

Gaul, conversation and youth genre(s) in Java

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Genres may be defined as “culturally recognised, patterned ways of speaking, or structured cognitive frameworks for engaging in discourse” (Coupland, 2007, p. 15). The youth identity gaul and its associated language styles have been well-described (cf. Smith-Hefner, 2007) but little has been done to show how use of these styles is patterned or structured.

This paper investigates casual youth conversations in Malang, East Java, and shows how use of gaul styles is patterned and positioned within a structured cognitive framework. Specifically, I show how gaul styles are selected at key points within conversations to enact stances. It is these stances, I argue, as much as the selection of the styles themselves, that enable young speakers to construct gaul as a social category.

I begin by reviewing prior descriptions of gaul language styles, including idiomatic expressions and styles associated with the capital Jakarta. I then explore use of these styles in casual conversations by 25 young, educated Javanese individuals. More than 25 hours of casually-occurring conversations were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

Results show how gaul styles are used to construct and respond to youth discourse in a patterned and generic way. For instance, in question-answer dyads, gaul styles are often used to ask bold and potentially offensive questions as well as to provide self-confident and ironic responses. Gaul styles also play a critical role in the construction of *curhat*, literally ‘pouring out of one’s heart’. *Curhat* is an informal genre of conversation in which a speaker discusses a troubling personal issue with an intimate friend. Within *curhat*, gaul styles are shown to play an important role in information management and interpersonal alignment.

I close by positioning gaul styles and ‘patterned ways of speaking’ with regard to the wider socio-cultural realities of contemporary Indonesia.

References

- Coupland, N. (2007). *Style: Language Variation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith-Hefner, N. (2007). Youth language, gaul sociability and the new Indonesian middle class. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 17(2): 184-203.