



# Language Particles as Markers of Social Identity: A Sociology of Literature Study on the Use of “Kin” and “Da” in the Speech of the Alas Community

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sociology of literature, spoken language, social identity, linguistic particles, Alas community

## ABSTRACT

Spoken language does not only function as a means of communication but also as a symbolic medium that represents the social identity and cultural structure of a community. This study examines the use of the linguistic particles “Kin” and “Da” in the speech of the Alas community as a linguistic practice rich in social meaning. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, oral utterances are viewed as social texts that reflect the relationship between language, ethnic identity, and the reproduction of cultural values. This research uses a qualitative approach with participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of spoken discourse produced by native speakers of the Alas language in Southeast Aceh Regency. The data were analyzed through sociocultural discourse interpretation to reveal the symbolic and social functions of language particles in everyday interactions. The results show that the particles “Kin” and “Da” function as markers of social identity that affirm ethnic affiliation, build social solidarity, and reproduce the linguistic habitus of the Alas community. Although these particles do not have a decisive grammatical role in determining propositional meaning, their presence serves as a symbol of origin and collective memory that distinguishes Alas speakers from other ethnic groups. These findings confirm that spoken language, particularly linguistic particles, plays a strategic role in maintaining cultural identity amid the pressure of national language homogenization, and theoretically contributes to the development of Indonesian sociology of literature by expanding the object of literary studies to include oral speech practices as living and dynamic social texts.

## KATA KUNCI

sosiologi sastra, bahasa lisan, identitas sosial, partikel bahasa, masyarakat Alas

## ABSTRAK

Bahasa lisan tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai medium simbolik yang merepresentasikan identitas sosial dan struktur kultural suatu masyarakat. Jurnal ini mengkaji penggunaan partikel bahasa “Kin” dan “Da” dalam tuturan masyarakat Alas sebagai praktik linguistik yang sarat makna sosial. Berangkat dari perspektif sosiologi sastra, penelitian ini memandang tuturan lisan sebagai teks sosial yang merefleksikan relasi antara bahasa, identitas etnik, dan reproduksi nilai budaya. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan teknik observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, serta analisis tuturan lisan penutur asli bahasa Alas di Kabupaten Aceh Tenggara. Data dianalisis melalui pembacaan wacana sosiokultural untuk mengungkap fungsi simbolik dan sosial partikel bahasa dalam konteks interaksi sehari-hari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partikel “Kin” dan “Da” berfungsi sebagai penanda identitas sosial yang menegaskan afiliasi etnik, membangun solidaritas sosial, serta mereproduksi habitus berbahasa masyarakat Alas. Meskipun tidak memiliki fungsi gramatikal yang menentukan makna proposisional, keberadaan partikel tersebut justru menjadi simbol asal-usul dan memori kolektif yang membedakan penutur Alas dari kelompok etnik lain. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa bahasa lisan, khususnya unsur partikel, memiliki peran strategis dalam mempertahankan identitas kultural di tengah tekanan homogenisasi bahasa nasional. Secara teoretis, artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan sosiologi sastra Indonesia dengan memperluas objek kajian sastra ke praktik tutur lisan sebagai teks sosial yang hidup dan dinamis.

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## **Introduction**

Language does not merely function as a neutral means of communication but also as a social and symbolic practice that reflects the cultural structure and identity of a community. In social and cultural studies, language is understood as a medium through which individuals construct meaning, negotiate social relations, and reproduce values that shape collective life. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, language, both written and spoken, can be interpreted as a social text because it represents the interaction between individuals, society, and cultural norms. Oral speech in particular contains layers of meaning that go beyond grammatical structure, since it carries emotional, social, and symbolic dimensions that reflect the lived experiences of a community. Therefore, spoken language may be analyzed not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a cultural expression that reveals social identity, collective memory, and the continuity of tradition.

The Alas community in Southeast Aceh is one of the ethnic groups that preserves its cultural identity through everyday language use. The Alas language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of social belonging and ethnic affiliation. In daily interaction, speakers frequently use the particles “Kin” and “Da”, which appear consistently in oral speech even though they do not have a decisive grammatical function. These particles do not change the propositional meaning of a sentence, yet their presence gives a distinctive nuance that characterizes the speech of the Alas community. In many situations, the use of these particles allows listeners to immediately recognize the speaker as a member of the Alas ethnic group or as someone who has strong social ties with the community. This fact shows that language operates not only through formal linguistic rules but also through symbolic elements that carry social and cultural meanings. The persistence of these particles, even when speakers shift to Indonesian in bilingual situations, indicates that linguistic habits are closely related to identity and collective memory.

Previous studies on language particles in Indonesian regional languages have generally focused on structural and pragmatic aspects, such as syntactic position, intonation, and communicative function. Although these studies provide important contributions to linguistic description, they often overlook the social and cultural significance of particles in everyday interaction. In the case of the Alas language, research discussing the particles “Kin” and “Da” is still limited and mostly treats them as optional linguistic features rather than as symbols of social identity. This study attempts to fill that gap by applying the perspective of the sociology of literature, which views oral speech as a living social text that reflects cultural values and social relations. Through this perspective, the particles “Kin” and “Da” are analyzed not only as linguistic elements but also as symbolic markers that express ethnic affiliation, social solidarity, and cultural continuity in the Alas community. The purpose of this research is to explain the social function of these particles in everyday speech and to show how small linguistic elements can play an important role in maintaining social identity in the context of cultural change and language standardization.

## **Method**

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with the perspective of the sociology of literature as the main analytical framework. The qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of this research was not to measure the frequency of language use statistically, but to understand the social and symbolic meanings attached to the use of the particles “Kin” and “Da” in the speech of the Alas community. In this perspective, spoken language is viewed as a social text that reflects cultural values, social relations, and collective identity. The analysis combines sociological interpretation with discourse analysis to examine how linguistic particles function within everyday communication.

The research was conducted in Southeast Aceh Regency, Indonesia, particularly in areas where the majority of the population belongs to the Alas ethnic community. The subjects of the study were native speakers of the Alas language from different age groups in order to observe the continuity of particle usage across generations. Participants were selected purposively based on their active use of the Alas language in daily interaction. Data were obtained from natural conversations, informal communication, and interviews with speakers who were considered to have strong linguistic and cultural competence in the Alas community.

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, recording of spoken conversations, and in-depth interviews. The recorded speech was transcribed verbatim to preserve the original linguistic features, including the use of the particles “Kin” and “Da”. The data were then analyzed using sociocultural discourse analysis to identify the social functions of the particles in different interaction contexts. To ensure the validity of the interpretation, triangulation was applied by comparing conversational data, interview results, and field notes. Through this method, the study aims to reveal how linguistic particles function not only as elements of speech but also as markers of social identity and cultural continuity in the Alas community.

## **Results**

The results of this study are based on the analysis of spoken interactions among members of the Alas community in Southeast Aceh obtained through participatory observation, recorded conversations, and in-depth interviews with native speakers from different age groups. The findings show that the linguistic particles “Kin” and “Da” appear consistently in everyday speech and are used in a wide range of communication contexts, including family conversations, informal social interaction, and community activities. These particles are not required by grammatical rules and do not change the propositional meaning of a sentence, yet their presence is very frequent and forms a distinctive characteristic of Alas speech. In most of the recorded data, the particles occur at the end of utterances, especially in declarative and imperative sentences, although they may also appear in the middle of speech when the speaker wants to emphasize a statement or strengthen the tone of expression. Sentences spoken without these particles are still understandable, but for native speakers they may sound less natural or incomplete. This pattern indicates that the particles function as part of habitual speech rather than as elements determined by syntactic structure. Speakers often use them spontaneously without conscious intention, which shows that the use of

“Kin” and “Da” has become an internalized linguistic habit that is closely related to daily communication practices within the Alas community.

The frequency of particle usage varies depending on the situation and the social relationship between speakers. In conversations among close relatives, friends, or people who share the same social background, the particles appear more often and may be repeated several times within a single exchange. In these situations, the presence of “Kin” and “Da” contributes to a relaxed and familiar atmosphere, and the speech sounds more natural to the participants. In more formal situations, such as conversations with people who are not well known or with individuals who have higher social status, the particles tend to be used less frequently, but they do not disappear completely. Some speakers continue to use them unconsciously even when they try to speak more formally, which shows that the use of these particles is strongly influenced by habit rather than by deliberate choice. Differences in usage are also found between generations. Older speakers generally use the particles more consistently in everyday conversation, while younger speakers sometimes reduce their use, especially when they speak Indonesian or when they are in formal situations such as school or official meetings. However, the particles still appear in informal communication among younger speakers, particularly when they interact with family members or other Alas speakers. This indicates that the particles continue to be transmitted across generations, although the intensity of use may change according to social context and language situation.

Another important finding is that the particles “Kin” and “Da” frequently appear even when speakers are not fully using the Alas language. In many bilingual conversations, speakers construct sentences in Indonesian but still add the particles at the end of the utterance, creating a mixed speech pattern that combines Indonesian structure with Alas linguistic elements. This mixed form occurs naturally in everyday communication and is not considered unusual by the speakers themselves. The persistence of these particles in bilingual speech shows that their use is not limited to the grammatical system of the Alas language but has become part of the speaker’s habitual way of expressing meaning. The data also show that the particles can be used in various types of speech acts, including statements, questions, commands, and responses. In statements, the particles often strengthen the speaker’s intention or make the utterance sound more complete. In questions, they may soften the tone and create a more natural conversational flow. In commands, the particles can make the expression sound less direct and more acceptable in social interaction. In responses, they frequently appear as markers of agreement, confirmation, or emotional reaction. The use of the particles is also related to the level of closeness between speakers, because they are used more freely when the speakers feel that they share the same social background. In many cases, speakers do not realize that they are using the particles until the recorded conversation is replayed, which shows that the habit has developed through long-term social interaction and has become part of the natural speaking style of the Alas community. The consistent appearance of “Kin” and “Da” in different situations, different age groups, and even in bilingual communication confirms that these particles are not accidental elements of speech but stable features that characterize everyday language use in the Alas community.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study show that the particles “Kin” and “Da” are consistently used in everyday speech among members of the Alas community, even though these particles do not have a decisive grammatical function. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, this phenomenon can be understood as evidence that language operates not only as a formal system but also as a social practice that reflects cultural values and collective identity. Spoken language, in this context, can be interpreted as a living social text that contains symbolic meanings beyond its linguistic structure. The frequent appearance of the particles in different communication situations indicates that they function as part of the cultural habitus shared by the speakers. Habitus, as understood in sociocultural theory, refers to patterns of behavior that are formed through long-term social experience and become natural for members of a community. The use of “Kin” and “Da” shows that linguistic habits are shaped by social interaction and continuously reproduced through everyday communication.

The persistence of these particles in both informal and semi-formal situations also demonstrates that small linguistic elements can carry strong social meaning. In many cases, speakers continue to use the particles even when they try to speak in a more formal style or when they switch to Indonesian. This suggests that the particles are not simply optional additions but part of the speaker’s internalized way of expressing meaning. In sociolinguistic and cultural perspectives, language is closely related to identity, and the choice of certain linguistic forms often reflects the speaker’s social background. The use of “Kin” and “Da” can therefore be seen as a marker of belonging, because it signals that the speaker shares the same cultural environment as other members of the Alas community. Even when the speaker uses Indonesian, the presence of these particles maintains a connection to the local identity, showing that language can function as a symbolic bridge between tradition and modern communication.

Another important aspect revealed by this study is the role of linguistic particles in creating social solidarity. The results show that the particles appear more frequently in conversations between people who have close social relationships, such as family members, friends, or members of the same village. This pattern indicates that the use of “Kin” and “Da” contributes to the creation of familiarity and mutual understanding in interaction. In the sociology of language, speech style often reflects the distance between speakers, and certain linguistic forms may be used to reduce or increase that distance. The particles observed in this study function as subtle signals of closeness, allowing speakers to express emotional nuance without changing the structure of the sentence. Their use helps maintain harmony in communication and supports the sense of togetherness that characterizes the social life of the Alas community. This confirms that language does not only transmit information but also organizes social relationships.

The findings also show that the particles “Kin” and “Da” are transmitted across generations through daily communication rather than through formal teaching. Younger speakers learn to use these particles by listening to older speakers and participating in social interaction within the community. This process illustrates how language functions as a medium of cultural reproduction. In cultural and sociological studies, reproduction refers to the way social values and practices are passed from one

generation to the next. The continued use of these particles among younger speakers, even with some variation in frequency, indicates that the linguistic tradition of the Alas community remains active. At the same time, the presence of bilingual speech patterns shows that language use is adapting to changing social conditions. Instead of disappearing, the particles survive by being integrated into new forms of communication, which demonstrates the flexibility of oral language as a cultural system.

From the perspective of the sociology of literature, the use of “Kin” and “Da” can be interpreted as part of symbolic expression within everyday life. The sociology of literature does not limit its object of study to written texts but also considers oral expression as a form of social text that reflects the structure of society. The speech of the Alas community contains symbolic elements that represent identity, memory, and social relations, and the particles studied in this research function as signs that connect individual speech with collective culture. Although they are small linguistic units, their consistent use shows that meaning in language is not determined only by grammar but also by social context. The particles become meaningful because they are recognized by members of the community as part of their shared way of speaking. This recognition gives the particles symbolic value that goes beyond their linguistic function.

The continued use of these particles in the context of increasing use of Indonesian also shows the role of oral language in maintaining cultural identity. In many multilingual societies, local languages are gradually replaced by national or global languages, but certain linguistic features often remain as markers of identity. The data in this study show that the particles “Kin” and “Da” survive even when the main structure of the sentence follows Indonesian patterns. This situation can be interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance, in which speakers maintain elements of their local language to preserve their cultural identity. The particles serve as reminders of origin and belonging, allowing speakers to express who they are even when using another language. This confirms that oral language has a strategic role in preserving cultural diversity.

Overall, the discussion of the findings shows that the particles “Kin” and “Da” cannot be understood only as linguistic elements but must be seen as part of social practice. Their consistent use reflects the interaction between language, identity, and culture in the life of the Alas community. Through everyday speech, speakers reproduce their social relations, maintain their cultural memory, and express their belonging to a particular group. The sociology of literature provides an appropriate framework to understand this phenomenon because it allows language to be read as a social text that contains symbolic meaning. The results of this study therefore support the view that oral language, including small elements such as particles, plays an important role in the formation and preservation of social identity.

## **Conclusions**

This study demonstrates that the use of the particles “Kin” and “Da” in the speech of the Alas community is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a social practice that reflects identity, cultural continuity, and social relations. The findings show that these particles appear consistently in everyday communication, even though they do not have a decisive grammatical function. Their frequent and often unconscious

use indicates that they have become part of the habitual speaking pattern of the community, formed through long-term interaction and transmitted across generations. The particles are used in various communication contexts, including informal conversations, family interactions, and bilingual situations where Indonesian is spoken, which shows that their function is not limited to the structure of the Alas language but is closely related to social experience and cultural background.

The study also reveals that the particles play an important role in creating familiarity and solidarity among speakers. Their use is more frequent in conversations between people who share close social relationships, and less frequent in formal situations, although they rarely disappear completely. This pattern shows that linguistic particles can function as subtle markers of interpersonal distance and social belonging. The persistence of “Kin” and “Da” in bilingual speech further indicates that oral language has a strong connection with identity, allowing speakers to maintain their cultural background even when using another language. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, spoken language can be understood as a living social text in which meaning is produced through everyday interaction. The particles examined in this study function as symbolic markers that connect individual speech with collective memory and cultural values. Therefore, this research confirms that small linguistic elements may have an important role in preserving social identity and cultural continuity, and it also shows that the study of oral language can contribute to the development of sociology of literature by expanding the object of analysis beyond written texts to include everyday speech as part of cultural production.

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