TERMS OF ADDRESS

PERSONAL names, like pronouns, are a minefield of sensitivity in written and spoken Indonesian. People usually put some kind of kinship term before a name, or use these terms instead of names. This poses quite a challenge when translating into English, as in a collection of stories by Leila Chudori that I have been translating and which makes extensive use of appellations.

We are somewhat familiar with this in English, especially in older literature. We often use 'Uncle' and 'Aunty' to address people who are not really relatives, for instance. Or think of the use of the word 'Mother' for an older woman as in 'Old Mother Hubbard', or 'Son' to address a boy or young man (or in Cockney English as in British TV cop shows, for any male unless significantly older).

Then there are the terms 'Buddy' (or 'Bud') and 'Mate', used in the United States and Australia respectively. Recently, 'Bro' has become common—which decades ago was used in New Zealand as a particular marker of Maori and Pacific Island speech, and has now gone global. American English has an old precedent for this—think of Uncle Remus's Brer Rabbit. Women and girls seem to have fewer appellations. 'Sister' is not as common as 'Brother', but African Americans have popularized its use. I remember the thrill I felt when I was addressed as 'Girlfriend' in a shop in New York many years ago. 'Miss' or 'Madam' just do not have that zing.

In Indonesia, to address people with just their name feels abrupt, rude and cold, unless between extremely close friends who often use nicknames or shortened names. There must be some appellation before the name, or used instead of the name. Within a family, siblings address each other using words showing their relationship, and these same terms are used in wider society. This is one area where regional language use remains strong—and regional terms enrich Indonesian.

The words for 'Mr' and Mrs' in Indonesian are the same words as 'Father' and 'Mother', namely '*Bapak*' and '*Ibu*', which can be abbreviated to *Pak* and *Bu*. So these words can feel both very intimate and very formal. There is another word for father, *ayah*, which some families use for Dad or Father because it has no other more official connotation. No one in Indonesia would dream of addressing an older person, an official, or an adult with whom you are not familiar without the respectful '*Pak*' or '*Bu*'. Beyond that, there are dozens of appellations to choose from, many from regional languages, which show intimacy, social status, relative age and regional background.

For instance, the Javanese words '*Mas*' and '*Mbak*' for (older) 'Brother' and (older) 'Sister' respectively, are now widely used beyond Javanese circles. Television and film have helped popularize them, but they are used alongside other words; '*Kak*' or '*Kakak*' for instance, the Malay gender-neutral term for older sibling is widely used. The Sundanese word '*Akang*' for older brother, abbreviated to '*Kang*' has the same warm feeling as *Mas*. (*Kang* is also a Javanese appellation from *Kakang*, more formal than *Mas*, used for older brother or husband). The words *Cak* in Madura and *Beli* in Bali also mean 'brother'. For women, '*Yu*', the second half of the Javanese '*Mbakyu*' is often used to address an older sister. In Eastern Indonesia, the word '*Non*' (short for the Portuguese-derived *Nona*, or Miss) is a term of address for young women and girls, but is also in wider use. In Jakarta, the shortened '*Bang*' from the Malay *Abang* for older brother is a particular marker of Betawi speech. There are many, many other terms from other regional languages.

The use of appellations is an integral part of characterization in Indonesian literature. It reveals how characters place themselves, their backgrounds, and relationships between them. This is often difficult to translate into English. For example, in Leila's book, the main character, Nadira (who lives in Jakarta), addresses her father as '*Yah*', her older sister as '*Yu*', her older brother as '*Kang*', most of her journalist male workmates as

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'*Mas*' and female colleagues as '*Mbak*', her boss as '*Pak*' (although her colleagues call him '*Mas*'), her aunts as '*Tante*' or '*Bibi*', her uncles as '*Oom*' or '*Mang*', and her friend the police chief, '*Bang*'. And one must also notice when characters use no appellation at all. It might signify particular intimacy, but might not. For instance, there is a scene when the journalist Nadira is interviewing an obscenely rich thug, whose assistant totters over to ask her what she would like to drink. Nadira replies addressing her as '*Mbak*'. The upwardly-mobile dumb-blonde type assistant corrects her, and tells Nadira to call her by name, without the '*Mbak*'. This is not an invitation to intimacy. An Indonesian reader immediately understands the implication of character here: the assistant considers herself worldly, western and modern and looks down on this scruffy interviewer.

During Indonesia's period of early nationalism, revolution and the early republic, there was a drive to use terms that broke with the feudal past and which were sensed as egalitarian. The most well known and lasting of these terms is '*Bung*' for Brother, which was used by Indonesia's first President Sukarno and Vice President Hatta who are still known as *Bung* Karno and *Bung* Hatta. During Indonesia's revolutionary struggle for independence, posters supporting the fighters had the famous phrase '*Ayo Bung!*' (Come on, Brother!). It is unclear when, exactly, Sukarno began to use '*Bung*', but the earliest written reference to him as '*Bung* Karno' found to date (by Indonesian literature specialist Paul Tickell) is from 1931 in the Indies Dutch language daily newspaper.

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Where did '*Bung*' come from? It is still a mystery. It came to be a term particularly associated with the Left, especially among Indonesian exiles after the 1965 coup, although communists had their own words for Comrade, '*kawan*' being the most common. Some say that the word '*Bung*' comes from Ambonese Malay, but experts such as the linguist James Collins disagree, pointing out that the Ambonese term is not *Bung* but '*Bu*' from the Dutch '*Broer*', and it is unlikely that '*Bu*' and '*Bung*' are connected. Also, as Prof. Collins points out, it is unlikely indeed that Javanese revolutionary leaders would adopt an Ambonese title when Ambon was not allied with the revolutionary republic.

Paul Tickell has searched early Indonesian literature and found the word '*Bung*' used in 1934 in a serialized novel published in a nationalist newspaper in Medan. The hero of the novel is a Leftist, a follower of Tan Malaka, and so here the term '*Bung*' has a clear revolutionary-nationalist context. An earlier use, from Java, is from a 1931 story about a Communist Party activist and this seems to confirm a revolutionary context.

But not so fast! Yet an earlier appearance of *Bung* confuses things. The Eurasian writer Hans van der Waal who had the penname Victor Ido wrote a novel in 1915, *The Paupers,* about Eurasian society with a central shady character called '*Boong*'. This might put the origins of the word in the Eurasian-Indies community. Anyway, where '*Bung*' actually came from, and how it came to be adopted as an egalitarian term of address for men in the revolutionary nationalist movement, and then as the chosen appellation for Indonesia's first president is a story yet to be told.

After the 1965 coup, '*Bung*' became discredited. Indonesia's next president, a Javanese military general, Suharto, was '*Pak*', and so have been all them since, except for the only female president, *Bung* Karno's daughter Megawati, who was '*Bu*' or sometimes '*Mbak*' Mega.

It seems the days of an ideal of linguistic egalitarianism are past. ●

*JENNIFER LINDSAY IS A YOGYAKARTA AND SYDNEY-BASED WRITER

ILLUSTRATION: EDI RM