ON THE IDEOLOGY OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: THE STATE OF A LANGUAGE OF STATE

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In an era of resurgent, bloody, exclusivist ethnic nationalisms it seems an overstatement to call the success of Indonesia's national language "the envy of the multilingual world" (Lowenberg 1985: 3). Fifty years ago Indonesian, like its nation, was no more than a colonial intelligentsia's project; now it is the fully viable and universally acknowledged language of a nation of 190 million people, most of whom speak natively one of four hundred or so distinct ethnic languages. Indonesian's and Indonesia's rapid codevelopment, which seem nowadays even more "miraculous" (Fishman 1978: 338) than fifteen years ago, has been bound up with state-driven economic development to which it has been means, and with the idea of the nation of which it is a central symbol. The history and uses of Indonesian incorporate all the political and cultural tensions inherent in a "partly unconscious *project* for the assumption of "modernity" within the modalities of an autonomous and autochthonous social-political tradition" (Anderson 1966: 89). Indonesian has been both means and topic for nationalist discourse, both figuring and figured in the public discourse of Indonesian nationalism.

As questions about Indonesian's viability fade a new, official rhetoric is arising about threats which the dynamic of national development now poses to Indonesia's ethnic languages and cultures. A long dominant development ideology is now being brought to bear by the government on long muted ambiguities in Indonesian political culture, now reframed as a public concern. Most important among the nation's ethnic languages and groups thus addressed are the Javanese, and most conspicuous in this regard was a well-publicized Javanese Language Congress (*Kongres Bahasa Jawa*) which the Indonesian government sponsored in the summer of 1991. There some six hundred Indonesian technocrats, politicians, and intellectuals (mostly Javanese) met to discuss (mostly in Indonesian) the current state of their nation's dominant ethnic language (their native language) in the dynamic of national development. At the behest of President Suharto (himself Javanese), they framed a new institutional version of and response to the current problem of "language development."

That congress and the issues it addressed are considered here as a refraction of enduring cultural and ideological tensions within the project of national development. Neither ethnographic nor based directly on fieldwork, this paper nonetheless takes up the Javanese Language Congress as a kind of diagnostic event (Moore 1987: 730) which both embodied and also framed contemporary problems in the political culture of language in Indonesia. Read against the institutional grain, the congress appears in a

supralocal national context as a governmental move to deal with problems engendered by the government sponsored ideology and practice of development. In relation to Javanese language and ethnicity it counts as a conspicuous step toward a national version of a "local culture," one which will serve as a kind of counterweight or prophylactic for some of the social consequences of state-sponsored development viewed by the Indonesian (and Javanese) elite as pernicious. But this strategic appropriation of Javanese linguistic tradition presages a radical break with traditional Javanese conceptions of esoteric language, knowledge, and power.

1. Historical background

Indonesian's remarkably rapid elaboration and dissemination testifies not just to the fortuitous sociohistorical circumstances of its selection as potential national language, but the efficacy of the state-dominated infrastructure in which it has come to be used and propagated. From a structural point of view standard Indonesian is virtually identical to Malay, which was native language to only a small minority of the peoples of what is now Indonesia, what were the Dutch East Indies prior to the 1942 Japanese invasion. But varieties of Malay had served as the *lingua franca* of trade throughout coastal Southeast Asia before and during the era of European penetration. Already widely spoken in pidginized and creolized forms in major trading venues, Malay became for the Dutch a convenient auxiliary language of trade, and then of colonial administration. In the Dutch East Indies, the original plural society (Furnivall 1939), Malay served as language of wider communication between members of social groups set off by congruent ethnic, economic, political, and linguistic divisions. Put oversimply, the Dutch - unlike, for instance, the English in Malaya or India - restricted native access to Dutch language education, and had recourse for purposes of colonial administration, religious conversion, etc., to a version of Malay. But Malay was also developing as a print language among ethnically heterogeneous, polyglot populations in burgeoning coastal cities which were entry points for modern technologies and ideas. By the turn of the century social forces in both dominant and dominated fractions of colonial society had made Malay the common tongue of multiethnic urban society, and its intelligentsia. (A very good introduction to and overview of this complex topic is Hoffman 1979.)

By 1928, when a young proto-nationalist elite nominated Malay as Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*) and language of their nation-to-be, it was wholly associated with neither the colonial regime nor any of the colonies' most politically or demographically important ethnic groups. The choice of Malay, as is often pointed out, therefore permitted the strategic bypassing of Javanese which, with the largest group of native speakers in the colonies and a "high" courtly and literary tradition, was an obvious candidate. The motto formulated by that young group of intellectuals - One island, one race, one language - hardly rings hollow sixty-three years later. At the time of the declaration of independence in 1945 only a few million spoke regional and urban dialects of Malay. The 1971 national census showed 40 percent of the national

population of 118 million to be speakers of Indonesian; the 1981 census showed half of 150 million Indonesians speaking the language; the government has projected, not disinterestedly, that 60 percent of the country's 190 million citizens now speak Indonesian and that the percentage will rise to not quite 70 percent in a population of 240 million by 2001 (Abas 1987).

Indonesian's statistical success is primary evidence of Indonesians' apparent acquiescence if not allegiance to their government's self-legitimizing rhetoric of national development. Such statistics likewise provide a basis for worries expressed at the Javanese Language Congress about effects of Indonesian national development on local linguistic traditions.

But for at least two reasons the rhetoric of threatened ethnic languages and cultures is least appropriate for "the Javanese case." One is the obvious fact that the Javanese, who number some eighty million, have always been the demographic and political center of gravity of the nation, and have always dominated the nation's military and state apparatus. This was true when President Sukarno declared independence in 1945, and through his increasingly chaotic rule and deposal in 1965. It was true during and after the ostensible 1965 coup attempt of the Communist Party which was put down in series of nationwide bloody massacres. It has been true under the regime established by the military faction, headed by President Suharto, which moved after the massacres to establish the state apparatus called the "New Order," (*Orde Baru*, vs. Sukarno's *Orde Lama* "Old Order") and the "Development Order" (*Orde Pembangunan*).

The Indonesian term *pembangunan* 'development' has thus served as a keyword (in the sense of Williams 1983) in almost thirty years of governmental nationalist discourse, and served in state justifications for a wide range of policy decisions made mostly in top-down manner, many with massively disruptive effects on local communities. So too Suharto, for twenty-six years president of the New Order, has acceded to the title 'Father of Development' (*Bapak Pembangunan*), and heads a cohesive, authoritarian regime in which Javanese figure quite prominently. Concomitant with its moves to modernize Indonesia's economy and infrastructure have been steps by the New Order to disseminate Indonesian rapidly and widely. Among the first and most significant of the New Order decrees by President Suharto's was his 'Presidential instruction' (*Instruksi Presiden*) that a vast network of elementary schools (*sekolah Inpres*) be established throughout the country, with a primary goal of teaching literacy in Indonesian. Census figures cited earlier testify to the success of the development project, at least as far as the government and the national language is concerned.

A less obvious reason for questioning the rhetoric of the "threat to Javanese tradition" emerges from those same census figures, considered on a province-by-province basis. Lumping together figures for the provinces of Central and East Java - which, along with the special district of Yogyakarta, are home to the great majority of Javanese speakers in the nation - it appears that all save one other province (out of twenty-seven) have *greater* percentages of Indonesian speakers. One factor in this lag may be the relative ethnic homogeneity of Central and Eastern Java, which

lessens the need for a language of wider (interethnic) communication. In more heterogeneous provinces the same national development processes which have increased the need for interethnic communication have likewise provided Indonesian as obvious linguistic means. Figures comparable to those for Central and East Java are found for the similarly densely populated, ethnolinguistically homogeneous populations of West Java and Bali.

But there remains a kind of sociolinguistic paradox: that part of Indonesia which is home to most of the national elite, and which is among the most highly integrated into the national economy and infrastructure, has the lowest percentage of speakers of Indonesian. By government projections it will be among the very last (in 2041) to achieve universal competence in the national language. So a motivating context for the Javanese Language Congress needs to be sought elsewhere, in broader aspects of the current sociopolitical context.

The Development Order's development policies have had social and cultural effects it did not foresee and has been unable to fully control. Economic development, fueled by international capital, has led to a flood of commodities and a growing consumerist-based culture. Sprawling urban areas have become scenes for local versions and mediations of transnational mass culture, for which millions of rural Indonesians are a passive audience thanks to national mass media. In cities, where the state elite are most concentrated, changing habits and attitudes are often markedly at odds with traditional values, Javanese and otherwise. (See for further discussion Foulcher 1990.)

The state thus finds itself in an ambiguous position with respect to effects of modernization: images of sexuality, gender relations and family, fashions, music, clothing, and much else. Incipient middle class consumerism, essential for the practice and ideology of development, is giving rise to social change which is exogenous, undomesticated, and viewed with apprehension by those in the New Order concerned to preserve traditional political, moral, and cultural values. This circumstance may have been stimulus as well as theme for the Javanese Language Congress which President Suharto opened in Semarang, on the north coast of Central Java, in July of 1991.

2. The Javanese language congress

Claiming rather disingenuously to speak not as President of the Republic but a Javanese, Suharto began by urging the various language experts in attendance to discuss the uses of Javanese philosophy, especially as contained in the Javanese orthography, to develop and disseminate a Javanese character. His wish was that the Indonesian people possess a noble spirit necessary for proper social relations, relations between people and the environment, as well as between people and God. (In the interests of brevity and readability I translate here freely from reports of the congress which appeared in two newspapers published in Jakarta, the national capital: *Kompas* and *Suara Pembaruan*.)

Presupposed by the fond hopes Suharto expressed and the papers given at the congress is the assumption that Javanese needs not to be "developed" but preserved

from exogenous, possibly pernicious social forces which threaten to render it corrupt or extinct. Commonly assumed also was a broad range of concerns - philosophy, orthography, character - for which the term *bahasa*, glossable as "language," was a convenient rubric. That broader topic can be called for present purposes "linguistic tradition." (On sense of the Indonesian word *bahasa* and its Javanese cognate *basa* see Heryanto 1989.)

Reports on the congress make clear also shared assumptions that the linguistic tradition under discussion was associated with a very small, exemplary, ethnic elite: the literate courtly *priyayi* who traditionally resided in two royal principalities of Central Java up to the time of Independence. Javanese literacy and literature were traditionally the province of this tiny literati, and integral elements in their symbolic domination of an illiterate rural populace. Suharto's allusion to Javanese orthography noted above bespeaks his concern for the very traditional linkage between Javanese characters, the esoteric literary tradition written and transmitted with them, and the ideal, cultivated Javanese character which access to traditional literature made possible. So too much attention was given to the complex system of Javanese linguistic etiquette which, several papers given at the congress noted, was correctly used by fewer and fewer young Javanese. Largely ignored, correlatively, was the fact that exemplary control of these "speech levels" never extended widely beyond the traditional elite circles. An image of the traditional elite was thus doubly salient at the congress: as the community which defined "standard" varieties of Javanese, and as inheritors of a high Javanese literary tradition. Both are perceived, it seems, as threatened endogenous resources for national development.

Whatever the state of Javanese linguistic tradition, this traditional elite community is certainly moribund: most of its younger members have in fact moved to centers of national activity, and many have entered the larger, newer elite of the nation. (For discussion see Errington 1985.) So there are grounds for doubting that a "high" Javanese linguistic tradition, now receding fast into the past of its traditional bearers, might be easily made relevant for a far larger group of Javanese Indonesians. Such doubts can be read from a political cartoon about the congress by Pramana (apparently Javanese) reproduced below from the national newspaper *Kompas* in which it appeared. It depicts a government official reciting the Javanese syllabic orthography - represented in the cartoon along with its alphabetic equivalents - as he holds up a puppet from the Javanese shadowplay, the most famous of Javanese linguistic traditions. In the corner a young boy dressed in modern, not to say high-class style says to his father, in very idiomatic Indonesian, "Well, if you, Dad, of Javanese descent, don't understand it . . . all the more for me . . ." It is interesting that the boy attributes Javanese-ness to his father indirectly as a matter of ancestry, rather than directly as a matter of ethnic identity, i.e., as being a Javanese (*orang Jawa*). And although this Indonesian/Javanese youth might not deny his own Javanese descent, the cartoon suggests that he would by the same token be little concerned with Javanese traditions which seem to figure hardly at all even in his father's cultural heritage.

However daunting the task, congress attendants collectively acceded to President's Suharto's wish, recommending that the considerable power of the

Department of Education and Culture be lent to the project of disseminating Javanese language and orthography through all levels of governmentally sponsored education in Central and East Java. They thus sanctioned a regularized, institutionally treated version of their linguistic tradition, to be superposed on local communities through a supralocally organized school system.

This attempt to preserve an apparently anachronistic "high" culture may promote the ongoing project (recalling Anderson's terms) of an autonomous, autochthonous version of Indonesian modernity; a stronger sociopolitical diagnosis would be that this officially legitimized, reinvented ethnic tradition will serve to legitimize state responses to social and cultural consequences of the economic development program it has sponsored. An official version of Javanese tradition may then serve to mediate the ambiguities between good development and its "bad" consequences, and between ethnic and national identities. Thus figured, Javanese linguistic tradition will serve as one among many kinds of ethnic 'local content' (*muatan lokal*) which are insertable into a translocal state education framework.

The rhetoric of preservation also elides the gap between the linguistic face of nationalist development ideology and the culture of the traditional Javanese elite whose tradition is to be "preserved." Glossed over at the congress were larger cultural

consequences of subordinating and assimilating Javanese linguistic tradition to the national idiom. That exemplary tradition will be transformed from an esoteric to a reinvented exoteric body of cultural knowledge, distributed homogeneously throughout one ethnic part of the national citizenry. As an instance of standardized public culture, Javanese will thus be reconstituted on a smaller scale in the geosocially homogeneous, public image of Indonesian.

3. The language of development, the development of language

I conclude by touching briefly on ideological differences which might underly nationalist and ethnic visions of language, but which are effectively elided by an ideology of language development. Indonesian ideology intertwines exogenous conceptions of development and indigenous visions of national community so closely that it is impossible to avoid taking seriously "the substantive overlap between nationalist ideology and social science theory" which, Handler argues, "constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to our understanding of nationalism." (1988: 8) In that spirit, I opportunistically invoke European social theory on one hand, and an Indonesian's observations on development ideology on the other, to foreground some contrasts between Indonesian and Javanese linguistic ideologies.

The national vision of Indonesian can be called instrumentalist and constructivist, but also teleological. The former pair of terms serves to invoke the general model of nationalism and national language developed by Gellner (1983), whose quasi-functionalist argument resonates well enough with the rhetoric of Indonesian development to ventriloquate crucial aspects of Indonesian language ideology. To a Durkheimian notion of division of labor Gellner adds the need for what he calls, invoking Weber, a linguistic instrument for "cool, rational gauging of means and ends (1983: 20)." Such a language counts as "a universal conceptual currency . . . for the general characterization of things . . . all facts are located within a single continuous logical space . . . in principle one single language describes the world and is internally unitary (1983: 21)." Though I quote Gellner slightly out of context - he describes here "our society" - his vision of the nation fits with the presumable goals of national development, what Gellner would in any case see as the endpoint of the long hard road which eventually leads to where we are.

Indonesian as language of national development is available, in Gellner's words, for "all referential uses of language [which] ultimately refer to one coherent world [. . . It] can be reduced to a unitary idiom; and [. . .] it is legitimate to relate [those uses] to each other." State level thinking in Indonesia conforms likewise with Gellner's view that a national language must be developed and propagated by a centralized state sponsored school system (like Suharto's *sekolah Inpres*) as a supralocally codified, elaborated language of "exo-education." (1983: 32)

Particularly telling is the convergence between Gellner's social theoretical account of national languages and Ariel Heryanto's diagnostic social history of the Indonesian word *pembangunan* 'development' in nationalist rhetoric. He argues that in

the state dominated development view language is "primarily an 'instrument' of communication, used to express thoughts and feelings . . . Essentially, the students of both development studies and language studies see *bahasa* ('language') and *Pembangunan* as two things with separate realities, even though they are thought to be connectable for practical purposes at any time." (1986: 7)

I pass over Heryanto's careful discussion of the several significances of the root *bangun* and its derived forms, including the nominal *pembangunan*, to foreground his assessment of the current status of the term. "Fundamentally, *pembangunan* does not refer to natural process, but to a process of ENGINEERING [his emphasis], with primary orientation to the man-made or artificial PRODUCT which it yields, which has the characteristics of being NEW; or to the process of CREATING something which was formerly non-existent by mobilizing forces from OUTSIDE the object concerned . . ." (1986: 16) It is in this sense that Indonesian is viewed, like the project it subserves, as the outcome of a process of conscious construction, rather than organic growth. It is an ongoingly constructable artifact equally available in all contexts, for all topics, to all speakers.

Coupled with this vision of engineered linguistic, social, and economic change is an unobvious but important teleological moment. Development ideology justifies present actions through a vision of the "developed" future to which those actions are oriented as means, and toward which they collectively tend. Taken as a continuum, "development" depends therefore on a tacitly assumed endpoint or *telos* which is nonetheless undefined by any criteria extrinsic to ideology itself. In this respect, the envisioned end state of development is indefinitely deferrable, and counts as what Mannheim (1936: 192) called "[an] object alien to reality which transcend[s] actual existence and can nevertheless still be effective in the realization and the maintenance of the existing order of things."

In these three respects Indonesian language ideology contrasts markedly with traditional Javanese linguistic tradition, in which, to invoke Gellner again, "the most striking trait [is] of . . . the co-existence . . . of multiple, not properly united, but hierarchically related sub-worlds, and the existence of special privileged facts, sacralized and exempt from ordinary treatment." (1983: 21) Stripped of its functionalist overtones, Gellner echoes received academic wisdom about the relation in traditional Javanese political culture between power, knowledge, and esoteric languages (Anderson 1972).

The recent history of Indonesian nationalism and political culture suggests less a linear progression from traditional to modern, as is suggested by Gellner's model, than a complex process of reciprocal influence and partial assimilation. The "development" of an Indonesian vocabulary of exogenous English and endogenous Javanese words, for instance, can be read as evidence of the ongoing relevance of traditional Javanese views of language and power among Indonesia's political elite (Anderson 1966; Errington 1986, 1989). But the political asymmetry between modern ideology and traditional culture ensures that such reciprocal influence can only be covert and tacitly noted, running as it does so clearly against the appearance of ideologically proper national language development.

Javanese and the Javanese linguistic tradition, on the other hand, can be and are

objects of an overt project of transformation, to become exoteric public resources for enriching and justifying national development in local terms. They may also serve to valorize as non-native and foreign those effects of development uncongenial to state policy. A loss of traditional marks of social distinction is unavoidable in this project, which requires that formerly esoteric linguistic resources thus come to be standardized and publicized. But in the national political scheme of things this may be a fairly small price for the Javanese Indonesian elite to pay, hardly greater cost than the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars which the government spent for the Javanese Language Congress which acted in its interest.

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