

MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS

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Abstract: Minority Language Rights. This article discusses some issues relating to minority language rights in general. This stems from the phenomenon of the language where English is used as the number one language in the world. Furthermore, in this article we explain the nature of minority language rights and their objectives as well as the grouping of minority language rights. Furthermore, there is also a link between language and education specifically in the education system in Indonesia.

Keywords: language rights, minority languages

Abstrak: Hak Bahasa Minoritas. Artikel ini membahas beberapa isu yang berhubungan dengan hak bahasa minoritas secara umum. Ini bermula dari fenomena bahasa dimana bahasa Inggris digunakan sebagai bahasa nomor satu di dunia. Selanjutnya dalam artikel ini dijelaskan hakikat hak bahasa minoritas dan tujuannya serta pengelompokan hak bahasa minoritas tersebut. Lebih lanjut, dijelaskan pula kaitan antara bahasa dan pendidikan secara khusus dalam sistem pendidikan di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: hak berbahasa, bahasa minoritas

INTRODUCTION

Language presence is very important in human life. Every normal human being surely speaks a language to express his or her ideas, feelings, opinion, etc. Some individuals and groups have constructed their own language, for practical, experimental, personal or ideological reasons. Some languages, most constructed, are meant, specifically for communication between people of different island or province or even different nationality. That's why there are so many languages in this beautiful world.

According to Crase (in Maja, 2007) there are 6.000 languages exist in this world. In line with this, Grimes (in Janse, 2003) said that in this present century, we still have 6,809 languages. We may be proud of this because we still have a lot of cultural inheritance from our ancestor. However, we are not lucky enough because we are going

to lose them. Most of this extinction problem is faced by minority languages and it becomes a very serious problem. A half of them (it is about 3.000 of languages) are going to die (Krauss, 1992).

Furthermore, Crase (in Maja, 2007) argues that there are 6. 000 languages in this world and yet 55% of population speak those languages. It means that there are only 15% of population speak those languages. It is caused by some factors such as the invention and spread of agriculture, colonialism, later the industrial revolution and today the globalization of economies and mass media (particularly the internet). Take for an example is the globalization of economies. Nowadays economic imperialism is going hand in hand with linguistic imperialism as people turn to leave their mother tongue and support the dominant language. The next table presents data of languages spoken by European Union Citizens.

**Table: Languages Spoken by European Union Citizens
(The data is taken from Eurobarometer Report in Das (2007))**

Language	Language Acquired as First Language, i.e. Mother Tongue (In %)	Learned as Second Language (In %)	Total (In %)
English	16	31	47
German	24	8	32
French	16	12	28
Italian	16	2	18
Spanish	11	4	15
Dutch	6	1	7
Swedish	2	1	3
Greek	3	0	3
Portuguese	3	0	3
Danish	1	1	2
Finnish	1	0	1
Russian	0	1	1
Other	1	4	5

From the table, we can see that English is in the top position. It is learned as mother tongue (16 %) and as a second language (31 %). It might remind us how important English is. Everybody tries to acquire this language with the hope that they will have a good opportunity in getting job for their welfare in the future since English become international language and as lingua franca.

In contrast with English is Russian. People do not have it as their mother tongue and even people learn it as their second language, it does not mean at all because the total of it is not significant. By looking at the data above, we can say that English is *saved*, while Russian is *terminally endangered*.

If it always runs like that case, it is very possible for human being to lose their mother tongue (such as Danish, Finnish, Russian, etc). They will try to acquire the dominant languages (English, French, Mandarin, etc) to take a part in globalization era. If they want to get a good job for their future, they have to at least have the ability to speak in those dominant languages.

That would be a bad dream for our first language. It will lose its speakers; it becomes a minority language among its environment (because their native speakers abandon it and favor other

languages) and the worst one is our world will lose its culture and also our grandchildren will lose their ancestor inheritance.

When a language dies, it means a culture dies. Language is seen as the window of the culture. Nettle and Romaine (in Maja, 2007) state that losing a language means regardless of the number of speakers of that language; ignore humanity of a part of our universal human heritage insofar as the language embodies a unique worldview and knowledge of local ecosystems.

Based on the case above, the writer then is interested in writing this short article: "Minority Language Rights". This article wants to describe what minority language rights is, why it is important and its relation to education.

MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS

Defining Minority Language

There must be some feelings or emotions come into your mind when hearing the word *minority*. This term brings you feelings and emotions like underprivileged, dominated, subservient, smallness and so on. If you belong to a minority group in an environment, you may feel that you just have a very little chance to do

some progression in your life. And now, the idea of underprivileged, dominated and smallness also go to language/s.

A language is called as a minority language when it does not legal status from the government. Das (2004:2) defined minority language as “languages traditionally used by part of the population of a state that are not dialects of official languages of the state, languages of migrants or artificially created languages”. This definition then gives impact to the protection of the minority language.

For instance is the minority language in the EU. In EU, the regional languages are distributed into fifty nine (59) linguistic group populations. However, only six (6) have more than one million speakers and only two (2) over half a million. It means fifty one (51) have less than half a million speakers. Take a look at the case of Catalan and Sami.

Catalan is spoken by seven (7) million people in Spain, French and Alghero, Sardinia. It has official status so that it has been protected by the authority. While Sami is spoken by a few hundred speakers in northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. This language does not have status like Catalan and it is imminent danger.

This definition also covers communities who speak a language closely similar or identical to the official or majority language of a neighbouring State. Examples: Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy are included into German speaking communities; Germany is grouped into the Danish-speaking community; southern Italy is the part of the Albanian and Greek speaking communities; and the Croatian and Slovenian speaking communities of Italy and Austria. While those languages are saved due to their official status in neighbouring country, another case comes to Breton and Gaelic.

Due to the power of those languages (languages in the example above), these two languages seems to be like depressed. Those dominant languages become the matter which presses these minority languages.

The Purpose of Language Rights

Having rights is an important aspect of being human. By this human is free to do whatever they want as long as they feel comfortable and it does not against the law in society. Rights having by a language are necessary. It is not only for the

language but also for the speaker of this language. For the language, it is important due to its status. If it has official status, it means it is protected from being extinct; while for the speaker they will have opportunity to use their language without feeling of being dominated by other speakers of other languages.

Arzos (2007) mentions the main point of addressing language rights is the legal situation of speakers of non dominant language especially when there is no single majority language. This legal situation helps speakers of the minority language. They can use their own language rather than the majority language. They will have more chance to speak in their languages.

There are some cases in which the minority languages are not allowed to be used in communication. For instance, the case in Europe, there was a time where the minority languages across this continent were not permitted to be used along the communication with public officials and standing far away from the state policies. It, then gave bad effect to the intergenerational transmission. However since the minority language law in this continent is applied, the equal rights for regional and minority language are well guarantee even though there are still some difficulties in implementing it.

Categorizing Language Rights

Patten (2008:9) categories a couple of minority language rights, namely toleration and accommodation rights. The toleration rights are divided into toleration-oriented rights and promotion-oriented rights. Toleration oriented rights refer to protecting individual from government interference. It is a right which leads individual to speak whatever language that they like in home, work place, etc. While promotion-oriented rights include the use of a particular language by public institutions. It is used to promote the language in question. In this right, an individual might have a particular language to use in the public, such as in the courts, the legislature, the public school system, the delivery of public services, and in other official contexts.

The accommodation rights seem similar to toleration rights. In this right, an individual will be served with special accommodation. This kind of accommodation may be vary depends on the condition in the field. It may include the use of interpreter, the use of bilingual staff, and so

on. The main purpose of this accommodation is to set up communication between the public institution and those who are lack of proficiency in speaking the usual language. Mostly, this kind of accommodation can be found in business. It is very important for businessmen so that they can draw the profitable from what they expect.

LANGUAGE RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

Language plays a crucial role in all aspects of human life including education. Language is like a window of knowledge. Through language, we can get access to the levels of education. The wisdom of education system to use a certain language as the medium of transferring language might give disadvantage for some minority languages.

Furthermore ACFC (2012:22) stated that “disadvantages and discrimination can result from the exclusion of minority languages from education, from a lack of adequate possibilities to learn (in) minority language(s), and from segregation that is language-based, or justified as language-based, into *special schools* or *special classes*”. It might have correlation with the language policy, in which each country has one official national language. The monolingual system plays in case, even though there are some other languages which are received and recognized by the society.

For example is Indonesia. This country has a very big territory from Sabang- Marauke. It also has many ethnic groups with various culture, belief and language. In 28th October 1928 their youth decided to declare that they have one language, Indonesia as one of their points to be declared. Nowadays, Indonesia Language becomes the official national language of this country. This language comes as the savior for this country. It connects people all around this country (because it becomes the lingua franca) and plays as an important role in transferring information and knowledge in public services, business, education and so on.

However, the presence of this language seems like a sword which kills the local language having by the ethnic groups. For instance, Manggaraian Language. This language is generally spoken by Manggaraian ethnic group. They use it in their daily life such as in daily communication, singing, praying, and traditional ceremonies. Even though, people use it in their daily life, it does not guarantee that this language will exist until the

end of this world. In school, teachers and students do not use their mother tongue due to the use of Indonesian as a medium of transferring knowledge in education system. Every day, the teacher and students communicate through this language (Indonesian language) and there is no space for their mother tongue to involve in their communication during school time. The teacher will criticize even warn his/her students when hearing them talking in Manggaraian language. As the consequence, the students prefer to use Indonesian than Manggaraian to communicate with their teachers and friends.

Hand in hand with this is there is no special policy given by the local department of education and culture for the minority language. There is no special place for Manggarai Language to be taught in school in their curriculum. It ever taught in school few years ago when the writer was in Junior High School. However, a number of particular problems were encountered as regards opportunities for Manggarai Language learning, including the insufficient number of teaching hours, lack of teachers and teaching or learning materials.

On the other hand, the concept of one national language per nation-state is an important element in many languages policies in education (Dooly and Claudia Vallejo, 2009:4). Since the government has program to educate their society, they then spread the same knowledge with one purpose is the equality of human resources through the equal access to education. They then approved one official national language to be used all around their country. Since Indonesia Language becomes Indonesian’s official national language, it influences the language used by teachers and students in all parts of this country. In education, teachers and students use Indonesian. In order to get knowledge, students must understand or acquire Indonesia Language (because it is the main language/majority language). They do not have any enough chance to speak in their local language. Unconsciously, teachers and students abandon their mother tongue and favor the majority language.

For instance is the case of Indah. Indah was born in Palu’e (it is one small island in Flores Island). She used Palu’e language until she was nine (9) years old with her family & friends. She, then, moved to Maumere for continuing her study at elementary school. In Maumere, she communicated with her friends who come from Maumere. They used Indonesia as their medium to communicate and she also started to learn and communicated in

Maumere language with her friends to create better relationship. When she did it, she looked like to forget and leave her mother tongue (Palu'e) and support Maumere language. It is because she did not have any enough chance to speak in her mother tongue (Palu'e) when she was in Maumere.

Actually, the language policy and practices between countries might be different from each other in terms of the position of minority languages in education, especially in its relationship with the national language. The minority language/s in some countries has played a very important role in the battle of regional minorities revindicating differentiated identity, political and economical autonomy and so forth (Dooly and Claudia Vallejo, 2009:4). In the education policies of the country, the degree of success in this fighting has been reflected. There are some cases in which the language is the language of instruction can be considered highly successful, such as the Catalans and Basques in Spain, Irish speakers in Ireland.

CONCLUSION

Language as one of cultural elements plays an important role in human life. Language which is considered as cultural inheritance can recognize someone's identity. However many languages in this world died and are going to die. It is caused by some factors such as global market system where people all around this world construct a certain language as lingua franca (e.g English and Mandarin). It, then, makes people interested in learning those certain languages and acquires them as their tools for communication. Those languages become majority language while the other become minority language.

The term minority which attached to a language makes sense to the effort of protecting that language. People then raise up an issue of rights for language especially a minority language. This right consists of two main parts, namely toleration and accommodation rights. This right gives impact to the protection of language through the legalization process done by the government or other language authority such as UNESCO. As a result, there are some languages which rise from death like Catalan, Québec and Hebrew and so on.

In terms of education, language serves as a bridge to access to all educational levels. It gives people opportunity to get much knowledge through education process. However, the policy of some countries which approved one official national

language for one country/nation in education is a bad dream for the local languages. The speakers of those local languages will not have enough chance to speak in their mother tongue. They look like to leave their first language and support the majority language. Nevertheless, we cannot put the blame on them because that is not their fault.

Actually, there are still spaces for the government to protect their language from being extinct, such as, *first*, the preservation of local minority language school networks should be guaranteed. Giving chance to the minority language speaker to talk in their mother tongue is much needed. Teachers are hoped to let their students to speak in their mother language. *Second*, for minority languages that are only spoken by small numbers of people, there may be a particular need to revitalize the language. For instance through the creation of separate classes or through language immersion. And the *last*, requests for minority language teaching must be accommodated in an equitable manner.

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