

THE PRESERVATION AND GLOBAL DISSEMINATION OF THE JAVANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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Abstract. The Javanese language, integral to the cultural identity of millions in Indonesia, faces declining usage due to modernization, globalization, and the dominance of Indonesian and English. This threatens the transmission of traditional values and art forms like wayang and gamelan. However, digital technology and global interest in Javanese culture offer new opportunities for its preservation. This study examines how international efforts and digital innovations, such as wayang translations, Javanese-English dictionaries, and short story translations, have revitalized the language and expanded its global reach. Using qualitative research and case studies, the findings highlight how globalization, paired with technology and international collaboration, can ensure the continued relevance of local languages like Javanese.

Keywords: Javanese, culture, language, preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Javanese, a language spoken by millions in Indonesia, holds profound significance in the country's cultural landscape, serving as a bridge to the rich history, values, and traditions of the Javanese people. Historically, the language was a means of communication and a vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge, such as moral teachings, customs, and art forms. However, with the rapid pace of modernization, particularly in urban areas, younger generations are increasingly drifting away from using Javanese in their daily lives. The widespread influence of global languages, especially Indonesian and English, and the pervasive presence of technology have led to a decline in the everyday use of Javanese, especially among youth. As these younger individuals become more immersed in modern, globalized cultures, the natural transmission of the Javanese language and its cultural values in homes, schools, and communities has gradually diminished with minimum action by the policymakers (Zustiyantoro, 2024).

The richness of Javanese cultural values, which include respect for hierarchy, community solidarity, and an appreciation for art forms like wayang (shadow puppetry) and gamelan (traditional music), is no longer as easily absorbed into daily life as it once was. In the past, these values were passed down through verbal communication, storytelling, and ritual practices, all relying heavily on the Javanese language. Today, the younger generation often sees these cultural practices as outdated or irrelevant, opting instead for more contemporary, globalized activities. This shift has resulted in a disconnection from Javanese traditions, leaving many young people with limited knowledge of their cultural heritage and values. Even the Javanese high-level 'krama' variation is at risk of being endangered (Vander Klok, 2019).

As a result, preserving Javanese culture and traditions in their original form is becoming progressively more difficult. The generational gap in language use threatens the survival of many cultural expressions tied to the Javanese language, such as traditional ceremonies, folklore, and rituals. If this trend continues, the language and its associated customs risk being relegated to the periphery of modern life, possibly leading to their eventual extinction. Preserving Javanese language and culture in the face of such challenges requires a concerted effort to revitalize its use and integrate it into contemporary society, ensuring that future generations can continue to connect with their cultural heritage.

As globalization accelerates, many worry that local languages and cultural practices, including those of the Javanese people, are at risk of marginalization, overshadowed by the dominance of global languages and Western cultural norms. However, this perspective overlooks the potential of digital technology to serve as a powerful tool for preserving and promoting Javanese language and culture. The increasing global connectivity facilitated by the internet offers unprecedented access to resources supporting language learning, cultural exchange, and scholarly research. Digital platforms, such as online dictionaries, language learning apps, and cultural archives, have created new opportunities for Javanese language learners, enthusiasts, and scholars worldwide to engage with the language and its rich cultural heritage (Darihastining et al., 2023). By digitizing texts, offering real-time translations of traditional performances like wayang, and providing global access to Javanese literature, digital tools are not only helping to preserve the language but also expanding its reach to a much broader audience. In this way, rather than contributing to the decline of local languages, globalization, when paired with digital technology, can foster the global dissemination and revitalization of Javanese culture (Ori & Susianti, 2023).

There is still hope for preserving the local languages in this modern time. While many believe that modernization and globalization threaten local languages and cultures, the Javanese language and culture are thriving due to the passionate involvement of international individuals who have developed a deep enthusiasm for it. Their commitment to studying Javanese, translating literature, and participating in cultural activities has been crucial in keeping the language alive and relevant. This global enthusiasm supports the preservation of Javanese. It fosters an international community dedicated to celebrating and promoting its rich cultural heritage, demonstrating that modernization can allow a local language to flourish globally. This paper examines how the Javanese language and culture have been embraced and made more accessible, contributing to its preservation and global dissemination, highlighting three key examples of this transformation: live translations during wayang performances, the development of Javanese-English dictionaries, and the translation of Javanese short stories. These innovations not only contribute to the preservation of the Javanese language but also expand its global reach and acceptance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper employs a qualitative research approach to examine the role of international individuals in preserving and disseminating the Javanese language and culture, focusing on three key examples: wayang translation, the development of Javanese-English dictionaries, and the translation of Javanese short stories. Through case studies, this research profiles the works of individuals who have actively contributed to these areas, providing insight into how their professional efforts have facilitated the global reach and preservation of Javanese language and cultural heritage. By investigating the roles these individuals play in making Javanese language resources more accessible, the study aims to highlight the impact of their work on both local and international audiences.

Data for this study is drawn from various primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes online platforms such as websites, video streaming services, electronic documents, and books, which feature the contributions of international scholars, translators, and cultural advocates. These sources examine the digital tools, platforms, and resources used to promote the Javanese language and culture. Secondary sources, including academic articles, interviews, and reports, provide theoretical frameworks and contextual understanding of the efforts involved in Javanese language preservation. These sources help further situate the works of these individuals within broader conversations on language revitalization and cultural dissemination.

The collected data are analyzed and displayed to illustrate how these international contributions have directly or indirectly aided the preservation of the Javanese language and culture. Through careful examination of the case studies, the research concludes that these efforts—whether through

translation projects, digital archives, or educational tools—have significantly influenced the global visibility and continued relevance of Javanese heritage in the digital age.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Historically, Javanese was primarily confined to the island of Java, with its rich linguistic traditions and cultural practices mostly shared within local communities. Many people fear that the rise of the internet and digital tools may threaten the preservation of Javanese culture, as they believe these technologies could lead to the erosion of traditional practices and language. With the increasing dominance of global languages like English and the pervasive influence of modern media, there is concern that younger generations, especially those in urban areas, may become disconnected from their cultural roots. The ease of access to global content on the internet, coupled with the rapid adoption of digital technologies, might inadvertently overshadow local cultural expressions, pushing the Javanese language and traditions into the background. Critics argue that while digital tools can offer great opportunities, they might also accelerate the shift toward more universal, mainstream cultures, leaving local practices like Javanese language and arts at risk of becoming obsolete.

The international enthusiasm for Javanese culture has become a driving force behind its preservation and further dissemination. Many non-Javanese speakers, motivated by a deep interest in the culture, have taken it upon themselves to learn the language, contribute to translations, and share their experiences online. This passionate global community has not only helped keep the language alive but has also facilitated the spread of Javanese culture across the globe. As a result, the Javanese language and culture have become integral parts of a larger global cultural landscape, showing that modernization, far from endangering local traditions, can be a powerful tool for their preservation and celebration on a worldwide scale.

The growing global interest in Javanese culture has further enhanced the language's visibility and recognition worldwide. Digital platforms have become crucial in this process, enabling cultural artifacts such as wayang performances, Javanese literature, and traditional music to be shared internationally. For instance, the availability of live translations for wayang performances has allowed a global audience to access this unique aspect of Javanese culture while learning the language in context. Similarly, translating classic Javanese literature into other languages has helped convey the rich moral, historical, and cultural messages embedded within the stories. Once confined to specific regions, these cultural products have reached a much wider audience, fostering global appreciation for Javanese heritage.

3.1. Live Translations of Wayang Performances

Wayang, a traditional Javanese shadow puppet show, has long been a vehicle for storytelling, cultural expression, and the transmission of Javanese language. However, its performance is often in a language and dialect that can be difficult for non-native speakers or younger generations to understand. Digital technology has transformed how these performances are experienced by providing real-time translations and subtitles during live wayang performances. This innovation allows global audiences, including those unfamiliar with the Javanese language, to engage with and appreciate the intricacies of the performance. Including subtitles and live translations preserves the cultural essence of wayang and promotes the Javanese language to a broader, international audience.



Fig. 1. Simultaneous Translation in a Live Streamed Wayang Performance (photo source: YouTube Channel Purbo Asmoro Official)

Kathryn (Kitsie) Emerson has been translating wayang performances into live and online English since 2005, employing a unique simultaneous translation technique based on projected running text. Developed in collaboration with Ki Purbo Asmoro throughout worldwide tours, this system has enabled her to interpret 227 all-night performances by 52 different dhalang. Of these, 135 were for Ki Purbo Asmoro over 17 years, while 92 were for 51 other dhalang over 10 years.

Unlike standard pre-recorded subtitles, Emerson's simultaneous translations provide real-time access to the performance, allowing audience members to read the translation as it happens. These translations are approximate interpretations that preserve the spontaneity of the dhalang's performance without prior scripting or coordination. This methodology distinguishes itself from other methods, such as live commentary by an MC or basic narrative summaries in program notes, by capturing the entire depth of the performance, including character nuances, inside jokes, and the dhalang's unique interpretation.



Fig. 2. Wayang in Translation
(photo source: <https://ekalaya.org/wayang-with-translation/>)

Emerson continues to provide her translation services for future performances. As informed in the website of Ekalaya, despite hurdles such as YouTube flagging her content, she is committed to making her performances more available to a broader audience. The Wayang in Translation project, funded by AIFIS (October 2020–December 2021) and individual donors, contributes to the expenditures of technical personnel and equipment required for seamless, high-quality broadcasts. Because financing for the project is frequently limited, supporters are invited to contribute to help sustain the program.



Fig. 3. Dr. Kitsie is captured typing the translation during the Wayang Performance (photo source: YouTube Channel Purbo Asmoro Official)

As stated in Maryana (2024), Dr. Kitsie Emerson has become a key figure in the world of Wayang and Karawitan, bringing these two traditional arts to the international stage through cultural and artistic missions abroad as well as the use of Information Technology (IT) to help the global community understand Wayang performances through live translations during the shows. Kitsie has successfully introduced Wayang to international audiences, both as a producer and as a translator for other producers. Her cultural missions have included visits to Singapore, India, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Bolivia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia, and Belgium, with many of these missions taking place many times.

Quinn (2021) emphasizes the importance of the Javanese language as a regional language with millions of speakers in Indonesia, highlighting its role in national discussions and academic discourse, such as conferences and other scholarly gatherings. His work sheds light on the value of Javanese as a living language, advocating for its recognition and preservation in both local and national contexts. Similarly, Dr. Kitsie contributes to this effort by bringing the richness of Javanese heritage to the international stage. Her work bridges Javanese cultural products—be they literature, art, or traditions—with global audiences, enabling international art and culture enthusiasts to appreciate the depth and uniqueness of Javanese culture. Together, their efforts serve to elevate Javanese heritage, fostering greater understanding and appreciation of its historical and contemporary significance on a global scale.

3.2. The Development of Javanese-English Dictionaries

It was in 1835, when the linguists started developing Javanese dictionary, listed Javanese words translated to Dutch by P.P.Roorda van Eysinga in 1835. The first Javanese-English dictionary was published in 1974 by E. Home at Yale University and then continuously developed. After 1982, the most recent *Dictionary of Javanese-English* by Stuart Robson and Singgih Wicaksana, published in 2002 is a comprehensive linguistic resource that encompasses over 25,000 headwords, reflecting the richness and diversity of Modern Javanese.

This expansive collection includes common words used in daily conversation and delves into specialized terminology crucial for understanding various aspects of Javanese culture and society.

The dictionary features *krama* (the high, formal register) and *ngoko* (the low, informal register) variations of Javanese, offering readers insight into the language's hierarchical structure, integral to social interactions in Javanese-speaking communities. These two registers help to convey respect, formality, and the status of the individuals involved in a conversation, and the dictionary meticulously captures these nuances.

The dictionary explains Javanese cultural features in addition to linguistic terms. This includes concepts related to traditional customs, social structures, and belief systems that are uniquely Javanese. Terms related to folklore and religious practices are included, offering definitions and contextual information about spiritual beliefs, rituals, and mythological stories that form a core part of Javanese heritage. Moreover, the dictionary highlights traditional cuisines, costumes, and crafts, providing essential vocabulary for understanding the culinary traditions, clothing styles, and artisanal practices that define Javanese culture. For example, terms related to the famous batik textiles, traditional weapons like *keris*, and regional dishes such as *nasi gudeg* are explained in detail. The resource also includes terms from the performing arts, especially those tied to *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry), *gamelan* (traditional orchestra), and *reog* (traditional dance), all of which are vital components of Javanese artistic expression. These terms give readers the vocabulary needed to appreciate the complexity and symbolism embedded in Javanese art.

Additionally, the dictionary covers local flora and fauna, providing names and descriptions of plants and animals that are native to Java and hold cultural, medicinal, or ecological significance. Including idiomatic phrases further enriches the dictionary, offering examples of figurative language and expressions commonly used in everyday conversation, thus giving learners a deeper understanding of the subtleties and humor embedded in the language. Overall, this dictionary is invaluable for those interested in mastering the Javanese language and understanding the culture. It offers a broad, insightful reference connecting linguistic knowledge with cultural context.

This dictionary has achieved global recognition, being purchased, read, and cited by individuals and institutions worldwide. As the most comprehensive and up-to-date resource for modern Javanese-English translations, it is vital for enhancing Javanese language literacy. Its widespread use contributes significantly to the preservation and dissemination of Javanese culture internationally (Afdholy & Hidayat, 2024). Moreover, Muljono et. Al (2024) also emphasized the importance of maintaining and revitalizing the Javanese glossary digitally. By providing an accessible and reliable reference for Javanese speakers, learners, and researchers, this dictionary plays a crucial role in safeguarding the Javanese people's rich linguistic and cultural heritage, ensuring its relevance and vitality in the modern world.

3.3. Translated Javanese Short Stories

George Quinn, a distinguished scholar of Javanese literature from Australia, has devoted his academic career to exploring and preserving the richness of Javanese culture. His profound passion for the Javanese language and traditions has resulted in an impressive body of work, including numerous publications highlighting this cultural heritage's beauty and complexity. His most recent endeavor, *She Wanted to Be a Beauty Queen*, is a groundbreaking compilation of Javanese short stories translated into English. Published in 2023, this book showcases 30 carefully selected short stories handpicked and curated by Professor Quinn himself. The first-ever collection of contemporary Javanese fiction translated into English. Each story reflects the unique essence of Javanese life, offering vivid narratives that bridge the gap between local traditions and global understanding.

The collection delves into the authentic daily experiences of Javanese people, focusing mainly on those living in rural areas and small towns. It brings various aspects of Javanese society to light, including social dynamics, ethnic diversity, religious beliefs, cultural norms, and psychological struggles. The book entertains and educates through these stories, allowing international readers to connect with the nuances of Javanese identity and heritage. By translating these stories into English, George Quinn has made an invaluable contribution to the global appreciation of Javanese literature and culture. His work enables a broader audience to access and engage with the rich tapestry of life

in Java, fostering cross-cultural understanding and reinforcing the importance of preserving linguistic and literary traditions.

This book stands out as a special work because it is a compilation of short stories—a light and engaging literary form that is deeply intertwined with cultural values. Through these stories, local values are effectively conveyed, thanks to Prof. Quinn's fluency in Javanese. The book is intended for the international community and native Javanese speakers, who can enjoy the selected stories presented in a way that makes them accessible and meaningful within a global context. The book was launched in Australia and several cities across Indonesia, receiving an enthusiastic response, particularly from lovers of Javanese literature.

Short stories play a significant role in capturing and preserving the culture embedded in the language they use. As a compact and versatile literary form, short stories provide a window into the lives, values, and traditions of the people who speak the language. Through vivid descriptions, authentic dialogues, and relatable characters, they offer readers an intimate glimpse into the cultural nuances, historical contexts, and societal norms of a particular community.

One of the key strengths of short stories is their ability to convey complex cultural elements in a concise and accessible way. They often focus on everyday experiences, reflecting the customs, beliefs, and practices that shape a community's identity. Short stories serve as snapshots of cultural heritage, whether through folklore-inspired narratives, contemporary slices of life, or tales that explore moral and ethical dilemmas (Macasaet & Maranan, 2015).

Additionally, short stories excel in preserving linguistic features, including idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and colloquial language, which may be lost in longer, more formal literary works. These linguistic details are vital in understanding the worldview and thought patterns of a culture, as they often carry meanings and connotations unique to the language. In cultural exchange, short stories are particularly effective in bridging gaps between different cultures. When translated, they allow readers from diverse backgrounds to experience the world through the lens of another culture. This fosters empathy, appreciation, and a deeper understanding of cultural diversity.

Moreover, short stories are often accessible to a wide range of readers due to their brevity and relatable themes. This makes them an ideal medium for promoting and preserving cultural identity in a rapidly globalizing world. They serve as cultural ambassadors, ensuring that the values, traditions, and languages of a community are passed down to future generations and shared with a broader audience.

CONCLUSION

The preservation and global dissemination of the Javanese language and culture illustrate a successful balance between tradition and modernity. Despite challenges from globalization, urbanization, and declining intergenerational transmission, digital technology and international enthusiasm have revitalized Javanese heritage. Initiatives such as live translations of wayang performances, the development of comprehensive Javanese-English dictionaries, and the translation of Javanese short stories into English have significantly enhanced the language's accessibility and global appeal. These efforts, driven by passionate individuals and supported by digital tools, demonstrate that modernization and globalization can complement rather than undermine local languages and cultures. By bridging local traditions with global audiences, these initiatives preserve Javanese cultural identity while fostering cross-cultural appreciation. They highlight the potential of innovative, collaborative approaches to ensure the enduring relevance of indigenous languages and traditions in an interconnected world.

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