



## THE EFFORTS OF MAINTAINING TORAJAN LANGUAGE AS A MOTHER TONGUE OF TORAJAN PEOPLE FROM THE THREAT OF EXTINCTION: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe some efforts to maintain Toraja language as the mother language of Torajan people from the threat of extinction. This paper used a qualitative descriptive study. As it is conceptual writing of a preliminary study, this paper only presents some examples of the two varieties of Torajan language used in society. It proposes some suggested efforts on how to anticipate the extinction of the language concerned in the future. The results indicate some very important suggested efforts to maintain the two varieties (ordinary language and ritual language as used in both thanksgiving ceremony called *Rambu Tuka'* and death ceremony called *Rambu Solo'*) of Torajan language that requires attention from different parties. As a part of Torajan culture, Torajan language in various uses contains values and norms as the local wisdom. Therefore, various parties should involve in its maintenance, such as governmental institutions, educational institutions, social institutions, and religious institutions in doing research, providing various written documentations, and socializing or disseminating them among the community in general and the schools at all levels in particular for continuous consumption.

### KEYWORD

Maintenance Torajan language;  
local wisdom;  
*Rambu Tuka'*;  
*Rambu Solo'*.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background

Torajan ethnic group is one of the four largest ethnic groups in South Sulawesi, inhabiting two regencies, namely Tana Toraja and Toraja Utara Regencies. Both regencies are located in the northern part of South Sulawesi, which is approximately 350 km from Makassar. Torajan ethnic group is famous for its stunning natural beauty, a traditional house called *Tongkonan*, and unique culture, which is binarily depicted in the ceremony of *Aluk Todolo* (ancestral religious ceremony) two types. The first is a thanksgiving ceremony called *Rambu Tuka'* (ascending smoke), such as a wedding ceremony and thanksgiving entering a new house of *Tongkonan*. The second one is a death ceremony called *Rambu Solo'* (descending smoke). These two types of ceremonies are found in the entire life cycle of the Torajan people from their birth on earth, during their life, their death, until they go back to the Creator with a variety of traditions as performed through oral traditions descended from generation to generation.

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In everyday life, residents in both regencies speak the same language, i.e. Torajan language, divided into three dialects. They are Makale – Rantepao dialect in eastern Toraja, Saluputti – Bongga Karadeng dialect in the western part of Toraja, and Sillanan – Gandang Batu dialect southern part of Toraja. Some divide the language into several dialects, such as Tallu Lembangna dialect, Kesu' dialect, Eastern dialect, Western dialect, and others [1].

This language consists of two varieties. The first variety is used in everyday interactions that are not parallelism and uses ordinary words called *kada-kada dipamalolo* (straight talks). This variety includes ordinary talk such as the language used formally in village meetings and informally used at home, parties, the market, etc. In addition, *dipamalolo* talks are also used in the form of narratives of folklore called *ulelean pare* (a story generally narrated by parents or grandparents to children or grandchildren when rice is being waited for harvesting) such as the story of Tulang Didi, Dodeng (the love story between Lebonnna and Paerengan), Landorundon and others [2], and other literary works such as *pantun*, *karrume'* (puzzle), *simba* (critics), etc.

The second one is the language used in the ritual speech called *kada-kada dipasilopak* (paired words) in parallel structures with a high level of language called *kada-kada tominaa*. Such a language is generally used in traditional ceremonies both in *Rambu Tuka'* (thanksgiving) ceremonies and in *Rambu Solo'* (death) ceremonies [2], *badong* (hymn of mourning), *retteng*, etc. This language variety can only be spoken by certain people, called *tominaa* (traditional leader/priest of *Aluk Todolo* or ancestors' religion), and talented people functioning as masters of ceremony (M.C) called *Gora-gora Tongkon* in certain ritual ceremonies. Thus, ritual language can only be mastered through acquisition.

## B. Problems

In its development, there is a tendency that the Torajan language is decreasing in its use as there is a shift from using Torajan language to using Bahasa Indonesia, especially those living in urban areas such as in Makale and Rantepao as well as in other towns and cities. Besides, millennials think that they are outdated when using their mother tongue. Related to ritual speeches, people in general and young people, in particular, do not care anymore to understand and use them as they feel that such speeches are the language of *Aluk Todolo* followers. Besides, they are difficult and complicated to use and learn as they use a high language level.

## C. Objective

Based on the above problems, this conceptual paper aims to present some suggested efforts of maintaining the Torajan language used in the two varieties as mentioned previously to anticipate the threat of extinction in the future as a result of the influence of modernization/globalization.

## II. DISCUSSION

Torajan Language involving two types of varieties, as mentioned previously, is a part of Toraja culture, which contains ordinary/literal meaning and cultural symbolic meaning implying great norms and values of local wisdom. This can be seen in the following examples. The first example indicates the use of

ordinary language in the form of greeting having a symbolic meaning as that greeting is a part of linguistic practices, so it is important to deal with the questions on why people greet and whether similarities and differences in greeting across language varieties, speech communities, and types of encounters within the same community reveal something interesting *about* the speakers or *to* the speakers [3].

The following first two examples are related to ordinary talk or *kada dipamalolo*, while the third example is related to ritual speech or *kada dipasilopak*. The first example is a common **greeting** among Torajanese when, for example, passing in front of a house or visiting someone/a family.

Speakers	Utterances	Meaning	Description
A	<i>Manasumoraka?</i>	Is rice already cooked?	The dialogue indicates that the two speakers are trying to build a great interpersonal relationship through greeting. However, why it is opened by asking cooked rice, <i>Manasumoraka</i> . In general, Torajan people cook rice or <i>unnasu bo'bo/ma'nasu</i> using <b>three one-unity elements</b> , i.e., <b>pot/cooker</b> made of <b>soil (clay)</b> , <b>water</b> , and <b>fire</b> put on <b>three one-unity stones/furnace</b> . When the rice is estimated to be half-cooked, then one seed must be taken and pressed. If it is already divided into <b>three one-unity parts</b> symbolizing the secrets of life eternity, i.e., <b>clay/soil, fire, and water</b> , the water should be removed ( <i>diti'dikki</i> ). The clay pot/cooker is put on the fore coals next to the stove/furnace until cooked. In order that the pot is heated evenly beside the furnace, the pot should be rotated within <b>three one-unity directions</b> , i.e., from <b>east</b> to <b>west</b> through the <b>north</b> , symbolizing that life comes from the <b>east</b> (source of life) goes to the <b>west</b> (source of awakening) through the <b>north</b> (Puang Matua's/God's region). Thus, the word <i>Manasumoraka</i> actually has an implied meaning of "Are the heaven and the earth still yours?" or "Do you still have a long life?". The answer is <i>Manasumo, talendu'opa</i> meaning "Yes, we/I have it. Hopefully, you also have it, so that we both can have salvation (Paganna', 2015).
B	<i>Manasumo. Talendu'opa.</i>	Yes, it is already cooked. Please stop in.	
C	<i>Kurre sumanga. Ki/Ku tarru'pa.</i>	Thanks. Let me/us go.	
D	<i>Iamoke. Pada salama'</i>	Okay. May we be all safe.	

The second example is one of the most well-known folklore called *Ulelean Pare* in Toraja entitled: Eran di Langi' (Stairs to the Sky)

Paragraph	Text	Meaning
1	<i>Ia ade' tonna dolona tae'pa ia tu tau umpogau' kakadakean. Mintu' torro toline sitiyo lindopa ia Puang Matua belanna denpa tu Eran di Langi' bendan lo' padang di Bamba Puang. Eran iamote tu napolalan torro toline kendeke langngan langi' mekutana lako Puang Matua ke denni tu apa la napugau'.</i>	It is said that human beings have never committed a crime. All people can see the Lord because there is still a ladder to heaven standing in Bamba Puang. Through this ladder, man can see face to face with the Lord asking for advice if there are things the man will do.
2	<i>Denmi pissan na mesa' tau disanga Saratu' Sumbung Pio kendeke duka langngan langi' sitiyo lindo sia mekutana lako Puang Matua. Tonna la sulemo natiromi tu Te'tekan Bulawanna Puang Matua. Mailumi sia sepangmo tu penaanna lako kakadakean naurunganni naboko tu Te'tekan Bulawan. Tuba'mi kasengkeanna Puang Matua belanna napogau'mo toline tu kakadakean anna tarassai tu Eran di Langi' anna songka. Dadi tae'mo lalan la naola torro toline la sitiyo lindo Puang Matua. Randukmi ka'tu kasumpuranna Puang Matua anna torro toline belanna natumang kakadakean napogau' toline.</i>	Once upon a time, a man named Saratu' Sumbung Pio went up to heaven to meet the Lord and ask for advice. When he was about to return to the earth, he saw a lighter made of gold belonging to the Lord. His heart was tempted to commit a crime; then, he stole the lighter. Therefore, the Lord was very angry because of man's crimes, so He kicked the ladder until it fell. From that time, there was no more way for man to meet the Lord face to face. Since then, the relationship between the Lord and man had been severed because of human evil.
3	<i>Iatu Eran di Langi mangkan natarassai Puang Matua songka tama telino anna sumpandan randuk lo'mai sumpu rekke. Iamo ade' mendadi buntu batu ma'dandan randuk lo'mai Bamba Puang sae rekke Buntu Sarira inde' tondok Toraya.</i>	Stairs to the sky that had fallen to earth stretch from south to north. It was said that it becomes a rock mountain that stretches from Bamba Puang to Bukit Sarira in Toraja. That is the short story of Eran in Langi'

The third example is a closing part of a **ritual speech** in the form of parallelism (paired words) presented by *tominaa* (religious leader/priest) that can be used in both thanksgiving ceremony (*Rambu Tuka'*) and death ceremony (*Rambu Solo'*).

No	Utterances	Meaning	Description
1	<i>Denno</i> (a) <i>upa' ta poupa</i> (b) <i>paraya ta poparaya</i>	May we are blessed/lucky we are blessed/lucky	The utterances in number 2 (a) <i>merinding pala'</i> literally mean to fence with palms, and (b) <i>mekukambu taruno</i> means to fence with fingers. Both implicitly mean, "May God give us protection". Number 3 (a) <i>naburaki' lindo masakke</i> means to splash our face with a cool and (b) <i>napi'pikki tanda</i> marendeng means to splash us with an eternal sign. Both implicitly mean "May God gives us blessing". Number 4 (a) <i>masakke mairi'</i> and <i>marudindin</i> both mean cool with a wind. These utterances imply "healthy/happy/safe" instead of hot-meaning fever/sick. In short, such a closing speech contains a religious value, i.e., an invocation to God to give all people coming to a death or thanksgiving ceremony protection, health, happiness, safety, and blessing in their entire life
2	<i>belanna Puang Matua</i> (a) <i>tontong merinding pala'</i> (b) <i>mekulambu taruno</i>	because God keep protecting us in His fingers keep protecting us in His hand	
3	<i>belanna Puang Matua</i> (a) <i>masakke mairi'</i> (b) <i>marudindin</i> <i>sola nasang</i>	So we are all (a) healthy/happy/safe (b) healthy/happy/safe altogether	

The above examples indicate that Torajan language as a part of Torajan culture implies values and norms that should become a strong identity and pride of Torajan people to build their character as reflected in the entire life Torajan people. Therefore, it needs efforts for maintenance from all parties to anticipate the threat of extinction in the future. Some suggested efforts are given below.

No	Institutions	Suggested Efforts
A	Governmental Institution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The provincial and local governments should issue regulations on developing and maintaining Torajan language and strongly support its implementation through the Educational and Cultural Service.</li> <li>2. The district government and Education Service facilitate conducting speech contest using both ordinary language and ritual speech (<i>Tominaa</i> language), singing contest, writing folklore contest, and writing academic paper contest in Torajan language when commemorating Indonesian Independence Day or Religious Holidays.</li> <li>3. Through Education Service, the government should encourage and facilitate lecturers and teachers of the whole levels of education by providing them with the governmental fund to join training or scholarship to continue their study on Torajan language and culture and facilitate the non-civil servant teachers to become civil servants.</li> <li>4. Provincial Language Center/Board optimally supports the development of local languages, including Torajan language, by forming Local Language and Culture Center/Board called "Rumah Bahasa dan Budaya" in each regent for easier coordination implementing its tasks for the development and maintenance of local languages.</li> <li>5. The local government should facilitate the publication of books on Torajan language and culture that can become a reference and source of learning materials used at the educational level and the future generation's documentation.</li> <li>6. Local government through Educational Service facilitate the publication of periodical local magazines and newspaper using Torajan language for the dissemination of the language among the community.</li> </ol>
B	<b>Educational Institution</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Torajan language should be taught formally at schools (Elementary, Junior, and Senior High Schools) and university as a compulsory subject facilitated by Education Service.</li> <li>2. Students should be encouraged to use it in learning the language in certain learning activities such as storytelling using folklore such as telling <i>ulelean pare</i>, reading reciprocal pantun and <i>karrume'</i>, singing Torajan songs, etc., as Toraja has so many oral traditions.</li> <li>3. Students should always be encouraged to practice different writing types such as description, narration, giving an opinion, etc., or writing essays or papers at a higher level using Torajan language and Torajan culture.</li> <li>4. Students should be encouraged to make a video, youtube, and short film using Torajan language concerning Torajan culture in various aspects that can be shared</li> </ol>

		<p>in social media.</p> <p>5. University teachers and students, and even teachers of lower education levels, should be encouraged to research Torajan language and culture. The results can be used as references or teaching and learning materials, or developing tourism.</p>
C	<b>Social and Familial Institution</b>	<p>1. District government should facilitate young people form Focus Group Discussion in every district or village using Torajan language with cultural topics.</p> <p>2. In the familial domain as the basis of using Torajan language, parents, especially those living in cities and towns, encourage their children to mostly use Torajan language in their daily communication and tell them folklore like <i>ulelelan pare</i> as the parents used to do in the past.</p> <p>3. Community leaders control every village and district organization to make use of Toraja Language in their activities.</p>
D	<b>Religious Institution</b>	<p>1. The priests are expected to use Torajan language in delivering their sermons not only in the village and district churches but also in town, even city churches.</p> <p>2. The whole procession of certain periodical Sunday Mass is performed in Torajan language.</p> <p>3. The religious bodies facilitate children, youth, and family members to conduct contests of reading Bibles, doing puzzles, singing religious songs, and speech contest in Torajan language.</p>

### III. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Torajan language as a part of Torajan culture consisting of two varieties and functioning as the mother tongue of Torajan people imply meaning, values, and norms as the local wisdom reflected in the whole course of life of Torajan people as their identity as indicated in the three given examples above. The first example shows that such a greeting implies a value of love, fortune, and invocation/prayer. The second example contains a religious value, i.e., an invocation to God to give all people coming to a death or thanksgiving ceremony protection, health, happiness, safety, and blessing in their entire life, and the third example also implies a religious value in that the relationship between man and God is severed because of human evil. Therefore, this is good teaching for children to always keep a good relationship with God by always praying to Him to ask for goodness, blessing, fortune, and forgiveness of sins. They should all be implemented in the whole course of life among the three basic types of life on earth about God called *Tallu Lolona*, i.e., the life of man, the life of animals, and life of plants *A'pa' Tauninna*, i.e., relationship with God to ask for forgiveness for our sins.

Therefore, among the four types of parties/institutions mentioned previously, the governmental institution is the most powerful formal domain that should pioneer the development and maintenance of Torajan language by issuing a policy, i.e., rules and regulations implemented by other parties in different domains/institutions. As a formal domain, educational institutions have a very important role in researching and implementing them among the students. Social and familial domains have a basic role in consuming and implementing the use of Toraja language in various activities more actively and intensively. Meanwhile, religious institution is another important domain to disseminate and maintain the use of Torajan language among their people. In other words, all those parties should work simultaneously and synergically to develop and maintain the Torajan language from the threat of extinction in the future by doing researches, producing the results of the researches in the form of documentation books, disseminating them among all levels of education and society so that they become their consumption to internalize the values and norms implying in them as the source of local wisdom for character building in order that they can have a strong identity and pride as Torajan people.

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It is suggested that future researches on Torajan language be conducted in conjunction with the ordinary daily language used in society. Torajan culture does not have a written tradition, but various oral traditions instead such as folklore, ritual speeches of both thanksgiving ceremonies (Rambu Tuka') such as the compliments of Tongkonan house, *Merok*, *Bua'* etc., and death ceremony (Rambu Solo') such as *badong*, *osong*, etc., that are living among the society. Therefore, research and written documentation in books, films, videos, etc., are urgently needed to maintain the language.

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