

## **The Dynamics of Language Attitudes of Young Parents towards the Preservation of the Mother Tongue**

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### **Abstract**

It is undeniably true that local languages will be preserved if they are respected, used, and inherited to the next generations. They should be used in the family and community so that children do not avoid or become unfamiliar with their vernaculars. This study explored the attitudes of Acehnese young families toward Acehnese language, and further investigating their efforts in maintaining and passing the local language to their children. Twelve Acehnese couples (young parents) residing in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, were interviewed to obtain data. They were chosen on purpose because their first languages had to meet the study's criteria: (a) Acehnese-speaking parents, (b) Acehnese-speaking fathers and Indonesian-speaking mothers, (c) Indonesian-speaking fathers and Acehnese-speaking mothers; (d) Indonesian-speaking parents, (e) Acehnese-speaking fathers and other ethnic language-speaking mothers; as well as (f) other ethnic language-speaking fathers and Acehnese-speaking mothers. The data were then transcribed and identified for the key points, patterns, or themes in accordance with the attitudes of Acehnese young parents toward Acehnese language. The findings show that the Acehnese language was highly valued for being the heritage language, connecting people within and outside of families, expressing emotions, and requiring promotion despite its low popularity. Although a majority of parents in this study saw the Acehnese language as important for expressing their Acehnese identity and were aware of its values, they failed to pass the language on to their children. Out of the twelve families, only one family succeeded in passing on and maintaining Acehnese to their children. Nevertheless, language maintenance in the home works if parental practical efforts are made by providing their children with linguistic resources, and most important of all, using the local language in interactions with them.

### **Keywords**

Acehnese, Efforts, Language, Attitude, Maintenance, Young Parents.

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## Introduction

With a large nation in terms of geography, population, ethnics, cultures, and vernaculars (Rustipa, 2013), Indonesia is united with an official and national language Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian). This language is spoken while coexisting with other local languages around the country. Lewis, Simons, and Fenning (2013) note that there are 706 languages spoken throughout the archipelago. While the languages are linked in certain ways, none of them are mutually intelligible; hence, they are classified as different languages rather than dialects (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014).

Due to its role as the language of instructions and lingua franca, Bahasa Indonesia has triggered the impact on the minority/local languages (Kurniasih, 2005), and it seriously affects the existence of vernaculars (Al-Auwal, 2017; Zulfadli, 2014). As a result, the majority of the Indonesian population speak Indonesian as their second language, and more recently, it has been increasingly used as the first language, which coexists alongside other native languages in the country (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014).

Aceh is one of the provinces in the country located at the tip of the Sumatra Island (see Figure 1). Islam is the most widely practiced religion in this province, with almost 98% of the roughly four million people identifying as Muslims. It is recognized as Indonesia’s *Serambi Mekkah* ‘Verandah of Mecca’, because it was a pivotal site in the history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago (Birchok, 2013). It was occupied by the Dutch from 1873 until 1914, by Japan from 1942 until 1945), and in 1950, it became part of Indonesia. In 1973, political concerns originating from the Indonesian government’s fight with the Free Aceh Movement began in 1973 (Shaw, 2008). On August 15, 2005, the battle came to an end with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Peace in Helsinki, Finland (Ronnie, 2016).

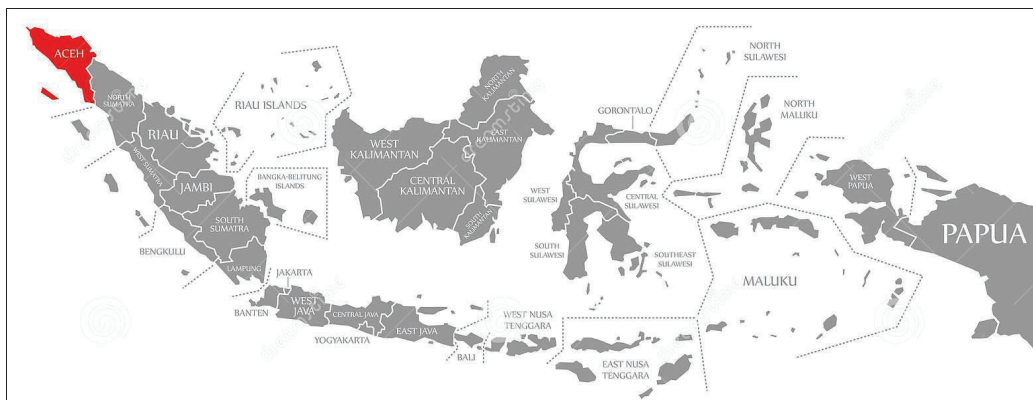


Figure 1: A map of Indonesia, with Aceh highlighted in red (Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/aceh-red-highlighted-map-indonesia-aceh-red-highlighted-map-indonesia-image166292044>).

The number speakers with Indonesian as their first language is also growing in Aceh, particularly among the younger generation, where parents believe that the benefits of the national language will help their children succeed academically (Aziz & Amery, 2016; Aziz et al., 2020). In this regard, they argue that raising their children as monolingual speakers of the national language will provide them with the best opportunities in life in terms of education, employment, and prosperity (Aziz & Amery, 2016).

Owing to the trend of the language shift which can be considered as one of the early warning signs towards language in danger, it is not impossible to believe that its speakers will decrease gradually for the position of the Acehnese language alone now is in an unstable stage especially if the trend of shift continues to happen (Aziz & Amery, 2016). Besides, the current characteristic of Acehnese families who tend to favor Indonesian to Acehnese language especially at home domain has no guarantee that the position of Acehnese language will remain strong and, in the end, it will lead to being endangered (Aziz et al., 2020).

Considering the fact that today's language attitudes of Acehnese young parents in the community living in Banda Aceh have become phenomenal yet remained underexplored, this research, therefore, is aimed at exploring the attitudes of Acehnese young families and how those values impact the local language maintenance. Attitudes towards a language display the profound frame of mind of the speakers of that language (Pillai et al., 2015; Yusuf et al., 2013; Zulkifley & Muammar Ghaddafi, 2016). The Acehnese families' efforts in maintaining and passing it on to their children are also explored. It is hoped that the research finding will provide a positive contribution to society as a wake-up call for them to be more alert of the decreasing use of the regional language in the community today.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Attitudes toward Language Choice in Multicultural Communities**

Language attitude has strong relation to the explicit behavior towards language and its users. This is because people's way of classifying languages or varieties is different; either they are elegant, expressive, vulgar, musical, polite, impolite, pleasing or unpleasing (Holmes, 2008). Mostly, the attitudes of the language users are influenced by this categorization for it reflects who they are and represents the social group they come from.

Attitudes towards a language may also display what people feel about the speakers of that language. Sadanand (1993) explains that "attitudes towards the use of different languages are motivated by people's perception of the role of each language and the functions it performs in relation to each other". In the context of multilingual society, Piller (2000) believes that the language spoken by a large community can be considered superior than those spoken by the minority. It is due to the fact that it serves more benefits to the speakers which can be influential for expanding their social network. The choice of a dominant language provides people the prestige (Managan, 2004) and the opportunity in socializing with other people (Dweik & Qawar, 2015). Hence, it is used as the medium of communication in various domains.

In the Indonesian context, for instance, Bahasa Indonesia has been assigned by the government as the official language which is used in every aspect of its citizens' life including as language of education, language of wider communication as well as the language of inter-ethnic communication. Consequently, the society regards Indonesian as prestigious, and learning and using it is considered most appreciated. On the contrary, any language whose range of use does not go beyond its local government area is referred to as minority languages, and generally evaluated poorly and ranked low. It is why positive or negative attitudes that people develop to particular languages is based on how the community identifies and labels them.

Regarding attitudes toward heritage/ethnic language, this language for some people holds various prominent values and thus it is important to retain. Several studies suggest that ethnic language and family attachment appear to be correlated. Ethnic language is used to assimilate with the people in the language community both socially and linguistically in order to build the relationship with them (Abd-el-Jawad, 2006). The language functions as a means to maintain communal or societal values instead of individual ones such as for self-identification or self-expression. Besides, ethnic/heritage language, for some other people can also be a symbol for their ethnic culture and identity. According to Fishman (2001), specific cultures and cultural identities are related to specific languages at the level of doing, at the level of knowing, at the level of being. Salami (2008) believes that language and culture are inseparable because it expresses and symbolizes culture. Specifically, Crystal (1965, as cited in Bichani, 2015) points out that language is the means through which religious rituals and beliefs are conveyed.

In terms of group identity, according to Phinney et al. (2001), ethnic language serves as a sense of belonging to and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group. A key factor in defining groups, according to Edwards (2011), is determined by the group's language whose function is as a distinctive marker within a group. Parents typically view their heritage language important owing to its role to form identity, to communicate with people, and to build a career in the future (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

Heritage language is also a way to protect cultural identity (Farruggio, 2010; Guardado, 2010), which is associated with positive emotions including stories, laughter and intimacy in social life (Guardado, 2008). Landweer (2008) discovers the importance of ethnic language as a language of instruction, scolding or correction, information, humor and comfort as well as religious observance. Positive attitudes towards heritage language for some people come from culture and pride (Dweik & Qawar, 2015).

For the reasons stated above, as a consequence, people tend to voice the significance of their own languages and the need to be able to pass them on to their future generation. In this regard, Letsholo (2009) believes that only when parents see the value of the heritage language and the complementary culture it entails can they transmit the language successfully. However, even though the people value their minority language and have a strong desire to transfer the language for their next generation, not all take active steps to ensure its proficiency, or in a long term. its retention. Garrett (2010) claims that one's language attitude may not always influence his/her actual language practice. Similarly, Aziz and Amery (2016) point out that positive attitude itself is not adequate enough for a language to survive because what people say does not always translate into their action. They might say that the language holds important values for them, yet in reality they do not speak the language with their children (Aziz & Amery, 2016).

In relation to the school context, ethnic/heritage language retention can be built with the help from school especially for children as reported in studies of Becker (2013) and Setiawan (2013). In this respect, Guardado (2002) supported this notion that for children, the school environment can be a key point for the use of ethnic language and learning its patterns. even though 'home' is the best place for ethnic language transmission (Clyne & Kipp, 1999). They believe that if a language is not maintained in the domain of home, then it cannot be

maintained elsewhere. In similar vein, Fishman (1997) confirms that the lack of intergenerational transmission and daily use at home leads to languages endangered, not because they are not being taught in schools or lack of official status.

## **1.2 Previous Related Studies**

For a language to be maintained, the key point is that it needs to be passed on to the young generation and acquired by them. Family and language choice play important roles either for the maintenance of ethnic language or the marginalization of it (Ong, 2021; Pillai et al., 2015). In this situation, a positive attitude toward the local language is important. Parents as a small part of the society should be wise in their decision making to choose the language(s) for their children as a home language. They should use the national language side by side with the local language in order to maintain regional languages which are their native cultural identity. The attitudes and language background of parents have a significant impact on how much of the home language children are exposed to and acquired (Fan, 2014). It is undeniably true that the local language will be preserved if it is respected, used, and inherited by the next generation. As a result, local language should be used in the family and community so that children are not unfamiliar with or avoid their vernaculars.

There have been several studies found in the literature which provide empirical evidences about language attitudes, language choice and its strong connection to language maintenance at the home domains. Pauwels (2005) discovered the role of family in preserving the community language in Australia. She suggested that family is a basis for the acquisition and also maintenance of community languages. Despite some challenges faced by family in maintaining the community languages, she found some successful strategies that can be applied to maintain the community languages. They included the persistence of use, the consistency of language use and also the parental use of teaching and learning technique. Meanwhile, Becker (2013) studied the Korean' descendants living in the U.S.A. who showed positive attitudes toward their heritage language and its preservation for their children despite their differences in strategies used. The parents also stated that their children are not required to study and maintain Korean outside the home since there are no heritage language opportunities in the community, including at their children's schools. Therefore, even though they speak Korean to their children at home, English is spoken more by their children as they get older.

In the Arabic-English context, Othman (2006) studied language choice among Arabic community in Britain in various domains of language use. The findings of his study showed signs of Arabic maintenance in the participated families. Here, the parents assign different functions of the two languages used, Arabic and English. Arabic is used regularly at the home domains, either between the parents or between the parents and their children. It is also used with friends, in news and entertainment media, and at mosques. As for English, it is used consistently at university/work, in formal situations in general, when talking to non-Arabs, and in shops. The study also revealed that sometimes both languages overlap within the same domain causing those bilinguals to use one language rather than the other, such when an Arab talks to his/her friend in the presence of a non-Arab they use English although Arabic is the unmarked choice in the domain of friendship among themselves. Moreover, in the Malaysian context, Sankar (2011) studies the language shift and maintenance of the Malaysian Iyers. It was found that the Malaysian Iyers have moved away from the use of their mother tongue

(Tamil) in the home domain. Government language policies and the influence of English as the language of business are seen as the main reasons why they shift away from their ethnic language. The results also indicated that the Iyer identity is not completely dependent on their ethnic language, as their identity is expressed more through their cultural practices. This is almost similar to the Acehnese descendants living in Kampung Aceh, Kedah, Malaysia (Pillai, Yusuf & Ali, 2013). From interviews with 57 residents from different generations about their use and identity of Acehnese, the results showed that despite Acehnese is still used in KA, it is decreasing by the youngest generation. But they still regard themselves as *ureueng Acèh* (Acehnese people), considering Acehnese as an important aspect of their identity and their perceived ties with the Aceh province in Indonesia

In the case of Aceh province in the multiethnic country, Indonesia, Muhammad (2013) carried out a study related to parents' attitude towards bilingualism in Acehnese-Indonesian context. Based on the data from questionnaires, it showed that from ten families participated in this study; only two families have Acehnese as the main language in the family. The other parents tend to speak Indonesian to the children although in the same time they speak Acehnese to their spouse. All parents have positive attitude towards bilingualism. They agree that being bilingual give more benefit than only being monolingual. Aziz, Daud and Windasari (2016) also explored the use of language in Acehnese home context despite its focus lays on intermarriage couples living in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. The findings in their study revealed that Bahasa Indonesia is the most dominant language used by the couples for daily interaction with each other and their children at home. Their reasons are based on the fact that the language is to accommodate the couples, to be conveniently used as a neutral language for them as well as to expand their social network. Besides, Indonesian as the national language of Indonesia is used as a communal language and it also functions as a medium of instruction for their children at school which leads them to be less motivated to use their own ethnic languages. The latest work by Aziz, Yusuf and Menalisa (2020) investigates the factors influencing young Acehnese parents' language choice to communicate with their children at home in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The results showed that Acehnese and Indonesian were the dominant languages used by the Acehnese families at home. Indonesian was the most favored language chosen by parents when communicating with their children in (as internal influence) and outside (as external trigger) of their home.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

This study involved the urban society residing in Banda Aceh. Twelve Acehnese couples, age 25 to 35 years old, and at least have one child of two years of age or older (till their teens) present in the homes (young parents), were selected and consented as the subjects. They were chosen on purpose because their first languages had to meet the study's criteria. They were selected based on the following categories, namely: (a) Acehnese-speaking fathers and Acehnese-speaking mothers; (b) Acehnese-speaking fathers and Indonesian-speaking mothers; (c) Indonesian-speaking fathers and Acehnese-speaking mothers; (d) Indonesian-speaking fathers and Indonesian-speaking mothers; (e) Acehnese-speaking fathers and other ethnic language-speaking mothers; as well as (f) other ethnic language-speaking fathers and Acehnese-speaking mothers. This decision was made to examine the impact of the parents'

language use on their children's choice of language(s). From each category, two families were selected to be interviewed and all have given consent to participate in this research.

## **2.2 Instrument**

The recent study employed a semi-structured interview protocol as the main instrument for data collection, because it provides in-depth information about participants' opinions and experiences with a specific issue (Turner, 2010). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) further suggest that semi-structured interview is the most valuable type of interview because it focuses on a narrow range of topics, and the probing questions provide more depth and detail, while follow-up questions can be used to achieve richness by delving into keywords, ideas, and themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, a number of 16 open-ended semi-structured questions were originally prepared for the interview. The questions were taken from the literature of Setiawan (2013), Othman (2006) and the National Indigenous Language Survey 2 (NILS2) designed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2014). All those questions were then adapted and modified to meet the condition for this study.

## **2.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

Henceforward, twelve couples/young parents of the selected families were interviewed. In addition, to avoid misunderstandings between the interviewer and the interviewees, the interviews were conducted in Indonesian. The husbands and wives from those families were interviewed together at the appointed time and place based on the agreements previously made. The length of the interviews was varied ranging from 20 minutes to 30 minutes tops, depending on the responses of each participant regarding the questions. The interviews were videotaped, and the recordings were then transcribed. The interviews are done in Indonesian and the English translations are available for every quotation in this paper.

Six steps were taken to achieve the results, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1. become familiar with the data (reading the transcripts carefully, identifying and removing any bias found in the data.), 2: generate initial codes (assigning codes to relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections), 3. search for themes (aligning data with critical themes/categories and subcategories by grouping the codes generated during the initial code generation), 4. review themes (categorizing and linking data), 5. define themes (determining the hierarchy of categories), and finally, 6. write up (transitioning findings by describing the categories and their relationships) on the attitudes of Acehese young parents toward Acehese language, and efforts made to maintain this mother tongue.

## **3. Results**

The results of the interviews revealed seven themes for this study. They are: (1) the important languages for children to acquire, (2) Acehese is an important language, (3) connects people, (4) expresses emotions and (5) an identity. Another theme which emerged is their explanation on (6) the Acehese popularity that is weakening, and this led to the last theme found, which is (7) efforts to maintain Acehese at home. Each theme is elaborated in the next sub-sections of this paper.

### 3.1 Important Languages for Children to Acquire

In relation to the participants' responses about the most important language for their children to acquire, it is clear that Indonesian was considered by the majority of the parents in Acehese families as the first most important language to be acquired by their children followed by Acehese language and English, respectively. Most of them had already used Indonesian as the main language in-home interaction since they are concerned about their children's future academic success because it is the language of instruction. They also mentioned that Indonesian was nationally used by the citizen of Indonesia and thus it was primarily important to be exposed to it. The answers of the participants based on the interviews on the important languages to be acquired by the children are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The important languages to be acquired by the children

Family no.	The most important languages to be acquired		
	The first	The second	The third
1	Arabic	Indonesian	Acehnese
2	Indonesian	Acehnese	English
3	Indonesian	English	Acehnese
4	Acehnese	English	Indonesian
5	Acehnese	Indonesian	English
6	Acehnese	Indonesian	English
7	Indonesian	Acehnese	English
8	Indonesian	Acehnese	English
9	Indonesian	Acehnese	English
10	Indonesian	Acehnese	English
11	Acehnese	Indonesian	English
12	Indonesian	Acehnese	English

However, Family 1, as seen in Table 1, was the only family which viewed Arabic as the first most important language. The participant spiritually reasoned that Arabic is the beautiful and holy language for Muslims since it is the language by which Al-Qur'an is written, as expressed in the following excerpt.

- I.1 *“Saya Bahasa Arab sebenarnya...ya karena Bahasa Arab itu bahasa yang paling bagus sebenarnya, bahasa Al-Quran ya”*. (“Actually, I think Arabic is the first most important language....because it's the most beautiful language, the language of Al-Qur'an”). (WF1).

Family 4 and Family 5, however, have shown their strong belief on the importance of the Acehese language to be acquired by their children due to the fact that the language was not largely spoken by the community anymore and its existence was threatened by the popularity of Indonesian, especially among children.

- I.2 *“Bahasa Aceh gak diajarkan di sekolah, tapi ini bahasa antar anggota keluarga kami. Kalau anak-anak gak kita perkenalkan atau ajarkan bahasa Aceh, nanti mereka akan susah berkomunikasi dengan saudara-saudara mereka yang berbicara bahasa Aceh dirumah”*. (“Acehnese is not taught in schools, but it is the language of our family members. If we don't introduce or teach the children the Acehese language, later they will find it difficult to communicate with their relatives who speak Acehese at home”). (WF4).



They argued that Acehnese was still their ethnic language, internally used by their extended family members, and also acted as the local language used by the majority of people in Aceh. WF5 reasons that, unlike Indonesian which is used in our surroundings today, Acehnese would not be found outside the home unless it is taught, therefore the family should take such an important role to preserve the local language.

Even though dominantly regarded as the third most important language by a large number of participants, English became significantly valued because of the educational reasons as well as its popularity as the international language. The parents argued that by mastering English, their children would be better at school and in the future when they applied for a job. WF4 said that her children should be able to master English because if they can speak English, it will ease them at school and will benefit them, too, for their job in the future. It is agreed by WF3 who also said English would help her children at school and for finding a good job later on.

### **3.2 Acehnese is an Important Language**

When questioned about how important Acehnese was in their homes so that it should be used to communicate with their children, nearly all of the participants in this study exposed positive attitudes toward Acehnese regardless of their differences in their first languages. They mostly agreed that Acehnese was important for their children in the future even though the language was not introduced as the first language to them in their homes. However, other participants thought otherwise.

All of the twelve families suggested that Acehnese is important to maintain because it is the heritage language from which their culture is rooted. As a result, they stated that the language should be inherited to their children since it represented their birthright as suggested by the parents in Family 10 and Family 4 below.

- I.3 *“Penting sih karena itu bahasa bapaknya, bahasa neneknya. Jadi, anak cucu juga harus bisa Bahasa Aceh”*. (“It’s important because Acehnese is their father’ and their grandparents’ language. So, the children and grandchildren must be able to speak Acehnese”.) (HF10).
- I.4 *“Penting. Sangat penting untuk menjaga identitas kita sebagai suku Aceh. Gimanaapun itu bahasa indatu kita. Harus dijaga kalau bisa”*. (“It’s important, very important to maintain our identity as an Acehnese ethnic. Nevertheless, it’s our heritage language. It should be preserved if possible”.) (HF4).

Similarly, the parent in Family 11 regarded Acehnese as an important language as well because it was her mother tongue despite her reluctance in teaching the language to their children due to the presence of two different languages in their nuclear family.

Based on the comments exemplified in excerpts I.3 and I.4 above, it suggests that the parents viewed Acehnese as an important language. They appear to voice a strong wish that their children would inherit and speak the language as they did. According to them, it is the way to keep in touch with their heritage language even though realistically they did not show any efforts in teaching the language to their children in the families.

### 3.3 Acehnese Connects Family Members

The Acehnese language was regarded as important for the parents because it was necessary for communication to connect their intrafamily members. They mostly suggested that the bond and connection between cross-generation would likely be created and attached through language by using Acehnese. In response to the importance of the language as the media of family connection, WF8's said that:

- I.5 *“Penting sih, soalnya nenek-nenek saya rata-rata masih pakai Bahasa Aceh. Rasanya lebih menghargai mereka kalau ngomong pakai Bahasa Aceh. Walaupun saya ngomong pakai Bahasa Indonesia dijawab pakai Bahasa Aceh juga”*. (Acehnese is quite important because my grandparents still use it. I think they will feel more appreciated if I speak Acehnese with them. Even though I speak in Indonesian, they keep responding in Acehnese). (WF8)

Apart from connecting intra-family members, Family 7 has also expressed their agreement that Acehnese became important when it was used outside the home to socialize with other people who happened to know and speak the language. Acehnese was significantly useful for some of the participants in terms of work-related events or situation, in which Acehnese was used by many of his colleagues, or village authorities such as Keuchik Gampong (a village head), Teungku Gampong (a prominent religious head), and other village practitioners (i.e., Tuha Peut, etc.). According to the wife in Family 12 who is an Acehnese and married to her Minang ethnic husband, Acehnese should be learned by her husband and their children whether they wanted it or not since they lived in a community where Acehnese is spoken. So that they can interact with people outside their homes.

### 3.4 Acehnese Expresses Emotions

Besides its importance as the heritage language and its purpose for connecting people, the Acehnese language, at some point is also used to express certain emotions as shown in the following excerpts. In this regard, WF1 said that when she gets mad, for example, she would definitely use Acehnese because sometimes there are no suitable words in Indonesian, at least not right enough to describe the feeling. She continues by saying it is hard to use Indonesian when you get mad. It is agreed by HF4 who admitted that:

- I.6 *“... Itupun kalau dongkol, keluar Acehnya. Lebih kena marahnya kalau bahasa sendiri”*. (... When I get mad, Acehnese will come out. It sounds more real when I express it in my own language). (HF4)

Almost all of the participants have expressed the same feeling about this matter. The comments show that the use of Acehnese becomes powerfully significant when it is used to describe strong feelings, such as anger.

### 3.5 Acehnese is Identity

Another reason that the Acehnese families retain the language is to show identity. Some of the participants claimed that the language was needed because it represented their identity as an Acehnese. WF12 agreed that speaking Acehnese is essential because it represents the identity of the speakers. Meanwhile, WF1 regretted that he did not start speaking Acehnese to his children since they were young despite strongly believing that Acehnese identifies their origin and identity. Parents from Family 1 also showed her deep regret for not introducing Acehnese

early to their children. She admitted that in their attempt to promote Indonesian for all their children as the main language at home, they seemingly forgot to anticipate its impact on their ethnic language which now resulted in their children's reluctance to speak Acehnese as their vernacular language. WF4 also admitted that she herself was not well exposed to the Acehnese language when she was a child so she hardly speaks the language. But deep inside she personally regretted it because as an Acehnese she should have not forgotten her own identity.

- I.7 *"Saya waktu kecil, orangtua tidak ngomong Bahasa Aceh dirumah, padahal mereka orang Aceh juga. Jadinya ya kebiasaan, tidak bicara Bahasa Aceh walaupun ngerti kalau dengar orang ngomong. Sama anak jadinya tidak ngomong juga. Sekarang nyesal, baru rasanya sadar, eh, Bahasa Aceh, itu penting untuk saya orang Aceh". ("When I was young, my parents did not speak Acehnese at home, even though they are Acehnese as well. So, I am used to growing up not speaking the language even though I understand it when I hear people speak it. So now I don't speak it to my children, either. Now I regret, now I just realized how important Acehnese language is to me as an Acehnese".) (WF4).*

Nevertheless, some young parents involved in this study wanted their children to be able to speak Acehnese so that their identity as an Acehnese would be well-maintained, but wanting it is not the same as conducting it. For those parents who did speak Acehnese to their children showed their need to introduce Acehnese to their children based on the fact that Acehnese is seen as the language to represent their identity and symbolize their pride.

### **3.6 Acehnese Popularity is Weakening**

Another reason uttered by the participants regarding how important Acehnese is in their family is that the language is losing ground to the national language in terms of popularity. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the importance of Acehnese for these families has a strong relation to the status of Acehnese itself which is becoming less in terms of the number of its users.

- I.8 *"Bahasa Aceh penting untuk generasi anak-anak kita, bahkan kalau tidak kita biasakan bisa-bisa akan hilang". ("Acehnese is important for our future generation. So, if we don't make it as a habitual daily communication, the language will be in danger".) (WF5)*
- I.9 *"Oh menurut saya sangat penting karena sekarang orang jarang sekali ngomong pakai Bahasa Aceh. Jadi, harus dibiasakan". ("Oh, I think it's very important because Acehnese is seldom spoken by people nowadays. So, it needs to be made as a habitual daily communication".) (WF6)*

Apart from the findings above which presented the participants' views on how important Acehnese is in their families, the results of the interview also discovered one contrasting opinion. One participant, in this matter, claimed that Acehnese was not very important in her family regardless of her and her husband's family background who were of Acehnese descendants. She reasoned that Acehnese took a back seat compared to Indonesian as the most favored language that she and her husband chose for their children. The following excerpt represented her opinion on the matter.

- I.10 *"Dibilang penting tidak juga ya? Karena kami sendiri ngomong ke anak-anak Bahasa Indonesia. Sekolah juga nuntut mereka untuk berbahasa Indonesia, Inggris dan juga Arab untuk pelajaran agama". ("Well, I don't think Acehnese is important because we ourselves speak Indonesian with*

our children. The school also requires them to speak Indonesian, English and also Arabic for religious lessons”). (WF2).

The statement in excerpt I.8 strongly indicates that Acehese is losing its significance in this family owing to the fact that Indonesian was more importantly valued and favored than their own ethnic language, Acehese.

### **3.7 Efforts to Maintain Acehese at Home**

With regard to the efforts made by the parents to maintain Acehese language by the families in Acehese homes, the data collected from interviews confirmed that only one family still used Acehese dominantly as the home language. Family 5 is identified to use Acehese dominantly to speak with their children at home along with Indonesian which was used as the second language. Despite the parents’ first language difference, Acehese dominated their linguistic repertoire since the influence of Acehese language from the wife’s side was quite substantial. In this family, the role of the wife as well as the mother of the children combined with the immediate family from her side which largely speaks Acehese is extensively accountable for the perseverance of the Acehese language. It is probably due to fact that mothers incline to spend their time nurturing their children more than fathers do. Therefore, children are more likely to need to speak their mother’s language rather than their father’s. The research by Ong (2021) also found that mothers play quite a big role in laying the foundation for their children’s heritage language maintenance by showing their children positive language attitudes.

The ideology of the parents regarding their awareness of the endangered of Acehese which occurred in their neighborhood is also seen as the contributing factor why Acehese was well-preserved in this family. From the beginning, they were aware that Acehese was likely in danger and they saw the need to preserve the language for their children since Indonesian according to them, could be picked up elsewhere. Not only Indonesian was automatically acquired from their father who was L1 Indonesian speaking, but it was also exposed in the surroundings where they lived and at school where they studied.

With regard to strategies used to retain Acehese language in this family, even though they suggested no specific strategies for home language preservation, they, however, mentioned the practically ongoing use of Acehese when speaking to their children despite their responses in Indonesian as the way for the maintenance of Acehese language in their family. The following excerpt illustrates the participant’s comment regarding the subject.

I.11 *“Strategi yang khusus tidak ada, cuma sebisa mungkin ngomongnya pakai Bahasa Aceh, biarpun nanti dia menjawabnya dalam Bahasa Indonesia, tidak ada masalah. Yang penting si anak ngerti apa yang kita arahkan, dia ngerti dan tau apa maksudnya”*. (“There is no specific strategy. But I always try to speak Acehese with my children. It’s not a problem to me if their responses are in Indonesian. The important thing is that they understand what I try to say and what I want them to do”). (WF5)

The except in I.10 suggests that in order to keep in touch with Acehese language, the wife in Family 5 appears to think that the language should be continuously used no matter what language their children chose to respond to as long as they still understood what she tried to convey.

## **4. Discussion**

The positive views of Acehnese as the heritage language have been expressed by the majority of parents in this study. They regarded the Acehnese language as their birthright from which the culture was rooted; therefore, they wanted their children to learn the language. Similarly, the Malays living in Singapore (Bakar, 2015) and Malaysia (Zulkifley & Muammar Ghaddafi, 2016; Pillai et al., 2015; Yusuf et al., 2013) also preserve their mother tongues as they remain connected to their ethnic heritage. This indicates that the preservation of the language is due to cultural identity (Yusuf et al., 2013). Becker (2013) states that heritage language has to be preserved because through it, is where the cultural identity is shaped and maintained. This finding, however, showed a contradiction to Sankar' (2011) findings when investigating Malaysian Iyers; the Iyer identity is not entirely reliant on Ayer their ethnic language, Tamil, because it is vented more through their cultural practices.

Acehnese language for some participants in this study is also important on the ground that the language helped them connect with their intrafamily members who speak Acehnese as their main language. Becker (2013) also discovers a similar finding that heritage/ethnic language is meant to sustain meaningful family communication. The Acehnese language for some other participants in this study functioned as a communication means to connect them with people outside their families such as for communicating with colleagues at work, or when assimilating with important people in the village where Acehnese is mostly used. In this situation, the language is regarded as a means to maintain communal or societal values instead of individual ones such as to identify or to express themselves (Abd-el-Jawad, 2006; Yusuf et al., 2013).

Most of the Acehnese people still use their heritage language in dealing with customs and traditions which involved rituals to perform the ordeals, such as in a wedding and to welcome a newborn in a family, or when one passes away. In maintaining these cultures and cultural identities, Acehnese feel much comfortable using the local language. This may trigger a speech community to speak in their mother tongue as Salami (2008) believes that language and culture are inextricably linked because it expresses and symbolizes culture. In addition, language is the medium by which religious rituals and beliefs are communicated (Bichani, 2015). In Acehnese traditions, those kinds of rituals are usually conducted in the Acehnese language since these rituals are rooted and passed on through this language.

Acehnese is also the language that is commonly used when gathering in social functions with other people who share the same social identity as a mark of familiarity and togetherness. According to Phinney et al. (2001), ethnic language serves as a means of self-identification, feelings of belonging and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group. Acehnese as the focus ethnic language in this study was stated worthy enough to be exposed to the children of these families for it represented their ethnic identity.

Another finding of this study shows that besides its significance as the heritage language and its function for connecting people in and outside the sphere of homes, the important use of the Acehnese language according to some other parents is also to express a particular feeling or emotion. This, in fact, confirms the concept of ethnic language as a language of instruction, scolding or correction, information, humor, and comfort as well as religious observance

(Landweer, 2000). It is also an adjacent channel for epitomizing a cultural identity related to positive emotions in social life, such as stories, laughter, and intimacy (Guardado, 2008). Meanwhile, all participants realized that the Guardado popularity of Acehese language is weakening (i.e., this is also reported by Al-Auwal, 2017). The failing use of the language became a positive motivation to the Acehese to wish for preserving it because they believe that it represents their identity; symbolize their pride and socialize with other Acehese people in their surroundings. As a result of culture and pride, speakers of a heritage language may have strong positive attitudes toward their language (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

Notwithstanding the participants' high outlooks in appreciating the Acehese language, their actions, on the other hand, are quite reversed. The demand of bilingual education (Indonesian, English and Arabic), are among the reasons for their reservation. Still, it appears to be paradoxical. On one side, they voiced the strong wish for their children to learn the language, on another side; they seemed reluctant and put effort to speak the language with their children. This corresponds to Aziz and Amery's (2016) statement that a positive attitude alone will not ensure the survival of a language because what people say does not always translate into their actions. They may claim that the language holds important values for them, but they do not speak it with their children (Aziz & Amery, 2016). Garrett (2010) takes a similar stance, arguing that one's language attitude does not always influence one's actual language practice. Despite the fact that parents value their minority language and are eager to pass it on to their children, not all take active steps to ensure their children's proficiency in it. This recent research finding also breaks Letsholo's (2009) belief that only when parents recognize the value of their ancestors' native language and the complementary culture it entails can they pass on the language successfully. Most parents in this current study viewed the Acehese language as significantly important and were aware of its values; they however failed to transmit the language to their children.

This study also revealed that the Acehese families do not put a lot of effort to maintain the language in the family. With only one family who holds strong beliefs and positive attitudes towards passing the Acehese language to their children, it may prove the claim. It is clear that the only strategy that the parent applied in Acehese language retention is the constant use of Acehese when speaking to their children at home. This recent finding is correlated with Muhammad's (2013) finding that the most visible effort that the parents can do in preserving the Acehese language is by speaking in Acehese to their children. In a similar vein, Chen (2011), Becker (2013), and Fan (2014) also found that passing on ethnic language by the parents themselves and using the language at home when speaking with children as two of many efforts the parents should apply for ethnic language conservation in the family.

This kind of practice according to Curtd-Christiansen (2009) and King et al. (2008) is a part of family language management which includes parental practical efforts to modify the children's language use. Among many other attempts in family language management to provide children with linguistic resources, the most important of all is interacting with their children in the target language (Kheirkhah, 2016; Spolsky, 2004).

## **5. Conclusion**

The Acehese language was highly valued for being the heritage language, connecting people in and outside families, expressing emotions, and needing for promotion of its less popularity.

Hence, only one family in this study speaks the Acehese language exclusively with their children. They used Acehese dominantly as the home language followed by Indonesian as the second language when interacting with the children at home. Despite the fact that most parents in this current study saw the Acehese language as important for expressing their Acehese identity and were aware of its values, they failed to pass the language on to their children.

The study has certain limitations. Interviews were conducted with twelve young parents with children from just one city, Banda Aceh, in Aceh Province. Due to the limited sample, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to all of the Acehese in Aceh. Another limitation is on the instrument used (i.e., interviews as part of the qualitative research method), hence, to gain more data in future related studies, researchers may consider constructing and using a comprehensive questionnaire to be distributed to larger sample sizes to gain more information on this topic.

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