Towards a history, and an understanding of Indonesian slang

John BOWDEN

Jakarta Field Station
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
and
Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

In this paper, I sketch out a brief history of Indonesian slang and make some comparisons with slang in some other languages in order to locate Indonesian slang in its wider multilingual context. By its nature, slang is often ephemeral and it is usually confined to spoken genres of language. Thus, it can be difficult to find records of older slang, and any history of slang is certain to be incomplete. Slang is often confined to particular subgroups within a society and it is often used to conceal its meaning from members of other subgroups in society. It is no coincidence that some of the first dictionaries of, for example, English slang were collections of the language of criminals and sailors. Indonesian slang is no different, so in this paper I will look at the slang of two subgroups in particular: *preman* (or gangsters) and gay men.

1. Introduction – what is slang?

Slang is a phenomenon that is found in many languages, and it is a phenomenon that people in contemporary Indonesia recognise very well too. As in many places, some Indonesians express angst at the 'withering away of linguistic standards' that the use of slang entails for them. University student Novi A, for example is quoted in the Jakarta Post of 11 September 2009 as saying that using slang was detrimental to the national language. "The next generation will not know whether slang is proper Indonesian or not, but they will use it daily." On the other hand, film director Joko Anwar is reported in the same article as saying "It is an informal language that makes conversation more natural. It means that new words can be taken up in Indonesian, and there is nothing wrong with that." Whatever one's attitude to slang, it is clear that Indonesian slang is vibrant, and widely used by young people and others.

Most people seem to have an implicit understanding of what constitutes slang, and they can usually identify it when they hear it. However, slang is not easy to define. Slang is a particular kind of informal speech, but it is not the same things as informal speech, and many popular accounts of so-called slang in the Indonesian media fail to see the distinction. What makes slang different from informal speech in general is that it consists of words that are usually restricted to a particular subculture or group of people. In the same article quoted above, for example, Joko Anwar is quoted as saying that "he would use *kamu* (you) to address a new friend, but after a while he would use *lu* (you) to indicate friendship", as if *lu* was a slang term. In my view, however, *lu* is not a slang term, but rather a lexical item from a regional variety of Indonesian, namely colloquial Jakarta Indonesian or *bahasa sehari-hari Jakarta*. (See Sneddon 2006 for a comparison of significant differences between Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian and the standard Indonesian language.) The use of terms like *lu* in colloquial Jakarta Indonesian is not

restricted to a particular subculture of Jakartans, but it is widely used by almost all Jakartans in informal contexts, as it has been by centuries of Betawi speakers.

There have been few attempts to define slang as a technical term in linguistics. One such attempt was made by Dumas and Lighter (1978: 14-15). They suggest that for something to be slang it must fulfil at least two of the following criteria:

- It lowers, if temporarily, "the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing"; in other words, it is likely to be considered in those contexts a "glaring misuse of *register*."

- Its use implies that the user is familiar with whatever is referred to, or with a group of people who *are* familiar with it and use the term.

- It's a taboo term in ordinary discourse with people of a higher social status or greater responsibility.

- It replaces "a well-known conventional synonym". This is done primarily to avoid discomfort caused by the conventional synonym or discomfort or annoyance caused by having to elaborate further.

These criteria need further discussion. The first of them is probably the most straightforward: slang is less formal than other kinds of language. This criterion on its own would include items such as *lu* 'you' from Jakarta Indonesian, as it would items like 'ain't' or 'dunno' from English, so the second criterion is needed to rule words like these out. The second criterion relates to social group membership on the part of the people who use it. People who use slang together are generally part of some social group where membership of the group involves sharing some vocabulary that people from outside the group do not usually know. Note that using terms which members of a particular subgroup use with each other is not enough on its own to characterise slang, since technical jargon is also language shared by an in-group and not used by others. However, technical jargon does not lower the tone of a conversation and it remains formal language since it can be used in scientific articles, mechanics text books and so on. The third criterion is more problematic since it leaves undiscussed how the authors might define terms like 'taboo' or 'ordinary discourse'. While it may be the case that particular items of slang are indeed taboo in some situations, this is not always the case by any means. The fourth criterion basically argues that slang terms usually have conventional synonyms. This would also help to rule out some words from technical jargon. A word like 'phoneme', for example, might be restricted in use to linguists or people who have some training in linguistics, but it does not really have a plain language counterpart. We might note that a slang term and its conventional synonym usually have distinctly different connotations, and these differences in connotations help to make some terms slang while others are not.

One of the greatest difficulties in trying to understand the history of slang is that by its nature slang is ephemeral: as an informal speech style, it is rarely written down and records of it are hard to find. In English, the fist records of 'cant', or thieves' slang come to us from Elizabethan plays, wherein beggars and thieves were depicted using the cant of the day. The first collection of criminal (or any other kind of) slang in English was published in 1674, in a book entitled 'The Canting Academy', but the

author of the text is unknown.[1] Another early English collection was compiled by an author known only as 'B.E.' in another (1692) book published in London. It is hardly surprising that criminal society is the first place from which comprehensive collections of slang are found. One of slang's most important functions is to provide a way of revealing one's thoughts and intentions to one's own group, but to keep them hidden from other groups. For criminals, clearly the ability to conceal what one is talking about (or at least to keep one's intentions hidden from the police) is a very important consideration. Like English, Indonesian also has a variety of slang expressions which have their origins in the criminal underworld, as do many other languages. Some examples of criminal slang from 17th century England, from Indonesian, and Yakuza slang from Japan are given in (1) – (3) below.[2]

(1)   **English – London gangster slang**
         prig-napper   'a horse stealer'
         queer-ken   'a prison'
         smudge   'one that lies underneath a bed, to watch an opportunity to
                                 rob the house'
         shop-lift   'one the filches commodities out of a shop, under the
                                 pretence of cheapning, or bying them of the shopkeeper'

(2)   **Indonesian preman slang (prokem)**
         mémblé   'ugly, frowning'
         kécé   'beautiful, good-looking'
         bokap   'father'
         bispak   'prostitute'

(3)   **Japanese (Yakuza)**
         itachi   'weasel', but in the yakuza world also a term for a very good
                                 police detective
         kakuseizai   speed, amphetamines, meth
         kuromaku   lit. 'black curtain'. A fixer who works behind the scenes'
         shobadai   'protection money paid by shopkeepers to the yakuza'

2. The origins of modern Indonesian youth slang[3]

Criminal slang is of great importance in the history of Indonesian slang. Rahardja and Chambert-Loir's (1988) *Kamus Bahasa Prokem* 'dictionary of *prokem* language' is

---

[1] The publication in question's full title (with original capitalisation preserved) was 'THE CANTING Academy; or Villanies Discovered. WHEREIN IS SHEWN the Mysterious and Villainous Practices of that wicked Crew commonly known as Hectors, Trapanners, Gilts &c. With several New Catches and SONGS: Also a complete Canting Dictionary, both of old Words, and such as are now most in use. A Book very useful and necessary (to be known but not practis'd) for all People.

[2] The English examples here are taken from the 'The canting academy' by anonymous (1674). *Prokem* examples are from Rahardja and Chambert-Loir (1988). The Japanese yakuza examples are culled from the Japanese Subculture Research Center's website at http://www.japansubculture.com/resources/yakuza-terminology/.

[3] In this paper, we will focus primarily on the slang that is used today by the youth of Jakarta, although other kinds of slang will also be mentioned occasionally.

actually of youth slang in Jakarta of that period, but they point out that the *prokem* used by students and other youth in Jakarta in the late 1980s and earlier actually had its roots in criminal slang. They say that the first published examples of *prokem* appeared in the novel *Ali Topan Detektip Partikelir* 'Ali Topan Private Detective' written by Teguh Esha and published in 1978. In this novel the *prokem* was a feature of *preman* 'gangster' speech. Indeed, the name *prokem* is itself derived from the word *preman* by means of a ludling[4] in which the onset of the first syllable of the word has –*ok* inserted between it and the initial syllable's rhyme, thus *prem + ok > prokem*. Further discussion of *prokem* from this period can be found in Slone's (2003) book on prokem in which he goes through a detailed analysis of where *prokem* vocabulary originates.

When Teguh Esha's book came out, the slang of *preman* was already being used by students and other youth in Jakarta, and these people adopted the term *bahasa gaul* (henceforth *gaul*) to refer to the style of speech. By the late 1990s and after the fall of Suharto, *bahasa gaul* was already on the way to becoming a commercial publishing phenomenon as well as an underground student or criminal one. Debby Sahertian's (1999) *Kamus Bahasa Gaul* 'Dictionary of the Gaul language' (or as it is subtitled on the cover *Kamasutra Bahasa Gaul*) became a big publishing success. It was reprinted thirteen times by June 2002. Debby Sahertian's book was part of a renaissance in Indonesian culture that occurred after the downfall of Suharto. The period immediately after his downfall saw a flowering of cultural artefacts of many kinds which would not have been permitted during Suharto's reign. Young women like Debby Sahertian and Ayu Utami (whose celebrated and wildly popular book *Saman* came out at about the same time as Sahertian's dictionary) were prominent in this cultural flowering, when many once taboo topics were being discussed in print. Sahertian notes that by the late 1990s *preman* cant was not the only significant source for youth *gaul*. Youth slang also relied heavily on gay slang for its vocabulary. Indeed the name *gaul* appears to have its source in gay cant. As Sahertian (2002: xii) puts it:

> Yang menarik adalah bahwa pada *kalajengking* homoseksual (gay dan lesbian) telah pula diciptakan cant *tersendora* untuk kelompoknya. Dan yang menarik adalah bahasa para gay dan lesbi *indang jugria tinta* langgreng, karena pada *berapose* tahun *indang* telah timbul jenis cant gay yang lain *lenggang* yang mereka namakan "Bahasa Gaul", dan "bahasa gaul" *indang* kini semakin ngepop atau ngetrend, sehingga diambil alih *jugria* oleh para remaja dan *organda* muda dari *kalajengking pengusahania*, aktris film, sinetron, mahasiswa dan lain-lain.[5]

Like criminals, gays and lesbians have often felt the need for some kind of secret shared vocabulary, especially when legal and social regimes have made them oppressed outcasts. Gay cant is again not limited to English and Indonesian speakers but is

---

[4] See §3.1 for further discussion of ludlings.

[5] The italic emphasis is from Sahertian and is used to mark the *gaul* terms which are found in the dictionary proper. My translation of is as follows: 'What is interesting is that in homosexual (gay and lesbian) circles, their own cant has also been created. And what is also interesting about gay and lesbian slang is that it is not everlasting because several years ago a new form of gay slang they called *bahasa gaul* arose, and *gaul* has become more and more popular or trendy, as it was also adopted by youth and young people from the necessary circles [i.e., those who had the ability to disseminate the cant widely, J.B.], film and soap opera actors, students and others.'

widespread around the world, as shown in (4) – (6), where examples of gay slang from English, Indonesian and Japanese again show.[6]

(4) **English gay slang**
    twink   'young hairless male'
    bear   'large often hairy male'
    cottaging   'having, or looking for, sex in public toilets'
    basket   'bulge of male genital visible through his trousers'

(5) **Indonesian gay slang**
    bencong   'gay person' (< *banci* + -ong)
    kucing   'male prostitute' (literally 'cat'. Cf. Japanese neko literally 'cat' for 'bottom in a gay relationship'.)
    waria   'transvestite' (< *wanita* 'woman' + *pria* 'man')
    akika   'I, me' (< *aku* 'I, me')

(6) **Japanese gay slang**
    okama   'gay person' (the noun *kama* means 'pot', as in 'a large pot used for cooking stews'.)
    okoge   'woman who hangs out with gay men' (cf. 'fag hag' in English; *okoge* is literally 'rice that sticks to the pot'
    nyu-hafu   'male to female transsexual' (from English 'new half')
    o su su   'man who hangs out with lesbians'

3. Ways of forming slang

Creation of slang means the creation of new words, or the adoption of old words for new purposes. The major slang creation processes for Indonesian are detailed below.

3.1 Ludlings

Ludlings are a kind of regular and systematic word-play defined by Laycock (1971) as being formed "as the result of a transformation or a series of transformations acting regularly on an ordinary language text, with the intent of altering the form, but not the content of the original message, for purposes of concealment or comic effect". For English speaking readers, perhaps the best-known ludling is what we know as 'pig latin'. To speak pig latin, one removes the first letter from a word and puts it, plus the sequence /ei/ at the end of the word, thus creating a new word. By means of this ludic transformation, then, 'pig latin' becomes *igpay atinlay*. For those who know the rule for pig latin formation, the derived words are instantly recognisable, but for those who don't, the derived words are opaque.

A fairly large percentage of the vocabulary of *prokem* was created by means of ludlings of one kind or another. The best known of these is the *-ok-* transformation via which the name for *prokem* itself is derived from the Malay word *preman* 'gangster' (< Dutch *vrijman* 'free man'). The ludling works (roughly) by taking the first part of the word

---

[6] The English gay slang and the Indonesian gay slang come from my own general knowledge. The data on Japanese slang was provided by Yoshimi Miyake to whom thanks are owed.

and inserting –ok- into it. (See Slone, 2003: 64-71 for a detailed analysis.) Other *prokem* words derived via this (and similar) processes include *bedokel* 'operation' from *bedel* + *-ok-*, *bokap* 'father' from *bapak* + *-ok-*, *nyokam* 'mosquito' from *nyamuk* + *-ok-*, and many others.[7]

Slone (2003: 64-71) details a rather large number of ludling transformations which were also found in *prokem*, but some of them do not seem to be very productive. One of these, for example, is the prefix *cong-* but it only seems to occur attached to the word *tipu* 'trick' to make *congtipu*.

One of the more productive ludlings also mentioned in Slone is the use of the suffix *–ong*. Slone (2003: 67) notes the form *lesbong* from 'lesbian' and also with the meaning 'lesbian'. Although Slone only notes *lesbong* (and *lesbong* is the only form based on this ludling that I can find in Rahardja and Chambert-Loir (1988)), the ludling is actually extremely productive in modern gay slang, and Sahertian (2002) notes the existence of a number of words derived from the same process including *bencong* from *banci* 'transexual', *jendong* from *janda* 'widow', and *kalong* from *kalau* 'if'. As we have already pointed out, Sahertian claims that much of the youth slang she calls *gaul* was first derived from gay slang, and the preponderance of *–ong* (and similar) forms found in her dictionary bear testimony to this idea. While Rahardja and Chambert-Loir do not point to the gay provenance of the *lesbong* 'lesbian' form found in their dictionary, it is clearly one of a myriad of similar forms that came from this subculture and made their way into contemporary Indonesian youth slang in Jakarta. Perhaps the form was borrowed into criminal cant from gay cant at an earlier stage.

While Jakarta slang is the primary focus of this article it should be mentioned that ludlings play an important role in gay slang throughout the archipelago. Oetomo (2013), for example provides a detailed template of a variety of ludlings used in the language of Indonesia's gay men and transgender women and people who relate to them, mostly focused on the communities found in Bandung and Surabaya. He lists some of these ludlings as detailed below. The first of his ludlings (illustrated in 7a) is the one we have already encountered in forms like *lesbong* and *bencong*, while those illustrated in (7b) and (7c) use the same vowel replacement rule (V > è), but use different suffixes. It is noteworthy that not all potential derived forms are equally acceptable according to Oetomo. While *polèsong* from *polisi* is normal, *polèses* from *polisi* is only marginally acceptable under rule (1b), while none of the potential derived forms from rule (7c) **polèsi, *bènci*, nor **hèmi* are acceptable at all, although other words are derived via these processes.

(7)   **Omong Cong, Omong Ces, Omong Ci(?)**

(a)   (C)V(C)(C)V(C) → … (C)è(C)(C)ong
       banci → *bèncong* 'transgender woman'
       homo → *hèmong* 'homosexual'
       polisi → *polèsong* 'police'

---

[7] In addition to the references already cited, see also Dreyfuss (1983) for an earlier discussion of this ludling.

(b)   (C)V(C)(C)V(C) → … (C)è(C)(C)es
       banci → *bènces* 'transgender woman'
       homo → *hèmes* 'homosexual'
       polisi → ?*polèses* 'police'

(c)   (C)V(C)(C)V(C) → … (C)è(C)(C)i
       kontol → *kènti* 'penis'
       p(e)rempu(w)an → *pèwi* 'woman'
       loco → *lèci* 'masturbate'

With what Oetomo calls –*in*-fixation, the first syllable's onset is followed by the infix –*in*-, but again, only some derived forms are acceptable according to him.

(8)   **-*in*- fixation**
       (C1)V(C2)(C3)V(C4)… → (C1)inV(C2)C3
       banci → *binan* 'transgender woman'
       homo → **hinom* 'homosexual'
       polisi → **pinol* 'police'

       but…

       laki → *linak* 'male, man'
       èkstasi → *inèk(s)* 'ecstasy (drug)'
       lèsbi(an) → *linès* 'lesbian'

The final ludling described by Oetomo involves suffixing the first CVC sequence with –*seʔ*. Again, only some of the potential derived forms are deemed acceptable by speakers according to Oetomo.

(9)   ***seʔ*-fixation**
       (C)V(C)(C)V(C)… → (C)V(C) seʔ
       banci → *banseʔ* 'transgender woman'
       homo → *homseʔ* 'homosexual'
       polisi → ?*polseʔ* 'police'

Ludling formations like the ones described by Oetomo above are confined to derivations of particular words and are not infinitely productive, but the ludling games that they are based on seem to be more or less infinitely productive. It would appear that the initial wordplay games produce a limitless variety of derivations, but only some of them actually 'stick' and become recognised words in the slang dialects they enter. Certainly, the –*ok*- infixation that occurred in *prokem* is not at all productive any more, but a few words such as *bokap* < bapak 'father', *pembokat* < *pembantu* 'maid' and *nyokap* (presumably from Betawi *nyak*) 'mother' have survived, but not always in their pure ludling form. Other ludling formation processes are more active, as in the Papuan Malay gay ludling described by Gil (2013) and exemplified below. In this ludling the sequence -*oCe* is attached to the end of the word after any final vowel has been removed. The C in the suffix is a copy of the final consonant of the root to which the suffix is attached. In these examples every word in each utterance is transformed via the same ludling.

(10) *Pitote   sekaroreng   bahasose   barore*
      Pit   sekarang   bahasa   baru
      David   now   language   new
      [Having fnished a story in one ludling, announcing that a new ludling will be
      used.]
      'David, now another language.'

(11) *Koyoye   punyonye   bosose   sapope*
      koi   punya   bos   sapa
      2sg   have   boss   who
      [From a discussion about daily life in a hairdressers salon]
      'Who is your boss?'

3.2 Other word plays

Ludlings are not the only forms of word play that are used to derive new words, and a
(far from comprehensive) selection of the other word play games that have contributed
to the development of Indonesian slang are discussed below.

3.2.1 Semi-ludlings

Sometimes, lexical forms occur that look almost like productive ludlings, but in fact
they do not quite fit the template exactly. An example of this kind which is culled from
Sahertian's book is the form *dingdong* for *dingin* 'cold'. While this bears a superficial
resemblance to the '*omong cong*' ludling described in (1) above, the excrescent /d/
between *ding* and *ong* seems to be there only because it makes the output *dingdong*
more whimsical.

3.2.2. Near homophones or words that have phonological similarities

Using a near homophone with an opposite or unexpected meaning to refer to something
else is also a popular strategy and a large number of such forms are found in Sahertian's
book. A few examples culled from her dictionary are given in (12).

(12) | **Form** | **meaning** | **Notes** |
      |---|---|---|
      | *jelita* | 'ugly' | In ordinary language, 'ugly' is *jelek*, and the phonologically similar form *jelita* actually means 'pretty' |
      | *pendekar* | 'short' | In ordinary language *pendekar* means 'warrior', while *pendek* is 'short' |
      | *Bing Slamet* | 'confused' | Bing Slamet was a well-known Indonesian singer and comical actor from the 1950's and 1960's. The normal word for 'confused' is *bingung*. |
      | *Jacky Chen* | 'Jakarta' | The capital city of Indonesia. |
      | *makarena* | 'eat' | The normal form for 'eat' is *makan* which is substituted by the name of a once popular dance. |
      | *Tasmania* | 'bag' | The normal word for 'bag' is *tas*. |

Ukraina	'size'	Indonesian for 'size is *ukuran* which is phonologically close to *Ukraina* 'Ukraine'.
Dolly Parton	'dollar'	Dolly Parton is a famous country singer with notoriously large breasts.

Using names of people which have similarities in sound to an everyday word as slang terms as in a few of the examples above continues to be a popular way to create new slang vocabulary. Some of the popular terms can be extremely vulgar and possibly even libellous (which possibly explains why none of this sort of slang term was found in Sahertian's dictionary). Oetomo (2103) reports a few terms of this nature as shown in (13).[8]

(13) **Form**   **Meaning**   **Explanation**

Angelina Sondakh	'dog'	Indonesian for 'dog' is *anjing*, and Angelina Sondakh was a former actress and corrupt politician. *Anjing* can also be used as a fairly obscene insult in Indonesian.
Meriam Bellina	'to shit'	Colloquial Indonesian for 'to shit' is *beqol* and Meriam Bellina was an actress.

3.2.3 Reversed language or *basa walikan*

While word reversal does not seem to play an extensive role in contemporary Jakarta slang formation, it does seem to have played a more important role in other places and at other times. Slone's discussion of 1980s *prokem* includes discussion of a number of different kinds of word reversal, and he mentions the following terms amongst others:

(14) **Reversed form**   **Original form**   **Meaning**

Reversed form	Original form	Meaning
jibi	*biji*	'seed'
pergi	*giper*	'go'
bacang	*cabang*	'branch'
bo'at	*obat*	'medicine'
cubat	*cabut*	'pull up, unplug'
cikung	*kucing*	'cat'

As can be seen from the previous examples a fairly wide range of different kinds of reversals is in evidence. The first two involve transposition of syllables while the others involve a variety of different kinds of transpositions. As far as I am aware none of the above forms seems to have survived into contemporary Jakarta youth slang.

In other parts of Indonesia, *basa walikan* is an ongoing and extremely productive way of forming slang. These days, very few reversals appear to exist in Jakarta slang, but in

---

[8] The use of people's names as profanities is not confined to Indonesian. Cockney rhyming slang from the 1980's in Britain included such delightful expressions as 'I need to do a Douglas' where 'Douglas' means 'turd' and comes from the name of Douglas Hurd, who served as a member of cabinet in the governments of both Margaret Thatcher and John Major. An anonymous reviewer also points to another cockney rhyming slang example whereby 'Liza' is used for 'telly' or 'television' after Liza Minelli the actress.

other places there is very active reversal. Yannuar and Kadarisman (2015) sketch out the situation in Malang where word reversals are widely used by the young and not so young. They describe an ongoing situation where older people can be defined by their use of reversals that are no longer used by contemporary youth, and contemporary youth can be defined by their own typical reversals. Malang slang originated in the post World War 2 period when local independence soldiers used the reversals to hide their messages from the Dutch colonial forces.

An interesting aspect of the Malang reversals is that they are used to apply to words from both Javanese and Indonesian and peppered into discussions in each language indiscriminately. While sometimes this process is confined to individual words, it can also be used across entire utterances. An example from Yannuar and Kadarisman (using Javanese) is given in (15).

(15) **Aku tuku səgɔ pətʃəl**

Uka   ukut   ogəs   lətʃəp
1SG   buy   rice   pecel
'I buy a plate of *pecel* rice'

In other parts of Indonesia other varieties of *basa walikan* can also be found, as in Yogyakarta for which Hendrastuti (2000) provides some information.
While few reversals are found today in Jakarta youth slang, one noteworthy word that is still used leads nicely to the next section on neologisms and borrowing: namely *woles* meaning 'slowly' and coming from English 'slow'.

3.3 Neologisms / borrowing

The vocabulary of *prokem* reported by Rahardja and Chambert-Loir included a smattering of loan words from other languages including German, English, Arabic and even Hawaiian, but none of these source languages provided a large number of words. Dutch influence on *prokem* was scant despite the existence of the term *prokem* itself which ultimately derives from Dutch *vrijman*. Foreign sources for *prokem* are outlined in Slone (2003: 11, 72-73), and some of these are detailed in (16).

(16)	**Form**	**Source language**	**Meaning**	**Notes**
	pakalolo	Hawaiian	'marijuana'	*ganja* in colloquial Indonesian
	zwaizwai	German	'in pairs'	
	bahlul	Arabic	'stupid, drunk'	
	hepi	English	'pretty'	In contemporary Indonesian slang *hepi* more often means simply 'happy' as its English source word.

Contemporary Indonesian slang uses many borrowings from English. Some of these are listed in (17) and all come from my own fieldwork.

(17) **Form**   **English**   **Notes**
      cekidot   'check it out'   Have a look at this
      aplod   'upload'   Computer terminology
      daunlod   'download'   Computer terminology
      blocop   'blowjob'   Fellatio
      ondewei   'on the way'
      tengkyu   'thank you'
      hepi   'happy'
      seksi   'sexy'

3.4 Abbreviation

Abbreviations (or *singkatan*) are extremely common in both formal Indonesian and in Indonesian slang. Before going on to discuss the use of *singkatan* in contemporay slang, it will be worthwhile examining the history of Indonesian *singkatan* first.
Contemporary colloquial *singkatan* seem to have their origins in the Javanese practice of *keratabasa* (*kerata* 'hunting' and *basa* 'words'). Miyake (2013) provides a detailed discussion of the phenomenon which is a creative way of providing folk etymologies. According to Miyake (2013:1), '*keratabasa* is a phrase, clause or sentence which purports to provide the etymology of a word'. Typically, Javanese words are disyllabic, and most commonly *keratabasa* contain words which have as part of them each of the syllables of the word for which an etymology is purported to apply. Some examples (all taken from Miyake, 2013) are given in (18) and (19) below. In example (18), we have purported etymologies for *gusti* 'master' and *guru* 'teacher'. A master is someone who should have a good heart, and a teacher is someone who should be obeyed and imitated.

(18) a. *gusti*   =   *ba**gus**   ing   *a**ti***
          master   good   def.art.   heart
                            'The lord should have a good heart'
      b. *guru*   =   *digu**gu***   lan   *diti**ru***
          teacher   =   to.be.obeyed   and   be.imitated
                            '(a teacher) is to be obeyed and imitated'

Keratabasa are sometimes remembered by many people, but they are the results of creative interpretation of words and they are contestable if someone does not like what the purported etymologies imply, as example (19) illustrates. Both (19a) and (19b) provide etymologies for *wanita* 'woman' but the first suggests that women like to be arranged while the second suggests that women like to arrange things for themselves.

(19) a. *wanita*   =   ***wani**   dita**ta***
          woman   =   brave   to be put in order
                            'Women likes to be arranged.'
      b. *wanita*   =   ***wani**   mrana**ta***
          woman   =   brave   to put in order
                            'Women wants to arrange things'

Keratabasa have been a part of Javanese culture for possibly centuries, but the idea was adopted by Soekarno during the early independence period who used the idea in reverse to create new words that had genuine abbreviations as their etymologies. Many such

words entered Indonesian during the early independence period, and a few of Soekarno's creations are illustrated in (20).

(20) **Word**   **'Keratabasa'**   **English**
     berdikari *berdiri di atas kaki sendiri*   stand on your own feet
     manipol   *manifestation politik*   political manifestation
     nekolim   *neo kolonialisme*   neocolonialism
     nasakom   *nasionalisme, agama dan komunisme*   nationalism, religion and
                                                         communism

Using such *singkatan* or abbreviations to create new words became a commonplace for Indonesian bureaucracy as well, so now we have literally thousands of words like the following:

(21) **Word**   **Source**   **English**
     Polres   *Polisi resor*   Local police
     Polsek   *Polisi sektor*   Sectoral police
     Polda   *Polisi daerah*   Regional police
     Polri   *Polisi Republik Indonesia*   National police
     Deplu   *Departemen Luar Negeri*   Department of Foreign
                                                                Affairs
     Depnaker   *Departemen Tenaga Kerja*   Department of Labour
     UPI (pronounced /upi/)   *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia* Indonesian University
                                                                of Education

Naturally enough, once this kind of word formation process was available to politicians and bureaucrats, it quickly lent itself to the creators of slang as well, and Rahardja and Chambert-Loir's dictionary of *prokem* already contained quite a few words formed by this kind of process. Some of them are illustrated in (22).

(22) **prokem**   **source**   **notes**
     akip   *agak   pikun*   *AKIP* is also an acronym for
                  rather senile   *Akademi Pendidikan Ilmu Peguruan*
                                                 or 'Teachers Education Academy'
     anggun   *anggota Ragunan*   *Anggun* means 'graceful' or well-
                  member Ragunan   dressed in standard Indonesian, but
                                                 Ragunan is the name of the zoo in
                                                 Jakarta. So in *prokem, anggun* means
                                                 'ugly person'
     Si kondom *situasi   kondisi   domisili* *Si* is a definite article often used for
                  situation condition residence animals and the like in folk tales.
                                                 Kondom is borrowed from English.

The creation of *singkatan* as illustrated above clearly provides a rich source for new word creation, and contemporary Jakarta youth slang is full of such words. The words in the following examples all come from my own fieldwork again.

(23)

word	source		notes
bugil	*bule*	*gila*	*bugil* also means 'naked' in standard Indonesian
	white.person	crazy	
coli	??		there seems to be general agreement that *coli* is a *singkatan* but it's not clear what it comes from exactly. Two of the potential sources are *colak lima jari* 'plug five fingers' or *coba olah raga lima jari* 'try five fingered sports'. In any case the meaning of *coli* is 'masturbate'
curhat	*curahan*	*hati*	means 'to open one's heart and say how one really feels'
	outflow	heart	
ember	*emang*	*bener*	so true!
	really	true	
fikmin	*fiksi*	*mini*	short piece of fiction (as often published in Twitter)
	fiction	mini	
pecun	*pelacur*	*culun*	means 'geeky bitch'
	prostitute	geeky	
titidije	*hati-hati di*	*jalan*	be careful on the road
	careful LOC	road	

Singkatan can be produced by combining elements of authentic Indonesian words with elements of borrowings as well.[9] Some of these are shown in (24).

(24)

word	source		notes
lola	*loading*	*lambat*	refers to slow internet loading
	loading	slow	
lalod	*lambat*	*loading*	refers to slow internet loading
	slow	loading	
ja'im	*jaga*	'image'	means 'put on a public face that is different from one's real inner feelings'. In order to pretend that one is a nicer person than in reality.
	look.after	image	

Interestingly, *singkatan* can be recursive: an element of a new *singkatan* may be derived from a *singkatan* itself. Thus, *bacol* 'someone who is so attractive one might want to masturbate while thinking about them' comes from *bahan coli* 'masturbation material', when *coli* itself is a *singkatan* (see example (23) above). Another such example was suggested by an anonymous reviewer. The form *pekcum* 'slut who gives sex for free' comes from *perek* 'slut' and *cuma-cuma* 'free of charge' while *perek* itself is a *singkatan* from *perempuan eksperimen* 'woman who experiments'.

In the same way that *keratabasa* provide purported etymologies of words, such etymologies can also be created in a *gaul* fashion these days. *Monas* is well-known these days as the *monumen nasional* or the 'national monument' found in the centre of Jakarta. A couple of years ago, however, a prominent Indonesian politician accused of corruption maintained that he would be happy to be hanged on Monas if he were indeed guilty of corruption. The politician, named Anas Urbaningrum was the leader of the

---

[9] Interestingly, such forms can be found in other languages too. The well-known Japanese term *karaoke* comes from Japanese *kara* 'empty' and *oke* which derives from English 'orchestra'.

Indonesia's Democratic Party when the corruption allegations were made. From that time onwards, for many people Monas became not *monumen nasional* 'national monument', but *monumen Anas* 'the monument of Anas Urbaningrum'.

4. Some final notes

Slang, by its very nature, is often transitory. It belongs to a group of people bounded in time and space as part of a subculture of some kind, so most slang words do not last for very long. Most of the words documented in Rahardja and Chambert-Loir's dictionary of slang no longer survive in the youth slang of today, although a few words (like *bokap* and *nyokap* for 'father' and 'mother') have hung on. When such words do persist, it is likely that they have ceased to be slang, and have moved into everyday colloquial language, as *bokap* and *nyokap* appear to have done. Who knows whether Indonesian will one day follow English in having the odd former slang term eventually appear in legal jargon as 17th English criminal slang 'shop-lift' as seen in example (1) appears to have done.

In this paper, we have not been able to discuss regional slang except in passing. Jakarta youth slang is possibly the most salient insofar as its ability to spread to wider colloquial Indonesian is concerned. Jakarta slang tends to be the variety most popularised on television and in songs, etc., but regional slang does exist, and it thrives in the regions. Some words are more popular in some regions than others. The terms *lola* (*loading lambat*) and *lalod* (*lambat loading*) both refer to slow internet download capabilities but *lola* appears to be more widespread in the western parts of Indonesia while *lalod* is more popular in the east, in places like Manado in North Sulawesi, for example. We have touched on gay slang from Surabaya and Bandung, and *basa walikan* from Malang, but there are rich veins of slang to be mined by others from across the archipelago.

Finally, I would like to make a few observations about what slang means for the health of Indonesia's national language. I believe that Novi A, who was quoted at the beginning of this paper saying that she thought slang may imperil the national language, really does not need to worry. The very existence of diverse slang-making traditions across the country should be celebrated as a form of folk art rather than derided. In fact, the rich slang formation we have surveyed is testament to the success of the national language project in Indonesia. If, as Dumas and Lighter (1978: 14) maintained, slang "lowers, if temporarily, the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing", it can only do this because the people who use slang actually have a fairly clear idea about what 'formal or serious speech or writing' is supposed to sound like. As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the fact that Indonesian has developed rich slang traditions indicates that it has become an intimate – rather than a forcefully imposed – langauge for its users, which should please those who love the national language rather than displease them. If all of this is true, then both *bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar* 'good and correct Indonesian' as well as *bahasa gaul* or 'slang' appear to have a bright future ahead of them.

References

Anonymous. 1674. *The Canting Academy; or Villanies Discovered. Wherein is shewn the Mysterious and Villainous Practices of that Wicked Crew Commonly Known as Hectors, Trapanners, Gilts &c. With Several New Catches and Songs: Also a complete canting dictionary, both of old words, and such as are now most in use. A book very useful and necessary (to be known but not practis'd) for all people.* London: Printed by F. Leach for Mst. Drew.

B.E. c. 1692. *A new dictionary of the terms ancient and modern of the canting crew, in its several tribes, of gypsies, beggers, thieves, cheats, &c. with an addition of some proverbs, phrases, figurative speeches, &c.* London.

Dreyfuss, Jeff. 1983. The backwards language of Jakarta youth: A bird of many language feathers. In James T. Collins (ed.), *Studies in Malay Dialects Part 1, NUSA* 16: 52-56. Jakarta: Universitas Atma Jaya.

Dumas, Bethany K. and Jonathon Lighter. 1978. "Is slang a word for linguists?" *American Speech* 53(5): 14-15.

Esha, Teguh. 1978. *Ali Topan Detektip Partikelir*. Jakarta: Cypress.

Gil, David. 2002. Ludlings in Malayic languages: An introduction. In Bambang Kaswanti Purwo (ed.), *PELBBA 15, Pertemuan Linguistik Pusat Kajian Bahasa dan Budaya Atma Jaya: Kelima Belas*, 125-180. Jakarta: Unika Atma Jaya.

Gil, David. 2013. Monosyllabic words, foot structure, ludlings and dialectal variation in Malay/Indonesian. Paper presented at the 17th International Symposium on Malay and Indonesian Languages. Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, 7-9 June 2013.

Hendrastuti, A.C. 2000. *Bahasa walikan Yogyakarta ditinjau dari aspek sosiolinguistik*. Thesis. Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia.

Japanese Subculture Research Center website: http://www.japansubculture.com/resources/yakuza-terminology/

Laycock, Don. 1972. Towards a typology of ludlings, or play-languages. *Linguistic Communications: Working Papers of the Linguistic Society of Australia* 6: 61-113.

Miyake, Yoshimi. 2013. Keratabasa: Javanese Folk Etymology. Proceedings of the International Workshop on 'Special Genres' in and around Indonesia: 17th-19th February, 2013. Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, pp.167 -170.

Oetomo, Dédé. 2013. Bahasa Binan: The Languages of Indonesia's Gay Men and Transgender Women and People Related to Them. Proceedings of the International Workshop on 'Special Genres' in and around Indonesia: 17th-19th February, 2013 Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, pp. 213-213.

Rahardja, Prathama and Henri Chambert-Loir. 1988. *Kamus Bahasa Prokem*. Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti.

Sahertian, Debby. 1999. *Kamus Bahasa Gaul*. Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan.

Slone, Thomas. 2003. *Prokem: An Analysis of Jakarta slang*. Oakland, California: Masalai Press.

Sneddon, James Neil. 2006. *Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

Utami, Ayu. 1998. *Saman*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.

Yannuar, Nurenzia and A. Effendi Kadarisman. 2015. On the phonetics, phonology and phonotactics of Basa Walikan Malang. Paper presented at the Fifth International Symposium on the Languages of Java. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. Bandung, 6-7 June 2015.

The Jakarta Post: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2005/09/11/wanna-learn-bahasa-039so-what-gituloh039.html#sthash.dK1zU2Xw.dpuf (retrieved on 3 September 2015)

Corresponding author:
Dr John Bowden
Institute for the Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
3-11-1 Asahi-cho, Fuchu-shi, Tokyo 183-8534, Japan
Email: f.john.bowden@gmail.com