

Indonesian Lexical Semantics in Mainland Southeast Asian Perspective: The Case of 'Eat'

Indonesian has various typological features in common with Mainland Southeast Asian languages, such as classifiers, SVO order and short words, in contrast with its sister Austronesian languages in Taiwan and the Philippines. This is indicative of language contact between Indonesian and MSEA, or perhaps of a wider linguistic area where these properties are found, the Mekong-Mamberamo area (Gil 2012), stretching to West New Guinea.

The question of how much of the lexical semantics of Indonesian is shared with MSEA languages has been less explored. Matisoff (1978, 2001) points out 'areal semantic' features of MSEA such as 'star shit' for 'meteor' and 'pig-madness' for 'epilepsy', which are found in Indonesian. This short study gives a few further examples, focussing on a case-study of the verb 'eat' *makan* and compares some of its uses with uses in Thai, Semai (Aslian branch of Mon-Khmer, Malaysia), Vietnamese, Cantonese, Hmong and Tagalog. The methodology involves consulting dictionaries, native speakers and corpus searches on these MSEA languages.

Various uses of 'eat' are shared with Thai but not other languages in the region, suggesting that these uses have spread by areal diffusion across Thailand and Malaysia. These include: *makan ongkos besar* 'eat a lot of money' = 'cost a lot of money' (กินเงิน *gin ngern*), *makan waktu lama* 'take up a lot of time' (Thai กินเวลา *gin wee-laa*), *makan angin* 'eat air' in the sense of 'go for fresh air' (Thai กินลม *gin loh*m), and the slang use of 'have sex with' (possibly similar to the Thai เสพ *sæhp* 'to eat, consume, have sex with').

Some semantic features are shared with other MSEA languages, but not Tagalog. These include the slang use of *makan candu* 'eat marijuana' = 'smoke marijuana' (c.f. Cantonese 'eat smoke' = 'to smoke'); *menghisap* 'suck' for 'to smoke' (shared with Thai, Vietnamese, Khmer and others); having an expression 'be a freeloader' using 'eat', *makan bebas* 'eat wantonness' = 'eat for free, freeload' (c.f. Vietnamese *ăn chực* 'eat dependent' = freeload' and Thai เกาะกิน *gàw gin* 'take eat' = 'freeload'); and expressions denoting emotions such as *makan bawang* 'eat onion' = 'be furious' (c.f. Vietnamese *ăn năn* 'eat regret' = 'regret', Cantonese *sik6cou4* 'eat vinegar' = 'be jealous'). Finally, some uses are shared with MSEA languages and Tagalog such as 'Have you eaten yet?' as a greeting; 'eat rice' to mean 'eat' (Tagalog *k'ain* is derived from 'rice'), 'eat medicine' and the heterosemy of 'eat' with 'food' (e.g. Hmong *noj su* 'eat/food noon' = 'lunch').

Semantic features thus differ in how widespread they are. This may be due to differences in diffusability, or it may be due to how old these features are: features shared only with Thai may be younger than features found over a larger area. Issues of methodology and the historical interpretation of these patterns are discussed in conclusion.

Gil, D. (2012). The Mekong-Mamberamo Linguistic Area. Talk given at the Workshop on Mainland Southeast Asian Languages: The State of the Art in 2012, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, 29 November 2012.

Matisoff, J. (1978). Variational Semantics in Tibeto-Burman: the 'organic' approach to linguistic comparison. Occasional Papers of the Wolfenden Society on Tibeto-Burman Linguistics, Volume VI. Publication of the Institute for the Study of Human Issues (ISHI), Philadelphia.

Matisoff, J. (2001). Is there such a thing as areal semantics, and if so, can we distinguish between plausible and implausible semantic change/associations in the Southeast Asian linguistic area? Oral presentation at the Summer Institute of the Linguistic Society of America, University of California at Santa Barbara, July 2001.

