



Austronesian relativization: A view from the field in eastern Indonesia

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Despite the important role Austronesian languages have played in the typological and universals research of relative clauses and the attendant hierarchy of grammatical relations (Keenan and Comrie 1977, *inter alia*), no critical assessment of the assumed analysis of the Austronesian relativization has been made. Based on the primary data from the fieldwork on Lombok Island in eastern Indonesia, this presentation shows that there are two robust and critical grammatical relations, Subject and Topic, in Sasak and that the Subject relation is not in fact relevant in relativization of this and other Western Malayo-Polynesian languages (as well as Formosan languages), contrary to the claim that “Subjects are universally the most relativizable of NPs.” (Keenan 1985:158) Similarity between the Austronesian relativization pattern and those seen in Tibeto-Burman, Uto-Aztecan and a number of Amazonian languages indicates that the so-called “Subjects-only” constraint in Austronesian languages recognized by Keenan and Comrie (1977) is an epiphenomenon emanating from the parallel involvement of the focus morphology in argument nominalizations and clausal predicates.

The proposed analysis recognizes three critically distinguished clause structures in Sasak and other Western and Central-Eastern Austronesian languages of Nusa Tenggara that are characterized in terms of the argument alignment pattern: Actor focus construction <A=SUB=TOP; P=OBJ>; Patient focus construction <A=SUB; P=OBJ=TOP>; Passive construction <A=OBL; P=SUB=TOP>. While many of these and other Austronesian languages do not have a passive construction, the relevant distinction between AF and PF constructions is made throughout the region (and beyond) even when the focus morphology has been lost.

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| Time: | 3:15pm |
| Date: | Friday 20 February 2009 |
| Location: | Room 509, Arts Centre, University of Melbourne |