabayan speakers are done to contextualize these findings, revealing the social connotations and contextual usage of terms. Surveys measure the frequency and perception of these phrases among different groups. A semiotic framework based on Saussure and Peirce's theories is used to investigate the relationship between linguistic signifiers and their signified meanings, with a focus on the phrases' symbolic, iconic, and indexical roles.

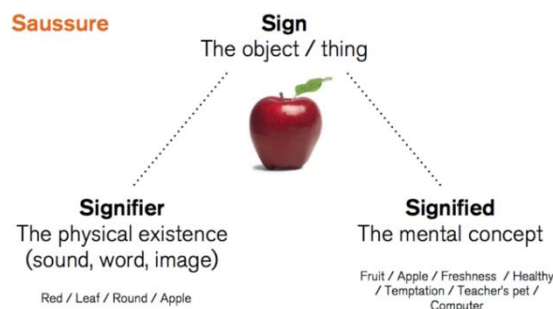
In community settings where Surabayan Javanese is commonly used, including

marketplaces, festivals, or family gatherings, participant observations are conducted with a focus on humor and social interactions. The use of semi-structured interviews with native speakers is to uncover personal interpretations of cultural symbols, humor, and idioms in order to promote a better understanding of the semiotic processes operating inside society.

Several semiotic frameworks are used in the data analysis to decode the underlying meanings in Surabayan Javanese. The way words or phrases in Surabayan Javanese convey social and cultural meanings is examined using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier and the signified. The way that Surabayan Javanese humor uses visual cues, symbols, and contextual allusions to construct meaning is examined using Charles Peirce's triadic model of semiotics, which consists of icon, index, and symbol. Additionally, the research considers the perspectives of scholars like Philip Riley (2007), who studies the connection between language and social context, particularly how Surabayan Javanese reflects ethnic identity and social ties. Language use has a big impact on how local identity is constructed in Surabaya, which is home to many different ethnic groups. Riley's theory aids in providing context.

Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of "Imagined Communities," which further deepens the study of how Surabayan Javanese fosters a collective identity among speakers, supports the notion that language acts as a unifying component within a cultural community. Lastly, Raskin's (1985) in Rod A. Martin's (2007) original Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) is meant to provide a formal model of humor competence (i.e., how can a text be recognized as humorous?) that works on the semantic mechanics of humor, which identifies the linguistic and cultural elements that contribute to humor's efficacy, serves as a guide for the study of humor building in Surabayan Javanese.

In a summary, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how Surabayan Javanese contribute to humor and identity development by combining semiotic analysis, ethnographic observations, and interviews. The study uses semiotic theories and sociolinguistic perspectives to analyze the intricate relationships between humor, culture, and language in this regional dialect.



ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Cultural and Linguistic Context

Ferdinand de Saussure's Dyadic Model in Sanders, C. (1993): focuses on the relationship between signifier and signified in language as a system of signs.

Data 1: Cak and Ning

These terms are culturally significant and are often used in Surabayan Javanese culture, especially in Surabaya, to address men and women respectfully.

- Signifier: Phonetic expressions Cak and Ning which are the auditory or written representations of the terms.
- Signified: The concepts or meanings associated with these terms in Surabayan culture: Cak refers to a respectful and often affectionate way to address a man, sometimes implying familiarity or honor. Ning is similarly used for women, often signifying grace and femininity which are tied to Surabayan identity.

Example Conversation:

"Cak Ahmad, piye kabare? Wes mangan ta?"
(Bro Ahmad, how are you? Have you eaten yet?)

"Ning Siti, iki gaweanmu apik tenan, lho!"
(Miss Siti, your work is really excellent!)

The relationship between the signifier (cak, ning) and the signified (respectful address for men/women) is arbitrary according to Saussure. There is no inherent connection between the sounds of these words and their meanings; their significance arises from social convention within the linguistic community.

Data 2: tetek mbengek and sak taek dayak

Phrases like tetek mbengek and sak taek dayak encode abstract cultural meanings beyond their literal sense.

- **Signifier:** The term *tetek mbengek* (*tetek* + *mbengek*) literally refers to incongruous elements (breast + asthma). Meanwhile, the expression *sak taek dayak* (container + feces + Dayak tribe), or literally refers to “a container of Dayak feces.”

- **Signified:** The expression *tetek mbengek* figuratively implies “everything without exception” in the Surabayan context. While the phrase *sak taek dayak* although seemingly nonsensical, humorously denotes “a great deal of everything” reflects cultural creativity in exaggeration and humor.

For example:

“Awakmu melu liburan karo aku, yo. Aku sing tuku tiket sak tetek bengek e.” (Come on a vacation with me, okay? I’ll take care of the tickets and all the other little details.)

These expressions highlight the creative linguistic strategies Surabayan speakers use to convey complex ideas succinctly while embedding shared cultural humor and worldview. The discrepancy between literal and cultural meanings emphasizes how local language evolves to capture shared understandings specific to a community.

Data 3: *pateng pecotot*

The phrase *pateng pecotot*, was once widely used in Surabaya, but it is now rarely heard typically describing an exaggerated or dramatic reaction, often conveys surprise, disapproval, or mockery.

- **Signifier:** The term *pateng pecotot* is a linguistic sign comprising the sounds and form with its repetitive and playful phonetics, carry an emphatic or humorous tone. It is culturally and phonetically specific to the Surabayan dialect. The phrase itself carries an expressive and somewhat playful tone, amplified by its phonetic qualities, which mimic the abruptness of bursting out.

- **Signified:** The concept associated with *pateng pecotot* is specific: the appearance of something protruding or bulging out of a person’s body, particularly the stomach. It conveys a very visual and contextual meaning tied to human physicality. The context limits its application. For instance, it is used to describe a person’s body but not other objects (like a watermelon bursting). This limitation of application underscores its specificity in cultural semantics.

For example:

Although the phrase refers to something spilling or bursting out, it would be unusual to say, “*Semongko iku pateng pecotot*” (That watermelon is bursting out) when seeing a watermelon scattered on the road. A more fitting use of “*pateng pecotot*” would be something like this: “Don’t wear clothes that are too tight, your belly looks like it’s bursting out.”—referring to how the fat around someone’s stomach becomes visible.

The connection between *pateng pecotot* (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is arbitrary in Saussurean terms, meaning there is no inherent link between the phrase and its meaning; the relationship is established purely through cultural and linguistic conventions. For speakers of the Surabayan dialect, the phrase evokes vivid imagery tied to local expressions and humor, making it an effective but context-dependent term.

Data 4: *nggapleki*

The term *nggapleki* often conveys a sense of someone being carelessly stubborn, indifferent, or dismissive in their behavior.

- **Signifier:** This word is a phonetic arrangement of sounds specific to the Javanese dialect spoken in Surabaya. Its sharp and informal tone adds to its expressive quality, making it effective in conveying a sense of irritation or annoyance.

- **Signified:** The signified of *nggapleki* is the mental concept of someone or something that is frustrating, irritating, or annoying. However, the term carries a nuanced meaning in Surabayan culture: It describes annoyance without labeling someone as inherently bad or evil and it can apply to both people and situations, showing its adaptability in meaning. Its use often conveys a tone of familiarity or casualness rather than harsh condemnation.

For example:

- When describing a person: “*Arek iku ancene nggapleki, kok*” (That person is really annoying).

- When describing a situation: “*Keadaan iki pancen nggapleki, rek*” (This situation is really annoying).

Saussure emphasized the arbitrary connection between the signifier and the signified. The association of the word *nggapleki* with the concept of annoyance is culturally agreed upon

within the Surabayan linguistic community. Outside this cultural and linguistic context, the word might not evoke the same meaning. The word's effectiveness as a sign depends on the shared understanding among speakers of the dialect. This agreement gives the term its communicative power.

Data 5: iwak

- Signifier: The term iwak.
- Signified: In standard Javanese, it refers to "fish," but in Surabaya and parts of East Java, it signifies any lauk (side dish, regardless of whether it is fish or not). The divergence in the signified concept for iwak illustrates the dynamic nature of language systems. The shift from referring solely to "fish" to encompassing all side dishes indicates a regional semantic broadening. This change reflects how social and cultural contexts influence the relationship between signifiers and signifieds. For Surabaya speakers, iwak becomes a generalized term, distinct from the Javanese lawuh, creating a semiotic boundary that reinforces regional identity.

Data 6: babah

- Signifier: The word babah (spoken or written form).
- Signified: The concept of indifference or a "let it be" attitude, akin to *biar* or *masa bodoh* in Indonesian. For example, when asked: "Sampean mau dirasani tonggo ngarep, loh." (You are aware that the neighbor in front of your house has gossiped about you. Surabayans will respond, "Babahno." (Whatever, forget it). The relationship between the signifier babah and its signified concept is arbitrary yet culturally determined. In Surabaya, babah exclusively signifies indifference, which contrasts with abah (father) and other Javanese terms like sakkarep. The use of babah reflects the localized linguistic system where meanings shift based on regional identity. Its distinctness helps solidify group identity for Surabaya speakers, emphasizing their linguistic and cultural uniqueness.

Data 7: embong

- Signifier: The word embong.

- Signified: The concept of "jalan raya" (main road or highway), as opposed to the standard Javanese term "ratan."

Nobody in Surabaya ever asks, "Ndek ratan ono opo kok rame?" (Why is the roadway so crowded?) Surabaya residents typically say, "Ndek embong ono opo, kok, rame?"

In Surabaya, embong is the signifier uniquely tied to the concept of a main road, highlighting linguistic variation within Javanese. This differentiation between embong and "ratan" demonstrates Saussure's principle that the link between a signifier and its signified is socially constructed and not inherently natural. The preference for embong in Surabaya reflects its role in establishing a regional linguistic identity, creating a clear distinction between Surabaya and other Javanese-speaking areas.

Data 8: njekethek

- Signifier: The signifier in this case is the word njekethek. Its phonetic structure (nje-ke-thek) suggests a unique rhythm and sound that is immediately recognizable within the Surabayan dialect. The word's similarity to ketek (monkey in Javanese) might create a superficial association with monkeys, but this is not its intended meaning.
- Signified: The signified is the concept that njekethek represents — something trivial or insignificant. In the given context, the word emphasizes the irrelevance or simplicity of the problem, such as in the example "Sepeda motorku wingi tak bongkari mesin e soale mati, njekethek bensin e sing entek." (I dismantled my motorcycle yesterday because it wouldn't start, it turned out that the gasoline had run out). This signified meaning has no direct relationship to the animal ketek. The connection between njekethek (the signifier) and its meaning (the signified: triviality) is arbitrary. There is no inherent reason why the sequence of sounds nje-ke-thek should denote triviality, except that this association has been culturally and linguistically agreed upon by speakers of the Surabaya dialect. The meaning of njekethek as triviality is unique to the Surabaya context and may not be immediately understood by speakers of other Javanese dialects. This highlights the role of language as a system shaped by local culture and social conventions.

While the signifier *njekethek* shares phonetic elements with *ketek*, it does not evoke the concept of a monkey in this context. The sound association is coincidental and does not influence the established relationship between *njekethek* and its meaning (triviality). This reinforces Saussure's notion that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary and context-dependent.

B. Semiotic Analysis

Data 1: Cak and Ning

Charles Peirce's Theory of Signs in Cobley, P (Eds.). (2014) Introduced the triadic model of semiotics (icon, index, symbol).

- **Icon:** Cak and Ning are terms with a direct resemblance to social roles or archetypes within Javanese culture. They iconically represent friendly forms of address for men (Cak) and women (Ning), often used in Surabaya.
- **Index:** These terms index cultural identity and regional relationship. Using Cak often points to Surabaya or East Javanese contexts, while Ning indexes traditional respect for women within Javanese society.
- **Symbol:** They symbolize local solidarity and camaraderie, embodying social closeness while also reflecting the speaker's cultural identity.

Data 2: tetek mbengek

This Javanese phrase refers to "small, trivial matters" or "a collection of various petty things." It is commonly used to describe a chaotic or overly detailed situation.

- **Icon:** There is no direct iconic representation in the phrase, as it does not visually resemble trivial matters but instead relies on an abstract description.
- **Index:** The phrase indexes a situation involving many small, interconnected things or details, often overwhelming or unnecessary. The phrase's use often arises in contexts where someone is frustrated by overly intricate or trivial issues, directly pointing to those situations.
- **Symbol:** The phrase is a symbolic expression rooted in Javanese cultural norms and language. Its meaning depends entirely on shared cultural understanding. Without context or knowledge of the Javanese language and its

idioms, the symbolic value of *tetek mbengek* would be lost.

Data 3: sak taek dayak

This phrase, likely referring to something akin to "with all one's effort" or "a desperate measure," conveys a sense of last-ditch effort or exasperation.

- **Icon:** The phrase does not rely on iconicity, as it does not visually or audibly mimic the effort or desperation it describes.
- **Index:** The phrase directly indexes a situation of exertion, desperation, or striving. Its use often points to circumstances where someone is giving their utmost or reaching a breaking point, serving as an indicator of the context.
- **Symbol:** Like *tetek mbengek*, this phrase functions as a symbol with its meaning anchored in cultural context and linguistic conventions. It may draw on specific regional or cultural expressions to communicate shared values about effort and endurance.

Looking into Semiotic Dynamics in both phrases, they operate primarily as symbols in Peirce's triadic model, heavily reliant on the shared understanding of cultural and linguistic contexts. Their indexical nature becomes apparent when they are used in specific situations that align with their meanings, acting as direct references to those contexts. They lack iconic elements because their meanings do not rely on resemblance but on convention and cultural association.

Data 4: pateng pecotot

The phrase *pateng pecotot*, which means *berhamburan keluar* (spilling out or bulging out), can be analyzed through the lens of Peirce's triadic semiotic model.

- **Icon:** The phrase is iconic in the sense that the way it is used to describe a bulging stomach (fat spilling out) creates a direct visual representation. The bulging, spilling quality of the phrase shares a visual resemblance to the body or something that overflows, such as fat spilling over clothing.
- **Index:** The indexical aspect of *pateng pecotot* points directly to a specific context of the human body. It is not used for inanimate objects like a watermelon (*semangka*), making the sign indexical to a human form or body in this usage. It signals an image or a scenario

where the body's condition (particularly the belly) is emphasized, rather than the action of spilling or overflowing in general.

- **Symbol:** The phrase is symbolic in that its meaning (*berhamburan keluar*) is culturally agreed upon and understood in Surabaya, though it doesn't directly correspond to the literal action of spilling. The cultural context behind the phrase gives it meaning, and it is a symbol for a specific form of body image critique related to how tight clothing may expose the body's shape.

Data 5: *nggapleki*

The term *nggapleki*, may mimic the emotional sound of frustration, used to describe someone or something irritating or frustrating.

- **Icon:** The term *nggapleki* (referring to physical appearance) itself doesn't have a direct resemblance to the act of irritating or annoying someone. Thus, there is no visual similarity or icon to be drawn here. However, one could say that its phonetic structure, with its harsh and abrupt sounds, could be iconically linked to the unpleasantness or irritation it describes.

- **Index:** The indexical nature of *nggapleki* is stronger. It refers directly to a condition or state of being — annoyance or frustration. The word points to a particular emotional or situational state of irritation, which is directly tied to both the person being described or the feeling of the speaker.

- **Symbol:** *nggapleki* is a symbol because its meaning is culturally and socially determined. It's not derived from a universal or physical connection between the word and the act of irritating; rather, it is a constructed term used by speakers in Surabaya to express frustration. It doesn't have inherent meaning but relies on social understanding to communicate irritation.

Both *pateng pecotot* and *nggapleki* demonstrate how semiotic signs work in specific cultural contexts, where Peirce's triadic model (icon, index, symbol) allows us to understand how these terms function as signs. The study of such phrases offers insight into how language evolves to express localized, culturally specific concepts and feelings through iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs.

Data 6: *iwak*

Iconic Dimension: In the case of *iwak*, its original meaning as "fish" has an iconic relationship to actual fish because the word *iwak* can evoke the image or idea of fish. The shift to mean "side dish" likely retains some iconicity because fish was historically a common side dish in Javanese meals, creating a tangible or visual connection between the word and the object it represents.

Indexical Dimension: The shift from *iwak* meaning "fish" to "side dish" is an indexical transformation grounded in cultural and contextual practices in East Java. Fish often served as the primary side dish in traditional meals. Over time, *iwak* became a metonymic representation of all side dishes. The regional use of *iwak* as "side dish" signifies the sociolinguistic and geographic context of East Java, showing how language evolves to reflect local habits and norms.

Symbolic Dimension: The symbolic meaning of *iwak* in East Java as "any side dish" showcases a divergence from its standard Javanese meaning of "fish." The redefinition of *iwak* relies on the linguistic community's shared understanding rather than an inherent or natural relationship. The persistence of the word *iwak* in this expanded meaning highlights the role of cultural convention in creating and maintaining symbolic associations.

Data 7: *babah*

In the context of the Surabayan term *babah* as presented, we can consider the linguistic and cultural aspects of its meaning and usage:

- **Icon:** In this context, *babah* does not function iconically, as the word does not visually or phonetically resemble the concept of indifference or detachment (*masa bodoh*). There is no direct sensory or representational link between the term and its meaning.

- **Index:** The use of *babah* as a casual expression of indifference among Surabaya speakers is indexed to the cultural and linguistic identity of the Surabaya region. It signals a speaker's geographical and social background, as it is a linguistic marker that distinguishes Surabaya vernacular from broader Javanese language patterns, like the use of *sakkarep* in Standard Javanese.

- **Symbol:** *babah* operates as a symbol because its meaning (*biar/masa bodoh*) is established through shared cultural and

linguistic conventions within the Surabaya community. Speakers of Surabaya dialect understand its meaning not because of resemblance or direct connection but because of its conventional usage within their social context.

Looking into its Cultural Significance, the term embodies more than its literal meaning. It carries a socio-cultural connotation, indexing Surabaya identity and possibly hinting at attitudes or worldviews associated with the community (e.g., a casual or laid-back attitude toward gossip).

Data 8: embong

- **Icon:** The word “embong” in Surabaya functions less as an icon since it does not visually resemble or replicate the concept of a road but derives its meaning more culturally and contextually.

- **Index:** “embong” serves as an indexical sign in Surabaya, signaling not just “road” but a regional identity tied to the local linguistic habit of Surabayan people. The usage of “embong” directly points to the speaker’s association with Surabaya. “Ratan” as an index reflects the broader Javanese cultural or linguistic tradition, marking a more general association with central or rural Javanese speech patterns. The choice of words functions as an indicator of geographical or social belonging. When a person says “ratan” instead of “embong” in Surabaya, it suggests they might not belong to the Surabayan linguistic group.

- **Symbol:** Both “ratan” and “embong” function symbolically within their respective linguistic communities. Their meanings are understood through a shared social and linguistic convention rather than an inherent connection to the concept of “road.” The use of “embong” instead of “ratan” in Surabaya represents the symbolic distinction of the regional lexicon, reinforcing cultural and social boundaries.

Using Peirce’s semiotics, this analysis demonstrates how linguistic terms like “embong” and “ratan” embody cultural and social meaning beyond their basic denotative function. The triadic model effectively unpacks the deeper cultural semiotics, where language choices are icons, indices, and symbols of identity, belonging, and tradition.

Data 9: njekethek

- **Iconic Aspect:** In the case of njekethek, the iconic relationship is weak, as the word does not visually or audibly resemble the concept of “something trivial.” Instead, njekethek has a phonetic resemblance to ketek (monkey) in Javanese, which may trigger an associative link to the literal meaning of “monkey.” However, this resemblance does not play a role in its intended meaning of “something trivial.”

- **Indexical Aspect:** Here, njekethek functions as an index because its meaning “something trivial” is derived from the socio-linguistic and cultural context in which it is used. The term njekethek indexes a pragmatic understanding among speakers that certain problems or situations can be dismissed as minor or inconsequential.

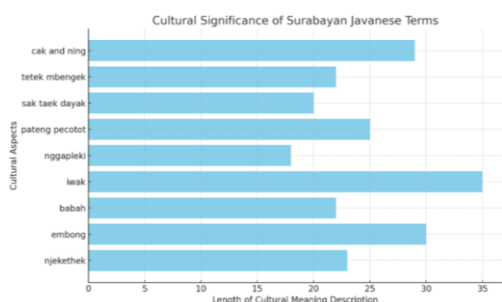
- **Symbolic Aspect:** The symbolic meaning of njekethek “something trivial” is entirely culturally constructed and detached from its literal root, ketek (“monkey”). This highlights the flexibility of symbols within a language. The speakers have collectively agreed upon the metaphorical or extended meaning of njekethek, so it operates as a symbol within the linguistic community to describe minor or negligible issues.

Using Peirce’s triadic model, njekethek functions primarily as a symbol, shaped by Javanese linguistic and cultural conventions. Its iconic connection to ketek is negligible in the interpretation of its current meaning. Its indexical nature emerges through its contextual usage, pointing to the triviality of certain situations. This example highlights the nuanced application of semiotics in understanding language and meaning in specific cultural contexts.

Diagram 1

Cultural Significance of Surabayan

Javanese Terms



Here is a horizontal bar chart visualizing the cultural significance of Surabayan Javanese terms. The length of each bar represents the length of the cultural

1. Surabayan Javanese as a System of Cultural Signs

meaning description for each aspect, showcasing their relative depth and complexity.

Further, the analysis of Surabayan Javanese as a system of cultural signs as illustrated in the table below demonstrates how linguistic components, humor, and social techniques serve as fundamental markers of local identity and interpersonal interactions. By evaluating numerous sign kinds, cultural meanings, and communicative practises, we can better comprehend how language reflects and shapes the social dynamics and cultural identity within Surabaya’s community.

1. Surabayan Javanese as a System of Cultural Signs

Aspect	Sign Type	Example	Cultural Meaning
<i>cak and ning</i> (Respectful address)	Signifier	“ <i>Cak Ahmad, piye kabare? Wes mangan ta?</i> ” (Bro Ahmad, how are you? Have you eaten yet?)	<i>Cak</i> is a term for men, symbolizing respect and familiarity; <i>ning</i> for women, indicating grace and femininity. These terms denote regional identity and respect within Surabaya’s social norms.
<i>tetek mbengek</i> (Exaggeration)	Signifier	“ <i>Awakmu melu liburan karo aku, yo. Aku sing tuku tiket sak tetek bengek e.</i> ” (Come on a vacation with me, okay? I’ll take care of all the tickets and little details.)	<i>Tetek mbengek</i> refers to something inconsequential, symbolizing cultural creativity in exaggeration, emphasizing the local humor in everyday expressions.
<i>sak taek dayak</i> (Exaggeration)	Signifier	“ <i>Sak taek dayak, yo! Pancen akeh tenan!</i> ” (A huge amount of stuff, really!)	This phrase humorously exaggerates a situation, conveying abundance or complexity, highlighting the playful and creative nature of Surabayan humor.
<i>pateng pecotot</i> (Surprise/Mockery)	Signifier	“Don’t wear clothes that are too tight, your belly looks like it’s bursting out.”	Represents exaggerated or dramatic reactions, often used humorously to describe something protruding (like a belly), reinforcing Surabayan’s playful linguistic style.
<i>nggappleki</i> (Annoyance)	Signifier	“ <i>Keadaan iki pancen nggappleki, rek.</i> ” (This situation is really annoying).	
<i>iwak</i> (Side dish)	Signifier	“ <i>Sore iki tak arep mangan iwak.</i> ” (I’m going to eat side dishes tonight.)	In Surabaya, <i>iwak</i> refers broadly to any side dish, not just fish. It reflects regional linguistic flexibility and local culinary practices.
<i>babah</i> (Indifference)	Signifier	“ <i>Babahno.</i> ” (Whatever, forget it.)	<i>Babah</i> signals a “let it be” or indifferent attitude, highlighting a pragmatic, sometimes nonchalant response common in Surabayan culture.
<i>embong</i> (Main Road)	Signifier	“ <i>Ndek embong ono opo, kok, rame?</i> ” (Why is the main road so crowded?)	<i>Embong</i> is Surabaya’s term for a main road, illustrating regional variation and a clear demarcation from other Javanese dialects.
<i>njekethek</i> (Triviality)	Signifier	“ <i>Njekethek bensin e sing entek.</i> ” (It turned out the problem was just that the gasoline ran out.)	<i>Njekethek</i> is used to emphasize trivial or insignificant issues, highlighting a Surabaya tendency to downplay complex problems in humorous way.

2. Linguistic Elements Reflecting Local Identity

Feature	Example	Identity Marker
<i>cak/ning</i> (Addressing)	<i>Cak Ahmad</i> and <i>Ning Siti</i>	These terms mark social roles in Surabayan culture, signaling both gender and respect while establishing regional identity through language use.
Use of <i>iwak</i>	<i>iwak</i> to refer to side dishes (not just fish)	Highlights regional divergence in meaning, demonstrating a distinctive Surabayan lexical preference.
<i>embong</i> (Main Road)	<i>embong</i> versus <i>raton</i> (main road)	Reflects a linguistic boundary between Surabaya and other Javanese-speaking areas, reinforcing local identity.
<i>babah</i> (Indifference)	“ <i>Babahno</i> ” as a response to gossip	The use of <i>babah</i> showcases Surabayan pragmatism and informal, nonchalant social attitudes.
<i>pateng pecotot</i> (bursting out)	“ <i>Ojok gawe klambi keciliken, wetengmu ketok pateng pecotot.</i> ”	Humorously describes exaggerated physical features, reinforcing local humor traditions.

3. Role of Humor in Social Interactions

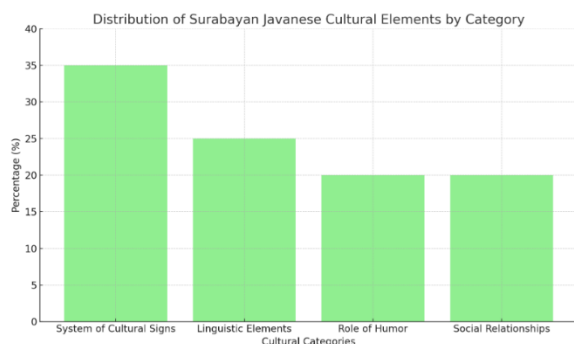
Humor Type	Example	Function
Exaggeration (<i>tetek mbengek, sak taek dayak</i>)	“ <i>Sak taek dayak, yo!</i> ” (A huge amount of stuff, really!)	Humor functions to lighten the mood and exaggerate everyday occurrences, making them more engaging and relatable in Surabayan culture.
Teasing (<i>pateng pecotot</i>)	“ <i>Ojok gawe klambi keciliken, wetengmu ketok pateng pecotot.</i> ” (Don’t wear clothes that are too tight, your belly looks like it’s bursting out.)	Teasing differs from other types of humorous interaction because of the presence of an element of “criticism” in the interaction.
Triviality (<i>njekethek</i>)	“ <i>Sepeda motorku wingi tak bongkari mesin e soale mati, njekethek bensin e sing entek.</i> ” (I dismantled my motorcycle yesterday because it wouldn’t start, it turned out that the gasoline had run out).	Used to downplay problems humorously, trivializing what might otherwise be seen as frustrating, reflecting Surabayan wit.

4. Negotiation of Social Relationships

Strategy	Example	Impact
Respectful address (<i>cak/ning</i>)	“ <i>Cak Ahmad, piye kabare?</i> ” (How are you, Bro Ahmad?)	Establishes familiarity and respect, signaling social closeness and regional identity.
Indifference (<i>babah</i>)	“ <i>Babahno.</i> ” (Whatever, forget it.)	Conveys a relaxed attitude toward gossip or judgment, emphasizing a Surabayan tendency toward indifference in social relations.
Expressing Frustration (<i>nggapleki</i>)	“ <i>Keadaan iki pancen nggapleki, rek.</i> ” (This situation is really annoying.)	Shows frustration without harshness, allowing people to vent in a more casual, non-confrontational way, maintaining social harmony.

Diagram 2

Distribution of Surabayan Javanese as a system of cultural signs by category



Here is a bar chart representing the distribution of Surabayan Javanese cultural elements by category in percentages. Each category reflects a portion of the overall cultural framework.

CONCLUSION

The Surabayan language's system of cultural signs is a vivid example of how language functions beyond communication, serving as a repository of humor, identity, and shared cultural values. By analyzing terms like *cak*, *ning*, *tetek mbengek*, *sak taek dayak*, *pateng pecotot*, *nggapleki*, *iwak*, *babah*, *embong*, and *njekethek* through semiotics and sociolinguistics, we see a rich tapestry of meanings that resonate deeply with the identity of its speakers, encapsulating both their worldview and social dynamics.

Further, the Surabayan lexicon embodies a rich system of cultural signs that intertwine language, identity, and humor. Through semiotics and language theories, we can understand how these words function not only as communication tools but also as markers of social belonging and cultural distinctiveness. This linguistic identity showcases how regional speech patterns

reinforce shared values and foster a sense of community among speakers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research will contribute to a greater understanding of how language, as a cultural sign system, functions within specific regional contexts to convey unique cultural values and identities. By examining the Surabayan variant of Javanese, the study will uncover how regional dialects serve as markers of identity and as means of reinforcing local pride, humor, and social cohesion. This analysis will also contribute to the field of linguistic anthropology by showcasing the cultural depth and significance of regional language varieties within the broader Indonesian linguistic landscape.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Contextual Sensitivity: Certain phrases and words in Surabayan Javanese may carry meanings that are hard to interpret without an insider's perspective. Working closely with native speakers will help mitigate this.

Dynamic Language Use: Slang and expressions can evolve quickly, making it necessary to update data frequently or risk obsolescence. Conducting fieldwork and staying current with popular expressions will help address this limitation.

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