On the Origin and Distribution of Third-Person Pronominal Enclitics in Jambi Malay

Uri Tadmor and Yanti
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and University of Delaware

In Standard Malay-Indonesian, the clitic form of the third-person personal pronoun, -nyā, has various functions. When attached to nouns, it marks possession (example 1); when attached to active verb forms and to certain prepositions, it marks the object (examples 2-3); when attached to passive verb forms, it marks the agent (examples 4). It also has some secondary functions, such as determiner (example 5).

1. Dia mem-baca-kan anak-nyā buku.
   3SG ACT-read-APPL child-NYA book
   He read his child a book.

2. Setelah itu, dia me-letak-kan-nyā di méja.
   after DEM.DIST 3SG ACT-place-APPL-NYA LOC table
   ‘Afterwards, he put it down on the table.’

   book DEM.DIST PASS-read-APPL to-NYA
   That book was read to him.

   book DEM.DIST PASS-read-APPL-NYA
   He read out that book. (Literally: That book was read out by him.)

   book-NYA PASS-read-APPL-NYA
   He read out the book.

(Abbreviations: ACT – active; APPL – applicative; DEM.DIST – distal demonstrative; LOC – locative; PASS – passive; SG – singular.)

In Old Malay inscriptions, -nyā occurred with similar functions, although its syntax was somewhat different than in modern Malay-Indonesian. Since most modern Malayic isolects in major speech areas have cognates of this clitic, it is possible to reconstruct a Proto Malayic third-person pronominal clitic *-nya. However, a few modern isolects exhibit other third-person pronominal clitics. One of them is Jambi Malay, spoken in and around the city of Jambi in east-central Sumatra. In the Jambi dialect, a third-person enclitic is -é is used side by side with -nyo (a reflex of Proto Malayic *-nya). This raises two interesting questions, one diachronic and the other synchronic.

The first question is, what is the origin of -é in Jambi Malay? This dialect has undergone considerable lexical influence by Javanese; since the third-person enclitic in Javanese is -(n)é, one may hypothesize that that this is the origin of Jambi Malay -é. However, -é also occurs in the dialect of Minangkabau spoken in the Pariaman region (on the west-central coast of Sumatra), which has not been influenced by Javanese. Moreover, Ketapang Malay, a dialect spoken in Western Borneo, has a third-person enclitic -i, apparently a cognate of Jambi Malay -é. This suggests that we are not dealing with a simple case of borrowing.
The second question is, what are the differences, if any, between -nyo and -é in Jambi Malay? Preliminary studies, based on a naturalistic corpus of transcribed conversations in Jambi Malay\(^1\), indicate that there are no significant differences in the functions of -nyo and -é. However, there are geographical and distributional differences. In the urban koine of the city of Jambi, only -nyo is used, while in the surrounding rural areas, -é is used predominantly—about 88.4% of all occurrences in the database—with -nyo accounting for the remaining 11.6%. This suggests that the presence of -nyo is the rural subdialects may be due to interference from the urban koine, which, in turn, has been strongly influenced by Palembang Malay (where -nyo is used).

\(^1\) This corpus is being compiled and analyzed as a joint project of the University of Delaware and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, under an NSF grant.