

A Comparative Study of Language Maintenance among the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju through Identity and Core Cultural Practices

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative study of language maintenance among the Balinese in Bali and the Dayak Ngaju in Central Kalimantan, viewed through the lenses of identity and core cultural values. Both groups share similarities in their sociocultural Hindu traditions and social structures: the Balinese are organized through the *banjar* (community system), while the Dayak Ngaju communities are traditionally based along river streams. The findings show that Balinese language maintenance is stronger than that of Dayak Ngaju. Balinese is widely used across traditional and modern cultural domains, while Dayak Ngaju is mainly used in traditional contexts. Moreover, Balinese is reinforced by its own script and a distinct diglossia structure, features absent in Dayak Ngaju. This study suggests that effective local language maintenance should consider the vitality of core cultural practices within each domain.

Keywords: comparative study on language maintenance; local languages; Balinese; Dayak Ngaju; identity; core culture

1. Introduction

Indonesia has cultural diversity, which is stated in the National Symbol of Garuda and has become the motto of the Indonesian, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or unity in diversity (see Febriani et al., 2023). One aspect of this diversity is the local language, usually referred to as the mother tongue: the language is initially introduced to a child within a family. Indeed, family is the core domain for maintaining a mother tongue, as it is the fact that maintaining mother language is parallelly with maintaining ethnic culture. This concept is in line with Humboldt's opinion in Darmojuwono (2011), who states that human thinking is formed by the language they use.

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The intrinsic relationship between language, as a fundamental cultural element, and its speakers is undeniable, given thought itself is profoundly shaped by linguistic structures and data (Holmes, 2013). These linguistic data cultivate a “mental dictionary” within speakers, in which this mental dictionary will epistemically construct their cultural lexicons. This intricate relationship prompts two important questions from a cultural perspective: is a local language merely an artifact ‘a man-made object’, or does it possess inherent dynamism and functional significance? These questions are proposed with the assumption that a local language powerfully reflects the thought processes – in creating, feeling, and aspiring – of the ethnic community, in which it thrives.

The issue of local language death has been discussed and has a long publication history. As stated by Pun (2024), every two weeks, one local language becomes extinct from the world. This matter also happened in Indonesia. Out of 718 Indonesian local languages, 11 (Tandia and Mawes, the local language in Papua; Kajeli, Piru, Moksela, Palumata, Hoti, Hukumina, Serua and Nila in Maluku; and Ternateno in North Maluku) have already extinct or death (*Badan Pengembangan Bahasa dan Perbukuan*, 2019). Also, 24 local languages have decreased in their speakers, such as *Bawo*, one of the local languages in Central Kalimantan, or Nedebang and Adang in East Nusa Tenggara. Most of these threatened local languages are geographically represented in the Eastern parts of Indonesia (Lauder, 2008). Moreover, according to Tjia (2013), many local languages in Indonesia are also in the dangerous position of potentially becoming dead languages in the near future.

The data above will only become more common and more widely distributed as what Abas indicated (1983): when all Indonesian provinces use Indonesian for 100% of their communication, in 2040 it will be a monolingual country. The efforts for local language maintenance have been implemented, either through strengthening, maintaining, or developing. The Indonesian Government through *Badan Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa* ‘Agency for Language Development and Cultivation’ of the Republic of Indonesia implemented Revitalization of Local Languages nationally (Kemdikbud, 2023). However, those efforts are not effective and efficient as they do not touch the main problem systematically. As language is a part of a culture, the main problem, then, is in the relationship between language and core culture, as the main habitant reflects speakers’ identity as one entity which shows their own ethnicity.

In relation to language maintenance and core cultural identity, this study focuses on two regional languages: Balinese and Dayak Ngaju. These two languages were selected because they represent communities that continue to actively preserve their linguistic heritage despite external sociocultural

pressures, such as globalization, dominant national language use, and shifting language domains. Balinese, for example, is increasingly constrained within limited domains due to tourism-driven modernization, while Dayak Ngaju remains strongly rooted in traditional and ritual contexts, yet is also vulnerable to language shift. Although the speaker populations of both languages are relatively small, they remain linguistically resilient and are aligned with Indonesia's *Trigatra Bangun Bahasa* policy, which mandates the prioritization of Indonesian, preservation of local languages, and mastery of foreign languages. Thus, comparing these two languages provides a strategic and empirically grounded basis to examine how different sociocultural environments influence language vitality and cultural identity. The aims are to reveal a comparative study on language maintenance for the Balinese, and the Dayak Ngaju languages through cultural identity of the speakers and core cultures. The findings of this comparative study are expected to offer theoretical and practical contributions for formulating more contextual strategies to preserve regional languages in Indonesia, especially those currently categorized as endangered.

2. Literature Review

Language is produced by a society (social) as the owner of the culture (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Therefore, language and culture are interrelated and cannot be separated: language can be preserved in language maintenance, or demolished in language death, are all based on the social or community who speak the language (Ino et al., 2023; Janse, 2003).

A culture is generally understood to consist of at least seven elements: language, knowledge system, social organization, equipment and technology, economy, religion, and arts (Koentjaraningrat, 1987). These elements are broadly categorized into the prominent domains of social and cultural practices (Uyanne & Oti, 2012). Since social practices inherently involve the use of language as a tool of communication (Foley, 1997), language plays a crucial role in fostering and preserving cultural products and practices (Marhadi et al., 2024). Therefore, as this discussion centers on language or local languages, which is an integral part of culture, an analysis of socio-cultural practices is essential to fully understand its use within the context of core cultures and ethnic identity.

The intrinsic relationship linking local languages to the core culture and identity of their speakers provides the essential groundwork for local language maintenance initiatives. Gandasari et al. (2024), for example, demonstrated that cultural preservation among the Dayak, Malay, and Chinese ethnic communities in Sintang District, West Kalimantan, can be advanced by utilizing dataset of indigenous knowledge, which include history and language. Parallel efforts include Kadyanan et al.'s (2025) proposal for Balinese language preservation

through the development of speech-based technologies in the digital age. Furthermore, Murhaini & Achmadi (2021) contributed by discussing the preservation of the Dayak community's farming management cycle systems and their conceptual framework regarding nature and environment in. Although these previous studies represent valuable preservation efforts across the Dayak and Balinese communities, they each focus on a distinctive domain (indigenous knowledge, technology, and farming system). Therefore, this research seeks to address local language and culture maintenance from an alternative perspective.

The analysis of the Balinese language (Bali Island) and the Dayak Ngaju language (Central Kalimantan) is grounded on Sociolinguistic theory, primarily the concept of language maintenance (Chambers, 2003; Koh, 2005). The core assumption is that mother tongue acquisition mirrors the process of cultural learning, involving internalization, socialization, enculturation, and institutionalization. This approach views language maintenance as a matter of intergenerational communication (Shulist, 2016). Additionally, this study draws on the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1974), which defines language use in a community as continuously and collectively patterned. This is supported by the idea that language guides speakers' thought processes and their understanding of their world (Duranti, 1997). Since communication within a culture is always related to its elements as unified whole (Saputra et al., 2022; Sumarsono, 2017), applying these theories allow the asses of the relationship between the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages and the identity and ethnic cultures of their speakers, thereby projecting the languages' future. The ethnography of communication is specifically employed to examine the verbal communication concept and the interpersonal functions of language within cultural patterns.

Research on speaker's identity, language or cultural identity and relationships among core cultures analysis, as studied in this current research, is a real action to support and realize the cultural revitalization and language inventory program. Thus, the existence of culture and language will continue. In relation to that, there are several related studies that have been conducted previously and are references in this research.

Research on language preservation highlights varied strategies and challenges. The studies of the Balinese language by Rahmawati (2020) and Beratha et al. (2017) demonstrate that preservation in multicultural contexts can be achieved through cultural activities and performances. A contrasting threat is identified by Sudirga et al. (2022) and Luardini et al. (2019), who argue for maintaining the Dayak Ngaju language in Central Kalimantan against the pressures of natural resource expansion by palm oil and mining companies. Beyond these case studies, broader research explores language revitalization

through media and identity. Yoniartini et al. (2023), for instance, analyzed how social media can promote local languages and culture (Tangkas & Suari, 2022; cf. Subali & Maharani, 2023). This aligns with the theoretical view of Tektigul et al. (2023), who emphasize that language and culture are inseparable, with language serving as the basis for explaining culture. Ultimately, successful efforts, such as the Chickasaw language revitalization studied by Davis (2016), enhance the status of current speakers and make the language accessible to new learners by reinforcing ethnolinguistic ideologies. Therefore, language revitalization strategies are crucial for creating opportunities for a language to be actively used again (Shulist, 2016).

It is concluded from the aforementioned research that the consistent use of language is essential for preserving values, character, and cultural identity, allowing them to thrive even when a community is immersed in cultural diversity. Conversely, a failure to use and nurture identity, culture, and language will inevitably lead to their loss through cultural dominance (Croucher & Kramer, 2017). These findings underscore the critical nature of research into culture and speaker identity, which offers a valuable lesson: the maintenance and sustainability of a language is a vital generational concern. Despite this importance, a significant limitation exists prior research has focused on specific, isolated local languages, and none have attempted a comparative analysis of their maintenance efforts. This current study addresses that gap by conducting a comparative analysis of language maintenance elements, based on culture and speaker identity, between the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Method

This qualitative research classifies as ethnography communication, introduced by Hymes in 1974, with the focus of comparative study on language maintenance for the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages by using the data of core cultures, identity of the speakers of the two languages. Based on an assumption that productivity of language is determined by the cultures, so, when the cultures are well maintained, the language can be preserved well also. This assumption can be used as the indicator of language maintenance.

An exploratory method (Stewart, 2018) was employed, using the research questions and aims as the starting point for data derivation. This approach required collecting data from a diverse set of local sources, including social practices, cultural performances, oral narratives, written records, and other information. The goal was to establish a clear frame of the complex interrelationship between language, speaker identity, and core cultures.

Data collection was a collaborative effort, combining direct observation,

field notes, and library research to ensure data validity and a comprehensive descriptive foundation for the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju languages. The fieldwork timeline can be described as the following: (1) Central Kalimantan: pre-observation occurred in Kapuas Regency and Palangka Raya from June 28–30, 2019, (2) the main field research was conducted collaboratively by both researchers from September 2–8, 2022, spanning Kapuas Regency (the assumed center of the Dayak Ngaju language) and Palangka Raya (the capital, where centralized cultural activities occur). Field research in Bali (Denpasar), was also conducted collaboratively by both researchers from November 9–13, 2022. The collaborative nature of the fieldwork provides the epistemological basis for the comparative analysis, ensuring a shared contextual understanding of the data from both regions. While the data collection and fieldwork were a joint effort, the initial, focused analysis of the data was conducted individually in separate regions. All remaining aspects of the study, including final data interpretation and manuscript revision, were managed through virtual collaborative discussion.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is focused on the comparative study on language maintenance for the local languages of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju based on core cultures that consist of seven elements: religion, language, arts, living hood, social systems, equipment and technology, and knowledge system. All elements of the core cultures are bounded in the language used, which were served as the data. The data, then, were analyzed by using domain analysis (Atkinson & Haj, 1996; Masthuroh & Prihantoro, 2020; Spradley, 1980), which means that each cultural element was regarded as a domain.

The data from each domain, then were analyzed based on some steps. First, comparing the characteristics of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju language in the number of the speakers, language typology, its autonomy, functions, and history. Then, the analysis of ethnolinguistics were those of the conditions of the two languages in their growth, compositions, network distribution, prestigious values, and internal and external pressures of the speakers. The next step was to classify similar semantics in three-elements relationships, that was a or preservation of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages based on all the domain analysis by selecting fieldnote data, and finding for possible terms, included terms that fit the semantic relationship, and making a list of all identified domains in core cultures. The last step was to compare the language maintenance data collected.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Characteristics of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju Languages

The Balinese language is a major local language, widely used across various social domains by the majority of the community in Bali. In contrast, the Dayak Ngaju language has a middle status, primarily serving as a tool for daily communication among other local languages in Kalimantan. Table 1 describes the distinct sociocultural characteristics of both, providing a clear comparison that underscores the factors influencing the current vitality and existence of these two local languages.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Balinese Language (BL) and the Dayak Ngaju Language (DNGL)

No.	Characteristics	BL	DNGL
1	The number of Speakers	4 million (3 million are in Bali Island, the rest spread in almost all parts of Indonesia as a transmigrate program) – major language.	0.89 million – middle language classification as the speakers is not more than 1 million*
2	Language Typology	Standard: spelling, grammar, and dictionary.	Standard: spelling, grammar, and dictionary.
3	Autonomy Area	One unity of area and identity, culture and ethnicity.	Autonomy as unity of law area in Central Kalimantan (CK).
4	Function	Major media of communication in a multilingual area (BL, Bahasa Indonesia (BI) or Indonesian, English, Java.	As a lingua-franca for all ethnic groups of the Dayaks in CK**, multilingual among local and national languages: DNGL, BI, Banjarese.
5	History	In its history, BL has literacy with the oldest script of Siddha Matraka or <i>Pra-Negari</i> or <i>Pallawa</i> script.	There is no history and literacy system of DNGL

Source: researchers (2022); *Abas, (1983) and BPS (2003); **Suan (2014).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the functional importance and societal position of the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju languages indicate their continued existence, growth, and dynamic development within their local cultures, primarily through daily communication. However, the Balinese language exhibits greater stability, which is historically underpinned by its established system of literacy (script), a feature the Dayak Ngaju language currently lacks.

4.1.2 Ethno-Linguistic Profile

Based on sociolinguistic data and their characteristics (status, autonomy, and geography), there are also differences in Ethno-linguistic profiles used as the indicators for the culture and existence mappings.

Table 2. Ethno-linguistic profile of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju Languages

No.	Indicators	BL	DNGL
1	The Growth of Native Speaker	3 million speakers in Bali Island with the growth of 100.000 people per year.	800.000 speakers with the growth of approximately of 16.000 people per year
2	Composition inter-districts (custom/tradition).	Distribution inter-districts are very close and even merge within road infrastructures.	The distribution is quite far, about 24 km from one district to the others and is connected by rivers and roads infrastructures.
3	Network Distribution of the Speakers.	Cross villages are intensive and close relations, so it is easier to have information and communication.	Distance cross villages make it slower in information and verbal communication access.
4	Speaker External Pressure (the influences of code-mixing and switching).	External pressures are profuse as it is a tourist destination.	External pressures are lenient based on geography, social, and political factors.
5	Prestigious values	• The social stratification system of caste/color causes BL to be important for socio-culture aspects of life. • International situation	• External prestigious values come from other Dayak ethnic groups as other groups are forced to learn DNL for communication. • Local situation among the Dayaks

Source: Researchers (2022)

4.1.3 The Domain of Core Culture

Both languages, the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju, are parts of culture and have a core (center) in each culture. The growth and development of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju cultures depend on those languages. In other words, the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages are used in traditional cultural domains (in traditional districts), such as in the religious domain, the arts, and social systems. For modern cultural domains, such as modern knowledge, information technology (IT), or trading, these two areas primarily

use Indonesian with only a small portion reserved for local languages. Traditional and modern cultural domains can be distinguished by their characteristics: (1) traditional culture characteristics: monoculture and monolingual, while (2) modern culture: multicultural and multilingual.

The comparative language use of the Balinese language (BL) and the Dayak Ngaju language (DNGL) can be described in Table 3-8 below.

Table 3. The domains of traditional core cultures of the religion

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
	Bali Hinduism			Religion	Kaharingan Hinduism
1	San, Kawi	Holly Book of Weda/Veda	Tatwa philosophy	Holly Book of <i>Panaturan</i>	SL, DNGL
2	San, Kawi	<i>Dewa Yadnya</i> God		<i>Raying Hatalla</i> God	SL, DNGL
3	BL	<i>Rsi Yadnya</i> Prophet		<i>Sangiang</i> Prophet	SL, DNGL
4	BL/ San	Ritual of death and ancestor soul	Susila code of conduct	Ritual of death and ancestor soul	SL, DNGL
5		<i>Ngaben</i> death ceremony		<i>Tiwah</i> death ceremony	
6	BL	<i>Pitra Yadnya</i> ancestors' soul	Ritual Ceremony for Human Life	<i>Batang Garing</i> Tree of life: 1. Vertical dimensions: <i>dunia atas</i> 'the highest authority', <i>dunia tengah</i> 'human life', <i>dunia bawah</i> 'natural down'.	DNGL
7	BL/ San	<i>Resi Yadnya</i> spiritual teacher			
8	BL	<i>Manusa Yadnya</i> human life			
9	BL-Kawi	<i>Buta Yadnya</i> spirit and human of natural down			

Table 4. The domains of traditional core cultures of the arts

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
1	BL-Kawi	<i>Wali</i> ‘calling Gods’	Ceremony	<i>Potong Pantan</i> ‘welcoming VIP’	DNGL
2	BL	<i>Gending</i> ‘traditional song’	Songs	<i>Karungut</i> ‘traditional song’	DNGL
3	BL	<i>Kemong</i> ‘percussion’	Musical instrument	<i>Katambung</i> ‘percussion’	DNGL
4	BL	<i>Pendet, Kecak</i> , etc	Dance	<i>Manasai, giring-giring</i> , etc	DNGL
5	BL	Hinduism Gods statues, all shapes of things	Chisel/ Curve	<i>Sapundu</i> Statue ‘statue for accompanying soul’	DNGL

Table 5. The domains of traditional core cultures of the living hood

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
1	BL	Farming		Cultivation	DNGL
2	BL	Trading		Forest	DNGL
3	BL	Labor		-	
4	BL	Carpentry		Hunting	DNGL
5	BL	Fishing (sea)		Fishing (river)	DNGL

Table 6. The domains of traditional core cultures of the social system

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
1	BL	Household		Household	DNGL
2	BL	Neighborhood		River stream	DNGL
3	BL	District system		District system	DNGL
4	BL	<i>Banjar</i> kinships		River streams/ kindship	DNGL
5	BL	• <i>Pemangku</i>, <i>Pedanda</i>, <i>Resi</i> religion leader • <i>Bandesa</i> leader of Customary Council • <i>Majelis Desa Adat</i> Customary Council of Provincial level		• <i>Damang/ Mantir</i> Religion leader • <i>Dewan Adat Dayak -DAD</i> Customary Council of Provincial/ Regency level	DNGL
6		-		<i>Majelis Adat Dayak National</i> 'Customary Council of National level'	
7	BL	<i>Sangkep</i> tradition meeting		<i>Bisik kurik</i> traditional meeting	DNGL

Table 7. The domains of traditional core cultures of equipment and technology

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
1	BL	Home appliances		-	
2	BL	Farming appliances		Farming appliances	DNGL
3	BL	Architecture		Architecture	DNGL
4	BL	Ritual		Ritual	DNGL
5		Irrigation of <i>subak</i>		-	
6	-	-		Hunting weapon (<i>sumpit</i> , <i>lunju</i> , <i>tombak</i>)	DNGL
7	BL	Traditional weapon (<i>tombak</i> , <i>keris</i>)		Traditional weapon (<i>Mandau</i> , <i>Sumpit</i>)	DNGL
8	BL	Fishing equipment (<i>dungki</i> , <i>bubu</i>)		Fishing equipment (<i>bubu</i> , <i>pisi</i>)	DNGL

Table 8. The domains of traditional core cultures of the knowledge system

No.	BL		Core Culture	DNGL	
	Language	Sub-culture		Sub-culture	Language
1	BL	<i>Wariga</i> astronomy <i>Pawukon</i> traditional calendar		-	DNGL
2	BL	<i>Dauh</i> time		Cultivation time	DNGL
3		-		Land use (sandy, peat, clay)	DNGL
4	BL	• <i>Usada</i> heath • Culinary • Farming/ Plantation		• Medicinal herbal • Culinary • Farming/ Plantation	DNGL
5	BL	Animal husbandry		Animal husbandry	DNGL
6	BL	Traditional gambling: <i>tajen</i> 'cockfighting'		Traditional gambling: <i>saung manuk</i> 'cockfighting'	DNGL

*Sans = Sanskrit; SL = *Sangiang* Language

Source: researchers (2024)

The comparative study of core cultural and subcultural domains for the two languages—Balinese and Dayak Ngaju—show both similarities and notable differences. A key distinction lies in their external linguistic influences: Balinese is complemented by the international classical language Sanskrit, used in the Vedas, their holy book originally from India. In contrast, the Dayak Ngaju language is accompanied only by the local *Sangiang* language, which is specifically reserved for *Kaharingan* rituals.

The two ethnicities, Balinese and Dayak Ngaju, share a broad religious identity in Hinduism, but they adhere to distinct sects. The Balinese practice Hindu Dharma (often called Hindu Bali), which uses the Vedas and centers worship in the Pura (temple) (Photo 1). The Dayak Ngaju practice Hindu *Kaharingan*, which uses the holy book *Panaturan* and centers worship in the *Balai Basarah* (Photo 2). *Kaharingan* gained this formal association with Hinduism and its current name in 1972 as local practitioners sought to establish a distinct, recognized identity for their traditional beliefs.



Photo 1. *Pura* 'Worship Center for Hindu Bali' (Photo: Putu Sutama)



Photo 2. *Balai Basarah* 'Worship Center for Hindu Kaharingan' (Photo: Maria Arina Luardini)

4.1.4 *Speakers Identity and Language Maintenance*

For a comparative study of language, culture, and identity, speaker identity is an essential analytic component. The Balinese identity within its cultural system is rooted in the concept of *wali*, which refers to a religious ceremony where Balinese dance is traditionally performed (Photo 3). While this term is central to

Balinese cultural behavior—the frequent conducting of ceremonies—it actually derives from Old Javanese, not Balinese. This pattern of cultural terminology forming identity is mirrored in the Dayak Ngaju language. Here, the term Ngaju literally means “upstream of a river” or a community that occupies the upstream area (Photo 4). This geographical naming convention is also seen in other groups, such as the Dayak Kapuas. In both cases, the ethnic culture is the wellspring of identity, ultimately defining the speakers (Kleden, 2016).



Photo 3. Balinese dance in a religious ritual (Photo: Putu Utama)



Photo 4. River as the Dayak identity (Photo: Maria Arina Luardini)

4.2 Discussion

Based on the characteristics of the two languages, the comparative study on language maintenance shows that the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages grow well, but the two have significantly different characteristics. The autonomy area of the Balinese is occupied by a mono-ethnic group of Balinese in one province and a relatively small island. The transportation structures and infrastructures are connected among the province areas, towns, and suburbs. On the other hand, the Dayak Ngaju language grows within a multi-ethnic group of the other Dayaks – there are at least 13 Dayakese and their dialects (Ukur, 1994). The expanse of Central Kalimantan geography is separated by forests and hundreds of large and small rivers. Such conditions cause obstacles in transportation infrastructures in some areas. It also influences language use, although the Dayak Ngaju language will still exist based on its function as the lingua-franca in Central Kalimantan (see Collins & Alloy, 2013).

Moreover, in linguistic history, the Balinese language has their own script system, the oldest of which was called the *Siddha Matraka* script, also known as the *Pra-Negari* or *Pallawa*. The process of its history is included:

- 1) *Pallawa Muda* Script
- 2) *Persegi empat* or *Pra-Kediri* Script
- 3) *Kediri Kwadrat* Script
- 4) *Majapahit* Script (Java Script)
- 5) Bali Script

Therefore, both the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju languages have been included in the Local Language Revitalization Program (RBD) — *Revitalisasi Bahasa Daerah* — held by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemdikbudristek). Initiated in 2021, the RBD constitutes the 17th stage of the *Merdeka Belajar* ‘Independent Learning’ policy, supported by Regulation No. 12 of 2022 on the Organization and Working Procedures of the Language Office of the Republic of Indonesia. The program’s mission is to ensure the preservation and development of Indonesia’s sustainable local languages, not only through formal and informal education but also via Information Technology (IT). Evidence of this IT focus can be seen in the development of social media tools and applications for these languages, such as local language dictionaries and Wikipedia platforms. For instance, the Balinese language has been recognized with a prestigious UNESCO award for *BasaBali Wiki* (Tempo, 2019), although the Dayak Ngaju language has not yet received a similar commendation.

The Balinese language exhibits diglossia, which manifests in multiple speech levels—*Alus* (high), *Madya* (middle), and *Kasar* (low)—as well as

variants determined by the speaker's social position (e.g., status, age). This social hierarchy directly impacts its pronominal system, which includes forms like *titiang* or *tiang* for the high/middle levels of (I) and *cang* for the low level. Conversely, the Dayak Ngaju language is structurally simpler and egalitarian. It has no historical evidence of diglossia or a traditional script system. Its entire community adheres to an egalitarian system that eliminates differences in language use, meaning a single first-person pronoun, *aku* (I), is used consistently by all speakers regardless of age, gender, or social situation.

The ecolinguistic profiles of the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju languages demonstrate a significant disparity in speaker growth, driven primarily by population size and geography. With a population of 4.32 million in 2021 (BPS Bali, 2021), the Balinese language boasts a higher estimated annual growth rate of 100,000 speakers. In contrast, the Dayak Ngaju language, located in Central Kalimantan, has a smaller population of 2.67 million (BPS Kalimantan Tengah, 2021), resulting in an annual growth rate of only 16,000 speakers. This difference is starkly emphasized by the respective regions' infrastructure: despite Central Kalimantan being geographically vast, its large area and transportation barriers result in less intensive interaction among the Dayak communities. Conversely, the high population density and well-connected infrastructure of Bali facilitate greater social and linguistic contact. Consequently, while Bali is no longer classified as having remote areas, much of Central Kalimantan remains designated as such, with ten out of its thirteen regencies still considered remote (The Ministry of Social Affairs, 2009).

Furthermore, the Balinese language faces significantly greater external pressure from other languages than the Dayak Ngaju language does, leading to more frequent code-mixing and code-switching. This dynamic is largely due to Bali's status as a major international tourist destination in Indonesia. This global exposure, particularly when tourists encounter Balinese culture and rituals (such as traditional dances), elevates the Balinese language's status, making it a prestigious language in international contexts (Setinawati et al., 2025). In sharp contrast, Central Kalimantan is primarily known for its natural environment (forests, rivers, peatlands, and habitats for species like the *orangutan*), which limits international linguistic interaction. Consequently, the Dayak Ngaju language remains prestigious primarily within the context of other Dayak communities.

The core cultural expressions of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages show a difference in lexical variety. The Balinese language possesses distinct lexical items to articulate both sacred and contemporary religious concepts, structured around three core cultural terms: *tatwa* (philosophy), *susila* (code of conduct), and *upacara* (ritual). These three concepts are considered inseparable—a philosophy, a ritual, and a code of conduct existing as a unified

whole. While the Dayak Ngaju language does not have explicit, separate terms for these concepts, they are implicitly embedded within its ritual practices. For instance, the death ceremonies, *Ngaben* (Balinese) and *Tiwah* (Dayak Ngaju), share the philosophical goal of guiding the soul to the eternal world. In this context, the Balinese concept of *upacara* (literally, a 'way to get close') refers to the ritual process and instruments used to facilitate the soul's journey.

The *tatwa* is how the people conduct the ritual by following a sequence of steps. The *tatwa* or philosophy is that which makes it necessary to use some instruments to reach the destination, known as *upacara*, and the use of the instruments has a code of conduct, known as *susila*. However, there is a slightly different concept in human life. The Balinese language has the terms of cosmology in terms of ritual ceremony for some purposes: *pitra yadnya* ancestor soul, *manusa yadnya* human being life, *buta yadnya* spirit and creatures of natural order, whereas the Dayak Ngaju language wraps those concepts into one symbol of *Batang Garing* 'tree of life'. The *batang garing* has two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension consists of three parts in which the upper part shows the symbol of the highest authority of God, the house of *Raying Hatalla Langit* 'God', the middle of the tree consisting of three parts symbolizes the earth or human being life which is authorized by *Maharaja Sangiang*, *Maharaja Sangen*, and *Maharaja Buno*, and the lowest part is for the *Jatta* creatures who have authority of natural down the earth (Agulero, 2017). In the middle level, human being life has some ceremony rituals, such as for death ritual ceremony (*Tiwah*), or for giving name for baby birth (*Nanuhan*)

The symbolization is actually similar as the statements from *Panaturan*, the Holy Book of Hindu Kaharingan, in verse 1:

"... penguasa alam atas bernama Ranying Mahatara Langit (Ranying Hatalla) bersama istrinya Jatha Jalawang Bulau, penguasa alam bawah, sepakat untuk menciptakan dunia, dengan diawali penciptaan Batang Garing (pohon kehidupan)". [... the ruler of upper life named Ranying Mahatara Langit together with his wife Jatha Jalawang Bulau, the ruler of the underworld, coincidentally created a world, starting by creating *Batang Garing* (tree of life)].

"Dari kehancuran tadi tercipta pula sepasang insan... Kedua insan ini kemudian menikah dan mendapatkan keturunan pertama berupa babi, ayam, kucing, dan anjing. Keturunan kedua berwujud manusia, yaitu Maharaja Sangiang, Maharaja Sangen, dan Maharaja Buno." [From the destruction, a pair of humans were also created... These two humans then married and had their first offspring in the form of a pig, a chicken, a cat, and a dog. The second offspring were in the form of humans, namely Maharaja Sangiang, Maharaja Sangen, and Maharaja Buno].

The Dayak Ngaju core belief system emphasizes shared provenance—viewing human beings and other creatures, including animals, as originating from the same source. While the most sacred aspects of core culture in both communities, particularly the religious domain, are typically restricted to believers, artistic expressions often serve as contemporary, public shows accessible to everyone. This is evident in ceremonies delivered in the respective local languages. For the Balinese, the sacred art of *Wali* accompanies religious ceremony or dances. Similarly, the Dayak Ngaju use their language in the *Potong Pantan* (welcoming ceremony for important persons), which also features accompanying dances, showcasing their culture to a wider audience.

In the livelihood domain, Bali and Central Kalimantan present a clear contrast. Bali has limited natural resources but relies heavily on its natural beauty for tourism. The economic focus on tourism and trade increasingly necessitates the use of the Balinese language in international contexts. In this case, for example, street vendors who need to market their handcrafted goods to foreign tourists will often struggle with speaking in a foreign language. (Moriarty, 2020). Conversely, Central Kalimantan is rich in forest resources and their associated products and inhabitants. Consequently, the local economy centers on utilizing the forests (hunting, cultivation, and palm oil), confining the Dayak Ngaju language primarily to regional situations (Safar & de Vos, 2022). These natural conditions also influence traditional knowledge and technology. For instance, the Balinese language includes terms for farming appliances, such as *gerejak* ‘a tool for separating rice from grain’ and *tambah* ‘hoe’, while the Dayak Ngaju language has specific terminology for hunting gear like the *tombak* (spear) or *sumpit* (poison blowing pipe). Similarly, the Balinese employ the language for *pawukon* (a traditional Balinese calendar system – the name of 210-day calendar uses for scheduling religious ceremonies, or rituals), whereas the Dayak Ngaju use their language to articulate knowledge systems related to cultivation timing based on climate and land types (sandy, peat, and clay).

In the social system domain, the use of the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju languages shows a functional similarity: both are crucial for maintaining traditional social order. The Balinese language is actively used within the *Banjar* kinship system (the local community council), while the Dayak Ngaju language is essential for communication within the family domain and the *Dewan Adat Daerah* (DAD), or ‘Customary Council of the District.’ Therefore, despite having different specific institutions, both local languages are fundamentally employed to govern traditional organizations and local customary institutions.

Concluding the situation of core cultures and speakers’ identity, the two local languages, the Balinese and the Dayak Ngaju, will be maintained and classified as safe languages based on the facts that they socialized through all

domains of culture (religion, knowledge system, social organization, equipment and technology, economy, and arts), and social practices. It is in line with Kohs (2005) statement, "... because a repeated habit of obedience within a societal setting socializes them and remarks their interest, so that they come to value rule compliance." Also, it is supported by the ethnography of communication theory of Hymes (1974) which says, "language as an important and integral part of social life and cultural activity."

5. Conclusion

To conclude the explanation, the Balinese and Dayak Ngaju languages exhibit similarities in several sociocultural aspects—including religion of Hinduism, social life with the *Banjar* system and river catchment communities, and arts—reflecting the deep connection between language, core culture, and cultural identity. However, they diverge significantly in their maintenance conditions. A key difference is the Balinese language's existence of its own literacy system or script and its *diglossia* 'varieties in language uses', which the Dayak Ngaju language lacks. Crucially, the long-term survival of both languages depends on the solidity and breadth of their use across all cultural domains. Although both Balinese and Dayak Ngaju are rooted in their abstract cultural elements (philosophy, ideology, norms) and actualized cultural products, Balinese shows a more robust and intensive pattern of maintenance.

This difference in usage strongly indicates future projection. The Balinese language is actively integrated across all cultural domains in both traditional and modern life, whereas the Dayak Ngaju language remains largely restricted to limited core and sub-core cultural domains. This disparity highlights a central principle: the continued vitality of a language is directly ensured by a positive correlation between speaker engagement and cultural development.

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