

THE MOI LANGUAGE'S MAINTENANCE LEVEL AND TRANSMISSION PATTERN IN SORONG, SOUTHWEST PAPUA

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Abstract

This research categorizes the Moi language's maintenance level and identifies its transmission pattern in the Moi tribe in Southwest Papua. The research population covered all Moi language speakers in Sorong. 168 research samples were chosen using the random sampling technique. Data collection methods were observation, questionnaire distribution, and interview. Data were analyzed qualitatively using the descriptive-qualitative approach. This research was carried out in Sorong, Southwest Papua, in April-September 2022. Results demonstrated that the Moi language's maintenance level in the Moi tribe was at level 3 because the Indonesian language had caused a shift in its use. The transmission pattern of the Moi language in the Moi tribe was commonly divided into three, i.e., BM + BI, BI + BM, and BM and MI (mixed). The results lead us to the conclusion that the Moi language spoken by the Moi tribe in Sorong had a low maintenance level.

Keywords: Maintenance, Pattern, Transmission, Language, Moi

1. BACKGROUND

Language maintenance issues are appealing by this point, as exhibited by the growing interest of language researchers worldwide in the issues in the last five years. Some research on language maintenance in the last five years focuses specifically on language maintenance in ethnic minorities (Dunmore, 2021; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016; Paciotto, 2014), language maintenance in multi-ethnic communities (Hermiyanty, Bertin, 2017), language maintenance in children (Liang, 2018; Smith & Li, 2020; Verdon et al., 2014), language maintenance in an educational field (Amezcuca, 2019; Widiyanto, 2018; Younas & Qingyu, 2021), language maintenance in a family domain (Ong, 2021), and language maintenance in political and government domains (Lewis & McLeod, 2021).

Language maintenance relates to the language's ability to survive a threatening situation which may lead it to extinction (Budiyana, 2017). The language, accordingly, must be able to compete with other languages spoken in a certain community (Wang, 2016). The language's inability to survive will cause it to shift or become extinct, and efforts to make it able to compete with other languages and survive are hence required (Dubiel, 2019; Ramlan, 2018).

Some countries, including Indonesia, have been attempting to maintain language, e.g., using the first language (L1) or mother tongue as the communication language in education (Shee, 2020), using the first language within a family environment (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021), conducting language documentation (Agyekum, 2018), and applying transnational strategies

(Fiorentino, 2017; Kwon, 2017). Data indicated by the research inform us that language maintenance strategies come in many different forms, but according to Bradley & Bradley (2013), the main factor in language maintenance or shift is the attitude of the language speakers.

An attitude toward a language is implicit, demanding us to observe it from how its speakers use and choose their language (Dewi & Setiadi, 2018; Halko et al., 2019). Language speakers can be considered to have a positive attitude toward the language when they possess loyalty and pride in using it and understand its norms (Garvin & Mathiot, 2012). Ideally, language speakers with a positive attitude to their first language will consistently maintain and use it proportionally in language usage fields (Hermiyanty & Bertin, 2017).

When language speakers show a positive attitude toward the language they speak, the language will likely survive since the speakers remain loyal to using it. Meanwhile, a negative attitude shown by language speakers toward their language, bringing on a preference for another language to their own, will cause the first to shift.

Some researchers have performed research on language maintenance in Indonesia under the topics of Sundanese language maintenance in West Lombok (Niswariyana & Nina, 2018), Balinese language maintenance in Kotabaru (Rahman, 2017), Javanese language maintenance in Banten (Suherman, 2015), and Muna language maintenance in Southeast Sulawesi (Sailan, 2014). And yet, research on language maintenance in Southwest Papua is still limited to perform on language maintenance in immigrant ethnicity (Haerani, 2021).

Our literature review on research pertinent to the Moi tribe points out that relevant research has been undertaken on economic (Suaib & Fitrianto, 2015), legal (Ilham et al., 2022), educational (Heriyanti, 2019; Metanfanuan & Hetharia, 2021), and cultural aspects (Fredrik et al., 2021). In the linguistic area, research on the Moi language only focuses on the language's phonemes (Gifelem et al., 2021), numerals (Gifelem & Pormes, 2019), and family names in the Moi language (Suripatty, 2015). It presented evidence that research on the Moi language maintenance in Southwest Papua is still very limited.

The Moi language is one of the 272 languages in Papua, spoken across the bird's head-like peninsula or Semenanjung Doberai, Southwest Papua. The language has been serving as a lingua franca for hundreds of years in Southwest Papua. The Moi language in Southwest Papua is spoken by 4,600 speakers domiciling in Sorong and divided into three dialects, which are the mountain dialect (Amber), the upstream dialect (Klasa), and the inland dialect (Kelim) (Berry & Berry, 1999).

The Moi tribe community remains active speakers of the Moi language to date and uses the language to communicate or carry out cultural, customary, and religious rites. Nevertheless, the latest research on the Moi language by Gifelem et al. (2021) discloses that the Moi tribe community, particularly children and adolescents, cannot speak the language well. They can understand the language yet cannot speak or use it and, consequently, use the Indonesian language instead.

The Moi language spoken by the Moi tribe exists among other languages spoken by immigrants in Sorong, Southwest Papua (Ramada, 2019). There are four primary tribes or ethnicities in Sorong, Southwest Papua: the Bugis tribe, the Buton tribe, the Kei tribe, and the Javanese tribe (Ahmad, 2011). The variety of tribes in Sorong, Southwest Papua, is indicative of the multitude number of languages used in the city on a daily basis. Additionally, it affirms a significant threat to the Moi language maintenance.

Considering the phenomenon, we perceive the necessity and significance of analyzing the Moi language maintenance, specifically the maintenance level, to examine the use of the language in the Moi tribe community and reveal its transmission pattern, allowing us to identify its maintenance status in the Moi tribe community by referring to theories (Batibo, 2005).

This research boasts several aspects absent in the previous research on language maintenance in transmigrant/immigrant communities. It brings into the spotlight the language spoken by Papuan natives, the Moi tribe. In addition, as its object, it underscores the Moi tribe community's capacity to maintain the Moi language in a heterogenous community condition.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative method using a sociolinguistic approach was used. Research data were collected through questionnaire distribution, interviews, and observation. The distributed questionnaires contained questions and statements related to the Moi language maintenance and transmission pattern. Data were also collected through semi-structured interviews and used to support the questionnaire-generated data. Meanwhile, the observation was carried out to examine the skills or the use of the Moi language in the Moi tribe community.

The research area was Sorong, Southwest Papua, selected because many Moi language speakers who were in line with the respondent criteria required by this research inhabited the city. There were also immigrants from different tribes there, generating the many languages used by the community to communicate on a daily basis in the city. Interested in analyzing this heterogenous community phenomenon under the topic of language maintenance, we performed this research in April-September 2022, also using supporting data collected from journal articles published in international and national journals, proceedings, books, papers, and other references with regard to the research topic.

The research population included all Moi language speakers in Sorong, Southwest Papua, and the sample was composed of 168 Moi language speakers chosen using purposive sampling pursuant to the research variables and grouped by the determined research variable indicators. The number of samples was acquired from 308 questionnaires distributed and responded accordingly in a valid and consistent manner. The research informants were housewives and community figures or traditional figures from the Moi tribe and considered knowledgeable about the Moi tribe, especially the Moi language.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Moi Language's Transmission Pattern

A language reflected the cultural affluence of a community and paved the way for a group of humans to manifest and endow their values, traditions, and identity from one generation to another generation. However, many local languages were currently facing the risk of extinction or shift due to era changes and challenges.

Language transmission was the key to maintaining language sustainability, particularly when a language shift or the use of the majority language could threaten the existence of another language, specifically the local or regional one, which was an essential part of cultural identity and local diversity.

We found that the Moi tribe community generally acquired the Indonesian language before learning how to speak the Moi language. This acquisition could be explained using Language Acquisition Theory and sociolinguistic environmental factors within a daily life context.

According to Language Acquisition Theory, children acquired their first language naturally through interaction with their surrounding environment (Song & Song, 2018), and in the Moi tribe's context, the Indonesian language was the first learned by children since they were born. They were exposed to the language consistently through communication with families, relatives, and community members and finally used the language to communicate on a daily basis.

Sociolinguistic environmental factors also played an important role (Duncan & Paradis, 2020), as suggested by our finding that the environment where the Moi tribe community lived provided opportunities naturally to practice and learn the Indonesian language. Social interaction with family members, peers, and community members was undertaken using the Indonesian language as the main communication language, inducing an environment which buoyed the development of the Indonesian language as the primary language the Moi tribe children acquired.

A daily life context also affected the priority in language acquisition. The Moi tribe community, who lived in an environment in which the majority of the inhabitants spoke the Indonesian language, considered that the language was relevant and imperative to a variety of aspects of their life. The Moi tribe children were inclined to use the Indonesian language when interacting with families, playing with friends, and participating in traditional cultural activities. Their language acquisition process began with learning the Indonesian language, which was spoken dominantly in their surroundings.

Although the Moi tribe community acquired the Indonesian language as their first language, they regarded that the Moi language was crucial and worth learning, and accordingly, the Moi tribe children commenced learning the Moi language to interact with a broader environment (Hashim & Yunus, 2018). The process of acquiring that second language could be inflected by several factors, such as formal education, interaction with non-Moi communities, and exposure to media using the Indonesian language.

Our research unraveled that the Moi tribe community, in general, acquired the Indonesian language prior to learning the Moi language, and this phenomenon could be examined using Language Acquisition Theory related to daily life, which impacted the language priority and exposure the children of the next generation had (Dong & Chow, 2022).

We figured out that prevalently, the Moi tribe community was exposed to the Moi language mostly from their family instead of acquiring it from the broad community, the phenomenon of which could be explained using theories and interrelated factors. Duncan & Paradis (2020) argued that children acquired their first language naturally by interacting with the surrounding environment, particularly family.

In the Moi tribe's case, the family environment served as the key source to understanding and acquiring the Moi language; in other words, the Moi tribe children were exposed to the language through daily communication with parents, siblings, and other family members who used the Moi language. Communication in the family environment acted as the foundation of the Moi language acquisition among the Moi tribe children (Baroto, 2017).

The Moi tribe community lived within a large-size family comprising some generations living together. This strong family environment allowed the Moi tribe children to interact with family members who spoke the Moi language. Within this context, the Moi language served as the main language used in daily conversation, narrations, songs, and family rites, and this warm and coherent family relationship bolstered the Moi language acquisition among the Moi tribe children.

Apart from the language acquisition aspect, cultural identity also influenced the domination of the Moi language understanding within a family environment, in which the language was of crucial importance in maintaining and passing the Moi tribes' cultural identity. The Moi language acted as both a communication tool and a facility to express the Moi tribe's values, traditions, and cultural history to the young generation, and here, family played a central role in maintaining and passing them to their children. A family environment understanding the Moi language and cultures would be the main environment where the Moi tribe children could acquire and practice the Moi language (Fitriani, 2019).

Another factor influencing the dominant acquisition of the Moi language from the family environment was the Moi tribe children's restricted exposure to the outside, leading to the family environment becoming their main source of interaction and exposure to the language. The absence of chances to interact with the outside community speaking the Indonesian language was a pivotal factor which produced the dominant acquisition of the Moi language from the family environment (Frese & Ward, 2015).

Our research results unveiled that the Moi tribe community acquired the Moi language mostly from the family environment rather than the broad community or media, the phenomenon of which could be defined using Language Acquisition Theory, strong family relationship factors, cultural identity roles, and constrained exposure to the outside community. Family environment, as the Moi tribe children's primary source of exposure and acquisition of the Moi

language, was a salient cornerstone in their language acquisition and cultural identity maintenance.

B. Moi Language's Maintenance Level

Our research data analysis resulted in findings stating that the Moi language in Sorong, Southwest Papua had a very low maintenance level, specifically at level 3 since its role had shifted because of the use of the national language or the Indonesian language, as suggested by Batibo's (2005) theory with respect to local languages' maintenance levels. The Moi language, which used to be spoken broadly within a variety of daily life contexts, e.g., communication in family environment and neighborhood, underwent a decline in usage when the Indonesian language took over the status as the language spoken broadly and dominantly.

Batibo (2005) argued that the use of the second language (L2) at level 3 was dominant over that of the first language (L1), as L2 was considered more prestigious than L1. It yielded the event of L2 taking over L1's position and L2 borrowing when the language community group concerned was communicating in L1.

At the Moi language's maintenance level 3, a significant shift was indicated, especially in its daily use by the Moi community, who still used it in several contexts. However, the Indonesian language was increasingly dominating many different communication aspects and social interaction.

Within a family environment, the Moi language might still be used to communicate between older family members or speak in informal situations. Nevertheless, the Indonesian language took over a greater role related to interaction on a daily basis, particularly among the younger generation. Children were liable to speak the Indonesian language at home, specifically when they received formal education using the Indonesian language at schools.

In addition, the Moi language also experienced declined usage among the community even though some situations required the use of the language, such as in customary events or community meetings. However, in such events, the Indonesian language was often the main language to communicate, especially in cross-ethnicity groups. The shift might result from several factors, e.g., social mobility, interaction with other ethnic groups, and greater economic opportunities associated with using the Indonesian language.

Modern media, such as television, radio, and the internet, also played a seminal role in this shift because they often used the Indonesian language, affecting the patterns of communication and language used by the Moi community on a daily basis. The younger generation might be exposed more to the Indonesian language through these media, accelerating the language shift.

At this level, the Moi language's maintenance was still carried out by some Moi community members, particularly in family environments and traditional cultural contexts, but the shift brought by the Indonesian language signaled the requirement to augment maintenance measures. Teaching the younger generation to speak the Moi language would foster them to use the language in formal and informal contexts and promote the awareness of the paramount importance of maintaining it as a significant part of the Moi cultural identities. The measure

was essential to maintain the language amidst persistent social and cultural environmental changes.

Our data on the Moi language use phenomena in the Moi tribe community in Sorong attested that the language fell into the category of endangered language because only adult groups could speak it fluently, whereas few children, even none of the children, learned it (Crystal, 2002; Wurm, 2002).

C. Conclusion

Results led us to some following conclusions. To begin with, the language acquisition sequence in the Moi tribe demonstrated that the Indonesian language was learned before they learned the Moi one. It exhibited a trend in which the national language had a priority in the educational area and daily interaction, and the fact that environmental and cultural factors might play a vital role in this pattern.

Furthermore, the Moi language's maintenance level 3 indicated a shift in language dynamics in the Moi community since it dominated various communication contexts no longer. The Indonesian language, on the contrary, was ever dominating though some situations required the Moi language. We could hence convey that the Moi language's role and impact declined significantly.

Lastly, the Indonesian language shifting the Moi language's role was pointed out by other findings showing that the first functioned as an additional language and a more common language used in a range of social interactions and communication situations.

Considering the phenomena, the Moi language maintenance is increasingly urgent by taking proactive steps to encourage its use and teaching, specifically among the younger generation. These steps can be conducted by integrating the Moi language into formal education, promoting its use in cultural and customary events, and reinforcing its role in local media. These steps are expected to address the ongoing shift well and maintain and appreciate the Moi language as a cultural heritage in the dynamic Moi community.

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