

Focus marking and phrase structure in Tsou

Henry Y. Chang
Academia Sinica

Abstract

This paper addresses the following three long-standing questions in Austronesian linguistics: (i) What is the nature of Focus marking? (ii) How should Focus constructions be structurally represented? (iii) How should the arguments associated with Focus marking be derived and realized in the syntax? Based on our recent findings in Tsou, we argue that (i) a Non-Agent Focus (NAF) construction is comprised of a voice phrase and an applicative phrase, whereas its Agent Focus counterpart lacks the applicative projection; (ii) the voice category is dichotomous, namely, Agent voice (AV) vs. Undergoer voice (UV), while the applicative category exhibits a three-way distinction, i.e. Patient applicative, Locative applicative, and Instrumental/Benefactive applicative; (iii) An argument must undergo a series of successive cyclic A-movement and feature-checking before landing in the subject position and getting assigned the nominative/absolute case. In addition, we suggest that the ergative O/S alignment requirement triggers the obligatory raising of the applied argument in NAF constructions, leading to a typologically unique scenario – an applicative without the applied object. This, coupled with the absence of direct object and accusative case, accounts for a number of otherwise mysterious syntactic properties of Tsou (e.g. the lack of object-control constructions and object-predicting resultatives; the ban on causer as the subject). Hopefully, this paper can manage to solve the puzzles revolving around Focus marking in Austronesian languages on the one hand and prompt the improvement of the theory of grammar on the other.