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Cultural Motivation and Social Network Structures as Mechanisms of Oral Language Maintenance: A Case Study of the Mạ Ethnic Minority in Southern Vietnam

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***Abstract*—This study examines the determinants of language maintenance among the Mạ ethnic minority in Southern Vietnam through an explanatory mixed-methods design (N = 420; n = 25). It argues that language maintenance among the Mạ is not simply a passive result of geographic or social isolation but rather an active process of identity negotiation in response to socioeconomic pressures. The regression model explains 84.0% of the variance in linguistic persistence (Adjusted R^2 = .840), identifying a structured hierarchy of influence among the predictors. Cultural Motivation (CM, β = .333) emerges as the primary predictor, followed by Endogamous Social Networks (ESN, β = .276), Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS, β = .248), and Domain Functional Expansion (DFE, β = .239). These findings suggest that internal psychological attachment and dense communal interaction within the family domain act as pillars of linguistic resilience. Qualitative insights further clarify how the Mạ language serves as a crucial marker of identity in the context of contact with the national language. The study concludes that sustaining ethnolinguistic vitality requires synergy between individual conviction and the expansion of functional domains beyond the intra-communal context.**

***Index Terms*—language maintenance, ethnolinguistic vitality, Endogamous social networks, intergenerational transmission, mixed-methods design**

I. Introduction

The maintenance of minority languages in the face of the dominance of national languages is a critical subject of inquiry within sociolinguistics, involving complex interactions between cultural autonomy and social structures. In the multi-ethnic landscape of Vietnam, the Mạ people—an indigenous group belonging to the Mon-Khmer language family—are experiencing language shift driven by socioeconomic integration. While established research often focuses on macro-level assimilation trends (Moseley, 2010) or examines these processes through the lens of socioeconomic modernization (Crystal, 2011; Edwards, 2010), there is a clear need to examine the internal and communal mechanisms that facilitate linguistic persistence. This focus aligns with recent evidence from Southern Vietnam, where ethnic minority communication is increasingly defined by a strategic balance between heritage preservation and socioeconomic adaptation (Hoang & Nguyen, 2025).

This research investigates the cultural and social factors contributing to the maintenance of the Mạ language within its traditional residential areas. Historically, language maintenance was frequently attributed to geographical isolation; however, as Mạ communities participate extensively in the market economy, the traditional isolation model does not sufficiently explain continued language use. Consequently, it is important to evaluate how internal psychological drivers and social network structures function as protective factors against the influence of the national language. Accordingly, this study utilizes Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) to assess how status, demography, and institutional support contribute to the community's linguistic health (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

Despite the extensive literature on language decline, a significant research gap persists regarding specific Mon-Khmer groups in Vietnam. Current studies have predominantly concentrated on linguistic descriptions or state-level policies (Nguyen, 2023), often overlooking how speakers actively make choices in their daily language choices. Furthermore, there is a lack of integrated mixed-methods evidence to quantify the relative influence of cultural motivation in comparison to social network density. Therefore, an investigation connecting individual conviction with communal structural support is required to address this gap in theory and evidence.

To address these issues, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do cultural and social mechanisms predict the maintenance of the oral Mạ language?

RQ2: Which specific mechanism emerges as the primary determinant in the hierarchy of factors influencing the persistence of Mạ in oral communication?

RQ3: How do the interactions between these mechanisms shape the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Mạ community within family and communal domains?

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This paper argues that Mạ linguistic persistence represents a form of active ethnolinguistic identity, sustained by a dual mechanism: internal cultural motivation and external endogamous social networks. Within this framework, language choice is viewed as a systematic response to social environments, where the Mạ language functions as a symbol that is crucial for identity negotiation (Baker, 2011; Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025). Rather than being a passive inheritance, this persistence involves speakers actively positioning their identity, in which speakers consciously use their heritage language as a a way to mark their distinct identity amid changing globalized economic and social conditions (Blommaert, 2010). This active effort aims to re-establish the language's functional relevance within integrated contexts. Utilizing an explanatory mixed-methods design (N = 420 for the quantitative phase; n = 25 for the qualitative phase), this study identifies key predictive variables to enhance the understanding of ethnolinguistic vitality and provides an empirical basis for language policy and planning in ethnic minority regions.

II. Theoretical Framework and Research Model

A. Language Maintenance Theory and Communicative Domains

Language maintenance (LM) is the preservation of a language's functional utility and communicative roles (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2011). This process relies on dividing up communicative domains, allocating languages to specific social or symbolic contexts (Appel & Muysken, 2025). As Mackey (1962) notes, bilingual usage is dictated by the environment's functional requirements. In contact situations, LM is sustained by functional exclusivity: the minority language occupies informal domains, while the majority language serves formal domains (Fishman, 1967, 1991).

For the Mạ community, this partitioning serves as a strategic negotiation of language use. While Vietnamese is utilized in institutional domains—such as formal education and economic transactions—the Mạ language remains firmly anchored in intimate and traditional domains associated with kinship and communal rituals. This resilience depends on the stability of these functional niches (Crystal, 2011). This separation prevents domain leakage—majority language encroachment—thereby preserving the mother tongue as the primary vehicle for identity and indigenous knowledge (Pauwels, 2016; Wright, 2016).

Furthermore, the maintenance of the Mạ language within these domains is intrinsically linked to Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EVT). The synergy between demographic density in the *Bon* (village) and the psychological valuation of the language ensures that the family domain remains a normative space for oral transmission. In this context, language maintenance is not merely a linguistic outcome but a manifestation of active ethnolinguistic identity, where speakers actively draw boundaries between the pragmatic utility of the national language and the affective, symbolic power of the indigenous tongue (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

B. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT)

Ethnolinguistic vitality (EVT) refers to a language group's potential to maintain its distinctiveness in intergroup settings (Giles et al., 1977). This viability is determined by three structural variables: status, demography, and institutional support. Rather than a static attribute, vitality is an ongoing interaction between macro-level ideologies and micro-level communal agency (Zuo & Wang, 2025). Within this paradigm, linguistic resilience is fostered by high social network density and geographic concentration (Landweer, 2000).

For the Mạ community, limited institutional support in formal domains is offset by demographic density in the *Bon* (village), ensuring mother-tongue continuity. This oral proficiency is sustained by social factors that strengthen group identity, providing a foundation for language maintenance even in the absence of formal literacy (Landweer, 2000).

Vitality is further mediated by subjective vitality—the speakers' internal perception of their language's socio-symbolic standing and their collective orientation within the social hierarchy (Appel & Muysken, 2025). According to Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (Giles & Johnson, 1987), high ethnic identification prompts speakers to establish linguistic boundaries to resist assimilation. For the Mạ, this subjective dimension functions as a psychological buffer: perceiving the language as a primary symbol of ethnic heritage encourages them to prioritize intergenerational transmission. EVT thus elucidates the negotiation between the instrumental value of the national language for upward mobility and the affective necessity of the heritage tongue for cultural continuity.

C. Family Language Policy and Intergenerational Transmission

The maintenance of ethnolinguistic vitality is fundamentally rooted in the domestic domain through Family language policy, which Spolsky (2009, 2012) conceptualizes as an integrated triad of language ideologies, practices, and management. Within the Mạ community, the family functions as the primary site for intergenerational transmission, where the mother tongue is transferred through oral traditions and interactional routines (Fishman, 1991). This process is characterized by active maintenance efforts, as parents act as active language managers who prioritize the indigenous language in domestic interactions to reduce the influence of the dominant national language (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Spolsky, 2012). As observed by Nguyen and Hamid (2016), such familial decisions reflect a deliberate commitment to preserving cultural heritage and ethnic identity, helping to pass on cultural value, and ensuring the continuity of indigenous knowledge systems (Bourdieu, 1991; Maffi, 2005). Ultimately, this transmission represents a strategic effort to sustain the Mạ language as a functional tool for social cohesion within the *Bon*, effectively serving as

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a structural defense mechanism that protects the indigenous tongue against the homogenizing pressures of a wider multi-ethnic society (Baker, 2011).

D. Social Network Theory

The social structure of a community supports language maintenance through various aspects of social networks. Milroy (1987) argues that dense and multiplex social networks within ethnic communities function as norm-enforcement mechanisms, promoting linguistic conformity and resisting external pressures. In the Mạ community, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) facilitates these close-knit networks, which regulate linguistic choices and reinforce the mother tongue as the primary medium for daily interaction (Pauwels, 2016).

These networks create a sociolinguistic environment where the ethnic language remains the normal, expected choice, acting as a structural buffer against the encroachment of the national language. By maintaining endogamous social ties, the Mạ community sustains its linguistic repertoire and reinforces ethnic cohesion (Heller, 2025). This communal support is a prerequisite for domain functional expansion, allowing the minority language to maintain or increase its communicative roles across social contexts (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2011).

From a broader perspective, these networks represent a micro-level mechanism of resilience that complements the broader structural factors of ethnolinguistic vitality—status, demography, and institutional support (Giles et al., 1977). By bridging the gap between individual agency and institutional structures, these networks ensure the language remains a viable instrument for both cultural heritage preservation and interpersonal interaction (Zuo & Wang, 2025).

E. Hypothesis Development

Cultural motivation encompasses the psychological drive and symbolic value attributed to a native tongue, serving as a primary predictor of linguistic survival (Baker, 2011). For the Mạ, the language is inextricably linked to spiritual rituals and indigenous knowledge (Maffi, 2005). This ideological commitment functions as a buffer against linguistic shift, as speakers view the language as a core marker of ethnic identity rather than a mere utilitarian tool (Nguyen & Hamid, 2016; Kroskrity & Meek, 2023). Such internal conviction establishes ideological barriers that resist the pragmatic pressures of the national language (Fishman, 1991).

H1: Cultural motivation has a positive influence on the language maintenance of the Mạ community.

The transfer of language from parents to children is the cornerstone of linguistic survival; its cessation marks a critical stage of decline (Fishman, 1991; Spolsky, 2009). In the Mạ community, where oral tradition prevails, the household is a crucial place for linguistic reproduction (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). Consistent intergenerational transmission provides the younger generation with the symbolic capital necessary to resist external educational and social pressures (Grenoble & Whaley, 2005).

H2: Intergenerational transmission strength is a positive predictor of Mạ language maintenance.

Social structures enforce linguistic norms through dense, multiplex communal ties that promote conformity and regulate communicative behavior (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016). For the Mạ, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) and intra-ethnic marriage create endogamous networks that limit external linguistic pressure (Heller, 2025). These networks ensure the minority language remains the unmarked choice for interaction, reducing social distance through co-ethnic ties and thereby resisting assimilation (Nguyen & Hamid, 2019; Zhang, 2012).

H3: Endogamous social networks positively contribute to the language maintenance of the Mạ people.

Language maintenance is enhanced when a language occupies diverse functional domains (Grosjean, 1982; Bradley, 2023). While often restricted to private spheres, expanding language use into communal gatherings, festivals, and cultural performances provides functional legitimacy (Nguyen et al., 2023). For the Mạ, utilizing the mother tongue in broader social spaces ensures its relevance within integrated socioeconomic environments, reinforcing its status and encouraging use among younger speakers (Appel & Muysken, 2025; Sariono et al., 2025; Zuo & Wang, 2025).

H4: Domain functional expansion has a positive impact on the language maintenance of the Mạ community.

F. Proposed Research Model

Based on the theoretical framework, the proposed research model synthesizes ethnolinguistic vitality into a measurable structural framework, positioning Language maintenance (LM) as the dependent variable. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model integrates internal continuity—Cultural motivation (CM) and Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS)—with external structural supports, namely Endogamous social networks (ESN) and Domain functional expansion (DFE) (Milroy, 1987; Bradley, 2023). Utilizing an explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), this framework evaluates the hierarchy of influence among these predictors to determine their relative contribution to linguistic persistence. Ultimately, the model examines whether Mạ linguistic continuity is a manifestation of deliberate ethnolinguistic agency, with each hypothesized path predicting a positive relationship with sustained language usage.

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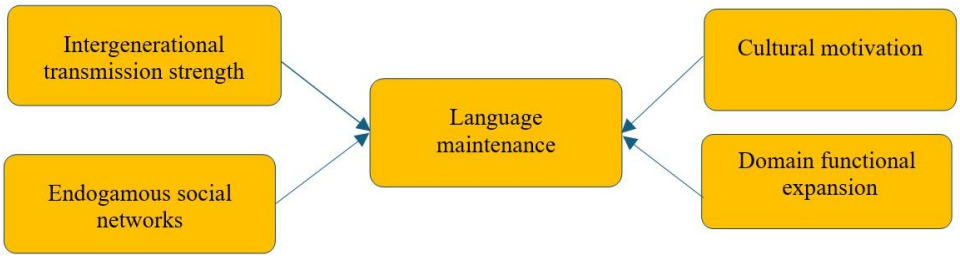


Figure 1. The Proposed Research Model

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

Based on the established framework, this study employs a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine the sociolinguistic complexities of the Mạ—an Austroasiatic group of 50,322 individuals (General Statistics Office, 2019) concentrated in Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Amidst rapid agrarian-industrial transitions, Mạ language choice serves as an important indicator of for their ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al., 1977), necessitating localized empirical data to document shifting linguistic landscapes (Nguyen, 2023).

The qualitative phase utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 key informants (village elders and cultural custodians) to provide ethnographically situated data on language maintenance during economic integration. These insights contextualized variables—specifically Cultural Motivation and Domain Functional Expansion—within the Mạ's unique cultural milieu. Simultaneously, the quantitative phase employed a cross-sectional survey to empirically test the proposed model and hypotheses (H1–H4), ensuring a comprehensive account of bilingualism (Mackey, 1962) and agentive maintenance within the community (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

B. Data Collection Procedure

The qualitative phase employed semi-structured interviews with 25 key informants (n = 25), selected via purposive sampling for their expertise in Mạ oral traditions and social governance. Utilizing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), these insights refined the conceptualization of variables—specifically Endogamous social networks and communicative domains—to reflect the community's multilayered sociopolitical context (Zuo & Wang, 2025).

For the quantitative phase, the minimum sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula. Based on a population of N = 50,322 (General Statistics Office, 2019) with a 5% margin of error (e = 0.05):

$$\mathbf{n}=\frac{\mathbf{N}}{\mathbf{1+N(e)^2}} \text{ (Equation 1)}$$

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}=\frac{50{,}322}{1+50{,}322(0.05^2)}\approx 397 \text{ (Equation 2)}$$

To enhance statistical power for multivariate analysis and mitigate non-response bias, the study validated 420 usable responses. This sample provides a robust basis for evaluating Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS) and other predictors of linguistic continuity (Fishman, 1991).

Face-to-face fieldwork was conducted from August 2025 to March 2026 in high-density Mạ regions across Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai. A multi-stage sampling design, integrating convenience and snowball techniques, was utilized. Given the community's predominantly oral culture, structured interviews were employed rather than self-administered questionnaires to ensure data accuracy. Strict ethical protocols regarding informed consent and anonymity were maintained throughout, framing the community's linguistic capital as a form of symbolic power within their shifting social space (Bourdieu, 1991).

C. Measurement Instrument

The primary research instrument for this study was a structured questionnaire designed to evaluate the socio-cultural determinants of language maintenance. To ensure accessibility for the Mạ people, the survey allowed for verbal clarification in the native tongue via local bilingual facilitators, thereby bridging gaps in literacy and linguistic nuance. Drawing upon the framework of Appel and Muysken (2025), the instrument integrates two complementary sections:

Socio-demographic profiling: Documented gender, age, education, and occupation (N = 420) to establish the sample's sociolinguistic landscape and the distribution of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

Psychometric assessment: Employed five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to operationalize five core constructs adapted from established metrics (Giles et al., 1977; Zuo & Wang, 2025):

Cultural Motivation (CM): 4 items on the symbolic value and internal drive to preserve heritage (Maffi, 2005).

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Endogamous Social Networks (ESN): 4 items assessing intra-ethnic interaction density and traditional *Bon* structures (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS): 4 items evaluating mother-tongue usage consistency within the household (Fishman, 1991).

Domain Functional Expansion (DFE): A 4-item measure tracking the utility of the Mạ language in public and communal spaces, reflecting strategies for managing language contact (Bradley, 2023; Grosjean, 1982).

Language Maintenance (LM): The 4-item dependent variable measuring proficiency and usage frequency as indicators of group structural strength (Wright, 2016).

A pilot study (n = 20) ensured instrument reliability, resulting in the linguistic simplification of complex terms to better capture the nuances of agentive maintenance and the community's response to language shift.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 through a systematic three-stage approach to ensure empirical rigor. Initially, descriptive statistics established a sociolinguistic profile of the N = 420 respondents, providing a foundational overview of the sample's distribution and contextualizing the community's linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025).

Subsequently, psychometric validation was conducted to evaluate the reliability and structural validity of the measurement scales. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a required threshold of ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This was followed by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. The adequacy of the data for factor analysis was determined via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (≥ 0.7) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) (Kaiser, 1974). To ensure indicator reliability, a minimum factor loading threshold of 0.5 was strictly maintained (Hair et al., 2019).

Finally, hypothesis testing was executed via Multiple Linear Regression analysis to evaluate the predictive power of the independent variables on Language maintenance. This multivariate technique identified the primary socio-cultural drivers of linguistic persistence through standardized β coefficients. To ensure model stability, diagnostic tests for normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity (VIF < 3) were performed (Hair et al., 2019). These rigorous procedures ensure that the findings accurately reflect the sociopolitical multilayered process of language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; Zuo & Wang, 2025).

IV. Results

A. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics (N = 420) provides a foundational overview of the Mạ community across three provinces: Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai. The sample exhibits a balanced gender distribution (57.1% male, 42.9% female) and a diverse age structure, with the largest cohorts being individuals aged 46–60 (31.0%) and 18–30 (29.8%). This generational spread is essential for assessing the Intergenerational transmission strength of the Mạ language. Preliminary inferential analysis revealed no significant differences in Language maintenance scores across gender, age, or educational categories ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the commitment to linguistic continuity is a collective endeavor that transcends specific demographic strata (Giles et al., 1977).

A systematic examination of language usage within the home domain reveals a complex state of bilingualism (Appel & Muysken, 2025). While this domain remains a primary stronghold for the heritage language, it is increasingly characterized by linguistic hybridization. Specifically, 25.5% of respondents utilize Mạ language only at home, and 37.4% use mainly Mạ language (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Collectively, 62.9% of the sample continues to prioritize the mother tongue in domestic communication, indicating a resilient level of language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This underscores the role of the family as the last bastion against language shift (Fishman, 1991).

Conversely, the integration of Vietnamese into the family domain reflects a process of domain leakage where the national language permeates private communicative domains (Spolsky, 2012). Approximately 26.9% of respondents report a balanced use of both Mạ and Vietnamese, while 10.2% utilize mainly Vietnamese (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This indicates that over one-third of the community (37.1%) now employs the national language in a substantial capacity at home (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This transition is often associated with the structural integration of minority groups into multi-ethnic environments, where the functional distance between the heritage and national languages continues to narrow (Schwartz, 2020).

The occupational and educational data further contextualize this linguistic negotiation. With 58.3% of participants remaining in agrarian roles, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) continues to facilitate Endogamous social networks (ESN), which serve as a normative mechanism for language retention (Milroy, 1987). However, for those engaged in industrial and service sectors (36.0%), Vietnamese serves as the primary medium for socio-economic mobility. Since nearly half of the sample (48.8%) has attained high school education or higher, a functional realignment occurs. In the absence of formal support for the Mạ language in schools, Vietnamese is frequently perceived as symbolic capital for public life (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025), while the Mạ language functions as a specialized code for cultural and ritualistic contexts (Grosjean, 1982; Bradley, 2023).

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B. Scale Reliability Assessment

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). To ensure the integrity of the instrument, the study required a Cronbach's Alpha of ≥ 0.70 and a corrected item-total correlation of ≥ 0.30 for each constituent item (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). According to Hair et al. (2019), these benchmarks confirm that the items effectively represent their respective constructs for subsequent multivariate analyses.

The analysis confirmed that all items surpassed the requisite thresholds. Specifically, the corrected item-total correlations for all variables remained consistently above 0.30, indicating that each item contributed meaningfully to its respective scale (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Furthermore, an examination of the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" values revealed that removing any individual item would not yield a substantial increase in the overall reliability. Consequently, all items were retained to maintain the theoretical breadth and content validity of the model (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

TABLE 1
THE RESULTS OF SCALE RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT

Variables	Coding	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural motivation	CM	4	0.871
Intergenerational transmission strength	ITS	4	0.823
Endogamous social networks	ESN	4	0.867
Domain functional expansion	DFE	4	0.853
Language maintenance	LM	4	0.801

The finalized reliability results in Table 1 show Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.801 to 0.871, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Notably, the Cultural motivation (CM) scale exhibited the highest reliability (α = 0.871), suggesting a consistent perception among Mạ respondents regarding the symbolic value of their language in maintaining biocultural diversity (Maffi, 2005; Baker, 2011). Similarly, the coefficient for Endogamous social networks (ESN) (α = 0.867) indicates that communal dimensions and the influence of traditional *Bon* structures are perceived with consistent patterns across the sample, aligning with the social motivations for language use (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016).

The reliability of Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS) (α = 0.823) and Language maintenance (LM) (α = 0.801) further confirms that familial dynamics and self-reported proficiency—critical indicators for reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991; Schwartz, 2020)—are effectively captured. These results provide a solid foundation, confirming that the measurement instrument is reliable and minimizes potential random error (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This stability allows the study to proceed with further empirical tests to evaluate the hypothesized relationships concerning language persistence (Hair et al., 2019).

C. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Following the assessment of scale reliability, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs (as cited in Hoang, 2026a). The analysis utilized Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to produce a clear, orthogonal factor structure, identifying distinct socio-cultural dimensions (Hair et al., 2019).

(a). Exploratory Factor Analysis of Independent Variables

The suitability of the dataset for factor extraction was verified through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, as presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.914
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4096.313
	df	120
	Sig.	0.000

The KMO measure of 0.914 exceeds the recommended threshold, indicating that the correlations among items are sufficient for factor extraction. Bartlett's Test was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the identity matrix hypothesis is rejected and the data are appropriate for EFA.

The Rotated component matrix (Table 3) produced a four-factor solution with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. All 16 items loaded onto their respective factors with coefficients ranging from .597 to .811, comfortably meeting the .50 criterion for practical significance (Hair et al., 2019). The four-factor solution accounts for 70.79% of the total variance, which is well above the acceptable 60% threshold for social science research.

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TABLE 3
ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

Item	Component			
	1	2	3	4
CM4	811			
CM2	810			
CM1	734			
CM3	605			
ESN1		772		
ESN3		765		
ESN4		763		
ESN2		687		
DFE3			793	
DFE1			791	
DFE2			756	
DFE4			597	
ITS1				792
ITS4				774
ITS2				729
ITS3				675
Eigenvalue	7.814	1.341	1.111	1.060
% of Variance	48.84%	8.38%	6.94%	6.63%
Cumulative %	48.84%	57.22%	64.16%	70.79%
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				

(b). Exploratory Factor Analysis of Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, Language maintenance (LM), was subjected to EFA to verify its unidimensionality (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This step ensures that the items measuring LM converge into a single, cohesive construct. The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test for this construct are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	510.192
	df	6
	Sig.	.000

The data showed a KMO of .784 and a significant Bartlett's Test ($p < 0.001$). The analysis extracted a single factor explaining 62.698% of the total variance. The Component Matrix, detailed in Table 5, confirms that all four items measuring LM loaded decisively onto this single factor (loadings from .733 to .830).

TABLE 5
COMPONENT MATRIX

	Component
	1
LM4	.830
LM2	.821
LM3	.780
LM1	.733
Eigenvalue	2.508
% of Variance Explained	62.698%
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

D. Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To evaluate the predictive power of the independent factors, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Prior to the analysis, the absence of multicollinearity was confirmed with VIF values ranging from 1.692 to 2.201.

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TABLE 6
MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.918[a]	.842	.840	.15.865	1.894

a. Predictors: (Constant), DFE, ITS, ESN, CM
b. Dependent Variable: LM

As illustrated in Table 6, the correlation coefficient (R = 0.918) indicates a positive relationship between the set of independent variables and language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.840) reveals that the four factors in the model account for 84.0% of the variance in the language maintenance of the Mạ community (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.894 indicates the absence of first-order autocorrelation among the residuals.

To assess the overall statistical significance of the regression model, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results are detailed in Table 7.

TABLE 7
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	55.599	4	13.900	552.248	.000[b]
	Residual	10.445	415	25		
	Total	66.044	419			

a. Dependent Variable: LM
b. Predictors: (Constant), DFE, ITS, ESN, CM

The ANOVA results (F = 552.248, $p < 0.001$) indicate that the regression model is statistically significant (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This suggests that the combined independent variables provide a reliable basis for predicting language maintenance within the studied community.

The individual contribution of each factor to language maintenance was assessed using standardized regression coefficients, as shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8
THE RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics		Remarks
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
1	(Constant)	0.322	0.091		3.527	0			
	CM	0.274	0.024	0.333	11.489	0	.454	2.2.01	Supported
	ITS	0.238	.024	0.248	9.782	0	.591	1.692	Supported
	ESN	0.230	0.023	0.276	9.893	0	.490	2.040	Supported
	DFE	0.192	0.022	0.239	8.650	0	.499	2.006	Supported

a. Dependent variable: LM

Note. CM = Cultural motivation; ITS = Intergenerational transmission strength; ESN = Endogamous social networks; DFE = Domain functional expansion; LM= Language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

The statistical evidence suggests that Language Maintenance (LM) among the Mạ community is influenced by a combination of internal psychological factors and external social structures. The hierarchy of these influences is as follows:

The standardized regression equation derived from the model provides a mathematical representation of the hierarchy of influence among the predictors:

$$LM = 0.333 \,.\, CM + 0.276 \,.\, ESN + 0.248 \,.\, ITS + 0.239 \,.\, DFE \text{ (Equation 3)}$$

The statistical evidence suggests that Language Maintenance (LM) among the Mạ community is influenced by a combination of internal psychological factors and external social structures. The hierarchy of these influences is as follows:

Cultural Motivation (CM, β = 0.333, $p < 0.001$): CM is the primary predictor, suggesting that language choice is linked to the internalized value of the mother tongue. When speakers connect their language with ethnic identity, they develop a psychological orientation that supports the retention of the language (Maffi, 2005; Baker, 2011).

Endogamous Social Networks (ESN, β = 0.276, $p < 0.001$): As the second most influential factor, ESN indicates that the traditional *Bon* (village) structure provides a social environment where the Mạ language remains a regular medium for communication. These networks help maintain linguistic norms (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS, β = 0.248): ITS shows a positive impact, confirming that the family remains a relevant site for language use. Consistent communication between generations helps maintain the language in private settings (Fishman, 1991).

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Domain Functional Expansion (DFE, $\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$): The use of the language in rituals and communal events provides functional legitimacy. This helps prevent the language from being limited only to domestic use (Bradley, 2023).

The interaction between individual motivation (CM), community structures (ESN and ITS), and public utility (DFE) forms the sociolinguistic framework of the Mạ community. This hierarchy suggests that language persistence is a result of both individual agency and communal stability, which together help manage the pressures of language shift (Giles et al., 1977; Edwards, 2010). The relationship between these factors supports the continued use of the heritage language in both private and cultural contexts.

E. Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative results, qualitative data derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews ($n = 25$) were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This phase sought to elucidate the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying the statistical predictors identified in the regression model (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The analysis reached thematic saturation, yielding four core themes that mirror the dimensions of the conceptual framework. The distribution of these themes and their corresponding illustrative quotes are summarized in Table 9.

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITATIVE THEMES ($N = 25$)

Themes	Codes	Frequency	%	Illustrative quotes
Theme 1: Cultural motivation as an identity anchor	CM	23	92.0	"The Mạ language is the core of our identity; it is the only way to truly express our culture in a way that no other language can replace."
Theme 2: Endogamous social networks as normative spaces	ESN	21	84.0	"Within our Bon (village), we only use Mạ to discuss community matters; it creates a bond of trust that strengthens our communal ties."
Theme 3: Intergenerational transmission strength and the home domain	ITS	18	72.0	"I make it a rule to speak only Mạ with my children at home; if the intergenerational chain breaks, the language dies with us."
Theme 4: Domain functional expansion and ritual legitimacy	DFE	16	64.0	"Using Mạ in our traditional ceremonies gives me the confidence that our language still holds a legitimate place in contemporary life."

The high prevalence of Theme 1 (92.0%) corroborates Cultural motivation as the primary driver ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < .001$). Informants perceive the Mạ language as indispensable to cultural continuity, acting as a psychological anchor against assimilation (Maffi, 2005). Similarly, Theme 2 (84.0%) underscores how Endogamous social networks, anchored in the traditional *Bon* structure, enforce linguistic norms and foster in-group cohesion (Milroy, 1987).

Theme 3 (72.0%) reinforces the empirical evidence for Intergenerational transmission strength, positioning the home as a vital site of linguistic resistance against the encroachment of the national language (Fishman, 1991). Finally, Theme 4 (64.0%) highlights Domain functional expansion; the language's presence in rituals and ceremonies provides the functional legitimacy and communicative confidence necessary for its survival in contemporary cultural settings (Bradley, 2023).

In conclusion, the convergence between quantitative predictors ($N = 420$) and qualitative themes ($n = 25$) establishes a sociolinguistic consensus. Language maintenance among the Mạ is an agentive process where internal conviction and communal solidarity function as primary catalysts for linguistic persistence (Giles et al., 1977; Fishman, 1991).

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

A. Discussion

The quantitative findings indicate that language maintenance (LM) among the Mạ ethnic minority functions as a structured sociolinguistic behavior rather than a process of unsystematic bilingual alternation. The research model, accounting for 84.0% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.840$), highlights the many dimensions of this phenomenon. According to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), these results reflect the structural strength of the Mạ community and their capacity to function as a distinctive collective entity within a multilingual environment (Giles et al., 1977).

In alignment with explanatory sequential mixed-methods logic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the qualitative insights elucidate how the Mạ mobilize specific resources to mitigate the encroachment of the dominant national language. This proactive stance aligns with established indicators of linguistic health, where the community's internal cohesion supports its long-term viability (Landweer, 2000). This adaptive strategy mirrors recent findings in other multilingual ecologies, where ethnic minorities maintain their mother tongue by strategically navigating the tension between heritage preservation and functional necessity (Yu et al., 2024).

Cultural motivation (CM, $\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.001$): As the primary predictor, CM demonstrates that the internal drive to preserve heritage is a determinant of linguistic behavior. Language serves as a symbol of ethnic continuity (Edwards, 2010) and a psychological anchor for cultural identity (Maffi, 2005).

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Endogamous social networks (ESN, β = 0.276): This factor suggests that the traditional *Bon* (village) structure provides a social environment where the Mạ language remains a regular medium for communication, facilitating the maintenance of linguistic norms (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS, β = 0.248): Descriptive data showing that 62.9% of families prioritize Mạ in the home underscores the family's role as a site of linguistic resilience. This aligns with the focus on passing language between generations in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991).

Domain functional expansion (DFE, β = 0.239): The presence of the language in rituals and festivals provides the functional legitimacy necessary for its use in broader social contexts (Spolsky, 2009).

In summary, language maintenance among the Mạ is a structured process, reinforced by internal values, familial bonds, and communal networks. These integrated mechanisms serve as a robust indicator of sustained ethnolinguistic vitality in the face of contemporary sociolinguistic pressures (Edwards, 2010; Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

B. Implications for Policies

Based on the influence of Cultural motivation and Endogamous social networks, this study proposes several strategic interventions:

Institutionalizing Mạ language: Authorities should establish community-based bilingual literacy programs within local Cultural Houses. This provides the institutional legitimacy needed to reinforce the language as a valid medium of communication (Spolsky, 2009; Bradley, 2023).

Integrating economic value: Linking the language to heritage-based ecotourism can transform linguistic and ecological knowledge into professional assets. This creates "linguistic capital," providing an economic incentive for continued language use (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025).

Expanding public domains: Normalizing the Mạ language through multilingual signage and its use in administrative communications during public festivals reduces functional displacement and fosters communal identity.

Digitalizing Mạ cultural resources: Developing digital tools, such as interactive dictionaries and social media content, is necessary to bridge the generational gap and maintain linguistic relevance for Mạ youth.

Empowering social networks: Supporting the *Bon* (village) structure and the role of elders is critical. Facilitating direct interaction between elders and children in the Mạ language strengthens the micro-level networks that mitigate linguistic erosion (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016).

VI. Conclusion

This study has assessed the many different factors influencing language maintenance among the Mạ ethnic minority (N = 420). Through an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research establishes that the persistence of the Mạ language is a structured sociolinguistic behavior rather than a process of unsystematic bilingual alternation. The results provide empirical evidence that the Mạ community maintains ethnolinguistic vitality through a strategic negotiation between internal psychological drivers and communal social structures. This resilience is consistent with Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), which emphasizes the synergy between status, demography, and institutional support in heritage language retention (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

The quantitative analysis demonstrates the explanatory power of the research model, which accounts for 84.0% of the variance in language maintenance (Adjusted R^2 = 0.840). This indicates that the selected dimensions effectively capture the primary mechanisms of linguistic persistence for this community. The empirical evidence reveals a hierarchy of influence among the predictors, where Cultural motivation (CM) emerged as the primary determinant (β = 0.333). This suggests that the internal value placed on the language as a carrier of heritage serves as a decisive factor against language shift. This psychological driver is supported by the strength of Endogamous social networks (ESN, β = 0.276) and Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS, β = 0.248), which highlight the role of communal density within the Bon (village) and primary socialization within the home domain as essential structural supports (Fishman, 1991; Milroy, 1987). Conversely, while statistically significant, Domain functional expansion (DFE, β = 0.239) exhibited the least relative influence, indicating that for the Mạ, internal conviction and domestic transmission currently outweigh the impact of language visibility in public spheres.

The qualitative findings (n = 25) further clarify these statistical relationships, confirming that language choice is a conscious act of cultural preservation. The convergence between internal conviction and communal solidarity demonstrates that the Mạ people utilize their mother tongue as a medium for identity construction and biocultural continuity (Maffi, 2005). Ultimately, the survival of the Mạ language depends on the ongoing combination between the community's psychological attachment and the availability of spaces where the language is accepted and valued for its active use.

Despite its rigorous framework, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The geographical scope was confined to specific provinces in Southern Vietnam, which may not fully reflect the linguistic diversity across all Mạ subgroups. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias regarding proficiency. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to assess long-term linguistic shifts. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track the trajectory of intergenerational transmission across decades. Expanding the comparative framework to include other Mon-Khmer speaking groups would provide a broader understanding of ethnic minority

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language resilience. Finally, subsequent studies could utilize ethnographic observations to gain deeper insights into the unspoken language rules within the private domain (Heller, 2025).

APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I: Personal information

1. Gender
   □ Male □ Female □ Other
2. Age group
   □ 18–30 □ 31–45 □ 46–60 □ > 60
3. Educational level
   □ Elementary school or lower □ Secondary school □ High school
   □ Vocational school or college □ University or higher
4. Occupation
   □ Farmer □ Worker/Freelancer □ Service/Business
   □ Civil servant/ public official □ Other
5. Place of residence: □ Lam Dong □ Dong Nai □ Dak Nong □ Other
6. Language most frequently used at home
   □ Mạ language only
   □ Mainly Mạ language
   □ Bilingual (Mạ and Vietnamese)
   □ Mainly Vietnamese language
   □ Vietnamese only

Part II: Measurement scales

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number (1: Strongly disagree to 5: Strongly agree).

Coding	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
CM	**Cultural motivation**					
CM1	I recognize the Mạ language as the most significant marker of our community identity.					
CM2	I am personally interested in ensuring that future generations remain fluent in our mother tongue.					
CM3	I find that specific cultural and traditional concepts are more accurately expressed in Mạ than in Vietnamese.					
CM4	I choose to use the Mạ language to maintain the continuity of our family and ancestral heritage.					
ESN	**Endogamous social networks**					
ESN1	I primarily utilize the Mạ language when interacting with neighbors and relatives within the *Bon*.					
ESN2	Speaking Mạ fosters a higher level of familiarity and trust during intra-ethnic interactions.					
ESN3	I tend to participate in social circles where the Mạ language is the conventional medium of communication.					
ESN4	My closest social circle consists mainly of Mạ speakers with whom I communicate in our mother tongue.					
ITS	Intergenerational transmission					
ITS1	In my household, elders actively encourage children to speak Mạ in daily life.					
ITS2	I use Mạ to share oral traditions, indigenous farming techniques, or folk knowledge with the youth.					
ITS3	The older generation (grandparents) remains the primary source of Mạ language socialization for grandchildren.					
ITS4	Younger members of my family demonstrate the ability to understand and respond fluently in Mạ.					
DFE	Domain functional expansion					
DFE1	The Mạ language is the customary medium used during traditional rituals and communal ceremonies.					
DFE2	I utilize Mạ to discuss shared community matters at the village hall.					

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DFE3	I feel comfortable using Mạ in public settings (e.g., markets or festivals) when interacting with fellow Mạ people.					
DFE4	I prioritize Mạ when performing traditional songs or exchanging indigenous environmental knowledge.					
LM	**Language maintenance** (Dependent variable)					
LM1	I maintain a consistent habit of using Mạ with my family members on a daily basis.					
LM2	I actively use Mạ when meeting acquaintances in multi-ethnic areas outside the village.					
LM3	I prefer using Mạ over the national language in intra-ethnic social contexts.					
LM4	I intend to continue using Mạ as my primary medium of communication in the long term.					

Part III. Open-ended questions

1. In your view, what is the connection between the Mạ language and the preservation of your ethnic identity? What drives your commitment to speak your mother tongue?

……

2. Which activities within your *Bon* (village) or during communal ceremonies offer the most significant opportunities for you to practice the Mạ language?

……

3. What are the primary obstacles to teaching the Mạ language to the younger generation today (e.g., media, school, or technology)? What communal actions could better support youth language acquisition?

……

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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