Beyond constructions:
Takivatan Bunun predicate-argument structure, grammatical coherence, and the nature of linguistic evidence

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Introduction

- Bunun, Austronesian, Taiwan
- Five dialects:
  - Northern: Takibakha, Takituduh
  - Central: Takbanuaz, Takivatan
  - Southern: Isbukun
- Predicate-initial
- Complex verbal morphology
Introduction

• Bunun, Austronesian, Taiwan
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• Predicate-initial
• Complex verbal morphology
Philippine-type systems

“… a system combining verbal and sometimes nominal morphology that indicates a special relationship between the predicate and any of a number of (typically three to five) syntactic-semantic participant roles in the clause.”

(De Busser, to appear; see French 1988)
Philippine-type systems


• More than binary opposition
  – Agent, Patient, Location, Instrument, Beneficiary, …

• Implications for transitivity and valence?

• Syntactic or functional-pragmatic phenomenon?
Takivatan argument alignment

• Verbal suffixes:
  – Focus (AF/UF/LF)

(1) na-ma-tasʔi-Ø-ʔak busul
    IRR-DYN-build-AF-1S.TOP gun
    ‘I make a gun’

(2) ... na pa-tasʔi-un
    so CAUS.DYN-build-UF
    ‘(The thing is broken,) so I want to have it fixed.’

(3) pa-tasʔi-an
    CAUS.DYN-build-LF
    ‘I want to make it so that something stays in a fixed spot’
Takivatan argument alignment

- Verbal prefixes (I):
  - Participant orientation (BEN/INSTR/…)

(4) $ki$-$saiv$-$ʔak$ $qaimaŋsuð$
    BEN-give-1S.TOP thing
    ‘Somebody has to give me things.’

(5) $sin$-$su$-$suad$ $bunuað$
    RES.OBJ-REP-grow plum
    ‘They had grown plums.’
    (Indicates that the plums are already on the tree)
Takivatan argument alignment

• Verbal prefixes (II):
  – Internal temporal structure

(7) ma-baliv-ʔak iðuq a min-puħuq
  DYN-buy-1S.F orange LNK INCH-rot
  ‘I bought meat that had become rotten.’

(8) nitu ma-naskal sadu-ki uskun-an
  NEG STAT-happy see-DEF.SIT.PROX together-LO
  ‘I was not happy to see my companions do it like this.’
Takivatan argument alignment

• Verbal prefixes (III):
  – Control (internal/external/joint)

(6)  \textit{pa}-tasʔi-un
     \textsc{caus.dyn}-\textit{make}\text{-}\textit{uf}
  ‘I will have it fixed (by someone else).’

(7)  \textit{ka}-\textit{daŋað}   \textit{baðbað}
     \textsc{assoc.dyn}-\textit{help}   \textit{have.conversation}
  ‘I’ll help you talk (by speaking in your place).'}
Takivatan argument alignment

- Personal pronouns

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bound</th>
<th>Free</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic (TOP)</td>
<td>Non-topical agent (NTOP.AG)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-(ʔ)ak</td>
<td>-(ʔ)uk</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1I</td>
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<td>1E</td>
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<tr>
<td>2P</td>
<td>-(ʔ)am</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Takivatan argument alignment

• Free arguments
  – Max. 3
  – Fixed order

Verb < Agent < Instrument < Beneficiary < Patient < Location < Place/Time/Manner
Interim conclusion

- Different grammatical distinctions
- Sometimes clashing
- ⇒ This is not a single coherent voice system!
Interim conclusion
What does it all mean?

• Traditional explanation:
  – Active/passive analysis
    • AF: active
    • Other focuses: passive  \textit{(Bloomfield 1917)}
  – Ergative analysis
    • One unmarked voice, often the PF
    • Other voices are valency-changing derivations
      – AF: antipassive
      – LF, BF, …: applicatives
  \textit{(Mithun 1994, and many others)}
Construction grammar

• Focus is:
  – Argument alignment system: conventionalizes predicate-argument relationships
  – Not fully grammaticalized / not fully grammatically abstract
  – Conventionalization at the level of functional roles (AG, PAT, LO) rather than abstract syntactic categories (S, A, O)
Construction grammar

Grammatical roles

Functional roles

Conceptual roles

Concepts
Construction grammar

Latin

Bunun

Event Act Pat Ben Instr Loc ...

Walking Walker ...
Eating Eater Eaten ...

St V O / Si V
Construction grammar

• Problem:
  – In its simplest form, the interpretation above presupposes the existence of a single coherent system
  – We saw that Takivatan predicate-argument structure consists of multiple subsystems that are partly clashing with each other.
... And Beyond

• The predicate-argument structure as a unitary grammatical system...
  – is an artifact of linguistic theory
  – does not correspond to cognitive reality
  – is partly incoherent
… And Beyond

• Cooperation and competition in a modular complex system
  – Different grammatical subsystems
  – … some of which cooperate with each other
  – … some of which compete with each other
  – … but which together fulfill a function perceived as coherent by the language users
... And Beyond

• Definition:

Modularity refers to the behaviour of complex systems to organise themselves into smaller subsystems which operate with a relative autonomy, i.e. the modules of such a system contain significantly more intramodular than intermodular relationships.
… And Beyond
… And Beyond

- **Modularity**
  - Naturally arises in complex adaptive systems (e.g. complex organisms; see Lorenz 2011)
  - Can account for partly incompatible subsystems

≠ **Innate language modules!!!**
= evolved internal organization in complex biological (and other?) systems
Language evolution
Conclusion

• Bunun predicate-argument structure is realized by multiple, partly incompatible subsystems

• \( \Rightarrow \) Bunun voice/focus does not exist, except as a theoretical artifact

• Emergence can account for multiple voice distinctions

• Evolutionary modularity can account for the evolution of partly incoherent subsystems


Unināŋ miqumisanaŋ!