

# THE IMPLEMENTATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN INDONESIA<sup>1</sup>

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## ***Abstract***

*Indonesia's language policy has become an interesting instance to discuss. Beginning from its diversity, Indonesia consists of over 13,000 islands and has approximately 700 languages among a significant number of different ethnic groups. The diversity of Indonesia faces various challenges in the development and implementation of the national language in order to unite the nation. On the other hand, there have been persistent struggles of the Indonesian government to keep maintaining the national language and preserving the vernacular languages. However, the paradox exists in the implementation of one language policy and the influence of English that would presumably displace the existence of vernacular languages and cultural identities. From the review of literature, this paper examines and critically evaluates the implementations and implications of language policy in Indonesia. Subsequently, for the purpose of the discussion, firstly the writer attempts to describe and discuss the context of language policy in Indonesia and its implication towards the minority languages. Furthermore, the author attempts to discuss the language policy's implementation on education and language teaching in Indonesia and ultimately, summarises the conclusion of the discussion*

**Keywords:** *Language Policy, Bahasa Indonesia, Multilingualism, Vernacular Languages.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The term 'language policy' is still continuing to convey its specific definition, as this particular term often interchangeably collides with the term 'language planning'. It is, then, substantial to make a clear distinction between these terminologies. Schiffman (1996) defined the term language policy as the official authorisation that has been agreed and decided by the legislators in order to be implemented by the society. Additionally, Spolsky and Shohamy (2000) stated that language policy is illustrated as an instrument used by the government to change the use and the status a particular language. In addition to its purposes, language policy is defined as the national language and culture which are functioned as a means of education, job, training and language status (Ager, 1996). On the other hand, the term language planning is the progress of regulating the language and focus on its implementation and status planning in a speech community (Spolsky and Shohamy 2000; Ager, 2001). Therefore, from the definitions, it can be summarised that language policy and language planning are positively associated with each other, as the successful language policy is definitely supported by the language planning.

In the case of Indonesia, its language policy has become an interesting instance to discuss. Beginning from its diversity, Indonesia consists of over 13,000 islands and has approximately 700 languages among a significant number of different ethnic groups (Simbolon, 1999). The diversity of Indonesia faces various challenges in the development and implementation of the national language in order to unite the nation (Paauw, 2009). On the other hand, there have been persistent struggles of the Indonesian government to keep maintaining the national language and preserving the vernacular languages (Simanjuntak, 2009). It is suggested that the more Indonesian language is being observed, the more vernacular or minority languages will be discovered, as in the study of Simbolon (1999), there have been only 410 languages over approximately 700 languages have been investigated. Therefore, in this paper, the author will examine and critically evaluate the implementations and implications of language policy in Indonesia. Subsequently, for the purpose of the discussion, firstly the writer will attempt to describe and discuss the context of language policy in Indonesia and its implication towards the minority languages. Furthermore, the author will attempt to examine the language policy's implementation on education and

language teaching in Indonesia and ultimately, summarise the conclusion of the discussion.

## **2. Context and Implication of Language Policy in Indonesia**

### **2.1. Context**

Prior to the independence of Indonesia in 1945, the language planning has been initiated since long time ago (Simanjuntak, 2009). It was in 1928, the Youth Pledge or “*Sumpah Pemuda*” was conducted in which a thousand of young people declared that Bahasa Indonesia is the unifying language, as stated in the pledge “one land, one nation, one language” (Paauw, 2009), and intended to replace the Dutch language as a means of both formal and informal communications (Wanandi, 2002). Consequently, after the Dutch’s imperialism, Indonesia upheld and spread the value of nationalism to all parts of the nations since its independence which was proclaimed by Ir. Soekarno, the first President of Indonesia on 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, as the embodiment of the nationalist movement and expression for the unity of a multifarious ethnic groups who lived in the archipelago (Bertrand, 2003).

Although the idea of “one land, one nation, and one language” seems to be monolingual, the establishment of sense of identity and sense of nationhood bring all the diverse ethnic community to unite and to avoid any conflicts and other potential risks that could happen among the society (Paauw, 2009). Furthermore, Alisjahbana (1962) states that “the more Indonesian people learned to express themselves as Indonesian, the more conscious they became of the ties which linked them” (p. 29). It was proven when the economic and political instability occurred in 1998, the unity of Indonesian was still kept maintaining by most of the society (Wright, 2004). This is how the government keeps showering the value of nationhood in order to maintain the stability of the nation.

In addition, *Bahasa Indonesia* is basically the root of *Bahasa Melayu* or Malay language which is widely used as a *lingua franca* in the coastal areas of Indonesia in Sumatera, and also widely spoken by several countries in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam (Simanjuntak, 2009). In order to state its own national identity, Malay was renamed as Indonesian in the Youth Congress

which was held on 28th of October 1928. Despite the richness and the number of interlocutors of Malay in Indonesia at that moment, it had been challenged by Javanese language, the most dominant local language compared to others, which was constituted 45 percent of the inhabitants of Indonesia (Kennedy, 1945) and the language itself possessed a multifarious literary tradition (Dardjowidjojo, 1998).

The status of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language is clearly stated in 1945's Constitution, chapter XV (verse 36). Following this, the position of *Bahasa Indonesia* was enforced as the official language in the 1950's Constitution, chapter IV, as it is considered to emphasise the significant value of nationalism which becomes the actionable resolution for the development and the implementation of the Indonesian language policy (Moeliono, 1986).

Furthermore, for the purpose of standardisation, the language seminar was conducted on 16th of August 1972, the spelling standardization was successfully achieved for the language use in written form (Nababan, 1991). In addition to that, the Indonesian Extensive Dictionary or "*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*" has been successfully accomplished in the Fifth Language Congress in 1988 (Simandjuntak, 2009). This is how the language policy and planning enforced by the government in order to strengthen the national language position through standardisation (Simandjuntak, 1972). However, there was an issue of lack of lexical items when Indonesia reaching the status of national language, the language was partially contributed from Javanese vocabularies, but there were several cultural and social restrictions of Javanese vocabularies (Dardjowidjojo, 1998). Therefore, some of the lexical items were borrowed from foreign language, English such as "*komputer, disket, laser, relevan, spiral*" (Dardjowidjojo, 1998: 41).

## **2.2. Implication towards minority languages**

Beside the enforcement of national language, government of Indonesia also promotes the idea of multilingualism or linguistic diversity by preserving and maintaining the diverse vernacular languages in Indonesia (Renandya, 2004). However, in reality, there has been a little attention on the cultivations of the local language, as it is proven by a consecutive language planning and instructions are

authoritatively made by a particular language agency under the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Indonesia (Idris, 2014).

In regards to concerning the development of *Bahasa Indonesia* and the vernacular languages, there have been several attempts enforced by the government, starting from establishing the Language Centre or “*Balai Bahasa*” in 1948, the Language and Culture Institute or “*Lembaga Bahasa dan Budaya*” in 1952, National Centre for Language Development or “*Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa*”, and up to now the Language Board or “*Badan Bahasa*”, all of these institutions are controlled under the Ministry of Education (Idris, 2014).

As a result of the significant expansion of national language, the number of its interlocutors increase immensely. Additionally, it is commonly understood that nowadays most of the Indonesian people are multilingual, they have multiple language competences with, at least, one vernacular language combined with *Bahasa Indonesia* (Lo Bianco, 2012). As the exemplification of my personal language competence, I am originated from *Bugis* ethnicity, I, therefore, can speak Buginese. Furthermore, I can speak *Bahasa Indonesia*, as it is widely used in the educational setting, ranging from primary school until higher education. Moreover, because of my University in Bachelor Degree was based in Makassar city, I am consequently able to speak Makassar variety. In addition to that, I also speak English, as it is important for me to obtain excellent academic resources at Newcastle University. This particular case does not only happen to me, but also many of Indonesian people are multilingual and even acquire more languages. Thus, it can be seen that this particular context reveals the successful of Indonesia in establishing a single language as the official language in a multicultural and multilingual society, and this could also lead to making the relationship *Bahasa Indonesia* and vernaculars become diglossic (Idris, 2014). In this case, the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* is widely used for inter-group communication in a formal setting such as education, law, administration, while vernaculars are generally used for intra-ethnic communication in an informal setting (Nababan, 1991). In addition to that, according to Dardjowidjodjo (1998), the functions of *Bahasa Indonesia* and vernaculars are different, in which the official language is functioned as “business language”, whereas the vernaculars are used as “family language” (p. 45).

The rapid spreading of *Bahasa Indonesia* has become a moot point, whether or not the emergence of *Bahasa Indonesia* could act as a catalyst for the endangerment of the local or vernacular languages. In the current study of Suryadinata, *et al.* (2003), they suggested that the development of *Bahasa Indonesia* has fortified particular languages and also deteriorated others, this is due to the fact that national language is essential for nation-building progress, and however, there are still several parts of minority groups in Indonesia are not fluent to speak *Bahasa Indonesia*, as they do not use it in daily conversation. However, the findings of the study of Suryadinata, *et al.* (2003) has positively contradicted the previous study from Alwi (2000) in which he observed the number of interlocutors of major vernacular languages in Indonesia, and his findings found that the number of speakers were stable over the 1980 until 1990 period. Additionally, Alwi (2000) also argues that the increase use of official language has not considerably declining the locals or vernaculars. This is due to the fact that the position of local languages remains exist and have a role to express the ethnic identities of the interlocutors even in the big city such as Jakarta in which *Bahasa Indonesia* is functioned as a means of intercultural communication (Lowenberg, 1991). Nonetheless, this particular point still need to be updated in a longer period of time.

Despite the fact that there is a wide range of local or vernacular languages in Indonesia, the people are still mutually intelligible by using *Bahasa Indonesia* with many different accents and pronunciations as a major distinction (Nababan, 1991). As a prime example of pronunciation difference between Sundanese and Buginese when uttering Indonesian words. Sundanese interlocutors have a problem of pronouncing variable /f/ and /v/ and pronouncing those variables as /p/ such as “*factor*” becomes “*paktor*”. On the other hand, Buginese people have an issue of pronouncing the final nasal sounds, /m/ and /n/ and pronouncing it as velar nasal /ŋ/ such as “*makan*” becomes /makaŋ/. Therefore, all the stakeholders in the country such as the educational system, the mass media, the civil service, have worked together in order to minimise the major differences among the vernacular varieties and also deal with the increase number of the interlocutors of the language (Nababan, 1991).

Although the domains of use of the locals or vernaculars are restricted in the society (Nababan, 1991), the right of the development and existence of vernacular language are still being guaranteed to be protected (Idris, 2014). This is proven by the

position of vernacular language in Indonesia stated in the Constitution (Explication of Chapter XV, article 36) in which it ensures the maintenance of vernacular languages which are properly preserved by their interlocutors. In addition to that, Nababan (1985) has stated that the spread of *Bahasa Indonesia* has not been seen as a discouragement and threat to the preservation of using vernaculars. Despite the maintenance of vernacular languages, only a few of them have been successfully maintained, especially the in the western part Indonesia such as Javanese and Sundanese which are widely spoken and classified as the larger vernacular languages in Indonesia, and there are still minority languages in the eastern part of Indonesia are being endangered and need to be preserved (Musgrave, 2008). The recent study of Idris (2014) reports that a few varieties such as *Tarwali*, *Kolo* and *Sanggar* are dying in Bima, Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), a province in eastern part of Indonesia, this is due to the fact that most of the interlocutors have shifted the language to *Bahasa Indonesia* and the little awareness of the young speaker to learn the varieties. As a consequence, Idris (2014) has suggested that the language policy and planning that concern on the empowerment of minority groups to maintain or preserve the roles of their local languages need to be implemented or made.

### **3. Implementation in Educational setting and Language Teaching in Indonesia**

In relation with the language policy in educational context in Indonesia, the government has legalised the use of regional or vernacular languages of the students as means of instruction in order to support the teaching process. This particular regulation is allowed in the level of kindergarten and in the first three years at primary school level, as it is regulated in 1950's Constitution No. 4, Chapter IV in section 5. In addition to that, this regulation is also emphasised in the 1989's Constitution No. 30. The main purpose of this consent is that the government considers the perceiving information of the learners in that level is vital, "if it is deemed necessary" (Dardjowidjodjo, 1998: 44). In other words, this particular policy is only applied in rural area where the majority of the learners' daily communicative language is not *Bahasa Indonesia*, while in the big city such as Jakarta, *Bahasa Indonesia* is still used a means of instruction. However, there could be a challenge for schools in the village

where the children have different local languages. For example, the Buginese which the children acquired from their parent in Sidrap regency is clearly noticeable as different from the one acquired by the parent in Enrekang regency, although the location is only separated by the regional border. In this case, the languages are not mutually intelligible, so that, there should be two vernacular languages of instruction in the first three years of primary school in that region. Thus, if this case occurs, Wright (2004) suggests that *Bahasa Indonesia* would be the rewarding choice in order to create an equal opportunity among the society especially in education context.

Although it is noticeable that the construction of language and culture have been recently developed in the education curriculum of Indonesia, Simanjuntak (2009) reports that the awareness of teachers to teach vernacular language only to follow the curriculum rather than to cultivate the value of the cultures to their students. This is because of the lack of concern from teachers (Simbolon, 1999) and the lack of awareness that language truly represents the identity of the interlocutors (Joseph, 2004). Additionally, it is clearly regulated in the primary purpose of the recent curriculum of language teaching in Indonesia is to focus on ‘discourse competence’, in which it concerns on the “changing perspective on language, from a test for nationalism to realistic daily basis roles” (Simanjuntak, 2009: 16). Furthermore, Alwasilah (1998) has suggested that the cultivation of the value of vernaculars should not be restricted by the development of official language throughout the nation.

On the other hand, the widespread of *Bahasa Indonesia* as a national language has brought the most essential factor in the development of literacy and educational system (Paauw, 2009). It is proven when the Dutch’s imperialism in 1930, Moeliono (1993) reports that only 30.8% of the Indonesian population over age of 10 was literate (p. 129). Following this, there has been a significant growth in 1996, after the independence, as Bukhari (1996) confirms that the percentage of inhabitants who is literate in Indonesia was 87.26% (p. 28). This phenomenon embodies the expanding availability of primary education throughout the country, and has a remarkable effect on the literacy of the national language (Paauw, 2009). Furthermore, the idea of literacy in this context is the ability to read and write, and the implication of this could catalyse the opportunity to get a better education and professional career (Simanjuntak, 2009).



In regard to concerning the foreign language teaching in Indonesia, English is considered to be substantial for the development of modern technology and scientific knowledge (Montolalu & Suryadinata, 2007). In addition to that, since the independence of Indonesia, English has become a compulsory subject for both junior and senior high school level in order that the learners would be able to write and read the scientific paper in English (Jazadi, 2008). Furthermore, the existence of English brings a lot of benefits in many areas such as education, business, diplomacy and cultural promotion, which can support the national development (Idris, 2014). On the other hand, the development of English in Indonesia has become a moot point, as the policy makers also consider the negative impact of this language that may cause the national identity and culture (Heryanto, 2007). Despite the negative consequence, government of Indonesia enforces the policies which simultaneously preserve and secure the national identity, while actively keep up with the globalisation and international education standard, and impose the language policies that oratorically intent to overcome the Herderian, 'one nation-one language' ideology (Zentz, 2012).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Ultimately, from the discussion, it can be seen that Indonesia can be categorised as the successful nation in implementing the language policy (Dardjowidjodjo, 1998), although there are several complex issues arise, and that is principally the nature of the multilingual society. Beginning from the paradox of upholding the idea of nationalism by having one language policy, while preserving the value of local culture or vernacular languages.

In addition to the context of language education in the country, there has been several attempts enforced by the government to simultaneously implement *Bahasa Indonesia* as a means of instruction, while also to preserve the vernacular languages by allowing it to be a means of instruction beginning from kindergarten until the first three years of primary school in rural areas (Dardjowidjodjo, 1998). Furthermore, foreign language teaching, English is also important to keep up with the excellent academic resources (Idris, 2014).

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