



Adaptability of Sundanese People in Learning Arabic as The Third Language: A Phenomenology Study of Arabic for Military Purposes in Indonesia

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Abstract. The diversity of the mother tongues of soldiers from various ethnicities throughout Indonesia is the difference in the backgrounds of the soldiers who are members of the Indonesian Officer. This adds complexity to language acquisition. Apart from the mother tongue or regional language as a first language and Indonesian as a second language, military soldiers are now faced with Arabic as a third language, which also serves as a medium for carrying out international duties. This research aims to explain the learning of Arabic as a third language in a multilingual and multiethnic frame in Indonesian military educational institutions and to explain the Arabic language proficiency performance of military students, in facing the language differences between Sundanese as their first language. This research used a qualitative method approach through a phenomenological study. Data was obtained through observation, interviews, documentation literature study, and purposive sampling techniques at the Indonesian Army Military Education and Training Center, Cimahi, Indonesia. The findings reveal that military soldiers can adapt to various languages: mother tongue, regional language/Sundanese language, language in the area/place of assignment (accidental language acquisition), and Arabic in the learning context. Learning in the military education system involves mastery of Arabic language knowledge and skills (language skills), as well as attitudes that are appropriate in the military education system with a centralized stay in the barracks during the education.

Keywords: Early Arabic as Third Language, Arabic for Specific Purposes (ASP), Language Adaptability.

1 Introduction

Indonesia has diverse ethnicities and cultures. According to the 2010 BPS census, Indonesia has more than 1,340 ethnicities and tribes spread from Sabang to Merauke (Suku Bangsa, 2017). Hadriana et al. (2024) argue that the diversity of ethnicities also makes the Indonesian nation a nation with its charm and uniqueness. Among the diversity of tribes in Indonesia, there are several majorities with the largest populations,

namely the Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, and Madurese (Finaka, 2024). In addition to ethnic diversity, Indonesia also has a diversity of languages that differ in each region. The diversity of languages owned by the Indonesian nation has also given birth to other diversity, namely the diversity of mother tongues used by every Indonesian community from Sabang to Merauke (Collins, 2014). The mother tongue referred to here is the first language acquired by a child according to their surroundings, which can be Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Madurese, Acehnese, Indonesian, and others. Conceptually, the mother tongue is the first scientific language acquired by a child (Ibda, 2017). This means that someone born in the Javanese ethnic group will most likely acquire Javanese as their first language or mother tongue. Likewise, a child born and raised in the Sundanese ethnic group will most likely acquire Sundanese as their mother tongue. According to data released by the Language Development and Fostering Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2024) through the Regional Language Revitalization (RBD) program, Sundanese is included in the category of languages with the most speakers. However, the Indonesian nation's language diversity also presents challenges (Putro et al., 2022).

Especially now, with the complexity of the flow of globalization and the entry of foreign languages, Indonesian and the diversity of other regional languages are entering a phase of concern over cultural shifts. Therefore, the government makes Trigatra Bangun Bahasa essential (Muhammadiyah et al., 2024). The concept of Trigatra Bangun Bahasa (TBB) consists of three things: Prioritizing the Indonesian language, Preserving Regional Languages, and Mastering Foreign Languages. The formulation of the Trigatra Bangun Bahasa was not long developed after the issuance of Law (UU) of the Republic of Indonesia Number 24 of 2009 concerning the Flag, Language, National Emblem, and National Anthem (Membaca Trigatra Bangun Bahasa, 2023). These three aspects are a unity that signifies the openness of the Indonesian government to the presence of languages in Indonesia, namely the national language (Indonesian), regional languages, and foreign languages (Muhammadiyah et al., 2024). The implementation of the Trigatra Bangun Bahasa must be jointly upheld by all Indonesian people, especially those who should learn a foreign language in their work or education. In this context, the military units are obligated to learn Arabic for their international assignments (Nurmala, 2021). Concerning the Trigatra Bangun Bahasa concept, it has become a must for military personnel not only to master Indonesian and preserve their regional languages but also to master foreign languages, especially for those on international missions. One of the foreign languages the soldiers need to study is Arabic, and they study Arabic to apply to military duties in the Middle East; learning Arabic for the military is also mandatory in military barracks (Nurmala & Supriadi, 2022). The phenomenon of language diversity experienced by military personnel with different ethnic backgrounds is attractive, especially those with Sundanese ethnic backgrounds. They must use Indonesian as the official language and learn Arabic as a third language for international duties. At the same time, their mother tongue is Sundanese, and their second language is Indonesian. Of course, this situation requires soldiers to have good linguistic adaptation and language contact skills (Tamrin & Nursyamsi, 2021).

According to Thomason (2001), language contact is when multiple languages are used in the same place and time. For example, a bilingual who masters Sundanese as a

first language and Indonesian as a second language will use Sundanese if the person he is talking to has the same Sundanese language ability. However, if the person he is talking to is from another part of Indonesia, he will use Indonesian to communicate (Firmansyah, 2021). One of the several factors that can cause language contact is through education (Fauziah, 2015). Furthermore, according to Wardhaugh (1992), apart from education, bilingualism and multilingualism can be caused by several other things, including the movement of a population, the presence of visitors from a community, marriage between two people who have different mother tongues, trade, and relations with the international world.

The language adaptation process encountered by these military personnel is not always as seamless as one might expect. Throughout this journey, there are instances where the soldiers struggle to separate or distinguish elements from the two languages they command. Consequently, this leads to a transfer of linguistic elements, resulting in the unintentional blending of rules from two or more languages they have learned. This phenomenon is referred to as language interference (Firmansyah, 2021). A similar situation has been observed among the Minangkabau ethnic group, particularly those who have migrated extensively across Indonesia, especially to the island of Java. Ariyani (2013) notes that the multilingual and multiethnic context faced by the Minangkabau often presents communication challenges with the local residents of Java. This underscores the fact that the language acquisition process for the Minang people in Java demands a significant period of adaptation.

It should be noted that members of the Indonesian military come from all regions spread across 37 provinces in Indonesia, from Sabang to Merauke (AD, 2023). This makes the military region full of diversity, including linguistic diversity. The military soldiers from Sabang-Merauke are present in their assigned areas, bringing their respective mother tongues from the regions where they come from. This diversity also requires soldiers to use Indonesian as a second language to communicate with other soldiers (Maghfiroh, 2022). This is what makes Indonesian military soldiers master at least two languages, namely the regional language as their mother tongue and Indonesian as the national language that they use to communicate with each other.

The acquisition of Indonesian as a liaison language for soldiers in communication cannot be overlooked. Currently, military personnel are also required to attend foreign language lessons that they will use during international assignments. One such language is Arabic, which is taught over 12 weeks with a total of 600 instructional hours (Nurmala & Supriadi, 2022). The aim of learning Arabic is to enhance the skills and knowledge of military personnel so that they are better prepared to undertake international assignments in the future (Hermawan, 2015).

This study will also discuss how an individual military soldier acquires Sundanese as a first language, then uses Indonesian to communicate with his colleagues, then learns Arabic as a third language in their military education process. The choice of the Sundanese ethnic group in this study is due to the fact that the Sundanese have a rather complex culture (Dienaputra, 2003), which undoubtedly supports the research that emphasizes the multilingual and multiethnic context. It should also be noted that the placement of the soldiers' assignment locations does not depend on their area of origin. This also triggers the acquisition of a new language for soldiers at their assignment locations

different from their area of origin. This phenomenon will be discussed further in this study. The purpose of this study is to describe the learning of Arabic as a third language in a multilingual and multiethnic framework in Indonesian military educational institutions and to describe the performance of Arabic language proficiency of military students, especially military students from the Sundanese ethnic group in dealing with language differences between Sundanese as their first language with regional languages and Indonesian in national assignment areas and then faced with Arabic as an international assignment language in the multilingual and multiethnic context.

This research is crucial given that Indonesia is a nation characterized by complex ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Such diversity presents unique challenges, particularly in the military context, where soldiers come from various regional ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. In a multilingual and multiethnic environment like this, soldiers are expected to adapt linguistically, mastering not only their local languages as their mother tongue but also Indonesian as the national language, as well as foreign languages like Arabic, which are essential for international assignments. Furthermore, this study is relevant for understanding the dynamics of linguistic adaptation faced by military personnel, especially those from the Sundanese ethnic group. As speakers of Sundanese, these soldiers must use Indonesian for official communication and learn Arabic as a third language within the framework of military education. The phenomenon of language contact experienced by these soldiers has the potential to cause language interference, necessitating strong and adequate linguistic adaptation skills.

2 Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to understand Sundanese military soldiers' experiences and language adaptation processes in learning Arabic as a third language. The phenomenological method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and describe the experiences of soldiers while learning Arabic as a third language. According to Husserl in Hasbiansyah (2008), phenomenology itself is a philosophical study that describes all areas of experience experienced by humans.

To collect relevant data, this study conducted observations and interviews involving respondents consisting of Sundanese military soldiers who were studying Arabic at the Pusdik Pengmilum Kodiklat TNI AD, Cimahi. The selection of the Sundanese ethnic group as the focus of this study was based on the desire to explore the language adaptation experiences of military soldiers who have a rich cultural and regional language background (Dienaputra, 2003) (see Table 1), and to see how they adapt in the context of learning Arabic as a third language. In determining the acquisition of Arabic by soldiers, this study also conducted tests to see the results of Arabic as a third language acquisition. In addition, interviews with military teachers were also conducted to obtain more in-depth information regarding the language learning and adaptation process.

In the data analysis process, this study conducted an analysis process that began with the transcription of interviews and observations, which were then organized into themes that emerged from the data. The researcher identified relevant patterns in the soldiers'

experiences and related them to the theoretical framework underlying the study. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how Sundanese soldiers interact with Arabic as a third language and the challenges they face during the learning process.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

<i>Classification</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<i>Region of Origin</i>	
Bandung	2
Others	1
<i>Ethnic Origin</i>	
Sundanese	3
<i>Assignment Location</i>	
Java	1
Kalimantan	1
Others	1

3 Findings and Discussion

In learning Arabic as a third language, the soldiers first encounter several languages in their military life and education process. After acquiring their mother tongue, Sundanese, they acquire Indonesian as their second or national language as a liaison between other soldiers from several regions in Indonesia after being placed in a different assignment location from their place of origin. They also get to know a new language, namely the language at the assignment location, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Language acquisition of participants

Sol-dier	Origin Tribe	First Lan-guage	Sec-ond Lan-guage	Assignment Region	Assignment Re-gion Language	Third Language (Arabic)
1	Sun-danese	Sun-danese	Indo-ne-sian	Papua and Solo	Papuan and Java-nese	Languages Ac-quired in Cimahi, West Java
2	Sun-danese	Sun-danese	Indo-ne-sian	Ambonese	Ambonese lan-guage	
3	Sun-danese	Sun-danese	Indo-ne-sian	Brau	Dayak language	

Based on the data above, to complete the previous explanation, Table 3 shows the interview data conducted with the military soldiers.

Table 3. Interview data

Question	Answer		
	Soldier 1	Soldier 2	Soldier 3
Are there any significant differences between the regional language of origin (mother tongue) and the regional language of the military assignment location (both in pronunciation and accent)?	Yes, there are differences.	Sundanese tends to have a lower intonation compared to Ambonese.	Yes, there are significant differences.
Is there a combination of elements or elements of language use from the regional language of origin (mother tongue) with the regional language of the assignment location?	Yes, I use body language when I cannot say something to my colleagues with different mother tongues, and I forget the equivalent in Indonesian.	Yes, there are. I have combined Sundanese with Ambonese several times in communicating and vice versa.	Yes, there are. I am required to speak Indonesian when on duty, and I am faced with an area where people speak Dayak.
Is there a combination of elements or elements of the use of the regional language of origin with the regional language of the assignment location and the use of Indonesian?	I use Indonesian as the official language at the assignment location to communicate with colleagues, seniors, and my leaders. However, using Javanese at my assignment location makes me prefer listening to Javanese songs, and I can enjoy them.	Yes, there is. The same goes for Sundanese and Ambonese. Several times, I have combined Sundanese with Indonesian or Ambonese. However, I do this only when I communicate with colleagues. It is different if I communicate with leaders or seniors; I will use Indonesian as my official language.	Yes, there is.
Does using the regional language of origin and the regional language at the assignment location influence speaking Arabic?	No.	Yes, there is an influence.	There is none.
What kind of influence (advantages and disadvantages) arises from using regional languages	There is no influence whatsoever; I can adjust myself to learning Arabic.	In speaking Arabic, I often use a Sundanese accent in my pronunciation. However, there is no bad influence or obstacle that affects me in	There is none

when learning Arabic?		the process of learning Arabic.	
What is your perception of Arabic after studying Arabic?	Arabic has become quite an essential language for me, and I place Arabic in a higher position than English.	I have been interested in learning Arabic for a long time, so now I am proud of my knowledge of Arabic.	I fell in love with Arabic because of the language used in the Qur'an; my experience learning Arabic rules also made me fall in love with Arabic even more.

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that (1) Military soldiers demonstrate their ability to adapt linguistically in various languages: mother tongue, the national language, namely Indonesian, language in the area/place of assignment, and Arabic in the context of learning; (2) Learning in the military education system involves mastery of Arabic language knowledge and skills (*Maharah Lughawiyyah*), as well as attitudes and behaviors that are appropriate in the military education system with a centered residence in the barracks during education and (3) Significant language skills (*Maharah Lughawiyyah*) of soldiers.

3.1 Linguistic Adaptability of Military Personnel

In learning Arabic in the military environment as a third language, the soldiers successfully demonstrated good adaptation attitudes towards the language learning they were undergoing. These attitudes are also supported by the theory presented by Fantini (2007). These attitudes include multilingualism: Soldiers can demonstrate their ability to master various languages, starting from Sundanese as their mother tongue, Indonesian as the national language that they use as a tool to communicate with other military personnel, the local language of assignment at the assignment location, and finally Arabic, which they acquired from the Arabic learning process in their military barracks. This attitude was demonstrated by soldiers 1-3, who acquired Sundanese as their mother tongue. They were placed in Papua, Ambon, Solo, and Brau, which areas use languages that are different from their mother tongue. This situation ultimately forced the soldiers to know at least a little of the variety of languages in the placement location. Not only are their mother tongue and the local language of the placement location, but they also use Indonesian as their national language to communicate with other soldiers. Furthermore, they also acquired Arabic as their third language, which they obtained through learning in the military barracks.

The next attitude is the soldiers' ability to communicate in the field: Linguistic adaptability is also reflected in how soldiers can communicate effectively in assignment areas that differ from their home areas. They can communicate with residents in the assignment area using the local language they learned accidentally; then, they can coordinate with other soldiers from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds using Indonesian as the connecting language. In addition, they still use Sundanese as their mother

tongue to communicate with soldiers with the same background as their mother tongue. Added to that are the soldiers' Arabic language skills demonstrated in the classroom when Arabic language learning occurs. Of course, this attitude is also demonstrated by the three soldiers, who can use the languages they have learned in various conditions well.

Fantini (2007) also explains that good language adaptability can be influenced by several factors, including good cognitive ability, motivation, open and flexible personality, broad cultural knowledge, and individual experience of culture and language. This is also reinforced by Hidayati (in Tamrin & Nursyamsi, 2021) that Indonesian people who master many languages tend to use a variety of languages in their communication. However, this does not prevent soldiers from being able to adapt linguistically well. This is supported by the statement made by the military teacher in the interview, which states that the soldiers can master Arabic quite well (Military Teacher, 2024, in the interview that was conducted).

However, the process of linguistic adaptation of the soldiers cannot be separated from the clash of the languages they have mastered, be it their mother tongue or their second language with the language they are learning, as stated by Soldier 2, where he used Sundanese which unconsciously appeared Ambonese vocabulary that he had known at the location of his assignment. This phenomenon is called language interference, as stated by Firmansyah (2021) in his research.

3.2 Arabic Language Learning in The Military System

In the process of learning Arabic in a military environment, military teachers involve mastering Arabic language knowledge and skills (*Maharah Lughawiyyah*), including the ability to read (*qiraah*), listen (*istimaa'*), write (*kitaabah*), and speak (*kalam*). This learning is divided into 4 Main Competency Courses (MKKU), totaling two credits. Learning Arabic as a third language takes place at the Pusdik Pengmilum Kodiklat TNI AD, Cimahi, and is carried out for 660 hours of lessons in 16 weeks, which is mandatory for soldiers in the military barracks.

This curriculum is designed to require students, namely military soldiers, to be able to master Arabic language skills well. In the context of the military system, Arabic language learning is still carried out with the Semester Credit Unit (SKS) system, which is guided by the curriculum that the Commander of the Indonesian Army Education and Training Command has set. The courses in this learning have also explicitly been determined so that soldiers can master four Arabic language skills, namely reading (*qiraah*), listening (*istimaa'*), writing (*kitaabah*), and speaking (*kalam*). In addition, this curriculum is also equipped with an understanding of Arabic grammar, namely nahwu and sharaf. The curriculum also aims to help soldiers and military instructors achieve their learning goals, including the ability to speak Arabic for military assignment purposes. Thus, soldiers are expected not only to communicate well in Arabic but also to have a deep understanding of Arabic's structure and grammar, which is essential to carrying out their international duties in the Middle East.

3.3 Significant Arabic Language Skills (Maharah Lughawiyah) of Soldiers

The ongoing Arabic language learning involving the ability and understanding of Maharah Lughawiyah has produced military soldiers who can speak Arabic well. This is shown by the success of the soldiers in achieving the minimum learning value (see Table 4).

Table 4. Recapitulation of final achievement assessment results for students in the academic year 2024

No	Name	Attitude Behavior (Weight 5%) Value	Knowledge And Skills (Weight 85%) Value	Physical Skills (Weight 10%) Value	Final Cumulative Achievement Index (Final GPA) Quantitative	Predicate
1	FIH	0.14	3.35	0.34	3.82	Cumlaude
2	IG	0.17	3.35	0.30	3.82	Cumlaude
3	R	0.14	3.31	0.37	3.81	Cumlaude
4	MRF	0.14	3.35	0.30	3.78	Cumlaude
5	AK	0.14	3.31	0.30	3.74	Cumlaude
6	F.A	0.14	3.36	0.24	3.74	Cumlaude
7	RRH	0.14	3.20	0.37	3.70	Cumlaude
8	M.F	0.14	3.09	0.40	3.63	Cumlaude
9	ADI	0.14	3.12	0.30	3.56	Cumlaude
10	FAS	0.14	2.95	0.30	3.39	Very Satisfactory
11	CCC	0.14	3.05	0.20	3.38	Very Satisfactory
12	HM	0.14	2.91	0.30	3.35	Very Satisfactory
13	M.S	0.15	2.77	0.34	3.26	Very Satisfactory
14	SHS	0.14	2.88	0.24	3.25	Very Satisfactory

The assessment results of these soldiers also showed successful adaptation from the soldiers in acquiring their third language, namely Arabic. Nurmala (2019) stated that these three assessment subjects are regulated by the Three Basic Patterns of Military Education, as shown in Table 5.

The first assessment is attitude and behavior. This activity includes activities inside and outside the classroom, including coaching and nurturing. This assessment is supported by written and unwritten rules in the Pusdik Peminglum supervised by the Education Unit (Satdik), tasked with accepting and closing education and providing information related to the rules during education. In addition, in this assessment, military teachers also have a unique role in assessing each student during learning. The next step is the assessment of Arabic language knowledge and skills. This assessment is assigned to military teachers or Arabic language lecturers who provide supplies and knowledge

of the Arabic language. In their learning, each student is required to demonstrate their ability in Arabic. The existence of this learning interaction also makes the teacher-student relationship very close. Teachers have a huge role in realizing learning objectives and evaluating students' abilities in this context.

Table 5. Three Basic Patterns of Military Education

No	Three Basic Patterns of Military Education	Percentage of Activity Assessment	Activity
1	Attitude and Behavior	5%	Student activities in class and the dormitory
2	Knowledge and Skills	85%	Learning activities in class and outside class, including learning outcomes of Arabic language theory and practice
3	Physical	10%	Student sports activities and physical fitness tests.

Furthermore, the third assessment subject is physical training. Military physical instructors are essential in organizing routine sports schedules and evaluating students. This is based on the Pusdik Peminglum curriculum, which believes that students' good physical condition can help them achieve their learning goals (Nurmala, 2019). Arabic language learning in the military environment has also succeeded in forming military soldiers who have good Arabic language skills, as evidenced by the achievement of satisfactory minimum scores. The results of the final achievement assessment show that soldiers are able to adapt well in mastering Arabic as a third language, which is reflected in a good final cumulative achievement index (IPK). The assessment in Arabic language learning follows the Three Basic Patterns of Military Education, which consists of assessment of attitudes and behavior, knowledge and skills, and physical.

4 Conclusion

This study shows that Indonesian military soldiers, especially those with a Sundanese background, can adapt linguistically well. This adaptation process also involves contact between Sundanese as a mother tongue, a second language (Indonesian), the regional language of assignment, and Arabic, which is obtained as a third language in the learning process. The soldiers managed to master Arabic well thanks to intensive learning carried out at the Pusdik Pengmilum Kodiklat TNI AD, Cimahi, which involved all Arabic language skills and understanding (*Maharah Lughawiyah*). Although their adaptation process faced significant language contact dynamics, this did not become an obstacle for military soldiers to acquire good Arabic language skills. Each element of the assessment carried out in this study also has an important role in the learning process, where military teachers contribute to providing Arabic language knowledge and supervising student behavior. In addition, good physical condition is also considered a

supporting factor in achieving learning objectives. Overall, the results of this study indicate that with the right approach to learning Arabic, soldiers can acquire the language skills needed to support their tasks in a military context.

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