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A sophistication unfolds in a new dictionary

KAMUS BESAR BAHASA INDONESIA PUSAT BAHASA ("THE GREAT DICTIONARY OF THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE OF THE LANGUAGE CENTRE"), Fourth Edition, Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2008, 1701 pages.

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Those who imagine Bahasa Indonesia to be a simple language will soon discover its sophistication if they make a serious effort to get acquainted with its literature and other writings. It may be relatively easy to learn some basic Indonesian, but when it comes to the more sophisticated variety, one is easily confronted with its linguistic complexities.

Actually, it is not only foreigners who help maintain the myth of the so-called "simplicity" of the Indonesian language; Indonesians themselves enthusiastically contribute in keeping this myth intact. But aren't all mother-tongues simple, as long as they are one's own mother-tongue?

One of the largest obstacles for any foreigner wishing to learn Indonesian is its extensive vocabulary. The fact that Indonesian contains some 20,000 loan-words from other languages (compiled in Russell Jones' *Loan-Words in Indonesian and Malay*, Jakarta, 2008), might lead to the wrong conclusion that it is a relatively poor language with a rather restricted original vocabulary of its own.

"The Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language", *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)* with its 90,000 entries and sub-entries clearly proves otherwise, and underlines Indonesian's linguistic and cultural wealth. The KBBI also uncovers the fact that the Indonesian language is still developing and continuing to incorporate many new concepts and technical terms. This is reflected by the strong increase of words, expressions and terminologies. The first edition saw 62,000 entries (1988), second saw 72,000 (1991), the third 78,000 (2000) and this year's edition saw an increase to 90,000.

But there is another phenomenon: the KBBI does not only reflect the development of Indonesian as a living language adapting to new circumstances, but also includes the opinions of its editors as to how this language should be according to the official grammar, or their interpretation of it. It appears as if Indonesian were a language which has been made by decision (which to a certain extent has been true since 1928), instead of being a language which has been recorded from a daily linguistic reality. It is not without reason that in the first edition of KBBI Anton M. Moeliono had the title of "Head of the Center of Language Building and Development" (*Kepala Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa*).

This linguistic "should be" does, however, not always reflect the linguistic situation as it really is. The KBBI therefore portrays a variety of the Indonesian language which the editors of the Pusat Bahasa ("Language Center") in Jakarta decided and agreed upon after lengthy discussion. The book contains a number of examples of this. The editors themselves note that, "the

compilation of a dictionary constitutes an effort of language codification which becomes part of standardization of a language."

If one wants to take note of the linguistic developments and internal debates concerned, it is interesting to compare the Third and Fourth Editions, not only as far as their vocabularies are concerned, but also when it comes to grammatical issues. To be able to adequately use an Indonesian dictionary one should have at least some grammatical foreknowledge.

The sub-entries of the Fourth Edition are no longer arranged in strict alphabetical order, as was the case with its predecessors, but according to their grammatical logic and derivations. This new arrangement provides better insight and understanding of Indonesian grammar and this should be of benefit to both Indonesians as well as to foreign students of the language.

Different visions on the origin of certain Indonesian words can subsequently lead to different structuring and arrangement of various entries. Take the example of *memperhatikan* and *memerhatikan* (both meaning "to heed" or "to pay attention to"): in the Third Edition we find *perhati* as the root word, the derived verb of which therefore could be *memerhatikan*. In the Fourth Edition it has been decided, however, that the root word should be *hati* (under which there is the sub-entry of *perhati*), from which *memperhatikan* is derived. *Memerhatikan* has fully disappeared in the Fourth Edition. All this must have been the result of linguistic discussions among the editors of KBBI, not of changes in daily Indonesian speech, because *memperhatikan* still prevails as it did before.

Although it should be considered correct that the KBBI includes those forms which follow the official grammatical rules, I personally think it is an omission that next to these forms some actually existing, and generally accepted forms have in various cases not been included. For example: under *pengaruh* ("influence") we find *memengaruhi* ("to influence"), but not *mempengaruhi* which constitutes a grammatical exception, but is nevertheless fully accepted.

Under *tahu* ("to know") we find a separate entry for *ketahu*, under which *mengetahui* is introduced. Its passive *diketahui* is not given specific attention, although this would have been worthwhile because it is, again, an exception in Indonesian, being the only root word in standard Indonesian in which the prefix *ke-* is maintained. *Diketahui* is only introduced afterwards to explain derivations of *mengetahui*.

Under the "m" we find *mengerti* ("to understand"), from where we are directed to *erti*. There we find *mengerti*, but not the passive *dimengerti*, which is an exception in Indonesian because it retains the prefix *me-*, whereas theoretically it should be **dierti** (which does not exist). Other prevalent exceptions in Indonesian have however been accepted in KBBI (as they should be), like *mempunyai* from *punya* ("to possess"), and not **memunyai**, which does not exist, or *belajar* ("to study") which is the only verb in which the prefix is *bel-* instead of *ber-*, and not **berajar** which does not exist. (I have gratefully used Hein Steinhauer's *Leerboek Indonesisch*, Leiden, 2005, as my guide and reference for grammar).

Indonesian "slang" is generally not included, although the entry *ketemu* ("to meet") can still be found under "k", from where we are rerouted to *temu*, under which it cannot be found back next

to the more official bertemu. The derivatives of ketemu (mengetemui and mengetemukan), which were present in the Third Edition, have not been included in the Fourth Edition, probably because they were considered as too colloquial. Various other words which I can find in, for instance, my hand phone dictionary, such as tajir, dong or nggak, do not occur in KBBI, presumably because they are all considered slang. For those words, as well as other forms not occurring in KBBI, one might refer to Stevens & Schmidgall-Tellings' excellent Kamus Lengkap Indonesia-Inggris (Ohio, 2004).

Some very common words such as bengkel ("garage", from Dutch "winkel") or perkedel (from Dutch "frikandel"), just to mention two examples which were present in the Third Edition, have been removed for unclear reasons, whereas various obsolete words have been maintained. Pelopor ("forerunner" from Dutch "voorloper") is in, but not its very common counterpart voorrijder ("advance motorcycle escort" from Dutch "voorrijder"), etcetera.

Nahdliyin (members of the Nahdlatul Ulama) is in the KBBI, but not nahdliyat (its female form), nor nahdliyin and nahdliyat or Nahdlatul Ulama, the official names used by Indonesia's largest Muslim organization. Whereas the Third Edition KBBI in its section "Foreign Words and Expressions" (Kata dan Ungkapan Asing) included the formula minal `aidin wal-faizin, widely used on the occasion of Idul Fitri, it has been dropped from the Fourth Edition for unclear reasons. Although this formula is composed of Arabic words only, it is on the other hand a purely Indonesian expression, which, to my knowledge, is unknown in the Arab world itself. In the same section we also find zitje (Dutch for "table and chairs"), although this word (unknown to many Indonesians) has already been fully assimilated into Indonesian as "sice".

Certain foreign words are in the process of being assimilated into Indonesian, although they do not fully follow the grammatical rules yet. Sukses, for instance, is at first absorbed into mensukseskan ("to make successful"), retaining the "s", instead of being transformed into menyukseskan. The more people feel comfortable using such a loan-word as if it were a native word, the more the latter form may be used. Although mensukseskan is still generally used, including in official speeches including at the presidential level, KBBI only includes the grammatically "correct" form menyukseskan, thereby ignoring part of the linguistic reality of Indonesian.

Finding a specific expression is not always that easy. An expression like mohon maaf lahir dan batin, also used during the Idul Fitri, can only be found under batin.

I have just discussed a few details of the more than 90,000 very informative entries, thereby also complying with the wish, expressed in the Preface by the Chief Editor of the Fourth Edition, Dendy Sugono, to provide some criticism. Sugono notes that "nothing is perfect" ("tak ada sesuatu yang sempurna"). Having said that, I fully endorse his wish that the publication of this dictionary, which I think is a great achievement in itself, may bring great benefit to the Indonesian people; and, if I may add, to foreign students of Indonesian as well.

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