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Differential Case Marking in Northern Sarawak

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Introduction



- In this talk, I present two interesting patterns of **Differential Case Marking** in the languages of Northern Sarawak based on fieldwork between 2013-2019:
 1. **Differential Actor Marking** (DAM) in Kelabit
 2. **Differential Undergoer Marking** (DOM) in Lun Bawang
- Both languages have Western Austronesian systems of **symmetrical voice** alternations – or alternations in the mapping of arguments to functions without changes in transitivity

Aims



- The main aims of the talk are:
 - To illustrate the **differential case systems** in Kelabit and Lun Bawang
 - To discuss the role of **information structure** in determining the choice of case form
 - Consider the possible **implications** for the typology of differential marking cross-linguistically and the analysis of Western Austronesian voice.

Outline



1. Differential Marking Cross-linguistically
2. Symmetrical Voice and Grammatical Functions
3. Differential Actor Marking in Kelabit
4. Differential Undergoer Marking in Lun Bawang
5. Implications & Conclusions



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Differential Marking

Differential Marking

- **Differential marking** = non-uniform marking of arguments

(1a) Persian (Indo-Iranian)

Hasan ketab-râ did
Hasan book-ACC see:PST.3SG
'Hasan saw the book'

(1b) Hasan ketab did
Hasan book see:PST.3SG
'Hasan saw a book'

(2a) Finnish (Uralic)

hän jo-i maido-n
s/he drink-PST.3SG milk-ACC
'S/he drank (all) the milk'

(2b) hän jo-i maito-a
s/he drink-PST.3SG milk-PART
'S/he drank (some of the) milk'

(Iemmolo 2013)

Differential Marking



- Differential Marking is known to be affected by **semantic factors** and **information structure**
 - Animacy, Referentiality and Definiteness
 - Properties of event semantics, e.g. volitionality, control, affectedness
 - Topicality/Focus
- **Topic** is the entity that the speaker identifies as most relevant to a given context and about which the proposition is made (Krifka 2008, Lambrecht 1994).
- **Focus** is the informative part of an utterance or proposition that allows information to be updated and typically indicates the presence of alternatives (Krifka 2008, Lambrecht 1994).

DOM and Topicality

- Often objects receive overt marking when they are **topical**:

Tundra Nenets (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011: 103)

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

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

Non-topical Object

What happened?

What did the man do?

What did the man kill?

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):

(4a) **Lhasa Tibetan** (Tournadre 1995: 264)
khōng khāla' sɔ̄-kiyo:re'
he food make-IPFV.GNOM
'He prepares the meals.'

Given Actor

What does he do?

(4b) **khōng-ki'** khāla' sɔ̄-kiyo:re'
he-ERG food make-IPFV.GNOM
'*He* prepares the meals.'

Contrasted Actor

Him and not someone else

Summary



- These correlations are well attested in the literature – especially in accusative languages (for DOM) and ergative languages (for DAM)
- **DOM** is often related to the **topicality** of the object (undergoer)
- **DAM** is often related to the **focus** status of the actor

Q. Is the link between case and information structure related to **semantic role** (e.g. actor vs undergoer) or **grammatical function** (e.g. subject vs object?)



Symmetrical Voice and Grammatical Functions

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

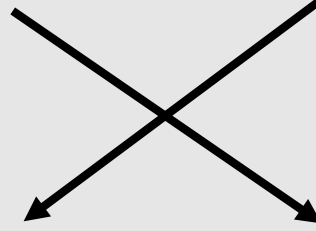
Semantic Roles

A

U

A

U



Syntactic Functions

SUBJ

CORE

SUBJ

CORE

Transitive

Transitive

Case-marking interacts with the voice system

Kelabit Voice



(5a) **Actor Voice**
Nengelaak *nuba'* **tesineh nedih**
PFV.AV.cook rice mother 3SG.POSS
'Her mother cooked rice'

← Subject

(5b) **Undergoer Voice**
Linaaak *tesineh nedih* *nuba'*
PFV.UV.cook mother 3SG.POSS rice
'Her mother cooked rice'

← Subject

Actor = Red
Undergoer = Blue
Subject = Bold
Non-subject core = italics



Morphological Evidence for Symmetrical Voice

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

(6a) Actor Voice

La'ih **sineh** nenekul *nuba'*
man DEM PFV.AV.spoon rice

'The man spooned up rice with a spoon'

ngen seduk
with spoon

(6b) Undergoer Voice

nuba' sikul *lai'h* *sineh*
rice <UV.PFV>spoon man DEM

'The man spooned up rice with a spoon'

ngen seduk
with spoon

Core arguments
have different
coding from
obliques



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:
 - **AV actors & UV undergoers** are subjects
(e.g. relativisation, control, pre-verbal position)
 - **AV undergoers & UV actors** are core arguments (and different from obliques)
(e.g. time adjuncts can intervene, closer to verb than obliques, no adjunct-fronting)



Kelabit Relativisation

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

only one 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'

UV actors and AV
 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.'



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



- Consequently, I will assume the following mappings from arguments to functions:

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| AV | subject | <i>non-subject core</i> |
| UV | <i>non-subject core</i> | subject |

This is important because it means the UV undergoer is the subject!

And the UV actor is the object!



Austronesian Case Marking

- In the more conservative WAn languages, case-marking is used to indicate the **function** of an argument within the voice system.
- Typically, three case distinctions are assumed for **pronouns** (cf. Kroeger 1993)

- **NOM** – subjects
- **GEN** – non-subject actors
- **OBL** – obliques and non-subject undergoers



Lundayeh (Kemaloh)

(6a) Actor Voice

iko nguit **neneh** amé **nekuh.**
 2SG.NOM AV.bring 3SG.OBLgo 1SG.OBL

'You bring him to me.'

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|------------|------------|
| AV | NOM | OBL |
| UV | GEN | NOM |

(6b) 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)

But Kelabit and Lun Bawang are different...



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Differential Marking in Kelabit

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, and Sa'ban (Kroeger 1998).
- Data is based on my own fieldwork in **Bario** from 2013-2019.



Kelabit (Bario)



(7a) Actor Voice

Uih

1SG.NOM

'I see him.'

ni'er

AV.see

ieh

3SG.NOM

(7b) Undergoer Voice

Seni'er

UV.see

'I saw him'

kuh

1SG.GEN

t=ieh

3SG.NOM

(7c) Seni'er

UV.see

'I saw him'

uih

1SG.NOM

t=ieh

PT=3SG.NOM

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | OBL |
| UV | GEN | NOM |

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|---------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | NOM |
| UV | GEN/NOM | NOM |

differential actor marking

UV actor = object



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What motivates the choice?



DAM & Information Structure in Kelabit

- 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.

Let's see some examples from **the corpus** and some **elicited information structure tests**



GEN as continuing topic

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

The GEN actor is a
continuing topic



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
undergoer
 isn't
 prominent



NOM as focus/contrastive

(9) 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



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Information Structure Tests

Topic Test



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

(10a) **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 = ✓

(10b) **#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 = ✗

Question Test

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

Context: who saw him?

(11a) seni'er *uih* *t=ieh*
UV.PFV.see 1SG.NOM PT=3SG.NOM **NOM = ✓**
'I saw him'

(11b) *seni'er *kuh* *t=ieh*
UV.PRF.see 1SG.GEN PT=3SG.NOM **GEN = ✗**
'I saw him'



Focus Particle Test

- Focus particle can **scope** over a NOM actor, but scopes over the verb+actor with GEN:

(12a) Pinupu' *uih*
 UV.PFV.hit 1SG.NOM
 'He was only hit by me'

tupu **t=ieh**
 only PT=3SG.NOM

(and by no-one else)

NOM = ✓

GEN = ✗

(12b) Pinupu' *kuh*
 UV.PFV.hit 1SG.GEN
 'He was only hit by me'

tupu **t=ieh**
 only PT=3SG.NOM

(and nothing else
 happened to him)



Contrast Test

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

(13a) 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 = ✗

(13b) **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



| Test | NOM actor | GEN actor |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Hanging Topic Actor | X | ✓ |
| Focus Actor (Question) | ✓ | X |
| Focus Actor (Particle) | ✓ | X |
| Contrasted Actor | ✓ | X |
| Contrasted Undergoer | X | ✓ |

- The choice of NOM vs GEN appears to be affected by **information structure** in similar ways to **DAM** in other languages
- The unexpected status of the **actor as focus** is marked with an unexpected case choice!



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Differential Marking in Lun Bawang

Lun Bawang



- **Lun Bawang** is a Western Austronesian language spoken in Northern Sarawak, Malaysia, in the Lawas, Limbang and Baram districts.
- It is also an **Apad Uat** language and related dialects are spoken in Sabah, Brunei and Kalimantan where the language is known as **Lundayeh**.
- Data comes from fieldwork in **Ba Kelalan** between 2017-2019





Lun Bawang (Ba' Kelalan)

(14a) Actor Voice

Uih

nemefet

keneh

1SG.NOM

AV.hit

3SG.OBL

'I hit him'

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | OBL |
| UV | GEN | NOM |

(14b)

Uih

nemefet

ieh

1SG.NOM

AV.hit

3SG.NOM

'I hit him (it?)'

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | OBL/NOM |

differential object marking

undergoer = object



Lun Bawang (Ba' Kelalan)

(14c) Undergoer Voice

Bifet *uih* **ieh**
 UV.PFV.slap 3SG.GEN 3SG.NOM
 'He hit him'

(14d) Bifet *uih* **keneh**
 UV.PFV.hit 3SG.GEN 3SG.OBL
 'He hit him'

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | OBL |
| UV | GEN | NOM |

| | actor | undergoer |
|----|-------|-----------|
| AV | NOM | OBL/NOM |
| UV | NOM | OBL/NOM |

differential undergoer marking

undergoer = subject



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What motivates the choice?



Differential Marking in Lun Bawang

- **Disclaimer:** there are not that many naturally occurring examples of pronominal undergoers (except OBL AV undergoers)
- Judgements from elicitation also need to be confirmed with more speakers
- However, it is possible that **information structure** does indeed play a role and that (as in other cases of DOM) an OBL undergoer is a **topic**.

Let's see some examples from **the corpus** and some **elicited information structure tests**



OBL as topical undergoer marker

(15) Actor Voice (OBL undergoer)

Dih **Bungkaak** nenaat *ki=Tuwau* feh
 and crow AV.PFV.decorate OBL=argus.pheasant PT

naru' *keneh* roo'-roo' taga
 AV.make 3SG.OBL good-REDUP pretty

'and so Crow decorated Argus Pheasant to make him beautiful'



The **OBL undergoer** is topical





OBL as topical undergoer marker

My dog is the poorest dog in the world. He got abandoned as a puppy and almost starved. He got into an accident and lost a leg. Once an eagle attacked him. That is why there is a scar between his eyes. Also my sister kicked him so hard, when she was young, that he lost all trust in human beings.

(16) **leh** tican, a **lun** nesa' **keneh**
 3SG.NOM UV.PFV.leave NEG people care 3SG.OBL



'He was abandoned, no-one looked after him'

idih le-le **ieh** nate kereb ieh isuut
 DEM almost 3SG.NOM die.PST time 3SG.NOM small

'And he almost died when he was small.'

The **OBL**
undergoer is
 the topic



NOM as less topical?

(17) Dih **ieh** nier **ieh** nge' luun
 DEM 3SG.NOM AV.see 3SG.NOM there upon
 'He looks at him [the man] up there'

A **delai** **dih** nier **keneh**
 NEG man DEM AV.see 3SG.OBL
 'But the man isn't looking at him'



The **NOM undergoer** is less topical than the actor



NOM as less topical?

- (18) Mo, naru' **kiteh** **ieh** keneh
 Yes, AV.do 1DU.INCL 3SG.NOM he.said
 'Yes, let's do it, he said'



The **NOM** undergoer
 is inanimate/
 less topic-worthy



OBL as topical undergoer marker

(19a) Undergoer Voice (OBL undergoer)

| | | | | | |
|------------|------------|--------------|---------|------------|--------------|
| Bifet | <i>uih</i> | keneh | ngaceku | <i>ieh</i> | pelaba lalid |
| UV.PFV.hit | 1SG | OBL.3SG | because | 3SG | very naughty |

'I hit him because he was very naughty'

| | | | | |
|-------|-----------|-------|---------|--------------|
| (19b) | merufu' | uen | masui | keneh |
| | sometimes | UV.do | AV.sell | 3SG.OBL |

'Sometimes when they sell it'



The **OBL undergoer** has topic continuity





NOM as contrast

(20) Kudeng peh **angat dih** mefeh, **ieh** melaak tuu peh,
 If PT branch DEM fall 3SG.NOM dry real PT

angat kayuh dih
 branch tree DEM

'If a branch falls down, even if it is a very dry, that branch'

A **ieh** miek lapen ku kabaa
 NEG 3SG.NOM able UV.IRR.take for firewood

'It cannot be used for firewood'



The **NOM**
undergoer is
 contrasted



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Information Structure Tests

Question Test

- If the actor is questioned/undergoer given, AV OBL undergoers are preferred

Context: who hit Bulan?

(21a) **Yudan** nemefet *keneh* OBL = ✓
Yudan AV.PFV.hit 3SG.OBL
'Yudan hit her'

(21b) */#**Yudan** nemefet *ieh* NOM = ✗
Yudan AV.PFV.hit 3SG.NOM
For: 'Yudan hit her'

Question Test

- If both actor and undergoer are given, OBL undergoers are preferred

Context: Why did you hit Bulan?

(22a) Bifet *uih* *keneh* ngaceku *ieh* melalid
UV.PFV.hit 1SG.NOM 3SG.OBL because 3SG.NOM ADJ.naughty
'I hit her because she was naughty'

OBL = ✓

(22b) */#Bifet *uih* *ieh* ngaceku *ieh* melalid
UV.PFV.hit 1SG.NOM 3SG.NOM because 3SG.NOM ADJ.naughty
'I hit her because she was naughty'

NOM = ✗

Question Test

- If the undergoer is questioned/actor given, UV NOM undergoers are preferred

Context: Who did Yudan hit?

| | | | | | | |
|-------|------------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| (22a) | i=uih | bifet | <i>ieh</i> | NOM = ✓ | | |
| | NOM=1SG.NOM | UV.PFV.hit | 3SG.NOM | | | |
| | 'He hit me' | | | | | OBL = ✗ |
| (22b) | */#Bifet | <i>ieh</i> | kuih/ | leh | nemefet | <i>kuih</i> |
| | UV.PFV.hit | 3SG.NOM | 1SG.OBL | 3SG.NOM | AV.PFV.hit | 1SG.OBL |
| | For: 'He hit me' | | | | | |

Contrast Test

- If the actor is contrasted/undergoer given, then OBL is preferred:

Context: Did Yudan hit Bulan yesterday? No, Yudan didn't hit her... Gituen hit her

(23) Iamo' **i=Gituen** luk nemefet *keneh* (**ieh*)
but NOM=Gituen REL AV.PFV.hit 3SG.OBL (3SG.NOM)

'It was Gituen who hit her'

OBL = ✓

NOM = ✗

Contrast Test



- If the undergoer is contrasted/actor given, then NOM is preferred:

Context: Did Yudan hit Bulan yesterday? No, he didn't hit Bulan... he hit me

(24a) iamo' **uih** (luk) bifet **ieh**
but 1SG.NOM (REL) UV.PFV.hit 3SG.NOM NOM=✓
'He hit me'

(24b) */#iamo' bifet **ieh** **kuih/** OBL = X **ieh** nemefet **kuih** ?
but UV.PFV.hit 3SG.NOM 1SG.OBL
For: 'he hit me'

Summary

| Test | AV | | UV | |
|------------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|
| | OBL | NOM | OBL | NOM |
| Focus actor/ given undergoer | ✓ | X | X | X |
| Topical actor & undergoer | ✓ | X | ✓ | X |
| Focus undergoer/given actor | X | ? | X | ✓ |
| Contrasted Actor | ✓ | X | X(?) | X |
| Contrasted Undergoer | ✓(?) | X | X | ✓ |

- There is a tendency to mark **topical undergoers** using OBL and focus/contrasted undergoers with NOM. This appears to be a similar pattern to **DOM** cross-linguistically...



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Implications



Typology of Differential Marking

- The link between DAM/DOM and the status of the **actor as focus** and the **undergoer as topic** is found in **symmetrical voice languages** as well as ergative and accusative languages.
- This suggests that patterns of **differential marking** may correlate with **semantic role** rather than grammatical function
- It supports the idea that there is a tendency for actors to be topics and undergoers to be focus/secondary topics and for the **unusual instance** in which actors are focused and undergoers are (primary) topics to be overtly marked.

Grammatical Functions



- Case marking in **Kelabit** and **Lun Bawang** (and perhaps WAn more generally) does not relate to **grammatical function**, but rather to semantic or discourse properties.
- In other words, **oblique coding** does not necessarily correlate with **oblique function** (contrary to ergative analyses of AV)
- This supports the idea that grammatical functions should be identified on the basis of **syntactic** rather than encoding properties (Dalrymple 2001, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011).

Symmetrical Voice



- It supports the idea that the **voice alternations** are alternations in **grammatical functions**
- AV and UV alternations are not solely for the purpose of reflecting **information structure** (or the status of the “subject” actor and undergoer as topic or focus)
- There are other means of doing this – including **differential marking** but also word order and marked constructions (e.g. hanging topic constructions, pseudo-cleft constructions)



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Conclusion

Conclusion



- In this talk, I presented the **differential case marking** system in Kelabit and Lun Bawang – both Western Austronesian languages with **symmetrical voice** systems
- In Kelabit, **DAM** is triggered by the status of the **actor as focus**.
- In Lun Bawang, patterns of **DOM** (differential undergoer marking) are affected by the status of the **undergoer as a topic** (apparently both when it is subject and object)

Conclusion



- This suggests that patterns of **differential marking** correlate with semantic role rather than grammatical function.
- This has important **implications** for Western Austronesian symmetrical voice, the typology of differential marking and the study of grammatical functions.
- And shows the importance of studying the motivations for case choices and in order to provide further insight into the relationship between **morphological encoding**, **grammatical function** and **information structure**.



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Many Thanks!

Especially to the speakers of Kelabit and Lun Bawang