

Towards an account of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian information structure

John Bowden

Jakarta Field Station

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

In this paper I make some preliminary observations about the coding of information structure in colloquial Jakarta Indonesian based on analysis of some of the large archive of conversational Jakarta Indonesian compiled by people at the Jakarta Field Station of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

Jakarta Indonesian is a colloquial variety of the Indonesian language spoken in the Indonesian capital and is the first language of perhaps 10 million or more people in the region. Being the colloquial language used in television soap opera and other genres it is also highly influential throughout the country. Jakarta Indonesian 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. Like many creole Malay varieties, Jakarta Indonesian tend 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. Connors, Bowden and Gil (2015) 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. Although certain kinds of word order structures are more common than others with different verbs, almost all potential structures are encountered in naturalistic data.

It would appear that principles of information structure and information flow need to be invoked in order to account better for the structure of the utterances that are actually made by speakers of the language. This paper constitutes an early attempt to understand some of these factors, and lays out the elements of a research program to be pursued over the next year or so that will pursue these issues more thoroughly.

References

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