Cognate object case in Samoan and Niuean

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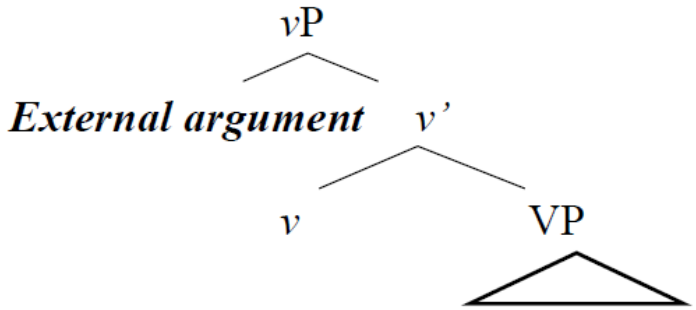
Transitive vs. unergative constructions

- Transitive verbs and unergative predicates have long received a uniform syntactic analysis:
  - Both require subjects that are merged VP-externally (e.g., Chomsky 1995; Hale & Keyser 1993; Kratzer 1996; Marantz 1997; i.a.)

(1) Split *v*/VP structure



  - The difference lies in whether an overt object is present (But we'll be adopting a modified version of (1) later).

Case licensing in unergative constructions

- For intransitive unergatives, two options:
  - Unergative constructions involve a covert cognate object, which is licensed in the same way as a transitive object (e.g., Baker & Bobaljik, 2017; cf. Hale & Keyser 1993).
  - Whatever case value is designated for prototypical transitive objects (e.g., accusative) is simply unassigned in unergative constructions (see Preminger 2011).
- **Today**: What happens when there ***is*** an overt object?
  - Cognate: *I danced a dance*
  - Hyponymic: *I danced a waltz*
  - We'll refer to these collectively as "unergative objects"

In nominative languages….

- Most straightforward answer: It gets whatever case would be designated for a transitive object.
- Looking at certain nominative-accusative languages, this appears true:

(2) Japanese (Tomo Yokoyama, p.c.)

a. Sono kodomo-ga booru-o ket-ta
that child-NOM ball-ACC kick-PAST
'The child kicked a ball'

b. Sono kodomo-ga odori-o odot-ta
that child-NOM dance-ACC dance-PAST
'The child danced a dance'

(3) Hebrew (Daphna Heller, p.c.)

a. Dana ahava et ha-rikud ha-ze
Dana love.PST ACC the-dance the-this
'Dana loved this dance'

b. Dana rakda et ha-rikud ha-ze
Dana dance.PST ACC the-dance the-this
'Dana danced this dance'

Variation in ergative Polynesian languages

- Samoan and Niuean: both are ERG-ABS, and subjects of intransitive unergative verbs consistently get ABS case.

(4) Samoan

a. Transitive

Sā fau e le tamāloa le fale.
PST build ERG DET man DET house.ABS
'The man built the house.'

b. Intransitive: unergative

Sā siva le teine.
PST dance DET girl.ABS
'The girl danced.'

(5) Niuean

a. Transitive

Ne tā he tagata taane e fale
PST build ERG person male ABS house.
'The man built the house'

b. Intransitive: unergative

Ne koli e tama fifine.
PST dance ABS child female
'The girl danced'

Variation in ergative Polynesian languages

- But: when unergative constructions are transitivized, there is a difference.

(6) Transitivized unergatives

a. Samoan

Sā siva le teine i le siva
PST dance DET girl.ABS *i* DET dance
'The girl danced a dance'

b. Niuean

Ne koli he tama fifine e koli
PST dance ERG child female ABS dance
'The girl danced a dance'

Our Questions:

(i) What difference(s) between the syntax of Samoan and Niuean give(s) rise to this contrast?

(ii) How can transitivized unergative construction help diagnose the nature of ergative case?

Proposal

- The difference stems from the interaction of 3 points of parametric variation in the syntax:
  1. Accusative case on v^0 in Samoan but not Niuean
  2. The locus of ABS case (T^0 in Samoan; v^0 in Niuean)
  3. The nature of the ergative case assigning head ($Voice^0$ in Samoan; $Appl^0$ in Niuean).

Roadmap

- Background
  - To the two languages;
  - Assumptions concerning case assignment;
  - The split *v*/Voice structure;
  - Middle verbs.
- Ingredients of the proposal;
- Concluding remarks.

Background: Samoan and Niuean

VSO word order (7); V-initial order is derived via raising of the object out of VP, followed by remnant movement of VP to a position below Tense (Massam 2001; Collins 2016), as in (8).

(7) V-initial word order

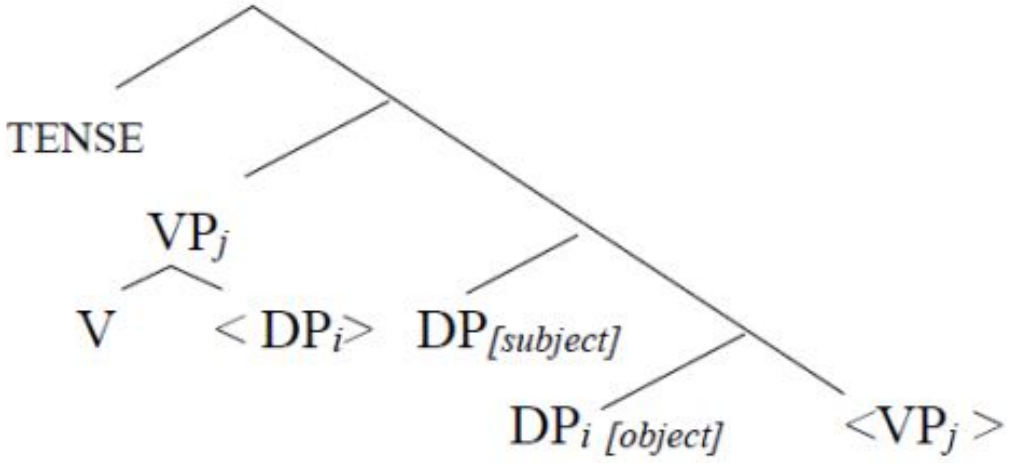
a. Samoan

Sā fau [e le tamāloa] [le fale].
TAM V S O
PST hit ERG DET man DET house[ABS]
'The man built the house.'

b. Niuean

Ne tutuli [he kulī] [e pusi]
TAM V S O
PST chase ERG dog ABS cat
'The dog chased the cat.'

(8) VP-remnant movement



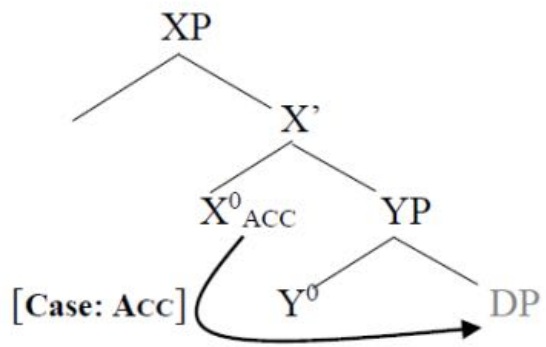
Background: Case assignment

- Adopting an approach in which case is assigned by syntactic heads, not configurationally.
- Dependent case theory (Marantz, 1991; Baker, 2014; a.o.) has not yet been adopted in syntactic literature on Polynesian (and is particularly problematic for Niuean; see Massam 2020).
- Distinctions between:
  - **Obligatory case licensers (NOM, ABS)** vs. **secondary case licensers (ERG, ACC)** (Levin & Massam 1985; Bobaljik 1993; Laka 1993; Rezac 2011; Kalin 2018, a.o.)
  - **Uninterpretable case** on obligatory licensing-heads (=must be assigned) vs. **interpretable case** on secondary licensing-heads (=can be absent/unassigned)

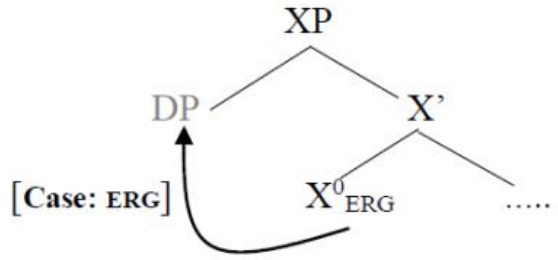
Background: Case assignment

- NOM/ABS case – assigned first to c-command domain, then to specifier in absence of qualifying nominal in c-command domain (cf. Bejar & Rezac 2009).
  - Absolutive case: variation!
    - Samoan: ABS = high “NOM” (Aldridge, 2004; Legate, 2008)
    - Niuean: ABS = low (Massam, 2000)
- Distinction between ACC and ERG w.r.t directionality (cf. Assmann et al. 2015).

(9) a. ACC



b. ERG



Background: Transitives vs. Unergatives

- At least some languages exhibit a Split *v*/Voice domain (Pylkkännen 2002; 2008; Harley 2013; Legate 2014; a.o.)
  - *v* verbalizes the root and introduces causative semantics
  - Voice introduces the external argument

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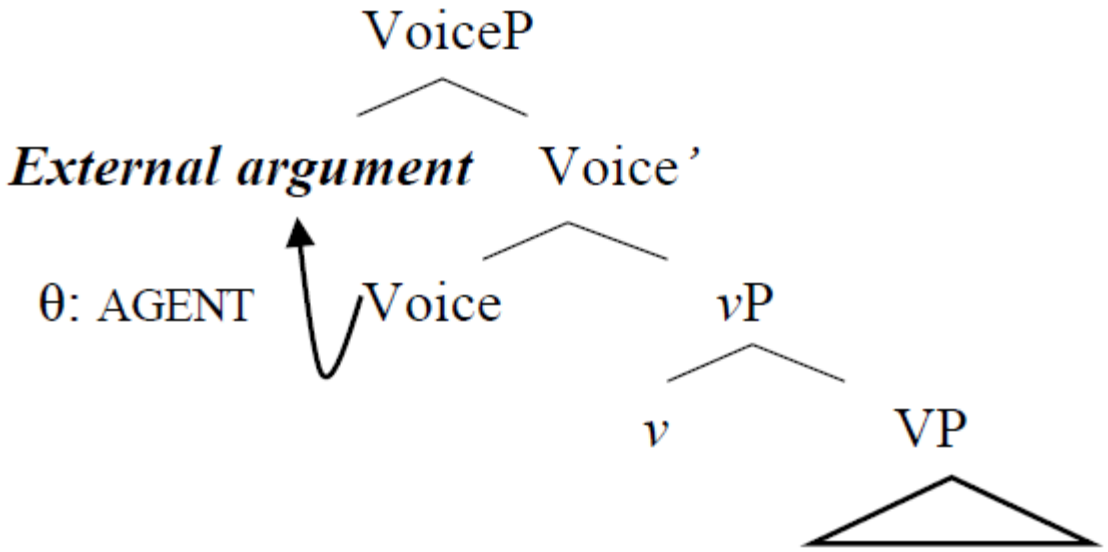

Background: Transitives vs. Unergatives

- Recent extension: Split *v*/Voice structure in which *both v* and Voice can introduce an external argument (Massam 2009 for Niuean; Tollan 2015; 2018 for Samoan; see also Polinsky 2016; Tollan & Oxford 2017).

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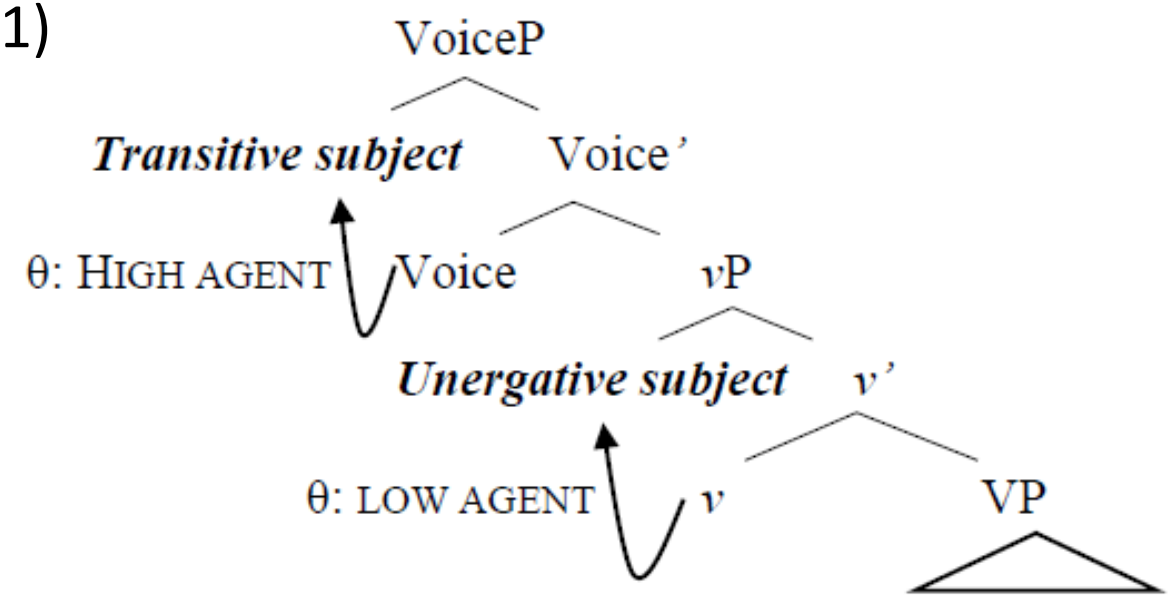


- **Harley 2017**: Splitting versus bundling of *v*P and VoiceP is a parameter of cross-linguistic variation (e.g., Hiaki, Uto-Aztecan vs. Ch'ol, Mayan)

Polynesian verb classes and the split *v*/Voice domain

Middle verbs

- Split ergative patterning (Silverstein 1976): middle verbs (Chung 1978)

(12) a. Samoan

E mana'o [le tamaititi] [i le masi].
PRS want DET child.ABS ***i*** DET cookie
'The child wants the cookie.'

b. Niuean

manako [e tama] [ke he niu]
want ABS child ***ke he*** coconut
'The child wants the coconut.'

- Middle objects behave as direct objects in both languages, insofar as they can undergo pseudo-incorporation.
  - But there is a critical difference between Samoan and Niuean (we'll discuss this later).

Unergative objects again

(13) Samoan

- ✓middle case frame

Sā siva [le teine] [i le uosi].
PST dance DET girl.ABS ***i*** DET waltz
'The girl danced the waltz.'

- ✗ERG-ABS case frame

*Sā siva [e le teine] [le uosi].
PST dance ERG DET girl DET waltz.ABS
'The girl danced the waltz.'

(14) Niuean

- ✗ middle case frame

* Ne koli [e tama fifine] [ke he koli fakapiki]
PST dance ABS child female ***ke he*** dance waltz
'The girl danced the waltz.'

- ✓ ERG-ABS case frame

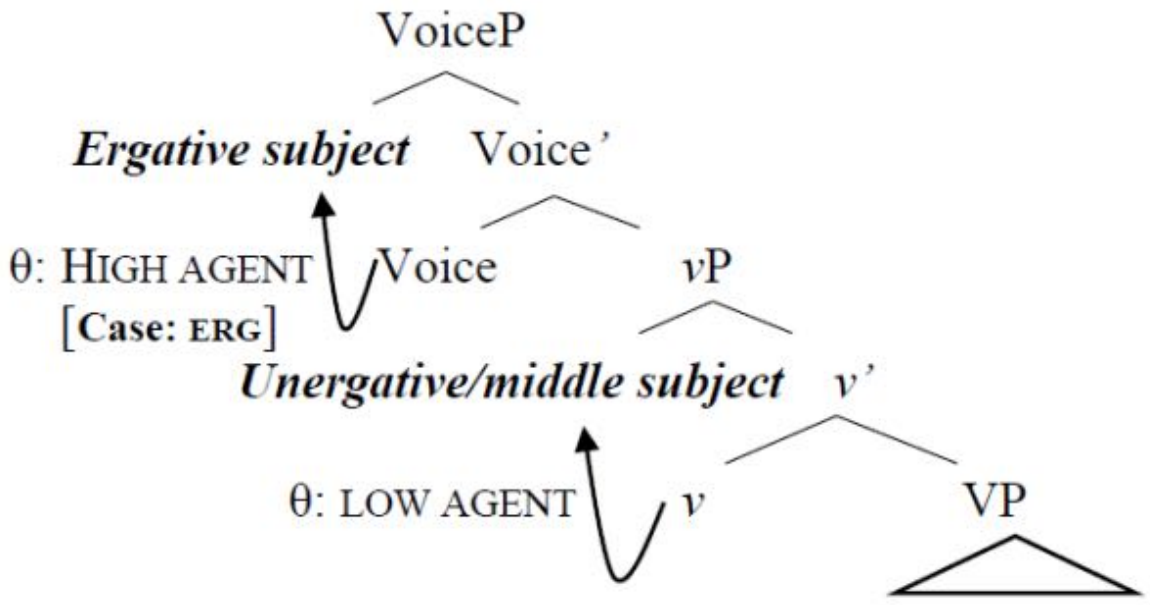
Ne koli [he tama fifine] [e koli fakapiki]
PST dance ERG child female ABS dance waltz
'The girl danced the waltz.'

Two subject positions

- If we assume that every language exhibits a bundled *v*/VoiceP, then the Spec-Head approach to ergative case (wrongly) predicts that all external arguments in Samoan and Niuean should be ERG.
- Tollan (2018) argues for Samoan that this contrast corresponds to the partition of subjects across Spec, *v*P and Spec, VoiceP, following from Massam (2009).
  - v^0 introduces basic semantic properties of agentivity (e.g., initiation of an event), associated with 'low agents' (i.e., subjects of unergatives and middles).
  - Voice^0 introduces additional properties such as effort, volition, and instigation of an effect or change of state of another entity, which characterise 'high agents' (i.e., most transitive subjects; cf. Hopper & Thompson 1980).
    - Voice^0 assigns ergative case to the argument in its specifier.

Two subject positions

(15)



- Primary evidence for the two positions: patterning of causatives (Massam 2009 for Niuean; Tollan 2018 for Samoan).
- Why two unergative subject positions for Niuean, but not for Samoan?

Proposal

Component 1: ACC case

- Tollan (2018) analyses Samoan middle case as structural accusative case, assigned under c-command to the object by v^0 when the *v*P specifier is occupied by a low agent.
  - Samoan middle *i* is cognate with accusative *i* in NOM-ACC Polynesian languages (e.g., Hawaiian).
  - Samoan middle objects behave like direct objects not only with respect to PNI, but also with respect to quantifier float.
  - The same is true of unergative objects.

(16) Quantifier float in Samoan

a. Absolutive object (Seiter '78: 1291)

Sa 'ou 'ai-a **uma**-ina$_i$ [fa'i t_i].
PST I eat-ES all-ES banana
'I ate all the bananas.'

b. Oblique DP

*Sa 'ou alu **'uma**$_i$ [i nu'u t_i o Toga].
PST I go all [OBL village of Tonga]
Attempted: 'I went to all the villages of Tonga.'

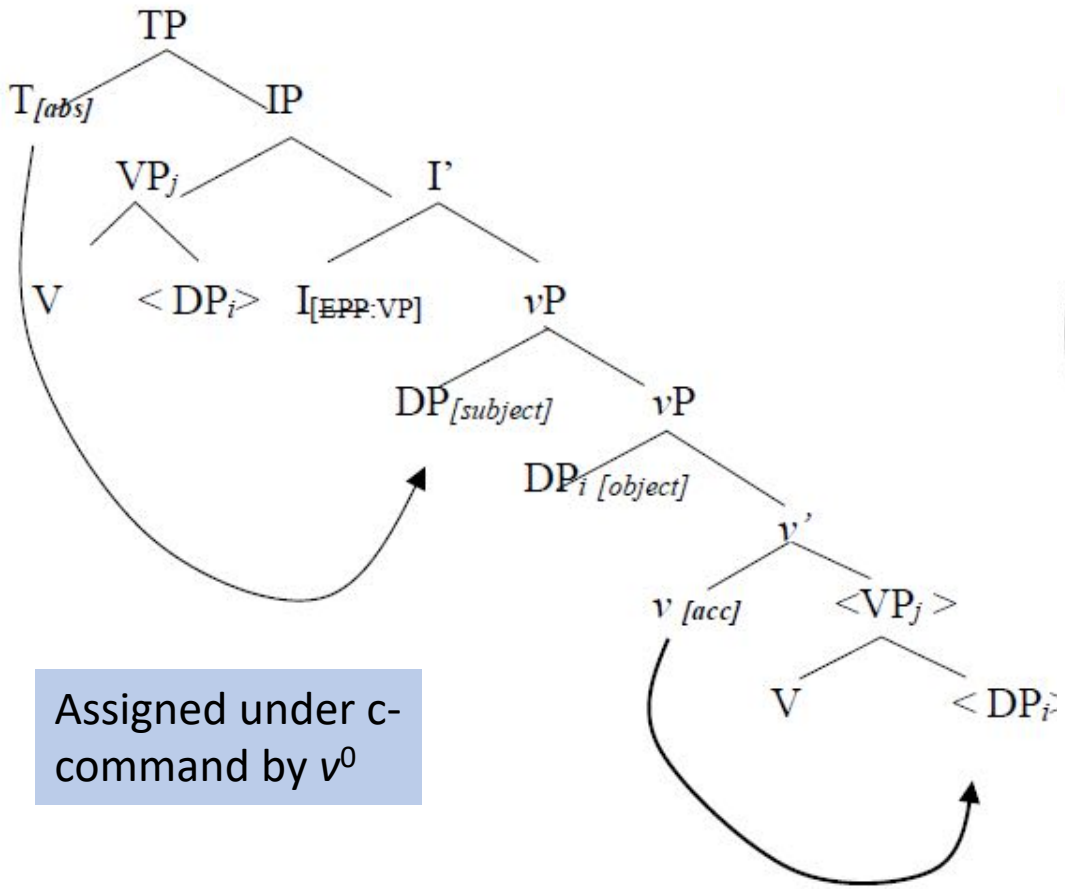
c. Middle object

E mana'o **'uma**$_i$ 'oia [i teine t_i o le nu'u].
PRS love all he [ACC girl of DET village]
'He loves all the girls in the village.'

d. Unergative object

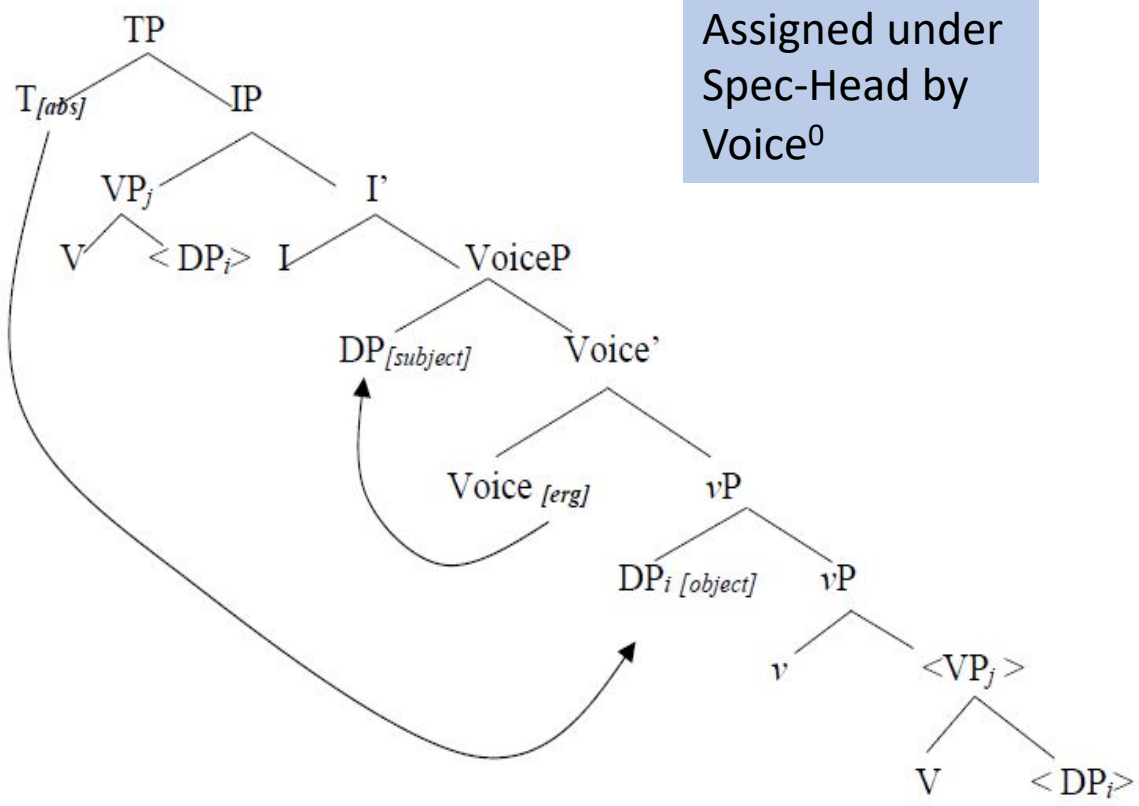
Sā siva **'uma**$_i$ 'oia [i le siva t_i]
PST dance all 3.s[ABS] [*i* DET dance]
'He danced all the dances.'

ACC case in Samoan



Assigned under c-command by v^0

ERG case in Samoan



Assigned under Spec-Head by $Voice^0$

Niuean: No ACC case

- In contrast to Samoan middle case, Niuean ***ke he*** middle case does not behave as a structural case.
- Rather, it comprises two freestanding morphemes: *ke* (cognate of Proto-Polynesian oblique **ki*), and *he*, which functions as a locative marker:

(17) **Locative *he* in Niuean (Seiter 1980: 66)**

Ō oti a mautolu **he** motokā
go all ABS 2.PL **LOC** car
'We're all going in the car.'

Niuean: No ACC case

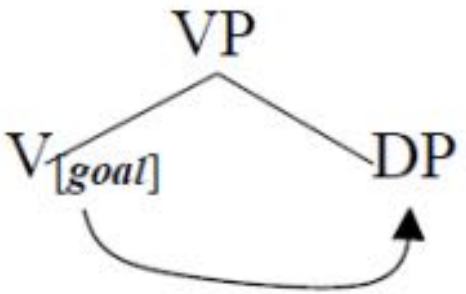
- And, unlike in Samoan, Niuean middle objects do not allow for a floated quantifier.

(18) No QF in Niuean (Seiter 1980: 68)

a. *Quantifier in situ*
Kua fanogonogo a au [ke he tau hūhū **oti** haau]
PERF listen ABS I GOAL PL question **all** your
'I've already listened to all of your questions'

b. *Quantifier float*
*Kua fanogonogo **oti**$_i$ a au [ke he tau hūhū t_i haau]
PERF listen **all** ABS I GOAL PL question your
'I've already listened to all of your questions'

(19)



→ Middle case is lexical, assigned by V to its complement, and available on a particular lexical subset of Vs which **does not include unergative verbs**.

Component 2: Variation in the locus of ABS

Samoan: ABS assigned high, by **T^0**

- (Tollan 2018)
- First-in-line for ABS case: the **subject**, unless the subject already has ERG case.
- Thus, **subjects** of all unergatives and middles receive ABS case straightforwardly (and the object gets ACC).

Niuean: ABS assigned low, by ***v^0***

- Massam (2002, 2006, 2020); Longenbaugh and Polinsky (2017) .
- First-in-line for ABS case: the **object**, unless the object already has middle case (or there isn't one present).
- Thus, **objects** of (transitive) unergatives receive ABS case

Further evidence in favour of the high-low ABS contrast: Samoan, like Tongan (Clemens & Tollan to appear) has ERG extraction restrictions and variable postverbal word order, whereas Niuean has neither.

Transitive unergatives in Niuean

- In Niuean, (i) there is no ACC case and (ii) ABS is low (and therefore, is first-destined for an object).
- This means that the subject of an unergative is left caseless.
  - That is, it cannot be accommodated in spec, *v*P.
  - There is only one option left: merge in the specifier of a projection in which it can receive ergative case. That is, “VoiceP”.
  - How can this be accommodated?

Component 3: The nature of the ergative case assigning head

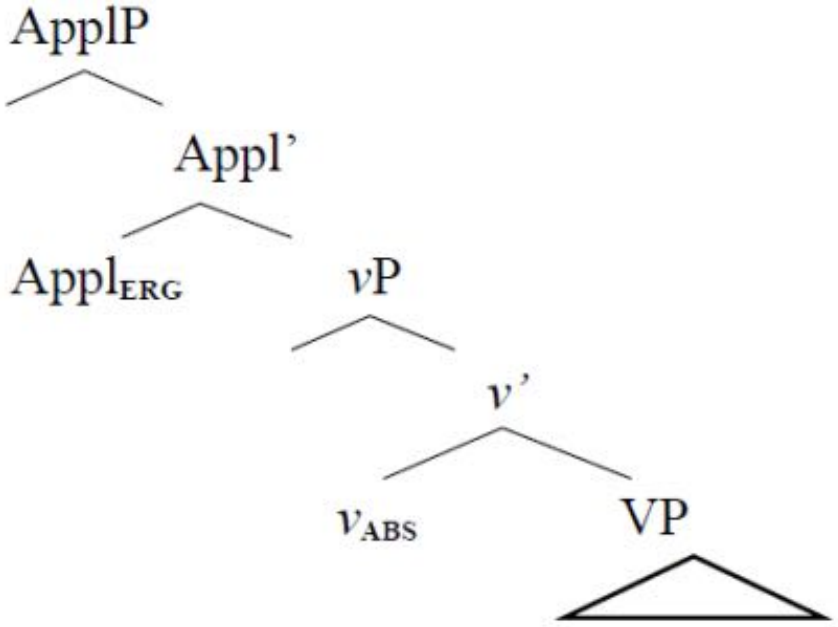
- **Samoan:** Voice^0 assigns ERG to **semantic high agents**.
  - This agent can be either volitional or non-volitional.
- An unergative subject is a semantic low agent, and does not merge there.
- Thus, it never gets ERG case.

- Niuean: Voice^0 assigns ERG to **an agent which *v*P cannot accommodate** (e.g., in terms of case licensing).
  - But, unlike in Samoan must be volitional.
  - (Non-volitional "agents" merge in a different ApplP)
- The subject of a transitive unergative meets these conditions, and can therefore merge there.

“Voice” in Niuean

- We therefore propose that VoiceP in Niuean is not a core verbal projection, rather it is **one of two dedicated valence-increasing heads**, which Massam (2020) labels as **Appl^0**, as in (20).
- ERG case is assigned by Appl to volitional agents.

(20)



Putting it all together

Transitive unergatives

Samoan

- Object gets ACC case from *v*;
- Subject gets ABS case from T;
- (VoiceP is not projected: no high agent).

Niuean

- No ACC case;
- Object gets ABS case from *v*;
- Subject can’t be accommodated in *v*P, so merges higher, in ApplP, where it gets ERG case.

Concluding remarks

1. Samoan and Niuean both have basic ‘ergative’ case systems, but the syntax of these systems differs in subtle yet far-reaching ways.

Samoan

Sā fau e le tamāloa le fale.
PST build ERG DET man DET house.ABS
‘The man built the house.’

Sā siva le teine.
PST dance DET girl.ABS
‘The girl danced.’

Sā siva le teine i le siva
PST dance DET girl.ABS ACC DET dance
‘The girl danced a dance’

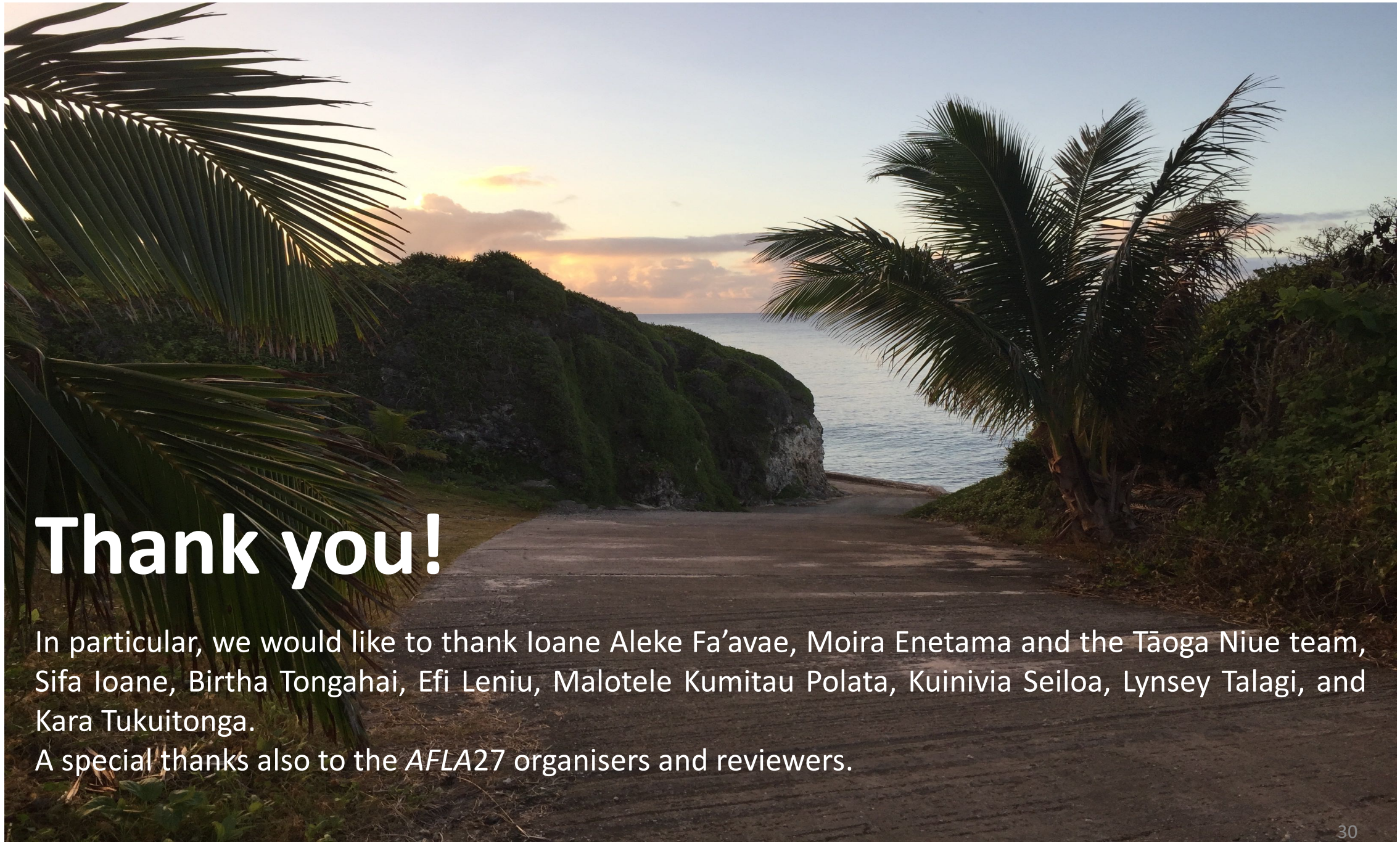
Niuean

Ne tā he tagata taane e fale
PST build ERG person male ABS house.
‘The man built the house’

Ne koli e tama fifine.
PST dance ABS child female
‘The girl danced’

Ne koli he tama fifine e koli
PST dance ERG child female ABS dance
‘The girl danced a dance’

2. The patterning of transitivized unergatives offers key insights into diagnosing the true underlying nature of a case system



Thank you!

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APPENDIX: Variation in locus of ABS case

Contrast 1: Word order

Samoan: VSO and VOS

(19) Source: Mosel & Hovdhaugen (1992, approx.)

a. VSO

Sā su'e e le teine le maile
PST search ERG DET girl DET dog[ABS]
'The girl searched for the dog'

b. VOS

Sā su'e le maile e le teine
PST search DET dog[ABS] ERG DET girl
'The girl searched for the dog'

Niuean: VSO only

(20) Source: Lauren Clemens, pers. comm.

a. VSO

Kua kai he tama e niu.
PFV eat ERG child ABS coconut
'The child ate the coconut.'

b. VOS

*Kua kai e niu he tama.
PFV eat ABS coconut ERG child
'The child ate the coconut.'

Contrast 2: A-bar movement

Samoan: Syntactic ergativity

(21)

a. Ergative subject relative clause

O le tamāloa na fai-*(a) le fale
PT DET man PST build-ES DET house[ABS]
'The man that built the house'

b. Absolutive object relative clause

O le fale na fai e le tamāloa
PT DET house PST build ERG DET man
'The house that the man built'

Niuean: No syntactic ergativity

(22) Source: Longenbaugh &Polinsky, 2018: 107)

a. Ergative subject relative clause

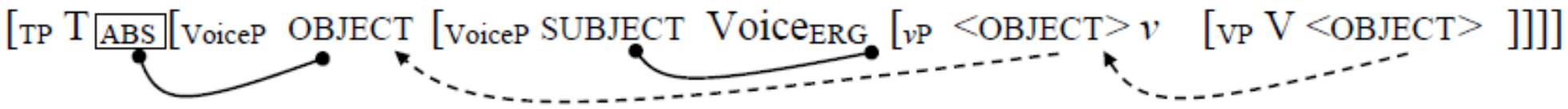
e fifine ne ofaofa a Sione
ABS woman PST love ABS Sione
'The woman who loves Sione'

b. Absolutive object relative clause

e fifine ne ofaofa e Sione
ABS woman PST love ERG Sione
'The woman who Sione loves'

ABS from T in Samoan, *v* in Niuean

- Clemens & Tollan (to appear): Variable post-verbal word order and syntactic ergativity in Polynesian are both a reflex of ABS case being assigned high, by T (Samoan).
  - The ABS object moves past the ERG subject in order to be licensed locally, and the ERG subject is trapped



- Fixed post-verbal word order and the absence of syntactic ergativity are a reflex of ABS being assigned low, by *v* (Niuean).