

Interpreting the geography of TAM marking across Indonesia

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This presentation will look at the broad typology of TAM marking with a focus on aspect and finiteness in a wide variety of Indonesian languages. The goal will be to better understand the diversity of Indonesian strategies for marking aspect and finiteness within the larger Austronesian picture.

We begin by looking at how TAM categories are canonically marked in the Philippine languages. Strikingly, Philippine systems are quite uniform in the following properties:

1. The infix <in> (in any of its numerous modern reflexes) indicates an initiated action or perfective aspect while reduplication typically marks various imperfective aspects.
2. Two second-position clitics, which I reconstruct here as PMP **dana* ‘already’ and **pa* ‘still’, are generally used to indicate what can be called ‘outer aspect’.
3. Aspect determines finiteness – in languages which distinguish a generalized imperfective form from an unmarked infinitive, a matrix declarative verb must be inflected for aspect.

These properties are also found in several Formosan languages and can, on this basis, be reconstructed to Proto-Austronesian (see Ross 2002 for the reconstruction of the first property). It is thus very surprising to see how rare this assemblage of properties is among the languages of the Indonesian area. For the most part, Indonesian languages typically employ adverbs and non-inherited clitics for what was originally handled by PAN verbal morphology. Reflexes of the inherited ‘outer aspect’ clitics **dana* and **pa* can still be found in many Indonesian languages but have been lost in a great many more. This can be gleaned from the many innovated syncretic forms we find for “not yet” (cf. Malay *belum*), while this is expressed uniformly throughout all Philippine languages as NEG + **pa*. Finally, very few Indonesian languages can be said to have a true non-finite form. Either one form serves double duty in a non-finite function as well as an imperfective function (as commonly found in the Pamona-Kaili sub-group), or there is no aspectual distinction marked on the verb at all (as in Malay).

I advance the proposal here that this simplification of the TAM system across such a large area of Indonesia is not coincidental but was rather a product of prehistorical language contact. One piece of evidence for this is that languages which are located in the areas most plausibly subject to prehistorical traffic on the western side are the same areas where we see convergence towards the far more analytic canonical mainland Southeast Asian system. I also entertain the possibility that the “re-complexification” of TAM morphology in many languages of eastern Indonesia was also a result of contact with non-Austronesian languages of the Papuan sphere. This, however, must remain far more tentative given that there exist considerably pockets of innovated morphological complexity in western Indonesia as well.