

English as an additional language in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the forms and functions of English as a 'foreign language' in Indonesia. A brief survey of the historical and current status of English in Indonesia reveals that English has few intranational functions as a dominant code of discourse. However, analysis of data from several sources demonstrates that English is nonetheless having a significant impact on language use in Indonesia, particularly through lexico-semantic and pragmatic contributions to Bahasa Indonesia, the widely spoken national and official language. In complementary distribution with borrowings from other foreign languages, especially Sanskrit, English lexical items are officially or 'spontaneously' borrowed for use in specific domains. These borrowings are often semantically extended, restricted, or totally shifted to provide new registers for Bahasa Indonesia, to foreground a modern identity for educated urbanites and for those who aspire to be like them, and to express or neutralize new values and behavior patterns in Indonesia's rapidly modernizing society. This paper concludes that these functions of English in the linguistic repertoires of many Indonesians warrant its classification in Indonesia as an 'additional' rather than merely a 'foreign' language.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, English as used by non-native speakers in countries where it is not the dominant language has been broadly categorized as English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). ESL in this context refers to the functions of English in such former colonies of Britain or the United States as India, Singapore, and the Philippines, where English continues to be widely used on a daily basis among large populations of non-native speakers in the relative absence of native speakers. In these settings, English retains an institutionalized, often official, status in several *intranational* domains, including government administration and law, banking, education, the mass media, and literature. In contrast, the term EFL is applied in contexts such as Germany, Thailand, and Japan, where English is used by a much smaller percentage of the population and in a limited range of largely *international* domains, such as science and technology, and international business and tourism.¹

This paper will examine the forms and functions of English in such a 'foreign-language' setting, Indonesia.² After a brief survey of the historical and current status of English in Indonesia, I will summarize the national objectives of English teaching there. I will then discuss how, despite difficulties which are being encountered in attaining these objectives, English is nonetheless having a significant impact on language use in Indonesia, particularly through lexico-semantic and pragmatic contributions to the total linguistic repertoire of Indonesians who do not regularly use English as a dominant language of discourse.

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH IN INDONESIA

The islands of present-day Indonesia have a long history of contact with foreign languages. In the pre-colonial era, the two languages having the greatest linguistic influence on the area were Sanskrit, introduced by Hindu priests accompanying Indian merchants

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who settled on the coasts of Sumatra and Java in the early centuries AD, and Arabic, brought as the language of Islam by Moslem traders who began arriving in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Meyer, 1965; Gonda, 1973). The adoption and spread of first Hinduism and then Islam by a succession of kingdoms on Sumatra and Java gave to these languages an important status which continues to this day, particularly in the many Sanskrit and Arabic borrowings in Bahasa Indonesia and many of the regional languages [see Gonda (1973) and Beg (1979)].

Though the Portuguese explorers and missionaries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries likewise contributed many borrowings from their tongue to the indigenous languages of the archipelago, Dutch was the first European language to have a significant impact on the Indonesian people. During the colonial era, many Western-oriented elites began speaking Dutch in their homes. Among professionals in the larger cities, Dutch was used as a code of modernity for domains in which the lexicons of Malay and the regional languages were not yet equipped, such as writing love letters and discussing Western clothing fashions, amusements, and conveniences (Anderson, 1966).

However, prohibition of the Dutch language during the Japanese occupation led to the assumption of many of its prestige functions by Bahasa Indonesia (Ellsbree, 1953; Reid, 1980). This decline in the status of Dutch continued after Indonesia's independence due to the diminishing use of Dutch in the absence of large numbers of its native speakers and the limited international utility of Dutch outside of the Netherlands and her remaining colonies (Sadtono, 1976).³

Concurrently, by the end of World War II, English had become the primary international medium of science and technology, diplomacy, business, and communications, and a significant body of the world's literature had been written in English (Kachru, 1986). Prior to Indonesia's independence, the Dutch had become aware of this increasing international importance of English and had taught it in their Dutch-language secondary schools for the non-European elites. Therefore, when the Dutch left Southeast Asia, Indonesia's new leaders were quick to see its utility in virtually every international domain. During the 1950s, English not only made accessible to Indonesia the latest social, political, and scientific ideas from Western Europe, but propaganda and other printed materials in English which arrived from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China as well (Douglas, 1970). Closer to home, at the end of the colonial era, English was the dominant language of Indonesia's immediate neighbors—Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, and Australia.

In addition, English was also the primary language of the United States, which exerted tremendous political and economic influence on Indonesia almost from the time of Indonesia's independence. Besides extensive material and financial support, the United States sent to Indonesia scores of advisors and consultants from a wide range of disciplines, and trained hundreds of Indonesian scholars and government officials in American universities. Between 1956 and 1964, from just two major Indonesian universities—the University of Indonesia in Jakarta and the Institute of Technology in Bandung—over 750 staff members studied in American colleges and universities under USAID and Ford Foundation programs (Douglas, 1970). This frequent interaction with Americans both in Indonesia and the United States gave many of Indonesia's new elites considerable direct contact with English as a language of modernization.

Thus, due to its utility as a world language, its role as the new lingua franca of the immediate geographical region, and the prestige and power it represented as the dominant language of the United States, English was soon adopted by the Indonesian elites as their

most favored foreign language (Sadtono, 1976). As had earlier been true of Dutch, some knowledge of English rapidly became “the mark of the well-educated man, a symbol of the new elite” (Tanner, 1967: 34).

However, English has never been used as a code of connected discourse among Indonesians to the extent that Dutch was during the colonial period. This is due largely to the relative absence of native speakers of English in Indonesia throughout Indonesia’s history, and to the broad functional range and high prestige which Bahasa Indonesia has acquired since the Dutch withdrew. Thus, the following observation by a government official shortly after independence is probably equally accurate today: “English is not and never will be a social language in the Indonesian community. Neither is it nor will it be the second official language of the administration of this country” (Sadtono, 1976: 35).

This status of English is reflected in Indonesia’s current language policy, according to which foreign languages, especially English as the official “first foreign language” (Sadtono, 1976: 32), are to be used for international communication, for the acquisition of knowledge concerning science and technology, and as sources for the lexical development of Bahasa Indonesia as a “modern language” (Diah, 1982: 26).

In the educational system, English instruction begins in junior high school, with mandatory instruction in English. According to Nababan (1982), every junior high school student (grades 7–9) studies English for 4 hr per week, with considerable work on oral/aural skills to get a basic foundation in English. In senior high schools (grades 10–12), students study English for 3–7 hr per week, depending on their educational stream; the teaching method now shifts to grammar–translation as more emphasis is given to reading.⁴ The primary objective here is to provide a well-developed reading ability among Indonesians who are at or beyond the senior high school level and must depend on English as a ‘library language’ providing access to knowledge and innovations originating in other countries and adequate preparation for university study, where up to 75% of scientific and technical books are still available only in English (British Council, 1975; Sadtono, 1976). The national curriculum objectives for English at this level include mastery of a reading vocabulary of 4000 words by the completion of senior high school (Nababan, 1982). At the university level, instruction in reading skills is given for 1–2 hr weekly for a minimum of 1 year in ‘aplikasi’ English (English for specific purposes), focusing on students’ areas of specialization (Nababan, 1982).⁵

However, this practical and carefully designed English teaching program has been largely unsuccessful in attaining even these rather limited goals. One problem is that most Indonesians, in order to contribute to their families’ income, are forced to drop out of school before reaching even junior high school, where instruction in English begins. Of the minority of elementary school students who enter junior high school, between 70 and 80% drop out before graduating from senior high school and therefore do not complete the English-language curriculum (Diah, 1982).

Among the Indonesians who do complete high school, a 1975 study revealed that, after 6 years of formal instruction in English, senior high school graduates had an average reading vocabulary of 1000 words—compared with the above-cited target in the national curriculum objectives of a 4000-word receptive vocabulary—and no more than 5% could read even simple books in English (Quinn, 1975; Nababan, 1982). As a result, at the university level English cannot be dependably used as a reading language. Although university libraries often hold substantial collections of up-to-date texts in English, most students can obtain the information in these volumes only if their professors can read the books and can then

summarize the contents in lectures or on stenciled synopses in Bahasa Indonesia (Quinn, 1975).

Explanations of these disappointing levels of English proficiency often focus on large-scale problems in the Indonesian educational system. Classrooms, especially on densely populated Java, are still generally overcrowded, hot, and noisy. Many English instructors themselves have inadequate proficiency in English or training in language pedagogy. In addition, salaries are low and teachers must often teach at three or more schools in order to support their families (Sadtono, 1976). Not surprisingly, the best teachers with the highest proficiency in English often leave the school system for employment with private international companies offering higher salaries and better working conditions (Quinn, 1975). With regard to development of reading skills in particular, Indonesia's insular geography poses many obstacles for the distribution of English-language textbooks and other written materials.

However, poor study and teaching conditions alone do not adequately explain the low proficiency in English of most Indonesian students. In regions frequented by English-speaking tourists, such as Bali or Jogjakarta, non-educated Indonesians often become quite proficient in selected registers of English without any formal instruction at all in the language because they must use English with these tourists daily in order to earn their livelihood (Sadtono, 1976). In contrast, the majority of Indonesian secondary-school students may well perceive few practical reasons to master either spoken or written English. They have little opportunity to go abroad or to converse with foreigners in Indonesia; there are few employment opportunities with foreign companies and these are only in the larger cities;⁶ Indonesian television and radio carry almost no English-language programming; and imported English-language films, though extremely popular, are always subtitled in Bahasa Indonesia. Even the reading skills toward which advanced English teaching is primarily directed are of limited use outside the classroom, as the above-mentioned shortage of English-language reading materials in the schools is compounded by a general lack of inexpensive English-language publications in the larger society (Sadtono, 1976). For example, in the late 1980s, Indonesia's four major English-language newspapers had a combined national circulation of only 87,000 (*Europa World Year Book*, 1989).

ENGLISH AND LEXICAL MODERNIZATION

Nevertheless, a small percentage of Indonesians are motivated to become proficient in both spoken and written English for the opportunities that it does offer through overseas study and employment with international companies. Chief among these users of English are the modern leaders and bureaucrats who direct Indonesia's larger businesses, academic institutions, and government agencies. This class, comprising only 1-3% of Indonesia's population, generally come from elite backgrounds, learn English at exclusive high schools and the best universities, and have often studied in English-speaking countries as well (Tanner, 1967).

These scholars, business executives, and government officials can usually speak and write English quite well in communication with non-Indonesians.⁷ Those who have studied in the United States also report using English among themselves in discussions and writing in their area of specialization because, in the words of one such returnee, "the terms are English, we studied it in English, and it's easier to talk about the concepts in English" (Tanner, 1967: 35).

However, as noted above, in most domains of language use, even these elite Indonesians do not use English for connected discourse when they communicate among themselves. Rather, the major impact of English in Indonesia has been these elites' widespread borrowing of English lexical items to create new registers in Bahasa Indonesia for domains of language use associated with modernity.

Language planning

A large number of these borrowings have entered through deliberate corpus planning by official language planning agencies, such as the Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, which have been charged with formally adopting new terminology for Bahasa Indonesia. These bodies generally try to base their decisions on suggestions from experts representing a variety of disciplines, including law, education, economics, the physical sciences, and the humanities. Whenever possible, this new terminology draws on lexical and morphosyntactic elements already available in Bahasa Indonesia and Indonesia's regional languages. In cases where borrowing from foreign languages has been considered necessary, the strategy of incorporating words from English or from other languages has depended largely on the domain and register of language use [see Alisjahbana (1976) and Abas (1978)].

In literature and culture—areas most likely to reflect Indonesian traditions and values—lexical innovations have often been based on Sanskrit, the language of Indonesia's long era of influence from Indian culture during the seventh through the fourteenth centuries (Spitzbardt, 1970). As Stevens (1973: 78) notes, "Indonesians somehow feel that the Sanskrit words are more indigenous, as well as more learned, than their Western equivalents." Examples of such planned borrowings are *kebudayaan*, 'culture' (from *buddhi*, 'intellect, reason'); *mencipta*, 'to create' (from *citta*, 'mind'); *mahasiswa*, 'university student' (from *mahasiswa*, 'great disciple'); and *hastakarya*, 'handicrafts' (from *hastakarya*, 'handmade things') (Sutjipto, 1966; Soebadio, 1969; Spitzbardt, 1970; Stevens, 1973).

In contrast, terminology adopted for use in the modern sciences and technology has more frequently drawn on borrowings from English, such as *metode anekdotal* ('anecdotal method') in psychology, *riset konsumen* ('consumer research') in management, *ekstensi* ('extension') in physiology, *motor starter* ('starter motor') in mechanical engineering, *parental* ('parental') anthropology, *fakta* ('fact') in mathematics, and *pakta* ('pact') in international law (Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, 1984, 1985).⁸

'Spontaneous' borrowings: register

In addition to these planned borrowings, many English loanwords in modern Bahasa Indonesia have arrived "spontaneously" (Stevens, 1973: 74), in that they have been borrowed on a seemingly ad hoc basis by diverse sectors of Indonesian society as needs for new lexical items have been encountered. These borrowings are especially prevalent in the written mass media (Kaehler, 1978), where they are used not only by the journalists who write regularly in these publications, but also by many of the readers, as reflected in English loanwords found in 'Letters-to-the-Editor' sections.

In the press, English borrowings appear most frequently in registers associated with modern, cosmopolitan topics, such as fashion, film, science and technology, and national and international politics and trade. For example, Stevens (1973: 75–76) reports several loanwords in a short newspaper article in which an Indonesian writer describes aspects of mysticism in Indonesia in terms of modern Western psychology. Some borrowings express