

Hili-Clauses in Tongan

Adverbial subordinate clauses starting with *hili* ‘after’ in Tongan are interestingly different from other subordinate clauses in the language. Some differences are evidenced from (1), showing both a clause with *hili* and a clause with the other kind of subordinator – *koe‘uhi* ‘because’ is representative. As (1b) shows, *koe‘uhi* takes a canonical finite clause complement. This complement, thus, exhibits certain morphosyntactic properties, including an initial Tense-Aspect-Mood word (TAM), post-predicate realization of ‘full’ nominals (both these properties are shown in (1b)), and pre-predicate/TAM-adjacent realization of subject pronouns. Taking *koe‘uhi*’s behavior as a baseline, I detail the apparently exceptional properties of *hili* and its complement. I propose these properties are the result of the realization requirements generally placed on semantic propositions in Tongan and the requirements that *hili* places on its complement.

Hili behaves differently from *koe‘uhi*. *Hili* cannot take a canonical finite clause, as in (2). However, it can take canonical noun phrases, as (3) shows. And the propositional complements of *hili* might be nominal, too, because they also begin with nominal function words, as shown in (1a). These propositional complements also show some other nominal properties: the pre-predicate pronominal realization utilizes the alienable possessive determiners, as in (4), and the apparently expletive third person singular inalienable possessive determiner *hono* can also appear before the propositional complement, as in (5).

The above data might indicate that the propositional complement is just an ordinary noun phrase: ‘verbs’ in Tongan can appear in both referential or predicating contexts morphologically unchanged (Tchekhoff 1984), so an NP analysis is a possibility. However, a fuller examination of the Tongan data suggests that the analysis of the propositional complement cannot be that simple. As shown in (1a), the nominal arguments of the main predicate are marked with the ergative and absolutive propositional case markers, forms found in verbal contexts. Furthermore, adnominal propositional case markers, such as the one clearly adnominal possessive form, are not possible on the arguments of the main predicate in the propositional complement, as shown in (6). So, the propositional complement does not appear to be internally nominal; rather, it is internally verbal. Overall, the data from this paragraph and the preceding one suggest that these constituents are, in fact, ‘mixed’: the pre-predicate region is nominal while the post-predicate region is verbal.

I propose to treat *hili*-clauses precisely as ‘mixed’. Specifically, the propositional complement consists of nominal functional projections – prepositional and determiner – over a verbal projection. The proposed structure is schematically shown in (7). This particular arrangement of syntactic categories arises because *hili* itself requires a nominal complement of some sort, as most clearly indicated by the nominal function words in (3). Yet, a semantic proposition must be realized in some sort of clausal fashion; that is, as some kind of verbal projection (with or without a TAM). The actual realization in Tongan represents a compromise between these two requirements. Finite clauses by themselves are not nominal enough to be the complement of *hili* and neither are verbal projections without a TAM. Yet these are the only phrases that are possible realizations for propositions. So, the absolutive case-marking preposition and the determiner (or a possessive determiner), in addition to their ordinary function in noun phrases, appear above a verbal projection otherwise lacking in function words to make it nominal enough to be a complement of *hili*. Furthermore, these sorts of ‘mixed’ constituents may not be restricted just to the propositional complements of *hili*; they also appear in *ko*-marked clauses as in (8).

Thus, even though Tongan’s noun-verb distinction is controversial, the complements of *hili* show that Tongan exhibits clear, systematic nominal and verbal patterning and also exhibits mixed category behavior just as other languages with an uncontroversial noun-verb distinction.

Examples

- (1) a. ... *hili* ‘a e kaiha‘asi ‘e he kau kaiha‘á na ‘a e koloa.
 after ABS DET steal.TR ERG DET PL thief DEM ABS DET goods
 ‘... after those thieves stole the goods.’
 b. ... *koe‘uhi kuo* fakanofa ia ki ha lakanga ‘i he Pule‘angá.
 because PFT appoint 3SG DAT INDEF position LOC DET government.DEF
 ‘because he has been appointed to a position in the Government.’ (Churchward
 1953, 52)
- (2) ...**hili na‘e* kaiha‘asi ‘e he kau kaiha‘á na ‘a e koloa
 after PST steal.TR ERG DET PL thief DEM ABS DET goods
 Intended: ‘... after those thieves stole the goods.’
- (3) Te u ‘alu ki Tongatapu [*hili ‘a e* Kilisimasi].
 FUT 1SG go DAT (island) after ABS DET Christmas
 ‘I will go to Tongatapu after Christmas.’
- (4) ... *hili ‘enau* kaiha‘asi ‘a e koloa.
 after 3PL.AL.POSS steal.TR ABS DET goods.
 ‘,, after they stole the goods.’
- (5) ... *hili hono* kaiha‘asi ‘e he kau kaiha‘á ni ‘a e koloa.
 after 3SG.INAL.POSS steal.TR ERG DET PL thief DEM ABS DET goods
 ‘... after these thieves stole the goods.’
- (6) ...**hili ‘a e* kaiha‘asi ‘e he kaiha‘a [‘o e koloa]
 after ABS DET steal.TR ERG DET thief INAL.POSS DET goods
 Intended: ‘... after the thief stole the goods.’
- (7)
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graph TD
 hiliP[hiliP] --- hili[hili]
 hiliP --- PP[PP]
 PP --- P_case[P_case]
 PP --- DP[DP]
 DP --- D[D]
 DP --- Vmax[V^max]

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- (8) Ko e [kai ‘a e puaka ‘e Sione].  
 ESS DET eat ABS DET pig ERG (name)  
 ‘Sione eats the pig.’

## References

- Churchward, C. Maxwell. 1953. *Tongan Grammar*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Tchekhoff, Claude. 1984. “Une Langue Sans Opposition Verbo-Nominale: Le Tongien [A Language Without a Verb-Noun Opposition: Tongan].” *Modèles Linguistiques* 6:125–132.