# Preliminary Notes on the Nedebang Language

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## 1. Introduction

This brief article presents a preliminary report on the Nedebang language (ISO 639-3 code: nec), based on 65 pages of field notes collected by the author on Pantar Island July 27-30, 2004.[1] Nedebang is one of four non-Austronesian languages spoken on the island of Pantar in the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, in the region of 8.275 S latitude, 124.202 E longitude. To my knowledge the only previously published data from Nedebang are to be found in a 117 word basic vocabulary (Stokhof 1975), recently re-elicited by Pampus (2006).[2] The present paper will attempt to provide a more current picture of the Nedebang language situation with an eye toward preparation for more comprehensive language documentation project. The content is necessarily limited by the short duration of the fieldwork.

The logonym Nedebang is widely recognized by speakers, though some prefer the logonym Klamu. The former refers to the name of an ancestral village located on a ridge above the area in which the speakers now reside. This area is reportedly still used for gardening and for traditional ceremonies. The term Klamu refers to a clan (Indonesian *suku*). The Klamu people moved from Nedebang to the coast sometime before Indonesian independence, probably in the 1930's. The Nedebang language is spoken today primarily in three locations: Balungada , Air Panas, and Baulang.[3] Air Panas is administratively a part of the village of Balungada but is separated by approximately 1 km from Balungada proper. Balungada is located approximately 3.5 km south of the district capital of Kabir, accessible by paved road. Baulung is located a further two hours walk along a trail from Balungada across a high ridge. This trail can reportedly be traversed by a (rugged) motorbike. Religion plays a significant role in the social and linguistic dynamics of the region. With the exception of Air Panas, the people of Balungada are Christian, and most residents are of Klamu descent. In contrast the people of Baulang and the Air Panas are Islamic and contain significant populations of Austronesian-speakers who have migrated from Baranusa. The language thus appears to be more viable in Balungada.

Nedebang is an extremely endangered language. While I have not undertaken a formal survey of the speaker population, it is possible to arrive at some rough estimates. The number of residents of Balungada is approximately 500 (including approximately 75 in Air Panas). The age of the youngest fluent speakers is approximately 40. This number was arrived at through interviews with speakers and can generally be confirmed by my

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[1] The primary consulting speaker for this work was Mr. Sem Serang of Balungada. Several other speakers also assisted. I am grateful to these people and to all the people of Balungada who assisted during my visit. Fieldwork was supported by U.S. National Science Foundation Small Grant for Exploratory Research, #0404884.

[2] I make no attempt here to reconcile the word list presented in Pampus with that included in this paper.

[3] The area referred to here as Air Panas should not be confused with the village of the same name which is the seat of the *Desa Tube* in the Central Pantar district (*Kecamatan Pantar Tengah*).

observations. The language is not used on a daily basis in households, and with the rare exception school-age children have no knowledge of even basic phrases. Assuming a life-expectancy of approximately 55 and a relatively youthful population distribution, I would estimate the number of fluent speakers in Balungada to be at most 150. While I have not yet visited Baulung, several factors suggest that the number of fluent speakers is not likely to be very large. Baulung is a yet smaller village; it is also mixed with Austronesian speakers; and it is likely to be in greater contact with Austronesian speakers in Baranusa due to its isolation from Kabir and environs. Hence, I (optimistically) estimate the total number of fluent speakers of Nedebang at 200. Given that the other three non-Austronesian languages of Pantar are spoken over wide regions in multiple villages, Nedebang is easily the most endangered language of Pantar Island and among the most endangered of the Timor-Alor-Pantar language group.

## 2. Phonology

The Nedebang consonant inventory includes: voiced and voiceless stops /p t k ’/ and /b d g/; a palatalized or affricate phoneme /c/ [$t^y$], voiceless fricatives /f s x h/; nasals /n m ng/; liquids /r/ and /l/; and glides/w/ and /y/. A significant feature of this inventory is the presence of a complete series of four fricatives. In this respect Nedebang is much more similar to Teiwa than to Western Pantar (Lamma), which lacks the labial and velar fricatives. Notably absent in this inventory are geminate (long) consonants. In the following chart IPA equivalents are given in square brackets.

**Table 1: Consonant inventory**

| | labial | alveolar | velar | glottal |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| stops | p | t | k | ’ [ʔ] |
| | b | d | g | |
| affricates | | c [$t^y$] | | |
| fricatives | f | s | x | h |
| nasals | m | n | ng [ŋ] | |
| liquids | | r | | |
| | | l | | |
| approximants | w | | y [j] | |

Stokhof’s (1975) wordlist also reports a sound transcribed at [qx], but I have found no evidence of this in my data. Words transcribed by Stokhof with [qx] occur in my data with [$k^h$] or [$k^x$]. For example, Stokhof’s [qxαnα] ‘hitam’ is my [$k^h$ana].

I have transcribed phonetically geminate consonants using doubled consonants. However, unlike the neighboring Western Pantar (Lamma) language, Nedebang consonants do not generally contrast in length. However, I have identified at least one case of contrast in length of alveolar laterals, as exemplified below.

(1) Consonant length contrast

| Nedebang | Western Pantar | |
|---|---|---|
| yila | hila | ‘water’ |
| yilla | hillang | ‘to fly’ |

This contrast can be seen to corresponds precisely with the length contrast in Western Pantar. As in Western Pantar geminate consonants in Nedebang are limited to word medial position.

The Nedebang vowel inventory is a typical five-vowel system. Diphthongs are limited to /ia/, /ai/, and /au/.

(2) Diphthongs

gia ‘go’
daggai ‘egg’
malau ‘ashes’

Diphthongs can be distinguished from vowel sequences separated by a glottal stop. In the latter case the glottal stop serves as a syllable onset.

Syllable structure follows a CV(C) pattern. All consonants can occur in onset position, however, the distribution of consonants in syllable coda position is fairly restricted. Only liquids /r/ and /l/, and the nasal /ng/ may occur in coda position. /s/ ???

(3) Coda consoants

ber ‘dog’
-si’al ‘shoulder’
kung ‘lice’

The minimal word is CV.

(4) Minimal words

ma ‘come’
se ‘house’
we ‘blood’

## 3. Morphology

Unpossessed nouns are generally mono-morphemic, although compound forms are common. Possessed nouns index the person and number of the possessor via a pronominal prefix. A limited set of nouns referring to body parts and kinship are obligatorily possessed and must occur with a possessive prefix.

### 3.1 Pronouns

There are three sets of pronominal paradigms, as given in the following table. Two gaps are apparent. First is the lack of plural form for the undergoer independent pronouns. This gap likely reflects lack of data rather than any real gap in the pronoun system. The second is the lack of a first person paucal/distributive reflecting an initial *t-*. This is a real gap: Nedebang does not have the *t-* pronoun series.

**Table 2: Pronouns and pronominal prefixes**

| | ACTOR | UNDERGOER | PREFIX |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1SG | nang | na’ing | na- |
| 2SG | ang | a’ing | Ø- |
| 3SG | gang | ga’ing | ga- |
| 1INC | ping | | pi- |
| 1EXC | ning | | ni- |
| 2PL | hing | | h- |
| 3PL | ging | | gi- |

## 4. Syntax

Noun phrases

Word order

Grammatical relations

The two sets of independent pronouns exhibit an active-stative pattern. With transitive verbs one set of pronouns is used for more agent-like or "subject" arguments, and the other set is used for less agent-like or "object" arguments.

(5) nang ga'ing bugi
1SG.AGT 3SG.PAT hit
'I hit him'

(6) gang na'ing bugi
3SG.AGT 1SG.PAT hit
'he hit me'

Active intransitive verbs employ "subject" pronouns, while stative instransitive verbs employ "object" pronouns (though not object prefixes.

(7) active intransitive verbs

nang apa 'I walk'
nang gia 'I go'
nang ba'a 'I fell'

Some (but not all) stative intransitive verbs index their single argument using the object pronominal paradigm, though not the object prefixes.

(8) stative intransitive verbs

na'ing maleca 'I am wet'
na'ing ko'as 'I am soaking wet'
na'ing aga 'I am hot'

Additionally, certain transitive verbs obligatorily index undergoer arguments via pronominal verb prefixes.

(9) nang hafi ga-fini
1SG.AGT fish 3SG-catch
'I caught a fish'

(10) nang ga-fini
1SG.AGT 3SG-catch
'I caught him'

(11) gang na-fini
3SG.AGT 1SG-catch
'he caught me'

However, not all transitive verbs admit object prefixes. For example, *gang nabugi 'he hit me' is not acceptable (cf. above). In fact, transitive verbs which employ object prefixes appear to represent a small minority of vocabulary.

Some intransitive verbs may be transitivized by the addition of an object prefix in a kind of applicative construction.

While pronominal prefixes generally index “objective” or “patientive” arguments there is some evidence for pronominal prefixes which index the single argument of an intransitive verb. For example, the defective paradigm below shows pronomoninal prefixes indexing first person S arguments.

(12)

| | |
|---|---|
| nang n-ola | ‘I go home’ |
| hang ola | ‘you go home’ |
| gang ola | ‘he or she goes home’ |
| ping p-ola | ‘we (inc) go home’ |
| ning n-ola | ‘we (exc) go home’ |
| ing ola | ‘you (pl) go home’ |
| ging ola | ‘they go home’ |

## 5. Wordlist

The following short word list was elicited from Mr. Sem Serang of Balungada. It is based on the 117 item list of Stokhof (1975). Roots which must be inflected with a pronominal prefix are transcribed with a preceding hyphen.

| | |
|---|---|
| ‘head’ | -ong |
| ‘head hair’ | -ong wa’a |
| ‘ear’ | -o wa’a |
| ‘nose’ | -fɛni |
| ‘nose snot’ | -mmi k$^{x}$olla |
| ‘snot’ | -k$^{x}$olla |
| ‘mouth’ | -yaka |
| ‘tongue’ | -lefu |
| ‘tooth’ | -ussing (bagga) |
| ‘neck’ | -efi kili |
| ‘chest’ | -etubuma |
| ‘breast’ | geyami |
| ‘stomach’ | -ata’o |
| ‘back’ | -uwa |
| ‘shoulder’ | -si’al |
| ‘leg/foot’ | -ya |
| ‘hand/arm’ | -atáng |
| ‘feathers, fur, skin’ | waka |
| ‘man/male’ | mofa’i |
| ‘woman/female’ | ala kamma |
| ‘child ’ | -waka |
| ‘water’ | (y)ila |
| ‘father’ | -máng |
| ‘mother’ | -oa |
| ‘house’ | se |
| ‘fire’ | ara |
| ‘fish’ | hafi |
| ‘tree/wood’ | ala (gagala) |
| ‘egg’ | daggai |
| ‘moon’ | ula |
| ‘rain’ | (h)ala(h) |
| ‘stone’ | wala |
| ‘eat’ | iná |
| ‘drink’ | wa’a |
| ‘sit’ | misi |

| | |
|---|---|
| ‘sleep’ | ta’a |
| ‘hit’ | bug(g)i |
| ‘one’ | nuku |
| ‘two’ | rako |
| ‘three’ | atagu |
| ‘four’ | utu |
| ‘ashes’ | maláu |
| ‘big’ | ada |
| ‘black’ | kana |
| ‘blood’ | we |
| ‘bone’ | kili |
| ‘cloud’ | bunna |
| ‘cold’ | maxafu / mak$^{x}$afu |
| ‘come’ | ma |
| ‘dead (of animals)’ | minna |
| ‘die (of people)’ | olla |
| ‘dog’ | ber |
| ‘dry’ | cici |
| ‘to fly’ | hilla |
| ‘fruit’ | yici |
| ‘go’ | gia |
| ‘good’ | kawa |
| ‘fat’ | bakor |
| ‘earth, soil’ | talaka |
| ‘leaf’ | (te) wa’a |
| ‘long’ | tenu |
| ‘head lice’ | kung |
| ‘meat’ | bo’o |
| ‘new’ | saba’a |
| ‘night’ | ila kana |
| ‘path, road’ | apa |
| ‘red’ | i’i |
| ‘root’ | ali |
| ‘sand’ | yasi |
| ‘see’ | bili |
| ‘small’ | cama / t$^{y}$ama |
| ‘(fire) smoke’ | (ara) bunna |
| ‘to stand’ | tassi |
| ‘star’ | yifa xoya |
| ‘warm, hot’ | aga |
| ‘white’ | miaka |
| ‘wind’ | hangi |
| ‘snake’ | dama |

Ross, Malcolm. 2006. Pronouns as markers of genetic stocks in non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea, Island Melanesia and eastern Indonesia. Papuan Languages and the Trans New Guinea Family, ed. by A. Pawley, M. Ross and M. Osmond. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

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