Knowledge E
enriching | engaging | empowering

Research Article

THE ROLE OF PARENTS' SOCIAL BACKGROUND IN HOME LANGUAGE PRACTICES: A FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Elvira Rosyida MR, Ira Maria Fran Lumbanbatu, Evynurul Laily Zen, Chatarina Tri Rahmawati

Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract.

Departing from Indonesia's unique and complex multilingual environment, our study sought to investigate the role of the social background of multilingual parents in implementing home language use. Specifically, we ask whether home language practice is shaped by parents' education level, ethnicity, and occupation, particularly in parent-child interaction. Our analysis draws from an online survey of 1.344 multilingual parents from different parts of Indonesia, with the survey being mainly distributed to over 28 provinces, including NAD, North Sumatra (North & West), Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Jambi, Bengkulu, Jakarta, West Java, Central, and East Java, Yogyakarta, Maluku, Kalimantan (North, South, West, East, and Central), Riau, Sulawesi (North, South, and Southeast), Bali, Nusa Tenggara (West and East), West Papua, and Papua. A single paragraph of 200 words maximum. Our findings indicate that education, ethnicity, and occupation significantly shape parents' decisions to manage home language practice with their children.

Keywords: social background, multilingual parents, home language practices

Corresponding Author: Elvira Rosyida MR; email: elvira.mr.fs@um.ac.id

Published 27 April 2023

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the IICB Conference Committee.

1. INTRODUCTION

A contesting nature of languages in a multilingual setting of Indonesia has extensively been discussed with the key findings indicating the fast progress of Indonesian – the sole national language of Indonesia – and the dramatic loss of regional home languages. In this paper, we use the term 'regional home language', 'local language', and 'ethnic language' interchangeably to refer to the language(s) other than Indonesian. Among a number of scientific discussions, one of the important findings is a comparative analysis of the 1971, 1980, and 1990 national census conducted by Steinhauer (1994) reporting a constant decline of local languages. With a focus on the 1971 national census data alone, the census reported the use of Indonesian as a primary home language by 41% of Indonesian citizens. The data particularly reflects the on-going dominance of

Indonesian over the regional languages with this marking the beginning of language shift phenomena in this ethnically diverse country. Other empirical findings suggesting language shift phenomena have been proposed by Nababan (1985), Ravindranath and Cohn (2014), Errington (1998), Kurniasih (2005), Poedjosoedarmo (2006), and Smith-Hefner (1983, 2009).

As far as language shift is concerned, Fishman (1991) argues that a low intergenerational transmission becomes one of the prominent factors. A strong desire of older generation to transmit the language to the younger ones has presumably linked to language ideology and attitude which are also interplayed with other factors, such as ethnicity, social and economic backgrounds (Song, 2010), as well as cultural identity (Templin et al., 2016). Choi (2003) maintains that speakers' ideology and positive attitudes toward a given language has a strong correlation with the intensity of language use, and vice versa. In this case, family plays a greater role in the process of language transmission and maintenance (Spolsky, 2012).

Previous studies within this scholarship in Indonesian context have focused on formal and institutional efforts of maintaining local languages (see Wardhani, 2016; Putri, 2018; Anshori, 2019; Tondo, 2009; Mu'jizah, 2018; Yusri & Amri, 2018). However, researchers have not discussed much about the possible interplay between parental social background and the shape of language policy implemented at home, in which, in this context we refer specifically to parent-child communication patterns at home. In other words, far too little attention has been paid to how Family Language Policy (FLP) takes shape in which our present study serves as an effort to close this gap.

In the area of sociolinguistic studies, Family Language Policy (FLP) has been regarded as an independent field of research with a continuous growth over the past decades (King et al., 2008; Fogle & King, 2013). In its history, FLP is stimulated under the underlying question on how children being raised in a multilingual environment are able to develop a balanced proficiency in both languages – the majority and minority languages (Smith-Christmas, 2016). In such cases, studies found that one of the prominent factors is a language policy implemented in the family either implicitly or explicitly. Here, family plays a critical role in legitimizing, selecting, managing, practicing, and negotiating the use of a corresponding language or languages at home that indirectly gives effects to the development of multilingual proficiency as well as the maintenance or shift of a language (Fogle, 2013; Kang, 2015; King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008).

Departing from the dynamic of multilingualism in Indonesia, and the fast-moving scientific exploration in the scholarship of FLP, our current study is set out to map out the acquisition background of multilingual families surveyed, and to investigate the extent

to which home language practices are shaped by the social background of multilingual parents, especially parents' education.

2. METHOD

This survey-based study involves the participation of 1,344 respondents from all over regions in Indonesia. See Table 1 below for detailed information of cities or regions of our respondents.

Regarding the demographic information, Table 2 below illustrates respondents' age based on 5 categories of age groups: 20 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 – 60, and above 60 years old with the results showing the greater number of 41 – 50-years-old group, followed by 31 – 40 years old. The smallest number of respondents were above 60 years old. Even though the number in each age group does not seem to be equal or proportional, we have enough representation that allows us to have various perspectives from different age groups. Regarding ethnicity, the result of the survey indicates the greater number of monoethnic respondents or individuals with one ethnic background (97%) compared to those with multiethnicity (3%).

The other essential demographic information is education background. The classification we made follows the formal education levels in Indonesia that include elementary school, lower secondary, upper secondary, diploma, bachelor, master's, and doctorate with the results demonstrating the greater number of upper secondary school (36% and 33.4%) and bachelor (32% and 33.2%) graduates (see Table 3). In the table, we can also see smaller numbers of parents holding master's (9.6% and 13.8%) and doctorate (1.6% and 2.5%) degrees. It is interesting, however, to also find that the number of parents graduating from elementary schools (6.7% and 5.4%) and lower secondary schools (5.9% and 4.9%). In this context, we hold an assumption that education background may somewhat reflect parents' socioeconomic status that hypothetically shapes their understanding about multilingual practices.

A survey study was employed as a primary approach in this present study upon its benefit of being able to collect large amounts of data. We designed our survey to collect data pertaining to (a) demographic information, e.g., age, birthplace, race, education background, (b) background languages, (c) home language practices and planning, and (d) parental ideology and attitudes about languages in a corresponding environment. For the background language part, we adapted Cohn et al.'s (2012) multilingual survey.

The data collection was largely spent targeting almost all provinces in Indonesia. We distributed the online survey, which took up to four months, to all over parts of Indonesia

Table 1: Respondents' Regional Background.

No.	Provinces	Regions
1	Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam	Langsa, Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Timur
2	North Sumatera	Medan, Langkat, Sidikalang, besitang,labuhan batu selatan
3	West Sumatera	Padang
4	Kepulauan Bangka Belitung	Sungai Liat, Pangkal Pinang
5	Jambi	Muaro Bungo, Muara Tebo
6	Bengkulu	Kaur
7	Lampung	Bandar Lampung, Air naningan
8	Kepulauan Riau	Pekanbaru, Minas
9	Jakarta	Jakarta
10	Banten	Tangerang, Serang
11	West Java	Bandung, depok, kuningan, Bogor, Ciamis
12	Central Java	Surakarta, Semarang, Wonogiri, Magelang, Blora, Rembang
13	Yogyakarta	Yogyakarta
14	East Java	Malang, Jombang, Blitar, Ponorogo, Surabaya, Kediri, Ngawi, Bojonegoro, Ngawi, Magetan, Pamekasan, Gresik, Lumajang
15	South Kalimantan	Banjar Masin, Tapin, Tanah Bumbu
16	North Kalimantan	Tarakan, Sembakung
17	East Kalimantan	Samarinda, Kutai Kartanegara
18	West Kalimantan	Pontianak
19	Central Kalimantan	Barito Timur, Gunung Mas, Tumbang Talaken
20	Bali	Singaraja
21	West Nusa	Bima
22	South Sulawesi	Bone, Makassar, Soppeng, Barito Kuala, Palopo, Sinrang, Pare Pare
23	Southeast Sulawesi	Rantai Baru, Bau Bau
24	North Sulawesi	North Sulawesi
25	Maluku	Piru, Ambon, Tual
26	South Maluku	Ternate
27	West Papua	Monokwari, Sorong, Fakfak
28	Papua	Biak, Jayapura, Serui, Merauke

through a friend-to-friend method and social media network. The collected survey has reached out 28 provinces including Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD), North and West Sumatera, Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Jambi, Bengkulu, Jakarta, West Java, Central and East Java, Yogyakarta, Maluku, Kalimantan (North, South, West, East, and Central), Riau, Sulawesi (North, South, and Southeast), Bali, Nusa Tenggara (West and East), West Papua, and Papua as indicated by the dots in Figure 1 below.

Table 2: Respondents' Age.

Age Group	Percentage (%)	
	Respondents	Respondents' spouse
20 – 30	24%	19%
31 – 40	27%	26%
41 – 50	29%	32%
51 – 60	17%	18%
>60	3%	4%

Table 3: Respondents' Education Background.

Education Level	Percentage (%)	
	Respondents	Respondents' spouse
Doctorate	2.5%	1.6%
Master's	13.8%	9.6%
Bachelor	33.2%	32.1%
Diploma	6.3%	7.4%
Upper secondary	33.4%	36.3%
Lower secondary	4.9%	5.9%
Elementary	5.4%	6.7%

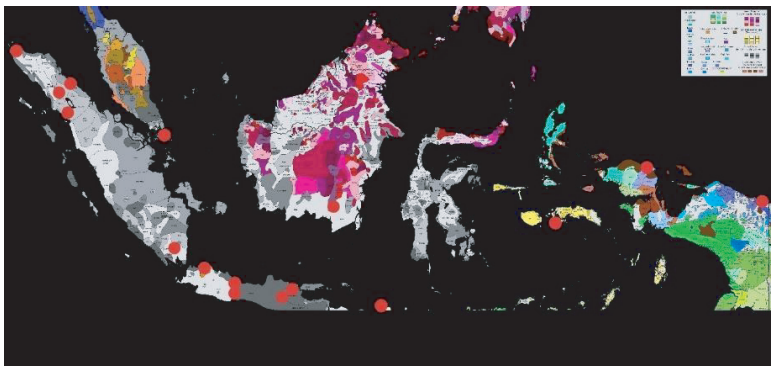

Figure 1: Regions of Survey Distribution (Adapted from https://www.ethnologue.com/profile/ID).

After the survey had been collected, we conducted a descriptive statistics analysis by referring to the objectives of our study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Acquisition Background of Multilingual Parents

Regarding the first objective – mapping out the acquisition background – we asked respondents to self-report their background languages with the questions projecting the information on the acquisition order and age. For these three questions, our respondents

were not only reporting their own experience but also their children. Here, we wanted to find differences in the way parents and children experience language acquisition and learning in multilingual settings.

Regarding the acquisition order, with a general assumption that the majority of Indonesian citizens are multilingual speakers knowing and speaking Indonesian (the national language) and a local language of their own in addition to knowing English or any other foreign language. Here, we did not set any specific level of proficiency because we understand that multilingual competence in Indonesian context can be very subtle. What matters for our survey is the acquisition order constituting first language (L1) or mother tongue, second language (L2), and third language (L3) in which we provided a guided information for our respondents to decide with Figure 2 and 3 below informing us the results.

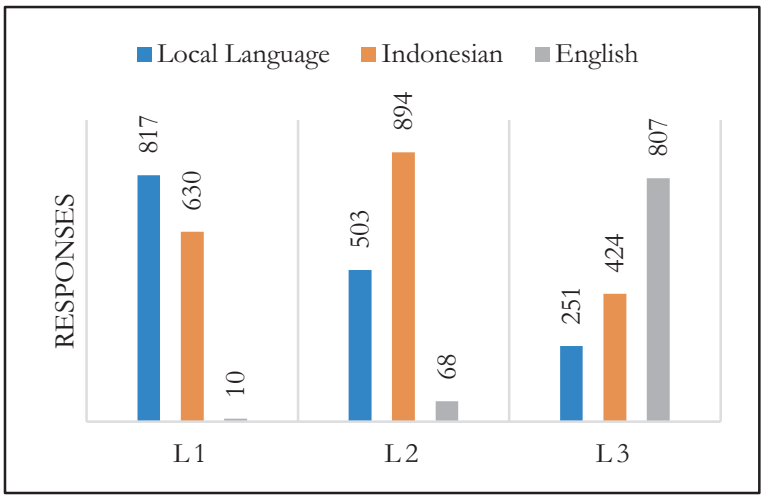

Figure 2: Parents' Acquisition Order.

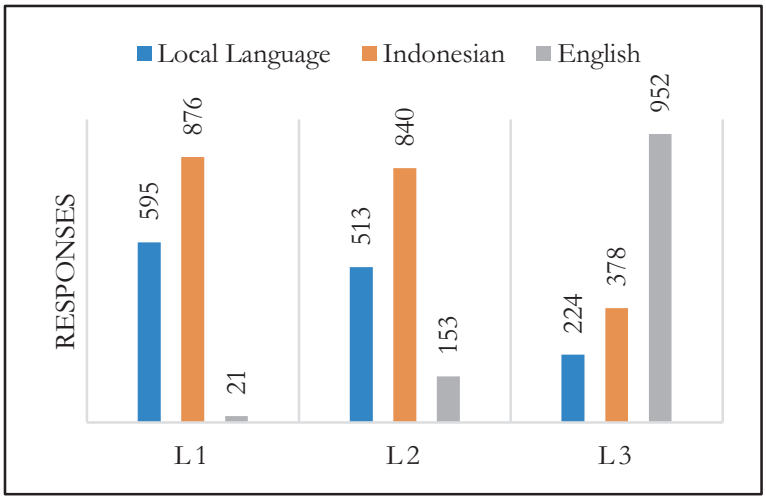

Figure 3: Children's Acquisition Order.

Comparing the pattern of acquisition order between parents in Figure 2 and their children in Figure 3, we learn that there seems to be a shifting trend where while greater number of parents acquire a local language as an L1 than Indonesian – 817 and 630 respectively – bigger number of children were reported to acquire Indonesian as an L1 than a local language – 876 and 595 respectively. In this context, English remains consistent as the L3 for both parents and children.

With respect to the acquisition age, the results indicate that local language is acquired before age of 3 for a greater number of parents (776) in Figure 4 than children (596) in Figure 5. It is consistent with the acquisition age of Indonesian by the bigger number of children at the very young age or before 3 years old as in Figure 5. In this case, the fact that Indonesian becomes more popular eventually ensures more regular uses of the language by also assuming a more dominant role of Indonesian in everyday conversation so much so that parents in today's modern Indonesia tend to adopt this linguistic pattern. Therefore, an important implication is that young children will most likely acquire Indonesian as L1 or before the age of three as the result of our survey has shown.

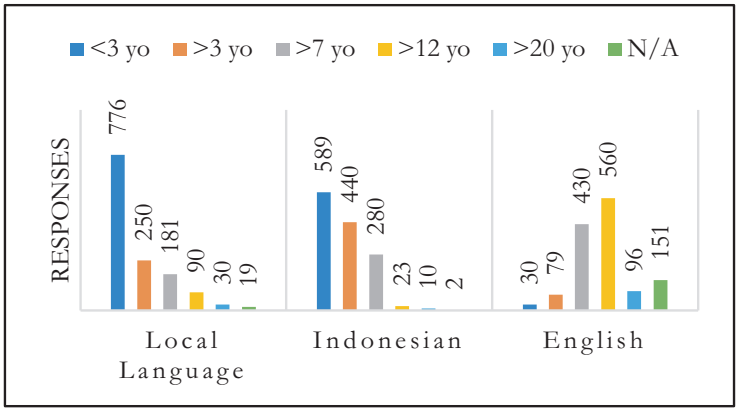

Figure 4: Parents' Acquisition Age.

It is also interesting to find that local language is learned after 7 years old (279) in the children group, which is bigger in number compared to the parent group (181). The finding explains how changes in bi/multilingual acquisition among our societies is in progress. In addition, learning a local language above the age of seven is highly likely when children attend formal school as we noted that local language becomes a compulsory local content subject at primary school levels in several regions. With regards to the age of acquisition among multilingual children, Zen's (2020) research demonstrates an important finding where there is a significant divide between children in the urban area of Malang and the smaller region of Blitar, with children acquiring only Javanese from birth is larger (11%) in Blitar than in Malang (1%) and the small-city children

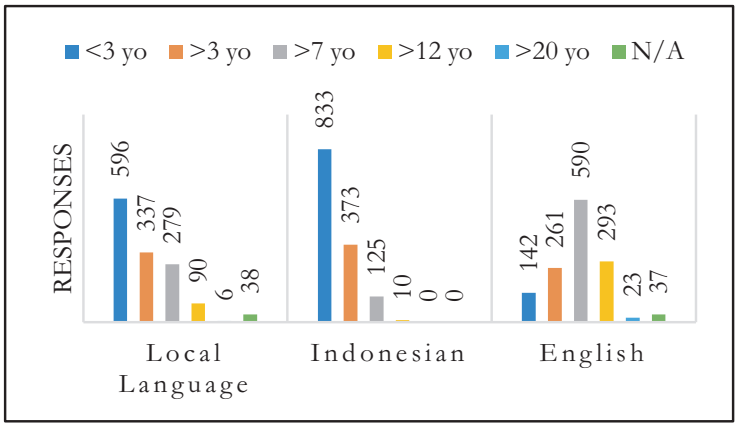

Figure 5: Children's Acquisition Age.

acquiring Javanese as an L3 is much smaller (11%) than those of the big city (21%). This data suggests that there is a tendency among urban children to acquire local language after Indonesian and probably English, which highlights the role of perceived societal norms; norms that reflect individual and family ideologies and beliefs.

3.2. Parents' Education and Home Language Use

To explore the extent to which parents' education background may shape actual home practices, some of the items of our survey asked about language(s) that our parent participants use when communicating with their spouse and child. In the first part, parents self-reported the language(s) they use when talking with their spouse (husband or wife) and child (see Figure 6). The Figure indicates that Indonesian only appears as the main language when communicating with spouse and child. Furthermore, while local language was the second most frequent language used in husband-wife talk, it was the bilingual pattern that appeared at the parent-child talk. In this situation, English remains the least used language.

As far as actual language practices are concerned, our findings indicated the primary use of Indonesian for the husband-wife talk, that it is particularly interesting given the fact that the number of parents aged 31-40 and 41-50 are the largest among others, 27% and 29% respectively. We assume that parents of this age group have lived in the era where interracial marriage in Indonesia becomes more and more common with internal migration, mobility, and technology being the underlying supports. In the case where interracial marriage occurs, the possibility to select Indonesian as the only means of communication in the family becomes very high as to bridge the language gap between husband and wife.

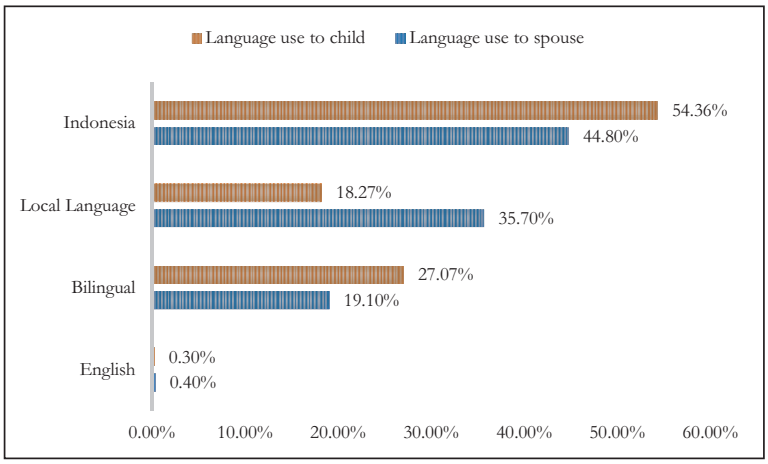

Figure 6: Language(s) in child and spouse talk.

The increasing use of Indonesian by parents with their children in our study is so much anticipated due to the extensive use of Indonesian in public spheres. Scholars working on multilingualism in Indonesia, such as Cobban (1996) and Smith-Hefner (2009) have also noted that since the birth of Modern Indonesia in 1945, the linguistic ecology of the country has changed due to the institution of Indonesian as a national language. In light of this shift, several major studies have also yielded similar results, primarily in family settings (see Errington, 1998; Kurniasih, 2005; Musgrave, 2014; Zen, 2017). A shifting pattern of acquisition order has also partly been evident in Smith-Hefner's (2009) study with a focus on the Javanese speaking community in Yogyakarta, the heartland of Javanese. In her study, the shift away from High Javanese *Krama* toward Indonesian – more often Colloquial Indonesian (CI) than Standard Indonesian (SI) – was apparently in correspondence to the shift of social attitudes as clearly shown by urban speakers and middle-class women and their daughters. Here, gender plays an important role in language shifts. More specifically, the shifting ideologies against the backdrop of new social and economic opportunities in modern Indonesia are also indicated; both men and women become more and more socio-economically equal, unlike in the past. Modern women, as Smith-Hefner's study demonstrated, experienced a transition from normative ideology of Javanese to modernism and equality. While the first treats Javanese women, especially mothers, as a role model of traditionalism for their children, the second provides women more choices as well as room for development. The transition has clearly determined the changing nature of linguistic practices as shown by young and educated Javanese women, in which she, a working mother, found it very challenging and time consuming to teach her young children to use proper Javanese. Prior to this observation, Kurniasih (2005) showed that a similar shifting pattern – from Javanese to Indonesian – evolved due to changing parental attitudes, especially in

mothers of a middle class background, while those of working class mothers remained stable. Although we have not gone far to analysing whether father and mother differ in their ideology and attitudes, while we have such data at hands, the work of Smith-Hefner (2009) and Kurniasih (2005) are, in part, parallel to our current findings in which there is a change in the acquisitional order, from local language as an L1 for parents and Indonesian as an L1 for the children.

Our finding on the shifting pattern of bilingualism is also consistent with Nababan's (1985) study on the 1980 nation-wide survey by the National Centre for Language Development. Surveying speakers across different age groups, the survey indicated that the most common bilingual pattern in the adult group was that of regional or local languages as an L1 and Indonesian as L2, with a reversed pattern in the children group, who had Indonesian as their L1 and a regional language as their L2.

The shifting pattern is also supported by the demographic data mentioning parents' level of education, the focus of our analysis. With the high number of upper secondary and bachelor graduates, we anticipate a greater number of parents to have largely received exposures in Indonesian from their formal schooling. The changing social behavior also seems to be at play with globalization and urbanization stimulating a more equal social relationship. In this context, when husband and wife share more equal roles, they usually demand for a more neutral linguistic code. As such, it is highly likely for them to use Indonesian even for everyday communication in private domains. Smith-Hefner (2009) found such tendency in her Javanese women participants in the city of Yogyakarta where Javanese women tended to shift away from using the high variety of Javanese when addressing their husband and started to use Indonesian instead as they were equally able to pursue higher education and gain wider economic opportunities. Here, we learn that language change may significantly be motivated by social change happening in society.

In looking at the possible interplay between parents' education background and home language use, we made two sub categorizations: low-education and high-education parents. The low group consisted of parents graduating from primary to higher secondary schools, while the high group was those having diplomas to doctoral degrees.

The language used by parents with low education to their child shows that the greatest language used is Bahasa Indonesia which is 55.94%, followed by the local language at 24.96%, bilingual at 18.93%, and English at 0.17%. It is different with the language used by the child with low educational background, the parents with a low educational background mostly talk in the local language with their spouse, which is

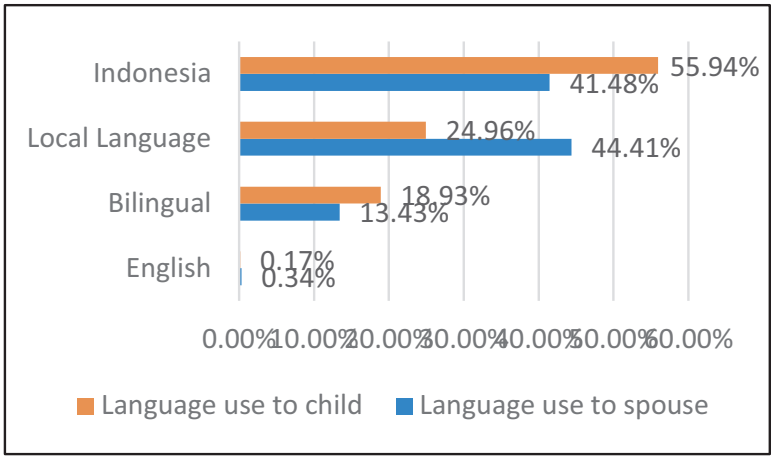

Figure 7: Home Language Pattern by Low Education Parents.

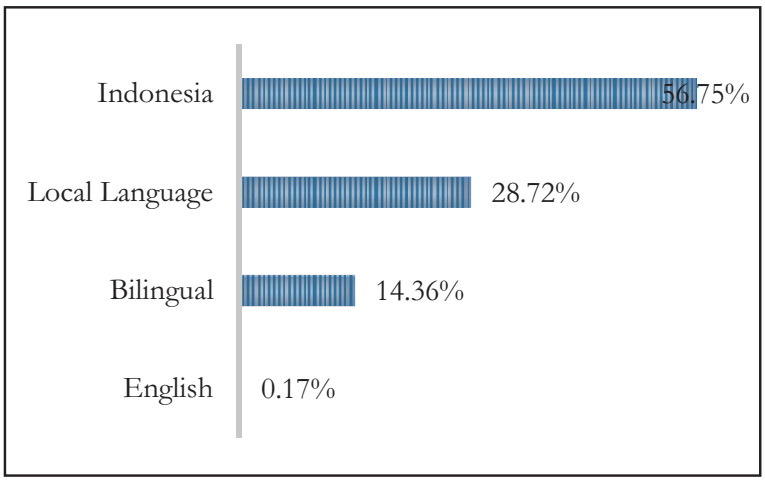

Figure 8: Child to Parent Pattern by Low Education Parents.

44.4% and it is followed by Bahasa Indonesia 41.48%, bilingual 13.43% and English 0.34%. It can be said that Bahasa Indonesia and the local language play a big role in communication in families with parents from low educational backgrounds.

Furthermore, the language used by children to parents with low educational backgrounds can be seen in Figure 8 above. The figure shows that the greatest language used by the child to parents is Bahasa Indonesia (56.7%), followed by local language (28.72%,) bilingual (14.36%), and English (0.17%).

Figure 9 shows the language pattern by high educational respondents to their spouses and children. The high educational parents here are those with diploma degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees. Parents with high educational backgrounds use Bahasa Indonesia for their child (52.96%), followed by bilingual (33.20%,), local language (12.90%), and English (0.40%). The figure also describes the language used by parents to their spouses. The greatest language

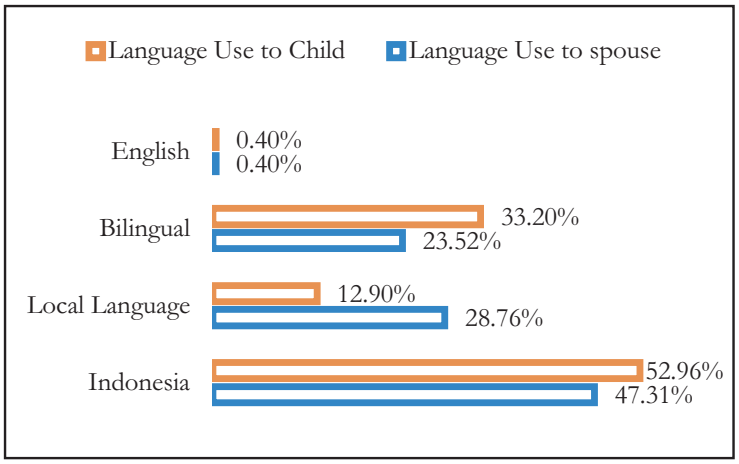

Figure 9: Home Language Pattern by High Education Parents.

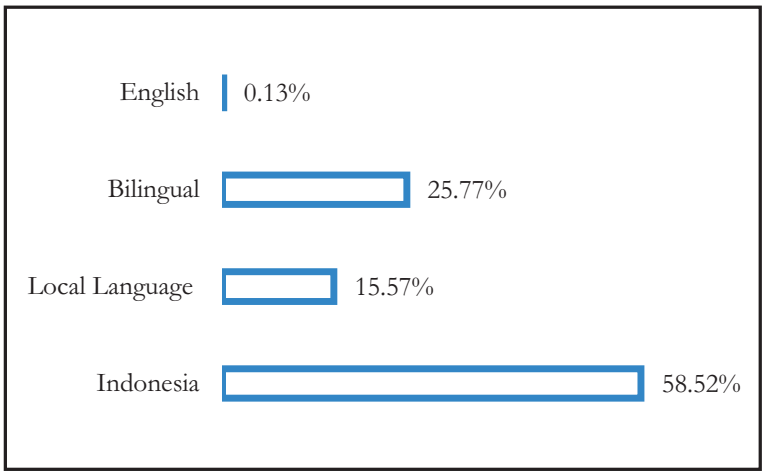

Figure 10: Child to Parent Pattern by High Education Parents.

used by parents to their spouses is Bahasa Indonesia which is 47.31% and followed by local language 28.76%, bilingual 23.52 % and English 0.40%. The data from Figure 10 shows that Bahasa Indonesia became the first place of language used by children to parents (58,52%). The second place of language used by children to parents with a high educational background is billingual (23,7%), and English becomes the least (0,13%).

4. CONCLUSSION

In conclusion, while Indonesian is the most commonly used language in both husband-wife and parent-child interaction at home, the second option of language chosen was different in which local language becomes the second primary tool of communication in husband-wife talk and the bilingual use of Indonesian and local language occurs at parent-child talk. In the extent to which parents' education influences the language

selection pattern at home contexts, we found that there is no significant gap indicated between parents of low-education and high-education groups as both groups show similar trends in utilizing Indonesian as the primary mode of communication.

References

[1] Anshori MS. Sosiolinguistik dalam kepunahan bahasa. An-Nuha. 2019;6(1):51–61.

[2] Choi JK. Language attitudes and the future of bilingualism: the case of Paraguay. Int J Biling Educ Biling. 2003;6(2):81–94.

[3] Cobban JL. Indonesia: Insular contrasts of the Java core with outer islands. In: Dutt AK, editor. Southeast Asia: a Ten Nation Region. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers; 1996. pp. 135–52.

[4] Cohn AC, Fougeron C, Huffman MK, editors. The Oxford handbook of laboratory phonology. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2012.

[5] Ethnologue. *Languages of the world: Indonesia*. 2019. Available from https://www.ethnologue.com/country/ID

[6] Errington J. Shifting languages: Interaction and identity in Javanese Indonesia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1998. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612480.

[7] Fishman JA. Reversing language shift. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters; 1991.

[8] Fogle L, King KA. Child agency and language policy in transnational families. Issues Appl Linguist. 2013;19(0):1–25.

[9] Fogle LW. Parental ethnotheories and family language policy in transnational adoptive families. Lang Policy. 2013;12(1):83–102.

[10] Kang H. Korean families in America: their family language policies and home-language maintenance. Biling Res J. 2015;38(3):275–91.

[11] King KA, Fogle L, Logan-Terry A. Family language policy. Lang Linguist Compass. 2008;2(5):907–22.

[12] Kurniasih, Y. (2005). Gender, class and language preference: A case study in Yogyakarta. 2005 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society. 2005;1–25.

[13] Musgrave S. Language shift and language maintenance in Indonesia. In: Sercombe P, Tupas R, editors. Language, Education and Nation-Building. England: Palgrave Macmilan; 2014. pp. 87–105.

[14] Mujizah M; Mu'jizah. Preservasi dan revitalisasi bahasa dan sastra Nafri, Papua: sebuah bahasa hampir punah. Aksara. 2018;30(1):75–88.

[15] Nababan PW. Bilingualism in Indonesia: ethnic language maintenance and the spread of the national language. Southeast Asian J Soc Sci. 1985;13(1):1–18.

[16] Poedjosoedarmo S. Perubahan tatabahasa: Penyebab, proses, dan akibatnya. Yogyakarta: Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar Fakultas Sastra Universitas Sanata Dharma; 2006.

[17] Putri NW. Pergeseran bahasa daerah Lampung pada masyarakat kota Bandar Lampung. Jurnal Penelitian Humaniora. 2018;19(2):77–86.

[18] Ravindranath M, Cohn AC. Can a language with millions of speakers be endangered? Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society. 2014;7:64–75.

[19] Shin SJ. Bilingualism and identity. Bilingualism in School and Society. New York: Routledge; 2013. pp. 97–118.

[20] Spolsky B, Shohamy E. Language practice, language ideology, and language policy. In: Lambert RD, Shohamy E, editors. Language Policy and Pedagogy: Essays in Honor of A. Ronald Walton. Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins; 2000. pp. 1–42.

[21] Spolsky B. Language policy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004.

[22] Spolsky B. Family language policy – the critical domain. J Multilingual Multicult Dev. 2012;33(1):3–11.

[23] Song J. Language ideology and identity in transnational space: Globalization, migration, and bilingualism among Korean families in the USA. Int J Biling Educ Biling. 2010;13(1):23–42.

[24] Smith-Hefner NJ. *Language and social identity: Speaking Javanese in Tengger* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, USA). Available from http://search.proquest.com/docview/303177712?accountid=13771

[25] Smith-Hefner NJ. Language shift, gender, and ideologies of modernity in Central Java, Indonesia. J Linguist Anthropol. 2009;19(1):57–77.

[26] Smith-Christmas C. Family language policy: Maintaining an endangered language in the home. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan; 2016.

[27] Steinhauer H. The Indonesian language situation and linguistics: prospects and possibilities. Bijdr Taal- Land- Volkenkd. 1994;150(4):755–84.

[28] Templin T, Seidl A, Wickström B, Feichtinger G. Optimal language policy for the preservation of a minority language. Math Soc Sci. 2016;81:8–21.

[29] Tondo FH. Kepunahan bahasa-bahasa daerah: faktor penyebab dan implikasi etnolinguistis. Jurnal Masyarakat & Budaya. 2009;11(2):277–96.

[30] Wardhani LS. Local language in globalization era: can it survive? *Proceedings of the International Conference on Language, Literary and Cultural Studies (ICON LATERALS)*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.217716/ub.icon_laterals.2016.001.1.27.

[31] Yusri & Amri, H. Pemertahanan bahasa Leukondi kabupaten Simeulue. Jurnal Dedikasi Pendidikan. 2018;2(1):14–28.

[32] Zhan CJ, Hopper R. Measuring language attitudes: the speech evaluation instrument. J Lang Soc Psychol. 1985;4(2):113–23.

[33] Zen EL. On the acquisition of English voiceless stop VOT by Indonesian-English bilinguals: Evidence of input frequency. *Kta. 2017; 20*(2), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.9744/kata.20.2.45-52.

[34] Zen EL. (2020). Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition by multilingual children in Indonesia (Doctoral dissertation, National University of Singapore, Singapore.)