

Argument alternations in Kimaragang

Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (see references below) distinguish between two kinds of object alternation in English. In some, like the Dative alternation, both forms describe essentially the same event; in others, such as the Locative alternation, the two forms may describe different events and may have different truth conditions. They note that alternations of the second type are possible with activity verbs but generally impossible with accomplishment (transitive change of state) verbs. They explain this difference based on the inherent complexity of the verb's semantic structure. Activity verbs have a minimally specified event structure which can be elaborated in various ways, e.g., *sweep the sidewalk (clean)* vs. *sweep the leaves off the sidewalk*. Accomplishment verbs, however, have an inherently complex event structure, and only the argument which undergoes a change of state can be expressed as object, e.g. *melt the snow off the roof* vs. **melt the roof (clean) of snow*.

In this paper I illustrate several types of alternations in Kimaragang, a Philippine-type language of northeastern Borneo. One type, corresponding roughly to the English Dative alternation, is illustrated in (1). This pattern was analyzed by Kroeger (1996) as an alternation in affectedness (specifically, the identity of the undergoer) without a change in thematic relations. This type of alternation occurs with both activity and accomplishment verbs. It is signaled morphologically by a change in the stem prefix (if any); but there is no change in the identity of the argument which is associated with each of the voice-marking affixes.

Other alternations do change the association of voice markers to arguments. For example, the verb *woog-an* 'wash' (dative voice) may be used to select either the surface or the dirt as subject (or "pivot"), as illustrated in (2). (The subject is italicized in each example.) Conversely, the goal or target of *pilay* 'throw' may be referenced with either dative voice (3a) or objective voice (3b), depending on what kind of event is being described: 'throw' (obligatory theme, optional goal) as in (3a) vs. 'throw at, pelt' (obligatory goal, optional theme) as in (3b). Alternations of these types occur with activity verbs, but do not seem to be possible with accomplishment verbs.

None of these alternations are "affix driven" in the sense that a particular affix is required to trigger the semantic and syntactic changes involved. (Kimaragang is different in this respect from Indonesian, in which the suffixes *-kan* and *-i* trigger analogous alternations.) Rather, each "sense" of a particular verb seems to be associated with a paradigm of inflected verb forms (combinations of stem prefix and voice marker), and no one affix occurs in every member of the paradigm. I suggest that each of these paradigms is associated with a distinct event-structure template. Moreover, there is some evidence which suggests that the choice of voice marker for a particular argument cannot be defined in terms of a simple semantic/thematic role label, but must be based on the entire template within which that argument appears. The alternate voice coding for goal illustrated in (3) provides one such example. Goals of intransitive motion verbs require still another option, the Locative Voice. If this analysis is correct, it provides striking support for the constant-plus-template theory of verbal semantics proposed by RH&L (1998).

Examples

- (1) a. Ø-pa-ta'ak oku do siin sid tanak ku.
AV-TR₂-give 1sg.NOM ACC money DAT child 1sg.GEN
'I give money to my child.'
- b. Mana'ak(m-poN-ta'ak) oku di tanak ku do siin.
AV-TR₁-give 1sg.NOM ACC child 1sg.GEN ACC money
'I give my child money.'
- (2) a. W[in]oog-an ku noh i burunsut di ki-tetee.
[PAST]-wash-DV 1sg.GEN COMPL NOM porch REL EXIST-feces
'I have washed *the porch*, which had feces on it.'
- b. W[in]oog-an dialo i tilob yoh.
[PAST]-wash-DV 3sg NOM vomit 3sg.GEN
'He has washed up *his vomit*.'
- (3) a. P[in]ilay-an ku nopoh ilo' tasu do takanon
[PAST]-throw-DV 1sg.GEN only that.NOM dog ACC rice
'I threw some rice to *that dog* (because I was afraid he would bite me).'
- b. P[in]ilay-Ø dialo do pampang i tulu di manuk.
[PAST]-throw-OV 3sg ACC rock NOM head GEN chicken
'He threw a rock at *the chicken's head*.'

References

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