The Case-marking System of Proto-Formosan

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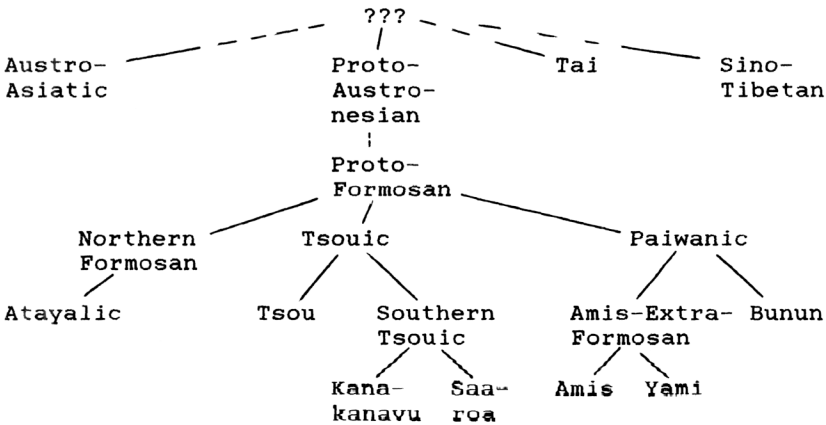
I. INTRODUCTION

'Formosan' is the name used by Austronesian linguists to refer to the aboriginal languages of Taiwan. Taiwan is very probably the homeland of all the Austronesian languages of the Pacific and mainland Southeast Asia, and Proto-Formosan (PF), the lowest common ancestor of these languages, is either a first-order subgroup of Proto-Austronesian (PAN), or is identical with PAN itself. If the Austronesian language family is in fact genetically connected with Tai, Sino-Tibetan, and/or Austroasiatic, this is the level at which to look for that connection:

1) Proto-Formosan and its extended family[1]



[1]The Austronesian part of the family tree shown in this diagram is based on subgroupings by O.C. Dahl (Dahl 1973:124), R.A. Blust (Blust 1977:2), Paul Li (Li 1985) and Laurence Reid.[2]PF had auxiliary verbs which

Formosan languages in general are grammatically quite similar to one another and to Philippine languages, especially in areas such as verb morphology and pronoun and determiner systems. However, there are significant internal differences among them, and the reconstructed proto-system that I will present in this paper in an attempt to account for the modern diversity looks much more isolating and mainlandish than any of its modern descendants.

We have a fairly clear idea of the verbal morphology and the general case-marking typology of this protolanguage thanks to work by Dahl (1973) and Wolff (1973). Starosta, Pawley, and Reid (1982) have reconstructed some of the earlier changes leading to the modern verbal morphology patterns, while Blust (1977) and Reid (1981) have reconstructed several sets of pronouns and determiners. However, many questions about the nature of the original case-marking system and its evolution into the various configurations found in the modern Formosan languages remain open. This paper, which draws on earlier work on Formosan languages by myself and other researchers, is an attempt to partly correct that deficiency. Using the lexicase dependency framework and the comparative method, it concentrates on reconstructing the earliest grammatical devices which overtly marked the grammatical relations between NPs and their regent verbs or nouns, and on showing the historical connections between NP case-markers and verbal focus affixes.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I will maintain at the outset that grammatical reconstruction cannot be done meaningfully in a theoretical vacuum. Within a rigorous and constrained theory, every reconstructed stage must meet the same constraints obeyed by any modern language, and a plausible abductive mechanism must be demonstrated for moving from each stage to the next. If the theoretical framework is sufficiently generative and constrained, then there will be little room for wild divergences in the reconstruction. Two independent reconstructions undertaken within the same generative and constrained framework will ideally reach the same conclusion, and we can have some confidence that this conclusion is in fact the correct one.

The framework I am employing in this paper is lexicase, a type of monostratal lexicon-based dependency grammar. This model has been tested and refined in the analysis of parts of almost fifty

languages, and I believe it is generative and constrained enough to use for the purpose of fairly reliable grammatical reconstruction. Nevertheless, although my reconstruction of the Proto-Formosan case-marking system will be stated for the sake of convenience as if it were attested fact, it must be borne in mind that the reconstruction is necessarily conjectural. It approximates factuality to the extent that it is the only possible scenario which is compatible with the facts of the modern languages, with the theory, and with the requirements of abductive grammatical change.

III. NOMINAL ACTANTS

A. Case marking typology

Proto-Formosan case-marking was ergative. NP case marking was somewhat similar to that of modern Atayal, with a small number of prepositions and determiners supplemented by a fairly elaborate system of demonstrative nouns and relator nouns to mark relations of location and possession between a head word (a verb or noun) and an NP dependent.

B. Noun phrases and determiners

There is little doubt that Proto-Formosan, like Thai and Khmer on the mainland, was a head-initial language, with two pre-noun determiners the only exceptions to this rule. No Nominative determiner seems to be reconstructible at this level, but non-subject actants were usually marked by one of two pre-N determiners, **i*[+Det,-Nom,+dfnt] if definite or **ɑ*[+Det,-Nom,-dfnt] if indefinite. Reflexes of both **i* and **ɑ* can be seen vestigially in those modern determiners containing *i-* or *ɑ-*, such as for example the Paiwan determiners *ti*, *ni*, and *tjai* (personal) versus *ɑ*, *nuɑ*, and *tuɑ* (common) (Egli 1990:160).

C. Case functions

The definite non-nominative determiner **i* was used to mark a broad range of non-nominative (non-subject) actants, including preposed topics, locative NPs, definite notional objects of two-argument intransitive verbs (analogous to the function of Tagalog *sa* and Polynesian *i*), and possibly transitive Agents, while **ɑ* was used for indefinite notional objects of two-argument intransitives (comparable to the function of Tagalog *ng* in antipassive sentences).

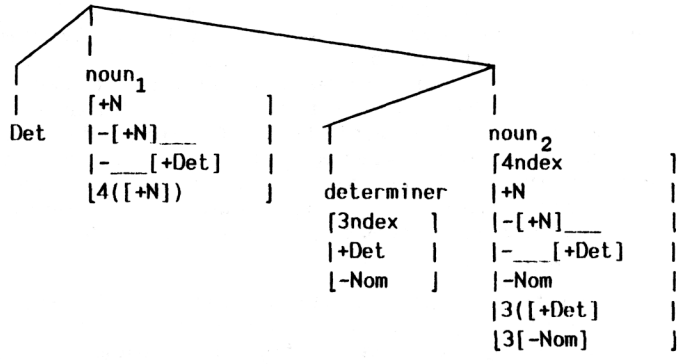
The Paiwan adnominal Genitive determiner *i* (cf. Egli 1989:188) and the Amis (Chen 1982:282,286) and Paiwan (Egli 1989:186) Locative *i* are direct

descendants of **i*, while the Paiwan and Amis ligature *a* reflects **a*, but otherwise neither **i* nor **a* survives in its original clause-level function in any of the daughter languages. Traces of both are however abundant in the determiner and pronoun morphology of the modern languages. The use of **i* to mark topicalized definite NPs can for example be seen in the *i*-initial topicalized Nominative pronoun forms in Kanakanavu (cf. Mei 1982:210-211) as well as the Atayal free Nominative pronouns *isu*ʔ and *ita*ʔ, which contrast with the respective clitic forms *su*ʔ and *ta*ʔ (cf. Egerod 1966:347-48, Huang 1989:117). The *i*-initial alternative forms of the nominative determiners which mark topicalized subjects in the Tapang dialect of Tsou (Tung 1964:64) also reflect this function.

D. The dependency structure of Noun Phrases

Proto-Formosan head nouns allowed NP or S dependents. Except for determiners, all dependents of nouns branched off to the right. NP dependents of the head noun attached either directly to their regent (e.g. inalienable possession and location) or else occurred as dependents of intervening relator nouns or the demonstrative noun **na*:

2) Proto-Formosan NPs



Noun-headed dependents of noun regents bore one of three functions to the head noun: equational, possessive, or locative, the same dependent types which are found in mainland languages such as Thai (Savetamalya 1989) and Old Khmer (Sak to appear).

1. Equational dependents

The equative dependent construction is very common in the languages of mainland and insular Southeast Asia. It is essentially a relative clause construction