

Kerata basa: Javanese folk etymology

Yoshimi Miyake

Akita University

Keratabasa is the Javanese term for folk etymology (although the origin of *kerata basa* itself is not known). Professionals of Javanese literature and language, *dhalang*, shadow puppet players are well familiar with *kerata basa* although the origin of *kerata basa* is not well known. As *kerata* denotes 'hunter', and *basa* 'language', *kerata basa* may literally mean 'searching of words'. Although the number of terms which has *kerata basa*, published in articles and books is about fifty, *kerata basa* can be productive and creative. *Kerata basa* has the following features.

1. Combination of the last syllable of each phrase or clause.

Kerata basa is a phrase, clause, or sentence, which purports to provide the etymology of a word. The most popular pattern is a combination of the last syllable of the first clause/phrase and the last syllable of the second clause/phrase as shown in 1, a sentence *kerata basa*.

1. *bocah = mangané kaya kebo, pagaweané ora kecacah.*

child: eating-the like buffalo actions neg. counted

'(The term) child originates from a sentence 'his/her eating is like that of buffalo, and his/her actions are not countable'.

The last syllable of *kebo* 'buffalo' and the last syllable of *kecacad* 'counted' are combined to consist the term *bocah* 'child', according to this *keratabasa*. In this way, *bocah* 'child' is considered that *mangané kaya kebo* 'his/her eating is like buffalo, and his/her action cannot be counted

Sample 2 is a clause *kerata basa*.

2. guru= digugu lan ditiru
teacher= to be obeyed and be imitated
teacher = to be obeyed and imitated

The term *guru* 'teacher' is from a phrase *digugu lan ditiru*, according to its *keratabasa*. The last syllable of *digugu*, a passive form of *gugu*, and the last syllable of a passive form of *tiru* are combined to make the term *guru* 'teacher', according to its *keratabasa*.

Sample 3 is a phrase *keratabasa*.

3. gusti= bagusing ati
lord beautiful-LOC ati

The term *gusti* 'lord, master' is from a phrase *bagusing ati* 'beautiful in mind', according to its *keratabasa*. The last syllables of *bagus* and *ati* are combined to make *gusti*. Particle or suffix does not form a *kerata basa* so the locative suffix *ing* is not counted as the last syllable.

This paper will discuss what differentiates *kerata basa* from the folk etymology of other languages; what kind of words are found in *kerat abasa* vocabulary; and what are the phonological features of *kerata basa*.