Reconstructing Proto-Austronesian Interrogative Pronouns

Blust (2009/2013) very astutely notices that interrogative pronouns for 'who' are morphologically complex in a great number of Formosan and Philippine languages. Specifically, this involves attachment of a reflex of the personal nominative case marker *si to a base *ma*. Note that this base is also found in the forms for 'what'.

(1)

	WHO	WHAT
Thao	ti-ma	nu-ma
Bunun	si-ma	ma-az
Amis	ci-ma	ma-an
Paiwan	ti-ma	nu-ma
Truku	i-ma	ma-nu

However, he does not reconstruct *sima 'who' to Proto-Austronesian. He opts instead for the form *ima and proposes that the forms in (1) are the result of an innovation which added *si to the original *ima: *si-ima > *sima.

Blust is certainly correct is reconstructing interrogative pronouns with incorporated case markers or determiners, but the exact forms he chooses introduce problems when it comes to accounting for synchronic variation. First, both *ima and *sima are reflected only in Nuclear Austronesian (NucAn; Ross 2009) languages and not in the more conservative languages Rukai, Tsou, and Puyuma.

(2)

	WHO	WHAT
Tanan Rukai	a-nu	ma-nu
Tsou	si-a	cu-ma
Nanwang Puyuma	manay	manay

Puyuma is particularly revealing, since 'who' and 'what' are distinguished only by their case marking, adding the personal nominative yields *i manay* 'who' and adding the common noun nominative produces *a manay* 'what', when the pronouns functions as a subject. If the pronoun surfaces in object position, then it is preceded by an object case marker. Tsou also presents an interesting case. The *si-* in the form for 'who' is one of several nominative case markers, which each encode the referent's visibility and distance from the speaker. This *si-* is probably cognate with the personal nominative marker *si* in NucAn languages, but in Tsou it still retains more functions of the demonstrative it grammaticalized from and is not related to person marking. In contrast to this, the Rukai form for 'what' clearly shows object marking, object pronominal forms being prefixed with a syllable beginning with a nasal consonant, e.g. *mo-so-a* 'ACC-you-ACC'. Assuming that the *a-* in the Rukai form for 'who' is also a determiner cognate with the Puyuma common noun nominative marker, it can be seen that all of the forms in (2) for 'who' are marked with a determiner, typically marking nominative case, while the forms for 'what' are generally marked like objects. From this, it can be concluded that PAn interrogative pronouns can be reconstructed as having incorporated subject and object case marking.

I reconstruct the Rukai forms to PAn: *a-nu 'who' and *ma-nu 'what'. These are in turn formed from the attachment of the determiner *a to 'who' and the object marker *ma- to the base *nu, which can be reconstructed as an indefinite pronoun. This makes it possible to construct a paradigm of interrogative pronouns including two additional forms: *i-nu 'where' < LOC *i + INDEF *nu; and *na-nu 'which'. From these, the paradigms in both (1) and (2) can be derived. Tsou innovated new forms by adding its own case markers to the PAn forms and then deleting the final syllable: *si-anu > *sia*, *cu-manu > *cuma*, assuming that *cu-* reflects an archaic object case marker in Tsou. Truncation of the form for 'what' led to the reanalysis of *ma* as the indefinite pronoun found in all of the forms in (1). In Puyuma, 'who' and 'what' merged in favor of 'what'. Truncation did not take place in this language, since there was no morphological incorporation of case marking. The 'what' form in Truku directly reflects PAn *manu. Regarding *i-ma* 'who', this can be explained in terms of the same rule as the other NucAn forms, i.e. *i* is the nominative marker for personal names in this language, as it is in Puyuma. The other languages reflect the truncated form of 'what', which combines with a case marker, nominative personal marking for 'who' and object common noun marking for 'what'. On this analysis, the forms of interrogative pronouns in Formosan languages are explained straightforwardly in terms of a general process of attaching a determiner/case marker to an indefinite pronoun.

References

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