

*Elusive articles in Sulawesi: between syntax and prosody*

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Abstract for HLK 2010 Lund

A typology of articles, especially in the Austronesian family, is still in its rudimentary stages. This paper aims to make a contribution to this typology by presenting data on articles in three Austronesian languages spoken in eastern Sulawesi (Indonesia): Tolaki, Muna and Balantak. All three languages have a cognate article, but its use is not related to definiteness, specificity or case. In fact, no independent meaning can be assigned to the article. Rather, these articles appear to be simple “noun markers” or “signs of nominality”, functioning in distinct and surprising ways.

- Tolaki has a preclitic article *o* which is only added to disyllabic nouns (and numerals), but excluded from specific syntactic contexts. These contexts include nouns following prepositions, certain compound-like noun phrases, vocatives, proper nouns and nouns with possessive enclitics.
- Muna has a preclitic article *o* which is added to all nouns to signal “relative syntactic freedom”. It occurs, for instance, with free-standing nouns and clause-initial nouns, but rarely with nouns following a verb and never with nouns following a preposition, nor in combination with possessive suffixes. This distribution can possibly be re-analyzed in terms of prosodic phrasing.
- Balantak has an enclitic article *a* which only occurs with post-predicate subjects; never with clause-initial subjects.

Each of these three languages has a unique combination of syntactic and prosodic constraints on the distribution of the article. The paper will present the data from these languages, look at those constraints in the light of research done on the phonology-syntax interface, and suggest a typology and a possible diachronic scenario.