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## Translanguaging Practices in Indonesian Pop Songs

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the practice of translanguaging in Indonesian pop songs and highlights the possible reasons behind the practice. In this study, translanguaging is viewed from the context of the Indonesian singers' linguistic repertoire, which allows varieties in the production (Canagarajah, 2013) of the songs. Three pop songs, composed by the singers themselves, are used for samples. The result indicates that translanguaging, performed using Indonesian and English, is utilized by the artists as a strategy to exercise their agency, either as Indonesian artists or as members of the global society. Translanguaging in the pop songs is not merely seen as a commercial activity, but it is also a deliberate practice which will attract the attention of the audience. The reasons behind the translanguaging practice indicate three things, namely (1) as a means to convey a cultural message, (2) as a means for meaning-making, and (3) as a means of gaining fame.*

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Indonesian, Pop songs, Culture

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### 1. Introduction

As an act of communication, 'translanguaging' has recently been viewed in two different contexts: bilingualism/multilingualism and pedagogy. In the context of bilingualism or multilingualism, translanguaging practice is commonly performed by bilinguals or multilingual to connect them with their 'identities, cultures, and rhetorical traditions' (Sugiharto, 2015, p. 125). In this case, translanguaging is seen as a flexible way in which bilingual/multilingual speakers can express themselves in their multiple languages. In the pedagogical field, the practice is associated with the students' linguistic repertoire from where they can use their mother tongue to express themselves or communicate effectively in the second or foreign language (Canagarajah, 2011; Duarte, 2018). In this context, translanguaging practice can be performed by both teachers and students in order to enhance learning.

In the field of pedagogy, particularly in the pedagogy of EFL writing, Sugiharto (2015) encapsulated the features of translingual approach into nine

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different features. He identifies that translingual approach: (1) respect to students' right to their own language, (2) texts are fluid, (3) texts are negotiated, (4) rhetorical differences are a resource, (5) language learners are language creators, (6) in favour of the English plus policy (additive in nature), (7) writing is an open system, (8) writing is a display of complex identities, and (9) writing is a spatial-temporal phenomenon. These features should be distinguished from those in Standard Written English, which is 'stative' and primarily gives 'respect to the dominant language used in academics' (Sugiharto, 2015, p. 130).

The translingual approach is nowadays rising as an opposition to the colonization of the standard variety of a dominating language. Quoting Sugiharto (2015), Standard Written English is considered insensitive towards other ideologies as it denies the enormity of the new varieties of Englishes. For this particular issue, Cushman (2016) argues that a translingual approach does not simply give a substitute content as an emancipatory attempt, but it also addresses the imperialist legacy of English. For Canagarajah (2013), translanguaging is a practice of how people can bring their linguistic resources into practice. Linguistic differences, thus, are recognized as resources.

Translanguaging may occur in everyday practice, as speakers or writers creatively negotiate and construct their identities and ideologies (Mazzafero, 2018). Therefore it can occur in a range of disciplines or professions; one of them is music. Concerning the dynamic relations among languages in this global era, translanguaging in music exists as a response to the diversity and fluidity in everyday social interaction.

In a musical discourse in Indonesia, the practise of translanguaging typically involves two languages: Indonesian and English. This paper highlights the translanguaging practice in Indonesian pop songs. The question to be addressed is: how is translanguaging in Indonesian pop songs practised, and what are the possible reasons behind the practice?

### ***Pop songs, language choice, and identity***

Many studies have been dedicated to how music and songs take part in culture. It would be impossible to discuss this as a phenomenon without acknowledging how the cultural context in society may give an impact on music practices. Music traditions have been seen as fluid, not as static and, as such, will change and change over the years. This fluidity has substantially increased because of the movements of global people. Besides, it is also because of the unprecedented exposure to other music cultures in an online environment. To understand profoundly how culture is expressed in music, the meanings related to music have to be understood. Many researchers in the field of literacy, for example, often discuss how people make meaning of the world around them by referring to these as literate practices (Barton, 2018). This notion brings the authors to look into how popular songs have been used as a medium of cultural transfer, especially in popular (pop) culture, where there seem to be no limits on a global scale, thanks to the internet.

Kong (1994), a Singaporean researcher, has come up with a conclusion that music is used by the ruling élite to perpetuate certain ideologies aimed at political socialization and to inculcate a civil religion that directs favour and

fervour towards the nation. Another conclusion she draws is that music is also a form of cultural resistance against some state policies and social-cultural norms. She finds that in Singapore, music embodies social commentaries on particular aspects of the society, such as controversial government policies and the grandiose lifestyle of many Singaporeans. Therefore, music cannot be treated merely for its entertainment purpose. Just like other any forms of arts, they represent the culture of the era, i.e. the value, norms, ideas, ideology, and identity.

Adegoke (2011) conducted a study on language and identity in popular songs in Africa. His analysis is based on the lyrics of four popular songs from two different African countries by implementing content analysis. The result of his research indicates that popular music has a broad spectrum of roles in Nigeria and South Africa. Adegoke (2011) also points out that popular music is evolving because of the development of socio-political issues in African societies. For example, there are critics over some specific socio-economic issues in Africa, which may threaten the realization of egalitarian societies across genders, class, age, group, ethnic, or race. In this case, through the use of language varieties spoken in the country, music can be used as a tool to express ideas and identity. This view is also shared by Baker (2000), who states that language is always present in identity formation, as it is particularly essential in building a society or community.

In any kind of communication, the choice of a language depends on its relevance. When a bilingual chooses to speak a particular language that exists in his/her linguistic repertoire, he/she uses the language because it is relevant to the addressee, time, and setting (Holmes, 2013; Wardaugh, 2006). The choice of language in music is different from that in spontaneous speeches. In music, language is used as a means to convey the elements of ethnic or cultural identity. One or more languages may be used, but even in the event of rapid code-switching, the decision is calculated and planned in order to meet the artists' objectives in communicating their ideas and identity.

Letcho (2017) studies language choice in popular bilingual songs in the United States of America (USA). She identifies several popular musicians who deliberately perform their bilinguality in their songs. She comes into the conclusion that music is a language itself. It has the power of presenting identity, personally as well as culturally through the lyrics. Musicians can convey their linguistic and cultural identities through entirely different environments. By combining the linguistic practices of various social statuses, dialects and slang, musicians can publicly think about, enact and perform their identities in imaginative ways (Brusila, 2003). When a musician chooses to be rooted in a particular place, culture, and ethnic group, he/she marks a strong degree of identification with a certain language group. In this case, the musician sees it as more integral to his/her personal identity, and at the same time, he/she would like to address the audience who shares the same ethnic background or cultural value.

## 2. Data Collection

The data for this research is three samples of Indonesian pop songs, which include Indonesian and English words, composed in different periods of time. They have been selected as samples because the songs were written and composed by the singers themselves. All singers/writers are Indonesians. Interestingly, the titles of the songs are all in English. See Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Source of data

Title	Artist / Music group	Year
<i>Dangdut is the music of my country</i>	Project Pop	2003
<i>Paralyzed</i>	Agnes Monica	2011
<i>Never leave ya</i>	Gamaliel Audrey Cantika (GAC)	2016

As the discussion will be on translanguaging, where the artists' agencies are involved in the composition, it is important to look at the artists' backgrounds at a glance.

### 2.1. Project Pop

Project Pop was formed in 1996 as a spinoff for the previous comedy group Project-P. This music group originally consisted of seven members. However, now only six remains: Hermann Josis Mokalau (Yosi), Muhammad Fachroni (O'on), Djoni Permato (Udjo), Gumilar Nurochman (Gugum), Wahyu Rudi Astadi (Odie), and the only female member Kartika Rachel Setia Redjeki Panggabean (Tika).

All members of the band come from different cultural backgrounds across Indonesia. The Project Pop songs usually tell about current issues which feature humorous lyrics and playful melodies. For example, the song 'Bur-Kat' was inspired by rap and their 2003 song 'Dangdut is the Music of My Country' (Pop OK Album) was a mixture between the hard-rock style and *dangdut*, a unique genre of Indonesian folk music which 'is partly derived and fused from Hindustani, Arabic music and to lesser extent, Malay folk music' (Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dangdut>). They did pop, soul, rock, house, rap, and *dangdut* songs. They claimed to have chosen to be different from any other bands in Indonesia (Yudhistira, 2009). The decision to be different may have partly explained why their music was developed and carried out with certain features.

### 2.2. Agnes Monica

Agnes Monica, recently professionally known as Agnez Mo, is an Indonesian singer, songwriter, actress, performer, and dancer. She has been a performing artist since she was a child and has recorded quite a number of albums. Her success in her home country encouraged her to join the international music industry. She has worked with top world musicians like, among others, Timbaland, Michael Bolton, Keith Martin, T.I., Chris Brown, and French Montana. She released her world debut album X in 2017. When the song *Paralyzed* was released in 2011, Agnes was in the early process of joining an international music industry.

The song *Paralyzed* was composed by Agnes herself. During the time of creating this piece, Agnes had been a success not only Indonesian-wide but also Asian-wide. She won several awards in the continent and aimed for a larger audience. *Paralyzed* was not her first bilingual song, but it was her first award-winning bilingual song.

### 2.3. Gamaliel Audrey Cantika (GAC)

Gamaliel Audrey Cantika (GAC) is a Jakarta-based music group, comprising of three singers, which was formed in 2008. The name *Gamaliel Audrey Cantika* was taken from the first names of the singers: Gamaliel Tapiher, Audrey Tapiheru, dan Cantika Abigail.

This music group generally made hip-hop, rap and R&B music. Their history dated back to their video covering English songs, uploaded on the video-sharing social media platform, YouTube. The group was unexpectedly famed after their first impromptu video uploaded in 2009. GAC was one of the icons of social media. They started their singing careers by using YouTube to create social media power and gained their authority to make their own music. The song used as the data is *Never leave ya*.

## 3. Translanguaging practices in Indonesian pop songs

This section will present the translingual practice performed by Project Pop, Agnes Monica, and GAC. It also includes a brief discussion of the possible reasons behind the practice of translanguaging in their pop songs.

### 3.1. Project Pop and their cultural message

As mentioned earlier, Project Pop songs usually contain humorous lyrics and playful melodies. The song *Dangdut is the Music of My Country* was a mixture between the hard-rock style (Western music) and *dangdut*. To date, *dangdut* is one of the most popular genres in Indonesian music. Performances of *dangdut* music are usually accompanied by dancing. Observe the lyrics of *Dangdut is the music of my country* below.

*Ada orang Batak, ada orang Jawa* 'There are Bataknese, there are Javanese'

*Ada orang Ambon, ada juga orang Padang* 'There are also Ambonese, there are also Padangnese'

*Ada orang Manado, ada orang Madura* 'There are Manadonese, there are Madurese'

*Ada orang Papua, nggak disebut jangan marah* 'There are Papuans, if you are not mentioned don't get angry'

*Apakah yang dapat menyatukan kita* 'What can unite us'

*Salah satunya dengan musik* 'One of them is music'

*Dangdut is the music of my country*

This is a verse from the song. It says there are many different ethnic groups in Indonesia; Bataknese, Javanese, Ambonese, Padangnese, Manadonese, Madurese, Papuan, and so on. One thing that can unite the diversity is music, which is *dangdut*, a typical genre of Indonesian. They



reflected their being diverse themselves in the band through their song. Instead of stating that Indonesian (language) brought them (and other Indonesians) together, they made it clear that music did it. Not expressed in Indonesian, this particular line was made in English, a language foreign to Indonesian.

This translingualism practice does not seem to convey mere commercialism for popularity; it is intentional and purposely decided. The performers were being authoritative to what they were capable of doing. Project Pop deliberately code-meshed *dangdut* into the English reprise to show their stance, being local and global at the same time. They were proud of the Indonesian diversity and proclaimed it to the world; hence, the use of the global language emphasized. How do you send a meaningful message to the world? There are many ways, but the simplest one might be by using English, a language that is used worldwide. Translingualism proponents have identified translation as an important tenet of translingualism and as a meaning-making process, in which they encourage students to exercise their agency in how they write and to translate or not to translate their translanguaged writing or items. Some scholars have argued that untranslated items/writing promote careful and interpretive reading as readers learn to rely on contextual cues to discover meaning. In this way, translingual texts are also transmodal, as translation becomes unnecessary when one can rely on other modalities to make meaning (García, 2018).

### **3.2. Agnes Monica and her meaning-making**

*Paralyzed* was composed by Agnes herself. During the time of creating this piece, Agnes had been a success not only Indonesian-wide but also Asian-wide. She won several awards in the continent and aimed for a larger audience. This song was not her first bilingual song, but it was her first award-winning bilingual song.

*Kata-kata dari mulutmu memang berbahaya* 'Words from your mouth are indeed dangerous'

*Kau memainkan hatiku dengan berbagai cara* 'You manipulate my heart in many ways'

*Mata bibirmu sentuhku sampai ku tak bersuara* 'Your eyes and lips touch me until I'm speechless'

*Lihat arogansimu ku malah lemah tak berdaya* 'Looking at your arrogance I'm helpless'

*Kau pikir ku mudah bagimu* 'I think I'm easy for you'

*Namun bersamamu tabu bagiku* 'But with you it's taboo for me'

Now baby boy listen to me boy show me (how you gonna get me paralyzed)

This is me now tell me (how you gonna get me paralyzed)

This is me, boy get me (how you gonna get me paralyzed)

I'm just like so alive, I want to do, get me paralyzed

How you gonna get me paralyzed (2011)

Many artists throughout the world are most likely to choose communication, that is to say, to express themselves in a language known and understood by the audience (Brusila, 2003). The question of comprehension and the oral exchange of ideas covers the language of the artist and his career choices. According to the historically recent but yet firmly established European nation-state ideology, the language issue is also often understood to be an option between pursuing a national career, using the country-of-the-art language or an international career using English. Nonetheless, the tensions between the many variations of national languages, dialects, minority languages, regional languages etcetera mean that the understanding of a language is often considerably more complicated than simple semantics, particularly when used in the lyrics. Looking at the background and her aspiration, her decision to translate the reprise to (American) English or not to translate it to Indonesian was deliberate. Besides exercising her agency of being Indonesian, and at the same time practicing her aspiration of being a part of the global society.

### 3.3. GAC and the YouTube Effect in gaining fame

GAC was one of the icons of social media. They started their singing careers by using YouTube to create social media power and gained their authority to make their own music. In 2015 they came up with their song entitled *Never Leave Ya*, a bilingual song.

*Berbaring di dalam kamar tidurku* 'Lying in my bedroom'

*Menantikan slalu kabar darimu* 'Always waiting to hear from you'

*Melihat fotomu (yes it helps a little)* 'Looking at your photos'

*Tak berarti ku tak rindu, kau keliru* 'It doesn't mean I don't miss you, you're wrong'

I believe that we can work it out

I believe that we can work it out

I believe that we can work it out

I believe that we can work it out

*Dan ku kan slalu milikmu* 'And I will always be yours'

*Walaupun aku harus jauh dari sisimu* 'Though I have to be far from your side'

*Dalam hatiku* 'In my heart'

*Terukir namamu* 'Your name is engraved'

*Jangan kau ragu takut aku pergi darimu* 'Don't doubt me, fear I'm leaving you'

Never leave

I'm never gonna leave ya

Never leave

I'm never gonna leave ya

Despite gaining their fame from covering English songs on YouTube, this could be one way they express their valorization towards Indonesian language, without sacrificing their earlier fame for singing English songs. Translingual practice is said to be the practice that implies efforts to elevate and to valorize one's home language, and to infuse it into the dominant discourse (Sugiharto, 2015). In the case of mainstream social media, like YouTube, English is still the dominant discourse. However, they tried to infuse Indonesian in practice, exercising their agency as Indonesian artists. On their YouTube channel introduction, the GAC members confidently express themselves in the English language and articulate very clearly that they are from Jakarta, Indonesia. They are fully aware of their potential global audiences, and therefore the English language is utilized. However, they maintain to write and compose their songs in Indonesian with a touch of English in the reprises, or in the titles.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper discusses the translanguaging practice in Indonesian pop music. From the three songs used as samples, it was clear that the composers practised their authorities in music to exercise their agency, either as an Indonesian artist or as a member of the global society, especially in the era of social media where the world is getting smaller and more universal. However, even in an online space where English is the dominant language and the lingua franca for communication, the intentions of the community, the affordances of the internet, and the socialization practices that are intentionally or unintentionally encouraged by the participants may lead to various uses of the other languages available to the participants in this community (Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez, 2018). That is what these artists do with their works. They represent how Indonesians have embraced English and made it a part of their evolving culture.

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