

Grammar and Interaction in Indonesian: state of the art and prospects

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Indonesian, whether a label for Standard Indonesian, the official language of Indonesia, or a cover term for a complex set of language varieties and lects spoken by upwards of 300 million people (mostly in Indonesia), is one of the least well studied of the world's major languages. The varieties of Indonesian (and/or Malay) spoken in everyday life throughout Indonesia, sometimes referred to as 'Colloquial Indonesian', are even less well studied. For this reason, a huge range of phenomena in the language are not well understood. In a recent paper, Ewing (2018) makes the case for using the approach of Interactional Linguistics to better understand and describe (colloquial) Indonesian. Much work in the Interactional Linguistic (and related Conversation Analytic) framework has demonstrated that grammatical patterns are shaped by their use in social interaction. That is, apparently alternative ways of saying the same thing (e.g. *saya* and *aku*, polar questions with or without a final particle, clauses with unexpressed vs. explicit subjects, etc.) are, in fact, distinct and serve different functions in everyday language use in interaction. This approach has great potential for deepening our understanding of the grammar of Indonesian as it is actually used. In this talk, I review recent work on Indonesian from an Interactional Linguistic perspective, taking stock of the current state of research on (colloquial) Indonesian and mapping possibilities for future studies.

Biodata

Nick Williams is a documentary and interactional linguist working at the University of Potsdam, Germany. He received his PhD in Linguistics from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2016, based on documentation of Kula, a non-Austronesian language of Alor, Indonesia and a study of place reference in everyday conversation in Kula. From 2017-2020 Nick worked as a Postdoctoral Researcher as part of the project "Grammar and multilingual practices through the lens of everyday interaction in two endangered languages in the East Tukano family" with Kristine Stenzel. Nick has also published research on demonstratives in Indonesian and institutional interaction in American English. His current research interests center on further documentation and description of Kula and other languages of Indonesia using the methods of Interactional Linguistics.