



A Parametric Grammar of Seediq by Arthur Holmer
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Arthur Holmer. 1996. *A parametric grammar of Seediq*. Travaux de l'Institut de linguistique de Lund, 30. Lund: Lund University Press. 237 pp.

Seediq is spoken in Central-Eastern Taiwan by approximately 14,000 speakers, as of 1996 (according to the population census given in Chang 1997). It is divided into three main dialects, Truku, Toda, and Paran. As the book title suggests, the author aims to present a grammar of Paran Seediq in a generative perspective.

To fully understand the implications of this ambitious work, it must be placed in a larger context, that of “Formosan linguistics.” Over the past few decades, numerous studies have been carried out on the Formosan languages. The pioneering work of Japanese scholars (Ogawa and Asai, then Tsuchida) was later extended by Paul Li and others during the 1970s and 1980s. Their investigations of the synchronic and diachronic phonologies of these languages laid the groundwork for the syntactic descriptions and analyses that began to appear in the late 1980s.

Despite the large amount of work on the Formosan languages, many morpho-syntactic and semantic aspects are still poorly understood. Even less explored are the variations that divide each language family. The main reason is that only a few grammars are available (see Tung 1964 and Szakos 1994 on Tsou; Li 1973 on Rukai; Huang 1993, 1995, and Rau 1992 on Atayal; and Egli 1990 on Paiwan). Most of these grammars (except Li 1973) provide a thorough description of the language, but in a nonformal/theoretical perspective. Holmer's grammar clearly departs from this tradition: it means to contribute to a better understanding of Seediq within a formal/theoretical framework. But Holmer (H) also seems to have another more far-reaching aim, as far as syntactic theory is concerned: he uses Seediq as an “experimental” language in an attempt to show how the various components of grammar interact with one another.

A BRIEF OUTLINE. The book is divided into two major parts: chapters 2–4 provide a grammatical sketch, and chapters 5–7 discuss theoretical aspects.

Grammatical sketch. Chapter 2 provides an outline of Seediq phonology, with a brief description—mostly based on Yang (1976) and Li (1991)—of its phonological system and a list of phonological rules and morpho-phonemic alternations.

Chapter 3 deals with the main parts of speech in Seediq, namely (i) nouns, (ii) verbs, and (iii) other categories such as “adjectives,” “adverbs,” and “prepositions.” After a brief overview of the pronominal system—which includes three sets of “long” forms (nominative, genitive, and oblique) and two sets of “short” forms (nominative and genitive/ergative)—Holmer devotes most of this chapter to verbal morphology, because “purely inflectional morphology on the nouns is almost non-existent” (29). Verbal morphology includes derivational morphology—with brief discussion of modality and changes in valency (causativization, reciprocity, and reflexivity)—and inflectional morphology—with an introduction to mood (indicative, subjunctive, and imperative), tense (preterit, present, and future), and focus. The discussion of adjectives and adverbs reveals that the distinction between “nouns” and “verbs” is far from clear-cut. Prepositions are treated as verbs.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of Seediq syntax, discussing the structure of (i) the clause, (ii) the noun phrase, and (iii) the verb phrase. H deals with word order in simple sentences vs. complex sentences; compares the distribution of nouns vs. pronouns, the function of auxiliaries (divided into two categories, “tense” vs. “focus”), and the position of negators; and defines the notion of “focus” in reference to discourse.

Theoretical analyses and implications. Having described the grammar of Seediq, H turns in chapter 5 to more theoretical analyses and implications. This chapter starts by discussing his reasons for rejecting the Minimalist Program (MPLT), which cannot, according to him, account adequately for the Seediq data because of its too-rigid framework. Adopting the theory of principles and parameters, H then devises step by step—that is, by integrating all the syntactic components discussed in chapter 4—the Seediq tree that “represents the direct information of the clause” (228). In so doing, H is obliged to depart from tradition, postulating that the Specifier of VP (Spec VP) and the Specifier of Agreement (Spec AgrP) are both inherently case-assigning positions. There follows a discussion of principles and parameters that provide the set of rules that govern the grammar of Seediq.

Chapter 6 attempts to show how syntax interacts with morphology (the morphosyntax interface), aiming more specifically to design a model (the “markedness-based model”) that can account for Seediq verbal morphology.

Chapter 7 covers residual problems concerning the variable shapes of certain morphemes (e.g., the “immediate future” prefix) at the phonological level, where H tries to link morphology to phonology (the morphophonology interface).

FORM AND CONTENT, THEORY AND PRACTICE. H's book is tough to read, because of the intricate organization of the contents, and also because of the wide range of linguistic facts and theoretical issues discussed. Since I am not really qualified to criticize H's revisions of existing theoretical models (mostly the principles and parameters framework), I will give only some suggestions and comments concerning the form and the content of the book.

Form. The organization of the book would have been more easily accessible if it had included (i) an index, (ii) more illustrative examples, (iii) some texts, and (iv) more references on the Formosan languages. I will develop briefly these four points in turn.

In order to account for the internal structure of the language in a theoretical perspective, H is led quite naturally to present the basic linguistic facts first. To that purpose, he divides the grammar of Seediq into three main components—phonology, morphology, and syntax—before showing in the second part how these components interact with one another. This presentation would not have caused any problem for readers if each issue were not trussed up in many subsections. Pronominal clitics, for instance, are first discussed in section 3.1.2 (31–32), where H provides a morphological overview of the pronominal system. Their syntactic distribution is given in section 4.3.2 (68–71), with a reference to “portmanteau” pronouns (i.e., pronominal forms that refer to both the patient and the agent). The issue is taken up again in section 4.9.2 (89), in relation to word order and in section 5.2.2.3 (111), in relation to their structural position in the sentence. This interlaced organization of the book unfortunately makes the presentation and analysis of the data unclear. Conscious of this problem, H admits that “it has often been necessary to delay certain answers until a later section or anticipate other answers” (228). A cross-referencing index would have certainly helped the reader through this labyrinth of back and forth discussions.

Although H covers a wide range of topics, the reader is often left hungry for more. Illustrative sentences are lacking that could have exemplified the construction mentioned or supported the author's claim. Because of space limitations, I will mention only two examples. First, no more than two (very similar) examples are provided on the comparative construction (52, 88). Second, H argues that both “adjectives” and “verbs” can be modified by the degree adverb ‘very’, but readers are unable to judge for themselves since only one example (adjective + ‘very’) is provided (52).

It is regrettable that the book does not include a single text, despite the fact that H's “fieldwork consisted ... of tape recordings of conversations, stories and songs” (22). Texts provide not only cultural context, but also countless examples that—because they occur in a larger informational context—may enable linguists to (i) check the validity of their assumptions, (ii) work on the discourse level, and (iii) discover paradigms and idiosyncracies that they may otherwise have overlooked.

The long list of references (230–237) shows that H is well-versed in general linguistics. There are, however, notable absences, including several important references on Formosan languages. These omissions have two repercussions. The first is an apparent partiality toward the work of his predecessors. Why, for instance, are Egerod (1965, 1966, 1978, 1993) and Li (1995) cited for comparative purposes on Wulai and Mayrinax Atayal, respectively, while Huang (1989, 1993, 1995) is not? The second has to do with H's real understanding of the Formosan languages as a whole. A number of linguistic facts are found in many Formosan languages that H just mentions in passing, such as *o* < *aw and *e* < *ay (45) and final particles that carry aspectual information (46–47), to mention only two. (For details, see Ross 1995, Huang 1995, and Yeh 1991.) A careful survey of more references on these languages would have enabled H to examine Seediq from a cross-linguistic perspective and to weigh his analysis against alternative solutions. I further develop these points below in relation to the range of topics covered.

Content. H's book represents a very ambitious project, namely, to study all the components of the grammar and their interaction with one another. However, the linguistic and theoretical issues discussed in this book would have been more impressive if Holmer had provided (i) definitions to clarify certain linguistic terms, (ii) more in-depth analyses, (iii) argumentation based on supporting evidence, and (iv) cross-linguistic comparisons.

H leaves the reader with the general impression that he has a good command of Seediq and that he understands the structure of the language quite well. It is also clear that he is aware of the multiplicity of existing theoretical models. He is able not only to choose the framework he believes accounts best for the data, but also to propose revisions whenever he feels necessary. This understanding of both linguistic facts and theoretical frameworks sometimes leads Holmer both to understate the facts and to forget to define linguistic concepts or terms that he takes for granted. An example of understatement is his assertion that “the linguistic affinity between these three languages [Seediq and the two Atayal dialects, Squliq and Cʔuli] is evident from the fact that each of the names (Seediq, Squliq and Cʔuli) derives from the word ‘person’ in each respective language” (9–10). We all know that “linguistic affinity” is not just based on a common ethnonym! Examples of undefined terms include: “subjunction” used as an equivalent to “conjunction”; “passive foci”; and the often tricky distinction between “derivational” and “inflectional” morphology.

The absence of definitions allows some confusion to arise. One example concerns the distinction between “tense” and “aspect.” H claims that “verbal inflection in Seediq comprises mood, tense and focus. The moods are indicative, imperative and subjunctive (or prohibitive). Indicative is further subdivided into three tenses: present, preterite and future” (35), with the last further subdivided into “immediate” vs. “distant” future. H's analysis unfortunately founders on confusion between “tense” and “aspect.” According to Comrie's (1976, 1986) well-accepted definitions, “tense” relates the time of a situation to another time (either

speech time or reference time) whereas “aspect” provides an internal characterization of that situation. In the same vein, “imperfective” is not a “tense” category—as H seems to believe—but an aspectual category. Thus the criteria advanced for defining such grammaticalized verbs as *wada* ‘go’, *ni* and *gaga* ‘exist’, *maha* ‘start’, and *musa* ‘go to’ as “tense” vs. “focus” auxiliaries are neither explanatory nor particularly relevant. In my opinion, these verbs should be treated as aspectual auxiliary verbs, since they provide an internal characterization of a situation.

Another source of confusion is the notion of “focus,” which in Formosan (and Philippine) languages remains quite controversial for a number of reasons. Chosen for inadequate reasons, this term clashes with two other notions, that of “voice” and that of “focus” as an informational process. Other, related problems concern whether focus affixation should be regarded as inflectional (as H assumes; 35) or derivational (as proposed, for instance, by Starosta 1986), and whether or not Formosan languages are partially or totally ergative (see Starosta 1986, 1988, 1997, Huang 1994, Chang 1997). It is very difficult to understand H’s point of views on such issues. He sometimes refers to Seediq as having an “active/passive” distinction, with three passives—an interpretation found in earlier work by Egerod (1966) and Starosta (1974). At the same time, he adopts the traditional terminology—whereby focus is treated as a morphological device on the verb that indicates which of the various NPs is the subject of the sentence—and refers to the active (voice?) as AF and the “passives” as PF, LF, and IPF.

The notions of tense and focus are central to the discussion of the morpho-syntactic and morphophonological interfaces and strongly affect the revisions H proposes to make (e.g., that Spec AgrP is a case-marked position). The conclusion that imposes itself is that H’s theoretical approach is flawed because it is based on terminology that is not clearly defined and on notions that are not adequately separated.

In the first part of the book, the reader’s interest is aroused nearly at every page by H’s description of the language. Very often, however, readers will be left unsatisfied for various reasons.

(i) Explanations that would have accounted for ungrammatical examples are not given. For instance, why is it that a “time adverb” cannot follow the subject unless an overt object occurs in the clause (53)?

(ii) Some very interesting issues are discussed very superficially. H shows (59–60) that *netun* ‘if’, *asi* ‘only if’, *da* ‘if/when’, *ado (ka)* ‘because’, and *ani naq* ‘although’ have a “verbal nature (some being *historically* related to verbs, such as *netun* ‘if’ < ‘to chance upon’)” [emphasis added]. However, he does not give the etymology in other cases, such as *asi* and *da*. Are they really verbs, or derived from verbs? If so, which ones? Nor does H show whether complex sentences introduced by these “subjunctives” are juxtaposed clauses or subordinate clauses.

(iii) The range of possible or impossible paradigms provided is not exhaustive, thus adding to the existing confusion. For instance, the occurrence in example (10d) of the verb *haun* ‘go’ (64) comes out of the blue. It is not mentioned as a

“focus auxiliary” on the preceding page. Such omissions sometimes lead H down the wrong track. Nothing is said, for instance, of the distribution of pronominal clitics, and more specifically the fact that “short” forms can cooccur with “long” forms. (For details, see Chang 1997.) However, it is important to determine whether bound pronominal forms are either “clitics” or “affixes,” because of their respective roles in grammatical vs. pronominal agreement. Clitics fill argument positions on the verb and their coreferent NPs thus function as adjuncts or topics. Affixes, on the other hand, express redundantly the semantic features (person, number, and/or gender) of their coreferent NPs. In that respect, they do not have any syntactic function. It is the coreferential NP that “bears an argument relation to the verb” (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987:741). Based on a number of morpho-syntactic tests, Chang (1997:97–110) has argued quite convincingly that Seediq “long” forms should be treated as “pronouns” while “short” forms must be regarded as “agreement suffixes.”

In many instances in both parts of the book, H does not support his claims with any kind of evidence. There are not enough illustrative examples, and the argumentation is sometimes circular, or even nonexistent. I have already provided examples for the first point, so will only cite two more to illustrate the second. In one instance, the notion of “desirative” as a “derivational” process is accounted for on the basis that “the agent of the desire always is identical to the agent of the verb, regardless of whether the verb is active or passive” (33). How does this explain the notion of “derivation”? In another case, no reason is advanced to support the idea of “fusion” between the two sets of short pronominal forms (nominative and genitive/ergative) (32).

H’s study would certainly have been more inspiring if earlier analyses of the Formosan languages had been subjected to closer scrutiny. Here again, I will only mention two examples. First, Seediq and Atayal are both characterized by the fact that verbs of existence have been grammaticalized as aspectual auxiliary verbs (one of which denotes immediacy in space and time; the other, remoteness). This phenomenon has been well illustrated and explained for Atayal by Huang (1993, 1995). Unfortunately, H does not discuss the difference between the existential verbs *ni* and *gaga* in Seediq. Second, Hsu (1994:42–71) has proposed a reanalysis of Yang’s (1976) and Li’s (1991) Seediq data, but H does not mention her analysis at all.

H’s book represents one of the few attempts in Formosan linguistics to combine a language description and formal theory in one grammar. However, for all the reasons stated above, this goal of contributing to a better understanding of Seediq in a generative perspective has only partially been reached.

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Osada, Toshiki. 1995. *Mundajin no nōkō bunka to shokuji bunka: Minzoku gengogaku kōsatsu* [Farming culture and food culture of Munda: An ethnolinguistic study]. Nichibunken sōsho 8. Kyoto: Kokusai Nihon bunka kenkyū sentā. 186 pp.

Another masterpiece from the author of the *Mundari grammar* (Osada 1992), this ethnolinguistic study consists of acknowledgements (4), a table of contents (5–6), an introduction (7–10), three chapters that constitute the main text (11–140), a conclusion (141–142), comparative wordlists (143–162), a bibliography (163–182), and an English-language table of contents and summary (183–186). Chapter 1 deals with the Munda farming culture, chapter 2 discusses the food culture, and chapter 3 presents an ethnolinguistic analysis of Munda agricultural vocabulary.

Osada (O) combines long firsthand field experience with enormous erudition, not only in Munda and general Austroasiatic linguistics, but also in Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, and Indo-Aryan historical linguistics. He has spent many years among the Munda, and even holds a Ph.D. degree from the Department of Tribal and Regional Languages of Ranchi University, which is one of the centers for tribal studies in India. It is fair to say that O strikes a fine balance between the qualities of a talented armchair linguist and those of an experienced fieldworker.

Not being a specialist in Munda ethnolinguistics, I cannot fully appreciate the first two chapters of the book, which provide a solid basis for the etymological analysis of Munda rice agriculture terminology undertaken in chapter 3. I can only note with admiration that it is a very carefully executed study, richly illustrated with maps and photographs that O himself took during his sojourn among the Munda. He traces and identifies there a number of edible plants cultivated by the Munda, for which he also supplies their taxonomic binomials. Besides this identification, he also provides details about the cultivation and harvesting of these plants, including the exact times in the year when these plants are collected and processed. In addition, he cites different songs, teasing addresses, and other samples of verbal behavior connected with agricultural rituals. This kind of folklore is usually quite resistant to translation and interpretation, but O accomplishes the task magnificently. His mastery of Mundari and other Munda languages,