Exclusive predicatehood of weak quantifiers in Formosan languages

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Abstract

Following Chang (2023), this paper deals with the syntax/semantics of weak quantifiers (i.e. noun phrases headed by cardinal numerals, adjectival quantifiers, negative quantifiers, or interrogative quantifiers) in Formosan languages. It is observed that (i) weak quantifiers typically occur exclusively as the predicate of a subject/topic; (ii) in contrast, strong quantifiers (i.e. noun phrases led by demonstratives, universal quantifiers, proportional quantifiers) are not subject to the restriction; (iii) the exclusive predicatehood of weak quantifiers is a typological feature of Formosan languages. Meanwhile, it is argued what looks like a modifier turns out to be a subordinate predicate. This basically aligns Formosan languages with Turkish and Nepali as a language with Existence Schema (cf. Zeitoun et al. 1999; Bril 2020), as opposed to the Action Schema language like English and Chinese (cf. Heine 1997; Stassen 2009). Miner deviations from this typological feature are only attested in Saisiyat and Puyuma (cf. Teng 2014). In addition to the traditional applications of the strong-weak distinction (e.g., Definiteness Effect in existentials, noun incorporation), this study adds one more testimony to its applications on the one hand and elevates it to a new height of typological significance (cf. Milsark 1977; Safir 1982; Keenan 1987; Diesing 1992; McNally 1997, 1998, 2020).

Keywords: weak quantifiers, strong quantifiers, predicate, modifier, existence schema, typology, Formosan languages.

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