

Speaking of speaking: Construction-coerced change of semantic roles for verbs of speaking in Puyuma (Austronesian)

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Keywords: semantic typology; construction grammar; frame semantics; reciprocals; Austronesian

In his semantic typology of action verbs, Dixon (2011) distinguishes two types of languages. In type A, dubbed the “nature-of-argument” type, different verbs in the same conceptual domain show different requirements on the nature of participants involved in the action expressed by those verbs. By contrast, in type B, or the “nature-of-action” type, the difference lies in the nature of the action irrespective of the nature of the participants involved. He illustrates these two types with verbs of speaking in English and Jarawara (Arawan). English belongs to type A because “[m]any verbs of speaking...have a fixed correspondence between semantic role and syntactic function” (p.211). For instance, the verb *report* requires the Message (i.e. what is talked about) to be encoded by its direct object and the Addressee by an oblique whereas the semantic-syntactic correspondence has to be reversed when it comes to the verb *inform*. On the other hand, Jarawara has two verbs of speaking, *-hijara-* and *-kamina-*, the difference of which “is not in the configuration of arguments involved, but in the type of action; *-hijara-* refers to a casual act of speaking, whereas *-kamina-* refers to something more deliberate, a story-telling” (p.212). This division of labor qualifies Jarawara as a type B language.

However, Dixon’s typology is concerned with the relationship across verbs, but not so much about the relationship of the same verb across constructions. In this study, we present an interesting case study of construction-coerced change of semantic roles concerning a reciprocally marked verb of speaking in Puyuma (Austronesian). Three constructions involving the verb *ma.za-zayar* ‘talk to each other’ are examined, where reciprocity is coded by the prefix *ma-* in conjunction with the *Ca*-reduplication of the root. In the inclusory construction (see Lichtenberk 2000), the plural pronominal clitic *=mi* ‘1PL.EXCL’ denotes a superset of the Speaker-cum-Addressee while the adnominal marker *tu=i=* introduces a subset of the Addressee. Importantly, the Speaker is interpreted as singular in spite of the use of a plural pronominal clitic. With everything else held equal, when *tu=i=* is replaced by another adnominal marker *kani=*, the same NP it marks encodes the Message instead and the same pronominal clitic has to refer to a plural Speaker. However, if the verb in the same sentence is additionally marked by *ki-*, which elsewhere in the language is a lexical prefix meaning “to get; to obtain” when collocating with a nominal root and marks passive voice when attached to a verbal root (Elizabeth & Teng 2009), the NP prefaced by *kani=* becomes the Addressee instead.

These constructions illustrate that semantic roles as well as participant numbers are not just locally determined by adnominal markers or pronominal clitics; instead they are coerced globally from the constructions they are part of. Moreover, we argue that reciprocal verbs without *ki-* encode symmetrical reciprocal activity, “where both parties have equal responsibility for initiating or maintaining the event” (Evans et al. 2011:11), whereas those with *ki-* profile one party as the primary initiator of mutual action, thus somewhat altering the nature of reciprocal activity. The Puyuma case shows that Dixon’s type A and B can both be observed across constructions in the same language even when the same verb of speaking is involved.

References

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