

Subject and object pronouns in Malagasy

1. Malagasian pronouns in general:

Malagasian pronouns are inflected for four different persons, two numbers and cases. The numbers are singular and plural and the persons are 1st, 2nd inclusive, 2nd exclusive¹, and 3rd. We haven't concluded yet which are the morphologically distinct cases of Malagasy, but we know that there is at least distinction between subject and non-subject case². Pronouns are not inflected for class /gender in Malagasy. Never the less there is a restriction on that pronouns cannot refer to non-humans.

(1) n anumé an iti w an k'ut aw
 past give case marker that (dem) to case marker Koto 1st-sg-sb
 "I gave that to Koto"

(2) *n anumé izi w an k'ut aw
 past give 3rd-sg-ob to case marker Koto 1st-sg-sb
 "I gave it to Koto"

The examples above (CE23Oct03) have the meaning of "I gave the cat to Koto". When the demonstrative is replacing "the cat" the result is grammatical, but when the 3rd pronoun does so the result is ungrammatical. So, I conclude that the 3rd pronoun cannot refer to non-humans. At the table below I present the different pronoun forms for subjects and objects³:

Table 1: two case forms⁴

	singular		plural	
	Subject	Object	Subject	Object

¹ The distinction between inclusive and exclusive is relevant only in plural. The 2nd-inclusive plural pronoun refers to the set that includes speaker the addressee and optionally one or more 3rd persons. The 1st-exclusive plural pronoun refers to the set that includes the speaker, optionally 3rd persons, but not the addressee.

² Possessive clitics also seem to be morphologically distinct.

³ It refers to the subject and object of the unmarked VOS word order. From now on when I say subject or object case, I will refer to the forms below, regardless if the sentence that they appear each time are subjects or objects.

⁴ The data is form (CE /14Oct03)

1 st (incl)	a(h)(w)	a(h)i	itsik	antsik
1 st (escl)			izaái	anai
2 nd	janaw	anaw	janarew	anarew
3 rd	iz	azi	rizarew	andrizarew

2. *Word order and subject form*

The form of the pronoun subject alternates depending on the word order and the form of the verb. Firstly, I will discuss the unmarked single object structure where the subject follows the object, which follows the verb (VOS).

2.1. Subject form in VOS structures

When the subject is at the final position the form of it is as at the table above. Below are some examples from (CE /14Oct03):

(3) n andré anarew ahw
 past hear 2nd-pl-ob 1st-sg-sb
 “I heard you”

(4) n andré ázi janaw
 past hear 3rd-sg-ob 2nd-sg-sb
 “You heard him”

(5) n andré anaw aw
 past hear 2nd-sg-ob 1st-sg-sb
 “I heard you”

We notice that there is some phonological similarity between different persons and some phonological similarity between different numbers of the same person. I will first discuss the similarity across persons. There is the tendency that the subject pronouns start with [i] or [j]: “janaw”, “iz”, “itsik”, “izaái”, “janarew”. The alternation between [i] and [j] may be due to totally phonological procedures⁵. So a possibility is that in all of the above cases the initial sound is the same suffix /i/.

⁵ There may be a procedure that makes an underlying high front vowel to turn into a glide when it occurs word initially preceding a low vowel. My goal is not to argue about what exactly this phonological procedure is. What I am arguing about is that [j] and [i] are underlying the same prefix /i/.

If the hypothesis that /i/ is a morpheme is correct, then we have to explain why it is missing from the third plural [rizarew] and the 1st singular [aw]. In the case of the former there is independent evidence that there is [r] is not the initial sound of the word, but that it is underlyingly preceded by a deleted sound. There are evidence that words that begin with /r/ take an epenthesized /d/ eg. /rakutu/ (Mr Koto) → [drakut]. Some other evidence is that in the object form [d] precedes [r]: [andrizaréw]. The above indicate that it is possible /i/ to precedes /r/ and to be deleted due to phonological reasons.

The absence of the suffix at the 1st singular /aw/ must be due to different reasons. It is possible that /aw/ is not the full subject pronoun, but a reduced form of it. Evidence for that come from the stressed subject 1st singular form /izaw/. I will discuss later about its distribution. What is important for the current point of the discussion is that the full form has /i/ initially, which, if the above discussion is on the right track, must be the same subject suffix. So, the phonological similarity between the subject case pronouns gives as evidence that /i/ is a subject case marker suffix, at least in the case of the pronouns.

An other similarity that I notice is that “(iz)aw”, “janaw”, “janarew” and “rizarew” all have word finally /aw/ or /ew/. I have no explanation about this similarity now. Some morphological origin should not be rejected as a possibility. But a better understanding of the phonological system of Malagasy is required in order to make any claim about that.

If now we compare the singular with the plural forms the phonological similarity is obvious in 2nd and 3rd person. An oversimplified analysis is that /re/ is a plural suffix, so that /janaw –re/ → [janarew] (metathesis) or /jana –re –w/ → [janarew] (/w/ is a morpheme). Similarly /i – r – iza – re –w/ → [rizarew]. These possible analyses are too insufficient for now because they don't attempt to answer the following questions. First, if /re/ is the plural morpheme for 2nd and 3rd, there is no explanation, which is the plural morpheme for the first person and why it is case that the first person plural is not formed with the /re/ suffix as well. Second, it gives no explanation about what is the /r-/ prefix in [rizarew] and if it is a plural morpheme why it does not appear in the second plural, while if it is a person morpheme why it does not appear in the singular form. Finally, an other unexplained issue is that the final sound /w/ appears in both forms of the 2nd person, but only on the plural form of the 3rd.

Direct object pronouns of a single object structures have the form that appears on the board in VOS structures (11).

- (11) n andré ázi janaw CE /14Oct03
past hear he you
“you heard him/her”

What is interesting on the object pronoun forms is that there is the tendency that they have as initial sounds /an/. That does not seem to be true for the first and third singular⁷. That it is not due to phonological reasons that first and third singular are missing an /an/ suffix is shown by the following data of full possessives, where the same forms are preceded by /an/.

- (12) an ahi iti alik iti DN/14Oct03
case me this dog this
(this dog is mine)

- (13) an azi iti alik iti DN/14Oct03
case 3rd-ob this dog this
(this dog is his/hers)

Although I have to offer no explanation about the above forms, there are evidence that we shouldn't abandon the idea that /an/ is a morpheme. This evidence comes from other than pronoun objects that have the /an/ suffix. Such a case is the demonstrative direct object in subject final (VOOS) double object structures⁸.

It is not so clear what happens with the object of VSO structures:

- (14) nukapua drizarew ahi
hit them me

⁷ Second person does not cause a problem because in some cases we have “annaw” and “annarew” (I have to find the data), which indicate that the underlying form can be /ananaw/ and /ananarew/, and there is vowel deletion due to phonological reasons.

⁸ Interestingly demonstratives direct objects in (VSOO) structures are not preceded by /an/. The distribution of /an/ is of great interest and should be studied systematically.

- (i) nume ku anaw ni CE /14Oct03
give my you that
“I gave that to you”

“They hit me”

(15) re (an) i k^hutu aw
hear case marking det Koto I-sub
Koto heard me

(16) nu taka ku rizarew⁹
nu kick me-poss them-sub
“I kicked them”

CE/28Oct03

So, we see that sometimes the pronoun object is in the subject case, while sometimes it is in the object case. This issue needs to be investigated farther and the data to be verified.

3.2 Indirect objects pronouns

Indirect objects at VOS structures¹⁰ have different forms according to their order with respect to the direct object. So, when indirect objects precede the direct objects, they appear as in the object case in the board. When they follow the direct object they have the same form preceded by “w”.

(17) n anume an in w anaw a CE /14Oct03
past give case marker that to you I
“I gave that to you”

(18) n anumé anaw an i^hni aw CE /14Oct03
past give you case marker that I
“I gave that to you”

4. Emphasized first singular form.

For first person singular there is an additional form when it is emphasized, when we would expect to have the subject form¹¹.

⁹ The corresponding VOS form is

(ii) na ntaka andrizarew aw
past kick them-ob I-sub
“I kicked them”

¹⁰ I do not have enough data available for indirect object of VSO structures. I will collect more data and add it at the discussion of “an” case marker.

¹¹ I am not sure if it can replace the object form, as well.

(19) izaáw m iinana ni aku ku
I-emp pres eat the chicken my
“I am eating my chicken”)

(20) ”Who did I kick?”¹²
izaháw
me-stressed form

Conclusions:

- Morpheme /an/ it is obvious from the selective appearance according to the kind of DP, (pronoun, common noun, etc) the kind of argument (direct- indirect object, not a subject) and the linear order that it is must be somehow part of the case morphology. Till now I haven't manage to predict when it appears and when not.
- It would be of great interest if we could figure out the morphemes that constitute the pronouns. It would let as some light on the properties of nominal morphemes in a language that seems to have a poor nominal morphology
- The subject and the direct object do not have the same form in VOS and VSO structures.
- The comparison between pronouns and other nominals as main names, common nouns, demonstratives, can be useful in determining the nominal morphology.
- The emphasized 1st-sg form is of great interest because it may be connected to the fact why the unstressed 1st-sg is missing the [i] suffix.

¹² It seems that the sub form is the default form in Malagasy:

(iii) “Who did I kick?”
izi
3rd-sg-sb
“him”