

Arabic loanwords in present-day Javanese: Linguistic syncretism as evidence of cultural syncretism

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Abstract

Loanwords generally indicate both linguistic and cultural contacts between languages. Although it is generally not possible to date exactly when a loan word enters the linguistic inventory of a language, it is possible to trace their origins and meaning. In the case of Arabic loanwords, many etymological researches have been carried out, for example the famous work by Jones (1984) on Arabic loanwords in Indonesian. However, not many have been done for Arabic loanwords in Javanese (Versteegh, personal communication). As for Arabic loanwords in Javanese, they have certainly been in the Javanese language for a long time. Although the words have made their way into Javanese through the spread of Islam, many of the words are not necessarily related to Islamic religion. An examination of two recent Javanese articles on the Internet, for example, reveals that even in an article on 'erotism', three per cent of the words used are Arabic loanwords while one on 'Sufism' has seven per cent words of Arabic origin. This paper tries to list Arabic loanwords in Javanese using two Javanese dictionaries for finding the loanwords (Horne's for the base loanwords and Partaatmadja's for checking and/or culling more recent entries). The Wehr Arabic dictionary is used for finding the origin. The categories of loan words are similar to those found by Poedjosoedarmo for Javanese loans in the Indonesian language. However, the underlying meaning and explanation for loan words that relate to religious and cultural practices are very different from those found in Poedjosoedarmo. The paper also offers an explanation on etymological doublets that is slightly different from that offered by other scholars such as Campbell (1996).