

Why is omni-argumentivity so much harder than omni-predicativity?

Daniel Kaufman

Queens College, City University of New York

Omni-predicative languages, in which phrases of any category can serve as a sentential predicate without the mediation of a copula, are widespread, having been documented amply in the Austronesian family and throughout the world. However, the flipside of this flexibility, the ability for phrases of any category to serve as arguments, i.e. "omni-argumentivity", has not been examined in the same detail.

The picture that emerges among Austronesian languages is that omni-argumentivity depends largely on the existence of obligatory case marking determiners, as commonly found in the Philippine languages, and is thus significantly more restricted than omni-predicativity. Why should this be so? Generative syntax seems to offer little help here, as null determiners and relativizers have been posited with equal support and enthusiasm as null copulas, predicting an even distribution of the two phenomena. I argue on the basis of a detailed examination of several Austronesian languages as well as the overall typological landscape that quantifiability is the key feature required of arguments and that this requirement is far stronger than the grounding of predicates in a temporal domain. While the latter is a strong and persistent force in Indo-European languages, it appears negligible for the vast majority of Austronesian languages. An incidental yet important result of this study is that overtness matters, which in turn poses deeper questions for long-standing analytical traditions that employ null determiners and type-shifters on par with their overt counterparts.