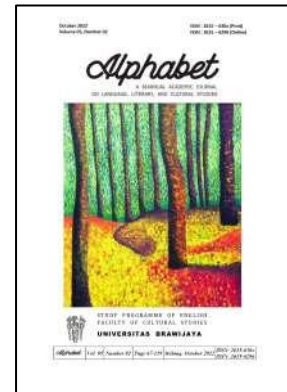


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Anastasia Tesalonika

Iis Nur Rodliyah

Alfina Khaidem

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Anastasia Tesalonika ¹

Iis Nur Rodliyah ²

Alfina Khaidem ³

Abstract

This study aims to reveal the Dayak Ngaju students' attitudes towards their mother tongue, the Ngaju language, and the factors affecting the attitudes. Following Fasold (1984) and Jendra (2012), a qualitative analysis of interviews with selected subjects was conducted after the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire respondents were 30 college students of Dayak Ngaju ethnicity, 9 of which were interviewed to corroborate their answers to the questionnaire. The results reveal the students' positive attitudes towards the Ngaju language. The students' positive attitudes were influenced by two factors: (a) the language's power and prestige, and (b) the language's internal system. The respondents considered the Ngaju language as an important part of their community because the language reflects the Dayak Ngaju people's cultural identity despite the challenges the speakers of the language might have when communicating in their mother tongue. Thus, language preservation is needed.

Keywords: Language attitude; local language; Dayak's Ngaju language; students' attitude

Dayak language is one of the indigenous languages in Indonesia which is spoken by the natives of Kalimantan or Borneo Island known as Dayak People. Referring to Alloy et al. (2008), in Kalimantan Island, Dayak ethnicity consists of around four hundred sub-ethnics each having its own language. The Ngaju language, also known as the language of the upriver community, (Kuhnt-Saptodewo, 1999) is spoken by one of the Dayak sub-ethnics, the natives of Dayak Ngaju, that are originated in Central Kalimantan. In Central Kalimantan, as many as 1,029,182 Dayak people make about 46.62% of the total population, and Dayak Ngaju is the biggest sub-ethnic group living along the riverside areas of

the Kapuas, Kahayan, Rungan Manuhing, Barito, and Katingan (Gordon, 2005; Statistics Indonesia, 2010). The population of Dayak Ngaju is mostly distributed in 6 districts in Central Kalimantan that include Palangka Raya City, Kotawaringin Regency, Pulang Pisau Regency, Katingan Regency, Kapuas Regency, and Gunung Mas Regency.

The important thing to note is that, due to the spreading of international influence throughout the world, there is a challenge to preserve the Dayak Ngaju before it is marginalized among its native speakers. This is because the natives tend to be bilingual or multilingual these days (Rizqi, 2017), meaning that they can speak Ngaju language as their indige-

1 Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia. Email: anastasia0229@student.ub.ac.id

2 International Graduate Program of Education and Human Development, College of Social Sciences, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan & Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia. Email: iis.nur.rodliyah@gmail.com

3 Linguistics Department, Manipur University, Manipur, India. Email: alfinakh@gmail.com

nous language, the Banjarese language which is a lingua franca widely spoken by almost all people in Kalimantan, and Indonesian language which is their national language. However, although the Ngaju language has been included in the school curriculum as a local subject according to the Governor's Regulation of Central Kalimantan Province Number 22 the Year 2011 (Governor of Central Kalimantan Province Number, 2011), the language has been infrequently spoken in daily conversation among the students with Ngaju ethnicity background.

Given the situation that the Ngaju language has less often been spoken compared to Indonesian and Banjarese languages in daily usage, there is a potential that the language will eventually become extinct in the future. Extinction in this context refers to the situation where despite the capabilities of Dayak Ngaju natives in understanding and speaking the language, they fail to transfer the language to the next generation. As a result, the exposure of the local language which also serves as a mother tongue, to the younger members of the ethnicity will be limited. The potential extinction of the Ngaju language can be harmful to the community and may result in cultural loss, a situation which according to Hall (2005) is frequently caused by some changes in the environment.

To measure the vitality of the Ngaju language, the researchers adopted the Language Attitude model proposed by Fasold (1984) and Jendra (2012). Language attitude, according to Jendra (2012), is the perception and attitude held by people towards not only a certain language but also its speakers. This theory also explains how a person feels about his or her own or other people's languages. Furthermore, according to Fasold (1984), people can show three different attitudes toward a language and its speakers namely a positive attitude, a negative attitude, or a neutral attitude. Moreover, in terms of language varieties, people's reactions to language varieties also reflect their perceptions of the speakers of the language varieties (Edwards in Cargile, Giles, Ryan & Bradac, 1994).

In determining how people feel about certain languages and toward their speakers, Fasold (1984) suggested two applicable methods to examine the cases: a direct method and an indirect method. The direct method is conducted by distributing questionnaires to the respondents and or by asking them questions in an interview, and the participants are made aware of taking part in the research. On the other hand, the indirect method is conducted without the awareness of the respondents or the subjects of the study that they are being observed.

In terms of language attitudes, four factors might affect people's language attitudes. Jendra (2012) identified four factors that influence people's attitude towards language: (1) the language's power and prestige, (2) the nation's historical background, (3) the social and traditional factors, (4) the language's internal system including grammar, vocabularies, and pronunciation.

There have been several studies examining the speakers' attitude towards vernacular language. Setiawan's (2013) doctoral dissertation, for example, focused on investigating East Javanese children's language proficiency and the relationship between their social networks and language use. He also analyzed the children's attitudes towards the Javanese language. Another study was conducted by Pawestri (2019) that observed Javanese college students' attitude towards the Javanese language used in the movie of "*Yowis Ben*". In addition, Ting & Puah (2010) worked to identify Hokkien speakers' attitudes towards Hokkien and Mandarin languages.

Considering the previous explanations, this research is intended to make an additional contribution to research in the domain of indigenous languages, especially the Ngaju language which is still under-studied. Therefore, this research is aimed at investigating the attitudes of Dayak Ngaju students toward the use of the Ngaju language as their local language. In addition to the attitudes of the students, the factors affecting these attitudes to-

wards the language were also identified to obtain more comprehensive results of the study.

Even though there have been a few studies on the Ngaju language, none has focused on language attitudes among its speakers or users, especially the youth. Disclosing how the youth, including students, feel about the use of the local language is important because the language that is used as a means of communication in daily life intensely forms social identity (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Adhering to this situation, the objectives of this study are (1) to find out the Dayak Ngaju students' attitudes towards their mother tongue, the Ngaju language, and (2) to identify the factors affecting the attitudes. The results of this study are expected to provide readers with more information about Dayak Ngaju students' attitudes toward their local language and to provide valid data regarding the previously mentioned social phenomena in the potential extinction of vernacular or local language thus a recommendation on the future conservation and preservation of the Ngaju language can be considered.

METHOD

To answer the research questions, this study applied the qualitative research method as its goal is to explain how and when a particular event happens (Berg & Lune, 2012). The data collection regarding the language attitude used the direct method as demonstrated by Fasold (1984). Thus, a questionnaire was distributed to 30 respondents who had Dayak Ngaju ethnic backgrounds from either one or both parents. All of the respondents in this study were undergraduate students of Palangka Raya University in Central Kalimantan (aged between 18 and 25 years old). Once the questionnaire was collected, 9 out of the 30 respondents were interviewed to corroborate some of the answers they gave to the questionnaire.

For the questionnaire, a semantic differential scale ranging from the point of 1 to 5 was applied (Lavrakas, 2008; Shuy & Fasold, 1973). The questionnaire was an adaptation of

the preexisting questionnaire constructed by Setiawan (2013) that consisted of three sections. The first section focused on the information about the respondents' backgrounds. The second section was constructed to collect information on the respondents' perception of the Ngaju language, particularly by asking the respondents to rate their impression of the use of the Ngaju language. This section consisted of 10 items accompanied by a five-point semantic differential scale which is a set of adjectives arranged in bipolar rating scales that include both positive and negative adjectives e.g. scale (1) Cool to scale (5) Uncool. Lastly, the third section contained 10 statements intended to reveal the respondents' beliefs, opinions, and feelings towards the use of the Ngaju language and the respondents' general ideas about the language that are measured using a five-point rating scale from (1) Completely agree to the scale of (5) Completely disagree. To classify the respondents' attitudes into positive or negative, the researchers calculated the mean score obtained from responses to each item of the questionnaire. If the result is lower than 3, it is considered a positive attitude. Oppositely, if it is higher than 3, it is considered a negative attitude.

As a follow-up on the respondents' answers to the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with 9 respondents. The interview was carried out to gain a better understanding of the attitudes of the representative respondents to the Ngaju language. The researchers prepared four questions to find out the respondents' attitudes in more detail that covered: (1) what would be the respondents' reaction when they encounter or hear other people speak in the Ngaju language, (2) how witnessing speech events in Ngaju language performed by others would make them feel, (3) what the respondents' opinion about the use of the Ngaju language in the past and the present times are, and (4) what challenges or difficulties the respondents have in speaking or using the Ngaju language in a daily conversation. To process the results, the interview recordings were transcribed to prepare them for further analysis. Then, the researchers applied

content analysis to identify and classify the affecting factors by referring to Kondracki & Wellman (2002) and Weber (1990). Lastly, the conclusion and suggestions were made.

RESULTS

The Attitude of Dayak Ngaju Students towards the Ngaju Language

The Impression of the Language

This section presents the data collected from 30 respondents' responses to the distributed questionnaire that has a five-point semantic differential scale. The findings to elaborate on here were taken from the 10 items from the second section of the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to choose one option from a set of bipolar rating scales consisting of positive and negative adjectives that referred to a design as explained by Brace (2008). These adjectives were divided into several categories that include the association of the language with the lifestyle, the speakers' impression, the benefits of using the language, and the specific purposes of using the language. To determine whether an attitude reflected through the responses belongs to a positive or negative attitude, the mean calculation was conducted leading to any score smaller than 3 being categorized as positive, while a score bigger than 3 being categorized as negative.

As explained in the method section, each category consisted of different sets of items. In the category of the language's association with lifestyle, the sets of items were 'cool – uncool' and 'modern – outdated.' In the category of the speakers' impression of the language, the sets of items were 'urban-like – rural-like,' 'educated – uneducated,' 'prestigious – unprestigious,' and 'rich – poor.' In the category of the benefits of the language, the sets of items were 'confident – not confident.' The last, in the category of the language's specific purposes, the sets of items were 'scientific – non-scientific,' 'suitable for technological use – not suitable for technological use,' and 'suit-

able for business purposes – not suitable for business purposes.'

The following Table 1 shows the findings from the second section of the questionnaire. The scores presented were the mean scores based on the questionnaire results related to the respondents' attitudes towards the use of the Ngaju language in Central Kalimantan focusing especially on their impression of the language.

Table 1. The Students' Impression of Dayak's Ngaju Language

No	Category	Mean
1.	The association of the language with lifestyle	3
2.	The speakers' impression of the language	2.92
3.	The benefits of the language	2.4
4.	The specific purposes of the language	3.51
Total Mean Score		2.96

Table 1 shows that the collective mean score of the four categories was 2.96. Because the mean score was not higher than 3, this overall result is categorized as a positive attitude. However, negative attitudes were found to be addressed to the category of the specific purposes of the language as shown by the mean score that was higher than 3, and neutral attitude was directed to the association of the language with lifestyle as shown by the mean score 3. Overall, the students still had a stronger cultural identity as indicated by the mean scores of items number 2, 'The impression of the speakers toward language', and item number 3, 'The benefits of the language.'

The Students' General Opinion of the Language

The findings presented under this subsection are generated from responses given to the 10 statements found in the third section of the questionnaire. The third section of the questionnaire aimed at measuring the respondents' attitudes toward the Ngaju language. The respondents were expected to rate each statement by choosing the given Likert scale op-

tions from 1 to 5 respectively referring from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree.’ A statement with a score of less than 3 was classified as a positive attitude, while a statement with a score of more than 3 was classified as a negative attitude. The first statement was about the loyalty and devotion the students have towards the use of the Ngaju language to find out whether they have always been communicating in the Ngaju language or not. The second statement was formulated to assess the students’ awareness of the need to improve their Ngaju grammar and vocabulary. The third statement was to see how well they understand their own mother tongue. Next, The fourth statement was intended to evaluate the respondents’ pride in their ability to speak the Ngaju language. The fifth statement was to measure the respondents’ pride in respect to using the proper Ngaju language to maintain their individual and regional identities. The sixth and seventh statements were addressing about the future and the preservations of the Ngaju language. Finally, the last three statements focused on the learning process of the Ngaju language in formal education.

Table 2 shows the findings from the third section of the questionnaire. The scores presented are the mean scores based on the responses provided by the respondents regarding their general opinion of the language. The questionnaire was originally written in the Indonesian language, and it is provided in Appendix 1. In Table 2, however, the researchers present the statements from the third section of the questionnaire that are translated into English.

Based on the findings in Table 2, each statement had a mean score below 3. Out of 10 statements, statement number 7, “The preservation of the Ngaju language represents the efforts to keep the local wisdom” had the lowest score compared to the rest. Overall, the data disclosed that most of the students showed a high awareness of preserving their culture as an indication of their true identity. Even though they learn other languages at school, i.e. Indonesian and foreign languages,

the findings indicated that they had a strong identity ascription and loyalty to their indigenous language.

Table 2. Students’ General Opinion of Ngaju Language

No	Category	Mean
1.	I always speak the Ngaju language, either at home or on campus, to communicate with others daily.	2.8
2.	I try to improve my ability in the Ngaju language by learning the rules of the language.	2.06
3.	I master both the Ngaju language and its language rules.	2.2
4.	I think the Ngaju language represents my identity.	1.53
5.	To use the proper Ngaju language means to preserve one’s individual and region’s identities well.	1.56
6.	The future sustainability of the Ngaju language depends on how it is used by the Ngaju community.	1.4
7.	The preservation of the Ngaju language represents the efforts to keep the local wisdom.	1.26
8.	Ngaju language is learned because it is one of the compulsory subjects to study at primary and secondary schools.	2.43
9.	Ngaju language lessons had been an interesting subject to learn during my study at the primary and secondary schools.	2.2
10.	I feel more enthusiastic to learn the Ngaju language compared to learning the Indonesian language or foreign languages.	2.63
Total Mean Score		2.007

Factors Affecting the Attitudes of the Students towards the Ngaju Language

To reveal affecting factors that determined the attitudes of the students towards the Ngaju language, interviews were conducted with 9 respondents. The interview consisted of 14 questions with the first seven asking about the language preferences of the respondent according to various given situations. Then, the last seven questions focused

on asking the thoughts and opinions of the respondents regarding the Ngaju language in different given situations, by linking it to their attitudes. The interview sessions were recorded, and once the interviews had been conducted, the interview recording was transcribed for ease of the analysis procedures.

Based on the interview results, two factors were found to mainly affect the students' attitudes towards the Ngaju language. These factors refer to the affecting factors on the language as explained by Jendra (2012). The two factors identified in this study were (1) language power and prestige and (2) the language's internal system. However, no evidence was shown on the influence of national historical background as well as the social and traditional factors on the respondents' attitude towards the Ngaju language.

The first affecting factor, language power and prestige, was indicated by the respondents when they expressed positive attitudes towards the language. The interview answers revealed that speaking in the Ngaju language gave the students a strong sense of pride because it revealed their identity related to Ngaju origins. Moreover, since the language belongs to only the Dayak Ngaju community, recognizing each other as belonging to the same community when someone speaks in the Ngaju language is becoming easier. Although some respondents were more interested in learning the national language (the Indonesian language) or in learning foreign languages than the Ngaju language, they were aware of the importance of maintaining the language so that it could be passed down to future generations. By doing so, their local wisdom would not deteriorate.

The second factor, the internal system of the language, also strongly influenced the attitudes of Dayak Ngaju students towards the Ngaju language. The majority of respondents claimed to find challenges related to the language system that covered pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Thus, negative attitudes still occurred despite the relative easiness of the language. For example, although

the Ngaju language is considered easy in terms of not having High (H) and Low (L) varieties like other local languages, many words in the Ngaju language vocabulary are homograph, and this can make it difficult for the students to recognize the proper pronunciation and the correct meaning of some words having the same spelling that could lead to some confusion among the students in learning and using the language. Some negative attitudes among a few respondents such as discouragement or refusal to speak the Ngaju language also resulted from the Ngaju students' inability to comprehend the internal system of the language. However, more positive attitudes were revealed during the interviews as indicated by the respondents' answers mentioning that they keep trying to use the Ngaju language in daily communication despite having difficulty with the language-internal system.

DISCUSSION

After calculating the means of both sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire, the findings showed that the Dayak Ngaju students were consistent in showing positive attitudes towards the Ngaju language. However, when compared to the other two previous studies, which confirmed the generally negative attitudes towards indigenous languages of Hokkien and Javanese reported respectively by Ting and Puah (2010) and Setiawan (2013), the current study indicated different results. This study disclosed strong positive attitudes of Ngaju students toward their mother tongue, Ngaju language. This finding supported the results of the previous study conducted by Pawestri (2019).

While this study was conducted entirely in one location, Setiawan (2013) conducted his study in three kinds of settings in East Java, Indonesia ranging from a village, a town, to a big city. The findings revealed that Javanese children in rural areas still generally speak Javanese; those in urban areas speak both Javanese and Indonesian; while in the big city, they speak only Indonesian. Besides, he uncovered that Javanese children's

ability in using the Indonesian language was typically better than using the Javanese language, and the children mostly showed indifferent attitudes toward the Javanese language. Setiawan (2013) explained further that using the Javanese language was considered a “symbol of ethnicity,” whereas using the Indonesian language, which is a national language, was associated with national identity and promoted “effective communication and prestige.”

Therefore, compared to Setiawan’s study (2013), this study shows contradictory results as most respondents’ attitudes towards their indigenous language are positive. The respondents of this study who showed positive attitudes consisted of 18–25-year-old-university students studying at Palangkaraya University, whereas in Setiawan’s study (2013), the respondents showing negative attitudes were 9–11-year-old-Javanese children. Thus, age group differences could be the factor determining the research results as reflected by the opposite attitudes shown by the respondents of each study. Compared to children, young adults may view things differently including, for example, the languages they speak or use. As young adults, university students have more chances to address matters including language preferences according to their own perceptions. On the other hand, children tend to have limited options in perceiving matters because they are still highly dependent on their parents or other caregivers. However, despite the contradictory attitudes shown by the respondents, these two studies share similarities in their findings. The respondents of this study, i.e., Dayak Ngaju students, and the respondents of Setiawan’s study (2013), i.e., Javanese children, both considered their indigenous language as a prominent aspect of their ethnicity and needed to be maintained as part of their identity. In addition, among the respondents of both studies who expressed a preference to use the national language which is the Indonesian language as their mean language to communicate, they considered a national language as a more effective means of

communication because it is spoken more widely or nationwide.

Comparing the results of this study with the previous study by Ting and Puah (2010), similarity and differences are noticeable. Like the current study, Ting and Puah (2010) conducted research on the language attitude of university students aged 20-25 years old toward their indigenous language Hokkien and Mandarin language. However, the main findings of Ting and Puah’s study (2010) were contrasting with the results of this study. In their study, the respondents, who are Hokkien language speakers in Kuching, Sarawak, showed more positive attitudes toward Mandarin than Hokkien and prefer to use standard Mandarin language which is mostly used in Mainland China. The respondents also perceived their vernacular language Hokkien to be inferior compared to Mandarin which is a standardized language. Besides, they associated the Hokkien language with people who have fewer leadership skills and are less educated than people who use the Mandarin language. They also prefer to use standard Mandarin, which is mostly spoken on the mainland, to Hokkien, which is a vernacular language. These findings are contradictory to the findings of this study regardless of the respondent’s age group similarity and that they are being university students. In this study, Dayak Ngaju students’ attitudes towards their vernacular language were found to be mostly positive, and the respondents did not associate the use of their vernacular language with the educational level or social status of its speakers.

The findings of this study were also consistent with the previous study by Pawestri (2019). Her findings revealed that Javanese university students had positive attitudes toward Javanese language use in the “*Yowis Ben*” film. Despite differences in research objects and subjects, both Pawestri’s study (2019) and this study showed a similar and consistent finding that the respondents from the ethnic backgrounds of Javanese and Ngaju showed positive language attitudes towards each of their vernacular languages. Furthermore, the

factors that influence these positive attitudes in the two studies were found similar, too. In Prawestri's study (2019), the most important factor affecting the Javanese university students' language attitudes towards the Javanese language is ethnicity, or in other words, it is the sense of ethnic pride that leads to the students' positive attitudes. This factor is comparable to the factor of language power and prestige which was found in this study. Regarding this finding, the Dayak Ngaju students' positive attitudes stem from a sense of pride and loyalty to their ethnicity and towards the Ngaju language which is an important part of their culture that must be preserved.

CONCLUSION

The Ngaju language is counted as an important part of the Dayak Ngaju community. The student respondents showed as holding positive attitude towards the Ngaju language due to the sense of pride that had been shown either within or outside the Ngaju community. The positive attitude was maintained by the students although some of them indicated to be less knowledgeable of the Ngaju language internal system and they had not perceived the language as applicable for specific purposes such as in the fields of science, business, or technology. However, because of their strong sense of pride, the Ngaju students are intensely aware of the importance of preserving the Ngaju language which is their mother tongue and an inseparable part of their identity and culture to ensure that cultural loss would not occur in the future.

Even though the language attitude topic has been researched extensively, other researchers may still conduct a study within this domain, but they can focus on different local languages while emphasizing investigating the historical background factors as well as the social and traditional factors that influence language use. Because most language attitude studies rely on questionnaires and interviews to collect data, considering different research instruments to collect the data will also be worthwhile. For example, instead of conduct-

ing a direct research technique by distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews, the next researchers can adopt the indirect method through a series of observations that can better maintain the natural states of the research settings and the research subjects. Lastly, determining the size of the data source or the samples is also essential to ensure the reliability and the validity of the data collected as well as the representativeness of the community being researched.

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Appendix 1

The Indonesian version of the 10 items of the third section of the questionnaire

1. *Selalu menggunakan bahasa Ngaju dalam berkomunikasi di kehidupan sehari-hari, baik di rumah maupun di kampus.*
2. *Berusaha memperbaiki penggunaan bahasa Ngaju dengan memperdalam kaidah bahasa Ngaju.*
3. *Menguasai bahasa Ngaju dan aturan kaidah bahasanya.*
4. *Merasa jika bahasa Ngaju menunjukkan identitas pribadi.*
5. *Menggunakan bahasa Ngaju dengan baik berarti menjaga identitas diri dan daerah dengan baik.*
6. *Masa depan bahasa Ngaju bergantung pada penggunaan bahasa Ngaju oleh masyarakatnya.*
7. *Pelestarian bahasa Ngaju merupakan upaya dalam menjaga kearifan lokal.*
8. *Bahasa Ngaju dipelajari karena menjadi salah satu mata pelajaran yang wajib diambil di bangku sekolah.*
9. *Pelajaran bahasa Ngaju adalah mata pelajaran yang menarik untuk dipelajari selama berada di bangku sekolah.*
10. *Merasa lebih antusias dalam mata pelajaran bahasa Ngaju daripada bahasa asing atau bahasa Indonesia.*