

Preserving Alune Language in Neniari Village from Becoming Endangered Language

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Abstract: The primary aim of this study is to review the importance of preserving the Alune language from extinction through the involvement of local agents in the context of Neniari Village, Maluku Province, Indonesia. This study has been driven by the emerging phenomenon of Alune as the local language in Neniari, which the young generation rarely uses. The data are acquired by library study, observation, and interviews with children, parents, and older people in Neniari. The result showed that historically Alune is the local or indigenous language used by Alifuru ethnics who lived in Nunusaku mountain. However, the language is facing the potential of extinction when fewer young people use it in their daily conversation, there is no support from the parents to encourage its use among their kids, and the village government's inability promotes its use in daily conversations among their villagers. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the local agents such as family, school, village government, and even religious institutions in Neniari to responsibly maintain the language for all generations.

Keywords: *Alune, Endangered Language, Local Language, Neniari village.*

Introduction

There is a prediction from experts worldwide that of all languages, just about 5 to 10% can be categorized as safe or strong languages. In comparison, those categorized as endangered languages reach almost 50%, and the remaining begin to weaken (Ewing, 2014). It is also mostly agreed that two languages become extinct each one month (Whaley, 2003). Consequently, it is shown that this world is at the edge of losing more than 80% of languages.

Then, how about Indonesia? Ethnology (2012) mentioned that there are 726 languages in Indonesia. Some still exist, while many of them will be extinct. In addition, another data shows that even though there are over 640 local languages, Indonesia already has 15 dead languages and will critically lose 139 languages to be dead or extinct when there is no serious attention from all levels (Moseley, 2010). Besides, several local languages in Indonesia are generally categorized in endangered status; they are one language in Kalimantan, 22 in Maluku, 67 in West Papua, and Halmahera Island, 36 in Sulawesi, two in Sumatra, and eleven in Timor-Flores and Bima Sumbawa. While, 15 dead languages in Indonesia include eleven languages in Maluku, one language in West Papua, one language in Halmahera Island, one language in Sulawesi, and one language in Sumatera (Sugiyono, 2019). Therefore, Indonesia is facing one critical problem right now: local languages are classified and will be classified as endangered languages. These languages are getting lost in social groups and culture in the future when there is no effort from an agent in the macro-level like the government and agents in micro-level such as families in maintaining the languages.

Based on data, Maluku can be classified as one of several provinces with critically endangered languages (Engelenhoven, 2003). Most people tend to use Bahasa Indonesia and Ambon-Malay as their daily communication. Additionally, they learn English as their third language for global communication but forget to use their local voice. Moreover, lots of them never know about their local language. It is even critical that many more regional languages in Maluku will be extinct some year later. This situation in Maluku is also mentioned in Rahtu and Yuniastuti (2019) "language extinction will be followed by the endangerment of local wisdom,

tradition and cultural heritage as happened in some Indonesian regions such as Maluku and Papua". Traditionally, Maluku is called Bumi Raja-Raja because of the number of custom villages it has and the various local languages it has in different villages. However, if the loss of the local languages in Maluku keep increasing, it affects losing the villages' values, traditions, and worldview.

To ensure the importance of the local language, it is necessary to understand the meaning of language. Language is how a human can express him/herself through symbols in speaking or writing. It has a role in communicating thought, emotion, and imagination and expressing identity (Cristal & Robins, 2013). Therefore, language is not merely a personal expression but also a cultural expression of a person as a member of a group or community. As a cultural expression, language has a role in strengthening the bond between the community members and maintaining a sense of belonging (Kirkness, 2001). Then, language strengthens and expresses both identities of the person. Based on these definitions and functions of language, it is evident that language is a symbol to communicate between human beings and expresses cultural identity, whether as an individual or as a part of an ethnic community. Since the language of one ethnic community is different from other communities, it then becomes a sign of his/her ethnic identity. Thus, language relates tightly with culture in social groups. Fishman describes the inseparable bond of language and culture. When language is taken away from culture, it also takes away the essential part of the culture, such as rules, music, melody, terms, symbol, and power (Fishman, 2007). In other words, when we lose our language, we are critically losing our essential cultural identity. Consequently, as mentioned before, when one province, especially Maluku, keeps losing its local languages, it is a critical problem that must have quick and proper attention not only by the government but also by the people in that community.

One of the local languages in Maluku that possibly will be endangered some years later is Alune. Alune is one local language in Western part of Seram Island (Pulau Seram Bagian Barat). Based on the observation and interview conducted by a writer in Neniari village, it is acknowledged that most children or the younger generation do not use Alune in their daily conversation. Moreover, sometimes, they do not understand the language when the older people use it in conversation.

A previous study concerning this issue in Indonesia is "Endangered Language Padang Pariaman-West Sumatera" by Rahtu and Yuniastuti (2019). The researchers tried to analyze lexicons in the Padang language. These are categorized as severely endangered languages related to agricultural tools and processes in Kabupaten Padang Pariaman. The reason for doing their study was to maintain the local language from possible extinction. Moreover, two other previous studies took an example of local languages in Maluku. First, a study by Ewing (2014) focused on language endangerment in Indonesia. The study took two examples which are in Maluku and Jawa. Then, the result showed that families and the broader community could help maintain the language for the children in the next generation. At the same time, the efforts by the government in the upper level did not work. This study suggested that society transform their assumption that learning their local languages was a minor point rather than Indonesian and English (Ewing, 2014). Second, Tahir et al., in 2019, did a study that aimed to revitalize one of Maluku's local languages in a multilingual learning model. Their research focused on Laha Language revitalization through a multilingual learning model at Al-Hilal IV Elementary School in Laha, Maluku. The result of this study showed that regional language learning had not been applied at Al-Hilal IV Laha Elementary School even though the school had competent resources and teachers in the Laha language (Tahir et al., 2019). The purpose of this research was to prevent the extinction of this language in Maluku. From these previous studies, it is seen that they focus on the bottom-up approach or the micro-level. Tulloch also uses this approach when she tries to maintain the dialect of an endangered language, which she calls "the bottom-up approaches move the forefront" (Tulloch, 2010). Similar to these studies, this research also emphasizes the local agents on this micro level to prevent local

language from endangerment and extinction, focusing on local languages in Maluku, which is Alune.

Based on the problem and the explanation above, this study focuses on the Alune language in Neniari village, with questions on how to preserve the Alune language in Neniari village? 2) How do local agents in the micro-level maintain the Alune language? Therefore, the purposes of this study are 1) to understand the way to preserve the Alune language, 3) and to offer some local approaches (micro-level) to maintain the Alune language.

Literature Review

Definition and Factors of Endangered Language

a. Definition of Endangered Language

According to its definition, a language can be classified as an endangered language when it seems to become extinct several years later (Woodbury, 2019). Tsunoda (2005) stated that language endangerment is a matter of degree, consisting of four degrees: strong, sick, dying and extinct or healthy, weakening; moribund, and dead. Besides these degrees, there are also five classifications to describe language endangerment: vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered, and extinct (Moseley, 2010), as described in the table below.

Table 1 Degree of Language Endangerment

Degree of Language Endangerment	Description
Vulnerable	A language is categorized as Vulnerable when lots of young generations speak their language, yet, it is limited to specific sphere.
Endangered	A language can be said as definitely endangered at which the language is no longer learnt and used by the young generation as their first language.
Severely endangered	A language is stated as severely endangered when parents no longer speak the language to their children, even though they understand it. In this status, older generations such grandparents are the only ones who speak the language.
Critically endangered	A language classified as critically endangered at which grandparents rarely speak the language.
Extinct	A language is categorized as extinct when no one person in the community speaks the language.

In addition, the term “endangered languages” also refers to weakening and moribund languages (Tsunoda, 2005). Then, according to these degrees of endangerment, a language that is vulnerable or endangered can be measured based on the speakers of the language.

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Reflecting on these degrees, Krauss (1992) stated that new generations are no longer learning as many as 50% of languages in this world of speakers. Therefore, he sums up that in the coming century, 3.000 of 6.000, those languages will be dead or extinct (Krauss, 1992). Relating to Indonesia, based on updated data on Ethnologue, a web-based statistical database of world languages, the number of established languages listed for Indonesia is 722, of which 357 languages are in trouble, and 79 languages are dying (Eberhard, 2020). According to these data, it can be

concluded that during these years in this century, more than a thousand languages will be extinct, or at least are in endangered languages status.

b. Factors of Endangered Language

Relating to the factors of language endangerment, the leading cause of the language becoming endangered is when the current generation no longer uses their language and when the parents no longer speak the language to their children. Similar to this statement, Grenoble (2006) even stated that language attrition or language endangerment happens when children no longer learn the language even though several people still speak the language. Since he thinks the young generation has the primary role in maintaining the language in existence. On the other hand, Anderbeck (2015) points out that globalization can also be a significant implication that causes most world languages to be vulnerable and even decline or become extinct. Supporting Anderbeck's statement, Collins (2020) explains that when globalization meets culture, it does not often cause a two-sided advantage, especially related to language in that society. Another factor for endangered languages is when more languages are used broadly in society (Woodbury, 2019).

Moreover, Wamalwa (2013) also shows that languages can be considered as seriously endangered based on several factors below:

- The number of people who recently speak the language, which is not more than 5000 speakers.
- The existence of two dominant languages in society. Since, speakers will usually prefer to use the majority language than minority one.
- The effect of socio-economic benefit when speaking the majority language rather than minority language.
- The existence of wrong thoughts and attitude toward the local language. Usually, people presume that their local language does not give them any advantages. Moreover, it can be a burden to learn it compared to the majority. Therefore, there is a massive shift from minority language to majority language.
- The local or minority language is not transmitted to the current generation. Since, parents also do not speak and teach the language to their children at home.
- The situation where only elders do speak the language and no more descendants will be taught the language.

Based on these factors, it can be stated that there is no single cause to endanger a language. Therefore, it needs more than one way or local agent to take part in maintaining any local language.

The Importance of Language Relating to Identity, Culture, and Community

Understanding how language relates to identity, culture, and community is better to understand the meaning of identity. Generally, identity is simply about who the people are individually and what makes them specific individuals. From a social science perspective, identity is about how the individual makes himself/herself part of a particular group or community; based on a psychological point of view, it is about his/her self-regard (Fishman, 1999). Related to identity, culture is an inseparable side of an individual's identity, which comprises custom values that influence the thought and attitude of the individual.

The question arises, what does language do with identity, culture, and community? As a fundamental element in human life, language has two functions that are a symbol to communicate between human beings since language itself is a vital instrument to express and share ideas through written and spoken activity and as an expression of the person. Being able to differentiate one community from another and language relates tightly with culture in a social group as a powerful symbol for their identity since they experience their lives spiritually, culturally, and socially through

language. That is why language is an embedded element in culture and has a role in communicating their culture (Rovira, 2008).

From this explanation above, it can be seen that language has a significant part in a community's existence and identity. When the local language of the community is endangered, it also affects the community's cultural identity, which endangers the sense of belonging as one community. Therefore, the role of all community levels is vital in maintaining the language, which also means maintaining their cultural identity.

Method

The method of this study is a qualitative method, in which data are collected from library study and interviews with some local people in Neniari village. The library study data are from journal articles and internet articles, while field data come from observation and interviews in 3 different small groups. First group consists of 10 children. These 10 children consist of 5 elementary students at SD Satu Atap Neniari, and 5 junior high school students at SMP N 6 Taniwel, Neniari. Second group comprises 10 parents who are recruited from the parents of the ten children. Third group consists of 5 elders who are the custom leaders. The location of the research is in Neniari Village which is located in a remote mountain area of the Western part of Seram island, Maluku Province. In addition, this research was conducted in 2019.

Finding and Discussion

The History of Alune Language

Historically, Alune language comes from and is used by the Alifuru ethnic (*suku bangsa Alifuru*) who lived in Nunusaku Mountain, Seram Island, Maluku. Alifuru itself means first human (*manusia awal*) and has two languages, that are Alune and Wemale. Etymologically, Alune comes from the word, *Laun*, which means leaf (*daun*), whereas Wemale comes from the word *Mabale*, which means down (*bawah*). Based on these meanings, it can be seen that at that time, Alifuru people who lived in mountain areas used Alune, whereas those who decided to come down (*turun gunung*) to live in lower places, have used Wemale. Therefore, Alune is regarded and used as local language in Western Part of Seram Islands, that include four areas:

West area : Kairatu, Neniari, Ririn, Rumahsoal, Lumoli, and Lohia- Sapalewa.
 South area : Rambatu, Rumberu, and Manusa.
 North area : Niulukan, Niwelehu, and Murnaten.
 East area : Buria, Uwet, and Wakolo.

Nowadays, Alune language is mostly spoken in custom ceremonies such as inauguration of village leaders, marriage proposals, and some daily conversation by old people. An example below is a part of Alune language spoken in a custom ceremony:

Akupua sia tuana mata banana.

Bei mete ulate kai batua bei mete.

Takuwa mene kai bena buini.

Mai selu ami mina petu meire.

Ami sake ama latu.

Bei luma mata lumbau.

Lopai sisine.

Lekai selu heina meire pinake petu luwa.

Son pasate luwaka kuwai tuane kese beini yake.

Kele kukure Tuane ama latu petu meire.

Hena tai ulete.

Ale kerike peneka elekai uwabni emebalamu lalei peneka.

Pinake petu luwa pina sou tilina ale kese mo.

Tele kukuru.

Alune as an Endangered Language?

Based on the table of the degree of language endangerment mentioned in the literature review, it shows that the Alune language in all part of Alune speakers in Western Part of Seram Island is in Vulnerable status that is in the process of Definitely Endangered status. However, what is the status of the Alune language in a specific village, Neniari? The result below will show the status of the language.

Based on the observation and interview conducted in Neniari, it is evident that most children do not get taught about their local language, Alune, by their parents. Below are the result of the interview done with children, parents, teachers, and older people:

Table 2 Result of Interview

Interviewee	Result of Interview
Children	All children in the small group which were interviewed acknowledged that they did not know that the name of their local language is called Alune language. Moreover, all of them said that since they were little, their parents have much spoken to them in Ambon-Malay rather than their local language. Then, in schools, they get much more Bahasa Indonesia and also Ambon-Malay. Therefore, the 10 children are fluently speaking in Ambon-Malay and Bahasa but not in Alune. Since, they only use the two languages in daily written and spoken activities whether to their parents, teacher or their friends. In addition, 2 children said that when their parents talk to each other in the local language, they only understand a few words, but do not know mostly what their parents were talking about and do not know how to respond in the language. On the other hand, only 2 children acknowledge that they have a sister and brother who are university's students that are able to speak in the local language. Then, when they are asked about when they mostly hear the local language being used by other people, all the children said that they usually hear the local language in a custom ceremony, but they do not know what the people talk about. 4 children state that they remember several words spoken by the people but they do not know the meaning of the words.
Parents	9 out of 10 parents acknowledged that they did not teach the children the local language, instead they mostly speak with the children in Ambon-Malay. Because they think that Ambon Malay and Bahasa Indonesia are important for them when they are grown-up, for example, to go to school in Ambon and to get a better job in Piru, Ambon and other areas. While 1 of the parents stated that he usually

	speaks in Alune to his children but never thoughtfully teaches them the language. When they are asked about the importance of the Alune language, the ten parents acknowledge that the language is significant to preserve their cultural identity, but due to economic issues, they prefer to use Ambon-Malay and Bahasa. Moreover, 8 parents admit that they do not teach the language to their children since they think that the children can learn it at school and/or through custom ceremonies held in the village.
Teachers	The elementary teacher states that in elementary school, there is one local-content course which is usually taught once a week. However, he admits that in the local content class, he just teaches them to sing songs, but never mindfully teaches the meaning of the song to the students. Not only that, the teacher states that all elementary teachers usually use Bahasa and Ambon-Malay in their daily activities at school. Therefore, Alune language is very rare to use in school. Similar to the response of elementary teachers, one junior high school teacher also states that all junior high school teachers only use Bahasa and Ambon-Malay whether between the teachers or to their students. Also, the school does not have a local content course and any textbooks or storybooks that contain local language that can be used by students to read and learn.
Elders	Elders in the village also acknowledge that mostly people who speak in Alune are those who are above 45 years old, whereas people under 45 years old usually speak in Ambon-Malay and Bahasa, but some adults speak in mixed Ambon-Malay and Alune language. The five elders who are also the custom leaders stated that almost all children in the village lack knowledge of the local language and they admit that it is because most parents now only use Ambon-Malay when speak to their children while some use mixed Ambon-Malay and Alune language, but the children are not accustomed to using the language on a daily basis. 1 elder says that children may always hear the local language through custom ceremony, but he thinks that they may not understand the meaning of what the people in the ceremony say, since the people only use the language without telling the meaning of what they say in Bahasa or Ambon-Malay.

Based on the result of the interview above and relating this context with the theory of endangered language in the literature review, it can be said that Alune is included as a Vulnerable-Definitely Endangered language in Neniari. It is Vulnerable because there are still few children who understand the language when older people or their parents use it, even with little meaning. On the other hand, it is more in Definitely Endangered Status, based on the profound reason that there is no proper transmission of this language to the children whether in family, school, and society. The observation shows that most children in Neniari do not learn and rarely use it in their daily conversation. Since children have not spoken the language, it can be identified as endangered, even though their parents and elders still use it.

Local Approach to Maintain Alune Language

Before mentioning the role of local agents in maintaining Alune language, here is words of the Maliseet Honour Code written by Imelda (as cited in Kirknes, 2001) that is worth to pay attention,

Grandmothers and Grandfathers
Thank you for our language
That you have saved for us

It is now our turn to save it
For the ones who are not yet born.
May that be the truth.

Those words above purposively to show that local language is such irreplaceable inheritance passed down by ancestors. Not only people's cultural identity, it is also a valuable heritage that causes one group to be typical of other groups.

As suggested by Tulloch (2010), there are several ways to protect and preserve endangered languages:

- a. Not only at macro level, goals and strategies to protect and preserve endangered languages must be established at micro level or local level. Therefore, micro level or local level for such as family, school, and village government should have strategies in protecting and preserving Alune language.
- b. The language also must be promoted. According to the context of this study, Alune language can be promoted through the routine use of the language in micro level as explained in discussion of each micro level below.
- c. The strategies must be focused on oral creativity. Since, relating to the result of the interview, it is seen that children do not use the language in their daily activities whether at school, house or their social environment.
- d. Another important thing to do is to strengthen the awareness of the language and its dialect, and also the sense of mutual belonging.

Based on the suggestions by Tulloch, simple but significant, the main way to prevent the endangerment status of Alune language is when children keep motivated to learn their own language, Alune. To achieve this, important local agents need to maintain the Alune are family, education institution (school), religious institution and village government which are discussed below:

1). Family

Family is the most significant local agent in maintaining the Alune language. Since the children are tiny, the parents must speak and teach the language to the children because the children are the ones who will continue the language in the future. The existence of the language is in their hands, and parents' role is to inherit the language from them. The study of Neustupny and Nekvapil shows that family is an example in which micro language planning occurs, particularly on raising children with bilingualism and multilingualism in mind (Baldauf, 2006). It means Alune as their local identity and Bahasa Indonesia as their national identity can be taught to children simultaneously. Therefore, it can be said that this maintenance of the language needs a combined contribution from both children and parents.

2). School

Besides family, school is another important place to help maintain the local language since school has a role in educating the children not only for their cognitive competence but also affective and psychomotor competence related to cultural values, especially the using of the local language. Therefore, elementary school and junior high school teachers in Neniari must seriously teach the Alune language. Notably, teachers should prepare practical and fun activities through the syllabus of local content courses, such as teaching them essential words used in daily conversation, singing traditional songs, and telling local stories to retell the stories. Moreover, it is better if primary agents like the Education Department in this region provide learning materials in Alune for students.

3). Custom and Village Government

To maintain the Alune language, customs and village government are important agents to preserve the language. These agents can cooperate with schools and religious institutions to create a language program; for instance, cooperate with the school to have speech competitions using Alune language.

In addition, custom leaders may teach the children through Kapata, an ethnic expression of the ethnic song usually performed by older people in custom ceremonies, and tell them the meaning or history behind it. Since Kapata has cultural meaning and history of seeing the world around them since a long time ago (Darman, 2017). This is important since there was a moment in field data. After one custom ceremony in the village, the writer asked several children and teenagers what the custom leader said in the ritual. They answered that they did not know it.

4). Religious Institution

The religious institution in Neniari can inevitably be the local agent to maintain the Alune language. For instance, this institution utilizes religious songs written in Alune to be sung by children periodically, and at the same time, tells the meaning of the words in the song. Even though it looks practical, it can be used for teaching the language to children.

Conclusion

The local language is a heritage that not only a nation has, but also that ethnic has since language is a symbol to communicate between human beings and an expression of identity in a social group and its culture. However, numbers of local languages increasingly become endangered and extinct when the younger generation rarely uses them. In that situation, Alune as the local language in Neniari has continued to decline in the young generation. An example of this situation, when the children do not know the meaning of a sentence in Alune. Most parents also acknowledge that they speak more in Malay-Ambon to children than in Alune, and adult people forget most of the Alune syntaxes, then causes the children to speak in Alune rarely. In addition, teachers at schools generally use Bahasa Indonesia and Malay-Ambon. Therefore, local agents such as family, school, village, custom government, and religious institutions have vital roles in maintaining this local language to the children in Neniari village. When these local agents at the micro level become aware of this situation and actively pass the language to children in various ways, Alune language can indeed survive.

This issue of language endangerment is critical and vital. Since the more loss of local languages occurs, the more loss of cultural diversity increases. Therefore, more local languages are on the level of endangerment that needs attention to maintain and revitalize.

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