

## Translanguaging in Religious Speech: Practices, Evaluation, and Perception

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### ABSTRACT

Few studies have examined translanguaging's uses in preaching, which is the field of religious communication, even though it has been widely studied in educational communication. The study aims to characterize, evaluate, and perceive the translanguaging practices in Sunday sermons using Simalungun, a traditional language in North Sumatra Province. The study used a descriptive qualitative method with a survey design. Sixty priests participated in the study as participants selected by using a purposive sampling technique. Simalungun language was chosen as the language of sermon delivery, and the research instrument was the Google Form platform. This study found that motivation to employ translanguaging is crucial for effective sermon delivery and understanding. This study examines the reasons for priests' use of translanguaging, including the predominant preaching genre, the language used, challenges encountered, and congregational perceptions. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive account of translanguaging in Simalungun sermons, perceptions of the translanguaging practices, and better comprehension of messages in the sermon as implications of the study. The study suggests that additional research on the content of preaching in Sunday sermons be conducted using various analytical methodologies.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Religious Speech, Practice, Evaluation, Perception

## 1. Introduction

The mainstream culture has introduced world languages into a global culture that is heavily influenced by Western cultural ideals. (Uzum et al., 2021). In general, the standard of civilization is measured from a Western perspective. All is retained at the center of our culture, often known as local wisdom in anthropology. Local wisdom, also known as local knowledge or local intelligence, serves as the foundation for cultural identity (indigenous or local knowledge).

The difficulty with regional languages nowadays is that their place and function no longer correspond to the positions and functions assigned to them (Siregar, 2022). Regional languages are no longer used as a source of pride and are no longer the primary means of communication among families and communities. As a result, it is vital to maintain regional languages. This issue concerns the community's cultural heritage. If a language becomes extinct or almost extinct, society may lose its cultural roots. People moving to cities or other regions may adopt dominant languages for economic and social reasons, leading to a decline in their native language. Even, many regional languages are not used in official government work, education, or media, making it difficult for them to survive. Some regional languages are seen as less prestigious, leading younger generations to prefer dominant languages.

Regional languages in Indonesia must be protected, maintained, and developed as a cultural resource. (H. Saragih et al., 2019). Regional language knowledge must be increased to promote, develop, and maintain them. Simalungun, a regional language spoken in North Sumatra, serves as both a daily communication language

and an Indonesian language. The language, like other Indonesian local languages, plays an important role (Pujiono & Gapur, 2022). The language of daily life and traditional rites serves as a social identity marker, particularly in bilingual and multilingual settings.

The use of regional languages, especially Simalungun, is reportedly declining in both quality and quantity (number of speakers). However, several studies contradict this trend by stressing the usage of regional languages in specific communication events, such as religious sermons. (Carrell, 2009). The fear of the existence of the Javanese language has both a bad and a beneficial consequence. The beneficial influence prompts additional research and attention from policymakers, linguists, and Simalungun observers to protect the species from extinction. Language conservation efforts are often carried out in religious contexts, such as Sunday sermons.

Recognizing the importance of preserving Indigenous languages in this age of the spread of globalization the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) has long maintained a policy of using them as the language of teaching worship. (Ho, 2007; H. Saragih et al., 2020) . This policy not only supplements our understanding of the Bible but also effectively preserves the use of the language. Priests and church leaders frequently use foreign languages in preaching, known as translanguaging.

Since Christianity arrived in Simalungun in 1903, some endeavors have been made to make Simalungun the primary language of instruction at church services. (H. Saragih et al., 2019) . This was done to meet the low communication skills of the indigenous inhabitants. With the advancement of the present day, church leaders have regulated the use of Indonesian and even English in worship services. This procedure was also implemented to meet the communication needs of congregation members, particularly those living in metropolitan areas. However, Simalungun continues the primary language of instruction in worship activities at this church. Other languages, such as Indonesian and English, are also employed, particularly in major cities, to meet the needs of the younger generation in understanding the meaning of worship.

In the framework of Simalungun belief systems, priests who offer sermons frequently incorporate foreign languages into Simalungun. (H. Saragih et al., 2019). Preparing and giving sermons during worship is a regular activity. According to the existing literature, there is no research on the application of this translanguaging approach in giving sermons in the language. This situation is believed to have existed for a long time and will continue to occur during Sunday sermons.

Previous research explored the use of code mixing when delivering sermons in worship in various religions in Indonesia. (Nurhayani et al., 2020; Sunarti & Fadeli, 2021) . For example, people in Central Java and Yogyakarta continue to use Javanese in their sermons on Fridays to maintain the language as a local language and a means of transmitting religious messages in Islam. Preachers and listeners frequently use local languages to communicate Islamic religious themes, but code-mixing with Indonesian is unavoidable in practice. The use of this local language aids in understanding the sermon's content, rendering it easier for the congregation to follow.

Several researchers in the Christian church have investigated the usefulness of translanguaging procedures in church sermons. (Carrell, 2009; Lord, 2014; Salisbury & Hall, n.d.; Sugiri et al., 2019). Almost all of the studies mentioned above explored the usefulness of employing code-mixing to communicate the text of the Sunday sermon in church. This study adds a new dimension by combining the practice of utilizing code-mixing with the priest's view of using code-mixing in the context of employing one of Indonesia's ethnic languages as the language of teaching.

Previous studies on the oral text of the application of code-mixing in the study of religious sermons (Joo, Chik, & Djonov, 2024; Gore, et. al., 2022)., mostly emphasize the description of the text and the performance of how the oral text is delivered to the congregation. This study further explores the performance of translanguaging in the context of sermons using regional languages (Simalungun), the variety of languages used in translanguaging practices, and the communication obstacles experienced by priests in translanguaging practices.

This study aims to contribute to understanding the communication hurdles that lead to the emergence of translanguaging, the range of text genres utilized in translanguaging, the language used in translanguaging, and the congregation's reaction to its practices. The author found no previous research on the use of code-mixing in Simalungun. Meanwhile, the goal of this study is to uncover the essence of employing translanguaging in the language, which will serve as literature for future research. (Galante, 2020; Muguruza et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2019; Wang, 2020).

The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to the translanguaging literature, particularly in its employment in the local language as a tool for conveying sermon messages in the church. Utilizing the common phenomena of translanguaging, this research paper seeks to describe the practice of utilizing

translanguaging to deliver sermons in Simalungun and to investigate priests' perspectives on the use of translanguaging in delivering religious communication messages.

Briefly, the present study aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. How is the performance of translanguaging practices in Simalungun religious speeches?
2. What languages are dominantly used in translanguaging practices in Simalungun religious speeches?
3. What problems do priests encounter in practicing translanguaging in Simalungun religious speeches?

## 2. Method

This study describes priests' translanguaging practices through a qualitative research approach and a case study design. Data were collected through Google Form questionnaires distributed to priests. The questionnaires included a series of open and closed-ended questions designed to learn about the respondents' translanguaging practices and perspectives on them. Participants were picked using a purposive sampling technique. Sixty priests agreed to participate in the study after being informed about its nature and goal, using a sampling approach. The demographics of the 60 participants are as follows. Participants were divided into three age categories: under 30 (5%), 31-50 (75%), and over 50 (20%). 43% of respondents obtained a master's degree in theology, while 6% obtained a doctoral degree.

The study questionnaires designated as research instruments were initially reviewed by three specialists in sociolinguistics, theology, and education science. The main categories of questions in the research questionnaire involve the frequency of translanguaging occurrence, the reasons for using the practice, the text genres used in translanguaging, the language used in the interaction, the problems of using translanguaging, and the congregations' responses to the priests' practices of translanguaging in their Sunday service speeches.

The assessment includes two sorts of questions: "open-ended questions" on reasons for translanguaging, the language used, and difficulties in utilizing the language strategy. The "closed-ended question" type is used to investigate information about the percentage of translanguaging practice, the genre of sermon texts that use translanguaging, and the priests' perception of the congregation's happiness with their translanguaging performance.

In September 2024, the questionnaires were delivered to 75 priests of Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS); however, only sixty priests returned the Google form. Some participants cited technical difficulties with the communication site or a lack of time to respond to inquiries. The questionnaire data were then examined using qualitative data analysis, data gathering, categorization, data reduction, data analysis, and conclusion and verification.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

#### 3.1.1. Translanguaging Practice

Figure 1 shows the distribution of data on the frequency of using Simalungun for translanguaging in sermons: "sometimes" (33.3%), "rarely and always" (21.67%), "often" (18.33%), and "never" (5%). This fact indicates that most pastors in Simalungun-speaking congregations use translanguaging. Only three priests, or 5%, had never used translanguaging when providing sermon materials in SL.

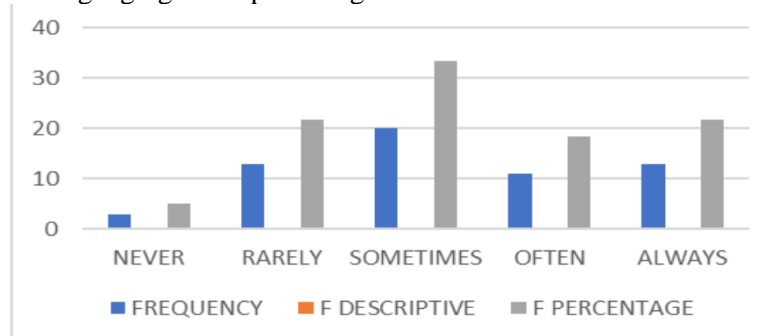


Figure 1. Translanguaging Practice Frequency

When the priests were asked why they use translanguaging in their preaching, the factors were clarified in the figure below. Using open-ended question styles, the study identified 11 different types of primary motivations for practicing translanguaging. The three main reasons were to make the sermon message easier to understand, which ranked first among the 18 interviewees (25.71%), highlighting the message/meaning of the preaching as specified by 15 interviewees (21.43%), and familiarizing the listening situation and status.

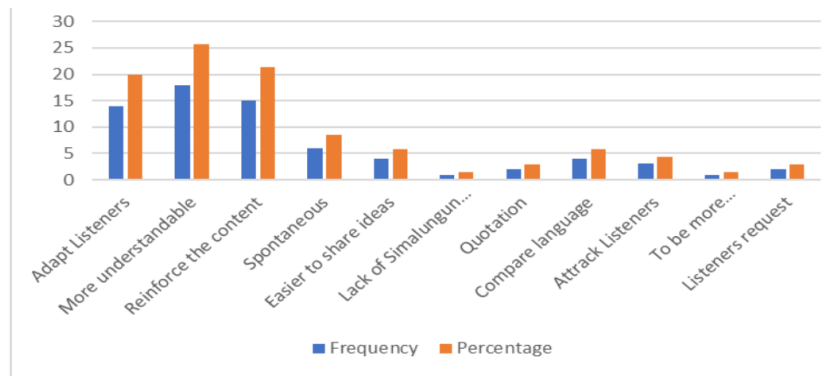


Figure 2. Translanguaging Motivation

Aside from the basic arguments listed above, the priests have provided various additional reasons for utilizing translanguaging. Some characteristics include impulsiveness (8.57%), language proficiency (5.71%), attraction efforts (4.29%), listener demands (2.86%), absence of Simalungun language, and reliance on communication (1.43%). In general, there are numerous types of text genres in sermons where priests must undertake translanguaging. According to the data collected, the genre involves definition, description, exposition, narration, and argumentation. The table below shows the frequency of text kinds that use translanguaging.

Table 1. Translanguaging in various text genres

Table	Frequency	Percentage
Definition	17	21.79
Description	9	11.54
Exposition	15	19.23
Narration	15	19.23
Argumentation	13	16.67
Mixture	9	11.54
	78	100.00

The priests described the text genres utilized in sermon materials, including translanguaging. This decision is often based on their experience with it. The most common text genres using translanguaging are "definition" (21.79%), "exposition and narration" (19.23%), "argumentation" (13%), and "mixed" (9%). Surprisingly, 9 respondents stated they do not know which text they use for translanguaging.

### 3.1.2. Language use for translanguaging

Priests have utilized various languages for translanguaging purposes. The languages listed here include Indonesian, English, Toba, Karo, Hebrew, Greek, and blending.

Table 2. Language for Translanguaging Practice (n=87)

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Indonesian	47	
English	14	
Batak Toba	9	
Karo	8	
Hebrew	2	
Greece	1	
Others	6	

Table 2 shows that the most common languages used by priests for translanguaging are Indonesian (52.87%), English (17.24%), Toba (11.49%), Karo (8.05%), Hebrew (2.30%), and Greek (1.15%). The priests prefer the official language of Indonesia, but the Toba and Karo Regional languages of the Simalungun Region rank second and third, respectively.

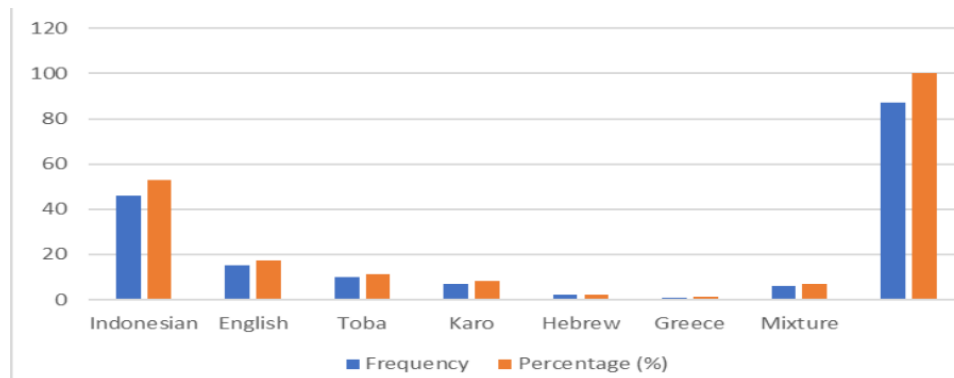


Figure 3. Language for translinguaging

### 3.1.3. Problems and Perception of Translinguaging

Aside from the description of translinguaging above, a lot of preachers indicated that they had no difficulty using it. However, a few pastors found a variety of challenges when undertaking translinguaging, as displayed in the graphic below:

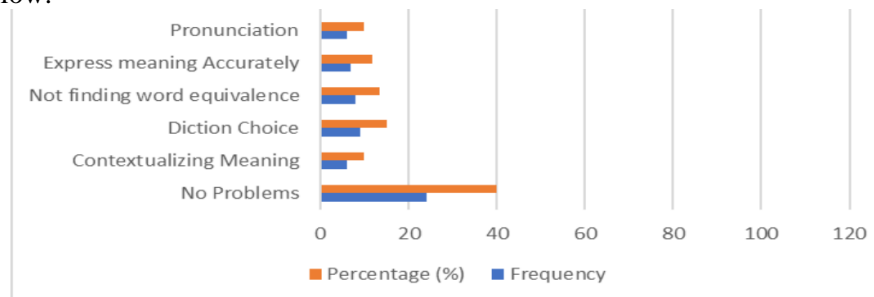


Figure 4. Problems of Practicing Translinguaging

Based on the data collected, 40% of priests had no difficulty performing translinguaging. However, 60% of priests struggle with practicing it. The issues are word choice selection (15%), a lack of acceptable meaning equivalency (13.3%), precise meaning stated during code-mixing (11.67%), context-specific meaning (10%), and spelling (10%). The study surveyed priests on their use of translinguaging in sermons and assessed their congregations' satisfaction with this practice. Eighty-eight percent of the 60 priests polled stated their congregations were pleased with the use of translinguaging in sermons. Ten percent of priests did not respond, while 6% expressed reservations or never inquired about their congregation.

### 3.2 Discussion

This study examines how priests use and interpret translinguaging in their sermons. The study uses Simalungun, the indigenous language of GKPS Lutheran Churches in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This study examined translinguaging practices and interpretations. This study defines translinguaging practice as the frequency with which it is utilized, the reasons for its use, the types of texts that employ translinguaging, and the language used in it. Assessing the impression of translinguaging focuses on the challenges faced by priests in the community's attitude to this activity.

To begin, when asked about the frequency of translinguaging, the majority of interviewees said "sometimes". This phenomenon indicates that Simalungun priests do not always employ translinguaging when delivering sermons. (Sianturi et al., 2024). This finding also confirmed that only people who have difficulty conveying Simalungun messages use translinguaging. Above all, translinguaging occurs spontaneously, without prior design. This fact is consistent with other research findings.

Priests demonstrate mastery of Simalungun by avoiding translinguaging and using it authentically in Sunday sermons. (Napitu et al., 2023). Some scholars also researched the prevalence of translinguaging in Sunday services, discovering that English was occasionally utilized when presenting sermons with Chinese as the language of instruction. There are similarities in the conclusions of this study, but the data source is what distinguishes it, as this study employs YouTube videos as secondary data.

Second, when asked why they used translinguaging in their sermons, the priests gave eleven reasons, however, the reasons were not fairly distributed. (E. Saragih & Saragih, 2021). The three most common reasons for employing translinguaging, according to respondents, are to emphasize that the sermon's message is easier to understand (Rosowsky, 2019). The second reason is to emphasize the meaning and message. (Werkmann Horvat et al., 2021) Of the sermon's substance, which is only acceptable if stated in the major language (Simalungun). The third most common reason given by respondents was to change the circumstances and

condition of the church, where the congregation's capacity to understand Simalungun as the primary language remained low. The justification for adopting translanguaging in presenting this sermon is consistent with the findings.

Respondents who were questioned about the sermon text's genre employed translanguaging (Lewis et al., 2012; Liu & Fang, 2022). They identified six genres of the sermon text. The five most common literary genres are definition, description, exposition, narration, and argumentation. The most commonly used translanguaging genres are definition, exposition, and storytelling. The preacher's interpretation of Simalungun in a bible passage may not align with the intended meaning.

Simalungun sermons mostly use Indonesian, English, Toba, and Karo as code-mixing languages. (Fitriyani et al., 2021; Muary & Nurwahyu, n.d.). Priests carefully choose language based on sermon topics, conventions, and message delivery. The majority of pastors choose to communicate in Indonesian, which is the national language. English is the second most selected language for code-mixing. In the Simalungun community, English-speaking priests are viewed as more current and knowledgeable about their preaching content.

This study highlights the usage of regional languages such as Toba and Karo for translanguaging. (Damanik et al., 2020; Sibarani, 2018). These two Batak sub-ethnics share cultural aspects with the Simalungun community, which also speaks their language. The Simalungun church, located near the tribal communities, has a higher use of these two languages. Hebrew and Greek are the languages that have a lower prevalence of code-mixing. These two roughly related languages are used to emphasize topics not found in the Bible.

Priests who utilize Simalungun as a medium of instruction often accept translanguaging as a viable option. While some priests have concerns about translanguaging, the most common issues are selecting appropriate diction, lacking Simalungun equivalents, effectively communicating meaning, contextualizing meaning, and pronunciation (Girsang & Sembiring, 2018). Priests often struggle with diction in code-mixing, but they can quickly locate equivalent meanings in other languages due to time constraints during sermon delivery.

Priests found that the majority of the congregation was satisfied with the use of translanguaging to deliver sermons. (Ingram, 2023; Tai & Wei, 2021), as it effectively conveyed the desired message. While some congregations believe that code-switching diminishes the authenticity of Simalungun, translanguaging should be reduced rather than avoided entirely. Translanguaging can help pastors and congregations transmit sermon content more effectively and understandably.

Other studies have chosen the issues of rationale, motive, function, and translanguaging ethnography in presenting sermon texts using the national language as the unit of analysis. (Alasmari et al., 2022; Itoi & Mizukura, 2023; Muguruza et al., 2020; Sobkowiak, 2022). This research is unique in that it analyzes the frequency, genre, motivation, and linguistic variation of sermons delivered in Simalungun, the regional language used at the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church. The study's second distinguishing feature is that it was conducted directly with people who use code-mixing in communication, resulting in more reliable and trustworthy results.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study explores priests' use of Simalungun as a communication medium and their view of translanguaging practices. Many priests use translanguaging to deliver Sunday sermons in multiple languages for various reasons. The study found that translanguaging was used in sermons to clarify meaning and messages for better understanding by listeners. The findings demonstrate how a code swap between priests and Simalungun is used to socialize their identities. This study also demonstrates that the ethnic church in Simalungun is an effective institution for transmitting and preserving ethnic identities as well as religious lessons. Furthermore, code-changing was important in the Simalungun language, and the usage of Simalungun as a means of sermon delivery is increasing. This poll serves to assess the practice of translanguaging in Simalungun sermons. However, there are substantial limitations to the study that should be addressed in future research. One disadvantage of the study is that the data was gathered solely from priests, ignoring information from the assembly. The discovery of translanguaging was based on priesthood data rather than liturgical transcriptions. One of the benefits of this study is that the information gathered comes from the priest who is the perpetrator of the code-mixing technique. The study's findings imply that the Sunday sermon in Simalungun can be used not only to educate biblical knowledge and the Christian faith but also to preserve Simalungun's ethnicity. Transferring from Simalungun to other languages might enhance Simalungun learning for heritage speakers by fostering a strong sense of ethnic identification and competence.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

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