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## The vitality of Malay Language in North Sumatera, Indonesia

Isda Pramuniati<sup>1</sup>, Mahriyuni Mahriyuni<sup>2</sup>, Tengku Syarfina<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> French Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Linguistics Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [isda@unimed.ac.id](mailto:isda@unimed.ac.id)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3255-0368>

#### Abstract

This study aims to describe the vitality level of the Malay language in North Sumatera. This study used a sociolinguistic approach, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis was carried out. Data analysis uses UNESCO references to measure the vitality level of a language. Data were obtained through a questionnaire to 165 respondents and analyzed using a Likert scale. The results show that the level of vitality of the Malay language in North Sumatera is experiencing a decline. This is associated with several findings, namely in terms of transmission, it is in grade 3: threatened with extinction; dwindling number of native speakers; the proportion of speakers is at grade 2: critically endangered; realm of use conditions at grade 3: shrinking realm; the condition of the new domain and media is included in grade 1: minimal; the condition of the availability of teaching materials and literacy is on scale 2: the condition of speakers' attitudes is on scale 4: indicating that almost all speakers are supportive of maintaining their language; and finally the documentation condition is in category 3: moderate. So, the vitality of the Malay Language is declining.

**Keywords:** decreased vitality, language maintenance, Malay Language



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### Public Interest Statement

This research unveils concerns about the diminishing vitality of the Malay language in North Sumatra. Employing a sociolinguistic approach and UNESCO metrics, both quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal a troubling decline in vitality. Findings indicate threats of extinction and critical endangerment, underscoring challenges in transmission, native speakers, and the language's realm of use. Urgent attention is needed to address these issues and implement measures for revitalization. Preserving the Malay language is not only vital for the cultural identity of North Sumatra but also aligns with broader linguistic diversity goals. This study urges collaborative efforts to safeguard the Malay language's future.

### Introduction

Language vitality refers to the ability of a language to accommodate and perform various functions and communication purposes. Specific languages may have high, moderate, or low vitality. Generally, regional languages tend to have low vitality due to their limited capacity to enter various realms of knowledge. The vitality of a language is evident in its external strength (the number of language speakers) and its internal strength (the number of word entries it possesses). For instance, in 1983, English was estimated to have 450 thousand words, French 150 thousand words, and Russian 130 thousand words. Achieving such vitality poses a significant challenge for regional languages (Candrasari & Nurmaida, 2018).

Vitality, or the life force of a language, pertains to the intensity of its usage and existence as a communication tool in various social contexts for specific purposes. A language is considered to have high vitality when many of its speakers and the language variations are widely used. This characteristic is one of the hallmarks of a language that will continue to be used and passed down from generation to generation (Meyerhoff, 2006:108, as cited in Harimansyah, 2017).

The term "Vitality" was first introduced in ethnolinguistic studies by Giles et al. (1977). The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group influences how a speech community behaves as a distinctive unit. The higher the vitality level of a speech community, the more potential it has for survival. In contrast, the language is predicted not to endure if it has low or no vitality. In other words, language vitality serves as a measure of the preservation of a language by assessing its everyday use as a communication tool in various social contexts for various purposes (Giles, 1977). In the context of language development, research on language vitality is crucial as it can be used to determine the likelihood of a language's sustainability in the future, and it can also be used to assess the potential for sustainable language development efforts (Candrasari & Nurmaida, 2018, p. 1).

Collins (2005: 8, 12) notes that the earliest known Malay text, dating back to 682, was etched onto a stone in Sumatra. The ancient Malay language adopted Indian orthography based on the Pallava script. This form of Malay continued to be used for inscriptions and tombstones until the 14th century, with occasional orthographic modifications. In 1292, during Marco Polo's visit to the north coast of Sumatra, inscriptions in Jambi were composed in Ancient Malay using the Old Javanese script. The oldest Malay inscriptions in Arabic orthography (Jawi) were documented by some researchers in 1303.

There are 87 Malay dialects in the Nusantara region, with six in North Sumatra: Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Panai, and Pesisir Sibolga. Based on dialectometric calculations, the differences between these six dialects range from 51% to 71.50% (dialect variation). People speak the Langkat dialect in parts of Langkat Regency and Binjai City. They also use the Deli dialect in parts of Medan City and Deli Serdang. In addition, the Serdang dialect is spoken in Deli Serdang Regency, Serdangbedagai Regency, and Tebingtinggi City. The Asahan dialect is spoken in parts of Asahan Regency, Batubara, North Labuhanbatu, and Tanjungbalai City. People use the Panai dialect in Labuhanbatu Regency and South Labuhanbatu Regency. The Pesisir Sibolga dialect is also spoken in Sibolga City and Central Tapanuli Regency.

Distinguishing between language and dialect is complex, as some linguists find it confusing (Wardhaugh, 1988, pp. 22-53). Chambers and Trudgill (1990: 3) posit that speakers of a language inherently

speak (at least) one dialect, and no dialect is inherently superior to another. Laksono (2009) ultimately views language as a collection of “mutually intelligible” dialects, provided they are closely connected. Here, the concept of a dialect chain applies within a continuum of dialect unity. Within this dialect boundary, it can also be asserted that a dialect’s primary characteristic is the balance between differentiation and unity (Meillet, 1970; Nothofer, 1987). Furthermore, it is suggested that a dialect is a set of local speech forms that, while distinct, share common features and are more akin to one another than to speech forms from another dialect of the same language. Regarding population composition, as of 2020, North Sumatra had a population of 15,136,522, with Malays making up only 6.36% (962,683 individuals). This demographic makeup has implications for the use of the Malay language.

The Malay language in North Sumatra is increasingly marginalized, particularly among adolescents and young people. Adolescence is a critical period in human development when individuals are especially susceptible to external influences as they form their identities. Linguistically, adolescents tend to form communities that may change, sometimes distancing themselves from their linguistic origins. In urban areas, it is not uncommon for young people to lose proficiency in their regional language, especially with the prevalence of slang. A healthy language is dynamic and capable of adapting to changing times.

As Lauder (2020) cites Barrena et al. (2000: 328-330), it is worth noting that globally, only about 30% of intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue language occurs smoothly. The remaining 70% face various obstacles. In Indonesia, and similarly in North Sumatra, the functions of regional languages have been largely supplanted by the Indonesian language, both in government administration and education. According to Lauder (2020), citing Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), this phenomenon of the national language taking over the functions and roles of regional languages in education is a widespread global occurrence known as linguistic genocide.

If people do not preserve the Malay language of North Sumatra, the possibility of a language shift becomes apparent. Sumarsono (2017) states that speakers who abandon their language and adopt another belong to the phenomenon of language shift. If a community continues using their language, they are actively preserving it.

Language competition raises concerns. The number of Malay speakers in North Sumatra has declined due to the pressure of more dominant languages, the national language, and foreign languages (Arka, 2013). The increasing percentage of foreign language use on a global scale, especially English as a lingua franca (Feely & Harzing, 2003), exacerbates this condition. Wurm (2003) mentions that regional languages with many speakers gradually lose ground to Indonesian, particularly among the younger generation. Holmes (2013) notes that the language spoken by individuals or groups, over time, can gradually replace the mother tongue and become a minority language.

The preservation and shift of language emerge as a prominent issue, highlighting the powerlessness of minority migrants to resist the majority language and to retain their native language (Malini, 2012). Since 1999, UNESCO has launched the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) to preserve linguistic diversity, mainly native mother languages. The celebration of Mother Language Day stems from concerns about the increasing threat of extinction faced by many regional languages over time.

Abbas and Iqbal (2018) suggest that a language’s vitality depends on its speakers’ attitudes. Speakers who hold a positive attitude towards their language ensure its growth. However, if speakers display a negative attitude towards their language, its existence is threatened.

So far, researchers have been unable to establish universal principles explaining the process of language death or extinction (Schmidt, 1985). However, it is generally agreed upon that a language is at high risk of disappearing when (i) a large number of changes occur in a very short period and (ii) some structures vanish from a language and are not replaced by alternative languages (see Dorian 1976, 1981; Muhlhausler, 1974; Dressler 1982, 1988). It is also evident that in language contact situations, cross-linguistic influence can permanently affect the recipient language, triggering changes at all linguistic levels.

Many scholars have suggested that sociocultural factors, rather than pure linguistic considerations,

should explain the process of language death (Alleyne, 1971; Irvine, 1978; Schmidt, 1985; McConvell, 1991). Alleyne (1971:182) writes that 'sociocultural factors everywhere determine the degree of disruption, from one region to another and even within a single region.' To define a better theory to understand language shift, McConvell (1991) looks at language choice in bilingual situations and the functions covered by two existing languages. According to him, language shift can be viewed as a result of losing bilingualism, meaning the loss of the ability to choose between languages for communication. Regarding social function, this is likely to be replaced by style choice within one language (McConvell, 1991, p. 51).

Suppose language shift occurs primarily because the dominant language takes over functions previously covered by the minority language. In that case, it seems necessary to examine some issues in code-switching, which some researchers believe are responsible for code-switching (Harris, 1977), removing its social meaning (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; McConvell, 1988; Heller 1988, 1995). The literature on code-switching is abundant, and it is also necessary to distinguish code-switching from code-mixing and borrowing.

Researchers have extensively researched language vitality so far. Some of them, like Wibowo (2014), have studied the vitality of the Enggano language. The result is that the Enggano language on Enggano Island, Bengkulu, is experiencing a decline. Winarti (2014) researched the vitality of the Bahonsuai language. The vitality of the Bahonsuai language in Bahonsuai Village, Central Sulawesi, is potentially declining. Aritonang (2013) conducted a study titled "Vitality of Seget Language: A Study Towards Mapping the Vitality of Regional Language." In addition, Aritonang (2016) also conducted research on the Talondo language titled "Criteria for Vitality of Talondo Language". The result is that the vitality of the Talondo language falls under the decline category. Candrasari (2017) compiled a dissertation titled "Devayan Language in Simeuleu Island: A Study of Language Vitality." The EGIDS scale assesses the vitality of the Devayan language in Simeuleu Island at level 6b, indicating that it is critically endangered. Wagianti, Wahya, and Riyanto (2017) researched the vitality of the Sundanese language in Bandung Regency. Maricar and Ety (2017) conducted a study titled "Vitality of Ternate Language in Ternate Island." Nugroho (2018) researched the vitality of the Yalahatan language in Maluku. The study shows that the vitality of the Yalahatan language is in a state of decline. Inayatussalihah (2018) researched the vitality of the Buru language in Wamlana Village, Buru Island, Maluku Province. The conclusion is that the Buru language in Wamlana Village falls under the third level of the UNESCO endangerment scale, indicating that it is endangered. Firdaus (2018) conducted a study titled "Threat of Extinction of Suwawa Language: Analysis of Language Vitality." The result is that the Suwawa language is stable but endangered. Setiawati et al. (2019) conducted a study titled "Language Vitality, Diglossia, and Its Tensions: The Preservation of Manduro Language in Manduro Village, Kabuh District, Jombang Regency, East Java". The result is that the Manduro language in Manduro Village is stable and firm but potentially endangered. Diglossia occurs in family, relatives, neighbors, and friendships. Tension in diglossia occurs in the domain of friendships. Vitality research on the Malay language, including Cikita et al. (2022), investigated the Vitality of the Malay language in Kampung Melayu Village, Tambelan Subdistrict, Bintan Regency, Riau Islands. Their findings indicate that the vitality of the Malay language in Kampung Melayu Village is categorized as stable but potentially declining.

The study is grounded in sociolinguistic theory, which focuses on the relationship between language and society (Hazen, 2010; Holmes, 2013; Hudson, 1996; Lillis, 2013; Spolsky, 1998). Sociolinguistics explores language use in social contexts, how language functions, social relations within communities, and how speakers construct their identities through language (Holmes, 2013). Sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field bridging linguistics and sociology, emphasizing the connection between language and its users (Chaer & Agustina, 2010; Nababan, 1993; Pateda, 2015; Sumarsono, 2017). According to Nababan (1993), sociolinguistics delves into the variations of language in society. It studies language use in social contexts, how language functions, social relations within communities, and how speakers construct their identities through language (Holmes, 2013).

Ibrahim (2009:97), based on Grimes' formulation of six levels of language endangerment, namely

critically endangered, severely endangered, endangered, eroding, stable but threatened, and safe. UNESCO (2011: 3) has identified nine factors to determine the vitality level of a language: (1) Intergenerational language transmission, (2) Absolute number of speakers, (3) Proportion of speakers within the total population, (4) Loss of existing language domains, (5) Response to new domains and media, (6) Materials for language education and literacy, (7) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, (8) Community members' attitudes toward their language, and (9) Amount and quality of documentation.

Fishman (1991) states that vitality involves the use of a linguistic system by a non-isolated native-speaking community, and this vitality hinges on whether the linguistic system still has native speakers or not. The study utilizes language vitality theory to measure the usage level of the Malay language within the Malay community of North Sumatra. Measuring language vitality entails evaluating language use in various settings, such as at home, child-rearing, education, public events, and governance (Zahir, 2018). Essentially, language vitality heavily depends on the language attitudes of its speakers; thus, the correlation between language vitality and language attitudes is clear and interrelated (Grenoble, 2011). Lauder (2020: 4) expresses that UNESCO's concept of measuring language vitality examines it from a sociolinguistic standpoint. Therefore, it must be understood from the outset that assessing language vitality cannot rely on one factor alone. It must comprehensively consider the interplay of various factors. It must be fully recognized and understood that assessing a language community is highly complex and diverse. Hence, UNESCO suggests evaluating language vitality based on six factors, assessing language attitudes based on two factors, and evaluating the urgency of documentation based on one factor (Lauder, 2020: 4).

This study employed the framework proposed by UNESCO, which identifies six critical factors for evaluating the vitality of a language: (1) language transmission; (2) number of speakers; (3) proportion of speakers; (4) domains of use; (5) new domains and media; and (6) availability of teaching materials and literacy. Additionally, it will consider (7) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, (8) Community members' attitudes toward their language, and (9) the Amount and quality of documentation. The assessment of the Malay language's vitality in North Sumatra utilizes these nine factors. Descriptions of these factors will be derived from primary data through questionnaires. Moreover, interviews and participatory observations will supplement or reinforce data not acquired through the questionnaires.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative-quantitative descriptive research method. The dominant method is quantitative; data collection is conducted through questionnaires, while qualitative methods explain the findings obtained through the quantitative method. Data collection for this method was done through interviews in the regions where Malay (abbreviated as BM) is spoken, specifically in Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Panai, and Pesisir Sibolga.

Questionnaires are used to assess the vitality level of Malay in North Sumatra (in the form of a total index) and index per factor that determines language vitality. The questionnaires are distributed to respondents who are Malay speakers and live in the research sample's selected regions of Langkat, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Panai, and Pesisir Sibolga. A total of 165 people responded. The respondents are chosen to represent social diversity in terms of gender, age, and education.

The Likert Scale assesses individuals' or groups' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of social phenomena. The Likert scale responses to each item in the instrument range from very positive to very harmful and can include phrases like strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree, or permanently, often, sometimes, never (Sugiyono, 2016, p. 135).

The respondents are divided into four age groups: children aged 10–15 years (40 respondents), early adults <25 years (50 respondents), middle-aged adults 26–50 years (40 respondents), and late adults >51 years (35 respondents). The research on the Langkat dialect of Malay is conducted in three villages: Paya Perupuk, Serapuh Asli, and Teluk Bakung in the Tanjungpura sub-district of Langkat Regency. The total population of these three villages is approximately 8,466 people, of which around 70% are of Malay

ethnicity. Thirty respondents are involved in measuring the vitality of the Langkat dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily fishermen, farmers, civil servants, and traders.

The research on the Deli dialect of Malay is conducted in three neighborhoods: Martubung in Medan Labuhan sub-district (population: 18,598), Titi Papan in Medan Deli sub-district (population: 34,701), and Aur in Medan Maimun sub-district (population: 8,093). The total population of these three neighborhoods is approximately 61,392, with about 50% being of Malay ethnicity. Thirty respondents are involved in measuring the vitality of the Deli dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily civil servants, entrepreneurs, and traders.

The research on the Serdang dialect of Malay is conducted in three villages: Hamparan Perak in Hamparan Perak sub-district (population: 16,905), Batang Kuis Pekan in Batang Kuis sub-district (population: 6,111), and Kota Galuh in Perbaungan sub-district (population: 4,432). The total population of these three villages is approximately 27,448, with around 65% being of Malay ethnicity. Thirty respondents are involved in measuring the vitality of the Serdang dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily fishermen, farmers, civil servants, and traders.

The research on the Asahan dialect of Malay is conducted in three areas of Asahan Regency: Sei Tualang Pandau in Sei Kepayang Barat sub-district (population: 1,461), Sei Tempurung in Sei Kepayang Timur sub-district (population: 1,292), and Lubuk Palas in Silau Laut sub-district (population: 6,925). The total population of these three areas is approximately 9,678, with about 67% being of Malay ethnicity. Thirty respondents are involved in measuring the vitality of the Asahan dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily fishermen, farmers, civil servants, and traders.

The research on the Panai dialect of Malay is conducted in three villages of Labuhanbatu Regency: Ajamu in Panai Hulu sub-district (population: 5,376), Labuhanbilik in Panai Tengah sub-district (population: 4,221), and Sei Berombang in Panai Hilir sub-district (population: 13,822). The total population of these three villages is approximately 23,419, with about 45% being of Malay ethnicity. Fifteen respondents were involved in measuring the vitality of the Panai dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily fishermen, farmers, and traders.

The research on the Pesisir Sibolga dialect of Malay is conducted in Tapanuli Tengah Regency, specifically in Sorkam Kiri in Sorkam sub-district (population: 441), Sorkam Kanan in Sorkam Barat sub-district (population: 1,411), and Pancuran Kerambil in Sibolga Sambas sub-district of Sibolga city (population: 3,212). The total population of these three areas is approximately 5,064, with about 35% being of Pesisir Sibolga Malay ethnicity. Thirty respondents are involved in measuring the vitality of the Pesisir Sibolga dialect of Malay. Their professions are primarily fishermen, civil servants, and traders. There are 135,467 people in the research locations, with an average of 73,259 of Malay ethnicity. This study aims to describe the vitality of Malay in North Sumatra. Consequently, it requires index values to determine the status of Malay language vitality in the region.

## Results and Discussion

Social needs fundamentally determine a language's existence, encompassing its use by individuals and function in society. All linguistic realities (systems, processes, and products) serve social needs (objectively existing purposes), and these needs are the source of diverse linguistic use and linguistic messages (Prucha, 1983, p. 287).

Strong evidence indicates that many languages in the world will disappear soon, including, in this case, Malay in North Sumatra. However, only some people can predict the future of Malay with certainty.

## Bilingualism in the Malay Community

Bilingualism refers to the ability to speak two languages equally or nearly equally. Technically, this refers to an individual's knowledge of two languages at whatever level.

Table 1. Respondents' Perceptions, Families, and the Malay Ethnic Group about their Proficiency in BM.

Indicator	Average	Tendency
Respondents' Mastery of BM	2.6	Proficient in Malay Language
Family's Mastery of BM	2.4	Proficient in Malay Language
Malay Ethnic Group's Mastery of BM	2.5	Proficient in Malay Language

According to the respondents' perceptions, respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group have proficiency in BM based on the average of the three items in the above data. Individually, 107 people are proficient in BM; in the family domain, 69 people are proficient in BM; and 76 people are proficient in BM based on ethnicity.

Table 2. Percentage of perceptions of individual, family, and Malay ethnic group proficiency in other local languages.

Indicator	Proficiency Level	F	%
<b>Individual Mastery of Other Regional Languages</b>	Highly Proficient Proficient	-	-
	Somewhat Proficient Not Proficient	107	64
		36	22
	Total	22	13
		165	100
<b>Family Mastery of Other Regional Languages</b>	Highly Proficient Proficient	-	-
	Somewhat Proficient Not Proficient	69	42
		52	31
	Total	44	27
		165	100
<b>Individual Mastery of Other Regional Languages for Malay Ethnic Group</b>	Highly Proficient Proficient	-	-
	Somewhat Proficient Not Proficient	76	46
		44	27
	Total	45	27
		165	100

Table 3. Proficiency of respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in other local languages.

Indicator	Average	Tendency
Respondents' Mastery of Another Language	2.2	Not Proficient in Another Language
Family's Mastery of Another Language	2.1	Not Proficient in Another Language
Malay Ethnic Group's Mastery of Another Language	2.3	Not Proficient in Another Language

This data shows that only 50 respondents, 41 respondent families, and 46 Malay ethnic group members can

master other local languages. Therefore, respondents, respondent families, and the Malay ethnic group tend not to be proficient in other local languages.

Table 4. Proficiency of respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in Indonesian.

Indicator	Average	Tendency
<b>Respondents' Mastery of Indonesian Language</b>	4.0	Proficient in Indonesian Language
<b>Family's Mastery of Indonesian Language</b>	3.9	Proficient in Indonesian Language
<b>Malay Ethnic Group's Mastery of Indonesian Language</b>	3.9	Proficient in Indonesian Language

According to the data above, all respondents, families, and ethnic groups are fluent in Indonesian. According to their admission, respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group's proficiency level in Indonesian is higher than in their native language, BM.

Table 5. Proficiency of respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in foreign languages.

Indicator	Average	Tendency
<b>Respondents' Mastery of Foreign Language</b>	2.0	Not Proficient in Foreign Language
<b>Family's Mastery of Foreign Language</b>	2.0	Not Proficient in Foreign Language
<b>Malay Ethnic Group's Mastery of Foreign Language</b>	2.1	Not Proficient in Foreign Language

The proficiency of respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in foreign languages tends to be lacking. Only 13 respondents, seven respondent families, and 18 Malay ethnic group members can grasp foreign languages (English) passively.

Table 6. Proficiency of respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in local languages, Indonesian, and foreign languages.

Indicator	Average Proficiency		
	Local Language	Indonesian language	Foreign Language
<b>Respondents' Mastery</b>	2.2	4.0	2.0
<b>Family Respondents' Mastery</b>	2.1	3.9	2.0
<b>Malay Ethnic Group's Mastery</b>	2.3	3.9	2.1

There are differences in proficiency among respondents, their families, and the Malay ethnic group in three languages: their native tongue, Indonesian, and a foreign language. The highest overall average proficiency among Indonesians indicates that their proficiency in Indonesian is higher than in their native tongue or any other language.

One of the factors influencing bilingualism is code-switching versus code-mixing in discourse. Code-switching refers to mixing various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, and sentences) mainly from two grammatical systems participating throughout the boundaries of speech events (Bhatia & Ritchie, 1996, p. 629). The results of this study indicate that all respondents experience code-mixing and code-switching in discourse. Another factor is code-switching versus borrowing. Some people use mixing to refer to mixing and borrowing (Romaine, 1989; Pfaff, 1979) and encompasses transfer, shift, and related phenomena



(McLaughlin, 1984, pp. 96-97). Crystal (1980:36) defines borrowing as ‘linguistic forms taken over by one language or dialect from another.’ From this perspective, it can be said that borrowing is a diachronic phenomenon (Wheeler & Westwood, 1989), whereas code-switching is synchronic. As Berk-Seligson (1986) noted, borrowing can occur within a speech community of one language, while code-switching requires proficiency in two languages.

**Language Transmission**

A language classified as safe may not retain that status if its speakers fail to pass it on to the next generation. This phenomenon can be observed in the case of Bahasa Malaysia (BM) in North Sumatra.

Table 7. Respondents’ perception of the existence of intergenerational language transmission.

Indicator	Tingkat penguasaan	F	%
<b>Parents teach Malay to their children</b>	Strongly Agree	96	58.2
	Agree	69	41.8
	Disagree	0	-
	Strongly Disagree	0	-
	Total	165	100
<b>Children’s Proficiency in Malay</b>	Very Proficient	-	-
	Proficient	7	17.5
	Somewhat Proficient	18	45.0
	Not Proficient	15	37.5
	No Answer	-	-
	Total	40	100
<b>Malay is taught in school</b>	Yes	-	-
	No	165	100
	Total	165	100

The above data shows that 58.2% strongly agree and 41.8% agree, meaning that intergenerational language transmission occurs among Malay speakers. However, Malay transmission is only sometimes continuous. Malay children speak Indonesian as their first language to ensure that their children have a positive school experience. Malay is taught to their children as they grow older. As a result, the next generation’s proficiency in Malay is passive. They understand what their parents say but have difficulty responding in Malay.

The absence of continuous transmission from an early age results in Malay children not mastering the language. The lack of Malay instruction in school further worsens children’s proficiency in this language. UNESCO’s language inheritance framework designates Bahasa Malaysia (BM) in North Sumatra as being in Position 3, signifying its endangered status. This means the language is no longer actively passed down as a mother tongue within households, with speakers primarily belonging to the older generation. If parents continue to speak that language to their children, they will generally understand passively and partially, so they will respond in another language.

**Number of Speakers**

This research reveals that the dwindling number of speakers significantly contributes to the decline and potential extinction of Malay in North Sumatra. The most significant factor is the decreasing number of

native speakers. Looking at the Malay population in North Sumatra, which is less than one million people, only some speak Malay.

According to the research location, the total population in all locations is 135,467, with 73,259 being of Malay ethnicity (BPS North Sumatra, 2020). In terms of population composition, North Sumatra's population in 2020 was 15,136,522, with the Malay population accounting for only 6.36%, or 962,683.

**Proportion of Speakers**

Based on the proportion of speakers in the total population, Malay speakers are a minority group. The percentage of Malay speakers in the total population is depicted below.

Table 8. Respondents' perception of the proportion of speakers in the total population

Indicator	Response	F	%
<b>Respondents' Perception of the Proportion of Speakers in the Total Population</b>	More Malay speakers	26	15.8
	Equal number of Malay and speakers of other languages	42	25.5
	Fewer Malay speakers.	97	58.7
	Total	165	100

Based on the data above, it is evident that the proportion of Malay speakers in the total population is small. Therefore, regarding the proportion of speakers, it falls into category 2, critically endangered.

**Domain of Usage**

In the domain of usage, we will examine the domains of household, formal, religious, educational, and commercial usage.

Table 9. Usage of Malay in the household domain

Indicator	Average	Tendency
<b>Use of Malay in daily communication with family members at home</b>	2.1	Not Used
<b>Use of Malay in written correspondence and telephone with family members</b>	2.0	Not Used

The average use of both languages within households shows that Malay tends to be utilized less frequently. Nevertheless, some households employ it, albeit at a limited level, indicating a potential deficiency in its usage.

Table 10. Trends in the use of Malay in formal settings

Indicator	Average	Tendency
<b>Use of Malay when speaking with sub-district/village officers</b>	1.7	Not Used
<b>Use of Malay when speaking with health personnel at Community Health Center</b>	2.0	Not Used
<b>Use of Malay in brochures from village/sub-district/district government</b>	1.9	Not Used

Three indicators suggest that Malay is rarely used in formal situations. This includes talking to village or district officials, interacting with health workers, and reading official announcements from the local government.

Table 11. Trends in the use of Malay in religious contexts.

Indicator	Average	Tendency
<b>Use of Malay in religious activities</b>	2.0	Not Used
<b>Use of Malay when praying</b>	2.0	Not Used

Two indicators for measuring the use of BM in religious contexts show low numbers. BM is no longer prevalent in formal religious settings, including religious activities and prayers. This points to a shift from the traditional use of the local language, moving instead towards adopting Indonesian and Arabic. This change underscores BM's fragile state in terms of its vitality.

Table 12. Use of Malay in educational settings

Indicator	Average	Tendency
Use of Malay by teachers when teaching at school	2.0	Not Used
Use of Malay by teachers or school principals when speaking with students from the Malay ethnic group	1.9	Not Used
Use of Malay in school correspondence to students	1.8	Not Used

Based on the data above, looking at the three indicators of language use in the educational context, all three indicate that Malay is not commonly used.

The proficiency in the local language among children living in multi-ethnic environments will further decrease because schools need to provide books in the local language. According to the information provided by the respondents, no Malay language books are available in schools, including textbooks as well as fiction or storybooks.

Table 13. Use of Malay in trade and commerce settings

Indicator	Average	Tendency
Use of Malay in bargaining activities at the market	2.1	Not Used
Use of Malay in lease/sale agreements	1.9	Not Used
Use of Malay in advertisements for the sale of goods	1.7	Not Used

The data above indicates the use of language in sales agreements and advertisements for the sale of goods. In semi-formal documents like sales agreements and certain advertisements for the sale of goods, Malay (BM) is not utilized. This implies that in trade and commerce, both in formal scenarios such as sales agreements and select advertisements, as well as in informal situations like bargaining in the market, there remains a need to use Malay.

Based on the domain of language use, the condition of language use falls into category 3, which is a shrinking domain.

#### New Domains and Media

The use of other languages is considered an obstacle to the use of Malay. This also includes the response to new domains and media.

Table 14. The presence or absence of regulations/usage of other languages that hinder the use of Malay

Regulation	Average	Tendency
Regulations that hinder Malay	2.8	Present
Other local languages hinder Malay	2.4	Present
Indonesian hinders Malay	2.9	Present

Based on the data above, respondents consider that there are regulations that hinder Malay. Both the regional language and Indonesian are also seen as hindrances to Malay. Therefore, based on the data, it can be said that regulations considered “favorable” to the survival of Malay do not exist.

Table 15. Tendency of the presence or absence of response to new domains and media

Response to New Domains and Media	Average	Tendency
Development of new vocabulary	1.9	Absent
Malay for modern scientific discussions	2.0	Absent
Use of Malay in the virtual world	2.0	Absent
Malay script in unicode	2.0	Absent
Use of computers for writing Malay	2.0	Absent

Despite the claims of two respondents, there was no evidence of new vocabulary development in Malay. Furthermore, Malay is not used in discussions about modern science. There were also no instances of Malay being used in the virtual realm, such as writing in Malay on computers, using Malay on the internet, or communicating among Malay speakers online. Regarding new domains and media, Malay is classified as category 1, indicating limited usage in a few areas.

#### Availability of Teaching Materials and Literacy

Languages with a written tradition (orthography) and script systems tend to have better, higher vitality. However, availability only sometimes supports the vitality of a language. A writing system does not guarantee that the community has access to literacy. The availability of literacy materials does not ensure that these materials are also read. In many cases of language shift, some community members may be literate in Indonesian but not in their regional language.

Below is the data from respondents regarding the availability of teaching materials and literacy in Malay in North Sumatra.

Table 16. Availability of teaching materials and literacy

Availability of Teaching Materials and Literacy	Average	Tendency
Reading materials in Malay	2.1	Not Available
Writings in Malay	2.1	Not Available
Malay script system	2.9	Available

Based on the data above, reading materials in Malay are generally not found. Likewise, it is exceedingly uncommon to come across written materials in Malay. Respondents know the Malay script system, namely using Jawi or Arabic script.

Next, let us look at government policies and institutional efforts in preserving and using Malay.

Table 17. Existence of regulations regarding Malay

Indicator	Availability of Regulation	F	%
Local regulations on the preservation of Malay	Unsure	26	15.8
	No	132	80.0
	Yes	7	4.2
	Total	165	100

Government recommendation on the use of Malay	No	149	90.3
	Yes	16	9.7
	Total	165	100

Local regulations and recommendations for using Malay are either unavailable or non-existent—similarly, government policies and institutions dealing with this subject must be included. Malay use in this region is becoming “restricted” due to regulations encouraging the use of another language, Indonesian, which means not using the regional language in the workplace. Recommendations for using Indonesian in public, government, and work settings, per Law Number 24 of 2009, concerning the Flag, Language, State Symbol, and National Anthem, are seen as impeding Malay use.

Table 18. Regulations regarding Malay

Policies and Regulations	Average	Tendency
Government and institutional policies	2.0	Absent
Regulations on the use of other languages (Indonesian) that hinder	3.8	Present
Regulations on the use of local languages that hinder	2.1	Absent

The government needs to issue regulations or rules to address the decline in the use of regional languages, particularly those with few speakers.

The following table summarizes the status of Malay in North Sumatra based on the responses provided by the respondents.

Table 19. Status of Malay

Indicator	Status	F	%
Is Malay the most important language in this region?	No	28	17.0
	Yes	137	83.0
	Total	165	100
Is there an obligation to use Malay in the domain of governance?	No	165	100
	Yes	-	-
	Total	165	100
Is there an obligation to use Malay in public services?	No	165	100
	Yes	-	-
	Total	165	100
Is Malay used in arts and customs?	No	23	13.9
	Yes	142	86.1
	Total	165	100

The Malay community in North Sumatra values its language. It is significant because it is part of their Malay identity. Malay (BM) identity distinguishes them from other ethnic groups.

According to respondents’ perceptions, this language is essential in determining BM’s status. Because it is used in traditional activities, BM is considered critical. Furthermore, BM is used to express aesthetic aspects. Despite being regarded as necessary by respondents, BM is not used in government because Malay is not required in government matters. If there were rules or obligations regarding using this language, speakers of both BM and other languages would follow them.

Regulations and the use of other languages must also support the vitality of a language. The data from respondents on this subject is shown below.

Table 20. Respondents' Perception of Regulations/Use of Other Languages

Indikator	Jawaban	F	%
<b>Are there regulations that hinder Malay?</b>	No	165	100
	Yes	-	-
	Total	165	100
<b>Do other local languages hinder Malay?</b>	No	46	27.9
	Yes	119	72.1
	Total	165	100
<b>Does Indonesian Language hinder Malay?</b>	No	33	20.0
	Yes	132	80.0
	Total	165	100

According to the data above, no regulations are preventing the use of BM, specifically regulations governing its use. An official institution advises on the importance of using Indonesian in daily communication, both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic, to avoid any suspicion that they are discussing sensitive topics.

The Malay people see the more prevalent use of other regional languages as a barrier to the use of BM. The Batak community's use of other regional languages, such as the Batak language, which is socially and economically more dominant, has a psychological impact on them. Feeling like a minority, economically and socially marginalized, causes them to be "shy" about using BM, even if they have a positive attitude toward it. Their pride in BM is not supported by its use in various domains.

In addition to the Batak language, the Indonesian language is regarded as the most obstructive to the use of BM. Malay speakers prefer using Indonesian due to its perceived higher value or prestige. The government and educational institutions primarily use Indonesian to reinforce this preference.

Table 21. Presence or absence of regulations/use of other languages that hinder the use of Malay based on averages

Regulation	Average	Tendency
<b>Regulations hindering Malay</b>	2.0	None
<b>Other local languages hindering Malay</b>	2.3	Yes
<b>Indonesian Language hindering Malay</b>	3.4	Yes

Based on the data above, if we look at the responses of the respondents, regulations related to hindering Malay are considered to exist by the respondents. Similarly, other regional languages and Indonesian are also considered to have hindered Malay. Therefore, based on the respondents' responses, it can also be said that regulations considered "favorable" to the survival of Malay do not exist.

Table 22. Sanctions for Violations of Malay Usage

Indicator	Response	F	%
Is a person who violates the use of Malay considered to be violating custom?	Yes	5	3.0
	No	160	97.0
	Total	165	100
Will a person who violates the use of Malay be disliked by the Malay community?	Yes	-	-
	No	165	100
	Total	165	100
Will a person who violates the use of Malay be ostracized?	Yes	-	-
	No	165	100
	Total	165	100

Based on the three questions in the data above, all of them indicate that nothing can help maintain the vitality of Malay. The absence of customary sanctions for violations of Malay usage and social sanctions from the community for violations of BM usage are mitigating factors. This situation provides ample room for the Malay community to refrain from using Malay. The leniency or freedom of the Malay community not to use BM will lead to a decreased vitality of Malay.

Based on the description from the data and the above conditions, the availability of teaching materials and literacy in Malay falls into category two on the scale, meaning the language is considered to have written material. However, it is only beneficial for certain social strata, while for the general public, it is more symbolic. Literacy education in that language is not part of the school curriculum.

**Language Attitude**

Language attitude can be observed at several levels: at the national or government level, attitude at the majority group level, and lastly, language attitude at the community level of speakers of that language. Government and institutional attitudes are often influenced and even determined by the attitude of the majority population (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 11). Here are the language attitudes of the Malay community towards BM in North Sumatra.

Table 23. Respondents' Attitudes towards Malay

Indicator	Respondents' Attitudes	F	%
The Malay community is proud of Malay	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Agree	132	80.0
	Strongly Agree	33	20.0
	Total	165	100
Malay is more important compared to other regional languages	Strongly Disagree	28	17.0
	Disagree	76	46.1
	Agree	61	37.0
	Strongly Agree	-	-
	Total	165	100

Malay is more beneficial compared to other regional languages	Strongly Disagree	21	12.7
	Disagree	16	9.7
	Agree	108	65.5
	Strongly Agree	20	12.1
	Total	165	100
Malays should have a greater command of Malay compared to their proficiency in other regional languages	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	2	1.2
	Agree	48	29.1
	Strongly Agree	115	67.7
	Total	165	100
Malay should be used among the Malay community members.	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Disagree	-	-
	Agree	127	77.0
	Strongly Agree	38	23.0
	Total	165	100

The pride of the Malay community in Malay is relatively high. This is evident from the data above, which shows that most Malay communities take pride in BM. This pride is also supported by their agreement that BM is a more critical language than others.

The Malay community regards BM as a language that brings many benefits. These benefits are more symbolic or aesthetic. Due to this function, they believe all Malays must master Malay. However, some respondents stated that the Malay community does not have to use Malay in everyday communication. This is because they believe that Indonesians already serve this purpose.

Respondents' statements suggest that Malay should be mastered more by the Malay community compared to proficiency in other regional languages. They believe that BM is their identity as Malays. Therefore, they should have a better command of BM than other regional languages.

Table 24. Language Speakers' Attitudes towards Malay based on the average

Indicator	Average	Tendency
The Malay community is proud of Malay	3.3	Positive
Malay is more important compared to other regional languages	3.1	Positive
Malay is more beneficial compared to other regional languages	2.8	Positive
Malays should have better mastery of Malay compared to their proficiency in other regional languages	3.7	Positive
Malay should be used among the Malay community members	3.7	Positive

The data above show respondents' language attitudes toward BM are generally positive. This is indicated by the average of the five statements presented. The statement that the Malay community should master BM more than other regional languages has the highest average value. They consider BM to be their Malay identity. As a result, they should have a better command of BM than other regional languages.



Table 25. Government's Attitude towards Malay

Indicator	Respondents' Attitude	F	%
<b>Does the government appreciate the use of Malay?</b>	Very Unappreciative	-	-
	Unappreciative	-	-
	Appreciative	160	97.0
	Very Appreciative	5	3.0
	Total	165	100
<b>Does the government develop/protect Malay?</b>	Very Unsupportive	-	-
	Not Supportive	46	27.9
	Supportive	72	43.6
	Very Supportive	47	28.5
	Total	165	100

One factor determining the survival of a language is the support or lack thereof from the government. Prohibitions on the use of regional languages and encouragement to always use the national language are seen as contributing factors to the accelerated decline of regional languages. The data above displays the government's attitude towards BM to understand the local government's stance towards BM.

The absence of prohibitions from the government regarding the use of BM by the Malay community is seen as a form of protection and appreciation for BM. The Malay community can use BM in daily communication, both within their ethnicity and across different ethnic groups. However, efforts by the government to develop BM are perceived to need improvement.

In addition to the government, traditional institutions or organizations are also seen as protectors of BM. This protection is manifested, among other things, by the continued use of BM in some traditional ceremonies or activities. According to respondents' perceptions, traditional institutions or organizations contribute to the development of BM. However, based on field observations, the form of BM development by traditional institutions or organizations is temporary.

Table 26. Attitudes of institutions and private entities towards BM based on respondents' perceptions

Indikator	Sikap Responden	F	%
<b>Do private companies allow Malay people to speak Malay?</b>	Very Unwilling	-	-
	Unwilling	-	-
	Willing	138	83.6
	Very Willing	27	16.4
	Total	165	100
<b>Do customary institutions promote the development of Malay?</b>	Very Unsupportive	-	-
	Not Supportive	-	-
	Supportive	133	80.6
	Very Supportive	32	19.4
	Total	165	100

<b>Do customary institutions protect Malay?</b>	Very Unprotective	-	-
	Not Protective	24	14.5
	Protective	88	53.3
	Very Protective	53	32.2
	Total	165	100

The protection provided by traditional institutions or organizations for BM, as stated by the respondents, is evident. There is no prohibition from the government and traditional institutions/organizations regarding using BM, but in official forums, using BM is prohibited, especially when working in an office.

Table 27. Attitudes of Government and Institutions towards Malay based on Averages

Government and Institutional Attitudes	Average	Tendency
<b>Government appreciates the use of Malay</b>	4.0	Appreciating
<b>Government protects the Malay</b>	3.0	Protecting
<b>Private companies allow the use of Malay in society</b>	3.2	Allowing
<b>Customary institutions promote the Malay</b>	3.2	Promoting
<b>Customary institutions protect the Malay</b>	3.1	Protecting

The government values and protects BM. The same goes for traditional institutions. However, its use must be adjusted to the situation. When inside the office or workplace, the national language should be used. Based on the data provided by the respondents, an evaluation of their language attitude can be determined. First, the government’s attitude falls into UNESCO’s category 3, which is passive assimilation, meaning there is no explicit policy for the minority language; the dominant language applies in the public sphere. Second, regarding the speakers’ attitude, it falls on a scale of 4, indicating that almost all speakers support preserving their language.

**Evaluation of Documentation Urgency**

In terms of documentation, two factors that can indicate whether a language is well-preserved or not are the type of documentation and the quality of the documentation of that language. The following is presented about this through the respondents’ perceptions.

Table 28. Documentation Quality Based on Respondents’ Perceptions

Indicator	Response	F	%
<b>Is the Malay language well-documented?</b>	Unsure	15	9.1
	No	29	17.6
	Yes	121	73.3
	Total	165	100
<b>Are Malay language documents easily found?</b>	Unsure	43	26.1
	No	79	47.8
	Yes	43	26.1
	Total	165	100

<b>Are there Malay documents in book form?</b>	Unsure	36	21.8
	No	20	12.1
	Yes	109	66.1
	Total	165	100
<b>Have Malay documents been found since the last century?</b>	Unsure	28	17.0
	No	11	6.7
	Yes	126	76.3
	Total	165	100

The data above indicates that some respondents answered “unsure.” This lack of knowledge is attributed to respondents needing more reading culture and the limited availability or absence of reading materials.

Table 29. Documentation Quality Based on the Average

Documentation Quality	Average	Tendency
<b>Good Malay Documentation Malay</b>	3.4	Unavailable
<b>Documentation in Book Form</b>	3.1	Available
<b>Discovery of Malay Documentation Since Centuries Ago</b>	3.4	Available

Some respondents believe that the documentation quality of BM could be better because such resources are not available in their area. Documents such as books about BM, dictionaries, grammar guides, and BM history are also challenging to find in the areas where respondents live.

Table 30. Availability of Documentation Types in Book and Audio Form.

Documentation Type	Average	Tendency
<b>Audio about Malay</b>	3.4	Available
<b>Malay Dictionary</b>	2.8	Available
<b>Grammar</b>	2.2	Available
<b>Malay History</b>	2.3	Available

The data above represents the average availability of documentation types from the Regional Language (BM), to which respondents’ answers refer to what they know in their residential areas.

The documentation status of BM falls into category 3, which means it is in a moderate condition. This indicates a language that may have adequate grammar books, dictionaries, and texts but needs daily media. It may have audio and video recordings with varying quality or annotation standards.

### Conclusion

According to several indicators used to assess the vitality of the language, spoken BM in the research area is declining. This conclusion is based on factors such as language proficiency among Malay speakers capable of mastering other regional languages. This multilingualism is caused by factors such as code-switching and code-mixing in speech and borrowing from other languages experienced by BM speakers. As per the UNESCO framework, the language is classified as endangered regarding language transmission or inheritance. This means the language is no longer learned as a first language in households. The speakers are primarily from older generations. Even if parents communicate the language to their children during this stage, they typically comprehend it passively and partially, frequently responding in a different language.

The dwindling number of speakers has resulted in the extinction of BM in North Sumatra. This is supported by the high proportion of critically endangered speakers in category 2. Meanwhile, based on the domain of BM usage, the usage domain condition is at position 3, which is shrinking. Furthermore, the condition of domains and new media for BM falls into category 1, which is minimal, meaning it is only used in a few domains and new media.

The availability of teaching materials and literacy in BM falls into category 2, a language considered to have written materials but is only beneficial for specific social strata. For the general public, it is more symbolic. Literacy education in that language is not part of the school curriculum. As for the evaluation of attitudes towards the language, first, the government's attitude falls into category three according to UNESCO, which is passive assimilation, where there is no explicit policy for minority languages; the dominant language applies in the public domain. Second, the speakers' attitude falls into category 4, indicating that almost all speakers support preserving their language. The documentation status of BM falls into category 3, which means it is in a moderate condition. This indicates a language that may have adequate grammar books, dictionaries, and texts but needs daily media. It may have audio and video recordings with varying quality or annotation standards. Based on this data, the vitality of the Malay Language is declining.

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