

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Language is obviously a vital tool for communication. It is not only as a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it is also used for creating friendships, cultural ties, economic relationships, etc. Without a language the society can not be formed and there will be no community. It is agreed that language can not be separated from the culture as language is the product of the culture. The connection between culture and language has been noted clearly in past time and probably long before. Language is the most “visible” symbol of an ethnic group.

In this world, there are thousands of languages. In Indonesia, specifically there are hundreds of ethnic languages; there are 762 local languages in Indonesia as Indonesia consists of five big islands and hundreds of small islands. Each island has some ethnic groups that cause the creation of many languages. Each of these languages is unique. These ethnic groups spread all over Indonesia, for example Java, not only make a settlement in Java but they also created settlements in Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and even Irian Jaya. The same case as Aceh ethnic group, they are not only living in Aceh but also they spread to other regions for different reasons and purpose.

Aceh itself consists of many regions, namely north Aceh, south Aceh, West Aceh, East Aceh, West coast Aceh and Central Aceh. In Central Aceh, the people there called as Gayonese. They do not want to be called Acehnese because they assume that they are actually not Acehnese, they are different. Gayo is situated in a highland of Aceh, known as Central Aceh and the capital of Central Aceh is Takengon but at present Gayonese is not only in Takengon but spread to some other places, such as Bener Meriah, Blangkejeren, Kutacane, etc.

It is a fact that at present, Gayo language is endangered never realized by the Gayonese themselves. Many of Gayo the people immigrate from the Gayo land mostly for educational purpose as it is realized that education in Gayo land is less well than other big city such as Medan. And of course the age range who immigrate are mostly the teenagers as they need to increase their knowledge in order to be able to compete in this globalization era.

Living in this globalized era sometimes is not really easy. We have to adjust ourselves to the changing of time. This is hardly felt by the youth. As now is their turn to carry on what has been existed and they will decide the direction of the next generation. Being teenagers is not easy as teen's age is the hardest time because this is the stage of the character building and they must determine their identity. One of the teens character is the tendency to form groups and tendency to do group activities. They will ask for permission from their group to do things, if they banned it they will be kicked out from their group. These teens sometimes also try to create their own language in order to keep secret between them and also

that is they way they think that could make they different from the adults. This really affects the language maintenance as known that when this new language used in their daily life it means they will forget about their mother tongue (first language). It is also clearly seen as the phenomenon nowadays that the teenagers try to adjust themselves to the time changing and globalization which push them to learn foreign language and leave their tribal language. And this is not only happen to the Gayo teenagers but also all the teenagers from all of the ethnic groups.

According to al-Gayoni (2010), one of the Gayo activists who lives in Medan and has just finished his Master Degree at North Sumatera University (Universitas Sumatera Utara: USU), the number of Gayonese in Medan is 2000-2500, while the total population of Medan (*Wikipedia, 2010*) is about 2.036.018. Thus, it can be seen that the number of Gayonese is very small with only 0,1 % of Medan's total population. It can be said that the Gayonese is a minority ethnic group in Medan. This minority position gives effect to their way of life or life style and language is one of the examples. As a minority group they use the majority language to communicate with the majority or adapt with the multicultural situation and use Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian) as the vernacular then causes a language shift.

What is happening now still based on a research done by al-Gayoni (2009) on the university student at USU that some of the Gayo teenagers there (based on a research to the 57 students), still use Gayo language. In that research he found that in formal situation (meeting) the Gayo student utter Gayo language about

22.8%, bahasa Indonesia 12.27% while mix language (Gayo-Indonesia) about 64.9%. While in an informal meeting they utter Gayo language about 38.58%, bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian) about 17.53% and mix language (Gayo-Indonesia) about 43.84%. But if there are any other language speakers around them, they utter Gayo language about 5.25%, bahasa Indonesia 73.67% and mix-language (Gayo-Indonesia) about 21.26%. (al-Gayoni, 2006: 27-40). Based on this research it can be seen that they still utter Gayo language, and we can not make a direct judgment that teenagers nowadays do not have any attention to their ethnic group. There must be some factors that affect this phenomenon.

Actually, there are so many things that can be done in order to maintain a language for example intramarriage (same culture marriage), one language users live in the same community, including the language in the school curriculum, perform cultural events, etc. An authentic example is the existence of Batak language. It can be seen that they tend to have intramarriage but have to be from different family clan. As they have the same language in one family they speak the Batak language at home and then their children will be familiar with the language and able to speak the Batak language. But this is not the only way to maintain such language. The other way, can be by including the language in the school curriculum. For example Sundanese, in West Java, the government inserts the Sunda language to the curriculum so that the people there still know and use the language. In Gayo itself, there is a regulation about inserting Gayo language to the school curriculum (*Qanun*). Other parts of Indonesia namely Java, Kalimantan,

Sulawesi and Irian Jaya there is no regulation as Qanun for Gayo language to be taught as Gayo is not the local ethnic group. This is the exact situation for the Gayonese in Medan, i.e. the Gayo cannot maintain the language through the curriculum. But still in this era of globalization the time has changed and may be there are some other factors that can cause language maintenance. It is hoped that this thesis will be able to show the factors and how to increase those factors so that the language maintenance can be happen.

### **1.2 The Focus of the Study**

The focus of this research is the factors of Gayo language maintenance in Medan by the teenagers. Based on this focus the problems of the research formulated as below;

- 1) What factors affect the Gayo language maintenance in Medan?
- 2) How do the Gayo teenagers maintain the Gayo language in Medan?
- 3) Why do the Gayo teenagers maintain the Gayo language?

### **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

Along with the problems of the study there are some overarching objectives, they are:

- 1) To see what factors affect the Gayo language maintenance in Medan
- 2) To know how the Gayo teenagers maintain the Gayo language in Medan
- 3) To understand why do the Gayo teenagers maintain the Gayo language

#### **1.4 The Scope of the Study**

A study on language maintenance should be very interesting and it is very closely related to language planning program as the program of the Department of Education of every country. In order to avoid its disappearance in public especially the community who speaks the language. And Indonesia as the big country with 726 languages (746 according to Balai Bahasa, Medan) and one of them is Gayo language as a language of the people of Gayo, a town in Central Aceh, with its small community and population of 2500 people in Medan, the language should be maintained. Therefore, the scope of this thesis is on Gayo language and the teenagers will be taken as the subjects.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

Language is a symbol of identity. Indonesian is one of the symbols of identity for Indonesian people that they are Indonesian. Indonesia is a huge diverse nation. In Indonesia, there are so many tribal languages. A source from the internet says that there are 726 local languages (746 according to Balai Bahasa, Medan) (ethnic language) in Indonesia. These numbers of local languages create the uniqueness of Indonesian. This uniqueness need to be preserved. One of the endangered tribal languages in Indonesia is Gayo language. This Gayo language is endangered according to some elder man of Gayo. As the problem of lack of printed or written material about Gayo this cause the next generation of Gayo have no idea about their own culture and cause their lack of knowledge of language.

After conducting this study, it is hoped significantly relevant to the theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this research finding hoped to be useful for the next researchers who will do an in depth research dealing about language maintenance or any research about Gayo. Practically, since this research focuses on Gayo Language which is directly connected to the Gayo culture and existence, it is also hoped to be useful for all Gayonese to realize that it is important to maintain their language in order to keep the existence of their ethnic group.

