
Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers: A Political Strategy Of Indonesian Language To Go International

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ABSTRACT

The significance of this writing lies in its exploration of the political process of the Indonesian language, a crucial step in making Indonesian an international language. Internationalizing Indonesians is a key area of study in our research. This qualitative descriptive research uses data collection techniques through a literature study. Indonesian language politics began: (1) in 1917, with the establishment of Balai Pustaka, (2) in 1928, through the Youth Pledge, (3) the First Indonesian Language Congress in 1938, (4) in 1945 through the 1945 Constitution to language regulations, (5) a series of II-XII Indonesian Language Congresses 1954-2023, (6) a series of changes in Indonesian spelling from Van Ophuijsen to the perfected spelling (EYD V) in 1901-2022, (7) The V Indonesian Language Congress (1988) initiated the process of internationalizing the Indonesian language through BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) until the formation of the APPBIPA organization. Our research has uncovered a unique connection: the internationalization of Indonesian is intricately linked to the transformation of Malay into Indonesian before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. Our research fills a significant gap in the literature. There has been no comprehensive study on the long journey of internationalization of the Indonesian language, from pre-independence to recognizing Indonesian as one of the languages of instruction at UNESCO.

Keywords: *BIPA, international language, internationalization of Indonesian, Malay language, political language*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation consisting of hundreds of regional languages. As one of the colonized countries, Indonesia has a unifying language that was uprooted from a regional language. This language is Malay language, as a lingua franca among tribes in Indonesia, namely from Sabang (in west Indonesia) to Merauke (in east of Indonesia), and from Miangas (north of Indonesia) to Rote island (south of Indonesia). As a huge country, Indonesian Language as a tool of uniting the nation is maintained and perfected through various regulations, events and products. Since it was declared as a tool of unifying the nation on 28 October 1928, the government and Indonesian people have kept its strong position among regional languages and foreign languages in the midst of global era. Discussion on political language of Indonesian Language has often been carried out. For the first time on 25-28 February 1975 there was a seminar on the Politics of National Language (SPBN) in Jakarta, preceded by Pre-seminar of National Language Politics (Politik Bahasa Nasional) on 29-31 October 1974 in Jakarta. Then Indonesian Language Congress VII, 1998, was held in Hotel Indonesia, Jakarta on 26-30 October 1998. The Indonesian Language Congress VII carried a theme “*Pemantapan Peran Bahasa sebagai Sarana Pembangunan Bangsa dalam Era Globalisasi*” (Strengthening the Role of language as a Means of National Development in the Era of Globalization). After twenty-five years, to be precise on 8-12 November 1999 Seminar on Language Politics was held in Cisarua, Bogor, West Java. Then on 3-6 June 2015 it was held again for the third time in Jakarta with the theme “Guarding a great nation by starting with language.” (Sudaryanto et al., 2019)

However, along with the development of time – global era, MEA – there needs to be a policy that could include all aspects of lives in terms of nation, states and regions. (ASEAN). According to Paragraph 1 of Article 44, Chapter III of the Constitution No 24/2009, “The government improves the function of Indonesian Language to become an international language gradually,

systematically, and sustainably”; therefore, steps to realize it needed to be taken. The explanation section of the Constitution No 24/2009, mentions that “what is meant by ‘international language’ is a language that is used as a communication tool among nations.’ This means that Indonesian Language will be used not only by Indonesian people, but also by other nations worldwide. (Sugono, 2017)

Then, how can Indonesian Language that has been rooted from regional languages be used for communication by other nations worldwide? For this reason, there needs to be a language politics. Warami *et al* (Warami et al., 2014) who quoted Lapoliwa (2011: 202) says that the national language politics is actually based on the language vision that has existed in the country, in this case Indonesian Language, regional languages and foreign languages. The national language politics is aimed at realizing the vision of language and literature. The Ministry of Education and Culture as the government representative holds the policy of the national language that focuses on research activities and development of language and literature.

The acknowledgement of Indonesian Language as one of the official languages used in UNESCO is a long process of struggle. Since *Balai Pustaka* was established in 1917, the politics of Indonesian Language has developed until now. To internationalize Indonesian Language through various policies is one of the significant efforts to introduce Indonesian Language into the global world. The main objective of this research is to explore the political process involved in making Indonesian Language an international language.(Unairnews, 2023)

2. METHODS

This is a descriptive research using a literature review as a technique for collecting data. This literature study is used because the data needed are taken from documents. The literature study is a research whose data resources are taken from written documents, such as books and articles that contribute to all the research process (Chang William, 2014). Those documents are official documents and also private documents. Official documents consist of internal and external documents. Internal documents are those that were published by an authorized institution in its field and consumed by the institution itself. External documents are all information published by a publishing institution and higher education: bulletin, news broadcasted by massmedia, notifications and announcements, online and offline. These documents are accountable academically (Bungin, 2012). Therefore, since this research describes the political journey of Indonesian Language in order to go international, the data are obtained through the literature study that is related to the policy of Indonesian Language. Based on the concept, this research involves tracing news from newspapers, government institutions (web), regulations, and scientific articles.

The procedure of collecting data is gathering all documents on policies of language in Indonesia, namely in the forms of regulations, laws, ministry regulations, government regulations, and presidential decrees. Those documents have been accessed via the internet. The researchers continue to search for the information via the web <https://badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id/>. The data search was then continued through a search of scientific articles both in international and national journals, regarding the policy of Indonesian Language. Searching through internet uses key words in Indonesian Language for national articles and in English for international articles. The key words are language policy and internationalizing Indonesian Language. International articles are searched through <https://www.sciencedirect.com/> and <https://www.tandfonline.com/>. National articles are searched through Google. Those articles are then studied and cited. Searching documents, articles, and other information was carried out for three months, from May to June 2024.

After all documents were collected, they were read, and significant information was noted, such as articles and verses in regulations related to the policy of internationalizing Indonesian Language, statements from the government officials in the document in the form of news; and findings and conclusion from the reserach results in the scientific articles. Later on, the notes were cited and decribed according to the sub-topics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The establishment of an intsitution that takes care of languages in Indonesia

The Indonesian people’s attention to the development of Indonesian languages and cultures started in 1930s, to be precise during the Dutch colonialization, namely they started to do some research on cultures existing in Indonesia. The research was under the auspices of Lembaga Pndidikan Universiter, Kantoor voor Inlandsche Zaken, en Oudheidkundige Dienst. After the

independence of the Republic of Indonesia, in 1947 an institution was established, namely Institut voor Taal en Cultuur Onderzoek (ITCO) under the auspices of Departemen van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen (the Ministry of Teaching, Arts, and Sciences). One year later, in 1948, *Balai Bahasa* was established to take care of the maintenance and development of Indonesian Language and regional languages. Four years later, in 1952, *Balai Bahasa* became part of the Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia. The duties of *Balai Bahasa* were carried out by the Language and Culture Institution, which is a combination of the Investigating Institution of Language and Culture (ITCO) and Language Investigation Section, *Balai Bahasa*, and Cultural Department. Later on, the Language and Culture Institution change its name to the Language and Literature Institution. Since that time, the institution and its branches have separated from the Faculty of Letters of the University of Indonesia and are directly under the Department of Education, Teaching and Culture. Seven years later, in 1966, the Language and Literature Institution changed its name to become Directorate of Language and Culture. Three years later, in 1969, the name of Directorate of Language and Culture changed again to become the National Language Institution. Structurally, this institution is under the Directorate General of Culture, Department of Education and Culture. Five years later, in 1974, the National Language Institution was changed into Center for Language Coaching and Development. After 26 years, to be precise on 25 July 2000, the name Center for Language Coaching and Development was shortened to become Language Center. However, ten years later, in 2010, Language Center changed its name again to become the Language Development and Fostering Agency under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education. Until now, this agency has been well-organized, namely there have been 17 language centers and 13 language offices in 30 provinces (Badan Bahasa, 2025).

In accordance with one of the functions of the Language Development and Fostering Agency (internationalizing the Indonesian language), various programs have been implemented, such as sending BIPA teachers abroad, developing BIPA curricula and teaching materials, and mapping and fostering BIPA institutions. Currently, there are 598 BIPA institutions worldwide ([Kemendikdasmen] Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2024).

The Standard Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI)

In the early of the fifteenth century, there was already a list of Chinese-Malay words which consisted of 500 hundred entries; a list of Italian-Malay, the work of Pigafetta (1522); Frederick de Houtman's work, *Spraecck ende woordboek, Inde Malaysche ende Madagaskarsche Talen met vele Arabische ende Turcsche Woorden* (1603); Casper Wiltens and Sebastianus Danckaerts' work, *Vocabularium ofte Woortboek naer order vanden Alphabet in't Duytsch-Maleysch ende Maleysche-Duytsch* (1623). In the twentieth century, before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, E. St. Harahap wrote *Indonesian Dictionary* (1942). After the independence of the republic of Indonesia, W.J.S. Poerwadarminta compiled *the General Dictionary of Indonesian Language* (1952) and Sutan Mohammad Zain compiled *the Modern Dictionary of Indonesian Language* (1954). *Indonesian National Language Institute* compiled the *Indonesia Dictionary* starting at the end of 1974 and published it in 1983. This dictionary was continuously refined and in 1988, the First Edition of the Standard Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) was published with approximately 62,000 entries. Then the Language Center, which used to be called Indonesian National Language Institute, kept perfecting the KBBI for the Second Edition in 1991 with approximately 72.000 entries. The Second Edition of KBBI has been around for quite a long time and has been printed many times. After nine years, which is in 2000, The Language Center published the Third Edition of KBBI with approximately 78,000 entries. Eight years later, the Language Center published the Fourth Edition of KBBI with more than 90,000 entries. In 2016, the Fifth Edition of KBBI was launched by the Minister of Education and Culture and the number entries and sub-entries reached 112,000. The Fifth Edition of KBBI was also published in an on-line application, and it could be accessed on-line through the web-site <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/>. In accordance with the technological development, the Fifth Edition of KBBI is updated regularly for the online version every year in April and October. In every updating, one thousand new entries is added, which consists of entries or subentries and revised entries or subentries. The Fifth Edition of KBBI has been published in three forms: printed, offline (iOS dan android), and online (<https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/>). In addition, the Fifth Edition of KBBI also provides a version of the KBBI for the disabled: the Braille KBBI and the Disnetra KBBI (blind and deaf disabled) ([Kemendikdasmen] Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2022).

Moments that Strengthen Regional Languages and Indonesian Language

The strengthening of Indonesian Language as the unifying language of the Republic of Indonesia has started since the Youth Pledge was declared on October 28, 1928. This pledge was reinforced by a language congress which is generally held once in every five years. Since the First Language Congress was held in Solo on 25 – 27 June 1938, there have been 12 times congresses. However, the Second Congress was held 16 years after the First Congress or nine years after the independence of Indonesia (1945). The Second Indonesian Language Congress was held in Medan on 28 October – 2 November 1954. The Third Indonesian Language Congress was held in Jakarta on 28 October – 3 November 1978. The Fourth Indonesian Language Congress was held in Jakarta on 21 – 26 November 1983. The Fifth Indonesian Language Congress was also held in Jakarta on 28 October – 3 November 1988. The Sixth Indonesian Language Congress was held on 28 October – 2 November 1993 in Hotel Indonesia Jakarta. The Seventh Indonesian Language Congress focused more on the role of language and culture in the global era. This congress was held in Jakarta on 26 – 30 October 1998. The Eighth Indonesian Language Congress was also held in Jakarta on 14 – 17 October 2003 (Imran, 2019). The Ninth Indonesian Language Congress (2008), the Tenth (2013), the XI (2018), and the XII (2023) were also held in Jakarta. At each congress, one of the themes raised is the internationalization of Indonesian Language through BIPA programs.

Regulations and Events that Strengthen the internationalization of Indonesian Language

The internationalization of Indonesian Language has been initiated by higher education institutions, namely by the faculties of literature (culture) at several universities. Besides higher education institutions, the internationalization of Indonesian Language was also discussed in the forums of language and culture of Indonesia, such as language congresses. The process of internationalizing Indonesian Language gained its momentum when BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program was established at the Fifth Indonesian Language Congress in 1988. BIPA was aimed to teaching Indonesian Language to non Indonesian speakers and promoting the language globally. The formation of APPBIPA (Association of Indonesian Language Teaching to Foreign Speakers) further institutionalized these efforts. In fact, activists and teachers of Indonesian Language for foreign speakers founded an organization and held annual and biennial meetings related to BIPA. These meetings prompted the Indonesian Government to issue regulations regarding this matter (Table 1). In the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 57 of 2014 concerning the Development, Fostering, and Protection of Language and Literature, as well as the Improvement of the Function of the Indonesian language, Chapter VII. "Improving the Function of the Indonesian Language to Become an International Language," Article 31, paragraphs 1 and 2, it is stated that the aim is to show the identity and increase the competitiveness of the nation through 1) the use of Indonesian Language in the international forums; 2) program development of teaching Indonesian Language to foreign speakers; and 3) increasing linguistic and literary cooperation with foreign parties.

Table 1. Events related to the internationalization of Indonesian Language

No	Events and Policies	Year
1	The Faculty of Culture (used to be the Faculty of Letters), University of Andalas got the responsibility to conduct an Indonesian Language course for Dutch students; the person in charge for the course was Prof. Dr. Khaidir Anwar, MA. In the same year, UGM (The University of Gajah Mada) also opened the Indonesian Study Center (PSI), and then it became Learning Indonesian Language as A Foreign Language (LBIFL) in 1992 and Non-Aligned Government (NAG) in 1993. Since 2000, this institution has changed its name to become the Indonesian Language and Culture Learning Service (INCULS) at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the University of Gajah Mada, whose aim is to provide courses and workshops for foreigners who are interested in Indonesian Language, Indonesian culture, and local languages.	1987
2	The University of Indonesia (UI) in 1991 conducted Seminar BIPA.	1991
3	The VI Language Congress was held, and one of its recommendations was	1993

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- to internationalize Indonesian Language through BIPA.
 - 4 The First BIPA Teaching International Conference (KIPBIPA). was held at the University of Kristen Satyawacana (UKSW), Salatiga (Defina, 2018). 1994
 - 5 The Second KIPBIPA Conference was held at IKIP Padang (now the State University of Padang). 1996
 - 6 The VII Language Conference was conducted. 1998
 - 7 The Third KIPBIPA was held in IKIP Bandung. 1999
 - 8 Association of BIPA Teachers (APBIPA) was established. 1999
 - 9 *KIPBIPA IV* was held in *Denpasar, Bali*. 2001
 - 10 The VIII Language Congress was conducted. 2003
 - 11 KIPBIPA V was held in the State University of Makasar. 2004
 - 12 KIPBIPA VI was held at Hotel Sol Elite Marbella, Anyer, Banten on 11-14 July 2006 with the theme "Reactualization of BIPA Role in Increasing Indonesian Image Worldwide". 2006
 - 13 The IX Language Congress was held, and one of its recommendations was internationalizing Indonesian Language through BIPA. 2008
 - 14 Ratification of Laws RI No. 24 Tahun 2009 concerning Flag, Language, and the State Symbol, as well as the National Anthem. Article 32 chapter 1 of the Laws Number 24 of 2009 explained that Indonesian Language must be used in the national as well international forums in Indonesia ([BPK], 2015). 2009
 - 15 KIPBIPA VII was held by the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Indonesia, collaborating with APBIPA and Language Center of University of Indonesia with the theme "Strengthening the Position of Indonesian Language in the Globalization Era by Improving the Quality of Management and Teaching of BIPA." 2010
 - 16 KIPBIPA VIII was held in July 2012 by Language Training Center, Satya Wacana Christian University, APBIPA and Language Development and Development Agency and Perth and ACT Language Center. 2012
 - 17 The X Language Congress was held and one of its recommendations was internationalizing Indonesian Language. 2013
 - 18 Ratification of Permenaker No. 12 of 2013 concerning Procedures for using Foreign Workers, which in Chapter V of the Requirements for Foreign Workers, Article 26, paragraph 1d, states "can communicate in Indonesian Language." 2014
 - 19 Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 57 of 2014 concerning the Development, Fostering, and Protection of Language and Literature, as well as Improving the Function of the Indonesian Language, Article 2. The scope of this Government Regulation includes: paragraph d, stating "improving the function of the Indonesian Language to become an international language." (Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 57 Tahun 2014, 2014) Besides, in this regulation, Article 18 and 19 concerning Indonesian Language Proficiency Test (UKBI). In Article 20 paragraph 1 it is stated" Foreign citizens who will work and/or study in Indonesia or will become Indonesian citizens must have Indonesian language skills in accordance with the required Indonesian Language Proficiency standards." 2014
 - 20 KIPBIPA IX was held in Bali on 30 September-2 October 2015 with the theme "Indonesia: Earth in Transition: Globalization, Multiculturisms and BIPA Teaching Development Strategies." 2015
 - 21 The ratification of the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 27 of 2017 concerning the Competency Standards for Graduates of Courses and Training in the Fields of Tour Guiding Skills, Park Maintenance, Health Workers, Construction Carpentry, Bricklaying, Scaffolding, Pipe Installation, 2017
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- Heavy Equipment Mechanics, Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers, which explains the BIPA rankings (1-7 levels) along with the competency standards (Kemendikbud, 2017).
- 22 KIPBIPA X was held, with the theme “Dignity of the Indonesian Language in Facing Changes in the World Political and Economic Constellation” in Malang, collaboration between the Language Development Agency (BPPB) and APPBIPA and Bawijaya University. 2017
- 23 The XI Language Congress was held and one of its recommendations was internationalizing Indonesian Language. 2018
- 24 The ratification of Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2018 concerning the Use of Foreign Workers (TKA) and in Article 26, it is stated: “Every TKA Employer is obliged to: a. appoint Indonesian Workers as Companion Workers; b. carry out education and training for Indonesian Workers in accordance with the qualifications of the position held by the TKA; and c. facilitate education and training of Indonesian Language for TKA.” 2018
- 25 KIPBIPA XI, was held on 7-9 August 2019; collaboration between The Language Development and Promotion Agency, APPBIPA, and Indonesian Language and Culture Learning Service (Incult) Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gajah Mada University ([UGM] Universitas Gajah Mada, 2019). In addition, The Language development and Promotion Agency published *Jurnal Indonesian Language bagi Penutur Asing (JBIPA)*; the first edition was in Mei 2019 containing articles related to BIPA. 2019
- 26 The ratification of Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 63 of 2019 concerning the Use of the Indonesian Language, Part Eight National Forums or International Forums in Indonesia, Article 27 (1) Indonesian Language must be used in national forums or international forums in Indonesia. 2019
- 27 The Ratification of The Regulation of the Minister of Manpower, of the republic of Indonesia Number 8 of 2021 concerning the Implementing Regulations of the Government Regulation Number 34 of 2021 concerning the Use of Foreign Workers (TKA), Article 43 (1) TKA employers are required to facilitate Indonesian language education and training of Indonesian Language to TKA which is carried out by the TKA employers or in collaboration with Indonesian language educational institutions or training institutions. 2021
- 28 KIPBIPA XII was held in the University of Education (UPI) Bandung. 2022
- 29 The XII Indonesian Language Congress was held and one of its recommendations was the establishment of a master plan and roadmap for the advancement and dignity of the Indonesian language and literature, as well as the establishment of a master plan and roadmap for the comprehensive internationalization of Indonesian language and literature, involving all stakeholders. 2023
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Source: (11–14)

The Strengthening of Indonesian Language by UNESCO

Finally, Indonesian Language becomes an official language in the General Assembly of UNESCO (*United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization*). Quoted from the Indonesian Cabinet Secretariat website (Humas Setkab RI, 2023), the proposal of Indonesian Language as the official language of the UNESCO General Assembly went through several discussions before being executed and finally approved. The Indonesian Ambassador to France discussed with the Deputy Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Indonesia to UNESCO to recognize the potential of Indonesian Language as the official language of the UNESCO General Assembly. The proposal was then submitted to the Language development and Promotion Agency. Further

discussions were held regarding the opportunities and strategies for proposing Indonesian Language as an official language of UNESCO General Assembly followed by the drafting of the proposal. The Indonesian Representative in Paris, France, submitted a proposal to nominate the Indonesian Language to the UNESCO Secretariat for inclusion on the agenda of the UNESCO Executive Board meeting. The UNESCO Executive Board approved the proposal. The proposal was presented by the Indonesian delegation to the Legal Committee at UNESCO Headquarters, and it was approved without objection. On November 20, 2023, the UNESCO plenary session decided to accept the Indonesian Government's proposal to make Indonesian Language the tenth official language at the UNESCO General Assembly. Thus, Indonesian Language now has official language status at the international level through recognition as an official language at the UNESCO General Assembly.

Several considerations were put forward in document (UNESCO, 2025) numbered 42 C/28 dated November 6, 2023 concerning the role of Indonesian Language as a unifying language amidst the diversity that exists in Indonesia, which has 1,340 ethnics and 718 regional languages spread across 17,500 islands. Besides, it is also mentioned that Indonesia ranks fourth in the world population and the global reach of the Indonesian language is exemplified by the inclusion of Indonesian Language in education in 52 countries. Indonesia also has become the UNESCO member since 1950; therefore, the active participation of Indonesia in the international arena proves that Indonesia has played an important role in addressing global challenges, encouraging collaboration, and advocating solutions in maintenance, peace, climate change, economic development and cultural exchange. Furthermore, it was explained that the recognition of Indonesian Language as an official language in UNESCO General Assembly will not only ensure the equitable dissemination of information, encourage inclusiveness, foster a deep understanding and appreciation of Indonesian language and literature, but also strengthen the cooperation with UNESCO and reinforce Indonesia's commitment to advancing global culture, peace, and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The existence of Indonesian Language did not happen in a flash of time. There has been a long process that has been through until the acknowledgement of Indonesian Language to be used in the General Assembly of UNESCO. The establishment of the Language Centre that handles the maintenance and development of Indonesian Language is a good historical beginning. An encouraging moment happened when the compilation of Indonesian Language Dictionary was carried out by the Indonesian National Language Institute, starting at the end of 1974 and published in 1983. Furthermore, the process of internationalizing Indonesian Language gained momentum with the establishment of the BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program at the Fifth Indonesian Language Congress in 1988. Finally, Indonesian Language has become an international language that is used in the General Assembly of UNESCO.

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