

# The Language Attitude of Simalungun People toward Vernacular Maintenance in Pematang Siantar

*by* Cek Turnitin

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**A atitude linguística de Simalungun Pessoas em direção à manutenção vernacular em  
Pematang Siantar**

**The Language Attitude of Simalungun People toward Vernacular Maintenance in  
Pematang Siantar**

**La actitud lingüística de Simalungun Personas hacia el mantenimiento vernáculo en  
Pematang Siantar**

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**Indra Jayanti Damanik**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7304-2330>

Universitas Simalungun, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

e-mail: [jayantidamanikiin@gmail.com](mailto:jayantidamanikiin@gmail.com)

**Ridwin Purba**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3708-221X>

Universitas Simalungun, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

e-mail: [purbaridwin61@gmail.com](mailto:purbaridwin61@gmail.com)

### **Resumo**

Este estudo tem como objetivo descobrir a atitude linguística do povo Simalungun em relação à manutenção vernácula em Pematang Siantar. Os dados foram coletados do povo Simalungun que vive no distrito de Sitalasari na regência de Pematang Siantar. O estudo emprega um projeto de pesquisa qualitativa com o consentimento de algum informante com a necessidade desta pesquisa para obter entendimento. Os sujeitos deste estudo foram 18 pessoas Simalungun (17 a 25 anos). Os instrumentos utilizados para a coleta de dados foram ficha de questionário, ficha de observação, gravação e entrevista. Os dados da folha de questionário foram usados para examinar a atitude de linguagem. Os achados mostram que há 10 (55,6%) informantes que apresentam atitude negativa e 8 (44,4%) informantes, atitude positiva. Estes são influenciados por três fatores diferentes que afetam a atitude, a saber: a tendência de deslealdade da linguagem, falta de orgulho e desconhecimento da norma. Isso faz com que a linguagem seja menos usada, especialmente na comunicação da vida social diária.

**Palavras-chave:** Atitude de linguagem; Manutenção vernácula; Língua.

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### Abstract

This study is aimed to find out the language attitude of Simalungun people toward vernacular maintenance in Pematang Siantar. The data were collected from the Simalungun people living in Sitalasari district Pematang Siantar regency. The study employs qualitative research design with some informant's consent with the need of this research to get understanding. The subjects of this study were 18 Simalungun people (17 years old to 25 years old). The instruments used for collecting data were questionnaire sheet, observation sheet, recording and interview. The data from questionnaire sheet were used to examine the language attitude. The findings show that there are 10 (55, 6 %) informants who have negative attitude and 8 (44, 4 %) informants have the positive attitude. These are influenced by three different factors which affect the attitude, namely; the tendency of language disloyalty, lack of pride and unawareness of the norm. This causes the language to be less frequency in use particularly in daily social life communication.

**Keywords:** Language attitude; Vernacular maintenance; Language.

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### Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo conocer la actitud lingüística de la gente simalungun hacia el mantenimiento vernáculo en Pematang Siantar. Los datos fueron recolectados de la gente de Simalungun que vive en la regencia de Pematang Siantar del distrito de Sitalasari. El estudio emplea un diseño de investigación cualitativa con el consentimiento de algún informante con la necesidad de esta investigación para obtener comprensión. Los sujetos de este estudio fueron 18 personas Simalungun (de 17 a 25 años). Los instrumentos utilizados para la recolección de datos fueron hoja de cuestionario, hoja de observación, registro y entrevista. Los datos de la hoja del cuestionario se utilizaron para examinar la actitud lingüística. Los hallazgos muestran que hay 10 (55, 6%) informantes que tienen actitud negativa y 8 (44,4%) informantes tienen actitud positiva. Estos están influenciados por tres factores diferentes que afectan la actitud, a saber; la tendencia a la deslealtad del lenguaje, la falta de orgullo y el desconocimiento de la norma. Esto hace que el uso del lenguaje sea menos frecuente, especialmente en la comunicación de la vida social diaria.

**Palabras clave:** Actitud lingüística; Mantenimiento vernáculo; Idioma.

## 1. Introduction

Globalization and high community affect Simalungun social life, almost all aspects of Simalungun influenced by globalization which is hard to control. It leads the Simalungun community to a better life, such as the development of information and technology that will be able to ease relation in society. This also supports negative effect to that society especially for those who live in the capital city of Medan as they become egoistic, apathetic, and show improper lifestyle to cultural norm. The influence of globalization affects action, awareness, and attitudes of this community to use their vernacular. This can be seen in the phenomena of less frequent usage of the vernacular, where they tend to speak Indonesian rather than their own vernacular in daily life interaction, in working place, family, and public places. For instance, when the leader of community announces something, or even in an important community meeting they use Indonesian. This situation shows Simalungun people force them to use other vernacular namely Indonesian. It can be assumed that the people think Indonesian more guaranties for their future.

Furthermore there are many youths of this people who cannot speak or understand Simalungun vernacular, this indication is very risky for the existence of the vernacular, especially the young generation at the age of 18 to 20 years old on the street, market, office, and some other places tend to speak Indonesia rather than using their own vernacular, this can be seen when someone asking something in Simalungun; he or she tends to response by using Indonesian vernacular. Moreover, there is a lack of eagerness from the children at school age to use local vernacular in their interaction, it is proven by Iskandar (2008) research on the students' attitude on using Simalungun in family, community, and school. It shows that 26% of students in Medan disagree to use the vernacular because it will constrain their knowledge, difficult to reach the development and to use Simalungun will only limit their perception on regionalism which lead to disintegration. They have less positive attitude to Simalungun vernacular, whereas attitudes are crucial in vernacular growth or decay (Batang, 2010). Consequently, to make sure the vernacular is maintained, it needs positive attitude from its own speakers. Furthermore, parents have the tendency in guiding and pride their children to use that vernacular in their family interaction and they feel proud when their children are able to speak Indonesian or other vernacular fluently since the beginning (Batubara, 2012).

In addition, Pematang Siantar is multilingual community since the community Pematang Siantar itself does not only consist of Simalungun but some other ethnics group as



well. It can be seen that Simalungun people in Pematang Siantar are minority ethnic group, especially in Kelurahan Sofa, Siantar Sitalasari district. It allows choosing any code or variety in social interactions. These choices may have potential longer-term effects on the vernacular existing in a community. Nowadays, there is an indication that Simalungun vernacular is sidelined from that community daily life especially from its young generation and that vernacular is signaled unable to fulfill the need of its speaker for the life in a nation, particularly for the need of economic aspects.

Having strong and fast social change, maintenance of Simalungun vernacular in Pematang Siantar is a relevant effort to make sure that the vernacular is survived. Acehese vernacular maintenance is positive initiative to keep using vernacular to a better continuity in the future, since vernacular is a vital part of the development and expression of identity (Oriyama, 2010). In addition, vernacular is the identity for Simalungun people. Holmes (2013) states that vernacular is an important symbol of a certain ethnic group. Based on the condition above, the researcher is interested in conducting her research relates to the attitude of Simalungun people towards their own vernacular maintenance which occurs among the speakers in Pematang Siantar. The researcher determines Pematang Siantar as location of research because the researcher consider that the-place as the most progressive among other regions. Beside that in those regions, Simalungun people are as minority clan. Based on the background of the study, the problems are formulated as the following: "What are the attitudes of Simalungun people toward their own vernacular in Pematang Siantar?" In relation to the problems of the study, the objectives of this research are to elaborate the attitude of the people towards their vernacular maintenance. It is also to describe attitude realization of the people towards their vernacular maintenance.

As attitudes are mental phenomena which cannot be observed directly but it is normally manifested in the form of action. Therefore, condition and process to form vernacular attitudes is not quite different from the attitudes in general, accordingly vernacular attitudes is mental phenomena and must be observed through the behavior or the use of vernacular. So, it can be assumed that vernacular attitudes can be defined as positive or negative evaluation of vernacular. As stated by Yusri (2011) attitude towards a vernacular refers to the perception of a community towards that vernacular. Therefore it has a tendency to react in a certain way either positive or negative. Vernacular positive attitude is to use or to treat the vernacular positively in daily interaction. In line with this, Garvin and Mathiot (1968) formulate the following category of positive vernacular attitude:

- Vernacular Loyalty, where the people of certain vernacular encourage themselves to

maintain own vernacular and prohibit the effect of other vernacular if it is needed.

- Vernacular Pride, where the people of a certain vernacular encourage themselves to spread and use the vernacular as a symbol of identity and symbol of unity.

- Awareness of the Norm, where the people of a certain vernacular encourage themselves to use the vernacular and accurately. This is considered as a dominant factor to influences the action of vernacular use. A positive vernacular attitude is an eagerness of the community to use vernacular in all domains. It is believed that the positive vernacular attitude categories above support the vernacular to be maintained. In accordance to positive attitude to the vernacular, there are some categories provided as in UNESCO document on endanger vernacular (2003). Holmes (2013) states that positive attitudes support effects to use the vernacular in variety of domains, and this help people resist the pressure from majority group to switch to their vernacular. Therefore positive attitude considered important in vernacular maintenance. From the definition and factors contribute to the vernacular maintaining and vernacular shift and effect of them, it can be categorized into the following table:

**Table 1.** Economic, Social, Politic, and Demographic Factors Contributes to Vernacular Attitude and Its Effect.

No	Category	Indicators	Effects
1	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vernacular is considered</li> <li>- Effect to use the vernacular at home.</li> <li>- Ensure the vernacular is used in setting such as school and worship place</li> <li>- Government of the country legislate the use of vernacular in all domain such as education, law and administration</li> <li>- Family sees that there is a good reason to continue using the vernacular.</li> </ul>	Vernacular maintenance
2	Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vernacular is seen as an important symbol.</li> <li>- Community sees an important reason for learning the second vernacular</li> <li>- Community sees no reason to take active steps</li> </ul>	Vernacular shift

		to shift maintain their 16nic vernacular. - People are anxious to “get on” in society where knowledge of second vernacular is a prerequisite for success.	
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Source: Adopted from Brenzinger (2003).

Vernacular maintenance is the continuing use of a vernacular in the face of competition from a regionally and socially more powerful vernacular (Mesthrie, R., & Hurst: 2013). So it can be said that vernacular maintenance refers to a situation where members of a community try to keep the vernacular they have always used. It is in fact crucial for the vernacular survival. The effects of vernacular maintenance programs can be extremely positive for threatened cultural groups. Since most ethnic groups have a distinct vernacular or dialect and these linguistic characteristic can be necessary attributes for membership in the group, we can surmise that the mother tongue is a key criterion for ethnic group membership (Cavallaro: 2005). In addition, Gomaa (2011) states that it is very important for the minority group, in order to maintain their home vernacular, to have a number of cultural core values. These values are crucial to its vernacular’s existence and continuity. Negative attitude is the decrease of loyalty from members’ community to the vernacular they have used. Such attitude will lead the vernacular to shift, loss, or death, as mentioned in a UNESCO document (2003), if positive attitude to vernacular does not occur, it means that those people contribute negative attitude to their vernacular. Such negative attitude to the vernacular, can lead to the vernacular shift, loss or death.

Negative attitude to vernacular can also be happen when the people or a group of people do not feel proud of their own vernacular anymore, it occurs when ethnic vernacular is not highly valued and is not seen as a symbol of identity. This happens when teenagers or young generation gradually abandon to use ethnic vernacular or mother vernacular in daily communication, or if members view their vernacular as hindrance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society, they may develop negative attitudes towards their vernacular (Unesco, 2003). Pematang Siantar city as the biggest population in North Sumatera experiences the rapid development since the city fulfilling the population growth which is fast enough. This case caused by urbanization of society from regions of Simalungun Regency. Besides that, enlargement of region and the development of public facility became one of factor which contributes to the dense population in this fresh city.



Simalungun vernacular is an Austronesia vernacular and is spoken around by 2 million people especially in areas surrounding of Simalungun Regency, involves Pematang Raya, Sidamanik and Around Pematang Siantar City, Indonesia. The vernacular is included in Austronesia vernacular and part of Batak vernacular group. According to history, Pematang Siantar is one of intended area by Batak Toba people who move from highland, Lake Toba. At the beginning of 1900s, Batak Toba people immigrated from Toba Samosir to Pematang Siantar at the time Batak People in war fighting Holland Colonials. The attendance of Batak Toba people to Pematang Siantar are influenced of some factors both influenced factors from source area and promising factors from promising factors. The number of population causes pressure to the area densely populated. The attendance of Batak People in Pematang Siantar gives big enough influence in vernacular, livings, identity, and culture of Simalungun in Pematang Siantar. Batak Toba people living in Pematang Siantar use show their identity by holding cultural celebrations, and family name association and daily vernacular used is Tobanese vernacular. This condition causes Simalungun people to be a minority people in Pematang Siantar.

## <sup>12</sup> 2. Methodology

This study is conducted in qualitative research, according to Bogdan & Biklen (1992), it designs in order to describe the attitudes toward Simalungun vernacular maintenance occurred among Simalungun speakers in Pematang Siantar. Djam'an and Aan (2010) argue <sup>17</sup> that qualitative research refers to the meaning, concept, definition, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things. <sup>1</sup> Qualitative design attempts to describe what is going on and what data shows. Therefore, in order to understand the phenomena, the researcher elaborates the study, make a list and present it descriptively. The written results contained quotations from data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. The data include (1) observation, (2) questionnaire, and (3) interview. Mack (2005: 15) says that observation is the way of collecting data which is done through looking and taking note about the indications occurs from subject of the research. This research will apply direct observation through looking, listening and taking note about phenomena on the Simalungun vernacular maintenance among Simalungun speaker in Pematang Siantar. It means that researcher will observe in the field to look at the phenomena which relate to the efforts and supporting reason to their attitudes towards Simalungun vernacular maintenance through taking note on the phenomenon. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) interview is the way to capture a word-



picture of setting, people, actions, and conversation. Furthermore, Seidman (2006) says that interview in a research is aiming at collecting information about human life, their point of view in society and it is also as a main support for observation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Language Attitude

As stated by Yusri (2011) language attitude <sup>7</sup> refers to the perception of a community towards a language. It has a tendency to react in a certain way either positive or negative. The positive and negative categories are classified based on the frequent use of the language. From the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, it is seen that the respondents show positive and negative attitudes towards Simalungun ethnic language. The attitude shown by the respondents was analyzed based on the theory as a temporary category of data analysis to answer the problem. The frequency of the attitude of inter-ethnic marriage Simalungun people towards their ethnic language occurred within the respondents whose marriage is at the period of least 17 years old and maximum 25 years old is shown in the table below:

**Table 2.** Positive and negative attitudes of Simalungun people towards their ethnic language.

No	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE	
	Informant	%	Informant	%
1	2,4,5,8,9,10,11,12	44,4 %	1,3,6,7,13,14,15,16,17,18	55,6%

Source: Adopted from Brenzinger (2003).

From the table displayed above, it can be seen that the percentage of attitude from informants towards Simalungun ethnic language is dominantly negative. Negative attitude which is shown by the respondents is higher than positive attitudes. This is due to the reason that 55,6 % of the respondents do not use Simalungun ethnic language in all domains as medium of communication in their daily communication and 44,4 % of informants use Simalungun ethnic language as device of communication. Therefore, 8 informants considered to have positive attitude towards Simalungun ethnic language, while 10 informants show negative attitude. Negative attitude is the decrease of loyalty from members' community to the language they have used. Such attitude will lead the language to shift, loss, or death, as mentioned in a UNESCO document (2003), if positive attitude of language does not occur, or

weak from someone or from a group of people of a certain language, it means that those people contribute negative attitude to their language. Such negative attitude to the language, can lead to the language shift, loss or death.

22 Negative attitude to language can also be happen when the people or a group of people do not feel proud of their own language anymore, it occurs when ethnic language is not highly valued and is not seen as a symbol of identity. 15 Therefore, once the informants do not have an eagerness and awareness to keep using vernacular language in variety of domain, they can be categorized into negative attitude. Data of attitudes comprise 18 respondents/informants; they are 6 Simalungun young people from low level class, 6 Simalungun young people from middle level class and 6 Simalungun young people from high level class. Based on the table, it can be seen that 55,6 % of informants have negative attitude because they do not keep using their vernacular language in all domains. It can be seen in the following explanation taken from the recording and customized with research questionnaire:

#### **Data 1 (N/R/01)**

Informant: I rarely use Simalungun language as the main delivery language in daily life communication

From the data, it can be concluded that the informant (Simalungun young people who comes from low level status background) have negative attitude toward their vernacular because they are not aware that Simalungun vernacular is their identity. The informant has negative attitude because the vernacular language has not a role in their family. Since family must be considered as the basic unit of communities; it consists of core family and extended families. In this case, parent of the Simlaungun young people do not introduce the language to their children because the informant rarely use Simalungun vernacular in their daily communication. Moreover if another language serves as means of communication and it is used to communicate with others to represent and exchange their experience of by using the language(s) they know. The presence of other speakers with different linguistic in the networks of speakers might have changed the language of their daily life. In line to definition above it is clear that there are some factors influence the language shift. What Martin says as the factors of language shift such as the speaker parents, spouse, and children agrees with what occurs with the speakers of Simalungun vernacular in Sitalasari district Pematang Siantar regency. Language shift in this case is caused by the negative evaluation of its Simalungun youth because the change of individual's main language, such as the speaker's

parent, spouse or children. This is influenced by the presence of other speakers with different linguistic in the networks of speakers. This is clearly understood as young people are easily got affected both in language and lifestyle. The data as shown in data 1, 3, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 show how the speakers' evaluation of Simalungun young people towards their language in Sitalasari district Pematang Siantar regency.

**Data 2 (N/R/03)**

Informants: I never use Simalungun language when communicate with my father and I seldom use Simalungun language when communicate with my mother in daily interaction.

**Data 3 (N/R/06)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language when communicate with my brother and my sister in daily interaction.

**Data 4 (N/R/07)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language when communicate with my grandmother and grandfather in daily interaction.

**Data 5 (N/R/13)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language in religion activities.

**Data 6 (N/R/14)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language when communicate with the people in my environment.

**Data 7 (N/R/15)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language in social activities.

**Data 8 (N/R/16)**

Informant: When attending Simalungun cultural ceremonies, I seldom communicate in Simalungun language with others.

**Data 9 (N/R/17)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language with the shopkeeper in the market.



**Data 10 (N/R/18)**

Informant: I never use Simalungun language with my family when bumping into each other in the market.

From the data, it shows that the Simalungun young people seldom use Simalungun vernacular and most of them never use their vernacular language in their daily life. It means that the attitude of Simalungun young people toward their vernacular absolutely contributes in determining how the speakers of Simalungun' evaluation towards their language, in this case is negative or positive evaluation. Simalungun young people dominantly have the negative attitude towards their vernacular language; this also proves that the attitude language of Simalungun young people affects the survival of their vernacular then causing the shift of Simalungun language.

**3.1.1. Language Disloyalty**

According to <sup>21</sup> Garvin and Mathiot (1968) there are three categories of negative language attitude; a) Language disloyalty, b) Language Pride Lack, and c) Language unawareness of the norm. Language disloyalty, where the people of certain language do not encourage themselves to maintain own language and allow the effect of other language affect their language survival. Language disloyalty of young Simalungun people can be seen in the following table:

**Table 3.** Language Disloyalty towards Simalungun vernacular.

No	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE	
	RESPONDENTS	%	RESPONDENTS	%
1	2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 14, 15	38,8 %	1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18	61,1 %

Source: Adopted from Brenzinger (2003).

From the table, it can be seen that the respondents dominantly show the negative attitude on the category of language disloyalty. This means that they do not use Simalungun vernacular as the medium of communication. There are 11 informants showing negative attitude to the category of language disloyalty, it means that 61,1 % informants show negative attitude to the category of language disloyalty. It can be considered that the informants show their disloyalty to Simalungun vernacular. This indication shows us that informants do not use Simalungun vernacular as medium of communication in most of their daily interaction. The

following is the data acquired from research recording after being transcribed.

#### Data 10 (N/R/18)

Informants: I never use Simalungun language in my neighborhood

From the data, Simalungun young people have negative attitude toward vernacular in category disloyalty because they do not use Simalungun vernacular when they communicate in their neighborhood. The existent of other people who does not Simalungun in their environment make them change their language to have become Indonesian language.

#### 3.1.2. Language Pride Lack

Language pride lack is where the people of a certain language do not encourage themselves to spread and do not use the language as a symbol of identity and symbol of unity. Eventhough, Simalungun young people have negative attitude towards their vernacular, they are still having responsibility to maintain Simalungun vernacular since it is considered as symbol identity and symbol of unity.

**Table 3.** Language Pride Lack towards Simalungun ethnic language.

No	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE	
	RESPONDENTS	%	RESPONDENTS	%
1	2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15	61,1 %	1, 3, 6, 13, 16, 17, 18	38,9 %

Source: Adopted from Brenzinger (2003).

From the table it can be seen that 11 informants or 61.1 % informants show positive attitude to the category of language pride lack, it means that the respondents keep using their vernacular in attending the social activity. This indicates that the respondents show their pride of their vernacular as their identity or typical characteristic and as a symbol of unity in particular ceremonies. This condition can be seen at the following statement taken from questionnaire:

#### Data 1 (P/R/2)

Informant: I use Simalungun language in culture ceremony.

I use Simalungun language in Religion activity.

### **3.1.3. Unawareness of the Norm**

The category of language unawareness of norm is the people of a certain language do not encourage themselves to use the language politely and accurately. From the questionnaire distributes, there are 66,7 % of informants who show negative attitude from the data ( 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16,17, 18 ), meanwhile 33,3 % of the informants show positive attitude from the data (5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Based on the data percentage of informants that is 33,3 % show negative attitude to the level of unawareness of the norm of Simalungun vernacular, it means that only a few of the respondents perform or speak Simalungun vernacular ethnic language with good respect to the norm of Simalungun vernacular where they do not use and speak Simalungun vernacular politely and accurately based on its norm.

### **4. Conclusions**

The objective of the study which is to discover the attitudes of indigenous Simalungun people toward their own vernacular in Pematang Siantar has been attained. This result also leads to different factors and reason behind the negative attitude which is considered as the main attitude shown by the respondents' questionnaires. Some of them are deemed as the language disloyalty as they are consciously choosing neither to inherit the vernacular to the children nor to use in the daily life such as in social purposes. Apart from that, it is also associated with the lack of pride to the vernacular as they also do not have an effort or intention/ willingness to speak the language to their children at home. However, the pride is still shown when it comes to language of traditional ceremonies or religious speeches. The respondents still find it easier to not speak in the vernacular when communicating in between the events. It is hope that the findings will be expected to be useful and relevant theoretically and practically. In addition, the findings are expected to add more horizons in vernacular planning issues and give contribution and recommendation to governments in order to start maintaining language through education curriculum such as language learning as also suggested by Ferguson (2006).

Practically, the findings are expected to awaken awareness of Simalungun speakers in multilingual contexts. In addition, the findings are relevant to vernacular planners in efforts to maintain endangered vernaculars. The result of this research will be contributed to Kabupaten Simalungun as reference of vernacular study, especially vernacular attitude of Simalungun people towards their own vernacular. Therefore, future research can be possibly conducted in



different area within the province to provide wide ranging insights on the maintenance of Simalungun vernacular.

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**Percentage contribution of each author in the manuscript**

Indra Jayanti Damanik - 50%

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# The Language Attitude of Simalungun People toward Vernacular Maintenance in Pematang Siantar

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