

## A Comparative Sociolinguistic Study of Archaic Forms that Decline in Indonesian and Early Modern English

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to analyze the decline of archaic forms between Indonesian and Early Modern English Language. The approach used in this research is sociolinguistic with a qualitative comparative method for studying language evolution in society and historical context. The data research has been collected from various sources, including historical texts, literary works, and a language corpus that are relevant to related topics. Research findings have shown that the trend toward simplification in the form of pronouns is one of the main indicators of the decline of archaic Indonesian and English. In addition, these changes are also affected by various social factors, such as society's structural changes, language contact, and the development of communication culture. The contribution of this research lies in providing cross-cultural evidence regarding the dynamics of change in both languages, particularly in understanding how and why archaic forms of both languages are used in the modern era in their use.

**Keywords:** Archaic Forms; Language Obsolescence; Sociolinguistic Change; Comparative Study; Pronoun Simplification

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara komparatif terhadap kemunduran antara bentuk bahasa arkais dalam bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris modern awal. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah sosiolinguistik dengan metode kualitatif komparatif untuk mengkaji evolusi bahasa dalam konteks sosial dan sejarah. Data penelitian diperoleh dari berbagai sumber termasuk teks histori, karya sastra, dan korpus bahasa relevan dengan topik terkait. Hasil penelitian telah menunjukkan adanya kecenderungan penyederhanaan dalam bentuk pronomina sebagai salah satu indikator utama penyebab kemunduran bahasa arkais Indonesia dan Inggris. Selain itu, perubahan ini juga dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor sosial seperti perubahan struktur masyarakat, kontak bahasa, dan perkembangan budaya komunikasi. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada penyediaan bukti lintas budaya mengenai dinamika

perubahan terhadap kedua bahasa khususnya dalam memahami bagaimana dan mengapa bentuk-bentuk arkais dari kedua bahasa tersebut telah mengalami pergeseran atau bisa dikatakan hilang pada kedua bahasa di era modern pada penggunaannya.

**Kata kunci:** Bentuk Arkais; Keusangan Bahasa; Perubahan Sociolinguistik; Studi Komparatif, Penyederhanaan Pronomina

## INTRODUCTION

### The Background

Over time, the world has experienced various significant changes caused by various factors, such as changes in the means of communication or in the way ideas and messages are conveyed by humans, namely, language. Language is something that can be described as dynamic, because there are so many things that exist in the language, like vocabulary, phrases, and sentences, that change due to social and cultural factors as time goes on (LMS-SPADA INDONESIA, 2023). As a result, many linguistic forms and rules gradually fade away and are replaced by newer ones that are better suited to the social and cultural context of the time. One of these terms is a phenomenon about the fading of the so-called archaic forms of language that once existed in the past.

Archaic form is one of the language forms that have long since fallen out of use with the advent of the modern era. This occurs because prevailing social and cultural norms, archaic language is no longer considered relevant for use in everyday life today; consequently, it is extremely rare to encounter archaic forms in communication between individuals or groups in the modern era. However, even though it has fallen, this language form can still be found in several literary works, such as poetry, folktales, short stories, novels, etc. Thus, although archaic forms are rarely used in everyday communication, they have been preserved and maintained to this day through works that contain phrases and vocabulary using these archaic forms, to ensure that future generations are aware of them and preserve them, even though they have fallen out of use.

The disappearance of archaic forms in a language phenomenon is not limited to a single language; it is also found across various languages and cultures around the world. Two examples of this phenomenon can be found in Indonesian and English, particularly during the Early Modern English era. For the examples in the Indonesian Language, various vocabulary in the archaic forms like *beta*, *tuan hamba*, and *kisanak* were used in the past in the specific context; in today's era, they have been shifted by the vocabularies that are considered more modern and relevant in use, such as the words *saya*, *aku*, and *kamu*. This is caused by the transformation and adaptation in the social and cultural field as time goes on. The same is true of Early Modern English, in which pronoun forms commonly used during that period—such as *thou*, *thee*, and *thy*—which were then considered to reflect social relationships, have now been replaced by simpler and more general forms, such as *you* and *yours*. Thus, despite differences in their social and cultural contexts, both languages have experienced a gradual decline in the use of archaic vocabulary forms, adapting to their respective cultures over time.

## RESEARCH GAP

Although the causes of the decline of archaic forms in Indonesian and Early Modern English have been extensively studied in numerous research studies, none of these studies has directly examined a comparison of the decline of archaic forms in both languages from a sociolinguistic perspective. In fact, this kind of comparative approach provides new knowledge and understanding regarding whether the patterns of decline in archaic forms in these two languages are the same or different due to the influence of different social and historical factors within the respective cultural contexts of the two languages.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze how archaic forms in Indonesian and Early Modern English have gradually faded over time, as well as to examine the process of decline in these two archaic language forms, with a focus on the sociolinguistic factors that may influence this process. Furthermore, this study also seeks to identify the similarities and differences in these linguistic changes in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language and change influenced by social and cultural contexts.

## THEORY

### Archaic Language & Obsolescence: Lexical Attrition and Register Loss

Language is never static. Even within a single lifetime, speakers witness vocabulary shift, grammatical simplification, and the quiet disappearance of forms that once felt natural and necessary. The study of archaic language sits at the intersection of historical linguistics and sociolinguistics, concerned not merely with cataloguing "old" words but with understanding the social and structural processes through which certain linguistic forms become obsolete. Two theoretical concepts are foundational to this inquiry: lexical attrition and register loss.

Lexical attrition refers to the gradual process by which specific words, morphological forms, or grammatical structures fall out of active use within a speech community. The term "gradual" is important here because attrition is rarely a sudden event. Instead, a form typically undergoes a slow recession: it first loses frequency in everyday speech, then becomes marked as formal, old-fashioned, or literary, then retreats into narrowly defined contexts such as religious ritual or ceremonial address, and finally survives — if at all — only in frozen expressions or historical texts. Scholars such as Trudgill (2011) and Mufwene (2001) have emphasized that attrition is fundamentally a community-level phenomenon, meaning it is not the idiosyncratic forgetting of individual speakers but a shared, socially coordinated drift away from certain forms. This distinction is critical for a comparative study because it means we must always ask: what social conditions made an entire speech community gradually abandon a form that once served a clear communicative function?

It is also useful to distinguish between the types of attrition that a linguistic form can undergo. A word may experience lexical attrition in the strict sense, meaning the word itself disappears from the active lexicon. Alternatively, it may undergo functional attrition, retaining its presence in the language but losing specific grammatical roles it once performed. Or it may undergo register-based attrition, surviving only within a narrow social domain while vanishing from general use. In both Early Modern English and Indonesian, all three types can be observed operating simultaneously, and often on comparable categories of vocabulary.

In Early Modern English, the second-person singular pronoun "thou" and its associated oblique and possessive forms "thee" and "thy" offer the clearest illustration. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thou was the ordinary form for addressing social inferiors, intimates, and God, while "ye" and later "you" functioned as the formal or plural address. As social hierarchies shifted and the pragmatic value of marking intimacy through grammar became less central to everyday interaction, thou underwent first functional attrition — losing its systematic role as an intimacy marker — and then register-based attrition, retreating into religious prose, poetry, and eventually the King James Bible, where it became fossilized rather than living. By the eighteenth century, it had ceased to be a productive grammatical option for most English speakers. A parallel fate befell the verb inflection associated with it: the "-eth" ending of the third-person singular, as in "he speaketh" or "she goeth," similarly receded in favor of the "-s" ending that dominates Modern English, leaving the older form alive only in scriptural and ceremonial prose.

Indonesia offers a comparably rich set of examples, though the social pressures driving attrition operated along somewhat different historical axes. The pronoun system of Indonesian and its Malay antecedent has long been characterized by a layered complexity reflecting social hierarchy, regional origin, and formality. Forms such as "engkau" and "kamu," both second-person singular pronouns, coexisted for centuries with a wide array of regional and honorific alternatives. As Bahasa Indonesia was codified and promoted as the national language following independence in 1945, a deliberate simplification took place. The form "Anda," a relatively recent coinage designed to be socially neutral and unmarked by the class or intimacy associations carried by "engkau" and "kamu," was introduced and institutionalized through formal education and media. "Engkau" in particular — once common in Malay literary and religious texts, including translations of the Bible and Quran — has since undergone register-based attrition, retreating into religious usage and poetry while "Anda" dominates formal public discourse. Similarly, the first-person pronoun "hamba," which originally encoded a deeply deferential self-positioning inherited from court Malay, has become largely archaic in everyday Indonesian, surviving mainly in set phrases or historical literature, displaced by the more neutral "saya."

Beyond the pronominal system, Indonesian also shows significant lexical attrition in vocabulary drawn from older Malay court registers. Words such as "bersabda" — meaning to speak, but specifically used of royalty or divine figures — or "patik," a self-

referential pronoun used when addressing a sovereign, have retreated almost entirely from modern colloquial and formal Indonesian, surviving only in literary historical contexts or deliberate archaism. This mirrors the way Early Modern English retained forms like "dost," "hath," and "wouldst" in deliberate literary and religious registers long after they had vanished from spoken use, using archaism itself as a stylistic signal of gravity or tradition.

Register loss operates at a higher level of abstraction but is intimately connected to lexical attrition. A register, in the broad sociolinguistic sense, is a variety of language that is functionally tied to a particular social situation, relationship, or purpose — the language of the courtroom, the language of intimate address, the language of royal proclamation, the language of prayer. Registers carry their own vocabulary, grammatical conventions, and pragmatic expectations. When the social situation that gave rise to a register disappears or transforms, the register itself becomes vulnerable. And when a register collapses, it tends to take a whole cluster of associated lexical and grammatical forms with it, because those forms no longer have a functional home.

In Early Modern English, the collapse of the thou register is inseparable from the erosion of the social structures it encoded. The register of intimate or condescending address — in which a master would use thou to a servant, or a parent to a child, or a speaker to God — depended on a shared social understanding of hierarchical and personal relationships being linguistically marked. As English society moved through the social upheavals of the seventeenth century, including the Civil War, the rise of a more commercially organized middle class, and eventually greater urbanization, the fine pragmatic distinctions encoded by thou versus you became socially unmarked, and the register that depended on those distinctions became redundant. The entire ecosystem of grammatical features that surrounded thou — its verb forms, its associated terms of address like "thee" and "thine," even its stylistic connotations of either intimacy or condescension — collapsed together.

Indonesian shows an analogous dynamic in the dissolution of the high Malay court register, sometimes referred to in linguistic literature as Bahasa Melayu Tinggi or elevated Malay. This register, which drew heavily on Sanskrit-derived vocabulary and elaborate honorific conventions refined through centuries of court culture across the Malay Archipelago, was already under pressure during the colonial period as Dutch administrative language and Dutch-educated Indonesian elites increasingly operated in a more flattened, bureaucratic linguistic register. The nationalist movement of the early twentieth century, culminating in the Youth Pledge of 1928, which formally enshrined Bahasa Indonesia as the language of national unity, further accelerated the dissolution of court Malay as a living functional register.

Vocabulary items associated with that register — honorifics, court titles used as pronouns, ceremonial verbal forms — lost their functional home as the social context of the court itself ceased to be a dominant organizing structure of public life. Much as thou lost its register and its associated grammatical ecosystem, so too did the high Malay

register lose the social scaffolding that had sustained it.

This connection between register loss and lexical attrition reveals that the decline of archaic forms is rarely about the forms themselves being linguistically inferior to their replacements. More often, the social contexts that once required those forms have changed, and the forms become stranded — still comprehensible, perhaps still symbolically resonant, but no longer functionally necessary. The archaic form becomes a kind of linguistic relic, preserved in specific niches — religious text, poetry, historical drama, formal ceremony — precisely because those niches are themselves defined by their relationship to the past.

It is also important to resist the temptation to treat obsolescence as a purely neutral or inevitable linguistic process. As Aitchison (2001) argues, language change is always value-laden: communities attach social meaning to the forms they use and abandon, and the decision — conscious or not — to stop using a particular form often reflects broader social negotiations about identity, prestige, and belonging.

Archaic forms carry associations with an older social order, and their decline frequently coincides with moments of social rupture, standardization, or ideological reorientation, in which that older order is symbolically distanced or deliberately discarded. This is why both cases examined in this paper — English across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Indonesian across the twentieth — involve not merely gradual linguistic drift but accelerated obsolescence driven by identifiable external pressures, which will be examined in detail in the sections that follow.

In sum, lexical attrition and register loss together provide the conceptual vocabulary for describing what is happening when archaic forms disappear. Attrition captures the word-level process of declining use, while register loss explains the structural collapse of the social situations that once sustained those forms.

Together, they establish that the phenomenon under study is not incidental but systematic, not purely linguistic but deeply social, and not isolated to a single language or culture but observable across distinct linguistic traditions under comparable conditions of social transformation. These concepts will serve as the analytical foundation upon which the theoretical frameworks of the following sections — language change theory, register theory, standardization, and the sociology of language — will be built.

## Language Change Theory

Language change is a complex social phenomenon, revealing pathways of communication and sociocultural influence. This means language does not change on its own — it changes because of human interaction within specific social contexts.

### Key Theories

#### 1. Functional Theory (Halliday)

Developed by Halliday, this theory states that language is a tool that evolves to serve economic and social functions. New vocabulary is invented or adapted for technological

developments, and words are shortened due to the need for fast communication. Words move in and out of use as society changes.

## 2. Contact Theory

This theory states that language change comes about through language contact, which in the past happened through trade and invasion, but now happens through social networking and immigration.

## 3. Wave / S-Curve Theory (Chen & Bailey)

This theory explains that language change happens gradually, demonstrated by an S-curve, and the process is sped up by social triggers such as prestige, which can be conscious or unconscious.

## 4. PID Model (Milroy)

This model states that language change has three stages: Potential (the speaker makes a linguistic choice), Implementation (the change becomes selected), and Diffusion (the change is imitated beyond the site of origin).

## 5. Social Network & Social Influence (Labov, Goel et al.)

Language change can be viewed as a form of social influence. Tie strength plays an important role — densely embedded social ties are significantly better conduits of linguistic influence.

## 6. Social Factors Framework

Labov identified six major independent social variables that influence language change: sex, age, social class, ethnicity, race, and community size. These factors lead to the study of patterns of communication, the homogenizing effects of social networks, and the transmission of linguistic change across generations.

## 7. Social Dynamics in the Digital Age

The study of social dynamics of language now integrates insights from social psychology, linguistics, and computational analysis to reveal how emergent group identities evolve, and how language adapts as communities form, dissolve, or reposition themselves.

## Register Theory

Register Theory, proposed by M. A. K. Halliday, explains that language use is influenced by situation, communicative purpose, and the social relationship between speakers and listeners. A register refers to a variation of language used in a particular context, such as formal, informal, academic, literary, or administrative language.

In this study, archaic language forms are understood as part of a formal and elite register commonly found in old texts, classical literary works, royal documents, and official communication during certain historical periods. This register is characterized by more complex linguistic structures and the preservation of traditional language forms.

Along with social development and changing communication needs, the use of archaic registers has gradually declined. Modern societies tend to prefer language forms that are simpler, more practical, and easier to understand in everyday communication. As a result, many archaic forms are no longer widely used and are now mainly preserved in literary, historical, or religious contexts.

For example, in Early Modern English, words such as *thou*, *thee*, and *thy* were once commonly used in formal communication and literary texts, but they have largely been replaced by simpler forms such as *you* and *your*. A similar phenomenon can also be observed in Indonesian, where several old vocabulary items and traditional forms of address are gradually disappearing because they are considered less relevant to modern language use.

Through Register Theory, the decline of archaic forms can be understood not only as a process of vocabulary change but also as the result of shifts in social function, language context, and communicative needs within society.

## Standardization

Language Standardization is a process that refers to the language structure that aims to create equality and consistency in its use in the community. According to Milroy (2001), the purpose of language Standardization is to shape linguistic norms that will be widely accepted in the vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and also pronunciation aspects. Through this process, it will affect the various forms of specific language legitimized as standard forms. Meanwhile, other forms of language won't be relevant or marginalized gradually.

Consequently, this Language Standardization process makes a significant contribution to the decline of archaic forms of language. So, along with community development, the use of language overtime tend to prioritize the communication efficiency, equality, and widely accesibility in the society. This affects the old language forms that were assumed to be very formal, limited in use in certain regions, and not relevant to society development anymore, slowly shifted by language forms that are very simple and standardized.

Then, besides the Language Standardization, which created equality of language use, this process also contributes to marginalizing the various specific languages. That is, language forms that are not matched with standard society norms that have already been implemented will slowly be considered these forms as ancient, not formal forms, and not relevant in modern communication. As a result, the use of archaic forms of a language will be increasingly limited in the literature, history, or certain cultural contexts.

For the examples, in the Indonesian language context, this standardization process shows through the government policy that arranges the proper and correct use of the Indonesian language, such as the implementation of EYD (*Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan*) system in the formal situation, and also teaching of standard language in the education institution (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2019). While in the English language, the forms

of this standard language grow through the convention of formal language structure and pronunciation model in this language, such as Received Pronunciation (RP) in British English (Payne, 2025). Therefore, the process mentioned before has pushed the use of the language structure to become more equal than before, which, in the end, this process will lead to the decline of archaic expressions and pronouns in everyday communication today.

## Language and Power

In terms of the function of language, in addition to serving as a means of communication for conveying ideas between individuals or groups, language can also be viewed as a tool for gauging the extent of a person's influence and standing among other individuals or groups. According to a theory proposed by Bourdieu (1991), language is not merely a tool for communication but also an instrument that reflects an individual's actions and power. This pertains to how an individual uses language to shape society's perception of them, which is linked to their social class, education, social status, and position within society. Thus, the use of a particular form of language by an individual is considered or recognized as "correct," "formal," and "authoritative" due to support from certain entities such as the state, schools, the media, or politics. The use of language described above is referred to as the concept of legitimate language; if a person has mastered the use of this legitimate language, they will gain social benefits from its use in the form of recognition, respect, trust, and the ease with which their words are accepted by society. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) also explains an important concept regarding language and power, namely linguistic capital, which is described as the ability to use a language in a way that enables an individual to attain high social value. Examples include the use of a formal accent, standard grammar, academic vocabulary, and a manner of speaking that makes one appear more professional. In other words, the higher a person's use of linguistic capital, the greater their chances of attaining higher social status, access to education, and greater power.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) states that language can be likened to a "market" within the social sphere, or what might be called a linguistic market. This means that language or speech can determine the value society assigns to the use of a particular language or way of speaking, based on the appropriate context for its use. For example, formal language is accepted when used in official situations, such as on campus or in government; professional language is valued when used in the workplace; and slang is more accepted when used within certain social circles that prioritize closeness over formality. Therefore, a person is required to adapt to the use of a specific language or manner of speaking that is appropriate for their environment, with the aim of being accepted within that particular social setting.

In addition, Bourdieu (1991) also introduced the concept of a language that can be described as symbolic power, in which he posits language as a symbol through which an individual gradually acquires power and social legitimacy. This means that the goal of achieving power is not only attainable through mere physical coercion but can also be

obtained by disseminating a “doctrine” to society that leads people to accept a power hierarchy as something considered “normal” or “legitimate” in daily life. For example, many people believe that using a less prestigious regional dialect makes one appear less intelligent, while using the standard language is seen as a sign of intelligence, and that certain accents are considered more refined than others. Consequently, this can lead people to eventually accept the formation of such a linguistic hierarchy, even though it is actually merely a social construct that has been established as a standard by a particular society.

Therefore, in light of the theoretical explanation above, the decline of archaic forms in Indonesian (such as the disappearance of certain very formal pronouns or suffixes) and the transition from Early Modern English (such as the loss of the distinction between “thou” and “you”) can be explained as the result of shifts in the linguistic market and power struggles. According to Bourdieu’s theory, these changes occur due to a redefinition of what is considered “legitimate language.” As power structures shifted from monarchy or feudal systems toward more egalitarian or bureaucratic societies, archaic forms that signified a more rigid hierarchy lost their “market value” because they no longer provided a “profit of distinction” for their users in public spaces.

## Previous Studies

Several previous studies have discussed language change and the decline of older linguistic forms in different contexts. In Suyata’s study (n.d.), they examined the lexical and semantic changes in Bahasa Indonesia from a historical comparative perspective. The study found that lexical meaning in Indonesian continuously evolves due to social and cultural developments, where it is indicating that language change is a natural phenomenon within the social environment.

Then, another study by Firdaus & Yohanes (2023) analyzed semantic changes in Arabic loanwords in Indonesian. The result of this research showed that borrowed vocabulary experiences narrowing, broadening, and total semantic shifts influenced by contextual and communicative factors.

In the context of English, Moessner (2012) has discussed sociolinguistic variation in Early Modern English, particularly the replacement of older pronoun forms such as *ye* by *you*. The study emphasized the role of social stratification, gender, and regional factors in the diffusion of language change.

Similarly, Kyto & Walker (2019) investigated the decline of archaic determiner forms such as *mine/thine* in Early Modern English. Their findings demonstrated that standardization and communicative simplification contributed significantly to the disappearance of older linguistic variants.

Thus, although previous studies have explored language change in Indonesian and Early Modern English separately, comparative sociolinguistic studies focusing specifically on the decline of archaic forms in both languages remain limited. Therefore, this study attempts to compare the sociolinguistic processes underlying the decline of archaic forms

in Indonesian and Early Modern English within different historical and cultural contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses the qualitative comparative method with a sociolinguistic study approach to analyze the decline of archaic forms in the Indonesian Language and Early Modern English Language. This method is used because this research aims at the interpretation of linguistic phenomena, and also the study of social factors that influence language changes from time to time. While a comparative approach was implemented with the purpose of identifying the similarities and differences in the process of the decline of archaic forms between both languages.

Then, the data research was collected from various writing sources, such as historical documents, literary works, previous research, and a linguistic corpus that relates to the archaic forms in the Indonesian Language and Early Modern English. Various archaic forms and pronouns like *beta*, *tuan hamba*, *thou*, *thee*, and *thy* have been chosen as the main data of this research because they have historical relevance and sociolinguistic significance to the topic studied.

The technique of collecting the data in this research is done through literature study and documentation. Means the data that has been obtained, then identified, classified, and interpreted based on the linguistic characteristics and also its social and cultural context. Furthermore, the data are analyzed using sociolinguistic analysis, lexical analysis, and also comparative analysis in order to study how social transformation, language standardization, and communication development have a contribution to the decline of archaic forms in both languages.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Archaic Forms in Indonesian

Archaic pronouns from classical Malay-Indonesian literary tradition, though rarely used in modern everyday speech, still appear in old literary works such as *hikayat* (traditional tales), *syair* (poetry), royal letters, and classical prose — all of which reflect the feudal social hierarchy of the ancient Malay kingdoms of the Nusantara.

The first pronoun discussed is **beta**, a first-person singular pronoun used exclusively by royalty or nobles to refer to themselves. It signals high social status and authority, and is commonly found in palace poetry and Malay royal correspondence. An example of its use is: "*Beta titahkan engkau pergi ke negeri itu*" — meaning "I command you to go to that land."

Next is **daku**, a poetic and literary variation of the word *aku* (I/me). Unlike *beta*, it carries no strict social hierarchy and is used purely for aesthetic and lyrical effect in classical poetry and romantic prose. A typical example is: "*Jangan kau lupakan daku, wahai kekasih*" — meaning "Do not forget me, my beloved."

The third pronoun, **hamba**, was used by people of lower status when speaking to their superiors. The word literally means "servant" or "slave" and functions as a self-

humbling expression of submission and devotion. Its use is famously illustrated in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*: "*Hamba tiada bernama dan tiada tahu akan bapak hamba*" — meaning "I have no name and do not know my father."

**Tuan hamba** is a second-person pronoun, equivalent to "you," used when addressing someone of higher rank with great respect. It effectively elevates the listener to a position of superiority in the conversation. An example from *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* reads: "*Hai, Tuan Hamba! Betapa hal kita ini?*" — meaning "O, my lord! What shall become of us?"

Finally, **kisanak** is a form of address used among peers or equals, roughly equivalent to "friend" or "comrade." It conveys a sense of horizontal familiarity within a feudal context and is especially characteristic of Javanese-Malay classical prose. A typical example is: "*Kisanak, dari mana gerangan asalmu?*" — meaning "Friend, where do you come from?"

Taken together, these five pronouns reveal how the classical Malay language encoded social rank directly into its vocabulary. The choice of pronoun was never merely stylistic — it reflected and reinforced the feudal structure of the Malay kingdoms. Today, these forms are primarily preserved in classical literature and historical texts, serving as a linguistic window into the social world of ancient Nusantara.

## Archaic Forms in Early Modern English

Archaic forms in Early Modern English are commonly found in literary works, especially in the plays and sonnets of William Shakespeare. Several pronouns that are now considered obsolete were widely used during the 16th and 17th centuries, including thou, thee, and thy.

- "Thou" is used as a singular subject pronoun (similar to "you" in informal or intimate situations).
- "Thee" is used as an object pronoun.
- "Thy" is used as a possessive adjective (similar to "your").

These forms carried important social meanings. Their usage reflected relationships between speakers, particularly in terms of intimacy, social hierarchy, politeness, and emotional closeness. In many contexts, thou was used among close friends, family members, or toward people of lower social status, while you gradually became the preferred form for formal and respectful interaction.

In the works of William Shakespeare like *Romeo and Juliet* (1901), the distinction between thou and you often indicates emotional tone and social relations between characters. For example, characters may shift from you to thou to express anger, affection, intimacy, or superiority. This demonstrates how pronoun choice functioned as a sociolinguistic marker in Early Modern English society.

The decline of these archaic forms occurred gradually due to language simplification and changing social norms. By the Late Modern English period, the pronoun you replaced most singular and plural distinctions, resulting in a more

standardized and egalitarian system of address.

## Processes of Archaic Decline

### *Indonesian Language*

In Indonesian, there has been a shift in linguistic forms—particularly archaic forms, including vocabulary, phrases, and pronouns—toward more modern forms as times have changed; today, these archaic forms are rarely used in everyday communication. These forms are generally found in old literary works, folktales, or in highly formal or hierarchical communication contexts, such as in the historical Indonesian literary work titled “Hikayat Hang Tuah I” discussed in the study conducted by Wulandari et al. (2020). Several archaic Indonesian forms that are now rarely used in everyday communication have transformed into more modern forms and are presented as follows:

Archaic Forms	Modern Forms	Old Function/Context
<i>beta</i>	<i>aku / saya</i>	first-person pronouns
<i>hamba</i>	<i>saya</i>	a form of humility toward a higher authority
<i>tuan hamba</i>	<i>Anda / kamu</i>	a form of respectful address in a feudal social system
<i>kisanak</i>	<i>saudara / teman</i>	formal titles for a respectful person
<i>manira</i>	<i>saya / aku</i>	Classical pronouns in Old Indonesian literature

These forms are currently falling out of use and are more commonly found in folktales, classical literature, or traditional performances than in modern everyday communication (Faaizah, 2023; KBBI, 2016; Wikikamus, 2026; Wulandari et al., 2020). This has occurred due to the influence of government policies requiring the public to use a more standard and neutral language in formal situations, such as in the field of education and in the mass media (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2019).

This phenomenon refers to a process known as language standardization, a theory introduced by Milroy (2001) in the previous explanation. Thus, this phenomenon demonstrates a shift in the language influenced by the social orientation of Indonesian society, moving from a hierarchical communication system toward a more egalitarian and practical form of communication.

Consequently, archaic forms in the Indonesian language—which previously symbolized high social status and formality—are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the context of modern communication.

## Early Modern English Language

In Early Modern English, there are also various archaic forms that, in today's era, have rarely been used in everyday communication and have shifted with language forms that are very modern. The various forms are the pronouns *thou*, *thee*, and *thy* that are now replaced by *you* and *your* (Buyle & Smet, 2018; Davies et al., n.d.), also the verb forms like *hath* and *dost*, transform to be *has* and *do* (Criado-peña, 1989). These changes show that there is a simplification of the English Language structure along with the development of modern society.

Archaic Form	Modern Form
<i>thou</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>thee</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>thy</i>	<i>your</i>
<i>hath</i>	<i>has</i>
<i>dost</i>	<i>do</i>

One of the main factors of this decline is pronoun simplification, like the explanation of Milroy (2001) before. That is, in the Early Modern English era, the use of pronouns like *thou* and *thee* had a specific social function, such as showing familiarity, social status, or showing communication hierarchies. However, as English society developed towards a more practical communication system, the use of pronouns began to be simplified into one general form, namely *you* (Buyle & Smet, 2018; Davies et al., n.d.). Thus, this simplification makes the communication system more efficient and easier to use in various social contexts.

In addition, the transformation of social norms also contributed to the fading of archaic forms of the English Language, as English society slowly experienced changes in social orientation from a communication system that exactly pressed the hierarchy of communication towards more egalitarian communication (Buyle & Smet, 2018). As a result, the language forms previously used to mark the difference in social status have become increasingly irrelevant in modern communication. Therefore, these phenomena show that the language change is exactly related to the changes in the social structure of society.

## Sociolinguistic Factors

The decline of archaic forms in both Indonesian and Early Modern English cannot be adequately explained by internal linguistic logic alone. In both cases, the recession of older vocabulary and grammatical structures correlates strongly with a cluster of external

sociolinguistic forces: modernization, the expansion of formal education, the rise of mass media, the democratization of language, and the restructuring of social class hierarchies. These factors did not operate in isolation; rather, they formed an interlocking set of pressures that collectively destabilized the social conditions under which archaic registers had previously flourished.

### *Modernization*

Modernization, understood here in the sociolinguistic sense as the broad reorganization of social life around urban, industrial, and bureaucratic structures, has long been identified as a primary driver of language change. As Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) argue, modernization tends to flatten social hierarchies and erode the localized, community-specific registers that depend on stable, face-to-face social arrangements. In Early Modern England, the economic and social transformations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries — the growth of London as a commercial centre, increasing geographic mobility, and the gradual dissolution of rigid feudal social categories — created conditions in which the fine pragmatic distinctions encoded by forms like *thou* versus *you* became increasingly difficult to maintain consistently. Speakers encountering strangers in new urban and commercial contexts defaulted to *you* as the socially safer, unmarked option, and over time, this default became the norm (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003).

In Indonesia, the process of modernization operated through a different but structurally analogous mechanism. The Dutch colonial administration introduced a bureaucratic model of governance that required a standardized, functional variety of Malay for administrative communication, gradually displacing the more elaborate register hierarchies of pre-colonial court Malay. Post-independence modernization, driven by the new Indonesian state's investment in national infrastructure, urbanization, and economic development, accelerated this process further. As Sneddon (2003) documents, the shift from an agrarian, feudally organized society toward a modern nation-state created communicative demands that older, hierarchically layered registers were ill-suited to meet, hastening the retreat of archaic honorifics and court vocabulary from everyday use.

### *Education*

Formal education has historically served as one of the most powerful institutionalizing forces in language standardization, and its role in the obsolescence of archaic forms in both languages is substantial. In England, the spread of grammar school education from the sixteenth century onward, combined with the growing influence of printed texts, established a relatively uniform written standard that increasingly marginalized the regional and register variation in which many archaic forms had persisted. Milroy and Milroy (1985) identify education as a key mechanism of standardization, through which a prestige variety is codified and transmitted to successive generations, effectively delegitimizing alternative forms, including archaic ones.

In Indonesia, the role of education was even more explicitly ideological. Following independence, the Indonesian government implemented a national curriculum

conducted entirely in Bahasa Indonesia, the standardized national language. This had the direct effect of displacing not only regional languages in formal contexts but also the older, more elaborate Malay-derived registers that had characterized educated speech in certain communities. Alisjahbana (1976), one of the most influential figures in Indonesian language planning, explicitly argued that the national language needed to be modernized and simplified to serve the communicative needs of a democratic, developing society — a position that implicitly devalued the archaic honorific and courtly vocabulary of classical Malay. Through schooling, successive generations of Indonesians acquired Bahasa Indonesia in its standardized, simplified form, without the archaic register vocabulary that had been central to older educated speech.

## *Mass Media*

The emergence of mass media introduced a powerful new force for linguistic convergence in both contexts, though separated by several centuries. In Early Modern England, the printing press served a functionally analogous role to what broadcasting and print journalism would later serve in Indonesia. Eisenstein (1979) has argued that print culture was transformative for language standardization in Europe, because it required printers and publishers to make consistent choices about spelling, vocabulary, and grammar across large print runs intended for broad audiences. This created a visible, widely circulated standard that gradually drew spoken and written norms toward it, marginalizing variant and archaic forms. The eventual standardization around London English as a prestige written norm effectively rendered many regional and archaic forms invisible in public textual culture.

In twentieth-century Indonesia, national radio broadcasting — later supplemented by television and eventually digital media — played a structurally comparable role. Radio Republik Indonesia, established in 1945, broadcast exclusively in standardized Bahasa Indonesia, bringing a single linguistic norm into homes and public spaces across the archipelago (Loven, 2008). The register of broadcast Indonesian was formal, neutral, and deliberately stripped of the archaic and regionally specific vocabulary associated with older Malay varieties. Over time, this media-disseminated norm became the reference point against which other varieties, including more archaic ones, were measured and found wanting in terms of modern prestige.

## *Democratization of Language*

The democratization of language refers to the sociolinguistic process by which forms that encode social hierarchy, deference, or asymmetrical power relations are replaced by more egalitarian alternatives. This process is closely tied to broader political democratization but operates at the level of everyday linguistic practice. Fairclough (1992) has written influentially on the "democratization of discourse," observing that modern public communication increasingly tends toward informality, symmetry, and the reduction of markers that explicitly signal status difference.

In Early Modern English, this dynamic is visible in the gradual collapse of the thou/you distinction as a marker of social hierarchy. As Crystal (2003) notes, the social

asymmetry that thou encoded — whereby a social superior would address an inferior with thou while receiving you in return — became increasingly uncomfortable in a society that was, however slowly and unevenly, moving toward new models of civic equality. By the eighteenth century, you had become the universal second-person form precisely because it carried no hierarchical baggage, representing in miniature a broader democratization of social address.

In Indonesian, the introduction and rapid adoption of "Anda" as a standardized second-person pronoun is a paradigmatic example of deliberate linguistic democratization. Unlike "engkau," which carried connotations of intimacy or condescension depending on context, or "kamu," which was marked as informal, "Anda" was explicitly designed as a socially neutral form that could be used regardless of the relative status of speaker and addressee (Sneddon, 2003). Its promotion through education and media reflected a broader ideological commitment to egalitarian national identity, in which the elaborate status-marking systems of older Malay and Javanese-influenced registers were seen as incompatible with the values of a modern democratic republic.

### *Social Class Restructuring*

Underlying all of the above factors is a deeper structural shift: the reorganization of social class in both societies fundamentally altered the landscape of linguistic prestige. Bourdieu (1991) argues that linguistic forms derive their value not from intrinsic properties but from the social fields in which they circulate, meaning that when the social class structure changes, the prestige attached to particular linguistic forms changes with it. Archaic forms, in both English and Indonesian, had been sustained in large part by their association with elite social groups — the nobility, the court, the clergy, the educated upper class — whose linguistic practices set the prestige standard for the broader community.

In England, the gradual rise of a commercially prosperous middle class from the sixteenth century onward produced a new locus of linguistic prestige that was not rooted in aristocratic or ecclesiastical tradition. The linguistic norms of this emerging class — more pragmatic, less ceremonially elaborate, less invested in the archaic forms of courtly or religious register — increasingly competed with and eventually displaced the older prestige standard. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003), drawing on the Corpus of Early English Correspondence, demonstrate empirically that the adoption of newer forms like you over thou spread fastest through the upwardly mobile mercantile classes before diffusing to other social groups, confirming that class restructuring was a primary vector for the change.

In Indonesia, the displacement of the old aristocratic and colonial elite by a new nationalist middle class following independence produced an analogous restructuring of linguistic prestige. The priyayi class — the Javanese aristocratic and administrative elite whose speech norms had heavily influenced formal Indonesian — lost much of its social dominance in the post-independence period, and with it went much of the prestige

attached to the elaborate, hierarchically sensitive register it had cultivated. The new nationalist intelligentsia, drawing its membership from a broader social base and committed to an egalitarian national ideology, favored a more accessible, standardized Indonesian that deliberately moved away from the markers of the old elite register (Anderson, 1990). The archaic forms associated with priyayi speech and classical Malay court culture were thus doubly marginalized: stripped of their prestige class base and ideologically reframed as obstacles to national unity and democratic modernity.

Taken together, these five sociolinguistic factors — modernization, education, mass media, democratization of language, and social class restructuring — constitute a mutually reinforcing system of pressures that drove the obsolescence of archaic forms in both English and Indonesian. No single factor is sufficient on its own; it is their convergence, operating across different historical periods and cultural contexts but producing structurally comparable outcomes, that gives this comparative study its analytical force.

## Comparative Analysis

### *Similarities*

Both Indonesian and Early Modern English experienced the decline of archaic language forms as part of broader social and linguistic change. In both languages, the simplification of pronoun systems occurred to make communication more practical and accessible. Additionally, the disappearance of archaic forms reflects a shift toward more egalitarian social relationships, where language became less dependent on rigid hierarchy and social class distinctions.

### *Differences*

The decline of archaic forms in Indonesian was strongly influenced by institutional and political factors. The development of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language encouraged language standardization through education, government policy, and mass media. As a result, older forms such as *beta*, *kisanak*, and *tuan hamba* became limited to literary or historical contexts.

In contrast, the decline of archaic forms in English occurred more naturally through gradual linguistic evolution. Pronouns such as *thou*, *thee*, and *thy* disappeared because of changing social norms and the increasing dominance of *you* in everyday communication. Literary influence, including the works of William Shakespeare, preserved these forms mainly in historical and literary contexts rather than institutional policy.

### *Interpretation*

The comparison shows that language change is a universal phenomenon influenced by social transformation. However, each language experiences change through different historical and cultural processes. Indonesian archaic decline was more institutional and politically driven, while English archaic decline developed through gradual social and linguistic evolution.

## CONCLUSION(S)

This study demonstrates that the decline of archaic forms in both Indonesian and Early Modern English is closely connected to social transformation, language standardization, and changing communicative needs within society. Archaic forms such as *beta*, *hamba*, *tuan hamba*, *thou*, *thee*, and *thy* once functioned not only as linguistic elements but also as markers of hierarchy, intimacy, power, and social identity. However, as societies evolved toward more modern, egalitarian, and practical systems of communication, these forms gradually lost their relevance in everyday usage.

The findings reveal that both languages experienced similar processes of simplification, particularly in pronoun systems, which reflects a broader tendency toward efficiency and accessibility in communication. Nevertheless, the sociolinguistic mechanisms behind this decline differed significantly. In Indonesia, the disappearance of archaic forms was strongly accelerated by institutional intervention through language planning, education, media, and national standardization policies. In contrast, the decline of archaic forms in Early Modern English occurred more gradually through natural linguistic evolution and changing social norms, without direct centralized regulation.

Furthermore, this study confirms that language change cannot be separated from social context. Modernization, democratization of language, mass media, education, and shifts in class structure all contributed to reshaping linguistic practices in both societies. As the social environments that once supported hierarchical and formal registers weakened, archaic forms increasingly survived only in literary, historical, religious, and cultural contexts.

Ultimately, this comparative sociolinguistic analysis highlights that the disappearance of archaic language forms is not simply a matter of vocabulary loss, but a reflection of broader cultural and ideological change. The study contributes to the understanding of how languages adapt to societal transformation while preserving traces of historical identity through literature and cultural memory.

For future research, further comparative studies involving other languages and historical periods are recommended in order to explore whether similar sociolinguistic patterns of archaic decline occur across different linguistic traditions and cultural settings.

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