General Diachronic Course of Proto-Austronesian Casemarkers

Prepositions and Topic Markers: Sources of Austronesian Casemarkers

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Overview

This is an exploration in Diachronic Natural Language Syntax (DNLS). It moves toward reconstructing what the spoken natural language may have been like in PAN, possibly 6000 years ago. What it attempts to reconstruct is the Surface Structure, including the word order. It deals with syntax on the level used in reference grammars, such as Mosel and Hovdhaugen’s (1992) Samoan Reference Grammar, and the reference grammars of Philippine and Micronesian languages produced by the University of Hawai‘i.

Abbreviations include P proto, AN Austronesian, MP MalayPolynesian, PN Polynesian. I shall sometimes use “PCM” for “prepositions and casemarkers” or even “prepositions, topic markers, and casemarkers”. Why not include “topic” in the set of cases? Partly because the development of topic markers into Nominative or Absolutive case markers has some analogy to the development of space prepositions into abstract casemarkers. Note, too, that topics, like vocatives and exclamations, are not syntactically within a clause. Latin grammars include Vocative as a “case”, but the ancient grammarian Panini considered Sanskrit to have only seven cases, not eight, as Vocative, not being in a clause, does not enter into syntactic relations. I like Li’s concept that prepositions are one type of casemaker, though it is convenient to distinguish prepositional phrases sharply from Det phrases.

In his Ph.D. dissertation done under Starosta, Li (1973: 111) remarked, “Prepositions, determiners, personal pronouns, verbal formations, and occasionally word order...are case markers in Rukai.” He added (op. cit., 116): ”[P]reposition (P) is not a sister category of noun (N). Of the four main case forms treated in this study, two of them are marked on P’s, while the other two are marked on N’s. P’s are marked for the two main case forms: [+L] and [+I], and N’s are marked for these two:
[+NM] and [+AC].’’ [This is a distinction based on the difference between a PP, prepositional phrase, which modifies a verb or noun (and is thereby adverbial or adnominal/adjectival), and DetP, determiner phrase, which is a substantive.] This system allows us to regard, for example, Mayrinax ki “to, toward, into” as a preposition, without preventing it from being a “casemarker” in paradigmatic tables in which its position is analogous to that of Nominative casemarkers, which cannot be called prepositions. So, in this paper, whenever I distinguish “prepositions” from “casemarkers”, read that as distinguishing casemarkers that are prepositions from casemarkers that are not prepositions.

The concept of “topic” used here is much the same as that used by Foley and Van Valin (1984), as follows. “Pr[agmatic]P[ivot]s in at least some languages developed out of earlier topics. But...[p]ivots are clause-internal, whereas topics occur external to the clause... Topics are normally set off from the rest of the sentence by a pause... Topics play no such central role in the syntax of any language...; they seem instead to be an adjunct to a sentence rather than an integral part of it...”

From the situation prevailing in conservative languages it is the consensus that PAN had verb-initial word order. It is precisely because the topic is not part of the clause that it was allowed to come first.

A general principle of diachronic Universal Grammar is that particles of Locative usage (at, in) acquire Ablative usage (from); and particles of Ablative usage acquire Genitive usage (of); and perhaps Locatives can acquire Genitive usage directly without first acquiring Ablative usage.

As I shall use capital letters C and V for generalized consonant and vowel, I’ll use a lower-case c for the reconstructed PAN consonant usually written *C. Dyen had used the lower-case c for another phoneme, but that shouldn’t cause a problem, as neither Ross’s (1992) nor Wolff’s (1995) sound chart uses the symbol *c any more.

The general scenario proposed is as follows. The ancient markers were light CV syllables. The vowels were a for nonspecific common nouns, and i for personal pronouns and proper names of persons, and the default value was u.
Consonants were zero, n, k, d, s, and both c and t (which fall together as t in MP).

Of the reconstructed prehistories of casemarking, the most clear cut are those of the space prepositions, which were: ablative nV, locative V, allative kV, locative dV, allative tV, locative cV, and locative and general oblique sV. Every one of those has living languages today that preserve the original space usage that they had in PAN. Every one of them, of course, has developed new usages in some languages. The most conservative of all is the nV particle which consistently glosses 'of', 'from', and (agentive) 'by'. (When major syntactic reanalysis changes Ergative case to Nominative, as it did in Proto-Central Eastern MP, the casemarked na pronoun from nV + demonstrative a becomes Nominative in some contexts.)

PAN had phrases that occurred at the left edge of the sentence and were not in any clause. Those included topics, vocatives, and exclamations. At first they were marked by a particle only on their right edge, separating them from the clause. We trace the complex process by which (in many of the daughter language groups) topics acquired markers on their left, were moved to the right of the sentence, served briefly as clarifying afterthoughts, and then were reanalyzed as Nominatives (including Absolutives). There were two generations of markers of Topic (and specificity). An earlier wave of Topic becoming Nominative was with kV, and a later wave used plain V (zero consonant).

Comparison of sentence-constructions of Amis with those of Malagasy shows the change caught in the act. Framing of the topic between demonstratives took place before the movement took place (preserved in Amis) and persisted at least briefly after the movement (preserved in Malagasy). The sequence was (1) framing; (2) movement of the Topic phrase from the left to the right edge of the clause; (3) inclusion of the former Topic into the clause and reanalyzing it as the Nominative/Absolutive and as Spec,IP; (4) loss of the sentence-final Topic marker; and (5) relaxation of the requirement to keep the (new) Nominative/Absolutive sentence-final (as VOS has less optimality than VSO).

**Successive Steps in the Development of Casemarking from PAN to PMP**

Though we'll focus on specific parts of it, I'll give here, as a framework, my understanding of the comprehensive
course of theory of case-marking ancestral to the MP division, the group that includes some 90 percent of the AN languages. From study of the evidence, this is what I think happened. Perhaps this set of hypotheses will serve as a stimulus to scholars who may prove some, disprove others, and arrive at a more definitive synthesis.

1. At a very early time in PAN, the language had a set of monomoraic particles, each a single light syllable consisting of a consonant + vowel u. The consonants were zero, n, k, d₁, s, and both t and c. Thus the set was: u, nu, ku, d₁u, su, tu and cu. All of them served as prepositions of space relations such as “in”, “at”, “to” and “from” with perhaps additional functions. The variants with vowels a and i came later, with the possible exception of the locative particle, which may have always been i.

2. PAN had a particle i, which must have been an article or classifier used before personal pronouns and proper names of persons. The sequence Cu i contracted to Cui and then Ci. A Cui form survives in Chamorro as nui.

3. PAN had a particle a, which must have been an article or classifier for nonspecific common nouns. The sequence Cu a contracted to Cua and then Ca. Two Cua forms survive in Paiwan as nua and tua < *sua. A Cua form survives in Kanakanavu as sua.

4. Thus a paradigm developed of Ca, Cu, Ci, with some of the consonants. While some consonants have gone through steps 1, 2, and 3, others besides locative i may have begun with a lexically specific vowel, and then undergone reanalysis into the three-vowel paradigm.

5. All these particles, prepositional casemarkers (PCMs), were capable of being grammaticalized into non-prepositional casemarkers. They did so in varying time frames in various languages.

6. If there was a PCM cu it was homophonic with the demonstrative pronoun cu (whose consonant is known to be PAN c because it is tsu in Paiwan). Like all demonstratives, PAN’s had distality (from “this” to “that”). PAN had six such demonstratives, ni, d₁i, a, cu, na, and d₁a, and probably also ta and ti, as we discussed in last year’s SEALS paper.

7. When followed by nouns, the prepositions and casemarkers remained independent words. But when followed by demonstrative pronouns the PCMs coalesce with them to form bimoraic casemarked demonstrative pronouns.