



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XLII No. 63

December 1991



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Beatrice Clayre. (1991). Focus in Lundayeh. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XLII (63): 413-434

FOCUS IN LUNDAYEH

Beatrice Clayre

The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

AF	actor focus
AN	Austronesian language
BF	benefactive focus
CA	continuous action aspect
Dem	demonstrative (non-focussed)
DemF	demonstrative (focussed)
F	focus
GF	goal focus
Gn	goal focus imperative
IF	instrument focus
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
INT	interrogative
LF	locative focus
LFI	locative focus imperative
N	any nasal stop
NM	noun marker (non-focussed)
NMF	noun marker (focussed)
PA	pretence aspect
PAN	Proto-Austronesian language
PF	perfective aspect
PT	particle
Rec	reciprocal aspect
ST	stative verb
Ø	zero morph

FOCUS IN LUNDAYEH

by

Beatrice Clayre

The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

AF	actor focus
AN	Austronesian language
BF	benefactive focus
CA	continuous action aspect
Dem	demonstrative (non-focussed)
DemF	demonstrative (focussed)
F	focus
GF	goal focus
GFI	goal focus imperative
IF	instrument focus
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
INT	interrogative
LF	locative focus
LFI	locative focus imperative
N	any nasal stop
NM	noun marker (non-focussed)
NMF	noun marker (focussed)
PA	pretence aspect
PAN	Proto-Austronesian language
PF	perfective aspect
PT	particle
Rec	reciprocal aspect
ST	stative verb
ϕ	zero morph

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe the focus system as it occurs in Lundayeh and Lun Bawang, two closely related dialects of the Apo Duat language group,¹ which is found in south-west Sabah, north Sarawak and over the border in Kalimantan. Following the description there will be a brief discussion of how Lundayeh relates to other languages of Sabah and Sarawak and a comparison with the proto-Austronesian (PAN) focus affixes.

The term focus was first introduced some thirty years ago to refer to a particular type of syntactic relationship between the verb and one nominal in the clause selected for special prominence. It is a characteristic feature of the languages of the Philippines.² Since then this relationship and the way it is manifested have aroused much linguistic interest.³ Today it is recognised that focus occurs not only in Philippine languages but also in many languages from Madagascar to Oceania and from Taiwan to Indonesia, all members of the Austronesian family of languages. One linguist has even suggested that "focus rather than subject, transitivity, or case is the organizing principle that underlies verbal predication, not only in Philippine type languages but in other Austronesian languages as well."⁴

In these languages focus is an essential part of the structure of the verbal clause and it is perhaps best illustrated by reference to one of the Philippine languages, such as Tagalog, which shows the relationship quite clearly. A typical verbal clause in Tagalog consists of a verb followed by a string of noun phrases, one of which is selected for special prominence. The verb affix indicates the participant role of the focussed noun phrase. Thus *-um-* or *mag-* signals that the focussed nominal is the actor, *-in* the goal, *-an* the benefactive or locative, and *i-* the instrument. The focussed noun phrase is always definite, and whatever its participant role it will be signalled by the focus noun marker *ang*. Non-focussed noun phrases are marked by the noun marker *ng* if they are the actor, goal, or instrument or by *sa* if they are the locative or benefactive. In examples (1)-(3) the verbal affixes *-um-*, *-an*, and *i-* signal that the actor, benefactive, and instrument respectively are in focus. In each clause the corresponding nominal in focus is marked by *ang*.

- 1 *b-um-ili ang bata ng isda sa tidahan.*⁵
AF-buy NMF child NM fish NM store
'The child bought fish in the store.'
- 2 *binigy-an ng bata ng isda ang pusa.*⁶
gave -BF NM child NM fish NMF cat
'The child gave the cat some fish.'
- 3 *i-pinutol ng bata ng isda ang kutsilyo*
IF-cut NM child NM fish NMF knife
'The child cut the fish with the knife'