Why is Indonesia so reluctant to use its mother tongues in education and other contexts?

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Outline

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2. The legislative context
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Indonesia and its languages:
255 million people in 2015 (BPS 2014)
707 living languages (Lewis et al. 2016)
The legislative context: The national language

1) 1928, Sumpah Pemuda:
   ‘We the sons and daughters of Indonesia revere the language of unity, Bahasa Indonesia.’

2) 1945, Constitution:
   ‘The language of the State is Bahasa Indonesia.’

3) 2009, Law No 24 on the National Flag, Language, Symbols and Anthem:
   ‘It is obligatory to use Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction in the national education [system].’
The legislative context: The local languages

2002, Constitution (IVth Revision):
‘The State respects and protects the local languages as a national cultural treasure.’

2004, Law No 29:
‘Local governments are obliged to develop, promote and protect local languages and literatures so that they can continue to occupy their positions and functions in social life.’
Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa
(Body for the Development and Promotion of Languages)

- Under the Ministry of Education & Culture
- Tasks include creation of inventory and documentation of local languages
- Language Offices in 30 out of 34 provinces
  
  (Program Unggulan & Prioritas Badan Pengembangan
dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016)

- Sutarsih. 2016. ‘Words used in mantras, charms and incantations as a feature of the Javanese language.’
- Ida Herawati. 2016. ‘Terms used to describe activities of the hands and arms in the Dayak Kanayatn language, West Kalimantan.’
Language in education policy

• 1947-1975 parallel local language and national language school systems at primary level; local language schools used local language as medium in Years 1-3 and Bahasa Indonesia as subject, then reversed in Years 4-6

• 1975-2013 time allocated for local language as a subject in primary schools reduced from 8 to 2 hours per week

• 2013 primary school: ‘local language should be integrated with Art, Culture & Handicraft’

• 2013 junior secondary: ‘Art & Culture may include the local language if desired’

• 2013 senior secondary: ‘local content may include the local language’
Why is Indonesia (707 languages) so different from India (447 languages)?

75 different languages offered in India’s schools, including 31 first languages (Meganathan 2011)

Official language policy of State of New Delhi: Hindi, English, Punjabi, Urdu (Meganathan forthcoming)
Restaurant sign in Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu

Signs in public places in New Delhi:
12 languages, 17 language combinations
(Meganathan forthcoming)
Influence 1: Perception that use of local languages closes off access to development


Dutch colonial period:

- Education for village people was delivered only in Javanese and a few other local languages

- Most Indonesians (except for the ‘aristocrats’) were not allowed access to Dutch-medium education

- Yet it was Dutch that opened doors
Influence 2: The success of Bahasa Indonesia after independence

Alisyahbana (1974):

‘… by raising Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, the language of unity and the official language, the opportunity for the local languages to be developed as modern languages has been cut off … Compared to the status of Bahasa Indonesia … the local languages have been pushed to the back (bahasa daerah sangat dikebelakangkan).’
Influence 3: Perception that local languages are inadequate for use as media of instruction

International Symposium on Language Planning, Jakarta, 2010

HC: ‘Language planning in several Asian nations from the point of view of education’

• Prof Anton Moeliono: ‘Possibly a few major languages might be considered as MOI.’
• Other participants: ‘Impossible!’
Influence 4: Mother tongue instruction leads to linguistic impurity


Keynote speaker: ‘In Indonesia, fortunately, we never hear people mixing languages like they do in Malaysia. This is because we do not have mother tongue medium schools.’
Influence 5: Perceived risk of national disintegration

National Symposium on Curriculum Diversification, Jakarta, 2015

HC: ‘Curriculum diversification through the medium of instruction’

Seminar conclusion:
• No mention of language
• ‘Cultural plurality must be a strength, not a potential source of conflict/disintegration’

‘SARA’
Influence 6: Ambiguity of education policy + monolingualist perception

1955: ‘English is the first foreign language of Indonesia’

1967: ‘English is needed to accelerate development of the nation’ (Kepmen Dikbud No 096)

2007-2013: elite state-funded English-medium school system (RSBI ‘international standard schools’)

When English is prioritised the local languages lose out.
Why does it matter?

- Indonesia’s performance in PISA and TIMSS surveys of competence in reading, science and mathematics is consistently weak; medium of instruction almost certainly has an impact.

- Delivery of health care, especially maternal death rate, awareness of dangers of risky life styles (smoking, unprotected sex, diet).

- Access to justice.
Some positive signs

• More speakers from Indonesia at this conference than any of its predecessors, including some representatives of government

• Several local authorities (*pemerintah daerah*), especially in Bali and West Java, are encouraging use of local languages

• Some small-scale use of local languages as medium of instruction in Papua, Kupang, and Ambon
Permen Dikbud No 24 Tahun 2016:

- New Ministerial decree of 29 June 2016 on core and basic competencies in all subjects and at all levels of education

- encourages use of local language for clarifying explanations and carrying out tasks in teaching of Bahasa Indonesia in primary schools

- e.g. ‘Menyampaikan penjelasan (berupa gambar dan tulisan) tentang anggota tubuh dan panca indera serta perawatannya menggunakan kosakata bahasa Indonesia dengan bantuan bahasa daerah secara lisan dan/atau tulis’