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Indonesians' Tendency to Refer Abbreviation as Acronym: Types of Abbreviation as Word Formation Process

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the tendency of Indonesians words formation process to assume all types of abbreviation are acronym. This study examines the types of word formation process of abbreviation, and whether abbreviation or acronym is the correct umbrella term for this particular morphological process. Using library research method, this paper refers to two key morphology researchers from Britain and Indonesia, Laurie Bauer and Harimurti Krisdalaksana respectively, as well as one Indonesian Doctorate Arie Ansrasyah Isa whom referred the former two researchers in her study that proposes 16 types of abbreviations using data from top Indonesian newspapers, Jakarta Post and Kompas. This paper concludes that common people in Indonesia refer all abbreviations as acronyms because their high preference in abbreviating long phrases stems from the desire to increase pronounce ability and familiarity of words, usually in the context of humor, but is highly prevalent in all situations, formal or non-formal.

Keywords: Morphology, Abbreviation, Acronym, Word Formation, Pronounce ability

INTRODUCTION

The national language of Indonesia, which is Indonesian or *Bahasa Indonesia*, is almost exclusively taught in schools, and often only used in government pronouncements, official media, and print publications, and less often in digital publications and everyday life (Smith-Hefner, 2007). Official Indonesian language had to develop as a way to communicate Indonesian nationalism, aspirations, and traditions (Anderson, 1966), and the same purpose may also be found in the development of Indonesian youth language or *Bahasa Gaul Indonesia* because the official Indonesian language has become popularly considered as stiff and too humorless to function as

everyday language. Whether it's formal or informal language, Indonesians are notorious in using abbreviations, such as in the news, both print and digital (Noviatri & Reniwati, 2015). This phenomenon directly relates to Indonesia's reformation movement after the end of President Soeharto's regime in 1998 that marks the people of Indonesian's freedom of speech. Indonesians were finally, at least relatively, free to make their own opinions, and consequently create new words on their own.

In linguistics, the discipline that deals with language (Matthews, 1997), the branch concerned with the word formation process is called morphology. This paper will refer to three morphology researchers. Two of them are highly well known, one from Britain and one from Indonesia. Laurie Bauer, whose main area of interest is morphology, Particularly in word formation, and Harimurti Krisdalaksana, an esteemed Indonesian literary expert. The third researcher, Arie Andrasyah Isa, is an Indonesian Doctorate who tried to dissect the process of abbreviation which she believed have been largely provided with incorrect information in 2006. Her paper is still of interest now because of her digestible explanations of each different types of abbreviations.

One of the ways to form new words is through abbreviation, which is the act of shortening existing set of words. One can create abbreviations by taking initial capitalized letters of longer phrases, such as:

- BA : Bachelor of Arts
- NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- ASAP : As soon as possible

One can also create abbreviations using non-initial letters and periods of the longer phrases, such as:

- BSc : Bachelor of Science
- Inc. : Incorporated
- Asap : As soon as possible

These six examples are chosen in particular because they illuminate a certain property of abbreviation that this paper is interested in: its pronunciation. All these six abbreviations have their own pronunciations; some only has one way of pronunciation

while some has more than one way. For example, *BA* and *BSc* are pronounced using their letters, and while the former can be pronounced as one syllable unlike the latter, English-speakers do not pronounce *BA* as one syllable. Meanwhile, *NATO* and *Inc.* can be pronounced with only its letters, but practically no English-speakers do so and sound the four-letter *NATO* in two syllables and the three-letter *Inc.* as a one-syllable word. Lastly, the phrase *as soon as possible* can be abbreviated in two forms, with *ASAP* being pronounced as one word in two syllables and *asap* having each of its letters sounded out.

The difference in pronouncing abbreviations creates two types of abbreviations. For example, the abbreviation *NKRI* (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*) can only be pronounced by sounding out its individual letters, because applying regular reading rule such as phonological pattern of English is impossible for this example of an abbreviation. Because the abbreviation consists of initial letters pronounced separately, it is called an initialism (Krisdalaksana, 1989; Bauer, 1983). Some examples of Indonesian initialism type of abbreviation can be seen as below:

- PT : Perseroan Terbatas
- DKI : Daerah Khusus Ibukota
- PMR : Palang Merah Remaja
- FLSF: Foreign Language Student Forum
- RCTI: Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia
- RAPBN: Rancangan Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara

Some abbreviations such as the last three examples displayed above are pronounced with more than three syllables. While they fulfilled the purpose of shortening lengthy base words, initialism type of abbreviation may still take “too long” to be said, so people are more favorable to create abbreviations that can be pronounced with only 1-3 syllables because they are easier and “more fun” to pronounce. A pronounceable abbreviation is called an acronym (Krisdalaksana, 1989; Bauer, 1983). Some examples of Indonesian acronym type of abbreviation can be seen as below:

- BEM : Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa

- EDSA : English Department Student Association
- PAUD : Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini
- LIPI : Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia
- TOEFL : Test of English as a Foreign Language
- U-RAISE : Unilak Research Academy for Intellectual and Scientific Empowerment

PRACTICE OF ABBREVIATION

The practice of abbreviating words could be traced back to Roman times. One of the oldest acronyms is INRI (*Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum*). Roman Empire's official name *Senatus Populusque Romanus* was frequently abbreviated to SPQR, which can still be seen in the manhole covers in Rome. These instances indicate that the practice of abbreviating is not new, however, their usage in before and after the twentieth century is different. Prior to instant communication enabled by technology, abbreviations are sparsely used. Old abbreviations that are regularly used were AM/PM (*ante meridiem* and *post meridiem* respectively, meaning before noon and after noon), as well as AD (*Anno Domini*, in the Year of our Lord).

It is during the Second World War (1939-1945) that the use of abbreviations significantly increased because there is greater need for encrypting and accelerating communication, and it is during this time period, specifically in 1943, that the word 'acronym' itself is coined. Though world wars have ended, the practice of forming abbreviations still continue, which can be seen from the first edition of Acronyms, Initialisms and Abbreviations Dictionary (AIAD) in 1960 consisting of 12,000 words to the 16th edition of AIAD in 1992 consisting of 520,000 words.

As society becomes more and more technical with numerous discoveries in scientific and nonscientific journals, the proportion of abbreviations also significantly increased to familiarize the highly technical words into 2 or 3-syllable words that will be easier to use in daily life, i.e., *DNA*, *EEG*, *CD-ROM*, *DVD* (Fandrich, 2008; Stockwell & Minkova, 2001). Abbreviations are actively used in text messages and e-mail communications, such as *lol*, *btw*, *myob*, *etc* (Permatasari, 2013). Some abbreviations are so regularly used, many people are unaware of their nature as abbreviations, such as *radar* (radio detection and ranging), *scuba* (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), and

laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation). This indicates that due to their high frequency (Yonelinas, 2002; Connine *et al.*, 1990; Whaley, 1978; Oldfield & Wingfield, 1965) these abbreviations have eclipsed their identities as abbreviations, specifically acronyms, and are now treated as actual words.

INDONESIA'S PERSPECTIVE OF ABBREVIATION

This paper is interested in the way most Indonesians regard abbreviation. When they discuss about abbreviations, they seem to mostly refer to acronyms. Most Indonesians consider abbreviation and acronym to be identical, and even lump them with other types of word formations by abbreviation such as blend (two words lose phonetic materials and combined, such as *smoke + fog* blended into *smog*) and truncation/clipping/shortening (the base word lose a few phonetic material to become monosyllabic in order to mark familiarity, such as *laboratorium* truncated into *lab*, or *telephone* clipped into *phone*) (Lepic, 2016; Malenica & Fabijanić, 2013).

Evidence of this Indonesians' tendency to refer abbreviation as acronym is obvious from a wikipedia page titled 'List of Indonesian Acronyms and Abbreviations.' The webpage showed no distinction as to which is abbreviation or acronym, and includes other types of abbreviations such as blends, truncations, and contractions (two words fused to make one new word, such as *want + to* contracted into *wanna*) (Smith-Hefner, 2007).

It's also evident in Indonesian research papers, such as Abidin (2012) that says *SVM*, which can stand for *Support Vector Machine* in Computer Science field and *Sourcing and Vendor Management* in Management field, is an acronym, even though it is pronounced as individual letters. *Ujian Nasional* (National Exam) which can be shortened as UN is also called an acronym in this Indonesian research paper, even though UN is pronounced with their letters and never as a regular word.

The way Indonesians refer nearly every abbreviation as simply acronyms raised questions in some Indonesian scholars. One whom believed that there are mistakes on the information and definition of abbreviation presented up to 16 types of abbreviation using data from Indonesia's top newspapers *Jakarta Post* and *Kompas* (Isa, 2006). Isa agreed with Bauer's definition that acronyms are words made up of initial letters of words, title, or phrase which are then pronounced as if they are new words (Bauer,

1988), and accordingly to phonological rules (Kridalaksana, 1993). Isa offers an explanation for abbreviations that do not include all the initial letters of all long phrases such as *BSc*, *RAPBN*, *TOEFL*, and *U-RAISE*. The latter two examples that could be pronounced as a regular word, Isa defined them as ‘acronym’ type of abbreviation. For the former two which needed each letter to be sounded out, they are ‘alphabetism’ type of abbreviation, which is most likely Isa’s term for ‘initialism.’ The summary of the results of her research paper concerning the word-form process in the morphological level that is abbreviation would be:

- (1) Alphabetism/Initialism: a type of abbreviation using the initial letters of a set of words to form a new word which could not be pronounced as a regular word. Example: United Kingdom → UK, Thank God It’s Friday → TGIF.
- (2) Acronym: a type of abbreviation using the initial letters of a set of words to form a new word which could be pronounced as a regular word. Example: White Anglo-Saxon Protestant → WASP.
- (3) Part Acronym: a type of abbreviation using the initial letters of a set of words and also the the initial letters of prepositions or connectors to form a new word which could be pronounced as a regular word. Example: search and rescue → SAR.
- (4) Acronym Coinage: a type of abbreviation using the initial letters to create a word as a title (usually of a product). Example: central processing unit → CPU.
- (5) Synchronism: a type of abbreviation using syllable and acronym, targeting a specific letter that both words have in common (syllabic juncture) so the new word is easy to pronounce. Example: motor + hotel → motel.
- (6) Blend: a type of abbreviation using non-morphemic (not morpheme-based) parts of words. Example: information + entertainment → info + tainment → infotainment.
- (7) Lexical Blend: a type of abbreviation fusing parts of words. Example: breakfast + lunch → br- + -unch → brunch.
- (8) Loan Blend: a type of abbreviation using the morphemes of a foreign and native word. [French] aer(o) + [British] plane → aeroplane.
- (9) Separated Blend: a type of abbreviation fusing the letters that are not necessarily

part of the root words, purposefully using letters in that will coin a word that is easy to pronounce. Example: Association Southeast Asian Nations → ASEAN, United States → USA, inspektorat jenderal → irjen.

- (10) Amalgam: a type of abbreviation using the first two letters of a first word and all the letters of a second word. Example: glass + asphalt → gl- + asphalt → glasphalt.
- (11) Analogical Form: a type of abbreviation deriving fully specified word forms. Example: cheese + burger → cheeseburger, work + -aholic → workaholic.
- (12) Contraction: a type of abbreviation that shortens the base lexeme (all forms of a single word). Example: do not → don't, tidak ada → tiada.
- (13) Letter symbols: a type of abbreviation producing 1 or two letters that describes a scientific concept in the context of quantity or element. Example: gram → g, calcium → Ca.

Although at first glance it seems impressive that Isa manages to break down the highly creative process of forming new words by abbreviation that Indonesians use into 16 types, at least one of them seems mixed up or unnecessarily categorized as a different type. That is, the explanation for 'synchronym' is nearly identical with 'blend,' an oddity considering Isa refers to both Bauer and Krisdalaksana to explain about 'blend.' As further research reveals little outside references for 'analogical form' and 'amalgam,' both of these seems to be Isa's proposal for abbreviation types.

With these in mind, it's clear that Indonesians take liberty in the formation of words. It's a highly viral practice in the media concerning politics or even just for comedic purposes. It's highly common for Indonesians to create acronyms using whatever letter is available from the names of government candidates in order to increase familiarity and virality, such as Syahrul Yasin Limpo and Agus Arifin Nu'mang's names being abbreviated to *Sayang*, which is actually an established regular word meant as a term of endearment (Rijal, 2015).

Indonesians also often purposefully create longer versions of words using an already established regular word, making it become an abbreviation. *Bupati* is an Indonesian title for the head of a region, but later on in humorous context the word becomes an acronym for *Buka paha tinggi-tinggi*, which refers to people who showed an obscene

amount of thigh skin. Furthermore, Indonesians would give new definitions for already familiar acronyms such as *Golput (Golongan Putih)* to be *Gerakan orang kesal dan putus asa*, or *Orba (Orde Baru)* to be *Orang-orang banyak akal*.

We can see the reason why Indonesians simply lump all types of abbreviations as ‘acronym’ might be because they regularly practice making multiple words into create new ones that are easy to pronounce and remember. Because of this highly common practice, laymen wouldn’t concern themselves to make sure they are using the correct specific terms for “the internal structure of the potential complex of words of a language” (Aronoff & Anshen, 2017). Therefore, for Indonesians, ‘acronym’ could be more a more familiar term than ‘abbreviation’, though those who studied it understand that ‘abbreviation’ is the umbrella term for the numerous types of word formation.

CONCLUSION

Indonesians are notorious in using and creating abbreviations for both formal and informal settings. Although to a great extent, Indonesians seems to mostly refer all of their attempts to shorten long phrases as acronyms, giving little note to the fact that they are actually creating initializes or blends. Using library research method, this paper tries to answer why most Indonesians seem to think all attempts to shorten words as acronyms. Referring to highly prominent scholars of linguistics morphology British Laurie Bauer and Indonesian Harimurti Krisdalaksana, this paper found Arie Andrasyah Isa whom also referred to both key researchers in her attempt to answer to address the how Indonesians view the word formation process by abbreviation which she believes to have been mistaken by misinformation or incomplete definitions. From studying the discourse of abbreviation as word formation process by the three scholars, it is clear that abbreviation is the umbrella term for all types of the word formation processes discussed.

The reason why Indonesians mostly lump abbreviation with acronym or act as if acronym is the umbrella term of the process is because laymen understands that acronyms emphasize pronounceability. The viral practice of abbreviating long phrases and even single words stems from the motivation to create words that are easy to pronounce. Acronyms are created with the specific purpose of pronounceability, so there will be abbreviations that do not use all the initials available, and acronyms that

use additional letters or syllables that are available from the words being shortened. People in common wouldn't confuse themselves with properly labeling the ways they are abbreviating words, and simply call everything 'acronyms' because that specific type of abbreviation is the one that they are generally aiming for. Whether it's by abbreviating or making a regular word into an abbreviation, the way Indonesians create new words is a subject of interest for further study. Although some people have raised concerns with the unusually high preference for abbreviations than regular or proper words in nearly every situation, this phenomenon might add difficulty for future generations in learning proper Bahasa Indonesia.

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