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Bahasa walikan malangan and the building of indo-javanese urban spaces

Deandré A. Espree-Conaway
The University of the South, United States of America.
E-mail: espreda0@sewanee.edu

Language expresses people's social experience while also creating that social experience in itself. *Bahasa Walikan Malangan*—whose name literally means the "Reversed language of Malang"—used only in the city of Malang (the second largest city of East Java)—pulls from both the Indonesian and Javanese lexicon, flipping around their pronunciation so that the Indonesian *mobil* 'car' becomes *libom* and Javanese *arek* 'child' becomes *kera*. This mixed language functions not only to express the experience of the world "through the eyes a Malangese", its use is also the performative creation of urban identity. People transmit and speak this language in certain culturally bounded urban spaces—places of 'national culture' that are tightly tied to the local community. Here, I explore these spaces understanding more largely current Indonesian cultural ideologies of language and landscapes.

Keywords: Mixed Language, Indonesia, Urban Spaces

1. Introduction

Bahasa Walikan Malangan speakers—originating from the city of Malang in East Java—reverse the pronunciation of words primarily from the lexicons of Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*) and Javanese (*bahasa Jawa*), creating a language that is an expression and, moreover, an imagined social construction of the urban center and urban identity of Malang. How does a Malangese person, through the use of *bahasa Walikan*, create the urban spaces from which this urban identity is born? A Malangese places himself or herself within an urban center which he or she considers in three contexts: 1) the individual context, 2) the national context, and 3) the international context. Before continuing, I must state that this is a work in progress. Albeit a substantial understanding, there is still a need for further field investigation. This paper touches on those concepts that are beginning to emerge.

The individual context serves as "foundation" for constructing Malangese identity—it is that upon which all other contexts can be built. This context guides how a Malangese understands the base of Malang as a city in the construction of the identity born from this urban social space. The national context is the meeting place where Malang participates in "national" culture—that is, aspects that are overarchingly "Indonesian" and part of the way the nation constructs itself, part of which construction Malang dialogically plays a role. The international context is where Malang considers itself in the context of a nation-constructed world. All of these contexts are the materials that construct the identity of the

imagined Malang urban social space and the speaking of *bahasa Walikan*, with its vocabulary, grammar, and ideologies, is a practice of this constructing act of imagined identity. While speakers use *bahasa Walikan* to express the everyday concerns of the city, the nation, or the world through the eyes of a Malangese, it is more so the expressed creation of a social entity and experience—that which is Malang.

People refer to *bahasa Walikan* by several names which include: (the more Indonesian) *bahasa Malangan* and *bahasa Ngalam*, and (the more Javanese) *boso Malang*, *osob Ngalam*, *osob Ngalaman*, and *osob Kiwalan*. *Bahasa Walikan*, the most popular of them all and the one employed in this paper (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012), derives from *walik* of Javanese, meaning "to invert" and the Indonesian word for "language or tongue" *bahasa*, rendering its name's meaning as "inverted language" (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). *Malangan* or "Malangese" may also be added to distinguish this language from a similar language known as *bahasa Walikan* spoken in Yogyakarta in central Java.

As mentioned before, the *bahasa Walikan* speaker inverts items from the Indonesian and Javanese lexicons; however English words are also employed and inverted. There is also a number of lexical items that are specific to the city of Malang of which some are reversed while other are not. A few examples are as follow:

Indonesian	Javanese	Malangese	English
sepatu → *utapes* "shoe"	*boso* → *osob* "language"	*ojir* → *raijo* "money"	*relax* → *skelir*
sepeda → *adapes* "bicycle"	*arek* → *kera* "young boy/girl"	*ebes* "parent"	*slow* → *woles*
Malang → *Ngalam* "city of Malang"	osi→iso "can, be able to"	*naskin* "eat"	*orang kaya* → *ayak men* "rich people"

Table 1. *Examples of formations of bahasa Walikan's vocabulary*

As for the structure of the language, *bahasa Walikan* follows a base work order of subject-verb-object (SVO) like Javanese and Indonesian. While the language pulls from Javanese (specifically the Malangese dialect of it) and Indonesian for its vocabulary, its grammar—that is, its system of morphology and syntax—is primarily based on the Javanese language (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). Its system of discourse, as research has revealed thus far, is primarily from Indonesian (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012).

In its historical relation to other languages of world, as it is an extension of Javanese and Indonesian, linguists classify *bahasa Walikan* as an Austronesian language, belonging to the same linguistic family as languages like Tagalog, Malagasy, Ilocano, Maori, and Tahitian. In the same way that English, French, Spanish, Gujarati, Persian, and Russian and many other languages from Europe to Northern India share a common ancestor through Proto-Indo-European, so do these languages share a common ancestor through Proto-Austronesian. The Austronesian language family is the world's largest in terms of the number of languages and in terms of indigenous geographical extensiveness.

Although *bahasa Walikan* is Austronesian through Javanese and Indonesian, its social birth is much more recent. The language began in the 1940's as a form of secret code speech created by the *Gerilya Rakyat Kota* (GRK) "the [Malang] City People's Movement" during the independence war against Dutch colonialism. *Bahasa Walikan* functioned to conceal the Malangese resistance group's messages during that war. This language of war for liberation becomes the language of solidarity for those who are born and live in the city of Malang. It is the "special language" of the Malangese, the language of an *arek Malang* "a child of Malang" (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). The situation is as Dukut Imam Widodo mentions in his writings:

> *[A]rek-arek Malang…saat bertemu,…kami...menggunakan bahasa Walikan....Ada suasana romantisme tersendiri ketika berbicara bahasa Walikan. Di samping itu juga untuk menjaga identitas sebagai arek-arek Malang sejati!*
>
> The children of Malang, when we meet, we use *bahasa Walikan*. There is a distinct atmosphere of romance when speaking *bahasa Walikan*. Furthermore, it is also to preserve the identity of the true *arek-arek Malang!* (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012; Doea, Djilid, Dukut Imam Widodo et al., 2006)

The Malangese use this language to express matters about the world from their perspective as an *arek Malang*, but much more this language is the practice of an urban identity that constructs the urban spaces that reinforce it. This urban spaces and identity is predicated on the individual context, the national context, and the international context that surround and compose it.

2. The making of a malangese

As mentioned before, the individual context is the way in which a Malangese understands the primary socio-cultural source of Malang as a city. This is the "foundation" on which all other contexts can be built in the formation of the social identity generated from this urban space. This first context touches on the "formation of the Malangese citzen" as a subjectivity. The Malangese are the agents who create and reinforce through practice this urban identity. Although not completely fixed, this subjectivity is imagined ethnically/racially as Malay. This aspect of the imagined citizen most clearly arose, as most identities do, in opposition with another—not only in the fight against the Dutch, but also more recently in opposition with the ethnic Chinese population in Malang as one informant discusses:

> kalau mereka orang tuanya pendatang, anaknya mungkin tidak begitu bisa bahasa walikan. Yang pendatang, imigran, mereka tidak begitu bisa bahasa walikan. […] Karena yang kebanyakan memakai adalah orang Malang asli, bukan dari etnis Cina. Dari etnis Cina jarang bergaul dengan anak-anak Malang, mereka membentuk sosial sendiri.
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> If their parents are immigrants, the children are not likely to speak *bahasa walikan*. The newcomers, the immigrants, they do not speak *bahasa walikan*. [...] Most of the ones that employ it are native Malangese, not of the ethnic Chinese. The ethnic Chinese rarely interact with Malangese children, they formed their own social scene.

The Malangese person is also Javanese. He or she is a member of a larger culture that consumers the island of Java and that could be considered one of the major cultures of Indonesia. The Javanese language forms that grammatical foundation of *bahasa Walikan* and is at the base of intimate Malangese-Javanese life.

This aspect of intimacy in the Malangese subjectivity is especially important as it plays a role in the "home" as a social space. Many people with whom I spoke mentioned that Javanese was a more intimate language, especially used the home (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). In order to achieve a feeling of "closeness" (*akrab*) people speak Javanese. This emotion of *akrab* is also that which surrounds the use of *bahasa Walikan* (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). Rarely do people use Indonesian, an aspect of strictly national culture, at home. At home in Malang, there is only Javanese and *bahasa Walikan*. This Javanese aspect with its role in the Malangese home is foundational to the individual context constituting the Malangese social space. However, this is not the only constituent of this context.

The history of Malang itself, in the protecting of "home" so to speak, is a source for forming this individually Malangese context. In recounting this history, one informant says:

> ketika period kolonial belanda jadi banyak mata-mata … [dan] banyak mata-mata orang Indonesia juga,…ketika [pejuang Indonesia] berbicara mereka mengerti…seperti operasi atau rencana…jadi mereka pikir harus ada seperti bahasa khusus.
>
> [D]uring the period of Dutch colonialism, there were many [Dutch] spies… and many Indonesian spies [for the Dutch side of the war] as well…when [the Indonesian fighters] speak, they [the Dutch] understand the operations or plans so they [the Indonesian fighters] felt they had to have a special language (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012).

All of these aspects of subjectivity form the Malangese person and play a role in his or her identity, but what does this mean in the given social contexts that structure the imagined city? This begins with the individual context centered in the home and connects to the formation of a Malangese history through Indonesia's revolutionary era. The home, drawing on Javanese/Malay aspects of subjectivity, and the history are the foundation of Malangese social space and urban identity. However, there is also a national context that surrounds the Malangese person which is centered on the Indonesian national school system and the inter-city soccer league.

3. The creation of urban social spaces

The Indonesian school system and soccer league are places of national culture. These are the social milieu where overarchingly "Indonesian" aspects of culture are transmitted. In a country composed of over 13,000 islands and hundreds of languages and cultures, "Indonesian" references no single ethnic group. Even the language *bahasa Indonesia* (literally, the "language of Indonesia") is almost no one's native tongue. Most people learn the national language in school and use it as the *lingua franca* throughout the archipelago for matters dealing with national society. The system of education and the soccer leagues are institutions of that national society.

The school system of Indonesia is composed of five principle parts: *Taman Kanak-kanak* (TK) or kindergarten where students attend from ages 4-5, *Sekolah Dasar* (SD) or elementary school from ages 6–11, *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (SMP) or middle school students from 12-14, *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (SMA) or high school from ages 15-17, and *Kuliah* or College/University education from 18 and beyond (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). School is not only where the Indonesian language is learned, but it is also where *bahasa Walikan* is acquired. During SMP, although this occurs sometimes earlier during SD, many students get their first real exposure to the language. Before this time students may or may not hear much of it, but by the time they reach this level of schooling, students with more experience teach the others through conversation until everyone knows the language. Due to *bahasa Walikan*'s transmission in a national culture and because the language is based on Indonesian—an artifact of the national culture—, it is clear that the national context plays a role in the identity formation of the Malangese.

The other aspect of that national context is the realm of *sepak bola* or inter-city soccer. Whether on the field or in the stands, *bahasa Walikan* is being spoken as a performance of team spirit and identity while Malang fights against other city teams. Along with wearing Malang's team color blue, in rival city Surabaya, it is said to be slightly "chancy" to speak *bahasa Walikan* (Espree-Conaway, DeAndré A., 2012). *Bahasa Walikan*'s use in institutions of national Indonesian culture under the national context plays a formative role in Malangese urban identity.

4. Language ideology of prestige and landscapes

There is an international context—the context of a nation-constructed world—within which the Malangese imagine themselves. One key language ideology, that envisions the prestige of languages hierarchically based on the extent of the geographic landscape of usage, reveals part of this context. Although regional or local languages (*bahasa daerah*), may carry prestige of their own based on singular

histories, from an international view, they are alloted the lowest prestige. Therefore, from the perspective of Malang in an international context, Javanese carries the lowest prestige. Indonesian comes in strong second, even tied for first in most cases, because it is the language of the nation as one informant discusses:

> Karena bahasa Indonesia adalah bahasa nasional, bahasa yang mempersatukan seluruh rakyat Indonesia. Jadi saya berbicara dengan orang Jogja, dengan orang Bali, menggunakan bahasa Indonesia mereka mengerti, tapi kalau saya menggunakan bahasa Jawa , orang Bali tidak mengerti.
>
> [it is] because Indonesian is the national language, a language that unites all people of Indonesia. So [whether] I talk to people in Jogja [or] to people in Bali, [if] I use Indonesian, they will understand, but if I use Javanese, a person from Bali would not understand.

A Malangese person can travel across the entire archipelago and use Indonesian. Indonesian is also tightly linked with education so that it is viewed as a language of erudition. English, however, is emerging as the first in the hierarchy. This is predicated on its status as a world language. Not only is it the national tongue of many nations, even in places where it is not, English is commonly spoken in various degrees. English also is another language of education, a fact that contributes to its prestige. A Malangese can travel the world with English and thus it merits first in prestige.
When *Bahasa Walikan* is placed within this framework, it has a liminal position because it is a mix of all of these languages. The result is that it forms a context for Malangese identity as a linguistic reflection of a Malangese person's place in the world.

5. Urban space and identity

How does a Malangese person, through the use of *bahasa Walikan*, create the urban spaces from which this identity is born? These social spaces such as the home, the soccer stadium, and the school yard in Malang are conceptualized through the individual, national, and international contexts that compose Malangese identity performed in the speaking of *bahasa Walikan*.
The individually Malangese context as the "foundation" of Malang as a city is formed through the ethnically Malay and culturally Javanese aspects of Malangese subjectivity as it is surrounded by the spatial area of the home and the temporal area of the Indonesian anti-colonial revolution. The Malangese identity is composed of a national context by way of the acquisition and performance of *bahasa Walikan* in Indonesian national institutions and through its utilization of the national language. The history, while focusing individually on Malang, is plays a part, in many ways, in the national liberation narrative. Thus there is overlap between the individual context and the national one built upon it. The international context where Malang imagines itself within a nation-constructed world, through the language ideology of hierarchy predicated on the geographic extensiveness of usage and the embodiment of its parts as a liminal mix of tongues, creates a linguistic reflection of Malangese identity in a wider world. All of these contexts are the materials that construct the identity of this imagined urban social space. The speaking of *bahasa Walikan* is the performance of this formative act of envisioning Malang.
Examining bahasa Walikan as a "new urban metaphor" allows for a constantly pertinent understanding of urban spaces as social spaces. Fainstein and Campbell write that:

> [u]rban space gains its meanings as a consequence of the activities carried on within it, the characteristics of the people who occupy it, the form given to it by its physical structures, and the perceptions with which people regard it. Consequently, such space does not simply exist; it is, instead, a social creation. Yet, although the product of creative

> activity, spatial relations once formed take on a seeming fixity, a life of their own" (Fainstein, Susan S. and Scott Campbell., 2011).

This example shows how symbolic practices of spatial relations take on "a life of their own" in the formation of urban identity—specifically, in this case, Malangese identity.

By understanding and making connections with such metaphors, scholars and researchers can begin to answer important questions such as, "how can visibility be given to the new forms of interactions between citizens and urban spaces?" and "how can dialogues be formed between opposed physical and geographical identities belonging to the same metropolitan region?". Patsey Healey writes that "meaning making often gets explored … by the use of metaphor and analogy. Framing work, like the process of probing the available knowledge about situations and issues, requires an expansive yet integrative, pluralistic yet synthetic, collective imagination" (Healey, Patsy., 2009). Trying new epistemological approaches will be key to new analyses in the pursuit of apprehending urban complexity. Reflections on language and culture, such as this one, could provide another pertinent approach to urban studies.

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