

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD HERITAGE LANGUAGE

Akhmad Hairul Umam

*Tanri Abeng University*

*School of Management & Leadership, Tanri Abeng University*

*Jl. Swadarma Raya No. 58 Ulujami Jakarta Selatan 12250*

*Email : ahmad.umam@tau.ac.id*

### **Abstract**

*This research investigates the language attitude of university students in South Jakarta toward the heritage language and language maintenance by employing a questionnaire and an interview. The study also tries to find out students' efforts in maintaining heritage language and difficulties dealing with heritage language maintenance. Based on the research study most of the students have positive attitude that heritage language maintenance is very important. The challenges with heritage language maintenance are caused by many factors such as the environment, parent's policy, lack of exposure to learn and to practice the heritage language in speaking, listening, and reading. By taking the case study approach, the present study found that students whose parent from mixed culture tend to neglect heritage language. They prefer to use Indonesian language or other foreign languages instead of heritage language.*

**Keywords:** *heritage language, attitude, language maintenance*

## INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that Indonesia is well known as multicultural and multilingual nation with 718 heritage languages across Indonesia. This phenomenon makes Indonesia as one of the countries that has the largest number of heritage languages in the world. The word of heritage means things "belong to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, which come from the past and are still important (Fan, 2017). Heritage language as a language is often used at or inherited from home, and that is different from the language used in mainstream society (Pillai & Soh, 2015). In the Australian context, heritage languages are defined as languages other than English. Meanwhile in the United State of America, the term of heritage language has been used synonymously with community language, native language, and mother tongue to refer to an immigrant, indigenous, or ancestral language (Potowski & Shin, 2019).

A heritage language is also defined as a language minority for a small group of people within community or country learnt by its speakers at home. However, it is

never fully developed because its speakers grow up with a dominant language in which they become more competent (Valdés, 2000). Other scholars see heritage language as a continuum that ranges from fluent speakers to barely-speaking individuals of the home language. In some countries or cultures, they determine one's mother tongue by the ethnic group, a heritage language would be linked to the native language (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007).

Referring to above description on heritage language, there are factors affecting language attitude (Baker, 1988). The variables (factors) are gender, length of residence, attainment in school, ability and density of neighbourhood speaking Welsh language. Furthermore Baker put the situations as follows: ... attitude to Welsh was connected with gender (girls more favourable in attitude than boys), length of residence in Wales (a less favourable attitude tends to be held by immigrants), attainment in school (a more favourable attitude to Welsh is linked with higher attainment with some age...); ability (younger children of high ability tend to be more favourable), and the Welsh-speaking density of neighbourhood (the higher the density of Welsh speakers, the more favourable the attitude).

Study of heritage language has been written by many researchers such as Perceptions about One's Heritage Language: The Case of the Acehnese in Kampung Aceh and Malacca Portuguese- Eurasians in the Portuguese Settlement in Malaysia (Pillai & Soh, 2015), Chinese Language Learning Motivation: A study of Heritage and Non-heritage Learners (Wen, 2011). Language Shift, Cultural Maintenance and Ethnic Identity: A Study of a Minority Community: The Sindhis of Malaysia (Khemlani-David, 2015). Language Attitudes and Language Revival/Survival (Bell & Bell, 2013). In addition, Wong Fillmore (2000) as quoted in Sarkar research study conducted a qualitative study of one Chinese family, immigrated to America from China. This study reveals that immigrant families lose their family language. Moreover, members of that young Chinese family are likely to lose their first language easily in the early years of school. This shift has a very negative impact on their family relations, because the family members could not understand each other due to the different languages used by adults and children (Park & Sarkar, 2015).

The notion of language maintenance for this study refers to the situation where a speaker, group of speakers or a speech community continues to use their language in same despite competition with the dominant or majority language to become the main language. Brecht and Ingold make the point that knowing one's heritage language is not only gaining a language as a skill, but also as a national resource. They mention that the United States of America has an incredible need for individuals to not only be highly proficient in English, but also in many other languages. For example, more than 70 government agencies indicated a shortage of people with foreign language expertise (Brecht & Ingold, 2002). While both motivation and attitude are strongly linked each other. It could be claimed that students' motivation will be mostly determined by their attitude toward the culture of interest group, language, and learning surroundings (Nunan & Lamb, 1996).

There is a model that explains three main factors of language maintenance: 1. Status is a prominent factor in nearly all studies in language maintenance, where group of minority language speaker have relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift toward majority language. It is very closely linked with economic status and it is probably equally with respect to language maintenance. 2. Demographic: they concern with the number of member of linguistics minority group and their social distribution. The absolute number of speakers of certain language becomes important when it decreases. 3. Institutional support: it refers to the extent to which the language of minority group is represented in the various institution of a nation or community. Maintenance is supported when the minority language is used in various institutions of the government, church, cultural organization etc (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977).

With regards to above explanation, the present study would like to investigate and to explore the attitude of university students who come from multicultural and multilingual background at specific context specifically one university located in South Jakarta. The researcher also wants to find out students' efforts in maintaining heritage language and difficulties how they deal with heritage language maintenance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. To carry out this research, a questionnaire survey was employed as the prime data-collection instrument and interview. Both data from questionnaire and interview were analyzed accordingly using quantitative approach for descriptive analysis. The research was conducted in September 2019.

### **Participants**

The respondents of the research study are 40 students who are studying at private university located in South Jakarta. They are selected randomly as the example of the population. Four of them were invited to participate in interview to get a deeper understanding related to topic. In term of gender background, the participants consist of 22 females, 18 males. They come from different ethnics and regions such as Jakarta, Java, Sumatera, Sulawesi, Ambon and Maluku.

### **Instrument and data collection**

The data was collected through questionnaire and interview that consist of statements and questions to elicit student's attitude toward heritage language and language maintenance. There are 20 items on questionnaire as tools to investigate student's attitude toward heritage language and language maintenance using a Likert scale style. To find out detailed views from participants, the interview was conducted individually in a conversational place around the Campus. The interview taken a few days after questionnaire distribution was complete. The range of interview lasted 7-10 minutes.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Data analysis**

Students' responses toward the questionnaire were grouped based on related questions given with four scales such as strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree responses. After all scores were recorded and examined by using the frequency and percentage, researcher gave an interpretation toward the finding based on questionnaire and interview as the conclusion of this research.

### Percentages of students' responses

For detailed findings of this part will show how university students responded to the questionnaire items based on the categories used in the research. The following discussion will be presented in order started from the ability of heritage language skill, the attitude, preference of language use, and heritage language maintenance of respondents.

*Table 1. The Ability of Heritage Language*

NO	Statements	Frequency & Percentage			
		Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
1	The ability of your heritage language	0	10 25%	20 50%	10 25%
2	Your ability to speak heritage language	0	8 20%	20 50%	12 30%
3	Your ability to speak other languages	2 5%	7 17.5%	18 45%	13 32.5%

Based on the data table 1, clearly stated that the ability of heritage language of respondents mostly is categorized into *fair* with 50% and the rest is *good* and *poor* with a percentage only 10%. This data shows that their heritage language competency is not very good compared to other language skills. Meanwhile, if they are asked about the ability of other languages such as Indonesian or foreign languages, the respondents gave different options started with *very good* 5%, *good* 17.5%, *fair* 45% and *poor* 32.5%. Seemingly reading through the data above the distributions of competence for other languages are quite diverse compared to heritage language.

*Table 2. Attitude Toward Heritage Language*

NO	Questions /Statements	Frequency & Percentage			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree

1	Your opinion about the important of heritage language is preserved?	23 57.5%	7 17.5%	10 25%	0 0%
2	Heritage language is the local wealth that is very valuable and needs to be preserved	1 2.5%	26 65%	13 32.5%	0 0%
3	Using heritage languages can increase your love for ethnicity	15 37.5%	5 12.5%	13 32.5%	7 17.5%
4	What is the attitude of parents to the use of your heritage language?	2 5%	2 5%	35 87.5%	1 2.5%
5	Maintenance of heritage languages is much influenced by the family environment	5 12.5%	32 80%	3 7.5%	0 0%
6	The government plays an important role in efforts to preserve regional languages	15 37.5%	21 52.5%	3 7.5%	1 2.5%

In general, looking through table 2 most respondents had a positive response when asked about the importance of heritage languages preservation. More than one-half of all respondents, 57.5%, responded *strongly agree*. The majority 65% of respondents agreed to value the heritage language that need preserve and no one said disagrees. Their opinions on the use of heritage languages can increase their love for ethnics quite diverse. There were 37.5% responded strongly agree, 32.5% were *neutral*, 12% *agree*. And only 17.5% chose to be *disagree*.

Parents' attitudes towards the use of heritage languages the numbers of participants were very high at 87.5% they were *neutral*. This means that their parents do not have concern for the heritage language passed to their children. Relatively the same number when prompted the question of heritage languages maintenance is much influenced by the family.

Responding to efforts to preserve the language heritage, 52% of respondents agreed that government had a role in preserving heritage languages. The data shows the message that there is an incentive for the government to act and provide support in favor of maintaining heritage languages through policies that can increase the interest and ability for the next generation.

*Table 3. Preference & Domain of Language Use*

N O	Questions	Frequency & Percentage			
		Heritage Language	Indonesia	Foreign Language	Nothing
1	What language do you fill most closely to?	17 42.5%	23 57.5%	0 0%	0 0%
2	What language do you feel most comfortable when speaking?	22 55%	17 42.5%	1 2.5%	0 0%
	When meeting with someone who comes from same ethnic what language do you use?	25 62.5%	15 37.5%	0 0%	0 0%
4	What language do you use when talking to your parents?	26 65%	12 30%	2 5%	0 0%
5	What language do you use when you are in the school environment?	0 0%	37 92.5%	3 7.5%	0 0%

On the table 3 contains the choice of language that the respondent chooses in different domains. to heritage languages with 42.5%. When they were asked what language, they felt most comfortable in communicating, heritage language was at a high position 55% and Indonesian with 42.5%. This data is in line with the choice of language when meeting someone from the same ethnicity, the majority of respondents chose to speak heritage

language with 65%. While the use of Indonesian at formal education such as school, the majority chose Indonesia language with 92.5%. The high use of Indonesian in educational institution is in line with government policies that make Indonesian language as a formal language and an introduction to teaching and learning activities across Indonesia.

*Table 4. Heritage Language Maintenance*

N O	Questions	Frequency & Percentage			
		Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant
1	How important is the heritage language taught to the next generation?	36 90%	3 7.5%	1 2.5%	0 0%

If we look at table 4 above, the use of heritage languages is not too high. There were 42.5% respondents acknowledged that they are rare using heritage languages. This is in line with the maintenance of language through reading activities that are very rare choices, namely 95%. Relatively higher maintenance of heritage languages through watching TV or listening to radio in which the respondents 70% said rarely and the rest are 30%. It can be concluded that the maintenance of heritage languages for respondents is very low. Thus, it is possible in the future, even though they have studied and used to have heritage language skill will disappear by itself due to the low exposure. This hypothesis is supported by with the opinion of Giles, Bourhis and Talyor (1977) that mentions the main factors that encourage the maintenance of heritage languages.

*Table 5. Reasons for Using Heritage Language*

N O	Questions	Frequency & Percentage			
		Family do not teach	No Interlocutor	Not to be called tacky	Others
1	The reason you do not use heritage language?	15 37.5%	25 62.5%	0 0%	0 0%



*Table 6. Reasons for Not Using Heritage Language*

N O	Questions	Frequency & Percentage			
		Able to talk with family	To know more heritage culture	Travel to heritage culture	Others
1	Why do you still use heritage language?	15 37.5%	17 42.5%	5 12.5%	3 7.5%

*Table 7. The Important of Heritage Language*

N O	Questions	Frequency & Percentage			
		Heritage Language	Indonesia	Foreign Language	Nothing
1	What language do you fill most closely to?	17 42.5%	23 57.5%	0 0%	0 0%
2	What language do you feel most comfortable when speaking?	22 55%	17 42.5%	1 2.5%	0 0%
3	When meeting with someone who comes from same ethnic what language do you use?	25 62.5%	15 37.5%	0 0%	0 0%
4	What language do you use when talking to your parents?	26 65%	12 30%	2 5%	0 0%
5	What language do you use when you are in the school environment?	0 0%	37 92.5%	3 7.5%	0 0%

Tables 5 and 6 ask the reasons keep using heritage languages. They continue to use heritage language, 42.5% of all respondents due to willingness to know more their ancestral culture. There were 37.5% using pragmatic reasons for being able to talk to family. This means that even though they rarely use their heritage tongue, the majority of respondents have a desire to know the local language and culture of their ancestors. Respondents did not use the heritage language awhile in Jakarta due to no interlocutor who has same competence with 62.5% and 37.5% of blaming that their parents did not teach it. Positively if we look at table 7, the majority of respondent 90% think that it is very important to teach heritage

language to next generation.

### **The Use of Heritage Language**

The information obtained from the interview focuses on findings needed to explore further such as why the language skills of respondents are fair, the perceptions of language use and the domain. Based on interview the majority of the parents came from mixed ethnic background whose language was different from each other. The following excerpts are the examples of interviews with respondents.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*“Sejak kecil saya sudah diajari bicara bahasa Indonesia walaupun ibu saya berasal dari etnis Sunda dan Bapak Sulawesi. Orang tua mendorong saya belajar bahasa asing dari pada bahasa daerah. Saya bisa bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris. Menurut Bapak saya penguasaan bahasa Inggris membantu memiliki masa depan yang lebih cerah”. Almira*

The quote above, it looks there is a pragmatic interest that encourages respondent to learn and to acquire the language. According to Almira’s family heritage language is no value compared to other languages. Her parents are reluctant to teach and practice the heritage language at home. This is very understandable why Almira can’t speak heritage language due to her family do not give her a chance to learn and practice. Almira follow her parents advise to learn other languages instead of heritage language.

#### **Excerpt 2**

*“Orang tua saya berasal dari etnis Sunda & Jawa dan saya lahir dan besar di Jakarta. Orang tua saya sehari-hari berbicara menggunakan bahasa Indonesia. Saya tidak punya kesempatan untuk belajar bahasa daerah seperti Bapak/Ibu.” Dindu.*

Even though both parents came from different ethnicities, apparently her family did not give access to her children to practice their heritage languages. The parent prefers to choose Indonesian language (lingua franca) as daily language tool perceived more easily and understandable by both parents and the child.

#### **Excerpt 3**

*“Saya tinggal di Bogor. Walaupun Bapak Sunda dan ibu Betawi, saya menggunakan Bahasa Indonesia dalam interaksi dengan keluarga. Saya tidak punya kesempatan belajar bahasa*

*daerah, mengingat lingkungan saya berada menggunakan Bahasa Indoensia dlaam komunikasi termasuk kedua orang tua sendiri” Fauzan*

What expressed by Fauzan was actually a common finding found at mixed ethnic parents who tend not to use heritage languages. Furthermore, they prefer to use Indonesian language at home.

Excerpt 4

*“Saya sehari-hari bicara Bahasa Dayak. Bapak dari Jambi dan Ibu Cina Dayak. Sejak kecil saya sudah menggunakan Bahasa Dayak termasuk juga Bapak walupun dia punya daerah tersendiri. Bapak saya sepertinya mengalah untuk tidak mengajari saya tentang bahasa daerahnya” Irna*

What happened to Irna was different from previous informants who used Indonesian in their daily lives. Irna and her mother’s language that is used by the majority of people who stay in Kalimantan. However, because of moving to Jakarta to study, the frequency of heritage languages uses getting less naturally.

## CONCLUSION

In general, the study reveals that majority of respondents are having problems with their heritage language. This can be approved by their language competence in which 50% of respondents are just fair below the standard of ‘good’. The respondents acknowledged that mostly they do not have access and opportunities to practice and maintain their language. When having an interview with respondent’s representative, there are a few whose parents are from different ethnics directly learning Indonesian language instead of heritage language due to parents’ policy. So, it is understandable if their heritage language skills is poor and tend to passive. However, the participants have very positive concern toward the important of heritage language preservation and being taught to young generation. Most of the respondents agree that maintaining heritage language is important. Knowing one’s heritage language not only develop a healthy cultural identity but also build connections with their family members.

It is important to note that analysis of this study is only based on the data from one university with only 40 people as representative of the population. Therefore, this research is only intended to capture the snapshot of university students’ attitude in South Jakarta. In

short, this finding is not generalizing the other students due to different demographic traits.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, C. (1988). *Key issue in bilingualism and bilingual education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Bell, J., & Bell, J. (2013). Language attitudes and language revival /survival. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 4632. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2013.794812>
- Brecht, R. D., & Ingold, C. W. (2002). Tapping a National Resource : Heritage Languages in the Tapping a National Resource: Heritage Languages in the United States. *ERIC Cleaninghouse on Language and Linguistics Washington DC*, 1–8.
- Fan, L. (2017). *Teachers ' beliefs and classroom practices related to students ' heritage language and culture*.
- Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, R. Y. &. (1977). *Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations*. London, UK: Academic Press.
- Khemlani-david, M. (2015). Language shift , cultural maintenance , and ethnic identity ; a study of a minority Community : the Sindhis of Malaysia. *Walter de Gruyter*, 130, 67–76.
- Nunan, D., & Lamb, C. (1996). *The self-directed teacher: managing the learning process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Park, S. M., & Sarkar, M. (2015). Parents ' Attitudes Toward Heritage Language Maintenance for Their Children Maintain the Heritage Language: A Case Study of Korean-Canadian Immigrants. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, (August). <https://doi.org/10.2167/lcc337.0>
- Pillai, S., & Soh, W. (2015). Perceptions about One ' s Heritage Language : The Case of the Acehese in Kampung Aceh and Malacca Portuguese-Eurasians in the Portuguese Settlement in Malaysia. *KEMANUSIAAN*, 22(2), 67–91.
- Polinsky, M., & Kagan, O. (2007). Heritage Languages: In the 'Wild' and in the Classroom. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1(5), 368–395. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818x.2007.00022.x>
- Potowski, K., & Shin, S. J. (2019). Heritage Language Instruction. *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Learning*, (2003), 673–695. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108333603.029>

Valdés. (2000). *Introducion In Spanish for Native Speakers. Harcourt College, I*, 1–32.

Wen, X. (2011). Chinese Language Learning Motivation: A Comparative Study of Heritage and Non-heritage Learners. *Heritage Language Journal*, 8(3), 41–66.