

# **BAHASA INDONESIA: POLICY, IMPLEMENTATION, AND PLANNING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Language policy or language planning is still in the surge for familiarity and importance. However, this paper argues that in the case of Bahasa Indonesia current implementations should be evaluated based on its relevance and future plan. The historical perspectives will reveal the roots of the current policy and therefore make foundations for further discussions. From the study of literature, this paper is arguing that new paradigm for nationalism, roles in the global competition, as well as regional languages as competitive advantage could be well adopted to nurture a more inclusive and progressive Bahasa Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *language policy, nationalism, Bahasa Indonesia, regional language*

## **ABSTRAK**

*Kebijakan bahasa atau tata kelola bahasa belum merupakan kajian yang hidup dan dikenal masyarakat. Hal ini disebabkan kurangnya sosialisasi mengenai pentingnya pengawalan masyarakat pada penerapan kebijakan bahasa dalam kehidupan berbangsa dan bernegara. Studi literatur ini mengangkat beberapa argumen tentang penerapan kebijakan pemerintah mengenai Bahasa Indonesia, dengan mengkritisi tujuan awal diciptakannya kebijakan tersebut. Simpulan memberikan beberapa implikasi bahwa Bahasa Indonesia perlu mendapat kajian lebih serius dengan pertimbangan paradigma baru nasionalisme, peran bangsa di persaingan global, serta potensi bahasa daerah sebagai peluang di perdagangan dunia.*

**Kata kunci:** *kebijakan bahasa, nasionalisme, Bahasa Indonesia, bahasa daerah*

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## INTRODUCTION

Emerging in the early 40s, the term “language policy” is still progressing for a precise definition. Often used interchangeably with “language planning” which focuses more on the process of language implementation in a speech community (Tollefson, 1996; Wiley, 1996; Spolsky and Shohamy 2000; Ager, 2001), a distinction between the two is still important to make. Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) set some boundaries for language policy, stating it to be the prerogative of the power holder to change language use.

Language policy in Indonesia is an interesting case to study. It started with an idea of nationalism and is challenged by the same issue in its development and implementation. As being relatively a young language, *Bahasa Indonesia* is still evolving rigorously. There are constant struggles between power maintenance and preservation of regional languages. They appear as moulding process for an ideal national language as part of national identity.

This paper will discuss the emergence of language policy in Indonesia, the implementation of the policy regarding Bahasa Indonesia and some challenges in planning. In the implication for language teaching some underlying achievements are also discussed.

### Research Method

This paper looks carefully on the issue through the study of literature. There are some documents, publications, and also government’s reports consulted as the ground for arguments. A wide range of literature selection will then be arranged to its importance, the older ones for more historical reference purposes, and a more current selection of reference for the actualisation of discussion.

## DISCUSSION

### Language Policy in Indonesia

Language planning in Indonesia has been initiated long before the state is officially declared in 1945. Having a long history of oppression under Dutch’s imperialism, Indonesia considers nationalism as the most important value for the country. Driven by the idea of independence and search for identity, in 1928 a youth congress was held. The congress comes with an important decision of a national language, i.e. *Bahasa Indonesia*. It is declared as the unifying language in the new nation of Indonesia and should be used instead of Dutch for formal and nation-wide communications. A *lingua franca* among traders over a long period of time, *Bahasa Indonesia* is not part of any regional languages within the archipelago. On the contrary, the language is derived from *Bahasa Melayu* or Malay, which is also used by the people in Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. It is not chosen out of practical motive but of a dream, of unity, and recognition (Poerbakawatja, 1970). Since the declaration, *Bahasa Indonesia* has developed further away from *Bahasa Melayu* to a language with its own form and identity.

The place for *Bahasa Indonesia* in the constitution is found in chapter XV verse 36 in 1945 Constitution and chapter IV section 5 in 1950’s Provisional Constitution. In the 1945 Constitution, *Bahasa Indonesia* is established as national language. The chapter formulates the status of *Bahasa Indonesia*, as national and state language. Furthermore, in 1950’s Constitution, it is stated as the “official language”. The changing in the 1950’s Constitution, according to Moeliono (1986), is to underline the importance of nationalism, which becomes the action force in the implementation (Anwar, 1979; Moeliono, 1986; Alwasilah, 1997).

There are 2 benchmarks in the support of language policy. They give the language a framework for standardization. The first one is from the Language Seminar in 1972, which comes up with a reference for Perfected Orthography (*Ejaan yang Disempurnakan/EYD*). The new standard simplifies the use of language in writing. In 1988, the Fifth Language Congress finishes the Indonesian Extensive Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*). This is considered as a big step in the language as new vocabularies resemble adoption of regional languages, as well as foreign languages. This strengthens the language's position, after being attacked as unclear in its standardization (Simandjuntak, 1972).

According to Ager (2001), in the making of any policies, including the language policy, at least 3 power sources come to play, which are: the individuals, ruling groups, and states. At the time, the ruling power is young intellectuals affiliation, who desires to put an end on Dutch imperialism, which uses its infamous strategy of disintegration (*divide et impera*) to rule over the archipelago. On the other hand, the majority of people with influence are the Javanese. The group of power in the 1928 Youth Congress chooses to aim at unification when choosing *Bahasa Indonesia*. Later on, the official government has the same language policy. However, sometimes unity would be interpreted extremely, focusing on the uniformity in the aspects of the nation (Ager, 1996). Although considered as more efficient and effective in governance process, it also promotes elitism (Ager, 2001). When Tollefson (2002) mentions language policy as dedicated to shape language use, those who fail to follow the model proposed by the policy would be considered as not supportive to the policy. Following the implementation of the policy, schools with language other than *Bahasa Indonesia* are closed or given no permission to operate.

As a coin with two sides, language policy has the other half, which is language planning. Focuses more in the function of language, language planning works in opposition with language policy (Ager, 2001). Language policy usually reflects a top-down idealism, whereas language planning speaks more about the ideal form, which the whole society desires. Therefore, it demands an ideal formulation of other aspects for an ideal language in the country. Grillo (1989) views language very seriously, stating it as identifier of egalitarian measure. Accordingly, people would approve to a model of language, which has real benefits to everyday interactions, rather than one which is appointed by the government.

A policy works within a jurisdiction (McGroarty, 1996; Wiley, 1996) and Indonesia's jurisdiction consist of multilingual and multicultural community. This results in struggles between the national languages with the mother tongues of speech community. There are almost 1000 languages in the archipelago with different numbers of speakers, ranging from hundreds to 58 million people (Nababan et al., 1992). From an interaction with the regional languages, *Bahasa Indonesia* receives a lot of benefits for its development.

The language of dominant speakers in Indonesia is Javanese. Considered as the regional language with the biggest speakers, Javanese supports *Bahasa Indonesia* in its lexicon. However, there is no attempt to adopt further parts of this language, as *Bahasa Indonesia* is considered easier to learn than Javanese, which functions under triglossic situations. In its interaction with languages close to Malay, *Bahasa Indonesia* is said to have more consistent rules and its own identity compared to the language of origin (Simandjuntak, 1972). Furthermore, in implementing the language policy, the people in those areas are benefited from the exposure of language and become bilinguals faster. Wardhaugh (1992) considers the rise of *Bahasa Indonesia* in Indonesia as a vernacularization, a restoration or elaboration of indigenous language in relation to its adoption as an official language. However, this is proven otherwise. Being a mother tongue of no one in its time of establishment, *Bahasa Indonesia* is considered more as the unifying language among the 753 regional languages in the country (Simbolon, 1999).

The government promotes the implementation of *Bahasa Indonesia* in education as partnership with the regional languages available. This also marks the policy regarding regional language, which is stated in the Regulation No. 4, 1950, Chapter IV section 5. However, as the implementation always becomes a main issue of policy's success, there are some problems in the process of this ideal picture. Further discussion in the area of language teaching would give more information on this matter.

### **Implementation on Language Teaching in Indonesia**

One prominent drawback of language policy in Indonesia is the assumption of native languages' use as opposing nationalism (Moeliono, 1986). Among the utilization is the practice of local languages in education which would be considered as hindering government's plan to literacy (c.f. *BPS*, 1998). This is because *Bahasa Indonesia* is the preferred language of instruction at schools from the primary level.

The National Policy on Language Education regulates the use of regional languages or mother tongues of the learners, to aid the education process. It is explained that *Bahasa Indonesia* as the language of unity is the language to be used in every school in Indonesia and that regional languages could be used in kindergarten and the first 3 years in school (Regulation No. 4, 1950, Chapter IV section 5). The reason for this permission is to help students with the learning process, in order to provide them with the most possible help in perceiving the information in classes. Nevertheless, it is also mentioned that in the area where national language is well understood by the majority of people, the language must be used as a main language for teaching and learning purposes in schools. There could be no clear evidence whether previous assumption of native languages' threat to nationalism could be derived from such premises. The possible explanation to this would be from the issue of national stability, which throughout history has received many opponent forces from the growing body of regional awakening.

However, it is uplifting to see that recent curriculum designs are developed into a more comprehensive construction of language and culture. Unfortunately, there are still many teachers who teach regional language for the sake of following the curriculum rather than for cultivating love for the cultures. They do not realize that language embodies the identity of its users (c.f. *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*). A recent research reveals such lack of concern from teachers all over the country, although such teaching is given as a free choice from the government (Simbolon, 1999).

When *Bahasa Indonesia* is taught as a compulsory subject in all levels of education, regional languages could or could not be taught at all depending on the provincial government scheme (Simbolon, 1999). Each province could apply different policy in which the regional languages are taught or not in schools. Further finding, from the research conducted by Simbolon and The Ford Foundation in 1999, show that among 27 provinces, only 10 of them have regional languages in the school's curriculum. Therefore, the effort of mother tongue's cultivation would not go effectively as some educational institutions of the country choose not to apply this in their schools. However, such irony does not evoke enough concern from the government to a promotion of regional languages.

Beeby (1979) reports the education performance in Indonesia and makes comments on the issue of language and equality of opportunity. In the report, he says that there are evidences of conflict between the national need for a common language and the chance to demonstrate students' abilities in full, having proficiency in *Bahasa Indonesia* as obstructing the process. He also notices the high drop-out rates are caused partly by "a familiar tongue" (p. 278). The language which is supposed to be an access to broaden opportunities of gaining knowledge has become obstacles in obtaining one. Naturally, learning becomes more challenging when the language used in the process is not one that is

familiar to the students. The difficulty, of course, is because the language in school is not the language the students use at home for daily communication.

In the case of literacy, data from government's statistic states the rate of illiteracy to be higher in rural areas. From the 1998's report by *Biro Pusat Statistik* (Statistic Indonesia) illiteracy rate is 13.96 percent in rural areas, whereas only 5.08 percent of people in urban areas are illiterate. The shortest definition of literacy would be considered as an ability to read and write. In Indonesia, the target language, in which one should be considered as literate, would be *Bahasa Indonesia*. Further implication on literacy would lead to opportunities for further education or for professional occupations.

The concepts of nation as unified, homogenous, socially, culturally, and linguistically (Grillo, 1989) should also consider the fact that Indonesia consists of many different cultures and languages. Acknowledgment on such diversity has developed until recent government, which started from the emerging of Reformation Era. Accordingly, new understanding on nationalism as synergy from diverse elements would be a good starting point. Accordingly, *Bahasa Indonesia* should share its dominating role with other languages in Indonesia. One achievement would be the acknowledgement of Chinese New Year, which is marked by official declaration of the event as national facultative holiday. This is because beforehand the Chinese culture is considered as related to communism, which is a major threat to nationalism. This could be considered as a breakthrough in adopting multiculturalism in Indonesia.

In the line of new understanding of nationalism, other researches have shown that considerations to the advantage and possible threat to other cultures need to be linked with nationalism. Suleiman (2006) shows that when Arabic takes its place as the national language in the Middle East, it also competes with other foreign languages (such as French and Hebrew). But then, it argues the preference to its identity construction. Thus, singular existence doesn't mean the elimination of other languages' influence or other cultures' unique contribution.

In relation with foreign language teaching, English comes on top of the list. Accordingly, affiliations with English speaking countries regarding education and language teaching are flourishing. *Bahasa Indonesia* has been promoted overseas, especially with neighbouring countries. One of the examples is affiliation between Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia and Padang State University (UNP) in Sumatra, Indonesia (Antara, September 24, 2002). Other affiliations are ACICIS in Yogyakarta, UNSW, and State University of Malang. *Bahasa Indonesia* has even become one of the four Asian languages aimed for learning by most students by the year 2006 (Lo Bianco, 1997). From the point of view of foreign languages teaching, this is an encouraging fact. Hopefully, it would work retrospectively to re-opening schools where foreign languages are taught, such as schools in Hokkien or Indian languages, which were available until the late 60s. As *Bahasa Indonesia* is very well respected in other countries, Indonesia should show openness to multicultural values in its own territory in more consistent way.

### **Implication for Future Planning**

Other findings were shown in Simbolon's research in 1999 on *Bahasa Indonesia* and regional languages. It was stated in his research, that among 753 regional languages, only 410 languages have been researched. Fortunately, the government opens a research centre, *Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa/PPPB* (Centre for Language Cultivation and Development), to carry on researches on languages. The centre also acts as conceptualists for language policy (1991). However, language development should not rely entirely on government research. Independent researchers, such as Simbolon, need to be supported to give more comprehensive picture of language activities in Indonesia. There would be some challenges as well as evidences of language preservation. In a more

practical way, children should be encouraged to acquire their parents' language(s). Naturally, it would be easier to lose a language than to acquire one.

Another challenge is to set a neutral ground for *Bahasa Indonesia* in partnership with the native/regional languages in Indonesia. Previous experiences dealt with rigorous power maintenance could be opted out for future development of the language. In past time, success in education would be detected by the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* in schools. Ortiz Sanz in United Nations' document for West Irian (or Papua) during 1968 to 1969 periods said, "the Government must be given credit for progress in elementary education, the process of assimilation through use of a common language (*Bahasa Indonesia*)" (Saltford, 2000). It would be justified by saying that this report is written on a political agenda of integration rather than objective assessment on (language) education. The essence of reality and local values are also important for the teaching practice. Morgan and Ramanathan (2005) show the failure of English has made when neglecting the importance of the recipients or students innate values and mother tongues. Therefore, partnership with local languages rather than competition would open new opportunities for embracing *Bahasa Indonesia* into educational perspective.

The language curriculum in 2003 focused on "communicative competence" and "discourse competence", show a changing perspective on language, from a test for nationalism to realistic daily basis roles. In addition, native languages should be considered as equal in cultural value from the national language (Moeliono, 1986). Furthermore, the development of national language should not significantly limit the cultivation of regional languages in the country, as some experts fear (Anwar, 1979; Alwasilah, 1998).

However, the realistic demand of having to be able to speak in *Bahasa Indonesia* would be a good encouragement to learn the language. There is a strong motive in learning *Bahasa Indonesia* through which more opportunities, especially in the workplace, would be available. Those who were not speaking *Bahasa Indonesia* are becoming limited in wider interactions and opportunities for governmental positions. This resulted in the language as having exclusive, but realistic position (Nababan et al., 1992).

A certain remark made, in regards with availability of the teaching of *Bahasa Indonesia*, gives both bitter and elevating qualities. A report on teaching *Bahasa Indonesia* in the state of Victoria (Kelabora, 1983) warns teaching would plummet. The main reasons are availability of textbooks, having outdated materials irrelevant for quality teaching, and lack of teaching skills. In short, he states the major factor is "a bad course with its unreliable assessment system". Reading such elaborative report evokes the reality of language teaching in the native country of *Bahasa Indonesia*. Comparing Australia and Indonesia, the condition in the language's native country is far less fortunate. For example, Indonesian textbooks appear with more informative and interesting features than those available for Indonesian students. A case study by Diah (1981) utters a concern in the quality of literature used by students. Within the last 10 years, good progress has been made in both quality and quantity of textbooks. There are wide opportunities for better improvements for language teaching and development.

New concept in nationalism brings a new perspective to the development of *Bahasa Indonesia*. The 1928's Youth Pledge marks the earliest stage of language planning, gives information to the motive as well as direction to where it is heading in the future (Fishman, 1993; Ager, 2001). In regard to this, the planning should serve the current needs of the people without putting away the first motive of language policy. The nation should go through, what by Ager (2001) considered as, a symptom of nation preservation in a multilingual state. He specifies the tendency of achieving stability and cohesiveness of having a single, unifying language rather than perceiving the potency of other available languages to enrich communication in national scope. Over time, Indonesia has adopted some regional languages to be an assisting national communication, and not as intrusive to the nationality. However, this effort faces growing challenges to realisation.

Language policy should consider the fact that multilingualism is everywhere in big states in the world (Tollefson, 2002). From the discussion above, especially on the historical background of Indonesia and its national language, multilingualism seems to be not alleged enough in the development of language. Social positioning within the language of society, e.g. gender perspective, is also an important aspect to be considered (Menard-Warwick, 2007). Considering that multilingualism would be as a framework for any policies in language teaching would be a better option. This means that language teaching is not merely considered as the transferring of knowledge, but as having more in shaping the society. Although monolingual approach would be considered as easier and taking less effort, multilingual approach would bring more comprehensive knowledge of what the people and state have. In other words, the policy would bring the state and people together rather than have the state in a difficult position of instruction, that have more potential conflicts because the lack of consideration of each components of the state.

Despite the problem that Indonesia's official institution should develop in making language policies, some optimism remarks are made. One of them is the possibility of promoting Indonesia as the language for South East Asia area. The argument for this is presented by some linguistic experts in an Inter-Country Language Congress in Malaysia in 2000. It is said that *Bahasa Indonesia* is easier to learn and more consistently developed in terms of writing and phonology (Antara, 2000). The need for international recognition is crucial for a better standpoint in global negotiation.

Another high consideration comes from the same government's news agency, Antara, which believes *Bahasa Indonesia* to be the second language in Australia. The assumption is perceived as an over expectation as the reality speaks differently. It is understood that the Australian government abolishes a budget allocation for some Asian languages, including *Bahasa Indonesia* (Antara, 2002). These show how the Indonesian government is trying to promote the language, although it sounds overoptimistic.

Finally, Indonesia should learn from other countries where language policy or planning has helped the activities in country. One example to follow is Australia, which is considered as the first Anglophone nation with explicit language policy (Romaine, 1991). Another neighbouring country, Brunei Darussalam has also noted for its bilingualism plan which considers current development in industrial and trade (Jones, 1997). Indonesia has a wide opportunity to learn from others and improve its current language planning.

## CONCLUSION

Discussion on the increasingly important notion on language policy bears its complexity. There are aspects of history and national multi identities in relation to implementation and further change considerations. In respect to the Indonesian Language Policy way forward, some aspects need to be carefully taken into consideration. Firstly is nationalism. Status of regional languages, in comparison to *Bahasa Indonesia* and relationship with foreign languages need to be aligned with the current situations. The emergence of nationalism idealism should be actualized with the current global relationships. In addition to this, more collaborative partnerships with external parties should be taken into the perspective of nationalism and national language. As the result of the world becomes a global village, more interactions could be at the end shape of nation's identity, including the national language. This should be aimed to position *Bahasa Indonesia*, or even knowledge of any regional languages in Indonesia, as a competitive advantage in global trading initiatives.

Secondly, the government's commitment to be more transparent and discursive in the application of national language, and the policy following its use could further the growth of *Bahasa Indoensia* as a key element in national communication with the participation of its users, and more awareness of language policy could help the fostering of *Bahasa Indonesia* in the future.

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