

The Development of So-called “Instrumental Focus” Verbs in Philippine Languages

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Proto-Austronesian (PAN) is often characterized as exhibiting the following system of verbal affixation and “voice” contrast: (i) *-um-: “active” or “Actor Focus,” (ii) *-en: “direct passive” or “Goal Focus,” (iii) *-an: “local passive” or “Locative Focus,” and (iv) *Si-: “instrumental passive” or “Instrumental Focus” (Wolff 1973, 1979; Dahl [1973] 1976; Ross 1995, 2002; Blust 1998, 2002; etc.). This system has undergone a great variety of formal and/or functional changes. In some cases, the formal change is so transparent that reflexes of these forms can be easily identified. In other cases, the change is so drastic that reflexes of these forms can hardly be identified. The function associated with a certain form, in some cases, has been expanded so that the function formerly associated with another form in the system has been taken over by this form. In other cases, the function associated with a certain form has been replaced by a new form that was not formerly in the system.

Among the above four types of “voice” contrast, the development of the so-called “Instrumental Focus” verbs is of special interest to me. Wolff (1973:79) associates the following three meanings to the so-called “Instrumental Focus” verbs in Proto-Austronesian: (1) verbs in which the focus is the instrument or the means of the action; (2) verbs in which the focus the beneficiary of the action; (3) verbs in which the focus is the direct recipient of the action.” However, a cursory look at data from Philippine languages shows that the development of the so-called “Instrumental Focus” verbs is *not* uniform. More specifically, when the “focus” of a clause is the instrument/means of the action, typically the verb form will contain reflexes of PAN *Si- /PMP *hi-. However, when the “focus” of a clause is the beneficiary of the action, the verb form does *not* necessarily contain a reflex of PAN *Si- /PMP *hi-. Instead, sometimes a reflex of PAN/PMP *-an and/or a reflex of *Si-...-an may be employed.

What motivates the divergent development of these two types of “Instrumental Focus” verbs is still unclear. It is worth investigating whether the development of these two types of “Instrumental Focus” verbs conforms to the subgrouping hypotheses proposed by Blust (1991, 1999).

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