

**Melayu Papua: A hidden treasure**  
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**Abstract** *Melayu Papua is a Malay-based language spoken by approximately 500,000 people, most of whom live on the island of Papua. The language might not be in danger of disappearing in the near future, but is certainly under threat of losing domains. It could gradually become just a colloquial language that we use at home—the language in which we can best express our thoughts, tell jokes and share emotions—but not the one we will use for other important domains in life: work, study, technology and/or economy.*

*This paper discusses significant roles of Melayu Papua with respect to education in Papua, outlining the language's typology, exploring its diachronic features and predicting its future forms and functions. The question of whether or not Melayu Papua is in danger of losing more domains is worth considering here. Finally, the paper proposes ways to revitalize and preserve the language.*

**Key words** Domains, Indonesian, Melayu Papua

## **0 Introduction**

Indonesia is a country of ethnolinguistic diversity. The nation has about seven hundred languages, out of which nearly three hundreds are found in Papua.<sup>1</sup> The October 1928 youth pledge claims the national unity of Indonesia must be reached by achieving one nation, one country and one language. Such leads to a determination of having a unifying language, today known as Indonesian. It is encouraging to see that the language as it functions today has achieved some success as it was destined to be – a unifying language – through the promotion of the ‘using a good and correct language’ slogan throughout the country. On the other hand, many languages of the above ethnics are in danger of losing domains, which is a matter of concern. That concern includes Melayu Papua, the heart language of many Papuans living on the island of Papua. Losing domains is a first step of a language in danger of disappearing – it is a stairway to a graveyard of languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly Irian Jaya, and was Nederland Nieuw Guinea before 1963.

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## 1 Typology

Melayu Papua is a Malay-based language with Papuan tendencies. It is an SVO language with either clause initial or final peripheral elements. It is head-modifier: [*babi hutan* 'pig jungle' > wild pig] but modifier-head in numerals: [*dua orang-orang* 'two person-person' > two persons]. As to possessive forms, the Malay linker *punya* 'to have' is optional: [*sa (pu) bapa de* '1s (to have) father 3s' > my father (him alone) vs *sa (pu) bapa dorang* '1s (to have) father 3p' > my father (with his companion)]. Numeral-classifier pronouns are obligatory in forms like [*sa (pu) bapa de* and *sa (pu) bapa dorang*] above. Lexical items for copulas and articles are not found. The preposition *di* has either directional or locative function [*ko di* '2s at' > where are you? and *ko pi di* '2s go at' > where are you going?]. Verbs are intransitive: [*pi* 'go'], transitive: [*pana* 'bow'], ditransitive: [*bakar* 'roast'] and ambitransitive: [*tinggal* 'stay, leave'] (Burung 2004a: 3). Phonologically, Melayu Papua lacks schwa with a simple vowel phonemes: *i, e, a, o, u*. The consonant phonemes are: *b, p, d, t, k, g, m, n, ny, ng, s, h, c, j, r, l, w, y*. Unless otherwise, stress is penultimate. Since there is no written grammar available on the language yet, the information given is purely based on my native observation. What follows is a brief account on the language change.

## 2 From old to new skin

The above typology represents Melayu Papua before 1963. A new shape of the language in terms of its phonology, lexical and syntax after 1963 is presented here.

The phonology of Melayu Papua before 1963 lacks velar fricative [*h*] or is hardly audible mostly word medially and finally. The same is true for alveolar and velar plosives [*t* and *k*] word finally. Thus *lia* for *lihat* 'see' and *kaka* for *kakak* 'older sibling' as in [*kam lia kaka de di* '2p see older.sibling 3s at' > where did you see my older sibling?]. Melayu Papua after 1963 allows both forms [*kamu lihat kakak (dia) di mana* '2p see older.brother (3s) at where']. Speakers from the time before 1963 will use front open mid vowel [E]

instead of schwa, as in [*dong ke mana* ‘3p to where’ > where are they going?] while speakers after 1963 may use both. Likewise, we find [bEs] ‘bus’ for those of before 1963 and [bis] for today generation. The high front vowel [i] and mid vowel [a] may be replaced by schwa in the Melayu Papua after 1963: [*ukincing* becomes *kenʉcing* ‘urinate’ and *barana* is *beranak* ‘give birth to’]. In the instance *kincing* and *kencing*, the stress is also shifted. The high back vowel [u] is interchangeable with mid vowels [a and o] among the after 1963 speakers: [*bakulai* ~ *bakalai* ‘fighting’] and [*dulu* ~ *dolo* ‘before, first’]. What tends to be diphthongs [ou, au, ai] in today speakers was vowels in the before 1963 speakers: [*boʉbo* is *boʉbou* ‘smelly’, *piso* is *pisau* ‘knife’ and *pante* is *pantai* ‘beach’]. There should be more changes noticed pending further observation.

Concerning lexical changes, some words are now considered rude, impolite, shameful or even taboo: [*mati* ‘die’ should be replaced by euphemistic expressions such as *meninggal* ‘to leave (the world)’, *berpulang* ‘going home’ and honorific such as *wafat* and *tewas* for officials and/or soldiers]. The same is true for [*bera* ‘faeces disposal’ is *pi kakus* ‘go toilet’, *buang air besar* ‘dispose water big’ or *pi/ke belakang* ‘go/to back’], and [*bunting* ‘pregnant’ becomes *badan dua* ‘body two’ or *hamil*]. The reciprocal *baku* is hardly used today in expressions like: [*baku bawa* ‘reciprocal carry’ > ‘dating’, which now is replaced by *pacaran*]. Likewise [*baku piara* ‘reciprocal take.care’ > ‘living together as husband and wife’ is now *kawin lari* ‘marriage run.away’]. Compounding such as [*hari jadi* ‘day happen’ > ‘birthday’ is now (*hari*) *ulang tahun* ‘(day) repeat year’ or simply *ultah*] and [*bola kaki* ‘ball foot’ > football is now *sepak bola* ‘kick ball’] as well as [*kapal udara* ‘vessel air’ > airplane is now *pesawat terbang* ‘instrument flying’]. Moreover, [*gula-gula* ‘sugar-sugar’ > sweets, is now *permen* or *manisan*], a friendly-used term [*maitua* ‘wife’ or *paitua* ‘husband’ is mostly preferred to *bini* or *laki* respectively], since [*bini* or *laki*] is now considered an uneducated and rude term. Similar case is true for [*kawin* ‘to marry’ being replaced by *nikah*]. The verb [*dusu* ‘to chase someone’ is now *kejar*] and the noun [*garis* ‘match’ is *korek (api)* ‘to scratch (fire)’].

Syntactic changes have more to do with the use of standardized Indonesian. The obligatory numeral-classifier pronoun feature is bad grammar and therefore must be abandoned in order to speak Indonesian well. Such creates varieties of forms as in (1).

- (1) a. *sa bapa dorang pi pancing pagi-pagi*  
1s father 3p go fishing morning-mornig
- b. *sa bapa mereka pergi pancing pagi-pagi*  
1s father 3p go fishing morning-mornig  
'My father and his companion went fishing early in the morning'
- c. *sa bapa pergi pancing pagi-pagi*  
1s father go fishing morning-mornig  
'My father went fishing early in the morning'

Likewise, agreement between head nouns and their modifiers in terms of numerals: [*dua orang-orang* 'two person-person' > two persons, or *banya ana-ana* 'many child-child > many children] is considered hypercorrect and therefore bad grammar. Among today speakers of Melayu Papua, the forms: [*dua orang* 'two persons' and *banyak anak* 'many children] are mostly preferred.

In an effort to use standardized Indonesian such as: [*ibumu sedang pergi ke pasar* 'mother.2s is go to market' > your mother is going to the market], the insertion of the directional preposition *ke* 'to' has also led to the following possible forms:

- (2) a. *ko (pu) mama de ada pi pasar*  
2p (to have) mother 3s exist go market
- b. *ko (pu) mama (de) ada (pi) ke pasar*  
2p (to have) mother (3s) exist (go) to market
- c. *ko pu mama (dia) ada (pergi) ke pasar*  
2p to have mother (3s) exist (go) to market  
'Your mother is going to the market'

In a comparison form we may also have varieties of the English *John is more handsome than Felix* (Dixon 2004: 2), as follow (Burung 2004a: 4):

- (3) a. *Jon de pu muka bagus Felik de tra laku*  
Jon 3s to have face good Felix 3s no value
- b. *Jon de pu muka lebe bagus dari Feliks*  
Jon 3s to have face more good from Feliks
- c. *Jon lebih tampan dari Feliks*  
Jon more handsome from Feliks  
'John is more handsome than Felix'

Even though it is hardly used, the form given in (3)c is a good standardized Indonesian – but how come and for what?

### 3 Roles of Melayu Papua in education

Consider the following conversation, typically takes place in a daily life of a Papuan family. A father has just arrived at home from work, tired and hungry.

(4) Father: *eee maria kam pu mama de di?*  
interjection Mary 2p to mother 3s at  
have  
'Where is your mother, Mary?'

Mary: *iii sa tra tau eee*  
interjection 1s no know interjection  
'I don't know!'

Father: *bapa lapar ni kam masa apa eee*  
father hungry this 2p cook what interjection  
'I am hungry, what did you (plural) cook?'

Translating it into a good grammar of Indonesian, we will have the following:

(5) Father: *sedang ke mana-kah ibu-mu, Maria?*  
is to where-Q mother-2s Mary  
'Where is your mother, Mary?'

Mary: *maaf, saya tidak tahu*  
pardon 1s no know  
'Sorry, I don't know!'

Father: *bapa-mu lapar, apa yang sudah kalian masak?*  
father-2s hungry what which already 2p cook  
'I am hungry, what did you (plural) cook?'

The dialog given in (5) is a book dialog that we never find in a Papuan home. Trying to apply it in a daily conversation at home will only create an odd feeling and situation. Further, the pronoun *kam* in [*eee maria kam pu mama de di?*] indicates that Mary is not the only child in the family. While the one in [*bapa lapar ni kam masa apa eee*] suggests that, it is, more or less, a habit that Mary always helps her mother cooking. Such a significant semantic input is not found in the Indonesian forms.

Following the year of 1963 native speakers of Melayu Papua, particularly today's generation, believe that they speak Indonesian while using Melayu Papua. It is merely a distinction between a standard and market language. A student, for instance, will pass a language exam for the ability to produce (5) above. The reverse is true for (4). The thought of 'what and which is my native tongue' is confusion. The ability to see the

difference between Indonesian and Melayu Papua is beyond comprehension and therefore is cumbersome even to talk about it.

A challenge for linguists to these present days is that we are facing a complicated socio-linguistic phenomenon. Apart from the speakers of Melayu Papua, the island of Papua, in terms of its population, is a multi-ethnolinguistic land. People come from different language backgrounds, trying to communicate with others, who, themselves, might come from yet different ethnicities, using Melayu Papua – a market language of Indonesian – while believing that they are speaking Indonesian. Young generations do not really speak their parents’ language or languages but grow up speaking Melayu Papua, which, again, they believe to be Indonesian.

I propose here that there are at least five types of Melayu Papua speakers today. Those who grew up with their parents’ languages, thus have at least two mother tongues, i.e., Melayu Papua and one of their parents’ languages. Those who grew up without their parents’ languages, have only one mother tongue. Those who grew up without their parents’ languages but with other languages, have at least two mother tongues. Those who grew up without their parents’ languages but with Indonesian, have Melayu Papua and Indonesian as their mother tongues, and the lucky ones are those who grew up with their parents’ languages and Indonesian have at least three mother tongues. Is it possible? Two things are clear here – I need to do further observation and/or upgrade my linguistic knowledge.

The above five types can be generalized into three major types of native speakers of Melayu Papua, i.e., single mother tongues, dual mother tongues and multi mother tongues, as drafted in the following table:

	Melayu Papua	Parents’ tongues	Other tongues	Indonesian
Single	✓			
Dual	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
Multi	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)

Clearly, Melayu Papua stands out as a language of communication. It is the heart language of the Papuan people before, today and hopefully tomorrow. Ironically, hardly anyone knows that it is Melayu Papua they are using (rather than Indonesian), and therefore, it is not a language that its speakers would hold dearly. The language policy has been to promote Indonesian as a national unifying language of the country through academic curricula of both state and private schools through out the country – even

though Indonesian is only an optional language in the above table. Surely this has significant affects to the academic achievement –mostly poor – in schools and universities in Papua, where the hidden collision between Melayu Papua and Indonesian occurs while the first lacks prestige. (Further research is needed to support this hypothesis.)

It is important to let the Papuan people know that they indeed use Melayu Papua, not Indonesian, as a means of communication in their daily life. It is also significant to make them aware of the danger of their language losing domains. It is important to encourage the speakers of Melayu Papua to expand its use into every domain of the language.

#### **4 Domains in danger**

Crystal (2000: 83) suggests two general types of domains; official and non-official. In the case of Melayu Papua, the language has lost mostly the official domains (work, study, technology and economy). More domains are threatened by the use of Indonesian in movies with subtitles through television or DVDs. The Indonesian language is also used in both written and oral instructions for the use of mobile phones. Notices in the main meeting places, like airports, terminals, hospitals, clinics, shopping centres, restaurants, security posts, even markets, are also in Indonesian. Songs recorded in cassettes or CDs are not available in Melayu Papua but English, Indonesian, one of ethnic languages in Papua or in indigenous languages in Indonesia. In terms of religion, sermons are commonly delivered not in Melayu Papua but Indonesian theological terminology. In sports, commentators tend to use broken Indonesian rather than Melayu Papua.

So what should we do?

#### **5 Recapturing and revitalization for preservation**

In the fifth chapter of his book, *Language Death*, Crystal postulates six significant factors to language revitalization. I repeat them here: “*An endangered language will progress if its speakers*

- increase their prestige within the dominant community,*
- increase their wealth relative to the dominant community,*
- increase their legitimate power in the eyes of the dominant community,*
- have a strong presence in the educational system,*
- can write their language down, and*
- can make use of electronic technology.”* (Crystal, 2000: 127-144)

I would like to add two more: An endangered language will progress if its speakers

- are aware of the presence of their own language within the dominant community, and
- use their language in many domains within the dominant community.

The above eight points are real and therefore crucial. They represent the situation pointed out in section 4 – there is no evidence to suggest that speakers of Melayu Papua meet those points.

Revitalization is crucial to preserve Melayu Papua. In order to do so the first needed component is people (human resources). We need people who can work together in a team. We need researchers, linguists, writers, programmers, administrators, teachers/trainers, and treasurers. We need a team that can do research, analyzing and writing reports of findings, formulating training materials based on those reports, and finally implementing those materials in a training programmes for mother tongue speakers of Melayu Papua. The outcome of this working team is a team of Melayu Papuan writers, who are responsible for writing various materials in Melayu Papua for publication. This includes a grammar of Melayu Papua presented in an accessible language for all Papuan speakers. Is there anyone who can be involved in the team? This leads us to the next.

The second challenge is, of course, funds. Financial resources are not so easy to obtain in a country like Indonesia, let alone Papua the easternmost part of the country. Who can finance the above team and the work of the team, is a good question. To accommodate this work, we would also need a legally recognized institution, another matter of the financial need.

Finally, it is time that matters for us. We surely do not want to keep talking about language preservation without taking any further action. Conferences like this need to be continued with a good yearly budget. For the next conference, it would be good to have special reports from teams working on particular languages. It would be good to know that there are languages that are being taken care of. Do we need a committee to monitor any field language projects? Do we have some sort of financial aid for the committee and the field teams? These are questions worth considering.



With this, I conclude my observations regarding Melayu Papua. I have, within my limitations, suggested some ways to preserve Melayu Papua – the language that its native speakers do not even know exists. I hope, if I am still alive, to present conference participants with a much more positive and promising report of the language I hold dear... at the next conference.

## Appendix

This list contains, mostly, lexical items of Melayu Papua before and after 1963 – still under construction.

alifuru > kampungan  
almari > lemari  
anak rumput > anak haram  
hari jadi > (hari) ulang tahun  
mati > berpulang, meninggal (dunia), wafat, tewas  
bakalai, bakulai > berkelai > berkelahi  
baku bawa > pacaran  
baku mara > bertengkar  
baku melawan > bertengkar mulut, beradu mulut  
baku nai > baku cuki, tidur dengan ...  
baku piara > kawin lari cf. samen leven  
baweto > mara-mara, ngomel  
bera > berak, buang air besar  
beranak > melahirkan  
bes > bis  
bini, maitua > istri  
binongko > kampungan  
bobou > bau, berbau  
bola (kaki) > (sepak) bola  
bon-bon, gula-gula > permen manisan  
bunting > hamil, mengandung > berbadan-dua  
cakadidi > ? – expressed by ‘trabisa dudu diam’ in, e.g., ‘perempuan tu trabisa dudu diam’ for  
‘perempuan tu cakadidi sampe’  
dapa (causative) > kena  
dusu > kejar  
enak trabae punya > enak sampe > enak sekali  
famili > marga, keluarga  
foya > tipu  
fui-fui, tiop-tiop, baca-baca > guna-guna, obat-obatan  
game > pangge > panggil  
garis > korek api  
haven > pelabuhan, kota  
kadera > kursi  
kakarlak > kecoa, kacoa  
kalawai > ?  
kali > sungai  
kapal udara > pesawat terbang  
kawin > nikah  
kincing (penultimate stress) > kencing (stress swifited to final due to schwa on the penultimate)  
kolot > kontrol, gosi

krans > surat kabar  
kukis > kue  
laki, paitua > suami  
langgar > lewat, menyeberang  
mata-mata > intel  
mesin tek > mesin ketik  
mistar > penggaris  
oto > mobil  
pamali > pantangan  
pardidu > ?  
pasiar > jalan-jalan  
pastiu > bosan  
perempuan > wanita  
piso > pisau  
popi > boneka  
prompi > ?  
senapan > senjata api  
simore > snang  
stif > (karet) penghapus  
strom > listrik  
susu > susu, buah dada > payudara  
tabe(a), da, dada > selamat  
tafiaro > terpencah  
takaruang adat > sabarang > sembarang  
tatawa > tertawa  
tukang bual > pambual > pembual  
tukang tipu > panipu > pendusta  
tunangan > pacar  
tuter > klakson

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