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Cracking the code

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Cracking the code –
Towards understanding, diagnosing and remediating dyslexia in Standard Indonesian

Elisabeth Borleffs

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CLCG

The research reported in this thesis has been carried out under the auspices of the Center for Language and Cognition Groningen (CLCG) and the Graduate School for the Humanities (GSH) of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen, and the School of Behavioural and Cognitive Neurosciences (BCN) of the University Medical Center Groningen.

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It all started in May 2013 at the kitchen table in Haren (the Netherlands), talking to my parents. Berend and I were to leave for Medan in about two months, and my parents and I were reflecting on interesting work opportunities for the years we would be spending in Indonesia. My father suggested contacting Tim Zwaagstra, Program Manager Southeast Asia at the University of Groningen, to discuss the possibility of doing research in Indonesia. And that's where the story begins! Tim put me into contact with an Indonesian exchange student from the Faculty of Law of the University of North Sumatra (Universitas Sumatera Utara; USU) in Medan, who forwarded my email to Ibu Elvi Andriani, the former head of the Developmental Psychology department. By the time I met with Ibu Elvi Andriani and Ibu Irma Irmawati (the former Dean of the Psychology Faculty) in August 2013 to discuss a possible research collaboration, there were still some 'minor' issues to be resolved: I hadn't found a supervisor yet to help me conduct the research I was considering, I didn't have an actual research design outlining my plans or any funding to pay for it… and my Bahasa skills were still at a level where I barely managed to order a *nasi goreng* for dinner. But luckily this all changed shortly after. By September 2013, Professor Frans Zwarts, whom I'd contacted with the question whether he had any suggestions for research that I could be conducting in Indonesia, not only wanted to be part of this project-to-be, but he also forwarded my email to Professor Ben Maassen, suggesting to Ben to get involved as well. By early November, we had our first skype meeting to discuss the possibilities, with us talking over the pre-final version of our research proposal in December 2013 in Groningen. By the end of March 2014, everything was signed and sealed and my PhD research had officially started! I set up an official collaboration between the two universities, and, once this was formalized in Groningen and Medan, I met with my co-researchers Debby Daulay, Indri Nasution, and Ade Siregar for the first time to discuss the details of our research plan.

My promotores - First of all, I'd like to thank my supervisors Professor Ben Maassen and Professor Frans Zwarts. With an enormous amount of energy and enthusiasm you've both joined me in this exciting adventure, making it a great experience thanks to the good teamwork. Even when all internet cables got stolen, the GraphoGame laptops got stuck at customs for 3 months, or when the schools

had forgotten to tell me before getting on an airplane from Zurich to Medan that it would be school holiday during the scheduled follow-up test sessions, you two never felt a single doubt that we would pull it off. Our 2-weekly skype sessions were always extremely productive and meetings in Groningen ended, whenever possible, with a drink in a local café. Your extensive knowledge of reading acquisition and dyslexia, your vision and creative thinking have been a source of inspiration to me throughout this project. I feel very lucky having had you as my supervisors. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to start and complete my PhD research in Medan!

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clicks using one of your amazing scripts, something that would've taken me days if not weeks. In return, I was happy I could help you out with things you needed a native Dutch speaker for. Moreover, our weekly skype meeting on Monday mornings to discuss the upcoming week was a great way to start the work week. Toivo, thank you very much for your (practical and mental) support and advice throughout this project!

Bernard Jap, the fact that you contacted Ben Maassen end of 2013 with the question whether he wanted to supervise you in a project with the aim to develop a diagnostic tool for Standard Indonesian, has had an enormous impact on this thesis. Ben, Frans, and I'd just arrived at the point where we realized that we'd been looking at our research design from our own European perspective, not thinking of the possibility that no single standardized reading test would be feasible that could select and assess the reading skills of primary school kids in Indonesia. This first contact resulted in the assessment battery used throughout this thesis and two shared publications. Also many thanks for always being available to answer my questions about Indonesian phonology and for being 'The (male) Voice of GraphoGame'. Bernard, it's been a pleasure working with you!

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