

Multiple languages and heteroglossia in Indonesian adolescent fiction

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The term ‘heteroglossia’, coined by Bakhtin (1981), refers to the diversity of dialects, registers, and individual styles that are identified with and co-exist in tension within a particular language. While the politics of national language seeks to unify this diversity under the umbrella of one language, the novel as a genre typically embodies it in the different ‘speech types’ of the characters and narrators (1981: 263). In both cases, these dialects/registers/styles are stratified in the sense that they are identified with social groupings according to, for example, age, profession, activities, and ideologies. According to Bakhtin, the novel, which he defines as ‘a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized’ (1981: 262), is the best example of a genre that captures linguistic stratification. Sociolinguistic research on young people’s linguistic practises – many draw on Bakhtin’s notion – shows that young people draw on linguistic resources known to them to interact in social world and appropriating others’ styles to communicate stances and carve out identity.

My purpose in this paper is to examine how heteroglossic practises are represented in adolescent novels and what purposes they serve. The novels under study, broadly categorised as ‘teenlit’, are a popular fictional genre aimed primarily at girls. One of the characteristics of the genre is the abundant use of *bahasa gaul*, the youth register of colloquial Indonesian. As noted by Smith-Hefner (2007), borrowing from regional and foreign languages (notably, English) is among the common characteristics of *gaul*. I will show how *gaul*, which itself is influenced by various dialects and languages, is juxtaposed in teenlit with other languages – regional and foreign – to construct social voices. The dialogic representation of these languages creates ‘stratification’ that both rejects while at the same time reinforces the stereotype and idealisation of their speakers. This study is based on data from three novels by different authors, published in 2004, 2006, and 2010, respectively, and includes examples of Betawi, Javanese, English, and Spanish. I will show that Betawi and Javanese are foregrounded to suggest resistance against global forces perceived as a threat to ‘local’ languages. The use of English and Spanish suggests an orientation toward a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Meanwhile, *bahasa gaul* provides the background against which this linguistic ‘stratification’ emerges.

While references to these languages in teenlit constitute a fictional representation rather than ‘real’ voices, they nonetheless indicate the authors’ stances on linguistic matters and responses to the larger community’s concern about language maintenance. They are also part of authorial style, where style is understood in terms of words and structures in the text, as well as the social meaning tied to the entire context of the fiction’s production and reception.

References

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