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Minimalist Analysis of Ergativity

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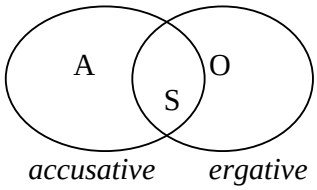
Summary

This paper proposes a Minimalist analysis of the case and [EPP] features on T and *v* which accounts for the basic morphosyntactic properties of syntactic ergativity. I show first that absolutives should not be analyzed as subjects and accordingly propose that their case-licensing features be distributed between T and *v*. The hallmark characteristics of syntactic ergativity which are the absolutive restriction on A'-extraction and the antipassive construction are accounted for by constraining [EPP] features to transitive (and not intransitive or antipassive) *v*. Generally speaking, I show that while both case and [EPP] features are obligatorily checked by T in accusative languages, the role of *v* in feature-checking is much more prominent in ergative languages. In descriptive terms, it can be said that accusative languages have a clear notion of grammatical subject, while in ergative languages absolutives have properties of both subjects and objects.

1. Morphological Ergativity

The primary goal of this paper is to propose a formal analysis of syntactic ergativity which explicitly specifies the parameters distinguishing ergative from accusative morphosyntax. Descriptively speaking, ergative and accusative languages can be characterized in terms of how morphological and syntactic processes affect the grammatical primitives A (transitive subject), S (intransitive subject), and O (transitive

object) (Dixon 1994, 1979). In accusative languages, A and S roles share certain properties, distinct from O, while in ergative languages it is S and O which pattern together.

(1) 

Syntactically ergative languages display this pattern in two ways. On the morphological level, this pattern is observed in the case-marking pattern of the language. In an accusative language, S and A receive one type of case-marking – *ga* in the Japanese example in (2) – and O receives a different type of case-marking – *o* in Japanese.

(2) a. Hanako=*ga* kita.
Hanako=Nom came
"Hanako came."
b. Hanako=*ga* Taro=**o** hihan-sita.
Hanako=Nom Taro=Acc criticize-did
"Hanako criticized Taro."

In an ergative language, S and O are marked alike, while A is in a different case. In the Tagalog[1] example in (3), S and O take *ang* absolutive marking, while the A argument takes the ergative marker *ng*.

(3) a. D-**um**-ating *ang* *babae*.
-Intr.Perf-arrive Abs woman
"The woman arrived."

[1] I use Tagalog examples for illustration in this paper. Aldridge (2004, 2006) argues extensively for an ergative analysis of Tagalog syntax and shows that Tagalog syntax is essentially parallel to Inuit languages, which are uncontroversially ergative. See also Payne (1982), Gerdts (1988), de Guzman (1988), and Liao (2004). Maclachlan (1996) and Maclachlan & Nakamura (1997) also present an ergative analysis of certain aspects of Tagalog syntax.

b. B-**in**-ili **ng** **babae** *ang* *isda*.
-Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman Abs fish
"The woman bought the fish."

In addition to morphological ergativity, syntactic ergativity involves extending the S/O grouping to certain syntactic operations which fall under the rubric of A'-movement. For example, only absolutives are able to undergo A'-movement operations such as relativization. The O argument can be relativized in the transitive clause in (4a). But in order to extract the A argument, the clause must be detransitivized by adding the antipassive suffix to the verb, as in (4b). This makes the object into an oblique and affords absolutive status to the external argument, allowing it to extract.

(4) a. isda=ng b-**in**-ili ng babae
fish=Lk Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman
"fish which the woman bought"
b. *tao=ng b-**in**-ili ang isda
person=Lk Tr.Perf-buy Abs fish
"person who bought the fish"
c. tao=ng b-**um**-ili ng isda
person=Lk -Intr.Perf-buy Obl fish
"person who bought a/the fish[2]"

Keenan and Comrie (1977) have proposed that if only one grammatical relation can undergo relativization in a given language, that grammatical relation is the subject. Hence, absolutives are frequently assumed to have properties of subjects. However, as I will argue below, the absolutive does not function as the subject in a transitive clause. In fact, one of the most salient characteristics of syntactic ergativity is that the case-marking does not serve to identify a subject grammatical function. Rather, in transitive

[2] As I will discuss in section 2.2, absolutive objects in Tagalog are always definite or generic, while oblique objects in antipassives are typically indefinite and nonspecific. When the external argument is extracted from an antipassive clause, however, the object may be interpreted as definite.

clauses, it is the ergative-marked A argument which functions as the subject, while the absolutive is the subject in intransitive contexts.

2. Division of Subject Properties

2.1 In his seminal work, Anderson (1976) shows that ergative languages are generally parallel to accusative ones in that it is the A and S arguments which function syntactically as the subject. Similar observations have been made by Bobaljik (1993), Larsen & Norman (1979), Manning (1996), Murasugi (1992), Ura (2000), and others[3]. For example, (5) shows that A and S can bind a reflexive pronoun. The ergative agent binds the reflexive in the absolutive DP in the transitive clause in (5a), while the absolutive subject binds the oblique reflexive in the antipassive in (5b). As I will discuss in the next subsection, antipassives are formally intransitive, so the external argument is treated as an S and afforded absolutive status.

(5) a. P-in-igil **ng** **lalaki** ang sarili=niya.
-Tr.Perf-control Erg man Abs self=3s.Gen
"The man controlled himself."

b. Nag-pigil=**siya** sa sarili=niya.
Intr.Perf-control=3s.Abs Dat self=3s.Gen
"He controlled himself."

A and S also serve as imperative or hortative addressees. (6a) shows a transitive clause, in which the ergative agent is the imperative addressee. (6b) is intransitive and the addressee of the hortative expression is the absolutive.

[3] The division of subject properties between ergative and absolutive DPs illustrated in this section are essentially parallel to the division between role and reference related characteristics proposed for Tagalog by Schachter (1976), although Schachter himself does not attribute these characteristics to ergative syntax.

(6) a. Bigy-an=**mo**=siya ng kape.
give-App=2s.Erg=3s.Abs Obl coffee
"Give him the coffee."
b. K-um-ain=na=**tayo**.
-Intr.Perf-eat=now=1p.Abs
"Let's eat now!"

It is also A and S roles which can function as controlled PRO in a nonfinite clause. (7a) shows an embedded transitive clause with PRO in the A role. In (7b), PRO is the S of an intransitive clause.

(7)a. Nag-ba-balak ang babae-ng [PRO tulung-an ang lalaki]
Intr.Perf-Red-plan Abs woman-Lk (Erg) help-App Abs man
"The woman is planning to help man."
b. Gusto ng babae-ng [PRO -um-alis]
want Erg woman-Lk (Abs) -Intr-leave
"Maria wants to leave."

2.2. There are, however, certain syntactic privileges enjoyed only by absolutives. Craig (1977), Payne (1982), England (1983), Dixon (1979, 1994), Bittner (1994) Manning (1996), Campana (1996), Aldridge (2004), and others have shown for a variety of syntactically ergative languages that only absolutives can undergo A'-movement[4]. The absolutive restriction on relativization in Tagalog was seen in (4) in section 1. The same is true of *wh*-movement. In (8a), O can be *wh*-fronted in a transitive clause. The A argument in (8b), however, cannot be fronted. In order to extract the agent, the verb has to be detransitivized so that the external argument is given absolutive status.

(8)a. Ano ang b-**in**-ili ng babae?
what Abs Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman

[4] The absolutive in Dyirbal additionally functions as the pivot in clausal coordination, as well as PRO in nonfinite clauses. The difference between Dyirbal and other ergative languages may be best captured by analyzing Dyirbal absolutives as subjects, i.e. checking the [EPP] feature on T. See Murasugi (1992) for an approach along these lines.

"What did the woman buy?"

b. *Sino ang b-**in**-ili ang libro?
who Abs Tr.Perf-buy Abs book
"Who bought the book?"

c. Sino ang b-**um**-ili ng libro?
who Abs Intr.Perf-buy Obl book
"Who bought the book?"

A note here is in order regarding Keenan and Comrie's (1977) claim that the privilege of relativization (and presumably other A'-movement operations) is a property of subjects. Nine of the twelve languages cited in their survey are Austronesian. One of the other three is Dyirbal, which is uncontroversially ergative. If, as Aldridge (2007) claims, the A'-extraction restriction in Austronesian languages can be traced historically to ergative syntax in the proto-language, then the claim that the relativization privilege identifies subjects becomes a circular argument, since the vast majority of the languages which form the basis of Keenan and Comrie's claim are Austronesian. Furthermore, given that the absolutive A'-extraction restriction is a wide-spread characteristic of syntactic ergativity, it is logical to conclude that this restriction is a property of absolutives in ergative languages rather being associated with subjects in accusative languages.

Syntactically ergative languages additionally have an antipassive construction. An antipassive is a transitive clause in the sense that there are two DP arguments. However, antipassives are formally intransitive, and the external argument is treated as an S and thereby afforded absolutive status. Hence, one function of an antipassive construction is to give absolutive status to transitive subject so that it can be extracted, as in (4c) and (8c). Another characteristic of antipassives is that the direct object does not have absolutive status but rather appears in an oblique case. The object also is typically interpreted as indefinite, often nonspecific (Cooreman 1994, Palmer 1994, among many

others). Comparing the following Tagalog examples in (9), both sentences have subject and object DPs. In the transitive clause in (9b), the object has absolutive case and is interpreted as definite. But in the antipassive in (9b), the verb takes intransitive inflection. Case-marking also follows an intransitive pattern. The external argument takes absolutive case, as if it were an S argument in an unergative construction. The object is given inherent oblique marking is interpreted indefinite and nonspecific.

(9) a. B-**in**-ili ng babae **ang** *isda*.
-Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman Abs fish
"The woman bought the/*a fish."
b. B-**um**-ili ang babae **ng** *isda*.
-Intr.Perf-buy Abs woman Obl fish
"The woman bought a/*the fish."

Furthermore, as Bittner (1987, 1995) has argued extensively for Inuit languages, absolutive objects and antipassive obliques often exhibit different scopal properties. Absolutive DPs also tend to take wide scope, while antipassive oblique objects are interpreted with narrow scope. The absolutive object in (10a) takes wide scope over the ergative DP, while the oblique object in (10b) is interpreted with narrow scope with respect to the absolutive subject.

(10)a. B-**in**-asa [ng lahat ng bata] *[ang marami-ng libro]*
-Perf.Tr-read Erg all Gen child Abs many-Lk book
"All the children read many books."
MANY > ALL
b. **Nag**-basa [ang lahat ng bata] *[ng marami-ng libro]*
-Perf.Intr-read Abs all Gen child Obl many-Lk book
"All the children read many books."
ALL > MANY

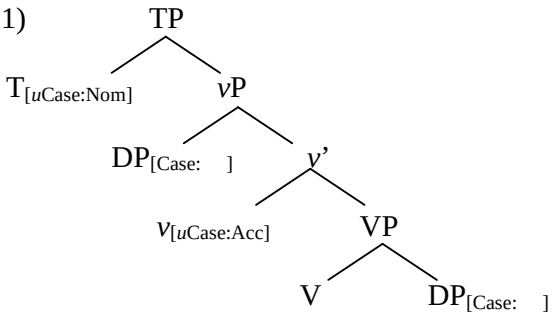
It should be clear from the preceding discussion that, although absolutives have certain syntactic privileges when it comes to interpretation and A'-movement, it is still

the A or S argument which functions as the subject with respect to argument structure and binding. Given that A and S have different case-marking – ergative for A and absolutive for S – then it can be said that ergative languages do not identify the grammatical subject by means of case-marking.

3. Analysis of *v*-Type Ergativity

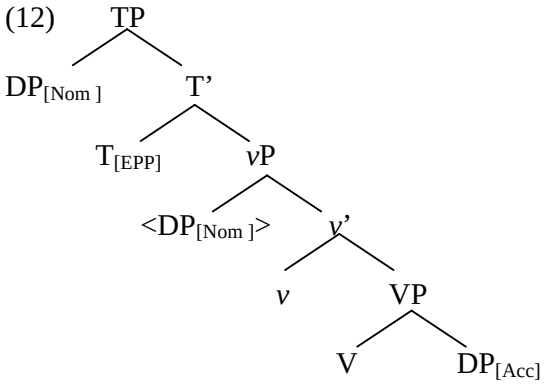
In formal terms, the properties observed in the previous section can be accounted for in terms of structural prominence, case-licensing, and constraints on locality. Before entering the analysis of ergative syntax, let me first summarize the analysis of the corresponding characteristics in a typical SVO accusative language. The analysis which I propose is based in the Multiple Spell-Out version of the Minimalist Program, as proposed in Chomsky (2001). Internal arguments, e.g. patient, theme, goal, etc., are merged in VP and the external argument in the specifier of *v*P. DPs are merged with unvalued case features. The functional heads T and *v* supply the values for these features, nominative by T and accusative by *v*. The features on T and *v* are uninterpretable and therefore must be checked off for the derivation to converge. In order to ensure that this happens, the uninterpretable features act as probes, initiating searches in their c-command domains for matching features to check off against. When the first matching goal is found, the value of the case feature on T or *v* is copied to the goal DP and the uninterpretable features are checked off. In an accusative language, since the closest goal to T is the subject and the closest goal to *v* is the object, nominative case will always be assigned to the subject and accusative to the object.

(11)



Accusative languages also typically have an EPP feature on T, which requires the subject to move to the specifier of this functional projection.

(12)



The fact that there is a clear notion of subject in an accusative language falls out naturally from this analysis. Given that a probe always checks the features of the closest goal with matching features, it will always be the highest DP in *v*P, i.e. the logical subject, which checks nominative case and resides in the structurally prominent [Spec, TP] position. Assuming a Minimalist approach to parametric variation based on feature bundles on functional heads, I specify the case and EPP features just discussed as follows.

(13) Accusative language

v_{Tr}:	[*u*Case:Acc]
	Optional [EPP]
v_{Intr}:	No case feature
	Optional [EPP]
T_{Fin}:	[*u*Case:Nom]
	[EPP]

v additionally has the option of carrying an EPP feature. This is in accordance with the approach to dislocation and locality in the theory of the Multiple Spell-Out. One key locality condition in this framework is the Phase Impenatrability Condition (PIC).

(14) Phase Impenatrability Condition (Chomsky 2001b:5)
Only the edge of a phase (*v*P, CP) is accessible to operations.

The PIC dictates that movement of VP-internal material must first pass through the edge of *v*P, i.e. a specifier. In the case of object *wh*-movement, for example, *v* must have an [EPP] feature to first draw this DP into its outer specifier. Located in the edge of *v*P, the object becomes accessible to a probe in the next phase, e.g. a [wh] feature on C, and can undergo further movement, for example to [Spec, CP]. Direct movement from within VP to [Spec, CP] would violate the PIC.

(15) What did you [$_{vP}$ t_{what} [$_{v'}$ t_{you} [$_{v[EPP]}$ [$_{VP}$ eat t_{what}]]]]?

It is assumed for English that EPP features are generated on *v* when needed. Hence, I specify this feature as optional in (13).

The most common approach to ergativity in the syntactic literature (Marantz 1981, 1984; Levin 1983; Murasugi 1992; Campana 1992; Bittner 1994; Bittner & Hale 1996; Manning 1996; Ura 2000) is to treat the absolutive as a subject at some level of representation and analyze its case as being licensed by the functional head responsible

for nominative case in an accusative language, which is T in the framework of Chomsky (2001). However, we have seen in section 2 that absolutives do not behave uniformly as subjects. Nor do they always have the properties of objects, since the absolutive S is the subject of an intransitive clause. The analysis of ergativity which I propose in (16) captures this dual behavior by exploiting the fine-grained distinctions allowed by the featural approach to parametric variation. First, there is a division of labor between T and *v* with respect to absolutive case-checking. *v* checks absolutive case in transitive clauses, which accords with the intuition that absolutives in transitive clauses are more object-like. In intransitive clauses, however, the absolutive functions as the subject. Consequently, its case is supplied by T. The case feature on T is specified as optional. In the discussion below, I will show that the derivation converges only when this feature appears in intransitive clauses and not in transitive ones.

The absolutive restriction on A'-extraction, as well as the interpretive properties of absolutives, is accounted for by the asymmetry between transitive and intransitive (including simple intransitive as well as antipassive) *v* in terms of the [EPP] feature. The [EPP] feature on transitive *v* draws the absolutive object to the edge of the *v*P phase, allowing the absolutive to undergo further movement and also to receive a presupposional interpretation at LF.

(16) Ergative language[5] (Tagalog)

v_{Tr}:	Inherent ergative case
	[*u*Case:Abs]
	[EPP]
v_{Intr}:	No case feature
	No [EPP] feature
T_{Fin}:	Optional [*u*Case:Abs]
	No [EPP]

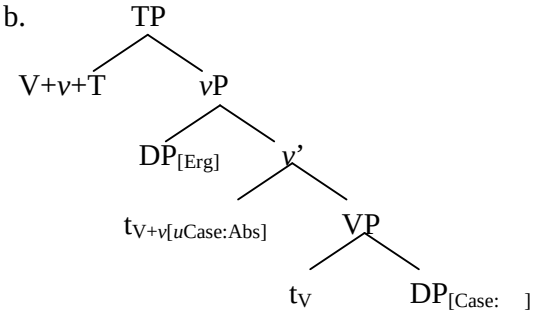
[5]The proposal that absolutive case assignment is divided between the subject and object case-checking functional heads should be originally attributed to Aldridge (1998). See Legate (2002) for a similar analysis of Warlpiri.

Note further that T does not carry an [EPP] feature. This is essentially due to the fact that Tagalog is a VSO language, and all arguments remain in *v*P in declarative clauses. However, the lack of an [EPP] feature on T can also be viewed as being related to the lack of a clear grammatical function of subject in most ergative languages. Not raising the A and S arguments to [Spec, TP] affords a structurally prominent status to the absolutive DP in certain contexts, as I will elucidate below.

3.1 This subsection shows how the analysis in (16) derives transitive clauses in Tagalog and accounts for the properties of ergative subjects and absolutive objects introduced in section 2. First, transitive *v* values absolutive case on the object DP and assigns inherent ergative case to the external argument in its specifier[6]. Since basic word order is VSO, the verb moves to T.

(17)a. B-**in**-ili ng babae *ang* *isda*.
-Tr.Perf-buy Ergwoman Abs fish
"The woman bought the fish."

b.



The relative structural positions of the ergative and absolutive DPs account for the subject properties of the former discussed in section 2.1. The ergative DP, as the

[6] The notion that ergative case is inherent is not new. See Mahajan (1989), Woolford (1997, 2006), Legate (2002), and others for similar proposals.

external argument, is naturally the addressee in a hortative or imperative construction. Being merged in the structurally prominent [Spec, *v*P] position affords it the other subjects properties. For example, since it is able to c-command all VP-internal constituents, it can bind a reflexive pronoun lower in the structure.

Recall also from section 2.1 that in a transitive nonfinite clause, the ergative argument is treated as the PRO subject, while an absolutive object can appear overtly.

(18) Nag-ba-balak ang babae-ng [PRO tulung-an ang lalaki]
Intr.Perf-Red-plan Abs woman-Lk (Erg) help-App Abs man
"The woman is planning to help man."

This is clear evidence not only that the ergative DP functions as the subject but also that the absolutive is functioning more as an object than a subject and that its case is checked by *v* and not by T. Given that nonfinite T is not able to check case[7], the source of absolutive case on the object in the embedded clause must be *v*. This fact is difficult to account for by analyses which claim that the absolutive is a subject at some level of representation and the source of its case is T, e.g. Murasugi (1992), Campana (1992), Bittner (1994), Bittner & Hale (1996), and Ura (2000).

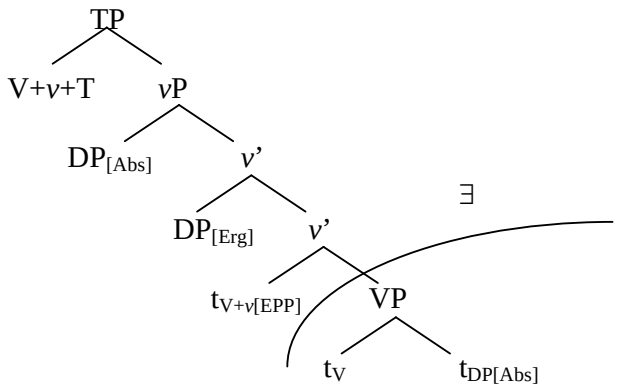
Note further that the embedded object in (18) could not have received its case from matrix *v* through exceptional case-marking (as proposed for Inuit languages by Murasugi 1992). This is because the matrix clause is an antipassive, as is clear from the fact that intransitive inflection appears on the verb. Therefore, matrix *v* does not have an absolutive case feature, as I will demonstrate in the next subsection. The only absolutive case available in the matrix clause is the one supplied by T, and this is

[7] I do not consider the possibility that PRO checks null case, as per Chomsky and Lasnik (1993). What is important for the discussion in this paper is the uncontroversial acknowledgement that nominative (or absolutive) case cannot be checked by nonfinite T.

checked with the matrix subject. Therefore the embedded object must rely on the embedded *v* for its case.

In a transitive clause, the absolutive DP also covertly[8] raises to *v*P phase edge to check [EPP] feature on *v*. Since basic word order in Tagalog is VSO, the verb also undergoes head movement to T. The ergative DP remains in its base position in *v*P.

(19)



As the highest DP in the *v*P phase edge, the absolutive object is also eligible to undergo further movement[9], as in *wh*-movement or relative clause formation. Thus we derive the ability of absolutive objects in transitive clauses to undergo A'-extraction.

(20) Ano ang b-**in**-ili ng babae?
what Abs Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman
"What did the woman buy?"

Having moved out of the VP domain of Existential Closure, the absolutive object will receive a presuppositional reading at LF, as per Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis.

[8] This movement must be covert, since the result is not manifested in the surface word order. I assume that covert movement involves spelling out of the lower copy (rather than the upper copy) of the moved constituent in the mapping to PF. See Rackowski (2002) and Rackowski & Richards (2005) for other analyses of Tagalog syntax which assume covert movement of absolutive objects.

[9] Although it is located in the *v*P phase edge, the ergative DP cannot be moved over the absolutive. This can be accounted for assuming a more rigid approach to locality, e.g. Fox and Pesetsky (2005), Rackowski and Richards (2005), Ko (2004) and others.

(21) B-**in**-ili ng babae **ang** *isda*.
-Tr.Perf-buy Ergwoman Abs fish
"The woman bought the/*a fish."

This also affords a wide scope interpretation for absolutives, since they are located in a position to c-command the ergative DP at LF.

(22) B-**in**-asa [ng lahat ng bata] *[ang marami-ng libro]*
-Perf.Tr-read Erg all Gen child Abs many-Lk book
"All the children read many books."
MANY > ALL

Movement of the absolutive might seem to contradict the claim that the ergative DP c-commands and binds reflexive objects because it is located in a structurally more prominent position than the absolutive object. Actually, reflexive binding provides additional evidence for movement of the absolutive. First, if we assume cyclic application of Binding Condition A (Baltin 2000) in a derivational approach to phrase structure, Condition A is satisfied at the point in the derivation when the external argument in merged into the structure. At this point, the external argument, which is the intended antecedent, c-commands the reflexive and satisfies Condition A and therefore the possibility of binding in (5a), repeated below as (23). Subsequent movement of the absolutive DP does not violate any of the other binding conditions, specifically Condition C, since the pronoun is embedded inside a larger, possessed DP. Inside the complex DP, the reflexive is unable to c-command the intended antecedent after raising.

(23)a. P-in-igil ng lalaki ang[$_{DP}$ **sarili**=niya].
-Tr.Perf-control Erg man Abs self=3s.Gen
"The man controlled himself."
b. P-in-igil [$_{DP}$ **sarili**=niya] ng lalaki t_{DP} .
-Tr.Perf-control self=3s.Gen Erg man

Tagalog does not, however, allow bare reflexives in absolutive position. This is expected on the raising analysis, since the raised reflexive would c-command the intended antecedent, thereby invoking a Binding Condition C violation.

(24)a. *P-in-igil ng lalaki ang **sarili**.
-Tr.Perf-control Erg man Abs self
"The man controlled himself."
b. *P-in-igil **sarili** ng lalaki t_{sarili} .
-Tr.Perf-control self Erg man

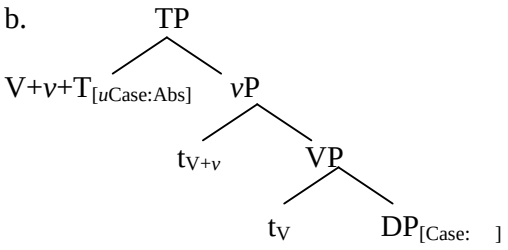
It is important to note at this point that the absolutive is not required to raise higher than the edge of *v*P, unless attracted by a probe on a higher functional head, e.g. an operator or [wh] feature on C. This is shown by the examples containing negative polarity items in (25). An NPI can appear in either ergative and absolutive position and still be licensed (c-commanded) by negation. This again poses a challenge for Murasugi (1992), Bittner and Hale (1996), Ura (2000), and others, who assume that the target of covert absolutive raising is subject position, which would place the absolutive outside the scope of negation.

(25)a. Hindi=niya t-in-anggap ang **anumang** mungkahi.
Neg=3s.Erg -Tr.Perf-accept Abs any proposal
"He/she didn't accept any proposal."
b. Hindi t-in-anggap ng **sinuman** ang mungkahi=niya.
Neg -Tr.Perf-accept Erg anyone Abs proposal=3s.Gen
"Noone accepted his/her proposal."

3.2 In intransitive clauses, *v* does not have an absolutive case feature. Therefore, T must be the source of absolutive case in intransitive contexts, which is valued on the S argument. This will be the single argument in a simple intransitive clause, as in (26). Following Chomsky (2001), I assume that unaccusative *v*P is a weak phase, which means that T is still able to probe into VP looking for a DP to check its case feature.

(26)a. D-**um**-ating *ang* *babae*.
-Intr.Perf-arrive Abs woman
"The woman arrived."

b.



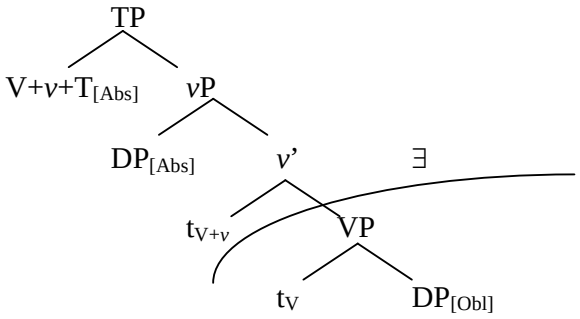
In (16), I specified that the case feature on T is optional in *v*-type ergative languages. However, the obligatory presence or absence of a case feature on *v* ensures that T checks case only in intransitive clauses. This is because of the requirement in Minimalist theory that uninterpretable features must be checked and unvalued features be valued for the derivation to converge. If T did not have a case feature in a finite intransitive clause, then the case feature of the subject would not be valued. Therefore, T must check absolutive case in an intransitive clause in order for the derivation to converge. Likewise, in a transitive clause, where *v* checks absolutive case with the object and assigns inherent ergative case to the subject, if T were to carry a case feature, then it would not be able to find a goal to check its uninterpretable feature, and the derivation would also crash. In this way, the fact that T checks and values absolutive case in intransitive clauses is derived without stipulation[10].

As mentioned in section 2.2, antipassives are also intransitive. Therefore, *v* does not have a case feature, and T must value absolutive case on the external argument. The object receives inherent oblique case from the verb. In this way, the appearance of

[10] This marks a departure from Aldridge's (2004) analysis of Tagalog, which stipulated that T must check case in intransitive clauses. This analysis also differs from Legate (2002, 2007), according to which finite T always carries a case feature but uninterpretable features are allowed to go unchecked. The current proposal avoids both extra stipulation and potentially problematic modification of the relationship between feature-checking and convergence of the derivation.

absolutive case on the external argument in an antipassive is accounted for. The fact that T values absolutive in an intransitive clause also captures the intuition that absolutives are subjects in intransitive clauses, as shown in section 2.

(27)



Antipassive *v* also lacks an [EPP] feature. This means that the oblique does not move to the *v*P phase edge and will therefore receive a non-specific, narrow scope interpretation at LF.

(28)a. B-**um**-ili ang babae **ng** *isda*.
-Intr.Perf-buy Abs woman Obl fish
"The woman bought a/*the fish."

b. **Nag**-basa [ang lahat ng bata] *[ng marami-ng libro]*
-Perf.Intr-read Abs all Gen child Obl many-Lk book
"All the children read many books."
ALL > MANY

The oblique object also cannot undergo A'-movement without violating the Phase Impenetrability Condition. If A'-movement takes place, it will be the absolutive subject which is attracted, since it is now the highest DP in the *v*P phase edge.

(29)a. Sino ang b-**um**-ili ng libro?
who Abs Intr.Perf-buy Obl book
"Who bought the book?"

b. *Ano ang b-um-ili ang babae?
what Abs -Intr.Perf-buy Abs woman
"What did the woman buy?"

The intransitive status of antipassives is further demonstrated by the lack of structural case for the object. This is shown by exceptional case-marking. ECM is available for a subject in a nonfinite embedded clause only when matrix *v* is transitive and not when it is antipassive. The embedded clause in (30) is nonfinite and intransitive. Therefore, there is no case available for the subject within the embedded clause. But since the matrix *v* is transitive, it can be licensed through ECM.

(30) B**in**a-balak ng babae-ng
Tr.Prog-plan Erg woman-Lk
[makapagaral *ang* *anak=niya* sa UP]
Intr.study Abs child=3s.Gen at UP
"The woman is planning for her child to study at the University of the Philippines."

However, when the matrix *v* is intransitive (antipassive), then the embedded subject is not case-licensed. The verb in an antipassive can only assign inherent case. But this case is not available for the embedded subject, since this DP is not selected by the matrix verb.

(31) *__Nag__ba-balak ang babae-ng
Intr.Prog-plan Abs woman-Lk
[makapag-aral *ang* *anak=niya* sa UP]
Intr-study Abs child=3s.Gen at UP
"The woman is planning for her child to study at the University of the Philippines."

Aldridge (2006) provides additional evidence from small clause and causative constructions to show that antipassive *v* in Tagalog is not able to check structural case. She uses the lack of a structural case feature on antipassive *v* as evidence against analyses of Tagalog as an accusative language, such as Kroeger (1993), Rackowski

(2002), and Rackowski & Richards (2005), which claim that Tagalog antipassives are transitive.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of ergative syntax which I have proposed in this paper captures the division of subject properties between ergative and absolutive DPs. It further accounts for the dislocation and interpretive properties of absolutives which constitute the hallmark characteristics of this grammatical function in syntactically ergative languages. This is made possible largely by the Minimalist approach to cross-linguistic variation in terms of formal features on functional heads, which allows a subtle distribution of case and [EPP] features on T and *v* rather than forcing either the ergative or absolutive role to be treated as a subject.

However, this does not rule out a descriptive depiction of ergative and accusative syntax in terms of grammatical function. Given the pivotal role played by T in checking nominative case and ensuring movement of the subject to the most prominent A position in the clause, it is easy to see that accusative syntax is heavily subject-oriented. In contrast, in ergative languages, *v* plays a more prominent role in case-licensing and dislocation. When *v* carries both case and [EPP] features, i.e. in transitive clauses, the direct object is given the privileged role of absolutive. When *v* does not carry these features, in other words in intransitive clauses, the role of any object present is deemphasized, i.e. it has the status of an oblique, and the subject is afforded the syntactic privilege of absolutive status. Hence we can characterize the duel nature of absolutives as alternating between subject and object roles.

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