

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE OF NIAS LANGUAGE IN GUNUNG SITOLI CITY – NIAS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the language maintenance of Nias Language in Gunung Sitoli Nias. The maintenance of vernacular has always been a challenging study for investigation. It has its own challenge as it stands among the national language and foreign language. These days vernaculars seem to be facing a threat to be maintained in their domains. The hit of English referred as a prestigious language at schools and Indonesian Language as a communication language has signed of a language shift. Nias language as a vernacular is one of the vernaculars that is needed to be preserved which have withstood the cultural strength among the speakers. The older speakers tend to speak Indonesian and only use Nias Language among their generation. The young generation comprehend the Nias Language through their listening during the parents spoken. This circumstance makes Nias Language remains a major concern for Niasnese parents, linguists, educators, language activists and for immigrant families, who need to support and maintain their vernaculars for the next generation.

Keywords: *Language Maintenance, Nias Language*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pemeliharaan bahasa Bahasa Nias di Gunung Sitoli Nias. Pemeliharaan bahasa daerah selalu menjadi studi yang menantang untuk diselidiki. Ini memiliki tantangan tersendiri karena berdiri di antara bahasa nasional dan bahasa asing. Saat ini bahasa daerah tampaknya menghadapi ancaman untuk dipertahankan di domain mereka. Kemunculan bahasa Inggris yang disebut sebagai bahasa bergengsi di sekolah dan Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa komunikasi telah menandai pergeseran bahasa. Bahasa Nias sebagai bahasa daerah adalah salah satu bahasa daerah yang perlu dilestarikan yang telah bertahan dari kekuatan budaya di antara para penuturnya. Penutur yang lebih tua cenderung berbicara bahasa Indonesia dan hanya menggunakan Bahasa Nias di antara generasi mereka. Generasi muda memahami Bahasa Nias melalui pendengaran mereka selama orang tua berbicara. Keadaan ini membuat Bahasa Nias tetap menjadi perhatian utama bagi orang tua Nias, ahli bahasa, pendidik, aktivis bahasa dan keluarga imigran, yang perlu mendukung dan mempertahankan bahasa daerah mereka untuk generasi berikutnya.

Kata Kunci: *Pemeliharaan Bahasa, Bahasa Nias*

Introduction

The advancement of human civilization and the development of technology, in some situations found by researchers indicate that the Nias language is only preserved to the first generation, the rest of the second generation uses Indonesian and mixes it with the Nias language itself. Parents only

speak the local language at home with their spouse or with people who are their age and older than them, but when talking to their children they switch to Bahasa Indonesia. In Gunungsitoli city at present there are many children who communicate with their parents using Indonesian with a Nias accent. Researchers once asked if they were taught Nias local language at home and they said no, they just understood it naturally because their parents and other older relatives often spoke the local language. In addition, at religious activities the priest or pastor often still speaks Nias and they gradually began to understand the Nias Regional Language itself. They also know Nias local language from traditional ceremonies that are still strong and preserved to this day.

The inclusion of English subjects makes parents proud of their children who are capable of speaking English have defined a kind of achievement and pride for them to their children, so that children are often praised if they are good at English and often scorned if they are not good at English. This phenomenon is of course worrying about the sustainability of the existence of local languages, especially in the younger generation. Pride in the local language must be instilled since childhood and passed down to the next generation. For this reason, the researcher wants to find out more about the role of Nias local language by the younger generation as native Nias speakers.

One of the places where the young generation of Nias gather is in the school environment. The researcher in this case took the research location at Gunungsitoli City. In addition, it is hoped that the younger generation at will find out the results of this research to be used as material and reference in the preservation of the Nias regional language itself. Furthermore, it is hoped that the results of this research will arouse the feelings and change the attitudes of the parents of the younger generation of Nias.

Language Preservation from Fishman's point of view (1991) states that language preservation is an effort to maintain the existence of a language in order to stay alive amidst the pressure of the dominant language. Language preservation can be done through intergenerational transmission, bilingual education, and language policy. This indicates that the generation of local language speakers together with the government or authorized officials who can issue policies on local languages must be vigilant and aware of the importance of preserving local languages.

In line with that Fishman, Giles, Bourhis & Taylor (1977) developed the Language Vitality Theory within the framework of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory which states that the sustainability of a language is influenced by three main factors, namely:

- a. Status: The social, economic, and symbolic value of the language.
- b. Demographics: Number of speakers, geographical distribution, and community concentration.
- c. Institutional support: Presence of the language in educational institutions, media, government, etc.

Based on the theory above, it can be concluded that if the vitality of a language is high, then the chances of the language to be maintained will also be high. Spolsky (2004) states that language preservation is highly dependent on language policy which includes:

- a. Language ideology: Society's attitude towards language
- b. Language practice: Daily language use
- c. Language management: Planned efforts (usually by governments/institutions) to maintain a language

The Maintenance of vernacular also has been done by Agnes Maria Diana Rafael (2020) where She found that the intensity of the use of Tetun language (BT) in NTT is still quite high in Manusak village. There are four factors of BT preservation, namely (a) the factor of loyalty to the mother tongue, (b) the factor of pride in BT, (c) the factor of family environment, and (d) the factor of migration and regional concentration.

By this research, it is hoped that parents will realize that their local language must be passed down to the next generation, and the younger generation must be willing to learn and preserve it. And the general public also knows how the development of the use of Nias language in the original area of speakers whether it still survives and is used by the younger generation or switches to another language. The shift from the mother tongue to the national language is certainly an indication of a shift in the use of local languages in the area of native speakers. However, if the local language still survives to the young generation then Nias Language is considered to have a good level of language maintenance. Hopefully the results of this study are expected that the government will continue to participate in the role of maintaining and preserving regional languages, especially Nias Language as one of Indonesia's cultural treasures. Local languages are our shared responsibility and must be preserved.

Method

The research method used is descriptive qualitative which aims to understand the behavior of a person or group of people in a particular situation that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. The research technique is done through observation or observation that is needed directly and records everything related to the research. Then interviews were conducted to obtain very accurate data sourced directly from the research site and conduct literature studies by studying various Sociolinguistic books on Language Retention studies such as from Janet Holmes, James Milroy and so on and looking for references from various sources on the internet.

Result and Discussion

Ethnic Identity

The language maintenance for many sociolinguistic scholars has a significant relationship with the maintenance and retention of one's identity (Clyne, 1991, Fishman, 1989, 1991, 2000; Hatoss, 2003). As cited out by Fishman (1989), the minority language is an important tool for expressing cultural heritage and ethnic identity. Significantly there is a strong bond between language and identity. According to Fishman, the loss of the language may also lead to a loss of identity. In line with that Supriyadi (2020) discusses the dynamics of language, including changes, shifts, and efforts to preserve it. Currently, the position and role of Nias language on the island of Nias is not regard as a very strong in the household, customs and religious environment. As the researcher have indepth interview it found that they regard themselves as Indonesia people, so they will speak Indonesian language not Nias language anymore, except if they speak to elder people. They also assumed that in the capital city it is better to speak Indonesian Language, as they just use Nias language when they go to villages.

Family Role

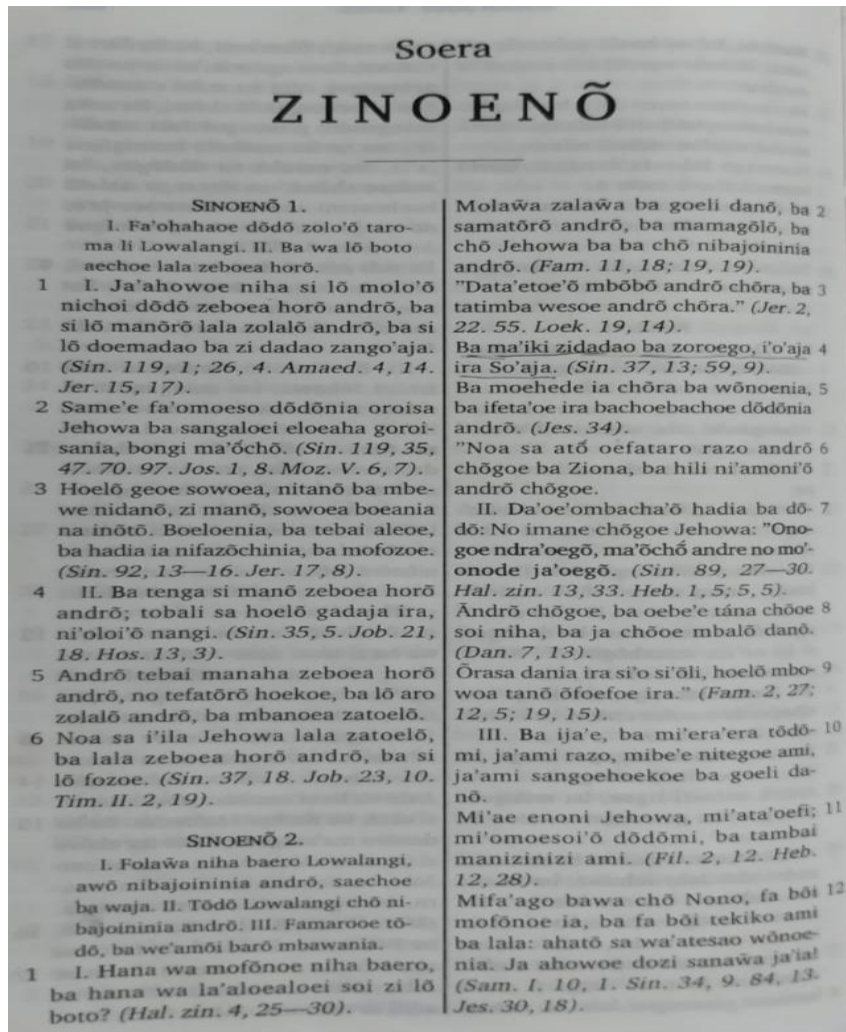
The home is the only domain where parents have main control in terms of interactions to their children. Children are exposed to the majority language of their parents outside the home domain in places such as schools and other places. As indicated by Clyne (2003, 2005), language is not going to survive another generation unless it is transmitted in the home, within the family.

The family of Nias speakers tend to speak Nias Language between them, the mother and the father. But when they speak to the children they shifted into Indonesian Language. When the researcher asked for the reason they said that it is better for their children to know Indonesian language first as it would make them easier to speak it at schools with their friends and teachers. And some of them referred it to make their children able to learn lessons at school. As they regard the Nias Language itself would be easily to known as the time goes by and as it has become the major language at home. Another reason found is that the parents think that Nias Language won't be useful when their children have an education out of the Nias island. The Nias parents also tend to refer that they live in a capital city, where the circumstances are about to develop and if the Nias language is not spoken in the city that would be fine. In this part the researcher asked the children whether they know Nias language well or not. And mostly they said they know the meaning but to speak it sometimes they still need effort in arranging the sentences.

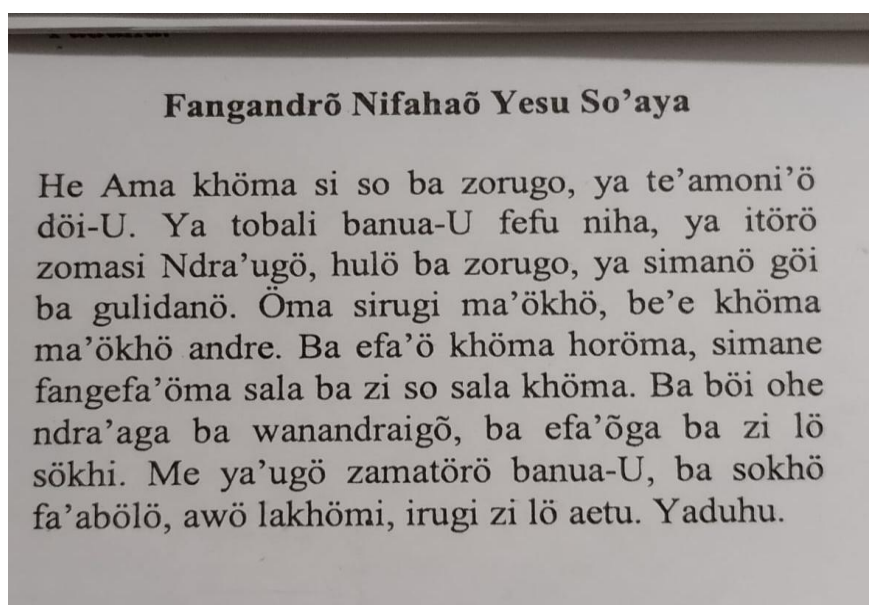
Religion factor

Nias young generation seems to know Nias Language well from home context and while they are at a religion activity. At church during a religion activity, there are 4 (four) shifts of praying activity which are twice in the morning, once at noon, and once in the evening. From the four shifts, only 1 (one) shift is using Nias language, meanwhile the rest (three shifts) is held in Indonesia language. During the three shifts of the religion activity, the prayers scripts shared in papers, the prayers songs, the speech by the priest are in Indonesian Language.

The congregation mostly are dominated by teenagers and adults as the parents. And at 11 A.M. the religion activity is held in Nias Language. The congregation mostly is elderly or very old people. The bible is printed in Indonesian and used during the religion activity at church three times in a day as mentioned previously. Meanwhile the bible and the praying copy in paper which are printed in Nias Language are used once in a day as seen below.



Picture 1. The Bible in Nias Language version
(The verse of Psalm / Mazmur)



Picture 2. The Praying Copy in Nias language version
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(Doa Bapa Kami)

Demographics

The geographical concentration of community languages in a particular area can be very helpful for language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; Clyne 2005; Holmes, 2013; Lee, 2013; Sanchez-Castro & Gil, 2009). In line with that Fishman (1991) said that community languages were better well-maintained by minority groups who were more concentrated within certain geographical areas than those that were more dispersed.

But although Nias island is in a specific area, which is separated from Sumatera island, the spread of information and technology have brought impacts in their language behaviour. As cited in Bangun, M. A., Nasution, et al (2024) shows that social media has opened up opportunities for greater accessibility for the Indonesian language in the current era of globalization. However, this influence has also brought many changes in the correct grammar and spelling of Indonesian.

In GunungSitoli Niasnese are concentrated in an island where the community speak Nias Language through it has many dialects. It indicates that the former Nias community was successful in maintaining the Nias language. The reason is related to the strength in numbers of population and also the Niasnese maintained daily contact within their community surrounding them. But as time goes by, the Nias Language speakers tend to change their behaviour affected by the social media development. The teenagers would like to speak Indonesian language rather than Nias language. And Nias language is mostly spoken in villagers or remote areas in Nias island.

Institutional Support

The maintenance of languages can be influenced by the availability or the lack of governmental or non-governmental institutions such as media, religious and educational organisations. The role of institution contributes to the maintenance of the community language while their absence may lead to a language shift or even loss. These institutional support factors are an integral part in most language maintenance theories and models (Baker, 2011; Clyne, 2003, 2005; Fishman, 2000).

In line with that Aljamaliah S. N. M., & Darmadi, D. M. (2021) in investigating the use of Sundanese found that the current phenomenon is that teenagers who are local language maintainers have started to rarely use local languages. The position of regional languages has decreased, including the use of Sundanese. This can be influenced by the use of a second language, both Indonesian and foreign languages. Teenagers think that Indonesian and foreign languages have a more prestigious position than regional languages.

The interaction in GunungSitoli city develops an open communication with three languages. The mostly spoken during the class interaction is Indonesian Language, then Nias Language and the last is English. Many teachers teach in Indonesian Language as the lesson books are in Indonesian language. The interaction among the students and the teacher in the class is Indonesian language. The interaction among the students in the class is Indonesian language and rarely mix with Nias language when they are outside of the class. They speak Indonesian Language with Nias dialect, sometimes it heard awkward for those who are not living in Nias. As they speak Indonesian in a formal way, they seldom use "kau" instead of "kamu", put the "ba" when inquires something, and the term "bale" regards as a close relationship with the audience. And several kindergartens which are identified as the best ones in Gunungsitolis has put English as their opening prayer at school.

Conclusion

The Nias community in Nias island seems to refer their Nias language as an abandon language, it would only useful in villages or only when they are having traditional party like wedding, funeral, etcetera. In there the children, teenagers, and Muslim and non-Muslim Nias people would speak Nias language. The use of Nias language seems to shifted to Indonesian language as it covers much areas as mentioned above. The younger generation seem to assume it as a normal thing as the information and any languages spread all around the world supported by the technology which mostly in English and Indonesian Language.

The researcher regards it as a threat for a language shift which could pointing to a language death or loss someday. As the researcher found the matters and findings, the researcher would like to inform the audiences especially the local government to be aware of this circumstance. And for the centre government to pay attention to preserve the Nias culture and language. It hopefully next the government and institutionals and schools would like to make many efforts in enhancing and bouncing the awareness of the Nias language maintenance among parents and teenagers. Based on the research, it can be concluded that the Nias language maintenance is at low level, then the chances of Nias language in Gunung Sitoli to be maintained also lose that could create a threat as it will loss or death due to the language shift itself. Indonesian language has taken part as a new symbolic for the society replacing Nias language, meanwhile the English as foreign language has taken an important part regarded as a new prestigious language that must be learnt the young generation.

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