Nominalizations and Demonstratives:  
Doubt on the status of the Isbukun Bunun demonstrative -a

Recently there has been a growing attention on nominalization in Formosan languages (e.g. Zeitoun 2002; Zeitoun and Huang 2006; Yap et al. 2011). However, Bunun, a language with five distinct dialects across a wide geographical distribution, was not touched upon in the aforementioned studies. Thus, this study presents a preliminary investigation on nominalization in Isbukun Bunun, specifically on grammatical argument nominalization (ArgNmlz; better known as “headless relative clauses”).

The data is mostly drawn from traditional myths collected in the 30’s by Ogawa and Asai (1935) and my personal fieldwork in 2010. Not surprisingly, the Focus/voice morphology is all it takes minimally to derive ArgNmlz from a predicate, as is the case in most other Formosan languages. Moreover, in O & A’s texts the additional definite pronoun sia is found to frequently co-occur with ArgNmlz (1). However, this “sia ArgNmlz” construction is disfavored by my consultant, who prefers using a suffixal demonstrative in place of the prenominal sia (cf. 2 and 3). Previous studies (Ho et al. 1986:55; Lin 1997:16; Zeitoun 2000:76) unanimously agree that the suffixal demonstrative paradigm splits into nominative and oblique, with each case consisting of three members, which vary in terms of distance and/or visibility (4). However, it is argued that the so-called nominative distal demonstrative /a/ is in fact not in the same paradigm as its two other nominative counterparts, that it is an enclitic rather than a suffix, and that its function is to introduce ArgNmlz regardless of the case marking involved, which is akin to the function of sia in O & A’s texts (5). Lin (1997:9) first pointed out the nominalizing function of /a/, but held that it is a dedicated nominalizer. I refine his position by arguing /a/ per se does not mark ArgNmlz and that it is the whole construction that is nominalized. In addition to determiner-like sia and /a/, another additional strategy is to introduce ArgNmlz with maza. It is speculated that maza is the coalescence of the interrogative maz ‘what’ and the nominative marker /a/. If this is the case, Isbukun would then employ a nominalizing strategy quite analogous to English what-ArgNmlz. But unlike English what-ArgNmlz, Isbukun maza-ArgNmlz has generalized to denote human entities despite the fact that maz only asks for non-human entities.

Data
(1) habas-ang hai, sia min<uni> kukuav hai, itu ailtangusan tu uvaaz
          before-DUR TOP <ANT>become eagle   TOP POSS ex-wife   ADN child
‘In the past, what became the eagle was the child of an ex-wife.’ (Pingaz tu uvaaz mini’uni kukuav, Ogawa & Asai 1935)
(2) nii as mataiklas asa mapatala i kuisnah,
   NEG NOM AV.smart want AV.catch.with.hands because stink
   aupa sia mataula mapatala
   then DEF AV.stupid AV.catch.with.hands
   ‘The smart one didn’t want to catch (it) with (his) hands because it stank; and yet the stupid one caught (it) with (his) hands.’ (Kan’a’asang vali, Ogawa & Asai 1935)
(3) nii a mataiklas-a asa maku-ima antala,
   NEG NOM AV.smart-DEM want use-hand catch.with.hands
   kaupa mas mataula-cia maku-ima antala
   only OBL AV.stupid-DEM.OBL use-hand catch.with.hands
   ‘The smart one didn’t want to catch (it) using (his) hands; only the stupid one caught (it) using (his) hands.’ (ISB-H100617-014)
(4) kalat a ’asu-in/-an/-a mas ngaung-cin/-tan/-cia
   AV.bite NOM dog-DEM.NOM OBL cat-DEM.OBL
   ‘This/that dog bit this/that cat.’ (Lin 1997: 16)
(5) a. [sa<i>-da-daza takna sia lukis]=a hai, laniahu
   climb<ANT>-RED yesterday LOC tree=DEF TOP Laniahu
   ‘(The one who) climbed a tree yesterday is Laniahu.’ (ISB-H100617-026)
   * b. [sa<i>-da-daza takna sia lukis-in/-an] hai, laniahu
   climb<ANT>-RED yesterday LOC tree-DEM.NOM TOP Laniahu
   Intended: ‘(The one who) climbed this/that tree yesterday is Laniahu.’
   (ISB-H100617-027.28)

References