

PARENTS' ROLE IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN AN INTER-ETHNIC FAMILY

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Abstract

Qualitative research is applied in studying parents' role in language maintenance, especially in interethnic families in Medan. Observation, interview, and audio-recorded family conversations were done in data collection. Parents' role at home is the main discussion in this study. Language maintenance succeeded by language use at home and activities at home and surroundings while Javanese-Batak Toba families are patriarchal. Speaking vernacular language continually at home influences language maintenance (Pauwels, 2016). The analysis displays the relationship among culture, attitude, and prestige in maintaining vernacular language through the parents' role. We conclude parents have an important role in maintaining the vernacular language. The language choice which is done by parents contributes to language maintenance. Parents who have positive attitudes to their culture in order to show their prestige enforce children to maintain the vernacular language. This study recommends that further researchers explore vernacular language maintenance across three generations of Javanese-Batak Toba families.

Keywords: Families; Javanese-Batak Toba; language; maintenance

INTRODUCTION

Vernacular language maintenance has various factors (Gal, 1979; Wiley, 1998). Parents' role gives positive and negative effects on language maintenance. Parents' role involves language maintenance and language shift. Family is one of the vernacular language use domains and it supports by social, demographic, and education if the family members practice the vernacular language continually. Family has power and is a place to maintain a language (Fishman, 1991). In addition, the role of family (parents) is very essential in maintaining the vernacular language. Family practices vernacular language at home (Pauwels, 2016). Similarly, family is the crucial agent in vernacular language maintenance where the language is passed on from parents to children (Brown, 2010).

Parents' choice of language practice affects children's ability to speak the vernacular language and influences children's language use (Lin, 2016). In interethnic marriage, a number of studies discussed family's role in maintaining vernacular language (Brown, 2008; Igboanusi & Wolf 2009; Pauwels 2016; Schwartz 2008). This study interrogates parents' role in the language practices of inter-ethnic families in which parents' mother tongues are different. This study analyzes the crucial factors of successful and unsuccessful language maintenance in the family in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Two age groups spanning the generation from parents and children are the target of this study.

METHODS

This study reported four inter-ethnic families, two families were Christian and two families were moeslem. The fathers were born and raised in Java Island but educated in North Sumatera (bachelor's degree). While the mothers were born, raised, and educated in North Sumatera. Their children were born, raised, and educated in North Sumatera. The couples had at least one child who was old enough to use language(s). The data were taken through observation, questionnaire survey, interview, and audio-recorded conversation.

The information in this study was naturally occurring in family conversations which the families recorded at home using digital audio recorders. The researchers provided digital audio recorders to record the daily conversation at home which was done by family members. Information from digital audio needed to be clarified. We visited each family, delivered the questionnaire, and did the interview. Family members got involved in recording, questionnaire survey, and interviewing. The questionnaire was divided into two; personal information

and open-type questions. The open-type questions were framed to allow the respondents to write out their own answers and, in some cases, provide reasons for such answers (Yamamoto, 2002 & Brown, 2008).

Part one: Demographic information

- City of residence:
- Occupation:
- Sex:
- Age:
- Primary language (your mother tongue):
- The primary language or mother tongue of your wife/husband:
- Level of Education:
- Religion

Part two

1. In what language(s) do you speak at home with your:
 - Mother:
 - Father:
 - Brother:
 - Sister:
 - Husband/wife:
 - In what language do you speak with your relatives from
 - Mother:
 - Father:
2. Husband/Wife:
3. What language do you speak?
4. What language(s) would you prefer your children to speak, and why?
5. In what language do you talk to each other at home?

After delivering the questionnaire survey, it continued with the interview. The interview questions were adopted from Baker and Sanderson (2000):

1. In what language(s) do you speak to your relatives?
2. In what language(s) do your children to your relatives?
3. How often do you speak to your relatives?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was done in some steps. The first step was transcribing the conversation. Next was selecting the conversation appropriate to the research. The last was interpreting the result.

Table 1

Participants' language used at home, environment, school, work, worship place

	Language used at home	Language used at environment	Language used at School	Language used at Work	Language used at worship place
Family 1					
Father	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian
Mother	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Javanese/Indonesian
Daughter	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Javanese/Indonesian
Family 2					
Father	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian
Mother	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/ Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/English/ Indonesian	Indonesian	English/Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Family 3					
Father	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Javanese/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Mother	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Son	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Daughter	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian	Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian
Family 4					
Father	Javanese/Indonesian	Javanese/Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian
Mother	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Indonesian
Son	Javanese/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	Batak Toba/Indonesian	-	Indonesian

The father in Family 1 worked as a civil servant in the government office, and the mother worked as a nurse. They had one son and one daughter who were sixteen and fifteen years old. They were Christian. They lived in an environment in which Javanese was the majority language. The father and mother in Family 2 worked as entrepreneurs. They had two daughters who were twenty and eighteen years old and one son who was fourteen years old. The daughters were students in a private university in which English was the introduction language. Their son was a student at an international school. They were Muslims. The father in Family 3 worked as a civil servant and the mother worked as a doctor. They had two sons who were twenty and seventeen years old and one daughter was fifteen years old. Their sons were students at a state university. Their daughter was a student in a private school. They were Christians. The father and mother in the last family worked as civil servants. They had two sons who were sixteen and thirteen years old. They were Muslims. They lived in an environment in which Batak Toba was the majority language.

The father in Family 1 explains he spoke Javanese proficiently and his wife spoke Javanese and Batak Toba language proficiently. They practiced Javanese at home to influence their children's language use. Practicing the Javanese language continually at home affected their children's proficiency. It was also encouraged by choosing a worship place, and environment. The parents chose an ethnic church to support their language maintenance. They presented essential information about their reason for practicing Javanese in North Sumatera.

Quote 1

Father1 : dimana lagi mereka mulai belajar bahasa Jawa kalau tidak dari rumah, di luar sana sudah kebanyakan bahasa Indonesia. (Where would they start learning Javanese if it is not from home? Indonesian is the dominant language out there.)

He mentioned learning a vernacular language started at home. He emphasized using a vernacular language would demonstrate identity and present their prestige to their tribe.

Quote 2

Father1 : Pakai bahasa Jawa ya menunjukkan kita orang Jawa. (The use of Javanese shows their identity as Javanese.)

Language use in the environment and worship places supported the vernacular language maintenance. When a minority language was used continually in a domain, it would be maintained.

Quote 3

Father1 : Kita beribadah di gereja yang berbahasa Jawa, dekat sini, sama lah dengan lingkungan sini, pakai bahasa Jawa juga. Jadi pas bahasa Jawa yang berkembang di sini. Kebudayaan Jawa juga berkembang di sini. Kita orang Jawa, adat Jawa, bahasa Jawa. Kalau bukan kita, siapa lagi. (We follow an ethnic church which use Javanese, near here, it is as same as this environment, it uses Javanese. So, javanese develops here. Java Culture also develops here. We are javanese, java culture, javanese. If it is not us, who else)

Maintaining a vernacular language means maintaining culture. They cannot be separated. Language is a guidance to culture. Language and culture shape an identity. The use of language in a society identifies a certain culture (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).

Quote 4

Father3 : Di Batak Toba, ketika anak lanang menikahi boru Batak Toba maka anak lanang itu akan diberikan marga Batak Toba. Ya bisa jadi marga dari paribannya boru Batak Toba itu. Makanya saya punya marga, karna sudah punya marga , ya saya aktif di kumpulan Batak Toba terutama yang berhubungan dengan marga saya. Kita juga beribadah di gereja yang berbahasa Batak Toba. Di gereja kami sering ada kegiatan yang berkaitan dengan kebudayaan nah di situ anak-anak belajar budaya dan bahasa Batak Toba. (In Batak Toba tribe, when a man married a woman, he will be given a surname from Batak Toba. This surname can be taken from the preferential spouse. That is why i have surname, because of this surname, i get involve in Batak Toba community especially in my surname community. We follow a fellowship which uses Batak Toba language. In our church, we always have some activities related to culture. So children learn about Batak Toba culture and language from these activities.

The implementation of the ratification or the inauguration of the clan according to the custom of the Batak Toba aims to make a woman or man from a different tribe to be a member of the Batak Toba tribe and a part of the Batak Toba fellowship of the clan. This raises two consequences of custom:

Since granting it formally, a woman or man who is not from the Batak Toba tribe has already been raised to become the Batak Toba tribe in accordance with the clan passed.

Position has the same rights and obligations as the citizens of other customary.

According to Gultom Rajamarpodang (1992), need for Batak Toba on marriage between tribes in Indonesia of the Batak Toba so son-in-law really be the indigenous people of the Batak Toba therefore granting clan must be followed by changes in attitudes and behaviour so that the question can really be accepted as indigenous.

Meanwhile, language use at home is influenced by language use at school. Children who study at international schools are contaminated by English. They use English almost all the time. Even, if parents speak a vernacular language, children answer it as simply as possible. They feel comfortable using English. Sometimes they get frustrated in speaking the vernacular language.

The level of participants' competence in using a vernacular language is various; basic, fluent, and proficient. The level of participants' competence was caused by the participant frequencies in using vernacular language. The generations in Family 1 spoke Javanese fluently because they spoke Javanese at home and outside the home. They spoke it continually.

Table 2
Participants' proficiency in practicing the language

	Javanese	Batak Toba
Family 1		
Father	Proficient	Basic
Mother	Fluent	Proficient
Son	Fluent	Basic
Daughter	Fluent	Basic
Family 2		
Father	Proficient	Fluent
Mother	Basic	Proficient
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Son	Basic	Basic
Family 3		
Father	Proficient	Proficient
Mother	Basic	Proficient
Son	Basic	Fluent
Son	Basic	Fluent
Daughter	Basic	Basic
Family 4		
Father	Proficient	Proficient
Mother	Fluent	Proficient
Son	Fluent	Fluent
Son	Fluent	Fluent

The participants' frequencies in visiting their homeland and communicating with relatives influence the participants' ability to communicate by using the vernacular language. Supporting children to communicate with relatives from the homeland gave an impact on their language maintenance as shown Table 3.

Table 3
Participants' frequencies of travel to their homeland and communication to relatives in their homeland

	Children's frequency of travel to Java Island	Children's frequency of travel to Toba samsosir and surrounding.	Communication with relatives at Java Island	Communication with relatives at Toba samsosir and surrounding.
Family 1				
Son	Once	1/ year	Seldom	Frequent
Daughter	Once	1/ year	Seldom	Frequent
Family 2				
Daughter	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Daughter	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Son	1/ 2 years	At least 2/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Family 3				
Son	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Frequent	Frequent
Son	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Seldom	Seldom
Daughter	1/ 2 years	1/ year	Seldom	Seldom
Family 4				
Son	1/ 5 years	1/ year	Frequent	Seldom
Son	1/ 5 years	1/ year	Frequent	Seldom

CONCLUSION

From the data analysis, it is seen from the parents' language choice and the use of the vernacular language at home and surrounding. Indonesia is patriarchal. Generally, fathers have the power and responsibility in choosing everything. Of four families, three families were able to speak the Batak Toba language: fluent and basic. Two families were able to speak Javanese; one family spoke Javanese in all domains, and another spoke Javanese only at home. It means one family was able to speak Javanese and Batak Toba languages. Thus, the mother language was maintained as the impact of culture's role. Mothers' role in language maintenance is important.

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