



LANGUAGE CHOICE IN TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVITY AS A MEANS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN MINANGKABAU SPEECH COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Since there is a transaction between sellers and buyers, the ability to use language is one of the most important factors in making a successful transaction. A good language choice and a good understanding of the cultural background of society can affect the transactional activity because language and culture are closely tied together. This paper investigates the effects and factors of language choice in transactional activity while the buyers do bargain and talking to the sellers or shopkeepers in the market domain. The use of Minangkabau (MIN) as the local language, and Indonesian (BI) as the official language, are examined in this study. To conduct this research, the researchers used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies by using a questionnaire for 68 participants, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The data transactions are taken in different situations such as in traditional markets, local markets, local shops, supermarkets or department stores, and malls. The findings of this study show the impacts of socio-cultural factors: participants, setting, and topics, on language choice, are significant. The setting of location is the key determinant of their language choices where a variety of patterns of language use are found in each situation and location.

Keywords: Language Choice, Transactional, Ethnic Identity, Minangkabau.

1 Introduction

People in each society represent their attitudes and behaviours toward their own culture in a variety of ways. Their actions have an impact on how people engage the use of language in a society (Thamrin, T., & Gani, M. H. (2008); Thamrin. T, 2015). The use of language in society has different functions. Brown & Yule (1996:5) describe language into two functions, namely transactional functions, and interactional functions. The transactional function is the function to express content; whereas the interactional function is a function of language involved in social relations and personal attitudes. Based on this classification, language in the discourse of buying and selling is a language that carries out interactional functions. The use of the language is used to negotiate role relationships, exchange conversations, and influence each other between sellers and buyers. This is reflected in the choice of words, phrases, sentences they use to influence speech communication.

In principle, buying and selling transactions involve two parties, the seller as the first party and the buyer as the second party. In this situation, the seller must be able to convince the buyers to be able to successfully achieve the expected sales and price target. In this activity, the choice of language is very important to achieve the target. It is quite difficult to observe the language choice in transactional activity because it is related to the situation that holds the language. This situation includes two things, the social and cultural situation. The language choice in the transactional activities depends on these two situations to meet the agreement between buyer and seller.

This article addresses the question of how language choice is used to express ethnic identity.

What factors and effects influence the language choice of Padang people to do the transactional activities in the shop, traditional market, department store, or malls. The approach taken here is that although the social address of a speaker (i.e., ethnicity, setting, etc.) influences the experiences that shape identity and also the construction of identity varies situationally as the salient aspects of interlocutors' identities change across interactions (Holmes, 2013).

In these data, the researchers look at the language choice of Padang people where they do shop and negotiating with the sellers. Observing that activity while they are in this the transactional places explicitly define themselves as an ethnic group, they also use language choice to differentiate the price and bargaining the price targeted. In the following sections, a framework for identifying language choice and code-switching will be introduced, and research on language and identity that informs this analysis will be discussed.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Language Choice and Code-switching

There are three main social factors in language choice, which often affect the choice of language in a domain; they are participants, setting, and topics (Holmes, 2013:26). Holmes gives examples of Paraguayan language use, where urban bilingual Paraguayans select different languages for different situations and topics. Family, friendship, religion, and education are the domains she describes. Paraguayans use Guarani in the family and friendship domains and in school during storytelling. They use Spanish in religion, education and administration, and other official domains. The illustration of language choice in the Paraguayan community can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Domains of language use in Paraguay¹

Domain	Addressee	Setting	Topic	Variety / Code
Family	Parent	Home	Planning a family party	Guarani
Friendship	Friend	Café	Funny anecdote	Guarani
Religion	Priest	Church	Choosing the Sunday liturgy	Spanish
Education	Teacher	Primary School	Telling a story	Guarani
Education	Lecturer	University	Solving a Math problem	Spanish
Administration	Official	Office	Getting and an import license	Spanish

Table 1 shows how language choice in a community differs in different domains in the Paraguayan community where it is clearly showing the three social factors that affect language choice. Regarding this study, the researchers investigate one domain of language use that is the market domain, or in this article; the term of the transactional domain is used. In the analysis, the writer analyzes the domain of language use in relation to four social factors: addressee, topic, social relationship, and setting. All factors play an important role in choosing either Minangkabau or Indonesian.

Talking about language choice, it cannot be denied that the discussion about code-switching should be included. Code-switching is used with many different meanings in the literature on bilingual discourse; a discussion of how this concept is operationalized in this research is warranted. The main focus of this research is on changes in language choice across speaker turns, for example, when speaker A speaks Minangkabau and speaker B responds in Indonesian.

¹ This table was constructed from data provided in Rubin 1968 as cited in Holmes (2013:23).

2.2 Bilingual Society and Ethnic Identity

Today, Indonesians are overwhelmingly bilingual. Sneddon (2003), as cited in Musgrave (2011:4), has argued that much of Indonesia has a diglossic situation, with the formal standard Indonesian (BI) having the status of the higher code, and with the local languages being a lower-status variety (see also Ewing, 2005). In other words, many people in Indonesia learn the local language of their island or region and, when they enter school, they learn Bahasa Indonesia, which is the national language and medium of instruction in educational institutions at all levels throughout the country (Thamrin. T, 2018). According to Ferguson (1959:336), the definition of diglossia is:

a stable language situation in which the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

Ferguson labels the two speech varieties High (H) and Low (L). The H variety is the superposed variety, while in his formulation, L is any regional variety of the same language. Ferguson (1959:328) gives examples of the use of a High variety in High domains such as a sermon in a church or mosque, speeches, high forms of literature, university lectures, news broadcasts, and newspaper stories. Examples of a Low variety used in Low domains are conversations with family, friends, and colleagues, instructions to servants, waiters, and clerks, captions on a political cartoon, radio soap operas, and folk literature. Later development of diglossia by Fishman improved Ferguson's definition to include bilingual diglossia, as in the Guarani example above where the High and the Low are distinct languages. In this reformulation, Fishman (1967) notes the four possible combinations of bilingualism and diglossia. To clarify the relationship of these two terms, Fishman presents a quadrant of the relationship between bilingualism and diglossia as illustrated in the following figure:

		Diglossia	
		+	-
Bilingualism	+	1. Both diglossia and bilingualism	2. Bilingualism without diglossia
	-	3. Diglossia without bilingualism	4. Neither diglossia nor bilingualism

Figure 1. Relationship between bilingualism and diglossia (Fishman, 1967:30)

The first quadrant refers to the situation where the existence of both diglossia and bilingualism occurs in a speech community side by side. In this situation, the community knows the functions and role of each language whether it is used as the H or L variety. This type of community exists in Paraguay, where all the people are bilingual in Spanish and Guarani (Fishman, 1967:30), and in Minangkabau communities. As we can see, BI is the nationwide High variety and wide ranges of local languages are the local Low varieties. As stated by Nababan (1985:6):

The survey of bilingualism was based on the assumption that, through the status and function of Indonesian as the official language, an increasing number of Indonesians in their everyday life need to use Indonesian and a vernacular; in other words, they need to be bilingual. Generally speaking, people use Indonesian in more modern and public activities and the

vernacular in the more traditional and regional aspects of their life. It was also assumed that the vernacular was considered the main symbol of one's ethnic identity.

There are some cities and regions, such as Jakarta and Riau, where the local Low variety is informal Malay quite closely related to BI; for these locations, there is no separate standard for the local Malay variety, though these are widely used in Low contexts. In the case of Minangkabau, like several other nearby Malayic languages in central Sumatra closely related to BI, the Low is a separate language with a separate standard variety rather closely related to BI; but in most other areas, the BI High and the local Low are much more distinct (Thamrin.T, 2015). In this study, we see that the national language, Indonesian, plays the role of the diglossic High variety (Sneddon, 2003), while Minangkabau is the Low variety (Thamrin.T, 2018). Currently, we are seeing a gradual decline of many of the Low varieties across Indonesia, as is the case for Minangkabau in West Sumatra (Thamrin,T, 2018).

Ethnicity is a sociocultural construct, is multifarious and its characteristics and components may shift through time due to social changes or in other ways (Bradley, D., & Bradley, M., 2019; Thamrin, T., & Gani, M. H., 2020). It can be deliberately or unconsciously deployed by a group to redefine itself, Bradley, D., & Bradley, M., (2019) gives an example which is cited from Fisher (2011) about the example of ethnicity and group membership in the Thakali of Nepal. Fisher (2011) as cited from Bradley, D., & Bradley, M., (2019) says, ethnicity is 'not a simple cultural given defined by primordial evidence such as language, dress, social organization, religion and the like. Individuals have access to numerous dimensions of identity – for example, those based on class, kinship, locality, or religion – some of which become more important at certain times.

Social identity is defined as the socially constructed membership in a social group or category (Kayambazinthu, 1995). While groups and categories themselves are often an individual's memberships are socially constructed through their own (and others) language and social behavior. In a recent discussion of research in the field of language and identity. Seong, M.P. & Mela (2003) discusses several approaches, among them what she terms practice-based variation. Identity emerges within the interaction, although the linguistic means to construct identity are linked to the real and perceived speech of individuals and members of certain groups. All identities, including ethnic identity, are negotiable and variable, and there is no one-to-one correspondence between language and ethnic or national identity.

One aspect of identity negotiation in a multilingual community is the status of a given code as a majority or minority language in a particular society (Xue-hui Zhang, 2003). In the setting for this study (see details below), the status of Indonesian as the language of the wider community and mainstream education, and Minangkabau as a minority language spoken primarily by members of a particular ethnic group in in-group settings are critical aspects of the negotiation of identity. This does not mean that Indonesian is de facto the language of authority or prestige, or that Minangkabau uses necessarily indexes solidarity; both languages can be used to develop a variety of speaker roles and identities (Thamrin. T, 2015). Language choice is important in-service encounters in ethnically diverse societies because language is one of the barriers to efficient transactions in business settings.

3 Methodology

A survey questionnaire method was used to collect language choice data from 68 Minangkabau people who live in Padang were recruited randomly. The different situations such as in traditional or local markets, local shops (*warung*), supermarkets or department stores, and malls are used as a setting of language. It is seen in the table below.

Table 2. Language Choice in Market Domain

Domain	Participants	Topic Activities	Social Distance	Setting
Transactional Domain	Shop Employers/vendors	Bargaining transaction	Do not know each other	Traditional Central Market
		Buying/ selling things		Department store/mall Local shop (<i>Warung</i>) /Local Market

34 participants reported their age as being between 11-18 years, while another 34 participants reported being over 20 years old. 27 reported themselves as male and 37 as female. Participants were asked to fill in an anonymous language survey in Indonesian which began with an attitudinal item asking how much they would have preferred the questionnaire to be in their in-group language if they were as fluent in that language as they were in Minangkabau. Other items on the questionnaire assessed self-reported language proficiency, language use, and attitudes about language use in transactional contexts. Participants were also asked about the degree to which they mixed Indonesian and their Minangkabau language in communication. The questions seek to ascertain the degree of use of Minangkabau or Indonesian within the transactional domain. The domains of language choice are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 being the use of MIN exclusively, 4 being a more frequent use of MIN than BI, 3 being the equal frequency of use of MIN and BI, 2 being a higher frequency of use of BI than MIN, and 1 being the exclusive use of BI.

Other methods used in the process of data collection included participant observation and in-depth interviews. As Labov (1972:32) states, “The effort to observe how speakers talked when they were not being observed is the Observer’s Paradox. Among the partial solutions to this paradox within the face-to-face interview, the elicitation of narratives of personal experience proved to be the most effective”. The researchers used both methods to try to observe various phenomena, using participant observation for data that could not be obtained through questionnaires and formal interviews. While in the field, we took shops, malls, and traditional markets. In addition, participants were asked to provide other information (e.g. age, gender, education background, occupation, etc).

4 Result and Findings

This section describes the language use of Padang people, which can be categorized as youth and adults in transactions with shopkeepers or traders in different situations such as in traditional markets, local markets, local shops, supermarkets or department stores, and malls. A variety of patterns of language choice are found in each situation. Each data set is presented in showing the relative use of Minangkabau and Indonesian in different domains. The numbers of questions on this table reflect the number of questions on the questionnaire. They are organized to show patterns of language use across domains.

The market is (1). A regular gathering of people for the purchase and sale of provisions, livestock, and other commodities; (2). An open space or covered building where vendors convene to sell their goods or an area. (3). Arena in which commercial dealings are conducted.² Every region in West Sumatra has traditional markets. Commonly people buy their daily goods at the market (*Pasa*). The activity of going to the market is a daily routine for Minangkabau people, especially for women. For people who are not rich, going to the market every day is a routine activity because these people

² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/market>

do not have enough money to buy a large quantity at once. They have to go to the market every day to buy what they can with as much money as they have on that day. Since the price in the market is not fixed, bargaining to get a cheap price is normal. One who is good at bargaining will get a good price and higher quality products. Bargaining requires the skill of speaking and understanding the local language.

4.1 Youth and Adult Language Choice in the Transactional Domain

This section investigates the comparison of language use by youths and adults, when communicating with shopkeepers at supermarkets or malls, with traders at traditional markets or local markets, and with vendors at local shops.

Table 3. Youth and Adult Language Choice in the Transactional Domain

Youth QN	Adults	Description	Youth Mean	Adults Mean	Shift Youth vs Adult
1	1	Selling things at a supermarket or mall	2.1	2.45	-0.35
2	2	Talking to shop employer in department store or mall	2.16	2.38	-0.22
3	3	Talking to shop employer in traditional market	3.14	3.77	-0.63
4	4	Buying things at local shop	3.8	3.87	-0.07
5	5	Buying or selling things at local market	3.69	3.87	-0.18

These results indicate that the use of Indonesian is strong in question 1. The shift of Indonesian language use in question 1 for youth and adults is -0.35, while in question 2, it is -0.22. There are possible explanations for these results. Firstly, supermarkets, department stores, and malls are places where all classes of society can come. Even though people of middle or higher classes more frequently use this place, it is not impossible for others to come here, even just to window-shop. Furthermore, this place is not just for the local people; it is also for outsiders. This is why BI, as the national language, is widely used as the preferred tool of communication in these places.

Secondly, as part of my participant observation, the researchers had a simple conversation with some salespeople or shopkeepers about the reason why they use BI to customers and why respondents chose to use BI dominantly when asking for items in this place. The answer from the shopkeepers was that it is the rule of their company to use the national language (BI). For them, using MIN for communication is not appropriate for use with their customers. They also mentioned that using MIN to people that they do not know or to strangers is not polite. Another answer from respondents for why they tend to use BI in these places is that using MIN is not the proper language. Thirdly, since the prices are fixed, there is no bargaining in these places. As mentioned in the previous section, the skill of bargaining is needed in the local market to get the best quality and price; however, in department stores, supermarkets, and malls, all the prices are fixed and labeled and no bargaining can occur.

In contrast, in traditional or local markets, the use of MIN is strong. Both the youth group and the adult group prefer to use MIN in these transactional places. The greatest shift of language use is found when respondents are talking in the traditional market (q. 3). The results indicate that adults use more MIN than youths (-0.63). The least shift is found in question 5, where there is only a -0.07 points difference in language use between youth and adults. There is a different type of interaction between the seller and the buyer if the buyer uses BI to bargain, especially about the price. It is

considered that prices are higher if someone uses BI or another language. This relates to the motivation and solidarity of people who identify as part of the same community. People who do not use MIN are considered as belonging to a different community; however, when someone uses MIN (even if they are not Minangkabau), the trader will consider him or her as Minangkabau. Therefore, the choice of language in this place affects prices. The price will be lower if speaking in MIN, while it will be higher when the customer speaks BI. It is proved that the language in transactional activity is a means of ethnic identity.

The researchers performed a test case during participant observations for bargaining in the marketplace. In the first scenario, BI is used to ask for the items and bargain for a lower price. In this situation, vendors seemed to keep the price the same as first mentioned. This scenario tried again, but unfortunately; the vendors did not want to lower the price. The next day, another scenario by using MIN is used in the same place with the same people to buy the same items. In this place, the items were asking using MIN with the native accent and style. Fortunately, the negotiation and transaction ran smoothly, because the vendor immediately gave me a lower price than on the first occasion. The price was much lower than the price that I got in the first scenario. I performed this test multiple times in several places in each research location and came up with the same results. Therefore, it can be concluded that the choice of language from the buyer will affect the price paid. These findings are supported by the answers from one of the adult respondents interviewed in Padang. She is one of the respondents who almost exclusively use BI in her daily life. She speaks BI all the time wherever she goes. The following is part of the conversation:

Me: *Uni, tadi uni mangecek bahso uni ndak fasiah bana ba bahaso Minang. Berarti uni dari ketek alah berbahasa Indonesia jo keluarga di rumah? Kiro-kiro umua bara uni baraja bahaso Indonesia, sajak lahia atau alah disakolah?*

‘Sister, you just now told me that your MIN is not too fluent. So, it means since you were small, you and your family have spoken BI at home and also in your daily life? At what age did you start to speak BI?’

DSR: *Iya, saya mengerti bahasa Minang, tapi lidah saya sudah kaku untuk berbahasa Minang, karena dilingkungan keluarga saya dari kecil kami berbahasa Indonesia. Di tempat kerja saya juga berbahasa Indonesia. Ketika saya di SMP, Saya tinggal dengan Om saya di Padang. Dia adalah seorang dosen. Di rumah dia mewajibkan seluruh orang berbahasa Indonesia. Oleh sebab itu saya jarang sekali berbahasa Minang. Saya juga berbahasa Indonesia dengan anak-anak saya sekarang. Kadang-kadang saya menjadi sedikit bermasalah kalau berbelanja di pasar tradisional. Membeli jeruk nipis saja kalau saya berbahasa Indonesia harganya bisa berbeda dengan orang yang menggunakan Bahasa Minang. Akhirnya setiap kepasar saya mengajak suami saya yang fasih berbahasa Minang. Dialah yang selalu menawar harga’.*

‘Yes, I understand Minangkabau's language, but my tongue is frozen already to speak in MIN because I have always used BI with my family since I was young. I also use BI at my workplace. When I was in Secondary School, I stayed with my uncle in Padang. He was a lecturer and asked all the family members in his house to use BI to communicate. Therefore, I rarely used MIN until now, because the whole family uses BI exclusively. Now, I too use BI for my children. Sometimes, I get into some trouble when I do shop in the traditional market. I get a different price if I use BI for buying a lime. Therefore, every time I go to the traditional market, I ask my husband to accompany me. He speaks MIN fluently and bargains for the price’.

4.2 Comparison based on Traditional and Transactional Places

The following discussion looks at the preference of language in different types of transactional domains. The table is classified into two categories: traditional and modern. The traditional category consists of traditional markets, local shops, and local markets, while the modern category is concerned with department stores/malls and supermarkets.

Table 4. Comparison between Traditional and Modern Transactional Places

Groups	Traditional			Modern	
	Traditional Market	Local Shop	Local Market	Talking at Department Stores/ Malls	Selling at Supermarkets / Malls
YOUTH					
1. BI	25.05	13.05	16.05	49	53
2. BI > MIN	13.05	6.05	5	18.05	16
3. BI = MIN	14.05	15	16	11.05	12
4. MIN > BI	17	18	18	12.05	9
5. MIN	29.05	47	44.05	8.05	10
ADULT					
1. BI	13.05	15.05	14	40.05	42
2. BI > MIN	5.05	3.05	03.05	15	10
3. BI = MIN	17.05	11	12	20	22
4. MIN > BI	18	18.05	22.05	15	12.05
5. MIN	45.05	51.05	48	9.05	12.05

The table above shows the comparison of language use in different types of transactional areas in the market domain. In youth, there is no substantial difference in preference between using Indonesian or Minangkabau in a traditional market. According to the data, 39% of respondents use Indonesian (scale 1 and 2), while 46.5% (scale 4 and 5) use Minangkabau. Very high differences are found when respondents communicate in the local market and local shops. Almost two-thirds of respondents use Minangkabau to communicate in these two places. Conversely, the use of Indonesian is very strong when respondents are communicating in department stores, supermarkets, or malls. For the adult group, the use of Minangkabau is very strong when respondents are communicating in traditional markets, local shops, and local markets; however, strong use of Indonesian is also found in the modern markets. If we do further analysis by comparing the use of Minangkabau and Indonesian between youths and adults, we can see that the youth respondents still use more Indonesian compared to adults. The comparison of results about the use of language in each place shows that youth use more BI while adults use more Minangkabau.

5 Conclusion

In the Transactional domain, both groups of respondents from all research areas reported that they use Indonesian almost exclusively in department stores and shopping malls. My observational data also shows that the use of Indonesian is normal in modern places, such as fast-food restaurants, cafes, and entertainment venues. In these places, people who use Minangkabau might be viewed as villagers or uneducated. In general, Minangkabau is not thought of as a prestigious language and it is not appropriate to use it in these places. When I tried to have a conversation in Minangkabau with shop assistants, waiters, and waitresses, they would always answer in Indonesian. My observations

in modern shopping places show that shop assistants stick to using Indonesian, even though I continue to use Minangkabau.

The same phenomenon is also found in the use of Javanese in Java, wherein trendy or “modern places” such as department stores, restaurants, and malls, Javanese seems to be taboo (Setiawan, 2013:302). Sneddon (2003:207), as cited in Setiawan (2013:302), also agrees that “Indonesian is an appropriate language used in ‘modern places’ such as department stores, restaurants, malls, and other places that urban Indonesian considers ‘upmarket and prestigious’”. For all shopping activities in these modern shopping centers, whether it is buying or selling items, Indonesian is the main tool for communication. In contrast, respondents reported that they are more likely to use Minangkabau in traditional shopping places, such as in a local shop, a traditional market, or a local market. My observational data also shows this tendency to use the local language in traditional shopping places where it is greatly shown how is the ethnic identity reflected in this place. Besides that, in bargaining, the price of goods in traditional markets is not fixed; therefore, the ability to use the local language is one way to get a good price, whereas in modern shopping places there is no bargaining between sellers and buyers.

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