

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research problems, aims of the study, significance of the study. It discusses the importance of traditional kissing as one of the communication practices of the Sabu people and explains why this tradition is significant to be studied from a sociolinguistic perspective.

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is one of the most important aspects of human life because it enables people to communicate, express ideas, share experiences, and establish relationships with others. Through language, people interact with members of society and participate in various social and cultural activities. According to Holmes and Wilson (2022), sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society. It examines how language is used by different groups of people and how social factors such as culture, ethnicity, age, gender, and social status influence communication. Similarly, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) explain that language and society cannot be separated because language reflects the identity and culture of its speakers. Therefore, language is not only a communication tool but also an important element in preserving cultural identity.

Communication is not limited to spoken or written language. People also communicate through facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body movements, physical touch, and other symbolic behaviors. These forms of communication are commonly known as nonverbal communication. According to Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank (2021), nonverbal communication refers to all forms of communication

other than spoken words that convey messages and meanings between individuals. Likewise, Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2021) state that nonverbal communication plays an important role in expressing emotions, attitudes, respect, intimacy, and interpersonal relationships. In many traditional communities, nonverbal communication is closely connected to cultural values and social norms that have been inherited from previous generations.

As society develops, sociolinguistics has expanded its scope from studying language variation to examining communication in broader social contexts. According to Johnstone (2018), language is a social practice through which people create meanings and construct identities within their communities. In addition, Bucholtz and Hall (2022) explain that identity is continuously produced through interaction and communication. This means that communication is not only verbal but also includes symbolic actions and cultural practices that represent the identity of a community. Therefore, studying nonverbal communication is an important part of sociolinguistic research because it helps explain how cultural identity is expressed through everyday interaction.

One of the ethnic groups that continues to preserve its traditional culture is the *Sabu* people who live on Sabu Island, East Nusa Tenggara Province. The Sabu people have maintained various ancestral traditions despite the influence of modernization and globalization. Their customs regulate many aspects of daily life, including family relationships, social interaction, traditional ceremonies, and communication among community members. These traditions play an important role in strengthening solidarity, maintaining harmony, and preserving the cultural identity of the Sabunese community.

Among the many traditions practiced by the Sabu people, traditional kissing is one of the most unique cultural practices. Unlike kissing in many modern societies, which is generally associated with romantic relationships, traditional kissing among the Sabu people functions as a customary greeting performed during traditional ceremonies, family gatherings, welcoming rituals, reconciliation events, and other important social occasions. This practice symbolizes respect, affection, kinship, hospitality, solidarity, and acceptance among members of the community. Therefore, its meaning cannot be understood merely as a physical action because it represents the cultural values shared by the Sabunese people.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, traditional kissing can be regarded as a sociolinguistic marker. According to Holmes and Wilson (2022), sociolinguistic markers are communicative features that reflect the social identity and cultural background of a speech community. Similarly, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) explain that communication reflects the norms, values, and identities of the people who practice it. Although sociolinguistic markers are often associated with language variation, dialects, accents, vocabulary choice, and code-switching, nonverbal communication may also function as a sociolinguistic marker because it communicates cultural meanings that are recognized by members of a particular society. Therefore, traditional kissing among the Sabu people can be understood as a nonverbal sociolinguistic marker that represents ethnic identity, social solidarity, and cultural belonging.

Identity has become one of the major discussions in contemporary sociolinguistics. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2022), identity is not a fixed characteristic but a dynamic process that is continuously constructed through

communication and social interaction. Likewise, Hall (2020) argues that cultural identity is maintained through shared traditions, collective experiences, and cultural practices inherited from previous generations. In the context of the Sabu people, traditional kissing is one of the cultural practices through which members of the community express their identity and maintain their connection with their cultural heritage.

In recent years, researchers have shown increasing interest in studying the relationship between language, culture, and identity through the perspective of sociolinguistics. Many studies have discussed language variation, multilingualism, code-switching, politeness strategies, and cultural communication in different communities. According to Holmes and Wilson (2022), sociolinguistics not only examines language variation but also investigates how communication reflects social identity, cultural values, and relationships within society. This broader perspective allows researchers to understand communication as a cultural practice rather than merely a linguistic phenomenon.

Several previous studies have examined nonverbal communication and cultural identity in different cultural contexts. Some researchers have focused on traditional greetings, symbolic gestures, and ritual communication as forms of cultural expression. Others have investigated how indigenous communities preserve their traditions through verbal and nonverbal communication. These studies have contributed significantly to understanding the relationship between communication and culture. However, most of these studies mainly discuss communication practices in general without specifically analyzing traditional kissing as a sociolinguistic marker of ethnic identity..

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich sociolinguistic studies, particularly those related to nonverbal communication, cultural identity, and indigenous communication practices. Practically, the findings may increase public awareness of the importance of preserving the traditional kissing practice as part of the cultural heritage of the Sabu people. The researcher also expects that this study will encourage younger generations to appreciate, maintain, and continue practicing their ancestral traditions as an important aspect of their ethnic identity.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulates the following research problem: What are the form, function, and meaning of traditional kissing among the Sabu people?

1.3 Aim of the Study

Based on the research problems above, the aim of this study :To describe the form, function, and meaning of traditional kissing among the Sabu people..

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic studies, particularly those related to nonverbal communication, cultural identity, and the Ethnography of Communication. This study is also

expected to enrich the literature concerning sociolinguistic markers in indigenous communities, especially in the context of Indonesian local cultures. Furthermore, the findings may serve as an additional reference for future researchers who are interested in conducting studies on sociolinguistics, cultural communication, and identity construction.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study is expected to provide benefits for several parties.

For the Sabu Community: This study is expected to increase public awareness of the importance of preserving traditional kissing as one of the cultural identities of the Sabu people. It may also encourage community members to continue practicing and transmitting this tradition to younger generations.

For Researchers: The findings of this study are expected to become a useful reference for researchers who are interested in sociolinguistics, nonverbal communication, cultural identity, indigenous communication, and ethnographic studies. It may also inspire further research on other traditional communication practices in Indonesia.

For the Local Government and Cultural Institutions The findings of this study are expected to support government agencies and cultural institutions in documenting, preserving, and promoting the traditional cultural heritage of the Sabu people. The study may also contribute to future cultural preservation programs and policies aimed at safeguarding Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage.