Transitivity and the Referentiality of Implicit Objects in Austronesian

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An interesting split exists in Austronesian in the treatment of implicit objects of ambitransitive verbs. In languages such as Malay and Malagasy, an implicit object (indicated by ∅) of an actor voice verb may introduce a discourse referent, but this is impossible in languages like Tagalog and Chamorro (Chung 2005, Kaufman and Paul in progress). This is most easily diagnosed by the sluicing construction (Ross 1967) as shown in (1)-(4).[1]

> (1) Saya mau menulis ∅ tapi tak tahu apa. (Malay)
>   1SG want AV.write   but NEG know what
>
>   'I want to write but I don't know what.'

> (2) Tia ma-noratra aho   ∅   fa tsy fantatr-o
>   want AV.IRR-write 1SG.NOM   but NEG PV.know-1SG.GEN
>
>   hoe inona. (Malagasy)
>   COMP what
>
>   'I want to write but I don't know what.'

> (3) *Nais ko-ng s<um>ulat   ∅ pero hindi ko   alam
>   want 1SG.GEN <AV.INF>write   but NEG   1SG.GEN know
>
>   kung ano. (Tagalog)
>   COMP what
>
>   (for 'I want to write but I don't know what.')

> (4) ??Man-änaitai gui', lao ti hu-tungu' hafa. (Chamorro)
>   AGR.AP-read.PROG he   but NEG AGR-know   what
>
>   (for, 'He's reading, but I don't know what.') (Chung 2005, [ex.15b])

Here I will investigate the connection between the treatment of implicit objects and transitivity. It appears that the licensing of implicit object referents correlates with some typical transitivity properties (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980) of the actor voice verb in a given language. Specifically, the possibility of specific/definite objects (Hopper and Thompson's "individuation") in the actor voice correlates with the ability to refer back to an implicit object as seen in (5)-(8).[2]

> (5) Saya menulis buku ini.   (Malay)
>   1sg AV.write book this
>
>   'I wrote this book.'

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[1] The cognate Chamorro form in [4] is analyzed as an antipassive by Chung (1998).

[2] Dez (1980) claims that actor voice verbs with definite objects are awkward in Malagasy. However, they are certainly more acceptable in Malagasy than in Tagalog as can be seen from their frequency.

(6)   Na-noratra   ity   boky   ity   aho   (Malagasy)
      AV.PST-write   this   book   this   1SG.NOM

      'I wrote this book.'

(7)   *?Nag-sulat   ako   ng   librong   ito.   (Tagalog)
      AV.PRF-write   1SG.NOM   GEN   book-LNK   this

      (for 'I wrote this book.')

(8)   *Man-änaitai   gui'   I   libro. (Chamorro)
      AGR.AP-read.PROG   he   the   book

      (for, 'He's reading the book.')

Languages like English class together with Malay and Malagasy in allowing both definite objects and implicit object antecedents for sluicing. Here I will look at the extent to which this correlation holds true for Austronesian and some implications for the treatment of the actor voice.

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