Philippe Grangé


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*L’Indonésien* is a description in French of the Indonesian language. As stated in the book’s preface (p. 3), it aims to provide an overview of the characteristics of Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*). In this effort, I believe the author has fully succeeded. His monograph touches upon a wealth of known and lesser known aspects of Indonesia’s national language. Wherever restrictions of space preclude him from going into detail, he cites relevant literature for further reading. As such, *L’Indonésien* is a welcome and necessary addition for Francophone readers to the work of Lombard (1976), which—though still useful—describes the language of two generations ago.

The book’s first chapter presents a short but informative overview of the Indonesian language (pp. 5–26), addressing the language’s Malay roots, its status as Indonesia’s national language, and its number of speakers. Attention is also given to a number of clichés and misconceptions, in particular the oft-alleged simplicity or even non-existence of Indonesian grammar. The chapter then provides a brief description of the history of Malay, its popularity as a regional lingua franca, the ways it has been written, the differences between Malaysian and Indonesian standardizations, the relation between standard Indonesian and Jakarta Indonesian, Indonesian language politics, and relevant previous literature.

The second chapter discusses phonetics and phonology (pp. 27–42). As the author argues, the Indonesian language lacks diphthongs and fixed patterns of word stress. This chapter also touches upon borrowed phonemes, regional and diastratic variation, and what the author calls ‘sandhi’ (in the Anglophone literature, ‘prenasalization’, ‘nasal-prefixation’ or ‘nasal assimilation’ are common terms for this phenomenon). Also addressed is the orthography (p. 36), which in the author’s view largely exhibits a one-to-one correspondence to the Indonesian pronunciation, with the exception of the (e). Here I would like to add that this is not necessarily the case for loanwords; some examples of counterintuitive pronunciations are provided by the author himself: *kopi* ‘coffee’ (p. 42), *pasca* ‘post-’ (p. 50) and *sholat* ‘Islamic prayer’ (p. 51), which are commonly pronounced as /kɔpi/, /paska ~ pastʃa/, and /sɔlat/.

The third chapter centers on the Indonesian lexicon (pp. 43–108), including its etymological origins and processes of word-formation: acronyms, neologisms, and derivation through affixes. A list is presented of loanwords with their purported sources (p. 47); my personal preference would have been to also include each etymon and by doing so to add a dimension of verifiability.
yet unfortunately this remains exceptional in publications dealing with Malay varieties. In any case, it is hard to disagree with the author’s regret (p. 48) that an exhaustive etymological dictionary of Malay/Indonesian has thus far remained unpublished. I do not share his analysis that forms like leluhur ‘ancestors’ and tetangga ‘neighbor’ are made with an infix (p. 71); if anything they reflect partial reduplication, a well-attested historical process in Malay.

The fourth chapter focuses on grammatical classes and phrases (pp. 109–164). It addresses the noun-verb distinction, grammatical categories, word order, and verbal phrases. The fifth chapter deals with the Indonesian sentence (pp. 165–214), including transitivity, voice, interrogatives, and tense–aspect–mood. It is in this chapter that the author is most exhaustive. The functions of sudah ‘already’, for example, are elaborated on in numerous contexts and constructions. The sixth chapter, by contrast, consists of only four pages (pp. 215–218). It describes discourse and utterance acts (‘énonciation’), including topicalization, focalization, and thematization. The book concludes with a glossary (pp. 219–221), which is not—as one might expect—a list of words used in the book, but a Swadesh list. It is followed by a transcribed, glossed, and translated Indonesian video fragment (pp. 222–224).

Needless to say, it is my duty as a reviewer to offer some critical remarks at this point. Many of the book’s IPA transcriptions strike me as dubious, including /kədəle/ ‘soybean’ instead of /kədəle/ (p. 36), /nɛnɛʔ ~ nɛnɛk/ ‘grandmother’ instead of /nɛnɛʔ ~ nɛnɛk/’ (p. 40), /məŋantʊʔ ~ məŋantʊk/ ‘sleepy’ instead of /məŋantʊʔ ~ məŋantʊk/ (p. 222), /məmaŋ/ ‘really’ instead of /məmaŋ/ (p. 224), and /d͡ʒɔlɔʔkan/ ‘to prod at sth.’ instead of /d͡ʒɔlɔʔkan /. One may further point out that the map on p. 6 situates Ambon Malay where Ternate Malay is spoken (see Litamahuputty 2012). The Oceanic languages do not form a major Austronesian subgroup alongside Malayo-Polynesian, as is suggested on p. 13, but constitute a sub-sub-branch of the latter. As regards the terms Bahasa Prokem and Bahasa Gaul (pp. 19–20), it may be added that the former was popular two generations ago, the latter one generation ago, whereas today’s generation—especially Indonesia’s netizen population—uses the term Bahasa Alay. Ananta Pramoedya Toer (p. 26) should be either Pramoedya Ananta Toer or Pramudya Ananta Toer; the author has used both spellings to write his name.

The advantages of L’Indonésian, however, greatly outweigh these minor details. One benefit is the work’s reference to both Indonesian and French publications, several of which are rarely mentioned in the Anglophone literature. Another is the fact that many examples are taken from real-life data, including novels. Equally useful are the numerous contrastive and (deliberately) ungrammatical examples used to illustrate the nuances and correct usage of affixes, particles and other morphosyntactic devices. The author does not shy away
from describing phenomena used in locally flavored Indonesian as well as different stylistic registers of the language, such as literary Indonesian (pp. 124–5), classical Malay (pp. 194–5), and substandard Indonesian (p. 214, fn. 105). Colloquial Jakartan Indonesian is also discussed at several places, although it is not the book’s main focus.

In keeping with the Malay-Indonesian tradition, the author concludes with a traditional quatrain (pantoum), self-debasingly asking for guidance (p. 224). It is only appropriate to reciprocate him (*berbalas*) with a follow-up poem:

Angin berhembus dari utara  
Tampak bendera terkibar-kibar  
Salah dan silap jangan dikira  
Bersama-sama kita belajar

(‘The wind is blowing from the north  
Banners flutter in the breeze outside  
Be untroubled by mistakes henceforth  
For we are but learners side by side’)

*Tom Hoogervorst*
kitlv/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies  
hoogervorst@kitlv.nl

**References**

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