

## Deriving ergativity in Samoan: the case of the missing “accusative”

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As is well-known, Samoan is an ergative case marking language. The arguments of a predicate predictably map onto absolutive (unmarked) > oblique (i-) case(s), **except** for transitive verbs with *both* a volitional agent *and* an “affected” object. These map onto ergative (e- , for postverbal DPs, in careful registers) and absolutive case (unmarked). Surface c-command relations and diverse syntactic tests diagnose e-ergative>absolutive>(i)-oblique. If absolutive equals nominative, the question arises why objects must systematically be nominative in this context, and why accusative is systematically absent in Samoan, which also lacks have possessives, double object constructions, etc. Basic to understanding Samoan ergativity is the puzzle that neither volition nor affected objecthood by itself gives rise to ergative case marking patterns, but both properties must hold. This paper explores the idea that the lack of accusative follows from general principles and structure together with independent properties of Samoan which are easily observable in causative constructions, the prototypical environment for affected objects. Samoan systematically distinguishes causatives initiated by a natural cause or a non-volitional argument (1a) and causatives initiated by a volitional argument (1b):

- (1) a. ua mama: le ‘ie’afu i le timu “V”<sub>bare</sub> Abs > Obl  
 PAST clean the sheet<sub>abs</sub> OBL the rain<sub>obl</sub> *the sheet got clean from the rain*
- b. na faqamama: e Ioane le ‘ie’afu “V”<sub>complex</sub> ERG>Abs  
 PAST CAUS.clean ERG John the sheet *John cleaned the sheet*
- c. \*ua mama: e le timu le ‘ie’afu not an alternative to a \* “V”<sub>bare</sub> Erg > Abs  
 \*ua mama: le timu i le ‘ieafu not an alternative to a \* “V”<sub>bare</sub> > Abs>Obl

This distinction shows up in the “size” of the predicate (bare forms ‘mama’ clean, ‘ata’ laugh’ in contexts like (1a), and complex predicates in contexts like (1b)), which suggests that the syntactic structure in (1b) contains the structure in (1a). “Small” causatives like (1a) **must** give rise to theme<sub>abs</sub> > oblique<sub>cause</sub> patterns. Neither e-ergative<sub>cause</sub> > absolutive<sub>theme</sub> patterns, nor absolutive<sub>cause</sub> > oblique<sub>cause/acc</sub>(theme) patterns (the pattern for transitive structures with other types of objects) are possible. If we find out why accusative is absent in (1b), we will also get an answer why it is absent in structures that embed it (1b). Where exactly are “affected” objects and accusative case located? Extending a proposal by Hallman (2004) for relative scope of subjects and objects, I propose that affected objects must occur in a position higher than the lowest position of the external argument (where the natural cause is introduced), but lower than the position where a volitional argument is introduced) and that this is also the position of the missing “accusative” (lower objects in Samoan will be caseless as “incorporated” objects, or oblique). This raises a question as to how an affected object can reach this position over an intervening subject. Lexicalization patterns in causatives show that the Samoan predicate does NOT extend beyond the low external argument position in causatives (this holds for transitive verbs more generally). Object shift is therefore impossible, since it is contingent on the position of the verb. Samoan resorts to a (silent) Voice to “lift” the object above the intervener in (1a). Following Collins (2005), I assume Voice attracts a VP constituent, which smuggles the object around the intervener. This movement brings the object local to the absolutive and the cause will map into an oblique, perhaps because of a property of Voice. The absence of the accusative can now be related to the presence of silent (passive) Voice, a non-surprising (though theoretically not well understood) effect. What happens now when this structure is embedded under a volitional agent, introduced by a lexical element, as in (1b)? Volitional agents are also initiators, raising the problem of what licit syntactic relation can hold between the two positions over an intervening object. In the absence of objects or in the absence of generic objects (“incorporated objects) or unaffected objects nothing intervenes between the two, and the structure can converge. In the presence of an intervening object though, the structure cannot converge, unless a (silent) Voice attracted a VP is merged above the volitional agent shell. It is this Voice that is responsible for the ergative case marking on the postverbal DP. C-command tests involving pronominal binding show that the ergative argument is both above and below the absolutive as predicted by the particular analysis. Samoan ergative patterns thus are “double” passive structures that arise only given a particular constellation of facts.