

Pronouns and other person-referring items: Indonesian and typological implications

Like a number of other languages of Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Flannery 2010, Wallace 1983), and in contradistinction to many other language families in the world, Indonesian's class of pronouns has been analyzed as being open rather than closed, with some elements characteristic of open classes functioning pronominally. These latter items include, but are not limited to, kinship terms, proper names, titles, personal pronouns from languages other than Indonesian, demonstratives/ deictic, and some uses of null anaphora. Further, there are multiple lexemes that encode the same person and number distinctions, but that differ along some other dimension such as politeness or honorificity. As such, these are instantiations of 'pronoun avoidance... a strategy (as opposed to a categorical feature) of pronoun use' which incorporate various social distinctions indexed by various pronoun substitutes (Helmbrecht 2013).

Recent works in this area have aimed to explain the use of one form over the other, and have relied on notions such as stance taking, self-categorization, formality, and positioning. These studies have all looked at some relatively narrow subset of the various members: Kartomihardjo (1981), Errington (1998), Djenar (2007), and Englebretson (2007) model the Indonesian first person-referring choice of item in terms of Brown and Gilman's (1960) t/v distinction (extending their model of second person pronouns); Sneddon (1996) describes the distinction in first person pronouns in terms of formal vs. informal; Djenar (2007) explains the use of various first and second person pronouns as 'strategic acts of self-categorization', rejecting the formal/informal/intimate labels as too simplistic. More recently, Manns (2012) has analyzed variation in first person pronouns as instantiations of different 'stances.'

McGinn (1991) actually goes furthest in accounting for the range of elements that can function pronominally in Indonesian, extending his politeness analysis to proper names and kin terms.

The present paper aims to build on this body of work and create a taxonomy of semantic types that function as the class of pronouns in colloquial Indonesian. First, I discuss the features that are used to define pronominal function. I then argue that pronouns in Indonesia are not, in fact, an open class. It is, however, a very large class in comparison to say Indo-European languages. It is an open class only in as much as novel members of predefined lexical categories may be used pronominally in a novel way. The class of categories itself, however, is relatively fixed. The taxonomy of lexical-semantic types, and the classification of the system as a closed system, is further strengthened through comparison with analogous systems in the typologically distinct Korean and Dhivehi languages. Work in progress explores a more foundational question of whether the act of person-indexation may itself be subject to vagueness or ambiguity used intentionally and strategically by speakers.

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