



Shift of Muarasipongi Language among Teenagers in Educational Context

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Abstract

This study explores the language shift occurring among teenagers in Muarasipongi, North Sumatra, focusing on the educational context. As globalization and national education policies promote the use of Indonesian, local languages face marginalization. Through qualitative fieldwork and sociolinguistic analysis, this research identifies the factors contributing to the decline of Muarasipongi language use among youth, particularly in school settings. Findings reveal that institutional language practices, peer influence, and digital media contribute significantly to the shift. The study recommends culturally responsive education models to preserve linguistic heritage while supporting academic achievement.



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1. Introduction

Language is more than a tool for communication—it is a vessel of cultural heritage, identity, and collective memory. In multilingual societies like Indonesia, local languages play a crucial role in maintaining ethnic diversity and transmitting indigenous knowledge across generations. However, the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, coupled with the growing influence of English in education and media, has led to a gradual erosion of regional languages, particularly among younger speakers.

The Muarasipongi language, a variant within the Mandailing-Angkola linguistic continuum spoken in Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra, is currently experiencing a noticeable shift among teenagers. This shift is most evident in educational contexts, where institutional language policies, peer dynamics, and digital media converge to shape linguistic preferences. As teenagers increasingly adopt Bahasa Indonesia and English for academic and social purposes, the use of Muarasipongi language becomes confined to informal and familial domains, if not abandoned altogether.

Language shift, as defined by Fishman (1991), refers to the process by which a speech community transitions from using one language to another across generations, often resulting in the decline or loss of the original language. In educational settings, this shift

is accelerated by curricular frameworks that prioritize national and global languages, leaving little room for local linguistic expression. Holmes (2013) argues that language choices are influenced by perceived status, utility, and identity alignment, especially among adolescents who are navigating social belonging and future aspirations.

In the case of Muarasipongi teenagers, the pressure to conform to dominant linguistic norms is compounded by the lack of institutional support for local language preservation. Teachers rarely incorporate Muarasipongi language into classroom discourse, citing standardized curricula and assessment demands. Moreover, digital platforms—ranging from social media to e-learning tools—reinforce the use of Indonesian and English, further marginalizing local languages. As Crystal (2000) warns, “when a language dies, so much more than words are lost; a whole way of understanding the world disappears.”

This study seeks to investigate the sociolinguistic dynamics of language shift among Muarasipongi teenagers within educational environments. It aims to identify the factors contributing to this shift, examine the patterns of language use and attitudes, and explore the implications for cultural identity and educational equity. By adopting a qualitative methodology grounded in sociolinguistic theory, the research contributes to broader discussions on linguistic diversity, cultural sustainability, and the role of education in shaping language ideologies.

Ultimately, the study advocates for a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational model—one that recognizes the value of local languages not only as heritage assets but also as pedagogical resources that enrich learning and affirm identity

Language is not only a medium of communication but also a carrier of cultural identity. In Muarasipongi, a subdistrict in Mandailing Natal Regency, the local language—part of the Mandailing-Angkola linguistic group—is experiencing a decline in use among teenagers. This phenomenon is especially evident in educational settings, where Bahasa Indonesia dominates formal instruction and interaction. The shift raises concerns about cultural erosion and the weakening of intergenerational transmission of local knowledge.

This study investigates the dynamics of language shift among Muarasipongi teenagers, aiming to understand the sociolinguistic factors behind it and propose educational strategies to mitigate its impact.

2. Literature Review

Language used by teenagers—often referred to as youth language or teenage slang—is a dynamic and informal linguistic variety that reflects the social identity, creativity, and communicative needs of adolescents. According to Nuraeni and Pahamzah (2021), teenage slang is a generation-specific style of language that serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool for constructing identity and differentiating youth from the adult world. This form of language is characterized by frequent use of acronyms, clipped words, creative coinages, and borrowed expressions, often shaped by digital media, pop culture, and peer interactions. Bell (2016) further explains that adolescent

language use is deeply tied to developmental processes, where teenagers experiment with linguistic forms to assert independence, signal group membership, and navigate social hierarchies. Slang and informal expressions allow them to express humor, rebellion, intimacy, and emotional nuance in ways that standard language may not accommodate.

A sociolinguistic perspective, teenage language is not merely a deviation from formal norms but a legitimate and evolving register that reflects broader cultural and technological shifts. Bahar et al. (2025) argue that youth slang functions as a marker of social identity, enabling teenagers to create in-group solidarity while resisting adult surveillance and linguistic authority. Their study found that terms like “YOLO,” “salty,” “PAP,” and “BFR” are commonly used among high school students to express emotions, attitudes, and shared experiences. These expressions often carry meanings that are context-dependent and rapidly change over time, making youth language one of the most fluid and innovative domains of linguistic practice. Harwood (2020), drawing on Social Identity Theory, emphasizes that language choices among teenagers are strategic acts of self-categorization, where individuals align themselves with particular social groups through linguistic behavior.

In essence, teenage language is a rich site of linguistic innovation and social meaning. It reflects the interplay between individual agency and collective identity, shaped by age, culture, media, and peer dynamics. For educators and researchers, understanding this linguistic variety is crucial for engaging youth meaningfully and appreciating the cultural depth embedded in their everyday communication.

Language shift remains a critical concern in sociolinguistics, particularly in multilingual societies where dominant languages increasingly displace minority or heritage languages. Recent studies between 2023 and 2025 have expanded our understanding of this phenomenon, especially in relation to globalization, education, and digital transformation.

2.1 Globalization and Cultural Identity

Kasiyarno & Apriyanto (2025) examined the impact of globalization on regional language decline in Indonesia. Their study found that global cultural flows—especially through social media and entertainment—have significantly reduced the use of local languages among youth. The authors argue that Indonesian and foreign languages now dominate daily communication, leading to a weakening of local linguistic identity. However, they also highlight the potential of digital platforms to revitalize local languages through targeted cultural campaigns and educational integration.

2.2 Family Language Policy and Pandemic Disruption

Meir et al. (2025) conducted a comparative study across Cyprus, Germany, Israel, and Sweden to analyze home language shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Family

Language Policy (FLP) framework, they found that external disruptions—such as school closures and increased home time—led to varied outcomes. In some contexts, minority language use increased due to parental engagement, while in others, dominant languages gained ground due to digital schooling. The study underscores the fragility of linguistic sustainability and calls for adaptive language policies that support minority language maintenance in times of crisis.

2.3 Curriculum Design and Language for Specific Purposes

Sapawi & Yusoff (2025) conducted a systematic review of 24 studies on language curriculum development, emphasizing the shift toward domain-specific language education. While not focused solely on minority languages, their findings reveal that educational systems increasingly prioritize functional language skills aligned with global competitiveness. This shift often sidelines local languages unless explicitly integrated into curriculum frameworks. The authors advocate for localized, learner-centered approaches that balance pedagogical innovation with cultural relevance.

2.4 Youth Attitudes and Linguistic Prestige

Although not directly cited above, recent trends in youth language attitudes show that teenagers often associate dominant languages (e.g., Indonesian, English) with modernity, success, and social mobility. This aligns with Holmes' (2013) earlier assertion that language shift is driven by perceived prestige and utility. Contemporary studies reinforce this, showing that without institutional and familial reinforcement, minority languages struggle to remain relevant among younger speakers.

These studies collectively demonstrate that language shift is a multifaceted process influenced by globalization, education policy, family dynamics, and technological change. For communities like Muarasipongi, these insights offer a valuable foundation for designing interventions—such as culturally responsive curricula, digital revitalization strategies, and community-based language programs—that can help sustain linguistic heritage in the face of rapid change.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in sociolinguistic inquiry, aiming to explore the nuanced processes of language shift among teenagers in Muarasipongi. The qualitative approach is chosen to capture the depth of participants' linguistic experiences, attitudes, and contextual influences that cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures alone (Creswell, 2013).

A qualitative research design grounded in sociolinguistic inquiry is a methodological framework that seeks to explore how language operates within its social, cultural, and institutional contexts by engaging deeply with the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell

and Poth (2023), emphasizes the collection of rich, descriptive data through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, allowing researchers to interpret meanings, patterns, and social processes rather than quantify variables. In sociolinguistics, language is viewed not merely as a system of grammar and vocabulary, but as a dynamic social practice that reflects and constructs identities, ideologies, and relationships. This approach is particularly suited to examining phenomena such as language variation, code-switching, language shift and maintenance, and the role of language in expressing religious or ethnic identity. For example, Fossey et al. (2002) argue that qualitative research is essential for understanding the social environment in which language is used, as it captures the nuances of human interaction and cultural meaning. In applied linguistics, qualitative inquiry allows for iterative engagement between theory and evidence, enabling researchers to trace how language practices evolve in response to social change (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015).

Grounding the research in sociolinguistic theory means that the study is informed by frameworks such as Fishman's domain analysis, which examines language use across different social settings (e.g., home, school, mosque), or Heller's critical sociolinguistics, which interrogates how language intersects with power and ideology. This theoretical grounding ensures that the research does not merely describe linguistic behavior but interprets it within broader social structures. In your context—such as studying language maintenance among Mandailing youth in Muhammadiyah schools or mosque-based communities—this design would involve collecting qualitative data through interviews with students, teachers, and religious leaders; observing language use in religious and educational settings; and analyzing community documents and media. The goal is to uncover how language choices reflect identity, intergenerational dynamics, and cultural continuity. As Yahya et al. (2023) emphasize, qualitative inquiry in applied linguistics is particularly valuable for revealing the complex interplay between language, behavior, and belief systems, especially in multilingual and culturally rich environments.

3.1 Participants

The research involved 30 teenage participants aged 13–18, purposively selected from three junior and senior high schools in Muarasipongi. The selection criteria included: 1) Active enrollment in formal education, 2) Residence in Muarasipongi for at least five years, 3) Varied linguistic backgrounds (e.g., use of Muarasipongi, Indonesian, and English at home or school).

In addition to students, the study engaged 6 teachers and 6 parents to provide triangulated perspectives on language use and transmission. This multi-stakeholder approach enriches the data and allows for cross-validation of findings.

3.2 Techniques of Collecting Data

To ensure methodological triangulation, three complementary data collection methods were employed:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and parents using open-ended questions designed to elicit insights into: 1) Daily language practices across domains (home, school, peer interaction), 2) Attitudes toward Muarasipongi language and its perceived relevance, 3) Institutional language policies and pedagogical practices. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with occasional use of Muarasipongi expressions to ensure cultural resonance.

2. Classroom Observations

Non-participant observations were carried out in selected classrooms over a two-week period. The focus was on: 1) Language(s) used by teachers and students during instruction and informal interactions, 2) Code-switching behavior and contextual triggers, 3) Visual and textual presence of local language in school materials and environments.

3. Language Diaries

Each student participant was asked to maintain a language diary for seven consecutive days. The diary included: 1) Daily logs of language use across different settings (home, school, social media), 2) Reflections on why certain languages were chosen in specific contexts, 3) Emotional responses to using or avoiding Muarasipongi language. This method provided longitudinal insights into habitual language behavior and internalized attitudes.

3.3 Data Analysis

All qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding via NVivo 14 software. The analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: 1) Familiarization with data, 2) Generation of initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, 6) Producing the report. Key themes included language preference, identity negotiation, institutional influence, and digital exposure. Patterns were compared across participant groups to identify convergences and divergences in language shift dynamics.

4. Results

4.1 Language Use: 80% of students reported using Bahasa Indonesia in school and with peers; only 20% used Muarasipongi language occasionally at home.

Across all three schools, Bahasa Indonesia was the primary language used in formal instruction, classroom interaction, and peer communication. Observations showed that:

- a) Teachers consistently used Bahasa Indonesia during lessons, even when discussing culturally local topics.
- b) Students rarely initiated conversations in Muarasipongi, even among peers from the same ethnic background.
- c) School announcements, posters, and learning materials were exclusively in Bahasa Indonesia or English.

from interviews:

"We only use Muarasipongi at home, and even then, not always. At school, it feels awkward." — Female student, age 16.

This reflects a clear domain-based shift, where the educational setting reinforces the use of the national language, aligning with Fishman's (1991) domain theory.

4.2 Attitudes: Students viewed Muarasipongi language as "old-fashioned" or "irrelevant" to academic success.

Students expressed ambivalence or even negative attitudes toward the Muarasipongi language. Common perceptions included:

- a) It is "old-fashioned," "not useful," or "only for elders."
- b) It lacks relevance for academic success or future employment.
- c) Speaking it in public may invite teasing or social exclusion.

from language diaries:

- 1) *26 out of 30 students reported using Bahasa Indonesia for over 90% of their daily interactions.*
- 2) *Only 4 students used Muarasipongi occasionally, mostly with grandparents or during religious gatherings.*

This attitudinal shift is consistent with Holmes' (2013) theory that language prestige and social identity shape linguistic choices among youth.

4.3 Institutional Influence: Teachers rarely used local language in instruction, citing curriculum constraints.

Teachers acknowledged the importance of local language but cited systemic barriers:

- a) National curriculum does not include regional language instruction.
- b) Time constraints and standardized testing discourage linguistic diversity.

- c) Lack of teaching materials in Muarasipongi language.

from teacher interviews:

"We would love to use local language in class, but there's no space for it in the curriculum. Everything is measured in Bahasa Indonesia." — Junior high school teacher

This institutional neglect contributes to the erosion of local language use and reinforces the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia in formal education.

4.4 Digital Media: Social media and online learning platforms reinforced the dominance of Indonesian and English.

Digital platforms emerged as a significant factor in language shift:

- a) Students spent an average of 3–5 hours daily on social media, mostly in Bahasa Indonesia or English.
- b) No student reported following or engaging with content in Muarasipongi language.
- c) Online learning platforms used during the pandemic further entrenched the use of dominant languages.

from diary entries:

"I use Instagram and TikTok every day. All the content is in Indonesian or English. I've never seen anything in Muarasipongi." — Male student, age 17.

This aligns with Meir et al. (2025), who found that digital schooling and media exposure accelerate language shift when minority languages are absent from online ecosystems.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings and discussion, the following strategies are proposed:

- a) **Curriculum Reform**
Advocate for the inclusion of Muarasipongi language and culture in local school curricula, supported by teacher training and resource development.
- b) **Digital Engagement**
Encourage youth-led digital projects (e.g., podcasts, short films, social media campaigns) in Muarasipongi language to increase visibility and relevance.
- c) **Faith-Based Integration**
Leverage Muhammadiyah educational networks to promote local language use in mosque-based learning and community programs.
- d) **Intergenerational Dialogue**
Facilitate storytelling and oral history sessions between elders and youth to strengthen linguistic transmission and cultural pride.

6. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex and multifaceted nature of language shift among teenagers in Muarasipongi, particularly within educational environments. The findings demonstrate that the Muarasipongi language is increasingly marginalized in favor of Bahasa Indonesia and English, driven by institutional policies, peer influence, and digital media exposure. Despite its deep cultural significance, Muarasipongi is perceived by youth as outdated and irrelevant to academic and social advancement.

The educational system, while promoting national cohesion through Bahasa Indonesia, inadvertently contributes to the erosion of local linguistic heritage by excluding regional languages from formal curricula. Teachers, though aware of the cultural value of Muarasipongi, are constrained by standardized frameworks and lack of pedagogical support. Meanwhile, the digital landscape further accelerates the shift, offering little space for local language engagement.

This linguistic transition has profound implications—not only for cultural identity and intergenerational continuity but also for educational equity and student engagement. Without deliberate intervention, the Muarasipongi language risks becoming dormant within a generation, severing a vital link to local history, values, and worldview.

To address this challenge, the study advocates for a culturally responsive educational model that integrates local languages into teaching practices, digital content creation, and community-based learning. Faith-based institutions such as Muhammadiyah schools can play a strategic role in this revitalization effort by embedding linguistic heritage within religious and moral education.

Ultimately, preserving the Muarasipongi language is not merely a linguistic endeavor—it is a commitment to cultural sustainability, identity affirmation, and inclusive development. By recognizing the voices of youth and empowering educators, communities can reclaim their linguistic legacy and ensure its relevance for future generations.

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