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A Syntactic Analysis of the Pronoun System of Palauan

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In a discussion on modality in his Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics, John Lyons makes the following statement concerning the French subjunctive:

> "...There are very few contexts in which the indicative and the subjunctive are interchangeable in French. The subjunctive rarely occurs except in subordinate clauses, where its occurrence is very largely determined by the selection of a particular main verb, by negation, and by other factors. In other words, the indicative and the subjunctive forms of the verb are in almost complementary distribution."[1]

Though the relevance of the subjunctive to the topic of this paper will become apparent subsequently, the first point to be made here is concerned with the last portion of Lyons' remarks, i.e. with complementary distribution, and with its applicability to the analysis of the various pronoun sets in Palauan. By demonstrating that the syntactic contexts in which these sets appear are mutually exclusive, it will be possible to eliminate the semantic criteria which until now have been used to distinguish them.

The four pronoun sets in Palauan have been labeled in Lewis Josephs' Palauan Reference Grammar as follows: non-emphatic, emphatic, object, and hypothetical. (The status of possessed noun suffixes, which are in any case peripheral to the concerns of this paper, is ignored here.)

	non-emphatic	emphatic	object	
1s	ak	ngak	-ak	ku- (kę- k-) chomu-
2s	kę	kau	-au	chomo- (mo- chomu- mu- cho- chomę*, m-)
3s	ng	ngii	-ii	lo- (lu- lę- l-)
1pl-incl	kędę	kid	-id	do- (du- dę-)
1pl-excl	aki	kęmam	-ęmam	kimo- (kimu- ki-)
2pl	kom	kęmiu	-ęmiu	(same as 2s)
3pl-hum	tę	tir	-tęrir	(same as 3s)

(forms in parentheses indicate reduced forms)
*ch = glottal stop; ę = schwa, except in cases where data are cited from Josephs' PRG ę is written as ę in accordance with Standard Pal. orthography.

Non-emphatic-emphatic

Josephs contrasts the non-emphatic and emphatic pronouns as follows:

> "When they appear as sentence subject, the non-emphatic and emphatic pronouns are used in very different ways...

A: Ke mo ęr ker? 'Where are you going?'
B: Ak mo ęr a stoang. 'I'm going to the store.'

A: Ng tęcha a mo ęr a stoang? 'Who is going to the store?'
B: Ngak a mo ęr a stoang. 'I'm going to the store.'

> ...The use of an emphatic pronoun as subject implies a contrast (or opposition) between the person who actually performs some activity and any other persons who might be available to perform it but who for some reason do not...We can...characterize the difference between non-emphatic vs. emphatic (subject) pronouns as follows. The information supplied by a non-emphatic pronoun is old--that is, both speaker and hearer know about it and it is no longer of interest to them. On the other hand, the information provided by an emphatic pronoun is new--something previously unknown or unexpected."[2]

Since both non-emphatic and emphatic pronouns seem to occur in subject position, their syntactic functions seem to overlap, i.e. to be only partially in complementary distribution. It would follow then that the distinction between them must be based on meaning. Recent elicitation has shown, however, that the emphatic pronouns do not, in fact, appear in subject position. Native Palauan speakers report that the B-sentence in the second dialogue must be preceded by ng, 'it', which stands as a "pronominal trace" for the shifted subject a mo er a stoang, '(the one who) is going to the store':

A mo er a stoang a ngak ⟶ Ng ngak a mo er a stoang.

Shifting the subject to the end of the sentence is a very common phenomenon in Palauan, and while not obligatory in this case, it is the preferred form for complex NP's such as the above.[3]

The same is true for coordinate noun phrases which contain "emphatic" pronouns:

1. Ng ngak me a Droteo a mo er a stoang.
   '(It is) Droteo and I (who) are going to the store.'

2. Ng kau me ngak a mo er a stoang.
   '(It is) you and I (who) are going to the store.'

The phrases ngak me a Droteo and kau me ngak represent the predicate, the new information; the subject (the old information), in these sentences, a complex NP (a mo er a stoang '(the one) going to the store'), represented at the beginning of the sentence by the pronominal element ng, appears in final position. The "emphatic" pronouns may also appear in apposition to the subject pronoun:

3. Aki mo er a stoang, ngak me a Droteo.
   'We (excl.) are going to the store, Droteo and I.'

4. Kede mo er a stoang, kau me ngak.
   'We (incl.) are going to the store, you and I.'

The corrected analysis of the emphatic pronouns shows that they are now wholly in complementary distribution with the non-emphatic pronouns. The latter can be relabeled as subject pronouns, while the former can be considered as oblique or non-subject pronouns. It is interesting to note the parallel here with the so-called "disjunctive" pronouns of French, which serve as subject complements, as the object of prepositions, and in appositional phrases, but not as subjects:

5. C'est moi qui vais au magasin.
   Ng ngak a mo er a stoang.
   'It is I (the one) going to the store.'

6. Marie a reçu une lettre de lui.
   A Maria a ngiluu a babier el mle er ngii.
   (lit. Maria got it the letter which came from him.)

7. Toi et moi, nous allons au magasin.
   Ng kau me ngak a mo er a stoang.
   'You and me, we're going to the store.'

The tendency for "object" pronouns to be used as subject complements, thus becoming generalized as non-subject pronouns, is found in both English and Dutch:

8. If I were him, I wouldn't live in that house.
   Als ik hem was, zou ik in dat huis niet woonen.

A further consequence of the above reanalysis is the elimination of a problem which Josephs faced in explaining why verb phrases following emphatic pronouns must be introduced by the particle a while those following non-emphatic pronouns do not. Since verb phrases following noun phrases are also introduced by a, Josephs offers the following explanation:

> "...Many linguists would argue that the emphatic pronouns are truly independent words, while the non-emphatic pronouns are actually prefixes. If the non-emphatic pronouns were indeed prefixes, then the non-occurrence of a before the verb phrases... could be explained."[4]

Since it has been shown above that the "emphatic" pronouns are not subject pronouns and that what follows them (e.g. in (2)) is not a verb phrase but rather a complex noun phrase, the presence of a in Ng ngak me kau [a] mo er a stoang can be explained in terms of a general rule of a before NPs.[5] Further discussion of the morphological status of the "non-emphatic" pronouns will appear at the end of this paper.

Object:

Designating the "emphatic" pronouns as non-subject pronouns makes clearer their relationship to the object pronouns, whose form, except for that of the third person plural, consists simply of the non-subject form minus the initial consonant. Since these pronouns only appear suffixed to perfective verb forms,[6] they might be considered as a subset of the non-subject pronouns.

9. A Droteo a milengelebed er ngii.
'Droteo was beating him (her).'

10. A Droteo a chillebedii.
'Droteo beat him (her).'

Hypothetical:

Analysis of this set of pronouns requires some preliminary explanation of Palauan morphology. In (9) milengelebed is the past imperfective form of mengelebed 'beat'. (Past morpheme -il- is infixed.) me stands as the verb marker, ng as the imperfective marker, chelebed as the verb stem. (1st C of verb stem $\longrightarrow \phi$ / imperfective marker ____) It should be noted that the verb stem is a bound form, requiring verb marker me, except in "hypothetical" pronoun constructions, in which case the verb marker cannot appear:

11. A longelebed er a bilis a ngalek... (*lomengelebed)
'if the child hits the dog...'

Josephs introduces the hypothetical pronouns as follows:

> "Palauan has a special set of pronouns which appear as prefixes on verbs in a large variety of complicated grammatical constructions. Because many of these constructions express hypothetical events or situations--i.e. ones which are not real, but which are supposed, assumed, or imagined--the term "hypothetical" has come to be used as an identifying label for the pronoun prefixes as well as the verb forms to which they are attached."[7]

The hypothetical pronouns act as or refer to the subject of the clauses in which they appear. Among the four sets, the hypothetical pronouns are the most distinct in form. Furthermore, unlike the other sets, these pronouns show no singular-plural contrast in the second and third person. Some of the "complicated constructions" in which they appear are given below.

negation:

12. Ng diak losuub a John me a Mary. 'John and Mary aren't studying.'
It NEG study

conditional:

13. A kumes er a John e ak msa a ududel.
'If I see John, I'll give him his money.'

subordinate clauses:

14. Ng soak a chomonguiu er a hong.
'I want you to read the book.' (cf. French: Je veux que tu lises le livre.)
(lit. It desire-my you-read the book.)

imperative:

15. Moruul er a bento er ngak. 'Fix my lunchbox!'

propositive:

16. Lebo er a stoa a ngalek. 'Let the child go to the store.'
Dorael. 'Let's go!'

time clauses:

17. Ak dirk kekere er se er a lebo er a Merikel a demak.
'I was still small when my father went to America."

passive:

18. A bilis a longelebed er ngii a ngalek.
'The dog is (being) beaten by the child.'

As Josephs points out himself, the use of this set of pronouns does not always provide clear justification for the term "hypothetical":

> "...It is indeed very difficult to understand why hypothetical verb forms should be required in passive sentences. The only speculation we are able to make is that, in some sense, passive sentences are 'less real' than active sentences because they view a given event or situation in a less-than-usual way."[8]

Even if we accept this "stretching" of the definition, we are confronted with the problem of explaining the use of hypothetical pronouns in time clauses. In this case no speculation is offered:

> "The reason for this phenomenon (i.e. the obligatory use of hypothetical pronouns in time clauses CMD) is obscure: since hypothetical verb forms normally designate unreal events, as we have seen in so many previous cases, it is totally mysterious why they should be required in time clauses introduced by er se er a 'when', which refer to actual (or real) events in the past. As we will see below, all types of Palauan time clauses must--for some unknown reason--contain hypothetical verb forms."[9]

Further difficulties result from the fact that not all conditional clauses require hypothetical pronouns.

19. A lsekum ng ngar er ngii a ududem e ng sebechem el obengkek el mo er a Saibal.

20. A lengar er ngii a ududem e ng sebechem el obengkek el mo er a Saibal.
'If you have the money, you can go with me to Saipan.'

The difference in meaning between constructions containing hypothetical pronouns (b) and those containing the introductory conditional phrases a lsekum, a kmu, and ulekum (a) is not always clear, though, according to Josephs, the latter would seem to imply a greater degree of doubt or uncertainty. He speculates that lsekum may represent a "fossilized" hypothetical verb form with l standing for a third person hypothetical pronoun prefix. Even if this is true, a similar analysis cannot be applied to a kmu.

As was shown above with the "non-emphatic/emphatic" distinction, it is possible to analyze the "hypothetical" pronouns in purely syntactic terms. At this point, Lyon's comments quoted at the beginning of this paper in regard to the subjunctive become relevant, for there is a rather striking parallel between the use of these pronouns in Palauan and that of the subjunctive in European languages such as Latin and French.

21. A Mary a medakt er a bechil a longelebed er ngii.
Marie a peur que son mari (ne) le batte.
'Mary is afraid that her husband may hit her.'

22. A rechad er a tia el beluu a milsuub a tekoi
er a Merikel er a uche er a leme a resensei.

Les habitants de ce village apprenaient l'anglais
avant que les professeurs (ne) soient arrivés.

'The people of this village were learning English before the teachers arrived.'

23. A Mary a mlo er a skuul er a uriul er a leme a John.
Marie alla a l'école après que Jean fut venu. (not subj.)
?Marie est allée a l'école après que Jean soit venu.
'Mary went to school after John came.'

In analyzing the use of the subjunctive, just as in the case of the hypothetical pronouns, one faces the problem of form and content, syntax and semantics. The very term subjunctive is at least originally syntactic. It presumably describes the form of the verb phrase in subjoined sentences. Anyone who examines the use of the subjunctive in European languages is struck by its apparent arbitrariness. In French, it makes a certain amount of sense to say that clauses introduced by avant que, 'before...', describe events that have not yet occurred in terms of the main clause, whereas in the case of après que, 'after...', the events have already occurred. Yet why is it that espérer, 'to hope', takes the indicative while désirer, 'to want, desire', takes the subjunctive? In French the subjunctive construction has come to be regarded as a mood, expressing doubt, desire, possibility... The fact that the indicative and subjunctive overlap slightly in distribution can be explained by the interrelatedness of syntactic and semantic levels. The factual nature of some subordinate clauses leads to the use of the indicative, whereas subordinate clauses which normally take the indicative may "pick up" the subjunctive by analogy. (e.g. après que...)

The common element of most importance between the European subjunctive and Palauan hypothetical pronouns is that both serve to maintain the distinction between main and subordinate clauses. When this distinction is otherwise marked, indicative or main clause forms may appear. In French, conditional clauses which begin with si are in the indicative while in other cases the subjunctive is used:

24. Qu'il dise un seul mot et je le mets dehors.
S'il dit un seul mot je le mettrai dehors.

The same is true of Palauan, as was seen in the examples above: A lengar er ngii a ududem... versus A lsekum ng ngar er ngii a ududem..., 'if you have the money...'.

For the analysis of the hypothetical pronouns as subordinate clause subject pronouns to be correct, it must be shown that all of the uses of this pronoun set conform to the pattern. In the case of negation as well as conditional and time clauses, this is no problem. It is in the area of the imperative and the passive that some clarification is needed.

In the first case, I suggest that the form of Palauan imperative constructions offers evidence that they are clauses subordinate to main clauses which are deleted on the surface:

25. (Ng soak a) lak molim a biang.[10]
(lit. It is desire-my it not you drink beer)
'Don't drink beer!'

26. Ng soak a chomonga er a kelem.
'I want you to eat your food.'

27. Moka er a kelem.
'Eat your food!' (Ka is the verb stem.)

In Latin and French, there is a close relationship between the imperative and the subjunctive, especially in the first and third person:

28. Que je meure!
'Oh may I die!'

29. Dominum laudemus.
'Let us praise the Lord.'

30. Et ne in temptationem nos ducas...
'And lead us not into temptation...'

31. Qu'il sorte de suite!
'Have him out immediately!'

Josephs distinguishes two passive-like constructions as passive and ergative. The latter consists of the verb marker me + verb stem. The agent is not usually indicated.

32. A kall a mekang.
'The food is (being) eaten.'

The so-called "passive" form is derived as follows:

33. A John a mengelebed er a bilis
'John is beating the dog.'

A bilis a longelebed er ngii a John
'The dog is being beaten by John.'

Subject and object change positions; a hypothetical pronoun replaces the verb marker. It should be noted that when the object is specific, i.e. introduced by er, a "pronominal trace" remains when it is shifted: er ngii (singular), er tir (plural human). A literal translation of A bilis a longelebed er ngii a John would be: '(As for) the dog, John is beating him.' Here would seem to be a good case for considering the passive as a topicalization phenomenon. I suggest that what follows the preposed object is an embedded clause, very much like topic-comment pattern of Japanese:

34. Watashi-wa inu -o tatai-ta.
I TOPIC dog OBJ beat PAST

35. Inu- wa watashi-ga tatai-ta- n desu.
dog TOPIC I SUBJ MRKR beat PAST NOMINALIZER COPULA

Since relative clause formation involves a kind of topicalization, it is not surprising that hypothetical pronouns are found in clauses in which the relativized element is the object:

36. Ak milsa a bilis el milenga er a ngikel.
'I saw the dog that was eating the fish.'

37. Ak milsa a ngikel el lulenga er ngii a bilis.
'I saw the fish that the dog was eating.'

Topicalization rather than passivization would also seem to be a better description for those sentences which Josephs considers to be "unusual" in that they contain intransitive rather than transitive verbs:

38. Ak medengelii a (basio el) losuub a tekoi er a Belau er ngii a resensei er a Biskor.
'I know (the place) where the Peace Corps teachers are studying Palauan.'
(lit. I know it (the place that) the Peace Corps teachers are studying Palauan.')

39. Ak medengelii a taem el lebo er a skojo a Paul.
'I know the time that Paul is going to the airport.'

The above analysis of the "hypothetical" pronouns makes it possible to reconsider the claim that the "non-emphatic" pronouns are verb prefixes. Comparison of the two pronoun sets shows that while the "non-emphatic" pronouns, like the "hypothetical" pronouns, are restricted to the role of subject markers, there is considerable evidence that they are not morphologically but rather only syntactically bound.

First of all, the "non-emphatic" pronouns may appear only once: at the beginning of a VP, preceding not only the main verb but also its auxiliaries:

40. Ng mla mo merek er a babier a Droteo.
'Droteo has finished the letter.'

The hypothetical pronouns, on the other hand, function as genuine verb prefixes, appearing both at the beginning of the VP and before subsequent elements within it:

41. A babier a lebla lebo[ll] lemerek er ngii a Droteo.
'The letter has been finished by Droteo.'

Secondly, there is phonological evidence of the morphologically bound relationship between hypothetical pronoun and verb stem. Within morphemes b devoices in the immediate environment of any consonant other thar l, e.g. /kbokb/ 'wall' -- [kpokpə]. In the case of the hypothetical pronouns, the rule also applies across morpheme boundaries:

42. a kbo er a skuul... [akporaskuwl]
'if I go to school'

It does not occur across what can be considered a word-boundary in the following:

43. Ak bekerurt. [ak^{h}bəgerurtə]
'I'm a good runner.'

Palauan orthography accurately reflects this distinction.

Conclusion

The above analysis permits the classification of Palauan pronoun forms in strictly syntactic terms. There are two major sets, subject and non-subject, within each of which there are bound and unbound forms, the formerbeing the perfective object suffixes and the subordinate clause subject prefixes ("hypothetical pronouns"), the latter being the main clause subject pronouns ("non-emphatic") and those pronouns which appear as subject complements and as imperfective objects ("emphatic"). All four sets are represented in the following sentence:

Ng ngii a kichillebedii.
'It was he (she) that we beat up.'

Notes:

1. Lyons, Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics, p. 312.

2. Josephs, Palauan Reference Grammar, p. 82.

3. An alternate analysis which is pursued in DeWolf (in prep.) considers the underlying word order of Palauan to be VOS. "Non-emphatic" pronouns are VP subject markers comparable to those found in Yapese and some of the Micronesian languages.

4. Josephs, op. cit., p. 83.

5. It will be argued in DeWolf (in prep.) that a represents two homophonous morphemes, one an article preceding NPs, the other a topicalizer which appears between a VP and a fronted NP.

6. That the object pronouns are suffixes, i.e. bound forms, is evidenced by the fact that they take stress, a general characteristic of Palauan suffixes.

7. Josephs, op. cit., p. 103.

8. ibid., p. 404.

9. ibid., p. 445.

10. If the l of lak is taken as a fossilized pronoun, there are actually three clauses (25):

    Ng soak a lak mo lim a biang
    It (is) desire-my/ it (is) not/ you drink beer

    a preceding lak marks the complex NP a lak molim a biang which is the subject of the sentence, marked initially by ng.

11. bo is the verb stem of mo 'go', here used as an auxiliary. The verb marker m(e) is infixed with subsequent deletion of b. The mla-bla alternation in (40) and (41) can be explained in terms of the same structural description.

References

DeWolf (in prep.)

Josephs, L. S., 1975. Palauan Reference Grammar. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

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