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THE ASPECTS OF CULTURE THROUGH THE TEACHING
OF BAHASA INDONESIA

by David S. Sjafiroedjudin
Ohio University
November 24, 1972

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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In this short paper I would like to share with you some of the ways in which the language itself gives clues which help us to understand the culture, and the way I try to use the language to depict both the social and historical dimensions of the culture of the people.

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dow); of English origin, as botol (bottle) and pensil (pencil); of Dutch origin, as kamar (room) and bioskop (cinema); and of American origin, as silet (razorblade) and mobil (automobile). As the students advance in the study of the Indonesian language, they quickly learn that these words are the result of the influence of foreign cultures and words which diffused within Indonesian culture. It also appears that words are like people; they are born, live for a certain period, become old and finally die a natural death. The indigenous word hulubalang, for example, which depicts a person of high position in government, army and police, is on the verge of dying, and is being replaced by more modern words, like: jenderal (general), letnan kolonel (lieutenant colonel), perwira (officer), polisi (police) and bupati (district officer). Some of the borrowed words are disappearing too, for example the Persian nakhoda (skipper) which is being replaced by the Indo-Germanic kapten (captain).

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What is also important, but will be difficult to teach in U.S., is the fact that proper names are associated not only with ethnic group but also with dialects in Bahasa Indonesia, namely Javanese Indonesian, Batak Indonesian, etc.

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To reinforce the understanding of the meaning or the use of these titles one might want to provide "level-switching" exercises.

d. The Second Singular Personal Pronoun "You"

A significant phenomenon in the Indonesian language is the unstable position of the second singular personal pronoun. Although the words engkau and kamu exist in the language, Indonesians are hesitant to address anyone, whether superior, equal or inferior, with the word "you". Indonesians feel that the word "you" contains an element of disrespect toward the person addressed. This question seems to be related to the fact that status, honor and respect play a very important role in the life of Indonesians and therefore they want to be known by their proper name and/or title. An Indonesian is more than a "you", a singular entity; he belongs to his family, his community, and his position. For example, among the Menangkabau people every young man receives a title when he is married and thereafter he is always addressed with this name. A married Menangkabau woman is often spoken to as Rangkayo which literally means "wealthy person". The respect toward parents by child-
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Modern Indonesians themselves feel awkward in not being able to apply the second singular pronoun in their daily conversations. The Dutch word "jij" and "U" were used during the colonial period and are still used in a few places. The English "you" is now being applied by a few. There is a new word, anda, which was created to try to introduce one universal term for the second singular pronoun, but this seems to have been accepted for use only in advertisements. All these substitutes lead to no real solution to the problem because once they are accepted to mean "you" in a general sense they fall into the same category as the older forms of engkau and kamu, and are regarded in poor taste when used.

At present, tuan (sir) and saudara (brother) are the most acceptable substitute for "you". However, they cannot be used indiscriminately.
In Central and East Java the word tuan reminds one of the colonial era. In Sumatra, on the other hand, tuan is thought to be closely related to Tuanku or Paduka Tuan, or Paduka Tuan Yang Mulia (Your Excellency), titles used to address someone of the highest rank. In Indonesia in general, and in rural Java especially, Pak is more acceptable. In Java's cities the Dutch word "oom" (uncle) is often used. The Hokien Chinese "lu" is only used by the lower class in Jakarta and should be regarded as rather rude and not acceptable at all among educated persons. Javanese, and often Chinese use the second level Javanese word sampeyan which seems to have gained some degree of acceptance in Central and East Java.

The cause of the restricted use of "you" seems to have its origin in the importance given to status, honor, and respect in Indonesian life. Whatever other reasons might exist for avoiding the use of "you" the result is the same, in that the structure of Indonesian syntax is effected and the objective structure is one of the language's most important forms of sentence structure.

e. Connotative Meaning

The colloquial and vernacular phrases that are used in the Indonesian language indicate something about the character of the people. Indonesians are said to be reserved or "on guard". They do not seem to open their real feelings. On the other hand they do not seem to be cold but rather light-hearted and often easy-going. To "keep face" is an important element of Indonesian culture because it could effect the "good-name" of the speaker, his family and his community in which he lives. Hospitality toward strangers and concerns for the well-being of neighbors are other qualities of Indonesian culture. One greets people with Apa kabar? Literally this means "What is the
news?, but depending on the circumstances the question could mean "How are you?" or "What can I do for you?" The first two translations of the phrase is always answered with Baik (good, fine) or Kabar baik (good news, I am fine), regardless of how one is really feeling. An Indonesian would never express bad feelings to anyone unless he is very close. A language mask is utilized by answering that "everything is fine".

Another phrase that tells something about the culture of the Indonesian people is the greeting Sudah makan? (Have you had your meal?). This is usually answered in the affirmative Sudah (I have had my meal). To answer with Belum (not yet) would lead to many consequences. First, it forces the questioner into the circumstance in which he has to supply the other with food, and consequently creating an embarrassing situation if there is no proper food to be offered; secondly, by saying that he has not yet eaten might infer that he was not able to provide himself with food which might jeopardize his standing in the community. On the other hand, if he answers with Sudah (Yes, I have eaten) whether he has or not indicates that he is able to provide himself with food and is not burdening his host, but he also knows that he will be offered something which he may not refuse, since to refuse would mean to refuse rezeki baik (good luck) and would insult his host.

A phrase that is related to this area of food and eating could prove to be very embarrassing to a Westerner. A utterance of great compliment to someone would be to call them gemuk (fat). It is always a fine expression to compliment a man by telling him he has a "fat" wife. In a land where food is scarce and people are physically short and slightly built it is indeed fortunate to be fat which means to them good health and prosperity.

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When studying language, students are given drills and dialogues—
the latter sometimes accompanied by "acting out the situation"—which reflect the cultur
of the people whose language they are studying. This greatly enriches the students'
appreciation of the language and certainly makes some of the tedious work of drilling more enjoyable.

Stories and exercises that tell of the type of weather, something of the geography, of the food that is eaten, the clothes that are worn, the houses that are lived in, and the religious and national holidays, all add important background for understanding the people and their culture as well as learning the language. Dialogues that take place at weddings, births, entering a new home and religious feasts all show the importances that Indonesians place on these events. Stories and exercises that point out large families, familial values, importance of family decisions, and the effects on one incident on the entire family can point out to the students the importance the family plays in Indonesian life and culture.

There are certain expressions that can be used in stories and lesson materials to show aspects of adat (tradition, custom, law) and its spirit of gotong-royong (mutual help), for example: Marilah kita memotong padi Pak Karto (Let us harvest Pak Karto's rice), or Tiap-tiap orang mesti memperbaiki jalan desa (Every one must repair the village road). Using these phrases in a story and explaining their meaning will introduce the spirit of communal living and sharing work that is so much a part of the Indonesian way of life.

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At the end of their first year of studying Indonesian—a course that consisted of 120 contact hours in the classroom—one of my classes was
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