

Exceptive constructions: Tahitian and beyond

This paper presents and analyzes the syntactic expression of exceptive constructions (ECs) in the Polynesian language Tahitian. We argue that ECs in Tahitian are strictly clausal in nature despite their apparently reduced appearance.

Data. Tahitian is a VSO language (VOS is ungrammatical) with nominative-accusative case marking. Negation in Tahitian is a predicate (Académie Tahitienne 1986:328–34, Lazard and Peltzer 2000:49–59, Peltzer 1996) which takes a clausal complement whose subject obligatorily raises to a position immediately following the negative marker, (1a,b).

- (1) a. 'Ua hōhoni te ma'o 'i te tāvana
 PFV bite DET shark ACC DET chief
 'The shark bit the chief.'
- b. 'Aita te ma'o; ['i hōhoni t_i 'i te tāvana]
 NEG DET shark PFV.DEP bite ACC DET chief
 'The shark did not bite the chief.'

ECs in Tahitian are expressed by a combination of the negative marker '*aita* 'NEG', the particle *rā* 'but', and the exception phrase (underlined):

- (2) 'Ua tai'o pauroa te mau tamari'i 'i teie puta, 'aita rā 'o Terii.
 PFV read all DET PL child ACC DEM book NEG but DET Terii
 [EC]
 'All the children read this book, except Terii.'

The following arguments indicate that Tahitian ECs are clausal, expressed by a (reduced) negative clause: (a) ECs can be expressed in their unreduced form, as in (4); (b) the negative marker in ECs is the same as the clausal negative predicate found in sentential negation contexts, and as such it shows morphosyntactic variation across tense/mood (see the prohibitive negation in (3)); (c) Tahitian does not allow the exceptive to appear adjacent to the quantified noun phrase, which is possible if the exceptive is non-clausal (Hoeksema 1987, Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012); (d) reduced negative clauses as found in ECs are not limited to exceptives but are also observed in other environments, such as stripping; and (e) there are no c-command relations between the quantified noun phrase in the first clause and the material in the exceptive phrase, (3). This latter observation follows if the two are distinct, conjoined clauses.

- (3) 'E tāmā 'oe 'i te mau fare tāta'itahi 'eiaha rā tōna fare tūtu
 FUT clean 2SG ACC DET PL house each NEG.PROH but its kitchen
 'You will clean each house_i, except its_i kitchen.'

Analysis. Assuming that the underlying negative clause in (2) is 'Terii did not read this book', there are two possible derivations that lead to the reduced form: complement deletion (ellipsis targets the entire clausal complement of the negative verb) and scattered deletion (gapping of the verb and argument drop in the remainder of the clausal complement):

- (4) a. 'Aita rā 'o Teri'i_i [_{TP} 'i tai'o t_i 'i teie puta] *complement deletion*
 NEG but DET Terii PFV.DEP read ACC DEM book
 complement deletion
- b. 'Aita rā 'o Teri'i_i [_{TP} 'i tai'o t_i 'i teie puta] *scattered deletion*
 NEG but DET Terii PFV.DEP read ACC DEM book
 verb gapping **argument-drop**
 'All the children read this book, except Terii.'

Despite its desirable parsimony, the complement-deletion analysis (4a) makes several incorrect predictions. In particular, it predicts, contrary to fact, that the exception phrase must always be a subject because only the subject of the complement clause undergoes raising thus escaping the ellipsis site. (5) shows the exceptive phrase need not be nominative and (6) shows that it need not be a DP. Nominative case and restriction to DP are two characteristics of Tahitian subjects.

- (5) 'Ua 'ite au 'i tō'u mau hoa tāpīri ato'a, 'aita rā 'ia Odile
 PFV see 1SG ACC 1SG.POSS PL neighbor all NEG but ACC Odile
 'I saw all my neighbors, except Odile.'
- (6) 'Ua ho'o mai au 'i te puta nā te ta'ato'ara'a 'aita rā nā Teri'i
 PFV buy DIR 1SG ACC DET book for DET everyone NEG but **for** Terii
 'I bought a book for everyone except for Terii.'

These observations undermine the complement-deletion analysis and offer indirect support for the scattered-deletion analysis. Independent of ECs, Tahitian does have gapping and argument drop, providing the necessary ellipsis mechanisms for the scattered-deletion approach. Further, Polynesian languages that lack gapping, such as Tongan and Niuean, do not have Tahitian-like reduced ECs. Instead, ECs in these languages must be expressed by a full negative clause, as in the Niuean example in (7).

- (7) Kai oti e Mele e tau ika kae nākai kai (e ia) e lahakula
 eat all ERG Mary ABS PL fish but not eat ERG 3SG ABS tuna
 lit. "Mary eats all fish but (she) does not eat tuna."
 'Mary eats all fish except tuna.'

The paper concludes by considering the implications of this analysis for other Polynesian languages and for the more general theory of ECs.

References

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