Pronouns and pronominal prefixes in Alor -Pantar (Trans New Guinea)

Pronouns represent the primary evidence linking the well-defined Alor-Pantar island sub-group to the Trans New Guinea group (cf. Ross 2005). Indeed, the shape of pronouns throughout the Alor-Pantar languages almost universally reflects a *n-, *h-, *g- pattern for first, second, and third persons, respectively. However, the close phonological similarity of pronoun shapes belies substantial variation in the modern structure of pronominal systems. In particular, a number of distinct alignment patterns are discernable. For example, independent pronouns in Teiwa are syntactically-aligned in an nominative-accusative pattern, thus both active and stative intransitive verbs employ the same pronouns (Klamer to appear).

(1) a   heer   (2) a   min
     3PRO   climbs   3PRO   dead
     'he climbs up'   'he is dead'

In neighboring Nedebang active and stative intransitive verbs employ different pronominal paradigms, reflecting a semantically-aligned system (Holton 2004).

(3) nang   apa   (4) na'ing   ko'as
     1PRO.ACTIVE walk   1PRO.STATIVE soaking
     'I am walking'   'I am soaking wet'

The behavior of pronominal prefixes reflects even more variation. In Adang, pronominal prefixes may reference only the less agentive argument of transitive verb (Haan 2001); whereas in Lamma, pronominal prefixes may reference almost any argument, depending on lexical verb class (Holton to appear). In Abui, three distinct pronominal prefixes index different semantic classes of arguments (Kratochvíl 2007).

Until recently typological comparison of pronominal structures in the Alor-Pantar languages has not been possible, owing to the lack of relevant descriptive materials. This paper presents a preliminary survey of pronominal systems in the Alor-Pantar languages, relying on data from recent fieldwork studies and documentary work in progress. These data are then compared with selected samples from mainland TNG languages. The results reveal: (i) a striking amount of varition in the formal realization of alignment patterns (grammatical relations); (ii) the importance of lexical verb classes across the subgroup; and (iii) significant structural differences from mainland TNG pronominal systems.

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