Short Communication

Kita’s usage in spoken discourse: Collectivity to Singularity

Toshiko Yamaguchi
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur 50603, Malaysia

ABSTRACT:

This short communication explains that kita ‘we’ has an alternative usage as a singular personal pronoun, presented as kita ‘I’. The usage of kita is classified into six classes, based on its substitutability with saya and the context in which kita occurs. The purpose of this paper is to prove that there are three contexts that render kita a singular pronoun: (i) the speaker refers to people in general to share her point of view; (ii) the speaker wants to share information with a group of people whom she knows; (iii) the speaker exercises negative politeness.

Keywords: Collectivity, kita ‘we, I’, Malay language, personal pronoun, singularity

INTRODUCTION

In standard Malay grammar, the first person plural pronoun kita ‘we’ is categorized as an inclusive marker. It stands in contrast to kami ‘we’, an exclusive marker, which includes the speaker but typically excludes the hearer. When a student speaks to her classmates, uttering Kita ada ujian besok, ‘We have a test tomorrow’ (Mintz, 1994), she includes herself and her classmates. This type of inclusion takes the form of collectivity: her utterance is shared by ‘others’, in this case, her classmates. This short communication will demonstrate a new aspect of kita’s usage, which occurs frequently in spoken discourse, namely that although kita ‘we’ is a plural marker, it represents a speaker as a single person in certain speech situations. The reason the speaker employs kita ‘we’, and not saya ‘I’, is that the use of the plural form enables her to add extra meaning: first, she can refer people in general to share her point of view (Class IV); second, she can share information with a group of people whom she knows (Class V); third, she can