

Becoming Austronesian: The Languages of Java

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An idealized view of the spread of Austronesian languages out of Taiwan and the Philippines and into the Indonesian archipelago is that it constituted a single massive event in which a people bearing Austronesian genes, carrying Austronesian artifacts and speaking Austronesian languages fanned out over the archipelago, replacing the peoples, the cultures, and the languages that were there before. An alternative and more nuanced view of the spread of Austronesian languages into the Indonesian archipelago is formulated by Donohue and Denham (to appear), who highlight the following points: (a) genes, artifacts and languages are independent of each other, and the spread of Austronesian languages does not necessarily involve a concomitant spread of genes or cultural artifacts; (b) different kinds of language dispersal may have played out in different locations across the archipelago; (c) in at least some cases, "becoming Austronesian" was a process that involved substantial amounts of restructuring due to language contact.

The role of language contact in the spread of Austronesian languages formed the focus of a previous ISLOJ presentation (Gil 2011, subsequently published as Gil 2015), arguing that the languages of Java, like Austronesian languages in other parts of the archipelago, exhibit an array of linguistic features bearing a closer resemblance to the non-Austronesian languages of Mainland Southeast Asia and Western New Guinea than to the Austronesian languages of Taiwan and the Philippines. Such features, including, among others, basic SVO word order, low grammatical morpheme density and isolating word structure, were already in the region before the Austronesian expansion, and were subsequently acquired, by various mechanisms of language contact, by the incoming Austronesian languages.

This paper, a sequel to the 2011 ISLOJ presentation, attempts to shed light on the specific nature of the contact that took place in the case of the languages of Java, addressing the question how they became Austronesian. A widespread assumption is that whereas lexical items may readily be borrowed from one language into another, morphology is much more resistant to borrowing; accordingly, inherited morphology provides a much more reliable indicator of genealogical affiliation. However, application of this principle to the languages of Java runs up against two serious difficulties. First, as largely isolating languages, there is actually precious little morphology to work with. Secondly, as shown by Seifart (to appear) and others, morphological borrowing is not as impervious to borrowing as is commonly assumed.

This paper presents a detailed diachronic investigation of the morphological inventory of the languages of Java, focusing on Sundanese and Javanese. The results of the investigation show that there is actually not a single affix that can unequivocally be said to be inherited from earlier stages of Austronesian. Some affixes, such as the Sundanese plural infix *-ar-* are clearly innovative. Others, such as the Sundanese applicative/causative suffix *-keun*, although arguably built up from parts with plausible Austronesian etymologies, exhibit a current geographical distribution that is clearly the product of borrowing; thus, forms resembling Sundanese *-keun* are found across a wide swathe of Java, Borneo and Sumatra, encompassing languages that do not form a coherent genealogical subgroup within Austronesian, such as Javanese, Malay and Toba Batak.

Still, there would seem to remain a small hard core of affixes that appear to represent clear-cut inheritances from earlier stages of Austronesian, such as, for example, the supposedly active-voice prenasalization prefix *N-* in Sundanese and Javanese. However, examination of the residual non-Austronesian languages in the wider region, in the Malay Peninsula and the New Guinea Bird's Head, shows that for each and every putative inherited Austronesian affix in the languages of Java, there is at least one known case in which a cognate of that affix was borrowed from some other Austronesian language into a non-Austronesian one, either Aslian or Papuan. Thus, for example, prenasalization with an active-voice-like function has been borrowed, as an at least partially productive prefix, into, among others, the Aslian language Semelai and the Bird's Head isolate language Hatam. (It is worth noting that prenasalization also undergoes rampant borrowing within Austronesian, such as when different subdialects of Jakarta Indonesian borrow different forms of the prefix from Sundanese and Javanese respectively.)

So what, then, is the difference between Sundanese and Javanese on the one hand, and languages such as Semelai and Hatam on the other? Typologically they bear a close resemblance to one another; the major difference is in fact in the lexicon, which is Austronesian in the former, non-Austronesian in the latter. So are Sundanese and Javanese relexified versions of some long-since disappeared non-Austronesian languages, which, just like Semelai and Hatam, also happened to borrow some Austronesian affixes? The default and most likely answer to this question is negative: the languages of Java are still most probably Austronesian languages. However, the demonstrated borrowability of all of their supposedly inherited morphology suggests that such morphology cannot be invoked as a knock-down argument in support of their genealogical affiliation as Austronesian languages. Moreover, their typological profile, bearing a closer resemblance to the non-Austronesian languages of Mainland Southeast Asia and western New Guinea than to their Austronesian relatives in Taiwan and the Philippines, suggests that the way in which the language of Java became Austronesian must have involved a substantial amount of contact-induced restructuring in the grammar and in other domains.

Donohue, Mark and Tim Denham (to appear) "Becoming Austronesian: Mechanisms of Language Dispersal across Indo-Malaysia", in D. Gil and J. McWhorter eds., *Austronesian Undressed, How and Why Languages Become Isolating*, DeGruyter, Berlin.

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Seifart, Frank (to appear) *World Atlas of Morphological Borrowing*.