Two Adpositional Predicates in Mayrinax Atayal—
predicate selection and further implications

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In this paper, I propose that existentials (1a), predicative locatives (1b), and possessives (1c) in Mayrinax Atayal, an ergative Formosan language (Huang 1994; Starosta 1999; cf. Aldridge 2004), all share a locative origin (Freeze 1992), showing two subject positions across the existential closure (Diesing 1992). I also argue that kiya/haniyan are complex adpositional predicates derived from head incorporation to explain predicate selection, supporting den Dikken (2006).

(1) a. Kiya / haniyan a ruwas cku’ raralan
   EXIST IND.ABS book OBL desk
   ‘There is a/some book on the desk.’

   b. Kiya/haniyan cku’ raralan ku ngiyaw
   EXIST OBL desk DEF.ABS cat
   ‘The cat is on the desk.’

   c. Kiya/haniyan a pila ni Payan
   EXIST IND.ABS money ERG PN
   ‘Payan has money.’

First, kiya/haniyan is a non-verbal, adpositional predicate showing no voice alternation or TAM affixation (2a-b), and it assigns inherent oblique case to locative DPs (1a-b), with the ergative case in (1c) from an adpositional source (cf. Mahajan 1997).

(2) a. *k<um>iya / *kiya-an / *k<in>iya
   EXIST<AF> EXIST-LF EXIST<Perf>

   b. *h<um>ani / *hani-un / *si-hani / *pa-hani / *h<in>ani
   EXIST<AF> EXIST-PF BF-EXIST FUT.AF-EXIST EXIST<Perf>

Second, the absolutive DP is structurally higher than the locative DP, with evidence from quantifier scope and superiority.

(3) a. Kiya a tugal ka ruwas cku’ kahavag ka raralan
There are three books on all the desks.’ (3 > all; #all > 3)

b. ? Nanuwan ku kiya i inu
what DEF.ABS EXIST OBL where
(intended: ‘What is where?’)

b’. ** (I) inu ku kiya a nanuwan
OBL where DEF.ABS EXIST IND.ABS what
(intended: ‘Where is what?’)

‘Three squirrels are in all the trees.’ (3>all; #all >3)

b. ? Ima ku kiya i inu
who DEF.ABS EXIST OBL where
(intended: ‘Who is where?’)

b’. ** (I) inu ku kiya ku ima
OBL where DEF.ABS EXIST DEF.ABS who
(intended: ‘Where is who?’)

Yet, evidence from Q-floating (cf. Sportiche 1988) and definiteness constraint shows that the existential subject is within the nuclear scope (pP in this study) while the locative subject is out of it (5a-a’; 5b-b’). The DP order is indeed not free (contra Zeitoun et al. 1999).

‘All the squirrels are in the trees.’

a’. Kiya (tiqay) a ruwas *(tiqay) cku’ naniqan
EXIST some IND.ABS book some OBL desk
‘There are some books on the desk.’

b. Kiya cku’ kahuniq ku bhut=haca
EXIST OBL tree DEF.ABS squirrel=that
‘That squirrel is in the tree.’

b’. ?* Kiya a ruwas=haca cku’ naniqan
   EXIST IND.ABS book=that OBL desk
   ‘There is that book on the desk.’

I propose a unified analysis for the existentials, predicative locatives, and possessives in Mayrinax Atayal that they are derived from a complex adpositional projection [pP theme [p(lace) [P [ locative]]]] (cf. den Dikken 2006), also a nuclear scope. The p(lace) head is assumed to house a [distal]/[proximal] feature that selects kiya (P+[distal]p) or haniyan (P+[proximal]p), its adpositional equivalent with proximal semantics (Huang 1995, 2000).

The derivation for the three constructions proceeds as follows: P assigns inherent oblique case to the locative DP, and p introduces the theme subject forming a nuclear scope pP. In predicative locatives, T probes for the theme to checks the [Abs] feature, [EPP] carried by C attracts it to [Spec, C]. In existentials, T checks [Abs] of theme but C carries no EPP to attract it out of the nuclear scope (Diesing 1992). In possessives, the human locative DP, assigned ergative case (cf. Mahajan 1997; Markman & Grashchenkov 2012), attaches to the theme DP due to its clitic nature. The complex P moves to a head position below T. The structure undergoes TP-movement to [Spec, C] when merged with C for the predicate-initial word order, following Aldridge (2004).

This analysis supports (i) the locative-based analysis (Freeze 1992), (ii) his HAVE/BE hypothesis for Mayrinax Atayal lacks HAVE because the adoposition does not reach T/INFL-related heads, (iii) the complex locative adposition hypothesis (den Dikken 2006) for kiya/haniyan selection, and (iv) the dual-subject hypothesis (Guilfoyle et al. 1992). The dual subject fact questions Aldridge (2004) that absolutive DPs in Austronesian languages are unbiasedly attracted to the CP domain as a presuppositional element, if specificity or categorial EPP (cf. Laka 1993) is not taken into consideration.

Abbreviations:

ABS: absolutive case, AF: Agent Focus; BF: Beneficiary Focus; DEF: definite; ERG: ergative case; FUT: future tense; IND: indefinite; LF: Locative Focus; LK: linker; OBL: oblique case; Perf: perfective aspect; PF: Patient Focus; PN: proper name
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