

Batak Language Maintenance among Teenagers in Bekasi Indonesia



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ABSTRACT: Language maintenance is an effort to ensure that a language continues to be used and preserved, especially as the identity of a community group. This research aims to find out the factors of Batak language maintenance in Bekasi. This research used descriptive qualitative method. The subjects of this research are Bataknese teenagers who live in Bekasi Indonesia. The techniques used by researchers in the data collection process are observation and questionnaires. The result shows that the factors support the use of Batak language among Bataknese teenagers consist of the positive attitudes of the teenagers toward Batak language in which they still maintain the Batak language. In family, Bataknese teenagers still use Batak language to communicate with their family members. Homeland contact factor in which Bataknese teenagers has a really strong ties with each other and it is very often for Bataknese teenagers to gather up in a cultural event and most of the time, their extended family members would come from a far just to attend the event.

KEYWORDS: Batak language, language maintenance, positive attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society is known as a heterogeneous society in terms of ethnicity, language and culture. The level of heterogeneity causes differences in society so that it is known as a pluralistic society. This pluralism shows the diversity of a society, giving rise to differences. As stated by Nasikun (in Handoyo, 2015) that horizontal differences in ethnicity, nation, religion, customs, within an area are also known as characteristics of a pluralistic society. The diversity of languages and language use in Indonesian society is a characteristic of Indonesian society diversity as a multilingual society. In multicultural society is not just talking about many cultures in one place of living, but it is also talking about many languages inside of it. Many conditions, multicultural society choose one language which usually the original language is used in that place. Of course, these conditions affect the use of minority languages. If a language is not used or passed to, the language could be dead. Therefore, language maintenance is important to maintain a language existence.

Language maintenance is a speaker's loyalty to a language to continue speaking it, especially a regional language as a mother tongue amidst the influence of other languages. According to Fishman (1968:76), there are topics for language maintenance, namely as follows: 1). The habit of using local languages in communication; 2). Psychological, social and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in language use habits; 3). Behavior towards language, including attitudes and cognitive behavior. Baker defines language maintenance (2011:72) as relative language stability in the number and distribution of its speakers, its proficient usage by children and adults, and its retention in specific domains (e.g., home, school, religion). If language maintenance does not occur, there can be several results such as it could make the language owner become forget some of their language, younger speakers become dominant in another language, and the worst is that the language is gone for good. The culture's people do not die, they just lost their language and become of speakers of other language.

Language maintenance does not just happen by itself. Besides a minority language in a society, other influencing factors support language maintenance. Holmes (1992:63-66) stated that few factors support the maintenance of minority languages such as 1). attitudes and values, when the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer; 2). family, if families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, this also helps them maintain their language; 3). homeland contact, another factor that may contribute to language maintenance for those who emigrate is the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland. For this reason, commitment is needed in maintaining language, with efforts that can be made to maintain language use, namely a positive attitude, the habit of using local languages, attending religious services in which the mother tongue (local language) is used and the habit of visiting family members.

The behavior of language users toward language has a direct and indirect influence on language maintenance. Language behavior can be said to be language attitudes. According to Fasold (1987), attitude towards language is a unified concept that is understood

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by observing attitudes and responses to language use in various social situations. With a language attitude, a person chooses what language to use in a particular situation.

The condition of a multi-ethnic society followed by inter-ethnic contact including language contact can cause various linguistic phenomena such as bilingualism (or even multilingualism) which often occurs in minority language groups. For example, Bekasi City is a city in West Java Province, Indonesia. Currently, Bekasi City is developing into an urban residence and industrial center. The population of Bekasi City is a city with various ethnic groups. Most of the residents of Bekasi City are Javanese, Betawi and Sundanese. The Batak tribe is in 4th place with a population of 4.71% in Bekasi.

Batak language is one of the local languages in Indonesia which is used and maintained by its speakers, namely the Batak community or Batak ethnic group. The Batak language is a means of communication between groups of Batak people, of course the Batak language is also essential as an identity for the Batak ethnic community and provides meaning in people's lives to be maintained. From the explanation above, according to the results of observations made by researchers in the field, Batak language conversations in the family domain are still used as a means of communication, among teenagers they still maintain the local language, namely in their interactions they use Batak language to communicate with their family and closest relatives. This is proof of teenagers' loyalty to the Batak language. From the situation depicted above, there is a language maintenance factor, namely the existence of loyalty from the supporting community, which is proven by teenagers' Batak ethnic groups who still use the Batak language.

Mother language preservation studies remain relevant in Indonesia considering that Indonesian society is generally bilingual because apart from having a mother tongue which is usually a regional language, they also have a national language, namely Indonesian. Research conducted by Machmud & Hastuti (2019), Nisah et al (2020), Sundari (2022) provides evidence that the study of mother language preservation is still very important. Based on the description above, researchers are interested in conducting research regarding the maintenance of the Batak language among teenagers in the city of Bekasi, Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this research a qualitative approach was used with descriptive methods. Sukmadinata (2017, p. 72) stated that descriptive research is used to describe existing phenomena, whether natural or man-made, which pays more attention to the characteristics, quality and relationships of each activity. The subjects in this research focused on teenagers in the city of Bekasi who speak Batak as their first language. The techniques used by researchers in the data collection process are observation and questionnaires. In this research, the researcher acts as a key instrument. In the process of collecting data, researchers used observation and interview guidelines to obtain data. The data analysis technique used was in three stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The validity of the data obtained during research needs to be checked. The technique used to check the validity of the data is the triangulation technique. Theory and source triangulation research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table.1 below shows the results of the questionnaire regarding to the factors that the teenagers could support Batak language maintenance.

Table. 1: Results of Batak language maintenance factors

Statements	Disagree %	Undecided %	Agree %
Family has a major role to maintain Batak language	12	28	60
Talking with my Batak friends helps to maintain Batak language	12	28	60
Speaking in Batak language helps curing longing of homeland	24	24	52
Strong family ties among my ethnic group help maintain Batak language	20	24	56
Attending Batak cultural activities are helpful in maintain Batak language	16	16	68
The pride in Batak language had a role in maintaining my ethnic language	12	32	56
Watching movies or reading a book in Batak language comforts me	76	20	4
Checking on homeland local news keeps me maintaining Batak language	36	32	32

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The results on table.1 shows that the teenagers were mostly agreed of each statement. According to Holmes, there are several factors that support the maintenance of a language. The supporting factors such as:

ATTITUDES AND VALUES

On the seventh statement shows 56% of the teenagers were agreed with the pride of using Batak language influence them to maintain their ethnic language. The teenagers surely proud of being Batak and their ethnic language. Talking in Batak language would help these teenagers on curing the longing of hometown. Also, they added that, the pride of Batak language made them wanted to learn the language more. In line with Holmes that when the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer. Positive attitudes support efforts to use the minority language in a variety of domains, and this helps people resist the pressure from the majority group to switch to their language. Pride in their ethnic identity and their language can be important factors which contribute to language maintenance, provided there is a strong community to support and encourage these attitudes (1992:63).

FAMILY

The teenagers were mostly agreed on family has major role in maintaing Batak language. With 60% of them were agreed, this result was in line with the interview with two of the respondents where both of them were talking in Batak language with their family even though they sometimes mixing it with Indonesian. Most of them are also agreed on speaking in Batak language curing their longing of homeland. From the interview result, the teenagers' families were mostly around Bekasi and Jakarta, still their homeland were in North Sumatera. Also, they added that talking in Batak language with their family and friends were really helping them to not forgetting their ethnic language. From this, we could also conclude that their parents are still passing their ethnic language which passing a language was parents' job to do. In addition, the teenagers extended family such as aunts, uncles, or their grandparents were living around Bekasi, Jakarta or even West Java. They often meet due to a monthly family event, namely *Arisan Keluarga (doing a family lottery gathering)*. According to Holmes, if families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, this also helps them maintain their language (1992:65).

HOMELAND CONTACT

With a strong kinship among each other, Batakese cannot be separated with gathering. A cultural tradition gathering was another way to stay in touch with homeland. Gathering with same ethnic people, speaking in ethnic language and also having a feast with traditional food. Batakese was one ethnic with lots of cultural traditions. Attending cultural events such weddings, clan meetings, and others which also could made their ties grew stronger. Batakese cultural activities obviously use Batak language as communication language. As for 68% of the teenagers were agreed on the sixth statement. On the interview results, some of the respondents shared the same mind. They stated that attending Batak cultural events, they could speak, listen, and maintain their Batak language skill. They also added that it would be sounded weird and less if in Batak cultural events using Indonesian as the communication language. In addition, the teenagers mostly agree that Batakese always has a certain tradition in every aspect of life. Despite being away from homeland, immigrated Batakese would gather up and had a cultural event in places they live in. A weddings or funerals were included in cultural events. When a cultural event took place, Batakese families and relatives would meet up and catching up. Most of the time, if the event was held by a close-related family, Batakese would fly from their homeland to the city where the event held in and vice versa. Factor which may contribute to language maintenance for those who emigrate is the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland. A regular stream of new migrants or even visitors will keep the need for using the language alive. (Holmes, 1992:65)

CONCLUSION

The results show that there are three factors that support the use of Batak language according to Holmes. Firstly, attitudes and values factor. As we can see from the result beforehand, the teenagers are surely proud of the language and according to them, beside maintaing the language, talking in Batak language helps these teenagers on curing of their hometown. Secondly, family factors. We can conclude that family has the major role on maintaining a language because if an ethnic language does not use at home, it will die slowly. The teenagers indeed still talk in Batak language with their family at home. Lastly, homeland contact. Batakese has a really strong ties with each other and it is very often for Batakese to gather up in a cultural event. The teenagers said that when there is an event, their extended family members would come from afar just to attend that event. Also, when an event is held, the main language definetly will be Batak language.

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