

## **Javanese Dialects and the Typology of Isolating Languages**

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As a general typological feature, the morphology of the languages of Southeast Asia is often described as typically isolating, that is, independent words are generally monomorphemic. The Austronesian languages are often listed as an exception to this geographical tendency (except perhaps the Chamic languages). Standard Javanese is often thought of as comparatively rich in inflectional morphology, especially in its verbal paradigm which has distinct forms for various applicative, active and passive voices, in addition to indicative and imperative moods, and even a morphologically distinct subjunctive form (under some analyses there are at least 30 distinct verbal markers in standard Javanese (Uhlenbeck 1983) (27 for Ogloblin 2005)).

However, in this paper I argue that the pattern found in the ‘standard’ language (the dialects of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, henceforth Y/S), is actually far more complex than that found in most other dialects of Javanese, and in fact the Y/S dialects have undergone significant complexification. The majority of Javanese dialects displays a much simpler verbal paradigm and in fact has a much stronger tendency towards isolating as opposed to polysynthetic morphology.

Most dialects of Javanese, including Tengger, Banten, Osing, Banyumas, inter alia, have remarkably little inflectional morphology—although they have a good deal of derivational morphology. There is a cline in the in the geographic region comprising southeast Asia, with the languages of mainland southeast Asia, such as Vietnamese and Thai being almost purely isolating. As one moves east and south into insular Southeast Asia (and on to Papua and Australia) languages become increasingly polysynthetic. The evidence from Javanese dialects actually lends support for this characterization, as they have more complex inflectional morphology than, say, Khmer, but are still remarkably impoverished even when compared to other Austronesian languages found further east.

Further, I show that many of the affixes which appear on the Javanese verb are in fact optional, and they are not necessary to license the appearance of other arguments in a clause. Both the strong isolating nature and the native simplicity of most Javanese dialects have significant implications for questions of language complexity, here I address specifically the Compensation Hypothesis, arguing that Javanese dialects—as opposed to the ‘standard’—may display greater overall simplicity.

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Ogloblin, Alexander K. 2005. Javanese. In Adelaar and Himmelmann eds.

Uhlenbeck, E.M. 1983. *Javanese Linguistics*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.