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Indonesian abbreviations and acronyms

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INDONESIAN ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The purpose of this article is to present some linguistic observations on Indonesian abbreviations and acronyms, based mainly on the *Glossary of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in Indonesia* by A. Mörzer Bruyns (reviewed on p. 366 of this issue of the *Bijdragen*).

The formations can be divided into various groups.¹

I. THE ABBREVIATION.

A few letters of one word or more replace the whole word or a series of words belonging together: *bhb.*² (*berhubung* = in connection with), *bhw.* (*bahwa* = that, conjunction), *a.l.* (*antara lain* = among other things), *J.M.E.* (*Jang Maha Esa* = The Supreme One), and *d/a* (*dengan alamat* = c/o). The abbreviation does not occur in the spoken language; it exists only with regard to the written word, i.e. the spelling, as everyone will say /*antara lain*/, and never /*al*/ or /*a'el*/.

Comparable to this is the spelling *p'merintah* (*pemerintah* = government), *p'temuan* (*pertemuan* = meeting), *m'perhitungkan* (*memperhitungkan* = to calculate), and *dip'tahankan* (*dipertahankan* = defended). A. M. Moeliono³ points out that prefixes in particular are abbreviated in this way. They would not cause difficulties to the newspaper-reader. However, such spellings as *p'dingan* (*perundingan* = negotiation) and *k'tingan* (*kepentingan* = interest) — particularly in newspaper headlines — require greater effort. Here the abbreviations do not concern prefixes.

¹ See: G. J. Steenberg, *Letterwoord, initiaalwoord, verkorting, afkorting*, *Nieuwe Taalgids* 60, 1967, 42-46; and J. J. Mak, *Letterwoord en/of verkorting (afkorting?)*, *Nieuwe Taalgids* 59, 1966, 313-315.

² Henceforth I shall use the current spelling.

³ A. M. Moeliono, 'Kata Pantjung' dalam *Koran*, *Kompas*, 1-12-1969. The examples are also borrowed from this article.

II. THE ACRONYM.

The sound form of a word, or a group of words belonging together, is shortened.⁴

A. *The shortening.*

The sound form of a word is shortened: *pak* (bapak = father), *dik* (adik = younger brother or sister), *bu* (ibu = mother). This manner of word formation does belong to the spoken language. There is usually nothing of the deliberateness so characteristic of the cases to be mentioned below under B and C.⁵ These shortened forms have the sense of "familiarity", or "intimacy", in contrast to the full forms. Proper names and kinship terms in particular are subject to this process. The words are shortened to the final part: e.g.; *No* (Sutrisno), *Ti* (Siti), *Leh* (Saleh), and *Min* (Gimin), all of them proper names.

B. *Forms Composed of Initials (Initialisms).*

The first letters of a number of words are joined together to form a compound of letters, i.e. a compound the component letters of which are pronounced by their names: *F.D.R.* (Front Demokrasi Rakjat = People's Democratic Front), *M.B.I.* (Markas Besar Istimewa = Special Headquarters), *L.R.K.N.* (Lembaga Research Kebudajaan Nasional = National Culture Research Institute or Research Institute of National Culture).⁶ This process is very productive with proper names: *H.B.J.* (Hans B. Jassin). Sometimes initials originate from a bilingual group of words: *P.N.S.* (Perserikatan "Normaalschool", = Association of Teachers School Leavers). These letter-compounds have a special nature. First of all there are neither defined nor defining parts: they are copulative in character. Further, they do not form a single whole of common phonemic combinations, which gives reason for doubt whether they are actually words or not. On the other hand they show the characteristics of words: the accent falls on the final part, which gives the letter-group an appearance of unity. Semantically the group also forms a unity: forms such as *L.R.K.N.* name a definite object, or rather they refer to a definite object in the way proper names do. However, this is not always so: such forms as *B.S.* (berdiri sendiri = independent) really have a purely denominative character, since to the

⁴ Rulon Wells, *Acronomy*, in: *For Roman Jakobson*, The Hague 1956, 662-667.

⁵ The following do have an intentional character: *napi* (narapidana = prisoner), *kiasi* (klasifikasi).

⁶ But I heard a State Secretary pronounce *M.P.R.S.* as /empəres/ (15-7-1970 on T.V.).

Indonesian language-user *B.S.* does mean "independent". Nevertheless, these cases constitute a small minority; other examples are: *F.N.R.* ("Forward, no retreat", a slogan of Sukarno's, *A.T.D.* (*Anti Tjelana Dalam* = Anti-underpants, comparable to "topless"). All initialisms have the syntactic value of a noun. They also have the morphological value of a noun: *per-T.V.-an* /*pərtivian*/ (= things connected with television). Occasionally there arises a common Indonesian phonemic combination, although the whole is not pronounced as an Indonesian word: *K.I.T.* (*Kami ingin tahu* = we want to know); here the letters are pronounced by their names. Deviation from the common practice of using initial letters is rare: *K.K.O.* (*Korps Komando* = Commando Corps). In initialisms where "Korps Komando" is a constituent, *K.O.* is met with: *L.P.A.A.K.O.* (*Lembaga Pendidikan Amfibi dan Anti-Amfibi K.K.O.* = Commando Corps Training Institute for Amphibious and Anti-Amphibious Units); presumably this *K.O.* in *L.P.A.A.K.O.* is used on the analogy of such acronyms as *Pasinko* (*Pasukan Induk K.K.O.* = Commando Corps Mother Unit).

Combinations with figures also occur: *G. 30 S.* or *G.T.S.* (*Gerakan Tigapuluh September* = Thirtieth of September Movement), *A.P. '70* (*Aksi Peladjar 1970* = Students' Action 1970), *B.K. 5 I.* (*Badan Koordinasi Karyawan Kerohanian Kebatinan Kedjiwaan Indonesia* = Co-ordinating Body of Indonesian Mystic Spiritual Workers). In the latter case the figure qualifies the preceding letter — 5 times K — just as in *P. 3* (one of its meanings is *Penelitian Pendidikan dan Perkembangan* = Research in Education and Development). The figure can also precede: *3 P.* (*Pendidikan, Pangan dan Prasarana* = Education, Food and Infrastructure). In combinations that may produce misunderstanding, the figure qualifies the preceding letter: *B.P. 3 G.* (*Balai Penjelidikan Perusahaan Perkebunan Gula* = Sugar Estates Research Institute).

C. *The letter-word.*

A few letters from a series of words create as phonemes a new sound form, i.e. a new word: *Lipi* (*Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* = Indonesian Institute of Sciences), *saber* (*sapu bersih* = lit.: sweep clean), *Pertamina* (*Pertambangan Minyak dan Gas Bumi Nasional* = National Oil and Gas Mining). Just as the initialisms, these letter-words make up a semantic unity — also very often with the semantic characteristics of proper names — and they have the syntactic value of nouns. Likewise they have the morphological value in common

with nouns: *Nasakom* (Nasionalisme, Agama, Komunisme = "Nationalism, Religion, Communism", a slogan of Sukarno's)/ *nasakomisasi* (= "nasakomization"), *nasakom/ ber-nasakomo-phobi*⁷ (= to be afflicted by "nasakom"-phobia, Sukarno, 17-8-1963 speech), *Mahmilub* (Mahkamah Militer Luar Biasa = Extraordinary Military Judicial Assembly)/ *memahmilubkan* (= to try before an Extraordinary Military Judicial Assembly).

An important question is whether the letter words are monomorphemic or polymorphemic. For the users of the language they are by and large monomorphemic: they feel the word as a unity, without associating certain aspects of the sound form with definite sense aspects within the lexical meaning as a whole. Nevertheless, things are not so simple. In the first place, not all letter words obey the morphonological rules applying to the monomorphemic Indonesian word: *Panhut* (Panitia Hari Ulang Tahun = Anniversary Committee), and such curiosities as *Asrenopslitbang* and *Danpaskohandamar*. In the second place, the meaning of some letter-words is to a certain degree distinct: to the user of the language certain facets of the word-form are associated with definite aspects within the lexical meaning as a whole. Often parts within the word as a whole enable the user of the language to identify a letter-word yet unknown to him. In the longest acronym found in Indonesian, *Ifalpolekrochsofbud*, recognizable parts are found. They are recognizable on account of the fact that they recur in the same form in many acronyms: *-fal-* (falsafah = philosophy), *-pol-* (politik = politics), *-ek-* (ekonomi = economics), *-roch-* (rohani = spiritual), *-sos-* (sosial = social), *-bud-* (budaja = culture). The element *pan-* (panitia = committee) recurs in many letter-words. The letter-word *Hut* (hari ulang tahun = anniversary) is commonly known. *Panhut* (Panitia Hari Ulang Tahun = Birthday Committee) is polymorphemic for the user of the language: *Pan-* + *-hut*. The word could be called a compound; or it may be a derivative, since *pan-* occurs only as part of an acronym: *Panok* (Panitia Negara Organisasi = State Committee for Organization), *Panpers* (Panitia Personil = Personnel Committee), *Panota* (Panitia Organisasi dan Tatajara = Organization and Procedure Committee). Some other frequently used parts of acronyms are: *As-/ Askamat* (Asisten Kepala Material = Equipment Department Assistant Head), *Dan-/ Dansek*

⁷ The *o* in "nasakomo-" can be regarded as a transitional sound: the alternation of vowels and consonants produced makes the word sound more Indonesian.

(Komandan Seksi = Section Leader), *Jon-/Jonkes* (Bataljon Kesehatan = Health Battalion), *Men-/Menlu* (Menteri Luar Negeri = Foreign Minister), *Li-/Limil* (Ahli Pengetahuan Militer = Military Science Expert), *Pang-/Pangbes* (Panglima Besar = Commander-in-Chief).

The way a group of words is shortened to a letter-word is unpredictable, except that the letter-word should be pronounceable; this rather vague formulation makes it possible for such formations as *Ifalpolekrochsosbud* to be considered a letter-word. A few examples are *Pertamina* (*Pertambangan Minyak dan Gas Bumi Nasional* = National Gas and Oil Mining), *Gatrik* (*Tenaga dan Listrik* = Power and Electricity), *Barawadja* (*Badan Musjawarah Mahasiswa/Peladjar* = University and High School Students Consultative Body). An elegant borrowing is *Imka* (*Ikatan Masehi untuk Kepemudaan*) from *Y.M.C.A.*; another, needing no reinterpretation, is *Elpiji* from *L.P.G.* (liquid petroleum gas). The great number of synonyms is remarkable: *Asi* and *Asintel* (*Asisten Intelidjen* = Intelligence Assistant), *Bakop* and *Badkos* (*Badan Koperasi* = Co-operative Body); likewise the number of homonyms is great: *Mapram* (*Masa Perkenalan Mahasiswa* + *Masa Prabhakti Mahasiswa* = Students Familiarization Period + Students Pre-duty Period), *Repelita* (*Rentjana Pembangunan Lima Tahun* + *Rentjana Pendidikan Lima Tahun* + *Rentjana Perkorupsian Melipatkan Harta* = Five-Year Development Plan + Five-Year Education Plan + Plan for Corruption to Multiply Wealth). The desire for puns on existing acronyms, the confinement to a certain language circle, and the strongly dated character by which acronyms can be given new contents or their old ones forgotten, account for the great number of homonyms.⁸

The question whether the letter-words are mono- or polymorphematic is also dependent on the sound form. As one sees, many letter-words deviate from the rules applying to the Indonesian monomorphematic word. One of the causes is the use of unchangeable elements in new letter words: *Menlu*, *Dansek*, *Pangbes*, *Askamat*. In addition there are still a great number of deviations from the rules. Even so, these deviant forms are used in the spoken language. The Indonesian language also shows a flexibility in word-form which makes the fixing of rules a rather uncertain pursuit.

⁸ The initialisms *B.H.* are entered seven times: *Bali Hotel*, *Belum Hadji* (= No Haj yet), *Berita Harian* (= Daily News), *Biaya Hidup* (= Cost of Living), *Bung Hatta* (= Brother Hatta), *Bustehouder* (Dutch for brassière), and *Buta Huruf* (= Illiterate); the initialisms *B.P.* even occur 38 times!

The most common types are in the first place CVCVC (*Danjon*), then CVCCVC (*Madnas*), VCV (*Ibal*), and finally VCCVC (*Abrip*). Comparing this sequence with that of Verguin,⁹ we see that there is not much difference; I do not consider — as Verguin does — /mp/, /mb/, /nt/, /nd/, /ntj/, /ndj/, /ŋk/ and /ŋg/ as constituting a single phoneme. But these types do not quite make up 30 % of all the letter-words. The type CVCV (*Dati*) often occurs — Verguin reckons it as one of the most frequent — but less often than the type CVCVCVC (*Damatek*) or the type VCV (*Abi*), the type VCCV (*Abri*) or the type CVCCVCVC (*Dankotam*).

The monomorphematic Indonesian word is mainly bisyllabic.¹⁰ Forty per cent of the letter-words are of this type, too small a percentage to call this bisyllabic character “la forme canonique”. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that either the letter-words cannot simply be regarded as monomorphematic, or that the rules applying to the Indonesian word-form should be revised.

THE FREQUENCY OF VOWEL-PHONEMES:¹¹

	Initial	Final	
		closed syllable	open syllable
a	33 %	42 %	42 %
i	37 %	16 %	37 %
o	12 %	13 %	11 %
u	15 %	9 %	10 %
e	3 %	20 %	— %

Remarks:

1. The phoneme /e/ occurs scarcely at all in final position: the percentage is below 0.5 %; a few examples are *Bude* and *Djakarte*.
2. It should be borne in mind that ‘ai’ is looked on as two phonemes, i.e. /a/ and /i/. Fortunately ‘ai’ occurs so infrequently that the making

⁹ Joseph Verguin, *Le Malais*, Paris-La Haye 1967, 39-41.

¹⁰ idem, p. 40.

¹¹ I have come to these percentages of the final vowels through a random sampling which consisted of the investigation of all words beginning with A, E, I, O, U, B, D, and M. The question whether a certain combination is an initialism or is a letter-word was made to depend on the way it was pronounced by three students. When they were not familiar with the combination, they fell back on their language sense.

of a fundamental decision could be avoided. If such a decision were to be made, it would be more proper to regard 'ai' as one phoneme, either /ai/ or /e/. In the same way, 'au' has been looked on as combination of /a/ and /u/.

3. It is interesting to note that the bisyllabic words have the tendency to vary their vowels. When an /a/ is found in the first syllable, in the second syllable the percentage of /a/'s is half the percentage occurring in words with another vowel in the first syllable. The percentage of /i/'s in the second syllable is even 36 % of that occurring in words with another vowel in the first syllable. The same applies to the other vowels, although percentages cannot be given.

4. When the letter-words are trisyllabic, vowel repetition is exceptional. With trisyllabic words the dominant inclination is towards the types $V_1-V_2-V_1$, $V_1-V_2-V_3$, or $V_1-V_1-V_2$. The type $V_1-V_2-V_2$ is less frequent.

5. The phoneme /ə/ does not occur in initial and final position.

A few remarks follow by way of conclusion. The *shortenings* have an unintentional character. The *initialisms* and the *letter-words* do not possess this character: long forms are deliberately avoided, at least in the sense that a short linguistic form is intentionally created. The same applies to the *abbreviations*, but these are restricted to the written language. No change of meaning or sense condensation takes place. That is to say, the cognitive meaning does not change. But often the short form has an emotive meaning that the full form lacks. However, many initialisms and many letter-words lack the emotive meaning. The formations belong to the phenomenon of name-giving, except that a name is given to something already possessing a name. These formations can be accounted for as language economy, but why it is Indonesian that should have such a large number of acronyms still remains unexplained. Indonesian is to a large measure a developing language, and as such offers more possibilities than a language with centuries of tradition could ever do. A historical investigation might find out to what extent Classical Malay and possibly the regional languages have had this possibility for namegiving. Javanese has forms such as *nasgitel* (panas legi kentel = hot, strong tea with sugar), *délik* (gedé tjilik = young and old), *dalang* (kadal walang = lizard). Sundanese has *blag-tjingpo* (panto ngadjeblog utjing nempo = If you open the door, you'll see the cat = as plain as a pikestaff), *misbéh* (amis kabéh = everything is sweet). Proper names are also shortened, for example, in Minang-

kabau: *Hamka* (Hadji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah), Hasan Ry (Rangkuty). In Javanese, popular etymology causes *September* to be interpreted as "asat-asaté sumber" (= when the wells are at their driest).

The Indonesian language makes less use of reference words than it might. The pronoun *ia* (= he, she) cannot refer to *kota* (= town), or *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* (= Indonesian Institute of Sciences). This would cause more inconvenience in the latter case than in the former. The urge towards economy may have motivated the search for ways to avoid such long circumlocutions, and the acronym could then be extremely useful, especially in cases where the full form is already known from the context.

Although the use of most of the acronyms is restricted to the professional language — particularly the military — many have found their way into common speech through journalism. Perhaps one should rather put it this way: journalists impose the use of them upon the readers. A T.V. news-reader did not even take the trouble to explain who an announcement originated from when he read one from *Pangkopkamtib* (Panglima Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban = Commander of Security and Order Restoration Command) on 24-1-1970. Yet these formations cause a great deal of trouble; many fall outside the sphere of ordinary speech, and for many speakers they are not lexical: *Foma* (Foto Mahasiswa = Students' picture), *K.A.I.* (Korban Agresi Israel = Israel Aggression Victims). Another example is *L.M.M.* (Langit Makin Mendung = The sky is getting cloudier), although the literary or the scandal-loving reader could easily make a correct guess at the last, thanks to the fact that a short story bearing the name has produced, in 1970, a case against the essayist and magazine editor H. B. Jassin for libel against Islam. Likewise those interested in politics would readily understand *H.M.M.* which stands for "Harto, Malik and Hamengku Buwono"; the context would help them in any case.

This professional character is not the only salient feature; these formations would be unthinkable outside the written language. Indications are given by such spellings as *Imaan* /iman/, *Bappenas*, *Danki*, *Ankum*, *Basrev*, and still more obvious: *B.O.* (Boedi Oetomo, now *B.U.* = Noble Endeavour), *H.O.T.* (Hari Oelang Tahoen, already in 1923! = Anniversary), *Ori* (Oeang Repoeblik Indonesia = Indonesian Republic Currency). The last example is striking as it is used as a letter-word and not as an initialism.

The element of play — as has been pointed out before — has popularized many acronyms and encouraged new creations.¹² The *Angkatan Wanita Sadar* (= Generation of Duty-Conscious Women) called itself — rightly — *Awas* (= Beware); the *Gerakan September Tigapuluh* (= 30th September Movement) has been called by its opponents *Gestapu*; in 1965 and 1966 the *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa* (= Students United Action Front) called itself self-consciously *Kami* (= Us). Sukarno¹³ coined *berdikari* (berdiri diatas kaki sendiri = standing on one's own feet), which was immediately adopted into the language, and which, besides, begat a department in the one-hundred-man cabinet and even gave occasion to *Usdikari* (Usaha berdikari = "standing-on-one's-own-feet" enterprise). *Kipasmenang* (literally: "victorious fan", but standing for "Kita pasti menang" = we must win) also made the jump into common speech. The element of play turned *Hotel des Indes* into *Hotel Duta Indonesia* (= Indonesian Ambassador Hotel), in order to avoid the necessity of altering the initials *H.D.I.* engraved on the silverware.¹⁴ Modesty led to the abbreviation of *Indehoj*¹⁵ to *I.D.H.* (= to make love). However, such euphemistic formations are rare in the Indonesian language. Even French supplied an acronym: the pejorative *Lomplom* of Sukarno (L'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme). This play with letters even made it possible for a political programme of Sukarno's to be shortened to *Nekad* (literally: fearlessly determined):

Negara kita persatukan (= We unify our country);
 Ekonomi kita sosialisakan (= We socialize our economy);
 Keamanan kita selenggarakan (= We maintain security);
 Agama kita muliakan (= We glorify religion);
 Demokrasi terpimpin kita djalankan (= We practise guided democracy).

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¹² The writer Hadji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah has chosen *Hamka* as his pseudonym.

¹³ It would be worthwhile to investigate Sukarno's influence on such formations.

¹⁴ The element of play occurred in mediaeval Europe: *Roma* (radix omnium malorum avaritia). See J. J. Mak, *Taal en Spel*, Nieuwe Taalgids 60, 1967, 48-50.

¹⁵ *Indehoj* is derived from the Dutch *in het hooi* (= in the hay), with a change of article which would not surprise anyone with teaching experience in Indonesia.