

Abstract Case without morphological case¹

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1 Overview

- Traditional Case Theory has two components: nominal licensing and nominal morphology.
 - (1) Core components of Case Theory (Levin 2015)
 - a. *Nominal licensing* (= abstract Case)
Nominals must be licensed through syntactic dependencies, either by selection (inherent Case) or by an A-dependency within the clause (structural Case).
 - b. *Nominal morphology* (= morphological case)
The Case licensing of nominals has ramifications for their case morphology.
- Over the last 30 years, a strand of literature has debated the existence of nominal licensing (1a), particularly in the absence of nominal morphology (1b). In present terms:
 - ▷ Does abstract Case underlie morphological case?
 - ▷ Does abstract Case exist in the absence of morphological case?
- Positions on the existence of abstract Case fall into three categories:
 - (i) Abstract Case does not exist; case is a purely morphological phenomenon in all languages (Marantz 1991; McFadden 2004; Bobaljik 2008; Sigurðsson 2009)
 - (ii) Abstract Case exists in some languages but not others (Harford Perez 1985; Markman 2009; Diercks 2012)
 - (iii) Abstract Case exists in some form in all languages, but the source of licensing varies widely across languages (Sheehan & van der Wal 2016; Halpert 2016)
- ▶ In this talk, I provide evidence against (i) and argue in favor of (iii), namely that abstract Case is a universal phenomenon subject to variation in the source of nominal licensing.
- ▶ Based on original field data, I argue that Nukuoro (Polynesian Outlier) is sensitive to abstract ergative and absolutive Case licensing, despite showing no morphological evidence for ergative and absolutive case.
 - Evidence for abstract Case in Nukuoro comes from:
 - * Object shift and pseudo noun incorporation (PNI)
 - * A restriction on ergative extraction
 - * Alternative licensing in non-finite clauses
- This case study has a number of implications:
 - Abstract Case (i.e., nominal licensing) exists, even in the absence of case morphology
 - Expands the typology of languages that show abstract Case without morphological case (which is skewed toward African languages, specifically Bantu)
 - Describes a novel example of a language with an abstract *ergative* alignment, where most of the literature focuses on abstract nominative Case

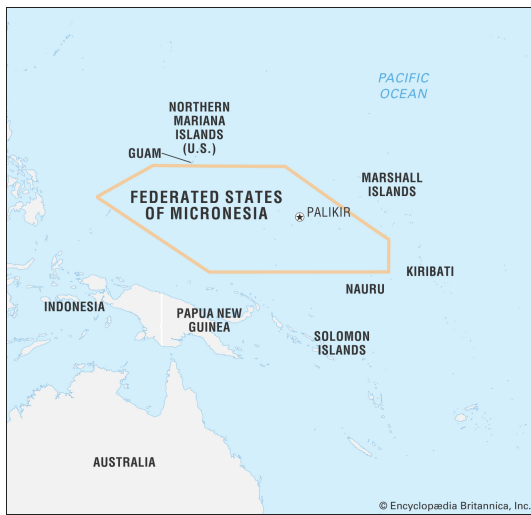
¹This work would not be possible without the time and generosity of Johnny Rudolph, Ruth Rudolph, and Mina Lekka: de abodonu laumalie i oodou daha! I am also grateful to Madeline Bossi, Amy Rose Deal, Peter Jenks, Line Mikkelsen, Tessa Scott, and audiences at UC Berkeley and LSA 95 for their invaluable comments on this work. Finally, I would like to give thanks to the land on which I live and work, the ancestral and unceded land of the Muwekma Ohlone people, who are alive and flourishing members of the Bay Area community today. All errors are my own.

- **Roadmap:**

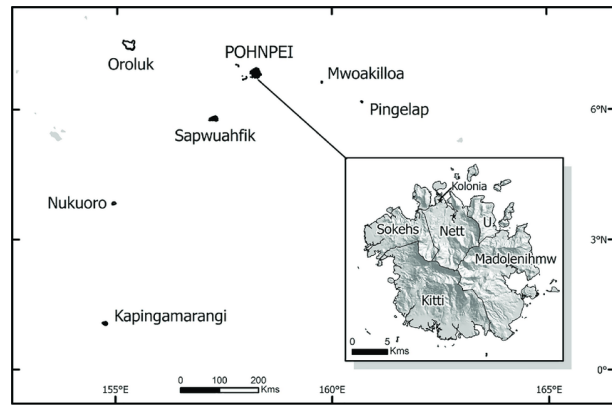
- §2 Nukuoro essentials
 - No morphological alignment
- §3 Evidence for abstract Case
 - Object shift and PNI
 - Ergative extraction
 - Non-finite licensing
- §4 Wrap-up and implications

2 Nukuoro essentials

- Nukuoro is a highly analytic Polynesian Outlier language spoken by ~1,200 people in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Guam, and the United States (Drummond & Rudolph to appear).
- Unless otherwise cited, all Nukuoro data presented in this paper comes from my own fieldwork in Kolonia, Pohnpei, on Nukuoro Atoll, and over Zoom from 2015–present.²
 - I work primarily with three speakers, Johnny Rudolph (70s), Ruth Rudolph (60s), and Mina Lekka (40s), who were all born on Nukuoro Atoll and migrated to Kolonia, Pohnpei in their teenage years.



(a) Map of the FSM



(b) Map of Pohnpei State, FSM

Figure 1: Location of the FSM, Pohnpei, and Nukuoro Atoll

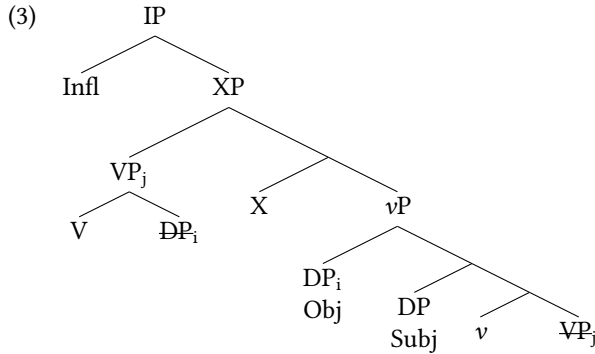
2.1 Clause structure

- Nukuoro has basic SVO word order, as shown in (2).

- (2) De gauligi ne lingi de koovee.
 DET child PFV spill DET coffee
 ‘The child spilled the coffee.’

²Funding for fieldwork was provided by the NSF (REU #1461056), a Hanna Holborn Gray Fellowship (Bryn Mawr College), three Oswald Endangered Language Grants (UC Berkeley), and a Lewis and Clark Fund Grant (American Philosophical Society). Documentary materials are archived with the Survey of California and Other Indigenous Languages and are available online: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.7297/X2M32T4N>.

- Nukuoro clauses involve a predicate fronting operation: movement of the DP object followed by movement of the VP, described for other Polynesian languages (Massam 2001; Collins 2017; van Urk 2019).
 - The DP object moves to the (outer) specifier of *vP* (which I justify in §3.1)
 - The remnant VP fronts to the specifier of some projection XP just below Infl



- Evidence for VP-fronting in Nukuoro comes from the position of VP-internal elements, which obligatorily occur between the verb and the DP object.
 - These elements include directionals (4a), VP adjuncts (4a), and the oblique anaphoric pronoun *ai* (4b).

- (4) a. Au ne [_{VP} dugu **ange maalie**] de beebaa gi hongaa teebele.
 1SG PFV put DIR slowly DET book to top DET.table
 ‘I slowly put the book on the table.’
- b. Au ne [_{VP} dugu **ai**] de beebaa.
 1SG PFV put OBL.PRO DET book
 ‘I put the book there.’

- Evidence that the object has vacated this VP comes from quantifier float: object quantifiers can float to the left of other VP-internal elements, suggesting that objects originate inside the VP (5).

- (5) a. Au ne [_{VP} gaigai ange] **alodahi dengaa gahudi**.
 1SG PFV eat.RED DIR all DET.PL banana
 ‘I tried (lit. ate at) all of the bananas.’
- b. Au ne [_{VP} gaigai **alodahi** ange] **dengaa gahudi**.
 1SG PFV eat.RED all DIR DET.PL banana
 ‘I tried (lit. ate at) all of the bananas.’

2.2 Relative clauses and pseudoclefts

- Nukuoro uses a genitive relative clause, where the subject of the relative clause receives genitive case (6).
 - Genitive case is marked by a distinct set of pronouns or the particle *a/o* before full DPs and proper nouns.³
 - These constructions do not use a complementizer.

- (6) a. de masovaa {**oou / o de gauligi**} ne seese ai
 DET time 2SG.GEN GEN DET child PFV walk OBL.PRO
 ‘the time that you/the child walked’

³The choice of *a* vs. *o* in nominal possession indicates alienability, with *a* marking alienable possession. In relative clauses, this choice reflects agentivity of the relative subject, with *a* marking agentive subjects (Drummond 2016).

- b. de masovaa {**aau** / a **de gauligi**} ne saabai ai de gede
 DET time 2SG.GEN GEN DET child PFV carry OBL.PRO DET basket
 ‘the time that you/the child carried the basket’

- If the subject is relativized, no argument appears in genitive case, making these relatives identical in form to matrix clauses (7).

- (7) a. Au ne gidee [de hine ne baguu].
 1SG PFV see DET woman PFV fall
 ‘I saw the woman that fell.’
 b. De hine ne baguu.
 DET woman PFV fall
 ‘The woman fell.’

- *Wh*-questions and focus constructions are pseudoclefts: the *wh*/focus element is a predicate, which takes a headless relative clause as its subject (Drummond to appear).

- (8) [Go ai_i] [Ø aau ne gidee t_i?]
 FOC who 2SG.GEN PFV see
 ‘Who did you see?’ [wh-question]
 (9) [Go taane laa_i] [Ø aagu ne gidee t_i].
 FOC DET.man DIST 1SG.GEN PFV see
 ‘It’s that man that I saw.’ [focus]

- As such, all \bar{A} -movement in Nukuoro is relativization, which I assume involves movement of a relative operator to the specifier of CP, where the relative C head is obligatorily null (10).

- (10) de hine [_{CP} OP_i C [ne baguu t_i]]
 DET woman PFV fall
 ‘the woman that fell’

2.3 No morphological case

- Aside from genitive case, Nukuoro has no morphological case marking.

– In the three core grammatical roles, pronominal and full DP arguments must appear unmarked.⁴

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(11) a. Au ne seni.
 1SG PFV sleep
 ‘I slept.’
 b. Soni ne doolohi au.
 Johnny PFV chase 1SG
 ‘Johnny chased me.’
 c. Au ne doolohi Soni.
 1SG PFV chase Johnny
 ‘I chased Johnny.’</p> | <p>(12) a. De gauligi ne seni.
 DET child PFV sleep
 ‘The child slept.’
 b. Soni ne doolohi de gauligi.
 Johnny PFV chase DET child
 ‘Johnny chased the child.’
 c. De gauligi ne doolohi Soni.
 DET child PFV chase Johnny
 ‘The child chased Johnny.’</p> |
|---|--|

- Attempting to mark ergative case (using the historical ergative form *e) is completely ungrammatical.

- (13) *E de gauligi ne doolohi Soni.
 ERG DET child PFV chase Johnny
 ‘The child chased Johnny.’

⁴This includes suprasegmental marking: Nukuoro does not show tonal marking of absolutive case, as has been argued for Samoan (Yu 2021).

- Nukuoro also does not mark case relations through head-marking.
 - As we saw in the above examples, Nukuoro does not show person agreement with any arguments.
 - A subset of Nukuoro intransitive verbs show participant number marking (Durie 1986; Corbett 2000), where verbs indicate plurality of their closest argument through suppletion or reduplication (14).
 - However, participant number is not carried out by Agree⁵ (Bobaljik & Harley 2017; Drummond 2020) and only references intransitive subjects in Nukuoro, not transitive subjects or objects (15).

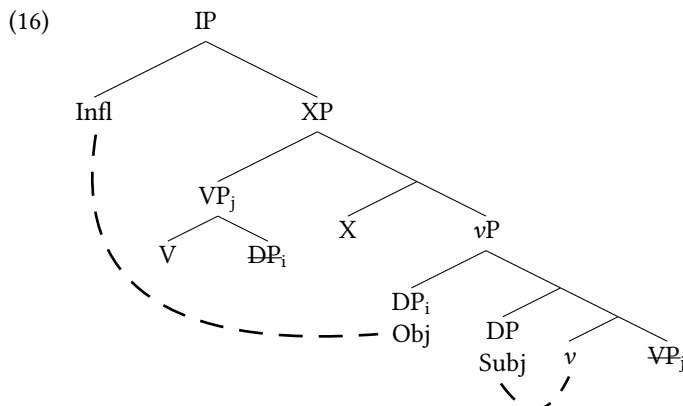
(14) a. Ia gu **seni**.
 3SG INC sleep
 ‘S/he fell asleep.’
 b. Gilaadeu gu **s seni**.
 3PL INC sleep.PL
 ‘They fell asleep.’

(15) a. Denga hadu gu **tige**.
 DET.PL stone INC roll.PL
 ‘The stones rolled.’
 b. Gilaadeu gu haga-**dige** denga hadu.
 3PL INC CAUS-roll.SG DET.PL stone
 ‘They rolled the stones.’

- In short, Nukuoro shows *no morphological evidence* that nominal arguments form syntactic dependencies with functional elements.

3 Evidence for abstract Case

- Despite a lack of case morphology, I argue that Nukuoro nominals require licensing (i.e., abstract Case).
 - Specifically, I argue that Nukuoro assigns abstract **ergative** and **absolutive** Case.
 - In doing so, I support recent work by Sheehan & van der Wal (2016) and Halpert (2016) showing that abstract Case exists in the absence of morphological case.
- I show that Nukuoro is sensitive to (ergative) Case licensing using three syntactic phenomena:
 1. DP objects obligatorily shift out of the VP to receive licensing.
 2. Nukuoro shows an ergative extraction restriction, which is sensitive to the licensing of the object.
 3. Transitive non-finite clauses fail to license both arguments.
- Throughout the section, I will assume that in Nukuoro:
 - Ergative is an inherent Case assigned by *v* (e.g., Woolford 1997, 2006; Aldridge 2004; Legate 2006, 2008).
 - Absolutive is a structural Case assigned by finite Infl (ABS = NOM; e.g., Campana 1992; Murasugi 1992; Bittner 1994; Bittner & Hale 1996a,b; Ura 2001; Legate 2008).



⁵Participant number has been more fruitfully analyzed as i) a set of verbs which can only compose with a plurality, such as English *scatter* or *gather* (e.g., Mithun 1988; Corbett 2000), ii) local root suppletion conditioned by number features (Bobaljik & Harley 2017), or iii) an affix which introduces a cardinality presupposition (Drummond 2020).

3.1 Object shift

- ▶ Using data from pseudo noun incorporation, I show that DP objects must vacate the VP in order to be licensed.
 - Furthermore, I argue that objects move to a position *above* the subject to be licensed by finite Infl.
- In §2.1, I showed that objects move out of the VP using evidence from post-verbal elements (e.g., directionals, VP adjuncts, oblique anaphors) and object quantifier float.
- However, objects may remain within the VP if they undergo pseudo noun incorporation (PNI), which has been described for other Polynesian languages like Niuean (Massam 2001) and Tongan (Ball 2004, 2009).
 - Given Nukuoro’s basic SVO order, PNI is only apparent when other VP-internal elements are present to demarcate the edge of the VP, such as the oblique anaphor *ai*.
 - DP objects appear outside of the VP (17), while bare NP objects may remain inside the VP and undergo predicate fronting (18).

(17) Deelaa de hale o tamaahine e [VP tilo ai] **denga dama**.
 DEM.SG DET house GEN DET.girl NPST watch OBL.PRO DET.PL baby
 ‘That’s the house where the girl takes care of the babies.’

(18) Deelaa de hale o tamaahine e [VP tilo **dama ai**].
 DEM.SG DET house GEN DET.girl NPST watch baby OBL.PRO
 ‘That’s the house where the girl takes care of babies.’

- Crucially, DP objects *cannot* remain inside the VP, suggesting that they are not licensed in this position (19).

(19) *Deelaa de hale o tamaahine e [VP tilo denga dama ai].
 DEM.SG DET house GEN DET.girl NPST watch DET.PL baby OBL.PRO
 ‘That’s the house where the girl takes care of the babies.’

- This pattern suggests that NPs and DPs have different licensing requirements.
 - DPs are only licensed if they vacate the VP, suggesting that they move in order to receive Case.
 - NPs cannot receive Case, and thus are licensed under strict verbal adjacency (Baker 2014; Levin 2015).

- ▶ I propose that DPs move to a position *higher than the subject*, namely the outer specifier of vP, in order to receive absolutive Case from finite Infl. This is supported by two pieces of evidence:

1. Nukuoro shows a pattern of weak crossover obviation, which suggests that objects A-move over subjects.
2. Subject quantifiers can float in a position after the object, indicating that subjects are (at some point) lower than the object.

- First, Nukuoro shows no weak crossover effect in matrix clauses (20), which is characteristic of languages with A-scrambling (e.g., Hindi, Mahajan 1990; Tongan, Clemens & Tollan 2021).

- The basic idea is that the *wh*-object moves above the subject before it undergoes \bar{A} -movement, allowing the object to bind the pronoun inside the subject DP.

(20) Go ai_i o dono_i dinana ne buuludi ange laa?
 FOC who GEN DET.3SG.GEN mother PFV hug DIR DIST
 ‘Who_i did their_i mother hug?’
 Reading: Who is it such that their mother hugged them?’

- Since A-movement is clause-bounded, this weak crossover obviation should only occur within a single clause.
- As expected, when the *wh*-phrase originates in an embedded clause, binding into the matrix subject remains impossible and weak crossover reemerges (21).

– Note that without binding, the syntax of the question itself is well-formed (22).

- (21) * Go ai_i a dono_i dinana ne hai laa bolo e seni?
 FOC who GEN DET.3SG.GEN mother PFV say Q that NPST sleep
 ‘Who_i did their_i mother say is sleeping?’
 Reading: Who is it such that their mother said they are sleeping?
- (22) Go ai aana ne hai laa bolo e seni?
 FOC who 3SG.GEN PFV say Q that NPST sleep
 ‘Who did she say is sleeping?’

- Second, subject quantifiers float naturally in a position after the DP object.

– This suggests that at some point, the DP object occupies a position higher than the subject.

- (23) **Alodahi denga gauligi** ne nengenenge taane laa.
 DET.PL child PFV tickle all DET.man that
 ‘All the children tickled that man.’ [unfloated]
- (24) **Denga gauligi** ne nengenenge taane laa **alodahi**.
 DET.PL child PFV tickle DET.man DIST all
 ‘The children all tickled that man.’ [floated]

* **In short:** DP objects obligatorily move above the subject to receive absolutive Case licensing.

3.2 Syntactic ergativity

- Nukuoro shows differential syntactic treatment of ergative subjects in \bar{A} -movement (i.e., syntactic ergativity).

- I argue that this extraction restriction arises due to the licensing requirements of the transitive object (e.g., Campana 1992; Bittner & Hale 1996a; Aldridge 2004; Coon et al. 2014; Assmann et al. 2015).
- Specifically, when the object is licensed by finite Infl, the subject is inaccessible for \bar{A} -dependencies.⁶ The object must be licensed in a lower position in order for the subject to be \bar{A} -extracted.

- Intransitive subjects and transitive objects can undergo unmarked \bar{A} -movement in Nukuoro (25).

- (25) a. Go ai e anu naa?
 FOC who NPST dance MED
 ‘Who is dancing?’ (S)
- b. Go ai a de gauligi ne tugi laa?
 FOC who GEN DET child PFV hit DIST
 ‘Who did the child hit?’ (O)

- Transitive subjects, however, cannot undergo this same unmarked movement (26a); instead, an additional *-Cia* suffix plus the postverbal particle *ina* must appear on the verb (26b).

- *-Cia* is a highly idiosyncratic verbal suffix, where C is a lexically specified consonant.
- The invariant particle *ina* is optional if the verb has a suppletive *-Cia* form, and obligatory if it does not.

⁶This phenomenon has received several explanations in the literature, including phasehood (e.g., Coon et al. 2014), relativized minimality (e.g., Bittner & Hale 1996a), a constraint on crossing dependencies (e.g., Clemens & Tollan 2021) etc. I do not adopt any particular analysis here.

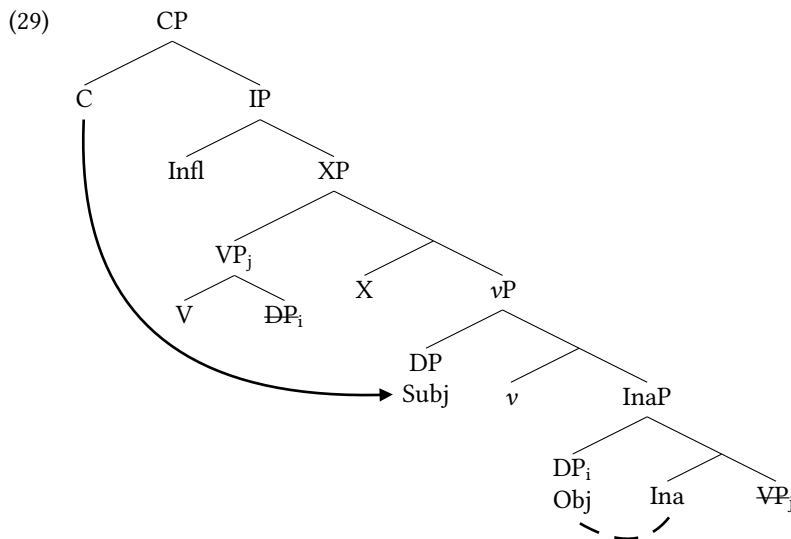
- (26) a. *Go ai ne tugi Soni?
 FOC who PFV hit Johnny
 'Who hit Johnny?'
 b. Go ai ne **duugia (ina)** Soni?
 FOC who PFV hit.CIA INA Johnny
 'Who hit Johnny?'

(A)

- This relativization strategy occurs in all transitive clauses where the subject is extracted: *wh*-questions, as seen above, as well as relative clauses (27) and focus constructions (28).

- (27) Au ne gidee tangada ne **unu ina** denga vai.
 1SG PFV see DET.person PFV drink INA DET.PL water
 'I saw the person who drank the water.'
 (28) Go Sigi ne **dolohia (ina)** denga gaagoo.
 FOC Sigi PFV chase.CIA INA DET.PL chicken
 'It was Sigi who chased the chickens.'

- I suggest that *-Cia + ina* realizes a functional head below *vP* that provides alternative licensing for the object and subsequently moves the object to its specifier (29).
 - This alternative licensing prevents the object from moving over the subject, allowing the subject to form an *A*-dependency with relative *C*.



- This restriction holds of all (and only) syntactically transitive constructions (i.e., those that have objects).
 - Cia + ina* is obligatory for extraction of the subject of ditransitives (30) and derived transitives (31), which are formed by adding the causative prefix *haga-* to an intransitive verb.

- (30) Go ai ne gaavange **ina** de beebaa gi Soni?
 FOC who PFV give INA DET book to Johnny
 'Who gave the book to Johnny?'
 (31) Go ai e haga-baguu **ina** ia?
 FOC who NPST CAUS-fall INA 3SG
 'Who tripped him?'

- By contrast, *-Cia + ina* cannot appear when the subject of an intransitive (unergative) verb is extracted (32a), nor can it appear with “middle” verbs, which are notionally transitive but select for PP objects (32b).

- This indicates that the restriction is sensitive to grammatical structure, not notional or thematic roles.
- Specifically, the restriction only arises when there is a DP object.

- (32) a. Go ai e gadagada (*ina) naa?
 FOC who NPST laugh INA MED
 ‘Who is laughing?’ [intransitive]
- b. Go ai e dele (*ina) i de moni?
 FOC who NPST sail INA PREP DET canoe
 ‘Who is sailing the canoe?’ [middle]

- Finally, long-distance \bar{A} -extraction of an embedded transitive subject requires *-(C)ia + ina* on the embedded verb, but not on the matrix verb.

- The restriction affects only those transitive verbs whose subjects are extracted, not all clauses that \bar{A} -movement proceeds through.

- (33) Go ai aana ne maanadu laa [bolo ne **buuludi ina** ange Johnny]?
 FOC who 3SG.GEN PFV think Q that PFV hug INA DIR Johnny
 ‘Who does s/he think hugged Johnny?’

- (34) Go ai aaau ne gidee laa [e **dolohia (ina)** Soni]?
 FOC who 2SG.GEN PFV see Q NPST chase.CIA INA Johnny
 ‘Who did you see chasing Johnny?’

- The presence of syntactic ergativity is *a priori* indicative of ergative and absolutive Case assignment.
 1. Syntactic ergativity is largely restricted to languages that show morphological ergative case (Dixon 1994).
 2. Generative analyses of syntactic ergativity overwhelmingly appeal to abstract ergative/absolutive Case or its assignment (Campana 1992; Bittner & Hale 1996a; Aldridge 2004; Otsuka 2006, 2010; Coon et al. 2014; Polinsky 2016; Deal 2017; Clemens & Tollan 2021).⁷
- This conclusion is further supported by the fact that the extraction restriction is sensitive to object licensing.
 - When the object is pseudo incorporated (i.e., licensed within the VP), *-Cia + ina* is no longer required for transitive subject extraction (36).

- (35) Go tamaa gauligi laa e [VP **gai ina**] denga gahudi i masoaa alodahi.
 FOC DET.child small DIST NPST eat INA DET.PL banana PREP time all
 ‘It’s that child who eats the bananas all the time.’

- (36) Go tamaa gauligi laa e [VP **gai gahudi**] i masoaa alodahi.
 FOC DET.child small DIST NPST eat banana PREP time all
 ‘It’s that child who eats bananas all the time.’

* **In short:** Nukuoro shows syntactic ergativity, which is sensitive to object licensing.

⁷One exception is Erlewine (2016, 2020), who argues that syntactic ergativity is derived via anti-locality constraints rather than Case-licensing. However, Henderson & Coon (2018) provide convincing arguments against some of the core adverb data from Kaqchikel, where the addition of TP-level adverbs appeared to obviate the extraction restriction; they argue that these adverbial constructions in Kaqchikel are actually biclausal and do not involve extraction.

3.3 Licensing in non-finite clauses

- When Case licensers are absent (i.e., finite Infl), we predict that alternative licensing strategies should appear.
- Coon et al. (2014) use this logic to explain the distribution of the morpheme *-on* in Q'anjob'al, which appears in ergative extraction and transitive non-finite contexts (37).

(37) Q'anjob'al ergative extraction and transitive non-finite clauses

- Maktxel max-ach il-**on**-i?
who ASP-2ABS see-ON-ITV
'Who saw you?'
- Chi uj [hach y-il-**on**-i].
ASP be.able 2ABS 3ERG-see-ON-ITV
'She can see you.'

(Coon et al. 2014:1)

- They argue that *-on* appears in these two seemingly disparate environments to assign Case to the internal argument when Case is otherwise unavailable.
 - Ergative extraction contexts: Case assignment from Infl would prevent subject extraction
 - Non-finite contexts: Finite Infl is not present to assign Case
- ▶ The same distribution is found in Nukuoro: in addition to ergative extraction contexts, *-Cia + ina* appears in all transitive non-finite clauses.
 - This suggests that finite Infl is responsible for assigning Case to internal arguments, and that *-Cia + ina* provides Case to internal arguments when finite Infl is unavailable.
- Nukuoro shows a distinction between finite and non-finite complement clauses.
 - Finite complements require the complementizer *bolo* and use any aspect marker (38a).
 - Non-finite complements have an optional complementizer and use the subjunctive particle *gi* (38b).

- (38) a. Ia e lodo bolo Soni e anu.
3SG NPST want c Johnny NPST dance
'S/he wants Johnny to dance.' [finite]
- b. Ia e lodo (bolo) Soni gi anu.
3SG NPST want c Johnny SBJV dance
'S/he wants Johnny to dance.' [non-finite]

- *Gi* is invariant for tense/aspect (39) and cannot be combined with other aspect markers (40).
- (39) a. Au e lodo [Mina **gi** hano daiao].
1SG NPST want Mina SBJV go
'I want Mina to leave tomorrow.'
- b. Au **ne** lodo [Mina **gi** hano anaahi].
1SG PFV want Mina SBJV go yesterday
'I wanted Mina to leave yesterday.'
- (40) Au ne lodo [Mina **gi** {*e / *ne / *nogo} seni anaahi].
1SG PFV want Mina SBJV NPST / PFV / PROG sleep yesterday
'I wanted Mina to sleep yesterday.'

- As predicted, transitive non-finite clauses lack finite Infl and thus fail to license both arguments.
 - *-Cia + ina* is obligatory to provide alternative licensing for the object.
- (41) a. Au ne dugu (bolo) Mina gi *hudi / **huudia** (**ina**) dahi mamu.
 1SG PFV allow c Mina SBJV catch / catch.CIA INA one fish
 ‘I allowed Mina to catch a fish.’
- b. Ruth e lodo (bolo) au gi **buuludi** *(**ina**) ange Soni.
 Ruth NPST want c 1SG SBJV hug INA DIR Johnny
 ‘Ruth wants me to hug Johnny.’
- We might expect, given that ergative case is inherent, that these non-finite clauses could stand on their own as matrix clauses: subjects are licensed inherently by *v*, and objects are licensed by *-Cia + ina*.
 - This is borne out: non-finite matrix clauses are grammatical and receive a deontic interpretation (42).
- (42) Koe gi *gai / **gai ina** hanu mamu.
 2SG SBJV eat / eat INA some fish
 ‘You should eat some fish.’
- * **In short:** When the relevant Case licenser is absent (i.e., in non-finite clauses), an alternative strategy is used to ensure that all arguments are licensed.

4 Wrap-up and implications

- Nukuoro shows a number of phenomena indicating a sensitivity to abstract ergative/absolutive Case licensing.
 - DPs are not licensed within VP, and obligatorily undergo movement to receive Case from Infl.
 - DPs must be licensed in a different way if their primary case assigner (finite Infl) is otherwise unavailable.
 - * Either because licensing from Infl would prevent subject extraction...
 - * ...or because finite Infl is not present in the structure.
- This case study is descriptively novel in two respects:
 - It’s a rare example of a non-African language that shows abstract Case without morphological case.
 - * Other non-African languages with this profile are Mandarin, Thai, and Jamaican Creole (Sheehan & van der Wal 2016).
 - It’s the first example of an abstract *ergative* alignment (Sheehan & van der Wal 2016 and the literature on Bantu focus exclusively on abstract nominative Case).
- **Conclusion:** We want some kind of abstract nominal licensing condition (e.g., Chomsky 1981; Levin 2015).
 - Nukuoro DPs aren’t licensed in their base position, while NPs are: either have to move over the subject or add additional structure that serves to license arguments (i.e., *-Cia + ina*).
 - * Can we do nominal licensing without derivational time bombs (e.g., Preminger 2014)?
 - The Nukuoro facts are very hard to explain under a morphological theory of case (e.g., Marantz 1991).
- We’re left with two possibilities:
 - Nominal licensing is required in some languages but not others (e.g., Diercks 2012).
 - *All* languages require nominal licensing, but this licensing can look very different across languages (Sheehan & van der Wal 2016; Halpert 2016).

- Nukuoro is compatible with both options, but provides further support for the claim that functional heads can do licensing in different ways, resulting in different empirical profiles.
 - If Infl and *v* do structural licensing: abstract accusative alignment
 - If Infl does structural licensing and *v* does inherent licensing: abstract ergative alignment
 - If KP does inherent licensing: “no Case sensitivity” (e.g., in Bantu)
- One final note: There’s a common idea that Case/nominal licensing should be carried out by or reduced to phi-agreement (Chomsky 2000, 2001; Kalin 2019).
 - While this has run into some other challenges (e.g., Bobaljik 2008), it also doesn’t seem like the greatest idea for Nukuoro, which shows no sensitivity to phi features or other by-products of phi-agreement.

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