

The argument status of clitic pronouns in Sou Amana Teru (Ambon Island, Indonesia)

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The literature on pronominal arguments (e.g. Jelinek 1984, Jelinek and Demers 1994, Bresnan and Mchombo 1987) has concentrated on languages in which elements which were originally pronouns have become part of the morphological system of the languages analysed, where grammaticalization is complete. The present paper looks at the status of pronominal arguments in a language in which pronouns are only beginning to acquire a morphological character. In Sou Amana Teru (Ambon Island, Indonesia), a pronoun obligatorily occurs immediately before the verb in both main and subordinate clauses (cf. Ross 2004 for Oceanic languages). This can be a free pronoun with independent stress:

Yau upa wa'a Morewaer-e
1sg sit LOC PN-SUFF
'I live at Morewaer (Tengah-tengah).'

It can also be a reduced pronoun which forms a phonological word with another element:

Ar=oi wa'a pe'e?
2sg=go LOC where
'Where are you going?'

Reduced pronouns do not always attach to the verb; they can also attach as enclitics to a preceding word which I analyse as heading a functional projection above VP:

Taha=u tea=re.
NEG=1sg know=3sgNH
'I don't know (it).'

A reduced pronoun can also reference a free noun phrase. This is common for third person NPs, but rare for free pronouns:

Mansia=re si=lohi ian-e.
person=DIST 3pl=look.for fish-SUFF
'These people are looking for fish.'

These facts suggest that in Sou Amana Teru pronouns always fill the subject argument position. The position of the pronoun is syntactically determined - it precedes the verb and attaches to the first element in the projection dominating VP. An anaphorically linked NP only occurs where it adds information, that is, when a third person nominal expression is involved or when contrastive prominence is given to a personal pronoun. However, this picture is complicated somewhat by the fact that there is no overt pronoun representing third person non-human entities in subject position. Three analyses are therefore possible: 1) there is a zero element filling the gap in the pronoun paradigm; 2) the preverbal pronoun is only optionally an argument - where a free noun phrase also occurs, the pronoun has only a cross-referencing function; 3) separate rules control the behaviour of non-human subjects. I argue that the first of these options is to be preferred as the analysis is then maximally general, and the position is supported by the evidence which shows that the preverbal pronoun is not part of the morphological system of the language.

(Syntax)

References:

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