

The Languages of Java in Areal-Typological Perspective

David Gil

This paper presents an exploration of the languages of Java in areal-typological perspective. Its point of departure is Connors' (2008) detailed description of the Tengger dialect of Javanese, plus his ongoing work on other colloquial varieties of Javanese, including Banyumas, Tegal, Osing and others. In Connors (2009) it is shown that in terms of their general grammatical characteristics, colloquial Javanese dialects are quite different from Standard Javanese, instead bearing a closer resemblance to colloquial dialects of Malay and Indonesian, and to the languages of Mainland Southeast Asia, which constitute a classical example of a linguistic area or sprachbund.

One possible interpretation of these facts is that Javanese and other nearby structurally-similar languages constitute outliers of a somewhat expanded Mainland Southeast Asian linguistic area; this interpretation is consistent with the view that the Indonesian archipelago is a transitional zone in which Mainland Southeast Asian linguistic features gradually fade out as one moves from Mainland Southeast Asia towards two other commonly assumed linguistic areas, New Guinea and Australia.

This paper, however, offers an alternative account of the facts. Rather than being located at the periphery of the Mainland Southeast Asian linguistic area, it is argued that the languages of Java are in fact right in the middle of a much larger linguistic area, one that includes Mainland Southeast Asia, Sumatra, Java, Nusa Tenggara, and parts of western New Guinea, with Borneo, Sulawesi and Maluku as a transitional zone to the north. With reference to the two major rivers dominating its two extremities, the area in question may be referred to as the *Mekong-Mamberamo* linguistic area.

The Mekong-Mamberamo linguistic area is characterized by a wide range of linguistic features, including the following:

- (1) (a) basic SVO word order
- (b) isolating word structure
- (c) weak or no grammatical voice contrasts
- (d) optional expression of tense-aspect-mood (Gil in preparation)
- (e) "eye day" > "sun" lexicalization (Urban 2010)
- (f) d/t place-of-articulation asymmetry (Donohue 2009)
- (g) multiple dental clicks as a paralinguistic expression of amazement (Gil 2005)

This paper discusses these and other features in detail, thereby providing empirical support for the reality of this linguistic area.

Historically, the Mekong-Mamberamo linguistic area is consistent with documented patterns of genetic markers, and also with evidence for ancient trade routes, such as those which brought bananas and sugar cane from New Guinea to Insular and then Mainland Southeast Asia. However, in recent millennia, the unity of the Mekong-Mamberamo linguistic area has been partially obscured by two historical processes impinging on the area's heartland: first, the intrusion, from the north, of Austronesian languages, originally characterized by a very distinct grammatical typology; and secondly, the rise of two standardized languages of empire, Malay and Javanese, with innovated grammatical features reflecting their vastly expanded sociolinguistic roles.

Nevertheless, colloquial varieties of Javanese managed to withstand these two processes and retain their original Mekong-Mamberamo character. When Austronesian languages first arrived in Java, they absorbed, possibly via creolization, many of the Mekong-Mamberamo characteristics of their non-Austronesian predecessors. Later, when a standardized variety of Javanese arose, colloquial varieties of Javanese survived, either in a relationship of diglossia alongside the standard language, or on their own, in geographically more peripheral regions where the standard language never made serious inroads. Thus, colloquial varieties of Javanese, alongside other languages of the Java region, maintained their Mekong-Mamberamo characteristics, reflecting their location at the geographical center of this major linguistic area.

REFERENCES

- Conners (2008) *Tengger Javanese Morphosyntax*, PhD dissertation, Yale University.
- Conners (2009) "Javanese Dialects and the Typology of Isolating Languages", Paper presented at the 11th International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics, 22 June 2009, Aussois, France.
- Donohue (2009) "Dental discrepancies and the sound of Proto-Austronesian", in B. Evans ed., *Discovering History Through Language*, papers in Honour of Malcolm Ross, Pacific Linguistics, Canberra.
- Gil, David (2005) "Para-Linguistic Usages of Clicks", in M. Haspelmath, M. Dryer, D. Gil and B. Comrie eds., *The World Atlas of Language Structures*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 572-575.
- Gil, David (in preparation) "Marking of Tense, Aspect and Mood", *WALS Online*.
- Urban, Matthias (2010) 'Sun' = "Eye of the Day": A Linguistic Pattern of Southeast Asia and Oceania, *Oceanic Linguistics* 49:506-517.