

Overgeneralization of *ada* in heritage Ambon Malay in the Netherlands (*Melaju Sini*)

In this paper, I investigate the frequency distribution of the preverbal marker *ada* in two Malay varieties, namely Ambon Malay (spoken in Ambon, Indonesia) and heritage Ambon Malay (spoken in the Netherlands, known as *Melaju Sini*). The preverbal marker *ada* functions mainly as a progressive aspect marker, but it can also mark realis mood and it can occur with stative verbs to indicate non-permanent or reversible states (van Minde 1997; Paauw 2008).

In the early 1950s, 12,500 speakers of (Ambon) Malay arrived in the Netherlands after the decolonization of Indonesia. Nowadays the descendants of these immigrants (approximately 42,000 people) are Dutch-dominant Dutch-Ambon Malay bilinguals. A number of studies have demonstrated that the grammatical system of heritage speakers often shows a marked tendency toward simplification (Polinsky 2008).

Heritage speakers, however, do not always simplify and reduce the grammatical elements of their language. On the contrary, some structures may be overgeneralized. This is indeed the case of the preverbal marker *ada*, which is overgeneralized by heritage speakers of Ambon Malay.

A quantitative and qualitative analysis of primary language data collected from 33 heritage speakers and from 33 ‘homeland’ speakers reveals a significant difference between the two groups. Heritage speakers tend to use the marker *ada* more extensively, not only in terms of absolute frequency, but also in terms of function. Specifically, *ada* is overgeneralized to achievements (*punctual event*) and accomplishments (*bounded process*).

I will argue that overgeneralization in heritage speakers is related to the mapping of *ada* whose function is not completely transparent to heritage speakers. But indeterminacy does not always leads to loss, and can also cause overgeneralization. In fact, when semantic indeterminacy is compensated for by phonological transparency, as is the case with *ada*, the form may undergo functional extension (Aalberse & Moro forthc.)

Aalberse, S. & F. Moro. (forthc.) “Stability in Chinese and Malay heritage languages as a source of divergence”, in *Factors and Mechanism in Divergence and Stability*.

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