

THE BACKWARDS LANGUAGE OF JAKARTA YOUTH (JYBL), A BIRD OF MANY LANGUAGE FEATHERS¹

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Bloch (1974) and Becker (1979) have discussed the possible ranges of speech situations in terms of "speaking the present" and "speaking the past". In contextualizing the backwards language used by Jakarta youth within the language spoken by Jakarta youth, the backwards language seems to be a particularly richly textured example of how many of Jakarta's youth "speak the present" in their combining of several area languages in the creation of new lexical items. Differences in the shape of the words of the backwards language compared with their Standard Indonesian counterparts can be attributed to the phonological systems of three languages, that is Javanese, Sundanese and Standard Indonesian. The ordering of these eclectic rules is discussed in some detail.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a portion of the lexicon of Jakarta Youth Language (JYL) described by Dreyfuss (1980), which is composed of Standard Indonesian (SI) words whose phonological and syllabic shapes have been altered in interesting ways from their SI equivalents.

The organization of this paper is as follows: Part 2 places JYL, and JYBL within its sociological and linguistic contextualizing frames, at least as I find them in modern Indonesian literature. The concepts of "speaking the present" and "speaking the past" are outlined in terms of two dialects of Indonesian used in literature about Jakarta the claim being that JYL (and especially JYBL) "speaks more the present" and SI "speaks more the past" within the linguistic cultural domains in which each is found in modern Indonesian literature. Part 3 presents the JYBL lexical data to be analyzed and their SI counterparts offering a tentative solution which posits multilingual sources for the composition of these words. Part 4 briefly compares JYBL to several other examples of backwards language found in both Southeast Asia and in the United States, arguing that JYBL seems to be unique in its multilingual source composition.

2. "SPEAKING THE PRESENT" AND "SPEAKING THE PAST"

"Speaking the present" and "speaking the past" are terms first used by Maurice

Bloch (1974) to describe a range of speech situations he observed among the Merina of Madagascar. Bloch distinguishes two poles, present and past speaking, in terms of how formalized the particular variety of language is, the more past speaking, the more formalized the language, the more present speaking, the less formalized the language. A.L. Becker (1979a) writing of Bloch's distinction (:213) takes exception to his ranging of past and present speaking along a scale of how formalized the language is. Becker states:

Bloch is wrong, I think, in contrasting formalized speech acts and everyday speech acts, on a scale of most to least formalized language. Everyday speech acts are also highly formalized. I feel that the poles of this scale range from repetition (most formal, speaking the past) to imagination or internal discourse (least formal, speaking the present)...

Another way of describing Becker's scale is that it ranges from most conventional speech (past speaking) to least conventional (or present speaking).

In modern Indonesian literature having Jakarta as its locus, it can be shown that there are at least two varieties of Indonesian, SI and JYL, which can be described in terms of how past or present speaking each is. In a paper concerning how the city of Jakarta is portrayed in modern Indonesian literature entitled: "Jakarta, Two Personae: The Big Village and Rock City", (1980) I suggested that Standard Indonesian (SI) is often the language of literary discourse when the scene described is more traditional,

more village-ethics centered, less influenced by western cultural norms. In contrast, a different variety of Indonesian is used which I termed "Jakarta Youth Language" (JYL), in describing the physical, sensory and ethical world of many of Jakarta's youth who wear peace symbols on chains around their necks, grow their hair long (*gondrong*), and listen to the lyrics of Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney.

The two texts I studied were *Pabrik* or 'Factory' by Putu Wijaya, and *Ali Topan Detektif Partikelir* 'Ali Topan Private Eye' by Teguh Esha. I discussed *Pabrik* as being set in a Jakarta *kampung*, which is a crowded 'barrio' type neighborhood found throughout Java, both in large cities and small villages. The smells, sounds and interactional choreography of *Pabrik*, I argued, were much the same as in a small Javanese village. *Ali Topan Detektif Partikelir*, on the other hand, presented the smells, sounds and ethics of a western youth culture world of discourse. Topan and his friends eat at a restaurant called "The American Hamburger", listen to "The Beatles" or "The Rolling Stones", speak about "joints" and generally address each other without using traditional honorifics, even when addressing older and higher status people. Let me briefly summarize several of the linguistic differences I found that correlate with these two texts' different conceptual worlds.

There are a number of striking differences in the language used between the two texts; phonologically, morphologically and lexically.

Phonologically, there are no deviations in *Pabrik* from Standard Indonesian. The vowel /a/ in final unstressed syllables retains its /a/ value. In *Topan* many of these vowels are reduced to schwa. In *Pabrik* word initial /s/ is always retained in words like *saja* 'only' and *sudah* 'completive'. In *Topan* /s/ is dropped consistently in these two words by younger speakers while older speakers in *Topan* sometimes retain the word initial /s/, sometimes drop it depending upon how much they adapt their language to the language of the young people they are talking with.

Morphologically, *Pabrik* is Standard Indonesian. *Topan*, on the other hand, deviates quite a bit from SI morphology. What is called the active verbal prefix, *meN-* of SI always occurs in its full form in *Pabrik*. In *Topan* a reduced form of the prefix, *N-* typifies Topan and his friends' language. The short form *N-*, is the form this prefix has in certain area languages such as Sundanese, Javanese, Madurese, and Balinese. In SI there are two verbal suffixes *-i* and *-kan* whose semantic and syntactic functions are distinguished. In *Pabrik* both suffixes flourish. In *Topan*, however, an *-in* suffix is used which combines the semantic and syntactic functions of both *-i* and *-kan* in Standard Indonesian.

Lexically, words in *Pabrik* are almost always SI in origin with the exception of some Dutch words spoken by older *kampung* residents who were brought up under the last decades of Dutch colonial rule. *Topan*, in contrast, is peppered with English, the language of status for many of Indonesia's youth today. It is the mode of English borrowings which particularly distinguish *Topan* as "present speaking". Words like *stoned* and *joint*, and expressions like *ok Jack* and *buseet* 'bullshit' are on almost every page of *Topan*. In *Pabrik* when the owner of the factory curses he uses the Dutch *God Verdom*. In *Pabrik* SI pronouns are used which comprise an elaborated list marking relative social distance, among other things. In *Topan* the borrowed Chinese (South Min dialect area) pronouns *gue* and *lu* are used for 1st and 2nd persons respectively; social distinctions are steamrollered away.

On the whole, the language of *Topan* seems more responsive to today, to speak more the present, than does the language of *Pabrik*. In *Topan*, speaking the present is often quite dramatically demonstrated in the imaginative composition of words whose parts may be traced to several languages. For example, consider the word *motretin* used in *Topan* (discussed in Dreyfuss). *Motretin* may be translated as 'to take a picture of somebody or something'. The root of this word is from Dutch 'portret'. The nasal active verbal prefixal form *N-* is added becoming an *m-* assimilating to the position of the stem initial "p". Finally, the verbal suffix *-in* is added. The *-in* is probably originally of Balinese origin. The form of the verbal prefix, *N-* is an overdetermined form cognate with several area languages, Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese and Balinese. The stem of the word is from Dutch. The form *motretin* speaks at least three languages at once in its composition.

In Part 3 of this paper I will present data from a portion of Jakarta Youth Language's lexicon. Topan and his friends have evolved a type of backwards language which they sprinkle among their JYL speech. I will suggest that this backwards language, like the example of *motretin* above, speaks three languages at once in its composition, and so, is a particularly salient example of how JYL speaks the present.

3.0. JYBL DATA AND ANALYSIS

Consider the following list of JYBL words (on the right) together with their SI counterparts (on the left):

SI	meaning	JYBL
1. <i>bisa</i>	'able'	<i>bokis</i>
2. <i>berapa</i>	'how much'	<i>brokap</i>

3. <i>celana</i>	'pants'	<i>celokan</i>
4. <i>cina</i>	'Chinese'	<i>cokan</i>
5. <i>gila</i>	'crazy'	<i>gokil</i>
6. <i>janda</i>	'separated, divorced'	<i>jokan</i>
7. <i>Jawa</i>	'Java, Javanese'	<i>jokaw</i>
8. <i>kita</i>	'we (inclusive)'	<i>kokit</i>
9. <i>lima</i>	'five'	<i>lokim</i>
10. <i>Madura</i>	'Madurese, Madura'	<i>madokur</i>
11. <i>mana</i>	'where'	<i>mokan</i>
12. <i>nama</i>	'name'	<i>nokam</i>
13. <i>penjara</i>	'jail'	<i>penjokar</i>
14. <i>pada</i>	'to'	<i>pokad</i>
15. <i>pesta</i>	'party'	<i>pokes</i>

Please note the following regularities from the above list. First of all, all of the SI words end in an open syllable whose vowel is /a/. Secondly, there seem to be a number of regular changes in the JYBL list from their SI counterparts. (1) There is a /k/ that appears, which begins the final syllable of each JYBL word. (2) The penultimate vowel in the SI word is the final vowel of the JYBL counterpart. (3) The final consonant or first of a final consonant cluster of the SI word appears in word final position in the JYBL words. (4) The final /a/ vowel vanishes from the SI word and is replaced by an /o/ which appears in the penultimate syllable of the JYBL word.

I would like to suggest that the changes in shape from the SI words to their JYBL counterparts in the above list can be understood, in part, with reference to phonological rules found in two substratum languages spoken widely in the Jakarta area, Javanese and Sundanese.

3.1. THE JAVANESE RULE (JR)

In Javanese phonology there is a well known vowel replacement rule which can be stated for most Javanese dialects as:

$$a \longrightarrow \begin{matrix} \text{ɔ}^{\wedge}/C \# & \text{(a)} \\ \text{—}\bar{c}\text{—}\# & \text{(b)} \end{matrix}$$

That is, an /a/ vowel in a final, or final and penultimate open syllable will show-up as /ɔ[^]/ (usually represented in the orthography as "o"). Several examples of how this rule works can be found below. In the column on the left a suffix in each case blocks the above rule from applying. On the right the rule applies freely:

Javanese words with suffix	meaning (more or less)	Javanese words without suffix
(a) <i>ngersa-aken</i>	'to want something'	<i>kerso</i>

(b) <i>apa-ne</i>	'what's up'	<i>opo</i>
(c) <i>dawa-ne</i>	'the length, its length'	<i>dowo</i>

The above rule is blocked just in case the final vowel of the word is other than /a/;

Javanese	meaning	JYBL
(d) <i>ani-ne</i>	'harvesting knife'	<i>ani</i>
(e) <i>aré-ne</i>	'the valley'	<i>aré</i>

Normally, if the penultimate /a/ vowel is located in a closed syllable, it will not undergo the rule:

(f) <i>jaksa-ne</i>	'the prosecutor'	<i>jakso</i>
(g) <i>darma-ne</i>	'one's duty'	<i>darmo</i>

However, if the penultimate syllable and the final syllable are joined by a consonant cluster in which the first member is a nasal, then the rule will apply:

(h) <i>landa-ne</i>	'the Dutchman, whiteman'	<i>londo</i>
(i) <i>jangka-ne</i>	'the goal'	<i>jongko</i>

In Javanese, and other area languages, nasals are most often analyzed as part of the following syllable, in (h) and (i) above as prenasalized stops, thus the penultimate syllables of (h) and (i) would be open allowing the rule to apply. Apart from the Javanese rule stated thus far, there is a Sundanese phonological rule that constrains the shape of JYBL words.

3.2. THE SUNDANESE RULE (SR)

In Sundanese and in Indonesian spoken by people whose first language is Sundanese, no word may end in an open syllable. Cognate words which in Javanese or in Indonesian would end in open syllables, in Sundanese or Sundanese influenced Indonesian end in a glottal stop. (Glottal stop in the orthography is usually represented as "k".)

Javanese	Indonesian	meaning	Sundanese speaker pronounces
(j) <i>*dawa(/dowo/)</i>		'long'	<i>dawak</i>
(k)	<i>pake</i>	'use'	<i>pakek</i>

With both the JR and the SR in mind consider the JYBL list of words (1)-(15). Note that in each case a /k/ begins the final syllable. This /k/, I suggest,

begins its life as a final syllable closing glottal stop which underlyingly is /k/. This /k/ is plausibly the result of SR having applied.

Here is why I think so. First the /k/ had to come from somewhere, and given the demographic information that roughly 40% of Jakarta's population is from a Sundanese first language background within one generation, it seems a reasonable guess that the final /k/ may be a residue of that language's influence on the language spoken in the Jakarta area. Second, the position of the final consonant and vowel of the JYBL words suggests a consonant and vowel metathesis of some sort suggesting by implication that /k/ began its journey at the end of the word (as it would have had SR applied). Third, by analogy with the fact of the occurrence of the JR having applied in the composition of JYBL words, it is not unreasonable to guess that speakers of JYBL would mark Sundanese language backgrounds too and so apply SR. As William Gass, a philosopher/poet said, and I edit slightly, "Let these languages (Javanese and Sundanese) coincide in a cacophony of sound".

In suggesting that SR has applied in the creation of JYBL words I appeal to the plausibility of JR having applied as well. Let's for a moment consider how plausible JR's having applied is in the formation of JYBL words.

Note from the JYBL list of words that while the final open syllable of the SI word counterparts contains an /a/ vowel, the penultimate vowel of the JYBL words is "o". It seems a reasonable assumption that if JR applied at all it would have to have applied before the shifting of vowels and consonants took place for once the shift took place the conditions for JR applying would have been bleached. Also, given the fact that JR only applies to open syllables, the application of JR would have to have preceded the application of SR; SR having the effect of closing the final syllable and, thus, bleaching the conditions for JR's application. Clearly the JR, SR and metathesis rules will have to be carefully ordered to have all this work out, but first please note that the JR as first stated:

THE JR (FIRST APPROXIMATION)

a \longrightarrow $\text{ɔ}^{\wedge}/\text{C}_{\#}$ (a)
 $\text{C}_{\#}$ (b)

does not cover the JYBL data. There is only one "o" vowel in the JYBL words. It seems as if penultimate /a/ vowels in the SI words are not converted to "o". If I am to maintain that JR has applied in the composition of JYBL words it seems that I will have to reformulate JR to exclude environment "(b)" above leaving it to apply only to final open syllable /a/. Please note that JYBL words (2), (3), (6), (7), (11), (12), (13), and (14) lead me to restrict the JR to:

THE JR (SECOND APPROXIMATION)

a \longrightarrow $\text{ɔ}^{\wedge}/\text{C}_{\#}$

That is, to environment (a) of JR's first approximation only.

Below, I offer a tentative list and ordering of rules which I have suggested are plausibly involved in the composition of JYBL words:

RULE LIST

- (i) a \longrightarrow $\text{ɔ}^{\wedge}/\text{C}_{\#}$ (JR second approximation)
- (ii) \emptyset \longrightarrow k/V_# (SR)
- (iii) $\text{V}_i\text{C}_i\text{ok}\#$ \longrightarrow $\text{okV}_i\text{C}_i\#$ (*la grande metathesis* (L.G.M.))
- (iv) $\text{CxCy}\#$ \longrightarrow $\text{Cx}\#$ (Word final C-cluster reduction)

RULE ORDERING

(Using examples (1) and (7), I suggest the following derivations.)

first	<i>bisa</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>biso</i>	
	<i>jawa</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jawo</i>	(JR)
second	<i>biso</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>bisok</i>	
	<i>jawo</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jawok</i>	(SR)
third	<i>bisok</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>bokis</i>	
	<i>jawok</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jokaw</i>	(<i>la grande metathesis</i>)

For examples (6) and (15) rule (iv) would come last, following metathesis:

first	<i>janda</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jando</i>	
	<i>pesta</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>pesto</i>	(JR)
second	<i>jando</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jandok</i>	
	<i>pesto</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>pestok</i>	(SR)
third	<i>jandok</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jokand</i>	
	<i>pestok</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>pokest</i>	(L.G.M.)
fourth	<i>jokand</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>jokan</i>	
	<i>pokest</i>	\longrightarrow	<i>pokes</i>	(C-cluster reduction)

Note that with regard to L.G.M. here I have to claim that the word medial C-clusters are treated as a single consonant. While there does seem to be some justification for treating *N+stop* sequences as a single consonant (i.e. prenasalized stops), I will probably have to reformulate the L.G.M. at some time to handle C-clusters such as we find in (15), i.e. *-st-*

In this paper I have only discussed a portion of JYBL's lexicon. There are other JYBL words which suggest that JR's application has been generalized in some cases to vowels other than /a/ in final open syllables as in:

Standard Indonesian word (SI)		JYBL equivalent
(1) <i>beli</i>	'to buy'	<i>bokel</i>

Note: the "e" in the SI word represents schwa

which elides in non-stressed position
when followed by a liquid

(m) *begini* 'like this' *begokin*

And in some cases JR has been generalized to apply to /a/ in final *closed* syllables:

(n) *bayar* 'to pay' *bokay*
(o) *becak* 'trishaw' *boket* (c# → t)

JYBL also has more mundane backwards language backwardisms as in:

(p) *ribut* 'noisy' *birut*
(q) *habis* 'finished' *bais* (#h → ∅)
(r) *tuju* 'direction' *jutu*
(s) *lebi(h)* 'more' *beli*

None of these last examples, (p)-(s) reflect substratum language influence in their creation. I have restricted my discussion in this paper to what I felt were the most interesting and clearest examples of how JYBL seems to make reference to the phonological systems of three languages in the composition of at least a portion of its lexicon.

Briefly, I would now like to survey several other backwards languages that I am familiar with to see if JYBL is truly unique in its hypothesised multilingual source composition.

4. OTHER EXAMPLES OF BACKWARDS LANGUAGES

In East Java there exists a variety of backwards language in which the backwards language word is the mirror image of its Javanese or SI counterpart:

Javanese	SI		East Javanese
			B.L.
(t)	<i>gadis</i>	'young girl'	<i>sidag</i>
(u)	<i>manis</i>	'sweet'	<i>sinam</i>

Interestingly, I know of no backwards languages in which there is syntactic reversal as the major rule within the clause or phrase. There is the possible exception of Ian Catford's backwards singing of "Old King Wensislaus" complete with backwards aspiration, backwards releases etc., a remarkable feat.

In Pig Latin the initial consonant is transposed to the end of the word and an /e/ is added to its right. If the word is vowel initial, it is spoken and an /e/ is added to its right.

In much of the JYBL lexicon relatively simply stated consonant or syllable reversals occur as in (p)-(s).

I would not be particularly surprised to learn that other backwards languages exist whose composition makes reference to more than one phonological system. I ask your help in finding them. My guess is that if they exist at all, they do so in extremely syncretic linguistic-cultural domains and that they might correlate with wider cultural, social and economic changes occurring.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at NWAWE-9 (New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English, 1980). I would like to express my thanks to those who contributed interesting comments on that occasion.

I would particularly like to thank all my friends at the ASRAMA MAHASISWA IKIP MALANG for introducing me to JYBL and East Javanese backwards languages. Their training in the subtleties of youth culture was a welcome relief from various frustrations which from time to time plagued my other research. I would also like to thank my guru A.L.Becker for his encouraging me always to draw lines between cultural and linguistic data so as not to torture either one.

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