

**VOICE IN MENTAWAI:
A Note on Its Typological Position in the Austronesian Languages of Indonesia**

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Abstract

This paper reports a preliminary study of the voice system in Mentawai---an Austronesian language of the western Malayo-Polynesian subgroup, spoken by about 64,866 people (see Munaf, et.al., 2001) on the island of Mentawai, 120 miles south-west of West Sumatra. The paper will discuss the nature of the voice system in this language in terms of how it fits with the typology of Austronesian voice systems in particular and the typology of voice and grammatical alignment in general. Given the basic data on voice in Mentawai shown in (1)-(2) (adapted from Lenggang et. al., 1978), we show that Mentawai belongs to the Indonesian-type language (cf. Himmelmann 2002, Arka and Ross 2005) but it has some peculiarities showing differences with the neighbouring languages such as Minangkabau (Jufrizal 2004). It has a two-way voice opposition, Agentive Voice (AV) vs. Undergoer Voice (UV). The AV construction has its verb affixed by *maN-/masi-/mu-* or *a- -an*, and the UV construction has its verb prefixed by *ay-* or *i-*, depending on whether the construction encodes past/realis (REAL) or non-past/irrealis (IRR) tense/mood. The paper will also address voice-related grammatical aspects in Mentawai. These include, among others, applicativisation and the nature of argument alternation, e.g. whether the actor of the UV construction which appears postverbally as an NP, not a PP, exemplified by the (b) sentences, is grammatically an oblique or a core argument, and whether the ‘cleft construction’ whose verb bears no voice morphology, exemplified by (c) sentences, is grammatically UV or not. The discussion on these aspects will shed light on important issues in Austronesian and Indonesian linguistics such as symmetry and markedness in voice systems and the poorly understood distinction of core and oblique classification of arguments. The role of information structure triggering voice selection will be also examined, especially the difference between UV constructions ((b) sentences) and the cleft constructions ((c) sentences), both of which show high degrees of pragmatic prominence associated with the Undergoer argument.

Examples:

- (1a) *Si Ponatin masi-kom bera?*
art name AV.IRR-eat rice
‘Ponatin is eating rice.’
- (1b) *Bera? i- kom si Ponatin.*
rice UV.IRR-eat Art name
‘Rice is (being) eaten (by) Ponatin.’
- (1c) *Bera? si Ponatin kom.*
rice art name eat
‘It is rice that Ponatin is eating.’
- (2a) *Ina masi-taptap leppey.*
mother AV.IRR-wash shirt
‘Mother is washing the shirt’

- (2b) *Leppey ay-taptap ina.*
shirt UV.REAL-wash mother
'The shirt was washed (by) mother'
- (2c) *Leppey ina taptap.*
shirt mother wash
'It is the shirt that mother is washing.'

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