

Towards Attributive Predication Syntax in Austronesian

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The inherent properties of human beings and the elemental world around them are essentially the same for all. Animate entities, for example, can move and do things to others while inanimates cannot; an action may be exocentric or it may be endocentric. However, the grid through which these phenomena are put through and the guiding principle by which they are organized into a syntactic system differ from one language to another. Furthermore, the manner and the extent to which semantic and pragmatic relations are "syntacticized" also differ.

We therefore find that in some languages, for example, Russian, Paiwan, Tagalog and some Austronesian languages, pragmatic roles are incorporated more into the syntax than in certain other languages and syntactic choices are based more on the pragmatic features of the situation. The question is which set of relations serves as the basis for the organizing principle that shapes the syntax and drives the discourse.

Cecilio Lopez refers to the Tagalog "verbal word" (the term used by Givón [1979] for the pretheoretical concept of "verb") as a "quasi-verb", a word that names an action (which he refers to elsewhere as *nomina actionis*):

The quasi-verb is not a pure real verb, for it is treated like a *nomen* in the sentence and its enlargements, according to their form, are considered as *attributes* and *not as objects* [*italics mine*]. (1928:51)

In Tagalog, making an assertion about extralingual reality takes the form of ascribing an attribute, which may be a thing, a quality, or an action, to the entity that the assertion is about. While the verbal word is verbal in meaning, it is treated like a noun in the syntax.

This is made evident by the fact that the NP immediately dominated by the verbal word in such a construction is marked by a genitive or attributive marker (by parataxis in certain constructs).

Without going into detail at this point, these and other indications, along with what is known of focus itself, led to the view that Tagalog has a predominantly nominal syntactic orientation and that the form of predication would tend towards attribution. Sentence syntax would then have a "HEAD + ATTRIBUTE" structure. This will be discussed in more detail in the paper itself and in Naylor (forthcoming).

Alieva (1978, 1980) shows that: (a) the syntactic structure of the possessive segment prompts one to perceive it as either in predicative or attributive function; (b) "a possessive structure is a syntactical type of organization of a given language structure" and in a language of this type, "the doer of an action is expressed by a possessive attribute" in exactly the same way as the possessor of an object, without any formal differentiation between the "object possessive and the process possessive". She also quotes the words of I.I. Meschaninov

on the matter: "A possessive structure of the predicate is at the same time a nominal phrase."

Since there are clear indications from the observations of a number of Austronesianists that attributive predication syntax is functional in other Austronesian languages, e.g., Indonesian, Paiwan, Fijian, Arosi to name a few, it may turn out to be a typological feature of Austronesian.

In spite of variation in many guises that may occur, a fairly representative number of Austronesian languages manifest a predication syntax that would be essentially attributive, characterized by attributive structures and semantically verbal predicates that are syntactically nominal.

Illustrative data from selected Western and Eastern Austronesian languages as well as views on the question of Tagalog and Austronesian typology will be presented.