

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN LEARNING HERITAGE LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY OF ACEHNESE FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

The old pattern of learning the heritage language has been disturbed because nowadays, some parents do no longer speak their heritage to their children as a mother tongue that consequently may result in a language shift among Acehnese children. The study aims to find out the role of parents in speaking Acehnese as a mother tongue to their children and how speaking Acehnese as a mother tongue for the children impacts on language maintenance and language shift among Acehnese children. This research is a case study that employed qualitative description. The data was collected based on interviews and observation. The informants of the study are six Acehnese people who live in Blang Puntuet village, one of the suburbs in Lhokseumawe city. The informants consist of three female parents and three Acehnese youths aged over 16 years old. The result of the study shows that from three families, one parent is actively speaking Acehnese to their children, one other parent is actively speaking Indonesian to their children, and the rest one is actively speaking Acehnese only to one of her three daughters. Therefore, the study indicates that once the old pattern is disturbed the ability of the children in speaking their heritage language is also disturbed because they are no longer actively speaking Acehnese in home in speech community.

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INTRODUCTION

A heritage language is a reflection of identity of its speakers (Amery, 2019) and part of the cultural diversity of the people in Indonesia. Thus, the heritage language reflects the cultural rules and values contained in the identity of a speaker as part of an entity from the plurality of society in Indonesia. Acehnese as one of the heritage languages of Indonesian reflect identity of Acehnese people who have different rules and values from other ethnics of Indonesia.

Acehnese language as one of the heritage languages in Indonesia is spoken by majority of Acehnese residing in coastal areas such as Pidie, Lhokseumawe, and Aceh Utara. Acehnese language is the majority spoken language along with other heritage languages such as Bahasa Kluet, Aneuk Jamee, Devayan and Alas. Therefore, Acehnese is only spoken and not written language because in most occasion, Indonesian as a national language is used for both written and spoken in formal and non-formal domain in

Acehnese speech community and among non-native speakers of Acehnese (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2021).

Through the heritage language, the culture is passed down from generation to generation. Thus, if a heritage language becomes extinct, then a culture as part of Indonesia's wealth and diversity also becomes extinct. Likewise, with the Acehnese language which is one of the heritage languages in the Aceh Province which is located on the island of Sumatra and in the westernmost part of Indonesia where the cultural values, and historical values of the Acehnese people are strongly influenced by the values of Islamic teachings in their daily lives that is reflected in Acehnese language. Therefore, the Acehnese language and characteristics of its speakers are an inseparable unit that reflects the distinct nature of Acehnese community and its region. Meanwhile, Indonesia is a national lingua franca and formal language for medium of instruction in formal sector particularly in education. Therefore, Indonesia language as a national language is also crucial for Acehnese community to be able to communicate with Indonesian people with vernacular language because Indonesian language is the symbol unity for Indonesia people with multicultural backgrounds.

A language will remain and sustain as long as its speakers keep using it but a language is extinct if the domain use of the language is shrinking or keep declining and the speakers are reluctance to use it in speech community. Due the status of Indonesian language as a national language, the Indonesia is considered as a symbol for prosperity by its speakers and has higher prestige than Acehnese community. Consequently, Indonesian become the dominant language among Acehnese community both in formal and in non-formal domain (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022a)). It is a growing trend that Acehnese parents are favor to speak Acehnese to their children at an early age due to various reasons such as educational pressure (Teuku Alamsyah, et.al, 2015; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b) and the symbol of Indonesian language as prosperous people (Ewing, 2014). Previously, Acehnese was learnt by children at their homes pre-school period as first language and children later learnt Indonesia as the second language at school, and from the environment outside their home (Muhammad, 2013; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b) This is in line with the statement from Ewing (2014) that nowadays, Indonesian children do not speak their heritage language as their mother tongue but instead acquire Indonesia as their first language which disturb the old pattern of using heritage language in home domain. Consequently, many Acehnese children no longer speak Acehnese fluently as a means of communication in their daily basis or even do not speak Acehnese at all with their parents (Aziz & Aulia, 2021; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b). Previous study has been focused on the attitude of the parents and young Acehnese in speak Acehnese in family domain (Al-Auwal, 2017; Aziz et al., 2021; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022a, 2022b), therefore this study aims to fill the gap on the parents' role in Acehnese language learning to their children as a mother tongue. This study tends to find out the influence of parents' role in speaking Acehnese at early age. The study focuses on the following issues:

1.How does the parents' role influence their children's speaking ability in Acehnese language?

2.How does learning heritage language in early age among Acehnese children impact on Acehnese language maintenance and language shift?

Sociolinguistics is a study on the human beings as part of society in using the language (Spolsky, 1998) and is part of an effort to gain knowledge about parents' role in speaking Acehese to their young children at home as a mother tongue and the role of parents in maintaining the use of to their children that influence the attitude parents in the use of the Acehese language in the future. In addition, this research is also a step to obtain information about the problems that cause the young Acehese to be reluctant to speak Acehese as a means of communication on their daily basis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language shift is the use of one language is more dominant than another language, or speakers of a particular language choose not to use their mother tongue and prefer another language as a means of communication in various conditions and situations. Language shift occurs in a bilingual society or a society that uses two or more languages as a means of communication during the process of social contact. In other words, language speakers prefer one language as a means of communication and abandon the other. Language shift can be interpreted as a partial replacement of a language or language abandonment caused by another language that is more dominant (Al-Auwal, 2017). Baker (2011) defines language shift as the loss in the language proficiency or decreasing use of the particular language in different domains. There are several factors that cause language shift, namely bilingual factors or the use of more than one language in social contacts of a society, social and economic factors, political factors, attitudes and values adopted by the speaker, and migration factors (Baker, 2011).

One of the factors causing the threat of the existence of heritage languages is the existence of a national official language policy by the Indonesian government where the official language of the state is Indonesian. This policy has a negative impact on the sustainability of heritage languages (Ansori, 2019) and the pressure of the dominant language in a multilingual society. Language can be managed within a national policy framework using the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, but this concept ultimately causes the threat of the existence of heritage languages (Arka, 2015). Acehese people use Indonesian to signify the prestige position of the speaker's social status in the midst of society in the community because of the status of Indonesian as the official language and national language (Al-Auwal, 2017; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2021).

Many linguists state that mastery of language from an early age provides several advantages that are not necessarily obtained after a young age, including the achievement of a perfect accent or dialect of the language being studied. The golden period when a young age makes it easier to master language is called the "critical period" (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000). The Critical Period (CP) is a period where learning a language is very easy to master and can get the best results compared to learning outside the age of CP. The age considered during the CP period is under 9 years of age. Pulvermüller & Schumann (1994) explain that the level of brain flexibility is much reduced at puberty and will not return to its original state as before puberty and this condition will be permanent. Therefore, mastery of language with perfect dialects or accents is not possible at the age after puberty, especially when learned in adulthood (Krasen, 1982, as cited in Singleton, 2007). This statement is in line with Lenneberg (1967, as cited in Marinova-Todd et al.,

2000) that puberty causes biological changes in a child related to the ability to process language on the left side of the brain. Therefore, the period before the onset of puberty, neurologic development of the brain occurs very quickly. Lamendella later (1977, as cited in Marinova-Todd et al., 2000) introduced the term sensitive period in which language acquisition will be perfect if it is done only in childhood.

Several studies have proven that the introduction of a second language from a young age can perfect the dialect pronunciation of the language being studied (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014) so that the introduction of Indonesian at an early age can threaten the sustainability of heritage language as a mother tongue. This can be found from the research conducted by Rahman et al. (2017) on the influence of age in language learning which shows that the language taught from a young age will produce the perfect accent or dialect of the language.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a case study that employed a qualitative descriptive method. The data was gathered based on the result of the unstructured interviews and observation to the informants as the two main instruments in collecting the data. The interviews were implemented with three Acehese female parents from Desa Blang Punteut, one of the suburbs in Lhokseumawe city, Aceh Province, Indonesia. However, this study only focuses on female parents. The interviews were conducted with the informants without the time and day agreed prior to the interview. This is because the availability of the time of the informants are unpredictable, however, before the interview, they were acknowledged that this data was collected for study purposes. Therefore, the interviews were done either in the morning or the evenings or during the weekends. The informants were selected based on Chambers and Trudgill's (1980) criteria, which is NORMF that stands for non-mobile, older, rural, male, and female. The non-mobile is a permanent community that has not migrated from the research area meanwhile the rural means who have lived in the village. The female informants were selected to find out the language pattern used by the parents to their children at an early age or as a mother tongue. Questions pertaining to the pattern of heritage language used as a mother tongue by the parents including the question of "What language do you speak at home before your children going to school?" The interviews were recorded using voice recorder from smartphone. The informants were 38 years old and above, therefore, all their children are already in school.

All parents are native speakers of Acehese. The informants aged 38, 45, and 47 years old. The first female parent aged 43 years old has three female children aged 21, 17, and 7 years old. The second informants age 47 years old and has 6 children aged 23, 20, 17, 15, 10, and 8 years old with 2 females and 4 males. The third informant age 38 years old and has 2 two daughters aged 19 dan 17 years old.

The observation had been conducted by interacting with the informants for long time because the first author is also the neighbor and friend of the informants. Questions that were posed during the interview and communication with the informants were questions related to the time of the informants speak Acehese to their children, the current language used by their children in their home and outside of the homes, and the frequent usage of the Acehese language between the parents and their children. The parents were also asked how, particularly they used the Acehese language in their home and outside of their homes with their children. Furthermore, the data were transcribed, decoded, and classified based on Miles et al., (2014). The informants were coded as follows:

Inf1.6: informant first. 6 children

Inf2.3: informant second. 3 children

Inf3.2.: informant third. 2 children

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Broken Old Patterns and Language Shift among Children

The result of the study shows that overall, the patterns of learning Acehese by informants' children of Inf2.3 and Inf3.2 are as follows:

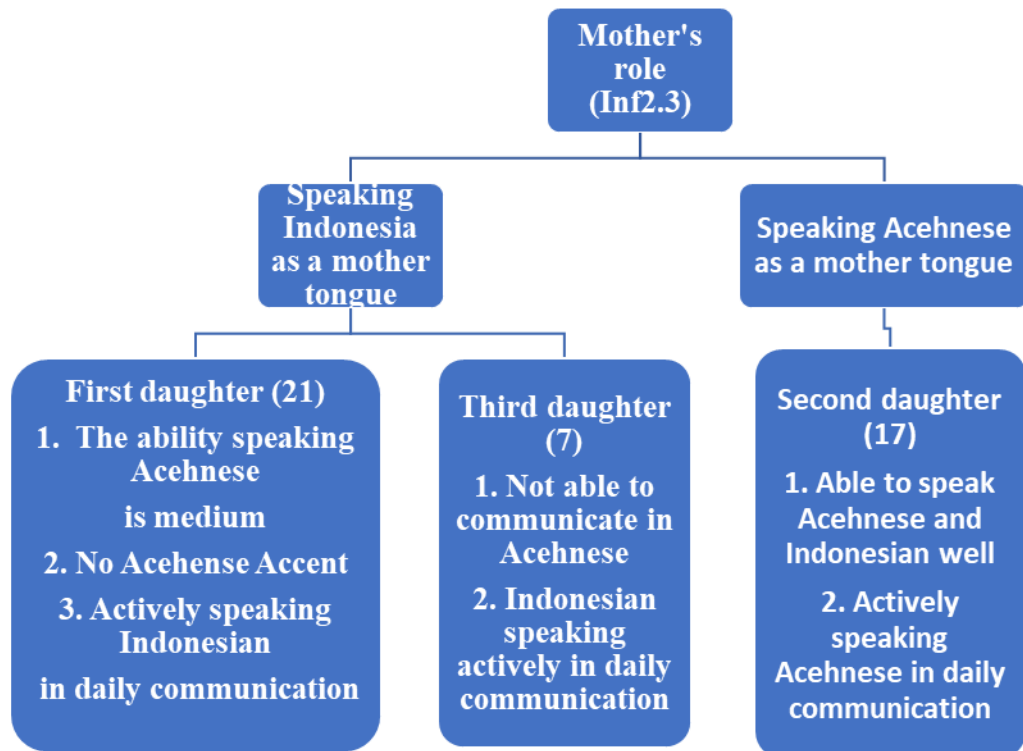


Figure 1: The Learning patterns of mother tongue used by Inf2.3

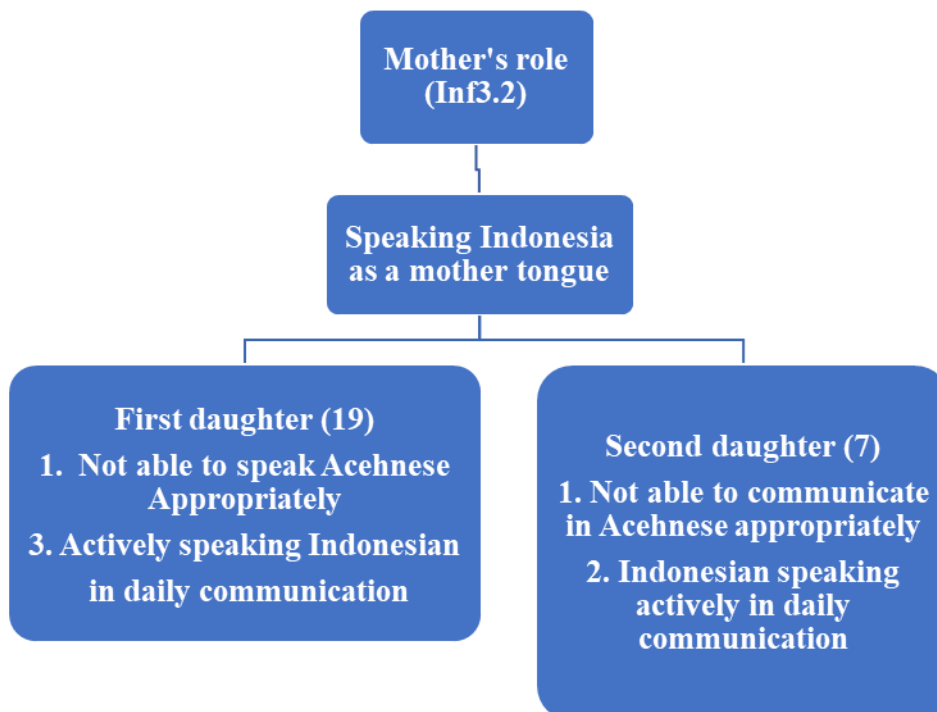


Figure 2: The Learning patterns of mother tongue used by Inf3.2

According to chart 1, the Inf2.3 uses Indonesian as a mother tongue to her first and third daughters massively before school age. Therefore, her first and third children are actively speaking Indonesian instead of Acehnese. The Inf2.3 mixed both Indonesian and Acehnese languages on daily communication with her first and second daughters however, she keeps speaking Indonesia intensively with her

youngest daughter. She admitted that she mixes the language because she had limited ability in speaking Indonesian. However, she kept trying her best speaking Indonesian when it comes to her youngest daughter.

Therefore, her first daughter today is actively speaking Indonesian and admit reluctant speaking Acehese. Her first daughter admitted that she feels more comfortable speaking Indonesian than Acehese. The Inf2.3 also said that her first daughter often responds Indonesia if she speaks Acehese to her. This also happens to her third daughter that speaks Indonesian as her first language. Therefore, her first and third daughter have little opportunity to be exposed and to communicate with their mother tongue. Consequently, they are more courageous to speak Indonesian and demotivated speaking Acehese. The inf2.3 acknowledges that she discourages her youngest daughter to speak Acehese because she considers that Acehese is less important than Indonesian as an educational language. Therefore, she is not worried if her youngest daughter is unable to speak Acehese.

Furthermore, the study shows that her first and the youngest daughters of inf2.3 have excellent accent in speaking Indonesia. However, her first daughter has medium accent in Acehese although her first daughter is not actively speaking Acehese. However, the inf2.3 admitted that her third daughter is not able to speak Acehese and are found dumbfounded when her teachers speaking Acehese to her children in school. This study shows that the third daughter of the inf.2.3 has lost her ability to speak her heritage language because her mother speaks Indonesian intensively with her as a mother tongue. The worse is that the inf.2.3 are not worried if her daughter is unable to speak Acehese and cannot communicate with friend in Acehese. She further illustrated that almost all family members speak Indonesian to her youngest daughter including her husband and her siblings. Therefore, only the youngest daughter of the Inf.2.3 that has no access to be exposed to Acehese language in home and outside her home that finally is resulted in reluctance of her youngest daughter and demotivated to speak Acehese.

However, the different scenario happened to second daughter of the Inf2.3. Her second daughter actively speaks Acehese with her because the Inf2.3 speaks Acehese to her second daughter as a mother tongue. Therefore, her second daughter uses Acehese as a means of communication every day with her. Her second daughter also has good accent of Acehese and speak Acehese dominantly. However, the Inf.2.3 seems not confident with her second daughter in speaking Indonesia because her daughter speaks Indonesian intertwined with Acehese.

The study also finds the similar phenomena to the children of Inf.3.2 that her daughters are not able to speak Acehese fluently or understand Acehese well because the inf.3.2 uses Indonesian as their mother tongue. So far, both of her daughters speak mainly Indonesian as means of communication in their home and also do not have access to speak Acehese outside of their home including the sibling of the Inf.3.2 because her siblings also speak Indonesian actively with their children as the first language and to her two daughters. However, the Inf.3.2 also confesses she is not worried that her daughters are not able to speak Acehese appropriately because she considers that Indonesian is ultimately important for education of her

daughters. This is in line with the studies conducted previously (Alamsyah, 2018; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b).

The result of the study reveals that when the Acehese is not spoken as their children first language, the children will not enliven with their parents' heritage language. This is in line with the statement of Marinova-Todd et al., (2000) that young age is the critical period for the children to acquire the language easily, and the research conducted by Rahman et al. (2017) on the influence of the language taught from a young age can attain the perfect accent or dialect of the language. Thus, the early introduction of Indonesian by parents to their children will eliminate the distinct dialect of the Acehese language and lead to the children to lose their ability to speak their parents' heritage language. Consequently, the children shift their heritage language to Indonesian in their homes and actively speak Indonesian as a means of communication on their daily basis.

Unfortunately, those phenomena have increased among Acehese parents that they are more favor on speaking Indonesian to their children (Muhammad, 2013; Idaryani & Fidyati, 2021), and disturbed the old pattern of learning heritage language as the mother tongue in home. When the children lost their parents' role in learning Acehese as a mother tongue at home, it leads to language shift among Acehese children as Ewing (2014) previously warned and the parents in speaking Indonesian as a mother tongue to their children is going trend (Amery, 2019) that contributes negative consequence for Acehese language maintenance because it influences the usage of Acehese in the future and the domain use of Acehese language may keep shrinking particularly in non-formal domain due to the reluctant of young Acehese speaking their heritage language where Indonesian should not be used in speech community. This is in line with some previous study conducted (see: Muhammad, 2013; Al-Auwal, 2017; Aziz et al., 2021;) that the ability of children speaking Acehese is decreasing. Ansori, (2019) once warned that the heritage language can be extinct if its speakers are reluctant and demotivated to speak it. Ansori (2019) has underlined that the role of parents who are no longer actively speak their heritage language to their children lead to the heritage language extinction.

Old Patterns and Language Maintenance among Children

The result of study indicates that all the five children from the Inf1.6 are fluent in speaking Acehese because the inf1.6 speaks Acehese as a mother tongue before her children started school and it becomes a means of communication on daily basis, except her youngest child who actively speaks Indonesian because her husband started speaking Indonesian as his mother tongue. However, the Inf1.6 still mix in speaking to her youngest son and he is also able to speak and understand Acehese very well although he keeps speaking Indonesian dominantly when he communicates with his siblings and his mother. Meanwhile, the rest of his siblings actively speak Acehese with him. Therefore, he still has adequate input from his sibling and his mother to speak Acehese. The language learning patterns for mother tongue used by Inf1.6 can be illustrated as in the following figure:

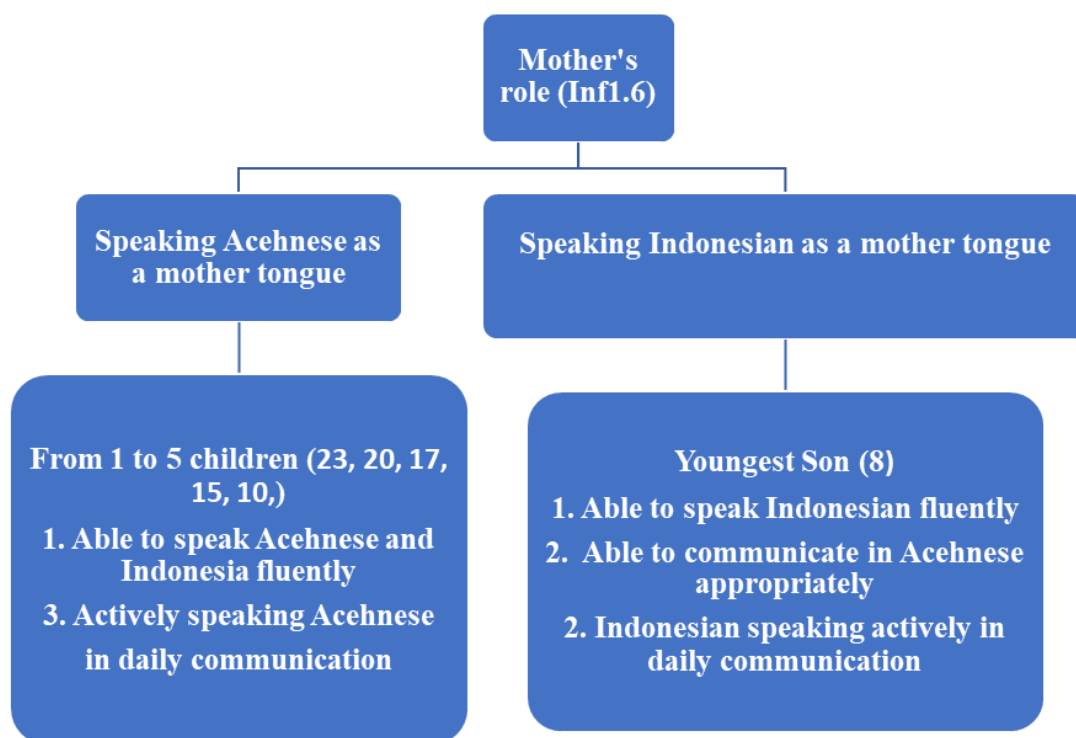


Figure 3. Language learning patterns for mother tongue used by Inf.1.6

The third diagram illustrates the pattern of Inf.1.6 speaking Acehnese as a mother tongue to their children. Five of her children are actively speaking Acehnese in home and outside their homes, only one her youngest child is Indonesian speaking actively because of her husband was speaking Indonesian as a mother tongue. When the parents actively speak their heritage language before school age, it enlivens the children to their heritage language. The result of study shows that Inf.1.6 role in speaking Acehnese as a mother tongue to her children indicates how significant is the role of parents in speaking their heritage language as a mother tongue since an early age or before school age. The children become the potential Acehnese speakers in home as one of the non- formal domains and have perfect dialect of Acehnese that reflects its own unique dialect as an identifier of the identity of Acehnese. By being introduced to Acehnese as a mother tongue, the children will feel that they own the language and inherent as part of their identity. This is in line with research conducted by Rahman et al. (2017) on the influence of the language taught from a young age can attain the perfect accent or dialect of the language. So, by choosing the Acehnese as a mother tongue to their children, the parents have maintained their heritage language among Acehnese young generation in the future as Canagarajah (2008) once stated that families have a big role in maintaining and introducing heritage languages as mother tongues to their children as part of the wealth of cultural heritage when compared to the role of educational institutions.

New Patterns on Learning Heritage Language

According to the pattern suggested by Ewing (2014), the old pattern of learning mother tongue is that parents speak their heritage language to their children at home before school age. Later on, the children learn Indonesian language as their second language at school and outside of their home when school time, or the parents start

speaking Indonesian to their children when they children start going to school. However, the result of the study confirms that the Acehese parents has broken old pattern of learning mother tongue. In contrary, two respondents have used the new patterns on learning mother tongues. They speak Indonesian as a mother tongue to their children and later on their children learn Acehese as a second language outside of their home therefore the parents have neglected their heritage language since the first day they decide to speak Indonesian as a mother tongue to their children. Although the environment may improve the ability of the children of speaking Acehese as the second language but it does not have as effective and crucial impact as the role of the parents particularly female parents as an agent in acquiring the heritage language by Acehese children. Anderbeck (2015) once said majority of Indonesian parents rely on the environment outside of the house for their children to acquire their heritage language. However, it does not have as massive impact as the parents' role have to their children because the environment has changed with the massive development of digital technology and rapid grows of social media that can be accessed easily by the children and the children can have massive input in Indonesian easily from an early age inside and outside of their homes but the Acehese language source is limited and difficult to access (Idaryani & Fidyati, 2022b).

Therefore, the role and awareness of parents play an important role to give the access of the Acehese language to their children as a means of communication at an early age in for Acehese language maintenance and to maintain sustainability and the original dialect of the Acehese language. The family is a fundamental place in the inheritance of the Acehese language and the robust domain from generation to generation to learn their heritage language because nowadays parents are the only and crucial resource for heritage language to their children among massive use of Indonesian both spoken and written from media in and outside the house, and from teachers in their school.

The strong efforts are needed to be implemented by Acehese government to restore the confidence of the Acehese parents to keep speaking their heritage language as a mother tongue to their children particularly in the current era of globalization where it is very easy to be influenced by outside cultures which causes the generation of native speakers of Acehese to feel inferior to speak their heritage language, and that finally they lose their sense of appreciation and pride as Acehese from their own cultural heritage (Septiyana & Margiansyah, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The role of parents in preserving the heritage language as a mother tongue to their children is very important. This is because the role of parents to speak Acehese at early age to their children will enliven their children and the dialect of Acehese is attained perfectly if a language is taught at early age which reflects the identity of Acehese as part of multicultural community of Indonesia.

It is suggested that certain policies have to be carried out and adopted by the government and other stakeholders as the effort to maintain the Acehese language for the future Acehese generation, and the certain language policy should be performed by the government to restore the confidence of Acehese parents in speaking Acehese as a

mother tongue to their children among the education pressure on using Indonesian language. The role of school particularly teachers should be highlighted on mixing between heritage language and Indonesian to their students during the school hour. Therefore, it is suggested that this study can raise the awareness of the Acehese stakeholder to make a policy or certain program to mix Acehese and Indonesian as medium of instruction among the teachers and encourage the school environment to keep speaking both Acehese and Indonesian with their students. Therefore, further study should be implemented to find out on how is important immersion approach conducted in school during the teaching hour to get used to the students to speak their heritage language in school domain and other formal contexts as an effort to promote the heritage language to its speakers who have neglected their heritage language.

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