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J A V A N E S E L A N G U A G E
A N D L I T E R A T U R E

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THE NAME JAVA

"Java" now is in general use as the name of the most important of the Greater Sunda Islands, south of the Philippines. The native pronunciation of the name is Java; in the native language it is written Djava; and the Dutch pronounce it Yava. This name is very old. In one form or another, it is found in the books of ancient Greek, Roman, and Arab geographers. However, in ancient times the name was not used exclusively for the island that now bears it. Sumatra sometimes was called "Greater Java"; and that use of the name only fell into disuse when Portuguese and Dutch navigators brought to Europe more accurate information about the geography of Southeast Asia.

Scholars have found adequate explanations for the geographical names of many countries, have made clear their original meaning. But some geographical names defy all such attempts. Where they came from remains unknown. Many scholars have tried to find the original meaning of the word Djava, but none of their explanations is satisfactory. The most common explanation of the word with "millet-land" is questionable. Probably the name Java must be ranged with others as coming from a very remote past and being untraceable.

In the Javanese language, the word Djava, as a matter of fact, is an adjective, and the island is called Djava-land. The Javanese call themselves Djava-men. Now, this adjective may originally have referred either to the country or to the people. There is reason to believe that the latter was the case, and that Java was in ancient times named after the people that inhabited the island, just as France received its name from the Franks.

Who are the Javanese? For a long time, the Dutch in common parlance called Javanese all the native inhabitants of Java. Those who were better informed called the Sundanese "Mountain-Javanese", since they inhabited chiefly the mountainous parts of Western Java. In the nineteenth century, Dutch scholars made it clear, however, that Java is inhabited by three indigenous nations - distinct in language, customs, and character. They are the Sundanese in the west, the Javanese in the center, and the Madurese in the east*. Some scholars regard the Malay-speaking inhabitants of the district around Batavia as yet a fourth nation.

* A sketch map provided by the author, which unfortunately it is impossible to reproduce here, indicates a purely Javanese-language occupation for the

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SUNDANESE AND "INDONESIAN"

The Sundanese, Javanese and Madurese languages are closely related to each other. Their relation may be compared with that, for example, between English, Dutch, German, Danish and Swedish. Scholars call the three native languages of Java, together with many related languages spoken on others of the Sunda Islands, the Indonesian languages. Among these they also include the Malay idioms of Malaya and Sumatra. The Indonesian languages thus form the most important branch of a very large family of interrelated languages, languages spoken on countless islands of the Indian Ocean and the western, central, and southern Pacific - except for Japan Proper. This family of languages is called the Austronesian. To it belong the various languages of the Philippine Islands which are most closely related to the Indonesian languages of the Indian Archipelago.

This is the correct use of the name Indonesian. The scholars who first composed that name meant it to denote a large group of interrelated languages, not a single language. But today the word "Indonesian" is often used to denote the modernized Malay idiom that is used in political papers and in modern novels. Again we are reminded of the relation that exists between English and the other languages of northwestern Europe. All these languages together form the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Germanic should not be confused with German. But Pan-German imperialist propaganda long has tried to spread confusion by an incorrect use of the term: suggesting that the German language is the truly original Germanic. Similarly, nationalist politicians misuse the name Indonesian to denote the modernized Malay idiom they use in their newspapers. They would fain have this idiom accepted as the Indonesian language par excellence.

Incorrect though they are, the name Indonesian for the modernized Malay idiom and the name Indonesia for the Indian Archipelago now seem definitely to have found their way into the language. Nationalist sentiment has triumphed over scholarship.

The Sundanese, Javanese, and Madurese languages of Java, and the other Indonesian languages spoken in Malaya and on islands of the Indian Archipelago - Malay included - and those spoken in the Philippines, are sufficiently different to make it next to impossible for unschooled people who speak one of

northwestern corner of the island, around Merak and Bantam, for the north coast east of the Chitarum River, and almost everything east of the Chi Tandui River up to the Brantas and Solo River plains, where a number of pockets of joint Javanese and Madurese communities are to be found. The Sundanese occupy all of western Java up to a south-north line from the mouth of the Chi Tandui River, except for the Javanese areas mentioned above, a Malay-speaking triangle around the city of Batavia, and a coastal area to the east of this which is jointly occupied by Javanese and Sundanese. The Madurese, in addition to the districts already mentioned, solidly occupy the plains south of Madura Bay in eastern Java and, of course, Madura Island which is separated from Java by the narrows at Soerabaya. On the Ijen Plateau, in the center of eastern Java, a fairly large area is occupied jointly by Javanese- and Madurese-speaking people. THE EDITOR

these languages to understand people who speak another. However, especially in Java many people possess some knowledge of another language beside their own; and this partial bilingualism influences their speech and their style. Nevertheless, the principal Indonesian languages remain quite distinct. There is nothing to warrant talk of their amalgamation.

JAVANESE LITERATURE

Of the three native languages of Java - Sundanese, Javanese and Madurese - Javanese is in many respects the most important. In the first place, because of the number of people who speak it. According to the Population Census of 1930, 8.5 million of the indigenous population spoke Sundanese, 27.8 million Javanese, and 4.3 million Madurese. There is no reason to believe that the ratio has changed materially since that time. Likewise, among the very large number of languages which together form the Austronesian family, spread over a large part of the Pacific, Javanese is the first as to the number of people who speak it. The Malay idioms of Malaya, Sumatra, Borneo and the Moluccas, and the modernized Malay idiom of recent years, all put together do not count as many speakers as does the Javanese language alone.

Scholars find Javanese an exceedingly interesting language. For something like a thousand years it has been a written language; and during this millenium many generations of Javanese authors and scholars have contributed to a literature of considerable size and importance. This literature is far more extensive than any of the literatures in others of the Indonesian languages - more extensive than the literature in any of the languages included in the great Austronesian family, not excluding the native languages of the Philippines. Its special significance derives, too, from its long, almost unbroken continuity and from the literary beauty of some of its products. In these respects, the Javanese language is unquestionably superior even to Malay, whether we think of the old literary idiom that used to be called High-Malay or of the common idioms of Malaya, Sumatra, and the other islands.

In the ten centuries of authorship, Javanese writers have consecutively used three scripts. In pre-Islamic days they used a script that was Indian in origin but well adapted to the characteristic features of the Javanese language. From this Indian script developed the modern Javanese script. In the fifteenth century, a majority of the Javanese embraced Islam as their religion. As a consequence, Javanese scholars then began to write in Arabic characters, though retaining their native language. Practically all peoples that have turned Muslim have done the same thing, however great the difficulties encountered in adapting the Arabic script to their respective native speech.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, under the influence of a great revival of Javanese literature, Javanese scholars returned to the use of the old script, of Indian origin, that had never been altogether forgotten. This return is one of the most striking proofs of the existence of a strong cultural conservatism which comes to the surface in the grand periods of Javanese civilization. Since that time, only some very pious Muslims continue to use Arabic characters in writing Javanese.

The third script in use is the Latin. It was introduced by the Dutch. It also encountered much resistance on the part of cultural conservatives among

Javanese scholars. Not before the second decade of the twentieth century did the Javanese begin more commonly to use Latin characters in writing their own language. This new preference for the Latin script has a purely practical origin: it is cheaper to print a paper in Latin characters than in Indian ones, which take far more space. Nevertheless, from idealistic considerations the Javanese ought to see to it that their old script does not altogether fall into disuse. Indo-Javanese characters may effectively be used, for example, for artistic purposes - as in the headings and decorations of books and letters. Fortunately, we can be fairly certain that some understanding of the cultural value of the old script will survive among Javanese artists, notwithstanding the strong modernizing influences which seem to prevail at present.

MANNERS OF SPEECH

During its long history, the Javanese language has accumulated a rich vocabulary. The large number of Javanese words is due, in the first place, to borrowings from foreign languages, especially Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, and Dutch. This is the most frequent way in which languages increase their vocabulary. In the second place, the number of Javanese words has grown through a process of transformation which makes new words out of existing words while the meaning remains the same. Such transformation often consists of a change in the vowel - as, for example, when koeta becomes kita (pronounced koot'ta and keet'ta). Both mean town, city. The original word is koeta, borrowed from India, where we find it in such geographical names as Calcutta - meaning the city of Kali (the name of a goddess). With the faculty of changing vowels, the Javanese language has produced the secondary word, kita. Both are in daily use and have precisely the same meaning. But they should not be used indiscriminately; the correct use of either in modern Javanese follows rules dictated by the manners of speech.

The existence of manners of speech is a characteristic feature of the Javanese language. People who are not well informed sometimes say that Javanese is not a single language, but that there are several, at least two, and that these are used interchangeably. This is the impression which the peculiar Javanese manners of speech may make on a foreigner. But it is a wrong impression.

The use of manners of speech in Javanese may be explained as follows. The whole vocabulary can be divided into several groups of words - at least three. By far the most numerous groups consists of words which it is permissible to use in any circumstances. They are not subject to any particular rules of use and non-use. Another group consists of words that are commonly called High-Javanese. A third is called Low-Javanese.

High-Javanese words are meant for use in addressing people politely. In the Javanese society of bygone days, both at the courts and in the villages, everybody knew his or her proper place in relation to others: noble or common, senior or junior, master or servant, and so forth. People of inferior rank of course always were expected to be courteous in addressing people of superior rank. Properly to express their deference they had to use High-Javanese words. In modern times, it has become difficult to discern differences in rank; and High-Javanese words are used on any occasion when a polite mode of expression is appropriate.

The specifically Low-Javanese words are the complements of the High-Javanese. In the Javanese society of the past persons of superior rank were in the habit of using Low-Javanese words when addressing people of inferior standing. This practice still obtains. But on the whole the use of Low-Javanese words tends to become merely an expression of familiarity - as is the case with the French use of tu as a pronoun still occasionally heard when a master addresses a servant (or an officer a private) but now more universally reserved to express intimacy in personal relations. Whenever people who are not related to each other and do not wish to be on familiar terms address each other, they use High-Javanese terms.

Therefore, although the words koeta and kita, given as examples above have the same meaning, they are not interchangeable. Koeta is Low-, and kita High-Javanese; the first is used in ordinary speech, the second in legal language, for example. This example also illustrates the fact that the Low-Javanese word is the original one, as a rule. Most of the High-Javanese words are new words, either borrowed or produced by the transforming process. Compared with the Low-Javanese words, they are secondary.

POETICAL IDIOM

There is still another class of words in the Javanese language, called Kawi (pronounced kar'wee). Again, they do not constitute a separate language but can be explained with reference to their origin.

In the ten centuries of its history, Javanese literature has known two great periods of intensive production. The first came in the pre-Mohammedan period, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of our era. The second came in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this second great period of letters, Javanese scholars assiduously studied the works of their predecessors, written four or five centuries ago. It is hardly surprising that often they did not understand them. In the intervening centuries the vocabulary had changed and developed. Moreover, there was not much left of thirteenth-century literature in the eighteenth century. Many books had been lost as a consequence of wars, fires, earthquakes, floods, insect pests and other disasters. Of the books left many contained textual mistakes, introduced by copyists who either did not understand the old literary idiom or were unfamiliar with the old script. In this connection it must be realized that books in Java were formerly recopied in each generation, so as to conserve the texts. Whether written on prepared palm leaves or on paper made from tree-bark, books did not, as a rule, keep for more than a century - or perhaps three quarters of a century - in the moist tropical climate, even when they were carefully conserved. Very old manuscripts in Javanese or any other Indonesian language, comparable with the precious old manuscripts in European languages, do not exist in Java.

The eighteenth-century Javanese scholars who studied the pre-Mohammedan literature came across many words of the meaning of which they were not sure. Some of these were really old words, some merely corruptions introduced by the copyists. All these words the scholars called Kawi, i.e., "poetical" words because found in use by the poets of olden times. Later on, this term came to be used also to mean more generally words to be found only in the poetical idiom of Javanese literature.

It is clear, therefore, that Kawi is far from being an independent language, distinct from present-day Javanese. It may be said to be the name of an antiquated idiom. Javanese poets of subsequent ages have made use of this idiom, and still do so when they wish to embellish their style with pre-Mohammedan expressions.

Because of the rather intricate manners of speech, and especially of the introduction of many Kawi words in the literature, the Javanese language is sometimes thought of as very difficult for foreigners to learn. Compared with the relative ease with which its neighbors in Java - Sundanese and Madurese - may be mastered, this is probably true. And, of course, Javanese is more difficult to learn than Low-Malay, the common mixture of Malay idioms and other languages, which is used as a lingua franca, or the pidgin used in the Indian Archipelago. But this is not surprising, since during its long history as a literary language Javanese has developed a character of its own to a far greater extent than have other Indonesian languages.

MODERN GROWTH

The difficulties which foreigners must overcome to learn the Javanese language have been exaggerated as a result of misunderstanding and insufficient information. Javanese certainly is no more difficult to learn than are the principal languages of India. In those parts of Java that are inhabited by Javanese, foreign residents - both Europeans and Chinese - in close contact with Javanese of the lower and middle classes have always in former days had some knowledge of the Javanese language. In some measure this is still true today.

As a matter of fact, foreigners always have known from experience that to know something of the language of the people with whom they have to deal is at least very useful if not actually indispensable to the establishment of really good understanding. Neither a knowledge of Low-Malay, the lingua franca of the Archipelago, nor that of the so-called Bahasa Indonesia, the modernized Malay idiom of the political papers and the modern novel, is comparable in this respect with a knowledge of the really native language of the Javanese.

As a result of various circumstances that cannot be discussed, Low-Malay has become the means of establishing a superficial mutual understanding - mainly for purposes of business - between people of different nationality who meet in the cities and towns of Java. But it should be realized that a very large majority of Javanese do not live in cities and towns. They are dispersed over thousands of villages on the plains and in the hills. To enter into any really hearty contact with this majority it is necessary to know the Javanese language. Missionaries know this very well.

Since about the end of the nineteenth century, some Javanese authors have tried to modernize the literature of their country in imitation of Dutch letters. But the power of tradition proved too strong for most of them. These modern Javanese writers found it extremely difficult to discontinue old linguistic habits - such, for example, as the use of highfalutin Kawi words. It is because of these old habits which are bound up with Javanese literature that in its modern development it has stayed behind the growth of new Malay literature, written in the so-called Bahasa Indonesia, as an expression of new ideas.

1. The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the car was the smell of the sea. It was a salty, bracing scent that seemed to fill the air. I took a deep breath, feeling the cool breeze on my face. The sun was shining brightly, and the water was a deep, vibrant blue. I could see the whitecaps in the distance, and the sound of the waves crashing against the shore was a constant, soothing hum. I felt a sense of peace and tranquility that I had never experienced before. It was as if the world had slowed down, and I was finally at home.

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The development of this Bahasa Indonesia began toward the end of the nineteenth century with the modernization of the High-Malay literary idiom. In the course of time, many influences worked on it; but from the beginning it was dominated by the example of Dutch literature and Dutch scholarship. It has very little character of its own; not much is to be found in this Bahasa Indonesia literature that is original. Modern Javanese literature, on the contrary, has kept intact much of the characteristic style developed by the long line of Javanese authors from remote times.

For the future of a truly national culture, this conservatism of Javanese authors, their reverence for a long and glorious history, undoubtedly is an asset. In time, it may be surmised, the higher culture of Java will profit from its conservatism - as has been the case in other conservative nations.

At present, Javanese language and literature suffer from a premeditated neglect on the part of the Republican authorities in Central Java. Some extremists even seem to think that the Javanese as a nation should abandon the Javanese language and adopt the so-called Bahasa Indonesia. They imagine that the amputation of the member of the body of Indonesian languages which has the oldest literary history would help to establish unity among the numerous nations of the Archipelago which speak so many different Indonesian languages. The ultimate aim of this group of extremists seems to be to substitute Bahasa Indonesia for all the native languages spoken in the Islands, so as to enforce the political unity of which they dream.

What has here been said about the relation between the Javanese language and Bahasa Indonesia is in a measure true for all Indonesian languages. But since this paper deals only with Java, further mention need here be made only of the prospects of Sundanese and Madurese. Both of these nations have for many centuries undergone the civilizing influence of the higher culture of the Javanese. In the past, Javanese civilization has gone through a period of great expansion. In fact, it spread all over Java and along the coasts of neighboring islands. In the languages and in the higher culture of many nations of the Archipelago, Javanese influence is clearly discernible. It is improbable that this age-old cultural influence will disappear altogether, and that the so-called Bahasa Indonesia and a shallow modernism will take its place.

What will be the fate of the Javanese language and of Javanese culture in the near future? It would be difficult to say. The present is a time of transition and confusion. Java has not seen the like of it since the fall of the kingdom of Mataram in central Java, which took place in the turmoil of wars and rebellions in the middle of the eighteenth century. We should remember, however, that, although they raged all over Java, those wars were succeeded by a long period of political and social stability. And this resulted from the separation between the kingdoms and principalities of central Java on the one hand and the areas under direct Dutch rule - carried out by both Dutch and Javanese officials - on the other. This separation has lasted for almost two centuries and has become familiar to all inhabitants of Java. It is significant that the second great period of Javanese letters, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fell into the period of this separation of authority.

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CONCLUSION

To summarize, Javanese is the language of thirty million people. The opinion that the Javanese language is dying is wholly false; indeed, it betrays a complete lack of knowledge, in those who hold it, of parallel historical phases in Europe and Asia. Centuries of experience have shown that among the elements which make up a national culture, language is the most vital and the most resistant. Neither in Europe nor in Asia have nations in their entirety ever abandoned their national language to substitute for it a foreign one, though under pressure the scope and function of the native speech sometimes have been greatly reduced, with the result of intense suffering. To bring about such a change in Java would require an amount of pressure many times heavier than that brought to bear on the Javanese at the present time.

Even if it were possible, the suppression of a nation's language just now would meet with unusually unfavorable conditions. This time calls for liberty and equality of rights - not least the rights of national civilizations. Not only individuals, but nations and national cultures, too, deserve to be respected and if need be to be defended against aggression.

For foreigners who stay in one of Java's rural districts and wish to have contact with the common people, it will remain indispensable to know something of the Javanese language. For European, American, or Chinese town dwellers, too, although they may not have much direct contact with the people (other than servants who are a class by themselves), some knowledge of the Javanese language always will be useful. Many Dutch interned in the camps of central Java during the Japanese occupation have had ample opportunity to appreciate this fact.

All authorities, corporations and companies, that employ foreigners to work in the Javanese-language parts of Java among and with Javanese should make some knowledge of the Javanese language obligatory for these foreign employees. The same is, of course, true, of the other native languages of Java and, for the matter of that, on all the islands of the Archipelago. To learn some simple Javanese, Sundanese or Madurese, a couple of months should suffice if the learner is sufficiently in earnest to give his time to this task. Nor will these months be lost, considering the profit and pleasure which a really good understanding with the common Javanese, Sundanese or Madurese people will bring. For missionaries and officials who work among the Javanese, ignorance of the Javanese language is, of course, nowadays inexcusable.

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