

MIXING OF INDONESIAN ADDRESSING TERMS IN THE LOCAL ENGLISH: MOTIVATIONS AND IDENTITY EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the effect of globalization on language usage, especially in the context of the Indonesian workplace. Within the context of international workplaces where employees often use English to communicate with their foreign colleagues, the researchers found that Indonesian addressing terms such as *Pak* or *Bu* are often mixed in with English. This study considers this phenomenon typical in high language contact situation, and sees the mixing of some Indonesian in the English spoken in Indonesia as a distinct characteristic of the localized English used in the country. Specific patterns and motivations for such mixing of the Indonesian addressing terms in the local English may uncover certain identity expressions by Indonesians as a reaction to globalization. To explore these issues, interviews were conducted with employees of international workplaces in Indonesia to determine: (i) different motivations for mixing Indonesian addressing terms in the local English, and (ii) what the different motivations may reveal about the identities of different Indonesian speakers. Results from the interview reveal that the use of Indonesian addressing terms and the related speakers' identities are largely dependent on social class.

Keywords: addressing terms, language mixing, identity, social hierarchy, exclusivity

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berkaitan dengan dampak globalisasi terhadap penggunaan bahasa, khususnya dalam konteks tempat kerja di Indonesia. Di tempat kerja internasional di mana karyawan sering menggunakan bahasa Inggris untuk berkomunikasi dengan rekan kerja asing, peneliti menemukan bahwa kata sapaan dalam bahasa Indonesia seperti Pak atau Bu sering kali dicampur dengan bahasa Inggris. Studi ini menganggap fenomena ini sesuatu yang biasa dalam situasi kontak bahasa intensif, dan melihat pencampuran bahasa Indonesia dalam bahasa Inggris yang digunakan di Indonesia sebagai ciri khas bahasa Inggris lokal yang digunakan di negara tersebut. Pola dan motivasi dari pencampuran kata sapaan Indonesia ke dalam bahasa Inggris lokal dapat mengungkap ekspresi identitas lokal Indonesia sebagai reaksi terhadap globalisasi. Untuk mengeksplorasi ihwal ini, wawancara dilakukan dengan karyawan di beberapa tempat kerja internasional di Indonesia untuk mengetahui: (i) motivasi dalam mencampur kata sapaan bahasa Indonesia ke dalam bahasa Inggris varian lokal, dan (ii) hubungan antara motivasi tersebut dengan identitas penutur bahasa Indonesia yang berbeda. Hasil wawancara mengungkapkan bahwa penggunaan kata sapaan dalam bahasa Indonesia dan identitas penutur terkait sangat bergantung pada kelas sosial mereka.

Kata kunci: kata sapaan, pencampuran bahasa, identitas, hirarki sosial, eksklusivitas

INTRODUCTION

English has become the global language in recent years, attributing its status to not only the massive number of speakers, but also how wide-spread in the world the speakers are. English has also become the language of choice between non-native speakers who do not share the same native language. This status was built on a long history of British colonialism and maintained by the rise of the United States as a global economic power (Crystal, 2003). Utilizing this historical fact, Kachru (1996) established a model of World Englishes consisting of three circles: The Inner Circle (native English speakers), the Outer Circle (English not native but holds importance), and the Expanding Circle (English holds less importance and is learned as a foreign language). This model shows the diverse contexts in which English is used, categorizing countries into inner, outer, and expanding circles based on their relationship with the language, and how the language is used. In Kachru's model, Indonesia is considered part of the expanding circle because English has little historical or governmental use. English is not recognized as an official language but is still important for communication and is prioritized in the country's foreign language curriculum. Especially in today's globalized world, English plays an important role in Indonesia as an international language, influencing various sectors such as communication, trade, education, and professional development.

In Indonesia, where bahasa Indonesia coexists with numerous other languages, including English, the dynamics and impacts of language contact is intricate and diverse (Woolard, 2000). This creates the ideal language borrowing and mixing environment, which is an essential foundation for linguistic innovation and change (Wei, 2020). One area where such mixing often results in innovative language use is in the field of advertising. On prominent billboards all over the capital city of Indonesia, for example, the following slogan can be seen: *BOOSTAD, for boost your ads*. If analyzed from a standard English grammar perspective, there is a mistake in the slogan. Instead of the preposition *for* in *for boost your ads*, *to* should be used. Alternatively, instead of *boost*, *boosting* may be used. Another example can be seen in the QRIS payment instructions available in various retail outlets: *Scan me if you having problem with QRIS*. Here, the notice omits the copula *to be*, which is ungrammatical in Standard English.

Considering the fact that these examples of deviation from standard English are present in public spaces, on quasi-official platforms, it would seem that these deviations are somewhat accepted by the local speakers of English. Van Rooy et al. (2011) argues that errors or deviations from the standard that have been conventionalized, by way of widespread acceptance or acceptance by authoritative figures, among others, may be considered characteristics of a new English variety. As such, deviations in English usage from the standard should not be seen as mere errors, but should be embraced as linguistic innovations (Jenkins, 2011). One notable aspect of language mixing and innovation involves the notion of culture specific items (Kuleli, 2019). This terminology stems from translation studies, whereby items that are culture specific and unique are not easily translatable into another language. These items typically include material culture like food and architecture, ecology like place names, flora and fauna, social culture like addressing terms, as well as ritual culture, among others (Newmark, 2010). Innovative Indonesian English speakers who are multilingual often opt to keep the local word for such items, resulting in a mix of local words when they speak English. This situation has been described by Sharifian (2010) as the glocalization of English.

This study is concerned with the glocalization of English particularly in the context of addressing terms. As a part of culture and communication, addressing terms and denoting the person spoken to during a conversation is integral to Indonesian society (Brown & Levinson, 1995). In Indonesia, addressing terms play a pivotal role as linguistic facilitators of social interactions (Errington, 1998). Therefore, Standard Indonesian address terms like *Bapak* and *Ibu*, and cultural terms such as *Mas* and *Mbak* are widely used. Additionally, English address terms like Miss, Ma'am, Mrs, and Mister are commonplace, especially within English-speaking schools in Indonesia. Although both Indonesian and English have addressing terms that might have similar functions on the surface, most are not really equivalent. For example, while *Sir* in English may denote both a direct address term and an honorific bestowed by the monarch, *Pak* in Indonesian, derived from *Bapak*, lacks such a distinction, leading to potential confusion in translation. This ambiguity underscores the influence of language on social and cultural codes (Sanchez-Rada & Iglesias, 2019; Radhakrishnan, 2017).

Despite their pragmatic significance and function in shaping relationships, addressing terms have received relatively limited attention in recent Indonesian studies. Moreover, more research in the Indonesian context is needed to explore the connections between addressing terms and identity, because addressing terms serve as highly significant indicators of identity for speakers, listeners, and analysts, as highlighted by scholars such as Errington (1985a), Kiesling (2004, 2009), Woolard (2008), and Bucholtz (2009). Navigating between English and Indonesian, Indonesian English speakers possess the agency to select which addressing term to employ (Kiesling, 2009). Consequently, understanding the nuances of addressing terms in Indonesian and English contexts is essential in understanding the identity of such multilinguals, and the mixing of Indonesian addressing terms in English conversations presents a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of language, culture, and identity. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors motivate Indonesian speakers to mix Indonesian addressing terms when speaking in English?
2. What do the factors in (1) reveal about the identity of the speakers?

METHODOLOGY

The study is a qualitative research conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia. The following consultants were interviewed to gain insights and answers to the first research question (motivation for mixing Indonesian addressing terms in English conversation): eight individuals consisting of five Indonesians working intensively with international colleagues at an embassy, two teachers at international schools, and a foreigner participant. The interviewers asked semi-structured, open-ended questions from a prepared list of themes. The recorded interviews were then converted into transcriptions, which were used as the data. The researchers employed thematic coding to uncover specific patterns in the participants' motivations for mixing Indonesian addressing terms when speaking English. These patterns were finally used to uncover how globalization in the workplace has affected the identity of the interviewees (second research question).

RESULTS

Transcripts from the interviews conducted reveal a varied pattern of Indonesian addressing terms used amongst Indonesian speakers when they speak English. While the use of Indonesian

addressing terms is common, there are some interviewees who purposefully avoid using them, preferring to use plain names in certain situations, and the English addressing terms in other situations. The authors discovered three big themes amongst the reasons for choosing the Indonesian addressing terms among respondents:

1. Politeness and hierarchical relationships
2. Workplace culture and habits
3. In-group and exclusivity

Politeness and hierarchical relationships

Politeness is an integral part of Indonesian culture, especially in the workplace. Unsurprisingly, many of those interviewed revealed that they prefer to use the Indonesian addressing terms instead of just calling people in the workplace, even foreigners, with just their names. Interview excerpt (1) illustrates this very clearly, in that the interviewee expressed how they feel more comfortable using the Indonesian addressing terms, instead of just names. Furthermore, they mentioned how using the Indonesian addressing terms indicate that they respect their conversation partners.

(1)

E: Gue nyamannya dengan manggil orang itu Bapak dan Ibu gitu kan. Kalau si XX juga sama kayak XXX. Mereka lebih nyaman manggil nama langsung. Tapi kalau gue ya itu tadi. Apa namanya? Dan officer yang gue panggil itu sih sejauh ini gak ada masalah sih. Maksudnya mungkin mereka tau karena kita kan di Indonesia dan itu nama panggilan kepada orang yang kita rasa hormat kan. Ya udah. Ya udah nyaman. Nyaman gitu.

“For me, it’s more comfortable to call colleagues with *Bapak* and *Ibu*. Other colleagues like XX and XXX feel more comfortable calling [foreign] colleagues with just their names, but I’m different. So far, none of the colleagues have any problems with that. I think they understand that they are in Indonesia, and that using Indonesian addressing terms is part of the Indonesian politeness culture. So, I feel comfortable with that.”

Interestingly, there are those who expressed the opposite view. In excerpt (2) from an interview with ‘A,’ the interviewee expressed that using the Indonesian addressing terms *ibu* dan *pak* may seem like they are putting their foreigner colleagues on a pedestal. While E in excerpt (1) sees this as a positive show of respect as part of Indonesian culture, A in excerpt (2) feels that doing this is an act of self-depreciation, not just on themselves, but on other Indonesian colleagues as well.

(2)

A: Untuk kolega asing gue prefer untuk enggak. Karena satu juga di posisi gue I consider the foreigners as a partner. Not as a supervisor atau somebody has a higher status than me.... Karena itu bukan, satu itu mereka juga gak ngerti konsep penghargaan terhadap tua muda. Misalkan contoh bos gue namanya K. Dengan K gue merasa lebih dekat. Akhirnya, pekerjaan lebih oke. Tapi ada few of them yang merasa kalau di pak dan bukan. Karena mereka tahu bahwa addressing terms ini menaikkan status atau menunjukkan status orang, maka cenderung condescending. Makanya, role gua juga sebagai perwakilan local staff untuk improve their quality of life, juga voicing their concerns and voicing their aspirations. Gitu, I cannot have a foreigner see me as lower than me.

“For foreign colleagues, I prefer not to [call them with *pak* or *bu*], because I consider them as partners, not as my supervisor, or someone with a higher status than me... They also do not have this concept of age hierarchy. For example, my boss, K. I feel that calling him just by K makes me closer to him, and it has a positive effect on my work. But a few of them [foreigners] are conscious of these addressing terms, because they understand that using these terms elevates their status, so if they are addressed as such, they become more condescending. As the representative of the local staff [at the workplace], I have to improve their quality of life, voice their concerns and aspirations. I cannot have a foreigner see me as lower than them.”

Workplace culture and habits

Many of the interviewees reported that they use Indonesian addressing terms because it is the custom or a habit. Interviewee D explained that it is simply a habit for them to use *pak* or *bu* in their everyday conversation.

(3)

D: *Gue lebih nyaman aja ya....Kebiasaan aja sih. Kebiasaan aja ya.*

“I just feel more comfortable...it’s like a habit, just a habit.”

Another person, interviewee number 2, expressed something similar, in that they are used to saying *pak* and *bu* as part of their conversation habit.

(4)

2: *...talking about intention where we are using that, yeah, I think there is like **normal things**, so **no intention at all, just like something normal**, something that we usually do, and then they also feel like okay with it and then they also use that when we use it. So yeah, it's kind of **just normal like that**.*

It is interesting to note from excerpt (4) above that aside from the speaker themselves feeling that using Indonesian addressing terms is part of their everyday custom, they also mentioned that the habit is accepted by those around them. From (4), interviewee 2 clearly stated that their conversation partners, even those who are foreigners “feel okay with [using Indonesian addressing terms], and they also use [Indonesian addressing terms] when we use it.” Here, it can be seen that the conversation partners’ acceptance and even participation in using *pak* and *bu* further enforces the habit formation of using Indonesian addressing terms while conversing in English. Excerpt (5) below further shows that even those conversation partners who might first seem reluctant to accept being called *pak* or *bu* eventually accepts this custom. Here, it can be seen from the exchange between E and the researcher that even when E’s supervisor, J, did not seem to be comfortable with being called *bu* at first, eventually J partakes in the custom of calling their colleagues *bu*. Additionally, E feels like they are not pressured to use English addressing terms at work. This shows that using Indonesian addressing terms seems to be an accepted norm.

(5)

I: *Nah lo sendiri nyaman gak memanggil mereka pak dan bu?*

E: *Iya nyaman. Nyaman. Dan sejauh ini mereka nyaman-nyaman aja sih karena kayak J pernah ngomong sama gue. Sebenarnya tidak usah panggil saya bu. Tapi saya tetap panggil dia bu, dan dia manggil gue bu. Dia kasih gue pilihan lagi dan gue menggunakan itu lagi..*

I: Oh. Terus? Terus Mr. Mrs. sama Pak Bu lebih enak mana? Mr. apa? Mr. sama... Manggil itu Mr. dan Mrs. Mr. dan Mrs. sama ibu enak mana? Pak Bu.

E: Balik lagi ke J tadi. Ya menurut gue gue lebih nyaman panggil mereka Bapak dan Ibu. Ya udah. Oh gitu. **Dan selama ini sih fine-fine aja sih ya. Gak ada yang merasa kayak gue harus manggil mereka nama atau Mr. and Mrs. gitu.**

“I: How about you? Do you feel comfortable addressing them [foreign colleagues] with *pak* and *bu*?

E: Yes, comfortable. Very comfortable, and they are also comfortable with it. One colleague, J, told me before that I don’t have to address her with *bu*, but I kept the addressing term; she followed and called me *bu* too. She asked me a few times, but I always stick with *ibu*.

I: And then? Which one is better for you? Mr. and Mrs., or *Pak* and *Bu*?

E: If we go back to the case of J previously discussed, I feel more comfortable calling them *Bapak* and *Ibu*. That’s it. And it’s been okay so far. Nobody feels like I have to call them just by their names or with Mr. and Mrs.”

Moreover, some interviewees reported that using Indonesian addressing terms is actively encouraged in the workplace, as illustrated by interviewee R’s experience at their orientation event.

(6)

R: Jadi pertama kali itu kan ada kita namanya... Apa sih namanya? Induction ya? **Ketika induction itu dijelaskan ada beberapa staf asing yang lebih tertarik menggunakan pak dan bu.**

“What do they call those first day functions? Induction? During the employee induction [orientation], it was explained to us that some foreign staff are also more interested in using *pak* and *bu*.”

From the different excerpts shown in this section, it can be concluded that the use of Indonesian addressing terms is a custom for most of the interviewees. This is part of their everyday life when using Indonesian, and they feel that it is part of their habit that should be brought over even when they speak in English. Such habit formation is strengthened by the acceptance of such custom by conversation partners within the workplace, including those who are foreigners. Most importantly, conversation participants seem to be likely to mimic and participate in this habit; and some workplaces formalize this as part of their new employee onboarding program.

In-group and exclusivity

Another recurring theme in the interviews conducted is the use of Indonesian addressing terms as a tool to form in-group membership and exclusivity. For example, when asked about why R thinks that the use of *pak* and *bu* is encouraged during orientation, they answered with the following.

(7)

R: Mungkin untuk lebih lebih ini lebih merasa **sense of belonging di Indonesia** jadi penggunaan kata itu. Lebih kayak dia itu **lebih dekat sama orangnya**. Karena kan kita sebagai staff Kedutaan itu kan kontak kita orang Indonesia. Jadi penggunaan pak dan ibu itu lebih kayak supaya mereka **lebih dekat ke kontak-kontak mereka**.

“Maybe to give them more of a sense of belonging in Indonesia, so [*pak/bu*] is used. That makes us closer. Because we, as Indonesians, are staff at the embassy and also their point of contact. So, the use of *pak* and *bu* gives them [foreigners] a sense of closeness to their local contacts.”

This excerpt offers an interesting insight into the perception that using Indonesian addressing terms is seen as creating a sense of belonging. In the work environment of R, who works at the embassy, there seems to be a certain degree of separation between local and foreign staff. Using Indonesian addressing terms between them serves as a bridge that makes them closer, almost like a marker that they belong to one group.

Speaker 2 who works in an international school environment expressed similar sentiments on the use of *pak* and *bu* to signal closeness.

(8)

2: *It also actually make us (foreigner parents and local teachers) **getting closer** like that. So, it is like, I mean, yeah, we are. We **have the boundaries, some things that we can talk, like informal talking, but we use that to make it more casual like that.***

Speaker 2 is even more explicit in stating that there are certain “boundaries” between foreigner-parents and themselves as local teachers, but this can be overcome by speaking casually with Indonesian addressing terms. This is interesting because the use of *pak* and *bu* seems to have some duality in that it can be both a marker of respect and a marker of closeness simultaneously. Within the international school environment, teachers must often navigate different situations involving very different conversation partners. In the interviews, it was revealed that while local teachers use Indonesian addressing terms with parents (including foreign parents), many refused to extend the same courtesy to their foreign teacher colleagues. This contrast is clearly shown in excerpts (9) and (10) below. In (9), when asked about addressing foreigner parents, speaker 2 clearly stated that *pak* and *bu* is still used with foreigner parents.

(9)

2: *So, they are familiar with that term. And then **they also call the parents, pak or bu** like that. So usually, we call the parents not with Miss or Mister. Now, **even though the parents are also foreigner, yes, sometimes we still use pak or bu for the parents.***

However, when asked about other foreign teachers, the situation is clearly different as seen in (10). When asked about the possibility of extending *pak* and *bu* to foreign colleagues who are also teachers, the interviewee objected strongly calling it “weird” and assuming that the foreign teachers may not understand the Indonesian addressing terms. In fact, their response also emphasized the identity of their foreign colleagues using words such as “foreigner” and “teaching English as a native speaker,” that clearly delineates their own identity as local teachers from that of the foreign teachers.

(10)

*I don't know. Maybe. I think there will be feels like **weird**. And maybe if **they don't know what Pak means**, what is pak? I think. But if they are usually to hear the something like that, maybe they can still fine with it....*

...I think I still call him Mr....

*...It's not familiar, but it's because he's a **foreigner**.....I think I still stick to the Mr. and Ms. Madam. Because in my school, **they still teach English as a native speaker**. So it must be **weird** when they are teaching English, but we call them Pak or Bu.*

It is clear then, that Indonesian addressing terms are used as a marker of in-group membership, whereby their use signals closeness or acceptance to a perceived community. It is to be noted, however, that refusal to use Indonesian addressing terms is also used to exclude people from this perceived community.

DISCUSSION

Motivations for mixing Indonesian addressing terms in English discussed in the Results section reveals a complex pattern of identity expression. Early studies on the globalization phenomenon predicted that a more globalized world would eventually dilute national identities in favor of collective, transnational identities (Adler & Barnett, 1998; Cronin, 1999). However, in light of the rise of populist nationalism, more recent studies have revealed that globalization has brought about a new and strengthened sense of national identity around the world (Snyder, 2019), with some even calling globalization a hindrance to the formation of transnational identities (Bremmer, 2017). Of course, it is also possible to draw the conclusion that there is no relationship between globalization and the formation of national, local and individual identities. Alternatively, Bearce et al. (2023) argues that globalization is contributing towards a weakening of national identity, but only for elite individuals at the top level. This situation creates a gap between people of different social class, income and educational backgrounds, whereby the elites are influenced by globalization that results in weaker national identities, and stronger transnational identities. People who do not belong to the elite class, on the other hand, are predicted to be largely unaffected by globalization.

Bearce et al.'s (2023) proposition can be used to make sense of the contradictory data seen surrounding the theme of politeness and hierarchical relationships described previously. Interviewee A expressed that they do not use the Indonesian addressing terms, especially with their foreigner colleagues, because that would signal deference, resulting in an emphasis on Indonesian staffs' inferior standing compared to their foreign colleagues. This signals an awareness of the history of Western colonialism and the more egalitarian system present in the Western culture. For A, this global development of equality within the workplace and the associated abandonment of addressing terms wins out over the local Indonesian politeness norms. This suggests a weakening of the national identity in favor of a more global one, resulting in the refusal to use Indonesian addressing terms especially with their foreign colleagues. Interestingly, A is also the only individual interviewed who has quite a high standing within their workforce. A has a supervisory role and is the representative of the Indonesian employees in their workplace.

In contrast, most other interviewees who do not hold such a position in the same workplace claimed that they regularly use Indonesian addressing terms. They indicated that they would like to keep using *pak* and *bu*, as they deem it to be part of the "Indonesian politeness" (excerpt 1). Others are less explicit in expressing the reason why they maintain Indonesian addressing terms in their English, citing mostly "custom", "habit", "comfort", and "normality" as the reasons (excerpts 3 and 4). But we can infer that the interviewees treasure using Indonesian addressing terms as something personal, a part of themselves and are unwilling to give this up in their international workplace. Some even do this when asked by their supervisor to just call them

by their name (excerpt 5). In short, even in a global workplace where they have to use English regularly, many are not willing to fully give up their local culture and customs to adjust to a more global identity. This stands in contrast to A who has a supervisory role (“elite”) and has taken on a much more transnational attitude towards the use of Indonesian addressing terms.

When considering the fact that many interviewees also use Indonesian addressing terms to build in-groups and exclude certain individuals, it becomes even more apparent that many are not quite ready to embrace a transnational identity. Instead, they view themselves as different from “native speaker teachers who teach English” (excerpt 10). They feel like there is a sense of otherness, apparent from words like “foreigner”, “not familiar”, and “weird” used to describe those that they address with *Mr.* or *Mrs.*, instead of *pak* or *bu* (excerpt 10). The interviewees even go so far as to assume that the people they perceive as “other” would also not be able to understand the Indonesian custom of mixing the Indonesian addressing terms in English (excerpt 10). It is important to note that this happens mostly in the international school context, where there is a more egalitarian workplace culture. Again, it can be seen that amongst those who are not elites, there is no indication that individuals are ready to embrace a transnational identity, or that they become much more trusting towards people from other countries, even in the face of globalization and internationalisation in their everyday lives.

CONCLUSION

This study has uncovered three distinct motivations for mixing in Indonesian addressing terms with English in international workplaces within the context of Indonesia: (i) politeness and hierarchical relationships, (ii) workplace culture and individual habits, and (iii) in-group and exclusivity. Upon closer examination of how these motivations relate to the interviewee’s individual identities, it can be concluded that local and national identities still dominate. Only in the case of individuals with supervisory roles, the so called “elites,” can a move towards a more global and transnational identity be seen. This supports a recent study by Bearce et al. (2023) that claimed that there is a growing gap in the effect of globalization on the identities of the elites and non-elites. However, to draw more sweeping conclusions, this study needs to be expanded to include more interviewees from different social, educational, and cultural backgrounds.

NOTE

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