



Local Language Interference on Non-Native Arabic Speaker in Rural Santri Communities: Sociolinguistic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of local language (Madurese) interference on foreign language (Arabic) acquisition among rural Indonesian santri communities. Recognizing that traditional views often frame interference as a linguistic deficit, this research addresses a gap in existing literature by exploring the deeper sociolinguistic dynamics and informal language use within rural *pesantren* settings. Specifically, it aims to analyze (1) forms of local language interference in Arabic, (2) factors causing such interference, and (3) its impact on santri speaking skills. Employing a qualitative-ethnographic design, the study collected data through naturalistic observation and unstructured interviews with 79 Madurese-speaking santri in Gondanglegi sub-district, East Java, analyzing them within a sociolinguistic framework grounded in interference theory and diglossia. Findings reveal significant phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical interference patterns demonstrably linked to the unique sociocultural context of *pesantren* multilingualism. Critically, these interferences are not merely errors but actively foster community, playfulness, and shared identity, thereby transforming Arabic into a more dynamic and engaging learning experience. This research offers a novel sociolinguistic analysis, arguing that interference in this context functions as an active strategy for religious pedagogy and cultural preservation. It expands translanguaging theory by highlighting the sacred-secular duality in language mixing – a phenomenon rarely documented in traditional Islamic education globally.

Keywords: Foreign language acquisition; Interlanguage; Language interference; *Pesantren*.

1. Introduction

In Islamic education, bilingualism and multilingualism are common phenomena, particularly in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) (Bin Tahir, 2015). As the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, *pesantren* not only plays a role in shaping the character and morals of students (*santri*) but also serves as a center for learning foreign languages, especially Arabic. Mastering Arabic in *pesantren* has strategic value because it has become the primary tool for understanding classical texts (*kitab kuning*) and a means of communication in religious contexts (Tabroni, et al, 2022). However, in practice, the teaching and use of Arabic in *pesantren* are inseparable from the influence of local languages used by the *santri* in their daily lives (Mawaddah,

2022). This phenomenon gives rise to symptoms of language interference that affect the language skills of the *santri*.

Language interference is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs when elements of one language influence the use of another language, both in aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. In the context of *pesantren*, local language interference with Arabic often occurs due to several factors, such as teaching methods that focus more on text comprehension than speaking practice, limited environments that support the active use of Arabic, and the habit of translating classical books into regional languages (Faizah & Hanafi, 2017; Imamudin & Haerudin, 2019). The *pesantren* education system emphasizes a habituation approach to character formation of *santri*. *Pesantren* also implements a multilingual environment in formal and informal interactions (Bin Tahir, 2015). Consequently, *santri* often face difficulties using pure Arabic without being influenced by elements of their mother tongue.

Although prior studies have investigated linguistic interference across various bilingual and multilingual settings (e.g., Ulfa et al., 2020; Hindun & Humaidi, 2024), most have focused on surface-level grammatical or phonological deviations in either Arabic or English without considering the deeper sociolinguistic dynamics unique to *pesantren* communities. These studies also predominantly adopt classroom-based perspectives, neglecting the informal, socially embedded language use in rural Islamic boarding schools. Moreover, the influence of local languages – such as Madurese or Javanese – as active mediators in shaping foreign language acquisition remains underexplored. Few researchers have examined how these regional languages not only interfere with but also transform the communicative functions of Arabic and English within *pesantren* culture. The theoretical lens of diglossia and interference theory has rarely been applied to these settings, and even fewer studies have employed ethnographic approaches to uncover the lived linguistic experiences of *santri*. This study addresses these conceptual and methodological gaps by providing a grounded analysis of language interference as both a cognitive and sociocultural phenomenon, revealing its implications for pedagogical practices and linguistic identity construction in rural Islamic education.

This research was conducted at Gondanglegi sub-district, an area widely recognized as a 'City of Santri' due to its numerous clustered *pesantren*. In this region, the majority of *santri* are Madurese speakers. The uniqueness of Gondanglegi lies in the socio-cultural factors that distinguish it from other regions, where the use of Madurese is very dominant in the daily lives of the *santri*. This has a significant influence on how *santri* adapts and uses Arabic in academic and social interactions. Therefore, this study aims to analyze three main aspects: (1) forms of local language interference in Arabic, (2) factors that cause language interference, and (3) the impact of such interference on *santri* speaking skills.

From a traditional perspective, language errors due to interference are often considered violations of linguistic norms. However, in the context of rural *pesantren*, this phenomenon can also play a role in building a more familiar and flexible learning atmosphere. Errors in pronunciation and language structure often create more relaxed interactions among *santri*, and can even lead to elements of humor and intimacy that strengthen their social relationships. To systematically analyze this complex phenomenon, this study adopts a sociolinguistic approach grounded in interference theory and the concept of diglossia. It examines how the phenomenon contributes to the social and cultural dynamics within the *pesantren* community. The study will identify linguistic variables – such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon – alongside sociocultural factors as key indicators for understanding the patterns and implications of this linguistic interference. Thus, this study not only highlights the linguistic aspects of language interference but also how this phenomenon contributes to the social and cultural dynamics within the *pesantren* community.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to provide a descriptive account of language use errors among *santri* in Gondanglegi sub-district, eschewing statistical generalizations (Creswell, 2007). Data were primarily collected through naturalistic observation and unstructured interviews. The investigation focused on instances of language interference across various linguistic levels: phonology (pronunciation), morphology (word structure), syntax (sentence structure), and lexis (word choice) (Mahsun, 2017). Beyond purely linguistic factors, the study also explored the influence of socio-cultural contexts and multilingualism. Data related to these non-linguistic dimensions were gathered through interviews with *santri*, *kyai* (*Pesantren* Leader), *ustaz* (teachers), and *pesantren* administrators.

Participants in this study were 87 rural *santri*, of whom 79 were successfully interviewed. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement. While five participants withdrew, and three could not be located, the resulting sample size provided sufficient data for analysis. Participants were included based on their status as active *santri* residing in rural *pesantren* within Gondanglegi sub-district and their daily engagement in both Madurese and Arabic communication. Exclusion criteria included *santri* who were temporary residents or those with limited exposure to both languages. The unstructured interviews explored the perceived causes and impacts of language interference, focusing on specific error types identified during observation. Documentary evidence, including notebooks, assignments, and other relevant materials, was also collected to supplement the interview data.

The data analysis in this study is grounded in a sociolinguistic framework, specifically language interference theory and the concept of diglossia, to unpack the observed phenomena. To address the first objective regarding the forms of interference, errors were categorized according to linguistic levels—phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon—as defined by Mahsun (2017) and observed in the speech of *santri*. Phonological interference was identified through phoneme alterations and pronunciation deviations; morphological interference through changes in word structure and affixation; syntactic interference through sentence construction errors and word order deviations; and lexical interference through inappropriate vocabulary usage. To identify the causal factors (second objective), the analysis considered linguistic variables (differences in language systems), sociocultural variables (multilingual environment, traditions, customs), and pedagogical factors (teaching methods). These indicators were drawn from interviews with *santri*, *kyai*, *ustaz*, and *pesantren* administrators, as well as from environmental observations. Finally, to explore the impact of interference on *santri*'s speaking abilities (third objective), the study analyzed how these errors affect communicative effectiveness and contribute to the formation of social relationships and linguistic identity within the *pesantren* community, with reference to the concepts of language adaptation and the identity function of language.

Data analysis followed the descriptive interactive model outlined by Miles and Huberman (2013, p. 96). This involved a three-stage process: data reduction, data display, and verification. In the data reduction phase, linguistic findings related to interference were summarized and categorized, prioritizing key information and excluding irrelevant details. This process facilitated a focused understanding of the

observed language use errors. The data display stage involved organizing the reduced data into descriptive narratives, diagrams, and/or relational frameworks to enhance clarity and systematic presentation. Finally, the verification stage entailed drawing conclusions based on a comprehensive review of the data, directly addressing the research questions. This iterative process allowed for a thorough analysis of the causes and impacts of language interference.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Interference of Local Languages into Foreign Languages

The following presents various forms of linguistic errors (interference) from local languages into foreign languages (Arabic) observed in the speech of rural Islamic boarding school students. These linguistic errors manifest in forms such as errors in pronunciation (phonology), word structure (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and vocabulary selection (lexical), as detailed in the table below. Additionally, the factors causing these linguistic errors, as well as the impacts resulting from such errors in language practice, are also explained.

For greater clarity, the following elaborates the descriptive results of data on local language interference with foreign languages in the speech of rural Islamic boarding school students, as outlined in the Table 1.

Table 1. Local Language Interference in the Speech of Rural *Santri*

No	Interferences	Speech Error	Actual Pronunciation	Intended Pronunciation	Explanation
1	Phonological	اِقْرَأْ الْبَابَ الْأَوَّلَ	/Al bebul awwel/	/Al babul awwal/	Change of phoneme /ba/ to /be/
		اِذْهَبْ إِلَى بَيْتِهَا	/beitihe/	/baitiha/	Change of phoneme /ha/ to /he/
		هُوَ يَأْكُلُ فِي الدُّكَّانِ	/ye?kulu/	/ya?kulu/	Change of phoneme /ya/ to /ye/
		الْحَمَّامُ يَغْنِي الْمَكَانَ لِقَضَاءِ الْحَاجَةِ	/hammam/	/ḥammam/	Change of consonant /ḥ/ to /h/

		أَحْيَانًا لَا أَخْضُرُ فِي الْمُحَاضَرَةِ	/ahyenana/	/aḥyaanan/	Change of phoneme /ya/ to /ye/
		هَذَا يَوْمُ الْإِثْنَيْنِ	/al isnain/	/Al isnain/	Change of consonant /š/ to /s/
		هُوَ يَدْرُسُ فِي الْمَدْرَسَةِ الثَّانَوِيَّةِ	/assanawiyah /	/assanawiyah /	Change of consonant /š/ to /s/
		خَلَّاصٌ! نَعَمْ، خَلَّاصٌ	/kholas/	/kholaş/	Change of consonant /ş/ to /s/
		كَمْ تَمَنَّاهَا؟ عِشْرُونَ	/isrun/	/isyrun/	Change of consonant /sy/ to /s/
2	Morphological	أَنَا مِنْ طَرِيقِ طَرِيقِ	/thoriq- thoriq/	ماسيا	Repetition for emphasis (Jalan-jalan in Indonesian)
3	Syntax	لماذا أنت يا أجي؟ بعد يأكل جاء	لماذا جئت متأخرًا؟	Why did you come late?	Error in sentence structure
4	Lexical	شُكْرًا كَثِيرًا	شُكْرًا جَزِيلًا	Thank You Very Much	Error in word choice or vocabulary

Based on the Table 1, there are four types of linguistic interference identified. First, phonological interference from the local language into the foreign language (Arabic) is evident in phoneme changes. For instance, the phoneme /ba/ changes to /be/ in the word الباب, /ha/ changes to /he/ in the word بيتها, and /ya/ become /ye/ in the word يأكل. In addition to vowel phoneme changes, consonant phoneme

alterations also occur in the speech of rural students. Examples include the change of the consonant /ħ/ to /h/ in words such as الحمام (/ħammam/ becomes /hammam/) and أحيانا (/ahyanan/ becomes /ahyanan/). Similarly, the consonant /š/ changes to /s/, as seen in the pronunciation of الاثنين and الثانوية, while /s/ changes to /ʃ/ in the word خلاص. Additionally, the consonant /sy/ becomes /s/ in the word عشرون (/isyrun/).

Second, morphological interference is observed in the alteration of word structures. An example is the reduplication in the phrase أنا من طريق طريق, which reflects a literal translation of the local language expression for "jalan-jalan" (/jelen-jelen/), whereas the correct Arabic expression should be ماسيا. Morphological interference also includes errors in affixation, where Arabic affixes are incorrectly combined due to the influence of native language patterns. For example, students may apply Indonesian plural markers incorrectly to Arabic words, resulting in morphological distortions.

Third, syntactic interference involves errors in sentence construction, such as in the phrases لماذا أنت يا أجي؟ بعد يأكل جاء. These constructions are influenced by the local language, exemplified by the phrase /Arapah kakeh tretan? Lastareh ade'er deteng/. The correct Arabic sentence should be لماذا جئت متأخرا؟ (Why did you come late?). Additionally, errors occur in subject-verb agreement, word order, and prepositional usage due to the differing syntactic rules between the students' native language and Arabic.

Fourth, lexical interference pertains to errors in vocabulary usage, as illustrated by شكرا كثيرا, where the word /katsira/ is influenced by the local language meaning "a lot," used in the context of expressing gratitude. The appropriate Arabic phrase for "thank you very much" is شكرا جزيلا. Lexical interference also occurs when students borrow words from their native language and attempt to arabize them, resulting in unnatural expressions.

The data presented in the table demonstrates that linguistic interference from the local language into Arabic occurs in the speech of students. These instances of interference result from the influence of the students' native language in their communication, leading to errors in phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical aspects of the foreign language. The occurrence of changes in speech at the level of sound system (phonology), word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and vocabulary (lexicon) are largely influenced by socio-cultural factors.

This is also explained by Mustikawati (2014), who notes that the unstable diglossia condition leads to the intrusion of elements from one language into another. The local cultural and linguistic traits possessed by rural students often color their language contact activities, whether in interactions among fellow students, with religious leaders like kyai (Islamic scholars) and ustaz (teachers). As a result, the patterns of linguistic interference become deeply ingrained in their communication practices, making it difficult to eliminate these errors without intensive linguistic training.

This phenomenon aligns with Susilowati's (2017) definition of interference as an indication of linguistic errors that emerge in bilingual or multilingual communities. Within this context, students who are learning Arabic must navigate between their native language and the foreign language, often resulting in unintended alterations in speech. Bialystok et al. (2020) further emphasize that in bilingual and multilingual settings, selecting the target language without interference from non-target languages

can be challenging, as speakers tend to blend linguistic elements from both. Consequently, language interference is not merely an error but rather a natural linguistic occurrence due to the cognitive process of language learning and adaptation.

The dominance of phonemes such as /e/, /h/, /s/, and partial reduplication frequently influences the speech patterns of students when speaking foreign languages. As a result, the foreign language (Arabic) spoken by the students undergoes changes at the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and lexical levels. This phenomenon of interference represents a common error in language use among people learning a foreign language (Arabic or another second or even third language).

The emergence of interference can also be analyzed through the six factors identified by Weinreich (1970: 64-65), which contribute to language interference: (1) speakers' ability to use more than one language, (2) lack of linguistic commitment within the community, (3) limited vocabulary among speakers or listeners, (4) the disappearance of rarely used words, (5) the need for equivalent terms, and (6) prestige or pride associated with the source language and its stylistic features. These factors manifest in the way students integrate elements of their local language into Arabic, particularly when encountering difficulties in finding direct equivalents for specific Arabic terms. Additionally, Faizah & Hanafi (2017) highlight that intentionality and habitual language mixing further reinforce this linguistic phenomenon. In the context of Arabic learning among students, the interplay of these factors underscores the complexity of linguistic adaptation and the persistent influence of their native language.

In sociolinguistic studies, errors or mistakes in language are often referred to as instances of linguistic accidents. These linguistic accidents often violate the rules of language use at various levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. Furthermore, changes occur from formal to informal or relaxed language forms. The presence of linguistic interference among students learning Arabic not only reflects their linguistic struggles but also illustrates the dynamic nature of language contact and adaptation.

To address this issue, several strategies can be employed. First, teaching methods should emphasize contrastive analysis between Arabic and the students' native language to highlight structural differences and prevent transfer errors. Second, increased exposure to authentic Arabic materials, such as Arabic literature, media, and conversation practice with native speakers, can help reinforce correct linguistic structures. Third, regular assessment and feedback on language use can guide students in identifying and correcting their errors systematically. By implementing these solutions, the impact of linguistic interference can be minimized, enabling students to develop greater proficiency in Arabic without the constraints of their native language influence.

3.2. Sociocultural Factors Influencing the Interference of Local Languages in Foreign Languages

The traditions of communities within the Madurese linguistic environment and multilingual speakers in the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) setting are products of a binding cultural heritage. These traditions constitute a primary factor contributing to various forms of deviations in the practice of foreign language use. Similarly, rural *pesantren* students, guided by human resources such as the *kyai* (religious leaders),

ustaz (teachers), *pesantren* administrators, and fellow students, act as both subjects and objects of communication. The use of foreign languages, particularly Arabic, in *pesantren* introduces a form of diglossia that aligns with its functions. The Arabic diglossia in *pesantren* evolves over time, adapting to the functional needs of its usage. In traditional *pesantren*, Arabic diglossia is shaped in accordance with the linguistic context of the *pesantren* environment.

Based on interviews with an informant (FI), it was explained that when students study with their *kyai* and *ustaz* using methods such as *sorogan* (one-on-one recitation with direct correction), *bandongan/wetonan* (group recitation where a teacher reads and students listen and take notes), *muḥāfaẓah* (memorization practices), and *syāwir/baḥs al-masāil* (deliberative discussions or problem-solving sessions), classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) is employed in various aspects of learning. The instructional language during these teaching processes also incorporates Arabic. This plays a critical role in the formation and preservation of the foreign language (classical Arabic), effectively transmitting both standardized Arabic discourse and communicative Arabic practices among students. This phenomenon is further explained by the multilingual speakers within the *pesantren* environment (diglossia), as illustrated in the Table 2.

Table 2. Phonemic Variations and Meanings of Local Language Words

No.	Words	Phonemic	Meaning
1	<i>bedeh</i>	/bedeh/	Exists / There is
2	<i>bedde</i>	/bedde/	Wrapper / Container
3	<i>Bedde'</i>	/bedde?/	Cosmetic powder / Face powder
4	<i>bedde</i>	/bedde/	Torn / Rip
5	<i>Tade'</i>	/tade?/	Does not exist / There is none
6	<i>sabe</i>	/sabe/	Rice field
7	<i>Sabe'</i>	/sabe?/	Put / Place

Secondly, partial word reduplication in the local language of rural santri communities involves the repetition of parts of words within utterances, reflecting the social and cultural characteristics of the community. This phenomenon of reduplication in the local language of santri also contributes to the occurrence of interference with foreign languages. This can be observed in the data presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Partial Word Reduplication and Its Influence on Arabic Interference

No	Root Word	Partial Word Reduplication	Arabic Language	Local Language Influence	Meaning
1	<i>Rajeh</i> /rajeh/	<i>Je-rajeh</i>	/kabir/	/bir-kabir/	Mostly big
2	<i>Raddin</i> /raddin/	<i>Din-raddin</i>	/jamil/	/mil-jamil/	Mostly beautiful

3	<i>Koros</i> <i>/koros/</i>	<i>Ros-koros</i>	<i>/nakhif/</i>	<i>/khif-nakhif/</i>	Mostly skinny
4	<i>kennik</i>	<i>Ni'-kenni'</i>	<i>/shaghir/</i>	<i>/ghir-shaghir/</i>	Mostly small

Thirdly, the use of humorous pantun (traditional rhyming poetry) is another characteristic of the local language of santri communities that influences language interference, particularly at the syntactic and lexical levels. The incorporation of local cultural elements to create humor in santri utterances fosters a sense of familiarity and closeness with interlocutors. This dynamic is illustrated in the data presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The Use of Humorous Pantun in Santri Language and Its Functions

No	Humorous Language	Meaning	Function
1	<i>Ker-plekker taenah embik // Ker-pekker pong ghi odhik</i>	Think about your fate while you are still alive	Advice
2	<i>Bedeh opas a tanak klareh// Caretanah Pas mareh</i>	The story has ended.	Conclusion of an oral story

The influence of local language and culture (the culture of the originating *pesantren* students) is a significant non-linguistic factor in shaping linguistic interference. In this regard, linguists argue that language cannot be separated from what is known as social context. Social context refers to the conditions underlying the emergence of certain language expressions. In linguistic terms, context refers to the words and sentences preceding and following the sentence being studied. Chaer and Leonie (2010, p. 62) assert that language is also the result of the social diversity of its speakers and the varied functions of language. However, context is not limited to just words or sentences; it also encompasses events, cultural norms, and the broader social environment that influence language use.

The use of a foreign language (Arabic) by rural *pesantren* students in conversations is inevitably influenced by the surrounding conditions. The expressions in the language that arise from a speaker are inseparable from the situation and environment around them. Therefore, in addition to linguistic factors, non-linguistic factors also play a crucial role in the formation of linguistic interference. Nevertheless, whatever emerges will always be within a contextual framework. The primary function, when viewed from the context of language and the circumstances underlying the interference of the local language on foreign language (Arabic) in the speech of rural *pesantren* students, is to facilitate social interactions. This interaction, which uses a foreign language (Arabic) in the speech of rural *pesantren* students, though often accompanied by linguistic errors, fosters intimacy within the *pesantren* language environment. Speakers are not overly bound by the rules or formalities of the language that might seem difficult. Instead, they prioritize communication effectiveness over linguistic accuracy.

Moreover, this linguistic adaptation can be understood through the framework of language change in social contexts. As noted by Falaky (2016), language is dynamic and continuously transforms in response to social interactions and cultural shifts. In the context of *pesantren* students, language interference occurs as part of their effort to

navigate multiple linguistic codes in daily interactions. The incorporation of local linguistic elements into Arabic serves as a communicative strategy that allows *pesantren* students to maintain cultural familiarity while engaging with a foreign language. The adaptation of Arabic vocabulary and grammar structures to match local linguistic patterns indicates that interference is not merely a sign of deficiency but also an adaptive linguistic strategy used to bridge communication gaps.

Furthermore, the emergence of a diglossia community (multilingual speakers in the *pesantren* environment) among rural *pesantren* students is a reality of necessity that cannot be avoided. This is similarly explained by Widi Astuti (2017), who notes that diglossia represents a relatively stable linguistic situation in building a language community. Within this framework, *pesantren* students frequently switch between their native language and Arabic, reflecting a form of code-mixing and code-switching that facilitates learning and social cohesion. This phenomenon also aligns with the sociolinguistic principle that language variation and change are natural consequences of language contact. The mixing of linguistic codes among *pesantren* students is influenced by the need to adapt to the communicative practices within the *pesantren* environment, which often blends formal Arabic instruction with informal local language interactions.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the influence of language interference on social identity is also significant. Language choice and adaptation among *pesantren* students shape their group identity and reinforce their connection to both the local and foreign linguistic traditions. Gao et al. (2022) argue that language not only serves as a means of communication but also constructs an individual's sense of belonging. In the *pesantren* context, the blend of Arabic with local languages becomes a marker of linguistic identity that differentiates *pesantren* students from other language users. This phenomenon highlights how language interference is not merely an error but also an expression of identity negotiation within the multilingual *pesantren* setting.

Additionally, the process of language interference can be examined through the lens of linguistic adaptation and cognitive processing in bilingual and multilingual contexts. Bialystok et al. (2020) emphasize that bilinguals continuously activate both languages in their cognitive system, making it difficult to entirely suppress elements of the non-target language. This explains why *pesantren* students, who operate in a multilingual setting, frequently exhibit patterns of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical interference when speaking Arabic. The interaction between cognitive mechanisms and socio-cultural factors thus contributes to the persistence of linguistic interference in *pesantren* communities.

The linguistic landscape of *pesantren* students is shaped by an interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic factors. While interference from the local language into Arabic may initially be perceived as an impediment to language acquisition, it also serves as a natural linguistic phenomenon that reflects adaptation and identity formation within a bilingual or multilingual context. As linguistic interference continues to be an inherent aspect of language learning, understanding its underlying causes and manifestations can help educators develop more effective pedagogical approaches that accommodate the linguistic realities of *pesantren* students while enhancing their proficiency in Arabic.

3.3. The Impact of Local Language Interference on Foreign Language

The occurrence of language interference, often considered a violation of linguistic rules, becomes an intriguing phenomenon in the communication of rural students, particularly in the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) setting. Errors in language, whether in phonology, morphology, syntax, or lexis, give rise to humor, jokes, and a sense of familiarity. As a result, foreign languages, such as Arabic, which are typically seen as rigid, rule-bound, and monotonous, become more engaging in the learning environment of the *pesantren*. The emergence of *pantun* (traditional rhyme) and *syiir* (poetry) in the local language, influenced by foreign languages, often serves as a unique method in *pesantren* education. This, in turn, affects the way students use foreign languages, imbuing the language with humor and a more relaxed atmosphere.

The influence of local cultural and linguistic factors, especially from the cultural background of the *santri* (Islamic students), plays a significant role in shaping non-linguistic factors. In this regard, linguists argue that language cannot be separated from what is known as the social context. Social context refers to the conditions underlying the emergence of certain language expressions. Linguistically, context means the words and sentences preceding and following a particular sentence being studied by someone. Chaer and Leonie (2010, p. 62) state that language is also a result of the social diversity of its speakers and the varied functions of language. However, context does not only consist of words or sentences but also includes events related to the cultural environment of the local language. The use of a foreign language (Arabic) by rural *santri* in conversations is inseparable from the surrounding conditions. The expressions in the language, emerging from a language user, are influenced by the situational and contextual factors present in their surroundings. Therefore, in addition to linguistic factors, non-linguistic factors also play a crucial role in the formation of language interference. Nonetheless, whatever emerges from language use remains tied to its context.

As noted by Falaky (2016), language reflects moral realities and adapts to social transformations. The dynamics of *santri's* language practices illustrate how linguistic adaptation aligns with socio-cultural developments, reinforcing their collective identity. Moreover, the interaction between local and foreign languages in *pesantren* fosters linguistic fluidity, allowing *santri* to express themselves in hybridized language forms. This phenomenon underscores the idea that language not only serves as a communication tool but also acts as a medium for cultural continuity and transformation (Hayakawa, Tannenbaum, Costa, Corey, & Keysar, 2017).

The primary function, when viewed through the lens of language context and the conditions underlying the emergence of local language interference on foreign (Arabic) language use in the utterances of rural *santri*, is to facilitate social interactions. Even though conversations involving foreign (Arabic) language often contain linguistic errors, these mistakes can foster familiarity and closeness within the rural *santri* language community. The language environment in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) dominated by the local language (Madura) plays a crucial role in producing multilingual speakers among rural *santri*. The local language culture (Madura) often capitalizes on its distinctiveness in linguistic or non-linguistic (cultural) systems, which contributes to the diglossia nature of the rural *pesantren* community.

According to Galkina & Radyuk (2019), the greater the differences between two

or more languages in use, the more significant the impact of interference on language users. This is evident in the *pesantren* setting, where *santri* from different regions bring their linguistic diversity, further enriching the language contact environment. Additionally, Nwaokugha & Danladi (2016) emphasize that language influences beliefs, choices, and moral decisions, which explains why the fusion of Arabic and local language in *pesantren* is more than just linguistic—it is also a reflection of socio-religious adaptation.

Utterances based on language codes serve as an essential medium for communication between individuals, allowing them to express opinions, thoughts, and identities during interaction and communication (Chow, Frey, & Naples, 2021; Suwastini, Wiraningsih, & Adnyani, 2020). The utterances in communication and interaction are often influenced by the environment, institutions, and teachers, who play a crucial role in setting examples to prevent arrogance, harshness, and ethical or religious neglect, as practiced by *santri* (students) in Islamic boarding schools (Normalita, 2020). In many cases, the utterances of *santri* in Java incorporate local languages as an effort to preserve linguistic heritage, as observed at Pondok Pesantren Durrotu Ahlissunah Waljamaah (Sih, Kurniati, & M.Pd, 2019). Strengthening the concept of *santri*'s utterances, as highlighted by Risnawati & Vitasari (2020), can reinforce the character of *santri* in facing the challenges of globalization.

In practice, *santri*'s utterances take two forms: direct and indirect. For instance, at Pondok Pesantren Darussaadah in Bandar Lampung, male *santri* employ direct and indirect utterances using three modes: declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, and imperative sentences, to convey advice, ideas, criticism, or thoughts (Sulistianawati, Supratno, & Indarti, 2020; Widodo, Febriyanto, Royani, & Febriyandi, 2022). Furthermore, Yoda & Mardiansyah (2020) explain that incorporating local languages through three linguistic code strategies—insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization—can be a means of integrating local language elements into Arabic, as practiced by female *santri* at Pondok Pesantren Al-Basyariyah. Consequently, combining various linguistic elements in *santri*'s utterances has led to a mixture of languages, including Javanese, Indonesian, and other foreign languages (Kurniasih & Zuhriyah, 2017).

In line with this, an informant (NAF) explained that the rules and expectations for rural *santri* to master foreign (Arabic) language, who come from diverse regions and cultural language backgrounds, make it more conducive and interesting. The informant (NAF) also explained that errors in language use (interference), which were previously considered to violate linguistic rules, are seen as intriguing events in the communication process of rural *santri*. This is because errors in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon can create a sense of humor, jokes, and closeness. Thus, the foreign (Arabic) language, often considered rigid, full of rules, and boring, becomes more engaging in the *pesantren* learning environment. The use of local language *pantun* (rhymed verses) and *syiir* (poetry) in teaching methods often influences the language of the *santri*, adding a humorous nuance to their foreign language expressions. In this regard, Alsuhaibani (2019) argues that foreign language dominance can challenge local identity and national loyalty. However, in the *pesantren* setting, rather than diminishing local linguistic identity, the integration of Arabic reinforces multilingual competence among *santri*, demonstrating how language

hegemony can be recontextualized as an empowering linguistic strategy.

Overall, this discussion highlights that local language interference among rural *santri* (Islamic boarding school students), although linguistically considered a deviation, serves significant sociocultural functions—such as fostering familiarity, facilitating humour, and acting as a medium for identity expression. This phenomenon challenges traditional views that regard interference merely as a hindrance, instead revealing the complexity of linguistic adaptation within the multilingual *pesantren* environment.

The novelty of this study lies in its sociolinguistic analysis of language interference in rural *pesantren*, particularly in illuminating the role of Madurese as an active mediator in the formation of the students' Arabic interlanguage, and in demonstrating how such interference contributes to social dynamics and the construction of collective identity. Unlike much of the global literature, which tends to focus narrowly on grammatical or phonological aspects and often adopts a class-based perspective, this study provides an ethnographic insight into socially embedded informal language use.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the concepts of interference and diglossia by showing that linguistic “errors” can function as strategies of adaptation and identity expression amidst the hegemony of the target language. Practically, the study implies the need for a more holistic pedagogical approach within *pesantren*, one that acknowledges and even leverages the role of local languages as linguistic resources in foreign language acquisition, rather than merely viewing them as obstacles. Such an approach may inform the development of curricula that are more responsive to the linguistic and sociocultural realities of *santri*.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of local language (Madurese) interference on Arabic acquisition among rural *santri*, addressing three key aspects: identifying phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical interference patterns; linking these to the unique sociocultural context of *pesantren* multilingualism; and demonstrating how such interferences foster community, playfulness, and shared identity, thus transforming Arabic into a more dynamic learning experience. This research contributes a novel sociolinguistic analysis, revealing that interference in this context acts as an active strategy for religious pedagogy and cultural preservation. It expands translanguaging theory by highlighting the sacred-secular duality in language mixing—a phenomenon rarely documented in traditional Islamic education globally. Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The qualitative-ethnographic approach, while providing rich, in-depth data from a specific context, limits the generalizability of findings to other *pesantren* settings or broader rural bilingual communities. Our focus on a Madurese-speaking *santri* population means the findings may not fully capture complexities in regions with different local languages. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported data from interviews, alongside observations, might introduce subjective biases. Building upon these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. A longitudinal study could track the long-term development and socio-cultural functions of interference across educational stages. Further quantitative studies assessing interference patterns across larger, more diverse *pesantren* samples could enhance generalizability. Investigating intervention designs

leveraging beneficial aspects of interference (e.g., humor, identity-building) in Arabic pedagogy could yield practical curriculum insights. Comparative studies across diverse linguistic regions or similar religious contexts worldwide would further enrich understanding of universal and context-specific interference and its implications for multilingual education.

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