

Orientation in the Spice Islands

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1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the system of orientation in the West Papuan languages of North Maluku in eastern Indonesia and in North Moluccan Malay, an Austronesian language. We will discuss this system by comparing it in several languages in North Maluku and see how these systems are related in the cultural area. This feature has been discussed for languages in this area by Bowden (1997), Shelden (1991) and Yoshida (1980).

West Papuan languages are spoken in two parts of Indonesia, North Maluku and the Bird's Head Peninsula of Indonesian New Guinea or Irian Jaya. It appears that there are two West Papuan languages spoken in West New Guinea and the rest are spoken in North Maluku. Although in Figure 1 we have shown Moi and Tehit as separate branches, it is not clear to us how these two languages are related to the rest of the West Papuan languages or to each other.

North Moluccan Malay is the form of Malay full of Ternatean loans that has been used as a contact language in eastern Indonesia for centuries. North Moluccan Malay is the source for other forms of Malay spoken in eastern Indonesia, such as Manado Malay and Irianese Malay. This can easily be demonstrated by the fact that both Manado Malay and Irianese Malay are full of Ternatean loans which they inherited from North Moluccan Malay.

2. Orientation

Some anecdotes will give a feeling of the system.

1. Once we were riding a *mikrolet*, a small vehicle with an open rear used for public transportation, with some other people. The *mikrolet* made what we would call a right hand turn and we were heading in the direction that we would call east. A mother and her young son were sitting in the *mikrolet* and the son was very close to the open end of the vehicle, not a safe position. Right after the turn, the mother told her son, "Move

SEAWARD!” That is, away from the open end. (We would have said, “Move farther in!”)

2. A friend of ours was sitting at our dining room table with his open notebook in front of him. He had written a song on the right hand page of the notebook and wanted to give us a copy. So he said, “Wait, I’ll write it on the SEAWARD page.” This was inside the house not near any windows, at night. We couldn’t see anything outside the house.

3. A Dutch linguist friend of ours, Miriam van Staden, was working on Tidore. One of her informants was talking about a picture on a wall of another room. He said that the picture was on the LANDWARD side of the SEAWARD wall of that room. (van Staden p.c.)

4. One of our neighbors was sitting at a table and in front of her on the left there was a pencil and on the right there was a pen. When asked which side the pencil was on, her answer was, “The LANDWARD side.”

In English and many other languages, we are used to talking about directions in two different ways, one relative and one absolute. The relative system is relative to oneself or something that is being talking about - left and right, in front of and behind, etc. The absolute system is north, south, east and west. We use these two systems for different scales of activity.

In North Moluccan languages there are words for these - left and right or north, south, east and west - but these words are used far less than the corresponding words in English. The only time we heard north and south used in Ternatean or West Makianese was for winds and the only time we have ever seen east and west used in any North Moluccan language was in a Tabaru folktale recorded by Fortgens (1928) about the king of the east and the king of the west. (Many northern Moluccan folktales appear to be of Middle Eastern or other outside origin.) The only time it seems that the word left and right get used by people in the northern Moluccas is when referring to body parts as in when describing some medical condition. Otherwise people in the northern Moluccas use a system whose basic orientations are LANDWARD, SEAWARD, UP and DOWN.

On the islands off the west coast of Halmahera, such as Ternate and Makian, from any point on the island toward the mountain is LANDWARD and from any point toward the sea is SEAWARD. Clockwise around the island is DOWN and counterclockwise is UP. (Figure 2)

On the northern arm of mainland Halmahera, UP and DOWN appear to be reversed when compared to the system on the smaller islands. When facing the sea, UP is to one's right (i.e. clockwise) and DOWN is to one's left. This is the system used in Tabaru, Galela and Ibu when spoken on Halmahera. (Figure 3)

We should make it clear here that this is not language dependent. This is the system no matter which local language one is using. There are some differences among the various local languages concerning this system which we will discuss later, but the basic directions are the same.

In the West Papuan languages used in the northern Moluccas, the words SEAWARD and LANDWARD do not derive from words such as the words for 'sea' or 'land', or 'mountain'. They uniquely refer to those orientations. However, the words UP and DOWN for 'counterclockwise' and 'clockwise' are the same as the words for 'up' and 'down' in all of the languages concerned. This can be confusing even for native speakers.

A friend of ours named Ul has a two storey house near the market. He told the following story. His uncle came one morning to see him and asked, "Is Ul here?" The girl who answered the door said, "He is sleeping UP", and went back inside the house. His uncle left and went to Ul's father's house which is in the UP direction on the island assuming that he was sleeping there. The girl had gone upstairs to wake Ul up. This kind of ambiguity is not uncommon and is possible in any of the local languages that we studied.

3. Ternatean

Ternatean has six directionals and five locatives (see Table 1). The locatives have one gap for 'here'. A combination of a prefix and a demonstrative, *ka-nee* 'LOC-this', is used instead.

The form *ka-gee* ‘LOC-that’ is used a locative meaning ‘there’ with a meaning similar to *daka*.

Ternatean directionals function as main verbs (‘to move towards X’) or as adverbs. Verbs in Ternatean may take a subject agreement marker.

(1) Mina moisa mohida ena sofo.

mina mo- isa mo- hida ena sofo
3SG.F 3SG.F-DIR.LANDWD 3SG.F-see 3NH bear.fruit
‘‘She went landwards and saw it (the tree) bore fruit.’’

(2) Ngori totagi hoko toma butu.

ngori to- tagi hoko toma butu
1SG 1SG-go DIR.SEAWD LOC market
‘‘I went (seaward) to the market.’’

(3) Maha Iwin telefon isa.

maha iwin telefon isa
wait Iwin phone DIR.LANDWD
‘‘In a while, Iwin will call landward (Ambon to Ternate).’’

(4) Ana tutup doka kain gee romoi isa hoko.

ana tutup doka kain gee romoi isa hoko
3PL close like cloth that one DIR.LANDWD DIR.SEAWD
‘‘They closed (the entrance) with a cloth landward seaward.’’

In (4), the coffee shop is facing counterclockwise around the island. Because it is still serving food during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, the owners placed a cloth all the way across (*isa hoko* ‘landward seaward’) the entrance.

Ternatean locatives are nouns and indicate location.

(5) Mina dai.

mina dai¹
3SG.F LOC.SEAWD
‘‘She is at a seaward location.’’

(6) Meri sema dahu toma fala daka.

meri sema dahu toma fala daka

Meri exist LOC.DOWN LOC house there

“Meri is down in the house over there.”

(7) Ngori die dai sofo raim.

ngori die dai sofo raim.

1SG POSS LOC.SEA WD bear.fruit already

“Mine at the seaward location bore fruit already.”

They also indicate starting or ending points of a motion and are often used with directionals. In this case, the position of a locative determines their meaning, either ‘to’ or ‘from’. If a locative occurs before a directional, it indicates where the motion originated from and if it occurs after a directional, it indicates the endpoint of the motion².

(8) Nonau rimoi dai isa waje...

nonau rimoi dai isa waje

male one LOC.SEA WD DIR.LAND WD say

“A man from a seaward point went landward and said...”

(9) Fotagi isa dia.

fo-tag i isa dia

1PL.INCL-go DIR.LAND WD LOC.LAND WD

“We went landward to a landward position.”

As mentioned above, neither *dai* nor *hoko* are related to the Ternatean word for ‘sea’, *ngolo*. Similarly, neither *dia* nor *isa* is related to any word meaning ‘land’ *kaha*, ‘mountain’ *kie* or ‘volcano’ *duko*. However, *daku* and *ie* do mean ‘up’ in the conventional sense, and *dahu* and *tara* do mean ‘down’.

(10) Mom ie.

momi ie

get.up up

“Get up!” or “Wake up!”

(11) Fotego tara!

fo- tego tara

1PL.INCL-sit down

“Let’s sit down!”

4. West Makianese

The orientation system of West Makianese is the same as Ternatean except that it does not have a gap in the locatives (Table 1). West Makianese has *sine* ‘here’, although this may be an Austronesian loan.

(12) Tinei moi.
tV - i nei moi
1SG-go UP Makian
‘I’m going to Makian’

(13) Nií no sine!
nV- i no sine
2SG-go hither here
‘Come here!’

The following sentence was uttered when we were standing on the landward side of a house as an order to some children to go inside.

(14) Fo nao!
fo nao
DIR.SEA WD LOC.SEA WD
‘Go seaward!’

The form *nao* also occurs in a set phrase where it no longer necessarily refers to a seaward direction.

(15) Tinao to³ wom.
tV- i nao tV wom
1SG-go SEAWD LOC sand
‘I’m going to the bathroom (i.e., toilet).’

As in Ternatean UP and DOWN in West Makianese can be used both as part of the orientation system and with the more conventional meanings.

(16) Tosoi fi.
tV- soi fi
1SG-go.home UP
‘I went home (counterclockwise around the island)’

(17) osu fi
 osu fi
 stand.up UP
 “stand up; morning”

(18) ibulang osu fi
 ibulang osu fi
 tomorrow get.up UP
 “tomorrow morning”

Also locatives can be used as nominal predicates.

(19) Menga nao.
 menga nao
 3SG LOC.SEA WD
 “He/she is at a seaward location.”

5. Tidore and Ibu

Tidore and Ibu at first appear to have a different system from that of Ternatean and West Makianese in that the locatives appear to have a three-way distinction instead of a four-way distinction (Table 1). We will use Ibu as our primary example. The three locatives in Ibu are *dina* ‘LANDWARD’, *dai* ‘SEAWARD’, and *dau* ‘NOT.LANDWARD.NOT.SEAWARD’, that is, UP and DOWN. This *dau* corresponds to Ternatean *daku* and *dahu*.

However, in both Tidore and Ibu this situation is the result of phonological change. Proto-North Halmaheran /h/ and /k/ have been eliminated in this phonological position in both languages. In the case of Ibu we can see this more clearly by looking at the closely related Padisua dialect of Sahu. The locative for UP is *daʔu* (Ternatean *daku*) and for DOWN is *dau* (Ternatean *dahu*) (Visser & Voorhoeve 1987). Further research to see how this merger of “up” and “down” works in daily use would be interesting. On the other hand, the directionals retain the distinction between *ie* ‘UP’ and *uu* ‘DOWN’. For example, one would say:

(20) Noi totagi uu.
 noi to- tagi uu
 1SG 1SG-go down
 ‘I’m going DOWN.’

6. Tabaru

Tabaru basically has again the same system as Ternatean (except that UP and DOWN are apparently reversed). The main difference is that, as most Northeast Halmaheran languages, in Tabaru the directionals have developed into a set of enclitics.

(21) ?O tarnateko totagi.

?o tarnate=oko to- tagi

ART Ternate=SEAWD 1SG-go

“I’m going to Ternate.”

(22) Muna dai.

muna dai

3SG.F LOC.SEAWD

“She is at a seaward location.”

(23) Daioko ?o Gamlamoko totagi.

dai =oko ?o gamlamo =oko to-tagi

LOC.SEAWD=DIR.SEAWD NM Gamlamo=SEAWD 1SG-go

“I’m going seaward to Gamlamo.”

(24) Dakuue toboa.

daku =ie to- boa

LOC.UP=DIR.UP 1SG-come

“I came up.”

(25) Dauue toboa.

dau =ie to- boa

LOC.DOWN=DIR.UP 1SG-come

“I came from a down location to an up location.”

(26) ?Una ?o ?amerikano.

?una ?o ?amerika=ino

3SG.M NM America =hither

“He is an American.”

7. Galela (Shelden 1991)

Galela has basically the same orientation system as Ibu, Tabaru and other northern Halmaheran languages in which UP and DOWN appear to be opposite (reversed) from the Ternatean system. The characteristics of Galela are that it has cliticised forms for directionals and that locatives have a NEAR/FAR distinction. Examples below are from Shelden.

(27) wa -hoko
3SG.M-DIR.SEA WD
“He went seawards.”

(28) muna mo -doma -sa
3SG.F 3SG.F-precede-DIR.LAND WD
“She was the first to go landward.”

(29) o teo-ko ta -hoko
ART sea-DIR.SEA WD 1SG-SEA WD
“I went seaward to the sea.”

(30) no -tuuru sa -dina
2SG-follow DIR.LAND WD-LOC.FAR.LAND WD
“You follow landwards to a far location.”

(31) ma awa mo -tagi o doro -sa
the mother 3SG.F-go ART garden-DIR.LAND WARD
“The mother was walking landwards to the garden.”

8. North Moluccan Malay

North Moluccan Malay uses the same system of orientation that we find in Ternatean although it is an Austronesian language. However, it uses Malay lexical items to do this. For example, the directional ‘seaward’ is *kalao* and the locative ‘seaward’ is *dilao*. These come from the North Moluccan Malay *lao*, but are used in the same way that *hoko* and *dai* are used in Ternatean. The word *dilao* does not usually mean ‘in the sea’ as it would mean in other forms of Malay.

(32) kalao dilao
 ka -lao di-lao
 toward-sea at-sea
 “in a seaward direction”

(33) Dia dilao.
 dia di-lao
 3SG at-sea
 “He/she is at a seaward location.”

9. Larger Scale

On a larger scale or at sea the system is slightly different, landward means towards Halmahera and SEAWARD means away from Halmahera. DOWN means toward Ternate and Tidore, and UP means away from Ternate and Tidore. This system apparently extends all the way to the north coast of Indonesian New Guinea (Bowden 1997:265). If you are at Galela or Tobelo, DOWN is north along the coast and UP is south along the coast because traditionally one went to Ternate and Tidore by sea following the coast around the northern peninsula of the island rather than overland to the west coast of Halmahera to cross over. This also explains the apparent reversal of UP and DOWN in the systems of the languages of the northern part of Halmahera when compared to the systems of Ternate, Tidore and Makian.

The two most powerful Sultanates in the northern Moluccas are Ternate and Tidore. These sultanates are thought of as the base of the social order. These are also places to which tribute, in the form of goods and labor, historically flowed. Thus in the local system, these places are thought of as DOWN. However, there was always rivalry between Ternate and Tidore for dominance within the northern Moluccas and the rest of eastern Indonesia (and part of the southern Philippines). Therefore, one does not go UP or DOWN to Ternate from Tidore or to Tidore from Ternate. One always goes THERE.

Bowden’s (1997) analysis is slightly different from ours on this point. He seems to say that DOWN has acquired a special significance because, on the larger scale, it is the direction of Ternate. We believe that Ternate (and Tidore) are DOWN on the

larger scale because they were centers of political power. He also fits the scales together for Taba, an Austronesian language spoken on Makian Island, by referring to the history of Mailoa, the clockwise-most Taba-speaking village on the island. He believes that the direction of Mailoa from the other Taba-speaking villages is DOWN because it is the earliest Taba-speaking settlement on the island and thus has some special significance. Although this analysis has the advantage of linking the larger and smaller scales of the system, it is hard to see why exactly the same system works on Ternate and Tidore where there is no special significance to settlements in the clockwise direction. Therefore we do not believe that the two scales can be linked in this way.

On an even larger scale, there are basically two terms, LANDWARD and SEAWARD. LANDWARD means toward northern Moluccas and SEAWARD means away from the northern Moluccas. People have asked us:

(34) Sema igo dai?

sema igo dai

there.is coconut SEAWARD

“Are there coconuts seaward?” (ie, in America)

When a speaker of a language from one part of the northern Moluccas is in another part of the northern Moluccas, the orientation system used is the local one. Tabaru speakers in Ternate use Tabaru directionals and locatives in the same way that Ternateans use Ternatean directionals and locatives just as Ternatean speakers adjust their use of Ternatean directionals and locatives to correspond to the local usage when they are in Halmahera.

Any language used in this cultural area has these directionals and locatives regardless of the language family. On the other hand, when the language is removed from this cultural area, it loses this orientation system. This is the case of Manado Malay. Manado Malay originates from North Moluccan Malay that was transplanted to North Sulawesi by the beginning of the last century. Today, however, if one says *Dia di lao* in Manado,

it means ‘He is in the sea’, not ‘He is at a seaward position on land’.

Where then is the semantic system of orientation in North Moluccan languages? The orientation system of the northern Moluccas is inscribed not in the grammar of the languages but in the cultural and political geography of the region. This semantic system is independent of the individual languages and will effect any language used within this cultural region.

Notes

1. Nouns in North Moluccan languages can be used as predicates.

(a) Ena nee fala sung.

ena nee fala sung

3NH this house new

“This is a new house.”

2. This is a general principle in the language. For example,

(b) Toma butu kara okodiho.

toma butu kara o- kodiho

LOC market just 3SG.M-go.home

“He just went home from the market.”

(c) Kara okodiho toma butu.

kara o- kodiho toma butu

just 3SG-go.home LOC market

“He just went home to the market.”

(d) Toma butu toisa toma Tabahawa.

toma butu to- isa toma tabahawa

LOC market 1SG-DIR.LANDWD LOC Tabahawa

“I went landwards from the market to Tabahawa.”

(e) Tagi kasaa?

tagi ka- saa

go LOC-where

Where are you going?

(f) Kasaa ino?

ka- saa ino

LOC-where hither

Where are you coming from?

3. In West Makianese the preposition *tV* is the general preposition similar to the Ternatean preposition *toma*. However it is never used to mean from. For example, the way you would say “I came from Makian” would be,

(g) Tawá moi e tií no omo.

tV- wa moi e tV- i no omo
 1SG-stay Makian then 1SG-go hither already
 ‘I came from Makian.’

Which literally means, “I stayed at Makian then I came here.” A common question (actually a greeting) is:

(h) Nawá sito e níí no?

nV- wa sito e nV- i no
 2SG-stay where then 2SG go here
 “Where are you coming from?”

or

(i) Nawá sito?

nV- wa sito
 2SG-stay here
 “From where?”

(j) Tawá nao e tií ta tabahawa.

tV- wa nao e tV- i tV tabahawa
 1SG-stay SEAWD then 1SG-go PREP Tabahawa
 “I came from the seaward side to Tabahawa.”

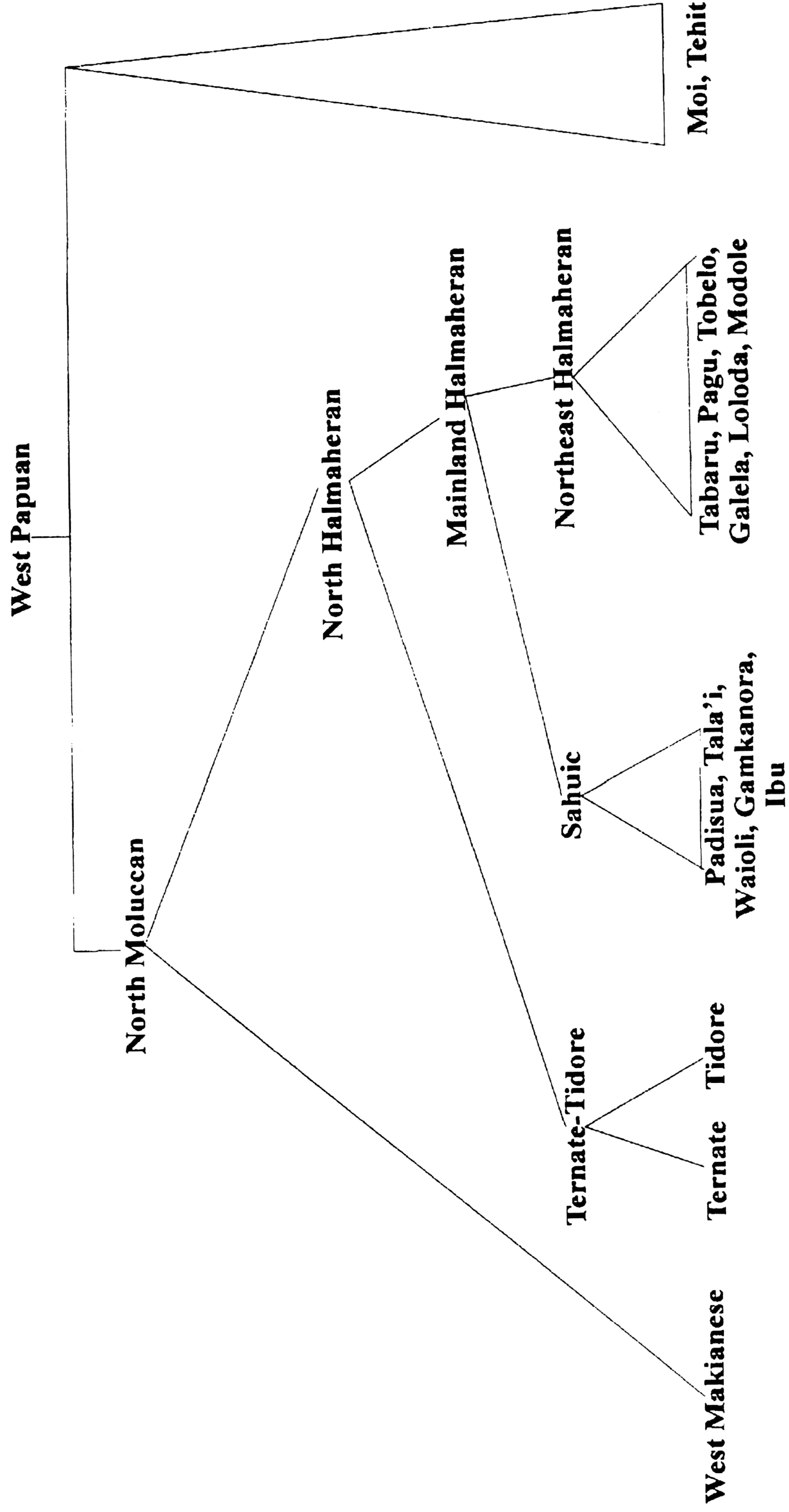


Figure 1 : West Papuan Languages

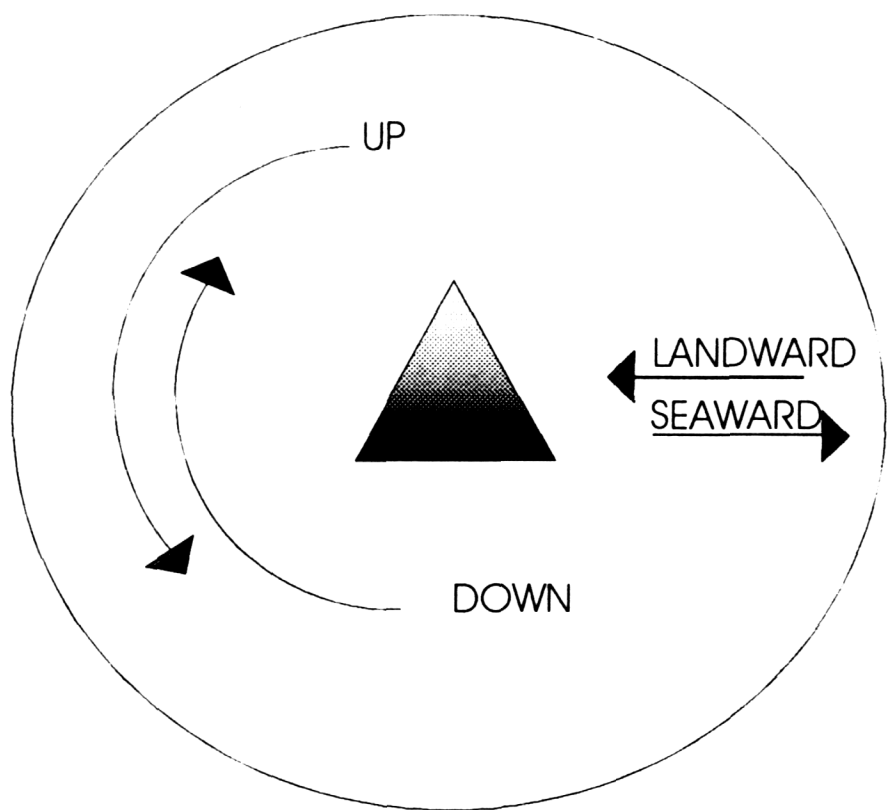


Figure 2: Orientation System on Ternate, Tidore and Makian

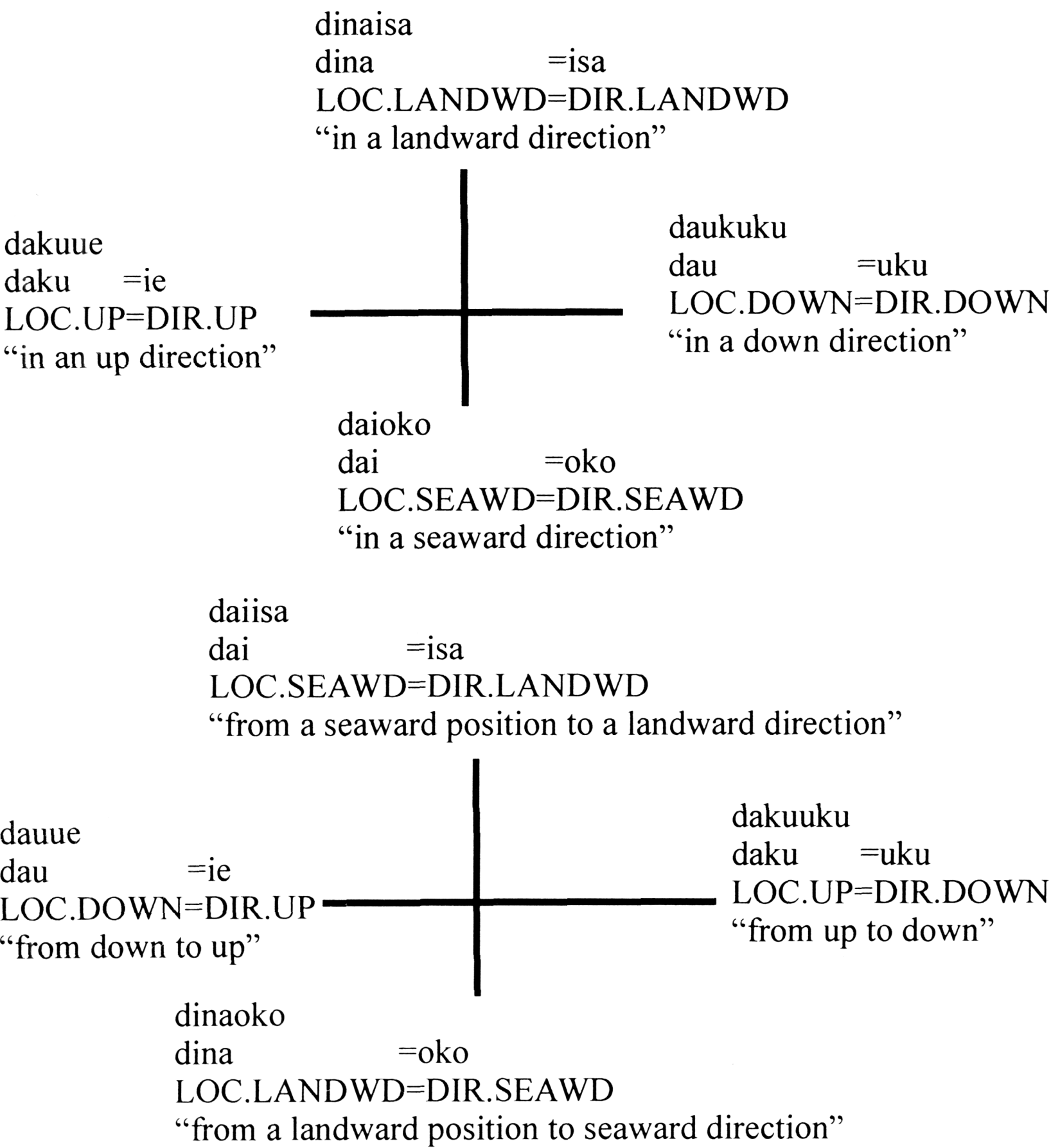


Figure 3: Tabaru Orientation

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