

Lexical Remnants in ‘Peripheral’ Javanese Dialects

Javanese, broadly defined, often refers specifically to the dialects of Yogyakarta and Surakarta. This is surely the basis for the language described in almost all grammars and dictionaries of Javanese, both monolingual and bilingual. Throughout the Javanese speaking parts of Indonesia, this is the language which is taught in schools. In this paper, I examine two distinct but related questions. The main focus is to explore the possibility of either an Austronesian or a non-Austronesian substrate lexifier language to Javanese. To do this I will examine a number of lexical items from ‘peripheral’ Javanese dialects. First, though I will define what is meant by peripheral dialects, and how they show great similarities, though geographically discontinuous.

Based on morphological and phonological evidence, I demonstrate that the Yogyakarta and Surakarta dialects are in fact the most innovative dialects of Javanese. Vowel harmony, vowel raising, and morphosyntactic complexification, which are often thought of as prototypically Javanese, especially in differentiating Javanese from surrounding Austronesian languages, are in fact recent developments which occurred in these central dialects and then spread out radially. The changes, though have spread out unevenly. The phonological changes are present in the ‘standard’ East Javanese dialects of Surabaya, Pasuruan, and Malang. However, the morphosyntactic changes are not. In the truly peripheral dialects of Banten, Osing, Tengger, Pesisir Lor, and Banyumas, none of these changes have taken hold.

Among these peripheral dialects are a number of shared lexical items which are not found in the central (and often eastern) ‘standard’ dialects. This is striking as they are very distant geographically, and in most cases have been separated/isolated for centuries. The evidence seems to point to an earlier substratum language which has now been lost. None of these lexical items appears in Old or Middle Javanese, which were literary languages based around the ‘standard’ dialects (both Central and East Javanese). Interestingly, many have no Austronesian root reconstructed, and I have not been able to find any cognates. This would indicate, that if in fact there were such a substratum, that it was not Austronesian.