

THE ROLES OF YOUTUBERS IN PRESERVING LOCAL LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at describing the role of Indonesian local YouTubers in preserving local languages through YouTube video contents. As widely recognized, many local languages around the globe are endangered. This is also the case for local languages in Indonesia; many of its local languages are reportedly facing extinction. Nevertheless, the recent development on the internet reveals new facts on the existence of local languages. There are a growing number of Indonesian YouTube content creators, another name of YouTubers, who use various Indonesian local languages as sources of their attractiveness. This paper is based on qualitative research that used secondary data collected from YouTube videos, with other various online sources (e.g. online news) as a complement. The study focuses on some YouTube channels representing some main local language speakers in Indonesia. They are chosen for representativeness of Indonesian main local languages and for their popularity, which is proven by the coverage of other media. Based on the findings, this paper describes the roles of local content creators, another name of YouTubers, in preserving local languages as follows: first, keeping the existence of local languages; second, introducing local languages to non-speakers; third, introducing varieties in local languages; and fourth, documenting local languages and their variations.

Keywords: local language, language preservation, YouTube

INTRODUCTION

As a plural country, Indonesia is inhabited by hundreds of ethnic groups. Consequently, the country is also rich in language diversity. The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has identified as many as 718 local languages throughout the country (Laboratorium Kebinekaan Bahasa dan Sastra, 2021). However, as other local languages in the world, especially those spoken by minority ethnic groups or communities, many of the local languages in Indonesia also face the threat of extinction. An expert from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) said that the extinction of local languages could cause loss for a country, e.g. the loss of ethnic identity and traditional knowledge (Gatra.com, 2021).

As the internet flourishes from time to time, its users in Indonesia also grow. A survey by the Association of Indonesian Internet Providers (APJII) tells that, in late 2020, the number of internet users in Indonesia is 196.7 million persons, or 73.7% of the total population. It shows an increase of 8.9% in the number, compared to that of 2018. Furthermore, the survey also reveals that most of the users are based in Java Island (Bayu, 2020). As part of internet penetration in Indonesia, an official of Google Indonesia said that the number of YouTubers and YouTube users in Indonesia also increased (Rosyadi, 2017).

One of the important points in the development of YouTube in Indonesia is the emergence of local YouTubers or YouTube channels that use local language. The existence of local YouTubers in Indonesia has attracted media attention. One media released nine YouTubers or YouTube channels that gained popularity for the use of local language. It listed Bayu Skak, Arif Muhammad, Fiksi, Elsa Septeani, D_Kadoor, Nadia Nesa Putri, Londokampung, Korea Reomit, and Londo Jowo Kabeh. Their contents include short movies, vlogs, reviews, reaction videos, and prank videos (Afdilla, 2020). Those facts bring about a question on the correlation between Indonesian Youtubers who speak local language and preservation of Indonesian local language. Specifically, the research behind this paper would like to investigate the roles of Youtubers in preserving local languages.

Research on the topic of Indonesian local language on YouTube has been conducted by many scholars. For example, Santoso (2018) found that the use of Bahasa Indonesia by foreign speakers on YouTube is still influenced by English and local languages, such as Bahasa Sunda and Bahasa Jawa. The next literature is by Sari and Andriani (2020); who argued that the YouTube channel Korea Reomit is an example of sustaining or maintaining the local language, specifically Javanese language. It is because in

the videos, the YouTuber speaks Javanese language and Bahasa Indonesia with East Java dialect simultaneously. There is also a publication by Sulistyowati (2019), who stated that YouTube channel Rendra Polapike brings pride to local culture, proves that Banyumasan language is preserved and spoken, and delivers teachings of local cultural values. Rendra Polapike is a Youtube channel with the contents of short comedy movies, in which Banyumasan language—a variation of Javanese language—is spoken. In the context of local language education, Rusdiana (2020) proposed that YouTube contents on preaches or lectures by Banjar Islamic clerics could be sources of teaching materials for Banjarese language education at schools. The author said that the videos are functional in teaching vocabulary, grammar, and language skills in Banjarese language—one of the local languages in South Kalimantan Province. Lastly, a paper by Hapsari and Mulyono (2018) explains that although Bayu Skak—a local Youtuber from Malang, East Java—speaks Javanese in his contents, there are still code mixing and code switching. The code mixing and switching occurred in the context of the use of Javanese language, Bahasa Indonesia, and English.

The previous studies described above have shed some light on the issue of local language in YouTube. However, the studies only focus on a specific local language. This paper tries to describe the use of local language by YouTubers of various local languages speakers and analyzes their roles in preserving the local languages.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is written based on qualitative research that used secondary data collected from YouTube videos—accessed from youtube.com, with other various online sources (e.g. online news) as a complement. YouTube channels chosen to be observed are those representing some main ethnic groups in Indonesia; which are Java, Sunda, Madura, Aceh, Batak, Minangkabau, Malay, Palembang, Lampung, Bugis, and Makassar. Another consideration in choosing the YouTube channels is the availability of eligible local YouTubers representing respective local languages.¹ Specifically, the channels chosen are those exposed by the online media. Another way to get the specific channels is by searching them on the YouTube search menu with keywords/phrases “*humor* (name of a specific ethnic group)” or “*komedi* (name of a specific ethnic group)”. The data, which are collected during April and May 2021, are then analyzed qualitatively by classifying the YouTubers’ role in preserving local languages.

ANALYSIS

The Use of Local Languages by Local Youtubers

There are many local YouTubers in Indonesia. Many of them represent their cities or ethnicities (or sub-ethnics) of origin; which means they use various local languages. Ethnic groups that are represented by the local Youtubers mainly are main ethnic groups, who are majority or dominant in a region. Talking about main ethnic groups in Indonesia, some names might come to prevail, they are, among others: Java, Sunda, Madura, Makassar, Bugis, Minangkabau, Batak, Malay, Lampung, Palembang, and Aceh. Javanese and Sundanese are two of the ethnic groups living in Java Island. Madurese is an ethnic group living in Madura Island. Makassarese and Buginese are two of the ethnic groups originating from Sulawesi Island. Meanwhile, the people of Aceh, Batak, Minangkabau, Malay, Palembang, and Lampung are ethnic groups living in the Sumatra Island. The examples of local YouTubers using local languages in their contents are listed in Table 1. The table also gives information on the local languages that they use, their contents, their number of subscribers, and whether they provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia or not.

¹ There are Youtube channels in which local languages are spoken but the YouTubers are not consistently producing contents; i.e. they are not reliable. Meanwhile, in the case of Papua, YouTube channels representing the Papuan speaks Bahasa Indonesia with Papuan dialect; YouTubers who speak specific Papuan ethnic languages are hard to find, not to say not available.

Table 1. Examples of Indonesian Local YouTubers

Local Language	YouTube Channel	Subtitle in Bahasa Indonesia	Subscribers (May 2021)	Content
Java	Cak Ikin	Yes	744.000	Short movie
	Ucup Klaten	Yes	1.450.000	Short movie
	Deedee Ka	No	1.100.000	Short movie, music
Sunda	Fiksi	Yes	1.210.000	Variety show
	Kampung Jerit Jengek	No	278.000	Short movie
	Budak Koceak	Yes	1.160.000	Short movie, vlog
Madura	Anom Songot	Yes	114.000	Short movie
Aceh	Bang Joni Kapluk Official	No	13.300	Short movie, news
Batak	The Kriboo 61 Official	No	4.790	Short movie, music
Minangkabau	Nadia Nesa	No	45.900	Vlog
Malay	Pandantun	No	244	Talkshow
Palembang	Buayo Nago	No	5.470	Short movie, vlog
Lampung	Nyak Amakmu Creator	Yes	11.800	Short movie, vlog
Bugis	Engkasi Official	Yes	332.000	Short movie
Makassar	Bassi Toayya	Yes	343.000	Short movie

Source: Data processed by author.

Table 1 shows that the examples of local YouTubers using Javanese language and its variations are Cak Ikin, Ucup Klaten, and Deedee Ka. Cak Ikin is a YouTube channel containing short animation movies with the genre of comedy. In the videos, Cak Ikin uses Javanese language with the East Java dialect, especially Surabaya (the capital city of East Java Province). Cak Ikin provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. Ucup Klaten is a YouTube channel with the content of situation comedy starred by three main figures; they are Mbah Minto, Ucup, and Penguk. The figures speak Javanese language, as they are based in the Regency of Klaten, Central Java. Ucup Klaten provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. Meanwhile, Deedee Ka is a YouTube channel presenting videos of short comedy movies that use Javanese language with the Banyumasan dialect or *ngapak* style, a dialect spoken in the western part of Central Java Province. Deedee Ka does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

The table also shows that Sundanese YouTubers are exemplified by Fiksi, Kampung Jerit Jengek, and Budak Koceak. Fiksi is a YouTube channel containing a variety of videos related to Sundanese (e.g. character, language, and tradition). As the Youtuber is based in Bandung, the style of Sundanese language that is used is Sunda Priangan dialect. The channel provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. Kampung Jerit Jengek is a YouTube channel with the contents of short comedy movies starred by a group of girls. As they are based in Serang (Banten Province), in the videos, they speak Sunda Serang dialect, which is different from other dialects, e.g. Sunda Priangan dialect. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. Meanwhile, Budak Koceak is a YouTube channel presenting short comedy movies starred by a group of youngsters from Tangerang, Banten Province. The local language that the channel used is Sunda Tangerang dialect. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

The next data listed in the table is that Madurese YouTubers are exemplified by Anom Songot. The channel contains short comedy movies starred by two main figures, they are two men named Gutteh and Awi. In presenting the stories, the channel uses Madurese language, an ethnic group originating from the island of Madura, a territory of East Java Province. Anom Songot provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Table 1 also tells that the example of a local YouTuber from Aceh is Bang Joni Kapluk Official. The channel is produced by a man named Abdul Hadi, an Aceh local actor and comedian. Bang Joni refers to the main figure on the short comedy movies presented in the channel. In the contents, Bang Joni and other figures speak in Acehnese language, a local language associated with the Acehnese living in the northern part of Sumatra Island. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

It can be seen also in Table 1 that the example of a local YouTuber who speaks Batakese language is The Kriboo 61 Official. The channel presents content on short comedy movies and local music. The main figures in the channel are three men with curly hair, which is called *kribo* in Bahasa

Indonesia. They speak the local language of Batak, as they are based in North Sumatera, the province from where the Batak originated. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Another data exposed in the table is that the example of a local YouTuber who speaks the local language of Minangkabau is Nadia Nesa. The channel is produced by a girl named Nadia Nesa. She is a Minangese who actually works in Jakarta. Nadia Nesa presents vlogs on her activity, especially during her visit to her hometown in Bukit Tinggi and other spots in West Sumatra Province. In the videos, Nadia Nesa mainly speaks Minangese, and sometimes uses Bahasa Indonesia. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

It is also shown by the table that the example of a local YouTuber that uses Malay language in its contents is Pandantun. The channel presents talk shows hosted by two men. The uniqueness of the talk shows is that the hosts recite *pantun* (rhyme), one of the oral traditions of Malaynese, every time they want to express ideas or ask questions. In the talk shows, they also present guest stars, who are local figures in Tanjungpinang, Riau Island Province, where the YouTuber is based. The channel does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

In the table, we can also see that the example of a local YouTuber that uses the Palembangese language is Buayo Nago. The channel is produced by a group of youngsters who are based in Palembang, South Sumatra Province. The contents of the channel are short movies and vlogs. In presenting the contents, the channel uses Palembangese language. It does not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Based on Table 1, the example of a local YouTuber that uses Lampungese language is Nyak Amakmu Creator. The channel is produced by a group of youngsters who are based in Lampung Province. The contents of the channel are short comedy movies. The actors in the short movies speak Lampungese language. The channel provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Furthermore, we can also see that the example of a local YouTuber who uses Buginese (The Bugis) language is Engkasi Official. The channel brings situation comedy starred mainly by a youngster named Tonra. He and his counterparts in the videos played in various settings and spoke in Buginese language, a local language associated with the ethnic of Bugis in South Sulawesi Province. Engkasi Official provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Finally, Table 1 shows that the example of a local YouTuber who speaks Makassarese language in its contents is Bassi Toayya. The channel consists of videos of short comedy movies starred mainly by two men named Sukri Meong and Adhi. Most of the videos tell stories about the life of silly thugs, acted by Sukri. They bring Makassarese language, an ethnic group originating from South Sulawesi Province, in their contents. Bassi Toayya provides subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia.

The table also tells that the number of subscribers of the channels is varied. The range is between hundreds to millions. The least subscribed channel is Pandantun with 244 subscribers, while the most subscribed channel is Ucup Klaten with 1.450.000 subscribers.

The Roles of YouTubers in Preserving Local Languages

The explanation of Table 1 above has described that local YouTubers who speak various local languages exist and flourish. Some of them are able to reach more than a million subscribers (e.g. Ucup Klaten, Deedee Ka, Fiksi, and Budak Kocak), upload hundreds of videos, and gain hundreds of millions of total views. It means that the channels have reached many audiences. From another point of view, it also means that many of the Indonesian netizens are interested in local contents, especially local language and its variations.

Furthermore, the local YouTube channel is not only attractive for subscribers or viewers who share the same local language with the channels—or those who come from the same region as the YouTubers, but also for those who are from other cultures or regions who do not even understand the local language used by the channels. It can be seen in some comments by some viewers of the YouTube channels, who said that they do not understand the local language used by the YouTubers but they enjoyed the contents. As an example: a viewer named Gitzzz commented on a video entitled “Rupa-rupa Bobotoh (Persib)” by Fiksi; Gitzzz said that he/she did not understand Sundanese but was entertained by the video.

² Another example, a YouTube user named Fitri WIndri from Surabaya (Java) commented on a video by Buayo Nago (Palembang).³

Based on the contents of the above YouTube channels, this paper found at least four roles of YouTubers in preserving local languages. First, keeping the existence of Indonesian local languages; second, introducing local languages to non-speakers; third, introducing varieties in local languages; and fourth, documenting local languages and their variations.

In keeping the existence of local languages, the YouTubers speak respective local languages. By speaking the local languages, the YouTuber not only keeps the local languages maintained, but also invites their audiences to use the local languages. This is the case mainly for those channels that do not provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. Furthermore, as the internet, especially YouTube is mostly associated with entertainment, the audiences have the option to enjoy entertainment delivered with their local language. It is a complement for a more formal mode of local language transmission through local content sessions at schools.

By speaking local languages in their contents, the Youtubers also play a role in introducing local languages to non-speakers. This is the case mainly for those channels that provide subtitles in Bahasa Indonesia. By providing subtitles, the YouTubers give the audiences who do not understand the local language an opportunity to enjoy the contents, and—to some extent—to get to know various local languages other than their own. Some YouTubers even provide short “tutorial” videos for viewers to learn their local languages. The example of this is a video entitled “Belajar Bahasa Minang 1 – Panca Indra” by Nadia Nesa.⁴ In the video, Nadia Nesa gave a lesson on some vocabularies regarding the five senses in Minangese language. Another example is a video by Fiksi entitled “Kamus Sunda (Sasatoan/Binatang)”, in which the channel introduced some Sundanese words for certain animals.⁵

Some local languages have variations. For example, Sundanese language spoken by Sundanese in Bandung has some differences to that spoken in other areas; e.g. Bogor, Tangerang, and Serang. The existence of YouTubers speaking variations of local languages introduces the variations themselves. Furthermore, some of the YouTubers also tried to introduce varieties in their respective local languages. As an illustration, a video by Deedee Ka entitled “Reaksi Bule Diajak Ngomong Ngapak” contains an interview by Dede Kustiawan, producer of the channel, with Dave Jephcott, a producer of YouTube channel Londo Kampung.⁶ Dave is a white man of Australian descendants, who speaks Javanese language with East Java dialect because he was born and raised in Surabaya, East Java. In the video, Dede spoke to Dave with Java Ngapak dialect, and Dave could not understand some words and sentences of Dede. Hence, the dialogue between them shows a variation of Javanese language. In general, the existence of YouTubers representing certain sub-ethnics already introduces the variations. For example, the channels of Fiksi, Kampung Jerit Jengek, and Budak Koceak show that there are variations in Sundanese language spoken in the areas of Bandung, Tangerang, and Serang. The channels of Cak Ikin, Ucup Klaten, and Deedee Ka are also examples in showing the variations in a local language. The three channels bring Javanese language, but with different dialects. Ucup Klaten speaks a common Javanese dialect; while Cak Ikin speaks East Java dialect and Deedee Ka speaks Banyumasan dialect.

By using local languages, the YouTubers also play a role in documenting the existing local languages, and their variations. It is because the act of recording and filming people speaking local languages means documenting the local languages themselves. Furthermore, uploading the videos to youtube.com means keeping documents in a database. Those digital documentations will last and available to access for any netizen coming from around the globe.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that there are some YouTube channels representing some main local language speakers in Indonesia. Those YouTubers have attracted the attention of audiences across cultural and

² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whRyINylX5A>.

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aou7C0jv6S4&t=203s>.

⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sddbf5WY2Vs>.

⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyZXspq4zRk>.

⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbzDl1q5w2o>.

language barriers. Furthermore, this paper also describes the roles of local content creators in preserving local languages. Their roles are: *first*, keeping the existence of local languages; *second*, introducing local languages to non-speakers; *third*, introducing varieties in local languages; and *fourth*, documenting local languages and their variations.

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