

Case, topic and clefts in Mono-Alu.

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This paper examines the particle *ga* in Mono-Alu (MA) (Northwest Solomonic (NWS)). Previously analysed as an absolutive case preposition (Fagan 1986), I demonstrate that *ga* cannot assign absolutive case and propose an alternative analysis in which *ga* is head of a Topic Phrase, with a DP or IP as its complement, the IP occurring in a cleft construction.

MA has been analyzed as displaying unmarked SV/AOV order (Evans & Palmer 2011:496, Fagan 1986:84, Ross 1988:228). All orders of DPs referring to A and O are possible. However, AOV (2a) and AVO (2b) account for most clauses with two overt DPs and occur with similar frequency, as do SV (1a) and VS (1b) (Fagan 1986:84). Fagan argues that postverbal DPs referring to S or O are marked with *ga* (1b),(2b), while A cannot be, leading him to conclude *ga* is an absolutive case preposition (1986:94), a typologically unusual marked absolutive with unmarked ergative, at odds with the claimed universal of absolutive as the unmarked case (Tsunoda 1981). However, several factors undermine Fagan's analysis.

First, preverbal S or O (1a), (2a) cannot be *ga*-marked, *ga* being confined to postverbal DPs, a fact not accounted for in Fagan's analysis. Further, *ga*-marked DPs appear to be adjuncts. Objects are obligatorily indexed by postverbal pronominal clitics (2), (3), (7), leading Fagan to conclude that MA displays both ergative and accusative case (1986:80,108). However, there is evidence that the clitics are not agreement but object pronouns in internal argument position, with a coreferential *ga*-marked DP as adjunct, a hypothesis resembling that proposed for object DPs elsewhere in Oceanic from Fijian (Aranovich n.d.) to Hoava (Palmer 2011). Evidence for this in MA includes the obligatory nature and fixed position of the clitics versus the optionality and freedom of location of object-referring DPs elsewhere in the clause, including the possible separation of a *ga*-marked DP from the verb by an oblique or even the A (3). Further evidence against Fagan's analysis lies in the fact that while postverbal S and O are typically marked with *ga*, they may occur without it (4), (8). Finally, and crucially, it transpires that while infrequent, *ga* may in fact occur with the A (5).

Fagan notes in passing another construction, in which S precedes the verb with *ga* located between S and V (6). For Fagan, *ga* is still associated with the S, but notes it cannot be a preposition here as it follows the NP with which it is associated (1986:95), acknowledging his theory is unable to account for this construction. In fact, this construction also occurs when the phrase preceding *ga* refers to the O (7), the A (8), or even an oblique (9).

This paper proposes a unified account in which *ga* does not mark absolutive case but topic. A post-predicate Topic Phrase occurs with *ga* 'TOP' as head. As in several other NWS languages (see e.g. Palmer 2009), marked (e.g. contrastive) topics are overtly expressed in a postverbal TOPP. In MA verbal constructions (1)-(5), DPs may occur in TOPP. Clause order of DPs is relatively free, and DPs may occur postverbally without occurring in TOPP, as shown by postverbal non-topic A co-occurring with a *ga*-marked O (3), and postverbal non-topic S (4) and O (8) not marked with *ga*.

In this analysis, the construction in (6)-(9) does not involve *ga* postposed to a preverbal NP as Fagan assumes. Instead, *ga* remains a preposition, with the IP as its complement forming TOPP in a cleft construction. The clause-initial phrase is a nominal predicate and is in focus, with the *ga*-marked IP expressing the situation or event in the context of which the focal information holds. The cleft construction resembles equative clauses (10), save that the *ga*-marked equative subject is an IP, rather than a DP.

