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Information Structure and Differential Actor Marking in Kelabit

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Overview



- In this talk, I will present an analysis of **NOM** and **GEN** pronouns in Kelabit, a Western Austronesian (WAn) language of Northern Sarawak.
- Although the pronoun sets appear cognate with other WAn languages, the **patterns of distribution** are somewhat different and both are possible in the context of marking UV actors.
- I will argue that they constitute a case of **differential actor marking (DAM)** and that the choice is motivated by **information structure (focus)**.

Outline



- Symmetrical voice
- Kelabit pronouns
- Differential marking cross-linguistically
- DAM and information structure in Kelabit
- A puzzling question
- Conclusion



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Symmetrical Voice

Symmetrical Voice



- Western Austronesian languages are known to have **symmetrical voice** alternations
 - Alternations in the mapping of arguments to functions without demotion/detransitivisation

Actor Voice

Undergoer Voice

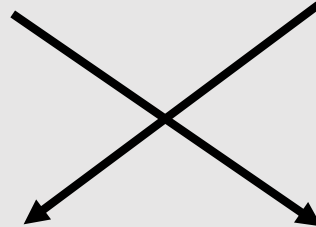
Semantic Roles

A

P

A

P



Syntactic Functions

SUBJ

CORE

SUBJ

CORE

Transitive

Transitive

Case-marking
interacts with
the voice system

Kelabit Voice



(1a) **Actor Voice**
Nengelaak *nuba'*
PFV.AV.cook rice
'Her mother cooked rice'

tesineh nedih
mother 3SG.POSS

privileged
argument/subject

Root = *laak*
AV = *neN-*
UV = *-in-*

(1b) **Undergoer Voice**
Linaaak *tesineh nedih* *nuba'*
PFV.UV.cook mother 3SG.POSS rice
'Her mother cooked rice'

privileged
argument/subject



Morphological Evidence for Symmetrical Voice

- Both actor and undergoer are expressed as **NPs** in AV and UV, whereas obliques are **PPs**:

(2a) Actor Voice

La'ih sineh

man DEM

nenekul

PFV.AV.spoon rice

nuba'

rice

ngen seduk

with spoon

'The man spooned up rice with a spoon'

(2b) Undergoer Voice

nuba'

rice

sikul

<UV.PFV>spoon man

lai'h

man

sineh

DEM

ngen seduk

with spoon

'The man spooned up rice with a spoon'

Syntactic Evidence for Symmetrical Voice



- There are **syntactic tests** that support the identification of both actor and undergoer as core arguments in AV and UV:
 - **Privileged arguments** are subjects
 - **Non-privileged actors and undergoers** are core arguments (and different from obliques)



Kelabit Relativisation

(3a) Relativising Actor

la'ih [suk **nenekul** *nuba'*
 man REL PFV.AV.spoon rice
 'the man who spooned up rice'

only the privileged argument
 can be relativized on

(3b) ***la'ih** [suk **sikul** *nuba'*
 man REL PFV.UV.spoon rice

AV actor and UV undergoer
 have subject properties

(3c) Relativising Undergoer

nuba' [suk **sikul** **la'ih** *sineh*
 rice REL PFV.UV.spoon man DEM
 'the rice that the man spooned up'

(3d) **nuba'* [suk **nenekul** **la'ih** **sineh**
 rice REL PFV.AV.spoon man DEM



Kelabit Post-verbal Position (core)

(4a) Actor Voice

La'ih **sineh** [ne-kuman (*ngimalem) *buah* *kaber*]
 man DEM PFV-AV.eat (yesterday) fruit pineapple

For: 'I ate pineapple yesterday'

Non-privileged
actors and
undergoers
cannot be
separated from
the verb

(4b) Undergoer Voice

[Kinan (*ngimalem) *la'ih* *sineh*] *buah* *kaber* **sineh**
 UV.PFV.eat (yesterday) man DEM fruit pineapple DEM

For: 'The man ate that pineapple yesterday.'

AV undergoer and
UV actor have
core argument
properties



Kelabit Post-verbal Position (obliques)

(5a) Actor Voice

La'ih **sineh** nenekul *nuba'* (ngimalem) ngen tekul
 man DEM AV.PFV.spoon rice yesterday with spoon

'The man spooned up rice yesterday with a spoon'

Obliques/adjuncts
 can be separated
 from the
 verb+object

(5b) Undergoer Voice

Nuba' sikul *la'ih* **sineh** (ngimalem) ngen tekul
 rice UV.PFV.spoon man DEM yesterday with spoon

'The man spooned up the rice yesterday with a spoon'

AV undergoers and
 UV actors behave
 differently from
 obliques

Summary



- These patterns all support the conclusion that both AV and UV are **transitive** and that the mapping from arguments to functions is as follows:

	subject	object
ACTOR VOICE	actor	undergoer
UNDERGOER VOICE	undergoer	actor

- What's important for us is that the **UV actor** is an object...



Kelabit pronouns

Kelabit



- Kelabit is a WAn language spoken mainly in the Fourth and Fifth divisions of Sarawak, Malaysia (Martin 1996).
- It is part of the **Apad Uat** subgroup of Northern Sarawak which also includes Lun Bawang/Lundayeh, Tring and Sa'ban (Kroeger 1998).
- Data is based on my own fieldwork in **Bario** from 2013-2017.



Kelabit NOM pronouns



	1.INCL	1.EXCL	2	3
SINGULAR		uih	iko	ieh
DUAL	kiteh	kediweh	meduweh	diweh
PAUCAL	teluh	keteluh	meteluh	deteluh
PLURAL	tauh	kamih	muyuh	ideh

Kelabit GEN pronouns



	NOM	GEN
1SG	uih	kuh
2SG	iko	muh
3SG	ieh	neh
3PL	ideh	deh

- ❖ What motivates the choice of **NOM** vs **GEN**?
- ❖ Is it related to **grammatical function**?
- ❖ Or is it related to **information structure**?



Pronouns in Proto-Southwest Sabah

- The Kelabit pronouns are referred to as **NOM** and **GEN** since they are cognate with other systems:

	NOM	GEN
1SG	*aku	*=ku
2SG	* (əi)-ka[w], *=kə	*=mu, *=nu
3SG	*[s]iə	*=yə, *=nə, *nyə
1DU.INCL	*[k]itə	*=tə
1PL.INCL	*[ki]ta-kau	*=ta-kau
1PL.EXCL	*ə-kai	*=mai
2PL	*ə-kau, *=kau	*=muyu[n]
3PL	*[s]idə	*=[ni-]də

NOM = subjects or
privileged arguments

GEN = non-privileged
actors and possessors

(Lobel 2013: 103)



Kimaragang Dusun (Kroeger 2005)

(6a)

Actor Voice

Mangalapak **okuh** *do* *niyuw.*
 AV.TR.split 1SG.NOM GEN coconut
 'I will split a coconut/some coconuts.'

(6b)

Undergoer Voice

Lapak-on **kuh** *it* *niyuw.*
 split-UV 1SG.GEN NOM coconut
 'I will split the coconut(s).'

(6c)

Instrumental Voice

Nokuroh.tu n-i-lapak *nuh* *do* *niyuw inoh* **dangol kuh?**
 why PST-IV-split 2SG.GEN GEN coconut MED.NOM knife 1SG.GEN
 'Why did you use my bush knife to split coconuts?'



Lundayeh (Clayre 2005)

(7a) Actor Voice

lko
2SG.NOM

nguit
AV.bring

neneh
3SG.OBL

amé nekuh.
go 1SG.OBL

'You bring him to me.'

(7b) Undergoer Voice

Inapung

UV.PFV.hide

kuh
1SG.GEN

ieh
3SG.NOM

rat neneh.
from 3SG.OBL

'I hid it from him.'

Kelabit



(8a) Actor Voice

Ne-kuman *bua'* *kaber* **uih**
PFV-AV.eat fruit pineapple 1SG.NOM
'I ate pineapple'

(8b) Undergoer Voice

Kinan **kuh** *bua'* *kaber* *ih*
UV.PFV.eat 1SG.GEN fruit pineapple DEF
'I ate pineapple'

Kelabit



- BUT: NOM is used for both actor-subject and undergoer-object in Actor Voice:

(10a) **AV Actor**

Uih

1SG.NOM

'I see him.'

ni'er

AV.see

ieh

3SG.NOM

(10b) **AV Undergoer**

leh

3SG.NOM

'He sees me.'

ni'er

AV.see

uih

1SG.NOM

Kelabit

- AND: NOM and GEN alternate in certain contexts

(10a) Undergoer Voice

Seni'er

kuh

ieh

UV.see

1SG.GEN

3SG.NOM

'I saw him'

(10b) Seni'er

uih

t=ieh

UV.see

1SG.NOM

PT=3SG.NOM

'I saw him'

➤ **non-AV actors**

- A argument of experiential and accidental predicates
- following prepositions
- for possessors (along with other strategies)

DIFFERENTIAL ACTOR MARKING (DAM)

Summary



- In many Western Austronesian languages case-marking distinguishes **subjects** and **non-subject actors**
- In other words, the choice of pronoun relates to the **grammatical function** within the **symmetrical voice system**.
- However, in Kelabit, NOM can mark all functions, and NOM and GEN alternate in certain contexts. Hence, it appears to be a case of **differential actor marking**
- This leads to the question of what **motivates** the differential use of NOM and GEN and what differences in interpretation emerge?



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Differential Marking

Differential Marking



- **Differential marking** = non-uniform grammatical marking of arguments
- It is known to be affected by both **semantic factors** and **information structure**:
 - Animacy, Referentiality and Definiteness
 - Properties of event semantics, e.g. volitionality, control, affectedness
 - Topicality/Focus

(Aissen 2003, Bossong 1985, de Swart 2007, Naess 2004, Iemmolo 2010, Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011, Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018)

DOM and Topicality

- Often objects receive overt marking when they are **(secondary) topics**:

Tundra Nenets (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011: 103)

(12a) xasawa **ti-m** xada^o
man **reindeer-ACC** kill.3SG.SUBJ
'A/the man killed a/the reindeer'

Non-topical Object

What happened?

What did the man do?

What did the man kill?

(12b) xasawa **ti-m** xada^o**da**
man **reindeer-ACC** kill.**OBJ**.3SG.SUBJ
'A/the man killed a/the reindeer'

Topical Object

*What did the man do to
the reindeer?*

DAM and Focus



- Often actors receive overt marking when they represent **focus/contrastive/unexpected** information (Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018):

(13a) **Lhasa Tibetan** (Tournadre 1995: 264)
khōng khāla' s̥o-k̥iyo:re'
he food make-IPFV.GNOM
'He prepares the meals.'

Given Actor

What does he do?

(13b) **khōng-ki'** khāla' s̥o-k̥iyo:re'
he-ERG food make-IPFV.GNOM
'*He* prepares the meals.'

Contrasted Actor

Him and not someone else

Summary



- **DOM** is often related to the topicality of the object (undergoer?)
- **DAM** is often related to the focus status of the actor

Does information structure play a role in the choice of **GEN** vs **NOM**?

What pattern do we find given that the **UV actor** is (arguably) both an **object** and an **actor**?



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Information Structure and DAM in Kelabit

DAM and Information Structure



- The choice of **NOM** or **GEN** does reflect the information structural status of the actor in UV constructions.
 - GEN pronouns are **favoured out of context** and used in naturalistic discourse when the actor is a **continuing topic**.
 - NOM pronouns represent **focus/contrastive/unexpected** actors.

GEN is more frequent



- In a small corpus of **folk stories**, **news reports** and narratives elicited using a video stimulus (**pear stories**), of c. 2000 clauses there were 184 uv clauses
- Of these 122 of 66% had **pronominal actors** – 119 were **GEN marked**
- Only 3 were **NOM marked** – one case could represent dialect differences and one where it was a partitive actor (*edteh burur ideh* ‘one of them’)

GEN is expected – NOM is unexpected



GEN as continuing topic

(14) Nalap *neh* *pupu'*
 UV.PFV.fetch 3SG.GEN hitting.implement
 'She [Dayang Beladan] fetched something to hit with'

Nukab *neh* *bubpu'* *daan*
 UV.PFV.open 3SG.GEN door hut
 'Opened the door to the hut'

Nalap *neh* *dteh* *kayuh*
 UV.PFV.fetch 3SG.GEN one stick
 'Picked up a piece of wood'

The GEN actor is a
given topic...

...and has high
topic continuity

NB: the *undergoer* is not
 necessarily given/topical



NOM as focus/contrastive

(15) En *kuh* ni'er *ieh* naru' ih
 UV 1SG.GEN AV.see 3SG.NOM AV.make DEM
 'I'd watch her [my great aunt] doing it'

Naru' *n=uih* *petaa* *ba'o* *rawir*
 Av.make PT=1SG.NOM bead.cap bead rawir
 'Then I'd make my own orange bead cap'

Kayu' inih, senuuk *uih* *neh*.
 Like DEM UV.PFV.string 1SG.NOM DEM
 'Like that one, I strung that [pointing to the bead cap on the table].'

The **NOM actor** is
 contrasted against
 her great aunt...

...and the
undergoer is the
 topic

Topic Test



- If you establish the actor as a **hanging topic**, then GEN is preferred:

(16a) **Paul kedieh,** kinan *neh* **bua'** **ebpuk**
Paul 3SG.EMPH UV.PFV.eat 3SG.GEN fruit passion
'As for Paul, he ate the passion fruit'

GEN = ✓

(16b) **#Paul kedieh,** kinan *ieh* **bua'** **ebpuk**
Paul EMPH.3SG UV.PFV.eat 3SG.NOM fruit passion
FOR: 'As for Paul, he ate passion fruit'

NOM = ✗

Focus Test



- If you make the actor the **answer to a wh-word**, NOM is preferred:

Context: who saw him?

(17a) seni'er *uih* *t=ieh*
UV.PFV.see 1SG.NOM PT=3SG.NOM **NOM = ✓**
'I saw him'

(17b) *seni'er *kuh* *t=ieh*
UV.PRF.see 1SG.GEN PT=3SG.NOM **GEN = ✗**
'I saw him'

Contrast Test



- If actor is **contrasted**, NOM is preferred – if undergoer is **contrasted**, GEN is preferred:

(18a) Pinupu' *uih* (*/#kuh) **t=ieh** pu'un, am dih iko
UV.PFV.hit 1SG.NOM PT=3SG .NOM first NEG DEM 3SG.NOM

'I hit him first, not you' (i.e. you didn't hit him first))

NOM = ✓

GEN = ✗

(18b) **leh** teh suk pinupu' *kuh* (*/#uih), am dih iko
3SG.NOM PT REL UV.PFV.hit 1SG.GEN NEG DEM 3SG.NOM

'He's the one I hit, not you' (i.e. I didn't hit you)

GEN = ✓

NOM = ✗

Summary



	Expectedness	Information Structure
GEN ACTOR	expected	A = continuing topic
NOM ACTOR	unexpected	A = focus/contrastive topic

- The choice of NOM vs GEN follows a **common pattern of DAM** – but the marked case (GEN) is used for topics and the unmarked case (NOM) is used for focus/contrast?
- Does this reflect the uv actor's status as an **object**? Or is it a product of **diachronic development**?



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A puzzling question...



A Puzzling Question

- Why focus a pronominal **actor in uv**? Why not use the **AV construction**?
 - The **pre-verbal position** is also associated with focus!

(19a) **lih** suk la' kuman ih?
 who REL want AV.eat DEF
 'who is it that wants to eat?'

(19b) **dih** **ieh** **dih** suk la' kuman!
 DEM 3SG.NOM DEM REL want AV.eat
 'He's the one (pointing) who wants to eat!'

Focus test shows
 that **AV actor** can
 also be in focus



A possible answer

- Difference: the **undergoer** does not “trigger” the choice of UV:

(20) Tulu **uih** na'am ngimet *ceiling*, lit
 if 1SG.NOM NEG AV.hold ceiling suddenly

tebpa teh langit ih keneh
 fall.in PT sky DEM he.said

'If I don't hold up the ceiling, it will fall in, he said.'

Uih teh nengimet *inih* keneh
 1SG.NOM PT PFV.AV.hold DEM he.said

'I am the one holding this [the ceiling] up'

The AV actor is a
contrasted topic...

...the undergoer
 does not have
topic continuity

Implications



- So perhaps the use of NOM for UV actors is restricted to contexts where the **undergoer** is mapped to **subject** (as it is the primary topic) *and* the **pronominal actor** is also **contrasted/focused**.
- Since pronouns and actors are typically topics – this would explain why such a context is rare!

Summary



- The differential marking of UV actors has important implications for our understanding of **case-marking** and **voice** in Kelabit:
 - the choice of UV is not necessarily motivated by the **pragmatic function** of the undergoer – either as topic or focus - since the **DAM patterns** have shown that the actor can fulfil both of these roles within a UV construction.
 - Conversely, the pragmatic status of the actor does not trigger **actor voice** (AV).
 - Instead, the felicity of the construction seems to depend on the status of **both actor and undergoer**.



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Conclusion

Conclusion



- Although many Western Austronesian languages use **NOM** for subjects and **GEN** for non-subject actors, in Kelabit both NOM and GEN can **alternate** as a means of marking UV actors.
- In this paper, I have argued that the choice is not random, or indicative of the general loss of case-marking in Borneo languages.
- Instead, it systematically reflects a contrast between **focus actors** and **topic actors**: a common pattern of **differential actor marking** cross-linguistically (Fauconnier and Verstraete 2014, Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018).

Conclusion

- This is interesting for cross-linguistic studies of **differential marking** as it suggests that different information structure patterns may be linked more to **semantic role** (e.g. actor) than **grammatical function** (e.g. object).
- Moreover, it suggests that voice and case together are chosen to give a particular information structure reading.
- Hence, differential marking may not only depend on information structure characteristics of the argument encoded, but also on **other relevant referents** in the clause.



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Many Thanks!