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978-0-521-51991-5 - Language, Migration, and Identity: Neighborhood Talk in Indonesia

Zane Goebel

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.0 Introduction

Indonesia is reported to be one of the most religiously, linguistically, and ethnically diverse regions of the world (e.g. Bertrand, 2003). Such diversity has attracted a lot of scholarly attention, especially from political scientists, historians, anthropologists and area specialists. For example, relationships between Javanese politicians from Jakarta and other Indonesian politicians from the outer islands has been an enduring topic of interest (e.g. Feith, 1962; Ricklefs, 1981; Sakai, 2002). Similarly, much scholarship has gone into relationships between bureaucrats from these geo-political spaces and discourses about those living in the outer islands (e.g. Hoshour, 1997; Lenhart, 1997; Schefold, 1998; Hoey, 2003), inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations (e.g. Bruner, E. M., 1974; Liddle, 1997; Hefner, 2001b; Sakai, 2002; Van Klinken, 2003; Bertrand, 2004), and social relations between Indonesian-Chinese and *pribumi*, or so called “indigenous Indonesians” (e.g. Coppel, 1983; Chua, 2004; Suryadinata, 2004b; Hoon, 2006; Purdey, 2006).

While many of these studies take into consideration post-structural arguments and social constructivist perspectives (e.g. Van Klinken, 2003; Purdey, 2006), their focus on interview, archival, and survey data usually doesn’t allow us to explore how these social relationships form and dissolve through face-to-face talk. Indeed, with the exception of some very brief descriptions of actual inter-ethnic talk by Kartomihardjo (1981: 159, 186–7) and Wolff and Poedjosoedarmo (1982: 66–8), no work has been done on this aspect of diversity in Indonesia. This book attempts to start to fill this gap by investigating how talk figures in mediating social relations in two diverse urban *Rukun Tetangga* (RT) “ward(s)” of Semarang, Indonesia, referred to henceforth as Ward 8 and Ward 5. I aim to provide a linguistic anthropological account of this diversity by exploring what factors contribute to or work against sustained contact with others in these wards, how such contact or lack thereof is talked about, whether and to what extent contact relates to interactional language use, how newcomers go about learning to interact in their new home, and how all of this relates to matters of identity.

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[More information](#)

In doing so, this book engages with a number of recurring and inter-related themes within humanities scholarship, including anti-essentialist approaches to notions of community and culture, and questions relating to how people from diverse backgrounds go about doing togetherness in settings where transience is increasingly the norm (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Baumann, 1996; Werbner, 1997; Wenger, 1998; Ang, 2003; Brettell, 2003; Vertovec, 2007). By taking a linguistic anthropological approach to migration I show how systems of trust (Giddens, 1984, 1990, 1999) or systems of expectations about behavior in public and private spaces (Goffman, 1967, 1974) develop in two ward contexts where diversity is the norm and where distinctions between who are newcomers and who are hosts continually change.

In this sense, this study differs from other studies of migration, migrants and language use in a number of ways. First of all it draws upon critiques of studies of migrants and migration (e.g. Baumann, 1996; Brettell, 2003; Poynting, Noble, Tabar, & Collins, 2004; Collins, Noble, Poynting, & Tabar, 2000), which highlight the diverse make-up of those who migrate rather than lumping them into particular “ethnic” groups whose existence thereof is partly a result of being the “other” in a so-called homogenous host community. Similarly, studies of migrant talk have largely focused upon interaction between migrants and hosts (e.g. Gumperz, 1982a; Blommaert, Collins, & Slembrouck, 2005a, 2005b; Campbell & Roberts, 2007). An often unintended consequence of such studies, along with those that look at intercultural talk more generally, is the essentialization of research participants into groups. These groups are often categorized as ethnic or racial and their ways of speaking are subsequently contrasted with an equally essentialized majority.

Drawing on the insights of those working at some of the intersections between sociology, anthropology, linguistics, media studies, cultural studies and education (e.g. Rampton, 1995b, 2006; Hall, 1996; Spitulnik, 1996; Wenger, 1998; Irvine, 2001; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004b; Bourdieu, 2006 [1998]; Dunn, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Hall, 2006 [1980]; Inoue, 2006; Wortham, 2006; Agha, 2007), my point of departure is one that sees identity as fluid and something that constantly emerges within a chain of communicative events involving discourses of sameness and difference. In particular, my thinking on “meaning-making” has been influenced by theoretical and methodological work on social practice and semiotics undertaken by Wenger (1998), Agha (2007) and Wortham (2006).

For example, Agha sees it as necessary to view interaction as a **semiotic encounter** within a larger system of constantly emerging **semiotic registers (SRs)**. In such interactions communication is not a product of a face-to-face meeting, but rather “participants’ mutual orientation to signs or messages” (Agha, 2007: 69). Such signs have histories, are indexically related to other signs (e.g. Bakhtin, 1981; Ochs, 1990; and the papers in Silverstein & Urban, 1996a) and are recontextualized (e.g. Bauman & Briggs, 1990) in each

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

subsequent **semiotic encounter** to make new meanings. Among other things, Wenger's work provides useful analytic categories, such as newcomer and old-timer, which from Chapter 4 onwards allow me more analytic purchase on notions such as migrant, ethnicity, and so on.

This approach also avoids making the assumption that difference in background will automatically lead to miscommunication (e.g. Ryoo, 2005; Higgins, 2007; Mori, 2007), while encouraging us to explore some of the socio-historical processes that enable social difference and sameness to be brought about in such interactions. That is to say, it allows us to move beyond single instances of situated interaction to look at their relationship to preceding and subsequent interactions, as well as a space to theorize and reflect upon the relationship of situated sign usage to sign usage in more perduring speech chains, such as those found in schooling systems, the mass media, census practices, political discourse, et cetera.

Just as importantly, for diverse multilingual settings such as the one studied here, this approach also offers a bridge between some of the dominant paradigms to code choice and codeswitching, such as identity-based approaches (e.g. Myers-Scotton, 1993), ethnographically informed approaches (e.g. Alvarez-Cáccamo, 1998; Stroud, 1998) and interactional approaches (e.g. Gumperz, 1982a; Gafaranga, 2005; Li Wei, 2005). For example, work on **SRs** and **processes of social identification** provides both theory and methods for understanding why it is that reportedly non-Javanese migrants used Javanese in interactions with their primarily Javanese hosts instead of the expected Indonesian. In particular, it allows us to explore interdiscursive relationships between perduring signs – linguistic and non-linguistic – and their recontextualization (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). Such recontextualizations represent a type of learning in a language socialization sense (Ochs, 1986, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990; Wortham, 2006), as participants move from engaging in practices of **crossing** (Rampton, 1995a) to practices of **adequation** (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004b). In the next section I set out how I will treat each of the above issues in this book.

## 1.1 Layout of the book

Chapter 2 fleshes out work on **semiotic registers (SRs)**, **enregisterment** and **processes of social identification** (e.g. Wortham, 2006; Agha, 2007). In doing so, I provide an introduction to the broader Indonesian context. In particular, I look at processes of **enregisterment** in Indonesia. I do this by exploring how colonial and post-colonial policy and practices relate to institutional representations of language use and how this has figured in the formulation of **SRs** linking language use to performable social categories of personhood and relationship.

I focus on three main sources of representation as they relate to the association of language to region and ethnicity, while pointing to the continuities

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978-0-521-51991-5 - Language, Migration, and Identity: Neighborhood Talk in Indonesia

Zane Goebel

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 4 Language, Migration, and Identity

that exist between such representations. The first source of representations – which **enregister** or link **languages other than Indonesian (LOTI)** to region and ethnicity and Indonesian to nationalism, developmentalism and the ethnic other – are those found in colonial discourses and in later post-1950 political discourses. I then move on to school settings to argue that the representation of language within these settings also reproduces such **SRs**. Moving my focus to popular mass media, especially television serials, I point out further continuities in the representation of language–ethnicity links while also noting the existence of some representations which denaturalize such links. For example, portrayals of internal migrants show that they regularly engage in practices of **adequation** (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a). That is, they situationally pursue sameness through the habitual use of linguistic tokens not normally associated with members of their ethnic group (e.g. Skapoulli, 2004; Sweetland, 2002).

Having explored how ethnicity has been associated with **LOTI**, in a sense contributing to the naturalization of ethnolinguistic categorization in Indonesia, I then move the discussion to focus on other ideologies of ethnicity in Indonesia as they relate to those of Chinese ancestry. I delineate Chinese ethnicity from other social constructions of region-based ethno-linguistic categorization by referring to them as representations of Chineseness. While this delineation is primarily done for ease of explication, within the time-frame I am working in, that is, pre-1999 Indonesia, discourses about ethnicity were mainly linked with region and language while Chineseness seemed to have been linked with ancestry and negative affect and deviance.

In Chapter 3 I begin my focus on the local setting in a way that allows us to take into consideration the conditions of production of talk. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1994) and Wenger (1998), I argue that government policy together with economic ability has figured in the emergence and reproduction of a number of **semiotic registers** that associate local spaces and practices with different social personas or categories of personhood within the Indonesian wards under discussion. In doing so, I point out that through routine engagement in the social practices of these wards – especially those associated with the upkeep, maintenance and well-being of the members of these wards – members and their interactions become part of the category of signs that make up emerging **semiotic registers (SRs)**. These **SRs** also figure in the forming of **frames of expectation** (e.g. Goffman, 1974) about social conduct in such spaces. Among other things, such expectations enable participants to engage in meta-talk about sameness and difference as it relates to interaction, language usage, and membership status within these wards.

Drawing upon notions of **semiotic encounters**, **semiotic registers**, **enregisterment**, **communities of practice**, **crossing** and **adequation**, Chapter 4 focuses on ward members' linguistic repertoires. In doing so, I engage in discussions about language alternation, especially as they relate to matters of

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

language categorization, language choice and codeswitching. In defining my approach to language alternation, I also introduce the members of these wards. With recourse to work on the study of conversational narratives (e.g. Ochs & Capps, 2001; Georgakopoulou, 2007), Chapter 5 examines **processes of social identification**. In doing so, I start to explore how perduring **SRs** might figure in such **processes of social identification**.

For example, I examine interdiscursive relationships between situated talk and perduring language–identity and language–activity relationships. In particular, I examine how participants recontextualize signs from perduring **SRs** and how they use collusion strategies (such as repetition) to position a non-present member as deviant. In doing so, I point to how the construction of this category of personhood relates to the construction of other categories of personhood, how such interactions simultaneously create local expectations for social conduct, and how all of this relates to emergence of a local **semiotic register**. I finish by asking the question whether and to what extent the interactions in this meeting might offer newcomers explicit lessons on social conduct.

In Chapter 6 I go on to explore whether and to what extent such lessons are actually learned by examining a newcomer's interactions in subsequent ward meetings. I focus on how one non-Javanese newcomer learns to use fragments of *ngoko* Javanese as part of a collusive public telling of a story about one neighbor's perceived inappropriate actions. The appropriation and recontextualization of these linguistic signs by this newcomer modifies the locally emerging **SR** described in Chapter 5. For example, this emerging **SR** now includes this newcomer within its category of signs. At the same time, such recontextualizations enable this newcomer to be seen as a member of this ward. Indeed, more generally in interviews that elicited meta-pragmatic commentaries, many of the newcomers and older residents of this ward noted the need to learn, or to appear to have learnt, some Javanese.

In concluding Chapter 6, I highlight how non-Javanese women of this ward frequently engage in the linguistic pursuit of sameness – that is, **adequation** (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004b) – through the heavy use of *ngoko* Javanese tokens in their interactions with other women of this ward who identify themselves as Javanese. In accounting for such **adequation** I point out its relationship to participants' **trajectories of socialization** (Wortham, 2005) and how this relates to my discussion in Chapter 3 about economic, spatial, demographic, religious and other factors. In addition, I point out that this practice seems to markedly contrast with perduring language ideologies about language–ethnicity relationships and about Indonesian as the language of inter-ethnic interaction.

These practices of **adequation** markedly contrast with the linguistic practices of the non-Javanese men of this ward, where Indonesian is commonly used in interactions with other men who report being Javanese. Chapters 7 and 8 look at such usage as part of my wider analysis of **processes of social identification**

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Zane Goebel

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 6 Language, Migration, and Identity

in male ward meetings within Ward 8. In taking a similar approach to that taken in Chapters 5 and 6, I focus on how deviance becomes a local identity category associated with persons of Chinese ancestry over the course of these ward meetings and how this relates to local events and perduring **SRs**. (Unless otherwise indicated I use the term “Indonesian-Chinese” to refer to Indonesians of Chinese ancestry.) In exploring why linguistic form usage contrasts so much with that found in interactions among the women of this ward, I again focus on participants’ **trajectories of socialization** and their relationship with economic, spatial and other factors. I conclude by noting that while such usage may be seen as gendered, the data I present in the following chapter suggests an alternative interpretation.

Chapter 9 moves us to interactions among the men of low-income Ward 5, where my focus becomes two types of language ideologies. The first relates to interaction amongst Javanese. In particular, I compare interactional practices with ideologies about asymmetrical sign exchange of the type found in school texts described in Chapter 2. I show that contrary to such language ideologies, categories of personhood relating to age and status do not figure in the linguistic sign exchanges found in interaction amongst the Javanese in Ward 5. These patterns of linguistic sign exchange mirror those found in Ward 8. In accounting for such differences, I argue that the nexus of a number of factors – including economic ability of participants, the resultant social organization in this ward, and daily social life – all help figure in the patterns of exchange I describe.

The second language ideology I examine relates to language use in inter-ethnic interactions, where the Indonesian constitution, language policy, language educators and school curriculum all seem to imagine that such interactions will be characterized by Indonesian usage. I argue that an unintended inflection of such practices – namely, Indonesian being seen as an index of the ethnic other – is a commonly held belief in this ward. At the same time, I show that ideologies about **LOTI** (in this case *ngoko* Javanese) and its indexical relationships with ethnicity seem to have been recontextualized to do intimacy identity work inter-ethnically through participants’ engagement in the practice of **adequation**. In accounting for these practices, I point out that their genesis could be traced back to the economic ability of ward members and the resultant impact on patterns of social interaction described in Chapter 3. When these findings are compared with the patterns of social practices and language usage found among the men and women of Ward 8, we can head off simplistic conclusions that might have been invited through comparisons of linguistic sign usage amongst the men and women there. This is so because it appears that men in Ward 5 have similar patterns of linguistic sign usage to the women of Ward 8.

In the concluding chapter I make two main points. The first is that a comparative view of the frequent practice of **adequation** found in these wards allows us

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

to come to some more general conclusions about identities and talk in this transient setting. In particular, and in answer to the main question posed at the start of the book, I point out that in this transient setting identities as part of systems of expectations are negotiated across speech situations. While such identities may draw upon widely held beliefs about language–identity relationships, they are not determined by them. This sits in contrast to essentialist interpretations by pointing to the lack of any long-term fixed relationships between linguistic forms and identity, such as ethnicity. While such insights are not new to those working within a conversation analytic (CA) paradigm (e.g. Auer, 1995; Sebba & Wootton, 1998), a temporal approach allows us to explore whether, to what extent, and why certain identities solidify. Secondly, I highlight how Agha's (2007) and Wortham's (2006) work on **SRs** might be used to build bridges between identity-based, ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches to language alternation.

## 1.2 Fieldwork in two wards

In the final part of this chapter I want to provide a brief account of the fieldwork setting and my fieldwork methods, both of which will be expanded as required in the following chapters. The data that I will be basing this book upon was gathered during two-and-a-half years of fieldwork in Ward 5 and Ward 8 between April 1996 and July 1998. During this time my spouse – herself an Indonesian – and I rented a house in Ward 8.

These two wards were located in the newly urbanizing fringes of the northern part of Semarang, the capital city of the province of Central Java (see Maps 1.1 and 1.2). They were located within fifty meters of each other and were part of a larger administrative unit called a *Rukun Warga* “neighborhood”, which was made up of twelve wards. Diagram 1.1 shows this hierarchical relationship and how it relates to the central government (all place names are pseudonyms). Semarang is unique insofar as Indonesian-Chinese make up nearly 4.5 percent of the population (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003: 164–5). It can also be characterized as a city with a high rate of in-migration, a history of strong support for communism, and a history of anti-Chinese violence, which occurred in 1966, 1971 and 1980 (Lerman, 1987: 62–98). As one would expect in a large provincial capital (with around 4 million inhabitants), the members of both these wards came from many regions within Indonesia and from diverse religious, educational, economic, occupational and experiential backgrounds.

In Ward 5, for example, many of the inhabitants were either from Semarang or from rural areas within Central Java. This is not to say that all ward members hailing from within Semarang or Central Java had similar experiences and language abilities. Indeed, much of my discussion from Chapter 2 onwards problematizes this issue of ethno-linguistic categorization. In contrast, most of



Map 1.1 The Indonesian Archipelago  
Map adapted from Errington (1998b: xvii)



Map 1.2 East, Central, and West Java, Madura and Bali  
Map adapted from Errington (1998b: xviii)

the members of Ward 8 were university-educated and had come from larger towns and cities within Indonesia. In terms of self-reports and reports by others, only three of the members from Ward 5 came from outside of Central Java, and of these, two had a spouse who was from Central Java. The remaining household was made up of a husband and wife who were both from Medan, Sumatra. In this respect Ward 8 was much more diverse, with nine of the

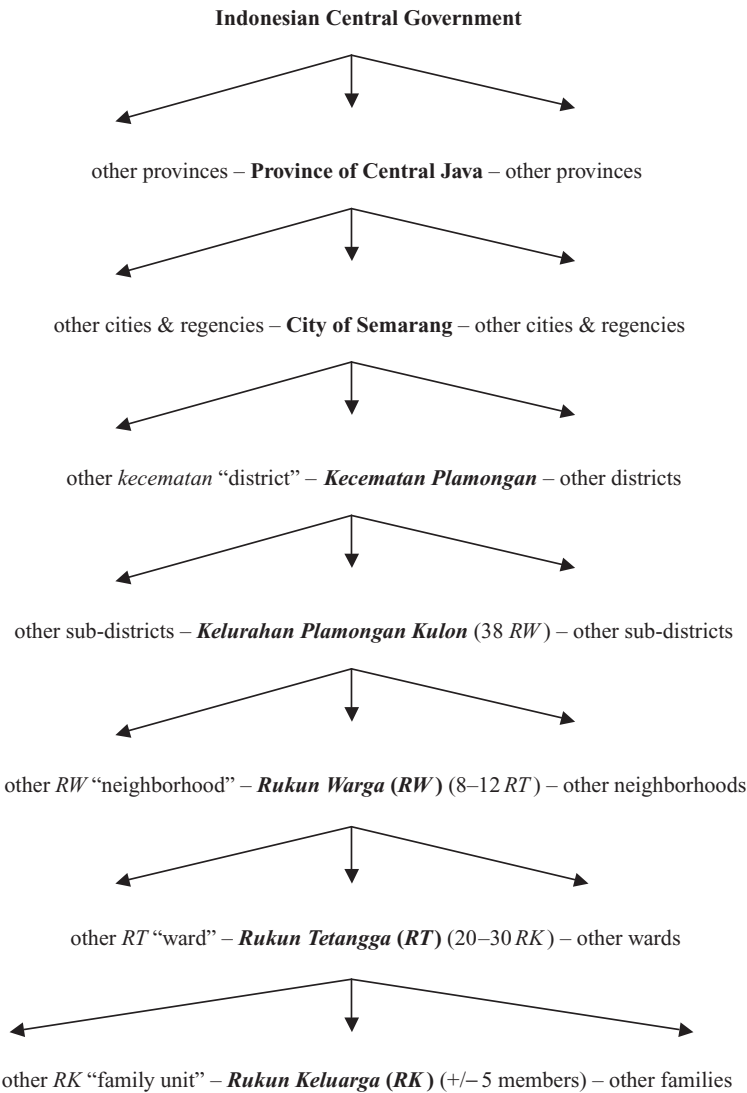


Diagram 1.1 Administrative hierarchy

twenty-three families having at least one spouse coming from outside of Central Java. Four families had both husband and wife coming from areas outside of Java proper.

Within these two wards there were also, of course, those who were of Chinese ancestry. For example, within Ward 5 there were two households where

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Zane Goebel

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 10 Language, Migration, and Identity

one or both heads were identified as Indonesian-Chinese by other residents. Within Ward 8 the number fluctuated during the period of research, with two to three households identifying or being identified as having Chinese ancestry. Differences in geographical background also often meant difference in religious background. Coupled with differences in economic ability this often produced certain patterns of social interaction. For example, in Ward 8 those who had migrated from other areas of Indonesia often sought the company of friends or relatives who were part of the same church group or Islamic meeting group. This was expedited by car and motorcycle ownership among this ward. In comparison, members of Ward 5 rarely engaged in this sort of interaction, but did frequently socialize with their neighbors.

Generationally, Ward 5 also had a large number of males in their late teens and twenties in comparison to Ward 8, which had a much larger population of females in their late teens and early twenties. In terms of numbers, there were in fact only two females in this age cohort in Ward 5, while their male counterparts numbered over ten. Another major difference between these two wards was length of stay. In Ward 5, for example, twelve of the twenty-four families had lived there since its construction in 1988 and another ten had been living there since 1992. In Ward 8, on the other hand, only nine families had lived in Ward 8 since it was formed in 1988. The rest of the population were transient and the longest period that new inhabitants would stay was around two years, the average time and often minimal period for which a house could be leased in this neighborhood. This pattern of inhabitancy can also be linked with the occupations of the inhabitants and potential inhabitants of Ward 8. For example, many of the original population were relatively senior public servants, who had since been transferred to other provinces. Similarly, many of the newcomers were also senior public servants, who had been transferred from other provinces.

As hinted above, income levels also differed considerably between and within these two wards, ranging from between 100,000 rupiah to 4 million rupiah per month. In Australian dollars in 1996 – before the economic crisis of 1997–1998 – this translated to figures ranging between 55 and 2,200 dollars a month. In Ward 5 incomes were around 100,000 to 600,000 rupiah per month and members of the ward had occupations such as low-ranking public servants and military personnel, small traders, public transport drivers, chauffeurs, teachers, junior university lecturers, shop assistants, laborers, tailors and other entrepreneurs. In comparison, in Ward 8 family incomes ranged from 600,000 to around 4 million rupiah per month, with most having an income around 1 million rupiah per month. Members of this ward held relatively senior positions in public and private organizations (e.g. judges, public prosecutors, senior lecturers, senior bank employees, local parliamentary representatives, medium-sized traders/shop owners and service providers).