

LOCAL LANGUAGE AS A MEANS TO BUILD TOLARABLE COMMUNITY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Indonesia is a large nation in terms of geography, population, ethnics, cultures, and vernaculars. Indonesian 1945 constitution guarantees that the ethnics, cultures, vernaculars in Indonesia will be taken care of by the government. But in reality, speakers of many vernaculars in Indonesia are getting less and less. Sneddon states that this is caused by lingua franca and language shift (2003: 203). Vernaculars will be preserved if they are respected, used, and inherited to the following generation. And maintaining them will lead the unity in diversity. Friberg (2011) states that languages that can be maintained are the ones written and can be read. We should not only use our national language, but also our vernaculars in order to maintain our regional languages, our native local identity. And as people of multilingual community, it is better if we are multilingual. For example: Indians are used to speaking five up to six languages, based on the languages spoken by people around them. It should be borne in mind that vernaculars reflect local cultures, local values, local identity. The exposure to regional languages will make people familiar with the languages. And as a result, the people will be familiar with their own cultural values and other people's cultural values. Komorowska (2010) claims that understanding others' languages will promote intercultural competence, understanding and communication between citizens. And this will lead to peace process, to deeper knowledge of other communities and their cultures, and in consequence to promote tolerance.

Key words: Vernaculars, language maintenance, language shift, lingua franca, peace, tolerance, multilingual, multicultural, cultural values, intercultural understanding, inter-cultural competence, endangered language, language decay

Background

Indonesia is a very large nation with a correspondingly large population and great linguistic diversity. It comprises 13,000 islands and a population of approximately 220 million inhabitants. Estimates of the number of languages in Indonesia vary, but Sneddon (2003) proposes a figure of 550 or more.

Areas of higher linguistic diversity like Indonesia always need means of interethnic communication, i.e. lingua franca. Apart from Indonesian, there are regional languages functioning as lingua franca, e.g. Banjarese to communicate in central and

south Kalimantan. This makes the number of Banjarese speakers increase significantly, but that of Dayak speakers decline rapidly.

In 1928, the Indonesian language was declared as the national lingua franca, the official and national language of Indonesia. And in 1945, it was confirmed in 1945 constitution. But the constitution also guarantees the preservation of vernaculars. And since its confirmation as official and national language, Indonesian has become an Indonesian national identity. It has become a common means of communication among citizens and it is the language of most interethnic contacts, the mass media, the government, education.

It is estimated that about 90 per cent of the Indonesian population can speak Indonesian. The success of the “Indonesiation” of Indonesian is done through the government’s active role. But, unfortunately the success in promoting Indonesian is impacting on the minority languages (regional languages) (Kurniasih: 2005). The speakers of many vernaculars are getting less and less which may cause language decay, loss of ethnic identity, cultural values. This may lead to interethnic, intercultural misunderstanding which may cause interethnic conflicts because speaking a regional language means understanding the culture with which it is associated. Tickoo (1995) claims that cultural misunderstanding is a source of conflict.

Based on the reasons above, I write this paper that will discuss the following issues: 1) maintaining vernaculars in Indonesia, 2) ethnic conflicts in Indonesia, 3) promoting peace and tolerance in Indonesia.

Maintaining Vernaculars in Indonesia

Nobody knows how many languages are spoken in the world today, but it is estimated that one-tenth of them are spoken in Indonesia. UNESCO has a strong commitment to maintain the value of the linguistic and cultural diversity, to protect the right to be different of those who belong to specific linguistic and ethnic population (King: 2003). It is done because there are many endangered regional languages and thus they need to be preserved. In this section, the endangered languages and the alternative ways to preserve them will be put forward.

1. Endangered languages

Jansen (2003) states that endangered language is language in the process of dying. He differentiates five stages of endangered language. Stage I is potentially endangered, that is, when the youths are attracted to use the dominant language more and more. Stage II is endangered, that is, when the language and the language variety is no longer spoken by children. Stage III is seriously endangered, that is, when the youngest speakers are 50 years old and above. Stage IV is terminally endangered, that is when there are only a few old speakers left who use the language or language variety. Stage V is the death stage, that is, when there are no speakers of the language or of the language variety left.

Musgrave (<http://users.monash.edu.au/~smusgrav/publications/>, April 20th 2011) claims that one cause of endangered languages in Indonesia is language shift. He explains that such shifts in patterns of language use are occurring throughout the Indonesia nation, and are resulting in threats to the viability of some languages, especially in the eastern part of the archipelago where there are many languages with small speaker populations. The size of the language groups in the east also has consequences for language maintenance. Although official policy recognizes the right of different language groups to maintain their languages and cultures, resources for such activities are scarce.

The other threat of vernaculars in Indonesia is the phenomena that the younger generations like using “colloquial Indonesian”. This variant of the Indonesian language is characterized by a large number of loan words from foreign languages (Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch etc.) but also from regional languages, especially Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese. The immense influence of Jakarta Malay upon Colloquial Indonesian as it is spoken in the cities and larger towns of the Indonesian archipelago can be explained by a continuous move of people who spend some years in the capital and then return to their place of origin, and of course by the influence of the media. Jakarta Malay is dispersed by popular teenager magazines, and by many radio and television programs (Kozok, 2008).

Steinhauer (1994) proposes the general scenario of gradual language death as follows: external pressure, subsequent changes in language behavior, and finally interruption of language transmission to a new generation. The case example of external pressure factor happened to Moi in the Bird's Head peninsula of Irian Jaya where

maintaining the traditional Moi way of life is made difficult by the aggressive presence of logging companies in their homeland. Thus, contact with outsiders has linguistic consequences. This also happened to Bayan Dayaks who gave up their tribal religion and converted to Islam and consciously abandoned their own language to shift to Banjarese as a sign of total conversion. Endangered language may also be caused by disaster, e.g. Tambora language which was destroyed and decay because of the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815.

Steinhauer further explains that increased mobility as an aspect of modernization has its effects on the language behavior of individuals. On the national level, regional languages diminish their prestige. The regional languages are taken over by Indonesian, or have become of secondary importance. Modernization may imply cultural genocide. But this should not be viewed as entirely negative.

The endangered languages were also reported by Subroto et al. (2009). They reported based on their research that “Krama” and “Krama Inggil” level of Javanese are endangered, particularly among the Javanese young generation because the Javanese youth tend to neglect these varieties and because they are not able to use them correctly and appropriately. If no measure is taken to preserve the varieties, thus, the Javanese “Krama” and “Krama Inggil” varieties will soon be left behind and the Javanese society will only have “Ngoko” (Subroto, et al.: 2009).

2. Ways to maintain vernaculars

Responding to the disappearance of many languages and to the endangered languages, in 1953 UNESCO published the expert report on “The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education”, within the context of “Education for all”. This is because most formal education systems tend to underutilize the knowledge and experience that ethnic minority children bring to school (Malone: 2004). Cope and Kalantzis (2000) state that this can minimize our failure of minority and poor children in school. King (2003) states that education in a multilingual country should balance and respect the use of different languages in daily life. Thus, multilingualism is more a way of life than a problem to be solved.

Uniform solutions for plural societies, e.g. the use of national language for education, may be both administratively and managerial simpler, but policy makers disregard the risks involved both in terms of learning achievement and loss of linguistic

diversity. UNESCO promotes the mother tongue instruction in education system. Mother tongue instruction generally refers to the use of the learners' mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Additionally, it can refer to the mother tongue as a subject of instruction. It is considered to be an important component of quality education, particularly in the early years. It's said that the linguistic rights of minority groups are: (1) schooling in their languages, if so desired, (2) access to the language of the larger community and to that of national education system, (3) inter-cultural education that promotes positive attitudes to minority and indigenous languages and the cultures they express, (4) access to international language. Thus, a careful balance needs to be made between enabling people to use local language, national language, and global language.

Concerning the vernacular maintenance in Indonesia, Friberg (2011) proposes that vernaculars are used in the family and in the environment so that the children are not strange with their vernaculars. Parents should not be afraid if their children are not able to speak the Indonesian language because the Indonesian language is always exposed through the written and electronic media every time. Becoming multilingual is another way to preserve vernaculars in Indonesia. It is better if we interact with more than one or two languages as happens in India where people speak five up to six local languages, based on the languages spoken around them. The other important way is by reading and writing in our vernaculars. Languages can only be preserved if they are written and can be read by the following generation.

Malone (2004) strengthens Friberg's idea that reading and writing program are important to preserve vernaculars. She proposes a program found in Asia within non-formal education systems. To help ethnic minority children to speak, read, and write, local communities supported by NGO and occasionally by universities teach them after school or weekend classes.

Subroto, et al. (2009) state that one of the causes of endangered vernacular, in this case Javanese is that the vernacular teacher is not competent, besides the time allotment is not sufficient. Based on their finding, thus, one way to preserve vernaculars in Indonesia is by upgrading the vernacular teachers.

Ethnic Conflicts in Indonesia

As a country with abundant ethnic groups, ethnic tension is potential to occur in Indonesia. Conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds have spread in many places in Indonesia. Too much blood has already been split. The ethnic groups struggle for recognition, equality, for independence.(Ismayilov :(<http://www.google.co.id/>, April 21st 2011) states that ethnic conflicts within a state belong to identity conflicts that are a type of internal conflicts. Besides identity conflicts there are other types of internal conflicts such as ideological conflicts, governance conflicts, racial conflicts and environmental conflicts. The dominant aspect of identity conflicts is ethnic, religious, tribal or linguistic differences. Ethnic conflicts can be defined as conflicts between ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic state, which have been going on some time, which may appear to be unsolvable to the parties caught up in them.

The roots of conflict are different, e.g. discrimination, misunderstanding, economic interest, politic. Ethnic conflicts are often labeled as cultural conflicts because of cultural differences that usually divide ethnic groups. Some examples of ethnic conflicts in Indonesia are: (1) communal violence between migrants from Sulawesi who are mostly moslems and Christian natives of Ambon, (2) Clashes between native Dayaks and Madurese migrants, (3) Violence of anti Chinese (Miah: (<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/>, April 21st 2011).

John (2000) claims that the issue of migrants against indigeneous people is a major theme that runs through communal conflicts in Indonesia. Pudjiastuti (2002) states that the core problem is marginalization of local community which is related with ethnic identity. It is not easy to understand each other soon. They need more time to adapt and understand each other. John (2000) proposes some factors to be done to improve the situation, among others: (1) we need skilled leadership at the national and local levels, which we don't have in Indonesia at the moment, (2) peace pacts and conflict resolution and agreement must be truly achieved, at the moment peace pacts have been almost forced on the population by the government, (3) building understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics.

Promoting Peace and Tolerance in Indonesia

Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and group. Respect for the languages of persons belonging to different linguistic communities therefore is essential to peaceful cohabitation. This applies both to majority groups, to minorities (whether traditionally resident in a country or more recent migrants) and to indigenous peoples (King: 2003). That is why, UNESCO supports language as an essential of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. Learning another language opens up access to other value systems and ways of interpreting the world, encouraging inter-cultural understanding and helping reduce xenophobia. This applies equally to minority and majority language speakers.

It is stated in the previous section that one of the causes of conflict in Indonesia is lack of understanding between ethnic groups, and this can be minimized by building understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics, multilingualism is regarded as a way of life rather than a problem to be solved. By this, hopefully people will have inter-cultural competence. People should be aware that language reflects cultural values that will guide them to behave, to respect, etc. In this section, I will present: (1) Language as the reflection of cultural values, (2) multilingual and inter-cultural understanding.

1. Language as the Reflection of Cultural Values

Each language is a product of a particular culture, and it reflects the culture of the people. Language is more than just the code, it also involves social practices of interpreting and making meanings. It is something people use to express, create, and interpret meanings, and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationship. Thus, there is fundamental relationship between language and culture.

Culture is defined by anthropologists in a various ways. The definition usually includes some notion of shared values, beliefs, expectations, customs, jargons, and rituals (Lazear: 1997). The relationship between language and culture is reflected not only in smaller units, but also in larger units such as in discourse organization. Each language and each culture has its own preference or taste in organizing ideas based on the values it holds.

The connection between language and culture in the lexical aspect is reflected in the language vocabulary. The Arabic language includes various terms that refer to the

specific types of camel because camels are important parts in Arab. Similarly, among the Eskimos, there are many terms for snow because snow is very common in their life. Javanese which is an agricultural society whose people live on the rice, there are many terms that refer to rice: *ketan, ketan ireng, gaga, gabah, beras, menir, sega*.

Concerning the relationship between thought and language, Kaplan (1980) explains that the typical characteristic of English rhetoric is dominantly linear in its development. While the Semitic, the Oriental, and the Romance language groups deviate from the preferred English development. Semitic language group manifests parallel construction, Oriental group is marked by what is called an approach of indirection, and Romance group is in favor of digression.

That language reflects the speakers' cultural values is very clear, e.g. the cultural values of Javanese people are reflected in the Javanese language. Ngadiman (1998) states that Javanese cultural values are: *toto tentrem, ormat, rukun, tepo sliro, andap asor*.

The use of speech levels (*Ngoko, Krama, Krama Inggil*) in Javanese reflects the principle of *ormat* (respect) and thus recognizes each person relative status. *Ngoko* is the lowest level and used when addressing someone of the same status, of the same age or of lower status, such as close friends, younger persons, and subordinates. *Krama* is the middle level and is used when addressing a second person who is fairly respected, for example a new acquaintance and respected younger persons. *Krama Inggil* is the highest level and is used when addressing a second person or talking about a third person who is highly respected, such as teachers, parents, grandfathers, grandmothers, *ustadz*, etc.

Subroto et al. (2009) reported that Javanese young generation tend to neglect these *Krama* and *Krama Inggil* varieties and because they are not able to use them correctly and appropriately. In fact, to the Javanese society, the ability to use *Krama* and *Krama Inggil* is closely related to Javanese manners, attitudes, and daily behaviors in their society. That is why, the Javanese young generation at present seem to have lost their polite Javanese manners, behavior, and attitudes and tend to be impolite and rude. So, it is clear that there is relationship between language and behavior.

Toto tentrem means order and peace. They are mutually independent. Without order, there will be no peace. And without peace, there will be no order. In order to

practice these values, conflict, violence need to be avoided. That is why, when speaking or writing, Javanese people are so careful so as not to hurt the feeling of the interlocutors. This is realized in the indirectness in expressing ideas.

The term *rukun* means harmonious situation. This is achieved if there is willingness to respect and adjust each other. Consequently, one needs to mind the other's existence, to treat all people with tolerance and respect. Harmony will not be achieved if there are conflicts because of misunderstandings. To avoid conflicts, statements, criticisms, warnings, requests are welcomed but they must be expressed in such a way that other people will not be hurt or disappointed. In Javanese, the best way for advancing criticisms, warnings, or requests is in refined, polite way, practicing the art of indirectness.

Thus, language that reflects Javanese values are speech level and indirectness. The indirectness is characterized by the use of metaphors, allegories, an analogy (*bebasan, paribasan, wangsalan, parikan*) (Ngadiman: 1998).

2. *Multilingual and Inter-cultural Understanding*

At this time, people are very mobile, moving from place to place for some reasons: job, travel, new settlement, marriage, etc. With the transmigration program held by the Indonesian government, the people movement to other provinces is getting easier. This means that the people must adapt and get along with the native people. They must learn the new language, the new culture. There must be mutual understandings between the native people and the new comers so that they can build harmonious relationship. If the harmonious relationship cannot be created, conflicts may potentially be appeared as explained in the previous section.

In multilingual community like Indonesia, to be multilingual and multicultural is one way to promote peace and solidarity, to minimize conflicts between ethnic groups. Being multilingual and multicultural means that we maintain our vernacular/ culture, learn other vernaculars/ cultures of the people around us, learn national language, international language in order that we can participate in local, national, international activities.

Steinhauer (1994) states that transmigration has caused linguistically relatively homogeneous areas to become more heterogeneous, especially in the target provinces. Javanese is spoken in every province of Indonesia such as Lampung, North Sumatra,

South Sumatra, Jambi, Riau, Bengkulu, Southeast Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Irian Jaya, Kalimantan. Besides Javanese, several other vernaculars are also spoken in several provinces.

No	Language	Province
1	Sundanese	West Java, Lampung, Central Java, Jakarta
2	Madurese	East Java, West Kalimantan
3	Batak	North Sumatra, West Sumatra
4	Minangkabau	West Sumatra, Riau
5	Balinese	Bali, Central Sulawesi
6	Buginese	South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, East Kalimantan, Jambi
7	Banjarese	South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Riau

Adapted from Steinhauer (1994)

Thus, the regional language is not only spoken in by the native speakers but also by the other ethnics. This is a good phenomena and need to be maintained and promoted to make multilingualism as a way of life, to promote peace and tolerance between ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Being multilingual will impact on the inter-cultural understanding since language reflects the culture of the speakers. King (2003) states that UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. Education should raise awareness of the positive value of cultural and linguistic diversity. The cultural component of language teaching and learning should be strengthened in order to gain a deeper understanding of the cultures, languages should not be simple linguistic exercises, but opportunities to reflect on other ways of life, other literatures, other customs.

Tickoo (1995) terms the inter-cultural understanding as intercultural communicative competence. He states that a speaker with intercultural communicative competence is someone who is able to communicate across cultural boundaries while using a language which originates from cultural and social contexts. Such a speaker becomes an intercultural speaker of a language. Thus, an intercultural speaker is someone who can operate his linguistic competence and his sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language the context in which it is used, in order to manage interaction across cultural boundaries, to anticipate misunderstandings caused by

difference in values, meanings and beliefs, and to cope with the affective as well as cognitive demands of engagement with others.

Byram in Tickoo (1994) defines socio-cultural dimension of intercultural competence in terms of attitudes/ values, ability to learn, knowledge/ knowing that, skills/ knowledge how.

a. Attitudes/ values

Affective capacity and perception of otherness and a cognitive ability to establish and maintain a relationship between native cultures and foreign cultures. This involves attitudes of openness, ability to relate the native and foreign culture, ability to take a role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture, including in situation of conflict.

b. Ability to learn

An ability to gain insight into unknown cultural meanings, beliefs and practices, either in a familiar or a new language and culture. This involves the ability to manage oneself and one's relationship to another culture and its practices.

c. Knowledge / knowing that

A system of cultural references which structures the implicit and explicit knowledge, acquired in the course of linguistic and cultural learning.

d. Skills/ knowing how

A capacity to integrate in specific situations of bicultural contact, e.g. between the culture(s) of speaker and those associated with the target language. It involves an ability to take into account the specific relationships between the cultural identities of the speaker and the interlocutors from a given society.

It is important to emphasize that intercultural competence involves comprehension not only how we understand others but also of how others perceive us. Speakers need to be aware that what they communicate is understood as a function of how others identify them.

One way of developing intercultural competence is through an interconnected set of activities involving (www.tllg.unisa.edu.au/lib_guide/, April 23rd 2011):

- a. Noticing cultural similarities and differences as they are made evident through language

- b. Comparing what one has noticed about another language and culture with what one already knows about other languages and cultures
- c. Reflecting on what one's experience of linguistic and cultural diversity means for oneself: how one reacts to diversity, how one thinks about diversity, how one feels about diversity and how one will find ways of engaging constructively with diversity.
- d. Interacting on the basis of one's learning and experiences of diversity in order to create personal meanings about one's experiences, communicate those meanings, explore those meanings and reshape them in response to others.

Conclusions

Based on the previous discussion, some conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. There are many endangered regional languages in Indonesia because of language shift, modernization, etc., and thus they need to be preserved.
2. Alternative ways to avoid vernacular decay are among others: (a) Mother tongue instruction, (b) Balancing the use of vernaculars, national language, global language, (c) The use of the vernaculars in the family and in the environment, (d) Reading and writing in the vernaculars, (e) Upgrading the vernacular teachers.
3. As a country with abundant ethnic groups, ethnic tension is potential to occur in Indonesia. Conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds have spread in many places in Indonesia. The roots of conflict are different, e.g. discrimination, misunderstanding, economic interest, politic.
4. Ethnic conflicts can be minimized by building understanding and sense of mix diversity ethnics, being multilingual and multicultural is one way to promote peace and solidarity.
5. Nowadays, because of migration, regional language is not only spoken by the native speakers but also by the other ethnics. That is a good phenomena and need to be maintained and promoted to make multilingualism as a way of life, to promote peace and tolerance between ethnic groups in Indonesia.

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