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### Speaking the Truth: Speech on Television in New Order Indonesia

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## Speaking the Truth: Speech on Television in New Order Indonesia

Jennifer Lindsay

### The synopsis

In April, 1996, at the time of the campaign to replace all foreign language signs with Indonesian, (Pondok Indah Mall becoming Mal Pondok Indah), Indonesia's then Ministers of Education and Culture (Wardiman Djojonegoro) and Information (Harmoko) announced that as of August that year, all foreign films on television should no longer be broadcast in their original language version with Indonesian summaries or subtitles, but were to be dubbed into Indonesian.

The campaign to promote good Indonesian had been announced by Minister Wardiman the previous year. The Minister's then language advisor, Prof. Anton Moeliono, explained that the motivation for the campaign was twofold; on the one hand to instil a sense of pride in the national language at a time when the elite and burgeoning middle class were associating English language use with status and showing little pride in their own language and identity; and on the other hand, to speed the familiarisation process of Indonesian in a country where the majority of the population spoke a regional language as their first or co-first language. An underlying motive in the wide national campaign to promote good Indonesian language use, he explained, was to promote an awareness of the importance of structure at a time when morally the nation was becoming lax.

Wardiman's announcement about Indonesian language dubbing did not carry the force of law, as the Ministry of Education and Culture has no authority over broadcasting. It was a "strong recommendation" made in the presence of the Minister of Information, Harmoko, who thus gave the statement his tacit support.<sup>1</sup> Given that the draft of the broadcasting legislation was at that time under review, it seemed clear that the Indonesian language dubbing requirement would become law the following year. However, by the time the revised Broadcasting Legislation was ratified in September 1997, a new Minister of Information was in power, Hartono. The Indonesian language dubbing regulation did not come into effect. Rather, Indonesian language dubbing was banned. The regulation had been completely reversed. All non-English language foreign films henceforth had to be dubbed into English, and all foreign films shown with Indonesian subtitles.

What happened? To answer this, we need a fuller picture of foreign language on television in Indonesia. Later, we will consider the implications of these media policy decisions and what they tell us about Indonesian perceptions of speech on television.

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<sup>1</sup> The announcement was made by Wardiman on 30 April, 1996. The full text of his speech "Pembudayaan Bahasa Indonesia Dalam Pembangunan Nasional" is reprinted in *Seminar Sehari Meningkatkan Mutu Sulih Suara*, ed. C. Ruddyanto, Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, Departemen P & K, 1996, pp. 87-98.

## The plot

Foreign language programming - predominantly English - has always been an integral part of Indonesian television. English was first spoken on Indonesian television in 1962 in Indonesia's very first television broadcast as the language of a recorded interview between the Indonesian TVRI interviewers and foreign team leaders attending the Asian Games. The interview was broadcast with sound-over in Indonesian, (a technique often used in news broadcasts where the original speech is heard at low volume with translation spoken over).<sup>2</sup> As more regular broadcasts started in 1964, and through until 1967, foreign material on television consisted of information films borrowed from Embassies - the U.S., West German and USSR in particular. The film text was invariably narration rather than dialogue, recorded using international sound (on magnetic stripe film), so the narration could be isolated and replaced with Indonesian narration.<sup>3</sup> But by the early 1970s, almost all the entertainment portion of TVRI's programming was taken up with American television programs broadcast in the original English. Of TVRI Jakarta's 39 broadcast hours per week in 1972-73, twelve and a half hours were devoted to American television shows like *Daktari*, *Gentle Ben*, *Bozo the Clown*, *Jungle Jim*, *Popeye the Sailor*, *Batman*, *Sinbad Junior*, *Lost in Space*, *The Deputy*, *Union Pacific*, *The Untouchables*, *Bonanza*, *Mission Impossible*, *Dr Kildare*, *The Avengers*, *Ironside* and *Echo* plus a Saturday night movie. In comparison, the programming slot for Indonesian culture and entertainment (regional arts, drama, but also jazz, Hawaiian and musical show) was three and a half hours per week - the last half hour program slot before television closed down (10:30-11 p.m.).<sup>4</sup>

Prior to subtitling, foreign language on TVRI was presented in Indonesian as narration, whether the original was narration or dialogue. Short plot summaries were narrated by the television announcer before the program, or as prose narration over the audible original sound; or short, usually handwritten, summaries of the story-line were shown occasionally at the foot of the image (a technique known as telecine optical or "telop", the immediate precursor to full subtitling). Experimentation with subtitling proper was begun around 1975 by TVRI, and began with a mixture of subtitled dialogue and narrative synopses for original English-language films or Mandarin films imported from Hong Kong already with dubbed English dialogue. In the early 1980s TVRI began to experiment with dubbing, trying first with the U.S. series *Dr Kildare*, but after five or six episodes decided to keep to subtitling. Foreign language dubbing did not get underway until the menu of foreign product became more varied, which occurred in the late 1980s and most spectacularly in the early 1990s with the arrival of private television. Prior to this there was little incentive to dub, as the broadcasting regulations allowed English language broadcast with Indonesian subtitles, and the cost of subtitling was about one tenth the cost of dubbing. Broadcasting regulations forbade the broadcast of languages other than Indonesian or English.

<sup>2</sup> *Televisi di Indonesia TVRI 1962-1972*. Jakarta: Direktorat Televisi Departemen Penerangan, 1972, p.48

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.57 and information from the late Mr Alex Leo Zulkarnain, former Director of Radio, Film and Television. The work of narration replacement was done at the West German Embassy - the only place then with a mixing table.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.40

Although Indonesian language dubbing did not really get underway until the 1990s, the technical expertise for dubbing had long been available in Indonesia, because the Indonesian film industry did not - and still does not - film using direct sound, but dubs over the dialogue and sound effects in the studio. This technique was used only for over-recording the original Indonesian language dialogue, and was never used for dubbing foreign films. The dubbing into Indonesian of imported foreign films was then illegal - a ruling strongly guarded by the Indonesian film industry to protect local film. Indonesian language dubbing on television began with the introduction of non-English language foreign programming on TVRI in the very last years of TVRI's monopoly before the introduction of private television. The first dubbed program (after TVRI's own earlier experiment with *Dr Kildare*) was the Brazilian *Escrava Issaura*, broadcast on TVRI in 1989 which had been dubbed in Malaysia. The dubbed program was not well received in Indonesia. "It was as though some creatures from another planet were studying moon language and just happened to use Indonesian", SCTV's subtitling and dubbing coordinator Agus Purwanto commented.<sup>5</sup> "Our big mistake then was that the dubbed language was not Indonesian, but Malay, which sounded strange to viewers", the former Director of Radio, Film and Television, the late Alex Leo Zulkarnain, explained.<sup>6</sup> The "added sound" quality of dubbed film was not new to Indonesian viewers; for them the new factor was the change of language and the curiosity of hearing foreigners "speak" Indonesian - or something resembling Indonesian.

The first Indonesian language dubbed program on private television was Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI's) broadcast of the Indian television series of the *Mahabharata* in 1992, the dubbing of which was supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This was a breakthrough - and the *Mahabharata* became TPI's most popular program. Its success was quickly followed by the other new private television stations which in their first two or three years had broadcast a heavy fare of American product subtitled in Indonesian. Around 1993 the private stations sharply increased their non-English foreign programming with Indonesian language dub. SCTV started the telenovela trend with huge success broadcasting Latin American soap operas (*Cara Sucia* and *Gadis Pemimpi* from Venezuela, *Kassandra* from Mexico, and the blockbuster *Maria Mercedes* from Mexico. (SCTV became known as *Surga Cerita Telenovela* or "heaven for soap opera stories"). The heyday of dubbing was 1995-1997 with RCTI and TPI broadcasting Indian films and series (TPI was broadcasting an average of 5 Indian films a week and was so identified with Indian product that it was called "**Televisi Pilem India**"), TPI also started a Thai television series, Indosiar broadcast Indonesian dubbed Mandarin films, and RCTI added Arabic and Philippine programs to its line-up.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Agus Purwanto R. Sutopo, "Sulih Suara Dewasa Ini di Indonesia" in *Seminar Sehari* 1996 (33-44) p.34.

<sup>6</sup> Interview August, 1998. Mr Alex Leo Zulkarnain died in April, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> In 1996/97, foreign production accounted for about 21 % of programming on TVRI, and had remained relatively constant since 1994, compared to RCTI 55%, SCTV 60%, TPI 50%, AN-teve 67%, Indosiar 72% see *Hasil-hasil yang telah dicapai selama tahun 1996/1997*. Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Direktorat Radio-Televisi-Film 1997, pp.83,211-212)

The fact was, then, that many foreign films and serials were already being dubbed into Indonesian in 1996 at time of Wardiman's Indonesian language campaign. Only English language programs were being broadcast with subtitles, and so English was already a separate category of "foreign" - the only language that could be broadcast in original version. Wardiman's ruling came at a time when the popularity of Indonesian language dubbing was no longer in doubt. The new regulation for across-the-board dubbing into Indonesian was therefore targeting English language programs, and would put English in same position as other foreign languages. The process of "popularising" Indonesian through dubbing foreign conversation had already begun.

The 1996 announcement about Indonesian language dubbing sparked debate. Indonesian viewers were used to hearing English spoken, and one argument was that Indonesian audiences would find it strange to have familiar foreign actors "speaking" Indonesian. Well-known linguistic-anthropologist Dede Oetomo questioned what the proposed ruling said about the role of language in broadcast media, arguing that language is not merely a communication tool. Understanding the dialogue of foreign films is not necessarily the issue, he pointed out.<sup>8</sup> Different viewers have varied levels of understanding, Dede wrote, some only half understanding, some not at all, but this had to be weighed against the pleasure of hearing the original speech and also against the fact that Indonesians were not used to hearing foreigners "speak" fluently in Indonesian, so dubbed Indonesian speech would not be more familiar, but more strange. Dede placed this new regulation within the context of the language politics of the New Order regime, as another example of the State's control of linguistic expression, the homogenising or Indonesian-ising of difference, such as the 1978 prohibition against Chinese script and publications, which was later applied also to Chinese-language videos.

However, Dede's prediction that viewers would find the phenomenon of foreigners "speaking" Indonesian on TV strange was already proven wrong when he wrote. Dubbing had increased the popularity of foreign material, and the Department of Education and Culture's "strong recommendation" emerged primarily in response to this popularity, to force the dubbing of English language programs. The popularity of dubbed foreign material was fed by business interests, for dubbing foreign material is much cheaper for a television station than producing local product, and the non-English language programs were cheap, at least prior to the economic crisis that began in July 1998 and which made product purchased with foreign currency around four times more expensive than previously. Prior to the monetary crisis, a dubbing studio could dub around 50 episodes of foreign programs (average 30-45 minutes each) per month. By August 1997, according to figures compiled by the Survey Research Indonesia, Indonesian television was broadcasting an average of 137.5 hours per week of dubbed foreign material, with very high ratings.<sup>9</sup>

### **Break in Transmission**

<sup>8</sup> "Ketika Sharon Stone Berbahasa Indonesia", *Republika* 9 May, 1996, republished in *Bercinta dengan Televisi*, ed. Deddy Mulyana and Idi Subandy Ibrahim, Bandung: P.T. Remaja Rosdakarya, 1997:333-343

<sup>9</sup> "Rumah Sulih Suara yang Belum Sempat Merekah", *Kompas*, 15 February, 1998

Between April 1996 and mid 1997 a tussle was going on behind the scenes between the Department of Information and the Department of Education and Culture about the dubbing issue. The first draft of the broadcasting legislation had been submitted to the House of Representatives in March, 1996, and included the clause for Indonesian language dubbing as supported by then Minister of Information, Harmoko. When Harmoko was replaced by Hartono in June 1997, the Indonesian-language dubbing lobbyists lost their support. The Indonesian film lobby, led by the Association of Indonesian Film Artists (PARFI) and supported by business interests with powerful connections, strongly lobbied the Department of Information and the new Minister Hartono to ban Indonesian language dubbing, fearing that the popularity of dubbed foreign material would kill the Indonesian film industry including the budding – and lucrative – Indonesian soap drama (*sinetron*) production. Perhaps they feared too the regulations for Indonesian language dubbing might be extended to permitting – or even forcing – all imported films shown in cinemas to be shown in Indonesian dubbed versions, which would increase costs for film importers and compete with television. According to the late Alex Leo Zulkarnain, such fear was ungrounded, for there was never any question of the dubbing requirement extending to films, the issue of Indonesian language dubbing being specifically related to television’s role as mass communication.<sup>10</sup> However, the business aspects of the dubbing issue were never openly debated – particularly given the monopoly in film import and distribution by then-president Soeharto’s step brother Sudwikatmono – and the public rallying cry against Indonesian dubbing became a moral one: the need to stop further infiltration of foreign values through broadcasting foreign programming using Indonesian speech.

Within a year of the call for total Indonesian-language dubbing of foreign speech on television, the government suddenly did a complete turn in the opposite direction. Claiming response to pressure from religious and educational groups that expressed alarm at the ease with which “foreign values” were being consumed by Indonesian audiences presumably unable to differentiate between familiar speech and foreign context, the House of Representatives, then reviewing the broadcasting legislation draft that had been prepared by the Department of Information-led team, reversed the Indonesian-dubbing rule, and instead of promoting it, banned it. Indonesian-language dubbing was now seen to be an insidious tool of infiltration of undesirable non-Indonesian cultural values. In mid 1997 it was announced that dubbing into Indonesian would cease as of October 31 of that year. Beginning in August 1997 the official film censor board (*Lembaga Sensor Film*) issued no more on-air licences for dubbed Indonesian foreign product, forcing stations to use only available stock for which licences had been granted. All dubbing of non-English language foreign films henceforth had to be made in English and broadcast with Indonesian language subtitles. English-language foreign films could be broadcast in their original version with Indonesian subtitles. From now on, all foreign speech would be English. The 31 October deadline was later extended to January 1, 1998 (partly to allow stations to use up their stock of dubbed films) and the dubbing regulations became enshrined as legislation in the

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<sup>10</sup> “Dubbing, Perlukah Dilarang?” *Republika*. August 1997, and interview August 25, 1998.

broadcasting legislation that was ratified on 29 September, 1997.<sup>11</sup> Religious programs, cartoons and children's programs were made exempt.

### Adaptation

Justification of this aspect of the new broadcasting legislation was for "protection of Indonesian culture". Articles in the press at the time used imagery of protective walls and fences to describe the role played by foreign-language speech as a bastion against alien values seeping osmosis-like into Indonesian consciousness via dubbed Indonesian-language speech. Marwah Daud Ibrahim, one of the parliamentary team-members for the legislation revision, spoke of the *attack* of foreign culture through Indonesian-language dubbing right into Indonesian homes which lack *fences* of protection.<sup>12</sup> Bachtiar Aly, a communications expert from the University of Indonesia commented that dubbing into English *fortifies* Indonesians against foreign values.<sup>13</sup> Keeping the speech foreign was seen as halting this process of adaptation to the value systems that speech contains.

But why was it English, then, to keep foreign values at bay? Why were all foreign programs not left in their own original distant foreign-ness? Why the double distancing for non-English language material? It is difficult to get any clear answer to this question. As the story so far shows, English had always been privileged on Indonesian television, and was the only language other than Indonesian (or languages of the same family, "*serumpun*", with Indonesian = Malay) permitted to be broadcast. The difference now was that non-English foreign languages had to be dubbed into English for Indonesian consumption. One could interpret that perhaps it was because English was a familiar sound on television that this latest regulation did not seem strange at all. From a business point of view, the demand to retain English language dialogue is understandable - but the dubbing of foreign material into English is not. The issue for production houses and film importers was not whether they had to dub into English, but whether or not they had to dub into Indonesian. The fight to maintain the right to show English language programs on television in the original language had business implications, for the dubbing rights for films and series distributed by major US networks, such as Disney or Warner Bros, were not only expensive, but strongly controlled at source. Unlike Indian movies or Latin American soap operas which can be dubbed for a small fee, many US films and series distributors demand approval of the dubbed voices. Understandably, importers and television studios do not want to pay such fees or be subject to such restrictions.

The official justification given for the privileged position of English, was that English language dubbing allowed Indonesian television-viewers to learn English - currently the most important international language. Communications expert Jalaludin Rahmat explained: "Apart from making people smarter, dubbing into English with [Indonesian]

<sup>11</sup> See UU Penyiaran, Pasal 33, ayat 6, 7, 8 and 9.

<sup>12</sup> ("*Budaya Latin, Amerika, Prancis, India, Hongkong, dan lain-lain, leluasa masuk ke rumah kita tanpa ada pagar lagi*"). "Menteri Hartono Sesalkan Kasus 'Dubbing' RCTI", *Republika*, Saturday 7 March, 1998

<sup>13</sup> ("*kita bisa membentengi sistem nilai, karena penonton televisi sangat cepat mengadaptasi sistem nilai yang ditontonnya*"). "Soal Dubbing Bahasa Indonesia di RCTI. Mudah-Mudahan hanya Transisi", *Republika*, 4 March 1998

subtitles will in an indirect way limit the entry of foreign values and culture into Indonesian life.” His colleague Bachtiar Aly commented: “the benefit of having English dubbing is that we can learn English *directly*.<sup>14</sup> However, a cursory glance at Indonesian television broadcasting at the time shows how far the reality was. The English dubbed dialogue was usually unintelligible. The effect was merely foreign garble – but perhaps this was the point.

An unwritten reason for allowing only one foreign language heard as speech, though, was to prevent the broadcasting of Chinese language films in Chinese (Mandarin). During the New Order, Chinese language was never transmitted on Indonesian television (other than a few undubbed songs in films imported already English-language dubbed in Hong Kong). The earlier Indonesian-language dubbing regulation effectively blocked Chinese-language speech on television. With the revision in 1997, any official relaxation of dubbing requirements that would allow for original language speech could not filter out Chinese on television unless Chinese was specifically stated as the single exception. Choosing one language only – English – was thus a way around making such a blatant exception.

New Order regulations against the public use of Chinese language, script and publication in Chinese were officially revoked in May, 1999.<sup>15</sup> Little attention was given to this announcement, and even during the “reformasi period”, it took some time for there to be change in broadcasting practice. Chinese speech even then remained a sensitive issue.

### Today’s program

After the ruling for dubbing to be made in English came into effect on January 1, 1998, dubbing studios had to drastically reduce staff and there was immediately a sharp reduction in foreign programming.<sup>16</sup> Support for local Indonesian production increased, and proportionately more Indonesian product was shown on Indonesian television. TPI reduced its Indian films from five times a week to twice. SCTV initially stopped broadcasting its Indian and Latin American telenovela. Antevie stopped its Thai soap opera that used to be prime time program.<sup>17</sup> Costs of English language dubbing, with the double work involved through translation into English, were around three times higher than Indonesian language dubbing, and this increased cost had to be met at a time of monetary crisis. The end result was also not encouraging for the dubbers struggling to perform in a foreign language and give life to the English scripts. TV stations reported a decline in interest and ratings for English-dubbed programs. As an article in the Jakarta Post reported: “Housewife Lasmini said that she and her friends had enjoyed the

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<sup>14</sup> (“[D]ubbing bahasa Inggris dan diberi subtitle,...selain akan membuat masyarakat lebih pintar, secara tidak langsung akan membatasi tata nilai dan kebudayaan asing ke dalam kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia” (JR). “keuntungan yang bisa didapat dari sulih suara bahasa Inggris...kita bisa belajar bahasa Inggris langsung...” (BA). Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Government abolishes anti-Chinese rules” *Jakarta Post* May 8, 1999

<sup>16</sup> PT Idola Citra reduced its dubbing staff from 30 to 5, Indosiar has only 11, Dinosat only 18 chosen from hundreds of applicants, *Jakarta Post*, January 1, 1998

<sup>17</sup> “Rumah Sulih Suara yang Belum Sempat Merekah” *Republika*, 15 Feb, 1998..

Indonesia-dubbed programs more than English dubbed ones. ‘Now it all sounds foreign to me,’ Lasmini said.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Next episode**

In May 1998, Soeharto resigned, the New Order fell, and slowly, timidly at first, the television stations began reshowing their Indonesian dubbed material. After Habibie’s disbanding of the Ministry of Information in 1999, the television stations all openly ignored the anti-Indonesian dubbing ruling. Over the next few years, some television stations started to broadcast Mandarin language programs, even producing their own local news in Mandarin. In December 2002, following two years of public discussion and heated debate in Indonesia, Parliament ratified a new Broadcasting Bill. The main issues of this debate and the bill itself are concerned with the regulation of media ownership and national coverage, and the formation of a new supervisory body (Broadcasting Commission). But tucked away in the new Bill are new regulations on language, which like the Bill itself have as yet no formal system of implementation. The prohibition on Indonesian dubbing has been lifted. Foreign languages are treated equally (no priority is given to English), and dubbing into Indonesian is now regulated in terms of amount: 30% of total foreign content may be dubbed. Foreign content itself is limited to 40% of total broadcast time. Significantly, Indonesia’s regional languages are given much more space, in keeping with the Bill’s promotion of local television broadcasting.

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### **Interpretation**

The political and economic implications of the legislative changes are interesting in themselves to pursue. I am interested, though, in reflecting on the dubbing issue more for what it can tell us about how audience response to mediated speech was perceived by New Order policy-makers (not how *do* audiences respond, but how are they *seen* to respond), and how language itself is viewed in its relationship to broadcasting. What exactly are the issues here, with regard to the dubbing regulations? I maintain that although Indonesian media policy reflects many conflicting ideas about language, it also reveals a perception of speech in the broadcast media as a specific category of speech activity with its own characteristic communicative power, and reveals the particular role the Indonesian language played in this context.

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### **Sound Effects**

Legislation for the language of broadcasting changes to adapt to new technology. In Indonesia, the regulations initially made a statement for the primacy of the national

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<sup>18</sup> “Many Dubbers Speechless Ater English-only TV rule”. *Jakarta Post*, Sunday January 18 1998..

language, Indonesian, above regional languages. English was permitted on television with Indonesian subtitles - for no dubbing then existed. Dubbing became an issue once other foreign programming became available, and when dubbing existed as a technique. It was then that the Indonesian term for dubbing itself was created. Prior to the 1997 legislation, the term used for subtitling or dubbing was *mengalihbahasakan* - to transfer from one language to another, but the 1997 legislation used the new term *sulih suara* - a term created in 1996 by the linguist Prof. Benny Hoed and popularised through Wardiman's campaign. *Sulih suara* was coined from the Javanese *sulih*, and so literally "to replace, or substitute sound", (no longer language, but sound) just as a *sesulih* is a substitute or stand-in (*wakil*). Linguistic experts at the time discussed other options - *alih suara* was also considered, but the Javanese term *sulih* was adopted as more thoroughly representing the idea of sound "substitution" rather than "transfer". The Indonesian term for dubbing itself transfers a Javanese word into Indonesian.

Notions of "transfer" or "substitution" lead back to the issue of notions about what dubbing substitutes or transfers. Officially, Indonesian language dubbing was rejected precisely because of the idea that it facilitated the "transfer" of foreign cultural values. Anti Indonesian-dubbing lobbyists argued that dubbing is not just a matter of substitution of sound, but of the sound-substitution of Indonesian facilitating the transfer of non-Indonesian values. Pro Indonesian-language dubbing lobbyists argued that it is only the language that is being substituted, and that this does not involve a complete transfer of the content. And if, they argued, the content of the program is the problem – ban the program, not the dubbing.<sup>19</sup> We are not Indonesianising the content, we are translating and substituting language, they claimed. "Hamlet, if translated and dubbed into Indonesian is still Hamlet, not Nasution", Anton Moelyono argued: "We should distinguish between what we call translation, which is the basis of dubbing, and adaptation....A work of Moliere, *L'Avare*, was translated into Malay-Indonesian and became *Si Bakhis*, with the original French hero becoming Haji Malik in his Indonesian role. This is not the aim of dubbing".<sup>20</sup>

Yet even the pro Indonesian-language dubbers offered contradictory positions here. One reason given to defend Indonesian dubbing was precisely because it could block out foreign values by blocking out the original speech, for the dubbing process does not necessarily re-present in translation every word of the original speech, and can be employed to replace questionable foreign phrases. With subtitling, this is not possible of course. Some critics of Indonesian language dubbing in 1996 even saw that its introduction was in fact a government system of control made precisely to keep out foreign values (bad language for instance) in non-Indonesian speech on TV.<sup>21</sup> But on the other hand, the strongest argument the pro-Indonesian language lobby put forward for dubbing was that it would popularise the Indonesian language through allowing viewers

<sup>19</sup> See Alex Leo Zulkarnain, "'Dubbing' Perlukah Dilarang?", *Republika* August 1997.

<sup>20</sup> ("Sebaiknya kita itu membedakan apa yang disebut terjemahan yang mendasari sulih suara dan saduran. ... [K]arya Moliere, *L'Avare* oleh Balai Pustaka itu diterjemahkan ke dalam Melayu-Indonesia menjadi *Si Bakhil*, dan peran Prancis itu menjadi Haji Malik dalam peran Indonesia. Itu bukan tujuan sulih suara", *Sulih Suara* 1996, p.70)

<sup>21</sup> Ariel Heryanto "Dubbing", *Bercinta Dengan Televisi* 1997, pp.330-332

to hear a wide range of speech. And if the dubbing is to be popular, then the language must be accepted as real – bad language and all.

What emerges from both sides of this debate is the concept that familiar speech expresses truth. The more familiar, the more true. Familiar language is real language. On the one hand, the speech of foreigners dubbed into Indonesian was feared because it is accepted by viewers as real speech. And if accepted as real speech by viewers, then what the foreigners say is accepted as real and true. On the other hand, because familiar speech is real, it was thought that the fact that Indonesian viewers will accept Indonesian-language dubbed foreign programs as real speech meant the viewers would learn more Indonesian. The anti Indonesian-dubbing lobby saw that when foreign speech is accepted as real, foreign values creep in. If speech is too close it is accepted as truth. There is a need to distance that speech. By keeping the speech foreign, it is kept as performance. Viewers are kept aware of the language. It remains foreign, as the housewife Laksmini said.

Foreign sounds were seen to act as a barrier to foreign reality. The foreignness of the sound distances the content of these sounds. Even when the meaning of the sounds is conveyed through written form, subtitles, the meaning remains disjointed from the speech, remains foreign, and therefore has no power. And yet – another contradiction here for the anti-Indonesian language dubbing lobby – the argument for English language dubbing is precisely that one can learn a foreign language through exposure to sound, even when the sound is already foreign to the context, as learning English through watching Mandarin, Hindi or Spanish films dubbed into English by Indonesian dubbers. In this case it was thought that the public may and should learn the language of the speech, but should not absorb the context of the language (which after all can only be truly absorbed if spoken in familiar Indonesian). Perhaps the idea was that indeed one should only half understand, in which case the subsequent dubbing, with the dubbed English almost totally unintelligible, totally succeeded. Indonesians could learn that foreign language Indonesia-nised, through local voices. Localise the foreign, but keep it foreign.

## **Dialogue**

After national pride, the primary argument for Indonesian-language dubbing was initially a linguistic one; to extend the language itself through forcing direct exposure to foreign speech that had to be translated, and thus to popularise Indonesian, making it more familiar nationally. In the early 1990s, there was still little Indonesian-language television production (the days of Indonesian sinetron were still to come, largely in response to foreign imports) and it fell to translation of popular foreign programs to popularize controlled Indonesian speech. The 1996 seminar declared that Indonesian language dubbing would: “develop the Indonesian language to make it capable of becoming the vehicle for the culture of the Indonesian people, whose feet still stand in their own country, but whose awareness traverses the boundaries of people of other

worlds.<sup>22</sup> Minister Wardiman's language advisors on the issue explained: "In my opinion, the dubbing efforts will assist us in the development of Indonesian; for example, because of historical reasons, the difference between formal Indonesian and colloquial Indonesian is so acute that when someone in everyday conversation speaks as I am speaking now, it would be regarded as stiff and unnatural". (Anton Moelyono). "I think that it is precisely [Indonesian language] dubbing that will surely give birth to many variants of everyday Indonesian". (Benny Hoed).<sup>23</sup>

In fact, the Indonesian dubbing was so successful in making the language familiar that viewers lost any idea that it was strange for foreigners to speak Indonesian. It was at the height of Indonesian language dubbing, when the technique was most developed, that the ruling came out against it. The language was too familiar, too much like real speech, too colloquial, and therefore the speech was too dangerous.

Indeed, colloquialism was precisely the problem. Foreign films presented translators and dubbers with non-Indonesian speech situations – or at least non *broadcast*-Indonesian speech situations that had to be dubbed. Abusive language, for instance, was problematic. With dubbed abuse, the language might be Indonesian, but the idea is that the behaviour is not. Only a limited selection of Indonesian words of abuse (*bajingan*, *bangsat*) is acceptable for subtitling foreign films or television programs. The one-day seminar on Indonesian dubbing discussed the situation of dubbing words like "motherfucking and fuck". How strong are these words in the English language context, they asked. What do we do about them?<sup>24</sup>

But another problem area was the use of dialect and language types. On the one hand this was seen as a challenge. Having to translate various levels of English, for example, related to social class, ethnic origin or region, and to different levels of linguistic competence, presented the real challenge of having to represent a wide range of speech types in Indonesian on Indonesian television, something then completely new. However, representing this breadth of Indonesian speech was also seen to be problematic, for it touched on the sensitive issue of ethnicity. How could one present variety and colloquial speech in Indonesian while avoiding regional accents, for instance. And if one portrayed regional accents, how would this be related to the visual portrayal of character type or social class? Agus Purwanto pointed out that Indonesian language on television irons out these differences – with the result that the speech seems stilted: "In general, everyday spoken Indonesian is very much influenced by regional dialect of one's origin... while here, to play safe and avoid doing anything wrong, we have to use standard Indonesian:

<sup>22</sup> ("mengembangkan bahasa Indonesia sehingga mampu menjadi wahana budaya bangsa Indonesia, yang kakinya masih berpijak pada bumi negerinya, tetapi wawasannya menembus batas-batas budaya masyarakat dunia yang lain" ) Seminar sehari 1996 p.2

<sup>23</sup> ("Pada hemat saya usaha sulih suara ini akan membantu kita mengembangkan bahasa Indonesia ke arah yang berikut. Karena sejarah, perbedaan antara bahasa Indonesia yang resmi (formal) dan bahasa Indonesia sehari-hari ada kesenjangan yang besar sekali sehingga orang yang berbicara seperti saya sekarang dalam percakapan obrolan sehari-hari dianggap kaku, tidak alamiah". AM "Saya berpendapat justru kegiatan sulih suara inilah yang nanti seharusnya melahirkan berbagai variasi bahasa Indonesia sehari-hari". (BH). Ibid pp.56, 58-59

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p.17

understandably, this sounds stiff and formal.” Benny Hoed summed up the dilemma: “If you portray the speech of the thief using a Javanese accent - does this mean that all the Javanese will be slighted?”<sup>25</sup>

While the idea was that dubbing could make Indonesian language on television colloquial, informal, flexible - in fact the dubbing experiments showed the limitations of this in Indonesian broadcasting. Indonesian foreign programming portrayed situations and types of speech that would not occur – or at the time were not allowed to occur – in Indonesian-produced television, and so the limitations of the kind of speech that the medium permits and promotes quickly became apparent. Indonesian language speech on television precisely should not be too colloquial, too free, too realistic. Paradoxically, it was the foreign speech dubbing that was forcing the boundaries of accepted speech to include swearing, “incorrect” grammar and a wide range of speech types including regional accents. Only foreigners, it seems, should speak like this - and in their own languages. Or at least, Indonesian language speech on television should be colloquial but correct, familiar only up to a point.

In other words, speech on Indonesian television is a special genre of speech. It must be intelligible nationally, and must be acceptable as familiar speech, but it should not be so colloquial as to get out of control, and not be too regionally attached. Indonesian television under the New Order was strictly a national medium, (and even today is more national than radio) unlike radio where local audiences allow and encourage local speech – and if not exactly a wide use of regional languages, at least strongly regionally-flavoured Indonesian.

Given this special genre of speech, the situation of Indonesia’s regional languages on television should be assessed in another light. Their presence, or absence, should be viewed within the whole wider context of language and broadcasting. While studies of mediatisation, for example, examine traditional performance genres on television, paying particular attention to adaptation of form to that broadcast medium, the larger question is left unasked; why performance? Why was it that traditional performance genres such as wayang kulit, ludruk, wayang golek, wayang wong, drama gong, were chosen to represent regional language on television during the New Order, and even continue this role today?

The intimacy, familiarity and potency of regional language speech is in fact controlled through the selection of genre. The broadcast of Javanese, Balinese or Sundanese performances on television in fact limits the presence of regional language to a clearly delineated, distanced and controlled area of speech activity, the safe realm of tradition and art. Within this safety zone, there are no problems of “ethnic stereotyping” of character types. A Javanese actor or dalang can portray a thief (or a village idiot or a corrupt politician) and there is no problem of “ethnic accent” – except for the Chinese-Indonesians, of course, who were considered fair fodder for ridicule by all). There are no

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<sup>25</sup> (“Pada umumnya bahasa Indonesia yang dipakai untuk percakapan sehari-hari dipengaruhi oleh logat daerah asal....sementara ini, agar aman dan tidak salah, terpaksa bahasa baku yang digunakan: wajar kalau nampak kaku dan formal.”) Ibid pp.19, 28,40

problems because the reality of the speech is controlled through the genre itself – this is a *performance* – and because the performance boundaries are known to the viewers familiar with the language. Understanding of the language presupposes knowledge of the performance as performance.

The more interesting question is why regional languages are not more present on television beyond established performance genres. The problematic position of regional languages on Indonesian television under the New Order– their virtual complete denial, or presence only in formalised performance – can be seen as a factor of fear of their inherent power of familiarity and colloquiality. The dubbing debate and the attitude towards speech that the debate reveals, indicate that regional languages in broadcasting were not seen as a potential threat to national unity merely because of their expression of regional, as opposed to national, identity. In terms of broadcasting, the real threat of regional languages is their uncontrollability. Regional language speech is rich, familiar, unpredictable, and therefore dangerous – like the speech of foreigners. It is real speech, whereas the speech of television is an Indonesian that smoothes out colloquiality, intimacy, abuse, and vulgarity. Indonesian viewers watch the portrayal of “real situations” in Indonesian language sitcoms and can accept the slight distance of the language as something “real” in Indonesian. But this would in fact appear less real in a regional language where levels of formality, distance, directness and intimacy are more self conscious and easily recognisable. Indonesian viewers watch television and see Indonesian-speaking actors “speaking like me” - and yet they are not speaking like them. It is a mediated form of speech. As Benny Hoed explained: “Indonesian does not yet have a colloquial everyday form that would be acceptable over all Indonesia if broadcast”.<sup>26</sup> The realm of real colloquial speech is not yet the realm of any nationally accepted and nationally understood Indonesian. This remains true despite the enormous developments made in Indonesian local television content and speech since 1998. The breadth of its reach inhibits Indonesian’s true competitiveness in colloquiality with locally rich regional languages. The medium of the Indonesian language itself is then the perfect middle level of controlled familiarity for national television.

## The Picture

When we view the overall language picture on Indonesian television, then Indonesian language indeed appears as a particular zone that mediates between kinds of reality, particularly between foreignness and local-ness. It mediates, filters, translates and controls between realms of intimacy and distance. The more direct and close speech is to one’s own speech, the more real and true it is. Therefore the foreign must be kept foreign, inaccessible, kept away. Indonesian speech on television seems like colloquial speech, and is accepted as “real” because there is no nationally accepted range of Indonesian speech that embraces all from the very formal to very colloquial. Regional-language speech encompasses formality, distance, intimacy, power, directness and vulgarity, but its breadth of range is limited to regional understanding. And this, it seems, is where the

<sup>26</sup> (“Bahasa Indonesia memang belum memiliki bahasa sehari-hari yang kalau ditayangkan ke seluruh Indonesia belum [sic] tentu berterima”). Ibid p.80

authorities wish it to remain. When regional language performances are shown with no subtitles, for example, - does this stress their familiarity or their foreignness? If in the case of foreign speech, Indonesian dubbed speech makes “them” accepted as “us”, what does this suggest for regional languages?

Examining media policy can provide a different angle of looking at the process of mediatisation, as not merely focusing on how a form is adapted to a medium, but also how the medium itself is shaped by policy decisions. In one sense, the dubbing debate in Indonesia could be interpreted as indicating a particular turning point in the historical development of Indonesian language. The abrupt turn-around of the dubbing policy could reflect a fear of revealing the birth of a real colloquial Indonesian speech - therefore an acknowledgement of the daily use of this real speech, or the real historical turning point for Indonesian now truly becoming a first or co-first language for its speakers. But even if this is so, it is clear that Indonesian media policy reveals a particular attitude towards speech in broadcasting. True, but not really true. Familiar, but distant. Powerful. A role perfectly performed by the Indonesian language itself.

### **Credits**

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