

Ethnosyntax of Somatic Illnesses in Two Formosan Languages

Fuhui Hsieh
Tatung University

As syntactic constructions are not only thick with cultural meanings, but used to “embody and codify certain language-specific meanings and ways of thinking, the syntax of a language must determine to a considerable extent this language’s cognitive profile” (Wierzbicka 1979:313; Enfield 2002:1). The main purposes of this study are to present some particular syntactic constructions related to somatic illnesses, i.e. sentence patterns related to the affected human body parts, in two Formosan languages, Kavalan and Saisiyat and to discuss how the syntactic constructions are related to and constrained by culture-specific features and expectations (Enfield 2002).

There are two sentence patterns recruited to express two types of somatic illnesses. One is the AF clause used to describe non-exo-triggered somatic illnesses, i.e. the pain or illness that is not caused by any external trigger. The other syntactic pattern is pertaining to exo-triggered illnesses, i.e. the pain or the illness caused by an external cause. Syntactically, the affected body part in Saisiyat occurs in a syntactic position independent of the person, and receives independent case marking; namely, it occurs in the Patient position and receives Accusative case in both non-exo-trigger and exo-trigger sentence patterns, as in (1a) and (2).

(1) Saisiyat

- a. yao bisbis **ka** **baSang.**
1SG.NOM AF.hurt ACC body
'My body hurts. I fall sick.'
- b. yao S<om>bet **ka** **korkoring.**
1SG.NOM <AF>beat ACC child
'I beat the child.'

(2) Saisiyat

- bato' '<in>taboe' sahapis **iyakin** ka/*ray 'a'ay.
stone <PFV>roll AF.crush 1SG.ACC ACC/*LOC leg
'The rolling stone crushed my leg. (Lit.: The rolling stone crushed me (and) my leg.)'

This makes the person and his body part both appear as core arguments in the sentence. What is intriguing of these Saisiyat sentences is that Saisiyat uses transitive clauses to express stative notion. The assignment of the syntactic arguments, or the thematic roles, in (1a) is exactly on a parallel with that in a common AF transitive clause, as in (1b). Moreover, when the human, i.e. the whole, and the affected body part are both explicitly mentioned in such a sentence, both are marked as by Accusative, which, thus, leads to a double-object construction, as in (2). In contrast, the affected body part in Kavalan is treated as a Location of the person, though oblique case is also acceptable in (3), in both sentence patterns, as in (3) and (4).

(3) Kavalan

- si-taRaw=iku **tu/ta** anem(-ku).
have-sick=1SG.NOM OBL/LOC heart(-1SG.GEN)
'I am sick to my heart.'

'I have a disease of my heart.' 'I have a heart disease.'

(4) Kavalan

- pukun-an-na **aiku** **ta-uRu-an-ku** /*uRu-ku.
hit-LF-3SG.GEN 1SG.NOM LOC-head-LOC-1SG.GEN /*head-1SG.GEN
'He hit me on the head. (*He hit me and my head).'

When the person and his part co-occur, as in (4), the part must be marked as a location, rather than a Nominative. In other words, the action is directed at the whole, and the part is the affected location through which the whole, i.e. the person, receives sensations. Note that there is always only one core argument allowed in the somatic sentence patterns in Kavalan. This study may shed some lights in the studies of socially situated usage of grammatical devices and may contribute to typological studies of the ethnosyntax of somatic illnesses.

References

- Enfield, N. J. 2002. Ethnosyntax: Introduction. In *Ethnosyntax: Explorations in Grammar and Culture*, ed. by N. J. Enfield, 3-30. Oxford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 1979. 'Ethno-syntax and the philosophy of grammar'. *Studies in Language*, 3.3: 313-83.