Pseudo noun incorporation and DOM: Definiteness agreement in Daakaka

Introduction: In Daakaka (West Ambrym, Northern Vanuatu, Oceanic), so-called *semitransitive* (ST) verbs show definite agreement with their objects: While specific/definite objects trigger object marking on the verb, unspecific/indefinite objects are not cross-referenced (1)-(2) (von Prince 2015). Although this type of agreement has been widely observed in Micronesian and 'Melanesian' languages (e.g. Odango 2014, Franjieh 2012, Sugita 1973; cf. Næss 2013, Margetts 2008), a formal analysis is still pending. In this paper, I draw a connection between ST and Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI), a phenomenon well-established for Polynesian (Collins 2017, Chung & Ladusaw 2004, Massam 2001). Based on extensive corpus data (von Prince 2013) and own additional fieldwork, I present evidence that objects in both ST and PNI are subject to the same syntactic/semantic constraints which suggests a parallel analysis of both constructions. Adopting Massam (2001) on PNI, I assume that while definite objects are merged as full DPs, unspecific/indefinite objects in ST are merged with reduced structure lacking a D-layer. Therefore, I argue that the presence of definiteness agreement in ST verbs is a subcase of Differential Object Marking (DOM) sensitive to the definiteness of the object (cf. Kalin 2018, Aissen 2003) and the absence of such marking is PNI. In sum, this paper not only presents a first analysis of definiteness agreement in Oceanic languages but also contributes to recent debates on the relation of DOM and PNI phenomena in the world's languages (cf. Massam 2009).

Data: The endangered language Daakaka (SVO, neutral case marking, argument drop) exhibits a subgroup of transitive verbs that show verbal agreement with the definiteness status of their object. This is shown in (1)-(2):

(1) a. *Ma   min-ø   kava.*   b. *Ma   min-**i**   kava.*   DAAKAKA
      REAL   drink$_{ST}$ kava   REAL   drink-OM   kava
      'He drank kava.'   'He drank the kava.'

(2) a. * *Ma   min-ø   [kava   en=te].*   b. *Ma   min-**i**   [kava   **en=te**].*
        REAL   drink$_{ST}$ kava   DEF=MED   REAL   drink-OM   kava   DEF=MED
                                        'He drank this kava.' (von Prince 2015: 55)

While the unspecific/indefinite object *kava* in (1a) does not trigger object agreement marking (OM) on the verb (*min* 'drink'), the definite object *kava en=te* ('the kava') in (2b) must be cross-referenced on the verb by the object marker (*-i*). The unmodified verb root *min* is ungrammatical in this context (2a). However, the definite article and demonstratives are optional in Daakaka (cf. Paul 2016 on Malagasy). Crucially, in presence of the object marker, bare objects are always interpreted as specific/definite (1b), but unspecific/indefinite in its absence (1a). The table in (3) gives a (non-exhaustive) list of different realizations of object agreement on the verb which is idiosyncratically determined by the respective verb root (von Prince 2015).

(3)

Marking	Semitransitives	Transitives	Meaning
=(a)ne	*doko*	*doko=**ne***	'pull'
	kolir	*kolir=**ane***	'sing'
(CV$_1$C)-V$_1$	*dis*	*dis-**i***	'withdraw'
	min	*min-**i***	'drink'
-se	*vyo*	*vyo-**se***	'carry'
-p	*sye-**p***	*sye*	'cut'
suppletive	***baa***	***tyup, tiye***	'fight'
	eli	***kii***	'dig'

Background: The observations above somehow mirror another cross-linguistically well-established phenomenon related to the definiteness of the object; namely PNI (Johns 2017, Massam 2009). Within the Oceanic subgroup, PNI has been prominently described for verb-initial Polynesian languages (Polinsky & Potsdam to appear). In PNI, the object of a verb is not marked for case, interpreted as indefinite/unspecific and undergoes phrasal movement together with the verb to a clause initial position (4). However, PNI-objects can be modified which indicates their

phrasal nature (5b) (contra "true" Noun Incorporation; Johns 2017; but see Barrie & Matthieu 2016, Baker 2014). Based on these observations, PNI-ed objects are analyzed as reduced nominal structures lacking a D-layer (i.e. NP) while non-PNI-ed objects display full DP (Collins 2017, Clemens 2014, Massam 2001). This line of analysis is based on the assumption that the DP is essential for both case and definiteness marking (cf. Kalin 2018, Kramer 2009).

(4) a. *Sā tausi e le teine le pepe* b. *Sā tausi *le pepe le teine.* SAMOAN
    PAST care ERG SPEC girl SPEC baby.ABS   PAST care SPEC baby.*ABS SPEC girl
    'The girl took care of the baby.'   'The girl took care of babies/a baby.' *Or* 'The girl
                                  is a baby-sitter.' (Collins 2017: 12)

As Daakaka does not exhibit case marking or VP movement, PNI is harder to detect than in Polynesian VSO/VOS languages. However, objects of ST verbs are subject to the same constraints as PNI-ed objects: They must be unspecific/indefinite (no determiners, no referential modification, no quantification), but may be modified by attributive modifiers (5). Personal pronouns are incompatible with both PNI and ST (von Prince 2015, Massam 2001).

(5) a. *Mwe en [webir pe~pyo].* DAAKAKA b. *Ne inu [kofe kono] a Mele.* NIUEAN
    REAL eat$_{ST}$ taro RED-white   PST drink coffee bitter ABS Mele
    'She ate white taro.' (von Prince 2015: 54)   'Mele drank bitter coffee.' (Massam 2001: 158)

Analysis: Because of the analog properties of objects in both constructions, I propose a unified analysis of the underlying structural configuration (cf. Massam 2009): unspecific/indefinite objects exhibit a reduced structure (presumably *n*P) and lack a D-layer (6a) (Massam 2001). This proposal captures the unavailability of determiners, articles, quantifiers and number marking of object in the context of unmarked ST verbs in Daakaka as such elements are assumed to merge structurally higher than *n*P (Alexiadou et al. 2007 for an overview). However, definite objects trigger object marking in ST languages (1b/2b) but not in PNI languages (4). To account for this observation, I claim that this kind of definiteness agreement marking is analyzed best as a subcase of DOM sensitive to definiteness features on the objects (Kalin 2018, Aissen 2003 and others). Adopting Kalin (2018), I argue that Daakaka ST verbs carry an unvalued, interpretable [DEF]initeness feature. In the case of DP objects, the [DEF] feature on the verb gets valued by the valued DEF feature of the D head of the object. The valued DEF feature on the verb is spelled out as object agreement (6b). In the absence of D, the verb fails to value its [DEF] feature and the feature is not spelled-out (6a). Importantly, the [DEF] feature on *v* is interpretable so that it does not cause a crash of the derivation in (6a) (cf. Torrego & Pesetsky 2007). In contrast, verbs in PNI languages like Polynesian lack such a [DEF] feature on the verb.

(6) a.

b.
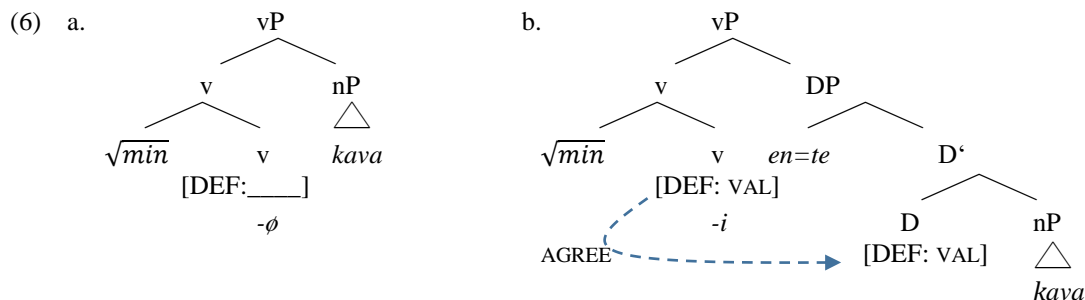
Conclusion: By relating ST to PNI, ST can be interpreted as a kind of DOM sensitive to the [DEF] feature of the object. Thus, I claim that ST is not an exceptional feature of 'Melanesian' and Micronesian languages, but represent a special case of PNI and DOM.

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