A Diachronic Linguistics Study of Imperative Forms: From Seventeenth-Century Malay to Modern-day Indonesian

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Abstract:

This article studies provides an example of how a research in diachronic linguistics can be carried out. By looking at imperative sentences written in Sourat ABC, a seventeenth-century Malay text this study reveals that there are elements in the Malay language that continues to be used in the Indonesian language today, and there are also elements that are no longer in use. One of the reasons why certain forms are dropped is for the sake of simplification. Cumbersome and clunky affixations morphed into more simplified construction as the language underwent changes and adaptation.

Keywords: diachronic linguistics, imperative forms, 17th century Malay, Modern-day Indonesia

1. Introduction

Diachronic linguistics is a branch of linguistics study that observes changes that happen in a language over a span of time. It is a fascinating sub-area of linguistics, because it provides us with a close look at how a language undergoes modifications—or evolution, even—as it travels through time, adjusting and adapting itself to the lives of the people speaking it. Diachronic linguistics, as Brian Joseph describes, uncovers the truth that happened in a language in the past, but even though it is exciting, it is also messy (Joseph, 1992, 126). The messiness of the study of diachronic linguistics, according to Joseph, is caused by the fact that it is not always easy to find the sources of the language as it was spoken in the past.

In the academic area of linguistics study, diachronic linguistics can be placed under the discipline of historical linguistics. Historical linguistics itself studies how languages experience changes or keep their form unaltered over certain period of time. Robert King calls historical linguistics as "the study of all aspects of language development through time" (King 1969, 1). Seen from this angle, King also calls historical linguistics the "study of language change" (King 1969, 2).

In academia, historical linguistics has been gaining more and more attention and even popularity in the past handful of decades. While in the past it was merely used as a practical tool to be used to develop linguistic theories, today it stands on its own as an exciting, interesting, and important field of study, without having to be pragmatic. Lyle Campbell comments that the study of historical linguistics is "fun, exciting, and intellectually engaging." At the same time, he also recognizes the practicality of historical linguistics, as it can assist us to get a better idea of human nature (Campbell 2013, 1).

Because it involves the study of history, and the core of history is indeed a story, historical linguistics tells stories as it describes the developments that languages experience. Roger Lass calls this area of study an "art of linguistic story telling" (Lass 1997, xiv). In this context, he sees the terms "historical linguistics" to intertwine with "language change" to build the entire study of this academic field.

Practically any aspect of a language can be a focus of a research in a diachronic linguistics study, provided that we have enough sources from the past to be used as the data of the research. The morphology and syntax of a language are perhaps the easiest components of a language to be studied. Any text written in the past can be analyzed from the perspective of diachronic linguistics to be the foundation of the research. In this article I intend to show the changes and continuity that happened in the imperative forms as the Malay language transformed into modern Indonesian. To this end I will analyze the imperative forms written in a small Malay booklet published by the Dutch in the seventeenth century, titled *Sourat ABC* (modern Indonesian: *Surat ABC*), first published in 1611 and revised in 1685. By analyzing the text of this small booklet that was published over 400 years ago, we can study the Malay language as it was then, and by comparing it to modern-day Indonesian, we can see how the language has undergone some noticeable changes. In so doing, the article contributes to the study of diachronic linguistics by presenting a finding that is hitherto unexamined.

2. A Brief Background of the Text Used in This Study

The language we now call Bahasa Indonesia has its roots in the Malay language. Long before the arrivals of the Europeans in the East Indian archipelago, Malay had been used as a *lingua franca* of many of the people groups living in the archipelago. As the Dutch came to monopolize the spice trading in the East Indies, they started the Dutch East India Company (the *Vereeneging Oost-Indische Compagnie* – VOC) in 1602. The Dutch chose to adopt the Malay language as the main language of communication between the Dutch and the indigenous people of the East Indies (Nagtegaal, 1996). Before the Dutch arrived in the East Indies, the Portuguese had already been in the region to do spice trading. They introduced the Portuguese language to the people. It was then widely used as the means of communication for commerce, daily interaction, as well as religious rituals. The Portuguese were Roman Catholics. When the Dutch came and monopolized spice trading only a few years after the establishment of the VOC, they decided that it was better for them and for the indigenous people of the East Indies to use Malay instead of Dutch or Portuguese. Kees Groeneboer argues that this decision was politically motivated (Groeneboer 1998, 117). The Dutch considered their own language to be too difficult to be taught to the indigenous people. They seemed to prefer to use it for themselves, so that they created a noticeable gap between them as the colonizers and the indigenous people as the colonized group.

The Dutch were reluctant to adopt Portuguese as the main language to communicate with the indigenous people, because the Portuguese were too close to Roman Catholicism. As Groeneboer explains, the Dutch were highly political in their choice of language. To adopt Portuguese as the means of communication in the East Indies signaled that it was superior to Dutch. In order for the Dutch to establish power and authority as they started to colonize the archipelago, they had to separate themselves as far away from the Portuguese as possible. In addition, in terms of religion, the Dutch embraced Protestantism. In Europe there was a sharp divide between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Dutch were in enmity with the Iberians—the Portuguese and the Spaniards—in matters pertaining to religion. Adopting the Portuguese as a *lingua franca* would likely be seen as a weakness. Therefore, they made a bold decision to use Malay instead of any of the European languages.

In order to familiarize themselves with Malay the Dutch studied Malay. Only one year after the VOC was established, the Dutch published a simple conversation book or dialogue in two

languages, Dutch and Malay, as well as a very basic Dutch – Malay dictionary, to help them learn and understand Malay. The dialogue and dictionary book was compiled by Frederick de Houtman, and was titled *Spraeck ende Woord-boek* (Speech and word book). It was published in Amsterdam and was then widely circulated among VOC workers in the East Indies.

The Dutch also opened schools for young children in many areas in the East Indies to teach them how to read and write in Malay so that they would be able to communicate with each other. This was a strategic approach, because the Dutch saw that as the children grew older, they would become adults who could work for the VOC. If they prepared these younger generations well, they could easily be controlled to work for the Dutch, as the European people expanded their colonizing efforts in the archipelago. The main text for educating the young was the *Sourat ABC.* It was published by a merchant or *Koopman* of the VOC named Albertus Ruyl. This type of instruction book, or primer as it was normally called, was common in Europe. Several of such primers were published in Dutch, French, English, German, and many other languages, for the purpose of teaching the young people how to read and write. Therefore, we can fully understand that the publication of the *Sourat ABC* was a logical step for the Dutch to take. They adopted the common method of teaching that was widely spread all over Europe.

The title of the 1611 primer says: *Sourat ABC, Akan meng ayd'jer anack boudack seperty deayd'jern'ja capada segala manousia Nassarany: daen berbagy sombahyang Christiaan.* In modern Indonesian this title can be transcribed as: "Surat ABC, Akan mengajar anak budak seperti diajarkannya kepada segala manusia Nasrani: dan berbagai sembahyang Kristen." As the title says, this primer was intended to teach the little children in the East Indies to learn about the teaching of the Christian religion the same way as it is taught to other people elsewhere. The booklet also contains written prayers to be used by the children at schools. In the booklet, the main texts are the basic instruction of Christianity called the Ten Commandments, the main beliefs of Christianity called the Apostles' Creed, and a prayer from the Bible called The Lord's Prayer. In 1682 the Dutch published a revised version of the *Sourat ABC*. It was still compiled by Albertus Ruyl. However, the title was then simplified to say: *Sourat ABC. Jang bergouna banja capade anac bouda bouda.* In modern Indonesian it can be transcribed as: "Surat ABC. Yang berguna banyak kepada anak budak budak." While the title was simplified, the content of the primer was pretty much the same. The only difference is that in the 1682 edition, some of the sentences in the prayers and teaching instruction underwent some changes or modifications. These changes reflected the changes that Malay underwent in the seven decades between the first and second editions of the primer. These two versions of the booklet were valuable sources to study diachronic linguistics, as they served as primary texts that showed how Malay experienced some changes within the span of the seven decades.

3. Imperative Sentences in the *Sourat ABC.*

As the *Sourat ABC* functioned as an instruction manual for young children, there are several imperative sentences included in the booklet. In addition, the primer also included prayers for the children to learn. In prayers, as people bring their petitions to God, their sentences are written in imperative forms. For instance, when we ask God to help us, we use the sentence: "Help me!" This petition is a most sincere cry to God. Even though the mood of imperative is employed in this petition, the content of the prayer is a request to God.

Imperative sentences, as Azier Alcazar and Mario Saltarelli has explained, always have the characteristic of having their subjects as the recipients of the speech act (Alcazar and Saltarelli 2014, 3). The subject of imperative sentences is second person, either singular or plural. However, in modern English, as in modern Indonesian, the subject "you" is not normally mentioned in imperative sentences, except in very rare cases where the subject "you" is emphasized.

The following are the imperative sentences found in the *Sourat ABC:*

1. *Tella kamoe souda bermacan daen menjady kinjang, maeka kamoe berdoala.* (Ruyl 1611, A7 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription of this sentence is: "Telah kamu sudah bermakan dan menjadi kenyang, maka kamu berdoalah." English translation: "After you have eaten and become full, pray!"
2. *Camoe beranacky hamba poula, akan membaeycky hydoup kyta* (Ruyl 1611, A7 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription of this sentence is: "Kamu beranaki hamba pula, akan membaiki hidup kita." English translation: "Make us also your children so that our lives are better!"
3. *Segala mata menonggo kapadamoe tuan hamba macka kamoe pon de berryn'ja maccannan* (Ruyl 1611, A6 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription of this sentence is: "Segala mata menunggu kepadamu, tuan hamba, maka kamu pun diberinya makanan." English translation: "All eyes look up to you, our Lord, so give us food!"
4. *Tuan Deos, segalla mata memandang capade mou, macca Tuan pon de brinja maccannan.* (Ruyl 1682, A7 recto). Modern Indonesian transcription of this sentence is: "Tuan Deos, segala mata memandang kepadamu, maka Tuan pun diberinya makanan." English translation: "Lord God, all eyes look up to you, so Lord, give us food!"
5. *Berryla rachmad kapada segala ourang sakit* (Ruyl 1611, A6 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription: "Berilah rahmad kepada segala orang sakit." English translation: "Give grace to those who are sick!"
6. *Ingatla pon pada barang orang nang souda sakit* (Ruyl 1682, A6 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription of this sentence is: "Ingatlah pun pada barang orang yang sudah sakit." English translation: "Remember the people who are sick!"
7. *Sayangla pada samoa dia orang* (Ruyl 1682, A6 verso). Modern Indonesian transcription: "Sayanglah pada semua dia orang." English translation: "Love all those people!"

4. Data Analysis

The first point that I want to make in this analysis is that in the seventeenth century Malay, the second-person singular subject *camoe* or *kamoe* is included in the imperative sentences. This can be seen in 1, 2, and 3 above. It is understandable that because in imperative sentences, the implied subject is a second person, either singular, or plural, "you." Therefore, in seventeenth century Malay, so as to make the subject clearer, the word *camoe* or *kamoe* is included in the sentence. When we look at the development of the Malay language into modern Indonesian, we no longer explicitly use the subject "kamu " because the Indonesian language has undergone a development or change, to make it comparable to other modern languages. Therefore, today, we no longer include the subject "you" in imperative sentences.

One noticeable constant in the imperative sentences is the presence of the suffix *~la* in seventeenth-century Malay, which is now written as *~lah* in modern Indonesian. Sentences 1, 5, 6, and 7 quoted above have this suffix. This constant shows that certain elements in a language remain, even when the language travels through time. It is good for us today to know that modern Indonesian has a long history of the use of *~lah* in imperative sentences.

Sentences 2, 3, and 4 give us an idea that in the seventeenth century, Malay used affixation in the imperative sentences that are no longer used in modern Indonesian. In sentence 2 we read: *Camoe beranacky hamba poula.* It is a petition for God to make the people his children. The verb used in that sentence is *beranacky*, which is formed from the root *anack* (or "anak" in modern Indonesian), and the additions of prefix ber~ and suffix ~y. This type of affixation was common in seventeenth-century Malay, but no longer used in modern Indonesian. Commonly, today in Indonesian, people will use the verb "jadikanlah…" to express the same imperative sentence. Thus, in modern Indonesia, that sentence will be: "Jadikanlah hamba anakmu pula."

Sentences 3 and 4 show the development in Malay from 1611 to 1682. The two sentences are basically the same expression in the petition or prayer to God, to ask God to give food for the people or the children. The clause: *pon de brinja maccannan* shows this petition. Again, here we find an affixation that is no longer used in modern Indonesian. The Malay verb *de brinja* or "dibrinya" was meant to express a request that is written in an imperative form. The root of this verb is *bri or beri*, meaning to give. In the seventeenth-century version, the verb was given a prefix *de~* (modern Indonesian: di~) and suffix *~nya*. In modern Indonesian, the imperative form is expressed as "berilah." Another departure from seventeenth-century Malay into the modern Indonesian language is that the prefix and suffix combination of *di~ + ~nya* form a passive voice construction. A modern-day Indonesian might be a bit confused in reading the clause *pon de brinja maccannan* because she might think that it was a passive indicative sentence that mean "to be given food." However, in seventeenth-century Malay, this construction is not a passive voice construction, but a petition in the form of an imperative sentence.

5. Conclusion

This little study shows how change and continuity happened as the Malay language underwent some transformation from the seventeenth century to today's Indonesian language. One constant that we see is the use of suffixes ~la or ~lah in imperative sentences. This suffix continues to be used to express request or command.

One noticeable change is the use of affixations to construct imperative forms in the seventeenth century that are no longer used in modern Indonesian. When we look at the use of the affixes ber~ + ~i and di~ + ~nya in the seventeenth century, we can see that this use is clunky and impractical. Therefore, it is understandable that in its development, the Indonesian language no longer uses those types of constructions to form imperative sentences. Modern Indonesian prefers a more streamlined form of the verb root + ~lah to express imperative sentences, such as "Berilah!" or "Jadilah!"

Another change that we discover in this research is that in the seventeenth century Malay, the second-person subject was still mentioned in some of the imperative forms. As the language progresses, the language dropped the explicit mention of the second-person subject, because it is redundant to mention it in the sentence. It is already implicitly understood that "you" is

the subject of imperative sentences. Therefore, in its development, the language prefers to use simpler and less wordy constructions in the formation of imperative sentences.

This article contributes to the study of diachronic linguistics. By using some texts published in the seventeenth century, it shows how such data can be used to trace the development of the Malay language in the past four centuries. While it is not always easy to conduct such academic research, this type of research needs to be developed in modern scholarship, to increase the interest of linguists in this field of study. More research work still needs to be done in this field. This paper only focuses on the use of imperative forms. The same text can be used to unearth more areas in diachronic study, such as the developments of the use of passive voice, interrogative sentences, and many other aspects of a language.

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