



## The Dynamics of Language Attitudes and the Preservation of the Acehese Language from an Intergenerational Sociolinguistic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Acehnese, as one of the regional languages in Indonesia, plays a crucial role in the cultural identity of the Acehese people. However, with the development of time and the influx of globalization, the existence of Acehese faces serious challenges. This study aims to examine the language attitudes of the Acehese community across three generations (elderly, adult, and youth) and the efforts to preserve the language. The approach used is qualitative-descriptive, through interviews and observations of 12 informants in two different areas (urban and rural). The results of the study indicate significant shifts in language usage, especially among the younger generation. Strategic interventions in education, media, and communities are required to maintain the continuity of Acehese as an intangible cultural heritage

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language is a mirror of culture and identity for a community. In the context of sociolinguistics, language not only serves as a means of communication but also as a symbol of solidarity, a marker of social identity, and a medium for transmitting cultural values. Acehnese, spoken by the Acehnese ethnic group, has a long history and is closely connected with customary systems, religion, and the daily lives of its people. However, today, Acehnese is experiencing a decline in its function and usage, particularly in family and educational settings. This shift is closely related to the dominance of Indonesian as the national language and the increasing global flow of information, which influences the language preferences of the community, especially the younger generation. UNESCO (2011) has classified many regional languages in Indonesia, including Acehnese, as languages at risk of extinction if serious revitalization efforts are not undertaken.

This study seeks to explore the dynamics of language attitudes and practices surrounding Acehnese across three generations, using a sociolinguistic approach. Its main focus is to understand how the perceptions, pride, and frequency of Acehnese usage have evolved from generation to generation and to formulate relevant preservation strategies in line with the current conditions of the Acehnese community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Sociolinguistic Theory**

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. According to Holmes (2013), sociolinguistics examines how language is used in social contexts and how social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, and education influence the form, function, and perception of language. Language is not simply a neutral vehicle for communication; it is embedded in a network of social meanings and power relations. In this context, Acehnese is not only viewed as a linguistic system with its own phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules, but also as a deeply embedded social practice. It serves as a symbol of ethnic identity, a marker of in-group belonging, and a reflection of cultural heritage and religious values. The use of Acehnese signifies solidarity within the community, respect for elders, and adherence to traditional norms. Moreover, sociolinguistic theory provides a framework to analyze how language shift and maintenance are shaped by social processes such as urbanization, migration, intergenerational transmission, and the prestige associated with different languages. In Aceh, the growing preference for Indonesian or foreign languages among the younger generation can be interpreted as a sociolinguistic response to broader socio-economic changes, including aspirations for mobility, modernity, and access to global information. Therefore, the application of sociolinguistic theory is essential in understanding how Acehnese is being maintained or replaced, and how language attitudes evolve over time in response to social change. It allows researchers and policymakers to move beyond a purely linguistic analysis and consider the broader societal dynamics that influence language vitality.

## 2. Language Attitudes

Language attitude refers to individuals' feelings, evaluations, and behaviors toward a particular language. Fishman (1991) emphasized that a positive attitude toward a mother tongue is a key factor in preserving the language. This attitude can be observed through the extent to which a community takes pride in using the language, whether it is passed down to children, and in what contexts the language is used. Language attitudes are shaped by various socio-cultural and psychological factors. These include the perceived utility of the language, its status within the wider society, and its association with identity and group belonging. A language that is perceived as outdated, limited in function, or lacking prestige may elicit a negative attitude, especially among younger speakers who are more exposed to dominant or global languages. In the context of Acehese, language attitudes are not formed in a vacuum but are influenced by institutional, familial, and media-driven factors.

The increasing dominance of Indonesian in education and public discourse, combined with the rise of digital platforms where Indonesian or English is often prioritized, has led many young Acehese to view their heritage language as less relevant or valuable. This is exacerbated by a lack of reinforcement from educational institutions and insufficient visibility of Acehese in popular media. Moreover, intergenerational transmission of positive language attitudes plays a critical role. When parents and community elders consistently use Acehese and express pride in the language, younger members are more likely to adopt a similar attitude. Conversely, if the language is neglected or regarded as a barrier to modern success, this sentiment can contribute to linguistic shift and eventual language loss. Therefore, understanding and addressing language attitudes is crucial in any effort to revitalize or maintain Acehese. Promoting a sense of pride, usefulness, and cultural value attached to the language – both in traditional settings and modern digital spaces – can foster stronger community engagement and intergenerational continuity.

## 3. Language Shift and Maintenance

Language shift occurs when a community gradually abandons its native language in favor of another. This often happens in bilingual or multilingual societies that experience pressure from more dominant languages. In contrast, language maintenance is an active effort to continue using and preserving the mother tongue in daily life, education, and media. One effective strategy is strengthening intergenerational transmission

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The research was conducted in two regions in Aceh: one urban area (Banda Aceh) and one rural area (Aceh Besar). Twelve informants were involved, representing three generations: the elderly (60 years and above), adults (35–59 years), and youth (15–34 years). Interviews were

conducted to identify language attitudes, patterns of Acehese usage, and perceptions regarding language preservation. Participatory observations were carried out during customary activities and daily family interactions. Data analysis involved data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Language Attitudes Across Generations

The interview results reveal that the elderly generation holds a very positive attitude toward Acehese. They use this language in almost all daily activities, including communication at home, religious activities, and social gatherings. The adult generation exhibits a fairly positive attitude, although the use of Acehese has started to mix with Indonesian, especially in work and educational settings.

In contrast, the younger generation shows a more neutral to negative attitude. Many of them prefer to use Indonesian, even at home. This shift is influenced by formal education systems, social media, and a lack of encouragement from families to use Acehese.

Factors Contributing to Language Shift

### 2. The Shift in Acehese Language Use is Primarily Due to:

- a. Limited use of Acehese in formal education,
- b. Lack of representation of Acehese in mass media and digital platforms,
- c. The view that Indonesian or foreign languages are more modern and offer better future prospects, and
- d. Urbanization and migration leading to language assimilation.

### 3. Language Preservation Strategies

Several strategies to preserve Acehese have been proposed, including:

- a. Incorporating Acehese into local curricula,
- b. Increasing the production of media content in Acehese (films, songs, storybooks),
- c. Organizing speech, storytelling, or writing competitions in Acehese, and
- d. Strengthening the role of the family as the primary environment for language transmission.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study reveals that there has been a shift in attitudes and usage of Acehese across generations, with the younger generation using Acehese less frequently in daily life. This suggests that Acehese is at risk of extinction if no strategic preservation efforts are made.

Preserving Acehese requires collaboration between families, educational institutions, the media, and local governments. With structured, community-based revitalization efforts, Acehese can continue to thrive and remain an essential part of the cultural identity of the Acehese people.

### **FUTHER STUDY**

This research still has a delay, so it is necessary to conduct further research related to the topic The Dynamics of Language Attitudes and the Preservation of the Acehese Language from an Intergenerational Sociolinguistic Perspective to improve this research and add insight for readers

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