



---

## FROM TRADITION TO TRANSFORMATION: BUGIS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN BIAU SUBDISTRICT AMIDST INTERETHNIC MARRIAGES AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Rahmatan Idul<sup>1</sup>

Elmawati Jaya<sup>2\*</sup>

Rizki Hidayah Baco<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Negeri Gorontalo,  
Indonesia

\*email: [rahmatan\\_idul@ung.ac.id](mailto:rahmatan_idul@ung.ac.id)

Received: Mei 2023

Accepted: Mei 2023

Published: Mei 2023

doi:

---

### Abstract

*This study explores Bugis language preservation in Biau Subdistrict, Gorontalo, Indonesia, amidst interethnic marriages and cultural assimilation. Amid Indonesia's multilingual context, local languages face marginalization due to scientific advancement and assimilation. Employing qualitative methods, the study examines language attitudes and preservation strategies of second and third-generation Bugis speakers. Second-generation speakers actively maintain Bugis through rituals and interactions, while the third-generation experiences language shift due to intermarriage. The study emphasizes targeted revitalization efforts considering intergenerational dynamics and offers insights for preserving indigenous languages. It identifies and highlights the roles of technology and government policies in addressing the Bugis community's challenges that contributes to broader discussions on language preservation.*

**Keywords:** Bugis language, language preservation, interethnic marriages, cultural assimilation.



© 2023 oleh authors. Lisensi **Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya**, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Artikel ini bersifat open access yang didistribusikan di bawah syarat dan ketentuan Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license.



## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia stands out as one of the few countries in the world where the majority of its population speaks local languages as their mother tongues. This unique phenomenon makes Indonesian society multilingual and places local languages in a significant position. As a result, the country respects and preserves local languages as part of its cultural heritage, as mandated by Article 32 of the 1945 Constitution.

However, local languages are increasingly marginalized. The advancement of science and cultural assimilation has led to these languages being no longer passed down to the younger generations. This phenomenon is somewhat predictable, as Sumarsono (2000) pointed out that languages, like living beings, have a life cycle—from birth, growth, reproduction, aging, to death.

Various factors contribute to the marginalization of regional languages, including language differences within a speech community that result in language shift. As Holmes (2001) argued, language shift occurs when a minority language shifts to the majority language. In this context, speakers of the majority language are reluctant to use the minority language, leading speakers of the latter to abandon their language in favor of the majority language or other more widely accepted languages. Moreover, as mentioned by Chaer and Agustina (2010), language shift can occur due to migration from one speech community to another. Aitchison (2001) viewed such migration as capable of influencing the language situation in a particular speech community, often without awareness.

This phenomenon is observed among speakers of the Bugis language in Biau Subdistrict, Gorontalo Utara Regency, Gorontalo Province, Indonesia. Initial research findings indicate that the dominant language used by Bugis speakers in this region for daily communication is Indonesian. Bugis is only spoken for communication among fellow Bugis speakers. Furthermore, Bugis is mainly spoken by individuals aged 45 and above, while those below 45 speak Indonesian more frequently. Additionally, they often learn to use the Gorontalo language to interact with the local community. As a result, the use of Bugis language has shifted in various domains, including family, community, workplace, and education.

This phenomenon is a logical consequence of Indonesia's diverse ethnic groups and languages, resulting in assimilation and bilingualism. Edwards (2008) defines bilingualism as a



---

person's proficiency in a second language, ranging from basic greetings to full fluency comparable to their first language.

In the long run, this unconscious language shift poses a threat to the preservation of the Bugis language in the speech community. Ultimately, language maintenance, defined by Chaer (2003) as the attitude or judgment towards a language to continue using it amidst other languages, becomes the determining factor. During this language selection process, language attitude plays a crucial role. If the attitude is positive, a speech community will choose to maintain their language amidst others. However, if the attitude is negative, speakers in a speech community may opt for another language they deem more suitable.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the extent of language shift and language preservation efforts within the speech community in Biau Subdistrict, Gorontalo Utara Regency, Gorontalo Province. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the preservation and revitalization of the Bugis language in this particular speech community.

Several significant studies have contributed valuable insights. However, they also reveal gaps that warrant exploration in future investigations. One notable study focused on language attitudes and local language shifting in South Sulawesi, specifically analyzing the languages Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and Enrekang (Lukman, 2015). While the study provides valuable insights into the attitudes and shifting patterns of these languages, it primarily emphasizes the correlation between language attitudes and language shifting. However, the study does not delve into the potential implications of language shift on broader cultural preservation and social dynamics. Therefore, there is a difficulty in understanding the multifaceted factors that shape language attitudes, the reasons for language shifts, and the broader impact of these shifts on linguistic diversity, intergenerational communication, and cultural identity in the context of South Sulawesi's local languages.

In Lombok, Bugis language preservation faces challenges, particularly among the younger generation (Azis, 2020). Further research could delve into the factors influencing language switching among the youth, such as school environments and social media. Additionally, comparing Bugis preservation strategies with those of other local languages facing similar challenges would provide insights into the effectiveness of these strategies. Furthermore, studying the influence of language contact with other languages, especially the dominant Malay



---

language in Lombok, is crucial for understanding code-switching and language integration in Bugis preservation.

Shifting focus to Ambon (Erniati, 2018), Bugis language preservation efforts in the Wara neighborhood were discussed, but further research is needed to explore other social and economic factors influencing language preservation in the area. Moreover, comparing Bugis language preservation efforts in Ambon with those in other regions of Indonesia would provide insights into differences and similarities in preservation strategies. Additionally, investigating the perceptions of the Bugis community regarding their native language, considering cultural identity and ethnic awareness, would help identify cultural and social barriers that need to be addressed to maintain the Bugis language.

Policies and government support play a crucial role in language preservation, but their effectiveness and implementation challenges require evaluation. The application of Aksara Lontara based on hypertext as a solution for language preservation (Baso, 2018) has shown promise. However, further research is needed to improve accessibility and effectiveness by developing applications that can run on various platforms, not just Windows. Additionally, conducting larger focus group testing would provide more robust insights into the application's effectiveness and user response. Moreover, integrating Lontara characters as an official part of the operating system would eliminate the need for additional installations, making the application more user-friendly.

In Bandung, there is a significant language shift towards Indonesian in various communication contexts among Buginese students (Rusdiansyah & Isnendes, 2018). The study demonstrates that the pattern of language usage is predominantly Indonesian, particularly when interacting with friends in their area. It suggests a discrepancy between their positive language attitudes and the actual language use, as they are more inclined to use Indonesian even though they have a favourable view of Buginese. The article provides valuable insights into the language shift phenomenon and its relationship with language attitudes, but further investigation could delve deeper into the factors that contribute to this divergence. Understanding the motivations behind why Buginese students, despite their positive attitudes, predominantly use Indonesian in their interactions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of language shift dynamics.

The present study aims to bridge the gaps identified in previous research by adopting a



---

comprehensive approach to assess the vitality of the Bugis language in the specific region of interest. In order to achieve this, the research focuses on expanding the geographical scope of the study, encompassing various Bugis-speaking communities in the area. By doing so, the study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the Bugis language's vitality in the region.

Furthermore, the study delves deeper into the factors contributing to language shift among the younger generation. Through rigorous investigation, it aims to shed light on the challenges faced in preserving the Bugis language within this demographic. By understanding these factors, the research can contribute to the formulation of targeted strategies to encourage language maintenance and revitalization efforts among the youth.

The role of the Bugis language in education is also a significant aspect of this study. By examining its presence in both formal educational settings and non-formal education in the region, the research seeks to assess the language's usage and significance in different learning environments. Understanding how Bugis is utilized in educational contexts will provide valuable insights into its integration into the daily lives of younger generations.

Moreover, the study recognizes the cultural and social barriers faced in preserving the Bugis language. By exploring the perspectives of the Bugis community regarding their language as an integral part of their cultural identity, the research aims to identify and address these barriers effectively. This in-depth investigation will help policymakers and language preservation advocates design strategies that respect and preserve the cultural heritage of the Bugis community.

Finally, the study examines the role of the government and language preservation policies in maintaining the Bugis language. By analysing the effectiveness and implementation of existing policies, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the support and resources required for successful language revitalization initiatives. Understanding the impact of government interventions will contribute to the formulation of more effective and sustainable language preservation strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To conduct this study, a qualitative approach was employed, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Bugis-speaking individuals from different generations, including second and



third generations. The interviews focused on their family history, migration stories, language usage patterns, attitudes towards the Bugis language, and factors influencing language shift. Key informants, such as community leaders, were also interviewed to gain additional insights into language preservation efforts.

Additionally, observations of language interactions and language use were carried out in various settings, such as homes, schools, and community gatherings, to gain a holistic understanding of language practices and the challenges faced in preserving the Bugis language.

Transcripts of interviews and field notes from observations were analysed using thematic analysis. This approach facilitated the identification of key themes related to language preservation challenges, factors influencing language shift, and community perspectives. Furthermore, data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing findings from interviews, observations, and secondary data sources related to language policies and preservation efforts, ensuring data validity and reliability.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were given utmost importance. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives and procedures, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. To ensure confidentiality, participant identities were kept anonymous during data analysis and reporting.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Historical Migration of the Bugis-Speaking Community in Biau Subdistrict**

Based on interviews with several second-generation Bugis-speaking individuals in Biau Subdistrict, it was revealed that the majority of first-generation Bugis speakers migrated to the area in the aftermath of the DI/TII rebellion led by Kahar Muzakkar in the 1950s in South Sulawesi. Fleeing from the conflict, they arrived in Biau either alone or with their families, using sea routes as their means of transportation. Upon settling in Biau, they occupied coastal areas and cleared nearby forests for agricultural purposes and habitation. Those who arrived alone eventually married local residents, leading to the assimilation of the Bugis-speaking community with the local population.

In the 1990s, the second-generation Bugis speakers began to arrive in Biau, primarily after seeking better opportunities in the urban center of Gorontalo. Subsequently, they decided to



---

settle in less populated areas, such as coastal regions, where they intermarried with local residents. As a result, the third generation was born and raised in Biau, with their cultural identity becoming more closely aligned with the Gorontalo culture and language due to the effects of intermarriage. This intermingling of cultures had a significant impact on the linguistic practices and language use among the Bugis-speaking community in Biau.

### **Language Shift among the Bugis-Speaking Community in Biau Subdistrict**

The phenomenon of intermarriage played a crucial role in shaping the linguistic landscape of the Bugis-speaking community in Biau. The first-generation Bugis speakers were proficient in both active and passive use of the Bugis language in their daily interactions. They predominantly used the Bugis language for communication, reserving the use of Indonesian only for interactions with the local Gorontalo-speaking population. In contrast, the second-generation Bugis speakers displayed a shift in language use. They limited their usage of the Bugis language to specific contexts and with particular individuals, preferring to use Indonesian with a Gorontalo accent for most of their interactions, even within their own families.

The most profound impact of intermarriage was observed in the third generation, who grew up in culturally heterogeneous families and within a community dominated by the Gorontalo language. As a consequence, they became more closely associated with the Gorontalo culture, resulting in a reduced active and passive proficiency in the Bugis language. The primary reason behind this shift was the lack of exposure to the Bugis language, even within the intimate domain of the family. Furthermore, social expectations and the prevalence of Gorontalo language and culture in various aspects of life contributed to this linguistic shift.

### **The Role of Intermarriage in Bugis Language Vitality in Biau Subdistrict**

The intermarriage between Bugis-speaking individuals and the local Gorontalo-speaking community has significantly impacted the vitality of the Bugis language in Biau. The first-generation Bugis speakers were instrumental in maintaining the language's usage, utilizing it not only for intra-group communication but also within the wider community. Their active engagement with the Bugis language fostered a sense of linguistic pride and cultural identity, leading to the preservation of the language within the community.

However, with the advent of intermarriage, the linguistic practices began to shift. The second-generation Bugis speakers, though familiar with the language, reduced their usage in favor of Indonesian with a Gorontalo accent, especially in public domains. This linguistic shift has resulted in a diminished prominence of the Bugis language within the community, impacting



its intergenerational transmission. The third generation, growing up in a predominantly Gorontalo-speaking environment, experienced a considerable decline in their Bugis language skills, reflecting the vulnerability of the language in the face of intermarriage.

### **Bugis Language Use in Different Settings in Biau Subdistrict**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of language use and language vitality among the Bugis-speaking community in Biau, the researchers conducted observations of language interactions in various settings, including homes, schools, and community gatherings. The results revealed that language choices varied depending on the context and the interlocutors.

In the home setting, the first-generation Bugis speakers retained their active use of the Bugis language, creating a linguistic environment conducive to the transmission of the language to the younger generation. However, the second and third generations displayed a shift towards using Indonesian, with the latter showing limited proficiency in Bugis. The use of Gorontalo language within the family setting was predominant, especially in families where one of the parents was of Gorontalo descent.

The school setting showed a similar pattern, with Bugis-speaking children increasingly using Indonesian as their primary language of communication. This shift was driven by the need to interact with peers and teachers who predominantly used Indonesian. The prevalence of Indonesian in the educational context contributed to the diminished role of the Bugis language in the linguistic repertoire of the younger generation.

Community gatherings, especially those involving both Bugis-speaking and Gorontalo-speaking individuals, witnessed a blending of languages. While the first-generation Bugis speakers utilized the Bugis language, the second and third generations tended to use Indonesian with a Gorontalo accent to accommodate the linguistic preferences of the wider community. This blending of languages further contributed to the erosion of the Bugis language's vitality in public spaces.

### **Strategies for Preserving the Bugis Language in Biau Subdistrict**

Among the second-generation Bugis language speakers, both active and passive language preservation efforts can be observed. Passively, they maintain the use of the Bugis language when communicating with other second-generation Bugis speakers or Bugis speakers outside Biau Subdistrict. Actively, they endeavor to preserve some of their native traditions, such as the





*Macera Palakka* ritual. In their homeland in South Sulawesi, this ritual is celebrated with elaborate ceremonies, including the serving of *tumpang* and goat meat. In Biau Subdistrict, however, the ritual is conducted in a more modest manner, with the main dish being a plate of rice. After the ritual, the participants usually stay and engage in conversations with one another in the Bugis language.

Such active and passive preservation efforts are not evident among the third-generation Bugis language speakers. Passively, it is clear that they are unable to speak Bugis. Actively, they rarely participate in the *Macera Palakka* ritual. And if they do participate, they swiftly return home after the ritual concludes, thereby lacking the opportunity to converse in Bugis or directly interact with those engaged in Bugis language communication.

The language preservation strategies among the second-generation Bugis language speakers are crucial in maintaining the vitality of the Bugis language within the community. Their continued use of Bugis in interactions with fellow speakers and their participation in traditional rituals help foster a sense of belonging and cultural identity. However, the negative attitudes exhibited by the third-generation Bugis language speakers pose challenges for language revitalization efforts.

### **Attitudes of Bugis Language Speakers in Biau Subdistrict**

Anderson (as cited in Chaer & Agustina, 2010) provides a definition of language attitude as an individual's cognitive disposition towards language that influences their inclinations to respond to specific utterances. This phenomenon is characterized by three primary indicators for assessing an individual's language attitude: linguistic loyalty, linguistic pride, and awareness of linguistic norms (Garvin & Mathiot as cited in Chaer, 2010). These three facets collectively determine whether the language attitude within a speech community is constructive or detrimental. Consequently, these dimensions offer a comprehensive framework for evaluating the overarching positive or negative orientation of a speech community's language attitude.

Active and passive language preservation efforts can be observed among second-generation Bugis language speakers. Passively, they continue to use the Bugis language when communicating with other second-generation Bugis speakers or speakers from outside Biau Subdistrict. Despite the gradual shift towards the Gorontalo language in various societal domains, they persist in using Bugis in specific social settings, particularly when interacting



with their fellow Bugis speakers. These language interactions act as a means of maintaining their linguistic ties and reinforcing their shared Bugis identity. The Bugis language becomes a marker of their ethnic heritage, and they strive to uphold its significance in their daily lives.

Actively, second-generation Bugis language speakers make concerted efforts to revive some of their original traditions, such as the ritual of thanksgiving known as "*Macera Palakka*." This traditional ritual holds deep cultural significance for them, and its observance provides an opportunity to preserve and showcase their Bugis heritage. While the manner of celebrating "*Macera Palakka*" may differ from its grandeur in South Sulawesi, its essence remains intact as a symbol of gratitude and unity. By continuing this ritual in Biau Subdistrict, they ensure that their Bugis cultural practices are kept alive and passed down to future generations.

In contrast, such active and passive preservation efforts are not evident among third-generation Bugis language speakers. Passively, it is evident that they are unable to speak the Bugis language. The absence of Bugis language use in their daily lives is largely due to their upbringing in families where Gorontalo is the primary language of communication. This environment influences their language preferences and affiliations, gradually leading to a detachment from the Bugis language. With limited exposure to Bugis language interactions, they do not develop a natural fluency or emotional connection to the language, contributing to its decline within this generation.

Actively, third-generation Bugis speakers rarely participate in the "*Macera Palakka*" ritual or other Bugis cultural events. Their focus on adapting to the dominant linguistic and cultural environment of Gorontalo discourages active engagement in Bugis language activities or rituals. As a result, they may choose not to participate in Bugis cultural practices, further limiting their exposure to the language and cultural traditions. The lack of active preservation efforts among the third generation highlights the challenges in sustaining the Bugis language and cultural heritage within this demographic.

The differences in language preservation strategies between the second and third generations can be attributed to several factors. The strong language attitudes and preservation efforts of the second generation are influenced by their formative years spent in families and communities where Bugis was the primary language. These early linguistic experiences instilled a deep sense of cultural pride and belonging, motivating them to preserve their Bugis identity. Moreover, their continued use of Bugis when communicating with peers and family members



---

reinforces their language skills and preserves the language in social settings.

In contrast, the third generation's language attitudes are shaped by their exposure to a linguistically diverse environment, with Gorontalo dominating as the prevalent language. The lack of regular Bugis language use within their families and communities results in reduced opportunities for language learning and maintenance. Without an emotional connection to the Bugis language and a sense of cultural attachment, they do not feel compelled to actively engage in language preservation efforts or cultural practices.

The interplay between language attitudes and preservation strategies is crucial in understanding the dynamics of language shift and revitalization within the Bugis-speaking community in Biau Subdistrict. The positive language attitudes and active preservation efforts of the second generation contribute to the continuation of the Bugis language in certain social domains. However, the negative language attitudes and limited preservation efforts of the third generation pose significant challenges to the language's continuity. To address these challenges and promote the preservation of the Bugis language, targeted interventions and language revitalization programs need to be developed, taking into account the unique sociocultural context and language attitudes of each generation. Efforts to strengthen the positive language attitudes and preserve Bugis cultural practices among the third generation are vital in securing the future vitality of the Bugis language in Biau Subdistrict.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results shed light on the contrasting attitudes and language preservation strategies of second and third-generation Bugis language speakers in Biau Subdistrict. While the second-generation speakers display positive attitudes and actively engage in language preservation, the third-generation speakers exhibit negative attitudes and face significant challenges in maintaining the Bugis language due to intermarriage and cultural assimilation.

The findings underscore the importance of targeted language revitalization efforts that consider the unique socio-cultural dynamics of the Bugis-speaking community. Strategies must be developed to address the language shift observed in the third generation and to foster a positive attitude towards the Bugis language. Encouraging intergenerational communication and implementing language programs in formal and informal educational settings are essential for sustaining the vitality of the Bugis language.



As linguistic diversity continues to face challenges in the modern world, preserving indigenous languages like Bugis becomes a matter of cultural heritage and identity. By understanding the historical migration patterns, intermarriage impact, and language attitudes, this study contributes to the broader discourse on language vitality and offers insights for effective language preservation initiatives in multilingual societies.

## REFERENCES

- Aitchison, J. (2001). *Language Change, Progress or Decay?* (3rd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Azis, A.D. 2020. Bugis Language Maintenance Strategy in Lombok. *SeBasa Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 3(2), 199-208
- Baso, Y.S. 2018. Model Aplikasi Aksara Lontara Berbasis HTML sebagai Salah Satu Solusi Pemertahanan Bahasa Daerah. *Jurnal Kata Penelitian tentang Ilmu Bahasa & Sastra*, 2(1), 1-12
- Chaer, A. (2003). *Psikolinguistik: Kajian Teoretik*. Rineka Cipta
- Chaer, A &, Agustina, L. (2010). *Sosiolinguistik Perkenalan Awal*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta
- Edwards, V. J. (2008). "Foundations of Bilingualism" in *The Handbook of Bilingualism*, Bhatia K. Tej, et.al. (editor). Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell
- Erniati. 2018. Pemertahanan Bahasa Bugis di Kota Ambon. *Totobuang Jurnal Ilmiah Kebahasaan dan Kesastraan*, 6(2), 215-228
- Fasold, Ralp. (1987). *The Sociolinguistics of Society*. New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Holmes, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Lukman, G. 2015. Local Languages Shift in South Sulawesi; Case Four Local Language (Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, Enrekang). *Journal of Language and Literature*, 6(3), 151-154
- Rusdiansyah & Isnendes, R. 2018. Language Attitudes of Buginese Speakers in Bandung. *Ideas Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics, and Literature*, 6(2), 49-61
- Sumarsono. 2000. Sikap dan Perilaku Tutur Penutur Bahasa Melayu Loloan terhadap Bahasanya dan Bahasa-Bahasa Lainnya. Dalam *Kajian Serba Linguistik untuk Anton Moeliono Pereksa Bahasa*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.