The Semantics of Malagasy Actor Voice Prefixes

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This presentation examines the voice paradigm of Malagasy with special reference to actor voice morphology. By cross-linguistic comparison we show that Malagasy voice affixes can be straightforwardly accounted for by making use of available semantic systematizations, primarily the typology of western Austronesian (in particular Philippine-type) voice paradigms (cf. Wouk and Ross 2002).

We try to demonstrate that, contrary to widespread assumptions (Rasoloson and Rubino 2005, among others), the different formatives for actor voice of Malagasy primarily do not reflect transitivity. On the basis of Pawley and Reid (1976), we want to argue, instead, that voice morphology on the verb reflects specific semantic roles. We maintain that the special properties of object marking in Philippine languages (*-an, *i- and *-en) resemble those of active agent marking in Malagasy (as components of m-i- and m-aN-verbs). We conclude that Malagasy instantiates a kind of 'voice marking shift', i.e. morphemes like *-an and *i- which in Tagalog mark goal-objects of active verbs and theme-objects of active verbs respectively, are employed as active AGENT-prefixes in Malagasy. Assuming that m-i- and m-aN-verbs are the most productive classes in Malagasy we want to show that, according to the aforementioned semantic features (theme versus goal), these two groups reflect common Austronesian (including Philippine) principles: m-i-verbs, by the majority are theme-oriented, m-aN-verbs include a significant number of goal-oriented verbs.

REFERENCES

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