MAINTAINING VERNACULARS TO PROMOTE PEACE AND TOLERANCE IN MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Indonesia is a large nation in terms of ethnics, cultures, and vernaculars. Indonesian constitution guarantees that the cultures, vernaculars will be taken care of by the government. This is in line with the UNESCO recommendation, to preserve vernaculars as the world cultural heritage. The most important thing is that preserving vernaculars will promote peace and solidarity in multilingual community. In reality, speakers of many vernaculars in Indonesia are getting less and less. Sneddon states that this is caused by lingua franca and language shift (2003: 203). Areas of higher linguistic diversity like Indonesia always need means of interethnic communication, i.e. lingua franca. People shift to lingua franca may cause vernacular speakers decline rapidly, which may cause language decay. The teaching of vernaculars only at the passive level, not emphasizing writing and reading will fasten the language decay. Vernaculars will be preserved if they are respected, used, and inherited to the following generation. Friberg (2011) states that languages that can be maintained are the ones written and can be read. We should not only use our national language, but also our vernaculars in order to maintain our regional languages. And as people of multilingual community, it is better if we are multilingual. It should be borne in mind that vernaculars reflect local cultures, local values, local identity. The exposure to regional languages will make people familiar with the languages. And as a result, the people will be familiar with their own cultural values and other people's cultural values. Komorowska (2010) claims that understanding others' languages will promote understanding and communication between citizens. And this will lead to peace process, to deeper knowledge of other communities and their cultures, and in consequence to promote tolerance.

Key words*: Vernaculars, language maintenance, language shift, lingua franca, tolerance.*

1. Background

Indonesia is a very large nation with a correspondingly large population and great linguistic diversity. It comprises 13,000 islands and a population of approximately 220 million inhabitants. Estimates of the number of languages in Indonesia vary, but Sneddon (2003) proposes a figure of 550 or more.

Areas of higher linguistic diversity like Indonesia always need means of interethnic communication, i.e. lingua franca. Besides Indonesian, there are regional languages functioning as lingua franca, e.g. Banjarese to communicate in central and south Kalimantan. This makes the number of Banjarese speakers increase significantly, but that of Dayak speakers decline rapidly.

In 1928, the Indonesian language was declared as the official and national language of Indonesia. And in 1945, it was confirmed in 1945 constitution, but the constitution guarantees the preservation of vernaculars. And since its confirmation as official and national language, Indonesian has become an Indonesian national identity. It has become a common means of communication among citizens and it is the language of most interethnic contacts, the mass media, the government, education.

It is estimated that about 90 per cent of the Indonesian population can speak Indonesian. The success of the "Indonesiation" of Indonesian is done through the government's active role. But, unfortunately the success in promoting Indonesian is impacting on the minority languages (Kurniasih: 2005). The speakers of many vernaculars are getting less and less which may cause language decay, loss of ethnic identity, cultural values. This may lead to interethnic, intercultural misunderstanding which may cause interethnic conflicts because speaking a regional language means understanding the culture with which it is associated. Tickoo (1995) claims that cultural misunderstanding is a source of conflict.

Based on the reasons above, I write this paper discussing 1) maintaining vernaculars in Indonesia, 2) ethnic conflicts in Indonesia, 3) promoting peace and tolerance in Indonesia.

2. Maintaining Vernaculars in Indonesia

Nobody knows how many languages are spoken in the world today, but it is estimated that one-tenth of them are spoken in Indonesia. UNESCO has a strong commitment to maintain the value of the linguistic and cultural diversity, to protect the right to be different of those who belong to specific linguistic and ethnic population (King: 2003). It is done because there are many endangered regional languages and thus they need to be preserved. In this section, the endangered languages and the alternative ways to preserve them will be put forward.

a. Endangered languages

Jansen (2003)states that endangered language is language in the process of dying. He differentiates five stages of endangered language. Stage I is potentially endangered, that is, when the youths are attracted to use the dominant language more and more. Stage II is endangered, that is, when the language and the language variety is no longer spoken by children. Stage III is seriously endangered, that is, when the youngest speakers are 50 years old and above. Stage IV is terminally endangered, that is when there are only a few old speakers left who use the language or language variety. Stage V is the death stage, that is, when there are no speakers of the language or of the language variety left.

Musgrave (http://users.monash.edu.au/~smusgrav/publications/, April 20th 2011) claims that one cause of endangered languages in Indonesia is language shift. He explains that such shifts are occurring throughout Indonesia, and are resulting in threats to some languages. The other threat is the phenomena that the younger generations like using "colloquial Indonesian". This variant of the Indonesian language is characterized by a large number of loan words from foreign languages (Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch etc.) and from regional languages, especially Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese. The immense influence of Jakarta Malay upon Colloquial Indonesian as it is spoken in the cities and larger towns of the Indonesian archipelago can be explained by a continuous move of people who spend some years in the capital and then return to their place of origin, and of course by the influence of the media (Kozok, 2008).

Steinhauer (1994) proposes the general scenario of gradual language death as follows: external pressure, subsequent changes in language behavior, and finally interruption of language transmission to a new generation. This external factor happened to Bayan Dayaks who gave up their tribal religion and converted to Islam and consciously abandoned their own language to shift to Banjarese as a sign of total conversion. Endangered language may also be caused by disaster, e.g. Tambora language which was desrtroyed and decay because of the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815.

Steinhauer further explains that increased mobility as an aspect of modernization has its effects on the language behavior of individuals. On the national level, regional languages diminish their prestige. The regional languages are taken over by Indonesian, or have become of secondary importance. Modernization may imply cultural genocide. But this should not be viewed as entirely negative.

The endangered languages were also reported by Subroto et al. (2009), stating that "Krama" and "Krama Inggil" level of Javanese are endangered, particularly among the Javanese young generation because the Javanese youth tend to neglect these varieties and because they are not able to use them correctly and appropriately. If no measure is taken to preserve the varieties, thus, Javanese "Karma" and "Krama Inggil" varieties will soon be left behind and the Javanese society will only have "Ngoko" (Subroto, et al.: 2009).

b. Ways to maintain vernaculars

Responding to the endangered languages, in 1953 UNESCO published the expert report on "The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education", within the context of "Education for all". This is because most formal education systems tend to underutilize the knowledge and experience that ethnic minority children bring to school (Malone: 2004). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) state that this can minimize our failure of minority and poor children in school. King (2003) states that education in a multilingual country should balance and respect the use of different languages in daily life. Thus, multilingualism is more a way of life than a problem to be solved.

Uniform solutions for plural societies, e.g. the use of national language for education, may be both administratively and managerial simpler, but policy makers disregard the risks involved both in terms of learning achievement and loss of linguistic diversity. UNESCO promotes the mother tongue instruction in education system. Mother tongue instruction generally refers to the use of the learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Additionally, it can refer to the mother tongue as a subject of instruction. It is considered to be an important component of quality education, particularly in the early years. It's said that the linguistic rights of minority groups are: (1) schooling in their languages, if so desired, (2) access to the language of the larger community and to that of national education system, (3) inter-cultural education that promotes positive attitudes to minority and indigenous languages and the

cultures they express, (4) access to international language. Thus, a careful balance needs to be made between enabling people to use local language, national language, and global language.

Concerning the vernacular maintenance in Indonesia, Friberg (2011) proposes that vernaculars are used in the family and in the environment so that the children are not strange with their vernaculars. The Indonesian language will still be achieved by the children because it is always exposed through the written and electronic media every time. Becoming multilingual is another way to preserve vernaculars in Indonesia. It is better if we interact with more than one or two languages as happens in India where people speak five up to six local languages, based on the languages spoken around them. The other important way is by reading and writing in our vernaculars. Languages can only be preserved if they are written and can be read by the following generation. Malone (2004) strengthens Friberg's idea that reading and writing program are important to preserve vernaculars.

Subroto, et al. (2009) state that one of the causes of endangered vernacular, in this case Javanese is that the vernacular teacher is not competent, besides the time allotment is not sufficient. Based on their finding, thus, one way to preserve vernaculars in Indonesia is by upgrading the vernacular teachers.

3. Ethnic Conflicts in Indonesia

As a country with abundant ethnic groups, ethnic tension is potential to occur in Indonesia. Conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds have spread in many places in Indonesia. Too much blood has already been split. The ethnic groups struggle for recognition, equality, for independence. Ismayilov (http://www.google.co.id/, April 21st 2011) states that ethnic conflicts within a state belong to identity conflicts that are a type of internal conflicts. The roots of conflict are different, e.g. discrimination, misunderstanding, economic interest, politic.

John (2000) claims that the issue of migrants against indigeneous people is a major theme that runs through communal conflicts in Indonesia. Pudjiastuti (2002) states that the core problem is marginalization of local community which is related with ethnic identity. It is not easy to understand each other soon. They need more time to adapt and understand each other. John (2000) states that some factors to be done to improve the situation, among others: building understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics.

Singh et.al (2004: 109) claim that language issues often become source of social tensions between majority and minority groups and can become a focus of conflict. That is why, the USA. provides fund for various native American communities to revitalize their native languages among younger generations. It is said that the bigger problems lie in making the learning of these languages and the cultural values they encode, attractive to young potential speakers, so that they will not only be encouraged to learn them, but also pass them on to their own children, thus ensuring cultural continuity. The young generation's leaving their native language and cultural values to integrate to the majority community who views them as "other" contributes to conflict and social problems. This insincere acceptance will make them frustrated, isolated which is in turn linked to increasing gang culture, alcoholism, high mortality rate. This is a reflection for us to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism as a way of life.

4. Promoting Peace and Tolerance in Indonesia

Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity, both for the individual and group. Respect for the languages of persons belonging to different linguistic communities therefore is essential to peaceful situation. This applies both to majority groups, to minorities and to indigenous peoples (King: 2003). That is why, UNESCO supports language as an essential of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. Learning another language opens up access to other value systems, encouraging inter-cultural understanding.

It is stated in the previous section that one of the causes of conflict in Indonesia is lack of understanding between ethnic groups, and this can be minimized by building understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics, multilingualism is regarded as a way of life rather than a problem to be solved. By this, hopefully people will have inter-cultural competence. People should be aware that language reflects cultural values that will guide them to behave, to respect, etc.

a. Language as the Reflection of Cultural Values

Each language is a product of a particular culture, and it reflects the culture of the people. Language is more than just the code, it also involves social practices of interpreting and making

meanings. It is something people use to express, create, and interpret meanings, and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationship. Thus, there is fundamental relationship between language and culture.

That language reflects the speakers' cultural values is very clear, e.g. the cultural values of Javanese people are reflected in the Javanese language, English cultural values are reflected in the English language. Ngadiman (1998) states that Javanese cultural values are: *toto tentrem, ormat, rukun, tepo sliro, andap asor,* reflected in the Javanese language which will be clarified below.

The use of speech levels (*Ngoko, Krama, Krama Inggil*) in Javanese reflects the principle of *ormat* (respect) and thus recognizes each person relative status. *Ngoko* is the lowest level and used when addressing someone of the same status, of the same age or of lower status, such as close friends, younger persons, and subordinates. *Krama* is the middle level and is used when addressing a second person who is fairly respected. *Krama Inggil* is the highest level and is used when addressing a second person or talking about a third person who is highly respected.

Subroto et al. (2009) reported that Javanese young generation tend to neglect these *Krama* and *Krama Inggil* varieties because they are not able to use them correctly and appropriately. In fact, to the Javanese society, the ability to use *Krama* and *Krama Inggil* is closely related to Javanese manners, attitudes, and daily behaviors in their society. That is why, the Javanese young generation at present seems to have lost their polite Javanese manners, behavior, and attitudes and tend to be impolite and rude. So, it is clear that there is relationship between language and behavior.

Toto tentrem means order and peace. They are mutually independent. Without order, there will be no peace. And without peace, there will be no order. In order to practice these values, conflict, violence need to be avoided. That is why, when speaking or writing, Javanese people are so careful so as not to hurt the feeling of the interlocutors. This is realized in the indirectness in expressing ideas.

The term *rukun* means harmonious situation. This is achieved if there is willingness to respect and adjust each other. Consequently, one needs to mind the other's existence , to treat all people with tolerance and respect. Harmony will not be achieved if there are conflicts because of misunderstandings. To avoid conflicts, statements, criticisms, warnings, requests are welcomed but they must be expressed in such a way that other people will not be hurt or disappointed. In Javanese, the best way for advancing criticisms, warnings, or requests is in refined, polite way, practicing the art of indirectness.

Thus, by knowing other people language and learning the cultural values, we will know how we should behave and treat the people. In other words, there will be inter-cultural understanding.

b. Multilinguaism and Inter-cultural Understanding

At this time, people are very mobile, moving from place to place for some reasons. With the transmigration program held by the Indonesian government, the people movement to other provinces is getting easier. This means that the people must adapt and get along with the native people. They must learn the new language, the new culture. There must be mutual understandings between the native people and the new comers so that they can build harmonious relationship. If the harmonious relationship cannot be created, conflicts may potentially be appeared as explained in the previous section.

In multilingual community like Indonesia, to be multilingual and multicultural is one way to promote peace and solidarity, to minimize conflicts between ethnic groups. Being multilingual and multicultural means that we maintain our vernacular/ culture, learn other vernaculars/ cultures of the people around us, learn national language, international language in order that we can participate in local, national, international activities.

Steinhauer (1994) states that transmigration has caused linguistically relatively homogeneous areas to become more heterogeneous, especially in the target provinces. Javanese is spoken in every province of Indonesia such as Lampung, North Sumatra, South Sumatra, Jambi, Riau, Bengkulu, Southeast Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Irian Jaya, Kalimantan. Besides Javanese, several other vernaculars are also spoken in several provinces, e.g. Sundanese (West Java, Lampung, Central Java, Jakarta), Madurese (East Java, West Kalimantan), Buginese (South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, Jambi), Banjarese (South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Riau). This is a good phenomenon and need to be maintained to make multilingualism as a way of life.

Being multilingual will impact on the inter-cultural understanding since language reflects the culture of the speakers. King (2003) states that UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. Education should raise awareness of the positive value of cultural and linguistic diversity. The cultural component of language teaching and learning should be strengthened in order to gain a deeper understanding of the cultures..

Tickoo (1995) terms the inter-cultural understanding as intercultural communicative competence. He states that a speaker with intercultural communicative competence is someone who is able to communicate across cultural boundaries. Such a speaker becomes an intercultural speaker of a language, i.e. someone who can operate his linguistic competence and his sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language, the context in which it is used, in order to manage interaction across cultural boundaries, to anticipate misunderstandings caused by difference in values, meanings and beliefs, and to cope with the affective as well as cognitive demands of engagement with others. It is important to emphasize that intercultural competence involves comprehension not only how we understand others but also of how others perceive us. Speakers need to be aware that what they communicate is understood as a function of how others identify them.

5. Conclusions

Based on the previous discussion, we can conclude that there are many endangered regional languages in Indonesia because of language shift, modernization, etc., and thus they need to be preserved. The alternative ways to avoid vernacular decay are among others: (a) mother tongue instruction, (b) balancing the use of vernaculars, national language, global language, (c) the use of the vernaculars in the family and in the environment, (d) reading and writing in the vernaculars, (e) upgrading the vernacular teachers. And as a country with abundant ethnic groups, ethnic tension is potential to occur in Indonesia. Conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds have spread in many places in Indonesia. The roots of conflict are different, e.g. discrimination, misunderstanding, economic interest, politic. One way to minimize ethnic conflicts in Indonesia is by building inter cultural understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics. This can be done by being multilingual and multicultural to promote peace and solidarity. It is a good phenomenon that nowadays a regional language is not only spoken by the native speakers but also by the other ethnics. This needs to be maintained to make multilingualism as a way of life rather than a problem to be solved, to promote peace and tolerance between ethnic groups in Indonesia.

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