Bilingualism and Linguistic Politics in Adonara, East Flores

Nancy Melissa Lutz
(Southern Illinois University)

Introduction

When I first began fieldwork on the island of Adonara in September 1980, I had initially planned to focus on ritual language, specifically the language of bridewealth negotiations and marriage exchange. When I arrived in Adonara, everyone I spoke with greed that this was a good research topic, as marriage was seen as the ‘social glue’ that held the society together. Data on ritual language, however, was nonforthcoming. Initially, this puzzled me, as the earlier experience of James Fox on the island of Roti, and of my contemporaries Janet Hoskins and Joel Kuipers on the island of Sumba, as well as Doug Lewis on the island of Flores, had shown that local peoples were only too happy to talk about ritual language, and indeed had often steered the researchers towards ritual language and away from their original research topics. Why was my experience, therefore, so different? Explanations were equally enigmatic. “Bahasa adat,” I was told, was (a) only for insiders, (b) only for men, (c) performed late at night when it was inappropriate for young women to be attending, or (d) just wasn’t being performed at the moment, as the appropriate ceremonies hadn’t come up. Certainly in the case of marriage negotiations, this was true: no one among the people I had met had any relatives who were in the process of nagi belis, or negotiating bridewealth, at the time. Perhaps the explanation which most successfully quieted my inquiries, though, was the pragmatic statement that I could not possibly learn bahasa adat until I had mastered conversational Lamaholot.

As time went on, and I dutifully worked on mastering Lamaholot, it became clear that something else was going on nevertheless. I attended many rituals, and heard a lot of formal speaking, but not always in bahasa adat. In fact, most public discourse was either in Indonesian or in conversational Lamaholot. And I realized that, to fully study ritual language in Adonara, I needed to attend not only to the stylized paired discourse of bahasa adat, but to all language forms which occurred in a ritual context.

In the article which originally inspired my interest in ritual language, James Fox notes that “for a Rotinese, the pleasure of life is talk — not simply an idle chatter that passes time, but the more formal taking of sides in endless dispute, argument, and repartee or the rivaling of one another in eloquent and balanced phrases on ceremonial occasions” (Fox 1989: 65). Bini, or Rotinese compositions in parallel verse, occur in “circumstances of formal social interaction”, including “greetings, farewells, petitions, courtship, negotiations, and all the ceremonies of Rotinese life” (Fox 1989: 74). These ritual language forms often combine elements from...
different Rotinese dialects, but, according to Fox, rarely mix Rotinese with Indonesian/Malay. “Ritual language,” notes Fox, remains remarkably impermeable to [Indonesian/] Malay” (Fox 1989: 81). Ceremonial occasions on Roti do occur, though, which combine Rotinese and Indonesian. Christian church services, for example, may consist of “readings from the Bible with translations in Rotinese, Malay songs, and long sermons, often in Malay, with long paraphrases in Rotinese, or interspersed Malay and Rotinese, or even a cacophony of two simultaneous sermons, with one preacher speaking Malay, the other translating in Rotinese” (Fox 1989: 70).

Of interest to me, in comparison to Adonara, is the willingness to intermix Rotinese and Indonesian/Malay in Christian church services in Roti, but not in other ceremonial contexts where *bini* would be appropriate. Local domain politics, in particular, seem integrally linked to domain dialects and to the appropriate formal speech forms there of. This occurs, moreover, despite the relative fluency of Rotinese speakers in Indonesian. The island of Roti was already certified as literate in Indonesian by the late 1950’s, and the use of *basa Kupang*, or Kupang Malay, had been common long before this time (Fox 1989: 69). Indonesian has long been readily available, therefore, as a resource for formal speaking. A key factor for not using Indonesian in formal speaking, however, may be linked to the continuing role (at least in the 1970’s) of traditional domains and their ritual-political leaders in Rotinese political speaking. “There exist at present [i.e. in the 1970’s],” notes Fox, “virtually the same local political domains as existed in 1656. These domains are afforded administrative existence within the bureaucratic structure of the Republic of Indonesia, their lords are acknowledged as administrative officials, and their courts retain jurisdiction over most civil disputes” (Fox 1989: 70). This political continuity, I would argue, may also encourage linguistic continuity, at least in the realm of political speaking. And this may contrast with other societies in the region, such as Adonara, where there has been less continuity in traditional political leadership and therefore less continuity as well in the forms of political speaking.

The island of Adonara

Adonara is a small island in the Solor Archipelago, located off the eastern tip of the island of Flores near the city of Larantuka. Together with the eastern end of Flores and the islands of Solor and Lembata, Adonara is part of the *kabupaten* (regency) of Flores Timur. The capital seat for this *kabupaten* is located in Larantuka. Adonara itself is divided into two subdistricts or *kecamatan*: Adonara Barat (West Adonara), with its *kecamatan* seat at Vure, across from Larantuka; and Adonara Timur (East Adonara), with its *kecamatan* seat at Waiwerang, on the south coast of Adonara.

Areatly, Adonara is quite small, with a total land area of 481 square kilometers. By the early 1980’s, though, its population was projected to reach about 80,000 (Wayong 1979), and this was in line with the population estimates I received from government officials in Adonara. (Accurate population figures for Adonara are difficult to calculate, due to the large extent of external labor migration.) Nevertheless, the figure of 80,000 gives a population density for Adonara of 166.3 persons per square kilometer. While such a population density would not be excessive in an agriculturally intensive area like Java, in a swidden-based savanna area like Adonara, it is ecologically catastrophic.

Traditional agricultural practices of corn, dry-rice, and cassava cultivation have increasingly given way to erosion and declining crop yields, and Adonarese farmers have increas-
ingly turned to cash crops like coconut (which is predominantly sold dried in the form of copra) and to external labor migration. In the early 1980’s, I calculated that approximately forty percent of Adonarese men between the ages of eighteen and sixty were away from their villages (usually working on coconut and oil palm plantations in Sabah, Malaysia) at any given point in time, and this figure continued to increase through the 1980’s. Indeed, combined with the increasing success of the government education system, by 1992, the number of Adonarese households which consisted only of women and young children, and increasingly only of older women, was striking. Even for young men who want to remain in Adonara, employment opportunities are limited, especially if their families do not own extensive amounts of land.

Bilingualism and language use

Ironically, one of the primary results of labor migration to Malaysia has been to increase the level of bilingualism and linguistic fluency in (Malay/) Indonesian. This is a somewhat different dynamic than the increase in bilingualism because of education, since most of the Sabah migrants are unskilled, semi-literate or illiterate peasants, whereas those persons who succeed in the Indonesian educational system, especially those graduating from high school and continuing on to post-secondary education, are usually the children of prosperous, high-ranking families or civil servants.

Labor migration, and also educational migration (since even the government high school, or SMA, is located off of the island of Adonara in Larantuka) also create extralocal experiences of transnationalism or transregionalism. Even for people still living in Adonara, the experience of translocality has been reinforced in the 1990’s by increasing access to multiple forms of national and international mass media, especially television.

The acceleration in communication technologies through the 1980’s was very evident to me over the course of several periods of fieldwork in Adonara. In 1980, when I first began fieldwork, a few teachers and civil servants had short-wave radios, but the only other available mass media were a few magazines or newspapers which people would bring in from outside, and the occasional film or video. Even cassette recorders were unusual in 1980, and many villagers were ambivalent about my tape-recording (and thus ‘documenting’ or making ‘permanent’) what they saw and preferred to see as evanescent speech events.

By 1985, many people, especially returning labor migrants, had cassette recorders, and ritual events like funerary wailing, ordinations, and government ceremonies were not only tape-recorded by local enthusiasts, but also broadcast over makeshift public address systems. Rather than being ambivalent about my academic interest in tape-recording and ‘documentation’, dokumentasi was all the rage, and villagers often chastized me for having a small tape-recorder, preferring me to use their giant boom-boxes. (This often worked to my research advantage, as local villagers would put their microphones much closer to the speakers or mourners than I ever would have dared, thus producing better recordings.). Televisions were limited, however, to a few families in Waiwerang, and reception was usually terrible. People would leave their televisions on with the sound down in the event that pictures might emerge from the more frequent static, but moments of good reception were few and far between.

By 1992, however, with the increase in extent and reliability of rural electrification, televisions were fairly common in Adonara, and satellite dishes had begun to spring up throughout the countryside. Villagers recounted how they had followed the Gulf War
every day on TV, with separate viewing groups for supporters of the United States and Saddam Hussein.

Adonarese viewers’ participation in the Gulf War through TV highlights their growing identification with global culture (see Lutz 1996), a fact which I believe has linguistic ramifications as well. While globally, the most common language of satellite television broadcasting is undoubtedly English, Adonarese viewers predominantly turn to Indonesian/Malay-language channels. They thus participate, through their viewing, in an Indonesian/Malay-language world, augmenting their perception, if not their usage, of Indonesian as an extralocal language of power.

As I have argued elsewhere (Lutz 1986), the Indonesian language and its Malay precursors in Adonara have historically been seen as languages of extralocal authority and state power. The use of Malay as a lingua franca along the coasts has a long historical precedent. As Metzner has noted, the Strait of Flores, which lies between the islands of Flores and Adonara, has “from time immemorial...been an important north-south trade route frequented by Malay seafarers” (Metzner 1982: 64), and Larantuka was an important stopping point and export port. Malay-speaking slavers also raided along the coasts of Adonara and Flores Timur, and in the 15th and 16th centuries, the region was considered a dependency of Ternate (Le Roux 1929: 14, note 2). The ‘kingdoms’ (kerajaan) of Flores Timur were externally-oriented coastal polities which were usually more strongly tied to other coastal polities than to their own interior peoples. To the villagers of the interior, therefore, Malay was seen as a language of external commerce and extralocal political affairs.

With the advent of Portuguese settlement in the region, Malay took on a new role as a colonial lingua franca, a role which was continued by the Dutch and the Japanese. Schools in the area, which were run by European Catholic missionaries, were also conducted in Malay. The use of Malay was mandated during the Japanese Occupation, when Japanese military and administrative personnel penetrated more forcefully into the region’s interior areas, conducting military patrols, demanding resources, and conscripting local men for forced labor projects. Malay/Indonesian in Adonara became a language of domination, and its impact in the island’s interior villages was felt more widely and deeply under the Japanese than it had been under the Dutch.

After Indonesian independence, Indonesian became the national language, but in remote areas like Adonara, it continued to be seen as a language of extralocal power and authority. Few national or local government administrators were actually from Adonara, and even village headmen (kepala desa) were increasingly picked from local figures known to be supporters of the central government. This policy was implemented even more strongly after 1965, and by the 1980’s, many local officials were former or present members of ABRI (the Indonesian Armed Forces).

Although bilingualism in Indonesian and Lamaholot (the local language of Flores Timur) has increased steadily in Adonara, even in the early 1990’s, Indonesian was only rarely the local-context language of choice. Adonarese villagers for the most part preferred to speak in Lamaholot, and would mainly use Indonesian when talking to outsiders or when in Indonesian-language contexts such as government offices, schools, Catholic churches, or Islamic mosques (where the personnel or officials in charge might also be outsiders to Adonara).

As noted above, and unlike the situation described for Roti, government officials in Adonara (at least in the 1980’s and early 1990’s) were only rarely traditional ritual-political lead-
ers. Speech events over which they presided, therefore, rarely used ritual language, or bahasa adat. While social events such as wedding receptions often interjected conversational Lamaholot into an Indonesian-language ceremonial frame, and religious events like ordinations had well-set precedents for incorporating Lamaholot texts in bahasa adat into the predominantly Indonesian-language Catholic liturgy, government-sponsored events like school graduations, national holiday commemorations, and village development contest (lomba desa) ceremonies were more purely Indonesian-language speech events.

Bahasa Protocol

The first such event that I witnessed in 1980, for example, was a ceremony in Waiwerang held in honor of the visit of the Provincial Head of Education and Culture from Kupang. Having just worked for a year at the Indonesian Consulate General in San Francisco, what struck me most about this ceremony was its ‘modularity’ and replicability (cf. Anderson 1991), the fact that this ceremony could have been held anywhere in Indonesia — in Jakarta, in Waiwerang, or at the Indonesian Consulate General in San Francisco — and would have been virtually identical in its language, its symbols, and its program.

The program consisted of a host of dignitaries, both local and visiting, high school youths in white skirts and trousers, flag raising, an enthusiastic rendition of Indonesia Raya (the national anthem), formal speeches, and ‘entertainment’ (hiburan) — in this case consisting of two ‘traditional’ dances, a female-performed harvest dance and a male-performed warfare dance. Neither of the dances, residents later told me, were performed any more, though one person noted that the warfare dance was sometimes performed before soccer matches. Nevertheless, they were seen to encapsulate a self-defined Adonarese identity of farmers and warriors, and the warfare dance especially was the high point of the entire ceremony. Linguistically, the ceremony was conducted entirely in Indonesian. The introductions, the speeches, and the commentaries on the performances were all conducted in formal standardized Indonesian. No attempts were made to incorporate Lamaholot, either through the adaptation of Lamaholot speaking styles or through the translation of sections of the speeches for members of the audience who did not speak Indonesian. The use of Indonesian placed the ceremony linguistically and ideologically in an Indonesian national context, creating a discourse on education and on culture that incorporated Adonara into the nation of Indonesia.

As Indonesian national discourse, the speeches were aimed at those members of the audience who understood Indonesian, members of the national speech community of Indonesia. Non-Indonesian speakers were also included, but in a more passive, subordinate way. For non-Indonesian speakers, the speeches were much like other forms of formalized ritual language — authoritative discourses whose meaning lay not in the intelligibility of their content, but in the power expressed by their speakers (cf. Asad 1979, Bloch 1977). It should also be noted, however, that this event was in many ways a ‘performance’ for the benefit of the central State. As well as an occasion to honor the visiting dignitaries, local officials were eager to show that their allegiances were ‘Indonesian’, and that they were fully conversant in the language and in the symbols of the Indonesian nation-state.

Mastery of bahasa protocol (‘protocol language’) is one way in which Adonarese government officials show their allegiance to, and identification with, the nation of Indonesia. Another ceremony, which I tape-recorded in 1985, distinctively shows this ritual/political
language genre. The occasion was a village development contest (lomba desa) evaluation conducted by the (N.T.T.) provincial-level evaluation team in the village of Kiwan’ona. As part of the evaluation, the village head (kepala desa) of Kiwan’ona delivered a formal report (laporan) summarizing village statistics and the efforts they had made towards village development. His speech was given in Indonesian (as was the entire evaluation process), in a very clipped, ‘military’ style (although he himself was not a member of ABRI, the Indonesian Armed Forces) while he stood rigidly erect, speaking into a stationary microphone in the community meeting hall (balai desa). As the following transcription shows, the first several minutes of his ‘report’ are consumed by elaborate introductions:

Laporan Kepala Desa Kiwan’ona
Report of the Village Head of Kiwan’ona

pada acara penilaian on the occasion of the evaluation of the
lomba desa tingkat Propinsi Provincial-level village competition for
Nusa Tenggara Timur
Nusa Tenggara Timur
pada tanggal 30 juni 1985: on June 30, 1985:

Yang terhormat Bapak Ketua tim penilai The honorable Head of the evaluation team
yang terhormat Ibu Ketua tim penggerak P.K.K. the honorable Head of the P.K.K. implementation team
yang terhormat Ketua tim penilai P.K.K. the honorable Head of the P.K.K. evaluation
yang terhormat Bapak Camat the honorable camat (subdistrict head) of
Adonara Timur, Adonara Timur (East Adonara),
yang terhormat Ketua tim penilai P.K.K. the honorable Head of the P.K.K. evaluation

Puji dan syukur kepada Praise and thanks be to
Tuhan yang Maha Esa the Almighty God
karena atas perkenannya... because it is at His pleasure...

Although the context of this speech was local (since it was held in the village of Kiwan’ona), it was national in its orientations, and its primary audience (in significance, if not in numbers) was the visiting provincial-level evaluation team. Thus, in the choice and genre of language that was used, this speech was ideologically as well as linguistically Indonesian.

At the time that this speech was given, this particular Village Head was extraordinarily popular in Kiwan’ona. A native of Kiwan’ona, he was fluent in Lamaholot as well as Indonesian, and he was very skilled in mediating the often conflicting demands of village and central State. An interesting example of his skills at mediation, in this case expressed linguistically (and, I believe, subconsciously), is shown in another speech which he gave, also in Kiwan’ona in the summer of 1985, which was also a formal laporan (‘report’). Here he was serving in his capacity as Kepala Desa at the opening of a formal dispute resolution session between Kiwan’ona and a neighboring village over an act of vandalism which had damaged two of Kiwan’ona’s signs. Elders from both villages were present, as were many residents of Kiwan’ona. The Village Head’s opening remarks on this occasion were as follows: (note: Lamaholot words are underlined)

\[
\text{Niti, uh...tenu’e lewo to’u kae} \\
\text{This, uh...elders of the village} \\
\text{wera’i suk’i pito kae} \\
\text{heads of the seven clan groups} \\
\text{lake belen} \\
\text{noble men} \\
\text{wae belen} \\
\text{noble women} \\
\text{seluruh lewotana} \text{the entire village} \\
\text{juga staf pemerintahan desa: and} \\
\text{the village government staff:} \\
\text{Bahwa hari senin remah} \text{Monday night} \\
\text{karena telori remah} \text{because it was three nights ago} \\
\text{mungkin kita bae toi’ero kae} \text{maybe we all know already} \\
\text{a na roi wa uli} \text{or} \\
\text{perhaps some don’t yet know} \\
\text{bahwa hari telori remah} \text{that three nights ago} \\
\text{ite - papan namatite lali} \text{our sign down there} \\
\text{no on Sepuluh Program P.K.K.} \text{along with the Ten P.K.K. Programs (sign)} \\
\text{na ‘anne raran to’u} \text{located there on the road} \\
\text{Jalan Asas Tunggal on Asas Tunggal Street} \\
\text{(praga’a) lalu..uh..ya..lalu data.} \text{and..uh..yeah..and was broken} \\
\text{Go Selasa pagi Tuesday morning I} \\
\text{Go dilaporkan I} \\
\text{I was told about} \\
\text{keadaan ini. this situation.} \\
\text{Go lodo periksa I} \\
\text{I went down to inspect} \\
\text{lalu go gere.} \text{then} \\
\text{I went back up.} \\
\text{Go membuat undangan and} \\
\text{I issued a summons} \\
\text{secara mendadak. immediately.}
Conflicts of discourse and authority

This speech is interesting both in its choices of language and in its choices of format. While it was stylistically a formal laporan (thus placing it within the realm of Indonesian-oriented political discourse), its cadence and paired structure conform closely to the stylizations of Lamaholot ritual speech. The first four lines, for example, are standard formulae for beginning a Lamaholot ritual text, and the paired structure continues even into the Indonesian-language portions of the speech. All deictics, moreover — references either to himself or to the immediacies of the village locality — are in Lamaholot, even when they are the only Lamaholot words in otherwise Indonesian language sentences. By combining the two languages and two formats, I would argue, the Village Head is garnering two legitimacies: Indonesian-oriented legitimacy as a government-appointed Village Head, and local legitimacy as a spokesperson for Kiwan’ona. Through his use of two languages and two oratorical styles, he is linguistically combining two political roles which in other contexts might be seen as opposed, and by his skillful combination, he accruing the authority and legitimacy of both roles. His linguistic combinations here are almost mandated by the ambiguities of his position as a relatively young man (in his 40’s) but Kepala Desa. As Village Head, he is the highest (Indonesian) government official in Kiwan’ona; as a relatively young man, however, in the adat world, he is still subordinate to the village elders. As a younger man without traditional ritual-political office, moreover, he has no right to preside over dispute resolutions conducted according to adat; for him to give an entirely Lamaholot ritual speech, therefore, would have been presumptuous on his part and insulting to the village elders. To stay strictly in his Indonesian government role as Kepala Desa, however, would have been to distance himself from the local context and to have denied his local ties and local identity. By combining the two formats and the two roles, therefore, he stayed within the bounds of his two authorities, speaking in his capacity as Kepala Desa but linguistically reinforcing his local ties and affiliations.

This ‘problem’, however, arose only because he was not also a traditional ritual-political leader. Unlike the situation in Roti, in Adonara, politics has bifurcated into ‘government’ and local arenas. Leaders in one arena are rarely also leaders in the other. Both linguistically and politically, therefore, this can lead to conflicts of discourse and authority. Interestingly, within the same dispute resolution session described above, these conflicts became audibly apparent. As the proceedings continued, different speakers from the two sides stated their cases. The elders from Kiwan’ona wanted to fine the vandalism according to adat; their arguments were entirely presented in traditional ritual speaking. The other village, however, who felt the adat fines were too weighty, wanted to take the matter to the Indonesian state police; their arguments, presented by younger men who were fluent in Indonesian, were entirely in Indonesian. Resolution of this issue was unfortunately not as fluid or congenial as the Kepala Desa’s bilingual prefaces; whatever the outcome in practice, however, the point to be made for this paper is that the performances themselves were linguistically iconic of the languages of politics in contemporary Adonara.

In Adonara today, extralocality and the power of the Indonesian state are increasingly felt at the village level. Because these dynamics are expressed linguistically as well as politically, bilingualism in Adonara has political ramifications. It is not yet possible in Adonara to speak Indonesian at the village level without denying one’s linguistic heritage; because of
the association of Indonesian with extralocal power and affiliation, moreover, to speak Indo-
nesian in Adonara is also to deny local roots and affiliations. Perhaps as the population be-
comes increasingly fluent in Indonesian, these dynamics will become less contentious; through the 1980s and 1990's, however, lan-
guage choice was still a vehicle for conflicting political stances and affiliations. Nevertheless, as the politics of languages change, so too will the languages of politics. From bahasa adat to bahasa protocol, ceremonial language forms in Adonara as throughout Nusa Tenggara Timur will continue to evolve, creating new and dynamic speech forms, like the speech given by Kiwan’ona’s Kepala Desa.

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