5 Person marking, verb classes, and the notion of alignment in Western Pantar (Lamma)

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1 Introduction

Much recent work on the languages of eastern Indonesia (for example Klamer 2008, Ewing, this volume) has focused on the identification of systems of argument alignment, particularly so-called active/agentive systems (Mithun 1991), which code single arguments of some intransitive clauses like agents of transitives, and others like patients of transitives. As is now well-understood, alignment patterns do not in general characterize languages but rather particular subsystems of a language. Thus, languages often exhibit splits in which different subsystems follow different alignment patterns. For example, in the Australian language Dyirbal, Dixon (1979) famously demonstrated a split based on person: first and second person pronouns follow a nominative-accusative pattern, while third person pronouns follow an ergative-absolutive pattern. Furthermore, just as alignment patterns are not always constant across a particular language, alignment patterns may also exhibit significant variation across genetically related languages. Ewing (this volume) discusses the varying degrees of instantiation of agentive systems in genetically related languages of Central Maluku; Klamer (2008) presents case studies of semantic alignment in nine language of East Nusantara; and Holton (2008) describes the evolution of agentive systems within the closely related languages of North Halmahera.

Yet, argument alignment is not always so easily described in terms of systems, such as active/agentive, accusative or ergative. Indeed, in some languages even the identification of an alignment system can present significant challenges. The non-Austronesian languages of the Alor-Pantar (AP) group present just this challenge. Spoken on the islands of Alor and Pantar in the eastern Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, the AP languages form a well-defined subgroup of some 15 to 20 languages exhibiting striking similarities in pronominal morphology.1 Both nominative and agentive systems are found,

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1 While much of the literature includes certain non-Austronesian languages of Timor within a larger Timor-Alor-Pantar group (Stokhof 1975), the precise relationship of the Timor languages and the degree to which they may represent a substrate influence remains the subject of some controversy (Donohue and Schapper 2007). The (T)AP languages are in turn assumed to belong to Ross’ (2005) West Trans-New Guinea linkage, though this relationship has also yet to be rigorously demonstrated.
and splits in argument alignment are abundant. The alignment of independent pronouns in AP languages is relatively straightforward. However, for many of the AP languages the alignment of pronominal prefixes is difficult to characterize within traditional categories. In many of the western and central Alor languages the object of a transitive verb may be coded with a different pronominal prefix according to lexical verb class, leading to a split in the transitive object (cf. Kratochvil 2007). Elsewhere, a single object prefix is the norm, but even so lexical verb classes play a role in determining the licensing of object prefixes. That is, not all verbs admit object pronominal prefixes. This is true for example of the Pantar languages Teiwa and Kaera (Klamer, this volume). In the western Alor language Klon, more than one pronominal prefix may be present (Baird 2008), while in the eastern Alor language Kula (Tanglapui) an inverse system has developed (Donohue 1996). The sheer variety of alignment systems in the Alor-Pantar region begs a closer look.

The goal of this paper is to describe the argument alignment patterns in Western Pantar (Lamma), a previously undescribed AP language. Western Pantar (WP) exhibits a number of features which have not been found in other AP languages. Most notably, in WP certain intransitive verbs may index their single argument via the same pronominal prefix used to index the object of a transitive verb, reflecting what at first sight appears to be an ergative alignment system. However, by examining the distribution of pronominal prefixes across a range of lexical verb classes the putative strength of this particular alignment system can be seen to be less robust. Pronominal prefixes may index any argument role, and the alignment of prefixes across argument roles can only be explained by appeal to lexical verb classes. Hence, evidence from WP provides additional support for the notion of semantic verb classes implicit in extant descriptions of AP languages. While a detailed characterization of these classes remains beyond the scope of the current paper, the WP data suggest that the distribution of pronominal prefixes in AP languages is better characterized in terms of such verb classes than in terms of traditional notions of argument alignment.

2 Western Pantar

Western Pantar (WP) is spoken by approximately ten thousand people on the island of Pantar, at the far western end of the AP language area. There are three principal dialects: Tubbe, Mauta, and Lamma. However, dialect variation is primarily lexical and does not extend to the pronominal systems described in this paper. WP remains one of the most isolated of the AP languages. As of early 2007 the region lacked regular electricity, cellular phone service, and (broadcast or satellite) television. Although a road now connects portions of the WP-speaking region with the Austronesian-speaking region of the district capital on the north coast, no roads connect the WP region with other AP language regions (though a road does serve Maliang, an area of mixed WP (Mauta dialect) and Teiwa speakers). Perhaps because of this isolation, language use within the WP region remains vigorous. WP is the language of daily communication outside schools, churches, and government offices; and most children continue to be raised bilingual in WP and Alor Malay. Most of the data in this paper derive from the Tubbe dialect and were collected during a total of 10 months of field work between June 2004 and July 2007, based on elicitation and on transcriptions of recordings of spontaneous narrative and conversation.
3 Person-marking

WP has two distinct paradigms of independent pronouns, which I refer to here as the actor (ACT) and undergoer (U) pronouns (see Table 1 below). In addition, WP has a single paradigm of bound pronominal prefixes. In order to describe alignment patterns I will use the heuristic primitives A (more agent-like argument of a transitive clause), S (single argument of a transitive clause), and P (more patient-like argument of transitive clause). The constraints on the distribution of pronouns across A, S, and P arguments are fairly loose. Both undergoer independent pronouns and pronominal prefixes may index any of A, S, or P. However, there are no instances of an actor independent pronoun indexing a P argument.

Before proceeding to describe person-marking in detail it should be pointed out that with most verbs person and number reference is not obligatory. Both independent pronouns and bound pronominal prefixes may be omitted with zero reference. Thus, clauses with no explicit nominal referent are common, as in (1).

(1) ang me golang ga
    market LOC go.home PFV
    'S/he came home from the market'

The referent of a clause such as (1) is generally inferred to be third person singular, however, other inferences are possible. For example, given the appropriate context (1) could also mean 'I came home from the market'. This could plausibly be uttered by a speaker entering a house upon return from the market. This meaning could of course be unambiguously expressed through the use of independent pronouns, as in (2) and (3) respectively.

(2) nang ang me golang ga
    IS.ACT market LOC go.home PFV
    'I came home from the market'

Moreover, a reference to first person could also be achieved via a pronominal prefix (though in this particular case use of a pronominal prefix is incompatible with the perfective aspect), as in (3).

(3) ang me na-golang
    market LOC 1s-go.home
    'I am coming home from the market'

While independent pronouns may occur optionally with many verbs, the use of pronominal prefixes is required with some verbs and is not possible with some other verbs. For example, the transitive verb -sorang 'sharpen' requires a pronominal prefix indexing the P argument, as in (4). A pronoun or pronominal prefix indexing the A argument (i.e., that is)

\[2\] Glossing follows Leipzig conventions with the following exceptions: the abbreviations ACT and U are used to refer to the actor and undergoer pronouns, respectively. Thus, the first person singular actor pronoun nang is glossed IS.ACT. It is important to bear in mind that these labels refer to grammatical, not semantic categories. In addition, INC is used to refer to the inceptive.
the more agent-like argument of the transitive clause) is not required and indeed is not present in this example.

(4)  
\( \text{nang } \text{kalang } \text{diris} \quad \text{wang} \quad \text{ga-sorang} \)  
\(1s.ACT \quad \text{spade} \quad \text{whetstone} \quad \text{on} \quad 3s.-\text{sharpen} \)  
'I am sharpening the spade on the whetstone'

In contrast, the transitive verb \( \text{lu'ung} \) 'cut' does not admit a pronominal prefix, as shown in example (5) below, as well as in (21) below.

(5)  
a.  
\( \text{nang} \quad \text{yettu} \quad \text{lu'ung} \)  
\(1s.ACT \quad \text{tree} \quad \text{cut} \)  
'I cut the tree'

b.  
\( \ast\text{yettu} \quad \text{na-lu'ung} \)  
\(\text{tree} \quad 1s.-\text{cut} \)

c.  
\( \ast\text{nang} \quad \text{ga-lu'ung} \)  
\(1s.ACT \quad 3s.-\text{cut} \)

The distinction between those verbs which admit pronominal prefixes and those which do not is lexically determined. In particular, certain transitive verbs require pronominal prefixes indexing the P argument, while other transitive verbs do not admit such prefixes, and yet others optionally allow pronominal prefixes.

The complete set of WP pronouns is shown in Table 1 below. As is the case across the AP group, these pronouns reflect the Proto-AP pattern of \( \ast n- , \ast h- , \ast g- \) for first, second, and third persons, respectively, and the singular-plural distinction is marked via vowel quality. The undergoer pronouns are derived from the actor pronouns via the addition of a high front vowel, and the pronominal prefixes are reduced forms of the independent pronouns. The pronouns glossed 4s in Table 1 refer to fourth person, and are used in switch-reference to distinguish a distinct third person. Four distinct sets of person and number markers can be identified, including two sets of pronominal forms, as shown in Table 1, and two sets of pronominal prefixes, as shown in Table 2.

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3 In contrast to the Pantar languages Teiwa and Kaera (Klamer, this volume), animacy does not play a role in the distribution of WP pronominal prefixes. Both animate and inanimate arguments may be indexed via a pronominal prefix.

4 The WP fourth person pronouns are cognate with Adang obviative pronouns (Haan 2001). The choice of fourth person terminology derives from that used in Athabaskan and Eskimo linguistics (e.g. Payne 1979) and is not intended to represent a theoretical claim regarding distinctiveness. Indeed, the function of the WP fourth person pronouns remains the subject of ongoing investigation.
Table 1: WP pronouns and pronominal prefixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>actor</th>
<th>undergoer</th>
<th>prefix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1s</td>
<td>nang</td>
<td>naing</td>
<td>na-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2s</td>
<td>hang</td>
<td>haing</td>
<td>ha-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3s</td>
<td>gang</td>
<td>gaing</td>
<td>ga-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4s</td>
<td>ang</td>
<td>aing</td>
<td>a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pi</td>
<td>ping</td>
<td>pi'ing</td>
<td>pi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pe</td>
<td>ning</td>
<td>mi'ing</td>
<td>ni-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1p PAUCAL</td>
<td>taing</td>
<td>taing</td>
<td>ta-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2p</td>
<td>hing</td>
<td>hi'ing</td>
<td>hi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3p</td>
<td>ging</td>
<td>gi'ing</td>
<td>gi-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actor and undergoer pronouns may occur alone, as in (6),

(6) a. gang mising
   3s.ACT sit
   ‘he is sitting’

   b. gaing massa
   3s.U  tired
   ‘he is tired’

or in an appositional construction together with a co-referential noun phrase, as in the examples in (7).

(7) a. Hen gang mising
    Hen 3s.ACT sit
    ‘Hen is sitting’

   b. aname ara sing gang mising
      person large this 3s.ACT sit
      ‘this big (important) man is sitting’

Likewise, pronominal prefixes may also co-occur with a co-referential noun phrase or an independent pronoun. Additional examples are given in (7). In (8) the noun phrase halía sing ‘that water’ in the first clause is co-referential with the prefix ga-, and the argument aname ‘person’ in the second clause is co-referential with the second person plural prefix hi-. (Notice also that the first prefix indexes a P argument while the second indexes an S argument.)

(8) halía sing i-ga-niaka allang yalu aname hi-yama kaising
    water that PROG-3s-see thus usual person 2p-come.toward scoop
    ‘he saw that water which you people usually came to draw’

Pronominal prefixes are relatively rare in extended discourse. For example, the narrative text excerpt in (9) consists of eleven clauses, yet only two verbs occur with pronominal prefixes.
(9) \textit{gabo} ang \textit{a-raung} kau \textit{ga'ung} mising
then 4s 4s-climb pandanus above sit
\text_quote{afterward he climbed a pandanus tree and sat on top'}

mising \textit{prame} kan kauwa hallang kuba ye ma
sit long right \textit{NEG} almost old.woman one come
\text_quote{he didn’t sit for very long before an old woman came along'}

kuba \textit{gimnu} Kuba Tuma Kau
old.woman this Kuba Tuma Kau
\text_quote{this old woman was [named] Kuba Tuma Kau'}

\textit{ai} kabbarung diggang gar ma \textit{halia} sing \textit{a-kaising} ga'ai
louse bee carry.on.head as come water this 4s-scoop PFV
\text_quote{she carried a beehive on her head as she came to scoop water'}

\textit{ma} mising halia i-kaising hallang kau
then sit water PROG-scoop almost pandanus

\textit{hissa} ye atang tasing
seed one on.top fall
\text_quote{while she was sitting scooping water a pandanus nut fell on her [head']}

In this case both pronominal prefixes are fourth person \textit{a}-, here glossed 4s, used to indicate switch reference. The fourth person prefix is used to refer to a second third person, distinct from another third person referent.

### 3.1 Independent pronouns

Core participants of WP verbs may be indexed via independent pronouns. The choice of independent pronoun is motivated, though perhaps not completely determined, by participant semantics. Sufficiently controlling agent arguments are indexed with actor pronouns, while non-controlling arguments are indexed with undergoer pronouns. This results in an agent-patient system of alignment, in the sense of Mithun (1991). Actor pronouns code the grammatical agent, and undergoer pronouns code the grammatical patient. In particular, controlling arguments of intransitive verbs are coded with actor pronouns, as in (10).

(10) \textit{nang} mising
1s.ACT sit
\text_quote{I am sitting'}

In contrast, non-controlling arguments of intransitive verbs are coded with undergoer pronouns.

(11) \textit{naing} massa
1s.\textit{AEQ} tired
\text_quote{I am tired'}
Undergoer pronouns may also occur with active intransitive verbs when the referent is not sufficiently controlling.

Three broad classes of intransitive verbs can be distinguished, based on whether the verb in question occurs with actor pronouns but not undergoer; with undergoer pronouns but not actor; or with either actor or undergoer pronouns. Examples of the first type include intransitive verbs which select for highly controlling agents, as in (12). These verbs cannot occur with undergoer pronouns.

(12)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nang (*naing) birang} & \quad \text{‘I speak’} \\
\text{nang (*naing) biring} & \quad \text{‘I run’} \\
\text{nang (*naing) kalalang} & \quad \text{‘I understand’}
\end{align*}
\]

Examples of the second type include intransitive verbs with non-controlling participants, as in (13). These verbs generally cannot occur with actor pronouns.

(13)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{naing (*nang) massa} & \quad \text{‘I’m lazy’} \\
\text{naing (*nang) ubah} & \quad \text{‘I’m wet’} \\
\text{naing (*nang) sisa} & \quad \text{‘I’m dry’}
\end{align*}
\]

Not every intransitive verb with a non-controlling participant refuses to admit actor pronouns. For some verbs it may be possible to force a reading with actor pronoun, as with muddi ‘strong’ in (20) below. Ultimately, the distinction between whether a verb takes actor or undergoer pronoun is lexically, not semantically determined. Indeed, verbs with seemingly identical semantics may take different pronoun sets. For example, the directional verbs pia ‘descend’ and mia ‘ascend’ occur with actor pronouns, as in (14) and (15).

(14)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nang (*naing) na-pia} & \quad \text{1s.act(*1s.u) 1s-descend} \\
& \quad \text{‘I descended’}
\end{align*}
\]

(15)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nang (*naing) na-mia} & \quad \text{1s.act(*1s.u) 1s-ascend} \\
& \quad \text{‘I ascended’}
\end{align*}
\]

However, the directional verbs middang ‘come from below’ and yang ‘come from above’ require undergoer pronouns, in spite of their semantic similarity to pia and mia.

(16)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{naing (*nang) middang } & \quad \text{ga} \\
& \quad \text{1s.u (*1s.act) come.from.below PFV} \\
& \quad \text{‘I came up from below’}
\end{align*}
\]

(17)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{naing (*nang) yang } & \quad \text{ga} \\
& \quad \text{1s.u (*1s.act) come.from.above PFV} \\
& \quad \text{‘I came down from above’}
\end{align*}
\]

The verbs pia, mia, middang, and yang function within a larger system of directional verbs, and there is no evidence that the last two of these verbs imply less control than the first two. Rather, the last two verbs have simply lexicalized with undergoer pronouns,
perhaps reflecting an historical semantic shift from a less controlling, patientive form. While agent-patient systems may be semantically motivated, choice of pronoun is not directly determined by verbal or participant semantics (cf. Mithun 1991).

The third class of intransitive verbs may occur with either actor or undergoer pronoun, though for a given verb in this class one pronoun set is less marked. The following pair of examples, which differ only in the choice of actor versus undergoer pronoun, is illustrative. The verb in both cases is the active intransitive motion verb pia ‘descend’. In (18) the use of a actor pronoun implies a controlling argument, thus yielding an unmarked reading with this active verb. The use of a undergoer pronoun in (19) implies less control, indicating in this case that the referent is accompanying another person who may be in more control of the action, as captured by the use of the comitative in the English translation.

(18) nang hoang me na-pia
     1s.ACT beach LOC 1s-descend
     ‘I am going to the beach’

(19) naing kan hoang me na-pia
     1s.U also beach LOC 1s-descend
     ‘I too am going to the beach [with you]’

Crucially, the choice of actor versus undergoer pronoun is governed not by the verb itself but rather by the participant semantics. However, that is not to say that the choice between actor and undergoer pronouns is completely free. The verb pia ‘descend’ occurs in isolated, elicited forms with actor pronouns, as in (18). The alternate form with undergoer is marked, and this markedness gives rise to the implicature which yields the comitative interpretation. In this sense the WP independent pronoun system differs significantly from semantically aligned systems such as found in the West Papuan language Tobelo, where many intransitive verb roots occur freely with either actor or undergoer pronominal prefixes, with neither form being more marked (cf. Holton 2003:58).

In many cases the choice between actor and undergoer pronoun with an intransitive verb can be directly correlated to the degree of participant control. Where varying degrees of control can be attributed to the participant, an alternation is possible. For example, the forms with actor pronoun in (20) imply a degree of control on the part of the referent, while those with undergoer pronoun imply less control.

(20) Actor Pronoun
     gang pali ‘is he afraid?’
     nang muddi ‘I should be strong’

     Undergoer Pronoun
     gaing pali ‘he is afraid’
     naing muddi ‘I am strong’

Thus, the forms with undergoer pronouns are simple declarative statements, whereas the forms with actor pronouns are non-declarative. The question gang pali? allows the possibility that the referent may choose whether or not to be afraid, whereas the declarative statement gaing pali assumes that decision has been made, and is now beyond the referent’s control. Similarly, the modal reading of nang muddi assumes that I still have a choice to be strong, for example, to carry on through difficult times. The non-modal naing
muddi simply indicates that I am in a state of being strong, a state over which I have no control."

Alternation between actor and undergoer pronouns is also possible with transitive verbs. Typically the more agentive, controlling argument of a transitive verb is coded with an actor pronoun, while the less agentive argument is coded with an undergoer pronoun, as in (21).

(21) *nang* goi' *lu'ung*
    1s.ACT  3s.U  cut
    ‘I cut him’

However, if neither argument of a transitive verb is sufficiently controlling, both may be coded with undergoer pronouns, as in (22).

(22) *naing* goi' *oswang*aggi
    1s.U  3s.U  outside  take
    ‘I took (coaxed) him outside’

In this example the use of a undergoer pronoun for the first person argument does not imply complete absence of control but rather a situation of less control than would be the case with an actor pronoun. Thus, the suggested gloss ‘coaxed’ rather than ‘took’. As Mithun (1991) points out, such double undergoer constructions are rather common among agentive systems, reflecting the increased role of semantics in determining alignment patterns in such systems.

Finally, while most of the examples cited up to this point reflect an APV word order, alternate word orders are extremely frequent in natural discourse. For example, (23) reflects AVP word order, while (24) reflects PAV word order.

(23) *ning* i-ga-*niaka* allang duang
    1pe.ACT  prog-3s-see  thus  snake
    ‘thus we saw the snake’

(24) *duang* ning *lu'ung* gaterannang *kanna* ga ya
    snake  1pe.ACT  cut  completely  already  PFV  and
    ‘and we cut up the snake completely’

Thus, word order does provide cues as to the alignment of independent pronouns.

### 3.2 Pronominal prefixes

As is evident from Table 1, the WP pronominal prefixes are phonologically reduced forms of the independent pronouns.\(^5\) Pronominal prefixes may occur with both intransitive

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\(^5\) An alternate interpretation of the use of actor pronouns with the irrealis mood forms, suggested by one of the reviewers of this paper, is that actor pronouns are simply required in the irrealis mood, neutralizing the semantic contrast between control and non-control. This hypothesis certainly warrants further investigation.

\(^6\) I use the term pronominal prefix here in a pre-theoretical sense, leaving open the question of whether these should be interpreted as agreement markers or pronominal arguments.
or transitive verbs, but not all verbs admit pronominal prefixes. Where they do occur, pronominal prefixes may co-occur with a co-referential noun phrase or independent pronoun, as in the following examples.

(25)  *nang duang ga-niaka*

1s.ACT snake 3s-see
‘I saw a snake’

(26)  *nang na-lama *ta*

1s.ACT 1s-go IPFV
‘I’m going’

The choice between reference with independent pronoun, pronominal prefix or both is quite complicated, and depends in part on the verbal semantics. However, one characterization which is possible is that referents indexed via pronominal prefixes are less affected. Some evidence for this hypothesis can be gleaned from transitive verbs which do not permit P arguments to be indexed by both prefixes and pronouns. For such verbs an alternation is possible between pronoun and prefix, and there is a preference for independent pronoun over pronominal prefix with more highly affected referents. That is, the undergoer pronoun signals greater affectedness of P than does the pronominal prefix. Thus, the use of a pronoun with the verb *diti* ‘stab’ in (27a) indicates a more severe stabbing than does the form with a pronominal prefix in (27b).

(27)  a.  *nang  goiung diti*

1s.ACT 3s.U stab
‘I stabbed him’ (severely)

b.  *nang  ga-diti*

1s.ACT 3s-stab
‘I stabbed him’ (superficially)

The affectedness hypothesis extends to the use of pronominal prefixes with intransitive verbs as well. Many intransitive verbs may occur with a pronominal prefix indexing the single S argument, in addition to a co-referential independent pronoun or noun phrase. In such cases there is a tendency for pronominal prefixes to occur in irrealis contexts, often to express a desire or intention, as in (28a). In contrast, forms without the pronominal prefix, as in (28b), are more typically associated with realis contexts.

(28)  a.  *nang na-golang *ta*

1s.ACT 1s-return IPFV
‘I’m going to go home (but haven’t yet)’

b.  *nang golang ga*

1s.ACT return PFV
‘I went home (already)’

This close association between the use of pronominal prefixes in imperfective contexts but not in perfective contexts is pervasive. However, modality not aspect is the crucial factor. Pronominal prefixes are found also with intransitive verbs in perfective, irrealis contexts, as in the negative form in (29).

(29)  *na-boleung haliarg kawwa*

1s-fall almost NEG
‘I amost fell’
This close association of pronominal prefixes with irrealis contexts yields highly productive alternations between actor independent pronouns and pronominal prefixes, with prefixes used to express desire or intention.

(30) a. nang tallang ‘I am swimming’ na-tallang ‘I want to, am about to swim’

b. nang kale’e ‘I am vomiting (now)’ na-kale’e ‘I am going to vomit’

In middle constructions the pronominal prefix may be used together with a co-referential undergoer pronoun, as in (31).

(31) naing na-ulang
1S.U. 1s-bathe
‘I am bathing’

3.3 Summary of WP person-marking

In summary, person-marking in WP is instantiated via two distinct but overlapping systems of pronominals. Independent pronouns pattern according to an agentive or semantically aligned system. One set of pronouns is used to reference more actor-like arguments, while another distinct set is used to reference undergoer arguments. Pronominal prefixes can also be used to reference arguments, either with or without co-referential independent pronouns. However, the distribution of pronominal prefixes is much more complex, to the extent that a single pronominal prefix may reference arguments with any of the A, S, or P roles. In the following section, the distribution of these pronominal prefixes is discussed in some detail, and distinct verb classes are delineated according to varying alignment patterns of the prefixes.

4 Distribution of pronominal prefixes

Constraints on the occurrence of pronominal prefixes in WP are lexically determined and can thus be used to delineate verb classes. Not all verbs admit pronominal prefixes, and among those that do the argument referenced by the prefix may be limited to a certain subset of A, S, and P. Based on this distribution I recognize seven verb classes. It should be acknowledged from the start that this classification is somewhat ad-hoc. Others might recognize a smaller or larger number of verb classes. Indeed, in a previous paper (Holton 2005) I recognized just five classes, lumping the Class III, IV, and V verbs (those for which the prefix is optional) together within a single class. The finer-grained classification presented here recognizes further restrictions on permissible macro-roles which can be indexed by the pronominal prefix. Other divisions are certainly possible. For example, the classification presented here essentially ignores transitivity, lumping intransitive and transitive verb together within single classes. Thus, Class I consists of all verbs which do not admit pronominal prefixes, regardless of transitivity. The purpose of the classification here is to provide insights into alignment systems; hence the focus on constraints on the indexing of A, S, and P.

It should also be emphasized that while I have attempted in some cases to provide an ad-hoc semantic characterization of each verb class, the classes themselves are delineated strictly on morpho-syntactic grounds based on the distribution of pronominal prefixes.
That said, semantics clearly has a role to play, in that argument structure and alignment patterns in WP are clearly based on semantic principles. Thus, Class II verbs with mandatory prefix indexing the P argument can be characterized as denoting highly transitive events with less affected P arguments, but this characterization derives ultimately from a characterization of the pronominal prefix as indexing low-affected arguments. In the following subsections I describe each verb class in turn.

4.1 Class I Verbs: no pronominal prefixes

Verbs in Class I are distinguished by their inability to occur with pronominal prefixes. This is a relatively large class of verbs which includes both intransitive-only verbs (including most statives) and transitive-only verbs, as in (32).

(32) Class I intransitive verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>batta</td>
<td>'stupid'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kutta</td>
<td>'fat'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maba</td>
<td>'cold', 'well'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irpatang</td>
<td>'understand'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class I transitive verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lu’ung ‘cut’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bugi ‘hit’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>komi ‘knead’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggi ‘take’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiggung ‘add to’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This class includes in particular most stative intransitive verbs. That is, most stative intransitive verbs cannot occur with pronominal prefixes but must instead be indexed via undergoer pronouns.

(33) naing maba ga (*na-maba)

1S.U  cold PFV
‘I am recovered’ (lit: ‘I am already cold’ [not feverish])

The semantics of transitive-only Class I verbs is more difficult to characterize, as there exist transitive verbs with similar meanings to Class I verbs which occur in other verb classes. For example, kasti ‘split’ belongs to Class VI (see §4.6 below), while lu’ung ‘cut’ belongs to Class I, and thus does not admit a pronominal prefix. One possible characterization of Class I transitive verbs is that they indicate a focus on the action itself rather than on its effect on the grammatical patient, as in (34), where the focus is on the activity of kneading rather than on its effect on the bread.

(34) nang roti komi (*ga-komi)

1S.ACT  bread  knead
‘I am kneading bread’

However, the robustness of this tentative characterization has yet to be fully tested.

4.2 Class II Verbs: mandatory prefix indexes P

Class II verbs are transitive-only, and require a pronominal prefix obligatorily referencing the P argument. This is a large class of verbs of high transitivity; the P argument is very clearly affected and individuated (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980). As
such there is a slight tendency for the P argument to be third person inanimate; however, animate P arguments are also possible. The examples in (35) are representative.

(35) Class II (transitive-only) verbs
- _-lu_ ‘chase’
- _-ammu_ ‘suck’
- _-ssi_ ‘bite’
- _-pa’ang_ ‘be different’
- _-wa’aling_ ‘hit’
- _-waling_ ‘wait for’
- _-sising_ ‘stare at’
- _-bili_ ‘drag’
- _-sidding_ ‘haul’
- _-riang_ ‘care for’
- _-boya_ ‘swing’
- _-alas_ ‘persuade’

Class II verbs are bound forms, and thus cannot occur without a pronominal prefix. In citation form these verbs are given with third person prefix _ga_-, for example _gassi_ ‘bite it’. Class II verbs may also occur with independent pronoun co-referential with the pronominal prefix, but in such cases the pronoun has an emphatic reading.

4.3 Class III Verbs: optional prefix indexes 1/2 person S

Verbs in Class III are intransitive-only verbs which optionally index first and second person referents via pronominal prefixes. Verbs in this class generally describe dynamic activities, but not always. Some examples are given in (36).

(36) Class III (intransitive only) verbs
- _golang_ ‘return’
- _ti’ang_ ‘sleep, go to sleep’
- _biring_ ‘run’
- _lama_ ‘walk’
- _mudali_ ‘play’
- _mising_ ‘sit down’

Class III verbs typically occur without a pronominal prefix, as in (37). However, first and second person referents may optionally be indexed via a pronominal prefix, as in (38).

(37) nang  bloko
1s.ACT  jump
‘I jumped’

(38) na-bloko
1s-jump
‘I jumped’

The distinguishing criterion feature of Class III verbs is their failure to admit third person pronominal prefixes. Pronouns or full noun phrases must be used instead, as in (39).

(39) _gang_ bloko (*_go-bloko_
3s.ACT  jump
‘he jumped’

4.4 Class IV Verbs: optional prefix indexes 1/2 person absolutive

Class IV verbs are ambi-valent. The intransitive form refers to an involuntary action or state. The corresponding transitive form has a causative sense, meaning that the A argument causes the P argument to carry out the action or come into the state denoted by the verb.
(40) Class IV (ambi-valent) verbs
\[ olang \ 'fall over' \]
\[ aroga \ 'angry' \]

Like Class III, this class is distinguished by the fact that its members do not admit third person prefixes, neither with intransitive (41) nor with transitive (42) forms.

(41) \[ gang \ olang \ ta \ (\text{"gang ga-olang ta"}) \]
\[ 3s.ACT \ fall.over \ IPFV \]
'he’s about to fall over'

(42) \[ nang \ gi’ing \ olang \ (\text{"nang gi-olang"}) \]
\[ 1s.ACT \ 3p.U \ fall.over \]
'I laid them down (to sleep)'

With first and second person S arguments, the presence of a pronominal prefix is optional, as in (43). The use of the pronominal prefix is commonly associated with irrealis contexts, as in (44).

(43) \[ nang \ olang \]
\[ 1s.ACT \ fall.over \]
'I fell over'

(44) \[ nang \ na-olang \ ta \]
\[ 1s.ACT \ 1s-fall.over \ IPFV \]
'I’m about to fall over'

First and second person P arguments of Class IV verbs may be indexed via either independent pronouns or pronominal prefixes, but not via both, though there is a preference for the latter. For example, the form (45) with pronominal prefix referencing the P argument is more acceptable than that in (45).

(45) \[ nang \ haing \ (\text{"h-}olang) \]
\[ 1s.ACT \ 2s.U \ (2s-)fall.over \]
'I laid you down (to sleep)'

(46) \[ nang \ (\text{"haing"}) \ h-olang \]
\[ 1s.ACT \ (2s.U) \ 2s-fall.over \]
'I laid you down (to sleep)'

First and second person A arguments of Class IV verbs are never expressed with pronominal prefixes; for these verbs pronominal prefixes are restricted to absolutive (S and P) arguments.

4.5 Class V Verbs: optional prefix indexes 1/2 person S and 3 person P

Class V verbs are also ambi-valent, and their behaviour is in many ways similar to those in Class IV. However, unlike Class IV verbs, verbs in Class V can occur with pronominal prefixes indexing third person arguments, though only in the P macro-role. As with Class IV verbs, the corresponding transitive form has a causative sense. Verbs in this class exhibit a high degree of semantic unity in that they generally denote involuntary states.

(47) Class V (ambi-valent) verbs
\[ pali \ 'to be afraid' \]
\[ natter \ 'to be standing' \]
With first and second person referents the intransitive form of these verbs may be expressed with either an independent pronoun (48) or a pronominal prefix (49). As with Class IV intransitive verbs, the use of a pronominal prefix is associated with irrealsis contexts.

(48) nang pessing  
1s.ACT sneeze  
'I sneezed'

(49) na-pessing  
1s-sneeze  
'I’m about to sneeze'

When a third person pronominal prefix occurs with a Class V verb it must be interpreted as indexing the P argument. The precise interpretation of such forms reflects a fair amount of lexicalization, as indicated by the gloss in (50). In order to express a third person S argument an actor independent pronoun is required, as in (51).

(50) ga-pessing  
3s-sneeze  
‘sneeze him!’ (i.e., ‘wipe his nose’)

(51) gang pessing (*ga-pessing)  
3s.ACT sneeze  
‘he sneezed’

Curiously, Class V verbs do not admit first or second person pronominal prefixes to index P arguments. Thus, to express clauses such as ‘he sneezed you’ the undergoer independent pronoun haing must be used to refer to the second person.

4.6 Class VI Verbs: optional prefix indexes 1/2 person A or 3 person P
Verbs in this class are transitive only. An optional pronominal prefix may index either first and second person A arguments or third person P arguments. Some examples are given in (52).

(52) Class VI (transitive-only) verbs
-na  ‘eat’
-uddang  ‘buy’
-kasi  ‘split’

With Class VI verbs first and second person pronominal prefixes must index the A argument, as in (53). First and second person P arguments must be indexed with independent pronouns, as in (54).

(53) attua hissa na-kasi  
coconut fruit 1s-split  
‘I split the coconut’

(54) gang haing na  
3s.ACT 2s.U eat  
‘he ate you’

The distribution of prefixes on Class VI may reflect a frequency effect. Class VI verbs are highly transitive, typically having A arguments which are high in agency and P arguments which are highly affected. Thus, the A argument of these verbs tends to be human and hence more likely to be first or second person, while the P arguments of these verbs tend to be third person non-human. In other words, the situation described in (53) is much more typical than that in (54).

7 Thanks to Michael Ewing for calling this to my attention.
4.7 Class VII Verbs: optional second prefix indexes A

Class VII consists of verbs which may occur with two pronominal prefixes indexing the A and P arguments. There are very few verbs in this class, but all are high-frequency lexical items. These verbs are mostly transitive, requiring at a minimum one pronominal prefixes (indexing P), as in (55). However, some of the verbs in this class have free roots and may occur with zero, one, or two pronominal prefixes, as in (56).

(55) Class VII bound verbs
-ussar ‘catch’
-niaka ‘see’
-nia ‘give’

(56) Class VII free verbs
tiaring ‘close, guard’
asang ‘say, speak, tell’

The ordering of pronominal prefixes within Class VII verbs is rigid. Where only one pronominal prefix occurs, it obligatorily indexes the P argument, as in (57).

(57) gang na-niaka
3s.ACT 1s-see
‘he sees me’

With transitive-only verbs, when two prefixes occur, the order is fixed. The first prefix indexes the A argument, while the second indexes the P argument, as in (58). However, the prefixes are not distinguished in form. These verbs consist of bound roots, which require a prefix indexing the P argument.

(58) ke’e pi-ga-ussar
fish 1p-3s-catch
‘we are catching fish’

These verbs consist of bound roots, which require a prefix indexing the P argument. So the rigid prefix order can be explained by a layer morphology in which the prefix indexing the A argument is affixed to an already complex form containing a P prefix. In other words, with a verb like ga-nia the third person prefix ga- must refer to the P, not the A.

The situation is drastically different with the free verb roots in this class. As a free root asang may occur without a prefix, as in (59). And as with the other Class VII verbs, when asang occurs with a single prefix, that prefix indexes the P argument, as in (60).

(59) o talle hang hala asang
EXCL friend 2s.ACT FOC say
‘Oh, friend, it’s you that spoke’

(60) ging biring wa wenang ga-asang
3p.ACT run go old.man 3s-say
‘they ran to tell the old man’

However, with two prefixes only the order P-A is possible, as in (61) and (62).
(61) wee go-i-tiaring
fishpond 3s-4p-close
'they are guarding the fishpond'

(62) nang ana ha-asang kauwa ing gob, ana
Is.ACT now 2s-say NEG if day

dinni ta ha-na-asang
how many before 2s-1s-say
'if I don't tell you now, how long will it be before I can tell you?'

The more 'normal' A-P prefix order is not possible with the above verbs, though there is some indication that younger speakers are beginning to use forms such as naga'asang 'I told him'. However, most speakers reject such forms in favour of either an independent pronoun nang ga'asang or the P-A prefix order.

5 Pronominal prefixes and alignment patterns

The distribution of pronominal prefixes described in the previous section can be difficult to interpret in terms of argument alignment patterns. If alignment is understood in terms of morphological coding of the A, S, and P arguments, then each verb class exhibits different alignment patterns. In some cases these individual patterns can be understood in a straightforward way. For example, Class II verbs index P arguments via pronominal prefixes; A and S arguments are not indexed. This reflects a nominative-accusative system which aligns the A and S roles. In contrast, Class IV verbs index S and P non-third person arguments via pronominal prefixes. These verbs are ambivalent: the pronominal prefix indexes the P argument of transitive verbs and the S argument of intransitive verbs, reflecting an ergative-absolutive pattern.

Yet even within a single verb class the alignment pattern is not constant. For example, Class IV verbs employ pronominal prefixes only for non-third persons, thus the ergative system is reflected only in first and second person forms. This results in a type of person-based split which is rather odd cross-linguistically, since in split systems the ergative-absolutive pattern has been argued to be more motivated for non-speech act participants (cf. Mithun 1991; Mithun & Chafe 1999). When examined across all seven WP verb classes, attempts to discern a coherent pattern of alignment yield highly variable results. As summarized in Table 2, the alignment pattern of pronominal prefixes varies both by person and by verb class, and each class reflects a unique distribution of permissible A, S, and P roles across the various persons.

Table 2 succinctly summarizes the alignment of A, S, and P across each verb class and person category. It is necessary to break this information down by verb class and person category because each verb class (by definition) exhibits a different pattern of alignment and, moreover, for at least some classes, the patterns are different for different persons. To say that Class II verbs exhibit a nominative-accusative alignment pattern is equivalent to saying that pronominal prefixes index P arguments (but not A or S arguments) for all persons. Thus the 'P' entry for each person in Class II in Table 2 (for example) indicates, for each person in each verb class, which arguments can be indexed by a pronominal prefix. For example, Class I verbs, which do not admit pronominal prefixes.
Table 2: Arguments indexed by pronominal prefixes by verb class and person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Class</th>
<th>person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arguably, Table 2 would be easier to interpret if standard descriptive labels such as ‘nominative-accusative’ or ‘ergative-absolutive’ were assigned to each verb class. But such an approach is fraught with difficulty. Firstly, many of the patterns in the table cannot be readily described in terms of standard labels. For example, Class V verbs exhibit an alignment split based on person. Third persons follow a nominative-accusative pattern (P is indexed via a prefix; S and A are not). But the pattern for first and second persons groups S as opposed to A and P (S is indexed via a prefix; A and P are not). And we do not have a standard label to describe systems which group A and P as opposed to S.

More problematic is the fact that any attempt to force an interpretation of the distribution of pronominal prefixes across these verb classes in terms of the alignment of A, S and P yields results which are inherently unstable, since small perturbations in morphological structure yield huge variations in alignment patterns. For example, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, Class V verbs exhibit a split in alignment patterns based on person. First and second person S arguments are indexed via pronominal prefixes, while first and second person A and P arguments are not indexed on the verb. On the other hand, third person P arguments are indexed via pronominal prefixes, while third person S and A arguments are not indexed. Class V verbs thus group first and second person S as opposed to A and P, and third person P as opposed to S and A. The pattern with third person can be readily labeled nominative-accusative, while the pattern for first and second person is rather odd and more difficult to label. In any case, this sort of description belies the underlying sensitivity to semantics governing the choice of pronominal prefix.

For example, Class V verbs are ambi-valent, so that each verb in this class has both an intransitive and a transitive sense. Thus, the verb *pessing* can mean ‘to sneeze’ or ‘to sneeze someone’, that is ‘to wipe someone’s nose’. The transitive reading requires a highly controlling agent and a highly affected patient. Attributing this level of affectedness to a non-speech act participant is permissible, but attributing this level of affectedness to a speech act participant (first or second person) requires a undergoer independent pronoun, which cannot co-occur with a pronominal prefix. Thus, it is possible to express the statement ‘he sneezed me,’ provided first person reference is achieved with a pronoun rather than a prefix, as in (63).

(63) gang naing (*na-)pessing
    3s.ACT 18.U (1s-)sneeze
    ‘he sneezed me’
With non-speech act participants either undergo pronouns or pronominal prefixes are possible: *gaing pessing* or *ga-pessing* ‘sneeze him!’. As this example demonstrates, the distribution of pronominal prefixes is at least in part motivated by the semantic parameter of affectedness.

In this regard it is interesting to compare WP with the Pantar language Nedebang. In Nedebang pronominal prefixes are generally restricted to indexing the P argument; however, there are some defective paradigms which show evidence of a system similar to that in WP, in which pronominal prefixes may index an S argument. For example, the paradigm for Nedebang *ola* ‘go home’ in (64) shows pronominal prefixes with first person S arguments.⁸

(64)  
\begin{align*}
\text{nang n-ola} & \quad \text{‘I go home’} & \text{ping p-ola} & \quad \text{‘we (inc) go home’} \\
\text{hang ola} & \quad \text{‘you go home’} & \text{ning n-ola} & \quad \text{‘we (exc) go home’} \\
\text{gang ola} & \quad \text{‘he or she goes home’} & \text{ing ola} & \quad \text{‘you (pl) go home’} \\
\text{ging ola} & \quad \text{‘they go home’}
\end{align*}

Nedebang *ola* is cognate with WP *golang*, a Class III verb which optionally indexes first and second person S arguments via pronominal prefixes. These verbs share a restriction against the use of pronominal prefixes to index third person arguments, but WP has relaxed that restriction slightly to allow pronominal prefixes with second as well as first persons. If the pronominal prefix is viewed as a marker of low affected arguments, then Nedebang marks the first person arguments in (64) as being low affected, reflecting a kind of middle construction, as in returning to my own home (cf. Kemmer 1993). WP simply extends this interpretation to all speech act participants, including both first and second person. In this respect the semantic difference between Nedebang and WP is quite small, yet the consequences for argument alignment are quite large.

It should be acknowledged that the lexicon still plays an important role, in that verb classes reflect lexical not semantic groupings. Crucially, verb classes are not identical across the Alor-Pantar languages. There may even be significant variation across closely related languages. As Donohue (1997) laments regarding the Alor languages Kui and Kolana, ‘annoyingly, although (some of) the pronominal forms are identical for the two languages, the verbs with which they occur aren’t.’ Furthermore, to say that the choice of pronominal prefix is semantically motivated is not to say that we can always provide a synchronic semantic explanation. Verb meanings may change over time, while the distribution of pronominal prefixes remains constant. Comparative information may eventually provide insight into the evolution of alignment systems in Alor-Pantar languages, but at the present time our understanding of the internal historical relationships remains in its infancy.

Indeed, to the extent that the present study is based on preliminary fieldwork, the conclusions presented here should be approached with some caution. What is clear is that traditional notions of alignment as operationalized via the alignment of A, S, and P arguments do little to elucidate the distribution of pronominal prefixes in WP. Rather, as I have argued for non-Austronesian languages elsewhere in East Nusantara, the multiplicity of formal alignment systems belies an underlying semantic unity. For example, in the closely-related North Halmaheran languages Tobelo and Galela, the choice of actor versus undergoer pronoun with intransitive verbs is governed by identical semantic principles.

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⁸ Nedebang data are from the author’s fieldwork in 2004.
(Holton 2008). However, due to differing morphological constraints Tobelo reflects a formally nominative-accusative system, while Galela reflects a semantically-aligned stative-active system. As more data become available, differences in formal alignment patterns between Western Pantar and other Alor-Pantar languages may similarly turn out to reflect structural constraints rather than actual differences in semantic categorization.

References


