Discourse Configurationality in Palauan: Against a clause-nominalization analysis of the topic construction

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Topicalizations in Palauan have been analyzed as base-generated A-bar dependencies in which a DP in an A-bar position (marked with the morpheme a) binds a resumptive pronoun in an A position (Georgopoulos 1991). Examples are given in (1), with a simply glossed as “A” and referred to as “topic-a.” Research on Palauan has treated topic-a as a a variant of the Palauan determiner a. On such an analysis, topic-a forms a DP constituent with its complement, forming something like a free relative, as in (2).

(1) a. [A usbech-er a dengki ]i a di meleketek proi.
[DET usage-our PREP DET electricity ] A just increase
“Our consumption of electricity is increasing.”
[Tia Belau, 12 October 2009]

b. [A blai ]i a lesilsebi proi a secheli-k.
[DET house ] A burned.down DET friend-my
“My friend burned down the house.”
[Georgopoulos 1991: 72, ex. 24c]

(2) Clause-nominalization analysis: (3) Topic phrase analysis:

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                     TP
                      /\
                     T'   DP
                      /   /\
                     T   D   TP

  a      ...       a      ...
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I do not contest Georgopoulos’s variable-binding analysis; instead, I propose a new structural analysis based on new data (following speculation in DeWolf 1988) in (3), in which topic-a is a topic marker and introduces the topicalized DP in its specifier position. Consequently, topic-a is not the same morpheme as the (homophonized) determiner a, and it does not form a DP constituent with its complement. This new analysis explains two empirical phenomena that prove problematic for the clause-nominalization analysis in (2), one involving complementary distribution of determiners and demonstrative pronouns and another involving the obligatoriness vs. optionality of plural morphology.

On the analysis in (2), topic-a should have the usual distribution of determiners; a should merge only with complements that can form DPs. Ordinarily, the determiner a cannot precede pronouns or demonstrative morphemes (see (4a)), which have themselves been analyzed as subclasses of D (see Postal 1966; cf. Abney 1987). However, a must precede demonstrative DPs that appear in predicate position whenever a topicalized DP appears to their left: in (4b–c), a precedes DPs headed by demonstratives. The ability of topic-a to co-occur with demonstrative DPs (unlike determiner a) suggests that topic-a itself is not a D; this is a point in favor of the analysis in (3).
(4) a. (*A) **Tirke** el chad a mla olenges eu er (*a) **se** el bilis.

(*DET) those LNK people A AUX help ACC (*DET) that LNK dog.

"Those people have helped that dog."

b. A reta er ngak a [**tirke** el chad el orrenges a teki-ngel.] DET ones PREP me A [those LNK people LNK hear DET words-his]

"My brothers are those who hear the his words." [Chedaol Biblia, Luke 8:21]

c. Se el ungil el teletelel a [se el mosaod a klemerang pro] that LNK good LNK Way A [that LNK explain DET truth you]

"My brothers are those who hear the his words." [Chedaol Biblia, Luke 8:21]

In Palauan, referential human plural nouns are **obligatorily** marked with the prefix re- (Josephs 1975). However, predicate nominals are **optionally** marked with re-, depending on whether the predicate nominal is referential (i.e., in specificational copular sentences) or non-referential (i.e., in predicational copular sentences; see Mikkelsen 2005 for more on the distinction). The contrast is shown in the translations of (5). Nominalized clauses (forming free relatives) are obligatorily referential and bear plural marking whenever their referents are human plurals; see (6). On an analysis like (2), topic-a is the head of a DP containing a nominalized clause, and such DPs that refer to human plurals should have obligatory plural marking as in (6), contrary to fact. In (7), re- is again optional, suggesting that what follows topic-a need not be a nominalized clause (as in (6)), but instead seems to be an ordinary predicate, as in (5). The alternative analysis in (3) has a natural explanation: the clause following topic-a need not be nominalized.

(5) [A re-chad er a osbitar ] a (re-)chad el smecher.

[DET PL-people PREP DET hospital ] A (PL-)people LNK Sick

Without re-: "The hospital patients are sick people."

With re-: "The hospital patients the people who are sick." PREDICATIONAL

(6) [A re-mo/(*mo) Er a osbitar ] a smecher.

[DET PL-go/(*go) PREP DET hospital ] A sick

Without re-: Ungrammatical if referent is plural.

With re-: "The (ones who) are going to the hospital are sick." SPECIFICATIONAL

(7) [A re-ngalek ] a (re-)*mo er a osbitar.

[DET PL-children ] A (PL-)go PREP DET hospital

Without re-: "The children are going to the hospital."

With re-: "The children are the (ones who) are going to the hospital." PREDICATIONAL SPECIFICATIONAL

Word count: 749

**Selected References:**


