Antipassive Clause Constructions in Yukulta

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Yukulta (non-Pama-Nyungan) makes a formal contrast between transitive and intransitive clause constructions. However, particular conditions constrain the actual contexts in which a true transitive clause can be formed. Intransitive clauses are thus relativity unmarked, while transitive clauses are marked. Two salient conditions that licence transitive constructions are listed in (1):

(1)

a. The tense and mood of the clause is either present realis or non-present realis or irrealis.
b. The clause does not violate the pronominal feature hierarchy (McConvell 1976).

A transitive clause can only be realised if both these conditions are met. If a clause cannot be realised as transitive but has a logical subject and object, an intransitive antipassive construction is used. The features of this construction are as follows: the logical subject occurs in absolutive case, the logical object occurs in dative case and the auxiliary complex exhibits intransitive tense and mood forms as well as distinct nominative proclitic pronouns. These features contrast with those of the transitive construction in which the subject occurs in ergative case, the object in absolutive case and the auxiliary complex contains transitive forms of tense and mood morphemes as well as distinct ergative subject and accusative direct object proclitics. This contrast is illustrated in (2) by a sentence pair adapted from Keen (1983):

(2)

a. palmpi-ya=nga-l-awa-yin-ingk-i wuu-tya
tomorrow-ABS=1-pl-DAT-2sgNOM-nPRES-IR give-IND
Tomorrow you will give it to us. (Keen's number 153a)

b. palmpi-ya=nk-i-ka-nt-i wuu-tya
tomorrow-ABS=1sgACC-2sgERG-TR-nPRES-IR give-IND
Tomorrow you will give it to me. (Keen's number 153b)

The relationship between transitive and antipassive clauses has previously been viewed as a detransitivising process or transformation (Keen 1983: 234). However, it is more helpful to view the antipassive construction not as syntactically derived from a corresponding transitive construction, but as a default construction that can occur when the transitive is blocked. These constraints on transitivity explain why in Yukulta the antipassive construction is always in complementary distribution with the transitive.

References

Keen, Sandra. 1983. Yukulta. In R.W.M Dixon & B.J. Blake (eds) *Handbook of Australian Languages,* Vol 3, 190-304. Canberra: ANU Press

McConvell, Patrick. 1976. Nominal Hierarchies in Yukulta. In R.M.W. Dixon (ed) *Grammatical Categories in Australian Languages*. Canberra: AIAS, 191-200