

**Workshop on Fieldwork, Language
Documentation, and
Linguistic Theory in Indonesia
Oct. 22-23, 2021**

**Evaluation of the Results of the
Project**

Peter Cole and Gabriella Hermon
University of Delaware

Background

- Indonesia is extraordinarily rich in undescribed and endangered languages
- East Indonesia is by far the most linguistically diverse area of Indonesia
- The minority languages of East Indonesia, like minority languages of many parts of the world, are highly endangered and on a path that may lead to their disuse in the not so distant future.

Background

- This project was based on an application to the Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) program of the U.S. National Science Foundation in 2017.

Background

- We had heard from Yanti and Asako that their short training courses on language documentation given in Kupang were met with enthusiasm by the undergraduate/recent graduate student participants.
- We wondered whether a modification and extension of what Yanti and Asako had done might produce a more enduring result.

Collaborative Fieldwork

- We hypothesized that with appropriate encouragement and by collaboration as described below students' interest in their own and neighboring languages could be mobilized to greatly increase the quantity and quality of language documentation in the country
- The idea was to create teams of three students who would conduct fieldwork together in remote areas in which the local language was relatively undocumented.

Collaborative Fieldwork

- The teams consisted of one American graduate student in linguistics and two Indonesian undergraduates or recent graduates.
- The Indonesians were native or fluent speakers of the local language.

Collaborative Fieldwork

- The task of the teams was to make recordings of various genres of the local language, and to transcribe, gloss and translate these recordings to English and Indonesian.
- The goal was not primarily for each team to document a large amount in its language.
- However, the documentation achieved would be archived in a major archive, Paradisec.

Collaborative Fieldwork

- The overall goal was to give both groups of students (American and Indonesian) training and experience in language documentation with the goal of motivating both groups to continue documentation and description in the future.

Goals

- More specifically, the long-term goal was to encourage American graduate students in linguistics to take on the documentation and description of an endangered regional or minority language in Indonesia as a serious research interest, or as part of a Doctoral dissertation.



Goals

- The second long-term goal was to encourage select Indonesian students from the group to apply to graduate programs in Indonesia, the U.S. and elsewhere (e.g. the Netherlands), with the purpose of continuing their studies, writing an M.A. thesis or a dissertation that documents and describes the language of an endangered minority language of Indonesia.

Goals

- The project attempted to combine the separate goals of the two groups so that the strengths of each group contributed to the success of the aims of the other group.
- A central aspect of our proposal was that American and Indonesian students would work together as a team, learning from each other.

Goals

- The Americans (graduate students) would guide the Indonesians in linguistics, while the Indonesians (native speakers of the language) would guide the Americans to a higher level of understanding of the local language and culture.

Project Organization & Management: Recruitment of Indonesian students

- Due to careful pre-training and preselection of local participants by Asako and Yanti we recruited 8 undergraduates/recent graduates as team members in 2018 and 2019. Selection was made from the groups that attended short training workshops organized by Asako and Yanti.
- Selected individuals had to be either native speakers or fluent speakers of the language under investigation. They had to have good English skills and a desire to work on language preservation in their communities.

Indonesian Students: Outcomes

We had no serious problems that caused our local team members to need to leave for extended periods during their field assignments.

All were devoted participants, who completed the project (more on this below).



Recruitment of American participants

We had a fantastic response rate from our US recruitment (18 applicants in 2018 and 22 in 2019), and were thus able to recruit 4 participants for each summer from some of the top U.S. linguistics programs in the country. All of the applicants accepted our offers.

We developed a checklist of desirable criteria for candidates that we used in selecting finalists:

- background preparation in general linguistics (phonetics, phonology, syntax and semantics)
- background in field methods,
- experience in conducting independent field work
- living experience in undeveloped and rural areas
- knowledge of Malay/Indonesian

Selected candidates met many of these criteria.

American participants

- All of our participants completed the program successfully.
- Only one person fell seriously ill, but did not need evacuation.
- Nobody had a motorcycle accident or got eaten by a crocodile while swimming in the sea!



Were the main goals of the program met?

- We conducted participant interviews and also relied on feedback about the quality of the program collected right before the end of the program. Evaluations were conducted by distributing a questionnaire with both quantitative and open ended answers to the participants.
- We conducted a second evaluation in Oct. 2021, asking how attending the program may have affected the professional or educational careers of the participants.

Goal 1: Development of Indonesian students' attitudes and enthusiasm towards their local language and culture

This is difficult to measure:

- we mostly recruited only participants that had a positive attitude towards the preservation of their own language and culture were for the training program
- we did not run a language attitude survey

Some of the local participants commented that the experience increased their interest in their local language:

“From this fieldwork also I learnt how important and unique my local language is. “

Others commented on this in their video presentations.

Goal 1: Development of Indonesian students' attitudes and enthusiasm towards their local language and culture

- An important piece of evidence is that according to our 2021 survey, at least 6 participants continued to work on data collection on their language, sometimes without any remuneration. This shows unusual enthusiasm and commitment !



Goal 1: Development of Indonesian students' attitudes and enthusiasm towards their local language and culture

A crucial indication of the increased enthusiasm of how Indonesian students view their local languages is the fact that 8 students who joined our training program decided to write a B.A. thesis on their local language. (8/14)

These include languages like Wejewa, Hawu, Lio, Adonara-Lamaholot, Uab-Meto, and Rote. Four of the theses were completed under the supervision of Jermy Balukh the thesis at the School of Foreign Languages CN Kupang. 👍

Goal 2: Increase the technical knowledge of the Indonesian student group in language documentation (finding consultants, recording, transcription, glossing, use of computers, etc.)

- A majority of the students complained that although they learned a lot from their American counterparts, glossing was very difficult since it involved a lot of linguistic knowledge, and involved long discussion of correct lexical terminology.
- Finding consultants was also noted as an unexpected difficulty.
- Using Elan and Flex was noted to be very difficult but manageable for the students.

Goal 2: Increase the technical knowledge of the Indonesian student group in language documentation

- A majority agreed that they had not only picked up a lot of skills in transcription and glossing but they also learned a lot of linguistics from their American partners .

Goal 3: Team building, collaboration and optimal division of roles to enhance productivity in the field

- We specifically asked about how roles were divided on specific tasks during daily activities.
- We asked students to rate the success of the collaboration.
- 94% of the team members rated the collaboration as excellent.

Goal 3: Team building, collaboration and optimal division of roles to enhance productivity in the field

- Indonesians noted how much linguistics they learned from their American counterparts and that they relied on the Americans for glossing and translating.
- The American students relied on their Indonesian counterparts for help in finding consultants and for help with fitting into the community.
- Both groups indicated that collaboration led to greater productivity.



Goal 4: Encouragement of advanced education for local participants

In 2018-2019, all of the people who filled out our questionnaire (with only one exception) expressed the wish to continue their education towards an MA degree in either linguistics or English:

“if there is a chance to continue my school(ing) then on linguistic I am in, I need to find out the hidden things from our own language.”

Goal 4: Encouragement of advanced education for local participants

By Oct. 2021, however, while 71% (11/14) of our respondents still claim they would like to continue their education towards an MA degree in linguistics or TESOL, not a single person had managed to apply for an MA program.

Goal 4: Encouragement of advanced education for local participants

There are multiple reasons for this:

- Students report greater financial stress than anticipated (possibly due to the pandemic) and hence have had to continue working.
- Lack of financial support from the government and universities for relevant programs in linguistics.
- We underestimated the problems that students from remote regions like Nusa Tenggara may have in applying for advanced programs. Simply training these students for 4-5 weeks in the summer, apparently does not qualify them as candidates for scholarships for the more serious MA programs in linguistics in Jakarta or Bali.

Goal 4: Encouragement of advanced education for local participants

- We did not, as part of our project design, provide a mentorship program by faculty to help students to continue their education by selecting suitable M.A. programs in Indonesia and abroad. Such mentorship would include creating contacts for students with faculty members at suitable programs, advising students about potential funding and job opportunities, and providing help with putting together application materials. This should be added in future training projects.

Goal 5: The collection of materials on each language from various genres to be submitted for archiving

- The proposal mentioned about 8 hours per group of varied text, so a total of 64 hours of archivable data.
- We submitted only about 9:45 hours of fully glossed data in total. This is a fraction (14.6%) of what we thought could be achieved. In addition, about 18 hours of transcribed and translated data were submitted, as well as other untranscribed audio and video files.

Goal 5: The collection of materials on each language from various genres to be submitted for archiving

- We emphasize that the main purpose of the program was training and the testing of the team method, employing foreign and local participants to enhance the interest in language documentation and description in both groups.
- Hence, we do not feel that archiving fewer hours of data than expected was a huge failure. However, giving our students unrealistic goals by imposing an unnecessary difficulty made the students in year 1 feel insecure. In year 2 of the program we emphasized that the amount of material collected was not the main point of the training, and this shift in emphasis actually did not negatively affect productivity (which increased in 2019).

Goal 6: Encouraging Americans to work on endangered languages (hopefully in East Indonesia)

- The American group indicated that they think their research program and development as a linguist was changed by the experience in the program to a significant degree (on a scale from 1 (not at all) – 10 (significantly), mean = 9).
- A majority of the students (7/8) continued working on the languages after returning to the US and 6/8 collected additional new data by either returning to the field (N=2) or by using WhatsApp or other means.

Goal 6: Encouraging Americans to work on endangered languages in Eastern Indonesia

- Students have made 11 presentations at conferences or workshops so far using the data, and have submitted 4 papers for publication.

Goal 7: Encouraging American students to complete dissertations related to endangered languages of (East) Indonesia

- One dissertation that reports on fieldwork on Hawu has been completed (Marielle Butters, 2021, *Negation in Four Languages of Indonesia*).
- Three additional dissertations are planned that include data from Amarasi, Li'o, and Uab Meto.

Goal 7: Encouraging American students to complete dissertations related to endangered languages of (East) Indonesia

This an exceptionally high success rate:

- 50% of the American participants have or are proposing to write dissertations on the languages they worked on with their team members.
- While all of the students indicated that the pandemic greatly affected their plans for research, it seems that only one person changed their area of interest from Indonesia to languages spoken in the U.S.



The Indonesian versus American group

- The training experience affected Indonesian student attitudes toward their languages, and increased their motivation and interest, probably to the same extent that it affected the U.S. participants.
- In our view, we need to CONTRAST the increased motivation of the Indonesians with their lack of means to continue their study. There is a huge gap between the two groups in terms of the means to continue study, but not so much in terms of motivation.

The Indonesian versus American group

- American graduate students are often fully supported while there is little support available for Indonesian graduate students.
- Another factor is that the Indonesians were undergraduates while the Americans were already graduate students. It is natural for undergraduates to still be exploring their future possibilities while Doctoral students would be expected to be committed to what they are studying, i.e. to linguistics.

Conclusions

- Collaborative fieldwork conducted by Indonesian and American students was enjoyable and beneficial for both groups.
- The opportunity to be trained and do fieldwork was an important formative experience for the American graduate students, perhaps even a “gamechanger”.
- Indonesian students would have benefited from more extensive training in basic linguistics before starting joint training with the Americans.

Conclusions

- Indonesian students need a framework with greater mentoring than we provided to prepare them for graduate study in linguistics.
- A way needs to be found to increase financial support for the Indonesian students since most cannot study without such support.
- Thus, we believe that the idea of collaborative, team-based fieldwork was a success.

Conclusions

- The main difficulties that need to be overcome relate to the creation of a more appropriate infrastructure to support the needs of the Indonesian students.