Nouns and verbs yet again: new questions in an old debate

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Do (all) Austronesian languages distinguish between nouns and verbs?

- ‘In Tagalog it is difficult to find a morphosyntactically relevant difference between event expressions and entity expressions’ (Himmelmann 1991: 5)
- ‘in Samoan the categorization of words into nouns and verbs is not given a priori in the lexicon’ (Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992: 76)
- ‘Tongan does not distinguish between nominal and verbal categories in the lexicon, and it does not distinguish between nominal and verbal categories in syntax’ (Broschart 1997: 153)
- ‘Riau Indonesian: a language without nouns and verbs’ (Gil 2013) ...
What does it mean for a language to lack a noun-verb distinction?

- **Omnipredicative**
  - all major-class lexical items belong to a single word class of ‘predicates’

- **Precategorial**
  - the distinction between predication and reference is made only in the syntax, not in the lexicon

- **‘Broschartian’**
  - lexical items fall into fine-grained semantic categories which determine their semantics when used in referential vs predicational environments

- **Rampant zero conversion**
  - most lexical items can appear in either predicating or referring contexts, but the semantic relationships are unpredictable

(Evans and Osada 2005)
What is a word class anyway?

- «most theories about word classes take for granted a one-to-one correlation between lexical categories and syntactic categories» (Bisang 2011: 293)

- ‘Lexical flexibility’ (e.g. Hengeveld 1992, 2013, van Lier and Rijkhoff 2013, van Lier 2017 ed.): a single lexical class can have more than one syntactic function
  - largely “maintain[s] syntactic function as a definitional and universal component of parts of speech” (Vapnarsky and Veneziano 2017: 7)
What is a word class anyway?

- Lazard (1999), Himmelmann (2008) and others: the terms ‘noun’ and ‘verb’ can be applied to different levels of analysis
  - ontological (e.g. OBJECT roots vs ACTION roots)
  - morpho-lexical (classes of words defined by morphological potential)
  - syntactic (function in syntax as e.g. head of argument phrase, predicate phrase, or modifier) (Himmelmann)

- These three levels need not overlap.

- Lazard (1999): there is considerable typological variation in the distinctions made at different levels.
Reframing the questions

- What are the consequences of this dissociation of levels for our understanding of core aspects of grammar?
- How are the levels interlinked?
  - Which level(s) does morphology - inflectional and derivational - operate on?
  - Does the lack of a direct link between syntactic function and lexical class have consequences for the grammatical means used to identify syntactic functions in a clause?
- How great is the typological variation in these areas?
  - recent work on lexical classes in Austronesian suggests that it is considerable (e.g. Bril 2017a)
Contrary to earlier claims, Tagalog roots are not precategorial but fall into distinct morpholexical classes.

However, these do not align in a one-to-one fashion with syntactic functions.

(Almost) all Tagalog content words may occur in exactly the same number and kinds of terminal positions in a phrase structure tree.

Syntactic function is indicated by position (in the case of a clause-initial predicate) and by function words (ang subject, ng/sa nonsubject argument or adjunct, na modifier).
Morphology in Tagalog

- Voice marking in Tagalog is consistently derivational
  - including with ACTION roots

- All voice-marked words in Tagalog are members of a single morpho-lexical class (the ‘V-class’), regardless of their base
  - only members of this class are inflected for aspect and mood
  - V-class words differ from all other content words in that they are systematically ambiguous:
    - used as predicates, they denote a specific instance of an action
    - used as arguments, they denote one of the participants involved in the action
Lexical class vs syntactic function in Tagalog

- Syntactic function is indicated by function words (and position in the case of an initial predicate)
  - lexical classes are not subcategorised for function

- Voice marking is derivational and applies to roots irrespective of their ontological category
  - the outcome is a morpho-lexical class of ‘V-words’

- Aspect-mood marking applies to a specific morpho-lexical class (the class of V-words)
Northern Amis (Taiwan, Bril 2017b)

- Roots are (largely) precategorial
- Voice markers derive verbal stems; noun stems are formed with noun markers
- TAM morphology applies to predicates (regardless of lexical class)
- Causative and nominalising morphology applies to verbal stems
- One-way flexibility: noun stems can be predicates, but verb stems cannot be arguments without derivational morphology
- Syntactic functions identified by word order (predicates are clause-initial) and morphology (arguments formed from verbal stems bear derivational morphology)
Äiwoo (Reefs)

Oceanic, Temotu (Ross and Næss 2007)
Äiwoo

- Surprisingly ‘Philippine-type’ in core areas of its grammar
  - symmetrical voice with a basic actor voice/undergoer voice distinction plus a circumstantial voice marked by a clitic
  - no possibility of promoting participants to anything other than subject (i.e. no applicatives if defined as adding an ‘object’ rather than a ‘subject’)
- But lacks ‘phrase markers’ like Tagalog ang, ng, sa or an obligatory ‘linker’ in modification constructions
Basic clause structure in Äiwoo

- **Intransitives: SV, prefixes**
  - I-ku-wä.
  - I MIN-IPFV-go
  - ‘I go.’

- **Actor voice: AVO, prefixes**
  - I-ki-vängä
  - I MIN-IPFV-eat.A
  - ‘I eat fish.’

- **Undergoer voice: OVA, suffixes**
  - Sii enge
  - i-wâ-nubo-wâ-no.
  - fish DEM:PROX PFV-CAUS-die-UV-I MIN
  - ‘I killed this fish.’

- **3MIN arguments are nearly always unmarked.**
Lexical classes in Äiwoo

- Two-participant verbs obligatorily inflect for actor voice/undergoer voice, with a number of inflectional classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>AV</th>
<th>UV</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>läve ~ lävi ‘fish with a net’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>-ei/-oi</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>gei ~ gi ‘rub, shave’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>eta ~ etai ‘fish with a line’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>-ou</td>
<td>-u</td>
<td>tou ~ to ‘carry, bring, give birth to’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>-âwââ</td>
<td>-ââ</td>
<td>eâwââ ~ eââ ‘pull’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>-lowe</td>
<td>-lu</td>
<td>tâlowe ~ tâlu ‘cut long flexible object e.g. hair, grass’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-ei</td>
<td>-(i)li</td>
<td>vei ~ vili ‘weave’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>-(e)â</td>
<td>välo ~ välœâ ‘beckon, wave to signal someone’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>iive-/iivä-</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>iivängo ~ ngo ‘twist or braid fibre into a rope’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lexical classes in Äiwoo

- Intransitives do not take voice inflection, though active intransitives can take morphology deriving an undergoer-voice transitive
  - mängä ‘laugh’, mängä-ive ‘laugh at’ (UV, no corresponding AV)

- Lexical nouns do not take voice morphology (with one exception to be discussed later)
Lexical classes in Äiwoo

- A subclass of nouns take obligatory suffixed possessive marking
  - tumo ‘my father’, tumomu ‘your father’, tumwä ‘his/her father’
- Other nouns are optionally possessive-marked by means of one of six possessive classifiers
  - na ‘food’
  - numwä ‘drink’
  - nogo ‘tools and utensils’
  - tä ‘real estate’
  - da ‘betel nut and betel-chewing paraphernalia’
  - no ‘everything else’

- Lexical verbs may occur with indirect possessive marking but only allow the ‘tool’ possessive.
Nouns as predicates

- Allow but do not require aspect-mood and person marking
  
  \[
  \text{Le ki-sime=to=we} \ldots \\
  \text{PROX IPFV-person=now=PROX}
  \]

  When he is becoming a person (i.e. when a child grows older) ...’

  \[
  \text{I-president no Mothers' Union} \\
  \text{IMIN-president POSS:GEN.3MIN Mothers’ Union} \\
  \text{‘I am the president of the Mothers’ Union.’}
  \]

  \[
  \text{Inâ [sime cathechisti nyigi] kele Ngäsinuwe=ke.} \\
  \text{3MIN person cathechist one here Fenua.Loa=PROX} \\
  \text{‘He was a cathechist here on Fenua Loa.’}
  \]
Verbs as arguments

Lâ  deu=kâ  [kele  tokoli  ee]
DIST  before=DIST  here  sit  DEM:PROX
i-mo-oli-mä-i=lä.
PFV-live-go.down-DIR:1-3AUG=CV
‘In the past, they abided by this (way of) sitting.’

Mo  käsä  [ngângo  mana  nä]
but  be.like  be.strong  very  of.3MIN
kode  nyidâbu  eve.
maybe  day  three
‘But it was really strong [lit the being very strong of it] for maybe three days’
Derivational morphology

- Causative \( \text{wâ-} \)
  
  I-nubo.
  PFV-die
  ‘S/he died (intransitive)’

  I-ku-wâ-nubo sii.
  I MIN-IPFV-CAUS-die fish
  ‘I’m killing fish (actor voice)’

  Sii eângâ i-wâ-nubo-wâ-no=ngâ.
  fish DEM:DIST PFV-CAUS-die-UV I MIN=DIST
  ‘I killed that fish (undergoer voice)’
Derivational morphology

- Causative morphology applies to predicates rather than lexical verbs:

  \[ \text{Ku-wâ-tepusi-eå-kä} \quad \text{i=nâ.} \]
  \[ \text{IPFV-CAUS-cat-UV-DIR:3} \quad \text{3MIN=DIST} \]
  ‘It turned him into a cat’

  \[ \text{Kâ-mu=wä} \quad \text{ku-wâ-sigiläi-eå-mu} \]
  \[ \text{say-2MIN=CV IPFV-CAUS-man-UV-2MIN} \]
  \[ \text{nuwopa} \quad \text{tä} \quad \text{i-lââ-kâ-mu} \]
  \[ \text{house} \quad \text{POSS:LOC.3MIN} \quad \text{PFV-build.UV-2MIN} \]
  \[ \text{ngä} \quad \text{nelo=kâ?} \]
  \[ \text{LOC} \quad \text{sea=DIST} \]
  ‘Did you want to make her into a boy, building her a house of her own by the sea?’
Derivational morphology

- **Action nominalisation?**
  - eä nyi-välowe-na là i-du=kâ ...
  - CONJ NMLZ-cut.hair-NMLZ DIST PFV-finish=DIST
  - ‘and (when) the haircutting is finished …’

- Wä=nâ, ile nyi-tei-na nogo
  - go=DIST PROX NMLZ-fish-NMLZ POSS.TOOOL.3MIN
  - ile isä=ne i-meli-kä=jo.
  - PROX mother.3MIN=PROX PFV-stop-DIR:3=PROG
  - ‘After a while, her mother stopped her fishing.’
Derivational morphology

Ilâ pesaliki=kâ singedaa ki-dâu,
DIST rich.man=DIST wife.3MIN IPFV-be.many
ki-dâu=kâ go
IPFV-be.many because.of
ilâ nye-pesaliki-na nogo=nâ.
DIST NMLZ-rich.man-NMLZ POSS:TOOL.3MIN=DIST

‘That rich man had many wives, he had many because he was a rich man (lit because of his [being a] rich man)’.
Derivational morphology

Eâmo i-te-mä sigiwâu nyigi.
then PFV-see-DIR:1 young.man one
‘Then a young man saw her.’

I-liaa-kä=jo nye-sigiwâu-na nogo.
PFV-reach-DIR:1=PROG NMLZ-young.man-NMLZ POSS:TOOL.3MIN
‘He was reaching adulthood.’

- Not a ‘nominalisation’ construction but a construction marking reference to an action or state.
- Applies to predicates rather than lexical verbs.
Identifying syntactic functions

- Two basic means of identifying the syntactic function of a constituent if this does not follow from the lexical class of its head alone: word order and morphological marking (Hengeveld et al. 2004)
- Cf. Tagalog
- Āiwoo: No case marking; predicates do not always show person and TAM marking.
- Word order is only helpful if all constituents are overtly expressed.
Identifying syntactic functions

Ote.
be.tiny
‘It’s tiny.’

Sigiläi.
man
‘A man/He’s a man.’
Identifying syntactic functions

Lamaa sigiläi=kâ.
if man=DIST
‘If he is a man.’

Eä i-kää-eopu go i-sii.
CONJ PFV-know-also because PFV-fish
‘And it knows too, because it is a fish.’

Me-ku-wo-lâ go sii=kâ.
I AUG-IPFV-go-out for fish=DIST
‘We go out for fish.’
Lexical class vs syntactic function in Äiwoo

- Voice is inflectional and largely defines the morpho-lexical class of (transitive) verbs
  - derivational morphology that adds an O argument applies to the lexical class of intransitive verbs
- Aspect-mood and person marking applies at the level of syntactic function, and partly works as a means of identifying such functions
- Some derivational morphology (causativisation, ‘nominalisation’) applies at the level of syntactic function
Conclusions

- Austronesian languages showcase the typological variation in how lexical classes and syntactic function may relate to each other
  - in terms of which morphological functions apply at which level
  - in terms of what means a language uses to identify syntactic function when this cannot be deduced directly from lexical class

- Understanding this variation is important not just for better linguistic descriptions, but for general theories of how different components of grammar can be integrated across languages.
References


- Hengeveld, Kees. 1992


References


