

On language documentation of colloquial Javanese varieties

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Javanese is spoken by over 90 million people primarily in Central Java and East Java on the island of Java in Indonesia, and is the tenth largest language in the world. Despite these large numbers, Javanese is under-documented and under-studied. One primary reason for the under-representation of Javanese is that this Austronesian language has many different dialects which differ in significant respects in all areas of the grammar but only ‘standard’ Javanese, as spoken in the Javanese court centers (Yogyakarta-Solo), has been the primary focus of most linguistic research: sociolinguistics (Wolff et al. 1982; Errington 1985, 1988), grammars (Le Favre 1866; Kiliaan 1919; Prijohoetomo 1937; Horne 1961, 1963; Keeler 1984; Arps et al. 2000; Robson 2014; Wedhawati et al. 2006), dictionaries (Le Favre 1870; Robson & Wibisono 2002), and theoretical research (Uhlenbeck 1975, 1978; Sumukti 1971; Poedjosoedarmo 1977; Suharno 1982; Ekowardono et al. 1999; Davies 1999; Davies & Dresser 2005; among others). Differences across Javanese dialects have been noted in a small but growing number of studies such as Hoogervorst (2010), Wolff (1997), Suwadji (1981), Connors (2008), and Vander Klok (2012, 2015). These studies reinforce the fact that Javanese dialects are highly divergent and highlight the need for more research on colloquial dialects.

In this paper, we present our on-going language documentation towards a comprehensive reference grammar and corpus on two non-standard varieties of Javanese as spoken in Malang, East Java near Mt. Bromo, and Semarang, Central Java on the north coast. Broadly, this work aims to educate the wider community on the current socio-political landscape of language in Indonesia and to show how the current project helps validate the non-standard dialects of Malang and Semarang Javanese.

Javanese has recently been identified as vulnerable to language endangerment given shifts in domains of use and loss of speech level distinctions (e.g., Adelaar 2010 and Cohn & Ravindranath 2013). Four areas have been identified: (a) a shift away from using the high form of Javanese, *krama* (Errington 1998; Poedjosoedarmo 2006); (b) class and gender differences in language choices (Kurniasih 2006); (c) social attitudes with respect to linguistic choices (Smith-Hefner 2009); and (d) effects of globalization and increased use of English (Zentz 2012). While these studies are focused in and around Yogyakarta, these language shifts could equally apply across all Javanese dialects, potentially leading to serious large-scale language endangerment. We present examples of (a), (c) and (d) on Semarang Javanese from interviews conducted in the fall 2014, suggesting that language shifts are occurring in large city centers as well.

In addition, a shift to the national language Indonesian has been traced in a number of recent studies (e.g., Kurniasih 2006), but less noted is a shift to regional varieties of the national language, such as the specific East Javanese variety of Indonesian which, in turn, puts negative pressure on speakers of Javanese in Malang and Surabaya. We explore the role of these regional Indonesian varieties here, with respect to Semarang and Malang.

While the above research demonstrates the vulnerability of non-standard Javanese, we argue that the current language documentation on Semarang and Malang Javanese varieties will also have a positive impact towards language maintenance through the ensuing reference grammar and public, on-line corpus. We outline the ways in which we hope these references will generate a positive outcome, such as using theoretical-neutral terms to invite as wide an audience as possible (from theoreticians to language learners) and presenting this work to local universities and community centers. By having the grammar published with a major publishing house, we also hope to have the widest distribution possible to both help fill the gap in the description of this major world language and to promote its importance among the local community.

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