

Indonesian Native Speakers – Myth and Reality

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How many people speak French, or Persian natively? The Swedish Nationalencyklopedin estimates 74 million native speakers for French, and 65 million for Persian. Ethnologue gives 76 million for French and 57 for Persian. The differences in the numbers of native speakers are expected due to different methodologies in data acquisition, and the year the data were collected. There is also no exact and universally accepted definition of what a native speaker is, and there is no universally accepted criterion for distinguishing a language from a dialect. Therefore it is quite understandable that French is said to have about 74-76 million, and Persian between 57 and 65 million speakers.

Indonesia is, with a population of 250 million, the fourth largest country in the world. Over 90% of her people speak Indonesian. Yet, according to Ethnologue, Indonesian is spoken by a mere 23 million Indonesians as a first language, and the Malaysian linguist Asmah Haji Omar confirms this number when she states that “over 90 percent of the population of Indonesia where *bahasa Indonesia* [...] is the national and sole official language, are non-native speakers”¹. The Indonesian language specialist Dr Uri Tadmor, on the other hand, estimates that at least 20% (roughly 50 million) of all Indonesians use Indonesian as their first language.

This article attempts to explain the discrepancy between the various estimates, and uses data from the 2010 census and other sources to determine the approximate number of native speakers of Indonesian.

The Roots of Modern Indonesian

The Malay language, from which Indonesian is derived, consists of many dialects that are natively spoken in southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei-Darussalam, and Singapore. The two most prominent dialects are Standard Malaysian Malay (*bahasa Melayu* or *bahasa Malaysia*), and Standard Indonesian Malay (*bahasa Indonesia*). *Bahasa Melayu* is the national and official language of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei-Darussalam whereas *bahasa Indonesia* is the national and official language of Indonesia and an important working language in Timor Leste.

Indonesia declared independence in 1945 after a period of three years of Japanese occupation. Before 1942 Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Some areas were under Dutch rule for more than three centuries, but most areas were colonised for no longer than 150 years, and in many cases for less than 50 years.

The Dutch never promoted their own language which was taught only at some elite schools. Initially they used the native languages in dealings with Indonesians, but in the nineteenth century there was a gradual shift towards Malay as the need of communication with the indigenes grew and the Dutch-controlled area extended far beyond the borders of Java. Malay was chosen because it had served already for centuries as a kind of a lingua franca in the Indonesian-Malay archipelago, and was spread even into remote corners of the archipelago by first Islamic and later Christian, both Catholic as well as Protestant, missionaries.

Only a small percentage of Indonesians ever spoke Malay as a native language. The Malay speaking pockets are limited mainly to Sumatra where about half of the population

speaks often unintelligible dialects of Malay and to Kalimantan where Malay dialects are spoken in the coastal areas. Malay dialects also emerged in other parts of the archipelago, notably in Jakarta, in and around of the city of Manado in Sulawesi, in the Moluccas, In Kupang on the island of Timor, and along the coasts of the island of Papua.

Even though Malay was spoken natively by a minority only, it was not uncommon for Javanese, Balinese, and even for the Batak living in the remote highlands of central Sumatra, to speak Malay which was relatively widely spread as a language of interethnic communication and which hence was mastered by almost everyone who was involved in the extensive trading network. The language used was naturally not the literary Malay of the Malay courts but a vernacular Malay. Because of its connection with trade, the Dutch called this language *Passer Maleisch* (Bazaar or Market Malay). Bazaar Malay is also sometimes named *Laag Maleisch* (Low Malay). The term *Laag Maleisch* is, however, also used as a general term for the various low Malay variants that were spoken in the archipelago. Bazaar Malay was a simplified language used as a language of interethnic communication. Its speakers were usually not native in Malay but in another of the many languages of the Indonesian archipelago. Bazaar Malay was also the language predominantly used by the Dutch to communicate with the local population.

With its high population and economic importance the Dutch were focused predominantly on the island of Java and it was here where a particular strain of Bazaar Malay developed that the Dutch first called *Java-Maleisch*. This is the language of communication used between European and native Javanese administrators. By the beginning of the 20th century this Java-Malay also became known as *Controleur-Maleisch* or *Dienstmaleisch* “administrative Malay”².

Another variety of Low Malay was known as *Kazerne-Maleisch* or *Tangsi Maleisch* (Barrack Malay) used in the colonial army. An example of this “most despicable gibberish that one can think of”³ is given as *Kassi sama kokki lima kilo bras deri ini karong* which is similar in vocabulary and syntax to other variants of “low Malay”⁴ that included Chinese Malay, Arab Malay, Christian Malay, Muslim Malay⁵ and other forms of Malay “of which one sounds just as uncivilised as the other”⁶.

It was estimated that in the mid-19th century about 5% of all Javanese could speak a low Malay variant as a second language and this number grew rapidly with the gradual introduction of a modern education system⁷.

The agrarian reform of 1870 resulted in a growth of private enterprises from Holland that also introduced new crops such as tobacco and rubber, not only in Java but increasingly in Sumatra and the other islands. The evolving plantation industry increased the demand for natives with at least elementary education who could carry out lower administrative jobs, and the ethical policy proclaimed in 1901 further improved educational opportunities for Indonesians. A standardised Malay became a necessity.

“The rise of international trade, burgeoning port cities, growing print media, and a new administrative infrastructure, together with the rhetoric of a colonial *mission civilatrice*, all made feasible and institutionally necessary what Dutch linguists made intellectually desirable: a Dutch promoted school Malay which was rationalized, uniform, and cohesive.”⁸

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Malay had grown in importance. It took its irreplaceable position as the vehicular language in the fields of administration, education, religion, trade, and the media. In order to fulfil this role, the language needed to undergo development and standardisation.

The Dutch authorities favoured a “High Malay” approach rather than building on the existent forms of “Low Malay”. The *Maleische Spraakkunst*⁹ by the Dutch linguist van Ophuijsen became the primary guide for the teaching of Malay in schools, using a standardised spelling system which became official in 1901. This School Malay, some even called it Ophuijsen Malay after its chief engineer, was based on “Riau-Johor Malay” – essentially a language of classical Malay literature of a late-medieval past that was not spoken by a single person. Not surprisingly this stilted school Malay was often referred to by the natives as *Bahasa Belanda* (the language of the Dutch).

Ophuijsen's “High Malay” was propagated by the Bureau of Literature (Balai Pustaka¹⁰) that was established in 1908 to counter the emerging and often recalcitrant literature in vernacular Malay. The British anthropologist C. Watson observes that the literary works published by Balai Pustaka are composed in “sometimes very artificial language” with an occasional “burst of colloquial language” in passages where direct speech was used.¹¹

The first quarter of the 20th century saw a strong increase of political, educational, cultural, and religious organisations and the majority of them adopted Malay as their official language. The Indische Partij, established in 1912, became the first political organisation pioneering Indonesian nationalism in the Netherlands Indies. A year earlier, Sarekat Islam, an Islamic-nationalist organisation, was established that from the very beginning exclusively used the Malay language. In the same period, the number of Malay language newspapers increased from just over thirty to 220. The language was based on vernacular, or “low”, Malay, but in the course of its development it became influenced by School Malay resulting in a new style of writing that was far more popular than School Malay as people could actually understand it, which with School Malay was not always the case.

This new intermediate form with elements from both “low” and “high” Malay became subsequently known as Modern Malay, as it was named by the Dutch Member of Parliament Henri van Kol in 1918 in the first chamber of the Dutch parliament, noting that it “was rapidly becoming the common language of the archipelago and was understood everywhere in the country” (Mahdi 2006:101).

On 28 October 1928 Indonesian youths, hailing from different ethnic groups and islands in the then Netherlands East Indies, convened a two-day Youth Congress in Batavia – present-day Jakarta. At the end of this historic meeting these young nationalists proclaimed that *bahasa Melayu* (which they renamed to *bahasa Indonesia*) shall become the language of a future independent Indonesia.

A year later the Director of Education and Worship reported to the governor of the East Indies:

“It is true indeed that there is a large cleft between the Riau Malay that is officially prescribed in the schools, and the cultivated Malay as it is employed, though with local differences, here in Java quite generally in daily intercourse, at meetings, and in the press. If instruction in Malay is to better answer its purpose and be valued more, then Riau Malay should as soon as possible be replaced by a Malay that stands close to the currently spoken and written language.”¹²

It was even suggested that the teaching of School Malay should be discontinued at the Malay-Chinese schools because the Malay that is taught is “obscure and useless in practical life” (onbegrijpelijk en in het praktische leven onbruikbaar)¹³.

However, this did not happen. School Malay existed further in parallel to Modern Malay and even in the early years of independence Indonesian schools continued to teach

School Malay as this was the language teachers were trained in. As the language taught in schools and disseminated widely through the government-sponsored publications of Balai Pustaka, School Malay continued to be influential on the development of the Indonesian language, but within the first two decades of independence the strict antagonism between artificial government sponsored “high” Malay used in government sponsored publications and “good” literature, and “low” vernacular Malay used by the press, and in unregulated “trivial” literature, began to dissipate. “High” Malay had become much more accommodative and willing to relax its strict grammatical rules and to accept some lexical items belonging to “low” Malay. Trivial literature and Sino-Malay comic books continued to be published in “low” Malay but with a more standardised spelling system and with a considerable body of words of “high Malay”.

In the post-independence period Indonesian became the sole language of instruction and the language in which all official, administrative, and government businesses had to be conducted. The political revolution of 1945 that led to independence coincided with a literary revolution where a new generation of young writers started to write poetry, short stories and novels in a straightforward, terse, and occasionally even experimental Indonesian language radically breaking with the conventions of pre-war authors with their long-winded and flowery language. Besides these literary figures, foremost among them Idrus, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Chairil Anwar and Sitor Situmorang, the political elite was also committed in shaping a modern Indonesian as the language of national consciousness. Soekarno, Indonesia’s first president, was particularly known for his innovative use of *bahasa Indonesia*.¹⁴

Following independence, the Indonesian language was further cultivated and developed by the Centre for Language Development (Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa) under the government’s Department of National Education, but even more so by Indonesia’s flourishing print media, radio and television. In the early days of the young republic traditionalists and modernists were divided about the direction Indonesian should take: the traditionalists insisted that new words should be based preferably on already existing Malay words whereas the modernists were much more willing to accept borrowings from European languages. But both traditionalists as well as modernists were often united in their opposition against the rigid rules of Riau Malay that they saw as an obstacle to the development of Indonesian. The fate of Riau Malay was finally sealed at the Language Congress of 1954:

From now on the efforts to cultivate Indonesian entered a new phase during which even the teaching of the language in schools was no longer affected by the opinions and limited ideas of the conservative school teachers and text-book writers. (Anwar 1980: 117)¹⁵

The congress did not solve the antagonism between traditionalists and modernists, and even though the modernists prevailed at the conference, none of the two camps turned out to be a true winner. In the further development of the Indonesian language new words were created based on European languages, Malay, regional languages (albeit almost exclusively from Javanese), and also from the classical scholarly languages of Indonesia, Sanskrit and Arabic.

It cannot be denied that language planning played a very important role in the development of the Malay-Indonesian language, first by the colonial authorities, and even more so after independence, but the shaping influence of the steadily growing user community was at all times much stronger than governmental efforts. It is hence not

correct to call Indonesian an “artificial language, [...] planned, sanctioned, and implemented by central government.” (Fischer 1999:190)¹⁶

Indonesia is not unusual in that it has a governmental agency regulating the standard language. In fact, most national languages undergo, at least to some degree, language planning, and many countries have governmental or national institutions responsible for language planning and standardisation. France has its Académie française, South Africa its Taalcommissie, Italy its Accademia della Crusca, and the South Korean regulatory body is the National Institute of the Korean Language (국립국어원).

While the Pusat Bahasa¹⁷, as the Indonesian regulatory body is called, is certainly influential, it does not function as a language police and is ultimately dependent on the goodwill of the user community who may accept a suggested new word or not.

Even though partly consciously planned, first by Dutch and later by Indonesian intellectuals, Indonesian grew mainly organically supported by its multi-lingual and multi-ethnic speaker community.

The usual claim that contemporary Indonesian is based solely or predominantly on “Riau Malay” – the literary classical Malay as used in the 15th - 19th century courts on both shores of the Strait of Malacca (Malacca, Johor and Riau) – must also be rejected as it denies not only the immense impact of Bazaar Malay via Modern Malay on the development of contemporary Indonesian, but also the enormous innovations that took place after World War II.

The opposing view, which has gained a lot of followers after the publication of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, claims that contemporary Indonesian is based on “low” *Dienstmaleisch*.

What happened instead was that by a slow, largely unplanned process, a strange language-of-state evolved on the basis of an ancient inter-insular lingua franca. Called *dienstmaleisch* [...] by the early nineteenth century it was solidly in place inside officialdom. When print-capitalism arrived on the scene in a sizeable way after mid-century, the language moved out into the marketplace and the media. Used at first mainly by Chinese and Eurasian newspapermen and printers, it was picked up by *inlanders* at the century’s close. Quickly the *dienst* branch of its family tree was forgotten and replaced by a putative ancestor in the Riau Islands [...]. By 1928, shaped by two generations of urban writers and readers, it was ready to be adopted by Young Indonesia as the national(-ist) language *bahasa Indonesia*. Since then, it has never looked back. (Anderson, 1983:121)

Anderson reminds us here of Indonesian’s “*dienst branch* of its family tree” [my emphasis]. It is important to emphasise that *Java Maleisch* alias *Dienstmaleisch* is just one of many branches – and not even the most important one – in the development of the Indonesian language. Other branches include Bazaar Malay, Betawi Malay, Manado Malay, Tangsi Malay, Sino-Malay and many other varieties of “low” Malay, whereas on the “high” side, the literary Malay of the Minangkabau court was another variety of “high” Malay and yet another branch in the history of the contemporary Indonesian language.¹⁸

The various strains of contemporary colloquial Indonesian have in most cases evolved either from local variants of Bazaar Malay or from existing Malay dialects. The precursor of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian, for instance, is Betawi Malay whereas Colloquial Medan Indonesian evolved from Bazaar Malay.

The most formal variant of Indonesian, *bahasa Indonesia baku*, which is used predominantly in official communication and in legal and technical matters still displays to

a certain degree the stiffness of School Malay. But neither *bahasa baku* nor colloquial Indonesian can be reduced to one single precursor. Both are the product of the convergence of many branches of “high” and “low” Malay.

From 10 to 200 Million Speakers in 60 years?

Van Kol’s statement that in 1918 Malay was “understood everywhere in the country” is an interesting observation by an contemporary observer. Unfortunately we do not have reliable data to support his claim. Contrary to van Kol’s observation it is said that on the eve of World War II only an estimated 15 per cent of then 70 million Indonesians were able to speak Indonesian either as first or second language, and only one in ten could read and write in any language.¹⁹ This estimate is certainly too low given that over 10% of Indonesians speak one of the many Malay dialects natively. It is possible that in the estimated 15 per cent only those are included who spoke standard Indonesian.

Today, according to Ethnologue, Indonesian has 23.2 million native (L1) speakers and another 140 million second language (L2) speakers whereas the closely related Malaysian language has 10.5 million L1 and 3 million L2 speakers.²⁰ The combined number of L1 speakers is hence 33.7 million, and that of L2 speakers is 143 million.

According to Wikipedia which relies on the data provided by Swedish Nationalencyklopedin (2007, 2010), the combined number of L1 speakers of Malaysian and Indonesian is 77 million or rank 14 worldwide (well up from the number of 37 million given by Wikipedia in 2013!).²¹ L2 numbers are not provided. The “Handbook of reading research”²² asserts that Indonesian is “the mother tongue of only a tiny minority of Indonesians”. According to Schrijver, only 13% of all Indonesians speak “the semi-artificial language Indonesian as a mother tongue”²³.

Encyclopaedia Britannica does not list Indonesian nor Malay in the list of “most widely spoken languages” which contains 21 languages with over 60 million speakers.²⁴ The *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*²⁵ includes Dutch, but not Indonesian as one of the “major world languages” despite the fact that Dalby²⁶, Swaan²⁷, and Calvet²⁸ all list Indonesian-Malay as one of the world’s twelve most important languages. Comrie²⁹ recognises Indonesian as an important language but, apparently relying on the Ethnologue data, adds that it has “relatively few native speakers. [...] The Indonesian variety of Indonesian-Malay is the native language of perhaps 23 million, but is used as a second language by about 140,000,000 in Indonesia.”

In the same publication Tadmor³⁰ comes to completely different results. He estimates that Malay-Indonesian has “over 250 million speakers. [...] The number of native speakers is difficult to estimate; perhaps 20 percent of the current total number of speakers acquired a colloquial variety of Malay-Indonesian as their first language. This figure is rapidly increasing, as more and more people in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei shift from their ancestral home languages to Malay-Indonesian.” (p. 791)

Grimes³¹ estimates that “there are an estimated 17-30 million first language speakers of Malay/Indonesian in most urban centers, and over 140 million second language speakers [...] with varying levels of speaking and reading proficiency.” (p.720)

The Wikipedia entry “Indonesian Language” lists 43 million native speakers of Indonesian citing the 2010 census as its source.³² However, table 30.9 of the 2010 census from which this number is taken, is based on the question “What language do you use at home?” 43 million Indonesians answered that they use Indonesian at home³³. We can safely assume that these 43 million Indonesians are native speakers but what about those

who have told the census takers that they speak both Indonesian and a regional language at home? Many Indonesians use the vernacular when they speak to their spouse or parents or other relatives who live in the same household, but use Indonesian when they speak to their children. The census takers were explicitly instructed:

If more than one language is used: Indonesian and a regional language, then write that a regional language [is used at home]. If more than one regional language is used, write the most frequently used language.³⁴

It is hence obvious that the real number of native speakers of Indonesian must be considerably higher than 43 million.

How and Where Indonesians Learn Indonesian

With a few exceptions, Indonesian children learn Indonesian following one of the following four patterns.

1. During early childhood the child is exposed to little Indonesian because it is raised by a family who speaks one of the 706 regional languages of Indonesia. At age six children have to attend *sekolah dasar* (primary school). In areas where the majority of children are exposed primarily to the regional languages, the government allows schools to use the local language for the first two years, but by the third year of primary school all instruction has to be conducted in Indonesian. Depending on how much Indonesian is used in the place they grow up, the quality of the school and other factors, some of these children will never attain full fluency in Indonesian.

This scenario was once the norm, but this is no longer the case. The regulation that allows schools to use the local language as the medium of instruction is still in place but has become increasingly irrelevant. The number of children who speak little or no Indonesian when they enter primary school is rapidly declining.

2. The child grows up in an environment where the regional language dominates. Children speak their local language at home and with neighbours but are frequently exposed to Indonesian: at home when the family has guests who do not speak their regional language; when they visit government offices or see the doctor, or when they visit a nearby town or city. Most of their peers speak the same regional language, but there are also a few who only speak Indonesian. The Indonesian they encounter most frequently is Colloquial Indonesian, but they are also exposed to Standard Indonesian when they watch children's programs on television or when their parents read them stories. Some of them attend early childhood education (*pendidikan anak usia dini*) facilities. Indonesia has 175,000 kindergartens (*taman kanak-kanak*), playgroups and other early childhood facilities in which the dominant language is Indonesian.³⁵ When they reach school age, they attend a school in which the language of instruction from year 1 on is Indonesian.

The majority of these children will become proficient speakers of Indonesian, but not necessary in *bahasa Indonesia baku* – the standardised variety used in official communication, in legal, scientific and scholarly discourse, and in formal public speaking. Only a relative small percentage will be able to communicate in the highest formal register, but many more will be able to communicate in a more relaxed variant of semi-formal Indonesian that can be used in formal as well as in informal situations. This register is characterised by occasional omission of the prefixes *me-* and *ber-*, less frequent use of *ter-* and *-i*. verbs, occasional replacement of diphthongs by simple vowels (*sate* instead of *satai*), acceptance of very few prenasalised verbs without *me-* (*ngantuk* instead of *mengantuk*), and the acceptance of some substandard forms such as *punya* instead of

mempunyai, bilang instead of *mengatakan*, etc. Some will not even master informal Indonesian, but may be very fluent in Colloquial Medan Indonesian or any other variety of colloquial Indonesian. It is important to emphasise that there is a linguistic continuum between formal standard Indonesian, informal Indonesian, and colloquial Indonesian.

In many cases their linguistic skills will become so developed that they cannot be distinguished from native speakers.

3. Children grow up in an environment that is linguistically as well as ethnically heterogenous. From early childhood on they become true bilingual speakers. At home they learn to speak the ancestral language. When they play with their peers they sometimes use a regional language, but more often they will use colloquial Indonesian. They learn relatively early to distinguish between formal and informal registers, and become used to code-switching between their regional language, colloquial, informal, and formal Indonesian. For the majority of these children, Indonesian is their preferred language.

4. Children grow up with Indonesian as their first language. Some speak exclusively Indonesian, while others may have a superficial knowledge of their ancestral language. The reasons for this are manifold. One or both of the parents only speak Indonesian and no regional language. Some parents do not want their children to learn a regional language fearing that they may be disadvantaged when they go to school. Sometimes children themselves are reluctant to speak the native tongue of their parents when Indonesian is the dominant language used by most of their peers. In the larger cities, and especially in Jakarta, Medan, and Palembang where there is not one dominant ethnic group, inter-ethnic marriages are very common and the offspring of such marriages are more likely to grow up speaking Indonesian.

The Impact of Urbanisation

In 1950 only 15% of all Indonesians lived in urban areas. In 1990 the urbanisation rate had increased to 30%. According to the 2010 census 118,320,256 of 237,641,326 (49.8%) Indonesians lived in urban³⁶, and 119,321,070 (50.2%) in rural areas.

Urbanisation increased especially rapidly after Indonesia gained independence in 1945. Between 1945 and 1959 the population of Jakarta grew from 600,000 to 2,800,000. Today, Jakarta has a population of over 10 million, but the city did not stop growing at its borders. Instead it spread into the surrounding areas which, before independence, were largely rural areas dotted with a few small and the four mid-sized towns of Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. Together with Jakarta, these four towns have grown to the second largest metropolitan area on earth. Jabodetabek as this urban juggernaut is called after the first letters of its five members, is home to over 28 million Indonesians.

Other Indonesian cities increased likewise. Medan, a sleepy village of a few thousand Malays in 1860 became a bustling city and the heart of the East Sumatran plantation belt. In 1945 it had a population of about 80,000. After independence, Medan's population exploded. Today, Medan City has a population of over 2 million, and the greater Medan area a population of over 4 million. In the first decade after transfer of sovereignty, the population of Bandung increased five-fold from 200,000 to 1,000,000. Other cities of Indonesia like Surabaya, Makassar, Semarang, Palembang and Batam – all having a population of over one million – experienced similar growth rates.

97% of the urban, and 88% of the rural population speak Indonesian. With the exception of the province Nusa Tenggara Barat which consists of the two islands Lombok

and Sumbawa, none of the 32 provinces of Indonesia has an urban population where less than 94% speak Indonesian.

In 30 out of 32 provinces the percentage of the rural population that speaks Indonesian is between 81 and 99% with a national average of 88%.³⁷ Two of the provinces with moderate and low rates of an Indonesian speaking rural population are West Sumatra and East Java. The reason why only 86% of the population of West Sumatra and only 81% of the population of East Java are able to speak Indonesian is that both provinces are ethnically and linguistically relatively homogeneous. 88% of the population of West Sumatra are ethnic Minangkabau who speak the Minangkabau language. Of the remaining 12 % who are not ethnic Minangkabau, the overwhelming majority speaks Minangkabau which, besides Indonesian, has become an important lingua franca in parts of Sumatra. As a Malay dialect, Minangkabau is closely related to Indonesian, and those who claim not to speak Indonesian, generally understand it. 97% of the population of East Java are either ethnic Javanese (79%) or Madurese (18%). The Madurese generally live separate from the Javanese in the eastern and northern part of the province, and when they live in majority Javanese-speaking communities, they tend to speak Javanese as well as Madurese.

Although a subsistence farmer in the deep countryside of provinces as homogeneous as East Java or West Sumatra does not have to speak Indonesian, there are many incentives for him or her to do so. Even in the most remote villages people listen to radio and television, read newspapers, and the children go to school. Some of the teachers, or the nurse from the local health centre may originate from somewhere else, and the sermons in the mosque or church are, at least occasionally, delivered in Indonesian. When they speak Indonesian, they speak in various grades of proficiency. Almost everybody understands some Indonesian, most speak it reasonably well albeit with a strong local accent and limited vocabulary. Only a very small minority, possibly not more than 5%, of those who live in a remote village in East Java have native-like proficiency in Indonesian. These are usually the teachers, the nurses, the administrative staff, the religious leaders, and the traditional village intellectuals.

The situation is different for villages that are located close to a town, or for villages located in ethnically heterogeneous areas. Here, the percentage of those who speak Indonesian with native proficiency is much higher and can reach 50% or more.

L1 Speakers & Bilinguals

Tadmor estimates that “perhaps 20 per cent of the current total number of speakers acquired a colloquial variety of Malay-Indonesian as their first language.”³⁸ Tadmor’s estimation is consistent with the 43 million Indonesians (20%) who at the 2010 census confirmed that they speak Indonesian on a daily basis at home.

But how do we treat bilingual Indonesians who speak a regional language besides Indonesian? Are they not native speakers?

The answer depends very much on how the status of a native speaker is defined, but let us first listen to the following dialogue between two native Indonesians in the Internet chat forum Reddit.³⁹

A Bahasa Indonesia is, for a large majority of people, a second language in Indonesia. [...] Most Indonesians’ first language is the local one where they come from; Javan [sic!] people speak Javanese, Sunda people speak Sundanese, Banjar people speak Banjarese, etc.

- B. Just correcting a little bit, boss. Indonesian language maybe a second language but the people speak it at the native level. What actually happens is most Indonesians are natively bilingual. I'm natively bilingual in Javanese and Indonesian languages.
- A. What does natively bilingual means?
- B. It means you speak two languages at a native level. This is the situation with most Indonesians. They have two native languages, their own local language plus the Indonesian language.

Pokorn observed that “the concept of ‘native speaker’ is defined according to different criteria, and [...] there is no objective definition of the concept which would cover all potential native speakers and not even the majority of them.”⁴⁰ Vivian Cook reminds us that “during the past decade the term *native speaker* has been deconstructed” (p. 240)⁴¹

The difference between L1 and L2 is generally said to be that of native (acquired) and learned proficiency. The L1 speaker has “natively” acquired the language as the first language in early childhood, and the L2 speaker has learned the language as a second language later in life. But what exactly do “native language acquisition” and “later in life” mean?

Many linguists believe that it is possible to develop native-like competence in two languages as long as the second language is acquired before the critical period – the cut-off point for bilinguals to achieve native-like proficiency. Unfortunately, there is no consensus about the end of the critical period. On one side of the spectrum are studies that suggest that the cut off point to achieve true native competence is around the age of six or seven while other studies indicate that the critical period ends at about the age of puberty. Bley-Vroman, for instance, found that adolescents in the age range of 10 to 15 “not only reach native-speaker competence, but they also progress more rapidly and perform with greater accuracy in the early stages of learning than do their younger counterparts.” (p.9)⁴² On the other extreme of the spectrum are those who reject the idea that a second language is categorically different for learners from a first language, and that there is no absolute distinction between native and non-native speakers. They are sceptical of the existence of an absolute biological constraint on second language learning and believe that a second language can be acquired with native speaker capacities even after the onset of puberty.⁴³

Singleton comes to the conclusion that “the notion that L2 age effects are exclusively neurologically based, that they are associated with absolute, well-defined chronological limits, and that they are particular to language looks less and less plausible”.⁴⁴ (p.85) Yet, Singleton also admits that there is a general consent that L2 acquirers who learn a second language at early age tend to have higher levels of proficiency than those who learn a second language during adolescence of childhood.

Davies, who essentially agrees with Singleton, also points out that the critical period may be quite different from individual to individual: “the distinction native speaker–non native speaker is still biological, but we cannot be sure when the development trigger kicks in for individuals. Which is not really different for other areas of development, for example the menarche.”⁴⁵

This position contrasts sharply with the position held by Cook who is convinced that there is no overlap between a native and a non-native speaker: “The indisputable element in the definition of native speakers is that a person is a native speaker of the language learnt first; the other characteristics are incidental, describing how well an individual uses the language.”⁴⁶ Davies criticises Cook's assertion: “We need to ask ourselves – and what Cook does not do – is just what the first learning of a language means cognitively and

behaviourally. What is it that Cook's native speaker knows and can do with that first learned language that no late acquirer can ever do?"⁴⁷ Most Indonesians who are L1 speakers of a regional language use their mother tongue with limited functionality. They read and write exclusively in Indonesian (their L2), and use their L1 predominantly in familiar settings to converse with relatives and acquaintances. As soon as the conversation becomes formal or technical they tend to switch to Indonesian.

Distinguishing between L1 and L2 speakers in Indonesia is not very productive as there are millions of L2 speakers who speak Indonesian as fluently as L1 speakers because they have learned Indonesian in early childhood. In fact, many speakers are much more fluent in L2 than in L1. Very often Indonesians also acquire their "mother tongue" (i.e. a regional language) concurrently with the national language (Indonesian) and are hence bilingual speakers of a kind that many would describe as "true" or "perfect" bilingual.

Even though Indonesia is a nation of bilinguals where approximately 80% of the population speak two or more languages, balanced bilingualism (balanced usage of and balanced proficiency in two languages across the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing) is an extremely rare occurrence as the two languages are used for different purposes, in different situations, and with different people. Javanese (or another regional language) is spoken at home, and Indonesian is spoken at work.

Unless one adopts an extreme interpretation of the concept of a native speaker, most bilingual Indonesians can be considered as native speakers. Even Cook, to whom "being a native speaker [...] is an unalterable historical fact" admits that individuals can have two L1 if both were learnt in childhood.

The role of bahasa Indonesia vis-à-vis bahasa daerah

The Indonesian language dominates in almost all spheres of Indonesian society. It is the medium of instruction at all levels in educational institutions. In politics, administration and the judiciary Indonesian is the sole official language. Indonesian is also the dominant language of business, and it is the undisputed principal language in the modern mass media.

Close to 100% of all radio and television broadcast is in Indonesian and most families own a television set. Even in the most remote areas, virtually everyone has access to television broadcasting. If another language than Indonesian is used, then it tends to be English rather than a regional language (*bahasa daerah*). The national film industry is entirely Indonesian.

During the Dutch period, newspapers were almost exclusively printed in either Dutch or Malay. Newspapers in regional languages only existed for some of the larger languages, and even then their numbers were small. The first Javanese newspaper was the *Bromartani* which was established in 1855, one year before the first Malay language newspaper was founded,⁴⁸ but soon the Malay newspapers outnumbered the Javanese newspapers, and no newspapers in any regional language have been published after the second world war. Even though Javanese has more than 80 million native speakers, there doesn't seem to be a market for a Javanese language newspaper.

The Indonesian government has never attempted to impose the national language on speakers in their private life, nor did it ever have a policy in place discriminating against regional languages – not even when Indonesia was a dictatorship under Soeharto's rule. There are and were no restrictions to use regional languages except for the ban on

Chinese language publications that was ended by president Abdurrahman Wahid during his tenure 1999-2001.

Indonesian has consequently not displaced the regional languages of different ethnic groups from their use in informal domains, and there has never been any attempt to impose the national language on speakers in their private life and everyday informal communication. Indonesian has instead been promoted as an addition to individuals' linguistic repertoires to enhance their access to education, government, broader employment and business opportunities, and the general modernization of the country as this has expanded in the hands of the Indonesians themselves. Such a deliberate hands-off approach, not attempting to interfere with the use of local languages in traditional and more informal areas of interaction, is commonly seen as one of the principal reasons why there has been such successful widespread acceptance and adoption of Indonesian as the national language [...]. Indonesian and regional languages are not in any confrontation with each other and do not compete for use in the same areas of life, but exist in a generally stable complementarity of distribution. The broad archipelago-wide spread of the national language during the last six decades has, because of this pattern of complementary distribution, not triggered any major negative reactions from the indigenous population – no linguistic riots or cries of oppression through the imposition of language.⁴⁹

This view, here voiced by a British scholar, is similar to that typically expressed by Indonesian policy makers and also by many Indonesian scholars who “do not want to admit that there is any conflict of interest between the national language on the one hand and the regional languages on the other.” (Khaidir Anwar: 140) The linguist Anton Moeliono wrote, 15 years before he became the head of Pusat Bahasa: “That vernacular languages exists has never consciously or unconsciously been regarded as a problem.”⁵⁰ What Khaidir Anwar wrote in 1980 is still valid today: “Many promoters of the national language regard the importance of the regional languages mainly in terms of their potential usefulness for the development and enrichment of the national language.”

While I do agree with Simpson's analysis, it should be added that due to the success of the Indonesian language, smaller regional languages have become endangered, and that the Indonesian government is making few attempts to support or protect the regional languages. The government's effort is largely limited to short-term projects that result in the compilation of a dictionary and occasionally some other form of language documentation.

According to the linguist Dalan Peranginangin who participated in a governmental project to document the Pagu language in Maluku Utara, there are only between two and three thousand remaining speakers of Pagu. From 2011 until 2014 the Indonesian government documented the Pagu language, but otherwise does not show much interest in protecting the language from extinction. Language protection or revitalisation efforts are mostly left to non-governmental organisations, which, in the case of Pagu wrote a textbook for the Pagu language to be used in primary schools. The government then facilitated the use of the textbook by making Pagu a compulsory “local” subject in the area where Pagu is natively spoken. These subjects are taught within the *muatan lokal* (local content) curriculum intended to provide schools with a wider opportunity to present subjects relevant to local schools' needs such as local languages, art, and culture.

Through the implementation of the *kurikulum muatan lokal* in the last two decades the government has recognised the importance of regional languages, cultures and arts and schools and teachers now show a more positive attitude towards regional languages. This was not always the case: Pagu speaking informants, now in their sixties, told Dalan

Peranginangin that teachers forced them to eat chalk as a punishment for speaking Pagu at school. Punishments for speaking the local language were, however, never systematically applied in Indonesia as it was the case, for instance, in Hawai'i after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy where school regulations mandated that children had to be physically punished for speaking Hawaiian and where, at times, teachers were even sent to Hawaiian-speaking homes to reprimand parents for speaking Hawaiian to their children.⁵¹

The textbooks created under the umbrella of the *kurikulum muatan lokal* and the dictionaries and other publications published by the government constitute the bulk of publications written in regional languages. Apart from the government-sponsored publications very little is printed in regional languages, and the few publications that one can find are almost always related to folklore. In 1994, the Indonesian writer Ajip Rosidi, who himself writes mostly in Indonesian, established the Rancage Literary Award to support literary works in Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, and Lampung. When asked why he is limiting the award to those four languages, Ajip replied that not a single literary work was published in any of the other 702 regional languages.⁵² Ajip is pessimistic about the future: only a few bookshops are willing to stock publications in regional languages, the average reader is middle aged or older, and the general interest in regional literature is waning. Already in 1999 Rosidi wrote:

A quarter of a century ago the number of magazines published in the Javanese and Sundanese language was higher than now, possibly two to three times higher. But not only the number of magazines decreased, also the print run of the remaining magazines is much lower than 25 years ago.⁵³

The dominance of the Indonesian language is so strong that even fluent speakers of regional languages are hesitant – or unable due to a lack of practise and training – to write in their own mother tongue unless it is something very personal, such as a letter to a family member. The Indonesian writer Eka Kurniawan (born in 1975) said in an interview with Katharina Borchardt from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*:

«My mother tongue is Sundanese», says Eka Kurniawan, «but I cannot write in Sundanese.» Once he tried to write a short story in his native language that is spoken in West-Java, but it felt strange. «Sundanese is the language in which I communicate with my family, but I write my books in Indonesian. This is the language I learnt at school.»⁵⁴

During a recent visit (in 2015) to one of the most remote villages in the highlands of North Sumatra where everybody speaks Toba Batak, I observed that people immediately switch to Indonesian as soon as the situation becomes formal. They do this almost naturally even in situations where only native speakers of Toba Batak are present.

In June 2014 the number of active users of the social medium Facebook in Indonesia had reached 69 million. In 1999, when I visited the central Sumatran region Kerinci for the first time, there were only a handful of Internet users in Kerinci. The only place to access email was the post office, and they charged the equivalent of about one Euro for one minute use of the Internet. Today even in the most remote villages in Kerinci (which is eight rough bus hours away from the closest airport) people use the Internet and connect through email and the social media with the outer world.

Most cyber communication is conducted in the national language, either in formal or in the informal register, but the amount of communication in regional languages is considerable. While the Internet is contributing to the continuing spread of Indonesian, it

also offers new opportunities for the regional languages: Wikipedia is not only available in Indonesian, but also in six regional languages: Acehnese, Banjarese, Banyumasan (a dialect of Javanese), Javanese, Minangkabau, and Sundanese. A Buginese Wikipedia is in preparation.

Standard Indonesian and Colloquial Indonesian

The formal register of Indonesian, The highest register of Standard Indonesian (SI), is used in formal writing, in educational settings, and in formal public speeches. A more relaxed variant of Standard Indonesian

SI is used in radio, television, film and the print media, but some radio and television programs, especially those catering for adolescents, popular movies and the serial dramas on television also use Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian (CJI).

Despite the fact that Indonesian has numerous informal registers, only three have been subjected to academic studies: Papuan Colloquial Indonesian⁵⁵, Riau Colloquial Indonesian⁵⁶ and Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian. Important other forms of colloquial Indonesian such as Colloquial Medan Indonesian have been completely neglected by the academic community.

The colloquial varieties of Indonesian are often regarded as deviations from the norms of correct (*baik dan benar*) Standard Indonesian. Colloquial Indonesian is accused of not only being corrupt itself, but also to corrupt (*merusak*) the standard language. Gil rejects these assertions, and argues instead that the standard varieties of Malay and Indonesian are derivative of their colloquial counterparts and not vice-versa.⁵⁷

While mastering the formal register is an essential prerequisite to get a white collar job, millions of Indonesians master only the informal register. This is, of course, not unique to Indonesian. There are also millions of native speakers of English who are unable to compose a letter in formal English. Just like native speakers of English are native in colloquial English and learn formal English in school, Standard Indonesian too is always a learned, and never a native language.

What Gil reports from the Sumatran province Riau is by and large also valid for the other varieties of CI.

The population of Riau province, numbering close to 5 million people, is linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous. Although the indigenous population is mostly Malay, a majority of the present-day inhabitants are migrants from other provinces, speaking a variety of other languages. Riau Indonesian is acquired as a native language by most or all children growing up in Riau province, whatever their ethnicity. It is the language most commonly used as a lingua franca for interethnic communication, and, in addition, it is gradually replacing other languages and dialects as a vehicle for interethnic communication.⁵⁸

Colloquial varieties of Indonesian emerged in response to the changing demographics. In the second half of the 19th century large plantations were established in Sumatra. About one hundred thousand Chinese, and even more Javanese coolies were brought into the plantation belt of East Sumatra around the city of Medan alone. Under the transmigration program (*transmigrasi*), which was started by the Dutch colonial government, and later continued by the Indonesian government, several million landless families were moved from densely populated areas in Java, Bali and Madura to less populous areas of the country. In what is now the province of North Sumatra, originally six

languages were spoken: five Batak languages and Malay. The number of languages in North Sumatra today is significantly higher with Javanese and Hokkien Chinese spoken by about one quarter of the population. The increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity was an important factor supporting the spread of Indonesian. Today 100% of the urban population and 92% of the rural population of North Sumatra speak Indonesian.

The rapid process of urbanisation, especially after Indonesia gained independence in 1945, further increased the spread of colloquial Indonesian which became the vehicle of inter-ethnic communication and for a substantial part of the urban multiethnic communities, a native language. In Jakarta the indigenous population already spoke a dialect of Malay called Betawi Malay, the precursor of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian.

Medan, the capital of the province of North Sumatra is, similar to Jakarta, a multi-ethnic city with an indigenous Malay-speaking community and without a majority ethnic group. In Jakarta and in Medan, varieties of colloquial Indonesian emerged as the language of inter-ethnic communication incorporating elements of the languages of the immigrant population. Both Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian and Colloquial Medan Indonesian became enriched with words from Hokkien, Dutch, and Javanese. In Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian one can find additional Balinese, Portuguese, and Sundanese influences whereas Colloquial Medan Indonesian has a limited amount of additional borrowings from Minangkabau and Toba Batak.

Despite obvious similarities, there is one major difference. The precursor of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian was the indigenous Betawi Malay whereas the precursor of Colloquial Medan Indonesian was Bazaar Malay and not the indigenous Deli Malay. When Medan was founded there were only a few thousand speakers of Deli Malay that were soon outnumbered by the immigrants. These were the European plantation administrators, the Javanese and Chinese coolies, their foremen, and the local Karo Batak and Malay population that communicated with each other in Bazaar Malay. After independence large numbers of Toba Batak moved into Medan. While first generation Toba Batak immigrants tend to speak Indonesian with a strong Batak accent, their children are usually bilingual, and almost all of them have become native speakers of Colloquial Medan Indonesian.

Riau and Papua⁵⁹ are very different as people here mostly live in towns and villages, but linguistically and ethnically Riau and the cities and towns of Papua are almost as diverse as Medan or Jakarta. Here too, the native population has been outnumbered by immigrants from other parts of the archipelago, which gave rise to the emergence of colloquial Indonesian varieties.

Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian (CJI) is the most important and influential register of colloquial Indonesian that has spread from Jakarta into almost all cities and towns of Java replacing existing local dialects of Indonesian. It has its roots in Betawi Malay spoken by the indigenous population of Jakarta or Batavia as it was known until 1942, and has, according to Ethnologue, an estimated 2.7 million native speakers. How Ethnologue counts these speakers remains a mystery. "Counting native speakers of Betawi Malay is impossible," says the linguist Uri Tadmor who conducted extensive field research in Jakarta. Jakarta Malay and Indonesian are both Malay dialects and for more than a century the two dialects have influenced each other. Nowadays it is virtually impossible to distinguish the language spoken by someone who identifies himself as native Betawi from the language spoken by a second generation immigrant. Tadmor comes to the conclusion that "there is no clear border distinguishing CJI from Betawi Malay."(Uri Tadmor, pers.com. 21/06/15)

This seems to contradict the findings of Grijns (1991), according to whom Betawi Malay speakers “shift to informal Jakartan Indonesian in the presence of strangers; it is an 'in-group' code and rarely heard by people from outside the anak Betawi communities”⁶⁰. but Grijns conducted his research 20 years ago, and as since Grijn's study Betawi Malay may have shifted so close to Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian that the two have become virtually indistinguishable.

Disseminated through the popular media (soap operas, Internet chat etc.) it already has considerably influenced other colloquial forms of Indonesian and gradually may replace them over time. CJI is universally understood by all young urban Indonesians who now constitute the majority of Indonesians as 50% of all Indonesians live in urban environments, and 55% of Indonesians are 29 or younger.

The differences between Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian and Standard Indonesian (SI) are significant but not to the point of mutual non-intelligibility. The differences are predominantly in the fields of verb morphology and lexicon. The most prominent phonetic difference is that CJI retains the schwa in in an ultimate closed syllable whereas in SI it shifts to /a/: CJI *sambel* = S.I. *sambal*; *dateng* = *datang*. SI tends to have a number of words that are more complex than their CJI equivalents. Sometimes they are formed with partial reduplication: CJI *tapi* = SI *tetapi* (but), *gini* = *begini* (like this), *gitu* = *begitu* (like that), or SI has an additional initial s in a limited number of words: CJI *ama* = S.I. *sama*, *aja* = *saja*, *udah* = *sudah*). Another difference is that the question tag *apa* is marked in SI with an additional question particle *-kah*.

Lexically there are only minor differences between SI and CJI. CJI has an estimated 200-300 words that are different from SI. Despite the relatively small number of different lexical items, the effect is considerable as most of these words are words of high frequency.

This is illustrated by the following two texts in CJI taken from teenager novels:

Badai Pasti Datang ⁶¹	<i>Upit Kejepit</i> ⁶²
<p>“Terus Adik bilang apa sama ibu itu?” tanya Parlin. “Aku bilang Abang jarang ke kampus, mungkin sibuk skripsi.” “Ibunya bilang apa? Enggak ninggalin pesan?” “Enggak ada, Bang. Cuma nanya alamat Abang aja. “Oh, tapi Adik sudah ngasih alamatku, kan?”</p>	<p>“Jadi kamu juga marah sama Mama? Kecewa sama Mama? Kamu sama papamu sama aja, nggak ngehargain Mama lagi. Nggak sayang sama Mama lagi. Kalau kamu nggak mau pergi, ya udah, biar Mama pergi sendiri ke rumah nenek.” [...] “Apa nggak mendingan kita tunggu Papa pulang, Ma? Biar kita bisa ngobrol bersama.”</p>

SI	CJI
meN-	N- or Ø
ber-	be(r) or Ø
ter-	ke-
-i	-in
-kan	-in

Table 1

ngasih (root: *kasih*; SI *memberi*), *ngeharagin* (root *harga*; SI *menghargai*), *tunggu* (root: *tunggu*; SI *menunggu*), and *ngobrol* (root *obrol*; SI *bercakap-cakap*). Stative passive *ter-* is in CJI rendered by the prefix *ke-*, and there is one suffix *-in* for locative, causative and benefactive verbs.

Printed in blue are lexical items that differ from standard Indonesian. The SI equivalent of these lexical items are listed in Table 2. It needs to be emphasised that half of the words also exist in SI, but in a slightly different meaning: *terus* (to go ahead), *bilang* (to count), *sama* (same), *biar* (let).

Printed in green are short forms: CJI *aja* is SI *saja*, *tapi* equals *tetapi*, *kan* = *bukan*, *udah* = *sudah*, and *apa* is *apakah*.

The two texts are not composed in “pure” CJI. In the first text we find SI *sudah* instead of CJI *udah*. The second text has SI *kalau* instead of CJI *kalo*, and SI *bersama* rather than CJI *bareng*. CJI has a large number of words that are taken either from SI or from CJI. The first and second person pronouns can either be SI *aku* and *kamu* or Betawi Malay *gue* and *lu* – the latter are only used in very intimate contexts. One can further observe that *sama* is neither shortened to *ama*, nor is the /a/ in final position realised as é as it is in Betawi Malay (*ame*). The demonstrative pronoun is rendered as SI *itu* rather than Betawi Malay *tu*. CJI is difficult to define as it can be located almost anywhere between Betawi Malay and SI. When it is used by speakers from Jakarta or in intimate contexts, then it is closer to Betawi Malay, but when it is used by speakers from outside Jakarta or in less intimate contexts, then it shifts towards SI. The above novels were not written for readers from Jakarta but for a general Indonesian audience, and hence the language used is somewhere in the middle of Betawi Malay and SI. The cline from Betawi Malay to CJI, from CJI to spoken cultivated SI, and from spoken cultivated SI to written SI is a rather smooth one. Spoken cultivated Indonesian borrows extensively from CJI, but even in texts using the formal register one can occasionally spot borrowings from CJI. Most speakers of Indonesian automatically adjust the register from intimate or casual to a more formal register as soon as the matter of discussion becomes more serious. Code switching between registers is the norm.

In regards to verb morphology – highlighted in red and summarised in Table 1 – Standard Indonesian attaches the prefix *me-* to most active verbs and then prenasalises the first consonant of the root. CJI also prenasalises (N stands for the nasal sound) but does not use the prefix *me-*: *ninggalin* (root: *tinggal*; SI *meninggalkan*), *nanya* (root: *tanya*; SI *menanyakan*),

CJI	SI	E
<i>terus</i>	<i>lalu</i>	then
<i>bilang</i>	<i>mengatakan</i>	to say
<i>sama</i>	<i>dan, oleh, kepada</i>	and, by, to
<i>enggak/nggak</i>	<i>tidak</i>	no, not
<i>cuma</i>	<i>hanya</i>	only
<i>kasih</i>	<i>beri</i>	to give
<i>mendingan</i>	<i>lebih baik</i>	better
<i>biar</i>	<i>supaya, agar</i>	so that
<i>obrol</i>	<i>bercakap-cakap</i>	to talk

Table 2

Literacy and Speaking Competence

One way to find out how many Indonesians can speak Indonesian is by looking at the literacy rates. In Indonesia, literacy always means literacy in the Indonesian language (*bahasa Indonesia*). Nobody in Indonesia is literate in a regional language and illiterate in Indonesian! On the other hand, there are (few) Indonesians who are illiterate, but who do speak Indonesian nevertheless.

According to the population census of 1930, the literacy rate of adult Indonesians in the Netherlands Indies was only 7.4 percent. When Indonesia declared independence in 1945, only one Indonesian in ten could read and write. In 1980, almost three-quarters of the Indonesian population aged ten years or older were literate,⁶³ and the adult literacy rate of 2010 was, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Education, 94.8%⁶⁴, and for 2012 96.4%.⁶⁵ However, the 2010 census indicates a lower adult literacy rate of 92.4%. As youth literacy (age 15-24) in 2009 exceeded 99% (98.6% according to the 2010 census),

illiteracy in Indonesia should soon be a thing of the past.

The great success in rising literacy rates was achieved through compulsory education. During the Japanese occupations 1942-1945 it became compulsory for all Indonesian children between the age of 6 and 14 to attend school with Indonesian as the language of instruction. Following the war of independence, the young republic introduced in 1950 six years of compulsory education beginning at the age of 7. School age was lowered to age 6 in 1984. In 1994 compulsory education increased to nine and in 2015 to twelve years.

From the data above, it can be concluded that the vast majority of Indonesians born after 1945 should be literate. This is supported by the 2010 census: in the year the 1945 generation became 65 years old, 77% of them could read and write in Indonesian.

Indonesians born after 1978 were even exposed to nine years of compulsory education. At the 2010 census they were 32 years old or younger, and 97.56% of them were literate in the Indonesian language.

Many provinces in the western part of Indonesia now have literacy rates comparable to those of developed nations. Even many rural areas such as the Kerinci regency in Sumatra, the Minahasa regency in Sulawesi, or the Kapuas regency in Kalimantan already show adult literacy rates of 99%. The highest literacy rates in Indonesia are found in

Province	Literacy	Speaking Comp.
DKI Jakarta	98%	100%
Sulawesi Utara	96%	98%
Kepulauan Riau	95%	99%
Kalimantan Timur	95%	99%
Sumatera Utara	94%	97%
Riau	94%	98%
Sumatera Selatan	94%	93%
Jawa Barat	94%	95%
Banten	94%	96%
Kalimantan Tengah	94%	94%
Maluku	94%	99%
Lampung	93%	98%
Bangka Belitung	93%	95%
Kalimantan Selatan	93%	93%
Aceh	92%	93%
Sumatera Barat	92%	90%
Jambi	92%	95%
Bengkulu	92%	95%
Maluku Utara	92%	98%
Sulawesi Tengah	91%	99%
Gorontalo	91%	98%
Jawa Tengah	90%	92%
DI Yogyakarta	90%	93%
Jawa Timur	88%	88%
Bali	88%	91%
Kalimantan Barat	88%	94%
Papua Barat	88%	99%
Sulawesi Tenggara	87%	97%
Sulawesi Selatan	85%	93%
Nusa Tenggara Timur	84%	90%
Sulawesi Barat	83%	94%
Nusa Tenggara Barat	79%	84%
Papua	62%	79%
Total	91%	93%

Table 3: Literacy and Speaking Competence (Source: Badan Pusat Statistik. (2012). *Penduduk Indonesia*).

Sumatra, Jakarta, West Java, Central and East Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, and in the Maluku islands.

In some remote areas, especially in less-developed eastern Indonesia, compulsory education was not always enforced resulting not only in high illiteracy rates, and also in a relatively low penetration of the Indonesian language.

The four provinces with the highest illiteracy rates (2010) are Papua (36.31%), West Nusa Tenggara (16.48%), West Sulawesi (10.33%), and East Nusa Tenggara (10.13%). The illiteracy rates here are very high, but the total population of these four provinces together is less than 14 million.

Illiteracy rates are also relatively high in densely populated East Java (7.87%) and in Bali (6.35%). Here, too, the penetration rate of Indonesian is low.

The literacy rates seem to indicate that 95% of all Indonesians can read and write in Indonesian, and hence we can also conclude that they can speak in Indonesian.

But how reliable are the literacy rates? During the 2010 census, literacy was defined as having the ability “to write a simple sentence”⁶⁶. Kozol suggests that the very high figures of literacy reported by the US census may be due to poor methodology,⁶⁷ which is confirmed by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) study conducted by the US Department of Education that showed that 21% to 23% of adult Americans were not “able to locate information in text”, could not “make low-level inferences using printed materials”, and were unable to “integrate easily identifiable pieces of information.” One can safely assume that the percentage of Indonesians unable to successfully complete these tasks is even higher than in the USA. On the other hand, while it is true that those who only possess limited literacy are also likely less competent speakers, the majority of those Americans who failed the NAAL study were monolingual native speakers of English.⁶⁸

Do you speak Indonesian?

Besides eliciting the language commonly spoken at home and whether one can read and write, the third language-related question in the 2010 census was just simply “Do you speak Indonesian?” which was positively answered by 92.5% Indonesians of age 5 and over. In the previous section I argued that those who read and write Indonesian, can be assumed to also speak Indonesian. Let us look at the provinces in Table 3 first. In the left column is the reading and writing competence (literacy), and in the right column the speaking ability in the Indonesian language. Generally the numbers correspond quite well. In most provinces there are some speakers of Indonesian who cannot read and write. Usually the discrepancy is a matter of a few percentage points except for Papua and Papua Barat where literacy rates are low, but where considerably more (11 and 17%) people can speak rather than read and write Indonesian. This will be discussed further down.

Table 4 lists literacy and speaking competence per

Age Group	Literacy	Speaking Comp.
5 - 9	73%	84%
10 - 14	97%	98%
15 - 19	99%	99%
20 - 24	99%	98%
25 - 29	98%	98%
30 - 34	98%	98%
35 - 39	97%	97%
40 - 44	95%	94%
45 - 49	92%	91%
50 - 54	89%	88%
55 - 59	86%	85%
60 - 64	79%	77%
65 - 69	73%	71%
70 - 74	64%	61%
75 - 79	59%	56%
80 - 84	55%	51%
85 - 89	53%	49%
90 - 94	48%	43%
95+	46%	41%

Table 4: Literacy and Speaking Competence per Age Group.
(Source: Badan Pusat Statistik. (2012). *Penduduk Indonesia*).

age group. The age group 5-9 years is of particular interest. Of course we cannot expect pre-schoolers to be able to read and write, and hence the literacy rate is with 73% well below that of their older peers. Interesting is the 24% difference in speaking competency when compared to their older peers. This means that 16% of children in the age group 5-9 are unable to speak Indonesian, but once they are a few years older they almost universally speak Indonesian.

This is interesting insofar as this is the critical age where children can achieve native competency in Indonesian.

It is in the age group 40+ where both literacy rates and Indonesian language competence start to decrease.

In the 90+ group (born in or before 1920) less than half can either read, write or speak Indonesian. Those born between 1921 and 1925 only do marginally better, and there is some steady improvement among those born between 1926 and 1940.

Those in the age group 65-69 (born between 1941 and 1945) speak, read and write much better than their older peers as were the first that underwent compulsory education that, however, was not always enforced and also often interrupted during the turmoils of first Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and then revolution and war of independence 1945-1949.

Sovereignty was transferred to the republic in 1949, but even after that the country continued to be in a politically unstable state and impoverished. Despite compulsory schooling, many children had to work rather than attending school. Yet, more than three quarter of those born in the young republic (age group 60-64, born 1946-1950) can read and write in Indonesian. Those born in 1951-1955 experienced yet another big jump to over 85% literacy and speaking competence. After that, the increase is gradual. Among those born after 1970 almost everyone can speak, read, and write in Indonesian.

Papua

The Indonesian province Papua deserves a special mention here. After 1945, when Indonesia declared independence, and even after 1949 when Indonesia was internationally recognised as an independent nation, Papua still remained under Dutch control. Papua was annexed by Indonesia in 1969. Despite the enormous progress made in Indonesia after 1970, Papua remained severely underdeveloped.

According to the 2010 census, Papua has the lowest literacy rate in the country: only 62% of Papuans can read and write, and only 79% can speak Indonesian.

Papua is also special as out of the 706 languages spoken in Indonesia, more than 300 are spoken by the less than 3 million inhabitants of Papua. In an area where the average number of speakers per language is not more than ten thousand, the need to speak a second language is much higher than in densely populated areas where only one regional language is spoken. Compared to the very low literacy rate (62%), and considering that Papua only became part of Indonesia in 1969, the number of speakers of Indonesian is relatively high (79%). Fields⁶⁹ estimates that 95% of native coastal Papuans, and 90% of native interior Papuans speak colloquial Indonesian. The number of those, who have control of the formal register, is considerably lower: 70-80% of coastal and 20% of interior Papuans master SI.

A journalist from the national newspaper Kompas reports with amazement how well the Papuans speak Indonesian:

When we visit the interior of Sulawesi, Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Timor and other islands, the majority of the populations still actively speak their regional languages on a daily basis. As a result, many of them either speak broken Indonesian or no Indonesian at all. [...] Exactly the opposite can be observed in Papua. In isolated villages inhabited by native Papuans we can find little children playing while speaking their local languages mixed with Indonesian. Even the adults use Indonesian even though they use their local language on a daily basis. When they speak to someone from another ethnic group, they instantly switch to Indonesian.⁷⁰

35 years earlier Khaidir Anwar wrote:

It is hard to imagine a more remote place in Indonesia than the valley of Baliem in Irian Jaya (West Irian)⁷¹. A good friend of mine, S. Effendi, an official at the Ministry of Social Welfare in Jakarta, has visited the place on several occasions connection with his work. He informed me that as far as he knew Indonesian was quite familiar to the villagers there and in fact the only language used as a medium of inter-village communication. (Khaidir Anwar 1980: 146)

The vast spread of Indonesian after the Dutch relinquished Papua to Indonesia in 1969 was at least partly caused by the fact that several hundred, often completely unrelated, languages, are spoken in Papua. Given the complex linguistic situation of Papua, inter-village communication in many cases equals inter-ethnic communication.

Among the three million inhabitants of Papua, roughly half are native and the other half non-native Papuans living mostly in the few urban areas.

Is it possible that some of the census takers did not regard Papuan Colloquial Indonesian as proper Indonesian and hence marked many speaker of PCI as non-speakers of Indonesian?

Conclusion

We are attempting here to estimate the total population of **native speakers of the Indonesian language**. The reader is warned that this is not rocket science and that all estimates on this and the following pages carry a wide margin of possible error.

As mentioned before, there are very few, if any, native speakers of the formal register of *bahasa Indonesia*. Native speakers of the Indonesian language are those who speak any register of the Indonesian language, including the many registers of colloquial Indonesian, but excluding native speakers of the various Malay dialects (*bahasa Melayu*) unless, of course, when they are also native speakers of Indonesian. Needless to say, in many individual cases it is problematic if not impossible to decide whether a person is a native speaker of Indonesian or of a dialect closely related to Indonesian. Yet, most native speakers of Indonesian who have travelled the country and are familiar with different varieties of colloquial Indonesian will quickly be able to decide whether a person, when asked to speak Indonesian in a linguistically mixed environment, can be regarded as a native speaker of Indonesian or of Manado Malay, for instance.⁷²

Age Group	Urban	Rural
5-9	41%	13%
10-39	37%	8%
40-59	32%	5%
60-69	26%	4%
70+	24%	4%

Table 5: Confirmed Native Speakers

In order to estimate the total number of native speakers of the Indonesian language, we can depart from one very conservative base number that is derived from the 2010 census. The question is: *Bahasa apa yang dipakai sehari-hari di rumah?* 'What language do you use on a daily basis at home?' 43 million or 21.6% of all Indonesians aged 5 and above answered that they

exclusively speak Indonesian at home. Unfortunately, the census did not record the number of individuals that speak Indonesian **and** a regional language at home. But even Indonesians who speak predominantly or exclusively a regional language at home can still have native proficiency in Indonesian. Therefore the census result in regards to this question can only be seen as a minimal indicator for the number of native speakers.

Among these confirmed native speakers, there is, as anticipated, a dramatic difference between those who live in cities and their fellow country folk. 36% of all Indonesians who live in urban areas speak exclusively Indonesian at home. In rural areas, only 7% use *bahasa Indonesia* as their **sole** domestic language. As expected, there is also a considerable difference

between the age groups (see Table 5).

The total population of Indonesia in 2010 was 238 million of which 215 million were 5 years and older. Table 6 gives an estimate of the total

Age	A	B	C	D
1 (5-9)	19.5	60%	5.9	2.0
2 (10-39)	119.7	75%	44.9	15.0
3 (40-59)	46.1	60%	13.8	3.5
4 (60-69)	8.1	50%	2.0	0.4
5 (70+)	4.4	40%	0.9	0.1
TOTAL	197.9		67.5	20.9
				88.4

Table 6

number of native speakers in Millions. According to our estimation, Indonesia had approximately 88 million native speakers in the year 2010. In the following section we will examine the four columns A–D of Table 6. Note that the numbers of native speakers among the urban population (Column B) and the numbers of native speakers among the rural population (Column C) are estimates with a high possible error margin. The justification for the rather conservative estimates are given under “Reasoning” for each age group.

- A Out of the 215 million Indonesians aged 5 and over, 197.9 million confirmed that they *dapat berbahasa Indonesia* ‘are able to speak Indonesian’.
- B is an estimate in percent and in numbers of the urban population that can be considered native speakers. We estimate that 67.5 million urban Indonesians can be considered native speakers.
- C is an estimate in percent and in numbers of the rural population that can be considered native speakers. We estimate that 20.9 million Indonesians in rural areas are native speakers.
- D This is the sum of B and C. The estimated total number of native speakers of Indonesian in the year 2010 is 88.4 million.

Age Group 1

A. 19.5 million (84%) of all 23.3 million Indonesians aged between 5 and 9 years speak Indonesian – the percentage is relatively low as the population of this age group is still learning Indonesian. According to the 2010 census, 5.3 million (27.3%) of the 19.5 million speakers are native speakers as they live in families where exclusively Indonesian is spoken. Of these 5.3 million “confirmed native speakers” 41% live in urban and 13% in rural areas.

B. Of the 19.5 million children who speak Indonesian, 50% (9.75 million) live in urban areas. We believe that the census underestimates the number of native speaker in this age group as it excludes bilingual speakers. Apart from the 41% confirmed native speakers, we estimate that a further 19% are bilingual

speakers who speak Indonesian fluently enough to be counted as native speakers. The true percentage of native speakers among urban Indonesian in this age group is hence not 41% but 60% or 5.9 million.

C. Of the 19.5 million children who speak Indonesian, 50% (9.75 million) live in rural areas. The census confirms that 13% of them are native speakers. We estimate that the true percentage of the 9.75 million children who can be considered native speakers is not 13 but 20% (rounded to 2 million)

D. The total estimated number of native speakers of Indonesian in this age group is 7.8 million (5.86 million urban and 1.95 million rural). This is 2.5 million over the 5.3 million confirmed native speakers.

Reasoning Children who grow up in an urban environment either speak Indonesian only, or are bilingual speakers. The bilingual children are usually more proficient in Indonesian than in their “mother tongue”. However, as some of the urban children may have recently moved from an rural area, we cautiously estimate that only 60% of the urban children have native speaker proficiency.

The picture in the countryside is completely different. Here, most children grow up with a regional language as their mother tongue. Some are bilingual, but they are typically more proficient in their mother tongue than in Indonesian. Furthermore, a considerable number of children aged 5, 6 and 7 have not yet learned Indonesian. The five years old do not go to school yet, and few children in the countryside attend playgroups or kindergarten. The six and seven year old children are still in grade 1 and 2 where the vernacular is often still used as the language of instruction.

Age Group 2

A. 97% or 119.7 million of the 123 million Indonesians in the age group 10-39 years speak Indonesian. According to the census only 22% or 26.9 million of the 119.7 million speakers are confirmed native speakers (37% in urban and 8% in rural areas).

B-D. Of the 119.7 million speakers in this age group 53% live in urban, and 47% in rural settlements. We estimate that on top of the 37% urban “confirmed native speakers” there are at least as many bilingual Indonesians who speak Indonesian as fluent as their mother tongue and who should hence be included in the native speaker count. We estimate that at least 75% of the urban (44.9 million), and 25% of the rural population (15 million) are proficient enough to be regarded as native speakers of Indonesian. The total number of native speakers in this age group is hence 59.5 million.

Reasoning The justification for combining six age groups (10-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, and 35-39) into one single group is because the percentage of speakers of Indonesian is about the same in all six age groups (97-99%). This is the generation born in 1971 or later when Indonesia had a reasonably well-functioning educational system in place. Virtually every single person within this age group who grew up in an urban area speaks Indonesian. Our relatively low estimate of only 75% native speakers is due to the fact that this age group has a proportionally high number of recent migrants from rural areas.

Age Group 3

The population of this group was born between 1951 and 1970. In 2010 when the census was administered, 50.6 million Indonesians were between 40-59 years old. 46.1 million people (91%) in this age group speak Indonesian, and 8.7 million (19%) are confirmed native speakers (32% in urban and 5% in rural areas). We estimate that approximately 60% of the urban and 15% of the rural population are proficient enough to be regarded as native speakers of Indonesian. The relatively sharp drop between Group 2 and Group 3 is due

to the fact that the majority of those in Group 3 who presently reside in urban areas, was brought up in a rural environment as the urbanization rate in 1950 was only 15%. Total number of native speakers in this group is estimated to be 18.4 million.

Age Group 4

Group 4 consists of 10.8 million Indonesians born between 1941 and 1950 who in 2010 were between 60-69 years old. 8.2 million people (76%) in this age group speak Indonesian, and 1.2 million (15%) are confirmed native speakers. We estimate that only 50% of the urban, and 10% of the rural population are proficient enough to be regarded as native speakers of Indonesian. Total number of native speakers in this group is 2.5 million.

Age Group 5

The population of Group 5 (7.3 million) was born before in 1940 or earlier. In 2010 they were aged 70 or older. 4.4 million (60%) in this age group speak Indonesian, and 0.6 million (14%) are confirmed native speakers. We estimate that 40% of the urban, and 6% of the rural population of this age group are proficient enough to be regarded as native speakers of Indonesian. Total number of native speakers in this group is 1 million.

The total number of native speakers of Indonesian in 2010 can hence be estimated to be at least 88 million. By the end of 2016 the number of native speakers will have reached approximately 95 million and 100 million by the year 2020.

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