

THE AGENT-VERB-PATIENT SYSTEM OF THE GORONTALO LANGUAGE: A TYPOLOGICAL SEMANTIC-SYNTACTIC ROLE APPROACH

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Abstrak

Kajian ini berkaitan dengan beberapa aspek morfosintaksis bahasa Gorontalo berdasarkan pendekatan Peran Semantis-Sintaksis Tipologis. Kajian ini bertujuan memberikan deskripsi tentang urutan konstituen pada tingkat klausa. Prosedur analisis data adalah dengan mengidentifikasi dan mengklasifikasi data menurut urutan konstituen, menentukan urutan konstituen dasar dan variannya yang berkaitan dengan sintaksis, dan memformulasikan kaidah-kaidah urutan konstituen dasar Agen – Verba – Pasien.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa urutan konstituen dasar adalah AVP berkorelasi dengan preposisi dan nomina-adjektiva (AVP<prep, N-Adj). Secara semantis, agen pada umumnya diisi oleh argument (+human, +animat) dalam klausa-klausa aktif intransitive dan transitif. Nomina diri bercirikan penggunaan partikel *te/ti* dan pronomina persona bercirikan penggunaan preposisi *olo(ole/oli)* di depan nomina dan bercirikan pronominal bebas tertentu. Dalam klausa bi-transitif, pasien diisi oleh frasa nomina yang secara semantis adalah tema; Goal diisi oleh pronominal bebas tertentu yang sama dengan pronomina untuk pasien dalam klausa transitif; Tipe bahasa Gorontalo adalah bahasa nominatif-akusatif; S subjek dan A agen memiliki pemarkah yang sama, namun dalam klausa bi-transitif tipe bahasa ini adalah objek sekunder; pasien dan goal memiliki pemarkah yang sama.

Kata Kunci: bahasa Gorontalo, morfosintaksis, konstituen, AVP, nominatif-akusatif

INTRODUCTION

The Gorontalo language is spoken in the town of Gorontalo and its environs on the northernmost peninsula of the Sulawesi island, Indonesia, where the coasts of this long and narrow peninsula run in a generally west-east direction. The town of Gorontalo is located on the south coast. The Gorontalo language is the principal and best known dialect in a larger language area, which also includes other closely-related languages or dialects, such as the Bonda dialect, which is spoken in the Suwawa district to the east of the town of Gorontalo.

The languages adjacent to the Gorontalo language area are those of Bolaang Mongondow to the east, and Buol, i.e. Buwolo, to the west.

Grammatical relations (GR) are often thought of as relations between arguments and verbs in a level of linguistic structure that is independent (or autonomous) of semantic and pragmatic influences. For descriptive linguists it is important to recognize that the GRs have universal functions in communication, while at the same time defining them in terms of language specific formal properties. The formal properties that most directly identify GRs are the following: 1) case marking, 2) participant reference marking on verbs, and 3) constituent order.

Why should a language pay particular attention to the relation between arguments and verbs at an abstract level of structure that is not sensitive to semantics or pragmatics? What use is this kind of structure to the speaker and the hearer in communication? If GRs turn out to be a kind representation or ‘mapping’ of semantic roles and/or pragmatic statuses, then their existence may be explained in terms of the communicational function of language. If GRs are simply labels on nodes in the autonomous syntactic form of sentences, they have no value. They clearly exist, and may even be universal, but why they exist is not immediately evident.

There are problems, nonetheless, with the assertion that grammatical relations are direct representations of semantic roles and/or pragmatic statuses. For example, there are many semantic roles and pragmatic statuses (see section 3.2.0, Payne), whereas here are only about three GRs in any given language. How can three formal categories express infinite variability in the message world? In fact, it is a common observation that a given GR in any language typically may express many different semantic roles, and that particular semantic roles may be expressed by several different GRs (Payne 1997:13).

The Grammatical subject *S* of the following clauses each expresses a very different semantic role:

- (1) a. George opened the door (*S* = Agent)
- b. This key opened the door (*S* = INStrument)
- c. The wind opened the door (*S* = FORce)
- d. The door was opened by the wind (*S* = P)

The fact that semantic roles do not map directly onto grammatical relations, at any conceivable level of abstraction, is *prima facie* evidence for some linguists that the GRs cannot derive from semantic roles. Therefore, GRs have independent status (autonomous) in any linguistic theory. Attempts to derive grammatical relations from pragmatic statuses are similarly unproductive. For example, some linguists have proposed that the ‘subject’ category in language is the linguistic manifestation of a pragmatic status such as ‘topic’. Topic, however, is a term that is even more difficult to define independently than Agent (see Payne, section 10.3). Most traditional definitions assume some form of statement like ‘the topic is that the sentence is about’. In the following sentences it is hard to imagine a way of identifying the subject *I* as ‘what the sentence is about’ independently of its status as a grammatical subject:

- (2) a. **I** just married the most beautiful woman in the world
b. **Now Beans** I like
c. **As for democracy**, I think it is the best form of government

These sorts of example make it clear that there is no direct ‘mapping’ or ‘derivational’ relationship from the intuitively significant notions of semantic roles or pragmatic status to GRs. Nevertheless, language do seem to have grammatical relations. GRs have proven useful to linguists for centuries, even though there has been much debate and little agreement as to why they should exist. They seem natural because languages do have them, but their functional status in language has been difficult to explain satisfactorily.

Modern functional linguists would take a different approach in defining grammatical relations. From functional point of view, the obvious, though inexact, relationship between pragmatic statuses/semantic roles and grammatical relations is motivated in terms of the notion prototype plus grammaticalization (see Payne, sec. 02). A noun phrase that is both a very good semantic Agent and a very good pragmatic topic is likely to be expressed as a grammatical subject. A functionalist would say that such a noun phrase is a prototypical subject. It is the kind of noun phrase in terms of pragmatic/semantic role that provides the functional basis for the formal category of subject in the first place. It is a very useful category, therefore it makes sense that languages should have a highly automated (grammaticalized) way of expressing it.

Now, what happens when a noun phrase refers to a slightly less prototypical Agent, or a less prototypical topic? As mentioned above, languages tend to have only about three grammatical relations. This indicates that pragmatic or semantic deviation can be quite significant before a nominal phrase is excluded from a particular GR. It would seem unreasonable and inefficient to have a grammatical distinction for every conceivable nuance in semantic/pragmatic roles. That would be like having entirely different word for every conceivable shade of color in the spectrum. Therefore, ‘clustering’ of pragmatic/semantic roles occur. Referents that are ‘close enough’ to the prototype are expressed by noun phrases in the same GR as are more prototype referents. Since the notion of ‘close enough’ is a judgment call on the part of language users, there is variability from language to language (even from situation to situation) as to how the roles cluster. For example, in English sentence *John likes beans*, the person who ‘likes’ is treated the same grammatically as the Agent of an agentive verb like ‘kill’ or ‘eat’.

The following discussion will attempt to provide the context and justification for the notion of grammatical relations in terms of grammatical expression of semantic roles in the Gorontalo language. Grammatical expressions of semantic roles and pragmatic statuses are understandable in terms of the communicational-functional language. Based on the discussion above, the paper focus on the following questions: (i) What is the basic constituent order, related to the relative order of agent, verb and patient (AVP)?, and (ii) How does the grammatical relation hierarchy of the Gorontalo language relate?

1 METHODS

The data resource was oral expressions supported by written materials 'Otanaha'. In collecting the data, the researcher applied both observation and interview methods supported by interviewing, recording, and note-taking techniques. In analyzing the data, the author used the distributional method with its 'immediate constituent' technique.

To determine the 'basic' constituent order of the Gorontalo language, the researcher follows the procedure of identifying the 'basic' constituent order of a language that is exhibited at least in pragmatically neutral clauses (Payne 1997:77). However, identifying one clause as 'pragmatically neutral' may be problematic. It is especially difficult to find pragmatically neutral clauses that contain one or more full noun phrases. One general way to approach this problem is by eliminating the clause types that are known to exhibit variant constituent orders in the language. These would include: (1) dependent clauses, (2) paragraph-initial clauses, (3) clause that introduce participants, (4) question, (5) negative clauses, and (6) clearly contrastive clauses.

2 THE RESULT

The following sections deal with the result of the research conducted.

2.1 Constituent Order in Main Clause of The Gorontalo Language

The 'basic' constituent order in the Gorontalo language, at least in pragmatically neutral clauses, is AVP order (or SVO). What I mean with the AVP order is that the order formed by the transitive verb together with its argument, i.e., semantically agent and patient or patient-like. Semantic patient functions as patient that is always present with a transitive verb in a transitive clause. The example below illustrates the construction in the Gorontalo language.

- (3) a (A) (V) (P)
Tio maqo mohama makuta
3p sg dir.2 act/fut-take crown
'She will go to take the crown.'

The position of the patient is always after verb in active clause. Fronting the verb in initial clause is also grammatical.

- b. (V) (P) (A)
maqo mohama makuta tio
c. (V) (A) (P)
maqo mohama tio makuta

The clause in (3b) has a VPA order and in (3c) the clause has a VAP order. Fronting patient before verb (PVA) or before agent (PAV) is not grammatical in active clause in the Gorontalo language.

- *d. (P) (V) (A)
Makuta maqo mohama tio
*e. (P) (A) (V)
Makuta tio maqo mohama

In intransitive clause the basic constituent order is SV, as in the following examples:

- (4) a. (S) (V)
Tio lo-naqo
3p sg past go
'she went'
- b. (S) (V)
Tio t-um-eteqo
3p sg - fut-run
'she will run'
- c. (S) (V)
Tio lo-dehu
3p sg past-fall
'she fell down'

In order to define grammatical relations, it is convenient to identify three basic semantic-syntactic roles, termed S, A, and P (Comrie 1978). Similar terms are used by Croft (1970), Payne (1997). These terms presuppose two prototypical clause types in the Gorontalo language.

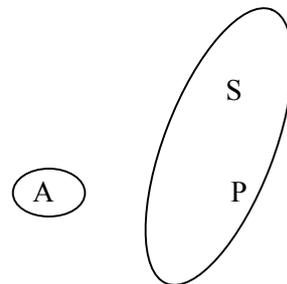
- (5) Single argument
- a. (S) (V)
Ti Ani ma le-dungga
part Ani perf. past-arrive
'Ani has arrived'
- b. (A) (V) (P)
Ti Ani lo-loduo oli mama / olio
Part ani past-invite to mother/p3 sing-fem
'Ani invited the mother/ her'
- c. (A) (V) (T) (G)
Te Ali lo-ngohi doi oli Ani/olio
Part ali past-give money to Ani/olio
'Ali gave money to Any/her'

The S is defined as the only nominal argument of a single one clause. Sometimes this type of clause refers to as an intransitive clause. (see Payne 1997:320). The A is defined as the most agent-like argument of a multi-argument clause. Sometimes this type of clause refers to as a transitive or bi-transitive clause. If there is no argument that is a very good agent, the A is the argument that is treated morphosyntactically in the same manner as prototypical agents are treated. Normally there will be one argument in every verbal clause that exhibits this property. P is the 'most patient-like' argument of a multi-argument clause i.e. transitive clause. Again, if none of the arguments is very much like a patient, then the argument is treated like a prototypical patient considered to be the P. T is the theme argument of a bi-transitive clause. It has a function similar to P in transitive clause. G is the goal argument of a bi-transitive clause. In traditional grammar terms, intransitive clauses have only a

single argument, the ‘subject’. Transitive clauses have two arguments, the ‘subject’ (as A) and the ‘direct object’ (P); the bi-transitive clauses have three arguments, the subjects (A), the direct object (T) and the ‘indirect object (G) (Croft 1990:102). The grammatical relation of ‘subject’ can be defined as S together with A, while direct object or ‘simply’ object can be defined as P together with T, as well as ‘indirect object’ can be defined as G alone.

Languages may treat S and A the same, and P differently. The Gorontalo language illustrates this fact with pronominal case forms – one form, **tio** ‘he’ is used for third person singular pronoun in both the S and the A roles. A different form, **olio** ‘her/him’ is used for third person singular pronoun in the P role.

- (6) a. (S) (V)
 Tio le-dungga
 3p.sg. past-arrive
 ‘she arrived’
 (A) (V) (P)
 Tio lo-loduo olio
 3p.sg- nom. past-invite 3p.sg acc.
 ‘she invited her’



Compare the above examples with the following examples from Indonesian and English.

- (7) a. (S) (V)
 Ia tiba
 3p.sg. arrive
 ‘she arrived’
 b. (A) (V) (P)
 Ia meng-undang- nya
 3p.sg. Nom. Act.- invite -3p.sg.acc
 ‘she invited her’
- (8) a. She arrived
 b. she invited him/her

In the Gorontalo language, the free forms of personal pronouns (waqu ‘1sg.’/ waatia ‘1sg-resp’, ami/ ‘1pl’ amiaatia/ito ‘1pl resp.’, yiqo ‘2sg’/ito ‘2sg resp.’, timongoli ‘2pl’, tio ‘3sg’, timongolio ‘3pl’ are used only for the subjects (S) of a single verb argument (intransitive verb) or the agent of a multi-argument verb (transitive and bitransitive), and the personal pronouns olaqu ‘1sg’ /olaatia ‘1sgresp.’, olaami ‘1pl’, olemu ‘2sg’ /olanto ‘2sg resp.’, olimongoli ‘2pl’, olio ‘3sg’, olimongolio ‘3pl’ are used only for the P of a two-argument verb (transitive) or for the G of a three-argument verb (bitransitive P and G).

The Gorontalo language manifests a nominative/accusative system in marking a free form pronouns. The Gorontalo language also manifests an ergative/absolutive system for organizing grammatical relations in person marking on verbs, as shown in the following examples.

- (9) a. (V -A) (P) (P) (V-A)
pate-u tio tio pate-u
hit-1sg erg 3sg abs 3sg abs go-1sg erg
‘pukul-ku dia’ (‘ku-pukul dia’) ‘dia pukul-ku’ (‘dia ku-pukul’)
- b. (V-A) (P) (P) (V-A)
hama -ubuku botia buku botia hama-u
take-1sg erg book dem. Book dem. take-1sg erg
‘I will take the book’ ‘I will take the book’

The free pronouns forms as subject or agent can be morphologically case marking on verbs and functions as agent. The cases are –u/-laatia ‘1sg’, -lami/lamiaatia/-nto ‘1pl’, -mu/-nto ‘2sg’, -limongoli ‘2pl’, -lio ‘3sg’, and –limongolio ‘3pl’.

Regarding the constituent order type in nominative/accusative orientation, S and A are treated alike in both subject of intransitive verbs and object of transitive verbs that most neutrally occur in preverbal position. It can therefore be concluded that the constituent order type of the Gorontalo language is AVP (70 percent), although there are other possible constituent order such as VPA or VAP.

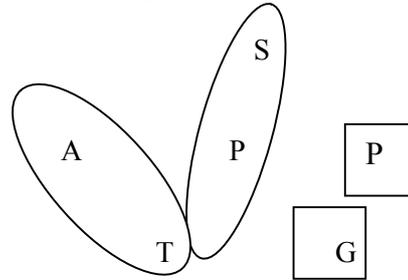
From the examples above we see that S and A are unmarked noun phrases that precede the verb, while P and G are unmarked noun phrases that immediately follow the verb. G is expressed as a prepositional phrase, i.e., a noun phrase whose grammatical relation to the verb is marked by a preposition. (This is encoded in the traditional grammar terminology: S + A is the subject and P + T is the direct object. G is the indirect object).

In the Gorontalo language G (the bi-transitive indirect object) is expressed in the same way as P (the transitive direct object). The position of the G argument varies. In the Gorontalo language neutrally the position G follows the T argument (see Usman 1990:1). The combination of P + G refers to the primary object and T as the secondary object (Croft, 1990:103). So, the grammatical relation hierarchy in the Gorontalo language can be expressed as S + A < P + T < G.

I quote again the examples from (5) above as (10) below:

- (10) Single argument
- a. (S) (V)
Ti Ani ma le-dungga
part Ani perf. past-arrive
‘Ani has arrived’
- b. (A) (V) (P)
Ti Ani lo-loduo oli mama / olio
Part ani past-invite to mother/p3 sing-fem
‘Ani invited the mother/ her’

- c. (A) (V) (T) (G)
 Te Ali lo-ngohi doi oli Ani/olio
 Part Ali past-give money to Ani/olio
 ‘Ali gave money to Any/her’



The case of patient in the Gorontalo language is an illustration of animacy. In the Gorontalo language, personal patients (+human) take the prepositions *oli/ole*. This evidence suggests that there is a case of animacy that NP type and animacy hierarchies is [human < animate , inanimate]. The implicational universal describing the cross-linguistic patterns is: ‘If a language uses a nonzero case marking for a patient on the animacy hierarchies, then it uses a nonzero case marking for patients higher on the hierarchies.’

2.2 Prototypes and the Interactions of Typological Patterns

The grammatical categories that are organized into typological markedness and hierarchy patterns do not occur in isolation. Any given noun phrase has a value for case and animacy for example, and any given verb has a value for tense, aspect, modality. In other words, grammatical categories always occur in combination in utterances. Hence it is reasonable to examine the possibility of grammatical interactions between categories and seek typological patterns in those interactions.

2.2.1 Animacy and Definiteness

In (10), the case marking of patients in the Gorontalo language is described as an illustration of animacy and definiteness. In the Gorontalo language pronominal patients human nouns takes the proposition *oli* for feminine and *ole* for masculine. The animacy hierarchy actually consists of three hierarchies, i.e., person, NP type and animacy proper. The first and the second persons are at the top of the combined hierarchy, because they are by definition human and pronominal. The first and the second person pronouns are also definite by definiteness. Thus, definiteness should be added to the person, NP type, and animacy proper hierarchies, since it is equally closely related to the personal pronouns, as summarized below:

Person: first<second< third
 NP type: pronoun< proper noun< common noun
 Animacy: human< animate< inanimate
 Definiteness: definite< referential<nonreferential

Hence, there is actually a cluster of four hierarchies, with the first and second linking the other three together by virtue of their inherent human, pronominal

and definite properties. The implicational universal describing the cross-linguistics pattern: “If a language uses a nonzero case marking for a direct object (a patient) on the animacy/definiteness hierarchies, then it uses a nonzero case marking for direct objects (patients) higher on the hierarchies.” In addition, as Givon and Moravesik note, agreement is frequently with the primary object, that is, with the G argument (see example above) of ditransitive verbs instead of with the T argument. Givon points out that the G argument, playing a semantic role of receiver or experiencer, is almost always human (in fact, by semantic necessity) and frequently definite, while T argument a possessed item or physical objects, is almost always nonhuman. Thus primary-object agreement has the effect of allowing agreement with the object (accusative) that is generally higher in animacy. This argument is supported by languages like the Gorontalo language. The typological evidence indicates that the various animacy and definiteness parameters cluster in a universal way with respect to accusative.

2.2.2 Case, Animacy and Verb Type

From the examples in the Gorontalo language given above, it was observed that the Gorontalo language orders arguments of the verb, animacy and not by case, so that the higher-animacy argument precedes the lower-animacy one, regardless of whether it is A or P in a transitive clause. Instead, “who did what to whom” is indicated on the verb: the particle ‘te or ti’ on the proper noun indicates that the higher-animacy argument is acting on the lower one, and the preposition ‘oli or ole’ before noun or proper noun indicates the opposite situation.

2.2.3 Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives

One of the relatively few unrestricted universals is that all languages have nouns and verbs. However, it is not entirely clear how one can define the category “noun” or the category “verb” in a universal sense. The methods of typological analysis presented so far allow one to make significant steps both in verifying the universality of nouns and verbs and in defining the two categories.

The first typological analysis of relevance to this problem was of a category whose universality has been repeatedly contested, however adjectives (Dixon, 1977). Cross-linguistically, the category identified with the label “adjectives” varies much more than those labeled “noun” and “verb”. In some languages such as English, there is a large class of adjectives which can be added to quite easily; adjectives from an open class of words, defined on internal grammatical criteria, which is generally identified with the category “adjectives”. In yet other languages, such as Chinese, it is claimed that “adjectives” do not exist, and the translation equivalents of English adjectives are assigned to the categories “noun” or “verb”. In the Gorontalo language the prefix *mo-* is used to mark adjectives, as we see in the following examples:

In English:

large	small
new	old
black/dark	white/light
good	bad

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In the Gorontalo language:

motota 'clever'
molanggato 'high'

mohulodu 'stupid'
moopa 'low'

The basic adjective concepts included dimension, age, color, and value (for example, *mopiohu* 'good', *moleeto* 'bad'). Dixon formulated the following generalization: If a language has an adjective class, it will include words referring to the basic adjective concepts (dimension, age, color, value) in that class. If a language includes nonbasic adjective concepts in the adjective class, then it will include basic adjective concepts in that class (see Dixon 1977:56, Generalization (a)).

3 CONCLUSION

Turning to word order, the Gorontalo language follows the syntactic-semantic hierarchy. The fact that agents (nominative) generally precede patients (accusative) is embodied in Greenberg's first universal: 'In declarative sentences with nominal subject and object, the dominant order is almost always one in which the subject precedes the object (Greenberg 1966:77). There is also animacy hierarchy. The animacy hierarchy actually involves several distinct but related grammatical dimension. If we turn to case marking, we find that the major manifestation of animacy pattern is found in the case marking of P and G in personal pronouns. In the Gorontalo language, a human pronoun direct or indirect object uses preposition in P and G arguments.

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