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Mark Durie, *A Grammar of Acehnese on the Basis of a Dialect of North Aceh*.
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This is a very fine grammar of a fascinating language. Acehnese (Ac), spoken by a large population in Northern Sumatra, exists in several dialects; as the title¹ states, this grammar is based on the dialect of North Aceh. It is clearly going to become one of the landmark grammars in Indonesian linguistics.

To write a great grammar, one must speak to the future. In linguistics, today's dazzling displays of theoretical virtuosity have an unfortunate tendency to become tomorrow's puzzling arrays of technical incomprehensibility. Durie (D) has met this challenge by writing well, with a minimum of theoretical baggage to obstruct future readers. The language he describes so clearly is well worth the effort.

Ac is an atypical Indonesian language in many respects, and has attracted considerable attention from linguists (sometimes for the wrong reasons - cf. Durie (1988), Lawler (1988) for further details). For instance, it has a large stock of monosyllabic roots, quite at variance with the disyllabic Indonesian norm, and its phonology bears traces of its Chamic ancestry as well as important influences from Austro-Asiatic.

¹ In passing, I might observe that the differences between Acehnese dialects, while significant, are hardly great enough to warrant memorialization in the title of this book: far better for long-term uses would be the title that appears on the spine of the book, consisting of only the first four words of the present title. This unfortunate situation would appear to be a case of overzealousness on someone's part.

particularly with regard to consonant aspiration, which is a pervasive feature of the phonology. Other phonological peculiarities include a wealth of diphthongs, particularly centralized ones, now rapidly disappearing in young people's speech but preserved by D, who describes the speech of older speakers preferentially.

There is also an unusually extensive system of nasalization in Ac, including two distinct series of nasal consonants (*plain* and *funny*), co-existing with at least one set of phonemically nasalized vowels. The funny nasals (which are unit resonant phonemes derived historically from homorganic nasal-stop clusters) are distinguished acoustically from the plain nasals mainly, D suggests, by features of the following vowel: plain nasals are followed by distinctively nasalized vowels, while funny nasals are not.

D's claim is that the vowel phones occurring after plain nasals are precisely the same phones that constitute the set of nasalized vowel phonemes (which can also occur without nasal consonants), while the set of vowel phones that follow funny nasals is precisely the set of oral vowel phonemes (p. 24). He thus proposes distinguishing the two nasal consonant series simply by marking the following vowels as nasal or oral.

My impression is that the situation is somewhat more complex than D's analysis would suggest: allophones of oral vowel phonemes following funny nasals appear to display *some* nasalization, though not as much as those of phonemically nasal vowels.² This implies that there is some allophonic vowel nasalization by funny nasals, as well as the possibility that the phonemically nasal vowels have allophones with yet a different degree of nasalization after plain nasals. As D observes (p. 25), 'Phonemic analyses of Acehnese are unavoidably problematical'. For this reason, D's proposal (pp. 23-25) that Ac nasality be treated as a *prosody*, rather than a phonemic phenomenon, is worth serious consideration.

It is in its grammar, however, that Ac, as described by D, diverges most widely from our expectations. Disputes over the problems of Ac agreement are the major venue in which Western linguists have become familiar with the language; these center on the questions³ of:

- [A] whether the clitic person markers on predicative uses of the verb constitute a 'true' agreement phenomenon; and,
- [B₁] if so, what NP they agree with, and how the agreement rule specifies this; or,
- [B₂] if not, what kind of phenomenon they *do* represent, and how *it* is specified.

It would appear that Ac clitics either aren't the kind of agreement we're used to, or else that they agree with NPs on the basis of their thematic roles (i.e., *Agent* and *Patient*), rather than their grammatical relations (i.e., *Subject* and *Direct Object*). My own papers on this topic (Lawler (1977, 1975)) were framed in early Relational

² This is quite in line with Catford's (1977: 140-1) analysis of the Ac funny nasals as lightly nasal, with a lesser rate of air flow through the nose.

³ See Lawler (1988) for further discussion of the relevant questions and their potential answers.

Grammar theory, and others (e.g. Perlmutter (1982)) have continued to follow later versions of that theory's descriptive canons in further work on Ac. In these theories, agreement must be stated in terms of grammatical relations like *Subject*; semantic terms like *Agent* are not accorded syntactic status.

In D's analysis, by contrast, agreement is essentially governed by *lexical* considerations; he analyzes Ac as distinguishing two types of verbal argument:

'An argument which can take proclitic pronominals on the verb is termed an *agent*. One which can take enclitic pronominals is termed an *undergoer*.' (p. 48; emphasis in original)

and three types of verb (*ibid*):

[1] *Intransitive Controlled* verbs,
'which take only an Agent', e.g.
gopynan ka = geu = jak u = keude (D's example (4-1), p. 47)
he IN 3 go to market
'He went to market.'

[2] *Intransitive Non-Controlled* verbs,
'which take only an Undergoer', e.g.
gopynan sakêt = geuh ((4-2), *ibid.*)
he sick 3
'He is sick.'

[3] *Transitive Controlled* verbs,
'which take both an Agent and an Undergoer', e.g.
ji = kap = keuh ((4-3), *ibid.*)
3 bite 2
'It'll bite you!'

If we were to take these statements at their conventional face value, there would be a serious danger of circularity here, since Agent (*A*) and Undergoer (*U*) are defined in terms of their use with verbs, while verbs are classified according to the usage patterns they allow. However, there are two independent sources that save this account from circularity.

First, *A* markers are proclitic, while *U* markers are enclitic; it is thus a simple matter to distinguish them and to determine whether a given token of a predicate is appearing *with* one, the other, or both. Of course, if a given root appears *without* one of them, this provides no evidence for categorization, since (a) both *A* and *U* clitics are subject to omission, for various reasons, not all syntactic, and (b) some predicates appear to belong to several categories; we will have more to say about this below.

On this analysis, a given intransitive predicate may govern either kind of agreement as a lexical subcategorization. Transitives can have both types of agreement simulta-

neously. On this basis, D accounts Ac as typologically distinct from both Accusative and Ergative languages; in the discussion in the section on *Core Roles* (8.2; pp. 180-191) he says:

'Acehnese is different from both Dyirbal and English in that an "intransitive subject" can be either an Agent, identified with the "transitive subject" function by use of the proclitic pronominal cross-referencing on the verb, or an Undergoer, identified with the "transitive object" function by (optional) enclitic cross-referencing.' (p. 186)

Second, D's use of "scare quotes"⁴ around phrases containing the words *subject* and *object* in this quotation is most appropriate; despite their presence here, no reference to them or to other syntactically-motivated categories is in fact necessary under his analysis of Ac agreement.⁵ Syntax in Ac on this analysis thus takes on a rather different status. Although D asserts that

'It needs to be kept in mind that the terms *agent* and *undergoer* refer to grammatical categories defined in terms of the cross-referencing they take.' (p. 55; emphasis in original),

he admits that he

'... owes much to Wierzbicka semantics, a sophisticated and powerful methodology of semantic analysis, in particular Wierzbicka (1980).' (p. 55, note 1)

That is, *A* and *U* are not strictly syntactic terms, pace D's reminder, and they have quite predictable semantics in many cases. Thus it is clear that Ac agreement is *not* only (or even principally) a strict syntactic matter, and consequently disputes over its syntactic details are missing the point. Even D's account, though broad in principle and useful in practice, suffers from some defects in this regard.

To begin with, D proposes to use two features (*Transitivity* and *Controlledness*), specifying the number and role of verbal arguments, respectively, to distinguish the three classes.⁶ But transitivity is a poor basis for verb subcategorization. In most languages, it is impossible to divide predicate types (as opposed to tokens) neatly into

⁴ Durie's usage of what appear at first to be "raised filled blocks" as technical scare quotes here and elsewhere in the book is actually an artifact of the text-processing environment in which the book was composed; these are discernable under magnification as simple double quotes, unfortunately compressed by the printer. Aside from this very minor infelicity (made even more minor because, like all the typographic conventions in this book, it is consistently applied throughout the book and its usage can be easily understood in context), the typography and print clarity of the book are exemplary.

⁵ See Lawler (1988) and Asyik (1987) for a different kind of analysis.

⁶ The combinatorially possible fourth category of *Transitive Non-Controlled* is in fact nonexistent in Ac, since one of the arguments with a Transitive *must* be an Agent.

two disjoint categories of *Transitive* and *Intransitive*. Any attempt to do so immediately founders on data like the following from English:

- (1a) He walked the dog.
 (1b) He walked 10 miles/a lot.
 (1c) He walked too much.
 (1d) He walked today.
 (1e) Did he walk?
 (2a) He ate the steak.
 (2b) He ate ten ounces/a lot.
 (2c) He ate too much.
 (2d) He ate today.
 (2e) Did he eat?
 (3a) He sells the books fast.
 (3b) The books sell fast.
 (3c) He sells fast.
 (4a) He opened the store early.
 (4b) The store opened early.
 (4c) He opened early.

Even though *eat* is a fair candidate for prototype transitive status, as *walk* is for intransitive, phenomena like direct object omission, measure phrases and other adverbs, zero-derivation causatives, idiosyncratic verb constructions, and so on, all conspire to muddy the water rather thoroughly.

The fact is that transitivity is a property not of lexical items per se, but of constructions, and therefore it is not really appropriate to use it to subcategorize verbs, as D does. What seems to be a more likely candidate for category status here is the semantic nature of the predicate, as D hints above. Unfortunately, more precise semantic characterizations are lacking.

Such a phenomenon is not unknown in Austronesian. In Fijian, according to Arms (1974), much the same situation obtains with regard to intransitive use of predicates. In that language, transitivity is a morphosyntactic matter; though still a property of constructions, it is always marked overtly by one of a set of suffixes.⁷ The individual roots without these suffixes cannot appear in transitive constructions, so it is easy to distinguish transitive from intransitive constructions and verb forms reliably.

Arms estimates (p. 43) that 'a great many – probably most – true verbs have both an intransitive and a transitive form'. There are two distinct intransitive patterns,

⁷ The syntax and semantics of these suffixes and the Fijian transitive construction generally is the subject of Arms' study – the analysis of intransitives cited here is presented in Arms (1974) only as incidental material.

however: one in which the Agent is the only NP argument occurring in an intransitive use – e.g. (Arms' example numbers follow each sentence⁸):

- (5a) era ā gunuva na yaqona na tūruga ((99), p. 43)
 3-p past drink-3u c-a kava c-a chief
 'The chiefs drank the kava.'
 (5b) era ā gunu na tūruga ((98), ibid.)
 3-p past drink c-a chief
 'The chiefs drank.'

– which Arms calls *Agent-oriented*, and one in which the Patient is the sole NP, which he calls *Patient-oriented* – e.g.:

- (6a) era ā bokoca na cina na gone ((101), p. 44)
 3-p past extinguish-3u c-a lamp c-a child
 'The children put out the lamp.'
 (6b) e ā boko na cina ((100), ibid.)
 3-u past extinguish c-a lamp
 'The lamp was put/was/went out.'

This is substantially the same as the Ac phenomenon that D describes, with the exception that, since transitivity is never at issue in Fijian, it is not necessary to posit a separate morphosyntactic class in that language for Transitives.⁹ What both analysts claim is that there are two lexical verb classes for Intransitives: one class, D's 'Non-Controlled', equivalent to Arms' 'Patient-Oriented', I will henceforth label as *U* for 'Undergoer'. The other, D's 'Controlled', corresponding to Arms' 'Agent-Oriented', I will label *A* for 'Agent'.

In addition, both indicate that these categories are not entirely disjoint – certain verb roots can appear in either intransitive configuration;¹⁰ I indicate these as belonging to an ambivalent *A/U* class. Arms classifies as *A* or *U* only about 100 Fijian verb roots, but states (p. 47) that both *A* and *U* systems are strong, and that at present there is no evidence that *A* verb roots outnumber *U* in the vocabulary. Of the verbs he does classify, some, particularly the ones in the *A* system, correspond reasonably well semantically to the categories proposed by D, but others, especially the *U* system, seem to be categorized by a very different set of semantic principles from the ones given by D. Arms does not in fact propose any semantic categorization

⁸ Arms uses the following abbreviations: 3-*p* is third person plural, 3-*u* is third person unmarked, *c-a* is 'common article'. Standard Fijian orthography uses *c* for /ɔ/, *j* for /ɛ/, *g* for /ŋ/, *b* for /mb/, *d* for /nd/, *dr* for /nr/, and *q* for /ŋg/.

⁹ Note that this phenomenon does not lead to problematic agreement in Fijian as it does in Ac: the verb agreement in (5–6) is with the pronoun preceding the verb, and there is nothing 'abnormal' about it.

¹⁰ Though Arms claims (p. 46) that 'verbs of such double orientation are few'.

for the *U* set, and limits his characterization of the *A* set to a remark that 'Verbs of motion, attention, feeling, and importuning tend to be Agent-oriented, as do adjectives that have been "verbalized"' (p. 46). See table 1 for a comparison.

Table 1
Examples of *A*-type and *U*-type intransitive predicates in Acehnese (Durie (1985)) and Fijian (Arms (1974)) categorized as in the original sources.

Acehnese (Durie)	Fijian (Arms)
(a) Controlled [<i>A</i>] class	Agent-oriented [<i>A</i>] class
<i>Animate posture or motion</i>	<i>Motion, attention, feeling, and importuning</i>
beudöh 'get up (from reclining)'	davo 'lie (on)'
cruep 'lie on stomach'	mira 'fall gently (on) [dry]'
êh 'lie down (to rest)'	miri 'fall gently (on) [wet]'
<i>Bodily activity, incl. speech</i>	
batôk 'cough'	gole 'turn towards'
muntah 'vomit'	caqe 'kick'
beureusên 'sneeze'	lua 'vomit (on)'
seuôt 'answer'	regu 'kiss'
khêm 'laugh, smile'	kaka 'stammer, stutter'
hah 'open mouth'	dredre 'laugh'
klik 'cry'	cegu 'breath'
marit 'talk'	taro 'ask'
<i>Thought/mental activity</i>	rû 'curse'
ingat 'think of, remember'	golou 'shout, scream'
kira 'think'	masu 'pray to, beseech'
pham 'understand'	lotu 'pray'
agam 'guess, suppose'	kudru 'growl, complain'
waham 'imagine, think'	vuli 'study, learn'
lumpoe 'dream'	wili 'count, read'
<i>Some emotions</i>	reki 'rejoice'
chên 'love, feel sympathy for'	kila 'be shy towards'
dam 'envy, hate'	cudru 'be angry'
keumeung 'want, like'	rere 'fear'
têm 'want, like'	vuvû 'be jealous'
(b) Non-controlled [<i>U</i>] class	Patient-oriented [<i>U</i>] class (no categorization given)
Events not specifically animate	
beureutöh 'explode'	biu 'leave'
jeuet 'become'	boro 'paint'
rhêt 'fall'	cori 'tether'

Table 1 continued

Acehnese (Durie)	Fijian (Arms)
<i>States not specifically animate, quantifiers, numerals</i>	kau 'carry'
bagah 'fast'	luva 'take off (clothes)'
beukah 'broken'	sogo 'close'
göt 'good'	sova 'spill, pour out'
brök 'rotten'	tobo 'catch (animal)'
habêh 'finish, used up'	love 'bend'
hana 'not exist, not be located'	qili 'twist in hands'
lheueh 'loose'	oti 'finish, complete, end'
tuha 'old'	vivi 'wind, bind (round)'
	cibi 'coil up'
	muđu 'cut off'
<i>Many emotions</i>	lili 'hang'
beureuhi 'desire'	wiri 'turn, revolve'
êk 'like, feel inclined'	tabu 'make holy/forbidden'
ku'eh 'envy'	bulu 'bury'
<i>Enduring personal attributes</i>	caka 'do, make, work'
beuhë 'brave'	buli 'make, form, shape'
beuô 'lazy'	qaqi 'crush, grind'
caröng 'clever'	keli 'dig'
ngeut 'stupid'	tara 'touch, take hold of, build'
<i>State of alertness</i>	ubi 'cover'
dawök 'engrossed, concerned'	vuni 'hide, conceal'
<i>Pathological bodily or mental states</i>	dola 'open'
gatay 'itchy'	kopi 'clip, shear'
gli 'ticklish'	bini 'heap, pile up'
mabök 'drunk, high, seasick'	tei 'plant'
mumang 'confused'	dresu 'tear, rend'
sakët 'sick'	musu 'break crosswise'
	sere 'unloose, untie'
	rogo 'hear'

We thus have a partial match; *A*-type intransitives in both languages would seem to have some semantic reason for their syntactic subcategorization, though the situation is far from clear about the *U*-type predicates. This is a phenomenon that would obviously repay further investigation.

It is also instructive to consider just how D's categorization (and glossing) of individual predicates varies from the other major source for the language, Asyik (As) (1987), a grammar written by a native speaker of Ac. Both agree in asserting that there is a class (*A*) of verbs with proclitic Agent agreement in their intransitive use, and another (*U*) with enclitic Patient agreement in the intransitive, and that some verbs are in an ambivalent class (*A/U*). For As, this is a semantic matter; as he says:

'As a general rule, volitional verbs take proclitics and non-volitional verbs take enclitics. Being non-volitional, all adjectives take enclitics.'¹¹ (pp. 256–257)

For D, as noted above, this is officially a grammatical matter, though in fact semantic considerations are prominent throughout his analysis.

Neither D nor As devotes much attention to the exceptions. D's discussion (4.4.3, 'Subgroups of intransitive verbs') comprises pp. 62–67 and lists a total of about 120 verbs in all three classes. As, on the other hand, gives explicit lists only of predicates that are exceptions to his semantic categorization (pp. 258–62).¹² Of the 49 predicates given by As in these lists, a total of 38 are listed also by D; this is impressive evidence of thoroughness on D's part.¹³ On the other hand, of these 38, some 12 (31%) are cited with *different* subclassifications by D and As, and often with quite different glosses.¹⁴ Table 2 summarizes the differences.

These merely point out the dangers of writing grammars, however, and do not really vitiate D's analysis. It is certainly no news that reasonable people may disagree about matters of linguistic structure, and Ac has plenty to disagree about. D and As concur in the interrelatedness of the semantics and the grammatical structures of the predicates, even if they predictably vary in their descriptive approach.

¹¹ As recognizes a category of Adjective; D explicitly does not, and discusses his reasons in a special section (4.6 'Why not Adjectives?' pp. 101–103).

¹² A comparison of the semantic characterizations they offer is also interesting. D classes the *A/U* class verbs under the following heads: 'Many emotions; Thought/mental activity; State of alertness; Ability and probability; Beginning and ending; Motion; Life and death; Attitude, status, behaviour to others' (pp. 66–67). As, on the other hand, has two groupings of exceptional predicates: his table 4 (pp. 258–259) 'Non-volitional verbs that take proclitics', divided into 'Verbs of sensation' and 'Non-volitional verbs of mental activity'; and his table 5 (pp. 260–262) 'Verbs and adjectives that can be used either volitionally or non-volitionally', which are divided into 'Verbs of liking/disliking' and 'Other verbs', 'Adjectives of emotion' and 'Other adjectives'. Again, while some feeling can be gathered, this is obviously a subject that needs some further work.

¹³ These counts do not include the 17 *tu*-words, verbs formed by contraction of the root *tu* 'know' with one of the *epistemological classifiers*, as D calls them: *tupeue* 'know what', *tupat* 'know where', etc, which are exceptional in a number of ways. See table 3 below.

¹⁴ The extreme differences in the glosses cited by D and As (see table 2 below) for the words *seugan* and *jeuet*, in particular, suggest that these may be cases of homophony, rather than synonymy; one- or two-word glosses are sometimes poor guides in determining lexeme identity. However, the fact that these words are included in exception lists by both authors argues against that.

The case of *jeuet*, in particular, is troublesome, because it is a very common verb, a modal. To find a modal cited with all three possible orientations [*A*, *U*, *A/U*] and with such widely varying (though generally modal-related) senses makes one suspect that there is much more going on here than simple verb subcategorization.

Table 2

Classification of Acehnese intransitive predicates as [*A*]gent, [*U*]ndergoer, or Ambivalent [*A/U*] in Durie (1985) and Asyik (1987).

Durie			Asyik		
Form	Gloss	Class	Form	Gloss	Class
batök ^a	'cough'	[<i>A</i>]	batök ^a	'cough'	[<i>A/U</i>]
beureusën	'sneeze'	[<i>A</i>]	beureusën	'sneeze'	[<i>A/U</i>]
muntah ^b	'vomit'	[<i>A</i>]	mutah ^b	'vomit'	[<i>A/U</i>]
seudëh	'sad'	[<i>U</i>]	seudëh	'sad'	[<i>A/U</i>]
deungki	'envy'	[<i>U</i>]	deungki	'maliciously jealous'	[<i>A/U</i>]
ku'eh ^c	'envy'	[<i>U</i>]	ku'eh ^c	'cruel'	[<i>A/U</i>]
gasa	'rude'	[<i>U</i>]	gasa	'rude, rough'	[<i>A/U</i>]
mabök	'drunk, high, seasick'	[<i>U</i>]	mabök	'drunk, crazy about'	[<i>A/U</i>]
seugan	'not want to'	[<i>U</i>]	seugan	'respect'	[<i>A/U</i>]
jeuet	'become'	[<i>U</i>]	jeuet	'dare'	[<i>A</i>]
jeuet	'able'	[<i>A/U</i>]			
thee	'know how to, intuit'	[<i>A/U</i>]	thée	'realize, become aware'	[<i>A</i>]
taköt	'afraid'	[<i>A/U</i>]	taköt	'fear'	[<i>A</i>]

^a The differences in diacritics here are the result of orthographic variance between D and As. It is essentially irrelevant which conventional system is used to mark vowels, but since the point of the comparison is differences between the two analyses, I quote each form exactly as it appears, including different diacritics.

^b [Sic] D cites this form with a nasal, while As does not.

^c Apostrophe before a vowel indicates nasalization in standard Ac orthography, and both D and As adhere to this convention.

One should expect there to be semantic categorizations to appeal to, along with the more ordinary structural criteria; what, after all, is the purpose of linguistic structure, if not to explicate meaning? D's discussion of this topic, indeed his whole chapter 4 on Verbs (pp. 47–105) is extremely interesting and useful.

D's discussion of syntax in chapters 8, 'Clausal syntax', and 9, 'Syntax beyond the clause' is equally interesting; together these chapters total 94 pages and contain 566 carefully chosen example sentences, an average of 6 per page. Together with Asyik (1987), which has roughly the same density of attested examples (though concentrated solely on sentence grammar), this comprises a massive amount of useful data on the grammar of the Acehnese language, which will surely be mined by linguists for decades to come.

However, despite the considerable interest and value of the rest of the book, the most interesting chapter of this grammar is chapter 6 (pp. 151–168), on what Durie calls *Epistemological Classifiers*. This is a new name for a category linguists have long been familiar with. Every language seems to encode its conception of the basic classes

of experience in some kind of classifier system (like English *where/here/there, whence/hence/thence, what/this/that*, etc.), and Ac is no exception; but its particular instantiation of this phenomenon is exceptionally rich.

Table 3
Acehnese epistemological classifiers (after table 6-1, Durie (1985: 151)).

peue	'what, whether'	kön	'reason, antecedent'
soe	'who, which of comparison'	dum	'how many'
töh	'which'	dít	'how few'
pat	'where, whence'	ban	'how (manner)'
ho	'whither'	kri	'how (manner)'
ne	'whence, how (of degree)'	bē	'how big (size)'
jan	'when'	'oh	'how far, how long'
po	'whose (possessor)'	'et	'how short'
ri	'appearance, form'		

Ac has 17 roots (see table 3) that combine with many other forms in a variety of construction types. The constructions include interrogatives, exclamations, relatives, negatives, quantifiers, compound verbs of knowing, wondering, determining, believing, evaluating, and so on. This beautifully elaborate morphological system ensconced in the middle of the largely analytic grammar of a largely monosyllabic language is the sort of serendipitous reward linguists sometimes get for careful investigation. D provides a fascinating account of it, though one naturally wishes for many more details – a separate book could easily be written on this topic alone. But then, it's easy to want more when the original book is this good.

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