

**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.

Map 1

Major Languages

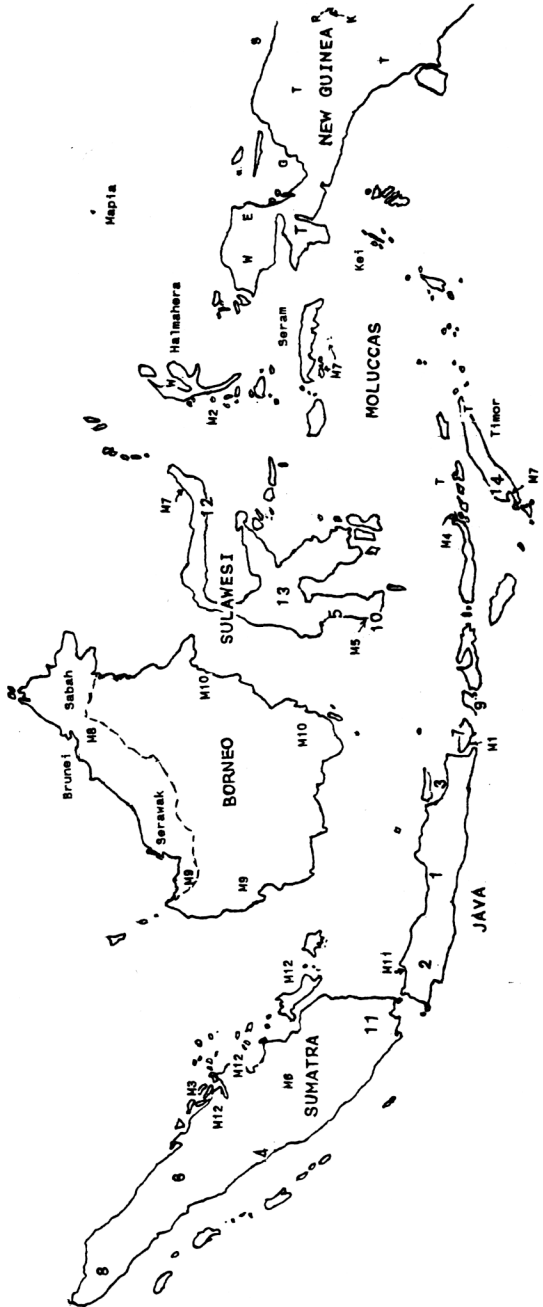
- 1 Javanese
- 2 Sundanese
- 3 Madurese
- 4 Minangkabau
- 5 Buginese
- 6 Batak
- 7 Balinese
- 8 Acehnese
- 9 Sasek
- 10 Makasarese
- 11 Lampungese
- 12 Gorontaloese
- 13 Toraja
- 14 Dayanese

Non-Austronesian Phyla

- T Trans New Guinea
 W West Papuan
 G Geelvink Bay
 E East Bird's Head
 S Sko
 K Kwomtari
 R Sepik-Ram

Varieties of Malay

- M1 Balinese Malay
 M2 Batak Malay
 M3 Orang Laut
 M4 Lantuka Malay
 M5 Makasarese Malay
 M6 Central Sumatran Malay
 M7 Eastern Indonesian Malay
 M8 Northern Borneo Malay
 M9 West Borneo Malay
 M10 South and East Borneo Malay
 M11 Jakarta Malay
 M12 Sumatran Malay



"modern offsprings of Proto Malay functioning as local vernaculars in Indonesia". If these are grouped into one Malay language, this language will rank third with about 20 million speakers. In chart 1, however, I have - not without arbitrariness - distinguished 12 varieties of Malay at language level: Balinese Malay, Bacan Malay and Orang Laut (each with less than 10,000 speakers), Larantuka and Makassarese Malay (with more than 20,000 speakers for Larantuka Malay and an approximately similar number for Makassarese Malay⁵), Central Sumatran, Eastern Indonesian, and Northern Borneo Malay (each sets of vernaculars with less than 1 million speakers), West Borneo Malay (including Serawak Malay) with 1 to 2 million speakers, South and East Borneo Malay (including Banjarese and Kutai Malay⁶) with more than 2 million speakers, Jakarta Malay (including Betawi) with an estimated 4 million speakers, and finally the Sumatra Malay continua with probably over 10 million speakers.

The majority of the minor languages are threatened with extinction. No certain figures are available as to the number of languages extinct or on the verge of extinction, but oral and written mention of individual instances are numerous and the general patterns are obvious enough.

Communities which are the bearer of a certain language increasingly cease to exist as such for a variety of reasons. Physically by slaughter or acts of God, culturally and psychologically by "modernization" and "progress", which in the current Indonesian context include nation building, supra-ethnic organization, population policy, new domains of language use, and constant exposure to other languages, especially Indonesian.

As is known, recent history of Indonesia has not been without violence and bloodshed, but there have been no reports of slaughter in recent times which resulted in the disappearance of a whole language community. In less recent history this may have happened, however. About one and a half century ago slave merchants from Gebe (East Halmahera) decimated the original population of the island of Mapia (north of the Bird's Head

⁵ The classification as Malay is based on lexical considerations. Grammatically Makassarese Malay is closer to Makassarese. See Steinhauer 1988.

⁶ J.T. Collins' presentation at the Third International Symposium on Language and Linguistics underlines the arbitrariness of the subgrouping given here: his data strongly suggest that Kutai Malay consists of two languages and that both differ on language level from Banjarese Malay.

Peninsula of New Guinea). Those who remained behind were not able to preserve their linguistic identity *viv-à-vis* the new population of imported plantation workers. A Mapia wordlist was found among the so called Holle lists published by W.A.L. Stokhof (Stokhof 1988).

A notorious case of an early genocide attempt was the Dutch depopulation in 1621 of the Banda archipelago in the Central Moluccas by slaughter and deportation. In the mid 19th century it was reported that the original language still survived in two villages in the Kei archipelago. Recent language surveys invariably include the language as still extant (Wurm and Hattori 1983, map 4; Hughes 1987).

For that matter, acts of God as a cause of language death are more reliable. The eruption of the Tambora on the island of Sumbawa in 1815 caused the disappearance of the Tamboran language. Its only source is the short wordlist in Raffles 1817: Appendix F, pp. cxcviii--cxcix. So far it has not been possible to classify the language: it is certainly not Austronesian, but does not seem to be "non-Austronesian" either; there is a possibility that it was two centuries ago the easternmost Austroasiatic language.

Famine and disease were the cause of the near death of the once prospering Enggano language on the island of that name, west of Sumatra; today one dialect of it is still maintained by approximately 1200 speakers (Nurzuir Husin, p.c.).

Earthquakes and landslides threaten the survival of several small language communities in the Jayawijaya (Goliath) mountains of Irian Jaya (cf. the report in the newspaper Kompas of 9 October 1989 on the resettlement of the Hubla tribe).

An earthquake too (on Saturday 30 September 1899) resulted in the definite decline of the Paulohi language of Seram. About 100 speakers survived the catastrophe, which enabled the German biologist E. Stresemann to make a description of the language at the beginning of this century (see Stresemann 1918: xxii). Subsequently, however, Wemale and Amahai speakers, who came down from the interior, overran and outnumbered the original inhabitants. The last Paulohi speakers were over 80 years old when J.T. Collins conducted fieldwork in Seram in 1976 (J.T. Collins, p.c.).

At least one other language of Seram, Loun, fell victim to the Spanish flu of 1919. The few survivors fled into the woods and somehow never regrouped afterwards (J.T. Collins, p.c.). The three or four Loun descendants Collins was able to retrace in the mid 1970-s appeared to have only a defective knowledge of the language of their forefathers (Collins 1983: 38).

These are known cases. It is highly probable that there have been unknown cases of language disappearance, also in recent times. That more will follow suit can

hardly be doubted.

Since long before European times (i.e. before the 16th century) the language of interethnic communication in large parts of the archipelago had been Malay or varieties of it. This was the case in trade but also in religion (Islam). Throughout colonial times Malay continued to keep that supraethnic function.

With the intensification of colonialism in the 19th century the Dutch could not do without a class of indigenous clerks and assistants, and for their training a schooling system had to be set up, which used Malay as language of instruction. Punishment for the use of a local vernacular seems to have been the rule, a rule which was still practised in early post-colonial times.

As a corollary to the growing economic and administrative European involvement Christian missionary activities became intensified too. Although missionaries were the first to study seriously all kinds of regional languages, they often had to fall back on Malay for reasons which are still valid today:

- Malay was widely known and accepted;
- there was a tradition in using Malay for religious purposes (notably in the dissemination of Islam);
- it had therefore developed a vocabulary for religious concepts;
- the choice of another language than Malay would have alienated the target group from their fellow Christians elsewhere in the country;
- for many regional languages with dialectal differentiation but without a natural or generally accepted standard, there were no criteria for selecting a particular dialect as the vehicle for making converts.

Such arguments could only strengthen the already existing diglossia. And this diglossia and the low profile of the regional languages were inherited and strengthened in independent Indonesia, with Malay, now called Indonesian, having become the national language.

Yet, until relatively recently preaches continued to be held in the vernacular, by inspired locals who could only talk by heart. But with the ongoing formalization of religious education a shift can now be observed towards Indonesian: preaching is now done by alumni of theological academies who were trained in Indonesian and in keeping to a written text. This is especially true for the Protestant churches, but Protestantism - though nationwide a minority - is strong precisely in the areas of the highest linguistic diversity, i.e. East Indonesia (the Lesser Sunda Islands, the Moluccas and Irian Jaya).

With independence, education, which had always remained the privilege of relatively few in colonial times, became a mass affair. And as Indonesian became the language of instruction at all levels of education, the role of the regional languages became further delimited.

Under the conviction that biligualism was a liability, use of the local language even at the first grades of primary school was banned completely between 1975 and 1984. This conviction was taken over from certain American authorities, who advocated that "this country has become great by using decent English at its schools, why should those Mexicans need Spanish?". And although other insights have since acquired acceptability, the practice is still largely the same: no Indonesian language except Indonesian. The main reasons today are practical rather than ideological:

- many language communities are too small to enable recruitment of sufficient teachers from their midst;
- the vocabulary for the subjects taught does not exist in the vernaculars;
- the production of teaching materials in the vernaculars would be economically impossible anyway.

The very fact that a "modern" career and all formal acquisition of "modern" knowledge is only possible through Indonesian has resulted in the widespread phenomenon of bilingual parents not using the local vernacular with their children but their variety of Indonesian. Research on language attitude shows that this practice can apparently be reconciled with the avowed conviction that knowledge of the local language is a valuable asset, also for their children; the belief that they put their children at an educational disadvantage vis-à-vis other children by not preparing them linguistically for school determines their language behavior.

This phenomenon is obviously a corollary to urbanization. It is a phenomenon of towns and cities and less apparent in rural communities, where the role of Indonesian is more marginal. Most larger population centres are linguistically mixed. In urban settings, topics pertaining to the domains for which it is proper to use the local vernacular are less likely to be discussed. Also the increasing number of mixed marriages are basically an urban phenomenon⁷. And so is formal education.

Although many villages have primary schools now, it is practically impossible to have one in each village, let alone a secondary school as well, and that will

⁷ In general, mixed marriages are a fruitful environment for language loss. Strong cultural pressure may in some cases postpone this. In her PhD research, Yayah Lumintintang found that children from a Javanese father and a Sundanese mother tend to be brought up with Javanese alongside Indonesian, whereas children from a Javanese mother and a Sundanese father rarely acquire any of the languages of their parents (see Lumintintang 1990).

probably remain so for decades to come. Especially in the linguistically less homogeneous areas, secondary schools often have pupils of a different linguistic background, whose home is not seldom so far away that they have to stay in boarding houses. Consequently they become alienated from their original surroundings, culturally and linguistically. This alienation is further strengthened by the subjects taught at school. Centralized as the education system is

- the curricula are programmed in Jakarta⁸ - it is based on the ideals of a "modern" society, i.e. a western type urban society, which does not make a return to village life easier. Where formal education is a success, the rural population will age, and so will the local vernaculars.

But the main reason why (young) people leave the villages is the growing impact of a money based economy and the new demands going with it: paid jobs are frequent and diverse in the cities, much more than in the villages. Again the effect is that the village population ages and that the migrants change their language behavior at the expense of their mother tongue.

But also migration between rural areas has its effect on the vernaculars. Since the beginning of this century programs have been implemented which were aimed at diminishing the population pressure of the overpopulated areas of Java, Madura and Bali by transmigration to less densely populated areas in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and recently also Irian. In certain areas, such as South Sumatra this has led to the original population becoming a minority. On the whole it holds that wherever the program is successful, interethnic communication increases at the expense again of the use of local languages. Besides the organized transmigration from Java, Bali and Madura, large scale spontaneous transmigration from south and southeast Sulawesi has similar effects in eastern Indonesia.

But even on a smaller scale, migration has its linguistic effects. Also since the beginning of this century efforts are made by the government (before and after independence) to reach the whole population of the archipelago by a policy of resettlement: people are persuaded to leave their isolated villages in the interior and move down to more accessible settlements along the coast, thus enabling the government to establish effective control over the whole population, while at the same time the people get easier access to

⁸ As of 1994, new curricula will become effective, which will be somewhat more decentralized, i.e. one fifth of the curricula will be confined to provincially differentiated "local input". Currently preparations are made to define these local inputs.

health care, education etc. These new villages (or old extended ones) often acquire a linguistically mixed population, which calls forth the constant use of a common language (which may be a local lingua franca, but often is a regional variety of Malay) and the eventual loss of the language of the original village.

All these patterns seem to be irreversible. No linguistic study on a smaller regional language appears without an expression of concern about its near future. Even in a major language area, such as for Javanese with its more than 80 million speakers, the younger urban generations seem to shift to Indonesian.

In this connection it should be stressed that the number of languages in chart 1 does not correspond to the number of language communities. Most "languages" in the atlas are only diasystems or convenient labels for groups of related "dialects". A comfortable number of speakers of language X therefore does not mean that that language is "safe": the number may be the sum total of a group of small language communities which are each on the brink of extinction. The 50 languages of the title of this paper may even be an optimistic estimate.

Scenarios to preserve the existing linguistic diversity - if imaginable at all - must be qualified as utopic. But the unavoidable shift to Indonesian should be made as fluent as possible and without causing loss of respect for one's original language. If only because a negative attitude to one's own language will rarely result in a good command of another language. One way - the least and probably also the most linguistics has to offer - is study of the languages which are in danger.

By force of constitution (Chapter XV, article 36) the Indonesian government is obliged to respect and maintain those languages which are respected and maintained by their users, as they are part of national culture.

However, it is not easy to operationalize that intention. Moreover, limited means and manpower make it unavoidable to establish priorities. Further development, cultivation and propagation of Indonesian as the language of modern knowledge, education, inter-ethnic communication and as one of the main binding factors of the Indonesian nation especially, have the highest priority. This is the main task of the National Center for Language-Development and -Cultivation, the government body dealing with all matters pertaining to language and language policy. Besides that, one of its aims is the preparation of dictionaries and grammars for the major languages, i.e. the languages with more than one million speakers (see footnote 3).

Other languages so far can only be dealt with incidentally and superficially. Since about ten years a

large scale project is running of short term research on linguistic and literary topics; each year about thirty research teams are given the financial opportunity to study an assigned topic on Indonesian or one of the vernaculars. It is not certain, however, whether this project will be continued after the current Five-Year Development Plan (1989-1994). Meanwhile the qualitative results do not match the quantitative output. For a variety of reasons:

- centralized assignment of research topics, often too broad and/or not in accordance with the structure or state of the language in question;
- lack of qualified researchers⁹ and therefore lack of motivation;
- lack of knowledge of relevant earlier research;
- red tape;
- lack of time;
- sharp deadlines with budgetary repercussions;
- insufficient feed-back (also because of deadlines);
- lack of qualitative selection where publication is concerned (unused funds earmarked for publication entail a smaller allocation for the next year);
- cursory proofreading if any (because of deadlines again, and the financial repercussions).

Much of the older linguistic studies (of the early 20th, but also of the 19th century) have therefore not lost their relevance completely, if only because no more recent sources have become available (for references, see the publications in the Bibliographical Series of the Royal Institute for Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden, the Netherlands, such as: Voorhoeve 1955, Cense and Uhlenbeck 1958, Teeuw 1961, Uhlenbeck 1964, Schouten 1981, Polman 1981 and 1982, Avé, King and De Wit 1983, Baal, Galis and Koentjaraningrat 1984, Noorduyt 1991).

For several of the Indonesian languages there exists a tradition of linguistic research for nearly two

⁹ Given the magnitude of the tasks to be fulfilled, sufficiency in this respect can only be a long-term goal. Since 1972 the State University of Leiden in the Netherlands, being the traditional centre of Indonesian studies outside Indonesia, has been involved in the training of Indonesian linguists. Since 1977 this involvement has continued officially and on a more long term basis, within the framework of the Indonesian Linguistics Development Project (ILDEP). Also on the Indonesian side training of linguists is enhanced: at the moment there are three state universities which have postgraduate courses (MA and PhD) in linguistics. Four other universities are programming such a course.

A major impediment for research, however, is that academic salaries are too low to enable academic staff to do research without extra payment: they need all their time to acquire additional incomes; so research is done only within a project (i.e. on a special budget), not as part of one's job.

centuries. What is an overwhelming amount of material on a language in a Papuan context is poor for a major Austronesian language. Also among the major Austronesian languages the differences are great: in comparison with Malay and Javanese Madurese data should be qualified as poor, but compared with - say - Onin they are again abundant. Moreover, the quality is rather divergent: for a certain language a dictionary and grammar may be available, but they may be of no linguistic value.

In short, a crash program in which Indonesian and foreign linguists coordinate their efforts is needed in order to inventorize and document the Indonesian linguistic riches as long as they are there. It can of course not be expected that the languages which will be investigated may be saved by the effort, but interest from outside the language community in question may contribute considerably in restoring a positive attitude of the speakers towards their own language as well as their own culture and traditional systems of knowledge. Moreover, the unique complexity of the Indonesian linguistic scene guarantees fascinating data. Also for general linguistic theory, which has too exclusively been oriented on western languages during the last 30 years. Dewesternization of linguistics is urgently due.

* A preliminary version of this paper was used by R.M.W. Dixon for his contribution ("Australia, Indonesia and Oceania") to the special issue of *Diogenes* on endangered languages, which is scheduled to appear in the course of 1992.

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