

Language and Identity: Exploring the Vitality of the Dayak Bentian Language in Kutai Barat, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

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[*Abstract*]

The Dayak Bentian language, spoken by the Dayak Bentian tribe in Dilang Puti Village, Bentian Besar District, Kutai Barat Regency, East Kalimantan, is experiencing a shift that weakens its vitality. This decline in speakers is driven by increased bilingualism and multilingualism due to contact with neighboring language groups. This paper examines the extent of this language shift, the current vitality level of Dayak Bentian language, and strategies to prevent its extinction. The study aims to assess the language's vitality and analyze its shifting domains, using descriptive methods.

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Data on language usage across various contexts in Dilang Puti village are gathered from local informants. The data are then processed through stages: (1) categorizing language use by domain, (2) identifying shifts in use, (3) evaluating language vitality using UNESCO and EGIDS scales, and (4) concluding findings.

Keywords: language shift, language vitality, Dayak Bentian language, sociolinguistics, language and identity

I . Introduction

Language vitality is a concept that describes the sustainability and capacity of a language to persist and evolve within a society. Languages exhibiting high vitality are typically utilized across various domains of daily life, including familial settings, educational institutions, media platforms, and social activities. Conversely, languages experiencing declining vitality tend to be marginalized and may face the risk of extinction (Tsunoda 2004). Giles et al. (1977) (in Candrasari 2017) initially introduced the language vitality term in ethnolinguistics. Furthermore, Trudgill (in Coluzzi, Riget, and Xiaomei 2013) characterizes "language vitality" or "ethnolinguistic vitality" as the extent to which a language community demonstrates a certain dynamism. This term is predominantly employed in the context of minority language groups. It refers to the potential for the continued existence of these languages or the risk of language shift and language death faced by the group. Additionally, Mufwene (2017) asserts that terms such as endangered languages, language loss, or language death are intrinsically linked to the concept of language vitality.

Indonesia is home to over 700 regional languages, including the Dayak Bentian language (DBL), utilized by the Dayak people in East Kalimantan, specifically in the West Kutai district. According to Eberhard, David, and Simons (2023), the Dayak people in the West Kutai Regency speak a minimum of three languages: Tunjung, Benuaq, and Bentian. Regarding these three languages, Eberhard et al. (2023) classified Tunjung in the threatened category, with 50,000

speakers recorded in 2008. Furthermore, Eberhard et al. (2023) indicated that the Benuaq and Bentian languages are components of the Lawangan language, which is also categorized as endangered.

DBL has encountered significant challenges in recent decades due to globalization and the dominance of Indonesian as the national language. Language contact with speakers of other languages in the DBL speech area has contributed to a decline in DBL usage, especially among the younger generation, who are increasingly becoming bilingual or multilingual. Economic factors also play a crucial role in this shift. Many DBL speakers migrate to urban areas or engage in economic activities that require them to communicate in more dominant languages, such as Indonesian or regional lingua francas. Over time, this economic necessity results in the reduced use of DBL in both public and private domains. As a result, in everyday interactions, most Dayak Bentian people use languages other than DBL. This aligns with the view of Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015), as they suggest that when one language dominates socially, a language shift can occur, leading speakers to switch to the dominant language. This is also related to one's language attitude, which examines an individual's behavior in response to a different language (Tuah, Shin, and Khiri 2023).

The connection between language and community is profoundly intricate. Language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbol of community identity and culture. Within the Dayak Bentian society, language stands as a representation of the values, traditions, and indigenous knowledge that have been transmitted across generations. The loss of a community's language leads to a communication gap and the erosion of its cultural identity and longstanding heritage. Language extinction is a pressing global concern, including in Indonesia, where UNESCO has identified over 300 languages at risk of disappearance. In the case of the DBL, dwindling usage among the younger generation and inadequate attention to language and cultural preservation contribute to its endangered status. To gain insight into the shift in the vitality of the DBL, this study will address two key issues: (1) the mechanisms underlying the language shift and (2) the current level of vitality of the DBL. Therefore, it is

imperative to comprehend the sociolinguistic dynamics of the Dayak language to devise effective strategies for language preservation and the fortification of its community identity.

Several research studies have delved into the vitality and preservation of Dayak languages. Aritonang (2019) and Masfufah (2020) highlighted the shifting vitality of the Dayak Tunjung language, attributing it to increased language contact among speakers of different languages. They also noted that many Tunjung speakers now possess proficiency in the Benuaq language. Meanwhile, Septiana, Yulianti, and Karyani (2020) examined the vitality and language shift of the Paku language in Central Kalimantan, concluding that the language has faced extinction due to the lack of intergenerational language transmission.

In addition, phonological documentation of the DBL has been conducted by Yulianti, Septiana, Firman, Isnaeni, Musayyedah, Rasyid, and Fatinah (2025), analyzing its sound system comprehensively. The study involved recordings, transcription using ELAN, and phonemic analysis. Findings show that DBL has seven basic vowels, long vowels, diphthongs, and unique consonant clusters such as [pm], [tn], and [kŋ], which indicate post-consonantal nasalization. These features affirm the language's Austronesian roots alongside its local innovations. Complementing these studies, another investigation has also been conducted by Yulianti, Septiana, Firman, Isnaeni, Musayyedah, Rasyid, and Kurniati (2024) that describes the morphological system of DBL, particularly its affixation processes. The study provides a description of the form, function, and meaning of affixes, as well as their morphophonemic processes.

Sudarmanto, Sari, Taher, and Khanif (2019) provided insights into the language shift of Rejang in Bengkulu, categorizing it as endangered and pointing to language shift and hindered language transmission as contributing factors. They also emphasized the need for preservation strategies, such as local content learning, language reference documentation, and traditional ceremonies.

Furthermore, Jerniati, Herianah, Ratnawati, Yulianti, and Musayyedah (2024) focused on the conservation of the phonological

system of the Pattae language in West Sulawesi. The study emphasized the importance of preserving endangered languages by measuring vitality, revitalizing efforts, and conserving the phonological system to strengthen the regional language. These efforts serve as the basis for compiling dictionaries and grammatical rules, contributing to preserving these valuable linguistic heritages.

While previous studies have primarily focused on documenting endangerment or recommending revitalization strategies, this study offers a different perspective by examining the underlying mechanisms that lead to the language shift away from DBL. By analyzing sociolinguistic patterns, economic influences, and intergenerational language practices, this paper aims to reveal how and why language choices are made within the Dayak Bentian community. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to provide an in-depth account of the process of language shift, rather than simply its consequences, thereby contributing a fresh analytical lens to existing literature on language vitality and shift in minority language communities.

II. Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this investigation is grounded on sociolinguistics. Holmes (2013) asserts in the opening segment of his work that sociolinguists analyze the correlation between language and society. Sociolinguistics delves into the intricacies of language usage in daily life, informal discourse, and media, as well as the existence of social norms, policies, and legal frameworks governing language (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015). Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) delineate the discourse in sociolinguistics into micro-linguistics and macro-linguistics. Micro-linguistics pertains to the investigation of the relationship between language and society to achieve a more comprehensive language structure and its role in communication. Conversely, macro-linguistics is concerned with the societal utilization of language, encompassing attitudes and affiliations that expound the functional distribution of language forms in society, language shift, maintenance, and replacement, as well as language

community boundaries and interactions. This study confines its discussion of language employed in society to the domain of macro-linguistics, focusing on language shift and the domains where language shift occurs, as well as language vitality and endangerment.

2.1. Language Shift

The term "language shift" denotes a community's complete abandonment of one language in favor of another, collectively electing to adopt a new language (Sumarsono 2009). Similarly, Holmes (2013) defines language shift as the process by which one language supplants another within a community. In this study, language shift pertains to the transition from using one language to another within a community, as exemplified by the DBL user community's adoption of a new language, thereby triggering a language shift.

Marmanto (2014) identifies factors contributing to language shift, including the diminishing domain of language use resulting from socioeconomic influences and governmental policies. Holmes (2013) also underscores socioeconomic factors as influential in language shift, in addition to other determinants such as politics, demographics, and language attitudes.

2.2. Language Shift Domains

In sociolinguistics, "domain" refers to institutionalized social situations typically governed by a standard set of behavioral norms (Crystal 2008). According to Holmes (2013) a domain involves specific interactions between participants and particular locations or settings. Building upon Fishman's framework, Holmes delineates five language usage domains that are prevalent in many communities: (1) family, encompassing interactions at home with parents; (2) friendship, involving interactions with friends at leisure locales; (3) religious, comprising interactions with religious authorities in places of worship; (4) education, encompassing interactions with educators in academic settings; and (5) work, involving interactions among employees in workplace environments. This study will examine the domain shift in the usage of DBL within these five domains.

2.3. Language Vitality

"Vitality" encompasses the capacity for survival or life force (Aritonang 2019). When applied to language, it refers to a language's ability to endure. The vitality of a language can be quantified; a speech community with high language vitality is more likely to persist, whereas a language with low vitality is predicted to face extinction.

Various factors can influence the vitality of a language. Musgrave (2016), referring to UNESCO's framework, identified several key factors that can affect language vitality within a community. These factors include intergenerational language transmission, government, and institutional language attitudes and policies, the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains, community members' attitudes towards their language, response to new domains and media, and materials for language education and literacy.

The factors identified by UNESCO serve as a foundation for assessing the vitality of a language and depicting the language shift scenario. Language extinction is categorized into five degrees on a scale of 0 to 5: Extinct (0), Critically Endangered (1), Severely Endangered (2), Definitely Endangered (3), Vulnerable (4), and Safe (5).

Furthermore, the assessment of language vitality in this study will incorporate a measurement scale developed by Eberhard et al. (2023) and published by SIL International on the Ethnologue: Languages of the World platform. This scale, known as EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), is utilized to determine the status of a language. A comprehensive assessment scale can be derived by integrating the two language vitality assessment scales from UNESCO and EGIDS.

<Table 1> EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale)

Level and Label EGIDS		Description	Score and Label UNESCO	
0	International	The language is used internationally for a broad range of functions.	Safe	5
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.	Vulnerable	4
2	Regional	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.	Vulnerable	4
3	Trade	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders.	Vulnerable	4
4	Educational	Literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.	Definitely endangered	3
5	Written	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.	Vulnerable	4
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.	Definitely endangered	3
6b	Threatened	The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely endangered	3
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are transmitting it to their children.	Definitely Endangered	3
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation.	Vulnerable	4
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.	Vulnerable	4
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community. No one has more than symbolic proficiency.	Safe	5
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Safe	5

Source: *Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS*, Lewis, M. Paul and Gary F. Simons, 2010.

III. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a sociolinguistic approach, aiming to explore and describe the shifting domains and vitality of the DBL in Dilang Puti village, Kutai Barat Regency, East Kalimantan. The research is grounded on naturalistic inquiry to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the language's sociocultural context.

The study was conducted in Dilang Puti village, located in the Bentian Besar District of Kutai Barat Regency, a region where DBL is still spoken—particularly among the older generation.

3.1. Data Sources

The primary data sources consist of primary data, derived from direct observation, interviews, and participation in speech events. Meanwhile, the secondary data are documents related to the Dayak Bentian community, demographic data from Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kutai Barat (2023), and previous studies or linguistic surveys. The main participants were native speakers of DBL, particularly those aged 50 and above, local elders, community leaders, teachers, and youth representatives.

3.2. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected by using the following techniques:

- Participant observation: Observing language use in natural settings (e.g., homes, churches, workplaces, schools).
- In-depth interviews: Conducted with selected informants using a semi-structured format to explore language use patterns, intergenerational transmission, and attitudes toward DBL.
- Domain-based questionnaires: Used to identify patterns of DBL usage across five major domains (family, friendship, religion, education, and work), adapted from the domain theory of Holmes (2013) and Fishman (YEAR?).
- Audio recordings and field notes: Used to document

natural speech events and collect supporting examples of language use.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed several stages:

- **Domain Classification:** Categorizing language use data based on the five identified domains.
- **Identification of Language Shift:** Analyzing differences in language use among generations and across domains.
- **Vitality Assessment:** Applying UNESCO's Nine Factors and the EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) to determine DBL's current vitality level.
- **Interpretation and Conclusion:** Synthesizing data into key findings related to the extent of the language shift and its sociolinguistic implications.

Trustworthiness of the data was ensured through triangulation, combining multiple sources (observations, interviews, documents), peer debriefing, and member checking with local informants to verify interpretations and minimize researcher bias.

IV. Findings

This study's discussion is structured based on the research objectives: describing the DBL shift domain and measuring the DBL vitality level.

4.1. The Dayak Bentian Language Shift

The DBL language shift will be described based on different areas of language use, such as family, friendship, religion, work, and education.

4.1.1. Family Domain

Researchers observed two families in Dilang Puti village in the family domain. One family consists of three generations, with

grandparents, parents, and children around twelve. The other family is young, with only the father, mother, and children.

Based on the researcher's observations in the DBL speech area, it was noted that only families with grandparents over 65 still use DBL in the family domain. The children and grandchildren in these families know that their grandparents can speak DBL, but they are not interested in learning it. The family's interaction between grandparents and children no longer involves DBL; they use Indonesian and mix DBL with the Benuaq language. The grandfather, who can still use DBL, mentioned that he rarely uses it because he has had no friends to interact with since his wife passed away. He only uses DBL when he meets his friends in the village, which is rare due to their old age and limited mobility. It is not that they do not teach DBL to their children, but their children prefer to use Indonesian and other languages because they socialize outside the home, and the tribe uses those languages. In young families, the children are aware of DBL, but only some pass on the language to their children. Therefore, in the family realm of the DBL speech area in Dilang Puti village, few people use DBL to interact with other family members.

4.1.2. Friendship Domain

In the context of friendship, a deliberate encounter was orchestrated between two individuals aged 65 years or above. Their interaction revealed a consistent employment of a distinct linguistic practice denoted as DBL. The participants articulated that when engaging with peers of similar age, they exclusively utilize this linguistic form, as it is perceived to be employed solely by individuals within their age cohort. Furthermore, they conveyed a collective aspiration to uphold the tradition of DBL while noting a diminishing usage of this linguistic practice among the contemporary younger generation. Thus, it can be deduced that within the domain of friendship in the verbal domain of Dilang Puti village, the utilization of DBL remains prevalent in the interactions of elderly individuals aged 65 and above.

4.1.3. Religion Domain

In the domain of religion, researchers have observed and

documented two distinct Christian worship practices in the Dilang Puti village. These practices include worship at the *Kemah Injil Indonesia* church, *Kebangunan Kalam Allah* church, and worship within families. During church services, the pastor predominantly uses Indonesian, occasionally incorporating the DBL in the sermon and interactions with the congregation. Similarly, during family worship, the pastor primarily utilizes the Indonesian language. It is worth noting that the use of the DBL in religious contexts has become increasingly rare. According to a village elder, traditional religious activities associated with ancestral beliefs are no longer practiced in the village as the community has transitioned away from these beliefs. In traditional wedding ceremonies, most customs and rituals adhere to the Dayak Bentian wedding traditions, reflecting the community's adoption of Christian marriage practices and customs.

4.1.4. Education Domain

In education, researchers have meticulously examined various schools in the village of Dilang Puti, spanning from pre-school to high school. These observations showed that teachers predominantly use the Indonesian language to impart their lessons in the classroom. Interestingly, rather than teaching local language subjects, educators prioritize instruction using the English language. The transmission and teaching of the DBL to children have yet to receive serious attention. Children are usually taught the Indonesian language because it is used in the teaching process at school. Moreover, the teaching of DBL in schools has yet to be carried out, even though there is a great demand from the community, especially from the Dayak Bentian community, for DBL to have its teaching materials and to be taught in schools. This lack of attention to DBL poses a significant challenge to preserving the language and meeting the community's desire to pass it on to future generations. Consequently, the local language needs to be actively used and taught within the education domain in this context.

4.1.5. Work Domain

In employment, particularly within governmental services, the indicators involved revolve around activities such as processing national ID cards, engaging in banking transactions, and dispatching

items to the post office. The findings reveal that a different language is more prominently utilized when dealing with governmental matters. Nearly all respondents indicated that they consistently use Indonesian when attending to work-related tasks. In the Bentian Besar Subdistrict, the local language is still sporadically employed, particularly in the sub-district office. However, the community predominantly uses this language when interacting with a specific ethnic group, primarily among the older generation. In interactions with different ethnic groups, such as the Javanese, they transition to using the Indonesian language.

There has been a noticeable transition from the local DBL language to Indonesian in the DBL speech area. The younger generation in this area have abandoned the use of DBL in favor of Indonesians.

4.2. DBL vitality

This study assesses the vitality of the DBL using two language vitality measurement scales. The first scale, adapted from Musgrave (2016: 389), consists of nine factors derived from the UNESCO language vitality and language endangerment model. The second scale, proposed by Lewis and Simons (2009) and later refined and published as the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) on the Ethnologue website (Eberhard et al. 2023), categorizes language vitality into thirteen levels.

Below are the DBL vitality levels based on the nine endangerment factors outlined by UNESCO in Musgrave (2016: 389).

4.2.1. Intergenerational Language Transmission

The intergenerational transfer of language is crucial in determining children's language proficiency in a community. A language without young speakers is at risk of becoming critically shifting. Based on this factor, DBL is categorized as vulnerable. Observations in Dilang Puti Village indicate that currently, DBL is spoken chiefly only by adults and individuals aged 50 and above, with its usage dwindling among the younger generation.

4.2.2. Number of Speakers and Language Vulnerability

Although UNESCO highlights the absolute number of speakers as a key factor in assessing language vitality, in the case of DBL, precise population data of its speakers is currently unavailable. However, based on field observations in Dilang Puti village—the primary area of DBL use—most fluent speakers are aged 50 and above. According to Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kutai Barat (2023), the total population of Dilang Puti is 937. Given that only a fraction of this population actively uses DBL in daily interactions, and considering the generational gap in language transmission, DBL can be reasonably classified as vulnerable. Furthermore, the community's gradual integration with the larger Dayak Benuaq-speaking population increases the risk of language shift and cultural assimilation.

4.2.3. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population

This factor helps to assess how widely a language is spoken within a community. The proportion of speakers serves as a crucial indicator of language vitality. The DBL speech area is located in Dilang Puti village, with a total population of 937 individuals (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kutai Barat 2023). Based on field observations, most active DBL speakers are adults aged 50 and above. Estimating that this age group comprises approximately 20–25% of the total population, the proportion of fluent DBL speakers is relatively low. While some younger speakers still understand or occasionally use DBL, the language is no longer dominant in daily communication. Considering this proportion and the observed decline in intergenerational transmission, DBL can be classified as a vulnerable language, though it remains in active—albeit limited—use within the community.

4.2.4. Trends in Existing Language Domains

The DBL is exclusively utilized within personal relationships, work, and familial contexts. A key mechanism for preserving the language is its application in religious and customary domains. Regrettably, the Dayak Benuaq ethnic group no longer employs their language in these domains. Similarly, its usage within other domains, such as education, has declined. Consequently, based on the criteria for assessing language vitality in this particular dimension, DBL may be

categorized as a language with highly restricted usage, facing a shift and definitely endangered.

4.2.5. Response to New Domains and Media

This factor explores how the Dayak Bentian ethnic group is evolving and adapting its language to new contexts. Through field observations in the village of Dilang Puti, it was found that the Dayak Bentian community continues to use DBL in various domains beyond traditional settings, including informal gatherings, community rituals, and emerging forms of media. Notably, several residents—particularly the younger generation—have begun incorporating DBL into social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, where they post cultural expressions, greetings, or community announcements in their native language. Despite the shift towards more dominant languages, DBL retains cultural prestige and remains an integral part of their identity. Consequently, based on this factor, DBL demonstrates signs of adaptability and can be considered a potentially *safe* language in this specific domain.

4.2.6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy

This factor examines the developmental stage of the DBL, including its literacy level. The questions asked are: "Do Dayak Bentian ethnic orthographies exist?", "Is there a common standard for writing the language agreed upon by community members?", "Are teaching and learning materials available for the language?", or "Is there literature, such as newspapers, stories, religious texts, etc., published in that language?" Documentation of the Dayak Bentian language has been completed at the phonological, morphological, and orthographical levels. Therefore, when assessing the vitality level of the BP based on the availability of teaching materials (materials for language and literacy education), the DBL falls into level 4 or vulnerable because efforts are being made to compile a DBL dictionary and its orthographic system.

4.2.7. Government and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use

This factor pertains to the government's language policies, encompassing the attitudes and policies of language institutions and the official status and usage. The government and language

institutions maintain explicit and implicit policies regarding dominant and minority languages. The region's government and language institutions demonstrate uniform support for all languages in this context. This signifies that all languages in the Indonesian territory, whether minority or dominant, are equally entitled to protection and preservation.

4.2.8. Community Members' Attitudes towards their Language

This factor is associated with the attitude of community members towards their ethnic language. Community members typically do not hold a neutral stance toward their language. They may consider it vital to their community and identity, using it proudly, or harbor feelings of shame, leading to a different approach. When community members exhibit a highly positive attitude towards their language, it becomes a primary symbol of the group's identity. Conversely, if members view their language as a barrier to economic mobility and integration into the broader community, they may adopt a negative attitude toward it. Observations in the DBL speech area indicate that this ethnic group continues demonstrating a positive attitude towards their language. Although the younger generation within this ethnic group is gradually incorporating the Indonesian language into their daily interactions, DBL still retains its relevance in certain communication spheres. For economic mobility, they transition to using Indonesian and other languages such as Banjar and Benuaq, or those predominantly used by traders in the region. When interacting with the general public, this ethnic group switches to using the Indonesian language. Consequently, the vitality of DBL, when assessed based on the community members' attitude towards their language, is at a value of 4 or vulnerable.

4.2.9. Type and Quality of Documentation

This factor assesses the need for documentation, focusing on the quantity and quality of existing language data. It includes transcriptions, translations, and audiovisual recordings of natural speech, which are essential for both community-based language planning and academic research. In the case of DBL, documentation is limited. Available materials include a few academic notes, short wordlists, and partial grammar sketches, many of which are unpublished or not widely accessible. However, one notable

exception is the existence of audio recordings containing Bible stories narrated in DBL. While these recordings represent a valuable resource, they are not yet accompanied by transcriptions or translations, limiting their broader utility. Overall, due to the lack of comprehensive and systematically archived linguistic data, DBL can be considered an *inadequately documented* language, which contributes to its vulnerable status. The measurement of the DBL's vitality involved using five key questions to assess the language's status. These questions aimed to guide the evaluation process and provide insights into the language's usage within the community. Below are the five key questions and the corresponding responses from language users:

1. What is the current function of the Dayak Bentian language within the community?

- The Dayak Bentian language serves as a means of communication within its community, primarily used among older individuals, within families, and in the workplace.

2. To what extent is the language used in official contexts?

- The Dayak Bentian language continues to be employed in official contexts, particularly in the workplace.

3. Do all parents pass down the language to their children?

- While the language is spoken across generations, only some parents within the Dayak Bentian ethnic group transmit it to their children. This question is relevant when the language primarily functions as a means of communication within the household.

4. What is the current status of literacy in the language?

- Presently, the DBL lacks standardized grammar and an orthographic system.

5. Which age group represents the youngest generation proficient in the language?

- The age group of 50 to 80 years, encompassing grandparents and parents of grandparents, exhibits fluency in

the language.

From the analysis of these critical questions, it can be inferred that according to the EGIDS scale, the DBL is positioned at level 6b, characterized as threatened. This indicates that the language is used orally across all age groups, but only a subset of parents actively passes it down to their children. In alignment with the UNESCO scale, the DBL falls within the classification of **definitely endangered**. All Generations use the language orally, but only some of the child-bearing generation transmit it to their children.

<Table 2> Vitality status of the DBL (Dayak Bentian language) based on EGIDS Measurement

6b	<i>Threatened</i>	<i>The language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children.</i>	<i>Definitely endangered</i>	3
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Source: *Assessing endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS*, Lewis, Melvyn P. and Gary F. Simons, 2010.

V. Discussion

Various literature discusses the factors contributing to a language's decline. For instance, Tondo (2009) identified ten factors causing language extinction, including the influence of the majority language, bilingual/multilingual speakers, globalization, migration, interethnic marriages, natural disasters, lack of appreciation for ethnic languages, low language usage, economic factors, and the influence of the national language. Meanwhile, according to Ibrahim (2011), there are three leading causes of language extinction: (a) parents no longer teaching their native language to their children and not using it at home, (b) some members of the community choosing not to use it in everyday communication, and (c) pressure from a dominant language in multilingual communities.

Based on observations in the Bentian Besar sub-district, Kutai Barat regency, several triggers that may cause the decline of the local language in the future can be identified. These factors are

closely related to development, particularly infrastructure.

5.1. Transportation Access

Transportation access serves as an indirect factor influencing the vitality of the Dayak Bentian Language (DBL). In the Kutai Barat region, road access to various areas improved significantly in recent years, although some routes still require maintenance. Improved infrastructure made previously remote DBL-speaking areas more accessible.

This ease of access facilitates increased interaction with the outside world and enables the influx of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The presence of natural resources, such as oil palm plantations and coal mining operations, further attracts migrants seeking better economic opportunities. Migration, as a direct factor, intensifies language contact and contributes to the growing dominance of Indonesian and other regional languages in daily communication—ultimately leading to a decline in DBL usage among the local population.

5.2. Industries

The economic development of Kutai Barat Regency, particularly in the mining sector, serves as an indirect factor influencing language shift in the region. The mining industry attracts a large workforce, drawing not only local residents but also migrants from other regions. This influx of workers has led to increasing linguistic diversity in many communities.

In these multicultural and multilingual environments, the use of Indonesian becomes essential for effective communication across ethnic groups. This language contact situation acts as a direct factor contributing to the decline of DBL, as younger members of the Dayak Bentian community increasingly adopt Indonesian in public and private domains. As Appel and Muysken (1987) suggest, individuals proficient in multiple languages tend to use them selectively depending on context, and in this case, Indonesian has emerged as the dominant language in multilingual settings.

5.3. Settlement Patterns

The development and attractiveness of a region trigger the multiethnic settlement pattern. West Kutai, as a mining area, attracts migrants from outside to seek livelihood in the region. Automatically, they will settle for a relatively long time and may even form families or amalgamate. They will live in new settlements provided by companies or integrate into existing local settlements. The presence of migrant workers adds to the ethnic diversity within a settlement. The multiethnic settlement pattern significantly influences interaction patterns, especially language use. This is closely related to the neighborhood's domain. Different ethnic neighbors typically interact using a language they all understand. A multiethnic neighborhood directly forces its speakers to communicate in a language everyone understands. This differs from a predominantly homogenous neighborhood, where there is a greater likelihood of using the original local language among neighbors. Therefore, the interaction domain among neighbors can be an essential indicator of the vitality of a language.

The three factors leading to the decline in language vitality mentioned above ultimately lead to one language event: language contact. Language contact is when two or more groups speak different languages, as in the West Kutai Regency, as previously described. Language contact creates opportunities for speakers of different languages to interact and influence each other. When a community is bilingual or multilingual, language interactions can lead to language changes, shifts, and maintenance (Chaer 2012). These social and linguistic phenomena are closely related to the survival of a language.

5.4. What Should Be Done?

Efforts to revitalize the role and function of regional languages in various domains need to be undertaken. Several experts have suggested various actions to save regional languages that are experiencing a decline. For example, Ibrahim (2011) proposed several actions, such as developing pedagogical grammar in print and recording media, compiling dictionaries, using the language in

newspapers, language classes for children and adolescents in their villages, community-based language schools for children, promoting the use of the mother tongue at home, and speaking the mother tongue in traditional events. Meanwhile, Lukman (2012) noted that revitalizing regional languages can be pursued by increasing their role and function, such as making the regional language the primary means of communication within the family, transmitting the regional language, fostering positive attitudes and behaviors, incorporating regional language terms and expressions into Indonesian, naming oneself, streets, and public places, and fostering a love for regional culture.

Crystal (2008) suggested several factors that are typically related to the internal community of speakers if they want to enhance the vitality of a language that is in a threatened position, namely, increasing prestige, improving economic mastery, enhancing their role in formal institutions, creating writings in the language, and utilizing electronic technological advancements. This perspective is in line with the opinion of Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (in Gudykunst 1992) regarding the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group, which includes three factors: the social status of the group related to prestige in the economic, social, and linguistic fields; demographic characteristics of the group related to its size and distribution in various regions; and institutional support related to the representation of language use in specific institutions, such as government, companies, and religious organizations.

To support revitalization efforts, studies of endangered languages must be conducted through language preservation programs. As recommended by UNESCO, it is essential to enhance research and documentation, develop inventories and registers, establish appropriate language protection laws and mechanisms, promote dissemination through education, raise awareness about the values and importance of intangible cultural heritage, encourage recognition and joint protection through knowledge transmission, and strengthen recognition and protection by involving all stakeholders, such as the government, local and regional communities, academic communities, educational institutions, civil society, public and private sectors, and the media.

The efforts made by the Badan Bahasa so far in anticipating the loss of these knowledge systems (including language systems) are through protective documentation and revitalization programs. Documentation must be carried out for languages that have yet to be used again by their communities. Documentation is essential to prepare research materials if needed in the future. For languages that have hope for survival, efforts can include revitalization for protection, which includes documentation, assessment, and the preparation of revitalization materials, such as dictionaries, grammar, teaching materials, and orthographic systems (Sugiyono 2015).

However, the most critical effort comes from the language-speaking community itself. A language speaker must transmit their cultural and language system to their children and grandchildren so that the language can continue to exist. People should not be ashamed of using their local language; instead, they should be proud and grateful for being born with the mastery of a language system rich in values and norms that cannot be compared with any material possessions. The community must have a positive attitude towards their language. Increasing awareness among the community about the importance of a language as an identity must continue.

In light of the previous discussion, it is imperative to consider several recommendations for preserving the local languages in Kutai Barat to fortify their vitality.

- Encourage the pervasive use of local languages in daily life, particularly at home, in education domains, places of worship, and workplaces. This can be achieved through impactful public awareness campaigns.
- Empower local communities to take an active and influential role in safeguarding their languages. This may involve collaborative projects and providing platforms for intergenerational knowledge exchange.
- Thoroughly document local languages through comprehensive research, recording of folktales, and oral traditions. This is crucial for comprehending the language structure and its

profound cultural heritage.

- Foster the creation of literature, videos, and other materials in local languages. Leveraging the internet and digital media enables the widespread dissemination of vital information in local languages.

- Provide comprehensive training for educators and community leaders to enhance their proficiency in local languages, equipping them to impart language skills to the younger generation effectively.

- Explore innovative ways to integrate local languages into local economic development initiatives, such as cultural tourism or traditional crafts, creating economic incentives to sustain language and culture.

- Encourage and support every village in nurturing and developing local culture, including local languages, to introduce and perpetuate local culture to the younger generation.

DBL is not merely a means of communication, but a powerful symbol of cultural identity for the Dayak Bentian community. This language encapsulates ancestral knowledge, oral traditions, values, and spiritual beliefs that have been passed down through generations. As the use of DBL declines, especially among the younger generation, there is a growing risk of disconnect between language and cultural practices.

The erosion of DBL usage leads to a gradual loss of culturally embedded expressions, ritual vocabulary, and local wisdom, all of which are difficult to fully translate into dominant languages such as Indonesian. For instance, traditional ceremonies and storytelling practices, once conducted in DBL, are increasingly being replaced or simplified in Indonesian, leading to a dilution of meaning and communal depth. This linguistic shift not only affects communication but also weakens the community's shared sense of belonging and continuity. In this context, revitalizing DBL becomes essential not only for preserving linguistic diversity but also for maintaining the cultural identity and resilience of the Dayak Bentian people in the face of globalization and modern pressures. When

people speak their language, they express their true selves and take pride in their cultural heritage.

Language is the primary medium for passing down knowledge and traditions from generation to generation. In the context of the Bentian language, numerous folk stories, songs, and traditional practices can only be genuinely understood and preserved through its use. Therefore, the vitality of the Bentian language is crucial for the continuity of Dayak Bentian culture.

In the age of globalization, many local languages are at risk of disappearing. The DBL represents the community's resistance to cultural homogenization and commercialization. By preserving and using their language, the Dayak Bentian community strives to uphold their unique identity amidst external cultural pressures.

Using DBL in formal and informal education can raise public awareness about preserving their language and culture. Bilingual education programs or including local languages in school curricula can help younger generations embrace and understand their cultural values.

VI. Conclusion

The younger generation of the Dayak Bentian ethnic group is increasingly inclined towards using the DBL and Indonesian as their primary languages, largely due to the prevalence of these languages as *lingua francas* in the region.

According to assessments using the EGIDS and UNESCO vitality scales, DBL is currently classified as *threatened* and *definitely endangered*. This classification reflects the fact that DBL is no longer being transmitted consistently to children, and its usage is largely confined to older generations and specific traditional contexts. The consequence of this vitality status is that without immediate and targeted revitalization efforts, the language is at high risk of falling into disuse within everyday communication. If the current trend continues, DBL may become functionally extinct within the next decade—meaning that it will no longer be spoken fluently in daily

life and will survive only in linguistic documentation, academic publications, and archived recordings. This would result in the loss of not only a linguistic system but also the cultural expressions, knowledge systems, and worldview embedded within the language.

However, this outcome is not inevitable. With sustained community engagement, targeted language education programs, and institutional support, there is still hope for revitalizing DBL and restoring its function in daily life. Recognizing the intrinsic link between language and cultural identity, any effort to preserve DBL also serves as a commitment to protecting the heritage and resilience of the Dayak Bentian people.

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