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Language Maintenance Through Comic Strips

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Abstract

Language, both spoken and written, is an evidence of human civilization as it tells the culture of its users. A language dead when its speakers were gone without passing it into their future users or when the new generation shift their language into another one so that the previous one is no longer used. The extinction of many indigenous languages in Indonesia shows that their users choose to use another languages that give them more benefit than those indigenous languages. Instead of using indigenous languages as their mother tongue, Javanese people choose Indonesian (the official language) or even English (the international language) as their first language. Language maintenance is then needed to do to preserve the language and the culture embedded in its use that can be done by using it through mass media since they have strong influence toward people. This research describes Javanese language maintenance through printed mass media, particularly comic strip on newspaper, tabloid and magazine. Comic strip is one of the sections in printed media, usually newspaper, using spoken language written on its panel that sometimes using part of indigenous language in the conversation of its characters. The writer shows how a comic strips in printed mass media indirectly preserve spoken Javanese.

Keywords: dead language, language shift, language maintenance, spoken language, printed mass media, comic strips

1. Introduction

Agus Dharma, on International Seminar of Language Maintenance and Shift, held by Linguistics Master Program, Diponegoro University, Semarang, in 2011, quoting Indonesian Vice President, in Metro TV's running text (21 Juli 2007), said that 35% of approximately 746 indigenous languages in Indonesia were in the danger of extinction as the speakers of those language were gradually decreasing.

Language extinction might happens as “younger speakers are becoming less and less interested in using indigenous language as more and more of them are leaving their place (mostly rural area) to get better life in new and bigger place (commonly urban area)” (cf. Dharma, 2011:8). Speakers who leave their homeland will gradually leave their mother tongue as they use the new language from the new place. In the new place, they -who become the minority- choose to use a new language (the urban language) to suit the urban community. Even if they build a strong community, they can only use the language among them. One reason why people loose their indigenous language as their mother tongue is that they choose another language to suit another community they considered better than their origin.

Another reason is proposed in International Seminar of Language Maintenance and Shift VII in 2017 by Shu-Chuan Chen, Ph.D who she said that mixed marriage between native and immigrant makes their descendant choose to use the language of their parent who is native since they are also native-born. They are leaving the language of their immigrant parent as it is no longer spoken in their environment.

There are two main ways to preserve -or at least maintain- endangered language (Agus Dharma, 2007:8-10), language development and language building. The first one can be done through language research, inventory, and documentation. By observing, listing and saving endangered languages, we have authentic evidence of the language. The second one can be done by building a language use through family, school, and society. By teaching the language in school as well as using it in family and society, the youth can recognize, understand and use the language well. It can be done by teaching it at school as a local content and using it in a family -mixed marriage family- as a mother tongue to avoid the children leaving one of their parents’ indigenous language (Holmes, 1992:68). It can also be done by supporting the language use in society such as directly using it in the community on a cultural event or indirectly using it through mass media by airing shows using indigenous language or publishing rubrics containing indigenous language.

Some comic strips in Central Java’s printed mass media like newspaper, tabloid or magazines contain part of Javanese as indigenous language. This research shows how Javanese as is maintained by society through printed mass media by taking *Panji Koming* in *Kompas* daily newspaper, *Cempluk* in *Cempaka* weekly tabloid and *Comic Mas Dipo* in *Manunggal* Campus Magazine as the media of spoken indigenous language usage.

2. Methods

This descriptive-qualitative research describes the Javanese maintenance through comic strips, published in three printed mass media (newspaper, local tabloid and campus magazine) as data sources. The sample were chosen using Purposive Sampling Technique (Sudaryanto, 1993) by selecting the population containing Javanese. The data were analyzed using Padan Translational (Sudaryanto, 1993) by taking the characters’ utterances containig Javanese from the bubble and translating it into English to know the meaning and function. It is done to introduce the language to the readers, showing

the meaning and usange, and hoping that they can also use it in their daily conversation to at least maintain some parts of Javanese.

3. Results

3.1. Kompas National Daily Newspaper



Figure 1: Panji Koming Comic Strip

In the fourth panel, one of the characters Den Mas says, “*Andhika* bebas karena tak ada bukti” which means, “You are free as there is no evidence (of your crime)”.

The word *andhika* comes from archaic Javanese meaning ‘you’. This word is not used in nowadays spoken or written Javanese.

Kompas, Panji Koming, May 8th, 2011.

3.2. Cempaka Local Weekly Tabloid



Figure 2: Cempluk Comic Strips

In the third panel, the main character Cempluk says, “*Gusti Allah mboten sare tur maha sugih*” which means, “God never rests and very prosperous”.

This sentence is a Javanese idiom describing how mighty God is in ensuring human safety and wealth.

Cempaka, Cempluk, May 20th-26th, 2017

3.3. Manunggal, Diponegoro University Campus Monthly Magazine



Figure 3: Mas Dipo Comic Strips

In the seventh panel, the character says, “*Aduh biyung.*” meaning “Oh, mom”.

The word *biyung* is an old Javanese term for ‘mom’ or ‘mother’ commonly used by people in rural areas of particular part of Central Java and Yogyakarta. It is only used in those limited areas among low level class society.

Manunggal, Mas Dipo, July, 2017

4. Discussion

4.1. Panji Koming in Kompas

From this comic strips, we can see old Java setting from the outfit worn by old Javanese. Bujel (the little boy) and Trinil (the little girl) are asking permission to Simbah Pandita (the holy old man) to follow a Monday ceremony. Simbah Pandita said

that following Monday ceremony is a good way to build youth character and nationalism. On their way to the ceremony, they saw Den Mas (senior government officer) did five negative acts in the second to the sixth panels, such as being dishonest (by deciding who got lost in a football game), showing dispatritism (by asking money/accepting a bribe to people trespassing the country's border), being unfair/uncivilized (imprisoning innocent person), being pro-government –not pro-citizen– (by building a palace although the people do not need it), and disintegrating (by competing for a 'chair' or 'position').

In the last panel, Bujel and Trinil go back to Simbah Pandita and said that the Monday ceremony is cancelled due to the absence of the ceremony's instructor. He said that, actually, there are many positive impacts of following the Monday ceremony for the youth. It means nothing when the leaders of the country, represented by Den Mas/ ceremony instructor, does not give good example for them. In the fourth panel, Den Mas uses the word *andhika* referring to Pailul who was being set free from prison as there is no evidence of his crime). This word is archaic since no Javanese used it in nowadays spoken or written Javanese.

As this comic strips is published in a national daily newspaper, it mostly uses Indonesian to let all readers understand the content and the message of the comic strips. However, it often uses old and even archaic Javanese word/phrase in the conversation of the characters as it uses old Java setting. The use of Javanese, even the archaic one, let the readers exposed to Javanese and understand more about it along with its meaning and usage. It also promotes the readers to use it in their daily conversation.

4.2. Cempluk in Cempaka

From this comic strips, we can see the Semarang traditional market setting shown by the simple stalls own by the characters, Cempluk and her neighbour are fixing their damage stalls caused by fire. In the first panel, Cempluk's neighbour suggests them to forget the past (the fire) and to embrace the future (rebuilding the damage stall). In the second panel, Cempluk fixes the stalls and makes a parody of Kartini's (Indonesian female hero) famous book entitled *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (After Dark there will be Light) into 'after fire there will be a project' which means the government will rebuild the damage place after it was burnt down. At the moment, there is a rumor saying that the government purposively burn certain places like traditional market as the sellers do not want the market to be renovated or relocated. In the third panel, Cempluk expresses a Javanese proverb '*Gusti Allah mboten sare tur maha sugih*' meaning "God never rests and very prosperous" to show that God understands what happened and will substitute the lost. This proverb is oftenly used by Javanese who got lost or being sad.

As this comic strips is published in a local tabloid in Central Java, particularly Semarang City, it often uses Javanese word/phrase/clause/sentence in the conversation of the characters as it used Semarang City as its setting. The use of Javanese let the readers exposed to Javanese and understand more about its meaning and usage. It also promotes the readers to use it in their daily conversation as they are also using Javanese with Semarang Dialect.

4.3. Mas Dipo Comic Strip

From this comic strips, we can see Diponegoro University Campus setting, shown by the quiet scene on Sunday as most students do not come to campus on Sunday. Mas Dipo is walking alone on Sunday morning when his friend, Risa, warns him to be careful with bicycle riders. However, he thinks that there will be no bicycle riders as the campus has varied geographical condition which makes it difficult to ride a bicycle. In the fifth scene, someone is riding a bicycle and hit him in the sixth scene (people usually spend their Sunday in the campus by walking, running, jogging, riding bicycle / motorcycle or doing car driving practice as it has long roads with good condition and it is quite empty on Sunday). In the seventh scene, he cried “*Aduh biyung.*” to expressed his feeling of being hit by a bicycle and injured (in the eight scene they were taken into *Rumah Sakit Nasional Diponegoro* or Diponegoro National Hospital). The word *biyung* (also the word *mbok* or *simbok* and *mak* or *emak*) are usually used by Javanese in rural areas of particular part of Central Java and Yogyakarta among low level class society as middle and high class Javanese society commonly used the word *ibu*.

As this comic strips is published in a Diponegoro University monthly magazine where most of its students are coming from Java and able to speak Javanese, it often uses Javanese word in the conversation of the characters. The use of Javanese let the readers exposed to Javanese and understand more about its meaning and usage. It also promotes the readers to use it in their daily conversation as they are also using Javanese with different dialects.

5. Conclusions

The use of part of Javanese in comic strips reflects language building through society which is done via printed mass media. It is aimed at letting the young generation -as comic or comic strips readers- to know, understand and use some part of Javanese -particularly spoken one- that they might forget or not know it before eventhough they were Javanese-born. As Ajidarma (2005:8,22) said that comic represents the culture of the society where it belongs, comic strips containing indigenous language becomes one of ways preserving the language as well as the culture embedded in it.

However, preserving local language cannot be done solely by the government as Prof. (Emeritus) James T. Collins, Ph.D, on the Second International Conference of Southeast Asia Maritime World in the Age of Motion, held by Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, in 2018, said that promoting the uses of local language sould be done from within. That is, making the speakers proud of using the language and making the language is used in daily and modern usage.

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