

# The Heritage Language Policy in United States and Canada

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**Abstract**—The ability to master official language is often associated with the level of someone's nationality, thus people started to use official language and leave their heritage languages. This article is aimed at describing the government's efforts to preserve heritage languages, through the language policy, especially in United States and Canada. Using the systematic review, the writer tried to collect, select, and review some relevant articles, then present the result of articles review in the discussion. The result showed that, both in the United States and Canada, there are some progressive efforts from the government to preserve the existence of heritage languages through the language policy and those policies are supported by the citizens so the language preservation efforts run well.

**Keywords**—*heritage language; official language; language policy*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As multilingual countries, people believe that Americans and Canadians speak languages other than official languages. The speakers of non-official languages refer to indigenous, immigrants, and refugees. This fact drives the government to provide the official languages education for them. Besides that, it is the right of society to get support from the government in learning official languages. As mentioned by Cleghorn, there are three reasons of providing official language education especially for immigrants, the reasons relating to: (1) citizenship and nationalism, (2) jobs, industry, and economic benefits of immigration, and (3) social welfare and integration [1]. The official language programs have been encouraged especially in the post-independence period. Unfortunately, these programs provide a negative impact on the existence of heritage language.

The official language education is not only the reason on the declining of heritage language existence. The nationalism issues, economic welfare, and also social integration among the society are also the cause the extinction of heritage language. Extremely, in some decades, the use of languages other than official language viewed by suspicion by society. In some cases, also found that the disabilities to communicate with official language caused people difficult to find jobs and sell their goods. The non-official language speakers are experiencing difficulties to blend with the society so most of them behind information and education. The reasons explained

above, push ahead the non-official language speakers to master official languages. If this condition left continuously, the heritage language will be completely extinct.

Taking into consideration the background above, this article tries to describe the language policy related to the effort of heritage language preservation in United States and Canada. In the end of discussions, suggestions related to the effort of heritage language preservation in Indonesia are also drawn.

The term of heritage language has varied definition due to some aspects such as; periods when it is defined and country where it is defined, but it often synonymous with the local language. Fishman described heritage language in America as any other languages that are used (or not) in a family or community except English, including indigenous languages, colonial languages, and immigrant languages [2]. Then, Li Yan defined heritage language as "a mother tongue and its dialectal varieties featured by the speaker's ethnic identity, which are first acquired and used in a family environment, and then degenerate or demise due to less or no use confined within a family or a community, or a social communication environment characterized by the common or dominant language" [3]. Later Cummins said that American heritage languages include not only languages of immigrants and indigenous people, but also non-English languages of refugees living there [4]. However, heritage language has almost the same connotation with ethnic language, ancestral language, home language, minority language, etc. [5].

In this paper, firstly, it is assumed that the definition of heritage language closely related with any languages spoken by society except official language; secondly, the heritage languages are inherited by ancestors through the words of mouth; and thirdly, it is synonymous with the local language. Therefore, heritage language is redefined in this paper as any languages, except official language, spoken by the society that is inherited by ancestors through the words of mouth.

According to Pennycook when we fight in support of a community-based language program, when we allow or disallow the use of one language or another in our classrooms, when we chose which language to use in Congress, conversations, conferences, or curricular, we are making language policy [6]. It means that the language policy is not only found in the government, official acts, and document but

it also found in a simple everyday speech. Language policies can be differentiated in terms of their degree of formality or explicitness, so it is useful to distinguish between explicit or official policies and those that are implicit or even tacit [7]. It also can be distinguished in terms of their goals or orientations ranging from (a) promotion-oriented policies, (b) expediency-oriented accommodations, (c) tolerance-oriented policies, (d) restriction-oriented policies, (e) repression-oriented policies, (f) policies aimed at erasing the visibility and even historical memory of various languages, and (g) null policies, which refer to the significant absences of policies [8].

Then, language policies are determined by fights for social and economic supremacy, which are always under the surface of the public debate [9]. The policy related to the language in a country is made by the government officials that can be creates an ongoing debate among the society. Anderson stated that languages policies have consequences for schooling, public broadcasting, the cohesion of imagined communities and nations [10]. So, whatever the policy, it will be some groups who reject it. It can be redefined that the language policy closely related with the choosing of language used, in the formal activities such as; education, trading, public services, etc. by the government.

## II. METHOD

A narrative literature review, which focused on describing and discussing the topic from a theoretical and conceptual viewpoint, has been carried out [11]. The selected articles are used to conduct this narrative literature review. The articles presented in this literature review have been obtained from various web articles. The search started in September 2018. The articles are found by using keyword "Language Policy and planning" in combination with other key phrases such as "in US and Canada", "history", etc. All articles from various years were collected, read, and classified. Next, the discussions have drawn through the ten-selected articles. Finally, the conclusion is made for the preservation of heritage language in Indonesian.

The 10 articles were deemed to be suitable for the literature review. These 10 articles solely focused on the heritage language policy in United States and Canada. Table 1 summarizes the identified studies, in the order of recent year, along with the key emphasis of the study, the location or country.

TABLE I. SHORTLISTED ARTICLES FOR THE REVIEW

Author/s and year of the published	Key of the Study	Location
Yan, 2018	Minorities heritage language planning	United States
Wang, 2016	Language policy	United States
Wiley & Gracia, 2016	Language policy	Canada
Cummins, 2014	Teaching heritage languages	Canada
Burnaby, 2008	Heritage language policy	Canada

Table 1. Cont.

Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007	Language policy and TESOL	-
Cummins, 2005	Heritage language	-
Tottie, 2002	Official language	United States
Knutson, 1996	National language policy	United States
Saouab, 1993	Multiculturalism	Canada

## III. DISCUSSIONS

### A. The Heritage Language in United States of America

English is not the official language of the United States of America but the creation of an official national language appears some ideas and terms such as bilingualism, bilingual education, multilingualism, unilingualism, monolingualism, English Only, Official English, US English, English First, English-Plus, English as a Second Language, transitional English, and two-way/ dual-language English [12]. The language policy in US is signal by three eras; English officialization, bilingual education, and English plus [9]. Before the language policy is discussed, firstly, it is important to know about the official language of US. English has been used as the dominant language in US but, in fact, it has never legally declared as the official language. Interestingly, the Declaration of Independence is written in English [13]. In the English officialization era, some government officials have tried to legalize English as the official language in US. One of it is Senator Hayakawa from California who proposed a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States. Unfortunately, this effort it had not accepted by the Senate because it caused an ongoing debate. In addition, it is also considered as the racist activity by some groups so the condition has not changed until now as the acts to respect the minorities. Although the activities to provide English-Only is rejected officially, a fact showed that immigrants of US, except in the isolated area, lost their native language by the third generation [13]. It is showed that position of English, as legalized official language or not, do not affect the fact that heritage language is started to be abandoned by society.

For the purpose of this discussion, bilingualism refers to the speaking of more than one language. According to Canadian Heritage bilingual country is one where the principal institutions provide services in two languages to citizens [14]. The bilingual education is held to overcome the negative impact of English officialization era in which indicates the English-only movement. If this condition is allowed for a long time, the heritage language in US will be extinct. So, the bilingual education era is the government effort to keep any language alive. In contrast, one of the Senator of Texas, explained, "It is not the purpose of the bill to create pockets of different languages through the country, but just to try to make those children fully literate in English" [15]. As explained before, English has never legally declared as the official language in United States, the US society is freely to speak in any language. But, most of activities (trading, teaching, etc.) used English, it is important for people to master English. Then, the ideas of teaching English using mother tongue has appeared and implemented through the bilingual education

program. In the end, this program also failed because of some reasons. Firstly, the teaching of English using native speaker language is not effective. It is supported by Phillipson who described and criticized the common assumptions about ESL teaching and learning through “five tenets”. One of the tenets described that English is best taught in monolingual. Secondly, American’s bilingual education could not keep any language alive. It happened because of some groups rejected the bilingual education system for some reasons. Lastly, the use of language other than English can decreased the social class of the speaker [16]. This is supported by the fact that most of Latino parents believe that using some language other than English placed people to second-class citizenship in America society [15].

The English plus is a serious effort to support the government policy called no child left behind (NCLB). In practice, NCLB has resulted in a two-tier educational system, in which English language learners are taught at a substandard curriculum that stresses basic skills, while more privileged students receive a challenging, all-round education that encourages the critical thinking needed in college and professional careers [9]. As what American needs that is English plus X not English plus One, it means that the students are freely to choose any language they are interested to learn and as provided by the schools. The ability of mastering English is not worrying anymore but if people just know English means that they get ready to be left behind. English plus is the result to overcome the NCLB problems and also the government effort to support the language rights in the country.

#### B. *The Heritage Language in Canada*

Canada has two official languages, English and French, but people believe that Canadians speak languages other than English and French. In about 1500, Aboriginal people lived in Canada, speaking about 450 languages and dialects from 11 language families. In summary, 59% of population speaks English, 23% speaks French, less than 1% speaks aboriginal languages, and 17% speaks other languages. The total of it is not including the immigrants yet. In Canada, people who do not speak in official languages are called non-official languages speakers. They refer to immigrants and the second and the third generation of immigrants.

The language policy in Canada has been changed over the decades [17]. Firstly, in the beginning of Independence Day, the heritage language viewed with suspicion in which people who speaks any language except the official’s language considered as traitor. So, in the name of nationality, society especially children are forced to forget their mother tongue. It is supported by the government through the Official Languages Acts of 1969 that government makes no provisions for the learning of official languages by residents of Canada who do not speak either language. The original policy stated that the government will continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada’s official languages in order to become fully participated in Canadian society’ [18]. Then, the condition has changed in the 19th to 20th century. People started to lose their heritage language and felt like they lose their identity. Then, some communities, most of them are immigrants, tried to save the existence of heritage language.

The communities organized heritage language education especially for children. They also support the bilingual schools and fund some private multilingual schools or classes in non-official languages in Canada.

The Official Languages Acts of 1969 provoked society to forget their heritage language. Hence, the heritage languages are being abandoned by society in which, if this condition allowed for a long time, heritage languages are endangered. Luckily, in 1971, the existence of heritage language started to be recognized by the government. It is signal by the government effort to build cultural enrichment which one of the programs is provide the heritage language education. Later, extensive and vitriolic resistance to establishment of heritage language classes at public expense developed [19]. Since 1977 up to now, the position of heritage language increasingly appreciated. The heritage language programs have been associated with the school’s agenda and it is funded by the government, and new ones have been created in the schools, but most of it were non-academically recognized [20]. In the province of Ontario, the heritage language teaching program provides support for the teaching of heritage language for up to two-and-one-half hours per week outside of the regular 5-hour school day and it is fully funded by the provincial government [21].

### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

#### A. *Conclusions*

In conclusions, the effort of heritage language preservation in both countries increased from year to year. In the beginning, the language policy in US and Canada just focus on the development of official languages but, as time goes by, the existence of heritage language started to be recognized and the effort of heritage language preservation sought especially by government. Then, the effort of heritage language preservation is done through the language policy in each country. Most of the policies are linked with the education institutional, such as; the obligation of English plus in United States and the heritage language programs that have been associated with the school’s agenda in Canada. Finally, support from the government help the preservation of heritage language. As mentioned in the discussions, previously, some American people did not want to speak any language other than English because it can decrease their social class but, the NCLB program has changed this assumption. Nowadays, people who just know English categorized as left behind. The condition in Canada is also similar. The condition in which speaker of non-official language viewed with suspicion in the beginning of Independence, totally changed. Now, the heritage language education has stolen the government focus.

#### B. *Suggestions*

The suggestions here have drawn for the development of heritage language preservation especially in Indonesia. The first suggestion is practicing the heritage language in the family environment. One of the ways to preserve the language can be done through practice the language in daily life. In the beginning, trying to make the society proud with their heritage language then they will use it is the best idea that can be

applied. The other suggestion is adding the heritage language lesson in junior and senior high school curriculum. It is no doubt that education is the ideal area to promote the heritage language. Through the education, students will learn the heritage language from the experts and practice it with their friends. So, it is suggested to add the heritage language lesson as the compulsory subject from the early childhood education until higher education. Finally, it is better to hold several competitions, a continuous competition, on the heritage language. This program can raise the people spirit to learn and preserve their heritage language.

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