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## LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TOWARDS GREAT ACEH AND NORTH ACEH DIALECTS

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### Abstract

Acehnese people tend to have negative attitude towards speakers of Great Aceh dialect and have positive attitude to North Aceh dialect speakers. Most of people assume that Great Aceh dialect is rude, rough and crude, while North Aceh dialect is judged as refined, standard and prestigious. This study is to investigate the attitudes of speakers of Acehnese towards the Great Aceh and North Aceh dialects. The matched guise test, which has been proved as a tool to investigate people's attitude towards particular language varieties, was used in collecting the data in this study. The data from the questionnaire of the matched guise test was analyzed in simple statistical way in order to determine the significances of the results. However, the findings of this matched guise test were not as expected. The responses from the respondents did not support certain personality traits which was strongly associated with stigmatized dialect. It was found that Acehnese speakers mostly share positive and favorable attitude towards both North Aceh and Great Aceh dialects. It indicates a stronger believe as suggested by Zulfadli (2014) that the use of this matched guise test in the study of language attitudes seems to be not suitable in Indonesia in general and Aceh in particular because of some conditions.

**Key words:** Acehnese Dialects, language attitude, matched guise test.

### INTRODUCTION

Acehnese is one of the indigenous languages in Indonesia, and it is spoken by around 3.5 million people based on the 2000 census (Lewis, 2009) in the northern tip of Sumatra. Many researchers have divided Acehnese into some dialects. Cowan (1981, p. 529) divides Acehnese into four major dialects; Banda or Lowlands (*baroh*) language, Upper Country (Tunong), Pidie/ Pase, and Daya. Ali, et al. (1983), as cited in Zulfadli (2014, p. 33), reports that the Acehnese language is divided into six geographical dialects; Great Aceh, Pidie, Peusangan, Pasai, East Aceh and West Aceh. While Asyik (1972) separates Acehnese into four main dialects, they are: Great Aceh dialect (spoken in Aceh Besar regency), Pidie dialect (spoken in Pidie Jaya regency), North Aceh dialect (spoken in East Aceh, North Aceh, and Bireun regency) and West Aceh dialect (spoken in Aceh Jaya, West Aceh, Nagan Raya and South Aceh regency).

When there are systematic differences in the way different groups speak a language, each group speaks a dialect of that language. Some of the differences are due to age, sex, size, speech rates, emotional state, and state of health (Fromkin, et al., 2003, p. 445). Other differences may be resulted from word choices, the pronunciation of words, and grammatical rules. Dialects of Acehnese are interchangeable that all speakers of the Acehnese can talk to each other and understand each other.

Consisted of many sub dialects, the Great Aceh dialect has the most noticeable differences of the pronunciation of word-final 'a' (Asyik, 1987, p. 4). In some of the dialect areas the word-final 'a' is pronounced [a] while in other areas it is pronounced as [ə] or [æ]. Other difference of the Great Acehnese is found in the pronunciation of 's' as [θ]. The consonant 'r' is also pronounced differently from the mainstream Acehnese dialects (e.g. North Acehnese) as voiced velar fricatives [ɾ]. On the other hand, North Aceh dialect is marked by the use of the pronoun *long* 'I' which is not found in Great Aceh dialect. In Great Aceh, people use the pronoun *lon* 'I' which is considered the polite form of *long* in North Aceh (Asyik, 1987, p. 6).

Based on those various characteristics of Great Aceh, people can generally identify the dialect background of an Acehnese speaker when they listen to the language variation someone uses. Speakers of North Acehnese react unfavorably towards the dialects of Great Aceh. Similarly, the Great Aceh speakers usually switch to the North Aceh dialect when they communicate with people who they believe are not from their dialect background (Zulfadli, 2014, p. 64). Zulfadli (2014, p. 67) further mentions that most of people assume that Great Aceh dialect is 'rude', 'rough' and 'crude', while North Aceh dialect is judged as 'refined', 'standard' and 'prestigious'. Furthermore, based on the writer's experience, she also found the same phenomena as mentioned by Zulfadli. Acehnese people tend to have negative attitude towards speakers of Great Aceh dialect and have positive attitude to the North Aceh dialect speakers. Such assumptions towards both dialects are called language attitudes.

Attitudes towards a language show what people feel about the speakers of that language. People do not only judge the language as a tool for communication, but also can predict both personal and characteristics of the language speakers (Ajzen, 2005, p. 3). Holmes (2001) mentions that attitudes to language reflect attitudes to the users and the uses of that language. While Szecsy (2008, p. 67) argues that people attitudes towards language are paralleled to their attitudes towards speakers. Therefore, if someone has positive opinion about a certain language, he/she will feel the same towards its speakers. In other word, the judgment feeling cannot be separated from the language or from the users.

In relation to research on Acehnese language, there are some studies that have been conducted. In this current research, the writer chooses two of four main dialects classified by Asyik (1972); Great Aceh and North Aceh dialects. The writer intends to investigate the Acehnese speakers' attitude towards Great Aceh and North Aceh dialects.

## METHODS

In order to get data for the attitudes of Acehnese speakers have towards Great Aceh and North Aceh dialects, the matched guise test was used. This test was first introduced by Lambert, *et al.*, (1960) as a mean in assessing the language attitude. It uses recorded voices of people speaking first in one dialect and then in another. In matched guise test, the speaker of the different dialects is called "guise" and the listeners are called "judges". The judges do not know speech samples are from the same person, but they judge the two guises of the same speaker as two separate speakers. In this matched guise test, there were the questionnaires adopted from Zulfadli (2014) contained 26 attitude statements that the judges or respondents were asked to rate on a four item of Likert-scale. Firstly, the writer used four recordings of three different persons reading passage of story in both dialects and all respondents or "judges" listened to the same speaker or "guise". Second, the respondents, as the judges of the test, listened to the same speech samples or recordings of the guise twice with additional voice recordings of one or more other speakers, known as "fillers", are inserted between the guise segments. These fillers are required in order to prevent the judges from recognizing the voice of the guise speakers. The guise recordings played in random order for data analysis to prevent judges or respondents from recognizing the voices. After the judges listened to the recordings, the judges were asked to respond to the questionnaire provided. The data was taken at Syiah Kuala University and Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. In each university, the writer took 30 students to participate with ranges of 18-20 years old and they had to understand Acehnese.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Szecszy (2008, p. 67) said that people attitudes towards language are paralleled to their attitudes towards its speakers. Nevertheless, from 26 questions in matched guise test, there are only few results which confirmed Szecszy's assumption. From the matched guise test results, it was found that Acehese speakers considered Great Acehese speaker as 'a country bumpkin' (*kampung*) and North Acehese speaker as a person who is living in the city. It might happen since Great Aceh dialect has the most noticeable differences in pronouncing 'a', 's' and 'r'. This feature is presumed to be the marker of a Great Acehese speaker. When people speak differently from the mainstream Acehese, they are stigmatized and laughed.

Zulfadli (2014, p. 372) said that Acehese people who speak uvular [r] are considered as 'deficient'. One of the reasons is because in Bahasa Indonesia which is the official and dominant language used in formal and informal occasions, it only has 'r' as a clear alveolar trill [r] and there is no uvular [ʀ]. North Acehese may assume that everyone should pronounce 'r' correctly as in Bahasa Indonesia. So, Great Acehese speakers are seen as 'country bumpkin' (*kampung*) since their inability to produce the normal 'r' while North Acehese speakers are considered to be a person who is living in the city since their normal 'r' pronunciation.

This phenomenon was also found in Zulfadli's research on investigating stigmatized West Aceh dialect. The use of uvular fricative [ʀ] in West Acehese has brought the negative judgment of West Acehese speakers by North Acehese. The West Acehese uvular [ʀ] is seemed to be funny as it is similar to people who are unable to produce [r] correctly. Because of this reason, West Aceh dialect is considered as 'incorrect' and 'substandard' dialect by North Acehese speakers and the speakers of this dialect are usually said as 'country bumpkin' (*kampung*). However, in matched guise test result, West Acehese guise was not associated with 'country bumpkin' trait. The results ran contrary to expectations for stigmatized variety speakers.

For North Acehese guise, besides considered as person who is living in the city, they also judged her as an influential, a good leader and a courageous person. The results were based on expectation where North Acehese guise was rated higher than Great Aceh guise. It is in line with Zulfadli (2014, p. 67) assumptions that North Aceh dialect is judged as 'refined', 'standard', and 'prestigious'. This result also confirmed Carranza's (1982, p. 63) assumption that the reflection of a group or community can be seen from people's attitude towards a language. Comparing to Zulfadli's matched guise test result in Acehese dialects context, it was found that there was no significant results for personality trait influential, a good leader and courageous. The result for these traits showed similar trends which were positively rated the guise of West Acehese.

Moreover, in this study, for personality trait 'ambitious' which had negative meaning, the results were on contrary to expectations. It was expected that Great Acehese guise would judged to be less favorable than North Acehese guise. Yet, the results confirmed that North Acehese guise was judged negatively and Great Acehese guise was judged positively. Matched guise test results for 'ambitious' trait in Zulfadli's (2014) also showed a contrary expectation. The respondents showed their disagreement for both guises whether form North Aceh or West Aceh. Another personality trait which was not based on expectation was 'coming from rich family'. It was found that North Acehese guise was judged as person who was coming from poor family as well as Great Acehese guise.

Even though first assumption said that Acehese people tend to have negative attitude towards speakers of Great Aceh and have positive attitude to the North Aceh dialect speakers, the matched guise test results showed that it was not only North Acehese guise was judged positively but also Great Acehese guise. The majority of the respondents gave positive attitude towards Great Aceh. It was also found in the observation that when the respondents listened to the Great Acehese speaker read the story, they laughed at the way she read it and showed negative reaction. Still, they judged Great Acehese speaker positively and favorably. Both of North and Great Acehese guises were highly valued as person who is honest, intelligent, independent, kind, self-confident, trustworthy, interesting, coming from religious family, having good and promising future, polite, higher class, friendly, has a good sense of humor, respected person, has a lot of friends, loves his family, and generous.

The findings of this matched guise test were not as expected. The responses from the respondents did not support certain personality traits which was strongly associated with stigmatized dialect such as 'impolite' and 'not-well educated'. Great Acehnese guise was not judged less polite or less educated by the respondents. Similarly, for North Acehnese guise, she was not judged as highly on 'trustworthy', 'independent' and 'intelligent' which were associated to a prestige dialect. Zulfadli's matched guise test results also found the same response for these traits. Even though the matched guise test considered as a tool to assess language attitude introduced by Lambert (1960), the use of this matched guise test in the study of language attitudes seems do not suitable applied in Indonesia in general and Aceh in particular because of some conditions. For example the strong Islamic values and Asian culture own by Acehnese can affect the test result. In Islamic context, as Muslims, they are prohibited to say bad things about other people. In context of Asian culture, it seems that respondents hide their true feelings from what they actually want to express. The respondents may feel sensitive to some statements in the questionnaire and unwilling to share their opinion to unknown people. Therefore, almost all of the answers in matched guise test were judged positively. In addition, Anderbeck (2010) carried out a language attitude study towards Bahasa Indonesia and Jambi Malay using matched guise test also found unexpected results. It can be concluded that using the matched guise test in Indonesia is still in question.

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