

Speech Level in Some Indonesian Regional Languages and Implication for Conservation

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Abstract— Indonesian regional indigenous languages are in decline and their conservation faces considerable challenges. One possible challenge is speech level. This paper aims to describe the existence of speech level in some regional indigenous languages and its possible implication for their conservation. The method comprises policy study, particularly documentary study. The sample included three languages, i.e., Sundanese, Balinese, and Javanese. The result shows the existence of speech level in the three languages. For example, the Javanese language at present has 4 levels, namely, high krama, krama, high ngoko, and ngoko. On one hand, the existence of the speech levels enriches structure and vocabulary. On the other hand, these levels make it difficult for new learners and speakers, particularly the younger generation, to master the languages. This may constitute a constraint for their conservation. Therefore, language experts and speakers of these languages need to consider corpus planning effort to simplify the speech levels in order to ease the difficulty of mastering the languages and support their conservation effort. For Javanese language, ngoko alus is recommended as the standard usage.

Keywords: *Indonesian regional indigenous languages, corpus planning, speech level simplification, language conservation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently in various regions, such as North America, South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia, local or indigenous languages are abandoned by their speakers, who switch to more dominant languages. These more dominant languages include not only imperial languages, such as English, French, Spanish, and Arabic, but also national languages, such as Swahili in Tanzania and Urdu in Pakistan [4].

Indonesia does not escape the trend. For example, Sugiyono, the head of the *Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa* [The Agency for Language Development and Cultivation], of the Ministry of National Education, estimated that by the end of the 21st century only around 10 percent of regional languages may survive [16]. Meanwhile, Endang Turmudi, the Head of Community and Cultural Research Center, Indonesian Institute of Sciences, stated that among hundreds of regional indigenous languages [RIL(s)] in Indonesia, only nine languages, which have script systems, may survive. These include the languages of Aceh, Batak, Lampung, Malay, Sundanese, Javanese, Balinese, Sasak, and Bugis [15].

The decline of Indonesian regional indigenous languages [RIL(s)] needs serious attention. Firstly, they constitute a cultural heritage, not only for Indonesia, but also for the world. Therefore, their extinction would mean the disappearance of some world cultural heritage. Secondly,

their conservation is mandated by the 1945 Constitution, which stipulates (in Article 32, verse 2) that, "The state respects and maintains regional languages as national cultural wealth." According to Jimly Asshiddiqie, a former chair of the Constitutional Court, this article implies that all efforts must be made so that RILs can be sustainable [3].

In order to find effective means to conserve RILs, various constraints that may hinder conservation efforts, need to be identified. There are several factors that can cause indigenous languages to decline [5]. The first includes physical factors, like natural disasters, wars, and disease outbreaks, which may cause the death of speakers. The second is the lack of use of the languages in public domains. This is usually related to the language policy which does not adequately support the indigenous languages. As an example, the uses of indigenous languages might not be allowed in official domains, e.g., as the language in the workplace or as the medium of instruction in education. Their uses in official domains provides an opportunity to develop more advanced structure and vocabulary. Therefore, indigenous languages that could not be used in official communication may stagnate in their development.

The lack of use in official domains affects the third factor, namely, loyalty of speakers towards their own indigenous languages. Because indigenous languages do not develop, gradually these languages can only be used for communication in informal domains and communication with a limited scope, such as in literature and arts. These limitations cause many speakers of these languages to switch to more dominant languages, which can be used for communication in numerous domains. However, in addition to external factors, there are also internal factors that can discourage speakers from using indigenous languages. These internal factors include special script and speech level.

Currently the most widely used script in various languages in the world is Latin. There are several languages that use other scripts, such as Arabic (for Arabic), Cyrillic (for Russian), Kanji (for Mandarin), and Devanagari (for Hindi). In Indonesia, some regional languages have their own scripts but also use Latin script. Speakers of regional indigenous languages (RILs) in Indonesia are more familiar with Latin script, because it is used in Indonesian, the national language, and RILs. Therefore, efforts to use special script for RILs for all purposes, without being accompanied by Latin script, may be less attractive to speakers of the RILs themselves.

Meanwhile, speech level concerns politeness, in which the language used is adjusted to suitable level of respect given to other parties. Various languages generally do not

have speech levels or apply them in a limited way. In Indonesian, for example, this level is seen only in certain words, such as in third-person singular pronouns, where 'ia' ['he', standard] is replaced by 'beliau' ('he', respectful), to refer to people who are respected, like parents or high officials. However, the rest of the vocabulary do not change, for example,

Ilham siswa di sekolah ini. Ia sedang makan di kantin.

[Ilham is a student in this school; He is having a meal at the canteen].

Pak Rahmat guru di sekolah ini. Beliau sedang makan di kantin.

[Mr. Rahmat is a teacher in this school. He is having a meal in the canteen].

By contrast, several RILs may have complicated speech level and this may affect the effort to conserve these languages. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it aims to describe the existence of speech levels in some RILs. Secondly, it aims to draw the implication of speech level existence for their conservation.

II. METHOD

This paper is a policy analysis. Policy analysis consists of two parts, namely (1) the retrospective part, which concerns the present or past policy, and (2) the prospective part, which concerns the future policy [6]. In the context of this paper, the policy analysis concerns corpus planning situation, i.e., speech level, in some RILs. The sample includes three languages, namely, Sundanese, Balinese, and Javanese. Analysis include document analysis, particularly, some grammar references for the three RILs.

III. RESULT, IMPLICATION AND DISCUSSION

The first part of this section deals with a short description of speech levels in three languages. The second part deals with the implication and discussion of possible effect of speech level on language conservation.

A. Speech level in some RILs

1) Balinese language

Balinese has its own script (*hanacaraka*), which is like Javanese script. Balinese has 4 speech levels (*unda usuk/ sor singgih basa*), Narayana, in [1], namely:

1. *Basa kasar* [low level], which is used in emotional situations;
2. *Basa andhap* [refined low level], which is used in close interaction between speakers who have equal status, age, and education;
3. *Basa madia* [intermediate level], which is refined but not too respectful;
4. *Basa alus* [high level], which is refined and respectful and used in traditional and religious ceremonies and official talks in meetings, seminars, or gatherings.

The four levels can still be further divided. For example, *basa alus* can be divided into *basa alus singgih*, *basa alus sor*, *basa alus rangkep*, and *basa alus mider*.

2) Sundanese language

Sundanese also has its own script. In addition, Sundanese has three speech levels [9], namely:

1. *Basa kasar* [low level], which is used in emotional situations;
2. *Basa loma* [refined low level], which is used in close, equal situations or to younger people;
3. *Basa lemes* [high level], which is used in situations of respect to parents or more respected people. *Basa lemes* is divided into *basa lemes keur ka sorangan* (for oneself) and *basa lemes keur ka batur* (for people who are respected).

An example is given in Table 1 [2].

Table 1 Example of speech level in Sundanese language

Language	Speech level	Example
Sundanese	<i>Basa kasar</i>	<i>Ngaran aing Jalud, asal ti Curug Seeng, ka Jakarta rek nyiar ubar lapar. Ari sia saha?</i>
	<i>Basa loma</i>	<i>Nepangkeun nami abdi Jalud, asal ti Curug Seeng, ka Jakarta rek neangan pagawean. Ari maneh saha?</i>
	<i>Basa lemes</i>	<i>Nepangkeun wasta abdi Jalud, sim kuring nu ti Curug Seeng, ka Jakarta bade milari padamelan. Dupi salira teh, saha?</i>
Bahasa Indonesia		<i>Perkenalkan, nama saya Jalud, asal dari Curug Seeng, datang ke Jakarta untuk mencari pekerjaan. Apakah saya boleh tahu siapa Anda?</i>
English		<i>My name is Jalud, originally from Curug Seeng, coming to Jakarta to look for work. May I know who you are?</i>

3) Javanese language

Figure 1 Javanese script

ꦲ ꦤ ꦕꦫ ꦏꦩ ꦭꦸ ꦱꦸ ꦠꦱ ꦮꦭ
 ha na ca ra ka da ta sa wa la
 ꦥꦏꦲ ꦗꦪ ꦚꦺ ꦩꦁꦏꦺ ꦧꦠꦁꦏꦺ
 pa dha ja ya nya ma ga ba tha nga

Table 2 Example of speech level in Javanese

Language	Speech level	Example
Javanese	<i>Krama alus</i>	<i>Sumangga panjenengan dhahar; kula wau sampun nedha.</i>
	<i>Krama</i>	<i>Mangga sampeyan nedha; kula wau empun nedha.</i>
	<i>Ngoko alus</i>	<i>Sumangga panjenengan dhahar; aku mau wis mangan.</i>
	<i>Ngoko</i>	<i>Ayo kowe mangana; aku mau wis mangan.</i>
Bahasa Indonesia		<i>Silakan makan; saya tadi sudah makan.</i>
English		<i>Please have a meal; I already have one.</i>

Javanese has its own script and speech level. The Javanese script, called *hanacaraka*, has the appearance shown in Fig. 1. The present standard Javanese has 4 levels. What is considered standard Javanese is the dialect used in the area of Yogyakarta special area and the former residency of Surakarta [7]. In the past, Javanese had more than a dozen levels. However, at present, this level has been simplified to 4 speech levels [8], namely:

1. *Ngoko* [low level], which used for children or people who are less respected;
2. *Ngoko alus* [refined low level], which is used for people who are equal in informal situations, for example, in informal conversations between employees in the office or parents to sons-in-law in educated circles;
3. *Krama/madya* (intermediate level), which is used for people who are not familiar, but less respected, for example to market traders, workers, and office boys/girls;
4. *Krama alus* [high level], which is used for people who are equal and more respected, in a formal setting. *Krama alus* is divided into *krama andhap* (modest high level) (for oneself) and *krama inggil* (respectful high level) (for others who are respected).

In addition to differences in vocabulary, there is also another difference in intonation. Higher levels are usually accompanied by slower pronunciation and flatter intonation. The use of intonation that is too dynamic is not suitable for use at a higher level, because it can be considered to have emotional content. The speech levels have their own sets of vocabulary. These vocabulary sets are partly similar but partly different and this difference causes difficulty. An example is given in Table 2.

Word placement cannot be arbitrary. Words from lower levels generally cannot be used at higher levels. For example, the word '*mangan*,' part of *ngoko level*, can only be used for oneself for *ngoko* and *ngoko alus* levels, but for others it can only be used for the *ngoko level*. This word cannot be used for the *krama* or *krama alus* levels.

Meanwhile, *krama alus* level has additional complexity, namely, *krama andhap* and *krama inggil* sub-levels. *Krama andhap* is intended for oneself while *krama inggil* is intended for others. In the example in Table 2, there is a verb that refers to the same performance, namely 'eating' or 'having a meal'. However, this performance is expressed differently, that is, '*dhahar*' in *krama inggil* and '*nedha*' in *krama andhap*. In this context, '*dhahar*' (*krama inggil*) is for others, while '*nedha*' (*krama andhap*) is for oneself. The same rule applies at *ngoko alus* level (see example above), where the higher word, '*dhahar*' is used for others, but not for oneself. What happens if the uses of these words are inverted, like in the following example?

Panjenengan mangga nedha, kula sampun dhahar.

[Please have a meal; I already have one].

This sentence may appear to belong to *krama alus*; however, due to the misplaced words, the sentence becomes disrespectful. The reason that is the *krama inggil* version '*dhahar*,' should have been intended for others; meanwhile, the *krama andhap* version '*nedha*,' which ranks less compared to '*dhahar*,' should not have been intended for others. The example gives the impression of elevating oneself towards others, which means being rude.

In situations where the two speakers know each other, the issue of level selection is already quite complicated. However, this situation becomes more complicated, even risky, in situations where persons do not know each other. For example, an elderly man may be conversing with an unknown younger person at the airport. The elder may use *ngoko alus*, while the younger is expected to use *krama alus*. However, if the elder uses *krama alus*, while the younger, for some reason, like inability to use *krama alus*, uses *krama/madya*, then the elderly may feel disrespected and assume that the young man is impolite.

B. Implication for language Conservation

The use of special script and speech level may become a constraint to preserve RILs. For script, it is very difficult for speakers who are accustomed to using Latin script to use a special script. However, the script constraint seems to be easier to overcome. There is a tendency among RIL speakers to use Latin script for general purposes and to use special script for special purposes. For example, it was found that most Javanese language teachers in Sleman regency agreed to the use of Javanese special script for limited purposes, namely, learning the Javanese language and studying ancient scripts. Meanwhile, Latin script is used for communicating in Javanese language in various domains, such as at the workplace, in learning in general, and in mass media [13].

By contrast, speech level constraint is more difficult to solve. For example, in Javanese, the speech level system used today (4 levels) is already simpler than the level system used in the past (13 levels) [8]. However, the system is still difficult for speakers, especially among the younger generation and the Javanese Diaspora, i.e., Javanese speakers who are born and live beyond Javanese ethnic areas.

For example, it was found that among families in the cities of Pekalongan and Semarang, there was a reluctance to use *krama alus* and *krama* [12]. Meanwhile, in the use of *krama alus*, errors often occur in *unggah-ungguh* (correct & polite usage) in the use of *krama inggil* and *krama andhap*, in which *krama andhap* is used for others while *krama inggil* is used for oneself, as shown the previous example. Another example is supplied below.

Bapak siyos mirsani? Monggoh sareng, kula nggih badhe mirsani. (p. 51)

[Do you want to watch it, Sir? Let's go together, as I also want to watch it.] (p. 51)

The use of *krama inggil* version, '*mirsani*' (watch), in the first sentence (to another person) is appropriate. However, the use of '*mirsani*' in the second sentence (to oneself) breaches the rules of *unggah-ungguh* (correct and polite usage). Here, the speaker is expected to use *krama andhap* version, i.e., '*ningali*' (this verb also means 'watch' but applies to oneself). In addition, the words *siyos*, *monggoh*, *nggih*, do not belong to standard form in *krama alus* level. The standard words are '*saestu*', '*mangga*', and '*inggih*'. Thus, the sentence above should have read:

Bapak saestu mirsani? Mangga sareng, kula inggih badhe ningali.

[Do you want to watch, Sir? Let's go together, as I also want to watch it.]

Lack of mastery of speech levels, especially *krama* and *krama alus* levels, was also found among younger generation in Surakarta [11]. It was concluded that Javanese *krama alus* was already at endangered level, which meant that it was abandoned by many young people. It should be remembered that Surakarta, in addition to Yogyakarta, is a center of Javanese language and culture [7]. Thus, what happens in Surakarta may describe the situation of Javanese language in other regions. The question is that, if future generation have difficulty in mastering the four levels, is there any possibility for simplification?

Maybe it would be fruitful to reflect the past, to the days before the Youth Pledge. Why was the Javanese language, the language with the highest speaker, or other majority languages - such as Sundanese, not chosen as the language of unity? In fact, in various parts of the world, the chosen language of unity is usually the language with the largest number of speakers.

There might be several possible reasons. The first reason might be to avoid the impression of Javanese domination. Malay was chosen because, in terms of the number of speakers, it belonged to a minority language. The selection of Malay, a minority language, might have been performed to suggest that there was no ethnic domination in Indonesia. The second reason might be that the languages of large ethnic groups were generally localized in the speakers' area of the language. For example, Javanese and Sundanese speakers were concentrated in Java island. Conversely, Malay had long been spread in coastal areas in the archipelago. As such, Malay was relatively better known by various other tribes, and thus it was fitter for the language of unity.

However, the third reason, which could be the most important, is the relative lack of speech level in Malay. Malay has only one level for all speakers, regardless of their social positions. The language has rare speech level, for example, in the case of the words '*ia*' [standard 'he'] and '*beliau*' [respectful 'he']. Therefore, Malay might have been considered as more democratic and practical for the language of unity.

A few decades ago, the RILs with speech level were undemocratic and impractical. Then, at present and in future, these aspects could be felt more seriously. Reference [7] found that many Javanese speakers preferred to use Indonesian, rather than risking using the wrong speech level. It is acknowledged that the existence of speech language level does enrich the languages because, for various situations and constellations, the speech level can be chosen accordingly. An official forum that uses high speech level can provide a majestic atmosphere that is not found in everyday conversation that uses lower speech levels.

On the other hand, as time goes by, speakers may choose languages that are more practical and easier to master, so that a complicated language might be abandoned by its speakers, especially if the language can only be used in the private sphere. Therefore, it is very important for experts, observers, and speakers of RILs to consider simplification of the speech levels. In the case of Sundanese, the Sundanese congress in 2001 suggested simplifying the levels into two, namely *loma* and *lemes* levels, while *kasar* level is removed. However, it

is not yet known whether this suggestion has been applied [9].

In the case of Javanese, [3] found that, among Javanese language teachers in Sleman district, most disagreed if speech levels in Javanese were abolished. Their reason was that speech level is a characteristic of Javanese. In addition, the use of speech levels constitutes an effort to instill manners, especially among younger generation. The reason is that the use of higher speech level is an expression of respect for others, especially to older or more respected people. However, most respondents could consider simplification into 2 levels, namely *krama alus* and *ngoko alus*.

Simplifying speech level has broader implications for preservation. To be sustainable, indigenous languages need to be used in the official domains, for example in education, at work, and in mass media. The question is that, in these various domains, which level should be used? In [14], it is recommended that that RILs be used as the languages of instruction at the elementary level. Then, several questions appear, e.g., (1) which speech level needs to be used in communication in the classroom? (2) which speech level needs to be used to print textbooks? Furthermore, which speech level should be used as the language at the workplace and in mass media?

It might be worthwhile to consider [10], an observer and lover of Javanese from Australia, about his experience in Javanese.

Aku dhewe wis bola-bali nemu masalah iki, prasasat "dijothak" amarga sing tak-ajak ngomong Basa Jawa sajake judheg, mbokmenawa kapatrapan tembung unggah-ungguh sing kleru, mula ngecakake sing kena diarani "tindak singkir" (avoidance strategy) kanthi mlayu menyang Basa Indonesia, tinimbang kisinin ngomong Basa Jawa karo wong manca sing kurang nJawani olehe ngomong (p.13-14).

[I myself have often experienced this problem; it's like being "alienated" because the persons I'm talking to in Javanese seem confused, maybe because my word usage is wrong, and thus they apply what can be called an avoidance strategy, by switching into the Indonesian language, rather than being embarrassed by a foreigner who doesn't really master Javanese in conversation (p. 13-14).]

What happened to Quinn was also observed by and may be a situation that is often encountered by Indonesian citizens themselves [7]. To overcome these problems, corpus planning is recommended in which the levels are simplified, it may be helpful to simplify, for example, into two levels, one for formal communication and the other for informal communication. Alternatively, one level is chosen, but for several parts of speech, like pronoun and verb, two levels are used, i.e. *andhap* (for oneself) and *inggil* (for others). In this context, *ngoko alus* seems to be the most promising candidate, because this level is still respectful of others, but simpler than *krama alus* level. As language use affects the society, language experts, societal leaders and speakers of the RILs in general need to discuss this corpus planning proposal seriously.

IV. CONCLUSION

The conservation of RILs faces external and internal constraints. External constraints include language policy and planning that does not favor RIL use in public domains. This limits their use and may affect their speakers' loyalty. Internal constraints include the use of special script and the existence of speech level. Three RILs, namely, Balinese, Sundanese, and Javanese, show the existence of three to four speech levels. While there are overlapping words among these levels, there are also different words that belong to different levels. The use of the different words could not be interchanged as this would breach appropriateness and courtesy. This creates serious difficulty to master the languages, especially among younger people. Some studies have shown that various RILs have started to be abandoned by their speakers, as new speakers face great difficulty in mastering various speech levels, especially the high level, and their complicated usage rules. Therefore, corpus planning is recommended, in which speech levels are simplified, so that it would be easier to master them and more practical to use them in various public domains. For Javanese, *ngoko alus* is recommended as the standard language. As the existence of speech level may affect RIL efforts, it is high time that language experts, community leaders, and general speakers of the RILs consider simplification of the speech level system, in order to support efforts to conserve these RILs.

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