

Acehnese Youth and Local Language: Their Social Identity in Public Space

(A Case study of Speakers of Gayonese and Acehnese)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at identifying the use of local language by the youth in Aceh, and the social identity represented by the youth through their decision in using or not using local language in public space in the city of Lhokseumawe and Takengon. Amongst local languages that are in use in the Province of Aceh are Acehnese language and Gayonese language. This study focuses on these two language speakers as they are two most spoken local languages in Aceh. The researchers investigate how the youth use these languages in coffee shops. Coffee shops are chosen in this study as the location of this research since they are considered public spaces that are modern and most visited by the youth. The methodology utilized in this research is descriptive qualitative. The data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews. The results of the study show that the use of local language in public space such as coffee shop is still less preferable amongst youth in Aceh. The study also found that there are several social identities represented by the youth through their decision of whether or not to use the local language in social interaction in coffee shops. First, there is the need to show the identity of city people, or “cool” people by not choosing to speak the local language. Second, youth show particular identity by using local language to immerse into the group they are hanging out with. Third, in male speakers, the use of local language is more preferable compared to their female counterparts to show the flexibility in mingling with their peers.

Keywords: *Acehnese Youth, Local Language, Social Identity, Public Space, Coffee Shop*

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of youth in the attempts of culture and language preservation is central. In the era of globalization, increasing the awareness on the importance of maintaining and preserving local culture started to be felt as urgent. The existence of one particular language is influenced by the attitude of the language speakers. A number of local languages in the world (indigenous languages) have become extinct due to the decreasing number of their speakers. These local languages that have the declining number of their speakers, according to Wurm in Crystal in [1], can be categorized as potentially endangered languages, or endangered languages, or seriously endangered languages. In some of the cases of language extinctions, one of the contributing factors for the loss of the speakers of local languages is the domination of a more

powerful language, or a higher prestige language in one particular country.

The use of language and the choice of language is closely related to the attitude or behavior of the language user. The speaker's behavior is strongly influenced by the social identity inherent in him. Language, according to Jaspal in [2], is a reflection of the social identity of the individual or society. Therefore, how teenagers view the regional language greatly influences the decision to use the regional language or not in public spaces.

Language in Sociolinguistics is seen as social behavior used in communication which has an important role as a means of communication to convey the intentions and main ideas of humans and express themselves in interactions in society. Language is a social behavior used in communication. Because society is made up of individuals and groups as well as the

whole, individuals influence each other and are interdependent. Language as a community property is also stored in each individual. Each individual can behave in the form of language [3]. Language is often seen as an ethnic characteristic of an individual or group and is said to be a tool of ethnic identity.

Regional languages are languages used by residents in certain geographical areas that are limited within the territory of a country. Besides being used to communicate within a tribe, local language is also believed to be able to strengthen solidarity within a certain ethnic group. Therefore, regional languages are considered important to be preserved and socialized by each ethnic group to the next generation. Regional languages are a feature of ethnic identity. Language is an important factor of ethnic membership and it is a social reality.

It is possible that there are differences in the existence of the use of several regional languages in Indonesia in the public sphere. As stated by [4], the use of the Javanese language is still active. For example, communication between students and lecturers, or lecturers with lecturers in WA. In these communications, the Javanese language is still actively used. Meanwhile, the use of Sundanese in public spaces is still identified as low and Sundanese speakers tend to use Indonesian to communicate in public spaces.

Acehnese and Gayonese languages are two regional languages in the province of Aceh. Based on initial observations in the city of Lhokseumawe, teenagers who are in public spaces tend to use Indonesian in communicating. Meanwhile, teenagers in Takengon, Central Aceh, still use their local language, namely the gajo language, in communicating with their friends in public spaces, in this case in contemporary coffee shops. How teenagers present themselves in the public space through the language used has implications for how the local language itself is viewed by the community, especially among teenagers.

Based on the above reality, the researcher wants to identify the perception of the Acehnese people, especially among Acehnese youth, towards the use of local languages, and the social identity presented by these teenagers when interacting and communicating in public spaces, in this case the modern koi stalls in Aceh.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Youth

Etymologically, youth in Latin is adolescence which means to grow or grow into an adult. The term adolescence has a broader meaning that includes mental, emotional, social, and physical maturity [5].

Adolescence is a very important, very critical, complex, and very vulnerable period. The term adolescence is used in the West, which means "puberty. Indonesian people refer to this period as 'akil baligh'. Adolescence is called the period of human life in the range of 11-19 years [6].

2.2. Local Language as part of Social Identity

2.3. Coffee Shop as Popular Public Space in Aceh

The development of coffee shops in Aceh is currently very fast. Coffee shops in Aceh used to be synonymous with middle-aged male coffee connoisseurs. However, coffee shops in Aceh have now been transformed into places to 'hang out' for young men and women. These coffee shops are designed with a café setting and are equipped with wi-fi facilities and a VIP room that makes customers comfortable to spend their free time at the coffee shop while enjoying coffee with friends and colleagues. In addition, coffee shops in Aceh now offer various types of coffee, not only black coffee which is served traditionally. This adds to the appeal of the coffee shop to serve as a place to gather and relax.

Customers of coffee shops in Aceh are currently dominated by youth. Coffee shops as public spaces in Aceh become a gathering place for individuals from various regions and backgrounds. The youth who came to the coffee shop came from various places in Aceh with different social and geographical backgrounds. They gather to discuss and do school/college assignments with friends, play online games, or just hang out.

2.3. Social Identity Theory

Social identity, according to Tajfel in [7], is a person's feeling or understanding of who they are based on their sense of group membership. Tajfel [7] suggests that social groups such as class/social strata, family, culture, and education where they are are the source of the formation of pride and self-esteem of an individual. These groups provide a sense of social identity, namely a sense of belonging or a feeling of belonging to the social world.

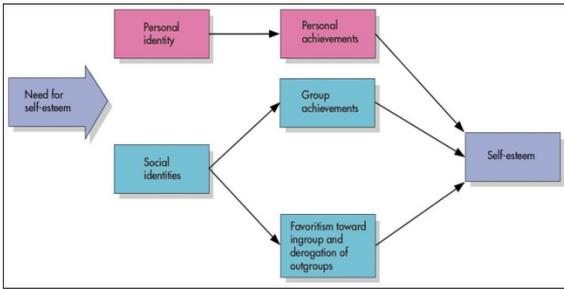


Figure 1 Concept of Social Identity [7].

According to this theory, humans divide the world into "us" and "them" through a process of social categorization. We group people into social groups. In doing so, the individual or society creates 'differences between groups' and 'similarities within the same group'. This process is called the "in-group (us)" and "out-group (them)" processes.

The main hypothesis of this theory is that group members from an "in group" will look for negative aspects of people who are in the "out-group", which will then form a good self-image.

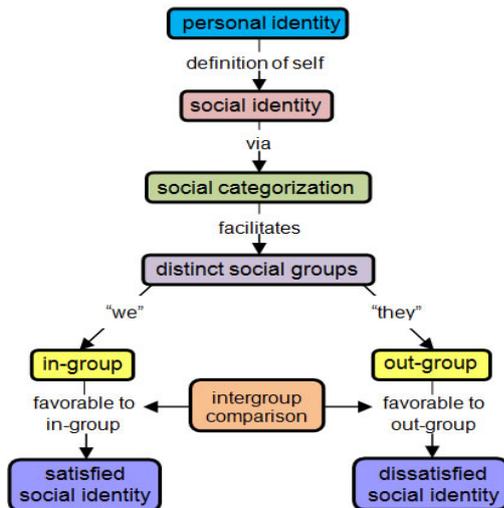


Figure 2 Stages of the process of evaluating other people into in-group and out-group [7].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Technique of Data Collection

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach which aims to describe, summarize various conditions, various situations, or various phenomena of social reality that exist in the community that is the object of research, and seeks to draw that reality to the surface as a feature, character, trait, model, sign, or a description of a particular condition, situation, or phenomenon. The qualitative descriptive format in this study uses the form

of a case study, which focuses on a particular unit of various phenomena [8].

The data collection technique in this research is through observation (observation) and in-depth interviews (In-Depth Interview). The observation or observation method is a data collection method used to collect research data through observation or sensing [8]. In this research, the writer uses in-depth interview method. In-depth interview is the process of obtaining information for research purposes by means of question and answer while face to face between the interviewer and the informant or the person being interviewed, with or without using an interview guide, in which the interviewer and informant are involved in a relatively social life. long. Thus, the peculiarity of in-depth interviews is their involvement in the lives of informants [8].

This study uses an interactive model data analysis technique developed by Miles and Huberman. There are three stages of data analysis, namely (a) data reduction, (b) data presentation, and (c) conclusion/verification.

3.1.1. Data Reduction

Reducing data means summarizing, choosing the main things, focusing on the important things, looking for themes and patterns. Data reduction is a sensitive thought process that requires intelligence and a high breadth and depth of insight. In reducing data, each researcher will be guided by the goals to be achieved (Sugiyono, 2007).

3.1.2. Data Presentation

Miles and Huberman (in Siyoto and Sodik, 2015) state that data presentation is a structured collection of information that gives the possibility of drawing conclusions. In qualitative research, data presentation can be done in the form of brief descriptions, charts, relationships between categories and the like. By presenting data, it will be easier to understand what happened, plan further work based on what has been understood [9].

3.1.3. Conclusion/Verification

After the data is presented which is also in a series of data analysis, the next process is drawing conclusions or verifying data. In the data analysis stage, a researcher begins to look for the meaning of things noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal pathways and propositions. The conclusions in the first stage are loose, remain open, unclear and then increase to become more detailed and firmly rooted. Final conclusions may not appear until

the end of data collection, depending on the size of the field notes collection, coding, storage and retrieval methods used, and the ability of the researcher to draw conclusions.

3.2. Informants

According to Emy (in Suyanto et al, 2005). Research informants are people who will provide information during the research process. In this study, the people who became research informants were:

3.2.1. Key Informants

Key informants are those who know and have the basic information needed in the research [10]. In this study, the key informants were teenagers at the TR coffee shop in Lhokseumawe City, and teenagers at ARB Café, Takengon, Central Aceh.

3.2.2. Additional Informants

Additional informants are those who can provide information even though they are not directly involved in social interactions. In this study, the additional informants were the owners and waiters of coffee shops/cafes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Aceh Youth Perception on Local Language use in Coffee Shop as Public Place in Lhokseumawe City.

From the observations, researchers found that Acehese teenagers in coffee shops tend to use Indonesian. The Acehese people who use the Acehese language are only adults. Meanwhile, teenagers generally use Indonesian in their interactions in public spaces, especially in coffee shops in Lhokseumawe City.

After conducting observations and interviews, the researcher found several things that became the results or findings of this study. The first finding is that the use of local languages in Lhokseumawe City Coffee Shops as a public space by teenagers tends to decrease or less. Next, the researcher found that teenagers' views of teenagers who still use the Acehese language in coffee shops were very positive and considered "cool" or deserved appreciation. Furthermore, the researcher also found that, according to Acehese youth in Lhokseumawe, the dominance of the use of Indonesian in coffee shops in Lhokseumawe City is a common thing and should not be considered a threat to the local language. The findings from the formulation of the first

problem in this study will be presented in detail as described in the next sub-heading.

4.1.1. The Use of Acehese Language in Public Place in Lhokseumawe City is still less preferable amongst Youth

Public space is a place where people gather and interact. One of the public spaces that are popular places to chat and share information in cities in Aceh today, including the cities of Lhokseumawe and Takengon, is a coffee shop. People who gather at the coffee shop come from various educational backgrounds, ages, and regions of origin. In this case, the researcher focuses on the interactions of teenagers who visit coffee shops in Lhokseumawe City.

Based on observations made by researchers in coffee shops that are crowded with teenagers in the cities of Lhokseumawe, teenagers tend to use Indonesian in interacting with colleagues in their group. At every table that the researcher observed, the groups of teenagers were seen using Indonesian in communicating. The researchers found only one or two groups of teenagers using local languages (Acehese Language).

Based on the interviews with informants, visitors of coffee shops who use the Acehese language tend to be adults. Meanwhile, teenagers still do not use the Acehese language in communicating with their group friends. This shows that the Acehese language is not "preferable" to be used among Acehese youth in Lhokseumawe City in interacting in public spaces such as in coffee shops. This also shows that there are differences in the use of regional languages, especially the Acehese language, at each age level of the people of Lhokseumawe City.

Not only with their fellow colleagues in their group, young coffee shop visitors also use Indonesian when ordering food or drinks to the waiter at the coffee shop. This shows that the use of Indonesian in interactions in public spaces is more common than the use of regional languages. People or youth in the city of Lhokseumawe no longer use the Acehese language to communicate in public spaces.

The lack of use of local languages among adolescents can be said to contribute to language attrition or what is known as language erosion among adolescents. In a multilingual or bilingual society, the phenomenon of local language attrition is very likely to occur. Language attrition according to [11] language attrition or language grinding is a phenomenon of the loss of a person's ability to speak a certain language within a certain period of time. "language attrition is

defined as the loss of language proficiency of within an individual over time.” if the majority of teenagers who spend a lot of time in public spaces no longer use the Acehnese language in interacting in these public spaces, then the phenomenon of language erosion in these individuals is feared to occur.

4.1.2. The Youth who Prefer to Speak in Acehnese in Public Places Are Perceived as “Cool” and Need To Be Appreciated

Although Acehnese teenagers in coffee shops realize that nowadays many teenagers prefer to use Indonesian when interacting in public spaces, however, teenagers are also aware and appreciate that there are groups of teenagers in coffee shops who use Acehnese language in communicating. Teenagers like this are considered "cool" because in modern conditions and times like today they are still not ashamed and proud to use local languages in modern coffee shops.

This shows that there is still a sense of pride in having an Acehnese ethnic identity which is shown by the use of their local language among teenagers. Pride of ethnicity is increasingly felt when teenagers are outside Aceh. The desire to display Aceh's ethnic identity is even more obvious when outside Aceh. Acehnese youth who are outside Aceh more often use the Acehnese language when they are in areas outside Aceh

4.1.3. The Domination of Indonesian Language in Public Places is Considered Normal and Not Seen as Threatening the Local Language

While there are concerns about the loss of local languages in a place due to the dominance of a more dominant language or having higher power and prestige, Acehnese youth actually perceive that the use of a dominant language in the public sphere is not a problem that needs to be worried about or needs to be eliminated. The use of Indonesian in public spaces is common. The local or regional language will be maintained as long as the speakers, in this case the youth, do not forget the language in their daily use.

In a multilingual society, where people use more than one language to communicate, the existence of one language that dominates the other is certainly a frequent occurrence. Generally, dominant language is a language that is more often used in formal contexts, for example in the education system. In Indonesia, the dominance of the Indonesian language can occur because Indonesian is the national language and the official language in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, many indigenous languages or local languages become the cultural

identity of a region. However, often these local languages are marginalized by the dominant language.

However, based on the interview above, teenagers do not view the use of Indonesian in public spaces as "dangerous" for the local language. The high use of the Indonesian language in public spaces also does not mean that the community, in this case the youth, has forgotten their local language. The use of Indonesian in social interactions in coffee shops is also not a threat to the erosion of regional languages as long as local languages are still used, although not in coffee shops. In the perception of teenagers in the city of Lhokseumawe, the use of Indonesian in public spaces is a common thing and can be continued.

4.2. Aceh Youth Perception on Local Language Use in Coffee Shop as Public Place in Takengon City.

4.2.1. The use of Gayo Language among Youth in Public Place Has Decreased

As previously stated, the use of the regional language (gayo language) in Takengon City has been greatly reduced at this time.

The interviews with informants not only show the low use of gayo language by gayonese teenagers in public spaces, but also the "slang" or contemporary identity that teenagers also want to have and display by using Indonesian and not using local languages. According to social identity theory, the process of an individual categorizing or grouping himself into a certain group shows how the individual has a perception of himself.

Based on this theory, gayo teens categorize themselves into contemporary youth groups, and see themselves in that society as modern people by choosing to use Indonesian instead of the local language

4.2.2. The Use of Gayo Language in Public Spaces Among Teenagers Must be Increased

Although the use of gayo language is relatively low among teenagers, teenagers see that it must be improved. There are concerns about the marginalization or even the extinction of the regional language (gayo language) among gayo youth in Takengon City.

4.2.3. The Influence of Foreign Languages (English and Korean) on The choice of Language Used by Teenagers in Public Spaces

Researchers also found that there was an influence of K-pop culture among gayo teenagers. They tend to

use vocabulary or terms from the Korean language in interacting with their fellow teenagers in coffee shops. Teenagers view the use of Korean terms or vocabulary as showing the modern level of a teenager when socializing. This then also affects the preference for the use of regional languages in public spaces.

English is also associated with modernity. Teenagers who use English tend to be considered "slang". English is a foreign language that tends to be considered to have "higher prestige", therefore, its speakers will be considered as people from a high social strata (high class), highly educated, or city people. The use of English is also often associated with a person's intelligence. Someone who can speak English is a person with high intelligence. This explains why teenagers tend to use English terms in social interactions in public spaces. By using English, they categorize themselves as "slang", city kids, contemporary, highly educated, or have high intelligence.

4.3. Social Identity of Aceh Youth in Public Place

4.3.1. The Relation between Local Language Preference and Gender Identity in Gayonese Speakers

The relationship between gender and language has been extensively studied with the main focus on the differences between male and female languages from different perspectives and methodologies. "Language and gender" refers to the relationship between male and female language. Gender differences are not only a reflection of the speech between men and women, but also a reflection of their different lifestyles and attitudes. For example, men are more concerned with power, take the initiative to be leaders, speak directly and take over information as the first thing, while women speak more indirectly, implicitly and softly. So many researchers have shown concern about the differences between male and female languages, not only in terms of the vocabulary used by men and women, but also in terms of how men and women communicate, including situations, locations, and opponents. talk. In sociolinguistics, researchers study the relationship between language and gender in many aspects, such as gender and politeness, gender and language style. Most researchers believe that women are more polite than men [12].

As in this study, there are differences in the use of regional languages between women and men which represent their identity. Most Acehese boys in Lhokseumawe City, for example, prefer to use the local language (Gayo or Aceh) when communicating with

their male colleagues. This is also a form of conveying the identity or character attached to them. Speaking in regional languages with certain language expressions can also be interpreted as an expression of masculinity or intimacy between group members. However, there are times when teenage boys also adjust/change the language they use (from Acehese or Gayo to Indonesian) when talking to the opposite sex under certain circumstances. Meanwhile, among young women in Lhokseumawe City, the use of regional languages (Aceh and Gayo) and Indonesian in daily communication does not have much difference. Based on the explanation from the informant, adolescent girls in Lhokseumawe City more often use Indonesian when communicating without being tied to the situation and the other person.

4.3.2. Feeling Ashamed of Having Local Accent

Another reason that causes Acehese youth in Takengon City to use the Acehese language is because they have not mastered Indonesian. Pronunciation or accent that is thick with regional languages has become a common reason why most teenagers do not want to speak Indonesian. So they choose to use the local language when communicating as described by one of the research informants. In fact, there are some groups who are still embarrassed to speak Indonesian properly and correctly. But there are also those who are prestige because they feel that Indonesian is less interesting to hear and even to say.

4.3.3. The Need for Acceptance in Particular Group of Community

Whenever we speak a certain variety of language, we show closeness to one social group. The variety of languages people use makes a significant contribution to shaping their social identity. This also happened among teenagers in Lhokseumawe City. Although it is widely believed that language variation is highly dependent on the location of a society, most people in the same area also speak different languages with respect to the social status to which they belong.

Differences in language use also indicate that a person comes from another group (outsider). And in cases where someone has a larger and more varied social scope, they are more likely to use the language according to the members of the group. This practice can be found in the association of Acehese youth, where when they are in a university environment, or in a city that is different from the environment where they come from, they will use Indonesian because Indonesian is more often used in lecture environments or among young people in urban areas. Meanwhile, when they are in a more traditional situation or in the area they come

from, they will use the local language (Aceh or Gayo) as their identity. This is done to show that they are also part of the group. If these teenagers use Indonesian in a traditional environment, society will stigmatize that they are not part of the community (outsiders) or are considered as teenagers who do not respect local languages. This shows that the use of language shows a person's social identity and from which group they come from [13]. Therefore, the teenagers in the city of Lhokseumawe adjust the language they use when communicating according to the environment they are in as explained by one of the research informants.

5. CONCLUSION

Local languages are one of the social and cultural identities of individuals. In social interaction, the language used is also a feature and a reflection of self-identity and social identity. From the results of the study, researchers can conclude several things related to the perception of teenagers who speak Gayo and Acehese languages about regional languages, and social identity in public spaces; 1) teenagers consider the use of regional languages (Acehese and Gayo languages) in public spaces to be very lacking. Teenagers tend to use Indonesian because they interpret themselves as someone who is contemporary or modern. 2) In Acehese speaking youth in the city of Lhokseumawe, researchers found an assumption among Acehese youth that if there are still young people who speak Acehese in contemporary coffee shops, then the group of teenagers is seen as "cool" because in the modern era, they are still want to use the Acehese language. This shows that there is still a "pride" or sense of pride over ethnic identity among Acehese youth, but the majority of them are faced with demands to be able to mingle with other teenagers, therefore, they must use Indonesian. 3) Adolescents who speak Acehese in Lhokseumawe City consider that the dominance of the use of Indonesian in public spaces is normal, and does not affect the existence of regional languages, as long as young people still use the Acehese language even though they are not in public spaces. 4) For Gayo speakers, researchers found the influence of foreign languages in the use of language in public spaces. The foreign languages that are often used are Korean and English. The use of these foreign languages shows that in terms of social identity, these teenagers consider or perceive themselves as modern, educated, and smart when they represent themselves in the group of teenagers.

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