



Luwu' Language Vitality: Preliminary Findings

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Abstract. The Luwu people of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, have a long and fascinating history, but in an increasingly globalised world, what is the status of the Luwu' language today? Sociolinguistic surveys documenting language attitudes, patterns of use, and intergenerational transmission were conducted in two areas of the Luwu regency, one urban and one rural, and the results show that Luwu' language vitality is vigorous in rural areas, but more vulnerable in urban centres. However, positive attitudes towards the language in all areas suggest that language maintenance and development work would be well received by the whole community.

Keywords: Luwu', Tae', language vitality.

1. Introduction

The Luwu region in northern South Sulawesi has a complex and fascinating history. Zainal records that Couvreur, Governor of Celebes in 1929, claimed Luwu was the most powerful Sulawesi kingdom between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, and that in fact the genealogies of the kings and nobility of South Sulawesi show that Luwu was founded before the kingdoms of Bugis, Mandar and Makassar (1983, p. 462). However, by the late 1800s, Luwu no longer held the political and economic power it once had (Errington, 2014), and ongoing power struggles and extensive migration to the area led to confusion over a Luwu ethnic and linguistic identity (Roth, 2005, p. 497).

The original language of the Luwu kingdom and its several dialects have been ascribed various names and subsumed under various surrounding languages by different linguists since the late 1800s (e.g. Adriani, 1898; Barr et al., 1979; Esser, 1938; Grimes & Grimes, 1987; Kruyt, 1920; Salzner, 1960; Sirk, 2007; Sneddon, 1981; Vail, 1991; Veen, 1929), and to this day there is still no clear consensus on the name of the language, with a number of researchers describing it as Bahasa Tae' (e.g. Garing, 2011; Ibrahim, 2013; Idawati et al., 2016; Sahraini, 1998) or Bahasa Taeq (Garing, 2012, 2014), while Laskowske and Mead observe that locals tend to call it Bahasa Luwu' (2004).

2. Luwu' Language Vitality Research

2.1 Language Attitudes, Domains of Use, and Intergenerational Transmission

This brief overview of the Luwu people's cultural and linguistic history provides a helpful backdrop for discussions of the current status of Luwu' language vitality.

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M. I. Sukardi et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of the International Conference Entitled Language, Literary, And Cultural Studies (ICONLATERALS 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 928,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-404-4_12

Identification with one's ethnic group and its language has a major impact on individual language maintenance, and on a group level, on language vitality (Tabouret-Keller, 1998). As Djamareng and Jufriadi also note in their research on Luwu' language maintenance in Makassar, positive attitudes towards a minority language by its speakers influence the language's status (2016, p. 82). Positive attitudes alone, however, are not enough to make a minority language thrive in an increasingly bilingual social sphere – the most important factor is whether the language is being actively passed on to successive generations. This intergenerational transmission is in turn closely linked to domains of use – what practical functions the language plays in the community will impact how valuable a commodity the language is for daily life, and thus how much importance parents will place on ensuring their children can speak the language (Fishman, 2001).

Thus, research into language attitudes, domains of use, multilingualism, and intergenerational transmission is crucial for assessing ethnolinguistic vitality and language status. In the course of his research on the Luwu' language in the 1980s, Ian Vail administered an oral questionnaire throughout the Luwu region on language use and literacy, and also mapped demographic patterns throughout the area, including language contact and patterns of use (1991). However, in the ensuing thirty plus years, which have seen tremendous growth in infrastructure, mobility and technology (all major influencing factors on minority language use), there has been no further published sociolinguistic research on Luwu' language vitality in the Luwu region outside of Palopo, and this paper is part of a research project that seeks to meet that need.

It asks: What are the attitudes of Luwu people to their language? What patterns of use are displayed in different generations, regions and domains? And what do these patterns and attitudes reveal regarding Luwu' language vitality?

2.2 The Survey Instrument

Following Vail's lead in administering oral surveys to gather linguistic data (1991, p. 80), I am conducting further and more in-depth surveys in the form of structured interviews to determine current attitudes of Luwu' speakers towards the Luwu' language, rates of multilingualism and literacy, and patterns and domains of use by the various demographic groups of Luwu society.

I designed an oral survey of open-ended questions assessing language behaviour (including proficiency, acquisition and usage) and behaviour toward language (including attitudinal and implementational behaviour) for this purpose (Cooper, 1979, p. 116), drawing on and fleshing out Anderbeck's (2010) Jambi language survey in Sumatra. Using a stratified sampling technique to ensure that all demographics and dialect areas of the Luwu region are represented, this survey instrument is designed to be administered by face-to-face interview in Indonesian (see appendix).

2.3 The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS)

These language use and attitude surveys will provide crucial up-to-date information for government and community language planning. As Lewis and Simons explain, for

a community to make informed decisions about their language maintenance and development goals, outside expertise providing scientifically accurate language vitality information is an important prerequisite (2017, p. 14).

To this end, Fishman developed the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale as a standard tool for measuring and comparing language vitality (1991). Lewis and Simons (2010) later expanded this scale, harmonising it with the UNESCO language endangerment framework (Moseley, 2010, pp. 11–12), to create an instrument suitable for ranking the vitality status of all past and present languages of the world. The data gathered from this survey can thus be used to assess the vitality of the Luwu' language according to the standardised EGIDS framework (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
(Lewis & Simons, 2010, p. 110)

Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (adapted from Fishman, 1991)			
Level	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Safe
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Safe
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Safe
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely Endangered

8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Severely Endangered
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically Endangered
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

2.4 Survey Demographics

This paper presents some preliminary findings based on surveys conducted in two main regions of the Luwu regency, namely, an urban coastal area with many immigrants near the government centre, and a rural mountainous area further inland and more isolated from the larger towns with mixed populations. All survey participants were ethnic Luwu and had lived in the region most of their lives. The participants were divided into three age groups to more accurately determine trends in intergenerational transmission of the language. Furthermore, 40% of respondents were male, and 60% female; and while 40% of respondents had tertiary-level qualifications, 30% had not completed senior high school, so people with a wide range of educational backgrounds were included in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

From the surveys conducted to date, there have been some interesting discoveries.

3.1 Language Name

Of all the people I interviewed, only one called the language *Tae'-Tae'*, all others said it was called *Luwu'*. In addition, 20% of respondents gave *Tae'-Tae'* as an alternate name for the language, and 10% said it can also be called *Tae'* (with no reduplication). The respondent who initially called the language *Tae'-Tae'* also gave *Luwu'* as an alternative name. This concurs with Vail's observations (1991, p. 57), that *Luwu'* is the preferred name for the language in the southern parts of the Luwu region, where my surveys were conducted.

Indeed, some people responded negatively to the name *Tae'* or *Tae'-Tae'*, as the word *tae'* means 'no', and therefore to some that name implies that *Luwu'* is not a language, or is a non-language. A desire to refer to the language by the name of the former

kingdom and present-day regency suggests a positive attitude towards the language, and a close tie between the language and an ethnic Luwu identity.

3.2 Written Language and Media

Only 25% of respondents were aware of any written materials in the language, and few use it to produce texts of any kind themselves, aside from social media use. However, 65% of respondents felt that the children in their community ought to learn how to read and write in the Luwu' language, and one respondent even said that sometimes they take the initiative in teaching their children how to do so. Another 10% cited a lack of written resources as an obstacle to children developing local language literacy skills.

Several respondents mentioned that occasionally the local television stations broadcast some local language media, for example in news reports of events that were conducted using Luwu' or a mix of Indonesian and Luwu'. Others lamented that children are generally taught the Bugis language and script at school rather than their own Luwu' language. Overall, respondents reported very little use of the language in any media. However, 100% of study participants welcomed the idea of increased availability of media in Luwu', showing that language development work would be well received by the community.

3.3 Regional Variation in Language Use

The data shows a clear differentiation between the coastal/urban and mountain/rural areas in language use, with people of all ages using the Luwu' language more often in day-to-day life in the mountains than on the coast. Indeed, respondents from every age bracket reported using Indonesian only rarely, and Luwu' constantly, in the rural region, whereas urban respondents reported mostly using Indonesian, though older respondents also use Luwu' many times every day.

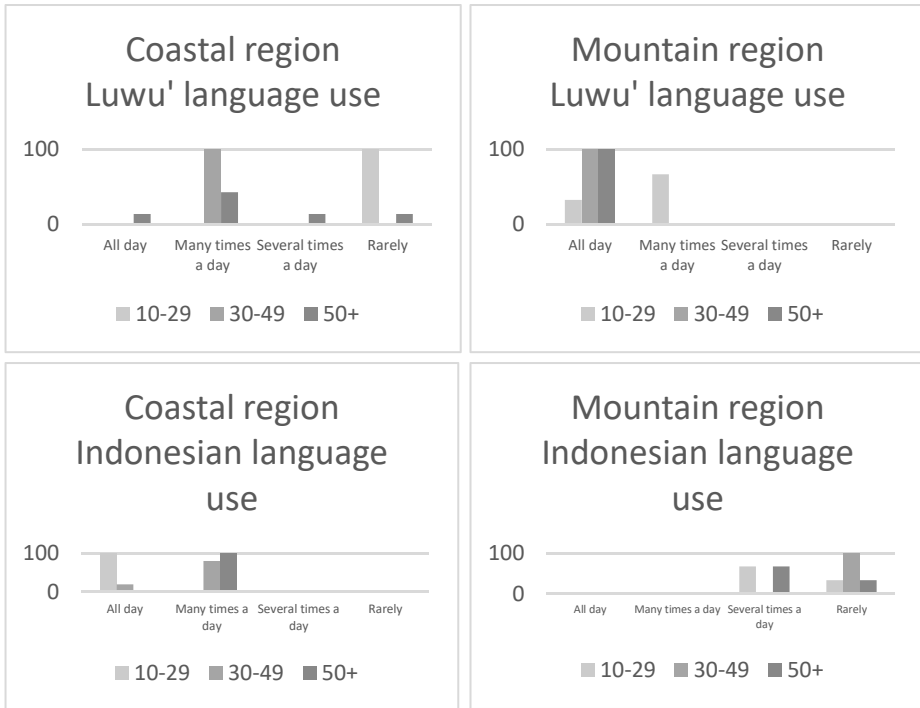


Fig. 1. Percentage comparison of Luwu' and Indonesian language usage by age group in coastal and mountain areas

3.4 Domains of Use

A closer look at the contexts in which each language is predominantly used is also enlightening in terms of language vitality. In both regions, respondents reported mainly using Indonesian in shops and interactions with government officials, at community events, as well as with people they don't know or from other ethnic groups, showing that Indonesian is the preferred lingua franca. However, when shopping at the market, or for religious events, the language use was more mixed, with respondents reporting frequent use of both Luwu' and Indonesian in these contexts. For planning and conducting religious rituals, respondents reported leaning more heavily towards Luwu'. Interactions with neighbours also showed strong leanings towards Luwu', with respondents of all ages in the mountains reporting almost exclusive use of Luwu' with neighbours, but coastal respondents reporting a little more of a mix. In the urban coastal regions, respondents reported mostly using Indonesian at school and work, whereas in the rural mountain regions, most respondents used Luwu' in the same contexts. However, further data is needed on this point, as more of the mountain respondents were farmers (71% compared to only 23% of coastal respondents), while the coastal respondents were more likely to work in offices (54% compared to only 29% of mountain respondents), so the type of workplace may be influencing the results on this

score. One other clear dichotomy between the two regions was that mountain respondents reported using Luwu' almost exclusively in the home, whereas coastal respondents gave a wide variety of responses, with some using exclusively Luwu', some using exclusively Indonesian, and some using both languages in the home.

3.5 Intergenerational Transmission

This distinction between the rural and urban patterns of language use also extended to intergenerational transmission. All respondents in the urban coastal area reported that local children learn Indonesian as their first language, but the majority of rural mountain respondents (almost 80%) said that local children in their region learn Luwu' as their first language.

All urban participants said they spoke Indonesian with children in the family, while all but the youngest participants spoke Luwu' with their parents. In contrast, even the youngest rural participants (in their teens and twenties) reported using Luwu' with their parents. However in speaking to younger children in the family now, rural respondents reported a tendency towards Indonesian, with some saying they use Luwu' with their children but Indonesian with their grandchildren.

Nevertheless, all respondents in the entire study felt that children should be able to speak the local language, despite the fact that almost all urban respondents said a mother should speak Indonesian to her children, and they are not actively seeking to pass their heritage language down. Thus while the trend towards focusing on Indonesian is concerning for the ongoing vitality of the language, the high value people place on their language as a key marker of their identity, and their interest in having more materials available to them, suggest that language development work could have a very positive impact on the trajectory of Luwu' language vitality. This concurs with Vail's observations over 30 years ago:

Sociolinguistically Tae' is relatively unaffected by the neighbouring languages in this present period of time. In fact there seems to be a strong pride in the language which emphasises its difference in certain regions... I have a feeling that this pride goes further than simply pride in one's language. Rather there seems to be often a conscious effort on behalf of the speakers to want to set Tae' apart. (1991, p. 92)

The most common reason generally given for teaching children Indonesian as their first language is to give them a better chance of a good education and consequently more opportunities in life. Perhaps more community education is needed to encourage additive bilingualism – as Marshall writes in his defence of local language development work in Makassar, "the human brain has an immense potential for developing multiple languages, so acquisition of new languages does not need to result in language loss of the heritage language" (2018, p. 9).

3.6 Language Vitality Status

Considering the above data, at this stage further research is needed to clearly determine the vitality of the Luwu' language. While many people use Luwu' on a regular basis in social media and text messaging, ranking the language at stage 5 (written, safe) on the EGIDS scale (see Table 1 above), in coastal areas the lack of language transmission to the youngest generation ranks the language at stage 6b (threatened, vulnerable). Thus, initial surveys suggest that Luwu' language vitality is higher in the more isolated or rural parts of the region, while it is undergoing greater shift in urban areas of mixed population and regional government centres that prioritise use of the institutionalised national language. Interestingly, this finding is virtually identical to Marshall's assessment of the vitality status of the Makassar language (2018, pp. 5–6).

Some of the factors most likely influencing this distinction between urban and rural language vitality include greater ethnic homogeneity in rural communities; higher proportions of the work force in rural communities being engaged in farming, rather than jobs which require use of the national language in face to face interaction with the wider public; and lower levels of education – as more highly educated members of rural communities move to urban centres in search of work to match their qualifications.

Nevertheless, in both urban and rural communities, positive attitudes towards the Luwu' language bode well for the acceptance and implementation of language maintenance and development work.

4. Conclusion

This paper has reported some preliminary findings on the status of Luwu' language vitality, drawn from survey reports on Luwu people's attitudes towards their heritage language, domains of use for the local and national (and other) languages, and rates of literacy, multilingualism and intergenerational transmission. While Luwu' language use appears to be vigorous in rural areas, in urban centres it is experiencing a potentially alarming shift; but positive attitudes towards the language show that language maintenance and development work such as the production of written materials and other local language media would be well received by the community. Collaborative efforts between the government, educators, researchers, and the local community can ensure not only the ongoing preservation, but the celebration, of this unique aspect of Luwu's – and Indonesia's – rich cultural heritage.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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