

## From “Yesterday’s Morphology” to “Today’s Syntax”: Two cases from Besemah

The study of grammaticalization has long held that over time an independent word loses phonological material becoming a clitic and eventually an affix by processes such as phonetic decay. Besemah, a Malayic language of southwest Sumatra, evinces a conflicting pattern by which synchronic alternations of the third person pronoun enclitic =*nye/anye* ‘3’ and the preposition *sandi/isan di=* ‘from’ have undergone innovations that have added phonetic material.

The third person enclitic =*nye* shows morphophonemic variation depending on whether the root is vowel-final as in (1) or consonant-final as in (2); [ɲɔ̃] surfaces after a vowel-final root, while [ɔ̃] surfaces after a consonant-final root.

- 1) [bini] ‘wife’ + [ɲɔ̃] → [biniɲɔ̃] ‘his wife’
- 2) [ɣumah] ‘house’ + [ɲɔ̃] → [ɣumahɔ̃] ‘his house’

Following the nominalizing suffix *-an*, the enclitic =*nye* demonstrates an unexpected alteration by which =*nye* is appended with the low central vowel [a], yielding a phonological word *anye* [aɲɔ̃] as in (3) below.

- 3) [bataʔ] ‘carry’ + [an] → [bataʔʔan] ‘s.t. carried’ + [ɲɔ̃] → [bataʔʔan] [aɲɔ̃] ‘his carried thing’

In a similar fashion, the preposition *sandi* ‘from’ is an independent phonological word that can occur as a complex of the phonological word *isan* and the general locative proclitic *di=* collectively meaning ‘from’. The *sandi/isan di=* alternation is shown in (4) and (5).

- 4) aku mbatak kawé **sandi** kebun  
1SG. carry coffee from garden
- 5) aku mbatak kawé **isan di=**kebulan  
1SG. carry coffee from LOC=garden  
‘I carried the coffee from the garden’

The =*nye/anye* ‘3’ and *sandi/isan di=* ‘from’ alternations demonstrate a similar pattern by which there is a canonical form =*nye* and *sandi* and a more phonetically robust alternate form *anye* and *isan di=*. From a synchronic perspective these forms are not surprising.

However, from a diachronic viewpoint, these alternations are unexpected under a grammaticalization analysis. The clitic =*nye* is straightforwardly reconstructed as \**ña* for Proto-Malayic by Adelaar (1992:125) and \**ni-a* for Proto-Malayo-Polynesian by Blust (1977a:11). Based on evidence from other Malayic languages, *sandi* is reconstructed as \**sa-N-di*, consisting of the indefinite marker \**sa*, the nasal ligature \*-N- and the locative marker \**di* (Uri Tadmor, pers. comm.). These reconstructions are more similar to the canonical forms in Besemah =*nye* and *sandi*, while the phonetically robust forms *anye* and *isan di=*, in fact, appear to arise from innovations of the canonical forms. That is, the *a-* in *anye* and the *i-* in *isan di=* are instances of phonetic strengthening. Crucially, these phonetically robust forms are not the remnant of some older form.

Based on the evidence above, this paper claims that =*nye* and *sandi* have undergone phonetic strengthening rather than the more usual process of phonetic decay. This claim is further supported by data collected during recent fieldwork in the Besemah highlands as well as evidence from other Malayic languages of southwest Sumatra. Finally, an explanation of the apparent phonetic strengthening is proposed.

## **References**

Adelaar, Alexander. 1992. *Proto-Malayic: The reconstruction of its phonology and parts of its lexicon and morphology*. Series C-119. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

Blust, Robert. 1977a. The PAN pronouns and Austronesian subgrouping: A preliminary report. *Working papers in linguistics of the University of Hawaii* 9/2:1-15.