This course aims to discuss the syntax of nonfinites with a special focus on infinitives across Formosan languages from a Minimalist perspective. Infinitives receive very little attention in the Formosan literature. One factor leading to the paucity may be that finiteness or tenseness is very difficult to define in Formosan languages, given their lack of clear-cut tense marking. It is indeed found that what have been categorized as infinitive verbs in Indo-European literature are subject to a morphological constraint dubbed as the AF-only restriction across many Formosan languages (Tang 1999, Chang 2006, among others). However, it is suggested that the AF-only restriction be not equated to infinitive. Recent findings have indicated that some of the Formosan nonfinites do not respect the AF-only restriction (Yeh and Huang 2009, Chang 2010, C. Wu 2013). It remains to be worked out how nonfinites are grammatically differentiated and constrained.

Another infinitive fact that deserves a more satisfactory account is the surprising causativization of an object-control complement in many Formosan languages (Chang and Tsai 2001). A similar fact is also found in Paiwan object-oriented resultatives, as observed in Li (2010). Chang and Tsai (2001) attribute it to an Actor-sensitivity restriction. Despite its descriptive appeal, Chang and Tsai’s account leaves unanswered some important questions, including: (i) Why cannot objects control, given their syntactic prominence (e.g., object triggers determine relativization) (ii) How is Actor-sensitivity related to other syntactic principles? (iii) Why is Actor-sensitivity attested in Formosan languages, but not in other languages like English and Chinese? Is it a typological feature? Obviously, further study of the phenomenon is needed.

With the above-mentioned issues in the backdrop, this course is intended to prompt a more comprehensive description of Formosan infinitives on the one hand and stimulate more adequate analyses of them on the other.

To this end, I have scheduled the following readings as the bases of discussion and the starting points of inquiry, along with an introduction to the course and the students’ final oral presentations:

1. Introduction (27 Sept 2013)
5. C. Wu’s guest lecture: Nonfinites in Mayrinax and Paiwan (8 Nov 2013)
6. Minimalist Workshop on Austronesian Verbs (15 Nov 2013, ILAS)
9. Chen (2008), Chapter 5: Direct perception constructions (6 Dec 2013)
10. Aldridge’s guest lecture: Tagalog infinitives (13 Dec 2013)
12. Oral presentations (3, 10 Jan 2014)
13. Panel discussion (17 Jan 2014)

References

Chang, Henry Yungli and Wei-tien Dylan Tsai. 2001. Actor-sensitivity and obligatory control in Kavalan and some other Formosan languages. Language and Linguistics 2.1: 1-20
Tang, Chih-Chen Jane, 1999. On clausal complements in Paiwan. Selected papers from the 8 ICAL: 529-578.
Wu, Chunming. 2013. The Syntax of linking constructions in Mayrinax Atayal and Sinvaudjan Paiwan. Ph.D. dissertation, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.