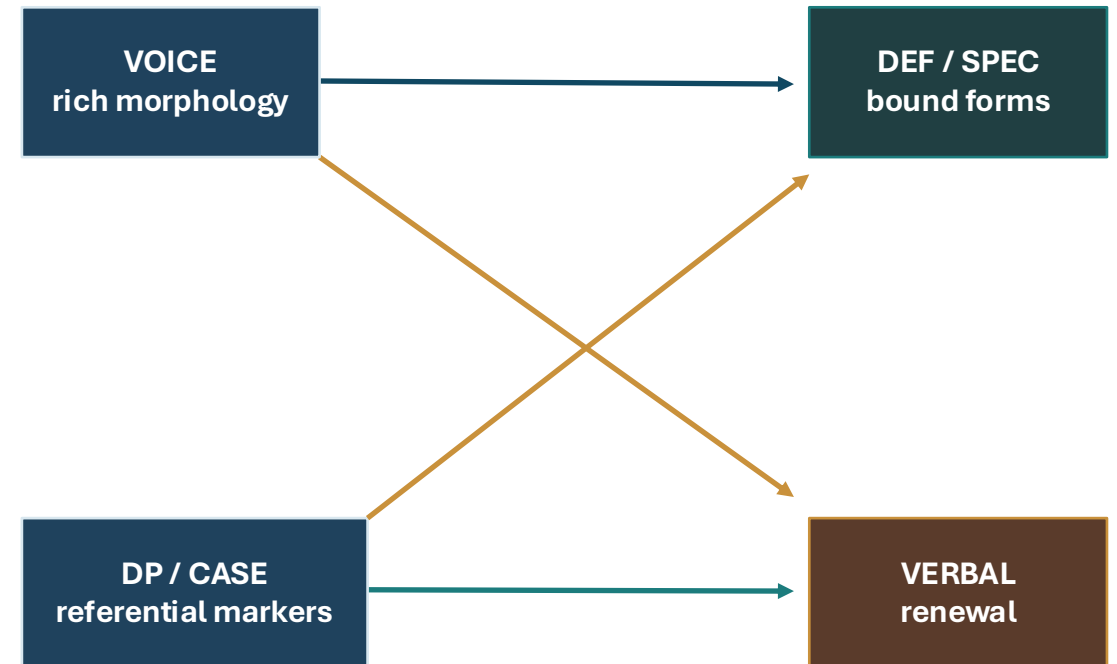


From Voice to Definiteness

Referential restructuring in Western Austronesian

Yustinus Ghanggo^{1,3} Ate & I Wayan Arka^{1,2}

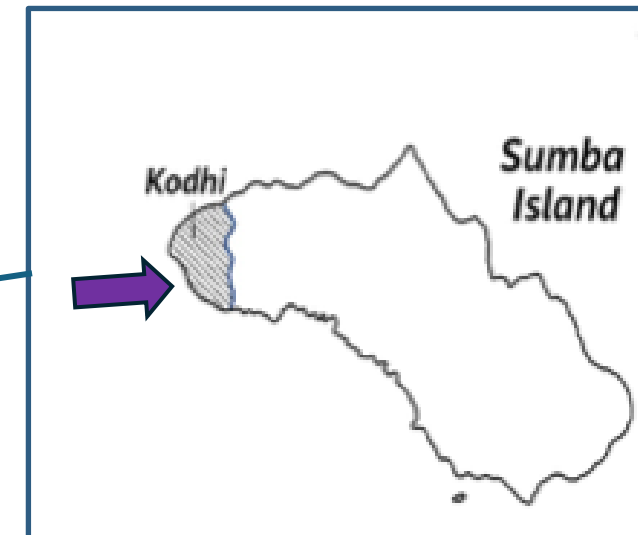
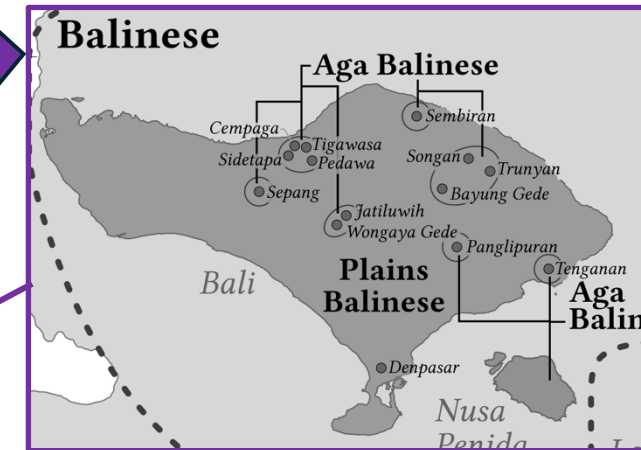
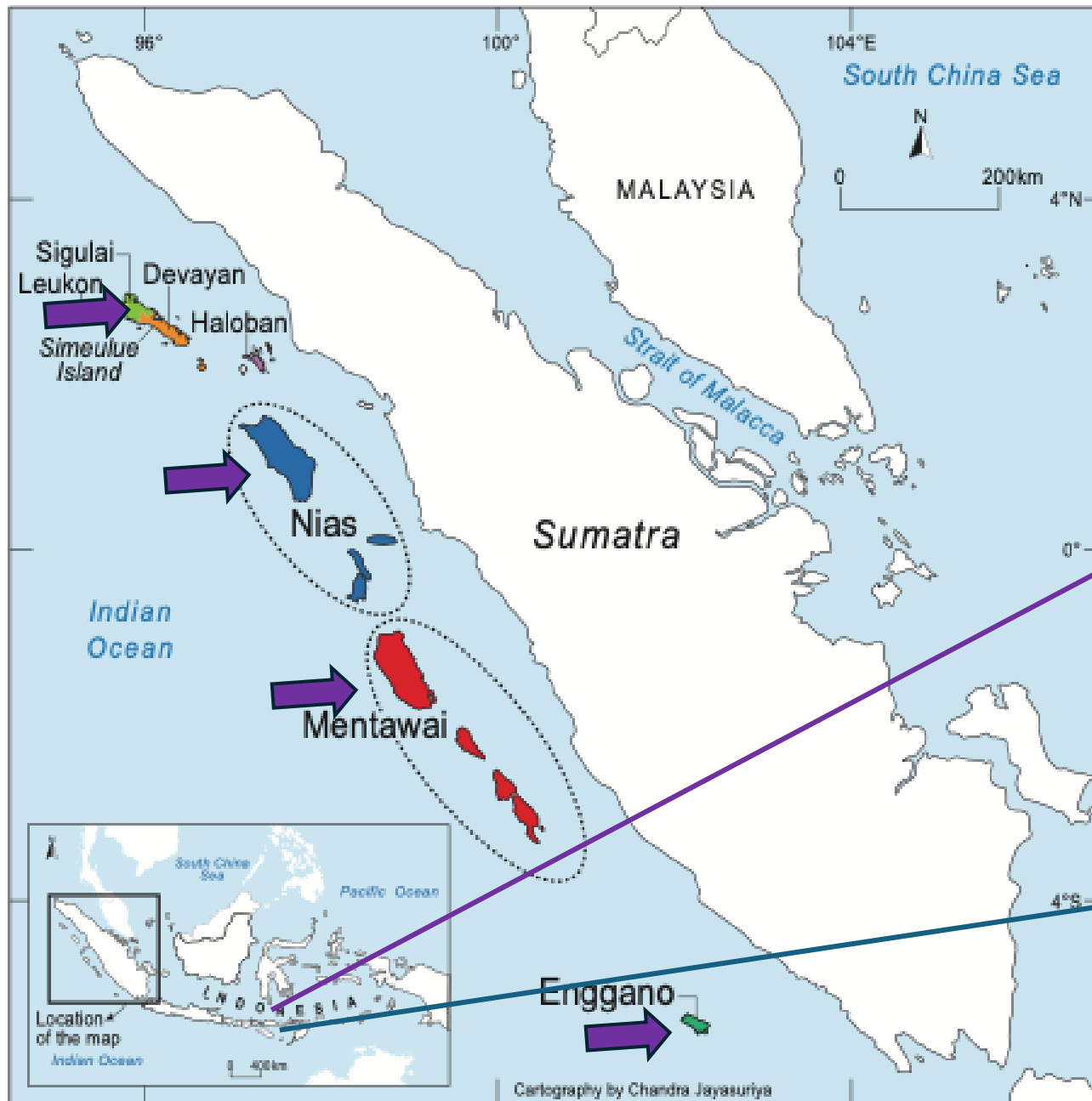
1: Australian National University, 2: Udayana University, 3: Weetebula Catholic University



Key points of the talk

- **Two evolutionary pathways** of definiteness/specificity marking in some Indonesian Austronesian languages:
 - (i) PERS/PRON **clitic** → **suffix** → **zero**; (ii) morphologicalisation of **si/*i*
- **The two emerge at the interface between voice attrition and nominalisation.**
 - When AV morphology **no longer reliably marks actor prominence**, and because **bare/UV predicates are available for U/predicate focus**, older **phrasal referential material**—possessive clitics and **si/*ki* phrase markers—is **recruited and morphologicalised** to mark salience, specificity, and definiteness
- **They are not accidental**; they represent different points along the same evolutionary path of grammatical restructuring, supporting Givón's (1971) classic aphorism, **'today's morphology is yesterday's syntax.'**

Empirical landscape



KEY EMPIRICAL PATTERNS, Pathway 1: clitic → suffix → zero

Balinese as a leading edge: parallel nominal and verbal attrition

Domain	Function	Conservative	Badung / casual	Stage
Nominal	DEF / POSS	-ne	-e / -ə	morphophonemic
Verbal	UV actor clitic	-na	-e / -ə	morphophonemic
Prosody	weak discourse marking	audible	barely audible / lost	towards zero

NOMINAL

Standard Balinese: Badung/casual Dialect:

buku=(n)**ne** *buku*-**e/ə**
 book=(LIG)POSS/DEF book-DEF
 'their/his/her/the book' 'the book'

VERBAL

Standard Balinese: Badung/casual Dialect:

X aba-**na** *X aba*-**a/ə/Ø**
 'X UV.bring-3 'X UV.bring-3
 'they/(s)he bring X' 'they/(s)he bring X'

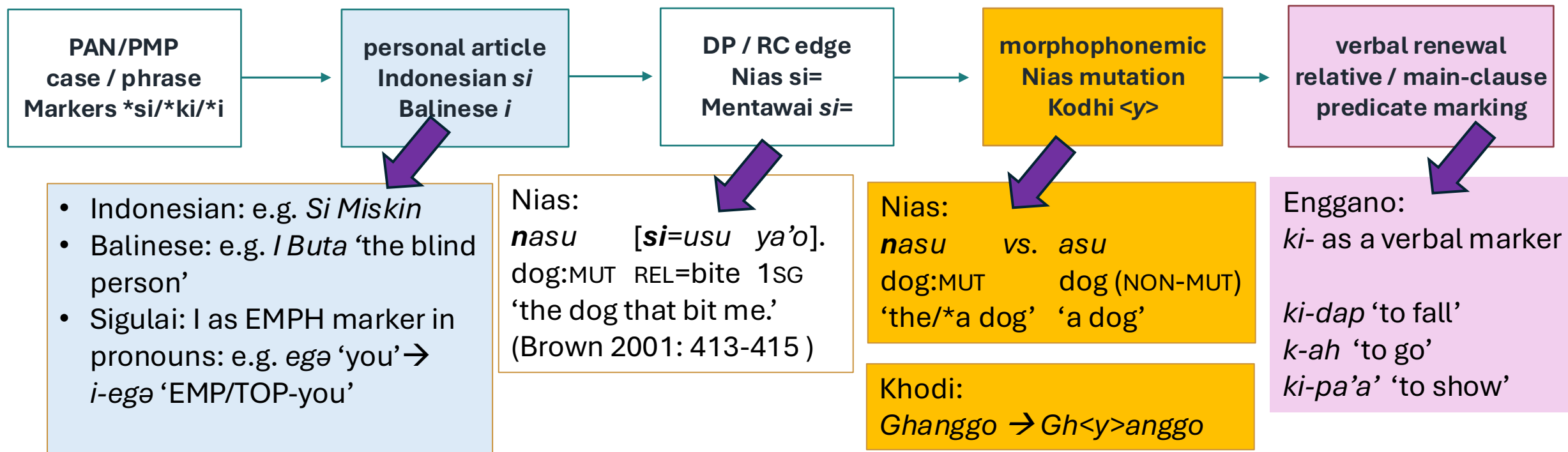
Nominal and verbal erosion move together.

The same phonological reduction affects definiteness/possession and UV actor indexing.

KEY EMPIRICAL PATTERNS,

Pathway 2: *si/*i resources persist, shift, or become “ghosts”

Evolution of case/phrase markers as seen in
Barrier Islands languages (Nias, Enggano, Sigulai), Indonesian, Balinese and Kodhi



The important comparison is **not just formal similarity**. It is **functional continuity**: personal/high-accessibility reference becomes a resource for definiteness/specificity, relativization, and predicate marking.

Our argumentation regarding the evolution of DEFINITE marking in AN languages

The evolution of definiteness/specificity marking
is not merely a nominal innovation:
it is part of the same **participant-tracking** ecology
as voice, case, articles and pronominal clitics.



Result: old referential resources survive as bound forms (suffixes, clitics, infixes, mutations) and verbal prefixes.

Three puzzling questions that motivate our research connecting the evolution of DEFINITENESS marking and Voice system:

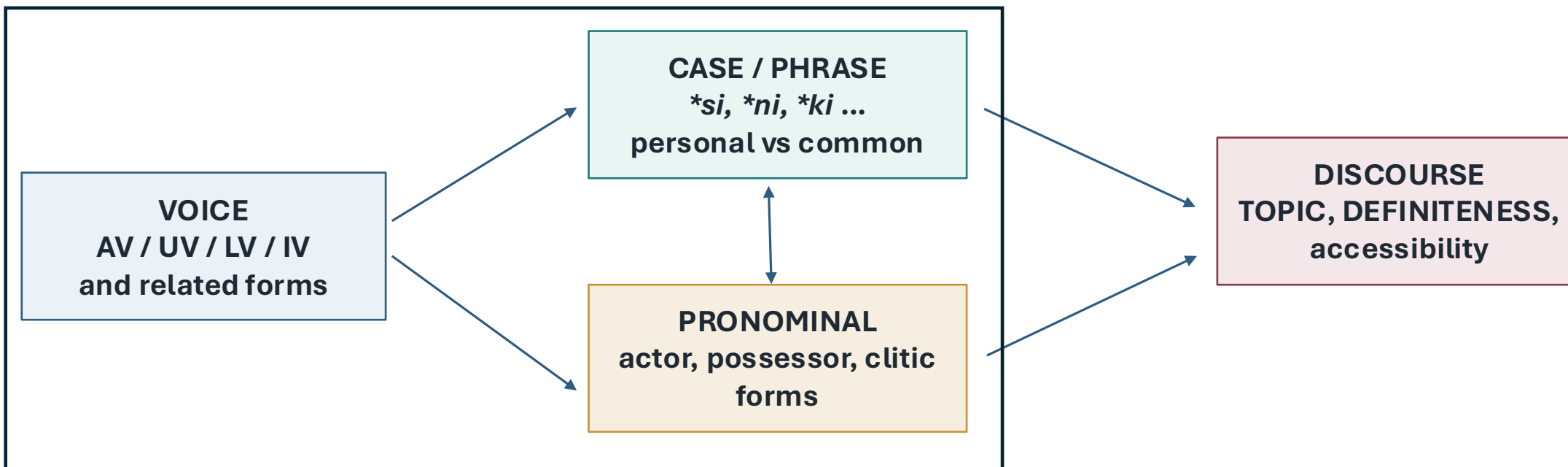
- 1 Why do definite markers emerge from possessors, case/pronouns, and articles? (e.g. Balinese $-(n)e$ 'DEF'?)
- 2 Why do some “nominal” markers reappear on verbs or relativised structures? (e.g. *si*= 'REL' (in Nias), *ki*- in Enggano)
- 3 Why do different languages show different endpoints: clitic, suffix, infix, mutation, zero? (e.g. Nias: MUT+asu $\rightarrow$ *nasu*, REL/NOMLZ *s(i/a)-*, *s-a-nago* 'thief (Ind. pen-curi) ; Kodhi <y> 'DEF.3SG')

Working hypothesis:

The diversity is **not random**. It reflects a **principled recurring Austronesian cycle**: **grammatically relevant discourse-referential material** is recruited, eroded, and redeployed under changing voice and word-order profiles.

Starting point: a voice-rich, referentially rich ecology

WMP inherited resources for tracking participants across clauses and DPs



**As voice contrasts weaken, participant tracking remains necessary.
The grammar does not lose the function; it redistributes the load.**

KEY DIACHRONIC MECHANISM

(cf. Givón's 1971 classic aphorism, 'today's morphology is yesterday's syntax'):

old syntax becomes morphology; old morphology may become morphophonemics; morphophonemics may become zero —
but discourse functions are renewed.

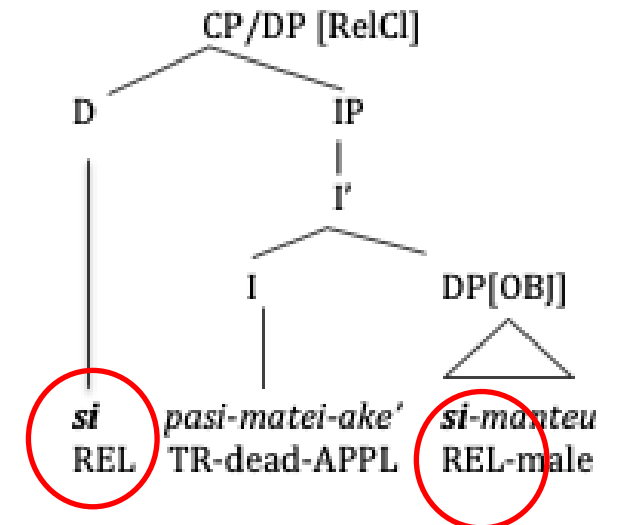
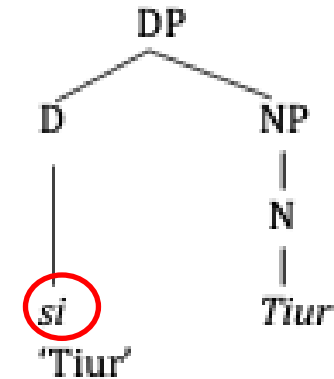
Rich voice system → attrition/disappearance of the contrast of AV (with *m-*) /UV (oral, without *m-*), **morphologicalisation in progress**

- Relativisation/nominalisation Sipora Mentawai

- REL in Mentawai is also marked by *si=*, as in Nias *si=*.
 - Resulting in phonological nominal word;
e.g. [*si=kua-m*] 'REL=say-2SG=your word; cf. Indonesian ***katamu***'
- The AV/UV contrast/alternation disappears:
bare (i.e., non-nasal) verbs are now used as the 'active/AV'
structure, with relatively word order flexibility.
 - *masi-* 'AV' (with nasal *m-*) vs. *pasi-* 'TR (transitivise marker, no nasal *m-*)
- This leads to disappearance of SUBJ being a PSA, e.g. in
relativisation, OBJ can also be relativised. In certain cases, this
results in ambiguity:

nera sikkoinan [REL *si=pasi-matei-ake'* [OBJ/ATU? simanteu]
that crocodile REL=TR-dead-CAUS male
'That's the crocodile that killed the man.' (OBJ=U) OR
'That's the crocodile that the man killed.' (OBJ=A)

(Keith and Arka 2025)



Referential Restructuring: Functional load is redistributed across domains

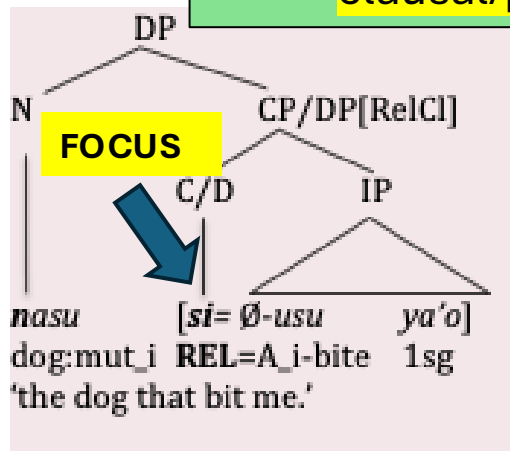


The same referential work (e.g. **SPECIFYING A/U=FOC/TOP**) may be carried by different structural loci at different historical stages when verbal voice marking diminishes.

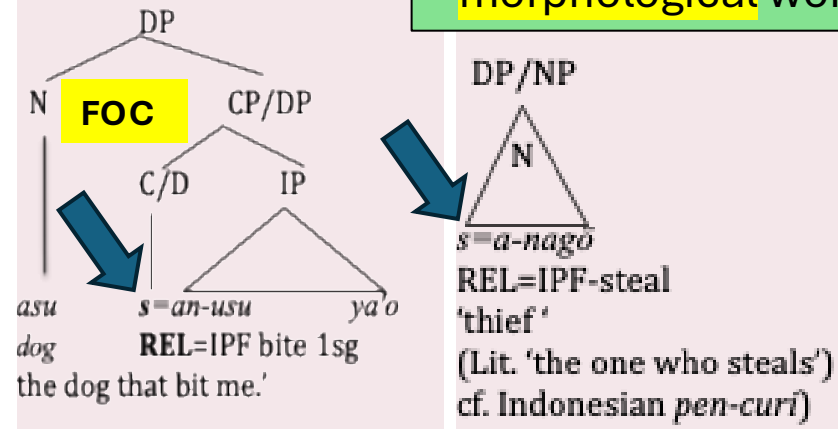
CLINE: SYNTAX → MORPHOLOGY → MORPHOPHONEMIC ATTRITION / ZERO

Nias: 2 ways of A relativisation, with/without *-aN* 'IPF':

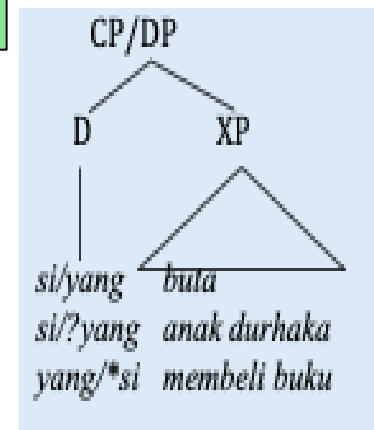
clausal/phrasal syntax



Phonological/
morphological word

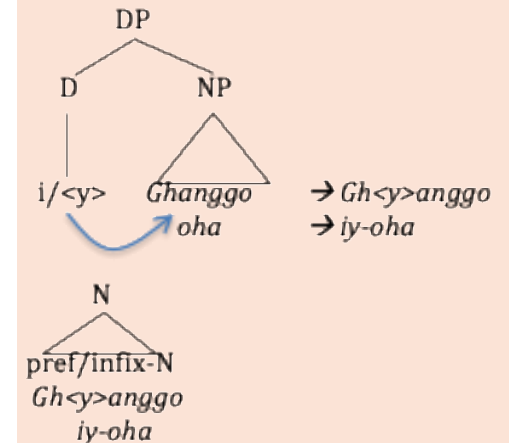


Indonesian si:



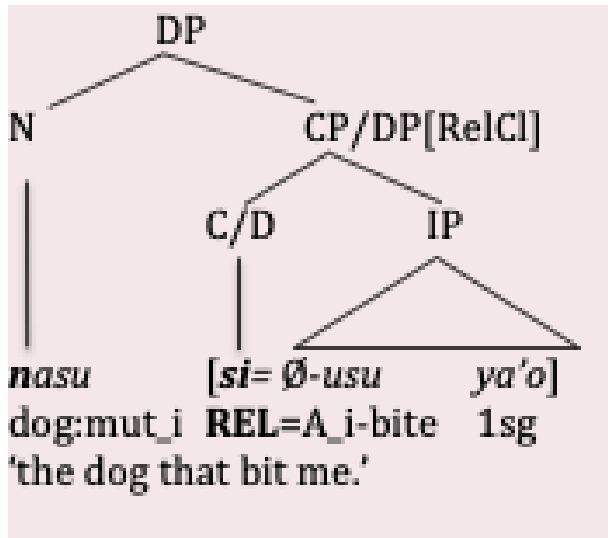
Kodhi i-/<y>:

morphological word



Nias mutation: “ghost” marking as morphophonemic survival

Earlier article no longer appears as an independent syllable; its residue survives as mutation of the noun-initial segment.



root
sekhula
'coconut'



definite form
zekhula
'the coconut'

(underlyingly **DEF(si+)** *sekhula*)



Analysis:

The marker is “there” in the segmental history, but not as a **free** morpheme.
This is exactly the morphophonemic stage in the cline.

Kodhi <y>: personal definiteness inside the name

Base name	With <y>	Function
Robhu	R<y>obhu	the person called Robhu; 3rd person, definite, non-present
Maghu	M<y>aghu	the person called Maghu; topic/identifiable
Ghanggo	Gh<y>anggo	infix after initial consonant of first name element
Oha	/i-oha/ [iyoha]	infix after initial consonant of first name element

Typological points:

- A DP-level definiteness/person feature is expounded inside a proper name — not at the ordinary DP edge.
 - This is the same feature associated with the article/DEF marker *si* as seen in Nias, Mentawai and Indonesian, or Sigulai *i* and Balinese */*
 - <y> is an advanced endpoint of article/clitic → affix → **prefix/infix** morphologization.

A diachronic typology of endpoints, as seen in the languages discussed:

Endpoint	Illustration	What it tells us
free article	Indonesian <i>si</i> , Balinese <i>i</i>	PATHWAY 2: conservative DP-edge personal/definite marking
suffix / clitic	Nias <i>s(i)-/BSS -ne</i> , Balinese <i>-na</i>	PATHWAYS 1, 2: <i>s/i-/POSS./PERS.</i> material has fused with host
weak vowel / zero	Badung Balinese <i>-e / -ə</i> , possible $\emptyset$	PATHWAY 1: advanced attrition; renewal pressure rises
mutation	Nias <i>zekhula < sekhula</i>	PATHWAY 2: marker survives as segmental effect only
prefix/infix	Kodhi <i>R<y>obhu</i>	PATHWAY 2: DP feature exponed inside prosodic word
verbal prefix	Enggano <i>ki-</i>	PATHWAY 2: referential material renewed in predicate domain

What looks like formal diversity is, in fact, the visible trace of a recurring grammatical cycle.

The missing link: U/predicate focus as nominalisation

- Both pathways converge in the same structural environment:
non-AV / bare predicate structures typically used for P-focus, predicate focus, relativisation, and nominalisation.

AV morphology indexes A-prominence

*<um> : → actor-oriented event construal
e.g. *m-* (Mentawai; *meN-* (Indonesian)

Bare / non-nasal verb indexes non-A / PRED prominence

UV, imperative, predicate focus, P-fronting, relativisation
e.g., *m-* 'AV' in Mentawai cannot appear in RelCls.

Indonesian Imperatives:

X *perbaiki!* 'fix it' / **Memperbaiki!*

Balinese reported speech:

X *saut-(n)e* 'X is what s/he answered/ his answer

➤ **X is salient, specific, often definite.**

The possessive/actor clitic does not simply mark possession;
it helps turn a verbal predicate into a **referential/nominalised unit**.

Bottom line: Predicate focus creates the bridge from **voice** to **definiteness/specificity**.
When voice diminishes, definiteness resources remain and evolve in different ways

Two pathways, one ecology

- Two routes to definiteness marking evolution: cliticisation and phrase-marker morphologisation

VOICE-RICH SYSTEM

AV <um>/N- vs. UV/bare predicate contrast

↓ voice attrition

NON-AV / BARE PREDICATE ENVIRONMENTS

P-focus • predicate focus • relativisation • nominalisation

↙ pathway 1

pronominal / genitive clitic

Bal. -ne/-na > -ə/Ø

Ind. tanya-nya

↓

DEF/SPEC marking

pathway 2 ↘

*si/*i/*ki phrase marker

Nias si=, Mentawai si=, Enggano ki-

Kodhi <y>, Nias mutation

↓

REL/DEF/predicate marking

- The two pathways are **not separate** accidents.
- Both arise where **older voice distinctions are weakened** and the grammar still needs to mark **which participant or predicate is discourse-salient, specific, or definite**.

KEY POINT:

Definiteness marking evolves at the interface between voice attrition and nominalisation.

Conclusion

Definiteness/specificity marking in the MP languages discussed in this paper provides a window into the afterlife of voice, case and argument-salience marking.

As voice morphology weakens, languages do not simply “lose” participant tracking. They repackage it through older referential resources: possessors, personal articles, case markers, pronominal clitics and nominalizers.

In terms of its FORMAL expression, definite marking is part of a broader cycle of grammatical renewal; cf. Givón’s (1971) aphorism: syntax → morphology → morphophonemics → zero (→ renewal).

THANK YOU

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Relative Clauses & definiteness in Kodhi

(1) *Naḥadḥaḥu a kinggu n̄wonggu . mur . wemyolo_{RC}*
na=ḥadḥaḥu a lakii=nggu n̄na=woyyo=nggu . muyo wemolo
 [3SG.NOM] ₁=be.sick [DEF.SG aunt=1SG.GEN] ₁ REL.S=give=[2SG.DAT] ₁ food yester
 'My aunt who gave you food yesterday is sick.' [Elicited]

(2) *A motor p̄kaleteḥa n̄aruhha_{RC}*
a motor pa=kalete=dha na=ruhha
 [DEF.SG motorbike] ₁ RELO=ride=[3PL.GEN] ₁ [3SG.NOM] ₁=be.broken
 'The motorbike that they ride is broken.' [Elicited]

- Different RC markers:
na= 'S.REL vs. pa-(non.S.REL)
- Different structural properties w.r.t co-occurrences with DEF marker/Article a

(9) a. *A bhi njara {a} paicengguni*
a bhi ndara a pa=icce=nggu=ni
 DEF.SG AUG horse DEF.SG RELO=see=1SG.GEN=3SG.DAT
 'The horse that I saw.' [KODXX-Paneghe~neghe 2]

(10) **A njara a nabhokolo*
a njara a na=bhokol-o
 DEF.SG horse DEF.SG REL.S=be.big-PAR
 'The horse that is big.' [Elicited]

Relative Clauses & definiteness in Kodhi

- a. Napaluya (a) waricoyyo.
na=palu=ya a waricoyyo
3SG.NOM=hit=[3SG.ACC]_i [DEF.SG woman]_{NP_i}
'He hit the/*a woman.'
- b. Napalu waricoyyo / *a waricoyyo.
na=palu waricoyyo a woman
3SG.NOM=hit woman DEF.SG waricoyyo
'He hit a/?*the woman.'