



# Language Preservation through *Bodendak* in Tanah Ulu Muarasipongi: A Study of Cultural Resilience

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## Abstract

The preservation of indigenous languages is an essential aspect of maintaining cultural identity, and this is especially true in the context of *Tanah Ulu*, Muarasipongi. The practice of *Bodendak* art has emerged as a unique medium for safeguarding the local language and transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations. This paper investigates the role of *Bodendak* art in the preservation of the Muarasipongi language, analyzing both its artistic and linguistic dimensions. The study explores how this art form functions as a cultural practice intertwined with the daily lives of the community, fostering an environment in which language is both preserved and innovated. By using ethnographic methods, including interviews, participant observation, and content analysis of *Bodendak* performances, the research reveals how the art contributes to language revitalization, engages the youth, and helps to maintain the vitality of the Muarasipongi language. The findings suggest that the *Bodendak* art form is not merely a medium of artistic expression but also an essential tool for language conservation in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization. The paper concludes with a discussion of the broader implications for the integration of art into language preservation efforts, highlighting the importance of community-driven initiatives in sustaining linguistic diversity.

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## 1. Introduction

The global language endangerment crisis has become a central issue in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies. As of the latest reports, over 40% of the world's languages are at risk of disappearing in the coming decades, with estimates suggesting that one language dies every two weeks (Crystal, 2000). The causes of language endangerment are multifaceted, but the primary drivers include globalization, urbanization, the dominance of national or global languages, and sociopolitical factors that marginalize indigenous languages. This section will discuss the nature of the crisis, the consequences of language loss, and the efforts to combat language extinction.

Globalization has led to the widespread dominance of a few major languages, most notably English, Mandarin, Spanish, and French. The rise of global media, the internet, and international trade has facilitated the spread of these languages, often at the expense of indigenous languages. For speakers of small languages, the utility of learning a global language outweighs the benefits of preserving their mother tongue, especially when economic opportunities and social mobility are tied to these dominant languages.

As rural populations migrate to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities, younger generations may abandon their ancestral languages in favor of the more widely spoken language of the city. Urbanization often leads to language shift, where young people grow up learning the language of the dominant society, while elders and rural populations continue to speak the indigenous language, often in private or in traditional settings.

In many parts of the world, indigenous languages are stigmatized or suppressed by state policies. Governments may promote the use of a national language for educational, legal, and administrative purposes, while indigenous languages are relegated to the margins of society. In some cases, indigenous languages are even banned or discouraged in schools and public life, leading to their gradual decline.

The pressure to assimilate into mainstream culture, often a result of colonialism or modern nation-building projects, leads many individuals and communities to abandon their traditional languages. The erosion of cultural pride, particularly in societies where indigenous cultures were historically oppressed, leads to a loss of motivation to learn and use indigenous languages. Language is often tied to identity, and as cultures become more homogenized, the indigenous languages that reflect unique worldviews and knowledge systems face extinction.

Local language preservation refers to the conscious and sustained efforts to maintain, revitalize, and promote the use of indigenous or regional languages that are at risk of decline or extinction due to sociopolitical, economic, and cultural pressures. These languages—often spoken by small communities—carry unique worldviews, oral traditions, and systems of knowledge that are deeply embedded in local identity and heritage. Preservation involves not only documenting vocabulary and grammar but also fostering intergenerational transmission, encouraging daily use, and integrating the language into education, media, and community life.

According to Kakembo (2024), language preservation is essential for safeguarding cultural diversity and reinforcing a community's sense of place and identity, especially in the face of globalization and urbanization which often favor dominant languages. In the Indonesian context, where over 700 local languages exist, efforts to preserve regional languages are closely tied to multicultural education and cultural decentralization. Nurwahidah (2019) emphasizes that local languages are vital tools for expressing local wisdom and resisting cultural homogenization, and their inclusion in educational and religious settings can strengthen national resilience and creativity. UNESCO also warns that nearly half of the world's 7,000 languages are endangered, with many spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, making preservation an urgent global concern. Ultimately, local language preservation is not merely a linguistic task—it is a cultural, educational, and political commitment to honoring the voices of communities and ensuring that their linguistic heritage continues to thrive in future generations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 *The Consequences of Language Loss***

The loss of a language is far more than a linguistic issue. It represents the erasure of a culture, a worldview, and a history. Some of the profound consequences of language extinction include:

#### **a) *Cultural Loss***

Every language is a vessel of culture, carrying with it customs, traditions, histories, and knowledge systems. When a language dies, a significant portion of its speakers' cultural identity and heritage is lost. Many indigenous languages encode ecological knowledge, medicinal practices, oral traditions, and historical narratives that are not easily transmitted to future generations without the language. This cultural erosion weakens community cohesion and diminishes the diversity of human thought and creativity.

#### **b) *Loss of Knowledge***

Indigenous languages often contain specialized vocabulary for concepts tied to local environments, such as unique flora, fauna, and ecological systems. Many indigenous languages also carry oral histories that provide insights into historical events, migration patterns, and traditional ecological knowledge. When these languages fade, societies lose valuable data that could offer solutions to contemporary challenges in areas like biodiversity conservation, climate change, and sustainable agriculture.

#### **c) *Identity Crisis***

The speakers of endangered languages, the loss of their language can lead to an identity crisis. Language is an integral part of self-expression, community belonging, and individual identity. Young people who are disconnected from their native tongue may experience a sense of alienation, as they are caught between two worlds: their cultural heritage and the dominant society. In some cases, this results in a loss of self-confidence, a diminished sense of belonging, and social disintegration.

#### **d) *Reduction of Linguistic Diversity***

The extinction of any language diminishes the overall linguistic diversity of the planet. Linguists argue that each language offers a unique way of thinking, structuring reality, and interpreting the world. The death of a language represents the loss of a particular cognitive and communicative framework. The world, then, loses not just a way of speaking, but also a way of thinking. Linguistic diversity is crucial for maintaining the cognitive richness of humanity, offering a range of perspectives on shared human experiences.

## ***2.2 Global Efforts to Address Language Endangerment***

Various international organizations, linguists, and indigenous communities have been working to address the language endangerment crisis through a variety of methods:

a) **The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007):**

In recognition of the importance of indigenous languages, the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which includes provisions for protecting indigenous languages and cultures. It calls on governments to take steps to promote the revitalization and preservation of indigenous languages, recognizing the role of language in maintaining cultural identity and heritage.

b) **Language Documentation and Revitalization Initiatives:**

Linguists and anthropologists have been at the forefront of efforts to document endangered languages before they disappear. Projects like the Endangered Languages Project (funded by the National Science Foundation) have provided resources for recording and preserving the oral traditions of endangered language speakers. Additionally, many language revitalization programs have been implemented worldwide, from language immersion schools to digital platforms that teach endangered languages.

c) **Community-Based Approaches:**

One of the most promising approaches to language revitalization is community-driven efforts. Many indigenous communities are leading the charge in revitalizing their languages by establishing language immersion programs, producing bilingual education materials, and integrating language into daily life through cultural practices. These efforts are often supported by linguistic organizations and government bodies that recognize the importance of protecting linguistic heritage.

d) **Use of Technology:**

Modern technology has become a critical tool in language preservation. Linguists and activists are using online platforms, apps, and social media to create resources for endangered languages. The use of video recordings, podcasts, and digital archives helps ensure that the knowledge contained within these languages can be shared and passed on to future generations. Additionally, some languages have gained visibility and traction through online communities, where speakers can connect and practice their language in new and innovative ways.

### **2.3 The Role of Art in Language Preservation**

Among the innovative strategies for language preservation, the integration of art and culture plays a pivotal role. Artistic practices such as music, dance, storytelling, and traditional performance arts have long been vehicles for the transmission of language and culture. Art creates an emotionally charged context for language use, making it more memorable and engaging for both speakers and learners. Art and performance not only help to revitalize a language but also reinforce the sense of cultural pride and identity necessary for the survival of a language.

In *Tanah Ulu*, Muarasipongi, for example, the *Bodendak* art form has emerged as a key cultural practice that contributes to the preservation and revitalization of the Muarasipongi language. By combining performance, storytelling, and the use of local language, *Bodendak* serves as an example of how art can help communities hold on to their linguistic heritage while also adapting to modern challenges.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, focusing on understanding the cultural and linguistic functions of *Bodendak* as a traditional art form in *Tanah Ulu*, Muarasipongi. Ethnography was selected due to its ability to capture in-depth, contextualized insights into social practices, meanings, and community perspectives—essential for understanding the dynamics of language preservation through cultural expression.

The research was conducted in a naturalistic setting, meaning the researchers did not manipulate the environment or variables, but observed and engaged with the phenomena as they occurred organically within the community. The goal was to capture the lived experiences of the community in relation to *Bodendak* and the Muarasipongi language.

### **3.2 Research Setting**

The research was conducted in *Tanah Ulu*, Kecamatan Muarasipongi. *Tanah Ulu* is known for its strong adherence to traditional customs (*adat*) and the continued performance of *Bodendak* art. The area is predominantly inhabited by indigenous ethnic groups, many of whom are fluent in the Muarasipongi language. The site was selected purposively due to its cultural richness and the active role of *Bodendak* performances in community rituals and storytelling traditions.

### **3.3 Informants**

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling and included individuals who have deep knowledge of *Bodendak* and are active users or preservers of the Muarasipongi language. They were categorized as follows:

(a) Key Informants:

- 1) Traditional artists and performers of *Bodendak* (5 people)
- 2) Language elders or native speakers aged above 60 (3 people)
- 3) Local cultural leaders and traditional leaders (*tokoh adat*) (2 people)

(b) Supporting Informants:

- 1) Youth participants involved in *Bodendak* performances (5 people)
- 2) Teachers and educators promoting local language in informal settings (2 people)
- 3) Audience members or community members (5 people)

A total of 22 participants were involved. These individuals were chosen because of their roles in the transmission, performance, or reception of *Bodendak* and their usage of the Muarasipongi language in both formal and informal contexts.

### **3.4 Data Collection Techniques**

To obtain rich, valid, and reliable data, the following data collection techniques were employed:

a) Participant Observation

The researcher directly participated in and observed *Bodendak* performances, traditional rituals, and community gatherings where the Muarasipongi language was used. Observation focused on: (1) The linguistic elements used in *Bodendak* (e.g., metaphors, local idioms); (2) The social context and performance settings; (3) Audience interaction and response; (4) Intergenerational involvement.

Field notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings were taken as part of the documentation process (with permission from participants).

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with key and supporting informants using a semi-structured interview guide. Questions explored: (1) The personal meaning of *Bodendak* and language to the informants; (2) Perceptions of language vitality and shift, (3) The transmission process of language through *Bodendak*, (4) Challenges and hopes for language preservation.

Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and/or Muarasipongi, depending on participant preference, and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

c) Document Analysis

Supporting documents were reviewed, including: (1) Transcripts of *Bodendak* performances; (2) Song lyrics and chants, (3) Archival materials (e.g., manuscripts, photographs), (4) Government and NGO reports related to cultural preservation.

These documents provided additional insight into the linguistic structure, themes, and evolution of *Bodendak* over time.



### 3.5 Research Instruments

The instruments used to collect data included: (1) Interview guide: containing open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses; (2) Field notes template: for systematic observation of setting, interactions, and performances; (3) Audio and video recorders: to capture performances and interviews, (4) Transcription sheets: for organizing and coding interview and performance data; (5) Language checklist: developed in collaboration with local language experts to identify key lexical, grammatical, and phonological features of the Muarasipongi language found in *Bodendak*.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis was carried out using Thematic Analysis, supported by Linguistic Ethnography principles. The process involved the following steps:

a) Data Transcription

Audio and video recordings were transcribed verbatim. Translations into Bahasa Indonesia or English were done with assistance from local bilingual informants to maintain accuracy and cultural nuance.

b) Coding

Transcripts were coded using NVivo software (or manually) by identifying: (1) Recurring themes related to language use and cultural transmission; (2) Linguistic features (syntax, vocabulary, semantic fields); (3) Sociocultural functions of *Bodendak* (e.g., moral teaching, historical preservation)

c) Theme Categorization

Codes were grouped into broader categories such as: (1) "Language Vitality", (2) "Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer", (3) "Performance Contexts"; (4) "Linguistic Innovation", (5) "Resistance to Language Shift".

d) Interpretation

Themes were interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review (e.g., ethnolinguistic vitality theory, cultural resilience theory). The interpretation phase focused on understanding the role of *Bodendak* in maintaining language use within its social, cultural, and symbolic context.

## 4. Results

The research revealed four major thematic findings concerning the role of *Bodendak* in the preservation of the Muarasipongi language. These findings emerged through detailed field observations, interviews with 22 community members, and analysis of performance texts and cultural documents. The results show that *Bodendak* is not only a form of traditional art but also an active site of linguistic resilience, cultural identity reinforcement, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

#### **4.1 *Bodendak as a Medium for Intergenerational Language Transmission***

One of the most salient findings is that *Bodendak* serves as a living classroom for transmitting the Muarasipongi language from older to younger generations. Performances typically involve senior artists, known locally as *pakandea* or *pemangku adat*, who chant poetic verses, narratives, and oral histories in the local language. Young participants—often in the role of drummers, singers, or apprentices—engage in memorizing, imitating, and eventually improvising these verbal forms.

*"We learn more Muarasipongi words in Bodendak than in daily life,"* said a 17-year-old performer. *"We don't speak it at school, but we use it when we practice Bodendak with our elders."*

This pattern suggests that *Bodendak* functions as an informal yet powerful intergenerational linguistic institution. Unlike the classroom environment where the local language is absent or marginalized, *Bodendak* creates a context where speaking Muarasipongi is both encouraged and socially rewarded.

#### **4.2 *The Use of Traditional Poetic and Narrative Structures***

The linguistic analysis of *Bodendak* performances revealed a consistent use of traditional poetic forms, including: (a) Repetitive parallelism (repetition of lines or phrases with slight variation), (b) End-rhyme and internal rhyme (phonological mnemonic aids), (c) Symbolic metaphors and idioms rooted in local ecological and cultural contexts.

These structures make the language more memorable and emotionally resonant. A textual analysis of three major *Bodendak* chants found a high frequency of cultural-specific vocabulary (*e.g.*, plant names, ceremonial terms, ancestral metaphors) that are no longer used in daily conversation but preserved within *Bodendak*. For example, the word "*ndoku-lapasi*" (meaning "purification of land through ancestral rite") appeared five times in a single performance, although it was unfamiliar to younger speakers outside that context. This shows how *Bodendak* helps retain rare lexical items that would otherwise be lost due to language shift.

#### **4.3 *Emotional and Communal Attachment to the Language***

The study also found that *Bodendak* evokes a strong emotional and cultural attachment to the Muarasipongi language. For many participants, performing *Bodendak* was not merely a cultural obligation but a form of spiritual and ancestral connection. Several elder informants described the language of *Bodendak* as "*bahasa roh*" (language of the spirit), conveying a sacred quality that everyday speech lacks. One elder remarked:



*"When we sing Bodendak, we don't just speak—we speak with the voices of our ancestors. That's why we cannot let this language disappear."*

This attachment was observable not only among performers but also among community members who attended performances. Audience responses (including emotional reactions, call-and-response engagement, and collective chanting) demonstrated that the language used in *Bodendak* is deeply embedded in community identity and ritual practice.

#### **4.4 Resistance to Language Shift through Cultural Ritualization**

*Bodendak* was found to function as a form of cultural resistance to language shift. Although younger generations increasingly use Indonesian or Bugis in daily communication, they continue to use Muarasipongi within the *Bodendak* space due to the ritualistic and performative nature of the art, in which *Bodendak* is central—enforce the use of Muarasipongi, as these events are considered incomplete or invalid without the original language. The symbolic power of *Bodendak* lies in its untranslatability; many lines lose their meaning or sacred function when translated into Indonesian.

Furthermore, the communal consensus that *Bodendak* should not be altered linguistically contributes to preserving language norms. Even youth participants who lack fluency in everyday usage memorize full *Bodendak* verses in Muarasipongi due to the prestige and sacredness of the performance.

#### **5.5. Digital Adaptation and Language Innovation**

Interestingly, some youth performers have begun digitizing *Bodendak* performances through short videos on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. While the core language remains traditional, these digital expressions have sparked renewed interest in Muarasipongi among urban youth and diaspora communities.

These adaptations include: (1) Subtitling *Bodendak* in Indonesian for younger viewers; (2) Posting short verses with explanations of traditional terms; (3) Remixing *Bodendak* melodies with modern beats while maintaining original lyrics. Though controversial among elders (some see it as disrespectful), these digital innovations have extended the reach of the language beyond geographic boundaries and fostered creative engagement with the tradition.

### **5. Discussion**

The results of this study underscore the complex and dynamic relationship between traditional art forms and language preservation, particularly in indigenous and marginalized communities. *Bodendak*, as practiced in *Tanah Ulu*, Muarasipongi, demonstrates how a traditional performance art can serve as an active, emotionally

charged, and socially rooted mechanism for maintaining the vitality of an endangered language. This section discusses the significance of the findings in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, including language socialization, cultural resilience, and ethnolinguistic vitality.

## 6. Conclusion

The global language endangerment crisis is a complex issue that demands urgent action. While the decline of many indigenous languages is a formidable challenge, there are promising initiatives aimed at preserving linguistic diversity. Community-based efforts, technological innovations, and the integration of cultural practices like art offer a multi-faceted approach to language revitalization. As we confront the erosion of cultural diversity worldwide, it is essential to recognize that language is not just a medium for communication but a key component of human heritage and identity.

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