

The Spatial and Temporal Conceptualizations of Isbukun Bunun

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ABSTRACT

In many languages, the more concrete spatial concepts generally serve as the foundation for expressing the more abstract temporal concepts. Isbukun Bunun, an Austronesian language of Taiwan, has complex spatial and temporal systems and it is found that two deictic spatial concepts, namely proximal (+visible) and nonproximal (+/-visible), underlie not only its spatial system but also its temporal system. The nonproximal distance may be further divided into medial (+visible) and distal (-visible). These two spatial concepts are prevalent in Isbukun nouns, pronouns, spatial verb prefixes, determiner suffixes, verbs, conjunctions (*mais* ‘when (present)’ vs. *masa* ‘when (past)’), tense and aspect. This paper aims to construct the complex Isbukun spatial and temporal systems in terms of proximal and nonproximal spatial concepts (Tanz 1971; Clark 2000), the moving-ego and moving-time metaphors (Clark 1973; Traugott 1975; Huang 1977; Jeng 1985; Evans & Green 2006), the concept of absolute tense (Comrie 1985; Jeng 1999), Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980; 1999) and Lakoff’s (1987) concepts of cognitive categories and the embodied mind.

In Isbukun Bunun, while generic nouns have no determiner suffixes, specific nouns must be indicated as proximal and visible (marked by *-an/-in*) or nonproximal (marked by *-a*: medial (visible) or distal (invisible)). The same distinction is also found in third person pronouns: *sain/sian/sa-ian* (this/he/she) is always proximal and visible (see Zeitoun 2000: 72), whereas *sa-ia* (he/she/it) is nonproximal (medial (visible) or distal (invisible)). These various ranges of distance are also demonstrated in spatial verbs: “*isaincin*” (here: proximal); “*adaiza*” (there: medial); “*idaiza*” (over there/far away: distal). Thus, spatial distance from the viewpoint of the speaker plays an important role in Isbukun spatial conceptualization and is manifested in its morphosyntax.

The proximal/nonproximal dichotomy applies to Isbukun temporal conceptualization as well. Isbukun has a four-tense system based on the moving-ego metaphor with “here and now” as its point of departure heading toward the future in the front and leaving the past in the back (absolute tense): “*hanup*” (hunt: present/unmarked), “*hinanup*” (hunted: recent past/marked by the infix *-in-*), “*hininanup*” (hunted: remote past/marked by the infix *-inin-*) and “*nahanup*” (hunt: future/marked by the prefix *na-*). The present tense represents a present proximal and visible event;

the recent past tense, a recent nonproximal and invisible (medial) event; the remote past, a remote nonproximal and invisible (distal) event. And the future tense marker *na-* indicates an event yet to happen in the future.

Moreover, future temporal expressions are generally marked by the perfect aspect suffix *-in*, which when used as a verbal suffix has both the meanings of “completion of an action or a state” and “an action or a state to come”. It is our hypothesis that the second sense gives rise to the concept of futurity in temporal expressions with this suffix. Some parallel pairs of the contrast between past and future temporal expressions include: *habas* ‘in the past’ vs. *habasin* ‘in the future’; *sangan* ‘a moment ago’ vs. *sanganin* ‘a moment later’; *katavin* ‘last year’ vs. *katavinin* (next year). What is involved in these expressions is the moving-time metaphor, with the past in the front and the future in the back. For example, “*pinunmas-anpainsanan tu tanangaus*” (literally “ten years **in front**”, meaning “ten years ago”) vs. “*punmas-anpainsananin*” (literally “ten years **to come**”, meaning “ten years later”). And this moving-time metaphor is the very cognitive model on which the Isbukun aspect system is built, which distinguishes four aspects: “*hanup*” (hunt:simple/unmarked), “*hanupin*” (has hunted: perfect/marked by the suffix *-in*), “*hahanup*” (frequently hunt/hunting: repetitive/marked by reduplication of the CV of the penultimate mora), and “*hanupang*” (still hunting: durative/marked by the suffix *-ang*).

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