Construction-specific interpretations of Sümi differential case marking
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Sümi is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nagaland, North-East India. Like many Tibeto-Burman languages (see Chelliah & Hyslop 2011), Sumi displays optional/differential case marking of core arguments, where the choice of case marking is sensitive to the semantic transitivity of the clause, as well as discourse pragmatic factors, including whether a speaker wishes to flag the identify of a referent as counter to an interlocutor's expectations (Teo 2012). In general, S arguments of intransitive clauses are morphologically unmarked or flagged by an enclitic *=no* or *=ye*, while A arguments of transitive clauses and subjects of verbless clauses are obligatorily marked by *=no* or *=ye*.

In this paper, I show that the interpretation of the enclitic *=no* as a "focus" morpheme that marks an argument for some kind of pragmatic salience is construction-specific, i.e. determined by the type of clause in which it occurs, including the nature of the verbal predicate. In some constructions, a focus interpretation is most likely, while in others there is greater ambiguity in interpretation.

In verbless clauses, the subject is marked by *=ye*, coinciding with a new or continuing topic, as in (1). But if the speaker wants to place emphasis on the subject, e.g. when correcting an interlocutor's presupposition or to identify a referent from a set of other possible referents, *=no* is used, as in (2).

(1)   ***Tiye** ninga keno …*
        tī=je   nī-ŋá   ke=no
        MED=*ye*   1PL-daughter   PRF=CONN
        'That was our daughter …" [IZ1-20070905-Kutili_bird_story_short, line 29]

(2)   ***Paza no** Sümi*
        pā-zá=no   sīmì
        3SG-mother=*no*   Sümi
        'His mother is Sumi.' (correcting the interlocutor) [conversation, unrecorded]

In transitive clauses, *=no* typically marks a potent agent, as in (3). In this example, a contrastive focus reading is possible, but not necessary. If a speaker really wished to mark an A argument as being salient, e.g. correcting the interlocutor, the suffix *-u* is added, which is likely from the definite marker *-u*, as in (4). The use of *-u* to mark salience is not possible in examples like (2).

(3)   *… **azü no** küma yipesü uve.*   (**azü küma yipesü uve*)
        à-zì=no   kīmá   jīpēsī   ū-vē
        NRL-water=*no*   3DU   carry.away   go-VM
        '... the water (supernatural force, mentioned before in story) swept them both away.'
        [IZ1-20070905-Kutili_bird_story_short, line 9]

(4)   ***Atsüu no** awu ha cheni.*
        à-tsì-u=no   à-wù   hā   tʃè-nī
        NRL-dog-*u*=*no*   NRL-chicken   chase   HAB-NPST
        'A dog is chasing a chicken.' (not another animal doing the chasing) [elicited]

The data suggest that there is no single dedicated "focus" marker in Sümi, but that speakers co-opt morphemes with different meanings in other contexts/constructions to fulfill similar communicative goals. In addition, the choice of morphemes, i.e. the agentive/ergative and definite might be of interest from a cross-linguistic perspective.

<u>References</u>

Chelliah, Shobhana & Gwendolyn Hyslop. 2011. Introduction to Special Issue on Optional Case Marking in Tibeto-Burman. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 34(2), 1-7.

Teo, Amos. 2012. Sumi agentive and topic markers: *No* and *ye*. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area.* 35(1), 49-74.