

Language Revitalization through Education and Tourism Industry in West Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Culture is the system of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. It is classified into three categories; ideas, behavior, and products which are shared by members of a given group. Language as one aspect of behavior (Robinson, 1988: 7) is a valuable resource and a contributing factor towards the sustainable development of the people speaking the language. The role of a language, for instance, in society is significant as a vehicle for the exchange of information and facilitating the transmission of knowledge. It is an indelible expression of life that conveys core values, builds ambition and spurs invention essential to strengthening the aspiration of the people. Language as part of culture and heritage stimulates the generation of ideas vital to the creation of a strong social infrastructure. Revitalizing a language is a component critical to strengthening an ethnic minority community on the margins of society who struggle to retain its identity. Sundanese language (*bahasa Sunda*) is one of the ethnic languages in Indonesia which is challenged by the existence of traditional, national, and foreign values merged in one community so that it faces the declination of speakers that limits its opportunity for having high position and vitality. Tourism industry and education are two of alternative media to revitalize the language which will be discussed in this paper.

Key words: Revitalizing, culture, education, and tourism.

Introduction

Revitalization of language is not only the local and national concern but also international one. It is shown by the fact that it has been the concern of UNESCO. UNESCO's mission regarding language includes saving the linguistic heritage of humanity by encouraging its use in the creation and dissemination of information and culture (Moukala, 2003). The plan of action of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), underlines the importance of safeguarding languages, particularly those in danger. The Member States must take the appropriate measures towards: (1) safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity in giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages; (2) encouraging linguistic diversity-while respecting the mother tongue-at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/linguistic-diversity-in-unesco-normative-texts/>).

The 2003 UNESCO convention also emphasized the vital role of language in the expressions and transmission of living heritage. All intangible cultural heritage domains depend on language for their day-to-day practice and inter-generational transmission. Language is not only a vehicle of intangible heritage but also constitutes their very essence (UNESCO, 2003).

Sundanese language (*Bahasa Sunda*) as one of the ethnic languages in Indonesia is the main indigenous language spoken by Sundanese people (*urang Sunda*). It is possibly considered to disappear with the passing of the older generation and the changing values of the younger generation. This language, a mother tongue of the majority of inhabitants of the Western part of Java, needs to be revitalized because of several reasons as follows. First, the linguistic situation in West Java area, especially in big cities such as Bandung, Bogor, Sukabumi, and Cirebon, is very complex and the complexity derives from the fact that the people living in these cities are multilingual urban society with multicultural diversity. Therefore, most of them do not speak Sundanese language. This language is only spoken by a small number of people.

Second, the people in big cities in West Java area consist of those coming from other cities, such as Jogjakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Solo, Padang, Aceh, Lampung, etc., and bringing their own languages. The mixture of languages in these urban cities makes it difficult for Sundanese language to

maintain its high position and vitality. To be a means of communication in these urban areas, Sundanese language faces the problem of being in constant struggle with Bahasa Indonesia as the official language, other ethnic languages, and English as a foreign language. Third, many people living in big cities in West Java area seem to be more proud of speaking Indonesian to speaking Sundanese. According to Alwasilah (2008), the Sundanese people portray negative attitude towards their language. The 40 million people in West Java, most of whom are native Sundanese, do not really care about their native tongue. As a result, the gradual marginalization of Sundanese posing a threat to its vitality happens.

Fourth, based on the interviews with fifty students in a private university who belonged to Sundanese people living in West Java area, it was identified that ninety percent of the students did not speak Sundanese for several reasons. Only five percent of the students spoke Sundanese with their parents at home. With this in mind, Sundanese language needs to be maintained and revitalized. This paper tries to discuss two alternative media, education and tourism industry that can be used to revitalize Sundanese language.

Language as Part of Culture

Culture emerges as a very broad concept embracing all aspects of human life so the definition of culture is varied depending on one's own perception about culture. Robinson (1988:7) classifies culture into the three categories:

1. Ideas comprising beliefs, values, and institutions;
2. Behavior comprising language, gesture, customs or habits;
3. Products comprising literature, folklore, art, music, and artifacts.

Two basic distinctions can be made in these three categories. Firstly, the categories of behavior and products reflect a notion of culture as observable phenomena. Secondly, the categories of ideas reflect a notion of culture as not observable. It is something which is internal but which can also be explicitly described.

Valdes (1986: 182) states that aspects of cultures include the people way of life as well as the geographic, historical, economic, artistic, and scientific aspects of a society. Nelson Brooks (1968), cited in Seelye (1992: 14), identified five different types of culture: biological growth, personal refinement, literature and the fine arts, patterns of living, and the sum total of a way of life. Language as part of the culture is not only a logical instrument

but also fundamentally a social instrument which cannot be divorced from the society that uses it (Dewey, 1897), cited in Seeley (1992: 15). In brief, if we talk about culture, we must talk about the language because it is part of the culture.

Language Revitalization

Cultural revitalization can be defined as intentional, continuous, and planned efforts to make the cultural values not only be understood by the owners of the cultures but also arouse creativity in daily life and in facing various challenges (Alwasilah; 2006: 18). According to Alwasilah (2006), there are at least three steps to revitalize the cultures: (1) understanding that results in awareness; (2) collective planning; and (3) arousing cultural creativity. Nelson Brooks (1968), cited in Seelye (1992: 14), has been so influential in causing teachers to recognize the important of culture and its link with language. If we intend to revitalize the culture of a nation, it means that we also revitalize the language or languages of the nation. A language is a living entity and needs to be kept alive by a community of speakers, who will transmit their heritage to the next generation through that means.

The revitalization of a language is usually focused on long-term growth opportunities to revive the local community. According to King (2001: 23), language revitalization is the attempt to add new linguistic forms or social functions to embattled language with the aim of increasing its uses or users. More specifically, it encompasses efforts which might target the language structures, the uses of the language, as well as the users of the language. Thus, it is the process of moving towards renewed vitality of the threatened language. The definition suggests that the attempt is to promote the language and to increase the number of users of the language. With this understanding, the writer tries to analyze the revitalization of Sundanese language as an attempt to promote the language and to increase the number of the users of the language through education and tourism industry even though many efforts have also been made by the government and Sundanese community.

Revitalization of Sundanese language (*bahasa Sunda*) through Education

The status of *Bahasa Sunda* as a mother tongue has been registered in World Language Report from UNESCO, EXTEA centralized in Bilbao Basque since 2001 and Dutch colonial government even announced *bahasa*

Sunda as the standard language in Bandung area in 1912 (Djasudarna, 2007). In addition, it is stated in the Constitution that the government are in force to develop cultures. Thus, a language as part of the culture must also be developed (Rosidi, 2006).

To develop cultures means to develop education (Alwasilah, 2006: 39). Therefore, to revitalize *Bahasa Sunda*, we have to adopt the language into educational system. There are several steps to adopt the language into educational system. First, *Bahasa Sunda* must be included as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum at all levels of education as long as the schools are located in West Java province. Automatically, *Bahasa Sunda* would be used as a means of instruction in that subject. By doing this, the exposure of the language will be great in amount. The amount of exposure influences the language skills. However, the instructional goals and objectives at each level must be clear so the language skills that must be achieved at each level are also clear. Therefore, the related authorities, in this case *Dinas Pendidikan*, must be able to review and evaluate the operation.

Second, introducing bilingual education using *bahasa Indonesia* and *bahasa Sunda* to the students in West Java province would not only revitalize *bahasa Sunda* but also facilitate instruction for students who enter the education system with a limited understanding of the standard national language, *bahasa Indonesia*. Third, the core of education is reading and writing (Alwasilah, 2006: 39). Therefore, literacy environment must be created by teachers. The products comprising literature, folklore, art, music, and artifacts must surround the students so they are accustomed to seeing and reading the products of culture. By doing this, the creators of art, such as writers and handicraft makers, are also encouraged to work. It means that this condition arouses creativity. In addition, publishers of books written in *bahasa Sunda* can be encouraged to donate voluntarily some of the published books to the schools. At last, there must be a day in which students and teachers speak *bahasa Sunda* as suggested by the Mayor of Bandung Municipality to the civil servants working in the area of Bandung Municipality.

Revitalization of Sundanese Language through Tourism Industry

Another media which can be used to revitalize *bahasa Sunda* is tourism industry. Indonesia as a developing country is now encouraging the tourism industry as one of the sectors that can increase the state revenue. West Java is one of ten most tourist destination in Indonesia recorded by Central Statistics

Agency (BPS). There are so many tourism objects in West Java that can be visited by not only foreign visitors but also domestic ones. Valuable cultural potentials in these tourism objects are commonly offered to enhance the wealth of society. This condition is also an opportunity for Sundanese people to revitalize *bahasa Sunda*.

Suraratdecha (2010) shows in his study that tourism industry not only helps to better and strengthen the economic status of the community but also preserves the local language and culture. The study conducted by Prasert, Pansila, and Lasunon (2009) also shows that the organizing of tourism has brought self aware to the community of the importance of the natural treasures and cultural heritage, which many tourists are interested in. This awareness has caused many people to be proud of their community and treasure the abundant natural resources they have. Tourism has initiated the exchange of knowledge within the community. In other words, tourism industry can help maintaining, preserving, or even revitalizing the indigenous community, including the language.

Economic opportunity in urban areas, modern communication technology, and the development of society are emphasized as factors in their obliteration in West Java. Among these many factors, the young people are a key for a language to survive to the next generation. Their active participation and interest are important for the continuation of the mother language. Therefore, this young generation must be encouraged to be actively involved in the revitalization of *bahasa Sunda*.

There are several steps to revitalize *bahasa Sunda* through tourism industry. The first step is identifying cultural heritage resources such as indigenous products, natural resources, and good environment. The preparation of tourist attractions should be prepared and arranged to display the cultural uniqueness of the community. These are important factors to maintain a correct eco cultural environment (Praset, et al., 2009). The second step is identifying the aspects of tourism industry, including tourism sites, transportation, accommodation, restaurants, and entertainment, which will be the places of introducing the ethnic language. The means of communication in those places must be *bahasa Sunda* and all of the notices, such as exit, entrance, toilet, garden, park, and names of building and rooms must use original Sundanese names.

The third step is revitalizing the cultural heritage of the indigenous people by stimulating quality production of arts and crafts which would

encourage greater financial independence and economic prosperity, contributing to the wealth of the region and society. The products can be displayed and sold in each tourism site. Again, *bahasa Sunda* must be used as a means of communication in economic events. Fourth, through entertainment the language can be maintained. Traditional performances, such as *bobodoran*, *jaipongan*, plays, *angklung* (bamboo orchestra), classical Sundanese *gamelan*, and *wayang golek*, should be performed in any tourism sites, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment places. The language used must be *bahasa Sunda*. To attract the visitors, the costumes and the behaviors of the performers must support. Their natural and inherited hospitality must be shown to the visitors.

In summary, on any occasions the Sundanese people must be the subjects not the objects of the events. It means that it is the visitors who must adjust themselves to the cultures and the language used, not the Sundanese people as the hosts who must adjust themselves to the visitors' will. It is a must to speak *bahasa Sunda* in any tourism areas, such as the areas of transportations, accommodations, tourism objects, entertainments, and restaurants. If the visitors do not understand the language, try to explain what we mean by repetitions or gestures. By doing this, people who are the subjects and objects of tourism industry will be in force to speak the language and *bahasa Sunda* can be maintained by all levels of society.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Revitalizing the language is critical to strengthening the ethnic communities who struggle to retain their identity on both the national and international scopes. The Sundanese language spoken in urban areas is challenged by conflicting traditional, national, and foreign values and sometimes limits its opportunity for having high position. Introducing and promoting the Sundanese language in education system and tourism objects and at the same time maximizing the value of local traditions and products will help to revitalize the ethnic cultures including the language. However, there will be so many challenges that it is not easy to revitalize the ethnic language, in this case *bahasa Sunda*. My suggestion is that the initiatives that intend to revitalize indigenous language must be completely supported by the government and all original citizens in West Java. It means there must be a will and awareness from all people, from government officials to ordinary citizens, to be proud of *bahasa Sunda*. It is hoped that education and tourism industry as the media have brought self aware to the Sundanese people of the

importance of the natural treasures and cultural heritage, and this awareness make them be proud of their community and language.

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