

Regional Shift To Bahasa Indonesia: ‘Old Vernacular’ In A New Identity¹

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Abstract

The Gamkonora people are an ethnic group in Indonesia whose members have an outstanding linguistic ability: they are able to speak more than two languages, that is, two or more of Gamkonora, Ternatan-Malay, Ternate, and Bahasa Indonesia. The use of these languages is related to the residual traces of the powers that have ruled the area in the history of North Maluku: the Ternate sultanate, European colonialists and Indonesian central government since independence. Reflecting on the current language behaviour of the Gamkonoran younger generation, which tends to be the Indonesian language (read Malay); the authors question how far the Gamkonoran’s Indonesian language ability has influenced their Gamkonoran language and culture. Through ethnographic studies, the authors found that two languages—Indonesian and Gamkonoran—have different roles in their culture. Therefore, the language shift to Bahasa Indonesia by Gamkonoran youth will not replace the Gamkonoran language because the use of their tribal language is supported by their traditional institutions.

Key words: Gamkonora, Indonesia, Language shift

Igong Karung (Copra)

Nane berbagai macam kerja. Pada mulanya atau awalnya, *farari* membersihkan *mainang ma’areal* atau lokasi. Kemudian, *ngene fapele*. *Fapele rai fapolu*. *Fapolu rai*. *Fapopol*. Dari *fapopol* perlu dengan tanaga bantuan. Jadi *betengo dena modidi onakuliong fapopol* dan *fasiu*. *Fasiu nage fagee toma karung fasi bele toma parapara*. *Sibele toma parapara kara fagee ma u’u*. *Fagee ma u’u nage fa’atur* supaya *maigong nage ai lala*. Kemudian, *faka’ am*. *Faka’ am* tapi *fapili moju*. *Fagougou ngene fapisahkan falegu*. *Rai kara faka’ am ma lala ma gougou lala kara faka’ am ulang*. *Faka’ am rai fasisupu fopake geroba*. *Geroba sapi nane* untuk *fagasade ngene ngapengusaha atau ngene fajual ngene ma hasil tani nage*. Jadi sebentar *nane ngom ma petani* termasuk *fangare*. *Fangare tomerasa kesal* karena *ngom mahasil igong nane maijang ai hera ala*. Dalam arti, dalam Bahasa Indonesia, minim harganya. Tapi, apa boleh buat *fangare* tetap kerja karena *ngene ngakerja nagi dua*. *Ngaigong nage fapele ala forugi*. *Ala sing ado liwase*. Jadi *fangare* tetap kerja.²

Here is some of the work we do (to make copra). First, we cut the grass and clean up the coconut field. Then, we climb up the coconut trees and pick the fruit. After that, we collect (all the harvest) and split the coconuts into halves. In the processes we need one or two persons to help us. They will help to split the coconuts and pull out the coconut meat. Then, all the coconut meat is wrapped in sacks. (After we finish these processes.) Then, we put them in order in the *parapara* (a hut) and start the fire. This phase is to dry the coconut. After finishing this phase, we collect all the dried copra and wrap it in sacks. For any undried copra, we need to roast it again and wrap it in the sacks. After it is all well wrapped, we deliver it by ox cart to the collectors and sell it to them. Nowadays, I feel so upset because the price we are paid for our copra is very low. Nevertheless, I keep working on copra because this is my only job and the loss will increase if the coconuts fall and become rotten. So, I keep working.

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2 The data cited are from the field research of the Gamkonora Ethnolinguistic team, National Priority Fund, 2010–2013.

INTRODUCTION

The passage above and its transcription tell of the process of making copra and the complaint about the recent low copra price and it comes from Hadadi Walanda, who is 59 years old. He is a coconut farmer who was born in Gamkonora village. On his farm, while roasting the coconut meat into copra, he told us of the hard life that he faces because of the drastic decline in copra prices, the high costs of production and insect attacks that decrease the size of his harvest. However, he continues to process coconut meat for copra to utilise his farm's crops and to increase his income.

What the transcription above illustrates is that Gamkonorans, such as Hadadi Walanda, are able to speak two languages: Gamkonoran and Malay. The smooth code switching and code mixing are commonly used in the working domain. So, it is not so weird to hear Indonesian (Malay) mixed with Gamkonoran, as in the sentence, *Pada mulanya atau awalnya, **farari** membersihkan **mainang ma'areal** atau lokasi.* (The Gamkonoran words are in boldface.) Besides, Pak Hadad finds it convenient to use words and phrases of Indonesian in Gamkonoran sentences, such as *berbagai macam kerja, pada mulanya, membersihkan, pengusaha* and *hasil tani*. This linguistic habit is common to Gamkonoran people.

Indonesian (in this case Melayu Pasar [market Malay]) is spoken when Gamkonorans communicate with extra-ethnic groups who are unable to speak Gamkonoran. On the other hand, it is common for Gamkonorans to be able to comprehend neighbouring languages; Waioli, Tiana and Tobaru, at different levels of fluency. Similar to the other regional languages, Gamkonoran is essential for inter-ethnic communications and as an identifier in relations with extra-ethnic people.

The importance of regional languages, including Gamkonoran, is strengthened by the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, chapter XIII, article 32, paragraph 2, where it states: 'the state respects and maintains regional languages as treasures of national culture'. The constitution obliges us as citizens to preserve local languages in general and Gamkonoran is a case in point. Based on the Youth Oath Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda) of 28 October 1948, Bahasa Indonesia is stated to be an official language in chapter III, article 36, of the 1945 Constitution. Hence, Indonesian, the official language of the country, serves as the national lingua franca, as the medium of instruction in education, science and technology, as well as being the language of the mass media. Bahasa Indonesia can be said to be a constituent of Indonesian identity.

If we believe that language, as well as culture, is changeable (Mühlhäusler, 2001: 31), then changes of language are part of the dynamics of society and culture. If their language refers to their identity as Gamkonoran and the Indonesian language refers to Indonesian identity, then it is inappropriate to contest Indonesian and regional languages by questioning the losses and benefits of language shift. Nowadays, many of the Gamkonoran younger generation are fluent in Indonesian and they join institutions (that is, schools), that have been assumed to be a cause of language shift. The question is, how has Indonesian language proficiency caused language and cultural shifts to Gamkonorans?

THE ECOLOGY OF GAMKONORA

The language ecology perspective is important when discussing the relation of language and its environments; physical, social and psychological, because it studies language diversity, ethnic pluralism and the interactions among the ethnic groups. The social environment comprises the speakers who use the language as a code to communicate (Haugen, 2001: 325) and the psychological environment is the interaction of a given language (mother tongue) with other languages in multilingual discourse. How this language ecological perspective works is as follows.

Gamkonoran ethnic groups live in the Ibu Selatan and Ibu Tengah districts (see Table 1) and are distributed among four villages: Gamsungi, Gamkonora (the main village), Talaga and Tahafo. Table 1 shows the pluralism of the Gamkonora neighbourhood.

Table 1. Gamkonoran among neighbourhoods

<i>Village</i>	<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Population</i>
Jere	Waioli	Christian	385
Gamsungi	Gamkonora	Islam	905
Bataka	Waioli	Christian	1427
Talaga	Gamkonora	Islam	1021
Tobelos	Tiana (majority)	Christian	436
Gamkonora	Gamkonora	Islam	841
Sarau	Tiana (majority)	Christian	585
Togola-Waioli	Waioli (majority)	Christian	not available
Togola-Sangir	Sangir (majority)	Christian	815
Tahafo	Gamkonora	Islam	467
Ake Shibu	Mixed	Christian	757
Tongute Ternate	Mixed	Islam (majority)	not available

Figure 1. Map of the west coast of Halmahera



Source: Google 2013. Map data 2013 Tele Atlas

Ethnologue (2009, edn 16) states that there are 1500 Gamkonoran speakers and 3000 Waioli speakers. In 2012, the total population of Tobelos village was 436 and most of them are Tiana people. The same for Sarau village where most of the populations of 585 are Tiana. As an aside, it must be said that from population figures it is not possible to validly infer the proportion of speakers of a specified language: the data cited in Table 1 for Tobelos and Sarau, which are villages adjacent to Gamkonora, are included to show that there is no ethnic uniformity in the area chosen for study. Additionally, Table 1 not only shows the ethnic diversity around Gamkonora but it also tells us that those ethnic groupings can be easily identified even though they have been in contact for a very long period. One proof of their clear identity is regional languages. Moreover, the data also imply that even though these small communities are different in ethnicity and language, they keep in contact using the lingua franca, Bahasa Indonesia.

There are four languages that are used to communicate between the ethnic groups; the Gamkonoran, Tobaru, Tobelo and Galela languages. Almost all the older generation are fluent in Gamkonoran. Additionally, the Ternatan-Malay language is the main communication tool, a descendant of the Tenate language that was used in the Ternate Sultanate era. These languages are connected to past social and political traditions, that is, Sangaji Gamkonora, the Sultanate of Ternate, and to Islam, which were followed by the Dutch colonial period and the Indonesian republic. In the 16th century, the Sultanate of Ternate was officially established and its administration determined that Islamic proselytisers preach in the Ternate language. This decision helped Islam to expand through all the Sultanate territories. This missionary work also affected the Gamkonorans because they had been under the control of the Ternate Sultanate in the past (Fraasen, 1980: 104, 109).

In the colonial era, the Dutch administration used the Malay language, which has now developed into Ternatan-Malay after long contact with the Ternate language. The use of the Malay dialect apparently was not through education because, until the end of their rule, the Dutch did not establish schools in Muslim areas. Amal (2009: 80) contends that the extended use of the Malay language is related to the spice trade, which was the main interest in the area for the Dutch, but the trade was controlled by the Ternate Sultanate in the early 17th century. As the descendants of the subjects of the Ternate rulers, Gamkonorans reflect, directly and indirectly, the linguistic as well as cultural influences from that time.

Since Indonesia's independence, the Gamkonoran language has been enriched by Bahasa Indonesia, the official language of the Indonesian republic. Indonesian is a recent development of the Malay dialect, which has spread beyond the archipelago. For Gamkonorans, Indonesian is identical to Ternatan-Malay and they cannot differentiate the codes.

INDONESIAN AND MALAY AMONG THE GAMKONORANS

The explanation above shows that there are a number of languages spoken in West Halmahera. The 'Indonesian language' is now very familiar even though, a relatively short time ago, this language was novel for them. Very often Gamkonorans refer to their extra-ethnic code as Indonesian. In fact, for newcomers from western parts of Indonesia, their language sounds so different from Indonesian that they need time to adjust to it.

For Gamkonorans and most Halmaherans, Indonesian is not a given language or mother tongue and they need to make an effort to master it. Officially, this language, Bahasa Indonesia, was introduced to West Halmahera through formal education after the Republic of Indonesia came into being. The first basic schools built in the Ibu districts were Sekolah Rakyat Gamsungi, Tongute Sungi and Gamkonora in 1950. Two of the schools, namely, SR Gamsungi and Gamkonora, were in villages where Gamkonorans lived. Some of the older generation of Gamkonorans, who attended the schools found it difficult to follow the lessons in Indonesian. Moreover, some of them were punished

because of their inability to learn Indonesian and their habit of speaking their regional language in school. This situation continued until the 1980s.

The dramatic change in language use was after the 1999–2001 religious riots. At that time, all Muslims were evacuated, including the Gamkonorans, to Ternate. In the refuge they interacted and communicated with people from various ethnic backgrounds through the Malay language. Consequently, young Gamkonorans are now familiar with Malay (or Indonesian) and some have said that the riots and evacuation was when their youngsters displaced their mother tongue,

The effect of the changes in language behaviour are not only in the school environment but also in the domestic. This is because parents now feel more comfortable communicating in Malay with their children. Similarly, Gamkonoran youngsters who are below the age of ten years speak only Malay to their friends and parents. Hence, some of their parents believe that they must start to accustom their children to the Gamkonoran language when they are in their teenage years.

O'Shannessy (2011: 79) affirms that language contact can cause one or more of three effects: language maintenance, language shift or language creation. Language maintenance is when a language continues to be used even though is influenced by others. Language shift is linguistic displacement, which applies to all members of a linguistic group, and can be a rapid or slow process, shown by the stagnation of language transfer to children. The last effect is language creation, that is, a new language is formed; a pidgin, a creole or a bilingual, mixed language. Of these three effects, language shift is the most serious threat to the continuity of a language, especially for the vernacular.

Of the three possible effects from language contact for Gamkonoran language, it would seem that there are two that have taken place; that is, language maintenance leading to language shift. Those can be easily seen in the sample at the beginning of this paper. Older generations very often mix Malay and Gamkonoran. It seems that this mixing of the two language has been going on for a very long period and that Pak Hadad is comfortable using a mix of both in his usual discourse. But the situation has changed for the younger generation because in recent times they have learnt to speak Ternatan-Malay fluently, which is a language identical to Indonesian. The younger generation, the descendants, seem to be declining to use their traditional vernacular. This can be identified by use of Ternatan-Malay (Indonesian) in their domestic domain, which is the last battlefield for language survival. The lessening of local language use in the domestic domain is accelerated by the diglossic situation of national and regional languages. We all know that the national language of Indonesia is strongly supported by government policy, and through education and media, which, directly or not, lower the prestige of Gamkonoran as a regional language.

LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The affinity of the linguistic and the cultural takes place because there is language in culture and vice versa. If this is so, is it possible for language to be a cultural identifier? The research that we have done shows that there is no similar code for two different ethnic groups. For example, when Tobaru people speak the Gamkonoran language, their linguistic style is considered 'awkward' or 'funny' by Gamkonorans. Therefore, it is possible for a language to be characteristic of a particular group of speakers, as long as it is acknowledged by others and by members of the group itself. It has to be stated that a researcher, or any outsider, who is fluent in Gamkonoran cannot be called a Gamkonoran. Then, the question becomes: what is the justification for a language to be a cultural identifier?

The Gamkonoran case is quite complicated because most Gamkonorans, young or adults, are able to speak three different languages: Gamkonoran, Malay (Ternatan-Malay) and Indonesian. Additionally, they also use Arabic in religious events and customs.

Gobard (in Johnston 1992: 52–53) determines the affinity between language and culture through his concepts about language functions: vernacular, vehicular, referential and mythic functions. The more complete is the set of language functions found in a community language, the more attached is the language to the culture. How well do these concepts fit the Gamkonoran case?

For the over-50-years generation, the Gamkonoran language remains the ideal language to communicate and sometimes they mix with it Ternatan-Malay. Younger generation Gamkonorans—university and senior high-school students—who migrate to Ternate to study still use their home vernacular when they are on vacation in their hometown. They also use their local language in Ternate for some occasions, for example, at meetings of local organisations or when they want to discuss private matters among themselves. Thus, Gamkonoran has a vernacular function because it is still used as a communication medium among them.

The referential function of Gamkonoran refers to the culture that has meaning when there is the language to support it. *Dolabololo*, poems containing messages of good advice, values, customs and norms are well known to Gamkonorans even though some language traditions are just for amusement. The most fascinating is that almost all *dolabololo* are in Ternatan-Malay. Another function, the mythical function, refers to the after-death world and is significant in Gamkonoran. For example, they pray in Gamkonoran when turning on *loga-loga* (candles made of bamboo) on the 27th night of *Ramadan* (the fasting month). That same day, in the afternoon, families give *handuri* (a basket of miniature rice cakes) to their religious teachers in return for prayers to their ancestors. *Handuri* is a custom unique to the Gamkonorans. There are 40 kinds of rice cake miniatures in the *handuri*. Among the many are *nora sae* (a pillow-shaped rice cake representing ancestors' pillows); *nora gololo* (a roller-shaped rice cake as the ancestors' roller); *makassar* (a rhomboid rice cake to feed the ancestral spirits); *nya'o nonomut* and *waro nya'o* (fish-shaped rice cakes as the ancestors' side dish); *namol* (a chicken-shaped rice cake); *bawang* (an onion-shaped rice cake as cooking spices); *gagatang* (a cooking-ware-shaped rice cake); *bele* (a banana-shaped rice cake intended as the dessert) and *nako-nako* (a butterfly-shaped rice cake representing the carrier of news from the real world to the spirit world).

Of the language functions, there is only one that comes from outside Gamkonoran culture, the vehicular function. This function's role is in administration, law, politics, media and mass communication. This function is restricted to Bahasa Indonesia, in Gamkonora this is seen in the schools and government offices.

In these circumstances, is it possible for the Gamkonoran language to refer to Gamkonoran culture? If we reverse to our assumption that the more complete is the set of language functions, then the stronger is the relation of language to the culture. The descriptions above recognise that Gamkonorans are familiar with their language and with Ternate, Arabic, Ternatan-Malay and Indonesian. It could be inferred that there are two possibilities: first, those five languages are in one culture and, second, the strength of Gamkonoran and Ternatan-Malay by their referential and mythic functions develop Gamkonoran culture. however, Arabic only functions in the religion, the mythic function, and the Indonesian language primarily has a vehicular function.

CONCLUSION: LANGUAGE SHIFT AND ITS CULTURAL MEANING

O'Shannessy's explication shows that language shifts caused by contacts with other languages have deleterious effects on a language's continuance. The issue is how to fit the Gamkonoran language into this scheme of things because its speakers are in touch with a number of languages, especially after Indonesian independence. Moreover, their use of Indonesian as their national language (with its social, educational and economic values) might possibly downgrade Gamkonoran and cause a language shift, especially when the transfer of the language to the children ceases. It seems that tendencies to language and culture shifting are unavoidable. If O'Shannessy's rationale is accepted,

language contact leads to language death. On the other hand, Ehala (2010: 363–364) contends that it is possible to minimise language loss through language contact and language shift by supporting the culture. Additionally, Fairclough (1995: 220) argues the importance of political factors in ensuring linguistic longevity.

Allowing that a language is a component of a cultural identity, then a language shift can be symptomatic of cultural change. An example is the acknowledgment of the word *sawah* (paddy field). This Bahasa Indonesia word would not have been known before although Gamkonorans cultivate their rice in fields. However, since the Department of Agriculture introduced rice research programs, which involved taking samples from rice fields, Gamkonorans now know the word *sawah* and it has become part of their new vocabulary. Many of the younger generation of Gamkonora who were evacuated to and returned from Ternate because of the 1998 riots brought with them new language experiences, new words learnt and used. The push towards Bahasa Indonesia and institutions that accompany its use is supporting the Gamkonoran language and cultural shift. Primary schools (*sekolah dasar*, formerly *sekolah rakyat*), broadcasts by Radio Republik Indonesia and other mass media introduce and increase the use of Bahasa Indonesia. It means that the growth of the Indonesian language does not grow of itself but is supported by cultural institutions that infiltrate through government systems. This is different from Gamkonoran, which was developed together with Ternate, Ternatan-Malay and the enunciation and pronunciation of Arabic since the 13th century. In other words, Gamkonoran's linguistic condition is also supported by its institution, which are traditional and more established than Indonesian and its 'new' culture.

The shift to Indonesian does not obstruct the Gamkonoran language because its traditional institutions assume it and use it. It is possible for both languages to develop so that multilingualism, as well as cultural pluralism, are maintained to advance unity in diversity that is symbolic of Indonesian.

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