

Proto-Austronesian Case and its Diachronic Development

Based primarily on evidence from Formosan languages, Ross (2006) reconstructs the case markers of Proto-Austronesian (PAN) as **k-* ‘nominative’, **n-* ‘genitive’, and **C-* ‘oblique (including accusative)’, as shown in (1). He additionally claims that determiners expressing information about the following noun phrase were attached to these case markers: **i* for personal nouns and **a* or **u* for common nouns, differing possibly in terms of definiteness or specificity. This combination yields the following paradigm for case markers.

Blust (2015) reconstructs the same vowel distinctions but attributes a different function to **a*, reconstructing it as marking a plural personal noun. Blust also reconstructs different consonants to mark nominative and oblique cases: **s-* and **k-*, respectively, as shown in (2).

(1) PAN	NOM	GEN	OBL/ACC	(2) PAN	NOM	GEN	OBL/ACC
Personal	<i>*ki</i>	<i>*ni</i>	<i>*Ci</i>	Personal.SG	<i>*si</i>	<i>*ni</i>	<i>*ki</i>
Common	<i>*ka</i>	<i>*na</i>	<i>*Ca</i>	Personal.PL	<i>*sa</i>	<i>*na</i>	<i>*ka</i>
	<i>*ku</i>	<i>*nu</i>	<i>*Cu</i>	Common	<i>*su</i>	<i>*nu</i>	<i>*ku</i>

The current paper is primarily concerned with the reconstruction of nominative case forms but will also address the oblique forms. Specifically, I present additional evidence for Ross’ (2006) proposal that the nominative forms should be reconstructed with initial **k-*. I also propose a diachronic pathway for the development of nominative forms beginning with *s-*, *t-* or *c-* in some languages.

I begin by pointing out that Blust’s evidence comes primarily from Malayo-Polynesian languages and is much less well supported by Formosan languages, which represent multiple high-order subgroups of PAN. Blust (2015) is also challenged by the existence of nominative forms with *t-* or *c-* in some Formosan languages like Paiwan (3; from Chang 2000) and Amis (4; from Wu 2000). Blust’s reconstruction of PAN **s-* would require positing an unconditioned fortitioning from a fricative to a stop or affricate, which is not a common type of sound change.

(3) Paiwan	NOM	GEN	OBL	(4) Amis	NOM	GEN	OBL
Personal.SG	<i>ti</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>tjay</i>	Personal.SG	<i>ci</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>ci...an</i>
Personal.PL	<i>tia</i>	<i>nia</i>	<i>tjaia</i>	Personal.PL	<i>ca</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>ca...an</i>
Common	<i>a</i>	<i>n(u)a</i>	<i>t(u)a</i>	Common	<i>ku</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>tu</i>

A second argument comes from the fact that in Formosan languages employing alveolar or alveo-palatal nominative case markers, this is found only with personal names, while nominative common nouns are always marked with a reflex of the **k-* nominative. This pattern is found in Paiwan, Amis, Mayrinax, and Saisiyat. Bunun, Saaroa, and most Atayalic dialects display a syncretism between personal and common nouns in which a reflex of **k-* is favored. A syncretism is also found in Kananavu, in which the demonstrative *sua* is employed to mark all nominative NPs.

The third piece of evidence comes from nominative pronominal forms marked by *k-* in several Formosan languages, e.g. Kananavu, Amis, Bunun, and most dialects of Rukai. For example, nominative personal pronouns in Amis are formed by adding *k-* to a clitic form of the pronoun. In the partial paradigm shown in (5), the clitic forms are the corresponding genitives.

(5) Amis	NOM	GEN	(Wu 2018)
1.SG	<i>kako</i>	<i>=ako</i>	
1.PL.INCL	<i>kita</i>	<i>=ita</i>	
2.SG	<i>kiso</i>	<i>=iso</i>	

It should be noted that clitic pronouns did not show case distinctions in PAN (Ross 2015), so it may be countered that the addition of a reflex of **k-* to mark nominative case on pronouns is a post-PAN innovation. But even if this turns out to be an innovation, it clearly predates the use of alveolar or palatal consonants to mark nominative case. First, these Amis pronouns are lexicalized forms. It is also clear that they are not formed through the synchronic productive

process of nominative case marking, which would be to add the prefix *c-* (rather than *k-*). This is because the modern Amis productive nominative case marker for personal names are *ci* and *ca*, as can be seen in (4). In Formosan languages, case markers for common nouns never attach to pronouns in languages that have distinct marking for common and personal nouns. Interestingly, *c-* is in fact found in the formation of third person nominative pronouns, e.g. *cira* ‘3.SG’ and *caira* ‘3.PL’. This distinction between first/second and third person pronouns is an additional argument that *k-* is a retention, while *c-* is innovative. PAN did not have overt third person nominative pronouns (Ross 2015). Modern Formosan languages which do have them have innovated these forms from demonstratives. In Amis, *-ra* is a demonstrative indicating distal, visible referents (Wu 2018).

It should be noted that Blust (2015) offers evidence of his own for the retention of his reconstructed nominative **s-* in pronouns. He rightly points out the existence of forms like *sinu* ‘who’ in many Philippine languages and *siapa* ‘who’ in Malay/Indonesian, which are transparently formed by prefixing a nominative case marker for personal nouns to an indefinite pronoun, e.g. *siapa* < *si* NOM.PN + *apa* ‘what’. The same generalization might also apply to some Formosan languages like Bunun *sima*. However, forms like *tima* (Paiwan, Thao), *tiana* (Kavalan), and *cima* (Amis) are problematic from a phonological standpoint, since the change **s-* > *t-* or *c-* is an unusual sound change, as noted above.

In this paper, I argue for a revised version of Ross’ (2006) reconstruction in which nominative case was marked by **k-* and oblique by **t-*. This oblique marker is directly reflected in a wide range of Formosan languages, e.g. Paiwan, Amis, Kavalan, Thao, and Tsou.

(6) PAN	NOM	OBL	(7) Tanan Rukai	NOM	OBL
Personal	<i>*ki</i>	<i>*ti</i>	Personal	<i>ku</i>	<i>ki</i>
CN.SPEC	<i>*ku</i>	<i>*tu</i>	CN.SPEC	<i>ka</i>	<i>na</i>
CN.NSPEC	<i>*ka</i>	<i>*ta</i>	CN.NSPEC	<i>ka</i>	<i>sa/Da</i>

Consistent marking of nominative case by *k-* is reflected in Rukai, as exemplified by Tanan in (7). However, *ki* has shifted from nominative to oblique, a situation which also obtains in the Budai dialect, though Tona and Maga retain evidence for erstwhile nominative *ki*. I propose that the shift of **ki* from nominative to oblique was in progress at the time of the break-up of PAN into its immediate descendants, which according to Ross (2009) are Rukai, Tsou, Puyuma, and Nuclear Austronesian (NucAN), a subgroup encompassing all other Austronesian languages. The shift was completed in Proto-NucAN, where the oblique marker **ti* was extended to nominative personal names. Lenition took place to produce the variation among *ti*, *ci*, and *si* found in some Formosan and many Malayo-Polynesian languages today. After the extension of **ti* to the nominative paradigm in Proto-NucAN, the distinction between nominative and oblique was maintained by the innovation of the suffix *-an* on oblique personal names and/or pronouns (in addition to the case marker **ti*), which is reflected most clearly in Saaroa and Amis (cf. 4), but evidenced also by Kavalan and Truku, as well as being visible in frozen pronominal forms in Paiwan and Thao. Note further that *k-* is found marking oblique personal nouns in Mayrinax Atayal, as well as many Western Malayo-Polynesian languages. This forms the primary basis for Blust’s (2015) reconstruction of PAN oblique **k-*. However, as he notes, evidence for oblique *k-* marking of common nouns is extremely uncommon and is never found in Formosan languages (except being lexicalized in pronouns) that have a distinction between nominative and oblique cases. This fact further supports my proposal that PAN **k-* shifted from nominative to oblique only in the marking of personal names.

Selected references: Blust, Robert. 2015. The case markers of Proto-Austronesian. *Oceanic Linguistics* 54.2: 436-491. Ross, Malcolm. 2006. Reconstructing the Case-marking and Personal Pronoun Systems of Proto Austronesian. In Henry Y. Chang, Lillian M. Huang, Dah-an Ho (eds.), *Streams Converging into an Ocean: Festschrift in Honor of Professor Paul Jen-Kuei Li on his 70th Birthday*, 521-563. Taipei: Language and Linguistics.