

Research Article

CODE CHOICES AMONG MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES: A PILOT STUDY

Chatarina Tri Rahmawati, Evynurul Laily Zen

Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract.

Living in a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, Indonesian citizens have the privilege of being exposed to different languages and using them in various degrees of proficiency. As it becomes typical for an individual to mix and/or switch languages in everyday interaction, there is certainly room for more in-depth investigation, especially in determining the pattern of code choices among multilingual families. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, we observed how code choices occur in the family of two multilingual young adult speakers in Universitas Negeri Malang. The data of this current study were collected from two interview videos as a part of a larger project (Family Language Policy) we carried out in 2021 with a focus on how language selection processes work in their families. The results showed that there were different code choice patterns practiced in these two families; for example, the first family used Javanese as a primary communication code among family members, while the second family chose to use Indonesian. However, interestingly both families communicate in Indonesian when speaking to very young members or children. The findings of this current paper are important particularly in predicting the language shift phenomena in Indonesian contexts.

Keywords: *code choices, family language policy, multilingual families, Indonesia*

Corresponding Author: Chatarina
Tri Rahmawati; email:
rinafelicitas10@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an archipelagic country, Indonesia is reported as one of the richest countries in terms of ethnicities (Mavridis, 2015). It has more than 300 ethnicities with each having its own culture, language, customs, and local wisdoms. This condition proves that being diverse is inevitable, and thus the founding fathers of Indonesia framed *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) as the ideology of this country. Living in a nation filled with diversity, this country has over 580 languages and dialects even though 13 languages only have less than one million speakers. Relatively speaking, as language forms the culture of the speakers (Chen, Geluykens, & Choi, 2006), the variety of cultures in Indonesia becomes as diverse as the language itself. However, regardless of the various languages that exist in Indonesia, the citizens still acquire the Indonesian language as it is the lingua franca; the During the 2nd Indonesian Youth Congress (*Sumpah Pemuda*) in 1928, the

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Indonesian language was authorized as the national language used in the country. The language that was then employed in mass communication as well as the medium of teaching in official gatherings and educational processes. In comparison to neighboring nations, the development of the Indonesian language as a lingua franca has been effective and uncomplicated (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014).

Nonetheless the accomplishment of making Indonesian the unifying language of the country, several local languages coexist in the community. In some families, the mother tongue is the local language and Indonesian is the second language, and vice versa. The existence of several nationalities continues to exist anyhow. This circumstance then introduces Indonesia to the words “multicultural” and “multilingual”. According to Nieto (1992, cited in Locke & Bailey, 2014), “*Multiculturalism rests on the belief that all cultures have values, beliefs, customs, language, knowledge, and world views that are valid and viable and that these traits reflect the experiences of a particular group*”. Whereas multilingual refers to the condition where many languages are spoken in a country. From the total number of languages in the world, there are about 10% of languages which are spoken in Indonesia (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014). The complexity of linguistics in Indonesia arises from the inclination of people of each ethnicity to talk in their own native language inside their groups. They prefer to communicate in the native language with others of the same ethnicity because there is a sense of togetherness (belonging). Previous studies on Africans showed that the unity of ethnicity and language is proven to be able to strengthen and unite the group (Fishman, 1999). This can also be the reason why Indonesians still speak using their local language in every day’s life up to this day.

The complexity of languages in Indonesia resulted in the variety of language policies adhered to by families or groups of people in a community. There are certain unspoken rules for the use of the Indonesian language, the local language, and even foreign languages such as when to use them, how to use them, to whom we can use them, and so on. The rules are changeable and flexible as there is no fixed rule set by an organization or things like that, and code choices are usually affected by social factors such as the participants in the dialogue, settings, and the topic discussed (Holmes, 2013). Thus, this paper is particularly interested in the pattern of code choices that the interviewees have in their families.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative study that dealt with code choices in two multilingual families. This research design is used to subjectively process the data source to describe who, what, and where of events and experiences (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017). We employed the qualitative technique to collect and analyze data in order to gain a thorough knowledge of the respondents' perspectives toward code choices in their multilingual households. The qualitative technique is appropriate for this research because it allows for the investigation and examination of the context of the two interview videos for whom each language/code is used inside the households. These videos are part of a broader study (Family Language Policy) that we completed in 2021 with a focus on how language selection procedures function in families. Two young adult speakers pursuing bachelor's degrees at Universitas Negeri Malang's Department of English became the subjects of our research. The duration of each video is 16 minutes 39 seconds and 25 minutes 3 seconds.

In collecting the data, we watched and studied the videos on “*Bahasa dan Kita*” YouTube channel Episode 10 (Bahasa dan Kita, 2021a) and Episode 14 (Bahasa dan Kita, 2021b), and then took some notes on the language policy and code choices that the interviewees have in their family. Besides investigating code choices in families, we also scrutinize how the interviews are related to the result of our questionnaire in 2021 which was filled by 1344 participants.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout our team's and interviewees' interviews, we discovered multilingual occurrences that occur in the interviewees' families, or in this case, two students from cohort 2020 at the Department of English UM. In brief, both utilize Indonesian and local languages in their families, and neither of them mention English or any other foreign language in their everyday lives. We would further dissect the code choices our subjects make in the following sections.

3.1. Code Choices Practiced in the Interviewee 1 (S1)'s Family

Interviewee 1 (S1) has been living in Probolinggo since 2003 and has not experienced any movement. Her family once moved from Jember to Probolinggo, but it happened before she was born. She explained that in her family, she always talks to her parents

and her older siblings in the daily Javanese language. However, when it comes to her younger sibling, she always uses the Indonesian language. Compared to our study in 2021 where a number of 1344 parents from twenty-eight (28) provinces in Indonesia filled a questionnaire about the language policy used in their families, parents are more likely to speak the Indonesian language to their children (54%) than to speak local languages (17%). Notably, in S1's family, there is a significant difference in the way the parents speak to their children as they use the local language to S1 and her older siblings, but only use the Indonesian language when they speak to the youngest of the family.

(1) *"Kalau di keluarga sendiri, sama mama, ayah, sama kakak itu menggunakan bahasa Jawa, tapi Jawanya Jawa kasar. Kalau sama adik menggunakan bahasa Indonesia."* (3.08 - 3.20)

(In my family, with my mother, father, my older siblings, I always use Javanese language, the regular Javanese language I mean. But with my younger sibling, I use Indonesian language.)

(2) *"Mungkin sebenarnya itu natural ya. Soalnya saya pernah tanya ke mama sama ayah kenapa sih kalau ngomong sama adik itu harus pakai bahasa Indonesia? Kok adik nggak diajari bahasa Madura? Maksudnya biar sama dengan yang lain. Terus kata mama, adik itu kaku kalau ngomong bahasa Jawa karena lehernya pendek. Begitu katanya."* (3.50 - 4.19)

(Maybe it's a natural thing. Because I have asked my mother and father why I must use Indonesian language when I'm talking to my younger sibling. Why doesn't he learn the Madurese language? I mean, so it will be the same with the others. Then my mother said that it is because my younger sibling sounds so unnatural when he speaks Javanese language because he has a short neck. That's what my mother said.)

Fritz (1920) wrote that in general, our speech organs produce the motive power, vibratory element, and resonance in one's voice (Fritz, 1920). Even though at some points it is commonly considered that variances in the structure of human speech organs do not affect the sound produced and have no explanatory role (Dediu, Janssen, & Moisik, 2017), it is undeniable to say that the sounds human produce cannot be separated from human's anatomy. Previous studies show that the changes in human anatomy (even the small ones) can lead to distinct articulatory methods and influence auditory output (Bruner, 2000; Weirich & Fuchs, 2011; Zhou, Espy-Wilson, Tiede, & Boyce, 2007). Hence, there is a probability that the "short neck" condition S2's younger sibling has can affect the way he speaks the local language stiffly.

Surprisingly, even though the youngest of the family is never taught any local languages (Madurese and Javanese language) at home, he can understand the overall

meaning when he listens to someone who speaks using the local languages. In this case, S1's youngest sibling is a receptive multilingual person. Receptive bilingualism or multilingualism refers to the condition when people can understand a language, yet they are not capable of speaking it (Sherkina-Lieber, 2020). This can happen when someone is exposed to a certain language, understanding it is easier and faster than speaking in it. Murti (2021) wrote that "understanding a language involves the brain's ability to infer things from phonemes" (Murti, 2021). So, if a person has been listening to the language for a long time, he is highly likely to know the meaning of some words. As the sentences are out, he can assume the meaning based on the meaning of the words that he understands and makes a connection to finally comprehend or infer what the speaker says. Just like what S1 stated on (3).

(3) *"Adik itu sebenarnya mengerti kita bicarakan walaupun menggunakan bahasa Jawa."* (5.17-5.22)

(My younger sibling actually understands the things we talk about even though we use Javanese language.)

The complexity of language practice in S1's daily life shows as her surroundings tend to speak in the Madurese language whereas her knowledge of that language is very basic. She even stated that there are only a few people who speak the Indonesian language for their daily activities as Probolinggo is best known as the "district of Madura". Thus, most of the people are Madurese and use their own local language. However, as a consequence of her educational background, she is able to understand when people speak in the Madurese language to her.

(4) *"Karena saya SD di sini, tapi saya SDnya itu pondok, tetap di Probolinggo juga, tapi di Probolinggo yang sebelah timur. Itu basicnya Madura sekali. Dekat Situbondo itu di situ. Terus saya SMAnya juga agak ke barat sedikit, itu Madura juga. Jadi sedikit demi sedikit saya bisa."* (9.28 - 9.27)

(Because I was here for my elementary school, but I was in an Islamic boarding school. Still in Probolinggo, but on the eastern side. Basically, the basic accent is thick with Madurese. Near Situbondo. Then for my senior high school, I studied on the western side of Probolinggo which is very thick with Madurese as well. So, I can use the language a little bit.)

Based on our data from the questionnaire, the respondents (parents from the age of mid-twenties to sixties) mostly acquired their knowledge about the local language from home (57%), society (27%), then school (16%). However, S1's statement shows that she often learns the local language (Madurese language) in her school and society rather

than in her family. The local language that she learns the most from her family is the Javanese language as her parents are both Javanese.

3.2. Code Choices Practiced in the Interviewee 2 (S2)'s Family

Interviewee 2 (S2) was born and raised in Surabaya before he moved to Mojokerto in his high school years. His father is from Mojokerto, and his mother is from Kediri. He is the oldest with three younger siblings; the youngest is two years old. His family decided to move back to Mojokerto after his grandmother's death which made him stay with his grandfather from his father's side. S2's grandfather is a Javanese from Purwokerto, yet his late grandmother was a Chinese person.

As S2 spent his childhood in a part of Surabaya where the Indonesian language is mostly used and spoken, he does not really understand the Javanese language, especially *Bahasa Jawa Krama* (Javanese Language that is used to show politeness and respect to the elders).

(1) *"Ya, kemudian karena ya memang apa mungkin karena berpindah-pindah ya, jadi penggunaan bahasanya di Surabaya itu full bahasa Indonesia semua. Tapi kemudian karena nenek saya meninggal dan ayah saya ingin apa menemani kakek saya di sini, akhirnya saya tinggal di Mojokerto bersama kakek saya."* (2:42 - 2:57)

(Well, probably because we moved a lot, and we only used Indonesian language when we were in Surabaya. But then my grandmother passed away and my father wanted to be with grandfather here, so we decided to move to Mojokerto to live with grandfather.)

(2) *"Mungkin karena ada kakek saya ini, jadi bercampur menggunakan bahasa Jawa juga. Apa ngomong-ngomong menggunakan bahasa Jawa. Kemudian ketika saya berbicara dengan ayah atau dengan ibu, untuk membicarakan kayak "Udah makan belum?" atau "Ayo antar aku kemana" kita menggunakan bahasa Jawa biasa. Maksudnya enggak yang bahasa Jawa krama, ya bahasa Jawa biasa."* (2:57 - 3:17)

(Probably because of my grandfather, so it is mixed with Javanese language as well. We talk using Javanese language. Then if I want to talk with my father or mother, to say something like, "Have you eaten?" or "Drive me here" we use the regular Javanese language. I mean, it is not *Bahasa Jawa Krama*, just the regular one.)

In the dialogue (1) and (2), S2 stated how the presence of his grandfather affected his code choices used in his home. This proves Anastassiou and Andreou's claim that the utterer's environment influences his code-mixing and code-switching process (Anastassiou & Andreou, 2017) as S2 claimed in (1), he used the Indonesian language

fully in Surabaya but then uses simple Javanese language at some points after he moved to Mojokerto. Holmes's point is also proven to be true that someone's code choices are affected by many social factors, such as the conversation participants, the setting or social context, topics, and the function of the speaking (Holmes, 2013). From (2), S2 stated that because of his grandfather, he started mixing his language with simple Javanese language (participant of the conversation).

(3) *"Tapi kalau misalnya formal, untuk misalnya minta uang jajan atau minta uang kuliah atau apa, itu kita ngomongnya pakai bahasa Indonesia. Karena menurut saya dan menurut adik-adik saya juga lebih formal, enak untuk diomongkan dalam bahasa Indonesia. Tapi kalau untuk ngomong biasa, mau minta makan atau kalau ingin apa segala macam itu pakai bahasa Jawa."* (3:19 - 3:40)

(But in formal situations, for example, asking pocket money or school fees or whatever it is, we speak in Indonesian language. Because in my opinion, and my siblings as well, it is more comfortable to use Indonesian language. But in daily conversation, asking for food or things, we use Javanese language.)

Holmes's theory on language choices and social dimensions are also related to fragments (2) and (3) on the function of why the conversation happens. There is an unwritten agreement in S2's family that the Indonesian language sounds more formal and respectful instead of their local language or in this case, the Javanese language. The statement that S2 gave in his interview is in line with our study that 41.5% of parents described the Indonesian language as a formal language. The way the Indonesian language is seen as a formal language can be because of the establishment of the Indonesian language as the national language back in *Sumpah Pemuda*. Quoted from Hascaryo Pramudibyanto in his module, the Indonesian language can build a formal, authorized, and national ambiance, whereas the local language usually gives a family atmosphere and brotherhood (Pramudibyanto, 2013).

Yet even though S2 is exposed to a small amount of Javanese language in his house when he is communicating with his parents or grandfather, S2 uttered that his parents always speak in the Indonesian language to his youngest sibling (2 y.o). He assumed that it is because of his parents' plan to go back to Surabaya and make the youngest study there as well. Based on S2's statement, the environment that he used to live in in Surabaya is the place where the Indonesian language is mostly spoken. Thus, the language practice that S2's parents apply to the youngest child is in coherence with John Locke's theory that language is a behavior (Locke, 1793). Yogatama (2011) claims that the process of acquisition in the first language in children is the first step to becoming a member of society (Yogatama, 2011). Moreover, in one behaviorist theory,

the way infants and children learn an oral language is by imitating their environment, getting rewarded, and practicing. Other human beings (or mostly parents) have roles in giving the stimuli and rewards to the infants or children (Reutzel & Cooper, 2004). In S2's family, the language policy made for the youngest is since parents want the youngest to speak the Indonesian language well as a strategy for the child's academic life in the future.

Proceeding on the use of local language in S2's family, he mentioned that there is a dissimilarity in how the Javanese language is used in the family from the father's side and the mother's side. In his interview, he explicitly expressed how his big family from his mother's side is stricter in terms of local language usage than his big family from his father's side.

(4) *"Mungkin sebelumnya kayak kayak sudah ada perjanjian nggak tertulis gitu, Ma'am. Kayak, aku kayak, kakek saya udah tahu kalau "Oh memang nggak bisa ngomong bahasa Jawa yang..." iya memang masih belum bisa bahasa Jawa yang krama gitu, Ma'am. Jadi saya sudah kayak tahu ada kayak ikatan berbahasa itu sudah terjalin, Ma'am. Jadi kalau saya bilang bahasa Jawa biasa juga kakek saya nggak tersinggung juga kadang kakek saya juga ngomong ke saya ya pakai bahasa Jawa biasa meskipun kalau kadang kakek-kakek saya, kakek saya dengan tetangga-tetangga biasanya juga ngomong pakai bahasa krama."* (10:37 – 11:08)

(Maybe before there is like, like an unwritten agreement, Ma'am. Like, I am like, my grandfather already knows that "Oh, he can't speak Javanese language that is..." well, it is indeed true that I am still unable to use *Bahasa Jawa Krama*, Ma'am. So, it is like the connection is made already, Ma'am. So, if I speak in the daily Javanese language, the simple one, grandfather won't be offended. Sometimes my grandfather also speaks to me in simple Javanese language even though if he speaks with his neighbors he always uses the *Krama* one.)

(5) *"Kalau saya, misalnya hari libur, kemudian saya ke Kediri, Ma'am. Kan di Kediri kan juga ada kakek nenek saya yang dari ibu saya, nah di situ semuanya ngomong pakai bahasa Jawa, Ma'am. Jadi semuanya mulai dari tante, dari om semuanya itu pakai bahasa Jawa. Dan, mungkin saya dan adik-adik saya yang cuma pakai bahasa Indonesia. Jadi saya berusaha, benar-benar berusaha banget, pakai bahasa krama di sana. Jadi kadang kalau pakai bahasa Indonesia malah kadang diguyoni, "Masa rek nggawe bahasa Indonesia ning kene" gitu."*

(For instance, I went to Kediri on my holiday, Ma'am, as in Kediri there is my grandparent from my mother's side. There, everyone speaks in Javanese language, Ma'am. So, even from my aunt, uncle, everyone uses Javanese language. And probably only

my brother and I who use Indonesian language. So, I am trying, really trying, to use *Bahasa Jawa krama* there. Sometimes if I use Indonesian language, they will make a joke saying, “Why do you use Indonesian language here?” something like that.)

The family from the mother’s side takes language as their ethnic identity which plays a role in bonding all the family members seriously. Some previous literatures like Giles and Johnson (1981) and Romaine (2000) claimed that local languages can be used as a marker in identifying one’s ethnicity and to bring up a sense of belonging in a group. This language ideology seems a bit unlike the family from the father’s side who easily adjusts to S2 and his siblings’ language ability. In our questionnaire for the FLP Project, on a question using the Likert scale, 43% of people chose “strongly agree” and 43.2% of people chose “agree” for the statement that local language shows one’s ethnic identity.

The language policy that the family from the mother’s side adhered to is in contradiction to the language policy that S2’s family arranged for the youngest. This may cause confusion for the child himself. However, it is not impossible for the kid to learn the local language slowly just like how S2 does.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Even if there are no set rules or fixed patterns in how a family controls their language practices at home, there is a resemblance that can be found between S1’s and S2’s family language policy; it is in the manner both youngest members of the families are taught to talk in Indonesian rather than local languages. Regardless of the policy’s similarity, the backstory on why the families chose to do so is truly distinct. The interviews demonstrate the complexities of one’s family language practice, as well as the different elements that contribute to why specific languages must be spoken in certain communities or circumstances.

Because the participants of research for this study are confined to students in the English Department at Universitas Negeri Malang, it is desired that future studies would include a wider range of participants’ backgrounds. It could also be beneficial to increase the number of participants.

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