

Language Shift on Moi Community: An Initial Notes

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Abstract. Moi is a Papuan Language spoken by Moi Community in Kabupaten Sorong, West Papua. We conduct a sociolinguistic research on this language to see the language attitude of Moi Community on their language. This is only an initial research and we need to dig deeper on the result. The results show Moi Community have a tendency to choose Bahasa Indonesia than their language. This attitude happened for several generations. Furthermore, their attitude towards their language leads to major shift on Moi Language. This paper will show the recent condition of Moi Language regarding this shift and efforts from local government to “save” Moi Language.

Keywords: Moi Language, Language Attitude, Language Shift, Language Loss

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1 Introduction

Since proclaimed as a language of unity of Indonesian Archipelago at the 2nd Indonesian Youth Congress: Sumpah Pemuda on October 27-28, 1928 and then selected as national language of Indonesia on August 17, 1945, Bahasa Indonesia became one success story of a language policy and language planning among linguistics. This success story was told by many people [1][2]. But there is a “dark side” of this success. The most common one is Bahasa Indonesia “pushed” many local languages in Indonesia to their death. On the one side, the Government of Indonesia “encourage” people to prioritize bahasa Indonesia while preserve their local languages and master foreign languages—as we can all see in the catchphrase of The Language and Book Development Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture. The government of Indonesia has utilized plenty of methods to ensure bahasa Indonesia as the main language of communication in Indonesia, for example education, mass media, and so on. On the other side, prioritizing Bahasa Indonesia has led a multitude of loss on local languages in many parts of Indonesia, especially the East part of Indonesia. This condition is also emerged in West Papua, especially on Moi Language.

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Moi language is a Papuan Language spoken by Moi Community in Kabupaten Sorong, West Papua. Moi is a small language with only 4.600 speakers. There are 8 dialects on Moi Language; Moi Kelim, Moi Maya, Moi Sigin, Moi Lemas, Moi Abun Jii, Moi Abun Taat, Moi Salkhma, and Moi Klabra¹. According to the key informant of this research, Moi Kleim have the most speakers among these dialects so it is selected as the lingua franca inside Moi Community. By lingua franca, we refer to Moi Kelim as the common language to communicate between speakers of Moi. There are two registers in Moi language; Moi Halus and Moi Sehari-hari.

As we mention before, Bahasa Indonesia has pushed local languages in Indonesia to their death. It also occurred in Moi Language. Moi language might not be dead yet, but it is endangered severely because there is no generational transmission in Moi Language. This paper will highlight the recent situation of Moi Community and their attitude toward their local language that cause the endangerment of Moi Language. This paper is based on a sociolinguistics research we did back in 2019. We conduct numerous in-depth-interview with several key informants and many other Moi People in Sorong, West Papua.

2. Method

We mention briefly on previous chapter that Moi language has two registers; Moi Halus and Moi Sehari-hari. Moi Halus is a register use on special occasions, like wedding, funeral, and other traditional ceremonies. Moi Sehari-hari is the daily language Moi people use among them. When we conduct the research on 2019, our key informants explained that only people in their 50s are fluent both in Moi Halus and Moi Sehari-hari. People younger than that can only speak Moi Sehari-hari. People in their 50s communicate in Moi Sehari-hari but when they talk to younger people, they mostly switch to bahasa Indonesia. In some cases where the younger person is fluent in Moi sehari-hari, they will talk to them in Moi. Most of the people ¹ For further information, see Perda Kabupaten Sorong No.10 Tahun 2017 tentang Pengakuan dan Perlindungan Masyarakat Hukum Adat Moi di Kabupaten Sorong in their 40s and 30s know and fluent in Moi Sehari-hari. They will use Moi sehari-hari when having conversation with elderly, but switch to bahasa Indonesia among them or with younger generation—with children, teenagers, and people in their 20s. we found this situation in unique because they choose bahasa Indonesia over Moi sehari-hari even when talking with young people whom fluent in Moi. When we further questioned them, they say it is their habit to speak in bahasa Indonesia and they only use Moi because of their elderly.

3. Result and Discussion

This confession intrigued our curiosity to dig deeper on the language situation in Moi community. So, we interviewed several young married couples to see what is the first language they use in various situations. From the interview, we found that people in their 20s are fluent in bahasa Indonesia and know some Moi sehari-hari, like some verbs, greeting, and some furnitures. But they only know the Moi words and not using it in their daily conversation. Meanwhile, teenagers and children know nothing of Moi—they only know and speak bahasa Indonesia. Upon finding these facts, we conducted some more in-depth-interview with our informants to further our finding and uncover the factors behind those actions.

In the previous chapter we found that the younger generation of Moi choose bahasa Indonesia over Moi language. But after a further exploration, we found that the only generation using Moi in their daily life are people in their 50s. Moi people whom younger than 50s mostly used bahasa Indonesia as their language of communication. Bahasa Indonesia is used at their home, school, traditional market, offices, hospital, and even at the church. The main reason why this situation occurred is because Moi people see bahasa Indonesia as a symbol of modernization—and local language as traditional. This view was actually imprint by the Indonesian Government, especially in Orde Baru era. Some of my informants reminisced their childhood memories when they were hit by their teacher at school if they speak their local languages. Their teacher told them that local languages is for people behind the times and bahasa Indonesia is much more sophisticated; a symbol of modern time. So, if they want to be an advanced person, they have to use bahasa Indonesia, because bahasa Indonesia has a prestige as a language. This point of view is not exclusively in Moi people, but it also can be found in other local communities, such as Banyumas, Yogyakarta, and Bugis [3][4].

With the “encouragement” from the government, bahasa Indonesia was used as a language of communication in Papua. This is also applied in job vacancies. Most of the office jobs require bahasa Indonesia as a language of communication. This job includes clerk, office assistant, receptionist, security, and many more. This situation led to more and more people choose to “abandon” their local languages and switch to bahasa Indonesia in order to acquire the jobs in the office which have higher salary [5].

This attitude brings about no generational transmission of Moi language in their community. Less and less parents speak Moi to their children. If this attitude continues, Moi language will definitely face their death. Upon facing this condition, the local

government and Tetua Adat of Moi community made a handful of efforts to “save” their language. The local government of Kabupaten Sorong made Perda Kabupaten Sorong No.10 Tahun 2017. The implication of that perda is every Thursday Moi is utilized as the language of communication in governmental offices. There is also an attempt in establishing Moi as local curriculum at school—although this attempt has just begun in early 2019 and the Department of Education was started the initial discussions with all the stakeholders in Moi community regarding this issue.

Another work in preserving Moi language was initiated by Gereja Klasis Cabang Sorong. They are working on translating Bible to Moi language. However, just like the attempt on establishing local curriculum of Moi language, this work is only just begun in early 2019. The church has conducted a number of meeting with Tetua Adat of Moi community to decide which register of Moi language will be used in their Bible. Much work remains to be done. We will try to stand guard over these attempts by Moi community in hope for the best result to come.

Edward Saphir once said “...everyone knows that language is variable” [6]. Despite that, variations in language are shed by a negative light over the years and this opinion is still common nowadays. People have prejudices to dialects, one variation of a language is more superior than the other, and even a dialect is considered as a deviant form of the language. Trigger linguistic insecurities on speakers of indigenous and minority languages [7][8]. Albeit the fact that local, national, and global languages offer different opportunities linguistically and socially, as mentioned [9][10].

Reflecting on that, what lesson can we learn from Moi language? We are aware that this language is slowly disappear but we also know that shifting process on many local languages can not be avoided. Thus, what should we do? Moi people to value and speak Moi language at home and in the community. We also have to emphasize the importance of passing this language along to younger generations. We also need to change the attitude toward Moi language. Along with these steps, we need to build literacy materials to be use in the community and at local schools [11][12][13].

4. Conclusion

Even so, all of those steps are easier said than done. It requires support from all elements; the community itself, NGOs, the local government, and also the central government. We need all the time, energy, and finance that we have. Furthermore, when we look at Indonesia as one extensive archipelagic country with more than 700 local

languages, is it possible to be done? Or, maybe the more fitting question is, is it necessary to be done?

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