Mo (e): Putting (Niuean) Things Together

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This paper investigates three theoretical issues concerning the conjunctive and predicative uses of the form mo (e) in Niuean, an Austronesian (Oceanic) language spoken on the island of Niue and New Zealand. Through the examination of approximately 1060 examples from a written corpus, we explore the contexts for the use and non-use of the particle e after mo, the apparent lack of PP conjunction in Niuean, and the forms of VP conjunction in this VSO language. We argue that the Niuean conjunctive particle is prepositional in nature, always taking a DP complement, even in cases of adjectival or sentential conjunction. When mo is used to mean ‘as’, however, its complement is NP. In examining VP conjunction, we show that the Niuean data is consistent with a V-fronting analysis of VSO word order, unlike other V-initial languages such as Chamorro.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the Niuean form mo (e). Niuean is a Polynesian language spoken by approximately 8,000 people (Lewis 2009) in New Zealand and on the island of Niue in the South Pacific. It is close to Tonga both geographically and linguistically: Niuean and Tongan make up the two-membered Tongic subgroup of the Polynesian language family (Pawley 1966, 1967). Niuean has a strict VSO word order and an absolutive-ergative case marking system (Seiter 1980). Our analysis is based on written data from the text Niue: a History of the Island (1982), from which we isolated all occurrences of mo and mo e. There were approximately 1060 examples.

The morpheme mo (e) has several functions in Niuean, but in this paper we concentrate on its uses as a coordinator (‘and’) with residual prepositional properties, and as an adverbial linker (‘as’). After outlining its functions and classifying its typology, we sketch out three major issues which arise and propose a solution for each. This paper constitutes the first study of conjunction in Niuean, and is thus intended to serve as a platform for further research.

2. The Functions and Typology of mo (e)

Seiter (1980) outlines the major functions of the morpheme mo (e) as conjunctive (1) and comitative (2), and determines that e appears with mo when conjoining two common nouns (3) (cf. 1).1

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(1) Lageiki, Lagiatea mo Talimainuku
   ‘Lageiki, Lagiatea and Talimainuku’

(2) Ne nonofo a ia mo e patuiki.
   PST live ABS.P 3.SG with e king
   ‘She lived with the king.’

(3) Ko e tugaane mo e mahakitaga a laua.
   PRED e brother and e sister ABS.P 3.DUAL
   ‘They were brother and sister.’

Our data illustrates the broad scope of this morpheme’s conjunctive power, which encompasses nominal phrases (1), APs: attributive (4) and predicative (5), VPs (6), and sentences (7), (8). PP conjunction is not found: its absence is addressed in Section 3.2.

(4) Ke he tau motu ikiiki mo e tokolalo ne fā
   GOAL.C LOC.C PL island small and e low REL four
   ‘to four small, low islands’

(5) Kua mitaki lahi mo e fulufuluola e tau tali haana..
   PRF good great and e beautiful ABS.C PL answer GEN.P.3.SG
   ‘The answers he gave seemed very wonderful.’

(6) Veli mo e matulei ai a Tepunu Mutalau.
   fall and e die RES.PRON ABS.P Tepunu Mutalau
   ‘Tepunu Mutalau fell and died there.’

(7) Ulu ko e ulu, mo e lauta ko e matini.
   ulu PRED e head, and e lauta PRED e flag.
   ‘Ulu means head and lauta means flag.’

(8) Ne miti foki e ia to liu mai a Peniamina mo e taha e tohi
   PST dream also ERG.P 3.SG FUT return DIR ABS.P Peniamina with e one LIG book
tote mo e to pehe foki a ia, ko e taha nī e Atua he lagi.
   small and e FUT say also ABS.P 3.SG PRED e one EPH LIG God LOC.C sky
   ‘He also dreamt that Peniamina would return with a small book and that he would say that there was but one God in the sky.’

Furthermore both Sperlich (1997) and McEwen (1970) note that there are other translations and extended uses of mo, such as the equivalent of English ‘as’ (9).

(9) Ne eke aia Peniamina mo fekafekau he Faifeau talahaua.
   PST do RES.PRON ABS.P Peniamina as servant GEN.C missionary famous
   ‘Peniamina acted as the servant of the famous missionary.’
Sperlich notes that only the conjunction of common nominal phrases requires the appearance of e after mo. More precisely, we found in our data that e appears when the second conjunct is headed by a common noun as in (10).

(10) a. Kapeni Kuki mo e haana a tau kau-vaka
     ABS.P Captain Cook and e GEN.P.3.SG LIG PL crew-canoe
     ‘Captain Cook and his crew’

From this we conclude that mo (e) is a monosyndetic coordinator of the type A co-B (Haspelmath 2007) where the coordinator has a closer relation to the following conjunct than to the preceding conjunct, since there is a clear selection relation between the coordinator and the following element. Examples (1) and (10) show this phenomenon. In example (1), three proper nouns (Lageiki, Lagiatea, and Talimanuku) are conjoined and the e is absent. In example (10), a proper noun (Kapeni Kuki) is conjoined to a common noun (haana a tau kau-vaka ‘his crew’) and the e is present. It seems that whether the coordinator is mo or mo e depends on the conjunct following the coordinator (at least in the case of nominal conjunction). Niuean thus follows the trend typologists such as Kubo (2007) and Haspelmath (2007) have noted: verb-initial languages have monosyndetic prepositive coordinators.

3. Theoretical Issues

In this section, we investigate three issues arising from our mo e data. First, we explore the contexts in which e is present or absent. Second, we posit an explanation for the fact noted above, that PP conjunction is not found in our Niuean data. Third, we address the problem of VP conjunction in VSO languages, focusing on Niuean VP conjunction.

3.1 To mo or to mo e

In order to understand the behaviour of e in the context of mo, it is important to first present an overview of this morpheme. It primarily acts as an absolutive common marker (Sperlich 1997). In this usage, it clearly has a common feature, and it contrasts with a, the absolutive proper marker. For example, in (11a) the absolutive marker on Tomu is a, because it is a proper name, whereas in (11b) the absolutive marker on moa ‘bird’ is e, because moa is a common noun.

(11) a. Ne paoaoa e au a Tomu.
     PST strike ERG.P.1.SG ABS.C Tom.
     ‘I struck Tom.’ (M.265)

b. Ne kai he pusi ia e moa.
     PST eat ERG.P cat that ABS.C bird.
     ‘That cat ate the chicken.’ (S.73a:29)

The e that follows the conjunctive morpheme mo in case of a non-proper second conjunct is different from the absolutive morpheme e in that it contrasts with a null particle in the case of a following proper noun, rather than with a (e.g. (11a) vs (11b) compared with (1) vs. (3)). In this case, e also serves as an ergative proper case marker, which contrasts with he in case of a common noun, but since its value in this case is proper, not common, it is clearly not the same morpheme as the one we are studying in this paper, which has a common value.

3 The ergative marker is also inflected for proper/common, as are other cases in Niuean, but this is not relevant here.
pattern of behaviour, *e* after *mo* lines up with similar occurrences after prepositions such as *ma* (benefactive), and *ko* (predicative) (Seiter 1980; Massam, Lee, and Rolle 2006), which also alternate with a null particle in case of a following proper noun. For this reason we consider *mo* to be prepositional in its categorial nature, a reasonable claim given its function also as a comitative preposition, as in (2). Because *e* in these cases presents distinct behaviour from the absolutive case particle, we consider it here to be a common particle, which should be considered an article or a determiner, rather than an absolutive case particle (which we consider to be a portmanteau [case+article] morpheme, heading a KP > DP phrase).

The proposed distributions are shown in (12), which shows that absolutive case heads a KP and a determiner heads the DP, but the morphology does not always reflect this, since the two coalesce into either *a* or *e*, depending on the common or proper value of the following nominal. On the other hand, certain prepositional elements can appear in place of a *K*, heading a prepositional phrase, essentially a more complex instance of case than *K*. In such cases, the morphology is different, with distinct prepositions being pronounced, followed by either a proper article, which is null, or the distinct common article *e*.

(12) a. \[ [K_{abs} \ [D_{pr}] \rightarrow a \]
    b. \[ [K_{abs} \ [D_{c}] \rightarrow e \]
    c. \[ [P_{ben/conj/pred} \ [D_{pr}] \rightarrow \text{Prep NULL} \]
    d. \[ [P_{ben/conj/pred} \ [D_{c}] \rightarrow \text{Prep e} \]

If we consider conjunctive *e* to be a determiner marking a following common noun phrase, we are presented with a problem, because *e* also appears in cases of a second conjunct which is an AP (13), or a VP (14), and it also appears in cases of a sentential second conjunct (8). Such phrases are not usually considered to have values for proper or common.

(13) Ko Mourua ko e tagata tino malolo **mo e** mahikihiki.
    PRED Mourua PRED *e* man body beautiful and *e* well-built
    ‘His body was beautiful and well-built.’

(14) Ne fakaako ai a Peniamina ke iloa ke totou **mo e** tohitohi.
    PST cause-learn RES.PRON ABS.P Peniamina SBJV know SBJV read and *e* write
    ‘Peniamina thus learned to read and write.’

If the appearance of *e* in nominal conjunction signals a common final conjunct and its absence a proper final conjunct, why then should *e* appear when conjoining conjuncts to which the proper/common property cannot apply? The solution we propose is based on the following structural analysis:

(15)  \textit{Proposed structure for mo (e) as a coordinator.}

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\begin{align*}
\text{mo} \quad \text{PP} \\
\text{mo} \quad \text{DP} \\
\{e, \emptyset_{\text{proper}}\} \quad \text{XP} \quad (X = N, A, V, C/I)
\end{align*}
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Here, *mo* obligatorily selects a DP, whose head is either *e* or null and whose complement can be anything (except PP: see section 3.2). The claim that D can select complements other than NP in Niuean is supported by the fact that clausal nominalization is possible through the selection by D of a sentential complement (Seiter 1980). Since the null determiner appears in only one context, namely in case of a following proper nominal phrase, we propose that the unmarked form of the determiner is *e*, which surfaces in all grammatical contexts except before proper nominal conjuncts. In other words, *e* is the form for a determiner that is not specifically marked as proper.

This claim requires modification due to examples like (9). In such cases, the function of *mo* is not conjunctive (it means ‘as’) and in such uses, regardless of whether the final nominal conjunct is proper or common, *e* never appears. In (16), *fekekau* ‘servant’ is a common noun in Niuean and it occurs after *mo* ‘as’ without any common marking.

(16) Ne eke ai a Peniamina mo fekekau he Faifeau talahaua.

\[\text{PST serve RES.PRON ABS.P Peniamina as servant GEN.C missionary famous} \]

‘Peniamina then served as servant of the famous missionary.’

We propose that in such cases the determiner is not null; it is simply absent. In other words, the immediate complement of the ‘as’ *mo*-phrase is an NP, as shown in (17). This is a plausible proposal, because notably, the following nominal in such contexts is serving in a predicative function, rather than serving as an argument. In such uses, nominals crosslinguistically appear in a reduced form, such as in an indefinite or bare form (e.g. English: *John is a doctor/Mary will serve as president*)

(17) Proposed structure for *mo* (e) as ‘as’

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mo phrase
   \[mo\]
   \[“as”\]
   \[NP\]
   \[N\]
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Our modified hypothesis states that *mo* *e* is the unmarked form, which surfaces in all conjunctive contexts except before a proper nominal conjunct, where D is null, and in predicative contexts when *mo* means ‘as’, in which case there is no D present at all.

There are two complex expressions involving the ‘as’ function of *mo*. (9) above is one example of the *eke mo* (mena) construction, roughly meaning ‘to serve as (thing)’. In this case, the overt subject *Peniamina* interrupts the expression (i.e. ‘served Peniamina as servant’), but the expression appears together if the subject is dropped or *pro* as in (18).

(18) Ne eke mo mena ke hula lahi ai a tautolu

\[\text{PST serve as thing SBJV proud greatly RES.PRON ABS.P 1.PL} \]

‘(Oral traditions and historical research are two areas) that serve as things to give us much pride.’
When *mena* appears as in (18), its function is to allow *mo* to take its required NP complement, by means of *mena* ‘thing’, even though the semantic complement is not nominal (e.g. it is ‘to be proud’ in (18)). This and the absence of *e* corroborate our hypothesis that when it means ‘as’, the *mo*-phrase obligatorily selects an NP sister.

The other collocation we noted is *tatai mo e*, as in (19), which roughly means ‘equal to’ or ‘the same as’.

(19) ko e loga he kupu Niue ne *tatai nī moe* tau kupu he nā motu
PRED e many GEN.C word Niue REL same just as e PL word GEN.C pair island
nā ne ua.
DEM REL two
‘There are many Niuean words that are the same as the words of those two islands.’

We want to emphasize here that while the appearance of *e* seemingly contradicts our claim above, this is a different expression, denoting equivalence, and it does not have a predicative function. Its complement here is a nominal DP, as opposed to a predicative NP element. This is clear upon reflection, though the use of ‘as’ to translate both functions can be misleading.

### 3.2 PP Conjunction

We previously posited that the morpheme *mo* (*e*) can conjoin nominal phrases, APs, and VPs, as well as sentences. PP conjunction is completely missing from our data. Assuming this lack is not accidental, how can we explain the lack of PP conjunction, which appears freely in other languages such as English (e.g. *in the bathtub and under the bed*).

We can explain this through the claim outlined above that *mo* is categorically a preposition, originating as a comitative, which selects a DP. If we further assume, plausibly, that there is a fixed order of extended functional projections (e.g. Rizzi 1997, Grohmann 2003) and posit that a member of this group cannot select another functional head of the same or higher ranking (for example, Complementizers select Inflectional heads and cannot select other Complementizers or any higher head) then we can explain the reason for the apparent absence of conjoined PPs in Niuean. Since the conjunctive element is itself a P, that is, a member of the nominal extended projection, it selects a D, and thus it cannot select an element that is equal to or above P in the nominal extended projection. Following Gorrie, Kellner, and Massam (2010), the order of the Niuean extended nominal projection is as follows.\(^4\)

(20) **Preposition/Case > Determiner > Quantifier > Number > Classifier > NOUN**

Once the determiner is selected by *mo*, it also cannot itself select a higher functional projection. This co-occurrence requirement is supported by the fact that the three elements, preposition, case, and determiner, are very tightly connected, and they can be portmanteau items in Niuean. For example, *ki* (goal, proper) encodes a preposition (goal), a case (locative), and a proper common value (proper).

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\(^4\) Sometimes prepositions in Niuean can select KPs rather than DPs, but we do not consider these prepositions here, since *mo* belongs to the group of prepositions which select DPs. (See Gorrie, Kellner, and Massam 2010.)
3.3 VP Conjunction, the Problem that isn’t

The problem of VP conjunction in VSO languages has been outlined by Chung (1990). She examines a set of data in the VSO language Chamorro and notes that in such languages, VP conjunction is problematic, as there is no (surface) VP, since VO is interrupted by S. She notes that conjunctions with [V+O] can be analyzed as sentential conjunction, assuming there is an empty subject pro intervening, e.g. [V S O conj V pro O]. However, she argues that we would only expect cases such as this one, and not cases where the pro precedes its antecedent, as in [V pro O conj V S O]. She makes the following generalization (21):

(21) If a pronoun β is coindexed with a non-pronoun α and β is not preceded by α, then β must be c-commanded by α. (Chung 1990)

This condition only distinguishes sentential conjunction from VP conjunction where the subject appears in a non-initial conjunct (Davis 2005). So cases of [VO+VSO] are problematic since they violate the condition (21) above. Chung (1990) proposes a Subject Lowering Hypothesis for VSO word order in Chamorro, to allow for such conjunctions, which do exist in Chamorro, noting that the more prevalent analyses of verb fronting for VSO word order cannot account for them. Because Chamorro and Niuean have the same word order, the latter may contain instances of [VO+VSO] that may require a Subject Lowering Hypothesis to explain, even though a verbal fronting analysis has been proposed (e.g. Massam 2000, who argues for a remnant VP fronting analysis).

However, such a requirement does not seem necessary in Niuean, as we did not find any examples of [VO+VSO] in our data. We did find examples of [VS+VO], which we analyze as sentential conjunction [VS conj V pro O], with the antecedent S and pro coindexed, as in (22), in which we find the following conjunction: ‘[arose the parent and undid pro the belt]’.

(22) ti liu matike e matua aamo atu mo e veve e pipi ne tutaki then again get=up ABS.C parent care DIR and e undo ABS.C belt REL join.together

he tama.
LOC child

‘His father arose once more and cautiously untied himself from his child.’

There are some examples that initially resemble [V pro + VSO] conjunction, but they are in fact not problematic because an antecedent coindexed to the proposed pro in the first conjunct is found earlier on, as in sentence (23). Here, some magafaoa leaders is a topic, and it can be understood to be the antecedent for the pro (or possibly trace) in the first sentence ‘[selfish pro]’, as well as being coindexed with the pronoun a lautolu ‘they’ in the second conjunct ‘[think they]’, ruling out the necessity for the first conjunct pro to be coindexed directly with the pronoun in the second conjunct.

(23) Ko e falu takitaki magafaoa ne fa fulukovi mo e manatu ni a lautolu PRED e some lead family PST ASP selfish (pro) and e think EPH ABS.P 3.SG

ke ke tau mena ke hagahaga mitaki ai ni a lautolu. GOAL.C LOC.C PL thing SBJV appearance good RES.PRON. EPH ABS.P 3.PL

‘Some magafaoa leaders were found to be selfish and to only think about what makes them look good.’
Such examples obey Chung’s generalization above (21), as well as the weaker version characterized by Davis (2005), in his discussion of conjunction in St’át’imcets, a predicate-initial Salish language, as in (24).

(24) If a pronoun β is coindexed with a non-pronoun α across a sentence boundary, α must precede β. (Davis 2005)

From this exploration, we conclude that the conjunction facts in Niuean appear to be consistent with a verbal fronting analysis for the VSO word order in this language, unlike Chamorro, as argued by Chung (1990).

4. Future Directions

Remaining to study are some other uses of mo (e) in Niuean. For example, according to Seiter (1980), mo (e) can also conjoin AdvPs, and he gives the following elicited example (25).

(25) ke gahua mitaki mo e tonu tumau e haana a fekafekau
SBJV work well and e properly always ABS.C GEN.P.3.SG LIG servant
‘for his servant to work well and properly’

In addition, while we include three functions of mo (e) in this paper, McEwen (1970) offers other translations that may demonstrate functions distinct from the three analyzed here. One such translation is ‘from’ (26).

(26) Liga ko e mena ha ia ati tupu ai e manatu ha lautolu
Likely PRED e thing GEN.P 3.SG then grow RES.PRON ABS thought GEN.P 3.PL

ke ō kehe mo e motu ke kumi mena ke nonofo ai a lautolu.
SBJV go away from e island SBJV search thing SBJV stay RES.PRON ABS.P 3.PL
‘Over time these social pressures could be the cause for them to leave and seek new islands.’

5. Conclusion

This paper constitutes an initial exploration of the uses and characteristics of the morpheme mo in Niuean. We have shown that it functions as a monosyndetic coordinator of the type A co-B (Haspelmath 2007) in the language, and in this function it obligatorily selects a DP complement, which encodes a feature for +/- proper, and which in turn can take a variety of complements. We have argued that this conjunctive/comitative element belongs to the category Preposition, and that this explains the lack of PP conjunction in Niuean, assuming a strict ordering of nominal functional projections in the language. We have also shown that mo can be used in a predicative function, translating as ‘as’, in which case it takes a predicative NP complement rather than an argument DP, thus explaining the lack of the non-proper determiner e in such uses. Finally, we proposed that since there are no indisputable cases of VP conjunction in Niuean, since possible cases can be reanalyzed as sentential coordination, a V-fronting analysis for word order in this language can be maintained. In our final section, we noted that there are a few other uses of mo that remain to be studied in future work.
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