Assessing the impact of Indonesian on the maintenance of local languages

The choice and subsequent development of Indonesian as the national language following the founding of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945 is widely cited as a great success story in language planning. The results of this policy decision have indeed been very positive in terms of unity and nation building, and have led to increased literacy throughout Indonesia. The development of Indonesian has occurred in the context of an incredibly rich and complex linguistic situation, where hundreds of distinct languages have been used as native languages throughout the archipelago and multilingualism has been the norm. With increased use of Indonesian—both formal (*bahasa resmi*) and informal (*bahasa sehari-hari*)—in all facets of daily life, the question arises whether Indonesia will continue as a highly multilingual society or move toward monolingualism. The answer to this question has consequences for the fate of the hundreds of local languages spoken in Indonesia as well as implications for regional and national language policy.

Most work assessing vitality of languages and risk of endangerment focuses on the community level, such as the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/) and the more recently developed Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS, Lewis and Simons 2010, Simon and Lewis 2012). On the other hand, in-depth ethnolinguistic interviews give a more detailed picture of individual choices, but are limited in terms of the number of individuals interviewed, and usually do not offer cross-linguistic comparisons. In order to understand the relationship between individual choices and attitudes as well as community-level trends, we have developed a self-reporting questionnaire examining language use and language choice in Indonesia, which can be accessed online. Because of its wide availability, it will also allow for cross-linguistic and geographic comparison.

Drawing on recent studies, we have developed a series of questions focusing on the personal and language background of respondents. In addition to investigating respondents own language use and attitude, there are questions about the language use of respondents' parents, grandparents, spouses and children. We have integrated these into a self-reporting questionnaire format that can be completed either online or in hard copy. The questionnaire is being disseminated through colleagues as well as through Facebook and other online social media. The target respondents are computer literate people in their 20s. However, due to the inclusion of language background of four generations of family members, intergenerational transmission data is also be collected.

While acknowledging the limitations of the design (in terms of issues of reliability of self-reporting and problems with sampling using the internet), we believe that the present study will offer a more comprehensive picture of language maintenance and shift among young people in Indonesia today as it relates to language choice and intergenerational transmission. Pilot results indicate that potential respondents are willing to participate and the questionnaire is reliable. This approach offers comparisons between different language contexts as they relate to language population size, cultural attitudes, and geography and the results can provide the foundation for more specific studies and future research.

In this talk, we report on the development and testing of this instrument, the goals of the project, and pilot results from data collected to date.