

Lost in legal translation: language rights, interpreter mediation, and procedural inequality in Indonesia's multilingual courtrooms

Gerry Kadamehang

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesia's multilingual legal order places courtroom language access at the centre of fair-trial protection, because defendants, witnesses, and justice seekers may encounter state law through Bahasa Indonesia, foreign languages, regional languages, indigenous languages, or sign-language mediation in criminal and civil proceedings. **Objective:** This study examines how language rights, interpreter mediation, and procedural inequality are articulated across public Indonesian legal and courtroom-related materials. **Method:** Using a qualitative corpus-assisted sociolegal design, this study analyses 34 public documents comprising legal norms, court-service texts, courtroom event reports, contextual human-rights standards, and scholarly sources, coded through a language-rights matrix, an interpreter-mediation grid, and a procedural-inequality register. **Results:** The findings show that language access is recognised across several institutional registers, but its operational mechanism is unevenly specified. Interpreter mediation becomes most visible when multilingualism disrupts ordinary courtroom procedure, especially in foreign-defendant cases, disability-related access, remote testimony, or documented interpreter presence. **Implication:** Procedural inequality appears as a gap between formal audibility and effective participation, where understanding, response, repair, and accountability remain unevenly distributed. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in reframing courtroom interpreting in Indonesia as a condition of mediated legal participation rather than a technical supplement to legal translation within multilingual justice systems and access-to-justice research.

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Corresponding Author:

Gerry Kadamehang

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Jl. Colombo No. 1, Kampus Karangmalang, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta, 55281, Indonesia

Email: gerrykadamehang.2025@student.uny.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's courtrooms operate within a legal order that presumes Indonesian as the authoritative language of procedure, yet society before those courts is intensely multilingual. Badan Bahasa reported 718 regional languages in 2024, with many classified as vulnerable, endangered, critical, or extinct, indicating that linguistic difference is not peripheral to Indonesian citizenship but embedded in everyday social life. The legal stakes are sharper in criminal proceedings because Article 14(3)(f) of the ICCPR recognises the right to free interpreter assistance when an accused person cannot understand or speak the language used in court. Language access is therefore not a matter of courtesy or administrative efficiency; it is part of procedural fairness. In Indonesia, where foreign defendants, regional-language speakers, indigenous communities, and deaf litigants may encounter state law through mediated language, courtroom interpreting becomes a site

where legal authority, communicative vulnerability, and linguistic inequality meet directly in the ordinary performance of justice.

Court interpreting research has moved beyond the narrow question of whether words are translated correctly. Angermeyer argues that pragmatic equality before the law requires attention to how translated interaction distributes rights, responsibilities, and evidential voice, while his later work frames translation itself as a possible mechanism of institutional discrimination. Studies of monolingual ideology show that courts may treat standard legal language as neutral while marginalising multilingual repertoires [1], [2]. Recent work has also examined non-renditions, zero renditions, interpreter feedback, remote interpreting, and participation in bilingual trials [3], [4], [5], [6]. In Indonesia, studies have begun to address legal interpreting for foreigners, sign-language access, legal translation, and language rights [7], [8], [9], [10]. What remains underexamined is how these concerns converge as procedural inequality in Indonesia's multilingual courtrooms.

This study examines how language rights, interpreter mediation, and procedural inequality are articulated across publicly available Indonesian legal and courtroom-related materials. It asks three linked questions. First, how is the right to understand and be understood represented in legal norms, court reports, and scholarly discussions of Indonesian courtroom practice? Second, how does interpreter mediation appear as a communicative process rather than a merely technical act of equivalence? Third, what risks of procedural inequality become visible when interpretation is partial, delayed, ad hoc, ideologically constrained, or institutionally undervalued? The object of analysis is not courtroom multilingualism in the abstract, but the interaction between legal entitlement, institutional practice, and mediated participation. By connecting normative texts, public court documentation, and relevant legal-linguistic scholarship, this study clarifies how language access can be assessed without converting limited documentary evidence into unsupported empirical claims about actual courtroom behaviour.

This study advances the argument that procedural fairness in multilingual courtrooms cannot be secured by the formal presence of an interpreter alone. Interpreter mediation may support participation, but it may also redistribute agency when questions, answers, warnings, affect, politeness, repair, or evidential nuance are compressed, omitted, or reframed. This does not imply that interpreters are the cause of injustice; rather, it treats interpreting as an institutional site where legal norms, language ideologies, professional constraints, and courtroom authority intersect. The expected contribution is therefore conceptual and methodological: language rights should be evaluated through the quality of mediated participation, not only through the availability of translation. For Indonesian legal linguistics, this perspective connects legal translation, forensic language analysis, and access-to-justice scholarship in a single framework. For comparative sociolegal research, it shows why multilingual courtrooms require procedural analysis attentive to voice, comprehension, institutional asymmetry, and the unequal conditions under which litigants become legally audible.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language rights in courtroom settings

Language rights in courtroom settings are best understood not as abstract linguistic tolerance, but as enforceable conditions for meaningful legal participation. Classical fair-trial doctrine frames interpretation as a safeguard for defendants who cannot understand the language of proceedings, yet recent scholarship widens the concept toward participation, identity, and institutional equality. Kibbee (2020) [11], Stone (2022) [12], McEvoy (2023) [13], and Yi (2023) [14] emphasise the right to an interpreter as a fairness guarantee, while Angermeyer (2021) [15] argues that equality before the law must include pragmatic equality, not only semantic transfer. In Indonesia, Dwany (2026) [10] and Tampubolon (2024) [8] place language rights within questions of legal identity, citizenship, and access to justice.

The relevant dimensions of language rights can therefore be organised around availability, accessibility, quality, recognition, and enforceability. Availability asks whether interpreting is provided at all; accessibility concerns cost, timing, and procedural awareness; quality refers to accuracy, pragmatic adequacy, and professional competence; recognition concerns whose languages count as legally relevant; enforceability asks whether violations can be challenged. Recent studies complicate these indicators by showing that language access includes foreign defendants [7], [16], deaf legal actors [9], immigrants [17], and multilingual court users whose linguistic needs may not fit monolingual legal routines [18].

2.2. Interpreter mediation

Interpreter mediation refers to the communicative work through which courtroom talk is selected, reformulated, repaired, condensed, or repositioned across languages. Earlier models often imagined interpreters as neutral conduits, but interactional approaches reject that simplification. Wadensjö (2020) [19] foregrounds the bilingual courtroom as an interactional order, while Cho (2021) [1] and Runcieman (2021, 2022) show how monolingual ideologies discipline multilingual speech. Angermeyer (2022) [20] further

argues that translation can operate as discrimination when institutional norms treat linguistic difference as deficiency. Du (2024) [3], Karrebaek et al. (2023) [4], and Zhao and Huang (2025) [5] demonstrate that mediation shapes participation, defence opportunities, and the evidential value of utterances.

The main indicators of interpreter mediation include rendition type, participation management, repair, role boundary, and institutional positioning. Rendition type covers full renditions, reduced renditions, non-renditions, and zero renditions; participation management concerns who receives questions, warnings, and legal explanations; repair captures interpreter-initiated clarification or correction; role boundary concerns whether interpreters act as translators, cultural brokers, or procedural guides. Li (2023) [21], Chen (2024) [22], and García (2024) [23] show that minority-language interpreting is shaped by language ideology and institutional politics. Ran (2023) [24] adds that virtual court settings alter turn-taking and access, while Jimenez and Ballesteros-Lintao (2020) [25] highlight norms governing interpretation in criminal trials.

2.3. Procedural inequality

Procedural inequality names the unequal distribution of legal voice, comprehension, and agency produced through institutional procedure. It differs from general social inequality because it emerges inside formal mechanisms that claim neutrality. In courtroom discourse, inequality may appear when some participants understand accusations, questions, and evidential implications directly, while others depend on mediated, partial, or delayed access. Leung (2023) [26] links linguistics to social justice, while Angermeyer (2021, 2022) connects pragmatic disadvantage with institutional discrimination. Indonesian legal-linguistic work by Setiyawan (2026) [27], Sadani (2026) [28], and Setiaji (2026) [29] further indicates that legal meaning is inseparable from authority, reasoning, and power.

The indicators of procedural inequality include unequal comprehension, restricted participation, reduced evidential voice, delayed access, asymmetrical repair rights, and weak accountability for interpreting failure. These indicators allow this study to move beyond the binary question of whether an interpreter is present. They also prevent a purely technical account of translation accuracy from obscuring courtroom power. Drawing on Du (2024) [3], Yi (2024, 2025), Jerónimo (2025) [18], and Zhao and Huang (2025) [5], this study positions multilingual courtroom justice as a problem of mediated participation. Its theoretical stance is that language rights become meaningful only when interpretation enables legally consequential understanding, response, contestation, and voice.

3. METHOD

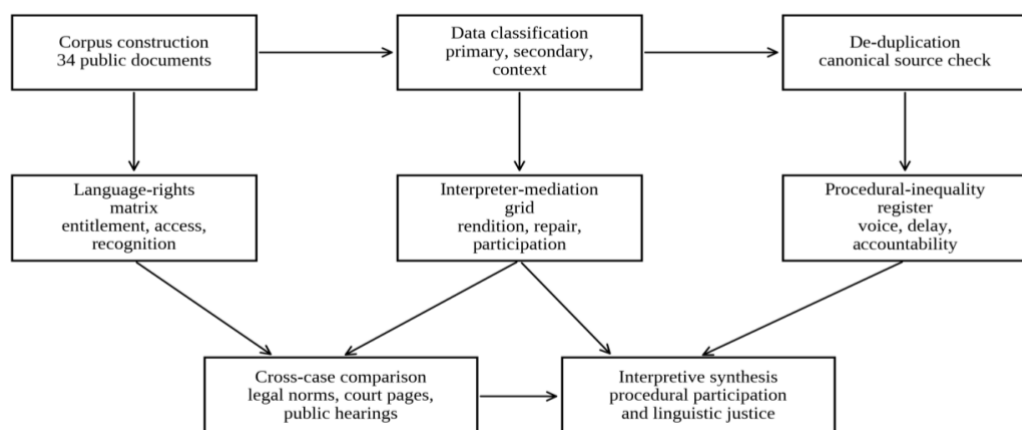
The unit of analysis is a document-level corpus of public, verifiable materials concerning language rights, interpreter mediation, and procedural access in Indonesian courtroom contexts. This corpus contains 34 items: 18 primary materials, nine secondary academic sources, and seven contextual legal or institutional references. Primary data include statutes, court-service documents, court websites, and public courtroom reports. Secondary data consist of scholarly works on court interpreting, legal translation, and linguistic equity. Contextual data provide comparative human-rights and institutional frames. Each document was coded as a legal norm, court-facing rights text, courtroom event report, academic interpretation source, or contextual standard, allowing this study to compare formal entitlement with operational courtroom visibility.

This study adopts a qualitative corpus-assisted sociolegal design. The design is appropriate because the research problem concerns how legal language, institutional documentation, and public courtroom reporting construct language access as a procedural issue. Rather than measuring courtroom behaviour statistically, this study examines publicly available documents as traces of legal entitlement, institutional practice, and mediated participation. The approach combines legal-linguistic document analysis with discourse-oriented coding, following work that treats courtroom interpreting as interactional mediation rather than neutral transfer. This design permits systematic comparison across document types without claiming direct causality between language policy and courtroom outcomes.

The information sources were selected from official legal databases, judiciary websites, court-facing public information pages, official court-news reports, and scholarly publications. Indonesian legal and institutional sources include JDIH BPK, JDIH Mahkamah Agung, Kepaniteraan Mahkamah Agung, district court websites, and Dandapala/Badilum MA. International context was drawn from OHCHR and UN Human Rights Committee materials. Academic sources were used as secondary interpretive anchors, especially studies on translation discrimination, interpreter mediation, non-rendition, courtroom repair, foreign defendants, disability accommodation, and linguistic equity. This source architecture separates primary legal and institutional data from scholarly explanation and comparative context.

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code range	Data type	Source	Location / jurisdiction	Period	Quantity	Characteristics
LLT-PRI-001–002	Criminal procedure laws	JDIH BPK	Indonesia / national	1981–2025	2	KUHAP and new criminal procedure framework
LLT-PRI-003–006	Disability and rights statutes	JDIH BPK	Indonesia / national	2005–2020	4	ICCPR ratification, CRPD ratification, disability accommodation
LLT-PRI-009	Judicial power law	JDIH BPK	Indonesia / national	2009	1	Broader procedural justice framework
LLT-PRI-012	Court service standard	JDIH Mahkamah Agung	Indonesia / district court	2023	1	Public service reference to interpreter provision
LLT-PRI-013–016	Court public information pages	District court websites	Mataram, South Jakarta, Muara Enim, Sarolangun	n.d.–2026	4	Public-facing language of justice-seeker rights
LLT-PRI-019–024	Courtroom event reports	Dandapala / Badilum MA	Labuan Bajo, Soasio, Kebumen, Pinrang	2025–2026	6	Foreign defendants, remote testimony, sworn/certified interpreters
LLT-SEC-026–029	Indonesian scholarship	Journal articles	Bali / Indonesia	2024–2026	4	Access to justice, court interpreting, foreign defendants
LLT-SEC-030–034	Comparative scholarship	Journal articles / DOI records	International, China, Portugal, Australia	2022–2025	5	Translation discrimination, non-rendition, repair, linguistic equity
LLT-CTX-007–008	International human-rights standards	OHCHR / UN HRC	International	1966–2007	2	ICCPR Article 14 and fair-trial interpretation guidance
LLT-CTX-010–011	Language-use framework	JDIH BPK	Indonesia / national	2009–2019	2	Bahasa Indonesia policy and legal language hierarchy
LLT-CTX-017–018	Judicial translation administration	Kepaniteraan MA	Cross-border legal assistance	2022–2023	2	Rogatory and translation requirements
LLT-CTX-025	Disability access commentary	Dandapala / Badilum MA	Indonesia / national	2026	1	Interpreter/support-person role ambiguity



Analytical movement: corpus verification → classification → coding → comparison → interpretive synthesis

Figure 1. Operational matrix of analysis

Data collection proceeded through targeted keyword searches, source verification, metadata extraction, and de-duplication. Search terms included “juru bahasa,” “penerjemah pengadilan,” “terdakwa asing,” “hak pencari keadilan,” “bahasa Indonesia pengadilan,” “akomodasi layak peradilan,” “court interpreting Indonesia,” and “language rights courtroom.” The period covered 1966–2026 because international fair-trial standards, Indonesian statutes, current courtroom reports, and recent scholarship occupy different temporal layers. Each item was assigned a unique document code, source URL, canonical URL, date, jurisdiction, document type, data class, and relevance note. Duplicate records were removed by comparing title, source domain, canonical link, and substantive overlap.

Data analysis followed three linked procedures. First, a language-rights matrix coded each document for entitlement, access, recognition, enforceability, and procedural framing. Second, an interpreter-mediation grid identified how interpretation was represented through availability, qualification, turn-taking, repair, remote mediation, and role boundaries. Third, a procedural-inequality register coded risks involving comprehension, voice, delay, evidential participation, disability accommodation, and accountability. These procedures produced a structured qualitative comparison across norms, court-facing texts, courtroom reports, and scholarship. This study therefore analyses language access as mediated participation, not merely as the formal availability of translation or the lexical accuracy of equivalent wording.

4. RESULTS

4.1. From formal entitlement to operational language access

Legal language access in this corpus emerges as a layered institutional problem rather than a single procedural guarantee. The strongest pattern is not found only in statutes or international standards, but in the interaction between formal entitlement, court-facing visibility, and scholarly critique. The corpus shows that language rights are distributed across different legal registers: criminal procedure, disability accommodation, public service discourse, courtroom reporting, and academic interpretation. This distribution matters because each register frames access differently. Legal norms define entitlement, court documents display institutional availability, public reports show practical appearance, and scholarship identifies inequality. In this sense, language access is not reducible to the presence of a translator; it is constructed across multiple sites where legal participation is authorised, mediated, and evaluated.

The dominant pattern is the prominence of scholarly critique, which accounts for seven documents, or 20.6% of the coded corpus. Operational courtroom visibility follows with six documents, or 17.6%, while interpreter entitlement, disability accommodation, and public-facing procedural rights each appear in five documents, or 14.7%. Language hierarchy appears in four documents, or 11.8%, and cross-border translation administration is the least represented category, with two documents, or 5.9%. Objectively, this distribution indicates that interpreter mediation becomes especially visible when ordinary courtroom procedure is interrupted by multilingual participation, foreign defendants, disability-related access needs, or transnational legal administration. However, the corpus also shows that operational details remain dispersed rather than consolidated in a single coherent language-access framework.

Theoretically, these patterns support Angermeyer’s argument that equality before the law cannot be assessed through semantic equivalence alone, because pragmatic participation is also at stake. They also resonate with Du’s work on non-renditions and participation, Karrebaek et al.’s account of interpreters mediating judicial information, and Yi’s emphasis on linguistic equity in courtroom examination. In the Indonesian context, the visibility of interpreter assistance across foreign-defendant cases, disability accommodation, and public-service rights suggests that legal language access is recognised, but unevenly institutionalised. This study therefore treats language rights as a procedural ecology: a set of entitlements, practices, documents, and mediations through which litigants become legally audible, comprehensible, and capable of responding within courtroom authority.

Table 2. Language-rights and normative access across the corpus

Subcategory	Operational indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data variation	Textual signal	Data codes
Interpreter assistance	Explicit or implicit recognition that a defendant or justice seeker may require language assistance	5	14.7%	Criminal procedure law, international fair-trial standard, court-facing rights text	“interpreter assistance,” “cannot understand the language,” “rights of the accused”	LLT-PRI-001; LLT-PRI-002; LLT-CTX-007; LLT-CTX-008; LLT-PRI-012
Sign-language and support access	Recognition of interpreting or support for deaf persons and persons with disabilities	5	14.7%	Disability law, reasonable accommodation regulation, court access commentary, notarial/legal assistance scholarship	“reasonable accommodation,” “sign-language interpreter,” “support person”	LLT-PRI-003; LLT-PRI-004; LLT-PRI-005; LLT-CTX-025; LLT-SEC-028
Court service information	Court websites or service standards displaying rights, procedures, or assistance for justice seekers	5	14.7%	District court pages, public service standards, justice-seeker information	“hak pencari keadilan,” “pelayanan pengadilan,” “bantuan hukum”	LLT-PRI-012; LLT-PRI-013; LLT-PRI-014; LLT-PRI-015; LLT-PRI-016
Bahasa Indonesia and legal authority	Documents foregrounding Bahasa Indonesia as the legal-administrative language of proceedings	4	11.8%	Language law, legal procedure, judicial authority, legal drafting	“Bahasa Indonesia,” “language of legal documents,” “court procedure”	LLT-CTX-010; LLT-CTX-011; LLT-PRI-009; LLT-SEC-027
Interpreter presence in reported hearings	Public reports describing interpreters, sworn translators, remote interpreting, or language assistance in hearings	6	17.6%	Court news, foreign-defendant cases, teleconference testimony, certified interpreter presence	“juru bahasa,” “penerjemah tersumpah,” “teleconference,” “foreign defendant”	LLT-PRI-019; LLT-PRI-020; LLT-PRI-021; LLT-PRI-022; LLT-PRI-023; LLT-PRI-024
Document translation for legal cooperation	Translation appearing in transnational judicial administration rather than courtroom interaction	2	5.9%	Rogatory documents, court administration guidance, translation requirements	“translation requirement,” “foreign legal assistance,” “rogatory”	LLT-CTX-017; LLT-CTX-018
Access, mediation, and inequality	Academic sources problematising language access, interpreter mediation, and procedural fairness	7	20.6%	Indonesian and comparative scholarship on interpreting, legal translation, and linguistic equity	“translation as discrimination,” “participation,” “non-rendition,” “linguistic equity”	LLT-SEC-026; LLT-SEC-027; LLT-SEC-029; LLT-SEC-030; LLT-SEC-031; LLT-SEC-032; LLT-SEC-034
		34	100.0%			

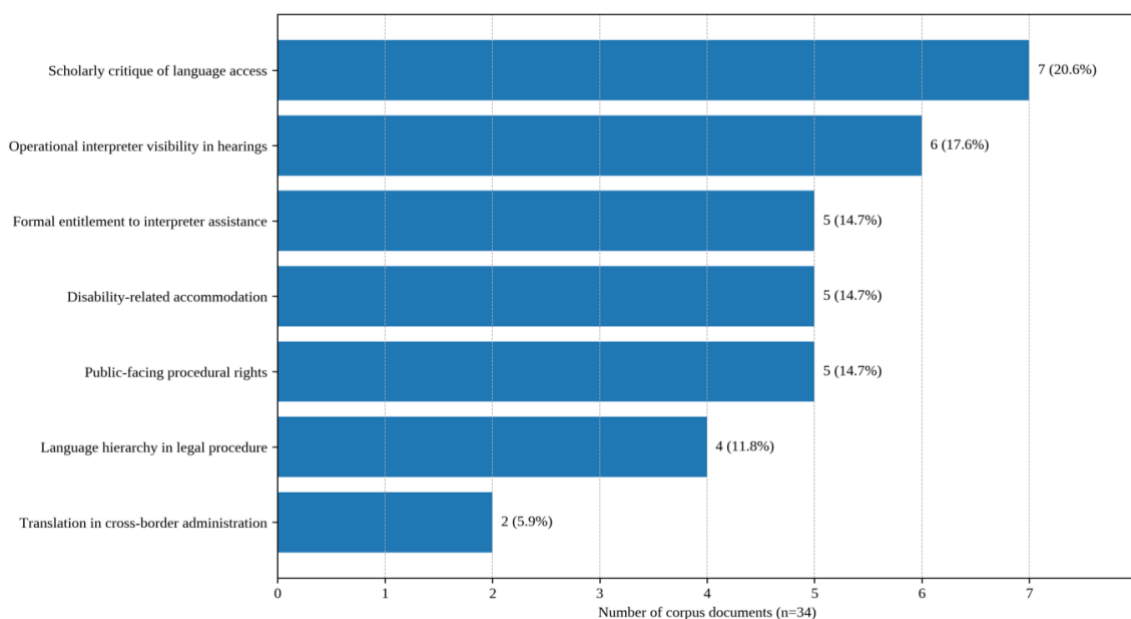


Figure 2. Distribution of language-rights and normative access indicators

4.2. Interpreter mediation as procedural participation

Interpreter mediation appears in the corpus as a differentiated institutional practice rather than a single act of linguistic transfer. Some documents make interpreters visible as courtroom actors, while others address mediation through professional qualification, disability accommodation, remote communication, or administrative translation. The strongest analytical signal comes from scholarly sources because they name interactional risks that public legal documents often leave implicit. This distinction is important for this study because interpreter mediation is not treated as a neutral bridge between languages. Following Angermeyer, Du, Karrebaek et al., Yi, and Zhao and Huang, mediation is approached as a procedural site where participation, repair, evidential voice, and institutional authority are negotiated.

The dominant category is interactional mediation risk, represented by eight documents, or 23.5% of the corpus. Direct courtroom visibility follows with six documents, or 17.6%, while five documents, or 14.7%, contain no operational detail about mediation despite addressing rights or procedure. Professional qualification and disability-related mediation each appear in four documents, or 11.8%. Role-boundary ambiguity appears in three documents, or 8.8%, while remote interpreting and cross-border documentary translation each appear in two documents, or 5.9%. This distribution shows that interpreter mediation is most explicit either when scholarship problematises it or when court reports narrate visible disruption caused by multilingual courtroom participation.

Theoretically, this pattern strengthens the distinction between formal language access and mediated procedural participation. A court may acknowledge interpretation, yet still leave unclear how questions, answers, warnings, objections, affect, and repair are transferred across languages. Angermeyer's critique of translation equivalence and Du's analysis of non-renditions are especially useful here because both show that meaning can be procedurally altered without obvious lexical error. Yi's work on linguistic equity and Karrebaek et al.'s account of interpreters mediating judicial information further suggest that access depends on how institutional knowledge is interactionally delivered. This study therefore treats interpreter mediation as a structured condition of legal audibility, not merely as courtroom assistance.

Table 3. Interpreter mediation functions across the corpus

Mediation function	Operational indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data variation	Textual signal	Data codes
Mediation risks identified through scholarly analysis	Documents discussing non-rendition, repair, pragmatic loss, role pressure, or mediated participation	8	23.5%	Comparative and Indonesian scholarship on courtroom interpreting and legal translation	“non-rendition,” “repair,” “participation,” “translation as discrimination,” “linguistic equity”	LLT-SEC-026; LLT-SEC-027; LLT-SEC-028; LLT-SEC-029; LLT-SEC-030; LLT-SEC-031; LLT-SEC-032; LLT-SEC-034
Direct interpreter presence in hearings	Public reports mention interpreters, translators, or multilingual assistance during hearings	6	17.6%	Foreign-defendant cases, sworn interpreter use, courtroom reports	“juru bahasa,” “penerjemah,” “terdakwa asing,” “penerjemah tersumpah”	LLT-PRI-019; LLT-PRI-020; LLT-PRI-021; LLT-PRI-022; LLT-PRI-023; LLT-PRI-024
No operational mediation detail	Documents recognise rights or procedure but do not explain how interpreting is arranged interactionally	5	14.7%	Legal norms, service texts, court-facing procedural information	“rights,” “service,” “procedure,” without operational interpreting details	LLT-PRI-001; LLT-PRI-002; LLT-PRI-009; LLT-PRI-013; LLT-PRI-014
Qualification or sworn status	Documents foreground certification, oath, appointment, or professional credibility of interpreters	4	11.8%	Court reports and administrative translation references	“sworn interpreter,” “certified translator,” “appointed interpreter”	LLT-PRI-020; LLT-PRI-022; LLT-PRI-023; LLT-CTX-018
Sign-language and accessible communication	Documents concern deaf persons, reasonable accommodation, support, or sign-language interpreting	4	11.8%	Disability law, court accommodation regulation, scholarship on deaf legal access	“sign-language interpreter,” “reasonable accommodation,” “persons with disabilities”	LLT-PRI-003; LLT-PRI-004; LLT-PRI-005; LLT-SEC-028
Interpreter/support-person ambiguity	Documents indicate overlap between interpreting, assistance, support, or procedural facilitation	3	8.8%	Disability access commentary, legal-interpreter role studies, user-feedback studies	“support person,” “assisting,” “feedback from users,” “dilemmatic role”	LLT-CTX-025; LLT-SEC-026; LLT-SEC-029
Remote or technology-mediated interpreting	Documents report interpreting or testimony through teleconference or remote courtroom communication	2	5.9%	Court event reports and remote-court interpreting scholarship	“teleconference,” “remote interpreting,” “virtual court”	LLT-PRI-021; LLT-SEC-033
Cross-border documentary translation	Documents concern translated legal documents rather than live courtroom interaction	2	5.9%	Rogatory administration and transnational legal assistance	“translation requirement,” “foreign legal assistance,” “rogatory”	LLT-CTX-017; LLT-CTX-018
		34	100.0%			

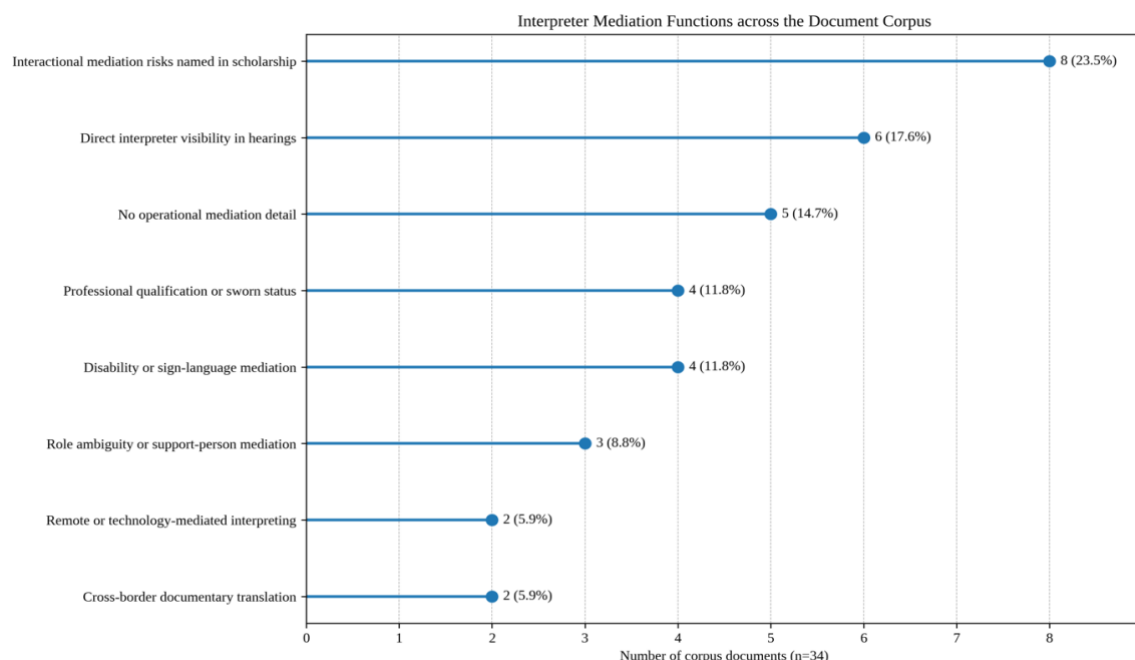


Figure 3. Interpreter mediation functions across the document corpus

4.3. Procedural inequality beyond literal translation

Multilingual courtroom inequality is distributed across several procedural sites rather than concentrated in one legal rule or one interpreter-related practice. The corpus shows that risks emerge at the level of entitlement, evidential participation, public visibility, disability accommodation, role accountability, technology, linguistic recognition, and administrative translation. This pattern matters because procedural fairness depends not only on whether language assistance is formally acknowledged, but also on whether courtroom participants can understand, respond, contest, and be heard under institutional conditions. The table therefore treats inequality as a procedural configuration. It links normative recognition, documentary visibility, and mediated participation without assuming that any single document directly proves courtroom harm or causal injustice.

The most frequent risks are formal recognition without mechanism and reduced legal voice through mediation, each appearing in six documents, or 17.6% of the corpus. Exceptional visibility and disability-access vulnerability follow, each appearing in five documents, or 14.7%. Accountability and role-boundary ambiguity appears in four documents, or 11.8%, while remote or technology-mediated constraint and language hierarchy each appear in three documents, or 8.8%. Administrative translation detached from courtroom interaction appears least frequently, with two documents, or 5.9%. Objectively, this distribution suggests that procedural inequality is most visible where language access is recognised in principle but under-specified in interactional, professional, or institutional terms.

Theoretically, these findings align with Angermeyer's argument that translation may become discriminatory when institutional equality is reduced to equivalence, and with Du's analysis of how non-renditions and mediated participation affect defendants' courtroom agency. Yi's work on linguistic equity and Zhao and Huang's account of interpreter-mediated repair further clarify why procedural inequality must be analysed through voice, comprehension, and interactional control. In the Indonesian corpus, the same logic extends to disability accommodation, foreign-defendant hearings, court-service information, and legal-language hierarchy. This study therefore positions procedural inequality as the gap between formal legal audibility and effective mediated participation: litigants may be present in court, yet not equally positioned to understand, answer, challenge, or shape legal meaning.

Table 4. Procedural inequality risks across the corpus

Procedural risk	Operational indicator	Primary data	Secondary data	Context data	Frequency	Percent	Data variation	Textual signal	Data codes
Formal recognition without mechanism	Rights to understand, interpreter assistance, or fair trial are recognised, but operational procedures remain limited or implicit	3	1	2	6	17.6%	Criminal procedure norms, fair-trial standards, court-service documents, scholarly access critique	“right to interpreter,” “fair trial,” “court service,” “language access”	LLT-PRI-001; LLT-PRI-002; LLT-PRI-012; LLT-SEC-027; LLT-CTX-007; LLT-CTX-008
Reduced legal voice through mediation	Mediated participation may alter how questions, answers, objections, and evidential meanings become legally audible	2	4	0	6	17.6%	Court-facing procedural texts and comparative courtroom-interpreting scholarship	“participation,” “non-rendition,” “repair,” “translation as discrimination,” “linguistic equity”	LLT-PRI-013; LLT-PRI-014; LLT-SEC-030; LLT-SEC-031; LLT-SEC-032; LLT-SEC-034
Language access visible only in marked cases	Interpreter use becomes explicit when foreign defendants, remote testimony, or unusual language needs disrupt routine hearings	5	0	0	5	14.7%	Public courtroom reports involving foreign defendants or interpreter presence	“foreign defendant,” “juru bahasa,” “penerjemah tersumpah,” “teleconference”	LLT-PRI-019; LLT-PRI-020; LLT-PRI-021; LLT-PRI-022; LLT-PRI-023
Disability-access vulnerability	Legal communication depends on reasonable accommodation, sign-language interpretation, or support-person mediation	3	1	1	5	14.7%	Disability law, accommodation regulation, access-to-justice commentary, sign-language scholarship	“reasonable accommodation,” “sign-language interpreter,” “support person,” “deaf persons”	LLT-PRI-003; LLT-PRI-004; LLT-PRI-005; LLT-SEC-028; LLT-CTX-025
Accountability and role-boundary ambiguity	Documents refer to interpreters, translators, assistants, or support roles without consistently defining responsibility and limits	2	2	0	4	11.8%	Interpreter-practice scholarship, public hearing reports, disability/legal assistance materials	“assisting,” “feedback from users,” “dilemmatic role,” “appointed interpreter”	LLT-PRI-006; LLT-PRI-024; LLT-SEC-026; LLT-SEC-029
Remote or technology-mediated constraint	Remote testimony or virtual interpreting may reshape turn-taking, repair, audibility, and procedural control	2	1	0	3	8.8%	Court reports, court information pages, remote-court interpreting scholarship	“teleconference,” “remote interpreting,” “virtual court,” “online hearing”	LLT-PRI-015; LLT-PRI-016; LLT-SEC-033
Language hierarchy and recognition gap	Legal procedure privileges Bahasa Indonesia or official legal language while minority-language needs remain less visible	1	0	2	3	8.8%	Judicial authority law, language law, legal-language framework	“Bahasa Indonesia,” “language of law,” “official language,” “legal documents”	LLT-PRI-009; LLT-CTX-010; LLT-CTX-011
Translation detached from courtroom interaction	Translation is recognised for documents or cross-border administration, but separated from live courtroom participation	0	0	2	2	5.9%	Rogatory documents, translation requirements, transnational legal administration	“translation requirement,” “foreign legal assistance,” “rogatory”	LLT-CTX-017; LLT-CTX-018
		18	9	7	34	100.0%			

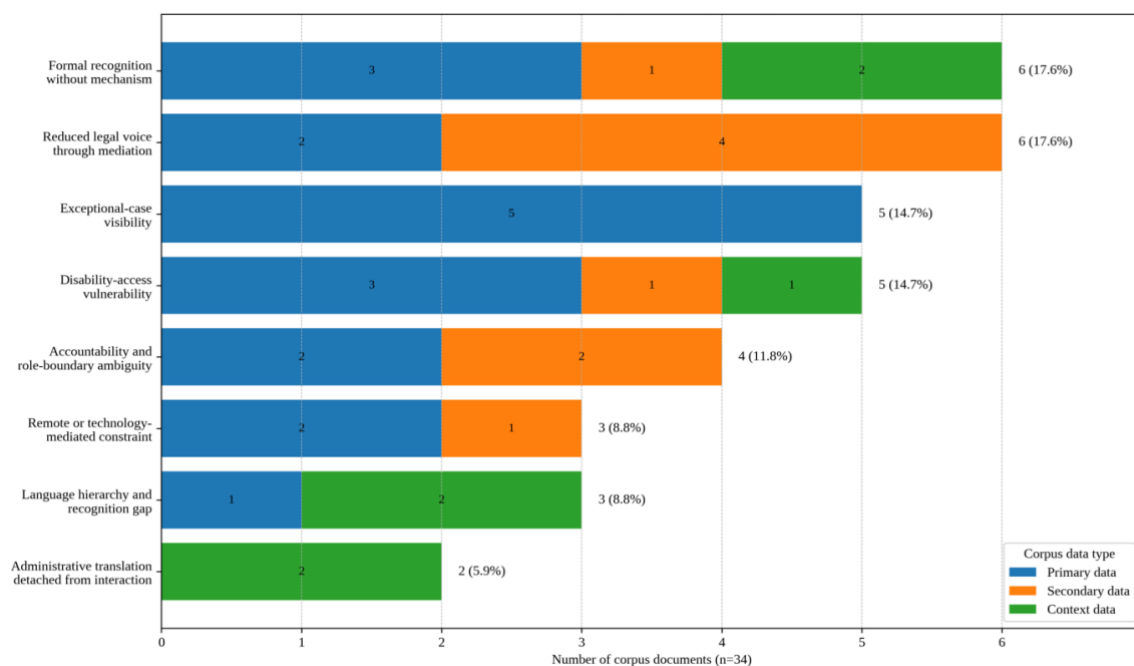


Figure 4. Procedural inequality risks by data type

5. DISCUSSION

The first implication of the corpus is that language rights in Indonesian courtroom discourse function more as a dispersed normative promise than as a consolidated procedural architecture. This matters because legal entitlement becomes fragile when its practical route remains distributed across criminal procedure, disability accommodation, public service standards, court reports, and international fair-trial norms. The findings show that language access is recognised across several legal and institutional registers, yet no single register fully explains how a linguistically vulnerable participant is enabled to understand, respond, and contest legal meaning. This supports Stone's and McEvoy's argument that the right to an interpreter must be read as a fairness guarantee rather than an administrative supplement. It also extends Dwany's concern with language rights and legal identity by showing that recognition alone does not secure procedural presence. The dysfunction, therefore, lies not in the absence of legal vocabulary, but in the fragmentation of that vocabulary across institutional sites.

This fragmentation is better understood as a structural effect of legal monolingualism operating within a multilingual society. Indonesian law gives Bahasa Indonesia authoritative force in legal administration, while courtroom participants may enter proceedings through foreign, regional, indigenous, or sign languages. The corpus does not establish a causal chain between language policy and courtroom inequality, but it suggests a patterned tension between official linguistic order and lived linguistic plurality. Cho and Runcieman warn that monolingual ideologies often appear neutral because they are embedded in institutional routine, not announced as exclusion. Angermeyer's critique of translation equivalence is useful here: equality is weakened when courts presume that formal access to translation automatically resolves pragmatic asymmetry. The underlying structure is therefore not simply a shortage of interpreters, but a legal culture in which linguistic difference becomes visible only after it disturbs ordinary procedural flow.

The second implication concerns interpreter mediation as a condition of legal audibility. The findings show that mediation is most explicit either in scholarly critique or in public reports where multilingualism becomes procedurally noticeable. This means that interpreters are institutionally visible at moments of disruption, but less visible as routine co-producers of courtroom meaning. Such a pattern complicates the common view of interpreting as a neutral bridge between languages. Wadensjö, Du, Karrebaek et al., and Zhao and Huang all show that interpreters participate in the organisation of turns, repairs, explanations, and evidential uptake. The corpus supports this theoretical direction by indicating that interpreter mediation is not simply a technical service placed beside legal procedure; it is part of procedure itself. The key implication is that fairness depends on mediated participation, not merely on whether translation assistance appears in the record.

The reason this mediation becomes consequential lies in the interactional structure of courtroom authority. Courtroom talk is not ordinary conversation; it is rule-bound, asymmetrical, evidential, and consequential. A question may restrict what counts as a relevant answer, a warning may define legal risk, and a repair may determine whether misunderstanding is corrected or preserved. When such actions are mediated, interpretation affects not only language transfer but also the distribution of agency. Du's work on non-renditions and zero renditions, Karrebaek et al.'s analysis of mediated judicial information, and Zhao and Huang's study of interpreter-mediated repair all point to this interactional problem. This study's corpus cannot show how every utterance was rendered, but it explains why public recognition of interpreters is analytically insufficient. What matters is the structure of mediated participation: who hears what, when, through whom, and with what opportunity to respond.

The third implication is that procedural inequality should be analysed as a gap between formal presence and effective participation. The corpus identifies risks involving recognition without mechanism, reduced legal voice, exceptional-case visibility, disability-access vulnerability, role ambiguity, technological constraint, language hierarchy, and administrative separation. These risks matter because they show that inequality can be produced inside lawful procedure without any overt denial of rights. A defendant, witness, or litigant may be physically present, represented, and formally assisted, yet still occupy a weaker position in understanding accusations, following legal argument, repairing misunderstanding, or shaping evidential meaning. Yi's work on linguistic equity and Leung's broader argument for linguistics as social justice help clarify this point. In Indonesia, studies by Ana, Tampubolon, and Sari similarly indicate that language access intersects with foreignness, disability, and institutional preparedness. Procedural inequality is therefore communicative, not only legal.

The underlying structure of this inequality is the separation between normative, interactional, and accountability regimes. Norms declare rights; interpreters mediate interaction; institutions record or omit procedural consequences. When these layers are not integrated, failures may become difficult to name, measure, or remedy. This explains why professional qualification, sworn status, or public mention of an interpreter cannot by itself guarantee equality. Jerónimo's work on overcoming language barriers in court practice and Yi's account of courtroom examination both suggest that linguistic justice requires procedural design, not only linguistic service provision. This study therefore positions Indonesian multilingual courtroom access as a problem of institutional alignment: entitlement, mediation, and accountability must be analysed together. The contribution is not to prove that Indonesian courts systematically fail multilingual users, but to show why language rights become meaningful only when they are operationalised as comprehensible, contestable, and accountable participation.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that language rights in Indonesian multilingual courtrooms cannot be reduced to the formal availability of an interpreter. The most important lesson is that procedural fairness depends on whether mediated participants can understand, respond, contest, and become legally audible within courtroom authority. By linking language-rights norms, interpreter mediation, and procedural-inequality risks, this study renews the perspective on courtroom interpreting as a sociolegal condition of participation rather than a merely technical act of translation. Its main contribution lies in the integrated analytical model: formal entitlement, mediation practice, and accountability are examined together as interdependent dimensions of linguistic justice.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available legal documents, court-facing texts, public reports, and scholarly materials. Such data allow systematic analysis of institutional discourse and documentary visibility, but they cannot fully capture live courtroom interaction, interpreter performance, litigant comprehension, or judicial responses to interpretation problems. Further research should therefore use courtroom observation, transcript-based interactional analysis, interviews with interpreters and legal practitioners, and comparative case studies across regional, foreign-language, indigenous-language, and sign-language contexts. Future studies should also examine how interpreter qualification, procedural training, technology-mediated hearings, and complaint mechanisms affect meaningful participation in multilingual proceedings.

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AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible legal norms, court-service texts, and courtroom event reports.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible legal norms, court-service texts, and courtroom event reports, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of documents analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Gerry Kadamehang     is affiliated with Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and is engaged in the study of language, literature, and public discourse. His academic concerns are related to literature, linguistics, and related fields. His research includes protest literature, critical discourse analysis, contemporary poetry, political expression, and cultural resistance in Indonesian contexts. He can be contacted at email: gerrykadamehang.2025@student.uny.ac.id