



Language Ideology and Attitudes Toward English Among Multilingual Families in Indonesia

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Abstract. Focusing on the complex multilingual setting of Indonesia, the present study investigates the representation of Spolsky's (2004) three aspects of language: ideology, management, and practice. Specifically, we look thoroughly at parental language ideology and attitude and how they are reflected in actual language practice and planning, focusing on English as a foreign language. Our analysis draws from a large-scale online survey of 1,344 multilingual parents from different parts of Indonesia, with the survey being distributed to over 28 provinces, including NAD, North Sumatra (North & West), Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Jambi, Bengkulu, Jakarta, West Java, Central and East Java, Yogyakarta, Maluku, Kalimantan (North, South, West, East, and Central), Riau, Sulawesi (North, South, and Southeast), Bali, Nusa Tenggara (West and East), West Papua, and Papua. Our findings indicated that English remains the additional language to learn and not to be used at home for parent-child communication practices. Consistencies were also seen between parents' ideologies and planning in which their positive attitudes towards the mastery and use of English are translated into their desire to support the development of English proficiency of their children. Moreover, the results of the semantic differential pairing in our survey demonstrated that English is perceived to be a language that indexes modernity, usefulness, and formality. Our findings can be used to predict the future trajectory of English in our society and, more particularly, our education system.

Keywords: Parental language ideology and attitudes · English · Multilingual society

1 Introduction

Our study departs from a complex use of multilingual configuration in Indonesian families and how it reflects parents' language ideology and attitudes with a more emphasis on English. We refer to the work of Spolsky and Shohamy [1] that defines language ideology and attitude as a set of beliefs and perceptions toward the structures and use of a given language.

Previous works in this scholarship repeatedly found that the pattern of parent-child communication is shaped heavily by parents' language ideology [2–7]. According to

De Houwer [2] and Pérez Báez [8], this ideology and attitude have also been seen to intertwine with bilingual children's upbringing, implicitly or explicitly. In the complex multilingual setting of Indonesia, however, little is known about how parents' ideology toward the importance of English as a foreign yet global language influences the language management and practices in the family context. Also, the previous studies have investigated ideology towards English in the context of macro-level policy [9], for example, in the institutionalization of English as the official language of the ASEAN community. While the studies on the formulation of language policy at the national level has been adequate, its implementation at the smallest social circle, e.g., family will shed light on how this policy is adopted and practiced on daily bases. Therefore, in this current paper, we look at how multilingual parents in our study view their children's acquisition and learning of English and how their views are manifested in Spolsky's [10] three aspects of language policy: ideology, practice, and planning.

In assessing speakers' attitudinal behaviors on language, Zhan and Hopper [11] focus on multidimensionality aspects, while Baker [12] maintains instrumentality and integral orientation aspects. In the multidimensionality aspects, Zhan dan Hopper [11] considers the features of attractiveness and superiority. This means that, often, we value a language more than the others because we are attracted by the beauty of its sounds, words, or other structural elements as much as we value its superiority and prestige. As for the instrumentality aspect, Baker [12] believes that the value of a language lies in how it becomes an important instrument in speakers' socio-economic life; one language might be an essential tool for everyday socio-economy delivery, while the others might not. When living in a multilingual environment, we can sense that it is necessary to learn a particular language, and not the others, to find better jobs, uplift social statuses, participate in a global economy, etc. This instrumentality aspect is coupled with an integral orientation that, according to Baker [12], refers to the function of language as an identity marker.

English, the language of our observation, has earned a unique sociolinguistic status in Indonesia. After the 1945 declaration of Independence, English was decreed as the first foreign language officially learned in schools [13]. However, unlike English in the former colonies of Britain, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and India, where the language is used institutionally and privately daily, the language remains foreign in the multiracial country of Indonesia [14].

Surprisingly used in a more limited setting in our society, English has developed progressively in the Indonesian popular media and among urban young speakers in the last several decades [15]. A large number of borrowed words such as *bisnis* 'business', *kredit* 'credit,' *fiks* 'fixed' [14], English-based nativization such as *mbois* 'youthful look' from *boyish*, *nyentrik* 'strangeness of clothes' from *eccentric* [16], and alternation practices in various forms of communication [17] continue to grow. In this context, the use of English as everyday repertoires indexes modernity, educated, and urban lifestyles that we continue to view mastering this foreign language as necessary.

Moreover, English has played an essential part in the Indonesian education system. Even with the ups and downs of the policy and practices, the results of a nationwide survey by the Indonesian government in 1989 indicated the increasing support from parents, teachers, and students of public and private secondary schools toward the inclusion of

English in the national curriculum [18]. Underlining the positive value of English among various stakeholders, this nationwide survey becomes a significant starting point for our study. By reassessing the ideology and attitudes of multilingual parents, we would like to explore how English is used among multilingual families and how parents' ideology and attitudes toward the language take shape.

2 Method

Using a survey-based approach, our study collected primary data from multilingual parents all over parts of Indonesia. Within four months of distribution through the friend-to-friend method and social media network, our online surveys have reached out to 28 provinces, including NAD, North Sumatra (North and West), Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Jambi, Bengkulu, Jakarta, West Java, Central and East Java, Yogyakarta, Maluku, Kalimantan (North, South, West, East, and Central), Riau, Sulawesi (North, South, and Southeast), Bali, Nusa Tenggara (West and East), West Papua, and Papua with a total number of 1.344 submissions or participation.

For the background language parts of the survey, we adapted Cohn's multilingual survey (2012), whereas, for the ideology and perception parts, we referred to Baker's [12] instrumentality and Zhan and Hopper's [11] superiority and attractiveness by covering all languages used in the family including Indonesian, the local language, and English. For this current paper, however, we only analysed the English part with a focus on parents' ideology, use and planning toward English.

Regarding the demographic information of our respondents, especially the age group, Fig. 1 illustrates the range into five categories: 20–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, and above 60 years old. Having respondents in all age categories, even though they were not equally distributed, we believe our survey allows us to have various perspectives from different age groups. The most significant number of respondents was the 41–50-years-old group (29%), while the smallest group was above 60 years old (3%).

Our survey has also informed us of the educational background of our respondents (see Fig. 2), with the results indicating that the most significant number of them graduated from upper secondary schools (33.4%) and bachelor's programs (33.2%). It is also

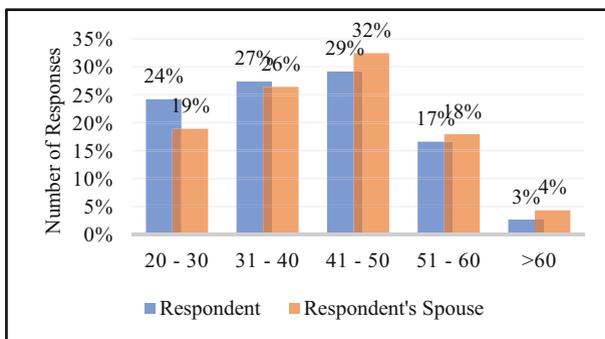


Fig. 1. Respondents' age

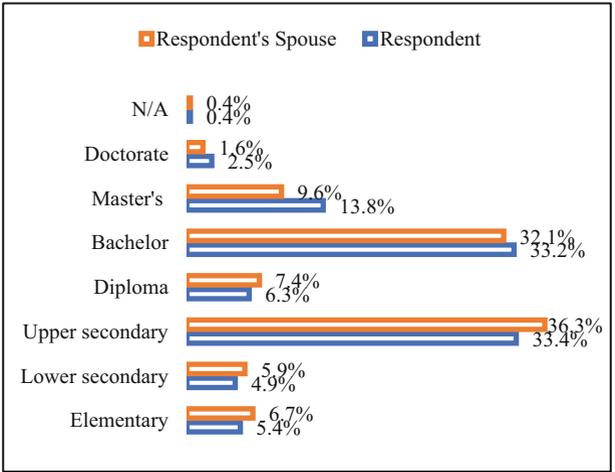


Fig. 2. Respondents' education background

interesting to find those holding master's (13.8%) and doctoral degrees (2.5%) among our respondents, especially regarding how parents' knowledge and education experiences might shape their views about home language learning and practices.

3 Findings and Discussion

After carrying out a careful analysis of the results of our survey, we will elaborate on the key findings below.

3.1 English Among Multilingual Families in Indonesia

Some parts of our survey included detailed information about respondents and their children's language backgrounds. With a specific mention of English, they self-reported the acquisition order, acquisition age, and fluency levels.

Concerning the acquisition order of English, Fig. 3 indicates that only 1% of the parents acquired English as their first language (L1), 8% as their second language (L2), and 91% as their third language (L3), while the percentages differ only slightly in children group with 2% as L1, 14% as L2, and 85% as L3.

These data indicate that English remains an additional language for most multilingual parents and children participating in our study. It also proves that Indonesian, the national language, and local language(s) are the dominant repertoire among multilingual parents, indirectly affecting their children's multilingual acquisition. The pattern of multilingual acquisition we found in our study supports Poedjosoedarmo's [19] argument that even though English is present in school, the language remains absent in daily communication in our societies. However, the spread of urbanization and technology has significant potential to change this country's multilingualism pattern. A scientific investigation of the national census results by Nababan [20] reported the shifting pattern of bilingualism

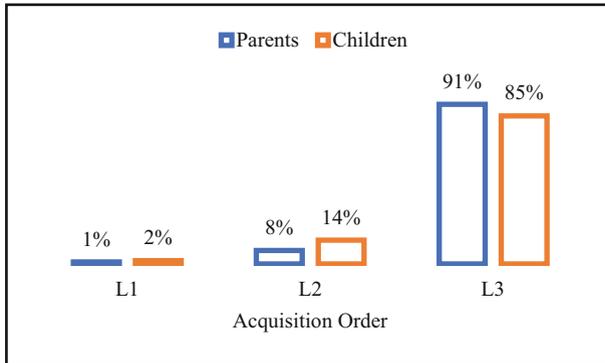


Fig. 3. Acquisition order of English by multilingual parents and children

from local language as L1 and Indonesian as L2 to the reversed pattern, particularly in the children group. It is being said that a multilingual configuration is subject to change depending on various factors.

Regarding the age of English acquisition, Fig. 4 illustrates our findings. As we can see, the age at which parents and children acquire or learn English varies considerably. A more significant number of children (11%) than their parents (3%) acquired English before three years old. The survey indicates similar trends with the acquisition of English after three years old, with 20% in children and 7% in the parent group. After seven years old they are 45% and 36% for children and parents correspondingly. The number of children acquiring English before three and above three years of age appears to be greater than their parents implies that parents seem to perceive that learning English is more important than the regional language. Hence, they provide access for their children to learn English from an early age. Interestingly, it is in sharp contrast that the more significant number of parents (47% and 8%) self-reported acquiring English after 12 and 20 years old than their children (22% and 2%). To a certain degree, parents generally decide when and how their children will get exposed to English, which is highly likely influenced by parents' language acquisition background.

In addition to the acquisition age of English, our parent respondents also reported the place of English acquisition as in Fig. 5. The figure demonstrates that, though the percentages vary, English is highly likely to be acquired or learned in schools for both parents (73%) and children (98%). It implies that schools have the biggest role in giving exposure to English and that this tendency is resistant to change as both parents and their children seem to have similar experiences. However, as Fig. 5 also shows, a greater number of children (30%) are reported to receive exposure to English at home than their parents (6%).

Regarding the acquisition place, we assume that English appears stronger in big cities and urban centers. Children receive exposure from various sources, such as formal education, the Internet, television, movies, songs, books, magazines, and other channels. This is evident from Zen's [21] research that participants from the big city of Malang are superior in the acquisition of English to those from the small city of Blitar.

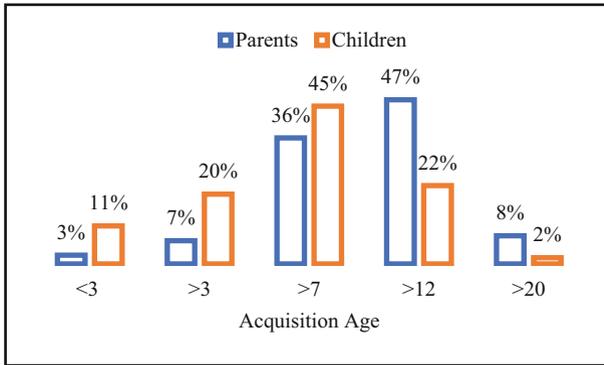


Fig. 4. Acquisition age of English by multilingual parents and children

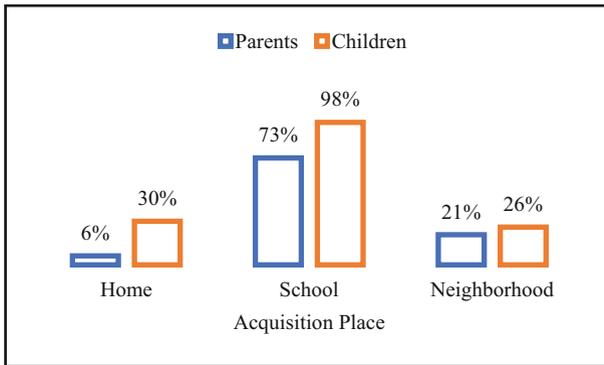


Fig. 5. Acquisition place of English by multilingual parents and children

We also asked parents to self-assess their proficiency in English, in which the result is in Fig. 6. In this informal assessment of English fluency, parents and children show a similar percentage of ‘very fluent’ (4% and 4%), ‘fluent’ (26% and 25%), and ‘not fluent’ (24% and 22%), respectively. Meanwhile, on the ‘less fluent’ part, parents (39%) were lower than children (48%). We acknowledge no significant differences between parents and children from the data. The data also denotes that our multilingual parents and children acquire English with various degrees of proficiency or fluency.

Regarding the fluency of a foreign language, the quantity and quality of input and exposures matter significantly. Therefore, the parent’s role is central to developing foreign language proficiency through various socialization and learning resources. In addition, Hoff [22] maintained that communicative experience becomes the primary input source; thus, children’s language acquisition and development depend significantly on their environment. Our study shows that the percentage of English learning from home is much larger in children (30%) than in parents (6%), indicating the ongoing change of foreign language learning in our environment.

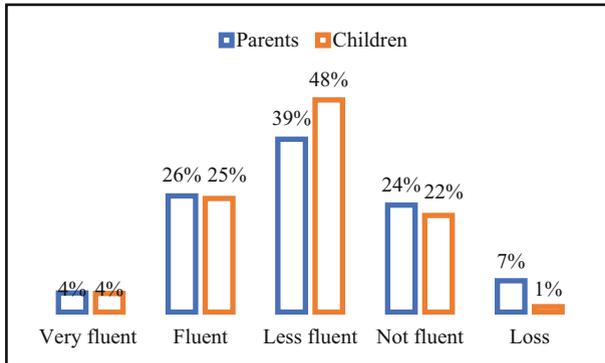


Fig. 6. Fluency levels of English among multilingual parents and children

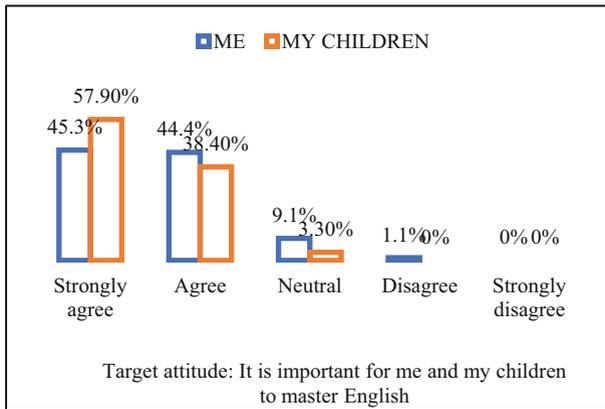


Fig. 7. Parental perception on the importance of mastering English

3.2 Parental Ideology and Planning Toward English

In exploring language ideology and planning, our survey elicited parents' perceptions of English in various thematic categories. The first one addresses the importance of English mastery for their life and their children's. Figure 7 demonstrates that parents strongly agree that mastering English is essential for their lives (45.3%) and their children (57.9%). The number is higher for their children and deserves our attention here. In the macro-context of language-in-education policy, the inclusion of English in Indonesia and other Asian countries, according to Kirkpatrick [23], is derived from the spirit of sustaining national economic growth and being able to compete at an international level with the ability to use English becoming instrumental.

Concerning how parents perceive English's role in their children's future, the survey results are consistent with the target attitude, in that parents are fairly positive about it. However, the portrayal of 45.9% of 'strongly agree' and 44.8% of 'agree' in Fig. 8 does not seem to mark a significant confidence level. This particular finding is in line with Krisprasetyama [24], who claimed that without English mastery, children's path to their

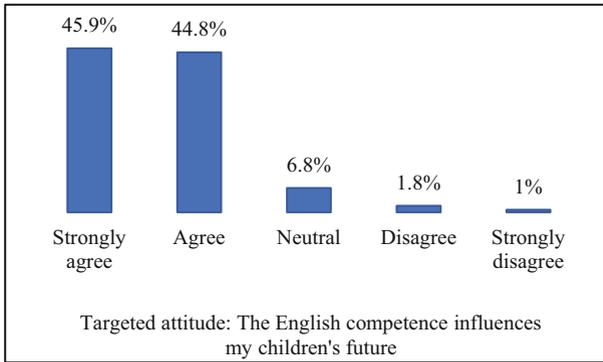


Fig. 8. Parental perception on the role of English for their children’s future

future could be challenging as English becomes more and more required in all aspects of life.

Given that less than 50% of parents consider the critical importance of English, we assume that the rural-urban divide might be at play here. In urban centers, English plays a more critical role in schools and professional spheres; the situation eventually does not exist in most rural areas. In this context, Zen’s [21] research has lent essential evidence that, while English is not a societal language and interactions with native speakers are absent, children in the big cities receive greater access to English resources than in the small ones. Typically, in urban areas, speaking English has become synonymous with a higher social status, and parents have continued to perceive its relevance in developing oral competencies in the language. Gaps in ideology and attitudes about English by regions have also been predicted in Nunan’s [25] survey study, in which he found that English in the rural areas of Malaysia was considered as foreign rather than an additional language, while in the big city of Ho Chi Minh the language gradually gained public interest due to the mushrooming of English language centers.

Regarding the role of regions in shaping parental attitudes, it can potentially be a follow-up analysis for our current study to address. To put it differently, there is a definite need for our study to extend the analysis into whether the regional background of our respondents determines their attitudes toward English or any other foreign language. Here, the hypothesis is that parents from urban areas will value English mastery more highly than those from rural areas.

Another crucial issue of the survey is parental ideology and attitudes toward local language(s), Indonesia, and English as expressed through semantic differential pairings. This way, we asked parents to assess these three languages in several adjectives. Six adjectives adapted from previous works in which ‘useful’ and ‘formal’ represent Baker’s [12] instrumentality, while ‘easy,’ ‘modern,’ ‘trendy’ and ‘polite’ express Zhan and Hopper’s [11] superiority and attractiveness.

As Fig. 9 shows, using the top two most voted adjectives, parents perceive local language(s) primarily as ‘easy’ and ‘polite,’ Indonesian as ‘formal’ and ‘easy,’ and English as ‘modern’ and ‘useful’. The selection of an adjective for each language reflects how our society values them in Indonesia’s multilingual environment.

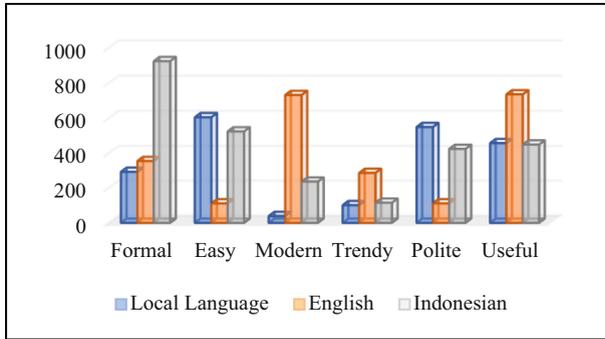


Fig. 9. Parental perception towards languages around the environment

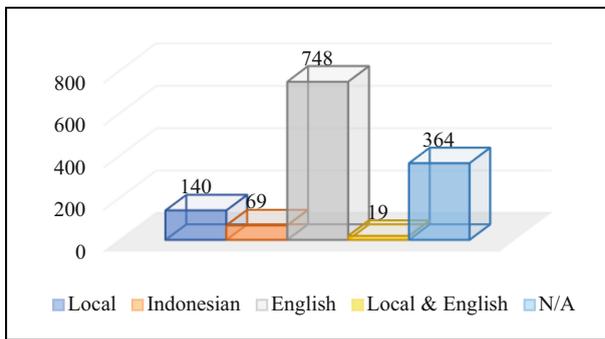


Fig. 10. Language(s) to learn and use at home in the future

We also examine the language planning among these multilingual parents, with the results in Fig. 10 indicating that English is interestingly the language most parents want to learn and use at home for themselves and their children. Local language only ranks second with a significant gap between them – 748 for English and 140 for the local language. The appearance of ‘N/A’ (unavailable) or those who did not provide answers for this language planning part has also attracted our attention as it is big compared to the total number of our respondents – 364 out of 1344.

The findings above show that parents seem to recognize the benefits of learning English for themselves and their children. This result is supported by Crystal [26], who maintained that there are six aspects of the importance of English: (1) economic and business purposes, (2) international relations, (3) media, (4) education, (5) communication, and (6) international travel and safety. Ellis [27] also argues that parents now recognize the prominent role of a foreign language in uplifting their children’s global development and future at school and work. It is in line with the work of Tsai [28], demonstrating that parents believe that children might have great opportunities in the future by having English ability.

4 Conclusion and Suggestion

The current study discusses how English as a foreign language is acquired and used among multilingual families. The key findings indicate that English remains the additional language or L3 for parents and children. However, from the parents' reports on their children's English acquisition age and place, there appears to be a shifting trend where children receive input and exposure to English at home and at early ages.

Our second objective was to explore parents' ideology and attitudes toward English, where we found that parents consider English pivotal for their life and their children's. English is also regarded as a valuable language for their children's future. Parents also continue to view that English indexes modernity, instrumental and formal, as the semantic differential pairing in our survey indicated. It is also interesting regarding language management and planning that these multilingual parents aim to have English as the language they speak at home and for their children to learn.

As we analyzed the survey data using a descriptive quantitative approach, the follow-up study should carry out a more advanced statistical analysis to assess the role of parents' ideology and attitudes towards home language practices and other variables.

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