

Intergenerational language transmission in Jakarta Indonesian: evidence from final vowel [e] in adults and children corpora

In their recent study of language change and acquisition, Meisel et al (2013) stated that one of the factors that can trigger intergenerational language change is multilingual settings. As a linguistic melting pot in Indonesia, Jakarta is an ideal place to study such phenomenon.

This paper investigates intergenerational language transmission in Jakarta Indonesian (JI), a variety of Indonesian spoken in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Through phonological patterns which are transmitted over three generation of speakers, this investigation attempts to shed light on the development of JI, and its relationships with other varieties spoken in Jakarta, namely Standard Indonesian (SI) and Betawi Malay (BM).

This investigation uses three naturalistic speech corpora of JI which were collected in colloquial settings. They are a corpus of children speech collected in early 2000s (Gil and Tadmor 2015), a corpus of adults speech collected in 1970s (Wallace 1976), and a corpus of adults speech collected in early 2000s (Gil and Tadmor 2015). The phonological variable which is investigated is the patterns of use of final vowels [a] ~ [e], correspond to SI final vowel [a], such as in [apa] ~ [ape] ‘what’.

In his investigation, Wallace (1976) classified his BM speakers into Traditional Jakarta Malay (TJM), and Modern Jakarta Malay (MJM). TJM are speakers of Betawi ethnicity, while MJM are speakers of those who have ethnic background other than Betawi but were born and grew up in Jakarta and their parents are not of Betawi ethnicity.

Wallace (also Chaer 2008 and Ikranagara 1980) proposed that the final vowels [e] were spoken in the lower city.¹ Wallace suggested that these vowels were adopted from the Arabs from Hadhramaut region (Yemen nowadays) who took part in trading in Southeast Asia and eventually settled in Jakarta urban area. This Arabic forms were imitated by Jakarta inhabitants and becoming a prestigious markers around the early 19th century. In the early 19th century, MJM speakers on the border of Sundanese speaking area were influenced by Sundanese. Speakers’ use of final vowels [e] was replaced by [ah] or [aʔ]. Interestingly, MJM speakers in this area used Sundanese forms only in content words, while Arabic patterns remained in function words.

From his 1970s data, Wallace reported similar findings with the situation mentioned above. TJM speakers used final vowel [e] across function words and content words, while MJM speakers used [ah] ~ [aʔ] in content words and used [e] in function words.

In his 1970s data, Wallace (1976) reported that the patterns of use of final vowel [e] in function words among MJM speakers were quite high. Final vowel [e] in function words are highly distributed among speakers from lower (L) to middle (M) socio-economic status (L: 98%, $n = 6$; M: 90%, $n = 4$), while speakers from upper (H) socio-economic status show much lower distribution (H: 22%, $n = 2$). Using Wallace’s ethnic classification, I investigate the patterns of use of final vowel [e] in function words produced by JI adults and pre-adolescence in Gil and Tadmor’s (2015) corpora. JI speakers here are under the same ethnic classification as MJM speakers. Preliminary findings show that adult speakers in 2000s corpus produce lower distribution than 1970s adult speakers (L: 11% $n = 2$; M: 4% $n = 2$), while pre-adolescent speakers in 2000s corpus produce even lower than 2000s adult speakers (L: 1%, $n = 2$; M: 1%, $n = 2$). It happens across lower and middle socio-economic status.² Table 1 shows the distribution across three generations.

¹ This lower city is Pekojan area, known as Kota nowadays.

² I exclude the speakers from upper socio-economic status due to a very limited tokens produced in the corpora.

This preliminary findings show that patterns of use of final vowel [e] have changed across these three generation of speakers.

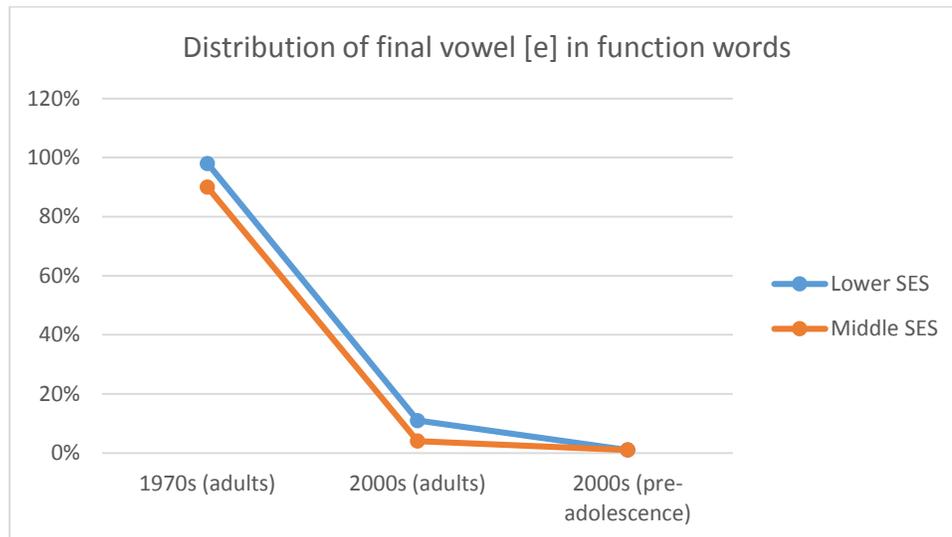


Table 1

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