SV. Verbal Person Marking

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1. Defining the values

Map SV depicts the number and identity of the arguments of a transitive clause which display person marking on the verb. "A" stands for the agentive argument and "P" for the patient argument. Five feature values are represented:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Value</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No person marking of any argument</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person marking of only the A argument</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person marking of only the P argument</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person marking of the A or P argument</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person marking of both the A and P arguments</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>379</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lack of verbal person marking is illustrated in (1) by Bari (Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan; Sudan).

(1) Bari (Spagnolo 1933: 17)

\[ nan \ nyanyar \ yango' \]

'I love mother'

Person marking of only the A argument is exemplified in (2) from Kobon (Trans–New Guinea; Papua New Guinea).

(2) Kobon (Davies 1981: 185)

\[ yad \ kaf \ pak-nab-in \]

'I will kill a pig.'

An example of person marking of only the P argument is given in (3) from Yawa (Geelvink Bay; West Papua/Indonesia).
Person marking of the A or P but not of both is found, for instance, in Nocte (Naga, Tibeto–Burman; India).

Observe that the person marking on the verb in (4a) is of the A, while in (4b) it is of the P. Whether it is the A or the P that is marked on the verb is dependent on which is higher on the person hierarchy 1 > 2 > 3. If the higher ranking argument is a P rather than an A, the verb occurs with a special marker, h, in (4b), called an inverse marker.

The final value, person marking of both the A and P arguments, is shown in (5) from Tawala (Western Oceanic; Papua New Guinea).

In most languages exhibiting verbal person marking, the person markers are affixes, attached to the lexical or auxiliary verb, as in the examples above. There are, however, also languages in which the person markers are not affixes but rather clitics. Clitics resemble affixes in forming a phonological unit with a word (their host) preceding them (proclitics) or following them.
However, whereas affixes attach only to specific types of words (or stems), clitics attach to phrases and/or specialized syntactic positions. A common position of person clitics is the beginning of the verb phrase or verb complex. In Tinrin (Remote Oceanic; New Caledonia), for example, the subject person markers are proclitic to the first element of the VP, which may be the verb (6a), a tense/aspect particle (6b), or a verbal modifier (6c).

(6) Tinrin (Osumi 1995: 215, 177, 182)

a. treanru rri=fi winro fonri
   people 3PL.S=go follow river
   ‘People went along the river.’

b. u=nrii ti wai
   1SG.S=PROG go already
   ‘I am going now.’

c. rri=see saafi wake nyorro
   3PL.S=NEG all.together always cook
   ‘They do not always cook together.’

Another common clitic position is after the first word or constituent in the utterance, as is the case in many southern Uto-Aztecan languages, including Southeastern Tepehuan (Uto-Aztecan; Durango/Mexico). We see below that the person marker is encliticized to a verb in (7a), the end of a postpositional phrase in (7b) and a question word in (7c).

(7) Southeastern Tepehuan (Willett 1991: 194, 191)

a. vacocoit=m=it gu a’ahl
   sleep=3PLS=PERF ART children
   ‘The children have gone to sleep.’

b. aptuvus ta’m=ach=ch vaji
   bus on=1PLS=PERF went
   ‘We went by bus.’

c. p=pim duc va-‘aiy-a’ mu-ja’p
   when=2PLS arrive-FUT there-area
   jam-quiquia’am
   2PL-homes
‘When will you arrive at your home?’

Though strictly speaking person markers such as those in Tinrin and Southeastern Tepehuan are not verbal person markers, they are treated here as such, provided the verb is one of the constituents to which the person clitics may attach. By contrast, person markers which cannot be bound to the verb, i.e. independent person forms such as the subject markers in Woleaian (Remote Oceanic; Micronesia) in (8), or free-standing combinations of person forms fused with tense as in Anejom (Central–Eastern Oceanic; Vanuatu) in (9), have been excluded.

(8) Woleaian (Sohn 1975: 93–94)

*sar kelaa re sa tangileng*

those children 3PL.S ASP cried

‘Those children over there cried.’

(9) Anejom (Lynch 1982: 119)

*et aviñ numu aen*

3SG.AOR.A want fish he

‘He wants a fish.’

Apart from affixal or clitic person marking, we occasionally find person marking via phonological changes in the stem. For example, in Misantla Totonac (Totonacan; Veracruz/Mexico), the second person singular A (and also S) marker is (with some verbs) marked by suppletion of the stem. This is the case with all verbs containing the roots /min/ – ‘come’ and /an/ – ‘go’. An example of the latter is given in (10).

(10) Misantla Totonac (MacKay 1991: 153)

a. *kit ñik-án*

1 1SCS-go

‘I go.’

b. *wįš pín*

you 2SCS.go
‘You go.’


a. t-ekîn era'ma-'pî paaka esa-'ya
REFL-pet.ABS see-PST cow owner-ERG
‘The owner of the cow saw his own pet.’

b. i-koneka-'pî-i-ya
3SG.P-make-PST-3SG.A-ERG
‘He made it.’

Rather less commonly, person markers occur in the presence of free pronouns but not nouns (e.g. Welsh, Dholuo) or alternatively in the presence of nouns but not free pronouns (e.g. Palauan). The occurrence of verbal person markers may also be conditioned by the location of the NP argument corresponding to the person marker (e.g. Apurinã, Cora, Paumari, Yagua), its animacy, definiteness or referential status (e.g. ChiMwi:ni, Daga, Lower Grand Valley Dani, Hua, Wanuma), the category of person (e.g. Imbabura Quechua, Koasati, Panyjima, Parecis) as well as tense (e.g. Wolaytta), aspect (e.g. Awa Pit), mood (Evenki, Ika, Mountain Arapesh) and polarity (e.g. Estonian, Sentani).

In classifying languages in terms of the number and identity of the arguments of a transitive clause manifesting person marking on the verb, most of the restrictions mentioned...
above have not been taken into account. Thus languages have
been classified as exhibiting A, P or both A and P person
marking on the basis of the maximal person marking that occurs
in a single clause. The person markers which have not been
included are: those found solely in dependent as opposed to
independent clauses (e.g. Krongo), those occurring only in a
minor mood such as the imperative (e.g. Nivkh) and those
accompanying only a handful of verbs (e.g. Ingush).

It must be pointed out that some languages may lack
markers of person on the verb for the A or the P, or even for
both, but may have markers of number and/or gender. For
instance, as shown in (12), in Archi (Nakh–Daghestanian; eastern
Caucasus) there are prefixes on the verb (lexical or auxiliary)
indicating the gender and number of the P (and also of the S)
but not person.

(12) Archi (Kibrik 1972: 124)

a. wez  dija  k’anši  w–i
  1SG.M.DAT  father  like  M.P–is
  ‘I like father.’

b. dez  buwa  k’anši  d–i
  1SG.F.DAT  mother  like  F.P–is
  ‘I like mother.’

c. wez  un  k’anši  w–i
  1SG.M.DAT  you  like  M.P–is
  ‘I like you (male addresse).’

d. was  zon  k’anši  w–i
  YOU.DAT  me  like  M.P–is
  ‘You like me (male speaker).’

That the verbal prefixes indeed mark only gender and not
person is evidenced by the fact that while the prefix w– is used
when the P is of male rational gender (12a) and the prefix d–
when the P is of female rational gender (12b), the same w–
prefix is used in (12a), (12c) and (12d), though the person of the
P changes from third, to second to first. To give another example, in Ostyak (Ob-Ugrian, Uralic; Siberia) as well as various other Uralic languages (e.g. Hungarian, Nenets, Mordvin, Mansi, and Selkup) there are person suffixes for the A which are preceded by suffixes for the P. As shown in (13), the latter, however, indicate only number not person.

(13) Khanty (Nikolaeva 1999: 24)

a. we:rla-ŋil-an
make-DU.P-2SG.A
‘You make them two.’

b. we:rla-l-an
make-PL.P-2SG.A
‘You make them.’

Given that Map SV is about the marking of person, gender and/or number markers such as those in Archi and Ostyak have not been considered.

2. Geographical distribution

We see that verbal person marking is very common and widely attested cross-linguistically. In fact only about a fifth of the languages in the sample lack any form of verbal person marking. Such languages are found mainly in West Africa, the Caucasus, and South and Southeast Asia. Lack of verbal person marking is particularly rare in North America and New Guinea. Among the languages which manifest verbal person marking, around two thirds exhibit marking of both of the transitive arguments the A and P. This is the dominant pattern of person agreement in every area but for Eurasia. It is particularly common in North America, New Guinea and Australia. In the languages manifesting person marking of only one of the arguments of a transitive clause, this argument is typically the A (25%) rather than the P (7%). Verbal person marking just of the A is most common in Eurasia. It is characteristic of most of the Indo-European languages of Europe, the Uralic languages of Russia,
Finland, Estonia and Hungary, the Turkic languages, and the Dravidian languages of India. It is also found in eastern Africa, especially among the Afro-Asiatic languages, the north of South America and New Guinea. By contrast, it is extremely rare in North America and there is no instance of it among the languages in the sample in Australia. Verbal person marking just of the P is an infrequent phenomenon everywhere. It is manifested mainly in Africa and South America but not at all in North America, Mesoamerica or Australia. In Africa it is found mainly among the Chadic languages, in a few Khoisan languages and sporadically in several groups of Niger–Congo languages.

References


