

A hidden language –Dutch in Indonesia

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October 28, 1988, was a memorable day in the life of the Republik Indonesia: it was another *Hari Sumpah Pemuda*, another ‘Day of the Youth Pledge’, in memory of a pledge, taken by Indonesian youths in 1928, the late colonial days. It had allegedly been commemorated all over Indonesia, from Sabang to Merauke, every year since Independence¹.

In 1988 the *Hari Sumpah Pemuda* was a somewhat special one: the Pledge had been made sixty years ago, a rather round number, that is. National and regional newspapers – all of them in Indonesian - spent attention to it in their pages, as they did every year. In the playground of schools everywhere in the Archipelago uniformed children stood in line, saluting the flag, singing the national anthem and listening to the recital of the Youth Pledge by an ‘exemplary student’, as they did every year. Similar rituals were performed by officials in government offices. In many schools, students were asked to write an essay about the Pledge, its makers, its meaning for young Indonesians now. So far, so normal. So far, so traditional. But then, in Jakarta, the undisputed point of calibration in the Republik, some special activities were organized around the commemoration. A national congress was held where scholars, artists and community leaders from all over the Archipelago as well as some foreigners gave presentations about language, culture and literature, very closely connected topics in discussions about the national culture of Indonesia until this very day. The minister of Education and Culture opened the first meeting of the congress with a speech; not hard to guess in the totalitarian days of the New Order, he pictured the Pledge as a proof of the force of Indonesian nationalism, so adequately reflected in the state ideology of Panca Sila, the key for the National Construction. Ideology and rhetoric ask for symmetry, and His Excellency’s speech was centered on the sharply phrased text of the 1928 Pledge:

Kami putra-putri Indonesia mengaku bertanah air satu, tanah air Indonesia

Kami putra-putri Indonesia mengaku berbangsa satu, bangsa Indonesia

Kami putra-putri Indonesia mengaku berbahasa satu, bahasa Indonesia

(we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one homeland, the Indonesian homeland)

(we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one nation, the Indonesian nation)

(we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one language, the Indonesian language)

At the congress a new official Indonesian dictionary was launched, entitled ‘Large Dictionary of Indonesian’², together with a new official grammar for Indonesian,

¹ The date and year of Indonesia’s independence differ: for Indonesian nationalists 17 August 1945 is the Day of Independence – and this day is annually commemorated, for Dutch politicians it should be 27 December 1949 when the so-called ‘transfer of sovereignty’ was formally signed in Amsterdam.

² *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, a joint publication of the Ministry of Education and culture and the official publishing house of Balai Pustaka.

‘Standard Grammar of Indonesian’³ – and in the late afternoon special bounded copies of the two books were presented to President Suharto during a very formal reception in the palace, which was nation-wide televised in the evening news as the most prominent event of a day in the world. Newspapers and journals had more to write about than usual, in short: some congress papers were discussed, some participants interviewed about the meaning of the Pledge, about the meaning of having a national language. And the newly published dictionary and the grammar were hailed as great achievements that proved, once again, the power and energy of Indonesian. All Indonesians should be proud of *bahasa Indonesia*. All Indonesian should be proud of these two national monuments, the products of a long-standing project. They showed that Indonesia deserved a place in the world of nations

That is the surface. Those were appearances.

Here and there grumblings and murmurs could be heard and read, raising questions about the memorability and the ‘real meaning’ of the Pledge; about the growing authority of Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*) and its complement, the growing marginalization of regional languages; about the virulence with which the national language had spread over the country; and about the government’s drive for its standardization which was strangling linguistic creativity, reminiscent of the way the monolithic ideology of the Panca Sila was enforced upon Indonesian society. Yes, the Republik needed so-called ‘national days’ at which some event or some person was commemorated in order to confirm the nation’s unity. Or did they serve to strengthen the state’s unity? Or did it both at once? State or nation, a lot of things were wrong with the Republik Indonesia, and the Pledge was a symptom of everything that was wrong. It was made too prominent an element in the indoctrination and propaganda machine of Suharto’s New Order. It had been but a little ripple in the ocean of the Indonesian Revolution. And perhaps events such as the communist-inspired rebellions that had taken place some years before the *Sumpah Pemuda* or the foundation of the Partai Nasional Indonesia in 1927 by Ir. Soekarno in Bandoeng were more important fragments in the national order of things and, hence, more worthy of commemoration. Or perhaps the foundation of the Indische Partij in 1913, the first political association in the Dutch Indies that had brought the possibility of Independence for the Dutch Indies into public discussion. And who were the people who had made the Pledge anyway? Did they have the right to call themselves *Pemoeda*, Youth? Were they true and sincere freedom fighters, like the *pemuda*’s in the Indonesian Revolution of 1945?

Its relevance praised, its importance questioned, in the 1990s the *Sumpah Pemuda* was to remain the central point of a national day – and its creation and subsequent life could serve as a leading theme in a narrative about Indonesian politics, and about Indonesian language politics in particular⁴.

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³ *Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia*. (The publication has a preface of the Minister of Education and Culture in which he writes, among other things: ‘Indonesian should have a standard grammar because Indonesian is a general language and a national language that lives and develops parallel with the life of Indonesian nationalism’)

⁴ see Keith Foulcher, ‘Sumpah Pemuda: the making and meaning of a symbol of Indonesian nationhood’, in *Asian Studies Review*, 24,3: 377-410 (2000)

In October and November 1928, the Malay newspapers in Batavia⁵ had given considerable prominence to the events in which the Pledge was embedded, the Second Meeting of Indonesian Youth (*Kerapatan Pemoeda2 Indonesia*⁶), but it is not easy to make sense of their reports. The Dutch Indies administration was developing shrewdly inconsistent forms of censorship and repression, following a zigzagging path in its efforts to keep publications about nationalism and independence, discussions about racism and colonialism under control, and the editors and journalists of Malay periodicals were fully aware of the complicated conflict of interests that were being played out. As a rule, the conversations and demonstrations in Dutch were less cautiously monitored than those in Malay – those who used Dutch were in principle part of the elite, the administration reasoned, and ultimately the elite should be rational and sensible enough to know whose side they were on. It was becoming increasingly more difficult and urgent, however, to follow Malay words and activities. In Dutch eyes, Malay was a language that did not have a culture; basically it was just a confusing and disorderly group of dialects - maybe precisely because it did not have a culture, because it was so confused, the reach of the growing number of speeches and publications in Malay was hard to fathom. What did they ‘really’ mean? What did they really refer to? Did they not evoke a new world that should be destroyed before it came into being, forgotten before it could be memorized? And as so often in political life, zigzagging easily leads to violence and repression: a number of political leaders and activists were sent into exile or imprisonment in the margins of the Archipelago, others fled the Dutch Indies, and those who remained free had to be on their guard in order not to be hit. Newspaper editors knew that their publications could be banned, their papers closed. Inlanders with a loud mouth were aware they were running the risk of being monitored, warned or worse. Thus the 1930s could be characterized. And the Malay newspapers that appeared in those years were hard to read.

The Second Meeting of Indonesian Youth was convened in Batavia 27-28 October, 1928, by a number of youth organizations – Jong Sumatra, Jong Java, Jong Islamieten Bond, Jong Ambon, Jong Batak - and local periodicals covered the proceedings (speeches and discussions) in report-like narratives, each with a different emphasis and with different heroes, all of them rather low-key and cautious. The confidential report of the Dutch observer, van der Plas, who attended the meeting, did not show any sign of the meeting’s anxiety and excitement either, if only because he preferred to write in a tone of derogatory amusement: these were hardly more than a group of firebrands who liked to perform a theatre play. Reading reports and narratives together, it is hard to develop a clear and comprehensive picture of the meetings during those two days. Photographs – in the days of the nationalist movement perhaps the most incisive tool for getting a feel of the relationships and emotions among people – are rare, the most famous one being the

⁵ Batavia is the name of the administrative and political center of the Dutch Indies, located on the island of Java, the central island in the colony, in terms of population, economy, and politics. In the 1920s other names, e.g. Jacatra and Djakarta were used by those who were striving for Independence. Djakarta (later: Jakarta) is the universally accepted name for the capital of the Republik Indonesia since 1949.

⁶ Later the Dutch word *Congres* was used with reference to this meeting (*kerapatan*); later the Resolution (*keputusan*) was made the Pledge (*soempah/sumpah*)

inevitable group picture: a number of conference's participants (males, all of them)⁷ are looking into the camera, most of them dressed up like Dutch gentlemen in the tropics, some of them like palace servants from Yogyakarta, and only some of them with the black cap on their hair, which was to become the symbol of Indonesian nationalism, once Soekarno, the charismatic leader, began to use it.

Not clear, for instance, are the participants' reactions to the way Soegondo Djojopoespito chaired the meetings⁸, and not clear either are, for instance, the reactions on what seems to have been the most important speech, performed by Mohammad Jamin, prominent member of Jong Sumatra, entitled 'Unification and Nationalism of Indonesia' (*Persatoean dan Kebangsaan Indonesia*) Unclear, too, is how Jamin read his text - a complete text was later published in the journal *Persatoean Indonesia* - in front of an audience, which may have become somewhat restless with his lengthy performance. And it could be questioned if the text was effectively and consistently performed in the language in which it was published: the Malay follows textbook grammars, its tone is very scholarly and detached. Did Jamin, a good speaker, not interlard his Malay with Dutch or even Minangkabau sentences and phrases? Was he not interrupted by participants who tried to change his monologue into a multiple dialogue, in the way the greatest orator of all time, Soekarno, would have operated? Many conversations and discussions in the Congress, the newspapers told their readers, were in Dutch. That should not come as a surprise: the youth that came together in Batavia to discuss past, present and future were Dutch educated and used Dutch as their language of communication about public issues. Their social status was an unclear one.

The *Kerapatan Pemuda* was one of the numerous meetings – congresses, conferences, rallies, gatherings - that 'inlanders'⁹ were organizing in the 1920s, and a feel of obligatoriness and tiredness hangs over the local newspapers' reports of the proceedings and events in Batavia in those late October days of 1928, perhaps because of routine, because of caution. Mention is made of 'lively discussions', of 'postponing the discussions to the next day'. The names of well-known people present are given as well as summaries of the speeches they gave and the discussions they were engaged in. There is also mention of a Dutch policeman who called those present to order when he heard the word *merdeka!* (freedom), and some speakers – there were men and women - are described as looking at him during their speech, short sentences that could remind readers but of colonial intimidation. Still, the subalterns did occasionally speak up, and occasionally the newspaper reports are candid enough to make readers wonder if there was perhaps some censorship involved – and they knew there was.

⁷ Most Malay newspapers make mention of some 1000 participants on the first day; some suggest that that number dwindled on the second day.

⁸ Van der Plas writes of the chairman's clumsiness, the result of his linguistic confusion, one newspaper describes his respect for the Dutch policeman present, apparently the result of the fact that he was summoned to appear in the police station on the Meeting's second morning. Soegondo, by the way, was the husband of Soewarsih Djojopoespito, whose *Buiten het Gareel* (Amsterdam, 1936) is the only pre-war Dutch novel written by a 'native'. *Buiten het Gareel* is a report-like strongly autobiographical description of the life of Indonesian intellectuals in the 1930ies on Java, and one of its many intriguing elements is the fact that they are pictured as having their conversations in Dutch and making painful efforts to be taken seriously by the Dutch masters.

⁹ A Dutch word referring to the 'natives' who, they themselves, transformed it into the mysterious, ungrammatical *boemipoetera*, and later in *orang Indonesia*.

Embedded in these repetitive reports, there were of course some striking novelties, as is the case in every repetition. There is, for instance, mention of confusion in which language the participants should speak and did speak: Dutch or Malay, or perhaps Javanese or Minangkabau. There is mention of an rude exchange of words between Jamin and the theosophist ‘Mr Rasid who shortly proposed the Congress should merge with the Dienaren van Indie (an association that smells like theosophy) because that Association is very strong indeed’. Perhaps the greatest novelty was the fact that in the meeting of the second day the composer Rudolf Supratman played a melody on his violin; only after loud applause and exhortations he recited the text, ‘Indonesia, my homeland’, as well, and under more roaring applause he proposed to make it the ‘national anthem of Indonesia’; the following year the proposal was unanimously accepted by Partai Nasional Indonesia, even though many leaders thought it too Western, not native enough. Supratman’s performance was to make the Meeting memorable with his music. And of course almost all newspapers make more or less prominent mention of the resolution (*keputusan*), unanimously accepted without discussion, in which those present, sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledged the idea of Indonesian unity. The text of the resolution was published in several periodicals¹⁰.

Kami poetra dan poetri Indonesia mengakoe bertoempah darah jang satoe, tanah Indonesia

Kami poetra dan poetri Indonesia mengakoe berbangsa jang satoe, bangsa Indonesia

Kami poetra dan poetri Indonesia mendjoendjoeng bahasa persatoean, bahasa Indonesia.

(We sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one place of birth, the Indonesian land

We sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one nation, the Indonesian nation

We sons and daughters of Indonesia revere the language of unity, the Indonesian language)

The resolution consists of three sentences. It is a short text. Such declaration-like short texts are often composed on the spur of the moment, and apparently, this was also the case with this particular ‘resolution’¹¹. Somehow, they tend to be worded in a way that could be called ‘deep’ or ‘thick’ or ‘open’, offering space to a wild variety of readings and interpretations that could but easily lead to subsequent corrections or amendments – and thus they easily become new texts that play a more or less prominent role in the invention of tradition¹². Short texts tend to have an aura of being utopian, conjuring up unfulfilled dreams, asking for implementation in real life. What was a ‘nation’, a *bangsa*? And what did ‘land’, *tanah* refer to? And what was ‘the Indonesian language’?

In retrospect, the resolution could be called a local interpretation – or a creative transposition, for that matter - of Renan’s famous 1882 lecture ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, and such an interpretation is not only based on the fact that a Malay translation of the text was circulating among students in Batavia, Jamin among them, giving

¹⁰ The translations are necessarily provisional.

¹¹ See e.g. Hans van Miert, *Een koel hoofd en een warm hart* (1995).

¹² Twentieth century history of Indonesia could be written around these short documents: the 1928 Resolution, the 1945 Declaration of Independence, the 1966 Supersemar, all of them written in Indonesian. Their originals are considered sacred, and of course it is not clear if they have been preserved. Of the three the Resolution of the Indonesian Youth is the best documented example of how a text can be corrected and amended, witness the text that had become national property in the 1980s.

materials for many discussions and polemics. ‘A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent. The desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form¹³’. The inspiration of Renan can also be deduced from the fact that he is the only writer Jamin explicitly refers to in his speech, in a quotation that reads like a creative transposition of Renan’s words: ‘Our love is growing. Of course our love for the house that we ourselves built is even greater, the house, that is, that we will leave to our descendants as a sacred heritage’. (Jamin 1928:147).

In Renan’s spirit, on Jamin’s instigation, the Meeting decided that the existence of Indonesia was inspired by the desire (*kemaoean*) to be together, and that youth was bound to play a prominent role in implementing this role. ‘ For us, youth of Indonesia, the unity of Indonesia is not a matter of belief, belief or disbelief. The unity of Indonesia is a matter of flesh and blood for each and all of us, a matter of emotions that keep our bones alive. If we want it or not, we all belong to the Indonesian nation, and if we want it or not, in our bodies streams Indonesian blood’. Indonesia had always been one country and one nation, Jamin argued, and its inhabitants were already pervaded by one language – and in the future this would be made visible thanks to the youth’s desire. The ‘Indonesian land’ remained unspecified, and so did the ‘Indonesian nation’.

The question which language was this ‘language of Indonesia’ remains unanswered too, and that was another shrewd move: language had been a sensitive issue since the idea of an independent state, later called ‘Indonesia’, had become a topic of public debate in the Dutch Indies in the 1910s in the wake of the Malay slogans, phrases and rallies that had been launched by the Indische Partij, Muslim associations, trade unions, and the Communist Party. However, everyone knew that it was to be Malay¹⁴, the language that for several decades had been the most used language in government offices and had been made the most common language in colonial educational efforts since the nineteenth century.

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¹³ The text continues: The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory, this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present., . (-) One loves in proportion to the sacrifices to which one has consented, and in proportion to the ills that one has suffered. One loves the house that one has built and that one has handed down. (..) A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feelings of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past, it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life’ (Renan 1990:19). Renan’s text was to play a dominating role in the nationalist discussions in the thirties; his emphatic rejection of religion, race, language and geography and tribal identities as steering features in nation building echoed in many speeches and conversations about the Indonesian nation.

¹⁴ Jamin, the author of the Resolution, included; at the first Congress: ‘I am convinced that Malay is going to be the language of conversation and unity for all Indonesian, and the Indonesian culture of the future will be expressed in this language’

The original text of the Resolution, soon renamed Pledge, could be contextualized and of course the second Meeting is the most self-evident context, which could be extended to the first Meeting¹⁵, and – a short cut - to the cultural policies of the Dutch Indies administration. Present at the conference were people who preferred to speak Dutch among themselves but had another language for their so-called mother tongue: Javanese, Minangkabau, Toba Batak, Mandailing, Acehese, Balinese – the colonial masters had counted at least three hundred fifty language in the Dutch Indies¹⁶. Living in the big cities of Java, far away from their homeland, and entertaining contacts with people of every possible walk of life and origin, they felt they had moved away from their land of origin, their homes, and they were looking for new roots and origins which, they thought, Dutch should give them, the language that had the aura of secrecy and sacredness.

Dutch was the language they had learnt at school: these were well-educated inlanders, most of them of good families, trimmed for positions in the administration and business in the Dutch Indies, so as to serve as mediators between Dutch masters and local subjects – and never they would have leading positions, which were only for Europeans, or rather: for white people, as the Dutch Indies was becoming a racially divided society, in which the ‘inlanders’ were told to remain in the margins of power and authority.

The Indies has often been described as a project: it was managed and developed by a relatively small group of Dutch technocrats, military, engineers and businessmen who had been given the task to transform the islands into a prosperous and harmonious society. The Indies as a project: ‘set up, developed, implemented and empowered by the Dutch, only the Dutch could complete this transformation. Indonesians who wanted to loyally cooperate in this project were welcome, but opposition was not tolerated as it could endanger the completion of the project’.)¹⁷ The language policy was one of the many elements in this colonial project – in tune with the administration’s constant reformulation of its targets and aims, also in the field of language planning conclusive decisions were made that were sooner or later subverted and replaced by new rules and regulations. In the ongoing discussions about language, some themes were to emerge again and again: Malay should be stimulated as the language of administration and education, other native languages should be taken to be less important, Malay needed a standard, and the knowledge of Dutch among inlanders should remain restricted. And when the Dutch Indies came to a violent end, Dutch was sent into hiding.

¹⁵ Where Muhammad Jamin had performed the most important speech as well, in Dutch this time: ‘The history of the present is: the road to a deeper and wider nationalism, a road not only to independence, but also to a more lofty target – a higher level of culture so that Indonesia can make a contribution to the world a very valuable very beautiful gift, in accordance with our honor’.

¹⁶ Depending on the definition of a ‘language’, it could easily be argued that there are many more languages within the borders of the Dutch Indies territory and now Indonesia. They are usually referred to as ‘regional languages’, a strangely marginalizing term

¹⁷ J.A.A. van Doorn *De laatste eeuw van Indie – ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project* (Amsterdam 1994:102) And van Doorn added some sentences by Paul van ‘t Veer: ‘The Netherlands did not want to repress but develop. So: the Indonesian should stop playing the role of the repressed - and whoever stuck to this role of the repressed , could not be trusted. He was deceived or he deceived others...’

There are always previous beginnings: forms of Malay had been very common not only in what the masters were to call ‘the Malay world’ – the areas around the Strait of Malacca, with Riau as its center¹⁸ – but also in the urban areas in the nineteenth century and before – and Malay had been the language that had been used by local people in their contacts with other locals since time immemorial, that is, even long before Europeans had reached the Islands. Malay was shared, so to speak, by a wide variety of people on the islands, and in many variations and forms it could be resorted to in the exchange of information, in trade, in conveying religion, anxiety and political ideas; in the process a network of shared words and notions was shaped that, no matter how brittle and heterogeneous, was strong enough to be called elements of Malay culture.

As is so often the case with languages and the cultures they are assumed to formulate and implement, self-proclaimed outsiders had extensive discussions about the essence of the Malay language and the reality of Malay culture; spoken and written by people with authority and aura, their words then intervened in the daily life of the ‘insiders’, those who used Malay without being aware of it, driven, that is, by particular memories¹⁹.

The idea that there were basically two distinct forms of Malay had firmly taken root in administrative thinking the nineteenth century: on the one hand, there was the Malay that was used in Riau and the east coast of Sumatra²⁰, on the other side (both geographically and culturally) there was the Malay that was being used elsewhere. That assumption was based on the belief that every culture should have a language (and the other way around) and that those people who knew a language next to their ‘own’ language could not make part of the culture that was supported in their so-called second language. In Riau and Sumatra lived the Malay nation which had, of necessity, used Malay as their language – a strange but necessary tautology – and elsewhere lived other nations and groups who had other languages and occasionally used Malay in their contacts with each other and with outsiders from far away.

The Dutch colonial project operated on, among other assumptions, this uneasy distinction between Malay as a ‘language of culture’ – used in the Riau archipelago – and Malay as a ‘language of communication’ – used elsewhere; this distinction was to have far-reaching consequences in colonial life, if only because in government circles and beyond heated conversations were held on the advisability to make the two converge. Dutch administrators found forms of Malay wherever they projected to transform local communities, and therefore they concluded that Malay could very well be used in its day-to-day contacts with the ‘natives’: it was thought to be an easy language²¹ - and given its

¹⁸ It is telling that the Malay translation of the term – *Alam Melayu* – did not come into use until much later and now has become of central relevance for the inhabitants of the Province of Riau: another example of the hidden power of Dutch

¹⁹ The word ‘language’ should refer to dictionaries and grammar books, the very sort of books Malay speaking people never made. “‘If you take away grammar and lexicon from a language, what is left?’ ‘Answer: everything’. (...) grammars and lexicons seemed beside the point, just things we do with languages, not things that are somehow within languages, not part of their being as languages’ (Becker 1995:4)

²⁰ Strangely enough, the Malay Peninsula, yet another area where Malay was used, does not play a prominent role in Dutch discussions of Malay; it was implicitly and vaguely seen as an extension of Riau, and the dynamics between the population of the two areas is hardly ever explored or even mentioned. .

²¹ In the last century of Dutch presence in the Archipelago, many Malay handbooks, grammars and readers were published for Dutch students that assured its readers that Malay was a very easy language and could

simplicity and apparent lack of a standard it was perhaps not even a language. The Dutch masters thought it was just gibberish, but, then, it was good to write and talk it and they were excited to share a language with their inferiors, not only to give commands, but also to have a conversation or two which could elevate these inlanders.

When the Dutch-led administration became denser, companies expanded, and authorities in Batavia began to think about expanding education for the ‘inlanders’ so as to engage them in bureaucracy and business life, the need to enforce a standard Malay became more urgently felt; the basis of this policy was laid down in the so-called Regulations of primary education for inlanders (*Reglement op het lager onderwijs voor Inlanders*, Weltevreden, 1872) in which it was stated that: ‘Malay will be taught following the rules and spelling of the pure Malay as commonly used on the Malay Peninsula and the Riau archipelago’ – and phrases with a similar message were to be repeated over and over again in the regulations that the government in Batavia circulated among its officials until the Japanese invasion. High Malay (*Melayu tinggi*) it is was called, in opposition with Low Malay (*Melajoe rendah*), but it was to take a long time until this High Malay effectively gained the authority of a standard, not only because the competition with low Malay was vehement and confusing, but also because other local languages had to be neutralized as possible alternatives, Dutch, Javanese and Sundanese (including their variants) among them²².

Concurrently, Dutch was made the language of relatively few natives²³ who had had the privilege of going to a Dutch language school, thanks to the status, wealth or prestige of their family (and rarely thanks to their intellectual capacities alone) – and not only Malay but also the use of Dutch was a frequent item in official and informal discussions: how intensively should Dutch be promoted among the natives, given the fact that Malay was made the primary language in educating inlanders, next to their regional languages? There was general agreement that Dutch should just sparsely be taught, and through the years a mixture of confusing and contradictory arguments have been brought up for this sparseness: it would be too expensive to teach Dutch to many ‘inlanders’; knowledge of Dutch would make subversive reading materials accessible to the native; Dutch was simply too difficult to learn; and why bother about spreading an unimportant and uninteresting language of a country that hardly had a culture? The arguments that have been brought up to promote the use of Malay were of equal importance to justify the ‘protection’ of Dutch: Malay already had a long tradition of being a language of communication in the archipelago; Malay was easy to learn, it was essentially a ‘democratic’ language in that it did not have a complicated system of words of respect; it was the language of Islam - and while inlanders should primarily be taught their ‘own’ languages so that they were better able to strengthen their own culture and close

be learnt in three or four weeks, enough to order the natives around and organize the administration.

Malay’s alleged simplicity was often brought up as an illustration of the inlanders’s lack of sophistication.

²² Siegel summarizes the Government’s anxiety in a wonderful phrase: ‘the circulation of language without authoritative control was a nightmare for Dutch authorities’ (Siegel 1997:45)

²³ Some sketchy numbers to illustrate this: in 1900 0.012%, i.e. 5000 of the 29 million inlanders knew Dutch, the European population being 75.000), in 1920 was this 0.12% (i.e. 60.000 of the total inlandse population of 48 million, 170.000 Europeans), in 1930 0.3 %, i.e. 188.000 of 59 million inlanders (240.000 Europeans), in 1940 1.1 %, i.e. 773.000 of 70 million (290.000 Europeans).(cf. Groeneboer 1993: 383, 392, 474)

themselves off from subversive influences from outside, Malay, closely related to most of them, seemed like a good, cheap and adequate alternative.

In the Indies, the discussions about languages were many and confused until the very end. Three publications that appeared before and after the Resolution of the Youth Congress in 1928 should serve as the hooks to summarize the issues and the solutions: a speech, a discussion, and an essay.

The speech that Suardhy Surya Ningrat gave on a Congress for Colonial Education in The Hague in 1916²⁴ was elegant one, inspired by a clear idea that, before long, was to take root in the Indies. It does not ask for much linguistic talent to learn the Malay language, Surnya Ningrat assured his audience, and 'Malay has been the language of communication between Europeans and inlanders and between inlanders in the various parts of Insulinde itself – and Malay will in the future be the appropriate language for the Indies as a whole'. Malay is not only an easier language than Javanese and Dutch. It was also a democratic language, according to the speaker, and this gave it an additional advantage over Javanese, by far the most used language in the Indies - and more and more Javanese, Suardhy himself included, were already beginning to use Malay, the language of freedom. And Dutch? Dutch could never become the language of the Indies: it was simply too difficult to learn, and it contained too many expressions and proverbs which inlanders would never understand, rooted as they were in a completely alien culture.

The discussion in 1916 between Westerveld, a Dutch teacher with socialistic leanings in Semarang, and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, a Javanese doctor with a great interest in the emancipation of the Javanese common man, could serve as a second hook. Westerveld argued that an educational policy that focuses on Dutch is fundamentally wrong – teaching Dutch to inlanders means that they lose contact with their own language and culture and are no longer able to show their people 'the way to emancipation and, ultimately, to independence' (sic). Education in their own indigenous languages is the key for emancipation, instead. Tjipto took the radically opposite stance: Javanese does no longer meet the requirements of the present day, unable and unwilling as it is to express modern ideas and convey scientific knowledge, and this hold for all languages in the Indies. Dutch is the solution for every problem of communication: it should be made the language of communication of the Indies, and if people argued that Dutch is so difficult: people in the Indies could make it easier and develop a distinct form of Indies Dutch.

Colonial language policy was formulated and reformulated again and again: who was to learn Malay? Who was to learn Dutch? What about the regional languages, Javanese included? Altogether, the colonial administration tried to follow a path in between: local languages, much Malay, little Dutch. In enforcing an ever-changing educational system upon the islands, it ignored the fact that inlanders were not only silent but also had wishes and desires, and that those who were deemed worthy of being taught Dutch used their

²⁴ The Indies were essentially a part of the Netherlands, and the mechanics of colonial policies in the Indies can not be understood without connecting them with discussions in the 'mother country'. Surya Ningrat spoke in Dutch: 'Welke plaats behooren bij het onderwijs in te nemen eensdeels de inheemsche talen, ook het Chinees en Arabisch, anderdeels het Nederlandsch?'. Surya Ningrat was sent to the Netherlands in 1913, accused of agitation and sedition against the colonial administration, the climax of which was his publication of a pamphlet in Dutch in which he tried to imagine himself to be a Dutchman (see e.g. Siegel 1997)

newly acquired knowledge of the world to speak out in Malay so as to reach more people than just the colonial masters.

In the 1910s, intellectuals, trade unionists and activists, began to play with Malay as the language to express new ideas and notions. For them, Malay was a liberating language; it could easily incorporate all sorts of words and terms and phrases that not only echoed Dutch notions but also opened the world to its speakers. Malay was the language in which Dutch ideas – Marxism, theosophy, Christianity, science – could be communicated with others, and in the writings and speeches of activists such as Mas Marco Kartodikromo, Tjokroaminoto, Hadji Misbach, and Semaoen a new and fantastic discourse took shape which, filled with utopian words and phrases, created a new corpus of recollection and memories about the future, the land of unfulfilled desires. For some years their words, playful, experimental, novel, could be freely published in all sorts of periodicals, but then the administration realized that the genius was out of the bottle but that it was perhaps not yet too late to keep it under control. That was a dream world, too.

The third hook is a long essay by Takdir Alsijahbana, published in 1933 in his own journal *Poedjangga Baroe*, entitled: *Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Persatoean* ('The language of Indonesia, the language of Unity'). It gives a summary of some relevant discussions about language in the Indies since 1880, echoes the Resolution of the Youth Congress, and then this:

These are the facts. In the largest part of the Dutch nation people have been shouting with a very loud voice and - in these days of crisis – they are shouting louder than ever before that the Government should reduce the opportunity for Indonesians to study Dutch. The number of HIS and Schakelschools – the most important educational institutions for the Indonesian people to study Dutch - should no longer be extended, but reduced, instead, because there are already too many of these schools now, given the cultural, economic and social situation in the society of our state. (..) Lately, this vision has been expressed tens of times in all sorts of newspapers and meetings.

On the other hand, in circles of the Indonesian nation this issue has taken another road. Indonesian intellectuals who move and lead a wide variety of movements in their nation have come to realize more and more that Dutch can only be tasted by a small part of the Indonesian people and because of it they would forever be very far away from the common man. By using the Dutch language, which they initially praised and revered, the movement would remain in a very small circle.

Inspired by the certainty that a movement can only achieve something large and lofty when a people as a whole stands behind it, they have been looking for a language which can be understood by as many people as possible. (..) People have to use a language of communication and unity that can reach the masses as widely and deeply as possible. Now the awareness is growing that the people of Indonesia, which consist of a variety of nations, branches and twigs, each with its own language, are only able to collect their force and energy when there is strong unity among these nation. That is how the need and desire to have a language which can comprise all inhabitants of the islands, almost as large as Europe, is becoming stronger and stronger, and can hardly be contained any more. (..) What is this Indonesian language? Indonesian is the language of communication that for ages has been growing slowly and steadily among the inhabitants of South Asia; after the rise of the movement of the awakening of the people of Indonesia at the beginning of the twentieth century it has been consciously lifted and revered as the language of unity. 'Consciously': I use that word here on purpose because, in my view, here lies the main difference between the language which is called Melayu in the past and Indonesia in the present. It can not be denied that Indonesian is a continuation, a perpetuation of Malay which gradually has taken the position of language of communication among the inhabitants of the archipelago but continuation, perpetuation or phase is different from a phase that is already completed because Indonesian is consciously recognized, used and taken care of as the language that connects and unites millions of people who live scattered over the islands between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.' (Takdir 1957: 30, 31, 35)

Dutch should be rejected by the natives, in short. No doubt many Dutch-speaking people in the Indies were as happy as the inlanders were excited about the idea, and G.W.J. Nieuwenhuis's passionate appeals to the Indies administration²⁵ that it should make a serious effort to create an adequate number of inlanders with a thorough knowledge of Dutch were bound to go unanswered. 'If eventually one million well-educated Indians speak and understand our language (that is to say 2% of the population), then Dutch books, Dutch works, Dutch ideas will keep their influence and Dutch products will find a market during the long period which will lead the colony to an independent nation', Nieuwenhuis wrote more than once: the Indies's economy should be strong and Dutch culture should keep a place in the country to serve the inlanders as the door to the world. And while the inlanders supported the latter image – Dutch could indeed offer access to the world – they also began to think more focused on the question of how to disseminate Malay (and literacy) among the population as the carrier of a national Indonesian culture. In the end, in 1941, it was estimated that only some 0.5% of the inlanders' population had a 'reasonable' knowledge of Dutch and that 8% was literate, most of them in Malay – and then the language was drowned in the wave of the Japanese invasion, together with the Dutch Indies administration. Dutch was banned as a public language, and for the time being, so it seems, Indonesian alias Malay was pushed as the national language by the Japanese; all sorts of activities were undertaken, partly on the model of the Dutch, to gain control over Malay – and many of the people who had been actively involved in the 1928 Meeting and had publicly expressed their support for the utopian Resolution (and the national anthem) were now actively engaged in developing the national language as members of all sorts of language committees, invited to develop plans of how to disseminate Indonesian so as to be able to engage the Indonesian people in the war effort. The disillusionment native activists and intellectuals soon began to feel about Japanese policies in the Indies was transformed in their dream of an independent Indonesia, with its own culture, its own language. And when the Japanese surrendered, the Constitution contained a sentence which summarized the linguistic developments in the first half of the twentieth century: 'The language of the State of Indonesia is Indonesian'.

The time of the Revolution 1945-1949 was the period when stunning forces were unleashed, the seeds of which had been sown by Pemoeda's as much as by the Dutch administration in the final decade of the Dutch Indies and in the 3 years of the Japanese period. The desire of the common man and woman to get a command of Indonesian was strong and sincere: everything was to be new and novel, and Indonesian was the symbol of this new world, and an Indonesian culture seemed to emerged as envisaged by Jamin in his 1928 speech. Dutch was placed on a back burner; the members of the elite used it to communicate with other members of the elite and to impress the others. In the revolutionary fervor no longer did it have the aura of sacredness – and it would never regain that aura, let alone the status of the window to the world. Indonesian should suffice.

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²⁵ Groeneboer 1993:388.

During the first years of independence the desire to construct a national culture was still so widely felt and shared that the idea of commemoration of special events was deemed unnecessary. ‘Now it is Hopplaa!!’ as the poet of the Revolution summarized his generation’s mood in 1945. It was as if an effort was made to forget about the colonial time which was summarized in some catchwords, so as to have more space to think of how to jump into the future. Only now and then, in passing, people referred to the *Congres Pemoeda* as a moment of great historical importance. But the times are always changing, and so did the mood. When the Republik Indonesia was on the edge of falling apart, the result of a civil war in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1956, the revolutionary fervor was slowly but steadily being strangled by economic problems, political infighting and mismanagement – and efforts were made to generate new fervor by way of instituting special ceremonies and rituals; on the initiative of President Sukarno and the Minister of Education and Culture, Muhammad Jamin, October 28 was made a day of national commemoration, and not Supratman’s first performance of the national anthem but the Congress’s Resolution was given the aura of being a monumental event in the history of Indonesia. October 28 was the day when the sons and daughters of Indonesia had given expression to their desire to be an independent country; the original formula was definitely rephrased into a symmetry: ‘one land, one nation, one language’ and the term Resolution – it sounded to administrative – was changed into Pledge, so much more dramatic, so much more memorable.

As it turned out, the creation of the Day of the Youth Pledge was one side of the coin. In 1957, the public use of Dutch was banned; Dutch language schools were closed, and the distribution of Dutch books and journals was stopped. Now Dutch was hidden in the ‘Indonesian land’, the ‘Indonesian nation’, the ‘Indonesian language’. And it was to be hidden until the present day – the annual commemoration of the Pledge was, above all, a reminder of the glory of *Bahasa Indonesia* and as such it found its place among an increasing number of other National Days of commemoration.

The fall of Sukarno and the rise of Suharto and his so-called New Order after the military take-over in 1965 were in many ways a break in the Indonesian Revolution; the commemoration of the *Sumpah Pemuda*, however, was not broken. If anything, this national day was made even more important, and a good illustration of the indoctrination and ideological brainwash that was still taking place could be found in a book of essays written by schoolchildren in 1977 about ‘their ideals’, – just a tiny element in an very totalizing effort. From Sabang to Merauke, the essays told the readers again and again, the Pledge was read aloud every week in the schoolyard, no doubt in the presence not only of all the students and teachers but also of the national banner, and occasionally a military. Suffice one quotation²⁶.

The youth of Indonesia played a prominent role in the struggle for Independence. They announced their determination and announced that the Indonesian nation, united in various associations such as Jong Java, Jong Sumatra, Jong Ambon, merged into one, and gave birth to the Youth Pledge on October 28 1928 in Jakarta. That was the time that the national anthem, Indonesia Raya, was made public, created by W.R. Supratman. As for the Youth Pledge, I recite it every Monday morning at a special ceremony, together with my friends of Basic School I and II. I am always the one who leads them. Full attention, in front of the teachers and fellow students I recite it with enthusiasm:

we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one homeland, the Indonesian homeland

²⁶ Tjita-tjitaku (Balai Pustaka: Jakarta 1977), pp. 8-9.

we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one nation, the Indonesian nation
we sons and daughters of Indonesia declare to be of one language, the Indonesian

Of course, here too the simplification of the Pledge's text is obvious – and it would be hard to determine if this was a matter of falsification or, rather, of estheticization. Obvious is the political and linguistic simplification: the text suggests that Indonesia has only one language, and if it does not, the performative power of every sentence, it should have only one. These are the very words that Suharto would use in 1988, perhaps prompted by one of the schoolchildren who had been to school in the late Sukarno time in which the simplification was already taking place or else by a student who had developed New Order ideals.

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Now what was this *Bahasa Indonesia* which the *Sumpah Pemuda* alias the Resolution of Indonesian Youth in 1928 conjured up as 'the language that is revered'? 'It is a form of Malay', those present at the 1928 Meeting would have answered on such a question, in elegant Dutch. And some people around Jamin would have hastened to add in equally flawless Dutch: 'But not really! It is a new language, with a new culture, opening the way to a new nation, which should comprise the territory of the Dutch Indies as a whole'. And another conversation would have started.

Censorship of political discussions became increasingly strict in the 1930 and for those who wanted to discuss matters of culture, language and literature rather than politics, labor unrest and economic mismanagement this repressive tolerance was like a blessing in disguise. For a complex of reasons, the Dutch masters hardly ever showed to have problems with discussions about cultural issues, and they may have made them more familiar with the idea of an Independent state. The blessing of a retrospect, it is possible to point at some exchanges and conversations that were more important than others in that they were later, in independent Indonesia, more often referred to in public demonstrations and textbooks. Spicy is the fact that many of these discussions were held in Dutch, the language of the native elite who did not shy away from meeting Dutch masters and converse with them about urgent matters in a near-gentleman-like manner. Still spicier is perhaps the fact that many of these youngsters would argue that they were talking about a new language, a novel culture, even though they fully knew that it was based on Malay, an already existent language. Spiciest was the inlanders's reticence about the fact that Dutch administrators had played an important role in the spread of Malay as a public language – and that Malay was in principle a Dutch creation. But then the native discussants would argue that making something new implies the act of forgetting, and that a performative act such as the *Soempah Pemoeda* inspired them to look forwards rather than backwards. The past should be forgotten, the present should be approached from the future.

In the discussions that developed in the 1930s in the shadow of the Resolution, it soon became clear that the Malay that was to become the *bahasa Indonesia* should in principle be close to the form of Malay that the Dutch linguist-administrator van Ophuijsen had developed, if not designed, in the beginning of the century. On the instigation of the Dutch Indies administration van Ophijsen had made a long journey to Riau and the so-called Malay Peninsula, that is to say: through the areas where allegedly the best and

purest Malay was used. The wordlist and grammar he constructed on his return in Batavia were, he claimed, based on the essence of the real Malay that he had found used around the Malacca Strait – and since the publication of his two books, the administration in Batavia tried to develop a more efficient strategy to make the numerous forms of Malay converge in this particular form of the language. Initially those efforts were with little concrete success²⁷ but in the late twenties, around the time of the Resolution, things seemed to change: Van Ophuijsen's creation became more visible and authoritative, as can be concluded from the Malay that Jamin used in his 1928 speech²⁸ as well as from the fact that some of those who were able to write in and about 'his' Malay were working for Balai Poestaka, a prestigious publishing house in Batavia that had been established by Dutch administrators to play a leading role in the publishing world of the Indies²⁹.

The ongoing interferences and interconnections between words, phrases and sentences – called 'linguaging' – make the description of a 'language' very complicated; a language is but the product, the summary of linguaging and as linguaging is infinite and indefinite, so is a language. The same holds for descriptions of a language that are of a sociolinguistic character: the idea of a clear and immaculate language is an ideal, a utopia that is not reflected in any way in the real world of daily conversations and polemics. At the most it seems possible to follow certain developments of and convergences between various forms of discourse, embedded in social developments. Malay still offers many problems for both a linguistic and a sociolinguistic description.

'Ophuijsen Malay' – the term is still used in Indonesia, and now sounds like a metaphor for old-fashioned but correct and elegant Indonesian, another term for 'high Malay' – is not only one of the numerous forms of Malay that have been distinguished³⁰ by outsiders and experts, it is also the product of very confusing activities of its name-giver. Van Ophuijsen – later he became a professor of Malay at Leiden University – claimed that the Malay he offered in his wordlist and his grammar book was a balanced and carefully crafted summary of the various forms of Malay that he had heard and read in the Malay world. However, Against the background of older linguistic publications about Riau and the Peninsula as well as with the ways Malay is now being used in those areas, this statement is a very unconvincing one, to put it mildly. Equally confusing is the fact that van Ophuijsen's Malay was distinctly different from the Malay that was used in writing at the time he did his research, compare for instance, the example sentences in his Grammar and Raja Ali Haji's *Tuhfat an-Nafis*, a book that had provisionally been completed around 1870 and was regarded to be one of the diamonds of contemporaneous Riau writing. Rather, it is older writing that counted for the Dutch master: linguists would say that van Ophuijsen Malay is primarily built on so-called older Malay texts such as the

²⁷ See, for instance, C.D. Grijns, 'Bahasa Indonesia avant la lettre in the 1920s' in *Papers in Austronesian Linguistics* No 1, 49-81 (1991).

²⁸ It is almost certain that Jamin and his friends learnt Malay from Sasrasoegonda's *Kitab jang menjatakan djalannja bahasa melajoe* (Batavia 1910), a grammar/textbook that is explicitly inspired by Malay grammars by Dutch scholars; in its turn it not only inspired Indonesian writers and speakers like Jamin but also Indonesian linguists like Takdir Alisjahbana and Muhammad Zain.

²⁹ There is irony in the fact that the 1988 Grammar of Indonesian was published by Balai Pustaka – but then irony may be the wrong word: in Suharto's New Order that publishing House had been revived by government assignments.

³⁰ Some self-proclaimed experts – who has the courage to make the claim of having a good knowledge of a language – would claim that Malay has at least 100 forms or dialects

seventeenth century *Silsilah as-Salatin (Sejarah Melayu)* which presents historical events in Malakka in a form that was still easily legible and understandable in the beginning of the twenty first century, and the eighteenth century *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, another text that is located in Malakka and was equally easily legible. The correspondences between these older texts and van Ophuijsen's grammar suggest that the latter Malay was primarily inspired by these older texts, and not by local dialect and variants.

This was the form of Malay Takdir Alisjahbana and his friends in Batavia were familiar with. They tried to apply it in their writings – and it was to take some time before this particular was recognized as the central feature in the efforts they undertook, first together with their Dutch masters, later by themselves, to make the numerous forms of Malay converge. Telling is the anger writers and intellectuals showed to have about Takdir's Malay during the famous Kongres Bahasa Indonesia in Surakarta, 1938; 'Dutch Malay' they called it: Malay words following a Dutch syntax, as easily to read for Dutch as for Dutchified Indonesians, and probably not yet as 'playful' as Suryaningrat had envisaged Malay to be in 1916. But then, the creation and acceptance of a standard is a tortuous and zigzagging project which, for better or worse, has to rely on politically motivated enforcement and support. In Indonesia the project was completed in 1988.

When Takdir Alisjahbana and his friends were given an almost free hand to develop a distinct standardized and canonized Indonesian during the Japanese period, they were practical enough to realize that van Ophuijsen's grammar and spelling book were an excellent basis for shaping the *bahasa Indonesia* which the Resolution of 1928 had conjured up and they wanted to create. And that is how a standard Indonesian came into being, represented in Takdir's *Tata bahasa Indonesia* ('Indonesian Grammar'). It was the most used and taught grammar book in the Republik Indonesia, until the arrival, in 1988, of the *Tatabahasa Baku Indonesia*, which in many ways continues the many echoes of Dutch descriptions of the Malay language that could be heard in Takdir's grammar.

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Dutch has disappeared from Indonesia, but for a very small group of people who either like to speak Dutch among themselves within the family for nostalgic reasons – the colonial days are slowly and painfully fading – or want to speak Dutch for business or scholarly reasons. The fate of Dutch in Indonesia is an unusual one: it would be hard to think of another colony where the language of the colonizers has so radically been erased. But then, perhaps terms such as disappearance and erasure are unfortunate ones. Rather, Dutch has been hidden by the inlanders, the natives, the Indonesians – and Dutch hid itself.

These are the facts, to quote Takdir Alisjahbana, one of the scholars who helped to hide the Dutch language by refusing to discuss it much longer or to acknowledge its presence in his own language, on his own land, in his own nation, obsessed as he was by the revolutionary fervor of creating a new language and a novel national culture.

Indonesian is based on a Dutch creation, so to speak. To put it in even more immediate terms: the basis of Indonesian was laid by Dutch scholars. Van Ophuijsen, working on the linguistic shoulders of students of Malay such as Gerth van Wijk and de Hollander rather than of those of Malay linguists, managed to formulate the principles of the grammar of Malay that was to find its climax in the 'Standard Grammar of Indonesian' in

1988. This was not only a matter of practical work in a more or less indirect cooperation between people in a scholarly genealogy – Takdir Alisjahbana wrote his grammar on the basis of van Ophuijsen, who wrote his grammar on the basis of Gerth van Wijk and Den Hollander - , but also in linguistic terms: until the present day, Indonesian linguists have not been able to escape the wordclass categorization (verbs, nouns, adjectives) and syntactical analysis which early twentieth century Dutch linguists introduced so as to systematize their very imaginary standard Malay, if only to realize that that systematization does not work: the study of Indonesian made a false start by working from wrong premises and wrong categories – and the textbooks of Indonesian are as confusing and inconsistent as the textbooks of Malay a hundred years ago. Not only grammar and syntax are inspired by Dutch models: roughly speaking 25% of the present day Indonesian vocabulary can be traced back to Dutch words, and many of them are the frequently used ones. Hidden is Dutch because no Indonesian speaker seems to be aware of such linguistic inspirations.

Also socio-linguistically speaking, Dutch has played a predominant role: the colonial administration gave a very conscious impetus to the use of Malay as the language of communication in the Indies and gave it preference over Dutch. As a result Malay was accepted as the most important language of the Indies by the natives themselves who incorporated many Dutch words in the process – and it could be wondered if the inlanders on their own had ever been able (or willing) to develop Malay into such a presence everywhere in the islands. It could also be wondered why the Dutch involvement in the stunning dissemination of Malay in the first part of the twentieth century has been hidden from the Indonesians themselves who are not very much aware of the colonial presence on their land in the past and show little interest in the colonial period of their nation beyond the skeleton of loose clichés.

It is hard to choose a metaphor to cover those loud silences. Dutch is certainly not a ghost or a specter in that it would be haunting *bahasa Indonesia* or Indonesian. It would be hard to assume that Dutch was simply forgotten as forgetting implies the possibility of a re-emergence in the shape of traumas and disjunctions. Somehow Dutch just disappeared. But now and then, suddenly it pops up again to remind Indonesian of its existence. In a discussion about language, for instance, or about an historical event. Perhaps we should simply say that Dutch has become a ‘dead language’, the language of archives, literature, laws and scientific treatises which together form a treasure-house that hardly anybody wants to enter - and slowly turns into dust. But even dust can sometimes be blown into the air again. And also a dead language may be very much alive.