CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This thesis has provided a general description of the voice system and argument-function linking patterns in Yami. Having demonstrated how existing grammatical theories fail to account for argument-function linkings in the language in a straightforward manner, we then proposed a theoretical model within an OT-oriented Lexical-Functional Grammar to account for linking in Yami in particular as well as linking in general. From the results of this study, we made some conclusions. The first conclusion is in relation to the argument-function linking patterns specific to Yami. The second conclusion is with regard to the framework proposed in this thesis. Also, our findings in Yami may have some significant implications about the typology for argument-function linking in language. Finally we discuss the limitations of this study and suggest directions of further research.

5.2 Accusative versus ergative

According to the grammatical description in Chapter 2, in Yami the argument-function linking is influenced by the special voice system. Following Chang (1997), we take this voice system to be a "subject-selecting" mechanism. There are

basically three major types of voice constructions in Yami. The argument selected by the voice marker is marked for the nominative case. Other case markers include the genitive case marker, which marks the agent role in non-AV sentences, the oblique case marker, which marks the patient role in non-PV sentences, and the locative case marker, which marks the locative role in non-LV sentences.

We have examined the functions of these case markers and made the claim that the nominative marker in Yami encodes the subject function, the genitive marker encodes the object function, and the locative case marker encodes an oblique function. Moreover, in a basic Yami transitive sentence where the verb does not have a voice marker it is the patient role that surfaces as the syntactic subject. Therefore, in Yami an AV sentence is in fact intransitive since it only requires one grammatical function, subject, while a non-AV sentence is transitive since it requires both subject and object. Among non-AV sentences, PV is the basic type of transitive sentences because the linking pattern of PV is the same as the linking pattern of sentences with no voice marking.

All these facts indicate that Yami shares the morphological and syntactic characteristics of an ergative language. Morphologically it is the transitive patient that is marked nominative, not the agent. And the nominative case is also assigned to the only argument of an intransitive sentence. This is a sign of morphological ergativity.

Syntactically, the nominative marked argument, a patient or otherwise, invariably serves the grammatical subject function. Therefore, although the voice system seems to have complicated the argument-function linking issue somewhat, Yami can still be identified, with confidence, as a syntactically and morphologically ergative language. In previous studies, Yami's ergativity has not been clearly identified. In Ho (1990) and Rau and Tung (to appear), the marker that marks patients in AV sentence is called 'oblique', which does imply that AV sentences are intransitive. However, they did not pinpoint the ergativity in Yami.

In fact, Austronesian languages with similar voice systems often pose difficulties as to whether they are accusative or ergative. Philippine languages are often said to belong to the "Philippine type" of languages, a term that has come to mean that such languages are neither ergative nor accusative. Holmer (2001) also called the Austronesian language Seediq a "split-ergative" type. He takes AV (AF in his term) sentences as accusative and PV (PF) sentence as ergative. The reason for this is that the AV sentence is also taken as transitive. Thus, it has an accusative type of linking, i.e., agent in a transitive sentence is marked the same way the only argument in an intransitive sentence is marked.

However, we claim that the patient role in AV sentences does not have the same grammatical function as the nominative or genitive argument in non-AV sentences.

This can be shown in control and other syntactic tests. Therefore, at least in Yami, AV sentences are not transitive.

The other important point we made is that we take the genitive agent as the grammatical object. Traditionally, ergative languages are considered to have an independent system in case marking and linking. If Yami can indeed be seen as an ergative language, what we call "genitive" should be more properly called "ergative" and our "nominative" called "absolutive". The subject status of absolutives are often observed (e.g., Phillips 1995), but the concept of object is seldom employed in the grammatical descriptions of ergative languages. We argued that since the genitive agent should be recognized as a non-subject term argument in a transitive sentence, the concept of object may indeed apply.

Manning (1995) proposed several types of different argument-function linking pattern. One of them is the so-called "inverse type". Given the transitive agent as A, transitive patient as O, and intransitive subject as S, the inverse type has O/S as subject and A as object. This is close to the ergative hypothesis proposed in Marantz (1984), in which he defined S and O as deep-structure subject and A as deep-structure object in syntactically ergative languages. We also apply it to Yami. Once the general concepts of subject and object are applied to Yami (and perhaps other ergative languages as well), a general argument-function linking theory is more or less within

reach.

5.3 A new OT-LMT model

Having identified the argument-function linking patterns of Yami as ergative, we then critically reviewed the argument-function linking module in several grammatical theories, including both transformational theories and lexicalist theories. They all come up short and do not apply to Yami in a straightforward manner. That is primarily due to the fact that these theories all employ the notions of thematic hierarchy and grammatical hierarchy. In transformational theories, grammatical functions are encoded as positions on the phrase structure. Argument roles are assigned to phrase structure positions according to the thematic hierarchy. Therefore, canonically an agent role is the highest role and is thus assigned to the most prominent subject position. In a lexicalist theory like LFG, grammatical functions are primitive notions and linking is between argument roles and grammatical functions. However, linking principles still assume that agent, as the most prominent role, is canonically the unmarked subject. In other words, all previous frameworks rely heavily on the thematic hierarchy for argument-function assignment.

In Yami, however, the unmarked subject (i.e., the subject in sentences with no voice marking) links with the patient role, not the agent. Therefore, previous theories are inadequate in accounting for the Yami linking problem. This of course is due to

the historical fact that most of the existing linking theories have been developed to account for linking in accusative languages, where the agent role is indeed canonically the unmarked or default subject. Yami, however, as we have argued, is an ergative language (with a special voice system). In fact, even prototypical ergative language will also present problems to these linking theories.

In light of such diversified and often contradictory linking patterns, grammatical theories must employ disjunctive measures such as parameters and perhaps even procedural rules to account for them, if not language-specific rules. Given the computational desirability of declarative rules, the Optimality Theory enjoys a slight advantage in its flexibility with typological variation. All constraints remain declarative and universal; typological variation is attributed only to the language-specific ranking of constraints.

Therefore, many grammatical theories have started to develop OT-based models. In this thesis we have adapted and modified Her's OT-LMT, an OT-based LMT. In OT-LMT, the constraints are transformed from the mapping principles and well-formedness conditions from the conventional LMT. Since the conventional LMT has also been developed out of the linking patterns in accusative languages, it is likewise inadequate in dealing with languages like Yami. Thus, a simple conversion of the existing principles and conditions to OT constraints is not enough, which sums up

nearly all previous OT attempts within LMT, including Her (2005).

For this reason we revised the constraints, taking into account not only Yami, an ergative language, but also the more common accusative languages such as Mandarin and English. We formulated the constraints in an attempt to make them more neutral and thus applicable to a wider range of data. Finally we formulate the language-specific constraint ranking to account for the specific linking patterns in each of the languages studied.

An interesting implication of this study is in relation to how event roles are represented differently psycholinguistically for different languages. More specifically, for speakers of accusative languages, the agent role, the most active participant, takes the central place and is the most prominent event participant. This is reflected in our OT account where the language-specific ranking dictates the unmarked canonical linking of the agent role to the most prominent grammatical function, subject. Speakers of ergative languages such as Yami, on the other hand, have the patient role, the most affected participant, as the most prominent event participant. This is likewise reflected in our OT account where the language-specific ranking dictates the unmarked canonical linking of the patient role to subject.

Our analysis thus implies a symmetry in languages. A language may either see the agent as the focal point or the patient as more prominent. While the accusative

languages, which most of the languages in the northern hemisphere belong to, emphasize the action, many of the indigenous languages in the southern hemisphere are ergative and view the undergoing as central. We thus have an interesting yin and yang split, the former denotes ergativity and the latter accusativity (Her, personal communication). The split of agents and patients here may fit into the model of Dowty (1991), in which the concept of proto-agent and proto-patient is introduced. Therefore the accusative type of languages can be said to be proto-agent oriented while the ergative languages are proto-patient oriented.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Due to the limit of time and resources, the data in this thesis is limited to several major sentence types in Yami. There may always be some peripheral sentence types in a language, which may have serious theoretical implications. Future studies should thus expand the database. Further constraints may be needed. For example, when dealing with the locative inversion construction, Her (2005) proposed a specific constraint. Typological variation is then attributed to a difference in ranking. Given the fact that Yami is still relatively under-studied, it should be no surprise that the current framework is inadequate to account for the argument-function linking patterns yet to be explored.

A second limitation is that we were able to test this OT framework with limited

data from only two other languages. Although we have identified the languages as accusative while Yami is ergative, these two types certainly do not exhaust all possible types in the world's languages. For example, some scholars claim that there are "split-ergative" languages. These different languages are an excellent source to test this OT-based theory.

Moreover, the variation within the Austronesian family itself is interesting. For example, Maclachlan (2002) studied three Austronesian languages: Malagasy, Chamorro and Tagalog, which all have similar voice system as Yami, and identified Malagasy as accusative, Chamorro as spilt-ergative, and Tagalog as something different, a Philippine type language. It would be interesting to see how our analysis of Yami and the account proposed can be extended to account for these different types of languages within the Austronesian family. The ultimate goal is of course to reach a UG model for argument-function linking.

5.5 Concluding remarks

This thesis focuses on a specific and special language, Yami, because it poses a problem for existing linking theories. We first identified and described informally the ergative linking properties in this language. We then proposed a framework, within an OT-oriented LFG, to account for its linking problem formally. We further compared Yami with two languages that we are more familiar with, English and Mandarin, and

demonstrated that this framework is applicable to the languages tested. However, given the vast amount of linking phenomena untested and numerous languages to be further explored, one would be naïve to make claims beyond the data covered. However, the fact that Yami is typologically distinct from the two other languages examined, English and Mandarin, does reflect the promising potential of the approach adopted in this study.

Thus, hopefully our model has achieved the status of "so far so good". Further examination of, and testing with, new data would probably show that our model still needs revision and fine tuning. However, this is precisely what a grammatical theory should pursue: to adjust itself to account for more data. This thesis therefore can be seen as an initiative attempt to this goal.