The Acquisition of Malay/Indonesian: What, When and How?

David Gil

Department of Linguistics
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
Inselstrasse 22, D-04103 Leipzig
Germany

Telephone: 49-341-9952310
Fax: 49-341-9952119
Email: gil@eva.mpg.de
Webpage: http://monolith.eva.mpg.de/~gil/

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Like, Uri and Betty at the Jakarta Field Station
What?

What Language?

A Typology of Malay / Indonesian Language Varieties

- acquired early
  - Standard Malay
  - Standard Indonesian

- acquired late
  - marketplace pidgins

- most colloquial varieties of Malay/Indonesian

- ethnically homogeneous
  - Siak Malay
  - Singapore Malay
  - Kuala Lumpur Malay

- ethnically mixed: old

- ethnically mixed: new
  - Riau Indonesian

- ethnically non-Malay
  - Peranakan Malay
  - Jakarta Indonesian
  - Sulsel Indonesian
What Grammar?

Some characteristic features of most colloquial varieties of Malay / Indonesian:

- No inflectional morphology.
- Little derivational morphology.
- Underdifferentiation of formal categories.
- Underdifferentiation of semantic categories.

(1) Cewek cantik
woman beautiful
[Watching Indian movie on TV, a woman appears]
(a) "(That's) a beautiful woman"
(b) "That woman is beautiful"
"entity associated with woman and beauty"

(2) Cantik gol
beautiful goal
[Watching replay of football goal on TV]
(a) "That goal was beautiful"
(b) "(That was) a beautiful goal"
"entity associated with beauty and goal"

Some differences between colloquial varieties of Malay / Indonesian:

- Rhythm:
  Kuala Lumpur Malay: stress timed
  Riau Indonesian, Jakarta Indonesian: syllable timed

- Derivational morphology:
  Kuala Lumpur Malay < Riau Indonesian < Jakarta Indonesian
  - voice morphology: \textit{di}- and \textit{N}-
  - associative/definite enclitic \textit{-nya}
  - macrofunctional suffix \textit{-an}

- Possessive constructions:
  Kuala Lumpur Malay: N G \textit{punya} [\textit{mya}] [\textit{nya}] N
  Riau Indonesian: N G
  Jakarta Indonesian: N G \textit{nya} G
(3) **Syntactic Categories:**

(a) **open:**  
- S: *rumah* "person"; *merah* "red", *pukul* "hit", *tiga* "three";
- apa "what"; *kenapa* "why"; *sendiri* "REFLEXIVE"/"only"
- *sama* "accompany"/"with"/"same"/"and"/"NON.ABSOLUTIVE";
- *sudah* "PERFECT"; *belum* "NEGATIVE:PERFECT" ...

(b) **closed:**  
- S/S

(i) **preceding:**  
- *yang* "REIFIER"; *paling* "SUPERLATIVE"; *setiap* "every";
- *kalau* "if"/"TOPIC"; *dari* "from"; *untuk* "for";
- *dengan* "with"/"and"/"OBLIQUE"; *tukang* "AGENT"
- *gara-gara* "because:ADVERSATIVE" ...

(ii) **following:**  
- *la* "AFFIRMATIVE", *e* "ADVERSATIVE", *diri* "REFLEXIVE" ...

(4) **Syntactic Structures:**  
Syntactic structures are unordered labelled trees. Each branch is of one of the following two kinds:

(a)  
- \[ S \ S^1 \ldots S^n \] (n>1)

(b)  
- \[ S \ S/S S \ ]

(5) **Monadic Association Rule:** *(optional: marked)*  
Given an S with interpretation M, S may be assigned the (superordinate) interpretation A(M).

(6) **Polyadic Association Rule:** *(obligatory)*  
Given a syntactic structure \[ S \ S^1 \ldots S^n \] (n>1) where S^1 ... S^n have interpretations M^1 ... M^n respectively, \[ S \ S^1 \ldots S^n \] is assigned the interpretation A(M^1 ... M^n).

\[ \text{for } n = 2: \quad A (M^1, M^2) \quad \text{"entity associated with } M^1 \text{ and } M^2" \]

\[ \begin{aligned} \text{M}^1 & \\ \text{M}^2 & \end{aligned} \]

(7) **Headedness Rule:** *(optional: unmarked)*  
Given a syntactic structure \[ S \ S^1 \ldots S^n \] with interpretation A(M^1 ... M^n), one of its constituent substructures, M_i: may be coindexed with the entire semantic structure for coreferentiality: \[ A (M^1 \ldots [M^j]_i \ldots M^n) \]_i.

\[ \text{for } n = 2: \quad [A ([M^1]_i, M^2)]_i \quad \text{"M}^1 \text{ associated with } M^2" \]

\[ \begin{aligned} \text{[M}^1]_i & \\ \text{M}^2 & \end{aligned} \]
Makan ayam
eat chicken

**Syntactic Structure:** \[[S [S maken ] [S ayam ] ]\]

**Semantic Structures:**

(a) Head: -

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A ( EAT, CHICKEN )
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"entity associated with eating and with chicken"
- "the eating and the chicken"
- "the eating or the chicken"
- ... etc ...

(b) Head: maken

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[ A ( EAT..1, CHICKEN ) ]1
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"eating associated with chicken"
- "the chicken ate it"
- "he ate the chicken"
- "he ate it with the chicken"
- "he ate it because of the chicken"
- ... etc ...

(c) Head: ayam

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[ A ( EAT, CHICKEN..i ) ]i
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"chicken associated with eating"
- "the chicken which ate it"
- "the chicken which he ate"
- "the chicken with which he ate it"
- "the chicken because of which he ate it"
- ... etc ...

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**'coordination'**

**'basic sentence'**

**'relative clause'**
When?

Three ways in which child language can differ from adult language:

- The child language has a construction that is ungrammatical in the adult language.
- The child language lacks a construction that is grammatical in the adult language.
- Certain constructions occur with different relative frequencies in child and adult language.

To what extent is this the case in Malay / Indonesian?

Andy, 2:4

(9) Tak pandai cium, pak
NEG know.how blow TRUNC-father
[Trying to play with a toy whistle, he can't make it whistle]
"I can't blow it, Dad"

(10) Nggak mandai ci-cium
NEG AG-know.how REDUPL-blow
[Trying to play with a toy whistle, he can't make it whistle]
"I can't blow it"

(11) Itu diambilnya
DEM:PRX PAT-take-ASSOC
[Playing with his lego, a smaller child crawls up and seems to want to take the pieces away from him, so he gives the lego to somebody else, explaining]
"He'll take it away"

(12) Ambilkan, mak
take-APPL TRUNC-mother
[Pointing to the lid on a jar]
"Give it to me, mum"

(13) Mamak Andy mana?
mother Andy where
[His mother walks off for a moment and he's worried]
"Where's my mum?"

(14) Mana satu lagi?
where one CONJ
[Playing with lego pieces]
"Where's the other one?"
(15) Eh diambreg-ambreg
EXCL  PAT-MESS
[To her cousin who spilled the snacks on the floor]
"You made a mess"

How?

A puzzle:
How do children learn to distinguish between members of the syntactic category S, eg. *semua* "all", and members of the syntactic category S/S, eg. *setiap* "every"?

(16) (a) semua rumah
all house
"all the houses"

(b) rumah semua
house all
"all the houses"

(c) semua
all
"all"

(17) (a) setiap rumah
every house
"every house"

(b) * rumah setiap
house every
"every house"

(c) * setiap
every
"every"

Two solutions to the puzzle:

◆ The distinctions are part of Universal Grammar, ie. innate.
◆ The child learns through negative evidence. That is to say, the child hears all of the constructions in (16a-c), and also the construction in (17a). And, crucially, s/he does not hear the constructions in (17b-c) even in contexts where they would be expected. Accordingly, s/he infers that such constructions are ungrammatical.