

Usage of English *you* and *I* in urban Malay codes in Malaysia

In colloquial Malay varieties, usages of person reference terms, including 1st and 2nd personal pronouns, are complex and status-marked, reflecting long-existing cultural norms that are highly hierarchical. However, in some social contexts, terms that reflect more symmetrical relationships may be present. Contact with other languages is one path through which additional terms enter the language. e.g., Southern Min *gua/wa* '1per' and *lu* '2 person', usages of which are documented in many contact and colloquial varieties. In some instances, these acquire novel functions in the target language that are distinct from usages in the source languages, e.g., Sneddon 2006:59 observation of *gua/lu* in colloquial Jakartan Indonesian as associated with cosmopolitanism. Apart from this, few details contextualizing the environments in which such terms appear are available.

This paper examines the rise in popularity of English *I/you* in urban Malay codes found in the Malaysian capital city of Kuala Lumpur. I present conversational data of two Malay Malaysians to demonstrate that in certain interactions, English *you* and *I* are selected as default personal pronouns. I contend that they reflect a kind of cosmopolitanism and 'modern outlook' shared by interlocutors, indexing a symmetrical and more status-neutral relationship between them. In such interactions, the functions of Malay-rooted personal pronouns such as *aku* and *saya* (1st person sg.) shifts to function as marked forms, often evoked for specific discourse-local reasons. As well, details such as participant information and topic are crucial to analyzing such usages.

The wider socio-cultural context in which English *I/you* appears is also discussed. While contact is a factor in the enlisting of of English *I/you*, significantly, they are not routinely present in the Malay(s) used by non-ethnically Malay speakers examined in similar interactions, who typically use Malay forms, particularly learnt forms, e.g., *saya* '1per.sg' and *awak* '2per.sg'. Thus they appear to be innovations of ethnic-Malay speakers in urban areas. It is suggested that English *I/you* is an aspect of the cosmopolitanization of ethnic Malay codes in urban areas, a major component of which is contact with English.

References

Sneddon, James. 2006. *Colloquial Jakartan Indonesian*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics