

Verbal Morphology in Enggano and Nias

Enggano and Nias are both Barrier Island languages spoken off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. Whilst Nias is generally recognised as Austronesian, the status of Enggano has long been a matter of debate (see e.g. Capell 1982, Blench 2014, Nothofer 1986, Edwards 2015). Most people would now agree that regular sound correspondences do support the inclusion of Enggano in the Austronesian family (see e.g. Nothofer 1986, Edwards 2015, Smith 2017). In this paper, we will argue that there is also morphosyntactic evidence for including Enggano in the Austronesian family. Specifically, there are striking parallels in the verbal morphology of Enggano and Nias, and differences can be largely explained through processes of historical change in the functions of different constructions.

As shown through analysis of the Kähler corpus collected in 1930s (1940, 1975) and contemporary materials collected as part of ongoing documentation since 2018, both transitive and intransitive verbs in Enggano can occur in one of three main constructions: *ki-*, *bu-* and bare:

(1) *Enggano*

a. **bu- verb**

a-duhür ean ka-**b**-dèhè
 CONJ=finish DEM 3-BU-hear
 ‘afterwards he heard’

b. **bare verb**

ki ke’ i-dèhè
 3SG NEG 3-hear
 ‘he didn’t hear’

c. **ki- verb**

ki ki-dèhè
 3SG KI-hear
 ‘he heard’ (elicitation)

These constructions can all occur in main clauses, as illustrated in (1), but have different discourse uses and different forms of expression for verbal arguments. *Bu-* verbs and bare verbs express subjects via different sets of verbal agreement markers (either in combination with overt NPs or alone). *Bu-* verbs are generally used when the subject is a continuing topic and hence are the most frequent in discourse. Bare verbs are restricted to negated clauses and imperatives. Finally, *ki-* verbs can occur out of context (e.g. in elicitation) and can be used at the beginning of narratives to introduce new participants. Arguments are expressed using free pronouns or NPs. The *ki-* verb construction is also the main structure used in relative clauses:

(2) *Enggano*

ě’ pa [mè’ ki-pu]
 DEM child REL KI-run
 ‘This is the child that ran’ (elicitation)

Southern Nias, as described in Brown (2001), has three equivalent constructions to Enggano: bare, *mu-* and *si=*. The markers *bu-* and *mu-* are both plausibly cognate with PAN **-um-* (see Edwards 2015). *ki-* and *si=* are also plausibly cognate, since **s>k* is a regular sound change in Enggano (Edwards 2015) but probably derive from erstwhile case markers, rather than voice markers.

(3) *Southern Nias*

a. **Bare verb** (Brown 2001:250)

Ma=i-cici-ni mbatö asu.
 PFV-3-defecate-TR MUT:floor dog
 ‘The dog has defecated on the floor’

b. **mu- verb** (Brown 2001:502)

ya-m-balö gefe Ama Dali
 3-MU-borrow MUT:money Ama Dali
 ‘Ama Dali wants to borrow money’

c. **si= verb** (Brown 200: 415)

Andrehe'e	nasu	[si=usu	ya'o]
DEM	MUT:dog	REL=bite	1SG

'That's the dog that bit me'

Much like in Enggano, bare and *mu-* verbs both take different sets of verbal agreement markers to express subjects. However, in contrast to Enggano, bare verbs with agreement are used for realis main clauses (not restricted to negation) and only with transitive verbs. Intransitive verbs often occur with a variant of *mu-* and never take agreement for S (see Brown 2001). This results in an ergative agreement pattern. The equivalent construction to Enggano *bu-* with agreement is found with both transitive and intransitive verbs, in contrast, but is restricted to future/irrealis contexts, like (3b). Finally, unlike *ki-*, *si=* cannot occur on main clause verbs and is a dedicated marker of relative clauses, like (3c). However, like with Enggano *ki-*, *si=* verbs never take agreement.

We argue that the constructions in (1) and (3) must be related given the formal similarities. The differences in use can be explained via processes of historical change. The ergative patterning in Nias is relatively widespread in the languages of Indonesia (see e.g. Zobel 2002) and hence we argue that the Enggano patterns represent the innovation. Specifically, we argue that *ki-* was extended to main clauses via reanalysis of a dedicated marker of relativization. This may relate to the fact that the use of *bu-* with both transitive and intransitive clauses was extended from irrealis contexts (where it is used in Southern Nias) to all main clause contexts, resulting in predominantly accusative alignment in Enggano. Whatever the exact series of changes, this comparison provides further morphosyntactic evidence for treating Enggano as an Austronesian language.

References

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