



Dialect Accommodation and Social Identity: A Sociolinguistic Adaptation of Jakarta Students in the Medan Speech Community


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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 5 September 2025 Revised 8 December 2025 Accepted 20 December 2025 Available online 31 December 2025</p> <p>ISSN: 2986-3848</p> <hr/> <p>How to cite: Hidir, A., Malik, R., Hondro, S.R., & Nasution, A. F. (2025). Dialect accommodation and social identity: A sociolinguistic adaptation of Jakarta students in the Medan speech community. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 4(2), 78-82.</p>	<p>This study aims to explore the process of dialect adaptation in Medan by migrants from Jakarta, particularly among students at the University of North Sumatra. Using a descriptive qualitative method with interviews and observations, the study found that the dialectal differences between Jakarta and Medan created communication barriers during initial interactions, especially in terms of vocabulary, accent, and pronoun usage. However, migrants from Jakarta gradually adapted to the local dialect through intense social interactions and efforts to adjust to local cultural norms. This adaptation process accelerated social integration and helped migrants build stronger relationships with the Medan community. The study also shows that language change reflects migrants' efforts to be accepted in the local community. Dialect adaptation is not just about communication but also about the formation of social identity and acceptance of local culture. The study concludes that despite initial barriers, dialect adaptation in Medan becomes a crucial strategy in the social acculturation process that allows migrants to be accepted into their new environment.</p> <p>Keywords: Adaptation, Dialect, Communication.</p>



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1. Introduction

Language plays a vital role not only in communication but also in shaping, expressing, and preserving cultural identity (Zanah, 2025). In terms of cultural adaptation (Hidir, 2009), highlights the necessity of an ecological point to view regarding cultural transformation. He believes that adaptation is contextual and is affected by the interaction between a human and their social and cultural environment. Blend with the local social of Medan, including the dialogue and assortment they use are some occasions that students from Jakartans in Medan ought to accommodate. Not only does that mean a different way of speaking, but it also means a different way of thinking, with different actions in relation to the local community. The most important thing here is language to adapt. Language can be seen as a bridge for interaction, but at the same time, it is one of the most important factors playing a role in the construction of social and cultural identity. However, in multicultural Indonesia, differences in language/root dialect sometimes become an obstacle in communication (Prisayuna, 2023). Similarly, Medan one of the biggest cities at North Sumatra has its own way of speaking, that is different from the other area especially Jakarta. As for students from Jakarta, adjusting to local language is not just a matter of dialect, it is also an issue of social identity.

The adaptation to new dialects goes beyond simply learning new words or adjusting accents; it can also change how these newcomers relate to other students and how they perceive themselves in this new social setting. Language as a social identity is significant while establishing the social lives of newcomers in a different environment and how they are accepted in the new society. This research is important then this understanding about how language adaptation may have an impact on social integration and individual identity is golden in a multicultural environment. From this knowledge, it is expected that the society will be more tolerable and more recognisable of each other cultures which could help to establish an inclusive and well-ordered environment in the midst of social diversity.

Despite lots of studies observing the matters of language and dialect adaptation in intercultural communication, the studies investigate specific dialect adaptation like Medan dialect toward the migrants from Jakarta are rare. Several other studies have been conducted in similar conditions, but they are based on other perspectives and are less focused on domestic migration or change at the level of whole societies and communities, such as change at the level of multicultural megacities around the world (Howard et al., 1973). Yet, very little addresses dialect adaptation in a domestically situated setting, particularly within a university context, in which social engagement and identity development are notably impacted by local community dynamics.

In addition, despite the fact that Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Morris, 2021) has been extensively applied in the aforementioned studies to examine language adjustment in many social contexts, the existing research has predominantly investigated stress in international or ethnical levels. That is research on the adaptation of Jakarta from migrants of Medan dialect, especially the students of the University of North Sumatra, which has rarely been to talk to people. Students, as a specific group of migrants with particular modes of interaction in terms of their social identity and experiences of integration in a context characterised by social and economic orientations, have significantly different patterns of language adaptation and social identity with regards to the management of accents.

Considering that there is still very little literature available for this, this study specifically aims to capture the way in which migrant students from Jakarta adapt to the Medan dialect, and what the process of adapting languages in a local environment will do to their social life and identity formation. In addition, by examining the role that dialect has in assimilation into the social scene in a higher education environment, this study also hopes to deepen our understanding of the influences dialect has of the theory of Communication Accommodation (Howard et al., 1973) on a more localized level.

2. Method

This study utilises a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is a method that describes phenomena in depth and comprehensively. As stated by Rijali (2019) in qualitative research, abstraction, concepts, categorisation, and description emerge from the “events” we collect through field research. The use of qualitative research with a phenomenological approach has several reasons for using this technique, namely its flexibility in extracting the social dynamics that may occur through the interactions of Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra, who come from Jakarta. This is suitable for investigating the process of adaptation to the Medan dialect by migrants and its relationship with how it affects their social interactions and identity formation processes.

The subjects of this study were Sociology student at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra, who came from Jakarta and were members of the DKI Sociology Student Association (IMAS DKI) in Medan. The general criteria for this study are sociology students in their third to seventh semesters of study, aged between 18 and 21 years old, who are active sociology students from the city of Jakarta. There are two specific criteria that guide the selection of subjects for this study:

1. Dialect Diversity: The students from Jakarta speak with a different dialect than the students from Medan, making them a good example for observing the extent to which dialect adapts to its new setting.
2. Social Interaction: The target participants for this research were students who are IMAS DKI members; thus, the cohesiveness of the social network is clearer, hence having a better depth of interaction analysis

We collected our data from observations and interviews. The analysis employed domain analysis following the suggestion of Spradley (Spradley & Elizabeth, 1997). Based on this model it will be showing how the students who went here from Jakarta adapting with the Medan dialect and how this can influence their social interaction and the construction of their social identity. This way of analysing shows researchers if any patterns emerge on how they take up the local dialect, and to what extent this helps them conform to the wider social domain.

3. Result and Discussion

Communication is simply the way of interaction between an individual with other individual in daily life. Many aspects affect the way a person interacts with others; their culture and environment are significant factors. Jakarta and Medan dialects of Bahasa are both unique to only these two larger cities in relation to Bahasa. Just as a side note, the *Medanese* can be classified as Malay speakers (Purba, 2007). This gap can be a problem for the adolescents who immigrated from Jakarta. The communication will face several challenges due to the different language competence among individuals and also due to the cultural variety owned by the society around (Pingki Setiyo & Wiwid Noor, 2020). Accents and dialects between the two cities often clash. As an example, words or phrases commonly used in Jakarta are often foreign objects for Medan people, and vice versa.

The more multicultural aspect of Jakarta surrounding social contact between people is also different from Medan, which is a more Malay culture. Unlike Medan which has a more conservative local value, Jakarta as the capital city has more diverse dynamics and communication (ethics). It makes the Jakarta migrants uncomfortable or awkward in adapting to the local community. This is worsened by feeling rejected and treated like a foreigner, both by new friends and Medan residents.

It definitely takes time to get used with different lifestyle and social interaction pattern, between Jakarta and Medan. To adapt themselves to the new environment, students often need to sustain the mutual relationship with their families, comprehend the indigenous language, and embrace foreign culture (Aldiansyah, 2019). We can easily find migrants who have a problem in understanding the language of the country they end up living in, this phenomenon is common in the context of dialects. Dialects are spoken by certain groups of speakers and have their own special features with respect to pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The reason is that one of the peculiarities of Indonesia is that every region has its own dialect. And these dialectal diversities can be a little bit hindrance for the migrants from Jakarta as they will find it hard deciphering what the words are being used by the speakers from Medan. Such attenuation of the local dialect is often at the expense of migrants, who stand to lose from the stigmatization of their native accent as strange as well as from the fear of being laughed at for 'pretending' (Sætermo & Sollid, 2021).

As in those migrants who went public transport (*angkot*) in Medan, lots of them who have a wrong perception. "Where do you want to get, off? Asked by an *angkot* driver. Which, to the migrant ear from Jakarta, can sound like an insult or angry cursing, when the driver is merely advertising availability to take someone from Point A to Point B. This example shows how differences in dialect can lead to confusion and misunderstandings in day-to-day communication. But, although dialect differences generally lead to communication problems, the will to find wider social relationships demonstrates well the good disposition of newcomers.

The first couple of days where you feel a little awkward and have trouble forming coherent sentences are a small hurdle on the road to adjusting. Eventually, people from Jakarta who settle down in Medan are able to interact and build stronger ties with the local inhabitants. This adaptation process considers the study findings that an open attitude towards new experiences and a willingness to learn from individuals from different cultural backgrounds is extremely important.

Every region has its own vocabulary and dialect, which we use in our everyday lives. Vocabulary is a set of words that is used by a community whereas dialects include differences in pronunciation as well as intonation and vocabulary used by a set of speakers in a region or community. In Jakarta, the language is more casual and relaxed where as in Medan the language is formal, blunt and strict. That is, for instance, the term '*makan siang*' (lunch), in Jakarta pronounced as '*makan tengah hari*' (midday meal), whereas the more frequently heard in Medan is '*makan siang*'. Another differences like *es teh* or *teh dingin* (iced tea) in Jakarta more common replaced with "*mandi*" or *s'manis dingin*' (cold sweet) in Medan this made confuse both sides.

In addition to differences in vocabulary, the way we speak also varies by dialect. The second person pronouns are, for example, '*kamu*' or '*lu*' in Jakarta, and '*anda*' or '*kau*' which are more familiar in Medan. Then words for self, in Jakarta say '*gue*' or '*gua*', but in Medan said "*aku*" or '*awak*'. The similarities and differences in the words means communication is hard; even when the words mean the same thing, they are pronounced and carry different social connotations.

The culture of Medan will be totally different from Jakarta therefore the variation of dialogue in Medan explains regarding an adjustment also with its culture at the same process the Jakarta people needs the knowledge regarding not everyone speaks within Jakarta dialogue. Jakarta shows a much more cosmopolitan culture including many ethnicities and social background whereas Medan is a Malay city attached with Batak ethnicity. For example, in terms of pronunciation of vowels, the letters 'e' and 'o' when pronounced in Jakarta

are somewhat sharper and clearer than in Medan, where the pronunciation is flatter or even replaced by other vowels.

And the disparity of social norms and traditions between the two cities also influences the social acclimatization of the newcomers. For instance, methods of asking for a greeting, public behaviour, or social event rules may differ. Due to this, Jakartans should follow the local social norms in Medan if they want to be part of the community.

Jakarta people also need to learn Medan dialect to be welcomed within the community in the context of social mixing. Learning the local dialect is an essential social adjustment strategy in the acculturation. Formal and informal contacts with the local community speed up the process of language change and make Jakartans more accepted as Medan residents and ultimately, they are socially accepted too.

Dialect and vocabulary change not only relate to common practices, but also signal individuals who try to improve their social networks. These changes are also a means of bridging cultural gaps and enhancing a sense of participation in the community. Adjusting to a new language is just one part of orienting oneself to a new culture, a necessary piece of the puzzle that is social identity development in a place where you belong.

From this series, the process of dialect adaptation by migrants from Jakarta in Medan can be explained as follows:

1. Initial Communication Barriers

- Dialect differences between Jakarta and Medan create communication barriers, especially in terms of vocabulary and accent.
- Migrants from Jakarta often find it difficult to understand words or phrases that are unfamiliar to the people of Medan, and conversely, the people of Medan may not understand how the migrants speak.
- For example, misunderstandings can occur when public transport drivers speak in a Medan dialect that sounds like swearing, when in fact they are only offering transport services.

2. Dialect Adaptation Process

- In this phase, migrants begin to adapt to the use of the Medan dialect. Intensive social interaction with the local community, both in formal and informal contexts, accelerates language adaptation.
- This adjustment includes changes in vocabulary, pronoun usage, and pronunciation. The process also involves adjusting attitudes, where migrants learn to be more open to new experiences and try to conform to local social norms.

3. Changes in Social Identity

- Dialect adaptation not only affects communication skills, but also plays a role in shaping the social identity of newcomers. Through the use of the local dialect, individuals demonstrate their efforts to be accepted and recognised in the larger community.
- This adjustment is often accompanied by changes in mindset and perspectives on the social and cultural values that exist in the new place of residence.

4. The Influence of Local Culture on Adaptation

- The local culture of Medan, which is strongly influenced by Malay and Batak cultures, has a significant impact on how migrants adapt, both in terms of language and social behaviour.
- Migrants adapt not only to the dialect, but also to the social norms that exist in Medan, such as how to greet people, how to behave in public places, and how to interact at social events.

5. Advantages of Dialect Adaptation

- Dialect adaptation provides advantages in building stronger social relationships and increasing social acceptance. Newcomers who can communicate using the local dialect feel more accepted in the local community.
- In addition, the use of the local dialect also strengthens a sense of involvement and increases an individual's confidence in interacting with the local community.

Thus, the present study revealed that the differences in dialect and culture between Jakarta and Medan influences the communication skills of students that are originally from Jakarta and living in Medan. A different dialect in terms of vocabulary, and accent is usually the first barrier to getting in touch with the local people. Consistent with past research that indicated language and dialect differences may result in miscommunication and potentially social strain in communication between culturally, linguistically, or ethnically diverse dyads (Howard et al., 1973).

As an exemplification, the interpretations on the encounters between Jakartans migrants and public transport drivers who speak the Medan dialect, right off the bat underlines that the skill of the nearby

vernacular is basic for day-by-day correspondence. Research by Bourhis et al. Somewhat similar, but based on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), (Howard et al., 1973) also indicates that in intergroup communication, individuals will modify their speech in order to decrease social and cultural distance. A point here is that the acculturation process will be easier if an acculturating person is less resistant to change or if he or she is willing to change and adapt to the person of other culture through a process called acculturation and in order to acculturate people of Jakarta who moves to Medan his or her accent will change to Medan dialect, so that means Jakarta can adapt to the Medan dialect.

Tabel 1. Domain Analysis in Medan Dialect Conversation

Theme	Description	Relevance to Findings
Initial Communication Barriers	Dialect differences between Jakarta and Medan caused communication difficulties at the beginning of interactions, especially in vocabulary and accent.	Newcomers from Jakarta felt awkward and experienced misunderstandings in everyday communication in Medan.
Dialect Adaptation Process	Newcomers from Jakarta try to adapt to the Medan dialect through intensive social interaction	Dialect adaptation through continuous social interaction accelerates the understanding and use of the local dialect
Social Identity and Adaptation	Dialect change serves as part of the formation of social identity and acceptance within the local community	The use of the Medan dialect by migrants reflects their efforts to be accepted and build relationships with the community.
Social Norms and Cultural Change	Newcomers need to adapt to local social and cultural norms in Medan	Adapting to the lifestyle and social interactions in Medan accelerates the process of social integration
Advantages of Dialect Adaptation	Dialect adaptation facilitates social integration and builds stronger relationships with the local community	Social acceptance increases, and confidence in communication grows over time.

Source: Processed Research Data, 2025

Furthermore, the findings of the study also showed that the language modification of the migrant students was not limited to dialect but also extended to their vocabulary and most appropriate pronouns to be used in the Medan dialect. This result is the same as we might expect from sociolinguistic theory which suggests language acts as a social identity tool connecting individuals to a particular speech community (D Robert Worley, 2021). With the aim of woven into the greater community rather than being perceived as outsiders, people not only cut down their number of words per minute with local dialects, but also are hungry for the acceptance.

The alteration of the vocabulary and accent as bridges to a lower social and cultural gap between migrants and the local community. This exemplifies the role that language socialisation plays in creating tighter social ties in the community. As argued by Hidir, the use of local dialects is one of the ways a the social identity and bonding of individuals into the larger community is negotiated in the process of language socialisation (Hidir et al., 2023).

But another key finding in this study are the confidence issues that many immigrants are facing and that becomes serious and worsen during the transition period. Lack of acceptance or being taken as stranger can delay the acculturation process as the Communication Accommodation theory, which indicates that shifts in communication styles are a function of social and psychological input (Giles et al., 1991).

4. Conclusion

The results of the study indicates that, dialect differences between Jakarta and Medan become the first obstacle for Jakarta students who live in Medan. Migrants from Jakarta may have trouble first communicating with the locals, but within a few months they can adapt to the Medan dialect. This adjustment is not just limited to communication ability, but also contributes to social identity and to the social bonding with the local

society. Moreover, the Medan dialect is also extremely used by the migrants within social integration with the intention to be well received in their new social ecosystems. A social environment that supports interaction on campus and in life speeds up the process of getting accustomed to the dialect and strengthens the interpersonal bond. The importance of this study is the understanding that dialect adjustment goes beyond mere words to bridge the mingling of communication through social acceptance, as well as cultural overtones of a new environment to be each other friendly among family, friends, profession, and peers.

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