

## ERGATIVITY IN THE PACIFIC

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Languages are often characterised in terms of how their core grammar is organised. Some are described as accusative and others as ergative. An accusative system is one in which the agent argument of a transitive verb (A) is treated in the same way as the sole argument of an intransitive predicate (S). An ergative system is one in which the patient argument of a transitive verb (P) is treated the same way as (S). English is characterised as accusative since A is treated like S in terms of case, control of agreement on the verb and position.

- (1) a. She jogs every morning.  
S  
b. She gives the memorial lecture every year.  
A P

In arriving at this characterisation linguists disregard an alternative means of expressing the content of a transitive clause, namely the passive. The passive of a transitive verb is considered to be an intransitive construction in which there is only one argument, though there is the option of adding a *by*-phrase as an adjunct to express what would be the agent argument of the corresponding transitive.

- (2) The memorial lecture is given by her every year.  
S

A language like the northeast Caucasian language, Avar, is characterised as ergative since P is identified with S in terms of both case marking and the pattern of representation on the verb. In the following examples the stem **-as** bears no case marking in S or P function whereas A bears ergative case marking. There are three gender classes in the language: masculine, feminine and neuter. These are marked by prefix to the noun and for a noun phrase in S or P function the appropriate prefix also appears as a cross-referencing prefix on the verb (Ebeling 1966:77).

- (3) **W-as w-ekér-ula**  
M-child M-run-PRES  
'The boy runs.'
- (4) **Inssu-cca j-as j-écc-ula**  
(M)father-ERG F-child F-praise-PRES  
'Father praises the girl.'

Languages like English and Avar are easy to characterise, since a number of grammatical criteria identify A or P with S consistently. However, there can be a conflict in the criteria. In the Australian language Warlpiri the case system identifies P with S as in Avar, but there are clitic pronouns which operate in terms of an SA or subject form and a P or object form. Examples (5) and (6) demonstrate the ergative case for A opposed to the unmarked nominative case for S and P and the use of a subject clitic covering S and A.<sup>1</sup>

- (5) **Ngatyu ka-rna pula-mi**  
I AUX -1SG shout- NONPAST  
'I am shouting.'

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<sup>1</sup> Examples based on Hale 1968.

- (6) **Ngatyulu-rlu ka-rna kurdu nyanyi**  
 I-ERG AUX -1SG child see- NONPAST  
 ‘I see a child.’

Hale has argued that despite the case marking, Warlpiri identifies A with S consistently in its syntax. The point is illustrated (7) and (8). In (7) the S of the non-finite verb **parnka** ‘to run’ is left unexpressed and is interpreted as coreferential with **kurdu** ‘child’, the object of the main clause. In (8) the A of the non-finite verb **kati-** ‘to tread on’ is left unexpressed and interpreted as coreferential with **kurdu** ‘child’. Clearly S and A are treated alike in that they remain unexpressed with the non-finite verb of the complement clause. This construction cannot be used with a covert P; for instance, it could not be used for *A man saw a child abducted by a social worker* (Hale 1968:3).

- (7) **Ngarrka-ngu kurdu nyangu | | parnka-n<sup>y</sup>ṯ<sup>y</sup>a-kurra**  
 man-ERG child saw |S| run-NM-COMP  
 ‘A man saw a child run.’

- (8) **Ngarrka-ngu kurdu nyangu | | warna kati-rnin<sup>y</sup>ṯ<sup>y</sup>a-kurra**  
 man-ERG child saw |A| snake tread-NM-COMP  
 ‘A man saw a child step on a snake.’

However, a language need not show an alignment of A with S in its syntax. It is possible to show an alignment of P with S. Languages with such an alignment are said to be syntactically ergative or to exhibit syntactic ergativity. The best known example is another Australian language Dyirbal (Dixon 1972). Syntactic ergativity is also found in Kalkatungu (Blake 1979). The following examples illustrate an intransitive clause (9), a transitive clause (10) and a derived intransitive (11).

- (9) **Thuarr ntuu-pia ngamputhati-nha**  
 snake hole-LOC disappear-LOC  
 ‘The snake disappeared in a hole.’

- (10) **Thuku-yu thuarr ari-mi**  
 dog-ERG snake eat-FUT  
 ‘The dog will eat the snake.’

- (11) **Thuku thuarr-ku ari-li-nytyangu**  
 dog snake-DAT eat-AP-HABIT  
 ‘The dog eats snakes.’

In the derived intransitive the agent is encoded as S in the nominative and the patient in the dative. The verb bears a derivational marker glossed here as A(NTI)Passive of which more below.

Now consider the non-finite clauses in the following set of examples. As with the Warlpiri examples in (7) and (8) it is assumed that an argument of the subordinate verb has been suppressed under identity with an argument of the governing verb. In (12) S is covert. In (13) P is covert. In (14) where the A of the transitive verb is co-referent with **thuarr** ‘snake’ in the higher clause, the detransitivised alternative is used to enable the A of the transitive to be expressed as the S of the derived intransitive **arili**.

- (12) **Martu-yu nanya thuarr | | ngamputhati-nyin**  
 mother-ERG saw snake |S| disappear-PART  
 ‘Mother saw a snake disappearing.’

(13) **Martu-yu nanya thuarr | | thuku-yu ari-nyin**  
 mother-erg saw snake |P| dog-ERG eat-PART  
 ‘Mother saw a snake being eaten by a dog.’

(14) **Martu-yu nanya thuarr | | pukutyurr-ku ari-li-nyin**  
 mother-erg saw snake |S| mouse-DAT eat-AP-PART  
 ‘Mother saw a snake eating a mouse.’

The principle here is that only S and P can be systematically suppressed with a non-finite verb. Where A would be the co-referent argument, a detransitived clause is used to convert A to S. This is ergative syntax in that S and P are treated alike. In an accusative language like English it is the subject (S and A) that is suppressed with a finite verb, but in a syntactically ergative language it is S and P, sometimes referred to as the absolutive relation, that is systematically suppressed.

These notions of accusative and ergative are simple enough, but they have proved difficult to apply to western Malayo-Polynesian languages, witness the ongoing debate about whether Tagalog is accusative, ergative or neither. Basically the problem revolves around the existence of two two-place constructions, one in which the agent has subject properties and one in which the patient has subject properties. If one or other of these constructions is taken to be a two-place intransitive, the other one emerges as the sole transitive Construction and the one that should be compared with one-place intransitives to determine whether the language is accusative or ergative. The difficulty arises because there appears to be more than one transitive construction.

Consider the following Tagalog sentences. In (15) there is a one-place predicate and the sole argument (S) is marked by the determiner **ang**. In (16) and (17) we have a two-place predicate **basa** ‘to read’. In (16) the patient is marked by **ang** and in (17) the agent is marked by **ang**. The construction in (16) is often referred to as a patient-focus construction and the construction in (17) as an agent-focus construction. It would be more accurate to talk about patient-subject and agent-subject, since **ang**-marked phrases have a range of subject properties.

(15) **Interesante ang libro**  
 interesting book  
 ‘The book is interesting.’

(16) **Binasa ng propesor ang libro**  
 perf-PF-read professor book  
 ‘A/the professor read the book.’

(17) **Bumasa ng libro ang propesor**  
 perf-AF-read book professor  
 ‘The professor read a/the book.’

A speaker of a European language faced with a set of constructions like these is likely to see the one in which the patient has subject properties as a passive. A number of earlier analyses of Tagalog adopt that view including Bloomfield 1917 and F. Blake 1925 as well as some more recent ones including Wolfenden 1961 and Llamzon 1968. An analogous interpretation of Cebuano was advanced by Bell within the framework of Relational Grammar (Bell 1983). Under this view the construction in which the agent is marked by **ang** is an active transitive construction. Implicit in such an analysis is the view that Tagalog is an accusative language.

More recently an alternative analysis has emerged which takes the patient-as-subject construction to be transitive and the agent-as-subject construction to be a derived intransitive. Under this view Tagalog is an ergative language since the patient of a transitive verb is treated the same as the sole argument of a one-place predicate. The ergative interpretation is to be found in Cena (1979), Payne (1982), de Guzman (1983, 1986), Cooreman et al. (1984), Starosta (1986, 1988) and B. Blake (1988).

Under a third view Tagalog is neither accusative nor ergative. This is the position adopted by Schachter in his widely quoted 1976 paper and recently espoused by Foley 1991. Foley's argument against the accusative analysis runs along the following lines. The accusative analysis involves taking the agent focus (as in (17)) to be the unmarked focus and the patient focus (as in (16)) to be a passive. The patient focus cannot be a passive since the agent is still an argument. The agent in a patient focus construction can control a reflexive, for instance, or be the addressee of an imperative.

However, we need to explore the possibility that the language could still be accusative on the grounds that the agent-focus is the unmarked choice. It would mean extending the notion of accusative system somewhat. As noted above, an accusative system is one in which the A of a transitive verb is treated like the S of an intransitive predicate. Now if we accept that the agent in the patient focus construction is not an adjunct but a complement, this could mean that the patient focus construction is transitive and that there are two transitive constructions. I do not want to argue for the accusative analysis since there is no reason to take the agent focus to be unmarked, but the question remains of whether a language can be characterised as accusative, or indeed ergative, if there is more than one transitive construction each with a different argument rated like the S of an intransitive construction.

Foley's argument against the ergative analysis is analogous. According to him it involves taking the patient focus to be unmarked and treating the agent focus as an antipassive. Foley does not define antipassive, but it is clear that he takes it to be a derived construction in which the patient is removed from the argument structure. He points out that the patient in the agent focus construction remains an argument, therefore the agent focus is not an antipassive, therefore the ergative analysis cannot be sustained. However, the agent focus could be a derived intransitive construction where the patient remains an argument or we could have a derived transitive construction and seek to argue that the language is ergative on the grounds that the patient focus is the unmarked transitive construction, the one that should be compared with the intransitive construction in determining the core type of the language.

The term 'antipassive' was originally coined by Silverstein for a derived intransitive construction in an ergative language. Since Silverstein took it to be the analogue of the passive construction, he probably thought of it as involving the removal of the patient from the argument structure; certainly he allows for the patient to be absent entirely. The term antipassive has been taken up in the literature without much consideration of the fate of the demoted patient. In Relational Grammar a distinction is made between direct-to-indirect object retreat and antipassive. In the former a direct object is demoted to indirect object as in the Kalkatungu example of a detransitivised construction given as (11) above.<sup>2</sup> In the RG antipassive the demoted patient becomes a direct object *chômeur*, which means that the patient no longer has the grammatical properties of a direct object or an indirect object. Both direct-to-indirect object retreat and antipassive apply to languages generally, not just ergative languages. The niceties of Relational Grammar need not concern us here, but it is important

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<sup>2</sup> The ascription of the label dative and claim that it marks an indirect object can be justified on a number of grounds.

to recognise the possibility of a derived intransitive construction where the patient remains a complement, whether we call that complement indirect object or not.

With the patient focus construction **it** is relatively easy, as Foley points out, to show that the agent is an argument, but with the agent focus construction it is not easy to find evidence for the status of the patient. Foley tries to show that **it** is implausible to take the patient to be removed from the argument structure by drawing on data from Sama. In this language there is an unmarked patient focus (perhaps better non-agent focus) and an actor focus marked by a nasal prefix (data from Walton 1983).

(18) **B'ili ku taumpa ma si Andi**  
 PF.buy I shoe(s) OBL Andy  
 'I bought shoes for Andy'

(19) **M-b'ili aku taumpa ma si Andi**  
 AF-buy I shoe(s) OBL Andy  
 'I bought some shoes for Andy'

As with most other western Malayo-Polynesian languages there are verb derivations available to allow certain roles to be introduced into the argument structure. In (20) the beneficiary, which was expressed in a prepositional phrase in (18) above, is expressed as a patient. This is an example of what is called the advancement of benefactive to direct object in Relational Grammar. The valency increase is marked on the verb by the suffix **-an**, glossed as AD(vancement).

(20) **B'ili-an ku si Andi taumpa**  
 PF.buy- AD I Andy shoe(s)  
 'I bought Andy some shoes.'

In Sama, but not in Tagalog, this advancement of beneficiary to direct object can co-occur with agent focus as in (21),

(21) **M-b'ili-an aku si Andi taumpa**  
 AF-buy- AD I Andy shoe(s)  
 'I bought Andy some shoes.'

Foley claims that (21) cannot be accounted for under the ergative analysis since to assign an antipassive interpretation would mean taking the beneficiary to be removed from the argument structure when there is a clear process of oblique to core promotion' (1991:15). What Foley neglects is the possibility of detransitivisation without removing arguments from the valency of the verb.

In Kalkatungu, for instance, it is not uncommon to antipassivise clauses that involve an advancement. The following examples illustrate a one-place intransitive verb (22a), a derived transitive where **-nti** marks the addition of an argument to the valency (22b), and the antipassive version of the transitive clause (22c).

- (22) a. **Pirla-pirla wani**  
 child play  
 'The child is playing.'
- b. **Pirla-pirla-thu thuku wani-nti**  
 child-ERG dog play-AD  
 'The child is playing with the dog.'
- c. **Pirla-pirla thuku-u wani-nti-yi**  
 child dog-DAT play-AD-AP  
 'The child is playing with the dog.'

Returning to Tagalog we could explore the possibility that the agent focus is a derived intransitive where the patient remains an argument. In this construction the patient is marked by **ng** (17) which also marks the agent in the patient-focus construction (16) as well as marking the possessor: **ang anihan ng mga Pilipino** ‘the harvests of the Filipinos’. This marking does not give a clear indication of intransitivity since **ng** is not associated with the marking of adjuncts. There is in fact some suggestion of transitivity in that agent-focus constructions round to patient-focus constructions just as transitive active constructions round to passives.

TABLE 1: *sulat* ‘to write’

	future	perfective	imperfective
Actor focus	<i>susulat</i>	<i>aumulat</i>	<i>sumusulat</i>
Patient focus	<i>susulatin</i>	<i>sinulat</i>	<i>sinusulat</i>
Benefactive focus	<i>isulat</i>	<i>isinulat</i>	<i>isinusulat</i>
Locative focus	<i>susulatin</i>	<i>sinulatin</i>	<i>sinusulatin</i>

Another approach mentioned above is to accept that there are two transitive constructions and argue that one is the unmarked choice. In terms of discourse frequency the patient focus is clearly the unmarked choice providing the patient is specific. The patient focus is also morphologically unmarked at least in the non-future tense/aspects. Consider the forms of **sulat** ‘to write’ in Table 1. There are three tense/aspects perfective, imperfective and future/contemplated. In the non-future there is no focus marking for patient focus. There is an infix **-in-**, but it is common to all non-agent focuses. In the future it is the agent focus that is unmarked. One could argue that the future aspect is marked and that the patient focus is unmarked in the unmarked aspects. Experience suggests that some linguists would regard this argument as tenuous, but the fact remains that the patient focus is the unmarked choice in discourse. One could argue that Tagalog is ergative in that though there is more than one transitive construction, the patient focus is unmarked and a comparison of the patient focus and intransitive constructions reveals an alignment of P with S.

With these notions of ‘accusative language’ and ergative language’ in mind and with the Tagalog controversy as background, we turn now to consider the basic syntactic typology of two other Austronesian languages Manggarai and Balinese. Manggarai is spoken in western Flores and is classified as central- eastern Malayo-Polynesian in Ruhlen 1987. The data described here is from the Kempo sub-dialect and appears in Semiun 1993. Balinese is a western Malayo-Polynesian language. The data is from Artawa 1992 augmented by personal communication.

Manggarai is an analytic language and it has practically none of the derivational morphology characteristic of western Malayo-Polynesian languages. The following sentences illustrate a typical one-place verb and a typical two- place verb. With the two-place verb there are alternative ways of expressing the same propositional content: an ‘active’ as in (24) and a passive-like construction as in (25).

- (23) **Ali selondeng**  
 ‘Ali dances’

- (24) **Ali inung te**  
 Ali drink tea  
 'Ali drinks tea.'
- (25) **Te inung le Ali**  
 tea drink by Ali  
 'The tea is drunk by Au.'

The **le-** construction looks like a passive, but there are several features that fail to confirm this:

- (a) The first and most important fact is that the prepositional phrase expressing the agent is obligatory. The agent is a complement not an adjunct. The preposition **le** in other contexts is local and is glossed as *by* (Compare English *by* which can be local as in *He stood by the window*, or grammatical as in *He was hit by a stone*).
- (b) The construction with **le** is not morphologically marked with respect to the agent-verb-patient construction, illustrated in (24), at least the verb is not marked. One could argue that the construction is marginally marked in that it contains a preposition whereas the agent-verb-patient construction contains no preposition.
- (c) Pronouns occur regularly in **le**-phrases, whereas they are not common in the agent phrases of passives.
- (d) The **le**-construction has high frequency in discourse.

All of these characteristics are compatible with the **le**-construction being an ergative construction. However, we cannot declare that Manggarai is an ergative language unless we can establish that the **le**-construction is the only transitive construction or at least the unmarked choice among competing transitive constructions.

Besides the **le**-construction there is also an analogous construction with the preposition **de** marking the agent. **De** is otherwise a genitive marking preposition. The **de**-construction is used to describe a situation or state that has come about via some agent. **It** is not used of punctiliar actions.

- (21) **Gambar ho'o gambar de Rafael**  
 painting this paint of Rafael  
 'This painting was painted by Rafael.'

Where there is reference to a resultant state, one can have a construction consisting of a patient subject and a verb as in the following.

- (22) **Jendela bike**  
 window break  
 'The window is broken.'
- (23) **Taung=si nakeng so'o**  
 finish=3PL fish this  
 The fish is all gone/eaten.

However, the statement that **le** is obligatory still remains true. These are not **le-** constructions minus the **le**-phrase as can be seen from the fact that there is a difference between the two constructions.

Although the constructions with **le** appear to be ergative rather than passive the language is not ambiguously ergative unless we can dismiss the agent-verb-patient-patient construction as intransitive. It is difficult to find any basis for doing so. The agent-verb-patient construction is not marked with respect to the **le**-construction; it is not marked in terms of syntactic or discourse constraints, it seems to be the unmarked way of expressing most two-place predicates including activity verbs involving an effect on a patient, the verbs that are central to the class of transitive verbs.

Since, as we have demonstrated, the **le**-construction is ergative, it is probably to be taken as transitive; so we are faced with the typologically unusual situation of a language with two transitive constructions.

Even with two transitive constructions we could still characterise the language as ergative or accusative if we could find reasons to take one of the two constructions to be unmarked. The agent-verb-patient construction is marginally unmarked with respect to the **le**-construction in that it lacks a preposition and it is probably the unmarked choice in discourse, though this is an educated guess at this stage rather than an observation based on a large corpus of data. This throws the balance in favour of an accusative interpretation.

There are clitic pronouns in the language, a subject set, a possessor set and another set that can be used for both subject and object. Since there is a subject (S + A) set and no absolutive (S + P) set, this further suggests an accusative system.

If we examine the syntax we find evidence that the pre-verbal noun phrase subject, though that does nothing to resolve the question of whether the language is accusative or ergative. Consider relative clauses, for instance. In (24) the agent of a transitive verb is relativised using the agent-verb-patient construction and in (25) the patient is relativised using the patient-verb-**le**-agent construction.

(24) **Aku ita ata-rona ca cumang hemi**  
 I see person-male REL meet 2PL  
 'I saw a man who met you.'

(25) **Aku ita ata-rona ca deko le polisi**  
**I see person-male REL catch BY police**  
 I saw a man whom the police caught.'

Manggarai, like many Austronesian languages, allows only the subject to be relativised via its basic relativisation strategy, and chooses the agent-subject or patient-subject construction according to whichever is to be relativised.

There is, however, one area of the grammar where there is clear accusative alignment. Consider the following complements to **ita** to see. Note that S and A are represented as the possessor in a nominalised construction. However, it is not possible to represent the P of a predicate as a possessor. Instead a different construction must be used (28).

(26) **Ita le John lako-e g-aku**  
 see by John walk-NOM POSS-1<sup>ST</sup>  
 'John saw me walking.'

(27) **Ita le John tengo acu-e g-aku**  
 see by John hit dog-NOM POSS-1<sup>ST</sup>  
 'John saw me: hitting the dog.'

(28) **Ita le John aku tengo le polisi**  
 see by John I hit by police  
 'John saw me being hit by the police.'

Now to Balinese. Consider first of all (29) with a one-place verb and (30) with a two-place verb.

(29) **Nyoman ulung**  
 Nyoman fall  
 'Nyoman fell.'

(30) **Nyoman lempag tiang**  
 Nyoman hit I  
 'I hit Nyomari.'

Somewhat surprisingly (30) is a patient-verb-agent sequence rather than agent-verb-patient. There is a way to encode the agent as the pre-verbal noun phrase, but that involves marking the verb with a nasal prefix. This prefix surfaces as **m-**, **n-**, **ny-**, and **ng-**. Since it is **ng-** before vowels one could take it to be basically **ng-** which assimilates to **m-** with labials, **n-** with dentals and **ny-** with s and the palatals.

(31) **Tiang nglempag Nyoman**  
 I N-hit Nyoman  
 'I hit Nyoman.'

Here there is a clear difference in morphological markedness between the two two-place constructions. On this basis one would have to take (30) to represent the construction that should be compared with the one-place construction. This would mean that Balinese is an analytic ergative language, since the P of a transitive clause is treated the same way as the S of an intransitive clause in terms of position or configuration.

(32) S V  
 P V A

This analysis would be unimpeachable if we could dismiss the agent-verb-patient construction (as in (31)) as intransitive. Note I use the designation agent-verb-patient rather than **AVP** since the latter assumes a transitive construction. However, I see no reason to take the agent-verb-patient construction to be intransitive. Of course it is difficult to find evidence. Consider what the difference between a transitive and a two-place intransitive is in a language like Latin, a language where the terms were originally defined. With the following examples (33) is transitive and (34) a two-place intransitive,

(33) Brutus **Caesarem interfecit**  
 Brutus Caesar.ACC kill-PAST  
 Brutus killed Caesar.'

(34) Brutus Caesari **non pepercit**  
 Brutus Caesar.DAT not spare- PAST  
 Brutus did not spare Caesar.'

The construction illustrated in (33) is said to have a direct object in the accusative case, and to have a corresponding passive. The construction illustrated in (34) is said to have an indirect object in the dative case, and not to have a corresponding passive, at least not a passive in which the indirect object becomes the subject. How then do we apply the labels 'transitive' and 'intransitive' in another language? How do we identify an accusative or a direct object? Ultimately the basis must be semantic. The verbs that are classed as transitive in Latin encode verbs that are semantically transitive, verbs of activity involving an effect on a patient. The verbs that are classed as two-place intransitives are not such verbs. They cover meanings such as 'help', 'favour' and 'obey', though that is not to say that all transitive verbs encode activities. **Amare** 'love' is a well known example of a transitive verb expressing an

emotion. When we consider verbs in other languages we typically find a large class verbs that includes the activity verbs and one or more smaller classes. We can identify the larger class that includes the activity verbs as transitive and the other class or classes as intransitive. This method works very well for most languages, indeed it works well for Balinese in distinguishing a large class of verbs including **lempag** ‘to hit’ and a smaller class with prepositional complements including **tresna** ‘to love’.

35) **Tiang tresna teken Nyoman**  
 I love to Nyoman  
 ‘I love Nyoman.’

But how does this help with the problem of deciding whether the nasal construction is intransitive? If a verb like **nglempag** in (31) were a derived intransitive, we might expect it to have a prepositional complement. Since it does not have such a complement, then there is no reason to take it to be other than transitive. As with Manggarai we appear to have two transitive constructions.

Now if we are to take Balinese to be ergative then it must be on the grounds that **it** is the unmarked transitive construction that shows an alignment of P with S. The traditional definition of ergativity is based on there being only a single transitive construction. Clearly the patient-verb-object construction is morphologically unmarked (in fact **it** is convenient to refer to it as the zero construction as opposed to the nasal construction), but is it the basic transitive construction in the language? A survey of discourse reveals that it has the highest text frequency. While it is not clear yet exactly what determines the choice between the two constructions in independent clauses (Artawa, personal communication), it is clear that discourse does not provide an argument against taking the zero construction to be basic.

Consider again example (30) with a first person agent. We can substitute a second person agent (36) or a kinship term referring to the speaker or addressee (37) or a third person non-specific (38) or generic (39).

(36) **Nyoman lempag cai** (mother)  
 (37) " " **meme** (mother)  
 (38) " " **anak buduh** (a madman)  
 (39) " " **polisi** (the police)

Nyoman was hit by you/mother/a madman/the police.

With a third person specific agent, the agent is represented by a third person enclitic with the option of a prepositional adjunct.

(40) **Nyoman lempag=a**  
 Nyoman hit=3SG  
 ‘S/he hit Nyoman.’

(41) **Nyoman lempag=a teken dokter-e ento**  
 Nyoman hit=3SG by doctor-DEF that  
 ‘Nyoman was hit by that doctor.’

The construction exemplified in (41) looks like a passive but **=a** is clearly a third person enclitic and not a passive marker. It cannot be accompanied by a **teken** phrase referring to first or second person. It is worth emphasising that this construction is not a passive; that it is not a derived intransitive, since to the casual observer it looks like a passive, which could lead to a misinterpretation of the grammar.

Another point that might be thought to throw doubt on the ergative analysis is the distribution of the nasal prefix. So far it has been presented as a prefix that is used with transitive verbs to mark the agent subject construction. It is also used with some intransitives. We can consider that one-place verbs have either an agent subject or a patient subject. Verbs like **ulung** ‘fall’, illustrated in (29), can be used in a sentence without any prefix. However, those in what I am calling the agent group require the nasal prefix. Thus **tegak** ‘sit’ be used in a sentence unless it is prefixed by a nasal.

- (42) **Tiang negak di korsi-ne (ng + t = n)**  
 I N -sit LOC chair-DEF  
 ‘I sit on the chair.’

It would appear that with intransitive verbs as well as with transitive verbs the patient is the unmarked choice for subject. Balinese is ergative in the sense that the patient rather than the agent is the unmarked choice for subject, in particular the patient is the unmarked choice for subject with verbs like **lempag** ‘hit’ that have both an agent and a patient in their valency.

### Conclusion

It appears to be true of a number of western Malayo-Polynesian languages that for verbs with both an agent and a patient in the valency there are alternative transitive constructions, one with the agent as subject, or ‘focus’ as it is called in Philippines linguistics, the other with the patient as subject or ‘focus. Since there are two transitive constructions it is not possible for these languages to be classified as accusative or ergative. However, if one can determine that one of the transitive constructions is unmarked with respect to the other, one could take this unmarked construction to be the basis of comparison with intransitive constructions and find an accusative or ergative system under an extended definition along the lines: a language is accusative/ergative if the A/P of the unmarked transitive construction is treated the same way as the S of an intransitive predicate. Under this approach Tagalog is ergative since the patient focus is clearly the unmarked choice in discourse and is arguably unmarked in terms of morphological marking. Manggarai on the other hand would appear to be accusative, since the agent-subject construction is marginally unmarked; there are clitics for subject, and nominalisation seems to treat A and S alike. In Balinese the patient-subject construction is clearly unmarked morphologically so on this basis the language would appear to be ergative.

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