Beginning Indonesian
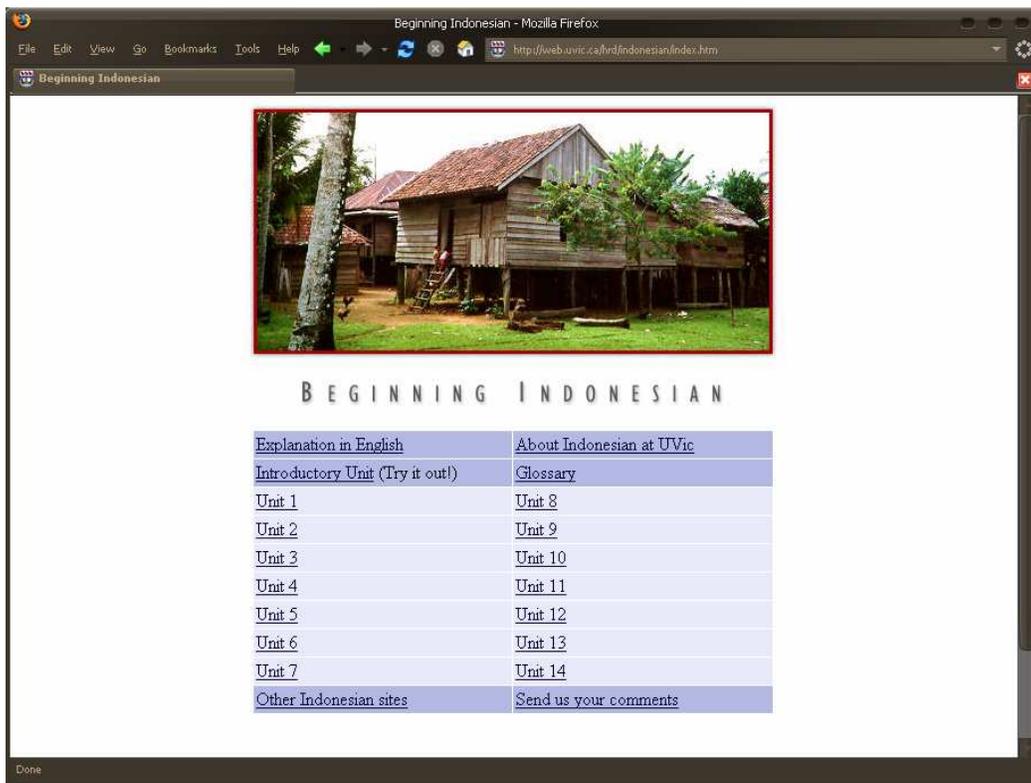
The website that is the focus of this review is titled *Beginning Indonesian* and is located at http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/indonesian/index.htm. It was originally designed by the University of Victoria in Canada to complement their pre-existing Indonesian teaching program for beginners. Today it has become a popular online resource used by many institutions teaching Indonesian as well as individuals learning Indonesian by their own initiative.

Aims / Purpose

The introduction to the website briefly and clearly states the overall purpose of the website as "to give elementary students of Indonesian the opportunity to practise and review basic vocabulary, grammar and sentence structures." Apart from this introductory statement, it gives no further information as to what language skills are addressed in the lessons. It would have been beneficial to students and teachers alike, if individual objectives had been provided for each of the fourteen lessons.

Nevertheless, all of the lessons do work together to achieve the main purpose of the site.

Authority / Expertise / Recognition

The website was authored by individuals with experience in the fields of CALL and teaching Indonesian. It was published by the University of Victoria, located in BC, Canada, and was developed by staff of the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, in conjunction with the university's CALL Lab.

The site is not listed as receiving any awards, but it is recognized by many teachers of Indonesian, including those at Curtin University, as one of the best Indonesian language learning/teaching resources available online. Also because of its high quality, it is often used to illustrate successful use of the software package Hot Potatoes.

Accuracy / Currency

The content of the site is accurate and up-to-date, which is a reflection of the amount of time and effort that has been invested into the site. Though my own understanding of the Indonesian language does not compare to that of a native speaker, the grammar and sentence structures used appear to be accurate and consistent with what is used by native speakers. There do not appear to be any errors or spelling mistakes.

The website has not been updated recently, with the last update marked as December 5, 2000. There has not been a need for any updates or changes of late, as the content is still current and accurate. It is still as useful today as when it was first published.

Content

The content of the website is of a high quality, but at some points there are little gaps which would normally be filled in during class time if the learner was studying at the University of Victoria. Therefore the content is best suited to students of Indonesian at that university, though it could be useful for anyone.
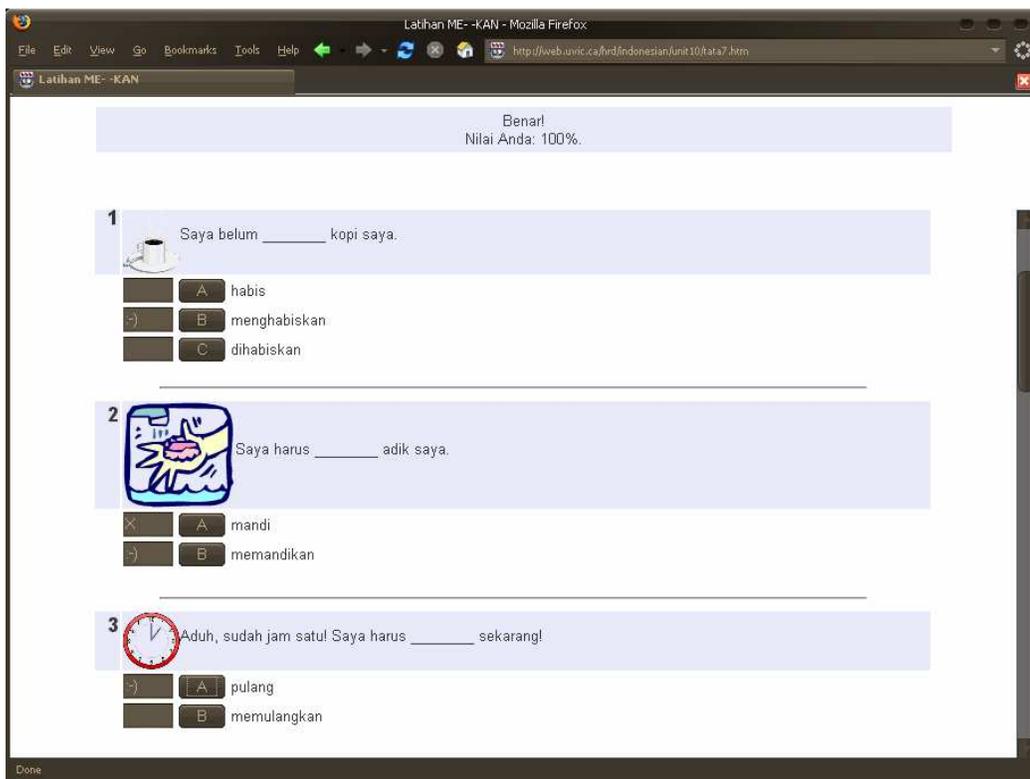
The content is appropriate for beginners, but someone who is literally beginning Indonesian for the first time, might need to start with something a little more basic

before trying this site. Once again because the website was designed to be used alongside an existing class program, there are some tasks that may be difficult to complete without external help.

All of the units follow a theme whether it is family, transport, fruit, weather or hobbies. The degree of cultural insight is very good with elements of Indonesian culture and society forming the basis for the lesson topics. Some examples of these from the website are *Batik* (Indonesian fabric), *Wayang* (Indonesian Puppetry), and *Becak* (form of Indonesian transport). The cultural insights are limited directly to the language being taught. The site does not have a section dedicated to culture and customs, but it does have a link section, which links to other sites with more information on culture and customs, as well as online Indonesian dictionaries and Indonesian news sites.

Example of a Multiple Choice Quiz found on the website:

The website contains a broad range of activities and exercises, many of which are quizzes, such as multiple-choice questions (see example above) and crosswords. Other types of exercises include listening and reading comprehension exercises, word

order exercises, and sentence construction. The website will help students to gain language skills mostly in the areas of understanding and utilising Indonesian grammar, recognizing and spelling Indonesian vocabulary, and constructing sentences. Some parts also make it possible to practice listening skills.

The website has an excellent feedback function, which allows the user to check their progress at any stage simply by pressing a button. Sometimes it is specified which questions have been answered incorrectly and correctly. At other times the percentage of correct answers is shown. Normally the user is able to go back and change the answers until they achieve 100%.

Design

The website is well designed. It was put together using the popular software package Hot Potatoes. The pages fit together well, having a clear layout that consistently runs throughout. The style is professional, which is well suited to the elementary students it was designed for. The pages are kept interesting by effective use of pictures and audio accompanying the text. It does not need any videos, but some flash animations might have fit well if they had been added.

Navigation is made easy by the presence of a navigation bar, which is accessible from anywhere on the site. Some difficulties in navigation arise from the way in which the units have been titled. Instead of reflecting their content they are simply titled Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, etc. The only way to really know what a unit covers is to complete it. Another feature it lacks is an inbuilt search function. This would enable the user to find a certain topic without having to search themselves through all of the fourteen units.

The website loads quickly, with pages loading almost instantaneously using a broadband connection. Even on dialup, loading time would still be quick as the images used are quite small, there is no video, and the audio is only loaded upon request. This last feature is helpful as the user does not have to wait for audio clips to

load that he/she may not even use. The pages are not too long in length, which also helps keep loading times to a minimum.

All of the pages must be accessed while online, unfortunately it is not possible to download the exercises in order to use them offline. Each of the lessons comprise of short pages which can usually be finished in 5-10 minutes. The user can always follow on where they left off, the next time they are online. There is no special print function built into the site, however the pages can all be printed effectively via the browser's regular print options. Students can print off pages, for their own future reference, or for their teacher to keep track of their progress.

Learning Approach

The primary learning approach used in the website is the communicative approach. An important feature of the communicative approach incorporated into the website is the constant use of the target language. After the introduction unit, English is not used at all, with Indonesian being used for everything including instruction.

An important understanding of the communicative approach is that making errors is a part of learning, and this website effectively allows room for students to make mistakes. Rather than being corrected, the student is given several chances to discover what they have done wrong and correct it. If they are still unable to complete the exercise then help is readily available when requested. The website effectively fulfils the role of a facilitator in a similar way a teacher adhering to the communicative approach would in the 'traditional' classroom.

Functionality for teachers

This site is a very useful aid for any teacher of Indonesian language. For teachers teaching Indonesian to beginners there is plenty of material available, but it probably should not be the only teaching material they use. The most effective way they could use this website would be to use it alongside an existing course book, either working through the website in class or giving it to the students as homework. The teacher will not have to spend anytime adapting the content. All that is needed is a little time

beforehand to search through the site and choose which units are relevant for that particular week.

Conclusion

Overall this is an excellent well-designed website that could be a valuable resource for student and teacher alike. True beginners might find it a little daunting to begin with, seen as it is almost all in Indonesian. However, with a little patience and maybe an additional Indonesian language course book or two, then this site could help take them to new heights. For those who have progressed a little further with their Indonesian, then this site would be an interesting way for them to revise and consolidate what they already have learnt.