Placename narratives and identity in north east Ambon Island

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Diachronic toponymy and landscape terms in East Nusantara
13-ICAL, Academia Sinica July 20 2015
Overview

- The language and its setting
- Western histories
- Traditional accounts
- Constructing identities
Tulehu
Where are we?

Placename narratives from NE Ambon
Where are we?
Where are we?

AMBON ISLAND

AMBON CITY

Larike
Liliboi
Allang
Wakasihu

Liang
Waai
Tulehu
Tengah-tengah
Tial

Seram

Province capital

(map not to scale)
The language

- Various names:
  - Bahasa Tulehu (for largest settlement)
  - Bahasa Tiga T (Tulehu, Tengah-tengah, Tial)
  - Bahasa Uli Solemata (*Uli was a pre-colonial grouping*)
  - Sou Amana Teru – ‘language of the three villages’

- Spoken in three villages
  - Dialect with small variations at Liang
  - Formerly spoken also at Waai

- Speaker numbers: c10,000 still
  - But almost all fluent speakers are 30+YO
Very basic typological profile

- Small phonemic inventory:
  - 5 vowels [ i, e, a, o, u ]
  - Historically only unvoiced obstruents: [ p, t, k, ?, s ]
    - Voiced counterparts now common in loans
  - Sonorants [ m, n, (ŋ), r, l, w, j ]
- SVO word order
- Quasi-obligatory subject indexing in main and subordinate clauses
- No voice system
- Alienability distinction in possessive constructions:
  - Alienable: PossessorNP Possessum
  - Inalienable: PossessorNP\text{\textsubscript{i}} Possessum-Index\text{\textsubscript{i}}
How it sounds

- Text 1 from Handout
- Speaker is Drs Hasan Umarella (Pak Acang)
  - On right in image
  - On left is Bapak Usman Tuharea (Pak Uceng), source for Text 3
Trade and colonization

- Maluku is source of several spices, especially cloves
  - *Caryophyllus aromaticus* Linne
- Evidence of trade in cloves to Mesopotamia as far back as 1700BC
European contact

- Portuguese ships reached Maluku in 1511
- Controlled region for about a century
- In early C17 Dutch took control
  - Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC – United East India Company)
  - Established 1602
- Original source of clove tree was North Maluku
- Cultivated in Central Maluku from early
- Ambon became centre of Dutch colony
  - Large sheltered harbor
  - Most stable pre-existing polity was based on Ambon Island at Hitu
Georg Eberhard Rumphius [baptised Rumpf] (1627 – 1702)
Joined VOC when 24, sent to Ambon
Spent remainder of life in East Indies
Major works are in natural history:
- *Herbarium Amboinense* – completed c1690, published 1741
- *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer* (Amboina Curiosity Cabinet, 1705)
Also prepared works on history and geography of Maluku for use by VOC employees
*De Ambonse Landbeschrijving* was written between 1672 and 1678
VOC impact

- Many villages were inland pre-VOC
- VOC built spice monopoly ruthlessly
  - Destroyed trees
  - Relocated villages
Relocations

- Coastal settlements were easier to control
- Dutch chose new sites in most cases
- Lierissa (1980):
  Uli-uli yang berkedudukan di pegunungan-pegunungan .... dipaksakan turun ke pantai di tempat-tempat yang ditentukan VOC. *Ulis which were located in the mountains ....were forced to come down to the shore to places decided by the VOC.*
- Local accounts from NE Ambon agree with Rumphius in part:
  - Tulehu and Tial were not coastal settlements pre-VOC
- Rumphius tells that Tengah-tengah only came into existence under VOC
  - Local traditions hide this
Tial

Tial or Pasir Putih lies on the east side of Ambon between the two Christian villages of Wai and Suli. It was a small mountain close to the sea, about 250 paces from the coast through a cleft.....Presently they are situated at the base of the mountain on the coast, in a small sandy bay which is called Pasir Putih.
(Rumphius p50)
Tulehu

- Tulehu lag vroeger op een steile heuvel, ruim een mijl ten noorden an Tial. Ze zijn pas onlangs naar de kust aan de noordoostzijde van die hoek getrokken.

_Tulehu formerly was on a steep hill, a good mile to the north of Tial. Not long ago they moved to the coast on the northeast side of the cape._

(Rumphius, p50)
Tengah-tengah version 1

- Rumphius gives two accounts of the founding of Tengah-tengah
- First version - problems in Tial:
- Langs de rug lagen vier afzonderlijke gehuchten, Helau, Osil, Moal en Wail, die gevieren de eigenlijke negorij Tial vormen. Omdat ze aan de kust echter niet alle vier bij elkaar konden wonen, hebben de laatste twee zich afgeschieden en vormen ze een afzonderlijke negorij, Tengah-tengah genaamd.

*Along the back were four separate hamlets, Helau, Osil, Moal and Wail, the four making up the actual village of Tial. Because they could not all four really live on the coast, the last two separated themselves and formed a separate village called Tengah-tengah.*
(Rumphius, p50)
Tengah-tengah version 2

- A benevolent action by the Dutch:
- Maar omdat de Papua’s daar jaarlijks op strooptocht kwamen, heeft de gouverneur Arnold de Vlamingh de twee soa’s Moal en Wail op de kust bij Lai geplaatst om die te beschermen. Ze worden Tengah-tengah genoemd.

*But because the Papuans came there raiding every year, the governor Arnold de Vlamingh placed the two soa’s Moal and Wail on the coast near Lai to protect them. It was called Tengah-tengah.*

(Rumphius, p50)
Tengah-tengah
Local evidence

- *Aman tawari* ‘the old village’ is often mentioned in Tulehu
- A specific location is accepted by most inhabitants
- Grave sites are reported to still be visible there
  - Matthew Spriggs (p.c.) confirms this
- One local expert (F. Umarella) goes further:
  - Traces several previous settlements
  - Links arrival at last prior site (*Aman tawari*) with arrival of Islam giving date around 1514
Relocations

Black type = current location
Grey type = former location
(From Rumphius 2002 edition)
Tulehu name

- Difference between traditional name and official name:
  - Tuirehui
  - Tulehu

- Version 2 ends with account of this:
  
  *Tapi karena waktu jaman penjajahan belanda* manae si *catat* ena amang ma eing nalare *menurut* walandama *karena* meisi taha laire uma isi apa'ar Tulehu *padahal yang sebenarnya* Tuirehui.

  But because at the time of the Dutch colonization, they wrote the name of the village according to the Dutch, because their tongues couldn’t cope, so they called it ‘Tulehu’ although it is really ‘Tuirehui’.

- Attributable to sound change in Ambon languages
  - Contrast of /l/ and /r/ neutralized in some environments
Etymology for name

- Two versions agree
- Name has two elements:
  - Bird call/name: *tui*
  - Location word: *rehu* 'below'
- Stories agree on main points:
  - Elders at new village site
  - Sitting beneath tree
  - Hearing bird above
- Variation in participants:
  - Version 1: *upu matuana* 'old men', later specifically two
  - Version 2: *tahinana matuana* 'old women and old men'
- Version 2 is specific about varieties of trees
Tengah-tengah

- Local name is *Morewaere*
- Two etymologies:
  - *more + waer*: ‘sink water’
  - *more + wai‘i*: ‘sink return’
- Story for etymology 1 is sketchy
  - Stream or well that dried up?
- Story for etymology 2 more specific
- Story for etymology 2 also gives etymology for official name: *tengok-tengok* → Tengah-tengah

- Participants:
  - Unspecified old people
  - A head man
Common elements - human

- Authority rests with *(tahinana) matuana* ‘old people’
- Restricted to two elders in Tulehu V1, but still not individuated
- A single head man mentioned in Tengah-tengah story
  - *upu ela* literally ‘grandfather large’
  - still implication of age?
  - Not named individually
- Only named participants are in Tengah-tengah story
  - Unnamed first inhabitant had three sons
  - Sons have names characteristic of each village
  - *ruma tau*: named houses, clans
Common elements - nature

- Responses to natural phenomena
  - Bird song
  - Failing water
  - Force of the ocean (boat sinking)
- Nature is not beneficent:
  - Neutral – bird song
  - Negative impact – water and ocean
Dutch version v. local version

- Human agency in Rumphius
  - Relocations have agents except for Tial
    “presently they are situated”
  - Tulehu – decision of inhabitants
    “they moved”
  - Tengah-tengah – two attributions
    - Inhabitants: “the last two separated themselves”
    - Dutch governor:
      “the governor Arnold de Vlamingh placed the two soa’s Moal and Wail on the coast”

- Traditional versions
  - Elders as seat of collective authority
  - Nature is relatively more powerful
Choosing identity

- Case of Tengah-tengah is very clear
- Transparent etymologies are rejected
  - *Morewaere* from names of two *soas*, *Moal* and *Wail*
  - *Tengah-tengah* as ‘in between’
- Role of Dutch covered up
- Only mention of Dutch in all stories is derogatory
  - Dutch were unable to pronounce [r]
  - Speakers claim mutual intelligibility with varieties on north coast
  - Some awareness of [r] / [l] variation
Choosing identity

- Foundation story is shared by villages
- Tengah-tengah version here is distinct in claiming primacy for that village
- But versions from other villages do not make Tengah-tengah secondary
  - Original inhabitant lived inland
  - Three sons came to coast to found villages
- Additional support for solidarity from Tulehu
  - Tulehu people can be called *teuna haturesi* ‘clan seed.left.over’
  - Story suggests Tuasalomonony was last brother to have village
Summary

- Etymologising placenames builds an identity
- What is included and excluded is significant
- In:
  - Community controlled by elders
  - Nature is important in life of community
- Out:
  - Individual agency
  - External human forces (Dutch)
- Wordplay can be subversive *cf.* plesetan
References


Sub-grouping

- Part of Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian sub-group
- Following Collins (1983):
  - Central Maluku
    - East Central Maluku
    - Seram
      - Nunusaku
        - Piru Bay
        - East Piru Bay
        - Seram Straits
        - Ambon (3 languages)
Cognate sets

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Only good evidence for chronology: Wallace’s wordlist from Liang (c1860) has [l] → [r] well established

Liang: *husur* v. Morella *husul* ‘box’ implying change before [e]
North Moluccan examples

- The third ancestor came from "somewhere" looking for his sister that one of the two brothers living in the area of Jai had married. Before heading into the forested interior, this third ancestor met up with the Sangaji (district head and sultan's representative) of Mareku. He told the Sangaji that he was just going into the forest to hunt kuso. The sangaji, knowing that the two brothers were living in that area of the interior and not wanting them to be angry with an intruder, warned the man to go hunting quickly. The expression for “quickly" in Ternatese, which is the language the Sangaji used with this stranger, is jai-jai. This was the origin of the name Jai. (Baker 1988: 68)

- NB also:
  As far as I am aware, soa names are never the names of founding ancestors. A few names have discernible meanings (“Four Houses”, “Middle Soa”, “Java”). For the majority that do not, there are usually stories (with several versions) about how the names were derived. (Baker 1988: 51, n20)
Language games and identity

- Folk etymology common across Indonesia
- Breaking words up in playful ways
- Example from Sumba (Keane 1997)
- *marapu* refers to ancestors
- Traditions of ritual speaking still survive
- Expert in that tradition offered three glosses of *marapu*
marapu

- Ancestor spirit – the living
  - MA = father, *ama*
  - RA = infant, *ana rara*
  - PU = mother, *pua* (woman)

- Ancestor spirit – of the dead
  - MA = first born, *mamaaya*
  - RA = ritual specialist, *ratu*
  - PU = grandmother, *apu*

- Carrying out bodily affairs
  - MA = Lord, *marimba*
  - RA = ritual specialist, *ratu*
  - PU = ritual spokesman, *pa-unangu kareuku* ‘weaver of speech’
Word formation and decomposition

- Indonesian coins new words this way:
  - *balita* ‘small child’ ← *bawah lima tahun* ‘under five years’
  - *pungli* ‘bribe’ ← *pungutan liar* ‘tax illegal’
  - *rojali* ‘cadger’ ← *rokok jangan beli* ‘smoke don’t buy’
  - *pilkadal* ‘direct election of HOS’ ← *pemilihan* (root: *pilih*) *kepala daerah langsung*

- Process is reversed
  - *sepeda* ‘bicycle’ ← *asepe tidak ada* ‘there is no smoke’

- Often with humorous (satiric) intent
  - *Harmoko* (former minister for information) → *hari-hari omong kosong* ‘every day say nothing’
Subversive humour - *plesetan*

- Folk etymology is subsumed under *plesetan*
- Tradition of humour which hides subversive criticism (Barnes 2004)
- Rooted in wordplay
  - Not only the type shown here
- Stories from Ambon can be seen in this tradition
  - Folk etymologies
  - Transmit meanings which are important to identity
  - Resist acknowledging role of powerful outsiders
  - Situated in community and natural world
- “Unlike true etymologies, which can be esoteric or alien, folk etymologies only exist if they are meaningful to the community of their users” (Rundblad and Kronenfeld 2003:129-130)