

Toward a Sociolinguistic Assessment Model for Evaluating Language Learning Through Performance Literature: A Conceptual Framework for Preserving East Javanese Local Wisdom

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ABSTRACT:

This conceptual paper proposes a sociolinguistic assessment model for evaluating language learning through sastra pentas (performance literature), positioning staged literary performance as both a learning medium and an authentic context for assessment. Conventional language testing, grounded in decontextualized instruments, tends to measure knowledge about language rather than the situated ability to use it, thereby overlooking the pragmatic, cultural, and interactional dimensions that define competent communication in multilingual communities. Drawing on theories of communicative and sociolinguistic competence, drama-based pedagogy, and authentic assessment, and on scholarship concerning language maintenance and local wisdom in Indonesia, this paper argues that performance literature offers a uniquely suitable site for evaluating language learning in a way that also serves cultural preservation. Through a conceptual analysis and synthesis of the relevant literature, the paper develops an integrated model that organizes evaluation around four domains—linguistic proficiency, sociolinguistic sensitivity, cultural transmission (local wisdom), and performative-strategic competence—each specified through observable indicators applicable to a live or recorded performance. The paper contends that embedding cultural performance within assessment can make the preservation of East Javanese local wisdom a measured outcome of language education rather than an unassessed aspiration, and that evaluation so designed can support the reversal of language shift. The proposed framework is offered as a transferable conceptual foundation for language education in multilingual settings, together with an agenda for its subsequent empirical validation.

Keywords: language learning evaluation; sociolinguistics; performance literature (sastra pentas); local wisdom preservation; East Java; conceptual framework

1. Introduction

Language learning in multilingual societies is never a purely linguistic enterprise. Every act of speaking, reading, or performing a text is simultaneously an act of positioning oneself within a web of social relations, cultural values, and community identities. This premise, long central to sociolinguistics, has profound implications for how language learning is evaluated. Yet in much of higher education, the assessment of language competence continues to rely on decontextualized instruments—written tests, discrete-point grammar items, and standardized rubrics—that measure knowledge about language rather than the situated ability to use it. Such instruments are efficient and reliable, but they frequently fail to capture the pragmatic, cultural, and interactional dimensions that define competent language use in real communities of practice.

This limitation is especially consequential in Indonesia, a nation of extraordinary linguistic diversity in which regional languages coexist with the national language and with global English. In East Java, Javanese remains demographically dominant, yet a growing body of sociolinguistic research warns that its intergenerational transmission is weakening, particularly among urban youth who increasingly favour Indonesian and English (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014). The refined speech levels of Javanese, its proverbs, its sung and staged narratives, and the etiquette encoded in its registers together constitute a repository of local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) that is at risk of erosion when younger speakers no longer use the language in its fuller communicative and artistic range.

Against this backdrop, *sastra pentas*—performance literature, encompassing staged drama, poetry performance, folk theatre, and other forms of literature realized through embodied performance—offers a compelling but underexploited resource for both language education and cultural preservation. Performance literature requires learners to inhabit voices, negotiate registers, and enact culturally situated interactions before an audience. Concrete East

Javanese forms such as *Jidor Sentulan*, a traditional stage performance in Jombang, illustrate how such literature functions as a strategy for preserving local cultural identity while giving rise to distinctive sociolinguistic phenomena (Darihastining, Wiyanto, Mukhzamilah, & Bisma, 2024). Drama-based pedagogy has likewise been shown to enhance learners' spontaneous and authentic oral production, accuracy, and complexity in second and foreign language contexts (Bora, 2021, 2024). Where such approaches have most often been studied for their effect on general proficiency, comparatively little attention has been given to their potential as a site of evaluation—a context in which language learning outcomes can be assessed authentically and sociolinguistically.

This paper addresses that gap conceptually. Rather than reporting an empirical study, it undertakes a theoretical analysis and synthesis of the relevant literature in order to construct an argument and a model. It asks how the evaluation of language learning can be reconceived when *sastra pentas* becomes the medium through which learners demonstrate competence, and how such evaluation can be designed to simultaneously serve the preservation of East Javanese local wisdom. The discussion is framed sociolinguistically: it treats language competence as inseparable from the social and cultural contexts of use, and it treats assessment not as a neutral measurement but as a value-laden practice that can either marginalize or sustain local ways of speaking. Three questions guide the analysis. First, which dimensions of language competence can performance literature render visible and assessable? Second, how might evaluation through performance engage and reproduce East Javanese local wisdom? Third, what set of evaluation indicators can integrate linguistic proficiency, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and cultural transmission into a coherent assessment model?

The paper contributes to scholarship in three ways. Theoretically, it extends models of communicative and sociolinguistic competence into the domain of performance-based evaluation. Conceptually, it articulates how

authentic assessment can be operationalized through cultural performance and specifies the constructs such assessment would target. Practically, it proposes a transferable model that language educators in multilingual regions can adapt, and it sets out an agenda for empirical validation.

2. Conceptual Approach

This paper is a conceptual contribution. Conceptual papers do not derive their claims from newly collected empirical data; instead, they build theory by identifying, integrating, and reasoning across existing bodies of knowledge to propose new frameworks, constructs, or relationships. The value of such work lies in the coherence, novelty, and usefulness of the argument it advances rather than in statistical generalization from a sample.

The approach proceeds in three analytic movements. First, relevant literatures were identified across four domains: communicative and sociolinguistic competence; performance literature and drama-based language pedagogy; authentic assessment; and local wisdom, language maintenance, and the sociolinguistics of Indonesian regional languages. Second, their key constructs were synthesized to establish points of convergence—most importantly, the shared emphasis on appropriate, contextualized use as the hallmark of competence. Third, from this synthesis an integrated model was derived, specifying evaluation domains and observable indicators mapped to the constructs from which they follow. Throughout, East Javanese performance serves as the illustrative context; the resulting model is a theoretical proposition whose psychometric properties and practical effects require subsequent empirical investigation.

3. Conceptual Foundations

3.1 Communicative and Sociolinguistic Competence

The theoretical foundation of this paper lies in the tradition of communicative competence. Hymes (1972) challenged narrowly grammatical conceptions of linguistic knowledge by arguing

that competence includes the ability to use language appropriately across social situations—knowing not only whether an utterance is grammatical but whether it is feasible, appropriate, and actually performed in a given context. Canale and Swain (1980) subsequently operationalized this insight into an influential model comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. Within this model, sociolinguistic competence—the capacity to produce and interpret language appropriately according to context, participants, and purpose—is precisely the dimension most difficult to capture through conventional testing (Bachman, 1990).

Sociolinguistic competence is central here because it foregrounds context, register, and social appropriateness—the very features that Javanese speech levels and performance conventions demand. A learner may command Javanese vocabulary and syntax yet still fail to select the appropriate speech level (*ngoko*, *madya*, *krama*) for a given interlocutor, a failure that is sociolinguistic rather than grammatical. Assessing this competence requires tasks in which social context is real enough to make appropriateness meaningful—a condition difficult to engineer in a paper test but native to performance.

3.2 Performance Literature (Sastra Pentas) and Drama-Based Pedagogy

Performance literature refers to literary works that are realized through embodied, public performance rather than solitary reading—drama, dramatized poetry, folk theatre, and staged narrative. In the Javanese context, such forms carry not only aesthetic value but also didactic and moral functions, transmitting proverbs, etiquette, and communal values across generations. A concrete case is Jidor Sentulan in Jombang, whose dialogues have been shown to preserve local cultural identity while generating distinctive sociolinguistic phenomena—including a Jombangan Javanese pidgin formed through morphological derivation and the functional alternation of Javanese speech levels (*krama* and *ngoko*) characteristic of diglossia

(Darihastining et al., 2024). Such performances constitute a social space in which speakers of different dialects and social levels interact and in which language variation is not merely preserved but actively evolves. Drama-based language pedagogy, in turn, has a substantial research base demonstrating gains in oral fluency, accuracy, complexity, and confidence (Bora, 2021, 2024): process and script-based performance create conditions for authentic, spontaneous language use because learners must respond in role, manage interaction in real time, and calibrate their language to socially specific situations.

The conceptual move made in this paper is to treat performance not merely as an instructional method but as an evaluative context. Performance externalizes competence: it makes visible how learners handle register, turn-taking, emotional expression, and culturally coded politeness, all in an integrated, observable event. This visibility is what makes *sastra pentas* a promising site for authentic assessment, and it is the property on which the proposed model is built.

3.3 Authentic Assessment and the Evaluation of Language

Authentic assessment requires learners to perform meaningful, real-world tasks that replicate the challenges faced by competent practitioners, rather than to answer decontextualized items (Wiggins, 1998). It values complex performance, contextual judgment, and the integration of knowledge and skill, and applied to language it aligns closely with sociolinguistic competence, since both prioritize appropriate use over abstract knowledge. Performance literature satisfies the conditions of authenticity in a strong form: the task is a genuine cultural act with a real audience, and success is judged by whether the performance communicates effectively and appropriately within its cultural frame.

3.4 Local Wisdom, Language Preservation, and the Sociolinguistics of Sustainability

Local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) denotes the accumulated knowledge, values, and practices

through which a community interprets and manages its world. Language is both a vehicle and a component of local wisdom: proverbs, honorifics, and narrative genres encode norms of respect, harmony, and social order. From the perspective of language maintenance and reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991), the survival of a regional language depends less on abstract prestige than on its continued use in valued domains of life. Where education treats a regional language and its literature as living, performable, and assessable, it enlarges the domains in which the language matters.

Recent Indonesian scholarship has increasingly integrated local wisdom into language learning materials and instruction, arguing that culturally grounded content strengthens both engagement and identity (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014). However, integration at the level of content has rarely been matched by integration at the level of evaluation. If assessment continues to reward only decontextualized linguistic knowledge, the cultural content of instruction risks being treated as peripheral. This paper therefore locates itself at the intersection of these literatures, proposing that evaluation—so often the tail that wags the pedagogical dog—can itself become an instrument of cultural sustainability when designed around performance literature.

4. A Proposed Sociolinguistic Assessment Model

Synthesizing the foundations above, this paper proposes an integrated model for evaluating language learning through *sastra pentas*. The rationale for the model rests on a single conceptual claim: because performance is an authentic, integrated, and socially situated act, it makes simultaneously observable the several dimensions of competence that conventional assessment separates or ignores. The model organizes evaluation around four domains—linguistic proficiency, sociolinguistic sensitivity, cultural transmission, and performative-strategic competence—each specified through observable indicators that can be applied to a live or recorded performance (Table 1).

Table 1. A proposed sociolinguistic assessment model for evaluating language learning through performance literature

Evaluation domain	Evaluation indicators	Evidence in performance
Linguistic proficiency	Accuracy of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar; fluency and complexity of speech; clarity of delivery	Comprehensible, accurate, and fluent delivery of lines and improvised dialogue
Sociolinguistic sensitivity	Appropriate selection of Javanese speech levels (ngoko/madya/krama); politeness and address strategies; register shifts matched to interlocutor and situation; discourse and turn-taking management	Register choices that remain socially credible across character relationships and scene contexts
Cultural transmission (local wisdom)	Accurate rendering of proverbs and culturally coded expressions; enactment of Javanese values (respect, harmony, etiquette); reflective awareness of cultural meaning	Performance that conveys the moral and cultural content of the text and the learner's articulated understanding of it
Performative-strategic competence	Use of intonation, gesture, pausing, and emotional expression; real-time repair; audience engagement	Paralinguistic and strategic resources deployed to sustain meaning and communicative effect

4.1 Rationale for the Four Domains

The first domain, linguistic proficiency, retains the core concerns of conventional assessment—accuracy, fluency, and clarity—but situates them within meaningful production rather than isolated items. The second, sociolinguistic sensitivity, is the model's theoretical centre of gravity: because performance requires learners to enact interactions between characters of differing social status, it compels them to select and sustain appropriate speech levels and address strategies, so that an inappropriate register is not a grammatical error but a social one, immediately consequential within the scene. Performance thus renders assessable the competence that Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980) placed at the heart of communicative ability and that written tests struggle to isolate (Bachman, 1990). The third, cultural transmission, makes local wisdom an explicit criterion of success—through the rendering of proverbs, the enactment of Javanese values, and the learner's understanding of cultural meaning. The fourth, performative-strategic competence, captures the paralinguistic

resources—intonation, gesture, pausing, real-time repair—integral to competent communication yet almost absent from paper-based assessment. Together, the four domains reflect the integrated, situated reality of competent language use and satisfy the conditions of authentic assessment (Wiggins, 1998).

5. Discussion and Implications

The model's significance lies in its integration. Rather than treating linguistic accuracy, social appropriateness, and cultural knowledge as separate constructs measured by separate instruments, it evaluates them as they co-occur in a single authentic act, reflecting the reality of competent language use and, crucially, making the preservation of local wisdom a measured outcome of language education. Because assessment powerfully shapes what learners attend to, rewarding culturally competent performance can enlarge the domains in which a regional language is actively and meaningfully used—the domain expansion that theories of

reversing language shift identify as essential to language vitality (Fishman, 1991).

For educators, the model offers a practical structure for designing performance-based assessment tasks and rubrics that go beyond generic speaking scales to include sociolinguistic and cultural criteria; for curriculum and policy, it suggests that aligning evaluation with cultural sustainability need not compromise linguistic rigour, since both can be pursued through the same authentic task; and for the broader field, it illustrates how assessment design can be theorized as a site of language maintenance rather than treated as a neutral technical matter.

Several considerations qualify these claims. As a conceptual proposition, the model awaits empirical validation: inter-rater reliability, scoring calibration, construct validity, and comparability with conventional measures remain open. Performance-based assessment also raises challenges of feasibility and the resource demands of observation and recording. Finally, the model is grounded in the sociolinguistic ecology of Javanese; adapting it to other languages and performance traditions will require attention to their distinct register systems and cultural conventions.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued, on conceptual grounds, that the evaluation of language learning can be reconceived by making *sastra pentas*—performance literature—the medium through which learners demonstrate competence, and that such evaluation can be designed to simultaneously serve the preservation of East Javanese local wisdom. Synthesizing theories of communicative and sociolinguistic competence, drama-based pedagogy, authentic assessment, and language maintenance, it has proposed an integrated model that evaluates linguistic

proficiency, sociolinguistic sensitivity, cultural transmission, and performative competence within a single authentic event.

The contribution is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the paper extends communicative and sociolinguistic competence into the domain of performance-based evaluation and shows how authentic assessment can be operationalized through cultural performance. Practically, it offers educators and policymakers in multilingual regions a replicable way to align evaluation with cultural sustainability, so that assessment itself becomes an instrument for reversing language shift rather than a force that marginalizes regional languages. Future research should operationalize the indicators into a scored rubric, test its reliability and validity across raters and settings, compare outcomes with conventional assessment, and extend the model to other regional languages and performance genres.

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