

Titan's Tensed Prepositions

In the Sivisa dialect of Titan (Admiralty Subgroup, Oceanic) there are a number of prepositions that agree in tense/mood (but not in person and number) with the main verb of the clause. The marker of tense on prepositions is homophonous with the third person subject agreement clitics on matrix verbs. Examples are given in (1) and (2) on the reverse of this page. These prepositions may also be used as locational adverbs, in which case the object of preposition does not appear (see (3)). Conversely, some other prepositions do not inflect whatever the tense of the clause, and may not appear without arguments (as in (4)).

The tense marked prepositions are homophonous with lexical verbs; *ila* in example (3) is related to the verb *la* 'go', while *iti* in example (1) has a counterpart in the verb *ti* 'be at (a place)'. Synchronically, however, the deverbal prepositions cannot be analysed as verbs. Lexical verbs show subject agreement whereas the prepositions do not. For example in (2), *kiti* cannot be agreeing either with the matrix subject (which would give a non-existent form **koti*) or with the matrix object (**kati*).

Deverbal prepositions have been reported for a number of other Austronesian languages; Durie (1988) analyses these prepositions as originating from certain serial verb constructions, while Lichtenberk (1991) examines the relationship between the core meaning of such verbs as COME and GO and their grammaticalisation as adpositions. It seems, however, that although the grammaticalisation of verbs as prepositions is quite common, their retention of tense marking is not.

The facts of Titan's prepositions are challenging for recent work in Generative Linguistics (Pesetsky and Torrego 1999, Chomsky 1999), where Tense feature is claimed to exist on functional heads (C(omplementiser) and T(ense)) and subject DPs. These prepositions seem to bear a tense feature that must agree with the tense feature of the subject agreement clitics (hosted by the verb). Subject agreement clitics bear both *phi* (that is, number and person) features and tense features, whereas the prepositions bear only tense features. We argue that the tense feature on this set of prepositions is deleted under the process of PROBE&GOAL agreement, as described in Chomsky (1999). The tense feature on the functional category tense (TP) probes the structure and agrees with the same feature on both the subject clitic and the preposition. Titan's tense agreement also shows that the feature [tense] is not limited to functional heads like T and C. This implies that the VP is a domain in which tense features can be checked, removing the motivation for any constituent within the VP to move out of it. The fact that there is no syntactic movement in Titan provides evidence in favor of our theoretical claim that VP may have all the semantic and syntactic capacity of a full clause.

In this talk we will present the facts of Titan's prepositional tense agreement system. We will give a brief historical account of the tense marking and show how it may be derived from serial verb constructions. We will discuss the problems that Titan's tense-marked prepositions pose in Minimalism and suggest a possible analysis, namely that since tense is marked on functional heads, these prepositions appear to be full functional heads. Such an analysis has implications for the status of both Prepositional Phrases and Verb Phrases within the clause.

Examples:

(non-future)

- (1) i=tawi mbuangan **i-ti** Manus.
3sg.nfut=place yams nfut-on Manus.

“He put yams on the island of Manus” (From a creation story)

(future)

- (2) **ko=lai** kopat asi **ki-ti** ndrita-m, **ko=wek**
2sg.imp=take crab all fut-on body-2sg.poss 2sg.imp=float

ki-lati palan-um e Alu
fut-at in.front-house poss Alu

“Take all the crabs and put them on your body, and float them [on a raft] to the front of Alu’s house!”

- (3) “Ko=me!” I pein i=tokai **i-la**.
2sg.imp=come 3sg woman 3sg=go nfut-‘to’

“‘Come (here)!’ The woman went there.”

- (4) “Oi mbulei, ku=tu nyany e um ...”
2sg mouse 1.sg.fut=prog rustle in house

“Mouse, I will keep making noise inside the house...”

References:

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Durie, M. (1988); “Verb Serialisation and ‘verbal-prepositions’ in Oceanic Languages.”
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Lichtenberk, F. (1991); “Semantic change and heterosemy in grammaticalisation.” *Language*
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Pesetsky, D. and E. Torrego (1999) “Tense to C: Causes and Consequences” Ms, MIT.