

The decline of ergativity in the Polynesian Outliers

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- Polynesian languages are largely verb-initial and generally have two alignment (case marking) systems
 - Eastern Polynesian (EP): accusative
 - Non-EP Polynesian: ergative

- Verb-initial word order is shown in (1a)
- Nominal fronting is permitted using the particle *ko, which marks focus and topic elements (1b)

(1) Niuean

- a. Kua tali e **Sione** e tau hūhū haaku.
PERF answer ERG Sione ABS PL question my
'Sione has answered my questions.' [VSO]
- b. **Ko Sione** (ne) kua tali e tau hūhū haaku.
PRED Sione NFT PERF answer ABS PL question my
'It's Sione who has answered my questions.' (Seiter 1980:101)

- Languages outside of EP (Tongan, Samoan) show an ergative/absolutive alignment
 - Ergative case: *e*, *ne*
 - Absolutive case: \emptyset , 'a...
- (2) Samoan (Mosel and So'o 1997:106, 107)
- a. Sā siva **le teine**.
PST dance DEF girl
'The girl danced.'
 - b. Na pu'e **e le leoleo le pāgotā**.
PRF catch ERG DEF police DEF culprit
'The police caught the criminal.'

- Eastern Polynesian languages (Hawai'ian, Māori) show a nominative/accusative alignment
 - Nominative case: \emptyset
 - Accusative case: *i, ki*
- (3) Hawai'ian (Elbert and Pukui 1979:39)
- a. Ua hele **au**.
PFV go 1SG
'I went.'
 - b. Ua 'ai **ke kanaka i ka poi**.
PFV eat DEF man ACC DEF poi
'The man ate the poi.'

- Polynesian Outliers don't fit neatly into this picture
 - Many Outliers have basic SVO order
 - Languages like Nukuoro and Luanguia don't show ergative or absolutive markers

(4) Nukuoro

- a. **De-nga haahine** gu hagasee tama laa.
DET-PL woman INC scold DET.child DIST
'The women scolded that child.'

[SVO]

▷ How did these systems arise?

- The Outliers show evidence of a **decline of ergativity**
 - Ergative marking is limited to post-verbal & pronominal subjects
 - In some languages, ergative *e marking is lost altogether
- Loss of ergative morphology starts with the availability of unmarked SVO orders (e.g., Clark 1976)
 - Subjects appear most frequently in pre-verbal topic position
 - Ergative *e remains on post-verbal resumptive pronouns
 - *e is reanalyzed as an animacy/agentivity marker or lost altogether

- This account for word order change in the Outliers has precedent in Australian mixed languages (Meakins and O'Shannessy 2010)
 - Ergative marking is reanalyzed after SVO is adopted through creolization
- Fits the Outliers into the larger alignment shift in Polynesian
 - The Outliers fall under the ergative umbrella, despite their neutral morphology

Introduction

Background

Word order change in the Outliers

Loss of ergative *e in the Outliers

Conclusions and implications

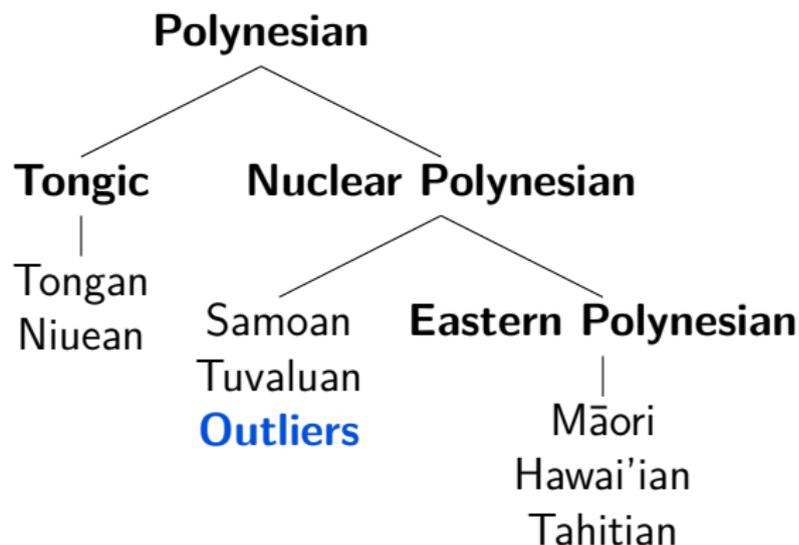
Background

Background: The Outliers

- The Outliers are spoken outside of the Polynesian Triangle
- Much of the presented data will be from the northern Outliers
 - Nukuoro, Kapingamarangi, Takuu, Luangiua, Sikaiana



- Data comes primarily from published grammars
- Nukuoro data comes from primary fieldwork in the Federated States of Micronesia from 2015-present
 - Nukuoro orthography note: ⟨b d g⟩ correspond to /p t k/



- No further assumptions about the subgrouping of the Outliers
 - Recent work debates the subgrouping of the Outliers and EP (e.g., Walworth and Davletshin 2019; Wilson 2021)

Word order change in the Outliers

- SVO orders in the Outliers arose via reanalysis of an unmarked topic position (e.g., Clark 1976)
- The proposed pathway:
 - In PPn, topic fronting was only possible with *ko
 - Some Pn languages innovated an unmarked topic position
 - In the Outliers, this unmarked topic position was reanalyzed to varying degrees as a subject position

- Properties of **topics** (Li 1976):
 - Any argument may be fronted (e.g., object, oblique)
 - The fronted argument can/must undergo resumption
 - The fronted argument must be definite

- Properties of **subjects**:
 - Only subjects may be fronted
 - The fronted argument cannot undergo resumption
 - The fronted argument may be indefinite/non-referential

- Languages where *ko marks topics:
 - Non-EP: Tongan, Niuean, Tokelauan, Samoan...
 - EP: Rarotongan, Maori...
- (5) **Ko e lupu kava haau**, ne inu e Sione.
PRED ABS bottle beer your PST drink ERG Sione
'Your bottle of beer, Sione drank (it).' (Seiter 1980:116)
- (6) **Ko Rewi** e whāngai ana i te kūao kau.
PRED Rewi TA feed TA ACC DET young.of cow
'Rewi_{Top} is feeding the calf.' (Harlow 2007:174)

- Some languages show the emergence of unmarked topics
 - *ko-fronting is restricted to focus-marked or clefted arguments
 - Unmarked fronting is only possible for topics
- This system is instantiated in modern Tuvaluan (7)

(7) **Ttoeaina** koo see matea **nee ia** se mea e tasi.
DET.old.man INC NEG see ERG he a thing NPST one
'The old man, he can no longer see anything.' (Besnier 2000:281)

- Besnier (1986) shows that unmarked pre-verbal arguments in Tuvaluan behave like topics
 - They must undergo resumption in base position (7)
 - Objects may occupy this position (8)
 - They cannot be indefinite (9)
- (8) **Te ika teelaa** ne ffuti ne Ioane.
the fish that PST pull ERG Ioane
'That fish Ioane caught (it).' (Besnier 1986:246)
- (9) ***Se tino** ni kai (e ia) te ika teelaa.
a person PST eat ERG he the fish that
Intended: 'Someone ate that fish.' (Besnier 1986:250)

- Unmarked topicalization also appears to be possible for Kapingamarangi, at least as of Elbert (1948)
 - Resumption in post-verbal position is possible (10)
 - Arguments other than subject may be fronted (11)

- (10) Keiokō **ti ahina** ku penepene **īa** tana mē.
then the woman PRF prepare she her thing
'Then the woman prepared her things.' (Elbert 1948:73)
- (11) Tērā rā **ti paipai** r'e takatakahi ko ni tāngata.
therefore the flounder that.TA step.on NOM the.PL people
'That's why the flounder, people step on (it).' (Elbert 1948:125)

- Kapingamarangi differs from Tuvaluan in that subject resumption is not obligatory (12a)

(12) Kapingamarangi

- a. Keiokō **ti ahina** ku hagarongo nherekhai ti kē.
then the woman PRF hear the.PL.word the turtle
'The woman listened to the instructions of the turtle.' (Elbert 1948:71)

- This suggests that topic-to-subject reanalysis is underway in Kapinga at this time, as Chung (1978) notes

Unmarked pre-verbal subjects

- In Nukuoro, unmarked fronted arguments have undergone a complete reanalysis as subjects (13)
 - SVO order is the most common word order in Nukuoro
- The unmarked topic construction also exists, but requires a prosodic break and resumption in post-verbal position (14)

(13) **Tama daane laa** ga gidee dahi haonga.
DET.child boy DIST PRSP see one nest
'That boy saw a nest.' [subject]

(14) **Tamaa gauligi,** de gaaduu gu kadi ia.
DET.child young DET dog INC bite 3SG
'The baby, the dog bit him/her.' [topic]

- Unmarked pre-verbal arguments in Nukuoro are not topics
 - These arguments cannot undergo resumption (15)
 - This position is restricted to subjects only (16)

(15) * **A Ruth** ne tilo **(e) ia** Johnny.
PERS Ruth PFV watch ERG 3SG Johnny
'Ruth watched Johnny.'

(16) * **De gahudi** ne gai de gauligi.
DET banana PFV eat DET child
Intended: 'The banana the child ate.'
JR: 'Sounds like the banana is eating the baby.'

- Unmarked pre-verbal arguments in Nukuoro are not topics
 - Pre-verbal arguments can be indefinite (17a) as well as non-referential (17b)

- (17) a. **Dahi dangada** ne haangai de gaaduu.
one person PFV feed DET dog
'Someone fed the dog.'
- b. Au e dee lodo [bolo **dahi dangada** e haangai
1SG NPST NEG want C one person NPST feed
de gaaduu].
DET dog
'I don't want anyone to feed the dog.' (neg > indef)

- Tuvaluan, Kapingamarangi, and Nukuoro represent three stages of topic-to-subject reanalysis
 1. *ko is lost for pre-verbal topics (Tuvaluan)
 2. Subjects are often pre-verbal topics; post-verbal resumption becomes optional (Kapinga)
 3. The unmarked pre-verbal position is reanalyzed as an argument position (Nukuoro)
- In the next section, I link this word order change to the loss of ergative *e marking in some Outliers

Loss of ergative *e in the Outliers

- Many Outliers have limited ergative marking in addition to frequent SVO word orders.
- Ergative *e appears:
 - Only on post-verbal pronouns: Kapinga
 - Demoted agents of passives: Sikaiana, older Nukuoro
 - Never (or archaic): Luangiua, modern Nukuoro

- All post-verbal ergative arguments: Tongan, Samoan, Tuvaluan

(18) Tuvaluan

- a. E see iloa foki **nee tino taumua** o tauloto fakallei.
NPST NEG know also ERG person former CMP study properly
'People in the olden days also did not know how to study properly.'
- b. **Ttoeaina** koo see matea **nee ia** se mea e tasi.
DET.old.man INC NEG see ERG he a thing NPST one
'The old man can no longer see anything.' (Besnier 2000:281)

- Only on post-verbal pronouns: Kapingamarangi
 - Word order is largely SVO
 - Post-verbal subjects must be pronominal (Chung 1978:16)

(19) Kapingamarangi

- a. Ku kopoina **e ia** a Hina.
PERF praise ERG 3SG PERS Hina
'He praised Hina.'
- b. Tee roaa **e kimaaua**.
NEG do ERG 1INCL.DU
'We two can't do it.'

- Only on post-verbal pronouns: Kapingamarangi
 - Ergative marking is optional on post-verbal pronouns (20b)

(20) Kapingamarangi

a. **Au** ku kitee **e au** a mee.
1SG PERF see ERG 1SG PERS person
'I saw him.'

b. **Mee** ku kitee **ia** au.
person PERF see 3SG 1SG
'He saw me.'

(Elbert 1948:34)

- Demoted agents of *-Cia passives: Sikaiana, older Nukuoro

(21) Sikaiana

a. A Sina ni aloha ki a Telaupounini.
PERS Sina PST pity to PERS Telaupounini
'Sina pitied Telaupounini.'

b. A Telaupounini ni aloha-tia **e Sina**.
PERS Telaupounini PST pity-PASS AG Sina
'Telaupounini was pitied by Sina.' (Donner 2012:17)

- The same pattern is documented in Nukuoro circa 1963

(22) Nukuoro

a. Ia e gage de nui.

3SG NPST climb DET tree

'He climbs the tree.'

b. De nui e gage-a e ia.

DET tree NPST climb-PASS AG 3SG

'The tree was climbed by him.'

(Carroll 1965:220)

- No *e, or archaic only: Modern Nukuoro, Luangiua
 - Clauses are almost always SVO
- All arguments in Luangiua are unmarked, even in *-Cia clauses

(23) Luangiua

a. **Anau** e li'i ke poi.

1SG NPST beat DET boy

'I beat the boy.'

(Salmond 1974:69)

b. Anau e li'i kahi lia **kau kamana**.

1SG NPST beat CONT PASS my father

'I am always being beaten by my father.' (Salmond 1974:97)

- Modern Nukuoro also shows no *e marking
 - VSO clauses no longer use e, which is recognized but archaic

(24) Nukuoro

a. Ne llanga **goe** denga gede?

PFV weave 2SG DET-PL basket

‘Did you weave a basket?’

JR: “My grandmother and people before her would use *e goe*.

My mother and people younger would say *goe*.”

- Modern Nukuoro shows no reflex of *e
 - Demoted agents of passives now use the preposition *i*

(25) Nukuoro

a. *De nui e gage-a e ia.

DET coconut.tree NPST climb-PASS AG 3SG

'The coconut tree was climbed by him.'

JR: "No, you cannot say that, it should be *i*."

b. Dogu hale ne haga-duu-lia ina i **Soni**.

my house PFV CAUS-stand-PASS PASS OBL Johnny

'My house was built by Johnny.'

- I attribute the reduced distribution of *e to word order shift
 1. Subjects appear most frequently as pre-verbal topics.
 2. *e is found most frequently on post-verbal resumptive pronouns.
 3. The ergative function of *e becomes opaque, and it is reanalyzed as an animacy/agentivity marker.
 4. As resumption of pre-verbal arguments is lost, so is *e.

- The opacity of ergative *e is particularly striking if you compare animate and inanimate topics

ANIMATE TOPIC	Topic _i	V	RP _i	
	Topic _i	V	e RP _i	Obj
INANIMATE TOPIC	Topic _i	V		
	Topic _i	V		Obj

- What does this pathway predict?
 1. *e might interact with the larger animacy system
 2. *e might be extended to intransitive subject pronouns
 3. Other ergative behavior might survive the loss of *e
- These predictions are borne out in Takuu and Nukuoro

Prediction 1: *e may interact with other animacy markers

- Many Polynesian languages have the ‘personal article’ *a*, which appears before proper names

(26) **A Sina** ni aloha ki **a Telaupounini**.
PERS Sina PST pity to PERS Telaupounini
‘Sina pitied Telaupounini.’ (Donner 2012:17)

- In Takuu, *e* and *a* are used interchangeably to mark agents
 - Moyle (2011:52): “*e* is more common with older people only”

- (27) a. **Ttama raa e faanaa a ia** te manu.
ART.child DEM COMPL release.PASS AG 3SG DET bird
'The child released the bird.' (Moyle 2011:52)
- b. Taatou ku taaia **e ia**.
1PL.INCL PERF beat AG 1SG
'He might beat us.' ('We might be beaten by him.')

Prediction 2: *e marking may be extended to non-ergative arguments

- In older/archaic Nukuoro, *e appears on intransitive subjects

(28) Gai ga humai huu e ia...

DM PRSP come when AG 3SG

'So when he came...'

(Carroll 1980:11-2.14)

(29) Au ne hano gi Kolonia [gi hedae ange ai e au
1SG PFV go to Kolonia SBJV meet DIR OBL.PRO AG 1SG
gi dogu dinana].

to my mother

'I went to Kolonia to visit my mother.'

JR (~70 y.o.): "My grandma would talk like this."

Prediction 3: Other ergative behavior may remain

- Nukuoro shows syntactic ergativity in questions and relative clauses (Drummond to appear)
- Questioning an absolutive argument uses a standard gap strategy

(30) a. Go ai ___ e anu naa?

FOC who NPST dance IRR

'Who will dance?'

b. Go ai a Ruth ne doolohi laa ___?

FOC who GEN Ruth PFV hit DIST

'Who did Ruth chase?'

- Questioning an ergative argument using the same gap strategy is impossible (37a)
 - Instead, *-Cia + ina* is obligatory on the verb (37b)

- (31) a. *Go ai ___ ne doolohi Soni?
FOC who PFV chase Johnny
'Who chased Johnny?'
- b. Go ai ne **dolohia ina** Soni?
FOC who PFV hit.CIA INA Johnny
'Who chased Johnny?'

Conclusions and implications

- The loss of ergative *e in the Northern Outliers can be attributed to word order shift to SVO
 - Unmarked topics were reanalyzed as subjects
 - Post-verbal *e was reanalyzed from marking grammatical function to a semantic/discourse function
 - *e is lost altogether when resumption is lost

- A pathway of ergative decline supports an ergative reconstruction for (a subset of) the Outliers
- This in turn supports an ergative reconstruction for Proto-Polynesian
 - The Outliers can be classified as (formerly) ergative
 - Non-morphological ergative properties remain in the Outliers
 - Accusative systems are limited to EP

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O- and a-marking in GRCs

- Genitives mark alienability in possessed nominals through o- or a-marking of the genitive.

- (32) a. **d-ogu** vae
DET-1SG.GEN leg
'my leg'
- b. de vae **o** **Soni**
DET leg GEN Johnny
'Johnny's leg' (inalienable)
- (33) a. **d-agu** biini
DET-1SG.GEN pen
'my pen'
- b. de biini **a** **Soni**
DET pen GEN Johnny
'Johnny's pen' (alienable)

A- and o-marking in GRCs

- In relative clauses, a- and o-marking of the genitive subject tracks ergativity: transitive subjects are a-marked. (Drummond 2017)
 - The distinction does not track alienability here, since the same relative head can have o-marked or a-marked possession.

- (34) a. de boose **oogu** e noho ai
DET boat 1SG.GEN NPST live OBL.PRO
'the boat that I live on'
- b. de boose **aagu** ne hagao
DET boat 1SG.GEN NPST buy
'the boat that I bought'

- The distinction cannot be tied to theta role: experiencers can be o-marked (35a) or a-marked (35b) depending on the transitivity of the verb.

- (35) a. de masovaa **oogu** ne kino ai ide goe
DET time 1SG.GEN PFV hate OBL.PRO LOC 2SG
'the time that I hated you'
- b. de gaagoo **aagu** ne gidee
DET chicken 1SG.GEN PFV see
'the chicken that I saw'

The Nukuoro data: Syntactic ergativity

- Relativization is the primary \bar{A} -movement strategy in Nukuoro.
 - Nukuoro uses a genitive relative clause (GRC), which marks the subject of the relative clause with genitive case.
- Intransitive subjects and transitive objects are relativized using an unmarked gap in base position (36).

- (36) a. Go ai [t_{ABS} e anu naa]?
FOC who NPST dance MED
'Who is dancing?' (S)
- b. Go ai [a Ruth ne tugi t_{ABS} laa]?
FOC who GEN Ruth PFV hit DIST
'Who did Ruth hit?' (O)

The Nukuoro data: Syntactic ergativity

- Transitive subjects cannot use the unmarked strategy (37a).
- Relativizing a transitive subject requires passive morphology on the verb (37b).

- (37) a. *Go ai [t_{ERG} ne tugi Soni]?
FOC who PFV hit Johnny
'Who hit Johnny?' (A)
- b. Go ai ne **duugia ina** Soni?
FOC who PFV hit.PASS PASS Johnny
'Who hit Johnny?'

- Voice morphology is a common cross-linguistic strategy to obviate an ergative extraction restriction. (Polinsky 2017)

The Nukuoro data: Syntactic ergativity

- This restriction is syntactic, not semantic: only syntactically transitive verbs relativize with *ina*.
- *ina* is ungrammatical for intransitive subject extraction.

- (38) a. Go ai [_{ABS} e gadagada (*ina) naa]?
FOC who NPST laugh PASS MED
'Who is laughing?' (intransitive)
- b. Go ai [_{ABS} e dele (*ina) i de moni]?
FOC who NPST sail PASS OBL DET canoe
'Who sailed the canoe?' (middle)