

Classifying events and referents: Rarissima in Abui verbs and Teiwa pronouns

In our paper, we discuss some unusual features of the Papuan languages Abui and Teiwa (spoken on Alor and Pantar, N of Timor island, Indonesia). The first issue relates to verbal classification in Abui, the second to the pronoun inventory of Teiwa.

1. Abui has a set of 19 verbs which combine a very generic semantics with a minimal form -- typically a single phoneme. Examples are the verbs *m* ‘with’, *l* ‘affect’, *r* ‘complete’, *ng* ‘apply’, *a* ‘be’ and *e* ‘add’. In other languages, such “generic” verbs may be combined with co-verbs (e.g. Jaminjung, Schultze-Berndt 2000) or appear in verbal sequences (e.g. Kalam, Pawley 1966, 1993). In Abui, the generic verbs combine with each other to derive new verbs, as illustrated in (1). Two or more generic verbs may constitute a morphologically complex verb, and each of the composing verbs specifies a distinct semantic feature of the event denoted by the derived verb. For example, in the verb *ma*, the generic verb *m* ‘with’ relates two entities as being with each other, the verb *a* classifies the event as a state; in *mar* the verb *r* marks the event as completed, in *mal* the verb *l* marks the argument as affected.

(1) Verb	Morph. str.	Semantics	Translation
<i>m</i>	m	WITH	with
<i>a</i>	a	BE	be
<i>ma</i>	m-a	WITH-BE	exist, exist at the same place
<i>mar</i>	m-a-r	WITH-BE-COMplete	complete to be with > be prepared, cooked
<i>mal</i>	m-a-l	WITH-BE-AFFECT	affect to be with > prepare, cook, perform
<i>mang</i>	m-a-ng	WITH-BE-APPLY	be always with > possess, be domestic(ated)
<i>me</i>	m-e	WITH-ADD	add to, move to be with > come
<i>meng</i>	m-e-ng	WITH-ADD-APPLY	add to be with > dress, put on to wear

In the paper, we describe the generic verbs of Abui, and present the restrictions that apply on number and types of generic verbs that combine into complex verbs. We analyse how the semantics of the complex verbs is derived, and propose how an Abui verb (generic or derived) is specified in the lexicon w.r.t. valency and thematic role of argument(s).

2. The second issue relates to pronouns in Teiwa. Teiwa makes distinctions in plural pronouns that are cross-linguistically rare. For example, it has a distinction between 3pl “they (unmarked)” (*iman*) and “they elsewhere (in time/space)” (*i'in*). This is illustrated in (2), where *ni'in* “we.excl” refers to two orphans who were not included in a count. In (2a) the counters are referred to with (unmarked) *iman*, in (2b), however, the use of *i'in* makes explicit that the orphans were not counted because the counters were elsewhere (in time/space).

(2) a.	Hala	ni'in	ma	iman	wan	tagan	man
	others	we.excl	come	they	be	count.Real	Neg
	The others, they did not count us [E.g., because they didn't want to].						
b.	Hala	ni'in	ma	i'in	wan	tagan	man.
	others	we.excl	come	they (elsewhere)	be	count.Real	Neg

The others, they (elsewhere) did not count us [E.g., because they were at another location, or we arrived later].

Teiwa also has special pronoun paradigms to specify the number of participants involved in an event, or the group they belong to. For example, there are pronouns for referents alone (*yi-qai* “2p-only” > “you alone”), for referents involving another group (*yi-qap* “2p-qap” > “you and they”), or pronouns expressing numbers (*yi-man ut* “2p-man four” > “the four of you”).

In sum, the verbal system of Abui presents an unusual window on how events can be deconstructed into sub-events -- the latter being expressed as generic verbs out of which complex verbs are composed; and Teiwa pronouns show unusual distinctions in the classification of pronominal referents.

References

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