

THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE
as a result of wider communication.

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Introduction

Indonesia is the largest nation in southeast Asia, and the fourth most populous in the world. The ethnically diverse area contains an estimated tenth of the world's languages,¹ and the Indonesian government asserts that the entire population will be fluent in Indonesian by 2041.² The language is not that of the area's European colonizers, but was co-created along with the modern republic. As such, Indonesian is constantly a language of inter-group communication, of participation in the nation, and is as heterogeneous as the Indonesian people.

Despite the association between the Indonesian language and nation, the language does not exist in a rigid relationship to a centralized norm. Its history has created a highly variable collection of varieties that today fall under the name of Indonesian. High levels of variability continue to be generated as Indonesian is acquired by speakers of other languages; as such it goes beyond models of creolization in which a temporally discrete event sparks the creation of a "new" language. These influences combine in the language attitudes of Indonesian speakers, who often portray Indonesian as a utilitarian language lacking in depth.

The present study aims to characterize the possible development of a "language of wider communication", as seen in the case of Indonesian (herein IN). To elaborate the meaning of this term, the history of Indonesia and IN is sketched. To conclude, comparisons to similar linguistic situations are developed.

Historical background

At two pivotal moments in the founding of the Republic of Indonesia, the role of language in defining and unifying the nation was made particularly explicit. The Indonesian Youth Congress in 1928, a gathering seen as the culmination of the nationalist movement against Dutch rule,³ pledged:

First: We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, declare we belong to one nation, Indonesia

Second: We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, declare that we belong to one people, the Indonesian people

1 Steinhauer (1994): 755.

2 Englebretson (2003): 4.

3 Anwar (1980): 15.

*Third: We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, vow to uphold the national language of unity, Indonesian.*⁴

Then, at the moment of Indonesian independence, the Constitution of 1945 in article 36 set this third sentiment down in law:

*The language of the state shall be Indonesian.*⁵

The adoption of a language of government may not seem exceptional, but at a time when defining Indonesia was an important and timely nationalist project, delimiting IN was a vital tool. An Indonesian language separate from Malay or Malaysian had not been widely perceived before this time,⁶ and from then up to the present day its boundaries have been fluid and its interior deceptively heterogeneous. Varieties of Malay⁷ had existed within the modern republic's borders long before independence, and not all speakers viewed their language use as part of the new national language.⁸

As a language of trade and intercultural communication, Malay spread as a myriad of contact varieties throughout the region. Even considering all of those Malay varieties as part of early IN, a very small portion of the newly founded Indonesia spoke IN. Declaring a language that was spoken by as little as 5% of the population⁹ the national language can seem surprising. To counter this was IN's association with inter-group communication and its inherent disassociation from any one ethnic group. These same reasons had historically convinced the Dutch colonial government to employ IN in administering the region, a bureaucracy of which many of the founding elite had been part.¹⁰

To now contextualize Indonesian independence, the history of what became IN can be described in roughly three periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and modern. A history of early Malay is outlined in Teeuw (1959). Emphasis on the high variability of Malay throughout history counters previous scholarship claiming that Malay was highly uniform. Teeuw attrib-

⁴ Abas (1987): 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anwar (1980): 16.

⁷ Individual authors make quite varied distinctions between (Bahasa) Malay, Malayu, and Malaysian, often encompassing IN within either of the former two. Here I will use Malay to refer to all language varieties that existed previously to Malay's division into the national languages of Indonesia and Malaysia, IN and Malaysian respectively.

⁸ Stasch (2007): 98.

⁹ Sneddon (2003): 5.

¹⁰ Errington (2008): 151, for a general description of how colonial languages become languages of state.

utes this to undue focus on monolithic literary forms of the language, and attempts to use geographically and temporally distributed inscriptions to chart a historical grammar of Malay. Though questions of historical directions of influence and of impact on modern IN are answered inconclusively, the regional spread of Malay and its variability is certain.

Dutch traders and the colonial era arrived in Indonesia to find “bazaar Malay” in important ports across the region. The colonial government is described as avoiding engaging the Javanese elite in their own language of elaborate speech registers that signaling social hierarchies, and instead chose to promulgate Malay. Hoffman (1979) emphasizes the insecurity the Dutch felt at the simplicity and mutability of Malay. Dutch was kept for Dutch, but much of the second-language Malay employed by the government was unintelligible to the populace. The multiplicity of Malay varieties made comprehension of the government’s own variety difficult to ensure.

After independence, the Indonesian state was very concerned with the intentional standardization and spread of IN. Anwar (1980) and Abas (1987), as indicated by their self-conscious terminological change from Malay to IN, are firmly situated within Indonesian nationalism and IN language planning. The historical background in Anwar begins with the Indonesian Youth Congress, and primarily describes the period of Japanese occupation and then the role of IN in the post-war national revolution. The expressly sanctioned national form of the language is contrasted with the use of IN by the Minangkabau of Sumatra and the Sundanese of West Java.

The motivation behind Abas’ writing is the potential for using IN in Southeast Asian international communication, with emphasis on its status (under different names) as an official language of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. A brief history of the use of the language since the seventh century is given. Studies of modern language attitudes towards IN are included, but as with Anwar the focus of the work is regrettably language planning, standardization, and reform. These are works not only shaped by attitudes within linguistics, but exhibit the spirit of the Indonesian government’s intentional transformation of the language after independence.

Throughout these periods, IN has existed as a “language of wider communication”.¹¹ A position often occupied by externally imposed colonial tongues, IN represents progress and modernity in its role of communication between groups. The rise of the Indonesian state tied IN to an identity category where before it was associated with no one ethnic group. Despite this, the wide diversity within Indonesia allows it to still function as a language for communicating across difference.

¹¹ Errington (2008): 129.

Features for wider communication

Rather than further elaborating the specific impact of Indonesia's history on the language, I hope here to outline broader commonalities. When a language without a preexisting norm is rapidly spread as a language of wider communication among a heterogeneous population, what course could be reasonably expected? The lack of a preexisting linguistic standard is critical: The acrolect/basilect relationship between colonial languages and some creoles does not describe IN. As it became the language of colonial and then national government, IN was shaped by its use without the same reference to a natively spoken standard (whether absent at times or not). The resultant variety with all of its contact effects has always existed without pressure from an external population wielding a prestigious and literate variety of the "same" language.

DECENTRALIZATION

In each period of IN's history, diverse forces simultaneously spread certain language varieties while creating others. Today, this has resulted in forty-five Ethnologue sub-entries under the name Malay, thirty-two of which are in Indonesia, and ten of those are specifically designated as languages of trade.¹² Most are named after various islands and regions, which suggests just how many centers of Malay/IN there are. While a national standard IN exists, myriad similar varieties are in circulation and the Ethnologue's count is merely suggestive of their number.

As Teeuw's discussion of early inscriptions shows, even Malay's beginnings as a language of trade exhibited great variation. More than that, the literary form of the language was distinct in each court throughout the region (including modern Malaysia). As a necessity for trading in the region, first the Portuguese and then the Dutch encountered a language shared between numerous cultural groups. Often the Dutch described Malay as encompassing a high and a low/market variety, but clearly there were more than just two regionally universal poles.¹³

Grimes (1994) describes the role of Malay in the colonial spice islands, specifically the variety now known as Ambonese Malay. The Malay spoken in Ambon and surrounding islands had arrived with trade before the Dutch, or even the Portuguese before them. The colonial schools and other institutions sought to use the "High Malay" learned in other parts of the country. As this was a partially acquired second language it seems they were often not intel-

¹² Lewis (2009).

¹³ Errington (2008): 135.

ligible, but nevertheless this put the Malay of Ambon into contact with features from further west. The particulars of this case study seem typical of many locations in Indonesia.

Additional varieties of IN exist today in Papua, as described by Stasch (2007). Some took root before the founding of Indonesia and have existed independently since. In a region somewhat cut off from the national stage, this complicates the perception of IN as a the national language. Even as exposure to more standard IN increases, Papua Malay/IN maintains a identifiably separate identity with different linguistic norms.

Though a language of wider communication, IN is not unified across the many groups that use it. Neither the colonial nor the national governments entirely converted their regional influence into linguistic homogeneity of IN. The language exists in numerous varieties throughout the region, with wide ranging norms.

HIGH VARIATION

Between the many regional varieties of IN exist numerous linguistic differences. Even more variation than this can be found though, as within individual locations or speakers IN is used in many different ways. Take for example Wouk's (1999) study of Jakartan IN. The many varieties of IN present in the capital city are made available to the speaker like registers. This allows for wide variation in verb morphology and word choice, which interacts strongly with formality and setting. These registers also index group identity, via both standardized and productive borrowings from Indonesia's many other languages. Part of existing as a decentralized language with many contrasting varieties is IN's variability.

It is often claimed that Malay gained favor in trade and colonial government because it was not associated with any one ethnic group. In Indonesia today, many groups employ particular varieties of IN for setting themselves apart.¹⁴ In addition to the borrowings already mentioned, there is frequent use of speech-disguise mechanisms, similar to "pig latin" in English or "verlan" in French, to create an insider's slang. In this way IN is changeable, and though not historically identified with any one group is frequently employed to delineate group boundaries.

ONGOING CREOLIZATION

The simplicity of IN is frequently remarked on, by academics and also in my experience second language learners. McWhorter's writings¹⁵ cite Malay/IN as proof that particular processes of simplification occur only in products of creolization. While not endorsing

¹⁴ For example, Chambert-Loir (1984) on Prokem; and Boellstorff (2007) on gay slang.

¹⁵ 2001, 2007, 2008, and others.

McWhorter's claims, Gil¹⁶ records Riau Indonesian as having one of the simplest grammars ever described. Despite responses illuminating the problematic claims of creole linguistics,¹⁷ it is certain that IN lacks many complicated structures that are present in related languages of the region. The processes of creolization may introduce new complexities as DeGraff points out, but the overall simplicity of IN must nevertheless be linked to its history of contact and creolization.

The usual model of creolization is not sufficient to describe the language, though. Much of creole linguistics supports a description of extreme language contact where the instability of creolization is a temporally discrete and limited event. IN has a much longer history of contact, with its internal variability yielding constant dialect leveling. There have existed numerous zones of contact between IN and many indigenous and foreign languages. Moeliono¹⁸ described the complexity of the situation by writing:

[T]here is not only interaction between speakers of the high variety of the dominant language and speakers of local dialects, but also between users of the dominant language and other related or unrelated language on the one hand, and between users of the local dialects of both the dominant language and the vernaculars of on the other.

A history of ongoing creolization is both a result and cause of IN's variability and decentered nature.

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

The perceptions of IN held by its speakers can be explained in terms of the above characteristics. For the present discussion, language ideology encompasses views of a language's utility, its intrinsic value, and the speakers' identity. Seeing IN as permissive of influence and without strict linguistic borders to uphold, IN language purity is not a strong force among Indonesians.

This belief works in two directions; first internally, results of language contact are not perceived as remarkable. Loan words are readily borrowed into IN.¹⁹ Usually indexing higher social status, they are therefore viewed favorably. More surprisingly, foreign (largely English) words and even sentences are often used without the full comprehension of the addressee. Such frequent borrowing is not viewed as a threat to IN. Moreover, loans imported to the point of unintelligibility has been a feature of IN since at least Dutch colonialism. Even

¹⁶ 2001, 2005a, 2005b, and others.

¹⁷ DeGraff (2003).

¹⁸ Moeliono (1994): 375.

¹⁹ Hassall et al (2008).

during the relatively short Japanese occupation, words entered the lexicon in this way.²⁰ After such prolonged input from other languages, IN speakers expect the language to readily exhibit new influence from other languages. The ready creation of neologisms for in group slang referenced above is another manifestation of this permissiveness.

Because the many language varieties that are part of IN are not kept to a strict standard, the variation and decentralization discussed above is readily able to persist and increase. A low view of IN's value is supported by this, and the language is perceived as having a less independent basis than might a literate language or one identified with a single group's history. This view does not conflict with a positive correspondence with Indonesian national identity. Indonesia's motto is "Unity in Diversity", and a language replete with the words of other tongues exemplifies such a principle.

Indonesia's linguistic ideology as impacted by such variability has a second result situated more on its borders: Language varieties that could easily be considered not part of IN are readily grouped as part of the same language. Substantial differences in vocabulary and morphosyntax separate standard IN from Riau Indonesian as described by Gil, to the point of impeding mutual intelligibility. Indonesians with a much less than perfect grasp of IN claim it as their native tongue on census figures.²¹ Nevertheless, such varieties are readily accepted as IN by Indonesians.

An investment in the unity portion of the national motto unsurprisingly supports this, but such tendencies are occasionally taken to an extreme. More than just government programs to spread IN to its more distant borders, there are projects to call languages IN despite undoubtable differences. A national sign language of Indonesia was developed by a committee in 1990, and aims to be a signed encoding of spoken IN. Printed dictionaries are provided to deaf schools, and the policy is to gradually replace the natural sign languages currently used by teachers with the new "sign language".²² The goal is to make IN, the language of national belonging, available to the deaf. Perhaps the world's oldest sign language exists in a village of northern Bali,²³ and instead of valuing that language as Indonesian, a means for spreading the national language must be created. Beyond the goals of facilitating assimilation and literacy that motivate signed codes of spoken languages world wide, in Indonesia the signed code is claimed to *be* IN.

²⁰ Anwar (1980): 32-47.

²¹ Sneddon (2003): 200.

²² Branson & Miller (2004): 18-20.

²³ Marsaja (2008).

As a legacy of IN's history of decentralized variability, Indonesians' language attitudes gloss over linguistic difference in favor of mosaic unity. Boundary cases are integrated despite undeniable difference, and ongoing external influences are not seen as consequential.

Comparison to other languages

I now turn to three other languages with similar histories, and in some ways similar results: Hindi, Tagalog, and American Sign Language. Errington compares IN to Swahili, emphasizing Belgium's analogous decision to utilize Swahili in colonial government, and its use as a language of wider communication. Today Swahili also represents national identity in a multilingual society. There is ongoing contact with several colonial languages and numerous indigenous languages. Extensive borrowing from English and acceptance of many regional varieties impacted by second language acquisition suggest a similar language ideology to that of IN.²⁴

H I N D I

The many regional lingua franca of India and the greater introduction of the colonial language differentiate the linguistic situation there from that in Indonesia. Hindi nevertheless occupies a similar position as a language of wider communication that ascended along with the founding of the modern state. Nayar (1968) instead uses the term "link language", and describes familiar government promulgation of a particular language variety with an interest in national unity. To support the view that Hindi is a national link language despite its association with certain regions and ethnic groups over others, Nayar quotes Gandhi declaring in 1917 that Hindi is already used as the national language.

In order to further a unified Indian identity, a range of language varieties are sometimes classified as Hindi (Hindustani, Urdu, Punjabi, and others), and their differences reveal the decentralization also found in IN. The problematic complications ignored by mapping languages of wider communication onto modern nations is revealed by the neighboring states which share each of the languages mentioned so far: The linguistic relationship between India & Pakistan resembles that of Indonesian & Malaysia or Tanzania & Kenya. The desire to closely align political borders with linguistic borders despite these difficulties encourages the inclusion of diverse languages within a single name that can be held up as the national language.

Interestingly, descriptions of the creation and present spread of "Bazaar Hindi" closely parallel "Bazaar/Pasar/Market Malay". Smith (2008) demonstrates how this variety of Hindi

²⁴ Mklifi (1972).

problematizes the archetypal pidgin definition, in ways that apply well to IN. He elaborates a definition of extended contact varieties similar to what I have called ongoing creolization:

*In extended pidgins and creoles, new variability may be introduced from three sources: the development of social and stylistic levels, continued contact with the lexifier, and continued bilingualism in the substrate languages.*²⁵

All three sources are readily evident in IN. Rather than a contact variety replacing the numerous substrate languages, IN, like the Bazaar Hindi Smith describes, continues to exist in contact with them and increase in variability.

T A G A L O G

Similar to the case in India, the colonial languages of English and Spanish were more widely introduced in the Philippines than Dutch in Indonesia. After World War II brought independence to the Philippines (as well as Indonesia), a national language of Filipino was declared. At the time English had the highest number of speakers in the country, with Tagalog close behind.²⁶ Unlike IN, Tagalog was associated with a single ethnic group, and using the new name of Filipino distanced it from this political liability.

Language attitudes toward the new Filipino resemble that of IN. Words from foreign languages, and varieties heavily influenced by other indigenous languages are readily accepted as part of Filipino. Tagalog as the national language has been intentionally developed and spread by the government, encouraging the use of regional “dialects”.²⁷ As the product of language shift, these varieties of Tagalog contain high variation and contact effects.

A M E R I C A N S I G N L A N G U A G E (ASL)

Unlike the other languages examined here, ASL is situated in the west and is not a language of state. It is instead identified with the Deaf²⁸ community within the larger United States. The similarity of Deaf Americans to a colonized people becomes readily apparent upon examining the institution most responsible for spreading ASL: government schools for the deaf. Concerns about language planning and the choice of which signed variety to use in education closely parallel the colonial attitudes of the Dutch described in Hoffman (1979). Unintelligibility of institutionally sanctioned methods of communication, many resulting

²⁵ Smith (2008): 264.

²⁶ Thompson (2003): 28-29.

²⁷ Ibid.: 40.

²⁸ The capitalization of Deaf is conventionally used to indicate identity-based membership in the Deaf community, which includes a full range of actual hearing abilities. Use of ASL is *the* prime marker of Deaf identity.

from oralist policies that persist into the present, is a common violence imposed on Deaf children and adolescents.

The history of ASL begins with the formation of a deaf school by Gaulladet and Clerc in 1817.²⁹ The contact variety that developed from Clerc's French Sign Language and the pre-existing sign languages of the children such as Martha's Vineyard Sign Language³⁰ was rapidly spread across the nation by the founding of new schools. Each generation of children in a deaf boarding school represents a certain level of creolization.³¹ This rapid spread, and decentralization among the many deaf schools created a form of ongoing creolization similar to IN.

Language ideology surrounding Deafness in the United States resembles the tendencies outlined for IN. ASL exists in constant contact with English due to numerous hearing second language learners. This introduces grammatical transfer as well as borrowings via finger-spelling, which due to articulatory difficulty is inherently unstable. Additionally, oralist education limits exposure to fluent ASL uninfluenced by English. Extreme variation is thereby introduced into the signing community. Due to the marginalized minority status of Deaf people, there is a strong tendency toward group unity. Interest in solidarity manifests itself in calling even heavily English-influenced signing ASL.

Conclusion

Languages that rapidly expand without exposure to a single target variety undergo sustained, extreme language contact. By becoming a language of wider communication, they exhibit extensive variation and divergent linguistic norms. The common motivation for the expansion of Indonesian, Hindi, and Tagalog was national unity after independence from colonial powers; in the case of American Sign Language, educational institutions and Deaf identity play a similar role. Resulting language ideologies respond to such variation by accepting external influences and incorporating borderline language varieties instead of policing language purity. Indonesian has become the decentralized and highly variable language it is today via a process that exceeds creolization.

²⁹ Groce (1985): 71

³⁰ Groce (1985): 71.

³¹ Aranoff et al (2005).

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