

Variation in aspect and modality in Borneo

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The high variation of languages in Borneo is well represented by the different aspect and modality markers that occur in the various languages. Nevertheless precise information on the TAME markers in most of the languages of Central Borneo is lacking due probably to the fact that in most of the cases they are optional. Aspect and modality are hardly expressed morphologically but mostly lexically and often seem to be non obligatory if context and semantics of the verbs contribute to the expression of this feature.

This paper illustrates the wide range of strategies used in particular by Pnan languages to express TAME as compared to the languages of the close neighbors Kayan and Kenyah employing narrative texts and elicited material.

The aspect markers of the languages investigated occur in specific positions in the verbal complex and interact with modals, auxiliaries, negators and main verbs to create a range of aspectual and modal meanings.

Perfective action is marked in the various Pnan languages by different lexemes that generally occur before the verb and can be omitted in some pragmatic situations or when some adverbs or adverbial phrases indicate the time of the action like 'yesterday, some time ago, earlier' etc, mainly *pengah* in Penan Benalui (1), *belum* in Punan Tubu' (2), *nga* in Punan Malinau (3), compared to *lepek* or *tene* in Kenyah (4), *uh* in Kayan (5).

1. kekat sakai **pengah** masek bibi
all guest PFCT go.in whole
all the guests have come in
2. **belum** kou moru?
PFCT 2SG N-bathe
have you bathed yet?
3. guhngan kiq **nga** mun
rice 2SF PFCT eat
you ate all the rice
4. a'eng **tene** ki tèsen je **lepeq** ta'eng kanane **tene** re
NEG PFCT 1SG know because PFCT NEG use-3SG PFCT PRTCL
I don't know because it has not been used any more
5. **uh** ateng nah ihaq
PFCT arrive PRTCL 3SG
he has arrived

On the other hand, for imperfective action the spatial expressions *dalew* (inside) in Penan Benalui, *aan tang* (in the middle) in Punan Tubu, *mai* (<*amai* inside) in Punan Malinau are employed, but these seem to be not always necessary. Data from elicitation sessions gives indication that imperfective action can be unmarked and when is expressed is conveyed through the use of spatial lexemes. Imperfective action is better expressed by the use of the deictic ‘this’, or the adverb meaning ‘still’ like in the following examples (6 and 7) from Punan Tubu’:

6. hok **ini** mom
1SG this bathe
I am bathing

7. nak inah **lelaa** keman
child that still eat
the child is (still) eating

How imperfective action is really conceptualized in these languages? Does the answer lie in other domains, like in the semantics of verbs, in the syntax of sentence constituents or in their combination?

Other aspects like iterativity or continuous action are expressed through reduplication of the verb or other constituents.

What is peculiar is the great amount of particles employed in the different languages with the purpose of expressing modality or other kind of evidence in the source of information in statements. These particles are not grammatical and seem to be optional occur all over the data in recorded texts but hardly in elicitations. A description of these particles will be provided together with the analysis of their distribution and combination with other aspect and modality markers.