

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to examine the existence of dative alternation in Yami, a language with a rich case marking system, that is similar to Japanese and Greek which are both reported to have dative alternation, as well as very unique ‘focus’ systems that can promote any argument into the subject position. Several issues have to be addressed: first, the case marking on the nominal is investigated in four most commonly observed ‘focus’ constructions from various aspects including degree of transitivity, thematic structure, and event classes,...etc; second, the term ‘focus’ is misleading and is identified as ‘voice’; third, arguments against Yami as an ergative language and supports for a valency-neutral voice system are provided. Once these basic linguistic properties have been clarified, an examination of trivalent verbs shows positive evidence of dative alternation in Yami. Dative alternation is found with the two trivalent Yami verbs meaning ‘distribute out/give out’ and ‘mail’. This finding is in accordance with Harley’s proposal of the co-existence verbal HAVE and dative alternation, and also suggests that dative alternation is not a language-specific property.