

## BETAWI MALAY LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BETAWI MASK PERFORMANCES FROM SEMIOTIC ANTHROPOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

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**Abstract** This article examines the identity of the Malay language and culture depicted in the Betawi Mask performance using a semiotic anthropolinguistic perspective. Betawi Mask is a form of traditional performing art that is rich in cultural symbolism and local values. Through semiotic analysis, this study aims to identify how the Malay-Betawi language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a representation of deep cultural identity. The method used is a qualitative approach with semiotic data analysis techniques, which include direct observation and recording of performances in various locations in Jakarta. The results of the study indicate that the dialogue in the Betawi Mask performance contains various symbolic meanings that reflect the social norms, religious values, and local wisdom of the Betawi people. The use of distinctive vocabulary in the Malay-Betawi language gives color to the character of the figure while strengthening the relationship between the performer and the audience. This performance not only functions as entertainment, but also as an educational medium that can transmit cultural values to the younger generation. This finding emphasizes the importance of language as a tool to preserve cultural identity in the era of globalization. By utilizing performing arts, the Betawi people can maintain their cultural heritage while remaining relevant amidst changing times. Therefore, it is recommended that more preservation and education programs be held about Betawi Masks, as well as the use of digital technology to reach a wider audience. This research is expected to contribute to further studies on the relationship between language and culture in the context of performing arts.

**Keywords:** Identity, Language, Culture, Malay-Betawi, Betawi Mask Performance, Anthropolinguistic Semiotics.

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity is an important aspect of understanding the uniqueness and diversity of Indonesian society. Betawi as an ethnic group living in Jakarta has a distinctive culture, one of which is manifested through the Betawi Mask performing arts. This cultural identity is full of elements of the Malay language and customs that are part of the identity of the Betawi people



(Susanto & Wibowo, 2021). Research on Betawi traditional arts is important to reveal the role of Malay identity in maintaining local culture amidst the flow of globalization.

Betawi Mask reflects the dynamics of Betawi society which is rooted in Malay identity. This identity is present in the language, symbols, and narratives presented in each performance (Rahman & Susanto, 2018). A socio-cultural semiotic approach is important in this study to analyze the social messages in these cultural symbols (Azis et al., 2019). Language is a key component in building and spreading cultural identity, which is seen in the Betawi Mask performance. The Malay-Betawi language as an artistic expression functions as a means of communication and as a medium for conveying Malay cultural values and identity found in Betawi society (Fauzan & Malik, 2021). The strong presence of the Malay-Betawi language in this performance shows a close relationship between Malay culture and Betawi society.

The anthropolinguistic semiotic approach is very relevant in studying the Betawi Mask performance because this approach combines the analysis of signs and symbols with cultural and social contexts. In this case, the anthropolinguistic semiotic approach allows us to understand how the language and symbols in this performance reflect the Malay-Betawi identity (Larasati & Firman, 2023). This analysis reveals the cultural meaning implied in the language symbols used by the Betawi Mask performers.

This research is important in the context of understanding Malay identity in Betawi traditional arts. With a socio-cultural semiotic approach, this research can enrich the literature on the study of Malay cultural identity and provide new insights into the meaning of cultural symbols in performing arts (Yunus et al., 2022). Several studies have examined the Betawi Mask as a performing art that represents Betawi cultural values. For example, research by Azis et al. (2019) shows that the Betawi Mask has strong symbolism that reflects the social values of the Betawi people. However, there are still few studies that examine the Betawi Mask from the perspective of anthropolinguistic semiotics, especially those that highlight the aspect of language as a Malay cultural identity.

In this modern era, maintaining traditional arts such as the Betawi Mask is a challenge in itself, especially with the increasing influence of global culture. As stated by Yunus et al. (2022), globalization often causes a shift in local cultural values. Therefore, arts such as the Betawi Mask play an important role in maintaining and communicating the Malay cultural identity to the younger generation and the wider community.

This research contributes to enriching the study of Malay culture in Indonesia, especially in the context of Betawi society. Through anthropolinguistic semiotic analysis, this study is expected to provide insight into how the Malay language in the Betawi Mask performance reflects the identity and values of the Malay culture embraced by the Betawi people (Ramadani, 2023). In addition, this study also highlights the importance of language as a cultural medium in performing arts. In this modern era, maintaining traditional arts such as the Betawi Mask is a challenge in itself, especially with the increasingly intensive influence of global culture. As stated by Yunus et al. (2022), globalization often causes a shift in local cultural values. Therefore, arts such as the Betawi Mask play an important role in maintaining and communicating the Malay cultural identity to the younger generation and the wider community. This study contributes to enriching the study of Malay culture in Indonesia, especially in the context of the Betawi people. Through anthropolinguistic semiotic analysis, this study is expected to provide insight into how the Malay language in the Betawi Mask



performance reflects the identity and values of the Malay culture embraced by the Betawi people (Ramadani, 2023). In addition, this study also highlights the importance of language as a cultural medium in performing arts.

Betawi masks are a medium for expressing Malay culture in a form that is accessible to the wider community. Through this performance, the Betawi people display their cultural characteristics that are deeply rooted in Malay customs, both in clothing, music, and the narratives conveyed (Yunus et al., 2022).

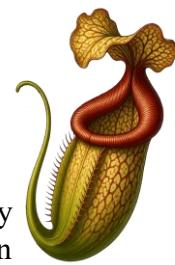
Betawi Masks not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium for social criticism. Through satire and sarcasm, Betawi Masks often display critical views on social problems in society, which reflect the lives of the Betawi people (Handoko, 2022). The symbolism in Betawi Masks can be seen in the movements and costumes used. Each element has a certain meaning that refers to Malay cultural values. For example, the color of the costume often represents certain aspects of Malay-Betawi identity (Azis et al., 2019). The dialogue in the Betawi Mask performance also contains cultural messages. Many expressions in the dialogue contain moral values, social criticism, and cultural identity that are typical of Betawi, using the Malay language structure (Iskandar, 2022).

The Betawi Mask performance is a means for people to interact and reflect on their cultural values. In the interaction between the performer and the audience, rich cultural communication occurs, where cultural messages are conveyed through symbols and language (Susanto & Wibowo, 2021). This performing art is also an important means to involve the younger generation in understanding and preserving Betawi culture which is rooted in Malay values. Through this involvement, the younger generation can get to know and continue the cultural heritage of their ancestors (Dewi, 2021). The challenges of modernization often change the cultural identity of the Betawi Mask. Modernization creates a dilemma between maintaining authenticity or adapting to the demands of the times, which has an impact on the symbols and language used (Ramadani, 2023).

The Betawi Mask as a typical Betawi performing art not only provides entertainment but is also full of cultural values and Malay identity that underlie the lives of the Betawi people (Kartika & Hamdani, 2021). Through the mask, social messages, political criticism, and customary values are packaged and conveyed. This article examines how the Malay language and cultural identity are present in the Betawi Mask performance through a socio-cultural semiotic approach.

This study focuses on two main things; first, how elements of Malay language and culture are represented in the Betawi Mask performance, and second, how these symbols reflect the social interactions of the Betawi people rooted in Malay culture (Iskandar, 2022). Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the symbolism of the Malay language in Betawi Mask and how the language functions as a reflection of Malay cultural identity in Betawi society. The anthropolinguistic semiotic approach is used to understand the cultural meaning contained in the Malay language used in this performance so that it is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of Malay-Betawi identity in traditional performing arts.

This study contributes to a better understanding of Malay-Betawi cultural identity, especially in the context of performing arts. Thus, this study is expected to be a reference for the development of studies on Malay cultural identity in Indonesia. This research is very important to add insight into how Malay identity is present through language and culture in



the Betawi Mask performance. Through an anthropolinguistic semiotic perspective, this study can enrich the literature on the relationship between language and Malay cultural identity in Indonesia (Yunus et al., 2022).

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### Betawi Malay and Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a key aspect in anthropolinguistics, which views language not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of the culture and identity of a society. As stated by Blommaert (2015), language is always attached to the social and cultural context, functioning to affirm group identity. In Betawi society, Malay cultural identity is present through the use of the Malay-Betawi language in Betawi Mask (Susanto & Wibowo, 2021).

The Malay language used in the Betawi Mask performance shows the attachment of Malay culture in Betawi society. This language is a tool of social representation, which shows the values and norms of Malay culture that are passed down from generation to generation (Harahap & Anwar, 2023). Language is the main component that forms the cultural identity of a group. In the Betawi Mask performance, the Malay-Betawi language functions to strengthen and disseminate Malay cultural identity to a wider audience (Iskandar, 2022). In the study of anthropolinguistic semiotics, every word and sentence in a language is considered a symbol that contains the meaning of identity. The Malay-Betawi language used in the Betawi Mask performance carries a distinctive cultural symbolism and shows the Malay identity of the Betawi people (Handoko, 2022).

Cultural identity is a concept that encompasses all values, beliefs, and practices that shape the uniqueness of a community group. According to Hall (2017), cultural identity is not something static, but is dynamic and continues to develop according to its social and historical context. In the Betawi context, cultural identity plays an important role in strengthening the unity and pride of the community (Susanto & Wibowo, 2021). Language is the main component of cultural identity because, through language, society conveys unique values and norms. The Malay-Betawi language often used in the Betawi Mask performance is an important medium to reflect the Malay cultural identity that is rooted in Betawi society (Harahap & Anwar, 2023).

The development of digital technology and rapid urbanization have brought significant changes to the form and function of traditional art, including the Betawi Mask. This art, which previously lived in local community spaces, now faces existential challenges due to shifts in values and cultural preferences in urban society. Amidst the rapid flow of information and global popular culture, the Betawi Mask must adapt to remain relevant and be maintained as a symbol of Betawi identity (Dewi & Sasmita, 2021). This change not only affects the aspect of art presentation, but also the way people access, appreciate, and reproduce local cultural values. Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which digital media and urbanization influence the role of the Betawi Mask as a means of cultural expression. Urbanization in Jakarta and its surroundings has led to the narrowing of cultural spaces that were previously home to traditional performing arts such as the Betawi Mask. Cultural villages that used to be the basis of the arts community have now largely transformed into modern residential or commercial areas (Wijaya, 2022). The shift in social structure from community to individualistic society has also reduced interest in communal performances. This makes the sustainability of the Betawi Mask performance increasingly dependent on formal and institutional preservation efforts. In this context, urbanization has a major



influence in weakening the traditional function of the Betawi Mask as a medium for conveying values, social criticism, and local identity.

On the other hand, the development of digital media provides new opportunities for the existence of the Betawi Mask. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have been used by a number of young artists to document and disseminate this performance to a wider audience (Putri & Ramadhan, 2020). Digitalization allows performing arts that were previously spatially limited to now reach the public globally. This changes cultural consumption patterns and enables cross-generational dialogue about the meaning and relevance of traditional art. Thus, digital media can be a strategic tool to revive the Betawi Mask as a contemporary cultural expression.

The adaptation of the Betawi Mask in digital media also gives rise to new forms in visual presentation, story scripts, and performance styles. The visualization of the mask, dance, and dialogue are modified to be more attractive to digital audiences without eliminating the inherent cultural essence (Mulyani, 2021). Several artists combine cinematographic elements in the production of Betawi Mask performance videos as a strategy to attract the attention of the younger generation. Cultural transmission no longer depends on direct teacher-student relationships, but also through digital tutorials, cultural vlogs, and online classes. This phenomenon marks an epistemological transformation in the preservation of traditional arts.

Digital media and urbanization create a more open, but also more fragmented, social space. Betawi cultural identity, which has been maintained through collective practices, now faces challenges in maintaining its narrative continuity amidst pop culture and commercialization of content (Haryanto, 2023). Several noble values that were previously conveyed in Betawi Mask performances, such as mutual cooperation, local wisdom, and social criticism, are at risk of being reduced to mere stage aesthetics. Therefore, cultural curation is important in producing digital content so as not to eliminate the historical and cultural messages in this art. At this point, Betawi Mask is at the crossroads between existence and essence.

The presence of digital media also opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and wider community participation in the preservation of Betawi Mask. Collaboration between traditional artists and digital content creators, cultural activists, and academics has been able to present new narratives that enrich the treasures of this performance (Nasution, 2022). Online communities such as Betawi cultural forums, local art channels, and alternative media have played an important role in distributing narratives and documentation of the performance. In addition, virtual cultural festivals have also begun to be initiated as a new alternative in celebrating traditional arts in the post-pandemic era. All of this proves that digital transformation is not always a threat, but rather an opportunity to strengthen local culture.

Betawi Masks are on a new historical trajectory amidst the flow of urbanization and digitalization. Although traditional communal spaces are shrinking due to urban pressures, this art finds new ways to survive and express itself through digital media. The resilience of Betawi Mask culture lies not only in the preservation of its original form, but also in the ability to innovate in media and how it is conveyed. However, this innovation must remain based on cultural values so as not to lose its identity. With synergy between local communities, government, and digital platforms, Betawi Masks can remain a relevant tool of cultural expression in the modern era (Suryandari, 2023). In the context of modernization, the



Malay cultural identity contained in language begins to change. The Malay language in the Betawi Mask performance may have been adjusted to remain relevant but still maintains elements that strengthen cultural identity (Darmadi & Lestari, 2019). The dance movements in the Betawi Mask contain certain symbolism that represents Malay traditional values. The movements and manners displayed reflect the character of the Malay people who are polite and humble (Handoko, 2022).

### **Betawi Mask Performance**

Betawi Mask is one of the traditional performing arts typical of the Betawi people that combines elements of dance, music, and theatre. This art is believed to have developed since the 19th century in the Jakarta area and its surroundings, especially in the outskirts such as Cisalak, Condet, and Kampung Sawah. Betawi Mask art initially grew as public entertainment in celebrations and also as a means of conveying moral messages and implicit social criticism (Mulyani, 2020). The term "mask" refers not only to the physical mask properties, but also to the style of storytelling and characterization in the performance. Betawi Mask is an integral part of Betawi cultural identity which continues to experience dynamics in its history (Suryandari, 2022).

During the Dutch colonial period, Betawi Mask art experienced a narrowing of space due to restrictions on artistic expression that had the potential to convey criticism of power. Even so, local artists continued to preserve this art in secret and made it a symbolic medium to convey people's aspirations. In its performances, satire of the socio-political conditions of colonialism is often inserted, although implicitly (Nasution, 2018). The existence of the Betawi Mask at that time not only functioned as entertainment, but also as a form of cultural resistance. This shows how traditional art is able to adapt to political pressure and survive as a collective expression of society.

After Indonesia's independence, the Betawi Mask regained space in society and appeared more openly in various cultural events. The DKI Jakarta regional government began to pay attention to this art as part of preserving local culture. However, the development of this art is still colored by socio-political dynamics, especially in terms of the representation of the Betawi ethnic identity which is sometimes marginalized amidst the flow of urbanization and modernization of Jakarta (Wijaya, 2021). The Betawi Mask became a means to emphasize the existence of the Betawi people in the national narrative. The social and symbolic functions of this performance are increasingly prominent in articulating traditional values, community solidarity, and social criticism.

The 1998 Reformation opened up new space for freedom of expression in various sectors, including arts and culture. Betawi Masks are experiencing a revival with the establishment of cultural studios and increased participation of the younger generation in performances. Contemporary socio-political themes are beginning to be raised in the stories that are performed, reflecting the sensitivity of artists to current issues such as corruption, poverty, and social inequality (Putri & Ramadhan, 2020). Mask performances are no longer limited to celebrations, but appear on academic stages, festivals, and digital media. This transformation shows that Betawi Masks are able to adapt to changing times without losing their original identity.

Betawi Masks are also inseparable from the process of cultural politicization carried out by the state, especially in efforts to form an inclusive Indonesian narrative. The government uses this performance in various state events to highlight cultural plurality.



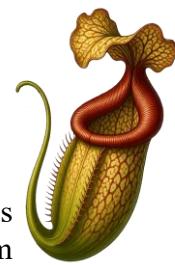
However, in this process, negotiations often occur between the authenticity of tradition and the symbolic needs of the state. Artists are sometimes faced with demands for commercialization or a more “popular” aesthetic, which can obscure the meaning of the original culture (Haryanto, 2023). In this context, Betawi Masks play a dual role as a cultural expression of the community as well as a tool of cultural diplomacy.

Amidst the challenges of globalization, Topeng Betawi faces the threat of reduced meaning and minimal regeneration of artists. Many young generations are more interested in modern forms of entertainment and are less familiar with local cultural roots. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate this art into the education curriculum, community training, and policy support that supports cultural preservation (Dewi & Sasmita, 2021). Several communities and NGOs have begun to develop revitalization programs with a participatory approach. This step is important to make Topeng Betawi not only a cultural heritage that is displayed, but also owned collectively by the current generation. Topeng Betawi is a reflection of the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the Betawi people from time to time. This art has gone through various phases of history, from the colonial era, independence, to the era of reform and globalization. As a means of cultural expression, Topeng Betawi not only functions as entertainment, but also as a space for the articulation of social criticism and collective identity. In a socio-political context, this performance is able to voice community concerns and strengthen social solidarity. Therefore, its preservation is an important part of efforts to maintain the nation's cultural diversity (Suryandari, 2022; Haryanto, 2023). Malay cultural values are present in every sentence and dialogue in the Betawi Mask performance. Values such as respect, politeness, and togetherness are clearly visible in the language used, adding depth to the meaning of the performance as a cultural heritage (Handoko, 2022).

Cultural representation is a process carried out by a cultural group to display its identity to the audience. Through this theory, it can be seen that the Betawi Mask acts as a means of representing Malay cultural identity in the context of Betawi society (Kartika & Hamdani, 2021). The use of Malay in the Betawi Mask reflects the social identity of the Betawi people. Through language, the Betawi Mask becomes a means for the community to reflect their identity as a group bound by Malay culture (Rahman & Susanto, 2018). The language used in the Betawi Mask is heavily influenced by the Malay-Betawi dialect. Language is the main tool in building awareness of Malay culture, especially through the use of expressions, proverbs, and dialects that show a close relationship with Malay culture (Rahman & Susanto, 2018).

The Malay-Betawi language in Betawi Mask is a social sign that communicates Malay identity to its audience. These linguistic signs show the uniqueness of Betawi culture which is rooted in Malay customs (Rahman & Susanto, 2018). Betawi Mask contains important social values in the lives of the Betawi people, such as politeness, respect, and togetherness. The Malay language used in this performance is a reflection of these values, where language acts as a cultural symbol that strengthens group identity (Harahap & Anwar, 2023). Thus, the Malay language in Betawi Mask is a medium that reflects and expresses the social values of the Malay-Betawi people.

Betawi Mask as a form of traditional performing arts reflects the cultural richness of the Betawi people which is rooted in Malay culture. Historically, Betawi Mask is not only entertainment but also functions as a medium for social and cultural expression. This performing art is considered capable of representing the identity of the Betawi people which is rooted in the Malay language, symbols, and culture (Pratama & Wijaya, 2019). The



symbolism of language in traditional performances such as Betawi Mask contains meanings that are not limited to literal meanings. According to Barthes (2013), language symbolism implies values inherited in society. The Malay language in Betawi Mask contains Malay customary values, such as respect and togetherness (Pratama, 2020). In the Betawi Mask performance, language plays a role in creating interaction between the performers and the audience. The dialogues in Malay-Betawi reflect cultural intimacy and close social relationships in society (Yunus et al., 2022).

In Betawi Mask, every element such as costume, music, and dialogue, acts as a sign that has cultural meaning. These signs function as a symbolic representation of the life of the Betawi people that reflects their unique identity (Pratama, 2020). Betawi culture, including Betawi Mask art, cannot be separated from Malay influences, in terms of language, customs, and beliefs. Malay culture has a strong identity in the social and cultural interactions of the Betawi people which functions as a glue for communal identity (Fauzan & Malik, 2021). In the context of the Betawi Mask performance, language plays a very significant role in conveying cultural messages. The Malay-Betawi language used by the performers functions as a liaison between the performers and the audience, strengthens emotional closeness, and facilitates the delivery of cultural messages effectively (Pratama, 2020). This shows that language in traditional performing arts functions as a cultural bridge. Traditional performing arts are often a medium to emphasize the cultural identity of a group. Betawi Mask is one real example of how performing arts function as a tool to voice the Malay cultural identity inherent in the Betawi people (Iskandar, 2022). In this context, traditional art is not just entertainment, but also a manifestation of cultural identity that is passed down from generation to generation.

The Betawi Malay language in Betawi Mask is often used to convey moral and ethical messages that apply to Malay culture. This shows that language is not only a means of communication but also a medium for social education (Larasati & Firman, 2023). Every element in the performance, such as costume colors and dance patterns, has a symbolic meaning that reflects Malay identity. For example, the color red often symbolizes courage and determination in Malay culture, which is also reflected in the costumes used in Betawi Mask (Darmadi & Lestari, 2019). Every dialogue text spoken in the performance contains cultural and social values that live in Betawi society. This study found that these dialogues often contain social satire that reflects social problems in society (Handoko, 2022). The movements and costumes in the Betawi Mask are not just aesthetic but are full of social meaning. Each color and movement has a symbolic meaning that reflects the Malay-Betawi identity (Susanto & Wibowo, 2021). The Betawi Mask performance is not only a means of cultural expression but also a forum for social interaction that strengthens the bonds of the Betawi community. The interaction between the performers and the audience creates rich cultural communication (Pratama, 2020).

### **Anthropolinguistic Semiotics**

Anthropolinguistic semiotics focuses on signs and symbols in language that have certain cultural meanings. This approach, as explained by Kress (2020), is useful for revealing how the symbolism of language in Betawi Mask reflects Malay-Betawi values. Betawi Mask not only functions as entertainment, but also as a medium to represent culture (Dewi, 2021). The study of cultural identity through semiotics focuses on the analysis of signs and symbols that appear in language and cultural behavior. With this approach, we can understand more deeply how the Betawi people convey their cultural identity through Betawi Mask (Harahap & Anwar, 2023). Semiotics is the main foundation of this analysis, which is based on Barthes'



view of how social signs and symbols function in cultural communication (Barthes, 2013). In addition, Hall's (2017) cultural identity theory emphasizes that cultural identity is always dynamic and bound by social and historical contexts. In semiotics, language is a form of sign that functions to communicate cultural values. The Malay language used in the dialogue of the Betawi Mask performance strengthens the Malay cultural ties in Betawi society and shows characteristics that distinguish it from other groups (Fauzan & Malik, 2021).

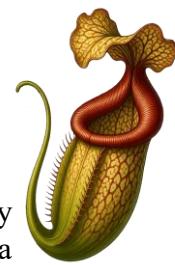
Anthropolinguistics combines anthropological and linguistic approaches to understand how language reflects cultural values. According to Duranti (2020), this approach provides a strong framework for examining how linguistic elements in cultural performances such as the Betawi Mask communicate the strong Malay identity of the Betawi people (Kartika & Hamdani, 2021). In anthropolinguistic semiotics, language is considered a cultural sign that holds the meaning of identity. Through the use of Malay, the Betawi Mask highlights the characteristics of the Malay-Betawi people who are friendly, polite, and full of traditional values (Fauzan & Malik, 2021). Language in anthropolinguistics is seen as a means to express cultural values. In the context of Betawi Mask, the Betawi Malay language reflects the collective values embraced by the Betawi people, such as cooperation and solidarity (Larasati & Firman, 2023). The colors in the Betawi Mask costumes have strong symbolism. Certain colors such as white and red are often used to represent purity and courage in the Malay-Betawi culture, which shows the identity of the Betawi people who still hold fast to their cultural roots (Yunus et al., 2022).

One interesting aspect of the Betawi Mask performance is the direct interaction between the performers and the audience. This interaction contains social symbols that reflect the close relationship in Betawi society and add depth to the representation of Malay culture (Dewi, 2021). Modernization has influenced various aspects of culture, including Betawi Mask. The Malay identity represented in this art has begun to change due to the influence of foreign cultures. However, the Betawi people still try to maintain their cultural roots (Ramadani, 2023). Anthropolinguistics can provide a unique perspective in analyzing performing arts. By using this approach, research can understand how performing arts such as Betawi Mask utilize language to convey Malay cultural identity and values in Betawi society (Ramadani, 2023).

The dialogues in Betawi Mask often contain social and moral values that reflect the life of Malay society. Betawi Mask is an effective medium for conveying social criticism and moral lessons to the audience (Larasati & Firman, 2023). Traditional arts such as Betawi Mask have an important role in preserving the cultural identity of the community. Through this performance, the community can maintain and pass on Malay cultural values to the next generation (Kurniawan & Wijaya, 2020). The language used in Betawi Mask often uses a distinctive Malay-Betawi dialect, which shows the strong Malay roots in this art (Fauzan & Malik, 2021). Through semiotic analysis, this language functions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method on the Betawi Mask performance in Jakarta (Kurniawan & Wijaya, 2020). Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with Betawi mask artists and interpretation of dialogues in several performances that have been broadcast in video form on YouTube.



The research method used in the study "Betawi Malay Language and Cultural Identity in Betawi Mask Performances from a Semiotic Anthropolinguistic Perspective" combines a qualitative approach with semiotic and anthropolinguistic analysis methods. This approach is used to explore the deep meaning of the symbols of the Betawi Malay language and culture that are manifested in the Betawi Mask performing arts. This study adopts an interpretive paradigm that emphasizes a subjective understanding of how language and local cultural elements reflect Betawi Malay identity (Dewi, 2018). This paradigm also allows researchers to explore the relationship between language, culture, and forms of expression presented through symbols in performing arts.

Primary data were obtained through direct observation and in-depth interviews with Betawi Mask artists who have direct experience in performing this art. Observations were made in real situations during the performance so that researchers could record verbal and nonverbal expressions in their original cultural context. Interpretation of meaning was also carried out by analyzing performance videos on YouTube. In addition, interviews were directed at the elements of language, movement, costumes, and musical instruments used in the Betawi Mask performance to reveal the elements of Betawi Malay identity that are intended to be conveyed through these symbols (Suryani & Wahyuni, 2020). The semiotic approach in this study utilizes classical and modern semiotic theories to interpret the symbolic meaning contained in the Betawi Mask performance. The Saussurean semiotic model is used to analyze language elements such as diction and sentence structure that reflect the characteristics of Betawi Malay culture. Meanwhile, the Peircian semiotic approach is used to examine nonverbal signs, such as facial expressions, gestures, and costumes (Setyowati, 2021).

From an anthropolinguistic perspective, this study analyzes the social and cultural context behind the language and symbols that appear in the Betawi Mask. Anthropolinguistics helps researchers understand how Betawi Malay identity is represented in this art performance through relationships between individuals in Betawi society and prevailing cultural norms. This perspective provides sufficient depth of analysis to understand the dynamics of Betawi language and culture in the context of globalization (Slamet, 2019).

Data collection was also carried out through historical documentation and literature on the Betawi Malay language and culture. These literature sources help in understanding the evolution of the Betawi language and cultural elements over time. This historical research also provides an overview of the development of the Betawi Mask as a unique and dynamic form of Betawi Malay cultural expression (Widiastuti, 2019).

Data analysis uses a descriptive-interpretive approach with the aim of describing and interpreting the signs found. Each element of language and culture that appears in the performance is identified and analyzed to find symbolic meanings related to the Betawi Malay identity. The results of the interpretation are then linked to the cultural context to gain a complete understanding of the identity presented (Hidayati, 2018).

Data validation was carried out through triangulation techniques by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. This technique ensures that the results of the analysis are not only sourced from the subjective perspective of the researcher, but are also supported by strong empirical data. This triangulation process also involves a study of previous research results on Betawi Masks and Betawi Malay culture as comparative material (Rahman, 2020). The use of the anthropolinguistic semiotic approach in this study not only



aims to identify elements of language and culture, but also to explore the meaning and social function of the Betawi Mask performance in the lives of the Betawi people. Through this analysis, it is hoped that it will be revealed how the Betawi Mask performance is an effective communication medium for the Betawi people to express their cultural identity (Yusuf & Nurliani, 2019)

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the study of semiotics and anthropolinguistics, especially in the context of Betawi Malay culture. In addition, the findings of this study are expected to be a source of inspiration for efforts to preserve Betawi culture through sustainable traditional art performances. Thus, this study not only focuses on the analysis of language and culture, but also on efforts to preserve the identity of Betawi culture local language (Prasetya, 2021). The research method used in this study focuses on an in-depth anthropolinguistic semiotic analysis to identify and interpret the Betawi Malay cultural identity in the Betawi Mask performance. Through this approach, it is hoped that a better understanding will emerge regarding the relationship between language, culture, and identity in the context of Betawi culture, as well as how the Betawi people maintain their cultural identity amidst the ever-changing currents of globalization (Rini, 2023).

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data related to the symbols of Malay language and cultural identity of the Betawi Mask story were obtained from the mask story which was mainly collected from performances by the Betawi Mak Manih Nirin Kumpul Art and Culture Studio in East Jakarta. The Betawi Studio is close to the Jakarta-Bogor highway. From the Bogor Highway, precisely from East Jakarta towards Bogor, near the Cibubur intersection there is Gang Kumpul. The studio is the residence of the late Nirin Kumpul, a famous Betawi comedian in the 1980s and 1990s.

In March 2023, the researcher visited the Betawi Mak Manih Cultural Studio in Pekayon, Pasar Rebo, East Jakarta, then met at the performance location of the Betawi Mak Manih Art and Culture Studio at Depok Town Square Mall. There, the researcher met and chatted with figures and artists of the Betawi Mak Manih Mask. There, the researcher met Mpok Linda, Bang Ocid, Mpok Linda's brother, Bang Yudi, Mpok Linda's brother, and Mpok Iput, Mpok Linda's sister.



**Figure 1**  
Photo of the researcher with Ocid and Linda Nirin together

In this study, four Betawi Mask actors were interviewed, namely Mpok Linda, Bang Ocid, Mpok Fitri, and Bang Yudi. All four are Betawi Mask performers. All four are children of the late Nirin Kumpul who is a legendary figure of the Betawi mask. All four are administrators and active members of the Betawi Mak Manih Cultural Studio in East Jakarta.



All four are still playing and actively performing Betawi Mask. The four of them are Betawi Mask actors who have really performed Betawi Mask for more than 30 years, from when they were little to when they were adults.

According to Bang Yudi, the identity of the Malay language and culture in the Betawi Mask story is very rich in philosophical meaning contained in the clothes worn. The accessories used by the dancers also have deep meaning and very important functions. For example, dancers in the Betawi Mask play performance wear clothes whose necks are covered by a round cloth covering the lower part of the neck. This round cloth covering covers the back and chest of the dancer. This covering symbolizes that Betawi women are not "easy" women whose genitals are easily seen. The round cloth covering is a marker in Saussure's semiotic theory. Meanwhile, the chest cloth showing that Betawi women are not easy women is as a sign. The chest cloth forming a syntagmatic meaning relation. Meanwhile, the chest cloth indicating that Betawi women are not easy women forms a paradigmatic meaning relation. In other words, Betawi women in principle do not easily expose their intimate parts in public.



**Figure 2**  
Photo of researcher with Bang Yudi Nirin Kumpul

Likewise, the lower part of the female dancer, especially the stomach to the knees, uses layers of cloth. The use of layers of cloth symbolizes that Betawi women are very protective of their intimate parts, especially the stomach to the knees. That part gets layers of protection. Not just anyone, especially the opposite sex, can see or touch that part. This symbol symbolizes and conveys the message that Betawi women are so strict and consistent in protecting their intimate parts, including when performing Betawi Mask art and culture. The layers of cloth covering the stomach to the knees are a marker. Meanwhile, the meaning that not just anyone, especially the opposite sex, can see or touch the sensitive part is a sign. The layers of cloth covering the stomach to the knees form a syntagmatic meaning relationship. Meanwhile, the meaning that not just anyone, especially the opposite sex, can see or touch the sensitive part forms a paradigmatic meaning relationship.

Bang Yudi's opinions above were also agreed by Mpok Linda, Bang Ocid, and Mpok Iput. Mpok Iput even added that the symbols of Malay language and cultural identity on the clothes worn by the dancers in the Betawi Mask performance were greatly influenced by Sundanese culture. It is not surprising of course that there are some similarities with the clothes and accessories of Sundanese dancers. According to Mba Iput, the Topeng story performance begins first, with the strains of tetaluk music which is very similar to Sundanese music. This music is to attract the attention of the audience. Then, after several songs are



performed, the lipet gandes mask dance is performed. Only then, the story of the Topeng play is shown.

In the display on the Youtube video entitled "Betawi Mask Asuhan Mpok Linda/ Ocit Nirin Kumpul" uploaded by the ASAI GOBREK channel, the Betawi Mask performance by Sanggar Mak Manih Nirin Kumpul is shown. As usual, the display begins with tataluk music which is very similar to Sundanese music. The musical performance was followed by the appearance of female dancers, dancing the Topeng Lipet Gandes dance. Well, the Topeng Lipet Gandes dancers immediately entered the story of the Betawi Mask performance. The Betawi Mask dancer in her performance wore a blue head covering/hat surrounded by colorful ornaments and tassels like on Betawi wedding clothes. She wore blue clothes with her chest covered by a kind of long yellow scarf that hung down to cover her stomach to her knees. The diversity of clothing used with colorful patterns of a combination of blue, green, yellow, and purple, according to Bang Yudi and the other three sources, symbolizes that Betawi people are very open to diversity (signifiers). At the same time, it also illustrates that Betawi descendants come from various ethnic groups in Jakarta (signifiers). As is known, Betawi society has influences and origins from a mixture of Malay, Sundanese, Javanese, and other Nusantara residents who have long lived in Jakarta and its surroundings. In fact, Betawi also has elements and influences from Arab, Chinese, and Portuguese. In the performance, the Betawi Mask dancers were also accompanied by male dancers played by Bang Yudi Nirin Kumpul.



Figure 3  
Picture of Betawi Mask dancers

In the performance, Bang Yudi danced and played in the story. As a dancer, Bang Yudi wore a brown beanie hat, a yellow t-shirt, and a sarong. Bang Yudi Nirin's appearance illustrates that the Betawi Mask story or play is a play with a daily theme in Betawi society. This is symbolized by the daily clothes worn by the actors/dancers on the stage. Bang Yudi wore a funny beanie hat which also symbolized that the Betawi Mask dancers/actors were ready to "joke" to entertain the public in the Betawi Mask play performance. Semiotic analysis shows that the Malay-Betawi language used in the Betawi Mask is a strong symbol of Malay identity in Betawi society. This language contains deep meanings related to customs, social values, and attitudes of the Malay community. As stated by Susanto & Wibowo (2021), the Betawi Malay language is used as a means to convey local wisdom values.

The dialogues in the Betawi Mask performance often contain social meanings that are relevant to people's lives. For example, the use of Malay vocabulary and expressions shows the respect and politeness typical of the Malay community. In this case, language plays a role as a reflection of the values of the Betawi community which are still heavily influenced by Malay culture (Harahap & Anwar, 2023). The Betawi Mask performance often contains humor that not only functions as entertainment but also to convey moral messages. Humor in



the Betawi Malay dialogue is often used to convey social criticism that brings the audience closer to the cultural issues being discussed (Larasati & Firman, 2023).

One of the cultural values expressed through language in the Betawi Mask is mutual cooperation and solidarity. The use of words in the Betawi Malay language shows close social ties, which shows a strong sense of togetherness among the Betawi people (Yunus et al., 2022). This shows how language becomes a medium to convey and strengthen the collective identity of the community. Betawi Malay in Betawi Mask also often contains religious elements that reflect the religious Malay identity. For example, the insertion of prayers or phrases containing the name of God shows the strong influence of religion in the lives of the Betawi people (Fauzan & Malik, 2021). This shows that the Betawi Malay cultural identity cannot be separated from religious values. In the modern era, the Betawi Malay language used in Betawi Mask has undergone several changes to keep up with the times. For example, the insertion of modern terms or expressions makes this performance more relevant to the younger generation, without eliminating the strong Malay elements (Iskandar, 2022). This change shows a cultural adaptation that maintains the Malay identity.

The Betawi Malay language in Betawi Mask has its own uniqueness that distinguishes it from other forms of Malay. This uniqueness can be seen from the use of Betawi idioms and expressions that are only understood by local audiences. For example, typical expressions such as "begimane, bang?" show the relaxed and familiar aspects of Betawi culture (Azis et al., 2019). The use of the Betawi Malay language in Betawi Mask not only reflects Malay culture but also shows the social status of the Betawi people. For example, characters with different backgrounds use different languages to show their differences in social status, which shows the complexity of culture in society (Pratama, 2020).

In the Betawi Mask performance, language also shows gender roles in Betawi society. Male and female characters often use different expressions, reflecting the values and roles expected of each gender in the Malay-Betawi culture (Dewi, 2021). This provides an overview of the typical gender roles in Betawi culture. The Malay-Betawi language used in the Betawi Mask functions as a bridge connecting the performers and the audience. Through dialogue and direct interaction, this language creates closeness between the performers and the audience, so that cultural messages can be conveyed more effectively (Ramadani, 2023).

The language style in the Betawi Mask not only functions as a means of communication, but also contains cultural symbolism that depicts the simplicity and hospitality of the Betawi people. The language style used shows that Malay cultural values can be conveyed in a relaxed but meaningful way (Rahman & Susanto, 2018). In addition to verbal language, non-verbal expressions in the Betawi Mask also have deep cultural meaning. Facial expressions, gestures, and intonation are part of the Betawi Malay language that support the delivery of cultural meaning, showing that this cultural language is more than just words (Handoko, 2022).

Betawi Mask audiences tend to understand and accept Betawi Malay as part of an authentic cultural identity. The use of this language shows how Malay identity can be appreciated and valued by the wider community (Larasati & Firman, 2023). In the era of globalization, the Betawi Malay language in the Betawi Mask plays an important role in maintaining Malay cultural identity. This language is a means to preserve and strengthen Malay identity amidst changing times (Iskandar, 2022). The Betawi Malay language in the Betawi Mask helps shape the collective identity of the Betawi people. This language creates



strong social bonds between individuals involved in the performance, both as performers and spectators, which shows how important language is in creating a collective identity (Darmadi & Lestari, 2019).

This analysis shows that the Malay-Betawi language in the Betawi Mask performance functions as a strong symbol of cultural identity. Through language, Malay cultural values can be effectively transmitted to the next generation, so that the Malay identity in Betawi society remains alive and sustainable. Language in this performing art is not only a means of communication, but also a medium that represents the existence and strength of the Malay-Betawi culture (Handoko, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the Malay-Betawi language in the Betawi Mask performance functions as a symbol of rich cultural identity. Through anthropolinguistic semiotic analysis, it can be understood how language is not only a means of communication, but also a representation of social, cultural, and religious values contained in Betawi society. The Betawi Mask performance effectively reflects Malay identity, while maintaining and passing on cultural values to future generations (Fauzan & Malik, 2021).

The Malay-Betawi language not only creates meaning in the context of performances, but also functions as a bridge between generations and as a link between local culture and global influences. By maintaining this language in performances, the Betawi people not only preserve traditional arts but also strengthen their identity amidst changing times (Susanto & Wibowo, 2021). This shows that language has a very important role in maintaining cultural identity in the context of performing arts.

## SUGGESTIONS

In an effort to preserve Malay-Betawi culture, the involvement of the younger generation in the performance of Betawi Mask is very important. Training programs and workshops that focus on the use of Malay-Betawi in performing arts can help introduce cultural values to children and adolescents. Through active participation in performances, the younger generation can better appreciate and understand their cultural heritage (Larasati & Firman, 2023). Collaboration between academics, artists, and the community is needed to develop programs that focus on strengthening cultural identity through language. Further research can be conducted to explore the influence of language in other forms of performing arts, and how this can contribute to cultural preservation in the era of globalization (Yunus et al., 2022). This initiative will help raise awareness of the importance of language as part of cultural identity.

In addition, the use of digital technology can be an effective tool to document and promote Betawi Mask. By utilizing social media platforms and multimedia applications, this performance can be reached by a wider audience, both locally and internationally. This can also increase public interest in traditional performing arts and encourage them to get involved in preserving it (Iskandar, 2022). It is hoped that the Betawi Mask performance can continue to be a medium for expressing the dynamic Malay cultural identity. With joint efforts from the



community, academics, and art practitioners, the Malay-Betawi language can be maintained and revived in a modern context.

These findings provide implications for cultural preservation, especially the importance of involving the younger generation in preserving Betawi Mask, so that Malay cultural values remain sustainable (Dewi, 2021). Further research is recommended to explore the relationship between Betawi Mask and other Malay performing arts, as well as the influence of modernization on the Malay-Betawi cultural identity in this art (Ramadani, 2023).

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