

The role of Animacy in Teiwa and Abui (Papuan)

The topic of this paper is the morphological alignment of the non-actor participant in transitive constructions (henceforth P) in Teiwa and Abui (henceforth T&A), two Papuan languages spoken on the islands of Pantar and Alor in E Indonesia. We focus on explaining the role that animacy plays in verbal agreement, the alignment of P. In addition, we suggest that animacy may play a role in the nominal classification of these languages. The paper is based on primary data collected on site in 2003-2005.

1. While it is common to find bound pronominal agreement affixes in Papuan languages, T&A represent the small minority of Papuan languages that only affix P, and not A (Foley 1986:102-104, 2000: 377). T&A both prefix P to the verb, keeping the actor (A) as an independent NP in preverbal position. The alignment systems of the two languages are different: Teiwa is nominative-accusative, Abui is agentive. Despite this difference, in both languages the marking of P is governed by animacy. In Teiwa, all Ps may occur as independent NPs, but only animate Ps may be prefixed, as in (1). The result is an asymmetrical system where verbal agreement is used to refer to just a subset of Ps, the animate ones. (NB. Pronominals unmarked for sex and number in T&A are translated as masculine singulars in English.)

- (1) a. A **ga**-regan [Teiwa]
3sg 3-ask 'He asks him'
b. A **ga'an** regan.
3sg 3 ask 'He asks it' (Or: 'He asks HIM' (emphatic))

Abui alignment of P is more complicated. There are three sets of pronominal prefixes (I, II, III) that mark semantically affected arguments (typically P). These prefixes distinguish between arguments with the role of patient/undergoer of physical change (prefix I); arguments with the role of theme (prefix II); or experiencer (prefix III). While the choice of prefix I does not depend on animacy, animacy does determine the choice for prefix II, which shows a preference for inanimate arguments (as themes or locations), and prefix III, which exclusively marks human experiencer arguments. This is illustrated in (2) by the transitive use of the verbs 'say' and 'fly' that are cross-referenced for their affected arguments.

- (2) a. **ha**-fang-a **he**-fang-a **ho**-fang-a [Abui]
3.I-say-DUR 3.II-say-DUR 3.III-say-DUR
'order him' 'say it' 'scold him'
b. **ha**-li-a he-li-a **ho**-li-a
3.I-fly-DUR 3.II-fly-DUR 3.III-fly-DUR
'shoot it, fly it' 'fly at it' 'fly at him'

Some Abui verbs cannot have agreement. If they involve an animate P, P is prefixed to a generic auxiliary verb that occurs in a serial verb construction with the main (uninflecting) verb.

2. After presenting the effect of animacy in verbal agreement, we argue that it also plays a role in the nominal domain of T&A. Like many other Papuan languages, T&A distinguish between alienable and inalienable noun classes, classifying body parts and family members as inalienably possessed. Teiwa marks this with obligatory possessive prefixes for inalienables, and free pronouns for alienable possessors. Since body parts as well as family members are typically animate, we suggest that the (in)alienable distinction is in fact a distinction between noun classes for animate vs. inanimate referents. In such a view, the (in)alienable possessive relation results from the (conceptually more basic) classification of a noun as +/- animate. The fact that in T&A, as well as in other Alor-Pantar languages, the possessive paradigm is formally very similar to (one of) the P marking paradigms also suggests a non-accidental relation between the two types of marking.

In sum, animacy plays a crucial role in the P-agreement marking of T&A, and also manifests itself in the marking of nominal possession.

References:

Foley, William. 1986. *The Papuan languages of New Guinea*. Cambridge: CUP.

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