

The Maintenance of the Manggarai Language in Religious Practices in Sambi Village, Manggarai

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Abstract. This study aims to describe the pattern of maintaining the Manggarai language in the religious practices in the village of Sambi Manggarai, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews with five participants, observation and documentation. Determination of participants is done purposively. The analysis and discussion uses Fishman's (1968) language maintenance theory which raises two main topics of language maintenance including (1) The habit of using regional languages in communicating, (2) Psychological, social and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in language use habits. By addressing these two key topics, the preservation of the Manggarai language in religious practices within Sambi village is upheld through various religious activities, which serve as the implementation of policies established by local church leaders. In addition, the use of the Manggarai language in several religious activities is an effort to communicate the feelings of the people to God the creator by using language that is easy to understand and accept. The pattern of maintaining the Manggarai language is grouped into three main components including 1) the use of the Manggarai language in the book collection of Catholic spiritual songs in the Manggarai language, called "Dere Serani", 2) the use of the Manggarai language in the celebration of the Eucharist (enculturation mass), and 3) the use of the Manggarai language in the celebration of the Eucharist. Mary's worship or prayer. The study enriches sociolinguistic discussions on the role of local church policies in promoting linguistic preservation through structured religious activities.

Keywords: language maintenance; Manggarai language; religious practices

1. Introduction

Currently, many regional languages in Indonesia are experiencing degradation. Language endangerment is primarily related to language shift [1]. These languages face the risk of extinction if not preserved by their speakers. Such a scenario is particularly likely within communities with a small number of speakers. The survival of a regional language is closely correlated with the preservation of traditional cultural values. The extinction of a regional language often aligns with the loss or extinction of the traditional cultural values associated with that region. In this context, language serves as a critical instrument for the community to

understand and internalize its traditional culture. In a more extreme perspective, the extinction of a regional language could lead to the blurring of a community's image and identity [2].

Efforts to maintain regional languages should be undertaken by all speaker communities across Indonesia, including the Manggarai community. The Manggarai community is a multilingual society that uses several languages in various social interactions, including Indonesian, Manggarai as a local language, and other diaspora languages such as Bajawa, Bugis, Minang, and Javanese. Indonesian is commonly used in formal settings, such as in educational and office environments or during inter-ethnic interactions. It is also often spoken at home by families with relatively high educational backgrounds. In contrast, Manggarai and other local languages are typically used in informal settings, such as family interactions, market transactions, cultural activities, and other informal engagements [3].

With the advancement of science and technology and the dominance of the national language, the existence of the Manggarai language, as one of Indonesia's local languages, is increasingly under threat. This is evident in the declining use and knowledge of Manggarai vocabulary among the younger generation in daily interactions. Furthermore, young people frequently engage in code-switching (mixing Manggarai and Indonesian) due to a lack of Manggarai vocabulary. This reality poses a serious problem if the Manggarai community does not collectively engage in language maintenance efforts.

Several previous studies have identified efforts by local language speakers in Indonesia to preserve their languages. [4] found that the use of Malay in cultural domains, particularly during wedding ceremonies, is one way in which Malay speakers preserve their language. Their research also revealed positive attitudes among Malay speakers toward their language. Similarly, [5] reported that Indonesians generally have a positive attitude toward their regional languages, preferring to use them in family settings and environments where they spend most of their time. However, Indonesian is often used in education and public spaces due to its practicality and effectiveness in communication. Other studies show consistent results, indicating that the use of local languages in specific domains significantly supports language maintenance efforts in Indonesia [6] [7] [8]

However, research on the preservation of local languages in religious domains remains limited in Indonesia. The religious domain represents a potential avenue for local language speakers to preserve their languages while simultaneously transmitting religious values, which are generally easier to understand and accept when expressed in local languages. Drawing on the studies mentioned above, it is crucial to examine the patterns of Manggarai language maintenance in the religious domain in Sambi Village, Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara.

This study aims to identify the types of religious activities that incorporate the Manggarai language, analyze the patterns of its use, and explore the underlying reasons for its maintenance. The findings are expected to reveal the significant role of Manggarai language in various religious practices, including prayers, hymns, sermons, and traditional ceremonies. Furthermore, the study anticipates that language maintenance in these contexts is influenced by local church policies, community involvement, and intergenerational transmission. Ultimately, this research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how religious institutions support indigenous language preservation, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual significance of the Manggarai language within the community.

2. Literature Review

According to Fasold (1984), language maintenance is a collective decision by a community to continue using a language previously spoken. Language maintenance represents the efforts of a community to preserve a language to ensure its continued use and prevent extinction. Multilingual communities also play a significant role in language maintenance [9] [10] [11].

[12] argues that national ideology within a society serves as a key factor supporting language maintenance. Similarly, [13] emphasize that language maintenance largely depends on the linguistic community's awareness of the importance of using regional languages. In this regard, [14] categorizes language maintenance into three main topics: 1) The habitual use of regional languages in communication; 2) The relationship between psychological, social, and cultural processes and the stability or changes in language use habits; 3) Attitudes and behaviors toward language, encompassing both emotional and cognitive dimensions.

Using language maintenance theory, [15] conducted a study titled *Language Maintenance and Language Shift in Burkina Faso: The Case of the Koromba*. This case study examined language maintenance and shift within the multilingual and multiethnic Koromba community in Burkina Faso, West Africa. The study found that the linguistic configuration in Burkina Faso resulted from prolonged contact among people with diverse languages and customs. Language shift was more likely in communities with centralized socio-political systems, while language maintenance occurred in those with strong tendencies toward decentralization. The study concluded that language maintenance and shift in Koromba were deeply entrenched and enduring phenomena.

Similarly, [16] explored *Language Maintenance and Language Shift among Second-Generation Tigrinya-Speaking Eritrean Immigrants in Saudi Arabia*. This research investigated language maintenance and shift among young Tigrinya-speaking Eritrean immigrants in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that respondents struggled with comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and oral translation between Tigrinya and Arabic. The study also showed that second-generation Tigrinya speakers were less proficient in Tigrinya compared to Arabic. Over time, the use of Tigrinya decreased while the use of Arabic increased, leading to a significant language shift. This indicated a tendency among second-generation Eritrean adolescents not to maintain their mother tongue.

Drawing on language maintenance theories [12], and previous studies, this research identifies and analyzes the patterns of Manggarai language maintenance in the religious domain in Sambi Village, Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara.

3. Method

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach. The study aims to comprehensively describe the phenomena experienced by the research subjects regarding the patterns of Manggarai language maintenance in the religious domain in Sambi Village, Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara.

The data for this research consist of words, actions, and documentation obtained through interviews with selected informants. The participants, five in total, were chosen purposively. Data collection methods included interviews and documentation, with recording and note-taking techniques employed during the process.

For data analysis, the researcher followed the steps outlined by [17]: 1) Data Collection: Data were gathered through interviews and documentation; 2) Data Reduction: This stage involved refining, condensing, focusing, discarding irrelevant information, and organizing the data to identify key findings; 3) Data Display: The data were presented to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the overall findings; 4) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: This final stage involved verifying the data and drawing conclusions.

The study ensured a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond surface-level observations. It's conducted by incorporating perspectives from multiple participants—church leaders, elders, and younger generations. This study captured the dynamic role of the Manggarai language in fostering cultural identity and intergenerational communication. By implementing these methodological strategies, this research aims to present a balanced and objective analysis, mitigating potential biases while highlighting the significance of the Manggarai language in religious and cultural contexts. Word document can be used as a template for papers to be published in EAI Core Proceedings. Follow the text for further instructions on text formatting, tables, figures, citations and references.

4. Results and Discussion

The pattern of Manggarai language maintenance in the religious domain has been one of the key factors supporting the persistence of the Manggarai language in Sambu Village to this day. The explanation and elaboration of this phenomenon follow [14] theory of language maintenance. Based on the collected data, the pattern of Manggarai language maintenance in Sambu Village's religious domain encompasses two main topics: 1) The habitual use of the local language in communication; 2) The relationship between psychological, social, and cultural processes and the stability or change in language use habits.

These two main topics reveal three components that form the pattern of Manggarai language maintenance in the religious domain of Sambu Village:

1. The use of the Manggarai language in *Dere Serani* (a hymn book).
2. The use of the Manggarai language in the Eucharistic celebration.
3. The use of the Manggarai language in the Marian/Rosary prayers.

The discussion of these components is detailed below:

4.1 The Use of Manggarai Language in the Dere Serani Hymn Book

The Manggarai community, which predominantly practices Catholicism, has significantly contributed to preserving and maintaining the Manggarai language. In Sambu Village, where all inhabitants are Catholic, the Manggarai language serves not only as a medium of daily communication but also as a way to build intimate connections with the Creator.

According to [18], one of the functions of language is expressive. In this function, language is used to convey emotions to others. The Sambu Catholic community uses the Manggarai language to express specific emotions through hymns, including repentance, praise, joy, and gratitude.

The Catholic Church in Manggarai publishes the *Dere Serani* hymn book, which contains Catholic hymns in the Manggarai language as part of its efforts to preserve the language through the religious domain. The consistent use of this book in Eucharistic

celebrations, combined with cultural values, strengthens language maintenance efforts [19]. The book also includes Manggarai prayers recited before the Eucharistic celebration, creating meaningful and culturally relevant worship experiences for the community.

[14] highlights that psychological, social, and cultural processes play a vital role in language stability. The documentation and consistent use of the Manggarai language in *Dere Serani* is a psychological process that encourages the community to use their language in religious ceremonies, achieving dual goals: fostering an intimate relationship with God and preserving their language as a marker of identity.

4.2 The Use of Manggarai Language in the Eucharistic Celebration

Habitual language use in communication is a critical aspect of language maintenance [14]. In the Catholic tradition, the Eucharistic celebration commemorates the Lord's Supper and involves collective expressions of gratitude, repentance, and praise through prayers and hymns.

The local church leaders in Ruteng Diocese have established policies encouraging the use of the Manggarai language in religious ceremonies. In Sambu Village, the Eucharistic celebration incorporates Manggarai-language prayers and hymns, performed monthly during the third week and in cultural-inculturation Masses. This practice not only fosters a closer connection between the community and their faith but also strengthens language maintenance through consistent use.

According to Bourdieu's theory of *bodily hexis*, cultural practices, including language use, are maintained through habits ingrained in daily behavior [20]. Although the Eucharist is celebrated in Manggarai only once a month, this habit sustains language use and reinforces community identity through religious practice.

4.3 The Use of Manggarai Language in Marian/Rosary Prayers

In the Catholic tradition, Marian or Rosary prayers are special devotionals held in May and October. In Sambu Village, these prayers are conducted in turns at various households, fostering both spiritual fellowship and social bonds within the community.

While certain parts of the prayers, such as the Confession of Sins or Creed, may use Indonesian, the Manggarai language dominates the majority of the prayer sequences. This practice allows the community to express gratitude and petitions in a familiar and culturally resonant language [21].

This finding aligns with the research by [22], which showed that Balinese communities maintain their mother tongue in religious activities. Similarly, the use of the Manggarai language in Marian prayers reflects conscious efforts by the speakers to preserve their language.

[23] notes that while languages evolve, such changes should be sustainable, positive, and stable, ensuring their continued use and transmission to future generations. This concept underscores the importance of Manggarai language maintenance in demonstrating the region's identity and resilience [6]. The persistent use of the Manggarai language in religious activities highlights its role as a tool for cultural preservation and intergenerational continuity.

5. Conclusion

Indonesia is home to a rich diversity of regional languages, each serving as a crucial pillar of cultural identity. Preserving these languages is vital to maintaining cultural heritage and ensuring their existence for future generations. Based on the findings and discussion, the preservation of the Manggarai language in Sambu Village, Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, is achieved through various religious practices. These practices encourage speakers to consistently use the Manggarai language in both formal and informal communication. The identified preservation patterns in the religious domain include: 1) The Use of the Manggarai Language in the "Dere Serani" Hymn Book. The hymn book contains Catholic spiritual songs in the Manggarai language and is used as a medium for expressing faith during religious gatherings; 2) The Use of the Manggarai Language in Eucharistic Celebrations. During Sunday masses, held once a month, and during other liturgical ceremonies, the Manggarai language is used for prayers and songs, fostering a connection between the congregation and their faith; 3) The Use of the Manggarai Language in Marian Devotions. Conducted during May and October annually, Marian devotions utilize the Manggarai language to communicate gratitude and petitions to God, further solidifying its role in the community's spiritual life. These practices are conscious efforts by the Manggarai-speaking community to prevent language shift and extinction. They help ensure the intergenerational transmission of the Manggarai language, safeguarding it as a symbol of cultural identity and heritage. Through these efforts, the Manggarai language continues to thrive as an integral part of Indonesia's cultural mosaic.

This study contributes to sociolinguistic theory by providing a nuanced understanding of language maintenance in the context of religious practices, drawing on Fishman's (1968) framework of language stability and change. Specifically, the study enriches sociolinguistic discussions on the role of local church policies in promoting linguistic preservation through structured religious activities. The findings highlight how the use of the Manggarai language in spiritual songbooks (*Dere Serani*), eucharistic celebrations (inculturation masses), and Marian devotions fosters a deeper emotional and cultural connection among community members.

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