

The Seko Languages of South Sulawesi: a Reconstruction

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Prior to this article, the only historical reconstruction to include a Seko language was Mills' 1975 reconstruction of Proto South Sulawesi (PSS). However, his failure to notice contrastive word-final vowel length led him to erroneously conclude that no South Sulawesi language exhibits a reflex of Proto Austronesian (PAN) *q. Hence *q was omitted from his PSS reconstruction. Countering that conclusion, Sirk (1989) pointed out evidence for the existence of PSS *q. Seko languages are therefore a test for PSS *q.

Since Mills' reconstruction, Sirk addressed the question of what characteristics define PSS. He and other researchers noted similarities between the Badaic languages of Central Sulawesi and South Sulawesi languages, particularly Seko,¹ but questions about genetic relationships persisted, which motivated me to undertake this reconstruction.

This paper seeks to establish a low-level node called Proto Seko, which should provide a basis for eventually clarifying Seko's position in relation to other Sulawesi languages. I herein present a reconstruction of Proto Seko phonology on the basis of data from four closely related languages in northern South Sulawesi (Seko Padang, Seko Tengah, Panasuan, and Budong-budong), based on several years of fieldwork in this area. Besides retaining a reflex of PAN *q, Seko languages share a quickness feature which corresponds to PAN *e.

¹ Sirk (1989:55-57), Martens (1989:22-23, 31-33), Mead (2003:130-3, 136-8)