

# Youth culture and urban pride

## The sociolinguistics of East Javanese slang

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### ABSTRACT

This study offers an overview of the characteristics and social functions of youth slang in the Indonesian province of East Java. It examines *Boso Walikan* and various types of Surabayan slang. *Boso Walikan* emerged in Malang as a secret language that was deliberately made unintelligible to outsiders. Over the decades, large parts of Malang's urban population developed proficiency in the language and appropriated it as an identity marker. The situation in nearby Surabaya is different. While lacking a uniform local slang comparable to that of Malang, several communities make an effort to differentiate themselves through specific linguistic habits, which are briefly introduced. These case studies tell us not only how young people shape their speech, they illustrate how the East Javanese dialect deals with linguistic variety, lexical borrowing and innovation.

### KEYWORDS

Slang, youth language, *Boso Walikan*, East Java, Malang, Surabaya.

As elsewhere, young people in East Java distinguish themselves through their appearance, behaviour, and language. It may be argued that the existence of an identifiable youth culture – belonging to a distinct age group between children and adults – is a relatively new phenomenon in post-colonial Southeast Asia. Students at Indonesia's first universities may have exhibited specific linguistic habits, but the emergence of a true "youth culture" and associated language is predominantly related to globalization, increased wealth and the creation of a leisure industry with products, places and events intended for adolescents. This study examines the emergence of "youth language" in East Java, Indonesia's second most populous province. The best-known slang in this province is *Boso Walikan* 'inverted language', which emerged in the dynamic city of Malang and was popularized by students. It is not the only

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