

## Language as a Status Symbol of Power in Social Interactions at a Multicultural School in the City of Medan

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### Abstract

One's habit in language use is influenced by daily social life structures thereby creating different interaction patterns both individually or as a group. Sociology of language critically analyzes the use of language as a symbol of power which dominates the arena in a multicultural school. This research utilizes mixed methods as it is considered capable of finding and answering the issues and problems under examination. The location of research was Sultan Iskandar Muda High School which is the only multicultural education curriculum based pilot school in the city of Medan. The informants in this study were the principal, teachers, and students while the respondents were samples of high school students totaling 86 individuals. Research results show that one's power in language use is determined by one's interest in using language. School power and individual power has different portions when positioning one's self during interactions. Although power is coercive in nature, the community must submit to rules of the school. The power of the school in determining language emphasizes values of nationalism, which is different to individual or group power which adjusts the language to the situation at hand so that relations of language use has its own portion of interaction in the multicultural school.

### Keywords:

language; status symbol of power; social interaction.

### Abstrak

Kebiasaan seseorang dalam penggunaan bahasa dipengaruhi oleh struktur kehidupan sosial sehari-hari sehingga menciptakan pola interaksi yang berbeda, baik secara individu maupun kelompok. Dalam sudut pandang sosiologi, secara kritis menganalisa penggunaan bahasa sebagai simbol kekuatan yang mendominasi arena di sekolah multikultural. Penelitian ini menggunakan mixed methods karena dianggap mampu menemukan dan menjawab permasalahan dalam penelitian. Lokasi penelitian yaitu SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda yang merupakan satu-satunya sekolah percontohan pendidikan multikultural berbasis sekolah di Kota

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Medan. Informan dalam penelitian ini adalah kepala sekolah, guru, dan siswa; sedangkan responden diambil dari sampel siswa SMA yang berjumlah 86 orang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekuatan seseorang dalam penggunaan bahasa ditentukan oleh minat seseorang dalam menggunakan bahasa. Kekuatan sekolah dan kekuatan individu mempunyai porsi yang berbeda saat memposisikan seseorang selama berinteraksi. Meski kekuatan bersifat pemaksaan, masyarakat harus tunduk pada peraturan sekolah. Kekuatan sekolah dalam menentukan bahasa menekankan nilai-nilai nasionalisme, berbeda dengan kekuatan individu atau kelompok yang menyesuaikan bahasa dengan situasi yang ada sehingga penggunaan bahasa memiliki bagian interaksi masing-masing di sekolah multikultural.

### **Kata Kunci:**

*bahasa; status simbol kekuasaan; interaksi sosial.*

## **Introduction**

Language is a part of symbols, according to Sturtevant language is a system of arbitrary symbols in the form of sounds used by members of a social group to collaborate and engage in mutual relations, while Keraf views language as a means of communication between members of the community in the form of sound symbols produced by human speech (Suandi, 2014: 4). Language is categorized into groups in its delivery, for instance, verbal, non verbal language, and gesture. Language use constantly undergoes imaginative movement/ activity rendering it to have an appeal of its own in the process of interaction.

Using a language one masters or is fluent in is a status symbol or a cultural characteristic of a particular group or individual in conducting social interaction processes. Based on data from the *Summer Institute of Linguistics* (SIL) in 2001 (Sobarna, 2007), there are actually 731 languages, including 5 that are extinct, in Indonesia. Furthermore, there are 13 main languages in Indonesia with a minimum number of 1 million speakers, among these languages are Javanese (75.2 million), Sundanese (27 million), and Malay (20 million). This data can then be used to show the status symbol of language in Indonesian multicultural community particularly regarding the aspect of language use by certain ethnicities which has its

distinctive character in demonstrating status symbol of authority in their interaction.

The status symbol of language is based on Pierre Bourdieu's idea which is focused on power. Language can be utilized as a means to dominate in the social arena. Bourdieu (in Jenkins, 2004: 237-238) states that language practice is directly positioned in social interaction, the entire theoretical framework is included in understanding discourse:

“Language relations are always power relations (*rappports de force*) hence it is indescribable within the compass of linguistic analysis. Even the most unpretentious linguistic exchange is played into a complex network of historical power relations involving the speaker and supported by social authority and audience that acknowledges the said authority in various human levels”.

Language has a central role in power mechanism that is dominating, especially in concealing the true intent of a violent action element. The dominant class broadens and forces its *habitus* over the dominated class. Meaning, the dominant language has been set by those in power in determining the type of language used in the process of interaction to the dominated social class. As an example at the macro level, we take the analogy of the government (upper class) determining the national language of the Republic of Indonesia

to be Indonesian which is emphasized in Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. All citizens must subsequently comply in using Indonesian as a language that unites the Indonesian nation, hence the dominated community i.e. people without power to rule (lower class) who may actually possess their own power in using their native language is forced against their will to follow the rules set by the government. Language also reflects "*who the speaker is*" hence the message is interpreted as a symbol. The dominant class seemingly intends to inform the dominated class that "*this is my habitus*" and "*this is my culture*" through language. Meanwhile, the dominated class has no access to disseminate its *habitus* (Martono, 2012: 47). An analogy can also be made at the micro level, that is the power of the community in using languages other than the national language when engaging in personal interaction namely by using the native language each ethnicity has or a foreign language which has been mastered.

Language as a status symbol of power is not established without the process of social interaction. Gillin dan Gillin (1942: 501) stated "*the fundamental social processes may be divided into two classes: (1) processes of association and (2) processes of dissociation. The latter are divided into two sub classes: (a.) competition and (b) contravention and conflict. The former also are subdivided into two classes: (a) accommodation and (b) assimilation and acculturation.*" Based on these division of social processes the author attempts to interlink the relation of language as a status symbol of power to social interactions at a multicultural school.

Multicultural schools are identical to multicultural communities, wherein the difference is only in the span of their scopes. A multicultural community unites all differences without removing cultural backgrounds and values embedded within individuals such as ethnicity, religion, culture, and language, as is the case with a multicultural school. An

interesting point of discussion in this article is that the use of language as a status symbol of power in a multicultural community experienced a shift. Research conducted by Wardani et.al. (2013), for example, stated that the language attitude of students at the Singaraja Public High School 1 tended to be trilingual towards Indonesian language which shows that the use of national and foreign language in social interaction had shifted. What is meant by shift here is that the status symbol of language changes with the advent of mixture in linguistic culture, for instance "*aku butuh kepastian yang real*" (I need real certainty) or "*kapan bisa kita follow up proposal penelitiannya?*" (when can we follow up on the research proposal?). These language mixtures produce nonstandard sentences thus creating the shift that cause language change.

The language symbol in this article is divided into three categories, namely the power of the native, national, and foreign language. Language is also supported based on demonstrating the standing of linguistic culture in the arena of a multicultural school. Sofyan (2014: 83) views language as a symbol in maintaining power by the former ruler. Through language, an individual can create a domination of power. The use of language symbolization provides an understanding on the sustainability of action which must immediately be taken in employing that power. Nasution (2007, 448-449) stated that in the Old Order period the word revolution, capitalist lackey, imperialist lackey, implies that the Indonesian government at the time was not amicable to the capitalist and imperialist systems. This is different to the Reform Era which boasted anti collusion-corruption-nepotism (KKN), reform, and empowerment of the legislative body (DPR). The political language of every government administration had differing characteristics.

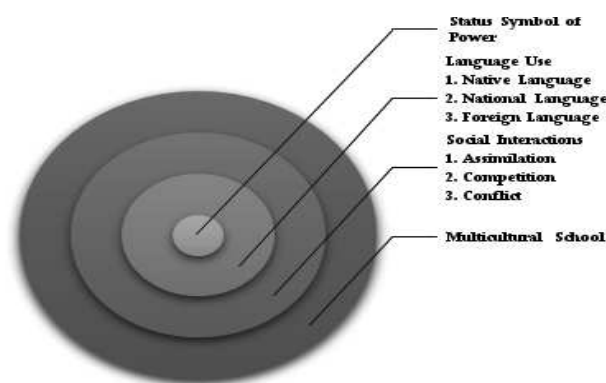
This can be perceived through the obligatory government regulation in schools

of using Indonesian as the national language. Indonesian is used in the teaching and learning process as well as interactions in school in accordance to Law No. 24 year 2009 article 29 verse (1,2,3) which aims to facilitate teachers in transferring knowledge to their students. This emphasis demonstrates that language has its own status symbol of power which depends on how the community positions that language. Former research show language holds a significant role in nurturing integration and interaction in multicultural schools. The author observes that multicultural schools have a strong concept of maintaining ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. However, in terms of linguistic diversity, it seems that actual harmony has yet to be observed. On the one hand, the community's habit in using language is certainly determined by the school, yet on the other the power of language use is solely determined by the individual.

This article focuses on observing the influence and relations of native, national, and foreign language use as a status symbol of power towards social interactions at a multicultural school in Medan. The author attempts to interlink these issues by applying the theoretical concept of Bourdieu (2011) on status symbol of power and the theoretical concept of Gillin and Gillin (1942: 501) on social interactions in aspects of assimilation, competition, and conflict. The Sultan Iskandar Muda Private High School Medan was chosen as a research location as it represents the macro multicultural community, and it is the only school in Medan which implements a multicultural education curriculum that is acknowledged and certified by the Medan municipal education office and the former minister of education Anies Baswedan in 2014. In addition to differences in ethnicity and religion, this school also has the unique characteristic of having 5 houses of worship on the school ground namely a mosque, a church, a vihara (Buddhist temple), a Chinese temple, and a shrine.

Actually, the multicultural school merely served as a venue for the occurring process of interactions in using native, national, and foreign language. The object of research was the principal, teachers, and students at the multicultural school in the city of Medan. The native, national, and foreign languages will be linked to the position of an individual or group in their interactions with interlocutors verbally, nonverbally, and through gestures.

**Picture 1.**  
**The Conceptual Framework of Language as a Status Symbol of Power in Social Interactions at a Multicultural School**



*Source: Quoted from the theory of Pierre Bourdieu and the concept of theory Gillin and Gillin*

The power of the native language is symbolized as a language owned by each of the ethnic culture. For instance, there is the Batak language, Malay, Javanese, Chinese, Karo language, Minangkabau language, et cetera. Additionally, the power of national language signifies a status symbol of being an Indonesian citizen with a high level of nationalism with the desire of preserving Indonesian as the official national language. Wahyun (2010:14) stated that Indonesian is both a political and cultural symbol and identity which serves as a strong binding chain in developing closeness of a community bearing various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The social interaction process of the above scheme shows the influence of an individual or group *habitus* in positioning the use of native, national and foreign languages in a multicultural school at the time of interaction surely brings about an impact that is visible in aspects of: (1) assimilation, as seen from the impact of linguistic culture mix experienced by the student through her tolerance in using the native, national, and foreign languages during interactions at the multicultural school; (2) competition, as seen from the use of communal or personal languages being turned into a competition or contestation among students and group of students in demonstrating and preserving the language they are fluent in; (3) conflict, as seen from the negative impact of using languages that induce quarrel at the multicultural school.

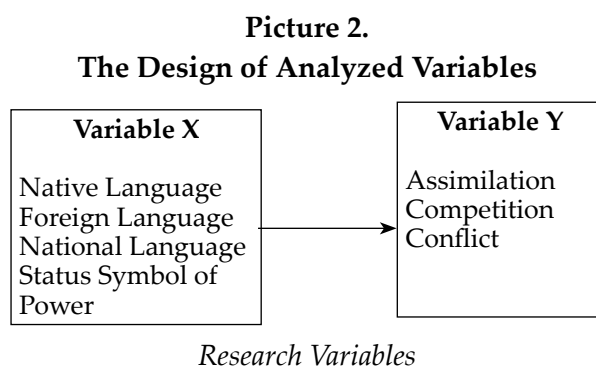
The objectives of this article are: (1) one's habit in language use is influenced by one's life structure, thus creating a pattern of interaction that differs individually or as a group seen from the place of residence, power relations in determining language thus becoming habitual in using language which causes a shift in the originality of linguistic culture; (2) the abundance of multicultural based education at school in pedagogical aspect only introduces culture, respect towards religious, ethnic and racial differences, while language is merely regarded as insignificant since there is already a dominant uniting language that is Indonesian which leads ethnic languages to be sidelined and even lost; (3) sociology of language is an interesting field to be critically studied in order to understand power domination in using native, national, and foreign languages during social interaction.

## Methods

The research method employed in this article is mixed method which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Creswell (Ishak et al., 2011, 29-30) defined mixed methods as a research whereby a researcher collects and

analyzes data, integrates the findings and makes a conclusion using the qualitative and quantitative approach or methods in a single case study or research program. Research using mixed methods is able to review the real data obtained according to the necessary portion. A number of data suitable in measuring variables of language use namely native, national, and foreign languages in social interactions as assimilation, competition, and conflict were designed to measure quantitative data while a qualitative approach in the form of interviews was used to delve deeper into the quantitative data acquired. The object of research in this article were students of Sultan Iskandar Muda Private High School in Medan.

The author employed qualitative research as the primary data as it used methods of observation and interview. All of the teacher and student activities in using language verbally, nonverbally, and through gestures while interacting were observed. In addition, interviews were conducted on the principal, language teachers, and students. As for the quantitative research, the data results were processed using SPSS program software version 20 as this application facilitates in testing statistical data acquired through the questionnaires. Shown in the following is the design of the analyzed variables:



Variable X is the use of native language as seen from the use of native language that is known and mastered by each of student at the multicultural school. National language is

seen from the use of Indonesian as the official language used in the process of teaching and learning within the school grounds. Foreign language is seen from the use of English, Japanese, and Mandarin. The status symbol of power is seen from the intensity in using a language mastered by the student be it the native, national, or foreign one. Variable Y in the aspect of assimilation is seen from the impact of linguistic culture mix experienced by the student through her tolerance in using native, national, and foreign languages when interacting. Competition is seen from the use of communal or personal language during acts of speech. Conflict is seen from the impact of language use which instigates quarrel at the multicultural school.

The population sample for this research were students with religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences. The sampling technique utilized in this research is purposive sampling. Prior to conducting data analysis process to determine the number of samples necessary from the given population, a sampling technique based on Taro Yamane's formula was implemented (Bungin, 2011:115), that is:

$$n = \frac{N}{N(d)^2 + 1}$$

The population was 612 multicultural students. Once the formula above was employed, the result was 85.95, which means that the number of samples to be acquired from the student population of Sultan Iskandar Muda Private High School Medan was as much as 86 students. The characteristics of samples taken from the teacher and student population were: (1) students capable to passively and actively speak in native, national, and foreign languages; (2) students with different ethnic background; (3) students from grades X and XI, considering that their involvement does not hinder their learning process during the actual research; (4) students with different religious background.

## **Language Activity as a Status Symbol of Power in Influencing Social Interaction Process at a Multicultural School**

The observation showed activities of language use verbally, nonverbally, and through gestures during interaction process. Verbal language can be regarded as direct use of language in the form of speech. In this regard, interaction among student parents of mutual ethnicity using their native language with a teacher of mutual Karo ethnic group was observed. A student parent was also observed speaking in Karo language to one of the teachers. Yet, when the parent was speaking with another parent of Chinese descent the language used was spontaneously changed to Indonesian. And when the homeroom teacher interacted with another parent soon after, he/she used Indonesian.

Regarding nonverbal language, it was observed in several venues at school where writings in Indonesian and English were written with certain symbols or the school also used language by putting writings in the school compound so that students and the community at school can read the message and essence delivered regarding multicultural philosophy. Nonverbal language was also actively used by the school in propagating language although through indirect delivery the goal and intent can be understood by the reader. The delivery of language in writing form can only be found in Indonesian and foreign language.

Concerning gestures, it seems that there was an obvious difference in the style of speaking and physical movements of students when using language in activities with their friends. There were a number of language style that were specific to certain individuals although it could not be fully observed that this character refers to a particular ethnic trait. The author purposely emphasized the activities of Chinese as a native language since out of all the students, the most active in using their native tongue were the Chinese descendants, while students originating from Batak, Karo,

Mandailing, Toba, Padang, Malay, Java, and other ethnicities seldom use their native tongue when interacting.

It was observed that the Chinese students would talk with their friends of the same ethnic background in Chinese. However, other friends of different ethnic origin who heard them talking by chance would respond with a “chuckle” since they did not understand what they were saying thus leading the Chinese students to change from their native tongue to the national language so that their friends could understand. The use of native language is latently aimed at demonstrating the status symbol of a certain ethnicity although the language being spoken is spontaneously said with total disregard to others who do not know the language. Indonesian language also shows its status symbol as the national language. The use of foreign language in this school is not too prevalent among the students, as it is merely regarded as a special skill that is unsuitable to be made a symbol and that its considered as an accomplishment for those who study it.

Language is a *habitus* that is inseparable from social life be it verbally, nonverbally,

or as gestures. The research findings show that native, national, and foreign languages actually bear influence in the status symbol of power at the multicultural school. The school determined Indonesian as the language to use in pedagogic activities and interactions. Not only verbal interactions but nonverbal ones as well. All ethnic groups use Indonesian as the national language and they are obligated to do so in order to avoid miscommunication with their interlocutors.

The social practice of using languages seems to be influenced by family, friends and social surroundings since there is a special disposition which enables one's *habitus* to naturally emerge. A person communicates using a language that is suitable to the social arena so that the interlocutor can accept the interaction process by adjusting the language hence the use of native, national, and foreign languages can be easily adapted.

### The Influence of Native Language as a Status Symbol of Power

Sociologically, native language is the *habitus* of an individual or group that is

**Table 1.**  
**Response of Ethnicity Based Respondents**  
**Regarding Native Language as a Status Symbol of Power**

| Ethnicity of Respondents | Establishing a native language study group can enhance language education insight at school |      |       |       |        |       |          |      |                   |   | Fluency in using native language at school can lead to the popularity of respondent's ethnicity |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      | The school establishes the respondent's native language as an extracurricular activity for students at school |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |   |
|--------------------------|---|------|-------|-------|--------|-------|----------|------|-------------------|---|---|------|-------|------|--------|------|----------|-------|-------------------|------|---|------|-------|------|--------|------|----------|-------|-------------------|------|---|
|                          | Strongly Agree  |      | Agree |       | Unsure |       | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |   | Strongly Agree  |      | Agree |      | Unsure |      | Disagree |       | Strongly Disagree |      | Strongly Agree  |      | Agree |      | Unsure |      | Disagree |       | Strongly Disagree |      |   |
|                          | N   | F    | N     | F     | N      | F     | N        | F    | N                 | F | N   | F    | N     | F    | N      | F    | N        | F     | N                 | F    | N   | F    | N     | F    | N      | F    | N        | F     | N                 | F    |   |
|                          |   |      |       |       |        |       |          |      |                   |   |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |   |
| Acehnese                 | 0   | 0    | 3     | 3.50  | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 2     | 2.32 | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16  | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 1      | 1.16 | 1        | 1.16  | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Batak Simalungun         | 0   | 0    | 2     | 2.32  | 1      | 1.16  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 2        | 2.32  | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 2        | 2.32  | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Batak Toba               | 0   | 0    | 2     | 2.32  | 2      | 2.32  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 2      | 2.32 | 1        | 1.16  | 0                 | 0    | 1   | 1.16 | 0     | 0    | 3      | 3.50 | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Indian Punjabi           | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Indian Tamil             | 0   | 0    | 11    | 12.80 | 3      | 3.50  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 5      | 5.81 | 5        | 5.81  | 1                 | 1.16 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 3      | 3.50 | 9        | 10.46 | 1                 | 1.16 |   |
| Javanese                 | 1   | 1.16 | 4     | 4.65  | 3      | 3.50  | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 5      | 5.81 | 3        | 3.50  | 1                 | 1.16 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 4      | 4.65 | 3        | 3.50  | 2                 | 2.32 |   |
| Karo                     | 0   | 0    | 4     | 4.65  | 2      | 2.32  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 2     | 2.32 | 2      | 2.32 | 2        | 2.32  | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 6    | 6.97     | 0     | 0                 |      |   |
| Mandailing               | 0   | 0    | 7     | 8.13  | 1      | 1.16  | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 4      | 4.65 | 5        | 5.81  | 1                 | 1.16 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 4      | 4.65 | 4        | 4.65  | 2                 | 2.32 |   |
| Malay                    | 2   | 2.32 | 2     | 2.32  | 1      | 1.16  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 0     | 0    | 3      | 3.50 | 0        | 0     | 1                 | 1.16 | 1   | 1.16 | 1     | 1.16 | 1      | 1.16 | 2        | 2.32  | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Minang                   | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0     | 1      | 1.16  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    |   |
| Nias                     | 1   | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0     | 1                 | 1.16 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16 | 1        | 1.16  | 1                 | 1.16 |   |
| Sundanese                | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16  | 0                 | 0    | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    | 0        | 1     | 1.16              | 0    | 0 |
| Chinese                  | 1   | 1.16 | 13    | 15.11 | 10     | 11.62 | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 5     | 5.81 | 8      | 9.30 | 9        | 10.46 | 3                 | 3.50 | 1   | 1.16 | 3     | 3.50 | 8      | 9.30 | 10       | 11.62 | 4                 | 4.65 |   |
| Total                    | (N= 86 f= 100%)   |      |       |       |        |       |          |      |                   |   |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |   |

Source: Primary Data, 2016

inseparable from their daily life activities. Although school regulation has the authority to regulate the type of language used in school, the *habitus* will eventually surface when the individual or group encounters a suitable interlocutor. Table 1 below shows the results of statements from the respondents based on ethnicity

Table 1 shows as much as 15.11% of Chinese respondents agreeing more to using native language study group to enhance language education insight at school. This is supported by the Indian Tamil ethnic group in which 12.80% also agreed to the statement. Based on the analysis of the given statement it can be concluded that the Chinese and Indian Tamil ethnic groups appreciate native language being learned in a multicultural school more.

In addition, approximately 10.46% more Chinese chose to disagree with the statement that fluency in using native language at school can lead to the popularity of their ethnicity. What is meant by popular in this article are the languages of Batak, Karo, Java, Malay, Minang, and others that are frequently heard hence arousing the interest of others to know the language. One's fluency in using a native language does not influence others to imitate other ethnicities and speak with the native language they speak in. Native language is merely an informal language that is seldom used as it is only a language to show a status symbol of power.

Approximately 11.62% of Chinese did not agree to the school establishing native language as an extracurricular activity at school since they are aware of their status that does not consider ethnic majority and minority. The native language as a status symbol of power it seems has yet to have significant influence in social interaction at the multicultural school. In other words, native language is used to dominate the school arena as a venue for using native language. This article found similarity to Bourdieu's (2011) thought in seeing the

presence of a dominant and non-dominant in a given arena wherein the non-dominant class becomes more sidelined by the power of the dominating class thus the use of native language was not significant enough to demonstrate native language *habitus* at the multicultural school.

This article also found that the ethnic majority are more concerned with their native language in the multicultural school. The Chinese highly respects the effort in preserving native languages. Native languages would remain in existence if it is used intensely by a multicultural community without having it be made into a special lesson in the multicultural school. In general, a person's *habitus* in using native language indirectly demonstrates the status symbol of their ethnicity during interaction. Native language naturally emerges when there is an interlocutor using the same language. The power of native language is determined by its user depending on when, where, and with whom the person is interacting.

This data is supported by observational data in which an Indian Tamil parent seen speaking to his/her child tended to speak in Indonesian. This is different to Chinese parents who were observed speaking Chinese with their children. Our Chinese informant stated:

"if I speak Chinese it is usually easier for me to say because it is customary to speak Chinese at home. Particularly when talking with another Chinese, I think it is more comfortable speaking in Chinese but sometimes when there is someone (in the conversation) who doesn't understand Chinese I will speak in Indonesian, but sometimes I would blurt out in Chinese as there is someone of the same ethnicity present there".

The use of native and national language verbally seems to obviously be used according



to the conditions and situation at hand. The power of a person's language use depends on where they are since it is a personal *habitus* which is affixed to themselves and they can spontaneously change the type of language they use depending on the interlocutor they are speaking with. In other words, the community in the multicultural school can adjust the use of their language as not to ruin the ongoing process of interaction.

### The Influence of National Language as a Status Symbol of Power

Table 2 below shows the appreciation of the Chinese ethnic group regarding the compulsory use of the national language as it can introduce national identity to other countries, with 13.95% of them strongly agreed. From that statement, it is analyzed that the national language has a strong authority in showing its status symbol since it is the uniting language for the community in the multicultural school.

The Chinese shows more appreciation regarding the response on the government and school publishing lesson text books using

Indonesian with a value of 16.27% who strongly agreed. Although the Chinese appreciate the power Indonesian language has as the uniting language of the nation, other ethnicities also positively responded to Indonesian as a symbol of state thus provided that the government is serious, Indonesian language should be made compulsory for foreigners intending to enter the country.

On average, all ethnic groups agreed that foreigners entering Indonesia should be obligated to use Indonesian. The Chinese tend to agree by approximately 8.13%, although some of the ethnic groups stated uncertainty by approximately 9.30%. The use of national language signifies the nation's language identity through the provision that it must be preserved as stipulated in the prevailing laws. Bourdieu's (2011) thought on status symbol of power has a strong appeal towards the use of a national language. The status symbol is present because the structured social structure as seen from the nation's historical background as well as the results of social construct established by the power of the government or individuals into becoming the *habitus* of the community by implanting values and norms into the social arena.

**Table 2.**  
**Response of Ethnicity Based Respondents**  
**Regarding the National Language as a Status Symbol of Power**

| Ethnicity of Respondents | The compulsory use of Indonesian can introduce this nation's identity to other countries |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   | The government and school publish text books for lessons in Indonesian |       |       |       |        |      |          |   |                   |   | Foreigners entering Indonesia are obligated to use Indonesian |      |       |      |        |      |          |      |                   |      |   |
|--------------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|----------|------|-------------------|---|--|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|----------|---|-------------------|---|---|------|-------|------|--------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|---|
|                          | Strongly Agree   |       | Agree |       | Unsure |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |   | Strongly Agree   |       | Agree |       | Unsure |      | Disagree |   | Strongly Disagree |   | Strongly Agree  |      | Agree |      | Unsure |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |      |   |
|                          | N  | F     | N     | F     | N      | F    | N        | F    | N                 | F | N  | F     | N     | F     | N      | F    | N        | F | N                 | F | N   | F    | N     | F    | N      | F    | N        | F    | N                 | F    |   |
|                          |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |   |                   |   |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |      |                   |      |   |
| Acehnese                 | 2  | 2.32  | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 1  | 1.16  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 2    | 2.32     | 1    | 1.16              | 0    | 0 |
| Batak Simalungun         | 1  | 1.16  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 3  | 3.50  | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 2    | 2.32  | 1    | 1.16   | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Batak Toba               | 2  | 2.32  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 2  | 2.32  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Indian Punjabi           | 0  | 0     | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0  | 0     | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Indian Tamil             | 7  | 8.13  | 6     | 6.97  | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0 | 9  | 10.46 | 5     | 5.81  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 4   | 4.65 | 2     | 2.32 | 5      | 5.81 | 3        | 3.50 | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Javanese                 | 5  | 5.81  | 4     | 4.65  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 5  | 5.81  | 3     | 3.50  | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 1      | 1.16 | 4        | 4.65 | 1                 | 1.16 |   |
| Karo                     | 3  | 3.50  | 3     | 3.50  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 3  | 3.50  | 3     | 3.50  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 1   | 1.16 | 3     | 3.50 | 0      | 0    | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Mandailing               | 5  | 5.81  | 3     | 3.50  | 2      | 2.32 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 5  | 5.81  | 4     | 4.65  | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 3   | 3.50 | 1     | 1.16 | 1      | 1.16 | 5        | 5.81 | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Malay                    | 2  | 2.32  | 1     | 1.16  | 1      | 1.16 | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0 | 3  | 3.50  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 3   | 3.50 | 2     | 2.32 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Minang                   | 0  | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0  | 0     | 0     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Nias                     | 3  | 3.50  | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 3  | 3.50  | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 2   | 2.32 | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Sundanese                | 0  | 0     | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 0  | 0     | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 0   | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Chinese                  | 12   | 13.95 | 10    | 11.23 | 4      | 4.65 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 | 14   | 16.27 | 11    | 12.79 | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 | 5   | 5.81 | 7     | 8.13 | 8      | 9.30 | 6        | 6.97 | 0                 | 0    | 0 |
| Total                    | (N= 86 f= 100%)  |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |   |                   |   |   |      |       |      |        |      |          |      |                   |      |   |

Source: Primary Data, 2016

**Table 3.**  
**Response of Ethnicity Based Respondents**  
**Regarding Foreign Language as a Status Symbol of Power**

| Ethnicity of Respondents | Lesson materials at school must use a foreign language |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      | Rules in using foreign language at school can change education quality in Indonesia for the better |      |       |      |        |       |          |      |                   |      | Being fluent in a foreign language provides the special opportunity to acquire scholarship learning overseas |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |
|--------------------------|--|------|-------|------|--------|------|----------|-------|-------------------|------|--|------|-------|------|--------|-------|----------|------|-------------------|------|--|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|----------|------|-------------------|---|
|                          | Strongly Agree   |      | Agree |      | Unsure |      | Disagree |       | Strongly Disagree |      | Strongly Agree   |      | Agree |      | Unsure |       | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |      | Strongly Agree   |       | Agree |       | Unsure |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |   |
|                          | N  | F    | N     | F    | N      | F    | N        | F     | N                 | F    | N  | F    | N     | F    | N      | F     | N        | F    | N                 | F    | N  | F     | N     | F     | N      | F    | N        | F    | N                 | F |
|                          |  |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |  |      |       |      |        |       |          |      |                   |      |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |
| Acehnese                 | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 2      | 2.32 | 0        | 0     | 1                 | 1.16 | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0     | 1        | 1.16 | 1                 | 1.16 | 0  | 0     | 1     | 1.16  | 1      | 1.16 | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0 |
| Batak                    | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 3      | 3.50 | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 1  | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 2  | 2.32  | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Simalungun               | 1  | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 1  | 1.16 | 2     | 2.32 | 1      | 1.16  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 2  | 2.32  | 2     | 2.32  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Batak Toba               | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0     | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 1     | 1.16  | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Indian                   | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 3      | 3.50 | 6        | 6.97  | 5                 | 5.81 | 0  | 0    | 6     | 6.97 | 6      | 6.97  | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0    | 5  | 5.81  | 8     | 9.30  | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Punjabi                  | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 5      | 5.81 | 1        | 1.16  | 2                 | 2.32 | 0  | 0    | 4     | 4.65 | 4      | 4.65  | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 1  | 1.16  | 7     | 8.13  | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Indian Tamil             | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 3      | 3.50 | 3        | 3.50  | 0                 | 0    | 1  | 1.16 | 1     | 1.16 | 3      | 3.50  | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 1  | 1.16  | 5     | 5.81  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Javanese                 | 2  | 2.32 | 1     | 1.16 | 2      | 2.32 | 2        | 2.32  | 3                 | 3.50 | 2  | 2.32 | 6     | 6.97 | 1      | 1.16  | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 3  | 3.48  | 6     | 6.97  | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Karo                     | 1  | 1.16 | 1     | 1.16 | 1      | 1.16 | 0        | 0     | 2                 | 2.32 | 1  | 1.16 | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16  | 3        | 3.50 | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 0     | 2     | 2.32  | 1      | 1.16 | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0 |
| Mandailing               | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0     | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 1      | 1.16  | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 1     | 1.16  | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Malay                    | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 2      | 2.32 | 0        | 0     | 1                 | 1.16 | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0     | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 2  | 2.32  | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Minang                   | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 2      | 2.32 | 0        | 0     | 1                 | 1.16 | 0  | 0    | 1     | 1.16 | 0      | 0     | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 2  | 2.32  | 1     | 1.16  | 0      | 0    | 0        | 0    | 0                 | 0 |
| Nias                     | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16  | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 0    | 0     | 0    | 0      | 0     | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0    | 0  | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0    | 1        | 1.16 | 0                 | 0 |
| Sundanese                | 1  | 1.16 | 3     | 3.50 | 5      | 5.81 | 14       | 16.27 | 3                 | 3.50 | 5  | 5.81 | 7     | 8.13 | 11     | 12.79 | 3        | 3.50 | 0                 | 0    | 9  | 10.46 | 13    | 15.11 | 2      | 2.32 | 2        | 2.32 | 0                 | 0 |
| Chinese                  | (N= 86 f= 100%)  |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |  |      |       |      |        |       |          |      |                   |      |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |
| Total                    |  |      |       |      |        |      |          |       |                   |      |  |      |       |      |        |       |          |      |                   |      |  |       |       |       |        |      |          |      |                   |   |

Source: Primary Data, 2016

### The Influence of Foreign Language as a Status Symbol of Authority

Foreign language is used as a bridge to draw knowledge acquired from overseas in order to properly compete with other countries. Further data findings and results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the Chinese ethnic group did not agree with a frequency of approximately 16.27% regarding lesson materials must use a foreign language at school because the respondents language of communication is Indonesian. In the following response, the rules of using foreign language at school can change the quality of education in Indonesia for the better. 12.79% of Chinese respondents had chosen uncertain. It is then concluded that foreign language is not an indicator for enhancing education quality. Foreign language is merely an additional knowledge acquired from abroad and made into a requisite of acquiring scholarship to study overseas.

The Chinese ethnic group agreed with a frequency of 15.11% in the statement that

being fluent in a foreign language provides the opportunity to acquire scholarship learning overseas. The symbol of foreign language can influence the power of an individual or government in viewing foreign languages that are marketable in international forum. It is proven that the respondents in the multicultural school considers individuals capable of speaking foreign language(s) as having a higher social status than those that do not understand any foreign language. Through education, a person's power in enhancing his/her social class is considered able to boost their quality of life because the power of the government compels the community to master foreign language(s) in multicultural schools.

The status symbol of language power in the multicultural school shows that difference in language is signified by language symbols that are influential in maintaining closeness between teachers, parents, and students in their interactions. This symbol is signified by the ethnic background and native language being used. In addition to native language, national and foreign languages also demonstrate their

linguistic status during interactions. National language is generally used to integrate the entire student, while foreign language is used to enhance knowledge. Native, national, and foreign languages in reality have their own respective position of use depending on how one positions the language during interaction so that language activities as a status symbol in affecting the process of interaction have their own style dependent on where, when, and with whom one is interacting.

### **Analysis on the Relation of Native, National, and Foreign Languages as Status Symbol towards Social Interaction in the Aspect of Assimilation, Competition, and Conflict**

#### **The Relation of Native Language towards Social Interaction Process**

This article shows correlation between user of native language as a status symbol towards social interaction. The use of native language has a positive relationship to the formation of assimilation with a significant value of 0.000 and competition with its significant value of 0.000 which shows that the value is below 0.05. Native language is considered to have a positive relation towards the formation of the assimilation process not only during conversation among the same ethnic group. The use of native language received positive response towards social interaction in the aspect of competition in regards to competition with national and foreign languages. In the aspect of conflict, the use of native language did not have positive relation towards social interaction with a significant value of 0.072 which means that it is above standard statistics value of 0.05. In conclusion, the use of native language at the multicultural school left a number of students confused subsequently leading to gestures of avoiding conversations as they did not understand the native language of the other ethnic groups.

#### **The Relation of National Language towards Social Interaction Process**

The use of national language in the aspect of assimilation has positive relation with a significant value of 0.003, while in the aspect of conflict it has a positive relation with a significant value of 0.001. National language can instigate the process of inter-ethnic assimilation and bring about integration at the multicultural school. The power of the Indonesian language is undeniably a part of the unification of the nation. However, upon observation of its interaction in the aspect of conflict it is found that the national language has a positive relation. Indonesian language is dominant at the multicultural school hence it is not uncommon when a dispute occurs language may lead to conflict. In general, language which leads to conflict may be in the form of sentences that are abusive, scornful, and indecent through speech, writings, or gestures. The use of the national language as a status symbol towards social interaction in the aspect of competition, with a significant value of 0.587, does not seem to have a positive relation because Indonesian language is the unifying language of the nation thus respondents considered it does not induce competition.

#### **The Relation of Foreign Language towards Social Interaction Process**

The use of foreign language in the aspect of assimilation has a positive relation with a significant value of 0.002. The use of foreign language as a status symbol means that it can be used to unite the community consisting of various ethnicities this is seen from the student's learning interest in joining foreign language classes at school such as joining the English, Mandarin, and Japanese classes. The use of foreign language in the aspect of conflict also has positive relation with a significant value of 0.017. Inappropriate use of foreign language may lead to conflict although

it does not cause physical contact. Additionally, the use of foreign language also has positive relation in the aspect of competition with a significant value of 0.002. Fluency in foreign language(s) among the students can add special value because it increases the respondents to be competitive in acquiring opportunities of studying abroad.

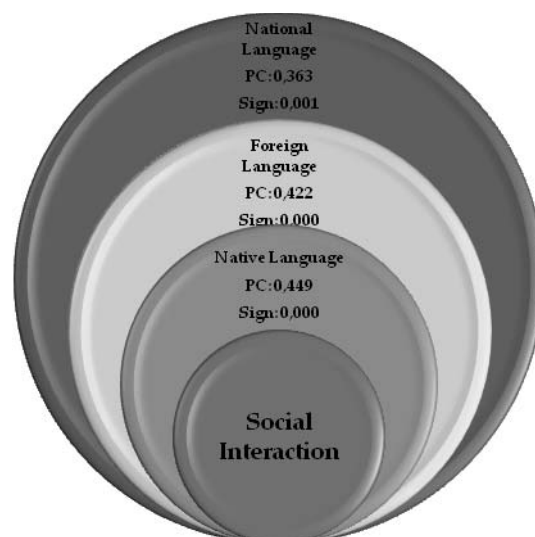
The relationship of language use as a status symbol towards social interaction sociologically reveals that language can surface because of existing power relations within the social arena that is constantly being utilized hence creating *habitus* for the language user. The theory presented by Bourdieu (2011) seems to have a connection with the result of findings from the data in this research. A person's power in using a language (speaking) is determined by the person's interest in using the language. In addition, the power of the school and the power of the individual possess different portions in regards to positioning the self during interaction. Although power is coercive, the community submits to the rules made by the school. The school emphasizes values of nationalism and public needs in determining which language to use, this is different to the people at the multicultural school who personally use language according to the situation at hand so that the relation of language users has its own portion during interaction. Although power relates to violence with its coercive nature upon language users, they can positively accept this situation.

### The Relation of Language as a Status Symbol of Power towards Social Interaction

Language as a status symbol has a strong relation towards social interaction process at the multicultural school. Based on the results of correlation test the use of native language has a positive relation towards social interaction with a pearson correlation of 0.449 and significant value of 0.000. The use of the national language also has a positive relation towards social interaction

with a pearson correlation of 0.363 and significant value of 0.001. As for the use of foreign language, it also has positive relation towards social interaction with a pearson correlation of 0.422 and significant value of 0.000.

**Figure 1.**  
**Correlation of Language Use as a Status Symbol of Power towards Social Interaction**



Source: Primary Data, 2016

The above diagram shows that as a whole the variables have positive relations, yet they specifically have different portions. The use of language that is most related to social interaction is native language first, national language comes second, and foreign language third. This result shows that national language has a different portion compared to the use of the other languages thus begging the question "why is this the case?" while in fact the national language is compulsory and it is used every time during interaction. It is concluded that the national language is actually already a *habitus* of the community at the multicultural school so it is regarded as commonly used since the respondents were of very young age. An informant mentioned:

"Indonesian is actually a language known to the community since birth, because this is a language I'm

accustomed to, I use it to interact at home, with friends, at school I would use Indonesian all the time during conversations. So, it's not uncommon... when we are at school we just learn Indonesian to gain deeper understanding".

This statement shows that the national language is a common one to use during interactions and regarding its relation it is actually positive and is able to establish close relationships in the social arena.

Based on observations of the relation in the use of native and foreign languages, it is found that this relation can get students to become closer during interactions because native language can tighten the relationship among students, teachers, and parents thus leading to a more harmonious interaction. A student of Chinese ethnic background stated:

"using native language with a friend of the same ethnicity enables me to speak fluently during our interaction, our conversation usually discusses online gaming such as DOTA or Point Blank. But if there are other friends around that do not understand our language, we would use Indonesian to respect them".

This statement shows that native language is very influential during interactions. It can strengthen emotional bonds among the same ethnic group. They think that native language can strengthen ethnic network in conducting negotiations.

## Conclusion

Status symbol of power in fact has a significant influence as observed from the three status symbol of language namely native, national, and foreign languages towards interaction at the multicultural school. Native language as a status symbol of power seems

to bear influence in social interactions. In other words, native language is used to maintain relations among people of the same race and to enhance knowledge of language used by other ethnic groups. The national language as a status symbol of power at the multicultural school has actually become a *habitus* of the existing community at the multicultural school and is inseparable from social life because the authority of the school directly propagates the use of Indonesian as compulsory in nature. The status symbol of foreign language produces a significant value for its user to acquire education overseas. However, the school currently encourages students to speak using foreign language only to those interested.

Bourdieu's (2011) thought seems to be related to this article. A person's power in choosing the language one uses is determined by interests which enables said person to use that language. The school's power and the individual's power have different portions when positioning themselves during interactions. Although power is coercive in nature, the community must submit to the rules established by the school. The power of the school emphasizes values of nationalism more in determining the language to be used, this is different to individuals who use language according to the situation at hand thus the relation of language use has its own portion during interactions at the multicultural school.

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