The Event Semantic Role of the Nasal Prefix in Banyumas Javanese

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Traditional studies of the Javanese verbal system have focused on a dyadic opposition analyzed broadly based on participant semantics (e.g. Uhlenbeck, 1978, Poedjosoedarmo 1986, Keeler 1984, Robson 1992; inter alia)[1]. Keeping within the Austronesian tradition, this opposition has variously been characterized as active/passive, topic/comment, actor/patient focus, etc. Keeler goes furthest in his analysis of *paired* versus *unpaired* classes of verbs in Javanese. Some recent work on Javanese dialects has started to explore their TAM systems in greater detail, including Vanderklok (2011) on Paciran, Conners (2008) on Tengger, and Cole et.al. (2008) on Peranakan Javanese. These studies, however, focus on phenomena distinct from the participant based accounts mentioned above. Here I demonstrate that the nasal prefix */N-/*[2] in Banyumas Javanese (BJ) provides aspectual contrasts rather than participant (voice) based contrasts. As such, in the synchronic language, it is not in paradigmatic contrast with the passive/patient focus/comment marker *di-*.[3]

The standard analysis for Javanese rests on the fact that the bare stem – unmarked for participant role—is only licit in a highly circumscribed, defective class of words, as seen in (1) below. Here the verb *tutup* 'close' cannot appear in bare form (1c) – it must appear with either the nasal prefix (1a) or one of the passive verbal prefixes[4] (1b). The examples in (1), however, stand in contrast to those from BJ in (2) with *tugel* 'cut' an inherently telic root and (3) with *anggo* 'wear (clothes), an inherently non-telic root. In these examples the verb can appear in bare form, with prenasalization, or with the passive prefix. In (2a) the bare stem form has a preferred telic reading. The addition of the nasal prefix renders a habitual or durative reading. In (3a), the bare stem reading of an inherently non-telic root is not specified for telicity. The addition of the nasal prefix in (3b) however, gives an atelic progressive reading. The role of the nasal prefix in both cases functions in the event semantics to convert a non-telic event into an a-telic event, it is a detelicitizer. Significantly, the class of verbs which can appear in bare form in BJ is not as restricted as that reported for Standard Javanese[5].

The analysis of the nasal prefix in BJ accords with recent work on verbal prefixes in related languages including Wallace (1979) on Jakarta Malay and Gil (2002, 2006) on Jakarta Indonesian and Riau Malay. As presented here, though, the BJ data suggest that the function of the nasal prefix in the event semantics of these languages, and not just the participant semantics, needs to be examined.

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[1] In addition to the complex system of applicative suffixes.

[2] Where /N-/ stands for prenasalization, that generally assimilates in POA to the initial sound of the root.

[3] Diachronically, at some early stage of the language the nasal prefix did stand in paradigmatic opposition to /di-/. It may be only recently that the paradigm has shifted, now standing in contrast to the bare stem.

[4] Banyumasan has a first person passive marker */tag-/* and a fossilized second person passive marker */kog-/*. Their distribution are similar to the */di-/* marker here, which is not, however, marked for person, as demonstrated by the co-occurrence of */di-/* with the first person pronominal agent *nyong*. A full discussion of those markers is beyond the scope of the current paper.

[5] The existence of these bare verbs renders problematic the characterization of the system as a symmetrical voice system as in Himmelmann (2005).

DATA

The current study is based on extensive field recordings made in Purwokerto, Cilacap, and Purbolinggo – which together represent the larger Banyumas dialect; and in depth elicitations with native speakers of each variety.

1. a. Nyong nutup lawange.
      1sg N-close door-E
      'I closed the door.'
   b. Lawange ditutup nyong.
      door-E DI-close 1sg
      'I closed the door.'
   c. *Nyong tutup lawang.

2. a. Budi tugel tangane.
      budi cut hand-E
      'Budi cut his hand.'
   b. Budi nugel kayu.
      budi N-cut wood
      'Budi cuts wood.'
      'Budi is cutting wood.'

   c. Kayune ditugel Budi.
      wood-E DI-cut Budi
      'The tree was cut by Budi.'

3. a. Vito anggo klambi.
      Vito wear clothes
      'Vito wears clothes.'
   b. Vito nganggo klambi.
      Vito N-wear clothes
      'Vito is wearing clothes.'
   c. Klambine dinggo Vito.
      clothes-E DI-wear Vito
      'The clothes were worn/used by Vito.'

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