Undak Usuk Basa as a Reflection of Social Hierarchy in Sundanese Communication

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Abstract:

Background: *Undak Usuk Basa*, the system of speech levels in Sundanese society, functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a representation of social hierarchy and politeness. This study contributes by highlighting the socio-pragmatic functions of *Undak Usuk Basa* in the modern context, an aspect often overlooked in previous research that has predominantly focused on its decline.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to analyze how *Undak Usuk Basa* encodes social hierarchy and how modern social changes influence its patterns of use.

Method: The method employed is a literature study, analyzing 25 selected articles out of an initial 45 obtained from databases such as ScienceDirect, Garuda, Google Scholar, Sinta, and DOAJ, covering publications from the past decade. The selection process was based on criteria of topical relevance, credibility, and both theoretical and empirical foundations.

Results: The findings reveal that *Undak Usuk Basa* regulates language choice based on age, social status, and interpersonal relations, making it an essential instrument for maintaining social harmony. However, globalization, urbanization, and the penetration of digital media have fostered more egalitarian and practical communication patterns, particularly among younger generations, leading to a decline in the use of speech levels.

Theoretical implication: The study affirms that linguistic hierarchy functions as cultural capital, reflecting and sustaining social structures.

Practical implication: The findings suggest the need for preservation through education, digital media, and cultural programs.

1. Introduction

Language is an inseparable part of human life, functioning not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for transmitting values, norms, and cultural identity. Koentjaraningrat (2009) emphasizes that language is one of the seven elements of universal culture that serve as guidelines for social life. In every community, language is not merely a collection of words and grammatical structures but also a symbol that carries specific social meanings. Thus, language represents the value system prevailing within a society, including hierarchy, power relations, and the mechanisms for maintaining social harmony.

In the context of Sundanese society, the system of *Undak Usuk Basa* is one of the most prominent manifestations of the relationship between language and social structure. This system regulates speech levels according to the age, social status, and position of the interlocutor. There are three main categories: *basa kasar/loma* (low), *basa panengah* (middle), and *basa lemes* (refined). For example, a child uses *basa lemes* when speaking to parents, while parents may respond with *basa panengah* or even *basa loma* when addressing the child. This interactional pattern not only reinforces power relations and respect but also reflects how social order is maintained through everyday linguistic practices (Juliani et al., 2023).

The study of *Undak Usuk Basa* can be examined through the lens of sociolinguistic theory, particularly in relation to politeness and linguistic hierarchy. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains that language use is always connected to strategies for maintaining the "face" of both speakers and interlocutors. Politeness functions as a means of reducing threats to the interlocutor's face, thereby ensuring harmonious interaction. In this context, the social hierarchy embedded in *Undak Usuk Basa* demonstrates that Sundanese is not merely a communicative tool but also a medium of social regulation. This perspective is reinforced by Spencer-Oatey (2008), who emphasizes that linguistic politeness is inseparable from prevailing social norms and power relations. In Sundanese society, appropriate lexical choice serves as a means of showing respect and safeguarding the interlocutor's face, as articulated by Brown and Levinson (1987). Thus, *Undak Usuk Basa* is not only a linguistic rule but also a mechanism for upholding politeness, respect, and social harmony. Furthermore, this concept can be connected to Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic hierarchy, which views speech levels as a form of cultural capital. Accordingly, individuals who are able to employ *Undak Usuk Basa* appropriately gain social legitimacy and recognition as cultured members of society.

In addition, a sociolinguistic perspective on language maintenance and shift is relevant in understanding this phenomenon. Fishman (1991) underscores that the vitality of local languages depends on intergenerational transmission and the role of social domains in which the language is used. However, modernization, urbanization, and globalization have driven shifts in these linguistic practices. Such changes have encouraged younger generations to use Indonesian more frequently as the national lingua franca, and English in global contexts, while Sundanese—particularly in its traditional form, such as *Undak Usuk Basa*—has experienced a reduction in usage domains (Kurniawati et al., 2021). This is supported by Riyanto (2018), who found that younger generations increasingly avoid using *Undak Usuk Basa* because it is considered complex and incompatible with the practical demands of modern communication. Similarly, Juliani et al. (2023) observe that in urban

settings, the communication patterns of young Sundanese speakers tend to be egalitarian, even when interacting with older individuals. This phenomenon highlights the tension between traditional hierarchy-based norms and the demands of modern communication, which is more efficient and egalitarian.

Although several studies have noted the decline in Sundanese usage among younger generations (Riyanto, 2018; Juliani et al., 2023), most of this research has remained limited to issues of vitality or frequency of use. Relatively few studies have examined in depth the socio-pragmatic functions of *Undak Usuk Basa* in modern contexts, particularly regarding how the system adapts to or hybridizes with Indonesian and global languages in urban domains and digital media. In other words, there is a research gap in understanding how *Undak Usuk Basa* is not only under threat of decline but also transforming meaning and function within the communicative culture of younger generations.

Based on this background, the present study addresses the following questions: (1) How does *Undak Usuk Basa* encode social hierarchy and politeness in Sundanese society? and (2) How do dynamics of modern social change, such as globalization, urbanization, and digitalization, affect its usage and relevance among both younger and older generations? By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute theoretically to sociolinguistic research, particularly in understanding the interconnection between language, politeness, and social hierarchy. In addition, it offers practical implications for the preservation of Sundanese culture through educational strategies, language policy, and the use of digital media.

2. Method

This study employs a literature review method, considered the most appropriate approach since the research focuses on conceptual and theoretical exploration rather than direct field observation. By systematically analyzing previous studies, this method enables the identification of patterns, the synthesis of findings, and the critical evaluation of how *Undak Usuk Basa* has been discussed in relation to social hierarchy, politeness theory, and modern social change. A literature review is also well suited for tracing the cultural and communicative meanings embedded in language use across various contexts, offering both breadth and depth of analysis that a single field study may not provide.

The data were obtained from secondary sources, specifically scholarly journals published within the last ten years, accessed through academic databases such as Garuda, Google Scholar, Sinta, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ. The initial search identified approximately 45 articles. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria—namely (a) relevance to the research topic, (b) credibility and accreditation status of the journal, (c) inclusion of both theoretical and empirical discussion, and (d) publication within the last decade—the final analysis included 25 selected studies. Articles that were opinion-based without empirical grounding, repetitive in content, or outside the scope of Sundanese sociolinguistics were excluded.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, carried out in several stages: (1) reading and reducing the collected documents to extract relevant information; (2) coding key statements and arguments; (3) categorizing the data into thematic clusters such as social hierarchy in the Sundanese language, the communicative meanings of speech levels, and the influence of modernization and globalization on *Undak Usuk Basa*; and (4) synthesizing these findings into an

integrated interpretation. This categorization enabled the tracing of recurring concepts across sources and highlighted the cultural significance of *Undak Usuk Basa*.

To ensure methodological rigor, cross-source triangulation was applied, whereby interpretations were validated against multiple scholarly references addressing similar issues. This step enhanced both the validity and reliability of the findings, ensuring that the conclusions drawn were not dependent on a single study but instead reflected a broader scholarly consensus.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Representation of social hierarchy through the *Undak Usuk Basa*

Undak Usuk Basa consists of several speech levels, namely *basa loma* (low or informal), *basa panengah* (middle), and *basa lemes* (refined or polite). Each level is used according to the social context and the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. For instance, *basa loma* is employed in informal situations or when addressing younger individuals, while *basa lemes* is reserved for formal settings or when speaking to older individuals or those with higher social status (Riyanto, 2018). The use of these speech levels not only indicates politeness but also reflects social hierarchy. For example, a child will use *basa lemes* when speaking to parents, while parents may respond using *basa panengah* or even *basa loma*. This illustrates how social position and age are acknowledged within the Sundanese social structure (Juliani et al., 2023).

Theoretical frameworks on linguistic politeness have been extensively developed in global sociolinguistic scholarship. One of the most influential is Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic theory, which introduces the concept of "face" as the self-image that must be preserved in interaction. They distinguish between positive face (the need to be appreciated and accepted) and negative face (the need to be free from imposition) and propose politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), such as requests, refusals, or criticisms (Fathi, 2024). These strategies include bald on record (direct utterances), positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record (indirect) strategies. According to their model, the choice of strategy is influenced by three social variables: power (P), distance (D), and rank of imposition (R). This model is highly relevant to *Undak Usuk Basa*, as the choice of speech levels (*loma, panengah, lemes*) can be understood as instruments for managing P, D, and R in conversation. For instance, a child uses *basa lemes* with parents to reduce threats to their face, while *basa loma* is more common among peers with a high degree of familiarity.

Politeness theory was further developed by Spencer-Oatey (2008) through the framework of rapport management. This framework views interpersonal relations as managed not only through the concept of face but also through sociality rights and obligations (such as equity rights and association rights), as well as interactional goals. Spencer-Oatey emphasizes that politeness management can be observed across multiple domains, including the stylistic domain related to speech-level choices. In the context of *Undak Usuk Basa*, the use of *basa lemes* represents respect for the sociality rights of individuals with higher status, such as parents, teachers, or community leaders. Meanwhile, the use of *basa loma* among peers reinforces solidarity and association rights. Thus, *Undak Usuk Basa* functions not only to safeguard face but also to uphold social rights and achieve interactional goals within Sundanese society.

Speech-level distinctions in Sundanese are also evident in lexical variation, where different forms convey varying degrees of politeness within the same lexical category. For example, the word *teu* ("no") shifts to *henteu* in polite speech. This lexical change reflects recognition of social hierarchy, in which older or higher-status interlocutors are addressed with more refined expressions (Wahyuni, 2021). Sundanese grammar also reflects hierarchy. For instance, the second-person pronoun *anjeun* ("you") in polite speech signals respect, whereas *maneh* ("you") in informal speech is used in casual contexts or with younger interlocutors. Lexical variation extends beyond human interaction; for example, the word *nyatu* ("eat") is typically reserved for animals, and when applied to humans, it is considered rude and impolite. Such examples demonstrate how Sundanese accommodates social hierarchy in everyday communication (Riyanto, 2018).

The practice of *Undak Usuk Basa* differs significantly across domains. Within families, this system is preserved because parents act as primary agents in instilling values of politeness through language from an early age. Haerudin (2019) shows that 79.7% of parents actively teach and habituate their children to use the *lemes* form as a sign of respect, positioning the family as a crucial space for reproducing moral and cultural values. Similarly, at the community level, particularly in traditional settings, *Undak Usuk Basa* remains a component of collective identity that reflects social order and cultural solidarity, and its use continues to be regarded as a norm.

In the family context, *Undak Usuk Basa* reinforces hierarchical relations between parents and children, as well as between older and younger family members. Children are expected to use polite language when addressing parents, while parents may use middle or low forms. This reflects the values of respect and obedience within Sundanese families (Juliani et al., 2023). In community contexts, *Undak Usuk Basa* often reinforces hierarchy between leaders and followers, teachers and students, or community figures and ordinary citizens. For example, students are expected to use polite speech with teachers, while teachers may use middle-level forms. This illustrates how *Undak Usuk Basa* serves as a tool for maintaining social order and respecting authority (Wahyuni, 2021).

Hierarchical linguistic systems are also found in other cultures, such as Javanese with its *Krama, Madya,* and *Ngoko* levels; Japanese with *Keigo*, which includes *Sonkeigo* (honorific speech), *Kenjougo* (humble speech), and *Teineigo* (formal polite speech); and Korean, which recognizes six to seven speech levels in its honorific system, such as *Hasipsio-che* (formal polite), *Haeyo-che* (informal polite), and *Banmal* (casual) (Brown & Whitman, 2015). Compared to Javanese, Japanese, or Korean, the Sundanese system of *Undak Usuk Basa* is relatively simpler yet remains effective in marking social status, age, and relational closeness. The commonality lies in the presence of politeness levels based on social hierarchy and age, while the difference lies in its relative flexibility and simplicity compared to the more complex Javanese system.

Although structurally different, the social function of these systems is similar: to maintain politeness, respect, and social harmony. In *Undak Usuk Basa*, the use of *lemes* emphasizes the values of *silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh* (mutual love, mutual learning, mutual care), which form the foundation of Sundanese ethics (Pangestu & Sudjianto, 2016). This parallels Javanese, where *Krama* is used to show respect toward parents and authority, while *Ngoko* signifies intimacy among peers (Atmawati, 2021). Japanese *Keigo* underscores the importance of hierarchy in

professional and social contexts, where lexical choice determines politeness (Takiura, 2021). Korean is even stricter, as violations of honorific usage may be seen as serious breaches of etiquette (Sohn, 2017). Thus, *Undak Usuk Basa* stands alongside other hierarchical systems as a form of local wisdom for maintaining social harmony.

Today, hierarchical languages face similar pressures worldwide. In both Javanese and Sundanese, younger generations prioritize Indonesian in daily interaction, making *Ngoko* and *loma* more dominant than refined forms (*lemes*) (Andriyanti, 2019). In Japan, Maruki (2022) finds that *Keigo* remains strong in professional contexts but weakens in casual conversation, especially among youth. Similarly, in Korea, Brown and Whitman (2015) reveal that social media has encouraged increased use of *Banmal* even across age groups, challenging traditional norms. This pattern parallels *Undak Usuk Basa*, where families and traditional communities still preserve the *lemes* form, but egalitarian speech dominates among youth and in digital communication (Juliani et al., 2023).

The decline of *Undak Usuk Basa* is closely tied to social changes influencing communication patterns in Sundanese society. One major factor is modern social change, driven by social media and increasing interethnic interaction. Social media, with its egalitarian and informal character, tends to disregard speech-level distinctions. Consequently, language considered rude or impolite has become more common, especially in online conversations (Widianto, 2022). This phenomenon is prevalent in urban and casual settings, particularly among youth, who face both practical and cultural pressures to use shorter, more universal, and easily understood forms, such as Indonesian, mixed colloquial speech, or even foreign languages. Silitonga and Astuti (2018) also found that only 24% of Sundanese youth in Batam remain fluent in Sundanese, largely due to the lack of prioritization in education and career domains. Modernization and globalization reinforce this trend, as interethnic interaction and digital exposure promote universal languages. Thus, social media acts as an accelerator of this shift, as online communication patterns often neglect linguistic politeness norms, which are at the core of *Undak Usuk Basa*.

Accordingly, *Undak Usuk Basa* persists in domains that uphold hierarchy, morality, and cultural identity, such as families and traditional communities. Conversely, in youth and casual settings, it tends to erode under the influence of modernization, social media, and demands for more egalitarian communication (Syaepul Uyun, 2022). This threatens the sustainability of politeness and respect values embodied in *Undak Usuk Basa* (Wahyuni, 2021). Urbanization and cross-cultural interaction further affect its use, particularly in heterogeneous urban contexts, where Sundanese is less practical in everyday communication. As a result, younger generations increasingly prefer Indonesian or foreign languages, leading to a decline in the understanding and use of *Undak Usuk Basa* in daily life (Juliani et al., 2023).

From this comparative study, two important points can be identified. First, speech-level systems function as cultural instruments for maintaining politeness, respecting social hierarchy, and fostering solidarity. Second, these systems may also reinforce inequality, particularly when differences in social status are translated into asymmetrical linguistic obligations. For instance, in *Undak Usuk Basa*, a child must always address parents using *lemes*, while parents may freely use *loma* toward their children. Similar asymmetries are observed in Japanese and Korean, where subordinate groups bear heavier linguistic obligations than dominant groups

(Wehmeyer, 2014; Brown, 2015). This raises the question of whether hierarchical language systems primarily serve to maintain politeness or to perpetuate power relations.

Although *Undak Usuk Basa* has declined in daily use, it remains preserved in certain Sundanese communities that uphold tradition, particularly in formal and ceremonial contexts. Research by Sudaryat and Nurhadi (2020) shows that in traditional ceremonies, weddings, or official gatherings, *Undak Usuk Basa* continues to serve as the standard form of communication. This indicates that the system still plays a significant role in certain social contexts, even though in urban daily interactions, its use has become increasingly rare.

3.2. Dynamics of modern social change and its relation to the existence of the use of *Undak Usuk Basa*

Contemporary social transformations, propelled by globalization, urbanization, and the advancement of digital technologies, exert a profound influence on the use of *Undak Usuk Basa* in Sundanese society. As a linguistic stratification system embodying social hierarchy and cultural norms of politeness, *Undak Usuk Basa* is increasingly challenged by shifting values and the rise of more egalitarian modes of interaction. Rather than signaling a complete erosion, however, these dynamics simultaneously create opportunities for adaptation and the reconfiguration of its relevance in modern contexts.

Table 1. Social factors influencing the shift in *Undak Usuk Basa*

Social factor	Main impact on *Undak Usuk Basa*	Observed trend	Example of adaptation
Globalization	Reinforces dominance of Indonesian and English; reduces prestige of hierarchical Sundanese	Younger generations favor practical/egalitarian communication	Use of "mangga" and "hatur nuhun" inserted in Indonesian or English
Urbanization	Multilingual settings reduce relevance of stratified forms	Preference for Indonesian in public spaces; Sundanese confined to family	Casual use of *loma* speech even toward elders
Digital media	Promotes brevity, informality, and code-mixing	Stratified levels replaced by neutral/Indonesian-English hybrids	Expressions like "punten guys" or "hatur nuhun bestie"
Intergenerational perspectives	Older generations preserve hierarchy; younger generations adopt egalitarian style	Growing perception gap between elders and youth	Hybrid integration of Sundanese politeness markers

Source: Processed research data, 2015

Globalization has become one of the key drivers accelerating the shift in linguistic values among Sundanese communities. Beyond facilitating the flow of

information and technology, globalization also reshapes how people interact, think, and evaluate linguistic identity. It reinforces the dominance of national and international languages, especially Indonesian as a lingua franca and English as a global language. This trend encourages younger generations to rely more on Indonesian or English, particularly in schools, workplaces, and digital media. Riyanto (2018) notes that younger Sundanese speakers tend to perceive their regional language as less modern, inefficient, and even irrelevant in the context of global demands. Juliani et al. (2023) similarly found that youth in urban areas overwhelmingly prefer Indonesian or English in daily interactions, with the stratified *Undak Usuk Basa* system often regarded as unnecessarily complex.

Globalization also introduces values that emphasize egalitarianism. In academic and professional domains, neutral and universal forms of language are often deemed more practical than adhering to hierarchical conventions. Ramadhani (2024) highlights that values such as efficiency and equality discourage younger speakers from sustaining stratified systems like *Undak Usuk Basa*. Moreover, Wahyuni (2021) found that urban youth frequently construct their identity through Indonesian or English as more "modern" and "universal," while Sundanese is often viewed as restrictive. Nevertheless, globalization does not entirely eradicate *Undak Usuk Basa*; certain expressions such as *mangga* ("please") or *hatur nuhun* ("thank you") remain integrated into Indonesian or English conversations, functioning as markers of politeness. This process illustrates a form of rehybridization, in which local linguistic elements persist despite the global orientation of communication.

The migration of people from rural areas to urban centers has fostered heterogeneous social environments in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture, which necessitate more universal lingua francas. Large cities such as Bandung or Jakarta exemplify this condition, where Sundanese coexists with Javanese, Betawi, Minangkabau, and other groups. Indonesian becomes the preferred medium of interaction, limiting Sundanese primarily to family domains (Juliani et al., 2023). Urbanization also reshapes values: rural communities preserve *Undak Usuk Basa* through cultural homogeneity and communal solidarity, while urban settings foster egalitarianism and individualism. Wahyuni (2021) notes that Sundanese youth in Bandung often use *loma* speech even with older interlocutors—a practice considered impolite by traditional norms. The fast pace of urban life also demands linguistic efficiency, rendering *Undak Usuk Basa* increasingly impractical for many younger speakers (Riyanto, 2018).

Digital media has further accelerated linguistic change by promoting concise, hybrid, and egalitarian forms of communication. Online interactions typically favor short sentences, abbreviations, or visual markers such as emojis (Crystal, 2011). Among Sundanese youth, Indonesian and English dominate digital spaces, while Sundanese appears mainly in humorous or identity-driven contexts, often stripped of stratification (Juliani et al., 2023). Social media also blurs intergenerational hierarchy: students may casually message teachers or comment on elders' posts without employing polite forms. Hybridized expressions such as "punten guys" or "hatur nuhun bestie" (Robiah & Hernawan, 2021) reflect adaptation rather than abandonment, shifting the function of Sundanese from hierarchical to creative identity expression. Politeness, once encoded through *lemes* vocabulary, is increasingly conveyed through emojis or symbols, marking a reconfiguration of cultural norms in digital interaction.

Intergenerational differences further illustrate these dynamics. For older speakers, *Undak Usuk Basa* remains a symbol of Sundanese identity, respect, and moral values (Sumarlina & Permana, 2024). In contrast, younger generations often perceive it as outdated or obstructive to fast, egalitarian communication. Wahyuni (2021) observes that many youth prefer casual forms even when addressing elders, reflecting the influence of both digital spaces and practical communicative needs. Yet this decline does not equate to total disappearance. Many young speakers creatively hybridize by inserting Sundanese politeness markers into Indonesian or English sentences, signaling identity while adapting to modern discourse. Similar multilingual strategies are observed in other Sundanese-speaking communities, such as the Baduy, who strategically maintain their mother tongue for internal solidarity while using Indonesian in external interactions (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Accordingly, the contemporary trajectory of *Undak Usuk Basa* cannot be understood solely as a narrative of decline. Instead, it reflects a broader process of transformation: older generations sustain it as a hierarchical system, while younger speakers adapt it into hybrid and symbolic forms within modern, globalized communication. This dynamic demonstrates that Sundanese cultural identity remains resilient, albeit expressed through evolving linguistic strategies.

3.3. Preservation efforts and cultural relevance

The preservation of *Undak Usuk Basa* must be understood within a sociolinguistic framework of language maintenance and shift. Fishman's (1991) Reversing Language Shift model emphasizes that revitalization can only succeed if local languages are reinforced within core domains such as family, community, and formal education. In this sense, preserving *Undak Usuk Basa* is not merely a matter of documentation but of creating functional spaces where the system remains alive and relevant in everyday communication.

Several initiatives in West Java have sought to promote its preservation. In education, local government policies have made Sundanese a compulsory subject from elementary through secondary school (Adela & Al-Akmam, 2024). This program aims to instill values of politeness from an early age, although its effectiveness is limited by a shortage of qualified teachers. Technology-based innovations have also been developed, such as the *Kamus Sunda* mobile application and interactive learning platforms, which provide engaging access to Sundanese vocabulary, expressions, and speech levels (Ramanda, 2023). These efforts highlight the importance of digital adaptation in maintaining *Undak Usuk Basa*'s relevance among younger generations.

In the cultural domain, public events such as Sundanese language festivals and speech competitions are held regularly by community groups and universities. Nur Lisdawati et al. (2025) show that such festivals serve not only as entertainment but also as venues for transmitting cultural values, fostering ethnolinguistic pride, and revitalizing the use of *Undak Usuk Basa* in formal contexts. These community-led initiatives reflect a bottom-up approach to revitalization, where preservation is sustained not only through government policy but also through active community participation.

Preservation strategies can be categorized as short-term and long-term. Short-term strategies include social media campaigns, creative competitions, and the production of entertaining content, such as songs, memes, and short dramas, in

Sundanese, aimed at increasing visibility and awareness among youth. Long-term strategies focus on integrating *Undak Usuk Basa* into the formal education system, enhancing teacher competence, and institutionalizing cultural events as part of regional agendas. These measures ensure that *Undak Usuk Basa* is transmitted structurally across generations, rather than preserved merely as a symbolic artifact.

Nonetheless, implementation faces several challenges. Limited funding and competing policy priorities in education often place regional languages at a disadvantage compared to Indonesian and English (Ambarita, 2019). The shortage of educators with deep knowledge of *Undak Usuk Basa* also undermines effective classroom instruction. Moreover, younger generations, shaped by global cultural flows, often perceive *Undak Usuk Basa* as outdated or impractical. Preservation strategies must therefore align with contemporary sociocultural contexts, ensuring relevance to youth rather than romanticizing the past.

Ultimately, safeguarding *Undak Usuk Basa* requires synergy among government, educational institutions, communities, and families. Efforts must be adaptive, combining traditional approaches with modern media, and oriented toward sustainable intergenerational transmission. If pursued consistently, *Undak Usuk Basa* can endure as a meaningful marker of Sundanese cultural identity within the context of globalization.

4. Conclusion

This study reaffirms that *Undak Usuk Basa* functions not merely as a linguistic system but also as a form of cultural capital representing social hierarchy, politeness, and the normative values of Sundanese society. Within the framework of global politeness theory, it illustrates how language operates as a social instrument to enforce norms, maintain harmony, and simultaneously reproduce social inequalities. The findings reveal that globalization, urbanization, and the expansion of digital media have contributed to a shift in the use of *Undak Usuk Basa*, particularly among younger generations and adolescents, while its relevance remains preserved within family domains, customary communities, and ceremonial contexts. Theoretically, this research contributes to sociolinguistic studies by examining the nexus between language, culture, and social change. Its limitation lies in the reliance on secondary data, which calls for further research employing ethnographic approaches, language attitude surveys, or cross-generational studies to provide deeper insights. Practically, the results may serve as a reference for cultural preservation policies through school curricula, community programs, and digital innovations that emphasize values of politeness and respect, thereby ensuring the endurance of *Undak Usuk Basa* amid modernization.

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