Bòsò Walikan Malangan : structure and development of a Javanese reversed language

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and Summary

Bòsò Walikan Malangan 'Malang-style reversal language' is a word-reversal practice in Malangan Javanese. Walikan incorporates reversed words originating from Malangan Javanese, Malangan Indonesian, Arabic, English, and other languages into a Malangan Javanese structure.

The main aim of this dissertation was to describe the structure of Walikan and its development through time. First, Walikan was discussed from the perspective of youth languages, in order to establish in which aspects it is similar or different from other youth languages. I then investigated the phonology and phonotactics of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian to provide a foundation to discuss the reversal rules and phonological system of Walikan. Third, the sociolinguistic variability among different gender and age groups was explored. Finally, the on-going popularity of Walikan in media and public space was discussed. Looking at the current situation of Walikan also allows some conclusions to be drawn about its future. These points will be elucidated in what follows.

7.1   Status of Walikan

While exploring the characteristics of Walikan through the concept of youth languages, I applied the Total Linguistic Fact framework (Silverstein 1985) to

understand Walikan's forms, practices, and ideology. Similar to most youth languages, the forms of Walikan are characterized by linguistic manipulation, in this instance phonological and semantic manipulation. The phonological manipulation consists of fully reversing the phonemes of each word. The reversal mostly conforms to the phonology and phonotactics of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian, with occasional deviations violating the phonotactic limits of both source languages. The semantic manipulation is the alteration of meaning in certain words, indicating that Walikan is not a play language that is based on a template.

In order to speak Walikan, one can use any number of accepted reversed words in a Malangan Javanese structure. Not every word in an utterance should be reversed; their use every now and then is enough. More fluent speakers use more reversed words in their speech. In the case of existing reversal forms or synonyms that come from different language sources, one needs to assess the semantic and social value of the form to know which is better suited for certain situations or addressees.

Words from other Javanese dialects are prohibited in Walikan. They are perceived within the speech community as having a somewhat lower status than Malangan Javanese. Aside from certain lexicalized expressions, such as ANAMID 'where', affixes and possessive pronouns are not part of the reversal, instead they are attached to a reversed root.

As a language practice, Walikan is shown to have developed from a secretive slang to a marker of shared identity; people consider it as an emblem for identity construction. Walikan words nowadays are used in wider communication, including by people who do not speak Walikan or Malangan Javanese. A similar process is also found in youth languages in Europe and Africa (Kießling and Mous 2004; Nortier and Dorleijn 2013).

Walikan ideology has shifted in line with social change. In the past, it showed elements of Halliday's (1976) anti-language, but in the following decades it gained ground among the youth, particularly among students, musicians, and football fans. Similar to Gaul (Smith-Hefner 2007), Walikan articulates a rejection of social hierarchy. On a local level, it has become mainstream.

7.2 Reversal and Phonology

7.2.1 Phonology of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian

The stops in Malangan Javanese and Indonesian are acoustically voiceless. They are heavy stops followed by breathy vowels, except in prenasalized position. In root-final position, they appear as their light counterparts. The glottal stop [ʔ] appears in both Malangan Javanese and Malangan Indonesian as the realization of /k/ in root-final and word-final position.

Malangan Javanese and Indonesian vowels, with the exception of the schwa, have allophones that are conditioned by the segments that follow them. They have the same distributions, except for the word-final low central vowel /a/ in Malangan Indonesian that remains as [a] and is not realized as [ɔ] as was historically the case in Malangan Javanese. The divergence of [a] and [ɔ] as separate phonemes might be due to language contact with Malangan Indonesian.

Malangan Javanese and Indonesian syllables generally have one consonant in the onset and coda, and one vowel in the nucleus. However, a maximum of three consonants are permitted in the onset of a syllable, both in root-initial and root-medial positions. The root-final position cannot hold any consonant clusters, except in recent loanwords. The root-medial homorganic consonant clusters in Malangan Javanese and Indonesian are not separated by syllable boundaries.

7.2.2 Reversal and Phonology of Walikan

Word reversal in Walikan predominantly follows the Total Segment Reversal rule, in which the segments or phonemes in a word are totally reversed and restructured. In order to create well-formed onsets and codas in the reversed words, vowel and consonant insertion, vowel and consonant deletion, simplification of clusters, or the exchange of vowels or consonants are also sometimes attested.

During the reversal process, the underlying form is reversed in conformity with the phonological and phonotactic rules of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian. The source language's phonological system is effective in Walikan. The heavy stops in word-initial position become light stops when they are reversed to word-final position. The allophonic alternation of /k/ and [ʔ]

also takes place in Walikan. The homorganic consonant clusters remain intact in root-medial position, which is evidence that they are tautosyllabic in Malangan Javanese and Indonesian, i.e part of a single syllable.

Some Walikan words, however, show evidence that speakers no longer strictly follow the allophonic patterns between /e/ ~[ɛ] and /a/ ~[ɔ]. This indicates a phonological change that is ongoing in Malangan Javanese and Indonesian.

Sometimes the same words have several reversed forms because speakers seem to base the reversal on the way the source words are written. But more importantly it is also because reversed languages are intended to deviate from the rules, so internal variation is to be expected.

7.3   Sociolinguistic Variability in Walikan

Walikan is used among different genders and age groups. Male speakers show more confidence than female speakers in reporting their fluency. In addition, the number of words or expressions that have socially negative connotations are found more in the male domain.

There are phonological differences between age groups in the way they use the reversed forms. Older speakers tend to conform to Malangan Javanese and Indonesian phonology and phonotactics. In some cases, they also make use of old spellings. Younger speakers are the most dynamic group, since they also add and create new forms or produce new pronunciations that are unknown to older speakers.

These differences also tell us that Walikan is not a static practice; older speakers can still speak it, but younger speakers are those who control the contemporary form of Walikan by spearheading innovative and frequent forms.

Walikan has existed for decades and is now present among different age and gender groups. As Walikan is no longer confined to younger speakers, it can now be perceived as an urban language (Rampton 2015). Both the older and younger generations consider Walikan as an informal or a colloquial variety of Malangan Javanese that is able to project local pride, solidarity, and regional identity.

7.4   Future of Walikan

Walikan was an oral linguistic practice but is now widely used in different media. It has expanded from a spoken to a written medium, from in-group interaction to public communication, and from offline to online platforms.

Walikan has introduced more local colour to the linguistic landscape of Malang. At the same time, it shows that local (urban) languages can coexist in the linguistic landscape of Indonesia alongside Standard Indonesian and other established local languages.

The changes and developments observed in the domains of Walikan have introduced changes in the nature of the language itself, from a strong conformity to Javanese phonotactics to more innovative strategies which allow violations of phonotactic rules. However, Walikan forms in written media still comply with the phonotactics, because they have to be socially accepted to be well-received. Hence, the standard is determined by informal consensus within the speech community. Walikan has existed for more than five decades, and it will continue to exist for decades to come. Its survival and viability is in the hands of the speakers, who must continue their autonomous use of Walikan. The authorities can also encourage the use of Walikan, but it will probably continue to be used mostly in informal domains.

7.5   Directions for Future Research

The analysis of the structure of Walikan in this dissertation was predominantly based on the lexicon and the internal structure of the words. The results inform how the phonology and phonotactics of Walikan follow and deviate from Malangan Javanese and Indonesian. Focusing on the phonology of the two language systems also results in a thorough description that contributes to the description of Javanese dialects.

Throughout the description of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian, I have highlighted that the distinction between retroflex and non-retroflex consonants is disappearing, as also observed in other Javanese varieties (Villerius 2019; Zen 2019). This change may be the result of bilingualism with Indonesian, in the case of Malangan Javanese, in combination with social, gender, and age factors. It is important that future research is designed to better understand this widespread manifestation of language change.

The heavy stops in word-final position are neutralized in Walikan. This is in line with the findings in an acoustic study by Vander Klok et al. (2018)

on how bilingual Central Javanese speakers produce word-final stops in Javanese. For future research, it would be interesting to conduct a similar type of study on Walikan speakers. Most Walikan speakers are minimally bilingual, evidenced by the way they use Malangan Javanese and Indonesian words in reversals. Hence, such a study could also shed light on the role of linguistic transfer or interference effects in the way speakers treat heavy and light stops.

One of my findings on Walikan phonology shows that the allophonic patterns between /e/ ~[ɛ] and /a/ ~[ɔ] are not consistently followed by Walikan speakers, which may indicate an ongoing change in Malangan Javanese under the influence of Indonesian. Future studies can focus on exploring possible language change by looking at more Eastern Javanese and Indonesian data.

Other potential research directions relate to the field of informal, urban youth languages. It would be beneficial in the future to design a systematic way of collecting Walikan data from the Internet or digital media. My corpus includes Internet data that I collected as I browsed through different websites and forums, but I did not follow a certain data collection method which allows me to capture the use of a certain variety on the Internet as a whole. My goal was to collect a large corpus of Walikan words online and observe their users as well as their usage. Future research on Walikan could focus on a specific digital communication medium and observe how speakers interact in Walikan. The relation between an urban language and digital communication is of interest to scholars in the fields of sociolinguistics, media studies, communication studies, and digital literacy studies.

Further, it is recommended to create a larger dataset of Walikan or other informal, urban youth languages in East Java and Indonesia. The dataset could also include data from rural areas, which is often overlooked by research on informal languages. Most of the speakers in my Walikan corpus, for example, are from the city area of Malang. In the future, the inclusion of speakers from the countryside would enrich the description of Walikan.

Finally, this dissertation has contributed to the description of informal, urban youth languages in Southeast Asia, which are still underdescribed despite their emergence throughout the region (Djenar 2015; Hoogervorst 2015). It encourages future work to focus on similar types of communication in the region.