Report on Recent Linguistic Fieldwork on Pantar Island, Eastern Indonesia

Overview

This paper describes linguistic fieldwork on the Nedebang and Western Pantar (Lamma) languages undertaken June-August, 2004 under the auspices of NSF grant #0404884 *SGER: Exploratory Fieldwork with the Nedebang Language of Eastern Indonesia*. As such it is not intended as a linguistic description of the language s of themselves. See my reports *Preliminary Notes on the Nedebang Language* and *Preliminary Notes on the Western Pantar Language* for more information on the languages themselves.

Western Pantar (or Lamma) and Nedebang are closely related languages spoken in two distinct regions of Pantar Island, in the eastern Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timor. Both languages belong to the Timor-Alor-Pantar (TAP) group, which in turn appears to belong to the Trans-New Guinea family. The other languages surrounding the TAP group are Austronesian.

Neither WP nor Nedebang has been extensively documented. The most reliable published documentation is a 117 word vocabulary in Stokhof's (1975) survey of Alor and Pantar languages. The Indonesian National Language Center (Pusat Bahasa) has published a short sketch of WP (Nitbani et al. 2001) which has not proved to be very edifying. Other linguistics who have worked in the area include Mark Donahue (National University of Singapore), who has done some work with WP, and Marian Klamer (University of Leiden), who is currently working on Madar dialect of Tewa, which borders the Nedebang language. However, there is currently no active documentary work on WP or Nedebang.

Several features of WP and Nedebang grammar warrant further study, as they may greatly inform our knowledge of both typological constraints and genetic relations. Of special note is the presence of a rather unique system of grammatical relations. As in many languages of eastern Indonesian, grammatical relations are motivated by semantic factors, however, both WP and Nedebang exhibit splits between active-stative and nominative-accusative systems. WP shows a further odd twist, in that the single argument of active intransitive verbs and the patientive arguments are treated identically. That is, in terms of the semantico-syntactic meta-roles S, A and P, $S_A == P$. Other linguistic features worthy of note include (i) elaborate use of compounding; (ii) serial verb constructions; (iii) prosody (stress and intonation); (iv) directional system; and (v) locational constructions.

Logistics

In this section I describe the logistics of access to the Pantar region. Although there is no airport on Pantar, there is daily air service between Kalabahi, on the neighboring island of Alor, and Kupang, the capital of NTT, Six days were required to travel from Fairbanks, Alaska to Kalabahi, the capital of the regency (Indonesian *kabupaten*) of Alor, of which Pantar is an administrative unit. I departed Fairbanks June 21 and arrived Kalabahi June 27. The journey required domestic flight connections in Denpasar and Kupang. Each of these connections required two days, since it was not possible to purchase (or reserve) the domestic flights outside of Indonesia. I then departed Kalabahi July1 on the next ferry to Pantar Island. Other travelers have reported longer connection times, so I feel fortunate to have completed the journey from

Fairbanks to Pantar in just ten days. For the return journey I departed Kalabahi August 11 in order to be certain not to miss my international flight connection in Denpasar on August 20.

I reached Baranusa, the ferry terminal on Pantar, on July 1. Having met some potential Western Pantar consultants during the journey, I continued to Kakamauta to work with the Western Pantar language. The logistics of travel and accommodation in the Western Pantar region are much more complicated than in the Nedebang region, so having found good consultants in Western Pantar it seemed reasonable to take advantage of my relative good fortune by devoting relatively more time to the Western Pantar work. In total I spent 10 days traveling to Pantar; 4 days internal travel; 23 days linguistic fieldwork with Western Pantar (Lamma); 4 days linguistic fieldwork with Nedebang; 12 days in Kalabahi working with speakers of both Western Pantar and Nedebang; and 9 days returning to Alaska. A total of 62 days.

The strait between Alor and Pantar is affected by some of the strongest tidal currents in Indonesia, and sea travel can be extremely rough even at the calmest times of the year. The most reliable and safe transportation option to Pantar is by scheduled ferry service from Kalabahi to Baranusa two times per week. Travel time is approximately five hours. This ferry continues on to Larantuka in eastern Flores, a journey of 20 hours. This schedule may be interrupted during the monsoon season, October through April. There are also regular connections from Kalabahi to other locations on Pantar by small wooden boats. It is also possible to charter a small boat to Pantar either from Kalabahi or from Alor Kecil, a village located 16 km west of Kalabahi. All of these boats are generally overcrowded and of questionable seaworthiness. Local residents report regular sinkings.

In Western Pantar transportation options are quite limited. The road network is surprisingly good, at least in the dry season, but there are very few vehicle. Trucks carry passengers and cargo to and from some villages on market days. Otherwise the only public transport option is to ride on the back of a hired motorbike (Indonesian *ojek*). Unfortunately, this option is easier to arrange from Baranusa to the villages. Return journeys can be extremely difficult to arrange due to the lack of motorbikes in the villages. Another option is to rent a motorbike in Kalabahi and bring it on the ferry to Baranusa. Walking is also an option, as the distances are not very great and the terrain not very steep. From Baranusa to Alimakke, at the far end of the WP region, is a distance of only 15 km by trail.

In the following two sections I describe the fieldwork situations in each of Western Pantar and Nedebang in more detail. I also discuss the current socio-linguistic situation for each language and present some basic grammatical information.

Western Pantar

Western Pantar is spoken throughout most of the district known by the same name (*Kecematan Pantar Barat*). This language is known in the existing literature as Lamma (Stokhof 1975; Grimes 2000). Within the region the name Lamma is used within the region to refer to just one of the three principal dialects, the other two being Mauta and Tubbe. These three names are also used to refer to distinct tribes (Indonesian *suku*). The dialect differences are primarily lexical and all speakers confirm the mutual intelligibility of the dialects. In fact, most speakers are able to supply common vocabulary in all three dialects. Nevertheless, my consultants are hesitant to refer to the three dialects as one language but prefer the term family (Indonesian *rumpun*). Even so, my consultants could not supply an appropriate name or label for this family.

It is perhaps this difficulty which explains the reluctance to categorize these mutually intelligible varieties as a single language.

For the purposes of this discussion I propose the logonym Western Pantar (WP). This term (or it's Indonesian translation *Pantar Barat*) is of course not likely to be adopted in the region. However, it avoids the ambiguous use of Lamma to refer to both the language and a single dialect of the language. Also, given that most of my data were collected from the Mauta and Tubbe dialects, Lamma is an especially inappropriate logonym for use in this report.

WP is spoken across a contiguous region of the Indonesian district also known as Western Pantar. Historically WP speakers occupied only the interior of the island. Some groups of speakers were forcibly removed to the coast as Portuguese and Dutch colonial forces vied for power in the region in the early 1950's following Indonesia independence. Though a major factor elsewhere in the Alor regency, removals by the Indonesian military during the mid 1960's appear to have been less of a factor in Western Pantar. Today WP is spoken throughout the interior of Western Pantar and along the southwestern coast of Pantar. On the north and western coast reside speakers of the Alor, an Austronesian language. To the east are speakers of Tewa, a related non-Austronesian language.

The WP language region encompasses the western slopes of Mt. Sirung, an active volcano. The area receives very little rainfall, and there is very little potable ground water. The only existing surface water during the dry season is in the form of non-potable sulphurous springs. The economy is entirely based on subsistence agriculture, the primary crops being rice, corn and cassava. Many residents consume a diet consisting almost entirely of rice. A limited amount of subsistence fishing occurs, but most fish is obtained through trading with the people of the west coast of Pantar. What rainfall Pantar does receive often occurs in torrential storms during the monsoon season, often resulting in flooding and crop failure. Residents report crop failure on average every four years, though I have not confirmed this figure. The last major failure occurred in 1996; famine was avoided only by international relief efforts. These efforts also led to the extension of an asphalt road to Puntaru on the southwest coast.

Nevertheless, the WP region remains among the poorest regions in Indonesia. There is no electricity and no running water and no stores. A limited amount of goods is available at weekly markets. Economic problems are compounded by the presence of endemic faciparum malaria. While few cases of malaria are reported during the dry season, health workers in the region report a significant portion of the population to be chronically affected during the wet season. In spite of acknowledged existence of chloroquine-resistant strains of malaria in the region, the government continues to use chloroquine as a primary treatment regimen. While climate, economy and health are perhaps not of immediate relevance to the linguistic situation, these factors due help to explain the why WP has not yet received extensive attention from documentary linguists.

The following is a (perhaps incomplete) list of villages in which each of the three dialects of WP is spoken.

Table 1: Dialects and villages of Western Pantar

dialect		
Tubbe	Mauta	Lamma
Puntaru Air Panas	Kakamauta Alimakke Lauki Kapas Kolihabbang Alikallang	Kalondama Latuna

In all of these areas WP is widely spoken by persons of all ages , with the exception of some civil servants (primarily teachers) who are stationed in the region. Very young children appear to be monolingual, but most persons of school age or above are also fluent in Alor Malay, the local variety of Indonesian. The first two years of grade school are conducted in a bilingual format to transition children to Indonesian. Some older persons have limited ability in Indonesian, but none appear to be truly monolingual. The total number of WP speakers in all three dialect regions is approximately 6000. This figure is arrived at based on census estimates in the region.

My fieldwork was concentrated in the villages of Kakamauta and Puntaru and is thus focused on the Mauta and Tubbe dialects. However, I had ample opportunity to consult with speakers of the Lamma dialect as well. (The grandmother of house where I stayed in Puntaru is a Lamma speaker.) In both Kakamauta and Puntaru I was able to find lodging in the households of excellent language consultants, a factor which greatly facilitated my fieldwork. Due to the lack of electricity it was not possible to use a computer in Kakamauta or Puntaru, so my data are limited to recordings and written notes. These data were later transferred to computer in Kalabahi.

Dialect differences appear to be limited to lexical rather than phonological or syntactic differences. Most words are identical across all three dialects. Some examples of lexical differences are given in the table below.

Table 2: Lexical comparison of dialects of Western Pantar

Tubbe	Mauta	Lamma	
niar	nisser	niba	'my father'
niaku	nebu	nekul	'my younger sibling'
niu	niau	nau	'my mother'
ganiaka	ganeka(r)	ginaka	'see (it)'
dia	si	yel	'go'

There are few systematic differences in pronunciation, and most of these differences can be formulated in terms of tendencies which are more or less prominent in one dialect or another. For example, the in all three dialects phoneme /y/ may occur as liquid [j] or palatalized as [t^y] or affricated as [dʒ]. However, the affricate pronunciation is much more strongly associated with the Lamma dialect.

The most distinguishing feature of WP phonology is the presence of phonemic geminate consonants, which are pronounced with longer closure than there non-geminate counterparts. All consonants other than glides /w/ and /y/, trill /r/, and glottals /h/ and /'/ can occur geminate in

word-medial position. This yields contrasts such as *duba* 'slippery' versus *dubba* 'push'. Gemination is also an active phonological process. The perfect prefix *i-* triggers gemination of initial consonants in mono-syllabic, open verb stems. Thus *dia* 'go' versus *iddia* 'has gone'.

Nominal morphology is limited to noun possession and compounding. Possessive prefixes index the person and number of the possessor. Noun-noun and noun-verb compounding is widespread. Verbal morphology is somewhat richer. Pronominal prefixes may index the person and number of one verbal argument, usually the more patientive argument of a transitive verb. And at least one aspectual prefix and an evidentiality marker can be found in the verb complex.

Grammatical relations are extremely complex. Two distinct paradigms of independent pronouns exist. One set is used with more agentive arguments, while the other is used with more patientive arguments (compare the Nedebang examples in the following section). This system can be described as agent-patient system in which the crucial semantic parameter is control. Active intransitive verbs always occur with agentive pronouns. Stative intransitive verbs with an agentive, controlling participant occur with agentive pronouns, while those with a non-agentive, non-controlling participant occur with patientive pronouns.

(1)   nang   mising
       1SG:AGT   sit
       'I am sitting'

(2)   naing   masa
       1SG:PAT   tired
       'I am tired'

To some degree the determination of control is governed by lexical semantics. For example, the verb *halli* 'cry' occurs with agentive pronoun, as in *nang halli* 'I am crying'.

Patientive pronouns may also occur with highly active intransitive verbs when the argument is not sufficiently controlling.

(3)   nang   hoang   me   na-pia
       1SG:AGT   beach   LOC   1SG-descend
       'I am going to the beach'

(4)   naing   kan hoang me   na-pia
       1SG:PAT   also beach LOC   1SG-descend
       'I too am going to the beach (with you)'

With transitive verbs the more agentive, controlling argument is coded with an agentive pronoun, while the less agentive argument is coded with a patientive pronoun.

(5)   nang   gaing   lu'ung
       1SG:AGT   3SG:PAT   cut
       'I cut him'

However, if neither argument of a transitive verb is sufficiently controlling, both may be coded as patientive.

(6)   naing   gaing   oswang   aggi
       1SG:PAT 3SG:PAT outside   take
       'I took him outside'

It is this possibility for double patient coding—perhaps more than anything else—which argues most strongly that grammatical relations as encoded in independent pronouns be interpreted as an agent-patient system as opposed to a split-ergative one.

However, the most unusual aspect of grammatical relations concerns the pronominal prefixes which may occur on the verb. The prefixes also pattern according to active-stative, or more properly agent-patient system. However, in this system less agentive arguments of transitive verbs are coded in the same way as agentive arguments of intransitive verbs. Patientive arguments of transitive verbs and agentive arguments of intransitive verbs (meta-roles S_P and A, respectively) are not generally indexed via pronominal prefixes.

(7)   nang   na-lama
       1SG:AGT   1SG-walk
       'I walk'

(8)   gang   na-ganiaka
       3SG:AGT   1SG-see
       'he sees me'

Several other grammatical features of WP warrant further study. For example, both independent and bound pronouns distinguish different two different third person forms: proximate and obviative. Proximate *gang* (*ga-*) is used when reference is unambiguous. Obviative (or fourth person) *ang* (*a-*) is used to refer to a different third person. This latter form occurs with high frequency in texts. Another important feature of WP grammar is the extensive and productive use of serial verb constructions.

Nedebang

Nedebang is spoken in the villages of Balungada and Baulang in the district of Eastern Pantar. There are also Nedebang speakers in Air Panas, administratively part of Balungada but located 1 km from the main village. The logonym Nedebang is widely recognized by speakers, though some prefer the logonym Klamu. The former refers to the name of an ancestral village located on a ridge above the area in which the speakers now reside. This area is reportedly still used for gardening and for traditional ceremonies. The term Klamu refers to a tribe (Indonesian *suku*). The Klamu people moved from Nedebang to the coast "some time before Indonesian independence", probably in the 1930's. Religion plays a significant role in the social and linguistic dynamics of the region. With the exception of Air Panas, the people of Balungada are Christian, and most residents are of Klamu descent. In contrast the villages of Baulang and Air Panas are Islamic and contain significant populations of Austronesian-speakers who have migrated from Baranusa. The language thus appears to be more viable in Balungada. Although I have not yet collected data from Baulang, there appears to be no strong dialect division within Nedebang.

Nedebang is an extremely endangered language. It is no longer used as the language of daily communication, even with the home. Indonesian or Alor Malay is used widely. Some residents of Bolungada are also fluent in Tewa; and some residents of Air Panas speak the Baranusa dialect of the Alor language (not to be confused with Alor Malay). While I have not

undertaken a formal survey of the speaker population, it is possible to arrive at some rough estimates. The number of residents of Balungada is approximately 500 (including approximately 75 in Air Panas). The age of the youngest fluent speakers is approximately 40. This number was arrived at through interviews with speakers and can generally be confirmed by my observations. The language is not used on a daily basis in households, and with the rare exception school-age children have no knowledge of even basic phrases. Assuming a life-expectancy of approximately 55 and a relatively youthful population distribution, I would estimate the number of fluent speakers in Balungada to be at most 150. While I have not yet visited Baulung, several factors suggest that the number of fluent speakers is not likely to be very large. Baulung is a yet smaller village ; it is also mixed with Austronesian speakers; and it is likely to be in greater contact with Baranusa due to its isolation from Kabir and environs. Hence, I (optimistically) estimate the total number of fluent speakers of Nedebang at 200. Given that the other most of the non-Austronesian languages of Pantar are spoken over wide regions in multiple villages, Nedebang is easily among the most endangered language of Pantar Island and among the most endangered of the Timor-Alor-Pantar language group.

The logistics of fieldwork with Nedebang are much easier than with Western Pantar. Balungada is accessible by paved road 3.5 km from the district capital of Kabir. Baulung is located a further two hours walk along a good trail from Balungada. This trail is reportedly traversable by (rugged) motorbike. Kabir itself can be reached by regular boat service from Kalabahi or Alor Kecil, a journey of approximately three hours. Local transport in Kabir is limited to chartered motorbike, but the distances are short and travel is easy. Electricity is available at night and reaches the Nedebang-speaking village Balungada. The Kabir region is relatively fertile, and a variety of foodstuffs are available. There are at least five telephones in Kabir (though the transmitter was not operating while I was there). The local health clinic is staffed by two nurses and a doctor.

I was able to undertake three days of fieldwork with Nedebang while enroute from Puntaru to Kalabahi. During this time I elicited vocabulary from two speakers, one in Balungada and one in Air Panas) and conducted a total of four hours of grammatical elicitation with one speaker. I also consulted informally with several other speakers. Since Nedebang is not used as a language of daily communication the opportunities for language learning are much more limited than for Western Pantar. Even good speakers have trouble recalling vocabulary and grammatical constructions. Nevertheless, I have identified several good consultants, and the quality of their work would presumably improve with practice.

The sound system of Nedebang differs in some respects from that found in WP. I found only one or two examples of geminate consonants in Nedebang rather than the full range of geminates found in WP. In contrast, Nedebang contains a full range of fricatives /f s x h/, while WP has only two fricatives /s h/. Nedebang also has phonemic stress, contrasting for example *tá'a* 'sleep' with *ta'á* 'add'.

Like WP, Nedebang has two distinct paradigms of independent pronouns. However, these two sets appear to function in a much more straightforward active-stative fashion. With transitive verbs the agentive paradigm indexes the more agent-like argument, and the patientive paradigm indexes the more patient-like argument.

(9)   nang   ga'ing bugi
          1sg   3sg   hit
          'I hit him'

(10)   gang   na'ing bugi
          3sg   1sg   hit
          'he hit me'

Active intransitive verbs employ "subject" pronouns, while stative instransitive verbs employ "object" pronouns (though not object prefixes).

(11)   active intransitive verbs

          nang apa   'I walk'
          nang gia   'I go'
          nang ba'a   'I fell'

Some (but not all) stative intransitive verbs index their single argument using the object pronominal paradigm, though not the object prefixes.

(12)   stative intransitive verbs

          na'ing maleca 'I am wet'
          na'ing ko'as 'I am soaking wet'
          na'ing aga   'I am hot'

As in WP some Nedebang may occur with pronominal prefixes cross-referencing patientive arguments. For the most part these seem to be restricted to transitive verbs. However, there is some evidence of a limited number of intransitive verbs which may occur with pronominal prefixes. However, these paradigms are usually defective. For example, pronominal prefixes occur only in the first person forms for the verb 'go home'.

(13)   nang nola 'I go home'
          hang ola   'you go home'
          gang ola   'he or she goes home'
          ping pola   'we (inc) go home'
          ning nola   'we (exc) go home'
          ing ola   'you (pl) go home'
          ging ola   'they go home'

Prospects for Further Research

The prospects for further field research with both Western Pantar and Nedebang seem quite good. At the present time I am aware of no other linguists working extensively on these languages. Mark Donohue (National University of Singapore) has conducted a limited amount of fieldwork with Western Pantar. Marian Klamer (University of Leiden) is currently working on the Madar dialect of Tewa but apparently has no plans to investigate Nedebang. (Balungada is located 1.5 km from Madar.) There is strong support within the Western Pantar and Nedebang regions for language documentation projects focused on the production of basic documentary materials including dictionaries and grammars. Either language would make an excellent

dissertation project. However, it should be acknowledged that these projects would require especially motivated students and close supervision by mentors experienced in the region. Living in Western Pantar for an extended period could impose significant hardships. Living in the Nedebang region would be much easier; the challenge there is the difficulty of engaging in salvage fieldwork with a language no longer spoken on a daily basis.

The following recommendations would improve the viability of a long-term documentation project.

- Electricity. Bring solar power generation equipment to power a laptop (approx. $1000). My existing solar panel (purchased in 1995) proved to be inadequate to power a modern laptop computer. Hence, I was unable to use my computer in Western Pantar and was forced to enter all data after returning to Kalabahi.
- Transport. Local transportation options on Pantar are extremely limited. A better option would be to bring a motorbike from Kalabahi. Rentals are expensive and difficult to arrange for long-term. Adequate motorbikes can be purchased new in Kalabahi for $1500.
- Communication. Telephone service is very limited in Pantar and not very reliable. No service is available outside the district capitals of Baranusa and Kabir. A long-term project would benefit from a satellite phone (approx. $1500 plus $30/mo. for service). Telephone service would be especially useful in the event of a medical emergency, since it could be used to arrange an evacuation to East Timor (and on to Australia, if needed).
- Health. Faciparum malaria is a endemic in Pantar. Prophylaxis with Malarone is recommended (approx. $5/day/person).

In spite of the difficulties of pursuing fieldwork The Timor-Alor-Pantar group contains some of the least well-documented languages in Indonesia outside of Papua (Irian Jaya). Among these languages Western Pantar and Nedebang are the only languages not to have received extensive attention from linguists. Both are deserving of more detailed documentation. While Nedebang is likely to be quite similar to neighboring Tewa, the endangered status of the language should make it a priority for documentation. The WP language, while less endangered, also warrants fuller study. Linguists who have worked in the region note that WP grammar is markedly different from that of other TAP languages (Donahue, pers. comm..; Klamer, pers. comm.).

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