

## Maintain or Shift? Focus on Inter-Ethnic Families in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The study of mixed marriages is always an interesting topic to talk about, especially regarding the topic which is the impact of inter-ethnic mixed marriages. This study aims to describe the phenomenon of mixed marriages associated with the maintenance of traditional language. This paper applies qualitative research on language maintenance by Javanese-Batak Toba Families in Medan. The research data were derived from observation, interviews, and audio-recorded family conversations, parents' role at home is the most dominant factor in maintaining vernacular language in inter-ethnic families, and vernacular language maintenance in inter-ethnic families is succeeded by language use at home and activities at home and surroundings while Javanese-Batak Toba families are patriarchy. The practices of vernacular language at home and in surroundings guide vernacular language maintenance (Pauwels, 2016). The analysis displays that the relationship between culture, attitude, and prestige requires parents to maintain the vernacular language. Batak Toba language is maintained dominantly by families. Mother language is maintained. We conclude parents who have a positive attitude to their culture to show their prestige enforce children to maintain the vernacular language. This study recommends that further research explore vernacular language maintenance across three generations of Javanese-Batak Toba families.

**Keywords:** Language, Maintenance, Javanese-Batak Toba, Families



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### 1. Introduction

Language and identity frequently go hand in hand. Because language helps a person to be anchored at a national level, language in multicultural nations not only distinguishes an ethnic group but also denotes relationships that go over ethnic boundaries and strengthen a sense of ethnic and national identity (Humeidat, 2018). Ethnic identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the influence it has on their thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors. National identification relates to one's feelings of devotion to the place of residence or the host country. From nation-states to small local groups, language plays a crucial role in defining the boundaries of an in-group (Davies, Papp, & Antoni, 2015). Although there are nonlinguistic barriers, such as those based on looks and beliefs, language is frequently one of the most significant indicators of ethnicity. For adolescents, forming a sense of identity is a crucial developmental job. Research has demonstrated that self-esteem and numerous psychological consequences, including feeling in control and well-being, are critically related to identity. One identity component that is especially relevant for teenagers in multicultural situations is ethnic identification. Even though there has been much research on ethnic diversity, little is known about how language, and specifically bilingualism, may play a role in the relationship between ethnic identification and well-being in multilingual and multicultural contexts like Indonesia (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021). According to some studies by Triwardani (2015) and Daniels & Hebard (2018), speaking the language and being proficient in the dominant culture may be crucial for one to build a bicultural identity. Bilingualism is widespread in Indonesia, has been upheld down the generations, and is not hampered by national language assimilation laws. There are hints that the importance of ethnic language in day-to-day life varies across ethnic groups in Indonesia, but it is unclear how these variations link to variations in identity and well-being. Factors

of vernacular language maintenance are various (Gal 1979, Wiley 1998). Despite the effect of parents' role is not always negative but also positive. Parents' role involves language maintenance and language shift. Family is one of the vernacular language use domains and it supports by social, demographic, and education if the family members practice the vernacular language continually. The family has power and is a place to maintain a language (Fishman, 1991). In addition, the role of the family (parents) is very essential in maintaining the vernacular language. Family practices vernacular language at home (Pauwels, 2016). Similarly, family is the crucial agent in vernacular language maintenance where the language is passed on from parents to children (Brown, 2010).

Previous researchers, parents' choice of language practice affects children's ability to speak the vernacular language and influences children's language use (Lin, 2016). In interethnic marriage, several studies discussed the family's role in maintaining vernacular language (Pauwels 2016, Igboanusi & Wolf 2009, Schwartz 2008, Brown 2008). This study interrogates parents' role in the language practices of inter-ethnic families in which parents' mother tongues are different. This study analyzes the crucial factors of the success and unsuccessful of language maintenance in the family in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Two age groups spanning the generation from parents and children are the target of this study.

Humans are known as hologrammatic because language is a connecting mechanism that sets them apart from other organisms. Formally speaking, language is one hierarchical system with many subsystems, including sound, morpheme, sentences, and subsystems of meaning (Putri & Santika, 2020). Fourth, the subsystems interact with one another and other subsystems to build the grammatical system. When speakers study language or linguistics, they develop an intuitive understanding of the language system (Amano et al., 2014). Each of the four can be studied alone or in tandem as a stand-alone subject study.

Batak Toba is one of the various Batak ethnicities. It is the most numerous of Batak ethnicities in North Sumatra. It is dominantly found in Toba Samosir, Humbang Hasudutan, Samosir, North Tapanuli, Dairi, central Tapanuli, and Cibola. Batak Toba language practices in Toba Samosir and Samosir Regency (Saragih, Subhilhar, Harahap, & Purba, 2019). Batak Toba people are identified by their surname. Their lives are full of traditions/customs which are communicated by language. Batak Toba People create their identity from customs/tradition, religion, and education taught from generation to generation (Supriatna, 2008). Social status can be seen in the surname. Surname is the basis of *partuturan* (a relationship family from the same surname and also different surname) (Simanjuntak, 2006).

In addition to Indonesian, speakers of Toba Batak use it as a linking language daily. The Toba Batak language is spoken locally, along with its customs and traditions (Hanan, Suwardhi, Nurhasanah, & Bukit, 2015). The Toba Batak language, meantime, is employed as an identity identifier for the people outside the area of use, particularly in bilingual or multilingual circumstances. It is also important to note that, in common usage, the name "Batak" is sometimes solely used to refer to the Batak language Toba; hence, the language of the tribe should also be mentioned. It is also similar to the speakers of the Javanese language in North Sumatra (Ngang & Chan, 2015). Generally, Javanese is one of the various ethnicities in Indonesia and is located on Java island. Javanese people migrate to North Sumatra to seek a new life for instance to seek a job.

Marriage is the primary factor in language maintenance. It assigns to language practice at home and changes the language use at home (Igboanusi & Wolf, 2009). Generally, bilingualism arises in inter-ethnic marriages. It is a result of a deliberate effort to ensure that both languages get established at home. Two approaches to achieving bilingualism in cross-language families are strategies of dichotomy (or fixed choices), and strategies of free alternation. A dichotomy is an approach called the one-person one language (Jensen, Thøgersen, Jensen, & Thøgersen, 2011). It means each parent uses his/her language with the children (Huss, 1991; Grosjean, 1982). Most mixed-language families focus on language proficiency in both languages. While in some cases, children acquired monolingual, not only one language used at home but also none of the used. It can be caused by some factors, such as political, pragmatic, international, prestige, economic, etc (Arnberg, 1991).

Speakers' attitude influences language maintenance and language shift. It connects to identity. Parents' attitude to their vernacular languages affects to choice of the language to be practiced at home. Speakers' positive attitude guides language maintenance, while speakers' negative attitude guides language shift (Holmes, 2004).

The results of this study can describe how the language phenomenon results from mixed marriages among ethnic groups in Indonesia, especially from the Toba Batak sub-ethnic who occupy the province of North Sumatra. Although this research still has some limitations, especially those related to the choice of research objects, methods, and triangulation of findings; however, the research results can contribute to adding to the literature related to the topic of revitalizing traditional languages in Indonesia.

## 2. Literature Review

It has been established that the Toba Batak language is still utilized by its speakers as a reliable daily communication tool both inside the region and in other locations outside of its traditional boundaries (Sibarani, 2018). However, the Batak people of Toba can also communicate in Indonesian and can understand it. The development of the Toba Batak language has suffered among the younger generation, both those who are native speakers and those who live in metropolitan areas. This raises concerns since it could harm the growth of the Toba Batak language, according to the author.

Indonesian as the national language for communicating with and interacting with other sources is based on the national agreement (Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021). However, the language of the region is still being learned and developed. Due to this, the majority of the population speaks Indonesian and other regional languages neutrally. Bilingualism is the practice of using two languages, or more specifically, two dialects of a single language, by the same person or group of people. Bilingualism is not just the study of two languages by individuals, but also the study of two languages by the general public, and it is not just the ability to use two similar languages, but also the capacity to converse effectively in both of those languages (Ortega, 2019).

## 3. Methods

This study reported four inter-ethnic families, two families are Christian and two families are moeslem. Fathers had been born and raised in Java Island and educated in North Sumatra (Bachelor's degree). While Mothers had been born, raised, and educated in North Sumatra. Their children were born, raised, and educated in North Sumatra. The couples have at least one child who is old enough to use language(s). The data were taken through observation, a questionnaire survey, interviews, and audio-recorded conversations.

The information in this study was naturally occurring in family conversations that the families recorded at home using digital audio recorders. The researcher provided digital audio recorders to record the daily conversation at home which was done by family members. Information from digital audio needed to be clarified, we visited each family, delivered a questionnaire, and did the interviews. Family members got involved in recording, questionnaire survey, and interviewing. The questionnaire was divided into two; personal information and open-type questions. The open-type questions were framed to allow the respondent to write out their answer and in some cases provide a reason for such answers (Yamamoto, 2002 & Brown, 2008).

The instrument of the research requests information from the respondents. The information covers City of residence, Occupation, Sex, Age, Primary language (your mother tongue), the primary language or mother tongue of your wife/husband, Level of Education, and religion. Part 2 requests information about the language used by the mother, father, brother, sister, husband, and wife. The questions asked by the researchers cover the language they use, language preference by family members at home, at work, and social interactions. After delivering the questionnaire survey, it continued with the interviews. The interview's questions are adopted from Baker and Sanderson (2000):

1. In what language(s) do you speak to your relatives?
2. In what language(s) do your children to your relatives?
3. How often do you speak to your relatives?

## 4. Results

Data analysis was done in some steps. The first step was transcribing the conversation. Next selecting the conversation appropriate to the research. Then, interpreting the result.

**Table 1.** Language use at home, environment, school, work, worship place

	Language used at home	Language used at environment	Language used at School	Language used at Work	Language used at worship place
Family 1					
Father	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian
Mother	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	Indonesian		Javanese/Indonesian
Daughter	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	Indonesian		Javanese/Indonesian
Family 2					
Father	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian
Mother	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/ Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Family 3					
Father	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Mother	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian		Batak Toba/Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian		Batak Toba/Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian		Batak Toba/Indonesian
Family 4					
Father	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian
Mother	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian		Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian		Indonesian

Father in Family 1 works as a civil servant in the government office, and the mother works as a nurse. They have one son and one daughter who were sixteen and fifteen years old. They are Christian. They live in an environment in which Javanese is the majority language. Father and mother in Family 2 work as entrepreneurs. They have two daughters who were twenty and eighteen years old, and one son was fourteen years old. The daughters are students in a private university in which English is the introduction language. Their son is a student at an international school. They are moslem. Father in family 3 works as a civil servant and the mother works as a doctor. They have two sons who were twenty and seventeen years old and one daughter was fifteen years old. Their sons are students at a state university. Their daughter is a student in a private school. They are Christian. In the last family, the father and mother work as civil servants. They have two sons who were sixteen and thirteen years old. They are moeslem. They live in an environment in which Batak Toba is the majority language.

Father in family 1 explains he speaks Javanese proficiently and his wife speaks Javanese and Batak Toba language proficiently. They practice Javanese at home to influence children's language use. Practicing the Javanese language continually at home affects children's proficiency. It is also encouraged by choosing a worship place, and environment. Parents choose an ethnic church to support their language maintenance. He presents essential information about their reason for practicing Javanese in north Sumatera:

Quote 1

Father1 : dimana lagi mereka mulai belajar bahasa jawa kalau tidak dari rumah, di luar sana sudah kebanyakan bahasa Indonesia. ( where would they start learning Javanese if it is not from home, Indonesian is the dominant language out there)

He mentions learning a vernacular language is started at home. He emphasizes using vernacular language will demonstrate identity and presents their prestige to their tribe.

Quote 2

Father1 : pakai bahasa Jawa ya menunjukkan kita orang Jawa. (The use of Javanese shows their identity as Javanese)

Language use in the environment and worship places supports vernacular language maintenance. When a minority language uses continually in a domain, it will be maintained.

Quote 3

Father1 : kita beribadah di gereja yang berbahasa Jawa, dekat sini, sama lah dengan lingkungan sini, pakai bahasa jawa juga. Jadi pas bahasa Jawa yang berkembang di sini. Kebudayaan Jawa juga berkembang di sini. Kita orang Jawa, adat Jawa, bahasa Jawa. Kalau bukan kita, siapa lagi. (We follow an ethnic church which use Javanese, near here, it is as same as this environment, it uses Javanese. So, javanese develops here. Java Culture also develops here. We are javanese, java culture, javanese. If it is not us, who else)

Maintaining vernacular language means maintaining culture. They cannot be separated. Language is guidance to culture. Language and culture shape an identity. The use of language in a society identifies a certain culture ( Allwright D & Bailey KM, 1991).

Quote 4

Father3:

*Di Batak Toba, ketika anak lanang menikahi boru Batak Toba maka anak lanang itu akan diberikan marga Batak Toba. Ya bisa jadi marga dari paribannya boru Batak Toba itu. Makanya saya punya marga, karna sudah punya marga , ya saya aktif di kumpulan Batak Toba terutama yang berhubungan dengan marga saya. Kita juga beribadah di gereja yang berbahasa Batak Toba. Di gereja kami sering ada kegiatan yang berkaitan dengan kebudayaan nah di situ anak-anak belajar budaya dan bahasa Batak Toba.* (In Batak Toba tribe, when a man married a woman, he will be given a surname from Batak Toba. This surname can be taken from the preferential spouse. That is why i have surname, because of this surname, i get involve in Btak Toba community especially in my surname community. We follow a fellowship which uses Batak Toba language. In our church, we always have some activities related to culture. So children learn about Batak Toba culture and language from these activities.

The implementation of the ratification or the inauguration of the clan according to the custom of the Batak Toba aims to make a woman or man from a different tribe to be a member of the Batak Toba tribe and a part of the Batak Toba fellowship of the clan. This raises two consequences of custom: 1) Since granting it formally, a woman or man who is not a Batak Toba tribe already raised become a Batak Toba tribe by the clan passed. 2) Position has the same rights and obligations as the citizens of other customary.

According to Gultom Rajamarpodang (1992), the need for Batak Toba marriage between tribes in Indonesia of Batak Toba so son-in-law is the indigenous people of the Batak Toba, therefore, granting clan must be followed by changes in attitudes and behavior so that the question can be accepted as indigenous. While

language use at home is influenced by language use at school. Children who study at international schools are contaminated by English. They use English almost all the time. Even, if parents speak the vernacular language, children answer it as simply as possible. They feel comfortable using English. Sometimes they get frustrated in speaking the vernacular language.

**Table 2.** Participants proficiency in practicing the language

	Javanese	Batak Toba
Family 1		
Father	Proficient	Basic
Mother	Fluent	Proficient
Son	Fluent	Basic
Daughter	Fluent	Basic
Family 2		
Father	Proficient	Fluent
Mother	Basic	Proficient
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Son	Basic	Basic
Family 3		
Father	Proficient	Proficient
Mother	Basic	Proficient
Son	Basic	Fluent
Son	Basic	Fluent
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Family 4		
Father	Proficient	Proficient
Mother	Fluent	Proficient
Son	Fluent	Fluent
Son	Fluent	Fluent

The level of participants' competence in using vernacular language is various; basic, fluent, and proficient. The level of participant competence is caused by the participant frequencies in using vernacular language. The generations in family 1 speak Javanese fluently because they speak Javanese at home and outside the home. They speak it continually.

**Table 3.** Participants' frequencies of travel to them

	Children's frequency of travel to Java Island	Children's frequency of travel to Toba samosir and surrounding.	Communication with relatives at Java Island	Communication with relatives at Toba samosir and surrounding.
Family 1				
Son	Once	1/ year	Seldom	Frequent
Daughter	Once	1/ year	Seldom	Frequent
Family 2				
Daughter	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Daughter	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Son	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Family 3				
Son	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Son	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Seldom	Seldom
Daughter	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Seldom	Seldom
Family 4				
Son	1/ 5 years	1/ year	Frequent	Seldom
Son	1/ 5 years	1/ year	Frequent	Seldom

Participants' frequencies in visiting their homeland and communicating with relatives influence participants' ability to communicate by using vernacular language. Supporting children to communicate with relatives from the homeland give an impact on their language maintenance as shown in table 3.

## 5. Discussion

Both positive and negative influences will result from events affecting the two languages. A language's existence will be enriched by positive impacts, whereas short-term negative influences may conflict with the language's structure, laws, or norms. This harmful influence is a result of interference (Sinaga, Rizal, & Damanik, 2018). Interference happens as a result of mutual influence, influence between the source language and the recipient language, or when the recipient language harms the source language. This can be placed to allow for reciprocal interference effects.

Many Toba are unable to distinguish between Toba Batak and language patterns as a result, Toba Batak speakers in Indonesia have had linguistic pattern crises. Toba Batak speakers use the Indonesian grammatical structure while speaking Toba Batak (Saragih, Ridwan, & Adisaputera, 2020). This pattern change is detrimental to the growth and upkeep of the Toba Batak language itself. At the time, maintaining the Toba

Batak tongue was tremendously thrilling and quickly replaced English Bible as the primary language for preaching. Since Toba is a Batak language, communication and understanding problems are not a problem for the Batak people. Even though many words are already extinct, the terminology utilized is actually from the Toba Batak language.

In Batak Toba culture, it is quite uncommon to come across a vocabulary that has been impacted by a foreign tongue or Indonesian itself. It has been established that the Toba Batak language can accurately convey the thoughts of the time's inhabitants (Saragih et al., 2020). The Toba Batak language was quite well received at the time by society. Toba, a highly proud member of the Batak tribe, considers the language of the Batak people to be their identity.

## 6. Conclusion

Talking about the research on mixed marriages is always interesting, especially when it comes to the subject of the effects of inter-ethnic mixed marriages. The purpose of this study is to explain the phenomena of mixed marriages connected to the preservation of traditional language. From the data analysis, it is seen from parents' language choice and the use of vernacular language at home and surroundings. Indonesia is patriarchal. Generally, the father has the power and the responsibility in choosing everything. Of four families, three families can speak the Batak Toba language; fluent and basic. Two families can speak Javanese; one family speaks Javanese in all domains and another speaks Javanese only at home. It means one family can speak Javanese and Batak Toba languages. Thus, Mother's language is maintained as the impact of culture's role. Mothers' role in language maintenance is important. The findings of this study can be used to explain how the linguistic phenomena in Indonesia, particularly among the Toba Batak sub-ethnic who live in the province of North Sumatra, are caused by mixed marriages between ethnic groups. However, the research findings can contribute to the literature on the subject of revitalizing traditional languages in Indonesia. This research still has some limitations, particularly those relating to the choice of research objects, methodology, and triangulation of findings.

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