Defining Language Identity of Youth Learning Islamic Studies in Traditional Pesantren[1]

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Abstract

This article is a library study taking a look at how the traditional pesantren santris use their languages by focusing at what languages are recognized and used by them, and to see whether the language is used as the reflection of their identity both as young persons and santris of traditional pesantren. This article will also look at how their language identity is reflected through literary works. The previous studies show that mostly they used their mother tongue in daily communication, in all level of Javanese, as they feel obliged to use it to converse with different addresse. However, out of the context of pesantren, they also use informal Bahasa Indonesia, closely similar to the language used by other teenagers. Literary works also describe the language used by santris as being modern, typical type of informal Bahasa Indonesia used by teenagers.

Keywords: traditional pesantren, language identity, santri.

1. Introduction

Traditional pesantren is an educational institution focusing on teaching Islamic studies, and therefore the students (santris) learning there also work more on Islamic studies. In many cases, traditional pesantrens are highly differentiated from the modern ones, where the tradition in both teaching and communal living are highlighted. The main difference of keping traditional pesantren distinct from the modern ones was actualy on the type of studies taught and how these studies are taught. However, what is taught and how it is taught do affect the students in percieving the concept of learning and somehow it is carried out by and through their communication style. As learners, santris perceive what is important based on how it is highligted by the teacher (Kyai), and how a subject is being highlighted may take various forms

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not only in the frequency of it is mentioned as being important but also on how the subject is treated.

As in other institutions, traditional pesantrens also have focus of what is considered important, and this is the focus that is then taught to the santris. As the name bears, traditional pesantren is focusing on teaching traditional kitab (book of knowledge source) which is commonly called as *Kitab Kuning.* A lot of traditional pesantrens were established years ago, most of which may be dated from the early 1900s, and most of them retain their focus of teaching and their ways of teaching tradition. Therefore, the tradition of life and learning in many traditional pesantrens continue up to today. One of the unique things about traditional pesantren is that the medium of instruction in teaching Islamic studies is the local language which is indeed considered as a continuation of tradition. Therefore the local language is fruitfully cultivated in this domain. Another obvious thing observed in traditional pesantren is that the honorific tradition is held tightly, where the santris show respect toward Kyai in both behavior and language. It is true that anywhere in the world, students must show respect toward the teacher. However, in the case of santris, the respect that they show toward Kyai is not merely a respect of young people toward the older ones, but it refers more on the established tradition of Kyai being the sources of their knowledge and their future ―happiness‖ Therefore, we may see santris show genuine respect in both behavior and language.

On the other hand, santris do not live within the pesantren context only, though they indeed live in the dormitory of the pesantren. The world around them also provides another context through the prevalence of media that they used. They are not immune to the use of modern technology such as television, cellular phone, computer, internet, and so on, which introduce them to modernity and the lives beyond pesantren. As young people, santris also enjoy this modernity especially in terms of communication means. They watch TV, use internet, and communicate through cellular phone as well. The exposure of the world through the use of these modern technologies may influence the way they behave, as they make contact with the ―other‖ culture. The influence may take the form on language they use or how they behave, and thus may create particular identity which may be slightly different. This research is conducted particularly to figure out how santris use their languages in communicating their ideas, and therefore defining their language identity, and how their language identity is reflected in literary works.

2. Research Method

This study is conducting in part as a library study which focuses on what has been revealed on the isssues of pesantren, teenagers, and language identity. Another part is focusing on how the santris as teenagers use their language. To have the picture of what language is used by santris, observation is conducted in 15 traditional pesantrens in Semarang. The observation is focused on how the communication is carried out by santris in different context, such as in the classroom and outside the classroom. It also sees how santris communicate with different interlocutors. This study also takes a look at how santris language identity is revealed through some literary works. In particular, three Islamic teenage novels, Cahaya by Pipit Senja, Perempuan Merajut Gelombang by Maulana Syamsury, and From Pesantren with Love by Irvan Aqila, are studied with the focus on the language used by the characters in the novels.

3. Traditional Pesantren

Pesantren is the oldest Islamic institution in Indonesia. The word pesantren was taken from Tamil language which means the trainer of Quró reading, and from Indian language of *Shastri* which means the sacred book, or the books on religion (Fachrudin, 2012), as the first encounter of Indonesian with Islam was through Gujarat, Indian traders. As the meaning bears, originally pesantren was developed as an informal teaching of reading Al Quróan, the Islamic Holy Book; hence the main focus was on the teaching of reading Arabic grapheme. Then it developed in to the teaching of Islamic values, as it was written in Quran, hadistó and other Islamic sources of knowledge. As Islam continued to spread all over Indonesia, pesantren as the medium of learning also spread everywhere. As of today there are hundreds of pesantren institutions in Indonesia and they undergo different development with the different focus.

Based on the focus of teaching, pesantrens can be divided into four types (Noor, 2011). The first, and the oldest type of pesantren is the traditional pesantren or *salaf an-sich,* that is the pesantren which only teach Islamic knowledge as written in *Kitab Kuning,* hence it bears the name of *salaf.* This kind of pesantren can be found easily mostly in Java, to name a few are Pesantren Lirboyo in Kediri, several pesantrens in Sarang, Rembang, and many others in Demak,

and Semarang. The second type of pesanten is the pesantrens which include non-islamic subject in their teaching, in addition to the major Islamic subject, but the arrangement of their curriculum is not in accordance with the national curriculum, and therefore the sertificate of graduation they issued will not be accepted for admission in further education. The example of such pesantren is Pesantren Maslakul Huda in Pati. The third type is the modern pesantren, that is the pesantren which not only teach the Islamic subject but also teach the non-islamic subjects, and arrange its curriculum by adopting national curriculum. In fact, in some big modern pesantrens such as Gontor, or Assalam English and Arabic are also emphasized and targetted for communication. The last type is the pesantren which let the santris to live in the pesantren, but to take formal education outside of the pesantren.

The focus of teaching *Kitab Kuning* in traditional pesantren carries the characteristic of *salaf* tradition as well, such as classical teaching with the role of Kyai becomes the central of education. As explained by van Bruinessen (1994), in this type of teaching, the Kyai usually reads the text aloud to a group of santris who sit either at the desk or on the floor, and he would explain the text linguistically by giving emphasis on grammatical niceties and the semantic meaning of certain terms. What is particular in this type of teaching is that, the language used as the medium of instruction in teaching is the local language, in this case is the Javanese language, as the observation took place in Semarang, where Javanese is used as the local language.

It is worth to notice that besides having particular kitab to teach, traditional pesantren also teach the moral values which emphasize on classic paradigm such as brotherhood, selflessness (*keikhlasan),* simplicity in living *(kesederhanaan)*, and self-sufficiency (*kemandirian)* (Lukens-Bull, 2000). The teaching is reflected in their daily performance such as in the way santris dress themselves like wearing *peci* and *sarong* (Asmani, 2003), which reflects the values of traditional clothing which becomes the reflection of their identity. Besides showing their simplicity in living, the type of clothing that they choose also revealed their attitude toward modernization. Traditional pesantren considered that it is important to develop morality and mentality which is ―immune‖ from modernity ―viruses‖ (Asmani, 2003), as there is a strong assumption in the circle of traditional pesantren people that modernization is associated with the lost of traditional values, and therefore it may challenge the spiritual living (Lukens-Bull, 2000).

4. Santris and Language Identity

   4.1. Language Identity

   People use language as the means of communication. In doing so, they also reveal their identity, whether they realized it or not. Even when they start making connection to other people by acknowledging their greeting, there is a high tendency that this will reveal their tendency (Wulandari, 2011). Gumperz and Gumperz (1982) state that language is used as interactional discourse which may lead to the construction of social identity derived from gender, ethnic, and class parameters. This statement bears two meanings, that to be meaningful ways of defining identity, language must be used for interaction, and that the identity defined shows the background of the speakers, which may reveal the gender, ethnic, or social class of the speaker. It should also be able to define the speakerøs attitude toward a certain language, or toward the world in general. This way, language is not seen as a structured rules of concept but the use of language in interaction show social function of the language in a way that it is only by using the language someone is able to create meaning with the purpose to participate in the targeted speech communities (Bakhtin in Norton and Toohey, 2011).

   How speakers define their speech community defines their language identity, because it is necessary for the speakers to recognize their belonging on a certain sepech community before he/she is able to acknowledge that recognition to others through the use of language. Another important point to note is that how others see the speakers as s/he belongs to certain speec community also count for the establishment of the speakersø language identity. Rydland and Aukrust (2008) point out this notion by focusing on the development of ethnic identity as the result of how a person thinks of *his* own ethnic and how the other ethnic thinks of *his* ethnic. Hence the identity is not only developed by considering ourself as the members of that community but it is also imperative to consider how others see us as part of that community.

   The ability in seeing oneselføs language identity and being accepted in certain community becomes aparent especially in the case of language contact. In the place where two languages are used ó as one of the cases of language contact, there are many language pehnomena resulted, one of which is bilingualism. Being able to use two languages does not mean that both languages will be used equally, nor does it mean that the speakers will use them interchangebly. There are various inequal ways of using the languages, especially when the

languages are in diglossic condition, or having different status. Such ways of incorporating two languages may take the forms of phonological and/or lexical borrowing, or further on syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic changes (Sankoff, 2001). Therefore, the bilingual speakers may incorporates two languages they master in a way that ranges from the simplest one as changing the phoneme, or borrowing morpheme, to the most complext ones of incorporatinng semantics or pragmatics changes. This is true in the case of Javanese people who are able to speak in their local language, i.e. Javanese language, and in their national language, i.e Bahasa Indonesia.

4.2. Young People's Language

Many studies mention how young people tend to have different ways of speaking (Huffaker and Calfert, 2005; Wieland, 2009; Thurlow, 2003). Holmes (2001) considers age as one of the factors in defining social dialect, by dividing it into three categories of teenagers, adult, and olders, and that teenagers are said as having the most informal ways of speaking. Wieland's study (2009) reveals that teenagers' utterances are characterized by the use of unstandard language with the intensive use of borrowing, and discourse markers showing closeness or frienship. The same result on written communication is generated from Huffaker and Calvert's studi (2005), which shows that teenagers often used acronym, and emoticon in writing their blog. This type of language shows how teenagers tend to simplify their language and create their own ways of communication as in the case of creating slang language.

4.3. Santris Language Use

In traditional pesantrens observed, though not all of them are originally from Semarang, the santris are mostly Javanese, hence they are able to speak Javanese. As it is explained above, Kyai used the local language, the Javanese language, to teach *Kitab Kuning.* All of the santris accept this way of teaching although there are few of them who have difficulty in understanding him, because they are not from Java, and are not able to speak Javanese. This acceptance may due to the high obedience of santris toward their Kyai (van Bruinessen, 1994) or due to the long accepted tradition of using Javanese for teaching *Kitab Kuning.* That santris feel obliged to continue this tradition as part of their pursuit of moral values againts modernization adds more reason for such acceptance. Wulandari (2012) reports that santris also accept this way

of teaching as they feel the sentimental and instrumental attachment toward the use of Javanese as the medium of instruction. The sentimental attachment is related to the fact that they are having the same commitment in continuing pesantren tradition, whereas the instrumental attachment is generated as santris feel that it is important for them to understand and be able to use Javanese language if they want to work in such pesantren in the future, or to establish their own pesantren.

Productively, santris use Javanese language in their communication, though all of them also are able to use Bahasa Indonesia. As predicted, santris are able and feel the need to use honorific Javanese language to speak with different interlocutors. With their Kyai, they use Krama Inggil, the highest level of Javanese language, not just because the Kyai is older than them, but also because they considered Kyai as a very important person who will transfer not just his knowledge but also his *karomah,* or his closeness to God that will create easiness in living (van Bruissen, 1994). Therefore, they genuinely respect Kyai through their behavior and their language, both in the classroom and outside the classroom.

In equal interactions among their friends, however, santris are more relaxed and use Javanese ngoko most of the time. Occasionally they also use Bahasa Indonesia. There is no general patern of when Javanese Ngoko or Bahasa Indonesia is used, except for when they are communicating with the non-Javanese speakers, which is of course required the use of Bahasa Indonesia. However, they also use Javanese language with non-Javanese speakers for short responses, and not to engange in longer conversation. The same thing occurs with the use of Bahasa Indonesia, that it is used in shorter responses and not to engange in longer conversation between and among Javanese speakers.

The interesting thing was noted on the used of their written communication, as revealed through the messages they texted from their cellular phones. The messages that are intended for their peers tend to be informal, with acronim such as *bw* for *ben wae*, cu for see you, and emoticon, the ones provided by the cellphone providers or the ones they created themselves by using symbols. There are plenty of shorthened words that if we are not accustomed with it, it will be difficult to understand the meaning. The examples are *ws (wis), gk (gak), ntOk (entuk), poa (po ora), ng (neng), sbregn (sembarangan).* There are also intentional used of capital letters in the middle of the words, such as *kenO, kOntrol, gOle'ke.* The language thay they use were not

merely Javanese language, but there are also fractions from Bahasa Indonesia, *bete, kayaknya, ngaco,* and English words which has become popular in use within teenager cricles in Indonesia such as yes, halo, mornin, no problem. There are also slang words used such as *oce, cis, lebay, norak, garink.*

4.4. Santris Language Identity

It is obvious that santris define their language identity is related with their Javanese language ability, as it is the language that they used mostly in their communication, both in formal setting ó in the classroom, to speak o their teacher, and in informal setting ó outside the classroom to various interlocutors, and in written communication. They donøt have similar ability of using Javanese Krama and Ngoko, with the range from being native speakers in Javanese Ngoko, and somehow facing difficulty in Javanese Krama. They do have positive attitude toward the use of Javanese language, both in formal class, as it is used as the medium of instruction, and in informal situation of daily conversations. Having positive attitude and willing to use the language openly show how santris perceive their language identity quite easily.

On the other hand, the data shows that they are also influenced by modernization through the use of technology. Though we are not yet be able to say that the influence gives impact toward the values that they perceive about themselves, at least santris welcome such influence in a more open manner. That they are willing to use Bahasa Indonesia is not a surprising fact, as they are Indonesian, and pesantren tradition never denies the existence of Indonesia, and in fact santris were and are also encouraged to embrace that identity as well. As Bahasa Indonesia is the national language, santris are also bilinguals of Javanese language and Bahasa Indonesia, and the willingness to alter in both languages show that they engange in positive identity practices as they embrace both identities (Gibson, 2004), though the degree of course will continue to be different.

In the case of using English, it is hard to say that it is also the values that they perceive. I believe that the use of English is merely a common expression, just as the data suggested. Santris perhaps do not even think of the effect of their use of those words.

5. Santrisø Language Identity as Reflected in Literary Works

Nowadays, there are plenty of teenage literatures written by santris or about santris living. Just to give a comparison of what others perceive about santris language and their language identity, I take a look at three novels written about how santris language is illustrated; those are Cahaya, Perempuan Merajut Gelombang, and From Pesantren with Fun. As the novels are written in Bahasa Indonesia, all of the novels depict santrisø language in popular Bahasa Indonesia. In Cahaya and in Perempuan Merajut Gelombang, their language are pictured as being in a more formal Bahasa Indonesia, yet there are also many expressions of popular language such as *berbaksos ria, gebetannya, dikerubutin, kayaknya, rada-rada, nyasar*. There are also some English words used, but only limited to those which are very popular such as attention, alloo, darling. In From Pesantren with Fun, santrisø language is illustrated in an informal popular language with the continued use of slang words such as *bete, ngaco, geblek, lebay, dodol, sableng,* etc.

What common in those three novels is that all of them use many Arabic expressions such as *afwan, subhanallah, syukron, astaghfirullahaladziem.* Another common expression is the use of *kamu, antum, aku*, and *ana*, instead of *lue* and *gue* which should be more common to be used in popular Bahasa Indonesia. The three novels also illustrates the more modern Arabic names such as *yusuf, nazwa, aliya, fadli, jafar, syifa, haikal,* while in reality most of santris in traditional pesantren have the arabic names which is considered as being less modern such as *siti, asiyah, khomsatun, khoirul, or dullah.*

The different ilustration on santris language and identity perhaps due to the fact that the novels are written in Bahasa Indonesia, hence the author must state their ideas in Bahasa Indonesia, not in Javanese language. The use of Bahasa Indonesia itself carries a more modern nuance of santris livinng which is reflected in the names they use for the characters, or the expressions which are more popular, again, in Bahasa Indonesia, and in Arabic. The fact that the novels do not really refer to traditional pesantren may also contribute reason of the discrepancies of identity illustrated.

6. Conclusion

Santris in traditional pesantren perceive their language identity in a quite easy way by embracing Javanese language, as it is used widely and viewed in positive attitude. In addition,

santris also welcome Bahasa Indonesia as their national language, though perhaps they do not really relate their identity in such a national way. Their strong attachment toward Javanese language is resulted form the use of Javanese not only as the means of communication in informal setting, but also as the language of instruction in Islamic classes. The use of Javanese as the medium of instruction generates not only sentimental attachment, but also instrumental attachment.

How their language is pictured in novels, however, show slightly differences with what they actually perceive about themselves. This may be due to the fact that the novels are written in Bahasa Indonesia and that they may not really refer to the lives of santris of traditional pesantren.

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