



PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN MAINTAINING THE HERITAGE LANGUAGE

(A Case Study of Preserving Ambonese Malay)

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Abstract: Intensity of using national and foreign languages in various sectors indirectly changes people's views on the importance of learning or even maintaining the heritage languages. Consequently, the heritage language may experience a transition because it is rare or even no longer used in daily communication, particularly in the family context. This current study aims to analyze parents' perspectives about the maintenance of the native language, including their practical ways to preserve the cultural heritage, namely Ambonese Malay. Twenty two parents were randomly selected to participate in this study by filling in the questionnaire that was distributed by electronic system through Google Form. Findings of this research showed that parents have positive language attitudes towards Ambonese Malay and its maintenance as heritage language. Their attitude was revealed in their willingness to teach the Ambonese Malay to their children, use the language in their family communication and at traditional ceremonial and family events, including their expectation of having Ambonese Malay in the school curriculum. Moreover, practical ways of using Ambonese Malay as the dominant language in discussing daily topics at home with the family members were the indications of parents' persistence ways in preserving the Ambonese Malay in the family domain.

Keywords: *Perspective and practices, language maintenance, heritage language, Ambonese Malay*

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization with its rapid development has had a major impact on many aspects of life, including on communication and social interaction. The opportunity to interact with many people enables speakers to develop their first and second language competence. However, it is undeniable that globalization has presented its own challenges to language development. Matthews and Thakkar (2012) mentioned that it might be difficult to communicate successfully in a global environment. Due to ethical and cultural differences, even when both parties speak the same language, there might be misunderstandings.

The use of national and foreign languages as the language of communication nationally and globally, both in written and verbal communication is clear evidence of the impact of globalization on the existence of language. In written communication, it is inevitable that descriptions or instructions in various technological applications are mostly written in foreign languages such as English. Communication in cyberspace through social media among young people is also usually in English. In addition, the demands of work and the world of education globally that require someone to be proficient in both Indonesian and foreign languages properly and correctly, have encouraged many people, including the school age group, to develop their language competence. Unfortunately, without realizing it, this circumstance has shifted the existence of native languages in terms of the level of urgency in using them.

The high frequency of using national and foreign languages in various important sectors of life such as the economy, education, technology and business indirectly changes people's views on the importance of learning the native languages. Consequently, the native language as the first language learned in the family, may experience a transition because it is rare or even no longer used in daily social interactions. Machmoed (2008) as quoted by Masruddin (2013) states that many minority languages in Indonesia are abandoned by young people as a result of "*Indonesianization*" and the impact of the globalization era. Based on this fact, it is not surprising that 30% of the 745 local languages in Indonesia have experienced extinction (Kalla, 2007 mentioned in Masruddin, 2013). This condition shows that there is a threat to native languages that threatens the loss of generations of speakers of that language. Therefore, the participation of all parties is needed to preserve native languages to the younger generation. This process can actually be done through the participation of the family as the first environment in which a child learns the language and learns to preserve their native language.

The terms "mother tongue," "native language," and "community language" are all used interchangeably when referring to heritage languages. Heritage language is a minority language that is learned at home by its speakers as children, but it is never completely developed since its people grow up speaking a dominant language in which they become more proficient (Valdes, 2000). Furthermore, heritage language is frequently characterized as a language spoken at home in a familial setting (Campbell & Peyton, 1998). As a result of the aforementioned definitions, heritage language can be defined as a language other than the dominant language utilized and spoken by its users in a specific social context (Sugiyanta, 2020).

Language maintenance is defined as the continuous use of the mother tongue, regardless of the cultural pressures or influences from a more prestigious or politically more dominant language (Benrabah, 2004 mentioned in Abdelhadi, 2017). In this case, a language can be maintained and preserved when it is considered as an important factor in maintaining a minority's identity (Sugiyanta, 2020).

The role of family in language preservation efforts begins with the role of parents in determining and implementing family policy. The family is the first language preservation contact for children who have the responsibility to pass on the native language to children (Gupta, 2020). In this process, children can learn to recognize, understand and use local languages through interactions within the family, both with parents and other family members. King and Fogle (2013) in Chen and Huang, (2019) suggest several family policy strategies in preserving native languages, for example by determining the type of language to be used when speaking between family members, building habits of using native languages in the family, applying rewards for those who use local languages when communicating in family and other environments. Through this process, local languages can not only continue to play a role as part of social interaction within the family, but also represent culture and family identity in general (Fishman, 1991). In this case, belief in native languages as cultural representations and family identities that need to be preserved is strongly influenced by parents' awareness of the importance of native languages (Kirsch, 2012; Spolsky, 2012).

Various studies on parents' views on native languages have attracted the attention of researchers in recent years. The results of several studies show that most parents generally have positive views of the preservation of native languages (Budiyana, 2017; LaRotonda, 2015; Becker, 2013; Martin, 2009; Park and Sarkar, 2007). Strong parental desire, parents' belief, cultural identity, opportunity to get a better economic level in the future (Park and Sarkar, 2007) and ease of communication are a number of factors that support the preservation of local languages from the parents' point of view (Sugiyanta, 2020). However, it cannot be denied that there are also a number of factors that hinder the preservation of native languages. Some of them are related to the behavior and views of children due to the influence of modernization, the lack of time and energy that parents spend in communicating with the local language with their children, the lack of parental competence in mastering the local language, and/or parents' belief and linguistics imperialism in society.

More specifically in the context of Ambonese Malay, Frans et al (2006) said that Ambonese Malay is still used as a lingua franca among the people, who inhabit Ambon Island (Ambon City, Liliboy, Hatu, Allang, Wakasihi and parts of Hila Kaitetu and Liang), coastal areas south of West Seram, Lease Islands and Buru Island. They further explained that Ambonese Malay is generally used in various purposes, such as chit chat, implicature or indirect language, greetings, rhymes and *cigulu-cigulu*, as well as slang and expressions. Various efforts to preserve the Ambonese Malay language have also been carried out in the form of providing reading literacy facilities, books, dictionaries and collections of stories, Ambonese songs, television shows, and other strategic efforts. However, efforts to practice through the family domain still seem to receive less attention. In fact, the preservation of a native language is very effective if it starts from the family domain which is the first environment for a child to know, learn and use the language.

Based on the explanation above, this current study aims to analyze the views of parents about the preservation of the native language, including their practical actions in the family to preserve the cultural heritage, namely Ambonese Malay. Therefore, the two following questions were addressed as the guideline to accomplish the objectives of the study:

1. What do parents think of the importance of Ambonese Malay?
2. What do parents do to preserve the use of Ambonese Malay in the family domain?

Result of this study guided by those two questions is expected to give a portrait of the existence of Ambonese Malay from the parents' points of view, and their effort in preserving the language, specifically in the scope of family domain interaction.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research approach, and covers issues such as the setting and participants of the study, research instrument, data collection technique and the procedure of data analysis.

This current study employed survey as the design in carrying out the study. Therefore, a Likert Scale questionnaire was used as the research instrument to collect the data from twenty two parents whose origins are from Ambon or regions of Maluku Province. The participants were randomly selected for their involvement in the study. However, as the number of the participants is also quite small, due to time constraint in conducting this study, then the result of the present research cannot be generalized as the representation of whole parents' population in Ambon.

The main instrument of this research was questionnaire in a form of Likert-Scale type, which consists of two main parts. Part one explored parents' perspective about Ambonese Malay in ten statements that should be answered by indicating their perspectives ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (3), Strongly Disagree (1). Then, the second part emphasized on elaborating the practical ways of maintaining Ambonese Malay by indicating the use of the language in family domain. In this part, parents were asked to determine type of code or language that was typically used in particular setting, with particular participants to specifically talk about certain topics. This model of Domain of Language Use analysis was adopted from Holmes (2008) theory of language use in multilingual communities. Domain is defined as a general concept that emphasizes three essential social factors in code choice; participants, setting and topic. The questionnaire was adapted from Sugiyanta (2020) with several adjustment in line with the purposes of this present study.

The questionnaire was written in Indonesian to enable the respondents to easily understand the points of each statements and able to provide the suitable answer. It was distributed to the respondents by virtual platform as a Google form. They were asked to fill in the questionnaires to explore parents' attitudes toward language and their practical ways in maintaining Ambonese Malay in their family domain. The data from the questionnaire were then categorized and analyzed, which can be presented in the subsequent section.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of results and discussion will cover the description of research findings on parents' perspective about Ambonese Malay, and their domain of language use that indicated parents' practical ways in maintaining Ambonese Malay in the family domain.

3.1. *Parents' Perspective about Ambonese Malay*

The results of the questionnaire on parents' views on Ambonese Malay showed that the majority of respondents had a very positive view (81.8%) about the importance of the existence of Ambonese Malay as a cultural identity of origin. This positive view has a very significant impact on communication interactions in the family environment. This was indicated by the results of the questionnaire where 50% of respondents strongly agreed and 45.5% agreed that it is necessary to use Ambonese Malay when communicating with children and other family members. Not only during communication interactions within the family, the majority of respondents also strongly agree (59.1) stating the importance of using Ambonese Malay during traditional and ceremonial events, as well as at family events (59.15). These findings were in line with the study conducted by Park and Sarkar (2007). It was discovered that parents' favorable attitudes and beliefs about the importance of keeping their heritage language will be critical in maintaining their cultural identity, as well as providing them with greater future economic possibilities.

Furthermore, when it comes to teaching literacy in native languages, 72 percent of respondents said they strongly agreed that their children need to be introduced to or taught native vocabulary that they don't understand. Teaching native language vocabulary to children is a good step in preserving native languages as cultural heritage and representation of one's cultural identity. In the middle of the extensive usage of foreign languages in the modern era, parents' positive attitudes were seen as an important thing to keep doing in order to preserve native languages. This is in line with the opinion of 59.1% of respondents who strongly disagree that communicating using Ambonese Malay to children seems outdated. This data is supported by the opinion of the majority of respondents (50%) who strongly agreed and 40.9% agreed that even in the era of globalization which requires someone to be proficient in foreign languages, children still need to master native languages, including Ambonese Malay. These data show that the majority of respondents believe that speaking with their children in Ambonese Malay is still beneficial in the present period and that it should be done. It implies that parents have positive attitudes in preserving their native language, which is Ambonese Malay, to their children. Fishman (1991) mentioned that parents frequently wish to teach their children their original language because it is linked to not only family interaction but also culture and identity.

Furthermore, the involvement of parents is viewed as crucial in the process of preserving the original language. This was conveyed by the majority of respondents (77.3%) who indicated their agreement on the role of parents in preserving the use of the Ambonese Malay language to their children. This finding is supported by Gupta's statement (2020) that parents are their children's initial heritage-language contacts, and they have the obligation of passing on the native language to them. It is essential since if a language is to be conserved, it must be passed down and learned by successive generations. In order to preserve the native language, Hinton (1999) proposed some language preservation practices that can be applied by parents at home, for instance speaking the local language at home, exposing their children to the native language, and taking vacations back to their place of origin. Hashimoto and Lee (2011) claimed that if parents do not encourage their children to use the heritage language (native language) at home, children are more likely to lose interest in learning or retaining the language.

Moreover, in line with the preservation of the native language, 54.5% of respondents disagree that Ambonese Malay is sufficient to use at home. This means that the use of a local language as a vernacular language is not limited to the home or informal settings, but can also be utilized in a more formal setting, such as in schools for teaching purposes (50%). Teaching of native language, in this case Ambonese Malay, in the setting of schools is obviously a great way of preserving native languages that are nearly extinct in the midst of widespread tendencies to use of foreign languages or national languages as the languages of instruction. Janet Holmes (2008) in her discussion about language revival provided a real sample of preventing language loss through education context. She deeply discussed that obtaining a native language television channel, developing successful bilingual education programs ranging from pre-school to university level, and providing effective bilingual schooling has proven to be particularly helpful in slowing the language loss process. The use of native language at school is primarily used as a medium of instruction to teach the normal school curriculum. Holmes further emphasized that as a method of learning a second language, this strategy has been quite successful in a variety of countries.

3.2. Practical Ways of Preserving Ambonese Malay

Any speech community can benefit from domain to capture large generalizations. It is possible to create a very simple model summarizing a community's language use by using information about domains of language use. Guided by the theory of domain of language use to answer the second research question, all participants were asked to identify the specific language or variety or code that they use when discussing several common topics in the family domain. It was expected that by identifying the code, then the portrait of parents' practical ways to preserve their native language in the family domain would be obviously revealed.

As a result, after all data were recorded in Google Form and tabulated, the data about practical ways of preserving Ambonese Malay in the family domain was summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Family Domain of Language Use

Setting	Participant	Topic	Variety/Code						
			AM	INA	INA & AM	AM & ENG	AM, INA, ENG	INA, ENG	Others
Home	Parents - Children	Giving advice	41%	18%	27%	5%	9%	0%	
Home	Parents - Children	Ask and explain about school lessons	18%	32%	32%	5%	9%	5%	
Home	Parents - Children	Telling about experiences at school/play, etc.	36%	9%	41%	5%	9% (English is dominant)	0%	
Home	Parents - Children	Read story books and discuss the contents of the story	18%	32%	36%	5%	9% (English is dominant)	0%	Depend on the language used in the book
Home	Parents - Children	Talking about television shows	45%	23%	18%	5%	9% (English is dominant)	0%	

Home	Parents - Children	Talking on the phone	50%	14%	0%	5%	9% (English is dominant)	0%	
Home	Parents - Children	Send messages in the form of SMS or messages on WA	59%	23%	9%	0%	9% (English is dominant)	0%	
Home	Children – other relatives (grandparents, aunty, uncle, sister/brother)	Talk to grandparents/uncle/auntie/sister/brother	54%	5%	31%	5%			5% (Tepa's Language)

Note: AM stands for Ambonese Malay; INA is for Indonesian; ENG is for English

Based on the concept of Domain of Language Use by Holmes (2008), it was found that Ambonese Malay is more dominantly used when giving advice from parents to children (41%), discussing television shows (45%), talking on the phone (50%), sending messages in the form of SMS or messages on WA (59%), and when talking to other family members such as with grandparents, sisters/brothers and aunty/uncle (54%). This data shows that there is a tendency to use Ambonese Malay in an informal context when discussing informal or casual topics between participants (family members). On the other hand, Indonesian as the national language is more likely to be used when discussing more formal or serious topics such as asking and explaining school lessons (32%) as well as reading story books and discussing content of a story (32%). It is also interesting to see that combination of using Ambonese Malay and Indonesian also occur at the same time when talking about experiences at school/playing (41%) and when reading books and discussing content of a story (36%). This fact shows that the use of Indonesian will be more dominant when discussing topics related to formal contexts such as school and study. This is understandable considering that Indonesian is the language of instruction in teaching and learning interactions at schools and also in most of the textbooks and story books used by children. The position of Indonesian as the national language and state language is considered to be higher than Ambonese Malay and other regional languages. Hence, Indonesian is more likely to be used in the realm of government/office, education or religion in formal situations (Frans et al, 2006).

Furthermore, the results of the study reveal interesting facts about the use of English combined with Ambonese Malay and Indonesian. Nine percent of respondents admitted that they also use English more dominantly in discussing various topics presented in the research table. This indicates that English as one of the international languages is also used in the context of daily communication in the family domain. The habit of using a foreign language may be motivated by the condition of the family which has used English as the language of instruction for communication with children since their childhood period. Consequently, their children grow up to be bilingual or multilingual person who have the ability to use two or more than two languages. The ability of parents to accommodate the use of foreign languages in daily interactions also influence the children to become proficient and accustomed in using the language.

Based on the results of the research above, it is obvious that the respondents in this study continue to use Ambonese Malay in their interactions within the family as ways of preserving Ambonese Malay. The preferences for using Ambonese Malay in discussing several daily topics were significant indications of parents' willingness to maintain and preserve the existence of Ambonese Malay as their language

heritage. This fact is absolutely influenced by parents' positive attitudes as have been previously explained, which is also in line with Park and Sarkar (2007) who claimed that parents' positive attitudes and their belief were one of the significant contributing factors that affect the maintenance of heritage language. They further mentioned that this factor is crucial indeed, since maintaining the heritage language would maintain a community's cultural identity.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the above research findings and discussion, essential conclusion can be drawn. First, parents have positive language attitudes towards Ambonese Malay and its maintenance as heritage language. Their attitude was obvious in their willingness to teach the Ambonese Malay to their children, use the language in their family communication and at traditional ceremonial and family events, including their expectation of having Ambonese Malay in the school curriculum. In addition, several practical ways of using Ambonese Malay as the dominant language in discussing daily topics at home with the family members (kids with parents, kids with other relatives) were the indications of parents' persistence ways in preserving the Ambonese Malay in the family domain.

Due to time constraints, a larger sample size and a variety of research instrument should be used in a subsequent study to ensure that the results are more representative and accurate.

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