S. Robson

Y. Kurniasih

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STUART ROBSON and YACINTA KURNIASIH

Describing Character in Javanese Three Grammatical Categories

The grammar of Javanese is still in the process of being explored. Good work had already been done by Dutch scholars in the pre-war period, but the grammar of the Javanese scholar M. Prijohoetomo (1937) is the one which comes to mind as being most usable from that period. Immediately after the Second World War, the many articles and monographs of E.M. Uhlenbeck, culminating in the volume *Studies in Javanese Morphology* (1978), set the study of Javanese grammar on a solid structural foundation. More recent descriptions, by Indonesian authors (Suharno 1982, Sudaryanto 1991), seem less helpful to the general student. Without doubt the most thorough and reliable work on Javanese grammar, although partly in the form of a course book and in Dutch, is J.J. Ras's *Inleiding tot het Modern Javaans* (1982), while Robson's *Javanese Grammar for Students* (1992) is only a concise summary.

The present Brief Communication takes Ras's work as a starting-point and makes grateful use of his insights. It has as its aim a sketch of three categories of words in Javanese that have in common the fact that they refer to *character* in some way. These have partly been recognized, and partly not. We will present a brief description of these categories, with a few illustrative examples, in order to contribute to a fuller picture of Javanese grammar. Regarding definition, as a 'category' we are looking at groups of words which are marked by the same morphology, correlating with a particular semantic area, and shared syntactic valence.

(1) The first type of word is formed from a base-word which itself is an adjective, with suffixation of *-an*, resulting in a form which is described by Ras as an adjective (Ras 1982:192-3), in that it qualifies a noun. This new adjective then has the meaning of 'possessing the quality indicated by the base-word as a lasting characteristic', or more simply, to have that character *by nature*. Ras gives the following three examples (note that a Javanese adjective can always be translated into English in a verb-like way, 'to be ...'):

from *gugup* – *gugupan* nervous by nature;
 from *isin* – *isinin* easily embarrassed, i.e. shy by nature;
 from *bosen* – *bosenan* soon bored with something (Ras 1982:193).

To these we can add:

from *kuwatir* anxious – *kuwatiran* easily worried;
 from *mangel* irritated – *mangelan* irritable;
 from *nesu* angry – *neson* or *nesonan* to get angry easily.

Ras lists another group of adjectives, also formed from adjectives with suffixation of *-an*, but with a different meaning, namely 'having the quality expressed by the base-word only to a relative degree'. His examples are *anyaran* relatively new; *cukupan* more or less enough; *gedhèn* on a large scale; and *cilikan* on a modest scale (Ras 1982:193). Hence these words can not be included in the category being described here, despite their similar shape.

(2) The second category is less well known. It is given by Ras under the heading 'Transposition from the verb to the class of the adjectives' (Ras 1982:113-4). Here we see a verb, which can be either a simple one or one marked by nasalization (mainly intransitive but also sometimes transitive), when suffixed with *-an*, become transformed into an adjective with the meaning of 'liable to; to have a tendency to do what the verb indicates'. It is interesting that the resulting words sometimes have the added negative nuance of 'to do ... too much, too easily'. Ras lists:

from *manut* to obey – *manutan* obedient;
 from *nangis* to cry – *nangisan* weepy;
 from *nrima* to accept – *nriman* undemanding;
 from *lali* to forget – *lalèn* forgetful.

To these we can add the following examples:

from *kudu* to have to, to feel obliged to – *kudon* to insist on getting one's own way, stubborn;
 from *pangling* to fail to recognize – *panglingan* to have difficulty recognizing people;
 from *meteng* pregnant – *metengan* liable to get pregnant;
 from *murung* to put things off – *murungan* to be in the habit of putting things off;
 from *nguyuh* to urinate – *nguyuhan* to urinate frequently;
 from *ngompol* to wet the bed – *ngompolan* to have a tendency to wet the bed;

from *ngamuk* to get very angry – *ngamukan* liable to blow one's top;
 from *ngongkon* to give orders – *ngongkonan* to be in the habit of giving orders, i.e. bossy;
 from *ngepèk* to pick up – *ngepèkan* liable to pinch things;
 from *mbleruk* to be gloomy – *mblerukan* to always look on the gloomy side;
 from *mutung* to give up – *mutungan* to give up too easily;
 from *ngutang* to incur debts – *ngutangan* to be in the habit of borrowing too much money;
 from *mangan* to eat – *manganan* to be in the habit of eating too much;
 from *ngenyèk* to tease – *ngenyèkan* to be in the habit of teasing;
 from *nonton* to go to the pictures – *nontonan* to be in the habit of going to the pictures too much;
 from *mèlèng* to go off the straight-and-narrow – *mèlèngan* to be liable to break the rules;
 from *manthuk* to agree – *manthukan* to always agree, never say no;
 from *njaluk* to ask for – *njalukan* to be always asking for things;
 from *nggembès* to go flat – *nggembèsan* prone to go flat (of a bicycle tyre, not a person!).

It appears that this group of words is larger than was thought, and the category may be productive.

(3) The third category consists of verbs characterized by the infix *-um-/-em-* (note that this infix, while it may be written as *-um-*, is normally realized as *-em-* in speech). In Modern Javanese, verbs with this infix are always intransitive, and can have various meanings, as discussed in some detail by Ras (Ras 1982:57-60). They include forms with verbal, adjectival and nominal base-words, and the range of meanings includes 'to occupy a certain position', 'to move in a certain way', 'to be in a particular state', or 'to produce a certain sound'. There are also some interesting examples which have the meaning of 'to be at a certain stage of development' (based on a noun), such as:

from *sega* cooked rice – *semega* (of a child) to be at the age of eating a lot of rice;
 from *klambi* coat – *kemlambi* (of rain) soft (not heavy), so that one does not need an umbrella, but only a coat;
 from *rambut* hair – *remambut* (of syrup) to be at the stage when it forms filaments;
 from *sawah* rice field – *semawah* (of water about to boil) to begin to bubble (like water in a rice field standing in the hot sun).

The group that we wish to draw attention to here; however, is formed from a verbal base-word which can also be turned into a transitive verb by means of nasalization. The form with *-um/-em-* has the meaning of 'having such a nature that one would like to perform the action indicated by the verb on it'. As such it applies to a person or thing which inspires that feeling – some of which feelings are positive and some negative. Some examples are:

alongside *nyuwil* to tear off – *cemuwil* as if you would like to tear a bit off, i.e. cute; e.g.:

Putrané Pak Broto sing ijik bayi iku lemu, lucu, nggemesaké lan pipiné menthek-menthek cemuwil

'Pak Broto's baby is plump, funny and cuddly, and his cheeks are chubby and cute';

alongside *nyipok* to give a big kiss – *cemipok* as if you would like to give it a big kiss; e.g.:

Wong-wong lanang padha seneng karo lambéné Marilyn Monroe sing abang mangar-mangar, gedhé lan cemipok

'Men like Marilyn Monroe's lips, which are bright red, big and kissable';

alongside *ngenyut* to suck – *kemenyut* as if you would like to suck it, i.e. attractive; e.g.:

Panas-panas kaya ngéné, ès lilin sing didol ana ngarep pasar kaé kemenyut banget

'As hot as this, the iced lollies being sold in front of the market are very inviting';

alongside *nyekel* to grab – *cemekel* as if you would like to grab it, i.e. tempting to handle, huggable; e.g.:

Aku seneng nggéndong ponakanku, Eri. Eri umuré limang wulan, lemu, séhat, gendhut lan cemekel

'I like carrying my nephew Eri around. Eri is five months, plump, healthy, has a big tummy and is huggable';

alongside *njiwit* to pinch – *jemiwit* as if you would like to pinch them, i.e. annoying; e.g.:

Bocah wédok cilik kuwi criwis, ora isa meneng, obah terus lan jemiwit banget

'That little girl is a chatterbox, she can't keep quiet, keeps on moving and is very annoying';

alongside *ngemethak* to knock on the head – *kemethak* as if you would like

to give them a knock on the head, i.e. stuck-up; e.g.:

Aku duwé kanca sekolah anyar, jenengé Budi. Budi iku kemaki lan senengé bengok-bengok banter karo sirahé geleng-geleng kemethak

'I have a new school friend called Budi. Budi is a know-all, likes to call out loudly while wagging his head in an irritating way';

alongside *nyokot* to take a big bite out of – *cemokot* as if you would like to bite a piece out of it; e.g.:

Saben soré aku liwat dalemé Mbah Wongso, weruh pelemé sing mateng-mateng pating grandhul cemokot

'Every afternoon I pass Mbah Wongso's house and see the ripe mangoes hanging down invitingly';

alongside *nyolok* to poke in the eye – *cemolok* as if you would like to poke them in the eye; e.g.:

Pak Habibie sing jaréné genius kuwi, yèn ngomong cepet, banter, mripaté mentholo bunder muter-muter cemolok

'Pak Habibie, who is supposed to be a genius, when he talks fast and loud, his eyes bulge roundly and swivel as if inviting a 'poke';

alongside *ngampleng* to punch – *kemampleng* as if you would like to give them a punch; e.g.:

Adhiné lanang Tuti sing arané Joko iku nakal, kurang ajar, ora sopan lan kemampleng

'Tuti's younger brother called Joko is naughty, insolent, impolite and needs a punch';

alongside *njambak* to pull the hair – *jemambak* as if you would like to pull someone's hair; e.g.:

Sri senengé pamèr rambuté sing ireng dawa banget sa-bokong krembyak-krembyak jemambak

'Sri likes showing off her black hair, hanging down to her bottom, swinging loose and asking to get pulled'.

The following examples are perhaps more straightforward, as they refer to the character of things, rather than people:

alongside *nggodhog* to boil – *gemodhog* (of peanuts) just right for boiling;

alongside *nyolong* to steal – *cemolong* (of expensive goods in full view) just asking to be stolen;

alongside *nggebug* to beat – *gemebug* (of a snake) tempting one to beat it with a stick;

alongside *nyeplus* to burst open – *cemeplus* (of a small, juicy fruit) ready to be bitten;

alongside *nglethuk* to crunch – *kemlethuk* (of fried peanuts) inviting one to crunch them;

alongside *mbakar* to roast – *gembakar* (of corn, cassava, etc.) at the right time for roasting.

Words which do *not* belong here are the ones characterized by what Ras calls the 'prefix *kum-*' (Ras 1982:59), such as:

from *ayu* beautiful – *kemayu* to act in a prim way (girl);

from *bagus* handsome – *gembagus* to put on airs (boy);

from *pinter* clever – *keminter* to act as if clever;

from *landa* a Dutchman – *kemlanda* to act like a Dutchman.

It can be seen that the emotions involved here can be either positive or negative, and can apply to either persons or to objects. From the examples it will be clear that these words express nuances of feeling that are not to be found in English (or Dutch), making adequate translation difficult.

As a general conclusion, it can be said that they exist alongside a wide variety of other words in the Javanese lexicon referring to emotional states, confirming the impression that Javanese is rich in this area.

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