

## Cultural Shifts in the Use of Acehese Language in Community Interactions in Banda Aceh City

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### Abstract

This study is motivated by the declining number of Acehese speakers in everyday interactions within the community in Banda Aceh. This research aims to identify the factors influencing the shift in the use of the Acehese language in daily interactions among the community in Banda Aceh. The analysis in this study employs Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory and utilizes a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings of this study reveal that the shift in the use of the Acehese language begins within the family environment. A lack of awareness among parents to pass down and instill the use of the Acehese language in their children leads to a failure in cultural transmission to future generations. In addition to family, the school environment also contributes to the declining use of the Acehese language, as teaching activities predominantly use Indonesian, with minimal local Acehese language lessons. Furthermore, the influx of migrants in Banda Aceh who are not proficient in Acehese also results in the community rarely using the Acehese language in public, making Indonesian the dominant language used as a collective action to adapt language use to those around them. This study highlights the need to enhance the collective awareness of the community in preserving and maintaining the Acehese language, as well as the necessity for educational policies that better support the teaching of the Acehese language in schools.

## Introduction

Regional language is the language used by the people of a particular region and is a characteristic and symbol of the region. In Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 57 of 2014 concerning the Development, Guidance, and Protection of Language and Literature, as well as Improving the Function of Indonesian Language (JDIH Kemenkeu, 2014) written in Chapter 1 Article 1 paragraph 5 that "Regional language is a language used by Indonesian citizens in regions in the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia for generations". Because language is the basis of the identity of a nation, therefore the development of language in a region has a very close relationship with the culture that exists in the community itself. This applies everywhere, including in the Aceh region which has a diversity of tribes and also a variety of distinctive regional languages (Puteh 2012).

Acehnese is one of the local languages that is still alive and used by the people of Aceh as an embodiment of Acehese culture. It functions as a means of communication in daily interactions and is also a symbol of identity, pride, and a unifying language in Acehese society. The Aceh language has existed, grown, developed, and moved with the people who use it. To this day, the Acehese language is still used to develop local culture. For the Acehese ethnic community, the Acehese language functions as the first language, the mother tongue, which helps foster thoughts and feelings, and also functions as a language that forms unity and culture (Sulaiman 1981).



However, the culture of using Acehese has begun to shift, especially among the younger generation. The use of Acehese is commonly used in community interactions in markets and other crowded places. However, some young people who live in the city rarely use Acehese. According to Usman (2003), the use of Acehese among the Acehese community has tended to decline since the development of information technology. This is due to several factors, including increased accessibility to digital media such as social media and digital content that is predominantly in Indonesian.

The phenomenon of the declining number of Acehese language use was also conveyed by Dadan Supriardi, who is the Coordinator of the Social Statistics Function of BPS Aceh Province. He stated that the highest peak of Acehese speakers was in the pre-boomer generation at the age of 77 years and over, with a number of up to 89.93 percent (BPS Kota Banda Aceh 2022). The use of Acehese gradually decreased in the next generation, which began in the baby boomer generation (58–76 years), and the number of Acehese speakers to 85.72 percent. Then the number further decreased in the gen X generation aged 42–57 years to 82.27 percent, millennials (aged 26–41 years) the percentage was 79.76, reduced again in Generation Z aged 10–25 years to 74.77 percent while in the youngest generation, namely post gen Z (aged 2–9 years) the number of Acehese language use dropped again to 64.36% (Yolandha 2023).

Based on information from the Language Development and Development Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022), of the hundreds of languages in Indonesia, the number continues to decrease from year to year until it is threatened with extinction, and some are even heading towards extinction. This language extinction is related to language death, which is a condition in which a language is no longer used or spoken. The neglect of the use of local languages by young speakers is a symptom of a shift in the culture of language use. Currently the number of active speakers of local languages has dropped drastically, local languages are only spoken by older speakers, while the younger generation does not even master their local languages anymore. In the Performance Report of the Aceh Provincial Language Center in 2020, the protection of regional languages and literature such as Acehese and other local languages in the Aceh region that are critical and endangered is one of the target activities in the Annual Work Plan of the Aceh Provincial Language Center Satker in 2020 (Aceh Provincial Language Center 2021). One of the problems that has been identified by the Aceh Provincial Language Center, which is being and will be faced is the decline in the positive attitude of the community towards the use of local languages and even Indonesian. This can be seen in the use of public language in public places, such as writing on signboards that use foreign languages. The increasingly widespread use of foreign languages is also one of the obstacles and threats to local languages. It is feared that if awareness of the use of local languages is no longer used, it will shift the culture of language use, from what used to use local languages to using foreign languages in daily interactions.

In the 2020 population census, it is known that Indonesia's population is dominated by Gen Z and millennials, which as of September 2020 amounted to 270.20 million people (BPS 2021). Banda Aceh City, which is the center of economic, political, social, and cultural activities as well as the center of education in Aceh, is dominated by a young population of around 180,000 thousand to 207,000 people. Based on information from the Demography of Banda Aceh City (2023), this city is dominated by young people, because the function of Banda Aceh City is one of them being the center of education in Aceh. In addition to education, there are many young people and migrants who migrate to Banda Aceh City with the aim of finding work. The interaction between local culture and immigrant culture encourages shifts and even changes in certain cultures as well as in

the culture of language use among young people. In the initial observations that researchers have made in the field, researchers found that the culture of using Acehese in daily interactions in Banda Aceh City has begun to decrease, especially in the younger generation. In interacting with friends at school, campus, or in public places, they mostly use Indonesian. Aceh language used to be used as a means of daily interaction in family life and social life. Currently in Banda Aceh City, Indonesian is commonly used, both in interactions within the family environment and social life. This causes the local language, namely Acehese, to slowly shift until it is feared that it will become extinct. This research identifies the factors that have led to a cultural shift in the use of Acehese. It is expected to provide a more holistic picture of the challenges faced in the preservation of Acehese language that is relevant in the midst of increasingly strong globalization. This research is expected to be an important reference for academics, policy makers, and the community in an effort to maintain the sustainability of Aceh language as part of Aceh's cultural identity.

### **Research Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach. Research with a qualitative approach refers to methods of exploring social problems and understanding the meaning attached to social and humanitarian issues caused by individuals or groups (Creswell 2019). The data sources used in this study used primary data and secondary data with data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. The research data analysis technique uses data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with informants. There were 7 informants used, namely 5 people from the Banda Aceh City Community, 1 Aceh Communication Expert, and 1 school teacher. The location of this research was conducted in Banda Aceh City. This location was chosen because based on preliminary observations made by researchers in the field, researchers found that the culture of using Aceh language in daily interactions in Banda Aceh City has begun to decrease, especially among the younger generation.

### **Cultural Shifts in the Use of Acehese in Family Interactions**

The people of Aceh use Aceh as their local language. Aceh Province is an area with a variety of cultural richness, including ethnic and linguistic diversity. There are 13 tribes in Aceh, each of which has its own language. In Aceh there are 13 local languages, namely; Acehese, Gayo, Aneuk Jamee, Singkil, Alas, Tamiang, Kluet, Devayan, Sigulai, Pakpak, Haloban, Lekon, and Nias. The municipalities of Banda Aceh, Sabang, Aceh Besar, Pidie and Pidie Jaya, North Aceh and East Aceh use Acehese in addition to Bahasa Indonesia. Aceh is the largest and most widely spoken of the regional languages in Aceh Province. Aceh language has about 70% of the total population of Aceh Province (Ilham 2016).

The Aceh language has several dialects, with Peusangan, Banda, Bueng, Daya, Pase, Pidie, Tunong, Seunagan, Matang and Meulaboh dialects. Although most of the people in Aceh province use Aceh language, but in each region the Aceh language used has different dialects. In Pidie District, for example, the Acehese language used uses the Pidie dialect, as well as the Banda dialect, used in Banda Aceh (Sufi 1998). Acehese language functions as a means of communication in daily interactions and is a symbol of Acehese identity and pride. It also functions as a unifying language within the Acehese community. As with other languages, the mother tongue will also potentially experience shifts and extinction if strategic efforts are not made to delay or defend it from extinction (Azwardi 2018).

The book published by the Aceh Culture and Tourism Office tells about the daily life of Acehese people in the past and the present written in Acehese. In a chapter entitled 'Eh Bak Balee' Hananan (2016) tells about the habit of sleeping in the hall or meunasah kampung for Acehese young people in the past. A character named Muhammad Rheda who is a young man who lives and grew up in Banda Aceh City is returning to visit his hometown. As for another character named Hasan who is a young man from the village, Hasan invited Rheda to come sleep in the village hall with other youths, that's when Hasan said that he was concerned about Redha's ability to use Acehese. Rheda has been taught and accustomed to using Bahasa Indonesia in interacting with her friends and family in Banda Aceh since she was a child. Although he is not fluent in Acehese, Redha can understand conversations in Acehese, it's just that he has difficulty pronouncing it.

In the past, Acehese was the first language of the Acehese people which was used starting from the family environment, buying and selling centers or other public places. But nowadays, its use is starting to shift, the culture of using Acehese is declining, especially in the younger generation. The culture of using Acehese is slowly losing interest, generally they tend to use Indonesian as the first language in daily interactions. This happens even among fellow Acehese where both can speak Acehese. It turns out that this condition starts from the smallest environment, namely the family. Currently, many families, especially young families in Banda Aceh City, no longer teach Acehese as the first language to their children and teach Indonesian as the language of instruction in daily interactions. They consider that Indonesian will provide opportunities and make it easier for children when later interacting in an educational environment. This is as said by the informant as follows:

*"This is my personal opinion. For my children, I want to teach them Indonesian first. Even though it's negative, it's actually because we're diluting the Acehese culture, we're losing the Acehese language. But how about it, because in the school environment, from kindergarten to elementary school, most of them are now using Indonesian. So if for example we teach Acehese first, I'm afraid when he enters school he will have difficulty interacting with his friends or teachers, he is still stiff in Indonesian. If we teach him Indonesian directly, he'll be able to use it because he's used to it."* (Interview, 28 August 2023)

Based on the interviews above, it can be concluded that parents who consider local languages or mother tongue can be learned by themselves by children over time. However, this has the potential to cause the younger generation, especially the post Gen Z generation (aged 2–9 years) to experience difficulties in communicating using Acehese. Thus, there is a reduction in local language skills among children, which has implications for the decline of their cultural identity. Similar research conducted by Eva & Pasaribu (2020) shows that the younger generation in Medan City are no longer taught to use local languages in the family environment. Parents tend to use Indonesian or foreign languages, so children do not get adequate socialization of their local languages.

In this context, the meaning given by the community to Acehese and Indonesian greatly influences parents' decisions in choosing the language taught to their children. Blumer explains collective action, where the actions of parents who teach Indonesian to their children are collective actions to match and adjust the use of language with their environment. Parents try to harmonize the language taught to their children with the language that is widely used in the community. Through social interaction, parents assess that Indonesian is more widely used in the community. This gives birth to the collective action of using Indonesian to match and adjust to the language in the environment.

## Cultural Shifts in the Use of Acehnese in Educational Interactions

Educational institutions, namely schools, apart from functioning as educational places where the teaching and learning process occurs and also the transfer of knowledge, schools also have other functions such as social functions that can foster student character. Generally, schools will use Bahasa Indonesia as the language of instruction in classroom learning activities. This is because schools are public places so the use of Acehnese in the school environment tends to be less. Aceh language lessons included in the school curriculum have not been able to support children's ability and knowledge in mastering Aceh language. As revealed by an informant named Hayatun who is an elementary school teacher, in the following interview excerpt:

*"There was local content, now it's back. Yesterday, from 2012–2015, it was Aceh language, then it was replaced with English, now it has started again. This year there are Aceh language lessons again in grade one. But from grades three to six it's no longer there because they already have other content. Now it's just grade one and grade two. English and Arabic from grade one to grade six"* (Interview, 9 October 2023)

The interview excerpt above shows the lack of priority given to local content or Aceh language lessons in schools. Schools prioritize teaching foreign languages to students. English and Arabic hours are more than Aceh language hours. Therefore, Aceh language lessons have not been able to support students' ability to master Aceh language well. Aceh language local content lessons are only taught in primary schools and only up to grade 2, while in the next level students tend to learn English and Arabic as language lessons. The number of language lessons taught using Indonesian as an introduction makes students confused in this case it affects their language skills so that in the end the most appropriate language is used only Indonesian. In Blumer's framework, symbolic interaction can be seen where students perceive Acehnese as a symbol that is less relevant in their educational context. Blumer states that actors will select, examine, think, categorize, and transform meaning in relation to the situation in which they find themselves. When Aceh language lessons do not get enough attention, the meaning students give to the language becomes lower and lower, so they prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia in their daily interactions.

### Use of Acehnese in the Work Environment

With his hermeneutic interpretive approach, Asghar rejects the concept of patriarchy commonly associated with classical interpretations of the Quran, which he deems discriminatory towards women. He interprets Quranic verses in a two-dimensional manner, normatively and contextually, hoping that these verses can be reinterpreted to be universally relevant (*das sollen*) while also considering their context (*das sein*). This approach aims to achieve equality between men and women and attain gender justice (Farah 2020). Asghar Ali Engineer argues that the purpose of the Quran's teachings is to create balance between men and women in life. Although history records the dominance of men's roles leading to inequality between the sexes, this dominance is supported by male interpretations of religious norms to maintain their supremacy. The Quran also provides a very honorable place for all human beings, including both men and women. This is emphasized in Quranic verses that state that the religious status of women is equivalent to their social status, just like men. Thus, Asghar Ali Engineer's views stem from a concern for the still troubling condition of women in Islam. (Farah 2020)



Asghar Ali Engineer's thoughts on gender equality are in harmony with the intent of Islamic teachings themselves. However, due to varying interpretations, some of which perpetuate patriarchal or even misogynistic cultures, there are discrepancies. According to Asghar Ali Engineer, both men and women have equal rights in the social sphere according to the principle of justice, as Islam is a religion of mercy for all the worlds. The topic of the relationship between men and women has always been a subject of endless discussion. Opinions from experts, philosophers, thinkers, and scholars over time have varied greatly, from views supporting equality to those demeaning the role of women. Some even believe that men can function independently of women and vice versa, without considering the actual needs that exist between them. However, in reality, men and women have complementary roles, especially within the family context. Both need each other (Salsabila 2022). The principle of gender equality is explained in the Quran, where Allah says:

*"And the men's mukmin and the women's believers, for the most part being helpers to the others. They made the almighty, discouraged the might, performed the prayer, fulfilled the alms, and called it upon god and his prophet. They shall be gods in heaven, verily god is mighty all wise yet."* (QS – At Taubah [9]:71).

It also explains the position between male and female. The verse's meaning reads:  
*"They are clothing to you and you are clothing to them"*. (Q.S Al – Baqarah [2]:187)

The Quran does not prescribe rigid gender roles for individuals but grants humans the freedom to choose roles between men and women that are mutually beneficial, both in the domestic and public sectors (Zaki 2018). There are several reasons that lead the Quran towards gender equality. First, the Quran provides a place of honor for all humans, including both women and men. Second, normatively and ethically, the Quran upholds the principles of gender equality. The Quran teaches that biological differences do not imply inequality or differences in status based on gender, but rather differences in biological and social functions (Engineer 2022). In this context, Islam emphasizes principles that support gender justice, such as: First, that men and women have equal opportunities and potential to achieve high spiritual degrees as ideal servants of Allah, namely the *muttaqon* (pious). Second, both are considered as Allah's *khalifah* (stewards) on earth, with the same duty to make the earth flourish. Third, both men and women equally receive and bear primordial trust. Fourth, both are involved in the cosmic drama and have the potential to achieve accomplishments (Zaki 2018).

The program of sustainable development or SDGs has a universal meaning as "the formation or process aimed at meeting today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, solely for individual interests." This statement was originally introduced in "Our Common Future," a report initiated by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. (Ngoyo 2015) The SDGs are based on the need for cross-sector collaboration to achieve common goals. (Trowbridge et al. 2024) After the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era in 2015, the SDGs program emerged with a target to be achieved by 2030. The SDG Agenda, as outlined by the UN, represents a global effort aimed at achieving a brighter future. (Organised by: EUPHA – PHMR and Chair persons: Heidi Lyshol (Norway) 2023) The SDGs or Sustainable Development Goals program has 17 goals to be achieved, which are:

*"1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5) Achieve*

*gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all; 8) Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all; 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation; 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development; 15) Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss; 16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development." (Ngoyo 2015)*

One point the SDGS will achieve is the gender equality project, which enables women to empower them. As the application of these points, Asghar Ali Engineer thinking is still relevant to the context of time. There was an engineering thought that emphasized that both men and women had equal rights in the public domain. This thought, in addition to harmony with the teachings of Islam, is relevant to the context of the age of equality and gender justice in order to achieve a peaceful and meaningful life on the planet. The goal of sustainable living aligns with the sociological discussion that focuses on how societies achieve order (Miftahuddin 2020:1 – 58). Issues of gender, as outlined in the SDGs, are always related to social structures and social institutions. (Abid et al. 2024:56 – 69) From a sociological perspective, gender equality is considered achievable when each group is aware of its roles, responsibilities, and positions (Ismail et al. 2020:154 – 61). According to this perspective, discussions about gender lead to the social construction of differences between men and women within societal life (Nursyif 2020:57). This means that challenges related to gender equality and injustice are specifically addressed in sociology, (Nursyif 2020) as sociology is inherently connected to society.

The hoped – for social construction is to achieve equality as it should be. In the social aspect of Indonesian life, gender equality has not yet been fully realized, as there are still many social phenomena leading to oppression. However, efforts to elevate the status of women have been made by many figures, including Indonesian women such as Raden Ajeng Kartini. Through her struggle, the book "Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang" was published, allowing women in Indonesia to access education. Considering the reality in the contemporary era, the struggle for gender equality continues in Indonesia. The understanding of patriarchal culture remains deeply ingrained, leading to numerous cases of harassment, oppression, and sexual violence. In this context, women are disadvantaged as they do not enjoy the rights to freedom and safety. According to data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), the implementation of gender equality in Indonesia needs to be realized in line with the SDG points.

*"Based on the type of violence, data from service institutions and the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) shows that out of 13,428 cases, there were 15,466 instances of violence recorded. The most common form of violence is physical violence, found in 6,784 cases or nearly 44%. For complaints to Komnas Perempuan, the most common type is sexual violence, with 2,228 cases out of 5,831 cases based on the form of violence, or 38%. This number has increased compared to 2021, which had 2,204 cases. The second most common*

*type is psychological violence (2,083 cases/35.72%). Meanwhile, service institutions are predominantly dominated by physical violence (6,001 cases/38.8%), followed by sexual violence (4,102 cases/26.52%)."* (Komnas Perempuan 2023)

In the political sphere, women's involvement is only thirty percent, but this target has not yet been met, so the representation of women in politics remains below thirty percent. Data from the World Bank (2019) shows that female participation in the Indonesian Parliament is still very low. Indonesia ranks 7th in Southeast Asia in terms of female parliamentary participation. This figure indicates that gender equality in Indonesia has not effectively addressed the disparities affecting women. (Fitriyani 2022)

Other obstacles contributing to gender inequality in Indonesia include human trafficking, the educational gap between women and men, and low or impoverished economic conditions. Forms of gender injustice can include double burden (the dual burden of both domestic and public work), marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and acts of violence (Dalimoenthe 2021:23–27). Additionally, research indicates that women living in low-income and standard countries are often directly involved in agriculture and plantation sectors. If gender-based violence occurs, it can reduce their contributions and weaken the economy (O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle 2024). In light of current data and realities, Asghar Ali Engineer's ideas remain relevant and applicable. His thoughts align with the gender equality goals of the SDGs, and in a social context, gender equality is crucial. Contemporary issues related to gender, social factors, and Islam have a reciprocal relationship in achieving sustainable living.

## Conclusion

The cultural shift in the use of Acehese in family, educational and work environments is a complex phenomenon influenced by various social factors. The process of self-identification and collective action carried out by the Acehese community shows that Acehese still has a place in social interaction, although the quality of use and mastery of the language is declining. To overcome this problem, strategic efforts in education and social policy are needed to support the preservation of the Acehese language, so that future generations remain attached to their cultural identity. To maintain the existence of the Aceh language, a planned and sustainable strategy is needed starting from the school environment. Such as the implementation of educational policies that require the teaching of Acehese in schools, both at primary and secondary levels. A curriculum specifically designed to study Acehese could cover linguistic, literary, and cultural aspects, thus encouraging the younger generation to recognize and love their local language. In addition, training for teachers to improve their competence in teaching Acehese is also an important step to make the learning process more effective.

In addition to educational policies, social campaigns involving various elements of society also need to be promoted. This campaign can take the form of using social media and digital platforms to promote the use of Acehese in everyday life. For example, through the creation of creative content such as short videos or podcasts using Acehese. Active participation from community leaders, local artists and influencers can also help increase the appeal of this campaign. Thus, the Aceh language can remain relevant and in demand, especially among the younger generation.

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