

# Preservation of Indonesian in the border area of Aruk, Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia

## Pelestarian bahasa Indonesia di daerah perbatasan Aruk, Indonesia dan Sarawak, Malaysia

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Submitted: June 22, 2022; Accepted: August 16, 2022; Published: August 25, 2022

### KEYWORDS

language  
preservation,  
language variety,  
language  
attitude

### ABSTRACT

West Kalimantan is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has three border areas with Malaysia. Community interactions between countries that have been going on for centuries undeniably lead to language contact which results in people choosing local language so that communication can run effectively. The purpose of this study was to determine the variety of language used around the area, language attitudes, and the preservation of Indonesian in the border area of Aruk, Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in which the data were obtained through observation, questionnaires, and interviews with a total of 150 respondents. The results show that the variety of languages used by students, traders and government circles as the target speakers is Indonesian. Furthermore, the language serves as an instructional language in education settings, the language of communication, a unifying tool as well as the language of government administration, while the other local and regional languages are used in certain limited contexts. Regarding the attitudes, the people on the border of Aruk, Indonesia and Malaysia show a very positive attitude towards Indonesian. The defense strategy is carried out by students, traders, and the local government.

### KATA KUNCI

pelestarian  
bahasa,  
ragam bahasa,  
sikap berbahasa

### ABSTRAK

Kalimantan Barat merupakan salah satu provinsi di Indonesia yang memiliki tiga wilayah perbatasan dengan Malaysia. Interaksi masyarakat antar negara yang telah berlangsung selama berabad-abad tidak dapat dipungkiri menyebabkan terjadinya kontak bahasa yang mengakibatkan masyarakat memilih bahasa daerah agar komunikasi dapat berjalan dengan efektif. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui ragam bahasa yang digunakan di sekitar kawasan, sikap bahasa, dan pelestarian bahasa Indonesia di kawasan perbatasan Aruk, Indonesia dan Sarawak, Malaysia. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kuantitatif dan kualitatif di mana data diperoleh melalui observasi, kuesioner, dan wawancara dengan total 150 responden. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ragam bahasa yang digunakan oleh kalangan pelajar, pedagang dan pemerintah sebagai penutur sasaran adalah bahasa Indonesia. Selanjutnya, bahasa tersebut berfungsi sebagai bahasa pengantar dalam pendidikan, bahasa komunikasi, alat pemersatu serta bahasa penyelenggaraan pemerintahan, sedangkan bahasa lokal dan regional lainnya digunakan dalam konteks terbatas tertentu. Mengenai sikap, masyarakat di perbatasan Aruk, Indonesia dan Malaysia menunjukkan sikap yang sangat positif terhadap bahasa Indonesia. Strategi pertahanan dilakukan oleh mahasiswa, pedagang, dan pemerintah setempat.

### How to cite this article:

Sulastriana, E., Herlina, & Hariadi, T. (2022). Preservation of Indonesian in the border area of Aruk, Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia. *Bahasa dan Seni: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Pengajarannya*, 50(2), 237–246.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.17977/um015v50i22022p237>

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## Introduction

The dynamics of language situation and practices in border areas have always been attractive to scholars. Several previous studies investigating border areas have mainly focused on language attitudes with the results consistently showing the positive towards Indonesian among Indonesian communities living in their respective border areas as evident from a linguistic analysis of the border areas of Indonesia and Timor Leste as well as Indonesia and Malaysia conducted by Mukhamdanah (2015) and Mukhamdanah and Handayani (2020).

In the context of this present study, border is an area that is geographically and administratively directly adjacent to a country and can be separated by either land or sea. Indonesia currently shares borders with several countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Timor Leste, and Papua New Guinea. With a specific case of Malaysian borders, West Kalimantan of Indonesia is closely adjacent to one of the Malaysian states, namely Sarawak in East Malaysia (Permatasari, 2014). In specific, several areas in the West Kalimantan which are directly bordered by Sarawak and already have a State Border Post or *Pos Lintas Batas Negara* (PLBN) are the district of Aruk, Sambas, Badau, Kapuas Hulu, Jagoi Babang, Bengkayang, and Entikong. They are all bordered by land which has resulted in high possibilities to move across countries to carry out various activities, such as trades. This land-based trade traffic spans a very long history, thus shaping and influencing socio-cultural dynamics in the Indonesia-Malaysia border areas.

Living in relatively remote areas, Indonesian communities in these borders were seen to experience various problems including low standard of living, poor access to information, poor facilities and infrastructure, poor quality of education, and inadequate health services (Manik, 2018; Marwasta, 2016). These complex problems have motivated them to find better life in the neighbouring country, Malaysia, with this trend arguably being seen as a treat to the sense of nationalism.

As far as nationalism is concerned, language attitudes can be one of the indicators. To put it differently, language attitude and nationalism are often seen as inseparable. In this case, the choice of language becomes one of the manifestations of the attitude towards the state. Garvin and Mathiot cited in Chaer and Agustina (2004) argue that language functions as a unifying and/or separating tool of a community. Language as the unifying tool refers to the sense of ownership and/or self-belonging to a community or a group of people who use the same language.

Based on our initial observations, the mobility of border communities across two countries appears to be very high for various purposes pertaining to economic, educational, social, and cultural matters. This social contact is indirectly imposing an interesting language contact situation. It is because both communities – Aruk and Sarawak – need a common language to carry out an effective two-way communication. The population of Aruk itself consists of various ethnic groups, namely Malay, Dayak, Chinese, Javanese, and Madurese. This multiethnic situation has resulted in the society becoming multilingual and multicultural as can be seen in the use of different mother tongue other than Indonesian (Kim, 2020; Ulucan, 2017). According to Thomason (2007) and Fauziah (2015), language contact occurs when speakers of different languages come into contact so that various forms of different codes might be used. In the scholarship

of bilingualism, this language contact phenomenon can take the form of diglossia, code switching, code mixing, interference, integration, and language shift (Chaer & Agustina, 2004).

This current study departs from a complex language contact situation in Aruk, Indonesia and Sarawak Malaysia with a focus on language attitudes. More specifically, this study aims to find how Indonesian carries out its role, function, and position as the national language mandated by Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution, how Indonesian citizens in the border area of Aruk perceive Indonesian after a long history of social engagement with Malaysia, and what strategies carried out by the government in maintaining Indonesian as the national language in the Aruk-Malaysia border area.

## Method

This is a quantitative and qualitative research that collected data from observation, interview, and questionnaire. A direct observation was carried out to find out public opinion and/or implicit policies in language selection practices in border areas. Structured and in-depth interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via telephone calls to obtain data on actual communication practices. To specifically collect data on speakers' attitudes, we distributed a questionnaire consisting of 66 questions with each question being assessed using a Likert scale – 3 (positive), 2 (neutral), and 1 (negative).

The participants were chosen using proportional stratified random sampling technique in which the population was classified into three categories, and then the participants were selected a representative from each category (50 participants in each category). There were a total of 150 speakers participating in this study having the following criteria: they are indigenous people living in the border area, they are from the closest school in the border area, and employees working at the Pos Lintas Batas Negara (PLBN). All these participants resided in the border area of Aruk-Indonesia and Sarawak-Malaysia, especially the National Cross-Border Post, Aruk Pasar Modern, and SMPN 3 Sanjangan Besar.

## Results

### *Language use among speakers in the border area of Aruk and Sarawak*

#### (1) Students' language use

Indonesian has been used in interactions with fellow students in classroom (during the learning process) which we can see from the students' responses. As many as 33 out of 46 students use Indonesian (BI) in class. However, when they are outside the classroom, only 14 students out of 46 students use Indonesian (BI), while the rest use their local language or Bahasa Daerah (BD) more often. In addition to interaction between students and students, we also looked the interactions between students and teachers. During the learning process, 45 out of 46 students used BI as the primary means of communication, while outside the classroom, students also tended to use BI (44 students). Outside the school area, 43 out of 46 students consistently use BI with their teachers.

Table 1. Students' self-reported language use

No	Statements	Responses			
		BI	BD	BC	BM
1	To classmates, I use ... language (During learning time)	33	11	2	0
2	To classmates, I use ... language (Outside the classroom)	14	23	9	0
3	To my teacher in the classroom, I use ... language	45	1	0	0
4	To my teacher outside the classroom, I use ... language	44	0	1	0
5	To my teacher outside the school area, I use ... language	43	2	1	0

The data in Table 1 confirms that Indonesian in the Aruk–Sarawak border area occupies its function as the language of public communication at school, both with fellow students and with teachers. The ethnic diversity that exists in these border areas, especially in school, becomes an important factor of the use of Indonesian as the language of unity. The primary role of Indonesian in student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions shows that the language has served its function as the language of instruction as mandated and institutionalized in the language-in-education policy in Indonesia. In addition, the use of Indonesian as a lingua franca allows students as well as teachers from various ethnic groups with their respective socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds to have a shared and common language to communicate (Nuryanto, 2015). An interesting phenomenon appears to be the case that students continue to use BI when interacting with teachers outside the school areas. A different case occurs when students interact with their peers in which they prefer to use local language or BD more than BI. In this case, Budhiono (2017) argues that in the school domain, there is a tendency to balance the use of BD and other languages.

## (2) Traders' language use

We also surveyed traders in the Aruk–Sarawak border areas with respect to the languages they use with different interlocutors and in various communication settings. As outlined in Table 2 below, the results showed that when the traders interact or communicate with their business partners, they tend to use BI (45 out of 49), and only very minor number of traders used BC (4 out of 49). The underlying factor of selecting Indonesian (BI) seems to be similar to those of school language, that is to bridge the communication gap between traders with various diverse linguistic backgrounds. It also appears that Indonesian or BI is mainly used in communicating with customers (41 out of 49), even though we also found a minor use of local language or BD (4 out of 49) and BC (4 out of 49). The cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in the area become the key reason of not only the primary use of Indonesian as a lingua franca, but also the existence of languages other than Indonesian in Aruk-Sarawak border.

Table 2. Traders' self-reported language use

No	Statements	BI	BD	BC	BM
1	To my business partners, I use ... language	45	0	4	0
2	To my business customers or consumers, I use ... language	41	4	4	0
3	To my superiors, I use ... language	46	0	2	1
4	On my shop signage, I use... language	35	3	11	0
5	In my transaction's notes, I use ... language	45	1	2	1
6	When I meet Malaysian, I use ... language	10	1	12	25

Interesting findings are seen from the use of language on shop signage in which, in addition to the high frequency of use of Indonesian (35 out of 49), BC was also frequently used (11 out of 49), and then followed by local language or BD (3 out of 49). The language used in the transaction notes during the trading activities, however, is primarily Indonesian or BI (45 out of 49). As outline in Table 2, when interacting with Malaysian

traders, Malay or Bahasa Melayu (BM) was seen to be most frequently used (25 out of 49), and 12 of them spoke in BC, 10 used Indonesian, and only 1 person admitted using local language or BD.

Taken together, Indonesian or BI is not only the most preferred medium of verbal interactions in trading activities, but also consistent across different communication settings and interlocutors, except when talking to Malaysian. The use of Indonesian or BI is clearly because of the diverse cultural and linguistic background in the areas. In other words, the use of BI by traders in the Aruk Indonesia–Serawak region of Malaysia functions as the language of unity. This is reinforced by the dominant use of BI when traders interact with buyers or customers as well as their partners. This means that BI seems to be used to bridge the possible linguistic gap between traders and their customers as the results of diverse ethnic background.

In the context of trader activities with Malaysians, BM is more dominantly used. However, it is important to take a note that Indonesian and Malay or BM are linguistically similar. The similarity makes it easier for the two residents to communicate (Siburian, 2012). Moreover, the transnational interactions in the Indonesia-Malaysia border are being carried out more intensively because of the socio-cultural similarities possessed by two citizens from different countries.

### (3) Government officers' language use

Table 3 below informs the results of our survey regarding the language used by government officials or staff residing in the Aruk–Sarawak border areas. 16 staff participated in the survey with the results showing that Indonesian or BI is most frequently used as the main language of verbal interaction. Interesting findings can be seen from the language used in peer or fellow staff interaction in which one person also used local language or BD and two persons used BC, while the majority of them (13 out of 16) spoke in Indonesian or BI. In the context of interaction with Malaysians, the four languages above are used. While the majority of the respondents (12 out of 16) admitted using BI, four respondents used BD and BC respectively.

Table 3. Government staff's self-reported language use

No	Statements	BI	BD	BC	BM
1	To my superiors, I use ... language	16	0	0	0
2	To my office colleagues, I use ... language	13	1	2	0
3	In a meeting, I use ... language	12	1	2	1
4	In writing announcements, I use ... language	13	2	1	0
5	In interactions with Malaysian, I use ... language	12	2	2	0

Given that Indonesian is institutionalized as an official language of the government settings, it is not surprising to find that Indonesian or BI becomes the dominant language used in communicating with colleagues, when writing announcements, and in meetings, as found in this present study. The use of Indonesian in offices is also due to the function of this language as a lingua franca bridging communication barrier among workers from various ethnic groups. Local language or BD was also found to be used but in very low frequency, especially in peer talk.

In a multilingual environment, code choices generally depend on interlocutors or with whom the communication is carried out, and to the kinds of communicative events (Widianto & Zulaeha, 2016). As shown in Table 3, it seems that some speakers,

eventhough in very small number, chose another language either BD or BC when talking to their peers or colleagues. This particular finding indicates that social structure including social status may provide influence the linguistic behaviour (Khanifah & Hendaryan, 2021).

#### *Language attitudes towards Indonesian*

Our study also seeks to investigate the language attitudes of Indonesian citizens in the Aruk-Sarawak border areas toward their national language, Indonesian. In thi regards, our survey focuses on the speakers' pride, loyalty, and awareness.

Regarding the sense of pride, our survey elicited the degree to which Indonesian is used in various conversation settings, such as at school, outside of school, at home, at PLBN office, and outside of the office. As illustrated in Table 4 below, it is obvious that our respondents had very positive attitudes (87.44%). The highest level of pride is shown using Indonesian at PLBN office (98.67), whereas the lowest one is at home (74.67%). The second highest pride of using this national language was at school, 92.67%). An interesting finding is indicated by the comparative outlook of the pride of using Indonesian at home and outside with the use of Indonesian at home is much lower (74.67) than outside (88%). The detailed data is below.

Table 4. Percentage of pride category towards Indonesian language

Conversation settings	Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
At school	139	92.67	7	4.67	4	2.67
Outside school	121	80.67	11	7.33	19	12.67
At home	112	74.67	20	13.33	18	12
Outside home	132	88	8	5.33	10	6.67
At PLBN office	148	98.67	2	1.33	0	0
Outside PLBN office	135	90	5	3.33	10	6.67
Average				87.44		

Positive attitudes were also demonstrated in the aspect of language loyalty towards Indonesian in various interactions. The highest degree of loyalty towards Indonesian or BI in the border areas investigated is found in the use of this language at PLBN office (96.67%), while the lowest degree is Indonesian or BI at home (80.67%) which is identical to that of the degree of pride towards Indonesian in Table 3. Table 5 below shows the detailed information.

Table 5. Percentage of loyalty towards Indonesian

Conversation Settings	Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
At school	142	94.67	6	4	2	1.33
Outside school	134	89.33	10	6.67	6	4
At home	121	80.67	9	6	20	13.33
Outside home	132	88	9	6	9	6
At PLBN office	145	96.67	2	1.33	3	2
Outside PLBN office	142	94.67	3	2	5	3.33
Average				90.67		

The language attitude which is reflected in the speakers' awareness of the language norms adopted widely in the border community of Aruk, Indonesia and Sarawak, Malaysia areas is shown in the table 6 below with an average value of 89.67%. This percentage indicates that, on average, speakers' attitudes are positive and that they are aware of the language norms around the area, such as at school and outside, at home and outside, as well as at PLBN office and outside.

Table 6. Percentage of awareness towards the language norms

Conversation Settings	Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
At School	145	96.67	5	3.33	0	0
Outside school	134	89.33	2	1.33	14	9.33
At home	118	78.67	2	1.33	30	20
Outside home	125	83.33	9	6	16	10.67
At PLBN office	145	96.67	0	0	5	3.33
Outside PLBN office	140	93.33	2	1.33	8	5.33
Average			89.67			

Table 6 shows that the highest degree of attitudes was indicated by the speakers' awareness towards the language norms at school (96.67%) and at PLBN office (96.67%), while the lowest degree was at home (78.67%). This result is consistent with the other two aspects of attitudes mentioned previously in which the use of Indonesian at PLBN office and at school were perceived to be highly positive, while the use of Indonesian at home was seen relatively less positive as evident from the lower percentage compared to other conversation settings.

In sum, our survey found that speakers have positive attitudes towards Indonesian as measured from three aspects: the degree of pride, loyalty, and awareness. However, the percentages seem to be different across the three aspects. As illustrated in Table 7 below, the highest degree of attitudes was seen in the level of loyalty (90.67%) followed by the level of awareness toward the language norms (89.67%), and finally the degree of pride towards this national language (87.44). The general language attitude of the people in the Aruk Indonesia. Malaysia border area towards Indonesian is found positive (89.26%).

Table 7. Average of Degree of Language Attitudes

Category	%
Pride towards Indonesian	87.44
Loyalty towards Indonesian	90.67
Awareness of language norms	89.67
Average	89.26

Among the conversation settings asked in the survey, it is found that the pride towards the use of Indonesian at the PLBN office was the highest one (98.67) compared to other conversation settings. This shows that respondents believe that the communication with co-workers, supervisors, and staff should be in Indonesian when giving services to either Indonesians or foreigners at the office as institutionalized by law. Furthermore, respondents continue to value the use of Indonesian when interacting in the school environment as seen from the high level of awareness (96.67%). Fishman (1972), Akçay (2017), and Rydenvald (2018) maintain that the pattern of language use and choice is related to the so-called linguistic domain, which is a kind of language selection and use behaviour appeared to be a common feature on bilingual or multilingual society that is associated with the social contexts or backgrounds of the conversation, participants, topics, and communication functions. In such multilingual settings, the choice of language can be shaped by the degree of pride towards particular language. In the context of our study, Indonesian citizens living in the border areas of Aruk-Sarawak show their pride towards Indonesian by using this language as the primary tool of verbal interaction in all settings, such as schools, PLBN office, and home, even though the use of Indonesian at home occupies the least percentage. In this case, using Indonesian can also a symbol of group identity.

The positive language attitude is also reflected in the degree of loyalty towards Indonesian by the people at the Aruk–Sarawak border as evident from 5. This sense of loyalty can be seen from their commitment in using Indonesian at school and outside, at home and outside, at the PLBN office and outside. It indicates that Indonesian citizens in this border area remain faithful, have a strong commitment in maintaining their national language, and protect themselves external influences. This attitude has also shown us that they do not want their national language to be lost or extinct.

Apart from the very positive attitudes toward Indonesian, our findings indicate the negative attitudes towards local or regional languages as they seem no longer use these languages because they think that their local or regional languages are complicated and less prestigious. It is evident from the low level of use of local languages as presented consistently in Table 4, 5, and 6. Even when the conversation takes place outside of school and office, speakers tend not to use local languages. The possible factors can be a multi-ethnic situation that occurs in this border area. So, they avoid using local or regional languages in public.

#### *Strategies in preserving Indonesian in the border area of Aruk and Sarawak*

Indonesian preservation can be done in a way that is seen from the perspective of students, traders, and government. The number of perspectives from different domains is adapted to the needs and linguistic situation of the community being studied (Jalaluddin, 2013). The following is a detailed explanation of the three perspectives.

The strategies adopted by students in Aruk–Sarawak border areas in maintaining Indonesian can be seen from a) the efforts taken by all school members to communicate using Indonesian both inside and outside the classroom, b) the fact that students and their family members are familiar with Indonesian and have been using this language from an early age at home, and c) the fact that students speak with community members using Indonesian in order to bridge the communication gap among various ethnic/ethnic groups. The preservation of Indonesian by students can also be seen from their enthusiasm in learning Indonesian and expanding their vocabulary through PUEBI, correcting language errors, and being very fond of Indonesian language subject to improve their proficiency.

The strategy carried out by traders in this border area to maintain Indonesian includes having a good level of understanding of the language itself and using Indonesian as the primary language when communicating with fellow business partners, customers, superiors, and employees. In addition, traders are also in support to the maintenance of Indonesian by using this language in the business transaction processes and commercials. As evident, traders prioritize Indonesian not only in verbal interactions but also writing shop signage and transaction notes.

Maintaining Indonesian in government offices, especially at PLBN, in the border area of Aruk-Sarawak can be seen from the use of Indonesian when communicating with superiors, fellow co-workers, and visitors. The government's effort in protecting the language goes hand in hand with the positive attitudes of the speakers especially in using Indonesian for public services, writing files/archives, making announcements/notifications, conducting activities/official government forums, field assignments, etc.

Taken together, the various strategies implemented in preserving Indonesian in the Aruk, Indonesia area are consistent with the positive attitudes towards the language shown by its speakers. It is also shown that speakers are consistent in using the which means that they stick to the rules of language both verbally and in writing and other ways of speaking. Pateda (1990) suggests that the mind is conditioned by linguistic categories and experiences which will be encoded in the form of data concepts that are already available. In other words, language can help human thinking to think more systematically. Furthermore, we also see that speakers tend to prioritize Indonesian as a means of communication to construct national identity. As for national identity, according to Antari (2019) language can be one of the elements forming national identity in which the symbolic system is arbitrarily formed on elements of the sound of human speech and as a means of interacting between humans. Finally, maintaining the national language can be done by loving, protecting, using, and being proud of the Indonesian language. With these efforts, it is expected that Indonesian continues to grow and is far from the extinction.

## Conclusions

This present study found that Indonesian or BI is mostly and widely used among students, traders, and government officers in various conversation settings. In this context, BI functions as the language of instruction in education, the language of business communication, the official language in public services, while other languages are used in certain limited contexts, namely when students communicate with their peers outside the classroom, in some of the signboards and shop signage, and when interacting with Malaysians. In terms of language attitudes, Indonesian citizens living in the border area of Aruk–Sarawak show a very positive attitude towards Indonesian. They choose Indonesian to communicate with speakers of other regional languages, while local languages are used to communicate with speakers of the same ethnic and language background. This attitude is therefore consistent with the actual use of Indonesian by the Indonesian communities in the border areas. Regarding the preservation strategies of Indonesian by the local community, they generally do it by continuing to use Indonesian in various forms of communication and with different interlocutors.

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