

LANGUAGE AND BASIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Frederick John Bowden*

*Jakarta Field Station, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya*

Abstract

Indonesia is a country with a great richness of local languages spoken within its boundaries – over 700 distinct languages according to Lewis, ed. (2009). Indonesia is also a rapidly developing country with growing incomes and growing educational achievement. Unfortunately, this growth in income and education is unevenly distributed across the country and significant portions of the Indonesian population are missing out on the benefits of increased economic growth and development. To a very large extent, the parts of Indonesia lagging in terms of development are the regions with the richest diversity of languages. In this paper, I argue the case for greater use of local languages in early education in the underdeveloped east of the country, not just as a means of defending local culture but also as a means towards more equitable educational achievement and economic development. I also examine some of the political issues that may be relevant in pursuing greater use of minority languages in classrooms.

Keywords: *local language, education, Indonesian educational system*

Abstrak

Indonesia adalah negara dengan kekayaan bahasa daerah yang, menurut Lewis, ed. (2009), jumlahnya lebih dari tujuh ratus. Indonesia juga negara yang cepat perkembangannya, dengan laju pendapatan dan tingkat pendidikan yang meningkat terus. Sayangnya bahwa peningkatan pendapatan dan kemajuan pendidikan tidak merata di semua daerah di Indonesia. Sebagian besar warganya belum menikmati keuntungan dari perkembangan ekonomi yang meningkat itu. Pada umumnya, daerah yang ketinggalan perkembangannya adalah daerah yang paling kaya jumlah keanekaragaman bahasanya. Dalam makalah ini, saya kemukakan betapa pentingnya penggunaan bahasa daerah pada pendidikan dasar di pelosok wilayah timur, bukan semata-mata demi mempertahankan budaya lokal tetapi juga demi tercapainya pemerataan peningkatan pendidikan dan kemajuan ekonomi. Saya juga membahas beberapa isu politik yang berkaitan dengan usaha supaya makin banyak bahasa lokal yang dipakai di dalam kelas.

Kata kunci: *bahasa daerah, pendidikan, sistem pendidikan Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a vast country consisting of more than 17,000 islands and with a population approaching 250 million people. It straddles the equator across an expanse of nearly 4000 kilometres. It is also home to over 700 languages, making it second only to Papua New Guinea in total number of languages per country (Lewis, ed., 2009). The national language of Indonesia is known in Indonesian as *Bahasa Indonesia* or ‘Indonesian language’. Local languages, or *bahasa daerah* are unevenly distributed across the country. Largely, the highest concentrations of local languages are found in the eastern parts of the country which are also in general the poorest and least developed parts of Indonesia. Indonesia is a rapidly developing country which in recent years has been achieving growth rates close to double figures. In places like the capital, Jakarta, a rapidly growing middle class provides a market for glitzy malls, new airlines, electronic gadgets and all the other accoutrements of growing wealth familiar in western countries. Educational achievement levels are also growing rapidly in the big cities. In rural

areas, however, in many cases little has changed since independence and there is still a huge amount of poverty. Throughout Indonesia the national language is used at all levels of schooling as the language of instruction although some local variation in the curriculum (and some relatively minor use of local languages) is permitted. In this paper I would like to start looking for some answers to two questions. The first is whether or not an increase in the use of local languages as languages of instruction in schools might help reduce the disparity in educational achievement levels across the country. The second issue concerns political factors that may contribute to the current state of the educational system in Indonesia. I will look at aspects of Indonesian history to see how historical/political factors may prove to be an impediment to greater use of local languages in schools.

THE BENEFITS OF MOTHER TONGUE-BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

Before looking at the benefits of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) we first need to ask what MLE is. According to UNESCO (2007:4), ‘mother tongue-based MLE programmes enable learners to begin their education in the language they know best. As they use their own language for learning, they are introduced to the new (official) language and begin learning to communicate in that language. At the same time, teachers help the learners develop their academic vocabulary in the new language so they can understand and talk about more abstract concepts. In the best programmes, learners continue to develop their ability to communicate and to learn in both languages throughout primary school’.

In many parts of the world, including Indonesia, children arrive at school without any knowledge of the national language they are about to be schooled in at all. Arriving at school, they sit in classrooms where the teacher begins a lesson in a language they do not understand and – not surprisingly – fail to learn very much about the science or mathematics that the teacher is trying to instil. As another UNESCO (UNESCO 2003) report puts it, ‘it is an obvious, yet not generally recognised truism that learning in a language which is not one’s own provides a double set of challenges: not only of learning a new language but also of learning new knowledge contained in that language’.

For the children involved, school is an unfamiliar place, with unfamiliar activities taking place in an unfamiliar language. Jhingran (2005) describes the scene in a classroom from a minority language community in India like this:

The children seemed totally disinterested in the teacher’s monologue. They stared vacantly at the teacher and sometimes at the blackboard where some [letters] had been written. Clearly aware that the children could not understand what he was saying, the teacher proceeded to provide even more detailed explanation in a much louder voice.

Later, tired of speaking and realizing that the young children were completely lost, he asked them to start copying the [letters] from the blackboard. “My children are very good at copying from the blackboard. By the time they reach Grade 5, they can copy all the answers and memorize them. But only two of the Grade 5 students can actually speak Hindi,” said the teacher.

Mother tongue education does not mean neglecting the national language. As the quote above illustrates, monolingual education can itself be an impediment to successful mastery of the official language. International experience shows that well-developed MLE programs actually provide better outcomes in not just subjects like maths and science and social studies, but also (eventually) in the national language too.

Guatemala is a developing country from Central America where Spanish is the national language but where substantial minorities of people speaking indigenous languages are also found. In collaboration with the World Bank, Guatemala began an ambitious program to

develop MLE educational programs to better serve the indigenous communities. The *Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo* (PRONADE) began pilot schemes in 1992.

According to Di Gropello (2006), ‘PRONADE decentralizes important functions to community school councils, the COEDUCAs (Comités Educativos), de jure giving the school a greater degree of decision making autonomy in its relation with the education authorities and enabling parents to have a stronger voice in their relation with school staff’.

The PRONADE educational reforms thus illustrate one of the important ingredients of successful MLE implementation which is the devolution of authority over local education to local communities and much greater involvement of parents in the education of their children. I will return to this point in the Indonesian context later.

One of the most interesting results of the PRONADE reforms in Guatemala has been that schools using a multilingual approach to education consistently achieve better outcomes than those using Spanish only education. Patrinos and Velez (2009:597) report that students in bilingual schools have higher attendance and promotion rates. They also have less repetition and less children drop out of school. Interestingly, they also find that bilingual education is less expensive than monolingual education. (The decreased cost is a result of increased efficiency and greater achievement of children.) Most tellingly, they report that bilingual students attain higher achievement levels in all subjects, including in the national language, Spanish.

THE INDONESIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Indonesia is the most linguistically diverse country in Asia. The official language, Indonesian, is the medium of instruction at all levels of education. The constitution and an education act support the use of students’ mother tongues as mediums of instruction in the early grades. In practice, however, local languages are rarely used in formal government schools apart from being taught as subjects in some areas (UNESCO 2007). The teaching of local languages is usually confined to *muatan lokal* ‘local content’. In most cases, *muatan lokal* is restricted to programs which teach aspects of local culture as a subject within the curriculum. For the most part, local languages are not used as languages of instruction. In many rural areas where minority languages are spoken, teachers do not know the first languages of the children anyway. However, there are some exceptions in places where there are strong local proponents of the use of *bahasa daerah*. In some rural areas where I have visited schools, teachers who do know the first languages of the children will use the children’s local language alongside Indonesian, often stating what they want to say first in Indonesian and then providing a running translation in the local language. However, most teachers are not trained in using local languages and those who succeed in doing it well tend to bring a great deal of creativity to the job. I recently saw photos of a class in a rural school in central Sulawesi where a very creative teacher conducted a biology lesson in the first language of the children, first (with the help of the children) writing on the board in their language all the parts of a tree. Following the classroom discussion the children all went outside and started gathering specimens of leaves and other bits of trees after which they gathered again and now wrote all the names of the different species they had collected.

Unfortunately, this kind of classroom experience is rare for Indonesian children, in spite of the fact that the children from the most linguistically diverse parts of the country also tend to have the weakest achievement levels as we shall see in the next section.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND DENSITY OF LOCAL LANGUAGES

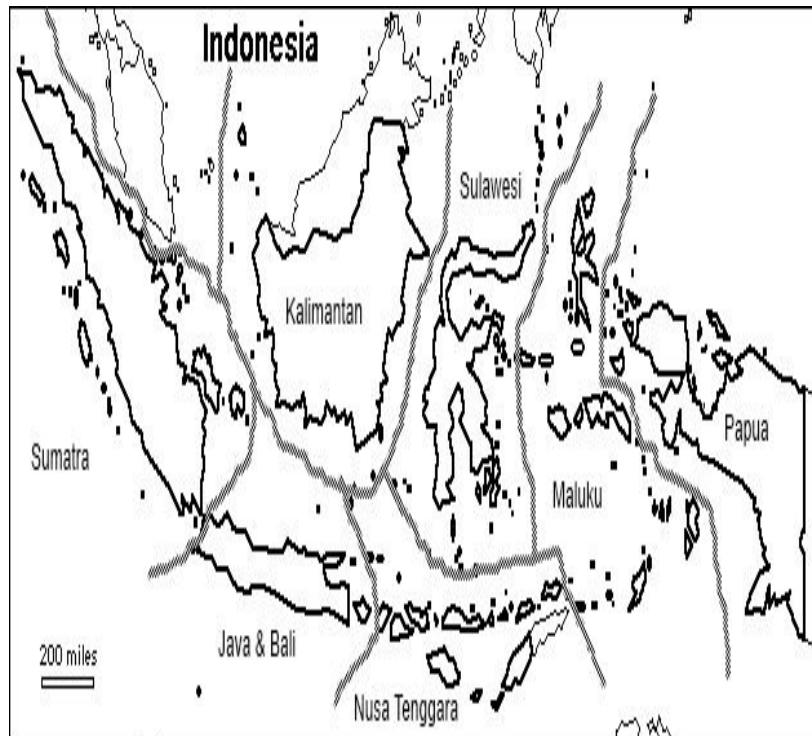
In this section, I will examine regional variation in educational achievement levels and attempt to correlate the density of local languages with educational achievement. Unfortunately, it is not easy to get directly comparable statistics since all the available data for educational achievement by region is compiled by province, yet the figures on occurrence of *bahasa daerah* are compiled within wider regions. Aggregation of provincial educational achievement results according to language region, however, will give us a clearer picture of the relationship between regional achievement in education and density of local languages. In what follows we start to develop such a picture. A map showing the boundaries of Indonesia's 33 provinces is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Map of Indonesia Showing Provincial Boundaries



The regions used for compiling statistics on *bahasa daerah* in ethnologue (where the most reliable data on the extent of *bahasa daerah* across Indonesia can be found) are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Map of Indonesia Showing Divisions for Compilation of *Bahasa Daerah* Numbers by Ethnologue (2009)



A comparison of the two maps shows the provinces that occur within each language region. The results of this comparison are shown in Table 1. Also given in Table 1 are population figures for each province. The population figures come from the 2010 Indonesian socio-economic survey (SUSENAS) conducted by the *Badan Pusat Statistik*.

Table 1. A Comparison of Language Regions and Provinces

Language Region	Region Population	No. of Provinces	Province Names	Province Population	
Sumatra	50,630,931	10	Aceh	4,494,410	
			Sumatra Utara	12,982,204	
			Sumatra Barat	4,846,909	
			Riau	5,538,367	
			Kepulauan Riau	3,092,265	
			Jambi	7,450,394	
			Sumatra Selatan	1,715,518	
			Kep Bangka Belitung	7,608,405	
			Bengkulu	1,223,296	
			Lampung	1,679,163	
Java and Bali	140,501,347	7	DKI Jakarta	9,607,787	
			Jawa Barat	43,053,732	
			Banten	32,382,657	9,607,787
			Jawa Tengah	3,457,491	43,053,732
			DI Yogyakarta	37,476,757	32,382,657
			Jawa Timur	10,632,166	3,457,491
			Bali	3,890,757	37,476,757
			10,632,166		

Language Region	Region Population	No. of Provinces	Province Names	Province Population	
Nusa Tenggara	9,184,039	2	Nusa Tenggara Barat	3,890,757	3,890,757
			Nusa Tenggara Timur	4,500,212	4,500,212
Kalimantan	13,787,831	4	Kalimantan Barat	4,395,983	4,395,983
			Kalimantan Tengah	2,212,089	2,212,089
			Kalimantan Selatan	3,626,616	3,626,616
			Kalimantan Timur	3,553,143	3,553,143
Sulawesi	17,371,782	6	Sulawesi Utara	2,270,596	2,635,009
			Gorontalo	1,040,164	8,034,776
			Sulawesi Tengah	2,635,009	2,232,586
			Sulawesi Selatan	8,034,776	1,040,164
			Sulawesi Barat	1,158,651	1,158,651
			Sulawesi Tenggara	2,232,586	1,533,506
Maluku	2,571,593	2	Maluku	1,533,506	760,422
			Maluku Utara	1,038,087	2,833,381
Papua	3,593,803	2	Papua	2,833,381	
			Papua Barat	760,422	

Table 2 gives figures on the numbers of *bahasa daerah* spoken in each region, along with population data for each region, and a calculation of numbers of speakers per *bahasa daerah*. Note that there are a number of problems in using the data from Ethnologue as it has been presented. The perennial problem of determining whether or not a variety is a distinct language or simply a dialect of another language is always manifested in the Ethnologue figures. It would be impossible to list in detail all of the individual cases where this is an issue in Ethnologue, so a couple of illustrative examples from the Java and Bali section will have to suffice. Ethnologue lists ‘Badui’ as a distinct language as far as its count of language numbers is concerned, but notes that it is ‘sometimes considered a dialect of Sunda’. It also lists separately Osing and Tenggger which are often considered to be dialects of Javanese. Another issue which inflates the number of languages Ethnologue ascribes to Java and Bali is that a number of languages which have native speaking populations in various parts of the country are listed exclusively in the Java and Bali section. Amongst these are a number of Chinese ‘dialects’ and Indonesian sign language. Although there are shortcomings in the Ethnologue data, it is believed that for present purposes the Ethnologue data should be robust enough for the sorts of comparisons I would like to conduct. Firstly, the problem of language vs. dialect is not confined to any particular part of Indonesia, so we can expect similar shortcomings for all regions to balance each other out overall. As far as the listing of some languages exclusively to Java and Bali is concerned, again, we can assume that this should not make a large difference to any outcome, since in spite of the fact that some more widely spoken languages are listed exclusively in this region, the huge population figures for Java and Bali mean that there are vastly more average numbers of speakers per language than in any other area anyway, even when more widely spoken languages are listed in this section alone.

Table 2. Number of Bahasa Daerah and Population per Bahasa Daerah by Ethnologue Region

Region	Population	No. of Bahasa Daerah	People per Bahasa Daerah
Sumatra	50,630,931	33	1,534,270
Java and Bali	140,501,347	21	6,690,540
Nusa Tenggara	9,184,039	76	120,842
Kalimantan	13,787,831	74	186,322
Sulawesi	17,371,782	114	152,384
Maluku	2,571,593	132	19,481
Papua	3,593,803	274	13,116

As can be seen from tables one and two, in general the highest density of *bahasa daerah* is found the further east one travels in the archipelago. Java and Bali stand out as having the largest numbers of people per language, but Sumatra also has a notably high number. Maluku and Papua have by far the smallest numbers of people per language. Underlying the figures for Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara is a rather uneven picture, where a few large languages (e.g. Bugis and Makassarese in Sulawesi; Sasak, Sumbawa, and Uab Meto in Nusa Tenggara) have boosted the average numbers considerably compared to what we would see if these particular languages had been taken out.

Our next step will be to begin looking at educational achievement levels across the country. The factors underlying educational achievement are complex and it is difficult to find any aggregated data that points clearly to the role instructional language plays in this regard. What follows here is simply a first rough attempt to see what role instructional language might play in educational achievement. I would suggest that more research is needed into the role language plays in educational achievement.

Table 3. Percentage of Population who are illiterate by Province and Age Group, 2010. Source Badan Pusat Statistik-Indonesia, SUSENAS 2010

Province	15-44	45+
Aceh	0.74	9.30
Sumatra Utara	0.51	7.65
Sumatra Barat	0.55	7.29
Riau	0.30	5.99
Kepulauan Riau	0.65	11.12
Jambi	0.68	12.67
Sumatra Selatan	0.37	8.10
Kep. Bangka Belitung	0.65	14.03
Bengkulu	0.82	14.27
Lampung	0.63	15.53
DKI Jakarta	0.19	2.77
Jawa Barat	0.42	11.54
Banten	0.67	13.01
Jawa Tengah	1.32	23.52
DI Yogyakarta	0.62	21.95
Jawa Timur	2.39	26.22

Province	15-44	45+
Bali	2.63	28.40
Nusa Tenggara Barat	6.48	46.33
Nusa Tenggara Timur	3.95	26.70
Kalimantan Barat	3.29	25.46
Kalimantan Tengah	0.45	8.54
Kalimantan Selatan	0.78	12.36
Kalimantan Timur	0.78	9.27
Sulawesi Utara	0.29	1.43
Gorontalo	1.30	10.58
Sulawesi Tengah	1.14	10.94
Sulawesi Selatan	4.04	29.21
Sulawesi Barat	4.94	29.29
Sulawesi Tenggara	1.96	24.43
Maluku	0.80	6.58
Maluku Utara	0.59	13.11
Papua	30.73	36.14
Papua Barat	3.55	10.37
Indonesia	1.71	18.25

Table 4. School Enrolment Ratio (SER) by Province 2010
Source *Badan Pusat Statistik-Indonesia, SUSENAS 2010*

Province	7-12	13-15	16-18	19-24
Aceh	99.19	94.99	73.53	24.11
Sumatra Utara	98.90	92.26	66.94	15.65
Sumatra Barat	98.24	89.51	65.65	21.26
Riau	98.75	92.09	64.54	14.02
Kepulauan Riau	99.35	92.16	66.56	8.64
Jambi	98.27	85.56	56.11	12.81
Sumatra Selatan	98.00	85.41	54.79	12.07
Kep Bangka Belitung	97.10	80.59	47.51	8.90
Bengkulu	98.67	88.25	59.63	16.95
Lampung	98.71	86.62	51.34	9.82
DKI Jakarta	99.16	91.45	61.99	17.91
Jawa Barat	98.29	82.73	47.82	10.38
Banten	98.01	81.70	50.90	11.70
Jawa Tengah	98.95	85.33	53.72	11.34
DI Yogyakarta	99.69	94.02	73.06	44.03
Jawa Timur	98.74	88.82	59.39	12.43
Bali	98.69	89.26	65.22	15.31
Nusa Tenggara Barat	98.26	86.52	57.71	15.39
Nusa Tenggara Timur	96.49	81.24	49.22	14.44

Province	7-12	13-15	16-18	19-24
Kalimantan Barat	97.04	84.48	50.35	11.43
Kalimantan Tengah	98.70	86.83	54.50	11.06
Kalimantan Selatan	97.90	80.59	50.23	12.18
Kalimantan Timur	98.68	92.49	64.76	14.88
Sulawesi Utara	98.30	89.06	56.75	13.30
Gorontalo	96.86	81.78	49.61	12.87
Sulawesi Tengah	97.52	84.17	50.06	14.69
Sulawesi Selatan	97.00	82.63	53.00	18.64
Sulawesi Barat	95.93	77.92	44.54	10.47
Sulawesi Tenggara	97.81	88.17	59.93	18.28
Maluku	98.27	92.85	72.40	21.88
Maluku Utara	97.23	90.76	64.12	17.04
Papua	76.22	74.35	48.28	13.18
Papua Barat	94.04	89.95	58.98	14.45
Indonesia	98.02	86.24	56.01	13.77

Table 3 illustrates illiteracy rates for 15-44 year olds and people of age 45+ by province across the country. The figures come from the Indonesian socio-economic survey (*Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional* or *SUSENAS*) for 2010 from the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS). Table 4 shows school enrolments as a percentage of population by age group in each province and these figures come from the same source.

Although the figures just seen in Tables 3 and 4 provide a start for our comparisons, these need to be converted so that they show regional figures rather than provincial ones. The regional calculations corresponding to the provincial ones given in Tables 3 and 4 are shown in Table 5. These have been reordered from top to bottom by decreasing numbers of people per *bahasa daerah* to facilitate comparisons.

Table 5. Indonesian Illiteracy Rates and School Participation by Age and According to Linguistic Region

Region	People per <i>bahasa daerah</i>	Illiteracy % age 15-44	Illiteracy % age 45+	School attendance 7-12	School attendance 13-15	School attendance 16-18	School attendance 19-24
Java and Bali	6,690,540	0.75	15.93	98.54	84.70	53.05	12.57
Sumatra	1,534,270	0.57	9.9	98.27	88.78	61.38	14.59
Kalimantan	186,322	1.53	15.12	97.94	85.88	54.69	12.45
Sulawesi	152,384	2.74	21.08	97.27	84.05	53.17	16.40
Nusa Tenggara	120,842	5.19	36.32	97.36	83.83	53.38	14.91
Maluku	19,481	0.72	9.22	97.85	92.01	69.06	19.93
Papua	13,116	11.58	17.99	88.77	85.34	55.82	14.07

The most striking thing about literacy rates that can be seen from Table 5 is that Indonesia is clearly being very successful overall in increasing literacy levels across the country. Illiteracy shows a sharp decline between those aged over 45 and those aged under across the whole country. The sharpest declines are in Java and Sumatra where illiteracy is now under one per cent in the younger age cohort. In all areas, however, the increase in literacy is quite large. However, in the Papua region illiteracy remains stubbornly above 10% even though there has been a reasonable decline even here. Illiteracy is also rather high in Nusa Tenggara, where density of *bahasa daerah* is quite strong. In general, illiteracy rates are higher in regions where the most *bahasa daerah* are spoken, but Maluku stands out against this trend. While Maluku is second only to Papua in terms of language density, its illiteracy rate is, along with Sumatra, Java and Bali amongst the country's best. What makes Maluku different from the other eastern regions is not clear.

There does seem to be some correlation between density of *bahasa daerah* and literacy levels displayed in the data above, but the evidence is not overwhelmingly clear. Clearly, the likelihood of success at school is influenced by many other factors than simply the choice of language of instruction. General resources, teacher training, class size and many other things no doubt play a role as well, so these things would also need to be factored in to make better sense of the data on literacy rates.

As far as school attendance is concerned, even more complex factors are at play and a simple equation of years spent at school with educational outcomes is not possible. In some cases, extra years are spent at school because children have to repeat years due to a lack of success. In particular, we should probably look at the numbers still attending school in the highest age group (19-24) as a negative factor rather than a positive one. While having a large proportion of 19-24 year olds attending university or other kinds of tertiary educational institutions is no doubt a good thing, the fact that many 19-24 year olds are still in school can largely be seen as a negative. It may imply that these students have either failed grades and repeated, or missed years of earlier schooling. School attendance in the earlier years may actually provide a better guide to education levels rather than later year attendance. If we look at attendance in the junior years in Table 5 above, the thing that stands out most clearly is that Papua is at the bottom of the table. In all regions except Papua, school is attended by between 97 and 99 per cent of all children between the ages of seven and twelve. In Papua, such a figure is an alarming 88.77% of students. Clearly Papua is a rather extreme outlier in terms of school attendance in the early years. Whether this figure is a result of language of instruction or of other factors, we do not know. At this point though, we do need to recognise the possibility that language of instruction plays a role in early school non-attendance.

While the kinds of aggregated statistics I have had access to cannot in themselves prove whether or not language of instruction has played a role in the significantly lower educational achievements of children from Papua, we should recognise that changes in language of instruction may have beneficial results. The question of whether or not using local languages in education may lead to better results in the Indonesian context should be addressed further by more extensive research.

In the following section I will look at the history of the Indonesian language and its role in Indonesian nationalism in an attempt to explain why there is often institutional resistance to greater use of languages other than Indonesian in the educational system.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDONESIAN AND MALAY

The official language of Indonesia is a standardised form of Riau Malay, one of a large variety of Malay dialects spoken around the country. It was adopted as the official language of the new country when Indonesia declared its independence on 17 August 1945, although Malay had been used as a *de facto* standard in the Dutch colonial administration before that time. Indonesian was first touted as a national language in the *Sumpah Pemuda* ‘Youth Pledge’ made by a group of young nationalists in the then Netherlands East-Indies, at the youth conference held in Bandung on 28 October 1928. The congress declared:

Pertama

Kami poetera dan poeteri Indonesia, mengakoe bertoempah darah jang satoe, tanah air Indonesia.

Kedoea

Kami poetera dan poeteri Indonesia, mengakoe berbangsa jang satoe, bangsa Indonesia

Ketiga

Kami poetera dan poeteri Indonesia, mendjoendjoeng bahasa persatoean, bahasa Indonesia.

The following is an English translation of the declaration:

Firstly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one motherland, Indonesia.

Secondly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one nation, the nation of Indonesia.

Thirdly

We the sons and daughters of Indonesia, respect the language of unity, Indonesian.

The choice of a dialect of Malay as official language was an unusual and important one in a number of respects. To begin with, most newly decolonised countries in other parts of the world chose the languages of the colonialists as official languages for the newly independent states. One has only to look across the African and American continents to see how unusual adoption of an indigenous language is. In addition, Indonesian (or Malay) has never been the language of any dominant ethnic group in Indonesia. The dominant ethnic group in Indonesian politics has always been the Javanese and these people make up something in the order of 30% of the entire population of the country. In spite of this, Javanese was never seriously considered as a national language. While Javanese always had the greatest number of native speakers, Malay had the distinct advantage that it was known as a second language or lingua franca by substantial numbers of people right across the country (and beyond).

At the time of independence, there were a huge variety of different Malay dialects (and other Malayic languages) spoken across the country. In Kalimantan and Sumatra are spoken a variety of closely related Malayic languages which are very similar to modern standard Indonesian. In eastern parts of the country Malay creoles had sprung up in trading centres in places such as Ambon, Kupang, Manado and Ternate. These were at the time spoken as native language by only a relative handful of city residents, but they were widely known by others in the region and used as a vehicle of interethnic communication by speakers of different *bahasa daerah*.

What followed independence was probably one of the greatest language engineering projects that the world has ever seen. In 1959 the *Lembaga Bahasa dan Kesusastraan* 'Division of Language and Literature' was founded within the Department of Education, Teaching and Culture. The *Lembaga Bahasa* had been formed out of the *Instituut voor Taal en Cultuur Onderzoek* 'Language and Culture Research Institute' at the University of Indonesia and the *Balai Bahasa* 'language home' from the Culture Division of the *Kementerian Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Kebudayaan* 'Ministry of Education, Teaching and Culture' which had itself been formed just after independence in 1948. These institutions had been charged with developing national standards for the Indonesian language. Under the guidance of what has since 1975 been known as the *Pusat Bahasa* or 'Language Centre' the Indonesian language has been one of the greatest (largely) unsung successes of the post-colonial world, Indonesian can now be used for all the important functions of a modern nation-state. Laws are written in the language, hundreds of newspapers are produced in it, university courses are taught in Indonesian and university-level text books are written in it. On top of this, the Indonesian language has been a remarkable vehicle of national unity in such an ethnically diverse country as Indonesia and it has had a major role in the promotion of national unity and the political project of Indonesian nationalism.

Indonesia is a country which periodically suffers from restless minorities seeking independence and/or greater autonomy. Various religious groups seek greater political influence for their religious beliefs at the expense of others who follow less popular religions. In a country such as Indonesia, it is hardly surprising that the political elites tend to want to defend and promote such a successful symbol of national unity as the Indonesian language.

Given the potential for significant gains in educational achievement and development that might be attained through greater use of local languages in education, however, the authorities might be persuaded that greater local autonomy in language use at schools may actually help the Indonesian nationalist project rather than hinder it. In Papua, where educational achievement is lowest, where language diversity is highest, and where there are – since autonomy in Aceh – the strongest rumblings for greater independence, local languages have never been an important part of the independence movement anyway. The language of resistance in Papua has always been Papuan Malay. Greater use of local languages would not seem to pose a real threat to national unity in Papua in any case.

Policy makers might also look again at the results of Guatemala's educational changes. In Guatemala, greater use of local languages has led to higher achievements by disgruntled indigenous groups than ever before. It has also led to a greater engagement with wider Guatemalan society and higher levels of Spanish proficiency. Paradoxically, increased use of local languages in schools may actually lead to greater engagement with the Indonesian nationalist project.

NOTE

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