

Sasak nasal verb variation - antipassives & extraction asymmetries

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Many Austronesian languages spoken on Java and surrounding islands share a nasal prefix, which is a well-known feature of these languages' voice systems. Some features of this cognate prefix at first appear widely shared. For example, the presence of a nasal prefix on verbs in Balinese, Madurese, and one Eastern Sasak prefix signals a preverbal actor, and is required when the actor has been relativized (Arka, 2009; Davies, 2005; Austin, 2013). However, Sasak is different because, not only are there various nasal prefixes, but Sasak dialects vary considerably in terms of which nasal prefix(es) they use and how the nasal verbs function (Austin, 2013). We provide novel data from additional sub-dialects, which shows further variation, and combine it with previous data (Austin, 2013; Shibatani, 2008) in order to demonstrate that the morphologically-distinct nasal prefixes correlate with particular syntactic facts; namely whether they occur with an object, and whether or not arguments may be topicalized. Importantly, the fact that one functions as an antipassive morpheme lends support to Aldridge's (2008) hypothesis that Indonesian *meN-* may have originated from such a morpheme.

Consider the dialectal variation of the prefix(es). Like Balinese, presence of one of the nasal prefixes in some Sasak dialects correlates with a preverbal actor (1) (Austin, 2013). While this particular prefix patterns similarly in some sub-dialects in North Lombok, in others the presence of the prefix does not correlate with preverbal actors (2). Instead, the nasal prefix occurs with both preverbal agents and objects. Moreover, another, morphologically-distinct prefix in Northern dialects indicates a detransitivized structure or one in which objects must be interpreted as non-specific. So, in (3) a direct object is required, but in (4a) there is an obligatorily null object and in (4b) the object is non-specific.

Aldridge (2008) proposes a framework for viewing Indonesian in the context of ergative languages such as Tagalog, and hypothesizes that at an earlier time *meN-* had been used in objectless clauses and later acquired a case feature, allowing verbs to project an additional argument. Despite now occurring with internal arguments, these arguments cannot be extracted (an extraction asymmetry similar to that found in Tagalog). Interestingly, the Sasak prefix in (4) occurs with either obligatorily null objects or non-referential patients (in other dialects). This provides synchronic evidence for the idea that the nasal prefix may have originated from an antipassive morpheme. Moreover, (2) shows how a separate prefix not only occurs with internal arguments, but these may be extracted unlike in other dialects; as a result, this sub-dialect does not show the asymmetry found in Indonesian and other Sasak dialects.

In summary, an examination of the syntactic patterns of Sasak nasal prefixes demonstrates how they can be described along two primary syntactic dimensions, including in terms of (1) what argument may be topicalized or relativized, and (2) whether or not the lexical verb projects an internal argument. Improved understanding of the Sasak facts shed light on our general understanding of the cognate nasal prefix and its possible origin and relationship to ergative syntax.

(1) Eastern Sasak, nasal prefix #1 (Austin, 2013)

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Eastern Sasak preverbal actor
<i>Lóq Ali m-beli balé</i>
ART Ali N ¹ -buy house
'Ali buys a house' | b. Eastern Sasak preverbal object
<i>Balé beli-n lóq Ali</i>
house Ø.buy-LNK ART Ali
'Ali buys a house' |
|---|--|

(2) Northern Sasak (Sukadana area), nasal prefix #1

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Northern Sasak preverbal actor
<i>Awan n-tulis surat=nó</i>
Awan N ¹ -write letter=DEF
'Awan wrote the letter' | b. Northern Sasak preverbal object
<i>surat=nó n-tulis isiq Awan</i>
letter=DEF N ¹ -write by Awan
'Awan wrote the letter' |
|---|--|

(3) Northern Sasak, nasal prefix #1 (transitive)

Mèlé-ng=ku n-séran burón kón pawang=nó
want-LNK=1SG N¹.hunt deer place forest=DEF
'I want to hunt deer in the forest'

(4) Northern Sasak, nasal prefix #2 (detransitivized)¹

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|---|---|
| a. Sukadana area, North Lombok
<i>Mèlé-ng=ku menyéran kón pawang=nó</i>
want-LNK=1SG N ² .hunt in.place forest=DEF
'I want to hunt in the forest' | b. Gondang area, North Lombok (Ahmadi, 2009)
<i>Araq tau ia mem-bau buaq pir léq kebòn=nya</i>
exist man 3SG N ² -pick fruit pear LOC garden=3POSS
'There is a man picking pears in his garden' |
|---|---|

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¹ Superscripts with nasal prefixes reflect morphological identity.