Splits in morphosyntactic alignment in Western Austronesian languages: Evidence from Gorontalic

A great deal of attention has been paid to categorizing the morphosyntactic alignment of Western Austronesian languages (Chen & McDonnell 2019). Much of the debate has centered around whether these languages should best be classified as having ergative-absolutive alignment (e.g. Aldridge 2004) or as having a symmetrical alignment system that is categorically different both from ergative-absolutive and from nominative-accusative alignment types (e.g. Riesberg 2014). (Analyses that assume a fundamentally nominative-accusative alignment type are less common, but see Chen 2017). Inherent to many of these attempts at categorization is the underlying assumption that a given language *has* a particular type of morphosyntactic alignment. However, we know from the prevalence of so-called split-ergativity, that languages do not always fit neatly into alignment categories. Splits in alignment are often associated with differences in animacy or in tense/aspect distinctions.

This paper presents new data from the Gorontalic languages of northern Sulawesi, revealing the ways in which these languages can best be described as exhibiting multiple alignment types that cut through the grammatical categories present in the languages. Our primary goal is to show how at least some of the issues surrounding the ergative-vs.-symmetrical debate in Austronesian linguistics can be resolved with appeals to splits in alignment type.

Along with the two Mongondowic languages, the seven Gorontalic languages form a subgroup of the Greater Central Philippine branch of Malayo-Polynesian (Blust 1991). They are spoken on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, often considered to be a transition zone between the canonically Philippine-type languages spoken further to the north and the more Indonesian-type languages spoken further to the south and west. This paper focuses on two Gorontalic languages, Gorontalo and Suwawa. We argue that—to some degree—apparent difficulties in ascribing a particular alignment system to these languages can actually be indications that there exist multiple types of morphosyntactic alignment within a given language (not unlike what is found in split-ergativity). Thus, for example, we see such a split between pronominal and non-pronominal argument marking in Suwawa. Whereas pronouns can most parsimoniously be analyzed as following ergative alignment (1), common nouns look rather more symmetrical (2).

(1a)   ami   lologo   neya
         1PL.EXCL.ABS seek   3PL.ERG
         'They look for us.' (patient voice, i.e., 'basic transitive')

(1b)   teya   mo-lologo   onami
         3PL.ABS   AV.NPST-seek 1PL.EXCL.OBL
         'They look for us.' (actor voice, i.e., 'antipassive')

(1c)   ami / teye   mo-nabu
         1PL.EXCL.ABS / 3PL.ABS   AV.NPST-fall
         'We/They will fall.' (actor voice, i.e., 'intransitive')

(2a)   pintu no-ga'ut-a   no   bola
         door   PST-close-PV   NPIV   money
         'The monkey closed <u>the door</u>.' (patient voice)

(2b)   bola   no-ga'ut-o   no   pintu
            monkey   PST-close-AV NPIV   door
            'The monkey closed the door.' (actor voice)

(2c)   pintu   no-ga'ut-a
            door   PST-close-PV
            'The door was closed.' (patient voice)

(2d)   pintu   no-ga'ut-o
            door   PST-close-AV
            'The door closed.' (actor voice)

With pronouns, we see that the single argument of the intransitive clause (*ami* or *teya*) (1c) is marked the same as the more patientive argument of the basic transitive clause (*ami*) (1a), whereas the more agentive argument is marked differently (*neya*, not *teya) (1a). The actor voice constructions could thus be considered an antipassive, where the more agentive (ergative) argument is promoted to absolutive (*neya > teya*), whereas the more patientive (absolutive) argument is demoted to an oblique (*ami > onami*) (1b). The semantic patient in the actor voice is therefore *not* marked as NPIV (*nami*), but is rather marked with a different oblique form (*onami*).

With common nouns, on the other hand, we see that the pivot argument (or focus) receives no overt marking, whereas the non-pivot argument (or non-focus) receives the marker *no*. There is no morphological indication of it being more parsimonious to interpret the patient-voice verb as derived from the actor-voice verb or to interpret the actor-voice verb as derived from the patient-voice verb, nor is there any evidence of a verbal morpheme indicating (in)transitivity, especially since *both* verbal morphologies are possible with single-argument constructions (2c, 2d). Furthermore, an ergative analysis would be unsatisfying here, since it would require the marker *no* to indicate both the ergative argument of the basic transitive clause (2a) and the oblique (patient) argument of the putative antipassive construction (2b) (there is a designated oblique marker *o* in Suwawa, distinct from the non-pivot marker *no*).

Thus, argument marking in Gorontalic languages exemplifies a split in alignment, such that pronouns appear more ergative, whereas full NPs appear more symmetrical. Although aspects of Gorontalic languages (such as 'SVO word order') indicate a move away from canonical Philippine-type symmetrical voice, we intend to show how splits in alignment in Gorontalic can help illuminate similar phenomena found among all types of symmetrical voice languages.

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