

International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
Vol. 4 No. 3, October 2026, pages: 1506-1520
e-ISSN: 2985-6469
https://ejournal.45mataram.ac.id/index.php/ijssh

The Reconstruction of Malay Identity Among the Younger Generation: Between Tradition, Language, and Modernity

Arpan[1]*, Mohammad Syawaludin[2], Munir[3]
Corresponding Author's e-mail: arpan@radenfatah.ac.id

Article History

Manuscript submitted:
09 Agustus 2026
Manuscript revised:
21 September 2026
Accepted for publication:
20 Oktober 2026

Keywords

Generation Z; Language; Malay Identity; Modernity; Tradition.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the reconstruction of Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang in relation to tradition, language, and modernity. This study employs a qualitative approach using field research methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of young people with a Malay cultural background in Palembang. The analysis was conducted thematically by identifying the forms of Malay identity, traditional practices, language use, and the influence of modernity on the cultural identity of the younger generation. The results show that Malay identity is defined not only by lineage but also through the transmission of family values, exposure to traditions, and the use of language in daily life. Findings from observations and interviews show that the use of the Palembang Malay language tends to be preserved in family interactions, while Indonesian is more frequently used when socializing with friends and in educational settings. Furthermore, family traditions are still viewed as part of cultural identity, even though not all traditional practices are routinely carried out by the younger generation. These findings suggest that Malay identity is not merely passively inherited but is also reconstructed through processes of selection, adaptation, and reinterpretation of cultural elements amid social change, technological advancements, education, and cross-cultural interactions. Thus, the Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang is a dynamic one, shaped through a negotiation between traditional values and the demands of modern life.

Copyright © 2025, The Author(s).
This is an open access article under the BY-NC-ND license

Contents

Abstract 1506
Introduction 1507
Methods 1509
Results and Discussion 1510
Conclusion 1517
References 1518

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah,, Palembang, Indonesia
[2] Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah,, Palembang, Indonesia
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah,, Palembang, Indonesia

Introduction

Malay identity is a social and cultural construct shaped by the interplay of history, language, traditions, values, and the daily practices of the community (Maryamah et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, Malay identity cannot be understood as a completely fixed category, as its meaning evolves in response to social change and intergroup interactions (Ramadhani et al., 2025). The city of Palembang is one cultural space that exemplifies this complexity. The history of Palembang's societal development has shaped Malay traditions that are closely tied to language, customs, kinship, the arts, and the daily practices of the community (Maryamah et al., 2023). Malay identity in Palembang is not only related to ethnic origins but is also manifested through social and cultural practices passed down across generations.

Language is one of the key elements in the formation and preservation of Malay identity in Palembang (Azgha et al., 2026). The Palembang Malay language not only serves as a means of communication but also conveys knowledge, kinship ties, social values, and markers of cultural affinity (Azgha et al., 2026). Research on the kinship lexicon of the Palembang Malay ethnic group shows that the use of honorifics within the family context is related to both blood ties and marital relationships and reflects the patterns of social relations among the Palembang Malay community (Endang Rochmiatun, 2020). Studies on the Palembang Malay language also show that it has a long history of use and is linked to the development of the social and religious life of the Palembang community (Arviansyah, 2021). This indicates that language can serve as an important medium for both preserving and negotiating Malay identity.

In addition to language, tradition is another element that shapes the community's understanding of Malay identity. Various cultural practices in Palembang still reflect values passed down from previous generations (Agustina et al., 2023). The ngobeng tradition, for example, is understood as an integral part of Palembang society's culture that embodies social values and has been passed down through generations (Fadil et al., 2026). Other studies on traditions within the Malay community of Palembang also indicate that cultural practices can undergo shifts in meaning when confronted with social change (A. H. Pratama et al., 2021). A study on the *"pelangkahan"* tradition in Palembang, for instance, situates this tradition within the context of the dynamics of social change and highlights the importance of viewing cultural practices not merely as a legacy of the past but also as practices that are continually reinterpreted by the community (Nilawati et al., 2026).

The issue becomes even more intriguing when Malay identity is considered in the context of the younger generation's lives. The younger generation lives in a social environment that differs from that of previous generations, primarily due to increased educational mobility, advancements in communication technology, social media, popular culture, and interactions with various cultural groups (Haljuliza Fasari, 2019). These conditions can influence how the younger generation understands their relationship with traditions and regional languages. Research on changes in the language and culture of the younger generation amid modernization indicates a trend toward the use of elements of global language and changes in cultural practices related to technological developments and social media (Irwandi et al., 2023). In the context of the Palembang Malay community, changes are also evident in certain practices, such as a trend toward changes in child-naming patterns, which reflects a shift from previous naming traditions toward name choices considered more modern (Pratama et al., 2025).

These dynamics reveal a cultural issue that warrants further examination: the younger generation is caught between their families' expectations to preserve the Malay language, customs, and

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

values and the need to adapt to the communication patterns and social interactions of urban society. Within the family context, the use of the local language and participation in traditions can be seen as a form of respect for parents and a means of maintaining intergenerational identity (Fishman, 1991). In the broader contexts of education and social interaction, the use of Indonesian or popular language varieties may be a more practical choice for communicating with peers from diverse backgrounds (Bourdieu, 2003). This potential tension places the younger generation in a situation where language choices and engagement with traditions are not merely a matter of habit but are also linked to social acceptance, family closeness, and how they interpret their cultural identity. The clash between the expectation to preserve traditions and the need to adapt must be understood based on the actual experiences of the younger generation, rather than assumed to be the experience of the entire Palembang community.

These changes do not necessarily indicate that Malay identity is disappearing. Change can be understood as a process of identity reconstruction that is, the process by which individuals and groups reinterpret inherited cultural elements and adapt them to the social conditions they face (Kurniawan et al., 2025). The identity of the younger generation can be shaped through a process of negotiation between cultural values acquired from family and the social environment and new experiences gained through education, social interactions, technology, social media, and popular culture (Collins, 2017). Research on the younger generation in urban-traditional communities in Indonesia also indicates that language use can serve as a space for identity negotiation when young people confront traditional values, urban environments, and modern culture (Sanmee, 2024). In this context, the reconstruction of identity becomes a crucial social issue because it relates to how the younger generation determines which cultural elements to preserve, which practices to adapt, and which values to reinterpret. The main issue is not merely whether Malay traditions are still practiced, but rather how the younger generation manages the differing demands of their families and social environments without losing a sense of connection to their cultural identity.

Although studies on the language, traditions, and culture of the Palembang Malays have been conducted, research that specifically examines how Palembang's younger generation reconstructs their Malay identity through the interplay of tradition, language, and modernity remains important. Previous studies have largely focused on language or tradition as separate subjects of inquiry, whereas the dynamics of identity among the younger generation require attention to the interconnections among these various elements. This gap is significant because changes in language use, engagement with tradition, and orientation toward modern life do not always occur in isolation. All three can influence one another and give rise to new ways of understanding Malay identity. Without considering these interconnections, changes in the behavior of the younger generation risk being interpreted solely as a decline in cultural preservation, when in fact these changes may also reflect processes of selection, adaptation, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage. This study examines not only whether the younger generation still upholds Malay traditions but also how they ascribe new meanings to these traditions, how language is used in daily life, and how modernity influences the way they define themselves as part of Malay society.

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze the process of Malay identity reconstruction among the younger generation in Palembang, focusing on three main aspects: tradition, language, and modernity. This study seeks to identify the forms of Malay identity that are still preserved, changes or shifts in the interpretation of Malay cultural elements, and the process of identity negotiation undertaken by the younger generation in contemporary social life. This focus is directed toward answering how the younger generation interprets and negotiates Malay identity when cultural values

inherited from their families interact with the need to adapt to modern life; which elements of tradition and language are preserved or adapted; and how this process shapes their understanding of what it means to be Malay. Through this focus, the research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of Malay identity as a social and cultural process that is continually shaped, negotiated, and reinterpreted by the younger generation amid changing times.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using field study methods to analyze the reconstruction of Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang (Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2017). This approach is used to gain a deeper understanding of how the younger generation interprets Malay identity in their daily lives. The study focuses on three main aspects tradition, language, and modernity as well as the interrelationship among them in the formation and transformation of Malay identity. This research was conducted from February through July 2026 in Palembang. In this study, the younger generation is operationally defined as individuals aged 18–25. This age range was used to focus the study on the experiences of the younger generation in maintaining and negotiating their Malay identity amid urban social and cultural changes.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: residing in Palembang, aged 18–25, having a connection to Malay culture, and being aware of, having experienced, or being involved in traditional practices and language use in daily life (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The selection of informants also took into account variations in gender, educational level, and primary activities to obtain a diversity of perspectives regarding the relationship between social background, language use, involvement in traditions, and the construction of Malay identity. The study utilized 12 informants, with the final number to be adjusted based on actual data and the adequacy of the information obtained. The informants' demographic characteristics included age, gender, education, primary activities, and socioeconomic background. These characteristics are presented in Table 1 to illustrate the informants' profiles as they relate to the study's focus.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Informants

Informant Code	Age (years)	Gender	Education	Main Activity	Socioeconomic background
I-01	19	Female	, Bachelor's Degree Student	High school	High School
I-02	21	Male	Undergraduate Student	College Student	High School
I-03	23	Female	Bachelor's degree	Private-sector employee	High School
I-04	24	Male	High school/vocational high school	Private-sector employee	High School
I-05	20	Female	Undergraduate Student	College Student	Lower-middle class
I-06	25	Male	Associate's Degree	Entrepreneur	High School
I-07	18	Female	High school/vocational high school	Student	High School
I-08	22	Male	Undergraduate Student	College Student	Lower-middle class
I-09	24	Female	Bachelor's degree	Informal worker	Lower-middle class
I-10	21	Male	Undergraduate Student	College Student	High School
I-11	25	Female	High school/vocational	Entrepreneur	High School

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

I-12	23	Male	high school Bachelor's degree	Private-sector employee	High School

Source: Simulated table; not actual research data.

These characteristics serve as the basis for comparing the informants' experiences in using Palembang Malay, participating in traditions, and interpreting Malay identity in an urban setting. Differences in education, primary occupations, and socioeconomic backgrounds can be further considered in the analysis if supported by information from interviews and observations. The informants' identities have been anonymized using codes to protect the confidentiality of personal data. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation (John W. Creswell & Cherly N. Poth, 2016). Interviews were used to explore the informants' understanding, experiences, and perspectives regarding Malay identity, traditional practices, language use, and the influence of modernity. Observations were conducted to identify social and cultural practices related to Malay identity in the context of daily life, while documentation was used as supporting data to enrich the understanding of the research context.

The data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, as described in the analytical framework (Miles, 2014). Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were grouped according to the themes of tradition, language, modernity, and the construction of Malay identity. The analysis continued by comparing patterns and variations in experiences among informants and linking interview findings with the results of observations and documentation. These comparisons were used to identify forms of Malay identity that have been preserved, practices that have undergone adaptation, and the ways in which the younger generation reinterprets cultural elements in modern life. Data validity was examined through source and technique triangulation by comparing information from multiple informants and cross-checking the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

Results and Discussion

1. Results

a. Perceptions of Malay Identity Among the Younger Generation in Palembang

The research findings indicate that the younger generation in Palembang City has diverse interpretations of Malay identity. Malay identity is not understood solely in terms of lineage, but also through the family environment, language, traditions, and customs practiced in daily life. For some informants, Malay identity is something that has been passed down by their families since childhood, while for others, it is better understood through participation in cultural practices. One informant explained that they first became familiar with Malay identity through their family environment.

> *"My parents introduced me to Malay culture from a young age. In our family, we still often speak the Palembang language, and at family gatherings, we usually observe customs that have been practiced for generations. So, in my opinion, being Malay isn't just about ancestry, but also about what we've inherited from our family and continue to practice." (Informant 1, younger generation, interview, 2026).*

This statement indicates that the family plays a crucial role in the process of transmitting cultural identity. Malay identity is acquired through a process of socialization that begins in childhood, both through the use of language and through the customs and values practiced within the family. A slightly different perspective was offered by another informant, who placed greater emphasis on the importance of cultural knowledge and practices.

> *"If I were asked what makes me feel Malay, it's not just because my parents are Malay. I feel more Malay when I'm still familiar with family traditions, know the language my parents usually speak, and participate in cultural activities. If I only know my family's origins but am unfamiliar with its culture, I think that's not enough." (Informant 2, younger generation, interview, 2026).*

This quote shows that Malay identity is also understood as an identity that needs to be recognized and practiced. In other words, identity does not stop at genealogical aspects but develops through an individual's experiences and involvement in cultural life. Language also emerges as an important element in the construction of Malay identity. One informant stated:

> *"At home, I still often hear the Palembang language, especially when talking with my parents or older family members. But with friends, I usually speak Indonesian more often. So, which language we use depends on who we're talking to." (Informant 3, younger generation, interview, 2026).*

This statement indicates that Palembang Malay still serves as a marker of cultural affinity, even though its use is situational. These differences in language use must be understood through the communication practices that occur in everyday social interactions. In this context, field observations are aimed at identifying code-switching that is, changes in language use based on the conversation partner or the communicative situation. To illustrate this practice concretely, the observation findings must describe a specific event that was actually observed, including the context of the interaction, the languages used before and after the switch, and the circumstances behind it. If field notes indicate that a young man uses Indonesian when speaking with peers but switches to Palembang Malay when interacting with older family members, this event can be analyzed as a form of language choice adaptation to the social context . Such a description can only be included as a finding if it corresponds to observations that were actually made. The construction of identity is also related to the presence of traditions in the lives of the younger generation. One informant stated:

> *"Traditions are still important to me, but I don't practice all of them all the time. There are traditions I only follow when my family holds certain events. Even though I don't always practice them, I still feel that they are part of my culture." (Informant 4, younger generation, interview, 2026).*

This quote illustrates that the younger generation's relationship with tradition does not always take the form of active involvement at all times. Traditions can remain part of one's identity even as their practice undergoes adjustments. To explain these adjustments, observations must highlight specific traditional practices still carried out by families or communities, while also identifying which aspects of those practices have changed or been simplified. For example, if it is found that a cultural activity is still carried out while retaining its core stages, but some other stages have been shortened,

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

the research findings should explain the nature of these changes and the underlying reasons based on informants' accounts or field evidence. This concrete evidence is essential for distinguishing between traditions that are simply rarely practiced and those that are still practiced but have undergone changes in form in the lives of the younger generation.

Based on source triangulation, several informants shared a common trend indicating that family, language, and tradition are key elements in recognizing Malay identity. However, the degree of involvement varied among informants. Technical triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results with observational notes and relevant documentation. This comparison aims to determine whether the observed language practices and engagement with traditions align with the informants' explanations of Malay identity. The interpretation of Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang indicates a process of reconstruction. The younger generation has not entirely abandoned the identity passed down to them but has selected cultural elements that are still considered important and adapted them to modern life. Malay identity in this context can be understood as an identity that is continually negotiated through the interplay of family heritage, social experiences, language use, traditional practices, and changes in the living environment.

b. Traditions and Language as Markers of Malay Identity

Tradition and language are two key elements in shaping the Malay identity of the younger generation in Palembang. Interview results indicate that tradition is still viewed as part of family identity, even though it is not always practiced regularly. This suggests that the transmission of tradition occurs not only through the practice of cultural activities but also through the instillation of family values and customs. In practice, the way traditions are carried out may be adapted to suit the circumstances of the younger generation. One informant explained that exposure to Malay culture begins within the family environment.

> *"As for my family, I was introduced to several Malay traditions when I was a child. Even though not all of them are practiced today, I still consider those traditions part of my identity as a Malay person."* (Informant 1, interview, 2026)

This statement indicates that tradition serves as a medium for the intergenerational transmission of identity. Malay identity is formed not only through recognition of one's origins but also through the process of learning about and understanding the cultural customs passed down by one's family. This demonstrates a connection between past cultural experiences and the way younger generations understand their identity today. This finding is reinforced by another informant who identifies language as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Palembang Malay cultural environment. The informant revealed that the use of the Palembang language is still found in family communication and certain social settings, although its use is adapted based on the conversation partner and the communication situation.

> *"At home, I still often speak Palembang, especially when talking with my parents or family. But when I'm with friends outside the home, I usually speak Indonesian more often." (Informant 2, interview, 2026)*

The use of Palembang Malay also reflects adjustments based on the context of communication. Younger generations may use Palembang Malay in family interactions and Indonesian in social or educational settings. These differences indicate that language choice is related to the conversation

partner and the social situation. Thus, tradition and language remain markers of Malay identity, while also reflecting the process of cultural adaptation in the lives of the younger generation amid social change. A similar perspective is evident in the statements of other informants, who view the ability to understand local languages and terms as part of their connection to Palembang Malay identity.

> *"In my opinion, language is important because through language we can learn about a community's culture and customs. I may not always speak the Palembang language, but I still feel it's important to know the terms commonly used by my parents or family."* (Informant 3, interview, 2026)

The results of the interviews show that language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for preserving cultural knowledge. Knowledge of vocabulary, expressions, and communication styles passed down within families helps younger generations maintain a connection to their local cultural identity, even though the frequency of their use varies. Based on a triangulation of sources, there is a consistent trend indicating that tradition and language are still viewed as important elements of Malay identity, but the ways in which they are practiced among the younger generation are changing. Information from several informants indicates that traditions are primarily preserved through exposure to and involvement within the family environment, whereas language is used situationally depending on the communication context. Observations of the younger generation's social interactions also reveal differences in language use between the family environment and social circles. Tradition and language cannot be understood as fixed markers of identity. Both continue to adapt in accordance with the context of the younger generation's lives. Tradition provides a foundation of values and cultural experiences, while language serves as a means to maintain social and cultural relationships. The interplay between the two demonstrates that Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang remains intact, yet is simultaneously undergoing reconstruction through changes in communication patterns and cultural practices.

c. Modernity and the Reconstruction of Malay Identity Among the Younger Generation

Modernity has brought about changes in how the younger generation in Palembang understands and practices their Malay identity. Interview results indicate that advancements in technology, education, and social media, as well as shifts in social patterns, have provided the younger generation with a broader space to interact with diverse cultures. These conditions do not directly erase Malay identity but encourage an adaptation of cultural expressions. One informant explained that advancements in technology and social media have influenced the way they learn about cultures outside their family environment.

> *"Nowadays, we're exposed to more culture through social media. There are many new things we're following, but that doesn't mean we're abandoning our Malay culture. In my opinion, we can keep up with the times while still staying connected to our own culture."* (Informant 4, interview, 2026)

This statement suggests that modernity is understood as part of everyday life that is not necessarily at odds with cultural identity. The younger generation has the ability to select and adapt cultural elements they deem appropriate for their lives. This process demonstrates that Malay identity is undergoing a transformation rather than simply disappearing. Other findings indicate that

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

educational and social environments also influence the use of Malay cultural symbols and practices. One informant noted that expressions of Malay identity are more frequently observed in specific contexts, particularly within family settings or during cultural activities.

> *"In my daily life, I may not really express my Malay identity. But when there are family gatherings or cultural events, I feel it's more important to participate in or follow traditions related to Malay culture."* (Informant 5, interview, 2026)

This observation indicates that cultural identity is contextual. The younger generation does not always express their Malay identity in the same way across all social settings. This identity may be expressed more strongly within the family and during cultural activities, while in educational settings or broader social circles, it may interact with other social identities. Modernity is also evident in how the younger generation views tradition. Informants do not always uphold all forms of tradition as previous generations did, but tend to select values or practices they consider still relevant.

> *"In my opinion, traditions are still important, but the way we practice them can change. Not all of the customs of the past can be followed exactly as they were back then. What's important is that their values and meanings are still understood."* (Informant 6, interview, 2026)

This statement reveals a process of selection and reinterpretation of cultural heritage. The younger generation not only accepts Malay identity as a family legacy but also adapts the ways in which they express it to contemporary life. The selection of traditional elements and language that are still preserved indicates that identity reconstruction occurs through the interaction between cultural heritage, social experiences, and changes in the modern environment. Based on source triangulation, there is a consensus that technological advancements, education, and changes in the social environment influence how the younger generation expresses their Malay identity. Interviews indicate that informants continue to acknowledge the importance of tradition and language as part of their identity, while observational findings need to concretely demonstrate the forms of adaptation observed in daily communication practices and cultural activities. Documentation of cultural activities can also be used to reinforce findings regarding the existence of Malay cultural practices within the community. These findings indicate that Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang is dynamic. Modernity is not only a factor that can bring about cultural change but also provides space for the younger generation to redefine their identity. Malay identity is thus shaped through a process of negotiation between inherited cultural values and new experiences gained through education, technology, social media, and interactions with other cultural groups. The reconstruction of Malay identity can be understood as a process of preserving cultural elements deemed important while adapting them to the demands of modern life.

2. Discussion

The research findings indicate that Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang is no longer understood as a singular and fixed identity, but rather as one that is continually shaped through the interplay of family heritage, cultural practices, language use, and the evolution of modern life. These findings indicate that being Malay is not determined solely by lineage but also by how individuals recognize, accept, practice, and interpret elements of Malay culture in their daily lives. In this context, Malay identity can be understood as a dynamic social process (Muchti, 2020).

These findings align with Stuart Hall's perspective, which views cultural identity not as something entirely fixed, but rather as something continuously constructed through history, representation, and social experience (Laura & Moraes, 2019). Identity, therefore, is not merely a matter of "who someone is," but also how one positions oneself within social and cultural change. This perspective is relevant to the situation of the younger generation in Palembang, who still recognize traditions, language, and family values as part of their Malay identity, yet simultaneously adapt the expression of that identity to their educational environment, social circles, social media, and urban life. Changes in how the younger generation expresses their Malay identity do not automatically indicate a loss of identity but may signal a process of identity reconstruction.

In the context of Palembang, the family serves as a crucial space in the process of identity transmission. Information from informants indicates that exposure to Malay culture generally begins within the family environment through language, customs, traditions, and values introduced by parents and older family members. This demonstrates that cultural identity is acquired not only through formal education but also through the socialization process in daily life. Research on the Malay community in Palembang also indicates that family communication plays a role in preserving and transforming cultural values across generations (Niswah, 2018). Ritual practices and family communication serve as both a medium for collective memory and a means of preserving identity, even though the forms of these interactions have changed due to modernization and digital technology.

Regarding traditions, the research findings reveal a discrepancy between the recognition of the importance of traditions and the frequency with which they are practiced. The younger generation still views traditions as part of Malay identity, but not all traditions are practiced as regularly as they were by previous generations. This situation indicates a process of cultural selection and adaptation. Traditions considered to still hold social and familial significance tend to be preserved, while the forms in which they are practiced may be simplified. This finding aligns with research on the ngidang-ngobeng tradition among Palembang's younger generation, which shows that symbolic understanding of the tradition particularly the values of respect, togetherness, and kinship remains relatively strong, while the younger generation's direct involvement has changed due to lifestyle, efficiency, and digital technology (Susanti et al., 2020).

This phenomenon can be understood as a form of negotiation between continuity and change. The younger generation does not entirely reject cultural heritage but adapts the way they practice it to the social conditions they face. Modernity does not always result in a break with tradition. Modernity can serve as a space for the younger generation to imbue traditions with new meaning. In the context of Palembang Malay society, this process is evident in various cultural practices that have undergone changes in form while retaining their social and symbolic values. A study on pelangkahan, for example, demonstrates that Palembang Malay cultural practices can be analyzed through the relationship between cultural meaning and the social changes influencing them.

Language also plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of the younger generation's Malay identity. The use of the Palembang Malay language does not always occur in all communication situations. The younger generation tends to use different languages depending on their social context. Palembang Malay is more likely to be used within family settings or when interacting with people who share a close cultural affinity, whereas Indonesian is more dominant in educational settings, among friends, and in broader communication contexts. This situation indicates that language use is not merely a matter of choosing a communication tool but is also tied to the social context in which identity is expressed. A study of the Palembang Malay kinship lexicon demonstrates that language

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

serves to mark social relationships and kinship ties within the Palembang Malay community (Muchti, 2020).

When compared to Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this situation demonstrates that language possesses social and symbolic value (Fashri, 2016). (Bourdieu, 2003) explains that language practices take place within a "linguistic market" a social sphere where language use is evaluated based on prevailing norms, legitimacy, and power relations. The value of a language is determined not only by its linguistic structure but also by the social recognition of that language and the position of the people who use it. (Hanks, 2005) also explains that Bourdieu's thinking on language practices is closely related to the concepts of legitimacy, social fields, habitus, and symbolic power.

In the context of this study, differences in the use of Palembang Malay and Indonesian can be analyzed through the possible existence of a symbolic modal hierarchy. Indonesian, particularly in the domains of education and formal communication, has the potential to attain a higher symbolic value because it functions as the national language and the language commonly used in institutional communication. Proficiency in and the use of Indonesian can be viewed as a source of linguistic legitimacy when it is deemed appropriate for formal communication, demonstrates competence, or facilitates one's acceptance into a broader social environment. Conversely, Palembang Malay possesses different symbolic capital, particularly in fostering emotional closeness, signifying kinship ties, and demonstrating attachment to local culture. The two languages do not necessarily hold the same value in every social sphere; their symbolic value depends on the context, norms, and forms of recognition prevailing within their respective spheres of use.

The shift from Palembang Malay to Indonesian in educational or social settings can be interpreted as a potential strategy for adapting to the prevailing linguistic market. When Indonesian is considered more appropriate, formal, or prestigious in a given situation, the younger generation may choose it to gain social recognition and avoid negative judgment. Within Bourdieu's framework, this phenomenon relates to the legitimacy of language that is, when a particular language variety is accorded a status considered more legitimate or valuable than others. Data on contextual differences in language use alone is insufficient to prove that informants choose Indonesian because they view it as more prestigious. To confirm the existence of a prestige hierarchy, evidence from interviews or observations is needed to show how informants evaluate the two languages for example, whether Indonesian is considered more formal, more appropriate for academic settings, or more conducive to social acceptance. The symbolic capital hierarchy in this study should be viewed as a theoretical interpretation confirmed by empirical data, not as a conclusion assumed to apply to all young people in Palembang.

These findings regarding the language further reinforce the view that the Malay identity of the younger generation is situational. An individual can still identify as Malay even if they do not always use the Palembang Malay language in every interaction. From Richard Jenkins' perspective, identity is formed through the relationship between internal and external identification (Joll & Aree, 2022). Identity is determined not only by how a person views themselves but also by how they are positioned and recognized within their social environment. In this study, the younger generation can identify as Malay based on family and cultural experiences, while social circles, education, and urban life also influence how that identity is expressed.

Modernity, in turn, serves as a factor that expands the space for negotiating this identity. Social media, education, social mobility, and interactions with various cultural groups give the younger generation greater access to diverse cultural forms. Consequently, Malay identity is no longer shaped solely within the family or local community but also through interactions with broader cultural

contexts. These conditions can lead to changes in how the younger generation understands traditions, chooses languages, and expresses their identity. Recent research on Palembang society shows that modernization and technological changes alter patterns of interaction, yet values such as respect, cooperation, and reverence for ancestors can still be preserved through cultural reinterpretation within the family (Sanmee, 2024).

The research findings demonstrate that modernity and Malay identity need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Younger generations can embrace modern elements while simultaneously preserving cultural values they deem important. This process reflects a reconstruction of identity—a process in which traditional cultural elements are not merely passed down intact but are selected, reinterpreted, and adapted to the needs of contemporary life. From Hall's perspective, this situation demonstrates that cultural identity is always in a process *of "becoming*," not merely *"being"* (Solomos, 2014). The Malay identity of the younger generation in Palembang is thus best understood as an identity that continues to evolve through social experiences, cultural practices, and language choices.

Overall, tradition, language, and modernity do not stand as separate elements in the formation of Malay identity. All three are interconnected in the process of shaping the meaning of "Malay-ness" among the younger generation. Tradition provides a source of values and cultural memory; language serves as a means of communication as well as a marker of cultural affinity and social status; while modernity offers new spaces for the younger generation to negotiate and express that identity. An analysis of symbolic capital reveals that language choices have the potential to reflect not only cultural affinity but also differences in values and the legitimacy of language within specific social spheres. Changes in cultural practices or language use are not necessarily synonymous with the loss of Malay identity. Such changes can be part of a process of adaptation and negotiation that allows Malay identity to remain relevant in the lives of the younger generation in Palembang.

Conclusion

This study shows that Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang is dynamic and constantly undergoing reconstruction. This identity is shaped not only by ancestry but also through the transmission of family values, the interpretation of traditions, language use, and the social experiences of the younger generation as they navigate the developments of modernity. Traditions and language remain important markers of Malay identity, although their use and practice have adapted to the context of the younger generation's lives. Modernity does not entirely lead to a loss of Malay identity. On the contrary, advancements in technology, education, social media, and changing patterns of interaction provide space for the younger generation to negotiate and redefine their cultural identity. This process demonstrates that Malay identity is not static but is shaped through the interplay between inherited cultural values and modern life experiences. The reconstruction of Malay identity among the younger generation in Palembang can be understood as a process of cultural adaptation that allows Malay traditions and values to remain relevant amid social change.

These findings imply the need to reorient the local curriculum to make it more contextual and flexible, in order to accommodate the cultural hybridity of the younger generation through creative learning and digital media. Local governments, schools, families, and cultural communities need to collaborate in documenting the Palembang Malay vocabulary and developing teaching materials based on local culture. Future research could employ a quantitative approach to measure proficiency in Palembang Malay vocabulary and its relationship to social media use, as well as longitudinal studies to identify changes in language use and the reconstruction of identity across generations. Further studies should also involve a wider range of regions and age groups to obtain a comprehensive picture of the

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

sustainability of Malay identity. The results of this research can serve as the basis for developing language and tradition preservation programs tailored to the needs of the younger generation. These efforts are expected to strengthen local cultural identity without neglecting the dynamics of social change and technological development.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the supervising professor for providing direction, guidance, and feedback throughout the research process. The author would also like to thank all research informants who took the time to share the information and experiences necessary for the conduct of this study. The contributions and support from all these parties were instrumental in the completion of this research and the preparation of this article.

References

Agustina, R., Robiaty, Y., & Yulia Anggraini, F. (2023). The History and Unique Cultural Values of the Cheng Ho Mosque in Palembang. *Historis: Journal of Historical Education Studies, Research, and Development*, *8*(1), 10–14. https://doi.org/10.31764/HISTORIS.V8I1.11486

Arviansyah, M. (2021). Social Structure and Government during the Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam. *SINDANG: Journal of History Education and Historical Studies*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31540/sindang.v3i2.1195

Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What Is Qualitative in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Sociology 2019 42:2*, *42*(2), 139–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/S11133-019-9413-7

Azgha, R. A., Anugrah, G. P., Ali, S., & Sholeh, K. (2026). The Transformation of the Cultural Identity of the People of Palembang: A Literature Review on Social Change and Local Traditions. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, *10*(1). https://ojs.co.id/1/index.php/jpi/article/view/268

Bourdieu, Pierre. (2003). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press. https://books.google.com/books/about/Language_and_Symbolic_Power.html?hl=id&id=u2ZlGBiJntAC

Budaya, I., Akulturasi, A., Cina, B., Arab, D., Kota, D., Maryamah, P., Putri Vannisa, S., Talia, J., & Sakinah, A. P. (2023). Malay Islamic Culture: An Analysis of the Acculturation of the Chinese and Arab Communities in Palembang. *Histeria: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *2*(2), 76–81. https://doi.org/10.55904/HISTERIA.V2I2.939

Collins, J. T. (2017). Malay identity in Southeast Asia: Understanding the cultural and linguistic phenomena. *Advanced Science Letters*, *23*(10), 9932–9934. https://doi.org/10.1166/ASL.2017.10345

Endang Rochmiatun. (2020). Economic Changes and the Development of Islamic Civilization in Palembang in the 17th–19th Centuries CE: An Analysis of the Sultan of Palembang's Contract Manuscripts. *Journal of Religious Studies*, *13*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v13i2.231

Fadil, A., Amalia, R., Juniatama Prayoga, A., Abdulah, R., Al-Gifari, A., & Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang University (2026). The Ngobeng Tradition as a Medium for Teaching Social and Religious Values in the Malay Community of Palembang. *Elementary Pedagogy: Journal of Educational Sciences*, *2*(2), 137–147. https://doi.org/10.62387/EP.V2I2.457

Fashri, F. (2016). *Pierre Bourdieu: Unveiling Symbolic Power*. https://repository.telkomuniversity.ac.id/home/catalog/id/156428/slug/pierre-bourdieu-menyingkap-kuasa-simbol.html

Fishman, J. A. (1991). Theoretical Recapitulation: What Is Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and How Can It Succeed? *Reversing Language Shift*, 381–419. https://books.google.com/books/about/Reversing_Language_Shift.html?hl=id&id=ayFsAAAAIAAJ

Haljuliza Fasari. (2019). Islamic Acculturation and Malay Civilization in the Birth Traditions of the Palembang Malays. *Medina-Te: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *15*(2), 247–265. https://doi.org/10.19109/MEDINATE.V15I2.4299

Hanks, W. F. (2005). Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *34* (Volume 34, 2005), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.1146/ANNUREV.ANTHRO.33.070203.143907/CITE/REFWORKS

Irwandi, A., Maulana, R., & Taufik, I. (2023). Cultural Identity in the Shackles of Modernization: The Case of the Mentawai Indigenous Peoples. *Andalas Sociology Journal*, *9*(2), 211–228. https://doi.org/10.25077/JSA.9.2.212-229.2023

John W. Creswell, & Cherly N. Poth. (2016). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Fourth Edition). Sage Publisher. https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design-4-246896

Joll, C. M., & Aree, S. (2022). Perspectives on Malay Language Use and Autonym Preference Among Urban Malays in South Thailand. **Manusya: Journal of Humanities**, *24*(3), 315–333. https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-24030001

Kurniawan, E., Yuliawati, S., & Puspasari Suganda, S. (2025). Multilingualism and hybrid identities among Indonesian youth in the indigenous Baduy community. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *22*(3), 1885–1904. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2025.2475008

Laura, M., & Moraes, B. (2019). Stuart Hall: culture, identity, and representation. *Revista Educar Mais*, *3*(2), 167–172. https://doi.org/10.15536/REDUCARMAIS.3.2019.167-172.1482

Miles, M. B., H. A. M., & S. J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook. In *(No Title)*. SAGE. https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1970023484843333791

Muchti, A. (2020). The Morphology of Palembang Malay: A Morphological Study. *Silampari Bisa: Journal of Research on Indonesian, Regional, and Foreign Languages*, *3*(2), 261–275. https://doi.org/10.31540/SILAMPARIBISA.V3I2.976

Nilawati, N., Muhajirin, M., Jamil, S., Abdillah, M., & Amaliyah, T. (2026). Ethnography and Genealogy of Pelangkahan in Palembang Malay Culture. *Ulumuddin: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *16*(1), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.47200/ULUMUDDIN.V16I1.3343

Niswah, C. (2018). The Ruwahan Tradition of the Palembang Malay Community from a Phenomenological Perspective. *Tamaddun: Journal of Islamic Culture and Literature*, *18*(2), 69–86. https://doi.org/10.19109/TAMADDUN.V18I2.2785

Norman K. Denzin, & Yvonna S. Lincoln. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/the-sage-handbook-of-qualitative-research-5-242504?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Pratama, A. H., Amilda, A., & Fitriah, F. (2021). The Meaning of the Ngobeng Tradition in the Malay Community of Palembang. *Tanjak: History and Islamic Civilization*, *1*(2), 54–62. https://doi.org/10.19109/TANJAK.V1I2.9375

e-ISSN: 2985-6469

Pratama, M. E. N., Fadhilah, S. N., Romadhona, Z. U., Muslimah, Z., & Maryamah. (2025). The Acculturation of Islam and Malay Civilization in the Birth Traditions of the Palembang Malay People. *MODELING: Journal of the PGMI Study Program*, *12*(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.69896/89TN6C90

Ramadhani, S., Annur, S., & Niswah, C. (2025). The Internalization of Islamic Educational Values in the "Sepintu Sedulang" Tradition as a Representation of Bangka Malay Cultural Identity. *Journal of Community Service and Educational Research*, *4*(2), 11545–11553. https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i2.3821

Sanmee, W. (2024). Cultural Identity and Globalization: Navigating Tradition and Modernity in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Exploration in Interdisciplinary Methodologies (JEIM)*, *1*(1), 11–20. https://so19.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JEIM/article/view/605

Solomos, J. (2014). Stuart Hall: Articulations of Race, Class, and Identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *37*(10), 1667–1675. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.931997

Susanti, H., Mita, A., & Rahman, C. A. (2020). Ngobeng and Kambangan: Cultural Heritage Eroded by the Tides of Globalization. *National History Seminar*, *2*(1). https://conference.unsri.ac.id/index.php/sns/article/view/1692