

Cultural consonance, linguistic isolation, and the elderly

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Language and linguistic study can contribute significantly to research in various fields. This paper is based on a long term study of older people in the Minangkabau community in modern Indonesia. While the study investigated various aspects of the life of the elderly, this paper will focus on issues related to cultural consonance among older adults, i.e. the degree to which their expectation of what their life was going to be like when they reached 65 years of age matched their actual experience. In addition, this paper will discuss the role of language in cultural consonance among older people in a multilingual context like Indonesia.

Background

The linguistic context in Indonesia is diverse and complex. Since achieving independence in 1945, Indonesia has used *bahasa Indonesia* as its national language. This was anticipated by the nationalist movement in the 1920s with the Youth Pledge (*Soempah Pemoeda*) that was made by nationalist leaders in 1928 and called for a future nation of Indonesia whose language would be Indonesian (Foulcher, 2000). However, there had in fact been a *de facto* Indonesian language in use for centuries before this time that became the basis for the national language.

Modern Indonesian is a standardized form of Malay, which is a member of the Austronesian family of languages. Malay had been in use as a *lingua franca* in the part of Southeast Asia that now makes up the modern nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam. Malay likely began as a trading language that was used to facilitate interaction among speakers of different languages that were also indigenous to the islands that would become Indonesia. Over time, Malay spread and developed. When Islam arrived in the region, Malay became associated with religious and cultural practices that were related to the religion (Adelaar and Himmelmann, 2005).

Indonesia eventually came under the control of the Dutch as the Netherlands East Indies, first under the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) and later the Dutch government when the VOC collapsed in 1800. Portuguese traders and missionaries had been active in the eastern part of the region before the VOC gained control of the whole region. The British had colonized the Malay peninsula and also held Bengkulu on the island of Sumatra from 1685 to 1824. The European powers were very interested in Indonesia because of the wide range of spices produced there that had been known in Europe for centuries. The availability of these commodities had been in the hands of middlemen in the Arab world and India (Ellen, 1977; Ricklefs, 2008). Despite intense interaction with European powers over a period of centuries, the European languages remained a source of loan words but were never widely used for communication in Indonesia. Instead, the Dutch colonial government, like other European groups in Indonesia, tended to use Malay, rather than try to teach local populations their language (Sneddon, 2003b).

By the 20th century, many people in Indonesia were able to speak Malay, and the language, as used in the region, had already begun to show distinctive features that were different from other areas where Malay was also in use (Teew, 1959). At about this time, a serious literature written in Malay began to develop. This further helped standardize and popularize the language. The writers of this period are often credited with contributing to the formation of modern Indonesian through their books which were published in the 1920s and 30s (Teeuw, 1972).

While there have always been groups in Indonesia whose first language is Malay, a majority of the Indonesian population speaks another local language as their first language. It is estimated that there are about 700 languages in use in the nation (Lewis et al, 2016). Some of these are linguistically related to Malay, while others, especially in eastern Indonesia, belong to another language family (Musgrave, 2014). For those Indonesians who speak one of these local languages as their first language, it is generally the language they use in the full range of informal interaction with family and friends in daily life. By contrast, the national language, Indonesian, is used in all formal contexts, including in education and the media. Children begin to learn the standard usages of Indonesian when they enter school, but they have usually been exposed to the language before this time through television and other incidental contact. Indonesia has been extremely successful in establishing the national language, with literacy rates in Indonesian reaching 98% for people aged 15-44. Literacy among older people aged over 45 is about 89%. In some areas, however, functional literacy among older adults is considerably lower than the national average (BPS, 2016).

In the last two decades, and especially since the establishment of regional autonomy in 2001, the language context in Indonesia has been changing. The nature of regional autonomy and the accompanying devolution of authority to relatively low levels of administration has made many of the regions more ethnically homogenous. This has generated a demand for local regulations requiring the use of local language in the public environment. Such local language regulations (*perda bahasa*) have been passed in a number of regions, especially in Java, where the vast majority of the public speaks Javanese as a first language (see Pemerintah Kabupaten Banyumas, 2013; Pikiran Rakyat, 2015; Kabar Nias, 2015; and many more). Indonesia's 1945 Constitution protects local languages and recognizes their place and function in Indonesian society but specifically mandates the use of Indonesian in all formal contexts. For this reason, it has been noted that local laws requiring the use of a local language in government, education, the media, and so forth at certain times (often one day a week) is unconstitutional. Proponents of these local regulations on language believe, however, that they are necessary to prevent loss of ability in the public's first language.

For many of the people in Indonesia who are now over the age of 60, a local language is their main language of expression and the one in which they have the greatest fluency. These older individuals began any formal education they might have in the 1950s or earlier, soon after or just prior to Indonesia's independence in 1945. This schooling would have taken place in Indonesian, even though the language had not yet undergone the standardization undertaken by the government in the 1960s and 70s as part of its language planning efforts. Those individuals who eventually entered professional careers generally became fluent in the formal, standard language used in this setting, but many have nonetheless used their local language in informal interaction for their whole life. Others with less formal education can often read and understand formal language use (such as can be heard in TV news broadcasts) but are less able to understand the informal language varieties that characterize youth

culture. These informal varieties of Indonesian are heavily influenced by Javanese usage and a type of slang associated with the highly urbanized context of the capital (see Smith-Hefner, 2007, for a discussion of this). This type of language is in widespread use on the internet as well as on television in entertainment and comedy programs. This variety of Indonesian is very popular among younger Indonesians, who often imitate these dialects even when they are not used in interaction in their region of origin. The dynamic nature of Indonesian, the appearance and popularity of non-standard varieties, and the widespread use of English for reasons of prestige represents a challenge to many older individuals and may seriously impede their ability to interact fully, except in their local language.

Language and Older Adults

Language use by older adults has been of interest for several decades. The cognitive abilities associated with language comprehension and production are extremely complex (Burke, MacKay and James, 2000; Kemper and Mitzner, 2001). Many people of all ages believe that this facility diminishes with age (Ryan et al, 1992), and it has been found that deterioration in the ability to use and comprehend language does interfere with the ability of older adults to interact and socialize freely (Kemper and Laca, 2004; Hummert et al, 2004). Much of the literature on this topic relates to word, sentence, and discourse issues in the speaker's first language and has been reviewed in detail by Thornton and Light (2006).

Language ability in older people is often characterized in terms of language attrition, especially in the context of bilingualism. This approach assumes that certain aspects of language use are more likely to be affected by changes in the cognitive processes associated with aging and that such changes are likely to occur in the same way for various populations, regardless of language and other background factors (Seliger and Vago, 1991; Goral, 2004). There is, in fact, considerable variation observable between individuals, even when overall patterns of language change are similar. In the case of Indonesia, the research that relates to specific linguistic skills is especially relevant. For example, a number of studies have shown that vocabulary use and syntax are not affected by the normal aging process and may even improve with increasing age (Wingfield and Stine-Morrow, 2000; Goral et al, 2008). Lexical retrieval, however, has been found to decrease with age (Baressi et al, 2000; Mackay et al, 2002), as has the comprehension of complex ideas (Wingfield and Stine-Morrow, 2000; Waters and Caplan, 2001).

A second body of research relates specifically to bilingual speakers. This work has identified two parallel processes, decreased use of one of the languages (intralanguage attrition) and influence of one language on the other (interlanguage attrition). This literature generally does not address the issue of original level of mastery, however, and it does not clearly distinguish between performance as opposed to competence. For instance, the situation of a person who mostly uses his or her second language and experiences attrition in the first language would be very different from another person whose second language use declines with age and, as a result, is subject to attrition. This situation is further complicated by the fact that many bilinguals do not attain native speaker competence in their first language (if, for example, they enter the second language environment as children and their language development is not yet complete), while others do not achieve native speaker competence in their second language (see Goral, 2004, for discussion of this issue). Research suggests that language attrition among bilingual speakers frequently relates to lexical retrieval. This results in increasing difficulty recalling a term in one of the languages spoken. Studies of speakers of various languages indicate that code-switching and code-mixing become increasingly common with age and may involve either the first or second language (Hansen, 2001; Hulsen, De Bot and Weltens, 2002; Schmid, 2013).

In Indonesia, the ability of older people to use their local language and Indonesian is not completely dependent on their social context and has a strong element of inherent ability as well. While less capable of being quantified and evaluated than mastery, it is well-documented that some people are more 'language bound' than others in terms of relying on the structures and conventions of their first language. This may impede their ability to develop fluency in a second language (see Day, 1979, for discussion of this). Attitude and self-perception may also impact significantly on an individual's mastery of a second language (Butler and Hakuta, 2004).

The language experience of older Indonesians is closely related to their perception of well-being and may be severely challenged by language attrition in either Indonesian or their local language. Nonetheless, there are also enhancing effects of exposure to multiple languages for those individuals who have been able to master them over the course of their life. Older people usually have more time for non-work pursuits, so those who have better mastery of Indonesian, in particular, may be able to use this ability to greatly facilitate their own wellbeing through reading, television, and increasingly the online environment, all of which require language competence. This is especially relevant for those older adults who worked as professionals and used Indonesian at a high level. Many of these individuals also have higher levels of formal education and may be more used to reading. The ability to read fluently in Indonesian, for example, can be taken advantage of by older adults to deepen religious knowledge or pursue personal interest in various areas. In addition, for those whose Indonesian is fluent, a growing range of television programming, combined with the easy availability of satellite dishes, allows access to movies, serials, sports, game shows, variety shows, and so forth. Foreign programming is widely available as well and is watched by many Indonesians even though they do not speak the language used.

Language, then, can affect older Indonesians in two opposing ways. For individuals who experience some form of language attrition or gap in their mastery, loss or lack of ability to interact fully in either Indonesian or a local language can isolate the person involved and impede social inclusion and participation. The opposite of this is also the case, however. Greater language facility, especially in Indonesian, enhances wellbeing by allowing access to a much wider range of entertainment and opportunities for personal development. Both extremes exist among older Indonesians, and many other individuals fall somewhere between the two poles. Those who achieve, or end up with, lower levels of mastery, however, may experience serious impediments to their ability to socialize and interact effectively with the people around them. This type of linguistic isolation may be very serious in terms of affective state and may also be a major contributing factor to depression and loneliness.

Cultural Consonance

Cultural consonance relates to expectations a person has for his or her own experience. Specifically, the concept refers to the degree to which the individual's situation conforms to what he or she anticipated. This anticipated state is often unconscious and relates to cultural norms and practices that were absorbed and from earliest childhood. This understanding of cultural practices is closely related to language (a means by which culture is transmitted) and allows the person to fit in and take part in his or her native society. People are generally not aware of their cultural expectations or how they will feel if these expectations are not met, but they are very much aware of the impact of the lack of consonance, especially when it starts to affect their physical or mental health.

The concept of cultural consonance was developed by Dressler and colleagues (Dressler et al, 2005a; Dressler et al, 2005b). They define it as the extent to which the beliefs, perceptions and behavior of individuals accord with prototypes that exist within their culture. The underlying assumption is that people strive to act in ways that accord with their culture of origin but may be unable to do so because of the context in which they live. This acts as a source of stress that may be experienced as physical disease or psychological distress. Dressler (2005), for example, found that higher levels of cultural consonance were associated with lower blood pressure and greater wellbeing in a number of studies. Similar results were obtained when cultural consonance was measured for various populations in a number of different locations (see, for example, Dressler and Bindon, 2000).

Culture, as applied in the study of cultural consonance, is of a body of knowledge that is learned and shared by individuals but that also has a location in a specific group of interest. Culture, then, is assumed to be 'distributed' (Sperber, 1985) and to represent the body of shared learning that is required to function effectively within the social group of interest (Goodenough, 1996). Dressler et al (2007) note that the distribution of cultural knowledge within the group may vary. Aspects of culture may potentially be shared by most members of the group or only by a few, may be concentrated in one or several sub-groups, or may be widely distributed across society. In this last case, there is a high level of both sharing and agreement. In practice, though, this means that some people may not possess a very developed conscious knowledge of culture but will nonetheless have a very clear sense of the collective aspects of culturally accepted behavior (D'Andrade, 1984; Searle, 1995). This exemplifies the distributed nature of culture, which is an aggregate of characteristics of a particular group that also exists within individual members (Jaskyte and Dressler, 2004; Atran et al, 2005).

Every group then is assumed to have a cultural model that contains the shared information that defines the characteristic perspective of members (see, for example, D'Andrade, 1992; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Romney and Moore, 1998). The degree to which individuals share this cultural model can be evaluated using the cultural consensus model developed by Romney et al (1986), which allows the interpretations of individual members of society to be compared with a cultural model for the group to determine the degree of fit with the aggregate model. This approach has a number of advantages that include the degree of sharing of cultural knowledge among members of a group of interest can be assessed; the level of consensus can be quantified, and high-consensus and low-consensus domains can be identified; intragroup diversity can be measured using a calculated cultural competence coefficient; and the level of reliability and generalizability of specific aspects of the culture can be determined (see Handwerker, 2001). Dressler and colleagues have suggested that a lack of cultural consonance can be a chronically stressful situation that results in psychological dissonance because the individual is aware that his or her actions do not accord with accepted cultural norms and/or because he or she may experience social sanctions in interacting with other members of the group (see Dressler et al, 2007). This situation may result in poorer health involving both physical and psychological symptoms.

A difficulty with this way of describing the effects of cultural consonance is that it implies that the individual may have, in some way, chosen not to participate in the shared cultural norms for his or her society. While this does not eliminate the possibility of factors that may direct individual behavior in certain social contexts, it is also the case that social and cultural behaviors may be dictated by the context. This may eliminate certain possible behaviors such that "choice" is limited or nonexistent in practice. In other words, a person who would rather act in a way that is consistent with his or her cultural model may be unable to do so because of the nature of the social context. Behavior, then, may

be directed by circumstances the individual is unable to affect. This forces a loss of cultural consonance that is unintentional and unexpected from the point of view of the person involved. In the case of older Indonesians, this dimension of cultural consonance is central and has resulted from rapid social change in Indonesia over the past several decades, a situation that is beyond the ability of any individual or group to anticipate or address.

The cultural consonance model assumes that a lack of consonance, as perceived by individuals relative to their native culture, is a prolonged source of stress that is different from the acute stress associated with specific events or experiences. This, as discussed by Dressler and colleagues (2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2007), may result in clinical symptoms that can be measured empirically and that link cultural experience to physical and psychological health. By contrast, our research, on which this discussion is based, focused on the perceptions of the people involved and the experiential dimension of aging in modern Indonesian society. The increasing prevalence of depression is a concern among the older population in Indonesia and suggests that a replication of the methodology of Dressler and colleagues might further elucidate the contribution of cultural consonance to the growing incidence of chronic illness among older Indonesians, alongside lifestyle factors, such as diet, exercise and smoking behavior, that are better understood.

Language, Identity and Cultural Consonance in Older Indonesians

The traditional role for older people in Indonesia, in its ideal form, places elderly men and women in a position of respect and authority within their family and community. Typically, this represents a source of identity as well as gives a sense of purpose to these older adults. Traditional values as well as customary social practices hold that older people are an important influence on children and young people in their formative years. Without this recognition, many older Indonesians feel their life has little social value, and they often complain that they do not have the status they associate with the experience of their own grandparents and other elderly relatives they knew. This is particularly significant among those who are retired and whose identity derived in large part from their occupation. Even older people, who lived their whole life in their village of birth, may find that the position of authority they expected to occupy in older age is not available to them because there are now many fewer relatives living in the area, and those who do live there have other options that have reduced their dependence on traditional social relationships. This may result in a situation where younger people increasingly do not recognize the traditional status of the older person, and, in the most extreme circumstances, can lead to exclusion of the elder from the village context. Identity issues among older people have been recognized in many communities (see, for example, Gubrium and Holstein, 2008) but have not been studied in Indonesia, despite indications that they may be important factors in the rising incidence of depression among older people.

The lack of an identity as an elder in the traditional context is a serious challenge to cultural consonance for many older Indonesians. Traditionally, older people were expected to help guide the younger generation in making decisions, to participate in addressing problems, and also to contribute in a meaningful way to decision-making at the family level. Most Indonesians do expect to play this role at some time in their life and feel it very strongly if they are unable to influence the actions of children and grandchildren. A common complaint from older people, wherever they are and regardless of the relationship they have with children and grandchildren, is that younger relatives do not ask for or value

their advice. Many older people are resigned to this situation but may not accept that their views seem irrelevant to their children or their younger relatives, perception that they do not fully understand the problems of the next generation. This can be especially distressing to older adults because of a strong wish to transmit their cultural values to younger relatives and for their children to share their views. Without the support of the extended family and the reinforcement provided by traditional social structures, however, there is generally not much they can do to influence the actions of their younger family members

The language issues that can arise in this situation are discussed above and reflect a situation that is likely to be experienced by members of any of Indonesia's local cultures in the context of increasing urbanization and domestic migration. However, while Indonesians tend to believe strongly in the value of Indonesian as the national language and support its use in various social contexts, it is unusual for people to be aware that mastery of any language brings with it a cognitive framework and way of thinking that is unique to the language in question. For older people, this often becomes apparent only through interaction with grandchildren whom they often feel are very different from their expectations.

Many older Indonesians expect that their children and grandchildren share their views about their culture, family, values, as well as social, religious, and cultural principles. They often feel that they have tried to teach their younger relatives these things, but, in practice, many young people find it difficult to grasp these issues because they are so far from their own life experiences. As younger Indonesians become more involved in the urban, globalized culture that increasingly characterizes life in cities and towns, many traditional practices tend to seem vague and irrelevant in the context of their day to day experiences. For those living in Jakarta or another large city, the experiences of older relatives have little correspondence to anything they are familiar with and have often been transmitted to them in Indonesian, rather than their heritage local language which contains specific terms and expressions for cultural phenomena.

One of the ways that this gap in perception between the generations is observed is in the inability of younger family members to understand why an older relative insists on staying in their village, even if he or she is miserable and lonely there, or why a parent, who has been living in another area for decades, takes an increasing interest in their ethnic culture as he or she ages. These younger people are often surprised that their older relatives seem unable to be content where they are. This can lead to conflict and disappointment, especially when an older person requires the assistance and support of younger family members who live in another location. In some cases, the older person has no alternative but to accept that he or she will have to live in a place where family members can provide care. In other cases, the older person may insist on remaining in the village, even if that means living alone or in a socially unusual situation.

There can be no doubt that the experience of older Indonesians today is extremely different from that of their parents and grandparents. Their experiences are also very different from those of their own children and grandchildren who are more integrated into the modern Indonesian social and cultural context than ever before. In this sense, today's older people represent a transitional generation, whose life has been marked by unprecedented social, cultural, political, and economic change that altered some of the basic aspects of the collective experience of life in Indonesia.

Many of today's older people have certainly benefitted from this process of change in a number of ways, including economically. Many are much better off financially than previous generations. At the same

time, however, this generation has experienced a significant reduction in the importance of *adat* and its precepts, as well as changes in daily practices that derive from the traditional culture of the group. When asked to reflect on this, most older adults can list numerous social, cultural, and religious practices that no longer exist in their community that they felt benefitted the community or were significant in traditional culture. The basis for this assessment is the cultural model they developed in childhood based on their own experiences and the collective knowledge of the community, which at the time had been much less affected by outside elements.

This process of change has been gradual and has occurred over the life course of these older individuals. Many of them have adapted well and have been able to take advantage of new and increased opportunities, especially in relation to education and work. Nonetheless, in older age, many rely on a cultural model of aging that derives from the traditional context and reflects the nature of life as it may have existed in the past. In many cases, this model does not fully fit with the experience of these older people or with their interests and desires as a member of the larger Indonesian community. As a result, many experience a serious problem with cultural consonance where the gap between their expectations for their own older age and the reality of their situation is significant and tangible.

Indonesian does not contain the concept of cultural consonance or the terminology to express its principles. Nonetheless, issues of cultural consonance can be observed when many older adults talk about the matters discussed above and their perceptions of them. They use terms that recall the typical definition of depression and other negative psychological states. For example, many individuals mention feeling alone and lonely (*merara terpencil*), sad (*sedih*), uneasy (*tegang, perasaan kacau*), anxious (*gelisah*), or ashamed (*malu*). Others report being unable to sleep or complain of having no social role and that their life is empty (*hampa*) (see Syukra, 2012; Fanany, Fanany and Tas'ady, 2014). Feelings of this kind are common among older people in a range of contexts, their traditional place of residence, a provincial city or town, a city away from their place of origin, and also institutions, suggesting that gaps in cultural consonance are widely experienced, regardless of the environment and situation of the person involved.

At present, there has been little attention paid to the growing problem of depression and mental health problems among older people in Indonesia, although their existence has been noted in many locations. While it is possible that these conditions characterize the current generation of older people, and may be intensified by the dynamic nature of the social and cultural contexts over the course of their lives, it seems more likely that Indonesia's aging population will continue to experience mental health problems, some of which may relate directly to issues of cultural consonance. This is likely to be the case until a new cultural model comes into existence in the many cultural groups that make up the population that provides precedents and meaning for old age in the modern context.

Among older Indonesians, it is possible to observe the various patterns of language use and attrition reported in the literature. However, their nature and occurrence is related to several factors specific to the social patterns of the group. Many older speakers who have lived their whole lives in their village of origin or similar location were never fluent speakers of Indonesian and rely on a local language as their main language of communication. Unless these individuals had a reason to use Indonesian, such as in the context of employment, their mastery of the language may be limited to comprehension (often of more standard usage only), and they may have little productive ability. Speakers of this kind are normally extremely fluent in the local language, however, and are capable of using it in all contexts. They may also show mastery of a range of language varieties, including the highly stylized varieties of

language used in traditional literature and *adat*. A second group of older people are truly bilingual in their local language and Indonesian. These individuals are often professionals whose formal education and employment required the use of Indonesian at a high level but who continued to use the local language in a full range of social contexts outside these domains. Speakers of this type often live in an urban area in their region of origin, where a majority of the community speaks the local language, and there is environmental reinforcement of both it and Indonesian. Some of these speakers engage in considerable borrowing between Indonesian and the local language, especially when discussing matters associated with the domains for one language in the other. However, many of them have equal facility in the two languages and can switch between codes effortlessly as the situation requires. This pattern of language use is often observed among older people who have lived much of their adult life in one of Indonesia's largest cities, where they have generally been exposed to a much more diverse language context and speakers from other parts of the country with different language backgrounds. Many of the individuals in this situation are able to use one or more varieties of Indonesian. Mastery is often dependent on level of education and occupational status, with those who are university educated professionals, for example, generally having greater competence in several varieties of Indonesian, while those who worked in trade or in the informal sector are often only able to use the highly colloquial, informal urban dialects that characterize the lower economic classes of Indonesian speakers. Some of these speakers also have exposure to another local language and may have some facility in that language as well. In terms of their retention of their local language, older individuals who have spent their adult lives in the urban context also show considerable variation, which is related to a number of social factors but also to inherent language ability.

Not surprisingly, the extent to which an older person living in an urban environment can maintain his or her ability to speak and understand his or her local language is directly connected to his or her personal situation and social network. For older people who are married to another speaker of the same language, the local language may be used in daily communication within the home or at least between the spouses involved. Children, however, often do not speak the language, although many can understand. They are often native speakers of Indonesian and exhibit full mastery of relevant varieties as well as the dialect used in the place they live. Older speakers in this situation, regardless of their mastery of Indonesian, often retain high level ability in their local language, which may be supported by participation in ethnically-based social groups and, in many cases, strong connections with their region of origin. Many older people who have spent their adult lives outside of their region of birth are married to people of other backgrounds, who have also lived much of their adult life away from the region associated with their ethnic group. In situations of this kind, the local language is not typically the language of the household. Instead, daily conversation may take place in Indonesian or, occasionally, in another local language. Individuals in this situation vary greatly in their participation in ethnically based social groups and organizations and the degree to which they interact with extended family and friends in their region of ethnic association. The location where both male and female speakers live is also significant in marriages where the partners speak different local languages and considerable variation can be observed. For example, if the family lives in a region where one spouse's local language is used, that language may take on greater importance and will likely be spoken by any children of the marriage in addition to Indonesian. It may also be the language used in the home. If the family resides in an area that uses a third language that is not spoken by either spouse, the home language is often Indonesian, and children often have some knowledge of the mother's language, whatever it is. These phenomena have been observed for a number of Indonesian ethnic groups (see, for example, Sakur et al, 2015; Juliani et al, 2016; Tamrin, 2016).

For most Indonesians, identity as a member of an ethnic group is extremely important and, for many people, represents their true persona. This often results in the adoption of a more pronounced ethnic identity as they age and especially when they are no longer working. One reason for this is related to the nature of Indonesian identity and ethnic identity in modern Indonesia. This dichotomy is closely associated with language use. For many people, with the exception of those who work in the informal sector in a community that uses their local language, employment requires the use of Indonesian which people tend to associate with their professional identity. When they are no longer part of the work force, the need to use and be Indonesian lessens for many older people. At the same time, if they live in a region where their local language is used, they may play a more important role in the leadership of their family or take part in religious or community affairs that fit the social norms for older people. Even for those who live permanently in another location and do not have a great deal of contact with their extended family or with other speakers of their local language, older age is often characterized by behavior and attitudes that are more associated with their culture of origin than with the culture they live in.

The result of this is often an increasing sense of identity loss, cultural consonance, and well-being. For many older Indonesians, the split between an Indonesian identity associated with the use of the national language and an ethnic identity associated with their culture of origin and a local language is extremely difficult to reconcile. The extremely rapid social and cultural change experienced nationwide since Indonesia achieved independence in 1945 has created a strong focus on modernization and global participation that extends into all areas of life at the individual as well as the group level. The modern Indonesian context, however, does not contain relevant models for successful aging and does not support the behaviors, attitudes and practices that are seen as appropriate and beneficial for older adults in the traditional context. The result of this is a growing lack of cultural consonance among older adults that centers on issues related to language and the associated cultural identity. There can be no doubt that these issues will increase in severity as well as prevalence as the population continues to age and older people make up a more significant proportion of Indonesia's population.

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