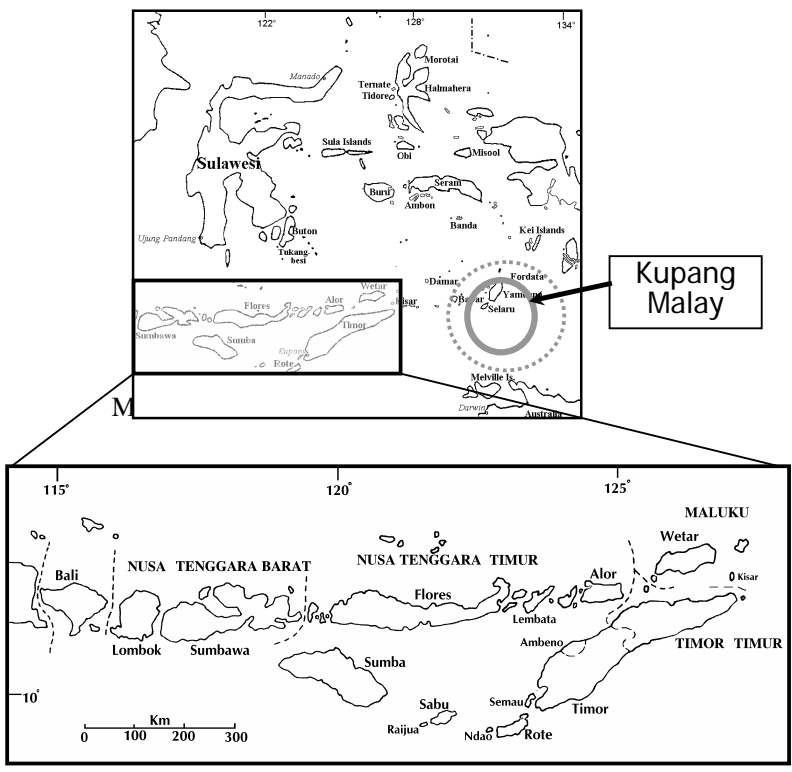# How *Bad* Indonesian becomes *Good* Kupang Malay: Articulating Regional Autonomy in West Timor

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When the governor of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) discusses *otonomi daerah* ('regional autonomy' — *otda*), his focus, like most *otda* discourse, is typically on political and economic processes (e.g. Tallo 2001). However, the ideology of *otda* is also helping legitimate a supposedly 'illegitimate' language spoken on West Timor in the provincial capital of Kupang. In this paper, I show how people in Kupang use Bahasa Kupang (also called *Malayu Kupang*, Kupang Malay) to express a level of identity that challenges conventional linkages between language and ethnicity in Indonesia. Bahasa Kupang is spoken practically everywhere in Kupang, but because this type of language belongs nowhere in the state's language ideology, it has often been considered to not even be a language, merely a deficient, substandard, lazy way of speaking the state-sanctioned form of Melayu labeled Bahasa Indonesia (C. Grimes 1996). But at the same time, people in Kupang have a sense of pride in speaking their variety of Melayu. Such varying opinions inevitably make Bahasa Kupang a controversial form of speech. I discuss a series of local debates that surround Bahasa Kupang which show that *otda* is not only addressing political and economic relations of domination between the centre and periphery in Indonesia, but is also enabling people to subtly challenge the domination associated with Bahasa Indonesia as the powerful, prestigious language of the state, and by implication, the only legitimate form of *Melayu* within the state.

Kupang
Malay

MALUKU

115°   120°   125°

NUSA TENGGARA BARAT   NUSA TENGGARA TIMUR   Wetar

Bali   Flores   Alor   Kisar

Lombok   Sumbawa   Lembata   Ambeno   TIMOR TIMUR

Sumba

Sabu   Semau   Timor

Raijua   Ndao   Rote

Km
0   100   200   300

10°

Research for this paper comes from my ten years of association with Kupang, where I have been involved in a variety of language related issues in NTT. While the debates I discuss are often items of everyday conversation in general Kupang society, these debates came into sharp focus during a four-day seminar sponsored by the NTT Department of Education and Culture in March 2003, entitled *Bahasa Ibu Peletak Dasar Perabadan Manusia dan Pendukungan Perkembangan Bahasa Indonesia* ("Mother Tongue as the Foundation of Human Civilization and Supporter of Indonesian Language Development").

Data for the paper also come from the linguistic work of Charles Grimes (1999a) and June Jacob (2001) and their combined work (2003, 2005). Jacob is a native speaker of Bahasa Kupang and a university lecturer in Kupang. She is a passionate promotor of Bahasa Kupang in education, striving to see her mother tongue gain "a legitimate place in the society of West Timor." She is also author and illustrator of delightful children's literature in Bahasa Kupang.

Bahasa Kupang: *What it is?*

In technical linguistic terminology, *Bahasa Kupang* is a Malay-based creole (C. Grimes, Therik, B.D. Grimes, Jacob, 1997, B.F. Grimes, 2000). Linguists speak of pidgins and creoles as 'new' languages that develop as the result of mutual linguistic accommodation in contact situations. When speakers of different languages attempt to communicate in situations such as trade, they often create a 'simplified' language, technically referred to as a *pidgin*, which may not be used beyond that initial contact situation. However, if the pidgin continues to be used to the point that it has established grammatical patterns, a wide vocabulary and children learn it as their first language then it is referred to as a *creole*. (Mühlhäusler 1986; Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Berry and Hudson 1997).

Malay-based creoles have developed in many contact situations in Indonesia such as in Kupang (Steinhauer 1983), Ambon (Clercq 1876; Collins 1974, 1980, 1981, 1983, Hoëvell 1876, B.D. Grimes 1991, Manuputty 1972), Larantuka (Kumanireng 1982). In this paper I also provide a comparative perspective with other creoles such as in Hawaii where Hawaii Creole English (called Pidgin locally) has developed with Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese and other elements, and in the Top End of Australia where another English-based creole (called Kriol locally) has developed with elements from Aboriginal languages.

In discussing Bahasa Kupang and other Malay-based creoles, it is important to stress that the *Melayu* that formed the basis of these creoles, not only pre-dated Bahasa Indonesia, but was also a different type of *Melayu* than the variety that became Bahasa Indonesia. Prentice (1978) and others (C. Grimes 1996a, b, Sneddon 2003) have pointed out that from a historical perspective, there were three basic types of Malay: (1) *mother tongue* (vernacular) Malays, (2) *lingua franca* (trade or inter-ethnic) Malays, and (3) *official language* (court, government, literary) Malays from the sultanates of Riau and Johore. The official language variety of Malay is the historical source for Bahasa Indonesia, whereas trade Malay was the historical source of Bahasa Kupang.

In simple terms, Bahasa Kupang can be described as *Melayu* that was brought to Timor by traders where it came to be used by a variety of groups speaking different languages as a lingua franca, or language of wider communication. As this *Melayu* became nativized (or Timor-ized) it became mixed with grammatical structures and a significant amount of vocabulary from local languages (particularly Rote, Sabu), as well as the colonial languages of Timor, Dutch, Portuguese, and even English (See J.Jacob and C.Grimes 2003).[1]

The development of Bahasa Kupang is intricately tied up with the history of trade and contact on Timor island and more specifically with Kupang town. Sandalwood was the major trade commodity sought in Timor by traders from places like Java and Malacca who came centuries before the Portuguese arrived in 1515. In 1613 the Dutch East Indies Company (*Veerenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* — VOC) established a presence near the bay of Kupang, reaching an agreement with the local Helong *Raja* to establish a fort, but it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that the VOC were able to control the region around Kupang, which they did by employing native mercenaries from Rote, Sabu, Kisar and Solor. The VOC rewarded each ethnic group with a portion of land around the fort at Kupang. The Rote people were granted the beach around Fort Concordia, the Sabu people given the beach to the east, the Solor people the beach directly beside that, and the Kisar people were given their own area as well (Fox 1991).

Later when the Dutch established a colonial presence in the Timor region, they encouraged the use of Melayu as an administrative language (James Siegel 1997). In 1916 there were

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[1] Lexical borrowing from local languages is far more prevalent in Kupang Malay than in Ambon Malay (J.Jacob and C.Grimes 2003).

3500 inhabitants in Kupang, 230 of whom were European, while more than 1000 were Chinese, Arab and other foreign 'Asiatics'. After independence, the number of Europeans declined, particularly Dutch missionaries and colonial officials. But in 1958 Kupang became the capital of NTT, becoming not only the center of administration and education, but also an important economic, religious and military center. This attracted people from all over NTT where around sixty different languages are spoken (C. Grimes et.al., 1997).

Thus, from its earliest beginnings, Kupang was an inter-ethnic 'polyglot town' (Fox, 1991:249) where a 'new' language developed from the Melayu lingua franca. Bahasa Kupang eventually became the first language of a new generation of Kupang children, including the first language of many resident Chinese. Today Kupang Malay has around 100,000 native speakers, with 200,000 second-language speakers in and around the city of Kupang (B.F. Grimes, 2000:510).

Utilizing Bahasa Kupang in daily life

Since Kupang is a polyglot city where many languages are spoken, it is not surprising to find that the different languages are used for different tasks. The phenomenon that different speech varieties commonly function in different roles in multilingual societies was described as diglossia by Ferguson in 1959. He considered the functions or situations calling for the 'High' (H) variety to be those which were "decidedly formal and guarded" while those calling for the 'Low' (L) to informal, homey and relaxed. Many studies on diglossia have followed Ferguson's, including the recognition that diglossia may involve more than two languages, but the basic point is still insightful in understanding just how Kupang operates as a 'polyglot' town.

Vernacular languages are heard regularly and frequently in Kupang, particularly in the neighborhood areas associated with specific ethnic groups. For inter-ethnic communication, however, Bahasa Kupang is used as a lingua franca, as it was in the past. But it is more than just a lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication. Today Bahasa Kupang is a creole language with native speakers who are increasing in number as more children are born or move to Kupang where they speak Bahasa Kupang as their first and primary language. Ethnically these children self-identify with a traditional ethnic group (e.g. Rote, Sabu, Timor, Alor, etc), but they do not necessarily speak that language, or may have only a passive knowledge of it.

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Since Bahasa Kupang is often the first language of children, but the second or third language of their parents, the issue of Bahasa Kupang in education is significant. A survey conducted among elementary school teachers regarding language use in Kupang (Jacob 2001) found that:

1. While teachers claim to use Indonesian when they teach in the classrooms, they acknowledge that they explain material by using both Indonesian and Kupang Malay. This overt acknowledgement of Bahasa Kupang as an explanatory language in education suggests a level of self-confidence among teachers that is quite interesting, given that fact that in 2001 Bahasa Kupang had no legitimate status as a language at all. Schiffman (1999:432) notes that in Madura, he found Bahasa Madura to also be an explanatory language of education. However, in Madura, this was not usually acknowledged in overt ways, given the hegemony of Bahasa Indonesia in education.

2. When students answer questions, they attempt to use Indonesian. However, when they talk to their schoolmates (in the classrooms and in the playground) they use Kupang Malay.

3. As soon as class is over, Indonesian is no longer used in the classroom. Both teachers and students communicate with one another in Kupang Malay in the classroom, indicating that the students are confident and do not feel guilty using Kupang Malay.Jacob also asked, "What is the role of Indonesian in the life of children of Kupang?"

4. Indonesian is a learned language, acquired as a second language in school. It is not the language of the home.

5. Indonesian is a language used in formal functions (government, education, and often church).

Jacob's observations resonate with Errington (1998) and many others who have commented on how Bahasa Indonesia is overtly related to the institutional infrastructure of the Indonesian state, and is the vehicle of state discourse and of typically top-down governmental policies. While Bahasa Indonesia is the official mode of communication of the government in Kupang, even in government offices it is limited to formal speeches and written communication.

When civil servants communicate with each other in the office, they frequently speak Bahasa Kupang, (unless interacting with 'outsiders').

Thus, even without formal recognition as a language, Bahasa Kupang is used vigorously and enthusiastically in the social life of Kupang. Local newspapers typically report news in Bahasa Indonesia, but in 1992 a local journalist, Paul Bolla, began to use Kupang Malay in a daily column called *Tapaleuk* meaning 'wander around with no specific purpose or goal'. The daring move to write and publish Bahasa Kupang and to provide a rich taste of local culture captured many people's attention. However, some objected to the column, claiming it was inappropriate to use an informal language in a formal written context. But Tapaleuk continued despite the objections and has remained popular for many years, describing not only Kupang life in Bahasa Kupang, but providing social commentary on the very news that is being reported in Bahasa Indonesia. The following sample of Tapaleuk headlines reflect this:

Pung nae harga lai….	(commenting on price rises)
Awas aksi pajak	(commenting on taxes)
Karisis moral	(commenting on moral crises)
BBM Na'ek	(commenting on price rises of fuel)
Ka-ka-eN	(commenting on corruption)
Tunggu paroyek	(commenting on project dependency)
Seok doi IDT	(commenting on government funding)
Sipil ato ABRI sama sa…	(commenting on military heavy-handedness)
Pajabat parakus	(commenting on corruption)
Reformasi cendana	(commenting on government sandalwood monopoly)
Jaringan Pencuri	(commenting on burglaries)

The use of Bahasa Kupang among contemporary school children is reflected in the following story written by one of the schoolteachers at the Dept. of Education and Culture seminar in March 2003:

Kotong Bakawan

Beta pung nama Legowo, ma dong pange sang beta, bilang Ook. Beta lahir di Kupang. Beta pung orang tua tu, orang Jawa. Be pung tamán, ampa orang; andia Udin, Richard, Bagus deng Edi. Udin pung papa-mama orang Ende; Richard orang Rote; Bagus orang Bali; deng Edi orang Sabu.

Beta sonde bisa basa Jawa; Udin sonde bisa basa Ende; Richard sonde bisa basa Rote; Bagus sonde bisa basa Bali; Edi ju sonde bisa basa Sabu. Kotong ba'omong pake basa Kupang sa.

Hari-hari kotong bamaen di SMU I. Kotong bamaen kalereng, gambar, deng bola kaki. Kalo su cape bamaen, kotong dudu-dudu maen gila di bawa pohong kadondong utan. Richard ana yang lucu, bekin kotong katawa sampe parú saki. Kotong bakawan, sonde parná bakalai.

We're Friends

My name is Legowo, but they call me Ook. I was born in Kupang. My parents are Javanese. I have four friends, who are: Udin, Richard, Bagus and Edi. Udin's parents are from Ende; Richard is [ethnically] from Rote; Bagus is Balinese; and Edi is from Sabu.

I can't speak Javanese; Udin can't speak Ende; Richard can't speak Rote, Bagus can't speak Balinese; and Edi can't speak Sabu. We just talk to each other using Bahasa Kupang.

Each day we play at school. We play marbles, draw, and play football. When we're tired playing, we sit and joke around. Richard tells funny stories and makes us laugh until our stomachs hurt. We're friends, we've never fought.

The debate: Is Bahasa Kupang a real language, or it is just bad Indonesian?

In a certain sense, it is to be expected that Bahasa Kupang would be held in low esteem as 'bad Indonesian'. Many creole languages are devalued and stigmatized, particularly creoles that are in contact with a related 'standard language'. For example, Hawaii Pidgin, in contrast to 'standard' American English, is seen as 'bad English'. Australian Kriol is 'rubbish language' in contrast to proper Australian English. Many more examples could be cited. Bahasa Kupang is no exception in being unfavorably compared with the standard Melayu of Bahasa Indonesia. Bahasa Kupang is called *bahasa pasar* ('market language'), *bahasa Indonesia yang rusak* ('broken Indonesian'), and is sometimes attributed to the laziness of Timorese in not wanting to speak Bahasa Indonesia 'properly'.

Compulsory education has been the major medium through which Bahasa Indonesia and the state's language ideology is taught all over Indonesia. As Errington (1998) points out,

"educational institutions are at the crux of the state's sociosymbolic power" and "the professoriate is its secular priesthood." It is not surprising that educators then feel highly obligated to promote and advance the use of 'proper' Indonesian. It is from this sense of obligation to the state's language ideology and the potential 'disunity' that local languages can bring (cf. Kuipers 1998, Alishabana 1976, Fishman 1978) that the title of the seminar on the use of mother tongues in education in NTT included the reminder that any discussion of mother tongues must also support the development of Bahasa Indonesia (*Bahasa Ibu Peletak Dasar Perabadan Manusia dan Pendukungan Perkembangan Bahasa Indonesia* ('Mother Tongue as the Foundation of Human Civilization and Supporter of Indonesian Language Development'). Before the seminar, out of obligation to their duties as high priests of Indonesian, schoolteachers and educators would typically express great scorn about BK as 'bad Indonesian' that needed to be eradicated.

However, many of these same educators speak Bahasa Kupang at home or with their friends, and it is often the first language of their children. When presented with the possibility that Bahasa Kupang might actually be a legitimate language, it did not take too much evidence for most to agree. Note the self-reported positive attitudes expressed in the Jacob survey (taken several years before the seminar). *Pos Kupang* newspaper reports of the seminar quoted the head of the Dept. of Education and Culture and his staff as eager to acknowledge the legitimacy of Bahasa Kupang and its role as the mother tongue of many children in Kabupaten Kupang.

Over the past few years, a legitimating of Bahasa Kupang has been slowly occurring at multiple levels in Kupang society. In addition to its recognition as the mother tongue of Kupang children at the Dept. of Education and Culture seminar, significant legitimating factors at a popular level have been the boldness of Paul Bolla in publishing Tapaleuk each day, and the use of Bahasa Kupang on radio chat shows. In academic circles, the proof of Bahasa Kupang legitimacy as a real language was its inclusion in scholarly lists of the world's languages (B.F. Grimes, 2000). Jacob's (2001a, 2001b) Master's in Applied Linguistics from Australia on Bahasa Kupang and subsequent papers presented in Kupang encouraged numerous students at universities in Kupang to write on Bahasa Kupang for their S1 theses. More recently a *Kamus Pengantar Bahasa Kupang* (Introductory Dictionary of Bahasa Kupang) has been published, (Jacob & C. Grimes, 2003), which is seen as further validating Bahasa Kupang as a language in its own right. At the religious level, portions of the Bible

have also been translated into Bahasa Kupang. It is also used increasingly on secular and religious radio stations.

Nevertheless, the debate over the legitimacy of Bahasa Kupang as a 'real' language continues. When government, military and police employees from other parts of Indonesia are posted to Kupang, they often express initialcontempt for the local lingo. However, as in other creole situations (such as Hawaii and Jamaica) outsiders must learn and use it in daily interaction or they will continue to be perceived by locals as outsiders. For locals, however, even if they wanted to disregard Bahasa Kupang, the frequency and strength of its use, and the fact that it is now the mother tongue of many children like Udin, Richard, and Edi, compels them to acknowledge that bahasa Kupang is something.

The debate: How can BK be a real language, if there is no space for it in the state's language ideology?

When the NTT Dept. of Education and Culture defined its seminar topic as *Bahasa Ibu Peletak Dasar Perabadan Manusia dan Pendukungan Perkembangan Bahasa Indonesia* (Mother Tongue as the Foundation of Human Civilization and Supporter of Indonesian Language Development) the term *bahasa ibu* ('mother tongue') was a carefully selected term, because of the difficulty of categorizing Bahasa Kupang. It was obvious that Bahasa Kupang is the mother tongue of children in Kupang, but there appeared to be an initial hesitation to give Bahasa Kupang any other label, because the state's educational policy recognizes only three kinds of languages:

> -*bahasa lokal* ('local language')
> -*bahasa nasional* ('national language')
> -*bahasa internasional* ('international language')

The national language and the international language in the Indonesian school system, are well defined as Bahasa Indonesia and English. However, the meaning of *bahasa lokal* is not well defined. Since 1994 the National Curriculum has allowed up to 20% of the curriculum to be developed locally. Responsibility was delegated to each provincial department to provide locally developed *muatan lokal* or *mulok* (local content) on topics such as natural resources, cultures and languages (DepDikBud, 1994). In areas like NTT, however, where there are over sixty local languages, the task of providing *mulok* in *bahasa lokal* is

overwhelming, and minimal implementation has actually happened. Even the foundation step of how to write these local languages appropriately is unclear to the untrained.

As educators discussed the Kupang language situation at the seminar, they easily came to a rather irrefutable conclusion that most children in Kupang speak Bahasa Kupang as their mother tongue. It was acknowledged that a simple political solution to address the lack of recognition of Bahasa Kupang in education was to declare Bahasa Kupang to be a *bahasa lokal*, so it could therefore be included in the local curriculum.[2] Defining Bahasa Kupang as a *bahasa lokal*, required an implicit rejection of the popular assumption in Indonesia that language is inherently linked to ethnicity. In NTT there was no question about the status of Bahasa Rote, Bahasa Sabu, or Bahasa Helong as *bahasa lokal* (or *bahasa daerah*), since histories and ethnic identities could be attached to those languages. Bahasa Kupang, however, is a language without a link to a single ethnic group. In Kupang it is everyone's language, but no one's cultural heritage. Regardless, the Dept of Education and Culture came to view Bahasa Kupang as a *bahasa lokal*, and thus provided it a place in the local curriculum.

The Pos Kupang news report of the Seminar from 11 March 2003:

> *Even though previously it was doubtful, the NTT Department of Education and Culture through its Regional Technical Implementation Unit for Language, has recommended that Melayu Kupang be one of the subjects for local material in primary schools in Kupang City and Kupang District. ....*

> *In the opening ceremony, the head of the NTT Dept of Education and Culture, Drs. Johanis Manulangga, M.Ed reflected on the theme of the seminar, saying that this [Bahasa Kupang] was a very significant issue that needed to be understood, developed and applied by many people, particularly in the field of education.*

> *Manulangga acknowledged that until now this issue apparently has been forgotten and even neglected. Now, with the involvement of language experts, the NTT Dept of Education and Culture hopes to change the thinking, and increase the awareness of the importance of the mother tongue, in this case Melayu Kupang. People need to be aware of the existence of their mother tongue, which is actually a regional asset," he said.*

Encouraged by general political moves toward decentralization and *otda*, the NTT Dept of Education staff were willing to apply that to the field of education and challenge the notion that there is no place for a local Melayu creole in the national education system, even if they had to argue for it in the discourse of *otda*, claiming Bahasa Kupang as a 'regional asset'. In acknowledging that Bahasa Kupang was a 'forgotten' and even 'neglected' mother tongue,

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[2] In 1990 I presented a paper of the History and Development of Ambonese Malay to teachers at Universitas Pattimura. They also came to the conclusion, that if Bahasa Ambon is a real language and not just bad Indonesian, it is therefore a bahasa lokal and has the 'right' to be included in the educational curriculum in Ambon.

Manulangga was willing to acknowledge an educational problem that is very likely to not only be in Kupang, but in other areas of Indonesia where other regional varieties Malays are also spoken, as in other creole situations around the world.

The problems of 'neglecting' Bahasa Kupang as a mother tongue of thousands of school children and having it invisible in the educational system are numerous. Jacob (personal communication) reports that as a mother tongue speaker of Bahasa Kupang, she was in Year 4 or 5 when she began to realize that what she, her family, her friends and acquaintances spoke, was somewhat different from the Standard Indonesian that she was being taught in school. She remembers feeling extremely confused standing in front of a cinema in Kupang. As the teacher had said, "Today's feature" had a sign HARI INI above it. But she stood there mystified, knowing very well that she, her family and her acquaintances all said *ini hari*, not *hari ini*. She recalls, at that point, "If someone could have just pointed out to me as a young child, that *hari ini* is how we talk Indonesian and *ini hari* is how we speak when we speak Kupang, I could have understood the difference institutively and known when to use each form." But there was no awareness of Bahasa Kupang as a real language by her teachers. Instead, what was communicated to her was, 'how you speak is not only bad, it is not even a language."

It is not uncommon in Indonesia (and elsewhere) for people to have similar reactions when their mother tongue is belittled and made to seem of no value in school. However, in most contexts both students and teachers know that there are two languages – the vernacular home language and the national language of school. In creoles situations, the problem is even more distressing and confusing to children, when there is no recognition that the student's mother tongue is actually a language. Like Jacob, they are left to feel worthless for speaking incorrectly, but they cannot understand why the way they and their families speak is incorrect.

Jeff Siegel's (1993, 1999) research on the use of pidgins and creoles in education reveals that Jacob's feelings of confusion and low self-esteem are typical. When teachers communicate that a child's language is bad, they are communicating that child is also bad. Educators familiar with creoles (Jeff Siegel 1993, 1999, Barry and Hudson 1997) realize that in contexts where creoles are spoken alongside a standard language, an important first step for both teachers and students is awareness that the two languages are different. As Jacob says, "If only someone had told me (in Year 4) that there is bahasa Kupang and bahasa Indonesia.

That there is a way to speak good Kupang and good Indonesian. But instead, the message was how what we spoke was 'bad' and no one could explain why."

There is a growing awareness that creoles need special consideration by educators, and increasing evidence that when students are taught how to differentiate between a creole and its standard language, they actually perform better in the standard language, as well as feel valued and secure in their own identity and language. (Craig, 1977, 1980; De Rieux, 1980; B.F. Grimes, 1989; Kale, 1990; Reynolds, 2000; Jeff Siegel, 1992, 1993, 1999). A case study that has strong parallels to the Kupang situation is described in Reynolds (1995, 2000) where elementary school students who speak Hawaii Creole English [HCE] have limited exposure to American Standard English [ASE] and consistently underperform in comprehension tests and standardized achievement tests when compared with their classmates from ASE speaking areas on the mainland. After establishing a baseline with an experimental group and a control group, Reynolds worked for one-year with the experimental group of Year 5 students, deliberately helping them become aware of similarities and differences between HCE and ASE, and teaching them how to successfully manipulate the two. At the end of a year on the ASE tests, her experimental group scored significantly higher than the state average, whereas the control group showed no statistically significant improvement.

University lecturers in Kupang often bemoan the poor use of Bahasa Indonesia by university students. This is to be expected when students have never be taught to differentiate Bahasa Kupang and Bahasa Indonesia vocabulary and grammatical patterns. There are similar anecdotal reports from lecturers where other regional varieties of Malay are spoken (e.g. Ambon, Makasar, Manado, Sabah,) (C.Grimes, personal communication).

The debate: Can Bahasa Kupang be a language without adat?
Another debate in Kupang (but not so much in the realm of education) is whether Bahasa Kupang can be a real language if it has no *adat* ('traditions'). In Kupang, when 'adat' is called for in occasions such as marriages, births, and deaths, 'traditional' Rote, Sabu, Sumba, etc. *adat* is evoked, not Kupang *adat*. Debate then arises over whether or not Bahasa Kupang can be a legitimate language if it lacks the cultural authority of *adat*.

In that Bahasa Kupang can be everyone's language, but is linked to no single ethnic *adat,* it is like Bahasa Indonesia, which is also a lingua franca with a defined role in society, even

though it has little historical depth and no unified 'adat'. As James Siegel (1997) described lingua franca Melayu during the nation-building period, it was a language without a culture attached. While acknowledging that a variety of traditional adats are used in ritual occasions in Kupang, more articulate native speakers like Jacob are willing to challenge the notion that Bahasa Kupang is a language with no cultural authority. The authority and power of Bahasa Kupang come precisely from its roots as a lingua franca creole – it is a language that symbolizes the collective identity of local 'low' NTT voices from the periphery in contrast to the distant, 'high' voice of the state from the centre.

Conclusion:

Masanori (2002) describes a similar but contrasting situation in Sumatra where Bahasa Lampung has also been identified as a local language for use in education. Like Kupang, Lampung is a multi-ethnic society, but there Lampung is being imagined as a homogenous cultural identity, of which the Lampung language is indexed as its symbol, making other minority languages invisible.

In NTT, however, no single vernacular language has come to represent the whole. And as the educators recognized at the seminar, Bahasa Kupang is not the mother tongue of all students in NTT, because outside of Kupang city and Kupang district, vernacular languages are the mother tongue of children, and other vernacular languages also need to be used in *mulok*. But Bahasa Kupang does reflect the multi-ethnic nature of NTT and it is used by people in Kupang to self-identify with NTT. In that sense it is ambiguous – it can stand for any or all NTT ethnic groups as an *in-group*. But Bahasa Kupang can simultaneously be be used to define and exclude an *out-group* of non-locals from places associated with the more prestiguous centres of power in Indonesia. At times it does seem that people in Kupang use Bahasa Kupang language to proudly express their social marginality within the state and their language's marginality to the state's official language.

When contrasted with Bahasa Indonesia used to report the 'news' in Kupang newspapers, the *Tapaleuk* column is a local reaction and interpretation of the news. In further contrast to Bahasa Indonesia as the foundation for the nation's Imagined Community (cf. Anderson 1991), Bahasa Kupang is the language of a real community, spoken on the streets, in the markets, in the homes, in the schools, and in the offices of Kupang.. But in privileging Bahasa Indonesia as the only sanctioned form of Melayu, an ideological 'erasure' has occurred by getting people to imagine that Bahasa Kupang didn't exist. But with *otda* and the right to

acknowledge local resources, Bahasa Kupang is no longer a completely invisible language in Kupang.

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