

Dialect variation in the voice system of Sasak: when is a nasal-verb not a nasal-verb?

Peter K. Austin
(Endangered Languages Academic Programme)
(Department of Linguistics, SOAS)

The Sasak language is spoken on the island of Lombok (immediately east of Bali) by around 2 million speakers. It shows great internal variation, both geographical and social, with a complex linguistic ecology (Austin 2003) that includes five ‘dialects’ recognized by native speakers and named for the shibboleth terms for ‘like this-like that’ (eg. Ngeno-ngene, Meno-mene, etc.). The geographical varieties show variation in phonology, lexicon and morpho-syntax, especially in the areas of clitic pronouns (Austin 1996, 2006) and valence-changing processes (Austin 1996, 2000, 2001), but also in verbal morphology. All varieties have a contrast between nasal-prefix verbs (also called ‘nasal verbs’, Arka 1998) and non-nasal prefix verbs (also called ‘oral verbs’ or ‘zero verbs’), however in some the contrast has syntactic relevance in terms of relating to cross-clausal ‘pivot’ choice, while in others the contrast is related to different semantic-pragmatic interpretations of the non-agentlike NP in a two-argument clause (where such an argument must be interpreted as non-referential or non-specific in the nasal-prefix verb construction).

This paper explores the distribution of nasal-prefix verbs in varieties of Sasak. It uses data from geographically-based surveys, including comparative materials from ‘frog story’ and ‘pear story’ texts, together with other kinds of narratives. The goal of the paper is to determine how different varieties employ nasal-prefix verbs and which functions such constructions carry out.

References

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