

Some Problems in the Study of Old Javanese as a Linguistic System

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Abstract: The aims of my address for the ISLOJ conference of June 2006 are twofold. First I will raise the question of the status of Old Javanese as a linguistic system and how this is related to processes of literization that are as much in evidence in the textual idioms that we study under terms like ‘Middle Javanese’ as they are in Old Javanese itself. I aim here to suggest that a broader understanding of the effects of literization and their grounding in the aims and practices of particular scriptoria can lead us to a view of diachronic processes in the languages of Java and Bali that will open up a larger domain of study than is possible so long as we bracket our studies with terms that suggest a strict periodization of linguistic change and literary practice. As part of this discussion I will raise the question of whether we can detect a consciousness of linguistic patterning within the Old Javanese canon itself and how this may relate to the preservation of parts of the tradition of Pāṇinian analysis to a surprisingly late date in Java and Bali. I will also raise the issue of genre, insisting that we need to understand inscriptional, didactic and literary uses of languages like Old Javanese in terms of the modes of production of particular scriptoria.

My second aim in this address is to demonstrate how the study of the syntactic patterns of Old Javanese can be further developed as a valuable source of information on early phases in the history of the Austronesian languages by carrying forward the work of several pioneers in the field. Here I will mention briefly the work of Becker and Oka (YEAR) on deixis and what they term an associated “cline of person” of central importance in the organization of both temporal and spatial coordinates of discourse in Old Javanese. I will note that their work may need revisions in terms of a larger corpus of examples, but that in essence their views on deixis have given us a valuable tool for investigations into the organization of Old Javanese discourse. I will then look at the work of Oglobin (2005) on irrealis, suggesting that his paradigmatic approach can be augmented by a processual approach, which I believe can shed valuable light on the question of aspectual features of the Old Javanese system of symmetrical voice. Finally I will look briefly at an insightful work by Uhlenbeck (1986) on particles in Old Javanese, focussing on his analysis of the particle *n/an*, whose phonological form is minimal, but which plays a large role in structures of complementation that stand alongside nominalization of verbal clauses as a major support for recursiveness in Old Javanese syntax.

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