

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Study

*Li Niha* or Nias language as one of hundreds of Indonesian vernacular is an Austronesian language spoken on Nias Island and the Batu Islands off the west coast of Sumatra. It belongs to the Northwest Sumatran subgroup which also includes Mentawai and Batak languages. *Li Niha* is spoken in three different dialects, namely *si fabada'õ* (Northern dialect), *si fabagandrõ* (Central dialect) and *si fabahõ'õ* (Southern dialect). The Southern dialect of *Li Niha* is used by the people in Teluk Dalam, Fanayama, Toma, Maenamõlõ, Pulau-Pulau Batu and Hibala sub districts; whereas Central dialect is spoken in Gomo, Lõlõwa'u, Lõlõmatua and Aramõ sub districts; and Northern dialect covers Gunungsitoli, Mandrehe, Lõlõfitumoi, Tuhe Mberua, Gidõ and Idanõ Gawo sub districts.

Any language in the world tends to change which might be in the forms of lexical, morphological, syntactical, semantic, and pragmatic changes. Specifically, lexical change is manifested in every single of lexical classes of a language, such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, and interjection. A case of lexical change in *Li Niha* is the word *olõ*, a plantation in the mountain in which the irrigation is not available or needed. It is regarded one of lexical losses of Southern dialect of *Li Niha* because it is not practiced anymore. Another empirical exemplification is *suti* (injection) which is categorized as a

noun becomes a verb which means “persuade to do bad thing”. This phenomenon, which is caused by the metaphorical application, is called as semantic change due to its lexical class movement from noun to verb. Empirically, the older speakers of *Li Niha* experience that the youngsters are reluctant to use their mother tongue so that they sometimes mix between *Li Niha* and Indonesian language. These evidences serve as the beginning of language change itself.

Having the previous exemplification, it is feasible to assert that the lexical change contains types, patterns, and reasons. Lexical change type is defined as the sort of change realized in the lexicons, which might be loss of lexicon or change of meaning like the examples above. Lexical change pattern refers to the ways on how the change takes place, e.g. the pattern change of the lexicon above is noun to verb. Lexical reason is indicated as the completely influential factors of lexical change, for instance the metaphorical application on the semantic change above.

The existence and maintenance of *Li Niha* is highly influenced by the characteristics of the speaker’s day to day life, culture, social condition, education and religion. One of the factors of language maintenance is concerned with both tangible and intangible things required by the *Li Niha* speakers to survive in the world. The tangible things are viewed as the things that can be concretely perceived by the human’s sensory devices, whereas the intangible things are those which can be only perceived by the human’s psyche. This is in line with the abstract concept. The characteristics of the speaker’s day to day life: tangible and intangible things resulted from the physical and psychological processes are potentially changeable. Similarly the words used to name them are in constant

flux. Through this phenomenon the existence and maintenance of *Li Niha* is obvious.

Language is a part of culture; consequently Nias culture serves as a determining factor of *Li Niha* existence and maintenance. Thus it can be said that the language and culture, that is the mutually shared behavior such as beliefs, feelings and values among the members of a group or society experience are tightly interrelated-the more culture changes the less language is maintained.

The social condition simply refers to the environmental situation where the language speakers' activities take place. The increasingly modern influence nowadays is regarded as factor for *Li Niha* existence and maintenance. The fashionable and innovative devices and needs bridge the *Li Niha* users' attention to lexical modernization: a process by which a language standardizing, enhancing, and expanding its domains of activity (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997:69). On the other hand, the popularity of Southern Nias as one of the most beautiful tourism areas governs the existence and maintenance of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*. This is because the great possibility of code-switching between Southern dialect of *Li Niha* and tourist's language, which serves as a major factor of language change (Lindstrom, 2007:232), take place.

There will be also a tendency to the change of *Li Niha* when its speakers are more educated. This has been proved by the fact that the role of *Li Niha* used in educational setting is not the same at home. This is definitely rooted from the empirical evidence that the medium of teaching and learning in Nias schools is Indonesian. Consequently, the students' attitudes towards *Li Niha* eventually decreases which automatically makes Indonesian dominantly used in their day

life. This condition, which serves as determining factor of lexical change, makes the mixing of *Li Niha* and Indonesian.

Religion as a particular system of faith and worship based on the belief of language speakers serves as another influence of *Li Niha* existence and maintenance. This condition can be seen in the Indonesian loanwords from Arabic such as *Alhamdulillah*, *tabib*, etc. or the *Li Niha* words *fandrita* (priest), which borrowed from Indonesia *pendeta*.

A language is fundamentally viewed as much more than a system of communication. It is a symbolic marker that distinguishes who belongs to a group and who is outside. In this case language in general and *Li Niha* in particular is considered as a central feature of Nias ethnics-the reflection of Nias people identity. Hence, *Li Niha* in relation to this perspective it is, then, expected not to change since *Li Niha* purification and originality are extremely needed to establish its strong identity.

In reality, Wurm (2003:22) states that there are very few languages in Sumatera which would be likely targets for endangerment from Indonesian and/or local languages. One language (*Li Niha*) on one of the islands located off the south-western coast of Sumatera is endangered due to the lack of learning of *Li Niha*. Apart from this, according to Laiya (2009) Southern Nias dialect consists of 3,500 totally different vocabularies from other dialects of *Li Niha*. Therefore it is obvious that Southern Nias dialect is a new phenomenon to which language change, especially lexical change takes place. Language change is customarily viewed as the process by which the linguistic features change due to the particular cause of internal and external factors.

Theoretically, according to Moyna (2009:131-132) language changes resulted from the social and individual factors. Social factors are the contact between speakers of different varieties due to conquest, migration, culture, education, economic, and religion. The social or external factors of language change not only include the type of input in the environment but also the mechanisms and rates of input processing. The mechanisms are concerned with the techniques and methods of input provided to the language speakers, whereas rates deal with the amount of input itself. On the other hand, the individual or internal factors deal with the language change which resulted from an entire generation of child acquisition. This theory has been proved on the changes of *Li Niha* lexicons above.

According to Varshney (1995:283), the lexical change can be in the forms of lexical loss (or a phenomenon in which a particular lexicon disappears), semantic change (or the shifting meaning in language), and creation of new lexical item (or the process of creating a new lexical item to name an object, concept and place through the internal and external borrowings of words).

The theories proposed by Moyna (2009) and Varshney (1995), of course, were not from the research results executed on *Li Niha* but totally derived from the scientific researches on English which had been studied hundreds years ago by the experienced historical linguists. Thus there will be a tendency that these theories are not completely applicable in *Li Niha* due to the differences between the two languages. For instance, (1) the consonant is dependent in *Li Niha* but it is independent in English, (2) the sound [p] is absent in *Li Niha* but it is present in English, and (3) Predicate+Subject+Object structure is applied in *Li Niha* but not

in English. These three fundamental distinctions, which serve as determining factor of deciding whether or not *Li Niha* is considered as a new phenomenon of language change, led the writer's interest to conduct this scientific research.

### 1.2 The Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is presented in the question of "How is the lexical change of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*?" This question then is elaborated into more particular questions, such as the following:

- 1) What are the lexical changes of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*?
- 2) How do the lexicons of Southern dialect of *Li Niha* change?
- 3) Why do the lexicons of Southern dialect of *Li Niha* change the way they do?

### 1.3 The Objectives of the Study

This research is aimed at studying the new phenomenon on lexical change of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*. It specifically attempted to objectively describe the lexical change as well as the ways and reasons of Southern dialect of *Li Niha* change. Thus, the objectives of this study were elaborated as the following:

- 1) To investigate the lexical changes of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*,
- 2) To describe the patterns of lexical changes of Southern dialect lexicon of *Li Niha*,
- 3) To explain the reasons of lexical change of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*.

### 1.4 The Scope of the Study

The various language change domains and the numerous lexical classes (or parts of speech) of language results in the researcher's scope of the study to the lexical change, particularly to the change of noun, verb, adjective, adverb,

pronoun, preposition, conjunction, and interjection of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*. More specific it is in an attempt to provide an objective and explanative description of the lexical change of lexical classes of Southern dialect of *Li Niha*.

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

The findings of this study are strongly expected to have the theoretically and practically indispensable significances. Theoretically, the research findings would be valuable contributions for other researchers who will conduct a research in the field of language change, particularly lexical change and the source of the methods of how language changes. Practically, on the other hand, the research findings would be beneficial as the evidence of *Li Niha* change which serves as a core embryo of consideration for language planning policy of the government of Southern Nias which is urgently useful for the Southern dialect of *Li Niha* maintenance in the future.