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Summary of PhD thesis

Bòsò Walikan Malangán

Structure and development of a Javanese reversed language

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INTRODUCTION¹

This paper is an updated version of a doctoral thesis summary (Yannuar 2019: 249-254), containing additional examples.² Bòsò Walikan Malangán ‘Malang-style reversed language’ is a word-reversal practice in Malangán Javanese. The

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² The original summary has been translated into Dutch by Sophie Villerius and into Walikan by Nurenzia Yannuar (see Yannuar 2019: 327-341). The online publication of the thesis is available at <https://www.lotpublications.nl/boso-walikan-malangan-structure-and-development-of-a-javanese-reversed-language>.

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word *walikan* in Javanese means ‘reversed’, referring to the way this variety reverses words originating from Malangan Javanese, Malangan Indonesian, Arabic, English, and other languages into a Malangan Javanese structure (see Table 1). In this study, the terms Malangan Javanese and Malangan Indonesian are used to refer to the local variety of Javanese and Indonesian spoken in Malang, respectively.

No.	Malangan Javanese	Malangan Indonesian	Arabic	English	Local Coinage
1.	<i>kéra</i> < <i>arék</i> ‘kid’	<i>igap</i> < <i>pagi</i> ‘morning’	<i>néz</i> < <i>zén</i> ‘nice’	<i>woles</i> < <i>selow</i> ‘slow’	<i>nolab</i> < <i>balon</i> ‘prostitute’
2.	<i>kétam</i> < <i>maték</i> ‘dead’	<i>agit</i> < <i>tiga</i> ‘three’	<i>sébé</i> < <i>ébés</i> ‘father’	<i>siob</i> < <i>mbois</i> ‘boyish’	<i>idrek</i> < <i>kerdi</i> ‘to work’

Table 1. Examples of reversed words in Walikan and their origins (Yannuar 2019: 33).

The results presented here were based on a total of ten months of extensive fieldwork, yielding 725 words collected from 132 speakers and a substantial number of written and digital Walikan materials observed in the media and public areas.³ 56% of the words’ origins are categorized as Malangan Javanese, 40% as Malangan Indonesian, 0.9% as English, and 0.6% as Arabic. In addition, 1.9% of words combine Malangan Javanese and Indonesian, and 0.6 % combine Arabic and Malangan Javanese or Indonesian.

Example (1) shows a normal utterance in Ngoko Javanese, while (2) exemplifies how reversed words are used within the Malangan Javanese structure. In these examples Walikan words are written in small caps.

- 1) *Énak yò koen wis kerjò ngono iku.*
 Nice yes 2SG already work like DEM.
 ‘Nice that you have already had a job’.
 (Yannuar 2019: 33)

- 2) *KANÉ yò UMAK wis òJREK ngono iku.*
 Nice yes 2SG already work like DEM.
 ‘Nice that you have already had a job’.
 (Yannuar 2019: 33)

The main aim of this dissertation is to describe the structure of Walikan and its development through time. First, Walikan is 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 investigate the phonology and phonotactics of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian to provide a foundation

³ The data are archived in DataverseNL and are accessible through <https://hdl.handle.net/10411/TIGXZT>.

to discuss the reversal rules and phonological system of Walikan. Third, the sociolinguistic variability among different gender and age groups is explored. Finally, the on-going popularity of Walikan in media and public space is discussed. Looking at the current situation of Walikan also allows for some conclusions about its future. These points will be elucidated in what follows.

STATUS OF WALIKAN

While exploring the characteristics of Walikan through the conceptual framework of youth languages, I applied the Total Linguistic Fact framework (Silverstein 1985) to understand its 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. Reversal mostly conforms to the phonology and phonotactics of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian, with occasional deviations violating the phonotactic constraints of both source languages. Semantic manipulation in Walikan consists of the alteration of meaning in certain words, indicating that it is not a play language based on a simple 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 occasional use suffices. More fluent speakers use more reversed words in their speech. To correctly use existing reversed forms or synonyms that come from different source languages, one needs to take into account the semantic and social judgements 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 those from Malangan Javanese. Aside from certain lexicalized expressions, such as *anamid* from Indonesian *di mana* 'where', affixes and possessive pronouns are not part of the reversal process, 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. Nowadays Walikan words 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) notion of an anti-language, but since the 1980s it gained ground among the youth, particularly among students, musicians, and football fans. Similar to Gaul, another Indonesian youth language (Smith-Hefner 2007), Walikan articulates a rejection of social hierarchy. On a local level, it has become a mainstream variety.

REVERSAL AND PHONOLOGY

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.

REVERSAL AND PHONOLOGY OF WALIKAN

Word reversal in Walikan predominantly follows the Total Segment Reversal rule (95% out of 725 words), in which the segments or phonemes in a word are entirely reversed and restructured. Examples for this type of reversal can be seen in Table 1. In order to create well-formed onsets and codas in the reversed words, modification strategies such as consonant addition and deletion, vowel and consonant exchange, or simplification and adjustment of consonant clusters are also attested (see Table 2).

No	Type of reversal	Number of tokens	Original word	Reversed word	Gloss
1.	Consonant addition	6	<i>gedhé</i>	<i>hédheg</i>	'big'
2.	Consonant deletion	8	<i>wédok</i>	<i>kodé</i>	'woman'
3.	Vowel exchange	10	<i>bingung</i>	<i>ngingub</i>	'perplexed'
4.	Consonant exchange	6	<i>setuju</i>	<i>utujes</i>	'agree'
5.	Simplification of consonant clusters	4	<i>mbah</i>	<i>ham</i>	'grandparent'
6.	Adjustment of consonant clusters	4	<i>mlebu</i>	<i>ublem</i>	'to enter'

Table 2. Examples of modification strategies when Total Segment Reversal is applied.

During the reversal process, the underlying form is reversed in conformity with the phonological and phonotactic rules of Malangan Javanese and Indonesian. The matrix 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, for instance, 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.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIABILITY IN WALIKAN

Walikan is used across 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 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.

FUTURE OF WALIKAN

Walikan was historically 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 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 will, in all likelihood, continue their autonomous use of Walikan. The local authorities may at some time in the future decide to encourage the use of Walikan, but it will probably continue to be used mostly in informal domains.

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 describe how the phonology and phonotactics of Walikan follow and deviate from Malangan Javanese. Focusing on the phonology of the language system as well as that of Malangan Indonesian also results in a thorough description that contributes to the description of Javanese dialects and localized varieties of Indonesian.

Throughout the description of Malangan Javanese, I have highlighted that the traditional distinction between retroflex and non-retroflex consonants is disappearing, as also observed in other Javanese varieties (Villierius 2019; Zen 2019). This change may be the result of bilingualism with Indonesian, in combination with social, gender, and age factors. It is important for future research 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 Kloek 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.

As indicated above, 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 convergence 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 specific data

collection method which would have allowed me to capture the use of a certain variety on the Internet as a whole.

My goal has been 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 are 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 under described despite their emergence throughout the region (Djenar 2015; Djenar et al. 2018; Hoogervorst 2015; Martin Anatias 2018). I hope it will be seen as an encouragement for future researchers to focus on similar types of communication in the region.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

2SG	second person singular
DEM	demonstrative

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