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LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND STABLE BILINGUALISM AMONG SASAK-SUMBAWANS ETHNIC GROUP IN LOMBOK

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Abstract

One of the minority languages in Lombok, which is now still used and highly maintained by its approximately 20,000 speakers throughout the island, is the Samawa or Sumbawa language (henceforth BSb). Although it has been existing right there for approximately three centuries, the Sumbawans are commonly Sumbawa–Sasak bilinguals or trilinguals due to the fact that they communicate in their mother tongue within their own village boundary but use either Sasak (henceforth BSs for Bahasa Sasak) or Bahasa Indonesia (BI) outside when talking with the Sasaks. On one hand, Sumbawans are proud that they could still use their indigenous Sumbawa-ethnic origin repertoire as employed just across Lombok island to the east, while they could also command Sasak as a wider means of communication among the people of Sasak in Lombok on the other. For the Sasak-sumbawans (the term referring to the ethnic naming) in Lombok, it seems that the language preservation is important for several reasons. The first and most dominant of all is that language is a symbol of its distinct intragroup identity as is clearly shown by the patterns of its language use. BSb is used as the main medium of communication in the home domain, neighborhood domain, religious domain as well as in intra-villager group relations. In the meantime, BSs is used only for communication with inter-villager group relations. For communication in public sphere such as school or government offices and in certain situations, however, BSs is preferable beside bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, these two related languages form a kind of diglossic or poliglossic situation, whereby BSb serves the L function, BSs the M (medium), and Bahasa Indonesia the H function. BI, however, is used only in a very formal situation. This research report will discuss in some details how Sumbawans bilinguals or trilinguals could maintain their indigenous language on one hand, and could use the dominant group language on the other. It is based mainly on my research carried out during 2004 -2005 and partly as an 'observer' being native of Sasak and live in a neighbouring Sasak-sumbawan village in East Lombok.

Key words: *language maintenance, stable bilingualism, Sasak-sumbawans ethnic group*

1. Introduction

In a huge country like Indonesia where over hundreds of indigenous languages exist and are used by such diverse ethnic groups, it seems that bilingualism and multilingualism was and is the norm in many parts of the archipelago as a consequence of migration and the compulsory of the use of Bahasa Indonesia at school. With the greater mobility of people and consequent cross-linguistic and cross-cultural relationships, an increasing number of children are growing up with early exposure to two or three languages, one being the indigenous language or the language of the family at home and neighborhood, another being the language of the dominant people spoken outside the children's milieu, and other being the national language used at school. As a result, bilingualism is inevitable. Usually, children acquire the language sequentially, first the mother tongue at home as the vernacular and then as they grow up and go to school they begin to learn the other language/s. This situation is easily observable and commonly found in such areas where natives of Sumbawan or Balinese migrant descendants reside in Lombok. As a further socio-cultural and psychological consequence, they may have identified themselves as natives of Sasak in terms of ethnicity (see Wilian, 2006). Further, from the dominant group's perspective, they are considered as Sasak even though they speak *Samawa* at home and in their village. Interestingly enough, however, their being bilinguals has no indication of their leaving their indigenous language.

2. Linguistic Situation in Lombok.

By far Lombok is inhabited by approximately 3 million people, the majority of whom speak Sasak as the native language. Up to the present time Sasak is known to have one of the largest group of speakers in Indonesia along with Javanese, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Balinese and others. Beside Sasak, however, Lombok is also occupied by other native language speaker groups, namely the Sumbawans who live mostly in the eastern part of the island and the Balinese living in the western part either in or near the capital Mataram. These two distinct speech communities comprise only about 2,5 % of the total population of Lombok. Indigenous Sumbawans and Balinese live in groups of scattered places separated from the dominant native Sasak villages. Out of the seven Sumbawan villages (Jantuk, Rempung, Kembangkerang, Rumbuk, Taliwang, Kuang Berora, and Dasan Baru), two are of independent administrative sub-districts (*Desa*), which are not integrated with other Sasak villages.

It is a common knowledge for the Sasaks in Lombok that Sumbawan speech community are addressed as Sasaks. Therefore, in the statistical population data of the East, Central, and West Lombok no mentioning of Sumbawan ethnic group is found. This seems congruent with what Yaningsih (1986:11) stated:

“In Lombok there are also villages inhabited by Sasaks of Sumbawan decendants, which we can find among others in Karang Taliwang, West Lombok, as well as in Rumbuk, Jantuk, Rempung, and Kuang in East Lombok. These people now dwelling those villages have now been united with the customs and traditions of the Sasaks and they have identified themselves as Sasaks. The one that is still maintained is the language, namely Bahasa Sumbawa. Up to now if we could go around these villages we can still see this distinctive characteristic.”

The Sasak-sumbawans who inhabit these villages are not recent immigrants. Some of them appeared in Lombok by the late seventeenth century, but the main expansions took place as early as the eighteen century (when they were invited by the King of Selaparang to help fight against the Karang Asem Kingdom who wanted to expand its power in Lombok). After the war had ended they were not allowed to leave Lombok. Instead, they were offered land to cultivate and settled in Lombok since then. Now they still live in groups of several scattered villages distinct from the majority groups, with *Samawa* as their main intra-group means of communication. Sasak, however, is acquired naturally as soon as they go to school and socialize with the dominant groups.

3. Theoretical Perspectives and Problems

Language maintenance and language shift basically deals with the degree of the stability of patterns of language use in bilingual or multilingual society. Fishman (1972:109) maintains that *the study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between degree of change (or degree of stability) in language usage patterns, on one hand, and ongoing psychological, cultural, or social processes, on the other, in populations that utilize more than one speech variety for intra-group or for inter-group purposes*. The most basic datum of study is whether some demonstrable change has occurred in the pattern of habitual language use. Closely related to this study is the concept of ‘domain’ (Fishman, 1964–1972) and the notion of ‘diglossia’ initially addressed by Fergusson (1959a). The former refers to *a construct that certain topic is best expressed in a certain language or variety because that topic relates to the domain in which the language is dominant in a certain community* (Beardly and Eastman in Eastman, 1983:142). Domains of language behavior and use may differ from setting to setting depending on topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication. Domain could be grouped into home/family domain, neighborhood, friendship, religion, education, government, employment. The latter, in its narrow and original sense of the term, pertains to the use of two distinct varieties of the same language in a community, with one regarded as a high (H) variety and the other a low (Low) variety (Holmes, 1992:32). Each variety is used for quite distinct function and no one uses the H variety in everyday conversation, example of which is found in Enggenwil, a small town in Switzerland where two varieties of German are used. One is the local Zwiss German and the other is standard German. In its extended meaning of the term, diglossia refers to a linguistic situation in a bilingual or multilingual community in which one language functions as L and the other as H. Each code or language is used in different situations from the other. Example of this is the use of Spanish and Guarani in Paraguay where Spanish is utilized in context of H function which is usually learned in school and Guarani as L function learned at home. However, though H is a standardized language and is codified in grammar books and dictionaries, it doesn’t mean that L is a neglected heritage. Some are also codified and standardized too as far as it is politically preserved for linguistically and culturally oriented documentation.

In a bilingual or multilingual speech community, however, like in Paraguay or Indonesia, code switching is a normal phenomenon. People sometimes switch code within a domain or social situation. A speaker may switch to another language as a signal of group membership and a shared ethnicity with an addressee. A switch may also reflect a change in the other dimensions, such as the status relations between people or the formality of their interaction. Different kinds of relationships, however, are often expressed through different codes. People may select a particular variety or code because it makes it easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless of where they are speaking. What speakers in bilingual or multilingual community should be aware of is that the use of the H variety or code in the home domain may or could threaten the existence of the L, which may cause the event of 'diglossia leakage'. It is in conjunction with this phenomenon that this research is conducted to seek the trend whether *Samawa* is maintained or threatened by Sasak.

4. Pattern of Language Use and the Stable Bilingualism

One of the clearest findings to emerge from the research is that *Samawa* in Lombok is still highly maintained and will always be used by its speakers although they have been living there for more than three centuries. Within the context of language use among the Sasak-*sumbawan* bilinguals or trilinguals, *Samawa* serves as their vernacular for intra-group communication, while Sasak is used for external one, utilized in conjunction with matters of everyday social gathering, intimacy, and friendship, as a means of inter-group wider communication. Bahasa Indonesia, however, is utilized along the lines of a **H**(igh) language in connection with education, government, and religion domain. In a more sociolinguistical terms, we can say that *Samawa* serves as **L**(ow) function, Sasak as **M**(edium) or middle function, and Bahasa Indonesia as **H**(igh) language. The claim that *Samawa* is now in the process of being replaced by Sasak, being the M, has not yet been proven. This is shown by the overall mean score of language choice in the home domain (figure 1) given by 244 respondents in the questionnaires, which yields a figure of 1.66 (the rating scale of language choice being 1–5, with 1= [almost] always BSb, 3 = BSb and BSs with same frequency of use, and 5 = [almost] always BSs, 2 = more BSb than BSs, 4 = more BSs than BSb). But, there is a slight increase in the mean score of language choice in the neighbourhood domain that is 1.83, which still means that *Samawa* is almost always used, and yet close to 'more BSb than BSs'. Outside their village, there

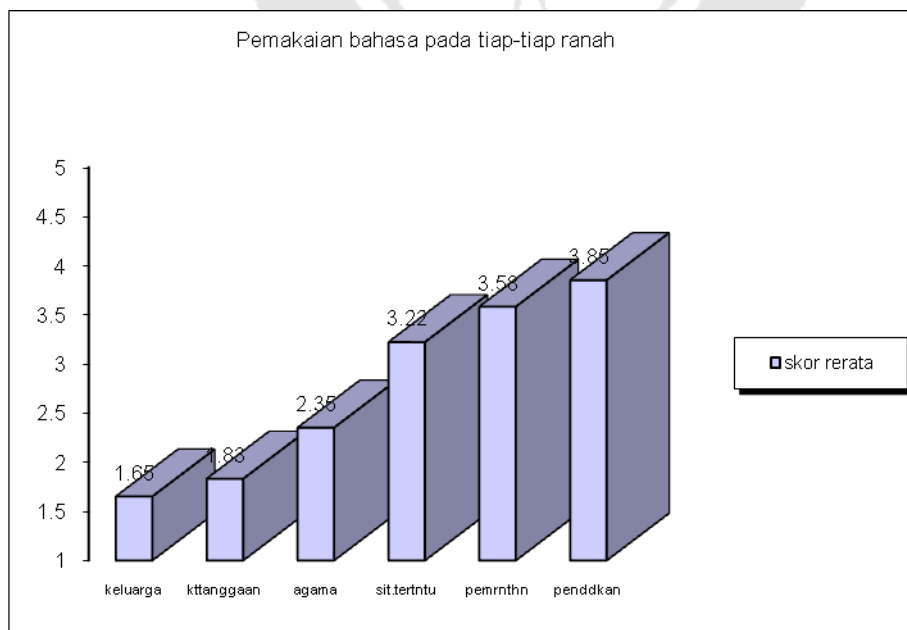


Figure 1: Mean score of language choice and language use in each domain (scale 1–5).

is a tendency that more BSs is used than BSb as shown by the mean score of language use in the government and school domain in figure 1. This also shows that regardless of the age and sex of the respondents when they go to government office and school BSs is preferable.

Based on figure 2 also below, we can see the variability of the mean score of language choice in different situations, which can demonstrate a condition of stable bilingualism in a diglossic community. The use of the vernacular is clearly driven by the role relationship of the

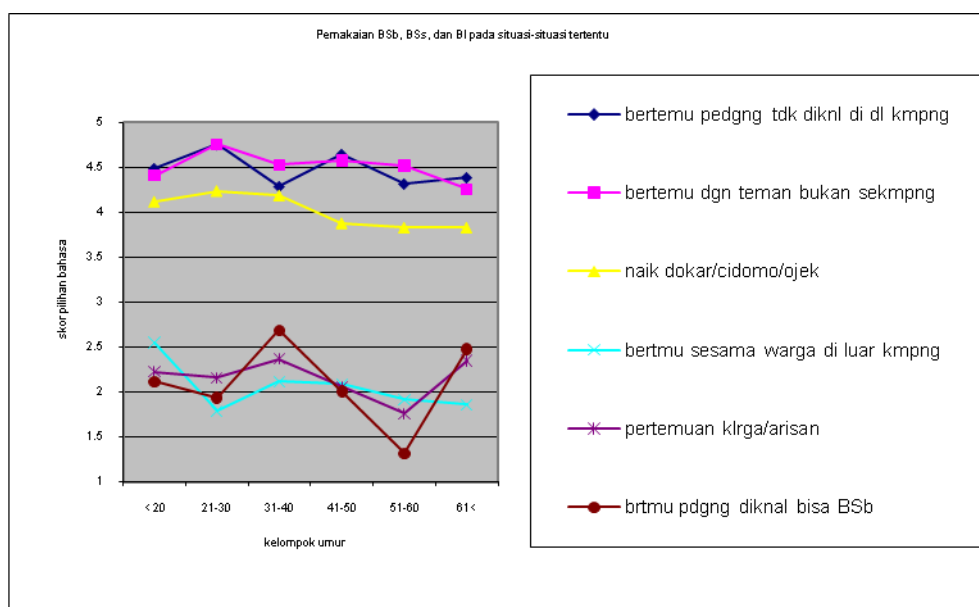


Figure2: Pattern of Language Use under Certain Situations

communicators. When they meet with traders they are not familiar with in their village they speak Sasak. But when they encounter a village mate outside they would speak *Samawa* as they would also use when having family gathering '*arisan*' and when they meet merchants whom they know they can speak BSb.

5. Conclusion

For the SS in Lombok, it seems that the language preservation is important for several reasons. The first and most dominant of all is that language is a symbol of its distinct intragroup identity as is clearly shown by the patterns of its language use. BSb is used as the main medium of communication in the home domain, neighborhood domain, religious domain as well as in intra-villager group relations. In the meantime, BSs is used only for communication with inter-villager group relations. For communication in public sphere such as school or government offices and in certain situations, however, BSs is preferable in addition to bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, these two related languages form a kind of diglossic or poliglossic situation, whereby BSb serves the L function, BSs the M (medium), and BI the H function. BI, however, is used only in a very formal situation.

Secondly, the use of BSb as a primary means of communication in the home domain and neighborhood is made possible because of the isolation of their residential areas from the dominant group, the majority of them live separately from the Sasak *kampoeng* in Lombok. They have their own mosques and sometimes elementary schools with almost homogenous students. These all may facilitate to use mother-tongue as their medium of intra-group communication, which may then brings pride in their language.

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