

# MEDIA OF LANGUAGE SHIFT IN BAJAU SAMA KOTA BELUD: SPEAKING, UNDERSTANDING, READING, AND WRITING

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated language shift among middle-age, adult, and youth age groups of the Bajau Sama Kota Belud indigenous people. The cross-sectional study involved 243 participants, selected using stratified sampling. The questionnaire was based on language transmission assessment by Brenzinger et al. (2003). Results showed that language shift across different skill areas — speaking, understanding, reading, and writing — showed that the Malay language in everyday life is more dominant than their mother tongue among adults and youths. The language skills and the language daily use scores of Bajau Sama adults and youths are not significantly correlated. The two groups manifest the four variables of language shift in Bajau Sama. This study shows that the language shift phenomenon in Bajau Sama is accelerated in the younger generation, and they serve as the living agent of language shift. Following this, there is an urgency to develop a Bajau Sama language corpus and to implement revitalisation initiatives in Kota Belud, Sabah.

**Keywords:** media of language shift; Bajau Sama language; language endangerment; intergenerational language transmission

## Introduction

The Bajau Sama community is the second-largest ethnic group in Sabah, Malaysia (Yakin & Mahali, 2008). Historically, the Bajau Sama Kota Belud (from now on, Bajau Sama KB) is an agricultural and socially egalitarian community. Settlement factors contribute to their identity as cowboys of the east because of their horse-riding agility (Ismail et al., 2017; Marinsah et al., 2019; Yakin et al., 2016). This ethnic group uses Bajau Sama KB and the Malay language daily. The West Coast Bajau Sama village of Menunggu, Kota Belud, Miller (2007) found that more families used Malay as the home language (16 families) than Bajau (13 families), and in fact Malay may even be used with the children when both parents are Bajau and speak Bajau to each other. If the trend of parents using Malay with their young kids continues, it is hard to say whether or for how long the Bajau language will continue to thrive in domestic and village settings (Miller, 2007). Implementation of the Malay language as the official language and the language of instruction in the education system of Malaysia further strains the daily use of Bajau Sama (Ismail et al., 2017). Based on first and second language speakers, it is estimated that there are less than 10,000 speakers (Eberhard et al., 2019).

According to Ravindranath (2009), “language shift (LS) is the process by which a speech community in a contact situation (i.e., consisting of bilingual speakers) gradually stops using one of its two languages in favor of the other” (p. 1). Hickey (2020) describes language shift as an eventual switch from one (original) language to the majority language. Nawaz et al. (2012) suggest that language shift is a phenomenon stimulated by “interrelated historical, cultural, economic, social, and psychological factors” (p. 1), while Fishman (1991) posits that language shift is a by-product of social change in financial and technical development. This scenario occurs over a long period and on a scale involving more than a few households.

Preventing language shift predisposes the strategy of maintaining the vitality of the home language (Sasse, 2012). Dixon et al. (1991, p. 230) pointed out that “some communities do not realise that their mother tongue is threatened until it is too late to reverse the process of language shift that has taken place.” In most cases, young people are less likely to use their mother tongue and favor Malay (Coluzzi et al., 2017). One of the causes of language shift is a more positive attitude toward a more prestigious language in society (Adam, 2017). Bhakti (2020) stated that “the higher the level of education, the higher the intensity of the use of the prestigious language in daily life” (p. 35). Data from previous studies revealed that several ethnic groups in Malaysia are already transitioning from mother tongue to Malay (see Ghazali et al., 2019; Suhailin et al., 2020).

However, studies on the Bajau Sama KB language are still lacking in the published literature. Factors accounting for the deteriorating use of Bajau Sama KB are crucial in this study given the decreasing mastery of the mother tongue across three generations: the middle-aged, adult, and youth.

The study examines possible language shift among the Bajau Sama community in Kota Belud district, in Sabah State, East Malaysia. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do the different age groups show different levels of speaking, understanding, reading, and writing the language for the Bajau Sama KB language?
2. Is the intergenerational language transmission of Bajau Sama KB endangered?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the Bajau Sama KB speaking, understanding, reading, and writing skills and the daily use of the language among the participants?

This study will therefore provide a novel contribution to the sociolinguistics knowledge of indigenous languages in Malaysia.

### **Literature Review**

Previous studies have found language shift factors in particular speech communities. Ghazali et al. (2019) examined the Cham language transition in the Cham community in Ulu Tiram, Johor. A total of 56% of respondents agreed that the first-generation Cham language in Johor would shift to the Malay language in the future. On a typical day at school, at home, and with peers, the use of the Malay language was higher (75%) compared to the use of the Bisaya language, which was only 25% (Suhailin et al., 2020). The correct use of negative words, conjunctions, and adverbs in the Bisaya language of 205 upper secondary school students in Beaufort, Sabah, were also found to be unsatisfactory.

Mohamed and Hashim (2012) concluded that the Sihan language in Belaga, Sarawak was endangered. The language prevailed in the home domain and had many functions, yet the dominant Malay language still permeated the family domain. Zulkifli (2010) found that the Semang Kensiu language vitality was severely endangered. According to Wan et al. (2015), like other indigenous communities in Malaysia, the elderly Kayan found it challenging to pass the language to their children and grandchildren. Part of the reason was the increasing number of educated children who moved from longhouses to raise their families in big cities. As children spend less time in their communities in the traditional village, the natural environment for the ethnic language was eroded, resulting in them abandoning the Kayan language.

In Sabah, the Malay language has threatened several indigenous languages. Kluge and Choi (2016) examined the influence of the Malay language on Bonggi, an Austronesian language spoken on Banggi Island. Those who shifted to Malay were children of mixed marriages. Another study on language transmission of the mother tongue between generations by Dani et al.'s (2019) showed that about 84% of the ethnic Dusun students' mother tongue was severely endangered. Another study of ethnic Bisaya students in Beaufort, Sabah, showed that the intergenerational language transmission between parents and children is definitively endangered (Suhailin et al., 2020). In a preliminary survey of Bisaya language revitalisation in Limbang, Alas (2019) stated that the language changed due to socio-political influences in Brunei Darussalam. The generation under 30 years of age has embraced the Brunei Malay language and culture.

We posit that the media of possible language shifts—speaking, understanding, reading, and writing—among the different age groups would show contrasting implications for the Bajau Sama KB language.

### Theoretical Framework

In his book titled “Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages,” Fishman (1991) described media of possible LS variables as such: “In modern society, these four ‘media,’ understanding, speaking, reading, and writing, constitute an ‘implication scale’ of LS” (p. 43). Essentially, if a handful of samples understand the Bajau Sama KB language, the number of samples that can speak the language is usually small. Given that a small sample uses the mother tongue, the reading and writing skills of the language would also be limited. This is because reading skills are required for writing skills. Those who attain skills later in the list already have skills earlier in the list. However, the implicationality in the opposite direction is not applicable (e.g., those who can speak the language may not necessarily be able to write in the language). Therefore, researchers are encouraged to report the command of skills separately.

Based on the description of intergenerational language transmission factors displayed in Table 1, Fishman’s concept of possible LS media did not receive much attention due to the lack of a methodology for distinguishing the speaking, understanding, reading, and writing in the mother tongue language in a speech community. The first differentiation needed to arrive at a consensus as to whether LS has occurred and, if so, where in the entire language-use arena differentiate between speaking, understanding, reading, and writing the Bajau Sama KB. This distinction is obviously of great importance vis-à-vis any remedial steps subsequently.

Fishman (1991) stated that a mother tongue is endangered when few users (speakers, readers, and writers) understand the language. When a first language is lost to the dominant one in the family domain, its status becomes merely symbolic. Therefore, expanding mother tongue use in new domains is essential but only achievable if there is no threat to language transmission. Fishman (1991) further emphasised the importance of restoring intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue through primary communication between parents and children in the family domain. The factor used to assess the vitality of the mother tongue is language transmission from one generation to the next, measured on a continuum from stability to extinction. The following are six intergenerational language transmission factors (Brenzinger et al., 2003).

**Table 1**  
*Intergenerational Language Transmission Factors*

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
Safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.

Unsafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
Definitively endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
Severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
Critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
Extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

### Research Methodology

To answer the research questions of this study, we performed a cross-sectional survey. While LS is best studied longitudinally (diachronically) over a length of time, the time constraints that researchers work usually do not permit this; hence age-graded studies across generations are a viable option (Fishman, 1991). The cross-sectional study enabled us to identify participants' responses from different age groups. The Bajau Sama KB ethnic group was the target population of different ages, namely, 20–29 (G3), 30–39 (G2), and 40–49 (G1). We determined identical dependent variables: the ability to speak, understand, read, and write the mother tongue; and intergenerational language transmission. The scores allow us to examine the shifts of the Bajau Sama KB language across age groups.

### Sample and Selection of the Participants

The Bajau Sama KB speakers reside in the Kota Belud district located in the Tempasuk plain, about halfway between Kota Kinabalu (Sabah's capital city) and Kudat (Sabah's northern district). Kota Belud is the largest settlement of the Bajau Sama speakers in Sabah, which is also the centre of the Bajau Sama cultural area (Sather, 1997). Based on the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2010) census in Kota Belud, the Bajau Sama KB population was 4,047. However, there were no written reports on the total population based on age group at the study location in Kampung Taun Gusi 1 Kota Belud. Therefore, participants were determined based on maternal and paternal Bajau Sama KB ancestry.

According to Taun Gusi Village Security Development Committee Report (2019), the total population is approximately 692. Thus, we applied Fishman's (1991) framework to select the appropriate participants. The LS assessment framework is necessary to detect an uneven shift in the target population. For example, to obtain the slope of decline in the graph of mother tongue use, we found that participants aged 20–29 years (G3) used less mother tongue than those aged 30–39 years. In turn, the 30–39 years age group (G2) used relatively less mother tongue than participants in the 40–49 years age group (G1). Consequently, the slope of the graph reflects the gradual shift of a mother tongue use over the years. To consider age group differences, we applied stratified sampling as suggested by Fishman (1991). The participants provided informed consent in written form. According to Bartlet et

al. (2001), “the sample size in a survey must be 30% — 50%, to overcome the shortcomings of data collection” (p. 46). Table 2 shows the profile of the target population and the calculation to obtain the sample for this study.

**Table 2**  
*The Target Population Profile in Age Groups*

Age Group	Target Population	Sample (35%)
20–29 years (G3)	293	103
30–39 years (G2)	217	76
40–49 years (G1)	182	64
Total	692	243

The sample of Bajau Sama KB-speaking participants were from five localities in Kampung Taun Gusi 1 Kota Belud (government secondary school, government primary school, the mosque, residential school area, and shop outlets). In total, 300 questionnaires were distributed, but only 243 (81%) were utilised based on the three age groups.

Overall, there were 64 participants in Group 1 (40 – 49 years), 76 participants in Group 2 (30 – 39 years), and 103 participants in Group 3 (20 – 29 years). For this study, the population sizes of each age group were 293, 217, and 182. To ensure that subgroups or strata are representative of the target population, the sample sizes of 35% were used, resulting in a total of 103, 76, and 64, respectively.

### **Instrument**

The questionnaire in the current study was constructed based on previous studies that focused on language shift, particularly on endangered languages that may still function in the presence of a predominant language (Seruji, 2014; Simanjuntak, 2017; Dani et al., 2019; Suhailin et al., 2020). The questionnaire includes multiple-choice questions, close-ended questions, response formats, rating scales, and open-ended questions.

The questionnaires were divided into four parts. The first part was designed to elicit demographic information about the participants, such as age, gender, and education. The second part dealt with intergenerational language transmission adapted from Brenzinger et al. (2003). This part measured the continuum from stability to extinction with six levels of endangerment and their interpretation (see Table 1). The third part collected data on the participants’ proficiency (skills) in Malay and Bajau Sama languages. Frequency and percentage of their responses were captured using the Likert scale, measuring variations such as quality, frequency, and likelihood on a five-point scale, listed from 1–5. The last part was the information on the knowledge of Bajau Sama lexical (noun, verb, and adjective) among the participants. The questionnaires were distributed based on the established social network with Bajau Sama Language and Culture Association in Kota Belud.

The questionnaire was the standard Malay language. It is the official written language in Malaysia, the language of education, and the only language the Bajau Sama people can write in other than their own language. Participant's Information Sheet and Consent Form were attached to the questionnaire. Upon their consent, we clarified the purpose of the research, the scope of their involvement, the informants' rights, and anonymity.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Next, we distributed the questionnaire at the study location. Only the participants listed in the sampling framework were required to fill in the closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions provided numerical data to identify patterns, trends, and correlations statistically. These took the form of multiple-choice questions, where respondents chose from a set list of answers. Finally, we segregated the completed questionnaires according to the age groups.

The types of descriptive statistics used in this study are frequency (count, percent, and frequency), central tendency (mean), and dispersion (standard deviation). The description and interpretation of the frequency and percentages reflect the Bajau Sama KB language skills and daily use of the mother tongue for G1, G2, and G3, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The Paired Samples Correlations showed the Bivariate Pearson Correlation coefficient (with a two-tailed test of significance) for each pair of the variables. There are four pairs of variables for each group (G1, G2, and G3). Pair 1 is Bajau Sama KB speaking skills and daily use of Bajau Sama KB. Pair 2 is Bajau Sama KB's understanding skills and everyday use of Bajau Sama KB. Pair 3 is Bajau Sama's reading skills and Bajau Sama KB's daily use. Pair 4 is Bajau Sama KB's writing skills and everyday use of Bajau Sama KB. For each pair of the variables entered, the Paired Samples Statistics and Paired Samples Correlations are displayed in a table. The Paired Samples Statistics gives univariate descriptive statistics (mean, sample size, standard deviation, and standard error), whereas Paired Samples Correlations provides the test results. According to Pallant (2007), "the correlation coefficient provides a mathematical value for measuring the strength of a linear relationship between two variables that can take values from +1 to -1" (p. 130). The Correlation Coefficient Test at 0.05 level (2-tailed) and 95.0% confidence intervals indicates either a positive or a negative linear relationship between the two variables.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Media of Language Shifts—Speaking, Understanding, Reading, and Writing**

Figure 1 displays the percentages of Malay and Bajau Sama KB participants of the three age groups (G1, G2, and G3) based on four media of LS (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing). The percentage of responses is measured on a continuum, 1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, and 4=excellent for each age group.

G1 had the smallest percentage of participants who speak the Malay language (84.24%) compared to G2 and G3. This group showed the lowest

percentage in speaking, understanding, and reading in Malay. As such, G1 could communicate and understand the Bajau Sama KB language best among the three groups.

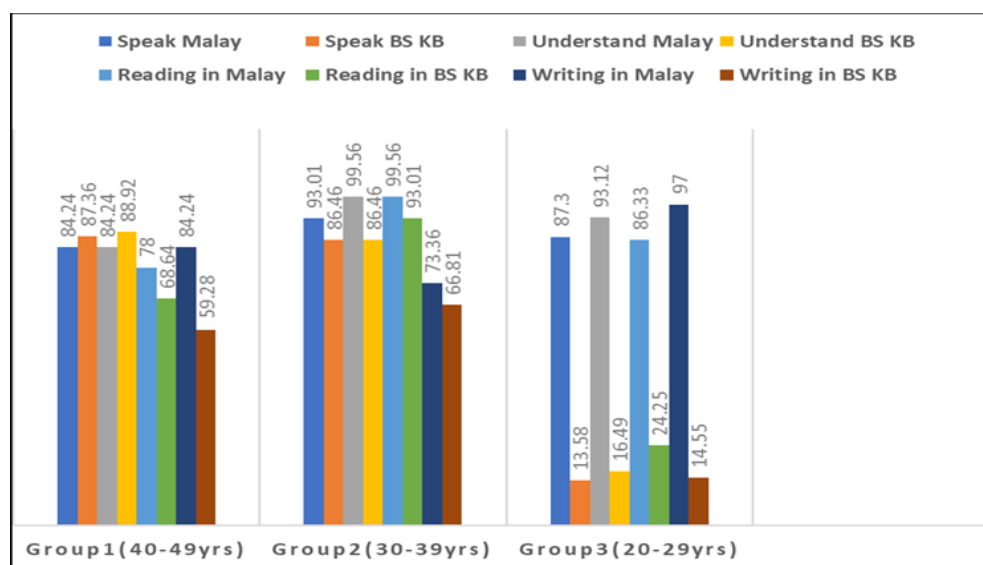
G2's rates of speaking (93.01%), understanding (99.56%), reading (99.56%), and writing skills in Malay (93.01%) were the highest among the three groups. Thus, G2 was proficient in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing Malay.

For G3, the results showed that the participants in this age group could speak (87.3%), understand (93.12%), read (86.33%), and write (97%) in the Malay language much better than the Bajau Sama KB language. The G3 data also demonstrated that their writing in the Malay language (97%) was higher than G1 and G2.

The rate of speaking Bajau Sama KB in Figure 1 reveals a significant difference between the middle-aged, adult, and young generations. For example, based on the continuum from stability to extinction, the young age group born in 1991–2000 used less Bajau Sama KB than the adults born between 1981–1990. Showing the same pattern, the adult generation used less Bajau Sama KB than the middle-aged group born between 1971–1980. Furthermore, when the data of the four media for G1, G2, and G3 in the Bajau Sama KB language were isolated from the data for the Malay language, the slope of possible LS was vivid, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 1**

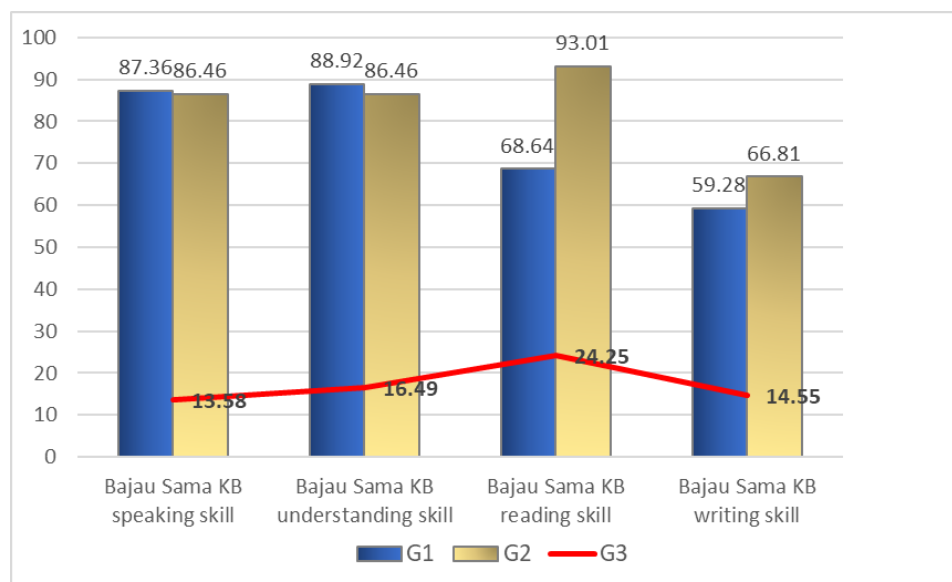
*Bajau Sama Kota Belud versus Malay Language Skills in Three Age Groups*





**Figure 2**

*Media of Possible LS in the Bajau Sama Kota Belud in the Three Age Groups*



Among the three groups, G1 is better at speaking (87.36%) and understanding (88.92%) the Bajau Sama KB language. To be more specific, the percentage rates of their reading (68.64%) and writing skills (59.28%) exceeded the 50% range between the lowest and the highest values in the data set. Therefore, G1 still retained the four media of the mother tongue. G1 met the implication scale positively in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing the Bajau Sama KB language.

The competency of G2 to read (93.01%) and write (66.81%) in the Bajau Sama KB language was the highest among the three groups. The same percentage rate, namely, 86.46% in speaking skills and understanding the Bajau Sama KB for G2, also exceeded the range of 50% value in the data set. Consequently, G2 positively met the LS implication scale in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing in the Bajau Sama KB language.

On the other hand, G3 exhibited deficiency in speaking (13.58%), understanding (16.49%), reading (24.25%), and writing (14.55%) in the Bajau Sama KB language. Group 3 did not attain the 50% range needed in the four media, meaning that they might be unable to retain their mother tongue. Hence, group 3 impacted the LS implication scale negatively.

Figure 2 answers the first research question that the media of language shifts among the different age groups show contrasting implications for the Bajau Sama KB language. The finding showed that the media of LS lies on the G3 data since the outcome is not a good fit for the Bajau Sama KB language vitality.

### Intergenerational Language Transmission of Bajau Sama KB

Besides the influence of the Malay language, a variable that is often associated with the LS phenomenon is intergenerational language transmission. Fishman (1991) highlights intergenerational mother tongue transmission as a significant indicator of social dislocation. Our findings suggested that the intergenerational language transmission of the Bajau Sama KB seemed to shift to Malay. Table 3 shows the endangerment level of the Bajau Sama KB language.

**Table 3**

*Transmission of Bajau Sama KB Language between Age Groups*

Endangerment Level	Grade	20–29 years G3, n=103	30–39 years G2, n=76	40–49 years G1, n=64
Safe	5	7 (6.79%)	27 (35.37%)	11 (17.16%)
Unsafe	4	26 (25.22%)	36 (47.16%)	50 (78%)
Definitively endangered	3	68 (65.96%)	13 (17.03%)	3 (4.68%)
Severely endangered	2	2 (1.94%)	–	–
Critical endangered	1	–	–	–
Extinct	0	–	–	–
Total		103 (100%)	76 (100%)	64 (100%)

The transmission of Bajau Sama KB ranged from a stable continuum to extinction. The safe level did not guarantee the longevity of the mother tongue. The speaker might cease transmitting the mother tongue to the younger generation. The data revealed that the imparting of Bajau Sama KB in G3 was at the level of definitively endangered. At this level, most parents and older generations used Bajau Sama KB. The youngest speakers were the parent generation. Parents still spoke in the mother tongue when talking to their children, but the children usually did not respond using the same language. Most G2 and G1 exercised the unsafe level—suggesting that the Bajau Sama KB has lost its status as a first language and is only necessary for limited social purposes.

### The Daily Use of Bajau Sama KB among the G1, G2, and G3 Participants

The Paired Samples Correlation in Table 4 addresses the third research question. The Bajau Sama KB scores for speaking, understanding, reading, writing skills, and the daily use of the language among G1 are significantly and positively correlated respectively ( $r = .997$ ;  $r = .989$ ;  $r = .995$ ;  $r = .953$ ). The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating sufficient evidence that there is a significant and positively perfect correlation between Bajau Sama KB language skills and the daily use of the language among the G1 participants. Nevertheless, the Paired Samples Correlation in G2 and G3 indicate that the significance value is not acceptable since it is above 0.05. Consequently, there is no sufficient evidence for a significant association between

the Bajau Sama KB language skills and the daily use of the language among the G2 and G3 participants.

We explored the media of LS in the Bajau Sama KB in Kampung Taun Gusi 1 Kota Belud, Sabah. The result which showed that the Malay language is replacing the mother tongue among the Bajau Sama KB younger generation reflects a similar change that is occurring across other indigenous ethnic languages of Sabah. These data supported Suhailin et al. (2020), who studied the spoken language of Bisaya ethnic students in Beaufort, Sabah. Their research found that on regular days at school, at home, and while with friends, students' use of Malay was higher than the use of their mother tongue. In the same vein, Dani et al.'s (2019) study revealed that Malay plays a dominant role in the Dusun ethnic community. This is synonymous with the the evidence found in the Bajau Sama KB in Kampung Taun Gusi 1.

Our findings are also consistent with findings from Coluzzi et al. (2017), who found that younger generation used a minor Mah Meri language but spoke more Malay. A similar trend was found in Ghazali et al.'s (2019) study among the first and second generations of Cham people in Malaysia. The mother tongue was no longer the first language among younger generations.

The diminishing mother tongue transmission between generations indicates a change in the vitality of the Bajau Sama KB. In the future, it is reasonable to predict that Bajau Sama KB will become extinct when the younger age group reaches parenthood. At any time, they could choose a dominant language (Malay) other than English as a first language.

**Table 4**

*G1, G2, G3 Bajau Sama KB Language Skills and Daily Use of the Mother Tongue*

Pair	Paired Samples Correlations	N	Correlation	Sig.
1	G1's Bajau Sama KB Speaking Skill and daily use of the language	4	.997	.003
2	G1's Bajau Sama KB Understanding Skill and daily use of the language	4	.989	.011
3	G1's Bajau Sama KB Reading Skill and daily use of the language	4	.995	.005
4	G1's Bajau Sama KB Writing Skill and daily use of the language	4	.953	.047
1	G2's Bajau Sama KB Speaking Skill and daily use of the language	4	-.120	.880
2	G2's Bajau Sama KB Understanding Skill and daily use of the language	4	-.120	.880
3	G2's Bajau Sama KB Reading Skill and daily use of the language	4	-.125	.875
4	G2's Bajau Sama KB Writing Skill and daily use of the language	4	.255	.745
1	G3's Bajau Sama KB Speaking Skill and daily use of the language	4	.393	.607
2	G3's Bajau Sama KB Understanding Skill	4	.423	.577

	and daily use of the language			
3	G3's Bajau Sama KB Reading Skill and daily use of the language	4	-.130	.870
4	G3's Bajau Sama KB Writing Skill and daily use of the language	4	-.085	.915

As the number of fluent Bajau Sama KB speakers decreases, the transmission of the mother tongue to the new generation dwindles. Thus, in Kota Belud's linguistic ecology, Malay as a more dominant language impedes the Bajau Sama KB in the broader society. For instance, active and fluent speakers of the mother tongue only came from the parents' generation, even though the Bajau Sama KB were the majority population in one district (Inayatussalihah, 2018; Simanjuntak, 2017; Suparta & Kardana, 2017). The shift to the majority language is identical to the Bajau Sama KB, even though the Bajau Sama are the second-largest ethnic group in Sabah.

The language shift phenomenon among the Dusunic young generation mirrors a series of similar events for the current study. The older generation's positive attitude toward the Bajau Sama KB in Kampung Taun Gusi 1 was most evident but deteriorated significantly among the two groups (G2 and G3) due to the social mobility factor inherent in Malay. Confirmation by ethnic leaders at the study location via interviews reinforced the younger generation's role as language shift agents in the community. We obtained similar findings to those of other researchers, such as Abbasa et al. (2020), which concluded that participants' language attitudes toward the dominant language were very positive; in contrast, the sense of belonging of the mother tongue on the solidarity dimension was low.

### Conclusion

The data from this study provide evidence that the younger generation is accelerating the language shift phenomenon for Bajau Sama KB. The decline in intergenerational language transmission indicates that the language is no longer the first language of the G2 or the G3. The younger generations in the ethnic community are living agents of language shift.

The G1 met the LS implication scale positively. G1 could speak and understand the Bajau Sama KB language the best among the three groups. G2's ability to talk in Bajau Sama KB appears lower than in Malay. The G2 was a transitional generation since they chose to use a language that did not fit the traditional model of language in bilingual communities. Like their elders, the G2 was not utterly dominant in Malay, identical to their children or Bajau Sama KB. This transitional generation used Creole, shaped from Bajau Sama KB and the Malay language. G2 and G3 negatively met the LS implication scale. The implication scale is commonly regarded as a limiting factor with respect to the number that can speak Bajau Sama KB. Social dislocation is a significant problem for the future of any ethnic culture-based community. Like other races in Malaysia, Bajau Sama KB speakers shifted to Malay due to social mobility opportunities and the primary language used in interethnic communication.

The findings of this study yield several contributions to sociolinguistics. First, the study creates awareness of the language shift in the Bajau Sama KB language community and the vulnerability of their mother tongue. Currently, the Bajau Sama KB language is definitively endangered, but there has been no effort from any party to preserve the language. Efforts are needed to revitalise the Bajau Sama KB in the current situation. The necessary step is introducing the Bajau Sama Standard language in formal education. If there is an official recognition in the constitution that guarantees the indigenous people's political, cultural, and language rights in Malaysia, language preservation and revitalisation initiatives are possible. Without the genuine involvement of Bajau Sama ethnic activists in Malaysia, the efforts will be ineffective. Hopefully, the government will introduce the Bajau Sama Standard language in primary and secondary schools, as was done with the Kadazandusun language beginning from 1997 (Dani et al., 2019). The Bajau Sama ethnic group is the second-largest population in Sabah after Kadazandusun. They have the rights to protect their heritage and the capacity of doing so.

The findings contribute to the study of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Bajau Sama indigenous community in Kota Belud, Sabah. This study limited its respondents to three generations of the Bajau Sama in Kampung Taun Gusi 1, Kota Belud. Future research involving the entire district of Kota Belud, namely Mukim and Kampung N.6 Tempasuk, Mukim and Kampung N.7 Kedamaian, and Mukim and Kampung N.8 Sports would be able to reveal more of the linguistic ecological factors of Bajau Sama KB. Research on the Bajau Sama community in suburban or rural areas can construct a linguistic ecology compared to the Bajau Sama KB in Kampung Taun Gusi 1, Kota Belud. There is an urgency to develop a Bajau Sama KB language corpus for contrastive analysis of the west coast of Bajau Sama KB with the Bajau tribes on the Sabah East Coast (Semporna, Tawau, and Sandakan).

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