

Parallel composition and semantic parallelism in Lamaholot (East Indonesia)

Lamaholot is an Austronesian language spoken at the eastern tip of Flores island and three close islands in the Lesser Sunda Islands, Indonesia. This language, labelled “Central-East Malayo Polynesian”, has approximately 200.000 speakers. As in many languages, the Lamaholot lexicon includes attributive compound nouns e.g. *wawé ruken* “boar” (literally “pig forest”) or frozen metaphors e.g. *ina puken* “the woman who distributes the food at a ceremony” (lit. “lady branch”). This paper deals with a peculiar type of word composition that we will call parallel composition, where the two morphemes are semantically linked by parasyonymy (near equivalence) or by antonymy (more accurately, a semantic complementarity).

Parasyonymic compounds include *uma lango* “home” (residence+house); *tana ékan* “territory” (ground+soil); *maan kowana* “garden” (garden+plantation); *koda kirin* “to tell” (say/word+speaker); *tutu marin* “to inform” (recount+convey); *déso’ dan* “to hit” (beat+knock). Examples of complementary compounds are *léra wulan* “God” (sun+moon) ; *gohak ana’* “family” (my wife+my children); *tobo déi* “to live” (sit+stand up); *sudu bito* “to wag one’s head” (bow+look upward).

The complementarity is not always clear-cut and obvious, especially when based on cultural grounds. Thus, a symbolic duality may be expressed through the opposition between male and female creatures or associated places and artefacts, e.g. *ketipa bala* “dowry gifts” (woven sarong+elephant tusk), as *ketipa* are given by the “wife givers” clan or family, and *bala* by the “husband givers”.

The parallel compositions are quite frequent in Lamaholot daily conversations. Therefore a parallel composition cannot be considered as an embellishment pattern, although it seems reflecting an essential ritual speech feature. In the ritual and ceremonial speech, the Lamaholot shows a common feature to East Indonesian cultures, the semantic parallelism (as defined by Fox 1988, 2005).

<i>matak</i>	<i>koi</i>	<i>koda</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>hala</i>
eye-1SG	see	say	JUSS	NEG
<i>wekik</i>	<i>lilé</i>	<i>kirin</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>hala</i>
body-1SG	look	speak	JUSS	NEG

My eyes see, I don’t even utter ; my body looks, I don’t even speak.

In this couplet (or dyadic set), the first three words of each line respectively are semantically linked, for instance *koda* // *kirin*. Beside this, at a standard Lamaholot speech level, one can notice the frequent occurrences of the compound *koda kirin* “to tell”. In ceremonial discourses of the mid-XXth century (Arndt 1951), we remark pretty much of this lexical pairs displayed in semantic parallelism, while the same lexical pair forms a parallel composition occurring in standard Lamaholot. Nevertheless, we cannot state whether the parallel composition originate from the ceremonial speech, having undergone “freezing” like some metaphors, or if the semantic parallelism echoes the parallel composition, by means of splitting the two words and linking it within a couplet.

References

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Gloss: JUSS: jussive ; NEG : negative