

# CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE VITALITY OF MINORITY LANGUAGE: EVIDENCE FROM LOLOAN MALAY

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## Abstract

This paper reports our preliminary sociolinguistic research on the ethnicity, identity and language vitality in minority language maintenance, taking Loloan Malay in East Loloan village as a case study. Loloan Malay was originally only spoken by the Moslems but at the moment it is also acquired as a native language and used as the means of communication by the Moslems and non-Moslems in this village. This language is well maintained in various situations although it is frequently mixed with the lexicon from its contact languages, Balinese, Bugis, and Indonesian, Arabic, even English. The data was collected through ethnography and extended interviews with samples based on the three groups, namely teenagers, adults, and housewives. They were chosen because they are most responsible to the language maintenance and language sustainability. Our study provides fresh empirical evidence for the significance of Loloan Malay as a symbolic linguistic tool, playing a central role for group-internal and group-external identity, giving rise to sustainable language vitality. Our findings also confirm with the current theoretical paradigm in sociolinguistic research that social group identity is multi-faceted with ethnicity and religion are just two among complex variables, that performance of such identity is on-going, socially constructed and enforced, and that social identity plays a key role in language maintenance.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, language vitality, language variation, social group, minority language

## INTRODUCTION

Loloan Malay is a minority language spoken by the people living in the village of West and East Loloan. What is special about Loloan Malay is that it is neither expanding like other varieties of Malay in eastern Indonesia such as Kupang Malay and Papuan Malay (Paauw, 2008), nor shrinking to the point that it is categorized as being endangered (at least in the eye of its speakers). Thus, its vitality can be conceived as relatively stable and healthy. This is surprising, given its language ecology and minority status under intense and constant pressure from the dominating language in the area, namely Balinese (and also Indonesian).

There have been previous studies on Loloan Malay (Sumarsono 1993; Bagus, 1978; Suparwa 2007; Rahman 2011; and Putu P., Malini, and Suparwa 2015). Most relevant to our present study is Sumarsono (1993) on language maintenance. However, his research was undertaken around twenty-five years ago. A lot have happened since then, and it is time now to revisit his findings on the maintenance of Loloan Malay, in particular the question of the underlying sociolinguistic force responsible for the relatively strong vitality of Loloan Malay. Sumarsono's conclusion is that this is mainly due to strong language loyalty, linking Loloan Malay to a Loloan Moslem identity. However, Sumarsono has not actually discussed how such identity has been constructed. Building on his work, our present research investigates the complexity of identity construction and language vitality in Loloan in the context of most recent development in Indonesia and also in light of the progress in (theoretical) sociolinguistics made in the past two and half decades. We plan to combine our socio-ethno linguistic research with

modern language documentation, so far not yet done, to provide a solid corpus-based basis for any future research on Loloan Malay including the research on linguistic vitality.

In our research we only focus on Loloan Malay in East Loloan sub-village. There are good sociolinguistic reasons of choosing East Loloan in our research on identity construction and language vitality. First, it is demographically more heterogeneous than West Loloan in that there are ethnic Balinese in East Loloan. Sociolinguistically, an ethnically mixed speech community would be of interest as far as the research of identity construction is concerned. Second, there is a strong local language activism in East Loloan to maintain Loloan Malay; this is further discussed below.

The main findings our research consist of two points, empirical and theoretical. Empirically, there is strong evidence showing that Loloan Malay serves as a symbolic linguistic tool, playing an equally central role both for group-internal identity within the Loloan community and for group-external identity (i.e. distinguishing them from other ethnic groups in the region, especially with the dominant Balinese. This point is in line with Sumarsono's main finding. Theoretically, our research has revealed and confirmed the current paradigm in sociolinguistic research that social group identity is multi-faceted (with ethnicity and religion are just two among complex variables), that performance of such identity is on-going, socially constructed and enforced, and that social identity plays a key role in language variation and change. These confirm the current theoretical paradigm in sociolinguistic research (Fought, 2013; Kiesling, 2013, among others).

We argue that it is the identity motivation and its on-going strong social enforcement of Loloan Malay as intra- and inter-group identity, which sustain relatively healthy vitality of Loloan Malay as a minority language in Bali, despite the odds that it is not ecologically isolated and in constant intense contact with the dominant Balinese. Our research also points out the significance of the role of local community in language activism for any successful language maintenance initiatives.

The paper is organized as follows. After a description of our present research and the data so far collected, we provide some background and demographic profiles of East Loloan villages. Then, the findings and discussion related to aims of this research, and also the conclusions are presented.

We plan to undertake long-term comprehensive research on language vitality using Loloan Malay as a case study for good reasons already outlined in the preceding section. Our approach is interdisciplinary in nature, combining traditional qualitative research methods with modern language documentation techniques in data collection and analysis. Our research is at its initial stage at the moment, and we can only report our preliminary findings.

Data collection has been done by means of an ethnographic approach (e.g., observing people talking and direct participation in communicative events), combined with interviews. Target local people interviewed consist of various groups: teenagers, adults and housewives. They were chosen because they are considered to be the ones most responsible to the language maintenance and language sustainability. Children and adults (in group of three) were asked to tell a story based on the picture cards given, applying four steps namely (1) describing 16 picture cards (by two persons), (2) arranging those cards into the correct order, (3) both persons telling the story to the third person, (4) the third person retelling the story. The activities were done at *rumah baca* (a library) in East Loloan Village. By asking the teenagers and adults to tell the story from the picture cards, the use of words and intonation of the Loloan Malay can be identified. Moreover, 8 housewives (5 persons are the primary school teachers, 1 person is a vendor, and the other two persons are housewives) were interviewed in order to know how

often they use other languages like Balinese and Indonesian for daily communication. The interviews took place at *Madrasah* (Islamic Primary School) and at one of the street vendors in East Loloan Village. All of the data from the three groups of people were recorded. The scripts of the recorded data were chosen and analyzed qualitatively. The data collected provided the answer about when and to whom they use the Loloan Malay and what they or their parents do to maintain the language. The pictures of the data collection are as the following.

**Picture 1**

**Describing picture cards (group of adults)**



**Picture 2**

**Describing picture cards (group of teenagers)**



**Picture 3**

**Interview with the housewives from East Loloan Sub-Village**



The analysis makes use of current advances in theoretical Sociolinguistics especially in relation to constructing identity and about ethnicity (cf. Kiesling 2013, Fought 2013). In relation to identity construction, it has been revealed that ethnic identity is constructed by using several important elements, which include, among others, language, relationship, and place. This identity is maintained and renewed by the relevant group for its continued stability. Identity is more than simply physical group flagging; rather it is how individuals in the group define, create, or think of themselves in terms of their relationship with other individuals and group. Thus, theoretically, the understanding and analysis of identity, particularly in relation to language as an identity, must take the two basic related concepts into consideration: the nature of relationship among the speakers of a language and how the language responds to those relationships. What is meant by relationship here is the similarities and the differences felt by the speakers towards the other groups of people. When a group of people have a similar identity with another group, the need to have a distinct identity will make one group keep on signaling that they are different to the other group which they do not want to be affiliated with. Variation

of language can therefore be used to present identity. However, it should be noted that such variation of language use may or may not be deliberately chosen by the speakers to flag their social identity.

Language and ethnicity have been known to be intimately linked, with language playing a central role as a marker of ethnic identity. Language is an exceptionally rich verbal system from which multilayered identities can be indexed; it has become the source from which the people of an ethnic group select the linguistic tools needed. These tools can be a heritage language, a heritage dialect, a borrowed variety, a mixed variety, suprasegmental features, specific discourse features and/or language norms. For a minority group, place also plays an important part in preserving the language. In their environment, the members' choice of certain languages, or language varieties, or codes may be considered odd, even viewed negatively, as choice reflects social indexing and in-/out-group affiliation. However, in dealing with interlocutors from different ethnic groups, the members have to play their multilayered identity by adopting the other linguistic tools needed to make contact with the interlocutors from different ethnic groups.

However, the connection of language and ethnicity is a complex, not one-to-one, correlation. This is seen in Loloan Malay. Ethnically, the speech community of Loloan Malay has no homogenous ethnic root, since historically they are descendants of different ethnic groups in Indonesia, such as the Buginese and Javanese, who have their own indigenous languages distinct from Loloan Malay. This raises the issue regarding the nature of Loloan Malay as a 'language', whether it is a language on a par with Balinese and Buginese, or whether it is actually a creole. Discussing this issue is beyond the scope of the present paper. What is important and relevant for our present discussion is that Loloan Malay is a linguistic marker for group identity.

The village of East Loloan is located in Jembrana regency in the west of Bali. The village covering an area of 434 hectares (or 4.34 square kilometer) is surrounded by the village of Pendem in the north, the village of Dauhwaru and Budeng in the east, the village of Kombading in the south, and the village of West Loloan and Lelateng in the west. People in those surrounding villages, except West Loloan, mostly speak Balinese. Below are the maps showing the East Loloan Village and its sub-villages.

**Picture 4**  
**Map of Bali Island**



**Picture 5**  
**Map of East Loloan Village**



The village with 7.065 people in 2016 has three sub-villages, namely East Loloan, Ketugtug, and Mertasari. In 1980, there used to be 5.055 people lived in East Loloan Village, however,

the number of people who live there decreased in 1988, that was 4.569. Most of the people are Moslems, and the rests are Hindu, Buddha, Catholic and Christian. The table showing the number of people based on their religions is as the following.

**Table 6 Number of people in East Loloan Village based on the religions**

RELIGION	MALE	FEMALE
Moslem	2539	2505
Christian	15	13
Catholic	14	21
Hindu	890	997
Buddha	34	37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3492</b>	<b>3573</b>

In Ketugtug sub-village, the people are Moslems and Hindu, in East Loloan sub-village, most of the people are Moslems, and in Mertasari sub-village, the majority of the people are Hindus. The Moslem people who live in East Loloan village live from fishing especially men who live in East Loloan sub-village, meanwhile, the non-Moslem people are vendors.

**Picture 7  
Fishing boats**



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Constructing identity of Loloan Malay language**

As mentioned earlier, Loloan Malay in East Loloan is of particular interest for research on identity construction since it is spoken by demographically a heterogeneous speech community. In addition, there is strong local language activism in East Loloan to maintain Loloan Malay. In this section we discuss how the social identity of being Loloans makes use of Loloan Malay as a key linguistic tool in its construction. It is a collective process, involving a combination of socio-cultural-religious-historical variables with traditional social enforcements.

The Loloans have managed to take advantage of their majority status in their own village, despite being minority in the larger context of Bali. In terms of the population in East Loloan, it can be seen that this village is inhabited by various ethnic groups, apart from the Loloans as the majority. Those other ethnics are, Balinese, Javanese, and Maduranese. Those ethnics, except the Balinese are Moslems and they speak Loloan Malay when they communicate with anybody within the village. Even the Balinese use the Loloan Malay when they communicate in that village. This is done for two reasons. First, it is to make the communication easier since the Loloans always claim that they do not speak Balinese or Indonesian. Apparently, they mean that they do not speak proper Balinese and Indonesian, since our observation has confirmed that they do use those two languages, code-mixing them. For example, they use the Balinese words such as *ngambul* (upset/adjective), *jagur* (punch/verb), *ajak* (with/preposition) and Indonesian words *kates* (papaya/noun), *ngomong* (speak/verb), *sel* (prison/noun). The second reason is for social-identity indexing in the communication with other groups. This is a way of displaying linguistic loyalty and pride in their own territory. As the majority in the village, the Loloan Malay speakers are reluctant, or refuse, to use a language other than the Loloan Malay in their own place, for instance when they buy things from the non-Loloan people. To be accepted in the Loloan community – East Loloan people who work in other cities like in Denpasar and Jakarta, should speak Loloan Malay when they come back home to East Loloan sub-village; otherwise they are negatively perceived (e.g., arrogant and selfish), and may run the risk of receiving social exclusion sanctioned by the community. This social punishment appears to be a powerful means in language maintenance.

Loloan Malay as an identity marker has been also constructed through its close connection with Islam, a religion not affiliated with the Balinese ethnic group. That is, in contrast to the Balinese language, which is closely identified with Hinduism, the Loloan Moslems need a linguistic marker distinguishing themselves as a group, socially distinct from the Balinese people and found Loloan Malay as a perfect tool for this. It is not surprising then that Loloan Malay is uniting local Loloan Moslems irrespective of their ethnic origins. The Loloan Malay speakers are highly aware of their situation being surrounded by the Balinese-speaking villages. East Loloan is just a small area in the middle of Balinese speaking area holding Hindu religion. Religion is a highly sensitive issue locally and nationally. It comes with a set of belief systems, instigating a high degree of loyalty, including the obligation to defend it at all costs and preventing fellow followers to switch affiliation. Thus, the religion-based construction of language identity in Loloan has proven to be a very powerful process, giving rise to strong language loyalty to Loloan Malay. In short, speaking Loloan Malay and being Moslems have been symbolically one thing, and must be enforced and defended.

The performance of religion-based language identity construction is on-going, with active engagement done by the young people. For example, we found the pamphlets distributed by the young people in East Loloan about Quran reading for children. Importantly, this activity must be, and has been traditionally conducted in Loloan Malay. Our interview confirms that the Loloan young people are proud of using Loloan Malay. Such pride is evidenced from the comment made by Ahmad Baras (from East Loloan sub-village, graduated from one of the Universities in Malang), and Mufti (from East Loloan sub-village, a post-graduate student in one of the Universities in Malang), who do not feel embarrassed with his Loloan Malay and even finally his friends learned how to speak the Loloan Malay.

It has been known that language pride is a significant variable in language loyalty; hence language maintenance. Such language pride has a historical explanation, related to the pride stemming from their ethnic root as the descendant of the Bugis people. Historically, their

ancestors were the ones who helped the Jembrana Kingdom in the war with the kingdom of Buleleng. It was the Bugis people who made the kingdom of Jembrana stay free and not inhabited by the kingdom of Buleleng. It is also told that when the king of Jembrana asked the Bugis ancestors what they would like as a return, they just asked for a favour that their descendants would not be disturbed. This story is written in the profile book of the village to be known by all apparatus in the village and the villagers including the Balinese, and the story has been passed from generation to the generation providing the pride of being the descendant of the Bugis. Because of this, they sometimes consider themselves having higher social status than the local Balinese people. All the Moslem respondents claim that they are the descendants of the Bugis ancestors, and that Loloan Malay is their native first language. This ethnicity variable (i.e. being Bugis descendants) adds weight to the religion variable discussed earlier; both making Loloan Malay as a powerful identity to differentiate themselves from their ethnic Balinese neighbours.

The historical ethnic root of the Loloans has become part of the common local knowledge, which appears to determine the attitude of the Balinese towards the Loloans.

Given the central role of Loloan Malay as a symbol of identity, we have detected a strong desire among the Loloans that they want to keep their language “pure”. From linguistic point of view, this means the avoidance or prevention of (extensive) code mixing with Balinese (and Indonesian) as much as possible. Sociolinguistically, while this is understandable, in practice it remains to be seen how successful such efforts would be, given the intense contacts in recent developments with language in the social media. The youngsters have to communicate with other people from different ethnics; or the study taken by the youngsters in different part of the country, and the social media, the preach in the mosque—all of which use the Indonesian language. Language instruction at schools is also Indonesian. All these have put unprecedented pressures to Loloan Malay, threatening the success of maintaining linguistic purity of Loloan Malay as intended by the Loloans. Confirming earlier research by Putu P. et al (2015), our recent research confirms that the Loloan Malay has absorbed lexicon from the Balinese, for example ‘*Wak Ngah*’ (*Ngah* = *Nengah*/ the second child in Balinese family), “*Wak Oman*’ (*Oman* = *Nyoman*/the third child in Balinese family); from Indonesian Language, for example *cemburu* (jealous), *narkoba* (drugs), *selingkuh* (adultery); from Bugis, for example *ropo-ropo* (padlock) *jaro-jaro* (wooden bars), *tongtongan* (window); from Arabic, like *umi* (mother) and *abah* (father); from English, like acting, jumping, standing. However, it remains to be further investigated how extensive such loans have penetrated Loloan Malay lexicon. It is also debatable whether linguistic purity can be assessed and determined by the proportion of loanwords alone in the grammar.

To conclude, the description about identity construction, which makes use of religion, ethnicity and place as discussed above is in line with Kiesling’s (2013) and Fought (2013).

### ***Language loyalty and local language activism***

The strong local language activism in East Loloan is conducted by the young Moslem Loloan generation. The place for expressing their creativity is used to be called *Sanggar Pilot* (Pilot theatre) that has successfully performed a play entitled *Sambal Terasi*, and because the play is very famous, the name of the theatre was then changed into *Sanggar Sambal Terasi*. The famous *Sambal Terasi* play is about the activity of Loloan people in their daily life between the young generation and the elderly. The play also shows that the young generation uses Loloan Malay in communicating with their friends, family, and the elderly.

Loloan Malay language becomes the important language of communication in East Loloan

and this fact is in line with Sumarsono's finding saying that the strength of the language is the result of the fanaticism of Moslem people (Sumarsono, 1993). They feel reluctant and tend to separate themselves from the Hindu community. Furthermore, when young couple starts their own marital life, they are suggested by their parents to stay away from the Balinese community who live in East and West Loloans, so that their Malay Loloan language is not affected. Their parents suggest that they should do this. The actual purpose is to keep their houses close one to another and located in one area so that it will be easier for them to communicate in Loloan Malay. Those who come to their community should speak the language to be accepted. Even if any of them speak other than Loloan Malay, they will be said as arrogant. They do this in Loloan, as for the Balinese, they do not do the same thing because they do not think too much about the language maintenance. They speak Balinese and Loloan Malay to the Loloans who are Moslem because of their willingness to make their interlocutors happy.

To provide more opportunity in using the language, the young couple can bring the relatives from both sides to stay with them so that they live within the extended family. Another proof that can support the finding says that in Sumarsono's research (1993) it was found that six out of ten respondents claim that they do not like mingling with the Balinese people. The fact that there is a religious sentiment among the Loloan Moslem people is also mentioned by Suparwa (2006) saying that the existence of the Malay Loloan language is considered to be the symbol of ethnicity and the symbol of community of the Loloan Moslems. However, it cannot be avoided that the socialization in the society result in the loan words from both the Balinese for example "*busan*" meaning "just now" and Indonesian language for example "*istirahat*" meaning "to rest" coming in into the Loloan Malay language.

### **Language vitality of Loloan Malay**

Although there are some words from different language absorbed by the Loloan Malay, physically this language is considered safe. This consideration is related to the statement stated by Unesco (2003) saying that a language is considered to be safe when it is spoken by all generation. Based on the observation on the site, Loloan Malay is used as a means of communication by all generation in almost every aspect of social life. However this stability might be shaky if it is not well maintained. Some activities performed by the Loloan Malay speakers to maintain their language and culture are as follows.

#### **Older people**

They pass the language to the younger generation and use it in the house. This language is also used in various ceremonies like wedding ceremony, circumcision ceremony. Some of them teach children how to read Al-Quran in Arabic and at the same time teach them about good characters of their prophets through stories about them. The older people pass Loloan Malay language to the young generation, no matter what ethnicity they come from. For example, those who come from different ethnicity, when they marry the Loloans, they will use Loloan Malay to communicate with their children. They do that because the language is the symbol of their identity, although the reason for teaching the children the language is because it is easy, but the real reason is that they want to transfer the symbol to their identity to the next generation.

#### **Younger people**

They create youth organization which is called "Gerakan Pemuda Loloan" of which slogan is "Togetherness for prosperous society". They work on social, economy, religious and



education areas. They also establish a library in which anybody can do then reading to improve their knowledge. They hold religious activities for children, door to door, they train the children muscle arts, they perform theatre for people including children to watch. All those activities are conducted in Loloan Malay. New married couple will chose the place to live in the environment as stated by Sumarsono (1993).

### **Children**

They use the language when playing with their friends, when joining the activities performed by the older people. Theatre can be used as learning activities for children because when they watch it, they are accompanied by elder people who will explain the meaning of the language they do not understand.

## **CONCLUSION**

The discussion above shows that religion (Islam) and language (Loloan Malay) are used as the symbol of their identity as the descendant of Bugis people. They can keep the religion intact but there is a question about the purity of the language. It has been proved that the Loloan Malay has absorbed many lexicons from other languages such as Balinese, Indonesian, Bugis, Arabic, and English. Despite of the absorption of lexicon from other language, there is a strong determination from the speakers to keep the language as the symbol of their identity. To realize this, they have done several important things like mentioned in the discussion above. The activities to keep the language vitality are supported by all the speakers including the government of Jembrana who from generation to generation respect the agreement of their ancestors. The research has proved that the children do not know a lot of original Loloan Malay, for example 'cokok' (mouth), 'darek' (monkey). In this modern era, preserving the language of minority is not an easy thing to do. More hard work is needed so that instead of only the accent is kept, the whole elements of the language can be preserved and placed in the safe condition.

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