



Language Shift in The Padoe Community: Intergenerational Changes in Language Use

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Abstract

Language shift is a major challenge for the maintenance of local and endangered languages, particularly when younger generations increasingly use a dominant language in everyday communication. This study examines intergenerational changes in language use among the Padoe community in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, with particular attention to the use of Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia in family and community interactions. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed involving three generational groups: children, adults, and elders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal a clear intergenerational pattern of language shift. Older speakers demonstrate relatively strong competence and continue to use Padoe, particularly in interactions with other older community members. Adult speakers occupy an intermediate position, using Bahasa Indonesia more frequently while maintaining limited and mixed use of Padoe, especially in interactions with older family members. Among children, Bahasa Indonesia is strongly dominant, accounting for 91.33% of reported family language use, while Padoe accounts for only 2.67%. The findings also show that children's active competence in Padoe is considerably weaker than that of older generations. These patterns indicate that the main challenge to Padoe maintenance lies in the weakening of intergenerational transmission and the declining use of Padoe in everyday family communication. Strengthening the use of Padoe within the family is therefore important for sustaining the language across generations.

Keywords: *language shift; Padoe language; intergenerational transmission; language maintenance; local language*

Introduction

Language is closely connected to cultural identity, social relationships, and the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations (Ahtif & Gandhi, 2022; Aziz et al., 2022). In multilingual communities, however, the position of local languages may change as speakers increasingly use a socially dominant language in everyday communication (Smith, 2022). This process is commonly referred to as language shift, in which the use of one language gradually decreases as another language expands into communicative domains previously occupied by the local language. Language shift is particularly important to examine in minority-language communities because changes in everyday language practices may affect the continuity of the language across generations.

In Indonesia, the relationship between Bahasa Indonesia and regional languages provides an important context for understanding language shift. Bahasa Indonesia has an essential role as the national language and is widely used in education, administration, mass media, and interregional communication (Hadiwijaya et al., 2022). At the same time, regional languages continue to function as important markers of local identity and cultural belonging. However, the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia in both formal and informal domains may influence the position of regional languages. Cohn and Ravindranath (2014) argue that the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia across communicative domains has contributed to changes in the use and intergenerational transmission of local languages. Their analysis of language use in Indonesia shows that even languages with large speaker populations may experience pressure when Bahasa Indonesia increasingly becomes the language of everyday communication.

One important dimension of language shift is the change in language use across generations. A local language may remain relatively strong among older speakers but become less frequently used among adults and younger speakers (Bromham, 2023). This generational difference is particularly significant because the family is one of the primary contexts in which children encounter and acquire a local language. When parents increasingly use a dominant language with their children, opportunities for the younger generation to use the local language may become more limited. Consequently, language shift can occur gradually through changes in everyday interaction rather than through an immediate disappearance of the local language.

Research conducted in the Indonesian context has demonstrated the importance of examining family and intergenerational language practices. Muin et al. (2023), for example, examined the role of family interpersonal communication in preserving local languages in East Luwu and found that Bahasa Indonesia had increasingly become part of everyday family communication. Their findings also indicated that children could respond to parents' use of a local language in Bahasa

Indonesia or through mixed-language practices, illustrating how language choice within the family may influence the continuity of local languages. Such findings reinforce the importance of examining the family as a key domain in which language maintenance and language shift take place.

Studies conducted by the present author also provide a relevant background for understanding language shift in South Sulawesi. Rusdiansyah (2018), in a study of Tae' in Palopo, found that the local language had experienced a shift in everyday communication, including within the family domain. The study showed that although Tae' remained associated with the identity of the Luwu community, its use in daily communication had decreased. The research also demonstrated that language attitudes alone could not guarantee sustained language use, highlighting the importance of examining actual language practices within the community.

This line of research was subsequently extended through a study of Tae' language vitality in Palopo. Rusdiansyah, Kurniawan, and Malik (2023) examined language vitality through language use, speaker numbers, documentation, government policy, and the inclusion of the language in education. Using a qualitative descriptive approach involving interviews and observations, the study identified language use as an important component of the vitality of Tae'. These earlier studies provide an important comparative foundation for the present research because both Tae' and Padoe are local languages associated with the broader sociolinguistic environment of Luwu.

The relevance of language shift to the Padoe community is particularly important because Padoe is a minority language spoken in East Luwu, South Sulawesi. The language exists within a multilingual environment in which speakers have access to Bahasa Indonesia and other languages used in education, administration, social interaction, and wider communication. Such linguistic conditions create opportunities for multilingualism but may also affect the domains in which Padoe is actively used. Examining language use across generations can therefore provide evidence of whether Padoe continues to function as a language of everyday interaction or is becoming increasingly restricted to particular speakers and situations.

Although previous studies have examined language maintenance, language attitudes, and language vitality in several local languages in South Sulawesi, relatively limited attention has been given to the intergenerational use of Padoe in East Luwu. In particular, there is a need to understand how older, adult, and younger members of the Padoe community describe their everyday language practices and how the relationship between Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia has changed across generations. This focus is important because the existence of a positive cultural attachment to Padoe does not necessarily mean that the language continues to be used regularly in family interaction.

The present study therefore examines intergenerational changes in language use among the Padoe community in East Luwu, Indonesia. Drawing on qualitative evidence from interviews with members of different generations, the study explores how Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia are used in everyday communication and how speakers perceive changes in language use over time. The study focuses particularly on family interaction and communication between generations because these domains provide important evidence of the continuity or weakening of intergenerational language transmission.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is Padoe used across different generations within the Padoe community in East Luwu?
2. What changes in language use can be identified across generations?
3. How do these intergenerational changes reflect language shift from Padoe toward Bahasa Indonesia?

By examining Padoe through an intergenerational perspective, this study extends previous research on language shift and vitality in the Luwu region. It also contributes qualitative evidence concerning a relatively under-researched language community and demonstrates how everyday language choices within and across generations can provide insight into broader processes of language shift.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine intergenerational changes in language use among the Padoe community in East Luwu, South Sulawesi. The study focused on the use of Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia in everyday communication across different generations and explored how patterns of language use have changed within the community. The research was conducted in several areas of East Luwu where Padoe communities are found, particularly Malili, Wasuponda, Towuti, and Nuha. The participants were members of the Padoe community representing three generational groups: children (under 17 years), adults (18–40 years), and elders (41 years and above). Participants were selected purposively based on their familiarity with Padoe and their involvement in everyday communication within the family and community.

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews focusing on participants' experiences and practices in using Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia in different communicative contexts. The interviews explored language use within the family, communication between parents and children, interactions among siblings and relatives, and language use in the wider community. The interviews were conducted using Padoe, Bahasa Indonesia, or a combination of both languages, depending on the participants' linguistic practices. Questionnaire data concerning language use and intergenerational transmission were also used as supplementary evidence to support the interpretation of the interview findings. The qualitative

data were analyzed thematically following the general procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and review of themes, definition of themes, and interpretation of the findings. The analysis focused on patterns of Padoe use across generations, the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia, differences in language practices between older and younger speakers, and changes in intergenerational transmission.

The questionnaire results were used descriptively to provide supporting evidence for the patterns identified through the qualitative analysis. To enhance the credibility of the findings, interpretations were compared across participants from different generations and considered in relation to observations, relevant documentary information, and previous studies of local-language use in Indonesia.

Results

Padoe as a Language of the Older Generation

The findings indicate that Padoe remains most strongly associated with the older generation of the community. Older speakers continue to demonstrate relatively strong competence in Padoe and use the language more frequently in interactions with spouses, relatives, neighbors, and other members of the Padoe community. Interview data suggest that for older speakers, Padoe is not merely a means of communication but also a familiar language associated with family interaction, cultural identity, and everyday social relationships. However, the continued use of Padoe among older speakers does not necessarily indicate that the language is being maintained across generations.

The pattern of language use in the family provides an important indication of this situation. The older generation still uses Padoe relatively frequently when communicating with other adults. In interactions between spouses, for example, Padoe remains more frequently used than Bahasa Indonesia. A similar tendency can be seen in communication with relatives and neighbors. This suggests that Padoe still has a relatively strong functional position among speakers who acquired the language as part of their early socialization. The language is therefore still present in the community, particularly within networks involving speakers from the same generation.

However, the situation changes when older speakers communicate with their children. The interview findings indicate that parents do not consistently use Padoe when addressing their children. In several routine activities, Bahasa Indonesia has become the more frequent choice. The quantitative data support this observation: Bahasa Indonesia was used by 63.33% of parents when calling their children and by the same proportion when giving instructions. When parents expressed anger toward their children, Bahasa Indonesia was still dominant at 56.67%, while Padoe accounted for 36.67%. Only in giving advice was the distribution relatively balanced, with 46.67% using Bahasa Indonesia and 46.67% using Padoe. These patterns indicate that Padoe remains available in the linguistic repertoire of

parents but is not consistently selected in parent–child interaction.

This distinction between language competence and language use is important in understanding the position of Padoe among older speakers. The older generation may retain strong knowledge of the language, while their everyday choices gradually provide fewer opportunities for children to encounter and use Padoe. In other words, the presence of competent older speakers does not automatically guarantee intergenerational maintenance. The critical issue is whether their linguistic competence is transferred through regular communication with younger family members.

This finding is consistent with Idaryani and Fidyati (2023), who found that parents' attitudes and language practices played an important role in the intergenerational transmission of Acehnese. Their qualitative study showed differences in parents' confidence and orientation toward using their heritage language, with these differences having implications for language transmission within the family. The Padoe case similarly suggests that the family remains a crucial site for determining whether a local language continues to function as a living means of communication or becomes increasingly restricted to older speakers.

A comparable pattern can also be observed in East Luwu. Muin et al. (2023), in their study of local-language preservation in Tabarano Village, Wasuponda, found that family communication increasingly tended to use Bahasa Indonesia, although some parents continued to expose their children to the local language through direct teaching and everyday interaction. Their findings demonstrate that the family can simultaneously become a site of language shift and a potential site of language preservation.

Thus, the position of Padoe among older speakers should not be interpreted simply as evidence of successful language maintenance. Rather, it represents a situation in which the language remains relatively strong among those who acquired it earlier in life but is becoming less consistently transmitted to younger family members. The older generation consequently occupies an important position in the continuity of Padoe: they retain much of the linguistic knowledge necessary for maintenance, but the future of the language depends increasingly on whether that knowledge is transferred through sustained everyday interaction with younger generations.

The Changing Language Practices of Adult Speakers

The adult generation occupies an important position in the continuity of the Padoe language because it is located between the older generation, who generally retain stronger competence in Padoe, and the younger generation, who increasingly use Bahasa Indonesia. The findings show that adult speakers still use Padoe in several communicative situations, but Bahasa Indonesia has become more

dominant in their everyday interactions. Thus, the adult generation represents a transitional group in the ongoing language shift within the Padoe community.

The questionnaire data indicate that the use of Bahasa Indonesia is dominant in the family domain among adult speakers. In communication with their parents, Bahasa Indonesia was used by 53.57% of respondents, while Padoe was used by only 10.71% and mixed language by 35.71%. A similar pattern was found when communicating with their mothers, with 53.57% using Bahasa Indonesia, 10.71% using Padoe, and 35.71% using a mixture of the two languages. The dominance of Bahasa Indonesia was even stronger in telephone communication with parents, where 71.43% of respondents used Bahasa Indonesia and only 3.57% used Padoe. These patterns suggest that although adult speakers still have access to Padoe, they do not consistently use it as the main language in everyday family communication.

An important exception appears in communication with grandparents. When speaking with grandparents, 39.29% of adult respondents used Padoe, compared with 42.86% who used Bahasa Indonesia and 17.86% who used a mixture of the two. The relatively higher use of Padoe in this interaction suggests that the choice of language is influenced by the interlocutor and by the linguistic practices associated with older family members. In other words, Padoe remains functional when adult speakers interact with members of the older generation who are more closely associated with the language. However, this pattern does not necessarily extend to communication with younger family members.

The same tendency can be observed beyond the immediate family. In their general daily communication, adult respondents used Bahasa Indonesia in 61.31% of the reported situations, Padoe in only 8.53%, and a mixture of the two languages in 30.16%. Bahasa Indonesia was particularly dominant in communication through text messages and telephone calls, with Padoe accounting for only 3.57% in both contexts. Similarly, Padoe was used by only 3.57% of respondents when communicating through social media. However, Padoe was somewhat more visible in face-to-face interaction, such as communication with neighbors, where 21.43% reported using Padoe, while 32.14% used a mixture of Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia. These findings indicate that Padoe has not disappeared from the communicative repertoire of adult speakers, but its use has become increasingly restricted and often occurs alongside Bahasa Indonesia.

This pattern is consistent with the view that language shift is not necessarily an immediate replacement of one language by another. Instead, speakers may gradually expand their use of a dominant language while reducing the domains in which the minority language is used (Mufwene, 2022; Tenés et al., 2023). Cohn and Ravindranath (2014), for example, explain that the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia in everyday life can affect local languages when Indonesian begins to take over domains that were previously associated with regional languages.

In the Padoe context, the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia among adult speakers can therefore be understood as a gradual reorganization of language choice rather than the complete abandonment of Padoe.

The findings also have similarities with research on other regional languages in Indonesia. Idaryani and Fidyati (2023), in their study of Acehnese families, found a discrepancy between parents stated support for the heritage language and their actual language practices at home. Their findings show that the traditional pattern of intergenerational transmission can be disrupted when parents increasingly use the dominant language in family communication. A similar tendency is visible among adult Padoe speakers. Although Padoe remains part of their linguistic repertoire, Bahasa Indonesia is increasingly selected for routine communication, particularly in interactions involving technology and wider social communication.

Overall, the adult generation demonstrates that language shift in the Padoe community is occurring gradually. Adult speakers have not completely abandoned Padoe, and their relatively higher use of Padoe with grandparents indicates that the language remains meaningful in interactions with older speakers. Nevertheless, the overall dominance of Bahasa Indonesia and the frequent use of mixed language show that the position of Padoe has weakened in everyday communication. The adult generation therefore represents an important transitional stage in the intergenerational shift from Padoe toward Bahasa Indonesia.

Bahasa Indonesia Dominance among Younger Speakers

The most visible evidence of language shift in the Padoe community can be observed among the younger generation. Unlike older speakers who continue to use Padoe in various domains and adult speakers who maintain some degree of bilingual or mixed-language practice, younger speakers predominantly use Bahasa Indonesia. The findings indicate that Bahasa Indonesia has become the main language of everyday communication among children, including communication within the family.

The questionnaire data show a substantial difference between Bahasa Indonesia and Padoe use among younger speakers. Across various family communication activities, Bahasa Indonesia accounted for 91.33% of language use, while Padoe accounted for only 2.67% and mixed use for 6%. This pattern was particularly clear in direct communication with parents. For example, 90% of children reported using Bahasa Indonesia when speaking with their fathers, while none reported using Padoe exclusively. In communication with mothers, 80% used Bahasa Indonesia, compared with only 3.33% who used Padoe and 16.67% who used a mixture of both languages. The dominance of Bahasa Indonesia was also evident in communication through telephone and text messages with parents.

The use of Padoe was similarly limited in communication with other family members. When children interacted with their grandparents, 90% used Bahasa Indonesia, 6.67% used Padoe, and 3.33% used a mixture of both languages. This finding is particularly important because grandparents represent the generation in which Padoe remains relatively strong. The fact that children still predominantly use Bahasa Indonesia even when communicating with grandparents suggests that the presence of fluent older speakers alone does not guarantee the continuation of intergenerational language use.

The low frequency of Padoe use among children is also reflected in their language competence. Only 3.33% of the children were categorized as very fluent in speaking Padoe, while 23.33% were somewhat fluent and 33.34% had only limited speaking ability. Most importantly, 40% reported that they could not speak Padoe at all. A similar pattern appeared in literacy skills: 36.67% reported that they could not read Padoe, while 30% could not write in the language. Although comprehension was somewhat stronger, with 26.67% reporting that they understood Padoe very well, 23.33% reported that they could not understand it at all. These findings indicate that passive or partial knowledge of Padoe may remain among some children, but active productive competence is substantially weaker.

The distinction between understanding and speaking is important in interpreting the language shift. A child may still recognize or understand words and expressions in Padoe because of exposure to older family members, while not having sufficient opportunities or motivation to use the language actively. In this situation, Padoe can remain present as part of the child's linguistic knowledge without functioning as the child's primary means of communication. The findings therefore suggest that the weakening of Padoe among younger speakers is not simply a matter of reduced vocabulary, but also involves a reduction in opportunities for active language use.

The strong position of Bahasa Indonesia among children is also consistent with broader patterns of local-language shift in Indonesia. Cohn and Ravindranath (2014) note that the increasing use of Bahasa Indonesia can contribute to the displacement of regional languages when Indonesian becomes the preferred language across an expanding range of communicative domains. In the Padoe community, this process is particularly visible because Bahasa Indonesia has become dominant even in family interactions that would normally provide opportunities for children to acquire and practice the local language.

The findings can also be compared with research on language transmission in other Indonesian communities. Family language practices play an important role in determining whether a heritage language continues to be transmitted to younger generations (Fernández & Lamas, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Similarly, the findings from the Padoe community demonstrate that the presence of positive attitudes toward a local language does not necessarily result in frequent use among children when everyday family communication is conducted

predominantly in the dominant language.

The dominance of Bahasa Indonesia among younger Padoe speakers therefore represents an important stage in the ongoing language shift. The older generation still provides a reservoir of Padoe knowledge, while the adult generation retains some competence and uses both languages in particular contexts. However, younger speakers have substantially fewer opportunities to use Padoe actively. The result is a generational gap in which Padoe remains associated with the linguistic knowledge of older speakers but has a much weaker position in the everyday communicative practices of children.

Conclusion

This study has shown that language use in the Padoe community varies considerably across generations. Padoe remains more strongly associated with the older generation, while adult speakers demonstrate a more mixed pattern of Padoe and Bahasa Indonesia use. Among younger speakers, however, Bahasa Indonesia has become the dominant language of everyday communication, including within the family. This generational pattern indicates that the position of Padoe has weakened progressively across age groups.

The findings also demonstrate that the shift from Padoe to Bahasa Indonesia is particularly visible in the family domain. Adult speakers still use Padoe in certain interactions, especially with older family members, but Bahasa Indonesia is more frequently used in their everyday communication. Among children, the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia is much stronger, while active use and speaking competence in Padoe are considerably limited. The high proportion of children who cannot speak Padoe indicates that opportunities for active use and acquisition of the language have become increasingly restricted.

Overall, the findings suggest that the main challenge for the continuity of Padoe is not simply the declining competence of individual speakers, but the weakening of its use as a language of everyday intergenerational communication. Padoe continues to exist in the linguistic repertoire and cultural knowledge of the community, particularly among older speakers, but its transmission to younger generations has become increasingly limited.

Strengthening the use of Padoe in family interaction, particularly between parents and children, is therefore important for maintaining its position as a living community language. Further research could examine the role of schools, community activities, and local language programs in creating additional opportunities for younger speakers to use Padoe actively.

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