‘Give’ constructions in Timor-Alor-Pantar: variation and diachronic change

Marian Klamer & Antoinette Schapper – Leiden University

This paper describes the grammatical variation in the expression of ‘give’ constructions in a geographical sample of Papuan languages spoken on this islands of Timor, Alor and Pantar (TAP), in eastern Indonesia. By studying the synchronic variation we reconstruct (i) a single basic pattern from which the various ‘give’ constructions in the TAP family have developed, and (ii) three diachronic changes that occurred.

We discuss data from Kamang in central Alor (Schapper field notes 2010), Blagar as spoken in the straits between Alor and Pantar (Steinhauer, p.c.), Teiwa on west Pantar (Klamer 2010), Makalero in eastern East Timor (Huber 2011) and Bunaq in central Timor (Schapper 2009), see Map below.

‘Give’ constructions involve an agent (A), a recipient (R) and displaced theme (T). Treating R like the patient (P), the TAP languages show ‘secundative alignment’ (Malchukov et. al. 2010: 3, Dryer 1986). Without exception, they index an animate R on the verb ‘give’ with a prefix. As TAP ‘give’ is typically a two-place predicate, the third participant T is introduced with its own verb: me/mei ‘take’ (1) & (2), ma ‘come’ (3), or the compound met-ma ‘take-come’ (4). Together with ‘give’, the verbs form a serial verb construction (SVC) to express a three-participant event. TAP languages are verb final. Thus, T and R, where explicit, precede the verbs which introduce them, (V1) and (V2) respectively.

(1) A T V1 R-V2
Kam Maria falak me ne-n
Maria cloth take 1SG.GEN-give
‘Maria gives me a cloth’ (Schapper, field notes)

(2) A T V1 R-V2
Mak Ani osan mei m-ei-ini
1SG money take m-2SG-give
‘I give you money’ (Huber 2011: 425)

(3) A T V1 R R-V2
Tei Mama te ma bif g-an
mother(IND) tea(IND) come child 3s-give
‘Mum gives the child tea’ (Klamer, field notes)

(4) A T V1 R R-V2
Bla Na vet nu met-ma n-oʔal ?-enang
1SG coconut one take-come 1SG-child 3SG-give
‘I give a coconut to my child’ (Steinhauer, p.c. 2010)
Bunaq in central Timor shows exceptional behaviour in three respects. Firstly, the Bunaq ‘give’ construction does not involve a SVC but is expressed as a single ditransitive verb; secondly, the T is postverbal rather than preverbal, and thirdly, the R index on ‘give’ marks an animacy distinction (5), (6).

(5) Nei Markus g-ege tumel
Bun 1PL.EXCL. Markus 3.AN-give money
‘We gave Markus money’ (Schapper 2010: 127)

(6) Nei gereja h-ege tumel
Bun 1PL.EXCL. church(IND) 3.INAN-give money
‘We gave the church money’ (Schapper 2010: 127)

In the paper we present arguments to reconstruct the proto-TAP ‘give’ construction in (7):

(7) NPₐ take NPₜ [NPₙ] proₙ-give

Today, this construction is still robustly attested throughout Alor. We discuss the diachronic changes that gave rise to the innovative constructions attested in Pantar and Timor:

(i) In Teiwa, the handling verb ‘take’ that introduces T was replaced by the deictic verb come. We show how this may have happened.

(ii) The Makalero verb ‘give’ has a grammaticalised verb ‘take’ as initial consonant m-, followed by a pronominal index of R, see (2). We present an account of this reanalysis on the basis of Huber (2011: 422-428), and discuss the alternative encoding that developed subsequently, see (8).

(8) A R-V₁ T V₂
Mak Mu’ani=ni ei-asu faru meini
who.SUBJ=CONTRASTIVE 2SG-be for shirt give.to.you
‘Who gave this shirt to you?’ (Huber 2011: 426)

(iii) The exceptional word order and ditransitivity of the Bunaq ‘give’ verb are contact-induced. We show how the Bunaq construction represents a mediation between the TAP pattern and the Austronesian pattern of its neighbours.

This comparative study of the TAP languages thus provides us with information on the varieties of ways in which languages that lack ditransitive verbs express ‘give’ constructions; the original pattern from which their constructions developed; and the diachronic changes that led to the synchronic variation attested today. (~475 words)
References
Dryer, Matthew. 1986. Primary objects, secondary objects, and antida

Map: The languages of the Timor-Alor-Pantar family (from Schapper 2010:21)