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AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY

TOKELAUAN SYNTAX

STUDIES IN THE SENTENCE STRUCTURE OF
A POLYNESIAN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

A fairly comprehensive treatment of the main features of Tokelauan sentence structure is the central aim. The syntactic analysis is presented within a framework which is an adaptation of Chomsky's 'Standard Theory' but special consideration is given to the problem of squaring a grammar based on formal evidence with a functionally-based analysis of sentences.

The principal modification to the Standard Theory is the readoption of kernel sentences and generalised transformations, i.e. a partial reversion to the transformational model proposed in Chomsky's Syntactic Structures. Thus, the output of the base rules is a set of simple sentence structures, with no embeddings.

The treatment of other aspects of Tokelauan included in this analysis are described below in a brief synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter 1 is introductory, serving to locate the language, place and the people of Tokelau. Previous discussions of the position of Tokelauan within the Polynesian group are reviewed, and a basic vocabulary list is provided together with Cognate percentages shared

by Tokelauan of Samoan, Nanumean Ellice and Sikaiana. The aims and scope of this analysis are then discussed in the context of a brief survey of earlier syntactic studies of Polynesian languages, and of the various grammatical models applied to Polynesian or developed in recent theoretical work on syntax and semantics.

Chapters 2 and 3 are essentially referential, presenting lists of all the grammatical elements and rules to be discussed in later chapters. Chapter 2 has two parts. In Part 1 the segmental phonemes of Tokelauan are described, along with the practical problems associated with the choice of orthographic symbols. In Part 2 the functor (grammatical) morphemes of Tokelauan are listed and their uses exemplified. Chapter 3 lists the categorial rules of the base component and some transformational rules.

Chapters 4-6 discuss evidence for and against the formal analysis outlined in 3. Chapter 4 treats the major categorial (phrase structure) rules, stating the procedures used to determine immediate constituents, and defending potentially controversial parts of the analysis against alternatives. Formal and functional analyses are made independently, then compared.

In Chapter 5, certain transformational rules of Tokelauan are examined with illustrative examples.

The final chapter is in two distinct but related parts. First the grounds on which Hohepa based his ergative-accusative classification of Polynesian languages are summarised, and reviewed in relation to the evidence of Tokelauan. One result is a rejection of the concepts of direct object (and so, of transitivity) and of an active-passive transformation as significant grammatical relations in Tokelauan. The later sections examine certain functional relations associated with the constituent analysis of sentences particularly the functions of case markers. This exercise provides a framework for verb classification in Tokelauan.

CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	iii
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	viii
<u>CONTENTS</u>	xi
<u>CHAPTER 1</u>	
<u>ORIENTATION</u>	1
<u>1.1</u>	1
<u>THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE</u>	
<u>1.2</u>	5
<u>THE TOKELAUAN LANGUAGE</u>	
<u>1.2.1</u>	
<u>THE POSITION OF TOKELAUAN WITHIN</u>	
<u>THE POLYNESIAN GROUP</u>	5
<u>1.2.2</u>	17
<u>PREVIOUS STUDIES OF TOKELAUAN</u>	
<u>1.3</u>	19
<u>MODELS OF ANALYSIS</u>	
<u>1.4</u>	
<u>PREVIOUS SYNTACTIC WORK ON POLYNESIAN</u>	
<u>LANGUAGES</u>	25
<u>1.5</u>	27
<u>AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS ANALYSIS</u>	
<u>1.6</u>	32
<u>ABSTRACT</u>	
<u>CHAPTER 2</u>	
<u>THE PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL</u>	
<u>ELEMENTS OF THE LANGUAGE OF TOKELAUAN</u>	34
<u>2.0</u>	35
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	
<u>2.1</u>	
<u>AN ORTHOGRAPHY FOR THE LANGUAGE OF</u>	
<u>THE TOKELAU ISLANDS</u>	36
<u>2.1.0</u>	36
<u>A PHONEMIC ORTHOGRAPHY</u>	
<u>2.1.1</u>	37
<u>THE PHONEMES OF TOKELAUAN</u>	
<u>2.1.2</u>	39
<u>TOKELAUAN ORTHOGRAPHY</u>	
<u>2.1.3</u>	39
<u>THE FRICATIVES /h/ AND /f/</u>	
<u>2.1.3.1</u>	39
<u>FRICATIVE /f/</u>	
<u>2.1.3.2</u>	41
<u>FRICATIVE /h/</u>	
<u>2.1.3.3</u>	41
<u>PHONEMIC CONTRAST /h/ AND /f/</u>	

		<u>PAGE</u>
<u>2.1.4</u>	<u>CHOICE OF SYMBOLS 'f' AND 'h'</u>	42
<u>2.1.4.1</u>	<u>SYMBOL 'h'</u>	42
<u>2.1.4.2</u>	<u>SYMBOL 'f'</u>	43
<u>2.1.5</u>	<u>THE VELAR NASAL /g/</u>	44
<u>2.2</u>	<u>THE FUNCTOR MORPHEMES OF THE LANGUAGE OF TOKELAU</u>	45
<u>2.2.1</u>	<u>INDEX OF FUNCTOR MORPHEMES</u>	45
<u>2.2.2</u>	<u>ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES AND DISCUSSION OF FUNCTORS</u>	50
<u>2.2.2.1</u>	<u>CONJUNCTIONS</u>	51
<u>2.2.2.2</u>	<u>TENSE/ASPECT MARKERS</u>	62
<u>2.2.2.3</u>	<u>NEGATIVES</u>	68
<u>2.2.2.4</u>	<u>PREPOSITIONS</u>	71
<u>2.2.2.5</u>	<u>ARTICLES</u>	80
<u>2.2.2.6</u>	<u>PREVERBAL PARTICLES</u>	87
<u>2.2.2.7</u>	<u>PREBASIC PARTICLES</u>	89
<u>2.2.2.8</u>	<u>PREFIXES</u>	90
<u>2.2.2.9</u>	<u>SUFFIXES</u>	94
<u>2.2.2.10</u>	<u>DIRECTION PARTICLES</u>	96
<u>2.2.2.11</u>	<u>MANNER PARTICLES</u>	98
<u>2.2.2.12</u>	<u>POSITION MARKERS</u>	99
<u>2.2.2.13</u>	<u>INTENSIFIERS</u>	102
<u>2.2.2.14</u>	<u>ANAPHORIC PARTICLES</u>	103
<u>2.2.2.15</u>	<u>EMPHATIC PARTICLES</u>	105
<u>2.2.2.16</u>	<u>THE PRONOUNS OF TOKELAUAN</u>	107
<u>CHAPTER 3</u>	<u>A LIST OF THE RULES OF THE SYNTACTIC COMPONENT OF THE TOKELAUAN LANGUAGE</u>	125
<u>3.1</u>	<u>LIST OF SYMBOLS</u>	125

	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>3.2</u>	<u>PHRASE STRUCTURE RULES OF THE BASE COMPONENT</u> 130
<u>3.3</u>	<u>THE TRANSFORMATIONAL RULES</u> 137
<u>CHAPTER 4</u>	<u>SIMPLE SENTENCES : EVIDENCE FOR THE BASIC CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE</u> 144
<u>4.0</u>	<u>INTRODUCTION</u> 145
<u>4.1</u>	<u>A CONSTITUENT ANALYSIS OF SOME TOKELAUAN SIMPLE SENTENCES</u> 151
<u>4.1.1</u>	<u>SIMPLE SENTENCES IN TOKELAUAN</u> 152
<u>4.1.2</u>	<u>DISPENSIBILITY : OPTIONAL DELETION OF PARTS OF THE SENTENCE</u> 153
<u>4.1.3</u>	<u>PERMUTATION OF POSSIBLE CONSTITUENTS OF S</u> 154
<u>4.1.3.1</u>	<u>FREE PERMUTATIONS</u> 154
<u>4.1.3.2</u>	<u>CONDITIONED PERMUTATIONS</u> 158
<u>4.1.3.3</u>	<u>A SINGLE CONSTITUENT FOR CASE</u> 162
<u>4.1.4</u>	<u>A PRELIMINARY SET OF RULES FOR VERBAL SENTENCES</u> 163
<u>4.1.5</u>	<u>A CONSTITUENT ANALYSIS OF SOME VERBLESS SENTENCES</u> 166
<u>4.1.6</u>	<u>CO-ORDINATION OF PROPOSED RULES WITH MODIFICATIONS</u> 170
<u>4.1.7</u>	<u>A MODALITY CONSTITUENT</u> 173
<u>4.1.8</u>	<u>THE CONSTITUENT STATUS OF CASE COMPLEMENT</u> 175
<u>4.1.8.1</u>	<u>'TIME LOCATIVE' SEQUENCES</u> 175
<u>4.1.8.2</u>	<u>HYPOTHESES</u> 176
<u>4.1.8.3</u>	<u>i NP LOCATIVES IN OTHER POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES</u> 177

		<u>PAGE</u>
<u>4.1.8.4</u>	<u>HYPOTHESIS A</u>	180
<u>4.1.8.5</u>	<u>HYPOTHESIS B</u>	183
<u>4.1.8.6</u>	<u>HYPOTHESIS C</u>	183
<u>4.1.9</u>	<u>RULE REVISIONS</u>	185
<u>4.2</u>	<u>A DISCUSSION OF CERTAIN FUNCTIONAL NOTIONS OF LANGUAGE</u>	187
<u>4.2.1</u>	<u>A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF SENTENCE</u>	189
<u>4.2.2</u>	<u>A DEFINITION OF SUBJECT</u>	195
<u>4.3</u>	<u>NP + NP - TYPE VERBLESS SENTENCES</u>	202
<u>4.3.1</u>	<u>FORMAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS</u>	202
<u>4.3.2</u>	<u>PHRASE STRUCTURE RULES FOR EQUATIONAL SENTENCES</u>	207
<u>4.3.3</u>	<u>PHRASE STRUCTURE RULES FOR SENTENCE</u>	213
<u>4.4</u>	<u>THE CONSTITUENTS OF NOUN PHRASE AND VERBAL ARGUMENT</u>	214
<u>4.4.1</u>	<u>TWO TYPES OF NOMINAL PHRASE</u>	214
<u>4.4.2</u>	<u>THE CONSTITUENTS OF NOMINAL</u>	223
<u>4.4.3</u>	<u>THE CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE OF VERBAL ARGUMENT</u>	224
<u>4.5</u>	<u>SUBJECT MARKING IN TOKELAUAN SIMPLE SENTENCES</u>	228
<u>4.6</u>	<u>i NP SEQUENCES OF LOCATIVE ARGUMENT AND DESCRIPTIVE CASE</u>	234
<u>4.7</u>	<u>CONJUNCTION IN GRAMMAR</u>	239
<u>CHAPTER 5</u>	<u>TRANSFORMATION RULES OF TOKELAUAN</u>	243
<u>5.0</u>	<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	244

		<u>PAGE</u>
<u>5.1</u>	<u>PERMUTATION RULES</u>	246
<u>5.1.1</u>	<u>SUBJECT SHIFT</u>	246
<u>5.1.2</u>	<u>CASE SCRAMBLING</u>	247
<u>5.1.3</u>	<u>PRONOUN EMBEDDING</u>	249
<u>5.2</u>	<u>FOCUS RULES</u>	250
<u>5.2.1</u>	<u>SUBJECT FOCUS</u>	251
<u>5.2.2</u>	<u>DESCRIPTIVE CASE FOCUS</u>	253
<u>5.2.3</u>	<u>DIRECTION CASE FOCUS</u>	254
<u>5.2.4</u>	<u>ORIGIN CASE FOCUS</u>	255
<u>5.2.5</u>	<u>AGENTIVE CASE FOCUS</u>	256
<u>5.2.6</u>	<u>EXPLANATORY CASE FOCUS</u>	257
<u>5.2.7</u>	<u>LOCATIVE ARGUMENT FOCUS</u>	264
<u>5.2.8</u>	<u>GENITIVE ARGUMENT FOCUS</u>	265
<u>5.3</u>	<u>VERBAL SENTENCE NOMINALISATION</u>	266
<u>5.4</u>	<u>SENTENCE EMBEDDING</u>	269
<u>5.4.1</u>	<u>FOCUSED SENTENCE EMBEDDING</u>	269
<u>5.4.2</u>	<u>NOMINALISED SENTENCE EMBEDDING</u>	272
<u>5.4.3</u>	<u>AMBIGUITY FROM EMBEDDING OF NOMINALISED VERBAL SENTENCES</u>	274
<u>5.5</u>	<u>RELATIVE CLAUSE REDUCTION</u>	279
<u>5.6</u>	<u>POSSESSIVE PRONOUN PREPOSING</u>	284
<u>5.7</u>	<u>INTERROGATIVE SUBJECT DELETION</u>	285
<u>5.8</u>	<u>INTERROGATIVE HEAD SUBSTITUTION</u>	287
<u>5.9</u>	<u>IMPERATIVE SUBJECT DELETION</u>	288
<u>5.10</u>	<u>LOCATIVE ARGUMENT TRANSFORMATIONS</u>	288
<u>5.11</u>	<u>ACTUALISATION OF NEGATIVES</u>	295
<u>CHAPTER 6</u>	<u>THE ERGATIVE-ACCUSATIVE DIVISION IN THE LANGUAGES OF POLYNESIA: ACTIVE, PASSIVE AND VERB CLASSIFICATION IN TOKELAUAN</u>	301

		<u>PAGE</u>
<u>6.0</u>	<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	302
<u>6.1</u>	<u>SOME ERGATIVE-ACCUSATIVE CLASSIFICATIONS</u>	305
<u>6.1.1</u>	<u>HALE (1968a), (1968b)</u>	305
<u>6.1.2</u>	<u>HOHEPA (1969)</u>	305
<u>6.1.3</u>	<u>LYNCH (1972)</u>	308
<u>6.1.4</u>	<u>SUMMARY AND ORIENTATION</u>	310
<u>6.2</u>	<u>ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENTENCES IN TOKELAUAN</u>	311
<u>6.2.1</u>	<u>THE PASSIVE VOICE IN TOKELAUAN</u>	311
<u>6.2.2</u>	<u>THE ACTIVE VOICE IN TOKELAUAN</u>	314
<u>6.2.3</u>	<u>PRONOUN EMBEDDING AND VERB SUFFIXATION</u>	317
<u>6.2.4</u>	<u>SOME RELICS OF PASSIVE SUFFIXATION</u>	319
<u>6.2.5</u>	<u>REINTERPRETATION OF PASSIVE SENTENCES AS ACTIVE SENTENCES</u>	323
<u>6.2.6</u>	<u>SUMMARY</u>	325
<u>6.2.7</u>	<u>REJECTING TRANSITIVITY AND THE PASSIVE TRANSFORMATION</u>	326
<u>6.3</u>	<u>A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CASE- CATEGORIES AND VERB CLASSIFICATION IN TOKELAUAN</u>	
<u>6.3.1</u>	<u>STATIVE VERBS AND CASE</u>	330
<u>6.3.2</u>	<u>ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VERBS</u>	336
<u>6.3.3</u>	<u>A DEFINITION OF STATIVES</u>	337
<u>6.3.4</u>	<u>VERB CLASSES IN TOKELAUAN: A FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION</u>	341
<u>6.3.5</u>	<u>THE MEANINGS AND SELECTIONAL RESTRICTIONS OF CASE-MARKERS</u>	342

		<u>PAGE</u>
<u>6.3.6</u>	<u>THE DESCRIPTIVE CASE</u>	346
<u>6.3.7</u>	<u>SUMMARY</u>	351
<u>6.4</u>	<u>FUNCTIONAL VS FORMAL CRITERIA</u> <u>FOR LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION</u>	351
<u>6.5</u>	<u>VERB TYPES IN TOKELAUAN</u>	356
	<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	