



## BRIDGING CULTURES: THE IMPACT OF BAHASA INDONESIA ON INTERNATIONAL LEGAL DIPLOMACY

### MENJEMBATANI BUDAYA: DAMPAK BAHASA INDONESIA TERHADAP DIPLOMASI HUKUM INTERNASIONAL

**I Wayan Alit Sudarsana<sup>1</sup>, Manual Selvaraj Bexci<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Science Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Email: [iwasudarsana.phdscholar@lincoln.edu.my](mailto:iwasudarsana.phdscholar@lincoln.edu.my)

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Social Science Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Email: [bexci@lincoln.edu.my](mailto:bexci@lincoln.edu.my)

\*corresponding email: [bexci@lincoln.edu.my](mailto:bexci@lincoln.edu.my)

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#### Abstract

This research explores the role of Bahasa Indonesia in shaping international legal diplomacy through a doctrinal legal analysis. By examining primary legal sources, such as treaties, diplomatic correspondences, and international agreements involving Indonesia, alongside secondary sources including scholarly articles, legal commentaries, and historical analyses, this study aims to uncover how Bahasa Indonesia functions as a diplomatic tool in legal contexts. The research critically analyses the extent to which language can bridge cultural and legal divides, enhance mutual understanding, and influence the negotiation and interpretation of international agreements. By situating Bahasa Indonesia within broader legal and diplomatic frameworks, this study offers insights into the intersection of language, culture, and law on the global stage, highlighting the strategic importance of linguistic identity in international legal diplomacy.

**Keywords :** Bahasa Indonesia, International Legal Diplomacy, Cross-Cultural Communication

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran Bahasa Indonesia dalam membentuk diplomasi hukum internasional melalui analisis hukum doktrinal. Dengan mengkaji sumber hukum primer, seperti traktat, korespondensi diplomatik, dan perjanjian internasional yang melibatkan Indonesia, serta sumber sekunder termasuk artikel ilmiah, komentar hukum, dan analisis historis, studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana Bahasa Indonesia berfungsi sebagai alat diplomasi dalam konteks hukum. Penelitian ini secara kritis menganalisis sejauh mana bahasa dapat menjembatani perbedaan budaya dan hukum, meningkatkan pemahaman bersama, serta memengaruhi negosiasi dan interpretasi perjanjian internasional. Dengan menempatkan Bahasa Indonesia dalam kerangka hukum dan diplomasi yang lebih luas, studi ini memberikan wawasan tentang persimpangan antara bahasa, budaya, dan hukum di panggung global, serta menyoroti pentingnya identitas linguistik secara strategis dalam diplomasi hukum internasional.



**Kata Kunci :** Bahasa Indonesia, Diplomasi Hukum Internasional, Komunikasi Lintas Budaya

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a bridge between cultures, particularly in the realm of international law and diplomacy (Xhemaili, 2022) (Sayın & Sayın, 2013). It is through language that legal meanings are conveyed, treaties are negotiated, and diplomatic relations are maintained. In this context, Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language of one of the world's most populous and culturally diverse nations, plays a crucial but often underexplored role. Indonesia's active participation in international organizations such as the United Nations, ASEAN, and various multilateral forums has inevitably brought Bahasa Indonesia into closer contact with global legal processes. Yet, the impact of this language on international legal diplomacy remains a field that has received relatively limited scholarly attention, particularly through a structured legal analysis.

This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a doctrinal legal analysis based solely on primary and secondary legal sources. Primary sources, including treaties, international agreements, diplomatic correspondences, and Indonesia's international legal instruments, will be critically examined to identify the presence and influence of Bahasa Indonesia in diplomatic contexts. Secondary sources, such as legal commentaries, scholarly articles, and historical analyses, will be used to enrich and contextualize the findings. By focusing exclusively on these legal sources, this research aims to offer a systematic understanding of how Bahasa Indonesia has contributed to shaping legal interactions across national and cultural boundaries.

In particular, this research will explore several key themes: the use of Bahasa Indonesia in treaty-making processes, the role of translation and interpretation in international legal communications, and the embedding of Indonesian legal concepts into international agreements. Special attention will be given to how language can shape the negotiation dynamics, the drafting of legal texts, and the subsequent interpretation and enforcement of international obligations (Heddaya et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the study will interrogate the broader cultural and diplomatic significance of promoting a national language like Bahasa Indonesia within a predominantly English-speaking international legal environment. It will consider how language policy, linguistic identity, and legal diplomacy are interconnected in advancing Indonesia's strategic interests on the global stage. In doing so, the paper seeks to highlight not only the legal but also the cultural power of language in international relations.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between law, language, and culture. It will argue that Bahasa Indonesia, beyond being a tool for domestic unity, has emerged as a subtle yet meaningful force in the practice of international legal diplomacy, offering new perspectives on the role of non-dominant languages in global legal affairs.



## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a doctrinal legal research method, focusing exclusively on the systematic analysis of primary and secondary legal sources (Majeed et al., 2023). Doctrinal research, often referred to as "black-letter law" research, involves identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing legal principles, rules, and doctrines as found in authoritative legal texts. It is particularly suitable for a study aiming to explore the role of language—specifically Bahasa Indonesia—within the formal frameworks of international legal diplomacy (Kharel, 2018).

The primary sources for this research include international treaties, conventions, diplomatic correspondences, multilateral agreements, and relevant national legislation from Indonesia that have international significance. Special attention will be given to official treaty texts, bilingual or multilingual legal documents where Bahasa Indonesia is used, and legal communications issued by Indonesian representatives in international forums. The aim is to closely examine instances where Bahasa Indonesia has been employed, directly or indirectly, in shaping international legal relations.

Secondary sources will consist of academic journal articles, legal commentaries, books, reports, and historical analyses related to international law, linguistic diversity in diplomacy, and Indonesia's legal and diplomatic history. These materials will provide the necessary scholarly context to support the analysis of primary documents and to situate the discussion within broader academic debates.

The analysis will be carried out through qualitative, interpretative techniques. Legal hermeneutics will be employed to interpret legal texts within their diplomatic and cultural contexts. The study will categorize findings based on recurring themes such as treaty negotiation, legal translation, cultural diplomacy, and the incorporation of Indonesian legal concepts into international agreements.

No empirical or field-based data collection (such as interviews, surveys, or observations) will be conducted. The scope is intentionally confined to legal texts and authoritative commentaries to maintain the purity of the doctrinal approach. Through this method, the study aims to develop a clear, structured understanding of the influence of Bahasa Indonesia on international legal diplomacy.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study, through a doctrinal analysis of primary and secondary legal sources, reveals significant insights into the role of Bahasa Indonesia in international legal diplomacy. The findings are organized into several thematic areas that collectively demonstrate the nuanced impact of the language on diplomatic and legal practices at the international level.

### 1. The Use of Bahasa Indonesia in Treaty-Making and Multilateral Agreements

One notable finding is the presence of Bahasa Indonesia in treaty-making, particularly within the ASEAN framework



(Alam et al., 2022). As a founding member of ASEAN, Indonesia has consistently advocated for the recognition of Bahasa Indonesia alongside other regional languages in legal instruments and diplomatic communications. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) provides an early example, where Bahasa Indonesia versions of the treaty are treated as equally authentic to their English counterparts. This practice reflects Indonesia's commitment to linguistic inclusivity and signals the importance of cultural identity in the legal foundation of regional cooperation (Harmoko, 2015).

Moreover, in bilateral agreements with countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Timor-Leste—nations where linguistic similarities exist—Bahasa Indonesia versions of legal documents often hold authoritative weight. This demonstrates that Bahasa Indonesia not only functions as a national language but also as a diplomatic bridge, facilitating legal understanding and reinforcing Indonesia's cultural presence within regional legal frameworks.

## 2. Legal Translation and Interpretation: Challenges and Strategies

Another significant finding pertains to the challenges of legal translation involving Bahasa Indonesia. International law predominantly operates in English, French, or other widely used languages, which often requires translation of Indonesian legal texts into English for international audiences (Tomuschat, 2017). Through doctrinal analysis, it becomes apparent that translation is not a mere linguistic exercise but a legal act that can affect the interpretation and enforcement of treaties (Moser, 2024).

For instance, nuanced legal concepts unique to Indonesian customary law (*hukum adat*) do not always have direct equivalents in English or other languages. In such cases, translations must convey not only the literal meaning but also the cultural and legal context, which can influence the treaty's implementation. Misinterpretations arising from translation inaccuracies could potentially lead to disputes over treaty obligations. Hence, Bahasa Indonesia plays a dual role: as an instrument of diplomacy and as a custodian of Indonesia's legal traditions in international law.

## 3. The Embedding of Indonesian Legal Concepts in International Agreements

The research also reveals instances where Indonesian legal concepts, transmitted through Bahasa Indonesia, have subtly influenced international legal instruments (Elvardi et al., 2022). For example, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration reflects principles that resonate strongly with Indonesia's Pancasila philosophy and constitutional traditions, including the emphasis on collective rights and harmony over individualistic notions predominant in Western legal systems.

By promoting legal norms through the medium of Bahasa Indonesia in diplomatic negotiations, Indonesia has contributed to shaping regional legal frameworks that are culturally attuned to Southeast Asian values. This demonstrates the indirect yet powerful influence of Bahasa Indonesia as a conveyor of legal philosophy, affecting how rights, duties, and legal relationships are conceptualized at the regional level.

## 4. Bahasa Indonesia as a Symbol of Legal Identity and Cultural Diplomacy



In addition to its functional roles, Bahasa Indonesia also emerges as a symbol of Indonesia's diplomatic and legal identity (Utama, 2020). The use of Bahasa Indonesia in speeches at the United Nations General Assembly, in ASEAN meetings, and in international conferences reflects Indonesia's assertion of linguistic sovereignty and cultural pride within global legal and diplomatic spaces.

This symbolic dimension strengthens Indonesia's soft power by projecting an image of a nation that values its linguistic and cultural heritage. Language, therefore, becomes an instrument of cultural diplomacy, reinforcing Indonesia's legal positions while fostering greater cultural understanding. In a global context where linguistic hegemony often marginalizes smaller languages, Indonesia's promotion of Bahasa Indonesia represents an act of resistance and a strategic affirmation of national identity.

## 5. Limitations and Opportunities

However, the research also highlights certain limitations. Bahasa Indonesia's reach in international legal diplomacy remains largely regional rather than global (Hermawan & Habir, 2015). While its influence within ASEAN is notable, its impact diminishes outside Southeast Asia where English, French, and Spanish dominate legal and diplomatic communication.

Nevertheless, this limitation presents opportunities. Indonesia's rising geopolitical influence, combined with strategic initiatives such as promoting Bahasa Indonesia learning abroad, could enhance the global relevance of the language. Programs that encourage the study of Bahasa Indonesia by foreign diplomats, legal scholars, and international lawyers could further embed the language into global legal diplomacy over time.

## 6. The Strategic Future of Bahasa Indonesia in International Legal Diplomacy

Finally, the findings suggest that Indonesia could pursue a more strategic approach to expand the role of Bahasa Indonesia internationally (Effendi, 2016). This includes advocating for the inclusion of Bahasa Indonesia as a working language in more international organizations, investing in training programs for legal translators and interpreters, the use of AI to optimize the process (Okwong & Vivekanandam, 2024), enhancing the quality and consistency of legal translations, and investing in the education of multilingual legal practitioners who can bridge Bahasa Indonesia with other major legal languages.

Such strategies would not only benefit Indonesia's diplomatic standing but also contribute to greater linguistic diversity in international law, promoting a more inclusive global legal order that respects and incorporates non-Western legal traditions.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine the role of Bahasa Indonesia in international legal diplomacy through a doctrinal analysis of primary and secondary legal sources. The findings demonstrate that language is not merely a tool of communication but an active agent in shaping legal meaning, cultural understanding, and diplomatic relations. Bahasa Indonesia, though





often operating within a regional rather than a global framework, plays a significant and multifaceted role in Indonesia's international legal engagement.

The use of Bahasa Indonesia in treaty-making, particularly within ASEAN, reflects Indonesia's efforts to assert its linguistic and cultural identity in the construction of regional legal norms. By incorporating Bahasa Indonesia into official treaty texts and diplomatic correspondences, Indonesia strengthens its influence over how legal obligations are interpreted and negotiated. Furthermore, the challenges associated with legal translation highlight the importance of language precision in protecting national legal interests and ensuring the faithful transmission of Indonesia's legal and cultural concepts into international law.

The embedding of Indonesian legal philosophies—such as the collective orientation found in Pancasila—into regional instruments like the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration further underscores the strategic role of language in exporting national values into the broader legal discourse. Bahasa Indonesia thus acts not only as a medium for communication but also as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy and legal identity-building.

Nevertheless, the reach of Bahasa Indonesia remains largely regional, suggesting both a limitation and an opportunity. To enhance its global presence, Indonesia must adopt deliberate strategies to promote the international study and use of Bahasa Indonesia, particularly in legal education and diplomacy.

In conclusion, this study shows that the strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia in international legal diplomacy enriches linguistic diversity within international law and offers a powerful example of how language can be leveraged to bridge cultures, shape legal norms, and assert national identity on the global stage. Future research could further explore empirical dimensions, including how diplomats and international lawyers perceive and navigate linguistic challenges in practice.

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