Orientation in the Spice Islands

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1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the system of orientation in the West Papuan languages of North Maluku in eastern Indonesia and in North Moluccan Malay, an Austronesian language. We will discuss this system by comparing it in several languages in North Maluku and see how these systems are related in the cultural area. This feature has been discussed for languages in this area by Bowden (1997), Shelden (1991) and Yoshida (1980).

West Papuan languages are spoken in two parts of Indonesia, North Maluku and the Bird's Head Peninsula of Indonesian New Guinea or Irian Jaya. It appears that there are two West Papuan languages spoken in West New Guinea and the rest are spoken in North Maluku. Although in Figure 1 we have shown Moi and Tehit as separate branches, it is not clear to us how these two languages are related to the rest of the West Papuan languages or to each other.

North Moluccan Malay is the form of Malay full of Ternatean loans that has been used as a contact language in eastern Indonesia for centuries. North Moluccan Malay is the source for other forms of Malay spoken in eastern Indonesia, such as Manado Malay and Irianese Malay. This can easily be demonstrated by the fact that both Manado Malay and Irianese Malay are full of Ternatean loans which they inherited from North Moluccan Malay.

2. Orientation

Some anecdotes will give a feeling of the system.

1. Once we were riding a *mikrolet*, a small vehicle with an open rear used for public transportation, with some other people. The *mikrolet* made what we would call a right hand turn and we were heading in the direction that we would call east. A mother and her young son were sitting in the *mikrolet* and the son was very close to the open end of the vehicle, not a safe position. Right after the turn, the mother told her son, "Move

SEAWARD!" That is, away from the open end. (We would have said, "Move farther in!")

2. A friend of ours was sitting at our dining room table with his open notebook in front of him. He had written a song on the right hand page of the notebook and wanted to give us a copy. So he said, "Wait, I'll write it on the SEAWARD page." This was inside the house not near any windows, at night. We couldn't see anything outside the house.

3. A Dutch linguist friend of ours, Miriam van Staden, was working on Tidore. One of her informants was talking about a picture on a wall of another room. He said that the picture was on the LANDWARD side of the SEAWARD wall of that room. (van Staden p.c.)

4. One of our neighbors was sitting at a table and in front of her on the left there was a pencil and on the right there was a pen. When asked which side the pencil was on, her answer was, "The LANDWARD side."

In English and many other languages, we are used to talking about directions in two different ways, one relative and one absolute. The relative system is relative to oneself or something that is being talking about - left and right, in front of and behind, etc. The absolute system is north, south, east and west. We use these two systems for different scales of activity.

In North Moluccan languages there are words for these - left and right or north, south, east and west - but these words are used far less than the corresponding words in English. The only time we heard north and south used in Ternatean or West Makianese was for winds and the only time we have ever seen east and west used in any North Moluccan language was in a Tabaru folktale recorded by Fortgens (1928) about the king of the east and the king of the west. (Many northern Moluccan folktales appear to be of Middle Eastern or other outside origin.) The only time it seems that the word left and right get used by people in the northern Moluccas is when referring to body parts as in when describing some medical condition. Otherwise people in the northern Moluccas use a system whose basic orientations are LANDWARD, SEAWARD, UP and DOWN.

On the islands off the west coast of Halmahera, such as Ternate and Makian, from any point on the island toward the mountain is LANDWARD and from any point toward the sea is SEAWARD. Clockwise around the island is DOWN and counterclockwise is UP. (Figure 2)

On the northern arm of mainland Halmahera, UP and DOWN appear to be reversed when compared to the system on the smaller islands. When facing the sea, UP is to one's right (i.e. clockwise) and DOWN is to one's left. This is the system used in Tabaru, Galela and Ibu when spoken on Halmahera. (Figure 3)

We should make it clear here that this is not language dependent. This is the system no matter which local language one is using. There are some differences among the various local languages concerning this system which we will discuss later, but the basic directions are the same.

In the West Papuan languages used in the northern Moluccas, the words SEAWARD and LANDWARD do not derive from words such as the words for 'sea' or 'land', or 'mountain'. They uniquely refer to those orientations. However, the words UP and DOWN for 'counterclockwise' and 'clockwise' are the same as the words for 'up' and 'down' in all of the languages concerned. This can be confusing even for native speakers.

A friend of ours named Ul has a two storey house near the market. He told the following story. His uncle came one morning to see him and asked, "Is Ul here?" The girl who answered the door said, "He is sleeping UP", and went back inside the house. His uncle left and went to Ul's father's house which is in the UP direction on the island assuming that he was sleeping there. The girl had gone upstairs to wake Ul up. This kind of ambiguity is not uncommon and is possible in any of the local languages that we studied.

3. Ternatean

Ternatean has six directionals and five locatives (see Table 1). The locatives have one gap for 'here'. A combination of a prefix and a demonstrative, *ka-nee* 'LOC-this', is used instead.

The form *ka-gee* 'LOC-that' is used a locative meaning 'there' with a meaning similar to *daka*.

Ternatean directionals function as main verbs ('to move towards X') or as adverbs. Verbs in Ternatean may take a subject agreement marker.

(1) Mina moisa mohida ena sofo.
mina mo- isa   mo- hida ena   sofo
3SG.F 3SG.F-DIR.LANDWD 3SG.F-see 3NH bear.fruit
"She went landwards and saw it (the tree) bore fruit."

(2) Ngori totagi hoko toma butu.
ngori to- tagi hoko   toma butu
1SG 1SG-go DIR.SEAWD LOC market
"I went (seaward) to the market."

(3) Maha Iwin telefon isa.
maha iwin telefon isa
wait Iwin phone DIR.LANDWD
"In a while, Iwin will call landward (Ambon to Ternate)."

(4) Ana tutup doka kain gee romoi isa hoko.
ana tutup doka kain gee romoi isa   hoko
3PL close like cloth that one   DIR.LANDWD DIR.SEAWD
"They closed (the entrance) with a cloth landward seaward."

In (4), the coffee shop is facing counterclockwise around the island. Because it is still serving food during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, the owners placed a cloth all the way across (*isa hoko* 'landward seaward') the entrance.

Ternatean locatives are nouns and indicate location.

(5) Mina dai.
mina   dai[1]
3SG.F LOC.SEAWD
"She is at a seaward location."