Internally Headed Relative Clauses in Austronesian Languages

A fact little noticed in the generative literature on Austronesian languages is the existence of internally headed relative clauses in many of these languages. (1) shows an example from the Formosan language Seediq and (2) from the Philippine language Tagalog. In both cases, the head NP appears inside the clause, immediately following the verb.

(1) s-n-malu sapah na tama
-Perf-build house Erg father
“the house Father built”

(2) b-in-ili-ng libro ni Maria
-Perf-buy-Lk book Erg Maria
“The book Maria bought”

One reason the existence of internally headed relative clauses in languages such as Seediq and Tagalog should be of interest to linguists is that they present a clear counterexample to the assertion of Cole (1987) that IHRCs are found only in verb-final languages. Seediq and Tagalog are both verb-initial, as shown in the Tagalog example in (3).

(3) B-in-ili ni Maria ang libro.
-Perf-buy Erg Maria Abs book
“Maria bought the book.”

Seediq and Tagalog internally headed relative clauses also cannot be accommodated by the analysis of Williamson (1987), who argues that heads of IHRCs tend to be indefinite. The translations for examples (1) and (2) show that definite IHRCs are perfectly acceptable in Seediq and Tagalog.

This paper rather takes an approach more similar to Basilico (1996) and others who propose that IHRCs are quantificational. Contrary to Basilico, however, I propose that there is a clause-internal A’ position which the head moves to in order to establish the operator/variable relationship responsible for the interpretation in the relative clause. I call this position “FocP” because it is typically associated with focus.

(4) \[
[TP \quad s-n-malu \quad [FocP \quad \text{sapah}_i \quad [vP \quad na \quad tama \quad t_i \quad ]]]
-Perf-build house Erg father
“the house Father built”
\]

Support for the existence of a clause-internal focus position comes from placement of wh-words in Seediq in immediate post-verbal position, as in (5). It is clear that the wh-word has been dislocated in (5), as the base position for locatives is to the right of patients, as shown in (6).

(5) M-n-ari inu patis ka Ape?
-Perf-buy where book Abs Ape
“Where did Ape buy books?”
(6) M-n-ari patis Taihoku ka Ape.
-Perf-buy book Taipei Abs Ape
“Ape bought books in Taipei.”

Interestingly, Basilico also notes that short clause-internal movement of the head NP is frequently observed in IHRCs in other languages. The head xat (“dog”) in the Yuman example below has been moved from its base position adjacent to the verb to a position outside VP but to the right of the subject.

(8) John xat\textsubscript{t} su:r \textsubscript{t} pa:cu:s-p-t\textsuperscript{y} u:n\textsuperscript{y}iL\textsuperscript{y}cis
John dog rock hit\textsubscript{-DEM-SUBJ} black\textsubscript{EMPH}
“The dog John hit with the rock was black.”

This paper explores the possibility that internally headed relative clauses are formed on short A’-movement within the embedded clause. Central to this investigation is the more general discussion of short wh-movement and focus movement in these languages. This paper additionally examines differences in basic word order and clause structure in these languages. Verb-initial Tagalog and Seediq have IHRCs but Indonesian, an SVO Austronesian language, does not. This paper considers the possibility that the existence of IHRCs in an Austronesian language is related to basic word order generation, i.e. whether raising all or part of the predicate to a high position is related to the existence of a post-verbal focus position in these languages. The aim of this paper, therefore, is not only to contribute to the continuing debate on the structure and interpretation of IHRCs but also to clarify the issue of clause-internal A’-movement and also shed light on certain characteristics of word order and clause structure in Austronesian languages.

Partial References

Basilico, David (1996) “Head Position and Internally Headed Relative Clauses”, Language 73, 3