

## **Sociolinguistic (Language Maintenance and Shift): Bataknese's Songs Case Study**

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### ***Abstract***

This article explores how *Batak* songs contribute to maintaining the local language while also reflecting signs of language shift through code mixing. Language maintenance involves the conscious efforts of a community to keep their native language alive, whereas language shift occurs when one language is gradually replaced by another in daily use. Fishman (1972) explains that language use is shaped by context and social settings, while the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis highlights how language influences people's thinking and culture. Additionally, Hedenheimer, Heclo, and Adams (1983) argue that policies and social structures have significant effects on whether a community preserves or abandons its traditional language. The song *Poda (Tagor Tampubolon, 1979)* demonstrates the effort to sustain *Batak* language through cultural advice, while *Martina I Love You (Romansa Trio, 2017)* and *Please Sahali Nai (Henry Manullang & Debora Pardosi, 2017)* show how mixing languages and modern phrases can indicate a shift. This study also applies the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977) to identify factors that influence the strength or decline of a language. Overall, the analysis reveals that *Batak* songs help both preserve traditional language and highlight changes in its use among young people.

*Keywords: language maintenance, language shift, Batak songs, sociolinguistic, Ethnolinguistic Vitality*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Language is inseparable from culture and society. As explained in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, language does not merely describe reality but actively shapes how people think and understand their surroundings. In multilingual settings, the continued existence of a local language depends on the community's commitment to using it in daily life and cultural activities. Fishman's (1972) Sociolinguistic

Domain Theory suggests that maintaining a language requires its presence in everyday contexts such as family interactions, education, religion, and cultural events. If these domains remain strong, a language is more likely to endure through generations.

Nevertheless, Hedenheimer, Heclo, and Adams (1983) point out that factors like societal structures, policy decisions, and modernization trends can push a community to abandon their native language. For minority languages such as Batak, urban life, modern communication, and exposure to dominant languages like Indonesian and English can reduce the use of local languages, especially among youth.

According to Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, three aspects determine whether a language will survive: its status in society, the size and spread of its speakers, and the extent of institutional support. When these elements decline, the chances of a language shift increase as young people may adopt more dominant languages for practical or social reasons.

Traditional songs play an important role in preserving cultural roots and language strength. In the Batak community, for example, the song *Poda* helps pass down ancestral advice and identity through the Batak language. The term *Poda* itself means advice, and the song reminds young people to value their heritage.

Meanwhile, songs like Martina I Love You and Please *Sahali Nai* show a different trend by combining local language with English. This mixing of languages may reflect a shift in language preference, particularly among younger audiences who are influenced by global media and modern culture.

By studying these songs, this paper demonstrates how traditional and modern music can reveal the balance between maintaining a local language and the tendency to shift towards other languages. It also argues that preserving local languages needs more than just pride—it also requires policies, community involvement, and new ways to keep the language relevant for today's generation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Language Maintenance and Language Shift**

Within sociolinguistics, language maintenance describes how a community keeps using and passing on its native language from one generation to the next. Fishman (1972) points out that this process relies on whether the language remains active in daily life, particularly in areas like family conversations, religious activities, schools, and cultural events. If these areas keep the language alive, it is more likely to endure despite outside influences.

On the other hand, language shift happens when speakers slowly replace their heritage language with a more widely spoken one. Factors like modernization, urban growth, and the spread of global culture often speed up this replacement. Hedenheimer, Heclo, and Adams (1983) note that when schools, media, and cultural policies fail to support a minority language, the process of language shift becomes harder to resist.

### **2.2 Theoretical Perspectives**

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis proposes that the language people use directly influences how they think and see the world, meaning that losing a language could lead to the loss of unique cultural perspectives. This idea underlines the importance of keeping minority languages alive as a way to protect cultural identity.

The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) explains that a language's chance of survival depends on three factors: its social status, the number and spread of its speakers, and support from institutions like schools, media, and government programs. Communities with high vitality show pride in their language, have a solid base of speakers, and benefit from strong institutional backing.

Andriyanti (2019) explains that when people stop using their mother tongue and instead use a more common language, a language shift occurs. The new language gradually replaces the original

one, especially in bilingual or multilingual communities, until the minority language loses its function and speakers.

Wardhaugh (2015) describes code mixing as the practice of using two languages in the same conversation or sentence without changing the topic. This blending can involve parts of words, whole words, or phrases.

Hoffman (1991) outlines that people who speak more than one language often switch between languages within the same sentence for different reasons, such as clarifying meaning, expressing emotion, quoting others, or reinforcing group identity. He categorizes this mixing into types like intra-sentential mixing (inside sentences) and intra-lexical mixing (inside words).

Abtahian (2016) studied how language shift happens when younger generations, especially those who face pressure to use dominant languages in schools and public life, gradually rely less on their native tongue. This situation often leads to fewer young people speaking the language fluently, threatening its future.

These theories show that songs can help preserve a language by sharing cultural messages and keeping the language alive in cultural spaces. For example, traditional songs like *Poda* help pass on cultural knowledge and native vocabulary, while modern songs that blend local language with Indonesian or English—such as *Martina I Love You* and *Please Sahali Nai*—may indicate the beginning stages of language shift through code mixing.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to analyze how Batak songs represent language maintenance and language shift. The focus is on interpreting the meaning and linguistic features found in song lyrics as cultural texts. This design allows the researcher to explore the underlying messages and the sociolinguistic phenomena reflected in traditional and modern Batak songs.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

The primary data in this research are the lyrics of three Batak songs: *Poda*, *Martina I Love You* and *Please Sahali Nai*. These songs were selected purposefully because *Poda* illustrates traditional advice and cultural continuity, while *Martina I Love You* and *Please Sahali Nai* show elements of modern influence and code-mixing. Secondary data were obtained through library research, including books, articles, and previous studies related to language maintenance and language shift theories by Fishman, Sapir & Whorf, Hedenheimer et al., and Giles et al.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using content analysis. The researcher identified specific words, phrases, and lines in the song lyrics that represent language maintenance or indicate a shift, such as the use of indigenous vocabulary versus mixed codes with Indonesian or English. The analysis applied Fishman's Sociolinguistic Domain Theory to interpret the contexts where these songs are likely performed or heard. Furthermore, the Ethnolinguistic Vitality framework was used to discuss the factors influencing the strength or weakening of the Batak language as reflected in these musical expressions.

### **4. DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Language Maintenance**

The concept of language maintenance focuses on how a minority or local language can continue to be used despite the influence of dominant languages. For the Batak community, music—especially traditional songs or modern songs with ethnic elements—serves as a valuable tool to keep their language alive. A clear example is *Poda* (Tagor Tampubolon, 1979).

Donnes Harianto Sirait, Tiur Martha Siboro, Rocia Fani Kaban, Dara Hagayna Br Sembiring

The song *Poda*, which means *advice*, is sung mainly in *Batak Toba* and delivers messages from parents to their children. Through this song, traditional wisdom is passed down, showing how music acts as a bridge to transfer language and cultural values between generations.

### **Batak lyrics**

*Angur do goar mi anakkon hu, Songon bunga-bunga i nahussusi, Molo marparange na denggan doho, Diluat nadao i, Jala ikkon ingot doho, Tangiang mi do parhitean mi, Dingolumi da tondikku. Unang sai mian jat ni rohai, Dibagasan rohami, Ai ido mulani sikka mabarbar, Da hasian, Ikkon benget do ho marroha, Jala pattun maradophon natua tua, Ai ido arta na ummarga i... Dingolumi..*

### **English lyrics**

Let your name be fragrant, my child, Like blooming flowers so beautiful and bright.  
When one day you grow up to be good, Far away from home,  
Always remember, Your prayer is your strength, Listen to this, my child.  
Do not let your heart waver easily, Plant this deep within you,  
For this is the beginning of a peaceful life.  
My beloved child, Stay firm in your heart, Respect the elders,  
For that is the most precious treasure...Listen to this...

## **4.2 Language Shift**

Language shift describes how a community slowly stops using its traditional language and moves toward a more dominant one. This change often happens because of social, economic, and cultural reasons. A clear sign of this process is code mixing—when speakers mix words or phrases from two or more languages in everyday conversation. By looking at these patterns, researchers can see how far a community's language shift has gone.

Kim (2006) mentions several reasons why people switch between languages in a conversation. These include the fact that many people naturally speak more than one language (bilingualism), the influence of social groups, the need to adjust to different situations, gaps in vocabulary, and the prestige that comes from using global languages like English. For young people, mixing languages can also be a way to appear modern or educated.

Bilingual speakers often use code mixing to show they belong to a certain group or to express closeness with others. According to Hoffman (1991), code mixing can happen within sentences (intra-sentential) or between sentences (extra-sentential). In the songs *Martina I Love You* and *Please Sahali Nai*, English words are inserted into Batak lyrics, showing this mixing clearly.

"Martina, I Love You"(Created by Romansa Trio 2017)

### **Batak lyrics:**

*Sian Jerman ho ito, Gabe turis Hasian, Tu samosir Pulo Nauli, Jatuh cinta au tu ho, Jatuh cinta ho tu au, Martina I Love you, Martina You Love me*

### **English lyrics:**

You are from Germany, my dear, So you're like a tourist, my love, To Samosir, the beautiful island,  
I fell in love with you, my dear, You fell in love with me,  
Martina, I Love You, Martina, You Love Me.

For instance, *Martina I Love You* blends Batak with English phrases like "I Love You" or "Welcome to my country", while *Please Sahali Nai* uses English terms such as "Please" and "I think I'll be okay without you". These phrases could be fully expressed in Batak but are left in English, which shows a tendency toward using dominant languages.

## Sahali Nai by Henry Manullang

### Batak lyrics:

*sahali nai pe ito*, Please hear *me unang pittor muruk ho*

*Husolsoli do sude pambahenan hi hasian*, I think i'll be okay without you

### English Lyrics

Please, just this once, Please listen to me, Don't be angry so quickly,

I regret everything I've done, my love, I think I'll be okay without you

To clarify further, the Language Shift is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Language Shift

Batak Song Lyrics	Language Shift
<i>Sian Jerman ho ito, Gabe turis Hasian, Tu samosir Pulo Nauli, Jatuh cinta au tu ho, Jatuh cinta ho tu au, Martina</i>	<b>I Love you</b> (code mixing)
<b>You Love me</b>	<b>You Love me</b> (code mixing)
<b>Please</b> <i>sahali nai pe ito</i> , <b>Please</b> hear <i>me unang pittor muruk ho</i>	<b>Please</b> (inserting word)
<i>Husolsoli do sude pambahenan hi hasian,</i>	<b>Please</b> (inserting word)
<b>I think I'll be okay without you</b>	<b>I think I'll be okay without you</b> (inserting clause)

Muysken (2000) adds that code mixing appears in various forms: inserting words or phrases, alternating clauses, or blending dialects within one sentence. The Batak songs studied mostly use insertion—borrowing single English words or short phrases within Batak sentences.

Abtahian (2016) explains that this mixing reflects a deeper shift: younger generations may know the heritage language but choose dominant languages more often in daily life. If this pattern continues, it can weaken the role of the native language in the community.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, this research shows that both traditional and modern *Batak* songs reveal the ongoing interaction between preserving and shifting language within the *Batak* community. The song *Poda* illustrates how cultural advice and local wisdom are kept alive through the active use of the *Batak* language, which aligns with Fishman's idea that language survives when passed down informally across generations. This highlights that music can be a valuable space to strengthen the vitality of a minority language.

*Poda* by Tagor Tampubolon demonstrates how songs can support language maintenance by sharing traditional values and native vocabulary through meaningful lyrics. This supports sociolinguistic ideas such as Fishman's Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory, Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, and the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which connects language and worldview. As threats to minority languages continue, using songs with deep cultural meaning can help keep a language strong for future generations.

In contrast, songs like Martina *I Love You* and Please *Sahali Nai* show how modern influences and the mixing of English or Indonesian phrases reflect signs of a shift away from the local language. This indicates that without conscious efforts to maintain *Batak*, dominant languages may gradually take over daily use, especially among young people.

The analysis of these songs shows how code mixing appears both within sentences (intra-sentential) and through word or phrase insertion (extra-sentential), which are clear signs of language shift in progress.

These findings also confirm the idea that losing a language may result in the loss of unique cultural knowledge, as proposed by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Hedenheimer, Heclo, and Adams remind us that supportive policies and social structures are essential. If there is no strong support, the vitality of the *Batak* language could decline further.

Therefore, building community awareness, fostering pride in local culture, and creating policies that encourage the use of *Batak* are important steps. Creative cultural works like songs can continue to play a significant role in revitalizing and preserving minority languages.

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