

ACEHNESE LANGUAGE SHIFT AND ITS IMPACT TO YOUNG GENERATION

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ABSTRACT


Language shift means replacing one language to another as a communication tool within a community. This study intends to investigate the factors that cause language shift among Acehnese and its impact to the young generations of Acehnese language users. The study reveals that there are two factors causing a shift in Acehnese language, namely: the external factors (i.e., culture, economy, and inter-generational transfer) and (2) internal factors (i.e, language attitude and language ability). In addition to the impact of language use, the study points out that although most of the Acehnese people are able to speak their own community language, their children are rapidly losing their language.

KEYWORDS: *Acehnese Language, Language Shift, Impact, Young Generation.*

INTRODUCTION

Every region in Indonesia has its own language (local language) used by the people as a communication tool within the group. This local language generally plays as a mother tongue for community members in their region. Therefore, it can be ensured that every member of the community who lives in a region is able to use and understand their local language.

However, diglossia occurs between Indonesian language and Acehnese in Aceh Province. Acehnese language is one of 742 languages used in Indonesia, and the language is spoken in a number of regions in the province of Aceh (Muhammad, 2013). Generally, Acehnese people use Indonesian, as the standard and national language, in various settings including formal events, educational environments, and mass media. In contrast, the people use Acehnese language among close friends and in casual situations. Nowadays, many community speakers in Aceh use Acehnese language



infrequently as their mother tongue, and they tend to use Indonesian as their daily language in any situation.

In this case, this phenomenon has positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is that Indonesian language develops and is used by every element of society both old and young speakers and in any circumstances by the speakers in the village as well as in the city. On the contrary, the use of Acehese language is declining as the communities tend to use Indonesian in every aspect of their life. As time goes by, this phenomenon may lead the local language to be replaced with Indonesian, and such replacement of language is called language shift.

In relation to this issue, Holmes and Wilson (201) states that language shift may be a result of social as well as linguistic changes occurred within a community. They also add that language shift commonly happens among the third or fourth generation, but sometimes language shift is completed in just two generations. Language use occurred in many domains indicates that language shift is underway. Also, a factor leading to a language shift is the declined proportion of young language users as they are likely to speak with another language they consider more prominent (Edwards, 1994).

Furthermore, language shift continues from time to time and it gradually develops from one generation to another (Fasold, 1984). In such a situation, the community members start using languages which are more impressive in a series of communicative situations. In light of this discussion, therefore, the study tried to investigate the following questions: 1) what are the underlying factors that cause the language shift in Acehese? And 2) what is the impact of language shift to the young generations of Acehese language users?

LITERATURE REVIEW

LANGUAGE SHIFT

Language shift is mostly referred to a downward language movement. This is indicated by a decline number of language users, a declining saturation of language users in the community, a loss in language competence, and a declining use of a language in many aspects (Baker, 1996). An American sociolinguist, Fishman (1972) mentions five areas identified in society: family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. Gal (1979) states that the language shift process is, in fact, similar to other types of linguistics changes, which involves socially motivated language users speakers in various social environments.

According to Dressler (1981), the whole process of language shift follows into the following patterns: (1) language shift occurs wherein one language is less dominant in a speech community, in which the language receives no official support in language policy and use, (2) recessive language users are inclined to have vague attitudes in maintaining unbalanced bilingual situations, (3) The substitution of language from the recessive to the dominant language lead to the gradually restructured language use in a speech community, usually indicated by having a modified pattern of language acquisition.

Furthermore, Baker (1996) states that language shift can occur due to intentional decisions which influence the language and reflect changes in various fields. Several factors affecting language shift are immigration, movements of minority language users in a specific place, and intermarriage of different language users. Baker also adds that less dominant languages are at risk due to a number of causes, such as the development of mass communications, tourism, information technology, and transportation links. The presence or absence of bilingual education can also be a cause in the fluctuations of the use of recessive and dominant languages.

Holmes and Wilson (2017), similarly, says that the factors causing the community to shift in the use of one language to another are diverse. He classifies the most obvious factors, including economy, social, politics, attitudes, and values in a community. In line with those factors, Grimes (2000) also points out that language shift is closer to the community's behaviors, such as parents forcing children to learn a dominant language well, and a second/foreign language being applied as the language of instruction in school.

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study was conducted in Lhokseumawe City, Aceh Province. Data were collected by means of interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and observation. The participants of the study were several local people consisting of public figures in cultural sustainability, teachers, lecturers, chief of subdistrict, chief of Lhokseumawe Aceh Tradition Forum and teenagers, all of whom were related to the domain language use. The data were then analyzed qualitatively to identify the factors influencing language shift and its impact to young generations.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

LANGUAGE SHIFT IN ACEHNESE

Language shift is often regarded as shifting from using one language to another in a language community (Grenoble, 2021). Generally, this condition happens when a community chooses to use or to abandon a language. The choice of one of these conditions occurs over a long period of time. Its span of time can reach more than two or three generations. Fasold (1984) reveals that language shift and language maintenance are like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated from one another. It is the collective result of language choice. In language maintenance, communities collectively decide to continue using the commonly used language. When a society chooses a new language in the realm of the old language, it is then possible to process a language shift.

Alamsyah (2011) conducted research on Acehnese and found that there is a difference of language shift of Acehnese spoken in towns compared to that in villages. Very few village children are unable to speak Acehnese. This certainly happens because parents in the family domain interact with their children in Acehnese. Thus, the Indonesian language becomes the second language for the children and this language is generally obtained by the children when they are in school. This case will be very different from that in towns where Acehnese tend to fade more. Many children in towns are unable to speak Acehnese even though their parents are both fluent speakers of Acehnese. Many teachers in urban schools use Indonesian language as an introduction to the learning process. This raises the assumption for parents that the children should be taught Indonesian language, otherwise the children are considered to get a difficulty to understand the subject matter presented by the teacher (Alamsyah, 2011).

The phenomenon above also occurs in Lhokseumawe. There seems to be a decrease in using Acehnese especially young generations. The researchers observed the phenomenon of language shift in young generations only in four domains, i.e. family, neighborhood (friendship), education (school), and transaction (employment). The first two were done in housing community of Cunda, and the last two domains were done in schools and traditional markets. Based on the interviews' results, the study found that there are some main factors triggering the language shift in Lhokseumawe.

Some factors have described the reality of young generations who tend to do language shift. The most observed factor in almost all towns in Aceh is bilingualism. However, bilingualism does not always result in language shift even if it is one of the criteria of a language change. Language shift mostly happens through intergeneration (transfer of generation) (Chairuddin, 2018). The point is that language shifts take more than a

generation. Most children in Lhokseumawe are bilinguals. They speak Acehnese and Indonesian, but because of the needs, they tend to shift the use of Acehnese.


Besides, the study also found that the very young generation, aged under 7 years, are unable to speak Acehnese due to parents' choice of not transmitting Acehnese to their children. According to Lieberson (1980), almost all cases of language shift in society occur through an intergenerational shift. In other words, language transition takes place through generations in a bilingual community after a longer period of time. However, there are also bilingual communities that have remained bilingual for generations (Trisnawati, 2017), so this means the existence of a bilingual society does not necessarily mean a shift in language.

Further, school environment is often also blamed as a contributing factor to the shifting of mother tongue because in schools the students are usually taught foreign languages, and thus, it sometimes leads a shift in local languages (Sumarsono & Paina, 2002). The study found that parents were reluctant to teach their local language to their children since parents believed their children would find it difficult to understand the subject presented by their teachers in Indonesian language. Eventually, children cannot speak the local language properly or children can only understand the local language without being able to use it actively.

Based on the findings obtained from the interviews, parents played a role in the shifting of Acehnese language among children. This means the level of language usage practiced by parents when they communicate to children, they indirectly affect the mastery of the mother tongue by the children. When children are used to listening to people that exist in their environment using the mother tongue since early age or in their language acquisition, this can form their first language acquisition abilities either actively or passively.

Many parents who settled in Lhokseumawe, especially in sub-districts including downtown areas, including Cunda sub-district, Muara Satu sub-district and Kampung Jawa sub-district, often used Indonesian when interacting with their children. In fact, they also used more than one language when communicating with others. This is because the condition of society in Lhokseumawe is multi-cultural. Therefore, people in Lhokseumawe choose to use the Indonesian language as a means to communicate on a day-to-day basis, as stated in the interviews:

"I do not agree to use the local language because not all children and the parents are originally Aceh, so it is better to use the standard language. Children are also less fluent if we talk in the local language."



In this case, the use of a national language by parents to their children greatly affect their local language skills. Therefore, this has indirectly affected the shifting of Acehese language in the city of Lhokseumawe. The findings are supported by the theory proposed by Sun (2000) in her research of language maintenance in Chinese immigrant families where the role of people in maintaining their language is very significant. Similarly, Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) affirm that families play an important role in maintaining children from the shift of mother tongue. In addition, Benjamin (1993) has also found the importance of family roles in maintaining Spanish language on Mexican children. Further, Bodnitski (2007) also discovered the use of language minorities in daily life.

From the FGD with the teachers, parents and language policy makers discussing the language attitude of parents toward Acehese usage, the study found that their attitude was very positive toward the efforts in maintaining the language. Most of the participants in the FGD were also parents, and therefore, they represented the idea of parents regarding their mother language, in which they agreed to use Acehese at home with their children. However, it seemed that their positive attitude did not give positive impact to children's language attitude. The children tended to use Indonesian in their daily life due to their needs in their school assignments. The FGD recommendation is to encourage children using the language through interesting activities that can attract children's interest, such as reading Acehese poetry, cooking Acehese cuisine, writing essays in Acehese, Blog competition in Acehese, and many others.

CONCLUSIONS

The factors influencing language shift from Acehese to Indonesia include the internal factors, such as language attitude and motivation, and the external factors, such as economic, cultural, and educational factors. The impact of the positive attitude from the parents, however, still does not support directly the children's language attitude and language competency. Therefore, there must be some efforts initiated to encourage them to maintain their local language, in this case Acehese.


The study recommends that all Acehese parents give language exposure to children to use Acehese, and language policy makers should provide interesting and smart language activities that attract the children's interests.

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