

On Downward-Entailing Existentials and Differential Object Marking in Palauan

Josephs (1975) describes two distinct phenomena in Palauan that may be categorized as differential object marking (DOM; see Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003, de Swart 2007), which I call DOM1 and DOM2. In DOM1, the direct object of an *imperfective* verb may either co-occur with the overt accusative case marker *er* or bear no morphological case, an alternation conditioned by the animacy and definiteness hierarchies argued to govern DOM patterns in many other languages. On the other hand, the direct object of a *perfective* verb is never case-marked, but the DP triggers an object agreement suffix on the verb that matches the φ -features of the DP. Still, not every direct object triggers agreement — this “differential object agreement” constitutes DOM2.

Josephs (1975) and Woolford (2000) hypothesize that the class of DPs that are not case-marked under DOM1 is identical to the class of DPs that do not trigger object agreement morphology under DOM2. Despite the significant overlap between these two classes, I offer empirical evidence that they are not fully identical: singular, non-human, non-specific DPs are *not* case-marked in DOM1, but they *do* trigger object agreement in DOM2. The evidence arises from two different areas of Palauan syntax: the licensing of NPIs and the existential construction’s definiteness effect.

In Palauan, the expression *ngiidil* shares many of the properties of English *any*, which may serve as either a free choice item (FCI) or a negative polarity item (NPI) (see Kadmon & Landman 1993). Like FCI-*any*, FCI-*ngiidil* may be licensed under the deontic nominal modal *sebech* “ability (to...)” (1a), but not in episodic sentences (1b) (cf. the parallel with Spanish FCI/NPI *cualquiera* in Menéndez-Benito 2005). However, *ngiidil* may be licensed as an NPI in downward-entailing episodic sentences (see Ladusaw 1979), such as negatives (2a) and questions (2b) [cf. (2c)].

Milsark’s Generalization (1977: 4–9 *et seq.*) states that the pivot of an English existential sentence cannot be occupied by a “strong” DP (where “strong” means, roughly, definite). (3) sharply suggests that the definiteness effect also manifests itself in Palauan. In (3a), the “bare” DP pivot *a sensei* “teacher” (though ambiguous between a definite and indefinite reading in other positions) *must* be construed as indefinite; on this reading (3a) is grammatical with both positive (*ngarngii* “exist”) and negative (*diak* “not exist”) polarity. If the pivot is replaced with a demonstrative DP, a pronoun, or a proper name (3b) — all of which Milsark classifies as strong in English — the sentence is ungrammatical. This Palauan correlate of the English definiteness effect equips us with a diagnostic to classify DPs as indefinite. Returning to DPs containing *ngiidil*, the definiteness effect diagnostic indicates that *ngiidil* indeed *can* occur grammatically in the DP pivot of an existential, but only in downward-entailing environments: compare (4a–c) with (2a–c). Put differently, the contrasts in (3) and (4) together provide evidence that whenever *ngiidil* is interpreted as an NPI, the DP in which it occurs must be interpreted as indefinite.

Finally, contrasts between sentences like (2a) and (5) can now be viewed as evidence in favor of a disparity between the conditions governing DOM1 and DOM2 in Palauan. The same DP that is not case-marked via DOM1 in (2a) still triggers object agreement via DOM2 in (5), contrary to what is predicted by the Josephs-Woolford hypothesis. In both sentences, the direct object is a singular, non-human, non-specific indefinite. That the DP contains NPI *ngiidil* indicates that it is indefinite. Karttunen’s (1969) diagnostic further confirms that the DP *a ngiidil hong* is non-specific (unsurprisingly, for an indefinite DP under negation), as it does not establish a discourse referent [see (5a–c)]. If the proposed analysis of *ngiidil* is correct, then the Palauan data reveals that the pertinent features governing DOM alternations (e.g. specificity, humanness, etc.) may differ not only across languages, but even across multiple DOM phenomena within a single language.

- (1) a. Ng sebec-em *pro* [el ng-uu **a ngiidil kat**] *pro*.
3SG ability-2SG your [COMP take.PF-3SG any card] it.EXPL
“You can take any card.” (*lit.* “It is your ability to take any card.”)
- b. * Ke ngil-uu **a ngiidil kat** er a elii *pro*.
2SG take.PF.PAST-3SG any card PREP yesterday you
intended: “You took any card yesterday.”
- (2) a. Ng dimlak [a ku-nguiu (*er) **a ngiidil hong** *pro*].
3SG not.exist.PAST [NMLZ 1SG-read.IMPF (*ACC) any book I]
“I wasn’t reading any book.” (*lit.* “‘Me reading any book’-IMPF didn’t exist.”)
- b. Ke milenguiu (*er) **a ngiidil hong** *pro*?
2SG read.IMPF.PAST (*ACC) any book you
“Were you reading any book?”
- c. * Ak milenguiu (er) **a ngiidil hong** *pro*.
1SG read.IMPF.PAST (ACC) any book I
intended: “I was reading any book.”
- (3) a. Ng ngarngii/diak **a sensei** er a delmerab *pro*.
3SG exist/not.exist teacher PREP room there.EXPL
“There is/isn’t a>(*the) teacher in the room.”
- b. * Ng ngarngii/diak **ngkel sensei / ngii / a Ngirarirs** er a delmerab *pro*.
3SG exist/not.exist that teacher / him / Ngirarirs PREP room there.EXPL
intended: “There is/isn’t that teacher/him/Ngirarirs in the room.”
- (4) a. Ng dimlak **a ngiidil kerrekar** er a sers *pro*.
3SG not.exist.PAST any tree PREP garden there.EXPL
“There wasn’t any (kind of) tree in the garden.”
- b. Ng mlarngii **a ngiidil kerrekar** er a sers *pro*?
3SG exist.PAST any tree PREP garden there.EXPL
“Was there any (kind of) tree in the garden?”
- c. * Ng mlarngii **a ngiidil kerrekar** er a sers *pro*.
3SG exist.PAST any tree PREP garden there.EXPL
intended: “There was any tree in the garden.”
- (5) Ng dimlak [a Ø-chiu-ii **a ngiidil hong** *pro*].
3SG not.exist.PAST [NMLZ 1SG-read.PF-3SG any book I]
“I didn’t read any book.” (*lit.* “‘Me reading any book’-PF didn’t exist.”)
- a. # Ng chedekelek *pro*.
3SG black it
“It’s black.”
- b. # Ng chedekelek sel hong.
3SG black that book
“The book is black.” (*lit.* “That book is black.”)
- c. # Ng chedekelek a hong er ngak.
3SG black book PREP my
“My book is black.”

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