

Inventory of Archaic Vocabulary in the Asilulu Language as an Effort to Preserve Regional Language Among Parents

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Abstract

This study seeks to document archaic vocabulary to conserve regional language among parents in the Assilulu language of Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency, Maluku Province. This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology. The data gathering methods employed in this instance are observation, interviews, and documentation. This study was conducted in Astilulu Village, Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency. Assilulu Village in Leihitu District was selected due to the predominant use of the Asailulu language among its population. This research functions as a data collection effort utilizing the primary instrument, which is actively engaged in data gathering. The researcher's direct presence in the field acts as a criterion for the effective comprehension of concerns pertaining to the inventory of archaic vocabulary in the Assilulu language. Analysis of the collected data revealed that archaic vocabulary from the Assilulu language is predominantly utilized by the elderly. Specifically, the term Yami is infrequently encountered, as the term Ami, meaning "we," is more commonly employed in everyday conversation, leading to the gradual obsolescence of Yami.

Keywords: *Archaic; Asilulu Language; Elderly; Inventory; Preservation.*



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INTRODUCTION

Language is a crucial component of human existence that facilitates communication and serves as a medium for cultural expression and identity (Chaer & Leonie, 2010). In Indonesia, the linguistic diversity is remarkable, with hundreds of regional languages coexisting alongside the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. However, many of these regional languages face the threat of extinction due to various sociolinguistic factors, including globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of national and international languages (Sari et al., 2020).

The Asilulu language, spoken in Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency, represents one such regional language that requires urgent documentation and preservation efforts. As a member of the Austronesian language family, Asilulu contains rich linguistic features and cultural knowledge that risk being lost if not properly documented (SIL International, 2006). The phenomenon of archaic vocabulary loss is particularly concerning, as these linguistic elements often carry deep cultural significance and historical information about the community's heritage (Afria, 2017).

Research on language endangerment in eastern Indonesia has highlighted the critical importance of documenting archaic vocabulary before it disappears entirely (Kaiping & Klammer, 2018). The intergenerational transmission of language, particularly specialized or traditional vocabulary, has been identified as a key factor in language maintenance (Wang & Hatoss, 2024). When elderly speakers, who are typically the primary repositories of archaic vocabulary, are no longer able to transmit this knowledge to younger generations, the linguistic heritage of the community becomes vulnerable to permanent loss (Ellen, 2023).

The sociolinguistic situation in Maluku presents unique challenges for language preservation. The historical influence of trade languages, colonial languages, and the contemporary dominance of Bahasa Indonesia and Ambon Malay have created complex multilingual dynamics that affect the vitality of local languages (Latuheru et al., 2025). Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective preservation strategies that can address the specific needs of the Asilulu language community.

Language preservation has emerged as a critical field of study in linguistics, particularly as researchers recognize the rapid rate of language endangerment worldwide (Esron, 2019). The documentation of archaic vocabulary represents a specialized aspect of language preservation that focuses on linguistic elements that are no longer in active use or are known only by elderly speakers (Piningit, 2022). This type of documentation is particularly urgent because archaic vocabulary often contains cultural and historical information that cannot be recovered once lost (Sibarani, 1997).

Contemporary approaches to language documentation emphasize the importance of community-based methodologies that involve native speakers as active participants in the research process (Daigneault & Anderson, 2023). This participatory approach ensures that the documentation process respects community values and priorities while also producing more accurate and culturally relevant results (Mahsun, 2005). In the Indonesian context, such approaches have proven particularly effective in documenting endangered languages across the archipelago (Rumalean, 2017).

Research on language change in multilingual societies has identified several key factors that contribute to the loss of archaic vocabulary and traditional linguistic forms (Sumarsono & Paina, 2004). Urbanization and modernization often lead to domain restriction, where traditional languages are used in increasingly limited contexts (Sosiowati et al., 2019). Educational policies that prioritize national languages can also contribute to intergenerational language shift, as younger speakers develop stronger competencies in prestige languages (Sugiyono & Sry, 2011).

The concept of linguistic vitality has been central to understanding how languages maintain or lose their functional domains over time (Hanson & Aroline, 2019). Factors such as demographic strength, institutional support, and community attitudes toward the language all influence its long-term viability (Pateda, 2015). In the case of regional languages in Indonesia, the balance between maintaining local identity and participating in national culture creates complex dynamics that affect language use patterns (Nababan, 1984).

The linguistic landscape of Maluku reflects the region's complex history of trade, colonization, and cultural contact (Rumalean et al., 2019). The province is home to numerous Austronesian and Papuan languages, many of which are spoken by relatively small communities (SIL International, 2006). Historical

research has documented the influence of various contact languages, including Malay trade varieties, Dutch, and Portuguese, on local linguistic systems (Chaer, 2012). Contemporary studies of language vitality in Maluku have revealed concerning trends regarding the maintenance of traditional languages (Behuku et al., 2022). Young people increasingly use Ambon Malay or Bahasa Indonesia in daily communication, while traditional languages are often relegated to ceremonial or domestic contexts (Ellen, 2023). This pattern of language shift has significant implications for the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditional practices (Latuheru et al., 2025).

This study aims to contribute to the broader field of language documentation and preservation by providing a systematic inventory of archaic vocabulary in the Asilulu language. The research focuses specifically on the linguistic knowledge of elderly speakers, who represent the primary source of traditional vocabulary that may not be familiar to younger generations. By documenting these linguistic elements, this study seeks to create a resource that can support future language revitalization efforts and contribute to the preservation of Asilulu cultural heritage.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology to document and analyze archaic vocabulary in the Asilulu language. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena and provides flexibility in data collection methods (Moleong, 2012). The descriptive nature of the study focuses on systematic documentation and categorization of archaic vocabulary items, following established practices in language documentation research (Sudaryanto, 1993).

The research was conducted in Asilulu Village, Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency, Maluku Province. This location was selected because it represents one of the primary communities where the Asilulu language is still actively spoken, particularly among older generations. The village's relative isolation from major urban centers has contributed to the preservation of traditional linguistic forms, making it an ideal location for documenting archaic vocabulary.

Data collection employed three primary methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted to understand the natural contexts in which archaic vocabulary is used or referenced. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with elderly community members who were identified as knowledgeable speakers of traditional Asilulu. The documentation method involved recording and transcribing linguistic data, creating written records of vocabulary items and their cultural contexts.

The study focused primarily on elderly speakers aged 60 and above, who were identified through community consultation as having extensive knowledge of traditional Asilulu vocabulary. A total of 15 participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring representation of different family lineages and traditional roles within the community. All participants provided informed consent for their participation in the research.

Data analysis followed standard procedures for linguistic documentation, including phonetic transcription, semantic analysis, and cultural contextualization of vocabulary items (Sudaryanto, 1986). The collected data were organized into categories based on semantic domains and frequency of use. Comparative analysis was conducted to identify patterns of vocabulary retention and loss across different age groups and social contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Archaic Vocabulary Documentation.

The documentation process identified 47 archaic vocabulary items in the Asilulu language that are primarily known and used by elderly speakers. These vocabulary items span various semantic domains, including kinship terms, traditional occupations, cultural practices, and natural phenomena. The analysis revealed significant variation in the retention and use of these archaic terms, with some items being completely unknown to younger speakers while others maintain limited recognition.

Semantic Domains of Archaic Vocabulary. The documented archaic vocabulary can be categorized into several distinct semantic domains:

Kinship and Social Organization (12 items): Traditional terms for extended family relationships and social roles that are no longer commonly used in contemporary Asilulu society.

Traditional Occupations and Tools (15 items): Vocabulary related to traditional fishing, agriculture, and craft-making practices that have been largely replaced by modern techniques and equipment.

Cultural and Ritual Practices (10 items): Terms associated with traditional ceremonies, beliefs, and cultural practices that are less frequently performed in contemporary community life.

Natural Environment (10 items): Traditional ecological knowledge encoded in vocabulary related to local flora, fauna, and environmental phenomena.

The study revealed clear intergenerational differences in knowledge and use of archaic vocabulary. Speakers aged 70 and above demonstrated comprehensive knowledge of traditional vocabulary items, often providing detailed explanations of their meanings and cultural contexts. Speakers aged 60-69 showed moderate familiarity with archaic terms but were less confident in their usage and cultural significance.

In contrast, speakers aged 50 and below demonstrated limited knowledge of archaic vocabulary, with many items being completely unfamiliar. This pattern suggests a critical break in intergenerational transmission that occurred approximately 40-50 years ago, coinciding with increased access to formal education and greater integration with regional economic systems.

Case Study: The Obsolescence of “Yami”. A detailed analysis of the term “Yami” illustrates the process of archaic vocabulary obsolescence in the Asilulu language. Traditionally, “Yami” served as a first-person plural pronoun with specific cultural connotations related to inclusive group identity. However, contemporary speakers predominantly use “Ami,” which has a broader semantic range and is more consistent with Ambon Malay usage patterns.

Elderly speakers explained that “Yami” was traditionally used in formal contexts and carried implications of collective responsibility and traditional authority. The shift to “Ami” reflects broader changes in social organization and communication patterns within the Asilulu community. This case demonstrates how lexical change often reflects deeper cultural and social transformations.

Documentation of Selected Archaic Vocabulary. The following table presents a selection of documented archaic vocabulary items, their contemporary equivalents or meanings, and their English translations:

No.	Archaic Term	Contemporary Equivalent	English Translation
1	<i>Yami</i>	<i>Ami</i>	We (inclusive)
2	<i>Hatene</i>	<i>Tahu</i>	Know
3	<i>Mauni</i>	<i>Mau</i>	Want
4	<i>Tete</i>	<i>Nenek</i>	Grandmother
5	<i>Upu</i>	<i>Kakek</i>	Grandfather
6	<i>Lari</i>	<i>Lari keluar</i>	Run out into the street
7	<i>Kona</i>	<i>Semua</i>	Everyone
8	<i>Pesi</i>	<i>Raja</i>	Most powerful person
9	<i>Kesepipi</i>	<i>Dilanggar</i>	Stepping over
10	<i>Huhututa</i>	<i>Bersusun</i>	Regular

Factors Contributing to Vocabulary Obsolescence

The analysis identified several interconnected factors contributing to the obsolescence of archaic vocabulary in the Asilulu language:

Educational Language Policy: The emphasis on Bahasa Indonesia in formal education has reduced opportunities for traditional vocabulary transmission within family and community contexts.

Economic Modernization: Changes in traditional occupations and practices have eliminated functional domains where archaic vocabulary was previously essential.

Media and Communication Technology: Increased exposure to regional and national media has promoted the use of standardized linguistic forms over local variants.

Social Mobility and Urbanization: Young people's migration to urban areas for education and employment has disrupted traditional patterns of linguistic socialization.

CONCLUSION

The author has highlighted the research topic of the Inventory of Archaic Vocabulary of the Assilulu Language as an Effort to Preserve Regional Languages Among Parents in Assilulu Village, Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency. Based on the data obtained and analyzed, the use of Archaic Vocabulary of the Assilulu Language among parents was found, namely the causes of the Assilulu Language Archaic Vocabulary starting to disappear and the Assilulu Language Vocabulary starting to become archaic because language use within the family is rarely used.

The use of archaic terminology in the Assilulu language is nearly no longer employed because this vocabulary is old and the Assilulu people prefer to use Ambon Malay. The advancement of time and technology also adds considerably to the infrequent use of archaic words in Assilulu Village, Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on language endangerment in eastern Indonesia by providing systematic documentation of archaic vocabulary and identifying key sociolinguistic factors affecting language maintenance. The findings demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive preservation strategies that address both immediate documentation needs and long-term community engagement. The integration of contemporary research on language preservation with traditional documentation methods offers promising pathways for supporting the vitality of the Asilulu language and similar endangered languages throughout the region.

Based on the discussion and data analysis, the researcher has several suggestions regarding the Inventory of Archaic Vocabulary in the Assilulu Language as an Effort to Preserve Regional Languages Among Parents in Assilulu Village, Leihitu District, Central Maluku Regency. Future efforts should prioritize community-based preservation initiatives, educational programs that incorporate traditional vocabulary, and policy advocacy for multilingual education support. The documentation provided in this study serves as a foundation for these broader preservation efforts and contributes to the maintenance of Asilulu cultural heritage for future generations.

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