

Language Maintenance of Bataknese Language in Batak Toba People in Tangerang

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Abstract

This study examines language maintenance practices within the Batak Toba community in Tangerang, Indonesia. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through a Google Form survey to assess the frequency and context of Bataknese language use. The study focuses on individuals aged 25–40, who are primarily active speakers of Bataknese, reflecting the community's commitment to preserving their linguistic heritage. Guided by theories from Creswell, Fishman, and Dawson, the researchers analyzed the data to uncover reliable insights. The findings highlight the significant role of community and cultural identity in language preservation. Within the Batak Toba community, the Bataknese language continues to thrive through interactions in familial and communal settings, despite challenges posed by urbanization and multicultural influences in Tangerang. The study identifies environmental restrictions and specific domains, such as home, work, and public spaces, as key factors influencing language use. It underscores the need for targeted language preservation strategies to ensure the Bataknese language remains vibrant across generations. Practical recommendations include fostering a sense of pride in the language and its cultural roots, encouraging its use in familial and social contexts, and promoting educational initiatives to strengthen linguistic competence. In conclusion, this research emphasizes that language maintenance is vital for preserving cultural identity. The Batak Toba community in Tangerang demonstrates how linguistic resilience can counter the pressures of dominant languages, providing a model for other minority groups facing similar challenges. By focusing on these strategies, the community can ensure the continued vitality of the Bataknese language.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language, identity, and community has been a focal point in sociolinguistic research. In the context of globalisation and rapid urbanisation, the preservation of minority languages often becomes a challenge. By examining the relationship between language and society, it provides us information about the way language works, as well as about the social relationships in a community, and the way people conveys and constructs their social identities through their language (Holmes, 2022, p.1).

Indonesia is renowned for its rich cultural and linguistic diversity. Indonesia has more than 1000 ethnicities with around 700 vernacular languages (Agustina et al., 2019). While Bahasa Indonesia serves as the official language and lingua franca, unifying the nation, the multitude of vernacular languages, including Javanese, Sundanese, Malay, Batak, and many others, continue to thrive. In Indonesia, people tend to speak several languages, such as Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, their vernacular language, and some people also master foreign languages, such as English (Sneddon, 2003).

The existence of language must be maintained because it is the speaker's identity. Amalia et al. (2023) defined language maintenance as the regular occurrence or use of languages, with the dominant speaker willing to preserve the language and teach it to another generation.

A study by Sagimin (2020) found that most young generations in Indonesia, particularly students of Pamulang University use their vernacular language and Bahasa Indonesia at the same level. Though many of them use vernacular language when communicating with their family, they prefer using Bahasa Indonesia when communicating with their friends. However, by focusing solely on Pamulang University students, they may not fully capture the broader language dynamics of the Indonesian young generations. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, this research expands the sample to encompass a wider range of backgrounds within the Bataknese in Tangerang.

Languages are dynamic entities that constantly evolve. The work of William Labov (1966), a pioneer in sociolinguistics, has shown how language varies according to social factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Maemunah (2017) reveals that the existence of a language is inseparable from the attitude of speakers of that language to use it in everyday life. Language maintenance is a deliberate attempt to maintain a particular language in an area that has linguistic and cultural diversity as a form to maintain ethnic identity and social adaptability (Crystal, 2002). The term language maintenance is used to describe a situation in which a speaker, a group of speakers, or a language community continues to use their language in some or all areas of life despite competition with the dominant or majority language for becoming the primary language (Pauwels, 2004).

The key to preserving a language lies within the community that speaks it. A positive attitude towards the language among its speakers is crucial for ensuring its survival and transmission to future generations. Fishman (1972) identified several factors that contribute to language maintenance, including the size and density of the speech community, the degree of institutional support for the language, and the attitudes of speakers towards their language. Lambert and Gardner's research (1972) has shown that people's feelings about a language significantly influence how they use it. To understand Batak Toba language use in this study, it's essential to know how Batak Toba speakers view their own language and Indonesian. When the feeling of loyalty is high, then the higher the chance for the language to be maintained.

Bourdieu (1986) emphasised the role of social capital in language maintenance, arguing that individuals with strong social networks within their ethnic community are more likely to maintain their heritage language. These networks provide support, opportunities to use the language, and reinforce cultural identity. Essentially, a strong social fabric acts as a protective shield against language shift, fostering an environment where the heritage language thrives. Giles et al (1977) have shown how language can be a powerful symbol of ethnic identity. This concept, known as ethnolinguistic identity theory, suggests that language can be manipulated to accentuate group membership, especially when feeling threatened or insecure. Moreover, language can be a tool for maintaining power dynamics between ethnic groups, with dominant groups often using it to exclude or marginalise minorities. Research and studies on language maintenance have been carried out by many researchers, some of them are as follows.

Sugimin's (2020) study explored how young Indonesians, specifically Pamulang University students, are balancing their native language with the dominant language. By surveying students with open-ended questions, the research found that despite living in close-knit communities, many young people are adopting the dominant language due to global influences and technology. However, they still use their native language with family. To protect these traditional languages, Sugimin suggests promoting their value in schools and homes.

Rahman et al (2021) examined language maintenance of Buginese in Bastiong village, Ternate, North Moluccas. Based on their research, several factors contribute to the preservation of the Buginese language in Bastiong vilage. These include the community's strong sense of identity and loyalty to their language, as well as the concentrated Buginese population in the area. Additionally, the ongoing migration of Buginese people to Ternate has helped maintain the language.

This research would like to analyse about the Batak Toba people from Sumatra that have moved and settled in Tangerang for more than five years but are still using the Bataknese language and how they maintain their language. It seeks to understand how the Batak Toba language is preserved in a non-native environment. By examining the strategies and practices employed by the individuals, this study aims to examine the dynamics of language maintenance within a migrant community.

II. METHODS

The data collection for this research is analysed using the mixed method and focuses on identifying issues related to language maintenance. Data collection is conducted through participant observations using a Google Form and analysing their answers to obtain the maximum result on how language maintenance is practised within the Bataknese Toba community in Tangerang. According to Dawson (2019), a research methodology is the primary principle that will guide your research. It becomes the general approach to conducting research on your topic and determines what research method you will use.

The quantitative method is used to uncover phenomena that are measurable, allowing the researcher to investigate the changes in Bataknese use in Tangerang. Joshua Fishman (1992) defines language maintenance as the retention, use, and proficiency of a language by its speakers. The sample comprises family or community members from Sumatera who have already lived in Tangerang for more than five years but are still using a traditional Bataknese language. The study targets the Bataknese Toba community in Tangerang, with participants selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation.

The study uses percentage methods to analyse language use patterns across various demographics, including age, education, and occupation, while ensuring ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of participant responses. A Google Form survey efficiently collects and analyses data on the Bataknese Toba community's language maintenance practices in Tangerang, providing valuable insights.

By distributing the survey through online platforms such as WhatsApp and other social media, the researcher ensures that any particular Bataknese participant gets boarded and becomes involved in the survey while the Batak community has a different group or different surnames. John W. Creswell (2008) defines research as a systematic process involving the collection and analysis of data to enhance our comprehension of a particular subject or issue. The open-ended questions provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and attitudes towards language maintenance. Furthermore, from the sources of answers obtained, the researcher sorted back in order to get results that were in accordance with the research target.

III. RESULTS

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested that, as data is analysed, more information is expected to be revealed that will influence decisions to be made regarding what further information will be needed, and how this new information might support additional interviews for additional data to be collected. Adapting what Creswell and Guetterman said, the researcher used several processes to analyse the results of the survey answers: 1. The data was collected from an age group of 25-40 to offer a comprehensive understanding of language use and maintenance in community areas. This stage shows the result of the answers that have been filled out by participants according to the researcher's objectives. ; 2. The results from the Google Form that have been achieved are then summarised and organised according to the researcher's target. In processing the data that has been collected, the results answered by the participants are then sorted and processed according to the needs of the researcher, namely the Toba Batak people who live in the Tangerang area ; 3. The Google Form survey data will be analysed using both mixed methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of language maintenance among the Bataknese Toba community in Tangerang. The Google Form survey will be analysed using mixed methods to understand language maintenance among the Bataknese Toba community in Tangerang. Percentage will be used to identify trends and patterns in language use across different contexts and demographic groups. Furthermore, the survey result is interpreted into sentences to maximise the participant's perspective on influencing language maintenance in this community; 4. This study uses data from the Bataknese Toba community in Tangerang. Focusing on individuals with a connection to the Bataknese Toba language and culture. The researchers used a Google Forms survey to gather data from parents and young adults about their daily use of Batak and Indonesian. The survey aimed to understand their experiences and attitudes towards language preservation, particularly in a modern, multicultural urban environment like Tangerang, and the challenges and practices involved in maintaining the Toba Batak language; 5. Conclusion, the results of all the answers that have been analysed are then summarised into one answer that can ensure that the objectives of this research are conveyed.

After conducting research related to the topic to be studied, the researchers found facts about how the Batak Toba people can maintain their language, Bataknese language in Tangerang, Indonesia. It might be hard for someone who was born and lives where people live with many tribes and languages might find it a little difficult to maintain the Bataknese language. However, the loyalty of native speakers who live and settle in one place allows them to retain their

language. From the research results that have been obtained, 85,7% of the respondents are active speakers of Bataknese language, while the rest are passive speakers. Regarding the question that refers to the way Batak Toba people maintain and preserve their language, it can be seen by how the Batak Toba people keep using their vernacular language when talking with family or people with the same ethnicity. From this point, the researchers conducted their determination by doing surveys to the Batak Toba people about which language they use when communicating in certain places or conditions.

According to Fishman's theory (1996), Bataknese language maintenance starts from the smallest environment for native Batak Toba people to communicate that can be divided into three places in general. These places are their home, work place, and the public areas, such as church. Home is the place that people spend most of their time to communicate or interact, whether with their family or neighbour. From the three places, researchers can find out whether the Bataknese language can be maintained or not.

Home, in this context, researchers have given surveys about which languages are spoken with family members, either the nuclear family or the extended family and the people around their home, which is their neighbour. The house was chosen because it is the first place where interaction happened between married couples, parents and their children, siblings, and other family members. Based on the research that has been conducted, 50% of the respondents use both Bataknese and Indonesian language when they are communicating with their nuclear family. Only 14,3% use the Bataknese language without mixing it with other languages, and the rest use Indonesian language to communicate with their family.

While for the extended family, all of the respondents still have family members in Sumatra and though only 57,1% still communicate frequently with them and the rest rarely interact, they still keep in contact and communicate with their extended family. Surprisingly, 35,7% of the respondents communicate in Indonesian language with their extended family, while the rest either interact by mixing Bataknese and Indonesian language or by using Bataknese language only.

The environment outside of home, which is their neighbour, is also an important place to find out about the language the Batak Toba people in Tangerang use. Based on the data that the researchers have collected, all of them prefer to use Indonesian language when communicating with the people in their neighbourhood, so they will be able to communicate clearly with the people around them. Even though the neighbour is someone from the same ethnicity, only 28,6% of them use Bataknese language as they are more comfortable using Indonesian language in their neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, the maintenance of the Bataknese language at the workplace itself is not as strong as the one at home. This thing happens because of the different ethnicities of the people at their workplace, so they communicate in Indonesian language to make sure that they understand each other. Even when in the same workplace with people of Batak Toba, 57,1% of them still choose to communicate in Indonesian language to maintain their professionalism.

In maintaining the Bataknese language in public areas, including the one from the same ethnic groups or the different one. In this research, we make the scope smaller by choosing the religious place. From all the respondents, 85,7% of them communicate using Indonesian language, and only 14,3% of them use Bataknese language because they participate in a tribal church. Surprisingly though, when the respondents are praying, all of them choose to pray in Indonesian language as they feel more comfortable praying with the said language.

Maintaining language is not only using the language, but also the sense of pride that grows in the speakers. Rahman et al (2021) reveal the factors that are influencing the way to maintain language are social factors, environmental factors, loyalty factors, and migration factors. For that, the social contribution to language maintenance is important.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research presented above, the researchers can conclude that the Bataknese language in Batak Toba people in Tangerang is still maintained. Most of the respondents are active speakers of Bataknese language, while the rest are passive speakers. There are places such as their home, work place, and the public areas, such as church, where they can communicate in a small environment. More than half of the subjects still use the Bataknese language when communicating with their family.

When in another situation, such as the workplace, the maintenance of the Bataknese language is not as strong as the one at home. They tend to choose to use Indonesian language when communicating, even with the one with the same ethnicity to maintain their professionalism. In other places, such as churches, they tend to use Indonesian language because it is easier for others to understand them. Even when praying, surprisingly, they prefer to use Indonesian language because they are used to using it.

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