

Interaction between Indonesian and Kupang Malay

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This paper summarizes interim results of sociolinguistic research on interaction between standard Indonesian and Kupang Malay (*bahasa Kupang*). *Bahasa Kupang* has been characterized as a lingua franca variety of Malay which is intermediate on a post-creole continuum between acrolectal standard Indonesian and basilectal ethnic languages (Grimes 1996). This classification captures the perceived marginality of *bahasa Kupang*, and other Eastern Indonesia Malays, vis-a-vis categories of “nationality” and “ethnicity.”

Contact between *bahasa Kupang* and Indonesian can be framed differently by considering its distinctness and emerging status as an urban language variety that is codeveloping with new communities of young, educated speakers in an ethnolinguistically diverse province. Features of *bahasa Kupang* shaped by contact with Indonesian can be seen in this way as enhancing its functionality in a wider and more prestigious range of contexts.

Data of recorded use can be used to illustrate that *bahasa Kupang* is becoming both more homogeneous and more elaborated among educated people in the city, and perhaps its provincial surround. First, it shows that there is a reduction of ethnically linked variation in intonation and discourse particle usage among younger, educated speakers. This leveling process can be linked to interactional strategies for helping (or obliging) newcomers to learn covert vernacular norms. Second, it shows that assimilation of Indonesian lexical material to distinctively Kupang phonological and morphosyntactic patterns indirectly makes the national language a source of lexical registers, not just a distinct and superior dialect. In this way also *bahasa Kupang* comes to serve as Indonesian’s informal complement, not just its substandard surrogate.

Material gathered with questionnaires helps to explicate speakers’ perceptions and evaluation of this relation and to explain why, as Grimes and Jacob (2008) note, that they “can’t always tell you which language or register they are using.” Patterned inconsistencies in evaluations of Indonesian and *bahasa Kupang* suggest that speakers’ stances towards both varieties shift with their orientation to them as shared in distinct communities, or distinct kinds of interactional competence.

Time permitting, perceptions and uses of *bahasa Kupang* beyond the city as an emerging provincial lingua franca, will be mentioned.

References

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