

## Exploring Devayan Language Maintenance among Parents in Simeulue Regency, Indonesia

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Received: 25-01-2026; Accepted: 04-04-2026; Published: 09-05-2026

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the parents' efforts and their attitudes to maintain Devayan language within non-formal domain, and factors that influence the preservation of the Devayan language among parents in Simeulue Regency, Indonesia. Drawing on qualitative descriptive methods, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation, involving six Devayan-speaking parents. The findings demonstrated that Devayan remains actively maintained through consistent intergenerational transmission to their children, positive parental language attitudes, and dense local speech networks that extend beyond the household into neighborhoods, markets, and social gatherings. Parents play a central role by establishing Devayan as the dominant home language, modelling consistent speaking the Devayan with their children, and embedding language use within culturally meaningful activities. Parents are highly aware of the importance of passing on the Devayan language to their children as a cultural heritage that must be preserved. These practices position Devayan not merely as a communicative tool, but as a marker of identity for Devayan community. The study contributes to heritage language maintenance by highlighting the synergistic relationship between parents' consistency and community-level validation in language use. The findings suggest that effective language maintenance emerges from everyday practices grounded in affective commitment of parents to their children, cultural transmission, and adaptive bilingualism.

**Key Word:** Language maintenance, Devayan language, Parents

### INTRODUCTION

Heritage Languages (HL) in Indonesia are vital component of cultural identity of the community (Fransori et al., 2023), social memory, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. These languages are not merely a means of communication, but also a means of passing on values, norms, and customs that have existed for centuries (Amery, 2019). However, the use of HL is currently declining and face pressure from dominant national and global languages, not only among the younger generation but also parents as robust agent for intergenerational transmission of HL. This is due to the dominance use of Indonesian language in non-formal domain and Indonesian as an official language in formal domain, particularly in education that prioritizes Indonesian over local languages. Also, intense penetration of foreign cultures through social media and the internet, for example in the way young people speak words such as "vibes" or "savage" from English are often used, exacerbate the position of Indigenous languages. This



sociolinguistic shift has placed many heritage languages at risk of marginalization that deplete the domain use of language in non-formal settings (Ansori, 2019).

Devayan language, one of the HL in Indonesia that plays an important role in shaping the cultural identity of the Devayan community in Labuhan Bakti Village, Simeulue, also experiences similar challenges. Based on initial observations, it appears that the Devayan language is used more by the older generation, while the young generation tends to communicate more frequently in Indonesian. This situation indicates a language shift that could have a serious impact on the future of the Devayan language. If this condition continues without any preservation efforts particularly among the Devayan parents, the Devayan language is at risk of shifting as the number of speakers decreases. Efforts can be made particularly by parents as part of its community to preserve their language including introducing customs, traditional songs, oral stories, and the use of the Devayan language in everyday life in non-formal domain in particular, home domain.

Existing research on language shift and maintenance in Indonesia has largely focused on patterns of language loss within the family domain, highlighting the decline of heritage language use in favor of Indonesian one (Akbar et al., 2022; Aziz et al., 2021; Nopus & Riandi, 2021; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b, 2022c, 2023), leaving the gap on the issues of how a heritage language should be preserved by parents as the robust agents in the process of the language maintenance, and what factors impact on the Devayan maintenance among parents in non-formal domains. Addressing this gap, the present study explores how the Devayan language is maintained by parents both inside and outside the home, and identifies the key factors supporting parents' practices as a spoken language in non-formal settings. Having said so, the study aims to (1) examine parental attitudes and their efforts in Devayan language practices in the home and outside home domains, and (2) identify sociocultural and attitudinal factors that contribute to language maintenance. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to heritage language maintenance literature and offer insights relevant to language policy and revitalization efforts in multilingual settings for heritage language maintenance.

Language maintenance is a way to maintain a language from language shifts that results in the extinction of a language. Language maintenance is more related to attitudes or assessments of a language to continue using that language among other languages. According to Chaer (as cited in Nisah et al., 2020), language maintenance can occur in a language community that continues to use its mother tongue that is usually mastered by its speakers from generation to generation. Additionally, language maintenance refers to the continued use of a language as a speech community despite competition from more dominant languages (Ostler, 2011). This definition clearly explains that language maintenance is an effort, method, or process to protect, maintain, and preserve the mother tongue of a

particular community, society, or ethnic group so that it does not experience shifts or even extinction. In HL contexts, language maintenance is closely tied to intergenerational transmission in home and non-formal domains, speaker attitudes, and the availability of meaningful domains of use (Ansori, 2019; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022c, 2023). The family domain is the most critical site for heritage language (Ewing, 2014; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022c, 2023) because parents' beliefs, attitudes, and habitual practices in shaping children's linguistic repertoires (Romanowski, 2021). Positive parental attitudes toward a heritage language, with consistent use at home, significantly increase the successful transmission of Heritage Language (HL) to young generation. Recent studies highlight the importance of adaptive bilingual strategies, including controlled code-switching, which allow families to balance heritage language maintenance with participation in wider society (Gorter & Berardi-wiltshire, 2025).

According to Chaer (2004), language loyalty and prides of its speakers is part of positive attitude to encourages it's speakers to preserve, develop their language, and use it as a symbol of identity and unity. Furthermore, the continuity in the transfer of language from generations to generations is the due to high loyalty. Many studies have been conducted to explore the relation between speakers' attitude and HL maintenance as speech community in non-formal domains. Research conducted by Nisah et al. (2020) in the Bajau Samma Tribe Area in Jenebora Village, Penajam District, North Penajam Paser Regency examined efforts to preserve regional languages that face the threat of extinction due to the decreasing number of speakers and language shifts in society. The results of showed that language preservation is impacted by several factors, including speaker concentration, continuity of language transfer to the younger generation, loyalty to the mother tongue, language attitudes of young people, and language use in certain social groups. These efforts reflect the importance of language preservation as part of the cultural identity of the Bajau Samma people. Similarly, the research conducted by Ntelu et al., (2022) on the preservation of the Bajo language in Boalemo Regency examined the preservation of regional languages that faced challenges to the number of speakers. This study specifically examines the preservation of the Bajo language in Bajo Village, Tilamuta District, Boalemo Regency, with the pressure of Bajo language dominance in the community and how this causes the shift of other minority regional languages. The research revealed that the local community, the majority of whom have a Bajo ethnic background, is more dominant in using Bajo language than other regional languages. Dominance is manifested in community attitudes that include the selection, use, and maintenance of the Bajo language as part of their identity. This situation also has an impact on the shift of other minority regional languages in the area, as well as being a strong indicator of the preservation of the Bajo language in Bajo Village.

Previous research (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022a, 2021, 2023) on the attitudes of parents toward their heritage language in Aceh and their

implications in the intergenerational transmission of heritage languages highlighted the influence use of Acehnese heritage language as a mother tongue. The results of the study undelighted how these attitudes affect the continuity of languages among the younger generation. The study showed that parents' negative attitudes towards their heritage languages are strongly influenced by their higher educational background that have them shifted from using Acehnese in non-formal domains to Indonesian language. In contrast, parents with lower educational backgrounds have stronger self-esteem to use their heritage languages in speech communities in non-formal domains without feeling intimidated. However, there is a difference between parents' statements and their practices in passing on their mother tongue to their children. Although some parents have strong self-esteem in their heritage languages and consider it important for their children and domains, the family is the best place for their children to learn their heritage language, but they do not speak or pass it on to their children as a mother tongue due to educational pressures.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses descriptive research to describe a phenomenon or situation in detail. The techniques used in data collection for this research were observation and interviews. The observation technique was carried out by the researcher by observing the **parents** when communicating using the Devayan language, in daily activities and at home. The data were **also gathered from** the results of semi-structure interviews as the main data collection technique. The interviews were conducted when the required information is known from the outset (Santoso et al., 2021). Six parents were involved, fathers and mothers of each of three family members.

All informants were native speakers and aged between 28 and 50 years old who have young children. The interviews were conducted covering topics related to the use of Devayan as a speech community in home domain and in non-formal domain outside of home. Examples of questions included; what language was used, how Devayan language was use at home with their children, and outside the homesuch as at weddings, when talking with friends, and when shopping. The research Data is coded in table 1, as followed:

**Table 1. Data codification**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Age</b>
Kg 1-a	34
Kg 1-i	32
Kg 2-a	50
Kg 2-i	48
Kg 3-a	47
Kg 3-i	42

Description:

- Family 1-Father (Kg 1-f)
- Family 1-Mother (Kg 1-m)

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study highlighted that the use of the Devayan language is still active by the community in their daily lives, across various domains, both within the family contexts and in broader social spaces. Within the family environment, the Devayan language remains the primary language used in daily conversations between parents and children, including between grandparents and grandchildren such as giving advice, conveying instructions, or having casual conversations. The use of Devayan is also observed in community activities, such as in coffee shops, or when residents gather in the field. This finding is in line with previous work (Mascita et al., 2021), that one of the efforts to preserve a language is by using it in everyday communication. This language creates a more intimate, warm, and humorous atmosphere. Even in funny stories or light conversations, the use of Devayan feels more expressive and enjoyable. Moreover, based on the results of interviews and direct observations in the field, the researcher found several factors that influence the preservation of the Devayan. One of the most salient factors is parents being active using Devayan Language in home domain. Overall, the parents' efforts and these factors are described in the following table 2 and table 3.

**Table 2. Parents' Attitude and Efforts in Language Maintenance**

No.	Domains	Efforts to Preserve the Devayan Language	Data Evidence	Analytical Interpretation	Impact on Devayan Language Maintenance
1.	Home	Cultural Transmission	Involving children in Devayan traditional ceremonies (e.g. weddings)	Use of Devayan in weddings, although when mixed with outside customs	Links language to cultural identity and heritage
		Parents' Language Choice	Parents demonstrate when and why Devayan or Indonesian is used	Devayan used with co-ethnics; Indonesian used only for outsiders	Teaches children pragmatic and respectful bilingualism
	Identity Socialisation	Emphasizing Devayan as the "appropriate" language among Devayan people	"We are Devayan people, so it is better to use Devayan"	Strengthens emotional attachment and language loyalty	
2.	Non-Formal Domain	Social Interaction with Peers	Using Devayan when talking with friends	Friends speak Devayan, so Devayan is used	Expands domains of use

				beyond the home
	Intergenerational Community Use	Continuing to use Devayan with relatives or friends who have lived outside the region	Still using Devayan with long-absent community members	Reinforces long-term language retention
	Situational Language Choice	Adjusting language based on interlocutor's competence	Devayan with native speakers; Indonesian with non-speakers	Maintains Devayan without excluding outsiders

**Table 3. Factors Influencing Devayan Language Maintenance**

No.	Domains	Factors	Data Evidence	Impact on Devayan Language Maintenance
1.	Home	Intergeneration Transmission of Heritage Language	Parents teach Devayan from early childhood through constant exposure and imitation	Ensures early acquisition and fluency
		The consistency of parental language practice	Both parents consistently use Devayan in daily interaction	Establishes Devayan as the dominant home language
		Daily use as a speech community	Devayan used in routine activities (eating, advising, joking)	Normalizes and automatizes language use
		Sibling interaction	Parents view Devayan as identity and ancestral heritage	Motivates sustained transmission
		Controlled code-switching	Indonesian used only for clarification or school-related topics	Prevents language shift while supporting bilingualism
2.	Outside home domain	Positive community environment	Neighborhoods and relatives commonly use Devayan	Reinforces language use beyond home
		Speech community in public interaction	Devayan used in markets and social encounters with co-ethnics	Validates language in public spaces
		Peer interaction	Children use Devayan with siblings and Devayan-speaking peers	Strengthens confidence and fluency

Parental language attitudes emerged as a key factor influencing the Devayan language maintenance. Participants repeatedly expressed pride in Devayan as their mother tongue and as a marker of ethnic identity. Importantly, none of the participants reported feelings of shame associated with using Devayan, even in the

presence of Indonesian, the national and dominant language. This aligns with previous research suggesting that positive orientations toward a heritage language significantly increase the likelihood of successful intergenerational transmission (Romanowski, 2021).

The language attitudes of the Devayan parents, particularly their sense of pride and loyalty to the Devayan language, are central to this. The Devayan people view the Devayan language as a symbol of identity, self-identity, and ancestral heritage that must be preserved. This sense of pride is evident in the use of the Devayan language in social interactions, daily life, and traditional ceremonies. Furthermore, language loyalty is reflected in the Devayan people's efforts to maintain their use of the Devayan language despite the influence of other, more dominant languages. This positive attitude prevents the Devayan parents from abandoning their language, allowing the preservation of the Devayan language to continue and be passed on to future generations. Language loyalty is the desire of an individual or community to support, maintain, and preserve the language, even, if necessary, preventing it from being influenced by other languages. In contrast, the parents who abandoned their heritage language results in reluctant to use it in all domain even to their children (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2023).

Furthermore, the parents' explicit awareness of the risk of language loss due to the dominance of Indonesian motivate intentional maintenance practices, such as sustained home use of the Devayan. Such findings resonate with previous notion (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022c; Romanowski, 2021) where ideological commitment and emotional attachment drive sustained linguistic effort. This finding is significant, as previous studies have shown that HL are more likely to be maintained when they remain functionally relevant beyond intimate family contexts (Zen, 2021). In this sense, non-formal domains operate as reinforcement spaces, strengthening children's exposure and normalizing Devayan as a language of speech community for their children

Efforts to preserve the language through culture are evident in the continued use of the Devayan language in various customary and traditional community activities, such as wedding ceremonies and counseling. In addition to cultural practices, the preservation of the Devayan language is also carried out through social interactions in daily life. The Devayan parents still actively use the Devayan language when communicating with neighbors, peers, and relatives, especially in informal situations. The Devayan language is used when working together, and in buying and selling activities at the market. This intense and ongoing social interaction ensures that the Devayan language continues to be actively used and is not replaced by other languages. This is in line with Yunus' (2023) statement that a language will survive if it is used consistently in daily social interactions, passed down through the family environment, and maintained through education and culture. This key finding confirms how pivotal it is for parents to consistently use their HL to prevent from a threat as suggested from previous work (Idaryani & Fidyati,

2023). Beyond the home, parents actively maintained Devayan through daily social interactions such as neighborhoods, markets, and peer networks. Parents consistently using Devayan when interacting with friends, relatives, and community members who shared the same linguistic background. These practices position Devayan as the default language of solidarity and belonging within the local speech community that demonstrates that the language retains instrumental value in everyday life.

The process of maintaining and transferring the Devayan language to children is done naturally through habit. Mothers use Devayan in their daily lives, especially when at home. With this habit, children were extensively exposed to Devayan. Over time, they become accustomed to it, understand it, and eventually are able to imitate speech in Devayan. This shows that the continuity of language transfer from the parent to the children is still going well, because Devayan is still used as the main means of communication within the family. Thus, the consistent use of Devayan in the home environment is the main way of transmitting the language so that it remains alive and is not lost among the younger generation.

The role of parents is prevalent in the inheritance of HL. Parents are the first to introduce and teach the Devayan language to their children from an early age. This is part of language preservation efforts, because through the family, children learn the language naturally and become accustomed to using it in their daily lives. That way, the Devayan language continues to be used and is not lost over time. The parents are highly aware of the importance of passing on the Devayan language to their children. They realize that children are the successors who will preserve and continue the use of the Devayan language in the future. If children are not taught their regional language from an early age, the language will slowly be abandoned and may disappear because there are no more speakers. By teaching the Devayan language to their children, parents play a major role in preserving the existence and continuity of the regional language so that it remains alive from generation to generation. *"The way I teach the Devayan language to children is simple. I get them used to hearing and speaking Devayan. For example, when I give advice, I always use Devayan. An example of advice I often give them is, "daifak jahek- jahek mek sira, sinuk ba sira maro yang mambantumo," (don't be mean to your younger siblings, because when you are in trouble, they will be the ones to help you) (Kg3-f).*

By giving advice in Devayan, children not only learn the language, but also understand the moral and cultural values contained within it. This method is very effective in preserving the language, because language is not only used as a means of communication, but also as a medium for instilling character and Devayan cultural identity (Ibrahim & Usman, 2021; Lubis, 2019; Usman & Yusuf, 2020). Through the habit of hearing and speaking Devayan every day, children will grow up with good language skills and a sense of pride in their own language. The inheritance of the Devayan language has become a tradition passed down from

generation to generation within families. Parents play a big role in instilling language skills from an early age, even from the stage of learning to say their first words. This illustrates that the family is the main place for preserving the Devayan language. When the language learning process is carried out from an early age and continuously, the regional language will remain alive in the community, even though the influence of other languages is getting stronger.

Parents have an important role in preserving the Devayan language through language habits at home. By using Devayan more often than Indonesian, parents indirectly teach their children to be accustomed to using the regional language. This is a concrete form of language preservation, because the process of inheritance is carried out from an early age within the family environment. If children are accustomed to speaking Devayan at home, then the language will continue to be used and will not be easily replaced by other languages. That way, the Devayan language can continue to live on and be passed down to the next generation. The use of Devayan in the family has become a natural habit. Speaking with her husband in Devayan indicates that the language is still actively used in daily life at home. This habit plays a very important role in language preservation, because a language that continues to be used in the family environment will remain alive and will not easily disappear.

The tangible process of passing on the Devayan language within the family is prevalent. Children who are fluent in Devayan indicate that the language is still actively used and alive within the family. When children can use Devayan fluently in various situations, whether joking, talking seriously, or interacting with other families, it is proof that the language is still the main language in their daily lives. The husband and wife share the same views and habits in teaching Devayan to their children. Both of them use Devayan when speaking at home, so the children get direct examples from both parents. This unity makes it easier for children to learn and get used to using the language every day. This attitude shows that the joint role of parents is very important in the process of inheriting and preserving regional languages within the family environment. The parents have a shared awareness of the importance of keeping the Devayan language at home. By using Devayan in educating their children, parents set a direct example for their children to get used to communicating in that language. This is important for language preservation, because children will find it easier to master and love their heritage language if they see their parents using it consistently. Thus, parental cooperation in this matter helps ensure that the Devayan language is not lost and is passed on to the next generation.

The Devayan language become part of the family's daily life. The language is no longer something that is taught formally, but has become a natural habit in communication. Habits like this are very important for language preservation, because languages that continue to be used in everyday life will remain alive and will not be replaced by other languages. By making Devayan the main language at home, these families play a major role in maintaining the continuity and

preservation of the Devayan language amid the changing times.. When talking to their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, they always use Devayan without mixing in Indonesian. Moreover, when playing with siblings or friends who are also Devayan, they continue to use the Devayan language. Because they have been accustomed to it since childhood, they are more fluent and comfortable using the Devayan language. For example, when eating, helping their parents, or joking around, they automatically use the Devayan language.

The habit of children using the Devayan language from an early age shows the success of parents in instilling the value of regional languages to the younger generation. With the continued use of the Devayan language at home and when interacting with peers, children grow up with confidence and pride in their own language. This situation also shows that the family is the main place for preserving and passing on regional languages. When children are accustomed to hearing and speaking Devayan from an early age, their language skills will continue to develop naturally. In addition, interactions at home and in the surrounding environment using the Devayan language create an atmosphere that supports language preservation. Thus, the family serves as the primary bulwark in maintaining and sustaining the use of Devayan. As stated by Kg 5-i, "*The children at home are accustomed to using Devayan because our parents also speak Devayan. They are now fluent, and their pronunciation is even correct, just like their parents used it. When they visit relatives, they still use Devayan.*" The family sphere, as the smallest social sphere, plays a crucial role in achieving language preservation. The use of regional languages in daily life contributes to the preservation of regional languages (Alimin & Yuniarti, 2022).

The use of the Devayan language in public places is a form of pride and identity for its speakers. By using the Devayan language when interacting in public spaces, such as in the market, speakers indirectly introduce and maintain the existence of the language in society. This also allows others to recognize the origin and culture of its users. In relation to language preservation, the habit of using Devayan in public places is one way to keep this language alive and known to many people. The attitude of pride and not being ashamed to a heritage language by parents is an important factor in preserving Devayan use from generation to generation.

The absence of shame indicates that speakers have a positive attitude and appreciate their cultural heritage (Nopus & Riandi, 2021). The Devayan language is not just a means of communication, but also a symbol of identity and a legacy from ancestors that must be preserved. When someone feels proud to use the Devayan language, it encourages others, especially the younger generation, to join in preserving it. This attitude can prevent the Devayan language from becoming extinct, because a language will continue to live as long as it is still used and valued by its speakers. The pride in using their language is the main basis for preserving the language. By considering Devayan as their identity, speakers realize that

language is not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of identity and cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. This attitude shows a high level of awareness of the importance of preserving a heritage language so that they remain preserved to future generations. The absence of shame shows that the speaker has a positive attitude towards the Devayan language. When someone feels confident using their local language outside their home environment, it means that they are introducing the Devayan cultural identity to others. The speaker is proud to use the Devayan language because it is a legacy from their ancestors.

The findings reveal that language maintenance is sustained through culturally embedded practices, deliberate language choice in social interaction, and adaptive bilingual strategies. These efforts reflect both implicit and explicit family language policies, supported by a broader community ecology. The use of the Devayan language is still maintained as speech community outside the home, although its use is highly dependent on who the interlocutor is. If the interlocutor is an active Devayan speaker, then the speaker will continue to use the Devayan language. The use of Devayan is still strong in daily activities, such as in shopping at the market. The speaker chooses to use Devayan because the seller also uses the same language, making communication easier and more familiar. Neighborhoods and relatives commonly use Devayan reinforcing Devayan language use beyond home by parents. Devayan used in markets and social encounters with co-ethnics validates language in public spaces.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Devayan language is still actively spoken by parents, especially within families and in local communities. The Devayan language is used in daily communication between family members, such as between parents and children, as well as outside of home such as at coffee shops and traditional market place. The Devayan language is not only as a means of communication but also as a form of cultural identity that is preserved by parents. Parents are highly aware of the importance of passing on the Devayan language to their children as a cultural heritage that must be preserved. This is evident in their habit of using the Devayan language at home so that their children become accustomed to it and are able to understand and use it in their daily lives.

The limitation of the research lies in the research location, which focused on only one village, so the results cannot fully represent the entire Devayan-speaking community in the Simeulue region. Other villages in Simeulue may have different socio-cultural conditions, so language maintenance in other areas may show different patterns. Furthermore, this study only focused on observations within the family interaction in home domain so language use in schools, workplaces, social media, and religious institutions was excluded. These environments have a significant impact on regional languages, especially for the younger generation who interact extensively through digital media and in formal

education. Therefore, further research is recommended to seek the use of Devayan language as speech community from various generations and community members.

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