Harmony in Duality: Exploring singularity in plurality through reciprocals in Barrier Islands languages of Indonesia and beyond.

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Abstract

This presentation discusses the intriguing dynamics of asymmetry and reciprocity in grammatical constructions across several Austronesian languages of Indonesia, with a special focus on Barrier Islands languages. Starting with the fundamental premise that oral expression's linearity introduces inherent asymmetrical constraints in language structure (e.g., grammaticalised in the accessibility hierarchies (Keenan and Comrie 1977, Bresnan 2001, among others)), the discussion explores how this contrasts with the non-linear and symmetric properties found in other linguistic dimensions such as semantics and non-verbal communication (Gil and Shen 2019). The talk examines how languages like Enggano, Nias and Balinese encapsulate complex concepts of 'singularity in plurality' as seen in reciprocal expressions without dedicated grammatical markers of reciprocity. This reveals a nuanced and intriguing interplay between lexicon and morphosyntax reflecting deeper cognitive and sociocultural patterns. Through examples of reciprocal actions such as 'handshaking', 'meeting' and 'hugging', the presentation highlights how reciprocal verbs and constructions manifest in varied yet structurally revealing ways, offering insights into the grammaticalisation of reciprocity and its implications for understanding the cognitive and functional aspects of language. The talk aims to enhance our appreciation of how linguistic systems intelligently encode and navigate linguistically relevant concepts such as prominence (DiSciullo 2002, Barrie 2011, Himmelmann and Primus 2015, Arka 2024, among others) and perspectives of 'singularity in plurality' in discourse-information structure, shedding light on broader principles of human communication, cognition, and linguistic evolution.

References

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