Split Intransitivity and Voice in Mentawai and Balinese: Morphosyntactic Integration and Functional Versatility

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This study examines the morphosyntactic and functional properties of split intransitivity in Mentawai and Balinese, two Austronesian languages that exhibit distinct yet interconnected voice systems. By comparing the intransitive voice markers in Mentawai (*ma-*, *mu-*, *tu-*) with the intransitive markers in Balinese (*N*-'AV', ∅- 'UV', and *ma*- 'MIDV') (Arka, 2003; Artawa, 1994; Pastika, 2006; Udayana, 2013, among others), the analysis situates both languages within the broader typological context of Indonesian languages. Drawing on Klamer's (2008) analysis of split intransitivity in the Indonesian area, we explore how these systems reflect universal principles of agentivity and control while displaying unique morphosyntactic and semantic adaptations.

Key similarities between the two systems include their reliance on agentivity, control, and lexical aspect to distinguish intransitive predicates, as well as their shared roots in Austronesian morphosyntax. However, they diverge in their integration of voice-related morphology into syntax and discourse. Mentawai emphasizes semantic distinctions, such as habituality and inchoativity while Balinese integrates voice marking into syntactic structure, with AV and UV alternations encoding grammatical subject selection/alignment, typically also with pragmatic functions such as topicality and focus being highly critical. Both Mentawai and Balinese exhibit properties observed in Klamer (2008), namely split intransitivity in the Indonesian area often hinges on semantic criteria like volitionality and dynamicity.

The historical significance of these patterns sheds light on the evolution of Austronesian verbal morphology. Mentawai's system (cf., Gil, 2008) reflects a conservative preservation of Proto-Austronesian verbal formatives, while Balinese illustrates innovations that align with a shift towards tighter morphosyntactic and pragmatic integration. These findings contribute to theoretical discussions on the interplay between morphosyntax, lexical-aspectual semantics (e.g., dynamicity vs. stativity, volitionality), and pragmatics (e.g., topical prominence). Additionally, this paper offers a fresh perspective on split intransitivity and voice in Austronesian linguistics by presenting new data from recent fieldwork on Mentawai, providing insights into under-documented features of its innovative voice system.

Our findings and comparative analysis enriched by Klamer's (2008) typological framework and fresh Mentawai data, underscore the functional versatility and typological significance of voice and split intransitivity within the Austronesian languages of Indonesia, and beyond.

Keywords: split intransitivity, morphosyntax, aspect, Austronesian voice, language evolution

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