

“Absolutive” marks extractions, not case: against the syntactic ergative analysis for the Austronesian-type voice system

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1. Introduction. The Austronesian (AN)-type four-way voice system has been claimed to exhibit syntactic ergativity, based primarily on (i) the Abs(olutive)-only constraint in A'-extractions and (ii) the antipassive analysis of Actor voice (AV) (e.g. Payne 1982, Aldridge 2004 *et seq*). In this paper, we present novel evidence against the antipassive analysis for Formosan AV clauses from three constructions, (a) causative, (b) restructuring and (c) raising-to-object, which show that bivalent AV clauses across highest-level Austronesian languages are true transitives with structurally licensed internal arguments. With further evidence from nominalization, we argue for the following: (i) the AN-type voice system can be better accounted for if “Erg(ative)” and “Obl(ique)” are analyzed as the morphological realization of Nom(inative) and Acc(usative), respectively, and the “Abs” (pivot) marking as a marker signaling obligatory A'-agreement that is independent of Case-licensing, and (ii) the “voice marker”/nominalizer homophony shared by prototypical AN-type systems essentially signals the obligatory A'-agreement between an argument and an A'-head under both verbal and nominalized environments. The A'-agreement is responsible for the “Abs”-only extraction asymmetry in the AN-type voice systems.

2. Backgrounds. The Formosan languages exhibit prototypical AN-type voice system with an Abs-only constraint in A'-extractions and morphologically distinct “Erg” and “Obl” cases. Under a syntactic ergative analysis of these languages, Patient voice (PV) clauses are viewed as default transitives with “Erg”-marked external argument and Abs-marked internal argument, while Actor voice (AV) clauses are viewed as antipassives with Abs-marked external argument and (demoted) internal argument as an “oblique” (e.g. Aldridge 2004, 14).

3. Claim: AV≠AP, “Obl”≠Obl. Under the ergative approach to the AN-type voice system, “Obl”-marked internal arguments of AV are Case-licensed by the lexical verbs (V⁰) (Aldridge 2004, 12, 14; Chang 2011). Therefore, the distribution of “Obl” should be restricted to internal arguments of specific thematic roles. Under the Accusative analysis, however, “Obl” (Acc) is structurally licensed, therefore, “Obl”-marking is expected to appear on either external or internal arguments, and be free of thematic constraints. We show that causative, restructuring, and RTO data across eight Formosan languages* indicate that “Obl” (i) are not conditioned by the lexical verbs, (ii) are not thematically restricted, and (iii) can mark either external or internal arguments.

(a) Causative. Across the eight languages, bi-eventive causatives under matrix AV obligatorily present “Obl”-marked causee (e.g. (1a)), which behaves like normal external argument under binding tests. The analysis of “Obl” as a structural case is further motivated by the case alternation on the causee conditioned by the matrix voice type. When the matrix voice changes from AV to PV, **the causee obligatorily bears Abs** (e.g. (1b)). This contradicts the lexical analysis for “Obl”, which predicts no structurally conditioned case alternation.

(1) a. Ø-pa-pi-palu kaku cingranan tu wacu. b. pa-pi-palu-en aku cingra tu wacu.
 AV-CAU-AV-beat 1S.ABS 3S.OBL OBL dog CAU-AV-beat-PV 1S.ERG 3S.ABS OBL dog
 ‘I made *him* beat dogs.’ ‘I made *him* beat dogs.’ [Amis]

(b) Restructuring. Restructuring phenomenon found in the same languages is characterized by long-distance case licensing and clitic climbing under try-type verbs (e.g. Chen 2012). With AV try-type verbs, the internal argument within the restructuring infinitive (RI) is obligatorily “Obl”-marked (e.g. (2a)); with Non-AV try-type verb, it is obligatorily Abs-marked (e.g. (2b)). The long-distance case licensing can be straightforwardly accounted for by the lack of structural Acc case-licensor within the RIs (Wurmbrand 2001, 13). The ergative analysis, on the other hand, wrongly predicts the “Obl” case as a lexical case to be available even under restructuring environment (provided by V⁰), and therefore fails to account for the long-distance case-licensing.

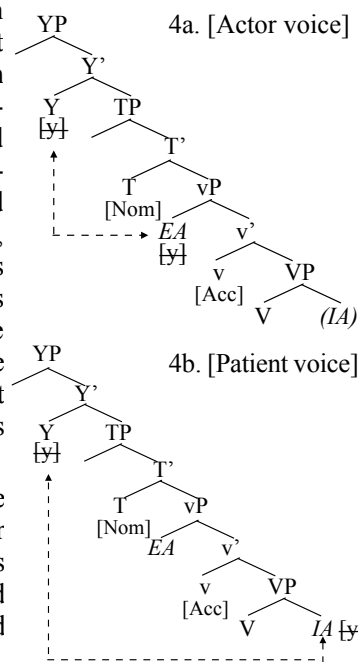
(2) a. talam=ku sanapa' kan Senten. b. ku=talam-ay sanapa' i Senten.
 try<AV>=1S.ABS cheat<AV> SG.OBL S. 1S.ERG=try-LV cheat<AV> SG.ABS S.
 ‘I tried to cheat *Senten*.’ ‘I tried to cheat *Senten*.’ [Puyuma]

(c) RTO. RTO construction provides another piece of evidence against the antipassive analysis for Formosan AV clauses. In the eight languages, the optionally “raised” phrase (XP) under matrix AV clause is obligatorily “Obl”-marked by the matrix case-licensor (e.g. (3)), as evidenced by the lack of case-connectedness effects between the XP and the embedded clause (3). This argues against the lexical analysis for “Obl”. Under a base-generated analysis of XP, the XP is standardly analyzed as non-thematic, which bears no Case and thematic relation with the matrix lexical verb. Under a raising analysis of XP, the “Obl” case is required to be structurally licensed, and cannot be analyzed as lexical.

(3) ma-ladram=ku kana ngiyawi [dra tu=pukpuk-aw ec(ABS)_i kan Senten].
 AV-know=1S.ABS DF.OBL cat_i [C 3.ERG=beat-PV ec(ABS)_i SG.ERG Senten]
 ‘I know that *the cat* was beat by *Senten*.’ [Puyuma]

*Eight languages surveyed in this paper: Puyuma, Amis, Paiwan, Seediq, Atayal, Bunun, Saisiyat, Tsou.

4. The Accusative proposal. As shown above, the predictions of an transitive AV analysis are born out with the empirical evidence from the three constructions (a)-(c), while the antipassive analysis makes the wrong predictions. The transitive AV analysis reveals a system with both AV and PV being transitive, yet with the “Abs” (pivot) marking appearing on the external and internal argument, respectively. We argue that an Accusative analysis as follows can better account for such a system. We propose that an AN-type voice system is Nom-Acc in terms of Case-licensing, with an obligatory A'-agreement between an A'-head (YP) and a particular argument required in each clause, which makes an argument “pivot”. The “voice marker”, obligatorily presents in all clauses, morphologically realizes the agreement relation between the A'-head and a specific argument. The “Abs” (pivot) marking specifies the element that enters the A'-agreement, and overrides the morphological case marking of the pivot argument. **In AV**, the A'-agreement targets the *subject*. Hence, the subject receives an “Abs” marking. The internal argument, if any, remains Acc (“Obl”)-marked (4a). Such analysis correctly predicts the distribution of “Abs” under AV as appearing on both transitive and unergative/unaccusative subjects. **In PV**, the A'-agreement targets the *object*, hence the internal argument receives the “Abs” marking, with the external argument Nom (“Erg”) marked (4b). The observation that patient-like unaccusative *subjects* cannot be licensed under PV is correctly derived under the present proposal. **In LV/CV**, the A'-agreement targets specific non-core arguments (e.g. benefactor, instrument, location). Hence, the external and internal arguments remain Nom (“Erg”) and Acc (“Obl”) marked, respectively, with the target phrase “Abs”-marked. The present A'-analysis of “Abs” shares some similarities with Richards’s (2000), Pearson’s (2005) and Erlewine et al.’s (2014, to appear) proposals for Tagalog and Malagasy, yet differs from the existing view that “Erg” and “Obl” are “repair”/last resort cases that license arguments when regular case marking options are not available (e.g. Erlewine et al. to appear). In contrast, the present proposal assumes no special mechanisms for the licensing of “Erg” (=Nom) and “Obl” (=Acc).



5. Why Abs “disappears” in nominalization. In addition to the three constructions discussed above (a)-(c), the proposed analysis offers an account for the widely observed absence of Abs-marked phrase inside nominalized structures (e.g. pseudo-cleft complement (5)) by analyzing the Abs-phrase inside nominalized structures as a null Operator, with all arguments inside the nominalized complement Case-licensed as they would normally be under verbal environments.

- (5) a. lima=tu rumi'ad ku [Op adada-an ni/*ci Aki<↑>]. b. lima=tu rumi'ad ku [Op sa-keru aku/*kaku <↑>].
 five=PRF day ABS [Op sick-LV.NMZ ERG/*ABS A. <↑>] five=PRF day ABS [Op CV.NMZ-dance 1S.ERG/*ABS <↑>]
 'Aki has been sick for five days.' 'I have danced for five days.' [Amis]

Given the proposal above, the “Erg” marking on both unaccusative (5a) and unergative (5b) subjects inside the nominalized adjunct pseudo-cleft complement is predicted, in that T can assign Nom to all subject arguments regardless of their thematic roles, with the null Op entering agreement relation with the A'-head. It remains a challenge for the ergative analysis, according to which “Erg” is an inherent case assigned to external arguments.

Nominalizer/voice marker homophony as supporting evidence. Nominalizer/voice marker homophony is a shared trait of prototypical AN-type voice systems. This homophony can be straightforwardly accounted for under the current analysis, in which a “voice marker” or a “nominalizer” essentially realizes obligatory A'-agreement between the A'-head and a DP in verbal environments (6a) and between the same head and a null Op under nominalized environments (6b-c).

- (6) a. puq-**un** na laqi ka sari. (clausal) b. maanu_i ka [_{RC} Op_i puq-**un** na laqi <↑>]? (pseudo cleft)
 eat-PV ERG child ABS taro what_i ABS [_{RC} Op_i eat-PV.NMZ ERG child <↑>]
 'The taro will be eaten by the child.' 'What is the thing that will be eaten by the child?'
 c. [_{NP} Op_i puq-**un** na laqi <↑>] (nominal)
 [_{NP} Op_i eat-PV.NMZ ERG child <↑>] [Seediq]
 'the thing that will be eaten by the child'

6. Conclusion and implication. The finding that highest-level Austronesian languages unitarily exhibit transitive AV clauses makes the ergative analysis for the AN (Philippine)-type system untenable. The present analysis suggests that the AN-type voice system can be accounted for without being placed under a unique typological group (e.g. Shibatani 1988), and indicates that what results in A'-extraction asymmetry in a given language can be independent of syntactic ergativity.

SELECTED REFERENCES. Aldridge, E. 2004. Ergativity and word order in Austronesian languages. Ph.D Dissertation, Cornell University. Pearson, M. 2005. The Malagasy subject/topic as an A'-element. *NLLT* 23:381-457. Richards, N. 2000. Another look at Tagalog subjects. In *Formal issues in Austronesian linguistics*, ed. I. Paul, V. Phillips, and L. Travis. Kluwer.