LANGUAGE POLICY IN INDONESIAN EDUCATION:
Regional and Local Languages as Oral Languages of Instruction

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Abstract
The aims of the paper are two-fold. The first aim is simply to describe that an issue about the use of regional and local languages as languages of instruction has been around in Indonesian education for over one century. It was in 1848 when the three-year elementary school was first opened for the Indonesian people and the languages of instruction were Javanese, Sundanese, and Madurese. After Indonesia gained her independence in 1945 and Indonesian language (bahasa Indonesia which was rooted in Malay) were proclaimed to be the state language, the language-in-education policy has changed with the compulsory use of the language as medium of instruction. In the current situation, the compulsory use of the state language is practiced only in writing the contents of the curriculum (subjects of study). In oral practices, Indonesian language is necessary to be mixed with the other regional and local languages. Therefore, the second aim of the paper is to argue that the provision of better quality schooling for Indonesian children should be made by requiring teachers to have good commands in children's home language and employ bilingual approach in basic education.

1. Introduction
The Republic of Indonesia is a vast archipelago of more than 17,000 islands covering about one-seventh of the equator. Today, the archipelago is inhabited by over 225 million people. Indonesian people bear a relation to each other, confirming the truth of the Sanskrit motto "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" or Unity in Diversity. They constitute one country, tanah air Indonesia (literally the land and water of Indonesia); one nation, bangsa Indonesia; with one common language, bahasa Indonesia. Despite this, they have a variety of ethnic identities and religious belief as well as a variety of languages.

There should be more than one thousand languages spoken by Indonesian children at home as mother tongue or what I would prefer calling them as home language. At least, seven hundred of local languages have been found
to be existing in the Indonesian archipelago. Eight languages have been considered to be the major ones: Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Batak, Minang, Balinese, Bugis, and Banjar. Two others should be added after them: Acehnese and Sasak. The more the Indonesian languages are investigated, the more minority languages will be found. From school children’s point of views, the linguistic situation will become very complicated.

The local language first acquired by children in one home village may be different from that in another village. For example, the Javanese which pupils learn from their parents in Semarang, Central Java is clearly marked as a different language from the one acquired by their peers in Tegal, Central Java (although the distance between Semarang and Tegal is just about 150 km). For school children, those languages will not be mutually intelligible so that on the basis of children’s home language there should be two languages of instruction at elementary schools in the region.

In this paper I attempt to discuss language-in-education policy in Indonesian. Language-in-education policy in such highly multilingual nation as in Indonesia can be seen as having two main problems: problems with languages used as the medium of instruction and languages taught as a subject of study. An issue about the choice of which languages are taught as subjects in the Indonesian system of education could be interesting, but the issue is not the focus of the discussion in the paper. The paper will give a historical overview on the position of the national language (Indonesian) and regional in Indonesian education from the time when the Dutch ruled the country up to the present day after the Indonesian country gained her independence. A special attention will be paid to the present use of Javanese as bridge language of instruction at elementary schools.

2. Language of Instruction in Historical Perspective

When Dutch colonialism began in Indonesia, in late 1600, it was part of the colonial policy that they should impose and transmit their aims and culture by a means of the Dutch language. The Dutch colonial policy concerning languages to be used and taught in formal education would be interesting. It is mainly because long before the Dutch arrival in Indonesia, a
coherent idea of the culture and linguistic unity of the region has already been in existence.

Malay was already serving as a means of wider communication at the area. Moreover, it was the lingua franca in Southeast Asia for more than a thousand years. As evidence for this, inscriptions found at Palembang in Sumatra, and a few other places suggest that Malay was already understood and spoken as early as the seventh century A.D. Other historical evidence reveals that the ancient Hindu Kingdom of Sriwijaya, with its centre in the region of Palembang, which flourished from 650 to 1370, employed Malay as its administrative language to rule its territory, which reached as far as Vietnam.

As Sriwijaya Kingdom was an important commercial power, Malay was also the language of trade, in a form known as Melayu Pasar or Bazaar Malay. In the thirteenth century, trade opened the islands to the new foreign penetration with the arrival of Moslem merchants from Gujarat in India. Their arrival made a significant change, with the emergence of many Islamic kingdoms along the coastal area where they did their trading. The merchants used Malay not only in dealing with the native rulers but also with the indigenous inhabitants. The new faith was introduced to the indigenous inhabitants together with the Malay language. As the result, Malay adopted the Arabic script.

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese came to the archipelago with their interests both in trade and in the promotion of religion. They were attracted by the rich spice islands of the Maluccas. With Malay, not only did the Portuguese succeed in the propagation of the Christian faith, but also in their spice trade. However, they were gradually displaced from trading contract by the Dutch East Indies Company. Initially, the Dutch came to trade. As becoming increasingly powerful, eventually, they acquired the monopoly of the spice trade and conquered the territory. They took their power over the archipelago for more than three centuries with Dutch as their administrative language.

During the Dutch colonial time, education was very limited. Even before the nineteenth century, the Dutch government did not pay any attention to the education of the native population. Dutch education was limited to
elementary schools for Dutch children, Christian children, and military children. However, in 1848 arose the move of reform in the Netherlands for the establishment of schools for indigenous children. The first three-year elementary school was opened for the native in 1849. The languages of instruction were Javanese, Sundanese, and Madurese.

In 1893 the Dutch government divided the native schools into two types: the five-year schools which were called first-class schools (for children of nobility and other important figures) and the three-year second-class schools (for children of commoners). In the two types of the native schools, the regional languages were provided as language of instruction. Moeliono (1986) noted that Malay functioned as additional language of instruction at the schools for the reason that the regional languages could not be employed. Dutch began to become language of instruction at the first-class schools in 1914 when the native schools of this type became seven-year schools.

A regional language and Malay (as additional language of instruction) was employed as language of instruction at the new type of native schools called village schools. Three-year village schools were first established in 1870, but in 1916 they became five-year schools equal to the second-class schools which had been established earlier. The outcome of both types of native schools for the commoners was considered equal. In 1912 the Dutch language replaced the regional languages and Malay as language of instruction from the first year. At this interesting point it should be noted that the Dutch government had initiated the use of Latin scripts for Malay and for Javanese.

After the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese occupation (1942—1945) led almost immediately and abruptly to the abolition of Dutch in favour of Indonesian as the chief language in the Indonesian community. All the official administration, press, and radio were carried out on Indonesian. The language became more and more used by the Indonesian people and it developed a considerable power to acquire freedom of expression in Indonesian. At schools and universities, the teaching and use of Indonesian as medium of instruction were obligatory.
3. Language of Instruction after Independence

Indonesia declared her independence on August 17th, 1945. The proclamation of the independence was written in Indonesian and so was the 1945 Constitution which the Republic promulgated on the following day of her independence. It is stipulated in the Constitution, Chapter XV, Article 36 that the language of the state is Indonesian. It should be noted that Indonesian has been adopted as the national language from the Malay by the congress on October 28th, 1928, known as "Sumpah Pemuda" or the Youth Pledge. The resolution of the historic congress reads in translation as follows.

Firstly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia declare that we belong to one father land, the Indonesian land.
Secondly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia declare that we belong to one nation, the Indonesian nation.
Thirdly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia uphold the language of unity, the Indonesian language.

It should also be stated that since Indonesian proclaimed her independence in 1945, Indonesian has its status of both national language and official language of the Republic. Since then, Indonesian can be identified with its role in the development of the country. In its broadest sense, the country development has been explored, communicated, projected, and reproduced through the channel of Indonesian. In other words, Indonesian is believed to be a necessary and helpful tool for facilitating the implementation of the development programs in various fields, not excluding in Indonesian education.

One obstacle of the implementation of the development programs was that the Indonesian people remained illiterate. It was one of the saddest legacies of the colonial regime. Most people were unable to read and write in Indonesian. On the Independence Day 1945, less than 10% of the entire Indonesian people could read or write in Indonesian. It was reported that in 1945 only 600,000 children out of the 85 million Indonesian people were attending elementary schools, and only 500 at secondary school. At that time, as stated earlier, the obligatory teaching of Indonesian and use of the language as medium of instruction at schools were promoted during the Japanese occupation.
Freedom of illiteracy was the major concern in the development project of Indonesian education. Anti-illiteracy campaign was set up in 1947 under the guidance and support of the Indonesian Ministry of Education. A general program of Indonesian language teaching has been carried out throughout the country. Textbooks were written in Indonesia, among other things Mari Membaca (‘Let’s Read’), and they were widely used in the course program. The objective of the course was to give the skills of reading and writing in Indonesian. After the program was launched, the illiteracy rate in Indonesian has been falling continuously.

According to the 1980 census, 39% of Indonesian people who were over five years old could neither speak nor read in Indonesian. Instead, they only spoke their home language or mother tongue. In 1990 the same national survey revealed that only 17% of Indonesian people who were over five years old were still illiterate in Indonesia. They were unable to read the alphabet of the Indonesian language. This illiterate group of the Indonesian people was identified as those that were living below the poverty line. They mostly lived in remote areas which did not yet get access to the development project. Recently, these areas have received a special attention from the Indonesian government. The government has put their target that the freedom of illiteracy program will be completed in this decade.

The language statistics have supported the assumption that the spread of Indonesian across the country has been tremendous. As stated earlier, in 1945 less than 10% of Indonesia’s population of 80 million could speak Indonesian. By comparison, in the 1990s Indonesian has been spoken by 83% of 160 million Indonesian who were over five years old. This figure can be divided into two groups. The first group amounting to 68% uses Indonesian along with their regional language. The other amounting to 15% uses Indonesian as their ‘sub-national’ language in their daily communication. Surely, the influx of information which is transmitted through Indonesian television programs will increase the member of the latter group.

The success story of Indonesian spreading across the country has confirmed the use of the language as main medium of instruction in present Indonesian education. It is stipulated in the Law on the National Educational System (No. 20 Year 2003, Chapter VII, Article 33) as follows: (1) Indonesian as the
4. The Oral Use of Local Languages

The use of local languages in education is not prohibited. In practice, local languages are preferably used to create conviviality between teachers and students. In classrooms, a joke is often expressed in local languages. It is not surprising to see that university students and lectures who have just come from other regions are trying to master the regional language of the new region because they do not want to become the victims of the joke. At this point, it should be noted that local languages in education well serve their function as phatic communion (to establish a pleasant atmosphere) rather than as the means of academic communication.

The situation above seems to be true in education at elementary levels. Nowadays it is the pattern in villages or remote areas where most of the school children have already been bilingual. Not only that they have sufficient exposure to the home language spoken by their parents, but also to Indonesian at the 'sub-national' levels of the language through watching television programs. Cartoons and the other films for children give a great deal of positive impacts on their bilingualism. As a result, at the first grade, children's home language becomes a secondary language of instruction because they are usually ready to listen to their teachers speaking in Indonesian.

Indonesian is acquired by children at almost the same time as their home language. Arnawa and Sulibrata (2002) give an evidence on Balinese children. They questioned the local curricula which has included Balinese as a subject of study. Balinese should be taught as the subject mainly because the language is considered to be the children's home language. Their study suggests that Balinese should not be the only home language of the children. Many Balinese children have also acquired Indonesian as one of their home
languages. This linguistic situation is not occurring only in the cities, but also in the urban cities. The situation is likely becoming trends in rural areas. They state this as follows:

"[...] tidak semua siswa berbahasa ibu bahasa Bali. Sebagian siswa sudah berbahasa ibu bahasa Indonesia. Profil kebahasaan ini tidak hanya terjadi perkotaan, tetapi sudah merambah ke daerah-daerah pinggir kota dan tidak tertutup kemungkinan merambah ke pedesaan. ([...] not all the students having mother tongue in Balinese. Some are having their home language in Indonesian. This linguistic profile is only happening in the urban cities, but also it is not unlikely to be intruding the rural areas.)"

As stated by Arnawa and Sulibrata, the use of the local language as a subject of study is generally accepted by children with a lack of internal motivation. They regard the subject will give more burden for their study so that their motivation to learn the local language at schools is not stable. Language activities like a singing contest in the local language are usually designed to enhance their motivation for the study. However, children's participation in the contest does not reflect the real linguistic condition of their mastery of the local language because they have been prepared only for the contest. Indonesian Education policy concerning the local and regional language to be taught as subjects of instruction could not be well-implemented.

The oral use of local languages as the language of instruction is also minimal. The language is added when the teacher feels that Indonesian is not sufficient. At present, Indonesian is the general medium of education at elementary levels; it is the language-across curriculum. All subjects of study are taught in the national language. It is not unusual that Indonesian is the language of instruction when a local language is taught as a subject of study in urban areas at which the local language is included in the local content of the curriculum. All teaching and learning materials are written in Indonesian. But the materials can be orally communicated by a means of local languages when it is necessary.

Obstacles for local languages to become written medium of instruction are related to linguistic problems with the languages. Linguistically speaking,
Local and regional languages are more complicated. For example, deeply embedded in Javanese culture is a social stratification based on genealogy, kinship ties, wealth, occupation, education, age, sex, and so on. This is reflected in the language by a system of speech levels. The major speech levels of the Javanese language are designated *ngoko* 'low', *madya*, 'intermediate', and *krama* 'high'. The difference among them is mostly lexical, involving substitutions of the whole words and some word endings.

The *ngoko* is the basic and the most sincere language. It is, for example, used for talking to oneself, for getting angry, and for speaking to one's intimates or to people below one in the social scale. The *madya* and *kromo* forms are applied to the people, actions, and possessions of those to whom one shows particular deference, e.g. older relatives and upper-class people as shown by the following example.

**NGOKO** : Aku AREP NGEKEKI kancaku buku.
   'I WILL GIVE my friend a book'

**MADYA** : Aku AJENG NYAOSI kakangku buku.
   'I WILL GIVE my (older) brother a book'

**KROMO** : Bapak BADHE MARINGI aku buku.
   'My father WILL GIVE me a book'

The problems with the written forms of local languages in Indonesian education can be outlined as follows. First of all, the language reflects a complicated social stratification system of speech levels. When the speech levels of *madya* or *kromo* were chosen as being written for language of instruction, the language may not be used as a means of daily communication. Meanwhile, the use of the *ngoko* language as language of instruction will create more psychological disadvantages of education for children: impoliteness being related to the language.

Furthermore, the local languages do not have one variety. As stated earlier, the one variety assumed to be standard in Semarang will be un-standard in Tegal although the language is spoken in one region (in Central Java). The choice of one variety would also raise demands of the other ones for recognition of language of instruction. This will imply costs for multiplying language of instruction. Availability of teachers mastering the local languages (even in oral forms) is becoming more and more limited.
5. Matters of Teacher Provision

As a matter of fact, school teachers provided for the children in basic education are not necessarily educated in the community where the children are brought up by the parents. Ideally, at school, teachers are able to take over the position of their parents and use the same language as one spoken at home. In such an ideal situation, more active participation can be achieved easily and more effective teaching method can be employed by the teachers for classroom instruction.

First language teaching will increase achievement in acquisition of literacy skills and other skills. The use of a first or home language should be successful in raising the achievement level. In the Indonesian communities where for the children, bahasa Indonesia is commonly used at home either by broadcasting media (like TV and radio) or by the parents of their own, low levels of learning achievement (and high levels of dropout and repetition) will not be associated with the language of instruction itself. However, this leads other problems: mostly with economic problems and partly with a lack of the teachers' awareness of their children's first or home language. The teachers tend to think of themselves and teach their teaching materials in bahasa Indonesia as a second or official language.

In the some communities which have not yet been approached by mass media and where their parents use Indonesian as their second language, the use of local language is sometimes unsuccessful in classroom instruction. An obstacle of its use in schooling has to do with parents' perception about the benefit of the second or foreign languages used at schools of their children. The local language is believed to be the one spoken only at home. The language will not be beneficial for the children later when they find a job after schooling. Because of this perception, Their teachers do not feel demanded to have good command in their children's home language as well as the language use as medium of instruction. Parents and teachers both resist the use of the children's home language as a language of instruction.

A further challenge is that when the central government has adopted a policy of decentralising basic education in terms of school-based management, the policy is not well-implemented. At present, school teachers are recruited and managed regionally, but teacher development and
deployment have not yet been modified. Pre-and in-service teacher training programs which are still managed centrally rather than regional have not yet designed to train the school teachers in the use of local languages for classroom instruction and in the development of teaching and learning materials by making use of those languages. To address this challenge, professional development for school teachers must be included in the bilingual education policy planning and the provision of bilingual teachers must include capacity building and awareness campaigns.

6. Conclusion

The language function in Indonesian education as medium of instruction is not necessarily static, but has been changed through time. During the Dutch colonial time, education above elementary level was not available to the great majority of Indonesian people. Two types of schools for the indigenous people, namely the five-year schools usually called first-class schools (for children of nobility and of other important figures) and the three-year second-class schools (for children of commoners), were all taught in regional languages. At that time, the use of the local languages was advisory in Indonesian education while the use of Malay was voluntary (additional). For some reason the regional languages could not be used, language of instruction was Malay.

The major factor in the establishment of regional language-based schools of the Dutch educational system was the fear of the Dutch that Malay-based educational system would raise national consciousness of Indonesian people. It was Nieuwenhuis, who theorised that Dutch should replace Malay as the lingua franca of the archipelago and therefore the language should be eliminated from the curriculum of the Dutch education (1930 in Meoliono, 1986). Before Indonesia gained her independence, local languages had been used more widely in the education.

After Indonesian independence, the most obvious change in educational language practice has taken place when the decision about the national language-based schools of the educational system was made. Indonesian is used as language of instruction. All the subjects of study at elementary schools are taught in the national language so that it becomes the language-
across curriculum. Regional, Local, or home language may become just a part of the teaching techniques employed by teachers for classroom instruction.

In the case of Javanese, the local language is never used in the written form, but it is necessary to be used orally. The oral use of the local language should be regarded teachers’ policy rather than the government’s policy. The success in the use of children’s home language as the language of instruction, especially at elementary schools, is depending on teachers’ ability in the local language. The main problem in Indonesian education is not how to use the local and regional languages, but how to provide school children with teachers being able to employ children’s home language. In terms of language-in-education policy, the use of local language is not prohibited. However, the language-in-education policy needs to be implemented by providing teachers who are able to speak the same local or regional language as the school children at the first grade and able to make use of the language as medium of instruction.

References


