

Cognates in Serbian and Indonesian language

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Abstract

A number of cognates in Serbian and Indonesian languages is presented, the possibility of them forming false friends is noted.

Keywords: Serbian language, Indonesian language, cognates, false friends

Introduction

Serbian language and Indonesian language are languages belonging to completely independent language families, respectively Indo-European and Austronesian. Serbia and Indonesia are about 10,000 kilometers away from each other and did not have historical relations until recently.

However, for some reason, Serbian and Indonesian language have similar phonology, more so than genetically closer languages, such as Russian or Javanese, respectively. In addition, both languages readily accept loanwords. All of this has led to them having a number of cognates, to the level that some of them become false friends.

This work aims to present a number of cognates by their origin, without intention to be exhaustive, and discuss their similarities and differences.

Internationalisms

By definition, both languages share a number of internationalisms.

International words of Serbian origin such as *paprika* and *vampir* exist in Indonesian. International words of Indonesian origin such as *orangutan*,¹ *gong* or *bambus* exist in Serbian.

Internationalisms may have the exact same spelling, pronunciation and meaning, such as *mikroskop* or *teleskop*. However, it is also common for them to have larger or smaller differences, as in the examples:

¹ From Indonesian *orang utan*, meaning “forest human”.

Indonesian	Serbian	Meaning
<i>telepon; fon</i>	<i>telefon</i>	telephone
<i>mobil</i>	<i>automobil</i>	automobile
<i>sepeda motor</i>	<i>motorcicl</i>	motorcycle
<i>motor</i>	<i>motor</i>	engine; motorcycle (<i>colloquial</i>)

Interestingly, even though formal terms for motorcycle are different, the colloquial word *motor* turned out to be exactly the same.

Europeanisms

A number of loanwords in Indonesian come from Portuguese or Dutch. They are rare in Serbian, however Serbian may still have their cognates loaned from other Romance or Germanic languages, so here we dub them “Europeanisms”.

These might also be exactly the same, such as *trotoar* (sidewalk), *plafon* (ceiling) or *bioskop* (cinema). Or they might show smaller or larger differences:

Indonesian	Serbian	Indonesian meaning	Serbian meaning	Comment
<i>kopling</i>	<i>kuplung</i>	clutch		
<i>sopir</i>	<i>šofer</i>	chauffeur		
<i>sekrup</i>	<i>šraf</i>	screw		Very dissimilar, since Indonesian comes from Dutch <i>schroef</i> , while Serbian from German <i>Schraube</i> .
<i>bendera</i>	<i>bandera</i>	flag	utility pole	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>zastava</i> .
<i>kubis</i>	<i>kupus</i>	cabbage		
<i>kol</i>	<i>kelj</i>	cabbage	Savoy cabbage	Appropriate Indonesian word is <i>kubis savoy</i> .
<i>murbai</i>	<i>murva</i>	mulberry		In Serbian, dialectal; the usual Serbian word is <i>dud</i> .

Sanskritisms

Indonesian language has a large number of loanwords from Sanskrit. Serbian does not, however as an Indo-European language, some Serbian words are derived from the same Indo-European root and can be recognized as cognates, though often deformed or having underwent a significant semantic shift. Examples include:

Indonesian	Serbian	Indonesian meaning	Serbian meaning	Comment
<i>madu</i>	<i>med</i>	honey		
<i>manusia</i>	<i>muž</i>	human	husband	Both deriving from Indo-European root <i>*mon-</i> .
<i>kepala</i>	<i>kefalo</i>	head	smartness (<i>figuratively</i>)	In Serbian, late borrowing from Greek.
<i>guru</i>	<i>guru</i>	teacher	Indian spiritual teacher	In Serbian, late borrowing, probably through English.

While the differences between the words are often large, there is still potential for false friends, as could be seen with the word *guru*.

Arabisms

Indonesian language also has a number of loanwords from Arabic. Serbian does too, however, in Serbian philology, these are usually called Turkisms, since it is believed they all entered Serbian through Turkish language. These words have the greatest potential to make false friends.

Perhaps the most obvious example is *alat*, which is written and read exactly the same in Serbian and Indonesian, and is even an uncountable noun in Serbian. However, even this is an example of a false friend, since in Indonesian *alat* can refer to a variety of tools and devices, while in Serbian it is limited only to hand tools.

Often, Arabisms in Indonesian will have a general meaning, while in Serbian will be limited only to meanings related to Islam. Examples include:

Indonesian	Serbian	Indonesian meaning	Serbian meaning	Comment
<i>menara</i>	<i>minaret</i>	tower	mosque tower	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>toranj</i> .
<i>nisan</i>	<i>nišan</i>	tombstone	Muslim tombstone; gunsight	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>spomenik</i> .
<i>adat</i>	<i>adet</i>	custom	Muslim custom	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>običaj</i> .

It is also possible for Indonesian words to be used in the vernacular, while Serbian cognates are archaisms or have other differences in style.

Indonesian	Serbian	Indonesian meaning	Serbian meaning	Comment
<i>zaman</i>	<i>zeman</i>	time period; age		In Serbian, archaic and usually used to describe the rule of the Ottoman Empire; appropriate Serbian word is <i>doba</i> .
<i>waktu</i>	<i>vakat</i>	time	time period	
<i>jumlah</i>	<i>džumle</i>	total		In Serbian, usually used for a group of people.
<i>hewan</i>	<i>hajvan</i>	animal		In Serbian, dialectal and often used pejoratively; appropriate Serbian word is <i>životinja</i> .
<i>kadi</i>	<i>kadija</i>	Islamic judge		In Indonesian, archaic; in Serbian, fossilized.

Finally, there are cases where the words are obvious cognates that underwent a semantic shift, though no obvious reason for the shift can be seen.

Indonesian	Serbian	Indonesian meaning	Serbian meaning	Comment
<i>hakim</i>	<i>hećim</i>	judge	Islamic doctor	A person who practices traditional Arabic medicine.
<i>koran</i>	<i>kuran</i>	newspaper	Quran	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>novine</i> ; appropriate Indonesian word is <i>Alquran</i> .
<i>mesjid</i>	<i>mesdžid</i>	mosque	small mosque	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>džamija</i> ; similar Indonesian word is <i>musala</i> . The similar Indonesian word for the former is <i>jemaat</i> , which means congregation or community.

<i>saat</i>	<i>sat</i>	a moment in time	hour; clock	Appropriate Serbian word is <i>trenutak</i> ; appropriate Indonesian word is <i>jam</i> .
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Serbian *sat* and Indonesian *jam* are both used for both the unit of time measurement (hour) and for the device that measures it (clock), so this is an interesting case of words of completely different origin that still ended up being used in the same way semantically.

A comparative study of differences between Arabisms in Serbian, Indonesian and related languages would probably yield additional insights into changes in Arabic culture through time and dynamics of the spread of Islam.

Conclusion

Serbian and Indonesian language share an unexpectedly large number of cognate words. Further identifying and analyzing them might yield new insights into developments of the languages. Identifying false friends among them is of importance for translation between the languages and the study of them as a foreign language.