

Local Language as Communication Capital in Building Seller and Buyer Trust in Traditional Markets of Surakarta

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ABSTRACT

Traditional markets in Surakarta face declining visitor numbers as modern retail and online trading expand. Local language, Javanese in its ngoko and krama speech levels, is presumed to be one of the communicative advantages distinguishing traditional markets from other transaction spaces. This study examines how local language functions as communication capital in building seller-buyer trust in three traditional markets of Surakarta: Pasar Gede Hardjonagoro, Pasar Klewer, and Pasar Legi, drawing on cultural capital and social capital theory, extended through communication accommodation theory and heuristic-trust literature. The study uses a focused ethnographic case study design, combining participant observation with in-depth interviews with five core informants and supplementary interviews with twenty additional traders, buyers, and market managers across the three markets, for a total of twenty-five informants; data were analyzed using the interactive model of analysis and checked through source and technique triangulation and member checking. Results show local language functions as communication capital through three interrelated mechanisms: dynamic selection of speech levels marking familiarity and respect, code accommodation by traders that widens social acceptance toward buyers of differing linguistic backgrounds, and local language as a trust heuristic sustaining buyer loyalty even over price. The study also identifies a regeneration challenge: declining krama proficiency among younger traders, unsettling the assumption that this advantage will persist unattended. The findings contribute theoretically to culture-based commercial-communication studies and practically to market managers and local government

formulating revitalization policies treating local language as a living, cultivable communication asset.

Keywords: *local language; communication capital; trust; traditional market; social capital*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional markets are among the social spaces richest in face-to-face human communication in Indonesia. Unlike modern retail, which emphasizes efficiency and impersonal transactions, traditional markets still preserve intense face-to-face communication between sellers and buyers, complete with bargaining, small talk, and culturally loaded greetings (Baskara & Nurhayati, 2023). In Surakarta, this communicative space persists today, with 44 traditional markets accommodating thousands of traders who depend on daily buying and selling for their livelihood. Nevertheless, these markets face considerable pressure: the Head of the Surakarta City Trade Office has reported a decline in traditional-market visitors of around 30 percent, as reported by traders, in line with a shift in public shopping patterns toward modern retail and online trading platforms. This condition underscores the importance of re-identifying the distinctive strengths of traditional markets that neither modern retail nor online platforms possess, one of which is the personal relationship built through communication, including the use of local language.

Local language, here Javanese with its ngoko and krama speech levels, is not merely a tool for conveying price and product information; it is also a marker of social identity, emotional closeness, and mutual respect between interlocutors (Penttinen, 2025). From a social-capital perspective, its use can be understood as a form of cultural capital as proposed by Bourdieu (1986), inherited through socialization and converted into symbolic and economic advantage. Putnam (1993) similarly emphasizes that networks, norms, and trust growing out of repeated interaction form the core of social capital that allows exchange to run more efficiently. Local language, accordingly, functions as a medium that activates cultural capital while nurturing social capital between sellers and buyers (S.E. Mandaru et al., 2025); this pattern reflects a broader sociolinguistic dynamic in which language choice

in commercial settings is rarely neutral, routinely encoding solidarity, distance, deference, or exclusion.

The urgency of examining this phenomenon in Surakarta is amplified by the city's cultural position as the historical seat of the Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran courts, widely regarded as a principal custodian of refined Javanese linguistic tradition, including the elaborate krama register historically tied to the court environment (Walenta et al., 2024). This inheritance means local-language erosion in Surakarta's public life touches a register carrying particular historical and symbolic weight for the wider Javanese-speaking world (Armaijn et al., 2024), even as the city's markets sit within a rapidly digitalizing regional economy in which younger consumers increasingly compare prices via mobile applications and expect cashless, low-friction transactions (Rosmeli et al., 2025).

Prior studies show local language is consistently present and functions distinctively in buying-selling interaction across contexts. At the level of register selection, a study at Pasar Krempyeng Pon-Kliwon in Ponorogo shows ngoko builds closeness without social distance while krama displays respect, a pattern affirmed by studies of politeness in the traditional markets of Arengka, Pekanbaru, and of trader politeness in markets of Denpasar and Badung. A study comparing traditional, modern, and online markets concludes that Javanese and Madurese use is consistently more dominant in traditional markets than in the other two, which tend toward formal Indonesian or foreign terms (Lutfiani et al., 2025). Research on Pasar Gede Hardjonagoro affirms that social capital, including trust and networks formed through repeated interaction, sustains the market's existence as both a culinary-tourism destination and an economic space (Xaverius et al., 2025), though without specifically foregrounding local language, opening space for the present inquiry.

Beyond Indonesia, comparable dynamics appear elsewhere: a discourse study of Nigerian banks, markets, and communication outlets, framed through Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, finds traders and customers strategically shift among English, Pidgin, Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa to secure advantage, vendors accommodating customers persuasively and customers accommodating vendors for better bargains (Ali et al., 2022),

indicating that Surakarta's phenomenon is part of a broader, cross-culturally observable pattern. A related strand documents eroding krama competence among younger Javanese speakers (Putri et al., 2025); Sujono (2020) identifies reduced everyday practice and weakening intergenerational transmission as central drivers, a pattern a Banyudono study attributes similarly to insufficient childhood krama exposure (Sujono et al., 2020), suggesting the regeneration challenge this study later identifies among traders is part of a wider pattern that traditional markets, as a still-living site of krama use, may be positioned either to sustain or, if neglected, to lose (Atmawati, 2021).

Taken together, these studies reveal three points: local language is consistently present and functions distinctively in market buying-selling interaction across regions; its function intersects directly with the economic relations and social capital of market actors; and studies specifically positioning local language as communication capital in building trust, analyzed from a communication-science perspective, remain limited, particularly for Surakarta's traditional markets. This gap is the study's point of departure.

Four interrelated bodies of theory anchor the analysis. Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital holds that competencies acquired through socialization, including command of local speech levels, convert into symbolic and material advantage within a field; in the market, fluency in Javanese speech levels functions as embodied cultural capital, uncertified yet recognized and rewarded (Oktavianingtyas et al., 2025). Bourdieu further distinguishes embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital (Bourdieu, 2024); local-language fluency falls squarely in the embodied state, a durable disposition acquired through years of immersion rather than formal instruction, and therefore not instantly transferable, purchased, or delegated the way objectified or institutionalized capital can be (Schlesinger, 2024) — a character that explains both its authenticity and its fragility, since it cannot simply be issued to a new generation of traders but must be lived into through sustained practice. Putnam's (1993) social capital frames networks, reciprocity norms, and trust arising from repeated interaction as resources that make exchange more efficient; repeated buying-selling interactions mediated by local language accumulate into a stock of relational trust

that lowers subsequent transaction costs. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), formulated by Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis (1973) and elaborated in later reviews (Firdaus Ridwan Sutarta et al., 2024), explains why speakers adjust speech, including convergence toward an interlocutor's style, to gain approval and facilitate understanding (Dragojevic et al., 2024), providing vocabulary for the recurring pattern of traders shifting code depending on a buyer's perceived competence. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) integrative trust model identifies a trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity as jointly determining trust, moderated by the trustor's propensity to trust, offering a lens for why fluent, situationally appropriate krama use is read by buyers as evidence of trustworthiness rather than neutral style. Finally, trust as a cognitive shortcut used when full information is unavailable connects to Luhmann's (1979) argument that familiarity is a precondition for trust, and to Gulati's (1995) finding that repeated ties reduce perceived opportunism risk over time. Read together, these frameworks suggest a causal chain: local language operates as cultural capital activated through accommodative speech-level choices (CAT), whose repeated, competent use accumulates into social capital in the form of a trust heuristic, summarized in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, which guided both data collection and the analytic categories used below.

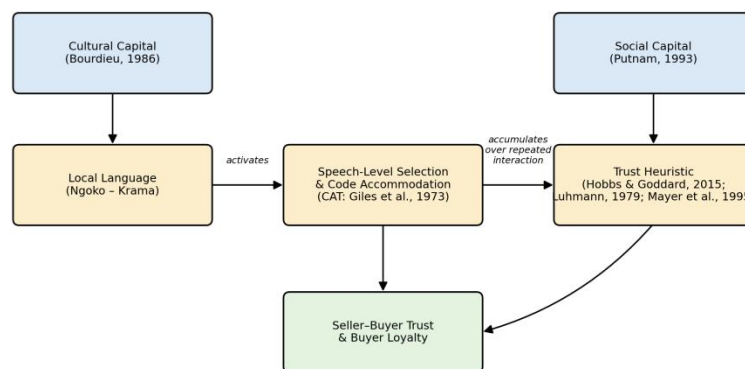


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: From Local Language to Seller-Buyer Trust

If local language genuinely functions as communication capital that builds trust and loyalty, understanding how it operates can inform revitalization strategies oriented not only toward physical infrastructure but toward the communicative and cultural assets already embedded in traders. This matters theoretically, by extending cultural- and social-capital concepts into commercial communication, an area still dominated by sociolinguistic approaches rarely framed explicitly as trust-based interpersonal communication; empirically, by providing contextual field data on how Surakarta's traders and buyers use local language across speech levels to sustain long-term relationships; and practically, by informing market managers and local government seeking to preserve local language as a communication asset rather than a static heritage item. This urgency is sharpened by generational timing: the traders most fluent in krama are, by this study's informants' account, disproportionately senior, and if that competence is not reliably passed to younger traders through ordinary family or community socialization, the window for deliberate intervention narrows. Based on the foregoing, this study aims to examine how local language is used as communication capital in building trust between sellers and buyers in Surakarta's traditional markets, situating the phenomenon within social- and cultural-capital theory, elaborated through communication accommodation theory and heuristic-trust literature, and connecting it to the markets' existential challenges amid changing consumption patterns.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Setting

This study employs a focused ethnographic case study design (Ridlo, 2023), combining the case study's bounded, context-embedded logic with an ethnographic commitment to sustained, in-context observation of naturally occurring buying-selling talk, rather than researcher-elicited data alone. The design was chosen because the research objective is to understand in depth the situated mechanism by which local language operates as communication capital within a specific social and linguistic field, not to test a measurable

cause-and-effect relationship. Fieldwork was conducted over eight weeks at three traditional markets in Surakarta: Pasar Gede Hardjonagoro, Pasar Klewer, and Pasar Legi, selected for the diversity of their visitor profiles and their significance to the city's economic and cultural life. Pasar Gede Hardjonagoro represents a market with a strong culinary-tourism dimension and a mixed local–tourist visitor base; Pasar Klewer represents a large-scale textile and batik trading center drawing buyers from across the region; and Pasar Legi represents a market whose transactions are dominated by daily necessities among long-standing, habitual customers. This variation allowed the mechanisms of local-language use to be observed across differing degrees of buyer familiarity and commodity type.

The three markets were treated not as strictly parallel replications of a single case but as an embedded, within-site design: the core unit of analysis is the buyer–trader relationship as it unfolds through repeated local-language interaction, observed across three settings differing in scale, commodity focus, and visitor composition, so that recurring patterns could be interpreted with greater confidence as genuine features of the phenomenon rather than artifacts of a single market's character.

Participants and Data Collection

Data comprise primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through prolonged participant observation of everyday buying-selling interaction at the three locations, conducted across multiple visits and times of day to capture variation in pace and crowd composition, and through two tiers of interviews. The first tier consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five core informants selected using purposive sampling to represent the diversity of positions and experiences of traditional-market users: one habitual buyer with a housewife background, one routine buyer with a private-sector employee background, one young-generation buyer with a university-student background, one buyer with a non-Javanese migrant background, and one head manager of Pasar Legi representing the market-management perspective (Notoatmodjo, 2025). These five interviews were extended, open-ended, and audio-recorded, allowing informants' own framing of their experience to surface with minimal researcher steering.

To broaden the empirical base beyond these five core accounts, and directly to bring traders' own voices into the data rather than relying on buyers' and management's accounts of them, a second tier of shorter, semi-structured field interviews was subsequently conducted with fifteen additional informants, five at each market: two traders, two buyers, and one market manager per site. A third tier added five further semi-structured interviews with young buyers (20-26) in Pasar Klewer's fashion segment, to strengthen direct representation of younger-generation buyer experience beyond the single young informant in the core tier. All supplementary interviews followed a common guide covering speech-level choice, code accommodation, trust, closeness, respect, loyalty, and social integration in market interaction, and were recorded as structured field notes and analytic memos rather than full verbatim transcripts, given their role as a breadth-oriented complement to, rather than a replacement for, the five in-depth core interviews. Combined, the study therefore draws on twenty-five informants across the three markets: five core informants interviewed in depth, fifteen supplementary informants (six traders, six buyers, and three managers) interviewed more briefly for triangulation and range, and five further young buyers interviewed to deepen the youth-buyer perspective specifically. This design directly addresses two limitations of a five-informant sample relative to markets each accommodating thousands of traders: it enlarges the base of accounts on which the study's claims rest, and it brings trader informants into the data directly rather than only through buyers' and managers' reports of them, though it does not fully resolve the latter concern, since none of the six trader informants interviewed, aged 44 to 61, represents a trader from the youngest working generation; this residual gap is addressed explicitly as a limitation below.

Secondary data were obtained from documents, reports of relevant agencies such as the Surakarta City Trade Office, and prior studies. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian and Javanese according to each informant's preference; informants were briefed verbally on the research topic and their right to decline any question or stop at any time, verbal consent was obtained and recorded before proceeding, and no informant withdrew

once an interview had begun. Names presented in this article, for both the five core and fifteen supplementary informants, are pseudonyms protecting informants' identities. Observation notes were expanded into field notes within the same day of each session to minimize recall loss and were cross-checked against interview material during data reduction.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of analysis, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, carried out cyclically rather than linearly so researchers could return to the field when additional data were needed (Sugiyono, 2020). Data reduction focused the observational notes and interview material around recurring themes of speech-level choice, code accommodation, and expressions of trust; data display organized these into the analytic categories reported below; and conclusion drawing involved constantly comparing interpretations against the theoretical framework. Table 1 summarizes the three main themes from data reduction, their conceptual basis, and an illustrative excerpt from the core-informant data.

Table 1. Data Reduction: Themes, Conceptual Basis, and Illustrative Data

Theme	Conceptual Basis	Illustrative Excerpt (Informant)
Speech-level selection	Ngoko as relational default; krama as a marked, situational signal of respect	Marni: ngoko felt like being served “at a relative’s place”; a shift to krama during a complaint read as “seriousness and respect”
Code accommodation	Communication Accommodation Theory – convergence toward interlocutor’s linguistic competence (Giles et al., 1973)	Rara: trader switched to ngoko/casual Indonesian for her; Made: trader used mixed Indonesian – simple Javanese for him
Trust heuristic	Trust as a cognitive shortcut reducing the need for verification	Slamet: no longer re-checks the scale/price with a familiar

	(Hobbs & Goddard, 2015); familiarity as precondition for trust (Luhmann, 1979)	trader; Marni: stays loyal despite cheaper prices elsewhere
Regeneration challenge	Embodied cultural capital that is not automatically transmitted (Bourdieu, 1986); language shift among younger speakers (Suryadi, 2017)	Yanto: younger traders' weaker krama "could potentially weaken" the market's relational strength

The supplementary fifteen-informant data were analyzed separately as a cross-case matrix (Table 3, presented in the Discussion), coded for a dominant theme per informant and then compared against the three mechanisms derived from the core data, functioning as a form of data-source triangulation across a substantially larger and more trader-inclusive base than the core interviews alone provide.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Validity was addressed through source triangulation, comparing accounts across informants with different backgrounds and across a much larger set of informant positions than the core five alone; technique triangulation, comparing interviews with direct field-observation findings; and member checking, restating key quotations back to core informants to confirm intended meaning had been captured accurately. Reliability was supported through prolonged engagement across the eight-week fieldwork period, allowing recurring patterns to be distinguished from one-off remarks, and through an audit trail of field notes, interview recordings, and analytic memos linking each reported theme to its source data. The researchers' own position as members of the Surakarta communication-studies community, familiar with everyday ngoko and krama usage, offered the practical advantage of following code-switching in real time without relying on post hoc translation, which can flatten situational cues; this familiarity also required deliberate reflexive effort during data reduction to avoid treating locally obvious meanings as self-evidently confirmed rather than as interpretations to be checked against informants' own stated understanding.

DISCUSSION

Informant Profile

The core data draw on five informants spanning positions relevant to the phenomenon under study: Marni (52), a habitual buyer with a housewife background shopping at the same stall for about 20 years; Slamet (45), a routine buyer with a private-sector employee background shopping two to three times weekly for roughly eight years; Rara (22), a university student representing the younger generation with about two years of independent shopping; Made (38), a non-Javanese migrant of about three years' residence with a year of regular market shopping; and Yanto (55), head manager of Pasar Legi for about ten years, offering a management-level view across many trader-buyer relationships. This deliberate spread, rather than a statistically representative sample, was intended to surface variation in how local language is experienced and its trust-building function activated or extended toward less fluent speakers.

Table 2. Informant Profile (Core and Youth-Buyer Tiers)

Pseudonym	Age	Role / Background	Duration of Market Interaction
Marni	52	Habitual buyer; housewife	±20 years at the same regular stall
Slamet	45	Routine buyer; private-sector employee	±8 years, 2–3 visits per week
Rara	22	Young-generation buyer; university student	±2 years of independent shopping
Made	38	Migrant buyer; non-Javanese background	±1 year of regular shopping (±3 years residing in Surakarta)
Yanto	55	Head manager, Pasar Legi	±10 years in the management role
Alya	20	Young buyer; university student (Pasar Klewer, fashion segment)	±2 years of shopping

Rizky	23	Young buyer; private-sector employee (Pasar Klewer, fashion segment)	±3 years of shopping
Fajar	26	Young buyer; freelance graphic designer (Pasar Klewer, fashion segment)	±4 years of shopping
Nabila	22	Young buyer; university student (Pasar Klewer, fashion segment)	±3 years of shopping
Bagas	25	Young buyer; young entrepreneur (Pasar Klewer, fashion segment)	±5 years of shopping

This core tier is supplemented by fifteen informants across the three markets (six traders, six buyers, three managers; see Table 3), which broaden the base beyond a single market's manager and this study's original five and bring trader accounts into the data directly. A third tier adds five young buyers (20-26) interviewed in Pasar Klewer's fashion segment, reported alongside the core tier in Table 2 to strengthen direct representation of younger buyers beyond Rara alone.

Speech Level Selection Patterns in Buying-Selling Interaction

The data show ngoko as the default register in everyday buying-selling interaction, with krama emerging as a situational marker. Marni recounted that ngoko greetings from her regular trader made her "feel as though she were shopping at a relative's place," whereas an occasional shift to krama, for instance over a defective item, read to her as "seriousness and respect that actually strengthened her trust" — consistent with findings from Pasar Krempyeng Pon-Kliwon that ngoko builds closeness while krama conveys respect. Yanto observed that traders "fluent in Javanese and flexible in it, including knowing when to use ngoko or krama, generally have more numerous and more loyal regular customers," indicating register switching is a communicative skill with direct economic consequences. Read through Communication Accommodation Theory, this switching is a form of convergence: traders reading situational cues correctly converge their speech toward what the relationship requires, interpreted by buyers as competence, care, and trustworthiness

(Dragojevic et al., 2024). The supplementary data reinforce this: across the fifteen additional informants, speech-level selection tied to familiarity and respect was the most frequently coded theme (Table 3), appearing independently at all three markets. Krama's comparative rarity is precisely what gives its deployment communicative force, consistent with a layered system in which ngoko supplies an everyday baseline and krama a reserve of heightened meaning.

Local Language as Cultural Capital in Transactions

Findings from the younger and migrant informants show how command of local language functions as cultural capital convertible into social acceptance. Rara, whose krama ability is limited, initially felt awkward when addressed in krama but found the trader she visited repeatedly "adjusted by switching to ngoko or a casual mix of Indonesian," which made her "feel accepted and more comfortable returning." Made experienced a parallel accommodation: greetings that gradually mixed "Indonesian and a little simple Javanese," which he read as the trader's effort to sustain communication despite his non-native status. Both cases show that cultural capital, per Bourdieu (1986), is not held statically by native speakers alone but actively negotiated through traders' code-accommodation, echoing evidence from Nigerian marketplaces where vendors accommodate customers linguistically as a persuasive strategy across ethnic differences (Ayeni, 2021). The data contain no clear instance of traders using divergence, CAT's opposite pole in which speakers accentuate linguistic distinctiveness (Giles et al., 1973); every documented code adjustment moved toward convergence, plausibly because a completed transaction depends on mutual comprehension and a buyer's willingness to return.

Five further interviews with young buyers (20-26) in Pasar Klewer's fashion segment sharpen this picture. Alya explained that when a trader accommodated her speech she felt comfortable asking about fabric, size, and price, echoing the pattern seen with Rara and Made. Rizky's account complicates a simple ngoko-as-informal reading: ngoko is not inherently rude, its meaning depending on tone and relationship rather than register alone. Fajar's experience shows accommodation extending beyond price into product knowledge,

as switching between Indonesian and courteous Javanese opened longer conversation about batik motifs. Nabila named krama as a barrier for younger buyers, reporting that traders adjusting downward, rather than testing her Javanese, read as good service and encouraged her return. Bagas anchored trust primarily in transactional honesty, with relaxed Javanese as secondary reinforcement, a useful corrective against overstating language's role relative to honest dealing. These accounts extend the core and supplementary data by showing code accommodation and trust heuristics operating similarly among fashion buyers as among daily-necessity buyers, while adding two refinements: register alone does not determine perceived politeness, and language can function as a gateway to richer product interaction, not only a marker of relational closeness.

This pattern also speaks to a conceptual question worth addressing directly: if krama proficiency is concentrated among senior traders and is not reliably passed down, is it still meaningful to call it "cultural capital," or only a form of social capital confined to an aging cohort? Bourdieu's own account answers this by distinguishing capital's present convertibility from its guaranteed inheritance: embodied cultural capital is, by definition, unevenly distributed across a field and must be actively reproduced through practice rather than automatically transmitted (Bourdieu, 2024). That krama fluency currently functions as cultural capital for the traders who hold it, converting into the loyalty and trust this study documents, is not contradicted by its precarious transmission; rather, the transmission gap identifies where that capital's future stock is at risk, which is precisely the regeneration concern developed further below.

Local Language and the Formation of Social Capital (Seller–Buyer Trust)

The data show local language functioning as a trust heuristic. Slamet explained that he chooses traders who habitually speak Javanese with him because he "does not need to re-check the scale or the price," while a sudden, overly formal Indonesian greeting made him "feel a distance, as if being served as a stranger." Marni affirmed she "never thinks of switching to another trader even though prices elsewhere are sometimes cheaper," citing trust in her regular trader's honesty. This is consistent with trust as a decision-making

heuristic relied upon when full counterpart information is costly or unavailable (Hobbs & Goddard, 2015), with Luhmann's (1979) argument that familiarity supplies a stable frame of expectation, and with Gulati's (1995) finding that repeated ties reduce perceived risk over time, aligning with Putnam's (1993) social capital. This extends prior research on Pasar Gede Hardjonagoro showing social capital's role in sustaining the market (Munawaroh et al., 2025) by identifying local language as a communicative component that constructs that capital.

A second conceptual question follows: since both traders and buyers may be strategically adjusting their language to secure a better outcome, is what is documented here genuine trust or simply a shared bargaining tactic? Viewed through Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) integrative model, the two are not mutually exclusive. A single accommodating utterance can be instrumental in the moment, while its consistent repetition across visits, which Slamet explicitly cites as his reason for no longer re-checking price, is what signals integrity and converts an initially strategic adjustment into a durable trust heuristic; correct krama and ngoko use signals ability, accommodating differing competence signals benevolence, and consistency over repeated visits signals integrity. It is this accumulation over time, not any single exchange, that explains why the effect proved strong enough to override the price advantage available elsewhere, fitting a broader distinction between price-driven switching and relationally embedded loyalty.

Cross-Case Validation from the Supplementary Informants

Table 3 summarizes the dominant code and theme for each of the fifteen supplementary informants. The pattern converges strongly with the core-informant findings: speech-level selection tied to closeness and respect, code accommodation across regional and generational differences, and trust or loyalty expressed as reduced need for verification recur independently across all three markets and across trader, buyer, and manager positions. This addresses, in part, a legitimate concern about generalizing from five informants across markets each serving thousands of traders: with informants now spanning both buyer- and trader-side accounts at all three sites, the three mechanisms are

supported by a broader and more trader-inclusive evidentiary base than the core interviews alone. The expansion does not, however, fully resolve the concern regarding younger traders specifically: none of the six trader informants across both tiers, aged 44 to 61, represents the youngest working generation, so claims about mechanisms as experienced by traders still rest on a middle-aged-to-senior sample, even as claims about younger buyers' experience of those mechanisms are now well supported.

Table 3. Cross-Case Matrix: Supplementary Informants (n = 15)

Market	Position (n)	Dominant Code(s)	Theme
Pasar Gede	2 traders, 2 buyers, 1 manager	NGK-KDK, TT-ADP, KRM-GM, ATK-TLT	Speech-level choice as closeness and accommodation to buyer age
Pasar Klewer	2 traders, 2 buyers, 1 manager	AKM-ADR, KRM-HRM, CS-OPN, INK-BHS	Language as bridge across regional origin and negotiation
Pasar Legi	2 traders, 2 buyers, 1 manager	NGK-DKT, AKM-DUA, SOP-LYN, GEN-BHS	Trust as service quality; generational shift noted by management

Synthesis: Three Interrelated Mechanisms

Taken together, local language operates as communication capital through three sequential mechanisms: (1) dynamic speech-level selection as the behavioral surface of the phenomenon; (2) code accommodation, adapting that surface behavior to a buyer's competence so interaction can proceed; and (3) the trust heuristic, the cumulative outcome emerging once (1) and (2) operate successfully across repeated encounters. These extend prior studies focused narrowly on the sociolinguistic function of speech level (Azila & Febriani, 2021; Febriyanti, 2023) or the social capital of traditional markets generally (Fatihah & Purwanto, 2025) by showing local language is not merely correlated with trust but an active mechanism constructing it.

Local Language amid the Pressure of Modern Retail and Online Trade

Read against the roughly 30 percent decline in traditional-market visitors described in the Introduction, these mechanisms take on added significance: standardized modern retail and algorithm-driven online marketplaces do not readily reproduce the situated, relationally accumulated trust heuristic documented here, since both are built around interchangeable providers rather than a specific, recognizable trader. This raises a further question: given that younger buyers value efficiency and comfort with digital tools, could a local-language-based revitalization strategy feel forced rather than authentic to them? The data suggest a qualified answer: younger informants valued not krama fluency itself but traders' willingness to accommodate their limited fluency without judgment, implying that what should be cultivated is accommodative flexibility rather than compulsory local-language use, which is compatible with, rather than opposed to, their preference for low-friction interaction.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study shows Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital and Putnam's (1993) social capital, more commonly applied to education or civic association, can be productively applied to everyday commercial communication; that, via Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1973; Soliz & Giles, 2014), converting cultural capital into social acceptance is actively performed through moment-to-moment adjustment rather than automatic; and that trust, framed as a heuristic (Hobbs & Goddard, 2015; Luhmann, 1979; Gulati, 1995) rather than a fixed disposition, is continuously reaffirmed through each transaction's linguistic texture. Practically, findings suggest value in informal peer mentoring among traders on register use; in market managers recognizing local-language competence as part of the market's intangible value proposition; and in local-government agencies incorporating communicative and cultural dimensions, such as low-cost documentation of senior traders' expressions, into revitalization policy rather than focusing solely on infrastructure.

Regeneration Challenge and Limitations

This study has several limitations. Its focus on linguistic and communicative features of trust means broader historical and socio-political factors surrounding Javanese in Surakarta's urban life were not comprehensively addressed. None of the six trader informants across both tiers represents the youngest working generation; claims about how younger traders themselves experience these mechanisms remain indirect, mediated through buyers' and managers' accounts, and warrant direct investigation in future research. The findings are not intended to generalize statistically to all traders across Surakarta's 44 markets; the informants support analytic rather than statistical generalization. Because the study is confined to three markets in one linguistically distinctive city, the specific ngoko-krama balance documented here should not be assumed to generalize to markets with different local languages or speech-level systems; the three mechanisms identified are proposed as transferable analytic categories, not as claims that other regions will exhibit the same specific behaviors, a transferability future comparative research could test directly.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that local language, Javanese in its ngoko and krama speech levels, functions as communication capital building trust between sellers and buyers in Surakarta's traditional markets through three interlocking mechanisms: dynamic speech-level selection as a marker of familiarity and respect, code accommodation that widens social acceptance across differing linguistic backgrounds, and a trust heuristic that sustains buyer loyalty even over price. Rather than treating cultural capital and social capital as static, once-acquired assets, the evidence indicates both are continuously produced through moment-to-moment accommodation and only accumulate into durable trust across repeated encounters; where repetition and accommodation are absent, as the regeneration concern among younger traders shows, the same mechanism that builds capital can just as readily let it erode. This reframes local language not as a fixed cultural backdrop to be preserved for its own sake but

as an active, cultivable communicative asset whose value is continuously renewed or depleted by ordinary market practice.

Theoretically, the study extends commercial-communication research by integrating cultural capital, social capital, communication accommodation theory, and heuristic-trust literature into a single explanatory chain applicable beyond Surakarta's markets. Practically, the regeneration concern points to a concrete, time-sensitive intervention point for market managers and local government: informal mentoring or documentation of speech-level practice among traders, rather than a general cultural-preservation mandate, and an approach to younger buyers built on accommodative flexibility rather than compulsory local-language use. Future research should interview younger traders directly rather than relying on buyers' and managers' accounts of them, and should test the transferability of the three mechanisms identified here in traditional markets using other local languages and speech-level systems, so that the communicative and cultural competencies embedded in traders across Java and elsewhere in Indonesia can be treated as a genuine, cultivable asset within revitalization planning, on equal footing with the physical and financial investments such planning more conventionally emphasizes.

AI Declaration

The authors declare that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used only as assistive instruments during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, DeepL was used to translate the manuscript from Indonesian into English, and Quillbot was used to paraphrase and refine the resulting English translation for language clarity, grammar, and formatting. Neither tool was used to generate, fabricate, or manipulate research data, analysis, interpretations, or references. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript. This use of AI complies with the Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement of the Journal of Linguistics, Culture, and Communication.

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