

**THE INDONESIAN LINGUISTIC SCENE:
500 LANGUAGES NOW, 50 IN THE NEXT CENTURY?***

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Official efforts to arrive at a reliable and up-to-date inventory of the languages in Indonesia have started only in the course of last year. Most of the languages of Indonesia are still unknown to the general public (including the Indonesian government), and even specialists may seriously answer "three" when asked how many languages there are in their country: "**bahasa nasional, bahasa daerah dan bahasa asing**" (national, regional and foreign languages).

However, it can safely be claimed that as regards number and types of languages Indonesia is still one of the richest countries in Asia and indeed in the world. It will probably remain so for some decades, but it is uncertain what such a qualification would mean - if applicable at all - after another two or three generations.

This paper discusses some of the mechanisms and circumstances which support that - for a linguist - gloomy prospect.

Today the estimated number of languages in Indonesia is about 500. This number does not include dialects, and it is certain that if one adopts the view that the term dialect should no longer be applied because of its pejorative connotations and because any dialect is a language in its own right, the number of languages in Indonesia will multiply dramatically. But whatever criteria one uses to arrive at quantitative statements about the linguistic situation in Indonesia, they do by no means justice to its qualitative side, which is extremely rich and complicated.

As far as is known, the languages which can be said to be indigenous¹ to Indonesia are divided into at least

¹ Languages which became part of the Indonesian linguistic scene in more recent - historic - times are usually considered non-indigenous. Although such languages as they are spoken in Indonesia today may have developed characteristic traits of their own and even local endonorms, they can still in some sense be claimed to belong to speech communities which are largely located outside Indonesia.

eight unrelated language families: one of them is the Austronesian language family, the others are the Trans New Guinea Phylum, the Sepik Ramu Phylum, the Sko Phylum, the Kwomtari Phylum, the West Papuan Phylum, the Geelvink Bay Phylum, and the East Bird's Head Phylum. The latter seven are collectively - but for non-linguistic reasons - classified as Papuan or non-Austronesian. The latter three are exclusive to Indonesia. At least 5 languages have not been classified so far. In the following chart (chart 1) the indigenous languages are grouped according to language family (phylum) and estimated number of speakers as indicated by the *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area* (Wurm & Hattori 1981, 1983).

family	number of								languages
	speakers								
	?	0	<200	<1000	<10 ⁴	<10 ⁵	<10 ⁶	>10 ⁶	
AN	3	5	16	62	126	82	28	14	336
TN	3	1	32	48	61	13			158
WP				3	10	8			21
GB	1			4	1				6
EB				1	1	1			3
Sko			1	1					2
Kw			1						1
SR			1						1
?	1	1	1	2					5
tot.	8	7	52	121	199	104	28	14	533

chart 1: number of languages classified according to language family and number of speakers.

(AN = Austronesian; TN = Trans New Guinea Phylum;
 WP = West Papuan Phylum; GB = Geelvink Bay Phylum;
 EB = East Bird's Head Phylum; Sko = Sko Phylum;
 Kw = Kwomtari Phylum; SR = Sepik-Ramu Phylum;
 ? = unclassified; tot. = total)

The Austronesian languages in the chart include those of East Malaysia (Sabah and Serawak) and of Brunei Darussalam, some tens of which are (probably) not spoken in the Indonesian part of Borneo. They also include the languages of East Timor.

It is understood that the data of the atlas are for some areas more reliable than for others. This is mainly a consequence of the poor state of the art for those areas, rather than of omissions from the part of the contributors or the editors².

Some areas in new Guinea especially still appear to be complete *terra incognita*, so that the number of languages cannot be considered definite in any case: recently the newspaper Kompas reported the discovery of a Kuruwai tribe some 80 miles southeast of the Baliem valley between the rivers Sungai Digul and Sungai Eilanden.

The distribution today of the language families of chart 1 suggests heavy linguistic turmoil in the past, resulting in a mozaïque of different language types, also within the larger individual families. Only through thorough linguistic research is it possible to explain this picture historically. A sweeping but fascinating (re)construction of the large scale prehistoric migrations of the Austronesian people is presented by Mahdi (1988).

In more historic times sizable communities of still other language families have become part of the Indonesian linguistic scene: Chinese, Dravidian (Tamil), Semitic (Arabic), Indogermanic (Portuguese, Dutch).

A variety of Portuguese was still extant until late in the 19th century in the capital Batavia (now Jakarta) (see Teeuw 1961:46). It has been reported that until now Portuguese is still used in church in Larantuka and Wure (on the islands of Flores and Adonare), although the Portuguese ceded the area to the Dutch around the middle of the 19th century. As is known Portuguese has not been completely replaced by Indonesian as the language of the educated and of interethnic communication in East Timor.

Dutch as a first language was still reported some 15 years ago for the village of Depok between Jakarta and Bogor (see de Vries 1976), but the recent explosive expansion of the city of Jakarta to the south and the newly built campus of the Universitas Indonesia near Depok has made the Depok community into a substratum, whose language will not be able to withstand the pressure exerted on it.

Chinese communities (Hokkien, Hainan, Hokchia, Hakka, Cantonese; see Wurm and Hattori 1983, map 47) are found in many towns and cities of Indonesia. Communities of Arabs must exist in more than a few major cities, but linguistically hardly anything is known about them. The same holds for the small Indian communities in a number of Sumatran cities. At least sections of these Asian immigrant communities have assimilated and adopted varieties of Malay as their first language, while those

² See Steinhauer 1986 for details.

who could afford to import wives from their original homelands regained or preserved their original linguistic identity.

Of the more than 500 languages which are indigenous to Indonesia since prehistoric times, and which, with the exception of only a very few, are not spoken outside Indonesia, only 11 to 14 have more than one million speakers, according to the most recent census data which have become available up till now (those of 1980). These languages, which have a (token) privileged status³ among the more than 500 languages in Indonesia, include:

- 1⁴) Javanese (83.9 million),
- 2) Sundanese (22.6 million),
- 3) Madurese (6.9 million),
- 4) Minangkabau (3.5 million),
- 5) Buginese (3.2 million),
- 6) Batak (3.1 million),
- 7) Balinese (2.4 million),
- 8) Acehnese (1.8 million),
- 9) Sasak (1.8 million),
- 10) Makassarrese (1.4 million).

As far as the census figures go, the biggest languages smaller than Makassarrese, such as Lampungese (11), Gorontalese (12), Toraja (13) and Dawanese (14) all have less than 700,000 speakers.

Only some of these languages can claim to have a more or less acknowledged standard variety. All of them have dialectal differentiation, which is sometimes quite considerable. Yet they are considered single languages as they are spoken in clearly confined and contiguous regional areas.

This cannot be said of (varieties of) Malay. The term Malay is linguistically rather vague. It may be used for the national languages of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, for the literary "standard" which preceded these national languages and which at least goes back to the 15th century Malaccan court language, to a variety of vernaculars along the coasts of Borneo, east and central Sumatra, and mainland Malaysia (forming several dialect continua), to the isolated vernaculars of various communities scattered throughout Indonesia, as well as outside it (e.g. in Kampuchea, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), to each of the varieties individually or to their collective as a whole, or also to their common origin. What is meant with "varieties of Malay" in this context should therefore be specified as

³ The policy has been formulated that study of these big languages deserves priority and that grammars and dictionaries of these languages should become available as soon as possible.

⁴ The numbers correspond with those on map 1.