

University of Macau Linguistics Seminar

Title: “Differential marking in Abui”

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Abstract

This paper gives an overview of differential marking in Abui, a language with semantic alignment. In Abui, semantic macro-roles are not generalized to case markers such as NOM, ACC, ERG, or ABS. Consequently, Abui syntax cannot rely on the generalized case markers to establish syntactic pivots A, O, and S which are traditionally used to define transitivity. Instead, a number of prominent semantic features (e.g. specificity, animacy, instigation, control, volition, affectedness, individuation and change of state) determine Abui argument realization. Building on the feature-decompositional approach to transitivity, the paper presents the cluster-like arrangement of the features, contradicting the traditional binary arrangement view. The paper overviews the differential marking across event types identifying semantic features of both events and participants responsible for differential marking. This paper investigates the semantic features driving differential marking in Abui, a Papuan language of Eastern Indonesia (cf. Kratochvíl 2007). Abui is a language with semantic alignment (cf. Donohue and Wichmann 2008). This means that the semantic proto-roles **actor** (A) and **undergoer** (U) (cf. Van Valin and LaPolla 1997) are not generalized to case marking such as NOM, ACC, ERG, or ABS.

In Abui, the prototypical transitive arguments are characterized by a cluster of semantic features. Typically both arguments are [+SPECIFIC]. The prototypical transitive A argument is characterized by features [+CONTROL, +VOLITION]. In (1a), the volitional and controlling participant is realized with the free pronoun *a* (2S). However, in (1b), the non-controlling participant requires an additional auxiliary verb.

- (1) a. *a kaanng ha-pating-d-i*
2Sgood 3II.PAT-advice-HOLD-PFV
'you have advised him well'
- b. *a=ng kaang ha-pating-d-i*
2S=LOOK good 3II.PAT-advice-HOLD-PFV
'(it turned out) you have advised him well'

The prototypical transitive U argument is characterized as [+AFFECTED, +INDIVIDUATED, +CHANGE OF STATE]. Not all transitive U arguments share all three features. Some U arguments are only [+AFFECTED, +INDIVIDUATED] or [+AFFECTED], as illustrated in Table 1. The different clustering of the semantic features triggers differential marking: (i) the LOC series prefix (first column) is used for U arguments characterized only as [+AFFECTED], (ii) the REC series prefix (second column) is used for U arguments characterized as [+AFFECTED, +INDIVIDUATED], (iii) the PAT series prefix (third column) is used for U arguments characterized by all three features.

Table 1: Distribution of Abui bound pronouns

	LOC	REC	PAT
a.	<i>he-fanga</i> 3II.LOC-tell.CNT 'tell (about) it'	<i>ho-fanga</i> 3II.REC-tell.CNT 'tell him off (scold)'	<i>ha-fanga</i> 3II.PAT-tell.CNT 'order him'
b.	<i>he-li-a</i> 3II.LOC-fly-DUR 'fly at it'	<i>ho-li</i> 3II.REC-fly 'fly at him'	<i>ha-li-a</i> 3II.PAT-fly-DUR 'shoot it'
c.	<i>he-faaling</i> 3II.LOC-listen 'listen to it'	<i>ho-faaling</i> 3II.REC-listen 'listen to him'	<i>*ha-faaling</i>
d.	<i>he-bol</i> 3II.LOC-hit 'hit for/instead of him'	<i>ho-bol</i> 3II.REC-hit 'hit him'	<i>*ha-bol</i>
	[+SPC, +AFF]	[+SPC, +AFF, +IND]	[+SPC, +AFF, +IND, +COS]

Constellations other than prototypical lead to differential marking for both A and U argument; they will be further discussed in the paper. The differential marking sensitive to semantic features operates also in intransitive constructions. In (2), the alternations are given, where the single argument is expressed with the free pronoun, as the A argument in the transitive construction.

- (2) a. *na wan ananri*
1S already tell.CPL
 'I have already told'
- b. *na=ng wan ananri*
1S=LOOK already tell.CPL
 'I had to tell it (against my will)'
- c. *na laak*
 1S leave.for
 'I go away, leave'
- d. *no-laak*
 1S.REC-leave.for
 'I retreat'

In (3), examples are given, where the single argument is expressed with a pronominal prefix, as the U argument in the transitive construction.

- (3) a. *ruwol he-pok-u*
 chicken 3II.LOC-burst-PRF
 'chicken hatched, burst out of the egg'
- b. *ho-lila*
 3II.REC-hot
 'he feels hot'
- c. *na-kaai*
 1S.PAT-stumble.CPL
 'I stumbled'

The paper presents the array of Abui argument realizations in both transitive and intransitive constructions which are motivated by the semantic features of the participants involved. Abui data requires us to adopt a scalar definition of transitivity, centred on a prototype but also allowing other constellations (cf. Næss 2007). Haiman's phonological bulk - core case correlation (Haiman 1983:792) is reformulated to identify the transitive prototype in Abui:

- (4) **Correlation between typical and atypical marking:**
the phonological expression of the atypical marking will be bulkier than the prototypical marking

Despite the rich variety of argument realizations, the underlying prototype of **Maximally Distinguished Arguments** is borne out in the opposition of free and bound pronominal forms. Abui argument realization supports Haiman's (1983:815-6) claim that alignments are derived from and similar to conceptual categories. Haiman (1983) further claims that different outcomes for encoding of two arguments found across languages are result of the two competing motivations of ICONICITY and ECONOMY. Abui argument realization maps the conceptual reality closely. Abui differential marking triggered by a number of prominent semantic features is motivated by ICONICITY. At the same time, there is always need for generalization which results in more economic systems (cf. Haiman 1983:816). Yet many domains of the economic systems are still sensitive to semantic features. The outcomes of this sensitivity are (i) DOM (DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING) sensitive to [INDIVIDUATION] and [ANIMACY], and (ii) DSM (DIFFERENTIAL SUBJECT MARKING) sensitive to [VOLITION] (cf. Kittilä 2006, Malchukov 2006). Both types of differential marking found in economic systems reflect the underlying conceptual continuum.

References

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