

Pronouns and other person-referring items: Javanese in typological perspective

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This paper builds on recent work (Connors 2014; Connors et al. 2014; Ewing 2014) to develop a typology of people referring expressions in Javanese, and explicate their usage according to their varying degrees of social deixis.

Like a number of other languages of Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Flannery 2010, Wallace 1983), and in contradistinction to many other language families in the world, Javanese's class of pronouns has been analyzed as being open rather than closed, with some elements characteristic of open classes functioning pronominally. These latter items include, but are not limited to, kinship terms, proper names, titles, personal pronouns from languages other than Indonesian, demonstratives/deictic, and some uses of null anaphora. Further, there are multiple lexemes that encode the same person and number distinctions, but that differ along some other dimension such as politeness or honorificity. As such, these are instantiations of 'pronoun avoidance... a strategy (as opposed to a categorical feature) of pronoun use' which incorporate various social distinctions indexed by various pronoun substitutes (Helmbrecht 2013).

Recent works in this area have aimed to explain the use of one form over the other, and have relied on notions such as stance taking, self-categorization, formality, and positioning. These studies have all looked at some relatively narrow subset of the various members: Kartomihardjo (1981), Errington (1998), Djenar (2007), and Englebretson (2007) model the Indonesian first person-referring choice of item in terms of Brown and Gilman's (1960) t/v distinction (extending their model of second person pronouns); Sneddon (1996) describes the distinction in first person pronouns in terms of formal vs. informal; Djenar (2007) explains the use of various first and second person pronouns as 'strategic acts of self-categorization', rejecting the formal/informal/intimate labels as too simplistic. More recently, Manns (2012) has analyzed variation in first person pronouns as instantiations of different 'stances.'

McGinn (1991) actually goes furthest in accounting for the range of elements that can function pronominally in Indonesian, extending his politeness analysis to proper names and kin terms.

The present paper aims to build on this body of work with an exploration of people referring expressions in Javanese, with particular attention to the role of non-canonical referring expressions. This latter label includes both null pronouns, and what have more recently been labelled pronoun imposters (Collins and Postal 2012; Collins 2014). Essentially, this class includes elements where the referential value of the entity referred to is not readily interpretable from the surface form. This is trivially true for null pronouns, as there is no overt form. For imposters, the denotational value of the form is in some way disjunct from the referential value. They form a class in a number of ways, not least of which is the interpretational burden they place on the hearer. Work in progress explores a more foundational question of whether the act of person-indexation may itself be subject to vagueness or ambiguity used intentionally and strategically by speakers.

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