

Voice system and epics in Bajo (Kangean archipelago, Indonesia)

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The Sama-Bajau communities are scattered in Southern Philippines, Sabah (Malaysia) and the eastern part of Indonesia. Their origins and the cause of their diaspora remain a mystery. In Indonesia, where some of them used to be sea-nomads, they are settled in dozens of hamlets on the shores of East-Kalimantan, Celebes, Lesser Sunda Islands and many tiny islands, fishing and collecting various maritime resources. In Indonesia, the Bajo, as they call themselves, speak *baun Same* “Sama language”, a Western Malayo-Polynesian language part of the Sama-Bajau sub-grouping. With strangers, they name their language *bahasa Bajo*.

We studied the most South-Western Bajo community, in the Kangean archipelago (North from Bali, but part from the East Java province). In the eastern part of this archipelago live approximately 20.000 Bajo people, mixed up with other smaller communities (Madura, Bugis, Mandar, Buton). The Bajo language is locally prevailing, thus used by people from other origins too.

The Kangean Bajo dialect is very close to the Bajo dialects of the Southern Celebes and the Lesser Sunda Islands. We gathered our corpus partly from daily conversations, and partly from the *iko-iko*, epic stories sung at night. We recorded, transcribed and translated five *iko-iko*, with the approbation of the last singer and the help of a local teacher, all of us being aimed at preserving this fascinating oral literature.

We will examine the voice system of the Kangean Bajo. It exhibits a symmetrical voice system, but like in some other Austronesian languages (see Himmelmann 2005 : 151, 158) there is also an ergative-absolutive opposition, bounded to the personal pronouns. Hence the Kangean Bajo has three sets of pronouns : free pronouns (voice neutral), ergative enclitic pronouns and absolutive enclitic pronouns.

The Actor Voice is marked by the verbal prefix *N-*. There are three Undergoer Voices : unmarked (prefix *Ø-*), passive (prefix *di-*) and non-volitional passive (prefix *ta-*). The symmetrical voice alternation is illustrated in example (1) :

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| (1) | <i>Tenun-ne bidah iru.</i>
weave-3SG.ERG sarong DET
She weaves this sarong. | <i>Iye n-(t)enun bidah iru.</i>
3SG AV-weave sarong DET
She weaves this sarong. |
|-----|---|---|

The enclitic pronouns may follow other words than the verb.

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|-----|---|---|
| (2) | <i>N-(t)enun telu-ye bidah.</i>
AV-weave three-3SG.ABS sarong
She weaves three sarongs. | <i>N-(t)enun bidah-nu-ye.</i>
AV-weave sarong-2SG.GEN-3SG.ABS
She weaves your sarong. |
|-----|---|---|

Two enclitic pronouns can follow the verb, the ergative pronoun coming first.

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| (3) | <i>Ada' na pa-ngaji-ku-ko.</i>
want will CAUS-teach-1SG.ERG -2SG.ABS
I want to have you taught (I want someone to teach you the Coran) |
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A wealth of syntactic orders is always available. For instance, “she weaves this sarong” as in ex. (1) can be uttered in seven other fashions, including focalisation patterns.

Finally, we will tell more about the *iko-iko* epics: the singer, the public, and the social circumstances of the performance. We will browse through some stories, looking for clues over the recent fate and fears of the Kangean Bajo community.

Glossing: AV : actor voice ; UV : undergoer voice ; DET : determiner; CAUS : causative ; ERG : ergative ; ABS : absolutive ; GEN : genitive

Reference:

HIMMELMANN, Nikolaus P. (2005) « The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar: typological characteristics ». in *The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar*, (A. Adelaar & N. Himmelmann eds.), pp. 110-181. New York: Routledge.