

## The Reality of Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia in Academia

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### Abstract

*One of the lingering and stark realities of British and European colonization in the Malay Archipelago is the emergence of varieties of Malay wrought by the process of extensive borrowings from the Dutch, the Portuguese or the English language into the receiving language, Malay. Thrust into diverse local and speech communities borne of varying socio-cultural and historical circumstance, the extension of form, meaning and function in present-day varieties of Malay can range from those mutually unintelligible with one another to those having a closer familial resemblance. Here, one domain where regionalized and localized varieties of Malay can become a catalyst for intercultural conflict is in higher education. This paper focuses on the intercultural conflict that can arise between academic staff and their Indonesian postgraduate students when new ecologies of Indonesian Malay brought forth by nativization and acculturation surface in the spoken and written academic discourse of these students currently pursuing their Master or Doctoral studies at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). In this paper, explanatory adequacy will be provided by highlighting the divergences in form, meaning and the extended range of functions between Bahasa Melayu, the pedagogical norm at UKM, and the many varieties of Indonesian Malay. The findings would not only reveal reasons behind disparities in meaning and use, but also indicate a cline of intelligibility between varieties of Malay in the Malay Archipelago. Both would lend themselves to greater understanding of subtle cultural and linguistic identities lurking in the Malay world.*

### Introduction

*And who in time, knows wither we may vent  
The treasures of our tongue, to what strange shores  
This gain of our best glory shall be sent  
To enrich unknowing nations with our stores?  
What worlds in the yet unformed occident  
May come refined with the accents that are ours  
Or who can tell for what great work in hand  
The greatness of our style is now ordained?  
What powers it shall bring in, what spirits command,  
What thoughts let out, what humors keep restrained  
What mischief it may powerfully withstand,  
And what fair ends may thereby be attained  
(Daniel, 1599, Musophilus)*

Daniel Samuel's (quoted in Kachru, 1990: 4) prophetic vision back in 1599 was possibly one of the earliest statements that predicted the beginning of the end where the virginity of a language and its many varieties were concerned. Indeed, one of the lingering and stark realities about the Malay language is the introduction of new words into its lexicon as a result of Dutch, Portuguese or English colonization of the Malay Archipelago. Thrust into diverse local and speech communities borne of varying socio-cultural and historical circumstance, and then subjected to the incessant throes of Diaspora, nativization and acculturation, the extension of form, meaning and function in present-day varieties of Malay can range from those mutually unintelligible with one another to those having a closer

familial resemblance. Here, one domain where localized varieties of Malay can become a catalyst for intercultural conflict is in higher education.

This paper focuses on the intercultural conflict that can arise between academic staff and their Indonesian postgraduate students when new ecologies of Indonesian Malay brought forth by nativization and acculturation surface in the spoken and written academic discourse of these students currently pursuing their Master or Doctoral studies at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). We begin first, however, with a short overview surrounding the emergence and types of localized norms in Malaysian Malay, henceforth, Bahasa Melayu and Indonesian Malay, henceforth, Bahasa Indonesia with the harmonizing objective to create greater understanding of cultural and linguistic identities presently lurking in the Malay world. Here, consistent with the aim of this paper, the documentation and discussion of words and phrases in Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Melayu that have the potential to cause miscommunication between the interlocutors concerned will be the primary focus of this paper. However, Sanskrit or Arabic influences on Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia will not be included. This is due to the observation of minimal divergences in form and meaning in Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia as a result of their presence in both languages following nativization. Such forms, thus, are not likely to be the primary culprit for intercultural conflict in the Indonesian students' written or spoken discourse.

## Emergence of localized norms

The 1500s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw marked changes in the linguistic and socio-cultural landscape of what is now Malaysia and Indonesia. Reasons for imperialism, colonialism and spice trades aside, linguistically, the coming of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British to the Malay world also wrought profound havoc on the native forms of Malay and its dialects as the tsunami of alien words from the colonial power altered the then existing morphology, syntax, phonology and semantics of the local varieties of Malay. Here, the extent of new words into the lexicon and the subsequent birth of new collocations, idioms, registers, many by the processes of borrowing, code-mixing and hybridization in the receiving language, Malay, can be said to vary according to length of stay by the colonial power. Indonesia, for example, was colonized by the Portuguese in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British from 1811-1816 and the Dutch by some 350 years until its independence in 1945. Malaysia, on the other hand, was colonized by the Portuguese from 1511-1641, and then was primarily under British rule from the late 1800s to Malaysia's independence in 1957. During these periods, the prolonged contact between the initially dissimilar languages and cultures in tandem with the jostling of new tones, pitch and accents brought about the emergence of local varieties of Malay having different linguistic and socio-cultural presuppositions across several domains of use.

Given the length of Dutch colonization in Indonesia and British colonization in Malaysia, it would be inevitable that Bahasa Melayu would have more borrowings and loanwords from the English language while Bahasa Indonesia would owe much of its unique linguistic identity to their Dutch masters. Here, the reasons for borrowing include lexical or semantic gaps to accommodate extensions in range of functions, for instance, in socio-cultural, administrative and educational spheres. Some examples of Dutch borrowings into Bahasa Indonesia include *tas* (bag), *rekening* (account) *kantor* (office), *wortel* (carrot), *wastafel* (washbasin), *boontjes* (green beans), *broeder* (brother), *das* (necktie) and *bioskop* (cinema). In contrast, borrowings from the English language into Malay embrace words such as *bag* (bag) *akuan* (account) *pejabat* (office), *tali leher* (necktie) *projek* (project), *tesis* (thesis), *pil* (pill), *tayar* (tyre), *ekologi* (ecology), *botani* (botany), *komputer* (computer), *wad* (ward-hospital), *e-mel* (e-mail), *tisu* (tissue), *kalendar* (calendar), *mei* (may) *universiti* (university), *linguistik* (linguistics) and *imigresen* (immigration). Suffice to say that these words listed above represent only the tip of the iceberg where borrowings are concerned. Such words have all undergone nativization of context be it with regard to phonology, syntax or morphology.

The processes of nativization and acculturation can be said to be more conspicuous, however, in the existence of words in Malay that share the same form but convey a different meaning and words that have dissimilar forms but convey the same meaning. Table 1 below provides some examples that bear testament to the natural inclination of languages to adapt to their surroundings forcing users to set new parameters for understanding the illocutionary force behind the words and phrases used. Some explanatory adequacy and more examples of these forms of nativization will be shown in section 3.0.

Table 1

Words	Bahasa Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia
Budak	Kid	slave
Polisi	Policy	police
Repot	Report	busy, occupied
Tambang	Fare	mine, rope

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/wikipedia>

The question of a linguistic model academic is also a salient issue in providing a suitable backdrop to the objectives of this paper. At Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), the reality for Indonesian postgraduate students is the expectation for them to interact with their lecturers and supervisors in the standard variety of Bahasa Melayu consistent with the demands of the formal domains such as that of higher education. This is especially so in their written or oral presentations be it for academic papers, their thesis or for the defense of their thesis in the final stages of their study. This expectation is further compounded by the linguistic attitudes towards varieties of Indonesian Malay such as Javanese, Sundanese and Balinese, to name a few used extensively by the Indonesian students in their academic discourse at UKM. Here, these varieties confound many university lectures who are not proficient in Indonesian Malay and other nativized innovations present in the varieties of Indonesian Malay. Given this scenario, the students are expected to use a linguistic model that their lecturers and supervisors can understand to avoid miscommunication and enhance, instead, the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the academic work presented. Many of the students, on the other hand, demand that such prevailing attitudes be overturned as even though Indonesian Malay contains many forms that are different, Indonesian Malay is as standard as Bahasa Melayu and the onus should be on UKM academic staff especially those belonging to the Malay community to strive to understand the differences between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. This view is in tandem with the fact that many Indonesian students also feel they should not be expected to acquire the expected linguistic model in the three to four years they spend at the university. Whether or not these attitudes are linguistically and pragmatically sound is an issue that is still being debated today by many sociolinguists and language practitioners and despite many points of view presented at conferences and seminars, the reality is that many foreign postgraduate students anywhere in the world are still expected to conform to the prescriptive models of the country in which they are studying. At UKM, the discrepancies between form and meaning between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia are a regular source of intercultural conflict among staff and Indonesian students. Examples of words that can lead to the aforementioned will be highlighted in Section 3.0 below.

## Methodology

Data for this paper was harvested from research data bent on determining the differences of lexical forms and meaning between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. The primary investigative tools were the use of questionnaires and interviews which were both then subjected to document analysis.

### Questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed to a randomly selected sample comprising of postgraduate students from various parts of Indonesia and who have been studying at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for at least a year in various fields of study. Here, the time frame of a year was deemed necessary due to the reasonable assumption that twelve months would be sufficient for the subjects to have been exposed to the style of academic writing discourse expected of them at UKM. In addition, their experience and the obstacles they have encountered so far with regard to writing term papers and completing their assignments in Bahasa Melayu would also be beneficial feedback particularly given the necessity for them in the questionnaire to provide specific examples of lexical items and terminologies which would have the potential for causing intercultural conflict between students and lecturers.

## Interview

Questionnaire data was augmented by short interview sessions with the subjects. The objective of these sessions was not only to validate responses received but also to extend the discussion particularly with regard to salient issues surrounding the challenges faced by the subjects in their necessity to communicate academically in Bahasa Melayu.

## Academic Writing Workshops

Data for the paper was also garnered during two academic writing workshops organized by the Centre for Graduate Studies, UKM. These workshops, with the objective to obtain first hand information from 25 workshop participants regarding the difficulties encountered in academic writing, was also instrumental in on-site identification and discussion of subtle divergences in meaning in the two languages caused by the use of different varieties of Indonesian Malay. Feedback from the workshop participants was positive in their quest to improve their academic writing skills in Bahasa Melayu.

## Document analysis

The document analysis technique was engaged on linguistic data collected from the Indonesian students' theses and dissertations written in the 1990s to the year 2004. Here, the analysis focused on lexical items, terminology, phrases and sentence structures wrongly used by the students in Bahasa Melayu. The general mode employed by document analysis is highlighted in section 3.0 below.

## Findings and Discussion

Asmah Haji Omar (2002) study on lexical differences between Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia categorizes the differences between the two languages into four categories, that is, transparent, opaque, obscure and vague. On the other hand, Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin and Halimah Hj. Ahmad (2005) have categorized differences in Malay and Indonesian terminology into three categories instead; transparent, conflict and opaque. Adopting from these two studies aforesaid, the data for this paper will be presented for discussion under the three categories of transparent, obscure and opaque.

### Transparent Categories

Transparent categories refer to words or expressions in Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia whose meanings are transparent between both languages. Most of the Indonesian words which fall into this category are direct borrowings from English and transliterated into Bahasa Indonesia. Such words, in addition, do not usually cause comprehension problems because they are recognized as borrowed English words which carry the same meaning in Bahasa Indonesia. Apart from this, there are other expressions which are not borrowings but that each language would follow a different spelling system. Differences in spelling conventions between Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Melayu, however, do not hinder understanding of the two languages because the variations in spelling are very minimal. Some of the examples of words under the transparent category are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Bahasa Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia	Meaning
aktiviti	aktivitas	activity
antarabangsa	internasional	international
banci	sensus	census
barah	kanker	cancer
bedah siasat	otopsi	autopsy
hartanah	properti	property
falsafah	pilsapat	philosophy
tentera	militer	military

syarikat	serikat	company
pesakit	pasien	patient

The list of words in table 2 show, for example, that words borrowed from the English language into bahasa Indonesia are more commonly the case as compared to that into bahasa Melayu, such as *otopsi* for autopsy and *properti* for property. While these are borrowed from English, some other words are spelled differently, for example *syarikat* in bahasa Melayu and *serikat* in bahasa Indonesia. Both words mean company but there is a slight difference in spelling and pronunciation.

### Obscure Categories

Lexical items and expressions which come under the obscure category are those which are seemingly available in both languages but each word used would signify a different meaning. These words are similar in form and spelling but they are commonly used by both Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia speakers to convey a different sense and meaning. Examples of such instances can be illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Words	Bahasa Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia
lemas	drowned	tired
comel	cute	fussy
bual	chatting	telling lies
gincu	lipstick	food colouring
pengacara	master of ceremony	lawyer
becak	mud	trishaw
percuma	free of charge	pointless

Due to the fact that words, such as those listed in table 3 above are similar in surface form in both languages, many students are not aware of the divergence in meaning of each word in the respective languages. For instance, the word *lemas* means “drowned” in Bahasa Melayu but in Bahasa Indonesia it means “tired.” Another interesting example is *comel* that conveys a very positive sense of someone who is cute or pretty. On the other hand, it conjures a negative connotation if someone is referred to as *comel* in Bahasa Indonesia because it refers to a person who is fussy or very meticulous over trivial matters. Similarly, while the word *pengacara* refers to a person who plays the role of a masters of ceremony in Bahasa Melayu, *pengacara* in Bahasa Indonesia, however, refers to a lawyer or an attorney. Research indicates that such divergences in meaning has repeatedly caused considerable misunderstanding between lecturers and supervisors when used in written assignments

### Opaque Categories

Opaque categories comprise words which are ‘uniquely’ Indonesian and almost totally incomprehensible for the Malay audience. This includes any unfamiliar words or expressions, acronyms, coinages and short forms which are not known in Bahasa Melayu. Some of these words are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Bahasa Melayu	Bahasa Indonesia	Meaning
graduan	wisudawan	graduates
arnab	kelinci	rabbit
tukang masak	koki	ch�f
farmasi	apotik	pharmacy



dapur	kompor	kitchen
lobak merah	wortel	carrot
getah	karet	rubber
tilam	kasur	mattress

These words are considered foreign in Bahasa Melayu because they do not exist in the Malay lexicon and they have never been used in any Malay context. The sense of the word *apotik*, for instance, is opaque in Bahasa Melayu because it does not give any clue whatsoever that it refers to a pharmacy. Bahasa Melayu, on the other hand, has borrowed the English word and has amended it to the appropriate spelling convention, thus, the word pharmacy becoming *farmasi*. Similarly, the word *wisudawan* in Bahasa Indonesia refers to graduates while the same groups of people are referred to as *graduan* in Bahasa Melayu. Yet, another example of the divergence of forms between both languages is *tukang masak* and *koki* for chef.. Consequently, the use of these words and others with opaque meanings could be a reason for miscommunication and conflict between lecturers and students to occur.

## Conclusion

This paper has highlighted potential areas of intercultural conflict between Indonesian students and their lecturers and/or supervisors at UKM through the display of differences in form and meaning amid both Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. Presently at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), ongoing efforts by the university to assist Indonesian students in their academic journey include *inter alia* two obligatory university courses in Bahasa Melayu aimed to equip them with the requisite academic writing skills in Malay and continuous research on ways and means to continually enhance the academic writing skills of these international students. This year, for example, one of the end-products of a year-long research is the publication of a book containing a glossary of terms in both Bahasa Melayu and Bahasa Indonesia. Such endeavors to bring Indonesian students to a successful conclusion of their study through the strategies mentioned above are a small price to pay for the world to come to UKM. A form of international recognition, indeed, and an opportunity to mutually share knowledge and expertise while finally enlightening local society about other cultures at the same time.

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