



# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

## **M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports**

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

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# Gayo - A language of Acha, Sumatra



Bree Smith, TESL 549, Summer 2011

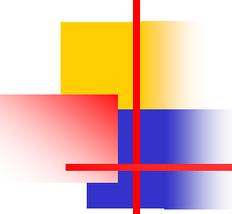
<http://library.thinkquest.org/>



# The Gayo Language

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- People Name: Gayo
- People Cluster: Aceh of Sumatra
- Language: Gayo
- Trade Language: Indonesian
- Population: 214,000
- The Gayo people, speakers of the Gayo language, live on the Indonesian island of Sumatra in a remote area of the Aceh Province.
- In their early history, the people of Gayo were conquered by the neighboring Aceh people who forced the Gayo to become their slaves.



# Economy and Education

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- The Dutch occupied Gayo from 1904-1944. post Dutch occupation the Gayo have had more access to higher levels of education, and to some degree have participated in the islamicization and modernization of their country.
- This history accounts for the fact that the Gayo language was an unwritten language for many years. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Gayo began using written language.



# Gayo Language Facts

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- The earliest known writing in Gayo used the Jawi script (Arabic letters) but since the 1950s most Gayo have used standard Indonesian orthography. By the 1980s most Gayo had competence in the Indonesian language.

# A lost language?



<http://uranggayo.wordpress.com>

- According to some who study the Gayo culture the language may be lost by the year 2016.
- This theory is based on the fact that the Gayo community often do not use the Gayo language in everyday communication. They are more likely to use the Indonesian language and are too tolerant to this.



## Problems Indonesian Speakers may have with English

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- In Indonesian, nouns are not inflected for number. Rather reduplication of a noun can be used to indicate a plural.
- The phrase *bukuini*, literally means “book this”, which can translate into “this book” or “these books”.



# Plurals

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- Indonesian ELLs may drop the plural endings after numerals, or have difficulty using the correct form of quantifiers and demonstratives.

Some examples of possible mistakes:

- She have three sister and two brother.
- The teacher gave too much correction.
- this pictures



# Phonetics

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- The Indonesian and English phonological systems are very different.
- English has 22 vowels and diphthongs and 24 consonants.
- Indonesian has only 6 vowels and three diphthongs.



# Spelling and Pronunciation

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- Indonesian words are generally spelled the way they are pronounced.
- Therefore, English words that are spelled differently than they are pronounced may be very problematic.



# Rhythm and Stress

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- Most varieties of Indonesian have a syllable timed rhythm, and the difference between various degrees of stress tend to be very small.
- When an Indonesian speaker talks in English this can lead to a sound of monotony or flatness.



# Articles/determiners

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- The Indonesian language does not use articles. Therefore the task of understanding articles can be very difficult for these ELLs.

Some common mistakes:

- *"How was exam?"*
- *"It have the four leg."*
- *"They include the secondary school as a kindergarten."*



# Confusions

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- Indonesian English learners have considerable problems with pairs of English words that have only one meaning in Indonesian.
- Some examples include: live/stay, tell/ask/say, open/start, take/send/pick-up



# Cross-Cultural Implications

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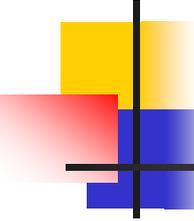
- English is considered a language of prestige in all parts of Indonesia including Gayo. Therefore the English teacher is very well respected.
- In the classroom the teacher is expected to maintain a very formal relationship with their students.
- Female teachers are expected to dress very carefully and keep arms and legs covered.



# Cross-culture cont.

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- The *Gayo* people place importance on avoiding any type of embarrassment or shame. This provides a restraining influence on conduct.
- In a classroom this could have a positive or a negative affect. The positive affect being behavior is usually superb. The negative being hesitance to try to pronounce English for fear of embarrassment.



# Resources

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## Books

Bowen, J. R. (1991). *Sumatran politics and poetics: Gayo history, 1900-1989*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Garry, J., & Rubino, C. (Eds.), *The facts about the world's major languages* (pp. 452-458). New York: H.W. Wilson Co.

Swan, M., & Smith, B. (Eds.), *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems* (pp. 279-295). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sneddon, J.N. (1996). *Indonesian: A comprehensive grammar*. New York: Routledge.

## Images

Wordpress. (2011). Save Gayo language now. *Tano Gayo*. Retrieved from:  
<http://uranggayo.wordpress.com/2008/07/17/save-gayo-language-now/>

## Maps

Team 26300-Think Quest (1999). Map of North Sumatra. Retrieved from:  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/26300/medan.html>

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