Tripartite case marking and the nature of ergativity in Yawanawa (Pano)*

Abstract

This article proposes that Yawanawa (Pano) has a tripartite case system with three case-assigning heads and morphological neutralizations grouping [+participant] transitive and intransitive subjects and [-participant] intransitive subjects and transitive objects. Based on recent work on ergative languages within the Minimalist framework, I argue that ergative case is licensed by a postposition, which is head of an adpositional phrase in the specifier of vP position. This postposition copies the phi features from the DP in subject position and projects them to the PP[1] level, thus enabling agreement between the verb and the ergative argument. I explore the parallel syntactic structures of TPs and DPs and propose that it can account for the analogous surface morphology found in ergative and possessor arguments. I also argue that oblique instrumental arguments are licensed by the same case-valuing postposition as ergatives and possessors.

1. Introduction

This article has two main purposes. The first is to offer a description of the Yawanawa case system and show that there is a split distinguishing [-participant] arguments (ergative-absolutive) from [+participant] arguments (nominative-accusative). I argue that the language has a tripartite case system (ergative-nominative-accusative), on a similar basis to what Comrie (1991) shows about the Australian language Dyirbal (Pama Nyungan). I also explore possible syntactic analyses of case assignment by functional heads, based on recent work on ergative languages within the Minimalist framework (Woolford 1997, 2006; Legate, 2008, 2011; Markman & Grashchenkov, 2012; Deal, 2012, a.o). I argue that in Yawanawa ergative is in fact an adpositional case assigned by a postposition to a DP in Spec vP

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1 PP is a phrase headed by an adposition (postposition in the case of head-final languages).

position.

The second purpose of this article is to try to account for what Valenzuela (2003:882) calls “syncretism/polyfunctionality involving the ergative, instrumental, genitive, and other oblique cases”, which is a major typological feature of Panoan languages. I argue that the common surface morphology that these cases share reflect the fact that they are being licensed by the same postposition.

I make a decision to work within the Minimalist framework because it provides theoretical tools which allow for generalizations of phenomena which seem otherwise unrelated. It accounts for the syntax of Yawanawa, and makes it possible to establish cross-linguistic structural comparisons.

Yawanawa is an endangered Panoan language spoken by circa 160 people in the Brazilian state of Acre. Around 565 individuals inhabit 7 villages up the Gregorio river, an affluent of the Jurua, which is a Southern tributary of the Amazon river. The language belongs to a subgroup within the language family named *Yaminahua* by Loos (1999) and *Purus* by Valenzuela (2003). Aldir de Paula wrote a descriptive grammar of Yawanawa as his doctoral dissertation in 2004.

The data presented in this article derives from elicitation sessions conducted in the course of the Yawanawa language documentation project, PRODOCLIN, held by FUNAI[2] and sponsored by UNESCO and Banco do Brasil Foundation. I have been part of the documentation team since 2010, working with multiple native speaker collaborators.

[2] The National Indigenous Foundation is the Brazilian government body that establishes and carries out policies relating to indigenous peoples.

In section 2, I present the Yawanawa data and compare it to several other languages to show the tripartite case morphology. I also argue that absolutive is not a structural case, but a morphological default inserted when distinct nominative and accusative morphology are lacking. In section 3, I explore the crosslinguistic syntactic properties of ergative languages and propose that two different functional heads are responsible for the assignment of nominative and accusative case in Yawanawa: T[3] and v[4]. I show the structures of transitive and intransitive verbs, arguing that Yawanawa is not a 'split S' language. Section 4 presents my proposal for the analysis of ergativity in Yawanawa. I argue that ergative is not a structural case, but instead, an adpositional case assigned by a postposition to the subject in the position of specifier of vP. In section 5, I propose a mechanism to deal with verb-subject agreement in Yawanawa. It accounts for the fact that the DP[5] in subject position is inside a postpositional phrase, and yet it agrees with the verb when the subject is 3rd person plural. I argue that the phi features[6] on the subject DP are copied by the ergative postposition. In sections 6 and 7, I try to account for the morphological syncretism that exists between ergative, possessor, and oblique instrumental arguments by arguing that they are all licensed by the same case-assigning postposition. I explore the structures of possessor constructions in section 6 and of oblique instrumental constructions in section 7. Section 8 is a brief summary that

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3 T stands for tense. It is the head of the phrase TP that holds verbal inflection. It is considered the head of a clause in Generative Theory.

4 v is the head of the phrase vP that selects a VP and is responsible for the introduction of an external argument in a verbal construction. It is considered the head of the predicate in Generative Theory.

5 A DP is a phrase headed by an element of category D (determiner).

6 Phi (Φ) features encode person and number in a nominal expression.

enumerates the conclusions and raises questions for further discussion concerning case in Panoan languages.

2. Yawanawa as a tripartite language

According to Paula (2004:187), Yawanawa has an ergative-absolutive case system. This pattern is attested in the following sentences, in which the proper name *Tika* has the same morphological form as the subject of an intransitive clause (1b) and as the object of a transitive clause (1c). It behaves differently when it is the subject of transitive clause (1a).

(1)

a) **Tika-nẽ**[7] yawa rete-a.
Tika-PP(ERG)[8] wild.boar kill-PRF
'Tika killed a/the wild boar.'

b) **Tika** itxu-a.
Tika[9] run-PRF
'Tika ran'

c) Yawã **Tika** nak-a.
Wild.boar.PP(ERG) Tika bite-PRF
'The/A wild boar bit Tika.'

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[7] I adopt the Yawanawa orthography throughout this article. IPA correspondence is as follows: <a> [a], <k> [k], <e> [ɨ], <f> [Φ], <h> [h], <i> [i], <m> [m], <n> [n], <p> [p], <r> [ɾ], <s> [s], <sh> [ʂ], <t>[t], <ts> [ts], <tx> [tʃ], <u> [u], <v> [β], <x> [ʃ], <w> [w], <y> [j], <ã> [ã], <ẽ> [ɨ̃], <ĩ> [ĩ], <ũ> [ũ].

[8] Glosses used throughout this article: PP(ERG) – ergative postposition; PP(POSS) – possessive postposition; PP(INS) – instrumental postposition; PRF – perfect aspect; PROG – progressive aspect; 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; S – singular; P – plural; DEM.MED – demonstrative pronoun, medium distance from speaker; DEM.PROX - demonstrative pronoun, close distance from speaker; NOM – nominative case; ACC – accusative case.

[9] I argue in section 3 that intransitive subjects are assigned nominative case, but I have chosen not to gloss zero morphemes here to make the data more clear.

The ergative morpheme is realized as the suffix -*nẽ* or by the nasalization of the noun's last vowel[10]. I argue that this allomorphy is conditioned by the language's iambic stress pattern. When -*nẽ* is suffixed to an open final stressed syllable, the suffix becomes a weak final syllable which tends to be elided in Panoan languages (Loos, 1999). According to Yawanawa's nasalization rule, the elided syllable's nasal onset resyllabifies as the coda of the previous syllable, spreads its nasal feature to the adjacent vowel, and deletes. This is the case of [ja.'wa] (μ'μ)→ /ja.'wa.nẽ/ (μ'μ)μ → [ja.'wã] (μ'μ). The proper noun ['Tiː.ka], on the other hand, has a long vowel that makes the first syllable bimoraic (heavy), thus attracting stress. The suffixation of -*nẽ* maintains the iambic stress pattern:

['Tiː.ka] (μ'μ)μ → [ˌTiː.ka.'nẽ] (μ'μ)(μ'μ).

The ergative pattern described above is attested only for nouns and third person singular, which is realized as a demonstrative pronoun. Third person behaves differently from first and second person pronouns concerning case morphology. The pronominal system distinguishes [+participant] from [-participant] arguments. First and second persons carry the [+participant] feature, whereas third person carry the [-participant] feature, according to Harley & Ritter (2002). While third person singular behaves like nouns, showing an ergative-absolutive alignment, first and second persons have a nominative-accusative pattern. Thus, [+participant] pronouns have only one morphological form in subject position, both with transitive and intransitive verbs, and a different form in object position, as shown in (2).

[10] When the transitive subject is a third person (demonstrative) pronoun, the ergative morpheme has a different morphological form, -*tũ*. This allomorphy is not contemplated by the stress rule described above.

(2)

a) Ẽ/Mĩ yawa rete-a.
1S/2S wild.boar kill-PRF
'I/You killed a/the wild boar.'

b) Ẽ/Mĩ itxu-a.
1S/2S run-PRF
'I/You ran.'

c) A-tũ ea/mia kux-a.
DEM.MED-PP(ERG) 1S/2S hit-PRF
'He/She hit me/you.'

d) Ẽ mia kux-a.
1S 2S hit-PRF
'I hit you.'

e) Ẽ/Mĩ a kux-a.
1S/2S DEM.MED hit-PRF
'I/You hit him/her.'

f) A itxu-a.
DEM.MED run-PRF
'He/She ran.'

In (2a,b), we see that regardless of transitivity, there is only one morphological form for first and second person pronominal subjects. (2c) shows the forms of first and second person pronouns in object position and the form of the demonstrative pronoun (third person singular) in transitive subject position. In (2d), we have [+participant] pronouns in transitive subject and object positions. In (2e,f) we see the form of the demonstrative pronoun in object and intransitive subject positions, which differs from its form as transitive subject.

The data above could suggest that Yawanawa has two co-existing case

systems – nominative-accusative for first and second person pronouns and ergative-absolutive for nouns and demonstratives. This would mean that case assignment depends on nominal type. Case morphology on third person plural pronominal arguments, however, shows tripartite morphology and seems to suggest a different scenario. In (3a), we see the ergative form of the plural demonstrative *a-hãu* triggering the suffixation of *-kãn*[11] to the verb, which according to Valenzuela (2003), is a verbal suffix that indicates plurality of the subject. We see the same morpheme in (3b), where the demonstrative pronoun has the form *a-hu* as an intransitive subject. (3c) shows a third morphological form of the plural demonstrative pronoun in object position, *atu*.

(3)
a) A-hãu epe shewa-kãn-i.
DEM.MED-PL.PP(ERG) straw weave-PL-PROG
'They are weaving straw.'

b) A-hu ve-kãn-i.
DEM.MED-PL come- PL-PROG
'They are coming.'

c) Ẽ atu kux-a.
1S 3S hit-PRF
'I hit them.'

Crosslinguistically, it is common to see ergative languages which exhibit this kind of split, in which the case pattern is conditioned by what Silverstein (1976) describes as a nominal hierarchy. Nominal expressions higher in the hierarchy - [+participant] pronouns - have a tendency to show a nominative-accusative case

[11] Any plural subject will trigger this type of agreement, not only 3rd person.

pattern, whereas the ones that are lower in the hierarchy – [-participant] pronouns and inanimate arguments – have ergative-absolutive alignments. According to Silverstein (1976:113), some languages have an intermediate ground, in which the case marking system has three distinct forms for transitive subject, intransitive subject, and object. Based on the data above and on Silverstein's hierarchy, I argue that Yawanawa has a tripartite case system, with ergative being assigned to transitive subjects, nominative to intransitive subjects and accusative to transitive objects.

Comrie (1991) shows a very similar split that takes place in the Australian language Dyirbal (Pama Nyungan). This claim follows Goddard (1982), who proposes that most Australian languages have three core case categories, dismissing the common belief that a typical Australian language has two co-existing case systems. While pronouns are said to have nominative-accusative alignment, nouns make a formal distinction between transitive and intransitive subjects, which characterizes an ergative-absolutive pattern. Conversely, nouns are said to have a single absolutive case covering intransitive subjects (S) and transitive objects (O), although pronouns make a distinction, with two different forms for S and O. Comrie suggests that the grammars of Australian languages should follow the tradition of describing Latin, which holds that if any nominal shows a morphological case distinction, then this case distinction must be carried over to all nominals. All Latin nouns are considered to have nominative, accusative and vocative cases, although for some, in particular all nouns of neuter gender, the three cases are formally

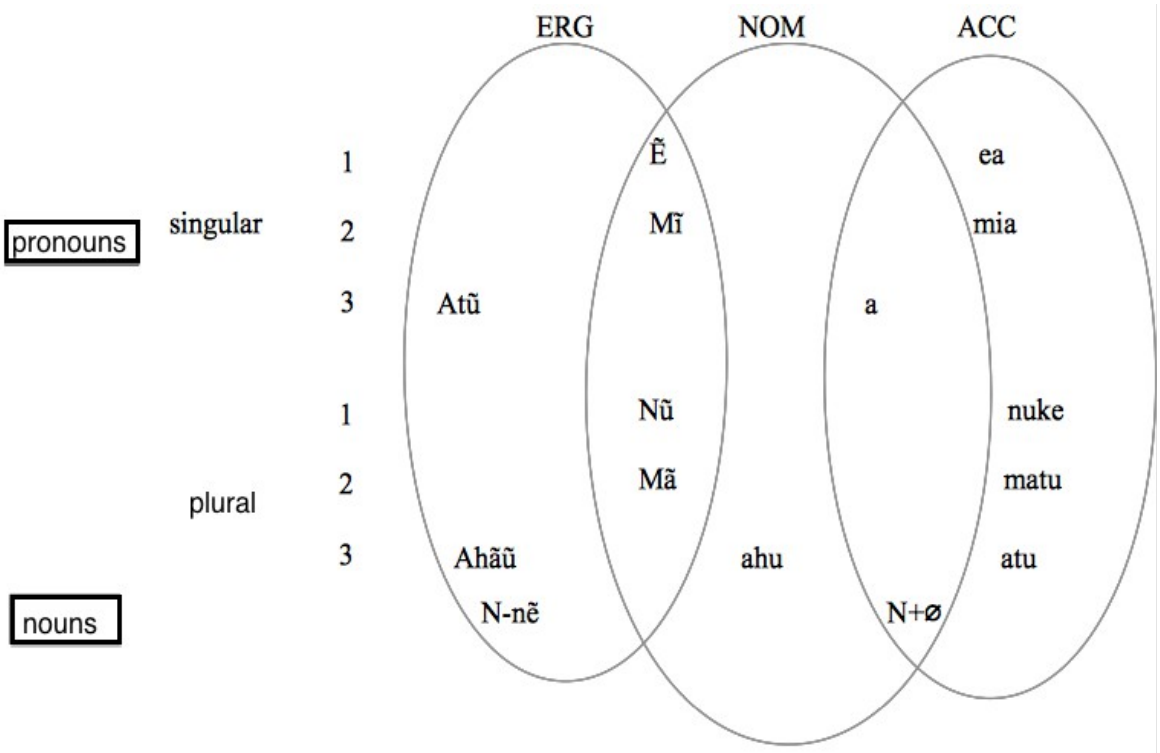
identical. Only in one class of Latin nouns is the vocative morphologically distinct from the nominative, though there is no doubt that all three cases do in fact exist. There are several instances of neutralization occurring in the morphology of languages. In Portuguese, for example, there are different morphological forms for pronouns in nominative and accusative case, but not for nouns. In English, the same morphological form *her* denotes genitive and accusative case of the third person singular feminine pronoun, whereas the masculine form has a distinct form for each case – *him* (ACC) and *his* (GEN).[12]

According to Legate (2008), the morphological realization of the cases varies across nominal types not only in Dyirbal, but in a number of other Pama Nyungan languages, including Djapu, Kugu Nganhcara, Margany, even though case assignment is uniform throughout: ergative on transitive subjects, nominative on intransitive subjects, accusative on transitive objects.

Like Dyirbal, Yawanawa has a distinct ergative case (morphologically distinct for non-participant arguments) and a distinct accusative case (morphologically distinct for participant pronouns). Comrie (1991) argues that intransitive subjects must be recognized as having a distinct case, given the different syncretism patterns: nouns and third person singular have the same morphological form in intransitive subject and object function, and [+participant] pronouns have the same form in subject function, whether transitive or intransitive. Thus, I argue that like Dyirbal, Yawanawa has three distinct cases. The data shown in (3) makes an even stronger

[12] Examples taken from Arregi & Nevins (2012:2).

claim to support this idea, since if we consider that the language has two distinct case systems for [-participant] vs. [+participant] arguments, we would actually need to propose an extra system in order to account for the tripartite morphology of 3rd person plural. Instead, I propose the following distribution of case morphology:



The Yawanawa data corroborates the idea defended by several authors that absolutive does not in fact exist as a structural case (Legate 2008, Murasugi 1992, Bittner and Hale 1996, a.o). Cross-linguistically there are two ways to interpret the absolutive in syntax. For languages such as Georgian (Kartvelian), absolutive corresponds to nominative case, assigned by the functional head T to both intransitive subjects and transitive objects. On the other hand, for languages such as Dyirbal, Warlpiri (Pama Nyungan), Hindi (Indo-Aryan) and Yawanawa, as I argue, the

term absolutive is considered a morphological default which applies when nominative and accusative morphology are lacking (Legate 2008). In these languages, the functional head T assigns nominative case to the intransitive subject and the functional head v assigns accusative case to the transitive object. In the next section, I explore the syntactic consequences of this idea.

3. Ergativity in syntax

According to Deal (2012:2), there are three independent properties related to ergative languages which shape the study of ergativity cross-linguistically. The first is the ergative property, which states that subjects of transitive clauses behave differently from subjects of intransitive clauses. The second is the absolutive property, according to which objects of transitive clauses and subjects of intransitive clauses behave identically. Finally, the argument-structural property states that in some languages subjects of unaccusative verbs behave differently from subjects of unergative and transitive verbs.

In section 2, we have already seen that the first of these properties does in fact apply to Yawanawa, but not the second one. It is an ergative language, in which transitive subjects ([-participant]) behave differently from intransitive subjects, but not an absolutive language. We observe this fact in the different forms of first and second person singular pronouns in intransitive subject (*ẽ/mĩ*) and object function (*ea/mia*), as well as in the 3 distinct morphological forms of the third person plural pronoun that suggest 3 different sources of case assignment in syntax. Thus, I argue that

Yawanawa behaves like languages such as Hindi and Warlpiri in which the term absolutive describes a morphological default which applies when nominative and accusative morphology are lacking, that is, with nouns and [-participant] pronouns. (see Legate 2008). That is, “absolutive” is not a structural case being assigned by a functional head to objects and intransitive subjects, it is simply a descriptive label. Instead, I propose that the functional head T assigns nominative case to the intransitive subject and the functional head v assigns accusative case to the transitive object. Since the language has no specific morphology to distinguish [-participant] objects and intransitive subjects (except for third person plural), these two forms assume a default morphological form that has been labeled as “absolutive”. We have seen evidence to support this idea, which is the fact that there are morphologically distinct forms of [+participant] pronouns in S and O positions.

There is one more piece of evidence to show that “absolutive” is not a structural case assigned by a functional head in Yawanawa. This evidence comes from verbs that take 3 arguments. Legate (2008) shows that in languages in which absolutive is equivalent to nominative case (that is, objects and intransitive subjects have nominative case), it is only possible to have one argument per sentence marked absolutive, since it is a case being assigned by the head T. On the other hand, when absolutive is just a label that corresponds to a morphological default neutralizing the differences between an argument marked with nominative case and one marked with accusative case, it is possible to have more than one “absolutive” argument per

sentence. This is the case of Yawanawa, as shown in (4), where we see that *a* and *pia* have no additional case morphology[13]:

(4)

Kapakurũ	a	pia	inã.
Kapakuru.PP(ERG)	DEM.MED	arrow	give.PRF

'Kapakuru gave him an arrow.'

In this sentence, we have a third person recipient argument *a* as well as a theme that are not morphologically marked, that is, “absolutive”. However, if instead of a third person recipient we have a [+participant] recipient (5), we see that this argument is actually marked accusative, as the first person *ea*:

(5)

Kapakurũ	ea	pia	inã.
Kapakuru.ERG	1S.ACC	arrow	give.PRF

'Kapakuru gave me an arrow.'

Thus, these examples corroborate the idea of the absolutive as a morphological default inserted in the absence of nominative and accusative morphology. Since it is not a structural case, this means what Deal (2012) describes as the second property of ergative languages – the absolutive property – is indeed not active in Yawanawa.

[13] See Zariquiey-Biondi on this same volume for a complete study of ditransitive constructions in Panoan languages. As this author points out, it is a typological feature of the language family to allow for a free order between theme and recipient arguments.

The third property of ergative languages is referred to as 'split S' by Dixon (1994). This split is based on the verb's argument structure: the sole argument of an active intransitive verb receives the same morphological marking as the subject of a transitive verb, whereas the sole argument of stative intransitive verbs gets the same mark as objects. In Generative literature, “active” verbs correspond to unergative and “stative” to unaccusative verbs. This distinction derives from the merge position of the intransitive verb's sole argument and its consequent thematic interpretation. The subjects of unaccusative verbs originate in complement position and get a low theta role such as patient or theme. The subjects of unergative verbs originate as external arguments (Spec vP) and receive a high theta role such as agent or experiencer.

Yawanawa is not a 'split S' language. The split we find in the morphology is not related to the verb argument structure, but to the nominal hierarchy described above. We have seen that the morphological forms of the third person pronoun show the neutralization that exists between the sole argument of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive construction, following an absolutive pattern. We have also seen that when it comes to first and second person arguments, the morphological neutralization occurs between a transitive subject and the sole argument of an intransitive construction, following a nominative pattern.

If it is true that the absolutive property is not active in Yawanawa, we must ask which case is being assigned to the sole argument of an intransitive construction. I propose, according to Legate (2008), that it is nominative case. One piece of

evidence to support this idea comes from verbs that have a transitive-inchoative alternation, that is, verbs that can behave as transitive or intransitive and thus create instances of structural ambiguity in Yawanawa. The verb *nuku*, for instance, has a transitive version which means ‘to meet’ and an intransitive version which means ‘to arrive’. In a transitive construction, we have an ergative and an accusative argument (6a). The sentence in (6b), however, is ambiguous. It has two possible meanings – either ‘He/She has arrived’ or ‘Someone met him/her’, with an elided external argument. (6c) is also ambiguous, meaning either ‘I have arrived’ or ‘I have met someone’, with an elided internal argument. In (6d), however, there is only one possible reading, equivalent to the second reading of (6b), with an elided external argument.

(6)

a) A-tũ ea nuku-a.
DEM.MED-PP(ERG) 1S.ACC meet-PRF
‘He/She met me.’

b) A nuku-a.
DEM.MED.NOM arrive-PRF ‘He/She has arrived.’
DEM.MED.ACC meet-PRF ‘(Someone) met him/her.’

c) Ẽ nuku-a.
1S.PP(ERG) meet-PRF ‘I have met (someone).’
1S.NOM arrive-PRF ‘I have arrived.’

d) Ea nuku-a.
1S.ACC meet-PRF
'(Someone) met me.'

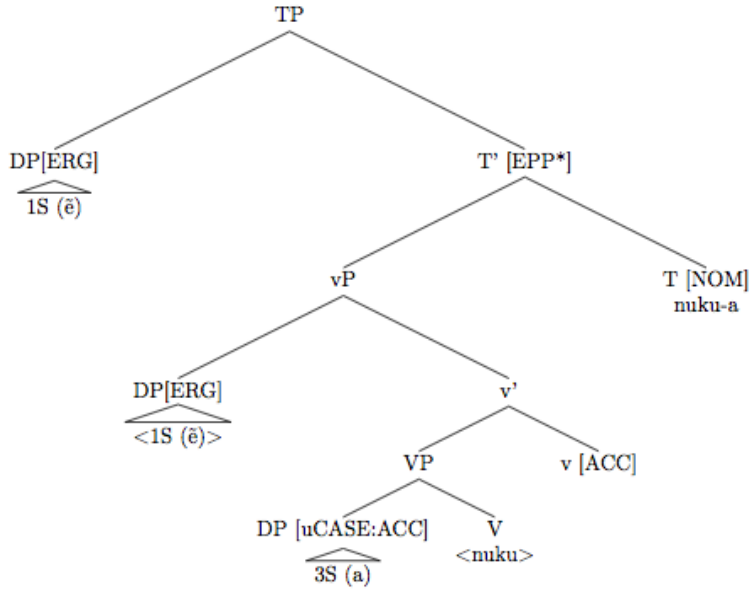
I argue that the alternation that these verbs[14] show in argument structure is related to the nature of the functional head v that they select. Folli & Harley (2004) argue that it is the selection of v that determines the structure that a verb will have in a given sentence. Verbs can select "flavors" of v and the possibilities of selection are specified in the lexical entry. This stops syntax from generating non productive structures, which would be expected if the syntactic component were the only part responsible for a verb's argument structure.

According to this idea, in the case of the verb in (6), there is only one entry in the Yawanawa lexicon referent to *nuku,* with the specification that it can select a transitive or unaccusative v. The functional node v has two roles in transitive constructions: the first is to introduce an agentive external argument and the second is to assign accusative case to the transitive object. In unaccusative constructions, we have a defective version of v, which does not play either role. In (7), I show the structures of the transitive (7a,b) and intransitive (7c,d) versions of *nuku,* according to the selection of v.

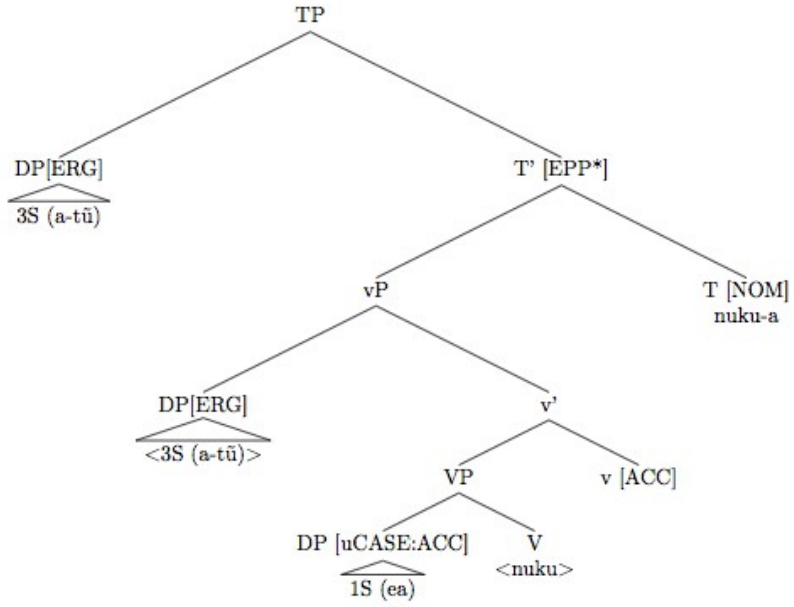
[14] Only a few Yawanawa verbs exhibit this alternation in argument structure.

(7)

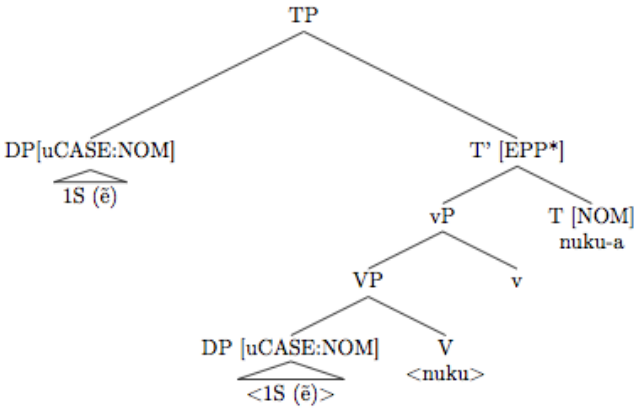
a)


TP
DP[ERG]
1S (ẽ)
T' [EPP*]
vP
T [NOM]
nuku-a
DP[ERG]
<1S (ẽ)>
v'
VP
v [ACC]
DP [uCASE:ACC]
V
<nuku>
3S (a)

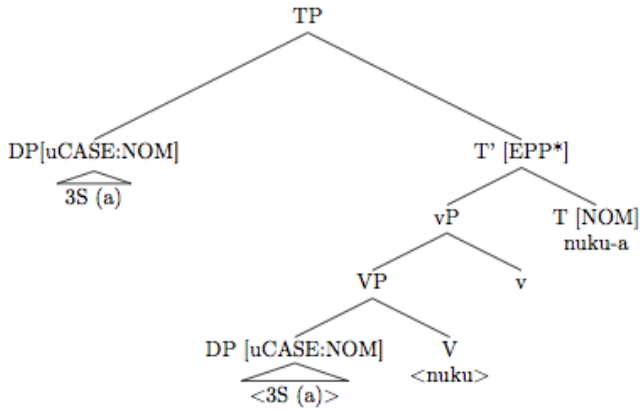
b)


TP
DP[ERG]
3S (a-tũ)
T' [EPP*]
vP
T [NOM]
nuku-a
DP[ERG]
<3S (a-tũ)>
v'
VP
v [ACC]
DP [uCASE:ACC]
V
<nuku>
1S (ea)

c)



d)



In unaccusative constructions, the sole argument is merged and receives a thematic role as sister of V. In (7a,b), a transitive v merged as sister to VP assigns accusative case to the object and introduces an agentive external argument (the assignment of ergative case to this argument will be the next topic of discussion and is not being considered here). T is merged as sister to vP and does not assign nominative case in transitive clauses. Legate (2008) proposes that T probes down the tree for a DP with an unvalued case feature, but finds both internal and external

arguments with their case features already checked. Nominative case is not assigned, but the derivation may continue unaffected (see Pesetsky & Torrego, 2001). In (7c,d), a defective v merged as sister to VP does not introduce an external argument and it does not assign accusative case, leaving the sole argument of the intransitive construction with an unvalued case feature. Thus, in these intransitive constructions, the functional node T, merged as sister to vP, is responsible for nominative case assignment by means of c-command (the *Agree* operation – Chomsky 2000, 2001).

The idea here is that a post-syntactic morphological component – as proposed by Legate (2008) – is responsible for the different forms of the first person pronoun as intransitive subject and transitive object. The presence of an accusative case feature triggers the morphological form *ea* (7b), whereas its absence triggers *ẽ* (7c), even though they are both merged in the same structural position. As I have shown in section 2, the nominative (7d) and accusative (7a) forms of third person show no morphological distinction, and they receive the default unmarked form (which has traditionally been labeled “absolutive”). It seems that [+participant] pronouns are prototypical agents and need a distinctive morphological marking to be interpreted as objects, whereas [-participant] arguments need extra morphology to figure as subjects of transitive constructions.

Thus I argue that unaccusative verbs in Yawanawa have the structure shown in (7c,d), with the sole argument being assigned nominative case by the head T.

Active intransitive verbs in Yawanawa do not have distinct morphology from unaccusative verbs, as shown in (8a,b,c). In (8d), I show that it is not possible have an ergative case mark in the sole argument of an active intransitive verb.

(8)

a) A itxu-a.
DEM.MED.NOM run-PRF
'He/She ran.'

b) Ẽ/Mĩ itxu-a
1S/2S.NOM run-PRF
'I/You ran.'

c) Tika itxu-a
Tika.NOM run-PRF
'Tika ran.'

d)* A-tũ/ Tika-nẽ itxu-a
DEM.MED-PP(ERG)/Tika-PP(ERG) run-PRF
'He/She/Tika ran.'

Thus, we see that the third property of ergative languages as described by Deal (2012) – a split that distinguishes case marking on intransitive subjects according to the verbs argument structure – in fact is not active in Yawanawa.

Up to this point I have discussed the tripartite system of case assignment in Yawanawa and shown that “absolutive” is not a structural case assigned by a functional head. I have also shown that intransitive verbs do not have ergative arguments. This accounts for the second and third cross-linguistic properties of ergativity proposed by Deal (2012). I now turn to the first property, intending to explore how ergative case is assigned. I have discussed the idea that v is responsible for the introduction of an agentive external argument in transitive constructions, but I have yet to show how the assignment of ergative case takes place.

4. Ergative case assignment

I have shown in section 2 that third person subjects (nouns and pronouns) of transitive clauses in Yawanawa are marked differently from intransitive subjects. This characterizes an ergative system. As I have argued, [+participant] pronouns also follow an underlying ergative system, though a morphological neutralization of transitive and intransitive subjects gives rise to a surface nominative-accusative pattern. The data that illustrates this system is repeated below – in (9a) we have a [-participant] transitive subject with ergative marking -*nẽ* and in (9b,c), the same noun receives no marking in its “absolutive” form. In (9d), we have a [+participant] transitive subject with ergative marking (*ẽ*), and is not morphologically distinct from a [+participant] intransitive subject (9e). In (9f), we see the distinct accusative form of a [+participant] object.

(9)

a) Tika-nẽ yawa rete-a.
Tika-PP(ERG) wild.boar kill-PRF
'Tika killed a/the wild boar.'

b) Tika itxu-a.
Tika run-PRF
'Tika ran'

c) Yawã Tika nak-a.
Wild.boar.PP(ERG) Tika bite-PRF
'The/A wild boar bit Tika.'

d) Ẽ yawa rete-a.
1S.PP(ERG) wild.boar kill-PRF
'I killed a/the wild boar.'

e) Ẽ itxu-a.
1S.NOM[15] run-PRF
'I ran.'

f) A-tũ ea kux-a.
DEM.MED-PP(ERG) 1S.ACC hit-PRF
'He/She hit me.'

I have also shown that demonstratives which function as third person plural pronouns in subject position have tripartite morphology and, as all plural subjects, trigger the suffixation of the plural morpheme *-kãn* to transitive and intransitive verbs. As shown in (10a,b), the verbal morpheme *-kãn* agrees with a 3rd person plural subject, but not with an object (10c).

(10)
a) A-hãu epe shewa-kãn-i.
DEM.MED-PL.PP(ERG) straw weave-PL-PROG
'They are weaving straw.'

[15] See the diagram in section 2, that explains the morphological syncretism between nominative and ergative case for [+participant] pronouns.

b) A-hu ve-kãn-i.
DEM.MED-PL.NOM come- PL-PROG
'They are coming.'

c) Ẽ atu kux-a.
1S.PP(ERG) 3S.ACC hit-PRF
'I hit them.'

I have also mentioned that according to Valenzuela (2003:882), a typological feature of Panoan languages is the "syncretism/polyfunctionality involving the ergative, instrumental, genitive, and other oblique cases." This means that these cases are marked with an identical morpheme[16], as shown in (11)[17]. In (11a), we see the same morpheme *-nẽ* marking an ergative subject and a possessor. The sentence in (11b) is ambiguous; *-nẽ* could be marking an ergative subject or a possessor, since the verb *pake* 'to fall' has transitive-inchoative alternation. In (11c), *-nẽ* marks a transitive subject and an oblique instrumental argument.

(11)
a) Tika-nẽ Paulo-nẽ manakati tsek-a.
Tika-PP(ERG) Paulo-PP(POSS) tooth pull-PRF
'Tika pulled Paulo's tooth.'

b) Tika-nẽ peshe pake-a.
Tika-PP(ERG) house fall-PRF 'Tika brought down the house.'
Tika-PP(POSS) house fall-PRF 'Tika's house fell down.'

c) Tika-nẽ weshati-nẽ nami shate-i.
Tika-PP(ERG) knife-INSTR meat cut-PROG
'Tika is cutting meat with a knife.'

[16] I gloss as PP(POSS) the same morpheme that Valenzuela (2003) refers to as 'genitive'. I show the motivation for this choice in section 6.

[17] Though, as noted by Valenzuela (personal communication) there are exceptions, for example the genitive of the 3SG in Shipibo-Konibo is not *ha-n* but *ha-wen*. The morpheme *-wẽ* also denotes possession in Yawanawa pronominal possessor arguments. I argue that *-nẽ* and *-wẽ* are allomorphs (see Camargo-Tavares, 2013).

We could either consider that this is simply a case of homonymy, or we could attempt to find a syntactic generalization to account for the multiple functions of the morpheme *-nẽ*. Cross-linguistic data suggest that a syntactic generalization involving ergative, possessive, and oblique constructions is possible.

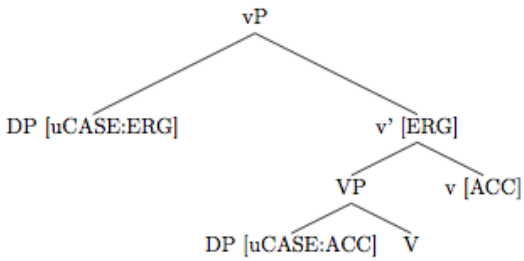
Like in Panoan languages, a close relationship between possession and ergativity is attested in many other languages – Circassian (Circassian), Hinalug (Daghestanian), Inuktitut (Inuit), Yup'ik (Eskimo- Aleut), among others, according to Markman & Grashchenkov (2012). Dixon (1994:57) shows that genitive and ergative case have the same form in the Caucasian language Lak and in the Tibeto-Burman language Ladakhi. This author also shows that an ergative argument has the same form as an oblique instrumental argument in Dyirbal and several other Australian languages; in Caucasian languages such as Avar and Andi; in several Papuan languages; and in Modern and Classical Tibetan. Besides that, Legate (2008) cites authors such as Pray (1976), Anderson (1977), and Garret (1990), who argue that ergative arguments can arise diachronically from the reanalysis of instrumentals. This indicates a possible syntactic connection between them. Also in Kuikuro (Karib) the same morpheme marks an external ergative argument and an adjunct argument with the semantics of cause/origin (Franchetto, 2010:144). According to Dixon (1994:57), in Limbu (Tibeto-Burman), ergative, genitive, and instrumental arguments have the same morphological form.

I argue that the ergative in Yawanawa is an adpositional case licensed by the same postposition involved in oblique and possessive constructions. The mechanism

of case assignment and thematic interpretation I am proposing here is based on the ideas of Markman & Grashchenkov (2012), Woolford (1997, 2006) and Legate (2008).

Following Woolford (1997, 2006), Legate (2008) argues that ergative is an inherent case licensed by v. Inherent case is assigned to a DP in its merged position, which is also the position of thematic role assignment (Chomsky, 1986). Inherent case is thus necessarily related to a theta role. It differs from structural case, which in Minimalist Syntax is assigned to a DP by the closest functional head through the *Agree* operation (Chomsky 2000, 2001). In this proposal, v plays 3 distinct roles in a transitive construction as shown in (12): a) it assigns structural accusative case to an object in complement of V position; b) it introduces an external argument and assigns a thematic role to it; and c) it assigns ergative as an inherent case to this external argument.

(12)



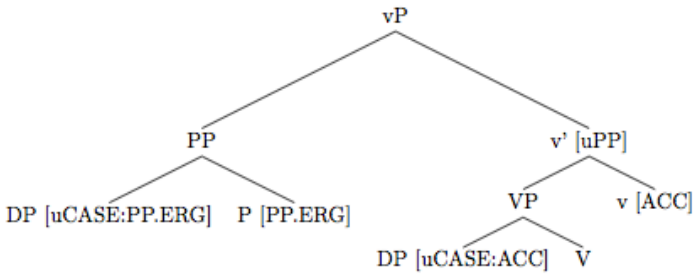
As I have discussed previously, v in Yawanawa seems indeed responsible for the introduction of an external argument and for its thematic interpretation as agent. Considering ergative an inherent case, however, seems problematic if we try to

account in syntax for the typological fact that ergative, possessor and oblique arguments are generally marked with the same morpheme in Panoan languages. As inherent case, ergative would be intrinsically related to the agent[18] theta role.

I propose, therefore, following Markman & Grashchenkov (2012), that ergative is an adpositional case assigned by a postposition to a transitive subject. This postposition is the head of a PP licensed by transitive v. Concerning the assignment of thematic role, I agree with Legate (2008) that v theta-marks its specifier as agent[19]. Markman and Grashchenkov (2012) on the other hand, believe that ergative languages lack a thematic v (and so do several authors such as Nash, 1996; Johns, 1992; Alexiadou, 2001; Mahajan, 1997). According to them, the adposition which assigns ergative case, which they call ergativeP, is also responsible for thematic interpretation.

In my view, different heads are responsible for a transitive subject's thematic interpretation and case assignment, as shown in (13).

(13)



[18] Or other high theta roles such as experiencer or causer.
[19] Same as 14.

I propose the following derivation: a) O is merged as sister to V and receives a thematic role from V in its merged position; b) v is merged as sister to VP and values the case feature on the DP in complement of V position as accusative through *Agree*; c) v has an uninterpretable uPP[20] feature which projects to v' level and is checked by a PP introduced in its specifier position; d) v theta marks the PP in its merged position as agent[21]; e) the DP in complement of P position has its case feature valued as postpositional "ergative" by P.

5. Agreement

The first problem that seems to arise if we consider "ergative" an adpositional case is how to account for agreement, if the subject is inside a DP that is the complement of the ergative postposition and thus there is no c-command between the transitive subject and the verb[22]. As I showed in section 2, the plural morpheme -*kãn* is suffixed to transitive and intransitive verbs with plural subjects (A or S).

This suffix is not the only agreement morpheme that encodes plurality of the subject. It only occurs if the verb is in the progressive aspect in Yawanawa (14a,b). In the case of a verb in the perfect aspect, the plural marker is -*hu* (14c,d), which is the same mark found on nouns. It is not a case of allomorphy, since the two morphemes

[20] An unvalued feature on a head must be checked by means of the *Agree* operation for the derivation to be successful. The head v, in most languages, have an uninterpretable DP feature, that is checked when a DP is merged in the position of specifier of v. Here, I am arguing that a transitive subject in Yawanawa is an adpositional phrase (PP), not a determiner phrase (DP). Thus, the v head has an uninterpretable uPP feature that needs to be checked.

[21] Same as 14.

[22] A c-comand relation is required for the *Agree* operation to take place and allow for subject-verb agreement.

occur in different positions: *-kãn* precedes the aspectual marker *-i* (PROG) and *-hu* follows the aspectual marker *-a* (PRF).

(14)

a) A-hãu epe shewa-**kãn**-i.
DEM.MED-PL.PP(ERG) straw weave-PL-PROG
'They are weaving straw.'

b) A-hu ve-**kãn**-i.
DEM.MED-PL come-PL-PROG
'They are coming.'

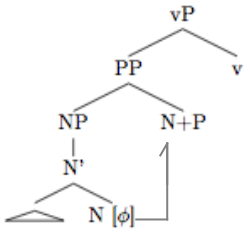
c) A-hãu shashu hu-a-**hu**.
DEM.MED-PL.PP(ERG) canoe go/take-PRF-PL
'They took the canoe.'

d) Westi pi-a-**hu.**
one eat-PRF-PL
'They ate only one (banana).'

e) Yume-**hu** westirasi hu-a-**hu**.
Young.man-PL some go/take-PRF-PL
'Some young men went.'

The relevant fact about the data in (14) is that both *-hu* and *-kãn* are verbal suffixes that denote agreement between the verb and a plural subject (intransitive or transitive). Markman and Grashchenkov (2012) account for this problem of agreement by stating that the ergative subject attaches to the postposition via incorporation, deriving a complex head N+P, as in (15).

(15)



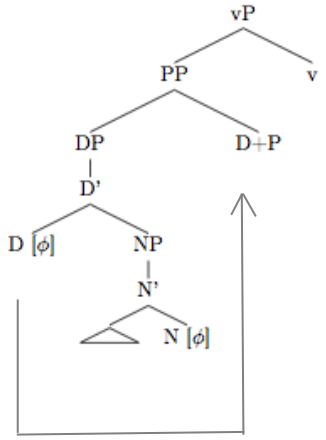
(adapted from Markman & Grashchenkov, 2012)

This operation has two main consequences: a) the postposition appears as a case marker on the noun, and b) the Φ (phi) features of the noun are incorporated by the head P and thus, project to the PP level, becoming visible to the verb. Markman and Grashchenkov (2012) propose that noun incorporation as illustrated above is a parameter that varies among ergative languages. In Hindi, where there is no agreement with the ergative subject, the noun is incorporated post-syntactically, at PF[23]. Thus, during the syntactic derivation, the noun's Φ features are not visible to the head T and no agreement occurs. This proposal has problems if we try to account for the Yawanawa data. First of all, it is important to emphasize that these authors are considering that the adpositional phrase selects a NP, not a DP. In the case of Yawanawa, it is possible to have a demonstrative pronoun in ergative subject function, and this pronoun would be the head of the determiner phrase (DP). This is the first problem we face when trying to pursue the analysis proposed by Markman & Grashchenkov (2012). It is not possible to extract the head of the noun phrase from the inside of a DP, because the DP constitutes a phase (see Chomsky, 2000, 2001).

[23] PF stands for Phonetic Form. It is an interface level between syntax and the language external articulatory-perceptual system.

We could consider that perhaps the head D and not the head N would be incorporated by the postposition. If this were the case, initially, when D is merged to a noun phrase the Φ features on the head N value D's unvalued features through the *Agree* operation. Then, when the ergative postposition is merged, D would be incorporated by the head P in a head-to-head movement. Thus, the Φ features of the incorporated head D are projected to the PP level, becoming visible to the verb. This operation is illustrated in (16):

(16)

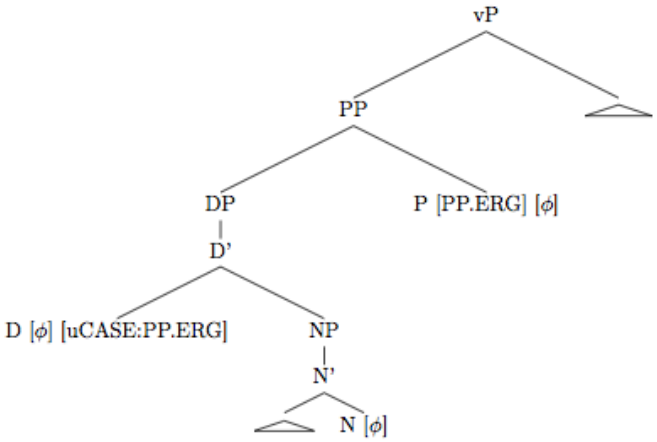


This operation could account for the cases in which a nominal expression is constituted by a determiner only. In the case of a determiner preceding a noun, however, if the determiner is incorporated by the postposition, we get the wrong order of constituents in the nominal expression.

Thus it seems that a more plausible analysis would be that the ergative postposition agrees with the subject. In this view, the head D would not be

incorporated by the postposition. Instead, it would value the postposition's Φ features through the *Agree* operation. Initially, when D is merged to a noun phrase, the Φ features on the head N value D's unvalued features. Next, as the ergative postposition is merged, D values the head P's unvalued Φ features and P values D's unvalued case features as postpositional ("ergative"), according to the structure in (17). Thus, the Φ features on the head P are projected to the PP level, so that they c-command the verb.

(17)



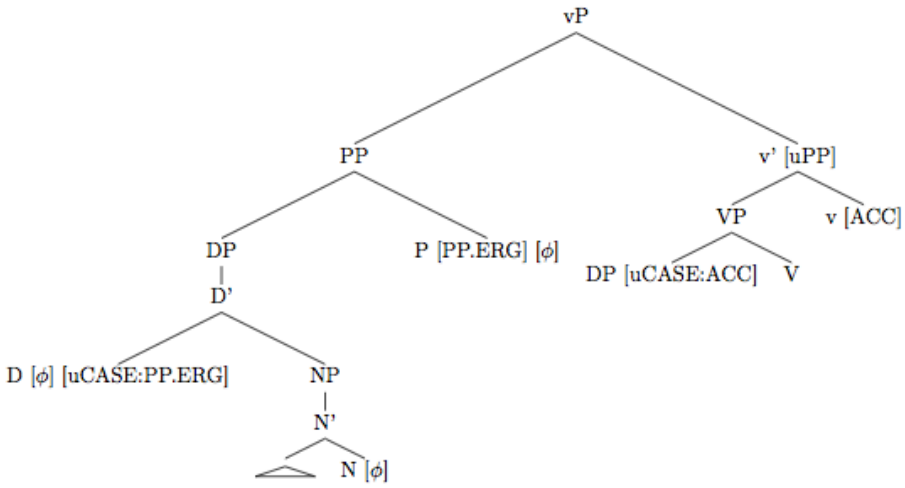
I am considering, like Markman & Grashchenkov (2012), that the ergative case marker is actually a postposition, that is, ergative is an adpositional case in Yawanawa, not a structural case. I have shown, however, that the operation they propose to account for agreement in this type of languages does not explain the Yawanawa data. I propose that the ergative postposition does not incorporate the heads N or D, instead, it is copying the subject's Φ features by means of the *Agree* operation.

6. TP-DP structural parallelism

Considering ergative an adpositional case would account for the common morphology of ergatives, possessors, and oblique instrumental arguments. I argue that this shared surface morphology represents an underlying structural parallel. These arguments are licensed by the same postposition, though they receive different thematic interpretations at merge. I compare the structures of a verb phrase (18) and a nominal expression (19).

In (18) I show the derivation of a verb phrase and the mechanisms of case assignment that have been discussed throughout this article. Note that the head P values D's case feature as postpositional “ergative” and copies D's Φ features, which are then projected to the PP level, where they c-comand the head V.

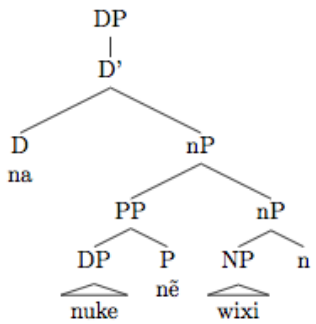
(18)



In (19), I explore the structure of a nominal construction. In clauses, a VP is selected by the functional head v, which licenses an agent in its specifier position. Similarly, NP is selected by a functional head n. According to the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH), the position of Spec nP also assigns the agent theta role and cannot be occupied by a possessor (see Baker, 1988). The possessor would originate in a projection above nP and below D, since it is possible that a determiner co-occurs with a possessor, preceding it (19a). Certain authors argue that a functional projection PossP selects nP and is then selected by the head D (see Adger, 2003). I propose that in Yawanawa possessive constructions are marked by the same postpositional case as ergative constructions. Thus, possessor arguments, marked by the suffix *-nẽ* and its allomorphs, originate in a postpositional phrase that adjoins to nP. In (19a), we have first person plural pronoun *nuke* as a possessive argument and in (19b), we have the proper noun *Tika*.

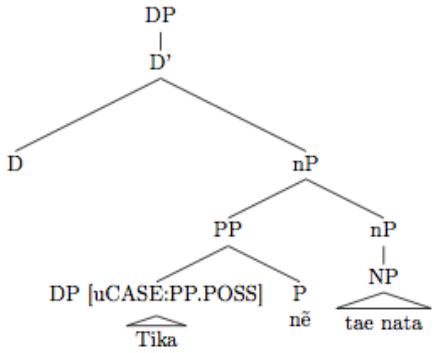
(19)[24]

a) Na nukẽ wixi
DEM.PROX 1PL.PP(POSS) writing
'This writing of ours.'



[24] Example was taken from the book *Yawanawahãu Wixi (*CPI/AC, 2005).

b) Tika-nẽ tae nata.
Tika-PP.POSS foot sole
'The sole of Tika's foot.'



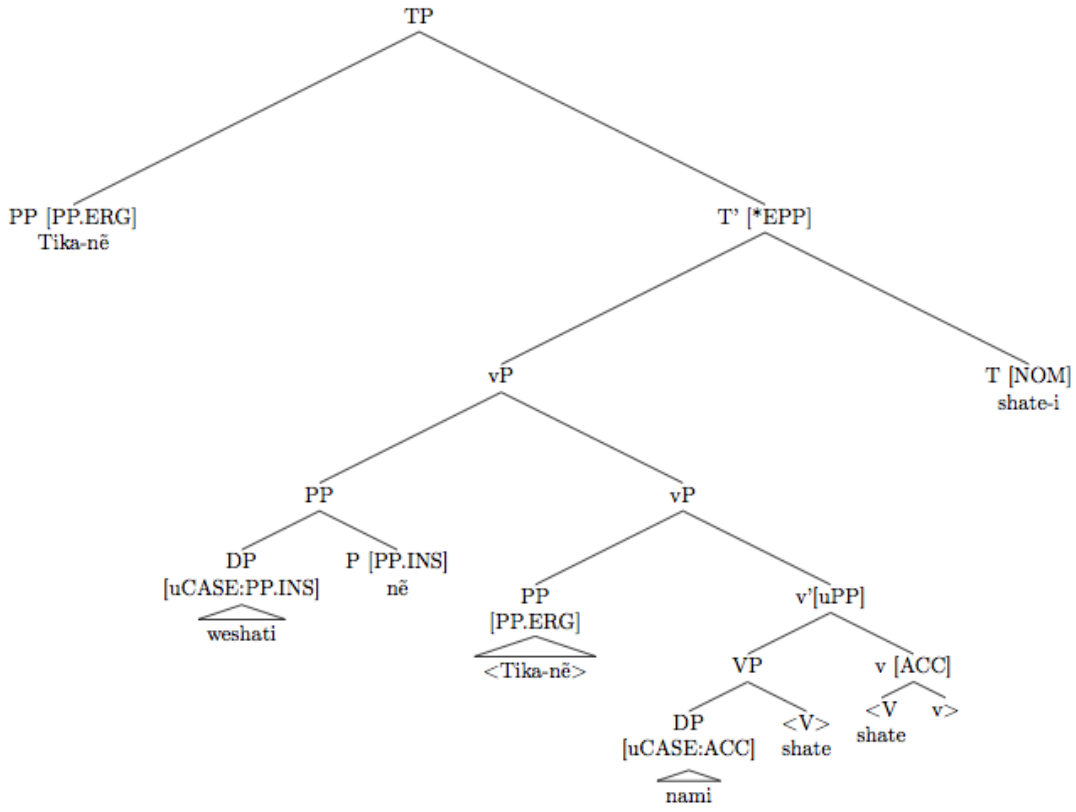
Thus, I propose that the morphology that ergative arguments share with possessor arguments reflect the fact that they are being licensed by the same postposition. They both get postpositional case, but in sentences, the adpositional phrase is merged in the specifier of vP position, whereas in nominal expressions, the possessor PP adjoins to the functional projection nP. It is because of this proposal that I adopt the gloss PP(POSS) instead of Valenzuela's (2003) 'genitive'. The possessor gets postpositional case and not genitive structural case.

7. Oblique arguments as postpositional phrases

We have seen in section 4 that an oblique instrumental argument receives the same morphological marking as ergative and possessor arguments. I propose that instrumentals are licensed by the same adposition as the latter arguments, receiving postpositional case. Just like possessor arguments, obliques are adjoined to syntactic structures, as in (20).

(20)

Tika-nẽ weshati-nẽ nami shate-i.
Tika-PP(ERG) knife-PP(INS) meat cut-PROG
'Tika is cutting meat with a knife.'



In this structure, we see the derivation of an entire clause, with two merged arguments – in the complement of VP and specifier of vP positions – and an adjoined PP, which is the oblique instrumental argument in question. I propose that an equivalent case-valuing postpostion that is incorporating the ergative subject licenses the oblique argument and values its case feature as postpositional.

8. Conclusion

I have attempted to show that Yawanawa, like Dyirbal, has a tripartite ergative-nominative-accusative case system with morphological neutralizations grouping [+participant] transitive and intransitive subjects and [-participant] intransitive subjects and transitive objects. The tripartite morphology of third person plural is one of the motivations for this system.

Furthermore, I have proposed that “ergative” is in fact an adpositional case licensed by a postposition, which is head of a PP merged in Spec vP position. This postposition copies the Φ features from the nominal expression and projects them to the PP level, thus enabling agreement between the verb and the ergative argument.

Finally, I have shown the parallel syntactic structures of TPs and DPs and proposed that this can account for the analogous surface morphology found in ergative and possessor arguments. I have also argued that oblique instrumental arguments are licensed by the same case-valuing postposition. The difference is that possessor and oblique arguments are adjoined and not merged into clauses.

It is possible that the proposed analysis of a tripartite system with 3 case-assigning heads can be generalized as a typological syntactic feature of the Panoan language family. According to Valenzuela (2003:882), all Panoan languages show “ergative alignments with different kinds of splits”, and it seems that the possibility of a syntactic generalization of this sort would be a promising theme for future investigation.

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