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The language shift of Bahasa Melayu Langkat among teenage speakers in Stabat, Langkat Regency, Indonesia: A sociolinguistic study

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the shifts in the local character of BML by teenage speakers in Stabat city, Langkat regency through code-mixing and code-switching phenomena. This research used qualitative approach. The observation was done to obtain the data from several locations in Stabat city where the language is used such as homes, markets, public places, places of worship, and places where the traditional ceremonies take place. The data collection was performed by using disguise and inducement techniques. The results prove that the lingual forms appear in the interactions of teenagers' verbal communication with various interlocutors. It also indicates that there are code switching and code-mixing usages in different domains such as in family and neighbors. In code mixing events, mixed forms of BML and Bahasa Indonesia (BI) appear. These mixed forms imply a loss of identity in the teenagers' community because the shifting forms are typical BML forms which characterize the BML which is different from the BI. In cultural lingual way, the forms which are the markers of identity for BML speakers have been shifted to lingual forms which are markers of identity for BI speakers.

KEYWORDS: Bahasa Melayu Langkat, linguistic identity, Malay community, sociolinguistics, teenage speakers

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1. Introduction

Bahasa Melayu Langkat (henceforth BML) is one of Malay dialects in North Sumatra. The Malay language in North Sumatra is experiencing a decline in vitality, with threats to its transmission and usage domains (Mulyadi, Dardanila, & Yusuf, 2024; Pramuniati, Mahriyuni, & Syarfina, 2024; Syarfina, Zein, & Yusuf, 2024; Yusuf, Mulyadi, Aswani, & Siregar, 2023). This includes BML that spoken in Stabat city as the capital city of Langkat regency. The survival of BML in Stabat can be seen from the regeneration process by its speakers. In the regeneration process, there are strong indications that the teenage speakers have no longer used a number of vocabularies due to the loss of some socio-cultural and socio-ecological elements in the Malayan community in Stabat.

The cultural changes (from traditional to modern) or regional changes (from rural to urban areas) impact the loss of several lexical icons (Yoga & Malau, 2020; Yuhdi, Tansliova, Barus, Wasilah, & Harahap, 2025). It is suspected that there are words for animals, plants, traditional tools, types of greetings, household items, traditional tools, and so on have been reduced or no longer used. The reduction or extinction of natural and cultural elements is assumed to have an impact on the loss of the speaker's conception of these entities. Apart from that, the multi-ethnic socio-cultural conditions trigger the language choices during the communication interactions (McConvell & Florey, 2005; Zielińska & Księżyk, 2021). The condition of macro-linguistic impact emerged the linguistic diversity and language shifts that develop in the usage of certain domains.

The language survival in sociolinguistics concerns the issue of whether a language still survives or not (Jamallullail & Nordin, 2023; Maher, 2013). This means that it is still used in daily communication interactions by the speakers (Amin, 2020; Emike, Sanni, Agu, & Olusanya, 2021). It naturally occurs because it is related to the values contained in the language. In the natural language usage, two processes occur which are caused by the speakers' behavior, they are the language maintenance process and the language shift process. Language survival can be observed based on domains of language use. The more a language is used in the realm of language use, the stronger the language survives.

The meaning of bilingualism is very broad and relative to one particular view. It is understood as a complex linguistic, psychological, and social behaviors. The boundaries and understanding given to bilingualism are generally determined based on the speaker's mastery and language usage (Heller, 2007) as well as speaker's ability to use multiple languages for different purposes and with varying proficiency levels (Nicoladis & Montanari, 2016). The other expert mentions that it is an individual characteristic, not a feature of language itself, and arises from contact between different monolingual communities (Mackey, 1962).

In relation to the condition in Indonesia, bilingualism is a prevalent phenomenon in Indonesia, with most Indonesians using multiple languages in daily life (Apriana & Sutrisno, 2022; Arjulayana, 2018; Hanafiah, Mono, & Yusuf, 2021; Insani, Himmah, Royani, & Fudhaili, 2024; Sugianto, 2018). This phenomenon also affects the young speaker. The linguistic effects of bilingualism in language shift ecologies is where younger speakers use the majority language instead of their ancestral language (Grenoble & Osipov, 2023) .

Language shift is one of the studies in sociolinguistics. It is a change in the form and meaning of a language until the collective phenomena appear that is when a speech community leaves its language and switches to another language (Abtahian, Cohn, & Pepinsky, 2016). This collective phenomenon is caused by the dynamics of a multilingual society with various social aspects within it especially in Indonesia (Al-Auwal, Amery, & Green, 2024; Farisiyah & Zamzani, 2018; Musgrave, 2014). In the context of ethnic diversity, not just urbanization, it drives language shift towards the national language in Indonesia (Pepinsky, Abtahian, & Cohn, 2020). But, the process of language revitalization in Indonesia is shifting to focus on preserving all local languages, not just minority or endangered ones (Budiono, Yanita, & Syarfina, 2024). That inlcudes the the preservation of BML as one of local languages and dialect variation of Malay language in North Sumatra.

In multilingual societies, language contact is unavoidable (Hanafiah et al., 2021). It is a crucial aspect of sociolinguistics, given the prevalence of multilingualism worldwide (Abtahian et al., 2016). The role, position and function of one language cause language choice. If the role, position and function of language begin weak, language shift or language extinction will occur, and the speech community will use another language in various domains of language use and leave the language. Moreover, the realization of language contact can be seen in the use of code-switching and code-mixing.

There have been several researches on language shift in Indonesia such as in Karonese language (Kaban,

2024), Acehnese (Al-Auwal et al., 2024; Muhammad, 2013), and Javanese (Amalia, Muhajir, & Ripai, 2024; Poetri, Ramadhina, Loka, Tryana, & Sunarsi, 2023; Wahyuningsih, 2019; Zentz, 2014). Regarding with Youth speaker, it was observed in Javanese language (Andriyanti, 2019), Karonese (Nurmaliya, Ginting, & Tambunan, 2022), Acehnese (Ismail, Fhonna, & Nasir, 2021), American (McCarty, Romero-Little, & Zepeda, 2006), African (Kamwangamalu, 2003), Turkish (Sevinç, 2016; Sofu, 2009), Chammoro language (Kai & Bevacqua, 2021), Dhatki and Mawari (Jhatial & Khan, 2021), and Xhosa language (De Klerk, 2000). Dealing with Malay language studies, it was done in Singapore (Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010; Mohamad Kassim, 2021; Ng, Tan, Pauwels, & Cavallaro, 2024), Malaysia (Abdalla, 2006; Renddan, Yasran Abdul Aziz, & Aina Dani, 2020), Northern Borneo (Martin, 2005). In relation to this phenomenon, this research aims to explore language shift in the local character of BML among teenage speakers in Stabat, Langkat regency, Indonesia. This study contributes to the growing body of research on language shift by focusing on an underexplored linguistic context—namely, the shift in the local character of Bahasa Melayu Langkat (BML) among teenage speakers in Stabat, Langkat Regency, Indonesia. While previous studies have examined language shift in various Indonesian regional languages such as Karonese, Acehnese, and Javanese, as well as among youth speakers in both local and international contexts, research specifically addressing BML remains scarce. By investigating the patterns and factors influencing language shift among BML-speaking adolescents, this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of language maintenance and erosion in a specific cultural and regional setting.

2. Method

This study employed qualitative approach. Observation was used to directly obtain factual and authentic data about several real language behaviors of the Malay teenager's community. The observation data were obtained from several locations where the language is used such as homes, markets, public places, places of worship, and places where the traditional ceremonies take place in Stabat, Langkat regency, Indonesia. The data collection was carried out using disguise and inducement technique. By using this technique, the researcher collaborates with the subjects who were being observed, but they systematically do not know that they are being researched (observer paradox) so that the data obtained is natural data, not made-up data. The direct involvement of the researchers in the community allows to obtain complete, accurate and comprehensive qualitative data. The collected data were then identified and selected to obtain a data corpus. Only the data corpus was used as material for analysis and discussion.

3. Result

There are several lingual forms of BML that experience the shifts. These changes occur at the lexical and grammatical levels. A distinctive characteristic of BML compared BI is the vowel sounds /u/ dan /i/ which often appears in closed tribes. Phonemically, these sounds are actually /u/ and /i/. Since there have been shifting and changing, the sound changed into an open vowel. Because there has been a decrease and change, the sound becomes an open high vowel [U] dan [I]. In teenagers' utterances, the two vowel sounds that characterize BML have experienced a shift. The sound shifts to follow BI's speech behavior. Because in BI the two vowels are /u/ and /i/, in the speech behavior of BML speakers they are also /u/ and /i/.

The strong relationship of BML to BI in the language kinship system causes a lot of vocabularyies are the same in both languages (Ediwarman & Syahwardi, 2023; Wahya & Arong, 2020). However, not all the same words in BML have the same meaning as BI. In a language there are many synonymous words as in BML. In BML, one of the synonymous words has developed and is used more widely. Some of the words that are widely used by Mel speakers are words that are also used in BI. For teenage speakers, words that are widely used are what they are familiar with, meanwhile other synonymous words are no longer known.

The loss of speaker's conceptual in native language words can be caused by the semantic specificity of the word. In the meaning components, many specific meanings are found. An object, thing, or event will be interpreted differently by the speakers because of the differences in the form, function, condition, size, process, result, and so on for examples, BML speakers specifically distinguish between *sengam* and *harum* (fragrant).

The speakers' conceptual ideas are formed through their sensory experiences of nature. These conceptual ideas are represented through lexicogrammatical languages that are mutually understood when they interact. In communication interactions through language, speakers use lexical items recorded in their minds. A number of

lexical items recorded in the speaker's mind are prefunctional lexical items, not as a words list as arranged in a dictionary. Changes in nature and in society have brought changes in the speaker's conception of new worldly treasures.

Language is a form of expression for individuals and the community who uses it. Thus, BML is an expression of BML individual and community speakers. In the language usage by the teenage speakers, it was found that a number of words have been shifted in the meanings. In the initial explanation above, an example of a shift in the meaning of a word in BML has been given which has also shifted to a word in BI. In BML, the symptoms of speakers' misperception of words were found. If this misperception is collective, there will be a shift in the meaning of the words. In BI, the meaning of "very" occurs through the lexical addition *sangat* and *sekali*, for examples *sangat cantik* or *cantik sekali*. The BML grammatical structure is considered more stable than the sound and lexical structures. There are not many examples of the grammatical structure of BML changing or shifting. The lingual forms in code switching and code mixing, several examples of lingual forms that changed or shifted have been presented.

3.1. The shift of the Local Character
There are several lingual forms of BML that experience the shifts. These shapes are typical BML shapes. These changes occur at the lexical and grammatical levels.

3.1.1. Sound Changes and Shifts
A distinctive characteristic of BML compared to BI is the vowel sounds /u/ dan /i/ which often appears in closed tribes. Phonemically, these sounds are actually /u/ and /i/. Since there have been shifting and changing, the sound changed into an open vowel. Because there has been a decrease and change, the sound becomes an open high vowel [U] dan [I].

In teenagers' utterances, the two vowel sounds that characterize BML have experienced a shift. The sound shifts to follow BI's speech behavior. Because in BI the two vowels are /u/ and /i/, in the speech behavior of BML speakers they are also /u/ and /i/. The sounds [U] and [I] as shown above have changed and shifted to become as follows.

[bu-{Uk]	[bu-ruk]	bad
[l«m-bUt]	[l«m-but]	soft
[sa-kIt]	[sa-kit]	sick
[p«-dIh]	[p«-dih]	pain

BML also has a distinctive consonant sound that makes the BML speakers easy to recognize. The typical consonant sound is a vibrating consonant sound /{/.

[{«øah]	'becek'	muddy
[su{ut]	'surut'	recede
[k«lambE{]	'kelapa'	coconut

The /{/ consonant has shifted along with the shift in BML in the teenage community. For some teenage speakers, especially those whose L1 are not BML, the /{/ consonant is often pronounced with /r/. Many of them are unable to pronounce this consonant. The phenomenon has become symptomatic and is commonplace among the Mel community in Stabat. Thus, even though the language they use is BML, they pronounce /{/with /r/.

Besides marking the phenomenon of language shift, the change in language sounds also marks the difference in speech style between the old and young speakers. The speech style of young people is easy to recognize because the typical BML sounds that are still used by older speakers have changed when they are used by younger speakers. There are not only typical sounds, but also several verbs that have sound changes in the consonants at the edge of the syllable. The consonant that has shifted is /t/. The articulator of consonant /t/ is alveolar and appears after the vowel /i/ shifts to the glottal articulator [ʔ]. Thus, the /t/ consonant at the edge of the syllable shifts to the sound [ʔ] in BML. The change can be seen, for example, in the following lexical items.

-[l«mbit]	[l«mbi?]	'lembek'	soft
[campit]	[campi?]	'campak'	throw away
[l«ntit]	[l«nti?]	'mentel'	overacted

The tendency to adapt the sounds in BML to BI sounds is also reflected in the shift from the [u] vowel at the beginning of the word to the [o] vowel. This shift occurs if the meaning of the BML word is the same as BI one. This sound shift can be seen, for example, in the words [ubat] and [uta?]. These two words are pronounced [(bat] and [(ta?] as pronounced in BI. If there is a word pronounced in BML is the same as the pronunciation in BI, then in that word there is no sound shift. This can be seen for example in the word [ubah]. Since the meaning and pronunciation are in accordance with BI, the word is still pronounced [ubah], it does not change to [(bah].

3.1.2. Lexicon Changes and Shifts
The strong relationship of BML to BI in the language kinship system causes a lot of vocabularyies are the same in both languages. However, not all the same words in BML have the same meaning as BI as in the following examples:

Lexical	Meaning in BML	Meaning in BI
pusing	Putar (turn around)	Sakitkepala (headache)
sambang	Sarang tawon/lebah (bees nest)	Mendatangi yang tidak ada penghuninya /tempat kediaman (visit an empty house)
pangsa	ruang-ruang tempat isi (spaces for storing)	Matra dalam buah durian (something in the durian fruit)
nalar	Sering (often)	Daya pikir (The power of thinking)

Based on the lexical examples above, several things can be described about the lexical characteristics of BML related to BI lexical. First, there are the same lexical items with the same meaning in BML and BI. Second, there are different lexical items with different meanings in BML and BI. Third, there is the same lexical code but the meaning is different in BI. Fourth, there is a shift in the meaning after the BML lexical is used in BI. This linguistic originality relationship between BML and BI causes BML speakers easily switch lexically. Apart from the factor of language originality, social, cultural and ecological changes, Mel also has an impact on lexical shifts and even some BML lexical items have disappeared in the speakers' minds, especially in the young generation. The BML lexical shifts and changes are described below.

3.1.3. Synonymous Words
In a language there are many synonymous words as in BML. In BML, one of the synonymous words has developed and is used more widely. Some of the words that are widely used by Mel speakers are words that are also used in BI. For teenage speakers, words that are widely used are what they are familiar with, meanwhile other synonymous words are no longer known. The tendency of the speakers to always use these words is also caused by the desire to actualize them by using BI. Some examples of words that are no longer familiar to teenage speakers are given below.

tandik	'sengat'	(sting)
kenas	'nenas'	(pineapple)
jering	'jengkol'	(jengkol, a smelly fruit)
belinjam	'tomat'	(tomato)
balang	'toples'	(jar)
beledi	'baskom'	(bowl)
uan	'tunggu'	(wait)

The italics words in the example above are words in BML, while the words marked in single quotation marks

('...') are synonymous words in BML which are also words in BI. The quotation marks words are prefunctional and productive words used by the Mel youth community in Stabat. The teenage speakers' conceptual incomprehension of the italicized words has been proven through lexical competency tests.

3.1.4. Words with Special Meaning or Hyponymy

The loss of speaker's conceptual in native language words can be caused by the semantic specificity of the word. In the meaning components, many specific meanings are found. An object, thing, or event will be interpreted differently by the speakers because of the differences in the form, function, condition, size, process, result, and so on for examples, BML speakers specifically distinguish between *sengam* and *harum* (fragrant). *Sengam* is a fragrant odor produced by fruit while *harum* is a fragrant odor produced by perfume. Apart from that, BML also has a lexical term for unpleasant odors called *manggum* and strong odors called *mersing*. Semantically, *sengam, manggum*, and *mersing* are components of the meaning of odors which are hyponymous. The same example can be seen in the meaning components *laboh 'jatoh'* (fall) and *tetak 'potong'* (cut). Many of the adolescent generation do not understand the hyponymous words or words of a special nature conceptually. They understand better words that are hypernyms or words that have a general meaning. The BML speakers' conceptual loss of words with special meaning has an impact on BML lexical decrease. In fact, the more lexical items that can specifically express worldly entities, the richer the language is.

3.1.5. Words that Undergo Referential Changes

The speakers' conceptual ideas are formed through their sensory experiences of nature. These conceptual ideas are represented through lexicogrammatical languages that are mutually understood when they interact. In communication interactions through language, speakers use lexical items recorded in their minds. A number of lexical items recorded in the speaker's mind are prefunctional lexical items, not as a words list as arranged in a dictionary. Changes in nature and in society have brought changes in the speaker's conception of new worldly treasures. Many entities have decreases in quantity or disappeared altogether. This decrease or extinction is caused by natural and social events. As a result, for the new generation, the loss of their entity and non-involvement in various socio-cultural activities in their native environment causes a decline in their mastery of BML vocabulary. This is what happened to BML speakers in Stabat. Several examples of lexical items that are reduced or lost in the conceptualization of BML speakers are presented below.

tebin	'arah ke sungai'	(towards the river)
genohor	'dapur tempat masak gula'	(a kitchen where sugar is cooked)
seloko	'pelita yang berpenutup'	(a lamp with a cover)
lenggayan	'sejenis tangguk (dengan menahannya di air deras)'	(something used to hold fast flow of water)
lolo	'alat bunyi-bunyian yang terbuat dari batang padi'	(instrments made from rice stalks)

3.1.6. Traditional Phrases

Language is a form of expression for individuals and the community who uses it. Thus, BML is an expression of individual and community Mel speakers. The form of expression with BML shows Mel's identity as the speaker. However, for teenage speakers, their Malayan identity is starting to diminish because many of them no longer use BML. Even if they use BML, they no longer understand a lot of BML vocabulary, let alone the vocabulary with traditional situation. It is feared that the vocabulary like this will disappear from the BML repertoire because it is not functional for its speakers. These vocabulary words are explained below.

kebang	'hilang atau pergi entah ke mana'	(lost or gone somewhere)
pegana	'digunakan sembarangan'	(used carelessly)
ayam gogok	'ayam jantan'	(cock or rooster)
ceroh	'mencuci beras'	(washing rice)
tingkip	'habis sama sekali'	(completely finished)
seraya	'makna halus untuk kata menyuruh'	(polite usage for the word order)

3.1.7. Misperceived Words

In the language usage by the youth community, it was found that a number of words have been shifted in the meanings. In the initial explanation above, an example of a shift in the meaning of a word in BML has been given which has also shifted to a word in BI. In BML, the symptoms of speakers' misperception of words were found. If this misperception is collective, there will be a shift in the meaning of the words. The examples of misperceptions are as in *lasa* ('weak'), *penger* ('deaf'), *sakit* ('type of disease'), and *pusing* ('turn').

For *lasa*, many teenage speakers misinterpret it. For the speakers, *lasa* is defined as a physical form that is sick or old. This mstake arose because the respondent made a wrong analogy about the object or entity referred to *lasa*. So, it is not weakness that is referred to, but the subject who experiences the weakness, or the circumstances that cause a person's weakness. Likewise *penger*. *It* is a condition of not being able to hear other sounds because of one or several loud and dominant sounds, or deafness because of loud sounds. So *penger* is related to the ear, not the sound. Most speakers actually interpret *penger* as a sound. Most of them chose the meaning of *penger* as noisy, not deaf.

For *sakit*, the speakers misunderstand it because *sakit* and *pedeh* have one meaning. Although they have one component of meaning, the words *sakit* and *pedeh* are not synonymous so they cannot be interchanged. In BML, *sakit* is differentiated from *pedeh*. *Sakit* is used for any type of disease meanwhile *pedeh* is for pain. In BI, for the pain meaning, it is used *sakit* and for the type of disease it is used *sakit* as well. Since in BI this is applied, the tendency that occurs for BML speakers is that language patterns refer to BI language patterns. The same thing happens with the word *pusing*. The speaker assumes that *pusing* is a disease, even though *pusing* is the sufferer's feeling in which his head is spinning.

3.1.8. Words that Say Very Much

In BI, the meaning of "very" occurs through the lexical addition *sangat* and *sekali*, for examples *sangat cantik* or *cantik sekali*. In BML, besides using the word *betol* ('very') such as *lagak betol* (very beautiful), this is also found which already contains the meaning "very". Some examples of words that contain the meaning 'very' are below.

Luai	'sangat luas'	very wide
lali	'sangat matang'	very mature
hayak	'sangat banyak dimiliki'	having so much
galib	'sangat heran'	very surprised
letem	'sangat manis'	very sweet

The forms with the addition of the lexical *betol* are used more often by the Mel community than those with a separate lexical. For example, *lenten = lagak betol* (acting confident). The Mel's community understands *lagak betol* more than *lenten*. Over a long period of time and several generations, these forms with the lexical bases and single morphemes became unknown and no longer used.

3.1.9. Grammatical Changes and Shifts

The BML grammatical structure is considered more stable than the sound and lexical structures. There are not many examples of the grammatical structure of BML changing or shifting. The lingual forms in code switching and code mixing, several examples of lingual forms that changed or shifted have been presented. This shift tends to be influenced by BI's structure. Therefore, there have been appeared some BML utterances as follows.

Table 1. The similiraties of BML and BI forms

Mixed forms	in BML	in BI
engko ni	engko ne	kamu ini (Ah you)
sama engko	tang dikau	sama kamu/kepada kamu(with you/to you)
sama ia	tang dia	sama dia/kepada dia (with him/her to him/her)
kukata	Nyiku	saya bilang/saya katakan (I say)

The examples of phrases above are commonly used by the teenager speakers in Stabat. These forms have even

become the speech style in the youth community. This happens due to the closeness of form and structure between BML and the high intensity of BI usage in verbal communication activities between them. Other mixed forms are also found at the morphological level. They can be seen in the words discussed and introduced. In BML, the two derivative words are *dibicarakan* (talk about) and *ngenalkan* (introduce). The wwords become *dibicaraka* and *ngenalka*. In these two words the sound [n] appears at the end of the word so that it resembles the BI structure. This form is a mixture of affixes in BML and BI. This means that one part of the structure is BML and the other part BI.

In mixed structure between BML and BI, there also found in the morphosyntactic structure. For examples, *dipulangkannya, mulangkannya,* and *ngelehnya* (sending home)*,* The confusion in the form of *dipulangkannya* occurs because the speakers use in BML, meanwhile they use BI affix. For *mulangkannya*, the speakers use BML words and affixes but the structure refers to the BI one. The speakers do not know that as an active speaker, after the *mulangkannya* it should be followed by *–nya* so that the form becomes *mulangkadia*. The same thing happens to the word *ngelehnya*. The BML form should be *ngelehdia*.

4. Conclusions

The language choices of the teenagers' community in various domains show a leakage of diglossia in BI's usage by BML. The language choices of the teenagers' community expressed quantitatively through self-recognition are identical to the qualitative language choices during the communication interactions. The lingual forms appear in teenagers' verbal communication interactions with various interlocutors indicate the existence of mixed language forms (dual type of bilingualism). These mixed forms are caused by similarities in phonological and morphological structure with BI. Internally, the lingual forms of BML have experienced a shift due to the BI's influence, either at the sound level, lexical level or grammatical level. The shifting forms are the forms that become the local characteristics and character of the Mel community. These shifting local characteristics happen at the sound, lexical, and grammatical level.

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