

Chapter 1.3

ELT Intricacies Within the Indonesian Language Policy

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The teaching of languages in Indonesia has been significantly affected in many respects by the political status of the Indonesian language, which has been made dominant in all educational settings. The spread and use of the Indonesian language has enormously enhanced the feelings of nationality among the Indonesians throughout the country. And at the same time, it has also helped governments at the national and regional levels to conduct their governmental affairs and services in effective ways. Certainly an intricate phenomenon, the national language policy in Indonesia has been formulated in different fora, specifically planned to review and revise the existing policy and to accommodate new challenges and developments that occur in the current linguistic scene. Here I will discuss the status of the Indonesian language within the multilingual setting of Indonesia, existing basic language policies, the educational stance of EFL teaching, and the roles of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs at the tertiary level.

The Indonesian Setting

Amid the complex multilingual setting of Indonesia, as portrayed by the presence of 700+ languages (of which more than 150 are spoken by over 10,000 speakers), the socio-political status and function of Indonesian acquire strategic significance. The status of the language is strengthened by Article 36 of the 1945 Constitution, which states that “the state language is the Indonesian language.” Hence, the multilingual atmosphere of the Indonesian nation constitutes a culturally rich blessing, but at the same time presents a challenge that needs further scrutiny.

The smooth acceptance of the Indonesian language as the national language took place during the historic youth pledge on October 28, 1928. Having its origin in languages spoken in the central part of Sumatera, the Indonesian language’s status as the state language was explicitly formalized in the 1945 Constitution, Article 36. In its status as the national language, it has been delineated (Anas 1993) that the Indonesian language functions as (1) a symbol of nationhood, (2) a conveyor of national identity, (3) an instrument for unifying tribes and communities that have different cultures and languages, and (4) a tool for cross-cultural communication. In its function as the official language, the Indonesian language functions as (1) the official state language, (2) the official medium of

instruction in educational institutions, (3) the official language for communication at the national level in social and government affairs, and (4) the official language for development of culture and the use of science and technology.

There is however rivalry between the Indonesian language and the local language in some regions in the country. On the one hand, the optimal strategy regarding language in education is the use of local or ethnic languages. “The rights of ethnic languages are recognized in the 1945 Constitution, saying that these minor languages are to be developed and protected by the government” (Alwasilah 2001, 4). In reality, the local language is indeed the language already proficiently acquired by the students in general, so that the teaching-learning activities could begin as early as possible without any necessary delay due to the acquisition of L2 as the medium of instruction to be used by the teacher. On the other hand, this strategy could endanger efforts to develop nationalism. When school students gain their education through the use of their ethnic language, the ethnic language would automatically gain significant status. This could cause the emergence of contra-national “nationalism.”

The goal of language policy from the political point of view is to support the formation of a nation. Language policy can be implemented not only as a solver of communication problems in multilingual societies, but also as a strengthening factor for national unity (Anas 1993, 10). In the Indonesian context, language varieties could certainly be seen as a mosaic ornamented by hundreds of ethnic languages. If one of the ornaments were taken out, the mosaic would not remain as beautiful. Language policy could be developed on the basis of economic motivations like international communication and marketing.

In a multilingual nation like Indonesia, a variety of language behaviors could become a unifying instrument of the nation, but it could also provoke disunity of the nation. An intricate problem with regard to language and nation recalls the stereotype hypothesis (Williams 1970, 381). This hypothesis states that “one’s evaluational reactions to speech are a stereotyped or generalized version of his attitudes toward the users of that speech.” Simply stated, this hypothesis states that we tend to relate speech type to person kind. Speech types could be in the form of a language, a dialect, or a variety. This stereotyping could affect the behaviors of speakers and listeners in an interactional setting—how one person perceives the message conveyed by the other, what expectations could be held of the other, and so on.

This linguistic problem reflects the linguistic complexity of the multilingual setting and atmosphere of Indonesia, a nation currently struggling to maintain and strengthen its national unity. In this respect, our nation’s nationalism is at stake as our multilingual context could indeed trigger intricate conflict-related factors that may jeopardize the nation’s unity. The spirit of “looking distinctive” and “performing with full freedom” in many instances shown by regional activists has seemingly been counterproductive to our efforts in cultivating our national language. Moreover, the issuance of Law No. 22 (1999) concerning the autonomy of local government could become a difficulty-causing factor in maintaining the Indonesian language as the national language, as one item in the law allows for the possibility of developing more room for the local language.

The Indonesian language has become more open to influences from information technology and the wide use of foreign languages, especially of the use

of English in different forms of international intercourse. Increasing use of foreign languages, especially English, for both governmental and business purposes necessitates reformulation of the status and function of foreign languages. On the other hand, in the context of the country's move towards regional-autonomy-based governance and of the preservation of local cultures, the local languages deserve more thorough attention as well.

What Policy Makers Have to Say

The national language policy in Indonesia has been articulated in different fora, specifically planned to review and revise the existing policy and to accommodate new challenges and developments that occur in the current Indonesian linguistic scene (Hamied 2001). The national language policy issue in Indonesia is certainly an intricate phenomenon. We have to view the linguistic context, first as it regards the Indonesian language as the language of national unity; and, second, as it regards the existence of hundreds of local languages. In addition, foreign languages, especially English, are indispensable tools in global competition and cooperation and for science and technology, as well as for trade, commerce, and other human-interaction activities.

We have updated our language policies in Indonesia at different historical meetings and conferences since the country's proclamation of independence. Moeliono (1981) has noted that the first linguistic meeting in Indonesia that produced historically significant language policies was initiated by *Poedjangga Baroe* (New Poets) at the First Language Congress held in Surakarta in 1938. The Second Language Congress was convened by the government in Medan in 1954, and the Third Language Congress by the National Language Center in Jakarta in 1978.

At the First Language Congress, the Indonesian language was proposed as the official language and as the medium for communication in representative bodies, in courts, and also in legal documents (Moeliono 1981, 66–67). The Second Language Congress, held in 1954, stipulated that language policy should regulate the status and the mutual relationship between the Indonesian language, local languages, and foreign languages. At the Third Language Congress held in 1978 it was agreed that a congress on national culture be convened. As regards language development, a grammar that reflected an established, norm-based language was to become the first priority. The Language Policy Seminar held in Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia on November 8–12, 1999 considered a comprehensive range of linguistic and literary matters, embracing problems regarding Indonesian language and literature, local language and literature, and foreign languages. Later national congresses recommended that the National Language Center become an institution equivalent in power to a Directorate General, reporting directly to the Minister of National Education. And in 2011, the Center became such an institution, called *Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa*. Given the current position reflecting the status of the Indonesian language, both as the national language and

the state language, other indigenous languages have the status of local or regional languages (Hamied 2012).

Each of the local languages in the Indonesian territory has its own functions. The local language serves as the symbol of local identity, the tool for communication among families and communities within the local region. It supports the local culture, as well as supporting Indonesian language and literature, especially with regard to the lexical growth of the national language. Selected local languages serve to support the national language as the medium for instruction at the preliminary stages of education. In certain contexts, the local language can complement the Indonesian language in regional governmental business.

Foreign languages function as the tool for international communication and for accessing the benefits of national development brought about by science and technology. The English language is considered as the first foreign language. In addition, along with Latin and Sanskrit, it is a source for Indonesian language enrichment and development, especially with regard to scientific terminology. Arabic also has a special place in the Indonesian context. Arabic functions as the language for religious matters and activities and for Islamic culture. When necessary, other foreign languages are also used as a source for lexical development of the Indonesian language (Hamied 2012).

The latest language policy also embodies guidelines for language development and cultivation. Regarding language development, three areas are covered, namely research, standardization, and preservation (Pusat Bahasa 1999; 2003; 2008). Research focuses on the use and usage of the Indonesian language and of the local languages. In addition, research on foreign languages is to be carried out to guard against negative impacts on the growth and development of the Indonesian language and to improve the quality of foreign language teaching.

As outlined above, the language policy has set the status and function of the Indonesian language, local languages, and foreign languages and provided guidelines for the development and cultivation of each. However, the linguistic and educational settings have created dilemmas. Should we use and teach Indonesian from the earliest stage in education at all schools and in all multilingual communities, or delay it until the students reach a level of bilingual maturity? Should we teach English as early as the first grade of primary education or even in kindergarten or teach it only when the students have gained sufficient proficiency in the Indonesian language, such as the seventh grade? Must we also take into account the need to recruit qualified language teachers or accept the fact that the government does not have the financial capacity to train and employ new recruits?

In some local language communities there has been a strong movement for the local language to be used as the medium of instruction, at least during the first three years of primary education. When no consideration is given to the level of multilingualism of the school environment, this can bring about problems such as the learning difficulties faced by students whose mother tongue is different from that of the local community and the medium of instruction. A Javanese child who does not have a sufficient level of proficiency in Sundanese and who has to go to school in a rural West Java village has serious difficulty in his/her class activities. The use of local languages as the medium of instruction also impedes cross-regional mobility for the students. Thus, the use of local languages must vary from school to

school and take into consideration the multilingual nature of the school and locality, as well as the need to allow for mobility for the students (Hamied 2012).

With regard to the question of when to teach English, the Ministry of Education has recommended that English can be taught at the primary school. It is not yet a compulsory subject. In some elementary schools, local content subjects are taught in English beginning from grade 4 (BSNP 2006). Opponents argue that introducing English at the primary school may hinder children's learning of the national language. They further point to the lack of readiness among primary school students for mastering more than one language; however, many of these children are already bilingual or even multilingual. Proponents of this idea argue that early exposure to English would better equip students with enhanced multilingual awareness that could itself promote their understanding of their own national language (Hamied 2012). Empirical research to support or challenge either of these opposing arguments has yet to be conducted. In my personal view, foreign language teaching, if conducted in a professional fashion by trained teachers, will not cause harm. But the question that requires an immediate answer is whether we have enough professionally qualified English teachers and adequate teaching-learning facilities to offer English as a foreign language at our primary schools, let alone teachers who can successfully teach content subjects through English.

The key issue in language policy implementation is obviously the issue of whether those who are expected to implement the policy are ready in the forefront, which is in the classroom. In this regard, we refer to availability of the language teachers. Offering any language program, whether it involves the national language, local languages, or foreign languages, requires qualified language teachers. In many schools, however, there are language teachers whose educational background is in a subject different from the language taught. For the many schools that badly need qualified teachers, most local governments cannot afford the training of new recruits. Therefore, the shortage of qualified teachers and lack of financial resources are on-going problems. There are very few local governments that provide a relatively great amount of funding for preparing teachers, but well-planned teacher training and recruitment still need to be developed in a more professional fashion.

Indonesian ELT

We have responded to global challenges through using English at some selected schools, both as a subject and as a medium of instruction for selected non-English subjects. By law, every province and every district is actually required to have at least one such school, and these schools use English as a medium of instruction. These schools must be recognized by the national board of accreditation at the highest accreditation grade. The curriculum should also be school-based and benchmarked against common practices in OECD and other developed countries. Another point most strenuously debated is the requirement to use English in teaching mathematics, science, and other selected core courses (Hamied 2012). Due to concerns such as the rich-poor widening gap, various stakeholders focus more on infrastructure rather than on academic stature, and unavailability of teachers with

adequate English proficiency in those various subjects, which has led to this government program being temporarily aborted.

In retrospect, we have had a long history of interacting with other countries, and hence with foreign languages. To improve our current political and economic standing, intensive communication and relevant support is required from other countries. Bilateral and multilateral interactions with other countries necessitate that many Indonesians need adequate proficiency in foreign languages, especially English. The role of English in the era in which information technology has become so advanced and socially penetrating is both fundamental and strategic. It is fundamental, as information is commonly disseminated in English; it is strategic, as English is also used to introduce our own marketable strengths and capacities to the global community.

Exposure of every individual citizen of Indonesia to different languages is a positive asset for his/her acquisition of new languages, including English. With the tremendous advancement of information and communication technology, exposure to English is a daily phenomenon, and therefore, learning English is thereby automatically enhanced. To take the birth of the Internet as an example, this now dominates many of our lives. According to Internet World Statistics (available online at: www.internetworldstats.com), the number of estimated Internet users was 2,405,518,376 for June 30, 2012. The largest number live in Asia, where there are 1,076,681,059 Internet users. In the list of the top ten Internet user countries, Indonesia is the fourth in Asia with more than 55 million users. Considering that most web pages on the Internet are in English, almost 55 percent of the most visited websites used English as their content language as shown in a study made by *W3Techs* in April 2013 (Wikipedia n.d.), then a substantial portion of Indonesians have daily contact with and exposure to English, including to a wide range of varieties of English (Hamied 2012).

Implementing an English-in-education policy in Indonesia is closely bound up with questions of language assessment, since the competitive pressures on education and student achievement are intense. Assessment can also be of great help in collecting information concerning success or failure in foreign languages, in the form of both standardized and classroom tests. However, most tests are relatively limited as they can only tell us about certain aspects of student achievement. Very often a test is claimed as comprehensive (most commonly referred to in language testing as integrative), and yet due to limited space and time, the so-called integrative test measures only part of what it purports to measure (Hamied 2010). The problem of validity then surfaces. This problem could be further intensified by the fact that validity could be seen from two different perspectives—positivistic and naturalistic (Lynch 1996). The positivistic perspective has a tendency to value internal validity; whereas the naturalistic perspective concentrates on an interpretation that is embedded in and shaped by testees' experiences.

In our TEFL arena in Indonesia, language assessment has been a burning issue for as long as we have been involved in assessment at classroom, regional, and national levels. Regional and national assessments have been regularly administered at different levels of schooling, generating results in the form of English national examination scores (Hamied 2010). Difficulties, dilemmas, mysteries, perplexities, and puzzles have been experienced by both parents and school personnel alike. The test scores have become the “only” tool that determines whether a student can

achieve entry to his or her first choice school. Moreover parents in certain regions know that malpractices exist so that they can have their children's test scores re-arranged or modified to provide them with enhanced educational opportunities. Testing problems exist not only at school, but also in colleges and universities.

The Indonesian government remains concerned about the standard of achievement of the nation's students (Hamied 2010). Therefore, national exams are still considered an important tool for setting national standards to maintain and develop quality education throughout the school system. Until the administration of the 2007 exam however, national exams at and senior high schools involving more than five million examinees had been mainly used as a determinant for passing different school year exams and for school-leaving certification, rather than for the improvement of teaching-learning pedagogy.

English is taught in quite a few primary schools especially in urban areas, and is compulsory in junior and secondary schools (with over 60 thousand schools and with over 18 million students). Yet, there are, on average, only two teachers of English for each school. Therefore one English teacher has to handle some 150 students. These are across-the-board statistics, which, in reality, means that there are schools in which English teachers have to handle even more students (Hamied 2012). So our problems in regard to teacher availability are not solely confined to academic and language proficiency qualifications but also to the issue of teacher recruitment and distribution.

Roles of Teachers Colleges

As indicated above, we still have teachers of English at our schools whose academic background and qualifications do not meet the minimum requirements set out in the Education Law, which is a minimum of a four-year college degree. More than 30 percent of English teachers have no academic qualifications. Deficiencies on the part of the teachers both in terms of the number of teachers and their quality to meet the demands of the task at school need to be addressed by teacher education institutions. In addition to the fact that we still have teachers of English whose academic background and qualifications do not meet the minimum requirements, their level of English proficiency is not convincing either. In 2007 and 2008, more than 27,000 teachers and school personnel were involved in a national assessment using the test of English for international communication (TOEIC). The results were not satisfactory at all. In the 2007 test administration, more than 50 percent of the candidates were categorized at the novice level. Only 15 percent achieved intermediate levels and above. The results suggested that less than 5 percent of teachers and school personnel were at a level capable of teaching subjects through English (Hamied 2012).

The role of teachers in any educational setting is central. As mentioned above, weaknesses on the part of the teachers need to be taken care of by teacher education institutions. At present, we have more private tertiary institutions than public ones offering English language teacher training and education. To prepare teachers with the minimum required teaching capacity, the teacher education

institution needs to obtain A or B accreditation levels which are considered necessary for producing qualified English teachers. Level A accreditation is conferred on a program that has surpassed the minimum standards as outlined in National Standards for Education, and B level accreditation is given to a program which is very close to the minimum standards. However, more than 30 percent of ELT tertiary programs fall below these levels, meaning that they are not qualified yet to train professional English teachers as expected. In this regard, the government still needs to pay heed to those teacher education institutions that are enthusiastically involved in teacher student recruitment but are incapable of conducting a teacher education program that could well prepare English teachers with the minimum capacity to perform at school as expected (Hamied 2012).

Conclusion

Language policies in the Indonesian context, as always, have naturally reflected the multicultural and multilingual setting of Indonesia with various political and linguistic issues entailing, including how much a foreign language could be accommodated in the curriculum and what second or foreign language proficiency levels to attain at particular educational layers in the national education system in the country. As a multilingual setting, Indonesia is likely to have English learners with varieties of English characterized by linguistic features influenced by hundreds of local languages. For an Indonesian learner of English as a lingua franca in the global transaction, the key issue is how to get things across, how to understand and how to be understood; the issue is not primarily native-like English. In addition, arguments against and for the teaching of English at the primary school have been put forward by certain government officials and TEFL experts and practitioners; so have pros and cons regarding the number of hours to be allocated for English at junior and senior secondary schooling. One issue that seems to be supported by all sides is the significance of English for maintaining and improving young Indonesians' competitiveness on the global stage. Conflicting arguments debate how much should be covered in the curriculum and what mechanism should be adopted in ELT implementation and instructional practices at the classroom level. The latter certainly has something to do with teacher capacity and capability, which the teacher education programs at tertiary institutions have a significant part to play in addressing.

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