The Politics within the Issue of the Indonesian National Language: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian politics of the national language has long been overshadowed by the interests of the dominant elites and it has tended to serve the ideologies of the power holders. Decisions regarding the national language policy are made top-down and ignore the ideologies of the grassroots people. In the name of the language slogan, "*Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa pemersatu bangsa* (the Indonesian language as the nation's unifying language)*"*, the country's language policy and planning has ardently been promoting Indonesian as the national language, but puts the heritage languages in danger of extinction. In this article, discussion will focus on conflicts over language preferences and assessment of their significance for the development and modernisation of the Indonesian language. This paper will also emphasises on the fact that the conflict is difficult to resolve due to the pluralist dilemma. Despite this dilemma, minority language speakers are able to take the initiatives to exercise their agency, reconstruct their identities and maintain their home languages. They use their heritage languages to appropriate and resist dominant languages. In this paper, such a practice is referred to as *grassroots performativity.*

Keywords: The national language, pluralist dilemma, minority language speakers, identities, home languages, dominant language

INTRODUCTION

The rapid global spread of English has recently forced the Indonesian government to take an educational policy initiative to abolish the teaching of English from the national curriculum for all elementary schools nationwide. The fear, often voiced by the state officials, is that the early

teaching of the English language will only decrease the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* (the Indonesian language) as the national language among school children, making them less proficient in the latter. However, such a policy has ignited a spat among educational observers and practitioners alike for its sensitivity toward the need for the import of the early mastery of English in anticipating the imminent ASEAN integration in 2015, which obliges the use of English as a lingua franca within the ASEAN's member states. This is stipulated in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Roadmap: "Support the citizens of Member States to become proficient in the English language, so that the citizens of the Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) region are able to communicate directly with one another and participate in the broader international community" (p. 69; see also statements on pages 68 and 111).

Meanwhile, Indonesia's language pundits, teachers, as well as social and cultural observers, though acknowledging the importance of the maintenance of the national language and the mastery of English for global purposes, have expressed concerns over the promotion of both the use of the Indonesian language in schools and the unprecedented rise of the numbers of private educational institutions which employ English as medium of instruction at the expense of the use of vernacular languages. They view the enthusiasm of promoting these languages as auguring ill to the fate of hundreds of Indonesia's living indigenous languages. Thus, to raise

an awareness of the looming threat to these local languages, the Indonesian Linguistic Society has of late made the following pledge during the 2014 International Linguistic Congress held in Indonesia:

> "In the past decades, home languages have suffered from a loss of transmission to younger generations. Many youth are no longer able to speak their mother tongue, even though learning the mother tongue provides a child's earliest opportunity to develop their academic potential as well as increasing their aptitude in learning additional languages. We the members of the Indonesian Linguistics Society pledge to pay special attention to the mother tongue languages spoken in our respective regions, to encourage their use, and to help the transmission of these languages to younger generations through education, research and community service."

In this paper, the author will first show that the unresolved conflicts over the preferences over the national, local and foreign languages which have been in existence for quite a long time, and that this has become the legacy of the past Indonesian politics of the national language. As the contemporary discussions on the Indonesian politics of the national language tend to resort to political quietism, the author will then go on to examine and

explain these protracted conflicts in terms of the conceptual framework of *identity politics* (Schmidt, 2006). Finally, I argue that while identity politics can be proven helpful to understand the significance of conflicts in language planning and policy, it views identity as something fixed and stable. Nonetheless, it does not say how identity gets constructed in response to the presence of dominant discourses. To this end, the author shall propose the term *grassroots performativity* as *the politics of location* (Canagarajah, 1999) in order to understand how the grassroots from ethnolingustic minorities exercise their agency by aligning their linguistic competence to diverse semiotic resources to make a space to index their ethnic identity.

CONFLICTS IN THE INDONESIAN POLITICS OF NATIONAL LANGUAGE: HINDSIGHT AND INSIGHT

The Indonesian politics of the national language – now manifested through the national language policy (the plan) and planning (policy implementation)[1] – has always been centring on issues related to the status and functions of the national language, regional languages and foreign languages. With the benefits of hindsight, both the status and functions of these languages can be seen from the consensus of the National Language Congress held on 25-28 February 1975: *Bahasa Indonesia*

(the Indonesian language) occupies its status as the national language. This status is stipulated in the Youth Pledge declared on October 28, 1928, the Indonesia's 1945 Constitution, especially in Article 15, Paragraph 36, and the Law Number 24, 2009. In terms of its function, the Indonesian language serves as the symbol of national pride, national identity and an instrument for unity of people from different cultures and regions. As for the regional languages, their status is considered as a component of national cultures protected in the Indonesia's 1945 Constitution (Article 15, Paragraph 36), while its functions include the symbols of regional pride, regional identity and the instrument of communication in the families and regional communities. Finally, foreign languages, as their names imply, are seen as foreign tongues among the Indonesian and are only taught at certain levels in education institutions in Indonesia. These languages serve as a tool for an international communication, for the process of modernisation of the Indonesian language, and for modern science and technology, which can aid national development.

Interestingly, as it was Indonesia's then *Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa* (the National Centre for Language Development and Cultivation), which was later renamed in 2000 as *Pusat Bahasa* (the Language Centre), that was assigned by the Indonesian government to be responsible for issues pertaining to the national language policy and planning, critiques of

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[1] See Baldauf (2005) for the distinction between language policy and language planning.

the products of national language policy and planning are often directed toward this Centre. For example, with regard to the above formulated national language policy, critics have argued that there is a politically motivated effort in the part of the Language Centre to manipulate the national language (i.e., Indonesian) for serving the political interests of the New Order (see Sneddon, 2003). Similarly, critical scholars such as Heryanto (1995, cited in Sneddon, 2003, pp. 140-141) saw the choice of Indonesian as the national language as elite-centred, pointing out that "the vast majority of the population, which forms the lower strata of the social hierarchy, is practically excluded, or at best marginalised, from the dynamic productive process of legitimate Indonesian." In addition, critics also said that the Language Centre's planning activities are too overly concerned with the formal language – the language used in such domains as education, business, law, government, and the press - neglecting the sociolinguistic aspect of the Indonesian language, which is by nature diglossic, *viz*. the presence of both high and low variants of the language (Sneddon, 2003). Because the Indonesian language has non-formal living variants or dialects as well, as language scholars have argued, considerations about them in the Centre's planning activities have been deemed paramount (Ruddyanto, 2004).

Yet, the often-voiced criticisms of the Indonesian language policy and planning are the Language Centre's tendency to valorise the national language and to elevate it to a position of high national import without rethinking the roles of the regional languages in planning activities. While it is true that both the status and functions of regional languages are acknowledged and valued in the policy, they are viewed by many as only playing an ancillary role. That is, they serve only as "carriers of "tradition" or "historical identity"" (May, 2005, p. 1057). Furthermore, the policy and planning activities have been lambasted due to its sheer disregard to a cultural orientation. Within this context, it is understandable that Alwasilah (2006), one of the staunchest critics of the national language policy, urges that any effort for the revitalisation of the Indonesia's regional language ought to be contextualised within the cultural strategies. His rationale is that the real value of a language lies in its meanings it symbolises, and that implicit in these meanings are the ethnics' cultural values.

Another scholar observes that despite the presence policy that promotes Indonesia's regional languages and protects their survival, the implementation is cast into doubt (Kosonnen, 2014). These criticisms seem to find their justification when the 2013 Indonesian Language Congress, choosing the theme *Penguatan Bahasa Indonesia di Dunia International* (The Strengthening of the Indonesian Language in the International World), produced thirty exclusive recommendations on the internationalisation of Indonesian; however, none of which mentioned the role of Indonesia's vernacular languages.

Another instance that might ignite another conflict came from the enthusiastic endeavours on the part of the Language Centre in promoting the use of Indonesian and in rejecting the use of foreign words. In retrospect, under the leadership of the then head of the Language Centre the late Anton Moeliono, the Centre was entrusted by the New Order to initiate a language project, the goal of which is to prohibit foreign terminologies found in billboards, advertisement, buildings and names of shopping centres and to replace them using mostly the Indonesian equivalents, though one can also find some equivalents taken from certain regional languages. To assist the people in finding the Indonesian equivalents of foreign terminologies, the Language Centre under the auspices of the Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture published a manual on the *Pedoman Pengindonesiaan Nama dan Kata Asing* (the Guidelines of the Indonesianisation of Foreign Terminologies).

It is important to note here that the conflict over the preference of Indonesian and its regional languages over foreign terminologies is reminiscent to the historic clash of the Titans between the two Indonesia's renowned language experts, Anton Moeliono and Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana. As an attempt to modernise the lexicon of the Indonesian language, both scholars were progressive in seeking and adopting terminologies from different languages, with the former tending to resort to either the Indonesian language or its regional languages, and the latter

to foreign influences (both European and Western languages). Moeliono (1989) found it necessary to recycle the available lexicon derived from either Indonesian or its regional languages. "I want Indonesians to be proud of their national language, and making sure Indonesian is used is one of the most effective ways to safeguard it" (Sugiharto, 2009, personal communication). However, Moeliono's preference has often been misunderstood as cultivating a purism attitude among the Indonesian people, and as if he rejected the influx of foreign terminologies in the Indonesian language. Sneddon (2003) clarifies Moeliono's position, saying that "His position…is in part a reaction to the indiscriminate and unplanned adoption of a great many English words, expressions and constructions by the Indonesian press and educated public, even when perfectly good Indonesian words are available (p. 131).

By contrast, Alisjahbana (1971) argued that adopting foreign terminologies would help transform Indonesian people into a modern society that is poised to face the advances in science and technology. "Since the scientific, technological, and other modern concepts were already available and easily assessable in the existing modern languages, the process of the codification of modern Indonesia terms could proceed steadily without too great difficulties" and can unite "Indonesia with the world of science and technology (Alisjahbana (1971, p. 183).

Moeliono's position seems to have formed an important linguistic legacy

among his former protégées. In the post-Moeliono era, the Language Centre under the new headship of Dendy Sugono was even more ambitious in its attempt to raise the people's awareness of using Indonesians in almost all domains by banning the use of foreign terms. Unlike Moeliono who was motivated by desires to enrich the lexicon of Indonesian, Sugono's motive was rather emotional than rational. Probably irked with the excessive use of foreign terms among the Indonesian people, the Language Centre under his direction proposed a language bill (comprising nine chapters and 32 articles, which stipulated that the Indonesian language is given preference over foreign languages in such domains as politics, government institutions, education, business and journalism. The legal action taken by the Centre – in the hope that people can be legally sanctioned and punished should they violate the regulation – seemed to indicate its frustration over its attempt to influence people's language behaviour (Sugiharto, 2007). Quite surprisingly, despite this legal action, people remained recalcitrant, and they still kept using foreign terminologies, mainly those from English.

In sum, these conflicts, which reflect the pressure Indonesia (as one of the nation-states in South-East Asian) is facing hitherto, emanate from two sources: externally and internally (see also May, 1998). Externally, the pressure derives from globalisation where politically and economically powerful countries often impose hegemonic ideologies to other developing countries via amongst other the elevation of the former's cultures and languages. Internally, as a multilingual and multicultural nation state Indonesia faces the pressure from the language minority groups, who insist that their cultural and language ideologies be represented in the national agendas.

IDENTITY POLITICS IN LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFLICTS

The recognition of the roles of politics and ideology in language policy and planning can be said to be a relatively new phenomenon. This is because in its early phase, the field was seen by its proponents as non-political, non-ideological, pragmatic and technicist, adopting the so-called "presentist" approach (May, 2005). Historical evidence suggests that early Indonesia's language policy and language planning activities subscribed this view (see Moeliono, 1989; Sneddon, 2003). This is evident, for example, in the Indonesian Language Centre's language cultivation program whose eventual goal is "to improve language use, ... and to raise the level of communicative competence *of language users* (Moeliono, 1989, p. 5, italics added). This programme had two dimensions, the first having to do with changing language attitudes, and the second being the dissemination of language information (mainly through mass media and language manuals) to language users. This programme, as part of language

planning activity, is akin to Cooper's (1989, p. 45) classic definition of language planning and policy as "deliberate efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocations of their language codes."

In its latter development, the field evolved and began to embrace insights from the works of scholar affiliated in the critical theory, from which political and ideological perspectives were embedded into language policy and planning scholarship (see Tollefson, 2006). From the critical theory vantage point, the fact that conflicts, contradictions and disagreements occur in the formation of the Indonesian politics of the national language needs to be viewed as something natural. The formulation process of the language policy (the plan) and language planning (plan implementation) is in itself ineluctably a political activity, which involves political actors, the planners. Also, as the process of coming into a final language policy decision and the evaluation of its resultant end-products are ripe with differences and fissures in vantage points of view, conflicts are subject to happen, and thus needs to be "dealt with in ways that we call political" (Schmidt, 2006, p. 98).

In this section, drawing on Schmidt's (2006) notion of identity politics, the author will also examine and explain the significance and meaning of conflicts that have occurred in the contexts of the Indonesian politics of national language. Schmidt (2006, p. 97) contextualises the

study of language policy, which he defines as "the development of public policies that aim to use the authority of the state to affect various aspects of the status and use of languages by people under the state's jurisdiction" in terms of the political theory because he believes that language policy activity cannot be divorced from its political actors, along with their political agenda. Linking the study of language policy to insights from political theory, Schmidt also contends that insights from the latter can usefully be used to help illuminate the occurrence of political conflicts over issues of language policy. As he said "...political theory can be quite helpful in enabling us to better understand just what is at stake when political conflicts erupt over issues of language policy" (p. 7). Yet, as it is humans (both as individuals and groups) who act as the political actors playing the political, Schmidt found it useful to reconceptualise the notion of politics from the perspective of an identity construction, hence identity politics.

At the core of the politics of language, I argue, lies a form of *identity politics*, in which language policy partisans compete to shape public perceptions about the "we" that constitutes the relevant political community, and to embody their aims in the language policy of the state (ibid).

The relevance of the notion of identity politics here to language policy and planning conflict is that every individual and group as political communities are always struggling and contesting to represent their identities and ideologies,

thus often creating ideological fissures. With such a conceptual framework in mind, we can argue that the conflicts over language preferences above are motivated by different political or ideological positioning and stances of the scholars. Meolino's insistence on promoting the Indonesian language (see Sugiharto's personal communication, 2009), Alisjahbana's Western-oriented attitude toward the use of Western terminologies and Heryanto's (1995, cited in Sneddon 2003) and Alwasilah's (2006) stances on the elevation of regional languages all clearly mirror identity politics. Moeliono subscribed to the nationalist ideology, while Alisjahbana to Western-oriented ideology. Both Alwasilah and Heryanto tend to represent the pluralist ideology. Thus, *who they are* constitutes identity politics, which matters in their political life.

Without doubt, the conflicts initiated by scholars with different identity politics have brought about significance at least in terms of the relative national language maintenance and modernisation as well as of a critical awareness of minority ethnolinguistic scholars. To begin with, Moeliono's strenuous efforts to boost Indonesian as a modern language through its lexical enrichment bore fruitful results, as many of its creative lexical innovation have been widely used by the Indonesian people. For example, words such as *rekayasa* (engineering), *tenggat* (deadline), *penyelia* (supervisor), *senarai* (list), *kudapan* (snack) and *pelantang* (loud speaker) have become common to the ears of many people. Despite

the people's acceptance of these words, there is also Moelino's legacy which is less popular among the Indonesian people. Words such as *jasa boga* (catering), *warta merta* (obituary), *umpan tekak* (appetizer) and *setakat* (hitherto) are hardly used in either spoken and written communication. They are used only by a limited segment of society such as Indonesian language scholars and the print media. During his tenure as head of the Language Centre, Anton Moelino managed to publish the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Great Indonesian Dictionary) as part of the effort to standardise the lexicon of the Indonesian language (Moeliono, 1988). This authoritative dictionary has undergone a thorough revision (now in its fourth edition), reprinted and renamed the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Pusat Bahasa* (Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language of the Language Centre). In term of the standardisation of Indonesian Grammar, Moelino was also successful in initiating the publication of the *Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia* (Standard Grammar of Indonesian) (Moeliono et al., 1988).

Furthermore, Alisjahbana's political stance on adopting Western languages has contributed to the development and modernisation of Indonesian lexicons. The adoption of foreign terminologies has been seen as useful in narrowing the lexical gap in the Indonesian language. Furthermore, as lexicon in Indonesian is considered insufficient in describing certain new concepts derived from Western

languages, Alisjahbana's thoughts on the borrowing of foreign terminologies have been felt necessary to enrich the semantic fields of Indonesian.

Finally, the language policy and planning conflict initiated especially by scholars advocating the elevation of regional languages at both national and international levels reflects an ethnolinguistic critical awareness. For example, Alwasilah (2006), a Sundanese scholar, has been ambitious in his effort to revitalise the dignity of Sundanese people and propose the renaissance of Sundanese culture in international fora. In fact, minority language scholars' critiques levelled against the ideology of political nationalism has evoked a strong sentiment from the grassroots, resulting in critical consciousness among them of the possible hegemony of dominant languages. Voices of minority language scholars have also partly become the impetus for the grassroots' initiative endeavours to maintain and preserve the existence of regional languages through various creative means, a point I will discuss later. The initiation of these efforts in many cases exemplifies a sort of overt resistance against the prevailing use of the dominant languages.

THE PLURALIST DILEMA

The protracted conflicts over the Indonesian politics of the national language seem to portray what Bullivant (1981, p. x) calls the "pluralist dilemma", which he defines as "the problem of reconciling the diverse political claims of constituent groups and individuals in a pluralist society."

May (1998, p. 274, italics in original) reinterprets this in terms of the problems in "reconciling social cohesion (civism)... with...a recognition and incorporation of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity within the nation-state", arguing that. " In the end, civism must be favoured over pluralism..."and "the 'claims of the nation-state as a whole' – emphasising the apparently inextricable interconnections between social cohesion and national homogeneity – are invariably invoked against more pluralistic conceptions of the nation - state where ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences *between different groups* are accorded some degree of formal recognition." May's conclusion is not surprising, as the notion of *nation* in the phrase of *nation- state* is believed to have been "organized around *coercion* rather than around ideological *consent*" (Blommaert, 2006, italics in original).

Related to Indonesia, while paradoxically the nation was originally established around the ideological consent by young people (hailing from diverse regions) who pledged to embrace one fatherland (Indonesia), one people (the Indonesian people), and one language (the Indonesian language), hence known as the Youth Pledge, the policy and regulation on language it imposed on the people can have coercive effects[2]. The call

[2] For example, a recommendation on the name and information related to media – formulated in the 2013 Conggress of Bahasa Indonesia – imposes a legal sanction to those who violate the Law No. 24, 1990 on the use of Bahasa Indoensia. See also Shohamy (2006) on the possible coercive effects of language policy.

for using the Indonesian language as the only national language as stipulated in the Indonesia's 1945 Constitution and the Law Number 24, 2009 is a clear case in point. It is this legal stipulation that has probably been used as a strong ground to promote the Indonesian language at the national and international levels and to seemingly demonstrate "a denial of practices that point toward factual multilingualism and linguistic diversity" (Blommaert 2006, p. 244). It is therefore no wonder that even an early effort to formulate the country's politics of the national language was concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the development and modernisation of the Indonesian language of the standard variety (see also Moeliono 1989; Sneddon, 2003; Heryanto, 2007).

Sneddon (2003), for instance, has noted that the early goal of Indonesia's language planning and policy was to develop a standard form of Indonesian in order to make it an effective national language. Despite numerous numbers of regional languages and the diglossic sociolinguistic situation, early advocates of language planners in Indonesia concerned primarily with the formal language – the language used in law, education, the press and government businesses, summarily dismissing the non-standard one. As Sneddon (2003) further says:

Any willingness to give colloquial language the dignity of being studied and described would appear to contradict their purposes of promoting the formal language.

Calls to use bahasa yang baik dan benar (good and correct language) mainly refer to improving formal spoken and written language; for many planners, there is a suggestion that formal ('correct') language is the only appropriate variety for any social situation (p. 124).

This statement remains germane until when the recent 2013 Congress of the National language sponsored by the Indonesia's Education and Culture Ministry reiterated the called to promote a good and correct *bahasa Indonesia* in most domains of life. Recommendations 26 and 27 from the Congress, for example, respectively stipulate that the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) need to remind all the broadcasting institutions to use good and correct Indonesian language, and the KPI can rebuke all broadcasting institutions which do not use good and correct Indonesian language.

There is here a deliberate effort to romanticize and sustain the legacy of the past politics of the national language, resulting in what Blommaert (2006) calls "monoglot ideology", which "may not only deny the existence of linguistic diversity, it may also sustain practices that actually and effectively prohibit linguistic diversity in the public domain" (p. 244). State, as Blommaert argues, functions as "the guardian of the monoglot idealization" and "offers (and often impose by coercion) particular ascriptive ethnolinguistic identities for its citizens (p.244)." While

this function augurs well for the anticipation of the imminent 2015 ASEAN integration for the sake of maintaining the use of the national language and promoting a feeling of nationalism through this language, it severely relegates the fate of Indonesia's hundreds of regional languages, a concern most minority languages scholars have expressed.

Interestingly, Indonesia is not the only ASEAN country facing the pluralist dilemma. By way of comparison, Singapore is likewise facing this dilemma. Lee and Norton (2009) reported that there has been a systemic effort taken by the Singaporean government to promote Standard English as the national benchmark in order to increase social cohesion by delegitimising the local variety of English known as Singlish (Singaporean English), which is often linked to identity and culture of Singaporeans. While the proponents of language pluralism fear that the national unification of the city state's multi-ethnics via the advocacy of Standard English leads to the destruction of linguistic and cultural ecology, the government equally expresses fear that "an increase in non-standard English usage was interfering with Singapore's potential for national economic prosperity as well as with its ability to compete with countries that spoke standard English" (Lee & Norton 2009, p. 279).

In sum, as noted in the preceding section, identity politics has helped us to understand the significance of language policy and planning conflicts, especially those voices from minority language scholars that admittedly have partly played a role in raising critical language awareness among speakers of these languages. Yet, despite its usefulness in acknowledging the import, the identity of the *we* in political life and conflicts, the notion of identity politics lacks explicitness in the potential nature of individuals' and groups' agency in resisting the domination of hegemonic language ideologies. For example, it remains silent on how an individual or a group takes actions in negotiating and appropriating dominant languages to gain voice which favours their rhetorical and ideological purposes. To remedy this limitation, the author shall propose a term *grassroot permormativity* as the "politics of location" (Canagarajah, 1999) or 'locus of enunciation' (Canagarajah, 2013) in order to showcase both individuals' and groups' potential to critically engaged with and creatively resist (albeit mostly covert), negotiate, and appropriate dominant languages.

GRASSROOT PERFORMATIVITY AS THE POLITICS OF LOCATION

The idea of grassroots performativity is predicated on the assumption that humans are complex and creative beings that continuously construct and reconstruct their identity through the use of their language, culture and other diverse symbolic resources. The construction and reconstruction of the identity can also be seen as part of the people's efforts to maintain their home languages and

cultures amid the pressure of using other dominant languages. These also portray what Shandu and Higgins (2016) call "discursive (re)production of ideologies" (p. 179). This is the politics of location or locus of enunciation –the construction and shaping of knowledge from one's relative positionality. However, this by no means implies the insistence on purifying one's language and the blatant rejection of dominant languages, the latter having been accused of suppressing the survival of regional languages.

Thanks to the paradigm shift in sociolinguistic scholarship from "a sociolinguistic as immobile languages" to "a sociolinguistic of mobile resources" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 43), contemporary sociolinguistic orientation has generated invaluable insights into how language is now treated not as a monolithic and stable entity, but rather as mobile and dynamic resources which enable one to cross from one language to other languages (see Pennycook, 2010). Studies adopting this new orientation have shown that speakers or writers of a certain heritage language managed not only to maintain their home language, but also to reconstruct it by meshing codes of dominant languages, with the former acquiring new indexicalities in new spatiotemporal contexts (see Canagarajah, 2013a; Sugiharto, 2015). The eventual goal of this practice is the creation of hybrid discourses.

It is important to highlight that the term grassroots performativity entails the importance of the process of aligning the

we (i.e., one's identity politics) or one's *self* with myriads of ecological resources surrounding him/her to achieve desired purposes. It is thus practice-based in its orientation and values multimodality for sources of identity reconstruction or revision (see Canagarajah, 2013b). With this orientation in mind, the pluralist dilemma can be mitigated, though not totally resolved.

In order to understand how this can be done, I will provide three illustrations on the maintenance of regional languages via different strategies: first, the use of the exclusive Javanese (language spoken in Central Java) in a social media like facebook to critically interrogate the domination of political power in Indonesia; second, the use of exclusive Manado Malay (a language spoken in North Sulawesi province) in a pop-song with vulgar contents and the use of code-switching of different languages, *viz*. Sundanese (language spoken in West Java), Indonesian and English in a comedy programme.

The selection of the cases is based on two criteria: the use of pure regional languages without being mixed with the national language, and the distinctiveness of the meaning evoked by certain expressions of the languages. Among the expressions from the samples shown, it is those expressions that bear the notions of vulgarism, cynism, playfulness and insult that were analysed and linked to the resistance theory. The analysis was used in order to reveal what motives undergirded the grassroots in resisting the use of the

dominant language and maintaining their home languages.

First, consider the following poem which tries to mock in an elegant manner the power holders or politicians who –having been elected as the people's representatives in the government – have become insensitive towards the aspiration of the grassroots:

NEGARA KERE II

ingendi dununge katentreman / awit kahanan wis ora nyawisake papan/kanggo pisambat lan ngutahake pangrasane rakyat / sabab kabeh panguwasa / padha rumangsa wis dadi malekat

hee,,panguwasa…!!! / galo sawangan / matamu rak ya weruh ta / bengawane padha asat

iwake megap-megap / padha ngelak gorokane / ya gene kowekok mung pamer esem rupa kucem / kok gendhong, kok indhit / jebul isine mung genthong-genthong mlompong / lan mblegendhuke weteng kadut isi wisa sarta / jerohan rempela atine kawula / sing kok kaniaya

sadawaning dalan sing ana mung pipihan gombal ora pakra

kanggo sumpel kupinge jaran lan / kacamata ireng jebul ora tembus panyawang…!!!

SIKAT…!!! GASAK…!!! SRUDUK…!!! MAJU…!!! ASU…!!!

(Ismawati, 2014, pp. 43-44).

The literal translation might read as follow:

A VERY POOR COUNTRY III

where is the place of peace / because the situation can no longer able to provide a place / for complaining and pouring the people's feelings / because all power holders / all have felt as if they were angels

hi…power holders…!!! / look around / your eyes still can see, can't they? / all the rivers turn dried / the fish is gasping / its throats are thirsty / but why you only show off your bleak-looking smile / you cuddle, you carry / it turns out they are only the empty earthenware bowls / and the rubber-like pot belly which has poison on it and / innards of the people / whom you torture / along the way are only pieces of valueless empty, false promises / used for closing off the horse's ears and / black spectacles which in fact cannot penetrate the sight …!!!

DEFEAT IT….!!! ATTACK IT…!!! BUTT IT WITH OUR HEAD…!!! COME FORWARD…!!! SON OF A BITCH…!!!

The deliberate and exclusive use of Javanese in the posted social critique above is intended to serve the writer's distinctive purpose, which is to satirize the politicians whom she thinks arrogant, snobbish, and insensitive toward the social and economic condition of the grassroots. The use of the

Indonesian language to convey the same critique may not be felt effective, for the language cannot completely capture and may erase the very nuance of the moral lesson the writer wishes to convey. Thus, in the context of strong linguistic nationalism, the use of Javanese for public consumption in social media mirrors an overt resistance, or as in the context of post-colonialism, a resistance to neoliberalism (Kubota, 2016).

The writer eloquently begins his critique by first asking a rhetorical question, a strategic beginning to invite the readers to ponder (with her) about the situation the community is facing now. Then, she likens the situation using a Javanese metaphoric expression of *bengawane padha asat* (the river turns dry), *iwake megap-megap* (the fish is gasping), and *padha ngelak gorokane* (its throats are thirsty). Her purpose here is to describe a painful situation that compels many people to painstakingly struggle to make ends meet. Yet, those who hold the power remain ignorant of, and indifferent to the people's suffering.

Note also that she aligns his critique with diverse ecological resources and symbolisms typical of her ethnic identity. In doing so, he/she tries to base her critique by elevating her community local wisdom. For example, the metaphoric use of the word *bengawane* (river), *jaran* (horse), and *genthong* (earthenware bowls), all of which are familiar words to the ears of the Javanese community. In fact, the community's life is surrounded by these things.

Furthermore, it is quite intriguing to analyse the way the writer "violates" the principle of politeness when at the end of the poem she employs a rather vulgar word ASU and other harsh-sounding and provocative words such as SIKAT, GASAK, SRUDUK. The latter words are commonly used to incite anger. Used in the context above, these words invoke a strong sentiment toward the solidarity of the grassroots to fight unjust practices. In general, the traditional Javanese community, which is diglossic by nature, is known for tightly holding the principle of politeness in communication. A youngster must use a high variety known as the *Krama* when conversing to the elders; yet, the elders are allowed to use the *Ngoko* as the low variety when speaking to the youngsters. In the case of the poem above, despite the writer's elegant use of metaphoric language to locally situate her critique and to mitigate her emotional voice, the use of ASU, SIKAT, GASAK, and SRUDUK at the closing of the poem might not be considered proper by many if used to launch criticisms against the government officials who are supposed to be the country's respected figures. However, this is the politics of location where the writer is trying to subvert the domination of what she probably sees as the unjust political power through the display of his ethnic identity.

Another creative strategy used to help maintain regional languages takes the form of a pop-song containing a vulgar content. Consider the following Manado-Malay written lyric with its Indonesian version:

Ngana kira kita ampas kalapa (kau anggap, aku bekas orang lain-tidak resmi)

Na ramas na buang (kau puas menikmati 'tubuh 'ku lalu kau campakkan begitu saja)

Tasisa santang kong na mo beking minya (setelah kau puas melampiaskan 'nafsu' kau bagi kepada yang lain)

Memang ngana so banya tai minya (kau ternyata pendusta, tak dapat dipercaya)…

Bukang tampa ba colo (saya bukan tempat persinggahan pelampiasan nafsu belaka)

Deng bukang tampa batera cinta palsu (dan bukan tempat pelampiasan cinta palsumu)

(Kudati & Arbie, 2014, p. 562)

The literal English translation reads as follows:

You consider me as the ex-sexually used woman unofficially

You're already sexually satisfied in enjoying my 'body' and then you dumped me

After you're sexually satisfied in releasing you lust, you share me with the other people

I'm not a temporary place for releasing your lust

And I am not a place for releasing you false love

While the Indonesian translated version of the song above sounds offensive, the original Manado Malay does not. Kudati and Arbie (2014) pointed out that the vulgar content in the song contains a deep philosophical outlook about a husband-wife relationship and mirrors the genuine situations faced by the local people in Manado. They also say that written with such vulgarism, the song can easily be understood by the local people, and is therefore so popular that it is often sung at such events as birthday and wedding parties. No less important, the song has been considered an effective means for the preservation of Manado Malay, for the content help to index the ethnic identity of the Manado people.

Finally, another common strategy adopted by speakers to maintain their regional language is through code-switching. Consider the following data obtained from an audio which broadcasts a comedy program titled *Curahan Hati* (A Heart to Heart Sharing) (Mulyanah, 2014, pp. 500-509).

(a) Aku mengeluh dengan hidup ini, aku selalu dicurigai. Aku bertamu ke rumah orang *dibangsatkeun*. Aku *ngetrekan awewe* di jalan, *dicopetkeun*.

(b) Ah sudahlah pokoknya aku mengeluh dengan hidup ini. Aku ke Indomaret *dituturkeun* kasir? *Marukankeun urang rek maok*? *Enya da enya beungeut urang mah beugeut sikasaeun.*

(c) **Please** *deleu* **Beb**. *Ieu mah* bukan tato tapi balas bogo.

These can be translated as follows:

(a) I'm complaining about this life, I'm always suspected. When I visit others' people house, I'm called a thief. When I tease a girl, I'm called a pickpocket.

(b) Just forget it I'm complaining about this life. When I go to Indomaret, the cashier always follows me? They think I want to shoplift? Right my face looks like a face that is deserved to be punched.

(c) Please have a closer look, Beb. This one is not a tattoo but a white spot.

The switching of different codes in the examples above signals the speaker's competence in shuttling into three languages: Sundanese (as his/her home language), Indonesian (as his/her second language), and English (as a foreign language). The use of Sundanese language in the three examples above is deliberate in order to produce perlocutionary effects (humorous). Thus, this regional language is deliberately embedded in both Indonesian and English to convey the intended performative acts, that is, to make the audience burst into laughter. However, more than this purpose, the infusion of the Sundanese code in Indonesian and English depicts the speakers' critical awareness of representing and indexing his ethnic identity as a Sundanese, with hybrid codes ensuing. Also implicit in these switches is the reconstruction of pragmatic ideologies of language and ethnicity that makes the

speaker easily crosses languages. Although the switches in the three instances above may give the impression of lacking serious purposes and aims, we need, as Maher (2010, p. 584, italics added) reminds us through his notion metroethnicities, to understand that even "Ethnicity can be a toy. Something *we can* play with."

The three instances of language preservation above are only a handful of evidence of healthy multilingual practices in many regions in Indonesia. These, despite a heighted linguistic nationalism, are feverishly advocated by the Indonesian government, and despite the external pressure of globalization which compels people to use English, minority language speakers are able to deal with the internal pressure of nationalist ideology and the external pressure of Western-hegemonic ideology by maintaining their regional languages in astonishingly creative ways through everyday linguistic and cultural practices. This indeed exemplifies covert resistance against both pressures. In a recent edited volume *Bahasa Ibu: Pelestarian dan Pesona Sastra dan Budayanya* (Mother Tongue: The Maintenance and the Exquisiteness of Its Literary and Culture) by Khak et al. (2014), scholars hailing from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Indonesia have convincingly demonstrated the vibrancy of multilingual practices in many parts of Indonesian remote regions such as West Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, West Sumatera, Sulawesi, South Sumetera, Papua and Riau, among other. These different regions have their own typical

ways of practicing multilingualism, depending on their respective cultural traditions.

As for the far-flung regions where the orthographic systems of the language are not known, undocumented, or even non-existent, cultural practices which are heavily reliant on the oral medium are of paramount importance for the maintenance of heritage languages. Khak et al. (2014) manage to document scholarly works that show the vibrancy of the practices, many of which include fairy tales, folklores, rituals (such as in marriage, customs, delivery, mourning and religious ceremonies), *pantun* (traditional poem) reading, animal-loving practices, artistic performances (such as plays, puppet shows), traditional songs, mantra reading, and other mythic rituals.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What implications do the instances of grassroots performativity shown above have especially for the pluralist dilemma? Admittedly, while contesting voices emanating from two different camps – those affiliating with the nationalist ideology (against English) and those adhering to the pluralist ideology (against the feverish promotion of Indonesian) – have their own significance in throwing light on the controversies over the Indonesian politics of the national language, we should not lose sight of the fact that the grassroots language speakers through their everyday linguistic and cultural practices (grassroots performativity) are able to exercise their

agency by creatively devising ways of maintaining their home languages from both external and internal linguistic pressures. Through these practices they are able to covertly display resistance to the exhortation of using the national language in many linguistic contexts. Quite interestingly, they also show prowess in appropriating other dominant languages to suit their rhetorical purposes.

From the above instances (and of course other ethnolinguistic communities in Indonesian regions) of vibrant linguistic performativity conducted by communities in different regions, the implication for conflicts of language preferences becomes clear. Excessive concerns over the survival of a certain language and its living varieties and over the loss of ethnic identities can undermine language users' potentials to critically engage and deal with the pressure of dominant languages. Similarly, feverish linguistic endeavours to advocate, for example, regional languages in the context of heightened linguistic nationalism will be suspected of spreading linguistic and cultural essentialism.

However, the argument often put forward by the advocates of the nationalist ideology is that the national language can be seriously threatened by the sweeping wave of globalization unless it is safeguarded via the imposition of a strict policy of using the Indonesian language in almost domains of life. Likewise, the proponents of pluralist ideology claim that both globalisation and the elevation of the national language can have devastating effects on the survival

of regional languages. The latter claim is furthered buttressed by the empirical data showing that innumerable numbers of regional languages have vanished, and that many more are on a moribund state, which is of course a cause for concern.

Nevertheless, while this predicament has long been relatively unresolved, grassroots language users are able to find creative ways of settling this quandary. As have been shown previously, they take their own initiative to preserve their regional languages by aligning their linguistic competence with diverse ecological resources and other modalities to make a space for them to index and represent their ethnic identity. Ironically, these vibrant multilingual practices have been summarily dismissed and not been put on a pedestal by the proponents of pluralist ideology when they are engrossed in both past and present language policy and planning conflicts.

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