

# インドネシアの言語政策

## Language Policy of Indonesia

民族主義とバハサ・インドネシア  
Nationalism and Bahasa Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

インドネシア共和国は、独立の際、本来は国民にとって外国語であったマレー語を国語として制定、インドネシア語と呼ぶことを決めた。本論は、なぜインドネシアが他の旧植民地国が独立と同時に採択した方法、(1) 最大多数の民族の言語 (2) 旧宗主国の言語のいずれの方法もとらずに、マレー語を採択したのかを、オランダ植民地政策、マレー語の歴史、言語学的特徴、最大多数民族であるジャワ人のジャワ語の特徴、そして、インドネシア共和国の平和五原則などの、多岐に渡る視点で説明する。独立と同時にインドネシア語は、短期間のうちに、国語としての確固たる地位を確立した。一方で、東チモール独立委員会は独立の暁には国語としてポルトガル語とテトゥム語を採択することを決めた。この決定はインドネシア語が単純にインドネシア民族主義の成果ではないことを示唆している。インドネシア語の今後の問題はさらに多様化するだろう。

## 1. Introduction

The study of the language policy of decolonizing societies must consider the process and structure of the colonization policy as well as the relationship between colonizers and colonized (e.g. Anderson 1983, Pabottingi 1990). For example, after gaining independence, some nations have decided to adopt the colonizer's language as a national language to communicate between different ethnic groups within the nation (e.g. India, Ghana), while others have decided to adopt one of the indigenous languages as their official / national language (e.g. Burmese in Myanmar, Tagalog in the Philippines, etc.). The Republic of Indonesia<sup>1)</sup>, in contrast to both of these models, adopted as their national language a foreign language, Malay, which was distinct from that of the colonizer and which very few Indonesians had known before independence. Nowadays Malay, referred to in Indonesia as Bahasa Indonesia, is no longer a foreign language for Indonesians any more but is used as a tool for both interethnic and intra-ethnic communication.

In this paper, through an analysis of the history of colonization by the Dutch, the rise of nationalism, and the development of modern Indonesia, I will consider why Malay was chosen as the national language of Indonesia, as well as potential dangers this policy may face in the future.

## 2. The Oath of Youth (1928)

In the beginning of the 1900s, youths in the Dutch colony of East India were awakened by

the spirit of independence in other countries and started forming active groups to discuss their political future. In the 1920s, university students in Batavia (now called Jakarta) formed the Perhimpunan Pelajar-Pelajar Indonesia ('Indonesian Students Association' (PPPI)). The members were young men and women, some of whom had studied in Holland and returned to their own country, others of whom had studied at a native university such as Batavia Medial School or Bandung Institute of Technology. On October 28, 1928, at the third general conference of the PPPI in Batavia, the chairman of the conference, Sugondo, read aloud the *Sumpah Pemuda* ('Oath of Youths'; Nagazumi 1980). The Oath consisted of three sentences:

1. Kami putra dan putri Indonesia mengaku bertumpah darah satu: tanah air Indonesia.  
"We, young Indonesians, men and women, agree to unite our blood for the land of Indonesia."
2. Kami putra dan putri Indonesia mengaku berbangsa satu: bangsa Indonesia.  
"We, young Indonesian men and women, agree to unite as a single people, the people of Indonesia."
3. Kami putra dan putri Indonesia menjunjung bahasa persatuan: Bahasa Indonesia.  
"We, young Indonesian men and women, treasure the language of unity, Bahasa Indonesia."

The Oath of Youths is the first public statement declaring the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia as Indonesia's national language, although it did not become official until independence in 1949. Today all elementary school students are taught the Oath.

Bahasa Indonesia, or Indonesian, is in fact the Malay language as it has been adopted in Indonesia. What is now considered Indonesia was commonly known in the 19th century as *Nederlandse Ooest Indie* ('Dutch East India') and *Insulinde* ('Indian-Islanders'); in Malay, it was called *Hindia* or *Hindia Belanda* ('Dutch India'). The term "Indonesia" itself is thought to have been coined by a British lawyer named Logan in 1850 and used in scholarly writings by a German ethnologist Adolf Batian (Nagazumi 1980). It was first used by Indonesians in the beginning of the twentieth century, by students studying in Holland, who, according to Nagazumi 1980, formed an association called *Indiers Bond*, a political group dedicated to independence from Holland. These students gained a certain degree of self-confidence in being Indonesian from the liberal attitude of many Dutch in the Netherlands regarding the autonomy of Indonesia, and openly declared their hope for independence. Returning from the Netherlands, they inspired young students in Indonesia as well.

The adoption of Malay as the national language represents two important themes in Indonesian nationalism, rejecting the Dutch language and indirectly unifying the ethnic languages. The students did not propose Dutch as their language. However, they proposed to call their language Bahasa Indonesia, to distinguish Indonesia from the then British colony, Malaysia.

The subject of each sentence in the Oath is the exclusive first pronoun plural *kami*, not the inclusive first pronoun plural *kita*. When *kami* is used, it generally means that the speakers are referring only to themselves, excluding the listeners and others. Therefore,

from this expression, it is clear that the Oath of Youths was not directed towards the members of the group themselves or others like them, but rather towards non-members<sup>2)</sup>. The use of *putra dan putri Indonesia* ('young Indonesian men and women') after *kami* adds to the ambiguity regarding who is actually excluded and to whom the Oath was directed. The most plausible interpretation, given the rise of nationalism at the time, seems to be that the use of *kami* was intended to emphasize the distinction between the members of the group and non-Indonesians, particularly the Dutch police who were present at the conference.

The third sentence, *Kami, putri putra Indonesia menjunjung bahasa satu, bahasa Indonesia*, uses a very specific verb, *menjunjung*, which literally means to carry something on the head, as Balinese women do. Used metaphorically, this verb means 'to respect deeply, idolize' (Echols and Shadily 1985). The use of *menjunjung* can be interpreted as a device to convey a hidden message that they intend to walk straight and carry their language everywhere, not with their body stooped as they did when working as laborers for the Dutch colonizers.

The wording of this oath, which became the basis for Indonesian nationalism, shows the central role of the Indonesian language in this ideology, particularly as a means of uniting the people.

### 3. How and why Malay was chosen.

Although Malay was the symbol of independence of the Republic of Indonesia, few historians have discussed how Malay was

chosen at the time of independence; most studies have paid more attention to how the Indonesian language has been politicized in the history of independent Indonesia (Anderson 1983, 1990, Hooker 1990, Pabottingi 1990. Tsuchiya 1980). Adopting Foucault's discussion of the power of discourse, that all languages are consciously or unconsciously politicized (Foucault 1972: 224-29), in an article entitled "How language determined Indonesian nationalism," Pabottingi (1990) tries to explain the inseparable relationship between nationalism and the choice of Bahasa Indonesia. Following his discussion, I will briefly explain how Indonesian was chosen as the national language.

### **3. 1. Dutch as the language of the privileged.**

As mentioned above, the choice of Malay as the national language carried several messages. First of all, it meant rejecting Dutch. In comparison with the British colonies, where natives were encouraged to learn English, the Dutch attitude was to "protect" their language from native people; as a result, few natives learned to speak Dutch. Pabottingi (1990) describes the Dutch attitude as follows:

The Dutch used their language very much as an instrument of exclusion, as a means of making the Indonesian 'not equal to us.' Dutch was identified with European civilization, which was too high and too noble for a native. In such circumstances, language was doubly politicized. It was openly transformed into a means of struggle (Pabottingi 1990: 8).

The use of Dutch by the Dutch in front of natives always constituted a reassertion of "our superiority and your inferiority; our right to rule and your obligation to obey." On the other hand, the use of Dutch by a native to a European would diminish the gap between inferior and superior — and this was to be avoided at all cost (Bousquet 1938: 88). Aristocrats, especially Javanese aristocrats who were supposed to act as mediators, and some converted Christians, were the only natives who had any opportunity to learn Dutch (Anas Maruf, p.c.).

Dutch was not immediately rejected, however, as a candidate for the national language. In fact, one of the first and most important nationalist organizations, formed in 1908, Budi Utama ("Beautiful Endeavor"), which counted about 300 medical students as well as doctors in Batavia as members, had as their slogan to unify the natives under one language, Dutch. They thought that, for the sake of the development of the natives, education in Dutch would be indispensable. Nagazumi 1980 notes that Budi Utama ended by paying more attention to higher education and the Dutch language, while ignoring the needs of the common people.

The majority of the members of Budi Utama were Javanese *priyayis*, an elite class of aristocratic origin (Geertz 1972, Nagazumi 1980). As Javanese aristocrats, rather than hoping to unify East India, their goal was to become equal to Europeans in terms of education, knowledge, and rights. This attitude was continued by the later nationalists' organization, Indische Partij, which declared that Dutch should be their language, while Javanese should be abolished (Nagazumi 1980). However, those elites also began to

realize that, although Dutch had been the medium through which they had developed nationalist and egalitarian ideals, it was still the language of the colonizer (Tsuchiya 1991), so that they would have to reach their goal of independence through some non-colonial medium.

### 3. 2. Rejecting Javanese

Then why was the language of the largest ethnicity, Javanese, not chosen? In the early stages of the nationalist movement, Javanese was considered as a candidate to be the national language. However, although Javanese is the language of a large proportion of the population of Indonesia (close to half), it is still the language of one particular ethnic group and only spoken as the main language of Central and East Java. Additionally, it was commonly believed that Javanese had developed such intricate sociolects, in which usage is based on the vertical relationship between the speaker and the listener, that it was too difficult for non-Javanese to learn. Not only that, but “correct” Javanese had in the Javanese colonial court context become — with Dutch encouragement — so artificially refined, stylized, intricate, and distorted that it was no longer accessible to the common people even in Java (Pabottingi 1990: 14). Thus, in reality, choosing between Dutch and Javanese meant not only choosing between the language of colonizers and the language of an ethnic group, but it also means choosing between the colonizer’s language and the ‘feudalistic’ and ‘royal’ language of one ethnic group. Neither option was very attractive.

### 3. 3. Choosing Malay

Malay was originally the native language of the people living in the Malay Peninsula, and parts of Sumatra and Borneo. Pabottingi states that the antiquity of Malay is “partly based on the fact that Malacca had been in existence more than seven centuries before the Portuguese arrived in the 15th Century” (Pabottingi 1990: 9). The earliest inscriptions in Malay, dating from the 7th century, have been found in South Sumatra, the interior of Sumatra, and the islands in the north of Sumatra. An inscription written in Malay in the 9th century has been found in Central Java as well as the vicinity of Bogor, south of Jakarta (ibid.).

Malay has functioned as a lingua franca in the area for some time, being used by traders and peddlers who traveled around the Malacca Strait as well as throughout the archipelago as early as the 7th century (Teeuw 1979, Pabottingi 1990). Beginning in the 11th century, the spread of Malay was promoted by Arab traders who at the same time spread Islam throughout the archipelago. Thus, before the Portuguese came to the area, Malay had been already spoken widely as a lingua franca among sultanates and written in Arabic letters throughout the region. It was later adopted by international traders, including Europeans, Arabs, Chinese, and Malays. Alisjabana (1957) writes that at the end of the 16th century, those who could not speak Malay in this part of the world could not function in trading; it was ‘the historical lingua franca’ of commerce and the cultural language of Islam throughout the archipelago (Johns 1967). Furthermore, since the beginning of the 17th century, Malay had been the

language of ethnic Chinese who functioned as mediators between the Dutch colonizers and natives (Anas Maruf: p.c.). Interestingly, Malay was also a language of Indo, mixed children born to Europeans and natives who later became the leaders of the nationalism movement (Nagazumi 1980, Pramoedya 1985). Pabottingi emphasizes that because it was a language of trading, it was seen as egalitarian, so that using Malay instead of Javanese meant emancipation from feudalism, the image of natives kneeling down in front of colonizers, or common Javanese walking barefoot and bending down before aristocrats.

Because of its history, Malay has constantly added foreign vocabulary. Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, and Japanese were the main contributors to the vocabulary, in addition to ethnic languages (Pabottingi 1990). According to Anderson 1983, the spread and the development of Malay throughout Indonesia was supported by the construction of railroads and the publication of journals made possible by the new printing technology of the beginning in the 20th Century. Novelists writing in Malay such as Abdoel Moeis, Alisjahbana, Armijn Pane, Amir Hamzah also played a significant role in the spread of Malay; the novels written in Malay in this period focused on the tragic consequences of colonization for the natives (Johns 1967).

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Malay was first used in an Indonesian nationalist context by Indiers Bond, an association consisting of 23 Indonesian students in Holland, at a conference in The Hague in 1916. One of the main figures of the Indiers Bond, Suwardi Suryaningrat, presented the

problem of language. Suwardi stated that “If we are to have one language to use all over East India, it is not a good policy to force a Western language, because we have Malay, which is not only easy to learn, but also has been a lingua franca all over the East India archipelago” (Nagazumi 1980: 170).

In 1918, as a result of the upheaval caused by the infamous Ethical Policy at the beginning of the century, the Dutch government formed the Volksraad (‘People’s Council’), the highest advisory group in East India (Van Niel 1960). The Volksraad consisted of twenty Europeans, fifteen natives, and three non-native Asians (Nagazumi 204-9). At the first general conference of the Volksraad, two members, a Javanese Regent (district head) and an enthusiastic Dutch supporter of the Ethical Policy, presented a request to have the Malay language approved alongside Dutch as an official language of the Volksraad. This suggestion was controversial (some Dutch administrators said that it would cause confusion like the Tower of Babel) but it was passed (ibid). After that time two languages were alternately used in the Volksraad.

#### **4. 0. Integration of Bahasa Indonesia.**

On August 17th, 1945, two days after the end of World War II, after Japan had occupied the area for three and half years, the nationalist leaders, who had once been imprisoned and banished to remote islands by the Dutch, declared their independence in Jakarta. The proclamation itself was written and read in Indonesian. However, Indonesia did not possess the apparatus for running a state and had to wait four more years to

acquire full independence (van Niel 1967).

Bahasa Indonesia became the national language of the new state, rapidly permeating the country, through radio, newspapers, and later TV. President Sukarno was fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, and his speech, often citing Javanese wayang stories, attained mythic proportions (Hook 1990, Miyake 1992). The Oath of Youth was given ideological prominence; it was not changed but integrated into the Pancasila, the Basic Five Principles, and the ethical code. Pancasila teaches the Belief in God (s), humanity, unification of Indonesia, government based on parliament, and social equality for all Indonesians (Agenda: n.d.). The first line of the Pancasila is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, a Sanskrit phrase which means 'Unity in Diversity'; it is recited almost every morning at schools as well as in the offices of civil servants. In reality, however, a number of problems caused by the diversity of the country, such as the conflict with Malaysia over Kalimantan, the conflict with Papua New Guinea over Irian Jaya (Adams 1965), the Coup d'état in 1965, the massacre of Tanjung Priok in 1980, the independence struggle of East Timor, and a series of conflicts in Aceh and other East Indonesian areas up to the present, have shown how difficult it is to keep "Unity in Diversity"; even this idea has turned out to be a myth which has been forced by the central government on all the ethnic groups.

Bahasa Indonesia, however, has functioned as a unifying force for the diverse country, spanning districts, ethnicity, religions, classes, and any potentially divisive factors. Generally speaking, Indonesians are raised in their own ethnic language at home by parents, kin, friends, neighbors, servants, and so on, and later learn Bahasa Indonesia, studying in

elementary school, watching TV, reading magazines, etc. Those few who do not speak Indonesian are people older than seventy, who have never been out of the village where they were born, and preschool children. At the national level, movies, novels, and poems are in Indonesian. When their setting is local, local vocabulary is inserted into Indonesian.

For example, in the city of Jogjakarta in Central Java, even though everyone speaks Javanese, almost of all the printed matter is in Indonesian; the only things written in Javanese are one local monthly magazine, books on Javanese divination, wayang stories, etc. The great majority of TV and radio programs, as well as Christian services, are conducted in Indonesian; Javanese is restricted to one church near the Jogjakarta court and TV and radio programs about mythology or historical dramas such as *wayang* and *keto-prak*.<sup>3)</sup> In all universities, Indonesian is used for communication, except for the Department of Javanese Language and Literature at Gajah Mada University. In elementary schools, middle schools, and senior high schools, classes are conducted in Indonesian; on many occasions, however, schoolmates speak Javanese with each other. At one high school, Konservatori Indonesia, where the majority of the students major in Javanese dance, drama and wayang, the instructors teach in the local language. It is also the case that children born to interethnic couples, such as Javanese / Batak, Balinese / Javanese, Minangkabau / Sundanese, regardless of where they reside, tend to be raised in Indonesian. Sukarno, who had a Balinese mother and a Javanese father, was apparently was exposed to Malay since when he was born, and became a strong supporter for

having Malay as the Indonesian national language (Adams 1965).

Dede Oetomo (1990) reports the rapid spread of Indonesian among middle-class people. He reports that married couples of the same ethnicity in urban areas tend to raise their children in Indonesian. He also mentions that in “fashionable” places such as plazas, malls, and department stores, usage of Indonesian is encouraged. Not knowing Bahasa Indonesia is a disadvantage which will block one from entering into higher education and politics.

As far as ethnic languages are concerned, basic grammar and writing of local languages are taught in elementary school. The original Javanese alphabet, of Sanskrit origin, is taught only in the first grade at elementary schools in Javanese-speaking areas. The majority of Javanese forget the Javanese alphabet because they have very little opportunity to be exposed to it. Starting in the 1980s, the Ministry of Culture and Education conducted vast research projects on local culture and language by opening institutes in each district for the purpose of maintaining ethnic tradition and languages. Ethnologists as well as linguists have collected data on customs and folktales as well as written documents in each district. The results of the research have been published by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The flexibility of Bahasa Indonesia has also resulted in an extreme politicization of language, which has been discussed by Anderson (1983, 1990), Hooker (1990), and Tsuchiya (1991). Coinings and borrowed words, previously from Dutch and more recently from English, have been increasing, and in the early 1970s, a high-powered

agency, the Center for Language Promotion and Development (PPPB), was established to promote the “correct” form of Bahasa Indonesia (Badudu 1991).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to discuss the relationship between the rise of nationalism and the adoption of the national language of Indonesia. Three languages, (1) Dutch: the colonizer’s language, (2) Javanese: the language of the largest ethnic group, and (3) Malay: the historical *lingua franca*, were the candidates to be Indonesia’s national language. However, because Dutch was the language of the privileged, while Javanese was the language of only one ethnic group as well as the language of feudalism, Malay was chosen as the national language and renamed Indonesian. From a macro-political point of view, by adopting Bahasa Indonesia, Indonesia has succeeded in avoiding “Uberfremdung”, that is, alienation from one’s self due to domination by a foreign self (Pabottingi 1990), unlike India, for example.

Because of the flexibility and tolerance of Indonesian, the vocabulary of the largest ethnic minority, Javanese, has vastly increased in Indonesian. Furthermore, even Javanese ethics have deeply entered into Indonesian so that the vocabulary of feudalism and conservatism, especially honorifics, which were not commonly used at the time of rise of nationalism, have increased (Ogawa 1993). On the other hand, the Javanese linguist Heryanto seems to grieve over the dominance of Indonesian. He states that *bahasa* of Bahasa Indonesia does not mean only ‘language’, but

rather refers to a whole set of cultural and social constitutions, and shifting from an ethnic language such as Javanese to Bahasa Indonesia means losing the Javanese ethos and putting the speaker in a world of a different *bahasa*, Bahasa Indonesia, which is “modern, rational, secular, and even Westernized” (Heryanto 1990). These two opposing arguments represent current problems in language policy in Indonesia.

Almost 70 years have passed since the Oath of Youths, and the Indonesian language seems to have established itself as the unifying power of this multi-ethnic / lingual / religious country, despite all the turmoil since independence. However, with demands for real democracy and awareness of the shortcomings of previous Indonesian governments becoming stronger, and central authority becoming correspondingly weaker, questions are beginning to arise regarding where Indonesian language policy has fit into this system. For example, when the Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorese (CNRT) decided that the official language of independent East Timor will be Portuguese, there was surprise or bewilderment from all sides outside of East Timor (Hull 2000a, b). This decision suggests that the CNRT rejects Bahasa Indonesia because it was imposed by Indonesia when it annexed East Timor in 1975. It also might seem surprising that the East Timorese chose their ex-colonizer’s language, not their indigenous language Tetum, which has been functioning as a lingua franca among sub-ethnic groups and between non-Timorese and Timorese; this shows clearly how the Timorese today associate colonialism with Indonesia, not with Portugal. This suggests that, although to date

the policy promoting Bahasa Indonesia has been considered one of the most successful examples of the combination of nationalistic and egalitarian ideals, nevertheless, to the extent that democratic institutions take hold in Indonesia, the role of Bahasa Indonesia may increasingly be called into question, as it might be taken (by e.g. Acehnese nationalists) to simply symbolize the political authority of the Indonesian government. This kind of uncertainty regarding the fate of Indonesian seems to be worth watching.

## Notes

- 1) The Republic of Indonesia, generally called Indonesia, is a huge nation in Southeast Asia, a member of ASEAN, consisting of 15,000 islands and more than 500 ethnic groups, with a population of close to 200 million people.
- 2) In 2000, a group of youths issued another Oath of Youths, called Sumpah Pemuda 2000, in which they swore that Indonesian youths would not let the Suharto dynasty exploit their own country’s wealth.
- 3) *Wayang* is usually translated as “Javanese shadow puppet play,” although many *wayang* performances shown on television programs are *wayang orang* ‘people’s wayang,’ performed by people. The plot is based on Indian mythology (the Mahabharata and the Ramayana) with Javanese modifications. *Ketoprak* is historical theater drama. Many of the themes focus on wars between Javanese kingdoms before the 19th century.

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