Restructuring in Squliq Atayal

Overview: This paper exemplifies how language variation may interact with principles common to all languages. The voice system of Squliq Atayal (VOS; Formosan) differs radically from that of languages like German. For example, Squliq voices determine which argument can A'-extract. I argue, however, that this system interacts with a Restructuring alternation identical to that of German (Wurmbrand 2001). Evidence for restructuring includes absence of embedded negation and tense. Moreover, AV and Patient Voice (PV) clauses differ in whether the agent or patient is Nominative-marked. AV objects bear Nominative when embedded under a PV restructuring verb, as predicted if (i) the Accusative-assigning head is absent in the infinitive and (ii) the AV object receives structural case. (ii) entails that AV in Squliq is not antipassive and Squliq is not ergative, contra previous research on Atayal and related languages (Huang 1994).

Reduced infinitive: Restructuring is an embedding construction whose embedded infinitive is radically functionally impoverished. A Squliq example is given in (1).

(1) M-asuq m-aniq sehuy qu Yumin.
    AV-finish AV-eat taro NOM Yumin
    ‘Yumin finished eating taros.’

The complement of restructuring verbs (restructuring infinitive) cannot be negated or have independent tense, as (2)-(3) show. Such restrictions are not observed in non-restructuring sentences. These suggest that the infinitives must exclude TP and NegP.

(2) *T<\text{m}>alam iyat qaniq sehuy qu Yumin.
    <AV>try NEG [AV]eat taro NOM Yumin
    Intended: ‘Yumin tried to not eat taros.’

(3) *M-wah hera m-aniq sehuy suxan qu Yumin.
    AV-come yesterday AV-eat taro tomorrow NOM Yumin
    Intended: ‘Yumin came yesterday to eat taros tomorrow.’

Long Passive: If restructuring infinitives are so small that they lack even the Accusative-assigning v₀ present in simple clauses (4a), we predict that passivizing the restructuring verb will remove the possibility of Accusative on the embedded object, which then must take Nominative from matrix T₀. This is correct, as (4b) shows.

(4) a. Cyux m-aniq sehuy qu Yumin.
    AUX AV-eat taro NOM Yumin
    ‘Yumin is eating taros.’

b. Suq-un m-aniq na Yumin qu sehuy.
    finish-PV AV-eat GEN Yumin NOM taro
    ‘The taros will be finished eating by Yumin.’

Condition C: Condition C further shows that the embedded object in (4b) has A-moved across the external argument (EA). In (5a), an AV restructuring sentence, the subject hiya c-commands Yumin in the embedded object and cannot be coindexed with Yumin. However, when the matrix verb is in PV (5b), the coindexation is grammatical.

    AV-finish AV-eat taro GEN Yumin NOM 3SG.FREE
    ‘He.*₁/₂ finished eating Yumin₁’s taros.’
Creation Verbs: In a PV restructuring sentence (6), *kbalay* can only mean ‘fix’ whereas in the corresponding AV sentence, *kbalay* is ambiguous between ‘build’ and ‘fix.’ The incompatibility with creation verbs in (6) supports that the embedded object has moved to the matrix clause across the existential closure.

(6) Suq-un kbalay na Yumin qu ngasal.
    Finish-PV [AV]make GEN Yumin NOM house
    ‘The house(s) will be finished *building/fixing by Yumin.’

A’-extraction: A’-extraction in Squliq can only apply to the Nominative argument, the highest argument of the clause (e.g. only agents can A’-extract in AV simple clauses). However, in a PV restructuring sentence (7), the embedded object can A’-extract even though the embedded verb is in AV. This shows again that the object has moved across the EA.

(7) Nanu suq-un m-aniq na Yumin?
    what finish-PV AV-eat GEN Yumin
    ‘What will be finished eating by Yumin?’

Structure: I propose that Squliq restructuring verbs take a bare VP complement. This explains the absence of embedded negation, tense and case dependency between the embedded object and matrix *v₀* or *T₀*.

Actor Voice: Squliq and related languages have been argued to be ergative (Aldridge 2004). AV sentences are said to exhibit properties found in antipassives: (i) they are less telic and (ii) AV objects are usually indefinite/nonspecific. However, the restructuring data suggest that the case on AV objects cannot be oblique. Specifically, we showed that when an AV object occurs in a restructuring infinitive and when the matrix verb is in PV, the object bears Nominative. This cannot be explained if AV sentences are antipassives whose object receives oblique case. That AV is not antipassive further argues against an ergative analysis for Squliq. Moreover, restructuring is found in most Formosan languages (Chang 2010), many of which have been argued to be ergative (Starosta 1986; Chang 1997). The discussion here suggests we re-evaluate such treatment of these languages.

References