

## Research Article

# The Language Attitudes of Indonesian Language Teachers Toward the Acehese Language

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## Abstract.

Language attitudes are one area in sociolinguistics that needs to be explored. This research highlights the language attitudes of Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh city toward their own mother tongue, the Acehese language. This paper aimed to figure out the attitudes of teachers as native speakers of the Acehese language and their language of preference in the educational context. The novelty of this research lies in the object of the research, that is, teachers, keeping in mind that recent publications about language attitudes have only revolved around students or parents. In executing the research, the researchers opted for qualitative methods to describe the phenomenon under study. The researchers used a descriptive approach to link, depict, and formulate the results and discussion. Questionnaires were used openly and closely to interview the respondents. The results of this research explained that Indonesian language teachers demonstrated strong, confident, affirmative, and flexible attitudes toward the Acehese language.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, language attitudes, language usage, Indonesian language teachers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language exposes not only one's competence in linguistics but also his/her attitudes towards it. Language has attitudes that eventually bring out differences to the users. In many contexts, language attitudes showcase people's preferences in using the language. Most of the time, language attitudes are intertwined with behaviours. Attitudes are always seen as precursors of behaviours; they serve as determinants of how a person will actually behave in his/her daily affairs [1]. According to Mc Kenzie [2], there are several dimensions to language attitudes. Some of them are attitudes towards language preferences, attitudes toward language lessons, and attitudes towards learning a new language. These attitudes are the anchors of this research. Therefore,

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uncovering language attitudes towards a certain language is pivotal to influencing language behaviours. This is condoned by the opinion of Caranza in [3] that highlights the importance of language attitudes in creating many spectra of changes in speech communities in terms of the explaining central issues in sociolinguistics such as language variation and change.

A discussion about the use of the Acehnese language amongst Indonesian language lecturers and teachers is urgently needed because the researchers found that previous research on language attitudes mostly revolved around students. This research attempted to present from different angles, including the social dimension within the frame of education. Related to this,[4] Bou and Commission disseminated the idea that social dimension elements like status can be defined as allegiance to the most valued social object. Teaching as teachers or lecturers is one of the most respected professions in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh. According to Jahidin [5] , being a teacher requires a certain set of skills, among which is the social skill. Socially, teachers and lecturers bring with them social power to influence students.

Using some of the spectra of language attitudes, such as the domains of language preferences, language lessons, and learning a new language, this research investigated the language attitudes of Indonesia language teachers and lectures in Banda Aceh towards the Acehnese language. Recent studies showed that the Acehnese language has begun to lose its grips particularly amongst youngsters. The research conducted by Aziz et al [6] revealed that members of the first and second generations of Acehnese women were eager to use the Acehnese language in most occasions, while those of the third generation spoke the Acehnese language reluctantly during interviews. This reality gave an emphasis on the language attitudes of women only. The uniformed tone is also presented in the paper conducted by Al-Auwal,[7] The results of the research revealed that students in one of the premier universities in Banda Aceh were more inclined to using the Indonesian language than the Acehnese language. This was due to their perceptions that the Acehnese language sounds harsh and weird and that speaking the Indonesian language gives the impression of prestige.

The fact that education plays an important role in preserving a language gives an opportunity for educators to wield influence and serve as role models. Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Aceh must have realized that they must disseminate knowledge and teach the language not only within the cognitive area but also in the social domain. Teachers and lecturers in Aceh face an interesting fact that almost all

students are bilingual or even multilingual [7]. The findings of Alamsyah [8] proved that there was a tendency of Acehnese families to speak the Indonesian language at home due to some reasons, one of which was the use of the Indonesian language as language of instruction at school, which means that speaking the Indonesian language at home would make it easier for their children to absorb school materials. In other words, Acehnese parents considered the Indonesian language as greater in importance in respect to education than the Acehnese language. Considering this fact, Indonesian language teachers in Aceh, who are also parents, native speakers of the Acehnese language, and part of society, must have faced the dilemma. It then leads to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the attitudes of Indonesian language teachers in Aceh towards the Acehnese language?
- 2) What is their language of preference within the educational context?

## 2. METHODS

The sociolinguistic area of study always fits with the work of qualitative research methodology. This research was adamant to choose qualitative methods because the core property of qualitative research is that it examines the way people make sense of their own concrete, real-life experiences in their own minds and in their own words and subsequently the way they analyse these understandings in the sense of a behavioural science such as psychology, sociology, politics, linguistics, etc. Brooks [9]. The respondents were chosen by their profession as Indonesian language teachers and based on their status as Acehnese native speakers. They must be in the age range 23–60 years and reside in Banda Aceh city. They were given a questionnaire and interviewed by the researchers. Generally, language use surveys consist of lengthy questionnaires intended to determine, among other things, the speakers' attitudes towards the languages available to them, and to determine the language the speakers use and when, where, with whom, and for what purpose they use it. Hornberger & Putz [10]

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the research questions, explaining the realm of sociolinguistics within the context of education is required. Scotton [11] believes that language choices including code-switching are indexical of social negotiations of rights and obligations. Bilingual classrooms are the center to represent the deliberation of the language chosen. According to Janks [12], classroom code-switching entails the simultaneous use of two languages, including a target language. This means that the occurrence of code-switching is inevitable in bilingual and multilingual classrooms. Brown in Roos [13] believes that language learning is part of a process of acculturation which requires a reorientation and permeable and adaptable ego boundaries. Having said that, the interaction between the teacher and the student is a conscious expression of their belief systems, and most of the time it is not a real reflection of their attitudes because opinions can be assessed by different situational and social factors.

#### 3.1. Attitudes -- data from the questionnaire

In this research, respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire. They were asked about their language usage and preferences, experiences with code-switching and code-mixing, language competences described in Acehese proverbs, and attitudes towards and beliefs about the Acehese language. The data displayed here are meant to expose the relationship between expressions of attitudes and sociolinguistic behaviours. Subjects were asked closed and open questions. The subjects were 56 Indonesian language teachers in Banda Aceh city, including 28 male teachers and 28 female teachers.

TABLE 1: Language usage by gender amongst Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh: 'Do you speak differently depending on where you are and who you are talking to?'

	Man		Woman	
Yes	22	79%	25	89%
No	2	7%	-	
Sometimes	4	14%	3	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>		<b>28</b>	

It can be inferred from Table 1 that gender determined attitudes towards a language. Female Indonesian language teachers were more affirmative and flexible when being

faced with different social contexts, backgrounds, and situations. This is in line with Trudgill’s opinion in [14] that women pay more attention to social status and situations. Women’s flexibility in adapting to different atmospheres when speaking is also reflected in the work by Meshtrie et.al [15], which concluded that women are more aware of the social significance of a language. The answers to this questionnaire question also deliver sociolinguistics’ contribution of an understanding of language in the education context.

In the next questionnaire question, the respondents chosen were only native speakers of the Acehnese language. There were 44 Indonesian language teachers whose mother tongue was Acehnese, 23 of whom were male and 21 were female.

TABLE 2: Language usage by gender amongst Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh: ‘Do you speak the Acehnese language in the classroom?’

	Man		Woman	
Yes	3	13%	1	5%
No	13	57%	9	43%
Sometimes Rarely	6	26%	11	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>21</b>	

The classroom in the sociolinguistic context is something to be reckoned with. The diversity in the classroom must be celebrated by every educator. He/she must be aware of the student’s linguistic competences particularly when teaching a foreign language. In this case, Banda Aceh city is the capital city of, and one of the biggest cities in, the province. The sheer multicultural height is unquestionable. That means that there is a great chance that the classroom is filled with students of different ethnic backgrounds. Even in Aceh province itself there are at least 16 local languages. The usage of different approaches in teaching a language must be flexible and adaptable. This is in line with Faizin’s statement [16] that educators should be able to maintain the status quo because each learner’s social background and language are varied. Based on the answers to the questionnaire question, it is obvious that female teachers were more considerate to use the Acehnese language in the classroom. Some respondents selecting ‘sometimes’ indicates that their use of the language was underlined by deliberate attitudes and reasons. One of the reasons was that they were all aware that they needed to insert some Acehnese proverbs in teaching Indonesian proverbs as the Acehnese equivalents of some Indonesian proverbs. Male teachers were stricter in applying the Indonesian language entirely in the classroom instruction because they felt the importance of using

the national language within the frame of education; there scarcely any usages of the Acehnese language in entirety in Indonesian language teaching.

TABLE 3: Language usage by gender amongst Indonesian Language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh: ‘Which language do you prefer when speaking to your colleagues at the office?’.

	Man	Woman	
Acehnese Language	18	78%	5 24%
Indonesia Language Other languages	5	22%	15 1 71% 5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>21</b>

Offices are a social domain where people of different ethnicities gather. From the results above, it is known that male Indonesian language teachers showed more affirmative and stronger attitudes towards the Acehnese language than female teachers. Male teachers were stricter in applying the Indonesian language as medium of instruction in the classroom than their female counterparts. When it came to socializing outside the classroom with colleagues, they were more inclined to using the Acehnese language because they were more comfortable using the language. Such is understandable because they thought that their mother tongue needs to be preserved and it felt better for them to use the Acehnese language when expressing their ideas to their colleagues. There was also a sense of pride in using a regional language or mother tongue. In this case, male teachers felt that they needed to still exercise their local language to keep and preserve their identity as Acehnese.

According to Benedetto [17] as cited in Bergwall [15], women and men developed patterns of language use, but women tended to focus on the affective function of an interaction more often than men. The reasons why female teachers preferred using the Indonesian language when speaking to colleagues at the office depended on how they first met those colleagues. If a female teacher used the Indonesian language in her first meeting with another female teacher, even though both of them were Acehnese native speakers, then their use of the Indonesian language would persist in the next meetings. This is very much related to Holmes’ universality formula of language and gender that emphasises that women will maintain and increase solidarity in an interaction. It is also said that women are stylistically more flexible than men. Having said that, the language attitudes of female Indonesian language teachers towards the Acehnese language in the office were more fluid than their male counterparts.

TABLE 4: Language usage by gender amongst Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh: “If you could, would you then speak the Acehnese language in teaching and learning processes all the time?”

	Man		Woman	
Yes	8	35%	3	14%
No	14	61%	14	67%
Depends on the situation	1	4%	4	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>21</b>	

In the context of language preservation, the preservation of a local language through education is indomitable, but within the frame of learning a national language, this situation is of a contrasting nature. There are many previous studies about language teaching that suggest educators must be very agile in using language in the right context. This is supported by Hornberger’s [18] opinion on educators. She believes that all teachers are language planners in the classroom, and the decisions and actions that educators take around language have profound implications for learners’ future. This is obviously reflected in the results of the questionnaire, according to which male and female teachers agreed that the Acehnese language should not be used and spoken all the time, particularly in the context of teaching and learning. Besides, they felt the need to maintain the Indonesian language as the main language of instruction in order to ensure the linguistic competences of the students according to the applicable standard.

Indonesian language teachers believed that in maintaining and preserving the Acehnese language, the family provides core education. Parents at home are expected to speak the Acehnese language and teach it to their children in order to pass the Acehnese language and legacy on to the children. An interesting finding of this research is that female teachers believed that the Acehnese language should be considered as a language of instruction while teaching the Indonesia language mainly because some students had better comprehension when they explained something in the Acehnese language. According to Kamwangamalu (2010), classroom code-switching is a teaching/learning aid that can be used to meet a wide range of classroom needs. Therefore, code-switching in the classroom context actually helps teachers transfer knowledge.

Indonesian language teachers exhibited a highly confident attitude towards the Acehnese language. Almost all teachers, male and female, believed that the Indonesian language as medium of instruction would not affect or endanger the Acehnese

TABLE 5: Language usage by gender amongst Indonesian language teachers and lecturers in Banda Aceh: “Do you think the usage of the Indonesian language in the classroom can endanger the existence of the Acehnese language as mother tongue?”

	Man		Woman	
Yes	1	4%	1	5%
No	20	87%	19	90%
Not sure	2	9%	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>21</b>	

language. They affirmed that it is necessary to be a bilingual or multilingual speaker by enhancing the use of both/all languages in many different contexts and situations. In practice, education in languages other than a standard national language was traditionally left to private efforts [20]. The confidence amongst Indonesian language teachers in the Acehnese language was also reflected by their own experiences. Teachers with children preferred speaking the Acehnese language at home to maintain their Acehnese identities. This process of passing on the mother tongue also occurred in informal situations such as big family gatherings, religious places such as mosques, traditional markets, and other public places such as restaurants, parks, etc. This reality brings about an affirmative statement that Indonesian language teachers had played their roles in formal and social contexts very well. Their attitudes towards the Acehnese language were strong, confident, affirmative, and flexible.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Language attitudes are reflected not only in the behavioral context but also in the social context. The more diverse the society, the more fluid the language attitudes of the society. In this research, it was discovered that the language attitudes of Indonesian language teachers were obviously framed in different contexts. Male teachers were stricter in applying the Indonesian language as language of instruction in the classroom than their female counterparts. In different occasions and contexts, male teachers felt most comfortable using the Acehnese language when talking to their colleagues in the workplace. Female teachers, on the other hand, were more flexible in using the Acehnese language in the work space, meaning that they could use both languages interchangeably. The results of this research showed that female teachers were more comfortable using the Indonesian language because they felt it was more socially and universally acceptable in the working context.



In terms of code-switching, almost all of the teachers believed that it is undeniable and indomitable. Code-switching is required in certain contexts for students' comprehension of the taught language. The language attitudes of Indonesian language teachers towards code-switching was very positive, and they believed that it is necessary. The majority of the teachers also believed that the Indonesian language is not a threat to the Acehese language in the educational context. They even persuaded themselves and the students to embrace bilingual and multilingual abilities in order to maintain the status of both languages, the Indonesian language as standard national language and the Acehese language as mother tongue.

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