

Language Maintenance Challenges and Successes: A Butonese Student's Story in the English Department at Pattimura University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and strategies of Buton students in maintaining their local language in the academic environment. This study was conducted on January 7, 2023, at the English Education Study Program, Pattimura University, using a semi-structured interview method with a Buton student. The results showed that students faced obstacles such as the dominance of English and Indonesian on campus, the lack of peers with the same cultural background, and the lack of use of the Buton language in academic activities. The student used several strategies to overcome these challenges, such as speaking with family in Buton during phone calls or visits, teaching younger siblings traditional songs and phrases, and listening to local stories and songs. She also utilizes social media to share buton words or proverbs, so that the language remains in a modern context. This research shows that minority language preservation requires the support of families, communities, and educational institutions. Campuses can support these efforts by providing space for cultural activities, seminars, or linguistic communities. The maintenance of the Buton language helps students maintain their cultural identity while enriching diversity in the academic environment. This collaborative support is important to ensure the survival of language and culture in globalization.

Keywords: *language maintenance, challenges, success, Butonese student.*

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in shaping our social interactions and cultural identity. Understanding and using language effectively is essential to navigating our complex world (Hastuti et al., 2018). Regional variations in language reflect diverse socio-cultural contexts. As a result, individuals develop unique linguistic patterns based on their environment and cultural background. Indonesia is a country with many different cultures, languages and traditions. One of the most obvious ways to see these differences is through the language spoken by people. Language is like a flag that shows where someone comes from and what their culture is like.

According to Fishman (2012), language maintenance is a situation when a speech community can maintain or continue to use its language from generation to generation even though there are

conditions that can influence them to switch to another language. Maintaining the language means striving for the local language to remain in use and not disappear from the daily life of the community Fishman (2012). In language maintenance, a speech community refuses to use another language. The attitude is often referred to as language loyalty, while the situation is known as language maintenance. Language maintenance not only saves an endangered language but also rejuvenates the cultural identity associated with its cultural heritage (Wang, 2021). A language carries the traditions, values, and identity of the people who use it. By maintaining a language, we ensure that its cultural heritage continues to flourish, connecting generations to generations, and preserving a unique way of looking at the world.

Minority languages are particularly important in multilingual communities. They connect people to their cultural identity and traditions, keeping a group's history and values alive. In multilingual societies, these smaller languages help maintain diversity by adding to the variety of ways people express themselves. They also create a sense of pride and belonging for those who use them, as they tie them to their ancestors and strengthen communities. Although larger, more dominant languages often take over, minority languages are vital because they help keep cultural diversity alive and make the world more inclusive, especially as it becomes more globally connected. Local languages whose speakers are minorities are urgent languages to be developed, fostered, maintained, and documented including local languages that exist overseas (Erniati, 2018). One of the local languages in overseas Maluku is Buton.

In research conducted by Butar, (2020) explained that the 2020 population census of Maluku population was 1,802,000 people. The data does not display ethnic categories, but as an illustration can be seen in the 2009 data which shows the number of Buton people in Maluku Province as many as 420,023 people or 35% of the total population. They came from Southeast Sulawesi due to various factors, one of which was the colonization process. In this process, the people in this village began to recognize the Ambon Malay language. According to Husni (2018) in his research, Ambon became the most popular destination for migrants from Buton. The prohibition of slaves in the 1870s led to a lack of labor in Maluku, which was then utilized by the Buton people at that time. After working in Ambon for some time, Buton people began to interact socially with the local community, including marriages between Buton people and Ambon people. From these social interactions, the Buton people adapted local customs both in terms of dress and language.

Buton is one of the minority languages from southeast Sulawesi spoken in the city of Ambon, located in Maluku province, Indonesia. It is mainly spoken by the Buton people, a small but distinct ethnic group with a rich cultural history. Despite the widespread use of Ambon Malay and Bahasa Indonesia in the region, Buton remains an important identity marker for its speakers, bringing with

it unique traditions, proverbs and expressions. However, as a minority language, Buton faces challenges in terms of its survival, especially in a multilingual society where larger languages dominate education and media.

In the scope of education in Indonesia, from the most basic level to the university has a national language, namely Indonesian. According to Rumalean et al. (2021), the ability to speak Indonesian is an effort made by students and educators to use Indonesian properly and correctly. The language policy at Pattimura University, which formally supports the use of Indonesian as the main language of instruction in academic activities, also influences the efforts to maintain the Buton language by students. Especially within the scope of the English Education Study Program where in a linguistic landscape dominated by Indonesian and English, Buton students face challenges to continue using and practicing their mother tongue, especially in the midst of a multicultural environment.

The study conducted by Hastuti et al. (2018) focused on language maintenance in specific community settings, such as the Minangkabau community in Jakarta and mixed-marriage families in France. Both studies highlighted the use of multiple languages in daily life and efforts to maintain minority languages amidst the dominance of other languages. However, these studies mainly examine language use in family or community contexts, where languages are preserved through everyday communication and cultural practices.

Rather, this research addresses language maintenance in an academic setting, where students face unique challenges in balancing their mother tongue, namely Buton, with the demands of learning English. This research explores one's personal struggles and strategies in an academic context, rather than in a wider community or family setting. The gap in this study lies in the focus on academic pressures and institutional contexts for minority language maintenance, which is not covered in previous research. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by a Butonese student in academic contexts and the strategies for maintaining their minority language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Maintenance

In general, language maintenance is related to language shifts that occur in a society. Dagamseh (2020) states that language maintenance occurs when a minority group continues to use its traditional language or mother tongue, even though the situation encourages them to switch to another language. Moreover, Veltman (1991) adds that “language maintenance is the practice of speaking one's mother tongue throughout one's life as the only language in daily use” (p. 147). It can also mean a situation where minority groups continue to learn and use their mother tongue,

despite pressures from the majority community that might encourage them to switch to another language.

Challenges in Minority Language Maintenance in Academic Contexts

In maintaining a language, it is certainly inseparable from challenges or obstacles. One significant obstacle is the dominance of the majority language, where minority language speakers feel pressured to adopt a language that is more widely used, especially for economic and social progress in the field of education. According to (Hukubun, 2018), bilingualism or mastery of more than one language and the dominant influence of local ethnic languages and national languages taught in educational institutions and used in daily activities contribute to the fading of the mother tongue. In addition, the challenges of the development of information technology and globalization that predominantly use national and international languages as well as tourist village programs that provide access to foreign travelers (Hartanti et al., 2019) are factors that contribute to the shift in the use of mother tongue. As globalization and urbanization spread dominant languages, younger generations are often exposed to and adopt these languages, further marginalizing minority languages.

It is difficult and challenging to maintain local languages. Educational institutions tend to prioritize the dominant languages, such as Indonesian and English in Indonesia. This creates pressure for minority language speakers to conform, so they face linguistic discrimination, language use limitations and identity conflicts. So the impact on academics by emphasizing the dominant language can affect the linguistic behavior of minority language speakers.

Strategies for minority language maintenance

Language maintenance is influenced by various interconnected factors that contribute to whether a community continues to use their heritage language.

a. Revitalization of regional languages:

Local language revitalization is one of the strategies for minority language maintenance. Community initiatives such as language courses, cultural workshops, and mentor-student programs can also provide the necessary support for the preservation of ethnic languages and cultures. According to Sari (2022), efforts to revitalize local languages and cultures are carried out through various means, such as bilingual education, publishing literature in ethnic languages, and organizing cultural festivals.

b. Family Language Policy:

The frequency of use of the inherited language within the family environment plays an important role. In a study conducted by Abdizadeh (2020), which examined the Persian language, it was stated that the first and most common strategy used by almost all participants was to speak in Persian to their children and ask them to speak only in Persian at home. This section discusses how families and cultural communities help reinforce the use of the local language through activities such as folklore, cultural events, or everyday conversations. Parents who should actively teach their children the heritage language create a supportive environment for language maintenance (Zuri, 2017). This is in line with the results of research by Ting and Ling (2013) in their research on languages in Sarawak, Malaysia which says that indigenous or ethnic languages are still used strongly in the family domain but have little place in the education and mass media domains.

c. Community Support:

Language preservation is greatly influenced by community support and community attitudes. Communities that actively support heritage languages through cultural events, local media, and communal gatherings provide an important foundation for language preservation. Factors that influence Language Maintenance in various communities include community members' recognition of their cultural distinctiveness, community efforts to create networks for cultural and linguistic loyalty (Abdizadeh, 2020). In addition, he also added that to address the issue of local language maintenance, language maintenance children can attend community language (CL) schools which are usually after-hours schools or weekend schools that help native speakers develop and maintain their community language. On the other hand, community attitudes also play an important role in promoting language maintenance. Positive attitudes towards a heritage language, such as a sense of pride and love for the language, can encourage its use in everyday life. Therefore, community loyalty as native speakers, accompanied by pride in the language, as explained by Zuri (2017), is key in maintaining the existence of heritage languages. It is also clear that minority languages play an important role in maintaining the identity of their native speakers.

d. Education System:

Educational Institutions that incorporate heritage languages into their curriculum or offer them as subjects contribute to language preservation. In a study conducted by Babaee (2014) said that learning in their heritage languages can facilitate language maintenance for students. However, linguistic minority students have less opportunity to learn their heritage languages in public schools. Therefore, in the area of education, strategies such as code-switching, bilingual practices, and incorporating cultural elements in academic tasks are discussed. For

example, students may use their mother tongue in informal conversations or group discussions as a form of maintenance.

e. Technology as a Tool

Factors such as migration and exposure to the dominant language often pose challenges to the maintenance of heritage languages. However, advances in technology and social media offer new opportunities to preserve minority languages. Research conducted by Abdizadeh (2020) which explains the strategies used to maintain the Persian language is the use of Persian media and literature. They encourage their children to read Persian books, watch Persian TV shows and movies, and listen to Persian music. That means platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube and other digital media can be utilized to share cultural and linguistic content, which helps strengthen cultural identity. According to Febrian (2018), digital technology plays an important role in language preservation through the use of social media and mobile applications that promote local languages. In addition, television programs, radio broadcasts and digital content that use local languages can increase their visibility and appeal among the younger generation. Concrete examples of the media's role in preservation are radio broadcasts in local languages and YouTube channels that focus on local culture, as described by Handoko (2019).

Language Policy in Higher Education

Language policy is a decision taken to regulate language use in a particular community (Khoirot, 2017). In the context of education, this policy is also an important consideration. The government supports the use of Bahasa Indonesia as a unifying language in the education system, without excluding the existence of regional languages.

The National Policy on Language Education regulates the use of local languages or students' mother tongue as a tool in the learning process. Indonesian, as a unifying language, is designated as the main language used in all schools in Indonesia. Diem and Abdullah (2020) also emphasized that the implementation of language policy in education reflects the government's commitment to maintaining national unity through the use of language.

Institutional Policies and Practices

The Ministry of Education and Culture has issued rules and guidelines that ensure Indonesian is used at all levels of education, from primary school to university (Lomi & Mbato, 2021). This policy not only establishes Indonesian as the language of instruction, but also makes

it a compulsory subject. This step aims to create a generation that has high literacy skills, and is able to appreciate national culture and identity (Puspitasari et al., 2021).

Language policies at universities, which often place Bahasa Indonesia as the primary language of instruction, can limit the use of minority languages. The lack of support for bilingual or multilingual education, as well as the tendency to favor one language over another, is often an obstacle to the preservation of minority languages. Brenzinger (2007) states that when minority or indigenous languages are not integrated into the formal education system, young people miss out on opportunities to learn and use these languages.

Case Studies in Indonesia

In the Indonesian context, research on language maintenance has been conducted by several researchers who discuss the maintenance of regional languages. According to research from Hartanti et al., (2019) which examines the maintenance of regional languages in one of the regions in Yogyakarta. They found that the factors that cause language preservation are the use of the mother tongue is still used in everyday life; there are local content lessons of the local parent language in elementary schools. The second research, from Febrian (2018) is about Lampung language maintenance. The results obtained are that as a national language, Indonesian has a very dominant position and function compared to Lampung language. The findings of this study indicate that Lampung language, like other regional languages in Indonesia, has problems that need to be addressed seriously so that it can be maintained as a means of communication. Young families of Lampung natives almost no longer use the Lampung language as a means of communication with family members and other relatives.

METHOD

Research Design

The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach utilizing a case study design centered on a single participant. As explained by McCusker and Gunaydin (2015), qualitative methods are employed to explore the “what,” “how,” or “why” aspects of a phenomenon. This approach emphasizes observing phenomena to understand their essence and significance, aiming to uncover in-depth insights into “why” and “how” events occur, rather than simply identifying “what” takes place. It seeks to interpret human experiences in a more personal and context-specific manner.

Research Location and Participants

This research was conducted on January 7, 2023, at the Department of English Education, Pattimura University. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to determine the participants in this study. According to Rai and Thapa (2015), purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgment in selecting informants to be studied. Here, the researcher determines which individuals to include in the sample based on various criteria set by the researcher regarding knowledge, capacity, and willingness to participate in the study. The participant used was a student of the Buton ethnic group, due to their unique linguistic and cultural background, which is in line with this study's focus on the challenges and strategies associated with minority language maintenance in academic contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers obtained consent from the participants after explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality of their answers. The interview protocol was carefully crafted to elicit meaningful answers while respecting the culture of the participants. Data was collected through interviews with participants using a semi-structured approach. These interviews involved open-ended questions designed according to the research needs to achieve the study objectives. According to Creswell and David (2018), semi-structured interviews provide predetermined topics and questions, but remain flexible. The researcher can adjust the wording and order of questions based on the participant's responses. This approach used five specifically designed open-ended questions to guide the interview.

- Challenges faced in maintaining the Buton language in an academic setting.
- Strategies used to balance academic life and cultural preservation.
- Experiences interacting with peers and members of the study program related to linguistic identity.
- The role of family and community in language preservation.
- The implications of these strategies on academic performance and cultural identity.

For data analysis, this study used thematic analysis to identify key challenges and successful strategies. Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves searching a data set to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved the following steps:

- Data Familiarization: Transcribing the interviews and reviewing the transcripts thoroughly.
- Initial Coding: Coded specific quotes relevant to challenges, strategies, and implications.

- Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into broader categories that reflect patterns in the data.
- Reviewing Themes: Ensuring that the themes accurately represent the data and are coherent.
- Defining and Naming Themes: Refining the themes to clearly articulate their relevance to the research question.
- Producing the Report: Summarizing findings with evidence from the data to support interpretations.

Finally find the final themes such as Challenges in Academic and Language Integration, Language Maintenance Strategies, and Implications for Academic and Cultural Identity.

FINDINGS

The results of the research found on maintaining the Buton language in an academic environment, especially in the English education study program at Pattimura University cover the challenges and strategies used to preserve minority languages in an environment dominated by national and international languages such as Indonesian and English.

Challenges Faced by Buton Students in Language Maintenance

Buton students in the English language education study program at Pattimura University face great challenges in maintaining their local language where the academic environment prioritizes English and Indonesian as national languages as well as introduction and communication. As students who live far from their homeland, Buton language is less relevant in daily interactions. This also creates a double burden for Buton-speaking students, as they must balance the demands of achieving academic proficiency in English while striving to maintain their language identity. Based on the interview results, the first significant challenge is the lack of peers who share the same language background. The participant explained:

“On campus, I rarely spoke Buton because my friends often used Ambon Malay or Indonesian.

Eventually, I could only use Buton when talking to my family.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

This limited interaction reduces the opportunity to practice the Buton language, which is crucial to maintain. The second challenge is that the emphasis on academic success in English often overrides the importance of maintaining minority languages. According to her, because of

the competition on campus that made her have to learn English, she was able to minimize this Buton language. She shared:

“I thought about focusing more on English to succeed in college, but sometimes it made me feel distant from my culture and identity.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

Furthermore, the lack of representation of Buton in lecture materials, formal discussions and other academic activities makes it difficult for students to integrate the language into their academic routines. This challenge not only limits their use of the language, but also limits their opportunities to promote Buton culture in a wider context.

Strategies for Language Maintenance

Despite these challenges, these students used various strategies to maintain their Buton language skills. The main strategy is to maintain regular communication with family members, especially during phone calls or home visits, where they consciously try to speak Buton. participants rely heavily on interactions with family members to practice and maintain the language. As she said:

“When I call my parents, I always try to speak in Buton. It's my way of keeping the language alive in the midst of academic pressure.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

In addition, students actively teach their younger siblings simple Buton phrases and songs. This is also supported by the results of interviews with these students.

“I try to pass on what I know to my younger siblings. It helps me to stay connected to the language and make sure they learn it too.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

Students also engage with cultural traditions by listening to traditional Buton songs and stories, which not only helps maintain their language skills but also deepens their appreciation of their cultural heritage. Learning the Butonese language and its meaning from elders is another strategy that emphasizes the intergenerational aspect of language preservation. In addition,

students occasionally share Butonese phrases on social media, using digital platforms to raise awareness and foster a connection with the language in a modern context.

In addition, Cultural Engagement is also one of the strategies used. According to him, participating in cultural traditions is another key strategy. Students listen to traditional Buton songs, learn proverbs from their grandmothers and grandfathers. These practices deepen their connection to the language and its cultural meanings.

“I love hearing stories from my grandmother. The words in Buton are sometimes difficult, but the meaning is very deep and makes me appreciate my culture more.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

The next step is to use social media or apps to continue learning Buton. This student also uses social media to promote Buton language expressions and phrases.

“I sometimes share Buton words or proverbs on social media. Although it is simple, it helps me feel that my language is still relevant.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

Sharing them on platforms such as Instagram or WhatsApp allows them to raise awareness about the language while integrating it into a modern context.

Implications for minority language maintenance in academic contexts

The efforts that Buton students make to maintain their language have important implications for both cultural identity and academic development. By continuing to use Buton in everyday life, participants feel more connected to their identity. As expressed by the respondents:

“Maintaining the Buton language helps me feel more 'whole' as an individual. My identity as a Buton person still feels strong even though I am outside the region.”

(LD, January 7, 2023- Translated)

This language maintenance also helps her face the challenges of identity in a multicultural environment like Pattimura University. By promoting Buton language and culture, this student enriches the diversity of the campus while creating a space for cultural reflection for her peers.

From an academic perspective, integrating Buton culture into coursework or projects broadens learning perspectives. Students can use their culture to explain concepts or provide unique examples, which is often appreciated by lecturers and peers. This not only boosts confidence but also contributes to the recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity in education.

However, these efforts also underscore the need for institutional support. Campuses and study programs can play an important role in providing spaces for students to preserve their minority languages. For example, through the provision of cultural communities, linguistic seminars, or activities that encourage the use of local languages. It is important to create an inclusive and supportive environment for minority language preservation amidst the demands of globalization.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize that the maintenance of minority languages is not only the responsibility of individuals, but also requires support from families, communities and educational institutions. This collaboration will ensure that languages and cultures like Buton can survive amidst the challenges of modernization and globalization.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research results, Buton students at Pattimura University face several major challenges in maintaining their local language. First, the dominance of Indonesian and Malay Ambonese in daily interactions reduces the opportunity to use Buton language in line with the findings of Hukubun (2018) which shows that bilingualism in Indonesia tends to reduce the use of mother tongue due to pressure to adopt the majority language for social, educational and economic mobility. This is compounded by the prioritization of English in academic settings, which creates additional barriers for minority languages. Local languages often lose their importance, especially in urban or developed areas, such as universities. This reflects the pressures of globalization and urbanization, as stated by Hartanti et.al (2019) which also encourage the shift in the use of mother tongue.

Despite facing various challenges, Buton students use creative strategies to maintain their language. One of the main strategies is to maintain communication in Buton when speaking with family, either over the phone or during home visits. This is relevant to Veltman (1991), who emphasizes the practice of speaking the mother tongue as the key to language maintenance. In addition, university students teach traditional phrases, songs or stories to their younger siblings as described by Zuri (2017), also found in the Buton community to ensure language transfer to the next generation. They also engage with the culture through listening to traditional songs, learning proverbs, and listening to stories from elders, which helps strengthen their connection to the

cultural heritage. In addition, social media as a modern tool is in line with the findings of Abdizadeh (2020) and Handoko (2019), which state that technology and digital media help promote local languages. So it can be concluded that social media is also utilized as a platform to promote words or expressions in the Buton language, creating new connections with the language in a modern context.

Buton students' efforts to maintain their language have important implications on both cultural identity and campus diversity. The social and academic implications of buton language maintenance reflect Dagamseh's (2020) view, that minority groups who continue to use their mother tongue strengthen their cultural identity despite pressure to switch to the majority language. By continuing to use the Buton language, students feel more connected to their cultural roots, despite being in a different environment. This strengthens their identity as individuals from the Buton culture. In this campus environment, the integration of buton cultural elements in academic tasks can enrich perspectives on linguistic diversity, support inclusivity and reflect multilingual practices as described in Babae's (2014) multilingual education practices.

The results show the need for university policies that support linguistic diversity. This is in accordance with the view of Hartanti et al. (2019), that local education policies can improve the sustainability of minority languages. Pattimura University could consider multilingual practices, such as local language revitalization programs through cultural clubs or ethnic-based teaching, as described by Sari (2022). These practices can also be reinforced by inclusive policies that support heritage languages in the education system, as proposed by Ting and Ling (2013) in Malaysia. Buton students use social media to increase the visibility of their language, which is in line with Febrian's (2018) research, which shows that digital media can be an important tool for language preservation. In addition, buton language-based radio broadcasts, video content and apps can be strategic steps to strengthen the sustainability of the mother tongue, especially among the younger generation.

This research shows that although there are great challenges in maintaining the Buton language amidst the pressures of globalization and the dominance of the majority language, strategies such as family communication, cultural engagement, use of social media, and institutional support can help strengthen language maintenance. Referring to theories such as Dagamseh (2020) language maintenance is not only important for maintaining cultural identity, but also as a form of resistance to linguistic homogenization. Collaboration between individuals, communities and educational institutions is the key to success in maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Buton students in the academic environment face great challenges in maintaining their local language, mainly due to the dominance of Indonesian and English, the lack of Buton-speaking communities, and the lack of representation of Buton language in campus activities. However, strategies such as family communication, cultural engagement and the use of social media help them keep the language alive. To support minority language preservation, educational institutions can provide spaces for cultural activities, seminars, or inclusive linguistic communities. However, this study was limited to the participation of one student, so the generalizability of the results is limited. Further studies with a wider range of participants may provide a deeper understanding of minority language maintenance in academic contexts.

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