

Sasak voice morphology

Antipassives & the syntactic dimensions of nasal verb variation

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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). I provide novel data from a Northern dialect, which shows further variation, and combine it with previous data (Austin, 2013; Shibatani, 2008) in order to show how the morphologically-distinct nasal prefixes correlate with particular syntactic facts; namely whether the verb occurs with an object, and which arguments may be extracted. I account for these facts utilizing a generative phase-based approach, but most 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. So, in (3) a direct object is required, but in (4) this argument is obligatorily null (and not optionally overt).

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

a. Eastern Sasak preverbal actor

Lóq Ali m-beli balé
ART Ali N¹-buy house
'Ali buys a house'

b. Eastern Sasak preverbal object

Balé beli lóq Ali
house buy ART Ali
'Ali buys a house'

(2) Northern Sasak, nasal prefix #1

a. Northern Sasak preverbal actor

Awan n-tulis surat=nó
Awan N¹-write letter=DEF
'Awan wrote the letter'

b. Northern Sasak preverbal object

surat=nó n-tulis isiq Awan
letter=DEF N¹-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)

Mèlé-ng=ku menyéran kón pawang=nó
want-LNK=1SG N².hunt in.place forest=DEF
'I want to hunt in the forest'

Many formal analyses of voice morphology have centered largely on Indonesian, Tagalog, and Malagasy (Guilfoyle, Hung, & Travis, 1992; Aldridge, 2008). Fewer accounts have examined and accounted for differences within the Indonesian languages that share this cognate nasal prefix. Aldridge (2008) proposes a framework in which we can view 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 in some respects to that found in Tagalog).

Interestingly, the Sasak prefix in (4) occurs with either suppressed internal arguments or non-referential patients (in other dialects). This provides synchronic evidence for the idea that the nasal prefix 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. These facts can be accounted for in a formal phase-based approach by assuming that syntactic variation can target single features on syntactic heads, namely Case and an EPP feature on *v* (following Aldridge's 2008 proposal). Nearly full parametric variation of these two features is borne out with the Sasak data. Overall, 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. Beyond Sasak, the data have relevance for the formal mechanisms permitted in linguistic theory since parametricity of single features allows for an account of the Sasak data, and the distinct morpho-phonological facts of the Sasak verbal prefixes provide evidence in favor of positing syntactically-distinct *v* heads.

Selected references

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