

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Study

Language is an arbitrary and conventional system of vocal symbols, produced only by human organs of speech, which can be changed into written symbols and used as a means of thinking and feeling, as well as understanding thought and feeling, in the context of communication in a society. Obviously it is very essential for human being and it distinguishes human from other creatures in the world. Language is the human property and originated in man.

People use language as a means of thinking and feeling, as well as a means of expressing thought and feeling in a society. There are millions of languages used in the world. It is because language is a product of culture, which means that different cultures may have different languages or different dialects. It is also functioned to show their existence, identity and culture in the society. In other words, a community's way of using language is a part of the community's culture, is a way of displaying group identity. Ways of speaking function not only to facilitate communication, but also to identify the social position of the speaker. As Crystal (1997) stated that people keep maintaining their language in order to create cultural diversity, keep ethnic identity, enable social adaptability,

increasing security for the children psychologically, and increase the linguistic sensitivity.

Indonesia is a multilingual country, language shifts potentially happen. Language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely in favor of another one. For instance as Gunarwan (2004:58) found that Lampung language is shifted because of Bahasa Indonesia's pressure. Siregar (1998) also found that language shift happens in bilingual youth generation society in Medan. This language shift can be seen from the high intensity of the use of Bahasa Indonesia among the dominant community.

Language shift is the process by which a speech community in a contact situation gradually stops using one of its two languages in favor of the other. In this case Arabic language is shifted into Bahasa Indonesia in Arabic community in Medan. If the disfavored language is one that has as its last speakers the members of the community in question, then the language faces endangerment and eventually, language death.

The topic of language endangerment and death has recently become an interest to linguists, after dire predictions of the large number of languages that are anticipated to be lost in the next century, and work on the topic has been accelerated (Grenoble & Whaley, 1996) as have efforts to reverse the process of language shift. There are, however, very few examples where language maintenance or language revitalization efforts can be thought to have been completely successful. Once the process of

language shift has started and language loss is imminent, there is little chance that the language will ever again be spoken as the first and primary language of any community.

Language shift and language maintenance is similar to two sides of a coin which cannot be divided each other (Fasold, 1984: 213). They form a collective result of choice. He said language shift simply means that a community gives up a language completely in favor of another one. Language shift is the progressive process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speak another language. It is in fact crucial for the language survival.

Almost all minority groups who live in such multilingual circumstance lack political and economic power; minority groups often become bilingual in the dominant language for both instrumental and psychological reasons. Even the speakers who are in the process of shifting do not show the same degree of shift all at once in all of the purposes or situations for which they use any language.

Further, from the stand of dominant group the presence of minority groups can be an obstacle to communication and, more importantly, to national integration, it may sound cynical but history supports the comment of Laponce (1987: 198) that dominant groups tolerate minorities “only on condition that they accept at least partial linguistic assimilation (learn the dominant language) and keep their numbers small.”

Medan, the capital city of North Sumatera, is one of many cities in Indonesia which has many kinds of different ethnics who live side by side. The city has diverse communities, reflecting its history. The Mandailings also live here in big numbers and working at the most strategic position in government. In addition, there is a large ethnic Javanese community, largely made up of the descendants of people transported from Java in the last century to be employed as contract workers in various plantations in North Sumatera.

Beside indigenous ethnics, there are several other minority ethnics found in Medan, North Sumatera, such as Chinese, Indian, Arabian, etc. This phenomenon happened because long time ago, Indonesian archipelago was a place for trade transactions among merchants from overseas including Europeans, Persians, Chinese, Indians, and Arabians, they were getting involved for trade transaction in Malacca Strait (Machmud, 1991). Malacca strait was connecting two large countries. They are India and China especially in Sriwijaya dynasty (Mulana, 1977). Those merchants finally settled in Indonesia and integrated to be Indonesian people, including Arabian.

In Indonesia, Arabian people are associated with the spreading of Islam in Indonesia. Arabian people are known as the pioneer in spreading Islam, they came to Tanah Melayu in 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, or it is called as the first year of Islam. They brought Islam voluntarily without any organizations and institutions specified to support them.

The distance between Arabic land and Indonesia is very far enough. It would take a long time to travel by ship at that time which people used as a tool of transportation. And the weather also took an important role for that time. Those merchants could not travel easily to move back to their countries. Because all that matters, they decided to establish family connections with the indigenous people by marriage. It accelerated the assimilation process and also the process of spreading Islam in Indonesia.

It happened year by year. Most of them married Arabic women who have been born and lived in Indonesia for many years. It makes the assimilation process developed fast. Some women were already bilinguals and some were monolinguals. It makes the children must choose the language while they talk to their mothers and fathers. Some of them still use Arabic language to their children and some of them do not. If the language is lost, it means the culture in which it lived is lost too.

The writer of this study observes this phenomenon clearly from her experiences. Many of her relatives, friends, and members of Arabic community in Medan do not use Arabic language anymore to their children. The Arabic children speak in Bahasa Indonesia all the time, even some of them cannot speak Arabic language anymore. When they are at school domain, they choose a regular school for their children, instead of Islamic dormitory schools which still use Arabic language in the school area. A similar study has been done by Fathi (2006) which investigates

about the language shift of Arabic language among Arabic community in Manchester, Britain. The study investigates language choice among Arabic-English bilinguals in this community. Such a choice reflects the status of Arabic maintenance/shift as a minority language in Manchester.

The shifting of Arabic language into Bahasa Indonesia is also caused by the differences in social economic and political power. As what Edwards stated in Hellinger & Pauwels (2007: 245), "Language decline is often a reflection of relative social inequality". Moreover he states that, "language decline and shift are most often symptoms of contact between groups of unequal political and economic power". It means, the tendency to shift Arabic language by Arabic community may also be caused by the different points of view in treating their own language between speakers in high economic power with the speakers with low economic power. People with high economic power have more responsible of shifting the language where they treat their own language less value than people with low economic power.

As Thomas (2004:158) stated that how you talk, along with other kinds of social codes such as how you dress or how you behave, is an important way of displaying who you are; in other words, of indicating your social identity. When Arabic people in Medan do not use their language anymore, all their kinds of social codes are missing. It is very dangerous if it happens to them.

Identity of a certain culture is showed through among others by language use. Besides, cultural phenomena such as wedding ceremony, artefacts, and arts are the signs of the identity of a certain culture and the loss of small indigenous languages entails the loss of the knowledge embedded in them – specifically the detailed knowledge and about local ecosystems encoded in indigenous languages. The loss of a language may do serious harm to the community's identity and culture, a view point strongly articulated by Fishman, who proclaims that: 'the destruction of a language is the destruction of a rooted identity' (cited in Ferguson, 1996: 78).

Tjandrasasmita (2000: 23-28) stated that there are still few studies which discuss about Arabic communities in Indonesia instead Arabic people are part of cultural formation and directly involved on social – economic activity in Indonesia (cited in Rabani & Artono, 2005: 114).

The researcher is one of the Arabic descendants in Medan. She wants to figure out what makes Arabians in Medan do to maintain their own language to preserve their own identity and existence in Medan. The parents never speak Arabic language anymore to their children at home.

The writer also sees many of these children speak Bahasa Indonesia among their community and social community as well. It is very important to analyze the language shift in Arabic language to make a good planning.

Even though Arabic language is not one of the Indonesian vernacular language, but it can also enrich more Indonesian culture since Arabians are

already there in Indonesia for ages. Nowadays Arabic is only learned by the Islamic dormitories or Islamic schools in Medan, but not the Arabians who are supposed to possess Arabic as their mother tongue. That is why this subject is very interesting to be researched. And it is a very important subject to study, so the Arabic people in Medan know how to make a language planning of their own in the future.

Well cultural preservation is attached to linguistic preservation. Lose a language, lose a culture. The writer adds a quotation from a linguist Claude Hagège about what it means to lose a language:

‘What we lose is essentially an enormous cultural heritage, the way of expressing the relationship with nature, with the world, between themselves in the framework of their families, their kin people, it’s also the way they express their humour, their love, their life. It is a testimony of human communities which is extremely precious, because it expresses what other communities than ours in the modern industrialized world are able to express’.

For linguists like Claude Hagège, languages are not simply a collection of words. They are living, breathing organisms holding the connections and associations that define a culture. When a language becomes extinct, the culture in which it lived is lost too.

## **1.2 The Problems of the Study**

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this study are formulated as the following.



1. What factors that make language shift occurs in Arabic community members in Medan?
2. What are the patterns of Arabic language shift in Arabic community members in Medan?
3. Why does language shift occur in Arabic community members in Medan?

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

In line with the problems, the objectives of the study are:

- 1) to find out what factors make language shift occurs in Arabic community members in Medan.
- 2) to find out what are the patterns of Arabic language shift in Arabic community members in Medan.
- 3) to find out why language shift occurs in Arabic community in Medan.

### **1.4 The scope of the Study**

The scope of this study was limited to certain members of Arabic communities in Medan. In this case the Arabic community members in Medan who live in several neighborhoods. Although in qualitative research, the number of subjects is not concerned, it was limited for 25 persons, 13 females and 12 males. There is no specific reason to take that numbers for the subjects. Since the Arabians are not in a large number, the researcher is sure that the participants taken were sufficient to represent

the whole Arabians in Medan, North Sumatera. The locations were held in the Arabic communities, Annady Al Islamy and Al Ichwany Al Arabia.

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

Theoretically, the study is considered to enrich the theories of language planning especially about Arabic language in Arabic community in Medan, the factors influence Arabic language shift in Medan, the pattern of language shift into Bahasa Indonesia and the reason of Arabic language shift into Bahasa Indonesia.

Practically, the results of the study are considered to contribute information about language shift in Arabic language in the Arabic community members in Medan for students, lecturers, researchers, and also the government. Secondly, the teachers, students, and Arabians can use it to support the reversing of the Arabic language shift in Medan. Thirdly, the result of this study can be a previous knowledge for the next researcher who has intended to gain a deep insight especially in Arabic language in Arabic communities in Medan and generally in language planning theories. The last, in this case Pusat Bahasa, hopefully the result of this study helps them to make a well planned of language planning particularly to keep maintaining the Arabic language, so the language is not lost.