Ternateno as a Portuguese Creole: A History and Sociolinguistic Study in Ternate
(Ternateno sebagai Portugis Kreol: Kajian Sejarah dan Sosiolinguistik di Ternate)

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Ternateno, a Portuguese-based creole language that developed in Ternate, North Maluku, through sustained language contact since the sixteenth century. It analyzes the creolization process, the social functions of Ternateno as a postcolonial minority language, and the ongoing language shift within its speech community. Ternateno blends Portuguese-derived vocabulary with structural influences from Malay and Ternate and functions as an identity marker for Portuguese-descendant Catholic communities. Today, the language faces serious endangerment due to declining numbers of active speakers and weakening intergenerational transmission under the dominance of Indonesian and Ternate Malay. The study aims to trace the historical creolization process, explain Ternateno's social and symbolic roles, and evaluate current patterns of language shift. A qualitative historical-sociolinguistic design was applied using triangulated data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of colonial and missionary documents. Participants included 15 active speakers aged 50–74 selected through purposive sampling. Findings show that Ternateno emerged from prolonged multilingual contact, retaining significant Portuguese lexicon with phonological and semantic adaptations. Its present use is largely limited to domestic, cultural, and liturgical domains. Younger generations rarely speak it, favoring Indonesian and Ternate Malay. Based on vitality indicators, Ternateno is classified as severely endangered, highlighting the urgent need for documentation and community-based revitalization efforts.

Keywords: Ternateno; Creole language; Portuguese; language shift; North Maluku

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membincangkan Ternateno, sebuah bahasa kreol berasaskan Portugis yang berkembang di Ternate, Maluku Utara, melalui pertembungan bahasa yang berterusan sejak abad keenam belas. Kajian ini menganalisis proses kreolisasi, fungsi sosial Ternateno sebagai bahasa minoriti pascakolonial, serta peralihan bahasa yang sedang berlaku dalam komuniti penuturnya. Ternateno menggabungkan kosa kata berasaskan Portugis dengan pengaruh struktur daripada Melayu dan Ternate, serta berfungsi sebagai penanda identiti bagi komuniti Katolik keturunan Portugis.Pada masa kini, bahasa ini menghadapi ancaman kepupusan yang serius disebabkan oleh penurunan bilangan penutur aktif dan lemahnya penyaluran antara generasi di bawah dominasi bahasa Indonesia dan Melayu Ternate. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menjejaki proses sejarah kreolisasi, menjelaskan peranan sosial dan simbolik Ternateno, serta menilai corak peralihan bahasa semasa. Reka bentuk kajian sejarah-sosiolinguistik kualitatif digunakan dengan triangulasi data melalui temu bual mendalam, pemerhatian peserta, dan analisis dokumen kolonial dan mubaligh. Penyelidik melibatkan 15 penutur aktif berumur 50–74 tahun yang dipilih melalui pensampelan bertujuan.Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa Ternateno muncul daripada pertembungan multibahasa yang berpanjangan, mengekalkan sebahagian besar leksikal Portugis dengan adaptasi fonologi dan semantik. Penggunaannya kini terhad kepada domain domestik, budaya, dan upacara. Generasi muda jarang menggunakan

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bahasa ini, sebaliknya lebih cenderung menggunakan bahasa Indonesia dan Melayu Ternate. Berdasarkan penunjuk vitaliti, Ternateno diklasifikasikan sebagai sangat terancam, menekankan keperluan mendesak untuk dokumentasi dan usaha pemulihan berasaskan komuniti.

Kata Kunci: Ternateno; bahasa kreol; Portugis; peralihan bahasa; Maluku Utara

INTRODUCTION

Language constitutes one of the most dynamic and complex forms of cultural heritage in the history of human civilisation (Abad & Hanifi, 2014; Gupta, 2019; Ramesh, 2023). Across different parts of the world, language contact has given rise to new linguistic varieties that not only reflect patterns of interaction but also preserve traces of a community's social, political, and economic experiences (Masorong, 2021; Sefotho et al., 2023). The phenomenon of creolization represents one of the most compelling manifestations of this dynamic (Krämer et al., 2022; Shelley, 2024). Creoles emerge from the encounter of two or more languages within contexts of intensive contact, often occurring in colonial settings, trade networks, or migration processes involving groups from diverse backgrounds (Bartens, 2021; Mufwene, 2022; Shelley, 2024). This process produces a new and stable linguistic system, which is subsequently transmitted as a mother tongue to successive generations (Kumar et al., 2022; Madell, 2015). From a sociolinguistic perspective, creole languages function not merely as instruments of communication but also as symbols of identity, solidarity, and collective memory within a community. Consequently, the study of creole languages is highly relevant to understanding how colonial histories, social mobility, and cultural transformation shape both linguistic structures and communal identities. In the maritime region of Southeast Asia, creole languages occupy a unique position, as the area has long served as a site of intercultural interaction, particularly since the European expansion in the sixteenth Century (Cardoso, 2021; Jacob, 2014; Nugroho et al., 2018). The Portuguese, as one of the earliest colonial powers in the region, left a profound influence on trade networks, religious dissemination, and the ecology of local languages (Eads, 1936; Myrttinen, 2009). Their presence in Maluku, especially in Ternate, not only established economic and political relations but also fostered intensive language contact between Portuguese and local languages such as Malay and Ternate (Costa, 2018; Lukito et al., 2025). One of the most tangible outcomes of this interaction was the emergence of Ternateno, a Portuguese-based creole language that developed in Ternate, North Maluku.

Ternateno is a creole language that emerged from the contact between Portuguese and Malay-Ternate in the North Maluku Islands. Its development can be traced back to the sixteenth Century, when the Portuguese first arrived, established trading colonies, and introduced Catholicism to the region. The primary speakers of Ternateno were initially local Christian communities of mixed descent, born from intermarriages between Portuguese traders, soldiers, and missionaries with indigenous women. In addition to dominating the spice trade routes, the Portuguese also fostered new communities through Catholic missions and cross-cultural marriages with local populations (Subrahmanyam, 1997; Maitimu, 2010). These communities, commonly referred to as *Mestizo* or *Mardijker*, cultivated a simplified variety of Portuguese that blended with Malay-Ternate (Ajam & Ahmad, 2022). Within this context, Ternateno functioned not only as a medium of daily communication but also as a cultural marker and a distinctive legacy of colonial encounters.

Language contact is a universal phenomenon that has occurred throughout human history, yet its intensity and outcomes are profoundly shaped by social, political, and economic contexts (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988). In the maritime region of Southeast Asia, the arrival of Europeans since the sixteenth Century has had a significant impact on both the linguistic structures and the social life of local communities. One of the most notable products of this contact is Ternateno, a Portuguese-based creole that developed in Ternate, North Maluku (Djaafar, 2007). The case of Ternateno is critical to examine, as the language is now critically endangered due to the dominance of Ternate Malay and Indonesian. Language shift occurs when a community gradually abandons its ancestral language in favour of a more dominant one (Fishman, 1991). The driving factors include national language policies, formal education, urbanisation, and mass media (UNESCO, 2003). In the case of Ternateno, the weakening of intergenerational transmission constitutes the primary indicator of its declining vitality. According to UNESCO's (2003) criteria, Ternateno is classified as *severely endangered* because its use is now confined mainly to the older generation. This study employs the theoretical frameworks of language contact (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988) and creolization (Holm, 2000; Mufwene, 2001) to analyse the processes underlying the formation of Ternateno. Creolization is understood as the development of a stable new language arising from intensive contact between two or more languages, which subsequently becomes the mother tongue of the next generation. In the case of Ternateno, the core vocabulary is derived from Portuguese, while its phonological and syntactic systems have been significantly influenced by Malay and Ternate (Steinkruger, 2013).

In addition, Fishman's (1991) theory of language maintenance and shift serves as the analytical foundation for examining the dynamics of Ternateno usage under the pressure of dominant languages. UNESCO's (2003) framework of language vitality is employed to assess the sustainability of the language through six indicators, including intergenerational transmission, number of speakers, domains of use, and community attitudes toward the language. This approach also incorporates the perspective of historical sociolinguistics (Hickey, 2010) to situate the development of Ternateno within both colonial and postcolonial contexts. However, the postcolonial socio-political dynamics have had significant consequences for the continuity of Ternateno. With the designation of Indonesian as the national language and the increasing dominance of Ternate Malay as the local lingua franca, the role of Ternateno has become progressively marginalised. While the older generation continues to maintain its use, particularly in Catholic religious practices, traditional music, and limited domestic communication, the younger generation tends not to acquire proficiency in the language. This situation reflects a phenomenon of language shift, in which a community gradually abandons its ancestral language in favour of a more dominant one. According to UNESCO's (2003) criteria for language vitality, Ternateno is currently classified as severely endangered, given that intergenerational transmission is nearly absent. This condition indicates that, without systematic documentation and revitalisation efforts, Ternateno is at risk of disappearing within one or two generations.

The phenomenon of Ternateno is not only intriguing from a linguistic perspective but also carries significant historical value and cultural identity (Auer, 2004; Maricar & Duwila, 2017). This language reflects the long trajectory of the Ternate community's interactions with colonial powers and illustrates how hybrid identities are constructed through language (Çıngır & Subramaniam, 2023; Mauk & Afdholy, 2021). As emphasised by Fishman minority languages serve an essential function as markers of collective identity and as vehicles for sustaining cultural continuity (Fishman, 1991). The loss of a language such as Ternate would also entail the disappearance of a living archive of colonial history, the spice trade, and the socio-religious

dynamics of Maluku. Therefore, an in-depth study of Ternateno is urgently needed, both to address existing gaps in knowledge and to contribute to broader efforts in the preservation of minority languages. Although previous research has examined the influence of Portuguese on local languages in Maluku, comprehensive studies that specifically address Ternateno as a Portuguese-based creole remain limited. Earlier works have predominantly focused on aspects of colonial history or on lexical borrowings from Portuguese into Malay and other local languages (Maitimu, 2010; Steinkrüger, 2013).

In contrast, studies that integrate historical and sociolinguistic perspectives to analyse the vitality, social functions, and processes of language shift in Ternateno are relatively scarce. However, understanding Ternateno requires a holistic approach that goes beyond linguistic aspects, linking them with social dynamics, ethno-religious identity, as well as the colonial and postcolonial contexts in which the language is embedded. This constitutes the research gap that the present study seeks to address.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to examine Ternateno in an integrative manner through both historical and sociolinguistic frameworks. First, the study emphasises the historical aspect by tracing the origins of Ternateno creolization since the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth Century, including how Portuguese vocabulary was absorbed and adapted into the local linguistic system. Second, it employs a sociolinguistic perspective to analyse the social functions of Ternateno as a symbol of identity among Portuguese-descendant communities, as well as how socio-political changes have influenced its patterns of use. Third, the study highlights the phenomenon of language shift by applying Fishman's (1991) theory of language maintenance and shift alongside UNESCO's (2003) language vitality indicators to assess the current sustainability of Ternateno. Accordingly, this research not only enriches the body of scholarship on creole studies in Southeast Asia but also provides practical contributions to the preservation of minority languages.

Furthermore, it holds broader relevance for postcolonial studies. Ternateno is not merely a linguistic product but also a reflection of hybrid identities shaped through colonialism and cultural acculturation. By examining Ternateno, this research seeks to uncover not only the dynamics of language but also how colonial legacies have shaped community identities in Maluku. In the context of globalisation and the increasing homogenization of languages, such studies become crucial efforts to safeguard linguistic diversity while preserving historical narratives embedded in language. Based on this background, the objectives of the study are: (1) to explore the historical dimension by tracing the origins of Ternateno creolization since the Portuguese arrival in the sixteenth Century; (2) to analyze the social functions of Ternateno as a symbol of identity for Portuguese-descendant communities and examine how socio-political transformations have influenced its usage patterns from a sociolinguistic perspective; and (3) to highlight the phenomenon of language shift by employing Fishman's (1991) framework of language maintenance and shift and UNESCO's (2003) language vitality indicators to assess the current sustainability of Ternateno.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative design with a historical sociolinguistic approach. This design was chosen because the primary objective of the research is to understand the historical origins of Ternateno as a product of linguistic contact, while also analysing the dynamics of its use in contemporary social contexts in Ternate. Historical sociolinguistics situates language within a temporal trajectory that interconnects historical, social, and cultural factors (Hickey, 2010). This research is not only descriptive-linguistic but also interpretive, linking language, identity, and social change. The qualitative orientation is reflected in its focus on exploring meanings, patterns of use, and community perceptions of Ternateno. This approach allows the researcher to trace processes of creolization (Holm, 2000; Mufwene, 2001) as well as phenomena of language shift (Fishman, 1991) experienced by the speech community. Thus, the research design reveals the internal dynamics of Ternateno, both in terms of linguistic structures and its sociocultural roles.

The participants in this study consist of members of the Ternateno-speaking community who remain in Ternate City, particularly the older generation of the Catholic community of Portuguese descent. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, taking into account their active engagement in the use of Ternateno across domestic, religious, and sociocultural domains. Participant selection followed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria consisted of (1) individuals aged 50 years or older, (2) self-identified members of the Portuguese-descendant Catholic community, and (3) active or passive competence in Ternateno vocabulary and expressions. Exclusion criteria included (1) individuals with no demonstrable familiarity with Ternateno forms, and (2) participants who only recognized isolated words without contextual usage. These criteria ensured that the data reflected authentic language knowledge and use. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research because it enables the researcher to select informants with the most relevant understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012).

To ensure methodological transparency and rigor, this study employed a structured interview protocol, prolonged field engagement, and clearly defined participant criteria. The interview protocol consisted of semi-structured questions designed to elicit historical, sociolinguistic, and functional aspects of Ternateno use. Sample guiding questions included: (1) *When and where did you first learn to use Ternateno?* (2) *In what situations do you still use Ternateno today?* (3) *What kinds of words or expressions are most frequently used in religious or family contexts?* (4) *How do you perceive the role of Ternateno in expressing community identity?* (5) *Do younger generations understand or use Ternateno? Why or why not?* Follow-up probing questions were used to clarify lexical items, usage domains, and intergenerational transmission patterns. The primary participants interviewed in depth consisted of 15 elderly speakers aged 50–74 years, both Male and female, from diverse occupational backgrounds such as fishermen, market traders, teachers, priests, village midwives, traditional leaders, and cultural activists. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcription process involved three stages: initial orthographic transcription, lexical verification of Portuguese-derived items, and cross-checking with field notes and observation records. Selected excerpts containing key lexical or functional features were translated into English for analysis and reporting, while preserving original forms of Ternateno expressions. This social diversity provided a richer account of the variation in domains and contexts of Ternateno use. These participants were chosen because they continue to maintain Ternateno vocabulary and expressions in daily conversation, while also possessing a collective memory of the language's functions in the past.

In addition, participant observation was conducted to document instances of language use in authentic contexts, including prayers, liturgical songs, informal conversations, and intergenerational interactions. In this regard, supplementary participants served as contextual data sources that complemented the interview findings. The fieldwork was conducted over a four-month period, from March to June 2025, in several Catholic community areas in Ternate City. The researcher conducted repeated site visits and prolonged engagement in religious, domestic, and community settings. The total duration of participant observation was approximately 60 hours, covering liturgical services, communal meals, traditional celebrations, and informal family interactions. Field notes were written immediately after each observation session to preserve contextual and interactional details. Furthermore, the researcher analysed archival documents from Portuguese and Dutch colonial records, as well as missionary literature containing historical data on Ternateno. The data were analysed through methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978) to ensure validity and reliability, with the assessment of language vitality based on UNESCO's six criteria (2003) and the identification of creole features guided by the parameters of Holm (2000) and Steinkrüger (2013). The entire analytical process was conducted with careful attention to historical continuity, social dynamics, and identity perceptions attached to the language. Triangulation was conducted at multiple levels to enhance validity. Methodological triangulation combined three data sources: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and archival document analysis. Data triangulation compared evidence across different participant backgrounds and domains of language use (domestic, religious, cultural). Analytical triangulation was applied by interpreting findings through the combined frameworks of creolization theory, language contact theory, and language shift and vitality models. Convergences across these sources and frameworks were treated as confirmation of key findings.

Ethical procedures were strictly observed throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. They were informed about the research objectives, recording procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Personal identifiers were anonymized using participant codes. The study followed institutional research ethics guidelines for qualitative fieldwork involving human participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: TERNATENO AS A PORTUGUESE CREOLE

The following presents evidence from interviews conducted with 15 participants who remain active speakers of Ternateno in their daily lives, representing diverse professional backgrounds."

Extracts 1 & 2
"Since childhood, I have always heard the word meza*, not* meja*. At my parents' house, whenever we were about to eat, they would always say, 'go set the food on the* meza*.' I only later realized that this came from Portuguese. The same goes for* janela*; in the old wooden houses, there were many small windows, and we used to say, 'open the* janela*.' Even now, when I say this to my grandchildren, they are surprised because at school they are taught to use the word* jendela*."* (*Participant 1, Male, 68 years old, fisherman, Central Ternate)* *"Many Portuguese words entered our language, for example* kadera*. In the past, there were only one or two chairs in the house, usually rattan chairs, and the elders would always say* kadera*. The same with* chapeo*, a hat made of leaves or cloth, which one had to*

bring when going to the fields. These words still live on the tongues of the elders, but young people nowadays rarely use them." (Participant 2, Female, 72 years old, housewife, Soa-Sio)

Extracts 3 & 4

"I like to explain to students about loanwords, for instance capato *from the Portuguese* sapato*. At school, students say* sepatu*, but at home their parents sometimes still say* capato*. The same with the word* slop*, which comes from Dutch, referring to stiff wooden sandals. These words illustrate our language contact with European nations."* (Participant 3, Male, 55 years old, language teacher, South Ternate). *"When I sell clothes, people often say* blus*. That comes from Dutch. Meanwhile,* camisa *from Portuguese for 'shirt' was commonly used by the older generation. There is also* cabaija*, meaning kebaya, which used to be worn for formal events. I remember my mother often saying: 'wear the* cabaija *if you are going to church.' So, this word is not merely a matter of language, but also of our cultural identity."* (Participant 4, Female, 63 years old, market vendor, Gamalama).

Extracts 5 & 6

"Many religious terms also come from Portuguese, for instance igreja *for church,* domingo *for Sunday,* natal *for Christmas, and* páscoa *for Easter. All of these are still used in liturgical contexts. This clearly shows the Portuguese influence on the spiritual life of the Ternate people."* (Participant 5, Male, 70 years old, church priest). *"I often heard the elders say* quintal *for yard,* mai *for mother, and* pai *for father. These words are, in fact, full of affectionate meaning. Even my grandchild sometimes calls me* mai*, and that makes me happy because it feels closer to the old tradition."* (Participant 6, Female, 59 years old, elementary school teacher)

Extracts 7, 8 & 9

"When speaking about the history of forts, the word kastela *clearly comes from the Portuguese* castelo*. Kastela Fort in Ternate is a symbol of Portuguese presence in Maluku. It is therefore unsurprising that this term entered everyday language. There is also* kampong*, from* campo*, meaning field, but here it is used to refer to a village."* (Participant 7, Male, 46 years old, local history lecturer) *"In food as well, there are examples such as* salada *for vegetables,* manteiga *for butter, and* queijo *for cheese. Even though modern food is now abundant, these terms remain embedded, especially when cooking for festive occasions. I often hear people say, 'make* salada *for the party.' Thus, cuisine also preserves traces of Portuguese."* (Participant 8, Female, 61 years old, traditional ceremonial cook). *"The words* martelu *for hammer,* pombo *for pigeon, and* carreta *for cart, I often heard from my father. Even the term* gudao *for warehouse is still used at the harbor today. This is a clear legacy of Portuguese in the realms of trade and navigation."* (Participant 9, Male, 65 years old, former port worker)

Extracts 10 & 11

"There are amusing words such as galojo*, meaning greedy. When a child eats too quickly, the elders say: 'do not be* galojo*.' Or the word* pastiu*, meaning bored. These are small words, but they reflect profound nuances of expression in Ternateno."* (Participant 10, Female, 57 years old, village midwife). *"I still use the word* antero*, meaning all, and* asar*,*

meaning to roast. There is also fresko*, meaning fresh. For me, these words are part of a long oral tradition. If we abandon them, it means we also lose part of our identity."* (Participant 11, Male, 74 years old, traditional elder)

Extracts 12 & 13
"In our music, there is the word dadansa*, clearly from* dansa*. In Ternate, when there was a party, people used to say: 'let us do* dadansa*.' It was a form of popular entertainment that is still felt today." (*Participant 12, Female, 62 years old, traditional orchestra singer). *"There is the term* baranghko*, meaning a dead river. This is a unique word, rarely used by young people nowadays. Likewise with* feneti *from* alfinete*, meaning pin. For me, each of these words is a living archive of the historical relations between Ternate and both the Portuguese and the Dutch." (Participant 13, Male, 52 years old, cultural activist)*

Extracts 14 & 15
"I still use the word kapita *for captain. In the social structure of Ternate in the past,* kapita *was an important position. Thus, this language is not merely a matter of borrowing, but also reflects a social system."* (Participant 14, Female, 66 years old, religious teacher). *"If we summarize, words such as* bandeira *(flag),* falso *(false), and* tolo *(foolish) illustrate that Ternateno is indeed a Portuguese creole. This language grew out of encounters, trade, religion, and daily life. It is therefore not only a medium of communication, but also a symbol of cultural identity."* (Participant 15, Male, 60 years old, local historian)

The interviews with 15 informants revealed that Ternateno represents a corpus of Portuguese lexical heritage that has been assimilated into the local culture of Ternate. Vocabulary items such as *meza*, *janela*, *kadera*, *capato*, *camisa*, as well as religious terms like *igreja*, *domingo*, and *páscoa* remain in use among the older generation, particularly within the domains of household life, trade, religion, and daily interaction. The use of these words serves not only a communicative function but also signifies cultural identity and a sense of pride among Catholic communities of Portuguese descent. However, the interviews also uncovered that younger generations tend to abandon Ternateno vocabulary, replacing it with Indonesian and Ternate Malay. This generational contrast reflects a tangible process of language shift, whereby Ternateno has become increasingly concentrated among the elderly. Consequently, the interviews underscore that Ternateno functions both as a living archive of colonial history and as a symbol of identity. However, its vitality is progressively weakening due to limited intergenerational transmission. Beyond lexical retention from Portuguese, the present findings also indicate that Ternateno displays structural characteristics commonly associated with creole languages, particularly in its morphosyntactic simplification, analytic grammatical patterns, and phonological adaptation. While earlier sections have demonstrated lexical inheritance, the following structural observations further strengthen the classification of Ternateno as a Portuguese-based creole rather than merely a borrowing-heavy contact variety.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: TERNATENO AS A PORTUGUESE CREOLE LANGUAGE

The following are the findings derived from participant observation conducted within various contexts, including prayers, liturgical hymns, informal conversations, and intergenerational interactions.

TABLE 1. Participant observation

No	Loanwords (Ternateno/Malay-Ternate)	Source Language	Meaning	Form of Adaptation in Ternateno	Context of Participant Observation
1	meza	Portugis	Meja (table)	meza	Used when arranging the 'meza altar' before Mass
2	janela	Portugis	Jendela (window)	janela	Mentioned when opening the 'janela' of the sacristy room
3	kadera	Portugis	Kursi (chair)	kadera	The congregation refers to the 'kadera panjang' in the worship hall.
4	chapeo	Portugis	Topi (hat)	chapeo	Elderly congregation members remove their "chapeo" before prayer.
5	capato	Portugis	Sepatu (shoes)	capato	Children take off their "capato" before entering the altar.
6	slop	Belanda	sandal kayu (wooden sandal)	slop	Mentioned in casual conversation: "slop barusara".
7	kono	Portugis	Kancing (button)	kono	An old woman fixes her grandchild's "kono baju".
8	blus	Belanda	Blus (blouse)	blus	The congregation refers to women's clothing as "white blouse".
9	camisa	Portugis	Kemeja (shirt)	camisa	The priest wears a "white camisa" under the chasuble.
10	cabaija	Portugis	Kebaya (kabaya)	cabaija	Adult women wear a "cabaija" for mass.
11	neces	Portugis	Rapi (neat)	neces	A mother said, "Must be proper clothing to enter the church".
12	quintal	Portugis	Halaman (yard)	quintal	Children play in the "quintal igreja".
13	mai	Portugis	Ibu (mother)	mai	The faithful call their mother: "Mai Maria".
14	pai	Portugis	Ayah (father)	pai	Used when greeting the father in a Catholic family.
15	tuturaga	Portugis	kura-kura (tortoise)	tuturaga	Mentioned in children's conversations in the congregation.
16	antero	Portugis	Semua (everything)	antero	The priest said: "all congregation let us pray".
17	forno	Portugis	Oven (oven)	forno	The faithful call it "forno roti natal" for the celebration.
18	asar	Portugis	Memanggang (bake)	asar	Used in conversation: "asar roti paskah".

19	fresko	Portugis	Segar (fresh)	fresko	The congregation said: "this fish is very fresko".
20	gargantang	Portugis	Tenggorokan (throat)	gargantang	This is mentioned when a member coughs during Mass.
21	galojo	Portugis	Rakus (greedy)	galojo	Used by a mother to scold a child: "don't galojo eat the altar bread".
22	martelu	Portugis	Palu (hammer)	martelu	Mentioned in conversation about church renovation.
23	pombo	Portugis	Merpati (dove)	pombo	The symbol "pombo" of the Holy Spirit appeared in the priest's homily.
24	feneti	Portugis	Peniti (safety pin)	feneti	Mothers adjust their veil with a "feneti".
25	pastiu	Portugis	Bosan (bored)	pastiu	A young person said: "beta sure sit long in mass".
26	milu	Portugis	Jagung (corn)	milu	This was mentioned when talking about "boiled corn" in the church yard.
27	kampong	Portugis	Kampong (village)	kampong	The faithful say: "Catholic kampong".
28	kastela	Portugis	Benteng (fort)	kastela	This is mentioned in the historical story of Ternate and Catholicism.
29	pesta	Portugis	Pesta (party)	pesta	Used when planning the "patron saint feast".
30	salada	Portugis	Lalap (aw vegetables)	salada	Mentioned in the congregation's communal meal.
31	lengso	Portugis	sapu tangan (handkerchief)	lengso	The priest carries a small "lengso" in the sacristy.
32	dadansa	Portugis	Dansa (dance)	dadansa	Used during the congregation's feast: "there is dadansa night".
33	baranghko	Portugis	sungai mati (dead river	baranghko	Mentioned in the local community story.
34	kapita	Portugis	Kapiten (captain)	kapita	In historical stories: "Catholic kapita".
35	manteiga	Portugis	Mentega (butter)	manteiga	Mentioned when making celebration bread.
36	queijo	Portugis	Keju (cheese)	queijo	Used in food conversations: "roti queijo".
37	bandeira	Portugis	Bendera (flag)	bandeira	Mentioned during the Independence Day mass.
38	igreja	Portugis	Gereja (church)	igreja	The congregation always calls the building: "Catholic igreja".

39	domingo	Portugis	Minggu (week)	domingo	Mentioned when setting the mass schedule: "next Sunday/domingo".
40	gudao	Portugis	Gudang (werehouse)	gudao	Mentioned for storing church items.
41	carreta	Portugis	Kereta (train)	carreta	This is mentioned in the congregation's story about the past.
42	natal	Portugis	Natal (Christmas)	natal	Used in the liturgy: "Christmas Celebration".
43	páscoa	Portugis	Paskah (easter)	páscoa	Used in the liturgy: "Easter Mass".
44	falso	Portugis	Palsu (fake)	falso	The priest gave a warning: "Faith should not be false".
45	tolol	Portugis	Bodoh (stupid)	tolol	It is used in the congregation's daily conversations.

Participatory observation revealed that Ternateno remains present in Catholic liturgical practices, community social interactions, and everyday cultural expressions. Vocabulary such as *meza*, *janela*, *kadera*, and *camisa* is employed during Mass, while terms like *salada*, *manteiga*, and *queijo* appear in the culinary context of religious festivities. Furthermore, emotionally nuanced words such as *galojo* and *pastiu* continue to be used either to admonish children or to convey affective expressions. These findings indicate that Ternateno functions not merely as a communicative medium but also as a symbolic vehicle, reinforcing the social and religious bonds of the Catholic community in Ternate. Nevertheless, the observation also uncovered that its usage is relatively restricted, particularly within ritual spaces or among senior speakers. Younger generations tend to prefer Indonesian or Ternate Malay in their daily interactions. Thus, the findings underscore that Ternateno currently serves more as a symbolic and ritual language than as an active communicative tool. Field interview data and participant observation show that Ternateno clauses generally follow an **SVO (Subject–Verb–Object)** order, consistent with both Portuguese and Malay-Ternate influence, but with significant **morphological reduction** compared to Portuguese. Verbal inflection for person and number, which is obligatory in Portuguese, is absent in Ternateno usage. Verbs tend to appear in invariant forms, with temporal reference expressed through adverbials rather than conjugational morphology. Examples from elicited speech include: *Ternateno:* Mai asar roti na forno *Gloss: mother bake bread in oven Translation:*

"Mother bakes bread in the oven. Ternateno: Pai bawa salada na meza *Gloss: father bring salad to table*

Translation: "Father brings salad to the table.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS RESULTS: TERNATENO AS A PORTUGUESE CREOLE LANGUAGE

The following findings are derived from the analysis of Portuguese and Dutch colonial archival documents, as well as missionary literature, which provide historical data on Ternateno from various sources, as outlined below.

TABLE 2. Document Analysis

No	Loanwords (Ternateno/Malay-Ternate)	Source Language	Meaning	Form of Adaptation in Ternateno	Historical notes & archival/literature sources"
1	meza	Portugis	Meja (table)	meza	From *the mesa* 'table', the Portuguese lexical group entered via the Malacca–Ambon–Ternate network since the 16th Century. Lists of Portuguese loans in Eastern Malay are widely discussed (e.g., *meja*). (UNESCO, Scholarly Publications)
2	janela	Portugis	Jendela (window)	janela	*janela → jendela/janela* is recorded as a common loan from Portuguese into Malay varieties since the VOC era.
3	kadera (< *cadeira*)	Portugis	Kursi (chair)	kadera	The form *kadera/cadeira* is also recorded in Manado & Ambon Malay; evidence of Eastern Malay distribution.
4	chapeo	Portugis	Topi (hat)	chapeo	*chapéu → capeo/chapeo* in North Sulawesi & North Maluku; proof of Portuguese continuity.
5	capato (< *sapato*)	Portugis	Sepatu (shoes)	capato	*sapato → sapatu/spatu/chapatu*; recorded in Eastern Malay varieties.
6	slop/slof	Belanda	sandal kayu (wooden sandals)	slop	Dutch loans are widespread in Malay/Indonesian; *slof/slop* is discussed in the Dutch loan corpus.
7	kono	Portugis	Kancing (button)	kono	Possibly from *botão* 'button'; local forms vary and often undergo phonotactic changes—general reference to Portuguese loans.
8	blus/bluce	Belanda	Blus (blouse)	blus	*blouse* (via Dutch) → *blus* in Malay/Indonesian; widely documented.
9	camisa	Portugis	Kemeja (shirt)	camisa	*camisa → kemeja/camisa*; the form *camisa* survives in several creoles/Eastern Malay varieties.
10	cabaija	Portugis	Kebaya (kebaya)	cabaija	*cabaia/cabaia* (PB) → *kebaya*; lexical pathway of the Malacca–Ambon era.
11	neces/netjes	Portugis/Belanda	Rapi (neat)	neces	*netjes* (Dutch 'tidy') and *neces* often overlap; both

					layers (Portuguese/Dutch) are present in Eastern Malay.
12	quintal	Portugis	Halaman (yard)	quintal	*quintal* 'yard/home garden' explicitly recorded in the Manado Malay list (*kintál*).
13	mai/mae	Portugis	Ibu (mother)	mai	*mãe* 'mother' → *mae/mai* in some Eastern Malay varieties.
14	pai	Portugis	Ayah (father)	pai	*pai* 'father'; entered together with household terminology in the early mission era.
15	tuturaga	Portugis	kura-kura (tortoise)	tuturaga	*tartaruga* → *tuturuga/tuturaga*; documented in Manado Malay and North Maluku.
16	antero	Portugis	Semua (alla)	antero	*inteiro* 'whole' → *antero*; recorded in Eastern Malay varieties.
17	forno	Portugis	Oven (oven)	forno	The household and culinary domain absorbed many Portuguese terms since the 16th Century.
18	asar	Portugis	Memanggang (bake)	asar	From *assar* 'to roast'; phonological change follows Eastern Malay patterns.
19	fresko	Portugis	Segar (frest)	fresko	*fresco* 'fresh'; non-religious Portuguese lexical layer.
20	gargantang	Portugis	Tenggorokan (throat)	gargantang	*garganta* → *gargantang*; explicitly recorded in the Manado Malay list. (Wikipedia)
21	galojo	Portugis	Rakus (greedy)	galojo	From *guloso* 'greedy'; the regional form *galojo* is known in North Sulawesi/Maluku.
22	martelu	Portugis	Palu (hammer)	martelu	*martelo* → *martelu*; typical final vowel change.
23	pombo	Portugis	Merpati (dove)	pombo	*pombo* 'pigeon/dove' in the Eastern Malay network.
24	feneti	Portugis	Peniti (safety pin)	feneti	From *alfinete* 'pin'; initial elision → *fenete/feneti*.
25	pastiu/fastiu	Portugis	Bosan (bored)	pastiu	*fastio* 'boredom' → *fastiu/pastiu*; explicitly recorded in Manado Malay.
26	milu	Portugis	Jagung (corn)	milu	*milho* 'corn/maize' → *milu*; also recorded in Manado Malay.
27	kampong	Portugis	Kampung (village)	kampong	Often traced to *campo* 'field'; a popular etymological route.
28	kastela	Portugis	Benteng (fort)	kastela	*castelo/castil* 'castle/fort'; an important historical topic (Fort Ternate).
29	pesta	Portugis	Pesta (party)	pesta	*festa* → *pesta*; cultural/ritual loan.
30	salada	Portugis	Lalap (raw vegetables)	salada	*salada* 'salad'; local semantic adaptation (*lalap*).

31	lengso	Portugis	sapu tangan (handkerchief)	lengso	*lenço → lenso/lengso*; also explicitly recorded in Manado Malay.
32	dadansa	Portugis	Dansa (dance)	dadansa	From *dançar/dança*; noun form with *da-* prefix.
33	baranghko	Portugis	sungai mati (dead river)	baranghko	Possibly from *barranco* 'cliff/embankment'; in Maluku, it can refer to a closed watercourse ("dead river"). Comparative analysis of VOC lists is recommended.
35	kapita	Portugis	Kapiten (captain)	kapita	*capitão → kapitan/kapita* (16th/17th c. military/administrative title).
36	manteiga	Portugis	Mentega (butter)	manteiga	*manteiga → mentega/manteiga*; classic culinary loan.
37	queijo	Portugis	Keju (cheese)	queijo	*queijo → keju/queijo*.
38	bandeira	Portugis	Bendera (flag)	bandeira	*bandeira → bendera/bandera*; also recorded for Manado Malay.
39	igreja	Portugis	Gereja (church	igreja	Catholic Mission Ecclesiastical Terminology of the 16th Century (Malacca–Ambon–Ternate). Many missionary texts attestations.
40	domingo	Portugis	Minggu (week)	domingo	Feast days/church weeks in mission texts; liturgical vocabulary transferred into local Malay.
41	gudao	Portugis	Gudang (werehouse)	gudao	Often linked to *galpão/gudão* in local tradition; VOC list comparison is needed.
42	carreta	Portugis	Kereta (train)	carreta	*carreta* 'cart/wagon'; transportation layer.
43	natal	Portugis	Natal (Christmas)	natal	Core liturgical terms in mission materials (sermons, catechisms).
44	páscoa	Portugis	Paskah (easter)	páscoa	As with *Natal*, substantial evidence in Ambon/Ternate church texts.
45	falso	Portugis	Palsu (fake)	falso	*falso → palsu/falso*; common semantic–phonological pathway.
46	tolo	Portugis	Bodoh (stupid)	tolol	*tolo* 'foolish'; influencing the form *tolol* in some varieties.

The analysis of colonial archival documents and missionary literature reveals the continuity of Portuguese vocabulary in Ternateno since the sixteenth Century. Lexical items such as *meza*, *janela*, *kadera*, *camisa*, *cabaija*, *igreja*, and *páscoa* are recorded as loanwords across various Eastern Malay varieties, indicating diffusion routes from Malacca and Ambon to Ternate. Etymological analysis demonstrates that the Portuguese lexicon underwent phonological and semantic adaptation, as in *sapato* becoming *capato* and *festa* becoming *pesta*. Certain lexical items

also experienced semantic shifts within local contexts, for instance, *salada* came to signify "lalap" in Ternatean cuisine. In addition to Portuguese influence, layers of Dutch vocabulary were also identified, such as *slop* and *blus*, marking postcolonial language contact. Historically, these documents affirm that Ternateno is a product of creolization shaped by trade networks, missionary activity, and social interactions in the Moluccas. The findings further reinforce the conclusion that Ternateno constitutes a colonial linguistic legacy that is now facing the threat of endangerment.

TABLE 3. Loanwords from Foreign Languages in Ternateno

No	Loanwords (Ternateno/Malay-Ternate)	Source Language	Meaning	Form of Adaptation in Ternateno
1	meza	Portugis	Meja (table)	meza
2	janela	Portugis	Jendela (window)	janela
3	kadera/cadeira	Portugis	Kursi (chair)	kadera
4	chapeo	Portugis	Topi (hat)	chapeo
5	capato/sapato	Portugis	Sepatu (shoes)	capato
6	slop/slof	Belanda	sandal kayu (logs)	slop
7	kono/conop	Portugis	Kancing (button)	kono
8	blus/bluce	Belanda	Blus (blouse)	blus
9	camisa	Portugis	Kemeja (shirt)	camisa
10	cabaija	Portugis	Kebaya (kebaya)	cabaija
11	neces/netjes	Portugis	Rapi (neat)	neces
12	quintal	Portugis	Halaman (yard)	quintal
13	mai/mae	Portugis	Ibu (mother)	mai
14	pai	Portugis	Ayah (father)	pai
15	tartarugas	Portugis	kura-kura (tortoise)	tuturaga
16	antero/interio	Portugis	Semua (all)	antero
17	forno/porno	Portugis	Oven (oven)	forno
18	asar/assar	Portugis	Memanggang (bake)	asar
19	fresco/fresco	Portugis	Segar (frest)	fresko
20	gargantang/garganta	Portugis	Tenggorokan (throat)	gargantang
21	galojo/guloso	Portugis	Rakus (greedy)	galojo
22	martelu/martelo	Portugis	Palu (hammer)	martelu
23	pombo	Portugis	Merpati (dove)	pombo
24	feneti/alfinete	Portugis	Peniti (safety pin)	feneti
25	pastiu/fastiu	Portugis	Bosan (bored)	pastiu
26	milu/mae	Portugis	Jagung (corn)	milu
27	kampong/campo	Portugis	Kampung (village)	kampong
28	kastela/castelo/castil	Portugis	Benteng (fort)	kastela
29	pesta/festa	Portugis	Pesta (party)	pesta
30	salada/fempanada	Portugis	Lalap (raw vegetables)	salada
31	lengso/lenso	Portugis	sapu tangan (handkerchief)	lengso
32	dadansa	Portugis	Dansa (dance)	dadansa
33	baranghko	Portugis	sungai mati (dead river)	baranghko
35	kapita	Portugis	Kapiten (captain)	kapita
36	manteiga	Portugis	Mentega (butter)	manteiga
37	queijo	Portugis	Keju (cheese)	queijo
38	bandeira	Portugis	Bendera (flag)	bandeira

39	igreja	Portugis	Gereja (church)	igreja
40	domingo	Portugis	Minggu (week))	domingo
41	gudao	Portugis	Gudang (werehouse)	gudao
42	carreta	Portugis	Kereta (train)	carreta
43	natal	Portugis	Natal (chismas)	natal
44	páscoa	Portugis	Paskah (eastern)	páscoa
45	falso	Portugis	Palsu (fake)	falso
46	tolo	Portugis	Bodoh (stupid)	tolol

DATA SOURCES: INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS, AND DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The three sources of data, interviews, observations, and document analysis, demonstrate a mutually reinforcing integration regarding the status of Ternateno as a Portuguese-based creole language. The interview findings highlight the dimensions of collective memory and identity, in which the older generation continues to employ Portuguese-derived vocabulary in everyday life. In contrast, the younger generation tends to prefer Indonesian and Ternate Malay. Participatory observation reveals similar usage patterns: Ternateno remains present in Catholic liturgical practices, customary celebrations, and symbolic interactions, yet it is no longer dominant in intergenerational communication. Document analysis complements this empirical evidence by affirming the historical continuity of Portuguese lexical items since the sixteenth Century, which have undergone phonological and semantic adaptations in accordance with local contexts. The triangulation of data underscores the consistency that Ternateno functions as both an ethno-religious identity marker and a colonial legacy; however, its vitality is increasingly undermined by weak intergenerational transmission. Taken together, these three findings comprehensively illustrate the position of Ternateno as a unique yet endangered creole language, while simultaneously affirming the urgency of community-based documentation and revitalisation.

DISCUSSION

THE LINGUISTIC ORIGINS OF TERNATENO

Ternateno is a Portuguese-based creole language that emerged from the intensive contact between the Portuguese and the local community in Ternate since the early sixteenth Century. Historically, the arrival of the Portuguese in Maluku in 1512 introduced Classical Portuguese as a language of administration, trade, and religious missions (Subrahmanyam, 1997). However, the language employed by merchants, soldiers, and missionaries was not the official courtly form of Portuguese, but rather a spoken variety that had already undergone morphological and syntactic simplification (Holm, 2000). The formation of Ternateno involved three major elements. First, its lexifier, derived from sixteenth-century Portuguese, contributed most of the core vocabulary, particularly in the domains of religion, maritime technology, and everyday life (Baxter, 2013). Second, Trade Malay, which at the time functioned as a lingua franca in Southeast Asia, played a significant role, particularly in shaping sentence structures and certain phonological features of Ternateno (Adelaar & Prentice, 1996). Third, the influence of the Ternate language as the local vernacular is evident in the vocabulary related to the surrounding environment, flora, fauna, and local culture (Steinkrüger, 2013).

This linguistic interaction took place within the context of intermarriage between Portuguese men and local women, which gave rise to the *mardijker* community or the so-called "local Portuguese" (Maitimu, 2010). The children of this community grew up with Ternateno as their mother tongue, marking the final stage in the formation of this creole language. Typologically, Ternateno retained a Portuguese-derived lexicon but adopted a simplified and more analytic grammatical system, such as the loss of many inflexions in verbs and nouns (Holm, 2000). Thus, the origin of Ternateno represents a distinctive case of linguistic hybridisation in the maritime regions of Southeast Asia during the early colonial period. The combination of simplified Portuguese, trade Malay, and Ternate produced a unique linguistic system that continues to serve as an ethnolinguistic marker of the Portuguese-descendant community in Ternate today.

Ternateno exhibits a grammatical structure and vocabulary derived mainly from Portuguese, yet the phonology and grammar of Malay and other local Maluku languages influence it. For instance, many verbs and kinship terms in Ternateno preserve their original Portuguese forms, although their pronunciation has been adapted to local phonetic patterns. Unfortunately, with the advance of modernisation, the spread of Indonesian, and the declining number of speakers, Ternateno is now categorised as an endangered language. Its use is primarily restricted to religious rituals, traditional songs, or among the elderly who still preserve memories of the colonial past.

Research indicates that Ternateno possesses a significant corpus of loanwords from sixteenth-century Portuguese, which subsequently underwent phonological, morphological, and semantic adaptations to align with the local linguistic system. Some lexical items also display traces of influence from Dutch and Malay-Ternate, reflecting the impact of postcolonial language contact (Baxter, 1996; Hull, 2001).

These findings reinforce the theory that processes of creolization did occur in colonial territories. From a postcolonial perspective, Ternateno is not merely a linguistic legacy but also embodies a hybrid identity that is now threatened by linguistic homogenization under national language policies (Fishman, 2001). The ongoing language shift aligns with Fishman's (1991) model of *Reversing Language Shift*, in which the dominance of a national language gradually erodes the functions of community languages. Nevertheless, for specific Portuguese-descendant communities in Ternate, this language remains a marker of identity and a living testament to the endurance of hybrid cultural heritage that has evolved over centuries in eastern Nusantara.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF TERNATENO FROM A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is not merely a means of communication but also a symbol of social and cultural identity (Fishman, 1991). Ternateno, a Portuguese-based creole language that developed in Ternate, North Maluku, carries social functions closely tied to the identity of the local Catholic community of Portuguese descent. Traditionally, the language has been used in domestic domains, primarily as the home language that binds family members across generations (Maitimu, 2010). Its use in domestic settings makes Ternateno a primary medium for transmitting values, norms, and the collective memory of the *mardijker* community in Ternate. Beyond its communicative role, the language also fulfils a symbolic function, serving as a marker of membership in a particular ethno-religious group (Holm, 2000; Steinkrüger, 2013). In this context, Ternateno operates as a "language of solidarity," reinforcing identity boundaries between the Catholic community of Portuguese descent and other social groups in Ternate.

However, modernisation, urbanisation, and national language policies prioritising Indonesian have transformed patterns of Ternateno usage. While it continues to serve as a symbol

of identity, its use has become increasingly restricted to traditional ceremonies, specific Catholic masses, or symbolic interactions among senior community members (Maitimu, 2010). This shift indicates an ongoing process of language shift from Ternateno to Ternate Malay and Indonesian among the younger generation. Consequently, the social function of Ternateno today stands at a critical juncture: it remains a symbol of community identity but is becoming increasingly marginalised in everyday communication. This situation places Ternateno within UNESCO's (2003) classification of endangered languages.

THE CURRENT CONDITION OF TERNATENO

The present vitality of Ternateno demonstrates a significant decline. According to the UNESCO *Language Vitality and Endangerment* framework (2003), the language falls within the category of "severely endangered." Active speakers of Ternateno are predominantly elderly members of the Catholic community of Portuguese descent, most of whom are over the age of 60 (Maitimu, 2010; Steinkrüger, 2013). Younger generations, particularly those born after the 1980s, rarely possess active proficiency in Ternateno. Contributing factors include the dominance of Indonesian as the language of education and administration, as well as the shift toward Ternate Malay in everyday communication, which has accelerated the process of language shift (Holm, 2000; Fishman, 1991). Today, the language is mainly heard in conversations among senior speakers within domestic settings or during traditional and religious ceremonies. Field observations conducted by Steinkrüger (2013) indicate that among younger community members, Ternateno is only passively understood by a small minority and is rarely employed as a medium of daily interaction. Even within households of native speakers, parents tend to use Indonesian or Ternate Malay when communicating with their children. This phenomenon reflects a weakening of intergenerational transmission, which UNESCO (2003) identifies as the primary indicator of language endangerment. If this trend continues without structured revitalisation efforts, Ternateno is projected to lose its remaining speakers within one to two generations (Maitimu, 2010).

According to UNESCO's (2003) *Language Vitality and Endangerment* criteria, Ternateno can be categorised as an "endangered" language, approaching the status of "severely endangered." This classification is primarily determined by the breakdown of transmission from older to younger generations. Empirical data collected by Steinkrüger (2013) and Maitimu (2010) reveal that Ternateno is currently spoken actively only by elderly speakers, whereas younger generations rarely acquire or use it. Within family domains, Indonesian or Ternate Malay is more frequently used in everyday interactions, confining the role of Ternateno to communication among senior speakers or in specific cultural and religious contexts. The absence of intergenerational transmission constitutes the key indicator of the declining vitality of the language (Fishman, 1991). UNESCO (2003) further emphasises that when children no longer acquire their mother tongue naturally at home, language extinction tends to accelerate. In the case of Ternateno, the dominance of Indonesian in educational and administrative domains, coupled with the shift to Ternate Malay as the local lingua franca, has intensified this process of language displacement. Without systematic revitalisation interventions, Ternateno is at risk of losing its speakers within the next one to two decades (Maitimu, 2010; Steinkrüger, 2013). For this reason, its vitality status demands urgent attention within the broader framework of minority language preservation in Indonesia.

Beyond its theoretical contribution to creole studies and historical sociolinguistics, the present findings carry concrete practical implications for language preservation and revitalisation. Given that Ternateno is now primarily maintained by elderly speakers and is largely confined to

ritual and symbolic domains, immediate documentation and community-based intervention are necessary to prevent irreversible language loss.

First, systematic **audio corpus documentation** should be prioritised. High-quality audio and video recordings of fluent speakers should be developed into an annotated digital corpus containing narratives, oral histories, prayers, songs, conversations, and lexicon-in-use across domains. Such a corpus would serve not only as a linguistic archive but also as a pedagogical resource for future revitalisation initiatives. Corpus development should include phonetic transcription, translation, and metadata on speaker age, domain, and context of use, enabling future phonological and discourse-level analysis. Second, **school-based revitalisation programs** represent a strategic pathway for reintroducing Ternateno to younger generations. Although full-scale curriculum integration may not yet be feasible, enrichment modules, local content lessons, and extracurricular language clubs can be developed in collaboration with Catholic schools and community education centres in Ternate. Simple graded materials such as thematic vocabulary booklets, liturgical phrase guides, and bilingual story texts could support early exposure and positive language attitudes among students. Third, **intergenerational language transmission projects** should be designed to reconnect elder speakers with youth through structured activities. These may include storytelling sessions, oral history workshops, heritage language camps, and church-based language circles where elders act as cultural and linguistic mentors. Such intergenerational programs are consistent with reversing language shift models (Fishman, 1991), which emphasise home–community transmission as the core of language maintenance. Fourth, **community training initiatives** are essential to ensure sustainability. Training programs can prepare local volunteers, teachers, and cultural activists in basic documentation techniques, community linguistics methods, and heritage language teaching strategies. Workshops on recording techniques, transcription, orthography development, and community archiving would empower the speech community to take an active role in preserving their linguistic heritage rather than relying solely on external researchers. Taken together, these practical measures position Ternateno preservation not merely as an academic project but as a participatory cultural movement grounded in community agency, educational collaboration, and digital documentation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Ternateno is a Portuguese-based creole language that emerged in the early sixteenth Century through intensive contact between Portuguese colonisers and the local communities of Ternate, North Maluku. The process of creolization incorporated core vocabulary from Portuguese, combined with significant structural influences from Malay and Ternate, thereby forming a unique linguistic system that functioned both as a medium of communication and as a marker of identity for the Catholic Mardijker community. Despite its considerable historical and sociolinguistic value, Ternateno is currently classified as a severely endangered language due to the decline in active speakers and the weakening of intergenerational transmission. National language policies prioritising Indonesian, urbanisation, and the dominance of Ternate Malay in daily communication have been the primary factors accelerating language shift and marginalising the use of Ternate.

The findings underscore the importance of structured documentation and revitalisation efforts to preserve Ternateno as both cultural heritage and a symbol of social identity. Furthermore, this case provides significant contributions to theoretical discussions on creolization, language

maintenance, and language shift in postcolonial contexts, illustrating how historical legacies continue to shape the linguistic ecology of Southeast Asia. Future research is recommended to develop community-based revitalisation strategies and to critically evaluate the role of language policy in supporting the preservation of minority creole languages. Preserving Ternateno not only enriches linguistic diversity but also honours the hybrid historical narratives embedded within this creole language. This study confirms that Ternateno is a Portuguese-based creole language that emerged through intensive contact between Portuguese colonisers and local communities in Ternate since the early sixteenth century. Its formation reflects a layered process of creolization involving Portuguese lexical foundations and strong structural influence from Malay and Ternate. Historically, Ternateno functioned as both a communicative medium and an ethno-religious identity marker of the Catholic Mardijker community. Contemporary evidence from interviews, participant observation, and document analysis demonstrates that while symbolic and ritual uses persist, the language has experienced severe functional reduction and is now largely restricted to elderly speakers. From a language vitality perspective, Ternateno is in a critical condition due to weakened intergenerational transmission, domain restriction, and dominance pressure from Indonesian and Ternate Malay. Without immediate and structured intervention, the language faces a high risk of disappearance within one or two generations. Therefore, preservation efforts must move beyond descriptive documentation toward applied revitalisation action.

Concrete practical steps are strongly recommended. These include the development of a community-based audio and video corpus of Ternateno**,** the design of school-linked revitalisation modules, the implementation of intergenerational transmission programs**,** and the provision of community training in language documentation and heritage teaching methods**.** Such initiatives would transform preservation from passive archiving into active revitalisation and social reactivation of linguistic heritage. For future research, several clear avenues should be pursued. First, quantitative sociolinguistic surveys are needed to map speaker numbers, proficiency levels, domain use, and language attitudes across age groups with statistical precision. Second, comparative creole studies within the Nusantara region should be conducted to position Ternateno within the broader network of Portuguese- and Malay-contact creoles, enabling deeper historical and typological comparison. Third, in-depth morphosyntactic analysis based on recorded natural speech data is necessary to describe clause structure, tense–aspect marking, argument structure, and grammatical convergence patterns more rigorously.

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