



Students Language Attitudes Towards Acehese Language: a Study on the Retention and Threat of Regional Language Extinction

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ABSTRACT

Language attitudes play a vital role in maintaining or threatening the sustainability of a language. This study examines the language attitudes of students towards the Acehese language by focusing on the potential for preservation and the threat of extinction of regional languages. The research was conducted on 400 students from 8 Islamic boarding schools in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh who were randomly selected, including 4 modern dayahs and 4 traditional dayahs. Using Garvin and Mathiot's theory of language attitudes, this study evaluated three main aspects: language fidelity, language pride, and awareness of language norms. With the Mix Method approach, qualitative data is analyzed to provide in-depth descriptions, while quantitative data is processed using SPSS for statistical analysis. The results showed that the attitude of speaking Acehese was positive, with average scores in the aspects of loyalty (67%), pride (59%), and awareness (66%). Interestingly, traditional dayah shows a higher level of language retention than modern dayah, with percentages of loyalty (73%), pride (63%), and awareness (72%). On the contrary, modern dayah students show lower scores in these three aspects. This research reinforces the importance of language preservation efforts through a community-based approach and education, as well as a reminder that language is a cultural bridge, not just a means of communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Language attitudes are a determining factor for the survival or extinction of a language. One of the main causes of language extinction is the low attitude of language shown by its speakers. Language attitudes refer to the reactions and behaviors of speakers in choosing and using language, as well as their commitment to language planning and preservation (Anderson in Sukma, 2017; Richard, 1985; Aritonang, 2004; Gunarwan, 2020). Speakers of a language have a

strategic role in determining whether a language will survive through preservation or slowly become extinct due to abandonment.

The condition of regional languages in Aceh shows interesting dynamics. Initially, the people of Aceh were known as a monolingual community that mastered Acehnese (BA) as their mother tongue. However, with the development of the times, the people of Aceh are now bilingual or multilingual, mastering BA, Indonesian as the national language, as well as foreign languages such as English which have an international function (Holmes, 2013; Anggraeni, 2016). This multilingual situation presents challenges in language selection that often lead to competition between languages. BA as a regional language often loses competition with Indonesian which is more dominant in daily communication (Creswell, 2016; Chaer, 2004; Damanik, 2009).

Language retention is highly dependent on the language choice and attitude of the speaker. Garvin and Mathiot (1985) identified three positive language attitude traits: language loyalty, language pride, and awareness of language norms. These three characteristics are important indicators in assessing whether a language still has a chance to survive. On the other hand, if these three characteristics weaken or disappear, then the language is in danger of extinction. Based on data from the Language Agency (2020), there are already several regional languages in Indonesia that have been declared extinct, such as the Tandia language in West Papua, the Mawes language in Papua, and several other languages in Maluku.

Previous research by Via (2020) showed that people's attitudes towards the Acehnese language in Banda Aceh City, especially in the adolescent age group, were classified as negative (49%). Teenagers in these areas tend to be disloyal and less proud to use BA, and even awareness of language norms is low. This phenomenon can be a real threat to the sustainability of BA, especially in the pesantren environment, where the use of Arabic and English is a priority. Modern Islamic boarding schools, in particular, require students to master these two languages as part of their flagship program.

This study aims to explore the language attitudes of students towards BA, focusing on the potential and threats to the sustainability of regional languages. This study utilizes Garvin and Mathiot's language attitude theory to assess aspects of loyalty, pride, and awareness of language norms among modern and traditional dayah students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh. In addition, this research is expected to make a new contribution to sociolinguistic studies, especially related to the preservation of regional languages in the midst of the influence of globalization and the dynamics of education in Islamic boarding schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a mixed approach, namely qualitative and quantitative approaches. A qualitative approach is used to produce descriptive data in the form of written and oral information, which aims to describe and reveal information related to Acehese language attitudes among students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh. Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was used to process numerical data obtained through filling out questionnaires, which were then analyzed using statistics to see the influence of language attitudes on changes in local wisdom in bilingual communities.

The population in this study is all students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh. The sample of this study consisted of 400 students from 8 Islamic boarding schools (dayah) spread across the two regions. The pesantren consists of two categories, namely modern dayah and traditional dayah, with each category having 50 respondents, so that the total sample taken is 400 students. The distribution of this sample aims to ensure a balanced representation of the two existing categories of Islamic boarding schools.

The data collection technique used in this study is questionnaire distribution. This questionnaire is designed to collect information about the attitude of Acehese from students. The indicators used to measure language attitudes consist of three categories, namely loyalty to using Acehese language, pride in using Acehese language, and awareness of language norms. Each indicator has 10 question items arranged on a Likert scale, which includes answer options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The Likert Scale is used to measure the level of agreement of respondents with the statements given, so that it can provide a clear picture of their attitude towards the use of the Acehese language.

The data analysis in this study uses a mixed method, which combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. Quantitative data was obtained from filling out questionnaires which were then analyzed descriptively using statistical techniques to calculate the percentage of answers from respondents. Data processing was carried out with the help of SPSS version 22 software to calculate the frequency of language use and language attitudes. Furthermore, the results of this analysis are explained qualitatively to provide an interpretation of the change in language attitudes among bilingual communities. The analysis steps include assigning numbers to answers, grouping answer categories in a table, describing the calculation results, interpreting the results, and drawing conclusions based on the data obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Language attitude is a belief about a particular language, about the object of language that gives a tendency for a person to react in a way that he likes. Language attitudes towards language or the variety of languages themselves are divided into two, namely positive attitudes or negative attitudes. A positive attitude is a person's attitude to maintain and defend their regional language, while a negative attitude is an indifferent attitude that a person has to foster and preserve their regional language (Sumarsono, 2004:369).

Based on the number of respondents in this study, as many as 400 students from 8 dayahs were selected as samples in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh Regency. The dayah randomly selected by the researcher includes 4 dayahs in the city of Lhokseumawe, namely Ulumuddin, Misbahul Ulum, Sirajul Muna, and Dayah Darul Yakin; and 4 dayahs in North Aceh Regency, namely Syamsuddhuha, Al Muslimun, Dayah Cut Nyak Dien, and Mahad Al-Ihsaniyah.

If viewed based on the overall research object, the language attitude of students in Lhokseumawe and North Aceh is classified as a positive attitude. The attitude seen includes aspects of loyalty, pride and awareness. This refers to the theory of Garvin and Mathiot (in Sitorus, 2014:10) stating that language attitudes contain three characteristics, namely language loyalty, language pride and awareness of language norms. The following is an average table of the language attitudes of modern and traditional Dayah students in the cities of Lhokseumawe and North Aceh.

The average percentage of language attitudes of modern and traditional Dayah students shows 3 aspects of language attitudes, namely loyalty, pride, and awareness of language norms. The percentages obtained are, (1) the loyalty aspect is 67% positive and 33% negative; (2) pride 59% positive and 41% negative; and (3) the awareness aspect obtained 66% positive and 34% negative. Thus, the average language attitude of students from three aspects of language attitude is categorized as positive. This is because the respondents' answers were in Acehnese language, the percentage of which was 50%-100%, it was considered that modern and traditional dayah students were positive.

A person's language attitude greatly affects the defense of their regional language. The more positive the language attitude, the higher the level of language defense. In the average table above, 7 Islamic boarding schools are seen to have a positive attitude in the aspect of loyalty, only 1 Islamic boarding school describes a negative attitude of 3% out of a minimum of 50%. Loyalty in this aspect is steadfastness in the choice of the chosen language and getting used to speaking the language of the chosen language.

Likewise, a positive attitude is manifested from the aspect of pride in the chosen language. Proud which means feeling that you have the language in question. If the speaker has taken pride in his language, he will keep it well preserved. This is shown by proudly using BA with tribal or non-tribal friends, teaching to children, and proudly using it at official events.

However, 3 out of 8 Islamic boarding schools in Lhokseumawe and North Aceh have experienced a negative attitude towards the aspect of language pride. 2 of them are modern Islamic boarding schools that carry out foreign language routines in Islamic boarding schools so that there is no opportunity to speak Acehnese among Islamic boarding schools. Unlike the awareness aspect, the dominant positive attitude is found in this aspect. This is shown by support for preservation in the area when students return to their respective residences.

These three aspects can be a reference for a person in determining the choice of language. Currently, students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh still have a positive attitude towards their mother tongue, although some of them have shown negative behavior. Some respondents admitted that they understood and understood the Acehnese language, but did not feel proud due to the demands of regulations at the pesantren and were worried that they would be punished for language violations. The reason for this is that they may not choose to use the Acehnese language when communicating with their opponents in the pesantren. Ideally, a positive language attitude is directly proportional to the choice of language. A person is said to have a positive attitude towards a language, if that person chooses that language in the speech. For example, if a person has a positive attitude towards BA, he will choose to use BA in various situations. However, this is inversely proportional for the students. They are aware of language norms, but cannot get used to them in everyday speech.

Language Attitudes Based on Dayah Categories

When viewed based on the dayah category, the language attitudes of students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh in this study consist of traditional dayah and modern dayah. The following is the attitude of the language of traditional dayah students. The percentage of language attitudes of traditional dayah students consists of 3 aspects of language attitudes, namely loyalty, pride, and awareness of language norms. The language attitude in the table above shows a positive attitude. This is because the respondents' answers using Acehnese are 50%-100% considered that traditional dayah students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh are positive. The phenomenon that can be seen is that the indicators of loyalty, pride, and awareness using the Acehnese language are more dominant which states positive rather than negative. Only

Sirajul Muna dayah has a percentage that will lead to a negative number in the aspect of loyalty, which is 57% while the attitude of language in the aspect of pride has a negative result, which is 42%.

The percentages obtained from three aspects of overall language attitudes are, (1) the loyalty aspect is 73% positive and 27% negative; (2) pride 63% positive and 37% negative; and (3) the awareness aspect obtained 72% positive and 28% negative. Thus, the average language attitude of traditional dayah students from three aspects of language attitudes is categorized as positive. This is because the respondents' answers use Acehese language, the percentage of which is 50%-100% is considered that traditional dayah students are positive.

The Attitude of Modern Dayah Students

The percentage of language attitudes of modern dayah students consists of 3 aspects of language attitudes, namely loyalty, pride, and awareness of language norms. The percentages obtained are, (1) the loyalty aspect is 62% positive and 38% negative; (2) pride 56% positive and 44% negative; and (3) the awareness aspect obtained 61% positive and 39% negative. Thus, the average language attitude of students from three aspects of language attitude is categorized as positive. This is because the respondents' answers use Acehese language, the percentage of which is 50%-100% is considered that modern dayah students are positive.

The percentage of language attitudes based on the modern dayah category obtained a lower number than traditional dayah. This is evidenced by 1 negative percentage acquisition in the loyalty aspect, namely 47% in the Almuslim dayah and 2 negative percentage gains in the pride aspect, namely 49% in the Syamsudduha dayah and 49% in the ulumuddin dayah. The positive side that dominates the modern dayah respondents is more in the aspect of awareness using the Acehese language. However, the average percentage of modern dayah students' language attitudes is positive from various aspects, namely the aspect of loyalty is 62% positive, pride is 56% positive, and the awareness aspect is 61% positive. Although only a few percent are linked to a negative percentage.

The cause of the weakening of the language defense of modern dayah students compared to traditional dayah is the implementation of foreign languages in Islamic boarding schools, namely Arabic and English. Currently, in general, modern dayah has enacted Arabic and English as the language of daily communication. In contrast to traditional dayahs who still use Acehese as the language of instruction for learning and communication in Islamic boarding schools. On the one hand, the implementation of foreign languages is good for improving the mastery of international languages so that students are

able to adapt to the situation of the times. However, it will have an impact on the extinction of regional languages, if regional languages are not preserved.

When viewed from the two categories of *dayah*, the Acehese language is still very well maintained by traditional *dayah* students. This can be seen from the comparison of percentages obtained between traditional *dayah* and modern *dayah*. The percentage of language attitudes in terms of loyalty, pride, and awareness in traditional and modern *dayah*. The table suggests that habituation and preservation of language in daily life greatly determines the positive or negative attitude of a person's language. In addition, a person's attitude towards language is very decisive for the extinction or not of a language. Thus, based on the results of the research and discussion above, the researcher concluded that the language attitude of traditional and modern *dayah* students is categorized as positive, but language retention is higher and more maintained among traditional *dayah* students.

This research makes a new contribution to sociolinguistic studies by revealing the differences in language attitudes between traditional and modern *Dayah* students towards the Acehese language. These findings underline that although in general the language attitude of students towards the Acehese language is still relatively positive, there is a significant disparity between the two categories of *dayah*. Students in traditional *dayah* show a higher commitment to maintaining the Acehese language than students in modern *dayah*. The uniqueness of this study lies in the disclosure that policy factors on the use of foreign languages, such as Arabic and English, in modern *dayah* directly affect the attitude of students to regional languages. This has not been explained in depth in previous studies which tended to generalize language attitudes without distinguishing the categories of religious educational institutions.

The existence of quantitative data in the form of percentages of aspects of loyalty, pride, and awareness of language norms provides a strong basis for evaluating students' language attitude patterns. The average positive language attitude in traditional *dayah* students shows that linguistic practices that support the daily use of Acehese contribute to the defense of the language. On the other hand, the low number in some aspects of modern *dayah*, such as the pride of the Acehese language (56% positive), indicates the potential threat of language extinction if it is not balanced with policies that support the preservation of local languages.

This study also introduces a new dimension in the analysis of language attitudes by linking internal (such as individual awareness) and external (such as institutional policies) factors to language retention. This dimension adds

insight into understanding how the policies of religious institutions can have implications for the sustainability of regional languages.

These findings provide an important foundation for the formulation of education policies in Dayah, especially in considering the balance between the application of foreign languages and the preservation of regional languages. A bilingual or trilingual policy that supports the use of Acehese along with Arabic and English can be adopted to ensure that the local language remains used and appreciated in the dayah environment. In addition, training programs for teachers in modern dayah to integrate the Acehese language in non-formal learning, such as cultural discussions or extracurricular activities, can be a solution to increase the pride of speaking Acehese among students.

Positive language attitudes towards Acehese language, especially in traditional dayah, show that regional languages are still an important part of the cultural identity of students. Therefore, the preservation of the Acehese language needs to be directed to strengthen the cultural identity of students through the development of a curriculum based on local culture. This curriculum can integrate folklore, oral traditions, and local values into formal and non-formal learning in dayah. The significant role of traditional dayah in maintaining the Acehese language is also in the spotlight. Traditional Dayah can be used as a model in developing strategies for the preservation of regional languages through programs such as training on the use of the Acehese language in a modern context, publishing books in Acehese language, or Acehese art and literature competitions.

The high awareness of language in both traditional and modern dayah shows great potential to build multilingual education in Aceh. Multilingual education that combines Acehese languages, Arabic, and English will not only create a generation of students who master international languages, but also who still respect and practice their local language. The low level of pride and loyalty of Acehese in modern dayah, on the other hand, shows the need for a stronger local language policy in modern Islamic boarding schools. The preparation of regulations that support the use of the Acehese language in certain activities and local cultural introduction programs can increase students' pride in the Acehese language.

The results of this research are also relevant for public awareness campaigns about the importance of preserving regional languages. Local governments can work with local media, cultural communities, and educational institutions to organize campaigns that highlight the importance of the Acehese language as a cultural heritage. This campaign can include the production of documentaries, drama performances, or Acehese music concerts

involving students as the main actors. In addition, this study opens up opportunities for further investigation of language attitudes in other educational institutions in Aceh, such as public schools, universities, or non-formal institutions, as well as for the development of Acehese language learning modules specifically designed for students.

The low level of pride in Acehese in modern dayah is an early warning about the potential threat of language extinction. Therefore, strategic steps such as documentation of the Acehese language in the form of dictionaries, digital applications, or online learning platforms need to be taken immediately to ensure the accessibility of this language for future generations. The Aceh local government can also use the findings of this study to design policies that support the preservation of the Acehese language at all levels of society, including in educational institutions. Collaboration between traditional and modern dayah is also one of the potential solutions, for example through a student exchange program that can increase understanding and appreciation of the Acehese language in both types of institutions.

Taking these findings into account, this study not only makes a theoretical contribution to sociolinguistic studies but also provides a practical guide for the preservation of the Acehese language. The integration of local languages in religion-based education in Aceh is a strategic step to maintain cultural identity while facing the challenges of globalization.

CONCLUSION

The attitude of Acehese students in Lhokseumawe City and North Aceh shows a positive trend, although there are differences between modern and traditional dayah categories. Students in traditional dayah showed a higher percentage of positive attitudes in the aspects of language loyalty (73%), pride (63%), and awareness (72%). Meanwhile, students in modern dayah get a lower percentage, namely 62% in the aspect of loyalty, 56% in the aspect of pride, and 61% in the aspect of awareness. Overall, the average positive attitude towards the Acehese language of the two categories of dayah was 67% for loyalty, 59% for pride, and 66% for awareness.

This significant difference in the defense of the Acehese language is mainly due to the language use policy in each dayah. Traditional Dayah tends to use Acehese as the language of instruction in daily learning and communication, thus supporting the preservation of regional languages. On the contrary, modern dayah prioritizes the use of foreign languages, especially Arabic and English, as part of efforts to prepare students to face global demands. The use of foreign languages has a positive impact on improving the

international language skills of students, but at the same time weakens the defense of the Acehese language.

This condition indicates that the implementation of foreign languages in modern dayah needs to be balanced with efforts to preserve the Acehese language so that it is not endangered. Strategic measures, such as the integration of the Acehese language in non-formal learning, cultural discussions, or extracurricular activities, can be taken to increase the pride and loyalty of the Acehese language among students. In addition, it is important to encourage collaboration between modern and traditional dayah in the preservation of the Acehese language, for example through student exchange programs or joint cultural activities.

In conclusion, although the attitude of Acehese students in general is still positive, efforts to preserve the Acehese language require serious attention, especially in the modern dayah environment. Without strategic steps, the dominant use of foreign languages can accelerate the decline in the use of Acehese among the younger generation.

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