

Javanese Language in Rituals and Traditions in Transmigration Areas of Lalembuu Sub- Regency

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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have extensively examined Javanese language shift, bilingualism, and identity negotiation, limited attention has been given to the maintenance of Javanese within ritual domains among transmigrant communities outside Java. This study investigates the use and preservation of Javanese in traditional rituals and ceremonies practiced by Javanese transmigrant communities in Lalembuu Sub-Regency, South Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Drawing on language maintenance, ethnolinguistics, and language ideology perspectives, the study explores how Javanese functions as a cultural resource for sustaining collective identity, social relationships, and symbolic meanings. A descriptive qualitative approach with ethnolinguistic methods was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving 45 informants from Javanese transmigrant villages in Kecamatan Lalembuu. The findings indicate that Javanese remains an important cultural medium in four major ritual domains: agricultural ceremonies, including slametan panen and wiwitan; life-cycle rituals, including birth, circumcision, and marriage ceremonies; communal safety prayers, such as kenduren and manakiban; and ancestral commemoration practices, particularly sedekah bumi. Despite prolonged interaction with Bali, Sunda, and Bugis communities, Javanese transmigrants continue to preserve specialized sacred registers, particularly Krama and Krama Inggil, while using mixed Javanese-Indonesian varieties in everyday communication. The selective use of ritual Javanese reflects a strong language ideology associating sacred speech with respect, spiritual authority, and ancestral legitimacy. Ritual language therefore strengthens ethnic identity, intergenerational transmission, and communal solidarity, demonstrating its role as an important form of cultural resilience in transmigrant communities.

Keywords: *Javanese Language, Language Maintenance, Ritual Language, Ethnolinguistics, Language Ideology, Transmigrant Communities*

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INTRODUCTION

The transmigration program in Indonesia, which began during the Dutch colonial period in July 1934 in Wonomulyo District, Polman Regency, West Sulawesi Province, and was significantly expanded under the New Order government from 1969 to 1999, resulted in large-scale population movements of Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese communities to the Outer Islands, including Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and Papua. Southeast Sulawesi became one of the important destinations for transmigrant settlement, where many Javanese communities established agricultural-based villages while bringing with them their traditional knowledge, social structures, cultural practices, and ancestral languages.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, migration creates complex challenges for the survival of minority languages because migrant communities must balance the preservation of ancestral languages with adaptation to dominant linguistic environments. Fishman (1991) argues that language maintenance and language shift are largely determined by the social conditions that support or weaken the transmission of a minority language across generations. According to Fishman (1991), the continuity of a language depends not only on the number of speakers but also on the availability of meaningful social domains in which

the language remains functional and valued. Domains such as family, religion, cultural activities, and traditional ceremonies may become crucial spaces where minority languages continue to survive despite increasing pressure from dominant languages.

The concept of language domains is particularly relevant for understanding the maintenance of Javanese among transmigrant communities. (Fishman, 1972) domain theory suggests that language choice is closely related to social contexts, participants, topics, and institutional settings. In this perspective, speakers do not randomly choose languages; rather, they select particular codes according to the social meanings attached to specific domains. Ritual contexts may therefore function as high-value domains where ancestral languages retain authority because they are associated with cultural legitimacy, respect, and collective memory.

Previous studies on Javanese communities in transmigration areas have predominantly focused on language shift, bilingualism, identity negotiation, and adaptation to dominant local languages. However, the role of ritual communication as a mechanism of language maintenance remains insufficiently explored. Many studies on minority language communities have emphasized the decline of heritage languages when younger generations shift toward national or dominant regional languages (Crystal, 2000; Fishman, 1991). Nevertheless, less attention has been given to how ritual practices preserve specific linguistic forms, speech levels, and cultural meanings after several generations of migration. In particular, the maintenance of *Krama* and *Krama Inggil* as ritual registers among Javanese transmigrant communities remains an under-researched phenomenon.

The ethnolinguistic perspective provides an additional framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to Hymes (1974), language cannot be separated from the cultural systems and social practices in which it is embedded. Similarly, Duranti (1997) explains that ethnolinguistics examines the relationship between language, culture, and human experience by investigating how linguistic practices reflect cultural knowledge and social organization. From this perspective, the use of Javanese in rituals is not merely a communicative choice but also a cultural practice through which communities reproduce social values, identity, and collective memory. Language becomes a symbolic resource that connects present generations with ancestral traditions and historical experiences.

Furthermore, studies on heritage language maintenance emphasize that cultural and religious practices can provide important contexts for sustaining minority languages. According to King et al. (2008), heritage language transmission is strongly influenced by family practices, community activities, and ideological beliefs regarding the value of the ancestral language. Similarly, Hornberger (2003) argues that language maintenance is shaped by the interaction between linguistic practices, language ideologies, and social spaces that enable minority languages to continue functioning. Therefore, ritual domains may serve as ideological spaces where communities assign special meanings and values to ancestral language use.

Transmigrant communities in Southeast Sulawesi have experienced continuous interaction with various linguistic groups, including Bugis, Balinese, Sundanese, and Tolaki speakers. At the same time, Indonesian has become the dominant language of administration, education, and wider social communication. Under such multilingual conditions, minority immigrant languages often experience gradual decline within two or three generations (Crystal, 2000; Fishman, 1991). However, (Sumarsono & Partana, 2007) demonstrates that cultural and religious practices may function as protective spaces for minority languages because they preserve symbolic meanings and strengthen community solidarity. Thus, ritual language may represent a form of cultural resilience that allows ancestral languages to survive even when their everyday use decreases.

Lalembuu Sub-Regency, South Konawe Regency, provides an important case for examining these theoretical assumptions. Established as a regency in 2003 through the division of Konawe Regency, South Konawe contains numerous transmigrant villages whose settlers arrived through government migration programs, including early settlements in Ranomeeto District in 1968 and Lalembuu Sub-Regency in 1982. Today, second- and third-

generation descendants of these migrants continue to inhabit villages such as Sumberjaya, Lamdandia, Potuho Jaya, Lambodi Jaya Padaleu, Atari Jaya, Atari Indah, Meronga Raya, Sukamukti, and Kapuwila. Preliminary fieldwork conducted by researchers in May 2026 identified the continued use of Javanese in several ritual contexts, including agricultural ceremonies, wedding traditions, ancestral commemorations, and communal safety prayers.

Therefore, this study addresses an important theoretical and empirical gap by investigating how ritual practices function as domains of Javanese language maintenance in a long-term transmigrant setting. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine language use in ordinary communication, this research focuses on the intersection between language domains, ethnolinguistic identity, and ritual language ideology. By applying Fishman's theory of language maintenance, the concept of language domains, and ethnolinguistic approaches, this study examines how ritual contexts preserve Javanese speech levels (*Ngoko*, *Madya*, *Krama*, and *Krama Inggil*) and sustain cultural meanings across generations.

Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What ritual domains continue to employ Javanese language in Lalembuu Sub-Regency South Konawe Regency transmigrant communities? (2) What speech levels (*Ngoko*, *Madya*, *Krama*, and *Krama Inggil*) are deployed in each ritual domain, and by whom? (3) What social and ideological functions does ritual Javanese serve in the context of long-term diaspora?

The significance of this investigation is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to discussions of language maintenance, Fishman's domain theory, and ethnolinguistics by demonstrating how ritual spaces support linguistic continuity among migrant communities. It extends previous research by showing that minority languages may survive through culturally significant domains even when everyday communication shifts toward dominant languages. Methodologically, it highlights the importance of ethnolinguistic participant observation for documenting forms of language use that are often absent from ordinary conversational data. Practically, the findings provide insights for regional language preservation policies and for migrant communities seeking to strengthen intergenerational cultural transmission.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design within an ethnolinguistic framework. The research was conducted from May to June 2026 in transmigrant villages across Lalembuu Sub-Regency, South Konawe Regency. An ethnolinguistic approach was considered appropriate because language maintenance and cultural practices are closely interconnected within community life. Previous studies have demonstrated that language preservation is strongly influenced by cultural continuity, language attitudes, and intergenerational transmission (Sain, 2020; Sain & Hermansyah, 2025).

Respondents

Forty-five informants participated in this study. The informants were selected using a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed as the primary sampling strategy because this study required participants who possessed specific knowledge, experience, and involvement in Javanese ritual practices. As noted by (Campbell et al., 2020), purposive sampling enables qualitative researchers to select information-rich participants who can provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

The initial informants were purposively selected based on the following criteria:

self-identification as ethnically Javanese and membership in the Javanese transmigrant community in Lalembuu Sub-Regency;

Participation in at least one traditional ritual activity, including agricultural ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, circumcision celebrations, communal safety prayers, or ancestral commemorations;

Familiarity with Javanese ritual expressions and speech levels (Ngoko, Madya, Krama, and Krama Inggil); and
Willingness to participate in interviews and allow audio and video documentation during ritual performances.

Following the identification of key informants, snowball sampling was applied to recruit additional participants. Initial participants, particularly village elders (*sesepuh*), ritual leaders (*juru slametan*), religious figures, and community organizers, recommended other community members who had relevant knowledge or experience regarding Javanese ritual language practices. This technique was considered appropriate because knowledge of ritual discourse is not evenly distributed within the community but is often preserved among individuals who actively participate in cultural and ceremonial activities.

The 45 informants ranged from 24 to 76 years old and represented three generational groups: first-generation transmigrants who directly experienced migration from Java, second-generation descendants who inherited ritual traditions from their parents, and third-generation descendants who continue to participate in contemporary ritual activities. This generational variation allowed the study to examine differences in language competence, ritual participation, and patterns of intergenerational language maintenance among Javanese communities. The inclusion of multiple generations was particularly important because heritage language continuity is strongly influenced by generational language shift, changing sociocultural environments, and language attitudes (Fishman, 1991; Sain, 2020).

Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, whereby additional interviews and observations no longer generated substantially new information regarding ritual domains, Javanese speech-level usage, and the cultural meanings associated with ritual language. The combination of purposive and snowball sampling enabled the study to obtain culturally knowledgeable participants while capturing diverse perspectives on Javanese language maintenance in a transmigrant setting.

Instruments

Data collection employed multiple instruments to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings (Fusch et al., 2018):

Observation sheets for documenting linguistic interactions during rituals.

Semi-structured interview guides to explore participants' perceptions and language practices.

Audio and video recording devices to capture authentic speech events.

Field notes for recording contextual information, non-verbal communication, and researcher reflections.

The use of multiple instruments facilitated a comprehensive understanding of language use in ritual settings and strengthened the trustworthiness of the data. Furthermore, the combination of observational and interview data enabled the researcher to examine both actual language behavior and speakers' attitudes toward language use, which are essential components in sociolinguistic studies of language maintenance (Sain, 2020; Sain & Hermansyah, 2025).

Procedures

Data were collected through the following stages:

Participant observation during ritual events.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with community members.

Collection and documentation of written and oral ritual texts.

Observed rituals included harvest ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, circumcision celebrations, communal safety prayers, and ancestral commemorations. Participant observation enabled the researcher to examine language practices in their natural sociocultural context, while interviews provided insights into participants' attitudes toward

Javanese speech levels and cultural preservation (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Investigating language attitudes was particularly relevant because positive attitudes toward a heritage language have been identified as a significant factor supporting language maintenance within multilingual communities (Sain, 2020; Sain & Hermansyah, 2025).

Data Analysis

The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed the six-phase framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2022), including familiarization with the data, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a flexible and rigorous approach for identifying recurring patterns within qualitative data.

Speech levels found in ritual discourse were classified into four categories—Ngoko, Madya, Krama, and Krama Inggil—based on contemporary descriptions of Javanese speech-level systems and sociolinguistic usage (Ayuani et al., 2021). The categorization enabled the researcher to examine how linguistic politeness and social hierarchy were maintained through ritual communication. The analysis also considered broader sociolinguistic dimensions of language maintenance, language shift, and language attitudes, as these factors have been shown to influence the vitality of local and heritage languages in multilingual settings (Sain, 2020; Sain & Hermansyah, 2025).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ritual Domains and Linguistic Practices of Javanese Maintenance

Analysis of the 20 observed ritual events and interview data revealed that Javanese language maintenance in Lalembuu is not simply reflected in the presence of Javanese during ceremonies, but more specifically in the preservation of particular linguistic forms, speech levels, and formulaic expressions associated with ritual authority. Four major ritual domains were identified: (1) agricultural ceremonies, (2) life-cycle rituals, (3) communal safety prayers, and (4) ancestral commemorations. Each domain demonstrates distinct patterns of language selection, speech-level variation, and code-switching practices.

Unlike everyday communication, where most younger speakers use a mixed Javanese–Indonesian variety, ritual communication preserves a specialized linguistic register dominated by *Krama* and *Krama Inggil*. These speech levels are not selected merely for politeness but because they index respect, sacredness, and social hierarchy. The choice of linguistic forms is therefore ideologically motivated, reflecting the community's belief that certain expressions are more appropriate and effective in ritual contexts.

Table 1. summarizes the Distribution of Javanese Speech Levels Across Ritual Domains.

Ritual Domain	Dominant Register	Linguistic Characteristics	Primary Speakers
Agricultural rituals (<i>slametan panen, wiwitan</i>)	Krama Inggil	Formulaic prayers, humble pronouns, blessing expressions	<i>Juru slametan</i> , elder farmers
Life-cycle rituals (birth, circumcision, marriage)	Krama with Indonesian insertions	Honorific expressions, ceremonial greetings, transitional code-switching	Elders, MC, parents
Communal safety prayers (<i>kenduren, manakiban</i>)	Krama Inggil + Arabic expressions	Religious formulas, prayers, explanatory Indonesian	Religious leaders
Ancestral commemoration (<i>sedekah bumi</i>)	Krama Inggil	Traditional poetic expressions (<i>pepujian</i>), archaic vocabulary	<i>Sesepuh</i>

Agricultural Rituals: Formulaic Expressions and the Preservation of Krama Inggil

Agricultural rituals, particularly *wiwitan* and *slametan panen*, represent the strongest domain of Javanese linguistic preservation. These ceremonies occur during important

agricultural cycles and require the use of highly conventionalized expressions that are transmitted through memorization and repeated performance.

During the *wiwitan* ceremony in Desa Sumberjaya, the *juru slametan* consistently employed *Krama Inggil* when delivering prayers (*donga*). The speech level shifted according to the relationship between speaker, audience, and ritual purpose. When addressing spiritual entities or expressing requests for blessings, the speaker used the highest honorific forms. However, when coordinating with assistants before and after the ceremony, the same speaker shifted to *Ngoko* or informal Javanese.

A representative excerpt from the ritual prayer is:

"*Mugi-mugi Gusti Allah paring berkah dhumateng panen kita sedaya. Ibu Dewi Sri, kawula nyuwun panjenengan kersa ngayomi wiji lan uwit pantun ingkang badhe kita panèn sakmenika.*"

The expression contains several linguistic markers of humility and respect. The first-person pronoun *kawula* ('I, humble form') positions the speaker as socially subordinate to the addressee. The term *panjenengan* ('you, honorific form') and the verb *kersa* ('to be willing/deign') construct a respectful relationship between the speaker and the addressed entity. Similarly, *nyuwun* ('to humbly request') functions as a formulaic expression frequently appearing in ritual requests.

These expressions are rarely produced in daily conversations by younger generations. However, participants recognized them as obligatory forms for ritual performances. Several second-generation informants explained that they learned these expressions through listening and repetition rather than through formal language instruction. This indicates that ritual language is maintained as a symbolic repertoire, even when active linguistic competence decreases.

The preservation of these formulaic expressions demonstrates that ritual practices function as linguistic archives. Rather than maintaining Javanese through everyday interaction, the community maintains selected linguistic forms that carry cultural and spiritual significance

Speech-Level Shifts in Life-Cycle Rituals

Life-cycle rituals, including birth ceremonies, circumcision celebrations, and weddings, demonstrate more flexible patterns of language use. Unlike agricultural rituals, which strongly preserve *Krama Inggil*, life-cycle ceremonies involve interaction among participants from different generations, resulting in systematic movement between Javanese and Indonesian.

During wedding ceremonies, for example, the ceremonial opening and announcements delivered by the master of ceremonies (*pembawa acara*) frequently combine Indonesian with Javanese honorific expressions. Younger MCs generally use Indonesian as the main communicative code but insert expressions such as *panjenengan*, *mugi-mugi*, and *kersane* to maintain cultural authenticity.

This pattern indicates that code-switching does not represent language abandonment. Instead, selected Javanese expressions operate as symbolic markers that maintain ritual identity while ensuring accessibility for younger participants who may not possess full competence in formal Javanese speech levels.

Birth and circumcision rituals show stronger retention of Javanese, particularly among elderly female practitioners. During *brokohan* and *syukuran sunatan*, older women employ formulaic expressions related to blessing, gratitude, and protection. Expressions such as *mugi dados anak ingkang soleh* ("may [the child] become a righteous person") demonstrate how Javanese linguistic forms are embedded within moral and religious expectations.

Younger participants generally communicate among themselves in Indonesian but shift toward *Krama* when interacting with elders. This shift illustrates that younger generations maintain receptive competence and understand the social expectation that certain situations require respectful linguistic forms.

Register Mixing in Communal Safety Prayers

The *kenduren* and *manakiban* rituals demonstrate the most complex multilingual practices. These ceremonies combine three linguistic resources: Javanese *Krama Inggil*, Arabic religious expressions, and Indonesian explanations.

The use of Javanese occurs mainly in expressions directed toward ancestors, community members, and cultural traditions, while Arabic formulas such as Quranic recitations and prayers are associated with Islamic authority. Indonesian appears when religious leaders explain the meaning of prayers to younger participants.

The following statement from Pak Zubaedy Asshofi (69 years old) illustrates this linguistic distribution:

"Bahasa Jawane kanggo ngomong karo leluhur. Bahasa Arabe kanggo ngomong karo Allah. Bahasa Indonesiane ya ben bocah-bocah mudeng."

This statement reveals that speakers possess an explicit understanding of language function. Each language variety has a specific social and spiritual role. Javanese indexes ancestry and cultural continuity, Arabic indexes religious legitimacy, and Indonesian indexes accessibility.

Therefore, multilingual practices in these rituals represent strategic linguistic adaptation rather than language replacement.

Formulaic Language and Ritual Memory in Sedekah Bumi

The *sedekah bumi* ceremony represents the most conservative linguistic domain because it preserves traditional expressions through oral transmission. The *pepujian* recited by the *sesepuh* contains archaic vocabulary and poetic structures rarely encountered in contemporary daily Javanese communication.

The preservation of these texts depends on exact repetition. The statement from the village elder that ritual expressions "*ora kena diganti*" ("must not be changed") demonstrates a strong language ideology in which linguistic form is considered inseparable from ritual effectiveness.

This belief transforms ritual language into a cultural artifact. The words themselves are viewed as carrying inherited authority because they connect present participants with previous generations. Consequently, language preservation occurs not only through communication but through collective memory and ritual obligation.

Agricultural Ceremonies: Slametan Panen and Wiwitan

Agricultural rituals are the most frequently practiced ritual type in the study communities, occurring at least twice annually (planting and harvest seasons). The *wiwitan*—a ceremonial first-cutting of rice attributed to the harvest goddess Dewi Sri—was observed in three paddy-farming villages and represents the most conservative linguistic context in the corpus. The *juru slametan* (ritual officiant) consistently used *Krama Inggil* throughout the *donga* (prayer), code-switching to *Krama* when addressing community elders and to *Ngoko* only in private, task-oriented communication with assistants.

A characteristic passage from the *wiwitan* prayer recorded in Desa Sumberjaya illustrates the formal register:

"Mugi-mugi Gusti Allah paring berkah dhumateng panen kita sedaya. Ibu Dewi Sri, kawula nyuwun panjenengan kersa ngayomi wiji lan uwit pantun ingkang badhe kita panèn sakmenika. (May God grant blessing upon all our harvest. Mother Dewi Sri, we humbly request that you see fit to protect the seeds and the rice plants that we are about to harvest).

Analysis of this excerpt reveals several *Krama Inggil* morphemes, including "*kawula*" ('I', humble form), "*panjenengan*" ('you', honorific form), "*kersa*" ('to deign'), and "*nyuwun*" ('to humbly request'). These forms are rarely used by second- and third-generation community members in everyday communication; however, all 20 first-generation

informants recognized them as appropriate and obligatory forms in ritual discourse. Five second-generation informants reported learning the prayer texts through memorization and repeated performance rather than through full linguistic comprehension. This finding supports recent studies suggesting that heritage and ritual languages may be maintained as symbolic cultural resources even when speakers possess limited communicative competence in the language itself (King & Bigelow, 2020). The continued use of Krama Inggil in ritual contexts therefore demonstrates the role of ceremonial practices in preserving linguistic forms associated with cultural identity, respect, and social hierarchy across generations.

Life-Cycle Rituals

Marriage ceremonies observed in the study area employ a three-phase linguistic structure. In the akad nikah phase, Arabic formulae prescribed by Islamic law dominate, but the surrounding ceremonial discourse—conducted by the MC (pembawa acara) and elder women—shifts systematically between Krama and Indonesian. Notably, the Krama register was maintained exclusively by first-generation informants; second-generation MCs employed Indonesian with Javanese honorific particles (e.g., panjenengan, kersane) inserted as code-switches.

Birth and circumcision rituals show a stronger retention of Javanese, particularly in the communal prayer (brokohan for birth; syukuran sunatan for circumcision). Elderly women (mbok dhukun) who conduct the bathing ritual use an almost entirely Krama lexicon, punctuated by Krama Inggil when addressing prayers to God or ancestral spirits. Younger female participants who assist in the ritual speak predominantly Indonesian among themselves but shift to Krama when addressed by elders, suggesting passive competence in the ritual register.

Communal Safety Prayers: Kenduren, manakiban

The kenduren manakiban is performed in response to perceived communal threats: disease outbreaks, flooding, or unexplained misfortune. Of all ritual types in the corpus, this ceremony displays the highest degree of register mixing. The prayer text combines Krama Inggil Javanese with Arabic invocations (Surah Al-Fatihah and selected doa) and occasional Indonesian explanatory glosses directed at younger participants. This tripartite mixture reflects the syncretic religious identity of the community—simultaneously Javanese, Islamic, and Indonesian national—and suggests that rather than a single language functioning as a sacred code, the community has constructed a composite ritual language that draws selectively on all three systems.

Informant Pak Zubaedy Asshofi (pseudonym), a 69-year-old first-generation settler who leads the kenduren in Desa Sumberjaya, articulated this explicitly:

"Bahasa Jawane kanggo ngomong karo leluhur. Bahasa Arabe kanggo ngomong karo Allah. Bahasa Indonesiane ya ben bocah-bocah mudeng."
(Javanese is for speaking to the ancestors. Arabic is for speaking to God.
Indonesian is so the young ones can understand).

This metalinguistic commentary encapsulates a sophisticated folk theory of linguistic register that aligns ritual language choice with addressee—a pattern Hymes (1972) would describe in terms of the SPEAKING framework, specifically the "ends" and "key" components of the speech event.

Ancestral Commemoration: Sedekah Bumi

The sedekah bumi (earth thanksgiving) is an annual ceremony in which the community collectively expresses gratitude to the earth and ancestral spirits for agricultural abundance and communal wellbeing. Observed in three villages, the ceremony features an extended prose poem (pepujian) recited by the sesepuh (village elder) in Krama Inggil, followed by communal eating. The pepujian texts are transmitted orally from generation to generation and represent the most archaic Javanese lexis in the corpus, including terms rarely attested in contemporary Central Javanese usage.

The sesepuh of Desa Sumberjaya a 68-year-old first-generation settler originally from Banjarnegara, Central Java, performed the sedekah bumi pepujian from memory without any written guide. When asked how he learned it, he replied that his own father had taught him each phrase during the journey to Sulawesi Tenggara by plane in 1982, emphasising that the words must be spoken exactly as received: "ora kena diganti" (they must not be changed). This prescriptive stance toward textual fidelity is consistent with a ritual language ideology in which linguistic form is indexically tied to efficacy.

Functions of Ritual Javanese in the Diaspora Context

Cross-cutting the four ritual domains, the data reveal three inter-related functions served by ritual Javanese in the South Konawe transmigrant context.

First, identity marking: The maintenance of Krama and Krama Inggil in ritual contexts serves as a performance of Javanese-ness that distinguishes the community from neighbouring Bali, Sunda and Bugis communities. Several informants explicitly stated that conducting rituals in Javanese was essential to "being truly Javanese" (dadi wong Jawa tenan), even if they could not fully explain the meaning of the archaic terms used.

Second, intergenerational cohesion: Ritual events constitute some of the few contexts in which three generations interact around a shared linguistic code. Even when younger participants cannot produce Krama forms, their presence as audience and their gradual exposure to ritual speech constitutes a form of language socialisation that sustains at least passive familiarity with the ancestral register (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).

Third, spiritual legitimacy: Informants consistently expressed the belief that prayers offered in Javanese "reach" their intended recipients – ancestors, spirits, and the divine – more effectively than those offered in Indonesian. This efficacy belief (kepercayaan khasiat) constitutes a powerful ideological motivation for language maintenance that is insulated from the pragmatic pressures that drive language shift in everyday domains.

Theoretical Interpretation: Ritual Javanese as Language Maintenance, Ethnolinguistic Identity, and Code-Switching Practice

The findings of this study provide important insights into how minority language maintenance operates within a transmigrant context. Rather than demonstrating a simple process of language loss caused by prolonged contact with Indonesian and other regional languages, the Lalembuu Javanese community illustrates a selective maintenance pattern in which ritual domains function as protected linguistic spaces. This pattern can be interpreted through three interconnected theoretical perspectives: Fishman's domain-based theory of language maintenance, ethnolinguistic identity theory, and code-switching theory.

Ritual Domains and Fishman's Theory of Language Maintenance

From the perspective of Fishman (1991) theory of language maintenance and shift, the survival of a minority language depends strongly on the availability of specific social domains in which the language continues to serve meaningful functions. The findings demonstrate that Javanese in Lalembuu has undergone a process of domain specialization, where its strongest maintenance occurs not in everyday communication but in culturally significant ritual domains.

The four identified domains – agricultural ceremonies, life-cycle rituals, communal safety prayers, and ancestral commemorations – represent what Fishman describes as high-value domains that support intergenerational language transmission. Although Indonesian has replaced Javanese in many formal and daily interactions, ritual contexts continue to provide institutional and social support for ancestral language use. The obligatory use of Krama and Krama Inggil in these events indicates that ritual participation reinforces the perception that Javanese remains necessary, appropriate, and meaningful in specific cultural situations.

This finding expands Fishman's domain theory by demonstrating that in migrant communities, language maintenance does not necessarily require broad everyday usage.

Instead, a minority language may survive through concentrated use in symbolic domains where linguistic forms are connected to cultural authority and collective memory. In this sense, rituals function as "maintenance domains" that protect linguistic features from complete disappearance.

Ritual Language and Ethnolinguistic Identity

The findings also support ethnolinguistic identity theory, particularly the idea that language functions as a marker of group membership and cultural belonging. According to this perspective, speakers maintain particular linguistic practices because these practices symbolize who they are and where they come from.

In Lalembuu, the continued use of Krama Inggil during rituals represents more than the preservation of vocabulary or grammatical forms. It constitutes a symbolic performance of Javanese identity (*dadi wong Jawa tenan*). Informants' statements that rituals conducted without Javanese would feel incomplete indicate that language has acquired an indexical relationship with ethnicity, ancestry, and authenticity.

This relationship is especially significant in a transmigrant setting where Javanese communities live among Bugis, Balinese, Sundanese, and Tolaki-speaking populations. Ritual Javanese creates a symbolic boundary that distinguishes the community while simultaneously strengthening internal solidarity. Therefore, language maintenance in Lalembuu is not merely a response to linguistic change but also a strategy for maintaining ethnic continuity in a multicultural environment.

Furthermore, the transmission of ritual expressions through elders, memorization, and repeated participation demonstrates that language socialization occurs through cultural practice. Younger generations who may lack active competence in Krama still acquire familiarity with ritual expressions as part of their ethnic identity formation. Thus, ritual participation becomes an important mechanism through which ethnolinguistic identity is reproduced across generations.

Code-Switching as a Strategy of Linguistic Adaptation

The patterns of language alternation observed in rituals further demonstrate that language maintenance and language adaptation occur simultaneously. The findings reveal systematic code-switching between Javanese, Indonesian, and Arabic rather than random language mixing.

Following code-switching theories proposed by scholars such as (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993), the choice of language varieties reflects social meaning, participant relationships, and communicative purposes. In Lalembuu rituals, Javanese is primarily associated with ancestral connection, respect, and cultural continuity; Arabic is associated with Islamic authority and communication with God; while Indonesian functions as an explanatory and inclusive language for younger participants.

The statement by Pak Zubaedy Asshofi—"Bahasa Jawane kanggo ngomong karo leluhur. Bahasa Arabe kanggo ngomong karo Allah. Bahasa Indonesiane ya ben bocah-bocah mudeng" (Javanese is for speaking with ancestors, Arabic is for speaking with God, and Indonesian is so children can understand)—illustrates that community members possess an explicit ideology regarding the functional distribution of languages.

This pattern corresponds with Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, where speakers select linguistic codes according to the social relationship and expected norms associated with a particular interaction. The use of Krama Inggil during prayers and ancestral communication represents an unmarked choice because it aligns with cultural expectations, whereas the insertion of Indonesian serves a marked but strategic function: ensuring comprehension and participation among younger generations.

Therefore, code-switching in Lalembuu rituals should not be interpreted as evidence of linguistic decline. Instead, it represents a dynamic adaptation strategy through which the community balances cultural preservation with communicative accessibility.

Integrative Interpretation

Taken together, the findings suggest that ritual Javanese in South Konawe operates through a complex relationship between maintenance, identity, and linguistic adaptation. Fishman's domain theory explains why Javanese survives within specific ritual spaces; ethnolinguistic identity theory explains why community members continue to value and reproduce these practices; and code-switching theory explains how multiple languages coexist within ritual performances.

The Lalembuu case demonstrates that minority language survival in transmigrant communities is not determined solely by the amount of daily language use but also by the symbolic power attached to particular linguistic practices. Rituals function as cultural institutions where language, identity, spirituality, and collective memory intersect. Consequently, ritual Javanese represents not only a preserved linguistic form but also a social mechanism through which the community negotiates continuity and change in a multilingual environment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that language maintenance among transmigrant communities is a dynamic process shaped by social meanings, cultural values, and community practices. The survival of Javanese in Lalembuu shows that minority language continuity depends not only on frequent everyday communication but also on meaningful social spaces where the language remains valued and legitimate. Theoretically, this study contributes to language maintenance research by emphasizing the importance of culturally embedded domains in sustaining heritage languages. It further shows that linguistic continuity can occur through the selective preservation of culturally significant practices rather than the complete retention of a language system, while highlighting the influence of language ideology and collective identity on maintaining ancestral linguistic resources. More broadly, sustainable heritage language preservation requires attention to cultural institutions, social relationships, and community values alongside linguistic competence. Future research should examine how younger generations negotiate heritage language learning and how community-based initiatives support linguistic continuity in changing social environments.

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