

Exotericity of Malayic Varieties

David Gil, Sihan Chen, Santi Kurniati, Yessy Prima Putri, Fadlul Rahman, Jana Reifegerste, Tessa Yuditha, Antonio Benítez-Burraco

In Gil (2024, to appear), a typology of Malay/Indonesian and other Malayic varieties is proposed based on the scale of *exotericity*, distinguishing between *traditional dialects* of a mostly esoteric nature, *koiné varieties* situated in the middle of the scale, and *standardized varieties* that are highly exoteric. Although the notion of exotericity, introduced by Thurston (1987) and Wray (2007), is based on sociolinguistic factors, a recent large-scale cross-linguistic study by Chen et al (2024), based on *WALS* (Haspelmath et al eds. 2005), shows that the scale of exotericity bears far-reaching grammatical consequences. Specifically, whereas esoteric languages tend to exhibit more complex morphology but simpler syntax, exoteric languages tend to be associated with the opposite pattern of simpler morphology alongside more complex syntax.

This paper surveys a range of evidence showing how the cross-linguistic correlation between esotericity/exotericity and morphological/syntactic complexity is replicated within the Malayic language family, with traditional dialects tending to exhibit more complex morphology while standardized varieties are more likely to be associated with more complex syntax. To do so, this paper presents five empirical studies, some complete, other in various stages of progress, providing independent support for the effect of exotericity on grammatical structure internal to the Malayic language family.

- (1) *Morphology*. Traditional and koiné varieties display a wide range of complex morphological structures absent from the standard varieties, including absolute/oblique alternations in Kerinci varieties, morphophonemic alternations involving the attributive associative marker in Sumatran varieties such as Tapan and Siak Malay, morphologically-conditioned metathesis in Kupang Malay, nascent subject-verb agreement in Papuan Malay, and others.
- (2) *Voice*. Whereas the voice system of Standard Malay/Indonesian has constituted the basis for the definition of what is sometimes referred to as an "Indonesian-type" voice system, many or most traditional and koiné varieties actually exhibit syntactically simpler voice systems, involving a periphrastic construction and/or a morphological alternation that is semantically rather than grammatically based.
- (3) *Grammaticalization of Thematic Roles*. An experimental study of the degree to which thematic roles are grammaticalized by means of devices such as flagging and word order reveals that thematic roles are encoded more strongly in Standard Indonesian than in koiné varieties such as Papuan Malay and Riau Indonesian and traditional dialects such as Bengkulu and Siak Malay.
- (4) *Adjective Order*. An experimental study, currently in progress, examines the extent to which, in multiple-adjective constructions, the order of adjectives is fixed in accordance with various syntactic or semantic principles. The hypothesis being tested is that the order will be freer in more esoteric languages and more esoteric Malayic varieties, but of greater rigidity in more exoteric languages and in Standard Indonesian.
- (5) *Reliance on Declarative and Procedural Memory*. An experimental study, which, at the time of writing, is still in its initial stages, is attempting to compare the relative abilities of different individuals with regard to two distinct memory systems, declarative and procedural, which have been argued to underpin certain aspects of morphological and syntactic linguistic competence. The hypothesis being tested is that individuals whose linguistic ecologies are weighed more heavily towards more esoteric languages will perform better on declarative memory tasks, while individuals with greater exposure to and

knowledge of exoteric languages will do better on procedural memory tasks. In particular, we expect this correlation to be replicated within the Malayic language family, with traditional dialects and koiné varieties being more strongly supported by declarative memory, and standard varieties by procedural memory.

Together, the above studies provide (or will, hopefully, provide) further support for the proposed correlation between exotericity and morphological/syntactic complexity, thereby showing how the study of microvariation within a family of closely related languages and dialects can shed light on worldwide patterns of cross-linguistic variation.

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