

Nouniness and Markedness

In the languages which show weak noun-verb distinction, or predicate-argument flexibility, primarily Philippine languages, Wakashan, Salishan, and Circassian (West Caucasus), any notional stem can be used either as an argument or a predicate, without further derivation needed. The semantics of such a stem can be predicted from its position in a clause. In particular, there is a well-attested construction with a verb that functions as a noun without any special markers (1). Lacking a head noun, the phrase has a distribution of NP.

Nevertheless, there are several criteria used to distinguish "nouns" from "verbs". In particular, it has been mentioned in (Davidson [2002] for Nuuchahnulth, Dahl [1986] for Malagasy, Testelefs and Lander [2006] for Adyghe) that "verbs" must obligatory have a specific determiner to function as an argument, while with "nouns" such a restriction doesn't hold: see (2).

One of the possible analyses of the examples above can be stated as follows:

- The referentiality of a 'verbal' argument must be specific.

That is, to function as a noun (or, as an argument), a verb must receive specific interpretation. Crucially, it is not a necessary condition. I propose that the restriction we observe in (2) is due not to specificity, but to markedness.

Languages that don't allow non-specific uses for 'verbal' arguments (Nuuchahnulth, Makah, Malagasy and Adyghe) have one common feature. Namely, all of them have a paradigm of specificity/definiteness with only one overtly marked, phonetically non-null opposition member. Non-specificity is expressed either by a zero article (as in Nuuchahnulth, Makah, Malagasy) or by absence of a case affix (as in Adyghe).

What if we consider data from languages with both specific and non-specific phrases marked? Tongan and Tagalog are also famous by the lack of category distinction (see details Foley [1998], Himmelmann [to appear] for Tagalog and Broschart [1997] for Tongan). In Tongan non-specific nouns occur with an overtly expressed indefinite article, *ha*.

In Tagalog specificity is expressed by case particles, *ang* (ABS), *ng* (ERG) and *sa* (LOC). It has been described in [Rackowski 2002], [Aldridge 2006] et al. that non-specific position is the one marked with the particle *ng* if the predicate has an agentive focus marker. As well as in Tongan, the non-specific argument is marked.

Both in Tongan and Tagalog, as we can see 'verbal' arguments are allowed to be non-specific: see (3-4).

To sum up:

- 'Verbal' arguments are allowed to be non-specific in the languages that have an overtly expressed non-specific marker.

In languages with specific and non-specific phrases both marked, arguments without a noun as a head can receive either interpretation. If a language has only one opposition member marked, it is always a specific one (Givon [1984]). Then, such a language doesn't allow unmarked (i.e. non-specific) form of a 'verbal' argument. So, we should restate the assertion above as:

- The referentiality of a 'verbal' argument must be overtly marked.

A verb, to appear in an argument position, must have some phonetically non-null referential marker. For an NP without a nominal head it is not sufficiently to occupy an argument position, some additional means are needed to demonstrate its syntactic role as an NP. Essentially, it means that even for the most "arguable" (with regard to the noun-verb distinction) languages as noted above it is necessary to have something like a syntactic nominalizing marker. This should be interpreted as another important evidence for the universality of lexical categories.

Data:

(1) Adyghe (Circassian, West Caucasus)

[newəʃə qe-k_wa-ʃtə]-r asker
tomorrow DIR-come-FUT-ABS PR.N.
The one who will come tomorrow is Asker.

(2) Nuuchahnulth (Wakashan)

a. ʔiiḥʔiʃ čakup-(ʔi)
big-3IND man-(DET)
The man is tall.

b. ʔiiḥʔiʃ mamuuk-*(ʔi)
big-3IND working-*(DET)
The working one is tall. [Woo 2005:8]

(3) Tagalog (Philippine)

at ang pare at siya ay naghintay
and ABS priest and 3SG INV PERF.AF.wait

ng sasabihin ng sundalo
ERG IMPF.PF.say ERG soldier

And the priest and he waited for what the soldier would say.
[Bloomfield 1917:30/13], from [Himmelman: in press]

(4) Tongan (Polynesian)

fai ha tohi
do.IMPV INDEF write

Write a letter. [Churchward 1953:24]

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