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# LANGUAGE ATTITUDE AND CHOICE BY MINANGKABAU COMMUNITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY IN MEDAN

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**Abstract:** The objective of the research is to observe language attitude and choice of Minangkabau community residing in Medan to find out whether the people in the community have a positive or negative attitude toward Minangkabau language, and whether their language choice shows a preference toward Bahasa Indonesia, Minangkabau language, or other languages. This research was conducted in two subdistricts covering four villages in Medan. The data of this research were 400 copies of questionnaire which contained the respondents' answers to 11 questions on language attitude and 18 questions on language choice. The data obtained were analyzed using Likert Scale for language attitude and domain analysis for language choice. It was found that the result of the language attitude was positive but in the language choice, respondents tended to use Bahasa Indonesia in the family, friendship, place, and media domains.

**Keywords:** language choice, language attitude, positive attitude, negative attitude

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengamati sikap dan pemilihan bahasa Masyarakat Minangkabau yang berdomisili di kota Medan. Sikap bahasa mengarah pada sikap positif dan sikap negatif. Pemilihan bahasa mengarah pada Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Minangkabau, dan bahasa lainnya. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di dua kecamatan yang meliputi empat kelurahan di kota Medan. Data penelitian ini adalah 400 lembar kuesioner yang berisikan 11 pertanyaan mengarah pada sikap bahasa dan 18 pertanyaan mengarah pada pemilihan bahasa. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis dengan Likert Scale untuk sikap bahasa dan analisis ranah untuk pemilihan bahasa. Hasil dari sikap bahasa adalah positif tetapi untuk pemilihan bahasa, responden cenderung menggunakan Bahasa Indonesia pada ranah rumah, teman, tempat, dan media.

**Kata Kunci:** pemilihan bahasa, sikap bahasa, sikap positif, sikap negatif

Language attitude and choice analysis in multilingual and multicultural community are a popular study for many researchers who choose to investigate a community's norms of language use. This research, similarly, endeavours to use language attitude analysis and domain analysis to investigate the positive and negative attitude among speech communities of Minangkabau language (MkL) and the language choice of MkL in the

family, friendship, place, and media domains. Holmes (1992) states that positive attitude towards language might support language maintenance in which the minority language is highly valued, while a negative attitude toward language can accelerate language shift, wherean ethnic language is not highly valued. She found two examples of languagemaintenance through positiveattitude:(1)themaintenance of French language in Canada as well as in U.S. due to the international status and prestige of French; and(2)the maintenance of Greek languagebymost of the Greek immigrants in other countriesbecause the Greeks are proud of the contribution of Greek to Western Philosophy and Culture, which helps them resist language shift to another language.Holmes further states thatyoung people are the fastest to shift languagesandwhen the language is seen as an important symbol of ethnic identity, it is generally maintained longer. Brown (2000) defines that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes, and negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation. Nevertheless, he believes negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality, for example, by encounters withactual persons from other cultures. Positive attitudes on the part of language learners can cause the development of an integrative motivation and this can consequently facilitate second language progress.

Related to this, Siregar, Isa and Husni(1998) found that 13 ethnic groups who stay in Medan showed negative attitude towards their ethnic language. Even in a private domain, such as home, local dialects almost disappeared. For some reasons, local dialects lost their function and role. Lubis, et al. (1991)conducted a research in Chinese community in Medan. He found that positive attitude toward their mother tongue was highly valued. They are very loyal to their mother tongue and only use Bahasa Indonesia (BI)in formal situation and in a certain occasion. This positive attitude has been implanted since the child is born, and the first language he has heard is his mother tongue. It is not a surprise if the children of Chinese descent are difficult to understand BI until they enter formal education.This positive attitude of the Chinese community only occurs in Medan. However, they will blend in with the local communityusing local dialect and learning about the local cultureif they stay outside Medan. In this research, the attitude of Minangkabaunese in Medan towards their ethnic language was investigated using positive and negative attitude analysis proposed by Holmes (1992).

Fishman(1972) introduced domain analysis which describes the use of languages in various institutional contexts in a multilingual society.These domains can then be identified with domains at the societal-institutional level (such as home, school, etc.). The language choice frequently made in various domains of language use are code switching and code mixing. Rokhman (2003) states that code switching occurs because of several factors.The first factor is concerned with the situation as the presence of a third person in the ongoing speech act and changing the topic. Secondly, itconcerns theemphasis on certain words or avoidance of the taboo word. The situation of code switching was illustrated in Minangkabau bilingual vendors at Sukaramai market in Medan. Minangkabau vendors only use MkL among the fellows. Even if there is a buyer of the same ethnicity (third person) who uses the same dialectin transaction, they only use BI to answer. Language switching from MkL to BI occurs due to lack of agreement between speaker and listener. Even though they come from the same ethnic group, they do not know one another beforehand and it makes them hesitate to use MkL. Besides that, there is a sense of prideas they use MkL to strangers. The presence of a third person (buyer of the same ethnicity) formsa new situation which as well causes the change in language use from MkL to BI(Deliana, 2002).This research used domain analysis proposed by Fishman(1972) to investigate types

of language choice used in family, friendship, place, and media domains in Minangkabau community who resides in Medan.

Two criteria serve as relevant background information to the goal of this research; firstly the attitude of Minangkabau community towards Minangkabau language in Medan, and secondly, the types of language choices available to Minangkabau community in Medan. A description of the first criterion is necessary to provide a framework that relates to the language maintenance through positive attitude and language shifting through negative attitude of Minangkabau speech community in Medan. The second criterion is necessary to provide a description of the types of languages choices available to Minangkabau speech community in Medan. The language choices would be Bahasa Indonesia (BI), Minangkabau language (MkL), and other languages (OL).

The plural community in Medan is very interesting to study because it is different from the communities in the other provinces in Indonesia. In other provinces such as Yogyakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Padang and other cities, the use of local dialect is often found even though people who stay there are from different ethnic groups. They use the local dialect of the place where they live. The use of local dialects in Medan has a less portion than BI; those local dialects are mostly spoken by people from outside Medan. In almost every language event, local dialects are hardly heard. Given this condition, it is undeniable that local dialects will slowly be extinct, especially for those who reside in big cities (Holmes, 1992; Crystal, 2003). Youngsters who are born and raised in cities hardly know their own dialects. Ironically, if a youth uses his dialect among his friends, he will be mocked as though it is something strange and embarrassing. Ethnic language is considered obsolete, worthless, and has to be forgotten. We should be aware of this negative attitude toward local dialects; it is like a deadly virus which will spread out. Related to this, Olaolorun, Ikonta and Adeosun (2013) found that Nigerian languages are endangered by the current trend where only English language is spoken by overwhelming majority of children. In some urban areas in Nigeria many young people cannot speak their mother tongues because some parents feel that it is a positive sign that their children will acquire a good command of English to the detriment of their mother tongue. They said if the indigenous languages are not passed on to the next generation, these languages will be lost and eventually may become extinct, i.e. they may die. Local dialects should be preserved as a heritage since they contain cultural values, philosophy of life, and behavior which are packed in the local wisdom of a society.

Based on the background of this research, the narrower scope of the local dialects and the declining loyalty of the Minangkabaunese to their own dialect, the research problems were formulated as follows: (1) How was the attitude and the loyalty of MkL speakers to their own dialect in Medan?; and (2) How did MkL speakers determine their language choice in Medan?

## **METHOD**

In this qualitative research, data were collected from 400 questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to two subdistricts covering four villages, that is, Kota Matsum I, Kota Matsum II, Kota Matsum IV located in Medan Area subdistrict and Kota Matsum III located in Medan Kota subdistrict. The sources of data are 1) Minangkabaunese who had stayed in Medan for at least 3 years and were more than 16 years of age, 2) key informants, and 3) books, articles, and journals relevant to research problems. The purpose

of the questionnaire was to obtain feedback on the nature of language use among Minangkabau in Medan. Unstructured and informal interviews were carried out with respondents such as family members, friends, place, and media to discuss any problems that arose during the survey. Participatory observation was carried out to confirm the data obtained. In this case, the researcher was directly involved in the survey (Sudaryanto, 1993). This research used direct method to measure attitude toward a language and its speaker. Direct method in measuring attitude consists of questionnaires and interviews. The main idea of this method is to ask respondents directly about their language attitudes. Interview and questionnaire used closed-ended questions. Here, the respondents choose from the ready-made answers the one which indicate his/her attitude towards the matter. The data obtained were calculated using Likert scale. According to Baker (1992), a scale designed by Likert is suitable for closed-ended questions. The answers can simply refer to a five-point scale, such as *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree*.

In measuring the respondents' language attitude, each answer was given score 1 to 5. The highest score for positive attitude was measured from the highest score to the lowest score (5 to 1). Conversely, the highest score for negative attitude moving from the lowest score 1 to the highest score 5 (1 to 5). In the questionnaire, statements from 1 to 5 reflected positive attitude and statements from 6 to 11 reflected negative attitude. There were 11 questions concerning respondents' attitude toward MkL as follows: (1) attitude toward proficiency in MkL, (2) attitude toward the ability to use MkL which was regarded as an honor, (3) attitude toward the ability to use MkL as part of appreciation and cultural preservation efforts, (4) attitude toward parents' condition who used MkL with his family at home in addition to BI, (5) attitude toward the effort of MkL retention as the nation's cultural wealth, (6) attitude toward the statement stating that the use of MkL only showed regionalism and it could adverse the interaction among ethnicities as well as inhibiting the development of BI, (7) attitude toward limiting the use of MkL, (8) attitude toward the situation when a friend of the same ethnicity who spoke MkL used BI to respondent in the situation of BI obliged, (9) attitude toward the situation when a friend of the same ethnic group who spoke MkL used BI in an informal situation, (10) attitude toward the situation when a friend of the same ethnic group who could speak MkL used BI in a formal situation, and (11) attitude toward the situation when hearing the Minangkabau who could speak MkL used it only with friends and relatives. The answers obtained were then calculated using percentages.

There were 18 questions for language choice concerning the use of language in family, friendship, place, and media domains. The data obtained were tabulated and calculated using percentage. The choice of language are BI, MkL, and OL. The 18 questions for the choice of language were given to biological parents, biological children, parents in-laws and so forth inside and outside home, language spoken with friends at the same ethnic group inside and outside home, language spoken by the indigenous at the traditional meeting, language used by the friends of the same ethnic group in the presence of a third person who was not of the same ethnic group, and language used in writing messages to close relatives and friends of the same ethnic group.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The number of statements for each question was 400. The range of values for the scale of attitude was 1 to 5. Positive attitude and negative attitude of the highest score was 5 and the lowest score was 1. Questions 1 through 5 led to a positive attitude and questions 6 through 11 led to a negative attitude. The result of the respondents' responses toward questions reflecting positive and negative language attitudes are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Language attitude**

No	QUESTIONS	Statement					Score	Total of Questions
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1	Question 1	995	792	9	0	0	1,796	400
2	Question 2	990	744	30	12	0	1,776	400
3	Question 3	895	804	60	0	0	1,759	400
4	Question 4	800	780	30	70	0	1,680	400
5	Question 5	995	788	12	0	0	1,795	400
6	Question 6	25	180	144	688	325	1,362	400
7	Question 7	7	80	240	592	625	1,544	400
8	Question 8	10	198	537	440	10	1,195	400
9	Question 9	49	288	348	340	30	1,055	400
10	Question 10	7	174	285	576	335	1,377	400
11	Question 11	16	164	291	552	335	1,358	400

The total score of the statements in sequence is shown in Table 2.

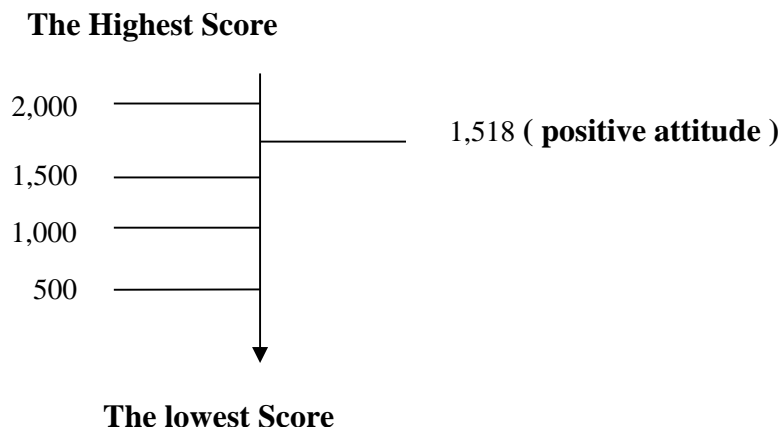
**Table 2 Language Attitude**

No	Questionnaires	Score
1.	Statement 1	1,796
2	Statement 5	1,795
3.	Statement 2	1,776
4.	Statement 3	1,759
5.	Statement 4	1,680
6.	Statement 7	1,544
7.	Statement 10	1,377
8.	Statement 6	1,362
9	Statement 11	1,358
10	Statement 8	1,195
11.	Statement 9	1,055
	Total Score	16,697

Statements nos. 1 to 5 reflected a positive attitude to MkL. The highest score was for statement 1 (1,796) which indicated that the respondents totally agreed with the Minangkabaunese who used MkL. The lowest score for positive attitude was statement 4 (1,680) which indicated that the respondents disagreed with the parents who used MkL with the family both inside and outside their homes. Statements nos. 6 to 11 reflected a negative attitude to MkL. The highest score to negative attitude was in statement 7 (1,544) which indicated that the respondents strongly disagreed since MkL could obstruct the development of BI. The lowest score for the negative attitude was for statement 9 (1,055) which indicated that the respondents felt happy when there was a friend who could speak MkL spoke BI with him in informal situation.

The total score of 11 statements on language attitude was 16,697. To measure the language attitude, the total score was divided by the number of statements found in the questionnaire, that is,  $16,697:11 = 1,517.90$  (rounded 1,518). If the range of values ranging from 2,000 (the highest score) to 500 (lowest score), then the total score which was in the range of positive and negative was 1,000. This is more specifically illustrated in the following scheme.

From the abovescheme, it could be seen that respondents who represented the Minangkabau community in Medan showed a positive attitude toward MkL as being far above the range of positive and negative scores (number 1,000). This is different from the results of the study conducted by Siregar, et al.(1998) who found that 13 ethnic groups who stay in Medan showed negative attitude towards their ethnic language and even in a private domain, such as home, local dialects almost disappeared.



The Minangkabaunese who reside in Medan consist of two groups. The first group are those who are born and raised in Medan. Generally, this group is intermarried so that their children have two different ethnic languages. Children who come from this group are not included in the data networking since the determination of data sources should be parents of the same ethnic group. The questionnaire was given only to one couple who had biological parents of the same ethnic group. In this group, even though they were born and raised in Medan, their language attitude remained positive. The second group was the migrants who came from different regions in West Sumatra. In this group, there was almost no mixed marriage and in general, their profession was vendors. The immigrants of the Minangkabaunese who had settled in Medan for more than 3 years, including the young and the old got a high score. The majority of them showed positive attitude toward MkL.

The domains investigated in this research are family domain, friendship domain, place domain, and media domain.

#### 1. The Family Domain

There were six sub-domains in Minangkabaunese family domain. They are: (1) conversing with biological parents, (2) conversing with parents in law, (3) conversing with spouse (husband-wife), (4) conversing with biological children, (5) conversing with siblings, and (6) conversing with close relatives (grandparents, uncle, aunty, brothers/sisters in law)

#### 2. Friendship Domain

There were three sub-domains in Minangkabaunese friendship domain. They are: (1) conversing with friends of the same ethnic group, (2) conversing with friends who are not of the same ethnic group, and (3) conversing with people of the same ethnic group

#### 3. Place Domain

There were five domains. They are: (1) conversing inside home, (2) conversing outside home, (3) conversing in traditional ceremonies, (4) conversing in informal situation, and (5) conversing in formal situation



4. Media Domain

There is one sub-domain in media domain, that is, conversing in a letter. In the questionnaire, there were 18 questions related to the language choice. Each of the respondents' statements on the use of language is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Language Choice**

Respondents' statement	Language use			Total
	Bahasa Indonesia	Minangkabau Language	Other languages	
<b>Statement 1</b>	159	241	0	400
<b>Statement 2</b>	133	267	0	400
<b>Statement 3</b>	197	203	0	400
<b>Statement 4</b>	203	197	0	400
<b>Statement 5</b>	211	189	0	400
<b>Statement 6</b>	216	194	0	400
<b>Statement 7</b>	265	135	0	400
<b>Statement 8</b>	264	136	0	400
<b>Statement 9</b>	171	229	0	400
<b>Statement 10</b>	182	218	0	400
<b>Statement 11</b>	144	253	3	400
<b>Statement 12</b>	153	244	3	400
<b>Statement 13</b>	187	213	0	400
<b>Statement 14</b>	227	173	0	400
<b>Statement 15</b>	177	223	0	400
<b>Statement 16</b>	316	84	0	400
<b>Statement 17</b>	244	156	0	400
<b>Statement 18</b>	271	129	0	400
<b>Total</b>	3,720	3,484	6	

Of the 18 questions, the highest response for the questionnaire items concerning the language choice was for statement 16 (316), which indicated that the respondents preferred

to use Indonesian with friends of the same ethnic group when there was a third person who was not of the same ethnic group present. The lowest figure was in the same statement, which indicated that there was still a respondent using MkL with friend of the same ethnic group despite the presence of a third person who was not of the same ethnic group. Furthermore, there were only 6 respondents using MkL due to intermarriage; one of the couples sometimes used ethnic language when he communicated with the relative's partner. Of the number of each language choice, the use of Indonesian looked more prominent than MkL. Although the difference in value was not so significant, respondents still used more BI. In other words, respondents representing Minangkabau community in all four locations of the research used BI more in daily interaction. This is rather different from Lubis, et al.'s (1991) research on Chinese community in Medan, which found that the people in the community are very loyal to their mother tongue and only use Bahasa Indonesia (BI) in formal situations and in certain occasions.

Based on the distribution of questionnaires, age and duration of living affected the MkL usage. Respondents who were included in younger age groups and were born and raised in Medan always used BI in communicating. This was due to the family environment which always used BI. But respondents in the same age group, which were newcomers, used MkL more often. This was because they were born and raised in West Sumatra and they always used MkL in the family environment. Respondents who belonged to an older group and were born and raised in Medan, seldom used MkL. This was due to the family environment which always used BI and most of them used MkL only in exceptional circumstances. Respondents belonging to this group, who were newcomers, used MkL more often both inside and outside their homes. This was because they were already accustomed to using MkL and it was difficult for them to abandon it.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the findings above it can be concluded that the younger age group and older age group who were born and raised in Medan, used BI as their language choice while the younger age group and older age group who were migrants from West Sumatra, used MkL as their language choice. In general, it could be concluded that respondents representing the Minangkabau community who resided in the Medan chose BI in communicating.

The research findings have answered two research problems. First, respondents representing the Minangkabau community in Medan show positive attitude toward MkL. This is contrary to the early assumption that town people show negative attitude toward the existence of the local language. Secondly, the majority of respondents prefer BI than MkL. In general, it can be concluded that even though BI is their language preference, their attitude toward MkL is very positive. Respondents still respect the language of their ancestors and they still feel proud even though they are MkL passive speakers.

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