

## Towards a history of Indonesian slang

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In this paper, I attempt to sketch out a short history of Indonesian slang. By its nature, slang is often ephemeral and it is usually confined to spoken genres of language. For these reasons it can be hard to find records of older slang. Slang is often confined to particular subgroups within a society, and it is no coincidence that some of the first dictionaries of, for example, English slang consisted of the language of criminals and sailors. Slang often involves the use of 'ludlings' or word games in which the sounds of a word are manipulated in some way or other. In the Indonesian context, the first widely recorded type of slang was a variety called *prokem* which was the slang of *preman* or gangsters in the 1970s. Prokem had many neologisms, but it also had a productive ludling involving the insertion of -ok- after the onset of the first syllable and the deletion of any subsequent syllables, thus the name of the language *prokem* is derived from *preman*. Another *prokem* ludling which has survived into modern Jakarta slang is *bokap* from *bapak*. During the 1990's *bahasa prokem* was taken up by students and other middle class Indonesians, enriched with more vocabulary, and more or less turned into *bahasa gaul* which is a kind of slang used widely nowadays by young 'hip' Indonesians in the capital and elsewhere.

Apart from *prokem*, one of the best-known subcultural ludling styles is found in *bencong* or 'transvestite' slang. Like *prokem*, the word *bencong* itself is derived via a ludling from the word *banci* as is e.g. *rempong* from *repot* 'troublesome'. These days it appears that slang in Indonesian gets richer and richer. Some slang is borrowed from English, e.g. *cekidot* from 'check it out', and much slang is formed from a productive process of making *singkatan* or abbreviations. These usually are formed by taking a syllable from one word and a syllable from another to create a new word, e.g. *bacol* < *bahan coli* 'material masturbate' or perhaps more colloquially in English as 'wank fodder' to describe someone deemed rather attractive. Singkatan can also be formed from a mixture of Indonesian and English words, e.g. *ja'im* from 'jaga image' which means literally 'to look after one's image' but also entails that any person who is *ja'im* is probably hiding something about their real personality from the rest of the world by presenting only one side of themselves.

Many commentators on contemporary language in letters to the editor and the like maintain that the existence of such slang is a threat to the existence of *Bahasa yang baik dan benar* which we might think of as 'good and proper Indonesian'. In this paper, I will argue that on the contrary, the richness of Indonesian slang actually attests to the huge success of the Indonesian national language program: slang is partly defined by its opposition to official language, and such a rich slang as found in Indonesian can only exist when there is a rich standard to depart from.