The ergative features of Papuan and Austronesian languages

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Pacific languages include several linguistic families: besides European languages recently introduced and pidgins, we found Aborigenal (Australian) languages, Papuan languages and Austronesian languages. Among the Pacific languages which show ergative features, different ergative splits are found which may be conditioned by the semantic nature of the noun phrases, by tense-aspect-mood markers or by the semantic nature of the verb. I will present some of these ergative splits, along with a few aberrant ergative constructions. Then I will briefly review the different historical hypothesis trying to explain the present day situation in the Polynesian languages. Finally, I will discuss some points concerning the pragmatics of ergativity.

1. Different kinds of ergative "split"

Most Australian languages are well known for their ergative structures. As a reminder, I shall mention just a few examples from Wargamay/Warrgamay (from Lynch, 1998:199-200). In examples 1 to 3, we find an ergative structure, with S and O marked by Ø in the absolutive while A has the ergative suffix -ndu:

1. \textit{maal} gagay
   man.ABS go
   "The man is going."
In many Australian languages, however, pronouns behave differently from nouns in marking core arguments. It is the case in Wargamay, where although 3rd person pronouns behave like nouns; non-singular 1st and 2nd person pronouns have an accusative pattern with the base form for S and A – *ngali* in (4) and (5) – and an accusative suffix, -*nya* in (6) marking O function:

4. *ngali* gagay
   1DU go
   "We two are going."

5. *ngali* ganal ngunday
   1DU frog.ABS see
   "We two are looking at the frog."

6. ganal-ndu *ngali-nya* ngunday
   frog-ERG 1DU-OBJECT see
   "The frog is looking at us two."

Finally, singular 1st and 2nd person pronouns show tripartite system with different forms for each of A, S and O.

In this kind of languages, the split is conditioned by the semantic content of NP's, lexical versus pronominal arguments. In fact, the different treatment between, on the one side, all of the pronominal arguments or at least some of them and, on the other, nominal arguments, is one of the main characteristics of most Papuan and Austronesian languages where ergativity is attested. I will illustrate this point with examples from Papuan languages, Melanesian languages from New Caledonia (Kanak languages), and from Western Polynesian languages.

1.1. Papuan languages

According to Foley (1986), a great number of Papuan languages indicate both the actor and the undergoer of transitive verbs by verbal affixes: S and A are indicated by suffixes, O by prefixes. Hence, overwhelmingly, the common verbal case marking schema for Papuan languages shows a nominative-
accusative pattern (oVa or Voa being the most common orders). Only a handful of languages show other patterns\(^1\), as for instance Yimas which treats A, O and S differently: 1sg S ama-; 1sg O ka-; 1sg A Na. But this tripartite marking is rare cross-linguistically.

In Papuan languages, the ergative-absolutive verbal case marking schema is unattested, in spite of the fact that nominal case-marking along an ergative pattern is rather common. Ergative case-marking on nominals is common in languages of the Highlands areas of both Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya. According to Foley, this has resulted from the spread of a peripheral case marker (for the ablative, causal and instrumental) to the actor, in order to avoid the potential confusion between actor and undergoer when they are both animate.

If there is no possible ambiguity, the ergative case marker is largely omitted, as is shown by example (7) from Dani, a language in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea where the two NP's are unmarked:

7. \(\text{ap wekki wat-n-an-h-e}\)
   \(\text{man charcoal hit-1sgO-put-REALIS-3sgA}\)
   "The man smeared charcoal on me." (Foley, 1986:107)

But if there is potential ambiguity (especially with two animate nominals), then the ergative marker (formally an instrumental/ablative marker: abl/instr→erg (A[+control])) is present:

8. \(\text{wam-en } \emptyset-na-sikh-e\)
   \(\text{pig-ERG 3SG.O-eat-REMOTE PAST-3SG.A}\)
   "The pig ate him." (id.)

Partly similar situations hold in other Pacific languages, as we will see in Drehu, a Kanak language from New Caledonia.

1.2. Kanak languages

Kanak languages exhibit different kinds of split. Ergative constructions are correlated with several syntactic features (verbal agreement, coreferency, verb classes, tense-aspect); they are also correlated with semantic facts (human/non human arguments, degree of agentivity or intentionality) and finally

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\(^1\) However, a group of Australian languages from south-east Queensland (Galali, Wangkumara...), or Dhalanji (Western Australia) also have distinct marking for S, A and O.
with pragmatic considerations (choice, when possible, between an ergative construction and something else).

In Nêlêmwa (Bril, 2002), clitic pronouns reflect an accusative structure, while nominal agent arguments are marked by \( (e)a \) if human beings or \( ru \) before other animate and collective inanimate. However, the ergativity does not go beyond this morphological marking, since other criteria, as coreference in subordination or relativisation and imperative clause, show that the Nêlêmwa structure is syntactically accusative.

Besides, basic constituent word order is VOA, and the ergative markers only appear with this word order, that is before A arguments which are postposed to the predicate, as in (10) and (11).

9. \( i u \ aroo-n \)
   3SG PERF leave husband-3SG.POSS
   "Her husband left."

10. \( i\ thege \ ve\ pwe \ ru\ nok \)
    3SG run in the distance fishing line AGT fish
    "The fish took the fishing line away." (Bril, 2000:327)

11. \( i\ tu'ai\ Pwâ-Hivic \( (e)\a\) Pwâ-Kebô \)
    3SG lie Pwâ-Hivic AGT Pwâ-Kebô
    "Pwâ-Kebô lied to Pwâ-Hivic." (Bril, 2002:142)

Besides transitive verbs, Nêlêmwa has a verb class called "medio-actives" (verbs of affect, Aktionsart, movement, perception), whose arguments can appear in two different orders: either VSabsOi as in (12) or VoiAerg as in (13). In both cases, O is marked by the oblique marker \( o \), but when the agent is expressed just after the verb, it is unmarked, whereas in final position it is in the ergative. These two constructions show different degrees of agentivity and of perfectivity.

12. \( i\ u\ toven\ Pwayili\ o\ shaya\ eli \)
    3SG PERF finish Pwayili OBL work that
    "Pwayili has finished that work." (Bril, 2002:147)

13. \( i\ u\ toven\ o\ shaya\ eli\ a\ Pwayili \)
    3SG PERF finish OBL work that AGT Pwayili
    "Pwayili has completed that work." (id.)

The Nêlêmwa ergative marker \( a \) or \( ea \), marking humans, probably has a nominal origin, since it used to take possessive suffixes; \( ru \) for non humans is the grammaticalised form of the verb \( thu \) "make".
In Nemi (Ozanne-Rivierre, 1979), there is an ergative split based on the animate/inanimate distinction: The marker *ru* appears before animate (14) or inanimate (15) agentive arguments of transitive verbs, and before animate agentive arguments of intransitive verbs (16), that is, a kind of "extended ergative" as Dixon calls it:

14. *yelu fe vi hyaok ru maali hnook*
   3DU take DEF child AGT DUEL woman
   "The two women take the child."

15. *ye teve-ek ru vi davec*
   3SG take away-3SG.O AGT DEF flood
   "The flood takes him away."

16. *ye ta-me ru vi hnook*
   3SG go.up-come AGT DEF woman
   "The woman is coming up."

An S argument referring to an inanimate remains unmarked:

17. *ye ta-me vi davec*
   3SG go.up-come DEF flood
   "The flood is increasing."

In Drehu (Moyse-Faurie, 1983), ergativity is (roughly speaking) more or less split depending on the tense aspect marker: the construction is ergative in the perfective and in the progressive aspect, but accusative in the past, present or future. However, the degree of agency/animacy and the word class to which the argument belongs also intervene in the argument marking.

– progressive: intransitive arguments are generally unmarked as in (18); the agent of a transitive verb is marked by the ergative marker (which is also the instrumental marker); this ergative marker is inflected, with the form *hnen* (+ nominal) as in (19), *hnei* (+ proper noun and pronoun) and *hne-* (+ possessive 1st person suffix); it has a nominal origin, meaning "place of":

18. *kola cia la hnitr e koilo trône uma*
   PROG grow DEF bush LOC there behind house
   "The bush is growing behind the house." (Lercari et al., 2001:411)

19. *kola humuth la puaka hnen la sinelapa*
   PROG kill DEF pig ERG DEF servant
   "The servant is killing the pig."

However, if they are proper nouns, intransitive arguments are also usually marked by the ergative marker as in (20):
20. *kola hmahma hnei Hetrue*
   PROG be ashamed ERG Hetrue
   "Hetrue is ashamed."

If there is no ambiguity concerning the respective role of the arguments, however, the A argument can stay unmarked. Hence, in (21), the agent is marked but in (22) it is not necessary since there is no ambiguity possible:

21. *kola hnyiman la utr hnen la aji*
   PROG laugh.TR DEF octopus ERG DEF rat
   "The rat is laughing at the octopus."

22. *kola xen la koko la nekönatr*
   PROG eat DEF yam DEF child
   "The child is eating the yam."

– In the perfective, we find an ergative construction, with S and O unmarked, A marked as shown in example (24).

23. *mec asë hë angatr*
   die all PERF 3PL
   "They are all dead." (Lercari *et al*, 2001:372)

24. *iji hë la melek hnen la nekönatr*
   drink PERF DEF milk ERG DEF child
   "The child drank the milk."

- In the past tense, there is a semantic and morphological agreement: *hnen* marker is necessary for a preposed argument referring to the agent, both with intransitive (25) and transitive (26) verbs:

25. *hnen la uma hna mel*
   ERG DEF house past burn.INTR
   "The house has burnt." (Lercari *et al*, 2001:353)

26. *hnen la aji hna hnyiman la utr*
   ERG DEF rat PAST laugh.TR DEF octopus
   "The rat has laughed at the octopus."

But: no marker is required when the sole argument is postposed to the predicate, has a low agency, and is a nominal as in (27):

27. *hna mel la uma*
   PAST burn DEF house
   "The house has burnt." (Lercari *et al*, 2001:353)

On the contrary, when the argument is a pronoun or a proper noun (or assimilate), the agent marker is compulsory, whatever the word order and the verb valency, as shown in (28) and (29):
28. *hnei*  
*PAST eat entire DEF meat*  
"They have eaten all the meat."

29. *hnei*  
*ERG Hettrue PAST be ashamed*  
"Hettrue has been ashamed."

- In non past tense (present/imperfective/future) the word order is SVO, S being always unmarked and preposed to the predicate as in (30) and (31):

30. *angeic*  
*3SG IMPERF sick*  
"He is sick."

31. *angeic*  
*3SG IMPERF eat DEF ya m*  
"S/he eats the yam."

Hence, Drehu shows a mixture of semantically based marking\(^2\) and morphological based marking: in the past tense, nominal NPs are marked "according to their actual role in a given instance of use of a verb"; with the perfective aspect, the argument marking is strictly ergative, whereas with the imperfective, the structure is strictly accusative.

Here, like in Nemi, we can analyse the Drehu argument marking pattern as a kind of 'extended ergative'. The ergative marker *hne*- is not extend to all S arguments\(^3\), but only in certain circumstances, to specify or insist on the agentive force of the S argument.

### 1.3. Polynesian languages

Western Polynesian languages are well-known – probably as much as Australian languages – for their ergative constructions. However, few studies have been undertaken that show the exact nature of ergativity in these languages.

Differences in word order, in the case marking of arguments, in the origin and distribution of tense aspect markers allow to make a primary

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\(^2\) That is "grammatical marking which directly describes the semantics of the conceptualisation of a particular situation without this having to be related to a prototype and filtered through basic syntactic relations." (Dixon, 1994:28-29). Following Dixon (1994:30-31), "it is best to restrict case labels such as nominative, accusative, absolutive and ergative to languages with syntactically based marking where they indicate syntactic relations, and to use other, semantically based, labels which mirror the semantics of each situation of use".

\(^3\) Hence we are not dealing with a 'marked nominative' which concerns all S (Dixon, 1994:64).
distinction between Western and Eastern Polynesian languages. Thus, if we consider argument structure, Western Polynesian languages have an ergative structure, whereas Eastern languages are accusative. I will return to this point later on and will first go through the East Futunan verb classes and types of argument marking, both for nominals and pronominals, in some detail.

In East Futunan, the verb classification can be based on the number and kind of admissible constructions with allowance for the optional or obligatory nature of the arguments and their semantic function. Verbs are usually inherently oriented for a specific construction; only a few are "labile". Most can only change their argument structure through a process of derivation. In terms of semantic relationships, verb derivation must be considered differently according to whether the absolutive argument of the nonderived verb represents an agent or a patient. It is thus impossible to define the verb classes of East Futunan and their range of constructions independently of the semantic relationship pertaining between the predicate and its primary absolutive argument.

a) Nominal arguments

– The absolutive argument of an intransitive verb may refer to an agent (Sa) as in (32); the intransitive verb may undergo a derivation, allowing it to become transitive; its agent is then marked in the ergative (33), and a patient is added in the absolutive; the verb *kava* "climb" takes on the terminative meaning "climb to the top" in its derived form.

32. e *kava* le toe (i le niu) ABS = agent

  NS climb DEF child (LOC DEF coconut palm)

  ‘The child climbs up (the coconut palm).’

33. e *kava*-i le niu e le toe ABS = patient, ERG = agent

  NS climb-TR DEF coconut palm ERG DEF child + derived verb

  ‘The child climbs to the top of the coconut palm.’

Ergative verbs with a sole absolutive argument referring to an agent enter both constructions, but without having to be derived; the S argument in a single-argument sentence (34) must become an A (ergative) argument in a dual-argument sentence and the added argument takes its place in the absolutive case (35):

34. e kaiä le toe ABS = agent

  NS steal DEF child

  ‘The child steals.’ / ‘The child is a thief.’
Only a few verbs allow both these types of construction without derivation: for example, *kaiā "steal"*, *va'iga "do (work) carefully"*, *inu "drink"*, *kai "eat"*, *taki "steer, drive"*, *'a'amu "spit"*, *tagi "cry"*, *autalu "hoe up (weeds)"*, *tafa "cut open, operate"*. These verbs are all agent-oriented, i.e., in a single-argument construction, their argument must be an agent. When two arguments are used, the agent (which is in the absolutive case in the single-argument sentence) will be marked for the ergative by *e*.

– The sole argument of some intransitive verbs expresses a patient (So) as in (36):

36. \( kua \ foa \ le \ tili \) ABS = patient
    \( \text{PERF be pierced DEF net} \)
    ‘The net has a hole.’

These verbs can also be transitivized: *mate "die, go out (fire)"*, *mate-'i "be put out by"*; *ula "flare"*, *ula-fi "be stoked by"*; *foa "be pierced"*, *foa-'i "pierce"*; *lalata "be tame"*, *faka-lalata "tame"*; *kā "be alight"*, *faka-kā "lit"*; *mātino "be pointed out"*, *faka-mātino "point out"*; S becomes O, and A is added as in (37):

37. \( kua \ foa-'i \ le \ tili \ e \ le \ ika \) ABS = patient, ERG = agent
    \( \text{PERF pierce-TR DEF net DEF fish + derived verb} \)
    ‘The fish has made a hole in the net.’

Hence, if the absolutive argument represents a patient, it will remain in the absolutive in a sentence with derived verb, which will contain an additional ergative argument.

A sole argument, still in the absolutive, may also refer to an argument corresponding to the patient of an ergative verb, as in (42):

38. \( e \ valu \ le \ niu \) ABS = patient
    \( \text{NS grate DEF coconut} \)
    ‘The coconut is grated’

(*e valu le tagata " the man is grated" is semantically not acceptable). In this example, the ergative argument is merely omitted. The absolutive argument, referring to a patient in the single-argument sentence, will remain in the absolutive case in a dual-argument sentence, with the agent added in the ergative case as in (39):
Verbs like *ake* "be cleaned", *vaku* "be grated", *tanu* "be buried", *vene* "be carried", *ali* "be raked", etc., belong to this class, which requires a patient argument in the absolutive but can also take an optional agent argument in the ergative case, without being derived.

– Ergative verbs with a sole ergative argument or a sole absolutive argument (So/a)

A few transitive verbs admit either a sole ergative argument or a sole absolutive argument. This is the case with verbs such as *mafai* ‘be able to’, *fakataga* ‘allow’, *tali* ‘accept, be willing to’, *iloa* ‘know’. It is interesting to note that these verbs denote either a real power or a mere potential action.

Although a great majority of ergative East Futunan verbs are ‘goal oriented’ (Biggs 1974:410), these verbs – mostly "modal verbs" – seem to be both ‘agent oriented’ (40) and (42) or patient oriented (41) and (43), depending on the case marking of the sole argument.

These verbs are generally verbs of action which require both an absolutive argument (patient) and an ergative argument (agent): *afa* "search", *ati* "build", *'eke* "filter", *fō* "wash", *futi* "pluck", *keu* "scratch", *sele* "cut", *numi* "crumple (up)", *fola* "spread", *iki* "strip off", *'ofa* "take apart", *ligi* "pour", *ta'aki* "dig up", *sae* "tear", *foke* "peel", *'opo'opo* "gather", etc.
To take a single absolutive argument (still a patient), they must undergo derivation by prefixing the "resultative" ma-. This elimination of the ergative argument is a kind of passive construction, but is limited to a few ergative verbs. They then have only one obligatory argument in the absolutive case, representing the patient, but may have other participants in the oblique case representing the indirect cause of the state expressed by the derived verb as i Muni in (47).

44.  
$$e \ \text{sele} \ \text{le} \ \text{niu} \ \text{e} \ \text{le} \ \text{tagata}$$  
NS cut DEF coconut palm ERG DEF man  
'The man made a cut in the coconut palm.'

45.  
$$e \ \text{ma-sele} \ \text{le} \ \text{niu}$$  
NS PREF-cut DEF coconut palm  
'O > S, derived verb, A > ∅ (= passive)  
'The coconut palm has a cut (made in it).'

46.  
$$e \ \text{'ofa} \ \text{le} \ \text{pusatu'u} \ e \ \text{Muni}$$  
NS take apart DEF cupboard ERG Muni  
'Muni takes apart the cupboard.'

47.  
$$kua \ \text{ma-'ofa} \ \text{le} \ \text{pusatu'u} \ (\text{i Muni})$$  
PERF PREF-take apart DEF cupboard (OBL Muni)  
'The cupboard has been taken apart (owing to Muni).'

"Indirect" transitive constructions abs/obl

Another verb class, with verbs usually referred to as 'middle verbs', require an absolutive argument and a second participant introduced by the oblique marker ki. Middle verbs belong to the same semantic category, as they are all verbs of perception, of feeling or of speech (alofa "love", tio "see", kamo "touch", kalaga "call", loi "lie", oli "desire", logo "hear", loto "want", pati "say", masalo "think", mokomoko "like", peu "contradict", etc.).

The absolutive argument is the experiencer whereas the oblique argument is the patient, the recipient of the sensation, feeling, or act of communication. Middle verbs do not behave like transitive/ergative verbs, and enter a strict accusative pattern:

48.  
$$e \ \text{loi} \ \text{le} \ \text{toe} \ \text{ki} \ \text{lona} \ \text{tinana}$$  
NS lie DEF child OBL its mother  
'ABS=experiencer, OBL=recipient  
The child lies to its mother.'

However, most middle verbs can undergo derivation and become ergative, as in (49):

49.  
$$e \ \text{loi-}'i \ \text{le} \ \text{tinana} \ e \ \text{lona} \ \text{toe}$$  
NS lie-TR DEF mother ERG its child  
'ABS=patient, ERG=agent  
The child submits its mother to its lies.'
In the case of middle verbs, verb derivation results in the absolutive "experiencer" being placed in the ergative, which implies stronger agency, and the argument in the oblique case becoming absolutive, hence a strongly affected patient.

b) Pronominal arguments

Let us turn now to the situation with pronominal arguments.

Western Polynesian languages comprise two series of pronouns. First, one series which is formally identical to independent pronouns, and can either be sentence initial, preceded by a topic marker, or postposed to the verb, marked by a case marker. Secondly, one preverbal series, with a generally reduced form and which does not accept any of these case markers.

As far as ergativity is concerned, differences appear among these languages concerning on one hand the behaviour of the 3rd person singular and, on the other hand, the syntactical function that may assume preposed pronouns (Moyse-Faurie 1997a).

In East Uvean for example, for all persons but the 3rd singular, the preposed pronominal system is accusative (S = A) but for the 3rd person singular, the structure is ergative, with S = O different from A.

In East Futunan (as in Samoan and East Uvean), for all persons except 3rd singular, there is a choice between preposed and postposed pronouns, whatever the verb valency. Preposed pronouns are available for all persons except 3rd singular, and may correspond to different types of arguments, that is:

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4 The existence of separate series for independent pronouns and clitic pronouns is also attested in Fijian, and is reconstructed in Proto-Polynesian (see for example Pawley, 1966). For each pronominal series, the following distinctions are found: singular, dual and plural numbers; first inclusive and exclusive, second and third persons. Preposed pronouns are not attested in Eastern Polynesian languages which exhibit an accusative structure with pronominal as well as lexical arguments.

5 These preverbal pronouns are usually described as clitic pronouns, as they belong to the verb phrase, and may form a single morphological complex with the tense aspect markers. However, clitic pronouns seldom merge with tense aspect markers (except in Tongan), and, at least in East Futunan and East Uvean languages, the negative marker occurs between the clitic pronouns and the tense aspect markers. Besides, Polynesian preposed pronouns never coexist in a clause with co-referential lexical arguments, as clitics often do.

6 The distinction between singular and non-singular third person pronouns is essential in these Polynesian languages, since dual and plural third person pronouns behave exactly like first and second person pronouns.
– absolutive of intransitive clauses, whether agent-like participant as in ex. (50) or patient-like participant as in ex. (51) and always correspond to the absolutive case, as shown in the sentences in brackets:

50. \(e \ lotou \ i\fo \ ki \ t\ai \ (\sim \ e \ i\fo \ a \ l\atou \ ki \ t\ai)\)
\(\text{NS 3PL go down OBL sea} \quad \text{NS go down ABS 3PL OBL sea}\)

‘They go down to the sea.’

51. \(e \ kau \ masaki \ i \ loku \ tamana \ (\sim \ e \ masaki \ a \ au…)\)
\(\text{NS 1SG sick OBL my father} \quad \text{NS sick ABS 1SG}\)

‘I am sick because of my father.’

– with ergative verbs, the preposed personal pronoun (except 3rd sg) may refer to an agent; it then corresponds to the ergative case as in (52) or (53):

52. \(e \ kau \ f\o \ le \ kofu \ (\sim \ e \ f\o \ e \ au \ le \ kofu)\)
\(\text{NS 1SG wash DEF dress} \quad \text{NS wash ERG 1SG DEF dress}\)

‘I wash the dress.’

53. \(e \ kau \ tamate \ a \ koe \ (\sim \ e \ tamate \ a \ koe \ e \ au)\)
\(\text{NS 1SG hit ABS 2SG} \quad \text{NS hit ABS 2SG ERG 1SG}\)

‘I hit you.’

– But in this East Futunan seems nowadays to be a unique case in the Polynesian family – the preposed pronoun (except 3rd sg) may also refer to the patient of an ergative verb, corresponding to the absolutive case as in ex. (54):

54. \(e \ kau \ tamate \ e \ koe \ (\sim \ e \ ke \ tamate \ a \ au)\)
\(\text{NS 1SG hit ERG 2SG} \quad \text{NS 2SG hit ABS 1SG}\)

‘You hit me.’

The possibility of having a preverbal pronoun in an ‘O’ function was first noticed by Biggs (1974) and was mentioned by Clark (1973). In the course of casual conversation, I noticed that the use of this pronoun was quite frequent in East Futunan.

In Samoan, according to Mosel and Hovdhaugen (1992) as well as to Cook (1996), it is impossible to use a clitic pronoun corresponding to the absolutive argument of an ergative verb. However, in Milner's dictionary, Cook found a sentence with a clitic pronoun corresponding to an O argument:

55. \(na \ m\atou \ v\aosia \ e \ le \ f\oma'i\) (Samoan)
\(\text{PAST 1PL.EXCL forbid ERG DEF doctor}\)

‘The doctor has forbidden (us) to do something.’ (Milner, 1966:314)

This sentence is refused by contemporary Samoan informants, but it is worth to notice that this kind of structure is still attested in East Futunan, and might have been the ancient Samoan structure.
In contrast to the majority of Western Polynesian languages, East Futunan manifests an original development (or kept the ancient system?), exhibiting a multifunctional use of first and second person preposed pronominals with ergative verbs. The attested use of preposed pronouns for the ‘O’ function is remarkable and questions the analysis of such pronouns as always ‘subject-like arguments’. In fact, as far as intransitive and ergative verbs are concerned, East Futunan shows a neutral treatment of preposed pronouns (except for 3rd sg), as ‘s’, ‘a’ and ‘o’ pronominal arguments of ergative verbs are not treated differently.

In East Futunan, the 3rd person singular pronoun *ia* is obligatorily postposed in a S or O fonction, often preceded by the absolutive case marker, just as in East Uvean; in A function, *ia* is also postposed, marked by the ergative marker *e*; contrary to East Uvean, the form *ina*, necessarily referring to an ‘A’ argument, is seldom used – in fact, it is found mostly in biblical translations, probably through analogy with neighbouring languages – and can only occur before an ergative verb in a subordinate clause:

56.  
ko Tuga’ala na faiga ke *ina* tamate a Niuliki  
PRED Tuga’ala PAST try in order to 3SG kill ABS Niuliki  
‘It is Tuga’ala who tried to kill Niuliki.’

1.4. Ergative syntax versus morphological ergativity

The splits conditioned by the semantic nature of the verb or by the semantic nature of NPs are some of the features that one must consider in order to determine the degree of morphological ergativity in a language such as East Futunan. Other criteria, such as imperative clauses, verb agreement, coreferency, provide evidence that the East Futunan structure is less accusative than ergative in its syntax.

a) Plural agreement : ergative structure

With a few dozen of verbs (mostly stative verbs), plural agreement (marked by partial reduplication) exists with the absolutive argument. Most of the verbs that show plural agreement are intransitive:

57.  
kua *masa* le kulo  
PERF empty(SG) DEF cooking pot  
‘The cooking pot is empty.’

58.  
kua *mâmasa* a kulo  
PERF empty(PL) DEF cooking pot  
‘The cooking pots are empty.’
But: a few derived verbs (with the causative prefix *faka*) also show plural agreement with the absolutive argument, as in (60):

59. \( e \quad fakamāva'a \quad a \quad le \quad matapā \quad e \quad toe \)

NS open(SG) ABS DEF door ERG child

‘Children are opening the door.’

60. \( e \quad fakamāva'ava'a \quad a \quad matapā \quad e \quad le \quad toe \)

NS open(PL) ABS door ERG DEF child

‘The child is opening the doors.’

b) Coreference: ergative structure

The non-expression of an argument through coreference in subordinate or coordinate clauses is compulsory when two absolutive arguments are involved. A coreferent argument is generally expressed between as S and an A and between two A’s.

– In (61): non-expression of a coreferential argument between two S with verbs of will:

61. \( e \quad kau \quad loto \quad ke \quad ano \quad ki \quad Uvea \)

NS 1SG want in order that go LOC Uvea

"I want to go to Uvea."

When the verb of the dependent clause is transitive, a coreferent A is generally expressed as in (62) or (63):

62. \( e \quad kau \quad loto \quad ke \quad fakamatala \quad e \quad au \quad le \quad uiga \quad o \quad Mauifa \)

NS 1SG want in order that tell ERG 1SG DEF meaning POSS Mauifa

"I want to tell the raison d'être of the Mauifa."

63. \( na \quad ulu \quad a \quad ia \quad ki \quad fale \quad o \quad ina \quad to'o \quad le \quad sele \)

PAST enter ABS 3SG LOC house COMP 3SG take DEF knife

"He came into the house to take the knife."

but can also be omitted as in (64):

64. \( e \quad kau \quad ano \quad o \quad fana'i \quad le \quad lupe \)

NS 1SG go COMP hunt.TR DEF pigeon

"I am going to hunt the pigeons."

Between two As, the coreferent pronoun seems compulsory as shown in ex. (65):

65. \( na \quad ä \quad e \quad läua \quad le \quad gāne'a \quad o \quad ave \quad e \quad läua \quad ki \quad ai \quad le \quad tuna \)

PAST enclose ERG 3DU DEF place COMP take ERG 3DU LOC ANAPH DEF eel

"They enclosed the place to bring the eel in it."
When the coreference concerns two O's as in ex. (66), no resumptive particle is possible, but it is between two S's:

66. $\text{na 'amo e tagata Alo a le fonu o ave e látou}$
PAST carry ERG man Alo ABS DEF turtle COMP take ERG 3PL

$\text{ki le Puke}$
LOC DEF Puke
"The men from Alo carried the turtle to bring it to Mount Puke".

c) Imperative clauses: accusative structure

Both Sa and A arguments are usually omitted in imperative clauses:

67. $\text{'au! avatu lou ili}$

come take away your fan
"Come!" "Take your fan!"

But: intransitive verbs whose sole argument refers to a patient (So) cannot appear in the imperative mood.

d) Ergativity and reflexivity

In East Futunan, reflexivity is possible with ergative verbs as well as with middle verbs, under certain conditions. In both cases, the valency is unchanged (contrary to reciprocal constructions, which are intransitive):

- the argument coreferential with the absolutive argument must be a pronoun marked for the ergative or the oblique, depending on verb class. The word order is unusual, the nominal argument preceding the coreferent pronominal argument (when the construction is not reflexive, pronominal arguments always precede nominal ones, whatever the case marking).

- the utterance must include a restrictive particle (fa'i) following the predicate or the coreferential ergative/oblique pronoun:

68. $\text{na ako'i le tagata e ia fa'i}$
PAST teach DEF man ERG 3SG RESTR
"The man became learned by himself."

69. $\text{na faka-vilo a Petelo e ia fa'i}$
PAST CAUS-fall ABS Petelo ERG 3SG RESTR
"Petelo threw himself on the ground (willfully)."

70. $\text{e 'ita a Petelo kiate ia fa'i}$
NS be angry ABS Petelo OBL 3SG RESTR
"Petelo is angry at himself."
According to verb agreement, most of coreferential contexts, nominal and 3rd singular pronominal argument marking, East Futunan exhibits a syntactic ergative structure. East Futunan, by contrast, shows an accusative structure in imperative clauses and with middle verbs. Pronouns (except 3rd singular) preposed to intransitive and ergative verbs show a neutral structure, since they can refer to any S, A or O.

2. Languages where the absolutive is marked while the ergative is not

A few Pacific languages are exceptions to universal hypotheses of argument-marking as claimed for example by Dixon (1994:11 and 58), who showed that absolutive case is always unmarked with respect to ergative and that if there is overt coding of the absolutive, then there is also overt coding of the ergative (Croft, 2001:141).

2.1. In Waris (PNG)

According to R. Brown (1981), Waris (PNG) has followed another pattern for disambiguation different from that attested in Dani (remember examples 7 and 8 above), extending the dative case-marker as in (71) to animate undergoers when there is potential ambiguity, as with two animate arguments in (72):

71. \( \text{di } \text{ka-va } \text{ye-m } \text{dembre-hun-v} \)
   \begin{align*}
   &\text{money } 1\text{SG-TOP } 2\text{SG-DAT } \text{put-RECIPIENT-PRES} \\
   &\text{"I give the money to you."}
   \end{align*}

72. \( \text{ye-m } \text{ka-va } \text{helvakomandha-v} \)
   \begin{align*}
   &\text{2SG-DAT } 1\text{SG-TOP } \text{kill-PRES} \\
   &\text{"I kill you (intentionally)."}
   \end{align*}

"The dative marker is also extented to S nominals, when associated with intransitive verbs expressing uncontrolled changes of states" (R.Brown, 1981:109-110):

73. \( \text{he-m } \text{daha-v } \text{ka-m } \text{takola-na} \)
   \begin{align*}
   &\text{3SG-DAT } \text{die-PRES } 1\text{SG-DAT } \text{slip.and.fall-PAST} \\
   &\text{"He is dying." } \text{"I slipped and fell."}
   \end{align*}

Hence in Waris, the dative marker has become the absolutive marker for O and for S[-control]).
b) In Nias, Austronesian language in Sumatra (data from L. Brown, 2003)

Another linguist, also called Brown but with Lea as first name, just described a language where the absolutive is marked whereas the ergative is not. This happens in Nias, an Austronesian language spoken in Sumatra. For example, the citation form for 'father' is *ama*, identical to the ergative form as in (74) while its absolutive form is *n-ama*, as shown in (75). Also note the consonant-initial mutation in *zi'ila* (abs) in (74) and *si'ila* (erg) in (76), the later being the citation form:

74. \( i \)-**tolo** *zi'ila* *ama*-**gu**  
    3SG.REALIS-help ABS.village advisor ERG.father-1SG.POSS  
    "My father is helping/helped a/the/some village advisor(s)."

75. *mofanö* *n-ama*-**gu**  
    leave ABS-father-1SG.POSS  
    "My father is leaving/left."

76. *la*-**tolo** *n-ama*-**gu** *si'ila*  
    3PL.REALIS-help ABS-father-1SG.POSS ERG.village advisor  
    "The village advisors are helping/helped my father."

c) In Roviana (Solomon islands)

In Roviana and other related Solomon languages, pronouns in the absolutive case are preceded by a special marker (*si* in Roviana, *ba* in Hoava), whereas pronouns in the ergative are not marked (Corston, 1996:14-15).

The third singular and plural pronouns have specific forms as seen in (77) and (78):

77. absolutive ergative and neutral  
    3SG (si) *asa* sa  
    3PL sarini ri  

78. *gina* ele *kamo* *si* *asa*  
    maybe PERF arrive ABS 3SG.ABS  
    "Maybe s/he has arrived."

Other pronouns have an identical form whatever their function, as *rau*, ergative (no marker) in (79) and preceded by the absolutive marker *si* in (80):

79. *dogor-i-a* *rau* *si* *asa*  
    see-TR-3SG.O 1SG ABS 3SG.ABS  
    "I saw him/her."

80. *la* ri *pusi-n-au* *iku* *si* *rau*  
    go 3PL.ERG tie-TR-1SG.O rope ABS 1SG  
    "They tied me up with a rope."
3. Direction of change

Debates about the structure of Proto Polynesian and the direction of change between the three structures (ergative, passive, accusative) have been extant in Oceanic linguistics during the last decades.

Phonologically and lexically, Polynesian languages manifest an evident genetic affiliation. But the existence of different argument structures raised questions about the origin of the passive constructions. What happened historically? Was it a drift from accusative to ergative, or on the contrary, the accusative construction as a late evolution?

And what about the higher branching? What was the structure of Proto Austronesian since, as we have seen, quite a few Austronesian languages still have ergative structures? Let us go through the three different dual-argument constructions involved, which can be summarized as:

- **type I**: \( V \ S \ i/kiO \)
- **type II**: \( V\text{-suf} \ eA \ O \)
- **type III**: \( V \ eA \ O \)

a) Accusative structure: the case of Māori

- **intransitive construction**: S unmarked:

81. \( \text{ka moe te tamaiti} \)

\begin{align*}
\text{AOR sleep} & \text{ DEF child} \\
"The child sleeps." & \\
\end{align*}

- **construction I**: A unmarked, O marked by \( i \)

82. \( \text{ka patu te tangata i te tuna} \)

\begin{align*}
\text{AOR kill} & \text{ DEF man OBL DEF eel} \\
"The man killed the eel." & \\
\end{align*}

S and A are unmarked, whereas O is marked.

Moreover, all Māori transitive verbs can undergo a derivation:

- **construction II**: suffixed-verb, A marked by \( e \), O unmarked:

83. \( \text{ka patu-a e te tangata te tuna} \)

\begin{align*}
\text{AOR kill-SUF AGT DEF man DEF eel} & \\
"The eel has been killed by the man." & \\
\end{align*}
This derived structure (construction II) has been traditionally analysed as a passive. But it appears that construction II is more used than construction I, a quite unexpected situation! Indeed, the passive is compulsory (following Biggs, 1969):

– when A is not expressed: \*ViO is impossible, only V-suf O:

84. \textit{kitemea ka hari-a te kai}
\textit{when AOR bring-SUF DEF food}
"When the food was brought..."

– when the object introduces a relative:

85. \textit{ka puta ki waho ngaa tamariki i horo-mia nei}
\textit{AOR arrive LOC outside DEF.PL son PAST swallow-SUF DUR}
"Then came out the sons she had swallowed."

– in imperative clauses with transitive verbs:

86. \textit{huti-a te punga}
\textit{pull out-SUF DEF anchor}
"Pull out the anchor !"

Active construction is required when:

- the object is not expressed: \*V-suf eS
- the object is incorporated
- the subject introduces a relative
- we have in reflexive constructions.

When the choice between active and passive is available, the passive occurs more than twice as frequently as the active.

b) Ergative structure: East Futunan

In East Futunan, the three types of dual-argument construction are also found:

Besides the intransitive construction (87), with S in the absolutive case \((a \text{ or } \emptyset)\):

87. \textit{e makape (a) le toe}
\textit{NS run (ABS) DEF child}
"The child is running."
We find:
– construction III, with ergative verbs: O (patient) in the absolutive, A marked by the ergative marker e:

88. e tä (a) le toe e lona tinana
NS hit (ABS) DEF child ERG his mother
"The mother hits her child."

– construction I, with middle verbs: A in the absolutive, O in the oblique case (ki marker)

89. na tio (a) le fenua ki le vaka
PAST see (ABS) DEF people OBL DEF boat
"Some people have seen the boat."

This ki marker is cognate with Māori i (see example 82), which introduces O in active transitive clauses.

We have seen that East Futunan middle verbs can undergo derivation and become ergative, leading to construction II:

– construction II: suffixed-verb, ergative A and absolutive O:

90. na tio-'i e le fenua (a) le vaka
PAST see-SUF ERG DEF people (ABS) DEF boat
"Some people have observed the boat."

This derivation is possible also with ergative verbs and has nothing to do with passive: O is simply semantically more affected and A is more agentive, but there is no change in valency.

So, on one side, we have ergative languages in Western Polynesia (Samoan, Tokelau, Tongan, Niuafo'ou, East Uvean, East Futunan), with a class of middle verbs which behave as the Māori construction I; on the other side, we find accusative languages, in Eastern Polynesia in which the passive construction (construction II) is more frequently used than the active construction (construction I).

Let's come now to the debate: If Proto Polynesian (PPN) was ergative, one must explain how Māori, Tahitian, Hawaiian and so on became accusative. If PPN was accusative, one must explain how East Futunan and other Western Polynesian languages became ergative.
Hohepa-Hale Hypothesis (1969)

Hohepa and Hale's explanation is that PPN had an accusative structure, with a passive construction (as in Māori). A drift inside Proto Polynesian would have favoured the passive at the expense of the active construction. In Western Polynesian languages, the passive would have become compulsory for all verbs except middle verbs. After that, the suffix became of no use to distinguish passive from active; it became optional, giving rise to variations between constructions II and III. The drop of the passive suffix gave rise to the ergative structure.

The advantage of this hypothesis holds in the fact that it implies only one rule:

- reanalysis of passive marking, which becomes compulsory;
- reanalysis of passive clauses which become transitive active clauses.

Clark's Hypothesis (1976)

Clark's main criticism of Hohepa's analysis is that it supposes a parallel change in Samoan and Tongan, languages which split at the Proto Polynesian level. Besides, he disputes the notion of drift.

For PPN, Clark proposes a model close to Western Polynesian languages, with two transitive verb classes:

– class A: direct transitives, "canonical" (eat, drink, kill, wash) which are ergative;
– class B: indirect transitives (see, call, love), that is, the so-called middle verbs.

PPN also had the three types of construction attested in nowadays languages:

The innovation would have only concerned the Eastern group (Māori), which would have generalized the type I for all transitive verbs. Clark also associates construction I to the notion of imperfectivity, with a less affected patient, and constructions II and III to the notion of perfectivity, with a more affected patient and a more agentive agent. The structure of modern Māori could be explained by:

- a generalisation of the accusative marker for all transitive imperfective clauses (construction I);
- reanalysis of the suffix as compulsory for perfective clauses of types II et III;
- reanalysis of imperfective clause marking (I) as the normal transitive clause;
- reanalysis of perfective ones (II et III) as passive clauses.
Chung's hypothesis (1978)

Clark's hypothesis has several disadvantages, pointed out by Sandra Chung:

- the perfective/imperfective opposition is not marked syntactically in Māori;
- the passive reanalysis of perfective clauses is not very plausible;
- the reinterpretation of V-(C)ia eS O as a passive seems impossible, because eS remains the syntactical subject and O the syntactical object.

Chung proposed a more complex reconstruction for PPN:

- she reconstructs an accusative marker *i different from the oblique markers *i and *ki.
- PPN would have had two verb classes:
  . canonical transitives V S i(accusative) O
  . middle transitives V S i/ki(oblique) O
- with, for both verb classes, a passive V-(C)ia eAgent S.

Western Polynesian languages would have reanalysed this passive form as an active one, leading to the type II construction (V-suf eA O), with progressive lost of the -(C)ia suffix, giving birth to the present day ergative type III construction. Hence, like Hohepa and Hale, Chung is in favour of a passive towards ergative evolution.

Gibson and Starosta (1990)

On the opposite side, Gibson and Starosta are convinced that Māori used to be an ergative language. They are both specialists of Philippine languages and of Proto Austronesian. They state that all linguists, whatever the theory they adopt (lexicase, relational grammar, Government and Binding theory ou categorial grammar), end with the same conclusion: Tagalog, Ilokano, etc. and Proto Austronesian are all ergative languages.

Then they ask the following question: how can we determine which is the canonical transitive construction, between constructions of type I and of type II? This is necessary to decide if the language is accusative or ergative, by comparing the canonical construction with the intransitive construction. If construction I is the canonical transitive construction, then the language is accusative and the construction II is a passive. But if S = O like in construction II, then the language is ergative, and construction I is an antipassive construction.
Gibson and Starosta put forward several criteria: argument marking, productivity, morphological identity, existence of middle verbs, semantic (degree of affectiveness, aspect), in order to decide which is the canonical transitive model and they conclude that in Māori, it is construction II which corresponds the most to this model. So, Māori must be an ergative language! Then, if all Polynesian languages are ergative, Proto Polynesian would have been ergative. Māori would simply have developed, from a canonical transitive type II without suffix, a type I, with unmarked subject and oblique object (less affected) for all the verbs (and not only middle verbs), this being related to the imperfective. That is, a kind of detransitivising rule for less affected object…

In fact, a similar situation can be seen in East Futunan, with ergative verbs which can enter a construction type I when the object is only partially affected. Compare construction II in (91) and construction I in (92):

91. e kai le fā mago e le toe
   NS eat DEF CLAS mango ERG DEF child
   "The child is eating a mango."

92. e kai le toe ki le fā mago
   NS eat DEF child OBL DEF CLAS mango
   "The child is partially eating a mango."

I must admit that Gibson and Starosta's arguments are quite convincing.

4. Pragmatics

The last part of this article will concern pragmatics.

In Papuan languages, we have seen that the ergative marker is largely omitted (as in example (7) from Dani), except when there is possible ambiguity.

According to Foley, the ergative marker has another, though related, function: it also expresses the actor's control: the actor is a volitionnal performer. "The ergative suffix indicates that the actor is acting independently, is self-motivated, and exerts his personal control over the situation; while its lack indicates that the actor is performing according to his set social obligations, not according to his own independent will, and does not assert his personal control over the situation […] For verbs expressing commands or requests, the ergative case is used if the actor's social position is such that it is appropriate for him to address commands or requests to the addressee. The ergative asserts his right to do so. If the actor does not have this right, then the ergative suffix should not be used." (Foley, 1986:108)
In §§ 1.3 and 1.4, I presented the syntactical structures of East Futunan, and how ergativity was represented in its syntax. But it would be unfair to hush up the pragmatic issue, that is, how much ergative constructions are really used. In fact, several structures exist in ergative Polynesian languages in order to avoid ergative marking. This has been thoroughly described for Samoan by Duranti and Ochs (1990) and Duranti (1994:130-132) in relation to communication strategies and social structure. They mention two structures that avoid using an ergative nominal argument: one by pure omission and the other in which the agent is marked as a possessor. Both constructions appear in East Futunan, with the same effect of backgrounding the agent.

a) Omission of the ergative argument

In Western Polynesian languages, a transitive verb is not obligatorily associated with a two-argument structure. In Samoan (Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992:426;700), only the absolutive argument is necessary and when the verb is transitive, this argument refers to a patient. The ergative argument denoting the agent is then an expansion. We have seen a similar situation in East Futunan, with three restrictions. On the one hand, some verbs may admit a unique ergative argument; on the other hand, some non-oriented transitive verbs may have a sole absolutive argument referring to an agent; finally, some transitive verbs required both absolutive and ergative arguments. However, if we go through a corpus of East Futunan texts, what is striking is the relatively low number of ergative constructions. The main reason for this low usage is that ergative constructions highlight the agent, a social behaviour which has little consideration in Polynesian societies. Either the ergative marking of the agent insists on the responsibility, and hence the culpability of the agent, or it is perceived by the hearer as a demonstration of excessive pride. It is then for social or pragmatic reasons that the ergative construction is seldom used, and that constructions avoiding the highlighting of the agent are often preferred.

b) Genitive noun phrase construction

Besides the omission of the agent, there is another way of avoiding an ergative agent, that is to express it as the possessor in a genitive noun phrase. The concept of agent is thus included in the expression of the possessor.
Instead of a two argument construction as in (93):

93. \textit{e} feave'aki \textit{e} Atelea ana fakapaku \textit{i} lamatu'a  \\
\textit{NS} peddle \textit{ERG} Atelea \textit{his} doughnut \textit{LOC} road  \\
‘Atelea peddles his doughnuts along the road.’

the agent will appear in a possessive construction as in (94):

94. \textit{e} feave'aki \textit{a} fakapaku \textit{a} Atelea \textit{i} lamatu'a  \\
\textit{NS} peddle \textit{ABS} doughnut \textit{POSS} Atelea \textit{LOC} road  \\
‘Atelea peddles his doughnuts along the road.’  \\
\textit{(lit. Atelea's doughnuts are peddled on the road)}

It must be noted that the possessive construction in (94) has two possible interpretations: the doughnuts (\textit{fakapaku}) may be sold by Atelea, or they may be Atelea's doughnuts sold by someone else, not mentioned in the sentence. But this latter interpretation is not primary.

Agent expressed as a possessor is quite frequent. Here is another example:

95. \textit{na} \textit{ta'o} \textit{lana puaka} lasi \textit{ke} ma'iloga \textit{ai} \textit{lona} tagata  \\
PAST cook \textit{his} pig \textit{big} so that \textit{show} ANAPH \textit{his} manhood  \\
i \textit{le} \textit{fakatasi}  \\
OBL DEF \textit{feast}  \\
‘He baked a big pig for the feast to show what a fine man he is.’  \\
\textit{(lit. his big pig is cooked for the feast in order to show his manhood)}

The agent expressed as a possessor rests on the conceptual link between an object and a process that the possessor is very likely to have conducted on it. This natural link underlines a potential but low and involuntary agentivity, which is socially acceptable.

On the contrary, the agent marked as an ergative argument, be it the second argument of a transitive verb or its prime argument with verbs such as \textit{mafai} "be possible" or \textit{fakataga} "allow", expresses above all the effectiveness of the process and the high responsibility of the agent.

c) Imperatives in Tuvaluan

In Tuvaluan (a Polynesian Outlier spoken in Tuvalu (formerly Ellice islands), Besnier (2000) notes that with certain verbs, there is a strong tendency to change the case marking of the subject of transitive verbs (96) from the ergative to the alienable benefactive (97) in imperative formation:
96. ne kai née koe ika mo uttanu kolaa. (PAST eat ERG 2SG fish and germinated-coconut those)
"You had some of that fish and germinated coconut"

97. kai maa koe ika mo uttanu kolaa! (eat BEN 2SG fish and germinated-coconut those)
"Have some of that fish and germinated coconut!" (Besnier, 2000:34)

"While ergatively-marked imperative subjects are not ungrammatical, they are less idiomatic than benefactively marked subjects" (Besnier, 2000.34)

5. Conclusion

Ergativity shows numerous facets in the Pacific languages. Its use not only depends on the semantic of the arguments (animate versus inanimate, pronominals versus nominals) and verb classes, but can mostly be characterized as a marked construction, used to avoid ambiguous situations or to insist on the responsability of the agent. It is often avoided, either by the use of preverbal pronouns, or by pure omission of the ergative marker (when there is no ambiguity about the role of the arguments) or by omission of the ergative argument itself when the situation is clear enough, or by the use of other constructions as the genitive one, in which the agent is expressed as an agentive possessor.

The existence of a few languages in which S and O arguments are marked whereas A is unmarked is also a striking fact, that seems to contradict a universal tendency.

**Abbreviations**

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