

Referring to space in Balinese and Rongga: its linguistic and cultural significance*

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1 Introduction

This paper explores differences and similarities of spatial systems in Balinese (around 3 million speakers, Central Malayo-Polynesian) and Rongga (central Flores, 4000 speakers, Central Malayo-Polynesian). Spatial expressions in the languages are highly significant linguistically and culturally (high frequency of use and related belief systems regarding sacred/good/bad locations). Certain spatial expressions in both languages were originally geo-centric, based on the local landscapes. They are therefore in a sense ‘relative’. However, they have developed into a system which is ‘absolute’ to a certain extent. The Balinese spatial system is more elaborated than the Rongga system in terms of the available distinctions (main cardinal and inter-cardinal) and the morphology of the spatial expressions. Their morphosyntactic differences are mainly due to the typological difference between the two languages (agglutinating vs. isolating).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 outlines semantic and cultural aspects of the two systems. The intricacies of the underlying systems and their use will be contrasted and discussed in terms of the typology of spatial systems, ‘absolute’, ‘relative’ and ‘intrinsic’ as outlined in Levinson (2003). The linguistic and cultural significance of the systems in both languages are also outlined in this section. Section 3 briefly discusses morphosyntactic features of the expressions. Section 4 provides the conclusion and pointers for future research.

2 Semantic and cultural aspects

2.1 *Terms for cardinal points*

Both Balinese and Rongga appear to have no native terms for cardinal directions. For example, the terms for ‘north’ and ‘south’ in Balinese came from nominals meaning ‘towards the mountain’ or ‘towards the sea’ respectively. (This is common in Austronesian languages, see §4) The term *lau* in Rongga meaning ‘south’ also

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clearly originated from the nominal meaning ‘sea’. The history of other cardinal terms both in Balinese and Rongga is less clear at the moment.

However, there is a clear difference between Balinese and Rongga. Balinese has developed a more elaborate system than Rongga as shown by the Figures 1 and 2. Balinese has terms for both cardinal and inter-cardinal points as shown in Figure 1. English and Indonesian terms are therefore translatable into Balinese. Rongga, in contrast, completely lacks terms for intercardinal points, and does not have ‘unique’ terms for cardinal points, except for *mena* ‘east’. A very rough translation of cardinal terms into Rongga is shown in Figure 2.¹ It should be noted that *zhale* could mean ‘west’ or ‘south’. *Zheta* actually means ‘up’ but it could be used to mean ‘north’ and ‘south’, depending on context.²

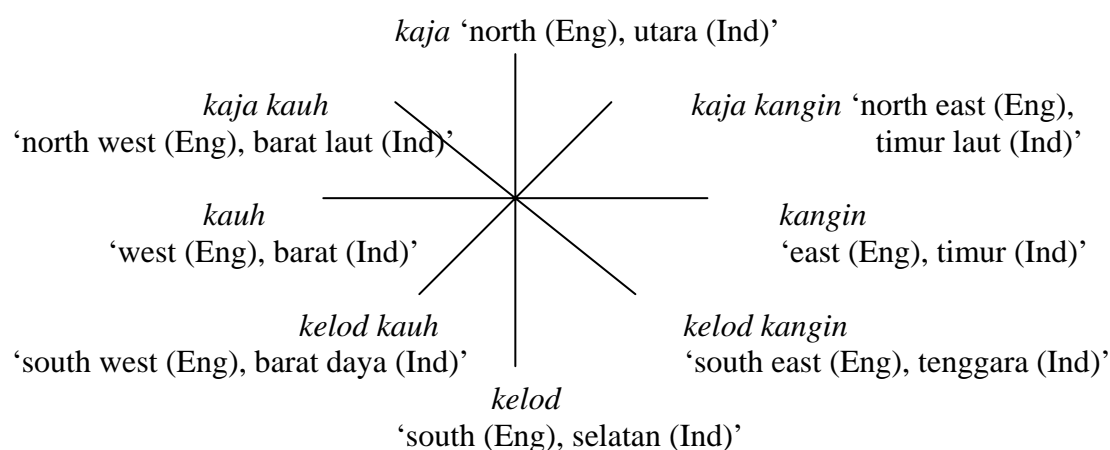


Figure 1

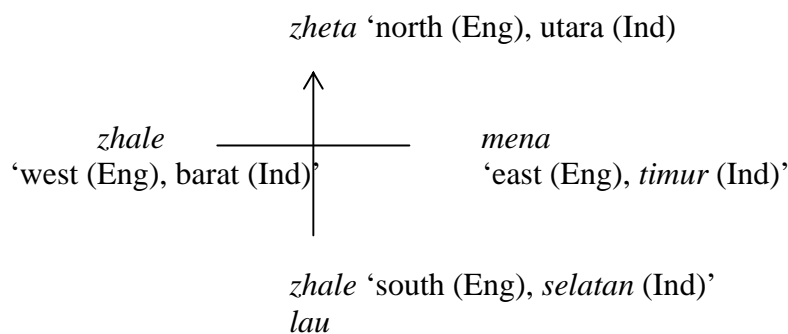


Figure 2

¹ The orthography *zh* represents the approximant alveolar [ɹ] sound. A complete description of this sound in contrast to the trill [r] sound in the sound system of Rongga is given in (Arka 2004).

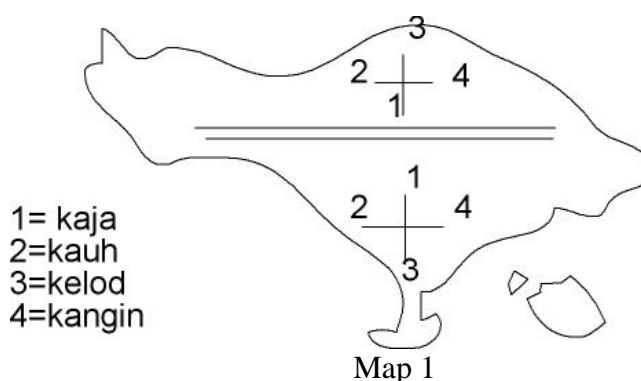
² While all of the spatial terms in Rongga have an initial *zh*, there is no evidence at least in contemporary Rongga that *zh* is a morpheme. It could have been a remnant consonant of a ‘captured’ locative preposition, possibly **d* of **di* in Proto Flores (cf. Fernandes 1996)/Proto Central Malayo Polynesian (Blust 1993). However, this is just a speculation, and further research is needed.

2.2 The use of cardinal terms in Balinese and Rongga

2.2.1 Absolute or relative?

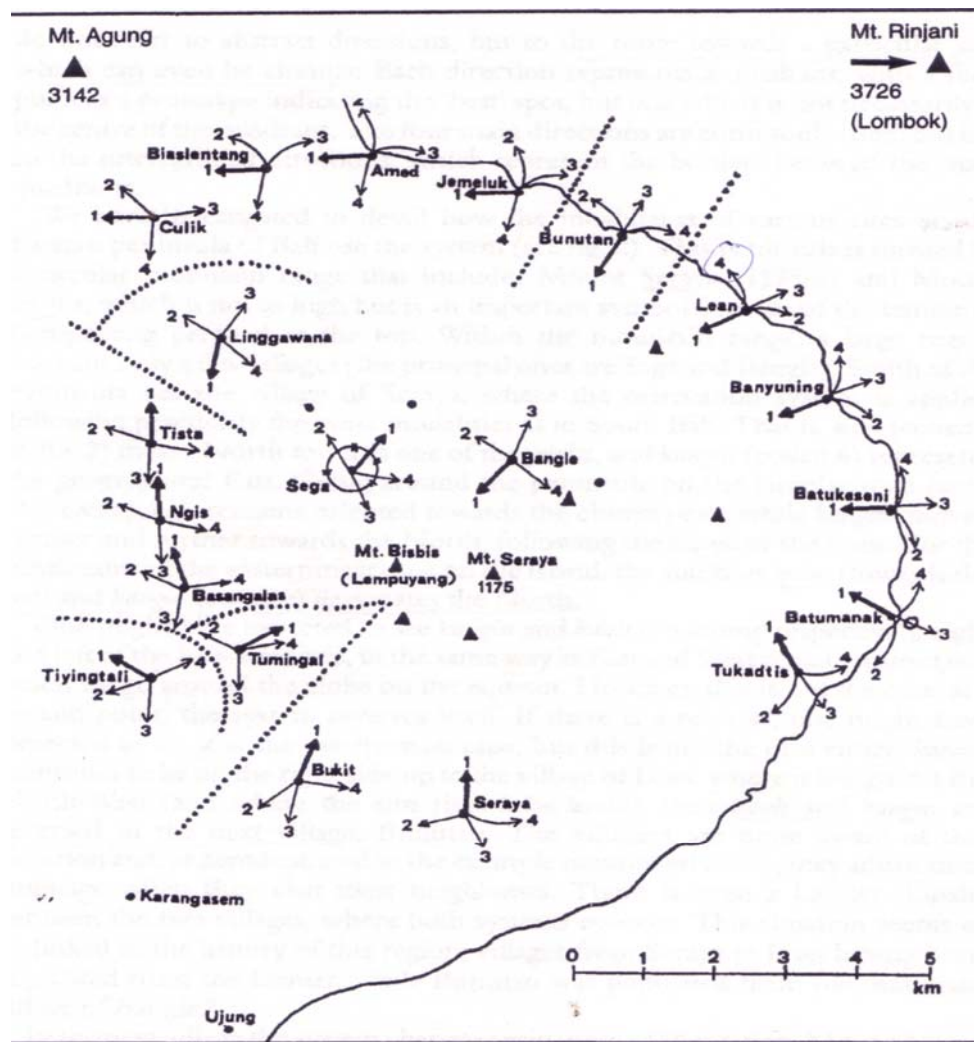
There are three kinds of spatial orientation: egocentric, intrinsic, and absolute (Levinson 2003). The egocentric term, e.g. *right* as in *on the right* (English) or *kanan*, as in *di sebelah kanan/kiri* (Indonesian), refers to a space relative to the viewpoint of the speaker (or the addressee). When the speaker changes his/her viewpoint, the spatial reference also changes. The intrinsic term, like the egocentric one, is also relative. It refers to a space or position relative to an object (not the speaker), and is determined by inherent features of the object independently of the speaker. This is exemplified by *in the front of X* (Eng)/*di depan X* (Ind). The absolute term refers to a space independent of the speaker and the position of other object. Spatial cardinal terms such as the English *north/south* or Indonesian *utara/selatan* are absolute.

However, the corresponding terms in Balinese *kaja/kelod* are partly absolute and partly relative. This is because the spatial system in Balinese is based on the landscape of Bali: the reference is the mountainous range across central Bali running from the west to the east. As a result, Bali is split two halves and there are two broad geo-centrally based spatial systems. (There are other marginal systems in the eastern tip of Bali, see below.) The two are shown in Map 1: they crucially differ in the reference of *kaja* and *kelod* (abbreviated as 1 and 3 respectively, following Wassmann and Dasen 1998). That is, *kaja* and *kelod* are, in a sense, relative depending on the position of the speaker/addressee with respect to the central mountains. *Kaja* literally or originally means ‘towards the mountain’ and *kelod* means ‘towards the sea’. Thus, for the people in the southern part of Bali *kaja* means ‘north’ and *kelod* means ‘south’, but for the people in the northern part of Bali the reverse holds. However, these terms could have absolute reference from the perspective of abstract spatial meaning in the mind of the native speaker. Native speakers in the lowland in southern part of Bali for example no longer acquire *kaja* and *kelod* in their original meanings of ‘towards the mountain and the sea’. Therefore, the referential coordinates for them are fixed, even when they move to northern part of Bali, or outside Bali. In this sense, then *kaja/kelod* are used in exactly the same way as Indonesian *utara* or English *north*.



The spatial systems in the areas in eastern tip of Bali are not uniform but strongly local. Research by Wassmann and Dasen (1998) has revealed a variety of situations shown in Map 2. These areas are peppered with small mountains. The reference of *kaja* is therefore not constant from one village to another, depending on the closest or visible focal points of mountains or hills. Likewise, the half-circular coastlines show

the variable positions of the sea. Moving from one village to another along the coastline anticlockwise, the position of the sea shifts from the south, to the east, and then to the north. Thus, *kelod* in the village of Seraya means ‘south’ as in it usually does in southern Bali, but it means ‘east’ in Batukesani village, and its exact reference could be north-east or north in the other villages to the north.



Map 2 Wassmann and Dasen (1998)

Like the Balinese system, the spatial system in Rongga appears to be partly geocentrally based, where the topography of the land is crucial. In addition to relative elevation of positions on land (up vs. down), relative distance (far vs. close) is also part of the meaning of spatial terms in Rongga. Excluding *lau* ‘seawards/south’ and *mena* ‘east’, we can represent the system in Figure 3. (The two are not necessarily activated at the same time.) It will be clear now that the term *zheta* does not actually mean ‘north’ as glossed in Figure 2, even though in an actual context it could refer to ‘north’. And indeed it often means ‘north’ as the mountains are in west-central Manggarai, i.e. north of Rongga territories.

The actual meaning of *zhale* is ‘down there at/in low(er) positions’. It is not surprising that it could mean ‘south’, as the lower land and the coast are in the southern part of the Rongga territory. It gets the meaning of ‘west’ as it is associated

with the sunset, contrasted with *mena* ‘east, which literally means ‘beginning of the day, sunrise’. Recall that the other term for ‘south’ is *lau*, literally means ‘sea(wards)’ (cf. the Balinese root *lod* of *kelod* ‘seawards’). In short, like Balinese spatial terms in Rongga originated from terms associated with locative topographical nominals such as ‘up (in or over the mountain)’ and ‘down there seawards’.

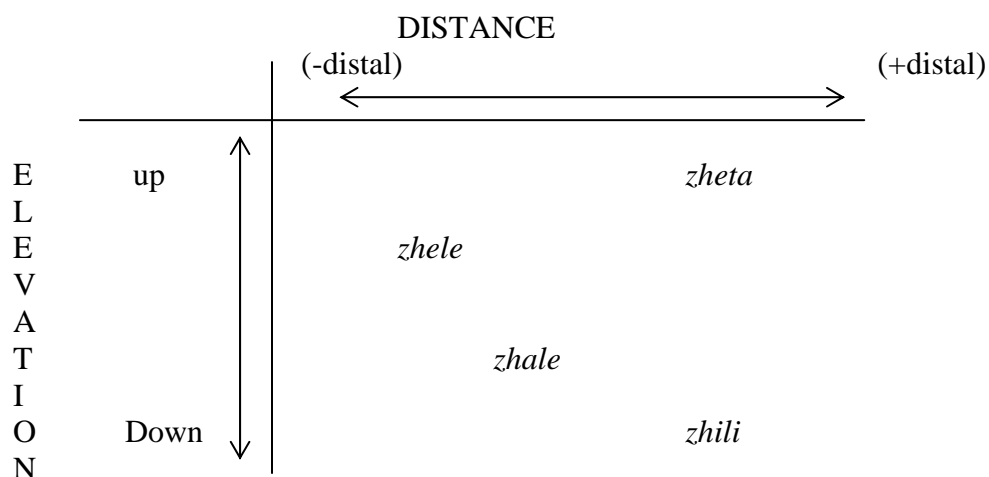


Figure 3

The spatial terms in Rongga are (almost) all relative, depending on the position of the speaker; hence ego-centric. They are therefore like deictics. While *mena* is translatable into *east* (English) or *timur* (Indonesian), it is not used in an absolute way. It is perhaps more correctly translated into ‘east of me, the speaker’. Likewise, *zheta* is ‘in/at a position higher up than me, or north of me’. In example (1) below, the speaker was situated in Wae Lengga a place of west of Bajawa, and in (2) the speaker was in Tanarata, south of Ruteng.

- (1) *One wula Agustus 1955, ja'o la'a sekolah mena Bajawa*
in month August 1955 I go School east Bajawa
‘In August 1995, I went to school in Bajawa’ (AG 019)

- (2) *Bulan Oktober 1958 ja'o pili ne raja tau tendu*
Month October 1958 I elect by king make follow

Kursus Pamong Praja wula zhua, latih zheta Ruteng.
Course Public service month two training in Ruteng.

‘In October 1958, I was appointed by the king to attend a civil service training course for two months in Ruteng.’ (AG 037)

2.2.2 Significance of spatial descriptors

2.2.2.1 Linguistic significance

Rongga makes extensive use of the spatial descriptors discussed in this paper. The following statistics show that, out of 9391 tokens in 28 Rongga texts investigated,

spatial words constitute a total of 6.19 %. That is, about 1 in every 16 words in Rongga texts is a spatial word.

Balinese, in contrast, shows high uses of generic location/directional prepositions *ring*, *di*, and *ka* at least in the texts investigated in the present study as shown in Table 2. Balinese Spatial descriptor such as *kauh/dauh* ‘(to) west’ in Balinese are used only in specific circumstances where misunderstanding could arise, otherwise general directional or locational terms would be used. Thus, while in Rongga one would say *zhale Labuan Bajo* ‘(lit.) in Labuan Bajo in the west down there’, in Balinese (also in Indonesian and English) one would simply say *ring/di Labuan Bajo*, where the meanings of ‘west and/or down’ needs not be explicitly expressed.

Table 1. Frequency of use of different spatial terms in Rongga
(from a total of 9391 tokens in 28 texts)

SPATIAL TERMS	NO. OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
<i>Zhili</i>	136	1.44 %
<i>Zhale</i>	124	1.32%
<i>Zheta</i>	119	1.27 %
<i>Zhele</i>	111	118 %
<i>Lau</i>	10	0.11%
<i>Wewo</i>	32	0.34%
<i>Wena</i>	49	0.52%
TOTAL	581	6.19%

Table 2. Frequency of use of different spatial/locational terms in Balinese
(from a total of 21987 tokens, 12 texts)

SPATIAL TERMS	NO. OF TOKENS	PERCENTAGE
<i>ring</i> ‘at/in/on’ (h.r)	247	1,12%
<i>di</i> ‘at/in/on’	219	0,99
<i>ka</i> (or <i>ke</i>) ‘to’	140	0,63
<i>kauh</i> ‘(to)west’	5	0,02
<i>samping</i> ‘beside’	5	0,02
<i>delod</i> ‘(in)south’	4	0,01
<i>beten</i> ‘under’	4	0,018
<i>dangin</i> ‘(in)east’	3	0,013
<i>kangin</i> ‘(to)east’	2	0,009
<i>dauh</i> ‘(in)west’	1	0,004
<i>kelod</i> ‘(to)south’	1	0,004
<i>kaja</i> ‘(to)north’	-	-
TOTAL	631	2.838

The significance of spatial terms in Balinese is evident from the following facts. They are among the first things that children are supposed to acquire in their early childhood. This is important as one should have a good sense of spatial orientation when talking in Balinese. Otherwise, one could have a problem in extended talk because all of horizontal spatial orientations and positions make use of cardinal or

intercardinal descriptors in Balinese. When one comes to a new place, if in doubt, the first question to ask is which one is ‘north’ or ‘south’. In everyday life, the greetings are literally asking directions, rather than weather or health as in the English culture. The following are examples of common greetings in Balinese if two people meet:

- (3) A: *Nyoman k-ija?*
 Name to-where
 ‘Nyoman, where (are you going) to?’
- B: *Ngajanan /*kaja*
 N-kaja-an
 AV-north-LOC
 ‘(I’m going) toward the north’

While spatial expressions are extensively used in Rongga, they are not something that is often asked to other people when one comes to a new place. Rongga is therefore different from Balinese in this respect. The difference is due to the fact that spatial expressions in Rongga are mainly based on relative elevation of land (up vs. down), which is always evident to the speaker.

Spatial expressions are also often part of the greetings, hence they are like Balinese.

2.2.2.2 Cultural significance

Spatial orientations in the two languages, especially in Balinese, are highly significant. The significance of spatial orientations in Balinese culture is rooted in the Hinduism-based belief system where mountains (hence *kaja* ‘north’, also *kangin* ‘east’), and therefore elevated/higher places, are sacred places, the dwellings of gods, whereas the lower places (which are ‘south’ or ‘west’ in the southern part of Bali), are non sacred places. This spatially related concept underlies many aspects of Balinese cultural practice, regarding what is a proper or correct position. This includes, among others, an orientation in sleeping where someone’s head must be on the north or east side of the room/bed and the layout of the buildings within a house compound, where the family temple must be on an elevated space at the north-east corner of the compound.

Spatial orientations in Rongga, especially up vs down (mountain vs river) opposition, are also culturally significant. The spirit of the dead person is believed to go to the mountain of Mbengan, a mountain located in the north of the Rongga territory. The direction of the head when someone sleeps or when a corpse is buried must be towards the mountain, and the feet must be directed to the location of the closest river. God (*Mori*) is believed to be around everywhere, not necessarily at the (top of the) mountain. Good and evil spirits could be the mountains as well as in the rivers. However, the location for the disposal of bad things is in the river. For example, the ritual *nggete maghi* (li. *cut palm*) is performed when there is a person killed due to certain accident such as falling off from a tree. The ritual must be performed in the river, around midnight. All the materials including the meat of the sacrificed black chicken must be disposed to the river and cannot be eaten or taken home.

3 The (morpho)syntax of the spatial expressions in the two languages

The morphosyntactic differences and similarities of the spatial expressions in Balinese and Rongga are summarized in Table 2. The differences are mainly due to the difference in language types, agglutinative (Balinese) and isolating (Rongga).

Table 2. Balinese and Rongga morphosyntax compared

	Balinese	Rongga	Notes
Language type:	Agglutinative	Highly isolating	Quite different
Morphosyntax (category and internal structure):	Clear: with morphology -morphologically complex (incorporated prepositions) -Spatial/ Relational nominals -verbal	Unclear: no morphology Syntactic distributions like ‘nominals’, ‘prepositions’, ‘adjectives’, etc.	Quite different
Syntax (phrasal structure and predication):	NP PP ADV(erbial) Argument-taking predicates	Nominal phrases, Adverbial phrases Predicate phrases	Similar: -prepositions rather than postpositions -argument-taking predicates

In terms of grammatical category and internal structure, Balinese spatial expressions are quite different from their Rongga counterparts. Balinese spatial forms are typically polymorphemic whereas Rongga terms are monomorphemic.

Spatial forms which are generally regarded as monomorphemic in Balinese such as *kauh* appear to contain an incorporated preposition, *k-* (<*ka*) ‘to’. Evidence for this comes from pairs showing contrast, e.g. the *k-* and *d-* contrast in *kauh* ‘west(wards)’, *dauh* ‘(in the) west’.

The spatial expressions could take a prefix and/or suffix. The affixation may derive a verb, e.g. *bed(e)lod* (be-d-(e)lod) or *mad(e)lod* (<*ma-d-(e)lod*) ‘be over there, south of the speaker’, *ngajanan* (<*N-k-aja-an* ‘AV-to-north-LOC) ‘move northwards’.

The grammatical category of Balinese spatial forms is clear. The evidence comes from the kind of affix that the spatial forms can take. In the following example (*d)aja* ‘north’ is treated in the same way as the noun *lima* ‘hand’ as it can take the ligature *-n* and possessor *cang* and determiner *-e*.

- (4) a. *lima-n* *cang-e* b. *daja-n* *cang-e*
 hand-LIG 1-DEF north-LIG 1-DEF
 ‘my hand’ ‘north of my position’

As part of nominal structure, syntactically the spatial form can appear as the head of an NP (4), a relational nominal (5), object of a preposition (6), and an adverbial nominal in a clause (7).

- (5) *di dauh umah cang-e* (**di dauh*)
 LOC west house 1-DEF
 ‘in a location west of my house’
- (6) a. *uli kauh* ‘from (the?) west’
 b. *uli kaja* ‘from (the?) north’
- (7) *Celeng-e macelep kelod*
 pig-DEF ma-enter south
 ‘The pig entered south, e.g. into the bush’

As an argument taking predicate, a spatial form is not necessarily a verb as in (8b). It can be a nominal as in (8a).

- (8) a. *Nto kaja*
 that north
 ‘that’s north’
- b. *Nyoman ngajan-an*
 name AV.north-LOC
 ‘Nyoman is going northwards’

Rongga is a highly isolating language. Spatial forms such as *zheta* and *zhili* are monomorphemic. There is no morphological evidence for grammatical categories such as nouns and verbs. Nevertheless, the spatial forms can act like i) a locative nominal, e.g. taking a determiner as in *zhale ndau* ‘lit. there that’, ii) a preposition, e.g. taking a noun as in *zheta Ruteng*, iii) an adjective, e.g. taking an intensifier as in *mbai zheta* ‘too high up’. In a clause, a spatial unit can act as an adverbial (9), or as an argument-taking predicate as in (10).

- (9) *Ndi'i zhale mai Leko Lembho, ja'o rau uma lau*
 reside down come name 1SG cut.wood dry.garden to

mai Rana Rinda ndia.
 come name this
 ‘Settling down in Leko Lembo, I opened a (new) garden in Rana Rinda’
- (10) *Ata sederhana mbiwa mbai zheta mbiwa dano mbai zhale*
 person simple not too up not also too low

landi ata menengah ndau ngaja Melaju.
 but person middle that speak malay

4 Final remarks and further research

This paper compares the spatial systems in Balinese and Rongga. The discussions are limited on the terms related the main cardinal points. Both languages have no native terms for the cardinal points. The spatial terms developed out of geographical terms meanings such as ‘sea-wards’. The spatial systems found in Balinese and Rongga are in fact not unique. While languages cross-linguistically do not exactly

have the same systems (Levinson 2003), the spatial expressions are generally based on the following systems (Florey and Kelly 2002):

- i. cardinal edges (Levinson 1992) (generally absolute);
- ii. celestial reference points as marked by the sun (Diamond 1993) (generally absolute);
- iii. wind direction (Bowden 1992) (generally absolute);
- iv. monsoons (Blust 1997);
- v. local fixed landmarks/places/topography, e.g. ‘sea’, ‘mountain’, and ‘river’ (Adelaar 1997; Florey and Kelly 2002; Soriente 2006) (generally absolute);
- vi. spatial frames (of reference) which could be:
 - a. intrinsic (with particular shapes of object of reference); or,
 - b. relative (with respect to the speaker and/or hearer), including deixis (Levinson 2003).

Spatial expressions such as *kaja* ‘north’ in Balinese and *zheta* ‘in/up there (distal)’ Rongga belong to category (v). Their uses are not always absolute, as discussed earlier in this paper. It should be noted that both Balinese and Rongga also have other spatial expressions that belong to category (vi), e.g. *arep* ‘front’ (Balinese) and *olo* ‘front’ (Rongga). They generally appear with other type of spatial expressions, e.g. in Balinese it appears with the generic preposition *ring* as in *ring arep* ‘at/in front of’ and in Rongga it appears with the relative spatial term *zhele* as in *zhele olo* ‘up front there’. Unlike Balinese, Rongga is not well documented yet. A full comparison of spatial expressions in Balinese and Rongga requires further research.

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