

Centralized Language Planning in the 21st Century

Now, in the 21st century, centralized language planning continues apace under the auspices of the BPPB (*badan pengembangan dan pembinaan bahasa*).

So far, Indonesia's language planners have been remarkably successful in matters of (i) "language reform" or 'deliberate change in specific aspects of language like orthography spelling or grammar in order to facilitate use' (Nahir, 2003: 445); (ii) "language standardization", 'the attempt to garner prestige for a regional language or dialect transforming it into one that is accepted as a major language or standard language of a region' (ibid.); (iii) "language spread", 'the attempt to increase the number of speakers of one language at the expense of another' (ibid.); and (iv) "lexical modernization" or 'word creation or adaptation' (ibid.).

The most daunting task it faces now would appear to be "language purification" or 'the prescription of usage in order to preserve the linguistic purity of language, protect language from foreign influences and guard against language deviation from within' (ibid.).

Here, it faces an uphill struggle and, in all probability, it is the innumerable contributions of unknown individuals that will change Indonesian most radically from now on.

Once upon a time, trade and religion provided the impetus that carried the Malay tongue to the four corners of the archipelago. Now, it is entertainment and popular culture, journalists and celebrities, opinion-formers and role-models and, most important of all, the viewers, readers and listeners who imitate them.

As the English playwright, Ben Jonson, once put it, 'Custom is the most certain mistress of language as the public stamp makes the current money' (Bolton, 1972: 39).

For better or worse, then, the people will cast Bahasa Indonesia in their own image, just as Bahasa Indonesia once forged a nation from hundreds of cultures, thousands of islands and millions of disparate individuals.