What agrees, why and how? Austronesian-type voice and its variation beyond Austronesian

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In this talk, I reconsider the question of how Ā-agree relations are encoded in narrow syntax. Through the lens of western Austronesian languages of the Philippine-type, I show that there are at least two crosslinguistically common means for realizing abstract Ā-agree relations: ϕ-feature agreement and the type of verbal morphology that indexes the A-relation of certain Ā-elements, known in the literature as 'symmetrical voice'. I argue that symmetrical voice, such as that found in Austronesian, Nilotic, and Caucasian, is best analyzed as the arbitrary spell-out of parallel chains (Chomsky 2005; Kandybowicz 2008) and is a key trait of discourse configurationality (Li & Thompson 1976; É Kiss 1996; Miyagawa 2010). I then demonstrate how symmetrical voice is independent of case alignment and how it may co-occur with traits of subject prominence, concluding that topic-prominence and subject-prominence should not be considered a dichotomy. Finally, I highlight several loci of variation and found among symmetrical voice languages and how they enrich our understanding of Agree and Move, as well as the evolution and eventual decline of symmetrical voice.

References

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