

On the Typology of the Attrition and Loss of Proto-Austronesian (PAN) **<um>* AV Marking: A Mandailing-Batak Perspective

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This paper explores the diachronic trajectories and synchronic reflexes of the PAN *<um>* Actor Voice (AV) marker—described by Blust (2013:383) as the single most important infix in AN languages. The focus is on its attrition, reanalysis, and functional reassignment in Mandailing (ISO 639-3: btm, ~400,000 speakers, North Sumatra, Indonesia), with typological contextualisation both within and beyond Sumatra. While its morphosyntactic integrity—including transparent alignment systems and verb class distinctions—has been largely preserved in Formosan (F) languages (Ross 2015), *<um>*'s fate varies across the AN family. In these F languages, *<um>* functions within a symmetrical voice system, as an argument selector marking Actor-subject or pivot, while also encoding dynamic aspectual meanings, such as agentivity. In contrast, many AN languages of Indonesia have experienced either partial or complete loss of this marker (cf., Adelaar 2011). Mandailing presents a compelling case of partial attrition: though *<um>* is more clearly preserved in related Batak languages such as Toba, its remnants persist in Mandailing in limited and lexicalised ways. In Batak languages, reflexes of *<um>* are no longer productive grammatical voice markers, having been supplanted by AV *maN-* (e.g., in Toba and Mandailing) and AV *N-* (in Karo).

In Mandailing, *<um>* survives as a fossilised or refunctionalised element embedded in lexical items and valency-changing constructions. Drawing on recent field data, we show that Mandailing retains fossilised reflexes of *<um>* in several domains. **(1) Stative–inchoative predicates** (e.g., *ma-dabu* '(it) falls'; example (1)). This *ma-* likely derives from an earlier reflex of *<um>*, via the pathway *mu-* > *ma-*, aligning with agent-suppressing functions associated with conservative PAN verb classes such as K/MA (Ross 2015). **(2) Complex constructions** such as *mang-ka-dabu* 'falling over (of plural entities/events)' (example (2)). Here, *mang-* reflects the historical *<um>* AV function, layered with the plurality function of PAN **<(a)N>* (cf. Kaufman 2009), pointing to lexicalised AV constructions that have been reinterpreted within new voice paradigms. **(3) A verbaliser/valency-changing prefix pair, *par-* / *mar-***—a recurring pattern known as *p-/m-* pairing in Austronesian linguistics (Blust 2013:372)—survives in productive derivation. The middle voice (MV) prefix *mar-* is analysable as containing a formative element derived from *<um>*, while *par-* functions as a causative prefix. This middle–causative pairing typically expresses a contrast in agency/transitivity, where the MV form denotes self-instigated agentivity—a function closely associated with *<um>* (e.g., *mar-abit* 'get dressed' vs. *par-abit* 'to dress (someone)'; see examples (3)–(4)). This supports the hypothesis of a historical layering of *<um>* onto causative and middle voice constructions.

Importantly, Mandailing shows increasing morphosyntactic opacity: although AV-like forms persist, their voice-marking functions have weakened, giving way to SVO alignment with bare verb constructions and a reduced inventory of productive derivational markers (cf., Adelaar 2011). This typifies the asymmetrical alignment shift characteristic of many western MP languages (Aldridge 2004; Riesberg, Malcher, and Himmelmann 2019; Arka 2024).

From a typological perspective, we argue that the attrition of *<um>* is not simply a loss, but a reanalysis trajectory. Our study suggests three key mechanisms: **(1)** AV semantic bleaching into an agentivity marker, as seen in MV in Indonesian languages; **(2)** Morphophono-logical fusion and reanalysis as lexical verb forms or aspectual markers (e.g. Indonesian *guruh* 'thundering' (V) (<*guruh* 'thunder'); **(3)** Shift away from symmetrical voice to SVO-based syntactic alignment, where voice alternations are lexical or analytical-constructional, rather than morphological, as seen in languages that drift into the isolating type, as seen in Flores languages (Arka and Wouk 2014).

By situating Mandailing within the broader Austronesian voice typology, this paper shows how the PAN voice system was dismantled through layered grammatical attrition, leaving behind diagnostic traces in derivational morphology and verb semantics. Theoretically, we stress the role of lexical-aspectual properties (Tenny 1994) and construction-specific patterns; cf., Croft (2001) and advances in lexically-based theories like LFG with CxG's insights (Matsumoto 2023). We adopt a lexical-constructional analysis, building on Ross' (2015) model of PAN verb classes, which offers the most insightful framework for tracing these *<um>* transitions in AN morphosyntax.

Examples

1. *Ma-dabu mangga i ngon batang.*
STAT-fall mango DEM from tree
'The mango dropped (jatuh) from the tree.' (Elicited)
2. *Mang-ka-dabu jambu i i-baen alogo na gogo.*
AV.PL-STAT-fall fruit DEM UV-make wind REL strong
'The strong wind made the fruits fall (Ind. *berjatuhan*).'(Hutasuhut et al. 2016:85)
3. *Madung mar-abit ia kehe tu horja.*
already MV-cloth 3sg go to party
'(S)he already got dressed and went to the party.' (Hutasuhut et al. 2016:4)
4. *Ulang ni-par-abit seragam sikola di bagas da.*
NEG.IMP UV-CAUS-cloth uniform school at home EMP
'Don't wear school uniform at home, okay?' (Hutasuhut et al. 2016:4)

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