Information Structure and Differential Actor Marking in Kelabit

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1. Introduction

- ❖ This paper explores differential marking in the Kelabit language of Northern Sarawak, Malaysia, based on data collected during fieldwork in Bario between 2013-2017.
- ❖ Like other Western Austronesian (WAn) languages, Kelabit has a system of SYMMETRICAL VOICE ALTERNATIONS in which the mapping of arguments to functions alternate without changes in the syntactic transitivity (Riesberg 2014).
  - ➢ Actor Voice (AV): actor = subject, undergoer = object
  - ➢ Undergoer Voice (UV): undergoer = subject, actor = object
  - ➢ Instrumental Voice (IV): instrument = subject, actor & undergoer = objects
- ❖ In many WAn languages, the function of an argument within the voice system is indicated via case-marking.
- ❖ However, for Kelabit the function of nominal arguments is indicated via word order and case-marking is restricted to pronouns.
- ❖ Moreover, the patterns of distribution differ from other languages, and NOM and GEN pronouns alternate in certain contexts as a means of expressing UV actors.
- ❖ Consequently, I argue that this is a case of DIFFERENTIAL ACTOR MARKING and aim to show that the choice of NOM vs GEN is triggered by information structure.
- ❖ What makes this interesting is that information structure is known to affect differential marking of objects (or undergoers) and subjects (or actors) in different ways, yet in Kelabit the differentially-marked argument is both an actor and an object.
- ❖ It therefore has important implications for how we understand differential marking cross-linguistically.

- ❖ **Roadmap**:
  - ➢ Symmetrical Voice
  - ➢ Kelabit Pronouns
  - ➢ Differential Marking cross-linguistically
  - ➢ Differential Marking & Information Structure in Kelabit
  - ➢ Conclusion

2. Symmetrical Voice

- ❖ Symmetrical voice alternations are alternations in verbal morphology that indicate different mappings of arguments to functions but do not affect SYNTACTIC TRANSITIVITY. In other words, there are multiple transitive clauses with two or more core arguments.

❖ This can be illustrated from Kelabit using the root *laak* 'cook':

(1)   *Kelabit[1]*
    a.   **Actor Voice**
       Nengelaak   *nuba'*   **tesineh nedih**
       PFV.AV.cook   rice   mother 3SG.POSS
       'Her mother cooked rice'

    b.   **Undergoer Voice**
       Linaak   *tesineh nedih*   **nuba'**
       PFV.UV.cook   mother 3SG.POSS   rice
       'Her mother cooked rice'

❖ Both (1a) and (1b) express the same event of a mother cooking rice and both are syntactically transitive with two core arguments.

❖ However, they differ in terms of which argument is mapped to which function and this is reflected in the verbal morphology:

Table 1. Grammatical Functions in AV and UV

	subject	**object**
ACTOR VOICE	actor	undergoer
UNDERGOER VOICE	undergoer	actor

❖ There is morphological and syntactic evidence for assuming the symmetrical voice analysis summarised in Table 1.

❖ Firstly, actor and undergoer are expressed as NP arguments in both AV and UV, whereas obliques are typically expressed as PPs:

(2)   *Kelabit Obliques*
    a.   **Actor Voice**
       La'ih sineh nemerey   *nuba'* [ngen anak nedih]PP
       man   DEM PFV.AV.give rice   to   child 3SG.POSS
       'The man gave rice to his child'

    b.   **Undergoer Voice**
       Birey   *la'ih sineh* **nuba'** [ngen anak nedih]PP
       PFV.UV.give man DEM rice   to   child 3SG.POSS
       'The man gave rice to his child'

❖ Secondly, there are several SYNTACTIC TESTS that support the identification of both actor and undergoer as core arguments, as well as an alternation in the mapping of arguments to subject:

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[1] Nb. word order is variable in Kelabit and the subject (or actor in AV and undergoer in UV) can appear both pre-verbally and clause-finally.

❖ Privileged actors and undergoers have a range of subject properties that uniquely identify them (e.g. relativisation, raising, external position etc.)

(3)   *Kelabit Relative Clauses*
   a.   **Relativising the Actor**
        la'ih [suk   nenekul   *nuba'*]
        man   REL   PFV.AV.spoon rice
        'the man who spooned up rice'

   b.   **la'ih* [suk   sikul   **nuba'**]
        man   REL   UV.PFV.spoon rice
        For: 'the man who spooned up rice'

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

   d.   **nuba'* [suk   nenekul   **la'ih   sineh**]
        rice   REL   UV.PFV.spoon man   DEM
        For: 'the rice that the man spooned up'

❖ Non-privileged actors and undergoers behave as core arguments (and differ from obliques) since they cannot be separated from the verb with adjuncts of time (4) and cannot be fronted before a pre-verbal subject (5):

(4)   *Kelabit - Post-verbal Position (adjuncts of time)*
   a.   **Actor Voice**
        La'ih sineh ne-kuman   (*ngimalem) *bua'   kaber*
        man   DEM   PFV-AV.eat   (*yesterday) fruit   pineapple
        For: 'I ate pineapple yesterday'

   b.   **Undergoer Voice**
        Kinan   (*ngimalem) *la'ih   sineh* **bua' kaber**   **sineh**
        UV.PFV.eat   (yesterday)   man   DEM   fruit pineapple DEM
        For: 'The man ate that pineapple yesterday.'

   c.   **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'

   d.   **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'

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(5)   *Kelabit Adjunct Fronting*

    a.   **Fronted AV Oblique**

       [Ngen tekul], **la'ih sineh** nenekul   *nuba'*
       with spoon man   DEM AV.PFV.spoon rice
       'With a spoon, the man spooned up rice'

    b.   **Fronted AV Undergoer**

       nuba',   **la'ih sineh** nenekul   [ngen tekul]
       rice   man   DEM AV.PFV.spoon with   spoon
       FOR: 'Rice, the man spooned up with a spoon'

    c.   **Fronted UV Oblique**

       [Ngen tekul], **nuba'** sikul   *la'ih   sineh*
       with spoon rice   UV.PFV.spoon man   DEM
       'With a spoon, the rice was spooned up by the man'

    d.   **Fronted UV Actor**

       la'ih sineh, **nuba'** sikul   [ngen tekul]
       man   DEM rice   UV.PFV.spoon with   spoon
       FOR: 'the man, rice was spooned up by him'

❖ This supports the conclusion that AV and UV are both transitive and that the UV undergoer is a subject and the UV actor is an object (see Table 1).

❖ Let us now explore how case-marking in Kelabit interacts with the voice system and how this differs from other Western Austronesian languages.

3. Kelabit Pronouns

❖ Kelabit is a Western Austronesian language spoken mainly in the fourth and fifth divisions of Northern Sarawak, Malaysia.

❖ It is a member of the Apad Uat subgroup which also includes Lun Bawang/Lundayeh, Sa'ban and Tring (Kroeger 1998).

❖ Basic pronouns in Kelabit demonstrates SINGULAR, DUAL, PAUCAL and PLURAL number distinctions and an INCLUSIVE and EXCLUSIVE opposition[2]:

Table 2. Kelabit basic 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

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[2] There is also an impersonal pronoun *narih* which is used in typical irrealis contexts, e.g. wishes/requests

❖ There is also a reduced paradigm of variant pronouns in 1SG, 2SG, 3SG and 3PL:

Table 3. Kelabit variant pronouns

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

❖ These are labelled NOM and GEN on the basis that they appear to be cognate with case marked pronouns in the more conservative Philippine-type languages:

Table 4. Pronouns in Proto-Southwest Sabah (Lobel 2013: 103)

	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

❖ In Phillipine-type languages, NOM pronouns mark subjects (i.e. actor in AV and undergoer in UV) and GEN pronouns mark non-subject actors and possessors:

(6)   *Kimaragang Dusun*
  a. **Actor Voice**
   Mangalapak   **okuh**   *do*   *niyuw.*
   AV.TR.split   1SG.NOM   GEN   coconut
   'I will split a coconut/some coconuts.'

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

  c. **Instrumental Voice (IV)**
   Nokuroh.tu   n-i-lapak   *nuh*   *do*   *niyuw*   *inoh*
   why   PST-IV-split   2SG.GEN   GEN   coconut   MED.NOM

   dangol   **kuh**?
   knife   1SG.GEN
   'Why did you use my bush knife to split coconuts?' (Kroeger 2005)

5

- In Lundayeh, a closely related language to Kelabit, NOM pronouns are used for subjects (i.e. actor in AV, undergoer in UV); GEN pronouns for UV actors and oblique pronouns for AV undergoers:

(7)   *Lundayeh*
   a.   **Actor Voice**

Iko	nguit	*neneh*	amé	nekuh.
2SG.NOM	AV.bring	3SG.OBL	go	1SG.OBL

      'You bring him to me.'

   b.   **Undergoer Voice**

Inapung	*kuh*	**ieh**	rat	neneh.
UV.PFV.hide	1SG.GEN	3SG.NOM	from	3SG.OBL

      'I hid it from him.' (Clayre 2005: 25)

- Hence, the primary function of case-marking in Kimaragang Dusun and Lundayeh is to indicate information about the grammatical function (and semantic role) of the pronominal argument within the voice system.
- In Kelabit, NOM pronouns are also used for subjects and GEN pronouns for non-subject actors:

(8)   *Kelabit Voice Alternations*
   a.   **Actor Voice (AV)**

Nekuman	*bua'*	*kaber*	**uih**
PFV.AV.eat	fruit	pineapple	1SG.NOM

      'I ate pineapple'

   b.   **Undergoer Voice (UV)**

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

      'I ate pineapple'

- However, NOM pronouns are used for both subject (actor) and object (undergoer) in AV clauses:

(9)   *Kelabit*
   a.   **Actor Voice**

Uih	ni'er	*ieh*
1SG.NOM	AV.see	3SG.NOM

      'I see him.'

   b.   **Actor Voice**

Ieh	ni'er	*uih*
3SG.NOM	AV.see	1SG.NOM

      'He sees me.'

- Moreover, although GEN is typically used for expressing UV actors, NOM and GEN alternate in the following contexts:
  - non-AV actors
  - single argument of certain non-voice marked predicates
  - following prepositions
  - for possessors (along with other strategies)

(10) *Kelabit*
    Undergoer Voice

    a. Seni'er   *kuh*   **ieh**
         UV.see   1SG.GEN   3SG.NOM
         'I saw him'

    b. Seni'er   *uih*   **t=ieh**
         UV.see   1SG.NOM   PT=3SG.NOM
         'I saw him'

(11) *Kelabit*
    Experiential Predicates

    a. Na'am uih   keli'.
         NEG   1SG.NOM   know
         'I don't know.'

    b. Na'am keli' kuh.
         NEG   know 1SG.GEN
         'I don't know.'

    b. Na'am sekenan   kuh   ngadan   ih
         NEG   remember   1SG.GEN   name   PT
         'I don't remember the name' (text, BAR21082014CH_06)

    c. Am   neto' uih   sekenan   ridtu' ineh kemuh
         NEG   PT   1SG.NOM   remember   fold DEM say.2SG.GEN
         'I don't remember that bit, you know.' (pear story, BAR02082014CH_01)

(12) *Kelabit*
    Accidental Predicates

    a. Ne-bila'   uih   bigan ih.
         ACCID-break   1SG.NOM   plate PT
         'I accidentally broke the plate.'

    b. Ne-bila'   kuh   neh   bigan ih.
         ACCID-break   1SG.GEN   PT   plate PT
         'I accidentally broke the plate.'

(13)   *Kelabit*
         Prepositional Phrases
   a.   [ruyung   kuh]PP   b.   [ruyung   uih]PP
         with   1SG.GEN   with   1SG.NOM
         'with me'   'with me'

(14)   *Kelabit*
         Possession
   a. ruma' uih   b. ruma' kuh   c. ruma' kudih
       house 1SG.NOM   house 1SG.GEN   house 1SG.POSS
       'my house'   'my house'   'my house'

   d. duih   ruma'
       1SG.POSS   house
       'my house' (elicitation, fieldnotes)

❖ The function of the pronouns is (seemingly) the same in the pairs above. Hence, NOM and GEN pronouns constitute DIFFERENTIAL MARKING in these contexts.
❖ This leads to the question of what motivates the differential use of NOM and GEN pronouns and what differences in interpretation emerge?
❖ The rest of the paper will address this specifically in relation to the alternation in the expression of UV actors in (10), leaving other contexts for future research.

4. Differential Marking and Information Structure

❖ Differential marking is the non-uniform marking of grammatical arguments.
❖ It is known to be affected by SEMANTIC FACTORS and INFORMATION STRUCTURE:[3]
   ➢ In some languages, differential marking is related to animacy, referentiality and definiteness (Aissen 2003, Bossong 1985, de Swart 2007)
   ➢ In some languages, differential marking is related to properties of event semantics, e.g. volitionality, control, affectedness (Naess 2004)
   ➢ In some languages, differential marking is related to topicality and focus (Iemmolo 2010, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011)

❖ DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING is often linked to topicality (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011):

(15)   *Tundra Nenets*
   a.   **Non-topical object**
         What happened? What did a/the man do? What did a/the man kill?
         xasawa   ti-m   xadaᵒ   /*xadaᵒda
         man   reindeer-ACC kill.3SG.SUBJ kill.OBJ.3SG.SUBJ
         'A/the man killed a/the reindeer'

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[3] Information structure can be understood as a formal mechanism for facilitating effective information exchange (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011) or information update (Erteschik-Shir 2007)

    b. **Topical object**
What did a/the man do to a/the reindeer?

xasawa	ti-m	xadaᵒda	/*xadaᵒ
man	reindeer-ACC	kill.OBJ.3SG.SUBJ	kill.3SG.SUBJ

'A/the man killed a/the reindeer' (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011: 128)

❖ DIFFERENTIAL ACTOR MARKING (or optional ergativity) is often used to mark focus, contrastive and unexpected information:
    ➤ e.g. Warrwa or Umpithamu (Australia)
    ➤ e.g. Ku Waru (Papuan)
    ➤ e.g. Meithei and Lhasa (Tibeto-Burman) (see Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018 and references therein, McGregor 2010)

(16) *Central (Lhasa) Tibetan*
    a. **Given Actor** (context: 'what does he do?')

khōng khāla' so-kiyo:re'
he food make-IPFV.GNOM
'He prepares the meals.'

    b. **Contrasted actor**

khōng-ki' khāla' so-kiyo:re'
he-ERG food make-IPFV.GNOM
'*He* prepares the meals.' (Tournadre 1995: 264)

❖ This is particularly true in contrastive contexts or question/answer pairs that represent 'argument focus' in the sense of Lambrecht (1994) (Fauconnier and Verstraete 2014)
❖ Since differential marking only occurs with pronouns in Kelabit (nominal arguments are unmarked), animacy, referentiality and definiteness do not apply…
❖ Q: Does information structure play a role? Does it follow the patterns of DOM or DAM?

5. Differential Actor Marking in Kelabit

❖ Interestingly, it seems 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 for UV actors and used in naturalistic discourse when the actor is a continuing topic.
    ➤ In contrast, NOM pronouns represent focus/contrastive/unexpected actors.

❖ This can be seen in naturally occurring data, as well as grammaticality judgements for elicited structures.
❖ In a small corpus of folk stories, pear story retellings and news reports of 122 UV clauses with pronominal actors, 119 had GEN marking, 2 had NOM marking and in one case the actor was partitive with NOM case, *edteh burur ideh* 'one of them'.
❖ As in (17), the GEN actor of a UV clause is typically a continuing topic (NB. the status of the undergoer is less important):

(17) *Kelabit GEN as topic*

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'

Nulin   **neh**   kuyad   sineh
UV.PFV.throw   3SG.GEN   monkey   DEM
'And threw it at the monkey' (narrative, PDA10112013CH_01)

❖ In contrast, (18) illustrates the use of NOM where the undergoer is given and the actor contrasted:

(18) *Kelabit NOM as focus*

Uih   keli' naru'   baney   let   uih   i'it ngilad
1SG.NOM   know   AV.make necklace   from   1SG.NOM small past

Nuuk   maya' edteh tetepuh menaken   kuh   keyh
AV.string   follow one   great.aunt   1SG.GEN   PT
'I've known how to make necklaces since I was young, I used to string beeds
following a great aunt of mine' […]

Nuuk   teh   kedieh   petaa   ngilad, petaa   ba'o rawir
AV.string   PT   3SG.EMPH bead.cap past   bead.cap rawir.beed
'She would make bead caps in the past, of orange beeds'

En   kuh   ni'er ieh   naru'   ih
UV   1SG.GEN   AV.see 3SG.NOM   AV.make   DEM
'I'd watch her doing it'

Naru'   n=uih   petaa   ba'o   rawir
Av.make   pt=1sg.nom   bead.cap   beed   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].'

❖ In fact, if you establish the actor as a hanging topic, then GEN is preferred:

(19)   *Kelabit Hanging Topics*
    c. **GEN marked actor**

Paul	kedieh,	kinan	**neh**	bua'	ebpuk
Paul	3SG.EMPH	UV.PFV.eat	3SG.GEN	fruit	passion

       'As for Paul, he ate the passion fruit'

    a. **NOM marked actor**

#Paul	kedieh,	kinan	**ieh**	bua'	ebpuk
Paul	EMPH.3SG	UV.PFV.eat	3SG.NOM	fruit	passion

       FOR: 'As for Paul, he ate passion fruit'

❖ But, if you make the UV actor a focus by making it the answer to a wh-word, then NOM is preferred:

(20)   *Kelabit*
Q.

senuru'	*iih*	tieh	ngelaak	ngen	tauh?
UV.PFV.order	who	PT+3SG.NOM	AV.cook	for	1PL.INCL

       'who ordered her to cook for us?'

    a. **NOM marked actor**

senuru'	**uih**	tieh
UV.PFV.order	1SG.NOM	PT+3SG.NOM

       'I ordered her'

    b. **GEN marked actor**

*senuru'	**kuh**	tieh
UV.PRF.order	1SG.GEN	PT+3SG.NOM

       'I ordered her'

❖ Similarly, in (21) the use of NOM is preferred when the actor is contrasted, GEN if the undergoer is contrasted and the actor is given:

(21)   *Kelabit Differential Marking*
    a. **Contrasted Actor**

Pinupu'	uih (*/#kuh)	tieh	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))

    b. **Contrasted Undergoer**

Ieh	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)

❖ Hence, NOM pronouns appear to mark an actor that is information structurally marked, as focus, contrastive or unexpected, whereas GEN pronouns are typically continuing topics (the default function of actor pronouns?).

Table 5. Summary of differential actor marking in UV

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

❖ The pattern is similar to DIFFERENTIAL ACTOR MARKING as discussed in section 4 (Bruil 2016, Witzlack-Makarevich and Seržant 2018)
❖ However, it is the marked case (GEN) that is used for continuing topics, and the unmarked case (NOM) that is used for focus/contrastive etc.
❖ Is this related to the grammatical function of the UV actor?
❖ Or is it that GEN case is expected for Austronesian UV actors (and possibly found in an earlier stage of the Kelabit language, given the Lundayeh patterns) as well as less marked in terms of discourse frequency?

6. A puzzling question

❖ An interesting question is why you would choose to focus pronominal actors in a UV construction, when actors can also be focused/contrasted by appearing pre-verbally in an AV construction:

(22) *Kelabit AV actor*
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   ne-ngimet   inih   keneh
1SG.NOM   PT   PFV-AV.hold   DEM   he.said
'I am the one holding this [the ceiling] up'

❖ In (22), the actor is contrasted, but also the primary topic. Perhaps the use of NOM actors in UV constructions is restricted to cases where the actor is focused *and* the undergoer is the topic?
❖ This might explain why it occurs relatively infrequently…

5. Conclusion

❖ Although many Western Austronesian languages reserve NOM marking for subjects and GEN marking 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, but rather 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).

❖ This is interesting because it indicates that the status of the actor is at least as important as that of the undergoer in UV – and argues against motivating the voice alternations in terms of the pragmatic function of the privileged argument

❖ Moreover, the felicity of the construction also depends on the status of the undergoer argument. 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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