



**Title:** Language choices and challenges in Indonesia

**Description:** The complexity and hybrid nature of language in Indonesia means the Indonesian language still vies with other tongues - and even with itself - in the choices people make about how they express themselves. Sociolinguists Dr Michael Ewing and Assoc. Professor Novi Djenar examine how the national language is faring in the hyper-polyglot archipelago. Presented by Peter Clarke. An Asia Institute Podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

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**Voiceover:** The Ear to Asia podcast is made available on the Jakarta Post platform under agreement between the Jakarta Post and the University of Melbourne.

**Peter Clarke:** Hello, I'm Peter Clarke. This is Ear to Asia.

**Novi Djenar:** In contemporary Indonesia, there is this strong awareness of linguistic diversity, of cultural diversity, and so what people want to highlight now is not national identity in that rigid sense of one nation, one language, but rather an Indonesia that is linguistically diverse, that is ethnically and religiously diverse.

**Michael Ewing:** This growing confidence in being Indonesian, and having these other various identities has meant that there's no longer the sort of negative attitude towards the use of foreign languages like English. People in Indonesia are really embracing their identity on the world stage, embracing other languages, foreign languages, Indonesian, Arabic and others without a sense of their own identity being threatened.

**Peter Clarke:** In this episode, language choices and challenges in Indonesia.

Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse places on the planet, with some 700 languages still being spoken. Its unifying tongue and only official language is Indonesian or Bahasa Indonesia. The national language adopted at the birth of the new republic was at the time spoken by a mere 5% of the population. Yet, it was chosen over much more widely spoken languages such as Javanese and Sundanese. Today, it serves to bind a still massively multilingual landscape while playing a key role, providing a sense of Indonesian national identity. Yet, as we'll hear, the complexity and hybrid nature of the languages spoken in the archipelago, means Indonesian still



buys with other tongues and even with itself in the choices people make about what kind of language they use.

To help us examine how the national language sits in hyper polyglot Indonesia, with us, Indonesian studies experts, associate professor Novi Djenar at the University of Sydney and Dr. Michael Ewing of Asia Institute. Welcome to you both.

Michael Ewing: Thank you.

Novi Djenar: Thank you.

Peter Clarke: This is a fascinating topic and I think we need to start, Novi, with how Indonesia came to adopt a rather small language in many ways but a very important language, spoken as I said in the introduction by only 5% of that population then. How did that all occur?

Novi Djenar: Yes, it's a very interesting history. Indonesian is really a variant of Malay and Malay has been there all the while. It was a language that was spoken as a lingua franca among different groups and it was a language of trade. Even though it was spoken by a minority of the population at the time, it was also a language that was already there and also a language that was perceived to be nonhierarchical and so that was an important consideration when people were thinking about choosing a national language.

Peter Clarke: Nonhierarchical, what do you mean by that?

Novi Djenar: At that time, the largest number of speakers of any particular language was Javanese. Javanese language has got different speech level and that means that when people interact with another person, they constantly, constantly have to calculate who they're interacting with, what kind of language they should use when interacting with that person so social hierarchy is embedded, is worked into the language.

Unlike in Malay. Of course Malay also has ways in which people can express formality and it has the informal register as well but it's not grammatically embedded in the way that Javanese is. I think it is being perceived as a more equal language.

Peter Clarke: By register, you mean that's a linguistic term meaning the level of formality in a way.

Novi Djenar: The level of formality. The level of social positions in a social hierarchy.

Peter Clarke: The desirability of having a language which was more knock about I suppose, and you mentioned trade. Was the Malay language like a complete



language? It had literature et cetera, or was it more a working day language?

Novi Djenar: This is an important question I think when we say that Malay is a language that doesn't have a speech level. It does have the formal variety and also informal variety. Obviously the formal variety would be used in education and also in government since the Dutch era actually. Since the 19th century. And the informal level, what used to be called the trade Malay or the Basa Malay, different informal varieties, were used for day to day communication in trade and also at home among different people, different groups.

Peter Clarke: We use the term Creole to describe for example, what's happened in Papua New Guinea which is more a pidgin, they have 850 languages just in Papua New Guinea. The archipelago has another 700 or so including West Papua. Explain to us why the Dutch when they came, chose this language which became the lingua franca. What made the Dutch chose Malay as the language they wanted to work with?

Novi Djenar: Actually it was not just Malay. Malay was chosen by the Dutch as the language of government but in schooling actually, there were regional languages as well. If there was a major language in a particular area such as Javanese, then Javanese would be used a medium of instruction in school. But for government it was felt that Malay was a language that was more fit, if you like. It has a long tradition of written literature and it is also already there, that's being used as a language of education and the Dutch was also interested in standardising. As they were adopting the language, they were also seeking to standardise the language so that it was more appropriate, so that it was more fit to be used as the language of government and trade.

Michael Ewing: Prior to the Dutch arriving as Novi mentioned, it was a language of trade so I think it's really important to remember that the area that we call Indonesia now and it certainly wasn't called Indonesia a 1,000 years ago but was an area where there was trade coming from China, from India, people moving through there from all parts of the world and we can see the sort of the original homeland of Malay as we know it now, as sort of in the area of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula and because that was a very important trade route, that is why that language began to be spread and used in other parts of the archipelago.

It was picked up both, as Novi mentioned, as sort of a language of day to day interaction at the trade level but then it also spread at this higher level that Novi mentioned, being used by various royal courts throughout the archipelago. For example, once Islam came into the area, various sultanates across the archipelago adopted Malay as the language of the courts and that's sort of where the standard language that Novi mentioned, originated from.

- Peter Clarke: With 6,000 islands inhabited now out of 17,000 islands in the Indonesian archipelago, was there high penetration in some areas versus low penetration of Malay as the lingua franca in others?
- Michael Ewing: Absolutely. As I mentioned, there's many parts of Sumatra, the Malay peninsula, parts of Kalimantan or Borneo where Malay's been spoken as the local regional language of the people there for generations. Then with the movement of trade in both indigenous people moving about the archipelago and then also these people coming from outside for trade purposes, also for spreading religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, other religions before Islam, the language spread with that. Then it would be picked up in various places. Maybe as an example, in the islands of Makalu in the area that is now called Ambon, that became an important centre of the spice trade and so people there began using Malay more and more and even become established then a few hundred years ago as sort of the local language of that particular area of where the trading post was set up.
- Peter Clarke: Is it important that religious missionaries chose high Malay as the language that they deployed?
- Michael Ewing: That is important I think. Again, we mentioned that there's many religions have come through Indonesia. Indonesia of course, has many traditional belief practises but over the 1,000 years, 1,800 years, we've had Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity coming in. The answer to your question in particular, when Europeans came in and were bringing Christianity, both in the form of Catholicism and Protestantism, they did look at what sort of language they wanted to use to proselytise and ask these questions about should it be in a local language? They discovered Malay of course, was the language that was spoken somewhat widely throughout the area so then the question was, should it be in the so called low Malay or that style of Malay that's spoken on a day to day basis or in high Malay, the Malay of the Malay literature Novi mentioned or the Malay used in the royal courts?
- Because of the status in their minds, of the Bible and religion, they chose high Malay despite the fact that actually the vast majority of people who might speak Malay wouldn't understand it at that point.
- Peter Clarke: Staying in that earlier period, Novi, were the inhabitants always using a number of different languages? The Malay language, perhaps their home language. And were those languages hybridising to some degree even in that earlier period before it became the lingua franca of an independent Indonesia?
- Novi Djenar: Indonesia has always been a very highly multilingual place, wasn't Indonesia of course, prior to independence but I think if we think about language as something that is alive, that is always evolving, I think Michael and I have

been talking about this a lot. Then it would be more productive for us to think about this regional languages or the existing languages at the time, as well as Malay, as well as Dutch that was introduced later on, as living languages. They were evolving as we were treating them as kind of different discreet languages.

Michael Ewing: And also, Indonesia is of course, is so varied across the whole archipelago that the way that Malay would interact with regional languages would vary greatly. For example, you can see a lot of influence between both Malay and Javanese because those cultures have been interacting for hundreds and hundreds of years. Whereas other parts of Indonesia have remained relatively isolated until relatively recent time and so the kinds of influences, the fluidity, hybridity that we're talking about might have only started to happen in the 20th century.

Peter Clarke: Could I clarify one linguistic point?

Michael Ewing: Sure.

Peter Clarke: We know that from Papua New Guinea that the language is there even on an island like Manus, are really different from each other. Indecipherable to speak other languages within that country. Is the same within the Indonesian archipelago that a distant island will have a language that's almost unknowable to someone living in another part of Indonesia.

Michael Ewing: Absolutely. The languages of Indonesia are completely different languages. They are of course, many of them related to each other. We talk about the Austronesian language family and the majority of languages spoken in Indonesia, including Malay and Indonesian are members of the Austronesian language family. And this is similar if you have heard the term Indo-European language family, many of the languages of Europe, including languages moving into India and parts of central Asia, are related to each other historically and it's the same sort of situation with languages across Indonesia, other parts of island southeast Asia and moving into the Pacific as well as far as New Zealand, Hawaii. They're related to each other but as different from each other as English is from Spanish, German, Hindi and things like that.

Peter Clarke: Take us now to that period when in fact the choice of Malay was designated as the lingua franca for Indonesia. It wasn't just a simple bureaucratic choice, it was a highly politicised choice.

Michael Ewing: That's right. That decision to designate Malay as Indonesian and to be the language of the nationalist movement occurred in 1928. What we now call Indonesia was still the Dutch East Indies. It was a very important part of that move by an intellectual and highly politicised elite within Indonesia to push

an agenda forward to raise the status of Indonesians within this colony with the ideal possibly of eventually having an independent nation. I think at that point, how in when that would happen wasn't really clear to people but they knew they had to really take a stand and to say that they were united people wanting to improve the lot of all Indonesians in the context of the Dutch colonial period.

Novi Djenar: What is interesting though Michael is that at the time, there had already been efforts actually by the Dutch to cultivate the Malay language. They wanted to standardise it to be used to make it more fit as a language of government. If you like, it was a two way thing. It was coming from the nationalist movement but also something that was already worked on by the colonial government as well.

Michael Ewing: That's right. The colonial government themselves knew that they had to somehow unite all these incredibly diverse cultures across the archipelago and so they chose Malay as the language of administration to do that. As Novi was saying, they just fed right into the nationalist ideal of trying to bring everyone together in fact to oppose the Dutch.

Peter Clarke: Novi, what's the best description? Was this lingua franca, Malay, the Bahasa Indonesia promoted generously or was it to some extent imposed upon the population?

Novi Djenar: To be thinking about if you like, the newly named language because it was not a new language, imposed to the population is partially correct I think and it is correct if we think about it in terms of government rigorously campaigning for the population to actually embrace what was being promoted was the standard variety of the language. In fact, the campaigns were asking the population to embrace or understand or use the standard variety of the language. What was not said was that they should embrace this variety and use it in the proper context. Namely in formal context.

And so often I think it was, I don't know if you agree Michael, it was mostly misunderstood as being a language that's out there to be embraced and once you have a name, Bahasa Indonesia, Indonesian, it was treated almost like a discreet entity to be imposed to the entire population. It is true that many people at the time, didn't have Indonesian as their first language but I think there should have been a note there in the campaign that said, "Okay, this is the standard variety, we want you to acquire so that you can participate in education, so that you can participate in government."

Was it a language that was imposed? Yes, I think in that sense. In that sense it was.



- Michael Ewing: At the same time that the initial imposition if we call it that, was very much at this level of education, use in the government and I'd say for many decades, the general population really wasn't picking up Indonesian as the language they would be using with each other on a daily basis, was probably during the Suharto government there's a really big push for mass education across the country together with great improvement in media and communication. Those two things together really popularised the use of Indonesian. There was this sort of official push to use it but then in very practical terms, suddenly everybody was going to school. Everybody was learning it there. They were listening to it on the radio, seeing it on television. Maybe the time when it really got picked up by the population as a whole.
- Peter Clarke: Sense of identity is one of the guests of this banquet table certainly and the old saying, acquire another language, acquire another soul. It's very, very important to culture. Identity is deeply tied to language. Was there resistance to adopting this national language?
- Michael Ewing: I would say in general there was not resistance. Would you agree Novi?
- Novi Djenar: Yes, absolutely.
- Michael Ewing: I think for most people, it's a practical thing. We've been describing it as a lingua franca, that means a language that you might use with people with whom you don't share another language. In that sense it's very practical. There would not have been resistance to that. And then as people began to aspire for better education, Indonesian was a very clear vehicle for that. For improved economic status. In fact, there hasn't been resistance, it's been growing, accepted and I don't think people have ever thought in terms, very much, of oh if I speak Indonesian I'll no longer speak Javanese, I won't speak Batak or Balinese or whatever it is. As we've mentioned before, it's a very multilingual archipelago, most people these days grow up speaking both regional, local language and Indonesian almost simultaneously and having both those cultures, both those identities, working together for individuals I think is a really important part of being Indonesian.
- Novi Djenar: It is certainly true that during the Suharto era when Indonesian was rigorously promoted, there was a lot less attention to the development or promotion of regional languages and I think in that sense it has been a little bit unbalanced. People felt that certainly critics have expressed that the promotion of Indonesian was at the detriment of other languages and also of other varieties of Indonesian. Informal Indonesian at the time, was treated as it was a different language that people shouldn't speak but that situation has greatly changed now.



- Peter Clarke: Is it fair to say, Novi, that Indonesian is a second language for most Indonesians?
- Novi Djenar: It was. It was. I think now according to latest information, about 95% of the population use Indonesian to speak in informal situations but also of course, at school. That situation, yes definitely has changed.
- Michael Ewing: And maybe a couple of ways it's changed is, first of all, in large urban areas, certainly in Jakarta and other large urban areas in Indonesia, people have come from so many parts of the country that everybody is using some variety of Indonesian, both in the formal context but also informal Indonesian and people growing up in those contexts are growing up as first language speakers of Indonesian.
- But then in other part of the country, as Novi was saying, it's not so much that it's a second language, it's that people are learning Indonesian and a regional language or even regional languages simultaneously so you don't really say one's a first language and one's the second but people are growing up multilingual.
- Peter Clarke: Michael, we talked about the practicality, the utilitarian aspect, particularly that early adoption stage of Indonesian but just from what you just said, obviously things have moved on markedly since then. We've got culture, we've got literature, we've got television, we've got fiction et cetera. Returning to the idea of identity, to what extent now in the 21st century is Indonesian a real marker of identity within the country?
- Michael Ewing: Indonesian is an important marker of identity but it's one of many markers of identities. Indonesians like anybody in the world, we all have multiple identities and for example, I've done some research in west Java where the dominant regional language is Sundanese and in the large city there, Bandung, young people who are from Sundanese families often speak Indonesian but they also speak Sundanese and what they really often do is mix them up. The choice between, am I speaking predominantly in Indonesian or I'm speaking in Indonesian but maybe I'll use pronouns to talk about, to refer to myself and the person I'm talking to, maybe I'll use the Sundanese pronouns which will add a little bit of Sundanese identity in that broader Indonesian identity. That happens all the time.
- Novi Djenar: Just to follow and from what you said Michael, I think it's the term or the notion of identity itself that's been now conceptualised differently. Previously when we thought about Indonesian as being a marker of identity, it was a marker of national identity and that was imposed by the new order government. As part of national identity one speaks the national language, one embraces the wearing of national costume and so on. All the superficiality that comes with it. But I think now people ask about





Indonesian identity in a different way. People talk about identities rather than just one singular national identity.

**Peter Clarke:** You said earlier that languages are a living organic thing and you can see something analogous to what you're describing happening in India as well with the mixing and matching of languages. A bit of Hindi, a bit of English and perhaps in other languages. Is something similar to that, from your description, happening in Indonesian, the mix and matching?

**Michael Ewing:** Absolutely. For me, that's one of the hallmarks of informal Indonesian. I remember when I was working on variety of Javanese in fact, in a town called Chittagong, many years ago. People would talk about how it was nice to speak Javanese but it was impossible to speak Javanese without also including some Indonesian or the other way around. And that in fact, it created a feeling of being more, they use the term *Sadat*, it was just a nicer flavour, a nicer feeling if you're mixing things together, sort of like mixing together spices to create a nice curry.

**Peter Clarke:** You're listening to *Ear to Asia* from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. I'm Peter Clarke with Indonesian studies experts, associate professor Novi Djenar of the University of Sydney and Dr. Michael Ewing of Asia Institute.

We're talking about the Indonesian language and its role in the massively multilingual social landscape of Indonesia.

Take us into an everyday situation Michael. We're in Jakarta say and we're in a busy market situation and I walk into the market. What language do I choose?

**Michael Ewing:** If you're in Jakarta walking into the market you would probably want to speak *Jakartan Indonesian*. Jakarta has been the capital of Indonesia since independence, prior to that, it was called Batavia and it was the capital of the Dutch East Indies and Malay has been the language of that metropolitan area since the early Dutch colonial period. And very distinctive variety of Malay developed there which now into the 21st century has evolved into what is often referred to as *Jakartan Indonesian*.

It's a very informal style of language that really does mark an identity of living in the capital city which brings with it all kinds of connotations of being modern and prosperous and progressive and all of that sort of thing. It's the style of speaking that has different pronouns, different kinds of grammar, but it's still understandable as a type of Indonesian. People move to Jakarta from all over Indonesia and internationally and anybody who lives in Jakarta for any length of time starts speaking Indonesian in that style on an informal basis.



- Michael Ewing: Because of the importance of Jakarta and the ubiquitous nature of media these days, that style of Indonesian is spreading throughout the archipelago and informing the ways that people speak informal Indonesian across the whole country.
- Novi Djenar: I think because wealth, modernity, it's very attractive to a lot of people and the style of speaking that is associated with Jakarta, then it's also adopted by people in other areas of Indonesia.
- Michael Ewing: At the same time, if I could jump in, it's not just adopted wholesale. It's bits and pieces. It's bits of style that inform a very local style. I was mentioning Bandung again. In Bandung, people speak Indonesian, they speak it informally, it has lots of qualities of Sundanese in it but it also has various aspect of Jakarta. It's again, this hybrid nature.
- Novi Djenar: Yes, I glad you mentioned that because we tend to think of the Jakartan style as being a style that just spreads all over Indonesia and people just adopt it like that but in fact what has emerged in different parts of Indonesia is kind of localised national how would you say it? Cosmopolitan style almost?
- Michael Ewing: Sort of a cosmopolitan styles.
- Novi Djenar: Informal way of speaking. Hip way of speaking.
- Peter Clarke: And the role of television, I'm just imagining there's a national news service, goes over the whole archipelago and that would be conducted in a certain kind of journalese version of Indonesian, I'm guessing. But you get individuals perhaps from more outlying islands that have jobs in the media. Is that part of the mixing and matching that's going on, that influence that you're describing?
- Novi Djenar: Yes and no. There are a number of television station and each station would have a certain amount of content from the local area. For example, if you got to Bali, there is the Balinese television.
- Peter Clarke: In their local language.
- Novi Djenar: In their local language, yeah, in Balinese. While people are exposed to different television stations and a language and the styles of speaking, I would say it in the plural. Okay, yes they speak Indonesian but actually what we think about as television programmes are quite varied. While the news bulletin will be read in Indonesian, in between reading news bulletin, people do speak in informal Indonesian and different programmes and of course English is there too in the mix.



Michael Ewing: That use of local languages as well as Indonesian in television is a really good example of one of the big changes that has happened in Indonesia in the 21st century. In the 20th century, Indonesian television was basically always in Indonesian and almost always standard Indonesian. And now people are embracing their local identity and this ability to move very fluidly between different languages, between different styles, using formal Indonesian, informal Indonesian, influenced by local languages all the time and that's really been taken up by the media in a way that it never was earlier.

Novi Djenar: I think that's a really good point. In contemporary Indonesia, there is this really strong sense of awareness of linguistic diversity, of cultural diversity and so if we go back to the point about national identity, what people want to highlight now is not national identity in that rigid sense of one nation, one language but rather an Indonesia that is linguistically diverse, that is ethnically and religiously diverse. Highlighting these different languages is part of that sense of confidence about being Indonesian.

Michael Ewing: Something that Novi and I were talking about earlier was how this growing confidence in being Indonesian and being Indonesian and having these various other identities has meant that there's no longer the sort of negative attitude towards the use of foreign languages like English. In the past there might have been a sense that oh, you shouldn't mix English into Indonesian or all advertisements should always be in Indonesian because there's this sort of fear of influence. But I think that people don't have that fear at all anymore. People in Indonesia are really embracing their identity on the world stage. Embracing other languages, foreign languages, Indonesian, Arabic and others without a sense of their own identity being threatened.

Peter Clarke: Novi, is there a generational dimension to all this? I'm thinking, I'm imagining grandmother in a particular location of strong cultural background. She's a superb speaker of the local language but the kids of course from the description you've both given us are often another kick really linguistically. Are there almost familial, social problem emerging generationally with the use of the lingua franca?

Novi Djenar: I think different parts of Indonesia would probably show different patterns of this. I can tell you that when I was doing my field work in Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia, I was recording high school kids and these are junior high school. They're in their 13, 14 years old. I didn't ask what language they should be speaking. I only said, "Okay, I would like to record your interaction." And what I got was Javanese. And another group, was like that in a private school, a bunch of male students, what we got was a whole lot of Javanese and some Indonesian.

If we say that there is a generational issue, yes there is but it depends on where we look. It might be the older generation that retains the language

and the younger generation is moving towards Malay. In some parts of Indonesia, such as Java, Javanese language is not threatened and that's probably shown among other things by this younger generation still speaking it quite fluently.

- Michael Ewing: At the same time, some of our colleagues have done research in other parts of Java, which has shown that in particular in urban areas, there are younger people who aren't speaking Javanese so much anymore. Particularly young women. There's evidence that often mothers are preferring to speak Indonesian to their daughters in a Javanese context. Very likely as a way of equipping them for education to advance economically.
- Novi Djenar: That's interesting Michael. This again, illustrates the different situation in different parts of Indonesia. Even within Java alone, you find different situations, different scenarios here. Were you referring to Jogja, central Java?
- Michael Ewing: That's right, yeah. And also with that, I guess the interesting counter story to that is that often it's the young men who are maintaining Javanese and one hypothesis about that is because of the speech levels that Novi was talking about before, men could be showing respect through those systems so they might often find that by retaining the use of the local language, it gives them a certain traditional prestige whereas the women of this context you're seeing embracing Indonesian as a way of moving into a more modern, contemporary kind of cultural context.
- Peter Clarke: From your combined description, hybridization, mixing and matching the regional languages and incoming languages internationally, it sounds like a language that's going through enormous change. Does it retain the force of a lingua franca?
- Michael Ewing: I suppose the answer's yes and no. In some ways in its official capacity as the language that unites Indonesia and is meant to be used as the language that you speak so you can talk to people who come from different parts of Indonesia, yes. But I think the reality that we've been talking about is that it has become so ingrained as a part of Indonesian national identity, of what people just use on a day to day basis that it's sort of moved into a different position where people simply take it for granted as the language of the country, of the nation. If you have something to add to that, Novi.
- Novi Djenar: Yes, I think this is an important point that you've raised Michael that Indonesian is now spoken by the majority of people. It's no longer that language that people need to consciously think about when they make a decision about which language to use for this particular purpose.



Peter Clarke: Novi, we haven't discussed the role of government very much today. What is the important role that they play? Especially recently in their attitude toward language.

Novi Djenar: For three decades, Indonesian was presented to the public as the language of choice and the language that people should know and should be familiar with, should be able to write and speak well. But now that the majority of the population is already speaking the language there is quite a significant policy shift. And that shift is shown in the way that the language council has allowed elements, words from regional languages to be included in the national dictionary. In the standard Indonesian dictionary. That's one.

Novi Djenar: And the other is the formal acknowledgment and also encouragement by the language council for people to maintain regional languages. By encouraging children to speak to their parents. In fact there is a call for people to cultivate their mother tongues. I think that's a very important change in the attitude of government.

Peter Clarke: That must have an impact on things perhaps like the arts where there must be a bit of tug if you want to be a successful artist, as a performing artist particularly, a comedian perhaps, to speak the national language. There's a bit of a tension there between that and performing in local situations.

Novi Djenar: Tension only in the sense that the performances in local languages, in ethnic languages perhaps are happening at the local level but not to the same extent as performances being conducted in Indonesian. But I think we must remember here that a lot of the performances, a lot of the literature are aimed at local audiences and so if we think about Indonesian being used in literature, the consumption is happening at the local level however, I was talking to Michael this morning, there's something that's really interesting thing happening is Indonesian young writers, many of whom were educated overseas are comfortable writing in both Indonesian and English and in fact some of them are writing in English. And want to be acknowledged as Indonesian writers but through English works.

And there is a lot of tension currently among those who would promote Indonesian literature written in Indonesian and Indonesian literature written in English. I think both of them are equally valid but I think this illustrates for us a very interesting situation in which once again, relating this to national identity, that national identity now is not so strictly defined in terms of Indonesian language.

Michael Ewing: I think we can see that it's not strictly defined in Indonesian language in the sense that people are very happy to embrace both local languages and international languages and we talked about those different kinds of identities and we can see it being played out right here in Melbourne

because the Indonesian film festival is on and if you think about Indonesian films, in the past they were always in Indonesian. In the past, often standard Indonesian, colloquial Indonesian has worked its way into Indonesian films. If Indonesian films were set in a particular cultural context, there might be few words to kind of mark it that way but these days, at the Indonesian film festival, there's a film that's entirely in Javanese. People are making entire films in local languages.

Interestingly, there's one film that's entirely in English. We can see Indonesian film makers really wanting to present their work to an international audience.

Peter Clarke: Finally Michael and Novi, what you've described both of you, is quite a complex process. It's been shifting and changing over that long period. But you're also describing something that's alive, as Novi said earlier. How do you see the future then, both of you? Social media of course is playing a big role. Jakarta itself is very much sold on social media, it has a huge Facebook following there. How do you see the future in terms of the development and the evolution of the Indonesian language?

Michael Ewing: I think in the short term we'll see the continued sort of fluidity and people moving between languages and creating new identities out of their sense of locality, wherever they are. International identities, pan-Indonesian identities, that's going to continue and we can see that on social media. And it's not just in Jakarta, it's across the archipelago. Everybody has a mobile phone and will be texting and accessing Facebook and Twitter and whatever. There we can see all of these same issues playing out.

You see posts in Indonesian, you see posts in very informal language, you see people posting in local languages. It's just I'd say continuing pretty much in the same direction at this point. I don't know Novi, what do you think?

Novi Djenar: I think it's not just social media but the internet has been hugely influential and hugely significant in both giving and contributing to the emergence of hybridity but also to the emergence of attempts to retain the language as stereotypically conceptualised as discreet entities. For example, you see a lot of young people now asking on social media, on the internet more generally, about how to speak Javanese. About how to speak a particular language. They have that cultural heritage, they can't speak it, they want to be able to speak it. How do they do it?

Of course ultimately, if you get answers on the internet, that's not going to make you into a fluent speaker but I think the questions themselves are important in showing us that the younger generation are interested in reviving the languages and that's a good thing.



Peter Clarke: An utterly fascinating topic. Thank you so much to you Michael and Novi for being with us today on Ear to Asia.

Novi Djenar: Thank you Peter.

Michael Ewing: Thanks Peter.

Peter Clarke: Our guests today, Associate Professor Novi Djenar of the University of Sydney and Dr Michael Ewing of Asia Institute. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple podcast app, Spotify, Stitcher or SoundCloud. If you like the show, please rate and review it on iTunes or Apple podcasts. Every positive review helps new listeners find the show and of course let your friends know about us on social media.

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