The *aN-* Agent Focus Affix in Minangali Music Terms[*]

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Abstract:

   Music is a universal phenomenon, but it is not a universal language. It is a process that takes place in a specific cultural context and can be properly understood only via the structures of the language of the society being studied. Direct questioning (e.g., 'Who are the musicians in your society?') necessarily relies on terms and concepts from the questioner's perspective. Indeed, a researcher's questions can appear nonsensical if they do not represent valid avenues of inquiry in the thought structures of the interviewee.

   The *aN-* agent focus affix in Minangali is used to derive some objects into verbs, including all of the society's music instruments (i.e., *aN-*[instrument] = to play [instrument]). *aN-* affixed verbs are also formed when someone is doing something to a specific object that is in the process of realizing its ultimate purpose (e.g., the preparation of houses and food). Additionally, some objects are similarly prefixed when someone is using them to project/send away something in order to achieve a result (e.g., spears, guns, and stones.) Examining the limited set of objects that can have this affix attached to it led us to some preliminary conclusions about a Mangali conceptualization of music. We suggest that Minangali music instruments are affixed in this way when they describe the action of being sounded, which is the time when they are being utilized for their ultimate purposes. Additionally, we believe that music is something which is intended to be 'sent away' in order to yield a result.

1. Introduction

   Miles Davis, the famous jazz musician, reportedly said, 'Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.'[1] Indeed, it is impossible to reduce to words the interplay of complex concepts like rhythm, melody, and timbre. However, the task of the ethnomusicologist, or of any ethnographer, is to understand these complex cultural concepts in the terms of the social context in which they happen. As music is always performed by people, for people, and with other people, its central concepts must be interpreted in light of its social constructs (Feld 1974:207). Despite the deficiencies inherent in using words to describe musical phenomena, language is essential in understanding music's cultural context.

   In our fieldwork we experienced the maxim that researchers ought to minimize as much as possible their own cultural framework when eliciting language data. For example, Mangali interviewees had difficulty answering our question, 'Who are the musicians in your society?' By framing the question in the way an American would, we artificially created a category that does not exist in Mangali society. There is no class of people who specialize in music and consider themselves 'musicians'; all Mangali people participate to some degree in music-making activities. How then does a researcher discover concepts that exist in the society being examined?

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[*] Most of the seven thousand Lower Tanudan Kalinga speakers of northern Luzon, Philippines inhabit the northern half of Tanudan municipality, Kalinga province. Minangali is the name of the language variety of Lower Tanudan Kalinga spoken in the largest village of the language area (Mangali). The data for this paper was supplied by speakers of the Minangali variety. In this paper the language in question will be referred to as 'Minangali.'

[1] Many people have been linked to this quote. It is nearly impossible to determine to whom it should be accurately attributed.

Charles Keil (1979) suggested the use of 'frame' sentences in the local language. Keil recognized the difficulty in exploring music concepts through the researcher's own framework when he critiqued Alan Merriam's conclusions about Basongye music terms. Merriam reported that the Basongye had different categories for 'noise', 'sound', and 'music' because these three English words appeared in a translation of three Basongye aphorisms.[2] Keil questioned whether these were truly relevant cultural categories, largely because Merriam failed to cite Basongye words for these concepts (1979:29). To better investigate the social context of a group's music, Keil suggested a method of data collection based on the language of the people being questioned:

> Still, the linguist's best tool, the frame, gives us a way to chase down the possibilities of a word to near exhaustion. First, select the word or short phrase that is of interest. Second, contextualize it by seeing (a) what can fill a blank placed in front of the word; (b) what can fill a blank placed after it; and (c) what words can replace it in various contexts. (1979:30)

Keil demonstrated his frame concept with data he elicited in the Tiv[3] language. In one frame example, he left blank the object of the sentence that could be glossed 'He composed _____.'[4] Besides songs, the responses consisted of objects such as crops, wells, and fetuses. Keil noted that composing a Tiv song was linked to harvesting, digging, and miscarrying. His conclusion, after further investigation and analysis, was that the 'compose' verb is used when 'something that already exists is taken from a prepared context so that a new effect is achieved' (1979:31).

By modifying Keil's framing idea for the Minangali language, we elicited some data related to the sounding of musical instruments. The following section briefly explains *aN-* affixed verbal constructions in Kalinga languages and how we used one to construct a frame for eliciting data. We then present some of the data that we elicited from Minangali speakers, concluding with some preliminary ideas about a Mangali concept of music.

2. Agent Focus and the *aN-* affix

In Minangali it is possible to make verbs out of certain nouns by using the *aN-* affix. In these cases the nasal of the affix assimilates to the point of articulation of the initial consonant, and then that initial consonant drops out.[5] See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Construction of a Minangali verb using the *aN-* affix

aN-   +   pang-ok[6]   =   amang-ok
          wooden club   to hit something with a wooden club

When a Minangali noun is affixed with *aN-* to make the word a verb, the object is contained in the verb. Consequently, what appears as a transitive verb in English, and could be said to be an intrinsically transitive verb (since there is an identifiable agent and object), appears as an

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[2] From page 28 of Keil (1979), quoted from Merriam (1964):
   When you are content, you sing; when you are angry, you make noise.
   When one shouts, he is not thinking; when he sings, he is thinking.
   A song is tranquil; a noise is not.
   When one shouts, his voice is forced; when he sings, it is not.
[3] For more information on Tiv see Gordon 2005. Available online at:
http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=tiv
[4] '*a dugh* _____.' See Keil 1979:31.
[5] Syllables in Minangali are either CV or CVC, and initial glottal stops are not indicated in the orthography.
[6] In this word, using Minangali orthography, the hyphen represents a glottal.

intransitive verb in Minangali. With some verbs that take the *aN-* affix, such as *angan* 'eat', where the root is not a noun, the object (what is eaten) is not usually mentioned in the sentence. On the rare occasion that it is, an oblique marker introduces it in an oblique reference. Other affixes can accommodate and/or highlight the object of such a verb. However, in the case of verbs that are formed by affixing a noun (with *aN-*), the object is the noun in which the verb is rooted. Hence, the object is embedded in the verb and does not therefore appear as a noun phrase, making the clause grammatically intransitive. This construction is used in speech about sounding musical instruments.

(1) Angullitong   ak   Nelson.
    aN-kullitong   ak   Nelson
    AG-bamboo lute   NM   Nelson[7]
    'Nelson is sounding the bamboo lute.'

In the above sentence, the kind of action is determined by the noun root of the *aN-* affixed, intransitive verb. The affix cannot be used to predict the kind of action; rather, the activity most associated with a given noun root becomes the meaning of the verb form.

Like Minangali, the related Southern Kalinga dialect can affix a noun in order to use it as a verb.[8] Bruce Grayden (1976) distinguishes two types of verbs that take a comparable affix in Southern Kalinga, both of which include verbs based on noun roots. One is a Semi-transitive Subject Verb, affixed with *maN-*. When using this affixation, the action is done by the actor, optionally to a goal. This affix is also used when the actor collects or gathers an optional goal, which is generalized in the verb and is optionally specified in the clause. The other type of verb is an Intransitive Subject Verb and can also use the *maN-* affix. With these verbs the goal is obligatorily absent, and the absolutive or focused noun phrase is the actor (agent). The actor, then, either performs the action in an intransitive way or makes or uses the object which is the root of the verb. This analysis correlates with what is seen in Minangali, where in many cases the object is obligatorily absent (generally because it is included in the verb itself), while in some cases there is an object (though it is never required). In the following Minangali sentence, *atta agama* is optional.

(2) Anilaw   atta   agama.
    aN-silaw   atta   agama
    AG-light   PL.OBL   crab[9]
    'He is gathering some crabs using a light.'[10]

Neville Thomas (1987) found that the Minangali *aN-* affix is frequently used with preposed agents and therefore functions as a nominalized construction.[11] However, aN- affixed verbs don't always, or even necessarily usually, function as nominalized constructions, as the following

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[7] AG = Agent focus
NM = Proper Name Marker
[8] For more information on Southern Kalinga, see Gordon 2005. Available online at: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ksc. For a language family tree showing the relationship between Minangali and Southern Kalinga, see http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=92565.
[9] OBL = Oblique
[10] Without *atta agama* the meaning is 'He is using a light to hunt.'
[11] See Wiens (1979) for a similar description of Limos Kalinga.

examples show. But the nominalized construction would be how one would refer to a person who is playing a kullitong.

(3) Angullitong   ak   Nelson.
    aN-kullitong   ak   Nelson
    AG-bamboo lute   NM   Nelson
    'Nelson is sounding the bamboo lute.'

(4) Ak   Nelson   angullitong.
    ak   Nelson   aN-kullitong
    NM   Nelson   AG-bamboo lute
    'Nelson is the one sounding the bamboo lute.'

Another aspect of Philippine languages is that the verb is often affixed in such a way that it indicates the semantic role of the absolutive noun phrase. Traditionally this has been referred to as the 'focus' of the clause; in an agent-focus clause the verb is affixed as to indicate that the absolutive noun phrase is the agent of the clause. Similarly, an object- (or theme-) focus clause is one in which the verb is affixed to indicate that the absolutive noun phrase is the object (or theme) of the clause. The Minangali *aN-* affix indicates that the absolutive noun phrase is the agent of the clause, so it is commonly referred to as an agent-focus affix.

3. Music Instrument Sentence Frames

Since Minangali sentences are apparently very different from Tiv, we constructed our own language 'frames' based on Keil. One of our Minangali sentence frames consisted of this *aN-* prefix followed by a blank.[12] Since this is how Minangali speakers talk about playing musical instruments, we also wanted to see what other objects could be affixed in the same way. Our initial list included only fifteen objects, and six of those were musical instruments. See Table 1 for the complete list of responses.

Table 1. Verb Affix + Object Frame Results

Responses	Root Word	Gloss
angullitong	kullitong 'bamboo zither'	to sound the bamboo zither
angullibaw	kullibaw 'jew's-harp'	to sound the jew's-harp
anungali	tungali 'nose flute'	to sound the nose flute
amaladong	baladong 'end-blown lip-valley flute'	to sound the end-blown lip-valley flute
anungngatung	tungngatung 'struck bamboo idiophone'	to sound the struck bamboo idiophone
anungadung	dungadung 'struck bamboo idiophone'	to sound the struck bamboo idiophone
anubay	tubay 'spear'	to throw a spear
amaltug	paltug 'gun'	to fire a gun
amalsok	palsok 'fish gun'	to fire fish gun
amang-ok	pang-ok ' wooden club'	to hit something with a wooden club

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[12] Our data collection through framing took place with seven Mangali participants in the village of Guilguila in March 2005. Glenn Machlan wrote the framed sentences on large sheets of paper (2 feet by 3 feet) that were taped to the wall. Our Mangali informants all gave their responses orally. Then Glenn Machlan listed their responses on the paper for all to read. All the frames could have generated many more responses than these Mangali participants provided. We consider it significant that these are the only responses given during this framing exercise, which was preceded by a discussion about music instruments.

angattod	attod 'fish trap'	to set a fish trap
amoloy	boloy 'house'	to build a house
anipoy	tipoy 'vegetables or viand'	to cook vegetables
angisna	isna 'cooked rice'	to cook rice
anaga	taga 'chisel'	to use a chisel for shaping timber

4. Categories of Music Use

In an attempt to analyze these results following Keil's example and thus try to learn how Mangali people perceive of music, we separated the non-musical objects into two categories: 1) objects that are 'sent away' from oneself in order to yield a result, and 2) objects that are prepared for their intended purpose. Falling under the former category are the verbs related to the spear, gun, fish gun, and wooden club. The latter category consists of the verbs for preparing a house, vegetables, rice, and chiseled wood.[13]

It is certainly not difficult to think of music as something prepared or fashioned from a musical instrument. Therefore, it is the 'sent away' category that we found most interesting in understanding how the Mangali people talk about music. This concept was reiterated when one of our companions discussed the qualities of a well-made gong.[14] While comparing two different gongs, he expressed that one had a better sound:

(5) Antayudkani
    an-tayud-kani
    AG- project -1PL.EX
    'We will be projected far.'[15]

The results from another frame that we presented for our Mangali companions provided further insight into the idea of music as something 'sent away.'

(6) Awad   ginga   _____.
    EXIST voice   [blank][16]
    '_____ has a voice.'

We knew that *ginga* 'voice' was a quality ascribed to the gongs, and we uncovered nothing unusual in the list of other things that have a voice: humans, dogs, the *idaw* 'omen bird', God, chickens, and guns. Glenn Machlan decided to use a contrasting frame:

(7) Naippun   ginga   _____.
    NON-EXIST   voice   [blank][17]
    '_____ has no voice.'

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[13] The *anaga* verb differs from the other preparation verbs since its root is the chisel doing the preparation rather than the acted-upon wood. Perhaps this is because rice, houses, and vegetables possess a certain inherent 'usability' quality about them; to *anisna* is to bring rice to it's intended state—cooked and edible. Wood, on the other hand, requires an intentional shaping to make its purpose known.

[14] Nelson Amangao taught Glenn Stallsmith the rhythms played on the *gangsa*—a hand-held, flat, rimmed gong. Nelson was also one of the Mangali assistants who provided input during the framing exercises.

[15] In the context of the utterance, it was clear that he meant 'while we are playing this gong.'

[16] EXIST = Existential

[17] NON-EXIST = Non-existential

The responses were: fish, ants, stones, trees, the dead, and the gongs. The last response surprised us; it seemed contradictory to claim both that 'The gong has a voice' and 'The gong has no voice.' The Mangali participants said that the latter statement is made on occasions when one is playing the gong poorly. It seems to be an idiom that means, 'His gong is not speaking well.'

Responses to the following frame seem to further confirm that the sound of the gong is 'sent away' from oneself in order to yield a result.

(8) Lawwekas ginga-n   ni   gangsa-m   te   _____.
    bad   sound/voice-LK   GEN   gong-2SG   because   [blank][18]
    'The sound (voice) of your gong is not pleasing because_____.'

Responses:
> *naippun sapul* —there is no *sapul* rhythm [19]
> *amatitig*—the beating is too fast
> *umaseaseset*—it is just banging (i.e., the sound is unorganized; the voice is too loud.)

If the gong's sounding is disorderly, then it does not speak. Speaking—or sending out a message—is evidently a concept related to sounding a musical instrument.

Clear communication arose as an important value when we presented Minangali frames about singing.

(9) Ambalu sana 'e   kanta   te   _____.
    good   that   LK   song   because   [blank]
    'That song is nice because _____.'

Responses:
> *nagayon-gongan*—it uses *gayon-gon* 'vibrato'
> *nan-anaanawat*—it uses rhyming
> *naapodiosan*—it is godly
> *maaawwatan*—it is clearly understood
> *abobba*—it is short
> *panggob atte gangganas*—about something enjoyable
> *angitod ak tuttudu*—gives a teaching
> *panggob atte bagbagan da an-asawa* – about the advice given to (lit., of) the ones getting married[20]
> *makaliwliwa*—able to comfort
> *ampaemes*—funny; causes one to laugh
> *ampasulsuldung* – makes you grieve/cry
> *ampakaan si suyop*—keeps you awake. Literally, 'Causes sleep to be removed.'[21]

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[18] LK = Linker
GEN = Genitive
[19] The *sapul* rhythm is the most important of the three rhythmic patterns played simultaneously by the gong ensemble.
[20] At a traditional Mangali wedding the guests are invited to give advice to the couples. This can be spoken or sung. If sung, it often takes the form of the epic song form (*ullalim*).

Results from the following, contrasting frame reinforce the same values regarding communication:

(10) Lawweng sana 'e kanta te _____.
 bad that LK song because [blank]
 'That song is bad because_____.'

Responses:
 adipun maawatan—it is not understandable.
 amod de gayon-gonna—there is too much vibrato
 nankalkalomtang—it is not orderly (Specifically: It jumps from topic to topic and makes
  no sense.)
 naippun maadalta—there is nothing for us to learn from it
 naippun bogasna—it has no meaning; it is meaningless
 ampasulsuldung—makes you cry
 ampaspasmok—makes you recall

Finally, additional evidence of that Mangali music performances are to be 'sent away' appears in the first two lines of this *suggiyaw* harvest song:

 Suggiyaw miballayaw
 Insap-uydad lamoyaw

 Suggiyaw [song] that will be carried in the air
 It will be blown somewhere

5. Conclusion
   According to the Minangali sentences we elicited with these frames, we offer some tentative conclusions about how music functions in Mangali society. Of the ten ways that Merriam suggested that music functions within a given society, it seems that 'communication' would rank among the highest in Mangali culture (1964:223).[22] As seen above, even non-textual instrumental music seems to have a 'going out' function when Mangali people attempt to describe or evaluate it. By contrast, it seems that 'aesthetic enjoyment' ranks low among Merriam's suggested music functions. Only one aesthetic musical term—*goyon-gon* 'vibrato' — was given in response to our frames about what makes music enjoyable. *Goyon-gon* is apparently valued, but only as much as its realization does not detract from the meaning of the text. Too much *goyon-gon* was readily offered as a negative example of vocal singing.
   Eleven sentence frames are only a starting point in the attempt to understand the Mangali social processes that are found in music performances. Much more data collection and analysis, combined with participant-observation, are required in order to yield anything but the most

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[21] Mangali people often sing at wakes for the dead. These events last through the night and the family and friends are expected to stay awake through the night. Singing is one method participants use to stay awake.
[22] Other research indicates that physical response, conformity to social norms, and contribution to the stability of culture are also important functions of Mangali music (Merriam 1964:223-225).

circumspect conclusions. However, these dozens of response sentences required only 90 minutes for elicitation. The clues they provided will involve days of follow-up questioning and interviewing. Sentence framing is certainly a viable jumping-off point for the ethnomusicologist in almost any stage of fieldwork.

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