

PSEUDO NOUN INCORPORATION IN BATAK TOBA: A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study investigates the occurrence of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in Batak Toba, a phenomenon not previously been analyzed within incorporation frameworks. PNI has been widely described in languages such as Niuean, Sakha, Hindi, and Tamil. The researchers realize that former studies have not examined PNI in Batak Toba. Drawing on two theoretical accounts by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014), this research analyzes morphosyntactic properties such as verb–noun adjacency, reduced nominal structure, and detransitivization. Using a qualitative descriptive approach based on corpus data and native-speaker judgments, the study identifies several PNI characteristics in Batak Toba, including adjacency, non-specific interpretation, restricted modification, and word-order variation. The findings demonstrate that PNI in Batak Toba aligns with cross-linguistic patterns while also exhibiting language-specific constraints, particularly in the absence of overt case marking. The present study fills and investigates the gap in which PNI in Batak Toba is possibly materialized. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to systematically describe PNI as it occurs naturally. The data were obtained from naturalistic corpus data and relevant literatures. It is done to ensure empirical validity and grammatical reliability. The findings indicate that Batak Toba displays several characteristics of PNI, including adjacency and verb detransitivization. Furthermore, modified nominals, conjoined nominals, and changes in word order are also observed. Overall, this study offers the first systematic description of PNI in Batak Toba and contributes to broader typological and theoretical discussions of pseudo incorporation.

Keywords: *adjacency; Austronesian language; Batak Toba; detransitivization; pseudo noun incorporation; syntactic structure*

1. Introduction

In morphosyntax, incorporation occurs when a noun or other element is systematically inserted into a verb to form a single word, altering argument structure and meaning (Mithun, 1984; Baker, 1986). More broadly, it refers to any type of complex word formation that involves placing a root into a different word structure, where the inserted root is expected to modify that structure (Shluinsky, 2022). Furthermore, it also refers to a

specific type of compounding process in which complex verbs are derived from other verbs by inserting a nominal (noun) element into their structure. This type of incorporation is typically associated with polysynthetic languages, although several instances have also been found in languages with different structural types and from various regions (Olthof, 2020).

Generally, there are three classifications of incorporation found across languages: verb incorporation (Winaya, 2016; Simanjuntak & Mulyadi, 2019), prepositional incorporation (Mulyadi, 1997; Peck & Lin, 2019), and noun incorporation (Johns, 2017). Additionally, Gerdtz (2017) also states that another type of it is the position is still unclear, namely pronoun incorporation. In fact, many studies on incorporation and affixation processes have been conducted, yielding numerous findings. However, no single study can fully explain the range of this phenomena across different languages, particularly in terms of their morphosyntactic behavior and functional distribution. This is because each language exhibits unique structural characteristics that influence how incorporation operates within its grammatical system. Consequently, further investigation is needed to explore how incorporation manifests in specific languages and to determine whether existing typological classifications adequately account for the patterns found in those languages. Such studies are important not only for enriching the typological understanding of incorporation but also for revealing how morphosyntactic processes interact with language-specific grammatical structure.

Research on in Batak Toba has grown moderately in recent years (Simaremare & Mulyadi, 2025). Previous studies have examined incorporation across different languages, such as *Types of Incorporation of Verb Deletion in Balinese* (Winaya, 2016), *Incorporation with the implementation of verbs in Aceh* (Maulana & Mulyadi, 2019) and *Prepositional Incorporation in Batak Toba Language* (Simaremare & Mulyadi, 2025). One notable example is the study by Simanjuntak and Mulyadi (2019) on Batak Toba, which explores incorporation involving verb deletion. Their findings indicate that shifts in verb position may result in verb deletion. However, the mechanisms responsible for this process have not been clearly explained. Despite extensive research on incorporation, the status of pseudo noun incorporation in Austronesian languages remains underexplored, particularly in languages lacking overt case marking such as Batak Toba.

This study is novel in its focus on Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in Batak Toba, a phenomenon not systematically analyzed before. Unlike prior studies that discuss incorporation in broader typological contexts, this research identifies and analyzes the analyzed beststructural patterns, grammatical behavior, and syntactic functions of PNI in Batak Toba. This investigation contributes new insights into incorporation typology and highlights the unique morphosyntactic features of Batak Toba within the broader Austronesian linguistic landscape.

Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) is a phenomenon closely related to noun incorporation and has been extensively discussed within the broader literature on incorporation (Mithun, 1984; Massam, 2001; Dayal, 2011). The concept was first introduced by Mithun (1984), who investigated noun incorporation across a wide range of languages. Her study revealed that, in certain constructions, nouns do not undergo complete morphological fusion with verbs; nevertheless, they form a unified semantic unit with the predicate. Expanding on this view, Borik and Gehrke (2015) argue that PNI involves bare nominals that combine with verbs to create a single complex predicate. Although these

nominals are interpreted as incorporated at the semantic level, they remain syntactically independent constituents (Mithun & Corbett, 2011). Furthermore, Baker (2014) classifies PNI as a subtype of noun incorporation in which the incorporated element is phrasal rather than a lexical head. He contends that PNI is best analyzed as a process of complex predicate formation resulting from head movement, whereby the head noun of an object Noun Phrase (NP) incorporates into the verb.

Against this theoretical background, the present study investigates the phenomenon of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in the Batak Toba language. Given the linguistic complexity and distinctive morphosyntactic characteristics of Batak Toba, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the morphosyntactic properties of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba?
2. How is Pseudo Noun Incorporation licensed and realized in the Batak Toba language?

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are twofold: (1) to identify and analyze the morphosyntactic properties of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba, and (2) to investigate the mechanisms through which Pseudo Noun Incorporation is licensed and realized in the language.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Incorporation

The term Incorporation in linguistics originally referred to classifications of languages into analytic, syntactic, fusional, and incorporative types (Keraf, 1990 p. 62), or into isolating, agglutinating, (in)flexional, and polysynthetic types (Spencer, 1993:38). Over time, the concept of incorporation expanded into a structural notion referring to a construction in which an argument becomes integrated into the verb, leading to what is known as *noun incorporation*, *object incorporation*, or simply *incorporation*. Moreover, Baker (1988) explains that grammatical-function changing typically involves shifting a lexical category from its original syntactic position to a new one, where one lexical item becomes embedded within another through a particular morpheme. This incorporation process alters the governing relationship between a predicate and its argument. Furthermore, the Toba Batak language also exhibits processes of affixation and lexical incorporation.

Example:

- (1a) *Mangalang debban si Butet*
Mang-alang **debban* si Butet
ACT- eat betel ART Butet
'Butet eats Betel'

Example (1a) illustrates an active verbal construction in Toba Batak in which the verb is followed by a nominal object and then the subject. The structure follows the typical Verb–Object–Subject (VOS) word order found in Toba Batak. In contrast with (1b) The construction *mang-alang debban* shows properties commonly associated with Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI). The object *debban* appears immediately after the verb without a determiner and receives a non-specific interpretation.

(1b) *Mardebban si Butet*

Mar-*debban* si Butet
 V -betel ART Butet
 'Butet eats betel'

before the affix *mar* is added, *debban* is Noun, but after the affixation *mar+debban* it becomes Verb. **Debban* is piper betel which culturally eaten by Batak Toba and Karonese.

2.2 Types of Incorporation

There are several types of incorporation studied by different linguists worldwide. However, some linguists have different terms on few types of incorporation. For instance, while Katamba (1993) emphasizes morphological incorporation, Baker (1988) and Massam (2001) highlight syntactic mechanism, showing complementary perspectives. However, he identifies several types of structures that function as or resemble incorporation. These fall under the broader domain of lexical morphology, where elements are combined into a single morphological unit. From Katamba's morphological framework, incorporation can be understood as involving Noun Incorporation (NI), Lexical Compounding Incorporation, Affixal/Derivational Incorporation and Zero-Derivation (Conversion) Incorporation.

In addition, the frameworks proposed by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014) provide important theoretical foundations for analyzing noun incorporation, particularly in languages where incorporation interacts with verb-initial syntax and morphological case systems. However, their explanatory adequacy for Batak Toba appears to be only partial. Baker's approach, which treats incorporation as a syntactic operation in which a nominal head moves to attach to the verb, also captures certain aspects of the Batak Toba data, especially the formation of complex predicates. However, Baker's model is largely based on languages with robust morphological case systems (e.g., Sakha). Batak Toba, by contrast, lacks overt morphological case marking on nouns. As a result, argument licensing relies more heavily on positional or adjacency-based mechanisms rather than morphological case. This typological difference creates what may be described as a single-adjacency constraint in Batak Toba: only one non-subject argument can occupy the structurally licensed position adjacent to the verb. Consequently, true ditransitive structures with two bare DP objects are generally disfavored, and the second argument must instead be expressed through an oblique phrase (e.g., introduced by *tu* "to").

In addition, Massam, working primarily on Niuean, analyzes verb-initial word order—particularly VSO/VOS alternations—through the syntactic movement of the VP or predicate rather than the movement of DP subjects. These characteristics are also found in Batak Toba language which is typically verb-initial (VOS) but can also surface as SVO, with variation influenced by information structure and discourse factors. However, the unique voice system in Batak Toba and specific licensing requirements both challenge and extend these models. The primary distinction lies in what moves and why. In Niuean, movement is often driven by the "reduced" status of the object, whereas in Batak Toba language, it is a more rigid structural requirement of the voice system.

1.3 Pseudo Noun Incorporation

There are several characteristics if one language experiences pseudo noun incorporation (PNI). Driemel (2020) states that in languages that have PNI, the object does not carry case marking (no causative marker, no determiner and no classifier). Moreover, it

cannot refer to a specific, known or topical entity and it must be interpreted in the narrowest, VP-internal domain. Earlier analyses of PNI that concentrate on the distribution and movement of these objects argue that incorporated nouns cannot be displaced from their original VP-internal position. This restriction follows from their weakened nominal structure, since they lack the functional layers associated with DP, they cannot receive case or undergo syntactic movement or because they are absorbed into a complex predicate with the verb, which prevents them from moving independently (Massam, 2001; Lopez, 2012; Frey, 2015). One of classic example is provided by Massam (2001) from Niuean, an Oceanic language with obligatory verb-initial word order.

(2) *Niuean*

Takafaga tumau ni e ia e tau ika.
 Hunt always EMPH ERG 3SG ABS PL fish
 'he is always fishing'

Massam claims it as PNI process since the verb and the noun are adjacent, the object *ika* ('fish') appears right next to the verb, with no full DP structure separating them. Then, the object loses its typical nominal features. According to Massam, in PNI constructions, the object shows clear signs of reduced nominal structure. It cannot take a determiner, and elements such as *e* (ABS) do not function as normal absolutive case markers. The object also lacks number and case marking in the usual sense and receives a non-specific interpretation. Massam argues that in examples like *tau ika*, the object does not behave as a full DP referring to "the fish," but instead patterns as a bare NP with the general meaning "fish." Similarly, she proposes that Niuean has an obligatory verb-initial word order. PNI occurs when the verb moves to the front while the bare NP remains inside the VP, and both are interpreted together as a complex predicate. This property of PNI is known as immobility.

Secondly, after analyzing language in Tamil and Sakha, Baker (2014) argues that PNI differs from true noun incorporation because it must be empty, meaning the noun and verb must appear directly next to each other in one linear line. A key point in his analysis is that head movement is not triggered by any feature-checking requirements, which means that such movement is entirely optional.

(3) *Tamil* (Baker, 2014)

Naan nalla paṣam tee- r- een
 I good fruit seek-PRS-1SG.SBJ
 'I am looking for (some/a) good fruit(s).'

The example Baker states behave like a bare NP, not a full DP. The phrase *nalla paṣam* 'good fruit' contains an AP (adjective) *nalla* 'good' a N' → N *paṣam* 'fruit'. But it does not project to a DP (no case, no determiner, no number marking). Hence, it is a typical property of PNI objects. Baker says that PNI requires string-vacuity movement, meaning the noun and the verb must stay right next to each other in the sentence. Baker claims that in PNI there is a linear adjacency between verb and noun. This category is called adjacency in PNI.

Another feature of PNI is studied by Dayal (2011) in Hindi. He finds that direct objects can sometimes appear without accusative case shows that incorporation is happening not

only semantically but also syntactically. He also argues that, in Hindi, inanimate objects do not always need accusative marking.

(4a) *Hindi*
 Anu har kitaab/ har kitaab-ko paRhegii
 Anu every book every book-ACC will-read
 ‘Anu will read every book.’

(4b). Anu kitaab/ kitaab-ko paRhegii
 Anu book book-ACC will-read
 ‘Anu will read a the book/the book.’

-ko shows that the object is general books, not specific one. *-ko* is optional in the noun specific object and it is one of the characteristic in pseudo noun incorporation. Semantically, the verb ‘reading’ as if unites with the object ‘book’. Therefore, another characteristic of PNI is the evident of bare noun. It means that in PNI the noun is non specific. (Öztürk, 2003).

Another language that also studied by Baker is Sakha and Tamil. He claims that PNI can only occur with certain kinds of complex predicates. In some types of predicates—such as verb + resultative adjective combinations—PNI cannot appear (see 5a, b).

(5) *Sakha*

a. Bu oqo djolloox oŋor-or.
 this child happy make- AOR.3sS
 ‘This makes a child/children happy.’

b. *Tamil*
 Adu paḻam perisaa aakkar-itu.
 It fruit big make.PRES-3nS
 ‘It makes fruit big’

According to him, the adjective must adjoin to the verb to form a complex predicate (Baker 2003). Because the adjective must be adjacent to the verb, there is no available position for the object to undergo PNI, which also requires adjacency.

Hence, several characteristics of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) have been identified. Incorporated elements typically appear as bare nouns without determiners, case markers, or plural marking, receive non-specific or generic interpretations, and must be adjacent to the verb. Although the verb and noun remain separate words, they function as a single semantic unit, and the occurrence of PNI depends on the syntactic structure of the language and the type of predicate involved (Massam 2001; Baker 2014; Borik & Gehrke 2015; Levin 2015)

2.4 Batak Toba

Batak Toba an Austronesian language and it has canonical order is verb-initial, typically VOS such as in example (1). Besides, there is no grammatical tense yet temporal interpretation depends on aspectual markers, adverbs such as *dung* means done and contextual information. (Erlewine, 2018). The diagnostics commonly associated with pseudo

noun incorporation (PNI)—including adjacency between the verb and the noun, the appearance of bare nouns, restricted modification, and a tendency toward detransitivization—provide useful criteria for identifying incorporation-like constructions. In Batak Toba, these diagnostics appear to apply in a consistent and systematic way, allowing PNI-like constructions to be distinguished from simple verb–object sequences or lexical compounding.

First, bare nouns in Batak Toba that participate in PNI-like constructions display a characteristic non-specific and activity-oriented interpretation, as in *mangallang ihan* “eat fish” or *manjaha buku* “read book,” where the noun does not refer to a particular referent but instead contributes to the event description. When determiners or quantifiers such as *si*, *do*, *angka*, or *sasude* ‘every/all’ are introduced, the noun becomes referential and the construction behaves like a regular transitive clause rather than an incorporation-like structure. This shift in interpretation supports the diagnostic role of bare nouns.

Second, Batak Toba exhibits a strict adjacency requirement in which nouns receiving incorporation-like interpretations must occur immediately after the verb, as intervening modifiers disrupt this interpretation. This verb–noun sequence forms a tightly integrated predicate-like unit rather than a typical verb–object configuration.

These constructions also show detransitivization-like properties described in PNI literature although Batak Toba lacks overt case marking, the incorporated noun behaves as a syntactically reduced object and the clause focuses on the activity rather than a specific patient. Semantically, Batak Toba patterns with languages that have optional object case marking, where the absence of marking correlates with incorporation-like readings. These parallels suggest that Batak Toba employs a syntactic incorporation strategy consistent with the broader typology of PNI across languages.

While Massam (2001) emphasizes syntactic adjacency and reduced nominal structure, Baker (2014) frames PNI as covert incorporation involving head movement. However, both frameworks assume structural conditions that may not fully apply to languages without overt case marking, such as Batak Toba. Taken together, these diagnostics allow PNI-like constructions in Batak Toba to be distinguished from simple verb–object sequences, where the object is referential and freely modifiable, and from lexical compounds, which are typically fixed lexicalized units rather than productive syntactic constructions. Thus, despite the absence of overt case marking, the combination of semantic non-specificity, adjacency constraints, restricted modification, and event-oriented interpretation provides a reliable basis for identifying pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design combined with formal syntactic analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows researchers to explore and describe linguistic phenomena in their natural context without relying on numerical measurement (Creswell, 2014). It is also used to collect natural language data and to describe the distributional patterns of bare nouns in Batak Toba, while the formal analysis applies theoretical models of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) from Massam and Baker to investigate how the Batak Toba encodes PNI structures.

- (b) *Mangampu hata* *si togar*
 mang-ampu (hata) si Togar
 ACT-say. words of gratitude PN Togar
 'Togar say words of gratitude'

In (6a) *appu* is a bare noun which means words of gratitude. After the prefixation *mang*, the N 'joined' the Verb and it forms a tight verb-noun unit. *Hata* is licensed via linear adjacency with *mang-ampu* (6b), forming a syntactic unit without additional morphology or case marking. In other words, PNI in Batak Toba language indicates a compatible case in which the nominal heads happen to be adjacent to the verb. On the contrary, adjacency cannot happen in Batak Toba if particle *do* appears between verb and noun since it results in verb and the noun that are no longer in an adjacent position. It is exemplified by (7)

- 7(a) *manjangkit do ibana hau*
 Man-jangkit do ibana hau
 ACT. climb FOC 3SG tree
 'he climbed the tree'

In the sentence *Manjangkit do ibana hau* 'He climbed a tree', the verb *manjangkit* 'climb' and the noun *hau* 'tree' are separated by the focus particle *do* and the subject *ibana*. Consequently, the verb and the noun are not adjacent, and the construction does not exhibit the tight V–N configuration typically associated with pseudo noun incorporation.

4.2 Detransitivization

One of the characteristics of PNI is detransitivization of verbs (Johnson, 2015). It is a syntactic and semantic process in which a verb that normally takes a direct object (a transitive verb) is transformed so that it no longer requires, or cannot take, a direct object (Massam, 2001). Essentially, it becomes intransitive. In Batak Toba, prefixation also change a transitive clause into intransitive by incorporating the bare noun to the verb. (8)

- (8a) *Mangallang indahan ibana*
 mang-allang indahan ibana
 ACT-eat rice 3SG
 'He eats rice.' (transitive)
- (8b) *Mangallang ibana*
 mang-allang ibana
 ACT-eat 3SG
 'He eats.' (detransitivized / object not expressed)
- (8c) *Mangindahan ibana*
 mang-indahan ibana
 ACT-rice 3SG
 'He rice-eats.' (pseudo noun incorporation)

The data in (8a–c) demonstrate three different clause types in Batak Toba: transitive, detransitivized, and pseudo noun incorporation constructions. In (8a), *mangallang* ‘eat’ is a transitive verb that requires a direct object, resulting in a two-argument structure. In (8b), the object is omitted and the verb becomes intransitive, indicating detransitivization and a reduction in verb valency. In (8c), the noun *indahan* ‘rice’ is morphologically incorporated into the verb, forming *mangindahan*. The incorporated noun is non-referential and does not function as an independent object, but instead forms a predicate-like unit with the verb. This pattern is consistent with pseudo noun incorporation as described in Massam (2001), where the noun is syntactically reduced and tightly integrated with the verb.

In many languages, including Batak Toba, detransitivization creates a verb that no longer requires a fully projected, case- marked object; instead, the verb can take a bare, non-specific nominal that functions more like a lexical modifier than a true argument. For example, detransitivized forms such as *marsipanganon* (‘engage in food-related activity’) illustrate how the verb becomes more generalized, enabling the nominal element to be interpreted as part of a verb–noun complex. Thus, detransitivized verbs naturally facilitate PNI because the object position is semantically incorporated but syntactically reduced, allowing the bare noun to be licensed without structural case.

4.3 Non-Specific Interpretation

One central characteristic of PNI is the non-specific interpretation of the object, where the bare noun does not refer to a particular entity but instead denotes a general type associated with the event (Dayal 2011). The example in Batak Toba is in (9a)

(9a) *marende ende ibana*
 mar-ende ende ibana
 ACT.sing song 3SG
 ‘he sings song’ (non specific)

(9b) *marende ende i ibana*
 mar-ende ende i ibana
 ACT-sing song DEF 3SG
 ‘he sings the song’ (specific)

The difference between (9a) and (9b) lies in the interpretation of the noun *ende* ‘song’. In (9a), the noun appears as a bare noun and receives a non-specific interpretation, referring to songs in general. In (9b), the noun is marked with the determiner *i*, which makes the noun definite and specific, referring to a particular song. This contrast shows that bare nouns in Batak Toba tend to have non-specific interpretation, which is one of the main characteristics of pseudo noun incorporation.

4.4 Modified and Conjoined Nominals

Massam maintains, in Niuean, PNI is attainable with modified and conjoined nominals. Conjoined bare nouns in Batak Toba behave similarly to pseudo noun incorporation objects, forming a single predicate-like unit with the verb and receiving a non-specific interpretation.

- (10) *mangingani jabu na bolon*
 mang-ingani jabu na bolon
 ACT.live. in house REL big
 'live in big house'

Example (10) shows that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba can also occur with modified nominals. The noun *jabu* 'house' is modified by *bolon* 'big', forming the modified nominal *jabu na bolon* 'big house'. Even though the noun is modified, the noun phrase remains bare and does not contain a determiner or definiteness marker. The modified noun phrase appears directly adjacent to the verb *mangingani* 'live in' and forms a tightly integrated predicate-like unit with the verb. Semantically, the noun phrase does not refer to a specific identifiable house but rather to a general type of house, resulting in a non-specific interpretation. This behavior is consistent with pseudo noun incorporation, where the incorporated nominal may be modified but still behaves as a non-referential object.

- (11) *Ucok do mangaloppa ihan dohot indahan nabodari*
 Ucok do mang-aloppa ihan dohot indahan na-bodari
 PN FOC ACT-cook fish and rice PST
 'Ucok cooked fish and rice.'

Example (11) illustrates pseudo noun incorporation with conjoined bare nouns in Batak Toba. The nouns *ihan* 'fish' and *indahan* 'rice' are conjoined using *dohot* 'and', and both appear as bare nouns without determiners or markers of definiteness. The conjoined nouns function together as a single semantic unit associated with the verb *mangaloppa* 'cook'. Rather than referring to specific fish and rice, the nouns receive a non-specific interpretation, referring to food in general. Syntactically, the conjoined nouns remain adjacent to the verb and form a tightly integrated predicate-like unit. This shows that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba can also occur with conjoined bare nouns. Hence, these examples show that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba is not limited to simple bare nouns, but can also occur with modified nominals and conjoined bare nouns, as long as the nominal remains non-specific and forms a tight predicate-like unit with the verb.

4.5 Restricted Modification

The last, like Niuean, Batak Toba shows word order shifts under PNI confirming adjacency as a licensing condition. For example, the normal transitive structure of the sentence is VSO but with PNI, the word order is VOS. It also occurs in PNI in Batak Toba but from VOS to SVO. It is shown in example (12a).

- (12a) *Manjangkit hau ibana*
 Man-jangkit hau ibana
 AV-Climb tree 3SG
 'He climb(s) tree' (modification)

- (12b) *Manjangkit hau na ganjang ibana*
 Man-jangkit hau na ganjang ibana
 AV-climb tree REL high 3SG
 'He climbs the high tree' (noun with modification)

In example (12a), the noun *hau* ‘tree’ appears as a bare noun immediately following the verb *manjangkit* ‘climb’. The noun does not carry any modifier such as an adjective, numeral, or demonstrative. In this construction, the noun receives a non-specific interpretation and forms a tight semantic unit with the verb. This pattern is characteristic of pseudo noun incorporation, where the verb and noun behave like a single predicate meaning ‘tree-climb’ rather than a regular verb–object structure.

In contrast, example (12b) shows that when the noun is modified, as in *hau na ganjang* ‘the tall tree’, the incorporation-like interpretation is no longer available. The presence of the modifier *na ganjang* ‘tall’ turns the noun phrase into a full noun phrase rather than a bare noun. As a result, the construction behaves like a regular transitive clause rather than a pseudo noun incorporation construction. This contrast demonstrates that Batak Toba pseudo noun incorporation constructions exhibit restricted modification, meaning that only bare nouns without modifiers can participate in incorporation-like structures, while modified nouns function as regular objects.

Massam observes that when PNI occurs, the word order systematically shifts to VOS. This word order change is not arbitrary; it follows from the syntactic behavior of the incorporated object. In Batak Toba it is predominantly VOS/VS(O). Then, the object normally appears immediately after the verb with bare nouns are common because the language lacks obligatory determiners. Baker's prediction for PNI is that verb must be adjacent to bare NP and Batak Toba places object immediately after verb (see 12). Moreover, he argues that incorporated NP must stay in situ (immobile). In Batak Toba, objects cannot move to the left of the verb (O-V is ungrammatical). Lastly, Baker also claims that PNI tends to appear in verb-initial languages. Indeed, Batak Toba is verb-initial (VOS).

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Theoretical Implications of PNI in Batak Toba

The findings support Massam's analysis that pseudo noun incorporation is closely related to reduced transitivity. The presence of bare nouns, strict verb–noun adjacency, non-specific interpretation, and the reduced syntactic status of the object indicate that Batak Toba exhibits PNI-like constructions rather than full morphological incorporation. Unlike languages such as Niuean, Batak Toba does not rely on case marking to distinguish incorporated objects. Instead, adjacency and word order function as the main licensing mechanisms. This suggests that PNI can be syntactically licensed through linear adjacency rather than morphological case.

The findings also support Baker's view that pseudo incorporation forms a complex predicate structure, where the verb and noun form a tight semantic and syntactic unit within the VP. In addition, detransitivization plays an important role in Batak Toba PNI. Voice prefixes such as *mar-* and *mang-* reduce verbal valency, allowing the object to lose full argument status and behave more like an incorporated element. Overall, the Batak Toba data support the view that PNI is closely associated with reduced transitivity and complex predicate formation.

4.2.2 Functional and Typological Significance

Functionally, PNI in Batak Toba emphasizes the event or activity rather than the object. The incorporated noun typically has a non-specific interpretation and serves to classify the type of activity rather than refer to a particular entity. The data also show that

information structure plays an important role: focus markers such as *do* interrupt verb–noun adjacency and block the PNI interpretation. This demonstrates that PNI in Batak Toba is influenced not only by syntax, but also by discourse and pragmatics.

Typologically, this study shows that PNI is not limited to polysynthetic languages, but can also occur in Austronesian languages with relatively analytic morphology such as Batak Toba. This finding expands the typological distribution of PNI and shows that incorporation-like constructions can arise through syntactic adjacency rather than morphological incorporation.

4.2.3 Contribution to Austronesian Linguistics

This study provides a novel contribution to Austronesian linguistics by identifying and systematically analyzing PNI in Batak Toba, a language that has received limited attention in incorporation studies. Moreover, the study highlights that voice system and argument structure in Batak Toba play a crucial role in shaping PNI behavior. Unlike languages with fixed subject-object alignment, Batak Toba allows flexibility in word order (VOS/SVO), yet still maintains strict constraints on verb–object adjacency in PNI constructions. This suggests that PNI is tightly integrated with the broader grammatical system of the language.

In conclusion, Batak Toba provides important empirical evidence that:

1. PNI can exist without overt case marking
2. Adjacency can serve as a primary licensing mechanism
3. Detransitivization plays a key role in facilitating incorporation-like structures
4. Discourse elements such as focus marking can interfere with PNI

These findings contribute to refining current theoretical models of PNI and highlight the need for more cross-linguistic studies that include underrepresented languages such as Batak Toba.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the characteristics of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba using corpus data and elicited judgments. The findings show that Batak Toba exhibits several core properties associated with PNI cross-linguistically, including strict verb–noun adjacency, restricted nominal mobility, detransitivization, and word-order alternation. These properties align Batak Toba with the typological patterns described by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014). The results also show that PNI influences clause structure by favoring verb–object sequences and reflecting the role of low-prominence nominals in clause organization.

The presence of PNI in Batak Toba, an Austronesian language that is not polysynthetic, has important implications for cross-linguistic typologies of incorporation. It shows that incorporation is not limited to polysynthetic languages with rich morphology, but can also occur in languages with relatively analytic structures. These findings suggest that incorporation should be viewed as a continuum rather than a typologically restricted phenomenon.

This indicates that syntactic and semantic integration can function as alternatives to morphological incorporation. Typological classifications should therefore account for languages that exhibit incorporation-like constructions without polysynthesis. This expands theoretical models to include more diverse morphosyntactic systems. Future research

should explore PNI in other Austronesian languages to determine whether adjacency-based licensing represents a broader areal feature.

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