

## On Symmetrical Voice Alternations: The case of Kelabit

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### 1. Introduction

- ❖ Western Austronesian languages are known for their typologically unusual systems of verbal morphology.
- ❖ Like active/passive alternations, they appear to encode an alternation in the mapping of arguments to functions.
- ❖ However, unlike other voice systems, the alternations do not result in syntactic detransitivisation – though they may be associated with different semantic and discourse properties.
- ❖ This has led to many different analyses of verbal morphology – including alternations in focus (Clayre 1991); pivot assignment (Foley and Van Valin 1984); topic (McKaughan 1958); case (Rackowski and Richards 2005); transitivity (Aldridge 2004); nominalisation (Kaufman 2009) and, finally, *symmetrical voice* (Foley 2008, Himmelmann 2005, Riesberg 2014)
- ❖ In this paper, I introduce Western Austronesian verbal alternations and put forward the case for treating the verbal alternations in Kelabit as symmetrical voice.
- ❖ The main aims are as follows:
  - a. To demonstrate that symmetrical voice is the best analysis of the Kelabit data
  - b. To consolidate the definition of symmetrical voice, provide a clear methodology for identifying symmetrical voice systems and thereby reinforce the need for including symmetrical voice systems in the typology of voice cross-linguistically.

### 2. Western Austronesian Voice Systems

- ❖ To illustrate how Western Austronesian (henceforth WAn) voice systems differ from other voice systems (especially active/passive and ergative/antipassive) this paper adopts a broad definition of voice:

*The morphological encoding of the mapping  
from semantic arguments to syntactic functions (Kulikov 2011)*

- ❖ Thus, voice alternations can be understood to allow different ways of expressing a notionally transitive event with different mappings from argument structure to functional structure.
- ❖ In addition, voice alternations often result in detransitivisation or the demotion of an argument.
- ❖ This can be seen in the English active/passive alternation in (1):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Subject underlined, object in italics

- (1) *English*
- a. **Active**  
The man bought *fish* at the store <morphologically unmarked>  
 <syntactically intransitive>
- b. **Passive**  
The fish was bought at the store (by the man) <morphologically marked>  
 <syntactically intransitive>

- ❖ This alternation is morphologically and syntactically *asymmetrical*
- ❖ In contrast, though verbal morphology in a language like Tagalog in (2) can reflect an alternation in which semantic argument is syntactically privileged, each voice is equally morphologically marked and each voice appears syntactically transitive:<sup>2</sup>

- (2) *Tagalog*
- a. **Actor Voice (AV)**  
 B<um>ili     ang lalake     *ng isda*     sa tindahan.     <marked>  
 <AV>buy     NOM man     GEN fish     OBL store     <transitive>  
 ‘The man bought fish at the store.’
- b. **Undergoer Voice (UV)**  
 B<in>ili     *ng lalake*     ang isda     sa tindahan.     <marked>  
 <PFV.UV>buy     GEN man     NOM fish     OBL store     <transitive>  
 ‘The man bought the fish at the store.’
- c. **Locative Voice (LV)**  
 B<in>ilih-an     *ng lalake*     *ng isda*     ang tindahan.     <marked>  
 <PFV>buy-LV     CORE man     CORE fish     SUBJ store     <transitive>  
 ‘The man bought fish at the store.’
- d. **Instrumental Voice (IV)**  
 Ip<in>am-bili     *ng lalake*     *ng isda*     ang pera.     <marked>  
 <PFV>IV-buy     CORE man     CORE fish     SUBJ money     <transitive>  
 ‘The man bought fish with the money.’
- e. **Benefactive Voice (BV)**  
 I-b<in>ili     *ng lalake*     *ng isda*     ang bata.     <marked>  
 BV<PFV>buy     CORE man     CORE fish     SUBJ child     <transitive>  
 ‘The man bought fish for the child.’ (Arka 2002)

- ❖ Thus, the WAn alternation appears morphologically and syntactically *symmetrical*
- ❖ Nonetheless, the analysis of WAn verbal morphology remains controversial (Adelaar 2013) on account of the fact that a) grammatical functions are themselves controversial

<sup>2</sup> Glosses have been adapted to allow comparison with Kelabit. AV and UV are used in a pre-theoretical way. NOM can be understood to reflect subjects and GEN non-subject core arguments.

and b) semantic differences between AV and UV have encouraged some to claim that AV is an antipassive and that the voices therefore differ in their transitivity (Aldridge 2004, 2012).

- ❖ So what does it really mean for a language to have symmetrical voice?

Riesberg (2014: 10): A language is symmetrical, if:

- a. It has more than one basic transitive construction
- b. The corresponding arguments behave equally in all different voices, and
- c. The verb is morphologically equally marked in all different voices

- ❖ In other words, if we want to show that Kelabit really does have symmetrical voice we need to show, firstly, that the morphology encodes an alternation in the mapping of arguments to grammatical functions and, secondly, that each of the clause-types is transitive – i.e. has two core arguments.

### 3. Kelabit Verbal Alternations

- ❖ 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, Adung and Tring (Kroeger 1998)
- ❖ The data in this paper was collected during linguistic fieldwork between 2013-2014. It relates to the dialect of Kelabit spoken in Bario.
- ❖ Kelabit, like Tagalog, has a series of verbal alternations that appear symmetrical:

(3) *Kelabit*

a. **Actor Voice**

La'ih sineh ne-nekul                      nuba' nedih    ngen seduk.  
 man    DEM    PFV-AV.spoon.up    rice    3SG.POSS with spoon  
 'That man spooned up his rice with a spoon.'

b. **Undergoer Voice**

Sikul                      lai'h sineh    nuba' nedih                      ngen    seduk.  
 UV.PFV.spoon.up man DEM    rice    3SG.POSS                      with    spoon  
 'That man ate his rice with a spoon.'

c. **Instrumental Voice**

Seduk                      pe-nekul                      la'ih    sineh    nuba' nedih.  
 spoon                      IV-spoon up    man    DEM    rice    3SG.POSS  
 'That man used a spoon to spoon up his rice.' (elicitation, fieldnotes)

- ❖ However, to show that the alternations are truly symmetrical voice we need to show:
  - a. That there is an alternation in the mapping of arguments to functions in (3)
  - b. That each clause in (3) is transitive

### 3.1 An alternation in the mapping of arguments to functions

- ❖ Grammatical functions – particularly subject – are controversial in WAn on account of the fact that typical subject properties (see e.g. Keenan 1976, Falk 2006) are split between the argument privileged in the verbal morphology and the actor semantic role.
- ❖ This is true for a wide range of WAn languages (that are otherwise structurally quite different from one another) as well as syntactically ergative languages.
- ❖ It can be seen in Kelabit in the patterns of relativisation (4) and reflexive binding (5):

(4) *Kelabit Relative Clauses*

a. **Actor Voice**

Seni'er          kuh    la'ih    [suk    ne-nekul          nuba'    ngen seduk]  
 UV.PFV.see    1SG    man    REL    PFV-AV.spoon    rice    with spoon  
 'I saw the man who spooned up rice with a spoon'

b. \*Seni'er          kuh    nuba'    [suk    nekul          la'ih    sineh]

UV.PFV.see    1SG    rice    REL    AV.spoon          man    DEM  
 For: 'I saw the rice that the man spooned up'

c. **Undergoer Voice**

Seni'er          kuh    nuba'    [suk    sikul          la'ih sineh    ngen seduk]  
 UV.PFV.see    1SG    rice    REL    UV.PFV.spoon    man    DEM    with spoon  
 'I saw the rice that the man spooned up with a spoon'

e. \*Seni'er          kuh    la'ih    [suk    sikul          nuba']

UV.PFV.see    1SG    man    REL    UV.PFV.spoon    rice  
 For: 'I saw the man who spooned up rice' (Hemmings 2015: 394-395)

(5) *Kelabit Reflexive Binding*

a. **Actor Voice**

Uih    ne-mada'          burur    kudih                  ngedeh  
 1SG    PFV-AV.show    body    1SG.POSS            to.3PL  
 'I surrendered myself to them'

b. **Undergoer Voice**

Binada'          kuh    burur    kudih                  ngedeh  
 UV.PFV.show    1SG    body    1SG.POSS            to.3PL  
 'I surrendered myself to them'

c. **Actor Voice**

\*Burur                  kudih                  ne-mada'          uih    ngedeh  
 body                  1SG.POSS            PFV-AV.show    1SG    to.3PL  
 For: 'I surrendered myself to them'

d. **Undergoer Voice**

\*Binada'      *burur kudih*      uih      ngedeh  
 UV.PFV.show    body    1SG.POSS      1SG      to.3PL  
 For: 'I surrendered myself to them' (elicitation, fieldnotes)

- ❖ Only the privileged argument can be relativized on (=privileged argument as subject), but it is the actor that binds reflexives regardless of whether it is privileged or not (=actor as subject).
- ❖ Since the split is quite systematic across a range of languages, Falk (2006: 16) concluded that typical subject properties are actually of two types:

*Table 1. Type 1 and Type 2 Subject properties*

<b>Type 1 Subject Properties</b>	<b>Type 2 Subject Properties</b>
Agent argument in active voice	Shared argument in co-ordinated clauses
Most likely covert argument	Raising
The addressee of an imperative	Extraction
Anaphoric prominence	Obligatory element
Switch reference systems	“External” structural position
Controlled argument (PRO) for some languages	Controlled argument (PRO) for some languages
Discourse topic	Definiteness/wide scope

- ❖ In languages where the properties are split, role-related (type 1) properties are associated with the highest semantic role, whilst reference-related (type 2) properties are associated with the syntactic pivot.
- ❖ The split has led to three main approaches to grammatical functions in WAn:
  - a. **Austronesian languages do not have subjects (cf. Schachter 1976)**
    - Subjects must have all of the properties in Table 1
    - The privileged argument is a topic
  - b. **The subject in Austronesian is the privileged argument (cf. Manning 1996, Manning and Sag 1998)**
    - Only Type 2 properties are important in identifying subjects
    - Type 1 properties are handled at argument structure
  - c. **The subject in Austronesian is the actor (cf. Aldridge 2004)**
    - Only Type 1 properties are important in identifying subjects
    - The privileged argument is a topic or an absolutive
- ❖ I will argue that the Manning and Sag (1998) approach is the best for Kelabit because: a) the privileged argument has many reference-related subject properties; b) there are good arguments against treating the privileged argument as a topic; c) the AV undergoer and UV actor behave like core non-subject arguments, which rules out both an ergative analysis and an analysis in which the actor is subject (see 3.2 below).

### 3.1.1 Privileged Argument as subject?

- ❖ In addition to extraction, there are a number of subject properties unique to privileged arguments:

Table 2. *Kelabit Subject Properties*

Coding	Behaviour
Optionally preceded by <i>neh</i> and <i>teh</i>	Extraction Shared argument under co-ordination Controlled argument (PRO) External structural position

- ❖ Only the privileged argument can be preceded by the particles *neh* or *teh*:

(6) *Kelabit Particle Patterns*

a. **Actor Voice**

Kuman            **teh**    Peter            *bua' kaber*        *nedih*            *keneh*  
 AV.eat            PT        Peter            pineapple        3SG.POSS        he.said  
 'Peter does eat his pineapple he said'

b. \*Kuman            Peter            **teh**    *bua' kaber*        *nedih*            *keneh*  
 AV.eat            Peter            PT        pineapple        3SG.POSS        he.said  
 For: 'Peter does eat his pineapple he said'

c. **Undergoer Voice**

Kenen            *Peter*            **teh**    *bua' kaber*        *nedih*            *keneh*  
 UV.eat            Peter            PT        pineapple        3SG.POSS        he.said  
 'Peter will eat his pineapple he said'

d. \*Kenen            **teh**    *Peter*            *bua' kaber*        *nedih*            *keneh*  
 UV.eat            PT        Peter            pineapple        3SG.POSS        he.said  
 For: 'Peter will eat his pineapple he said' (Hemmings 2015: 395)

- ❖ The controlled argument in an embedded clause is always the privileged argument of that clause:

(7) *Kelabit Control Constructions*

a. **Actor Voice**

Uih    *ne-nuru'*            *ieh<sub>i</sub>*    [PRO<sub>i</sub> *nge-laak*        *ngen*    *tauh*]  
 1SG    PFV-AV.order    3SG            AV-cook        for    1PL.INCL  
 'I asked him to cook for us'

b. \*Ieh    *merey*            *padey<sub>i</sub>* [PRO<sub>i</sub> *nibu*            *uih*]  
 3SG    AV.give            rice            AV.plant        1SG  
 For: 'He allows me to plant rice (elicitation, fieldnotes)'

c. **Undergoer Voice**

Ieh merey padey<sub>i</sub> [PRO<sub>i</sub> sebuwen *kuh*]  
 3SG AV.give rice plant.UV.IRR 1SG  
 ‘He allows rice to be planted by me’ (elicitation, fieldnotes)

- ❖ The only pattern that does not support the idea of privileged argument as subject is reflexive binding, and this could be handled at argument structure, following Manning and Sag (1998)

### 3.1.2 Privileged Argument as Topic?

- ❖ The main alternative to treating the privileged argument as subject is to treat it as a topic.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ However, the privileged argument is not really a topic in either the discourse or information structure senses.
- ❖ Cooreman, Fox, and Givón (1984) and Givón (1983) suggest that a discourse topic has high topic continuity in the sense that it has a low referential distance (and is easy to identify in context) and a high topical persistence (remains important).
- ❖ Though this may be true of the AV actor, it does not appear to be true of the UV undergoer:

(8) *Kelabit Discourse Topic?*

Nalap *neh* pupu  
 UV.PFV.fetch 3SG.GEN hitting.implement  
 ‘She 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.’

(text, PDA10112013CH\_01 00:08:45.260-00:08:53.220)

- ❖ In fact, it is the actor that has high topic continuity in this stretch of narrative discourse and is expressed with a pronominal form.
- ❖ In contrast, the undergoers are variously non-specific, indefinite and not important in the discourse.
- ❖ Hence, there is no direct link between privileged argument status and discourse topic.

<sup>3</sup> Another alternative is to treat the privileged argument as an absolutive in an ergative system but this presupposes that the AV construction is an antipassive. However, as shown in section 3.2, AV is a transitive construction.

- ❖ Similarly, both the AV actor and UV undergoer can fulfill the role of focus – which is often assumed to be mutually exclusive with topic in the information structure sense (Butt and King 1996):

(9) *Kelabit Information Structure*

a. **Undergoer Voice**

Q. Enun seni'er            *muh?*  
 what UV.PFV.see 2SG  
 'What did you see?'

A. [Edteh wayang]<sub>focus</sub> seni'ier            *kuh*    na'ah...  
 one video UV.PFV.see 1SG before  
 'I just saw a video...'

(pear story, BAR31072014CH\_06 00:00:09.640-00:00:15.950)

b. **Actor Voice**

Q. Iih suk kuman            *bua'*    *kaber*            *sineh?*  
 who REL AV.eat fruit pineapple DEM  
 'Who is eating that pineapple?'

A. [Peter]<sub>focus</sub> suk kuman            *bua'*    *kaber*            *sineh*  
 Peter REL AV.eat fruit pineapple DEM  
 'Peter is eating that pineapple.'

(elicitation, BAR19082014CH\_03 00:09:59.125-00:10:14.030)

- ❖ Consequently, the privileged argument appears to be underspecified for its information structure role.

### 3.1.3 Summary

- ❖ There are good arguments for treating the privileged argument as a subject and against treating it as a topic
- ❖ In the next section, we will also see arguments for treating the UV actor as an object and hence against treating it as a subject
- ❖ Consequently, the verbal alternations can be said to encode an alternation in the mapping of semantic arguments to subject and can therefore be described as voice.
- ❖ The next piece in the puzzle is showing that each of the voices is transitive...

### 3.2 Transitivity

- ❖ A syntactically transitive clause is one in which there are two core arguments.
- ❖ Hence, it is important to show that the AV undergoer and UV actor are also core arguments of AV and UV clauses and hence that AV is not an antipassive and UV not a passive.
- ❖ There are a number of syntactic properties that suggest their core argument status and distinguish them from both subjects and obliques:



Table 3. *Kelabit Object Properties*

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>
NP rather than PP	Post-verbal position No subject properties No adjunct-fronting

- ❖ Both the AV undergoer and UV actor occur immediately following the verb – adjuncts of time cannot intervene, which suggests that they form a tight constituent with the verb (a cross-linguistic property of objects):

(10) *Kelabit Adjuncts of Time*

a. **Actor Voice**

La'ih sineh ne-kuman    *bua' kaber*    **ngimalem**  
 man    DEM    PFV-AV.eat    fruit    pineapple    yesterday  
 'I ate pineapple yesterday'

b. \*La'ih sineh ne-kuman    **ngimalem**    *bua' kaber*  
 man    DEM    PFV-AV.eat    yesterday    fruit    pineapple  
 For: 'I ate pineapple yesterday' (elicitation, fieldnotes)

c. Kinan            *la'ih sineh*    **ngimalem**    neh    *bua' kaber*            ih  
 UV.PFV.eat    man    DEM    yesterday    PT    fruit    pineapple    PT  
 'I ate the pineapple yesterday'

d. \*Kinan            **ngimalem**    *la'ih sineh*    neh    *bua' kaber*  
 UV.PFV.eat    yesterday    man    DEM    PT    fruit    pineapple  
 For: 'I ate the pineapple yesterday' (elicitation, fieldnotes)

- ❖ In contrast, adjuncts of time can intervene between the verb and a post-verbal subject, and verb and oblique:

(11) *Kelabit Adjuncts of Time*

a. Tenganak    **ngimalem**    *keduih*  
 INTR.birth    yesterday    1SG.EMPH  
 'I was born yesterday (=yesterday was my birthday)'  
 (elicitation, BAR30072014CH\_01 00:42:15.883-00:42:17.668)

b. Nitun            *kuh*            tieh            **ngimalem**    ngen idih    meto'  
 UV.PFV.question 1SG.GEN    PT=3SG.NOM    yesterday    to    DEM    PT  
 'I asked her about that yesterday as well'  
 (elicitation, BAR28102013CH\_02 00:25:06.391-00:25:12.864)

- ❖ Finally, the AV undergoer and UV actor cannot be fronted, as in (12), unlike subjects and at least some adjuncts/obliques, as in (13):

(12) *Kelabit Object Fronting*

a. **AV Undergoer**

\**Bua' kaber*            ne-kuman        uih  
 fruit    pineapple    PFV-AV.eat    1SG.NOM  
 For: 'I ate pineapple'

(elicitation, BAR18082014CH\_02 00:08:01.770-00:08:05.590)

b. **UV Actor**

\**Uih*            kinan            bua' kaber  
 1SG.NOM        UV.PFV.eat    fruit    pineapple  
 For: 'I ate pineapple'

(elicitation, BAR18082014CH\_02 00:04:46.970-00:04:51.680)

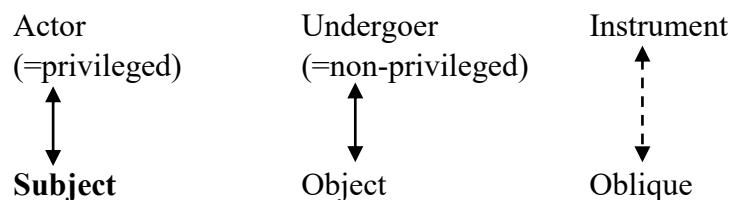
(13) **Actor Voice Oblique/Adjunct**

a. [Ngi    bawang        lun    beken] kuman        lemulun    *deley*    kinih  
 at        place                people other    AV.eat        people    corn    now  
 'In other places, people eat corn today'

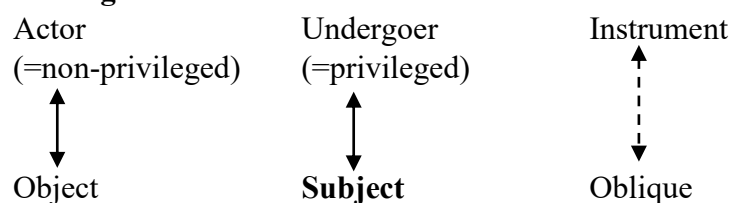
(text, PDA06112013CH\_06 00:07:44.567-00:07:48.420)

- ❖ Consequently, the AV undergoer and UV actor both behave like non-subject core arguments rather than obliques
- ❖ This suggests that both AV and UV are transitive and hence that the voice alternations are symmetrical.

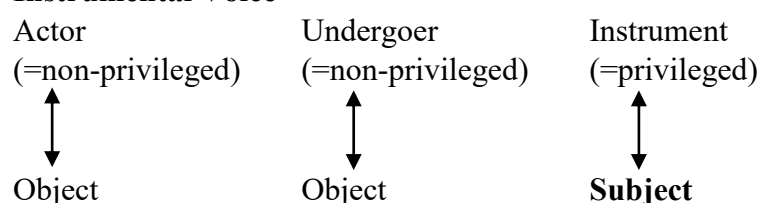
a. **Actor Voice**



b. **Undergoer Voice**



c. **Instrumental Voice**



- ❖ Moreover, although there is a restriction against definite undergoers in AV in languages like Tagalog in (2), this restriction does not apply in Kelabit and hence there is also less of a semantic motivation for a lower transitivity analysis (cf. Aldridge 2004, Rackowski and Richards 2005)

#### 4. Implications

- ❖ This is interesting for our cross-linguistic understanding of voice as it has several implications for how voice (and the mapping between arguments and functions) can vary across languages.
- ❖ Firstly, it suggests that there can be alternations between different mappings of arguments to functions without detransitivisation or demotion.
- ❖ Secondly, it suggests that voices need not necessarily be derived from a more basic voice and, hence, that there isn't necessarily a default mapping of arguments to functions.
- ❖ Thirdly, it suggests that there are languages in which actors are mapped to objects (or core non-subject functions), which would need to be accounted for in theories of linking (e.g. Bresnan and Kanerva 1989, Ackerman and Moore 2001, Dowty 1991).
- ❖ In particular, it suggests that default linking of actors to non-object functions, as is assumed in traditional versions of Lexical Mapping Theory (Bresnan et al. 2016, Bresnan and Kanerva 1989) and Dowty's (1991) Argument Selection Principle among other accounts, does not necessarily apply for all languages and cannot be assumed to be universal.
- ❖ For subjects, it also implies that they may be identified according to reference-related pivot properties and need not necessarily have role-related properties, which instead identify the highest core semantic role.

#### 5. Conclusion

- ❖ I have presented a number of syntactic properties that support the identification of the privileged argument as subject and non-privileged actors and undergoers as core arguments in Kelabit.
- ❖ These support the idea that verbal morphology encodes an alternation in the mapping of arguments to functions and results in multiple transitive clauses
- ❖ Hence, it suggests that the best analysis of the data is symmetrical voice
- ❖ This reinforces the need to include symmetrical voice in the cross-linguistic typology of voice systems
- ❖ It also gives us a clear methodology for how to identify these in other languages:
  - a. Demonstrate an alternation in the mapping of arguments to functions
  - b. Demonstrate that each alternation is equally transitive

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