1. Introduction

This paper proposes a diachronic scenario to account for the synchronic variation between SVO and verb-initial word order types in Austronesian languages. It is uncontroversial that verb-initial word order is more conservative than SVO (Starosta et al. 1982, Cumming 1991, Donohue 2007, 2008, among others). What I propose in this paper is that SVO has evolved from verb-initial order via topicalization of the subject.

The verb-initial language which I primarily use for illustration in this paper is the VOS language Seediq, an Atayalic language spoken in Taiwan. Seediq is an ergative language; the absolutive argument always appears in clause-final position, as in (1a). The SVO word order type is illustrated by the Indonesian example in (1b).

(1) a. *Wada biq-un hulama na Ape ka laqi.*
    PAST give-TR treat ERG Ape ABS child
    ‘Ape gave the child a treat.’

    Ali ACT-buy book for Nuri
    ‘Ali bought a book for Nuri.’
What I focus on in this paper is showing that the absolutive argument in
the verb-initial languages has characteristics of a A’-position topic, rather
than a subject residing in an A-position like [Spec, TP]. In SVO languages,
the clause-initial DP has properties of both A-position subjects and A’-
position topics. Crucially, what this suggests is that this DP in SVO
languages is currently in the process of being reanalyzed from a topic to an
A-position subject.

2. Verb-initial Languages

In this section, I discuss the position and interpretive properties of
absolutives in verb-initial languages. I focus primarily on VOS Seediq,
since the clause-final absolutive in this type of language can clearly be
demonstrated to reside in a TP-external topic position and not in an A-
position like [Spec, TP]. The absolutive in VSO languages like Tagalog,
however, also have some interpretative characteristics of a topic. Therefore,
absolutives in verb-initial languages in general should not be analyzed as
subjects residing in an A-position.

There are two possible derivations which result in absolutive-final word
order. One is simply rightward movement of the absolutive, similar to the
The other is leftward movement of the absolutive, followed by subsequent fronting the remnant TP to the left of this nominal.

Recent work on VOS word order in Austronesian languages (Massam 2000, 2001, 2003 for Niuean; Rackowski & Travis 2000, Pearson 2001 for Malagasy; Cole & Hermon 2008 for Toba Batak) has converged on a derivation involving fronting of the clause or predicate, along the lines of (3). Aldridge (2002, 2004) and Cole and Hermon (2008) argue specifically in favor of the predicate-fronting approach, based on the empirical observation that the fronted TP forms an island to extraction. As is well-known, only the absolutive nominal in VOS Austronesian languages is capable of being A’-extracted. All other clause-internal constituents must remain in TP, which is accounted for by the derivation in (3), the fronted TP forming an island to extraction due to the ‘freezing effect’ on fronted
constituents (Wexler and Culicover 1980) or the Condition on Extraction Domain (Huang 1982'). A theoretical reason to favor (3) for the purposes of the present paper is that it provides a direct input to the change to SVO word order, which involves a leftward position for the topic. I will assume the derivation in (3) in what follows. The reader is referred to discussion in cited works for detailed discussion.

The main focus here is showing that the absolutive nominal in VOS Seediq has a fixed position in the clause and that this position is an A’ topic position. First, the absolutive DP must be in clause-final position. No other clause-internal constituent can follow it.

Seediq
(4) a. \textit{Wada biq-un hulama na Ape ka laqi.}
   PAST give-TR treat ERG Ape ABS child
   ‘Ape gave the child a treat.’

b. *\textit{Wada biq-un hulama ka laki na Ape.}
   PAST give-TR treat ABS child ERG Ape
   ‘Ape gave the child a treat.’

c. *\textit{Wada biq-un na Ape ka laki hulama.}
   PAST give-TR ERG Ape ABS child treat
   ‘Ape gave the child a treat.’

Secondly, the absolutive argument can be shown to occupy a structurally prominent position. Clauses can be coordinated, excluding the absolutive.

Seediq
(5) a. [\textit{TP S-bari=na hulama} ma
   APP-buy=3.SG.ERG treat and
   [\textit{TP s-smalu=na lukus dungan}]
   APP-make=3.SG.ERG clothes also
‘She buys a treat for and also makes clothes for her child.’

b. \[ TP M\text{-}usa \quad Purishia \] \[ TP m\text{-}ari sama \] ka Ape.
   INTR\text{-}go Puli INTR\text{-}buy vegetable ABS Ape
   ‘Ape went to Puli and bought vegetables.’

NPI cannot be licensed in absolutive position, as in (6a), indicating that the absolutive DP resides in a position not c-commanded by negation. An NPI can, however, appear in direct object position in an antipassive, as in (6b). In an antipassive construction, the verb is marked as intransitive, the external argument has absolutive case, and the theme or patient is treated syntactically as an oblique. In Seediq, oblique objects remain in their base positions in VP and therefore can be c-commanded by negation.

\[
\text{Seediq}
\]

(6) a. *[Ini burig-i na Ape] ka animumaanu.
   NEG buy-TR.IRR ERG Ape ABS anything
   ‘Ape didn’t buy anything.’

b. [Wada ini bari animumaanu] ka Ape.
   PAST NEG buy anything ABS Ape
   ‘Ape didn’t buy anything.’

The topic status of the absolutive is demonstrated by the next set of examples. Pearson (2001, 2005) has argued extensively that the clause-final DP in VOS Malagasy resides in an A’-position. One argument he employs is to show that the clause-final DP must be definite. This is also true for Seediq. For example, Chang (1997) shows that \textit{wh}-words, which are inherently focused and not presupposed, are prohibited from occupying this
position. The wh-word undergoes fronting to clause-initial position in (7a), while it remains in situ in (7b).

Seediq (Chang 1997:146)

(7a)  Ima s-m-ebut laqi.
who -INTR-hit child
‘Who hits a child?’

b. *S-m-ebut laqi ka ima?
-INTR-hit child ABS who
‘Who hits a child?’

The asymmetry between (7a) and (7b) should not be understood merely as a requirement that wh-words move to [Spec, CP], since adjunct wh-words appear in post-verbal position, as in (8).

Seediq

(8)  M-n-ari inu patis Ape
INTR-PERF-buy where book Ape
‘Where did Ape buy books?’

If an object in Seediq is indefinite, it must be packaged as the oblique in an antipassive. In (9a), the verb has intransitive morphology. The object remains in VP, immediately following the verb. The external argument has absolutive case. (9b) is a transitive clause, in which the object has absolutive case. The object in the transitive clause is definite.

Seediq

(9a)  M-n-oda m-ari qushia mutaso Hori ka Ape.
INTR-PERF-go INTR-buy water clean Puli ABS Ape
‘Ape went to Puli to buy clean water.’
b. \textit{Wada=na s-pahu lukus ka qushia mutaso.}  
PAST=3.SG.ERG APP-wash clothes ABS water clean  
‘She washed clothes with \textit{the clean water}.’

Finally, Aldridge (2004) shows that absolutes in Seediq are resumed by clitic pronouns in the clause, while DPs remaining in argument position are not doubled by clitics.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Seediq}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{(10)a. Gaga=\textit{ku}=daha ngal-un ka yaku duri.}  
PRES=1.SG.ABS=3.PL choose-TR ABS 1.SG also  
‘They have also chosen me.’
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{b. M-usa=\textit{ku} mu-huma kyuuri=na}  
INTR-go=1.SG.ABS INTR-plant cucumber=3.SG.GEN ka yaku.  
ABS 1.SG  
‘I went to plant his cucumbers.’
\end{center}

No clitic appears with the ergative DP, however, since it remains in situ in vP. Ergative clitics are indeed possible, but only when there is no full DP in \textit{[Spec, vP]}, as in (11c).

\begin{center}
\textbf{Seediq}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{(11)a. Wada burig-un na Ape ka patis-ni.}  
PAST buy-TR ERG Ape ABS book-DEM  
‘Ape bought this book.’
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{b. *Wada=na burig-un na Ape ka patis-ni.}  
Past=3.SG.ERG buy-TR ERG Ape ABS book-DEM  
‘Ape bought this book.’
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{c. Wada=na biq-un hulama laqi}  
Past=3.SG.ERG give-TR treat child.ABS  
‘He/she gave the child a treat.’
\end{center}
Another important indication that absolutes reside in an A’-topic position and not [Spec, TP] comes from reconstruction effects. Pearson (2001, 2005) shows for Malagasy that the clause-final DP can be bound by the clause-internal ergative external argument. He proposes that this is possible because the surface position of the clause-final argument is a TP-external topic position and not [Spec, TP] subject position. This allows reconstruction for the purposes of binding, with the result that the possessors in the clause-final topics in (12) can be interpreted as variables bound by the quantified DPs in external argument position within TP.

Malagasy (Pearson 2005:424)

(12)a. "Novangian ny mpianatra tsirairi ny umaly.
   PAST.TT.visit.DE  student each DET father.3
   yesterday
   ‘His father, each student visited yesterday.’

b. "Norohan’ ny vehivavy rehetrai ny vadiny.
   PAST.TT.kiss DET woman all DET spouse.3
   ‘Their spouses, all the women kissed.’

Absolutives in the VSO\textsuperscript{ii} language Tagalog must also be interpreted as definite, as in (13a). If an object is indefinite (or nonspecific), then the clause must be antipassive and the object given oblique status, as in (13b). Richards (2000), Rackowski (2002), Aldridge (2004, 2005, 2008), and Rackowski and Richards (2005) all assume that basic word order is derived by head-movement of the verb to a position external to vP. The ergative and absolute DPs remain in their base positions in vP in overt syntax. The
presuppositional interpretation of the absolutive is obtained by covert movement out of the VP, along the lines of Diesing (1992).

Tagalog
   -TR.PERF-buy ERG woman ABS fish
   ‘The woman bought the/*a fish.’
b. B-um-ili ang babae ng isda.
   -INTR.PERF-buy ABS woman OBL fish
   ‘The woman bought a/*the fish.’

This section has shown that absolutes in verb-initial languages have characteristics of topics and not A-position subjects.

3. Subject in SVO Languages

This section discusses SVO, or Topic-initial, word order in two languages in Indonesia. The diachronic scenario is shown in (14) and (15). First, the absolutive DP undergoes topicalization to clause-initial position. This the first step in the VOS word order derivation assumed in (3). However, the second step does not take place, leaving TP in its base position following the topic.
The clause-initial topic is subsequently reanalyzed as an A-position subject located in [Spec, TP].

(15)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{TP} \\
\text{DP}_{\text{Subj}} \\
\text{T'} \\
\text{T}_{[\text{EPP}]} \\
\text{vP} \\
\vdots \text{t}_{\text{Subj}} \vdots
\end{array}
\]

However, this is a gradual process. What I show in this section is that clause-initial DPs in Indonesian and Balinese have a combination of A and A’ properties. What this suggests is that the reanalysis from topic to subject is not yet complete. In structural terms, this means that both [Spec, TP] and [Spec, CP] are available to clause-initial DP arguments in these languages.

I begin with the A-properties. (16) shows first that clause-initial position can host the controlled gap in a nonfinite clause.

**Indonesian**

(16)a. *Saya ingin [PRO mem-ilih dia sebagai presiden]*.

1.SG want ACT-choose 3.SG as president

‘I want to choose him/her as president.’

b. *Saya ingin [PRO di-pilih sebagai presiden]*.

1.SG want PASS-choose as president

‘I want to be chosen as president.’

Secondly, this position is the target of raising-to-object or exceptional case-marking. This is shown for a closely related language Balinese. The fact that the embedded subject is accessible to case-licensing from the matrix
clause indicates that it must be located in an A-position. Similarly, the asymmetry between the reflexive in (17a) and the pronoun in (17b) shows that the embedded subject position counts as an A-position for the purposes of binding. In other words, if the pronoun were in an A’-position, we would expect a reconstruction effect, which would yield opposite predictions to the binding relations exhibited in (17). For example, if reconstruction took place, then we would expect binding to be possible in (17b), since the pronoun would be interpreted in its base position in the embedded clause and therefore not in the local domain of the antecedent.

Balinese (Wechsler & Arka 1998:437)

(17)a. Iai, nawang awakne, lakar tangkep polisi.
   3 AV.know self FUT OV.arrest police
   ‘He knew that the police would arrest self.’

b. *Iai, nawang ia, lakar tangkep polisi.
   3 AV.know 3 FUT OV.arrest police
   ‘He knew that the police would arrest him.’

This is not to say that reconstruction of clause-initial DPs is never observed in Indonesian and Balinese. In Balinese, internal argument reflexive pronouns can be bound by the agent, regardless of whether they remain in VP or move to clause-initial position. In the actor voice construction in (18a), the agent is the subject and can bind the object reflexive in VP. In the object voice construction in (18b), however, the internal argument has been moved to clause-initial position, while the agent remains in situ to the right of the verb. Note that binding still obtains,
indicating that movement of the object cannot be A-movement which would alter binding relations. Therefore, examples like (18) provide evidence that clause-initial position sometimes has A’-properties.

Balinese (Wechsler & Arka 1998:406)
(18)a.  *Ia ningalin awakne.*
   3 AV.see self
   ‘(S)he saw herself/himself.’
b.  *Awakne tingalin=a.*
   self OV.see=3
   ‘(S)he saw herself/himself.’

Similar examples can also be found in Indonesian. A fronted reflexive can be bound by a pronominal agent which follows it in surface order.

Indonesian (Arka & Manning 1998:8)
   self-1.SG 1.SG surrender-APP to police
   ‘I surrendered myself to the police.’
b.  *Diri-nya mesti dia serah-kan ke polisi.*
   self-3.SG.GEN must 3.SG surrender-APP to police
   ‘(S)he must surrender herself/himself to the police.’

Reconstruction effects as shown in (18) for Balinese and (19) for Indonesian are parallel to the reconstruction effects seen for VOS Malagasy in (12), indicating that the clause-initial DP in the SVO languages retains some residual characteristics of topics found in the verb-initial languages.

This combination of the presence and absence of reconstruction effects is reminiscent of clause-internal scrambling in languages like Japanese and Hindi. Movement of an internal argument to clause-initial position
sometimes creates a new binding relation in these languages. (20a) and (20b) show that the reciprocal *otagai* requires a c-commanding antecedent. In (20c), the intended antecedent is scrambled to clause-initial position, where it c-commands and binds the reciprocal.

Japanese (Saito 2003:485)

(20a) *Karera-ga [otagai-no sensei]-o hihansita.*
they-NOM each.other-GEN teacher-ACC criticized
‘They criticized each other’s teachers.’

b. *? [otagai-no sensei]-ga karera-o hihansita.*
each.other-GEN teacher-NOM they-ACC criticized
‘Each other’s teachers criticized them.’

c. *?Karera-o [otagai-no sensei]-ga t hihansita.*
they-ACC each.other-GEN teacher-NOM criticized
‘Them, each other’s teachers criticized.’

On the other hand, clause-internal scrambling sometimes appears to require reconstruction for the purposes of binding. In (21), a reflexive anaphor has been scrambled to a position where it c-commands its intended antecedent. If reconstruction did not take place, both Condition C and Condition A would be violated, since the anaphor is not c-commanded by the antecedent and in fact itself c-commands the antecedent. Since binding is possible, we must conclude that reconstruction takes place.

(21) *Zibunzisin-o Taroo-ga t semeta.*
self-ACC Taro-NOM blamed
‘Himself, Taro blamed.’
This seemingly contradictory behavior of Japanese scrambling is traditionally treated as evidence that the landing site of this type of movement is sometimes an A-position and sometimes an A’-position (Mahajan 1990; Tada 1993; Saito 1992, 2003; and others). The mixture of A and A’ properties in Indonesian and Balinese subjects can be accounted for on the analysis presented in (14) and (15). Specifically, the reanalysis from topic to subject is not yet complete, meaning that clause-initial DP arguments are able to occupy either [Spec, TP] or [Spec, CP].

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that synchronic variation between verb-initial and SVO word order in Austronesian languages can be accounted for diachronically by positing topicalization of the absolutive argument, followed by subsequent reanalysis of this DP as an A-position subject. I have shown that the absolutive in verb-initial languages has characteristics of a topic and not an A-position subject. Subjects in the SVO languages, on the other hand, show a mixture of A and A’ properties, indicating that the reanalysis is currently in progress in these languages.

I might point out here that Donohue (2005, 2007) offers an alternative view of the change from verb-initial to SVO word order in some Austronesian languages. He shows that there are large concentrations of SVO Austronesian languages in geographic proximity to SVO and SOV languages in mainland Southeast Asia and western New Guinea and
proposes that the change to SVO in Austronesian languages was the result of contact with subject-initial neighbors. I offer in passing an informal opinion that this proposal does not contradict the claims made in the current paper. In fact, the two proposals can perhaps be seen to complement each other. Areal contact could very well be the external catalyst for the change in basic word order. What I have endeavored to argue for in this paper is a structural account of the change itself. My claim that the post-verbal subject had access to a clause-peripheral topic position facilitated the change to subject (or topic) initial order, since all that was required syntactically was the loss of TP-fronting, which left the topic in a clause-initial [Spec, CP], as shown in (14).

The proposal put forth in this paper has interesting consequences for the study of diachronic syntax. First, the identification of absolutives with topics (rather than subjects) in the ergative verb-initial languages is not surprising, given the well-known fact that syntactically ergative languages do not have a well-defined notion of grammatical subject, the cross-linguistic characteristics of subjects being distributed between the ergative and absolutive DPs (Bok-Bennema 1991; Murasugi 1992; Campana 1992; Bittner 1994; Bittner & Hale 1996a, b; Manning 1996; Ura 2000). Therefore, it should not be surprising that the change to SVO word order is accompanied by the reanalysis of absolute to subject, concomitant with the change from ergative to accusative alignment, as argued for Austronesian languages by Aldridge (2008).
Another consequence of the analysis is the clear evidence of continuity of older characteristics during the process of change, rather than an abrupt shift from ergative verb-initial syntax to accusative SVO. The relative stability of the mixture of A and A’ properties of subjects in Indonesian languages is clear evidence for the gradual nature of syntactic change.

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1 See Nunes and Uriagereka (2000), Stepanovic (2007), and others for more recent approaches to CED effects.

2 Strictly speaking, Tagalog word order is quite free. VSO is the basic order; permutations are permitted via scrambling. The key difference between VSO and VOS order is whether the absolutive argument has a fixed position. This is true only for VOS languages, which do not generally allow scrambling.