

ISSN: 2088-6799



# PROCEEDINGS

## International Seminar

### LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT

July 2, 2011

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**FACTORS DETERMINING THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE OF  
BILINGUAL JAVANESE-INDONESIAN CHILDREN IN THE VILLAGES OF  
BANCARKEMBAR (BANYUMAS REGENCY) AND SIDANAGERA (CILACAP REGENCY)**

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**Abstract**

*This paper is going to explain about the research on bilingual Javanese-Indonesian in Purwokerto and Cilacap. Most Javanese in rural areas are bilingual, i.e. Javanese and Indonesian. Javanese is usually spoken more in informal situations. Today, Javanese communicate more in Indonesian. The general impression is that the ability to read and write Javanese script is diminishing amongst the present generation of Javanese. Parents have an important role to preserve the Javanese language because if they use Javanese at home, their children will automatically master the language. The result of this research shows that there is an unsatisfactory attempt to master the complicated system of the standard Javanese language in Bancarkembar village, Banyumas Regency, and Sidanegara village, Cilacap Regency. Respondents in those two villages try to simplify Javanese language etiquette. The result of this research also indicates that the roles of the school are very important in supporting and repressing the Javanese language. Without considerable exposure to formal teaching and experience in other domains, it may lead to substantial differences in teaching the language to their children.*

**Key words:** *Bilingual, Javanese, Indonesian*

**1. Introduction**

When the Indonesian people in 1945 proclaimed their independence, the Indonesian Constitution stipulated that the Indonesian language was the sole national language. Therefore, it becomes the official language of the country. Since then, Indonesian has been used as the medium of instruction in school throughout the country. National newspaper, magazines, radio or TV programs, and films are in Indonesian. The Indonesian language is always used when people of different linguistics background communicate.

There are regional languages of Indonesia that are used as their first language or 'mother tongue'. Normally, the Indonesian people start speaking their regional language, and learning Indonesian as their second language later on in kindergarten or in primary school. In many cases, people in Indonesia speak three or more languages with one or more foreign language like English, Arabic, and Chinese.

The Indonesian government based on the 1945 Constitution ensures the preservation of the regional languages that are properly maintained by their speakers because those languages form a part of the living Indonesian culture. In certain areas, particularly the rural ones, Indonesian may not be widely used in daily conversation. As a result, pupils can begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue. To commence the school life in the first language, this will make the break between home and school as small as possible. The regional language in Indonesia is taught as a subject in the primary, junior and senior high schools. Students take the regional language subject as an optional.

Amongst other regional languages, Javanese is one of the most important language in Indonesia. The language is considered to be more complex than that of the Indonesian. The language has its conventions which specify that people of different social strata have to use different linguistic forms.

Today, Javanese is used at home with family, friends, and neighbors. Javanese is usually spoken more in non formal situations. Few printed materials, like newspapers or magazines, are published in Javanese. News on radio and TV are seldom broadcasted in Javanese. However, entertainments, like folk performances, still use Javanese though the time devoted to them in Indonesian is usually much greater.

Normally, most Javanese in rural areas are bilingual, i.e. Javanese and Indonesian. Javanese language has been strongly influenced by Indonesian. The spread of the national language throughout the country into sectors of society like education, commerce, and government, has made Indonesian to be more predominant language in daily life.

Parents have an important role to preserve the Javanese language because if they use Javanese at home, their children will master the language well. School is also an institution that can help the society maintain the regional language. However, a general problem in the teaching of regional language is the lack of qualified teachers. Besides, good materials for teaching the regional language are still limited.

This article attempts to see factors that determine the dominant language of bilingual Javanese-Indonesian children. The roles of the schools are very important in supporting and repressing the use of Javanese language to the young generation. Without considerable exposure to formal teaching of Javanese at schools and the uses in other domain, this may lead into imperfect mastery of the Javanese language.

## **2. Literature Review**

Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) divides bilingual children under four groups, namely elite bilinguals, children from linguistic majorities, children from bilingual families, and children from linguistic minorities. Children from elite bilinguals have a choice to be bilingual or to avoid it. Children from linguistic majorities have no choice, but the language that students learn at school and are educated in is determined by the policies of government. Children from bilingual families are similar to the ones of elite bilingualism. In the case of linguistic minorities, children are usually under strong external pressure to learn the language of the society at large.

It is the fact that the more powerful groups in a society are able to force their language upon the less powerful one (Taylor, 1977). This is because they believe that characteristics of their culture, customs, and language are better than others. Positive attitudes of members of more powerful group toward the other group are essential for promoting bilingualism.

Romaine (1989) explains bilingualism viewed from the status of languages with references to status and function. This means that there is a formal language, while another is a vernacular, i.e., a non formal language. There may be some pressures of various kinds, like economic, administrative, and political, which influence the bilingual towards use of one language rather than the other. Generally, a bilingual uses a dominant language of the two at home.

There is a trend that some smaller languages are dying out due to the spread of more dominant languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984). Many language deaths happen because of a community transition to the dominant language. One reason for the failure of language maintenance is the number of speaker of a language. The loss of ability to use a language frequently occurs in young generation. Therefore, it is expected that parents can act as a role model in the use of the language. Children have a better chance of learning the language into a community where not many people speak the language.

This is also the case of the bilingual society of Javanese – Indonesian (Guinness, 1986). When two languages exist in an unequal status, the less dominant language will be rarely used in daily activity. Where contact with Indonesian is so intense, especially among the younger generation, many Javanese people fear of losing their native language in the future. This anxiety is widely believed as a step along the road toward the language death. Hoffman (1991) reminds that it is not hard to find cases where language death is preceded by bilingualism.

Language maintenance refers to a situation where members of a community try to keep the language they have always used, i.e., to retain the same patterns of language choice (Hoffman, 1991). When language maintenance efforts result in the use of the minority language in education, then such efforts can be maximally. This kind of policy has been in Javanese – Indonesian in which the Indonesian government decides the regional language, like Javanese, is taught as an optional language.

Javanese can be given a function in the school context so that they can enable its community to maintain the language. Nicholas (1983) reminds that schools must provide reasons of learning their mother tongue by ensuring that children can achieve in school curriculum. Once the language learning is given a purpose in this manner, it compliments the language maintenance effort of the home. Therefore, bilingualism can be maintained over decades if so desired.

Nicholas (1983) emphasizes the objectives of teaching a mother tongue in a school curriculum, namely educational, language maintenance, ethnic identification, and language introduction. The educational purpose refers to the teaching of basic literacy skills in L1. Language maintenance should focus on the child's L1. Ethnic identification serves as the teaching of certain cultural areas such as religious instruction in L1. Language introduction is the teaching of the given language as a second language to speakers of other L1s.

The place of the Javanese language in the school curriculum is secured by the Indonesian government. Nababan (1982) notes that the Indonesian government ensures the preservation of the

regional languages, like Javanese. There has been no public effort to discourage people to use any of the regional language. Schools have to develop a way of using the regional language which gives pupils a reason for using it. However, the language maintenance will depend on a value judgment that Javanese is desirable for some reasons, like the needs for communicating in non formal situations.

### **3. Methodology**

This research was conducted in the villages of Bancarkembar in Banyumas regency, and Sidanegara in Cilacap regency. Samples were taken using a purposive sampling technique. From each village, 20 married couples were taken as samples consisting of 20 husbands (males), and 20 wives (females). Therefore, there were 80 respondents in total.

Respondents were selected based on certain criteria. First, both husband and wife were from the Javanese ethnic group. They had children aged 3 to 17 years because at that age, parents still could control their children language use at home. Second, respondents were taken from those Javanese families who had never moved into other areas which were considered as non Javanese culture areas. It was possible that a temporary stay in non Javanese culture areas could influence the preference of a domain language of the bilinguals Javanese – Indonesian.

Data were taken from primary and secondary resources. Primary data referred to information from questionnaires completed by the respondents. The questionnaires explored 3 main points, i.e., social background; knowledge of Javanese language; and reasons for choosing a dominant language.

The first part of the questionnaire was an open question as the respondents had to fill up their personal identity. The second part was a close question as the respondents only ticked their choices that best reflected their opinion. The third part was an open question because the respondents answered the questionnaires based on their opinions.

Secondary data were taken from the Family Identification Card (*Kartu Keluarga*) which was obtained from the leader of *Rukun Tetangga* (RT). The *Kartu Keluarga* was used to know the ethnic group of the respondents and other personal information of the respondents. Besides, an interview with the RT leader was also conducted to cross-check the data.

### **4. Result and Discussion**

#### **Respondents Characteristics**

Respondents were originally from Purwokerto, Banyumas, Gombong, and Purbalingga. Based on the Javanese linguistics area's classification (Koentjaraningrat, 1990), those areas belongs into a Banyumas dialect. The Javanese of Banyumas area speak distinctive Javanese dialect where general Javanese lower-back vowel is pronounced as a lower-central vowel, frequently cut off by glottal stops at the end of word.

Respondents were 20 – 43 years-old with the educational background ranging from elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. The husbands worked in various jobs, such as laborer; farmer, trader, and setting up a small business own his/her own; while all the wives were housewife. They lived in the villages ranging from 8 - 15 years. Respondents had 1 – 4 children with the youngest of 3 years-old and the oldest of 17 years -old.

#### **Knowledge of Javanese Language**

Respondents in both villages could speak Javanese. This finding supports the statement of Poedjosoedarmo (1982) which explains that Javanese language is normally used in the area that still maintains the values and beliefs of the culture in their society. Respondents of the two villages thought that the ideal life for the village community was to achieve and maintain social harmony. The Javanese viewed the goal of individual life as to reach a state of peace. Respondents in the two villages agreed with that philosophy so that they wanted to maintain their traditional values, including the language.

All respondents admitted that they could not write or read the Javanese scripts. Koentjaraningrat (1990) and Poedjosoedarmo (1982) state that today the Javanese communicate in Roman script. The general impression is that the ability to read and write Javanese script is diminishing among the young generation of Javanese, though the Indonesian government has tried to prevent this by making the Javanese language to be one of the optional subjects in the school curriculum. It is possible that the Javanese scripts may disappear if there is no effort to make the young generation of the Javanese to learn it. Few respondents, even, said that they still found it difficult to comprehend Javanese texts written in Roman scripts.

Most respondents thought that the Javanese language was difficult, especially in the style of speech and vocabulary. Smith-Hefner (1988) and Geertz (1961) explain that the Javanese language incorporate obligatory distinction according to differences in status, rank, seniority, and degree of regular acquaintance between addresser and addressee. Suharno (1982), even, explains that there are 8 (eight) different categories of vocabulary in Javanese. This caused all respondents thought that the Javanese language was a complex language.

### **Language Maintenance**

Respondents thought that the Javanese language would never die. They agreed to maintain the language as the young generation should be able to use it. According to them, the most effective way to maintain the language was through school curriculum. Children would learn the Javanese language at school as parents did not have any capability to teach their children a standard Javanese language. Therefore, parents hoped that the teacher would teach the children the Javanese language properly.

Respondents also said that the Indonesian government should be responsible to maintain the Javanese language. The government should decide a policy that supported the use of the Javanese language to the young generation, like in school curriculum. Parents could not do much to put any pressure on their children to speak in Javanese language as it was possible that some children might prefer using Indonesian language when interacting with their peers.

### **Reasons to Determine the Dominant Language**

Most respondents said that the dominant language as a Javanese – Indonesian bilingual at home was Javanese. Parents thought that children could learn a proper Javanese etiquette and behavior while they practiced the language. In Javanese society, respect is an element of every social interaction, including language. People have to speak with respect to any unfamiliar person meaning that respects place the two people in a known position in regard to one another so that further interaction could take place in a controlled and orderly way and uncertainties of expectation would be minimized.

Respondents said that their children spoke Javanese because their peers spoke it in daily conversation at home. Some children would speak in Indonesian to interact with their friends besides in Javanese, especially those children of the higher economics class as can be seen from the occupation of head of the family. Nevertheless, when children were with their parents, they spoke in Javanese. All respondents said that they always communicated with their children in Javanese. Unfortunately, most of them used non formal Javanese language in which, according to the standard Javanese language, this was considered inappropriate for the children to speak to their parents using that style of speech. Only few respondents, i.e., from the higher economical class, spoke formal Javanese language, though these respondents said that their children often mixed some vocabulary between the formal and non formal one.

In this research, children decided their dominant language as a Javanese - Indonesian bilingual based on the environment. Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) names the terminology of natural bilingual in which it refers to an individual who has learnt two languages without formal teaching in the course of his/her everyday life as his/her natural means of communication. In this case, there was no body put into pressure to the children to speak Javanese. Children actually had a choice to use the two languages. Seemingly, parents led the children to determine the dominant language for them as they normally communicated in Javanese in daily life.

Interestingly, some respondents thought that their children did not have to master the two languages well, i.e., Indonesian and Javanese, as the Javanese language nowadays did not play a significant role for their job career. According to the respondents, Javanese language was only a local language so the function was limited. Parents, even, thought that it was obligatory for their children to learn Indonesian and English for their future.

## **5. Conclusion**

- a. Most people in the two villages were not able to read and to write the Javanese scripts that might affect the existence of the Javanese language.
- b. Even though people in the two villages still spoke in Javanese language, the Indonesian language still dominated the society. They thought that the Indonesian language played more important role in finding jobs than that of the Javanese language. Therefore, children had to master the Indonesian language for their future career.

- c. Children used the Javanese language because of its environment. However, parents directed their children to use the Javanese language as the dominant language as they normally communicated with their children in the Javanese language.

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