Local languages, local Malay, and Bahasa Indonesia
A case study from North Maluku

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Abstract
Many small languages from eastern Indonesia are threatened with extinction. While it is often assumed that ‘Indonesian’ is replacing the lost languages, in reality, local languages are being replaced by local Malay. In this paper I review some of the reasons for this in North Maluku. I review the directional system in North Maluku Malay and argue that features like the directionals allow those giving up local languages to retain a sense of local linguistic identity. Retaining such an identity makes it easier to abandon local languages than would be the case if people were switching to ‘standard’ Indonesian.

Keywords
Local Malay, language endangerment, directionals, space, linguistic identity.

1 Introduction
Maluku Utara is one of Indonesia’s newest and least known provinces, centred on the island of Halmahera and located between North Sulawesi and West Papua provinces. The area is rich in linguistic diversity. According to Ethnologue (Lewis 2009), the Halmahera region is home to seven Austronesian languages, 17 non-Austronesian languages and two distinct varieties of Malay.

Although Maluku Utara is something of a sleepy backwater today, it was once one of the most fabled and important parts of the Indonesian archipelago and it became the source of enormous treasure for outsiders. Its indigenous clove crop was one of the inspirations for the great European age of discovery which propelled navigators such as Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan to set forth on their epic journeys across the globe. While neither Columbus nor Magellan did reach Maluku, some members of Magellan’s