

# An Unfinished Wordlist from Ternate

## Glimpses of Javanese at the Onset of Colonialism

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### Abstract

*The earliest sizeable Javanese wordlist was compiled in the late sixteenth century under the auspices of Jacob Cornelisz van Neck, a Dutch naval official who led a fleet to Banten and Ternate. This document appears to reflect the spoken language of its time, making it an invaluable resource for the diachronic study of Javanese. However, its use in academic research comes with several challenges.*

*First, the identities of the informants remain unknown, leaving their dialectal backgrounds and Javanese proficiency uncertain. This uncertainty is further compounded by the fact that the data were reportedly recorded in Ternate, raising the question of whether a Javanese-speaking community existed there at the time. If such a community did exist, it may have developed a distinct dialect shaped by contact with Ternate Malay or other local languages—an influence particularly likely in the treatment of the schwa and word-final nasals. Moreover, the linguistic competence of the compilers remains unclear. Given their almost certainly limited knowledge of Javanese, the wordlist serves as a prime example of useful linguistic material collected by inexperienced recorders.*

*Despite these caveats, the document thus remains a rare and valuable resource. Unlike most contemporaneous sources, which are primarily literary, this wordlist provides a unique glimpse into colloquial Javanese. Its linguistic features suggest tentatively that it reflects an archaic West Javanese dialect, possibly from Banten or Cirebon. The high frequency of Malay loanwords and apparently unidiomatic expressions further indicates that it was documented outside the Javanese heartland, lending credibility to the statement that it was recorded in Ternate.*

**Keywords:** Javanese; historical linguistics; lexicography; language contact; spelling; phonological reconstruction; morphology; Ternate.