

EDITORIAL

Language and media has always been in a mutual relationship. Historical record shows that mass media, such as newspaper, magazine and other products of printing technology, played a very instrumental role in the development of language and its changing practices and functions within society. In Indonesia, this can be seen during the late colonial period – particularly from early twentieth century onward – when printing technology was introduced on massive scale as part of the capitalist expansion to produce an increasing number of newspapers, magazines, journals, and other publications. These mass media boosted the literacy rate of Indonesian population and created a ‘reader community’, and cultivated written tradition, which later stimulated wider cultural and political literacy among Indonesian society. This ‘printing capitalism’ also facilitated the evolution of vernacular language and brought them into a modern written world that partially supported the identity formation of local society in a colonial context. More importantly, the mass media also mediated the transformation and institutionalization of Malay from a ‘vernacular language’ into a ‘national language’, known later as Bahasa Indonesia. A growing number of Western educated Indonesians used and practiced Bahasa Indonesia in their reading, writing, and speaking activities abandoning the Dutch as ‘national language’ of the colonial state of Netherlands Indies. In turn, this escalated the formation of Indonesian nationalism and forged the nationalist movement and the national identity to counter and liberate Indonesia from the tyranny of colonialism (Anderson, 1991; Adam, 1995).

In the postcolonial period, during the second half of the twentieth century in particular, the relation between mass media and language development in Indonesia becomes closer than before. The government of independent Indonesia took further steps to promote extensively Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, which was directed to support the decolonization agenda and ‘national building’ project, both become part and parcel of the political projection of Indonesia as a unitary nation-state. Some studies suggest that this nationalistic agenda was implemented through centralistic and top-down approaches, which apparently jeopardized to a certain degree the development and even the existence of vernacular languages of the country. To support those agendas, Indonesian government made use extensively mass media to control the promotion of Bahasa Indonesia as national language, particularly in education and state administration; and to control the standardization of this national language. This goes along with the development of information technology, such as television and movies, which allows not only the intensity and extensity of network, but also the speed and velocity of information circulation in the whole country. Shortly speaking, the government used (and often also misused) mass media to support its language policy as part of the nation-building project through a strong control over mass media (Hill and Sen, 2007).

The relation between language and mass media come to a new stage in the last decade of the twentieth century, after the invention of the World Wide Web – the Internet in the end of 1980s. This new information technology changes radically the form, the scale, and the speed of information circulation and the basic feature of language practice/use on mass media all over the world. This is inevitably so especially after the introduction of the so-called social media, such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and then WhatsApp. These new media soon become part of the modern life and mark the new social paradigm of information production, reproduction, and consumption. They offer a new way of communication and social interaction, where people are no longer consuming information but also participating and engaging in the process of information exchanges. So, these new media offer different communicative practices and social interaction for everyone. One of the consequences is that these online media have a profound effect on the linguistic practices and language development in general. Another

important fact that this new media run almost on such unlimited scale to an extent that almost no single authority can really control nor regulate the traffic of information and linguistic practices by those ‘digital native’ who are using social media in their daily life (Hill and Sen, 2005).

Putting those facts on perspective, we might ask the following questions: what were the implications of social media on the language or linguistic practices in certain country and society; to what extent social media can support or endanger the existence of certain national or vernacular languages; and do these new media create a ‘particular type of language’ that is unique in comparison with the formal one (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014: 2). These are highly relevant questions for Indonesia, a country with a national language that coexists with hundred vernacular ones and an increasingly large number of its population become active members of ‘digital native’, the users of social media. Other relevant questions for Indonesian case is to what extent do such ‘democratic’ and ‘anarchical language practices’ of Indonesians in social media can affect the position of Bahasa Indonesia as part of national identity; and to what extent do social media influence the national language policy just like the ‘old media’ until the last decade of the twentieth century. Certainly, this is an emerging issue to be examined by Indonesian linguists and scholars of related studies; and becomes an essential concern of this journal. Although the present edition presents no single articles dealing with the language issue of social media as mentioned above, yet it still commits to gives a space for language studies. This is also a very special edition, because it would be the first full-English edition to mark the integration of the journal into open access system that can be accessible for international audiences. And of course, we are very proud of it. (AW).

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