

Reduplication of Nouns and Adjectives in Indonesian

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Indonesian, like other Austronesian languages, makes extensive use of the morphological process of reduplication in all of its major word classes: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The wide variety of types of reduplication exhibits a nuanced set of semantic elements, diverse discourse functions, and numerous morphological forms.¹ By way of introduction, I present a review of the literature on reduplication in Indonesian. The body of the paper focuses on a few of the commonly occurring contexts in which the fully reduplicated nouns and adjectives (with no affixation) occur and the meanings associated with these reduplicated forms.

1. Review of the literature on reduplication in Indonesian

There is a rich variety of forms of reduplication in Indonesian, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, question words, and connectors. This wealth of reduplicated forms is associated with a wide range of semantic elements including, plurality, collectivity, diversity, intensity, reciprocity, diffuseness (distributive), iteration, facsimile, concessive, and imperfective aspect. It should be noted that plurality is not a unitary concept and can entail indefiniteness, extensiveness, as well as summation.

The following list summarizes the major forms of reduplication in Indonesian. (See M.D.S. Simatupang 1983 for a more complete description):

- a. Full reduplication of a lexical item with no phonological change, such as *kaya kaya* from the adjective *kaya* 'rich'.

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- b. Reduplication with vowel change, *bolak-balik* from the preposition, *balik* 'behind'.
- c. Reduplication with a consonant change, such as *ramah-tamah* from *ramah* 'jovial, friendly'.
- d. Reduplication with affixation. A non-exhaustive list of reduplication with affixation includes reduplication of the verb *lari* 'to run' in *berlari-lari*, the adjective *malas* 'lazy' in *bermalas-malas*, the adjective *tinggi* 'high' in *setinggi-tinggi*, the verb *lompat* 'to jump' in *melompat-lompat*, the verb *cinta* 'to love' in *cinta-mencintai*, the noun *katung* 'tortoise' in *terkatung-katung*, the noun *malam* 'night' in *semalam-malaman*, and the noun *ibu* 'mother' in *keibu-ibuan*.

Following the work of A. Moeliono (198:166-167), the two primary meanings associated with reduplicated nouns are: 1) non-singular with a sense of plurality, collectivity, or diversity and 2) resemblance. For example, *rumah-rumah* 'house' may have any of the three non-singular meanings, houses, a group of houses, or various houses. The construction *dedaunan* 'foliage' is derived from the base word *daun* 'leaf', thus exemplifying another form for expressing the collective meaning. The second basic meaning, facsimile or resemblance, is illustrated by the reduplicated construction *mobil-mobilan* 'toy cars' from the word *mobil* 'car'.

Moeliono (1988:212) briefly characterizes adjectives as having two functions: modifying verbs, thus becoming adverbs (See no. 1 below.); and modifying nominals and in this function, exhibiting the meaning of diversity. (See no. 2 below.)

1. *Dia lari cepat-cepat.*

He run fast

'He runs quickly.'

2. *Soal ujian kemarin mudah-mudah.*

Problem exam yesterday easy

'The problems on the examination yesterday were all easy.'

Rosen (1977) attributes three meanings to Indonesian reduplicated forms: 1. Diffuseness or distributive function of reduplicated verbs in which the NP agent, object or locative becomes non-singular or diffuse (see number 3 below.); 2. Metaphoric quality of reduplicated nouns with the affixation *ke-* or *-an* carries the meaning of pseudo-noun. For example; *kuda-kudaan* means 'rocking horse' and is derived from the noun, *kuda* 'horse'. Verbs also can obtain a metaphoric quality, *berkaca-kaca* 'to shine' from the verb *berkaca* 'made of glass'. The final meaning attributed to the reduplicated adjective is 3. Intensity with adjectives that are reduplicated with the *se-* prefix and *-nya* suffix. (See number 4 below.)

3. *Dia mau melihat-lihat di toko itu.*

He wants look in store that
'He wants to just look around in that store.'

4. *Dia lari secepat-cepatnya.*

He run fast fast
'He runs as fast as he can.'

Despite Rosen's general agreement with Moeliono (1988), she makes the categorical statement that, "Diffuseness is not the same as plurality, and the function of reduplication in Indonesian is not to mark the plural" (Rosen 1977:4). The dismissal of the use of reduplication as a plural marker distinguishes her analysis from that of Moeliono (1988), Simatupang (1983), and Gonda (1949).

M.D.S. Simatupang (1983:137-143) offers a detailed analysis of the forms and meanings of reduplication in Indonesian, supporting Moeliono (1988). Simatupang reiterates Gonda's suggestion of decades earlier that increasingly the reduplicated noun indicates plurality in contemporary Indonesian, whereas in Classical Malay texts reduplication of nouns was primarily used to indicate diversity (Gonda 1949:171-172). Although diversity and plurality are closely associated with each other, there is an important difference. Diversity carries a distributive sense and emphasizes the qualities of separateness and difference among the entities.

"During the 20th century the Malay language has, in fact, extended this use of duplicated nouns and they have, moreover, gradually assumed a purely plural meaning" (Gonda 1949:179). He suggests that this shift may be attributable to the influence of the Dutch language.

This paper looks at the function of fully reduplicated (non-affixed) nouns and adjectives in order to explore the role of these forms for expressing the collective and distributive meanings.

2. Analysis of the Data

In section 2, I present data from written and spoken Indonesian that illustrate the forms, meanings, and contexts of fully reduplicated nouns and adjectives in Indonesian. The data were gathered non-randomly from native speakers, print media, short stories, and literature from the 1920s. All the examples from published materials are referenced, the remaining examples are from native speakers.

Before proceeding with the examination of the data in 2.1, I present examples of non-singular nouns, expressed without reduplication. In the first case, a collective and generic meaning for a group of people is expressed using the lexical term, *kaum*, meaning group or class of people. (See sentence number 5 below.) Another lexical term, *para* signifies a referential yet indefinite group of people. (See number 6 below.) In both 5 and 6 the non-singular groups of people are viewed collectively as one entity without any interest in considering the characteristics that distinguish the individual members of the group from each other. Note that reduplication is never used with generic meanings.

5. *Kaum muslimin tidak makan masakan itu.*

Group Moslem not future eat dish that
'Moslems do not eat that food.'

6. *Para petani tidak dapat hasil yang banyak tahun ini.*

Plural farmer not get result rel.prn much year this
'The farmers did not get a good crop this year.'

For non-human nouns, there are no lexical items analogous to *kaum* and *para*; the context implies the non-singular meaning. (See numbers 7 & 8.) In sentence 7, although there is no morphological marking, the non-singular, distributive meaning is implied via the semantics of the sentence. It is clear that the wounds are attributed to many individual soldiers.

7. *Dalam perang itu, prajurit yang luka tidak*

In war that soldier that wounded not
bisa diselamatkan.

able save

‘In that war, the wounded soldiers were not able to be saved.’

Sentence 8 offers another example of zero morphological marking with a contextually supported, non-singular meaning. This example is taken from an advice column in the teen magazine, *Majalah Remaja Gadis* (3 November 1975:3). This type of referential, non-singular meaning, associated with the non-reduplicated noun is common in the informal register and may occasionally occur in more formal contexts as well.

8. *Trims atas pertanyaan Shirley.*

Thanks for question Shirley.

‘Thanks for your questions, Shirley.’

Shirley has just posed three questions in the text that immediately precedes sentence number 8. The non-singular number is most frequently indicated via the pragmatics of context, especially in face-to-face spoken discourse. Reduplication is associated with written language and with formal addresses or with non-face-to-face interactions such as in radio and television broadcasts. In brief, number, like tense, is not an obligatory category, and therefore speakers frequently rely on context to make number clear.

2.1. Reduplicated Nouns and Adjectives

The remainder of the paper examines the semantics of reduplicated nouns and reduplicated adjectives in a variety of

registers in Indonesian. The data show that reduplicated adjectives occur most frequently in an informal register such as in a casual conversation and in the informal language of popular short stories. In addition, they tend to occur in the predicate adjective position of the sentence. Reduplicated nouns occur in both formal and informal registers but are more characteristics of the written language and formal spoken language contexts.

Data contrasting reduplicated adjectives with reduplicated nouns

I searched for reduplicated adjectives and nouns in the Indonesian print media, email exchanges, and in relaxed conversational situations. Below are two contrasting sets of examples of reduplicated nouns and adjectives. The first set (sentences 9 & 10) is from native speakers and the second set (sentences 11 & 12) is from the teen magazine, *Majalah Remaja Gadis*.

9. *Di Amerika, kota-nya besar-besar.*

In America city-def big big
'In America, the cities are large.'

In sentence 9, the reduplicated adjective, which is in the predicate adjective position, modifies a referential but indefinite noun, *kotanya*. The sentence states that there are many large cities in America. It does not state that all cities are large, but rather that the quality of large is distributed over America. The modified noun, city, is not understood as a collective, unitary entity. American cities remain individuated, they are diverse entities, of diverse sizes. Implied, but not stated, is the fact that there are some small cities. Briefly this is an example of the distributive meaning of the reduplicated adjective.

In order to exemplify the contrast with the reduplicated noun, I present sentence 10 below.

10. *Di kota-kota besar ada banyak kesempatan*
in city-city large exist many opportunities

bekerja dalam bidang komputer.

work in field computer

'In large cities, there are many opportunities to work in the field of computers.'

Sentence 10 illustrates the reduplicated noun that is modified by an adjective (not in predicate position). Here the noun is referential and indefinite (as in sentence 9). The subject of this utterance, *cities*, is plural and viewed as a unitary category of large cities. The sentence predicates an attribute of large cities, thus viewing them as a single category. The interlocutor is not asked to focus on the diversity among the cities within the category, large city. The reduplicated noun results in the collective reading, not the distributive reading as in the case with the reduplicated adjective in predicate position.

The next set of sentences illustrates the same contrast as presented in sentences 9 and 10. The sentences are taken from the teen magazine, *Majalah Remaja Gadis* 3 November 1975:20. The two sentences in example number 11 are from an advice column. A young woman has written to the consultant, asking what she should do about her parents' behavior. The father stopped talking with her after he heard that she was not accepted into the university department he had hoped she would attend. His great disappointment drove him to ignore his daughter. The consultant addresses the young woman in number 11.

11. *Lho, kenapa mereka tak mau menegur-mu?*

Wow, why they not want speak - you

'Wow, why don't they want to talk with you?'

Apakah nilai-mu jelek-jelek?

ques. grades-your bad -bad

'Are all your grades terrible?'

In example number 11, we find a reduplicated *jelek* in predicate adjective position, modifying the indefinite, referential noun, your grades. The consultant is inquiring about

the grade for each class. Implied here is the question, was there not one grade that was good. She wants to know about the grade for each and every class, therefore giving the distributive meaning to the noun, grades.

The consultant continues to advise the young woman:

12. *Cobalah ajak orang tuamu berbicara secara*
 try request parent-your talk manner
sunnguh-sunnguh.
 open open
 'Try to ask your parents to talk frankly.'

Kalau nilai-nilai jelek, ya marahin kek,
 If grade-grade bad yea get angry particle
omelin kek, tapi janganlah anak didiamkan saja.
 Reprimand particle but don't child ignore just
 'If the grades are bad, okay, just get angry (with your child),
 reprimand her, but don't just ignore your child.'

In number 12, the consultant offers advice on the appropriate behavior of a parent (in general) when presented with a situation such as this. The sentence, introduced with the hypothetical/conditional marker, *kalau*, is in the irrealis mode. The consultant is offering general advice for any parent in such a situation. The grades are viewed from a unitary perspective and given a collective meaning. There is no diversity implied in the collection of bad grades, and thus no distributive meaning is found here.

As a final note to the above examples, my informants commented that mothers, upon seeing a bad report card, will commonly remark:

13. *Nilaimu jelek-jelek.*
 grade-your bad – bad
 'Your grades are bad.'

In sentence 13, the meaning is, "All of your grades, (viewed individually, each and every one of them) are bad." By viewing the grades individually and in the realis mode, greater importance and stress is given to the statement. It shows the mother's great disappointment in the child's achievements.

To summarize, the contrast between the reduplicated adjectives in predicate position and the reduplicated nouns can be seen as one of collective versus distributive meaning. The reduplication of the noun creates a collective meaning, while the reduplication of the predicate adjective places emphasis on the diversity and individuation of the non-singular noun.

2.2 Reduplication in Formal and Informal Registers of Indonesian

Although more research is certainly needed, I hypothesize that: 1) reduplicated nouns frequently occur in formal Indonesian, both spoken and written varieties, and 2) reduplicated adjectives are characteristically found in informal Indonesian, both spoken and written varieties. Below are some examples of reduplication from various sources of formal and informal Indonesian.

In the formal context of speeches and addresses, it is common to hear the reduplicated address terms (see no. 14) which are part of the formulaic pattern used to greet an audience. The component groups in the audience, the ladies, gentlemen, and colleagues, are all addressed as collective categories with no differentiation or individuation implied.

14. *Bapak-bapak, ibu-ibu, dan saudara-saudara*
 Gentleman-gentleman lady-lady and colleague colleague
yang saya hormati...
 whom I honor
 'Honored ladies, gentlemen, and friends...'

In an informal context, one will frequently hear the unreduplicated word, *bapak* to indicate a group of men. Speakers

rely on the context or pragmatics to convey information about number. For example:

15. *Maklum bapak akan diundang habis liburan ini.*

You know men will invite after vacation this
'You know, the men will be invited after this vacation.'

Sentences 16 and 17 offer examples of formal register in which there are reduplicated nouns with the collective meaning. The first is from a manuscript of the author and literary critic, Nirwan Dewanto, and the second is from the newspaper, *Bekasi Pos*.

16. *Sudah menjadi 'tradisi' bahwa bank-bank besar*

Has become tradition that bank big
mencari karyawan di antara lulusan universitas terbaik di
look for employees among graduate university best in
Indonesia. (Nirwan Dewanto, ms. January 2000)
Indonesia

'It has become a 'tradition' that the big banks look for their employees from among the graduates of the best universities in Indonesia.'

The big banks are treated as a category, thus exemplifying the collective sense of reduplicated nouns. The perspective is unitary with no interest in the differences among the big banks.

17. *Jika saja Gus Dur dan tokoh-tokoh Islam saat itu tak*

If just Gus Dur and leader Islam time that not
mau datang ke Istana dan tidak memberikan nasehat
want come to palace and not give advice
spiritual dan politik kepada Soeharto agar segera
spiritual and political to Soeharto so quickly
melepaskan jabatannya ...barangkali bangsa ini sudah
give up position-def. .. probably nation this past
dilanda perang saudara.
destroy war civil

(Bekasi Pos no.5 thn. 1(24 Februari–4 Maret 1999)hal. 3.

'If Gus Dur and the Islamic leaders at that time had not wanted to come to the Palace and give their spiritual and political advice to Soeharto to quickly step down, this nation would have probably been destroyed by civil war.'

The long and complex structure of number 17 exemplifies a formal, written register. The reduplicated noun, *tokoh* 'leader' refers to a group of Islamic leaders who came to visit Soeharto just before he stepped down. These leaders are being viewed as a unitary group, with no need for differentiation among them. Here we have the reduplicated noun form with the collective meaning in a high, formal register.

Sentences 18 and 19 are taken from the short story, *Ungkapan Korban Santet (Story of the Victim of Black Magic)* in the tabloid, *Podium* (no. 3, thn. 1: Februari 1999, hal. 24) that offers entertaining and sensational stories for the masses. The story, which is written using a colloquial style of language commonly found in popular literature, is told from the husband's perspective. It is about the black magic being used by his wife in an attempt to kill him. The following two sentences with reduplicated adjectives were found in this one-page short story.

18. *Ingatanku terbayang yang aneh-aneh.*
 thought-my imagine the strange-strange
 'A number of strange thoughts crossed my mind.'

19. *Dan se-minggu kemudian, setelah pulang dari*
 And a week later after return home from
Paranormal timbul peristiwa yang aneh-aneh.
 Paranormal arose event that strange
 'And a week later, after coming home from the paranormal,
 there occurred a number of strange events.'

The two reduplicated adjectives refer to a number of different and strange thoughts (in 18) and different and strange events (in 19). The thoughts and the events are viewed as

unique and distinct, thus supporting the distributive function of the reduplicated adjective. To summarize, I found that reduplicated adjectives in the predicate have a distributive meaning and occur more frequently in an informal register than in a formal register.

2.3 The Diachronic Dimension of Noun and Adjective Reduplication

In an effort to explore the frequency of the use of reduplicated nouns and adjectives in contemporary literature as well as the literature of the 1920s, I offer a few examples of data from both of these periods. I begin with the contemporary author, Seno Gumira Ajidarma. In the anthology of short stories, *Saksi Mata*, I found numerous examples of reduplicated nouns and a number of reduplicated adjectives with the distributive meaning. In the story, “*Maria*”, a mother muses about her desire to hear from her son who has disappeared (or has been disappeared). Below the author gives voice to the mother’s wishes:

20. *Maria ingin mendengar Antonionya bercerita, tentang apa*
 Maria wants hear Antonio-her tell stories about what
saja, yang ringan-ringan saja seperti tentang
 ever that light-light just like about
wanita-wanita-nya. (Adjidarma, 1994:32)
 woman-woman-his

‘Maria wants to hear her Antonio tell stories, about just anything, some light stories like about his women.’

The mother wants to hear from her son and the reduplicated adjective *ringan* is used to describe the various stories he might be able to tell her. The reduplicated noun, *wanita*, is the object of the preposition, about, and conveys the meaning of various unique women, each with its own story.

In another story by Seno Gumira Adjidarma, “*Listrik*”, we hear the thoughts of a tortured man. Below are some examples of reduplicated adjectives from this story.

21. *Bibir-nya tebal dan pecah-pecah karena pukulan*

Lip- his thick and cracked because beating
pentungan karet maupun besi. (Adjidarma, 1994:56),
 club rubber also iron

‘His lips were swollen and cracked (all over) because of the beatings with the rubber as well as iron clubs.’

The tortured man has been beaten and his lips (not marked for plurality) are swollen and cracked. The reduplication of the word *pecah* points to the many cracks all over his lips, creating the distributive meaning which makes the description more powerful than if there were no reduplication. Note that the club *pentungan* although clearly plural has no morphological marking for plurality.

There are numerous examples of reduplicated nouns in written discourse, while it is more difficult to find reduplicated adjectives in formal, written discourse. Below is an example of noun reduplication from the 1928 publication of *Salah Asoehan* by Abdoel Moeis.

22. *Tempat bermain tennis, jang dilindoengi oleh*

Place play tennis which shaded by
pohon-pohon ketapang sekitarnja, masih soenji.

Tree-tree nut around still quiet

(Moeis 1928:3)

‘The tennis court, which was shaded by the ketapang nut trees around it, was still quiet.’

Sentence 22 is taken from the first page of Abdoel Moeis’ classic novel, *Salah Asoehan*. Throughout the first twenty pages of the novel I did not find any examples of reduplicated adjectives, although there are many reduplicated nouns. The reduplicated noun, *pohon*, creates the collective sense of a cluster of trees; here the trees are being viewed as a single category. This collective plural with the reduplicated noun is commonly used in the novels of the 1920s and 1930s. I also examined the first chapter of *Perakwinan Tionghoa* by Ong Khing Han published in 1929 by the Chinese press, Tan’s

Drukkery, for instances of the reduplicated adjectives and was unable to find any examples of this construction.

Conclusion

There are a number of conclusions one can draw from the data above. First, the reduplicated adjective in contemporary Indonesian occurs most commonly in a causal, informal register of both written and spoken language. This reduplicated adjective is found in the predicate position and signifies a distributive meaning, emphasizing the diversity and uniqueness of the items included in the non-singular noun that it modifies. The reduplicated nominal most frequently refers to a group of like objects that are viewed as a single category. The reduplicated nominal thus generally carries the collective sense of plurality.

In addition, I suggest that, although more detailed research must be completed, it appears that in the late colonial period there was infrequent use (or perhaps no use) of the distributive meaning of reduplicated adjectives. This fact of language use may have been the result of Dutch language influence. Equally possible, this pattern of language use may be the result of the efforts of writers and editors to produce formal (correct) language in the written medium. The imagined 'correct' language may carry the mark of Dutch influence. In contrast, contemporary authors' frequently strive to reproduce natural, spoken language in their short stories and novels. It is in this natural speech of everyday discourse that we find instances of the reduplicated adjective with the distributive meaning.

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