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Re-Examining Labovian Vowel Raising Principles in Non-English Settings: A Case Study of Nusatenggara Languages[1]

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Abstract: This study examines vowel changes across language varieties in the languages in West Nusa Tenggara in order to examine the Labovian principles in vowel changes. Studies on dialectal variation in the languages of the locality are numerous (e.g. Teeuw, 1945; Mahsun, 2004; Mahsun, 2010, Yusra, 2012), but the approaches to the variation were motivated by the need to illustrated 'differences' among the language varieties. Labov (1966; 1972), however, has put forward a new perspective that these so-called dialectal differences are consequences of migration, socio-temporal segregation and geographical isolation. This perspective is interesting as it sees variation from the perspective of establishing similarities, rather than highlighting differences, and this view of linguistic differences is essential for Indonesia as a multi-ethnic and multilingual and yet united within a nation state. This study will explore the possibility of using the perspective in explaining variation and changes in three varieties of language: (a) the Punikan language, a Meriak-Meriku variety (spoken by older generation) but currently a Meno-Mene variety of the Sasak language spoken by the communities around Mount Punikan in Lombok, (b). the Sambori language, a Lambitu variety of the Bima language spoken by the Sambori community on top of Mount Lambitu (Bima) and (c) the Matta language, a Serasuba variety of the Bima language spoken by the Matta community on top of Mount Dana Kala (Sumbawa). Data for the studies were collected by using ethnographic fieldwork and Morris Swadesh 200 word list was used for elicitation. Phonological analysis was used to compare and contrast sound variation and changes and the Labovian principles of vowel changes were re-examined. While the analysis in general supports for possible universal application of the principles, it, nonetheless, offers several revisions and suggests other challenging areas for research in the field which have not been discussed by Labovian researchers simply because such data and phenomena are not existent in English but they are in non-English languages and contexts.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Linguistic adaptation has been commonly known to occur when speakers of a language or two varieties of the same language meet each other. As Bloomfield (1933: 476) has succinctly mentioned, the speakers of a language are continuously adapting their speech habits to those of the interlocutors. In sociolinguistics, this phenomenon is labelled speech accommodation.

Accommodation of speeches can occur in two ways: convergence and divergence. Giles, Taylor Bourhis (1977) has theorized that when speakers of different ethno-linguistic backgrounds encounter each other in social semiotic processes they will converge linguistically when they desire social approval from the audience, when they desire a high level of communicational efficiency, and when there is no other factors alternatively dictating another strategy (see also Street, 1982). On the contrary, when they have strong in-group identity and desire to frame the interaction as intergroup encounters, each speaker will maintain their way of speaking and diverge linguistically. The choice between convergence and divergence, however, is not a black and white situation. Burt (1992) has shown that adaptation of speech is a common phenomenon even when the speakers do not want to claim mutual co-membership of a social group with the audience. Yusra (1998) has also shown that divergence strategies have in fact been used for convergence purposes.

Labov (2001) has strongly suggested that when two speech communities are segregated they are likely to linguistically diverge. Labov (2001) has also reported a number of factors leading speech communities to linguistic divergence: social class, gender, neighbourhood and ethnicity. When two communities share these factors and continuous communication among them is maintained, linguistic convergence is expected. But, when they do not share them and communication between them is reduced or distorted due to socio-political or geographical barriers, linguistic divergence is the norm. As Labov (2001) has rightly pursued, any degree of linguistic divergence in an era of continuous, global, and borderless communication requires an explanation.

Linguistic divergence in the context of American English has mainly been studied by Labov (2001) and his student (e.g. Eckert, 2000) as sound changes following the migration patterns of the Americans from the two cities as migration departure points (i.e. Boston and Texas). Citing Bloomfield (1933: 353-4), Labov defined sound changes as merely changes in the manner in which the speaker produces phonemes and these changes affect the phonemes at every moment of speech production regardless of the linguistic environments where they occur. Thus, to Bloomfield, sound changes are not linguistically conditioned.

Labov (1994; 2001) has, nevertheless, shown that regularity in sound changes has been the basic working principle in the works of historical and comparative linguists. Labov has shown that the regularity follows Neogramarian patterns and, consequently, sound changes become both predictable and retractable enabling linguists to explain the rationale behind linguistic divergence and convergence. However, such studies have been mainly from American English cases and have not been extended to non-English settings. This article is expected to fill the gap by offering insights from the cases of sound changes in Nusa Tenggara languages. Due to space limit, the discussion is limited to examining vowel raising principle as a major strategy in dialectal divergence. Before this case can be discussed, let us now review the theoretical concepts in the study of vowel changes.

2 BASIC CONCEPTS IN VOWEL CHANGES

Basic theoretical concepts in the studies of vowel changes centre around three main concepts, i.e. the factors, the governing principles, and the mechanisms in which vowel changes can occur in a language.

2.1 Factors Affecting Language Change

There are a number of factors responsible for language changes or vowel changes in any languages. These factors might cause changes in a language: changes in loyalty and local identity, changes in socioeconomic class, changes as an act of identity changes, changes in regional dialect, cultural imperialism, crossing the cultural boundary, opposition to cultural dominance, changes in political culture, geographic isolation and transformation. Beard (2004) characterizes these factors as political (i.e. due to migration, invasion and colonization), social (i.e. foreign influences), cultural (i.e. exposure to other culture through mass media), technological (i.e. new technology with new

words), and moral factors (i.e. political correctness, new morality, anti-racism, and environmentalism).

Deumert and Mesthrie (2000) see languages change because social status, demographic, and institional factors. Changes in socioeconomic status and self-esteem of individuals as well as changes in the socio-political status of the region and language might as well change in the way speakers use the language. Demographic factors (e.g. relative number, rural or urban, and generational status of speakers) might also the status of a language. Institutional supports (e.g. being used in mass media, religious services, administrative services, education and social networks) are essential for the survival of a language.

While these factors might exert sudden abrupt changes in a language, Chen and Wang (1975: 257), however, have argued that language changes result from a regular sound change resulting from a gradual transformation in one or two features of a phoneme in a continuous phonetic space. While abrupt substitution of one phoneme for another in words that contain that phoneme might be unnatural, minor, gradual and subtle phonetic changes in words might be accountable for word changes and in turn language changes.

2.2 Process of Language and Vowel Shift

Christiansen and Chater (2008) perceive language and vowel changes as a mental process. Changes in the language and the vowel systems are motivated by the need to accommodate the human brain. They view language, following Darwinism, as a complex and interdependent species continuously evolving due to human pressure for learning and thought processing. Thus, languages themselves are shaped by intense selection from each generation of language users and learners. Consequently, the actually arbitrary dimensions of lexico-grammatical structure might not at all arbitrary but consequential from biases in learning and thought processing which are in turn affected by the structure of thought processes, perception, psychomotor factors, cognitive limitations, and pragmatic skills.

In this view, language has to adapt through various gradual processes of evolution so that it becomes easy to be learned, to be produced and to be understood. Thus, the structure of human language including vowels must unavoidably be formed around human learning experiences and processing systems and these in turn are shaped by the our thought structure, psychomotor skills, cognitive limitations, and pragmatic constraints. Language is now simple for us to learn and use, not because our brains embody the underlying knowledge of language, but because it has changed to be adaptable to the limit of our brains.

Croft (2013), Wedel (2006) and Fancois (2011) perceive language changes as resulting from factors internal to the language. As Croft (2006) states, a language changes when sounds in the language change in their pronunciation and the status in the complex linguistic system also shifts due to this articulation change. A language can also change when word form and meaning in that language are created or lost, or occupy different grammatical constructions, structure or functions. These changes occur in evolutionary replication and selection processes in that new entities like innovative vowels appear but some sounds get selected and maintained while others go extinct. To Wedel (2006), this replication and selection is rather predictable based genetic drift, i.e. random fixation of variants through pruning of lines of descent, blending inheritance, or natural selection..

To Francpis (2011), divergence typically affects word forms, whereas convergence mostly takes place between linguistic structures. She argues that there are situations in which languages or languages of the same family diverted from one another due to geo-political isolation but when this isolation is waived the languages maintain contact and as a result they develop more similarities and share common linguistic properties. During isolation, the languages intensively grow differences in sound and lexical forms but when the isolation is waived they grow more similarities in word, phrase and sentence structures. Though relatively diverse in the forms of words, the languages show similarities in the way they organize meaning and meaning-making..

2.3 Principles Governing Vowel Changes

The possible constraints governing language changes are as broad areas as linguistics. Recent works on language changes can cover those in semantics, morpho-syntax, and phonology. They have also associated language changes with how speech communities evolve, how this evolution fundamentally affects cognitive abilities, and how these abilities interact with both with physical capacities and with cultural practices.

Francois (2011) mentions that reconstruction of historical relationships between two varieties of a language requires divergence and divergence processes. In the former, languages have grown differently and overtime they have become less similar. In the latter, languages or language varieties

have developed more lexico-grammatical similarities between them that they become more and more similar in the course of time.

Nonetheless, Yusra (2012), Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and various studies in Thomason (1997) have shown that languages in multilingual societies over time tend to look more and more similar. Studies in contact situation involving languages genetically diverse (see Thomason, 1997) show that languages tend to merge taking vocabulary from one language and the grammar from another and Thomason (1997) refers to this variety as a mixed language. Aikhenvald and Dixon (2001: 11) suggest that while genetic linguistic diversity is often the basis of selecting a linguistic area, studies of socially and geographically encircled areas have shown that different families of language can significantly share similar linguistic characteristics.

The processes of divergence and convergence have played significant roles in the history of languages and they have indeed affected every dimension of language systems. The processes of divergence have become predominantly concentrated with differences in sound changes as well as lexical borrowing and replacement. The process of convergence, on the contrary, has been concentrated on grammatical homogeneity among languages. Language structure, as Aikhenvald and Dixon (2001) claim, has much more common homogeneity in the way how words are syntactically combined, how lexicon is semantically organized and how phrases are strategically constructed.

Labov (1994) has predicted the changes of vowel in English in the principles of vowel changes: chain shifting and merger. Chain shifting is a sound change where one phoneme occupies one place of articulation when the phoneme occupying the place moves away to another place of articulation. In contrast, a merger occurs when one phoneme assumes or approximates the position which is still held by others. The sound replacement in a minimal chain shift can be described metaphorically as entering and leaving a room: the phoneme evacuating the room is called leaving linguistic element, while the new phoneme occupying the vacant room is referred to as an entering linguistic element.

Labov (1994) suggests three important principles governing chain shifting in vowel changes. The first principle is that in chain shifting, long, tense vowels rise. Thus, when producing a long front low vowel /α/, the tongue position is predicted to rise to the position when articulating a front mid vowel /ɛ/ and /ɛ/ rise to front high vowel /i/. By the same token, when a long back low vowel /□/ is produced, the tongue position in chain shifting is predicted to rise to the position for a back mid vowel /o/ and then /o/ rise to /ʊ/.

The second principle states that in chain shifting short vowels fall. Thus, lax high front vowel /I/ is predicted in chain shifting to fall to lax mid front vowel /↔/ and then /↔/ is reduced to lax low front vowel /Θ/. By the same token, short high back vowel /Y/ will fall to short back mid vowel /□/ and articulation of this vowel will fall to that of lax low back vowel /ɷ/.

Finally, the principle suggests that in chain shifting back vowels move to the front. Thus, /ʊ/ chain shifting by rising from //□/ can move to /i/ by fronting as it is the only plausible solution. By the same token, short high back vowel /Y/ will lead to short low front vowel /Θ/ if this principle is a correct prediction.

Note, however, the principles do not apply to vowels in diphthongs. Specified as principle IIa, Labov (1994: 116) mentioned that the nuclei in diphthongs fall. Thus, /ow/ will fall to /aw/ and /eI/ will fall to /aI/ while /aI/ becomes /iI/ resulting from tongue lowering.

Again, the cases that Labov and his students have used were mainly from the cases in English and examining them in language other than English becomes essen

3 METHODOLOGY

Data in this article were derived from data on the Punikan language (Faizah, 2017), the Sambori language (Yusra et. al. 2016), and the Matta data (Yusra, Syahbudin, & Lestari, 2016). These data were originally collected in recorded face-to-face elicitation prompted by Swadesh 500 word list of basic vocabulary. While these word lists have been exhaustively used for dialectological investigation of the language varieties, this article focuses on vowel changes and examine if these changes follow the English-based pattern of vowel change that Labov (1994) has predicted.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing vowel changes in the language, let us be clear with a general background of the languages.

4.1 Overview of the Data Sources

Fauziah (2017) described that the Punikan language is a Meriak-Meriku variety of the Sasak language spoken by the communities on the northern slope of Mount Rinjani.which are now parts of North Lombok Regency. This language variety is Locally known as *Dayen Gunung* language as it is spoken mainly by the people north (Sasak: *daye*) of the Mount (Sasak: Gunung) Rinjani. Known as Bayan language, it is spoken as formal language during ceremonies in Bayan, the former centre of Islam and political power on Lombok. But the language and its speakers migrated to southern slope of the mount when the kng of Bayan embarked on a military expedition in the mid-eightieth century to free the people of Sasak from Balinese occupation. Failure in the expedition forced them to stay in Karang Bayan and Batu Mekar in the southern slope of the Punikan area of Mount Rinjani. Modernization, migration, and new housing complexes in the neighbourhood have forced the Karang Bayan and Batu Mekar people to make contact with people from other parts of Lombok, the majority of whom speak a Meno-Mene variety of the Sasak language. Being marginalized, low in economic status, and limited in number, the speakers of the Punilkan language, particularly younger and educated ones, slowly shift their language from the marginalized Meriak-Meriku to the more prestigious Meno-Mene. It is within this perspective that the Labovian principles of vowel changes can be examined.

The Sambori language, on the contrary, faces a different reality. Yusra et al (2016) described this variety of the Bima languegs as a a dialect different from the contemporary people of Bima who speak Serasuba variety. This language was isolated at the top of Mount Lambitu and was not accessible to the Searsuba speakers until modern roads were made at the beginning of the 20th century opening the area for accesses from the city of Bima, from Maria the capital town of Wawo, and from Belo. While none of the Serasuba speakers would understand the Sambori variety, the Sambori speakers would also be unable to understand the Serasuba variety unless they have been educated at the schools where Serasuba would be used as a medium of instruction and as a means of communication. Being long isolated at the top of a mount, the Sambori language is considered an older variety of the Bima language. This can be supported, for example, by the absence of clear /h/ sounds between vowels and glottal sounds at initial positions which are common in the contemporary Bima language. Access to the Sambori data as an old variety of the Bima language opens up the possibility for us to examine if the Labovian vowel change principles above are substantiated in the data.

The Matta language, as Yusra, Syahbudin and Lestari (2016) illustrated, is the Serasuba variety of the Bima language. This variety and its speakers migrated to the Matta area, west of Mount Dana Kala, Sumbawa, following the defeat of Sarise, the King of Bima, in 1626 to the crown prince La Kai who father, Salisi, was overthrown by Sarise. This area was surrounded by a thick jungle and access was not easy although there is a mud road connecting the area to the newly established trans-migrant area Tolo Oi and to the community of Kwangko. Recording the native speakers of this language, Yusra, Syahbudin and Lestari (2016) was able to identify that the Matta people in some respect speak the Serasuba dialect but in some respect it has developed some divergences with it. In this case, the variety also provides a good case to examine the Labovian principles.

4.2 Principle I: Long Vowels Rise

The first in the Labovian principle of vowel change is that, due to migration, social stratification or intergenerational transformation, long vowels will rise. The cases of long vowel rising are presented in Tabl1.

Table 1: Long Vowel Rising

No	**Vowel Changes**		***English***
Kr	**Bayan ⟶**	**Punikan**	
1	Mangan	Mengan	*Eat*
2	Ita	Ite	*You*
3	Peres	Pires	*Squish*
4	Sekembe	Sekimbi	*How*
5	Badok	Baduk	*Intestine*
Sambori	**⟶**	**Serasuba**	
1	Tine	Tini	*Calf*
2	Kado	Kidi	*Stand*
3	Boupo	Boupu	*New*
4	Sawou	Sawau	*After*
5	Dore	Doro	*Mount*
Serasuba	**⟶**	**Matta**	
1	Weli	Wili	*Buy*
2	Totu	Tutu	*Mention*
3	Tolu	Tulu	*Three*
4	Dowu	Duwu	*Person*
5	Nenti	Ninti	*Hold*

All data in the table indicates that long low (i.e. /a/) or mid vowels (i.e. /o/, /e/) change to long mid or high vowels (i.e. /o/, /e/, /u/ and /i/).

4.3 Principle II: Short Vowels Fall

The second in the Labovian principle is that short vowels. Note, however, as Yusra et al (2016) and Yusra, Syahbudin and Lestari (2016) have shown, all vowels in the Bima language are tense and short vowels do not exist. Thus, data for observation can be taken for the Sasak language alone (see Table 2).

Table 2: Short Vowels Falling

No	Vowel Changes		*English*
Kr Bayan	**⟶**	**Punikan**	
1	Dating	dateng	*Come*
2	Denger	dengah	*Hear*
3	Telır	teleh	*Egg*
4	Sia	Sie	*Salt*
5	Atap	Atep	*Roof*

The table shows that short high vowel /i/ is lowered into short mid vowel (/e/) and mid front vowel (/a/) is lowered to low central vowel (/e/).

4.4 Principle IIa: Diphthong Nuclei Fall

The Labovian principles predict that the up-gliding nuclei in diphthongs will fall. Thus, diphthong /ei/ becomes /ai/, /ou/becomes /au/ and /oi/ becomes /ei/ or /au/. Perhaps, this principle only applies to English and in the Nusa Tenggara languages (see Table 3) such cases are substantiated.

Table 3: No Changes in Diphthongs

No	Vowel Changes		*English*
Kr Bayan	**⟶**	**Punikan**	
1	σαϑι	σαϑι	*Who*
2	αϑι?	αϑι?	*Water*
3	ταΩ?	ταΩ?	*Know*
4	ναϑ	ναϑ	*Shit*
5	χοϑι	χοϑι	*Friend*
Sambori	**⟶**	**Serasuba**	
1	σαωοΩ	σαωαυΩ	*After*
2	παλαϑι	ραϑι	*Run*
3	ποΩ	φο?ο	*Mango*
4	κοϑι	κοϑι	*Cuddle*
5	⌊εϑι	⌊εϑι	*Seed*
Serasuba	**⟶**	**Matta**	
1	χοΩυ	χυΩυ	*Who*
2	τεϑι	τιϑι	*Teach*
3	⌊εϑι	⌊ιϑι	*Seed*
4	αϑι	αϑι	*Thread*
5	οϑι	οϑι	*Water*

While there are numerous distribution of nuclei and gliding sounds particularly in the Bima language, there are, as shown in Table 3, no vowel changes between the varieties. The fact that no changes in the diphthongs as predicted in the Labovian sound changes, the principles should be revisited in order to accommodate the cases in these languages.

4.5 Principle III: Back Vowels Moves to the Front

Finally, the Labovian sound change principle predicts that back vowels will move to the front. Table 4 presents data about fronting of back vowels in the languages under study.

Table 4: Back Vowel Fronting

No	Vowel Changes		*English*
Kr Bayan	**⟶**	**Punikan**	
1	Kako	keke	*Bite*
2	Krupuk	krupok	*Crackers*
3	Eto	ito	*That*
4	Tolok	telek	*Look*
5	Kedok	kedek	*Deaf*
Sambori	**⟶**	**Serasuba**	
1	σοωο	χιωι	*Nine*
2	⌊υνχα	⌊ινχα	*Shoulder*
3	ηα⌊υ	ηα⌊ι	*Cloudy*
4	οσι	οσα	*Wipe*
5	ιλι	ιλυ	*Nose*
Serasuba	**⟶**	**Matta**	
1	Dolu	dulu	*Egg*
2	σολυ	συλυ	*Wiper*

3	ɛl.ɪ	ɪl.ɪ	*Leg*
4	καροκυ	καρυκυ	*Flies*
5	≡ɛvɪ	≡ɪvɪ	*Sneeze*

Fronting of back vowels are very common in long isolated language varieties like the Sambori variety and the Serasuba variety. Even there are cases where high front vowel /i/ as in /osi/ and /ili/ changes to low front vowel /osa/ and high back vowel /ilu/. While the cases of fronting are dominant particularly in the Sambori data, the existence of extended cases as shown above indicates that fronting is an interesting case to study in depth.

In addition, the regularly patterned changes of consonants as in /s/ becoming /c/ as well as other data in the corpus requires more in depth analysis of the case as a way of re-constructing the history of migration and socio-historical relationship between one region to another in the area.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the possibility of using the perspective in explaining variation and changes in three varieties of the Nusa Tenggara languages: the Punikan language, the Sambori language, and the Matta language. While the phonological analyses of data support possible universal application of the Labovian vowel change principles, there are, nonetheless, cases where the principles do not apply. A more elaborated and comprehensive examination of the principles with other non-English languages is required. In general, however, the principles can help explain linguistically what happen to language differences and divergences.

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