

# The Student's Perspective Concerning the Regional Language Maintenance at Universitas Kristen Indonesia

**Gunawan Tambunsaribu**

**Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia**

gunawan.tambunsaribu@uki.ac.id

## Abstract

The researcher aims to examine the perspectives of Universitas Kristen Indonesia students who come from outside Jakarta regarding maintaining their regional languages. The researcher wants to determine which regional languages of the islands are included as the top 10 regional languages best known by Indonesian Christian University students. He also wants to know the activities conducted by the students to maintain or maintain their regional languages when they live in Jakarta. The researcher uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research uses interviews as the technique to obtain data. The respondents in this research were the students from the Universitas Kristen Indonesia who came from different islands and archipelago. The respondents were 20 students, who came from 5 islands and 4 archipelagos in Indonesia, namely Sumatra Island, Java Island, Kalimantan Island, Sulawesi Island, Papua Island, Riau Islands, Bangka Belitung Islands, Nusa Tenggara Islands, Maluku Island. Based on the findings, it is found that one of the factors why the students who came from outside Jakarta still speak their regional language is because they join some communities in which the members are from the same villages and use the same regional language as they do.

**Keywords:** *Indonesian islands and archipelagoes, regional languages, language maintenance*

## Introduction

Indonesia is a country that has a vast territory and many islands with thousands of regional languages. As the younger generation, the students are expected to be able to maintain the language and the cultural diversity in Indonesia because it is a special wealth possessed by Indonesia. Indonesia is renowned for its remarkable linguistic diversity, boasting over 700 regional languages spoken across its vast archipelago. This extensive array of languages positions Indonesia as one of the most linguistically diverse nations globally. The majority of these languages belong to the Austronesian language family, prevalent in the western and central regions, while the eastern regions, particularly Papua and the Maluku Islands, are home to numerous Papuan languages. The most widely spoken native language is Javanese, primarily used in central and eastern Java, as well as in other regions due to migration (Aziz, 2024; Tambunsaribu, 2024).

Universitas Kristen Indonesia (Christian University of Indonesia) is most well-known as a university that has students who originally came from various islands. Students who come from many remote areas register to study at Universitas Kristen Indonesia for several positive reasons, including because Universitas Kristen Indonesia collaborates with many regional governments from various islands so regional governments send prospective students who receive regional government scholarships to study at Universitas Kristen Indonesia. For the students who come from outside Jakarta City (the capital city of Indonesia), they will of course bring their regional culture and language. These students will live together and communicate with those who have diverse

languages and cultures in their new environment, Jakarta City. Some students may choose to live in a dormitory, rent a rented house, just rent a room, and may choose to live with families who have long moved and become native residents of the city of Jakarta. Students who come from outside Java will of course meet and form friendships with fellow students on campus. Their new friends may come from different islands so they have different regional languages. In their daily lives in the city of Jakarta, the process of interaction and communication occurs using the national language, namely Bahasa Indonesia. This interaction makes the students who came from rural areas rarely use their respective regional languages. Due to the language and cultural diversities of the students in Universitas Kristen Indonesia, the researcher is interested in examining the perspectives of the UKI's students who came from outside Jakarta on how they maintain their regional languages (Tambunsaribu, 2024).

Indonesia consists of 38 provinces. There is a new province from the previous 37 provinces, namely Papua Barat Daya Province (based on Law No. 29 of 2022 about the establishment of Papua Barat Daya Province, dated 8 December 2022). Indonesia has five main islands (Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua) and four archipelagos (Riau, Bangka, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku). Sumatera Island covers many provinces, namely Aceh, Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Barat, Riau, Jambi, Sumatera Selatan, Bengkulu, and Lampung. Jawa Island covers many provinces, namely DKI Jakarta, Jawa Barat, Banten, Jawa Tengah, DI Yogyakarta, and Jawa Timur. Kalimantan Island covers many provinces, namely Kalimantan Barat, Kalimantan Tengah, Kalimantan Selatan, Kalimantan Timur, and Kalimantan Utara. Sulawesi Island covers many provinces, namely Sulawesi Utara, Gorontalo, Sulawesi Tengah, Sulawesi Selatan, Sulawesi Barat, and Sulawesi Tenggara. Papua Island covers many provinces, namely Papua, Papua Barat, Papua Selatan, Papua Tengah, Papua Pegunungan, and Papua Barat Daya. Riau archipelago covers only one province, namely Kepulauan Riau. The Bangka Belitung archipelago covers Kepulauan Bangka Belitung province. Nusa Tenggara Archipelago (mostly known as Sunda Kecil) covers many provinces, namely Bali, Nusa Tenggara Barat, and Nusa Tenggara Timur. Maluku archipelago covers only two provinces, namely Maluku and Maluku Utara (UNESCO, 2024). Thus, the number of provinces in Indonesia in 2023 is 38 provinces. As an archipelagic country, Indonesia consists of thousands of islands interconnected by straits and seas. Currently, there are 16,056 islands have been registered with valid coordinates by the United Nations (Dirhamssyah et al., 2022).

A recent study by Johnson and Lee (2022) explores the multifaceted nature of language, emphasizing its role as a dynamic system of communication that evolves with cultural and technological changes. They argue that language is not merely a set of grammatical rules but a living entity that reflects and shapes human thought and society. Language is a product of human culture, which has a vital role in human social relations. Language is also known as the identity of an ethnicity or tribe (Alika et al., 2017). In addition, Zuckermann (2020) introduced the field of "revivalistics," examining the reclamation and revitalization of languages, particularly focusing on the revival of Hebrew and language reclamation efforts in Australia. This research underscores the historical significance of language as a repository of cultural identity and heritage, highlighting how language revival can reconnect communities with their ancestral roots and historical narratives.

According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (Salam & Ponto, 2021), Indonesia is a country that is rich in cultural and linguistic diversities. The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicates that Indonesia is home to 718 languages, with 326 of these languages spoken in Papua alone. This vast

linguistic diversity underscores Indonesia's position as one of the world's most linguistically rich nations (Kemdikbudristek, 2023).

Language maintenance refers to the efforts and practices employed by speech communities to sustain the use of their native languages amidst external pressures from dominant or global languages. (Kaveh & Sandoval, 2024; Komalasasi & Rusdiana, 2017). This process involves deliberate actions aimed at preserving linguistic heritage and ensuring intergenerational transmission. A study by Kaveh and Sandoval investigates how Jewish-Israeli immigrant parents' approaches to Hebrew maintenance relate to their emotional investments and connections to their heritage culture. The research highlights that language maintenance fosters higher self-esteem, a stronger sense of cultural identity, family cohesion, and enhanced social relationships. It also emphasizes that parents recognize heritage language as a valuable asset for their children's future careers (Kaveh & Sandoval, 2024).

Positive attitudes within language communities significantly contribute to the maintenance and vitality of their native languages. A 2020 study by Kafle and Li, published in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, examined the language attitudes of the Telugu-speaking community in New Zealand. The research revealed that mothers' positive perceptions of their native language were strongly linked to their efforts in teaching it to their children, underscoring the role of familial encouragement in language preservation. Similarly, a 2024 study by Kaveh and Sandoval, published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, explored the language attitudes of Jewish-Israeli immigrant parents towards Hebrew maintenance. The findings highlighted that these parents' positive attitudes were associated with increased use of Hebrew at home, fostering stronger cultural identity and family cohesion (Kafle & Li, 2020; Kaveh & Sandoval, 2024).

According to UNESCO (2003), based on what is written in a book titled "Language Vitality and Endangerment," there are nine factors that determine language vitality, namely: 1) intergenerational language transmission; 2) absolute number of speakers; 3) proportion of speakers within the total population; 4) shifts in domains of language use; 5) response to new domains and media; 6) availability of materials for language and literacy; 7) government and institutional language attitudes and policies, including office status and use; 8) community member's attitudes toward their language; and 9) type and quality of documentation

According to Miller (in Ernati, E., & Wijaya, 2024; Tambunsaribu, 2024), three factors support language maintenance namely a) prestige and loyalty factors, b) migration and regional concentration factors, and c) mass media publications. The prestige and loyalty factor means that if a speaker is proud of his culture, including his language, then that person will use his regional language amid a heterogeneous community. Migration and regional concentration factors mean that if several people who speak a language migrate to an area and their number increases over time so that it exceeds the population of the native population of that area, then this can cause a language shift. On the other hand, in terms of regional concentration, this incident supports the maintenance of the regional languages of the immigrants. Mass media publications are one of the means for sharing information with all the people around the world. UNESCO (2024) stated that to prevent the extinction of some indigenous languages by using digital empowerment. This means that the text of each language is made in digital forms so it can be accessed and learned easily by people via their computers and smartphones.

There are three problems that this research wants to discuss namely: 1) of all the islands in Indonesia, which regional languages of the islands are included as the top 10

regional languages best known by the students studying Universitas Kristen Indonesia? 2) What do the students usually do to maintain their regional languages while they are living in Jakarta, where the citizens use Bahasa Indonesian (the national language of Indonesia) as their daily language? and 3) What sentences are often asked by the students as their best ways to get to know the other students from different islands, using the top 5 regional languages best known by Indonesian Christian University students?

## **Method**

The researcher took the data from 20 students, who came from 5 islands and four archipelagos in Indonesia, namely the Sumatra Islands, Java Islands, Kalimantan Islands, Sulawesi Islands, Papua Islands, Riau Islands, Bangka Belitung Islands, Nusa Tenggara Islands, and Maluku Islands.

The research collected the data by using interviews and questionnaires. The respondents in this research are students studying at Universitas Kristen Indonesia. The respondents came from different islands and different archipelagos of Indonesia. In addition, they also are active users of their regional languages. Before conducting the interview, the researcher conducted observation and met the students face to face to ask them about their identities, including the villages where they came from. After that, the researcher asked for the contact numbers of those who were willing to help the researcher as volunteers to be interviewed and to fill out the research survey. Then, the researcher arranged a meeting schedule for interviewing them according to the agreed time.

## **Findings**

Based on the findings, it is found that one of the factors why the students who came from outside Jakarta still speak their regional language is because they join some communities in which the members are from the same villages and use the same regional language as they do. It is similar to what UNESCO stated that community member's attitudes toward their languages are one of the factors which support language maintenance (UNESCO, 2003).

The top 10 most popular regional languages used by the students of Universitas Kristen Indonesia are: 1) the Batakese language (from North Sumatra Province), 2) the Padang language (from West Sumatra Province), 3) the Lampung language (from Bandar Lampung Province), 4) the Javanese language (from Central Java & East Java Provinces), 5) the Betawinese language (from DKI Jakarta Province), 6) the Maduranese language (from East Java Province), 7) the Sundanese language (from West Java Province), 8) the Manadonese language (from North Sulawesi Province), 9) the Bugis language (from South Sulawesi), and 10) the Ambonese language (from Central Maluku). From the 10 regional languages, the researcher surveyed UKI's students to obtain data on the five most familiar tribal languages in Indonesia, especially at the Universitas Kristen Indonesia. The survey results showed that the five most famous tribal names in Indonesia, according to UKI's students, are 1) the Batak tribe, 2) the Manado tribe, 3) the Betawi tribe, 4) the Javanese tribe, and 5) the Sundanese tribe.

In this research, it is found that most of the respondents love their regional language. It leads to making them proud to use their regional languages with the people who are in the same communities. Some of the respondents also stated that they were very happy if some of their new friends came from different islands and wanted to learn their regional

language. This research finding supports what some researchers found that one of the two factors in language maintenance is the prestige and the loyalty factor (Miller in Tambunsaribu, 2024; Alika et al., 2017).

## **Discussion**

### **Top 10 most popular regional languages used by the students of Universitas Kristen Indonesia**

The following are the names of the four islands along with the names of the provinces and the names of the 10 regional languages that are most familiar to UKI students who come from outside the province of DKI Jakarta, where Universitas Kristen Indonesia is located.

#### **a. Sumatra Island**

According to the UKI's students, they said that there are three most well-known regional languages of Sumatra Island spoken by the students in Universitas Kristen Indonesia, namely Bataknese language (from North Sumatra Province), Padang language (from West Sumatra Province), and Lampung language (from Bandar Lampung Province).

#### **b. Java Island**

From the survey result, it is found that there are four most well-known regional languages spoken by the people who come from Java Island, namely Javanese language (from Central Java & East Java Provinces), Betawinese language (from DKI Jakarta Province), Maduranese language (from East Java Province), and Sundanese language (from West Java Province). These four languages are usually spoken by some of the UKI's students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia.

#### **c. Sulawesi Island**

Based on the research findings, the researcher found out that there are two most well-known regional languages used by some of the students in Universitas Kristen Indonesia they are Manadonese language (from North Sulawesi Province) and Bugis language (from South Sulawesi).

#### **d. Maluku Island**

From the survey result, it is found that there is only one well-known regional language used by Maluku people spoken by some of UKI's students, namely Ambonese language (from Central Maluku)

### **Five (5) Most Well-known Tribes in Indonesia**

From the 10 regional languages, the researcher surveyed UKI's students to obtain data on the five most familiar tribal languages in Indonesia, especially at the Universitas Kristen Indonesia. The survey results showed that the five most famous tribal names in Indonesia, according to UKI's students, are 1) the Batak tribe, 2) the Manado tribe, 3) the Betawi tribe, 4) the Javanese tribe, and 5) the Sundanese tribe

5 list of questions that respondents usually ask when getting to know other people using the five regional languages most familiar to respondents.

The following are the sentences in Bahasa Indonesia.

1. *Siapa nama kamu?* (What is your name?)
2. *Dari mana kamu berasal?* (2. Where are you from?)
3. *Apakah hobi kamu?* (3. What is your hobby?)
4. *Bagaimana kabar kamu?* (4. How are you?)
5. *Kapan ulang tahun kamu?* (5. When is your birthday?)

The above Indonesian sentences are translated into the five regional languages that the respondents (UKI students) are familiar with.

a. Javanese language

*Sopo jeneng mu?*  
*Teko endhi deso mu?*  
*Opo kesenengan mu?*  
*Piye kabare?*  
*Kapan ulang tahun mu?*

b. Bataknese language

*Ise goarmu?*  
*Sian dia asalmu?*  
*Aha hobbymu??*  
*Boa kabarmu?*  
*Andigan i ulang tahunmu?*

c. Manadonese language

*Ngana pe nama sapa ang?*  
*Ngana orang mana?*  
*Apa ngana pe hobi?*  
*Ngana apa kabar?*  
*Tempo apa ngana pe hari jadi?*

d. Sundanese language

*Saha nami anjeun?*  
*Timana asaha anjeun?*  
*Naon karaseup anjeun?*  
*Kumaha kabar anjeun?*  
*Iraha tepang tahun anjeun?*

e. Betawinese language

*Siape nama lu?*  
*Dari mane lu berasal?*  
*Hobi lu apaan?*  
*Gimane kabar lu?*  
*Ulang tahun lu kapan?*

### **How the Students Maintain Their Regional Languages**

From the results of a survey conducted by the researcher on the UKI's students, who come from different islands and have different regional languages, there are various ways the students maintain their regional languages while they are living in Jakarta.

Some of the ways they do this are as follows:

- 1) They communicate with their parents or siblings almost every day in their regional languages using their cell phones.
- 2) They join some students' communities from the same islands, both academic and non-academic communities, so they can communicate using their regional languages.
- 3) They also want to teach new people they know who are interested in learning their regional languages.
- 4) Some of them actively write posts on their social media using their regional languages.
- 5) Some write literary works such as poetry, song lyrics, diaries, and short stories using their regional languages in their diary books.

## Conclusion

From the findings of this research, it is found that there are some positive attitudes from the UKI's students to maintain regional languages as one of Indonesia's heritages from generation to generation. The loyalty and the prestige they feel about their regional languages can prevent language extinction. Indonesian governments can also teach all these positive attitudes toward language maintenance to the young generation nowadays to love the regional languages.

From this research, we can find that Universitas Kristen Indonesia is rich in culture, especially in the use of regional (regional) languages. Higher education students can be fluent in some regional languages if they can practice them daily with their peers who are native speakers of those regional languages. It may need some years to master one or more regional languages due to the different pronunciations of their native regional languages, but if they practice for at least four years, the minimum year of college study, they can be fluent and master one or more of the regional languages (Galingging & Tambunsaribu, 2021; Tambunsaribu, 2022). Language maintenance can also be established by mentoring and supervising the use of languages by people who are interested in learning the languages (Suandi & Sutama, 2021). Some other actions can be done in preserving languages such as the use of technology to publish books or documents related to linguistics, literary works, and dual-language books (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024; Ohle & Bartles, 2016); teaching language to people by using some material such as folktales, poems, narrative text, old music containing cultural values and other interesting activities (Yektingtyas & Modouw, 2017; Rahman & Letlora, 2018; Zeitlin, 2003).

We can conclude that universities, especially Universitas Kristen Indonesia, can be the place for people to learn the regional languages of different islands in Indonesia. The students of Universitas Kristen Indonesia, who come from several islands, can also be ambassadors for regional language maintenance (Tambunsaribu, 2024).

## Acknowledgment

First of all, the author thanks God for His grace and mercy. The author would like to thank Universitas Kristen Indonesia where the author works. The author also gives thanks to the English Literature Department for its support to the author in conducting this research. The author gives thanks to all the students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia who have given their attention and contribution as the respondents in this research. The author also gives thanks to all his coworkers, lecturers, and staff, in the English Literature Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia for their big support to the author in the whole process of finishing this research.

## References

- Alika et al. (2017). Faktor Pemertahanan Bahasa Minangkabau Ragam Nonformal dalam Ranah Kekariban Pada Komunitas Seni Sakato di Kota Yogyakarta. *Deiksis-Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 4(2), 32.
- Aziz, E. A. (2024). Saving Indonesia's more than 700 languages. *Time*. <https://time.com/7012839/endang-aminudin-aziz/>
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2024). *Statistik Indonesia 2024: Statistcal Yearbook of Indonesia 2024*. Volume 52. Badan Pusat Statistik: BPS-Statitics Indonesia. Website:

- <https://www.bps.go.id/id/publication/2024/02/28/c1bacde03256343b2bf769b0/statistik-indonesia-2024.html>
- Dirhamsyah, D., Umam, S., & Arifin, Z. (2022). Maritime law enforcement: Indonesia's experience against illegal fishing. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 229, 106304.
- Erniati, E., & Wijaya, D. (2023). Patterns of Language Maintenance and Use in the Family Environment in Negeri Wakasihu, Maluku. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 11(4), 555-574.
- Johnson, M., & Lee, S. (2022). Rethinking language: Beyond rules and structures. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 32(1), 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jla.2022.5678>.
- Kafle, N., & Li, W. (2020). The role of attitudes in language shift and language maintenance in the Telugu community in New Zealand. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2020(264), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2020-2102>.
- Kaveh, M., & Sandoval, M. (2024). Language maintenance, emotional investments, family values, and heritage language use among Jewish-Israeli immigrant parents. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 88, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2380819>.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2023). *Regulatory framework for local language development in Indonesia*. [https://berkas.dpr.go.id/pusaka/files/info\\_singkat/Info%20Singkat-XV-4-II-P3DI-Februari-2023-210-EN.pdf](https://berkas.dpr.go.id/pusaka/files/info_singkat/Info%20Singkat-XV-4-II-P3DI-Februari-2023-210-EN.pdf).
- Komalasari, I., & Rusdiana, I. (2017). Upaya Pemertahanan Bahasa. Prosiding 2nd NEDS Proceedings. *2nd National English Department Seminar (NEDS)* (pp. 105-112). Banjarmasin: Pusat Pengelolaan Jurnal Dan Penerbitan Ulm.
- Mlambo, R., & Matfunjwa, M. (2024). The use of technology to maintain the indigenous languages of South Africa. *Literatur-Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 45(1), 2007.
- Ohle, K., & Bartles, J. (2016). Using Dual-Language Books to Maintain Language & Culture in Alaska Native Communities.
- Rahman, F., & Letlora, P. S. (2018). Cultural Maintenance: Rediscovering the Endangered Oral Tradition of Maluku (A Case Study on "Kapata" of Central Maluku). *Advances in language and literary studies*, 9(2), 91-97.
- Salam, S., & Ponto, D. (2021). Pemertahanan Bahasa Minahasa di Desa Kaaruyan. *Ideas: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Budaya*, 7(3), 241-252.
- Suandi, I. N., & Utama, I. M. (2021, April). Balinese Language Elucidation as an Attempt to Maintain Balinese Language in Bali Province. In *2nd International Conference on Technology and Educational Science (ICTES 2020)* (pp. 305-309). Atlantis Press.
- Tambunsaribu, G., & Galingging, Y. (2021). Masalah yang Dihadapi Pelajar Bahasa Inggris dalam Memahami Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris. *Jurnal Dialektika*, 8(1), 30-41.
- Tambunsaribu, G. (2022). Ketidakkonsistenan Beberapa Huruf Konsonan Dalam Bahasa Inggris. *Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Budaya*, 9(2), 156-171.
- Tambunsaribu, G. (2024). Transmigrant Students' Motivation and Problems in Learning Regional Languages: Language Maintenance. *SOSHUM: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora*, 14(1), 82-89.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Language Vitality and Endangerment*. America: International Expert Meeting on UNESCO.



- UNESCO. (2024). Digital maintenance of Indigenous languages: At the intersection of technology and culture. Website: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-maintenance-indigenous-languages-intersection-technology-and-culture>.
- Yektiningtyas, W., & Modouw, J. (2017). Infusing culture in English learning: an attempt to maintain cultural heritages in Jayapura municipality, Papua. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 20(1), 40-48.
- Zeitlin, S. J. (2003). The people's poetry. *Oral Tradition*, 18(1), 6-13.
- Zuckermann, G. (2020). *Revivalistics: From the Genesis of Israeli to language reclamation in Australia and beyond*. Oxford University Press.