

## Conference Paper

# A Study of Comprehensibility of Javanese as Used by Master of Ceremony (*Pranatacara*)

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## Abstract

The current study is aimed at examining the level of comprehensibility of Javanese as used by a *pranatacara* with a particular emphasis on the young generation of Javanese. In one wedding reception, 50 people, aged (judging from their appearance) between 20 and 35 years old, were interviewed on how much they understood the Javanese spoken by the master of ceremony (*pranatacara*). The criteria for assessment were set as: (1) fully understood, (2) partly understood, and (3) did not understand. The findings indicate that most of the subjects (74%) partly understood, 10% fully understood, and the rest (16%) did not understand. The reasons for comprehensibility varied from one subject to another. As a local language of high cultural heritage, Javanese has to be preserved in all its manifestations. As a preliminary research, this does not fully describe the real situation. Other studies must be conducted, employing different methods, subjects, and settings. However, it is important that special steps be undertaken to preserve Javanese as a local language of high cultural heritage.

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## 1. Introduction

Javanese, as it has come to be known, is a language spoken (used) by the majority of Javanese people living in and outside Java. By nature, Javanese consists of *ngoko* (low level of speech) style and *krama* (high level of speech) style in which their use is very much dependent on seniority and social distance or power. *Ngoko* style, for example, is normally used by (1) a senior to a junior, (2) a senior to a senior of equal social power or close social relation, and (3) a junior to a junior of close social relation. Meanwhile, *krama* speech level is normally used by (1) a junior to a senior, (2) a senior to a senior of higher social power, and (3) a junior to a junior of higher social power [1]. Meanwhile, "..., every speaker of Javanese, regardless of his social status or geographical origin, uses all of the speech levels, each level in the appropriate situation depending upon whom he is addressing" [2]

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However, there is one speech form that is now considered “archaic.” This is referred to as *Bahasa Bagongan* or *Bahasa Kedaton*. [3] wrote:

*“Bahasa Bagongan menggunakan beberapa kata yang berbeda dengan kata-kata yang dipakai dalam varian bahasa Jawa yang lain. Di samping itu juga menggunakan aturan pembentukan kata kerja dan kata benda yang agak berbeda dengan yang biasa dipakai dalam varian tingkat tutur krama (halus).”*

It is argued, accordingly, that *Bahasa Bagongan* or *Bahasa Kedaton* (Kedaton speech style or *Bagongan* speech style) makes use of some lexical items differing from other Javanese variants. In addition, it makes use of verb and noun formation processes (morphological processes for nouns and verbs) differing a little bit from the *krama* (high) level of Javanese variant. (Most importantly, as it is archaic, this *Bagongan* speech style is not at all used as a means of daily exchanges in any discursive practices.

Claimed as being used in the Royal Family, *Bagongan* speech style is actually also used at Javanese receptions, such as wedding receptions and other similar traditional events. It is the *pranatacara* (master of ceremony) who uses *Bagongan* speech style.

Research on Javanese *Bagongan* speech style has been conducted with various aims [4], for example, discussed at some length the Javanese symbolism in the *pranatacara* genre of interpersonal perspectives. It is argued that Javanese makes use of symbols to represent something or someone, such as the bride is often symbolized as an “angel” coming down to earth with all its beauty and attraction. The wedding reception itself is described as being similar to that of a Royal Family wedding, which is, of course, a sort of hyperbolism. It is also theorized [5, 6] that complicated leveling of Javanese speech style has been simplified for clarity and practicality. This also applies to the use of *Bagongan* speech level, as it is now more simplified in order to facilitate understanding.

The current study attempted to explore how much the reception attendants understood the Javanese (*Bagongan*) at one wedding reception. The findings of this study may contribute to the language policy in which strategies are badly required to preserve Javanese as a local language of high cultural heritage. In addition, facts have shown that Javanese is suffering from its correct usage. *Ngoko* and *krama* styles are sometimes interchangeably yet wrongly used. This may be due to the fact that nowadays the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language is strongly emphasized, even from early education (toddler, kindergarten). Moreover, the spread of English as an international language is indispensable as a means of technology advancement. It is not wrong at all, however, to preserve Javanese, as previously mentioned, as a local language of high cultural heritage with all its possible variants.

## 2. Methods

This is an exploratory research and very much interpretative in nature [7, 8]. First of all, to give evidence that *Bagongan* speech style is labeled as archaic. The current study also tried to translate (part of) the *Bagongan* Javanese as used by the *pranatacara* into its English equivalent for the international readership.

At one wedding reception, approximately 50 people, aged (judging from their appearance) between 20 and 35 years old, were interviewed on how much they understood the Javanese spoken by the *pranatacara* (master of ceremony). There were three criteria for assessment, namely (1) those who fully understood, (2) those who partly understood, and (3) those who did not understand. Since they were guests at the reception, the interviews were conducted very informally; their responses were recorded for further analysis.

Finally, the results of the analysis were then discussed and elaborated to cover the rationales for the linguistic phenomena, leading to a unified whole understanding about the use of the *Bagongan* speech level of Javanese and its comprehensibility among the young generation of the Javanese people. The findings were referred to possible previous studies, in order to prove that the current study makes theoretical contributions.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Result

It has been previously mentioned that *Bagongan* speech style differs from both *ngoko* and *krama* speech styles. Below are samples of texts expressed in *Bagongan* speech style along with their English equivalents (dynamic translation).

1. *Lamun cinandra sirna sipating janma pindho sang Hyang Bathara Kumajaya miwah Bathari Ratih angejawantah* [9]

[When described, the newly-wedded couple as though has lost their human characteristics, and thereby looked like the god, Kamajaya and the Goddess, Ratih coming down on earth]

2. *Sinten ta ingkang sinaraya kridha minangka pangaraning lampah ingkang kasebat Suba Manggala. Satuhu menika panjenenganipun Bapak ..... Dhasar dedeg pideksa,*

*apangawak prabata, sembada ing driya tan amingkung saliring kewuh, bangkit angentasi karya [9]*

[Who is in charge of leading the wedding proceedings, known as *Suba Manggala* (commander-in-chief)? This is Mr..... a very athletic man of high self-confidence, who is ready to perform the duties]

3. *Bangkeane hanawon kemit tandha yenta prigel ulah kridaning asmara lan tansah bisa nuju prana mring kakung. Asta nggandewa dhenta,yenta beksan bisa gawe gregeting pria [10]*

[Her hips are similar to those of a bee, an indication of having skillful love-making performance, and always being able to sexually satisfy the man. Her arms are similar to two bows whose strings are being pulled, she easily arouses men's libido with her dancing performance]

4. *Kawula nuwun sagung para tamu ingkang tansah sinugata ing pakurmatan.Mugi rahayu saha sih wilasaning Gusti kang maha asih tansah tumedhak, tumandhuk jiwa kasaliradumateng kula lan panjenengan sedaya. Nuwun injih kanthi asta tumadah nyenyandang, lumunturing berkah saking Gusti ingkang maha mirah, mugi tansah rumantah sarta lumarambah sagung titah, satemah sami amangun bingah, awit katarimah sedyaning manah, ngantos dumugi puta wayah (recorded data)*

[Excuse me, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, may the blessing of God, the Merciful, be upon us, me and you all. Humbly do I request that the blessing of God, the Merciful, be bestowed upon people on earth for them to achieve happiness up to the next generation]

5. *Dene sinambi angrerantu laksitaning adicara candha'ipun, wekdal wonten ngarsanipun group lelangen orchestra D'angelis sumangga kawula aturaken (recorded data)*

[While waiting for the next item, which is now in preparation, it's time for entertainment by the D'Angelis Choir. The floor is yours]

Common Javanese people without special training in *Bagongan* Javanese style, such as those who join the Permadani Group of Javanese *Pranatacara* Training or those who are classified as the young generation of Javanese, would not be able to fully understand such texts. However, they may have the ability to use both *ngoko* and *krama* speech styles [11–13].

Tabulated below in Table 1 are the results of interviews conducted at one wedding reception with respect to the following questions (dynamically translated into English for the international readership):

TABLE 1: Responses to the Interview.

1. *Permisi, Bapak / Ibu. Boleh mengganggu sebentar. Saya Sukarno, nih ceritanya sedang melakukan penelitian tentang sejauh mana Bapak / Ibu mengerti apa yang dikatakan oleh MC berbahasa Jawa khas candra manten. Bapak / Ibu mengerti secara keseluruhan, mengerti sebagian, atau tidak mengerti sama sekali? Gimana, Bapak/ Ibu?*

[Excuse me, Sir/Madam. May I bother you for a while? My name is Sukarno. Well, I am doing a research on how much you understand whatever is being said by the MC, speaking typical Javanese for wedding description. Do you fully, partly, or not understand the language? Yes, please?]

2. Oh, trima kasih, Bapak / Ibu. Kalau boleh tahu, kenapa Bapak / Ibu mengerti secara penuh?

[OK. Thank you, Sir/Madam. Well, if you don't mind telling me, why did you understand fully?]

3. Oh, trima kasih, Bapak / Ibu. Kalau boleh tahu, kenapa Bapak / Ibu hanya mengerti sebagian?

[OK. Thank you, Sir/Madam. Well, if you don't mind telling me, why did you only understand partly?]

4. Oh, trima kasih, Bapak / Ibu. Kalau boleh tahu, kenapa Bapak / Ibu tidak mengerti sama sekali?

[OK. Thank you, Sir/Madam. Well, if I may ask, why did you not understand at all?]

5. Terakhir, Bapak / Ibu, Bahasa apa yang Bapak / Ibu gunakan di rumah dalam berkomunikasi antar anggota keluarga?

[Finally, what language do you usually use at home for communicating among family members?]

Table 1 indicates that most of the participants (74%) partly understood what the *pranatacara* was talking about. This is not surprising since the *pranatacara* made use of

strange lexical items (archaic) in addition to complex grammatical features, making the language (Javanese) more and more difficult to understand, especially for those who were not familiar with it. The participants of this category expressed their concerns over the unfamiliar lexical items even though they were able to catch the overall meaning. This further strengthens the point that the language used by the *pranatacara* can be categorized as “archaic” in a positive sense.

Secondly, the participants in the category of “did not understand at all” (16%) consisted of mostly young people. They were simply busy enjoying their meals and occasionally talking with one another. They expressed their concerns that they could only use Javanese in its *ngoko* style, code-switching to *Bahasa Indonesia* from time to time. Among the family members, they spoke Bahasa Indonesia, code-switching to *ngoko* style Javanese. Meanwhile, some of them also criticized the teaching of Javanese at school, which only emphasizes the development of “unnecessary” lexical items. Rarely are the students encouraged to use Javanese as a means of communication among their peers, employing a particular level of Javanese style. As a result, they naturally use the *ngoko* style of Javanese, which is not well taught. In other words, they are picking up Javanese in the street. Moreover, they are supposed to use *Bahasa Indonesia* in their academic encounters, while English is very much encouraged as an international language, though most of them may well not reach the prescribed level of proficiency.

Finally, it was the third category of participants (10%) who claimed to fully understand the language used by the *pranatacara*. They were mostly seniors who, due to the system of education in the past, learned Javanese at school and were encouraged to use the language at home with the family members. In the past, Javanese was used very widely among the Javanese people as a self-identity and dignity. It was in Year 3 of the elementary school that *Bahasa Indonesia* was introduced at school.

### 3.2. Discussion

Javanese, as everyone realizes, is a local language spoken/used by the majority of Javanese people living in and outside Java. It is a symbol of identity and known as having a high value of cultural heritage. But in line with the development of human civilization along with the emergence of new technology (the Internet and other technological advancements), the Javanese people have started to use the national language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) as the language of unity since business has spread across

the archipelago, thereby making it impossible to maintain the use of Javanese to communicate with other tribes all over Indonesia. Moreover, the use of English as a foreign language and Mandarin as a trade language seems to have further “killed” local languages (Javanese and many other local languages) since the two foreign languages can serve as a means of communication across the globe.

The question is whether or not it is necessary to preserve Javanese in terms of its *ngoko* and *krama* style. Actually much has been undertaken with respect to preserving local languages through seminars, talk shows, and many other scientific forums. However, it seems that the recommendations from those scientific forums have not been followed up by implementation in the field. In other words, Javanese has become a subject of scientific discussion among scholars but without any consequences for not using Javanese.

The provincial government of Central Java, under Governor Ganjar Pranowo, has ruled out the use of the *krama* style of Javanese in the office on particular days. This is a good start and should, therefore, become a pilot project aimed at preserving Javanese. Other government offices at Regency, district, and even village levels may adopt the method used by the Central Java Governor’s Office. Meanwhile, it is quite understandable that many Javanese people do not use Javanese for the following reasons:

- Javanese cannot accommodate new lexical items as a result of technology advancement. Rarely can words such as “download,” “upload,” and “network” be found in their Javanese equivalents.
- Education, starting from kindergarten and through to college level, has been dominated by the use of the national language. English has even been used at some international schools in Central Java.
- Parents at home do not encourage their children to use Javanese as a means of communication. They prefer to use the national language or even foreign languages. It is claimed that using a foreign language may increase self-dignity. People think of it as being well-educated.

With respect to archaic Javanese, the current study has confirmed that there is such a variant of Javanese, which deserves to be called “archaic” in a positive sense. That is to say that only selected individuals can, with much intention, master this kind of Javanese variant. They have to undergo special training since this archaic Javanese is not offered in any formal education. However, some people in the rural areas still use

it in their formal neighborhood meetings—though not in its perfect form, and some even claim that they actually use the *krama* speech style, not the archaic form [14].

Javanese people are famous for their willingness to preserve traditions, such as wedding rituals, ceremonies, and/or receptions. On these occasions, the master of ceremony (MC) or the so-called *pranatacara* will employ archaic Javanese. However, when it comes to formal addresses or speeches, Javanese people will use the *krama* style in order to be polite and to comply with social norms.

From this point, a stance can be established that archaic Javanese is still appreciated in the Javanese community, although it is within a limited scope of usage. When asked whether or not archaic Javanese may disappear, most of the Javanese people will be very much concerned—strong willing to preserve. Thus, Javanese people remain Javanese with all their manifestations in terms of language use. In sum, the use of Javanese is classified into three major issues:

- *Ngoko* style is used among peers, colleagues of the same power relation to show close friendship, and among children as classmates. At one time or another code-switching to *Bahasa Indonesia* is often heard.
- *Krama* style is used in speeches at formal events (monologues), and by juniors to seniors, juniors to juniors of different power relations, and seniors to seniors of different power relations.
- The archaic style is used in a limited scope, such as wedding ceremonies, rituals, and/or receptions, by the MC (master of ceremony) or the so-called *pranatacara*. It requires special training in order to perform well linguistically. Many people of Javanese origin claim it is necessary to preserve archaic Javanese, noting that it has to be simplified for common people to understand. This style of Javanese is referred to as being acrostic with morphological affixation, as also confirmed by Siswanto [15]

## 4. Conclusion

The use of Javanese in its archaic form is still relevant at several events (weddings, circumcision receptions, and rituals). It is labeled “archaic” due to the fact that it uses different lexical items and grammatical intricacies and complexities from other Javanese variants. As a local language of high cultural heritage, Javanese has to be preserved in all its manifestations. However, it is commonly agreed that, despite the various

variants of this language with respect to geographical dialects, it divides into three major variants: *ngoko* (low), *krama* (high), and *Bagongan* or *Kedhaton* (archaic).

To preserve Javanese, the following actions are recommended:

- Javanese, whatever the variant, should be made the “self-identity” of Javanese, one of the Indonesian tribes.
- Parents should be encouraged to use Javanese at home among the other family members.
- Traditional receptions should be maintained, thereby ensuring that archaic Javanese will survive due to regular use, albeit in a limited scope.

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