

# The Subject in Central Sinama

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## 1. Introduction

In an attempt to develop a universal definition for “subject,” Keenan (1976) identified over 30 properties of a paradigmatic or “basic” subject, as well as describing a methodology for identifying the basic subject in any given language. He did not claim that every subject in every language would possess all of these properties—quite the contrary, in fact. Rather, Keenan’s list of properties provides a very useful guide to the sorts of characteristics a subject might have, and suggests an assortment of tests to identify the subject in any given language. Since Keenan, much additional work has gone into identifying meaningful tests for subjecthood in various languages.

This paper examines subject properties for the Central Sinama language of the southern Philippines. It shows that the nominative argument<sup>1</sup> of a Sinama verbal clause, the argument which is selected by the verbal morphology, is uniquely involved in several important syntactic processes. These processes serve as subjecthood tests, indicating that the nominative argument can be profitably described as the subject of a Sinama verbal clause. Thus, Sinama subject can be defined in purely syntactic terms.

Subjects in languages of the Philippines have at times been identified with a particular semantic role (e.g. Actor), or a pragmatic feature (e.g. Topic). Some researchers have claimed that subject properties in Philippine languages are split among syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features to such an extent that the concept of subject is of no value in describing them (Schachter 1976). My purpose here is not to dive into that debate, much less to try to settle questions of what “subject” means cross-linguistically. Rather, it is merely to show the importance of the nominative argument in Sinama and describe several of the syntactic processes it controls, to demonstrate the plausibility of describing it as the language’s subject.

My fieldwork on Sinama was performed in the Philippines from 2010-2013 and 2014-2015, primarily in Davao City and to a lesser extent in Zamboanga City. My emphasis has been on the dialect known as Sinama Dilaut, sometimes referred to as Badjao or Binadjao. Most of the examples in this paper are from that fieldwork, and are representative of the Sinama Dilaut dialect. A few, though, are from the dictionary material compiled by Dr. A. Kemp Pallesen during his decades of work on Sinama.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Overview of Sinama voice

### 2.1 Background

Central Sinama [sml] is an Austronesian language spoken primarily in the coastal areas of the southern Philippines, as well as along the north coast of Borneo in Sabah, Malaysia. It is a member of the Sama-Bajaw subgroup of languages. Lewis et. al. (2014) state the population of Sinama<sup>3</sup> speakers to be 105,000, with 90,000 of them in the Philippines.

Sama-Bajaw nomenclature can be confusing at times, with regard both to the separate languages in the family and to their respective dialects. Pallesen and Soderberg (2012:1-2) write of Central Sinama:

Central is not an indigenous label for the language; it simply reflects the central position of the language relative to other members of the Sama-Bajaw subgroup. Most native speakers of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term *nominative phrase* is used simply as a term of identification for the noun phrase in question. It is not intended to imply anything about the nature of the Sinama voice system. Quakenbush (2005:16-17) discusses the use of *nominative* in this general sense. Section 2.2 provides more information on the nominative phrase in Sinama.

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks are due to Pr. John Eroles, Jonathan Eroles and Omarjan Jahuran for their native-speaker judgments on the grammaticality of certain constructions. Thanks are owed as well to Ruth (Biral) Schroeder for her assistance with an early draft of this paper. Dr. Paul Kroeger, Dr. Michael Boutin and Dr. Kemp Pallesen also provided helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>3</sup> In actual usage the term “Sinama” can refer to any of several Sama-Bajaw languages, but in this paper mention of Sinama without further modification will refer to Central Sinama.

language identify themselves as Sama, and the language they speak as Sinama. They are also known by numerous other names, a fact that has given rise to some confusion both in regard to identity and demographic information. ... [M]any Central Sama, though few of them own or live on land, choose —like other Sama —to identify themselves by a place name.

The unmarked word order in a Sinama clause is predicate-initial. The order of the arguments following the predicate in a transitive verbal clause depends on whether they are pronouns or full noun phrases. If the Actor is a pronoun, it precedes the Undergoer; if the Actor is an NP, it follows the Undergoer (Pallesen 1963:6).

## 2.2 *Sinama voice*

Like other languages of the Philippines and north Borneo, Sinama has a complex voice system. There are several voice affixes, each of which uniquely cross-references a single semantic role in the clause. The basic voice alternation is between Actor Voice (AV), in which the morphology on the verb cross-references the Actor of the clause, and Undergoer Voice (UV), in which the verb morphology cross-references the Undergoer. The cross-referenced noun phrase is referred to here as the nominative phrase.

- (1) (Pallesen n.d.: entry *baklay*)
- |        |          |                         |      |          |
|--------|----------|-------------------------|------|----------|
| Hal    | kita     | aN <sup>4</sup> -baklay | bang | t'bba.   |
| merely | 1DU.INCL | AV-travel.by.foot       | when | low.tide |
- ‘When the tide is low we just walk along the shore.’

In example (1), the verb is affixed for AV. Consequently the nominative element is the Actor, the pronoun *kita* ‘we (dual)’. Of course this is the only candidate for nominative element in this example, because the verb *baklay* ‘to travel by foot’ is intransitive—the Actor is the only core argument in the clause. (The pronoun occurs in the preverbal position here due to the presence of the particle *hal* ‘merely’; see section 3.3.5.) Example (2) demonstrates the use of AV in a transitive clause. The nominative element in this clause is *aku* ‘I’, the Actor, because the Actor is selected by the voice morphology on the verb.

- (2) (Pallesen n.d.: entry *p'ssi*)
- |          |      |     |          |     |    |          |
|----------|------|-----|----------|-----|----|----------|
| aN-b'lli | gi'  | aku | p'ssi    | (ni | si | Bansan). |
| AV-buy   | IPFV | 1SG | fishhook | to  | PN | B.       |
- ‘I will buy fishhooks (from Bansan).’

Example (3) illustrates a verb in UV, indicated by a bare verb stem. The Actor is obligatorily expressed as an enclitic pronoun on the verb.<sup>5</sup> As a result, UV clauses are necessarily transitive—they contain both an Actor and an Undergoer. The nominative element in example (3) is the Undergoer *daing itu* ‘this fish’, which is cross-referenced by the verb morphology.

- (3) Bay            Ø-b'lla = na    daing    itu.
- |     |               |      |      |
|-----|---------------|------|------|
| PST | UV-cook = 3SG | fish | this |
|-----|---------------|------|------|
- ‘S/he cooked this fish.’

<sup>4</sup> *aN-* is an Actor Voice affix. The N represents an unspecified nasal, which changes form depending on the initial phoneme of the verb root.

<sup>5</sup> Sama Bangingih [sse] (Gault 1999:11) and Southern Sinama [ssb] (Miller 2012:3) have similar restrictions on the Actor in a UV clause.

Sinama also has a passive construction, in which the verb is inflected with the infix *-in-*. In a passive clause, the Undergoer is the nominative element. The Actor is either omitted entirely or else is expressed as an oblique marked by the particle *(h)e'*.<sup>6</sup>

(4) (Pallesen n.d.: entry *surang*)

Bang	kami	<ni <sup>7</sup> > holdap	he'	mundu
when	1SG.EXCL	<PASS>hold.up	AM	bandit

s <in> urang-an <sup>8</sup>	kami	timbang.
<PASS>point.weapon-CM	1SG.EXCL	gun

‘When we are held up by bandits we have weapons pointed at us.’

Example (4) contains two passive clauses. In the first, the Actor is expressed as an oblique; in the second, the Actor is omitted. *Kami* ‘we (exclusive)’, the Undergoer, is the nominative phrase in both clauses.

Sinama verbal morphology is much more complex than is presented here (Pallesen 1973). Each voice can be expressed by several different affixes, indicating additional features such as aspect, mode or intentionality. Moreover, in addition to the AV and UV affix collections, there are verbal affixes which allow the verb to select the Instrument, Location, or Time as the nominative element of a clause. The status of these additional affixes is not yet clear. It is possible that they are true voice affixes. But they might be better analyzed as nominalizers, or perhaps as a complex system of applicatives. Nonetheless, AV/UV/passive remains the most fundamental voice alternation. Due to this fact, and to the complexity of the morphology involved, the additional verbal morphology will not be treated in detail here.

Many of the languages of the Philippines have sentence-level particles which indicate the grammatical relations of noun phrases. In Tagalog, for instance, the particle *ang* indicates the nominative NP. Sinama lacks such particles. Contrastive pronoun sets help to clarify the status of pronoun arguments (for instance, non-nominative Actors are expressed by a special set of enclitic pronouns), but full NPs are not overtly marked for their grammatical relation. This creates the potential for ambiguity, but rarely causes any in practice. It is not common in natural speech for all of the arguments of a clause to be full NPs rather than at least one being a pronoun. When such a clause does occur, the grammatical relation of each noun phrase is indicated by word order. Any remaining ambiguity is usually resolved by the pragmatic context, and by common sense.

### 3. Subjecthood in Sinama

#### 3.1 Subjects in Philippine languages

Grammatical relations have at times been a controversial topic for the languages of the Philippines. Much ink has been spilled regarding the identity of the subject in particular. For Tagalog, the most thoroughly-studied Philippine language, there have been proposals to identify the subject with the Actor, the topic, the nominative NP, or some confluence of two or all three of these categories. Schachter (1976) concluded that Tagalog subjecthood properties are divided among these different categories to such a degree that the notion of subject has no relevance to Tagalog, and thus is not a language-universal concept. Other analysts, however, differ on the matter, saying that despite this splitting of subject

<sup>6</sup> Of the passive construction with *(h)e'*, Pallesen (1985:98) writes, “This ... construction is not found in other Philippine languages, to my knowledge, but corresponds to MLY [Malay] constructions with *oleh*...”

<sup>7</sup> *ni-* is an allomorph of the passive infix *-in-*, which occurs when the verb root begins with *h* or a vowel.

<sup>8</sup> *-an* here is a lexically-conditioned affix. It is required by a certain class of verb stems whenever a definite Undergoer is explicit in the clause, regardless of the verb’s voice (Pallesen 1973:97).

properties, the bulk of the properties still tend to cluster around the nominative NP in Tagalog and other Philippine languages (Kroeger 1993:22-36 for Tagalog; Schwartz 1976 for Ilocano).

### 3.2 *Subjects in Sama-Bajaw languages*

In her study of Sama Bangingih [sse], a language closely related to Central Sinama, Gault (1999:71ff.) showed a splitting of subject properties similar to that identified by Schachter for Tagalog. Some Bangingih subject properties are controlled by the Actor; some by the pragmatic topic; and some by the nominative NP, which Gault called the semantic pivot. However, Gault showed that the majority of the subject properties are associated with the nominative NP (41), and thus identified the nominative NP as the subject of the Bangingih clause. Miller (2007:135ff.) similarly identified the nominative NP (which he called the privileged syntactic argument) as the subject for West Coast Bajau [bdr], a Sama-Bajaw language of Borneo. Walton, in his study of Sama Pangutaran [slm], avoids using the term “subject” (1986:12,14), due to subject-property splitting similar to Bangingih. But he notes that “the [nominative] NP is the syntactic pivot for all of the major syntactic constructions in Sama” (116). He identifies constructions including relativization, content question formation, clefting, topic fronting, and the ability to launch floating modifiers—syntactic processes typically associated with subjects (130). Likewise, Donohue (1996:784-788) notes that in Indonesian Bajau [bdl] only the nominative NP is able to be relativized and to move to preverbal position, and thus concludes that it is the subject in that language.

### 3.3 *Subject in Central Sinama*

A similar case can be made for Central Sinama. Like its Sama-Bajaw siblings, Sinama shows a certain degree of splitting of the canonical subject properties among the nominative NP, the Actor, and the pragmatic topic. It behaves quite similarly to Sama Bangingih, in fact. However, sufficient subjecthood properties cluster on the nominative NP to make it clear that the nominative NP occupies a unique position in Sinama syntax. This is the subject. Tests which unambiguously indicate the subject in Sinama include control, access to relativization, clefting, and question formation.

#### 3.3.1 *Control*

Access to control is restricted to the subject in the majority of languages (Kroeger 2004:107, 297). In Sinama, access to control is restricted to the nominative element. That is, only the nominative element of the subordinate clause can be the controllee. This means that in order for an arbitrary NP of the subordinate clause to be controlled, the verb must be inflected in the appropriate voice to select that NP as the nominative element. This pattern is very strong evidence for the nominative NP’s status as the subject of a Sinama clause.

Examples (5) through (7) show control for an intransitive complement clause. In (5), both the matrix clause and the complement clause are in AV. In (6), the matrix clause is in UV and the complement clause is in AV. And in (7), both the matrix clause and the complement clause are passive.

(5)   Halam   aku    aN-soho'        iya    aN-kalang.  
       NEG     1SG    AV-command   3SG    AV-sing  
       ‘I didn’t tell him to sing.’

(6)   (Pallesen n.d.: entry *dalihag*)  
       Buwat   kami            Ø-soho' = nu            pa<sup>9</sup>-diyata'.  
       like     1PL.INCL        UV-command = 2SG    AV-ascend  
       ‘It’s like when you tell us to go up.’

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<sup>9</sup> *pa-* here is an AV prefix which occurs primarily on verbs of motion.

- (7) Bay            b <in> owa                    e' = nu            si            Omar    t <in> atak-an.  
 PST            <PASS>influence            AM = 3sg            PN            O.            <PASS>mark-CM  
 'Omar was influenced by you to get tattooed.'

More telling than these examples is the behavior of transitive complement clauses. Examples (8) through (10) involve AV complement clauses, embedded in AV, UV and passive matrix clauses, respectively. In all three, the Actor of the AV complement clause is the controllee.

- (8) aN-soho'                    aku    si            Abdul    aN-b'lli                    buwas.  
 AV-command            1SG    PM            A.            AV-buy                    rice.  
 'I will tell Abdul to buy rice.'
- (9) Bay            kami                    Ø-bowa = nu                    aN-adjal                    daing    hē'.  
 PST            1PL.EXCL            UV-influence = 2SG            AV-prepare.food            fish    DET  
 'You had us prepare that fish.'
- (10) Bay            aku    s <in> oho'                    aN-b'lli                    buwas.  
 PST            1SG    <PASS>command            AV-buy                    rice.  
 'I was ordered to buy rice.'

Examples (8) and (9) are presented in re-written form below as (11) and (12). They have been altered in an attempt to control the Undergoer of the AV subordinate clauses rather than the Actor. The attempt fails: the Undergoer of an AV complement clause cannot be the controllee.

- (11) \* aN-soho'                    aku    buwas    aN-b'lli                    si            Abdul.  
 AV-command            1SG    rice    AV-buy                    PM            A.  
 for: 'I will tell Abdul to buy rice.'  
 (Could only mean: 'I will tell the rice to buy Abdul.')
- (12) \* Bay            Ø-bowa = nu                    daing    hē'            aN-adjal                    kami.  
 PST            UV-influence = 2SG            fish    that            AV-prepare.food            1PL.EXCL  
 for: 'You had us prepare that fish.'  
 (Could only mean: 'You had that fish prepare us (as food).')

These attempts produce nonsensical meanings which illustrate that the controllee can only be interpreted as the nominative element of the subordinate clause. In (11), the controllee, 'rice', must be understood as the Actor of the subordinate AV clause, even though this is absurd. Likewise, in (12), 'that fish' must be understood as the Actor of the subordinate AV clause. But even when the Undergoer of an AV complement clause is a semantically plausible controllee, as in (13) and (14), it is grammatically impossible.

- (13) aN-soho'                    aku    si            Abdul    aN-bowa                    si            Mma'    ni            ispital.  
 AV-command            1SG    PN            A.            AV-carry                    PN            father    to            hospital  
 'I told Abdul to take Father to the hospital.'  
 \* for: 'I told Abdul to have Father take him to the hospital.'  
 \* for: 'I told Father to take Abdul to the hospital.'

- (14) Bay sigām s<in>oho' e'=na aN-pandu'-an si Abdul.  
 PST 3PL <PASS>command AM=3SG AV-teach-CM PN A.  
 'They were ordered by him to teach Abdul.'  
 \* for: 'They were ordered by him to be taught by Abdul.'  
 \* for: 'Abdul was ordered by him to teach them.'

The same restriction applies when the subordinate clause is UV or Passive, as the following examples show.

- (15) Bay aku Ø-soho'=na Ø-pandu'-an = nu.<sup>10</sup>  
 PST 1SG UV-command = 3SG UV-teach-CM = 2SG  
 'He ordered me to be taught by you.'<sup>11</sup>
- (16) aN-gara' aku <ni>hilut.  
 AV-plan 1SG <PASS>massage  
 'I intend to get a massage.'
- (17) (Pallesen n.d.: entry *kole'*)  
 Makannak itu mbal ta-kole' <ni>lāng.  
 children DET NEG PASS.ABIL-able <PASS>forbid  
 'These children are impossible to make stop.'

Again, the nominative NP—in these examples, the Undergoer—is the controllee. It is actually very difficult even to attempt to create a sentence that might violate this restriction. The Actor of a UV clause is obligatory (it is always expressed as an enclitic pronoun), and thus cannot be omitted from the complement clause as a controllee must be. In a passive clause, the Actor is demoted to oblique status and can always be deleted in any case. Thus the absence of an Actor in a passive subordinate clause is always interpreted merely as deletion of an oblique, never as control. So, for instance, in (16) *aku* 'I' can only refer to the massagee, never the person giving the massage.

### 3.3.2 Relative clauses

The Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977) is a famous ranking of grammatical categories according to how accessible each is to relativization.

Accessibility Hierarchy: Subj > Obj > Obl > Possessor

Each level on this hierarchy is more accessible—more easily relativized—than the level to its right. In addition to the hierarchy, Keenan and Comrie proposed three Hierarchy Constraints. First, a language must be able to relativize subjects. Second, any given relative clause strategy within a particular language must apply to a continuous segment of the accessibility hierarchy. And third, a strategy that applies to one

<sup>10</sup> For an isolated sentence, example (15) would be preferable if both clauses are in passive voice rather than UV: *Bay aku sinoho' e'na pinandu'an e'nu*. And in natural speech, the most likely formulation is probably something like *Bay aku sinoho' e'na mikipandu' ma ka'a* 'He ordered me to ask you to teach me.' But my respondents said that example (15) is grammatical and acceptable in a certain context, in particular when all three participants are present at the speech act. I do not yet understand all of the pragmatic considerations involved in such voice selections.

<sup>11</sup> It is almost impossible to translate example (15) without recourse to the English passive, but the subordinate clause is not passive in Sinama.

point of the Accessibility Hierarchy may cease to apply at any lower point. These Hierarchy Constraints have held up very well for a wide variety of languages worldwide.

Relative clauses in Sinama are formed via two strategies: a gapping strategy, and a resumptive pronoun strategy. The marker *ya* can be optionally used as a relativizer preceding the relative clause.<sup>12</sup> The verb of a relative clause may occur in any voice. The gap strategy can only be used to relativize nominative arguments. Resumptive pronouns can only be used to relativize possessors of nominative arguments. The first Hierarchy Constraint states that a language must be able to relativize subjects. For Sinama, this means that either the nominative NP or a possessor of a nominative NP must be the subject of a clause; the nominative NP is by far the more plausible candidate. This is evidence for the subject status of the nominative NP.

### 3.3.2.1 *The gap strategy*

In the gap strategy, the relative clause immediately follows the modified head noun, and the relativized function is omitted from the relative clause. Crucially, the relativized function in this case must be the nominative element in the relative clause.

Example (18) illustrates the gap strategy for an AV relative clause: the Actor, the nominative element, is omitted. Example (19) shows that the gap strategy omits the Undergoer of a UV relative clause, and likewise the Undergoer of a passive relative clause is omitted in (20). Example (21) corresponds to (18), showing that if a different NP is relativized from an AV clause, it must be construed as the Actor for the sentence to be grammatical, even if this gives a nonsensical meaning. (22) and (23) are failed attempts to relativize the Actor of a UV clause and the Undergoer of an AV clause respectively.

(18) ni a'a bay aN-b'lli daing ma tabu'  
to person PST AV-buy fish at market  
'to the person who bought fish at the market'

(19) onde' bay Ø-pandi = na ma undam  
child PST UV-bathe = 3SG at basin  
'the child s/he bathed in the basin'

(20) (modified from Pallesen n.d.: entry *ya*)  
batu <ni> hagnu'-hagnu' pangubug kuhita'  
stone <PASS>jig lure octopus  
'the stone jiggled up and down to lure an octopus'

(21) \* ni daing bay aN-b'lli a'a ma tabu'  
to fish PST AV-buy person at market  
for: 'to the fish that the person bought at the market'  
(Could only mean: 'to the fish which bought a person at the market')

<sup>12</sup> In the Sinama Dilaut dialect, the relativizer *ya* is not typically used with the gap strategy, but is preferred with the resumptive pronoun strategy. These preferences are quite strong, perhaps bordering on obligatory. I am not certain how universal they are; there seems to be dialectal variation in where and how frequently *ya* is used. Given that *ya* is also used in other constructions (see sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4), I suspect that there is more going on here than I have yet grasped.

- (22) \* ni a'a bay Ø-b'lli = na daing ma tabu'  
 to person PST UV-buy = 3SG fish at market  
 for: 'the person who bought a fish at the market'
- (23) \* onde' bay iya aN-pandi ma undam  
 child PST 3SG AV-bathe at basin  
 for: 'the child s/he bathed in the basin'

Any core argument can be relativized using the gap strategy, given the appropriate verb morphology to select that argument as nominative. This fact can be of use in analyzing more complex verbal constructions. For example, in example (24) *daing* 'fish' is relativized, indicating that it was chosen by the UV verb as the nominative argument. *Onde'na* 'her child' cannot be relativized because it is an oblique argument. So far, this is nothing new.

- (24) daing bay Ø-b'lla = na ma onde' = na<sup>13</sup>  
 fish PST UV-cook = 3SG for child = 3SG  
 'the fish she cooked for her child'

In example (25) the applicative suffix *-an* is used to promote *onde'na* to core status. Now the Beneficiary *onde'na* can be relativized, which indicates that it is selected as the nominative argument by the UV verb. Crucially, *daing* cannot be relativized as long as there is a Beneficiary core argument in the clause.<sup>14</sup> This is evidence that a clause does in fact have only one nominative argument at a time, as well as giving some indication of how the verb selects a nominative from the available options.

- (25) onde' bay Ø-b'lla-han = na daing  
 child PST UV-cook-APPL = 3SG fish  
 'the child for whom she cooked fish'

### 3.3.2.2 *The resumptive pronoun strategy*

The resumptive pronoun strategy is used only when relativizing the possessor of a nominative NP. In example (26), the clitic *=na* 'her' is a resumptive pronoun referring to the relativized function, the woman who possesses the lost husband:

- (26) d'nda ya p<in> ag-piha h'lla = na  
 woman REL <PASS>DUR-search husband = 3SG.  
 'the woman whose husband was being searched for'

Example (26) involves a passive relative clause. The resumptive pronoun can also be used with a transitive relative clause, as in example (27). However, although this example was said to be grammatical, Sinama speakers described it as quite difficult to parse. It takes a moment to figure out what it means. This suggests that the resumptive pronoun relativization strategy is less productive than the gap strategy.

<sup>13</sup> The clitic pronouns indicate possession when attached to a noun.

<sup>14</sup> Miller (2007: 395) identified a very similar system in West Coast Bajau.

- (27) d'nda ya aN-kakan daing h'lla = na  
 woman REL AV-eat fish husband = 3SG  
 'the woman whose husband was eating fish'

Only two functions in Sinama are accessible to relativization: the nominative NP of the relative clause (via gapping), and a possessor of the nominative NP (via resumptive pronoun). Any other argument must first be promoted to nominative by selection of the appropriate voice morphology prior to being relativized. Of these two functions, the nominative NP appears to be a much more plausible candidate for subject than a possessor. This is especially the case given that the resumptive pronoun strategy of relativizing possessors appears to be much less productive than the gap strategy for relativizing nominative NPs. Thus relative clauses provide solid evidence for the nominative argument's status as subject in Sinama.

### 3.3.3 Clefting

Focused elements can be clefted to the preverbal position via a construction very similar to relativization. The focused NP precedes a headless relative clause, which is marked by the particle *ya*.<sup>15</sup> The relative clause is formed via the gap strategy. Consequently, only the nominative argument can be clefted, because only the nominative argument can be gapped. This is additional evidence for the subject status of the nominative argument.

- (28) Si Abdul ya bay aN-pana' kuhapo' aheya.  
 PN A. REL PST AV-speargun grouper large  
 'It was Abdul who speared a large grouper.'
- (29) Kuhapo' aheya ya bay p<in>ana' e' si Abdul.  
 grouper large REL PST <PASS>speargun AM PN A.  
 'It was a large grouper that Abdul speared.'
- (30) \* Kuhapo' aheya ya bay aN-pana' si Abdul.  
 grouper large REL PST AV-speargun PN A.  
 for: 'It was a large grouper that Abdul speared.'  
 (Could only mean: 'It was a large grouper that speared Abdul.')
- (31) \* Si Abdul ya bay Ø-pana' = na.  
 PN A. REL PST UV-speargun = 3SG  
 for: 'It was Abdul who speared it.'  
 (Could only mean: 'It was Abdul who he<sup>16</sup> speared.')

Examples (28) and (29) demonstrate cleft constructions involving AV and passive clauses, respectively. Examples (30) and (31) are attempts to cleft out the Undergoer of an AV clause, and the Actor of a UV clause, respectively. Both attempts fail. The clefted NP must be understood as the nominative element of the relative clause, whether it produces a nonsensical meaning, as in (30), or not, as in (31).

<sup>15</sup> With relative clauses, Sinama Dilaut speakers strongly prefer *ya* to be absent for the gapping strategy (3.3.2). But when used to introduce the presupposed element of a cleft construction, it is strongly preferred, perhaps obligatory.

<sup>16</sup> Absent a larger context, the pronoun = *na* 'he/she/it' in (31) will certainly be interpreted as a human being, not the fish mentioned in (28) - (30).

### 3.3.4 Content questions

Core arguments of a Sinama clause are questioned using the question words *ai* ‘what’, *sai* ‘who’, and *ingga* ‘which one’.<sup>17</sup> Like cleft constructions, questions are formed using a headless relative clause. Normally, the question word is placed sentence-initial, as in example (32) and (33).

(32) Sai            aN-b'lli daing    ma    tabu'?  
       who            AV-buy fish      at      market  
       ‘Who will buy fish at the market?’

(33) Ai            bay    Ø-b'lli = na    ma    tabu'?  
       what        PST    UV-buy = 3SG    at      market  
       ‘What did he buy at the market?’

Not surprisingly, given the gapped relative clause, only the nominative argument is eligible to be questioned in this manner, as demonstrated by examples (34) and (35), which attempt to question the Undergoer of an AV clause and the Actor of a passive clause, respectively.

(34) \* Ai            aN-b'lli iya      ma    tabu'?  
       what            AV-buy 3SG      at      market  
       for: ‘What will he buy at the market?’

(35) \* Sai          bay    b <in> 'lli      saging            ma    tabu'?  
       who            PST    <PASS>buy      banana            at      market  
       for: ‘Who will buy bananas in the market?’

The question word may be placed at the end of the sentence if the relative clause is preceded by *ya*, in a sort of reverse cleft construction. In this case, too, only the nominative element may be questioned, because only the nominative element can be gapped in a relative clause.

(36) Ya            bay    aN-b'lli daing, sai?  
       REL            PST    AV-buy fish    who  
       ‘The one who bought fish, who was it?’

(37) Ya            bay    p <in> ana'            e'      si      Abdul, ai?  
       REL            PST    <PASS>speargun    AM    PN    A.    what  
       ‘What Abdul speared, what was it?’

However, question formation in Sinama has an additional wrinkle. Certain non-nominative arguments can be questioned by placing the question word *in situ*. This is demonstrated for an AV Undergoer in example (38), and for a passive Actor in example (39). Like the resumptive pronoun strategy for creating relative clauses, these *in situ* question words do not appear to be very productive.

<sup>17</sup> Oblique arguments can be questioned by using the oblique question words *ma'ai* ‘where,’ *maingga* ‘where,’ and *ma sai* ‘whose.’ For example,

(a) Ma'ai    bay    aN-pana'            kuhapo' si      Abdul?  
       where    PST    AV-speargun      grouper PN    A.  
       ‘Where did Abdul spear a grouper?’

Example (39) is only marginally grammatical, for instance, and attempts to question the non-nominative arguments of a ditransitive verb using *in situ* question words are mostly unsuccessful. More research remains to be done on *in situ* questions before they are fully understood. The strategy described above, using headless relative clauses, remains the default for Sinama questions, and it is limited to questioning the nominative argument of a clause.

(38) Bay            aN-pana'            ai        si        Abdul?  
          PST            AV-speargun        what    PN        A.  
          ‘What did Abdul spear?’

(39) ?? Ya        kuhapo'            itu,        bay        p < in > ana'            e'        sai?<sup>18</sup>  
          REL        grouper            this        PST        <PASS>speargun        AM        who  
          ‘This grouper, it was speared by whom?’

### 3.3.5 Potential Sinama subject properties: more research needed

Control, relativization, clefting and question words provide clear evidence of the centrality of the nominative argument to Sinama syntax, and thus of its subject status. In addition to these, there are three more constructions which might also be controlled by the nominative argument in Sinama: Access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> position in the clause; coordination reduction; and quantifier float. There is some evidence that each of these might be subject properties in Sinama, but the data is either still insufficient or too ambiguous to yet make a clear determination.

#### 3.3.5.1 Access to 2<sup>nd</sup> position

Sinama has a number of words, particularly grammatical particles and question words, which occur in the clause-initial (prepredicate) position: for example, *bay* ‘PST’, *halam* ‘NEG’, and *angay* ‘why’. When one of these words occurs in a sentence, the nominative argument moves into the clause’s 2<sup>nd</sup> position, immediately following it. For instance, in example (1), repeated here as (40), the pronoun *kita* is located prior to the verb, rather than in the default postverbal position, due to the presence of the word *hal*.

(40) Hal            kita                    aN-baklay                    bang    t'bba.  
          merely        1DU.INCL            AV-travel.by.foot            when    low.tide  
          ‘When the tide is low we just travel along the shore.’

The same process can occur in transitive clauses, both AV (41) and UV (42).

(41) Bay            iya        aN-b'lli                    daing    ma        tabu'.  
          PST            3SG        AV-buy                    fish        at        market  
          ‘He bought fish at the market’

(42) (Pallesen n.d., modified from entry *subay*)  
          Angay        aku        subay        hagda = nu?<sup>19</sup>  
          why        1SG        ought        order.around = 2SG  
          ‘Why must you order me around?’

<sup>18</sup> The grammaticality of this example is unclear. Some respondents say it is incorrect; others that it is technically correct but would never be used. In either case, it’s marginal.

<sup>19</sup> In (42) there are two clause-initial particles, *angay* and *subay*; the pronoun follows the first.

Pronouns always occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> position in this manner. Noun phrases are also able too, at least sometimes, as in example (43):

- (43) Angay      danakan = nu    subay    hagda = nu?  
       why        sibling = 2SG    ought    order.around = 2SG  
       for: ‘Why must you order your sibling around?’<sup>20</sup>

The ability to occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> position might provide a subjecthood test for Sinama nominative NPs. Walton (1983:127-128) claims that it does provide such a test for Sama Pangutaran, and Gault (1999:77) says likewise for Sama Bangingih.<sup>21</sup> If this is the case for Sinama, then only a nominative pronoun (or perhaps NP) should be able to occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> position. A sentence like (44), in which the Undergoer but not the Actor of an AV clause occupies the 2<sup>nd</sup> position, is definitely ungrammatical.

- (44) \*Bay        itu        aN-b'lli        iya        ma        tabu'.  
       PST        this        AV-buy        3SG        at        market  
       for: ‘He bought this at the market.’

The question, though, is whether a grammatical version of (44) would have only *iya* ‘3sg’, the nominative pronoun, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> position; or whether it would have both *iya* and *itu* ‘this’ in the 2<sup>nd</sup> position. The former would indicate that this position is reserved for the nominative argument, which is how I understand the language to work. However, to my surprise one Sama informant accepted sentences with two arguments in the 2<sup>nd</sup> position as being grammatical. For instance, example (45) looks very ill-formed to me, but it was said to be grammatical. I did not have time to fully investigate this seeming anomaly and determine if only nominative argument is eligible to occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> position.

- (45) ??Bay        itu        aku        aN-b'lli        ma        tabu'.  
       PST        this        1SG        AV-buy        at        market  
       ‘I bought this at the market.’

### 3.3.5.2 Coordination reduction

When two conjoined clauses share a coreferential argument, some languages, such as Tagalog (Kroeger 1991:29), allow the second argument to be deleted when they are both nominative. This is evidence for the subjecthood of the nominative element. There is at least some indication that the same is true in Sinama. For instance, in (46) the nominative *ka* ‘you (singular)’ is deleted from the second clause.

- (46) aN-b'lli    ka        buwas atawa    aN-sanglag    \_\_\_    panggi'?'  
       AV-cook    2SG    rice    or        AV-roast        \_\_\_    cassava  
       ‘Are you cooking rice or roasting cassava?’

In (47), ‘cassava’ cannot be deleted from the 2<sup>nd</sup> clause, even though it is the nominative NP, because it is not the nominative NP in the first clause. If the sentence were rearranged so that the first clause were in UV, ‘cassava’ could be deleted in the second, as in example (48).

<sup>20</sup> A better translation might be ‘Why must it be your sibling whom you order around?’ In that case, this example might be better analyzed as a type of clefting or topicalization.

<sup>21</sup> Both Walton and Gault refer to this process as “pre-predicate attraction.”

- (47) \*aN-sanglag iya panggi' atawa Ø-tompe' = na \_\_\_?  
 AV-roast 3SG cassava or UV-pancake = 3SG \_\_\_  
 for: 'Will he roast cassava or make it into a pancake?'
- (48) Ø-sanglag = na panggi' itu atawa Ø-tompe' = na \_\_\_?  
 UV-roast = 3SG cassava this or UV-pancake = 3SG \_\_\_  
 'Will he roast the cassava or make it into a pancake?'

However, this test is complicated for Sinama by the high incidence of topic-controlled pro-drop in natural discourse. Gault concludes for Sama Bangingih (1999:81) that this type of argument deletion is controlled by the pragmatic topic, not by the nominative NP. More study is needed for Central Sinama to disentangle the effects of pro-drop from true conjunction reduction, to determine whether conjunction reduction provides valid evidence for the subjecthood of the nominative argument.

### 3.3.5.3 *Quantifier float*

Quantifier float is a phenomenon in a number of languages in which a modifier, typically a quantifier such as 'all' or 'many,' is able to move out of a noun phrase and take up residence elsewhere in the sentence. This is exemplified for English by the following examples, in which the modifier *all* moves from its original position in the noun phrase (49) to a position in the predicate (50).

- (49) All the students will watch the games.
- (50) The students will all watch the games.

Even though both the subject and the object in these sentences are plural, the quantifier can only be understood as modifying the subject, 'students'. It is said that the subject has 'launched' this floating quantifier.

The ability to launch floating quantifiers is a subjecthood test for some Austronesian languages. This includes Tagalog, in which only the nominative argument is able to launch floating quantifiers (Kroeger 1993:22-23, citing Schachter 1976:501). Miller (2007:138-139) explored whether this was the case in West Coast Bajau as well. However, he was unable to make a clear determination; he found hard-to-interpret anomalies in the data, and concluded "More investigation is required to see whether the ability to launch floating quantifiers is ... a property unique to subjects in WC Bajau."

I found a similar situation in Sinama. There is some evidence that only the nominative element can launch floating quantifiers, which would be a useful subjecthood test. However, it proved extremely difficult to investigate. Seemingly subtle changes in sentence structure could produce dramatic changes in meaning. Moreover, my attempts to investigate the matter were based entirely on constructed examples. It is not totally clear that quantifier float even occurs in natural Sinama, though at least some constructions were accepted as grammatical. A great deal of further study will be needed to determine if quantifier float is a useful test for subjecthood in Sinama.

## Abbreviations

ABIL	Abilitative
ADVRS	Adversative
AM	Actor Marker
AV	Actor Voice
CM	Verb Class Marker
DUR	Durative
DV	Discourse Marker
NEG	Negator
EXCL	Exclusive

INCL	Inclusive
PN	Proper Noun marker
UV	Undergoer Voice

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