

LANGUAGE VITALITY: A CASE ON SUNDANESE LANGUAGE AS A SURVIVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Most Indonesians speak their own mother tongue as well as the national language which they learned at school. Sundanese language (*basa Sunda*) is one of the ethnic languages of Indonesia, spoken by the Sundanese people (*urang Sunda*), the second biggest ethnic group in Indonesia after the Javanese. It is the mother tongue of the majority of inhabitants of the Western part of Java. The linguistic situation in West Java area, especially in Bandung City, the Capital City of West Java Province, is a complex one and the complexity derives from the fact that it is a multilingual urban city with multicultural diversity. Sundanese is the main indigenous language spoken in this area. But the mixture of languages in the area makes it difficult for Sundanese language to maintain its high position and its vitality. In the bid to have a common language for easy communication in the urban centre of West Java, Sundanese is facing the problem of being in constant struggle with Bahasa Indonesia, the official language and English language as a foreign language. These two languages are being used as the languages of wider communication. The result of this is the gradual marginalization of Sundanese, which is posing a threat to its vitality. The chances of survival of any language in such circumstances depend largely on the attitudes portrayed towards it. This paper tries to discuss an alarm at the noticeable gradual decline in the use of Sundanese language even in its home base. It examines the attitudes of the speakers towards their language and provides some recommendations as a way of checking this negative tendency and ensuring the survival of Sundanese in spite of the heterogeneous linguistic situation in the urban city area.

Key words: language vitality, indigenous, surviving, marginalization, language attitude

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a multilingual country. *The Ethnologue* (Grimes, 1996 in Froyen (2005:48) indicates that 467 Austronesian languages are spoken in Indonesia (see also Masinanbow & Haenen; Crystal in Sobarna (2007)). The linguistic situation in Indonesia shows enormous diversity- in the number of languages, the size of ethnolinguistic groups and the vitality of languages. One of the biggest ethnic groups in Indonesia is the Sundanese people, the second one after the Javanese. Javanese and Sundanese are among the *Ethnologue's* "top one hundred languages in the world by population. It is said that Javanese and Sundanese have the greatest number of first language speakers. While none of these languages can yet be considered endangered, it should be noted that there is a shift towards *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian) as the official language and English as a foreign language, by younger generation 'the youths', and that there is some impact on the use of the speech levels which are a feature of these languages.

According to the data available in *the Ethnologue* (Grimes, 2000 in Froyen (2005:43), 10% of the approximately 6000 languages in the world today could be classified as 'safe' while 10% are nearly extinct and 20% are moribund (Krauss, 1992:6 in Froyen). In recent years, there has been a marked upsurge internationally in concern about the issue of language endangerment. The various topics relating to language endangerment and language obsolescence have been the subject of much academic discourse through the past decade. This paper aims to discuss issues on the vitality of Sundanese language as it is facing the excruciating problem of being in constant struggle with *bahasa Indonesia* and English language. These two languages are being used as the languages of wider communication. The result of this is the gradual marginalization of Sundanese, which is posing a threat to its vitality. Considering to this situation, the questions whether this indigenous language can survive and how it can maintain its vitality arise.

2. Language Vitality, Endangerment, and Language Attitudes

For language vitality, speakers ideally not only strongly value their language, but they also know in which social domains their language is to be supported. A positive attitude is critical for the long-term stability of a language. A language is *endangered* when it is on a path toward extinction. Language endangerment may be the result of *external* forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural, or

educational subjugation, or it may be caused by *internal* forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. Internal pressures often have their source in external ones, and both halt the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions. Many indigenous people, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood, and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace. The extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique cultural, historical, and ecological knowledge. Language is an ethnic identity. It should be handled seriously. The people who loose their language have lost their identity (Bernard 1992, Hale 1998).

According to Aikawa in UNESCO (2001), there are six factors to evaluate language vitality, that is, (1) Intergenerational Language Transmission; (2) Absolute Number of Speakers ; (3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population; (4) Trends in Existing Language Domains; (5) Response to New Domains and Media; and (6)Materials for Language Education and Literacy.

The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next (Fishman 1991). Six degrees of endangerment may be distinguished with regards to Intergenerational LanguageTransmission, Absolute numbers and Proportion of speakers within the population (see also Wurm, S.A. (2002:14) who distinguishes five levels of language endangerment).

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
<i>safe</i>	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
<i>extinct</i>	0	There exists no speaker.

Following Fishman , we would say, at a glance, that Sundanese is already unsafe and definitively endangered. (Wurm's term 'Potentially endangered language - if the young ones start preferring the dominant language). In the bid to become more competent in English, many Sundanese speakers, particularly the young ones, are gradually abandoning their language. The use of Sundanese is no longer highly favoured in many settings (home, school, church, media, social gatherings etc). Indonesian and English, the dominant languages are being preferred to Sundanese.

3. Language attitudes towards Sundanese

Bainbridge (1994:400) defines attitude as "the positive or negative evaluation of an object with anything, tangible or intangible, capable of being the object of an attitude". Othmen and Bashir (2000:449) while quoting Johnson (1973:167) opines that community language attitudes denote the positive-negative evaluations of individual languages or group of languages, with regard to such dimensions as loyalty, prestige, utility, cognancy or aesthetics. Wassink (1999:57) claims that language attitude can be overt or covert.

The Sundanese people portray negative attitudes toward their language (Alwasilah,2008). According to him, the 40 million people in West Java, most of whom are native Sundanese, do not really care about their native tongue. In 2000, the Sundanese language was spoken by 27 million people, make it the second most widely spoken, local language in Indonesia after Javanese. The number of speakers is believed to have declined, although there are no recent figures. Like other Indonesians, most Sundanese are bilingual. They speak both their native tongue, Sundanese, and the Indonesian national language. Generally, Sundanese is the language of choice among family members and friends, while in the public sphere, Indonesian is used. English could also be a rival to this local language. The fact now more and more primary schools offer English to students in various places in Indonesia and the fact that lots of children learn it at private courses is undeniable. Nowadays. parents feel elated at their children's achievement- mastering the 'prestigious' English language. This situation makes the Sundanese language

marginalized. "Acquiring English at the expense of their local languages is ill-advised" (Zein, 2011). The younger generations' attitudes towards their mother tongue may pose a big threat to its vitality.

Quoting the speech delivered by Rector of Universitas Padjadjaran, Ganjar Kurnia, there are even more convincing reasons to conclude that the language is already being endangered when we consider the fact that a large number of Sundanese parents fail to teach the language to their children. (at Commemoration of International mother-tongue day, 21st February 2011). As a result the number of city-born people who do not learn the ethnic language of their parents are increasing. Only a few parents, who consider the language to be an emblem of identity and a preserver of culture, still encourage the use of the language. The problem here is that these people, who appear to be loyal to Sundanese, probably out of sentiments or true intent, are in the minority. Their effort to sustain the vitality of Sundanese may not yield long lasting results. Their effort may be suppressed by those speakers who have negative attitudes towards the language and who are in the majority. These speakers can do all they can, probably out of ignorance, disloyalty or lack of good intent, to discourage the sustenance and continuity of the language. (see also Alwasilah, Rosidi and Lukmana in Millie's article).

4. Efforts concern with the survival of Sundanese

A language is a living entity and needs to be kept alive by a community of speakers, who will transmit their heritage to future generations through that means. Communities of people can only exist in viable environments, favoured by a support from States, especially in a thriving globalized context. If conditions are not favourable, communities and languages die along with their speakers. So this issue not only concerns local and national cultures, but also cultural goods in an international and increasingly globalized context. The border between a "natural" evolution and a political will is very thin, which is why we need to keep our eyes open.

Since UNESCO has decided February, the 21st as the international mother-tongue day and recommended mother tongues as the medium of instruction at education, more studies and concern to maintain, preserve and revitalize the indigenous languages has been flourishing.

It is obvious from the discussion so far, that there is indeed a gradual decline in the use of Sundanese and hence the need to revitalize it before any further decline. All hands must be on deck to restore its past glory and ensure its continued usage in every situation. Alwasilah mentioned there has been ten efforts performed to maximize the function of Sundanese as parts of the language planning. (see more in Alwasilah, 2008). The following information cited from a paper presented by Hawe Setiawan at International Seminar. He is one of the prolific writers on Sundanese culture and a chief editor of Sundanese monthly magazine, *Cupumanik*. He noted that several efforts have been undertaken to relate the Sundanese language to broader worlds. First, Jonathan Rigg, for example, an English planter working in West Java in 19th century, compiled the first Sundanese-English dictionary. His monumental work, *A Dictionary of the Sunda Language of Java* (Lange & Co., 1862), was published in 1862. The dictionary consists of some 9,300 entries. Some 141 years since the publication of Rigg's dictionary, in the year 2003, a new Sundanese-English dictionary by R.R. Hardjadibrata, a Sundanese lexicographer working in Australia, has been issued. Second, In 2001 the first International Conference on Sundanese Culture (KIBS) was held in Bandung. Organized by Rancagé Cultural Foundation, a small non-governmental foundation based in Jakarta, and supported by Toyota Foundation, KIBS invited some foreign scholars along with their local counterparts to discuss several aspects of the impact of globalization and the prospects of adapting Sundanese culture to the coming new millennium. The conference has recommended, among other things, revitalization and development of Sundanese language in several social contexts. According to Moriyama (2008), there are some aspects of change in the regional languages and literatures of Indonesia. In particular, he used the Sundanese case as example to argue the tree following points: (1) there is an increasing presence of regional languages in the public space; (2) efforts are being made to revive regional languages and literatures; and (3) new developments are occurring in regional cultures.

1) The increasing presence of Sundanese in the public space

In Bandung, the provincial capital city and the centre of Sundanese cultural activities, there are more regional television channels which started broadcasting some programs in Sundanese in recent years. These are the government-operated TVRI Jabar & Banten (Television of Republic Indonesia in West Java and Banten), a private channel STV or Sangkuriang Television, PJTV, and another private channel Bandung TV. Programs using the Sundanese language have variety now. The Sundanese language was used only in cultural programs such as *wayang golek* and traditional music. News programs are broadcast every day and talk shows and variety shows are regularly broadcast in Sundanese

by the above-mentioned TV channels. It is reasonable to suggest the relationship between the increasing presence of regional languages in the public space and the following:

- a. Regional Administration Law, Number 22 enacted in 1999 (*Undang-undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 22 Tahun 1999 tentang Pemerintah Daerah*). The regulation of the law, Number 25 of 2000 concerning Authority of the Government and Authority of the Provinces and Autonomous Regions (*Kewenangan pemerintah dan Kewenangan Propinsi sebagai Daerah Otonomi*), gave more autonomy to the local government in terms of administration, personnel and financial affairs to meet public demand for decentralization in the course of the *reformasi* movement (Oentarto 2004: 141-178). The law has had impact on various aspects of the social and cultural spheres and has encouraged the expression of regional aspirations.
- b. In 2003, the provincial government of West Java enacted a regulation Number 5 concerning the preservation of regional language, literature and script (*Pemeliharaan Bahasa, Sastra dan Aksara Daerah*). This regulation was a revision of a provincial regulation on the same issue which had a considerable impact on regional identity in 1996. The impact of this law, for instance, can be seen in the performing arts in Central Java as Hatley noticed (Hatley 2004: 88-94). See *Peraturan Daerah Propinsi Jawa Barat Nomor: 5 Tahun 2003 Tentang Pemeliharaan Bahasa, Sastra Dan Aksara Daerah*. The regulation is Number 6 of 1996 concerning the preservation, promotion and development of Sundanese language, literature and script (*Pelestarian, Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, Sastra dan Aksara Sunda*). See also in Jurriëns (2004: 34-37).

By this regulation, the promotion of the Sundanese language, literature and script became a concrete agenda of the Province of West Java compared with the 1996 regulation. The Governor of West Java has responsibility to implement the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction in schools (Article 5. b) and as the second official language next to Indonesian in the administration of the regional government (Article 5. c).²⁰ In fact, some government offices adopted a policy of using Sundanese at work. For instance, the use of the Sundanese language is encouraged (or staff are advised to use Sundanese) at the prefectural office in Bandung on Mondays and at the provincial office for culture and tourism on Fridays (Anggadhitya 2005). These practices can be understood as a result of the Regional Autonomy law enacted in 1999 after the fall of the Soeharto regime. The increasing presence of regional languages, at least in the Sundanese-speaking area, promises to undermine the single national language policy which has been promoted by the state for such a long time and will diminish central power over the regions. In other words, this new language environment opens up possibilities for expressing regional aspirations in this local language

2) Efforts to revive regional languages and literatures

In 1989 Mr. Ajip Rosidi, who is well-known as a writer, a *budayawan* (prominent figure in cultural activities), established a literary award "Rancage" (this Sundanese word means 'creative') The best literary work, i.e. novels, short stories or poetry collections, in Sundanese, is chosen from all the books published in the previous year on the basis of criteria decided by the committee. These include completeness as a literary work, richness of expression and depiction, correct usage of language, novelty in the tradition and so forth (Yayasan Kebudayaan Rancagé 1998). Rosidi's aim was to promote good literature by laying down certain criteria for giving this award (Rosidi 2004: 27). In the second year another prize was also presented to a person who had made a remarkable contribution to Sundanese literature. Later on the award was given not only to a person but also to an institution which contributed to Sundanese culture in general. Besides these two awards, another literary award, *Samsudi Award*, for Sundanese children's books has been presented since 1993. Perhaps partly as a result of this initiative, the number of publications of literary works in Sundanese has increased. In 1994, only 5 Sundanese books were published, but 27 books were published in 2002 according to the *Rancage* annual report. However, this award constitutes only one effort to revive Sundanese literature. There are other awards for Sundanese literature. For instance, the long-running award presented by *Mangle* magazine and *Lembaga Bahasa dan Sastra Sunda* (Institute of Sundanese Language and Literature) can not be overlooked. So, there is an increasing presence of regional languages and the promotion of regional languages and literatures by regional governments. It seems that a Sundanese cultural revival is in process when we take account of new developments in terms of the literary and cultural expression of regional aspirations.

3) New developments in Sundanes culture

The first evidence relating to the new developments is newly- published magazines. Within the last two years, two new Sundanese periodicals have appeared and another magazine was revived. In total, there

are now nine current Sundanese periodicals, including *Majalah Mangle* (since 1957), *Kujang* (since 1956, but ceased and reappeared in 2005), *Galura*, *Seni Budaya Swara Cangkurileung*, *Giwangkara*, *Bina Da'wah*, *Hiber*, *Cupumanik* (since 2003), and *Sunda Midang* (since 2004) (Purba 2005). This is a remarkable development in one regional language-speaking area in comparison with other regional language-speaking areas. It must be seen as one of the fruits of the deregulation of publication after the fall of Soeharto. The second of the developments is the appearance of a Sundanese poet, Godi Suwarna, born in 1956 in Tasikmalaya. He has been composing poetry since he studied in Bandung in the 1980s.

5. Conclusion

From the discussion above, we can note that the Sundanese language is shifting grounds for *bahasa Indonesia* and English as they are now used as common languages in West Java Province, particularly in its capital, Bandung, to break communication barriers. It is the case that people prefer to learn and use the languages that are socially and economically useful to them. We can see Sundanese speakers choose the better option of a more common language so that they can flow with the time. This probably accounts for the reason why the younger generation of Sundanese speakers has developed negative attitude towards their language. As Alwasilah said, there is a great deal of absence of language loyalty among Sundanese speakers especially the youths towards their mother-tongue. It can be speculated that the younger generations of Sundanese have negative attitude towards the language.

But efforts that have been taken to revitalize, to promote, and to ensure Sundanese's preservation and maintenance show positive attitude towards this language. As one of two biggest ethnic, Sundanese still has a large number of speakers. Consequently, the paper recommends, while concluding, that both the government and Sundanese people should as a matter of urgency and importance join hands together to revitalize their indigenous language. In spite of the multi-ethnic nature of the linguistic situation in West Java, serious attempts can be done to stop the threat to the vitality of Sundanese. In this way, its vitality can be sustained and cannot be endangered.

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