

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN INDONESIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Indonesia has successfully implemented language policy by choosing Malay language as its national language which enables to unite ethnics from a variety of vernaculars' background. However, Indonesia is not considered successful enough in preserving indigenous languages and promoting English as a crucial international language. In comparison with Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines faced some challenges when applying a language of majority as national language. Yet, both countries have more focuses to develop English in domestic level for global purposes. There are some sociolinguistic challenges for Indonesian policy makers in terms of local, national and international languages.

**Keywords:** *language policy; national language; Bahasa Indonesia; English; local language.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is the country which has the fourth largest population in the world which occupies thousands of islands across the country. The Republic of Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world which stretches from Sabang in the northern tip of Sumatra islands to Merauke in south-eastern Papua. The archipelago officially consists of 13.677 islands which contains five major islands, those are Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), Sulawesi and Papua (the western part of New Guinea) (Turner et al., 1997). There are more than 250 local languages and dialects that are spoken in Indonesia. Most of them cannot be understood each other

(Weinstein, 1990) and Bahasa Indonesia is used nationwide as the tool of communication to understand each other.

Using Bahasa Indonesia as a national language has been part of language policy in Indonesia. Sometimes, the terms language policy and language planning are considered the same. Actually, they are not the similar activities. The promulgation of a language policy directs language planning. A language policy is a part of ideas, laws, regulations, rules, procedures, and practices aimed to get the purpose of a policy (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003) and governments have used it as a subject for decision making (Weinstein, 1990). At national level, many attempts are done by language policy makers. Language policy accommodates the language needs of the nation from various communities and cultural background that exists, tests the resource that it has, investigates the function of language generally and particularly in the community life of a country, makes strategies that are needed in order to manage and develop language resources and connects all of these to be operated in some appropriate planning agencies (Corson, 1990). Particularly this paper will discuss the development of Indonesia's language policy in some periods, the comparison of language policy in Indonesia and its two neighbouring countries and the remaining problems that should be reconsidered in developing Indonesia's language policy.

## THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN INDONESIA

### *The colonial period and the choice of Malay*

After World War I, Indonesians searched means that could unite this heterogeneous people to struggle against the colonization of Dutch that had occupied their region for about 350 years (Weinstein, 1990). On October 28th, 1928, there were thousands of Indonesian youth in Jakarta who attended a youth congress which was signed by pledging an oath of allegiance to Indonesia, singing a new national anthem and raising a new national flag. There were crucial beliefs that had been stated in the pledge. The first one, the indigenous people who live in Indonesia have a common homeland only. The second one, whatever ethnic of the people who live in Indonesia are, they belong to a single people. The last one, the unity language of Indonesians is Bahasa Indonesia (Malay) (Simpson, 2007).

Simpson (2007) also adds that Malay was chosen as Indonesian national language based on some reasons. Firstly, across archipelago, Malay was well known and used as lingua franca for hundred years. Secondly, it was recognized as language of instruction in many areas in Indonesia. Thirdly, Malay was spoken by minorities in Indonesia, compared to Javanese that was spoken by 45% of the total population and located in the centre of Indonesia. If Javanese was chosen as a national language, it would probably raise issues for the future of Indonesia because other ethnic minorities refuse the use of Javanese language representing the language of a group in a majority as the national language.

#### *The Japanese Period*

When the Japanese occupied Indonesia in 1942, the use of Dutch in any situation was banned. They wanted to make Japanese to be the language of administration and purpose, although it could not be a reality in such short period of colonization. Immediately, Bahasa Indonesia had been the only language of education, administration and the mass media. Before the Japanese reached Indonesia, Dutch was used as the medium in all texts at high school and university. The translation of these Dutch texts to Bahasa Indonesia was done. Under the rule of the Japanese, Bahasa Indonesia grew tremendously. It was designed to be a mature modern language as a short time as possible, for example 7000 new terms of language was produced during Japanese rule (Paauw, 2009).

#### *Language policy and planning in the Republic of Indonesia*

After Indonesia declared its independence on August 17th 1945, Bahasa Indonesia was stated as the official language by Constitution (Alisjahbana, 1976). The Republic of Indonesia had developed into four periods. Firstly, the period of liberal democracy started from 1950. Secondly, the period of guided democracy of Sukarno era started from 1959. Thirdly, the era of Suharto which is called new order and it started from 1966. Fourthly, the era of reform, which refers to era started from 1998 to current era. During these eras, a lot of political changes occurred, but, it was not the change of language policy and planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003).

Furthermore, Kaplan & Baldauf (2003) divides Indonesian language planning issues based on two aspects, those are Indonesian standardization and modernization and language use in education. In terms of Indonesian standardization and modernization, it is crucial to know that some essential changes occurred to create standard varieties of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia. With regard to spelling reform, the new spelling for Bahasa Indonesia was made in 1967. In order to understand Malay and Indonesian easily, Indonesia and Malaysia formed a language committee. The agreement that had been produced from this attempt was the same spelling system that was well known in Indonesia as "A Perfectness General Guide for the Spelling of Indonesian". Nowadays, Indonesia and Malaysia apply this spelling (Dardjowidjojo, 1998). In 1988, from the fifth Indonesian language congress, a new official Indonesian grammar and dictionary were stated (Moeliono, 1993).

When technical terms are needed to express about modern science and technology, it becomes an important issue in Indonesia because the words from foreign languages, especially English, have been borrowed. For example Bahasa Indonesia possesses "computer", "disket", "relevan" and "regresi". To solve this, two types of books were published. Firstly, the book is about "technical terms for almost all scientific branches". Secondly, "booklets on foreign terms have been taken in" (Dardjowidjojo, 1998, p. 41). Besides, Bahasa Indonesia has been promoted well through the mass media of the country. From 1964 to 1988, Bahasa Indonesia was used in all television programmes. Bahasa Indonesia was also the medium of radio, newspapers and magazines. English and local languages were used very little to protect Indonesians and their language from foreign effects, and a law about the prohibition of the use of written foreign languages in public places like business names, advertisements and electronic and print media has been drafted. In addition Indonesian language tests have to be passed by foreigners if they want to work in Indonesia. The government also made consideration about the limitation of foreign media broadcast in Indonesia (Paauw, 2009).

With relation to education and literacy, it has played an essential role in development of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language. In 1930, 30.8% of the

above 10 year-old Indonesians were literate. However, in 1996, the numbers of literate people in Indonesia increased to 87.26%. It was caused by the increasing numbers of elementary school and a larger number of people studying at school. Bahasa Indonesia was used as a medium of instruction from elementary school to university in the country. However, in the past, there were very limited numbers of textbooks translated into Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, the books in the university are still in English and Dutch. In addition, after Independence, very few books have been published in Bahasa Indonesia like scientific, economic and technological books (Paauw, 2009).

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that in general Indonesia's language policy in using Bahasa Indonesia as a national language has been successful, as what Woolard (2000, p. 456) asserts "project of engineering an Indonesian language has been deemed a miraculous success." After finding out the development of language policy in Indonesia, it will be more worthwhile if the development of language policy in other countries in the same region which is South-east Asia can be explored in order to compare the similarities and differences. Language policy development in Malaysia and the Philippines will be discussed in the following section because to some extent, these countries are quite similar to Indonesia. For instance, from historical perspective those countries were also under colonization and related to citizen, they also consist of heterogeneous ethnics who speak various vernaculars.

## THE COMPARISON BETWEEN LANGUAGE POLICY IN INDONESIA AND ITS TWO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

In the Philippines, there are 7.107 islands which only 2.000 are occupied. Historically, the immigration of people from Indonesia, China and Malay to the Philippines and the geographic of the country which consists of many islands had caused a lot of language groups. There are about 80 different dialects which are spoken by people there (Peters, 1994).

The years before the Philippines obtained its freedom, Tagalog was chosen as its national language. Besides, continuing to use English was also considered at that time. Before the Japanese occupation, during and shortly after the World War II,

the Philippines were under the rule of the United States. 21% of the population of the Philippines speaks Tagalog as its native language that is located around the political power in Manila. The number of speakers of Tagalog is bigger than those of any other native languages in the Philippines. After the Philippines gained its independence, the speakers of other languages tried to oppose Tagalog, especially the speakers from Cebuano and Hiligaynon that are included in Austronesian languages of the Philippines as well. Meanwhile, Together with Tagalog, English has been used in education and functioned as the main language of government and the mass media and even more newspapers are published in English than in Tagalog (Weinstein, 1990).

Also, schools applied vernaculars for the first years of primary education. Then Tagalog was used to teach social sciences and English was used to teach social science and mathematics. English is also used as an international communication language by which international scientific and technical knowledge is accessed by Filipinos. In 1959, Jose Remero, Education Secretary, stated that national language, Tagalog, would be named as "Pilipino" (now spelt with an F (Filipino)) so that it distinguished it from Tagalog base and national identity could be given to it (Dekker & Young, 2005).

In 1972, the Constitutional Convention called by President Marcos had become a decline for the Pilipino. The declaration of Pilipino as a national language was refused by important majority. The promotion of Tagalog was considered as degradation to other ethnic communities (Weinstein, 1990). The continuing anti Marcos was agitated particularly by urban and militant students and finally caused the downfall of him and also included substantial anti-US themes and symbols. As a result, the role of English as a crucial language was probably challenged due to the negative symbol on nationalist grounds. Then, the use of Tagalog (Pilipino) was increased, particularly in cities. It was promoted continuously by Manila Elites through mass media. Pilipino is used increasingly together with English. In December 1986, Filipino was enshrined by Cory Aquino as the national language. Filipino and English are used as official language for the purpose of communication and instruction (Weinstein, 1990).

Another country with some periods of language policy development is Malaysia. Malaysia has two different parts, and Peninsular Malaysia that covers 40% areas of the country, while the rest of the country consists of the states of Sabah and Sarawak that lie in the northern part of Borneo Island. The population of Malaysia is from different ethnic groups like Malays, Chinese, Indians, the indigenous Orang Asli of the Peninsula and various tribes of Sarawak and Sabah (Rowthorn et al., 2001).

Related to language policy, national language was built up by Malaysian policy makers after being independent from British colonization. They attempted to limit the role and status of English, the language of ex-colonial masters, and Bahasa Melayu which was the language of dominant ethnic was selected as official language of government and education. In colonial era, Malays used English as a main medium of instruction in education, but after the independence, English was only a second language that was not dominant anymore (Gill, 2005).

From the beginning, language had become a conflict's focus between Malays and Chinese. Malays aimed to make Malay the only official language after 1967. While knowing that Mandarin would not be an official language in Malaysia, the Chinese ethnic group, however, hoped that English would be used as official language as well. Although Chinese considered Malay as a language that economically unused, Malays still eliminated English and determined Malay as an official language. After racial riots in Mei 1969, the Malaysian government made a strict and fast implementation of a national language policy which had purpose to put Malay as the only language that would be used in schools and deleted English. It was based on the reason that Malay should be upgraded so that Malay's political and economic status gain national unity (Kaplan & Bardauf, 2003).

By the mid of 1990s, Malaysian government asked tertiary institutions to use English as a language of communication. In addition, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Muhammad stated repeatedly and urged to use more English and assured his citizens that promoting English will not be a threat for national language status (Ridge, 2004). In his opinion, by 2020 Malaysia would be an industrialized country. Malaysians should not be only the consumers of the technology and discovery of the

world, but also should give contribution to the development of science and technology in the future. To be competent Malaysian scientists, he thought that English must be mastered fluently. He also stated that English should be used as medium of instruction of mathematics and science at university. This decision became a controversy among the Malaysian academics. It is believed that professor can teach in English, but the students' English proficiency is still doubted. Finally, when the policy was run, it did not give the result as expected (Omar, 2007).

In 2003, a significant change of the language policy in schools was declared. All schools in Malaysia would teach the students science and mathematics by using English. That was a drastic switch that did not need any more years and steps. Teachers had to join training of teaching the subjects in English and the retired proficient teachers in English were asked to teach at schools again. While teaching was running, textbooks were written. As a consequence of this policy, all schools were bilingual. The protests were raised by many sides, particularly Chinese Teacher's Association which argued that Chinese culture was eliminated. They believed that mathematics is more understandable to be taught in Chinese language with their tradition (Omar, 2007).

To conclude, there are some points that can be drawn in terms of language policy in Indonesia and its two neighbouring countries, the Philippines and Malaysia. Compared to both countries mentioned above, English does not play an important role in society in Indonesia. From elementary school to university, English is the subject of foreign language. Nevertheless, most of Indonesians, including educated scholars, are not be able to use English fluently to read and understand the scientific reading that is written in English. Orally, they have worse ability. In Malaysia and the Philippines, English is used both in education and community. English has functioned as an inter-ethnic lingua franca and the mean that is used to communicate internationally. So that it opens the opportunity to access world's literature (Paauw, 2009). Also, Indonesia did not consider former colonial language, Dutch, as higher as English that was considered by Malaysia and the Philippines as the important ex-colonial language. So that it was easier for Indonesia to delete Dutch than both countries to eliminate English (Dardjowidjojo, 1998).

With regard to its political elites, Weinstein (1990) asserts that Indonesia made language policy to refuse hegemonic status of Javanese language which was the major group in Indonesia and chose an aboriginal lingua franca that cannot be a threat to any ethnic. By contrast, in Malaysia, the elite representative of the major ethnics stated the policy by choosing their own language as the official language. The pluralistic ethnic is still a sensitive fact that this nation had. It is signed by unequal and different status between major and minor ethnics. In the Philippines as well, the preference of political elites to select a certain indigenous language as the only official language created hostility from other ethnics.

### THE REMAINING PROBLEMS IN INDONESIA

In spite of success in applying national language policy in Indonesia, there are some other issues that are vitally important to be taken into account. First of all is the threat of extinction of local vernaculars due to the success of its national language. When considering the fact that “Indonesia is the second most multilingual nation in the world, led only by Papua New Guinea” (Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014, P. 65), it can be concluded that it lies the richness of special cultural heritage behind those multilingual people. If the spoken local languages disappear, the uniqueness of local heritage in Indonesia will be gone as well. In other words, Rustipa (2013) supports this idea by mentioning that not only should national language be used and promoted, but also local languages for the sake of vernaculars and cultural identity maintenance. But, after World War II, the policy forcing the uniformity of national language use, has caused the shift in patterns of language use nationwide. Consequently, the shifts have threatened the existence of vernaculars, particularly in eastern part of the country where the local languages are only spoken by a small quantity of people (Masgrave, 2014). Besides, Kozok (2008, as cited in Rustipa, 2013) claims that the inclination of younger generations to use “colloquial Indonesian” also becomes a threat for vernaculars. In this type of language, many words from foreign languages and local languages (mainly Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese) are borrowed. Colloquial Indonesian is also strongly affected by Jakarta Malay which is spoken by people in the capital city of the country and then adopted by many people from other provinces who work and stay there for a while, and when

they return to their hometown they bring and use this language in their daily life. Jakarta Malay adoption also occurs due to the media which exposes its dialect across the country through popular magazines, radio and television programmes.

Furthermore, in this globalization era the emergence of English as lingua franca is undeniable. As coined in Kachru's model, English is not only owned by inner circle (like The UK or USA), but also by outer circle (such as Singapore or Malaysia) and expanding circle (for example in Indonesia). So, in expanding circle as in Indonesia, English is considered as an important international language for its community without having any special official status and is usually taught as foreign language subject at school (Lauder, 2008). Canagarajah (2005) argued that in terms of language policy planning, English is considered in other communities as a necessarily powerful tool for global relationships. To be able to communicate globally, English also gains special status as the first foreign language from language policy makers in Indonesia. However, despite its essential status, the policy makers worry that English language may give drawbacks to national culture and identity (Idris, 2014). Consequently, less promotion related to English language was done so that the majority of people, even educated intellectuals have lack of ability in English (Lauder, 2008). There had been actually an attempt from Indonesian government through Government Regulation number 20/2003, article 50 as a basis to develop schools with international standard where Bahasa Indonesia and English were used as the languages of instruction in order to prepare graduates with international quality. However, the implementation of this regulation was controversial because some challenges were faced, such as the lack of fund, competent teachers, and modern facilities. It was also considered using English as the language of instruction as unconstitutional because it was against the 1945 constitution, paragraph 3, article 31 which mentions that Government should establish a national education, not international education, and it also violated 1945's Basic Constitution which states that national language is Bahasa Indonesia. When English is used in education, it means Bahasa Indonesia which support nationalism was being ignored (Ipnugraha, 2013). Therefore, on January 8th 2013, Government Regulation number 20/2003 was canceled and the implementation of international standard school had to be

stopped (Huda, Sukmawati, & Hidayat, 2013). Again, English is not promoted widely in Indonesia because there is a concern that this would threaten nationalism.

To conclude the above discussion, as what Kaplan and Bardauf (2003) explain, although in linguistic parts the development of standard spelling, grammar and dictionary that Indonesia has made a lot of good progress, there are plenty of sociolinguistic matters that are necessary to be concerned about. In terms of Indonesia's national language itself for example, how it can still be updated, modernized and spread and if the work related to varieties of formal Indonesian had been done, what about the informal ones. Also, how books and other media can be presented more broadly in order to develop literacy in Bahasa Indonesia. Related to vernaculars, how regional languages that are diverse can be supported in order to maintain them from disappearance. Concerning international languages, the focus should be on how teaching English and other essential international languages can be increased in order to get knowledge internationally based, how English material stocks can be provided in schools to help language teaching, how the latest training for teachers is held to help them to transfer the knowledge successfully by using Bahasa Indonesia and English and how English can be made as a crucial first foreign languages effectively for the students, especially the students who live outside the central areas of Indonesia.

However, these issues are huge. Especially when considering that there is fear from Indonesian policy makers to promote English due to its potential effect of decreasing the function of Bahasa Indonesia. Although this effect can be true to some points, it also cannot be forgotten that English is necessary for Indonesians to respond to globalization challenges. Therefore, language policy which is beneficial both to Bahasa Indonesia and English use should be reconsidered. Furthermore, the reality that is occurring now in Indonesia is a developing country. Although in Suharto era some parts of this region had been developed, they were only the central parts such as Java, while other far regions like Borneo, Aceh and Papua were ignored. The ignorance is considered as one of the factors that had triggered unstable political and economy so that these factors gave contribution that make the government not able to deal with the language problems mentioned above.

## CONCLUSION

Indonesia which has lots of local languages chose Malay (Bahasa Indonesia) as a national language. Malay was a lingua franca for hundred years in Indonesian archipelago and was the language of minor group there. By not choosing a language from a major ethnic like Javanese, Indonesia can apply its language policy effectively without any conflict. Compared to Indonesia, its neighbouring countries, Malaysia and the Philippines, faced some conflicts in running their language policy due to their selecting of major ethnic's language as national language which is considered as the arrogance of the elites in the government who are the representatives of major ethnics. However, these countries also use English as their official international language which give benefits economically, educationally and scientifically. Meanwhile, Indonesia does not use English as an essential official international language in its policy. As a result, most Indonesians cannot master English which give disadvantages for the development of the country in the global world.

The issues that are necessary to be reconsidered by Indonesian policy makers are how important international language like English can be inserted more precisely, especially in education so that Indonesians can compete globally together with other nations. Then, besides having its national language, it should not be ignored that Indonesia has hundreds of vernaculars. So, it is important to not only improve the use of Bahasa Indonesia but also preserve and promote vernaculars which represent cultural heritage of this country.

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