

# Informal Indonesian and the Spirit of Pluralism

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## Abstract

*This brief paper deals with the emergence of the informal style of Indonesian, especially from the point of view of its motive, its function, its form and the effect of the vitality of the local vernaculars. It is the result of long observation and participation as a citizen of Indonesia, who speaks Javanese as a native speaker and who has spoken Indonesian from the time of its inception*

**Keywords:** *diglossic, informal Indonesian, code-switching*

## Introduction

When I was a pupil of *Sekolah Rakyat* (Elementary School) in Wonosari in 1941, I learned Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) as a subject. In 1945 Indonesia was declared independent and Malay was chosen to be the national language of the country with the name *Bahasa Indonesia*. Indonesia became diglossic, using Indonesian for official, national, and modern matters, and Javanese or any other vernacular for unofficial, regional, and traditional matters. In 1947 I started Junior High School (SMP, *Sekolah Menengah Pertama*), and Indonesian became the medium of instruction. I was amazed that most of my teachers were able to speak Indonesian fairly fluently. In 1948 very often student leaders from Gadjah Mada University visited us, informing us of the political situation of the country, and preparing us for the student mobilization to fight against the Dutch soldiers in case of the Dutch attack. The student leaders were good at delivering speeches in Indonesian, and that very much amazed me, too. We used Indonesian to talk about school subjects and to have deliberations in student organization meetings. In informal occasions, however, we used Javanese with our school friends.

Then from 1950 to 1953 I studied in SGA (*Sekolah Guru Atas*, Senior Teachers' School

in Yogyakarta. The teaching staff and the students were not only Javanese. Quite a few were from outside Java. There were two students from Aceh, eight students from West Kalimantan, two students from Manado, one student from Makassar, and one student from Bali. We lived in an *asrama* (hostel) next to the school. Outside school we talked in Javanese with our Javanese friends, but we had to use Indonesian when talking to the non-Javanese friends. I did not realize that this was the beginning of Informal Indonesian for me and for all of us living in the hostel. Informal Indonesian came into being.

## The Speakers of Informal Indonesian

Inter-ethnic friendship did not only occur in the hostel of SGA. There were several SGA's then, and there were also State Universities such as Gadjah Mada, the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, and ITB (*Institut Teknologi Bandung*, Bandung Institute of Technology) that enrolled students from various provinces in Indonesia. There were also government offices that employed officials from various different ethnic origins, private businesses with various employees from different islands, political activists who fought for the unity of the country, and religious leaders who wanted to spread their faith throughout the country. They too

became friends and used informal Indonesian when talking informally to each other. Thus, the rise of informal Indonesian signifies friendship between various people from different ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Nowadays informal Indonesian is also used by friends of the same ethnic background and has even spread to many children of educated people and has become the medium of communication in their family. For example, in Java to avoid the hesitating choice of the polite level (*krama*) or the non-respectful level (*ngoko*), new acquaintances or colleagues decide to use Indonesian rather than Javanese. Indonesian can be a solution for those who feel too polite using *krama*, but too rude in using *ngoko*. Further, as an instance, the sons and daughters of my nephews and nieces in Yogyakarta use informal Indonesian when talking to their parents and do the same thing to their grandparents. The grandparents complain but they cannot do anything to make their grandchildren talk to the parents and grandparents in Javanese. The grandchildren learn Indonesian from their kindergartens. Such a phenomenon and such a complaint do not seem to occur only among parents and grandparents in Yogyakarta or in Java. It has occurred in many other towns and provinces.

### The Form of Informal Indonesian

The form of informal Indonesian is just like standard Indonesian with several exceptions. The forms of the two styles of Indonesian are a little different because, first of all, if standard and formal Indonesian is meant to be used everywhere in Indonesia, informal Indonesian is usually more limited in its coverage. Formal style of speech observes the rules of prescriptive or normative grammar and standard dictionary, while informal speech contains many elements from outside the grammar book and the dictionary. Formal speech is used nation wide, whereas informal style of speech is used locally. Formal speech is learned at school, while informal speech is developed casually outside formal schooling. Informal speech is heavily influenced by the local vernacular. Each ethnic group may have its

own specific informal Indonesian. All linguistic variables of the vernacular may appear in the informal speech. It can be phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical. Sometimes the system in the speech level may also affect the form of the informal style. In the case of pronunciation, the influence can be seen in the form of the individual phoneme, syllable structure, or prosodic pattern. For example, the informal style of Indonesian used by the Javanese may contain such Javanese phonological features as the contraction of diphthongs and syllables and Javanese prosody. The contraction of diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ into /e/ and /o/ (*sampe*, arrive; *kalo*, if), the contraction of /CōrV/, /CōIV/ into /CrV/ and /CIV/ (*brani*, brave; *slalu*, always), and the even stress for the first and second syllable (*sla-lu, bra-ni*) frequently appear. Javanese affixes such as *θ*, *N-*, *ke—an*, *ke—en* may be used instead of Indonesian *ber-*, *men-*, *terkena...* or *terlalu...* (*kerja*, to work; *ngambil*, take; *kecurian*, stolen by thief; *keberatn*, too heavy). Javanese syntactic patterns such as the split of the subject into some sort of theme plus the subject, and also the subject following the predicate may also appear. For example *Pak Hari itu, anaknya cantik-cantik*, or *Pak Hari itu, cantik-cantik, anaknya* (Hari's daughters are pretty). Inverted sentences may happen in statements, questions, and commands. For example *Bu, sudah habis, nasinya* (Mom, the rice is gone), *Mau diapakan nasinya ini?* (What are we going to do with the rice?); *Masuk dulu, kamu* ((You) go in first). Inverted sequences within an informal discourse may also happen. The items presented in formal speech, which is usually well-ordered, may occur in inverted order or even in disorderly sequence in informal speech.

As for the lexical items, Javanese words such as *celeng* (boar), *tawuran* (mob fighting), *kenes* (flirtatious), and many others are used. In connection with the sentence pattern, very often sentence particles such as *dong*, *deh*, *sih*, *ya*, *lho*, *kok*, and *kan* are used. For examples, *Jangan mbolos ya* (Do not cut classes, okay), *Jangan gitu dong* (Do not do it like that, please).

Secondly, if formal and standard Indonesian is meant to convey messages

clearly in a brief and compact way, informal speech does not have to always be very clear and brief. A speaker may express a vague or even an unfinished message to his interlocutor, yet the latter knows what the speaker wants because the latter knows the speaker very well. The interlocutor knows the speaker's background, his temperament, his present condition, his preoccupation, and his aspiration. Corrupted words, corrupted affixes, unfinished sentences, dangling sentences, unfinished discourses, all can easily be comprehended by the interlocutor. The deleted sound(s) in the word and the affix(es), the deleted phrase or the clause in the sentence, the omitted sentences in the discourse do not seem to bother the interlocutor. The followings are some examples of corrupted words. They are almost always used in such forms that they seem to have become the accepted informal forms. Corrupted words are, *e.g.*, *aja* (only) for *saja*, *udah* (already) for *sudah*, *gitu* (like that) for *begitu*. Corrupted affixes are, *e.g.*, *0* for *ber* (intransitive verb prefix), *N-* for *meN-* (transitive verb prefix); so *jalan* (to walk) for *berjalan*, *ngambil* (to take) for *mengambil*. Corrupted sentence is *e.g.* *Telan dulu baru ngomong* (Swallow your food in your mouth first, then only you can talk) for *Telan dulu makanan di mulutmu, sesudah itu baru kamu dapat berbicara*. Corrupted discourses are for example the shouts of food vendors or shoe repairers in the street to attract the attention of perspective customers, such as *Te* for *Sate ayam, saya jual sate ayam. Silahkan beli sate ayam saya; Sol sepatu, sepatu sol* (shoe soles, sole shoes) is the shout of a shoe repairer who invites the customers to repair their shoes and sandals.

On the other hand, in informal speech, time is very often not very important. For example, to make his message clearer, a speaker can make his utterance very long by adding cumbersome illustrations. To give emphasis, a speaker may repeat the phrases, clauses, sentences or discourses that he wants to emphasize. He may repeat twice, three times, four times, and even more times. For example *Telan dulu, telan dulu, telan dulu, baru ngomong* (Swallow the food first, swallow the food first, swallow the food first, then you can talk). Very often a speaker adds

his message with irrelevant information or even seemingly unrelated utterances.

Thirdly, if formal and standard speech should be accurate, informal speech can be a little ambiguous. Instead of using accurate words and idioms, a speaker often uses terms that are too general in nature. They may have a lot of different meanings, and are of more highly frequent of use. For example, instead of asking for *telur dadar* (omelette) or *telur ceplok* (sunny side up) or *telur orak-arik* (scrambled egg), a husband may just say *Makan pake telur saja* ((I want to) eat (rice) with just egg). The verb *makan* (eat) in an informal speech can be used to mean many different things. For example *Remnya nggak makan* (The brake does not work), *Bapak itu makan anak tirinya* (That man rapes his own step daughter/child), *Kakinya patah dimakan Paiman* (His leg was broken because he was kicked hard by Paiman).

In terms of the sentences, informal speech is usually not expressed in long complex compound sentences as in the formal speech. They are usually in either simple sentences or coordinate sentences using such a connector as *dan* (and), *tetapi* (but), or *setelah itu* (after that).

Fourthly, if formal style of speech is business-like, informal speech can be emotional. Informal speech may contain lexical items that express various kinds of uncontrolled feelings, such as anger, sadness, burst of happiness, pain, and worry. Interjections (*e.g.* *aduh*, Goodness gracious), shouts (*e.g.* *ee*, *hi*), screams (*e.g.* *emoh*, don't want to), moans (*e.g.* *aduh biyung*, gosh), cries for help (*e.g.* *tolong*, help), and the like can be found in an informal speech.

Further, if formal and standard style of speech should be objective and distant (formal), informal speech can use intimate vocabulary or intimate expressions. The speaker may use kin terms such as *pak* (dad), *bu* (mom), or terms of address such as *dok* (doctor), *prof* (professor), or terms of endearment such as *sayang* (darling) that show his wish of intimate relation, urgent persuasion, or strong plea of favor.

Fifth, in an informal speech the speaker may also refer to such an extra-linguistic object in the surrounding using such a demonstrative pronoun as *ini* (this), *itu* (that), *di sini* (here) or *di situ* (there).

Sixth, if the formal style of speech uses one code consistently from the beginning to the end, informal speech can use code switching or even code mixing. This means that the speaker is free to change his emotion, his intention, his topic of conversation, the addressee he is speaking to, and how he regards his relation with the addressee. In the informal style of speech, the speaker often changes the style of speech, the speech level, the register, the dialect, and even the language he is speaking.

Related to code switching, while formal speech is expected to be in good sequence, informal speech one can be otherwise. The discourse does not have to start with the opening sentence and end with a closure. The opening sentence can be inserted in the middle or even at the end of the discourse. The topic sentence does not have to be at the beginning or at the end of the discourse, it can be inserted in the early part, middle part or final part of the discourse, or not be mentioned altogether. Informal speech does not have to follow a certain format. The speaker may vary the order in the way his impulse dictates to him, and the effect is perceived as normal.

### **The Function of Informal Indonesian**

The informal style of speech is used in informal communication. Moods of ease, informality, tolerance, accommodation and friendship surround the use of informal speech. Informal speech improves personal relationships. Informal speech facilitates relaxed conversations, conveyance of inner feelings, and exchange of jokes. In a joking atmosphere, friends tolerate unpleasant differences. Informal Indonesian seems to have the same function, especially when used by people of different ethnic backgrounds. With the rise of informal Indonesian, tolerance and accommodation of differences between people from different ethnic groups

in Indonesia has become easier. It has encouraged friendship between people from different islands, different provinces, and different regions.

In other words, the spirit of pluralism has arisen in Indonesia, due to, among other reasons, the use of informal Indonesian. People are beginning to appreciate differences in customs and habits. Friendship and inter-marriage are now normal practice.

### **The Effect of Informal Indonesian on the Linguistic Repertoire**

Up to 1950 the relation between such a regional language as Javanese and Indonesian resembles diglossia; with Indonesian functioning as the H (high) code and the regional language as the L (low) code (Ferguson, 1964). The regional language has its specific function and Indonesian has another specific function. Javanese is used for an unofficial situation and for intra-ethnic communication, while Indonesian is used for an official and inter-ethnic communication. Indonesian is a national language, and Javanese is a regional or provincial language. Indonesian is used to communicate "modern" topics such as science, national politics, and high level economics, while Javanese is for traditional topics such as traditional arts, religion, and social matters. The separation of the function is clear. Overlaps in the use of Indonesian and Javanese are rare. But when informal Indonesian has become popular, the separation of the function becomes more complex. Several domains of life can be conveyed in either Javanese or informal Indonesian.

The following are charts that give pictures of the separation of the functions between Javanese and Indonesian before and after the emergence of informal Indonesian. Figure 1 represents the diglossic situation and the clear separation of the function of Indonesian and Javanese. Figure 1 represents the diglossic situation and the clear separation of the function of Indonesian and Javanese. Figure 2 gives picture of the division of functions after the emergence of the informal Indonesian (Poedjosoedarmo, 2002).

**Figure 1**

The Separation of Function before the Emergence of Informal Indonesian

Function Language	Situation		Ethnic Origin of P2		P1-P2 Relation		Topic	
	Official	Unofficial	Outside	Inside	Distant	Close	Modern	Traditional
Indonesian	√		√		√		√	
Javanese		√		√		√		√

**Figure 2**

The Separation of Function after the Emergence of Informal Indonesian

Function Language	Situation		Ethnic Origin of P2		P1-P2 Relation		Topic	
	Official	Unofficial	Outside	Inside	Distant	Close	Modern	Traditional
Standard Indonesian	√		√		√		√	
Informal Indonesian		√		√		√		√
Javanese		√		√		√		√

From the above description it can be observed that nowadays the linguistic situation is no longer diglossic, but rather triglossic or even polyglossic. Such a phenomenon may not be described as a leaking diglossia, but rather a total split of the form and function of the H (high) code, and hence an overlap in the use of Indonesian and Javanese in several domains of communication.

### The Emergence of the Practice of Code Mixing

Among some speakers, especially among young children in urban areas and among good friends of middle class people, the separation of the function of Javanese and Indonesian has become distinct. For them the difference in function between informal Indonesian and Javanese is unclear. They can convey messages using either Javanese or Indonesian. This unclear separation between Javanese and informal Indonesian has prompted the practice of code-mixing. Unlike in code-switching, the speaker shifts codes not because he or she wants to give a certain impression, to show that he is addressing a different interlocutor, to communicate a different topic of conversation, or to show a different relational attitude toward the addressee. He constantly switches from Javanese to Indonesian, and vice versa, because he does not know the different

functions or the different meanings of the two languages. Unlike the code-switch, code-mix is not motivated by the change in intention, wish, or context of conversation, but rather by the change in the impulsive presence of the codes in the head of the speaker. Whichever code comes up in the mind, that is the one the speaker utters. And since the functions of the two codes are unclear, confusion dictates the appearance of the codes in the mind. Hence mixing is a common practice in Malaysia and the Philippines. In Malaysia people speak of *bahasa rujak* and in the Philippines *halo-halo language*. The popular names suggest that everything or anything can be mixed into the language. It seems that in Indonesia some people are starting to speak it. Once can name such a mixture of language *gado-gado* language.

### The Effect of Informal Indonesian on the Regional Language

In general one can state that the vitality of the regional languages in Indonesia is becoming less and less vigorous. The function of the standard style of the major regional languages (*bahasa daerah*) such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese is gradually shrinking because, instead, Indonesian is now in use. Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese are now rarely used to communicate official business. Further, with the emergence of informal Indonesian, the function of the

informal speech of the major regional languages is also gradually reduced. As a consequence, the lovers of *bahasa daerah* have to make an extra effort to maintain the vitality of their languages.

With the reduction of their vitality, the inventory of the lexicon of most regional languages is becoming smaller. Many words and idioms are fading away because they are rarely used. The younger generations are forgetting many traditional words and idioms. Apart from the lexicon, the syntactic pattern and the phonology of the regional languages are also becoming poorer. Many items have either merged with some others or have disappeared from use. This is understandable because the regional languages are only the informal code in the totality of the linguistic repertoire. An informal code does not have to be as rich as the standard one, because it has only to convey messages that require no maximal clarity unlike the standard one (Poedjosedarmo, 2002).

## Conclusion

The rise of the informal style of Indonesian is an interesting phenomenon. First of all, it reminds us of the existence of the informal polite (*madya*) level in Javanese (Poedjosedarmo, 1977). There are many similarities between informal Indonesian and *madya* level, either in their forms or their functions. In terms of the forms, both informal Indonesian and *madya* contain corrupted forms. For example, they use a lot of linguistic elements from the first code or the first language of the speakers. They do not have to be very clear and accurate. They use a lot of repetitions, interjections, and friendly terms of address. In terms of their meanings, both convey the spirit of informality, intimacy, accommodation and tolerance.

Secondly, the process of the development is also interesting. While in Europe people are busy developing their standard languages, in Indonesia people are developing informal Indonesian. Since the time of the renaissance many nations in Europe developed their standard languages to unite their countries

and to increase the prestige of their civilizations (Haugen, 1969: 119-130). In Indonesia, soon after Malay was accepted as the national language, people started developing informal Indonesian to facilitate the spirit of friendship and the acceptance of pluralism of culture.

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