

Maintenance of Karo Language among Teenagers in Tanjung Merahe Village, Selesai District, Langkat Regency (Socio- Linguistic Study)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the factors influencing the maintenance of the Karo language among teenagers in Tanjung Merahe Village based on Downes' theory, which categorizes language use into four domains: family, friendship, activities, and motivation. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with in-depth interviews conducted with selected informants. The findings reveal that in the family domain, six factors contribute to maintaining the Karo language at home: intentional teaching of the Karo language to children, intergenerational interaction, the use of Karo during family events, a home environment predominantly speaking Karo, and the instillation of Karo cultural values from an early age. In the friendship domain, six factors support the use of the Karo language: interaction with peers who speak Karo, the habit of conversing in public spaces, use of Karo within youth communities, peer influence in traditional settings, use of Karo in certain social media contexts, and role modeling by community leaders in language use. In the activity domain, two key factors were identified: the predominant use of Karo in traditional ceremonies and the involvement of teenagers in various cultural activities such as traditional ceremonies, arts, and Karo traditional music. In the motivation domain, six factors indicate the drive to maintain the Karo language: pride in using the Karo language, the desire to highlight Karo identity in front of outsiders, awareness of the importance of language preservation, commitment to using Karo in various situations, the intention to pass the language to future generations, and support from the village government through cultural preservation programs

Keywords: Language Maintenance, Karo Language, Adolescents, Sociolinguistics, Downes' Theory



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Introduction

Tanjung Merahe Village is one of the villages located in Selesai District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province. Geographically, this village is situated in a strategic area with relatively easy access to the district center and surrounding areas. The majority of the people in Tanjung Merahe Village work in agriculture, plantations, and small-scale trade, which are the main supports of the village economy. In addition, the social life of its community is still thick with the values of mutual cooperation, family ties, and local traditions that are passed down through generations.

The preservation of the Karo language among the youth of Tanjung Merahe Village becomes important, considering that the youth are the next generation who will determine the sustainability of the regional language in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to study the factors that influence the preservation of the Karo language, the forms of social and cultural support available in the village, as well as the strategies that can be implemented to maintain the vitality of the Karo language amidst the

development of the times.

The factors that significantly influence the sustainability of this language are support from family, customary environment, and cultural community. In sociolinguistic studies, this situation indicates the existence of a language preservation process influenced by social dynamics, media, and popular culture. Therefore, the active role of youth in revitalizing the Karo language in the social realm is very important to maintain the preservation of the language.

Sociolinguistic studies play an important role in revealing how language is used to negotiate power, solidarity, and identity in society (Gurning et al., 2024:239). Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistic science that is interdisciplinary with sociology and with the object of research being the relationship between language and social factors in a speech community (Scovel et al., 2015:8). In the sociolinguistic context, language is understood as the main tool of social interaction that reflects and simultaneously shapes social relationships within society. This means that language has a very important social function because through language individuals can communicate, build identity, and negotiate their social position (Khairunnisa, 2019:49).

Sociolinguistics not only pays attention to the form of language but also to the function and social meaning contained in its use (Gurning et al., 2024:240). Tarigan (in Ramdhani & Enawar, 2019:278) states that language is the main tool used by humans to express thoughts, feelings, and desires. Poedjosoedarmo (in Widiyanto, 2018:2) states that language has an important function as a means of communication that unites individuals within families and communities, especially in the process of socialization.

a. Bahasa Karo

Regional languages are a cultural wealth of a society. This language is considered a reflection of a self-sufficient society in living its life. Regional languages are also a noble cultural heritage for the community. Padeta (in Bramono & Rahman, 2012:1) states that social interaction occurs reciprocally and mutually influences each other. More active individuals tend to dominate that interaction.

The Karo tribe is an ethnic group that inhabits Karo Regency, North Sumatra. This regency is located in the highlands of North Sumatra Province and is often referred to as Tanah Karo. The population is around 409,675 people (data from 2018). Karo language is the language used by the Karo community scattered in the Karo highlands area (Karo Regency), Langkat, Deli Serdang, Dairi, Medan, up to Southeast Aceh. Karo language has an important function as a tool of communication and cultural identity of the Karo community (Nainggolan & Lyna, 2019:98).

b. Faktor Pemertahanan Bahasa

Maintenance There are many factors that influence the shift or continuity of a language. These factors can generally be grouped into two main categories, namely external and internal factors. External factors include the process of modernization, the social environment of the community, industrialization, inter-ethnic marriage, and education. Sumarsono (in Marpaung & Tampubolon, 2022:4) states that there are several factors that can cause a language to survive, including: concentrated settlement areas, tolerance from the majority community, loyalty from the speaker community members, and continuity of language transfer from generation to generation. Sumarsono (in Handini, 2020:177) states that there are several factors that influence language maintenance, namely economic, religious, and political factors. Other opinions mention that language maintenance is also influenced by the number of residences, identity and cultural pride, as well as stable economic conditions. Downes (in Alika, 2017:33) divides four factors that influence language maintenance, namely family factors, social interaction factors, activities, and desires.

c. Klasifikasi Usia Remaja

Classification of Adolescents According to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia in 2009, the age categories are: a.) Toddler age 0-5 years, b.) Childhood age 5-11 years, c.) Early adolescence age 12-16 years, d.) Late adolescence age 17-25 years, e.) Early adulthood age 26-35 years, f.) Late adulthood age 36-45 years, g.) Early elderly age 46-55 years, h.) Late elderly age 56-65 years, i.) Elderly age 65 and above (Sonang et al., 2019:167). The researcher takes the late adolescent period in the age range of 17 – 25 years, which generally has mature language skills, clearer identity awareness, and high intensity of social interaction in various domains, such as education, work, and socializing.

The researcher takes this age range because at this stage, adolescents are in transition to adulthood, so the decision to maintain or shift the local language is more conscious and influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. Methods According to Astiwi & Sudaryanto (2023:365), the descriptive method aims to describe linguistic data according to the reality in the field. This research was conducted for 3 months in Tanjung Merahe Village starting from April to June 2025. The reason the researcher chose the village

This is a place of research, because Tanjung Merahe Village is an area that still has many native speakers, this place is also interesting to study because some of the youth there still maintain the Karo language as their daily communication language. The researcher wants to see to what extent this Karo language is used in interactions. The data sources for this research include primary data sources. This research involves 20 informants from the Karo ethnic community. Informants were selected considering

age, social background, and the relevance of their experiences to the research topic, namely the Preservation of the Karo Language among Youth in Tanjung Merahe Village, Selesai District, Langkat Regency (Sociolinguistic Study). Kawasati (2012:2) states that data collection techniques are ways to obtain the necessary information in a research. The aim is to obtain valid, accurate, and relevant data, so that the research results are trusted and used as a basis for decision-making. According to Creswell (in Ardiansyah et al., 2023:4), there are three data collection techniques in qualitative research, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Saadah (2022:57) states that data validity is an important aspect that must be considered in research, because data plays a role as the main basis in the analysis process and drawing conclusions.

Methods

According to Astiwi & Sudaryanto (2023:365), the descriptive method aims to describe linguistic data according to the realities in the field. This research was conducted over 3 months in Tanjung Merahe Village, starting from April to June 2025. The reason the researcher chose this village as the research site is because Tanjung Merahe Village still has many native speakers, and it is also interesting to study since some of the youth there still use Karo as their daily communication language. The researcher wants to see how extensively this Karo language is used in interactions. The data sources for this research include primary data sources. The study involved 20 informants from the Karo ethnic community. Informants were chosen by considering their age, social background, and the relevance of their experiences to the research topic, which is the Preservation of the Karo Language among Youth in Tanjung Merahe Village, Selesai District Langkat Regency (Sociolinguistic Study).

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Results and Discussions

1. Results

The research results show that in the family domain there are 6 factors that play a role in preserving the Karo language in the home environment, namely intentional teaching of the Karo language to children, cross-generational interaction, the use of the Karo language in family events, support from the home environment that predominantly speaks Karo, and instilling Karo cultural values from an early age. In the social domain, there are 6 factors that support the use of the Karo language, including interaction with peers who use the Karo language, the habit of conversing in public spaces, the use of the Karo language in youth communities, the influence of friends in the customary environment, the use of the Karo language on certain social media, and the exemplary behavior of community leaders in language use. In the activity domain, 2 main factors were found,

namely the dominant use of the Karo language in customary activities and the involvement of youth in various cultural activities, such as traditional ceremonies, arts, and Karo traditional music. In the desire domain, there are 6 factors that indicate the motivation to preserve the Karo language, namely the pride in using the Karo language, the desire to highlight Karo identity in front of outsiders, awareness of the importance of preserving the Karo language, commitment to the Karo language in various situations, encouragement to pass on the language to the next generation, and support from the village government through cultural preservation programs.

2. Discussions

a. Pemertahanan Bahasa pada ranah keluarga

The research results show that in the family domain there are 6 factors that play a role in preserving the Karo language in the home environment, namely intentional teaching of the Karo language to children, cross-generational interaction, the use of the Karo language in family events, support from the home environment that predominantly speaks Karo, and instilling Karo cultural values from an early age. In the social domain, there are 6 factors that support the use of the Karo language, including interaction with peers who use the Karo language, the habit of conversing in public spaces, the use of the Karo language in youth communities, the influence of friends in the customary environment, the use of the Karo language on certain social media, and the exemplary behavior of community leaders in language use. In the activity domain, 2 main factors were found, namely the dominant use of the Karo language in customary activities and the involvement of youth in various cultural activities, such as traditional ceremonies, arts, and Karo traditional music. In the desire domain, there are 6 factors that indicate the motivation to preserve the Karo language, namely the pride in using the Karo language, the desire to highlight Karo identity in front of outsiders, awareness of the importance of preserving the Karo language, commitment to the Karo language in various situations, encouragement to pass on the language to the next generation, and support from the village government through cultural preservation programs.

b. Pemertahanan pada ranah pergaulan

Based on the overall interview results, it can be concluded that the use of the Karo language among the youth of Tanjung Merahe Village is still maintained, but tends to decline compared to previous generations. The Karo language is generally used in the family domain, social environments that are predominantly Karo ethnic, as well as in traditional activities and youth organizations such as Karang Taruna. In school or campus environments that are multi-ethnic, youth more often use Indonesian because it is considered neutral and easily understood by all parties. The use of the Karo language among peers is situational and often mixed with Indonesian, especially for expressive or symbolic purposes. Factors supporting the preservation of the Karo language include the role of family, cultural figures, socio-cultural activities, and a community environment that still predominantly speaks Karo. Meanwhile, the decline in the use of the Karo language is influenced by cross-tribal interactions, the development of the times, technology, social media, and the dominance of both Indonesian and foreign languages. Nevertheless, pride in Karo identity remains strong among some youth, thus strategic, sustainable, and community-based efforts are needed to foster the habit of using the Karo language in various life domains.

c. Pemertahanan pada ranah kegiatan

Based on the interview results, the Karang Taruna organization in Tanjung Merahe Village plays a strategic role in the preservation of the Karo language and culture among youth. Annual activities such as work programs serve as a platform for the younger generation to showcase cultural identity through dance, speeches, and the role of the host in the Karo language. The Karo language is also required in organizational meetings and remains predominantly used in daily communication because the majority of members are of Karo ethnicity. Although there are no specific programs in the form of competitions or Karo language training, Karang Taruna activities indirectly contribute to language preservation through interactions and social activities such as mutual assistance and village festivals. The attitude of youth towards the Karo language tends to be positive, as seen from their habit of using it both inside and outside the organization. However, the level of member activity still varies due to factors such as migration and employment. These findings indicate that Karang Taruna

has the potential to be an effective means to strengthen the use of the Karo language, especially through activities that integrate local cultural values.

d. pemertahanan pada ranah keinginan

Based on the interview results, the desire domain in the preservation of the Karo language in Tanjung Merahe Village is reflected in the strong motivation of the community, including individuals, families, cultural figures, and the village government, to continue using the language as a cultural identity. Parents play an important role through the habituation of using the Karo language at home and encouragement. 6 to children to use it outside the home, so that the Karo language continues to be used naturally in various situations. The younger generation expresses pride when able to speak Karo, especially in front of non-speakers, which strengthens the motivation for preservation. Community leaders consistently highlight the Karo language in public spaces as a symbol of identity, while traditional leaders emphasize the importance of the family's role in forming language habits from an early age. The village government supports preservation through customary activities, such as the process of handing over surnames, and encourages youth organizations to integrate the Karo language into social interactions. Overall, this collective desire becomes an important capital to maintain the Karo language amid the currents of modernization and language shift.

Conclusion

Based on the research results using qualitative descriptive methods with interview techniques that influence the preservation of the Karo language among the youth of Tanjung Merahe Village. The research results show that in the family domain there are 6 factors that play a role in preserving the Karo language in the home environment, intentional teaching of the Karo language to children, cross-generational interaction, use of the Karo language in family events, support from the home environment that predominantly speaks Karo, and instilling Karo cultural values from an early age. In the social interaction domain, there are 6 factors that support the use of the Karo language, including interaction with peers who use the Karo language, habits of speaking in public spaces, use of the Karo language in youth communities, influence of friends in traditional environments, use of the Karo language on certain social media, and the exemplary behavior of community leaders in language use. In the activity domain, 2 main factors were found, namely the dominant use of the Karo language in customary activities and the involvement of youth in various cultural activities, such as traditional ceremonies, arts, and Karo traditional music. In the desire domain, there are 6 factors that indicate motivation to preserve the Karo language, namely pride in using the Karo language, the desire to highlight Karo identity in front of outsiders, awareness of the importance of preserving the Karo language, commitment to the Karo language in various situations, encouragement to pass on the language to the next generation, and support from the village government through cultural preservation programs. Overall, the preservation of the Karo language in Tanjung Merahe Village is influenced by a combination of internal factors, such as language habits in the family environment and personal motivation, as well as external factors, such as customary activities, social interactions, and support from the village government. The sustainability of the Karo language requires ongoing efforts involving all layers of society so that the language remains alive in the community and amid the influence of other languages.

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