Grammatical Relations and Syntactic Ergativity in Roviana: A little-described language of Solomon Islands

A DISSERTATION TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY IN LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes the system of grammatical relations and syntactic ergativity in Roviana. Roviana is a little-described language of the Solomon Islands. Roviana is an ergative language and it codes morphological ergativity through the lack of an article before the transitive subject and overt marking of objects and intransitive subjects. Roviana indexes the object on the verb, but there is no index for subjects. Roviana displays a unique pattern of syntactic ergativity in that the ergative argument has access to some operations that the absolutive arguments do not have access to. This description is of value to Roviana community members and language science.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation describes and analyzes the system of grammatical relations and argument fronting patterns in Roviana, a little-described Austronesian language of the Solomon Islands. The description put forth is of value for both documentary and theoretical reasons. Roviana’s system of grammatical relations is typologically unpredicted and informs theoretical notions regarding ergativity. The ergative pattern of the fronting operations in Roviana represents a novel expression of syntactic ergativity. Describing grammatical relations and fronting in Roviana gives researchers and community members access to the growing Roviana corpus. This description may also be of value to community members, as it acts as a form of documentation.

Roviana is an ergative verbal-initial language which indexes objects on the verb. The morphological strategy of coding ergativity is typologically interesting because the ergative argument is unmarked while the absolutive argument is overtly marked (contra Dixon 1994, Hoop and Malkuchov 2008). Additionally, there is a split in the overt marking of absolutive nouns that is the opposite of the split for ergativity predicted by Silverstein (1976). The unusual morphological ergativity that characterizes Roviana is accompanied by typologically unique forms of syntactic ergativity. First, there is asymmetrical access to fronting processes described here as “plain fronting” and “si-introduction” (after Ross 1988). All argument types can undergo si-introduction, but only ergative arguments can undergo plain fronting. Wh-fronting also follows a syntactically ergative pattern as absolutive arguments may wh-front only through si-introduction.
and ergative arguments may wh-front only through plain fronting. Finally, all core arguments are compatible with a verbal strategy of relativization, but only ergative arguments may be relativized through a nominalization strategy. These novel patterns in syntactic ergativity in Roviana suggest that the ergative argument is the pivot in Roviana, contrary to typical systems of syntactic ergativity in which the absolutive argument is the pivot.

This study is organized into eight chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which presents necessary language background as well as describes how and where the data that inform the analysis were collected. The introduction ends with a brief phonological sketch of Roviana. The phonological sketch is necessary for a full understanding of certain alternations which may, a priori, appear to be syntactically conditioned. The second chapter lays out the theoretical assumptions which scaffold the analysis. The framework of this dissertation is meant to be as “theory-neutral” as possible, and the claims put forth should be easily translatable into any formal theory of syntax. Chapter three discusses major constituent order in Roviana—that is, the arrangement of verbs, subjects, and objects. Chapter four discusses two fronting operations in Roviana: plain fronting and *si*-introduction. Chapter five describes the case-marking system and provides complete paradigms for all possible noun types. Roviana is thoroughly ergative, which is coded in all basic sentence types. There is a split, however, in what types of arguments are eligible for overt absolutive marking. Chapter six describes Roviana’s cross-reference system, in which verbs index objects. The object is indexed on the verb of all basic transitive and ditransitive clauses without subject agreement. Chapter 7 describes the three patterns of syntactic ergativity in Roviana: fronting, wh-questions, and relativization. Chapter eight discusses the typological relevance of Roviana’s novel coding of morphological ergativity and its unique pattern of syntactic
ergativity. Chapter eight concludes by briefly discussing two remaining mysteries and their potential routes of investigation.

The system of grammatical relations and syntactic ergativity in Roviana may be unique among the world’s languages; nothing like it has been attested in the literature. Any language is inherently worthy of documentation and description. There is a sense of urgency, however, for a little-described language spoken by a small community, as it is more vulnerable to speaker attrition, lexical replacement, and possibly extinction. The sort of description and documentation put forth here will be an invaluable resource if Roviana becomes more vulnerable since revitalization efforts rely upon previous documentation and description to design their pedagogical materials and curriculum. Furthermore, Roviana linguistics shows the value of this sort of documentation to theoretically oriented linguists, as the patterns displayed by Roviana could inform, and perhaps revolutionize, our understanding of human language in regard to grammatical relations and syntactic ergativity.

Throughout this document I translate the second person plural pronoun, gamu, as ‘y’all’. The reason for this translation is that English lacks a discrete second person plural pronoun and ‘you’ is used for both second person plural and second person singular. In Roviana, however, distinct pronouns express plural and singular. Like the majority of Austronesian languages, Roviana does not indicate gender on third-person pronouns. The same pronoun is used for both animates and inanimates, so the best translation may be ‘it’. I have attempted to translate third person as male or female only if that was the intention of the speaker.
1.1 Roviana background

This section provides some context for the Roviana language. It discusses the Roviana community, geography, historical classification, and previous work on the language.

1.1.1 People

Roviana is spoken around the Roviana Lagoon area of the New Georgia archipelago in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands has rich linguistic diversity, with 70 indigenous languages still spoken (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2019). Several indigenous languages are spoken in and around the Roviana territory, including both Austronesian and Non-Austronesian languages.

According to chief Silas Oka (Roga and Sheppard 1998), the Roviana people originally lived in the forest on the mainland of the island of New Georgia before moving to what is now the Roviana lagoon. Today the Roviana language is spoken on the main island of New Georgia, the Roviana lagoon area, the island of Parara, and the island of Kohingo. It is also spoken to some extent on the islands of Kolombangara, Rendova, and Gizo, where a number of other languages are also spoken. Figure 1 displays the Roviana territory around the New Georgia archipelago.
1.1.2 Vitality

It is difficult to state the total number of Roviana speakers with certainty. Most estimates rely on census data collected decades ago. According to Ethnologue (Simons and Fennig 2018), Roviana is spoken by fewer than 10,000 people. Oxenham, Pearce, and Terraschke (2005) suggest that the number of native speakers is between 5,000–6,000. Corston-Oliver (2002) refers to an uncited 1976 census that states that the number of native speakers at 5,365, with a further 16,000 second-language speakers. Based on the current estimates, it seems likely that there are from 5,000 to 10,000 native speakers of Roviana.

There are no published data on the rate of intergenerational transmission of the Roviana language. However, I can provide some insights based on my own visits to Roviana communities. In my experience there were children speaking Roviana to each other in every town or village I visited, including Rarumana (Parara), Tolavae (Parara), Noro (New Georgia), and Munda (New Georgia). However, in both Tolavae and Munda I observed an asymmetry in how children use
Roviana: boys use it when speaking with each other, while girls tend to speak to each other in Solo Pijin. It is not clear what conditions this pattern, or even the rate of prevalence; nonetheless it is an important concern for Roviana language conservation.

1.1.3 Classification

Roviana is classified as an Austronesian language (Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002). Specifically, Roviana is part of the Oceanic family, within Austronesian. Figure 2 demonstrates the position of the Oceanic sub-branch within the Austronesian family.

Figure 2. Oceanic’s position within Austronesian (via Blust 2013; and Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002)

Within Oceanic, Roviana is part of the Western Oceanic branch. Within Western Oceanic, it is part of the Meso-Melanesian cluster and within that, part of the New Ireland/Northwest Solomonic linkage. Within that linkage, it is part of the St. George linkage, and within that group, part of the
Northwest Solomonic linkage. Figure 3 demonstrates Northwest Solomonic’s position within Oceanic.

Figure 3. Northwest Solomonic Linkage’s position within Oceanic (via Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2002).

Within the Northwest Solomonic linkage, Roviana is a part of the New Georgia/Ysabel family, specifically part of the New Georgia linkage. Figure 4 demonstrates Roviana’s position within the Northwest Solomonic linkage.
1.1.4 Previous work

There has been relatively little linguistic investigation into Roviana, but what does exist goes back almost one hundred years. This section starts by introducing the history of linguistic work on Roviana.

The first published description of Roviana was a small sketch of the grammar focusing on morphology (Ray 1926). A version of this description was also published in L. M. Jones’ revision of Waterhouse’s dictionary (Waterhouse 1949). Todd (1978) was the first to analyze Roviana as an ergative language. Ross’s (1988) seminal dissertation was the first to precisely classify Roviana within the Northwest Solomonic linkage. Corston (1996:3) proposed that ergativity in Roviana arose as a re-analysis of focus marking. Corston-Oliver (2002) contributed a sketch of Roviana grammar to Lynch, Ross, and Crowley’s (2002) book, The Oceanic Languages. In 2003, Corston-Oliver published a paper discussing the nominal hierarchy in Roviana. In 2005, a native speaker, in collaboration with linguists, published a transcribed, glossed, and translated text (Oxenham, Pearce, and Terraschke et al. 2005). Schuelke (2016) wrote the first published account of the
fronting patterns in Roviana, analyzing them as symmetrical-voice alternations. Additionally, Schuelke (2019a) wrote a manuscript description of the morphophonemics of reduplication in Roviana.

1.2 Methodology

The electronic elicitation of data began in 2014 and continues to the present. It began with translation tasks in 2014. Sets of English sentences were sent out to three native speakers—Glo Oxenham, Frank Tuke, and Layla Kere. All three speakers hold bachelor’s degree levels in education and have formal training in either language or linguistics. These primary translation tasks revealed the multiple word orders, many of which I analyze here as fronting operations. After collecting a series of translation task data, I began to create sentences in Roviana and seek translations and grammaticality judgements. This method of data collection tends to be very slow, sometimes taking months at a time. Nonetheless, it has proved to be a useful and valuable resource that I still employ when a question arises. Each year of the digital fieldnotes contains data that were collected electronically.

The first face-to-face fieldwork was conducted in 2016 with native speakers living abroad in New Zealand and Australia. My elicitation was scaffolded by the SIL’s elicitation schedule for Grammar and Basic Vocabulary in Oceanic Languages (Johnston 1980). I collected enough data to draft an analysis of fronting operations and grammatical relations in Roviana. However, it was necessary to collect follow-up data to bolster the analysis.
In 2017, Glo Oxenham visited me in Honolulu and provided some crucial data, which are stored in PS1-055. Later in 2017, I traveled to the Solomon Islands and spent time in the capital Honiara and in a Roviana village, Tolavae, in the Western Province. I traveled with my friend and collaborator, Frank Tuke. During 2017 I was able to collect data about quantifier interpretations, which greatly informed how transitivity works in Roviana, but due to malfunctions of equipment, and perhaps analyst error, these sessions were not recorded. The interpretations were entered directly into a word document for a paper I was writing about quantifier interpretations and a symmetrical-voice analysis of the fronting operations in Roviana. In 2018, I traveled back to Solomon Islands to study morphophonemics as well as work with Frank Tuke to transcribe texts collected in 2017. During 2018 fieldwork, Frank and I continued to explore Roviana syntax and these data were stored electronically.

Before I discuss the methods of elicitation employed to arrive at the analysis presented here, it is useful first to discuss the archiving of the data. Each example presented in this dissertation indicates the source of the data in the title. Sometimes the data are redundantly from multiple sources; in these cases multiple sources are indicated. All data used in the dissertation are archived so that the reader may consult the audio, video, and text files on Kaipuleohone1. One reason for providing the data in such a manner is to move the field of linguistics to a more rigorous standard as a science (Berez-Kroeker et al. 2018). Another reason is that community members may wish to investigate my data for language revitalization or other cultural purposes. It is my hope that this dissertation and the accompanying documentation will eventually serve the Roviana community.

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1 Kaipuleohone is a digital language archive at the University of Hawai‘i.
The data that inform this dissertation were collected across several years, beginning with electronic elicitation in 2014. The electronic elicitation acted as the scaffold for face-to-face data collection. All the data collected electronically were stored in word files or text files. In addition to electronic elicitation, often the data were entered directly into a word or text document during a face-to-face elicitation session. The digital records are archived in metafiles which I refer to as “digital fieldnotes.” The files are arranged by year and are archived on Kaipuleohone.

a. PS1-052 = 2014 digital fieldnotes
b. PS1-053 = 2015 digital fieldnotes
c. PS1-054 = 2016 digital fieldnotes
d. PS1-055 = 2017 digital fieldnotes
e. PS1-056 = 2018 digital fieldnotes
f. PS1-057 = 2019 digital fieldnotes

The first data pertaining to grammatical relations were collected electronically across 2014 and 2015. Follow-up data for the sections on case marking and object indexing were collected during fieldwork in 2016 in New Zealand and Australia. These elicitations are archived on the following Kaipuleohone files:
The data that inform the quantifier interpretation diagnostics in the symmetrical-voice chapter were collected primarily during fieldwork in the Solomon Islands in 2017. The very first elicitation schedule is archived on Kaipuleohone file PS1-035. During that elicitation I discovered that Roviana doesn’t have true reflexive pronouns. In the recording you can hear my early attempts to analyze this feature as “backward reflexive binding.” This analysis was abandoned after an off-the-record conversation over lunch the following day, as it became clear that there were no reflexive pronouns in Roviana. The quantifier interpretations were elicited at Chester Resthouse in Honiara with Frank Tuke, still in 2017. The quantifier interpretation sentences were written directly into the computer, but unfortunately the recorder malfunctioned, and this elicitation session was only preserved digitally as it was entered directly into a word file.
I conducted fieldwork again in Solomon Islands in 2018. Syntax sessions were not recorded, as they were the result of collaboration with Frank Tuke, who, by that time, was a trained linguist. We entered the data directly into a note on my phone and then these notes were put into a word document. Follow-up syntax sessions with Glo Oxenham and Frank Tuke were recorded and stored in digital documents in 2018 and 2019. These notes are available as PS1-056 and PS1-057.

There are six monologues stored on Kaipuleohone, which are meant to accompany this dissertation and serve for future corpus studies of Roviana.

Figure 5. Roviana texts on Kaipuleohone

a. **PS1-009**

   This file contains a custom story told by Glo Oxenham in Wellington, NZ in 2016. The Kaipuleohone file contains an audio recording as well as a transcription of the story.

b. **PS1-030**

   This file contains a custom story told by Frank Tuke in Newcastle, Australia in 2016. The Kaipuleohone file contains an audio recording as well as a transcription.

c. **PS1-046**

   This file contains a video and audio recording of a custom story about crocodile, monitor lizard, and giant, told by Piqe Tuke in Tolavae village, Solomon Islands in 2017. In 2018 the story was transcribed, glossed, and translated by Frank Tuke.
d. PS1-048

This file contains a video and audio recording of a custom story about the bad old man, Titahoro, told by Piqe Tuke in Tolavae village, Solomon Islands in 2017. In 2018 the story was transcribed, glossed, and translated by Frank Tuke.

e. PS1-050

This file contains a video and audio recording of a custom story about the boy and the eagle, told by Piqe Tuke in Tolavae village, Solomon Islands in 2017. In 2018 the story was transcribed, glossed, and translated by Frank Tuke.

d. PS1-051

This file contains an audio and video recording of a personal history told by “Mr. Peter,” in Tolavae village, Solomon Islands in 2017. In 2018 the story was transcribed, glossed, and translated by Frank Tuke.

Despite intentions to base the analysis on the corpus, this dissertation is based primarily on face-to-face and electronic elicitation. There are a few reasons for this decision. First, the phenomena that are being investigated don’t appear in the corpus. For example, there is not a single instance of a verbal object index of a first-person plural pronoun, nor is there an example of quantifier interpretation. Second, the styles of speech that people use in the stories often employ strategies of conveying information which do not reveal the details necessary to analyze grammatical relations. For example, there are many instances of absolutive marking of intransitive subjects and many instances of si-introduction, but many two-participant events are expressed through pseudo noun incorporation in natural speech, which does not shed sufficient light on
transitive clauses to perform an analysis on voice alternations and grammatical relations. It is worth noting that PS1-009 provides many useful examples of plain fronting of the transitive subject.

1.3 Phonological sketch

Before moving on to the topics of central focus to the dissertation, it is necessary first to discuss some aspects of the phonology of Roviana. Pronoun alternations may appear to be syntactically conditioned, but they are, in fact, phonologically conditioned. This section will provide enough background to support the argument that these pronoun alternations are indeed phonologically conditioned; however, a full description of Roviana phonology will have to be the subject of future work.

CONSONANTS

Roviana has 16 phonemic consonants. Place and manner of the consonants are illustrated in table 1. Voiced stops are pre-nasalized. The orthographic symbols in table 1 are indicated in angled brackets when they are not the same as the phonemic symbol. The following chapters all adopt the standard Roviana orthographic conventions for <b, d, q, v, g, ng>.
Table 1. Roviana consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>alveolar</th>
<th>velar</th>
<th>glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voiceless stop</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>k</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-nasalized</td>
<td>^b &lt;b&gt;</td>
<td>^d &lt;d&gt;</td>
<td>^g &lt;q&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced stop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiceless fricative</td>
<td></td>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced fricative</td>
<td>β &lt;v&gt;</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>γ &lt;g&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>η &lt;ng&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trill</td>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lateral liquid</td>
<td></td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VOWELS

Roviana has five phonemic vowels, illustrated in table 2.

Table 2. Phonemic vowel inventory of Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Back/Rounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no vowel-length distinctions or complex onsets/codas. Roviana does not allow sequences of identical segments.

PHONOTACTICS

Roviana has two surface syllable shapes in un-reduplicated forms, CV and V. I examined 3,680 Roviana words from Waterhouse’s (1949) dictionary as well as my own field notes, and not a single form had a coda. Outside of reduplication, it appears that Roviana actively avoids codas.
in surface forms. The avoidance of codas is most visible through the observed alternation of verb-final echo vowels and object-indexing enclitics.

Echo vowels, also called paragogic vowels, are vowels which are added to the end of a word. In the case of Roviana they are added after verbs that end in a consonant in the underlying form. Echo vowels in Roviana are diachronically visible in modern words like *matagutu ‘to fear,’ which comes from the consonant-final Proto Oceanic form *matakut (Blust and Trussel 2020). There is no restriction on which type of vowel can be echoed. Evidence for the addition of the echo vowel comes from the observation that infinitive forms of these verbs have a final vowel that disappears when an object index is added in a transitive context. For example, the surface form of /ɣarat/, *ɣarat*, loses its final vowel when an object agreement enclitic is attached, as in *ɣarat=ia ‘bite 3sg.obj,’ demonstrated in example (1a). The deletion of the final vowel in *ɣarat* contrasts with the behavior of final vowels of infinitive verbs that end in vowels in the underlying form, such as *taka, ‘kick.’ Example (1b) demonstrates that the final vowel in *taka* is preserved when agreement is added, as in *taka=ia, ‘kick 3sg.obj.’

(1) Roviana echo-vowel insertion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underlying</th>
<th>Surface IFTV</th>
<th>Underlying</th>
<th>Surface with OBJ.AGR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. /ɣarat/</td>
<td>[ɣarat] ‘to bite’</td>
<td>/ɣarat=ia/</td>
<td>[ɣaratia] ‘to bite it’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. /taka/</td>
<td>[taka] ‘to kick’</td>
<td>/taka=ia/</td>
<td>[takaia] ‘to kick it’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

2 Indeed, the Proto Oceanic reconstruction of ‘bite’ *kaRat (Blust and Trussel 2018) had a word-final consonant.
The echo-vowel addition phenomenon is characterized by a rule in example (2). Positing that the final vowel in *yarata* is paragogic is the best way to account for the difference in forms which have the object agreement =*ia* in examples (1a) and (2b).

(2) Roviana echo-vowel addition rule

\[ \emptyset \rightarrow V_i/V_i C \_\# \]

The echo-vowel addition suggests that Roviana phonology generally avoids codas in surface forms. The dis-preference for codas in surface forms runs contrary to the common pattern of CVC-reduplication, which is discussed in the following section.

Roviana tends to insert a [ə] or [a] before initial /ɣ/ and /ɾ/ if the consonant is followed by a back vowel without an interceding consonant. There is no phonemic schwa vowel in Roviana; thus, the insertion of either [ə] or [a] is perceived as the phoneme /a/. The full [a] tends to be used more in slow careful speech. In natural speech, the insertion of a vowel before /ɾ/ or /ɣ/ is most common in clause-initial words. This phenomenon has also been observed in elicitation of single word (PS1-001 – PS1-006) in dictionary form. The added vowel is perceived as part of the word in some cases, such as *ayoi*, but is not perceived as part of the word in other cases, such as *γona*. This process seems particularly common with words that begin with /ɾ/ or /ɣ/ and have a back vowel. It has not been observed as much in words which begin with /ɾ/ or /ɣ/ but are followed by a high front vowel, such as *γita*, the first-person plural inclusive pronoun.
(3) initial vowel insertion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phonemic</th>
<th>initial form</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/rau/</td>
<td>[arau]</td>
<td>‘1SG’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/rua/</td>
<td>[ərua]</td>
<td>‘neck’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɣoi/</td>
<td>[aɣoi]</td>
<td>‘2SG’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɣona/</td>
<td>[əɣona]</td>
<td>‘to shoot’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STRESS

Roviana has a general pattern of penultimate stress; however, there are apparent exceptions which display antepenultimate stress. Generally, Roviana only displays antepenultimate stress on words which have an echo-vowel, suggesting that stress assignment is “blind” to the echo-vowel.

Some three-syllable words with anti-penultimate stress words are illustrated in example (5).

(4) Penultimate stress in 2-, 3-, and 4-syllable words

/ˈhe.na/ ‘eat’
/ˈpa.tu/ ‘stone’
/ˈha.⁴⁴⁴bu/ ‘to fish’
/lu ˈmael/ ‘to understand’
/nu ⁴⁴⁴gu.ru/ ‘to enter’
/lma.ta.ˈyu.tu/ ‘to fear’

---

3 It is worth noting that some forms only appear to have echo vowels. For example, tomoko, ‘war canoe’ is said to come from the form *toa.moko, ‘alive.don’t cry.’ The verb moko had a final vowel historically, but in modern speech, it is indistinguishable from words that added echo vowels.
(5) Anti-penultimate stress in 3-syllable words

/ˈto.mo.ko/  ‘war canoe’
/ˈya.ru.mu/  ‘type of crab’
/ˈko.mo.lo/  ‘to smile’

A full discussion of stress is beyond the scope of this brief sketch and should be the topic of future work.
Chapter 2
Framework

This section begins by stating explicitly how each theoretical concept necessary to understand Roviana morphosyntax will be used in the dissertation. The concepts discussed in this section are transitivity, core argument status, the notion of subject, the notion of pivot, grammatical relations, and syntactic ergativity. The goal of this framework is to establish concepts and diagnostics that are accessible to readers without a background in theoretical syntax, such as typologists, language conservationists, and Roviana community members. The concepts and diagnostics discussed in this section should be easily integrated into any mainstream theory of formal syntax.

This framework attempts to remain as “theory neutral” as possible, because many theoretical approaches do not stand the test of time. It is important that descriptive materials on endangered and vulnerable languages can be understood, even if the theoretical framework they may be written in is abandoned. It is impossible to describe any syntactic phenomenon without making some theoretical assumptions—for example, that words are units that are grouped into phrases. Some of the major assumptions of the framework I propose here are that

1. there is a distinction between core and non-core arguments;
2. sentences can be categorized as intransitive, transitive, or ditransitive, based on the number of core arguments;
each sentence has a subject;
a language can be assigned to an alignment type, based on the patterning of the intransitive subject, the transitive subject, and the transitive object;
transitive patterns are distinct from passives, which are produced by a detransitivizing operation)
certain types of phenomena, particularly wh-questions and relative clauses, are sensitive to the language’s alignment type

These assumptions will be addressed in the following subsections: transitivity, core arguments, grammatical relations, subject, pivot, grammatical relations, and syntactic ergativity.

2.1 Transitivity

Syntactic transitivity is an important concept for descriptive and theoretical syntax, and prototypical transitivity is a crucial concept to establish in order to describe and analyze morphosyntax in a little-described language (Hopper and Thompson 1980, Lazard 2003, Kittilä 2002). The features of transitivity presented here can be used to discover prototypical transitivity and its correlated morphosyntactic features in an undescribed or little-described language, such as Roviana.

Transitivity is best viewed as a property of a clause (Hopper and Thompson 1980, Lazard 2003, Næss 2007), though it is sometimes also referred to in the literature as a property of verbs (Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000). One reason to attribute transitivity to clauses as opposed to verbs is that attributing transitivity to verbs entails an additional theoretical assumption about what kind
of information is stored in the lexicon. Furthermore, many verbs can occur in both intransitive or transitive contexts, such as the English verb *eat*.

The level of transitivity of a clause is determined by the number of core arguments it contains. Constructions with a sole core argument are *intransitive*, constructions with two core arguments are *transitive*, and constructions with three core arguments are *ditransitive* (Arka 2005). Example (6) shows the three basic sentences types in English. In example (6), sentence (a) is intransitive, with a single core argument: *the judge*. Example (6b) is transitive, with two core arguments: *Bill* and *the chicken*. Sentence (6c) is ditransitive, with three core arguments: *Liz, Bill*, and *the book*.

(6) Basic sentence types in English

a. **INTRANSITIVE**
   
   *The judge laughed.*

b. **TRANSITIVE**
   
   *Bill ate the chicken.*

c. **DITRANSITIVE**
   
   *Liz gave Bill a book.*

Much theoretical work on transitivity focuses on its scalar nature (Hooper and Thompson 1980, 1982, Kittilä 2002, Cooreman, Fox, and Givón 1984, Givón 1984, Delancey 1987, Croft...
1990, Kirbik 1993, Tsunoda 1994). However, prototypical transitivity is not gradient. Identifying prototypically transitive environments in a little-described language is essential for analyzing the morphosyntax (Lazard 2003). Two of the key features of prototypically transitive environments are: (1) the referential distinctness of the two participants (Hopper and Thompson 1980; Cooreman, Fox, Givón 1984; Kittilä 2002; Næss 2007). (2) Volitionality or agency of the agent (Hopper and Thompson 1980; Cooreman, Fox, and Givón 1984; Kittilä 2002).

The alignment of morphosyntactic subsystems (case, agreement, word order, and symmetrical voice) is generally classified by examining the patterns of prototypical intransitive and prototypical transitive constructions only. (A discussion of the typology of ditransitive constructions can be found in Malchukov, Haspelmath, and Comrie 2010.)

2.2 Core arguments and non-core arguments

The major participants in an event, expressed as noun phrases, constitute the arguments of a clause. Arguments fall into two general categories, core and non-core. The distinction between core arguments and non-core arguments is often subtle; however, it is possible to reliably distinguish between core and non-core arguments in prototypically transitive environments. I propose a morphological diagnostic which can be used to determine core status of an argument.

Following William O’Grady (p.c., who cites an unpublished paper by Paul Kiparsky), I take the key feature of a core argument to be that its relation to the verb is not mediated by an interceding meaning-bearing element, such as an adposition. In example (7a), the marathon is a core argument; thus, the whole clause is transitive. However, in example (7b), to work is non-core,
because it is modified by a preposition, *to*. Therefore example (7b) is intransitive, because it only
has one core argument.

(7) Non-core argument marked by adposition

TRANSITIVE

a. *Liz ran the marathon.*

INTRANSITIVE

b. *Liz ran to work.*

I propose that example (8a) is ditransitive and that example (8b) is a transitive construction
with an additional non-core argument. As previously mentioned, the key feature of a core argument
is that its relation to the verb is not mediated by an interceding meaning-bearing element, such as
an adposition. Thus, *Bill* is a core argument in(8a), *Liz gave Bill a book*, but not in (8b), *Liz gave
a book to Bill*, where its relationship to the verb is established via the preposition *to*. Harley (2002)
and Pesetsky (1995) propose that these two types of sentences, in English, are different
constructions. I do not propose any structure *per se*, but I agree with their intuition that these are
different sentence types.
(8) English three-argument construction types

DITRANSITIVE


TRANSITIVE

b. *Liz gave a book to Bill.*

The morphological diagnostic of core status is summarized in (9).

(9) Morphological diagnostic of core status

Arguments whose relation to the verb is mediated by a meaning-bearing element, such as an adposition, are non-core

2.3 Grammatical relations

Languages can be classified for their alignment of grammatical relations, depending on the morphosyntactic properties used to distinguish among the core arguments of transitive and intransitive clauses: intransitive subjects (S), transitive subjects (A), and transitive objects (O). The notion of subject will be defined in detail in the next section. Suffice it to say for now that core arguments can be ranked in a hierarchy (Pollard and Sag 1992), in which the subject is more prominent than the other core argument, the object. Since intransitive clauses have a single core argument, it is subject by default. (10) summarizes the three core grammatical relations of transitive and intransitive clauses.
(10) Core-arguments in grammatical relations

S = Sole argument (subject) of intransitive clause

A = Subject of transitive clause

O = Direct object of transitive clause

These grammatical roles often overlap with semantic macro-roles; however, the semantic and grammatical roles are distinct. Semantic macro-roles are less important in intransitive clauses, as the sole core argument will always be the subject. In a transitive context, one argument is typically the initiator or controller of an event (Onishi 2001) and is thus has more agency. The other core argument of a transitive event is typically the patient or undergoer of the event and has less agency. In a three-argument clause, there will still be an initiator with high agency, and there will be two additional arguments, both of which have less agency than the initiator. The verb to give is often used to demonstrate typical ditransitive events (Harley 2002, Pesetsky 1995). The argument which is being transferred is the theme, or patient, and the argument which acts as the destination for the given item is the recipient or goal.

(11) Semantic macro-roles

I = agent, initiator or controller of event

P = patient, theme, or undergoer of event

G = recipient or goal of ditransitive
Grammatical relations can be coded through three morphosyntactic strategies (Onishi 2001): (1) direct marking on the noun phrase (2) indexation on the verb (3) constituent order.

(12) Grammatical relations coding strategies (adapted from Onishi 2001)
1. Direct marking on noun phrase
2. Verbal indexation
3. Major constituent order

Cross-linguistic typology suggests that there are two types of intransitive subjects: one that is more like a transitive subject, and one that is more like a transitive object (Perlmutter 1978, Burzio 1981, 1986, Creissels 2007, Fukuda 2017). In the first type, sometimes called unergative, the intransitive subject shares a semantic property (agency) with a transitive subject; this type of intransitive subject will be referred to here as S1. The second type, sometimes called unaccusative, shares a semantic property (patienthood) with a transitive object; this type of intransitive subject will be referred to here as S2.

In some languages, the split in intransitivity is sufficiently salient to warrant classifying the alignment based on the similar treatment of one type of intransitive subject to the transitive subject and the other intransitive subject to the transitive object. This classification is referred to as “active-stative” (Mallinson and Blake 1981) or “Split-S” (Dixon 1995). Examples (13) and (14) illustrate active-stative alignment in Guarani, a language of Paraguay. In example (13a), the intransitive subject is indicated by using the same prefix form as the transitive subject in (13b). In example
(14a), the intransitive subject is indicated by using the same prefix form as the transitive object in
(14b).

(13) Active Marking in Guaraní (adapted from Shain 2008):

a.  a-  ñe-  mbo-jere  

    ACT.1.SG-   REFL-   put-twist

    ‘I spun around’

b.  upé  -va  niko  a-  hendu.

    that  -RC  truly  ACT.1.SG-  hear

    ‘I hear that.’

(14) Stative Marking in Guaraní (adapted from Shain 2008):

a.  nda  che-  py’aguapy  -ve  -í  -ko.

    NEG  STAT.1.SG-  peace  -more  -NEG  -EMPH.

    ‘I couldn’t be calmer.’

b.  ha  Felípa  che-  r-  echa.

    CONJ  Felípa  STAT.1.SG  REL-  see

    ‘And Felipa saw me.’
An active-stative alignment arises when one type of intransitive subject patterns with transitive subjects and the other type patterns with transitive objects. This sort of alignment is schematized in figure 6.

Figure 6. Active-stative alignment system

In the other two major alignment types, $S_1$ and $S_2$ are conflated in the morphosyntactic marking. In the most common alignment system (Comrie 2013a, 2013b; Siewierska 2013) nominative-accusative (henceforth accusative) (Mallinson and Blake 1981, Comrie 1989), the intransitive subject is coded the same as the transitive subject—by the so-called nominative case. Due to its distinct morphosyntactic coding, the transitive object is called the accusative argument.

Example (15) demonstrates accusative alignment in English. Subject pronouns work the same way in English: they take the same form, trigger verbal agreement, and precede the verb. The object, the accusative argument in (15c), has three characteristics: it is coded through a different pronoun, it does not trigger verbal agreement, and it follows the verb in linear order.
(15) Nominative-accusative marking in English.

a. *She laughs.*

b. *She eats the pizza.*

c. *The president thanks her.*

Figure 7 schematizes an accusative system of alignment. S and A are labeled “nominative” and O is labeled “accusative.”

Figure 7. Nominative-accusative alignment system

![Diagram of Nominative-Accusative Alignment]

Nominative  |  Accusative
---|---
S  |  A

2.3.1 Morphological ergativity

The next logical possibility is for the intransitive subject to pattern with the transitive object; this sort of alignment is called “ergative-absolutive” (Mallinson and Blake 1981, Comrie 1989, Dixon 1979, 1994, McGregor 2009), or simply “ergative.” The grouping of intransitive subject and transitive object is labeled “absolutive.” The transitive subject, which is coded differently, is ergative. Ergative-absolutive alignment is schematized in figure 8.
ergative-absolutive alignment system

Ergative alignment in nominal marking and verbal indexation is less common than accusative alignment (Comrie 2013a, Comrie 2013b, Siewierska 2013). Nonetheless, ergative alignment is attested for all three coding strategies: case marking, verbal cross-reference, and major constituent order. Any language which codes ergativity through one of these three morphosyntactic strategies can be said to be morphologically ergative.

Example (16) demonstrates ergative alignment in Tongan, expressed through nominal particles. In (16a) the intransitive subject is preceded by the marker ‘a, the same marker that can precede the object in (16b). In (16b) the transitive subject is preceded by the marker ‘e, indicating that it is the ergative argument.

(16) Ergative nominal marking in Tongan (Adapted from Otsuka 2011)

a. na’e kata ‘a Sione.
   PST laugh ABS John
   ‘John laughed.’
Example (17) demonstrates ergative alignment coded through verbal indexation in Mayan.

In Example (17a), the first-person plural intransitive subject is indexed on the verb by the prefix \( ax^- \); the same prefix indexes the first-person plural object in example (17c). In example (17b), the first person plural transitive subject is indicated through the prefix \( at^- \), demonstrating the distinct treatment of A in opposition to the unity of S and O.

(17) Ergative verbal indexation in Mayan (adapted from Du Bois 1987)

a. \( š-\ ax^-\ war\ -ek.\)
   
   c- \( 1\text{PL.ABS-} \) sleep \(-\text{IF}\)
   
   ‘We slept.’

b. \( š-\ at^-\ qa^-\ kuna\ -:\text{x}.\)
   
   c- \( 2\text{SG.ABS-} \) \( 1\text{PL.ERG-} \) cure \(-\text{TA}\)
   
   ‘We cured you (sg).’

c. \( š-\ ax^-\ a:^-\ kuna\ -:\text{x}.\)
   
   c- \( 1\text{PL.ABS-} \) \( 2\text{SG.ERG-} \) cure \(-\text{TA}\)
   
   ‘You (sg) cured us.’
Example (18) illustrates ergative alignment expressed through constituent order in Päri, a Nilotic language. In example (18a), the intransitive subject directly precedes the verb. In examples (18b) and (18c), the object immediately precedes the verb. Only S and O directly precede the verb. The transitive subject, the ergative argument, follows the verb in (18b) and precedes the object in (18c).

(18) Ergative constituent order in Päri (adapted from Dixon 1994:51’s adaption of Andersen 1988:320)

SV

a. ùbûr á- tûuk'.

Ubur completive- play

‘Ubur played.’

OVA

b. jòobi á- kêel ùbûrr -i.

buffalo completive- shoot Ubûr -erg

‘Ubur shot the buffalo.’

AOV

c. ùbûr jòobi á- kêel -ê.

Ubur buffalo completive- shoot -3sg.a

‘Ubur shot the buffalo.’
2.3.2 Split ergativity

Many ergative systems do not code morphological ergativity in the same way in all circumstances. Such a system is referred to as split ergative (Dixon 1994, McGregor 2009). Splits in ergativity are commonly conditioned by nominal type, tense or aspect, and clause type.

There is a consistent pattern in which types of nominals are more likely to be marked ergative in a split system. This pattern was first observed by Silverstein (1976) and later restated by Dixon (1994) and then McGregor (2009).

Figure 9 Silverstein’s referential hierarchy (adapted from Silverstein 1976)

1/2 pron > 3 pron > proper N > human N > animate N > other

Silverstein’s hierarchy predicts that if a split in ergative marking were present, it would be more likely for first-person pronouns to be nominative accusative, while it is more likely for third-person pronouns and common nouns to be marked ergative. Maragny, a language of Australia, inflect common nouns on an ergative absolutive alignment, as illustrated in example (19), but pronouns are not inflected on an ergative absolutive basis, as in example (20).

(19) ergative absolutive alignment of nominals in Maragny (adapted from Breen 1981 via Legate 2014)
a. nguda-nggu yurdi gamba:nhi.
dog-ERG meat.ABS bury.REC.PST
‘The dog buried the meat.’

b. nguda balga:nhi warnginhi-ngga.
dog.ABS hit.RES.PST bark.PRES-LOC
‘He hit the dog because it was barking.’

c. nguda nguna:labanhi.
dog.ABS lie.about.PRES
‘There’s dogs lying around everywhere.’

(20) nominative-accusative alignment of pronouns in Maragny (adapted from Breen 1981 via Legate 2014)

a. matya ngaya balganngandala yurdi.
before 1SG.nom hit.HAB.PST meat.ABS
‘I used to kill a lot of kangaroos.’

b. matya inda nganha wa:la.
before 2SG.NOM 1SG.ACC give.PST
‘You gave me [money] before.’
c. \textit{ngaya nhunu wabanhi.}  
\textit{1SG.NOM always come.PRS}  
\textit{‘I always come here.’}

\textbf{2.3.3 Marked absolutive}

There are some typological expectations in regard to ergative and absolutive morphology. Most relevant to Roviana is the claim that if a language only overtly marks one case, it will mark the ergative (Dixon 1994). Hoop and Malkuchov (2008) make the same claim from an Optimality Theory perspective, except that they consider the unmarked case to be caseless. Roviana is one of a few counterexamples to this claim as the absolutive case is overtly marked rather than the ergative. Nias, an Austronesian language of Indonesia, also potentially shows a marked absolutive pattern (Brown 2001), but this analysis is contested (Crysmann 2009).

\textbf{2.4 Subject}

The term \textit{subject} is defined in this work as “the most prominent core argument of a construction.” Similar to the hierarchy of obliqueness proposed by Pollard and Sag (1992), each core argument can be ranked on a hierarchy of relative prominence to other arguments.

Figure 10. Hierarchy of relative argument prominence (adapted from Pollard and Sag 1992)  

\begin{center}
\text{SUBJECT $\prec$ PRIMARY OBJ $\prec$ SECOND OBJ $\prec$ OTHER COMPLEMENTS}\
\text{MOST PROMINENT $\prec$ LEAST PROMINENT}
\end{center}
In the context of a basic transitive clause, the grammatical subject is the core argument which displays *syntactic prominence* relative to the other core argument with respect to certain key phenomena. A grammatical object, then, can be defined as the less prominent core argument of a basic transitive sentence. In basic transitive sentences, there is a correlation between thematic hierarchy and prominence—that is, agents tend to be subjects in basic transitive clauses, while patients tend to be objects (Schacter 1976, Falk 2000). The concept of *syntactic prominence* is intended to be as “theory-neutral” as possible. Prominence can be easily translated into structural approaches to syntax as structural height; however, no appeal to structure is necessary *per se*.

Syntactic prominence, as used here, is identified by the properties that relate to argument hierarchies. Some of the properties of prominence include:

1. A prominent argument can act as the antecedent for a reflexive pronoun, which gives roughly the results of Principle A in generative frameworks (Keenan 1976, Chomsky 1981, Falk 2000).

2. A prominent argument can license a wide scope interpretation by a universal quantifier (Keenan 1976, Falk 2000); however, a less prominent argument can typically not license wide scope. This asymmetry, which can be tested in a variety of environments, is taken to be evidence of prominence.

3. A pronoun cannot act as the antecedent for a less prominent referring expression (henceforth R-expression) in the same clause; an R-expression cannot act as antecedent for a more prominent pronoun within the same clause, which gives roughly the results of Principle C in generative frameworks (Chomsky 1981, Radford 1997). Because Roviana lacks reflexive
pronouns, this dissertation will focus on asymmetries in the availability of quantifier interpretations and restrictions on co-referentiality as diagnostics of prominence.

Example (21) demonstrates the correlation between subject prominence and the grammaticality of anaphor co-reference. In generative frameworks this phenomenon is called “Reflexive Binding” (Radford 1997) and is defined in terms of c-command (Chomsky 1980, 1981; Radford 1997; Carnie 2013). However, no appeal to structure is necessary to account for this phenomenon. In example (21a), the agent, Liz, serves as antecedent for the anaphor, herself. In example (21b), herself cannot take Liz as its antecedent, as a reflexive pronoun can only enter into a referential dependency with a more prominent argument.

(21) Reflexive binding in English

a. \textit{Liz} pinched \textit{herself}.

b. \textit{Herself} pinched \textit{Liz}.

The quantifier interpretation asymmetries used to diagnose prominence focus on the availability of the \textit{distributed} or, one-to-one, reading when one core argument of a transitive construction is associated with a universal quantifier (henceforth UQ), such as \textit{every} or \textit{all}. The distributed reading is typically available only when the universal quantifier is associated with the more prominent core argument\(^4\) (Barss and Lasnik 1986, Keenan 1976, Falk 2000)—in the case of a transitive construction, the subject.

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\(^4\) Quantifier scope in English is not constrained by prominence the way it is in many other languages. A sentence such as “a soldier guarded every dignitary” may have a distributed interpretation even though the quantifier is
A quantifier interpretation asymmetry is seen when one core argument is associated with a universal quantifier and the other core argument is associated with a possessive pronoun. The distributed reading of such a construction is referred to in generative syntax as “variable binding” (Chomsky 1980). The asymmetrical availability of the bound variable, or distributed, reading in English transitive constructions is demonstrated in example (22). The distributed reading is available in a transitive clause only when the universal quantifier is associated with the subject and the possessive pronoun is associated with the other core argument.

(22) Variable binding in English active sentence

UQ with AGENT/SUBJECT

a. Every mother$_i$ loves her$_{ij}$ child$_{ij}$.

READING: distributed and non-distributed

UQ with PATIENT/OBJECT

b. Her$_i$ mother loves every child$_{ij}$.

READING: non-distributed

In (22a), two interpretations are available: (a) a reading in which her refers to some unnamed person (irrelevant for our purposes), and (b) a “distributed,” “one-to-one,” or “bound variable” reading in which the referent of the pronoun varies with the individual members of the set denoted by the quantified NP (roughly, each member of the set of mothers loves her own child). Another

associated with the less prominent argument. Nonetheless, such counter-examples are rare, and, as noted by Reinhart (1997), they are often more difficult to interpret than their counterparts with a non-distributed reading.
way to view the prominence of the quantified subject in example (22a), is that the noun phrase *her child*, by itself, refers to a particular individual; however, under the distributed interpretation, it refers to multiple children. A quantifier associated with a less prominent argument does not allow for a plural interpretation of a more prominent singular noun phrase, as shown in (22b), in which *her child* can only have a singular interpretation.

The availability of the distributed reading when the UQ is associated with the agent is evidence that the agent is more prominent than the patient, consistent with the traditional view that it is the subject. In contrast, the pronoun cannot be interpreted this way in (b), where it is part of the agent noun phrase, and the UQ is associated with the patient—the argument traditionally taken to be the direct object.

Example (23) demonstrates that the asymmetry in available interpretations is reversed in passive sentences. In the active examples, (23a) and (23b), the distributed reading is available only when the UQ is associated with the agent. However, matters are very different in the English passive-voice construction. When the UQ is associated with the agent of a passive, as in (23c), only a non-distributed interpretation is available. This is evidence that the agent of an English passive is not the subject. However, in passive constructions, both readings are available when the UQ is on the patient, as in example (23d). The patient is more prominent in the passive— it is the subject. This confirms the traditional view that passivization has the effect of elevating the theme argument to subject and the relegating the agent argument to non-core status.
(23) Variable binding in English Active and Passive

ACTIVE (transitive)

UQ with AGENT/SUBJECT

a. *Every mother*$_i$ *loves her*$_{ij}$ *child*$_i$.

READINGS: distributed (24a) or non-distributed (24b)

UQ with PATIENT/OBJECT

b. *Her*$_i$ *mother loves every child*$_{ij}$.

READINGS: non-distributed (24c)

PASSIVE (intransitive)

UQ with AGENT/ADJUNCT

c. *Her*$_i$ *child is loved by every mother*$_{ij}$.

READINGS: non-distributed (24b)

UQ with PATIENT/SUBJECT

d. *Every child*$_i$ *is loved by her*$_{ij}$ *mother*.$_i$

READINGS: distributed (24a) or non-distributed (24c)
(24) Variable binding interpretations

\[ M = \text{mother} \quad C = \text{child} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. distributed</th>
<th>b. non-distributed</th>
<th>c. non-distributed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( C \to C )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
<td>( M \to C )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(one-to-one)</td>
<td>(all-to-one)</td>
<td>(one-to-all)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three types of quantifier interpretation diagnostics are worth investigating to confirm the more prominent core argument of a basic transitive clause. Each type has a universal quantifier associated with one core argument, and a variable associated with the other. The three types of variables are numeral, indefinite, and possessive pronoun. Each configuration is demonstrated in example (25).

(25) Quantifier interpretation environments

UQ with agent/subject - patient/object with a numeral

a. *Every student read one book.*

Available interpretation(s): distributed and non-distributed

UQ with patient/object - agent/subject with a numeral

b. *One student read every book.*

Available interpretation(s): non-distributed
UQ with agent/subject - patient/object with an indefinite article

c. *Every student read a book.*
Available interpretation(s): distributed and non-distributed

UQ with patient/object - agent/subject with an indefinite article

d. *A student read every book.*
Available interpretation(s): non-distributed

UQ with agent/subject - patient/object with a possessive pronoun

e. *Every mother loves her child.*
Available interpretation(s): distributed and non-distributed

UQ with patient/object - agent/subject with a possessive pronoun

f. *Her mother loves every child.*
Available interpretation(s): non-distributed

Restriction on co-referentiality

An R-expression, or lexical noun phrase, is an argument headed by a common or proper noun. An R-expression cannot serve as antecedent for a more prominent pronoun within the same sentence, an observation parallel to Principle C in Chomsky’s Government and Binding approach (Chomsky 1980, 1981; Radford 1997; Carnie 2013). Again, no appeal to structure is necessary to utilize this phenomenon to demonstrate the relative prominence of core arguments within a transitive clause. Example (26) demonstrates the restriction on co-referentiality of R-expression
and pronouns in English. In example (26a), the R-expression Liz may serve as antecedent for the pronoun her because Liz is the more prominent argument—that is, Liz is co-referential with her. In example (26b) Liz cannot serve as antecedent for she because she is more prominent. To summarize, a pronoun cannot have a less prominent antecedent.

(26) Restriction on co-referentiality in English “Principle C”

a. Liz hugged her cat.

b. She hugged Liz’s cat.

These observations provide yet another useful diagnostic of prominence summarized in (27).

(27) Coreference restriction

A pronoun cannot have an R-expression antecedent that is lower in the prominence hierarchy.

2.5 Pivot

The pivot is the single argument in a clause that is particularly privileged with respect to operations such as wh-fronting or relative clause gapping (Falk 2000), which are considered to involve “extraction” or “A-bar movement” in a generative framework (Radford 1997). Again, the framework proposed here does not appeal to tree structures; however, for the purpose of diagnosing pivothood, it is sufficient to unite these two phenomena under the label “extraction.”
Example (28) demonstrates wh-fronting and relative clause gapping in English.

(28) A-Bar Extraction in English

a. Relative Clause Gap (object)

   *This is the book that I think Bill read [___]*.

b. Wh-Question Gap (object)

   *What do you think [Bill ate [___]]?*

Keenan and Comrie’s (1977) seminal work on relativization suggests that some languages allow only subjects to relativize, a phenomenon which could be called “subject-only” extraction. In subject-only languages, pivot and subject are the same category, but the pivot does not have to be subject in symmetrical-voice and syntactically ergative languages. Prototypical symmetrical-voice languages, such as Lun Bawang (Mortensen 2018) and Ampenan Sasak (Schuelke 2019b), have more than one basic transitive pattern, and each transitive pattern selects a pivot which is available for extraction, whether it is subject or not (Foley 2007, Himmelmann 2002, Reisberg 2014, Næss 2015, Chen and McDonnell 2019). One transitive pattern, called actor voice (AV), selects intransitive and transitive subjects to be pivot, exactly as the so-called “subject-only” languages. This observation suggests that the subject-only languages are perhaps better viewed as languages which have only a single transitive voice: AV. In addition to AV, symmetrical-voice languages have an additional transitive voice, called patient voice (PV), which selects transitive objects to be pivots. In some ergative languages, only the absolutive marked arguments, S and O,
have privileged access to extraction, as will be shown for Tongan in section 2.6. Like the pivot of PV, the absolutive object is not a subject, according to the definition of prominence.

The pivots discussed thus far all align with particular grammatical cases. Like nominative case, the pivot of AV is either S or A. Like accusative case, the pivot of PV in symmetrical-voice languages is associated with the direct object of a transitive verb. The typical pivot of syntactically ergative languages has an absolutive pattern, as it encompasses both S and O. There is one more logical possibility for case aligned pivots: an ergative pivot. In such a language, A would be accessible to certain operations to the exclusion or S and O. Up until now, there is no language with an ergative pivot attested in the literature. I will propose that Roviana is a language with an ergative pivot.

Table 3 pivot types associated with case alignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical roles</th>
<th>nominative pivot</th>
<th>accusative pivot</th>
<th>absolutive pivot</th>
<th>ergative pivot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S, A</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>S, O</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6 Syntactic Ergativity

Syntactic ergativity describes any syntactic phenomenon which groups the S and O together but treats the A distinctly (Aldridge 2007, Croft 1990, McGregor 2009, Polinsky 2014). In typical instances of syntactic ergativity, the language allows S and O, but not A, to undergo extraction (Dixon 1994, Naess 2015). In this sort of syntactic ergativity, the absolutive argument’s privileged access to relativization with a gap suggests that absolutive arguments are the pivot

---

5 There is no attested language in which S is the pivot of PV. That O is selected as pivot, but never A and S, is an accusative pattern by definition.
(Dixon 1994), as they can undergo a syntactic operation that other arguments cannot. It is worth noting that there is no attested language which displays syntactic ergativity but does not also display morphological ergativity (Dixon 1979, Polinsky 2014).

Example (29) illustrates syntactic ergativity in Tongan. In Tongan, S and O can relativize with a gap, as in (29b) and (29d), but it is ungrammatical for A to relativize with a gap, as in (29e). A can relativize only if the relative clause contains a resumptive pronoun, as in (29f).

(29) Syntactic ergativity in Tongan (adapted from Polinsky 2014)

a. basic intransitive sentence

\[ 'oku \ malimali \ 'a \ e \ ta'ahine. \]

PRS smile ABS ART girl

‘The girl is smiling.’

b. relativized S with gap

\[ 'a \ e \ ta'ahine, \ [ 'oku \ malimali \ ___] \]

ABS ART girl PRS smile

‘The girl who is smiling’

c. basic transitive sentence

\[ 'oku \ 'ene \ 'e \ he \ tamasi'i \ 'a \ e \ ta'ahine. \]

PRS tickle ERG ART boy ABS ART girl

‘The boy is tickling the girl.’
Relativization strategies in Tongan show an ergative-absolutive pattern, as S and O relativize with a gap, but A cannot. This pattern of access to relativization with a gap in Tongan is summarized in table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relativize with a gap</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As previously mentioned, there is no attestation in the literature of an ergative language in which the ergative argument acts as pivot; however, it is a logical possibility. There is a substantial amount of formal literature dedicated to showing why the absolutive argument is uniquely accessible to syntactic operations. One of the most prominent is the so-called “inversion” approach (e.g. Aldridge 2004, Coon, Mateo Pedro, and Perminger 2015). The specific details of the inversion approach are not important for the current discussion, but a simple description of the inversion approach is that the absolutive argument occupies a higher position in the proposed structure and thus blocks access to the ergative argument. A language which allowed the ergative argument to be more accessible than the absolutive would be problematic for the inversion approach, as there is nothing to block the intransitive subject (S) from being accessed by a particular syntactic operation. Although this dissertation is not couched in any particular theoretical framework, its findings may still bear on the viability of particular theories. In the following chapters I intend to show that Roviana is a morphologically ergative language in which the ergative argument is the pivot.
Chapter 3

Roviana Major Constituent Order

This chapter examines the relative prominence and order of major constituents in basic intransitive and transitive constructions in Roviana. Prominence for the agent of transitive clauses is demonstrated by examining quantifier interpretation asymmetries and restrictions on the coreferentiality of referring expressions and pronouns, compared to those in a passive clause. These tests reveal that Roviana’s major constituent order for basic transitive sentences is VAO. The prominence patterns observed in VAO clauses are reversed for passive clauses.

3.1 Major constituent order

The basic transitive clause of a language is dependent on establishing the typical arrangement of subjects, object, and verbs in transitive and intransitive contexts. Intransitive word order is discussed first, and then, transitive word order.

Intransitive clauses display VS word order; clauses with SV order are judged ungrammatical by native speakers. Example (30b) demonstrates the ungrammaticality of SV, which is unacceptable regardless of whether it is accompanied by absolutive marking.
(30) Intransitive word order in Roviana (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017)

VS

a.  mae  si  asa.
   come  ABS  3SG
   ‘She/he comes.’

*Sv

b.  *(si) asa  mae.
   (ABS) 3SG  come
   *She/he comes

Using the diagnostics of prominence, it is possible to identify which coreargument of a prototypically transitive construction is the subject. Multiple word orders are reported in other Austronesian languages; for example, Ellen Smith (2015:211) describes Papapana, a Northwest Solomonic language of Bouganville, as having two “pragmatically unmarked transitive” word orders: AVO and AOV. Example (31) illustrates a VAO sentence, and the ungrammaticality of VOA and OVA. Roviana also displays a variety of word order patterns, but careful examination reveals that VAO is the basic word order and that other word orders involve argument fronting. The sentence in (31a) manifest the properties of prototypical transitive clauses; the two arguments are distinct in reference, and the event semantics entail an agent and affected patient.
(31) Roviana transitive word order (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052)

VAO
a. \( taka=ia \ Bili \ sa \ siki. \)

kick=3SG.OBJ Bill ART dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

*VOA

c. \*\( taka=ia \ sa \ siki \ Bili. \)

kick=3SG.OBJ ART dog Bill

*Bill kicked the dog

*OVA

c. \*\( sa \ siki \ taka=ia \ Bili. \)

ART dog kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

*Bill kicked the dog

As discussed in the framework section, there are various diagnostics for subject prominence, but only two appear to be applicable to Roviana. The first diagnostic of relevance to Roviana is that a distributed interpretation for a numeral or indefinite phrase is available only when a universal quantifier is associated with the subject of the clause. The second diagnostic involves the restriction on co-reference: in a transitive clause, an R-expression can serve as antecedent for a pronoun only if the pronoun is not more prominent.
The prominence diagnostics for the VAO word order are often contrasted with the same diagnostics performed on the passive construction. The passive in Roviana is signaled by a verbal prefix, \textit{ta-}. Example (32) below demonstrates the contrast between a transitive sentence and a passive one. The passive may omit the agent, as in (32b), or overtly mention the agent in an oblique marked \textit{by}-phrase, as in (32c).

(32) Active and passive sentences in Roviana (PS1-041)

a. Active:

\begin{verbatim}
taka=ia Bili sa siki.
kick=3SG.OBJ Bill ART dog
\end{verbatim}

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

b. Agentless passive:

\begin{verbatim}
ta-taka sa siki.
PASS-kick ART dog
\end{verbatim}

‘The dog was kicked.’

c. Passive with an overt agent:

\begin{verbatim}
ta-taka sa siki koe Bili.
PASS-kick ART dog OBL.PERS Bill
\end{verbatim}

‘The dog was kicked by Bill.’
Three tests for quantifier interpretation asymmetries illustrate subject prominence in Roviana, specifically the asymmetrical availability of the distributed interpretation. The distributed reading is only available in a transitive construction when the universal quantifier is associated with the more prominent of the two core-arguments, the subject. The agent, controller, or initiator (I) is typically the subject of a transitive clause, while the patient, theme, or undergoer (P) is typically the object. As discussed in chapter 2, the thematic hierarchy is re-structured in a passive construction which promotes the patient to subject.

Subject prominence is tested in three contexts involving quantifiers: (1) a universal quantifier associated with one argument and a possessive pronoun associated with the other; (2) a universal quantifier associated with one argument and a numeral with the other; (3) a universal quantifier associated with one argument and an indefinite article with the other. The prominence relations in the basic transitive word orders are contrasted with those of passive constructions. In the following diagnostics, the arguments are identified first by their thematic roles (agent/I or patient/P). In a transitive clause, the distributed interpretation is available only when the universal quantifier is associated with an agent subject. In a passive construction, the distributed interpretation is available only when the universal quantifier is associated with a patient subject.

Universal Quantifier and Possessive Pronoun

The examples below demonstrate the available quantifier interpretations when one argument is associated with a universal quantifier and the other argument is associated with a possessive pronoun. In the VAO example (33a), the universal quantifier is associated with the
agent, and the distributed interpretation is available. The availability of the distributed interpretation demonstrates that the agent is the subject in the VAO word order, as in (33).

(33) Quantifier doduru ‘all’ + Genitive Pronoun nana/dia ‘her/their’ (PS1-055)

\[
\text{VAO: UQ-I/PRO-P} \\
taturu=n=i \quad ari \quad doduru \quad barikaleqe_i \quad sari \quad dia_i \quad koburu. \\
\text{love=APPL=3PL.OBJ PL all woman ART.PL 3PL.POSS child} \\
\text{‘All the mothers; love their children.’} \\
\text{Interpretation: Distributed}
\]

This result is reversed in the passive sentence, in example (34), in which the UQ is associated with the oblique agent and only a non-distributed reading is available. This demonstrates that the agent is not the subject of the passive in (34).

(34)  PASS: UQ-I/PRO-P

\[
\text{sa \quad dia_i \quad koburu \_tataru-e \quad koari \_doduru \_barikaleqe*_{i/j}.} \\
\text{ART 3PL.POSS child PASS-love-DETRANS OBL.PL all woman} \\
\text{‘Their child is loved by all the mothers*_{i/j}.’} \\
\text{Interpretation: Non-distributed}
\]

---

Another way to describe this phenomenon is the say that the pronoun has a “bound variable” interpretation.
In the VAO example (35), the universal quantifier is associated with the patient. The unavailability of the distributed reading suggests that the patient is the direct object.

(35)  VAO: UQ-P/PRO-I

\[
\text{tataru}=\text{n}=i \quad \text{tina-na}_i \quad \text{sari} \quad \text{doduru} \quad \text{koburu}^{ij}.
\]

\[
\text{love}=\text{APPL}=\text{3PL.OBJ} \quad \text{mother}-\text{3SG.POSS} \quad \text{ART.PL} \text{ all} \quad \text{child}
\]

‘Her\_i mother loves all the children\_ij.’

Interpretation: Non-distributed

This result is reversed in the passive, as in (36), in which the UQ is associated with the patient subject.

(36)  PASS: UQ-P/PRO-I

\[
\text{sari} \quad \text{doduru} \quad \text{koburu}_i \quad \text{ta-tataru-e} \quad \text{koari} \quad \text{tina-dia}_i.
\]

\[
\text{ART.PL} \text{ all} \quad \text{child} \quad \text{PASS-love-DETRANS} \quad \text{OBL.PL} \text{ mother}-\text{3PL.POSS}
\]

‘All the children\_i are loved by their\_i mother.’

Interpretation: Distributed

The quantifier interpretations in examples (33-36) are summarized in table 5.
Table 5. UQ + possessive pronoun readings in Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>UQ-I/PRO-P</td>
<td>distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>PRO-I/UQ-P</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>UQ-I/PRO-P</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>PRO-I/UQ-P</td>
<td>distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Universal Quantifier and Numeral

The next set of examples illustrate the interpretations that are available when a universal quantifier is associated with one argument, and a numeral is associated with the other. The distributed reading is available only when the universal quantifier is associated with the agent in VAO (37) word order, demonstrating that the agent is the subject.

(37) UQ hopeke ‘each’ + NUM karua ‘two’ (PS1-055)

VAO: UQ-I/NUM-P

\[ tiro=i \quad hopeke \quad koreo \quad karua \quad buka. \]

read=3PL.OBJ each boy two book

‘Each boy read two books.’

Interpretation: Distributed

When the universal quantifier is associated with the patient, in contrast, the distributed interpretation is not available, as is illustrated in (38).
A distributed reading is likewise unavailable in the passive, where the agent argument in an oblique.

The quantifier interpretations from the examples in (37-39) are summarized in table 6. The distributed reading is only available when the quantifier accompanies the agent of the VAO. Unlike
UQ and possessive pronoun patterns, the distributed reading is not available in the passive voice, regardless of which phrase contains the UQ and the numeral.

Table 6. UQ+NUM interpretations in Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>UQ-A/NUM-P</td>
<td>distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>UQ-P/NUM-I</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>UQ-I/NUM-P</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>UQ-P/NUM-I</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Universal Quantifier and Indefinite Article

Examples (40-42) demonstrate the quantifier interpretations that are available when a universal quantifier is associated with one argument and an indefinite article is associated with the other. The Roviana article *sa* does not carry the same sort of information regarding definiteness as the English articles *the* and *a/an*; rather, it indicates that the following noun phrase is singular and common, as opposed to proper.

As with the other quantifier diagnostics, the distributed reading is available when the universal quantifier is associated with the agent in the VAO word order, demonstrating that the agent is the subject.
(40) UQ hopeke ‘each’ + indefinite (singular article) sa ‘a’ (PS1-055)

VAO: UQ-I/ART-P

\[ tiro=ia \hspace{1cm} hopeke \ koreo \ sa \hspace{1cm} buka. \]
read=3SG.OBJ each boy ART book.

‘Each boy read a book.’

Interpretation: Distributed or Non-Distributed

However, the distributed interpretation is not possible when the universal quantifier is associated with the patient argument.

(41) UQ hopeke ‘each’ + indefinite (singular article) sa ‘a’ (PS1-055)

VAO: UQ-P/ART-I

\[ tiro=i \hspace{1cm} sa \hspace{1cm} koreo \ sari \hspace{1cm} hopeke \ buka. \]
read=3PL.OBJ ART boy ART.PL each book

‘A boy read each book.’

Interpretation: Non-distributed

The distributed reading is likewise unavailable in passives, when the agent containing the universal quantifier is an oblique.
The quantifier interpretations in examples (40-42) are summarized in table 7. The distributed reading is available only when the quantifier accompanies the agent of the VAO word order. Unlike UQ and possessive pronoun patterns, the distributed reading is not available in the passive voice, regardless of which phrase contains the UQ and the indefinite article.

Table 7. UQ + indefinite interpretation in Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Arrangement</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>UQ-I/ART-P</td>
<td>distributed and non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAO</td>
<td>UQ-P/ART-I</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>UQ-I/ART-P</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>UQ-P/ART-I</td>
<td>non-distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prominence over precedence

At this point it is worth addressing the confound of precedence and prominence (Bruening 2014). Due to the word order of Roviana, the asymmetries that have been accounted for by reference to prominence might also be attributed simple to precedence. For example, in the case of the quantifier-related diagnostics, it might appear to be possible to say that a distributed reading is only available when the argument with the UQ precedes the pronoun rather than when it is more prominent.

One way to distinguish between the two notions is to examine patterns in which the UQ occurs inside a larger phrase, such as a relative clause. In example (43) the agent noun phrase, which has undergone plain fronting (see the next chapter for discussion), is prominent since it can trigger a distributed interpretation.

(43) UQ has precedence as well as prominence (PS1-055, PS1-057)

\[
\text{AVO: UQ-I/PRO-P} \\
ari \ doruru \ barikaleqe_i \ tataru=n=i \ sa.ri \ dia_j \ koburu. \\
\text{PL all woman love=APPL=3PL.OBJ ART.PL 3PL.POSS child} \\
\text{‘All the mothers love their children.’} \\
\text{Interpretation: Distributed}
\]

However, in (44) the UQ inside the relative clause precedes the pronoun in the higher clause, but it is not more prominent since it is not even an argument of the verb in the higher clause. Crucially, the distributed reading is not available under these circumstances.
(44) AVO: UQ in agent relative clause which precedes the patient

\[ sari \ tle \ sapu \ [tataru\!n=i \ sari \ doduru \ koburu] \ avoso=ia \ si \ asa. \]

\[ \text{ART.PL person that love=APPL=3PL.OBJ ART.PL all child listen=3SG.OBJ ABS 3SG} \]

‘People that love every child listen to him/her.’

Interpretation: non-distributed

Examples such as these establish that prominence, not precedence, is the crucial notion for licensing the quantifier-related phenomena that we have been considering.\(^7\)

Restrictions on coreference

Another piece of evidence that the agent is subject comes from coreference restrictions. Recall the coreference restriction principle, restated in (45).

(45) Coreference restriction

A pronoun cannot have an R-expression antecedent that is lower in the prominence hierarchy.

In a transitive construction there are only two core arguments. A pronoun in a transitive clause cannot be more prominent than its antecedent. Example (46) demonstrates the R-expression coreference restriction in Roviana. In (46), the pronoun is the agent and cannot be coreferential with the R-expression, demonstrating that the agent is more prominent.
(46) Restriction on co-reference in Roviana (PS1-056)

VAO word order

\[ \text{ngaza=ia } sa_i \text{ sa siki te } Bili_{i/j}. \]

\[ \text{hug=3SG.OBJ 3SG.ERG ART dog of } Bili. \]

‘She/he hugged Bill’s dog.’

Example (47) demonstrates the ability of agent R-expressions to serve as antecedent for less prominent pronouns in basic transitive sentences.

(47) Prominent R-expression serving as antecedent for less prominent pronoun in Roviana (PS1-056)

VAO word order

\[ \text{seke=a } Bili_i \text{ sa tasi-na_{i/j} koreo}. \]

\[ \text{hit=3SG.OBJ } Bili \text{ ART sibling-3SG.POSS male} \]

‘Bill, hit his brother.’

3.2 A note on ditransitive clauses

Though ditransitive constructions are not the focus of this work, they are worth discussing briefly for the sake of description and access to the online corpus. A prototypical ditransitive clause consists of an agent (I), a theme (P), and a recipient (G). Like prototypical transitive clauses, the

\[ \text{?I am not yet able to rule out the possibility that both prominence and precedence are required for the distributed reading. However, example (44) demonstrates that prominence is at least necessary, if not sufficient, for the availability of the distributed interpretation.} \]
agent is also the subject of prototypical ditransitive clauses. It is unclear if the oblique marked recipient is a core argument in Roviana; however, these clauses are referred to as ditransitive for ease of description, as there are clearly three semantic arguments.

Either the theme (P) or the recipient (G) may precede the other, illustrated by example (48). In (48a-b), the clause is verb-initial and either G or P can appear immediately after I.

(48) Recipient (G) and theme (P) scrambling (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>vuatu=n=ia</td>
<td>rau</td>
<td>sa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>give=APPL=3SG.OBJ</td>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘I give the basket to you.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>vuatu=n=ia</td>
<td>rau</td>
<td>koa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>give=APPL=3SG.OBJ</td>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>OBL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘I give the basket to you.’
Summary

The prominence patterns shown in quantifier interpretation asymmetries and the restriction on co-reference confirm that VAO is the default transitive pattern in Roviana. The prominence effects seen in the transitive VAO pattern are either absent or reversed in the passive construction. This is not surprising, as verb-initial word order is found in a number of branches of the Oceanic family, including languages closely related to Roviana. For example, New Georgia language such as Hoava (Davis 2003) and Ughele (Frosdat 2012) are described as having verb-initial word orders.

---

8 There are many examples of verb-initial languages throughout the Oceanic family, only a few of which will be mentioned here to demonstrate that this word order occurs in different primary branches. V-initial order is found in Western Oceanic languages like Hoava (Meso-Melanesian), as well as in Central Eastern Oceanic languages like Hawaiian (Central Pacific), Anejoñ (Southern Oceanic), and Gela (Southeast Solomonic) exemplify. Yap, which is considered to be the sole extant member of the Yapese primary branch, is also verb-initial.
Chapter 4

Argument Fronting

This chapter describes the two main argument fronting operations in Roviana: (1) plain fronting, and (2) *si*-introduction, both of which are important to the syntax of Roviana. Furthermore, these fronting operations display behaviors that are of interest to theoreticians, as they are part of the novel pattern of syntactic ergativity displayed by Roviana. Plain fronting will be discussed first and then *si*-introduction.

4.1 Plain Fronting

Plain fronting involves fronting an argument before the verb without any additional material. Example (49a) illustrates a typical VAO transitive sentence. In (49b), the transitive subject has undergone plain fronting. Note that in (49a) the proper noun subject is not accompanied by an article, but the plain fronted subject in (49b) is accompanied by the personal article, *e*. The lack of an article in (49a) will be further discussed in chapter four where the lack of marking is analyzed as ergative coding.
(49) Prototypical transitive sentence and plain fronted A (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052)

VAO

a. \(\text{taka}=\text{ia} \quad \text{Bili} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{siki}.\)

kick=3SG.OBJ Bill ART dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

Plain fronting (AVO)

b. \(\text{e} \quad \text{Bili} \quad \text{taka}=\text{ia} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{siki}.\)

PERS Bill kick=3SG.OBJ ART dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

Plain fronting is not available for S and O. The ungrammaticality of plain fronting for O is illustrated in example (50a) and the ungrammaticality of plain fronting for S in (50b).

(50) Plain fronting not available for O and S (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052)

*OVA

a. \(\text{*sa} \quad \text{siki} \quad \text{taka}=\text{ia} \quad \text{Bili}.\)

ART dog kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

*Bill kicked the dog
*SV

b. *(si) asa mae.

(ABS) 3SG come

*She/he comes

It is interesting that A may undergo plain fronting, but S and O cannot. This sort of exclusive access suggests, at least in the case of plain fronting, that the ergative is the pivot in Roviana.

The subject may also undergo plain fronting in a ditransitive clause, regardless of the relative order of P and G. Example (51) illustrates ditransitives in which the agent has undergone plain fronting.

(51) Agent plain fronting in ditransitive, G and P may scramble (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>G</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>Zone vala=ia sa heta koe Pita.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERS</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>give=3SG.OBJ ART betelnut OBL.PERS Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘John gave betelnut to Peter.’
An interesting aspect of ditransitive formation in Roviana is that the recipient may also undergo plain fronting, an operation which is reserved for the agent in a transitive context. Example (52) illustrates a recipient which has undergone plain fronting.

(52) Goal plain fronting (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
G & V & I & P \\
\text{koe} & \text{Pita} & \text{ele} & \text{vala=ia} & \text{Zone} & \text{sa} & \text{heta}.
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\OBL.\text{PERS} & \text{Peter} & \text{PFT} & \text{give=3SG.OBJ} & \text{John} & \text{ART} & \text{betelnut}
\end{array}
\]

‘As for Peter, John gave betelnut to him. (lit. To Peter John gave betelnut.)’

It is unclear if the goal of a ditransitive is a core argument, but the presence of oblique marking would suggest that it is not. Of the core arguments in a transitive construction, only A may undergo plain fronting. That S and O are prohibited from plain fronting suggests that ergative arguments are privileged, compared to absolutive arguments.

4.2 Fronting through \textit{si}-introduction

It is crucial to make sense of a particular fronting operation, called here \textit{si}-introduction, after Ross (1988). This sub-section merely describes \textit{si}-introduction, the precise nature of which
is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will be the topic of future work. Nonetheless, it is important to establish some of the basic features of his pattern, as it is relevant to claims about syntactic ergativity in Roviana.

Si-introduction is an operation in which a noun phrase appears clause initially and is followed by the particle *si* and then by the remainder of the clause. It is worth noting that this particle is homophonous with the absolutive marker for post-verbal arguments. This homophony is the result of a historic reanalysis of “focus” marking into an absolutive marker (Corston 1996).

A similar process is active in the closely related Chekeholo language (Palmer 2009), a member of the Northwest Solomonic subgroup. Like Roviana, Cheke Holo has an unmarked word order of VS/VSO (Palmer 2009). The primary difference between Roviana si-introduction and the *si*-focus operation in Cheke Holo, is that Cheke Holo’s *si*-focus moves arguments to the end of the clause rather than the front. Arguments can move to a clause-final focus position preceded by the particle *si* (Palmer 2009).

(53) Cheke Holo Clause Final Focus Constructions (adapted from Palmer 2009)

\[
\text{VO} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{S}
\]

\[
a. \quad \text{hea, nake e+ni tu=ao si ta-hati=a.}
\]

\[
\text{yes TAM do=3SG.OBJ AN=this SI we.INCL-PL=ART}
\]

‘Yes, we will do this.’
V si S  

b. the’ome tanōmana jau si te aho na nakete=gne.  

NEG be.able possibly SI SBD clear ASP rain=this  

‘That this rain will clear is not likely.’

SV si O  

c. keha mae-di Isabel=ḡre iho=ni  

some man-3PL.GEN Isabel=these not.know=3SG.OBJ  

si cheke Mariñe=gne=a.  

SI talk Maringe=this=ART.  

‘Some Isabel people don’t speak the Maringe language.’

SV si OBL  

d. mare theome au ka si namono=gne.  

e. mare theome au ka si namono=gne.  

they.M NEG exist LOC SI village=this  

‘They are not in this village.’

Looking at the Cheke Holo examples in example (53), it is clear that subjects, objects, and obliques have access to the clause-final focusing. Palmer (2009) notes that most non-subject clause-final focus operations in Cheke Holo are accompanied by subject fronting through topicalization. It is not clear that contemporary si-introduction in Roviana is a focus operation, though it may have some focus properties.
All core arguments undergo si-introduction in Roviana. Arguments that are in the initial si-introduction position are generally unmarked for case. For example, all proper nouns may be proceeded by the particle *e*, regardless of grammatical role, as in example (54a). Evidence that si-introduced arguments are still core arguments comes from the observation that objects of transitive clauses are still indexed on the verb (54b); which is not the case with operations such as passive and pseudo noun incorporation, which reduce transitivity.

(54) Si-introduction of core arguments (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017)

SsiV

a)  
\[ e \quad Bili \quad si \quad hegere \]

PERS  Bill  si  laugh

‘Bill laughed.’

PsiVA

b)  
\[ sa \quad vivinei \quad si \quad ele \quad toz=ia \quad rau. \]

ART  story  si  PFT  tell=3SG.OBJ  1SG

‘I already told the story.’

AsiVO

c)  
\[ e \quad Bili \quad si \quad korapa \quad raro=a \quad sa \quad ginani. \]

PERS  Bill  si  IMPERF  cook=3SG.OBJ  ART  food

‘Bill is cooking the food.’
It is also possible for adverbial material, such as time of the event, to be \textit{si}-introduced. Example (55) illustrates \textit{si}-introduction of temporal adverbs.

(55) Temporal adverbs undergo \textit{si}-introduction (PS1-054)

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{puke rane si hoke variperai} sari tie meke vari=gani pule=i tugo.
\item \textit{Long ago SI always fight=3PL.OBJ ART.PL person and DIST=eat return=3PL.OBJ also}
\item \textit{‘Long ago the men would fight each other and eat each other.’}
\end{enumerate}

\footnote{There is a distinction between \textit{na} and \textit{sa}. The distinction does not seem to line up with definiteness, as consultants have told me that \textit{na} is like English ‘a,’ but also told that \textit{na} means “specifically that one.” I have never observed \textit{na} used with the plural suffix \textit{-ri}, suggesting that \textit{na} cannot combine with plural nouns. A detailed study of the two common articles will have to topic of future work.}
It is worth noting that *si*-introduction may occur multiple times in a single utterance in natural speech. Example (56) illustrates sequential *si*-introduction in a text\(^{10}\) by Oxenham, Terraschke, and Pearce (2005).

(56) Sequential *si*-introduction (adapted from Oxenham, Terraschke, and Pearce (2005))

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ke} & \quad \text{dodururane} & \quad \text{vangunu} & \quad \text{tugo} & \quad \text{sa} & \quad \text{koburu} & \quad \text{si} & \quad \text{hoi} & \quad \text{pa} & \quad \text{batu} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{every day} & \quad \text{wake-up} & \quad \text{EMPH} & \quad \text{ART} & \quad \text{child} & \quad \text{SI} & \quad \text{that} & \quad \text{LOC} & \quad \text{top} \\
\text{huda} & \quad \text{tu} & \quad \text{si} & \quad \text{hoke} & \quad \text{la} & \quad \text{hake} & \quad \text{nana}. \\
\text{tree} & \quad \text{EMPH} & \quad \text{SI} & \quad \text{HABIT} & \quad \text{go} & \quad \text{perch} & \quad \text{3SG.GEN}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Everyday after the child wakes up, he is in the treetops and perches there.’

\(^{10}\) Several examples of sequential *si*-introduction can be found in Oxenham, Terraschke, and Pearce’s (2005) text.
4.3 Combined fronting

One fronting operation does not block the other, as plain fronting and *si*-introduction may occur in the same sentence. Example (57) illustrates sentences in which A has undergone plain fronting and O undergone *si*-introduction.

(57) Plain fronting and *si*-introduction (PS1-052, PS1-053, PS1-054)

OsiAV

a. sa talo si e Bili hena=ia.
   ART taro SI PERS Bill eat=3SG.OBJ
   ‘Bill ate the taro.’

OsiAV

b. ari doduru si gami toka=n=i.
   3PL all SI 1PL.EXC help=APPL=3PL.OBJ
   ‘We helped them all.’

OsiAV

c. gami si gamu doduru toka=ni=gami.
   1PL.EXC SI 2PL all help=appl=1PL.EXC.OBJ
   ‘You all helped us.’
4.4 Fronting summary

In this chapter we have seen that Roviana has two fronting methods: (1) plain fronting, and (2) $si$-introduction. All arguments have access to $si$-introduction, but S and O cannot undergo plain fronting.

Table 8. Roviana fronting summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain fronting</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$si$-introduction</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5
Nominal Case Marking

This chapter describes case-marking patterns on nominals in Roviana. Roviana displays an ergative-absolutive pattern in regard to case marking. That is, intransitive subjects (S) and direct objects (O) pattern together, to the distinction of transitive subjects (A), which pattern separately from S and O.

The previous section introduced the major constituent orders for Roviana—VS and VAO. In the VAO word order, ergative arguments are not accompanied by any article, which is required for common and proper nouns in any other context. This lack of an article represents a form of ergative coding. Only absolutive arguments, S and O, are formally marked with an absolutive particle. The distinct unmarked treatment of A and the similar treatment of S and O regarding coding for ergative or absolutive is summarized in table 9. This sort of marked-absolutive pattern is rare among the world’s languages. Furthermore, the marked absolutive pattern undermines the typological generalization that if only one argument in an ergative-absolutive system, it will be the ergative argument (Dixon 1994).

Table 9. Ergative pattern in case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>unmarked post verb</th>
<th>overtly marked post verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following sections will examine case marking in various contexts, arranged by word order and nominal type. The discussion begins with pronouns, followed by proper nouns, and then common nouns. The case marking paradigms examine intransitive and transitive contexts only, as this is how languages are categorized for alignment in the typological literature. However, there will be a brief discussion of dative marking in ditransitives.

5.1 Pronominal case marking

The pronouns will be discussed in order by person and then number. Examples are provided for each grammatical role. The section begins with singular pronouns, followed by plurals. Recall from the introduction that, in order to facilitate discussion, second person plural pronouns are translated as ‘y’all’ and third person singular pronouns are translated as either 3SG, ‘she’, ‘he’, or ‘it’. Roviana, like most Austronesian languages, lacks gendered pronouns. The object noun phrase for pronouns is typically optional in casual speech because it is redundant information as the object is also indexed on the verb.

The first-person singular pronoun (1SG) takes the form rau in all positions in the basic VAO/VS pattern. When 1SG occurs in sentence-initial position due to fronting, it is realized as arau. As discussed in section 1.3, this alternation is morphophonemically conditioned. The pronoun is pronounced arau in dictionary form, but, as mentioned in the phonological sketch, this form seems to be motivated by the avoidance of /r/ or <g> /ɣ/ followed by back vowels in initial position. For example, the word gona ‘to shoot’ was originally collected as <agona> in my fieldnotes during 2016 fieldwork in New Zealand with Glo Oxenham. However, it became clear that this initial vowel was inserted only when the word was used in isolation. In slow, careful
speech, speakers accept *arau* as grammatical in all positions, thus further confirming that the alternation between *rau* and *arau* is not syntactically conditioned.

(58) 1SG case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hegere</th>
<th>si</th>
<th>rau.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>laugh</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>1SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I laughed.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>taka=au</th>
<th>sa</th>
<th>si</th>
<th>rau.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kick=1SG.OBJ</td>
<td>3SG.ERG</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>1SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘He kicked me.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-052)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>taka=ia</th>
<th>rau</th>
<th>si</th>
<th>asa.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kick=3SG.OBJ</td>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>3SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I kicked him.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. 1st person singular case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>rau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>si rau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>si rau</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The case marking of second-person singular pronouns is illustrated in examples (59a–c). Like the first-person singular pronouns, the second-person singular pronoun has an alternation which is morphophonemically conditioned. Typically, agoi is used only when clause initial, and it is hypothesized that the initial vowel is added to the word. In other contexts, the pronoun goi is preferred. In extremely careful speech, speakers may produce goi or agoi in any position for any grammatical role, but in natural speech, agoi is reserved for clause-initial position. S and O are marked with si in all case-sensitive environments.

(59) 2SG case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

\[hoqa\ si\  goi.\]

fall \(\text{ABS}\) 2SG

‘You fell.’

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[taka=igo\ rau\ si\  goi.\]

kick=2SG.OBJ 1SG \(\text{ABS}\) 2SG

‘I kicked you.’
c. Transitive Subject (V A O) (PS1-052)

\[
taka=au \quad goi \quad si \quad rau.
\]

kick=3SG.OBJ 2SG ABS 1SG

‘You kicked me.’

Table 11. 2\textsuperscript{nd} person singular case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>goi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>si goi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>si goi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third-person singular pronoun /asa/ is proceeded by the absolutive particle /si/ if it is an intransitive subject or a transitive object. Interestingly, this form is typically shortened to /sa/ if it is a post-verbal transitive subject, as in (60c). This novel ergative pronoun form may have been historically motivated by avoiding consecutive identical segments, as the pronoun was likely to follow many object indexes which end in the vowel /a/. If a third-person transitive subject occurs in a clause-initial position, it is possible for it to be realized as either /sa/ or /asa/, suggesting that the /sa/ form is in the process of being reanalyzed as a true ergative pronoun form.

(60) 3SG case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (V S) (PS1-052)

\[
\text{mate} \quad si \quad asa.
\]

die ABS 3SG

‘She/he died.’
b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[ taka=ia \quad rau \quad si \quad asa. \]

kick=3SG.OBJ 1SG ABS 3SG

‘I kicked him.’

c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[ taka=au \quad sa \quad si \quad rau. \]

kick=1SG.OBJ 3SG.ERG ABS 1SG

‘He kicked me.’

d. Plain fronted transitive Subject (AVO) (PS1-052)

\[ (a)sa \quad taka=au \quad si \quad rau. \]

3SG kick=1SG.OBJ ABS 1SG

‘He kicked me.’

Table 12. 3rd person singular case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>plain fronted</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>(a)sa</td>
<td>sa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>si asa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>si asa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first-person plural inclusive pronoun, *gita*, is preceded by the absolutive particle *si* when it is S (61a) or O (61b). The ergative form is unaccompanied by a particle in either post-verbal (61d) or pre-verbal (61e) position. As mentioned in the phonological sketch, vowel insertion is less common in words that begin with /ɣ/ <g> but are followed by front vowels; thus, *gita* does
not become agita if it is in initial position. The inclusive pronoun is used in contexts where the speaker and interlocuter are both being referred to.

(61) 1PL.INC case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

   hegere si  gita.

   laugh    ABS    1PL.INC

   ‘We laughed.’

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

   toka=ni=gita  gamu si  gita.

   help=APPL=1PL.INC.OBJ    2PL    ABS    1PL.INC

   ‘Y’all helped us (inclusive).’

c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-057)

   toka=ni=gamu  gita  si  gamu.

   help=APPL=2PL.OBJ    1PL.INC    ABS    2PL

   ‘We (inclusive) helped y’all.’
Table 13. 1st person plural inclusive case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>gita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>si gita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>si gita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first-person plural exclusive pronoun *gami*, is preceded by the absolutive particle *si* when it is S (62a) or O (62b). The ergative form is unaccompanied by a particle, as in (63c). As mentioned in the phonological sketch, vowel insertion is less common in words which begin with /ɣ/ <g> but are followed by front vowels; thus, the form *gami* is used even if it occurs in initial position. The exclusive pronoun is used in contexts in which the interlocutor is not being referenced, an English approximation might be “us but not you.”

(62) 1PL.EXC case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

*hegere si gami.*

laugh ABS 1PL.EXC

‘We laughed.’

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-054)

*toka=ni=gami gamu si gami.*

help=APPL=1PL.EXC.OBJ 2PL ABS 1PL.EXC

‘Y’all helped us (exclusive).’
c. Transitive Subject (V\textsc{ao}) (PS1-054, PS1-057)

\begin{tabular}{lrlrl}
\textit{toka=ni=gamu} & \textit{gami} & \textit{si} & \textit{gamu}. \\
help=APPL=2PL.OBJ & 1PL.EXC & ABS & 2PL
\end{tabular}

‘We (exclusive) helped y’all.’

Table 14. 1\textsuperscript{st} person exclusive case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>gami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>si gami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>si gami</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second-person plural pronoun \textit{gamu} is preceded by the absolutive particle, \textit{si}, when it is S (63a) or O (63b). It is unaccompanied by a particle when it is ergative (63c). As a descriptive note, a vowel is not inserted before \textit{gamu}, even if it is in initial position, suggesting that if a consonant appeared between /ɣ/ and the back vowel /u/ that the insertion process is blocked.

(63) 2\textsc{pl} case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (V\textsc{s}) (PS1-052)

\begin{tabular}{lrl}
\textit{hegere si} & \textit{gamu}. \\
laugh & ABS & 2PL
\end{tabular}

‘Y’all laughed.’
b. Object (VAO) (PS1-054)

\[
\text{toka}=\text{ni}=\text{gamu} \quad \text{gita} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{gamu}.
\]

help=APPL=2PL.OBJ 1PL.INC ABS 2PL

‘We (inclusive) helped y’all.’

c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[
\text{toka}=\text{ni}=\text{gita} \quad \text{gamu} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{gita}.
\]

help=APPL=1PL.INC.OBJ 2PL ABS 1PL.INC

‘Y’all helped us (inclusive).’

Table 15. 2nd person plural case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>gamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>si gamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>si gamu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it is absolutive, the third-person plural pronoun, arini, may either be preceded by si or form a blend, resulting in the form sarini. The post-verbal transitive subject is realized as ri, perhaps representing the first true ergative marked pronoun in Roviana. The pre-verbal transitive subject is realized as arini. If A is plain fronted, the form arini is typically used, though ar is also acceptable for some speakers. It is worth noting that ar and ri are used as plural markers in various parts of the morphology; for example, the common article, sa, combines with ar to produce the plural common article sari.
(64) 3Pl case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

haqala / si arini / sarini/

run ABS 3PL 3PL.ABS

‘They ran.’

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

toka=n=i goi / si arini / sarini/

help=APPL=3PL.OBJ 2SG ABS 3PL 3PL.ABS

‘You helped them.’

d. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-052)

hiva=ni=gita ri si gita.

like=APPL=1PL.EXC.OBJ 3PL.ERG ABS 1.PL.EXC

‘They like us.’

e. Plain fronted transitive Subject (AVO) (PS1-054, PS1-057)

ari(ni) hiva=ni=gita si gita.

3PL like=APPL=1PL.INC.OBJ ABS 1PL.INC

‘They like us.’
Table 16. 3rd person plural case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pre-verbal</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>ari(ni)</td>
<td>ri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>si arini / sarini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>si arini / sarini</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Proper noun case marking

Proper nouns are marked as absolutive by using the particle *se*, which is a blend of the pronominal absolutive particle *si* and the proper noun article *e*. Ergativity is indicated on post-verbal transitive subjects through the lack of an article. Plain-fronted transitive subjects may appear with an article, recall that S and O do not have access to plain fronting.

(65) Proper noun case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

\[
\text{puta se Bili.}
\]

sleep ABS Bill

‘Bill slept.’

b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[
\text{taka=ia rau se Bili.}
\]

kick=3SG.OBJ 1SG PERS.ABS Bill

‘I kick Bill.’
c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-057)

\[
\text{taka}=ia \quad \text{Bill} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{siki.}
\]

kick=3SG.OBJ Bill ART dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

d. Transitive Subject (AVO) (PS1-052)

\[
e \quad \text{Bili} \quad \text{taka}=ia \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{siki.}
\]

PERS Bill kick=3SG.OBJ ART dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

Table 17. Interim summary of proper noun case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pre-verbal</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>e Bili</td>
<td>Ø Bili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>se Bili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>se Bili</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At first, it may appear that the proper noun article, \( e \), is an ergative marker for plain-fronted, proper noun, transitive subjects. However, further inquiry demonstrates that \( e \) is merely a proper noun article. As mentioned in chapter 4, \( si \)-introduced arguments are not marked for case. All core proper noun arguments may front through \( si \)-introduction and all three can be marked with \( e \).
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(66) \( e \) modifying all si-introduced proper noun argument types (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-054, PS1-057)

Proper S si-introduction (PS1-057)

a) \( e \quad Bili \quad si \quad hegere \)

PERS Bill si laugh

‘Bill laughed.’

Proper O si-introduction (PS1-057)

b) \( e \quad Bili \quad si \quad taka=ia \quad rau. \)

PERS Bill si kick=3SG.OBJ 1SG

‘I kick Bill.’

Proper A si-introduction (PS1-054)

c) \( e \quad Bili \quad si \quad korapa \quad raro=a \quad sa \quad ginani. \)

PERS Bill si IMPERF cook=3SG.OBJ ART food

‘Bill is cooking the food.’

Because the article \( e \) is not an ergative case marker, the previous summary chart is revised as table 18. In this version, the article \( e \) is replaced by the gloss ART to show that the pre-verbal proper noun A is preceded by an article, not a case marker.
Table 18. Revised proper noun case marking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>plain fronted</th>
<th>si-introduced</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>ART Bili</td>
<td>ART Bili</td>
<td>Ø Bili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>ART Bili</td>
<td>se Bili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>ART Bili</td>
<td>se Bili</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Common noun case marking

Common nouns are the only type of noun which is not eligible for absolutive marking in Roviana. Thus, S and O are preceded by the typical common article *sa*, when singular, and *sari*, when plural. The transitive subject (A) is not preceded by an article of any sort. This lack of an article codes the ergative status of A. The lack of an article with post-verbal A leads to a limitation on the type of information that can be expressed in the post-verbal A position. For example, a post-verbal A cannot be existentially quantified with a word like *kaiqa*, ‘some’. Rather, an existentially quantified A must be expressed in the preverbal position.

(67) Common noun case marking (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-054, PS1-057)

a. Intransitive Subject (VS) (PS1-052)

puta  *sa  siki.*

sleep ART dog.

‘The dog slept.’
b. Object (VAO) (PS1-052)

\[ \text{taka}=ia \quad \text{Bili} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{siki}. \]

\text{kick}=3\text{SG.OBJ} \quad \text{Bill} \quad \text{ART} \quad \text{dog} \quad

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

c. Transitive Subject (VAO) (PS1-057)

\[ \text{garat}=au \quad \text{siki} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{rau}. \]

\text{bite}=1\text{SG.OBJ} \quad \text{dog} \quad \text{ABS} \quad 1\text{SG} \quad

‘The dog bit me.’

d. Plain fronted transitive Subject (AVO) (PS1-057)

\[ \text{sa} \quad \text{siki} \quad \text{garat}=au \quad \text{si} \quad \text{rau}. \]

\text{ART} \quad \text{dog} \quad \text{bite}=1\text{SG.OBJ} \quad \text{ABS} \quad 1\text{SG} \quad

‘The dog bit me.’

Table 19 summarizes the case marking patterns observed in example (67).

Table 19. Common noun case marking in example (55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pre-verbal</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>sa siki</td>
<td>( \emptyset ) siki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>sa siki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>sa siki</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20 schematizes the general pattern of common noun case marking. Again, it is worth noting that Roviana has two common noun articles, *sa* for singular NPs and *sari* for plural NPs, and an additional common noun article *na*, which is used in certain contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pre-verbal</th>
<th>post-verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>ART NP</td>
<td>Ø NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>ART NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>ART NP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.4 Summary

Ergative-absolutive alignment is manifested for all three noun types: pronoun, proper noun, and common noun. In pronouns, ergativity is coded through overt absolutive marking with the particle *si* on S and O. In common nouns, ergativity is coded through lack of an article for A. In proper nouns, ergativity is coded through both lack of article of A, and overt absolutive marking of S and O. This pattern is illustrated in table 21, which summarizes the case marking generalization and the different treatment of A compared to S and O.

Table 21. Roviana case marking summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Proper Noun</th>
<th>Common Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>PRO-NP</td>
<td>(NO ART) PROP-NP</td>
<td>(NO ART) COM-NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>ABS PRO-NP</td>
<td>ABS PROP-NP</td>
<td>ART COM-NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>ABS PRO-NP</td>
<td>ABS PROP-NP</td>
<td>ART COM-NP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6

Object Indexation

Roviana indexes the direct object of a transitive clause on the verb; no argument is indexed on the verb in intransitive clauses. Object agreement is not affected by fronting operations. This section illustrates object indexing for every person and number.

Object agreement without subject agreement is a typologically rare phenomenon. For example, Siewierska’s (2013b) survey of 378 languages, only 24 marked the O and not the A in a transitive clause (she did not mention how many mark the O without marking the S). Another survey of alignment of verbal person marking (Siewierska 2013a) revealed that 212 out of 380 languages had a nominative-accusative alignment for their verbal marking system, but there was no mention of how many of these language marked only the O without marking S or A.

Table 22 summarizes the object indexes used in Roviana. There is a transparent relationship between the plural free pronoun forms and the plural object index forms for first person and second person. The first-person forms have a slightly more opaque resemblance to the free pronouns, suggesting that these indexes historically derived from free pronouns but have had sufficient time to become distinct. The third-person plural object index is =i, but, if it is preceded by the vowel /i/, then it will coalesce as a single vowel. Whether the object index or the preceding /i/ gets deleted is a matter of phonological analysis and will not be treated here. For these reasons
Table 22 represents the 3PL object index as either =i or zero, as it is unclear which one is deleted if the object index follows a verb ending in /i/.

Table 22. Verbal object indexing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Inclusive</th>
<th>1 Exclusive</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>=au</td>
<td>=igo</td>
<td></td>
<td>=ia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>=gita</td>
<td>=gami</td>
<td>=gamu</td>
<td>=i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Roviana, the object index functions the same as agreement would; however, it is likely a clitic which, for some (Baker 2012), does not constitute “true agreement.” Therefore, in an attempt to remain somewhat theory-neutral, the verbal object clitic in Roviana is referred to in this work as an object index, which will suffice for the sake of description.

Whether it constitutes true agreement or not, the object index does function much as agreement would. Example (68) shows that there are separate object index enclitics for objects of different person and number. Example (68) also shows that the object enclitic is absent for intransitive clauses. In example (69a) there is no object-index enclitic attached to the verb, because the sentence is intransitive. Examples (68b, c, and d) show that the object-index changes, depending on the person and number of the object.
(68) Roviana object index only in transitive sentences (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052, PS1-054)

No object index in intransitive clause (PS1-054)

a. *ele* vose si *arau.*

PFT paddle ABS 1SG

‘I paddled.’

b. *ele* vose=ia *arau* sa *hore.*

PFT paddle=3SG.OBJ 1SG ART canoe

‘I paddled the canoe.’

c. *taka*=au *sa* si *rau.*

kick=1SG.OBJ 3SG ABS 1SG

‘He kicked me.’

d. *taka* =igo *rau* si *goi.*

kick=2SG.OBJ 1SG ABS 2SG

‘I kicked you.’
6.1 Note on object index morphophonemics

Object indexes manifest some morphophonemically conditioned alternation. A complete study of the morphophonemics is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, it is useful to include some notes on the topic to remove any confusion over whether these alternations might be syntactically conditioned. There are also some historical considerations which provide context for some alternations. It is particularly important to note that Roviana avoids codas and avoids identical or similar segments.

The object index in Roviana is likely an enclitic, as it can attach to the end of the string of verbal elements. Example (69) illustrates an object index, \( =gita \), attaching to the end of a string of verbal elements. In example (69), \( =gita \) is associated with the verb \( kopu \), ‘to keep/care for’, yet it attaches to the end of a string of the adverb, \( valeana \). The object noun phrase was omitted from this example, as it is redundant information, though the noun phrase is often expressed.

(69) Object index as enclitic (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-054)

\[
\text{kopu} \quad \text{va}=\text{leana}=\text{ni}=\text{gita} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{tina-qu}.
\]

\( \text{keep CAUS=good=APPL=1PL.INC.OBJ ART mother-1SG.GEN} \)

‘Mother looked after us very well.’

Blust and Trussell (2020) reconstruct *-i as a transitive suffix for Proto Malayo-Polynesian, an ancestral language to Oceanic. The \( i \) found at the beginning of \( =igo \) and \( =ia \) likely descends from this transitive suffix, but, with the presence of object indexation, transitive marking becomes redundant information and the \( i \) is no longer an active transitivizing morpheme in Roviana. The \( i \)
may still appear before indexes which begin with a consonant, \( =\text{gita}, =\text{gami}, \) and \( =\text{gamu}, \) in some environments, particularly if an echo vowel is deleted, as Roviana prohibits adjacent consonants except for certain sequences created through reduplication.

Example (70a-j) illustrates some possible alternations following a transitive verb which ends in an echo vowel. In many cases it is grammatical to delete the echo vowel and attach the object index directly to the root, so long as it would not create a sequence of consonants. The echo vowel is dis-preferred before 2SG.OBJ, \( =\text{igo}, \) as shown in example (70c). This pattern seems phonologically motivated, but the precise nature of this dis-preference will have to be the subject of future work.

(70) Object index forms alternating after \( [\text{dogoro}] /\text{dogor}/ ‘to see’ \) (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-054)

1SG.OBJ

a. \( \text{dogor}=\text{au} \)

see \( =1\text{SG.OBJ} \)

‘See me.’

b. \( \text{dogoro}=\text{au} \)

see\( =1\text{SG.OBJ} \)

‘See me.’
c.  
\text{dogor}=\text{igo}  
\text{see}=\text{2SG.OBJ}  
‘See you.’  

3SG.OBJ  

d.  
\text{dogoro}=\text{ia}  
\text{see}=\text{3SG.OBJ}  
‘See 3SG.’  

e.  
\text{dogor}=\text{ia}  
\text{see}=\text{3SG.OBJ}  
‘See 3SG.’  

1PL.INC.OBJ  

f.  
\text{dogoro}=\text{gita}  
\text{see}=\text{1PL.INC.OBJ}  
‘See us (inc).’
g. *dogoro=gami*
   
   see=1PL.EXC.OBJ
   
   ‘See us (exc.).’

h. *dogoro=gamu*
   
   see=2PL.OBJ
   
   ‘See y’all.’

i. *dogoro=i*
   
   see=3PL.OBJ
   
   ‘See them.’

j. *dogor=i*
   
   see=3PL.OBJ
   
   ‘See them.’

It is worth noting that indexes which begin with a front vowel, such as, 3SG.OBJ =ia, often delete the front vowel if it follows a word ending in a front vowel, such as *hale* ‘to climb’ and *tozi* ‘to tell.’
(71) Prohibition against sequential front vowels created through enclitic

/hale =ia/ [hale =a] ‘climb it’
/tozi =ia/ [tozi =a] ‘tell it’

6.2 Applicative enclitic =ni

The morpheme /=ni/ may precede the object index in certain contexts. For the sake of description, it is analyzed here as an applicative. Verbs which are inherently intransitive in Roviana may have two core arguments when the applicative =ni is added. For example, the verb hohou ‘to bark (as a dog)’ is typically intransitive, as in example (72a). With the use of an applicative, a second core argument can be introduced, as in example (72b), where ‘me’ is the object of the dog’s barking. It is worth noting that =ni reduces to =n before object indexes which begin with vowels.

(72) Applicative with hohou (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-057)

a. hohou sa siki.
bark ART dog
‘The dog barks.’

b. hohou mae =n =au sa siki si rau.
bark come =APPL =1SG.OBJ ART dog ABS 1SG
‘The dog barks at me.’

The applicative morpheme can also be used to select alternate indexes for certain ditransitive verbs. For example, the verb zutu ‘to blame’ typically agrees with the entity being blamed, as in example (73a), but may agree with the cause of the blame if the applicative and the
directional particle *la* are used, as in example (73b). For the sake of convention, the cause of the blame is labeled as *cause*, and the entity being blamed is labeled as *goal* in example (73).

(73) Applicative changes index in ditransitive *zutu* (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-031, PS1-054)

a.  
\[ \text{zutu=i gami [sari kurukuru] [koasa vevhe].} \]

\begin{align*}
\text{blame=3PL.OBJ} & \quad \text{1PL.EXC} & \quad \text{[ART.PL bird]} & \quad \text{[OBL.ART noise]} \\
\text{AGENT} & \quad \text{GOAL} & \quad \text{CAUSE}
\end{align*}

‘We blamed the birds for the noise.’ (index-birds)

b.  
\[ \text{zutu la=n=ia gami [sa vevhe] [koari kurukuru].} \]

\begin{align*}
\text{blame go=APPL=3SG.OBJ} & \quad \text{1PL.EXC.OBJ} & \quad \text{[ART noise]} & \quad \text{[OBL.PL bird]} \\
\text{AGENT} & \quad \text{CAUSE} & \quad \text{GOAL}
\end{align*}

‘We blamed the noise on the birds.’ (index-noise)

6.3 Object indexing in clauses with fronting

This section demonstrates that the object index remains stable despite changes in word order due to plain fronting or *si*-fronting. Example (74) illustrates that the object index is not affected by the plain fronting of A.
(74) object index in sentence with plain fronting

1SG object index (PS1-054)

VAO

a. \(\text{taka}=\text{au} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{rau}.\)

kick=1SG.OBJ 3SG ABS 1SG

‘He kicked me.’

Plain fronting (AVO)

b. \((a)\text{sa} \quad \text{taka}=\text{au} \quad \text{si} \quad \text{rau}.\)

3SG kick=1SG.OBJ ABS 1SG

He kicked me.

Example (75) illustrates that the object index is not affected by the \(\text{si}\)-fronting O.

(75) Object index in sentence with \(\text{si}\)-introduction (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-031)

VAO

a. \(\text{ele} \quad \text{tozi}=\text{a} \quad \text{rau} \quad \text{sa} \quad \text{vivinei}.\)

PFT tell=3SG.OBJ 1SG ART story

‘I already told the story.’
si-introduction of object in PV (OsiVA)

b.  

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
  sa & vivinei & si & ele & tozi=a & rau. \\
  \text{ART} & \text{story} & \text{SI} & \text{PFT} & \text{tell=3SG.OBJ} & \text{1SG}
\end{array}
\]

'I already told the story.'

The persistence of the object index in sentences which have undergone argument fronting is consistent with the view that these fronting operations do not alter the transitivity of the sentence.
Chapter 7

Syntactic Ergativity

This chapter will examine ergative patterns in the syntax of Roviana. Recall that an ergative pattern is one in which S and O are treated the same and A is treated distinctly. This ergative patterning is particularly salient in three areas: (1) S and O do not have access to plain fronting, but A does, (2) S and O may only wh-front through si-introduction while A may only wh-front through plain fronting, and (3) while all arguments have access to the gap strategy of relativization, only A has access to a nominalization strategy. Contrary to typical accounts of syntactic ergativity, in which S and O are more accessible to particular syntactic operation that A does not, in Roviana A appears to be privileged in this regard.

7.1 S and O cannot undergo plain fronting

Plain fronting was described in chapter 4, but it bears repeating here, as it displays an ergative pattern. Example (76), reproduced here for convenience, illustrates plain fronting of A.
(76) Prototypical transitive sentence and plain fronted A (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052)

VAO

a.  *taka=ia  Bili  sa  siki.
    kick=3SG.OBJ Bill  ART  dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

Plain fronting (AVO)

b.  *e  Bili  taka=ia  sa  siki.
    PERS  Bill  kick=3SG.OBJ ART  dog

‘Bill kicked the dog.’

Plain fronting is not available for S and O. The ungrammaticality of plain fronting for O is illustrated in example (77a) and the ungrammaticality of plain fronting for S in (77b).

(77) Plain fronting not available for O and S (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-052)

*OVA

a.  *sa  siki  taka=ia  Bili.
    ART  dog  kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

*Bill kicked the dog
*SV

b. *(si) asa mae.
    (ABS) 3SG come

*She/he comes

In summary, A has access to plain fronting, but S and O are prohibited. Any pattern which treats S and O the same but treats A differently is ergative by definition. Nonetheless, this form of syntactic ergativity appears to privilege the ergative argument rather than the absolutive arguments, contrary to the pattern typically attested in the literature.

Table 23. Plain fronting summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plain fronting</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2 Wh-fronting

All core arguments may be wh-fronted in Roviana, but the strategies for wh-fronting show a distinctly ergative-absolutive pattern. Wh-A fronts through plain fronting, while wh-S and wh-A front through *si*-introduction. Example (78) illustrates wh-A fronting through plain fronting with a gap from a main clause and a dependent clause, and the ungrammaticality of wh-A fronting through *si*-introduction.
(78) Wh-fronting of transitive subjects/agents (PS1-055)

Wh-A from main clause

a. *esei  ____  hena=ia  sa  rereke?

who  eat=3SG.OBJ  ART  mango

‘Who ate the mango?’

Wh-A from dependent clause

b. *esei  balabala=n=ia  agoi  [_____  hena=ia  sa  rereke]?

who  think=APPL=3SG.OBJ  2SG  eat=3SG.OBJ  ART  mango

‘Who do you think ate the mango?’

A cannot wh-front from main clause through si-introduction

c. *esei  si  hena=ia  sa  rereke?

who  SI  eat=3SG.OBJ  ART  mango

*Who ate the mango?

A cannot wh-front from dependent clause through si-introduction

d. *esei  balabala=n=ia  agoi  si  hena=ia  sa  rereke]?

who  think=APPL=3SG.OBJ  2SG  SI  eat=3SG.OBJ  ART  mango

*Who do you think ate the mango?
Wh-O must front through *si*-introduction. Example (79) illustrates wh-O fronting through *si*-introduction with a gap in both main and dependent clauses. Wh-O fronting through plain fronting is ungrammatical.

(79) Wh-fronting of transitive objects (PS1-055)

Wh-O from main clause

a. *esei  si  taka=ia  Bili  ____  ?*

who  SI    KICK=3SG.OBJ Bill

‘Whom did Bill kick?’

Wh-O from dependent clause

b. *esei  balabala=n=ia  agoi  si  [taka=ia  Bili  ____  ]?

who  think=APPL=3SG.OBJ  2SG  SI    kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

‘Whom do you think Bill kicked?’

Wh-O cannot front from main clause without *si*-introduction

c. *esei  taka=ia  Bili?

who  kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

*Whom did Bill kick
Wh-O cannot front from dependent clause without *si-introduction

d. *esëi balabala=na ia agoi [taka=ia Bili ___ ]?

who think=APPL=3SG.OBJ 2SG kick=3SG.OBJ Bill

*Whom do you think Bill kicked?

Like wh-O, wh-S may only front through *si-introduction, as illustrated in example (80a) and (80b). Wh-S fronting through plain fronting is ungrammatical, as illustrated in (80c) and (80d).

(80) Wh-fronting of intransitive subjects (PS1-055)

Wh-S from main clause

a. esëi si taloa ___ ?

who si leave

‘Who left?’

Wh-S from dependent clause

b. esëi balabala=na ia [agoi si taloa ___ ]?

who think=APPL=3SG.OBJ 2SG si leave

‘Who do you think left?’

Wh-S cannot front from main clause without *si-introduction

c. *esëi taloa?

who leave

*who left
Wh-S cannot front from dependent clause without si-introduction

d.  
*esei  balabala=n=ia  agoi  [taloa  ____ ]?

who  think=APPL=3SG.OBJ  2SG  leave

*who do you think left

One of the reasons that wh-words appear to be fronted rather than “base-generated” in the sentence-initial position comes from the observation that there are environments in which the wh-word must remain in situ.¹¹ One such environment involves adjunct islands, which are exemplified below for intransitive subjects in (81), transitive objects in (82), and transitive subjects in (83). All the examples use mudina ‘after’ as the adjunct marker. Wh-S and wh-O are preceded by an absolutive marker in the adjunct island, and the wh-A occurs without an article, as it is ergative.

(81) Wh-S adjunct island paradigm (PS1-056)

a.  *kamo  mae  si  rau  mudina  taloa  se  Bili.

arrive  come  ABS  1SG  after  leave  ABS  Bill

‘I arrived after Bill left.’

b.  Kamo  mae  si  rau  mudina  taloa  se  eseī?

arrive  come  ABS  1SG  after  leave  ABS  who

‘I arrived after who left?’

¹¹ Such environments are conventionally referred to as islands, after Ross (1967).
(82) Wh-O adjunct island paradigm (PS1-056)

a.  
   Ele  kamo si  rau mudina  ngaza=ia  goi  se  Bili.
   PFT  arrive  ABS  1SG  after  hug=3SG.OBJ  2SG  ABS  Bill
   ‘I arrived after you hugged Bill.’

b.  
   Ele  kamo si  rau mudina  ngaza=ia  goi  se  esei?
   PFT  arrive  ABS  1SG  after  hug=3SG.OBJ  2SG  ABS  who
   ‘I arrived after you hugged whom?’

(83) Wh-A adjunct island paradigm (PS1-056)

a.  
   Ele  kamo si  goi mudina  ngaza=au  Bili.
   PFT  arrive  ABS  2SG  after  hug=1SG.OBJ  Bill
   ‘You arrived after Bill hugged me.’

b.  
   Ele  kamo si  goi mudina  ngaza=au  esei?
   PFT  arrive  ABS  2SG  after  hug=1SG.OBJ  who
   ‘You arrived after who hugged me?’

Ditransitive clauses are not the focus of the present work, but, for the sake of description, it is worth mentioning how they form wh-questions. Like wh-A, the goal of a ditransitive fronts through plain fronting, as illustrated in example (84).
(84) Wh-question in GV (Kaipuleohone, PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-0014 – PS1-017, PS1-035)

a. koe ese i vala=ia Zone sa heta?

   OBL. PERS who give = 3SG.OBJ John ART betelnut

   ‘Whom did John give the betelnut to?’

b. pavei veko=ia agoi sa qua buka?

   where put = 3SG.OBJ 2SG ART 1SG.GEN book

   ‘Where did you put my book?’

Just like the other core arguments, wh-G shows adjunct island effects. Example (85a) illustrates a goal in an adjunct phrase ‘after you gave betelnut to Peter’. Example (85b) illustrates the same sentence, except that the goal is questioned; the wh-G remains in-situ, and fronting is deemed ungrammatical.

(85) Wh-G adjunct island paradigm (PS1-057)

a. ele kamo si rau mudina vala=ia goi sa heta koe Pita.

   PFT arrive ABS 1SG after give = 3SG.OBJ 2SG ART betelnut DAT.PERS Peter

   ‘I arrived after you gave the betelnut to Peter.’

b. ele kamo si rau mudina vala=ia goi sa heta koe ese i?

   PFT arrive ABS 1SG after give = 3SG.OBJ 2SG ART betelnut DAT.PERS who

   ‘I arrived after you gave the betelnut to whom?’
In summary, wh-A may front through plain fronting, but not *si*-introduction. Wh-S and wh-O may front through *si*-introduction but not plain fronting. The distinct treatment of A compared to S and O is an ergative pattern by definition. That G may also wh-front through plain fronting suggests that plain fronting is available to at least some adjunct arguments; however a complete description of adjuncts if beyond the scope of the current work. Crucially, the three core arguments, S, A, and O, display an ergative-absolutive pattern in regard to wh-fronting strategies. The wh-fronting strategies are summarized in table 24.

Table 24. Wh-fronting strategies in Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wh-plain-front</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wh-si-introduction</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3 Relative clause formation

Corston-Oliver (2002) points out an interesting pattern in regard to the object index inside a relative clause. In an intransitive relative clause, as expected, there is no object index, as demonstrated in example (86).

(86) No object index in Relative S (Adapted from Corston-Oliver 2002:480)

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{hierana} & \text{sa} & \text{tie} & \text{sapu} & \text{kote} & \text{taloa}.\\
\text{this} & \text{ART} & \text{person} & \text{REL} & \text{FUT} & \text{leave}
\end{array}
\]

‘This is the man who is going away.’
My own elicitation confirmed Corston-Oliver’s observation about relative S. However, our data differs with respect to the relativized object. Example (87) illustrates Corston-Oliver’s example of a relativized object example, with a gap in the object position.

(87) Corston-Oliver’s Object index in a relative O (adapted from Corston-Oliver 2002:480)

```
hierana | sa | koreo | sapu | tupa | =ia | e | Zone
this    | ART | boy   | REL  | punch=3SG.OBJ | PERS | John
```

‘This is the boy that John punched.’

In my elicitation, the agent is not preceded by an article inside a relativized object clause, even in the exact same sentence. Example (88) illustrates the lack of the person article, \( e \), suggesting that A is still ergative. It is worth noting that \( hie \), in example (88), is merely a reduced variant of \( hierana \), with no difference in meaning.

(88) Object index inside a relative O (PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-031)

```
Hie | sa | koreo | sapu | tupa=ia | ___ | Zone.
this | ART | male | REL | punch=3SG.OBJ | John
```

‘This is the boy John punched.’

Our data conflict even further in regard to the treatment of relativized A. In Corston-Oliver’s example in (89), the object is indexed through a genitive suffix instead of the typical object indexation enclitic. In addition, the object inside the relative clause is marked with the
personal article *e*, as in example (89a). In example (89b) the object is first person and the index is first person, confirming that the genitive suffix is indeed referencing the object not the subject.

(89) Corston-Oliver’s Object index inside relative A (adapted from Corston-Oliver 2002)

a.  
  \begin{tabular}{l}  
  \textit{hierana} & \textit{sa} & \textit{koreo} & \textit{sapu} & \textit{tupa} & \textit{-na} & \textit{e} & \textit{Zone} \\
  \\
  \end{tabular} \\
  this & ART & boy & REL & punch & -3SG.GEN & PERS & John \\

‘This is the boy that punched John.’

b.  
  \begin{tabular}{l}  
  \textit{hierana} & \textit{sa} & \textit{tie} & \textit{sapu} & \textit{tupa} & \textit{-qu} & \textit{rau} \\
  \\
  \end{tabular} \\
  this & ART & man & REL & punch & -1SG.GEN & 1SG \\

‘This is the man that punched me.’

I collected some of the same sentences as Corston-Oliver’s and got different results. The first difference was that, in one of the same sentences “this is the boy who punched John,” the object inside the relative clause is marked absolutive.

(90) Object index inside relative A (PS1-052, PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-031)

\begin{tabular}{l}  
  \textit{hie} & \textit{sa} & \textit{koreo} & \textit{sapu} & \textit{tupa} & \textit{-na} & \textit{se} & \textit{Zone}.
  \\
  \\
  \end{tabular} \\
  this & ART & male & REL & punch-3SG.GEN & ABS & John \\

‘This is the boy who punched John.’

Additionally, I collected many relativized A’s which used the typical object index, rather than the genitive suffix.
Relativized A using the typical verbal object index enclitic (PS1-052, PS1-001 – PS1-006, PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-031)

a. *Hie sa siki sapu garat=au.*
   
   *this ART dog REL bite=1SG.OBJ*

   ‘This is the dog that bit me.’

b. *Hie sa siki sapu garata=igo.*
   
   *this ART dog REL bite=2SG.OBJ*

   ‘This is the dog that bit you.’

With further elicitation it became clear that both the genitive suffix and the enclitic are acceptable forms for object indexation inside a relativized A, as illustrated by example (92). These sentences represent legitimate relative clauses complete with an object index and an absolutive marked object.

(92) Relative A indexes judged as grammatical (p.c. Frank Tuke, PS1-057)

Genitive suffix indexes object

a. *sa siki sapu garata-qu si rau*
   
   *ART dog REL bite-1SG.GEN ABS 1SG*

   ‘The dog that bit me.’
Enclitic indexes object

b. \textit{sa siki sapu garata=\textbf{u} si rau}

\text{ART dog REL bite=1SG.OBJ ABS 1SG}

‘The dog that bit me.’

There is, clearly, a great deal of grammatical variation associated with indexing the object inside the clause of a relativized transitive subject. However, a native-speaker linguist, Frank Tuke, suggested that a particular pattern is preferred if the genitive suffix is used. This pattern is illustrated in example (93). Note that in the preferred relative clause type, the patient is indexed on the verb through the genitive suffix, but the patient noun phrase is not proceeded by an absolutive particle.

(93) Preferred relativized A if genitive suffix is used to index object (p.c. Frank Tuke, PS1-057)

\textit{sa siki sapu garata-qu rau}

\text{ART dog REL bite-1SG.GEN 1SG}

‘The dog that bit me.’

The lack of case marking on the object inside the relativized A suggests that the genitive suffix nominalizes the material inside the relative clause. Polinsky and Potsdam (forthcoming) note a nominalizing strategy of relative clause formation for other Oceanic languages, specifically referring to the operation as a genitive relative clause (GRC). Example (94) illustrates a GRC in Hawaiian.
(94) GRC in Hawaiian (adapted from Baker 2006 citing Hopkins 1992)

\[ \text{ka Pua puke i kākau ai.} \]

\( \text{GEN Pua book PFV write RC} \)

‘the book that Pua wrote (it)’

If the rel-A in Roviana is analyzed as a GRC, then a better translation for the preferred relative A in example (93) might be “the dog of my-biting,” which is interpreted as “the dog that bit me.” That this pattern is preferred over the one in (92a) suggests that there is reluctance to relativize the A. The preference for the nominalization strategy of relativizing the A may explain the variant structure in (92a) in which the genitive can act as a true object index, even though the case marking suggests that the material inside the relative clause is not a nominalization.

In summary, S, O, and A are accessible to the verbal strategy of relativization, but only A can be relativized using the nominalization strategy, furthering supporting an analysis in which the ergative is pivot in Roviana. Table 25 summarizes relativization strategies in Roviana.

Table 25. Relativization strategies in Roviana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal strategy</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominalization</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8

Conclusions

This chapter will discuss conclusions that can be drawn from the current discussion. It will begin by discussing the ways in which Roviana defies typological predictions. It will then introduce some of the remaining mysteries that should be the topic of future work.

8.1 Theoretical impact

There are two main ways in which Roviana defies typological predictions and stands to inform linguistic theory: (1) the novel coding of morphological ergativity, and (2) that the ergative argument shows properties of pivothood as it is the most accessible target for fronting operations.

8.1.1 Novel case marking

Typologists (Dixon 1994, Hoop and Malkuchov 2008) predict that if a language overtly marks only one case, it will mark the ergative. Nias, an Austronesian language of Indonesia, also shows a possible marked absolutive pattern (Brown 2001), but this analysis is contested (Crysmann 2009). Roviana displays a clear example of marked absolutivity for pronouns and proper nouns. The Roviana case marking summary is repeated here in table 26.
Table 26. Roviana case marking summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Proper Noun</th>
<th>Common Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>PRO-NP</td>
<td>(NO ART) PROP-NP</td>
<td>(NO ART) COM-NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>ABS PRO-NP</td>
<td>ABS PROP-NP</td>
<td>ART COM-NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>ABS PRO-NP</td>
<td>ABS PROP-NP</td>
<td>ART COM-NP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interesting aspect of this pattern is that there is a “split” in absolutive marking—that is, not all argument types are eligible for absolutive marking. Recall from the framework proposed in chapter 2, that Silverstein (1976) proposes a hierarchy which predicts where a split in ergative marking is likely to occur. The higher an argument is on the hierarchy, the less likely it is to be marked ergative.

Figure 11 Silverstein’s referential hierarchy (adapted from Silverstein 1976)

1/2 pron > 3 pron > proper N > human N > animate N > other

Less likely marked ERG  more likely marked ERG

Silverstein’s hierarchy predicts that if a split in ergative marking were present, it would be more likely for first-person pronouns to have nominative-accusative case marking, while it is more likely for third-person pronouns and common nouns to have ergative-style case marking. Roviana uses absolutive marking for S and O for proper nouns and for pronouns of all persons and numbers. However, common nouns that are S or O are not marked for case. The pattern displayed by Roviana’s absolutive marking is exactly the opposite of Silverstein’s prediction for a split in ergative marking. Perhaps the reason that the split is the opposite in Roviana is because it involves absolutive marking rather than ergative marking.
8.1.2 Ergative pivot

Recall that pivot is a single argument per clause which is privileged for certain syntactic operations (Falk 2000). Different types of pivots align with different grammatical relations alignment categories, as illustrated in table 27, reproduced here for convenience. Recall that work on the typology of alignment focuses on the relations S, A, and O. Interestingly, the R relations seems to have pivothood properties under some circumstances. While this warrants further investigation, the salient point is that in the context of transitive and intransitive sentences, the ergative argument appears privileged in comparison to the absolutive arguments.

Table 27. Pivot types associated with case alignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical roles</th>
<th>nominative pivot</th>
<th>accusative pivot</th>
<th>absolutive pivot</th>
<th>ergative pivot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S, A</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>S, O</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Syntactic ergativity in Roviana appears to operate around an ergative pivot. There are three pieces of evidence for this claim: (1) plain fronting is not available for S and O in any context, (2) S and O must wh-front through si-introduction, while A may wh-front through plain fronting, and (3) only A can be relativized via the nominalization strategy. These patterns confirm the pivot status of A in Roviana. Thus far, Roviana is the only attested language with an ergative pivot.
Attestation of the ergative pivot in Roviana stands to at least expand the typological possibilities that fieldworkers are looking for when collaborating with language communities.

Furthermore, an ergative pivot poses problems for some formal accounts of syntactic ergativity, particularly the inversion account (Aldridge 2004; Coon, Mateo Pedro, and Perminger 2015, etc.). Under the inversion account, the reason that A does not have access to operations is because the O is higher in the structure and thus “blocks” access to the A. This account could be applied in a transitive context in Roviana stipulating that the A blocks the O from plain fronting. But this approach fails to explain why the S would not have access to operations such as plain fronting, as there is nothing to block it.\(^\text{12}\)

8.2 Remaining mysteries

There is much work to be done in regard to the description and theoretical analysis of Roviana. This dissertation leaves two salient mysteries to be addressed: (1) there is a restriction on the existential quantification of transitive subjects in VAO; existentially quantified A must be plain fronted. (2) There is a dis-preference against sentences which have a si from both \textit{si}-introduction and \textit{si} absolutive marking, but \textit{si}-introduction and se absolutive marking is acceptable.

8.2.1 EQ restriction

The ergative argument may not be accompanied by an article; as previously mentioned; this acts as a sort of coding for ergative status. When testing for basic word order, it was shown that universal quantifiers may accompany the ergative article. However, there is a puzzling

\(^{12}\) Collins and Schuelke (forthcoming) put forth a formal account of the ergative pivot which employs grammatical-relations features to explain the connection between morphological case and privileged extraction patterns.
restriction on existential quantification (EQ) of the ergative argument (A). Transitive subjects may not have an existential interpretation in the VAO word order; they can have this interpretation only if they undergo plain fronting.

(95) Existential quantification of agents (Kaipuleohone PS1-014 – PS1-017, PS1-035)

EQ agent in AVO

a. kaiqa kukuasa garat=au (si rau).
   some centipede bite=1SG.OBJ ABS 1SG
   ‘Some centipede bit me.’

*EQ agent in VAO

b. garat=au (*kaiqa) kukuasa (si rau).
   bite=1SG.OBJ (some) centipede ABS 1SG
   *Some centipede bit me.

One approach to accounting for this EQ restriction in Roviana would be to propose that AVO is one of the basic transitive word orders. Under such an analysis, Roviana has multiple transitive word orders, VAO, and AVO, and wh-fronting patterns align with these word orders. These observations would support a symmetrical-voice analysis of Roviana. At first, this seems to explain the EQ restriction, as restrictions on definiteness have been observed in other symmetrical voice languages, such as Tagalog (Collins 2016, 2018). Nonetheless, the wh-island data from chapter 7 shows the wh-A occurs in situ in the VAO word order, which suggests that VAO is the
true basic transitive pattern. Neither of these solutions fully account for both the wh-island data and the EQ restriction. This puzzle, therefore, must be the topic of future work.

8.2.2 *si si

The next remaining mystery is the noted avoidance of a sentence with both si-introduction and si absolutive marking. This problem is particularly puzzling for two reasons (1) it is completely acceptable to have si introduction and se absolutive marking in the same sentence, and (2) it is also acceptable to have multiple sequential si-introductions, as demonstrated in chapter 4. Example (96) illustrates the sentences used to collect grammaticality judgements.

(96) si-introduction and si absolutive test sentences

si-introduction without si absolutive (NP dropped)

a. sa si siki garat=au

\hspace{0.5cm} ART dog SI bite=1SG.OBJ

‘The dog bit me.’ (judged grammatical)

Plain fronted A and si absolutive marking

b. sa garatau siki si rau.

\hspace{0.5cm} ART dog abs=1SG.OBJ 1SG

‘The dog bit me.’ (judged grammatical)
si-introduction and si absolutive marking

c. *?sa siki si garatau si rau.

   ART  dog   SI  bite=1SG.OBJ  ABS  1SG

   ‘*?The dog bit me.’ (judged “weird”)

Examples (96a) and (96b) were considered acceptable, but (96c) produced mixed reactions. All speakers were able to recover the intended meaning from (96c) and one even thought the sentence was grammatical. However, other speakers described the sentence as something “a child might utter…”.

One potential explanation for this avoidance is that the si in si-introduction is actually an absolutive marker and that everything following the si in si-introduction is a nominalization. However, this analysis fails because the proposed nominalized portion still bears verbal object indexing and proper noun case marking. An alternate approach is that the si in si-introduction is the only si in Roviana and that the apparent si absolutive marker is in fact some sort of focus operation, such as the one described in Cheke Holo in chapter 4. This analysis also fails, as it cannot explain why common nouns could undergo “final si focusing” as in Cheke Holo, nor can it explain the function of the personal absolutive marker se, which is formed as a blend of si and e. For example, if O undergoes si-introduction and a proper noun A undergoes plain fronting, the latter si does not blend with the e, despite satisfying the relevant phonological conditions. Example (97) illustrates a sentence in which O has undergone si-introduction and a proper noun A has undergone plain fronting. Notice that the person article, e, which precedes A, does not blend with the si-introduction particle si.
(97) *si*-introduction particle does not blend with *e* (PS1-052, PS1-053, PS1-054)

OsiAV

a. sa talo si e Bili hena=ia.

ART taro SI PERS Bill eat=3SG.OBJ

‘Bill ate the taro.’

The same is true for the absolutive blend of *si* and *arini as sarini*, as *ari* does not blend with *si* if it follows the *si*-introduction particle. This morphophonemic pattern suggests that the final *si* used for absolutive marking is homophonous, but distinct, from the *si* used for *si*-introduction. Yet another potential solution is that it is redundant or ambiguous and avoided for this reason, but this solution is doubtful, as multiple *si*-introduction is acceptable and the absolutive marker seems to be distinct. This problem will also have to be the topic of future work.

### 8.3 Conclusion

The most important lesson from this dissertation is the value of language conservation to language science and the value of language science to language conservation. Language conservation is of inherent value to language communities and, on a larger scale, human heritage. However, linguists often divorce language conservation from language science. A language conservationist without theoretical training may not have the tools to accurately capture the unique syntactic complexity of a system like that displayed by Roviana. Furthermore, without an organized system of knowledge, they may not be able to organize phenomena into a meaningful description. For example, a corpus of one thousand hours is unlikely to reveal quantifier
interpretations; therefore, the language conservationist must know to investigate them. On the other hand, often language scientists focus on an in-depth analysis of well-studied languages instead of laboring to understand the fundamental nature of little-described languages, which could then lead to in-depth studies. This dissertation supports the notion that language scientists ought to shift their efforts to the documentation and description of little described languages, as we cannot expect to fully understand the architecture of human language without first doing our best to investigate all the existing human languages.
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