

## Re-labeling “Ergative”: Evidence from Formosan

**1. Introduction.** Under the ergative approach to Philippine-type voice system (e.g. Payne 1982; De Guzman 1988; Mithun 1994; Aldridge 2004 et seq.), the morphological marking on non-Pivot external arguments (“Ergative”) is analyzed as an inherent case from transitive Voice assigned to its specifier (Aldridge 2004 et seq.). This paper presents novel evidence against this analysis, and argues for a Nominative analysis for “Ergative” based on three observations from three Formosan languages that belong to different Austronesian primary branches: (i) under the environments where an unaccusative subject does not bear Pivot status, it carries obligatory “Ergative”-marking, suggesting that “Ergative” is not tied to transitive Voice or external argument position, and (ii) “Ergative”-marking is not available to external arguments that are not the highest argument in a complex sentence with a non-finite embedded clause, suggesting that the licensing of “Ergative” is subject to locality and finiteness. Finally, we present novel data showing that (iii) Pivot-licensing in all three languages shows no locality constraint in ditransitives, contradicting the analysis that Pivot marks structural case from T (Aldridge 2004 et seq.). With (i)-(iii), we argue for the following analysis for Philippine-type voice system (1).

- (1) a. “Pivot” does not realize structural Absolutive, but a topic/focus marker that overrides morphological case and marks the information-structure status of one specific phrase per clause.
- b. “Ergative” marks structural Nominative from finite T that licenses the *subject* in each clause. It “disappears” only when Pivot-marking falls on the subject and *overrides Nominative case*.

**2. Phenomenon I: “Ergative case” on unaccusative subjects.** Puyuma, Amis, and Seediq are three Philippine-type Formosan languages that show independent evidence for unaccusativity. As exemplified in the following data from Amis, unaccusative verbs in the language obligatorily take a specific Actor-voice affix *ma-*, and can license an “**Ergative**”-marked external argument to form direct causation without changing the Pivot status (glossed as “ABS”) of the Undergoer ((2a), (3a)); unergative verbs cannot take the affix *ma-* or an “Ergative”-marked external argument as Causer (2b), and require independent causative affix to form direct causation. Further, they allow **Oblique-marked** cognate objects (e.g. ‘sing’, ‘dream’, ‘dance’) (3b), while unaccusative verbs do not.

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| <p>(2a) <i>ma-petek</i> (<i>nu faliyus</i>) <i>ku</i> <i>kayakay</i>.<br/> AV<sub>1</sub>-break (ERG typhoon) ABS bridge<br/> ‘The bridge is broken/Typhoon broke the bridge.’</p> <p>(3a) <i>ma-leneng</i> (<i>nu tamdaw</i>) <i>ku</i> <i>runan</i>.<br/> AV<sub>1</sub>-sink (ERG person) ABS boat<br/> ‘The boat sank/The person sank the boat.’</p> | <p>(2b) <i>c&lt;um&gt;ikay</i> (*<i>nu tamdaw</i>) <i>ku</i> <i>pusi</i>. [Amis]<br/> run&lt;AV<sub>2</sub>&gt; (*ERG person) ABS cat<br/> ‘The cat ran/*The person made the cat run.’</p> <p>(3b) <i>r&lt;um&gt;adiw</i> <i>kaku</i> (<i>tu lima a radiw</i>).<br/> sing&lt;AV<sub>2</sub>&gt; 1S.ABS (OBL five LK song)<br/> ‘I will sing five songs.’</p> |
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Despite the unaccusative-unergative distinction, intransitive subjects of either type are obligatorily “**Ergative**”-marked inside a relative clause or pseudo cleft, where the relative head noun or cleft predicate is coindexed with a temporal or locative adjunct inside the CP/presupposed clause (4)-(5).

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| <p>(4a) [<sub>DP</sub> <i>ku</i> [<sub>CP</sub> <i>ka-rumadiw-an</i> [<sub>DP</sub> ABS [<sub>CP</sub> INTR-sing-LV [<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">ni Lisin</span> ] LK <i>day</i> ] ] ] a <i>rumi’ad</i> ]<br/> ‘the day (when) Lisin sang’</p> <p>(5a) <i>ihakuwa</i> [<sub>DP</sub> <i>ku</i> [<sub>CP</sub> <i>ka-rumadiw-an</i> [<sub>DP</sub> ABS [<sub>CP</sub> INTR-sing-LV [<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">ni Lisin</span> ] ] ] ]?<br/> ‘When did Lisin sing?’</p> | <p>(4b) [<sub>DP</sub> <i>ku</i> [<sub>CP</sub> <i>ka-leneng-an</i> [<sub>DP</sub> ABS [<sub>CP</sub> INTR-sink-LV [<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">nu runan</span> ] LK <i>day</i> ] ] ] a <i>rumi’ad</i> ] [Amis]<br/> ‘the day (when) the boat sank’</p> <p>(5b) <i>ihakuwa</i> [<sub>DP</sub> <i>ku</i> [<sub>CP</sub> <i>ka-leneng-an</i> [<sub>DP</sub> ABS [<sub>CP</sub> INTR-sink-LV [<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">nu runan</span> ] ] ] ]?<br/> ‘When did the boat sink?’</p> |
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Under the standard analysis, the presupposed clauses in (5a-b) are instances of headless relative clauses that share the same internal structure with (4a-b) (e.g. Potsdam 2006; Ntelitheos 2006; Pearson 2009); this analysis is supported by empirical evidence from the three languages, in which the putative CPs in (4)-(5) are island-sensitive under standard diagnostics. One might argue that the “Ergative”-marking in (4)-(5) is in fact a Genitive case from D syncretic with “Ergative”; but such an analysis is unlikely, given that the subjects are embedded under a CP-shell. The presence of “Ergative case” on both unergative and unaccusative subjects thus contradicts the inherent-case analysis of “Ergative”.

\* Note that the presupposed clauses in (4)-(5) cannot be analyzed as instances of gerundives (i.e. event nominalization), given that event nominalization in the language takes the form *ka-√/pi-√*, which cannot serve as a relative clause and is morphologically distinct from the marking *ka-√-an/pi-√-an* used for relativization of temporal or locative phrases (4)-(5).

**3. Phenomenon II: Distributional restrictions.** In the same languages, “Ergative”-marking is not available to external arguments that are not the highest argument in a complex sentence. In productive causatives across the three languages, only the *Causer* but not the *Causee* can be “Ergative”-marked, although the *Causees* always behaves like a normal external argument under the diagnostics of quantifier-variable binding, agent-oriented adverb, and distinct temporal adjunct that modify the caused event (6)-(7).

- (6) ku=pa-trima-anay kana/(*\*tu=*) walak na kuraw andaman. [Puyuma]  
 1S.ERG=*CAU-buy-CV* DF.OBL/*\*ERG* child DF.ABS fish tomorrow  
 ‘I assigned the child to buy fish tomorrow.’
- (7) ku=pa-sabsab-anay masal paseket kana/(*\*tu=*) walak driya tu=trukap. [Puyuma]  
 1S.ERG=*CAU-wash-CV* again thoroughly DF.OBL/*\*ERG* child every 3.ABS.POSS=shoes  
 ‘I asked every child to wash his shoes thoroughly again.’

As in (6)-(7), in CV-marked causatives, the *Caussum* is obligatorily Pivot-marked in all three languages. Under the analysis that “Ergative”-marking comes from Voice, the case pattern in (8) is predicted to be an available option for CV-causatives, in which both the Causer and the Causee receive inherent Ergative case from the matrix and embedded Voice head, respectively, with structural Absolutive assigned to the Caussum. However, while *Ergative-marked Causee* has been reported in different languages (e.g. Abbott 1991; Abitov *et al.* 1957; Guirardello 1999; LaPolla 1996), a *Causee* can never access “Ergative”-marking in any Philippine-type language, to the best of our knowledge.

- (8) \* T Causer Voice  $v_{\text{CAUSE}}$  [ $v_{\text{VOICEP}}$  Causee Voice ..... Caussum]] (case pattern NOT applicable)  
 [ERG] [ERG] [ABS]

**4. Phenomenon III: Non-locality in Pivot-licensing.** Finally, all three languages exhibit the same voice-conditioned case alternation in *ditransitives* (9), with the three arguments maintaining the same structural relations under all voice types, as evidenced by the binding diagnostics exemplified in (10)-(11), which show that a *Recipient always asymmetrically c-commands a Transported theme* regardless of voice types. The invariable structural relation versus the “voice”-conditioned “case” alternation (8) thus suggests the non-local nature of Pivot-licensing, and falsifies an Absolutive analysis for Pivot-marking. The present analysis is additionally supported by the case pattern in *CV-causatives*, where Pivot-marking skips the external-argument *Causee* and marks the Caussum (6)-(7).

	IV	CV
Agent	[“Ergative”]	[“Ergative”]
Recipient	[Pivot]	[Oblique]
Theme	[Oblique]	[Pivot]

- (10a) ku=beray-ay [kantu=lribun] [i tinataw kana kiakarun driya]. [Puyuma]  
 1S.ERG=*give-IV* [3.POSS.OBL=wages] [SG.ABS 3.POSS.mother LK laborer every]  
 ‘I gave every laborer’s mother his wages.’ (✓ bound variable reading)
- (10b) ku=beray-anay [tu=lribun] [kan tinataw kana kiakarun driya].  
 1S.ERG=*give-CV* [3.POSS.ABS=wages] [DF.OBL 3.POSS.mother LK laborer every]  
 ‘I gave every laborer’s mother his wages.’ (✓ bound variable reading)
- (11a) ku=beray-ay [tu=walak] [kantu=lribun kana kiakarun driya]. [Puyuma]  
 1S.ERG=*give-IV* [3.POSS.ABS=child] [3.POSS.OBL=wages DF.OBL laborer every]  
 ‘I gave his child every laborer’s wages.’ (✗ bound variable reading)
- (11b) ku=beray-anay [kantu walak][tu=lribun kana kiakarun driya].  
 1S.ERG=*give-CV* [3.POSS.OBL child] [3.POSS.ABS=wages DF.OBL laborer every]  
 ‘I gave his child every laborer’s wages.’ (✗ bound variable reading)

**5. Claim.** We argue that a Nominative analysis for “Ergative” (1) captures the three observations at one time. First, Pivot-licensing’s lack of locality on the one hand (10)-(11) and the observation that “Ergative”-marking is subject to locality and finiteness on the other (6)-(7) follows from the analysis that “Ergative” essentially realizes *structural Nominative*, while “Pivot” is a topic/focus marker independent of Case-licensing, which highlights a specific phrase in each clause, as indicated by the appropriate agreement morphology (“voice affix”) on the verb (9). Under the present analysis (1a-b), “Ergative”-marking on intransitive subjects in (4)-(5) is expected, as any subject that is not under Agree relation with the Topic/Focus head is predicted to carry overt Nominative case.

**6. Conclusion and implications.** The novel evidence against the inherent analysis of “Ergative” lends further supports to the Accusative approach to Philippine-type voice systems (e.g. Chung 1998; Richards 2000; Pearson 2001, 2005), and suggests that A’-extraction asymmetry can be independent of syntactic ergativity.