

Multiple sources of inchoativity: Microvariation across Polynesian languages

In the Polynesian language Tongan (Oceanic, Austronesian), change-of-state (COS) semantics is not introduced by designated morphology but via a type-shifting operation in the context of additional event-selecting material, e.g. in the context of the perfect aspect *kuo* (1) (state/COS lability; Koontz-Garboden 2007, also Matthewson 2015 on Niuean; cf. Smith et al. 2023). Outside of such contexts, stative verbs cannot receive a COS interpretation. For the closely related Polynesian language Samoan, Mosel (2001) observes a similar pattern, as otherwise unambiguously stative verbs get a COS interpretation in the presence of the perfect marker *ua* (2), suggesting that state/COS lability is a common phenomenon in Polynesian languages.

- (1) a. *'Oku loloa ho 'ulu.* b. ***Kuo** loloa ho 'ulu.* TONGAN
IMPFV be.long your hair PERF be.long your hair
'Your hair is long.' 'Your hair has lengthened.'
(Koontz-Garboden 2007: 132)
- (2) a. *Sā tumu le arena.* b. ***'ua** tumu le arena.* SAMOAN
PST be.full ART arena PERF be.full ART arena
'The arena was full.' 'The arena got full.'

Based on novel data from the field, I demonstrate that the similarity between Tongan and Samoan is only apparent, as the distribution of COS semantics is more restricted and Samoan exhibits designated COS morphology, which is supposed to block the application of a type-shift (cf. Chierchia 1998). Re-evaluating potential type-shifting contexts (as perfect aspect above), I propose that COS semantics is instead either introduced morphologically via reduplication or by the respective constructions themselves (cf. Hohaus 2016), as already observed in non-labile language like English (cf. Koev 2022, Kearns 2007). These findings therefore suggest multiple sources of inchoative semantics within and across languages and reveal a certain microvariation across Polynesian languages (cf. Matthewson et al. 2015).

References:

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