

## Students' attitudes towards South Jakarta's youth language

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### ABSTRACT

This study presents the results of a qualitative survey of 56 English Language and Literature study program at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. It highlights their attitudes towards the code-switching practices in *Bahasa Jaksel*. The data were obtained through questionnaire with the students from batch 2015 to 2019. The study employed theories on language attitudes by Crystal (1997) to analyze the data. The findings demonstrated that the students show different attitudes. Overall attitudes of the students were unanimously negative towards the code switching practice in *Bahasa Jaksel*. The study also found that these attitudes can be related to a number of factors/reasons, i.e. Comprehensibility, appropriateness, language threat, education, intelligence and perception. The findings suggest that the students felt the use of code-switching in South Jakarta is not suitable to be used in real life situations.

**Keywords:** *Bahasa Jaksel, code-switching, language attitudes.*

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, Indonesians were surprised by the phenomenon of *Bahasa Jaksel*. *Bahasa Jaksel* means switching between English and Indonesian in a single sentence or in a conversation. As CNN reported in September 2018, the vocabulary used in *Bahasa Jaksel* are basic vocabularies (i.e. which, literally, etc.) these are two examples of *Bahasa Jaksel*: “*gue* literally *harus jalan kaki gitukan*, which is *capek gitu loh*” & “*Kemarin gue kehilangan kunci* which is *penting banget. Gue* literally *bisa abis nih*”. Furthermore, with the rise of this phenomenon, many people started to express their opinions regarding *Bahasa Jaksel*, which becomes popular, especially among young people.

Every individual has different opinion about certain things, including opinions about language. Language attitudes are appraising reactions to different language varieties (Dragojevic, 2017). They reflect two sequential cognitive processes: social categorization and stereotyping. Language attitudes are

composed of two evaluative dimensions: status (e.g., intelligent, educated) and solidarity (e.g., friendly, pleasant). Language attitudes have been introduced early in life. At a very young age, children tend to prefer their own language. However, most (if not all) children progressively develop the dominant group's attitudes, showing clear preference for standard over non-standard varieties in the early years of formal education, and sometimes much earlier. Language attitudes can be socialized through a variety of agents, including educators, peers, relatives, and the media. Since language attitudes are learned, they are intrinsically liable to change.

Language attitudes may change due to shifts in intergroup relations and government language policies, as well as more dynamically as a function of the social setting in which they are embodied. Language attitudes, once embodied, can have a vast array of behavioural consequences, with negative attitudes that tend to promote prejudice, discrimination, and problematic

social interactions. Hence, language attitudes hold an important factor to determine the success of any language projects (Baker, 1992). In addition, attitudes and motivations are considered as the significant factors on explaining language shift in bilingual societies (Lasagabaster & Huguët, 2007).

English may set as an example on how language attitudes can affect a language on a whole another level. The English language has been used in many countries in the world, even some people considered it as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2005). This phenomenon caused English to be more prestigious than other languages. Hence, it draws the attention from many people in the world, as they try to learn English (Francis & Ryan, 1998). Also, many countries adopted English as their language such as Fiji, Gambia, Ghana and many more. On the other hand, English is commonly learned as one of the subjects in school. As they learn and practice English, there are tendencies to switch between their mother-tongue with English. Among

South Jakarta's youth, there is no obligation to speak English language on their daily conversations, hence code-switching may occur when they speak their local language, such as *Bahasa sunda*, *Bahasa jawa*, *Bahasa medan*, and so on. It occurs when a person has a conversation with someone with the same ethnicity.

Lauder (2008) in his research regarding the status and function of English in Indonesia discovered that the status and the function of English in Indonesia has been limited by policy makers as a 'tool' to serve the needs of development or cultural curiosity have been purposely excluded. The policy on the development of *Bahasa Indonesia* makes English as the last choice for conversations, after *Bahasa Indonesia* and local languages. Although English has an important role, its use is very limited, for example it is only used at certain situations (i.e. Education environment, jobs that require English). English is also considered a threat to some educators in Indonesia who are concerned about the negative

impacts of the widespread knowledge of the English language on Indonesian culture, values, and behavior. This threat is often portrayed as a threat by western "liberal values"

In fact, attitudes toward code switching have been of interest to many educators and researchers. For example, the previous study done by Dewaele and Li in 2013 about language attitudes towards code-switching among adult mono- and multilingual language users, has highlighted the code-switch used by people who lived in multilinguals countries, ethnically diverse environments, and some participants with double nationalities. The results of this study showed personality traits are linked to attitudes towards code-switching, and another surprising finding was higher degrees of multilingualism were not automatically contributed to positive attitudes towards code-switching. In contrast to the case in Dewaele's and Li's research, the phenomenon about code-switching practices among South Jakarta's youths has different aspects. In Dewale and Li's study,

they did the study among adults in multilingual environments. While in this study, the researcher examine the issues among youth in monolingual environments. Specifically, the study tries to describe and interpret the attitudes of tertiary level students of English Language and Literature study program towards the code switching practice done by South Jakarta's youths. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can provide new insight.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employed both descriptive and with the help of quantitative statistics method to describe and interpret all of the data that have been collected. The descriptive method used in this research is used to portray the characteristics of a particular individual, group, or situation (Kothari 2004). The method also provided a description of the state of people's linguistics experience especially as it exist at the present.

Also, this research is qualitative by design. By using the qualitative

design, the study is able to uncover trends about code switching through thoughts and opinions (attitudes) from the subjects by judging them. Polkinghorne (2005) said that qualitative method is capable to analyze the data in depth because it serves as a means for the researcher to investigate the phenomenon being discussed from the point of view of participants. Qualitative approach also provides an access to describe the feelings of the participants and further to discover the underlying motives of their behavior (Kothari, 2004).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that there are two types of attitudes towards code-switching phenomena among South-Jakarta youth: positive and negative attitudes. The attitudes were identified to cover attitudes towards language use and language users. The reasons of having such attitudes were categorised into six themes namely comprehensibility, appropriateness, language threat, education, intelligence and perception. The first four themes are

related to attitudes to language use, while the remaining themes are linked to attitude towards language users.

The overall findings about attitudes towards *Bahasa Jaksel* from both language and user aspects is negative. Most of the participants stated that code-switching makes the language to be difficult to understand. They also stated that *Bahasa Jaksel* is not used in a proper setting thus making it inappropriate in certain contexts. Several participants also considered *Bahasa Jaksel* as a threat to Indonesian language since it may create language shift in which speech communities tend to use English and language attrition where the speakers start to lose their abilities in speaking the mother tongue. However, several participants considered *Bahasa Jaksel* as a medium for those who wish to learn English in a more practical manner; they also believe that *Bahasa Jaksel* may arouse other people's interest in the English language. On the other hand, they also considered the practice does not make a person to look intelligent or cool. They argued that the users of *Bahasa*

*Jaksel* may believe that the practice makes them look more prestigious as a way to be accepted in their social circles. The findings of the attitudes are interesting to note since Indonesia is a multilingual country with various local languages. However, English is not one of the languages that often mixed since its use is limited to formal settings, educational institutions, and social media. In short, English is not one of the languages commonly used by multilingual communities in Indonesia. With that being said, *Bahasa Jaksel* is considered as an oddity of a phenomenon according to the students of the English Language and Literature study program of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia.

As discussed earlier, the attitudes shown by students towards the language are mostly negative. The majority of the participants argued that the code-switching practice of *Bahasa Jaksel* makes both the Indonesian and English languages difficult to understand as opposed to the cases where the practice helps the speakers to 'borrow' terms or phrases

as supplements to the one being used (Holmes, 2001). With that being said, the attitudes of the students indicate that the practice of code-switching in *Bahasa Jaksel* is a hindrance towards the listeners' understanding. The students considered the fact that not all Indonesian speak English. In contrast, a study by Alenezi (2016) found that the participants considered code-switching to be beneficial to their school performance since it enables them to use several terms or phrases not available in one language by using the other. By comparing this study to that of Alenezi's, the result implies that the students in this research understood the need of practicing the language in a proper setting.

With context and interlocutors in mind, the students stated that *Bahasa Jaksel* at often times is used in improper settings. In real life situations, it is not appropriate to use code-switching between English and Indonesian, particularly to other people who do not use English in daily life. If used to these people, it would create incomprehensibility or

confusion to the listeners. In other words, by using *Bahasa Jaksel* in inappropriate setting, comprehensibility would become a major problem as mentioned in the previous paragraph. On the other hand, several participants argued that the practice is more suitable in personal settings such as social media since the said platform commonly uses English as its interface. Hence, it can be said the students who participated in this study were aware of their attitudes. This finding is supported by Garvin and Mathiot's theory (1968) that argued awareness, combines with language loyalty and language pride may influence an individual's attitude towards a language. In addition, the students also argued that the language is not properly used since English is not considered as one of the commonly used or official languages in the multilingual speech communities in Indonesia. Furthermore, a participant mentioned on how the style used in code-switching practices among South Jakarta's youth are not in accordance with the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language

(commonly known as *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia or KBBI*). This particular argument can be linked with the ongoing tension mentioned by Djenar (2012) within Indonesian language situation where colloquial forms gain more interest and encroached the standard variety. These previously mentioned statements are contradictory with the purpose of a conversation according to Grice (1975). In addition, a possible reason to why the students possess such attitude is that most of them are already exposed to an English-Indonesian setting in the university life as suggested by Holmes (2001) which stated that experiences develop certain feelings toward a language.

There are also statements that express their concerns regarding the code-switching practices among South Jakarta's youth can caused language threat. One participant stated "*...I am sure that one day my non-standard Indonesian slang will also be included in the KBBI (the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language)*". Other participants argued

that as more people believe code-switching among South Jakarta's youth is prestigious or every sentence that contains English is cool, this belief will decrease the use of Bahasa Indonesia. These arguments can be categorized as language suicide which means that the overly positive attitudes towards English language will eventually overpass Bahasa Indonesia. A statement by a participant implied that code-switching is used to gain social recognition and personal gratification. This can be inferred from the sentence "*by assuming the use of English is cooler; there will be more people who think that the style of South Jakarta's youth is cool*". This particular statement is related to teen and language. As stated by Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), teenagers play an important role for society in their own rights since teenagers are more vulnerable to be exposed in language changes. In addition, the participants were also concerned that the excessive usage of English will eventually lead to the decrease of Bahasa Indonesia proficiency among the users of code-

switching. When people assumed English is more prestigious than Bahasa Indonesia, there are form of favour towards English and disfavour towards Bahasa Indonesia. This leads to how English and Bahasa Indonesia are perceived among people. When a certain language is more preferred than other, there will be judgements about the other languages. This will usually lead to the categorization of bipolar terms (i.e. good or bad & correct and incorrect) (Holmes, 2001). This sentence is also related to the theory about language attitudes mentioned by Eagley and Chicken (1998:269) that state there is a psychological tendency about English expressed as an evaluation towards particular beings in a form of degree of favour and disfavour. In addition, attitudes and motivations are considered to be significant factors on explaining language shift among bilingual societies (Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007).

In regards to attitudes towards *Bahasa Jaksel*, most of the participants agreed that the language may be beneficial in some cases. A



participant suggested people who use more than two languages would incite others' curiosity in learning about the two languages. With that being said, the *Bahasa Jaksel* phenomenon can be used as a source of motivation for those who are interested in using English. Hence, *Bahasa Jaksel* is considered as a medium to spread the positivity of learning English. Another participant argued that although one may use *Bahasa Jaksel* as a way to look intelligent, it would be beneficial for them once in reality they are able to reach a higher level of English since they use it constantly in the said language. This motivation is in line with Baker's theory (1992) that argued that language attitudes holds an important part in determining success of any language projects. Thus, the people who use *Bahasa Jaksel* to appear more intelligent may actually use it as a way to learn English. As mentioned by Gardener (1985), there are two types of motivations related to language. They are called integrative and instrumental orientation. The statements by the participants mentioned about learning language

which included in parts of integrative orientation. Integrative orientation deals with the reason suggesting that an individual learned a particular language in order to learn about or interact with the community.

The second topic is students' attitudes towards the users of the language used by South Jakarta's youth. There are two major topics with the most frequently mentioned by the students is perception. There are statements that showed negative attitudes towards users of *Bahasa Jaksel*. These statements showed that language attitudes once embodied can have a wide range of interpersonal effects, including negative attitudes that appear to encourage prejudice, discrimination, and unpleasant social interactions. A participant mentioned that if a variety is too frequently used, the users can be described as a 'plebeian'. Some participants provided some evidence linked with the theory about teen and language. A participant stated that language used by teens usually more flexible than the language used by older people. As mentioned by

Holmes (2001), as people get older, their speech gradually become more standard and they will reach to a point where their use of language becomes more conservative. A participant mentioned on how to get accepted in a certain group, in this case, by using *Bahasa gaul* as a common requirement to get accepted since certain groups hold different values about certain things, in this case, language. This is also related to the theory proposed by Morgan and Grube (1991), they believe that friends among teenagers can also be a factor called peer pressure. However, peer pressure does not simply force someone to do something against their will, rather the common feelings about doing something in a certain way. Moreover, a participant addressed about social group and their values about certain things. The stated that the goals to use code-switching probably for tuning in with the groups and to look cool. These possible reasons are related to several theories, language choice, teen and language, motivations and code-switching. From language choice's point of view, language choice also affects on

how people want to be perceived, especially with positive and good values (Quinn, 2001). Furthermore, from teen and language's point of view, friends or groups in teens' world are considered to be a significant figure who play important roles in determining one's attitudes. That reason explains why the users of code-switching use the variety and try to fit in and blend with the groups (Holmes, 2001). Moreover, from the perspective of motivations, the users seek social recognition from the groups they try to fit in. This motivation belongs to extrinsic motivations (Cheery & Whitbourne, 2013), and it also belongs to integratively motivated which means an individual try to get to know another culture or tune-in in a certain language community. In addition, the use of code-switching can also show the expression of solidarity (Holmes, 2001).

Lastly, the students also show their view regarding whether using *Bahasa Jaksel* makes an individual to appear intelligent. Most of the students considered the content is

more important than the language used. As attitudes of language are composed by three factors which include speakers' cognition, behavioral intention, and affection, the statements by the students belongs to the cognition factor which means the judgement they made based on their beliefs and experiences they have about a particular situation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). As mentioned earlier, there are also participants who agreed by using code-switching can help someone to look smarter. Several participants showed their agreement regarding the usage of code-switching helped someone to look smarter. Moreover, some even stated their personal experiences regarding this issue, this factor mentioned by Garret (2011) regarding attitudes towards code-switching. Another participant also stated not everyone is fluent in English, and using code-switching may help someone who is not fluent in English look smarter. Another participant suggested the goals of using code-switching might to increase the user's skill in English and show their social status. These

arguments are included in instrumental orientation which refers to an urge to learn language on specific goals, such as to get a job, degree, or improving the social status (Gardener, 1985). To conclude from those explanation mentioned above, the students of English Language and Literature study program of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia tend to perceive the phenomenon of *Bahasa Jaksel* negatively

## CONCLUSION

This research investigates English Language and Literature students' attitudes towards code-switching practice in *Bahasa Jaksel*. Based on the analysis of this study, the students showed different attitudes. The majority attitudes of the students were unanimously negative towards the code switching practice in *Bahasa Jaksel*.

The study also found that these behaviors could be linked to a variety of reasons (i.e. Comprehensibility, appropriateness, language threat, education, intelligence and perception).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the students consider the usage of code-switching in *Bahasa Jaksel* is not suitable to be used in real life situations since the interaction made with those who do not speak English may create comprehensibility issues among them.

They also argued that the continuous practice of mixing two languages in an interaction may create trends that would threaten the national language, Indonesian. The said threats include language loss in the speakers as they speak Indonesian less often than its English counterpart. The other threat is *Bahasa Jaksel* may incite a language shift in Indonesian speech communities. Although Indonesia is multicultural by nature, English, however, is not one of the official languages nor a commonly used language in the speech communities. Hence, the code-switching between the national and local languages may shift to English-Indonesian as commonly practiced in *Bahasa Jaksel*.

On the other hand, several students show their support to the

practice of *Bahasa Jaksel* as they argued that it may arouse people's interest to learn English since they are more exposed to the language. In addition, some consider the code-switching in *Bahasa Jaksel* can be used as a media for learning English in a more practical manner. In regards to the attitudes towards the users, the students unanimously agreed that *Bahasa Jaksel* does not make an individual appear more intelligent or prestigious. Most of them agreed that the content of a conversation is more important than the language being used.

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