

THE INTERCHANGE OF LANGUAGE AND PHILOSOPHY IN SUNDANESE SPEECH LEVEL SYSTEMS

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Abstract: Sundanese speech level system i.e., *kasar* (coarse), *loma* (moderate), and *lemes* (polite) represents a culturally significant yet underexplored area in linguistic and philosophical research. Despite its role in reflecting Sundanese values such as *unggah-ungguh* (harmonious relationships), existing studies have largely focused on descriptive aspects and overlooked its deeper cultural and philosophical implications. This study aimed to investigate how Sundanese speech levels capture social hierarchies, interpersonal relationships, and cultural philosophies. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study involved literature reviews, textual analyses, and comparative evaluations of universal linguistic theories against Sundanese-specific findings. The results indicate that *kasar* is used in informal settings to reflect equality or emotional expressiveness; *loma* maintains a neutral politeness appropriate for everyday interactions; and *lemes* conveys deference and respect in hierarchical or formal contexts. These levels align with Sundanese cultural philosophies emphasizing respect, harmony, and social order. Universal linguistic theories of speech act provided a foundational lens but required adaptation to account for cultural specificity. Sundanese speech level system is not merely a linguistic structure but a philosophical expression of cultural values. It demonstrates how language reflects and reinforces social and ethical norms, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and philosophy.

Keywords: Sundanese speech levels; *unggah-ungguh*; social hierarchy; cultural philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a profound reflection of human thought, social structures, and cultural philosophies. As a system of symbols and meanings, language shapes and is shaped by the worldviews of its speakers, encoding their values, relationships, and interactions (Araeva et al., 2022). This dynamic relationship between language and culture is particularly apparent in languages that include codified systems such as the Sundanese language of West Java, Indonesia. Its hierarchical speech levels i.e. *kasar* (coarse), *loma* (moderate), and *lemes* (polite) offer a unique perspective on how language reflects social order.

The importance of studying Sundanese lies in its ability to reveal the deep linking of language with cultural values and social organization. Spoken by approximately 40

million people (Guntara et al., 2021), Sundanese is one of Indonesia's most widely used regional languages. However, despite its prevalence, the language's complex speech level system and its cultural implications remain largely underexplored. Central to this system is *unggah-ungguh*, a principle of respect that governs the appropriate use of language (Adisti & Rozikan, 2021). This system explains how language functions not just as a means of communication but as a mechanism for maintaining social hierarchies and fostering harmonious relationships (Lestari et al., 2022). Understanding the Sundanese approach to linguistic practices thus opens a window into how language serves as a cultural artifact, shaping and reinforcing societal structures.

Sundanese speech levels are more than just linguistic features; they are a manifestation of the cultural philosophy embedded in the

concept of *unggah-ungguh* (Suherman, 2022). The speech levels reflect the importance of respect for hierarchy and social harmony. The use of *lemes* when addressing elders or figures of authority reveals a commitment to social cohesion, while *kasar* may be used in intimate or informal settings to express familiarity. Thus, language becomes a vital tool in navigating social complexities, balancing individual agency with the collective need for harmony. It aligns closely with the principle of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (linguistic relativity), which posits that language shapes habitual thought and worldview (Nishikawa et al., 2023). In Sundanese context, the stratification of speech levels reflects and reinforces a worldview emphasizing social order and harmony. For example, the use of *lemes* in addressing elders or those of higher status demonstrates how linguistic practices uphold respect and humility as cultural ideals. Conversely, *kasar* may appear in informal or conflictual interactions, reflecting the situational appropriateness of less formal or even confrontational speech. The neutral tone of *loma* balances these extremes in facilitating everyday communication while maintaining a baseline of social cohesion (Kulsum, 2020). These practices suggest that the Sundanese language not only reflects but also reinforces culturally significant values through habitual use.

Philosophical theories further illuminate the significance of Sundanese speech levels. The system resonates with Confucian ethics which emphasize hierarchical relationships and the maintenance of harmony through appropriate conduct (Rošker, 2023). In this framework, Sundanese *lemes* can be likened to the Confucian principle of propriety as both govern behavior in ways that uphold social order and mutual respect. Phenomenological perspectives highlight the role of lived experience in shaping language use. The choice of speech levels arises not solely from abstract linguistic rules but from a deeply embedded cultural understanding of relational contexts which thus reflects a worldview in which human interactions are fundamentally situational and dependent on social roles (Roetz, 2023).

From structuralist perspective, the Sundanese speech level system exemplifies the relational nature of linguistic meaning (Al-Smadi et al., 2023). Each level derives its significance in contrast to the others, creating a dynamic system that mirrors the complexities of social interaction. This relationality aligns with broader cultural philosophies that prioritize context-sensitive communication and the negotiation of social roles. Moreover, theories of ethnolinguistic identity suggest that the Sundanese language serves as a marker of cultural belonging, with speech levels reinforcing collective ideologies of respect, humility, and balance (Machdalena et al., 2023).

Despite its cultural significance, the Sundanese speech level system has not been adequately explored in linguistic and philosophical research. Most studies have focused on its descriptive aspects such as phonology (Alhammad, 2023; Geoffrey, 2015), morphology (Anggraini, 2019; Nurhayati & Mahdi, 2018; Nurlatifah et al., 2018), and syntax (Alfathani & Nurdini, 2022; Wahya, 2023; Wahya et al., 2023) while overlooking its cultural and philosophical dimensions. Research language levels often emphasizes their functional roles in communication, without addressing the cultural values and worldviews that underpin them (Kurniawati et al., 2021). Additionally, principal linguistic theories tend to prioritize universal structures or cognitive processes and leave cultural specificity largely unexplored. This gap in research calls for a deeper investigation into how Sundanese linguistic practices reflect and shape cultural philosophies, particularly those related to social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships.

Furhermore, there is limited exploration of how Sundanese challenges dominant linguistic theories. Universalist approaches, which emphasize structural or cognitive aspects of language, often overlook how deeply language is embedded in cultural and social practices. Although politeness theories by Brown & Levinson, (1987) and Leech (1983) have been widely applied to various languages, they are insufficient for capturing the complexities of Sundanese speech levels. For example, Brown

and Levinson's theory of face-threatening acts, which addresses strategies for mitigating social threats, is ill-suited to understanding Sundanese, where hierarchical speech levels transcend these concerns. In Sundanese, the use of language is less about avoiding threats to social face and more about upholding the cultural values of respect, harmony, and propriety.

While previous research has explored politeness and speech acts in Indonesian and Javanese, Sundanese remains underrepresented. This oversight is significant as Sundanese speech levels are among the most systematically hierarchical in the region. Particularly in the context of directive speech acts (commands, requests, and suggestions) there is a need to better understand how speakers navigate their linguistic options and how these choices reflect cultural values of hierarchy and respect. These questions remain largely unanswered in current literature.

The cultural philosophy underpinning Sundanese speech acts further complicates the analysis. The principle of *unggah-ungguh* is not just a set of social rules; it is a deeply ingrained value that guides behavior, emphasizing the maintenance of balance and harmony in relationships. This philosophy resonates with Wittgenstein's (1953) view that language is a form of life, shaping the way people navigate and interpret the world. In Sundanese, speech levels are not arbitrary; they are cultural artifacts that reflect and sustain the community's core values.

This study seeks to bridge the gap between universal linguistic theories and the specific cultural dynamics of non-Western languages by examining directive speech acts within the framework of Sundanese speech levels. Directive speech acts are particularly revealing because they involve direct interaction, where power dynamics, politeness, and social expectations come into play. These acts are not merely about achieving practical outcomes, but they are about negotiating social relationships and maintaining cultural norms. For instance, a command issued in *kasar* might be appropriate among peers but could be seen as disrespectful if directed at a superior. Conversely, a suggestion made in *lemes*

embodies humility and consideration, aligning with the Sundanese ideal of social harmony.

Sundanese speech levels, with their intricate rules and cultural grounding, offer a counterpoint to universal theories of language, highlighting the importance of considering language as a culturally situated phenomenon. This research aims to explore the philosophical foundations of Sundanese that offer an alternative perspective to universalist theories and emphasizing the significance of cultural specificity in linguistic analysis.

The objectives of this research are threefold: first, to uncover the philosophical principles embedded in the Sundanese speech level system, particularly regarding respect, harmony, and social order; second, to demonstrate how these principles challenge universalist language theories by providing a cultural lens; and third, to contribute to the philosophy of language by showing how linguistic practices reflect broader cultural values and societal structures. Through this exploration, the research emphasizes the importance of integrating linguistic, cultural, and philosophical perspectives in the study of language.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach focusing on the analysis of existing literature and textual sources to explore the intricate relationship between language, cultural values, and societal hierarchies in the Sundanese speech level system. Data collection involved two primary methods: a comprehensive literature review and textual analysis. The literature review examined prior studies on Sundanese language, cultural norms, and the speech levels of *kasar* (coarse), *loma* (moderate), and *lemes* (polite) to provide a foundation for understanding their sociocultural context. Textual analysis focused on Sundanese texts, identifying directive speech acts—such as requests, commands, and suggestions—and their associated speech levels to elucidate patterns of usage in varying social contexts.

The data analysis process employed multiple strategies to ensure depth and rigor. Sociolinguistic analysis was conducted to examine the usage of speech levels within

diverse social interactions as represented in the literature with directive speech acts categorized by speech level and contextual factors. Thematic coding was utilized to identify recurring themes related to politeness, social hierarchy, and cultural norms, enabling a deeper understanding of the interplay between linguistic choices and the cultural concept of *unggah-ungguh* (harmonious relationships). A comparative analysis evaluated the applicability of universalist linguistic theories, such as White (1963) and Searle's (1969) speech act theories, against the Sundanese-specific findings, highlighting potential areas of convergence or divergence. To ensure the reliability and ethical integrity of the research, validation techniques included triangulation and peer review. Data from the literature review and textual analysis were cross-validated by comparing findings across multiple sources, enhancing the credibility of the conclusions. Peer reviews by experts in Sundanese linguistics and sociolinguistics provided critical feedback, ensuring cultural and theoretical accuracy. Ethical considerations were central to the research process, with proper attribution for referenced works and a culturally respectful approach to analyzing the Sundanese language and its practices. These steps collectively ensure that

the study's findings are robust, contextually grounded, and ethically sound.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sundanese language provides a unique perspective on the interaction between language, cultural values, societal structures, and individual agency. This discussion investigates the intricate relationship between Sundanese speech levels and directive speech acts, exploring how linguistic choices mirror social hierarchies, cultural norms, and underlying philosophical values. Through the analysis of this relationship, a deeper understanding of the role of language as a cultural artifact emerges, supported by the synthesis and evaluation of arguments from previous studies and existing theories.

a. Sundanese Speech Levels in Navigating Social Hierarchies

Sundanese speech levels regulate linguistic choices and serve as markers of social relationships. In Sundanese society, the use of these levels reflects the speaker's awareness of the social context, their relationship with the interlocutor, and their adherence to cultural norms of respect and harmony.

Table 1. The Representation of Pronouns in Each Level

Speech Level	Singular			Plural		
	I (I)	II (You)	III (him/her)	I (we)	II (you)	III (They)
Kasar	<i>aing</i>	<i>sia</i>	<i>siana</i>	<i>aing saréréa</i>	<i>Saria</i>	<i>Sarariana</i>
	<i>kami,</i>	<i>silain,</i>	<i>silainna,</i>	<i>kami saréréa</i>	<i>sarilaing,</i>	<i>sarilaingna,</i>
	<i>déwék</i>	<i>ilaing</i>	<i>ilaingna</i>	<i>urang saréréa</i>	<i>arilaing</i>	<i>arilaingna</i>
	<i>urang</i>	<i>manéh</i>	<i>manéhna</i>	<i>arurang</i>	<i>maranéh</i>	<i>maranéhna</i>
Loma	<i>kuring</i>	<i>anjeun</i>	<i>anjeunna</i>	<i>kuring</i>	<i>aranjeun</i>	<i>aranjeunna</i>
				<i>saparakanca</i>		
Lemes	<i>kaula</i>	<i>andika</i>	<i>andikana</i>	<i>kaula saréréa</i>	<i>arandika</i>	<i>arandikana</i>
	<i>(ji)sim</i>	<i>sadérék</i>	<i>sadérékna</i>	<i>urang sadaya</i>	<i>sadérék</i>	<i>sadérékna</i>
	<i>kuring</i>				<i>sadaya</i>	<i>sadaya</i>
	<i>jasad</i>	<i>ajengan</i>	<i>ajenganana</i>	<i>jasad kaula</i>	<i>arajengan</i>	<i>arajenganana</i>
	<i>kaula</i>			<i>sadaya</i>		
	<i>abdi</i>	<i>salira</i>	<i>salirana</i>	<i>abdi sadaya</i>	<i>salira</i>	<i>salirana</i>
					<i>sadaya</i>	<i>sadaya</i>
	<i>jisim</i>	<i>gampanan</i>	<i>gampananana</i>	<i>jisim abdi</i>	<i>gampanan</i>	<i>gampananana</i>
	<i>abdi</i>			<i>sadaya</i>	<i>sadaya</i>	<i>sadaya</i>
	<i>abdi</i>	<i>dampal</i>	<i>mantenna</i>	<i>abdi gusti</i>	<i>dampal</i>	<i>marantenna</i>
	<i>gusti</i>	<i>gusti</i>		<i>sadaya</i>	<i>gusti</i>	
					<i>sadaya</i>	

Table 1 shows Sundanese pronouns across three speech levels e.g., kasar (coarse), loma

(moderate), and lemes (polite) which correspond to varying degrees of formality,

respect, and social hierarchy. Each level reflects specific cultural and social contexts that govern appropriate usage. Kasar pronouns are informal and are typically used in casual interactions among equals, such as close friends or peers, where social hierarchies are minimal or disregarded. For example, singular pronouns like *aing* (I) and *sia* (you) convey familiarity but can appear rude or offensive if used in formal or hierarchical settings. Similarly, plural forms like *aing saréréa* (we) and *sarina* (they) retain the same informal tone, suitable only in relaxed, non-deferential conversations.

The loma level represents a neutral register that is polite yet informal, making it appropriate for interactions with acquaintances, colleagues, or individuals of slightly higher status. Singular pronouns such as *kuring* (I) and *anjeun* (you) maintain a respectful tone without the formality of *lemes*. Plural pronouns, including *kuring saparakanca* (we) and *aranjeun* (you), are

used in interactions where the speaker aims to maintain balance and politeness. This speech level is versatile, bridging casual and formal contexts, and it exemplifies the Sundanese cultural value of moderation in social exchanges.

In contrast, *lemes* is the most refined and respectful, reserved for addressing elders, superiors, or individuals of higher social standing. Pronouns like *abdi* (I), *salira* (you), and *mantenna* (him/her) convey humility and deference. Plural forms such as *abdi gusti sadaya* (we) and *dampal gusti sadaya* (you) emphasize the speaker's respect and acknowledgment of the listener's elevated status. These pronouns are integral to maintaining *unggah-ungguh* (harmonious relationships) in Sundanese culture. The *lemes* level reflects not only politeness but also the broader cultural philosophy of prioritizing respect and preserving social harmony in communication.

Table 2. The Representation of Verbs in Each Level

Kasar	Loma	Lemes	Meaning
<i>nginum</i>	<i>nginum</i>	<i>Nyaneut, ngaleueut</i>	Drink
<i>méwék; béwéh</i>	<i>ceurik</i>	<i>Ceurik, nangis</i>	Cry
<i>ngagub</i>	<i>nyokot</i>	<i>Ngabantun, nyandak</i>	Bring
<i>dahar</i>	<i>dahar</i>	<i>Neda, tuang</i>	Eat
<i>medut; mejus</i>	<i>hitut</i>	<i>Hitut; kabobosan</i>	Fart
<i>héés</i>	<i>saré</i>	<i>Mondok; kulem</i>	Sleep
<i>sibanyo</i>	<i>sibanyo</i>	<i>Sibanyo; wawasuh</i>	Handwash
<i>teleg</i>	<i>teureuy</i>	<i>Teureuy; telen</i>	Swallow
<i>deuleu</i>	<i>ténjo</i>	<i>Tingal; tingali</i>	Look

Table 2 presents Sundanese verbs across the three speech levels illustrating how verb forms change based on social context, speaker-listener relationships, and levels of politeness. Kasar verbs are informal and often direct or unrefined in tone, suitable for interactions among close friends, peers, or subordinates where formality is unnecessary. Examples like *méwék* (cry) and *dahar* (eat) are straightforward and unembellished, reflecting casual or emotionally expressive communication. In hierarchical or formal settings, however, these forms would be deemed inappropriate and possibly offensive,

as they lack the cultural nuance of respect.

In contrast, loma verbs occupy a neutral register, making them appropriate for everyday interactions with acquaintances, colleagues, or those slightly higher in status. Verbs such as *nyokot* (bring) and *saré* (sleep) balance politeness with clarity, offering a versatile linguistic choice for most social contexts. Lemes verbs, on the other hand, are highly refined and reserved for formal situations or when addressing elders and superiors. Examples like *nyaneut* (drink) and *neda* (eat) embody humility and respect, reflecting the speaker's deference. This level

aligns with Sundanese cultural values, such as *unggah-ungguh* (harmonious relationships), emphasizing politeness and maintaining social harmony. The graded use

of these verbs illustrates the intricate interplay between language, social norms, and cultural philosophies in Sundanese communication.

Table 3. Examples of directives across Sundanese speech levels

Speech Level	Type of Directive	Example	Context of situation (Who speaks to whom)
Kasar	Command	"Geura dahar!" (Eat immediately!)	Close friends or equals, often in casual or heated situations.
	Request	"Cik pangnyokotkeun dahareun!" (Please take some meals)	Friends, subordinates, or informal settings with no hierarchy.
	Suggestion	"Mun hayang mah, dahar wae!" (Just eat if you want!)	Peers or equals, usually in relaxed contexts.
Loma	Command	"Geura sare!" (Sleep now!)	Acquaintances or peers, typically neutral in tone.
	Request	"Cik tenjo ka jandela!" (Look at the window?)	Colleagues or acquaintances in polite but neutral interactions.
	Suggestion	"Sibanyo heula samemeh dahar." (Wash your hand before eating.)	Peers or slightly younger individuals in a neutral context.
Lemes	Command	"Mangga geura kulem." (You can sleep, please.)	Younger person or subordinate speaking to elder or superior.
	Request	"Abdi tiasa kulem tipayun?" (May I go to sleep?)	Subordinate or younger person addressing a superior or elder.
	Suggestion	"Mangga, geura tuang." (Please, eat.)	Subordinate or respectful peer suggesting to elder or superior.

Examples in table 3 show how the Sundanese speech levels intricately encode respect, familiarity, and hierarchy. Through these levels, speakers navigate complex social dynamics, ensuring that their language aligns with cultural values of *unggah-ungguh*. This practice not only sustains harmonious relationships but also reinforces the broader societal structure rooted in mutual respect and consideration.

Scholars like Errington (1988) have explored similar speech-level systems in Javanese, noting that they function as tools for social differentiation and boundary maintenance. Sundanese, with its comparable system, reinforces this argument. By speaking in **lemes**, for example, a Sundanese individual acknowledges and reinforces a superior-subordinate dynamic, whether the superior is an elder, a community leader, or someone of higher social standing. On the other hand, **kasar** is reserved for informal or egalitarian contexts, where power dynamics are either negligible or inverted.

The hierarchical structure of Sundanese speech levels exemplifies the notion that language both mirrors and enforces societal

hierarchies. Sociolinguists such as Bernstein (1971) have argued that linguistic codes are shaped by the distribution of power and authority within a society. The Sundanese case supports this view, as the speech levels act as linguistic manifestations of the Sundanese value system. These linguistic codes do more than reflect social hierarchies—they actively sustain them by reminding speakers and listeners of their respective social roles.

b. Comparison with Universalist Linguistic Theories

The Sundanese speech level system challenges universalist theories of language, which often prioritize the functional and transactional aspects of communication. Austin's (1962) speech act theory, for instance, focuses on how utterances achieve practical effects, such as persuading, commanding, or promising. While this framework is applicable to Sundanese directive acts, it does not fully capture the cultural and hierarchical nuances embedded in the language.

Searle's (1969) categorization of speech acts as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary similarly overlooks the cultural

weight of speech levels. In Sundanese, the illocutionary force of a directive is inseparable from its speech level. For example, a command delivered in **lemes** is not merely a polite request; it is an assertion of cultural values and

an acknowledgment of social hierarchies. Thus, Sundanese highlights the limitations of universalist frameworks that fail to account for linguistic diversity.

Table 4. Comparison Between Polite and Casual Registers in a Story

Lemes	Loma	Kasar	English
<i>Waktos énjing-énjing</i>	<i>Waktu isuk-isuk</i>	<i>Waktu keur isuk-isuk</i>	Early in the morning
<i>Abdi mios ka bumi pun Aki</i>	<i>Kuring angkat ka imah Aki</i>	<i>Kuring indit ka imah si Aki</i>	I went to Grandpa's house
<i>Ngabantun ketu kanggo dipasihkeun ka anjeunna</i>	<i>Mawa kerepus pikeun dipasihkeun ka anjeunna</i>	<i>Mawa kerepus pikeun dibérékeun ka manéhna</i>	To bring a cap to give to him
<i>Kaleresan anjeunna nuju nyondong di bumi</i>	<i>Kabeneran anjeunna aya di imah</i>	<i>Kabeneran manéhna keur aya di imah</i>	He happened to be at home
<i>Sakantenan abdi nyuhunkeun landong ka pun Aki kanggo nambaan padaharan abdi anu raheut</i>	<i>Kuring nanyakeun ka Aki pikeun ubar beuteung kuring anu raheut</i>	<i>Sakalian kuring ménta ubar ka si Aki pikeun ngubaran beuteung kuring anu raheut</i>	I also asked Grandpa for medicine to treat my upset stomach
<i>Saparantos dipaparin tamba, teras abdi wangsul ka rorompok</i>	<i>Sanggeus dipasihkan ubar, kuring balik ka imah</i>	<i>Sanggeus dibéré ubar, tuluy kuring balik ka imah</i>	After being given the medicine, I went back home
<i>Saparantos ditampi, éta kopéah lajeng dianggo ku anjeunna dina mastakana</i>	<i>Sanggeus ditarima, éta kerepus dipaké ku anjeuna dina sirahna</i>	<i>Sanggeus ditarima, éta kerepus tuluy dipaké ku manéhna dina sirahna</i>	After it was received, the cap was then worn by him on his head

This critique extends to politeness theories as well. While Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face-threatening acts has been widely influential, it does not adequately address languages where politeness is grammatically encoded. Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, such as tact and modesty, are more applicable to Sundanese but still lack the specificity required to analyze hierarchical systems like kasar (coarse), loma (moderate), and lemes (polite). The Sundanese language demands a more nuanced framework that integrates linguistic structure with cultural philosophy.

c. Cultural Implications of Sundanese Linguistic Choices

The cultural significance of Sundanese speech levels extends beyond language use to broader societal values. The concept of unggah-ungguh captures the Sundanese ideal of harmonious relationships, which is central to their worldview. This principle is evident in linguistic choices and non-verbal behaviors,

such as gestures, posture, and eye contact. Together, these practices create a cohesive cultural system that prioritizes respect, humility, and social harmony.

This cultural philosophy aligns with the broader Indonesian principle of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), which emphasizes community over individualism. In Sundanese, the use of lemes in directive acts is not merely a linguistic convention but a cultural practice that reinforces communal values. By speaking respectfully, individuals contribute to the collective goal of maintaining harmony, a value deeply ingrained in Sundanese identity.

d. Philosophical Principles Embedded in the Sundanese Speech Level System

The Sundanese speech level system reflects core cultural values, particularly the principle of *unggah-ungguh*, which governs respect and social harmony. This system is a manifestation of how Sundanese society views hierarchy and social relationships. The philosophical principles underlying the speech levels

emphasize respect for authority, social cohesion, and the maintenance of balance in interpersonal interactions. The use of *lemes* (polite) speech conveys deference to elders and superiors, reinforcing the value placed on respect for hierarchy. In contrast, *kasar* (informal) language is used in intimate or familiar settings, illustrating how language fosters solidarity and personal connection. *Loma* (neutral) serves as a middle ground, facilitating general social interactions without the weight of formality or informality.

These speech levels are more than tools for communication; they reflect and enforce cultural norms, such as maintaining harmonious relationships and upholding the dignity of individuals through language. In this context, the Sundanese speech system is deeply embedded in the worldview of the speakers, where every interaction is seen as an opportunity to reinforce social order and respect.

e. Reflecting and Shaping Cultural Values and Social Structures

The Sundanese language, through its speech level system, plays an essential role in shaping and maintaining cultural values and social structures. By providing distinct linguistic tools for expressing varying degrees of respect, the language reinforces the cultural emphasis on hierarchy, decorum, and social harmony. In a Sundanese-speaking community, individuals are taught from an early age to recognize and act according to these speech levels, which ensures the perpetuation of social structures that prioritize respect for authority, elders, and social order.

The language facilitates not just communication but also the negotiation of social roles. For example, when making requests, giving commands, or offering suggestions, speakers carefully choose their speech level based on the social status of the addressee, the context of the interaction, and the desired tone. A request in *lemes* conveys humility, while a command in *kasar* may convey familiarity but also risk disrespecting authority. Thus, the Sundanese speech system is integral to the daily performance of social roles, guiding individuals in their interactions

and contributing to the broader cultural fabric of Sundanese society.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals how Sundanese speech level system captures not only sociolinguistic functions, but also philosophical foundations rooted in the Sundanese worldview. Each speech level reflects a unique approach to social interaction with *kasar* (coarse) representing informality and emotional expressiveness, *loma* (moderate) balancing equality and politeness, and *lemes* (polite) emphasizing deference and harmony. These layers of communication represent the philosophy of *unggah-ungguh* (harmonious relationships) and a deeply ingrained respect for social hierarchies, which are central to Sundanese culture. The main argument positions the Sundanese language within the broader discourse of the philosophy of language. It suggests that the speech levels are not mere grammatical constructs but a reflection of the community's moral and philosophical values. The linguistic distinctions align with ethical principles of respect, mutual understanding, and the maintenance of social order. Philosophical theories, such as those by Austin and Searle on performative speech acts, are both validated and challenged in this context. While these universalist theories highlight the function of language as action where politeness and hierarchy transcend mere communication and represent ethical living. From a critical perspective, this study emphasizes how language serves as a vehicle for philosophical thought, shaping and expressing the worldview of its speakers. The Sundanese speech level system illustrates that language is not only a tool for conveying meaning but also a framework for enacting cultural philosophies. The alignment between language and the Sundanese ethos of social harmony demonstrates how linguistic practices can embody and perpetuate ethical and philosophical principles. This study thus contributes to the philosophical understanding of how language operates as a cultural artifact that both reflects and constructs reality.

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