



Language Shift and Maintenance of Mina Yeisa in Seram Migrant Communities, Manokwari, West Papua

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Abstract

Language serves as both a communicative resource and a marker of cultural identity. In migrant contexts, minority languages are often subject to pressure from dominant languages, leading to language shift. This study examines the shift and maintenance of the Mina Yeisa dialect of Eastern Seram language among Seram migrant communities in Manokwari, West Papua. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, conversational analysis, Swadesh list elicitation, documentation, and visual ethnography. The analysis is informed by Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory. The findings reveal a pronounced intergenerational shift toward dominant languages in public and educational domains, while Mina Yeisa is maintained primarily in familial interactions. Language shift is driven by socio-economic mobility, majority language dominance, and limited institutional support, whereas language attitudes and community cohesion support maintenance. The study proposes a community-based model for sustaining minority languages in multilingual settings.

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Introduction

Language shift and maintenance constitute central concerns in contemporary sociolinguistics, particularly in multilingual contexts shaped by increasing internal migration. In such settings, language functions not only as a communicative medium but also as a symbolic resource through which cultural identity, social positioning, and access to power are negotiated. Existing research indicates that minority language sustainability is shaped by the interaction between structural factors—such as language status, demographic strength, and institutional support—and speaker-related factors, including language attitudes, ideologies, and agency (Clément & Norton, 2021; Tseng, 2021; Aboh, 2023). Migration and intensified language contact further complicate this relationship by accelerating language shift while enabling context-dependent forms of language maintenance (Mishra & Rahman, 2023; Li et al., 2024). Despite its extensive application, Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory has been criticised for prioritising macro-level structural indicators while insufficiently accounting for everyday linguistic practices and speaker agency. This limitation indicates a gap between structural models and the micro-level processes through which language use is negotiated, reproduced, and transformed across social domains. In particular, intergenerational transmission and domain-specific language use remain insufficiently integrated into vitality-based analyses.

This limitation is evident in the Indonesian context, where existing studies tend to separate micro-level linguistic analysis from macro-level sociological perspectives. Some studies examine internal linguistic variation without linking these findings to broader socio-cultural processes such as migration and language dominance (Mislihatin et al., 2023). Others identify determinants of language shift but do not develop integrative frameworks that explain the relationship between structural conditions and everyday language practices (Sahril, 2018; Mambrasar, 2021; Rohmah & Wijayanti, 2023). Consequently, the interaction between intergenerational dynamics, domain-specific language use, and community-based maintenance remains underexamined. This study addresses this gap by analysing the shift and maintenance of the Mina Yeisa dialect of Eastern Seram language among Seram migrant communities in Manokwari, West Papua.

The analysis focuses on intergenerational language practices and domain-specific usage, particularly the distinction between public and familial contexts. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory provides the analytical framework, complemented by a focus on speaker agency to capture how language practices are enacted in everyday interactions. This study contributes in two respects. First, it extends ethnolinguistic vitality by integrating structural conditions with micro-level language practices in a migration context. Second, it proposes a community-based model of language maintenance that emphasises familial interaction, social networks, and language attitudes as key mechanisms of sustainability. By presenting empirical evidence from Eastern Indonesia, the study also contributes to addressing the limited representation of this region in sociolinguistic research.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to examine the dynamics of language shift and maintenance of Mina Yeisa among migrant communities in Manokwari. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of linguistic practices in their natural context, as well as the interaction between structural factors and speaker agency in multilingual settings (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Levitt et al., 2021). The study was conducted in South Manokwari District, Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province, from September 2022 to January 2023. The

research subjects consisted of migrant communities who are speakers of Mina Yeisa. The data comprised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, including audio recordings, photographs, and field notes. Secondary data were obtained from relevant literature and documents. Informants were selected purposively based on age, social background, and frequency of language use to ensure data relevance and representativeness (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2018). Data reduction involved organizing and categorizing the data into key themes related to language shift and maintenance. Data display was presented in descriptive narratives supported by excerpts from field data. Conclusions were drawn iteratively through continuous verification to ensure consistency and validity. To enhance credibility, data triangulation was applied by comparing findings from observation, interviews, and documentation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Results and Discussions

1. Results

The study was conducted in South Manokwari District, Manokwari Regency, West Papua, a setting characterized by high levels of mobility and social interaction. In intergroup communication, Indonesian and Papuan Malay function as the dominant lingua franca across public and social domains. Within the Eastern Seram migrant community, two primary speech groups are identified, namely Mina Yeisa and Mina Tasuk. Mina Yeisa is primarily used in intra-group communication among specific subgroups, whereas Mina Tasuk is associated with coastal communities. Indonesian and Papuan Malay are predominantly employed in intergroup interactions and public domains, indicating a functional distribution of languages shaped by social context.

Evidence of language shift in Mina Yeisa is observed at both lexical and phonological levels. Analysis based on the Swadesh list indicates systematic changes in vocabulary, including lexical replacement by Papuan Malay, borrowing from Indonesian, and phonological adaptation of loanwords. Quantitatively, approximately 227 lexical items are identified as borrowings from Indonesian, while 11 items exhibit phonological modification. In addition, a number of indigenous lexical forms have been replaced by Papuan Malay equivalents. These patterns suggest an increasing influence of dominant languages on the linguistic structure of Mina Yeisa.

Dialect contact between Mina Yeisa and Mina Tasuk further contributes to linguistic change. This contact is facilitated by frequent interaction among speakers, structural similarities between the dialects, and the absence of rigid social boundaries. As a result, variation emerges in both lexical choice and pronunciation, reflecting ongoing processes of convergence and adaptation within the speech community.

Despite these shifts, Mina Yeisa demonstrates partial maintenance across specific social domains. Generational distribution indicates that speakers over the age of 18 continue to use Mina Yeisa actively, whereas younger speakers tend to exhibit limited or passive competence. In the family domain, Mina Yeisa is primarily used by adults, while children more frequently use Papuan Malay, suggesting a weakening of intergenerational transmission. In occupational settings, Mina Yeisa is largely absent in formal employment and only used to a limited extent in informal sectors. Within educational contexts, particularly among university students, language use is inconsistent and dominated by Indonesian.

These findings indicate a pronounced intergenerational shift toward dominant languages, particularly in public, educational, and professional domains, while Mina Yeisa is retained mainly within restricted familial interactions. The observed patterns reflect the influence of socio-economic mobility, the dominance of majority languages, and limited institutional support, alongside the role of community cohesion in sustaining language use.

Table 1. Domain-Based Distribution of Language Use among Mina Yeisa Speakers

Domain	Mina Yeisa	Melayu Papua	Indonesia
Family domain	30	60	10
Occupational domain	10	40	50
School domain	5	15	80
Social domain	10	70	20

Source: Research findings processed by the author

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of language use across four social domains among the Mina Yeisa-speaking community in Manokwari, West Papua. The data demonstrate a clear functional differentiation between Mina Yeisa, Papuan Malay, and Indonesian, reflecting ongoing processes of language shift and partial language maintenance within the migrant community. In the family domain, Mina Yeisa accounts for 30% of language use, indicating that the language is still maintained to a certain extent in intra-family communication, particularly among older generations. However, Papuan Malay dominates this domain with 60%, while Indonesian represents only 10%. This pattern suggests a weakening of intergenerational transmission, as younger family members increasingly prefer Papuan Malay for daily interaction. Although Mina Yeisa remains present in household communication, its use is becoming more restricted and symbolic.

In the occupational domain, Mina Yeisa shows a substantial decline, with only 10% usage. Papuan Malay occupies 40%, while Indonesian becomes the dominant language at 50%. This distribution reflects the importance of Indonesian as the primary language of formal employment and administrative communication, whereas Papuan Malay functions as an informal lingua franca in workplace interactions. The limited use of Mina Yeisa in this domain indicates that the language has minimal functional value in professional and economic activities. A more pronounced language shift is visible in the school domain. Mina Yeisa is used by only 5% of speakers, compared to 15% for Papuan Malay and 80% for Indonesian. The dominance of Indonesian is closely associated with its institutional role as the language of education and formal instruction. This finding demonstrates that younger speakers, particularly students, are increasingly oriented toward Indonesian, thereby reducing opportunities for active use and transmission of Mina Yeisa in educational contexts.

Similarly, in the social domain, Papuan Malay emerges as the dominant language with 70%, while Indonesian accounts for 20% and Mina Yeisa only 10%. The prevalence of Papuan Malay reflects its role as the primary medium of interethnic and community interaction in Manokwari. Frequent social contact among diverse ethnic groups encourages the use of a shared lingua franca, further limiting the presence of Mina Yeisa in broader social communication. Overall, the table confirms a significant intergenerational and domain-based language shift from Mina Yeisa toward Papuan Malay and Indonesian. Mina Yeisa is maintained mainly within restricted family interactions, while dominant languages prevail in educational, occupational, and social settings. These patterns

highlight the impact of socio-economic mobility, urban multilingualism, and the dominance of majority languages on the vitality of minority languages within migrant communities in West Papua.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the shift of Mina Yeisa among Seram migrant communities in Manokwari cannot be interpreted merely as an isolated linguistic phenomenon. Rather, it reflects the interaction between structural pressures and speaker agency within a multilingual social environment. From the perspective of Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Mina Yeisa demonstrates a relatively low level of vitality, characterized by limited institutional support, weak socio-economic prestige, and a declining base of active speakers. These interrelated dimensions collectively generate systemic pressures that accelerate the process of language shift.

The linguistic evidence further suggests that the shift has extended beyond patterns of language preference and entered the structural level of the language itself. Extensive lexical borrowing from Indonesian and Papuan Malay, accompanied by phonological adaptation within Mina Yeisa speech, demonstrates an ongoing process of internal restructuring caused by intensive language contact. Such changes indicate that the phenomenon cannot be reduced to simple lexical borrowing; instead, it reflects deeper transformations within the linguistic system. In migrant settings, repeated and asymmetrical contact with dominant languages may therefore contribute directly to the erosion of minority language structures.

An important finding of this research concerns the role of intra-community interaction in shaping language change. The shift is influenced not only by the dominance of Indonesian and Papuan Malay, but also by contact between Mina Yeisa and Mina Tasuk speakers within the Seram migrant community itself. Linguistic proximity and frequent social interaction between these groups facilitate lexical transfer and phonological convergence. This pattern demonstrates that language shift in migrant communities may emerge from multiple sources simultaneously, involving both external linguistic dominance and internal community dynamics. Consequently, the present findings extend earlier perspectives that primarily attribute minority language decline to the influence of majority languages alone.

From a demographic perspective, the study reveals a substantial disruption in intergenerational language transmission. Active use of Mina Yeisa is largely concentrated among adults, whereas younger generations display limited productive competence and tend to rely more heavily on Papuan Malay and Indonesian. In sociolinguistic research, the weakening of intergenerational transmission is widely recognized as a critical indicator of language endangerment. The findings therefore suggest that migration reshapes not only the geographical distribution of speakers, but also the linguistic ecology in which younger generations develop their communicative practices.

The decline of Mina Yeisa is also closely associated with changing language ideologies within the family domain. The preference of parents for Indonesian and Papuan Malay in daily communication reflects a shift in linguistic values, whereby dominant languages are perceived as providing broader educational, economic, and social opportunities. Under these conditions, speaker agency functions less as a mechanism of resistance and more as a factor contributing to language

shift. Everyday linguistic choices within households consequently play a decisive role in determining patterns of language maintenance or decline.

The unequal distribution of linguistic functions across social domains further intensifies the marginalization of Mina Yeisa. The language has only a limited presence within institutional domains such as education and employment, where Indonesian occupies the dominant position. Similarly, Papuan Malay functions as the principal lingua franca in interethnic interaction and informal public communication. Languages that lack strategic social functions tend to experience declining relevance among younger speakers, particularly within urban multilingual contexts. The restricted functional range of Mina Yeisa therefore contributes significantly to its gradual displacement from everyday communicative practice.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate that language maintenance remains partially visible within restricted familial interactions and community-based communication among older speakers. Although the vitality of Mina Yeisa has weakened considerably, the persistence of language use in selected contexts indicates that complete language loss has not yet occurred. Community cohesion and cultural identity continue to provide limited support for language retention, particularly among speakers who maintain strong social ties with fellow migrants from Eastern Seram.

Based on these findings, the study proposes that minority language maintenance in migrant contexts requires approaches that move beyond symbolic preservation alone. Sustainable maintenance depends on strengthening the social functions of the language across multiple domains. The community-based maintenance model emerging from this research highlights the importance of intervention at three interconnected levels: family transmission, collective community practices, and institutional support through educational and cultural policies. Without integrated intervention across these levels, language maintenance efforts are likely to remain fragmented and temporary.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by reinforcing an integrative approach to language shift that combines the framework of Ethnolinguistic Vitality with perspectives emphasizing speaker agency. Empirically, the research contributes to the relatively limited body of scholarship concerning minority languages among internal migrant communities in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that language shift is not a deterministic process driven solely by structural dominance, but rather the outcome of continuous negotiation between social structures, linguistic ideologies, and everyday communicative practices within multilingual environments.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Mina Yeisa dialect among Seram migrant communities in Manokwari is experiencing a significant process of language shift caused by multilingual contact, socio-economic mobility, and the dominance of Indonesian and Papuan Malay in public, educational, occupational, and social domains. The findings show that the vitality of Mina Yeisa is declining, especially among younger generations, as indicated by the weakening of intergenerational transmission and the increasingly limited use of the dialect outside family and intra-community settings. The shift also occurs at the structural level through lexical borrowing, phonological adaptation, and dialect contact with Mina Tasuk, showing that migration has reshaped the linguistic ecology of the community. Nevertheless, Mina Yeisa is still maintained in limited familial and community interactions, supported by adult speakers, community cohesion, cultural identity, and positive language attitudes.

Future research is recommended to examine Mina Yeisa and other minority languages in Eastern Indonesia through broader sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches, particularly by involving speakers from different generations, occupations, and migration backgrounds. For practitioners and community actors, language maintenance efforts should be strengthened through family-based transmission, community language activities, cultural documentation, and the active use of Mina Yeisa in informal education and cultural events. At the policy level, local governments and educational institutions need to provide institutional support for minority language preservation through documentation programs, community-based language revitalization, and the inclusion of local linguistic heritage in cultural and educational policies. Without coordinated efforts from families, communities, and institutions, Mina Yeisa may continue to face progressive marginalization and eventual language loss.

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