

Lexical typology meets Malay/Indonesian: The case of aqua-motion lexicon

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This paper deals with Malay/Indonesian verbs of “aqua-motion”, i.e. verbs denoting motion in fluid medium, within a broader context of the typology of lexicalization patterns (in the sense of Talmy 1985). Here we focus on one of the basic contrasts within this semantic domain, namely on the contrast between SWIMMING verbs (“active aqua-motion”, associated with special efforts), “passive aqua-motion” (FLOATING) verbs and SAILING verbs, i.e. verbs denoting motion of vessels or aboard the vessel (see Maisak & Rakhilina 2003 for preliminary observations). SWIMMING and FLOATING verbs are felt to be polar with respect to each other, while SAILING verbs are in a sense intermediate between them, although no testable support for this picture has been presented in literature. Yet we argue that Malay/Indonesian provides both semantic and morphosyntactic evidence for such a view.

Malay/Indonesian displays the above-mentioned tripartition contrasting between the “active” verb *berenang* ‘to swim’ (plus some other derivatives of the same root), the class of SAILING verbs (of which *berlayar* ‘to sail’ is the most neutral), and a whole family of FLOATING verbs such as *mengapung / terapung* ‘to float’, *hanyut* ‘to drift’ etc. Importantly, these classes reveal quite a number of oppositions.

(i) **Selectional restrictions.** Dictionaries sometimes claim that in Indonesian different aqua-motion verbs are restricted to different subjects, but in reality the situation is more complex. The use of “active” *berenang* is generally limited to contexts with animate subjects (although this restriction may be slighter; e.g., the crocodile who does not show well-observable efforts does not *berenang*). SAILING verbs are used either with human subjects or with humans and vessels. FLOATING verbs do not show any strong restrictions.

(ii) **Semantic functions.** Following Talmy (1985) we recognize the distinction between the fact of *MOTION* and its *MANNER*. While SWIMMING verbs seem to refer to *MOTION* itself, other classes arguably refer either to *MANNER* (being compatible with general motion verbs such as *pergi* ‘go’) or to *MOTION+MANNER*.

(iii) **Agentivity.** SWIMMING is inherently agentive, while FLOATING is by definition non-agentive. SAILING verbs, however, sometimes require a kind of agentivity of their subjects, especially if derived from nouns denoting vessels. For instance, the verb *berakit* ‘to raft’ presupposes that the referent of its subject drives the raft, otherwise a less specified *naik* ‘to ride’ is used.

(iv) **Aspectual behavior.** The SWIMMING verb *berenang* can refer to the process of swimming or to either starting or ending point of this process (sharing this aspectual potential with some other motion verbs such as *terbang* ‘to fly’). Other classes of aqua-motion verbs seem to prefer either the process or inchoative (but not completive) interpretation or - as with verbs of “vertical aqua-motion” such as those formed from the roots *-timbul* or *-sembul* ‘to rise; to hold out’ - can refer either to the process or to the resulting state but not to the starting point of the process (see Agus Salim et al. 1988 for description of such verbs). Further, it may be that for certain FLOATING verbs the non-process reading is really marked (if possible at all). Thus, the aspectual deficiency seems to increase together with the deviation from the SWIMMING class.

(v) **-i derivation.** The verb (*me*)*renangi* formed from the SWIMMING root *-renang* with suffixation of the “locative applicative” suffix *-i* usually is used for referring to ‘crossing (something)’, thus incorporating the idea of destination (even though it still requires only the location argument). The same suffixation with other verbs does not seem to presuppose such directivity of the action. This is likely to be related to the “completive potential” of SWIMMING verbs.

Thus, the SWIMMING class differs from other classes of aqua-motion verbs in a number of properties, but at least for some of them SAILING verbs turn out to be closer to it than FLOATING verbs. Probably, this conclusion may be generalized further. Perhaps, aqua-motion verbs differ as concerns the individualization of situations denoted by them. The possibility of the completive reading, certain semantic restrictions (directivity and agentivity) and the *MOTION+MANNER* use all make the situation less backgrounded and more individualized (see Hopper & Thompson 1980 on similar facts concerning prototypical transitive clauses). Crucially, this correlates with animacy restrictions, which are related to the individualization of discourse referents. This suggests that there may be a direct link between the individualization of discourse referents and individualization of situations (cf. the well-known interaction between tense/aspect/mood categories and individualization/specificity of arguments).

References

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