

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 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 – has shown that youth make use of the availability of linguistic resources known to them to interact in social world and to construct identity. Youth draw on and appropriate others' styles to create their own.

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 informal regional dialects as well as foreign languages (notably, English) is among the common characteristics of gaul. What I would like to show in this paper is how gaul, which itself is influenced by various dialects and languages, is juxtaposed with other languages – regional and foreign – to create social voices in teenlit. I argue that 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 demonstrate that the first two of these languages are foregrounded as a voice of resistance against global forces perceived as a threat to their existence, while the latter two languages are used to index an orientation toward a cosmopolitan lifestyle. In both cases, gaul is the necessary background against which this 'stratification' emerges.

References

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