

# Domain Dependent Code Choices and Their Implications for the Future of the Musom Language

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The Musom language is a small Austronesian language primarily spoken in Musom and Gwabadik (Gobadick) villages in Morobe province. According to some elders in Gwabadik village, most Musom speakers in Gwabadik are originally from Musom village. They moved to Gwabadik village due to some family conflicts. These elders also said that there is a small number of Musom speakers who reside in the small village of Posi, or Musom Tale, but most young Musom people there have abandoned their language for the neighbouring Bukawa language.

During a visit to Musom village in April 1994<sup>1</sup> I made a number of observations which indicated that language shift was occurring. These included the following.

- a) While the older people, that is, age 40 years and above were very willing to have their stories recorded, the younger ones were more reluctant.<sup>2</sup> One, a man about 30 years old, told me when I prompted him that his Musom was so mixed with Tok Pisin that he could not have his stories recorded.
- b) Even in the village, everyone except a few elderly people tended to converse in Tok Pisin.<sup>3</sup>
- c) When I asked some school-aged and preschool-aged children to record their stories, I was informed by some of the villagers that while the children understood Musom, they spoke only Tok Pisin. They needed to ask for clarification from

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate purpose for the visit was to make audio recordings of the Musom language at the request of Prof S Wurm, chairman of Comite International Permanent des Linguistes (CIPL).

<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely that this was due to the possible existence of generally recognised story tellers since I was not particularly interested in *tumbuna* (traditional) stories. I just wanted children to tell me about what they did at school or the previous day. My aim was to collect speech samples in Musom regardless of genre.

<sup>3</sup> This could have been due to the presence of an outsider. In some communities like my own, if people use Tok Pisin or English among themselves when a nonnative speaker is present, they do it as a joke or to impress the outsider. The situation in Musom seemed different, with Tok Pisin being used in casual conversation as a natural state of affairs.

their elders when they did not understand certain words and expressions in they heard in Musom.

These few small but significant incidents were signs to me that language shift from Musom to Tok Pisin was occurring. The purpose of the research reported in this paper, therefore, was to determine how multilingual the Musom speech community is and to what extent a language shift is taking place. Language choice analysis had to be done to determine this. Different domains were defined, and a questionnaire was used to determine what language choices are made in the different domains.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Maintenance, Shift and Language Death

I will use the following description of language shift by Fasold (1984:213) as a point of departure for this paper:

“Language shift and, the other side of the coin, language maintenance are really the long-term collective results of language choice. Language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one. The members of the community, when the shift has taken place, have collectively chosen a new language where an old one used to be used.”

Languages die for various reasons and the manner in which they die also varies. Campbell and Muntzel (1989, as quoted in Sasse (1992:22)) distinguish between four types of language death. The first type, sudden death, occurs when a language abruptly disappears because all its speakers suddenly die or are killed. The second type, radical death, involves rapid language loss usually due to severe political repression, often with genocide, to the extent that speakers stop using the language as a form of self-defense. The third type, gradual death, involves language loss due to gradual shift to the dominant language in language contact situations. The fourth type, bottom-to-top death, occurs when the language is lost in intimate family contexts, but is kept in ritual contexts.

There are certain commonly occurring conditions which may prevail before a language dies or, in other words, before a community changes or shifts languages. Dutton and Mühlhäusler (1993:43), drawing on the work of Fasold (1984), list the following conditions which are conducive to language death:

1. if a small group of speakers migrates to an area where their language is no longer of much use;

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<sup>4</sup> What is referred to here as language shift is a stage along a continuum that can result in language death.

2. if a language is spoken by a population smaller than the invading one;
3. if an area occupied by the language is being industrialised and/or is undergoing other major economic changes;
4. if the speakers are under strong educational and/or other government pressure to use another language;
5. if the area is being urbanised;
6. if the invading language is considered to carry greater prestige or to be of greater practical use.

Dutton and Mühlhäusler (1993:45) also note that when a language is in danger of dying, it shows certain signs of its death including the following:

1. parents begin using only the invading language with their children;
2. speakers of the old language show signs of devaluing their language, regarding it as inferior to the invading language;
3. speakers stop making the distinction between "us" (the ingroup) and "them" (the outgroup);
4. speakers start using the invading language in their church services.

Language shift is affecting many languages in Papua New Guinea. For example, while working on Magori and similar languages in the Amazon Bay area of Central Province, Dutton (1976) found that some small languages were dying. He noted that one of the languages, Ouma, had only four speakers, while two others, Yoba and Bina, had only two living speakers. Though he did not discuss the reasons for their decline and eventual death, he noted that the speakers from these languages were living in communities of larger language speaking groups.

Working in Morobe Province, Smith (1992) observes the situation of the Susuami language of the Angan language family is desperate. When Smith visited the Susuami community in 1980, he found over 55 living speakers of the language. When he visited ten years later in 1990, he found that most of the native speakers he had worked with in 1980 had died and that only 14 people still spoke the language. Moreover, these 14 speakers were living in five different settlements. This lack of cohesiveness along with a high incidence of outmarriages could speed up the death of the language.

## 2. Methodology

Fasold (1984) mentions two methods commonly used in the study of language shift and language maintenance. One is through participant observation where observation notes serve as the data. The other is through the use of surveys which can be in the form of returns from censuses or survey questionnaires. This study exploits the use of survey questionnaires.

The most effective way to determine the extent to which shift is occurring from the Musom language to Tok Pisin would be to use a long term survey, where data is collected at two different times. Due to limited available time, however, I used what Fasold (1984) terms a "one-shot" or "one-time" survey. The questionnaire, given in Appendix 1, was designed to determine to what extent the Musom speech community was multilingual and, especially, to determine the particular language(s) used in specific domains. The portion of the questionnaire dealing with language abilities focussed on Musom and Tok Pisin since my hypothesis was that there is a language shift taking place from the Musom language to Tok Pisin.

The questionnaire, consisting of 21 questions in Tok Pisin, was administered by fifteen assistants, seven from Gwabadik village and eight from Musom village. The use of Tok Pisin enabled the subjects and assistants to understand the questions more easily. More than 300 questionnaires were distributed, with the intention of having a questionnaire completed for every Musom speaker aged 3 or above, especially for those who were residents of Gwabadik or Musom village. I explained each of the questions in the questionnaire to the 15 assistants and then they collected the questionnaires and asked the questions to all those within the Musom speech community who were 3 years and above and filled in the questionnaires. The goal of the survey was to have Of the 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 268 were completed and collected. The reason why a good proportion of the questionnaires were collected back was because the researcher spent two full days; a day in Gwabadik village and another day in Musom where 15 youths, 7 from Gwabadik village and 8 from Musom village were engaged in administering the questionnaires.

### **3. The Languages of Musom**

The survey revealed that at least twenty languages are spoken in Musom and Gwabadik villages. These are listed in Table 1 along with the percentage of people who indicated they speak each one. In cases where a person did not know the name of the language, it is indicated as 'unknown' along with the geographic location.

**Table 1: Languages Spoken in the Musom Language Community**

Tok Pisin	94.4%	Guhu-Samane	1.5%
Musom	84.1%	Hiri Motu	1.5%
English	43.1%	Unknown Asaro	1.5%
Jabêm	19.7%	Lae (Kamkumung)	1.1%
Nabak	19.7%	Yalu	0.7%
Mesem	16.0%	Kabwum	0.7%
Wain	4.9%	Kâte	0.4%
Lambaip	4.1%	Unknown Wabag	0.4%
Bukawa	2.6%	Kuanua	0.4%
Unknown Markham	1.9%	Unknown Sepik	0.4%

The number of speakers for each of the languages ranges from almost a hundred percent for Tok Pisin to only one in the case of four languages. Most of the languages spoken by less than 5% of the population are present in the Musom villages due to outmarriages to people from surrounding language groups. This includes Lambaip, Wain, Bukawa, Guhu-Samane, Lae, and unknown Markham languages. Other 'outside' languages are known by Musom speakers who for some reason have taken up residence in these other communities at some time in their lives.

The language known by the greatest number of people in the Musom and Gwabadik communities is not Musom but Tok Pisin. Bradshaw (1978) found this to be the case with Numbami and Tok Pisin in the Numbami community. Bradshaw observes that the popularity of Tok Pisin among the Numbami is due mainly to outsiders who marry into the community and rely exclusively on Tok Pisin. He adds that many children of Numbami-speaking parents speak only Tok Pisin "generally as a result of having first learned to speak in areas where Numbami was not spoken outside the home to any great extent" (p.28). I believe this could also have been the case at least initially in the Musom communities. As later discussion will reveal, however, Tok Pisin is spoken in more domains than any other language including Musom. Thus it is difficult to attribute its popularity in the Musom community to any one cause.

Musom is a member of the Busu sub-family of the Atzera family (McElhanon 1984). As already indicated, it is the major local language of Musom and Gwabadik villages.

Jabêm is a mission language which was "originally spoken by some 900 people living on the coast near present-day Finschhafen" (Zahn (1940) as quoted in Bradshaw (1978:32)). Jabêm was adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea for use as lingua franca among speakers of the Austronesian languages that form a dialect

chain around the Huon Gulf. Jabêm was later also used as a language of instruction in Lutheran-run schools. Bradshaw (1978), drawing on the work of Hogbin, points out that before Jabêm was adopted by the Lutheran Church as the lingua franca among the Austronesian language speakers in the Huon Gulf, Kawa (or Bukawa) served as a pre-contact trade language among the Austronesian language speakers around the Huon Gulf, and along with Tami also served as a language of trade in the Siassi trade network in the Vitiaz Strait. Jabêm made its way into the Musom speech community after gaining its lingua franca status. The use of Jabêm today, however, is mainly restricted to a handful of elderly men and women and to the church and church related activities.

Nabak and Mesem are other two commonly used languages in Musom and Gwabadik villages. Both are non-Austronesian languages belonging to the Western Huon Family (McElhanon 1984). Nabak is one of the largest languages spoken in the Huon Gulf, with 9505 speakers in 28 villages (McElhanon 1984). Mesem is smaller, with 1750 speakers in 9 villages (McElhanon, 1984). Both Musom and Gwabadik villages are surrounded by Nabak and Mesem speaking villages. A tiny minority of the people living in Musom village speak one of these languages. The situation is different in Gwabadik, however, since the use of the two languages is quite common there. This is due to the fact that when a splinter group of Musom speakers moved to settle in the present Gwabadik village, Mesem and Nabak speakers settled there as well.

Table 1 reveals that there are many languages available for use in the Musom speech community. The reason why a number of languages are spoken by a relatively high percentage of the community is because most of the speakers are multilingual. Table 2 shows the percentage of people who speak various numbers of languages.

**Table 2: Multilingualism in the Musom Language Community**

Number of Languages Spoken	Percentage of People
1	9.7%.
2	16.8%.
3	44.8%.
4	16.8%.
5	8.9%.
6 or more	3.0%

As indicated in Table 2, only 9.7% of the population can speak only one language. All monolinguals are aged 12 or younger and speak only Tok Pisin. It is likely that as they grow older they will learn other languages and become multilingual. The largest number of languages is eight spoken by a 58-year-old

man in Musom village. Trilinguagals form the largest group, including almost half the community, followed by bilinguals and quadrilinguals.

Multilingualism provides the prerequisite for code choices in different domains. When a certain code is chosen more often in a number of domains, language shift is seen to be taking place. This is the concern of the rest of this paper.

#### 4. Code Choices in Different Domains

Fasold (1984) distinguishes three different kinds of code choices; code-switching, code-mixing and choices made between or among varieties of one language. Code switching takes place when a speaker speaks two or more languages and has to choose among these languages. Code-mixing refers to a situation “where pieces of one language are used while a speaker is using another language. The language ‘pieces’ taken from another language are often words, but they can also be phrases or larger units” (Fasold 1984:180). The third type of code choices involves a speaker choosing among the different varieties of the same language. This paper is concerned with code-switching.

The code choices in code switching are governed by what Fasold (1984) calls “certain institutional contexts, called domains.” Domains take into account factors such as location (places), topic and participants (persons). A similar list of factors are presented Halliday and Hasan (1985). With the context of situation and they list the three variables field, tenor and mode. Field would include Fasold’s location and topic, while tenor is more or less equivalent to Fasold’s participants (persons) and mode refers to how the message is transmitted, especially whether it is spoken or written.

The questionnaire in this study was designed to ellicit code choices in a variety of domains. The questionnaire takes into account location (but not topic), participants, and mode. In the following sections I look at each of these factors.

##### 4.1 *Participants (Persons)*

Questions 17-18 asked “When you speak to the people listed below, what language do you use?”

- i) your parents
- ii) your elder brothers and sisters
- iii) your younger brothers and sisters
- iv) Musom children
- v) Musom people older than you.”

The results obtained after the questionnaire was analysed are as follows:

**Table 3: Language Choices made when you are Speaking with your Parents**

Musom	47.4%
Tok Pisin	44.0%
Mesem	4.1%
Guhu-Samane	1.9%
Nabak	1.9%
Lambaip	0.7%

Here, though Musom language tends to be the popular choice, it just pushes out Tok Pisin by a mere 3.4%. Other languages which rate quite high are Mesem, 4.1% and Guhu-Samane, 1.9%.

**Table 4: Language Choices made when you are Speaking with your Elder Siblings**

Tok Pisin	57.2%
Musom	37.1%
Mesem	2.4%
Wain	1.5%
Nabak	1.1%
Guhu-Samane	0.7%

Tok Pisin here, with 57.2% tends to be the more popular choice when people in the Musom community speak with their elder siblings followed by Musom language with 37.1%. Other languages more commonly used are Misim, 2.4%, Wain, 1.5%, Nabak, 1.1% and Guhu-Samane, 0.7%.



**Table 5: Language Choice made when you are Speaking with your Younger Siblings**

Tok Pisin	60.4%
Musom	35.4%
Wain	2.7%
Mesem	0.7%
Nabak	0.7%

Here again, Tok Pisin with 60.4% is certainly the most popular choice of language when it comes to talking with younger siblings. The closest rival is Musom, the local tok ples of the people, with 35.4%. Other languages that have been indicated to be used in this situation are Wain, 2.7%, Mesem, 0.7% and Nabak, 0.7%.

**Table 6: Language Choice with Musom Children**

Tok Pisin	51.0%
Musom	35.1%
English	10.4%
Jabêm	1.6%

Again, as in the two previous cases, Tok Pisin, 51.0% is the language more commonly chosen when people talk to younger Musom children. Tok Pisin is followed by Musom 35.1% and then English with 10.4%.

**Table 7: Language Choice with Musom Elders**

Tok Pisin	52.0%
Musom	43.0%
Jabêm	3.4%
Wain	1.6%

Tok Pisin with 52.0%, again, is a popular choice here. It is followed by Musom with 43.0% and Jabêm with 3.4%.

What we have looked at so far are statistics showing language or code choices made by people of the Musom speech community of both Musom and Gwabadik villages when the people are speaking to certain individuals or certain group of individuals.

Another participant (person) related domain is the family. However, it can be equally, or better classified under location or place variable.

#### 4.2 Location (Place)

Location is one of the variables in Domain Analysis. As the word location “suggests”, the code that you choose to use is dependent upon the place where you are verbally interacting. The location or place dependent code choice variables that my questionnaire tried to elicit are

- (i) family or home
- (ii) church
- (iii) Market
- (iv) School, and
- (v) Meetings.

Each of the five variables are be looked at.

- (i) Family (Home).

The question asked about the family domains was, “When you are talking with or telling stories with your family at home, what language do you use?” The responses to the question yielded the following results:

**Table 8**

Tok Pisin	81.7%
Musom	36.2%
Mesem	1.5%
Wain	1.5%
Guhu-Samane	1.1%
Nabak	0.7%

The results show clearly that even at home, it is not the local language, Musom, that is the most popular choice but Tok Pisin. Musom is relegated to the second position with 36.2% who choose to use the language at home.

## (ii) Church.

The language choice associated with the church and church related activities reveal the following results as elicited by my questionnaire:

**Table 9**

Tok Pisin	87.3%
Jabêm	18.6%
Musom	18.6%
English	1.1%
Mesem	1.1%
Wain	0.7%.

Tok Pisin again stands out as the most chosen language in church and church related activities followed by Jabêm and Musom, both 18.6% each respectively.

## (iii) Language Choice in the Market Domain.

One other variable looked at under the location or place variable is the market domain. It was looked at because it is one area where mostly informal speech is found. What choice of language would the people make in an informal situation like the market. The following are the results revealed by the analysis of the responses to my questionnaire:

**Table 10**

Tok Pisin	81.7%
Musom	33.9%
Jabêm	5.6%
Mesem	2.2%
Wain	1.1%

Tok Pisin tends to be by far the most popular choice with 81.7% for the market domain followed by Musom, the local language with 33.9% and Jabêm with a small percentage of 5.6%.

## (iv) Language Choice in the School Domain.

Language choice in the school domain is the fourth domain looked at under the location or place variable. These are the results revealed by my questionnaire:

**Table 11**

English	48.1%
Tok Pisin	44.0%
Jabêm	8.2%
Musom	6.3%

Unlike the previous three cases where Tok Pisin tended to be the more popular choice, English seems to be the popular choice here with 48.1%. However, Tok Pisin, with 44.0% follows closely behind as the next common language choice. Jabêm, the Mission lingua franca and formerly, a language of instruction in Lutheran run schools follows with 8.2% and Musom, the local language, with 6.3%.

## (v) Language Choice in the Meeting Domain.

The fifth and the final domain related to the location or place variable looked at is the meeting domain. The analysis of the responses to the questionnaire reveals the following :

**Table 12**

Tok Pisin	81.3%
Musom	26.9%
Jabêm	4.1%

Tok Pisin, 81.3%, as in a lot of other previous cases is by far the most common language choice in the meeting domain. Musom follows a fair way behind with 26.9% and Jabêm, again a fair way behind Musom, with 4.1%.

4.3 *Mode*

The other domain that I have looked at does not belong to the participant variable in Fasold's (1984) model. It also does not belong to the location or place variable; two variables that we have looked at earlier. It is a situation where the language that you choose to use is governed by whether you are going to use the language in the written mode or in the spoken mode. That is, it is the channel through which the message is transmitted that determines what language choice is made. The English equivalent of the

question asked is, "When you write letters/notes to some of your relatives and acquaintances who reside in some other places, what language do you use?"

This is what the analysis of the responses to the question revealed:

**Table 13**

Tok Pisin	69.7%
English	4.5%
Jabêm	3.0%
Musom	2.2%

A large proportion, 24.6%, did not respond. With those who responded, Tok Pisin, with 69.7%, again tends to be by far the most popular choice of language used in writing. English trails far behind on 4.5% and Jabêm, not too far behind English on 3.0%. Musom, the local language, follows closely behind Jabêm with 2.2%.

## 5. Discussion of Results

To begin our discussion, let us have a relook at the aim of this paper. As pointed out earlier, the aim of this paper is to determine what language choices are made in various domains with the view of determining whether any one of the languages spoken in the Musom speech community stands out as a dominant language choice in a variety of domains. More specifically, the aim was to see if my suspicions that Tok Pisin was becoming a more common language choice in a variety of domains could be proven.

The variety of domains looked at are grouped under the three variables of participants (persons), location (place) and mode, referring to a situation where a language choice is made according to whether a piece of communication is to be transmitted in a written or spoken form.

Under the participant variable, the domains or more accurately, interactants or interlocuters looked at for language choices are parents, elder siblings, younger siblings, young Musom children and older Musom people. Since the concern of this paper is mainly on Musom and Tok Pisin, a comparison of language choice between these two languages is in order.

**Table 14: Language Choice in Domains under the Participant Variable:  
A Comparison of Tok Pisin and Musom.**

Interlocutors	Tok Pisin	Musom.
Parents	44.0%	47.4%
Elder Siblings	57.2%	37.1%
Younger Siblings	60.4%	35.4%
Musom Children	51.0%	35.1%
Older Musom People	52.0%	43.0%

Tok Pisin is the most popular choice in the four variables of elder siblings, younger siblings, Musom children and older Musom people. However, with choice of language used with parents, the local language, Musom tends to be the popular choice but it pushes out Tok Pisin by a mere 3.4%.

The other variable under which language choices have been looked at is the location or place variable. Under the location or place variable, the domains looked at have been family or home, church, market, school and meetings. Again, since this paper is concerned with mostly Tok Pisin and Musom, with a view of determining which language is a more popular choice, a comparison is in order.

**Table 15: Language Choice in Domains under Location Variable:  
A Comparison of Tok Pisin and Musom.**

Domain	Tok Pisin	Musom
Family or Home	81.7%	36.2%
Church	87.3%	18.6%
Market	81.7%	33.9%
School	44.0%	6.3%
Meetings	81.3%	26.9%

The above table shows that when it comes to language choices in the different domains listed above, Tok Pisin is by far the most popular choice in comparison to the local language, Musom.

The third variable under which language choices have been looked at is Mode and in this case it is the written mode. A comparison is again made here of the choices of language made in writing between Tok Pisin and Musom.

**Table 16: Language Choice in Mode: A Comparison of Tok Pisin and Musom**

Domain	Tok Pisin	Musom.
Mode	69.7%	2.3%.

Again here, Tok Pisin is by far the most popular choice when it comes to using the written mode to relay messages.

In almost all domains observed in this study, Tok Pisin has been shown to be the dominant language choice for the Musom speakers. It has taken over from the former language of the church, Jabêm, as the dominant language in the church domain. In the home or family domain where normally, Musom, the local language would be the more dominant language, Tok Pisin has been indicated by more than 80% of the people in my survey to be their choice of language in this domain. The same comment can be made about the market and meetings domains. A large proportion also choose Tok Pisin as a language they use in writing.

The results show in no uncertain terms that there is a language shift from Musom to Tok Pisin. The degree of shift varies from one domain to another. But whatever the degree of shift may be in the various domains, there is a clear tendency that shift is taking place from Musom to Tok Pisin.

## 6. Conclusion

I would like to conclude this paper with a quotation from an article by Dutton and Mühlhäusler (1993:43):

For us a language is beginning to die in a particular community when its speakers begin to give up using it in favour of another. Thus, for example, if a village here in Papua New Guinea gives up speaking its mother tongue X in favour of Y (for talking at home, for making speeches, for ceremonial purposes) then X is dying in that community. It is dying because it is no longer carrying out its former range of functions. If the language to which the community adopting Y belongs is large, then the loss of a single community in this way makes little difference to the language group as a whole. On the other hand, if the language is small, as are many in Papua New Guinea, such a shift in allegiance may represent a serious blow. Language death, then, usually means that a language has been replaced by another one.

Though at present, the situation might seem quite healthy with Musom language, there are signs that the speakers are beginning to give up their language for Tok Pisin and this is happening in a variety of domains to a large degree.





17. Dispela em bilong ol pikinini na ol manmeri inogat pikinini long ansa.  
Taim yu toktok long dispela lain mi raitim daubilo, wanem tokples yu save usim?
- i) papa na mama bilong yu
  - ii) ol bikpela brata na susa bilong yu
  - iii) ol liklik brata na susa bilong yu
  - iv) ol sampela Musom pikinini nabaut lo viles o sapos yu go long skul, lo skul
  - v) ol sampela bikman na bikmeri nabaut lo viles o lo skul
18. Dispela em bilong ol bikpela manmeri tasol lo ansa.  
Taim yu toktok lo dispela lain mi raitim daubilo, wanem tokples yu save usim?
- i) papa na mama bilong yu
  - ii) ol bikpela brata na susa bilong yu
  - iii) ol liklik brata na susa bilong yu
  - iv) ol pikinini bilong yu
  - v) sampela ol Musom pikinini nabaut lo viles
  - vi) sampela ol bikman na bikmeri nabaut lo viles
19. Taim yu toktok o stori wantaim famli long haus, wanem tokples yu save yusim?
20. Dispela em blo ol manmeri husait i save lo rait tasol lo ansa.  
Taim yu raitim pas i go long sampela lain blo yu i stap long sampela hap, wanem tokples yu save usim?
21. Taim yu stap long dispela hap mi raitim daunblo, yu save usim wanem tokples taim yu bungim sampela lain i save long tok Musom?
- i) long lotu
  - ii) long ol maket long Lae
  - iii) long skul
  - iv) long mitin lo ples

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