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Acehnese Attitudes Towards Their Heritage Language: A Qualitative, Inter-Generational Study

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Abstract

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Keywords

Acehnese, heritage language, intergenerational, language preservation

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Acehnese Attitudes Towards Their Heritage Language: A Qualitative, Inter-Generational Study

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Due to the dominant position of Indonesian as the national and official language, local languages have been less favoured amongst their native speakers. Even one of the most widely used languages in Aceh Province, Acehnese seems to be neglected by younger generations, especially in urban areas. This study investigates the practice, attitudes, and maintenance of the Acehnese language. Three generations of Acehnese women were interviewed in-depth on their language use. Most respondents, in this study, still use Acehnese in their daily communication. All respondents in the first generation and most in the second generation obtain a positive attitude towards Acehnese by using it. Only one informant in the third generation had a negative attitude towards it. She claimed that she spoke Acehnese a little but seemed reluctant to answer questions in Acehnese during the interviews. Third generation speakers are beginning to shift from their heritage language Indonesian. They are aware of wanting to maintain Acehnese for generations to come, even the third generation who speak less Acehnese because they fear of losing it in the future.

Keywords: Acehnese, heritage language, intergenerational, language preservation

Introduction

Acehnese is one of the indigenous languages in the northern tip of Sumatra in Indonesia. The number of speakers of this language is unknown. Arka (2008) suggests the language is spoken by approximately 2.4 million speakers. However, Lewis (2009) proposes its speakers are approximately 3.5 million people. The Acehnese language covers an area from the coast of Northern Sumatra to the southern, and western borders of Aceh (Zulfadli, 2014). Most of the Acehnese speakers use the language in daily conversation, but they use Indonesian in formal situations because Indonesian is the national language of the country (Fazlurrahman, 2019). The massive campaign to promote the use of the national language in almost every aspect of interaction in Indonesia, including in Aceh, has gradually weakened the position of local languages among their native speakers. Zulfadli (2014) has raised his concern that the dominant role of Indonesian as a national and official language has “seriously impacted vernacular languages in more formal situations and has put them under immense pressure” (p. 96).

Many Acehnese youths today speak Indonesian. Alamsyah, Taib, Azwardi, and Idham (2011) found many typical Acehnese family members now prefer to speak Indonesian rather than Acehnese at home. This shift is understandable because the indigenous language is not taught at schools, and Indonesian is the dominant language. Aziz and Amery (2016, p. 104) further argue Indonesian has become a “killer language” of Acehnese, as the usage of the national language is aggressively replacing usage of the local language. Aziz and Amery add that the attitude of Acehnese parents, who tend to prefer to use Indonesian rather than

Acehnese, may lead to the loss of the distinctive “Acehnese” identity (Aziz & Amery, 2016, p. 106).

The Acehnese language is not in a safe position now because the Acehnese youths, especially those who live in big towns in the province, are beginning to shift their language to Indonesian (see Alamsyah et al., 2011; Al-Auwal, 2017; Zulfadli, 2014). This indicates a negative movement towards the maintenance of Acehnese among its speakers. Eastman (1983) says the negative language attitude is one of the factors contributing to the decreasing use of a language. But a positive language attitude encourages speakers to maintain the language (Aziz & Amery, 2016). If they still use the language, they will maintain the language unconsciously for the next generation. Meanwhile, Suwija et al. (2019) have suggested the uniqueness of every heritage language has a positive effect on the speakers.

Previous similar studies have largely focused only on the Acehnese youth, or the Acehnese parents (Alamsyah et al., 2011; Al-Auwal, 2017; Aziz, Daud & Windasari, 2016), and thus this research intends to fill in the gap by studying the attitudes of three different generations. This study investigates the attitude of three generations of Acehnese families in the Bireuen district towards their heritage language. By addressing the issue, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical information on the use of Acehnese in the three generations, so it can be of future reference for researchers who are interested in the field.

Background

Ajzen (2005) uses the term “attitude” to refer to the combination of feeling and judgement. Regarding language use, the attitudes are often expressed towards the language itself, the speakers, or their ethnicity (Klerk & Bosch, 1994). Language attitude is defined as “the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others” (Crystal, 1997, p. 215). It is a concept in which people have an attitude towards a person who speaks differently from them and who speaks the same language as them (Kansikas, 2002). The attitudes towards a language, for Garrett (2010), are the circumstances that follow spelling, grammar, lexical items, pronunciation or accent, as well as the speed with which someone speaks. Based on these aspects, listeners usually respond in immediate manner by forming judgements about the speaker or the language. Sadanand (1993, p. 124) says, “attitudes towards the use of different languages are motivated by people’s perception of the role of each language and the functions it performs in relation to each other language.”

People’s attitudes toward language can be positive or negative. A positive language attitude refers to the continuous use of language in daily communication. Fakhurrrazi (2016, states, “when the community members’ attitudes towards their language are positive, the language may be seen as a key symbol of group identity” (p. 130). Contrary to positive attitude, negative language attitude refers to the perception of language speakers in decreasing the use of a language in daily communication. This attitude may affect the speakers to shift their language and can eventually lead to language loss or death (Yusuf et al., 2017). Aziz and Amery (2016) suggests, “if the younger generation regards the language as being ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘not cool’, they will likely abandon the language” (p. 103). Sometimes, it seems that younger people do not feel proud of their own heritage or minority language, and this may increase the use of dominant language in their community.

In the case of Acehnese that is spoken in Aceh province, Indonesia, Durie (1996) argues that Acehnese is used only in the villages, family life, and in the poetic tradition, whereas Indonesian is used as a lingua franca dominantly in the social community and high-class domains because of the higher prestige of the language as a national and official language. Because Indonesian has been used as a more dominant language in the Acehnese speech community, it has caused the Acehnese youth to have negative attitudes toward the Acehnese

language. The main factors causing Acehese youth to be unwilling to use the Acehese language within their groups and in daily life is that they claim Indonesian is more modern than Acehese and Acehese sounds “rude and weird” (Al-Auwal, 2017, p. 7). At the universities, for example, Indonesian is claimed to be spoken dominantly on campus and seems more prestigious and “cooler” than Acehese (Al-Auwal 2017, p. 8). Acehese youth said using and mastering the Acehese language may decrease their nationalism towards Indonesia, and they also think that Acehese is useless in schools (see Taib et al., 2004).

Therefore, there are several reasons for the Acehese native speakers to tend to shift their language into Indonesian. According to Alamsyah et al. (2011), some of the reasons include Indonesian can be an easier way in learning courses at school. The Acehese also claim that if they speak Indonesian, it is easier to socialize in the community such as when they want to make friends or interact with a new person. Another reason is Indonesian is used dominantly in society, so it is easier for children to build a conversation with others. These phenomena result in many children now, as to say in the years 2000 and above, growing up with Indonesian as their first language (Aziz & Amery, 2016).

Fortunately, there are some positive findings of language attitude expressed by the younger Acehese generation the Acehese language expresses their identity as Acehese. There are of course many younger speakers who still use Acehese in daily communication, especially in rural areas. They still have a positive attitude towards their own language. The Acehese younger generations who have a positive attitude toward their language are mostly motivated by ethnic identity, communication success, and prestige factors (Ulfa, 2016). The influence of parents also becomes one of the factors which influenced the attitude of the younger Acehese generation towards their vernacular language. This possibility may happen because the younger Acehese generations imitate what their parents do. If their parents frequently speak in Acehese in family communication or another domain, they may also do as their parents. However, Muhammad (2013) claimed Acehese parents do have a positive attitude towards their children being bilinguals. That means they do support their children speaking more than one language in their lives, in this case, Acehese and Indonesian.

Method

This study aimed to find the language attitudes of the Acehese speakers in Bireuen District, Aceh Province. As there are some dialects of Acehese, the researchers chose North Aceh dialect as the focus because the dialect is regarded as the standard dialect of Acehese (Zulfadli, 2014), and it has been easier to obtain the data since the North Aceh dialect is the third researcher’s dialect. The first and second researcher of this study have worked comprehensively on the Acehese language both on its grammar and sociological studies. Due to the massive campaign of promoting Indonesian to the local people, the Acehese people have steadily shifted their heritage language toward the national language. This raises the concern that the next generation may drive negative attitudes towards their heritage language. Therefore, we have invested our expertise and resources to investigate this phenomenon so the local language can hopefully be maintained alongside the Indonesian language.

Participants

The design of this research is descriptive qualitative to explore the phenomena about the attitude of Acehese towards their language from three different generations. A qualitative research explores and understands the meaning of individuals or groups toward social or human problems (Creswell, 2014, p. 32). In qualitative methods, the characteristics or quality of the concepts are explored, interpreted, and described (Hale & Napier, 2013). The descriptive

qualitative is used in this study because the data are primarily presented in the form of words including the interview excerpts, and it uses a natural approach as the primary source of data collection.

This research was conducted in the Bireuen district, Aceh Province. The district was selected to conduct this research because it is one of the big districts in Aceh and it is quite a homogenous city in the province. Nine Acehnese women from three different generations included three women in the age range of 15-20 years old, three women in with the age range of 45-50 years old, and three women in the age range of 80-85 years old. They were our acquaintances and were selected by using purposive sampling based on, at least, two criteria: (1) the language used by the parents to their children; (2) the language(s) learned from older family members at home (Bühmann & Trudell, 2008). These criteria were used when selecting the three youngest respondents for this study. Furthermore, these respondents were coded as G for Generation, which is preceded by the number of generation (first, second, or third) and the code number of the informant (1, 2, or 3). For example, G1.1 refers to first generation 1, respondent number 1.

Instruments

The researchers used an interview guide as the instrument in order to obtain the data required in accordance with the objectives. The interview questions were in the form of a semi-structured interview which consisted of five questions. These questions were modified based on the framework from Coronel-Molina (2009) and Yusuf, Pillai, and Ali (2013) that voiced language practice, language attitude, and language maintenance. The interviews were conducted one month by the third author to get information from the respondents about their attitude towards the Acehnese language, and their efforts to maintain the language. She is from the Bireuen district, a native Acehnese who grew up with Acehnese as her L1 and thus can speak the language fluently. The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. Before the interviews, the third author had first made appointments with the informants individually. Consent was given and signed prior to the interviews. The interviews were then recorded by using a tape recorder. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes.

Procedure

In collecting the data, the researchers first confirmed with participants who could intently participate in this study. Secondly, when the researchers acquired the agreements, began to make an appointment with the family members. Then, during the interview sessions, the researchers recorded their answers by using an audio recorder from the smartphone. One of the families was recorded in one area because they lived in the same house. However, for the other families, the participants were recorded in different areas. This condition happened because the third generation lived in a different town from their parents. In this case, an audio recorder was an important tool used by the researchers to record all the conversations during the interview session.

The data were transcribed and analysed in three steps: (a) data condensation, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion or verification (Miles et al., 2014). During the data condensation, the researchers removed unnecessary answers or information from the interviews and focused on the important points for data display. After that, the data were transcribed into narrative descriptive form. In the data display step, the data were drawn in the form of narrative descriptive after the researchers designated important points from the interviews. This process allows the researchers to assemble the answers to the research problem. In this research, the transcriptions that had been reduced in the first step were chosen, and the most important ones

are displayed. The conclusion or verification step allows the researchers to conclude the perception of language attitude of the Acehese families (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, the data in this paper were primarily presented in the form of narratives from interview excerpts. The Acehese orthography used in the examples follows Pillai and Yusuf (2012) and Yusuf and Pillai (2013).

Results

Language Practice

Based on the responses given during the interviews, the respondents said they still used Acehese in conversations. Most of them used their native language to communicate among them at the home, market, school, and other public places.

First Generation

For the first generation, it was found that they still used Acehese as their primary language in communication. They claimed that, because Acehese has been used since they were young, it is still used dominantly until now. During the interviews, they could answer the questions asked in Acehese without any hesitancy. They were very comfortable with the use of the language. As shown in E1, one of the informants, G1.1, claimed she spoke Acehese because it had been used since she was young. In the data display of this paper, E refers to excerpt, meanwhile, the transcriptions in Acehese are italicized, and those in Indonesian are underlined and italicized.

E1: *“Peugah haba basa Acèh, dari ubit ka ngön basa Acèh...paléng seuréng peugah haba basa Acèh (I speak Acehese, since I was young, I speak Acehese, I speak Acehese the most)”* (G1.1, age 83).

The other informant, G1.2 in E2, of the first generation, also said she rarely spoke in other languages, and, so, she spoke in Acehese the most.

E2: *“Basa Acèh, ho-ho yang lônng jak basa Acèh, ngön basa Acèh mandum sabab lônng hanjeut basa Indonesia (Acehese, wherever I go I speak Acehese, I speak in Acehese about everything because I cannot speak Indonesian)”* (G1.2, age 82).

As can be seen from the sample response, the first generation of the Acehese reported that they used their heritage language dominantly. They did not mix their language with Indonesian although they claimed they could speak Indonesian. One of the informants also argued that wherever she went, she always spoke Acehese.

Second Generation

In accordance with the first generation, it was found that the second-generation informant, G2.3 in E3, spoke Acehese well and did not mix their language as well when speaking to another Acehese. She seemed to be comfortable to speak just Acehese. Indonesian is used due to the need to interact with her neighbours, co-workers in the office, and community that does not know Acehese.

E3: “*Basa Acèh, ureueng Acèh tulèn, leubèh seuréng Acèh, ‘eu, Acèh, meunyoe dikantô kadang Indo, kadang Acèh* (Acehnese, pure Acehnese, I often speak Acehnese, yes, Acehnese, if I am in the office, sometimes I speak Indonesian, sometimes in Acehnese)” (G2.3, age 48).

While interviewing the informants, it was surprising to find one of the language informants, G2.1, answered the questions in E4 Indonesian even though she could speak Acehnese well. When asked in Acehnese, she kept using Indonesian. Then, she answered the question and argued that she spoke both Acehnese and Indonesian. She responded in Indonesian saying:

E4: “*Lima puluh lima puluh, kalau sama mamak sama kakak di rumah ngomong bahasa Indonesia* (Fifty, I speak Indonesian with my mom and my sister at home)” (G2.1, age 46).

G2.1 used Indonesian as the primary language at home. She argued in E5 that she spoke Indonesian because her husband spoke Indonesian; however, he is an Acehnese. It indicates that there is also a decrease in Acehnese usage in her daily life.

E5: *Pokoknya lebih bahasa Indonesia, itu bahasa utama gitu di rumah. Kalau sama anak, sama suami campur, tapi dominan bahasa Indonesia, walaupun suami Aceh, Aceh asli, tapi keluarga suami enggak menggunakan bahasa Aceh, dirumah lebih bahasa Indonesia mungkin* (Indonesian is the primary language. When I speak with my children and my husband, I mix the language, but we speak Indonesian dominantly, even though my husband is Acehnese, pure Acehnese, but my husband and his family do not use Acehnese, maybe they (also) speak Indonesian dominantly). (G2.1, age 46)

As shown by the second-generation informants, in general, Acehnese is still used by them, too. We only found one informant, G2.1, who seemed to be different from others. She did not speak Acehnese dominantly and sounded comfortable speaking Indonesian. This finding showed the second generation began to shift their language in communication and indicated there is a decrease in heritage language usage.

Third Generation

Following the decrease of heritage language use shown by the second generation, it was also found that one of the informants of the third generation spoke Indonesian dominantly. Informant G3.1 did not speak Acehnese at home or in other places, but she understood what the other people say in Acehnese.

E6: *Bahasa Indonesia, kurang bisa bahasa Aceh, enggak terlalu, lingkungan enggak ada bahasa Aceh, bisa cuma sikit-sikit, sembilan puluh persen bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian, I speak Acehnese less, Acehnese is not commonly used in my neighbourhood, I just know a little, ninety percent Indonesian). (G3.1, age 16)

G3.1 confessed that she hardly spoke Acehnese. When asked about the language, she seemed to be confused and spoke with limited Acehnese. Sometimes, she just answered the question by nodding her head.

In E7, it was also found that one of the informants of the third generation, G3.2, claimed she used Indonesian most, but she answered the interview questions in Acehnese well. She used Acehnese based on the purpose and the interlocutors. She would speak Acehnese with adults and speak Indonesian with her friends.

E7: Paléng seuréng basa Indonesia, biasa jih pakék basa Acèh, nyan kadang miseu ngön ureueng tuha, kan ngön ureueng tuha mangat basa Acèh, tapi meunyo jinoe kadang ngön kön ka peugah basa Indonesia (I often speak Indonesian. Usually, I speak Acehnese with adult people because I am confident to speak with them in Acehnese, but here, sometimes I speak Indonesian with my friends). (G3.2, age 19)

From the informants of the third generation, two of them tended to speak Indonesian although they also spoke Acehnese sometimes. Only one of them, G3.3, spoke Indonesian because she had very few opportunities to speak Acehnese dominantly in her neighbourhood.

Language Attitude

The Acehnese informants believe being Acehnese is through the language used in the conversation.

First Generation

From the first-generation informants, it was found that Acehnese still was their first choice in communication. One of them, G1.1, even believed many elders in the Acehnese community could not speak Indonesian because all the Acehnese spoke Acehnese as the only means of communication among each other in the past, as said in E.8:

E8: Peugah haba basa Acèh, dari ubiet kön ka ngön basa Acèh, malah meunyo ka nèk-nèk hanjeut basa Indonesia (I speak in Acehnese, since I was a child, I have spoken Acehnese, well, we are as grandparents now, we still cannot speak Indonesian). (G1.1, age 83)

Speaking Acehnese since they were young has become other reasons from the first-generation informants about their attitude towards the use of their language. It was found that G1.3 used Acehnese because when she was young, and Indonesian was not used much in communication, so Acehnese was used since then.

E9: “Basa Acèh, karna uroe jéh kureueng komunikasi ngön basa Indonesia (Acehnese, because there was less opportunity to speak Indonesian for communication at that time)” (G1.3, age 85).

Other responses indicate that the Acehnese language would be used depending on the situation and the interlocutors in the conversation. G1.1 argued in E10 she tended to speak Indonesian when she went to other towns outside of Aceh. The situation made her speak Indonesian. Furthermore, if the people were not Acehnese, she would speak in the language used by her interlocutor in the situation.

E10: “*Watèe ta-jak meurantoe, ka basa Indonesia, tergantung ureueng miseu* (When I visit other towns outside of Aceh, I speak Indonesian, depending on the person [that I am speaking to])” (G1.1, age 83).

In accordance with the first informant, G1.3 had the same line in choosing Acehnese in communication. In E11, she claimed that if she went to the market, of course, she should speak Acehnese because the sellers were commonly Acehnese. Therefore, it was impossible if she spoke Indonesian.

E11: “*Bak pasai basa Acèh, karna awak meukat ureueng Acèh, masak ta-peugah haba basa Indonesia, hana mangat lah* (I speak in Acehnese in the market because the sellers are Acehnese, so it is inappropriate to speak in Indonesian)” (G1.3, age 85).

It was clear that the respondents of the first generation had the same line in choosing Acehnese as their primary language in communication. Thus, they still spoke Acehnese without any doubt in conversations.

Second Generation

In choosing Acehnese as the primary language in conversations, the second-generation informants showed a different view. They claimed they often spoke Acehnese, but their responses to the questions during interviews showed they mixed the languages between Acehnese and Indonesian. Hence, this shows their positive attitude towards Acehnese. For the first language informant of the second generation, G2.1, it was found that she chose Acehnese depending on the situation and her interlocutor. In E14, she said she used Acehnese outside of the house but mostly used Indonesian at home with her husband and her children.

E12: *Tergantung situasi, miseu di luwa na basa Acèh, di rumoh mandum peugah haba basa Acèh, kecuali sama anak, pokoknya lebih bahasa Indonesia itu bahasa utama gitu di rumah kalau sama anak. Sama suami campur, suami Aceh juga* (It depends on the situation, such as outside of the house [with the neighbours], I speak Acehnese, we speak Acehnese at home, except with my children, actually Indonesian is the dominant language at home when I speak with my children. I speak a mixed language with my husband despite my husband is Acehnese, too). (G2.1, age 46)

Then, G2.1 added in E13 that the choice of the language used was dependent on who her interlocutors were and what language they talked first. Therefore, she would choose Acehnese or Indonesian as her language in communication. According to her, the comfortable conversation depended on the choice of language:

E13: *Kalau pertama kenalnya bahasa Aceh, udah enak bahasa Aceh, pertama ngomongnya kenalnya bahasa Indonesia, bahasa Acehnya udah gak enak* (If I meet someone and she speaks Acehnese first to me, so I speak Acehnese well. But if we meet and speak Indonesian first, then I don't feel good speaking Acehnese [anymore]). (G2.1, age 46)

Similar responses were also found from another second-generation respondent, G2.3. She claimed she used Indonesian with her children in order to make her children understand

what she said. She also argued that she sometimes spoke Indonesian at work with the other employees.

Yet only one of the second-generation language informant, G2.2, answered in pure Acehese; she did not mix the language with Indonesian. But in E14 she admitted she spoke Indonesian just because of the situation nowadays in their environment. She had told us that around her neighbourhood, there were mostly non-Acehese speakers so that sometimes she spoke in Indonesian with them.

E14: *Acèh paléng dominan, dari lahé ka ngön basa Acèh, meunyoe ngön adék-adék basa Acèh, basa Indonesia karna lingkungan* (Acehese dominantly, since I was born, I know Acehese, I speak Acehese also with my younger brothers and sisters, I speak Indonesian because of the environment). (G2.2, age 45)

In the use of Acehese in conversations, another phenomenon was found about the choice of Acehese. Some of them used Acehese to express anger, convey serious messages, or make jokes with others. G2.1 chose Acehese in conversation when she was upset with her children. In E15, she argued the Acehese words take her directly to the point of her message towards her children.

E15: *Sama anak mungkin menggunakan bahasa Aceh disaat marah kadang kalau ngomong bahasa Indonesia tedengar agak lembut, akhirnya udah kesal menggunakan bahasa Aceh* (I speak Acehese when I get upset with my children, sometimes if we use Indonesian, it sounds too soft so that if I scold [my children] then I use Acehese). (G2.1, age 46)

G2.1 also added in E16 that Indonesian words sounded “less serious” and so, if she wanted to talk seriously with another Acehese, then she would speak Acehese instead. Furthermore, she thought Acehese could also better express her jokes compared to Indonesian. If she wanted to make jokes, she would use Acehese. She believed Acehese sounds funnier when some words were combined and produced with certain idioms. In Aceh, some idioms have their own meaning that makes them sound funny in communication among Acehese.

E16: *Sang bahasa Indonesia itu hana, gak serius. Bicara yang serius nyan bahasa Acèh. Ngomong bahasa Aceh saat bercanda juga, bahasanya lucu dan ngena, tergantung situasi kiban yang mangat* (I think Indonesian [words] do not sound serious [if I want to talk about something serious], to speak seriously, Acehese is used. [I also] use Acehese when I joke, the language is funny and have good punches, it depends on the situation, what is best) (G2.1, age 46)

It is very interesting to note that G.1.2 would completely speak in Acehese with the members of her family. However, she would speak either Acehese or Indonesian if the situation of conversation requires her to choose between the codes.

It can be seen from the findings that the use of Acehese depends mostly on the situation and the interlocutors with whom they were talking to. G2.3 in E17 said she worked in an office and both languages were used with her colleagues.

E17: *“Meunyoe di kantô seuréng basa Acèh, tapi kadang Indonesia kadang Acèh* (In the office I often speak Acehese, but sometimes I shift between Indonesian and Acehese)” (G2.3, age 48).

Third Generation

Nonetheless, not all of them spoke Acehnese in conversation. In the third generation, it was found that one of them spoke Indonesian and could not speak Acehnese well. As expressed in E18 by G3.1.

E18: “*Biasanya ngomong pakek bahasa Indonesia, kurang bisa bahasa Aceh* (Usually I speak Indonesian, I hardly speak Acehnese)” (G3.1, age 16).

G3.2 in E19 claimed she preferred to speak Indonesian rather than Acehnese because her environment made it possible for her to speak Indonesian. When she was young, she knew Indonesian first. After she moved to another place in Aceh, she started to learn Acehnese, and now, she could speak some Acehnese. Then, she added that nowadays she spoke both Acehnese and Indonesian but dominantly Indonesian.

E19: *Mungkén meunyo jinoe udah campor-campor, basa Acèh na, basa Indonesia na, tapi kebanyakan bahasa Indonesia, paléng seuréng basa Indonesia. Karna phôn dari ubiet kön basa Indonesia jadi uroe nyan pah pinah, jeut jih bahasa Aceh* (Now I mix [Acehnese and Indonesian], there's Acehnese, there's Indonesian, but dominantly Indonesian. Because when I was young, I was taught Indonesian first, then we moved to another resident, then (I learned to) speak Acehnese). (G3.2, age 19)

Choosing the language as their daily communication depends on their priority towards the language. As shown by E20, G3.3 used other languages because of the rules at school. She had education in an Islamic boarding school, and the school obliged the students to speak Arabic and English all the time if they were in the boarding school.

E20: “*Lông peugah haba basa Inggréh, basa Arab, hana basa Acèh bak sikula* ([In school] I speak English and Arabic, there is no Acehnese in my school)” (G3.3, age 15).

Based on the above interviews with the third generation, it can be concluded most of the third-generation informants prefer to use Indonesian rather than Acehnese as their daily language for communication.

Language Maintenance

In maintaining the language, most of the informants argued they still used Acehnese outside their homes. When they met non-Acehnese speakers (in the market, rice field, office, etc.), they also used Acehnese to communicate and even tried to make non-Acehnese learn about Acehnese. In each generation, based on the interviews, they had their own ways to maintain their heritage language.

First Generation

It was found that G1.1 in E21 claimed she always spoke Acehnese, but when she went somewhere outside of Aceh, she tried to shift the language to the language used most in that community, that is, Indonesian.

E21: “*Peugah haba basa Acèh, kecuali ngön ureueng luwa, watèe jak meurantoe, nyan ka laén* (I speak Acehnese, except with people from another city, when I go outside of Aceh, it is different)” (G1.1, age 83)

Nowadays, G1.1 added that because the young generation rarely speaks Acehnese, she had to sometimes speak Indonesian to get them to understand her. But, as one of her efforts to maintain Acehnese and pass it on to her younger generation, she spoke Acehnese to her grandchildren progressively. She believed her grandchildren could learn Acehnese from her. She claimed their parents did not speak Acehnese with them, and she was disappointed with this situation. However, because she did not want to interfere with her children’s language use at home with their family, she initiated the effort to speak Acehnese to her grandchildren whenever she had the chance. As she stated in E22:

E22: “*Meunyoe aneuk miet hana jaweub ngön basa Acèh, lông sambôt aju ngön basa Indonesia ‘euh. Karna aneuk miet jinoe mak ih Acèh, bapak ih Acèh, tapi basa Indonesia lam rumoh. Mandum lagèe nyan, lông cuco dum basa Indonesia. Kiban ta peugöt man? Jadi lông lah yang peureunoe cuco mandum* (If I speak with my grandchildren and they cannot answer in Acehnese, so I use Indonesian. Because the young generation nowadays even though they come from pure Acehnese mother and father, but they speak Indonesian. All of them are like that; all my grandchildren speak in Indonesian. What can we do? So, it is me who must teach them.). (G1.1, age 83)

Meanwhile, G1.2 believed Acehnese would not be lost if she spoke Acehnese and passed it on to her grandchildren. She claimed in E23 that she would protect her heritage language by using it with her descendants because she realized that the young generation today prefers to speak Indonesian rather than Acehnese.

E23: *Insyallah miseu sampé jinoe lông mantöng meututô basa Acèh ngön cuco han akan gadöh basa tanyoe. Ukeu nyan hóm bak mak ih eunteuk, bak droe ih. Lom watèe di-jak sikula, panèe na ta kumit lée tanyoe lée. Sinan kan ka basa Indonesia...TV pih ka basa Indonesia. Yang peunténg ngön lông mantöng ngön basa Aceh* (God is willing; if I speak Acehnese with my grandchildren until now, our heritage language will not be lost. The future (of this language) depends on their mother. When they go to school, we do not know because we are not beside them. There, of course, Indonesian is used...the TV is also in Indonesian. The most important thing is that I still speak Acehnese with them). (G1.2, age 83)

The language informants in the first generation agreed that they should maintain their heritage language by using it and trying to teach it to their young generation even though they knew it would be hard work to pass it on to their younger generation due to the influences from the environment and the media.

Second Generation

One of the informants in the second generation, G2.2 in E24, indicated she did not want to shift her heritage language and get “influenced” by her non-Acehnese language speakers. She said she would like to speak Acehnese although the non-Acehnese in her community did

not fully understand Acehnese. Once, she introduced Acehnese to her new neighbours who were non-Acehnese, so they could learn Acehnese step by step from her.

E24: *Miseu dak na ureueng tamöng keunoe lông biasakan peugah haba basa Acèh sit...nteuk awak lông meututô basa Acèh sit mangat jeut i-teupu basa Acèh. Nyan meunan. Na ureueng Indonesia, beu ta-peurunoe basa Acèh, makajih ta campu-campu, sikrèk-krèk ka i-teupu eunteuk* (If there are people (who do not speak Acehnese) come to our village, I will try to still speak Acehnese with them...we will speak Acehnese in order to make them understand Acehnese. That is how it should be. When there are non-Acehnese people (in our community), we should teach them Acehnese, that is why I mix my language (i.e., Acehnese and Indonesian), little by little then they will understand). (G2.2, age 45)

Not all the informants thought of maintaining their language outside of their homes or when they met Acehnese or non-Acehnese speakers. Some of them used Indonesian when talking with their interlocutors although they knew the interlocutors were Acehnese. For example, G2.3 in E25 informed the researchers that she would follow the language which was used by her interlocutors towards her first.

E25: *“Kalau diajak ngomong bahasa Indonesia, ya bahasa Indonesia, kalau Aceh, ya Aceh* (If they speak to me first in Indonesian first, then I speak Indonesia, but if in Acehnese, then I speak Acehnese)” (G2.3, age 48).

Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that G2.1 in E26 claimed herself as a true Acehnese, even though in the previous interview she stated she used Indonesian with her family (see E7). She further implied she would not be embarrassed to speak Acehnese if needed regardless of the Acehnese interlocutors speaking in Indonesian to her. Yet, she still gave her response in Indonesian.

E26: *Ngomong aja bahasa Aceh, kan kita orang Aceh. Malah kita orang Aceh harus bangga bicara bahasa Aceh, jangan malu-malu* (Let's speak in Acehnese because we are Acehnese. In fact, we should be proud to speak in Acehnese, we should not be ashamed). (G2.1, age 46)

Referring to the responses of the second generation, it can be seen that they still had the same feeling to maintain their heritage language although some of them still used Indonesian to communicate with another Acehnese. They realized that Acehnese is a part of their identity.

Third Generation

Decreasing language maintenance can also be seen from the third-generation informants. All of them would shift their language to Indonesian depending on their interlocutors. G3.3 stated in E27 that if her Acehnese interlocutor spoke in Indonesian, then she would answer in Indonesian.

E27: *“Jaweb basa Indonesia sabab jih i-peugah haba basa Indonesia, hana basa Acèh* (I answer in Indonesian because they (my interlocutors) speak Indonesian, (so) I don't answer in Acehnese)” (G3.3, age 15).

Furthermore, another language informant, G3.2, mentioned that she was living in the capital of the province and all her friends came from different cities so she should speak Indonesian. But she sometimes mixed Acehnese and Indonesian with Acehnese interlocutors because she did not want to forget Acehnese.

Nevertheless, all of the third-generation informants still had awareness of their heritage language. They believed that if they do not speak Acehnese now, the language will be lost one day. As said by G3.2 in E28:

E28: *Nyoe memang, na sit tingat kiban miseu generasi ukeu hana lée basa Acèh? Hana soe lée yang peurunoe basa Acèh. Makajih jinoe lông mantông lông pertahankan basa Aceh, tetap basa Acèh sit sigö-gö* (Yes, I know, I have thought about what if the next generation do not know Acehnese? No one can teach them Acehnese anymore. Therefore, I still maintain Acehnese, I still speak Acehnese sometimes). (G3.2, age 19)

But some decreasing awareness was shown by G3.1 in E29. At first, she stated she did not mind if her generation could not speak Acehnese because all her peers speak Indonesian either at school or in the neighbourhood, but she continued that she did have a strong intention to learn Acehnese; it was her environment that made her needs difficult to be realized. For example, her family, despite all being Acehnese, did not speak the language at home. She also showed her apprehension of Acehnese one day being lost, saying she did not want it to happen.

E29: *“Biasa aja, sih, karena kan sekarang semua bahasa Indonesia, di sekolah pun bahasa Indonesia, jadi biasa aja. Tapi memang niat belajar ada, kepengen sih bisa ngomong bahasa Aceh cuma dirumah enggak ada yang ngomong bahasa Aceh. Nenek ngomong bahasa Aceh, tapi kan jarang jumpa. Sayang ya, enggak tau lah, kalau bisa jangan sampe hilang lah* (I do not mind because nowadays all of us speak Indonesian, we also speak Indonesian at school, so it does not matter. But I am willing to learn Acehnese, I really want to know how to speak it but there is no one speaking Acehnese in my house. My grandmother speaks Acehnese, but we rarely see her. It is a pity, I don’t know, I hope Acehnese will not be lost)” (G3.1, age 16).

Whether able to speak Acehnese or not, all the third-generation language users were still aware of their heritage language existence. They did not want to lose it, even though they spoke Indonesian dominantly. While their environment did not fully support the use of Acehnese with them, they still realized they should practice it before they would lose this language one day.

Discussion

In terms of attitude, the first generation showed a very positive attitude towards their heritage language use. Acehnese is their primary language of communication with another Acehnese. This attitude largely encourages them to maintain the language in their family and community (Aziz & Amery, 2016). Previous studies have also shown Acehnese parents or elders are supportive of having their children grow up to become bilinguals in both Acehnese and Indonesian (Muhammad, 2013). They also had a very strong desire to pass on Acehnese on to their children and grandchildren. Their positive attitude towards Acehnese was largely reflected through language, kinship, ethnicity, and culture. This is like theories proposed by Brown (2009) and Sapir (2003), in that language, ethnicity, and culture are important parts of

identity because they encourage closer relationships and participation for congregations from the speakers (Tannenbaum, 2005; Zhang, 2012).

However, one informant out of the second generation of speakers is gradually showing some shift from Acehnese to Indonesian, where she did not pass on her Acehnese to her children. She would use Acehnese only for certain situations, such as expressing resentment and/or making jokes she considered to sound more entertaining in her heritage language. This situation is, as Alamsyah et al. (2011) described in their research, like many Acehnese families today who choose to speak Indonesian at home instead of Acehnese. These parents argue Indonesian is necessary to live in Indonesia because it is the national language in the country and is used formally in schools, government offices, and to communicate with other ethnicities in Indonesia. Nevertheless, this will lead to the decreasing use of the heritage language, and when this happens, the perception of self-belonging about language will also decrease (Val & Vinogradova, 2010). It is feared that if Acehnese parents do not want to transfer Acehnese to their younger generation, it may lead to the loss of a positive attitude towards the language, and further lose the heritage identity of their children (Yusuf et al., 2017). Yet, all respondents in this generation still identified as Acehnese, both from ethnicity and language.

A more evident shift to Indonesian is reflected by the third generation. Zulfadli (2014) has shown the Acehnese language is in danger, because the youths are beginning to shift their language use to Indonesian (Alamsyah et al., 2011; Al-Auwal, 2017; Taib et al., 2004). When the heritage language is gradually being abandoned, the dominant language will take over the community (Aziz & Amery, 2016). From three informants, two still spoke Acehnese depending on situations and their interlocutors; thus, one informant spoke fully in Indonesian. She expressed a desire to learn and speak Acehnese, but she contended that it was her environment that did not give her the opportunity to speak it (i.e., the language at home and with friends is Indonesian). Her sense of belonging from language (Valeš, 2007) is subsiding. Despite the positive and negative attitudes towards Acehnese from this generation, the respondents still identified themselves as Acehnese because of their ethnicity and place of residence (i.e., in Aceh). They were also conscious of the existence and maintenance of their heritage language. Despite using more Indonesian than Acehnese, the participants did not want Acehnese to be lost for their future generations because they do believe the heritage language is part of their identity. This fear is endorsed by Mirsky (1991) who said when a speaker is losing his or her heritage language, a sense of loss of self-identity follows. This situation shows there is a “struggle” inside these Acehnese youths to want and to know how to speak their heritage language proficiently.

Moreover, according to Morcom (2017, p. 365), it is “vital to develop high personal self-esteem that results in a positive concept of oneself as a learner, and high collective self-esteem, or attitude toward one’s heritage, family, community, and school.” However, from our understanding, it seems that their environment, starting from parents, friends, school, and the government, did not give them enough support and importance to do so. Therefore, there is an urge of call to the Acehnese community, especially the local government and the elders today, to upkeep and encourage heritage language preservation starting from the home. As mentioned by Burke (1993), language is among the vital identity signs of a group of speakers. Thus, it is hoped that by realizing and explicitly addressing the Acehnese who are now facing the possibility of losing their heritage language in the future, it can raise the awareness of people and the local government to take swift actions to preserve the language.

Conclusion

Based on the informants’ answers, we can conclude most of them still used Acehnese as their daily language in communication, especially from the first and second generations.

From the first generation, we found that all the informants had a strong attitude in defining themselves as the Acehnese by using Acehnese in their daily communication and by kinship or ethnicity. They spoke in Acehnese with other Acehnese and did not mix the language with Indonesian. This showed their positive attitude towards Acehnese.

It is from the second generation; we argue that the respondents began to shift their language into Indonesian. They answered the interview questions in mixed Acehnese and Indonesian and not fully in Acehnese. Only one of the informants used Acehnese abundantly. Meanwhile, from the third-generation informants, we found that one out of the three had a negative attitude towards her heritage language. She claimed she spoke Acehnese a little, and she seemed reluctant to answer in Acehnese during the interview. This demonstrates these language speakers are beginning to shift their heritage language towards a more dominant one used in their community, which is Indonesian. Nevertheless, all informants, even those in the third generation, had the awareness in wanting to maintain Acehnese for generations to come and bear the fear of losing it in the future generations.

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