Reflecting on data collected from research in 2012-2013, I seek to discuss the multiple ways in which youths as students use multiple languages in their processes of learning and socializing within an educational institution. Using the notion that there are orders of indexical or social meanings of language, I argue that there are multiple orders of multiple language use present in vocational high schools. These orders can be emergent from student interaction and the practical/work-oriented purposes of vocational training or they can be instated by the institution of language classes in vocational high schools. While the institutional side of vocational high schools demands monolingual competence in multiple languages, paying ethnographic attention to actual language use points to a polylingual and translingual norm of communication. Here, the use of linguistic features from multiple languages to fulfill social communicative purposes is pragmatically more salient for participants than full competence in multiple languages. In both their peer group communication of “being youth” and their vocational training of “becoming adults”, students alternate between the multiple footings afforded by the indexical meanings they associate with Javanese, Indonesian and English. Instead of using a certain form of youth language, I show that students have a polycentric orientation to multiple social meanings of locality, tradition, nationalism, lifestyle and global connections in their polylingual and translingual uses of Javanese, Indonesian and English. Being youths and learning to become adults in 21st century Java is thus inherently multilingual, although with differences between institutional definitions and interactional practice, differences that tend to be put under erasure through various language ideological techniques and institutional power relations.

Keywords: youth language, order of indexicality, multilingualism, vocational education, language ideology

INTRODUCTION

Formal education in Indonesia is generally multilingual, particularly at the secondary level. Language classes in secondary schools focus on three language categories: local, national, and foreign or global. As Zentz (2014:240) reports, the slogan on language learning from the Indonesian Ministry of Education states that “citizens are to ‘love’ their local languages; ‘use’ their national language, Indonesian; and ‘study’ foreign languages, with extra emphasis on English.” In the case of Central Java, the main local language that high schools teach is Javanese. Like other provinces, however, the other main language classes are Indonesian, as the national language, and English, as the main foreign language. Both Indonesian and English are also the main language subjects that are present in the end of high school national examinations (Ujian Nasional).

Vocational high schools represent a unique case in the use of multiple languages in Indonesian secondary education. With its orientation towards producing ready-for-work graduates (Newhouse and Suryadarma 2011), vocational high schools present dual demands of using languages for youths as students in their process of becoming adults through vocational training. The first demand is the practical/pragmatic demands of following globalized industry practices in the use of technical/industry registers that combine linguistic features of English and Indonesian, while also including Javanese as part of the practical learning interaction in vocational classrooms.
The second demand is the state-backed institutional requirement for students to be monolingually competent in Javanese, Indonesian, and English (Nababan 1991; Darjowidjojo 1998). In parallel, students also use multiple languages in their popular or youth culture communicative practices of being youth (Smith-Hefner 2007; Djenar 2012).

This study seeks to investigate the different institutional demands on language use and learning as well as the popular culture communicative practices of students as constituting differing orders of socially meaningful (i.e. socially indexical) forms of language use. These differing orders also represent different levels/scales of social space and interaction, from local, national, and global, thus making vocational high schools a globalized sociolinguistic space (Blommaert 2010). In discussing the way students navigate the “push and pull” (Blommaert 2010:42) of these different orders and scales of social language use, this study contributes to the understanding of the sociolinguistic process of education, the notion of multilingualism, and the role of language in globalization.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The mainstream (academic and public) notion of multilingualism often defines it based on linguistic competence (Edwards 2009:248), with an implicit implication that multilingualism consists of “multiple monolingualisms” (Juffermans 2011:166). In contrast, this paper adopts a practice-based notion of language (Hanks 1996) that emphasizes the use of linguistic features from multiple languages for the social purposes of communication, regardless of competence, as the foundation of multilingualism (Jorgensen 2008). This aligns with recent notions of multilingualism that emphasize it as forms of crossing, fluidity, and mixing across language boundaries (see Rampton 2005 on language crossing, Jorgensen 2008 on polylingualism, Otsuji & Pennycook 2010 on metrolinguism). This new perspective on multilingualism emphasizes more the social/indexical and communicative meanings in the use of multiple language forms by language users. Hence, I will use ‘register’ (Agha 2005) as more functional concept that connects these forms of language use to certain social types and domains. These social forms are internally ordered through norms of practice such as ‘interactional or language regimes’ (Blommaert, Collins & Sllembrouck 2005). Moreover, this new perspective on multilingualism is an inherently ‘language ideological’ perspective (Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroksrity 1998), attuned to the social, cultural, and political evaluations of language forms. A further implication, due to the post-structuralist underpinnings of the language ideological perspective, is that the social meanings of registers are often hierarchically ordered based on stratified evaluations and unequal distribution of repertoires, i.e. ‘orders of indexicality’ (Blommaert 2007a). Likewise, different registers may also access/enact hierarchical scopes/levels of social space, i.e. ‘sociolinguistic scales’ (Blommaert 2007b). Within multilingual and globalized contexts, such as vocational high schools, language users can thus have ‘polycentric’ (Blommaert 2007a) orientations towards numerous registers and their attendant norms and orders of evaluation and scope. The potential tensions arising from the push and pull of different registers, however, can often be put under ‘erasure’ (Irvine & Gal 2000) to mask contradictions with the dominant language ideological order.

Differing orders of multilingually being youths and becoming adults

The findings of this study are based on ethnographic fieldwork in two state vocational high schools (sekolah menengah kejuruan negeri – SMKN) in Semarang, Central Java, from mid-2012 to mid-2013 (Tamtomo 2016). In the two locations, I did participant observations, interviews, and documentations of student and school texts. I focused mainly on students’ extra-curricular
activities but also observed classes and interviewed teachers. The study findings point to a number of orders of indexicality operating within these vocational high schools.

The first and most ideologically visible (and informant reported) order of indexicality is the state-backed institutional multilingualism, most clearly exhibited in the main language classes taught in both schools. In teaching Javanese, Indonesian, and English, vocational high schools refer to the government curriculum (both national and regional) that demands monolingual competence in these multiple languages, often based on a standard or culturally dominant variety (as in the case of krama Javanese). The curriculum also reflects an implicit hierarchical ordering of languages, with Indonesian and English playing instrumental functions for knowledge transfer, economic opportunity and cosmopolitan engagement (Darjowidjojo 1998; Nababan 1991), while Javanese functions to maintain local scales of tradition. In these classes, any language mixing is put under erasure by the teacher’s demand for a monolingual end product. However, the degree of tolerance for language mixing and the ability to demand monolingualism differs between language classes, highlighting the gap between participants’ repertoires and institutional demands, with the Indonesian class having the strictest monolingual standard, while the Javanese and English classes have more tolerance for grammatical mistakes and the use of other languages. Institutional multilingualism nonetheless represents the dominant idea in vocational high schools on both the notion of multilingualism and the monolingual standard of each language.

The second order of indexicality is the practical multilingualism of the ‘productive’ classes where students learn the technical skills of their respective vocational programs. This practical multilingualism operates using a ‘polylingual’ norm (Jorgensen 2008), in which speakers combine features from multiple languages to meet communicative purposes without requiring monolingual competence in all the languages involved. Written texts combine the use of English technical terms with broader Indonesian narration, often reproducing the multilingual practice of prominent multinational companies in their vocational fields. While Javanese is absent from these texts, it emerges and is tolerated in verbal interaction and instructions, functioning as a way to further vernacularise this practical multilingualism. In these productive classes, students are thus learning the specific technical register of their vocational field, a technical register that can combine features from multiple languages without necessarily requiring standard monolingual competence.

Running parallel to the two school-sourced orders is the third interactional order of indexicality based on the way students use languages to communicate among themselves. This interactional order exhibits norms of language mixing, hybridity, and fluidity in which students combine linguistic features from Javanese, Indonesian and English for their social communicative purposes in both speech and writing. In their spoken communication, students primarily combine Javanese and Indonesian in a bilingual register. However, we can still see the influence of the dominant institutional multilingualism in the way students use code switching to perform changes in footing for discourse and social identity oriented purposes. For example, students predominantly use Javanese for interpersonal scales of interaction. They then switch to a predominant use of Indonesian to change footing to an official or group/forum scale of interaction. This ordered hierarchy of scales is also exhibited in their written communication, with official texts predominantly being in Indonesia while informal texts increasingly feature mixing, hybridity and the playful use of Javanese, Indonesian, and English. For the students, these hybrid practices of language use do not necessarily pose as contradictions to the dominant institutional multilingualism. While students often use these hybrid practices as forms of scaffolding in their
learning interaction, they often compartmentalize or put these practices under erasure in the face of the dominant institutional language ideology.

CONCLUSION

Being youths and learning to become adults through language use in vocational high school in Central Java is about being able to use multiple registers or social forms of language while also navigating their attendant language ideologies (interactional regimes, orders of indexicality, and scale). In learning to become state-acceptable adults, students learn registers associated with the ideal monolingual standard of Javanese, Indonesian, and English. In learning to become job-ready adults, students learn practical and technical registers that often combine these languages for the purpose of (and as a part of) learning how to perform vocational skills. At the same time, students as youths are also engaged in playful mixing of languages in their popular culture practices. Hence, students are learning to have a repertoire that consists of a continuum between standard monolingualism in multiple languages to playful polylingual mixing of multiple languages. This presents a ‘superdiverse’ (Bloomaert & Rampton 2011) notion of multilingualism of vocational high schools as a globalized sociolinguistic field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**STATE EDUCATION AND THE FUNNEL EFFECT: CHANGING DYNAMICS IN GAMELAN MUSIC LEARNING**

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The role of state-sponsored institutions in the transmission of gamelan music knowledge in Java has been widely observed in the context of the great transition from being a matter of oral transmission and the social ties it entailed to a study program relying on writing and on the state apparatus. While the role of the educational institutions – notably the network of art academies Institut Seni Indonesia – has been framed largely in ethnomusicological terms, little has been said as of yet of the consequences it triggered sociologically. A few of the most historically-conscious contributions debating the recent developments of Javanese gamelan music have suggested an interpretative key which supported either a modernization paradigm or a transformation-in-continuity model, as formulated most recently by the work of Rachel Hand. Although both perspectives can provide important insights in the way socio-cultural change unfolds, the ethnography I sketch here offers a more nuanced viewpoint.