

Marked Unergatives in Samoan Nominalizations

Jens Hopperdietzel and Artemis Alexiadou

1. Introduction

Samoan (Polynesian, Oceanic, Austronesian) *zero* nominalizations exhibit an exceptional tripartite/inactive case alignment which distinctly marks unaccusative, unergative and transitive subjects. While unaccusative subjects are marked by inalienable possessive *o* case (1a), unergative subjects are marked by alienable possessive *a* case (1b). Transitive subjects however maintain their ergative case marking with objects marked by inalienable possessive *o* case (1c) (Mosel 1992).

- (1) a. ‘*o le pa’ū o le teine* UNACCUSATIVE
PRES ART fall POSS.INAL ART girl
‘the falling of the girl’
- b. ‘*o le pese a le teine* UNERGATIVE
PRES ART sing POSS.INAL ART girl
‘the singing of the girl’
- c. ‘*o le solo(=ina) e le teine o le laulau* TRANSITIVE
PRES ART wipe-RSMP ERG ART girl POSS.INAL ART table
‘the wiping of the table by the girl’

Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou (forthcoming) argue that tripartite/inactive case alignment follows from the prepositional nature of ergative subjects in Samoan (cf. Polinsky 2016). As such, transitive PP-subjects but not unergative DP-subjects obey the unaccusativity requirement on nominalizations (Imanishi 2020, Alexiadou 2001). Thus, only unergative subjects must be merged in the nominal domain.

In this paper, we present challenging data from preverbal subject clitics in Samoan *zero* nominalizations, which differ from their DP counterparts in showing a marked unergative alignment, as ergative case on transitive subject clitics (SCLs) is replaced by inalienable *o* case (2c). Therefore, only unergative SCLs are distinctly marked by alienable *a* case (2b) (Mosel 1992).

- (2) a. ‘*o l=o=na pa’ū* UNACCUSATIVE
PRES ART=POSS.INAL=3SG.CL fall
‘his/her/its falling’
- b. ‘*o l=a=na pese* UNERGATIVE
PRES ART=POSS.AL=3SG.CL sing
‘his/her/its singing’
- c. ‘*o l=o=na solo=ina o le laulau* TRANSITIVE
PRES ART=POSS.INAL=3SG.CL wipe=RSMP POSS.INAL ART table
‘his/her/its wiping of the table’

* Jens Hopperdietzel, The University of Manchester, jens.hopperdietzel@manchester.ac.uk. Artemis Alexiadou, Humboldt-University of Berlin & Leibniz-Centre General Linguistics-ZAS, artemis.alexiadou@hu-berlin.de. We would like to thank Manumaua Luafata Simanu-Klutz for additional judgements and discussion. Many thanks also to Luke Adamson, Emily Hanink, Milena Šereikaitė, Ryan Smith, and Coppe van Urk as well as the audiences of WCCFL40 and NELS52 for their valuable comments. This work was funded by ERC-2017-COG769192 to Andrew Koontz-Garboden for Jens Hopperdietzel and DFG AL554/8-1 to Artemis Alexiadou. The glossing follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules; except: AL = alienable, INAL = inalienable, RSMP = resumptive, PRES = presentative preposition.

Based on the obligatory presence of the prepositional resumptive pronoun =*ina* in transitive contexts, we argue that transitive and intransitive subject clitics differ in their syntactic status, which follows from the prepositional nature of transitive subjects in Samoan (see Cuervo 2003, Bleam 2000 on mixed approaches to clitic doubling): While intransitive subject clitics are base-generated in their original argument position within the verbal domain, from which they subsequently move into a preverbal position (cf. Uriagereka 1995, Kayne 1975), transitive subject clitics, as D-elements, must be merged outside of the verbal domain and are resumed by prepositional =*ina* in Spec, VoiceP (cf. Sportiche 1996, Borer 1984). In *zero* nominalizations, transitive subject clitics therefore merge directly to D where they receive default inalienable *o* case (cf. Baker 2015), and thus obey the unaccusativity requirement on nominalizations. Unergative subject clitics instead violate the unaccusativity requirement and must be exceptionally introduced in the nominal domain, in Spec PossP, where they receive inherent alienable *a* case. Consequently, the marked unergative alignment of subject clitics in *zero* nominalizations supports both a prepositional analysis of syntactic ergativity and the unaccusativity requirement on nominalizations.

This paper is structured as follows: In section 2, we provide a brief overview of Samoan case alignment in the nominal and verbal domain, and sketch out the analysis of tripartite/inactive case proposed by Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou (forthcoming). In section 3, we turn to the case alignment of clitic pronouns in verbal and nominal(ized) environments. In section 4, we present a non-uniform analysis of subject clitics that we demonstrate accounts naturally for the marked unergative pattern in *zero* nominalizations. Section 5 concludes.

2. Samoan case

In this section, we briefly summarize the ergative/absolutive and the inalienable/alienable case alignment in the verbal and nominal domain, respectively, sketching out a morphosyntactic account. We then demonstrate how both case systems interact in mixed projections like deverbal *zero* nominalizations that exhibit tripartite/inactive case alignment in which all three types of subjects are distinctly marked.

2.1. Verbal domain: Prepositional ergative case

In the verbal domain, Samoan exhibits an ergative/absolutive pattern with intransitive subjects being marked by absolutive case, which is realized by a high tone on the preceding syllable (3a/b) (not reflected by the orthography; Yu 2021). Transitive subjects are instead marked by ergative *e* case (3c) (Tollan 2018, Collins 2017, Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992).

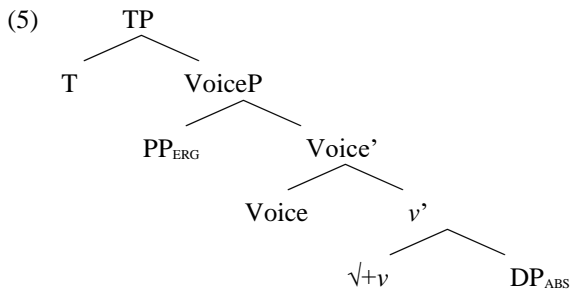
- | | | |
|--------|---|--------------|
| (3) a. | <i>Sā pa'ū le teine</i>
PST fall=ABS ART girl
'The girl fell.' | UNACCUSATIVE |
| b. | <i>Sā pese le teine</i>
PST sing=ABS ART girl
'The girl sang.' | UNERGATIVE |
| c. | <i>Sā solo e le teine le laulau</i>
PST wipe ERG ART girl=ABS ART table
'The girl wiped the table.' | TRANSITIVE |

Samoan shows properties of syntactic ergativity in that movement of ergative subjects is restricted but that of absolutive subjects is not (cf. Muāgututi'a 2018, Cook 1994, Mosel 1985): For example, while absolutive subjects undergo A'-movement to a clause-initial position (4a), transitive subjects are base-generated in the dislocated position and require the prepositional resumptive pronoun =*ina* in the post-

verbal subject position (4b). Crucially, dislocated transitive subjects are not marked for ergative case but appear in the unmarked absolutive form.

- (4) a. 'o le laulau s̄a solo e le teine ABSOLUTIVE MOVEMENT
 TOP ART table PST wipe ERG ART girl
 'It is the table that the girl wiped.'
- b. 'o (*e) le teine s̄a solo*(=ina) le laulau *ERGATIVE MOVEMENT
 TOP ERG ART girl PST wipe=RSMP=ABS ART girl
 'It is the girl that wiped the table.'

Adopting a prepositional approach to syntactic ergativity in Samoan (Hopperdietzel 2020, cf. Polinsky 2016), we take ergative case to be inherently assigned by a preposition (*pace* Tollan 2018), whereas absolutive case functions as the default case in the verbal TP-domain (cf. Collins 2014).



Transitive ergative PP-subjects therefore not only differ from intransitive absolutive DP subjects and objects in their syntactic type but also in their morphological case (prepositional/inherent vs. default).

2.2. Nominal domain: Split-possessive marking

In the nominal domain, Samoan distinguishes between two semantic types of possessors, as is typical for Polynesian languages (cf. Clark 2000): While alienable possessors are marked by possessive *a* case (6a), inalienable possessors are marked by possessive *o* case (6b) (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992).

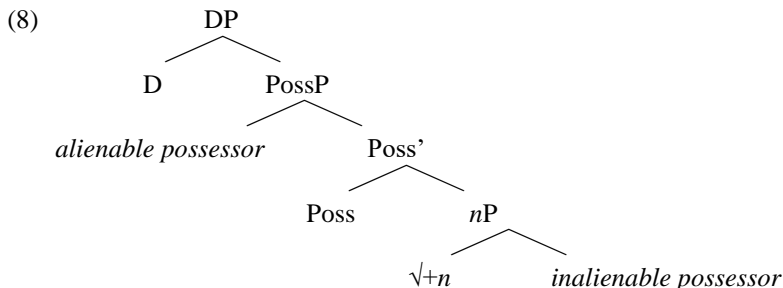
- (6) a. 'o le naifi a le teine ALIENABLE
 PRES ART knife POSS.AL ART girl
 'the knife of the girl'
- b. 'o le ulu o le teine INALIENABLE
 PRES ART head POSS.INAL ART girl
 'the head of the girl'

As illustrated below, alienable and inalienable-marked arguments can co-occur, indicating that the two possessive cases are not in complementary distribution.

- (7) 'o l=a=na taleni o le musika
 PRES ART=POSS.AL=3SG.CL talent POSS.INAL ART music
 'his/her/its musical talent'

Adopting a structural account of (in)alienability (Myler 2016, Alexiadou 2003), we assume that alienable and inalienable possessors occupy distinct syntactic positions: Alienable possessors are introduced by an additional functional projection Poss. In Samoan, Poss not only thematically licenses the argument in its specifier but also assigns inherent (alienable) possessive *a* case (cf. Tyler 2021). Inalienable possessors are instead merged as complements of *n*, receiving (inalienable) possessive *o* case, the default case of the nominal domain in Samoan (cf. Baker 2015). The status of inalienable possessive *o* case as a default

is indicated by the availability of double inalienable, but not double alienable case in the context of possessive clitics (see example (3c) above). Unlike languages like English, Samoan therefore exhibits two possessive cases whose distribution is sensitive to the syntactic position of the possessor arguments.



2.3. Zero nominalizations: Tripartite/inactive alignment

In mixed projections like deverbal nominalizations, the verbal and nominal alignment interacts in such a way that all three types of subjects are distinctly marked (Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou forthcoming, Collins 2014, Mosel 1992, Chung 1973). While unaccusative subjects pattern with objects showing inalienable possessive *o* case (9a), unergative subjects are marked by alienable possessive *a* case (9b). Transitive subjects instead do not take a possessive case but maintain their ergative case marking (9c).

- (9) a. 'o le pa'ū o le teine UNACCUSATIVE
 PRES ART fall POSS.INAL ART girl
 'the falling of the girl'
- b. 'o le pese a le teine UNERGATIVE
 PRES ART sing POSS.INAL ART girl
 'the singing of the girl'
- c. 'o le solo(=ina) e le teine o le laulau TRANSITIVE
 PRES ART wipe-RSMP ERG ART girl POSS.INAL ART table
 'the wiping of the table by the girl'

In Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou (forthcoming), we have shown that Samoan *zero* nominalizations qualify as *n*-based nominalizations that embed a VoiceP-complement (also Collins 2014). As such, *zero*-nominalizations are subject to the unaccusativity restriction on nominalizations (10) which requires Voice under *n* to not introduce an external argument DP (Imanishi 2020, Bruening 2013, Alexiadou 2001).

(10) **THE UNACCUSATIVITY RESTRICTION ON NOMINALIZATION** (Imanishi 2020: 175)

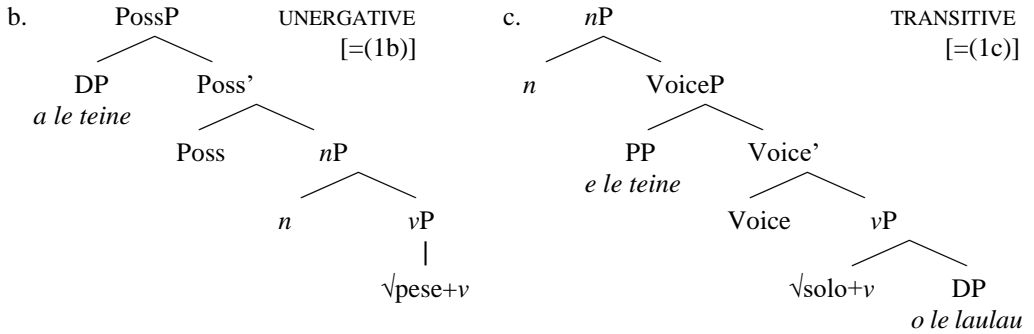
Nominalized verbs must lack a syntactically projected external argument.

As a result, ergative PP-subjects, which resemble passive *by*-phrases in languages like English, but not unergative DP-subjects survive the unaccusativity restriction (11c). The latter must instead be base-generated in the nominal domain, in Spec, PossP, where they receive alienable *a* case (11b). Unaccusative subjects, and objects, merge in their original argument position and receive inalienable *o* case, the nominal default case, in the absence of T (11a/c) (Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou forthcoming, cf. Baker 2015).

- (11) a. UNACCUSATIVE
 [= (1a)]
-
- ```

graph TD
 nP --> n
 nP --> vP
 n --- n_label[n]
 vP --> sqrt_pa_u_plus_v[√pa'ū+v]
 vP --> DP
 DP --- DP_label[o le teine]

```



## 2.4. Summary

To summarize, the tripartite/inactive case alignment of Samoan nominalizations follows from language specific properties, such as split-possessive marking and syntactic ergativity, in combination with the unaccusativity restrictions on nominalizations. In the following, we present novel data from subject clitics which exhibit a marked unergative alignment that supports our analysis.

## 3. Clitic pronouns

In addition to independent pronouns that show the syntactic properties of common nouns, Samoan exhibits a set of clitic pronouns that exceptionally appear in pre-nuclear, i.e. prenominal and preverbal, position. Aside from their syntactic position, subject clitics however also differ from independent pronouns in their case alignment in transitive contexts.

### 3.1. Subject clitics

In the verbal domain, Samoan clitic pronouns appear in between the TMA marker and the verbal root, and realize the number of subject but not the object argument (Cook 1994, Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992). While unaccusative and unergative subject clitics maintain their absolutive case marking in preverbal position (12a/b),<sup>1</sup> transitive subject clitic drop their ergative case marking and are marked by absolutive case instead (12c) (cf. Yu 2021 for discussion). In addition, the resumptive pronoun =*ina* attaches to the verb.<sup>2</sup>

- (12) a. *Sā ia pa'ū.* UNACCUSATIVE  
 PST=ABS 3SG.CL fall  
 'He/she/it fell.'
- b. *Sā ia pese.* UNERGATIVE  
 PST=ABS 3SG.CL sing  
 'He/she/it sang.'
- c. *Sā ia solo=ina le laulau* TRANSITIVE  
 PST=ABS 3SG.CL wipe=RSMP=ABS ART table  
 'He/she/it wiped the table.'

The ergative/absolutive case alignment is therefore neutralized, as all three types of subject clitics are marked by absolutive case, resulting in a double absolutive alignment in transitive contexts.

<sup>1</sup> Some speakers reject third person singular subject clitics in intransitive contexts (Tollan 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Mosel (1985) notes that in clitic contexts, resumptive =*ina* is (overtly) realized in only 61,6% of the cases. However, Cook (1978) shows that the distribution of =*ina* is driven by discourse prominence of its antecedent. As subject clitics are generally low in focus (Cook 1994), the overt realization of =*ina* may follow therefore from more general properties of argument realization in a *pro*-drop language like Samoan (cf. Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992).

### 3.2. Possessive clitics

In the nominal domain, clitic pronouns exhibit the same case split as common nouns and regular pronouns in that alienable possessors are marked by *a* case (13a) and inalienable possessors are marked *o* case (13b). However, like subject clitics in the verbal domain, possessive clitics appear in prenominal position where they cliticize to their respective case marker and article (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992).<sup>3</sup>

- (13) a. ‘*o* *l=a=na* *naifi* ALIENABLE  
 PRES ART=POSS.AL=3SG.CL knife  
 ‘his/her/its knife’
- b. ‘*o* *l=o=na* *ulu* INALIENABLE  
 PRES ART=POSS.INAL=3SG.CL head  
 ‘his/her/its head’

### 3.3. Subject clitics in zero nominalizations

In *zero* nominalizations, subject clitics neither show a tripartite/inactive alignment, like common nouns or regular pronouns, nor a neutralized one, like subject clitics in the verbal domain. Instead they show a marked unergative case alignment: Only unergative subject clitics are marked by alienable possessive *a* case (14b). Transitive subject clitics, on the other hand, pattern with unaccusative subject clitics and objects being marked by inalienable possessive *o* case (14a/c) (Mosel 1992). Parallel to the verbal domain, transitive subject clitics co-occur with resumptive *=ina* that cliticizes to the nominalized verb.

- (14) a. ‘*o* *l=o=na* *pa’ū* UNACCUSATIVE  
 PRES ART=POSS.INAL=3SG.CL fall  
 ‘his/her/its falling’
- b. ‘*o* *l=a=na* *pese* UNERGATIVE  
 PRES ART=POSS.AL=3SG.CL sing  
 ‘his/her/its singing’
- c. ‘*o* *l=o=na* *solo=ina* *o* *le* *laulau* TRANSITIVE  
 PRES ART=POSS.INAL=3SG.CL wipe-RSMP POSS.INAL ART table  
 ‘his/her/its wiping of the table’

### 3.4. Summary

By the assumption that unergative and transitive subjects are both introduced by Voice, either a neutralized or active/inactive alignment with unergative and transitive subject clitics marked by alienable *a* case was expected, contrary to the data. In the following, we demonstrate that marked unergative alignment follows from our analysis of tripartite/inactive case (Hopperdietzel & Alexiadou forthcoming).

Table 1: Case alignment in verbal and nominalized contexts of common nouns and subject clitics.

|                    | verbal/DP               | verbal/CL        | nominal/DP               | nominal/CL               |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| S <sub>UNACC</sub> | H <sub>ABS</sub>        | H <sub>ABS</sub> | <i>o</i> <sub>INAL</sub> | <i>o</i> <sub>INAL</sub> |
| S <sub>UNERG</sub> | H <sub>ABS</sub>        | H <sub>ABS</sub> | <i>a</i> <sub>AL</sub>   | <i>a</i> <sub>AL</sub>   |
| A                  | <i>e</i> <sub>ERG</sub> | H <sub>ABS</sub> | <i>e</i> <sub>ERG</sub>  | <i>o</i> <sub>INAL</sub> |
| O                  | H <sub>ABS</sub>        | ---              | <i>o</i> <sub>INAL</sub> | ---                      |

<sup>3</sup> Third person singular possessive clitics exceptionally have suppletive forms. Otherwise, possessive clitics generally correspond to subject clitics in the verbal domain in their morphophonological form (cf. Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992).

## 4. Marked unergatives

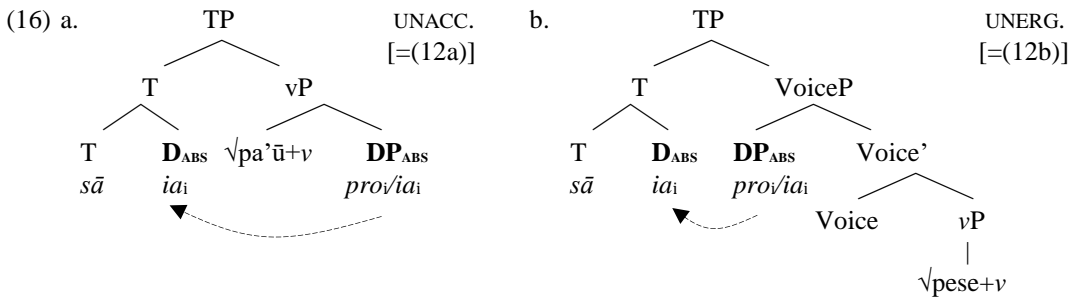
To account for the marked unergative alignment of subject clitics in *zero* nominalizations, we develop a non-uniform analysis of Samoan clitics that is sensitive to the prepositional nature of ergative subjects. As a result, only unergative subject clitics are both thematically and case licensed in the nominal domain, distinguishing them from both transitive and unaccusative subjects.

### 4.1. A non-uniform analysis of subject clitics

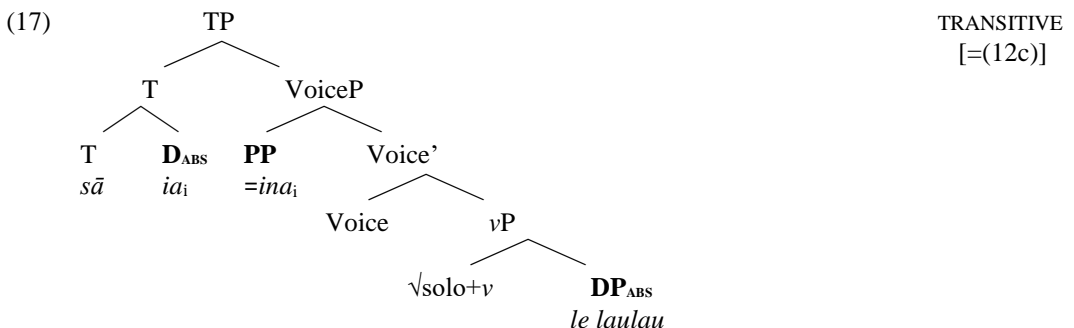
As Samoan clitics can be doubled by their independent counterparts to express an emphatic meaning (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992), they can be identified as true clitics, i.e.  $D^0$ -elements, as opposed to weak and strong pronouns (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999).<sup>4</sup>

- (15) *'ua 'ou sau lava a'u.*  
 PERF=ABS 1SG.CL come EMPH=ABS 1SG  
 'I, myself, have come.' (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992: 457)

Adopting a movement analysis (Uriagereka 1995, Kayne 1975, cf. Anagnostopoulou 2017 for an overview), we take unaccusative (16a) and unergative subject clitics (16b) to be base-generated within a (big) DP, located in their original argument position, i.e. complement of *v* or Spec, VoiceP respectively. In this position, they receive absolutive case, before subsequently moving to T. The associated DP may remain silent depending on the discourse contexts (cf. Otsuka 2000 on Tongan).



Based on the presence of the prepositional resumptive pronoun =*ina* in transitive contexts, we propose that transitive subject clitics are base-generated at T where they receive default absolutive instead of prepositional ergative case (cf. Sportiche 1996, Borer 1984). This split follows from the special status of transitive subjects in a syntactically ergative language like Samoan that requires them to be merged as PPs (Hopperdietzel 2020, cf. Polinsky 2016). Subject clitics as  $D^0$ -elements are therefore banned from Spec, VoiceP in transitive configurations and merge directly to T. In this position, they are resumed by prepositional =*ina* through which the transitive subject clitics receives its agent theta role.<sup>5</sup>



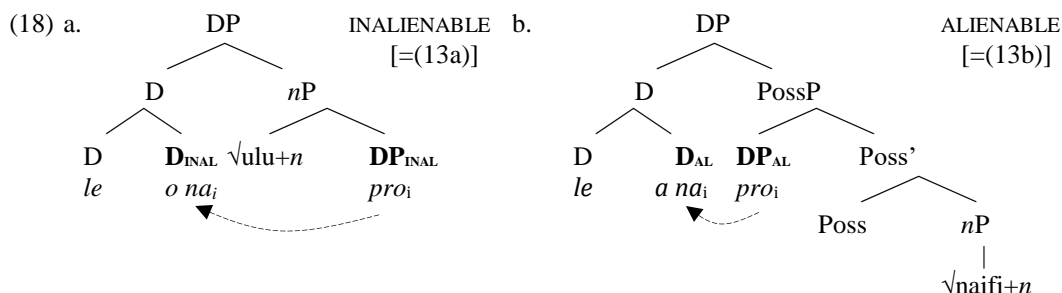
<sup>4</sup> The felicity of clitic doubling is subject to interspeaker variation, as it seems to be degraded for some speakers.

<sup>5</sup> For space reasons, we do not discuss the linearization of clause-internal constituents, but see Collins (2017).

As a consequence, subject clitics exhibit a non-uniform syntax in that while intransitive subject clitics move from their argument position to T, transitive subject clitics are base-generated in T (cf. Cuervo 2003, Bleam 2000). This split accounts for the neutralization of the ergative/absolutive alignment.

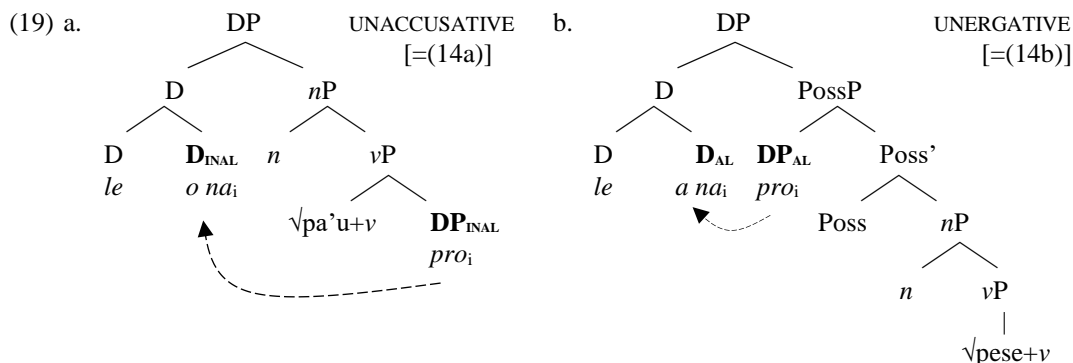
#### 4.2. A uniform analysis of possessive clitics

Parallel to the verbal domain, we assume that possessive clitics are merged within a (covert) possessor DP in the designated syntactic positions, i.e. Spec, PossP for alienable possessors (18b) and the complement position of *n* for inalienable possessors (18a). In this position, possessive clitics are thematically licensed and case-licensed before moving to D (cf. Macdonald 2014 on possessor doubling in Tongan).



#### 4.3. Unergative subjects as possessors

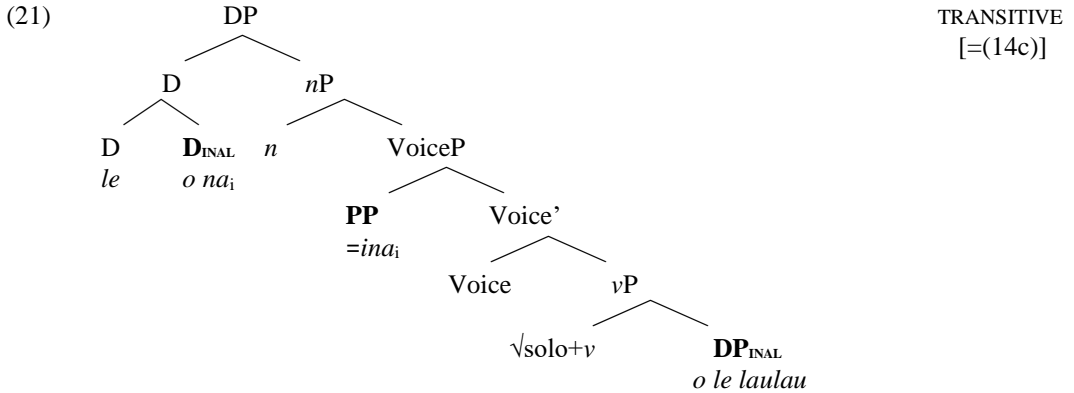
The marked unergative alignment in *zero* nominalizations then follows from the special status of unergative subjects: Unaccusative subject clitics merge in their original *v*P-internal argument position where they receive default inalienable possessive *o* case before moving to D (19a). To obey the unaccusativity restriction on nominalizations, unergative subject clitics as D-elements must be base-generated in Spec, PossP instead where they are assigned inherent alienable possessive *a* case by Poss (19b).



As unergative subjects receive a possessor theta role from Poss, we predict this difference to be reflected in their thematic relation to the event denoted by the nominalized *v*P, i.e. possessor vs. agent/patient (Harley 2009, Alexiadou 2001). This prediction is borne out by the data: Alienable possessive-marked subjects of nominalized unergative verbs like *pese* ‘sing’ are ambiguous and allow for an additional ownership reading, which is linked to their more possessor theta role (20a). In contrast, such an interpretation is unavailable for inalienable possessive-marked subjects of unaccusative verbs like *pa’ū* ‘fall’ which are unambiguously interpreted as patients (20b).

- (20) a. ‘o l=a=na pese                      b. ‘o l=o=na pa’ū .  
 PRES ART=POSS.AL=3SG.CL sing                      PRES ART POSS.INAL=3SG.CL fall  
 i. ‘his/her/its singing’ (event)                      i. ‘his/her/its falling’ (event)  
 ii. ‘the song by him/her/it’ (possession)                      ii. # ‘the fall by him/her/it’ (possession)

Due to the prepositional nature of transitive subjects in a syntactically ergative language like Samoan, transitive subject clitics are instead base-generated in the nominal domain, being resumed by prepositional *=ina* in Spec, VoiceP; in line with the unaccusativity restriction. Unlike unergative subject clitics however, transitive subject clitics receive their agent theta role from Voice, enabling them to merge directly to D where they get default inalienable *o* case, resulting in double default inalienable case.



The distinct thematic status of unergative and transitive subject clitics is again reflected by the unambiguous interpretation of transitive subject clitics. Parallel to unaccusative subject clitics, transitive subject clitics are obligatorily interpreted as agents and do not give rise to ownership readings, as observed in the context of unergative subject clitics.

- (22) *o l=ona solo o le laulau*  
 PRES ART= POSS.INAL=3SG.CL wipe POSS.INAL ART table  
 i. 'his/her/its wiping of the table' (event)  
 ii. # 'the wip(e/ing) of the table by him/her/it' (possession)

#### 4.4. Summary

To summarize, the presence of resumptive *=ina* in the context of transitive subject clitics suggests a non-uniform syntax of clitics in Samoan. The marked unergative alignment in *zero* nominalizations therefore follows naturally from the interaction of language-specific properties like split possessive case marking and syntactic ergativity in combination with the unaccusativity restriction on nominalizations.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented novel data from subject clitics that appear to challenge the analysis of Samoan *zero* nominalizations as proposed in Hopperditzel & Alexiadou (forthcoming), since transitive subject clitics pattern together with unaccusative subject clitics and objects, resulting in a rather unexpected marked unergative alignment. Yet a closer examination of the properties of subject clitics reveals their non-uniform syntax, which follows from the prepositional nature of transitive subjects in a syntactically ergative language like Samoan. On this basis, we have demonstrated that marked unergative alignment actually supports our previous analysis and highlights the special status of unergative subjects as possessors in deverbal nominalizations. Therefore, our study provides additional evidence for the unaccusativity restriction on nominalizations and a prepositional account of syntactic ergativity in Samoan, and thereby contributes to the recent debate on the cross-linguistic variation and syntactic implementation of both phenomena (e.g., Burukina 2021, Imanishi 2020, Polinsky 2016, Coon et al. 2014 *inter alia*). In addition, our findings have further implications for the status of (Polynesian) subject clitics, which present an interesting case study for microvariation (cf. Polinsky 2016, Macdonald 2014, Otsuka 2000).

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