

## The Use of Sabu Language by the Second Generation of *Sabunesse* Migrants Living in Kupang

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Sabu Language, Second Generation, Language Acquisition, Domain	This thesis is entitled: "The Use of Sabu Language by Second Generation of <i>Sabunesse</i> Migrants living in Kupang". The research problems of this study are; (1) How is the acquisition process of Sabu language undergone by the second generation <i>Sabunesse</i> migrants living in Kupang? (2) In what domains is Sabu language used by the second generation of <i>Sabunesse</i> migrants living in Kupang? The study aims are; to find out how is the acquisition process of Sabu language undergone by the second generation <i>Sabunesse</i> migrants living in Kupang and to find out in what domains is Sabu language used by the second generation of <i>Sabunesse</i> migrants living in Kupang. This study used a qualitative descriptive method. The subject of this research was the second generation of <i>Sabunesse</i> migrants living in Kupang. There were 10 informants. The instruments of data collection are: a list of questions, writing tools such as books and pen/pencil, audio-recording devices, cameras, and a list of words or sentences to be translated by the informant as an additional or supporting instrument. The result shows that eight informants acquire the Sabu language from their parents and neighbours, but two informants acquire the Sabu language only from their parents or family. There are two domains where the second generation uses the Sabu language; the private domain and the social domain.

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### INTRODUCTION

Savu Island is one of the regencies in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, located east of Sumba Island and west of Rote Island. The people on this island themselves call their island "Rai Hawu" which means "Land of Hawu" and the Savu people call themselves "Do Hawu". In communicating with each other, the residents use Sabu language as a local language with different dialects from each sub-district. In most interactions, including family, social, and sometimes professional settings, the people of Savu Island use their local language. According to Diver (1970), language is a system of verbal, handwritten, or traditional signs that people use to express themselves as members of a social group and participants in their culture. The existence of language cannot be separated from our daily lives. The functions of language include communication, identity expression, imagination, and emotional release. Every human being's acquisition, maintenance and use of language is influenced by the surrounding environment and one of the key factors influencing language maintenance in a society is the family in the pattern of language use within the family. In every family there must be a regional language that they want to preserve from generation to generation and this study was conducted to examine the acquisition and use of the Sabu language in families by the second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants living in

Kupang. The Sabu language is a language used by the Sabu people to communicate with each other in Savu Island. However, currently, because many residents have moved from Savu Island to Kupang for certain reasons, sometimes the second-generation residents of Savu Island who live in Kupang no longer use the Sabu language to communicate, some even no longer know it. The second generation of Savu migrants living in Kupang are children whose parents (father and mother) are natives of Savu Island who moved to Kupang and settled for certain reasons. They are also children who know, understand and can speak Sabu language. Based on the reasons above, the writer is interested in conducting research with the title "THE USE OF SABU LANGUAGE BY SECOND GENERATION OF SABUNESSE MIGRANTS LIVING IN KUPANG".

## METHOD

The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method to explain how the second generation of *Sabunesse* living in Kupang acquires the Sabu language, in what domains the Sabu language is used by second generation *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang, and what topics are usually discussed by second generation *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang. The subject of this study was taken from ten informants who were second-generation *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang and could speak or understand the Sabu language. These informants were the second generation whose parents (father and mother) came from Sabu Island but had settled in Kupang. The researcher used three data collection techniques: interview, audio recording and listening and note taking.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Based on the results of the study conducted through interviews and based on the list of sentences filled in by the informants, the researcher found that the use of the Sabu language by the second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang was influenced by various internal and external factors:

1. Passive vs. Active Acquisition: Most informants mastered the Sabu language passively during childhood. They could understand it because the language was spoken by their parents at home. However, active mastery (speaking fluently) was very limited, especially as they grew up and interacted more in Indonesian or Kupang Malay.
2. Input from Family: The main source of language exposure came from older family members, especially parents. Parents often use a mixture of Sabu language and Indonesian, or in some cases, only Indonesian or Kupang Malay. This inconsistent input influenced the mastery of the Sabu language in informants or the second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang.
3. Practice of using Sabu language at home: In households where Sabu language is intentionally used and preserved, children have higher confidence in speaking the language and understand better when someone speaks using the language. In contrast, in households that prioritize Indonesian or Kupang Malay, children tend to be able to understand but not speak Sabu language.

Based on the interview findings, eight informants understood the Sabu language but were not fluent or had difficulty speaking it. Then, one informant could not speak Sabu language at all but could understand when others spoke it. In addition, one other informant could understand and use the language. Furthermore, eight informants also acquired the Sabu language from their parents and fard neighbors,

but two informants acquire it only from their parents or family. The following are the interview results from ten informants:

Informant 1:

**Bahasa Indonesia**

*Saya bisa berbahasa Sabu tetapi tidak terlalu fasih atau lancar dan kurang memahami kalimat-kalimat panjang yang dikatakan oleh orang lain, tetapi jika mendengarkan pembicaraan sehari-hari saya mengerti. Bahasa Sabu merupakan bahasa ibu dari kedua orang tua sehingga yang biasa mereka gunakan sehari-hari sehingga sebagai anak saya terbiasa mendengarkan jadi saya sedikit mengerti dan tau. Selain orang tua biasanya tetangga dan keluarga yang lainnya juga sering menggunakan bahasa Sabu. Namun saat ini di rumah bahasa Sabu sudah mulai jarang digunakan karena sudah lama tinggal di Kupang dan digunakan disaat-saat tertentu saja. Bahasa Sabu biasanya digunakan di lingkungan sekitardirumah untuk membahas tentang kegiatan sehari-hari, tentang rahasia yang hanya ingin diketahui oleh keluarga tertentu. Selain itu di acara keluarga seperti pernikahan dan kedukaan, bahasa Sabu biasanya digunakan untuk membahas mengenai silsilah dan prosesi adat yang akan dilakukan agar anak-anak saat ini dapat mengetahui, jadi acara keluarga adalah momen yang penting untuk bahasa Sabu dituturkan. Di lingkungan Gereja juga biasanya digunakan didalam liturgi (penggunaan lagu dan khotbah) saat bulan bahasa dan budaya.*

**English**

I can speak Sabu language but not very fluently and I don't understand long sentences said by other people, but if I listen to everyday discussions I understand. Sabu language is the mother tongue of both parents so that is what they usually use every day so as a child I am used to listening so I understand and know a little. Apart from parents, neighbors and other families also often use the language. However, currently at home it is rarely used because I have lived in Kupang for a long time and it is only used at certain times. Sabu language is usually used in the surrounding environment at home to discuss daily activities, about private matters known only to certain family members. In addition, at family events such as weddings and mourning, it is usually used to discuss genealogy and traditional processions that will be carried out so that children today can find out, so family events are important moments for the language to be spoken. In the church environment it is also usually used in the liturgy (use of songs and sermons) during the language and culture month.

Informant 2 :

**Bahasa Indonesia**

*Saya mengerti ketika ada yang berbicara menggunakan bahasa sabu namun saya susah berbicara menggunakan bahasa sabu karena sudah lama tinggal di Kupang. Saya belajar bahasa Sabu dari orang tua karena masih sering menggunakan bahasa Sabu dirumah dan dari lingkungan sekitar karena rata-rata dikelilingi oleh orang Sabu. Yang biasanya berbahasa Sabu adalah orang tua dan tetangga, digunakan untuk berkomunikasi atau bercerita dengan sesama orang Sabu untuk berbicara mengenai rahasia atau hal yang privat. Bahasa Sabu biasanya digunakan di tempat kerja untuk pentas seni, acara keluarga seperti pernikahan dan kedukaan (dengan sesama orang Sabu) dan di gereja saat bulan bahasa dan budaya digunakan di liturgi (lagu-lagu) dan digunakan di lingkungan sekitar untuk membicarakan hal-hal sederhana sehari-hari.*

**English**

I understand when someone speaks in Sabu language but I have difficulty speaking in Sabu language because I have lived in Kupang for a long time. I learned Sabu language from my parents because they still often use Sabu language at home and from the surrounding environment because on average I am surrounded by Sabu people. Those who usually speak the language are parents and neighbors, used to communicate or tell stories with fellow Sabu people to talk about secrets or private things. Sabu language is usually used in the workplace for art performances, family events such as weddings and mourning (with fellow Sabu people) and in church during the month of language and culture is used in liturgy (songs) and used in the surrounding environment to talk about simple everyday things.

Informant 3 :

**Bahasa Indonesia**

*Saya tidak bisa berbicara menggunakan bahasa Sabu tapi saya mengerti jika mendengarkan orang lain berbicara. Saya mempelajari atau mengetahui bahasa Sabu dari orang tua saya (merupakan bahasa sehari-hari saat ayah dan ibu saya berkomunikasi) dan juga dari tetangga-tetangga saya. Namun saat ini bahasa Sabu sudah mulai jarang digunakan dirumah karena banyak anak-anak yang tidak mengerti bahasa Sabu jadi saat ini orang saya lebih sering menggunakan*

bahasa Sabu di rumah. Bahasa Sabu biasanya digunakan saat waktu tertentu di acara adat seperti pernikahan dan kedukaan. Saat acara keluarga bahasa Sabu digunakan untuk membahas tentang aturan adat yang harus dilakukan saat pernikahan dan kedukaan. Dirumah biasanya digunakan hanya untuk sapaan, menanyakan kabar hari ini dan pertanyaan sederhana. Selain itu bahasa Sabu juga biasa digunakan saat even sabung ayam yang sering dilakukan oleh orang-orang Sabu terkhususnya para lelaki.

#### **English**

I can't speak Sabu language but I understand when I hear other people talking. I learned the language from my parents (it is the language my parents use in daily communication) and also from my neighbors. However, currently Sabu language is rarely used at home because many children do not understand it, so now my parents use Kupang Malay more often at home. Sabu language is usually used at certain times at traditional events such as weddings and funerals. During family events, the language is used to discuss customary rules that must be followed during weddings and funerals. At home, it is usually used only for greetings, asking how the day is going and simple questions. In addition, Sabu language is also commonly used during cockfighting events which are often held by Sabu people, especially men.

## **Discussion**

### **1. The Acquisition Process of Sabu Language by Second Generation**

The results of the study indicate that second-generation *Sabunese* migrants living in Kupang acquired Sabu language through a natural and informal process, especially at home. However, the process was incomplete and passive for most participants. All informants stated that they knew the Sabu language from listening to their parents speak it.

The process of Sabu language acquisition among second-generation Sabu migrants in Kupang can be well understood through Krashen's Input Hypothesis. According to Krashen (1988), language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, that is, language that is slightly above their current level of understanding but still comprehensible ( $i+1$ ). In this study, many second-generation individuals received limited and inconsistent input in Sabu language which affected their fluency in speaking and understanding Sabu language when others spoke using Sabu language. As stated by informant 1 "I can speak Sabu language but not very fluently and I don't understand long sentences by other people", Informant 2 "I understand when someone speaks Sabu language but I have difficulty speaking in Sabu language because I have lived in Kupang for a long time", informant 8 stated, "I understand the Sabu language but I am not fluent in speaking it". There are even those who cannot speak Sabu language, namely informant 3 who said "I can't speak Sabu language but I understand when I hear other people talking using Sabu language".

Most second-generation speakers reported that Sabu language was primarily spoken by parents, grandparents or older relatives and neighbors. As informant 9 said "I learned Sabu language from my parents and neighbors also when with my family, but now it is rarely used at home because the children don't understand". However, the input they received was often discontinuous, unreinforced, inconsistent, and not varied across contexts. Parents often used Indonesian or Kupang Malay for daily communication, which limited the amount of natural exposure needed for effective Sabu language acquisition. As a result, language input was inconsistent and not strong enough to support active acquisition. This situation led to passive bilingualism, where individuals understand Sabu but are unable to speak it fluently. As informant 3 said "However, currently Sabu language is rarely used at home because many children do not understand the language, so now my parents use Kupang Malay more often at home. Sabu language is usually used at certain times at traditional events such as weddings and funerals".

## 2. Domains of Sabu Language Use

The findings also indicate that Sabu language is used selectively and inconsistently across domains, which is best analyzed using Fishman's (1972) domain theory. According to Fishman, language use depends on who is speaking, to whom, about what, and in what setting. Sabu use is concentrated in a limited number of domains, while other domains are dominated by Indonesian and Kupang Malay.

Fishman's (1972) language domain theory is relevant in analyzing the data. Each domain has different levels of formality, participants, and topics, which influence language choice. In this study: The private domain (the use of Sabu language at home and in the neighborhood/family) remains the strongest for Sabu language use, although the number is decreasing. Sabu language is primarily used by the older generation, especially parents to ask simple things that are everyday topics or even confidential matters. However, second generation individuals often respond in Indonesian or Kupang Malay, indicating a disruption in intergenerational language transmission, a key concept in Fishman's language maintenance model. When younger speakers are not actively using the language at home or in the neighborhood, it indicates an ongoing language shift.

Based on the research, two domains of Sabu language use were identified. The first is the private domain, which includes communication at home and within the family environment. This domain remains the strongest, although its use is decreasing, as stated by the informant 8, "I learned Sabu from my family and the ones who usually use Sabu are my parents when they meet their families, from grandpa and grandma when visiting Kupang so they often use Sabu, neighbors also often use Sabu because most of them are Sabu people".

The Sabu language is sometimes used by the older generation, especially parents to discuss simple, everyday topics or even things that are personal or confidential, as stated by the informant 4 "those who usually speak Sabu language are parents/older people and neighbors, used to communicate or tell stories with fellow Sabu people to talk about secrets or private things", although second generation individuals often respond in Indonesian or Kupang Malay. When younger speakers no longer use the language actively at home or in the surrounding environment, this indicates an ongoing language shift.

In addition, the social domain was also found in this study, where the Sabu language is used in places of worship or churches which are used in the liturgy of worship at the GMIT Kemah Ibadat Airnona church as 8 out of 10 of the informants come from the same church (GMIT Kemah Ibadat Airnona). They use the Sabu language in church when there is Language and Culture Month which is usually in May, and also in every last week of each month, as stated by the informant 1 "In the church environment it is also usually used in the liturgy (use of songs and sermons) during the Language and Culture Month", informant 2 "in church during the month of language and culture is used in liturgy (songs)" and informant 9 "In church it is also usually used in the liturgy of worship during the third Sunday of every month because the average congregation of the church is Sabu people".

In family events or traditional events such as weddings and funerals to discuss the rules during the traditional event, the family tree is spoken in Sabu language so that it can be known by the younger generation, as stated by informant 3 "during family events, Sabu language is used to discuss customary rules that must be followed during weddings and funerals", and stated by informant 8 "Sabu language is often used at family events to talk about family genealogy, ask how the day is going, tell stories, in mourning usually discuss the traditional procession that must be carried out after burial".

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate (1) the acquisition process of Sabu language among the second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants living in Kupang and (2) the domains in which the Sabu language is used. Based on the data analysis and findings presented above, the conclusions can be drawn as follows:

### 1. The Acquisition Process of Sabu Language

The second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants in Kupang generally acquired the Sabu language through informal and natural exposure within the home and family environment. The acquisition process mainly occurred during early childhood interaction with parents and extended family members who are fluent in the Sabu language. However, the intensity and consistency of Sabu language use at home significantly influenced the level of fluency among second-generation speakers. Some participants reported a passive understanding of the language but were less confident in speaking actively. This indicates that although exposure exists, the process is not always followed by complete language proficiency, especially if Indonesian is more dominant in daily interaction. This finding aligns with Krashen's (1988) theory of second language acquisition, particularly regarding the importance of comprehensible input and a natural, low-stress environment for language learning.

### 2. Domains of Sabu Language Use

The use of Sabu language among the second generation of *Sabunesse* migrants is mostly limited to specific social domains, such as family, cultural ceremonies, and religious events. According to Fishman's (1972) domain theory, language choice is closely related to the setting and participants. In this study, the Sabu language was found to be predominantly used in private or intimate domains such as communication with parents or grandparents at home, traditional ceremonies (e.g., funerals, weddings), and church events that involve the older generation. In contrast, in public domains such as school, workplace, and peer groups, the participants preferred to use Bahasa Indonesia, which is more widely understood and socially accepted in the urban context of Kupang.

In conclusion, while there is evidence of intergenerational transmission of the Sabu language, it is limited in scope and usage. The dominant use of Indonesian in public and semi-private domains contributes to the gradual reduction of Sabu language fluency among the younger generation.

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