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Making Endangered Languages Prestigious: The West Papuan Locals Hedging Against the Grip of Modernity

Katubi
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Dwiani Septiana
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Selly Rizki Yanita*
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Ryen Maerina
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Dendi Wijaya
National Research and Innovation Agency, Jakarta, Indonesia

Chrisma Fernando Saragih
University of Papua, Manokwari, Indonesia

Abstract—**Against a backdrop of linguistic assimilation, with the dominance of the Indonesian (Papuan Malay) language, this study describes how prestige dynamics influence community engagement in language revitalization efforts, a case study of the West Papuan local language in Kaimana Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative and participatory approach, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and sociolinguistic surveys, the findings reveal a paradox: while indigenous languages are deeply embedded in cultural identity and traditional ritual, they are often perceived as lacking economic and social utility in modern society. However, this study documents emerging counter-narratives in which indigenous communities are strategically reconfiguring the prestige of their languages to assert cultural identity and reclaim socio-political agency. These efforts include integrating indigenous languages into formal education, leveraging digital media for cultural expression, and revitalizing linguistic domains through grassroots initiatives. This study demonstrates that effective language revitalization requires a nuanced conceptualization of prestige and making a network between stakeholders as both a sociocultural construct and an instrument of power negotiation, thereby advancing sociolinguistic discourse on indigenous language maintenance.**

Index Terms—**West Papua, endangered languages, prestige, modernity, language maintenance**

I. Introduction

Prestige in sociolinguistics refers to the social status or value assigned by a community to a particular language or language variety. Prestige is not inherent in language itself but is socially constructed, influenced by factors such as politics, economy, history, education, and media (Holmes, 2013). According to Labov's (1972) classic works, there are two broad varieties of prestige: overt prestige and covert prestige. Overt prestige is tied to the formal, widely accepted standard of language that society's top groups usually use. Covert prestige, on the other hand, values non-standard languages that specific groups cherish for their cultural and symbolic worth. Language prestige has become an important component of culture and is the main sign of group membership across generations (Edwards, 2009, 2012; Fishman, 1991). It embodies the members of a community's identity, culture, and history in a broad sense. When a language is in danger or is replaced by or alternates with other languages, not only does linguistic diversity disappear, but also the community's cultural identity is at risk (Crystal, 2000).

In the context of traditional West Papuan culture, language prestige constitutes a fundamental aspect of cultural identity

* Corresponding Author. Email: sell003@brin.go.id

and functions as a primary vehicle for transmitting traditional social values and tribal histories (Rumbrawer, 2006). However, the combined forces of migration, urbanization, and national education policies that privilege the use of Indonesian and Papuan Malay have increasingly threatened the vitality of local languages in West Papua, placing many on the brink of extinction (Bromham et al., 2021). In this context by strengthening community identity through specific local languages, West Papua language revitalization became relevant and is usually conducted and prioritized by strengthening community identification with specific local languages, as this connection is crucial to reclaiming political and cultural identities (Hinton, 2001). Conceptually, effective revitalization will involve the active participation of stakeholders in education and literacy initiatives, particularly through intergenerational language transmission and the training younger speakers (Himmelmann, 2006). By integrating the practical and theoretical language discussed above, revitalization efforts in West Papua have not yet succeeded because the local language is widely recognized as an integral element of community identity, and community members must be engaged and committed to the revitalization process (UNESCO, 2022).

In the power relations of language, Bourdieu (1991) argued that educational institutions legitimize certain languages, thereby reinforcing class hierarchies. As dominant languages often carry greater economic and political capital than minority languages, this disparity frequently contributes to language shift (Fishman, 1991). Power relations in Indonesian language practices become particularly salient when languages are institutionalized through education, disseminated via written media, and embedded in broader societal discourse, such as communicating or working, as is the case in West Papua. Thus, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power elucidates how the institutional legitimacy of dominant languages like Papuan Malay strengthens existing language hierarchies and pushes minority languages to the side. Consequently, linguistic prestige and power are deeply embedded in social life, influencing patterns of local language use in daily life.

In some cases, indigenous people in several parts of the globe have managed to revitalize their languages, and the efforts in those countries could serve as valuable lessons for West Papuans. For instance, the revitalization of the Maori language in New Zealand speaks of the necessity to provide support for bilingual education and media, which raises the status of the language and its usage (Hill, 2016; May, 2013, 2017). Likewise, the attempt to revitalize the Hawaiian language demonstrates that community and political action are needed to alter perceptions and behaviors toward the language (No'Eau Warner, 2001). Similarly, efforts to revitalize indigenous languages in Papua New Guinea are actively supported by government policies that promote the use of local languages as the medium of teaching in schools (Malone & Paraide, 2011). Comparative studies of Papuan language between the Kaimana indigenous people in the South Head of Bird and those in the Yapen Islands Regency have highlighted the need for a deliberate and systematic approach to sustaining minority languages through community education, linguistic documentation, and community mobilization (Budiono et al., 2025; Gasser, 2017; Tamrin et al., 2024). In addition, Galla (2009) emphasized that digital media has played a significant role in the revitalization of Indigenous languages, particularly through platforms that allow for cultural expression, documentation, and language teaching. By putting their languages on digital platforms, these communities can reach a wider audience and make younger people proud of their heritage and languages. This technology creates a link between the older and younger generations, enabling the continued transmission of language and culture.

This study situates the indigenous languages of Kaimana Regency, West Papua, within broader discourses of linguistic prestige, power, and modernity, integrating both practical and theoretical insights. It also explores how intergenerational transmission, language ideologies, and local policies affect language endangerment and resilience, while considering revitalization strategies that sustain their cultural significance. as well as the role of cultural and educational initiatives in promoting their continued use.

II. Literature Review

Linguistically, West Papua belongs to the Trans-New Guinea phylum, encompassing 481 languages. Within this classification, the Asmat-Kamoro subgroup divides into 11 language clusters: 6 in Asmat, 1 in Wei, 1 in Kawori, 2 in Sabakor (including Buruwai and Oburauw), and 1 in Sepang. National surveys by the Indonesian Language Agency document 652 regional languages, with Papua hosting a significant proportion. However, vitality assessments from 2011 to 2017 reveal that merely 71 languages have been systematically evaluated. In West Papua Province, out of 100 documented ethnic languages, over 54% are no longer actively used, with many communities shifting to Papuan Malay. Modern documentation efforts remain minimal, with only a handful of languages receiving systematic linguistic attention (Sawaki, 2016, 2019; Sawaki & Arka, 2018).

Observational data indicate a marked decline in the use of West Papuan local languages across both public and private domains (Handayani, 2021). In fact, in public space settings, including schools, churches, and government offices, the Indonesian language dominates as the primary medium of communication, with minimal use of the indigenous language. According to Sawaki, these processes are increasingly leading minority languages to a gradual decline, with many instances of language shift from native to dominant languages. The sole exception occurs during traditional ceremonies and rituals, where the vernacular persists.

In Kaimana Regency, there are eight indigenous tribes: Mairasi, Miereh, Koiway, Oburauw, Kuripasai, Madewana, Irarutu, and Kuri, each with its respective language. However, Indonesian and Papuan Malay are becoming more and more widespread and common in schools and everyday life, which is putting these languages at risk. In addition, inter-ethnic marriages, especially in urban areas, are contributing to the decline of these indigenous languages. Furthermore,

the extinction of a language in West Papua is not merely the loss of a communication tool but also the erosion of unique ecological knowledge, oral traditions, and cultural heritage embedded within these languages (Kafryawan & Mursyid, 2024). In the intricate tapestry of West Papua, especially in Kaimana, linguistic diversity faces unprecedented challenges, with numerous regional languages teetering on the brink of extinction, necessitating urgent and comprehensive conservation efforts (Handayani, 2021). In the local people's communications, the interplay between local languages and Bahasa Indonesia illustrates the tension between cultural preservation and national integration (de Vries, 2012). Within this context, the Kaimana languages, spoken in remote villages, exemplify the struggles faced by smaller minority languages under the pressure of globalization and modernization (Bromham et al., 2021; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

However, there are still efforts to develop and preserve the language, such as printing the Bible in the Irarutu language, carried out by Japanese researcher Takashi Shimamora. The defense of regional languages is also carried out by using them in traditional ceremonies, such as Sinara, and popular songs shared on social media platforms like YouTube (Warami, 2020). Studies by Budiono et al. (2025), Gasser (2017), and Tamrin et al. (2024) suggest that language preservation efforts for minority languages in Papua need to receive deep attention because a large number of languages have a limited number of speakers, so the threat of extinction is quite strong. The result is that the vitality of the West Papuan language can be categorized as critical. Local languages exhibit a weak condition in all indicators of language vitality, with the primary cause being the absence of intergenerational transmission. The lowest indicators that require immediate language preservation efforts are (1) availability of teaching materials and literacy, (2) domain and new media, and (3) language documentation.

Although studies on language endangerment and revitalization in West Papua are increasing, most focus on the general linguistic situation between dominant and minority languages, leaving micro-level sociolinguistic studies on smaller language communities underexplored. Language preservation is intricately linked to community perception and identity (Fishman, 1991; Crystal, 2000), whereas the language ideologies influence how communities respond to pressures that lead to language shift (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). This study uses the UNESCO (2003) framework of language vitality, which identifies nine indicators to assess endangered languages, including intergenerational transmission, speaker numbers, language domains, media presence, literacy, government and speaker attitudes, and documentation. These indicators are essential for understanding the responses of West Papua minority languages to modernization and national language programs.

III. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and participatory approach to explore the sociolinguistic dynamics of a local language community in Kaimana Regency, West Papua, engaging the community members as research collaborators rather than mere informants (Bodó et al., 2022, 2025; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009). Their perspectives were essential in examining language vitality, status, prestige, and identity in relation to Indonesian and Papuan Malay. The analysis, based on UNESCO's (2003) language vitality indicators, integrates Fishman's (1991) concept of intergenerational transmission, Crystal's (2000) perspectives of language as cultural identity, and Woolard and Schieffelin's (1994) framework on language ideology to elucidate sociolinguistic resilience and endangerment.

Fieldwork was conducted for two months (January and February 2025). Kaimana Regency, West Papua, was selected for critical investigation because it represents an area facing severe language endangerment, yet demonstrating sincere efforts toward language preservation by its inhabitants. The selection process included preliminary meetings with key local informants—such as indigenous leaders and government representatives—to ensure continued access and contextual relevance.

Primary data collection consisted of sociolinguistic surveys with 30 respondents and in-depth interviews with 32 informants, including local government officials, community leaders, representatives of religions, educators, and community members. The interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into language use, sociocultural practices, attitudes, and the institutional frameworks involved. Participant observation was conducted during cultural ceremonies, language documentation sessions, and community meetings to directly observe language practices, language-related interactions, and social behaviors related to the resilience and endangerment of languages.

Secondary data were systematically reviewed and thematically analyzed within the UNESCO (2003) framework for language vitality. This provided contextual support for primary findings and revealed underlying patterns of linguistic resilience, community attitudes, educational implications, and institutional dynamics that shape the vitality of Kaimana's local languages.

Table 1 presents an overview of the various informants and institutional sources involved in this study. The informants were divided into three major groups: government and stakeholders, religious and community figures, and members of the educational framework. The groups provided information relevant to an understanding of the sociolinguistic factors affecting local languages in Kaimana, collectively forming a comprehensive and multifaceted foundation for examining language vitality within broader institutional and cultural contexts.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF INFORMANT TYPES AND INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES

Informant Group	Institution / Source	Focus of Analysis
Government and Stakeholders	Kaimana Culture and Tourism Office, Regional Planning Agency, Kaimana Library, Education Office, District Office	Local language policies, institutional roles, implementation challenges, and strategic plans
Community and Religious Leaders	Protestant Church of Indonesia, Kaimana Customary Council, Farmers and Fisherfolk, Customary Leaders, Village Officials	Language attitudes, cultural practices, and community perceptions on language vitality and maintenance
Educational Sector	SMKN 2 Kaimana, Kaimana Regency Elementary and Junior High Schools	Local curriculum integration, educational support, teacher roles, and attitudes

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Language Vitality

The indigenous tribes in Kaimana Regency exhibit distinct patterns of bilingualism and multilingualism across generations. The grandparents and older generations typically maintain multilingual competence, demonstrating fluency in three linguistic codes: (1) their indigenous language, (2) Indonesian as the national language, and (3) Papuan Malay as the regional lingua franca. Members of the older generation maintain not only their language but also proficiency in neighboring ones. In contrast, younger generations predominantly exhibit bilingual proficiency limited to Indonesian and Papuan Malay. The Kaimana regional languages have undergone significant functional attrition in village contexts. Although it served as the primary communicative medium until the early 2000s, current fieldwork data collected in 2025 documents its restriction to (1) elderly speakers and (2) informal domains such as domestic interactions, agricultural spaces, and casual street conversations.

Ethnographic observation reveals asymmetric bilingual interactions in which parents initiate communication in the regional language but receive responses exclusively in Papuan Malay. In extreme cases, caregivers code-switch to Papuan Malay due to children's complete lack of comprehension of the vernacular, marking an advanced stage language shift. The vitality of the Kaimana languages was observed through focus group discussions, interviews, and documentation sessions, and can be explained as follows.

(a). Intergenerational Transmission

The intergenerational transmission of Kaimana's local languages is sharply declining, placing them at risk of endangerment. These languages are primarily used by the older generations, such as grandparents and elders, and it is mostly used in conversation between their peers. In contrast, parental generations tend to communicate in Papuan Malay, especially with their children, despite their ability to understand and use local languages, whereas younger generations prefer Indonesian or Papuan Malay, particularly in educational and social settings. Among the younger generation, only a few individuals still understand the local languages.

The main factors causing this trend include school policies that prohibit the use of local languages to accelerate mastery of Indonesian, increased contact with Indonesian speakers due to the presence of workers from outside, and shifting attitudes among younger generations, who regard Indonesian as more prestigious and practical for daily communication. This trend is further reinforced by the development of infrastructure, education, and health services managed by non-local workers, leading Indonesian to function as the lingua franca in most public interactions.

Another reason for this trend is intermarriage. In Yarona Village, where Madewana is spoken, mixed marriages—such as between Madewana and Tanibar speakers—often lead to the use of Papuan Malay or Indonesian for mutual understanding. In these families, informal domestic communication increasingly excludes the local vernacular. Without intervention, the local languages may face extinction within a few generations.

TABLE 2
INTERGENERATIONAL SHIFT

Speaker Addressee	Older Generation	Parental Generation	Children Generation
Older generation	L, PM, ID	L, PM, ID	PM, ID
Parental generation	L, PM, ID	L, PM, ID	PM, ID
Children generation	L, PM, ID	PM, ID	PM, ID

Legends:
L = Local language
MP = Papuan Malay
ID = Indonesian

(b). Number of Speakers

The local languages in Kaimana are currently in a worrying situation regarding the number of speakers. The field data collection results estimate the Madewana, Oburauw, Mairasi, and Koiwai populations at around 2,000 people each. However, only around 1,000 people still actively use the local languages in their daily lives. These active speakers are

primarily from the older generations, including grandparents, parents, and adults.

In contrast, the younger generation and children in Kaimana tend to use Indonesian more often, both in school environments and in daily social interactions. The widespread use of Indonesian among the younger generation indicates a language shift, in which the local Kaimana languages is increasingly losing its function as the main means of communication in domestic and public life. The level proficiency in local Kaimana languages among the younger generation also shows worrying variations. Many of them understand the language only passively, without being able to use it actively, and some have almost no ability to speak local languages at all. The decline in the number of active speakers is a significant indicator that, without systematic preservation, the local Kaimana languages are at high risk of extinction within the next one or two generations. This condition highlights the importance of implementing systematic and planned language preservation interventions, to ensure that the local Kaimana language remains alive and thriving within its community in the future.

(c). Proportion of Speakers

The younger generation, comprising both teenagers and children, currently plays the role of passive listeners in communication using the local Kaimana languages. They almost never speak the local languages. The level of fluency in local Kaimana languages shows significant differences across generations. The generation born in the 1950s to 1970s remains fluent in the local Kaimana languages, using relatively pure forms with minimal mixing with other languages. Meanwhile, those born between the late 1970s-1990s began to show the influence of Indonesian in their speech. This generation can still speak the local Kaimana languages but often mix elements of Indonesian into their conversations. They tend to have difficulty forming sentences entirely in the local languages.

The condition is even more critical for the generation born after 1990. This generation has become passive listeners in conversations using the local Kaimana languages and is no longer able to speak them. This generation recognizes only some basic vocabulary and cannot form sentences or communicate actively in their native languages. These indicators show that the local Kaimana languages are experiencing a significant decline, with only the older and middle-aged generations still actively using them. If this trend continues without preservation efforts, local speakers in Kaimana will likely switch to Indonesian in the near future, potentially leading to the extinction of the local Kaimana languages within the community.

(d). Domain of Language Use

The use of language in various domains reflects the extent to which the local Kaimana languages maintain their communicative function amid pressure from dominant languages such as Indonesian. The local Kaimana languages remain prevalent in a multilingual social environment, although their use has declined notably. In certain social contexts, the local Kaimana languages remain alive, especially in traditional and informal domains. Based on focus group discussions with Waho villagers, the Oburauw language was found to still be used in village development planning meetings. However, it is often mixed with Indonesian.

In contrast, the Madewana language is not used in village administrative activities, primarily because the village chief belongs to a different ethnic group. In traditional events, such as ceremonies and weddings, the local languages remain the main language, particularly through traditional songs and dances.

On the other hand, in the religious domain, the use of the local languages is almost nonexistent. All worship activities in the church are conducted in Indonesian due to external factors—specifically the pastor's background, as he comes from the Maluku Islands and does not speak the local Kaimana languages. This condition encourages the local Kaimana communities, including the younger generation, to become more accustomed to using Indonesian in religious activities. In everyday social interactions such as in the gardens, on the beach, or when passing each other, the local languages are still often used, especially among community members. However, in functional domains such as official meetings or events involving outsiders, the use of Indonesian and Papuan Malay becomes much more dominant. Overall, these findings suggest that the local Kaimana languages are currently more prevalent in internal, informal, and cultural domains, whereas in formal and external domains, there is a dominant shift toward the use of Indonesian.

(e). The Social and New Media Domains

The survival of a language can be assessed through its adaptation to various social and new media domains. One important indicator of a language's resilience is its ability to adapt to changing times, including its use in digital technology, communication media, and naming systems in public spaces. This includes the use of language on the internet, social media, signboards, announcements, advertisements, and other visual displays integral to modern society. No instances of local languages were observed on any public media platforms. Villages use Indonesian for place-name boards, announcements, and various public signs or advertisements. This indicates that the local languages have not developed in the written domain, and their use in official and public communication remains highly limited.

Based on observations of digital media use, the younger generation spends much of their time on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, which have become their primary sources of entertainment, offering a wide range of video and music content. Their preferred music predominantly consists of Indonesian and East Malay songs, including Papuan Malay, Kupang Malay, and Ambon Malay. The prevalence of Indonesian and East Malay within digital entertainment spaces indicates an ongoing shift in language use, as younger generations are becoming progressively less familiar with

their local languages.

In terms of communication technology, local speakers more often use telephones and video calls to communicate with fellow community members. Only a few use SMS or messaging applications. Even when they communicate through written messages, the majority prefer using Papuan Malay rather than local languages. This situation shows that the local languages are not used in written form at all. These languages rely entirely on oral communication among their active speakers with no apparent effort to adapt or develop written forms in digital communication or public spaces. If this situation continues, the local Kaimana languages will become increasingly marginalized and risk losing their role in future generations, particularly in the digital era, which increasingly prioritizes text-based communication.

(f). Availability of Teaching Materials

Our research found written sources in the Irarutu and Mairasi languages, including Bibles and village histories, but none in teaching materials. The absence of teaching materials and literacy highlights the languages' vulnerability to extinction, as there is no written support for intergenerational transmission. The dominant use of Indonesian in schools, driven by the fact that most teachers come from outside Kaimana and lack proficiency in the local languages, further exacerbates this situation. Without local content that supports the local languages, children interact less and less with the local Kaimana languages in educational environments.

In Kaimana City, local languages are being incorporated into the educational curriculum, particularly at SMKN 2 Kaimana. However, implementation remains quite limited, lacking proper written teaching materials. The learning process primarily depends on oral instruction from teachers, as there are no textbooks or organized documentation available. Given these conditions, the developing teaching materials—such as textbooks, dictionaries, and documentation—is highly necessary. Integrating the local Kaimana languages into school curricula and strengthening community literacy programs are strategic steps to maintain their sustainability.

(g). Government Support

One external factor that can be used to evaluate language vitality is the government's support for the existence and protection of local languages. Government support through language policies can contribute to language maintenance or, conversely, accelerate language shift. In Kaimana, the local government encourages the active assimilation of local languages, although the approach taken is more symbolic than policy-driven. The local government demonstrates its appreciation for local languages through the representation of these languages in everyday conversations and their presence in public spaces. One example is the establishment of a monument displaying inscriptions in Mairasi, the language used by the dominant tribe in the Kaimana regency. However, at the village level, Indonesian is still more dominant in public representation.

However, we found that the local languages were used on objects related to community life. For instance, on fishing boats funded by government assistance, several inscriptions in the Oburauw language were found, including DD 2022 *Yogara Waho, Er Wewera Awesima Uwogorewasi,* and *Way Bus Fen Waho.* In addition, at the local health center, there are also writings in the Oburauw language, such as *Na Gisira Ao Bara E Danana*. This shows that although there is no specific policy from the village government requiring the use of the Oburauw language in formal environments, the language still holds a place in community life. Language assimilation in local villages does not result from coercion by Oburauw speakers; rather, Oburauw speakers integrate naturally. Thus, small initiatives such as creating nameplates in the Oburauw language and reproducing them in various places can be a beneficial first step toward preserving and strengthening the existence of the Oburauw language in the village.

(h). Speaker Attitude

The attitudes of language speakers reflect how a community values its language as part of its identity. While most speakers claim to support language preservation, findings from focus group discussions reveal otherwise. The older generation values the local language as a symbol of cultural identity, primarily using it in traditional activities and among equals. Nevertheless, Papuan Malay is the preferred option, particularly when communicating with younger family members. The parental generation, on the other hand, perceives the local language as less prestigious therefore tends to speak Papuan Malay as the primary language at home, believing it will benefit their children socially and educationally. For the younger generation, the local language is rapidly becoming irrelevant in their lives, as Indonesian and Papuan Malay are perceived as more practical and dominate the education system, media, and digital entertainment.

(i). Language Documentation

The documentation of the local Kaimana languages remains limited. For instance, Oburauw and Madewana are represented only by around 120 wordlists compiled in the 1980s by SIL, which are currently available online. Neither dictionaries nor grammars exist for either language. Comparatively, Mairasi has better coverage, with a dictionary, grammar, and Bible in the language. However, none of these documentation projects have been deposited in established international archives such as PARADISEC or ELAR, and their absence limits access and hinders long-term preservation efforts. The BRIN research team is currently documenting the Oburauw, Madewana, Mairasi, and Koiwai languages. The project involves recording audio-visual materials, including folk tales, life histories, livelihood narratives, and traditional songs. Data processing and transcription are currently in progress, with the goal of archiving the materials in an

established repository to ensure accessibility for future research and revitalization efforts.

B. Language Use

Social, cultural, and economic factors shape language use within a community. In a multilingual society such as the Oburauw and Madewana communities, language plays varying roles depending on context. It serves as the primary means of communication in public spaces, educational and religious institutions, and economic and governmental interactions.

TABLE 3
DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE USE IN KAIMANA VILLAGES

	Home	Farm/Garden	Beach	School	Church	Public place
Local Language	√	√	√			
Papuan Malay	√	√	√	√		√
Indonesia				√	√	√

Table 3 illustrates that both Indonesian and the local Kaimana languages are prominent in public spaces within the community. Indonesian is used in various settings, including schools, churches, and healthcare services, particularly where interaction with outsiders is frequent, such as among teachers and healthcare workers from outside the village. Conversely, local languages are commonly used during healthcare, church gatherings, and village meetings. Although there are few immigrants in Kaimana, they can communicate freely in their own languages, with Indonesian often preferred for administrative purposes.

Local languages are commonly used in various settings such as rivers, gardens, fields, houses, and beaches. This is primarily because few speakers marry outside their language group, allowing them to continue using their local language. Both men and women in the community, including grandparents and parents, often converse in the local language, especially in communal areas. If parents introduced more local languages to their children, it could strengthen intergenerational language transmission. However, future efforts are needed to ensure that the local Kaimana languages are used more widely in more public spaces.

Within the family domain, three distinct patterns of language usage emerge across generations. First, some members of the younger generation are capable of speaking the local languages but often switch to Indonesian when communicating with peers and older generations, influenced by schooling and social media, which are primarily in Indonesian. The parental generation uses other languages to ensure their children excel academically. Second, the parental generation exhibits varied patterns. Those marrying within the tribe continue using the local language actively, while those who marry outside switch to using Papuan Malay. Third, the older generation primarily communicates in the local language with peers and children but mixes Indonesian when speaking with grandchildren. There is no gender dominance in language use among them, although attitudes toward sons-in-law from different language backgrounds tend to change—often beginning in Indonesian before shifting to local languages as mutual understanding develops.

V. DISCUSSION

This section outlines strategies employed by communities to reconfigure the prestige of their languages, alongside examples of integrating Indigenous languages into formal education, digital media, and grassroots initiatives. Interviews with representatives from the Kaimana Education Office (Mr. SW) and the Culture and Tourism Office (Mrs. CC) revealed that a Regional Regulation (Peraturan Daerah, or *Perda*) on language protection has been initiated through collaboration among multiple stakeholders—the Education Office, the University of Papua (UNIPA), the traditional council, and the vocational school SMKN 2 Kaimana. The Education Office is represented by the regional language education sector, while UNIPA is represented by its Language Institute. The traditional council's representation includes tribal leaders and the council secretary. SMKN 2 Kaimana participates as the vocational education partner.

The proposal for regional language protection has reached the discussion stage within the Kaimana Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) during the term of Regent Fredie Thie. However, formal approval is still pending, as the draft regulation requires evaluation and endorsement from the Language Center in Jayapura. From a financial standpoint, the proposal is integrated into the existing budget framework of the Education Office, ensuring preliminary funding is not a major constraint. Pilot implementation of local language instruction has begun in two schools—SMKN Teologia and SMKN 2 Kaimana—the latter showing more consistent activity. Nonetheless, widespread adoption is limited due to several challenges. These include a shortage of qualified teachers—most of whom are civil servants from local tribes volunteering their time—a lack of standardized teaching materials, and inadequate instructional modules. Teachers are compensated informally at IDR 100,000 per session, referred to locally as *uang pinang* (betel nut money). Instruction typically occurs after school hours, contributing to decreased student motivation, as classes are scheduled when students are already fatigued and hungry.

Despite supportive responses from government and educational institutions, efforts to elevate regional language education to the district policy level remain constrained. Major barriers include the absence of formal teaching materials across school levels (elementary to high school), insufficient pedagogical training for local language instructors, and the lack of legal infrastructure needed to allocate budgets for materials and personnel. Moreover, preservation efforts in Kaimana tend to prioritize dominant languages, particularly Mairasi, whose speakers constitute the urban majority. For

instance, signage at the airport and city monuments predominantly features Mairasi-language inscriptions and symbols. However, this emphasis marginalizes smaller tribal languages, as non-Mairasi residents and migrants often cannot interpret these inscriptions. As a result, the current approaches to language strengthening risks reinforcing the linguistic dominance of the majority while neglecting minority languages with fewer speakers.

Interviews with the Madewana and Oburauw tribal leaders revealed that the prohibition of local languages in schools began in the 1960s, during the *sekolah rakyat* (people's schools) period. Most teachers at that time were not Papuan but came predominantly from Ambon, Maluku province. Due to their unfamiliarity with indigenous languages, such instructors discouraged and often prohibited the use of regional languages in classrooms, believing it hindered effective communication and teaching. Consequently, Indonesian (Papuan Malay) became mandatory as a medium of teaching and communication. This policy shift had a focal effect on the gradual decline in the use of indigenous languages, as older generations began learning Indonesian for daily communication (Fishman, 1991; Hornberger, 2008).

A second reason for the decline of local languages is the absence of schools in indigenous villages. To pursue secondary or tertiary education, most children must attend school in urban centers such as Kaimana City. There, Papuan Malay serves as the lingua franca, compelling families to adopt it at home so their children can integrate into school (UNESCO, 2003). As a result, regional languages are increasingly marginalized in favor of more widely used Malay varieties. Third, the geographic domains where local languages are used have become very limited. Today, these languages are primarily spoken during traditional ceremonies such as weddings or traditional celebrations. In other contexts, aside from those culturally determined, everyday use is rare. In some cases, older generations continue to sing traditional songs or use Madewana to communicate, but such acts are rare and largely symbolic (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

In both households and broader community interaction, language transmission varies across generations. The elderly speak their native languages to their children (the middle generation) but switch to Papuan Malay when interacting with grandchildren. The same pattern is observed in community interaction, as intergenerational transmission of local languages is increasingly replaced by the socially and economically dominant Papuan Malay (Crystal, 2000; Fishman, 1991).

The above description presents a decisive and proper investigation into the sociolinguistic phenomena that affect the oversight of the revitalization of the local Kaimana language according to UNESCO's (2003) indicators and theoretical insights from Fishman (1991), Hornberger (2002, 2003, 2008), and Woolard and Schieffelin (1994). The analysis closely relates language use to implications from the surrounding environment, educational policies, and societal attitudes, which call for specific revitalization strategies. This study provides evidence that closely aligns with Fishman's (2001) assertion that a disruption in parent-child language transmission will critically endanger language continuity, as reflected in the declining intergenerational transmission of language. Like other minority communities, younger Oburauw speakers exhibit only passive competence in their language. Still, they demonstrate an active preference for using Indonesian, largely due to the influence of external aspirations and educational norms (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). This phenomenon shares similar incidences with others in Papuan situations, such as Tamrin et al. (2024) on the Wabo language, emphasizing how those sociocultural pressures can severely threaten intergenerational transmission.

Another critical factor is the absence of written materials in Oburauw and the limited biliteracy opportunities within formal education, which hinder the application of Hornberger's (2002, 2003) *Continua of Biliteracy framework*. This framework assumes that literacy encompasses both orality and writtenness for effective language maintenance. In contrast, Sawaki (2016) documented other concerns about the Wooi community, highlighting that collective language documentation efforts have nurtured a structured educational framework that fosters language vitality. Oburauw, however, lacks such institutional support and heightening its vulnerability.

Government attitudes and policy implementation are among the most significant factors shaping language vitality. The largely symbolic, rather than practical, support for local Kaimana languages mirrors other cases in Indonesia, where government recognition rarely translates into tangible preservation measures. The more visible installation of Mairasi—language signage compared to the limited representation of Oburauw reveals unequal state involvement and differential treatment of minority languages within the same administrative region.

Meanwhile, the physical and practical context of the local Kaimana language community presents challenges distinct from those discussed above: limited interaction with linguists, scarce technical expertise, few curricular materials, and inconsistent government action. This situation contrasts sharply with that of languages such as Wabo and Wooi, which have benefited considerably from well-organized community initiatives supported by external institutions. This contrast highlights that resilience of a language largely depends on the availability and continuity of institutional, academic, and community partnerships.

These comparisons suggest that, despite some similarities across regions facing language shift, the presence or absence of synergy among revitalization programs significantly affects a language's capacity to survive and resist assimilation pressures. Therefore, the future of any language depends on collective intervention that affects intergenerational transmission, educational integration, institutional support, and positive community attitudes toward language preservation.

VI. Conclusion

The linguistic profile of Kaimana, West Papua, is highly diverse, both in terms of the numbers of languages and their structural characteristics. However, these languages face increasing risks of shift and extinction due to pressure from dominant local languages and from Indonesian, the national language. Research indicates that urbanization, economic development, cultural assimilation, interethnic marriage, political centralization, educational policy, mass media, mobile technology, and the internet all contribute to language loss across Indonesia, indirectly affecting Kaimana's linguistic vitality. The endangerment of Kaimana's languages can be assessed along two principal dimensions: the number of speakers and the functional domains of use. A language remains viable only when it is used in regular, everyday communication. Currently, the Koiwai language shows significant attrition, being used mainly by older speakers, while younger speakers primarily use Indonesian or Papuan Malay. Strikingly, younger generations show minimal active use of the heritage language, despite being able to understand Koiwai when addressed by elders—likewise echoed by observation from local community members.

Province-wide, Papua's Law on Special Autonomy (UU OTSUS) No. 2/2021 addresses education and culture in Chapter 16, and Article 58(1) dutifully requires the provincial government to "preserve, develop, and promote regional languages and literature to safeguard and strengthen Papuan cultural identity." However, the absence of implementing regulations has hindered effective enforcement, resulting in minimal tangible protection for indigenous languages. In Kaimana, conservation efforts are sporadic and lack systematic documentation or revitalization planning. One community-based initiative involves tribal elders offering local language classes at SMKN 2 Kaimana, limited to a single ad hoc hour per week and focused primarily on lexical translation from Indonesian. Research indicates the primary stumbling blocks: limited government support for local language teachers, insufficient instructional time, and a lack of teaching materials (e.g., textbooks, dictionaries). These systemic gaps underscore the precarious state of language preservation in spite of legislative intent.

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Katubi is a researcher and the Head of the Research Center for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). He holds a Doctorate in Language and Oral Tradition from the University of Indonesia. His research interests include ethnolinguistic identity and documentation of minority languages in Indonesia.

Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto is a researcher at the Research Center for Area Studies, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). He holds his Doctorate in Social Anthropology from Graduate School of Humanities, Tokyo Metropolitan University. His research interest focuses on migration, ethnicity, and cultural identity, with particular attention to local communities and border regions in Indonesia.

Dwiani Septiana is a researcher at the Research Center for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). She holds a Doctorate in Linguistics from the Sebelas Maret University. Her research interests include ethnolinguistics, documentation and description of minority languages in Indonesia.

Selly Rizki Yanita is a researcher at the Research Center for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). She holds her Master's degree in Linguistics from the University of Indonesia. Her research interests include lexicography and documentation of minority languages in Indonesia.

Ryen Maerina is a researcher at the Research Center for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). She holds her Master's degree in Linguistics from the State University of Jakarta. Her research interest focuses on language vitality, language mapping, and the documentation of minority languages in Indonesia.

Dendi Wijaya is a researcher at the Research Center for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). He holds his Master's degree in Linguistics from the University of Indonesia. His research interest focuses on description and documentation of minority languages in Indonesia.

Chrisma Fernando Saragih is a lecturer in Linguistics at the faculty of Letters and Culture, University of Papua. He holds his Master's degree in Linguistics at Radbound University. His research interests include documentation and description of minority languages in Eastern Indonesia.