

Syntax of Formosan languages

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Overview

- Philippine-type languages
 - Constituent order
 - Voice
 - Argument realization
 - Word classes



Philippine-type languages

- The problem of Philippine-type languages as a coherent category
 - “[...] claims that have been made for a Formosan-Philippine subgroup are unsupported.” (Blust 1995: 586)
 - Group of languages in Taiwan, the Philippines and the north of the Indo-Malaysian archipelago
 - Not a coherent subfamily of Austronesian
 - What are its *exact* characteristics?



Some putative characteristics

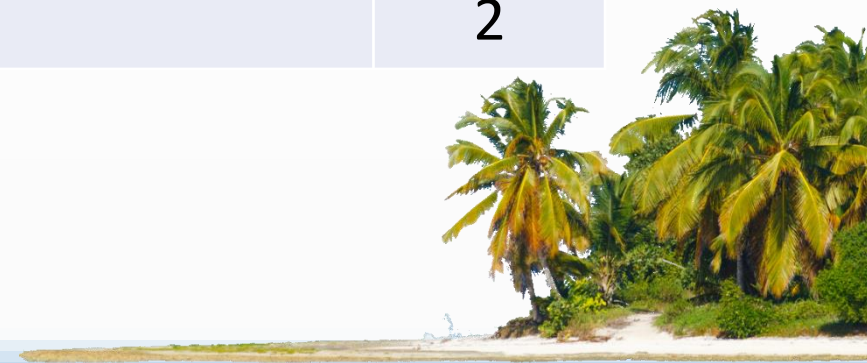
- Verb-initial clause structure (VSO or VOS)
- Particular voice system
 - Particular argument marking schemas
- Productive verbal morphology
 - Verbal affixes doubling as nominalizers
- Problematic noun-verb distinction
- Careful
 - Tendencies
 - Analytical bias and theoretical assumptions



Constituent order

- Tendency towards verb-initial constructions
- Substantial variation between languages

Preferred order	Languages	#
VSO	Bunun, Kanakanavu, Saaroa, Sakizaya, Siraya, Thao	6
VOS	Amis, Atayal, Kavalan, Paiwan, Seediq, Truku, Tsou	7
VSO/VOS	Puyuma, Rukai	2
SVO	Pazeh, Saisiyat	2



Example rigid VOS: Seediq

Seediq (Kuo 2015, p. 21)

a. * *m-ekan* *ka* *laqi* \emptyset *belbul.*
AV-eat NOM child OBL banana
V S O

b. *m-ekan* \emptyset *belbul* *ka* *laqi.*
AV-eat OBL banana NOM child
V O S

‘The child is eating/eats banana.’



Example flexible VSO/VOS: Maga Rukai

Maga Rukai (Zeitoun 1997, p. 318)

a. *ulngée* *ki* *Toto* *na* *dani.*
buy NOM Toto OBL house
V S O

b. *ulngée* *na* *dani* *ki* *Toto.*
buy OBL house NOM Toto
V O S
'Toto bought a house.'



Philippine-type voice system

- All Formosan languages, except for Rukai
- Languages of the Philippines, Madagascar, north-western parts of Indo-Malaysian archipelago
- Typically 3 to 6 voices
 - Functional-semantic distinctions: actor, patient, location, instrument, circumstance, ...
 - Basic voice: AV or UPV



Example: Paiwan

Paiwan (Ross & Teng 2005)

- a. *q<m>ahup a tsautsau tua vavuy i (tua) gadu tua vuluq*
 <AF>hunt TPC man OBL pig LOC (OBL) mountain OBL spear
 ‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

Actor voice

- b. *qahup-en nua tsautsau a vavuy i (tua) gadu tua vuluq*
 hunt-OF GEN man TPC pig LOC (OBL) mountain OBL spear
 ‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

Patient voice

- c. *qahup-an nua tsautsau tua vavuy a gadu tua vuluq*
 hunt-LF GEN man OBL pig TPC mountain OBL spear
 ‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

Locative voice

- d. *si-qahup nua tsautsau tua vavuy i (tua) gadu a vuluq*
 IF-hunt GEN man OBL pig LOC (OBL) mountain TPC spear
 ‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

Instrument voice



Philippine-type voice system: controversies

- What is Philippine-type voice?
 - Symmetrical voice
 - Ergative analysis
 - Something else
- What is the unmarked voice?
- What are the actual voice markers (vs. verb class markers / other valency-changing morphology)?
- Large cross-linguistic variation
- Different theoretical approaches and presuppositions



Example unmarked UV: Puyuma

Nanwang Puyuma (Teng 2005, p. 138)

- a. Actor voice with the infix

diru=ku.

<AV>bathe=1SG.NOM

'I washed.'

← Intransitive

- b. Patient voice with the suffix -aw

ku=dirus-aw

na

gung.

1SG.GEN=bathe-UVP

NOM.DEF

ox

'I washed the ox.'

← Basic transitive construction
Highest frequency in real-world text



Example unmarked UV: Puyuma

- c. Locative voice with the suffix *-ay*

<i>ku=dirus-ay</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>enay</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>bias.</i>
1SG.GEN=bathe-UVL	NOM.DEF	water	NOM.DEF	hot
'I washed in hot water.'				

- d. Instrumental voice with the suffix *-anay*

<i>ku=dirus-anay</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>enay</i>	<i>kan</i>	<i>Aliwaki.</i>
1SG.GEN=bathe-UVC	NOM.DEF	water	OBL.SG	Aliwaki
'I washed Aliwaki with the water.'				

Ditransitive applicatives



Argument marking

- The status of the privileged argument (cf. Li & Thompson 1976; Comrie 1988)
 - Subject
 - Topic
- Case marking strategies
 - Nominative-Genitive-Oblique system
 - Optional vs. obligatory marking



Example: Paiwan

		Nominative	Genitive	Oblique
Personal nouns	singular	Ti	Ni	tjay
	plural	Tia	nia	tj(a)ia
Common nouns		A	nua / na	tua / ta / tu

(A. Chang 2006, p. 67)



Example: Paiwan

Nominative

Genitive

Oblique

Paiwan (Ross & Teng 2005)

- a. *q<m>ahup a tsautsau tua vavuy i (tua) gadu tua vuluq*
 <AF>hunt TPC man OBL pig LOC (OBL) mountain OBL spear

Actor voice

‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

- b. *qahup-en nua tsautsau a vavuy i (tua) gadu tua vuluq*
 hunt-OF GEN man TPC pig LOC (OBL) mountain OBL spear

Patient voice

‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

- c. *qahup-an nua tsautsau tua vavuy a gadu tua vuluq*
 hunt-LF GEN man OBL pig TPC mountain OBL spear

Locative voice

‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’

- d. *si-qahup nua tsautsau tua vavuy i (tua) gadu a vuluq*
 IF-hunt GEN man OBL pig LOC (OBL) mountain TPC spear

Instrument voice

‘The man hunts the pigs in the mountains with a spear.’



Word classes

Open word classes

- Nouns
- Verbs
 - Active verbs
 - Stative verbs
 - Adjectives
 - (Locative/directional verbs)
 - ...

Closed word classes



Word classes

- Elaborate verbal morphology
 - Verbal affixes distinctive of verb classes
 - Voice markers applicable across verb classes



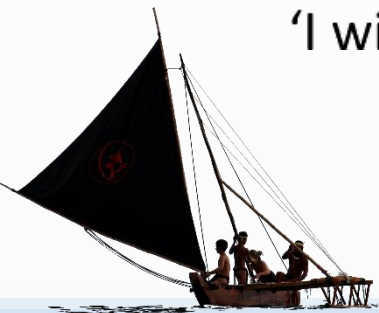
Example: Central Amis

Central Amis (Wu 2007, p. 126)

a. *palu-en* *n-i* *aki* *ci* *panay.*
beat-UVP GEN-PN Aki PN Panay
'Aki will beat Panay.'

c. *fa'det-en* *aku* *k-u-ya* *dating.*
hot-UVP 1SG.GEN NOM.CN-that vegetable
'I will heat up that dish.'

c. *nanum-en* *aku* *k-u-ra* *sayta.*
water-UVP 1SG.GEN NOM.CN-that soda
'I will drink that soda.'



Side note: Promiscuous voice markers and nominalization



Word classes

- Elaborate verbal morphology
 - Verbal affixes distinctive of verb classes
 - Voice markers applicable across verb classes
- Fluid word class boundaries



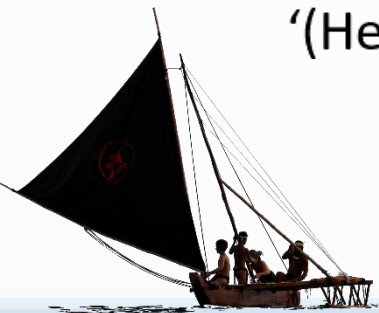
Example: Northern Amis

Northern Amis (Bril 2017, p. 369)

a. *ma-banaq* *haw* *k-isu* *iciraan?*
NAV-know QST NOM-2SG 3SG.OBL
'Do you know him?'

b. *awaay* *k-u* *ma-banaq-ay.*
NEG.exist NOM-CN NAV-know-NMLZ
'Nobody knows.'

c. *awaay* *k-u* *banaq.*
NEG.exist NOM-CN know
'(He) is not intelligent.' (lit. there is no intelligence)



Concluding remarks

- Are Formosan languages a coherent linguistic subgroup?
- Genetic perspective: doesn't look like it
- Areal/typological perspective: Philippine type
- Beware of over-generalization
 - Ignoring diversity in order to create order



Thank you for your attention



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