

WALKER, ALAN T. 1982. A grammar of Sawu. Jakarta: Bedan Penyelenggara Seri NUSA, Universitas Atma Jaya. Pp. xv, 75, Vol. 13.

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Written mostly in the framework of structural linguistics, this monograph, as Walker declares in the introduction, 'is primarily a description of Seba and Mesara dialects of Sawu', spoken in the south-eastern part of Indonesia. Sawu is usually considered to be an Austronesian language, but at this point of time, its family linkage is not clearly established.

Depending on the criteria one uses to distinguish language from dialects, Sawu will have either five or six dialects. For Walker Sawu is composed of only five dialects. More about this later. It is not clear at this point, however, why only Seba and Mesara dialects are chosen to represent the Sawu language. Walker mentions (1.1) that the differences among these dialects 'appear to be minor – mainly lexical with some phonetic variation'. But if this is the reason for not including other dialects fully in his analysis, I believe he would have done well to limit his work to only one representative dialect. I feel almost certain that Walker must have some definite justification for his selection of Seba and Mesara as major representatives of the language. A statement to that effect would have been appropriate.

Although it is not clearly stated anywhere in this monograph, one does not have much problem recognizing that the analysis presented in the book represents his Ph.D. thesis. A lack of explicit statement, however, makes it difficult to obtain whether the thesis reported here is in the original form or in a revised version.

This book, which is based on the analysis of a total of thirteen hours of text materials obtained from a number of informants, has nine chapters followed by three appendices and a short bibliography. Chapter one (1-4), which serves as an introductory chapter, offers a brief account of Sawu, the island, the language, and its speakers. It also recounts, in summary form, the recent history of the island and provides details of the fieldwork, informants and the data collected for the present work. It includes a broad survey of related linguistic literature. One would normally expect to learn in this chapter about the theoretical framework as well as the justification and significance of the study in relation to the existing literature. The book makes no mention of these.

Sawu phonology, including word stress and intonation, is presented in chapter two (5-8), which also attempts to explain at various points how the account presented here differs from earlier attempts, especially those by Radja Haba (1958) and Lee (Ms). In this sense the chapter is both descriptive and comparative. Although such a comparative vein is found all through out the monograph, it is nowhere more prominent than in this chapter, perhaps because the study of sounds is most elusive and is highly contingent upon the auditory perception of the analyst. For reasons such as these, the phonological study of language tends to be rather subjective even within the announced objectivity of structuralism. Or how else could one justify variety of phonemic inventories of the English language or, for that matter, of any other language that has been the subject matter of frequent linguistic study at the hands of various analysts? In another sense this chapter can be regarded as a historical study inasmuch as it discusses the sound changes that loan words usually undergo in Sawu.

Chapter three (9-10) simply enumerates Sawu word classes and their distinctive characteristics. These word classes, which are defined generally in terms of either their function or their structure or both, include nouns, verbs, pronouns, demonstratives, common articles, case prepositions, numerals, counters, non-numeral quantifiers, clause modifiers, and interjections.

Chapter four (11-20) provides details of Noun Phrase constituents and their arrangements. An apparent borrowing from the more recent grammatical model, the term Noun Phrase constituent here has no parallelism with its analysis in any of the transformational grammars. No attempt has been made here to describe the rule formation of the NP in Sawu. The chapter, in addition to providing a discussion of pronouns and demonstratives as heads of NP, presents a fairly detailed study of case prepositions and their

semantic roles. These semantic roles, however, have been taken into account primarily for taxonomic classifications of forms, a hallmark of the structural approach. Case prepositions may have certain pedagogical values; nevertheless, they are not always predictable semantically.

This in part explains why prepositions are one of the most difficult aspects in teaching and learning English as a second language. Hindi, which is a major language of India, has almost as many postpositions as Sawu has prepositions, and as in Sawu, it is hardly possible to have a clear-cut semantic function of the case post-positions in Hindi. In fact, cases (pre or post positions) have a tendency to overlap semantically both in Sawu and in Hindi.

An interesting part of this chapter has to do with the discussion of counters. With most Sawu NPs, counters are used to mark different referents. Walker describes these counters as (1) classifying – counters that classify referents being counted, (2) partitive – counters that count parts of a whole, (3) container – counters that count the number of containers of a referent, (4) others – counters that are not covered by the three given above. Walker feels that this classification of counters is not exhaustive. It is possible that these counters in Sawu, upon further analysis, might lend themselves to rather neat and more semantically oriented groupings.

Sawu verbs, like the verbs of most other languages that maintain a morphological and syntactic distinction between stative and non-stative verbs, have been divided into Action Verbs and Non-Action Verbs, or, what Walker calls them in chapter five, A-Verbs and B-Verbs. However, such a distinction in Sawu is characterized by very little morphology, which is restricted only to verb agreement, causative and reciprocal prefix (both of which are represented by a single morpheme *pe-*), and reduplication. A-Verbs denote action while B-Verbs indicate state or process. In addition to these two types, Walker mentions such other verbs as Agreement Verbs, Existential Verb, and Deictic Verbs. Although Walker mentions that Deictic Verbs are just one type of Agreement Verbs, it is not clear if these Agreement Verbs are distinguished from the two other classes – A-Verbs and B-Verbs. It seems to me that this chapter suffers from some organizational problems. First, the chapter does not provide any heading or sub-headings for Agreement Verbs (5.2.1) which are discussed under Verb Morphology (5.2). Under Description (5.2.1.1) Walker discusses 'a class of Sawu Verbs (nearly all of which are transitive) which have two forms: "singular" and "plural"'. It is not until 5.2.1.1 (d) (2) that one realizes that Walker calls this class of verbs Agreement Verbs. Even so, the reference to Agreement Verbs is sudden only to direct readers of Appendix B, which is a list of Agreement Verbs. It would have been more appropriate if the classification of Agreement Verbs were mentioned at the very beginning of 5.2.1.1 when he discusses the two forms of verbs – singular and plural. Furthermore, the first sentence of this chapter states that in 'the discussion below (5.1 to 5.3) reference is made to Sawu A-Verbs and B-Verbs'. Since Deictic Verbs are not discussed until 5.4 one has reasons to believe that these verbs though part of Agreement Verbs, form a separate class from A-Verbs and B-Verbs. And how about the Existential Verb? Does it belong to Agreement Verbs or to A-Verbs or B-Verbs? Or does it constitute a separate class by itself?

Covering only half a page, Chapter six (27) discusses Excessive Adverbs that function as clause modifiers in Sawu. Following are some of the examples of Excessive adverbs as presented in Table 8:

B-Verb	Adverb	
1. pana	(pe) tuu-tuu	'really hot'
2. wo-ie	tara-tara	'really good'
3. mædi	guru-guru	'very black'
4. kərəba	guru-guru	'very dark'

If the adverbs (*pe*) *tuu-tuu*, *tara-tara* and *guru-guru* are excessive in the sense that they indicate that 'the action or the quality of the state of the verb is in excess of the norm', the English equivalents that generally indicate excess should have been perhaps 'too hot', 'too good', 'too black', and 'too dark' rather than 'really hot', 'really good', 'very black', and 'very dark'. Thus it would seem that either the semantic characterization (Excessive) is not appropriate or the English equivalents need to be modified. Another related question that comes to my mind is whether *pana*, *wo-ie*, *mādi* and *karāba* are verbs or adjectives. At least it is not clear from the English translation provided in Table 8, unless they mean by virtue of being B-Verbs 'be hot', 'be good', etc.

Particles that serve as another set of clause modifiers in Sawu are discussed in chapter seven (28-35). Among other things particles are responsible for maintaining tense distinctions, particularly between past-completive and non-past. The stative particle *do* describes present state. The sense of existence, however, is handled by a separate verb called Existential verb *era* rather than by a particle.

In line with the practice in structural linguistics, a good part of the book is devoted to the study of syntax in Chapter eight (36-56), by far the longest of the chapters. The large number of NP prepositions in Sawu provide case frames for NPs that occur obligatorily or optionally with a particular verb. This chapter begins by classifying verbal clauses in terms of the case frames of their verbs. Two types of non-verbal clauses include interjections and juxtaposed NPs. All clauses are then analyzed according to their functions. In addition, this chapter also discusses, among other things, negation, possession, comparison, coordination, complementation and deletion in Sawu clauses. The last two sections of this chapter are devoted first to the analysis of Sawu word order to determine the predictability of the leftmost NP, and second to the examination of Keenan's subject properties and their distribution in so far as they apply to Sawu.

Chapter nine is a comparative study of Sawu and Ndao which is regarded by many as one of the dialects of Sawu. Ndao speakers concur with the assessment that it is a dialect of Sawu. But as I have mentioned earlier, Walker does not include Ndao among the dialects of Sawu. Instead he claims that Ndao is a separate language. The primary objective of this chapter is to justify such a claim. Based on the comparison of phonology, morphology, and syntax of the two (Ndao and Sawu), Walker concludes that 'despite a large area of common ground in lexicon and phonology, grammatical differences between the two are sufficient to indicate that Ndao is a separate language'.

It is very difficult to draw a line between a dialect and a language, particularly when the speakers themselves have a set opinion about their tongue. One cannot say for certain at what point a dialect begins to acquire the status of an independent language. Lexicostatistics, as Walker himself suggests, is not a very reliable means of determining whether a speech is a dialect or a language. The question then is – how much difference in grammar and semantics will serve as significant difference? No one seems to know the answer for sure. We know that American English is not very different from British English, and yet many linguists and language scholars have preferred to accord American English the status of a language. H.L. Mencken's use of the term 'American language' is just one example. In the ultimate analysis, it seems that it is the sociolinguistic rather than linguistic considerations that determine the status of a speech in terms of dialect or language. And I quote Bernard Spolsky (1978):

A clear distinction between language and dialect is not easy to make. The linguist first tends to seek a definition in terms of mutual intelligibility: X and Y are dialects of the same language if speakers of each can understand speakers of the other. But this turns out to raise difficulties. ...After this first distinction of mutual intelligibility, linguists try to produce more evidence, whether in terms of shared lexicon, phonological similarity, or grammatical closeness. The linguistic data produce a continuum rather than a decision point, so any decision is usually sociological rather than linguistic: if the speakers consider that their variety is different, and if they have a different name for it, then it is a different language; if they consider it a form of another language, then it is better called a dialect. Whenever one wishes to be a neutral, it is best to use the term 'variety'.

Appendix A lists some of the obvious lexical differences among the five Sawu dialects

Seba, Mesara, Timu, Liae, and Rainjua. Appendix B, as I indicated before, is a list of Agreement Verbs and Appendix C provides a Sawu text entitled 'The child who turned into a turtle'.

Generally the monograph is well written and provides a very good taxonomic analysis of Sawu. Because of the comparisons between the analysis presented here and the conclusions arrived at by earlier analysts on various points, one is almost certain to appreciate the rationale of Walker's judgment. Walker has tried to support his conclusions in one area, say phonology, with the evidence in other areas, morphology and syntax. This brings system to his analysis.

REFERENCE

- SPOLSKY, BERNARD. 1978. Educational linguistics, An introduction. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.