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The Linguistics of Particularity: 
Interpreting Superordination in a Javanese Text

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"A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world"
-----Raymond Williams (1977:21)

The term which titles this essay, the linguistics of particularity, I first heard from Kenneth L. Pike many years ago. Most of my own academic life has been spent exploring that term, with a growing sense of its importance. At first it seems perverse, this substitution of particularity for the pursuit of generality or universality as the goal of our craft. Is it any more than an instance of the general heuristic principle (mathematical or rhetorical): always invert?

For Pike, I think, the motivation toward a linguistics of particularity is part of his strong conviction that one's understanding of another language, or another person, is a movement from an etic perspective --- an outsider's perspective --- to an emic understanding, a more fully contextual understanding. This change is not just an increasing awareness of regular patterns in the language, but a change in what Pike calls the observer. That is, the particularity involves both the observer and the text: both are in history. What we call a text --- some remembered bit of language is the trace, often a very faint trace, of some event in some world in which somebody wanted to say something to someone about something, and that someone and somebody and something are particular. Likewise, that linguistic observer is a particular observer, full of biases he or she is never fully aware of --- the biases of his or her own language, and his or her understanding of that language. Like the horse's hoof and the prairie grass, the observer and the text co-evolve.

In the years since Pike first talked about a linguistics of particularity, I seemed to hear similar kinds of statements from several very disparate sources: from Gregory Bateson (1979:17) who wrote that "contextual shaping is only another term for grammar"; from the post-structural hermeneutic tradition in France --- most clearly, perhaps, from Paul Ricoeur (1981); from the late Wittgenstein (1958) in his understanding of language as a form of life; from Raymond Williams (1977), whose penetrating Marxist critique of linguistics begins with the sentence quoted above as an epigraph; from the interpreters of Heidegger like Grassi (1980) and Ortega (1957:242) who proposed an interpretive linguistics which the latter called, "una nueva filologia;" or from Clifford Geertz (1983:19) who describes a "laws and instances" approach in the social sciences being replaced by a "cases and interpretations" one.

I do not cite all those people to endorse a particular brand
of linguistics. A truly interpretive linguistics, a linguistics of particularity, has yet to appear. All of them, however, if not in unison then at least in harmony, suggest alternatives to a structuralist view of language --- and I mean generative as well as taxonomic structuralism. These alternatives share a resemblance in their view of language as activity in a particular context, co-evolving along with that context, in part constitutive of it.

In the unfinished job of projecting "una nueva filologia", Ortega (1959) gives two axioms of this discipline:

1. Every utterance is deficient -- it says less than it wishes to say.

2. Every utterance is exuberant -- it says more than it plans.

The philologist helps us correct our deficiencies and exuberances in understanding those we have trouble understanding, in distant cultures or right at home. The goal is not a theory of language, but something more like usefulness --- usefulness in helping us make the adjustments necessary to understanding the Javanese, the Cree, our own neighbours, and ourselves. And the rigor here is not the rigor of theory (with particular bits of language as examples) but the rigor that comes from the particularity of the text-in-context.

The best method I know for doing this is what has been called "back-translation," starting from a translation and then seeking out the exuberances --- those things present in the translation but not in the original --- and the deficiencies--- those things in the original but not in the translation. For most linguists, the translations are glosses, i.e. English substitutes for words and parts of words (including labels for linguistic categories). This is an English appropriation of the text under study. And, of course, we appropriate not only the words, but also a context for them. I would argue that most of the analysis is accomplished by the glossing. In "back translation" one reverses that process, not necessarily to improve the translation (one may be starting from what is already the best possible translation), but rather to get closer to that particular text-in-context, and see it as a reasonable and sane way of being in the world.

An Episode from a Javanese Wayang

The rigor in this essay comes from a written version of a scene from a Javanese shadow play. It is taken from a pakem, an interesting Javanese genre of models for shadow play performances. Sometimes they are quite abstract, other times (as here) rich with detail and very lively vocabulary. It's good data for studying Javanese discourse, since it has a full Javanese past, unlike some of the new language games for which the prior texts are non-Javanese. I had been reading the whole work with a fellow Javanist, Alan Feinstein, who was working on a translation. Every
week we would do back-translation --- trying to find the exuberances and deficiencies of his English interpretation. The passage I've selected for close inspection here is one we worked on. Later I sent the translation to a Javanese linguist, Bambang Kaswanti Purwo, and received many corrections.

The passage is a typical episode from a wayang used to "clean" a village of a variety of real and potential evils --- in people and in the air. It's the life story of the demon Kala. His name in Javanese means "time" --- as well as "destruction." Wayang is a means of coping with Kala; indeed, as the story recounts, wayang is used as a way not to defeat the demon but to constrain it. The demon is limited in his prey to children of various sorts --- an only child, twins, a girl born between two boys, and several other categories. These constraints on the demon were imposed by his father, Siva, who conceived Kala in a moment of anger.

In this episode, Kala is chasing an orphan boy, Jaka Jatusmati. Whenever he stops to hide from Kala, the boy escapes but a traditional taboo is broken. Here a steamer of rice is upset, which saves the boy but breaks a taboo and requires a very interesting remedial act.

Let us go through the story, lightly parsing, with a bit of commentary when it gets obscure. I hope the reader will be patient and read bilingually.

Dandang Rubuh

An episode form the Pakem Pangruwatan Murwa Kala by Kyai Demang Redutanaja, arranged here in lines, to be read from English to Javanese. (The spelling has been brought up to date, and some clear typographic errors corrected. The punctuation is as in the original.)

1. There was a woman steaming (rice) inside of her house,
   Be person female steaming at inside of house
   Ana wong wadon adang ing sajroning omah,

2. the doors were all closed,
   door art. all closed
   lawange kabei diinebi,

3. while the one who looked after (it) -- her grandfather
   while who look-after related-as grandfather
   dene kang tunggu kaprenah kakekne
   was outside of the house,
   be outside of house
   ana sajabaning omah,

4. concentrating on what he was doing so it happened
   while absorbed-in thing so happen-unnoticed
   sinambi anggegeb barang temah katungkul
5. Jaka Jatusmati entered the house,
Jaka Jatusmati lumebu ing omah,

6. and watched over the steaming
banjur ungu dang-dangan

7. and arranged the wood of the fire
kalawan angutik geni

8. Bathara Kala --- something made him stop walking
Bathara Kala kandheg lakune

9. And he sought the one who had put the steamer on the stove,
then tried person who put-on-stove steamer
nuli ngupaya wong kang ngenteb dandang,

10. And met her in the garden picking vegetables,
meet be in garden pick vegetables
ketemu and ing tegalan lagi remban janganan,

11. And urged her to order away
and urged to order go-away to
banjur sinraban supaya akon lunga marang
the child who watched over the steaming,
child who look-after steaming
bocah kang tunggu dangdangan,

12. But he was not paid any attention
but not be-reacted to
nanging ora dipaelu

13. Bathara Kala then returned impatiently.
then return not patient
Bathara Kala nuli bali ora saranta.

14. Jaka Jatusmati was enjoying himself, sitting, embracing his knees,
Jaka Jatusmati still enjoy
Jaka Jatusmati isih ngenak-enak
embrace knees ngrangkul dhengkul

15. looking after the fire.
and look-after fire
karo tunggu geni.

16. Bathara Kala opened the door
Bathara Kala mbukak lawang

17. and entered the house
then enter in house
nuli lumebu ing omah

18. Jaka Jatusmati was spied on
Jaka Jatusmati kadingkik

19. then seen to go hide behind the steamer,
then evade conceal steamer which erect
wis angocati ampingan dandang kang ngadad,

20. and he grabbed at him but he slithered away around the steamer
intend be-seized slip away circle steamer
arep cinandak marucut ngubengi dandang
(marucut - state of being 'loosed', as when you catch a fish
and the fish is slippery.)
21. Bathara Kala said
   Bathara Kala ngandika.

22. Hey, slippery child!
    Hey child slippery
    Heh boca kesit!

23. You just give up --- don't hide behind the steamer
    you follow just don't go-in-shade of steamer
    kowe nuruta bae aja ampingan dandang

24. Don't you feel you got enough from this steamer?
    ques. you not feel that get full from steamer this?
    apa kowe ora rumasa yen nggonmu wareg saka ing danding iki?

25. and he pounced.
    banjur nubruk.

26. Jaka Jatusmati escaped and went out,
    Jaka Jatusmati ngoncati metu,

27. The steamer fell over.
    dandange rubuh.

28. Bathara Kala slipped and fell, smeared with rice, his head moving continuously from side to side, and his legs jogging quickly to shake off the heat.
   Bathara Kala slip fall smeared shake-head jog
   Bathara Kala kapleset tiba galumphrut gobag-gabig, kicat-kicat
   (kicat-kicat= uncomfortable feeling in feet from walking on a hot place)

29. The woman who owned the house came home and saw that the steamer was upset, person who own house come see that steamer knocked-over
    wong kangi duwe omah teka sumurup yen dandange gimalimpang,

30. and asked her grandfather who was outside, ask to grandfather who be outside
    takon marang kakekne kang ana ing jaba,

31. what had happened that the steamer fell?
    what origin steamer get fallen
    apa mulane dandange nganti rubuh?

32. The one who was asked shared her remorse
    who asked go-with regret
    kang tinakon melu getun

33. and said almost unheard:
    and say very quietly
    banjur angucap lirih:

34. It was because Sang Kala (time) struck,
    that because hit by sankala
    Iku wong kena ing sangkala
35. which is fatal dressed as a woman
g got fatal dressed-as woman
nganti tiwas dandanan ing wadon

36. so then be naked, completely, and dance
so then experience naked expose dance
1ha banjur nglakonana wuda byar njoged
(byar - sudden change from darkness to light)

37. around the house in a ring three times,
circle house join bracelet times three
ngubengi omah tepung gelang kaping telu,

38. and I'll beat the rhythm --dhug, dhug, brag
I beat dhug, dhug, brag
tak tabuhi dhug, dhug, brag

39. And I'll address you as a naked madwoman.
and I address person crazy after naked
sarta tak elokake wong edan bar ndhul.

40. The person who received the instructions instantly then took off
her clothes,
person who receive lesson quickly then take-off clothes
wong kang tampa ujar ing sanalika banjur anrucat panganggone,

41. And did what her grandfather advised
act advice of grandfather.
anindakake sawewaraking kakekne.

42. Bathara Kala felt mocked by the woman
Bathara Kala felt mocked
Bathara Kala rumasa diiwi-iwi

43. then tried to shake-off the mockery:
and shake-off
banjur angipat-ipati:
(angipat-ipati recalls kicat-kicat in line 28. It means to make
a move to shake off something unwanted, like a cockroach on the arm).

44. Hey my child of the wind
Heh bocahingsun wadu barat!
(The wadu barat are the child-servants of Kala)

45. Besides taking away their wealth,
besides deprive wealth
kajaba elongana kayane,

46. also take away their rice everyday
also deprive rice of every day
uga elongana berase ing saben dina,

47. take away seven in a household,
deprive seven a household/family
elongana pitung somah,
(this line is obscure)
48. Don't let it cease until I have captured my prey,
don't you cease if not yet be seized prey-my
aja  kok uwisi yen durung kacandak beburonku,

49. Bathara Kala continued pursuing the boy, wherever he had gone,
Bathara Kala continue pursue to whichever-direction,
Bathara Kala isih nututi ing saparan,

50. but now walking slowly.
but pace slow
nanging lakune remben.

The purpose in arranging the text this way is to emphasize the
direction of inquiry --- from an English translation back toward
the Javanese. It is a difficult task to impose on a reader, to
figure out how those English words are related to the Javanese
and to undo their implicit grammatical interpretation. Here the
translation is a starting point, not a goal. The task is to de-
construct the translation, to the end of a greater authenticity
or fullness in interpreting the text. It is a self-correction in
the direction of emic understanding.

As a first step it is useful to list the exuberances and
deficiencies, following Ortega's axioms for a new philology:
1. Every utterance is deficient
2. Every utterance is exuberant.

Note that Ortega says "every utterance," not just some. The para-
doxx works even in the most intimate conversation, but the deficien-
cies and exuberances are almost overwhelming when one is approaching
a distant text. And so it is important to list them. Here is a
partial listing. I will focus here primarily on a few grammatical
differences, and set aside the numerous lexical, pragmatic, meta-
aphorical, phonological, and rhetorical differences, though these
can only with effort be separated, for purposes of comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exuberance of Translation</th>
<th>Deficiency of Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Only in English)</td>
<td>(Only in Javanese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Reduplications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Focus marked on verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>&quot;Zeroing&quot; for animate anaphora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphoric pronominalization</td>
<td>repetition for inanimate anaphora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Person inanimate pronoun</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these differences can be explored, with the goal of attuning
oneself to the text by giving up coherences produced by things in
column A --- the coherence of tense, of number, of some determiners,
of some pronominalization --- and learning to pay attention to the
cohercences produced by those things in column B --- reduplication,
focus, "zeroing", and repetition. Each of these differences affects the kinds of textures it is possible to produce, since each has to do with coherence, i.e. cross-sentential constraints.

Discourse grammar has to do mostly with paradigmatic relations, with constraints on the fillers of syntagmatic slots. Continuity of topic, tense, or focus binds sentences in quite particular ways. One can follow a topic through a text and see how it changes grammatical shapes and roles and gathers significance in new contexts. Recent studies of topic continuity by Givon (1983) and others help us get these chains (or themes or "paraphrase sets", as we called them twenty years ago.) into clearer focus.

When one examines the topic chains in the Javanese text, several interesting things appear:

1. We can see that "zeroing" (i.e. not mentioning a topic after its initial mention --- with "zeroing" in quotation marks lest we forget its English bias) occurs only with animate topics and only when the topic has been mentioned one clause earlier. There are many instances of this.

2. We can see that restrictive relative clauses only re-introduce formerly identified topics after a gap. (There are six instances here: 9, 11, 19, 29, 30, 40)

3. Pronouns are used in direct speech only, and only first and second person are found. There is no number. Topic chaining is not maintained by pronominalization, but by "zeroing" for third person animate topics in adjacent clauses, and by repeating elsewhere, i.e. with animate topics after a gap and with all inanimates. All inanimate chains are sustained by repeating the topic. There is no "it" in Javanese (nor in modern Indonesian, except as a very recent innovation.).

I would like to examine here just this last phenomenon, repeating inanimate topics, and see how it works in building the superordinate chain in the text. Some topic chains are more important than others in two senses:

1. Superordinate chains have a larger scope within a text and hence play a more important role in creating coherence.

2. As centers of coherence, superordinate chains give relevance to subordinate chains, just as a phrasal head gives relevance to its modifiers. Here we are looking at the hypotactic relations of topic chains to each other, in a paradigmatic hierarchy. (See Becker, 1965 and Halliday, 1981).

The topic with widest scope here is marked by the term dang 'to steam' in all its forms. Forms of dang occur twelve times in the text. (The nearest rival, Bathara Kala occurs only eight times.) Until near the end of the story, when the "antidote" episode occurs, this term, dang, appears in every sentence except two, and in these two (14-15 and 28) it is metonymically present, in the fire which produces the steam or the rice which is being steamed. Here is a minor text building strategy, a way of
topic chaining working under slightly different constraints from 
those we experience in English, since we have "it." Is this a 
difference that makes a difference, as Gregory Bateson used to 
say? Does it make the sort of difference that, say, the absence 
of tense or number clearly makes in text-building? (Becker, 1979)

In answer to this question, let us first see what happens to 
dang in each of its manifestations:

1. First it appears as a verb, stative in form: adang.
The woman is steaming something --- rice is the unmarked case. 
   (Line 1)

2. Then, later in the same long sentence, it is nominalized 
via reduplication: dangdangan 'the steaming'.
The boy attends to the steaming. (Line 6)

3. Then it becomes a noun through partial reduplication: 
dandang 'steamer'. It occurs in a relative clause reidentifying 
the woman who put the steamer on the stove. (Line 9)

4. In the same sentence, it appears again, this time re-
identifying the boy. (Line 11)

5. Next, the term in noun form (dandang 'steamer') appears 
twice in one sentence as the object of the verb. Kala sees the 
boy hide behind the steamer, and then slither away around it. 
(Lines 19 and 20)

6. It occurs twice in the next sentence, still as object. 
   (Lines 23 and 24)

7. Then, at the center of the story (Line 27), then noun 
dandang takes a definite article and becomes subject. The fact 
that this episode is traditionally named by this line (dandang 
rubuh 'steamer falls') lends weight to this interpretation of the 
line as the center of the story. This interpretation is given 
further weight by the line which follows it, a clause with a 
sequence of five predicates in a row, a common way of marking a 
climax. (Line 28)

8. The noun plus definite article (dandang + e ) remains 
a subject in two embedded clauses referring back to the incident, 
the falling. (Lines 29 and 31)

9. And then (line 35), via a near identity of form (dandang 
and dandan 'to dress, be adorned') --- a rhyme pun of 
the sort very common in Javanese --- the thematic term dang 
changes to dandan, so that in a formal way the falling of the 
steamer gets linked to the women's removing her clothes and hop-
ping naked around the house three times like a crazy person --- a 
corrective action for knocking over a rice steamer which Javanese 
friends assure me is not unknown in modern Java.

One might note that the topic chain which ranks second in 
superordination (in this episode), Sang Kala, is the superordinate
chain for the entire shadow play --- that is, it is the topic which gives coherence to the larger whole. Parallel to the pun in the dang chain in line 35, the Sang Kala chain changes, too, in the immediately preceding line, where the proper name, Sang Kala, becomes the common noun sangkala 'time'. Here, too, a sound correspondence is pivotal in linking the two parts of the story, the taboo breaking and the remedy.

By its persistence and repetition in a topic chain a certain term becomes a center around which other terms take subordinate positions --- the four characters, the house, the fire, the rice --- all of them get their cohesion from that steamer. It is the thing that holds the plot together. In Burkean terms, an instrument becomes thematic and shapes the plot.

The difference between Javanese and English in the management of a non-animate topic chain involves both exuberance of English, while the lack of rich possibilities of reduplication and repetition is a deficiency. In reading Javanese, we drop this form of pronominal substitution from our set of potential cohesion strategies and add reduplications of various sorts --- reduplications of whole words or of parts of words. It may well be that reduplication and repetition can best be seen as variants of a single strategy at different levels --- strategies of repeating. Repeating a term instead of pronominalizing or "zeroing" can be interpreted as the intersentential manifestation of a very common Austronesian strategy. Pronominal substitution, "zeroing", and repeating are, then, not alternate ways of doing the same thing, since they result in very different textures. It is difficult to generalize about these different strategies, but a list of some of the differences might help us to see how they do "make a difference".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pronominal substitution</th>
<th>repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Term is nominalized</td>
<td>Term freely changes categories (i.e. we follow it into predicates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Processing is speeded</td>
<td>Processing is slowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sound of term is lost, referentiality is preserved</td>
<td>Sound of term is preserved, even enriched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sound puns are difficult</td>
<td>Sound puns are easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In chaining then, zeroing is, as Fred Lupke puts it, a least, repetition a most, and pronominalization somewhere in between. Each has different effects. Note that the effects we are looking at here are not logical, but might better be called esthetic --- different modes of creating a satisfying texture. One homology with these differences of texture might be the general Javanese aesthetic of density (corresponding to a strategy of repetition in discourse) in contrast to the general Japanese esthetic of sparsity (corresponding to the strategy of "zeroing" so common to Japanese
discourse). Contrast a Noh play with a Javanese wayang, or a Japanese music ensemble with a gamelan. This kind of non-rational homology is one of the things that binds a culture. (See Becker, 1979.)

Recapitulation

One of the basic differences between interpreting the grammar of clauses and that of discourse is, as many have noticed (e.g. Pike, Burke, and Halliday), that in discourse the patterning seems predominantly paradigmatic, while in clauses it seems predominantly syntagmatic. Chaining is not a central clausal phenomenon, although it appears, of course, in the guise of "Equi-NP" operations, in which mono-clausal phenomena are usually given multi-clausal interpretations (under the strange notion that a clause can have but a single predicate). Nor is discourse predominantly syntagmatic, though we can press stories into tree diagrams, with effort. Following a topic through a chain, studying its continuity and discontinuity, and then studying the relations between chains seems central to the linguistic study of texts. The likeness between many modifiers sharing a single headword and many subordinate topic chains sharing a single superordinate topic chain may be a bit forced; likewise, the likeness between word-level re-duplication and the repeating of a term in a topic chain may be no more than that --- a likeness. On the other hand, language, like culture, may be bound by just such homologies.

A final word, then, about particularity. The topic chain we followed here is a particular thread in the texture of a particular tale. All discourse --- unlike the study of syntax --- is of necessity the study of particularity, as Ricoeur has pointed out. (Ricoeur, 1981 : 198) Ortega, too, saw this many years ago, when he wrote:"...the splendid intellectual achievement represented by linguistics as it is constituted today obliges it (noblesse oblige) to attain a second and more precise and forceful approximation in its knowledge of the reality, "language." And this it can do only if it studies language not as an accomplished fact, as a thing made and finished, but as in the process of being made, hence in statu nascendi, in the very roots that engender it." (Ortega, 1957: 242) The actual a priori of any language event --- the real deep structure ---- is an accumulation of remembered prior texts just like the one studied here: particular prior texts, acquired from particular sources. From the perspective of particularity, generality is a kind of epiphenomenon produced by the reshaping of a particular prior text to a new context. And our real language competence is access, via memory, to this accumulation of prior text.

Acknowledgements

Several people have helped in this essay: Alan Feinstein and Bambang Kaswanti Purwo in reading the Javanese, Eric Rabkin in expanding the interpretation to include the Sang Kala topic
chain, Deborah Tannen for very insightful discussions about repetition in text-building, particularly her paper presented at the Linguistic Society of America meeting held in Minneapolis in December, 1983, entitled, "Repetition and Variation as Formulacity in Conversation," Fred Lupke for insisting on the relevance of leasts and mosts, and Judith Becker for many useful suggestions.

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