

Notes on the etymology of the Malay-Indonesian suffix *-kan*

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Abstract for the 10th International Symposium on Malay/Indonesian Linguistics

University of Delaware, 21-23 April 2006

One of the most productive affixes in Malay-Indonesian is the suffix *-kan*, which forms transitive verbs. It appears to be transparently derived from the preposition *akan*, whose meaning corresponds vaguely to ‘about, regarding’. This hypothetical development is shown in examples (1) – (3).

- (1) Aku mimpi.
1sg dream
‘I dream.’
- (2) Aku mimpi akan dia.
1sg dream AKAN3SG
‘I dream about him/her.’
- (3) Aku mimpikan dia.
1sg dream-KAN 3SG
‘I dream about him/her.’

However, there are some complications with this straightforward analysis. First, the functions of the suffix *-kan* are demonstrably different from those of the free morpheme *akan*; its main meaning is causative (as in example 4 below), and secondarily benefactive (example 5), although the meaning of ‘about, regarding’ is still preserved in some verbs, as in example 3 above. Very often it merely derives transitive verbs with no additional meaning (example 6).

- (4) Anak itu memalukan ibunya.
child that ACT-embarrassed-KAN mother-3SG.POSS
‘The child made his mother embarrassed’
=‘That child embarrassed his mother.’
- (5) Ibu membelikan anaknya bola.
mother ACT-buy-KAN child-3SG.POSS ball
‘The mother bought her child a ball.’
- (6) Anak itu melemparkan bola kepada ibunya.
child that ACT-throw-KAN ball to mother-3SG.POSS
‘The child threw a ball to his mother.’

Second, those Malay dialects which have preserved a cognate of *akan* as a free morpheme, such as Ambonese Malay (*a*)*kang*, exhibit even more divergent functions, such as 3rd person inanimate pronoun ('it', example 7), and determiner (example 8).

(7) Mar be su kase kang par Anis! (van Minde 223)
but TRU-1SG PFCT give KANG to Anis
'But I've already given **it** to Anis!

(8) Akang gunting di mana? (van Minde 150)
AKANG scissors at where
'Where are **the** scissors?'

Third, both *akan* and *-kan* appear bear a phonetic resemblance to other function morphemes that do not seem coincidental, such as the directional preposition *ka-* (modern Malay-Indonesian *ke-*), the future marker *akan*, and the adversative/involuntary passive prefix *ka-*, present in Javanese, Sundanese, and some dialects of Malay-Indonesian.

Fourth, and most importantly, the suffix *-kan* has clear cognates (representing the expected sound correspondences, as well as close semantic and syntactic resemblances) in several other languages, such as Old Javanese (and modern Krama) *-aken*, Sundanese *-keun*, and Toba Batak *-hon*. If the development from *akan* to *-kan* were indeed a recent internal development in Malay, why should the suffix have cognates in other languages, none of which—it should be added—also have a free morpheme corresponding to *akan*?

This paper will address the four issues mentioned above and propose some explanations, citing data from several varieties of Malay-Indonesian as well as other Austronesian languages.