



**University of  
Zurich<sup>UZH</sup>**

# Argument marking in western Austronesian

A crosslinguistic assessment

**Tobias Weber**

[toweb@spw.uzh.ch](mailto:toweb@spw.uzh.ch)

**SEALS 21, Bangkok, May 11-13, 2011**

# Goals

- Typological overview of the presence and absence of core argument marking in western Austronesian languages
- Investigation of the coding alternations conditioned by voice alternations
- Focus on two-argument clauses
- Explanation of the interactions between core argument marking, voice marking and word order
- Explanation of geographical and genealogical distributions

# Definitions

## Core argument marking

- “dependent marking on the clause level” (Witzlack-Makarevich 2010:73)
- “morphological cases (whether marked by affixes, clitics, separate case words, ablaut, tone changes, etc., all of which we regard as differing in their degrees of phonological fusion but not as different grammatical phenomena) and adpositions” (Bickel & Nichols 2008:305)

# Definitions

## Valence (or valency)

- Term originally from chemistry, first introduced to linguistics by Tesnière (1959:238): “le nombre d’actants qu[e le verbe] est susceptible de régir”
- Traditional distinctions:
  - syntactic vs. semantic valence
  - Arguments (actants) vs. adjuncts (circonstants)

# Definitions

## Valence (or valency)

- Problem: What is an argument?
- Argumenthood tests (cf. Matthews 1981, Croft 2001):
  - Obligatoriness
  - More important/necessary for the event
  - Collocational relations (semantic rather than syntactic)
  - Privileged status

# Definitions

## Valence (or valency)

- Solution: purely semantic definition of arguments
  - Restoration of adjuncts (but not arguments) into a full clause
  - Assignment of semantic roles to arguments only (cf. Dowty 1991, Witzlack-Makarevich 2010)
- Advantages of a purely semantic analysis
  - Crosslinguistic comparison possible
  - No preference of specific morphosyntactic processes, since
    - this is arbitrary
    - these processes don't exist or don't behave in the same way in all languages

# Definitions

## Semantic roles: two levels

- Macro-level SRs: S, A, P, T, G
- Micro-level SRs: e.g. hitter, thinker, given entity, frozen entity, lived-in location
- No medium-level SRs (such as e.g. experiencer, theme, stimulus); they are (traditionally) pre-established and highly heterogeneous

# Definitions

## Macro-level semantic roles

(Witzlack-Makarevich 2010:74f.)

- S: the only argument of a 1-arg predicate
- A<sub>tr</sub>: the more agent-like argument of a 2-arg predicate
- P: the more patient-like argument of a 2-arg predicate
- A<sub>ditr</sub>: the more agent-like argument of a 3-arg predicate
- G: the more patient-like argument of a 3-arg predicate (mnemonic for 'Goal')
- T: neither more agent-like, nor more patient-like argument of a three-argument predicate (mnemonic for 'Theme')



# Definitions

## Voice

- “Grammatical voice is manifested in systems in which alternations in the shapes of verbs signal alternations in the configurations of nominal statuses with which verbs are in particular relationships” (Klaiman 1991:1)
- Suggested revised version:  
“Grammatical voice is manifested in systems in which alternations **in the shapes of predicates or whole constructions** signal alternations in the configurations **of the syntactic and/or pragmatic status of (semantic) arguments of a predicate**”

# Western Austronesian

## Western Austronesian Languages

- Geographical (rather than genealogical) label
- Different definitions by different authors
- Definition for this study:
  - Austronesian languages without Oceanic
  - I.e. Formosan, Western Malayo-Polynesian, Central Malayo-Polynesian and the South Halmahera-West New Guinea branch of Eastern Malayo-Polynesian

# Western Austronesian

## Languages included here

- Puyuma (Taiwan)
- Tagalog (Philippines)
- Lun Dayeh (Borneo, N Sarawak)
- Aceh (N Sumatra)
- Nias (NW Sumatra)
- Indonesian (Sumatra, Java etc.)
- Sasak (Lombok)
- Tukang Besi (S Sulawesi)
- Palu'e (Flores)
- Kambera (Sumba)
- Tetun (Timor)
- Taba (South Halmahera)
- Biak (West New Guinea)

## Sources

- Teng (2005)
- Kroeger (1993)
- Clayre (2005)
- Durie (1985)
- Brown (2001)
- Sneddon (1996)
- Wouk (2002)
- Donohue (2003)
- Donohue (2005)
- Klamer (1998)
- van Engelenhoven & W.-van Klinken (2005)
- Bowden (2001)
- Steinhauer (2005)

# Typological variables

- Marking of the A argument: present vs. absent
- Marking of the P argument: present vs. absent
- Voice:
  - Alternation of at least two voices: present vs. absent
  - Morphological marking on the predicate: present vs. absent
  - Symmetrical vs. asymmetrical marking
- Basic word order: V initial vs. V medial vs. V final

# Marking of the A argument

- Always present
- Present only in non-A voice(s)

Indonesian:

a. *Anak minum obat itu.*  
child [AV]drink medicine that  
'The child drank the medicine.'

b. *Obat itu di-minum (oleh) anak.*  
medicine that PV-drink by child  
'The medicine was drunk by the child.'

- Absent

# Marking of the A argument

- Puyuma            always present
- Tagalog           always present
- Lun Dayeh        personal nouns only
- Aceh                in P voice only
- Nias                in P voice only
- Indonesian       possible with 3rd person in P voice
- Sasak              possible with 3rd person in P voice
- Tukang Besi      always present
- Palu'e              absent
- Kambera           absent
- Tetun                absent
- Taba                absent
- Biak                 absent

# Marking of the P argument

- Always present
- Sometimes present (depending on NP type)
- Absent in prototypical transitive clauses; can be present in other predicate classes:

Indonesian:

*Dia tinggal di kota*

3SG live in city

'S/he lives in the city.'

# Marking of the P argument

- Puyuma            always present
- Tagalog           always present
- Lun Dayeh        personal nouns and pronouns only
- Aceh                absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Nias                always present
- Indonesian       absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Sasak               absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Tukang Besi      always present
- Palu'e              absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Kambera           absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Tetun               absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Taba                absent in prototypical transitive clauses
- Biak                absent in prototypical transitive clauses



# Number of voices

- one (no alternation)
- two
- three
- four
- five

# Number of voices

- Puyuma 4
- Tagalog 5
- Lun Dayeh 3
- Aceh 2
- Nias 2 (P voice only in relative clauses)
- Indonesian 2
- Sasak 2
- Tukang Besi 2
- Palu'e 2
- Kambera 1
- Tetun 1
- Taba 1
- Biak 1

# Voice: morphological marking

- All voices (symmetrical voice)
- A voice, but not P voice
- P voice, but not A voice
- Neither P nor A voice (symmetrical voice)

# Voice: morphological marking

- Palu'e: no morphological marking on the verb

(1) *la cube vavi vaʔa*  
3SG shoot pig that  
'He shot that pig.'

(2) *Vavi vaʔa ia cube*  
pig that 3SG shoot  
'That pig, he shot (it).' or 'That pig was shot by him.'

Privileged status of initial P:

- conjunction reduction
- controller of subordinate purposive clauses

(Donohue 2005:60)

# Voice: morphological marking

- Puyuma            all voices marked
- Tagalog            all voices marked
- Lun Dayeh        all voices marked
- Aceh                A voice unmarked, P voice marked
- Nias                A voice unmarked, P voice marked
- Indonesian      all voiced marked
- Sasak              A voice marked, (neutral) P voice unmarked
- Tukang Besi     no morphological marking
- Palu'e             no morphological marking
- Kambera          n/a
- Tetun              n/a
- Taba                n/a
- Biak                n/a

# Basic word order

- V initial
- V medial
- (V final)

# Basic word order

- Puyuma V initial
- Tagalog V initial
- Lun Dayeh V medial (/initial)
- Aceh V medial
- Nias V initial
- Indonesian V medial
- Sasak V medial
- Tukang Besi V initial (/medial)
- Palu'e V medial (/final)
- Kambera V medial
- Tetun V medial
- Taba V medial
- Biak V medial

# Overview

Language	A-marking	P-marking	#voices	morph. voice	word order
▪ Puyuma	present	present	4	all voices	V initial
▪ Tagalog	present	present	5	all voices	V initial
▪ Lun Dayeh	PN	PN&pro	3	all voices	V medial
▪ Aceh	P voice	absent	2	P voice	V medial
▪ Nias	P voice	present	(2)	P voice	V initial
▪ Indonesian	P voice	absent	2	all voices	V medial
▪ Sasak	P voice	absent	2	A voice	V medial
▪ Tukang Besi	present	present	2	absent	V initial
▪ Palu'e	P voice	absent	2	absent	V medial
▪ Kampera	absent	absent	1	n/a	V medial
▪ Tetun	absent	absent	1	n/a	V medial
▪ Taba	absent	absent	1	n/a	V medial
▪ Biak	absent	absent	1	n/a	V medial



# Results

- Correlation between argument marking and basic word order (i.e. presence of argument marking and verb-initial word order: worldwide tendency)
- Correlation of the number of voices and the presence of argument marking (holds within western Austronesian; not a worldwide trend)
- Geographical distribution: decrease of the number of voices and the presence of argument marking away from Taiwan and the Philippines; more voices and argument marking in Sumatra than in southern and eastern Indonesia (reflects Austronesian migrations)

# References

- Adelaar, Alexander & Nikolaus Himmelmann (eds.). 2005. *The Austronesian Languages of Asia and Madagascar*. New York: Routledge.
- Arka, I Wayan & Malcolm Ross (eds.). 2005. *The Many Faces of Austronesian Voice Systems: Some Empirical Studies*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Bickel, Balthasar & Johanna Nichols. 2008. Case-marking and alignment. In Andrej Malchukov & Andrew Spencer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Oxford: OUP, 304-321.
- Brown, Lea. 2001. *A Grammar of Nias Selatan*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Sydney.
- Bowden, John. 2001. *Taba: Description of a South Halmahera Language*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Clayre, Beatrice. 2005. Kelabitic languages and the fate of 'focus': evidence from the Kerayan. In Arka & Ross (eds.), 17-58.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: OUP.
- Donohue, Mark. 1999. *A Grammar of Tukang Besi*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Donohue, Mark. 2005. The Palu'e passive: from pragmatic construction to grammatical device.

# References

- Dowty, David R. 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67:547-619.
- Durie, Mark. 1985. *A Grammar of Acehnese on the Basis of a Dialect of North Aceh*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Klaiman, Miriam H. 1991. *Grammatical Voice*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Klamer, Marian. 1998. *A Grammar of Kambara*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kroeger, Paul. 1993. *Phrase Structure and Grammatical Relations in Tagalog*. Stanford. CSLI.
- Matthews, Peter H. 1981. *Syntax*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Sneddon, James Neill. 1996. *A Comprehensive Grammar of Indonesian*. London: Routledge.
- Steinhauer, Hein. Biak. In Adelaar & Himmelmann (eds.), 793-823.
- Teng, Stacy Fang-ching. 2005. Grammatical relations in Puyuma. In Arka & Ross (eds.), 127-140.
- Tesnière, Lucien. 1959. *Éléments de syntaxe structurale*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Van Engelenhoven, Aone & Catharina Williams-van Klinken. 2005. Tetun and Leti. In Adelaar & Himmelmann (eds.), 735-768.
- Witzlack-Makarevich, Alena. 2010. *Typological Variation in Grammatical Relations*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Leipzig.