THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL VARIABLES IN WALIKAN

Nurenzia Yannuar
Leiden University/Universitas Negeri Malang
n.yannuar@hum.leidenuniv.nl/ nurenzia.yannuar.fs@um.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on how Walikan, a youth language from Malang, Indonesia, is spoken across different gender and age groups. As youth languages are typically associated with boys, I first investigate the extent to which women and girls take part in or have influence on Walikan. Second, I analyze the forms of Walikan in different age groups. My analysis includes a systematic comparison of sociolinguistic questionnaires and spoken data from a balanced number of male and female speakers from different age groups. The results of the study reflect a preliminary attempt to understand how male youth language can enter the speech domains of females and middle aged individuals. Its findings can inform sociolinguistic descriptions of youth languages in Indonesia and in general.

Keywords: youth language, East Javanese, variety, gender, age

INTRODUCTION

Bòsò Walikan Malang (hereafter referred to as Walikan), is a distinctive linguistic practice used in the East Javanese city of Malang. It has been around for decades, most probably since the 1940s. In Yannuar (forthcoming), I explain how Walikan’s ideology has changed over decades from a secret language to an anti-language and finally to a marker of regional solidarity. In the past, the people in the city associated Walikan with gangsters and thugs, but nowadays we can find Walikan words across the linguistic landscape of the city. It is especially used to express in-group solidarity and proximity between its speakers.

The main characteristic of Walikan is its strategy of concealment-driven language manipulation, chiefly through lexical reversal. The most salient type of reversal, or metathesis, is the total phoneme reversal. The first segment becomes the last phoneme, while the second phoneme becomes the penultimate segment, and so on (1).

1) \[ C^1V^2C^3 > C^3V^2C^1 \]

The following provides examples of reversal in monosyllabic and polysyllabic words:

2) mas [mas] \( \rightarrow \) sam [sam] ‘older brother’
3) tahu [ta.hu] \( \rightarrow \) uhat [7u hat] ‘tofu’
4) makan [ma.kan] \( \rightarrow \) nakam [na.kam] ‘to eat’
5) selamat [sa.la.mat] \( \rightarrow \) tamales [ta.ma.las] ‘greeting’

In order to discuss Walikan, I refer to the term youth language or youth linguistic practice, which is used to describe a linguistic variety that is mainly characterized by the speakers’ linguistic manipulation strategies (Kießling & Mous, 2004; Nassenstein & Hollington, 2015; Nortier & Svendsen, 2015). The term implies a link to a certain demographic category, namely that the language is predominantly used only among youth groups (Rampton, 2015). However, the word ‘youth’ in youth languages can also be seen as something fluid rather than static. Rampton (2015) introduces the term Contemporary Urban Vernacular, in order to include language practices that start out amongst the youth, but remain in the repertoire of the speakers when they are older. In an African context, the youth language Yanke has been described as still being used by its speakers over fifteen years into adulthood (Nassenstein, 2014). The same is observed in Walikan, people who are in their 60s can still
be heard speaking it (Yannuar, forthcoming). Therefore in this paper, youth language is defined as a linguistic variety identifiable through linguistic manipulation that is learned when the speakers are still young.¹

Discussions of youth languages are currently limited to Africa and Western Europe (Nortier & Svendsen 2015), despite quite a number of similar practices attested in Asia. In Indonesia, a number of Indonesian youth languages have previously been described, including the Jakarta Youth Backwards Language (Dreyfuss, 1983), Gaul (Sahertian, 1999; Smith-Hefner, 2007), and the Surabayan youth language (Hoogervorst, 2014).

Unlike Gaul and the Jakarta Youth Backwards Language, Walikan originates from a city that is hundreds of kilometers away from the capital city of Jakarta. Walikan does not show an upward mobility into the national media and in general, but the fact that it has been around for decades is noteworthy. By looking at how Walikan is used in different age groups, I am able to investigate the development of youth language more broadly. In addition to that, I analyze how Walikan is used across gender groups. In general, youth languages are seen as male-dominated (Kießling & Mous 2004). Youth languages that are male-dominated are only accessible to male speakers. Female speakers may know some words but they will not be able to use it in communication. Therefore it is also the interest of this paper to investigate whether Walikan, which is seen as the language of pan-Malang solidarity, is strictly male-dominated or not.

**METHOD**

The data was collected in two separate fieldwork trips, the first one was from May to August 2015 and the second one from July to October 2016. The corpus used for this paper comprises sociolinguistic interviews and recordings of narratives and conversations.

The sociolinguistic interviews include a number of semi-open-ended questions including self-assessment of the speaker’s fluency in Walikan, the question with whom the speaker usually use Walikan, as well as popular Walikan words that the speaker often uses. In the beginning, participants individually filled in the questionnaire. Afterwards, I conducted a follow up interview, focusing on unclear answers, and empty or blank responses. If the speakers refused to answer the questions during the follow-up interview, the items were left blank. There were also participants that I met during street observations, whom I was not able to invite to complete the sociolinguistic survey. This results in uneven numbers of responses received, for example, the self-assessment answers comprised 48 males and 43 females, but a higher number of 55 males and 47 females were willing to share with whom they usually speak Walikan.

The spoken data include narratives and conversations of 133 Walikan speakers (79 males and 52 females). The narratives are mainly based on a children story entitled “Frog Where are You”, a sequel to “A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog” series written by Mercer Meyer. The 30-page book contains only pictures, and no text. The participants were asked to look at a printed copy of the book and narrate the whole story. This narrative is referred to here as frog story.

The second type of spoken data in the corpus is conversation. If there was more than one speaker of Walikan in the session, I asked them to speak to each other in Walikan. I was present when the conversation was taken place to set up the recording equipment and observe from afar. I made sure that I did not disturb the process, although occasionally they invited me to take part in their conversation. I am proficient in East Javanese and am also able to speak Walikan a little, but I limited my participation in the recordings.

¹ Following Yannuar (forthcoming), this paper also does not differentiate the term language, vernacular, variety and sociolect.
The spoken data were recorded using a Zoom H4n SP audio recorder and transcribed in a linguistic archiving software, ELAN. The transcriptions were then transferred into Flex, where they were glossed and combined together in one corpus.

ANALYSIS

This section is divided into two parts, the first part focuses on gender groups, followed by discussion of age groups.

a. Gender

In order to explore how Walikan is used by different gender groups, I decided to focus on the sociolinguistic questionnaire data and conversation data. The analysis focuses on how consultants of each gender assess their own fluency in Walikan. The word fluency here refers to how communicative and confident they are in Walikan. In the questionnaire, the speakers are given three choices: not very fluent, passive, and fluent. The results are shown in Figures 1 and 2 below.

![Figure 1. Self-Assessment of Male Speakers](image1)

![Figure 2. Self-Assessment of Female Speakers](image2)

Investigating how different gender groups assess their own fluency reveals the extent to which each group takes part in the linguistic practice. Fifty four percent of male speakers confidently reported that they are fluent in Walikan, whereas only 35% of female speakers claimed fluency. Female speakers seem to be more comfortable in labeling themselves as not very fluent (44%) or passive (21%). Passive means that they know and understand Walikan words, but prefer not to produce it in their communication. The data shows that male speakers have more confidence, which can also be interpreted as having more sense of belonging to the community of speakers.

In addition, I looked into the community of speakers. In my questionnaire, I asked them to mention with whom they usually speak Walikan. The results show that both male and female speakers use Walikan with their close friends, or people that they know well, such as relatives and parents. However, the male groups also mentioned that they could also use Walikan with older friends and strangers. They seem to be more comfortable in using Walikan. On the other hand, the female groups were hesitant in using Walikan with someone older because they feel it is impolite. They also would prefer not to use Walikan to a stranger because they need to be sure that the person they are talking to understands Walikan, otherwise it will be embarrassing. Thus, female speakers of Walikan tend to show a more conservative language attitude.

Furthermore, I investigated the type of Walikan words or phrases that each group mostly uses. In my questionnaire I asked them to mention any kind of Walikan words from the top of their head. It is useful to have preliminary ideas of what Walikan words they are mostly familiar with. If there is a large discrepancy, it may suggest that the gender groups utilize Walikan differently. The results show five most popular words as shown in Table 3.1 below.
Table 3.1. Frequent Words or Phrases in Walikan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>makan &gt; nakam ‘to eat’</td>
<td>14/254 (6%)</td>
<td>makan &gt; nakam ‘to eat’</td>
<td>20/149 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iyò &gt; ōyi ‘yes’</td>
<td>13/254 (5%)</td>
<td>iyò &gt; ōyi ‘yes’</td>
<td>17/149 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidak &gt; kadit ‘no’</td>
<td>11/254 (4%)</td>
<td>rumah &gt; hamur ‘home’</td>
<td>10/149 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saya &gt; ayas ‘I’</td>
<td>8/254 (3%)</td>
<td>pulang &gt; ngalup ‘to go home’</td>
<td>10/149 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kerdi &gt; idrek ‘to work’</td>
<td>7/254 (3%)</td>
<td>saya &gt; ayas ‘I’</td>
<td>7/149 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, I found that the word usage by both groups is quite similar. Nakam, ōyi, and ayas are found in the list of five most frequent words across the two different gender groups. This suggests that Walikan words do not display gender-based discrepancy.

However, when looking at the conversation data, I found that male speakers produce more pejorative expressions than female speakers. Words and expressions such as kēat ngicuk < taēk kucing ‘cat shit’, lōntōk < köntël ‘penis’, nguntal utapes ‘talk rubbish’ < nguntal sepatu ‘eat shoes’ and nēndhēs kōmbēt ‘to have sex’ < sēndhēn tēmbōk ‘to rest on the wall’ are found only in the male corpus. The word nēndhēs kōmbēt in particular is found in the female corpus but only with the literal meaning, that is ‘to rest on the wall’. Male speakers develop Walikan words in a way that can accommodate their social interactions, but this does not mean that the female speakers will accept such forms.

b. Age

Based on the collected data, I categorized Walikan speakers into five age groups: 1) elderly, 2) mature adult, 3) adult, 4) youth, and 5) adolescent (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Walikan Speakers’ Age Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Year Born</th>
<th>Year in Senior High School/University</th>
<th>Social Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60s and above</td>
<td>1950s and earlier</td>
<td>1960s or early 1970s</td>
<td>Retired, have more time to reconnect with old friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(elderly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s and 50s</td>
<td>late 1960s to 1970s</td>
<td>late 1970s to 1980s</td>
<td>Settled down, married, busy with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mature adult)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30s</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Working, in the most productive stage, starting to have more life responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(adult)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 24</td>
<td>1990s to early 2000s</td>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Still in high school or university, more time to hang out with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(youth)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 15</td>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Still in elementary school or junior high</td>
<td>Still under parents’ guidance, limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(adolescent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following Nassenstein (2014), age is an important social factor to be addressed in any description of a youth language. The categorization of age here becomes necessary, and it is important to address it before being able to compare the data. A clear-cut distinction was attempted, but there is a possibility that some speakers who are around the age boundary may overlap with another category. In order to avoid this, the categorization was drawn based on the year they were born, the year they spent in high school and university, and their current social situation.

First, the oldest group includes those who are in their 60s and above. They were born in the 1950s or earlier, during the early stages of Indonesian independence. They used more Javanese in their conversation, Indonesian was used mostly in schools or in very formal situations. They went to high school and university in the 1960s or early 1970s. The orthography or spelling they used was still more or less influenced by Dutch. At present, the people belonging to this group are mostly retired and have more time to reconnect with their friends from the past.

The second group is referred to as mature adult, which includes people born in the late 1960s until the 1970s, thus went to high schools in the late 1970s to the 1980s. Most of them have now settled down, married, and are quite occupied with family life. Next is the adult group, whose members are now in their late 20s up to 30s. They were born during the 1980s and went to high school in 1990s. In terms of social situation, they are now at the peak of their productive years. Most of them are working, and have started to have more responsibilities in life. The fourth group is the youth, which includes those who were born in 1990s or early 2000s. During data collection, they were still either in high school or university. They spend most of their time studying or socializing with friends.

The last group in my category are the adolescents, whose members are still around 10 to 15 years old. They are currently still living with their parents. I only managed to find two speakers belonging to this category. Most of them have not yet fully developed their skills in Walikan. They just started learning Walikan by picking up generic words and using it with their school friends.

In order to investigate different forms in Walikan across these categories, I compared frog story narratives produced in each group category by focusing on the Walikan words. As a result, four Walikan words were observed to show phonological differences as shown in Table 3.3. The grey area indicates unattested forms.

Table 3.3. Phonological differences across age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>kamu ‘you’ (Indonesian)</th>
<th>kecil ‘small’ (Indonesian)</th>
<th>wèdhòk ‘female’ (Javanese)</th>
<th>yang ‘that.REL’² (Indonesian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60s and above (old)</td>
<td>[kə.cil] &gt;[li.ʈəʔ], [li.ʈək]</td>
<td>[we.ɖɔʔ]&gt;[kə.ɖɛh], [kə.ɖɛ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s and 50s (mature adult)</td>
<td>[ka.mu] &gt;[ʔu.maʔ],[ʔu.mak]</td>
<td>[kə.cil] &gt;[li.ʈəʔ], [li.ʈək]</td>
<td>[we.ɖɔʔ] &gt;[kə.ɖɛh], [kə.ɖɛ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30s (adult)</td>
<td>[ka.mu] &gt;[ʔu.maʔ],[ʔu.mak]</td>
<td>[kə.cil] &gt;[li.ʈəʔ], [li.ʈək]</td>
<td>[we.ɖɔʔ] &gt;[kə.ɖɛh], [kə.ɖew]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 24</td>
<td>[ka.mu] &gt;[ʔu.maʔ],</td>
<td>[kə.cil] &gt;[li.ʈəʔ],</td>
<td>[we.ɖɔʔ] &gt;</td>
<td>[jən] &gt;[ŋaj]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² REL= Relativizer
It is noteworthy that the old group does not reverse the word *kamu* which means ‘you’. In one of my interviews, one of the participants told me that Indonesian words were not preferred. For the second person pronoun, they chose to use the unreversed word *kōwē, kōen*, or *sampeyan*, which are Javanese words. For them the unreversed form of *kamu, umak*, is non-existent or sounds peculiar. However, *umak* can be found across the other age groups. The stiff velar stop /k/ in the initial position is moved into word-final position because of the total segment reversal. This yields three different realizations: a) [*ʔu.maʔ], b) [*ʔu.mak], c) [ju.maʔ], and d) [ju.mak]. In (a) and (c), /k/ > [ʔ] in final position following Javanese phonology and phonotactics. In Javanese orthography, the grapheme <k> in word-final position is always realized as [ʔ]. On the other hand, [k] can rarely occur in word-final position but when it does, it is traditionally represented by the grapheme <g>. This suggests that there are two groups of speakers, one that conforms to Javanese phonology, and the other that simply realizes /k/ and [k] despite its position in the word, see examples (b) and (d). Examples (c) and (d) show that the youth group also has a different way of pronouncing the close-back vowel /u/, rendering it as [ju]. This innovation was mentioned by the speakers as a strategy to make Walikan sound modern, that is, by anglicizing the pronunciation. The word *kecil* [kə.cil] ‘small’ is reversed into three different forms: (a) [li.ʦʔ], (b) [li.ʦk], (c) [li.ʦʔ], and (d) [li.ʦk]. The explanation for the interchanging appearance of [k] and [ʔ] in the final position has been explained in the previous paragraph. The more interesting alternation, however is in (a) and (b), as /ɛ/ in the original form becomes /ɛ/ in the reversed form. Apparently this is due to the old spelling of the word, which was spelled as ketjil following an earlier spelling. These speakers must have paid attention to this antiquated spelling, but they could not reverse the written word into *lijtek*, which would yield [li.ʦʔ] or [li.ʦʔ]; both forms are not allowed in Javanese and Indonesian phonotactics, therefore they agreed on [li.ʦʔ].

Moreover, the word *wèdhôk* [we.ʣʔ] ‘female’ yields three different forms during reversal: (a) [kə.ʣh], (b) [kə.ʣe], and (c) [kə.ʣw]. The older group of speakers avoid (c), preferring (a) and (b) instead. Form (c) shows a total segment reversal despite breaking Javanese phonotactics, mostly used by the adult and youth groups. In Javanese and Indonesian, the bilabial approximant /w/ cannot occur in word-final position. Older speakers who are more comfortable with conforming to Javanese phonotactics seem to either delete the /w/ in the final position or replace it with /h/, as shown in (a) and (b).

Another form that also does not follow Javanese and Indonesian phonotactics is [ŋaŋ], which is a reversal from yang [jaŋ] ‘that.REL’. The palatal approximant /j/ cannot occur in final position Javanese and Indonesian phonotactics. This word is only found among the youth, and is not approved by the older speakers.

The discussion shows that more innovation is found among the youth, they create new reversed words, like *umak* and *ngay*, and they seem to show no hesitation when totally reversing the segment of any words, whether or not it breaks Javanese and/or Indonesian phonotactics. The young speakers, therefore, are less conservative than the older speakers. This is in line with the findings in Krauße, (2017), in which younger speakers are mentioned as key actors directing the change in Surabayan Javanese’s politeness forms.

**CONCLUSION**
This paper has presented data on differences and similarities of Walikan in different social groups, gender groups and age groups. Exploring the youth linguistic practice from these different perspectives is necessary to understand the overall picture of the Walikan speech communities.

The results show that Walikan acknowledges female practitioners even if it is a male-dominated practice – evidenced by the fact that more male speakers were found and more words in male domains have been observed. The male speakers in the corpus outnumber the female speakers, which confirms that Walikan’s domain is mostly masculine. They also show a more conservative language attitude. In addition, the number of words or expressions that have impolite or pejorative connotations are found more in the male domain. Male speakers use a higher number of impolite expressions such as kēat ngicuk ‘cat shit’, lōntōk ‘penis’, or nguntal utapes ‘talk rubbish’. Some female speakers are also fluent in Walikan, but they tend to only use generic, widely known terms of Walikan. As discussed above, the category of popular words refers to those that are most frequent in the corpus, as well as those that frequently appear in printed and online media. There are only a few numbers of pejorative words and expressions among the female speakers, which suggests that female speakers can indeed use Walikan, but in a more restricted manner, since Walikan in the past may have been a male-dominated linguistic practice.

Within age groups, I have shown that there are phonological differences in the reversed form of the words. Older speakers are seen as the most conservative groups, as they show greater tendencies to conform to Javanese and Indonesian phonology and phonotactics. In some cases, they also make use of old spellings, but they did not fully neglect the rules of phonotactics. Younger groups, on the other hand, can be seen as the most dynamic group of speakers, as they create new forms that violate Javanese and Indonesian phonology and phonotactics. These differences also tell us that the reversed forms in Walikan are dynamic, and they are evolving through different age groups. Walikan, therefore, is not a static practice; the older speakers can still speak it, but the young speakers – and particularly the men – are those who control the contemporary form of Walikan by spearheading innovation and frequent use.

REFERENCES:


**Biodata:**

Nurenzia Yannuar
Leiden University/Universitas Negeri Malang
n. yannuar@hum.leidenuniv.nl/nurenzia.yannuar.fs@um.ac.id
Graduated from University of Brawijaya Malang in 2006, finished a Master’s degree in Ohio University in 2010, and currently finishing her PhD in Linguistics at Leiden University Centre for Sociolinguistics, Field Linguistics