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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 exuberancies 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 from the Pakem Pangruwatan Murwa Kala by Kyai Demang Reditanaja, 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 kabeh 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  
banjurunggu 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 embrace knees  
Jaka Jatusmati isih ngenak-enak 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 Jatsumati was spied on  
Jaka Jatsumati kadingkik
19. then seen to go hide behind the steamer,  
then evade conceal steamer which erect  
wis angocati ampingan dandang kang ngaged,
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 galumprut 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 kang duwe omah teka sumurup yen dandange gumalimpang,
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  
 get fatal dressed-as woman  
 nganti tiwas dandananing wadon
36. so then be naked, completely, and dance  
 so then experience naked expose dance  
 lha 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 tanpa ujar ing sanalika banjur anrucat panganggone,
41. And did what her grandfather advised  
 act advice of grandfather.  
 anindakake sawewarahing 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 sapanan,
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 deconstruct 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 paradox works even in the most intimate conversation, but the deficiencies 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, metaphorical, phonological, and rhetorical differences, though these can only with effort be separated, for purposes of comparison.

A	B
Exuberance of Translation (Only in English)	Deficiency of Translation (Only in Javanese)
Number	Reduplications
Tense	Focus marked on verb
Aspect	"Zeroing" for animate anaphora
Anaphoric pronominalization	repetition for inanimate anaphora
Third Person inanimate pronoun	repetition for inanimate anaphora
...	...

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 coherences 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 Givón (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 dandang changes to dandan, so that in a formal way the falling of the steamer gets linked to the women's removing her clothes and hopping 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".

pronominal substitution

repetition

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Term is nominalized                                | Term freely changes categories (i.e. we follow it into predicates) |
| 2. Processing is speeded                              | Processing is slowed   |
| 3. Sound of term is lost, referentiality is preserved | Sound of term is preserved, even enriched                          |
| 4. Sound puns are difficult                           | Sound puns are easy  |

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 reduplication 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.

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