

Tonal marking of absolutive case in Samoan

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In Samoan, absolutive case on the direct object of a transitive sentence and the subject of an intransitive sentence has been said to be unmarked (Chung 1978; Collins 2014). However, a few sources in the literature remark that absolutive case is optionally but rarely marked in Samoan by the preposition *ia* (Hovdhaugen 1987: p. 154; Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992: p. 764; Vonen 1988: p. 38–39). Building on Yu (2009), this paper argues that absolutive case is, in fact, obligatorily marked in contemporary Samoan by a high boundary tone, and that the provenance of this high tone is the pitch accent on the optional absolutive case marker *ia*. Yu (2009) observed in intonational fieldwork with a single consultant that a high boundary tone (H-) occurs on the final mora of the phonological material preceding absolutive arguments in Samoan, e.g. 1a, 1b, and Calhoun (2014) confirmed this across different focus conditions with multiple speakers. This paper contributes: (1) additional evidence that the high boundary tone is an absolutive tonal case morpheme, (2) a possible explanation for why Samoan has this tonal case marker despite being an otherwise non-tonal language (with segmental case markers) and why it is a prosodic boundary tone realized in the prosodic phrase preceding the absolutive.

(1) **Additional evidence that the H- is a case morpheme.** This paper confirms that whenever there is an overt absolutive, it is marked by an H- on the preceding argument, in fieldwork with 5 additional native speakers in Apia, Samoa and Los Angeles: in (verb-initial) ditransitives, regardless of the order of arguments, as well as under *pro*-drop and relative clause extraction of the ergative argument (but not the absolutive). Moreover, work with my primary consultant shows that the distribution of obligatory H-s immediately preceding arguments is identical to the (allowed) distribution of the optional absolutive case marker *ia* (2). Finally, I show that the H- appears before absolutive postverbal pronouns, the subject in pseudo noun incorporation constructions (3), and before absolutive nominalized clauses.

(2) **The source of the absolutive H- and its exponence.** Although Samoan does not appear to have other grammatical tonal morphemes than the absolutive high, the process of segmental deletion of absolutive *ia* and tonal reassociation of its high tone—resulting in absolutive high—would be a process characteristic of the autosegmental nature of tones (Yip 2002; Hyman 2011), and segmental Samoan case markers are often dropped, especially in speech between intimates and in traditional Samoan settings (Ochs 1988). No such tonal reassociation process is available for other segmental case markers because they do not constitute a minimal domain for stress assignment since they are monomoraic while absolutive *ia* is bimoraic.

Why would the H end up being reassociated to the edge of the word preceding *ia*? Tones only get re-associated to adjacent tone bearing units in natural language, and the word preceding *ia* provides the nearest tone bearing unit. A consequence of the high tone being reassociated to the preceding word edge is that it may be a prosodic boundary tone—a tone marking a prosodic phrase edge—such that any absolutive argument would induce a new prosodic phrase. Preliminary vowel quality data suggests that the absolutive high tone does mark a phrase edge that phonological processes are sensitive to. The existence of an absolutive high boundary tone would suggest the possibility that constraints on morpheme realization might induce a prosodic boundary. It would also introduce a syntax-prosody boundary paradox, since the absolutive case head would be prosodically phrased with preceding material rather than with the following DP. This boundary paradox could be seen as a consequence of constraints on tonal reassociation, or also as the consequence of the ranking of constraint banning prosodic constituents that begin with weak prosodic elements above constraints

demanding strict syntax-prosody isomorphism (Selkirk 2011).

(1) Case-marking in transitive and intransitive sentences

a. Transitive sentence

na lalaŋa e le malini **H-** (ia) le mamanu.
 PAST weave ERG DET.SG marine ABS (ABS) DET.SG design
 ‘The marine weaved the design.’

b. Intransitive sentence

na ŋalue **H-** (ia) le malini (i le mamanu).
 PAST work ABS (ABS) DET.SG marine OBL DET.SG design
 ‘The marine worked (on the design).’

(2) Identical distribution of *ia* and H-

a. Absolutive H- present; *ia* allowed

e leaŋa **H-** (ia) ni malini tautala
 PRES bad ABS (ABS) ART.NSP.PL marine talk
 ‘It’s not good for marines to talk.’

b. Absolutive H- absent, *ia* not allowed

na laŋona e le liona *ia naʔo *ia le malini
 PAST hear ERG DET.SG lion *abs only *abs DET.SG marine
 ‘The lion heard only the marine.’

(3) Absolutive case in pseudo noun incorporation constructions

na momoli *ia malala ma sioka lanu-moana **H-** (ia) le malini
 PAST deliver *ABS charcoal CONJ chalk color-sea ABS (ABS) DET.SG marine
 ‘The marine charcoal-and-blue-chalk-delivered.’

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