



Suwawa Language Maintenance among the Community in East Suwawa District, Bone Bolango Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the state of Suwawa language maintenance and the factors influencing it in Suwawa Timur District, Bone Bolango Regency. The Suwawa language is a regional language that plays a vital role in the cultural identity of the Suwawa community. However, the changing times, the tide of globalization, and the dominance of Indonesian have led to a decline in the use of the Suwawa language, particularly among the younger generation. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, involving community leaders, parents, youths, and students as informants. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research findings indicate that the maintenance of the Suwawa language in Suwawa Timur District is ongoing but remains in a vulnerable state. The Suwawa language is still used in family, social, educational, religious, and organizational settings, as well as in communication among specific community members—predominantly by adults and the elderly. However, usage among the younger generation is declining, as they tend to use Indonesian for daily communication. The factors influencing Suwawa language maintenance include both internal and external elements. Internal factors encompass the community's positive attitude toward the regional language, a sense of pride, speaker loyalty, and language use within the family. Meanwhile, external factors include the influence of globalization, technological advancements and social media, the dominance of Indonesian in education and social environments, and the reduced use of the Suwawa language in formal domains. Efforts to maintain the language must be pursued through intergenerational transmission, increased usage within families and education, cultural activities, and the utilization of digital media as a tool for language preservation.

Keywords : Suwawa language maintenance, community, East Suwawa district

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental element in shaping the identity of a community. According to Situmorang et al. (2025:186), language is a crucial element in human life, as it enables humans to think, interact, and convey ideas and feelings. However, the function of language extends beyond mere communication; it also reflects culture and serves as a marker of a community's identity. Consequently, the existence of a language is deeply intertwined with the continuity of the culture and the sense of self of its speakers. Regional languages ??are those commonly used in specific areas and

are often referred to as local languages. They serve several important functions, such as symbolizing regional pride, reflecting regional identity, and acting as a medium of communication within families and local communities. As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia possesses a wide array of regional languages distributed across its various territories; one such language is Suwawa. This language is spoken by the people of Gorontalo—specifically in the village of East Suwawa—who continue to preserve the use of their mother tongue. In semiotic analysis, textual meaning can be ex-

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amined across several levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to literal meaning, while connotation relates to meanings shaped by experience and culture; myth, meanwhile, represents a higher level of meaning that has been naturalized into societal ideology. Through this approach, song lyrics are understood not merely as a sequence of words, but as a system of signs representing social and cultural realities. The preservation of regional languages has become a critical and urgent issue, particularly amidst the rapid tide of globalization, which significantly impacts community communication patterns. Globalization not only facilitates access to information and cross-cultural interaction but also indirectly displaces the role and function of regional languages in daily life. Public attitudes toward regional languages are crucial for language maintenance and usage in daily life. Garvin & Mathiot (Chaer & Agustin, 2010:152) explain that language attitudes encompass a sense of pride, loyalty, and awareness of language norms, all of which ultimately influence language choice and usage within a community.

In light of this, the study aims to provide applicable and relevant recommendations for various stakeholders—such as local governments, educational institutions, traditional leaders, and community groups—to assist in formulating policies and programs that support the preservation of local languages and cultures. Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic fields of sociolinguistics and cultural studies but also plays a tangible role in safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage that forms part of the collective identity of the Indonesian nation.

Artikel relevan ditemukan pada beberapa jurnal online, yakni:

- 1) Alimin, R., Asyik, A. G., & Wildan. (2020). Pergeseran dan Pemertahanan Bahasa PakPak Dialek Boang di Kecamatan Rundeng Kota Sulussalam [Preservation of Regional Languages through Cultural and Educational Activities]. *Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Pendidikan*, 11(3), 201-

210]. *Jurnal Master Bahasa*. 8(1), 429-441. <https://doi.org/10.24173/mb.v8i1.22155>

- 2) Nisah, N., Prasetya, K., H. & Musdolifah., A. et al. (2020). Pemertahanan Bahasa Daerah Suku Bajau Samma di Kelurahan Jenebora Kecamatan Penajam Kabupaten Penajam Paser Utara [Preservation of the Bajau Samma Language in Jenebora Urban Village, Penajam District, North Penajam Paser Regency]. *Jurnal Basataka*. Vol. 3 (1).
- 3) Komalasari, I., Hasuna, K., & Lismayanti, H. (2017). Pergeseran Bhasa Dayak pada Masyarakat Loksado Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Selatan Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan [Dayak Language Shift in the Loksado Community, Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency, South Kalimantan Province]. *Jurnal Hadratul Madaniyah*. Vol. 4(2), 1-8. <http://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33084/jhm.v4i2481>
- 4) Badjo, Efa L. (2015). Peran Komunitas Keluarga dalam Melestarikan Bahasa Tobelo di Desa Kumo Kecamatan Tobelo Kabupaten Halmahera Utara [The Role of Family Communities in Preserving the Tobelo Language in Kumo Village, Tobelo District, North Halmahera Regency]. *Journal Acta Diurna*, 4(4), 1-7.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design. The author utilizes participant observation—specifically focusing on naturalistic linguistic data gathered from the local environment—as well as interviews with relevant informants. Citing Halisa (2020:54–55), Mery notes that qualitative research aims to comprehensively understand the experiences of research subjects, including their attitudes, perceptions, motivations, actions, and other aspects. The author concludes that the descriptive qualitative method is the appropriate approach for this study. This method



does not aim to test specific hypotheses; rather, it describes a situation, variable, or phenomenon in its entirety without concerning itself with whether the subject matter is "right" or "wrong." A qualitative approach is used because the data collected consists of words rather than numbers. Key characteristics of the qualitative approach include the classification of objects, data collection within a natural setting, and the researcher serving as the primary instrument.

Data for this study was obtained from informants—specifically speakers of the Suwawa language—residing in the East Suwawa District of Bone Bolango Regency. The data obtained falls into two categories: primary and secondary.

Primary data refers to information obtained directly from the source through interaction with informants. In-depth interviews with individuals—including community leaders, teachers, and active Suwawa speakers across various age groups—serve as a crucial method for investigating community views and experiences regarding the use of the Suwawa language. Through these interviews, the researcher gains insight into the role of the Suwawa language in daily life and the meanings attributed to it.

Secondary data is derived from pre-existing sources, such as literature and documents related to the Suwawa language. Relevant books, articles, and historical records provide the additional context and background necessary for the analysis. These sources enable researchers to gain a better understanding of the Suwawa language and help identify issues hindering its preservation.

The data collection techniques employed in this study include the participatory observation/conversation technique, the non-participatory observation technique, the conversational method, and the note-taking technique.

- 1) Simak libat cakap technique: The researcher gathers data by participating in the interaction while listening—engaging in the conversation and listening to the dialogue. In this instance, the researcher is directly involved in the dialogue.

- 2) Simak bebas libat cakap technique: The researcher acts solely as an observer of the informants' language use. The researcher does not participate in the speech event being studied; this technique is supplemented by note-taking and recording.
- 3) Cakap (conversational) method: This data elicitation method is named cakap because the data collection process involves a conversation between the researcher and the informant. The existence of a conversation implies direct contact between them.
- 4) Catat (note-taking) technique: This involves recording conversations with informants that exhibit Indonesian language interference, focusing specifically on verbs, nouns, pronouns, and numerals.

The data analysis techniques used in the study are as follows:

- 1) Transcribing recorded data into written form.
- 2) Documenting and identifying utterances belonging to the Suwawa language, whether obtained directly or indirectly from informants.
- 3) Analyze the identified data using the theories relevant to this study.
- 4) Draw conclusions based on the data analysis, specifically addressing the research problem regarding the maintenance of the Suwawa language among the community in East Suwawa District, Bone Bolango Regency.

RESULT

1. Factors Influencing the Maintenance of the Suwawa Language

1.1 Social Factors

First, changes in communication patterns. Shifts in communication patterns within the community have become increasingly evident as the need for broader communication grows. Indonesian is now used not only in formal domains—such as education, government, and public services—but also in informal

conversations. People find Indonesian more effective for conveying information to diverse groups with varying linguistic backgrounds.

Second, increasingly intense inter-regional interaction. Heightened interaction between regions is a primary factor influencing changes in language use. Community mobility has risen, particularly among the younger generation who pursue education or employment outside the local area. Upon entering new environments, they must adapt by using Indonesian to communicate with individuals from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Third, technological advancements. Developments in information and communication technology have significantly influenced language usage patterns, especially among the youth. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp predominantly utilize Indonesian and English for content and conversation.

1.2 Cultural Factors

Changes in cultural values. Shifts in cultural values within the community influence perceptions of regional languages. In the context of modern society, regional languages are often viewed as less practical than Indonesian. Consequently, some community members do not prioritize regional languages in their daily interactions; Indonesian is perceived as more flexible, user-friendly, and relevant across various situations.

1.3 Educational Factors

First, the suboptimal teaching of regional languages in schools. The lack of comprehensive regional language instruction in schools is a factor contributing to the decline of Suwawa language usage among the younger generation. Many schools in the East Suwawa District lack a specific local curriculum that teaches the Suwawa language as a standalone subject. Suwawa Language Use in the Social Sphere: Regional language maintenance is a deliberate effort to preserve the use of a specific language. The preservation of the Suwawa

language undertaken by the community in East Suwawa, particularly regarding its use in social settings.

Second, the suboptimal role of teachers: Teachers play a crucial role in preserving local culture, including regional languages; however, this role has not yet been fully optimized within the educational context of East Suwawa District.

2. Strategies for Preserving the Suwawa Language in East Suwawa District, Bone Bolango Regency

2.1 Community-Level Strategies

Revitalizing the use of the Suwawa language within the family environment: Using the Suwawa language from an early age is a vital step in ensuring the language's survival, as the family serves as the primary environment where children are first introduced to and learn a language. Parents play a pivotal role in this process by introducing the language through daily interactions—such as conversing, storytelling, or playing with their children using the Suwawa language.

2.2 Increasing Language use in Customary and Social activities

Using the Suwawa language in traditional activities is a crucial step toward preserving the regional language amidst social change. Customary events—such as *mopotilolo*, *momuhuto*, or family ceremonies—hold significant cultural value and typically rely on the regional language as the primary medium of communication. This perspective reflects a collective mindset that views the connection between individuals and their origins as something natural; individuals are not seen as entirely autonomous entities, but rather as integral parts of the social and cultural environment that has shaped them from the outset.

2.3 Encouraging Youth Communities to Create Digital content in the Suwawa Language

Beyond general social media use, short videos serve as a highly relevant medium for disseminating the regional language. Brief videos



featuring casual dialogue, local humor, or cultural tutorials in Suwawa can capture audience interest due to their fast-paced, concise, and accessible nature. Creative and entertaining content has greater potential to go viral, thereby increasing the visibility of the Suwawa language within the community.

DISCUSSION

Maintenance of the Suwawa Language in East Suwawa District

Research findings indicate a significant decline in the use of the Suwawa language in East Suwawa District, particularly among the younger generation. This decline is closely linked to the phenomenon of language shift, which occurs when a community begins to abandon its regional language in favor of a language perceived as more dominant in social life. In this context, Indonesian has become the dominant language across nearly all spheres of life, thereby suppressing the use of Suwawa as a regional language.

Factors Influencing Suwawa Language Maintenance

Based on the research results, three main categories of factors influence the maintenance of the Suwawa language: social, cultural, and educational factors. These three factors are interconnected, demonstrating that language maintenance is heavily influenced by patterns of social interaction, shifts in cultural values, and institutional support from educational bodies. The following discussion outlines how these three categories of factors relate to the relevant theories.

Strategies for Revitalizing Suwawa Language Use within the Family

Using the Suwawa language from an early age is a crucial step in ensuring the survival of the regional language, as the family serves as the

primary environment where children first encounter and learn a language. Parents play a pivotal role in this process by introducing the language through daily interactions—such as conversing, storytelling, or playing with their children in Suwawa. Early exposure helps children naturally master basic vocabulary and linguistic structures while fostering a positive attitude toward their mother tongue (Fitriana & Akhyar, 2022:4888–4900).

CONCLUSION

Factors influencing the preservation of the Suwawa language can be categorized into two groups: internal and external factors. Internal factors encompass community attitudes toward the language, pride in the regional language, speaker loyalty in maintaining language use, and the role of the family as the primary environment for language transmission.

Efforts to preserve the Suwawa language can be pursued through various strategies, such as normalizing the use of Suwawa within the family, integrating the regional language into education and cultural activities, involving the younger generation in local customs and traditions, and leveraging digital technology and social media for language promotion and learning. Through collaboration among the community, families, the government, traditional leaders, and educational institutions, it is hoped that the Suwawa language will remain vibrant and endure amidst changing times and the influence of other languages.

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