Towards a full account of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian grammar

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In this paper I seek to explain the outlines of a theory of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian grammar. Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian (henceforth CJI) is a colloquial variety of the Indonesian language spoken in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta and it is the first language of perhaps 10 million or more people in the Jakarta region. CJI differs quite considerably from standard Indonesian, having developed in large part from Betawi Malay, a creole Malay variety which emerged in the old Dutch East Indies capital of Batavia (Muhadjir, 2000). Like many creole Malay varieties, Jakarta Indonesian tends towards what Gil (2005) calls an 'Isolating-Monocategorial Associational Language' meaning that the language has little internal morphological structure, little evidence for the existence of syntactic categories, and a largely associational semantics. Conners, Bowden and Gil (2014) discuss these features of Jakarta Indonesian as they relate to the idea of valence classes in the language, and show that there is very little in the realm of valence classes in the language if it is viewed from the perspective of what is allowable for different groups of verbs. It would appear that principles of information structure and information flow actually account better for the structure of the utterances that are made than do any morphological or syntactic principles.

In this paper I will argue that while CJI appears on the surface to exhibit rather extreme permissiveness in word order and omission of arguments, it can nevertheless be fruitfully described as having underlying AVO word order. This underlying word order rarely surfaces in actual utterances because a series of constraints and preference rules (somewhat reminiscent of Optimality Theory, Prince and Smolensky, 1993). These constraints are based on principles of information structure management and their application conspires to produce a range of alternative surface outputs.

References

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