

ACRONYMIC PATTERNS IN INDONESIAN¹

SOENJONO DARDJOWIDJOJO

1. INTRODUCTION

If we look at the shaping of a language such as Indonesian, we can readily see that this language arose out of circumstances under which a vehicle of communication was desperately needed among people with different language backgrounds (Alisjahbana, 1957; Dardjowidjojo, 1967; Halim, 1972). Despite the fact that this situation fits fairly well with Hockett's definition of a pidgin (Hockett, 1958, p.422), no one has ever volunteered to label Indonesian as a pidgin language, even when we know that some foreign languages, notably Sanskrit (Gonda, 1952), "helped shape" the language substantially.

When the term **Melayu** was changed into **Bahasa Indonesia** (*Indonesian language*) in 1928 and then adopted as our national language in 1945, Indonesian assumed a function much heavier than it had ever shouldered before. The use of Dutch was soon banned, and the Japanese occupation of the country could not change the fate of the course. Indonesian soon became *the* language to be used among different ethnic groups and in official communications. In academic circles, Indonesian had to progress as fast as the scientific endeavours demanded it to.

While at the moment we cannot say that Indonesian has achieved a standard by which we can measure all and any deviations as being non-Indonesian, we can certainly say that we are in the process of standardising and modernising our national language. In order to cope with the multi-directional demands, Indonesian not only has to borrow new terms for new concepts from other languages - **data**, **sensus**, **fonim**, **bisnis** to cite but a few - but it also has to intensify internal creations.

This paper is to look into one type of internal creation which I have called acronymisation. While I am fully aware that acronymic processes are found in virtually all languages, it seems to have a unique role and significance in the development of Indonesian. It is true that the acronymic phenomena have been in the language for a long time, but they did not become popular and productive until the 60s. In military academies, for instance, cadets are taught these acronyms as part of their courses (Departemen Angkatan Darat, 1968). The increase of military role after the 1965 abortive coup d'etat - and therefore the increase of acronyms found in mass media - only added fuel to the flame. People began to acronymise anything acronymisable and "play" with this new "in-thing". Puns began to appear. Among the Javanese, for instance, the acronym *pentilkecakot* '*telephone inspector for the city sub-district*' was coined from the full Indonesian forms *penilik tilpun kecamatan kota*, despite the fact that there is no such a position existing. It is apparent that this acronym was made merely in fun since the forms *pentil kecakot* do constitute real Javanese words meaning '*nipples unintentionally sucked*'.

While quite a number of these acronyms is found only in written forms, many are used orally as well, especially in cases where they show congruities with the phonotactic rules of the language. Thus, forms such as *pangkopkamtib* '*Commander of the Operation Command of the Restoration of Safety and Order*', which is derived from *panglima komando operasi pemulihan keamanan dan ketertiban*, are very much on the written side of the language, whereas *berdikari* '*to stand on one's own feet*', which is derived from *berdiri di atas kaki sendiri*, is very common both in its oral and written forms.

2. DESCRIPTION

Indonesians do not make a distinction between acronyms and abbreviations. The term *singkatan* '*shortened form*' is used to refer to both.² In this paper I will use the terms acronym and abbreviation interchangeably to represent the sense of *singkatan*.

In terms of familiarity and well-establishedness, we can classify acronyms into two major categories: (i) those acronyms which have been used in the language for a long time, and (ii) those which have been recently coined. Members of the first category are known virtually to every literate Indonesian and they have been used consistently by everyone in the country. Forms such as *kpd*, *tsb*, *a.l.*, *AURI*, *yth*, for instance, are not only known by Indonesians, but each form represents the same full form and the same semantic concept, namely, *kepada* '*to(ward)*'.

tersebut '*previously mentioned*', antara lain '*among others*', Angkatan Udara Republik Indonesia '*Air Force of the Republic of Indonesia*', and yang terhormat '*Dear (So and So)*' respectively.

The second category is very interesting to observe, because, while it is productive in its own right, it also bewilders even native speakers living in the country. This paper will be limited only to this second category.

2.1 ACRONYMIC SYLLABLES

Basically there are two ways to coin an acronymic syllable: (i) by observing some kind of syllabification of the words to be abbreviated, and (ii) by taking into account the graphemic representation of these original words.

There are several subtypes which belong to the first type above. Perhaps the most common of all is that the acronymic syllable is derived from the first syllable of the full form. Thus, *or-*, *mu-*, and *bi-* of *orba* '*new order*', *muker* '*work conference*', and *Bima* '*Blue coloured night train*' are derived from the full forms orde, musyawarah, and biru respectively.

A second subtype of an acronymic syllable consists of the last syllable of the full form. The acronymic syllables *-dan*, *-pur*, and *-yon*, for instance, are used to represent the full forms komandan, tempur, and bataliyan to form the acronymic words *dandim* (komandan distrik militer) '*commandant of the military district*', *zipur* (zenj, tempur) '*combat troop*', and *danyon* (komandan bataliyan) '*battalion commandant*', respectively.

The third subtype requires that the original full form ends in a consonant. If the first syllable of the full form has a CV, the acronymic syllable is formed by taking this CV plus the last C of the full form. This brings about the existence of forms such as *dit-*, *dir-* and *ban-* of *ditjen* '*director general*', *dirjen* '*director general*', and *banser* '*multi purpose troop*' where *dit-*, *dir-* and *ban-* are derived from the underlined parts of the full forms direktorat, direktor, and barisan respectively. *Ditjen*, *dirjen*, and *banser* come from direktorat jendral, direktor jendral and barisan serba guna.

Although there are not many examples found, there seems to be a tendency to apply this rule where the first syllable of the full form begins with a vowel. In this case the acronymic syllable is formed by taking the first V and the last C of the full form. Thus, '*inspector*' and '*engineer*' are abbreviated as *ir* as in *Irjen* (Inspektur Jendral) '*Inspector General*' and *Ir. Soekarno* (Insinyur Soekarno) '*Engineer Soekarno*'.

The fourth subtype involves cases where the last letter of the full form is a vowel. If the first letter of the first syllable of the full form is a consonant, the acronymic syllable is coined by juxtaposing the first consonant and the last vowel. Thus, kepala '*chief*', dua '*two*', and tertinggi '*highest*' are respectively abbreviated as ka as in KASAD (Kepala Staff Angkatan Darat) '*Army Chief of Staff*', da as in Letda (Letnan Dua) '*Second Lieutenant*', and ti as in Koti (Komando Operasi Tertinggi) '*the Highest Operation Commando*'.

While we have seen cases where the initial letter(s) of a full form is used to make an acronymic syllable with or without any additional letter(s), we have not seen cases where the last letter of the full form is used to represent the whole full form. I have so far found only one example where the last letter is used to represent the whole. The full form cepat '*fast*' is abbreviated into t as in Kopasgat '*Commando of the Fast Moving Troop*' which stands for Komando Pasukan Gerak Cepat.³

As we have seen from the above examples, virtually all of what Fries called content words (Fries, 1945), which are abbreviated, are represented in the acronyms one way or another. There are cases, however, where a content word is deleted from the acronym. In the case of Menlu '*Minister of Foreign Affairs*', where men = menteri '*minister*', the use of lu to represent luar '*outside*' and negeri '*country*' can perhaps be explained on the basis of redundancy. The collocation of menteri and luar forces people with no choice but to add the word negeri obligatorily since menteri luar by itself does not occur in the language and that the only possible menteri luar is menteri luar negeri.

In most cases, however, there does not seem to be any explanation available. The use of ser as in banser given above to represent the words serba '*various*' and guna '*use*' is a case in point. The morpheme serba in the context of banser can collocate with several other possible words such as neka '*type*', lengkap '*complete*' etc. and would still produce meaningful acronyms.

Still in some cases, not only is the deleted word a content word, but that that content word happens to be very crucial. Thus the acronym konjeran '*Commando of the Mine Sweepers*' lacks the acronymic form for penyapu '*sweepers*' because konjeran is supposed to represent komando jenis penyapu ranjau.

The role of the root whose derived form becomes the source of an acronymic syllable also seems important. We have cases where the acronymic syllable is not derived from the full form per se but from the root underlying the full form. The word for money, uang, for instance, is often abbreviated as u irrespective of the actual full derivative form. Thus the Academy of Finance and Banking is abbreviated as Akubang