



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***The language that saves tradition: Identity negotiation, religion, and the performative survival of East Javanese Coastal Ludruk**Sudiyono¹, Eko Suroso^{2*}, Budiana Setiawan³, Heru Setyono⁴, Sri Hendrawati⁵, Ariantoni⁵, Turahmat⁶, Achmad Habibullah⁵ & Fahmi Wahyuningsih⁷¹Research Center for Education, National Research and Innovation Agency Republic of Indonesia, Indonesia²Indonesian Language And Literature Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia³Research Center for Society and Culture, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia⁴Research Center for Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology, National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia⁵Research Center for Education, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia⁶Indonesian language and literature education, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia⁷German Language Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia*Correspondence: ekosurosooke@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study examines how East Javanese Coastal Ludruk negotiates identity, religion, and cultural continuity through language and performance. Using community-based participatory research, the study involved Ludruk communities in Surabaya, Gresik, and Lamongan through interviews, open questionnaires, observation, documentation, and thematic analysis. The findings show that Ludruk Pesisir survives not by preserving tradition as a fixed form, but by reorganizing its linguistic and cultural resources. Performers use colloquial registers, code-mixing, humor, religious narratives, visual symbols, musical recomposition, and intergenerational training to sustain audience intimacy, moral resonance, and social legitimacy. Islamic stories, Walisongo narratives, modest costumes, and pesantren-compatible performances demonstrate how religion becomes a cultural language for negotiating acceptance. Meanwhile, musical innovation, shortened performance duration, and collaboration with schools and local art groups expand Ludruk's relevance across generations. The study argues that Ludruk Pesisir embodies performative survival: tradition remains alive through repeated acts of speaking, sounding, moving, teaching, collaborating, and being socially recognized.

KEYWORDS: East Javanese Coastal Ludruk, performative survival, language and identity, religious discourse, cultural hybridity

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Introduction

Traditional performance never lives merely as a residue of the past. It remains alive because it continues to be spoken, performed, heard, interpreted, and transmitted by its community. In folk performance, language does not function only as a means of communication; it is also a way through which people construct memory, humor, social criticism, moral values, and collective identity. For this reason, tradition cannot be understood as a frozen form. It is a cultural event that moves through voice, body, music, costume, story, and audience response. This view is consistent with performance theory, which understands performance as a speech event and a social act shaped by context, participation, and audience recognition (Fahmi, 2026; Honda et al., 2026; Hymes, 2013; Majadly & Amara, 2025). Within the framework of language and culture, the stage can also be read as a space of many voices, a hybrid space, and a performative space where identity is produced through repeated actions, symbols, and socially recognized relations (Bourdieu, 1991; Butler, 2021; Fettahoğlu & Aydintan, 2026; Hall, 2003). On this basis, the continuity of traditional performance should not be seen only as the preservation of inherited forms, but as the capacity of a tradition to renew the cultural languages that keep it meaningful.

This issue is especially visible in East Javanese Coastal Ludruk. Ludruk is known as a folk theatre closely connected to everyday life, humor, music, dance, dialogue, social criticism, and stories of ordinary people. Today, however, Ludruk Pesisir communities face complex pressures: declining public interest, weak regeneration, competition with modern entertainment, limited economic prospects, and changing socio-religious norms. Recent studies on language revitalization and cultural heritage show that the sustainability of tradition cannot rely solely on documentation, archiving, or the preservation of form. It requires community involvement, intergenerational transmission, and the ability of cultural practices to adapt to changing media, social spaces, and audience habits (Fitzgerald, 2021; Mistrean & Sharma, 2026; Rizkita et al., 2025; Tamim et al., 2025). Studies on intangible cultural heritage also show that body, sound, technology, narrative, and audience experience are crucial to sustaining the life of cultural practices, especially when traditions face changing patterns of cultural consumption and new ways of accessing performance (Dai, 2026; Türker, 2026). Thus, the crisis of Ludruk Pesisir is not only about the loss of performance spaces; it is also about the weakening of the linguistic world through which Ludruk can be recognized, laughed with, understood, and inherited.

This article positions the revitalization of Ludruk Pesisir as a process of linguistic and cultural negotiation. Its focus is not only on how Ludruk is preserved as a traditional art form, but on how Ludruk learns to speak again to its community. The research data show that Ludruk Pesisir communities in Surabaya, Gresik, and Lamongan renew their performance through popular colloquial registers, code-mixing, Islamic narratives, Walisongo histories, moral messages, religious costumes, musical recomposition, shortened performance duration, artistic collaboration, and training for children and teachers. These findings show that language in Ludruk is not limited to words. It also includes body, sound, costume, movement, humor, and modes of transmission. Recent studies on language revitalization, cultural communication, and intangible cultural heritage emphasize that cultural identity can endure when language, symbols, education, community participation, and performative practices support one another within changing social spaces (Fitzgerald, 2021; Gans et al., 2025; Guo et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2024). The novelty of this article therefore lies in reading Ludruk Pesisir as a practice of *performative survival*: the vitality of tradition that emerges through acts of speaking, joking, singing, dressing, moving, teaching, and collaborating. Ludruk Pesisir survives not by freezing authenticity, but by continually reorganizing the cultural languages through which tradition can be spoken, heard, seen, embodied, and inherited.

Theoretical Framework

This article starts from the premise that traditional performance is a linguistic and cultural event, not merely an artistic form inherited from the past. In the ethnography of communication, language always operates within a specific social event; its meaning is shaped by who speaks, to whom, in what situation, through what style, and for what purpose Hymes (2013). For this reason, Ludruk Pesisir cannot be understood only through the structure of its plays, music, or costumes. It must be read as a speech event involving performers, audiences, humor, response, social space, and cultural values. Street & Bauman (1988) argues that performance is a communicative act that makes language appear in a marked and socially consequential way before an audience. In Ludruk, this performative quality is evident in colloquial registers, spontaneous jokes, code-mixing, kidungan, and dialogues designed to create closeness with spectators. Thus, the language of Ludruk does not simply deliver a story; it forms the social relationship that allows the tradition to remain recognizable, responsive, and transmissible.

The second theoretical layer concerns heteroglossia, cultural hybridity, performativity, and symbolic legitimacy. Wehrle et al. (1982) views language as a space of many voices, where different social registers meet and negotiate meaning. This perspective is useful for reading Ludruk Pesisir because its stage brings together local speech, colloquial Indonesian, playful English expressions, Islamic narratives, moral language, sound, and bodily signs. Bhabha (1994) helps explain this encounter as hybridity: an in-between space in which tradition reorganizes itself without fully abandoning its origins. In Ludruk Pesisir, hybridity appears when folk stories meet Walisongo narratives, gamelan is combined with contemporary instruments, Remo is performed in Muslim clothing, and the Ludruk stage opens itself to Jaran Jenggo, pencak silat, Campursari, and pesantren-based arts. Butler (2021), in turn, allows costume, gesture, gendered roles, and bodily appearance to be read as performative acts that are repeated and socially recognized. Bourdieu (1991) deepens this reading through the concept of symbolic legitimacy: cultural practices endure when they gain recognition within their social field. Hall (2003) further understands identity as a process of representation; in this sense, Ludruk Pesisir represents itself anew through language, body, sound, and symbols that contemporary audiences can recognize.

The final framework understands revitalization as the transmission of linguistic-cultural practice. Recent studies show that language revitalization and intangible cultural heritage cannot be reduced to documentation or archival preservation. Fitzgerald (2021) emphasizes the need for a revitalization framework that links documentation, community practice, and language sustainability, while Hammine & Tsutsui Billins (2022) show that language documentation and reclamation are stronger when carried out collaboratively with communities. In the field of intangible cultural heritage, that the transmission of performing traditions requires strategies that respond to changing social landscapes, while Hou et al. (2022) demonstrate that intangible heritage is tied to embodied practice and lived experience, not only to formal representation. Qiu et al. (2022) and Cerquetti et al. (2022) likewise show that heritage sustainability depends on social participation, community experience, and the capacity of tradition to remain relevant within everyday life. On this basis, this study conceptualizes Ludruk Pesisir as a practice of *performative survival*: a tradition that endures through repeated acts that allow it to be spoken, heard, seen, embodied, taught, and inherited.

Method

a. Materials

This study employed a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to examine how Ludruk Pesisir communities negotiate language, culture, religion, and identity through revitalized performance practices. CBPR was selected because this study positions the community not as an object of inquiry, but as a partner involved in identifying problems, interpreting cultural change, designing revitalization strategies, and reflecting on the outcomes. This approach is consistent with the principles of CBPR, which emphasize equitable partnership between researchers and communities, recognition of local knowledge, and an orientation toward social change relevant to the communities being studied (D'Agostino et al., 2026; Yau et al., 2024). The study was conducted in three Ludruk Pesisir communities in East Java: Sanggar Ludruk Cross-Generational Medhang Taruna Budaya in Surabaya, Senda Kala in Lamongan, and Widya Budaya in Gresik. These communities were purposively selected because they represent different models of sustainability, including cross-generational regeneration, the development of social-educational narratives, and the integration of local Islamic values into performance.

The research materials consisted of interview transcripts, open-questionnaire responses, observation notes, performance documentation, activity photographs, community reflections, and records of the revitalization process. The data analyzed included language use, humor, code-mixing, story themes, Islamic and Walisongo narratives, moral messages, costumes, bodily symbols, jula-juli, kidungan, musical arrangements, performance duration, training programs, recruitment mechanisms, and collaboration with schools, pesantren, and other art communities. In line with the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018), all materials were treated as linguistic-cultural evidence that allowed the researchers to understand Ludruk not only as a verbal text, but also as a social practice embodied through sound, body, movement, symbols, and intergenerational transmission.

b. Procedures

The research began with field observation and participatory discussions with Ludruk Pesisir communities to

understand the current condition of the tradition, including issues of regeneration, changing audience preferences, economic limitations, and the need for cultural adaptation. This stage was also used to build collaborative relationships with community leaders, performers, coaches, teachers, and local cultural actors. In this way, the research process followed the principle of CBPR by producing knowledge together with the community and grounding interpretation in their experiences and perspectives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, open questionnaires, observation, and documentation. The interviews were used to explore revitalization strategies, language adaptation, story transformation, musical innovation, costume change, training practices, and patterns of community collaboration. Open questionnaires were used to capture audience responses to revitalized performances. Observation and documentation were conducted during rehearsals, preparation, and performances in order to understand how cultural meanings were embodied through performance practices.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data familiarization, initial coding, pattern identification, theme development, and conceptualization of relationships among themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was conducted systematically through repeated reading, coding, category grouping, and theme review until the main patterns relevant to the research questions were identified. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source and method triangulation by comparing information from different participants and data types, in line with the principles of credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Alenizi, 2023; Mosch et al., 2024; von Bosse et al., 2025). All participants provided consent to participate, informant identities were anonymized using pseudonyms, and the study was conducted in accordance with applicable ethical procedures.

Results

The findings show that the revitalization of East Javanese Coastal Ludruk is not merely an artistic preservation effort, but a linguistic-cultural process through which tradition reorganizes its way of existing in contemporary society. Language in this study is not limited to spoken words. It also includes popular register, code-mixing, humor, religious narrative, costume, bodily signs, sound, performance duration, and intergenerational transmission. The Ludruk communities examined in this study did not simply repeat inherited forms; they reworked the semiotic resources of performance so that the tradition could remain intelligible, acceptable, and meaningful to contemporary audiences.

Before presenting the detailed findings, Table 1 maps the ontological shift of Ludruk Pesisir from inherited cultural form to contemporary linguistic-cultural praxis. The table demonstrates that Ludruk Pesisir is not a frozen cultural artefact, but a living performative discourse that survives by continuously renegotiating its narrative, temporal, managerial, and symbolic conditions of existence.

Table 1. Ontological Shift of Ludruk Pesisir: From Inherited Form to Contemporary Linguistic-Cultural Praxis

Cultural Dimension	Classical/Historical Paradigm	Contemporary Coastal Praxis	Philosophical and Theoretical Implication
Narrative and ideological function	Ludruk historically functioned as people's theatre rooted in everyday stories, folklore, legends, social criticism, and anti-colonial memory.	Ludruk Pesisir increasingly performs Islamic stories, Walisongo narratives, moral teachings, warnings about illegal cigarettes, and disaster-prevention messages.	Rearticulation of meaning: tradition shifts from folk narration toward moral and religious discourse. Ludruk survives by translating inherited stories into ethical language that remains acceptable to contemporary society.
Temporal aesthetics	Performances could last all night, following a slower communal rhythm, ritualized repetition, and extended audience interaction.	Performances are shortened and accelerated into more compact formats, in some cases approximately two hours, based on audience demand and contemporary attention span.	Contemporary economy of time: tradition negotiates with modern mobility, attention, and social rhythm. Survival depends not only on cultural content, but also on temporal adaptability.

Cultural Dimension	Classical/Historical Paradigm	Contemporary Coastal Praxis	Philosophical and Theoretical Implication
Managerial authority and cultural agency	Performance management tended to rely on maestro authority, seniority, inherited community structures, and top-down decision-making.	Communities develop representative task distribution, open casting, institutional partnerships, and selective collaboration with schools, pesantren, artists, and local groups.	Democratization of agency: cultural inheritance is no longer limited to lineage, senior authority, or inherited legitimacy. It becomes participatory, negotiated, and collectively managed.
Symbolic legitimacy	Ludruk's authority was historically grounded in its closeness to ordinary people's lives, humor, satire, and communal entertainment.	Ludruk gains renewed legitimacy through religious narratives, moral education, contemporary social issues, and institutional collaboration.	Reconstruction of legitimacy: Ludruk is not preserved as an object of nostalgia; it is reauthorized through social usefulness, ethical discourse, and community recognition.
Mode of cultural existence	Tradition was imagined as an inherited cultural form that should be maintained through continuity with the past.	Tradition is practiced as an adaptive discourse that reorganizes language, time, management, story, sound, costume, and audience relations.	Performative survival: Ludruk remains alive because it is not ontologically fixed. It survives as a changing cultural practice that continuously redefines how it can be heard, seen, accepted, and inherited.

Table 1 shows that the transformation of Ludruk Pesisir is not a simple movement from “old” to “new”. It is a deeper shift from inherited form to contemporary praxis. Narrative becomes moral discourse, time becomes compressed and negotiated, management becomes more participatory, and cultural legitimacy is reconstructed through religion, education, and social relevance. This ontological shift provides the foundation for the following subsections, which examine how language, sound, body, and intergenerational collaboration operate as the main semiotic resources of Ludruk's performative survival.

4.1 Popular Colloquial Register as Audience Intimacy

One of the most visible forms of revitalization in Ludruk Pesisir can be observed in the transformation of its performance register. Rather than preserving a rigid or standardized linguistic form, performers actively adapt their language to communicative styles that are familiar to contemporary audiences. This adaptation reflects an awareness that the sustainability of a performing tradition depends not only on maintaining its artistic structure but also on ensuring that its modes of communication remain meaningful and accessible to those who watch it. As an oral and highly interactive theatrical tradition, Ludruk relies on audience engagement, and language becomes a crucial medium through which performers establish connection, humor, and immediacy.

The interview data indicate that this adaptation takes place through the incorporation of colloquial Indonesian, local expressions, and occasional English phrases into performance dialogue. These linguistic choices are not incidental; rather, they represent deliberate performative strategies aimed at creating a communicative atmosphere that resonates with contemporary spectators. A community leader involved in Ludruk Pesisir explained this process as follows:

“We must adopt the culture to revitalize Ludruk. The cultural adaptation to coastal Ludruk art can be seen in several aspects, including the adjustment of language and acting. Sometimes we used ‘ehhm, nggak bahaya ta?’ and some English expression ‘What’s!’, ‘Oh yes, No Problem, Bro!’, ‘Ayok, walking-walking ...’” [Mr. AV]

This statement highlights that revitalization is not limited to organizational support or artistic innovation but also involves adjustments in the linguistic dimension of performance. The expressions “*nggak bahaya ta?*”, “*What’s!*”, “*No Problem, Bro!*”, and “*walking-walking*” demonstrate how performers draw upon recognizable

forms of everyday speech and popular expressions circulating within contemporary communicative environments. By integrating such expressions into performance, actors create a sense of familiarity that enables audiences to engage more easily with the unfolding narrative and comedic interactions on stage.

Importantly, these expressions should not be interpreted as evidence of broader linguistic shifts within particular social groups. Instead, they are better understood as performative resources strategically employed by Ludruk actors. Their significance lies less in their linguistic origin than in their ability to generate humor, spontaneity, and audience participation. Through these choices, performers bridge the gap between traditional theatrical conventions and the communicative expectations of present-day audiences.

Table 2. Popular Colloquial Register and Audience Intimacy in Ludruk Pesisir Performance

Linguistic Data	Linguistic Form	Performative Function	Cultural Meaning
“ <i>nggak bahaya ta?</i> ”	Colloquial Indonesian expression	Produces humor, immediacy, and conversational closeness	Performance language draws on familiar everyday speech
“What’s!”	Playful English fragment	Creates surprise and comic interruption	English expression is used as a humorous performative element
“Oh yes, No Problem, Bro!”	Mixed English expression	Builds a relaxed and humorous interaction	External linguistic elements are adapted to local performance contexts
“ <i>Ayok, walking-walking ...</i> ”	Hybrid Indonesian-English phrase	Generates lightness, parody, and stage spontaneity	Language mixing becomes a resource for comic performance
Colloquial Indonesian and local speech	Everyday speech register	Reduces distance between performers and spectators	Ludruk remains connected to ordinary patterns of social communication

Table 2 illustrates that the popular colloquial register functions as a performative strategy for creating audience intimacy in Ludruk Pesisir. Expressions such as “*nggak bahaya ta?*”, “No Problem, Bro!”, and “walking-walking” do not merely decorate the dialogue; they produce humor, immediacy, and conversational closeness. By drawing on familiar everyday speech and playful language mixing, performers reduce the symbolic distance between traditional theatre and contemporary spectators. In this sense, language becomes a bridge that allows Ludruk to remain accessible without abandoning its identity as a folk performance rooted in local communicative practices.

The use of English expressions should not be read as a claim of linguistic prestige or formal bilingual competence. Within Ludruk performance, such expressions are appropriated as comic resources and localized through timing, parody, and audience-oriented delivery. This shows that revitalization operates through adaptive communication rather than preservation alone. By modifying language and acting in response to changing audience expectations, Ludruk Pesisir negotiates continuity and change at once: it preserves its performative identity while renewing the communicative relationship that makes the tradition socially meaningful.

4.2 Code-Mixing and Stage Heteroglossia: Ludruk as a Space of Many Voices

After popular colloquial register has been read as a strategy of audience intimacy, the analysis moves to a broader level: how the Ludruk Pesisir stage operates as a space of many voices. In this section, *heteroglossia* is used as an analytical lens to explain the encounter of different linguistic varieties, symbols, and cultural expressions within performance. The term is not treated as a category that emerges directly from informants’ statements. Rather, it is used to read how local speech, colloquial Indonesian, English insertions, humor, religious narratives, costume, body, sound, and artistic collaboration come together within a single performative space.

The data show that Ludruk Pesisir does not merely insert new words into an older performance structure. What occurs is more complex: the stage is reorganized as a hybrid space in which different cultural signs interact. Verbal language interacts with humor; Islamic narratives interact with folk stories and social messages; religious costumes interact with the performing body; traditional music interacts with contemporary instruments; and Ludruk itself interacts with other local art forms such as Jaran Jenggo, pencak silat, Campursari, and pesantren-based arts. Revitalization, therefore, does not take place in one isolated element, but across the entire semiotic order of the performance.

Table 3. Taxonomy of Heteroglossia and Performative Hybridity in Ludruk Pesisir

Performative Element	Empirical Hybridity on Stage	Discursive Effect on Audience	Theoretical Lens
Linguistic register	Ludruk performers insert colloquial expressions such as “ <i>nggak bahaya ta?</i> ”, alongside playful English phrases such as “Oh yes, No Problem, Bro!” and “Ayok, walking-walking”.	These expressions create familiarity and reduce communicative distance between performers and contemporary spectators. Ludruk does not rely solely on inherited speech conventions, but also uses recognizable informal registers.	Heteroglossia: the stage becomes a polyphonic arena where local speech, colloquial Indonesian, playful English expressions, and humor intersect.
Humor and audience intimacy	Comic utterances, spontaneous jokes, and conversational language are used to make the performance feel closer to spectators.	Humor becomes a linguistic bridge that makes the performance more approachable and interactive.	Dialogic performance: meaning is shaped through interaction among performer, audience, and social context rather than through fixed textual authority.
Religious narrative	Local stories and everyday narratives are reworked into Islamic stories, Walisongo histories, moral teachings, and messages acceptable to religious communities.	Ludruk gains moral resonance and wider social acceptance. The audience encounters tradition not only as entertainment, but also as ethical and religious discourse.	Symbolic legitimacy: religious language becomes a cultural resource through which tradition negotiates recognition and acceptability.
Visual politics of identity	Older costume codes are modified through <i>kopiah</i> , hijab, modest clothing, and Muslim Remo dance costumes.	The performing body is aligned with local norms of modesty and respectability. Visual adaptation helps the performance become socially acceptable in religiously shaped settings.	Performativity: identity is produced and made recognizable through repeated bodily acts, costume codes, and social signs.
Gendered bodily signs	Some dances are performed by men dressed to resemble women, while other performances adopt more religiously modest visual codes.	Ludruk becomes a space where inherited theatrical playfulness and contemporary moral expectations are negotiated together.	Gender performativity: gendered identity is read as a repeated performance rather than as a fixed essence.
Auditory landscape	Traditional gamelan, <i>jula-juli</i> , <i>kidungan</i> , and Remo elements are combined with contemporary instruments and rearranged musical compositions.	The soundscape becomes more accessible to cross-generational audiences. Traditional sound is not abandoned, but recomposed for present listening contexts.	Cultural hybridity: tradition survives not through strict purification, but through selective recombination of aesthetic resources.
Spatial and inter-artistic composition	Ludruk performances incorporate Jaran Jenggo, Pencak Silat, Campursari, pesantren art groups, and other local artistic forms.	The stage becomes a meeting space for multiple local arts, expanding participation and preventing Ludruk from being isolated as a single endangered form.	Third space: hybrid performance creates an intermediate cultural space where old and new, local and religious, folk and contemporary elements are reassembled.

Table 3 shows that the vitality of Ludruk Pesisir is shaped through layered hybridity. At the linguistic level, hybridity appears in the encounter between local speech, colloquial Indonesian, playful English expressions, and audience-oriented communication. At the narrative level, it appears in the movement from folk stories and everyday narratives toward Islamic stories, Walisongo histories, moral messages, and contemporary social issues. At the visual and bodily level, hybridity is evident in costume adaptation, the use of *kopiah* and *hijab*, Muslim Remo costumes, and the staging of gendered signs through the performing body.

Ludruk Pesisir, therefore, does not survive by preserving authenticity in a rigid sense. It survives through its capacity to reorganize multiple voices, signs, and expressive forms so that the tradition remains recognizable while becoming socially acceptable in changing contexts. The Ludruk stage becomes a space of negotiation: local language meets popular expression, humor meets moral discourse, the traditional body meets religious norms, and inherited sound meets contemporary listening habits. From this perspective, hybridity is not a sign of cultural weakening. It is the very means through which tradition sustains relevance without losing its performative identity.

4.3 Religious Discourse as Cultural Legitimacy

The third pattern in the revitalization of Ludruk Pesisir is evident in the shift of stories toward religious and moral discourse. The data show that this change is most visible in the Ludruk community in Gresik, particularly Widya Budaya, which adapts its stories to local social norms and Islamic values. This transformation does not only concern external appearance; it also reaches the narrative structure of the performance. Stories that were previously rooted in folklore, local legends, and everyday life are increasingly directed toward Islamic stories, Walisongo histories, moral teachings, and values close to the lives of Muslim communities. In Lamongan, a similar moral orientation appears in stories about the dangers of illegal cigarettes and disaster prevention. Thus, Ludruk Pesisir does not merely retain its function as entertainment; it also expands itself into a medium of advice, social education, and moral legitimacy. This shift in narrative orientation is reflected in the following excerpt:

“In the past, many of the stories performed by Ludruk were everyday stories of people close to their lives. The language is easy to understand, but many are interspersed with jokes and movements that can make the audience laugh. Nowadays, the stories shown are adapted to the stories of today’s society and are more likely to be Islamic stories.” [Mr. YN]

The quote shows that the transformation of the story did not erase the old character of Ludruk as a folk theater, but added a religious and moral layer to it. Table 4 maps the discourse layer by placing the narrative data, discourse forms, performative functions, and cultural meanings more systematically.

Table 4. Religious and Moral Discourse in Ludruk Pesisir Narratives

Narrative Data	Form of Discourse	Performative Function	Cultural Meaning
Everyday stories of people’s lives	Folk-social narrative	Builds familiarity and humor	Ludruk remains rooted in ordinary community experience
Jokes and comic movements	Popular comic discourse	Produces laughter and audience engagement	Humor sustains Ludruk’s identity as people’s theatre
Islamic stories	Religious narrative	Reorients performance toward moral and spiritual values	Ludruk negotiates acceptability in Muslim social settings
Walisongo histories	Islamic-historical discourse	Connects performance to locally recognized religious memory	Tradition gains legitimacy through sacred historical references
Moral teachings	Ethical discourse	Turns performance into advice and public pedagogy	Ludruk becomes a medium for communal moral reflection
Illegal-cigarette warnings	Contemporary social discourse	Raises awareness of social problems	Ludruk translates public issues into performative language
Disaster-prevention messages	Preventive educational discourse	Communicates practical social knowledge	Ludruk functions as a culturally familiar medium of social education
<i>Pesantren</i> acceptability	Religious-social reception	Expands the audience and institutional space of Ludruk	Performance enters religiously shaped cultural environments

Table 4 shows that the transformation of stories in Ludruk Pesisir cannot be understood merely as a change of theme. What occurs is a shift in the language of legitimacy. Folk stories and humor remain the foundation of Ludruk as people’s theatre, but Islamic narratives, Walisongo histories, moral teachings, and contemporary social

issues provide an additional ethical authority. In this way, Ludruk does not abandon its popular character; it expands its social function from entertainment to a space of advice, education, and communal moral reflection. The excerpt from Mr. YN strengthens this finding by showing the performer's awareness of a changing narrative orientation: from everyday stories close to people's lives toward stories more attuned to contemporary social and religious conditions. In the context of Gresik and *pesantren* environments, religious discourse helps Ludruk gain social acceptance without erasing its identity as folk performance. Meanwhile, in the Lamongan context, issues such as illegal cigarettes and disaster prevention show that morality in Ludruk is not only religious, but also social and practical. Religion and morality in Ludruk Pesisir therefore operate as cultural languages through which the tradition negotiates recognition, acceptability, and continuity.

4.4 The Speaking Body: Costume, Gender, and Visual Language

The negotiation of identity in Ludruk Pesisir does not occur only through verbal language, but also through the body that appears on stage. Costume, gesture, gender roles, and visual arrangement are part of the cultural language of performance. In performative art, the body is never neutral. It carries particular signs, values, and social expectations. Before dialogue is spoken, the performer's body already "speaks" through clothing, position, movement, and the manner of presenting itself before the audience.

In contemporary Ludruk Pesisir, costume adaptation becomes an important form of visual negotiation. The data show that the Widya Budaya community in Gresik presents performers and musicians wearing *kopiah*, hijab, modest clothing, and accessories aligned with local Islamic norms. This adaptation should not be read merely as a change of dress. Costume functions as a visual sign that helps the performance build closeness with the socio-religious environment in which Ludruk is staged.

Table 5. Visual Signs and Cultural Meaning in Ludruk Pesisir Performance

Visual Data	Visual Form	Performative Function	Cultural Meaning
<i>Kopiah</i> worn by male performers or musicians	Religious headwear	Signals respectability and moral familiarity	Ludruk aligns its visual appearance with local Islamic norms
Hijab worn by female performers or musicians	Modest clothing code	Produces visual propriety in performance space	The stage becomes socially legible within Muslim communities
Modest clothing and religious accessories	Visual adaptation of costume	Reduces possible tension between performance and local moral expectations	Costume becomes a cultural bridge between folk theatre and religious society
Muslim Remo dance costume	Traditional dance with religiously inflected clothing	Allows inherited movement to remain performable in new moral settings	Traditional aesthetics are reinterpreted through contemporary visual codes
Male performers resembling female figures	Theatrical gender role	Maintains Ludruk's performative playfulness	Gender roles are staged through costume, gesture, and theatrical convention

Table 5 shows that costume in Ludruk Pesisir is not merely a decorative element. *Kopiah*, hijab, modest clothing, and Muslim Remo costumes function as visual language that enables the performance to be read socially and morally by particular audiences. At the same time, the practice of male performers playing or resembling female figures indicates that Ludruk has long provided a space for gender-role play within its stage conventions. The body in Ludruk therefore becomes a cultural text: it simultaneously presents tradition, humor, propriety, religiosity, and identity negotiation.

This visual adaptation is clearly shown in the documentation of the Widya Budaya community. The following figure illustrates how religious codes are displayed through clothing and stage accessories.



Figure 1. Religious visual codes in the performance of East Javanese Coastal Ludruk

Figure 1 shows that religious legitimacy in Ludruk Pesisir is constructed not only through stories or moral messages, but also through the appearance of the body. Kopiah, hijab, and modest clothing become visual signs that allow audiences to read the performance as familiar, appropriate, and aligned with local socio-religious norms. In this context, costume functions as a visual grammar: it helps Ludruk enter religious community spaces without abandoning its basic character as people's theatre.

A similar negotiation is visible in the adaptation of Remo dance. Remo is one of the important aesthetic elements in East Javanese performance traditions. In contemporary Ludruk Pesisir practice, however, Remo can be performed in Muslim clothing. This shows that traditional movement and contemporary moral codes can coexist within the same performative form.



Figure 2. Muslim costume adaptation in Remo dance performance

Figure 2 shows that costume adaptation does not necessarily weaken tradition. The movement structure and aesthetic identity of Remo are maintained, while its visual appearance is reinterpreted through Muslim clothing. In this way, Ludruk Pesisir does not survive by freezing every visual detail of the past, but by translating inherited aesthetics into signs that can be accepted within contemporary social environments. The performing body becomes a meeting point between tradition, propriety, and renewal.

This finding confirms that visibility in Ludruk Pesisir is part of its cultural language. Costumes and bodies do not merely beautify the performance; they negotiate the relationship between folk art, religious norms, and social acceptance. Ludruk becomes a space where stage gender play, visual ethics, and religious identity are performatively negotiated. Therefore, the vitality of Ludruk depends not only on what is spoken through dialogue, but also on how the body is displayed, read, and accepted by its audience community.

4.5 Musical and Narrative Recomposition: Sound as Cultural Translation

The next finding concerns the recomposition of sound, music, and performance structure. In Ludruk Pesisir, cultural language is not present only through verbal dialogue, but also through sound. Gamelan, *jula-juli*, *kidungan*, Remo dance, musical rhythm, dramatic tempo, and scene transitions form an auditory landscape that helps audiences recognize the feeling, emotion, and identity of Ludruk performance. Changes in music and performance structure, therefore, should not be understood merely as aesthetic variation, but as part of the way Ludruk translates itself into changing social conditions.

The data show that Ludruk Pesisir communities combine traditional musical elements with contemporary instruments and new arrangements. This innovation is not intended to erase the musical character of Ludruk, but to make the performance more dynamic and more accessible to cross-generational audiences. In this context, *sound as cultural translation* means that traditional sound is reorganized so that it still sounds like Ludruk, while at the same time responding to contemporary ways of listening to and enjoying performance.

Table 6. Musical, Temporal, and Inter-Artistic Recomposition in Ludruk Pesisir

Performance Data	Form of Recomposition	Performative Function	Cultural Meaning
<i>Gamelan</i>	Traditional musical base retained in performance	Maintains the recognizable sound of Ludruk	Ludruk preserves its auditory identity through inherited musical texture
<i>Jula-juli</i>	Musical-poetic element used for entertainment and transition	Provides humor, emotional rhythm, and scene continuity	Oral-poetic tradition remains central to Ludruk's performative identity
<i>Kidungan</i>	Sung poetic expression within performance	Carries affect, memory, and social expression	Voice becomes a medium for cultural remembrance
Contemporary instruments	Traditional music combined with newer musical elements	Creates a more dynamic performance atmosphere	Tradition is recomposed without abandoning its recognizable sound base
Rearranged compositions	Modified musical arrangement	Adjusts performance energy and audience engagement	Musical form becomes adaptive rather than fixed
Shortened performance duration	All-night performance compressed into a more compact format, sometimes around two hours	Responds to audience demand and contemporary time rhythm	Ludruk negotiates with modern attention and social mobility
<i>Jaran Jenggo</i> and <i>pencak silat</i>	Local arts incorporated into performance structure	Expands visual and dramatic energy	Ludruk becomes an inter-artistic meeting space
Campursari and <i>pesantren</i> art groups	Selective collaboration with other art communities	Broadens audience reach and social acceptability	Ludruk builds cultural resilience through collaborative performance

Table 6 shows that the recomposition of Ludruk Pesisir occurs across several layers: musical, temporal, narrative, and collaborative. At the musical level, gamelan, jula-juli, and kidungan continue to maintain Ludruk's auditory identity, while contemporary instruments and new arrangements provide fresher performative energy. At the temporal level, the compression of performance duration shows how Ludruk adjusts itself to the time rhythm of contemporary audiences. At the collaborative level, the presence of Jaran Jenggo, pencak silat, Campursari, and pesantren-based arts expands the Ludruk stage into a meeting space for various local artistic expressions. The following documentation illustrates one form of musical recomposition carried out by Ludruk Pesisir communities: the combination of traditional elements with contemporary instruments.



Figure 3. Musical recomposition through traditional and contemporary instruments

Figure 3 shows that musical innovation in Ludruk Pesisir functions as an auditory bridge. Traditional sound is not abandoned, but placed alongside newer musical elements to create a more dynamic performance atmosphere. In this way, music becomes a medium of cultural translation: it preserves the memory of older sounds while also opening possibilities for contemporary audiences to experience the appeal of the performance anew.

Beyond sound recomposition, Ludruk Pesisir also expands itself through inter-artistic composition. The presence of Jaran Jenggo, pencak silat, Campursari, and pesantren-based art groups shows that revitalization is not carried out only by renewing Ludruk's internal elements, but also by building relationships with other local artistic expressions. This strategy enriches the structure of the performance and strengthens Ludruk's connection with the surrounding cultural community.



Figure 4. Jaran Jenggo as inter-artistic composition in Ludruk Pesisir performance

Figure 4 shows that Jaran Jenggo is not merely a visual addition. It becomes part of an inter-artistic strategy that expands the energy of the stage and brings Ludruk into dialogue with other forms of folk art. Through this kind of composition, Ludruk Pesisir appears as a flexible cultural arena: it retains its own performative identity while

absorbing signs, sounds, and movements from the local artistic environment. The vitality of Ludruk, therefore, is shaped not only by its ability to maintain inherited elements, but also by its capacity to reorganize sound, time, and artistic collaboration so that it remains meaningful in contemporary social life.

4.6 Intergenerational Language Transmission: Teaching Ludruk as Teaching a Cultural Way of Speaking

The continuity of Ludruk Pesisir depends not only on changes made on stage, but also on the community's ability to transmit Ludruk's cultural language to the next generation. The data show that children are trained to play instruments, dance, and participate in lakon, while kindergarten teachers are trained to play gamelan, perform Remo dance, and sing jula-juli. What is transmitted, therefore, is not only artistic skill, but also a way of speaking, moving, singing, joking, and remembering as part of the cultural world of Ludruk.

Table 7. Collaborative Ecology and Intergenerational Transmission of Ludruk's Cultural Language

Collaborative Network	Social-Intervention Field	Participatory Action	Cultural and Sustainability Objective
Maestro artists and kindergarten teachers	Early childhood education	Kindergarten teachers are trained to play gamelan, perform Remo dance, and sing jula-juli before presenting the performance to young children.	Embodied cultural introduction: Ludruk is introduced through rhythm, gesture, sound, and affective memory before it becomes an abstract cultural concept.
Ludruk communities and children	Community-based regeneration	Children are trained regularly to play instruments, dance, participate in lakon, and recognize the structure of Ludruk performance.	Intergenerational transmission: children learn not only performance skills, but also the speech, sound, movement, humor, and social imagination of Ludruk.
Ludruk communities and schools/campuses	Youth cultural participation	Recruitment occurs through informal community interaction, arts education, school/campus programs, and open casting.	Cultural agency formation: young people are repositioned from spectators into potential performers, interpreters, and inheritors of tradition.
Ludruk communities and pesantren-based cultural spaces	Religious community and moral-cultural acceptance	Islamic stories, moral narratives, modest costumes, and pesantren-compatible performances are developed to expand social reception.	Symbolic legitimacy: Ludruk enters religious social spaces by translating itself into ethical and moral language recognized by the community.
Cross-boundary artistic alliances	Urban-coastal cultural society	Ludruk collaborates selectively with Campursari, Jaran Jenggo, pencak silat, pesantren art groups, and other local performers.	Collective cultural resilience: collaboration expands the social base of Ludruk and prevents the tradition from standing alone against changing entertainment cultures.
Community leaders, audiences, and local institutions	Participatory cultural governance	Communities participate in designing performances, selecting actors, negotiating venues, evaluating audience responses, and disseminating revitalization results.	Participatory ownership: revitalization becomes a shared cultural project rather than an external preservation program imposed from outside the community.

Table 7 shows that the regeneration of Ludruk Pesisir is a process of transmitting cultural language, not merely recruiting new performers. Through schools, *pesantren*, children's training, teacher training, open casting, and artistic collaboration, the community builds an ecology that enables Ludruk to be learned as a way of speaking, moving, singing, and conveying values. In this context, CBPR is not only a research method, but also part of the logic of revitalization, since the community is directly involved in designing, implementing, evaluating, and continuing the tradition.

Overall, the findings show that the performative vitality of Ludruk Pesisir is shaped through a layered linguistic-cultural process. Popular colloquial registers create audience intimacy; heteroglossia and hybridity make the stage responsive to multiple social voices; religious discourse and visual codes generate moral

legitimacy; musical recomposition translates inherited sound into contemporary performance contexts; and intergenerational training transmits Ludruk's cultural language to future performers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explain how Ludruk Pesisir negotiates identity, religion, and cultural continuity through language and performance. The findings show that the vitality of Ludruk does not lie in its ability to preserve older forms intact, but in its capacity to transform cultural language so that it remains recognizable within a changing society. The revitalization of Ludruk Pesisir should therefore be understood as a communicative process, not merely an artistic one. This finding extends the understanding of traditional performance as a speech event and a social act, as performance theory and the ethnography of communication emphasize that meaning emerges from the relationship among performers, audiences, context, and the ways language is displayed (Hymes, 2013; Terkourafi, 2026). Within this framework, Ludruk Pesisir is not simply "performed"; it is continuously negotiated through the ways it speaks, sounds, moves, and is transmitted.

The main contribution of this study is to show that language in traditional performance cannot be reduced to verbal utterance. Language operates as a system of signs that includes register, humor, body, costume, sound, space, and practices of transmission. This reading strengthens Wuster (2020) concept of heteroglossia, as the Ludruk stage becomes a meeting point for multiple social voices: local, national, popular, religious, and intergenerational. However, this study also shows that heteroglossia in Ludruk is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but a strategy of cultural sustainability. The varieties of language and signs that appear in performance do not stand alone; they work together to create intimacy, legibility, and social recognition. At this point, the findings are consistent with Fitzgerald (2021), Hammine & Tsutsui Billins (2022), who emphasize that the sustainability of language and community identity depends on the living relationship among language practice, social recognition, and community involvement.

This study also shows that religion in Ludruk Pesisir does not function as an additional element attached to tradition, but as a language of legitimacy. Islamic narratives, religious visual symbols, and the arrangement of the performing body show that tradition gains social acceptance through signs that can be read by its community. This strengthens Bourdieu (1991) concept of symbolic legitimacy and Butler (2021) concept of performativity: identity is not merely stated, but formed through actions, clothing, gestures, and repeated signs that are socially recognized. At the same time, these changes should not be read as a loss of authenticity. Following Bhabha (1994), they are better understood as hybridity, an in-between space in which tradition reorganizes itself without fully abandoning its cultural roots. This finding is also consistent with studies of intangible cultural heritage that emphasize that the sustainability of tradition depends on the body, experience, transmission, social adaptation, and audience involvement, not only on the documentation of cultural forms (Jing et al., 2025; Palimaru et al., 2026; Van Ninh & Van Tam, 2026).

The implication of this study lies in its proposal of the concept of *performative survival*. This concept explains that tradition survives not because it is frozen, but because it continues to be produced through recognizable actions: speaking, joking, singing, dancing, dressing, teaching, and collaborating. Theoretically, this concept connects language, identity, religion, and intangible cultural heritage within a more integrated framework. Methodologically, the study shows that CBPR is appropriate for research on traditional arts because communities do not merely provide data; they also help shape interpretation and sustain cultural practice (D'Agostino et al., 2026; Phillip et al., 2025; Yau et al., 2024). Practically, the findings show that Ludruk revitalization cannot rely only on festivals, documentation, or restaging. It needs to be directed toward the formation of a linguistic-cultural ecology: children's training, teacher involvement, schools, *pesantren*, art communities, and performance spaces that allow tradition to continue being learned as a living practice.

Further studies should move in several directions. First, audience reception research is needed to examine how different age groups, educational backgrounds, and religious communities interpret the language, humor, costume, sound, and narratives of Ludruk Pesisir. Second, comparative studies with other forms of Indonesian folk theatre could examine whether heteroglossia, religious hybridity, and intergenerational transmission appear in similar or different ways across performance traditions. Third, long-term research is needed to determine whether training involving children, teachers, schools, *pesantren*, and art communities actually produces performer regeneration and changes in audience bases. Fourth, studies on digital documentation and social media are also important, but they should be approached carefully so that digitalization does not replace the bodily practice, rehearsal, voice, and social relations that form the core of intangible cultural heritage (Li, 2025; Yu, 2026). Future research, therefore, should not only ask how tradition is preserved, but how language, body, sound, and community continue to produce the life of tradition in a changing society.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

AI tools were used only for language refinement and technical editing. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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