

Tense, aspect, mood and evidentiality in Sasak, eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

The Sasak language is spoken on the island of Lombok (immediately east of Bali) by around 2.5 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), verbal morphology (Austin 2010), and valence-changing processes (Austin 1996, 2000, 2001). Sasak, like many Indonesian languages, does not encode tense grammatically, however it has a rich system of marking aspect, mood and evidential categories. These are expressed via particles, verb reduplication, and, in one dialect of Sasak, by clitic placement.

All varieties of Sasak have non-inflecting particles that encode aspect, mood and evidentiality. They typically occur in Wackernagel (second) position in the clause and expresses a range of aspectual and modal distinctions, as well as polarity for declarative and non-declarative clauses. These particles typically host clitic pronouns which represent the highest thematic role (“Actor”) in the verb’s argument structure. They include such forms as *gin ~ gen ~ iaq ~ eaq ~ aq* ‘projective mood’ or *kenyeke ~ kenye ~ kenyje ~ jengke* ‘continuous aspect’. There is also a set of verbs that can occur after the predicate to express evidential meanings (experiential, reportative) such as *inde* ‘suppose, guess based on contextual evidence’. I present an analysis of the syntax and semantics of these elements using examples drawn from a corpus of texts. The evidential verbs are especially interesting given the general left-headedness of Sasak phrasal constituents. Examples are:

- (1) mòlahkò angenkò indeng, nganjeng
mòlah=kò angen=kò inde=ng nganjeng
easy=1sg feeling=1sg suppose=3 stand.up
It seems that I felt at ease, and I stood up. [sas-t072s027]

- (2) lalò cóbaqè indeng
laló=ò cóbaq=è inde=ng
go=2 try=3p suppose=3
Is it that you went and tried it? [sas-t072s028]

It also appears that some aspectual contrasts can be encoded by verbal reduplication in Sasak. Additionally, in one dialect only, the placement of clitic pronouns with respect to the verb can also encode realis versus irrealis mood (enclitic for the former, proclitic for the latter). Similarities to some south Sulawesi languages in this area will be noted.

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