A Minimalist Approach to the Emergence of Ergativity in Austronesian Languages

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1. Introduction

It is now virtually uncontroversial that the homeland of the Austronesian language family is the island of Taiwan, Austronesian speakers migrating there from southeastern China roughly 6,000 years ago and subsequently proceeding to populate the Philippines, Indonesia/Malaysia, Madagascar, and the Pacific (Adelaar 2005; citing Bellwood 1997). Less agreement, however, is found on the question of high-order subgrouping among the languages spoken in Taiwan. This short article summarizes three proposals, each refining and developing previous approaches by successively expanding the range of data under consideration, from phonological to morphological and then to syntactic.

2. Phonology, Morphology, and the Question of Nuclear Austronesian

Building on earlier work by Li (1981), Tsuchida (1976, 1982), and others, Blust (1999, 2009/2013) proposes ten primary subgroups of Austronesian, nine of which are comprised exclusively of languages which either are or were spoken only in Taiwan. The tenth subgroup is Malayo-Polynesian, containing all Austronesian languages spoken outside of Taiwan. Blust’s proposal is based entirely on phonological mergers and deletions, which are commonly acknowledged to be reliable indicators of subgrouping, since they are irreversible and consequently must be understood as innovations rather than retentions.
(1) **Austronesian** (Blust 1999:45)

Puyuma

Rukai

Tsouic: Tsou, Kanakanavu, Saaroa

Northwest Formosan: Saisiyat, Kulon-Pazih

Atayalic: Atayal, Seediq

Western Plains: Thao, Taokas, Favorlang-Babuza, Papora, Hoanya

Bunun

Paiwan

East Formosan: Basay-Trobiawan, Kavalan, Amis, Siraya

Malayo-Polynesian: all extra-Formosan languages

Ross (2009, 2012) takes his primary evidence from morphosyntactic paradigms to argue that there are only four first-order subgroups, separating Puyuma, Rukai, and Tsou from a large subgroup called “Nuclear Austronesian” (NucAn), which encompasses all other Austronesian languages. Most of the subgroups listed in (2) are equivalent to Blust’s (1999) proposal, with the exception of Tsouic, which is split apart by NucAn: Kanakanavu and Saaroa are located inside NucAn, while Tsou proper is outside.

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1 The order of subgroups listed by Blust (1999:45) is different from that given here. I have made this change in order to make the list more directly comparable with Ross’ (2009) subgrouping.
The primary innovation which Ross attributes to Proto-NucAn is the reanalysis of embedded nominalizations as realis root clauses, revising an earlier proposal by Starosta et al. (1981, 1982), who assumed that this change is reflected in all first-order subgroups of Austronesian. Starosta et al. proposed that the origin of ergative alignment illustrated by Tagalog in (3a, b) can be accounted for if the transitive clauses are derived from copula constructions in which the nominative NP is the subject predicated of a headless relative clause containing all other material in the clause. The aspectual and applicative affixes appearing on transitive verbs in Philippine and most Formosan languages were reconstructed as nominalizers used in relative clause formation. The external argument appears inside the relative clause and is marked with genitive
case, which is used for both ergative subjects (3b, c) and possessors (3d) in Philippine and most Formosan languages today.

**Tagalog**

(3) a. D<um>ating ang babae.

<INTR.PRV>arrive NOM woman

‘The woman arrived.’

b. [B<in>ili ng babae] ang isda.

<TR.PRV>buy GEN woman NOM fish

‘The woman bought the fish.’

c. [B<in>ilh-an ng babae ng isda] ang tindahan=ko.

<TR.PRV>buy-APPL GEN woman GEN fish NOM store=1.SG.GEN

‘The woman bought a/the fish at my store.’

d. isda ng babae

fish GEN woman

‘(the) woman’s fish’

Ross’ main revision is to show that this reanalysis is not reflected in all first-order Austronesian subgroups. For example, Puyuma verbs in relative clauses are affixed with nominalizing morphemes, while verbs in root clauses take different affixes. The perfective aspect marker <in> in (4b) surfaces only on nominalized verbs in Puyuma, but appears on finite verbs in Tagalog, as in (3b, c). Note further the Puyuma nominalizer –<an>, which has been reanalyzed as a locative applicative in Philippine languages, as in (3c).
Puyuma

(4) a. tu=trakaw-aw na paisu kanisaw
   3.GEN=steal-TR1 DEF.NOM money SG.OBJ Isaw
   'Isaw stole the money.'          (Teng 2008:147)

b. ala amuna sadru [[tu=tr<in>ekelr-an] na asi]
   maybe because many 3.PSR=<PRV>drink-NMLZ DEF.NOM milk
   'Maybe because the milk he drank is a lot.'      (Teng 2008:105)

As mentioned earlier, the main discrepancy between the Ross (2009) and Blust (1999) subgrouping hypotheses lies in accepting a Tsouic subgroup, which was first proposed by Tsuchida (1976) and has been adopted by Ho (1998), Blust (1999), and Sagart (2004, 2010). But Ross (2012) argues that several of the changes cited by Tsuchida (1976) are also observed in other subgroups and therefore could have been innovated independently in the languages in question, while other proposed innovations are more plausibly explained as instances of borrowing.

Ross (2012) further offers morphosyntactic evidence from Chang (2006) that Kanakanavu and Saaroa belong to the NucAn subgroup. For example, the latter languages reflect the reanalysis of nominalizations as root verbal categories. The perfective makers ni- and li- on the finite verbs in (5) are cognate with Puyuma’s nominal perfective marker <in> in (4b). Note also the genitive subject in the transitive clause in (5b).
(5) a. **ni-pia-pacai cau tutui**  

PRV-CAUS-kill person pig  

‘Someone killed the pig.’ (Kanakanavu; Chang 2006: from Mei 1982:221)

b. **li-ala na cuc’u ka vutuku’u**  

PRV-take GEN person NOM fish  

‘The person took the fish away.’ (Saaroa; Chang 2006; from Li et al. 1997:279)

By accepting with Ringe et al. (2002:68), Thomason and Kaufman (1988:52, 98), and Weinreich (1953:32) that bound morphemes, in particular morphological paradigms, are neither easily borrowed nor independently innovated, Ross (2012) is able to establish with a reasonable amount of certainty that his proposed innovation was not the result of borrowing or independent developments in the languages in question. He is further able to determine the direction of the change, which is from nominalization to verb and not vice-versa, because the extra-NucAn languages reflect only the nominal use. However, when it comes to reconstructing the parent language of the entire family, deciding between retentions and innovations is far less simple, as the only evidence available can be found in the languages which are in turn descended from this proto-language. Ross (2012:1255) refers to this as the “root-node limitation”.

One recourse in this case is to reconstruct the most commonly occurring forms in the daughter languages, the so-called “majority wins” strategy. Among the Austronesian languages of Taiwan and the Philippines, only Rukai has canonical accusative alignment, the others being characterized by a type of non-accusative alignment which has been labeled a “focus system”, “voice system”, or “ergative” (see Schachter 1976; Payne 1982; Gerdts 1988; de Guzman 1988; Shibatani 1988; Himmelmann 1999, 2005; Liao 2002, 2004; Aldridge 2004, 2008; Chang 2011;
and others for views and discussion). The “majority wins” premise would suggest that PAn should be reconstructed with this non-accusative type of alignment, which is the choice opted for by Ross (2009, 2012).

On the other hand, majority rule is not an absolute deciding factor in reconstruction. Given that discrepancies among sister languages must be accounted for in terms of changes from the reconstructed parent language, it is important to posit changes which are cross-linguistically plausible. In the following section, I propose a revision of Ross’ (2009) high-order Austronesian subgrouping and reconstruction of PAn alignment. Specifically, I go against the grain of “majority wins” and reconstruct PAn as an accusative language and show how the change to ergative alignment reflected in Tsou, Puyuma, and NucAn was a natural change conditioned by syntactic factors. I refer to the subgroup defined by this innovation as “Ergative Austronesian” (EAn).

(6) Austronesian
   /\ Rukai
  /   \\
/     \ Ergative An
Tsou  Puyuma  Nuclear An

3. New Proposal

Aldridge (2013, 2014) proposes that PAn was an accusative language and that this alignment is preserved in Rukai. Ergative alignment was first innovated in Rukai’s sister Proto-Ergative Austronesian in irrealis clauses, which I posit was the result of a commonly observed process of detransitivization in this clause type.
3.1. Morphology of irrealis in Ergative Austronesian

I first consider morphological evidence for the connection between irrealis clauses and ergative alignment in EAn. According to Teng’s (2008) description, Puyuma is a language with ergative or split-ergative alignment. What she glosses as “intransitive” is a simple intransitive or an antipassive. The three different transitive clause types differ in whether they are basic (“type 1”) transitives or applicative constructions. Applicatives are further divided into locative (“type 2 transitives”) and benefactive/instrumental (“type 3 transitives”) applicatives.

Puyuma realis (Teng 2008:147)

(7) a. tr<em>akaw dra paisu i isaw
   <INTR>steal INDEF.OBL money SG.NOM Isaw
   ‘Isaw stole money.’

b. tu=trakaw-aw na paisu kan isaw
   3.GEN=steal-TR1 DEF.NOM money SG.OBL Isaw
   ‘Isaw stole the money.’

c. tu=trakaw-ay=ku dra paisu kan isaw
   3.GEN=steal-TR2=1SG.NOM INDEF.OBJ money SG.OBL Isaw
   ‘Isaw stole money from me.’

d. tu=trakaw-anay i tinataw dra paisu
   3.GEN=steal-TR3 3.SG.NOM his.mother INDEF.OBL money
   ‘He stole money for his mother.’

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2 Teng (2008) does not label this construction “antipassive”, but she characterizes it as having attributes commonly found in antipassive constructions.
Another interesting fact about Puyuma is that, like many Formosan languages, it employs different affixes in realis and irrealis mood. (8) shows an array of focus affixes employed in imperative sentences.

\textbf{Puyuma imperatives} (Teng 2008:216)

(8) a. trekelr

\quad drink

\quad ‘Drink!’

b. pilang-\textbf{u} \quad i \quad \text{temuu} \quad m-\text{uka}

\quad take-TR1.IMP \quad SG.NOM \quad your.grandmother \quad INTR-go

\quad i \quad \text{drena-drenan}

\quad LOC \quad RED-mountain

\quad ‘Take your grandmother to the mountains.’

c. puka-i \quad \text{dra} \quad \text{tidrul} \quad \text{dra} \quad \text{samaya}

\quad put-TR2.IMP \quad INDEF.OBL \quad wasp \quad INDEF.OBL \quad some

\quad ‘Put some wasps (in).’

Examining the paradigm in (9) reveals an interesting parallel between realis and irrealis (imperative, negative, and future) transitive suffixes. The transitive realis suffixes all include \textbf{a}, which is followed by a glide. The glides in turn bear striking resemblance to the vowel suffixes – \textbf{u} and \textit{-i} in the irrealis forms. In fact, all of the realis forms can be derived by adding \textbf{–a} to the verb root or to the TR3 base \textit{V-an} and subsequently affixing either –\textbf{u} (for TR1) or –\textit{i} (TR2,
TR3).³

(9) Puyuma verbal inflection (adapted from Ross 2009:304)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TR1</th>
<th>TR2</th>
<th>TR3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realis</td>
<td>V-aw</td>
<td>V-ay</td>
<td>V-anay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>V-u</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>RED-V</td>
<td>RED-V-i</td>
<td>RED-V-an</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the origin and function of the pre-glide *a*, Ross (1995, 2002, 2009) reconstructs an *–a* suffix as the PAan nonfinite type 1 transitive suffix. This is understandable, given the role of the reflex in Tsou as the type 1 transitive suffix which surfaces on nonfinite verbs. The only finite verb forms in Tsou are auxiliary verbs. These show a transitive/intransitive⁴ dichotomy, but –a does not appear on auxiliaries.

Tsou (Chang 2011:285; based on Zeitoun 2000:93-4)

(10) a. mo mo-si ta pangka to emi ‘o amo

INTR.3S INTR-put OBL table OBL wine ABS father

‘Father put wine on the table.’

b. i-si si-a ta pangka to amo ‘o emi

TR-3.SG put-TR OBL table ERG father ABS wine

‘Father put the wine on the table.’

³ Ross (1995, 2002) identified a similar pattern, but did not propose an explanation for it.

⁴ (10a) appears to be transitive since it contains a direct object, but this is analyzed by Chang (2011) as an antipassive. Note that the direct object is indefinite.
Thus, Tsou offers compelling evidence that *-a attached to nonfinite verbs. Given the potential to further attach irrealis affixes, as in Puyuma, I reconstruct *-a as a nonfinite irrealis suffix, which I refer to simply as “subjunctive”. Further support comes from the fact that the reflex of *-a occurs on nonfinite, hortative, imperative, or subjunctive verbs in a variety of Formosan, Philippine, and Malayic languages, as noted by Ross (2009). Below are imperative examples from Rukai.

Tanan Rukai

(11) a. k<u>anɨ-a
   <M>eat-IMP
   ‘Eat!’

b. sila’-a na avava-su
   seek-IMP ACC toy-2SG
   ‘Look for your toy!’

Regarding the vowels/glides, Tsou also has –i on TR2 and TR3 verbs, suggesting that this portion of the paradigm be reconstructed to a common ancestor of Puyuma and Tsou.

(12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTR</th>
<th>TR1</th>
<th>TR2</th>
<th>TR3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonfinite</td>
<td>m-V</td>
<td>V-a</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-(n)eni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, we have arrived at the following reconstruction of the parent of Puyuma and Tsou. The non-accusative type of alignment found in modern Puyuma is reconstructed only for
irrealis contexts. Tsou retains the subjunctive forms as the basic nonfinite paradigm. The affixes have been simplified somewhat, and this may be due to a process of monophthongization, given that modern Tsou does not have diphthongs. The first column in (13) is labeled “verb” rather than “intransitive”. This is because ergative alignment is not found in realis clauses, where *M-V would have appeared on either transitive or intransitive verbs.

(13)    PEAn reconstruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>TR1</th>
<th>TR2</th>
<th>TR3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realis</td>
<td>*M-V</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive</td>
<td>*M-V-a</td>
<td>*V-a-u</td>
<td>*V-a-i</td>
<td>*V-an-a-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>*V</td>
<td>*V-u</td>
<td>*V-i</td>
<td>*V-an-i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have tentatively attributed the reconstructions in (13) to Proto-Ergative Austronesian, so Nuclear Austronesian languages are also predicted to reflect the irrealis transitive suffixes, and indeed they do. The realis affixes in the Atayalic language Seediq are reflexes of PAn nominalizers, as proposed by Ross (2009). The irrealis affixes are clearly related to the transitive affixes in Tsou and Puyuma.

(14)    Seediq realis vs irrealis (Holmer 1996:38)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTR</th>
<th>TR1</th>
<th>TR2</th>
<th>TR3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realis</td>
<td>&lt;m&gt;/m-V</td>
<td>V-un</td>
<td>V-an</td>
<td>s-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-ani</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V-i</td>
<td>V-ani</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 The chart in Holmer (1996:38) does not show the forms for negation but Holmer points out on page 62 that the negator ini is followed by imperative verb forms.
On the other hand, Rukai has consistent accusative alignment and does not reflect the transitive affixes in (13), though it does retain the *-a subjunctive as an imperative, as shown above in (11).

Tanan Rukai

(15)  a. uduri=aku sa bilbil

plant=1SG.NOM INDEF banana

‘I plant bananas.’

b. labuwal=aku kila

walk=1SG.NOM come

‘I come walking.’

On this basis, it is reasonable to conclude that the transitive irrealis paradigm arose as the result of an innovation in Proto-Ergative Austronesian, meaning that PAn can be reconstructed with accusative alignment, which is retained in Rukai.

(16)  PAn reconstruction


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>TR1</th>
<th>TR2</th>
<th>TR3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realis *M-V</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive *M-V-a</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative *V</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before proceeding, however, it must be acknowledged that Ross’ (2012) “root node limitation” makes it difficult to conclude with any certainty that irrealis suffixes were innovated. Another logical possibility is to attribute (13) to PAn and posit that Rukai lost the transitive
irrealis suffixes. In the next subsection, I support the proposed reconstruction of PA\text{n} as accusative by positing a natural syntactic change to account for the innovation of ergative alignment in irrealis clauses in Proto-Ergative Austronesian.

### 3.2. Innovation in the irrealis in Proto-Ergative Austronesian

Within the Minimalist Program of Chomsky (2001) and subsequent works, the functional heads finite T and transitive v value nominative and accusative case, respectively, with the first NP in their c-command domains. Consequently, nominative case generally appears on the structurally most prominent NP in the clause, specifically the subject, while accusative case is found on the highest NP within the VP, i.e. the object. In other words, this process results in accusative alignment, most notably the uniform assignment of nominative case to the first member of the verb’s argument structure.

(17) a. She[NOM] walks.
   b. She[NOM] sees him[ACC].
   c. TP
      \[ T[u \bar{\phi}] \]
      \[ vP \]
      \[ NP[\phi, NOM] \]
      \[ v' \]
      \[ v[u \bar{\phi}] \]
      \[ VP \]
      \[ V \]
      \[ NP[\phi, ACC] \]

In an ergative language, nominative case is not assigned uniformly to the subject. Rather, the subject in an intransitive clause shares the case of the object in a transitive clause.
This lack of uniformity requires a modification to the analysis in (17). A straightforward approach has been formulated by Legate (2008), which posits an exceptional type of $v$ in transitive clauses to assign an inherent case to the subject. This $v$ does not make accusative case available for the object, but since the subject does not require licensing from $T$, $T$ is free to look past the subject and value nominative case on the object. See also Bok-Bennema (1991), Bittner and Hale (1996), Ura (2000), Alexiadou (2001), Aldridge (2004), Anand and Nevins (2006) for similar approaches.
Aldridge (2012) has proposed that such a parametric distinction can account for the change from accusative to ergative alignment in nominalized clauses in Proto-Nuclear Austronesian. The input to the reanalysis is a cleft construction embedding a reduced relative clause $nP$. Since $n$ is a nominal category, it does not make accusative case available for the object. The object raises to the edge of $nP$ in order to receive a focus interpretation and also be case licensed by T. The subject is assigned genitive case in its base position in $nP$. Ergative alignment results when the cleft is reanalyzed as a monoclausal construction after loss of the copula in T, which in turn results in relabeling (in the sense of Whitman 2000) of $n$ as $v$.

(20)

Aldridge (2014) proposes that detransitivization of $v$ in irrealis clauses accounts for the emergence of non-accusative alignment in Proto-Ergative Austronesian. Irrealis clauses are detransitivized in a number of languages, in the sense that structural case is not available for the

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7 Hopper and Thompson (1980) propose realis/irrealis as one of their transitivity parameters. See also Denniss (2007), Beavers and Zubair (2010), and others for analyses of irrealis clauses as intransitive.
object. One example is the phenomenon known as “genitive of negation” in Slavic languages. In the following Russian examples, an object often receives genitive case in the scope of sentential negation, as in (21). Since inherent case is assigned to the object rather than the subject, alignment does not change, both transitive and intransitive subjects continuing to be marked nominative.

**Russian** (Harves 2002a:97)

(21) Anna ne kupila knig.

Anna.NOM NEG bought books.GEN

‘Anna did not buy any books.’

Under different conditions, the object can surface with nominative case. Objects in telic events in Finnic languages require structural licensing, which is typically accusative case, as in (22a). In atelic events, objects are assigned partitive case, as in (22b). Note the object is also definite in a telic event, while it can be (and often is) indefinite in atelic events.

**Estonian** (Hiietam 2004)

(22) a. Poiss luges raamatu läbi.

boy.NOM read.PAST.3.SG book.ACC through

b. Poiss luges raamatut.

boy.NOM read.PAST.3.SG book.PART

‘The boy was reading a/the book.’

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8 See Kiparsky (1998) for discussion of the correlation between case and aspect in Finnish.
Hiietam (2004) shows that accusative case is not available imperative clauses in Estonian. The object receives partitive case, as expected, in the atelic clause in (23a) but appears with nominative case in the telic clause in (23b). I interpret this as a consequence of the detransitivization of \( v \), depriving it of the ability to value accusative case. When the object requires structural licensing in the telic event, it must undergo Agree with T and value nominative case.

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{Estonian (Hiietam 2004)} \\
(23) & \text{a. Söö võileiba!} \\
& \text{eat.2.SG.IMP sandwich.PART} \\
& \text{‘Eat some sandwich!/ i.e. Do some sandwich eating!’} \\
& \text{b. Söö võileib ära!} \\
& \text{eat.2.SG.IMP sandwich.NOM up} \\
& \text{‘Eat the sandwich up!’}
\end{array}
\]

The emergence of non-accusative alignment in irrealis clauses in Proto-Ergative Austronesian, as proposed above in (13), can be accounted for as a consequence of the detransitivization of irrealis \( v \), coupled with the availability of inherent case for the subject. Note that subjects in transitive clauses in Puyuma are genitive, while the object is nominative, as shown in (23a). The object in the transitive clause is definite, while the object in the antipassive in (23b) is indefinite. This alternation also falls out naturally on the proposed analysis. Just as in Finnic languages, I assume that definite objects in telic events in PEAn required structural licensing, forcing the object to undergo Agree with T in irrealis clauses. But in atelic events, the indefinite object could
be assigned inherent case. The transitive irrealis clauses were later reanalyzed as realis root clauses in Puyuma. The objects in these clauses are always definite and have nominative case (Teng 2008:147). But the inherited realis clause type, with the verb inflected with a reflex of *M-, would have been retained in atelic events with inherently case marked indefinite objects. Put differently, this analysis accounts for why the reflex of *M- is found on intransitive or antipassive verbs in Formosan and Philippine languages today, while transitive clauses have a different diachronic source (irrealis in Puyuma and Tsou) and nominalization in NucAn languages.

**Puyuma realis** (Teng 2008:147)

(23) a. tu=trakaw-aw na paisu kan isaw  
3 GEN=steal-TR1 DEF.NOM money SG.OBL Isaw  
‘Isaw stole the money.’

b. tr<em>akaw dra paisu i isaw  
<INTR>steal INDEF.OBL money SG.NOM Isaw  
‘Isaw stole money.’

In this way, the emergence of ergative alignment in irrealis clauses in Proto-Ergative Austronesian can be understood as a natural and conditioned syntactic change, resulting from the detransitivization of v in irrealis clauses. As proposed in section 3.1, Tsou reflects the subjunctive of PEAn in embedded, nonfinite contexts. In Puyuma, the subjunctive was reanalyzed as a finite root clause type. Aldridge (2014) proposes that this was triggered by the loss of auxiliaries in this language, which are retained in Tsou. Evidence for the loss of the
auxiliaries in Puyuma comes in the guise of clitic placement. Subject agreement markers in Tsou are all post-verbal (specifically, post-auxiliary), as can be seen in (24), as well as in (10).

Tsou

(24) a. te-ta m-imo ta emi
will-3SG.BN AF-drink OBL wine
‘He will drink wine.’  

b. te-ta n’a ana ’e naveu?
IRR-3 ASP eat.PF9 NOM rice
‘Is she going to eat the rice (later)?’  

In contrast, weak pronominal subjects in intransitive clauses in Puyuma are enclitics, while they procliticize to the verb in transitive clauses. Note the lack of an auxiliary verb, the main verb occupying clause-initial position.

Puyuma

(25) a. bəray=ku ḍa kuraw ḍa ɲiaw (Tan 1997:11)
give=1.SG.NOM OBL.INDEF fish OBL.INDEF cat
‘I gave a fish to a cat.’

9 The main verb in (24b) is glossed as “patient focus” to indicate that the semantic object is the argument with nominative case in this clause type.
b. tu=trakaw-aw na paisu kan isaw (Teng 2008:147)

3.GEN=steal-TR1 DEF.NOM money SG.OBJ Isaw

‘Isaw stole the money.’

Starosta et al. (1982) and Ross (2002, 2006) have proposed that clitics in PAn were all enclitics and that proclitics in the languages that have them are the result of the loss of a clause-initial auxiliary verb. I adopt this analysis here and further suggest that the loss of the subjunctive-introducing auxiliary in Puyuma provided the trigger for the reanalysis of subjunctive to realis root clause in this language. Specifically, without the auxiliary, the child acquiring the language did not have evidence that the verb was nonfinite (or embedded, for that matter). Consequently, they chose the default parameter (in the sense of Roberts 1997, Roberts and Roussou 2003) setting and acquired these forms as finite root verbs.

4. Methodological Summary

This article has summarized three approaches to high-order subgrouping in Austronesian languages. I have shown how subgrouping hypotheses have been refined by examining different kinds of linguistic evidence: sounds, morphology, and syntax. The basic methodology is the same in all three cases. First, forms are compared in an attempt to reconstruct the linguistic system in the language ancestral to all of the languages under consideration. When discrepancies are found among the related languages, reconstructions are chosen so as to account for synchronic variation by means of natural changes.

I have proposed a syntactic change that accounts for the emergence of ergative alignment in Austronesian languages through a commonly observed process of detransitivization. The
naturalness of this change suggests that PAn should be reconstructed with accusative alignment, which is retained in Rukai, while ergative alignment was innovated in Rukai’s sister, Proto-Ergative Austronesian.

References


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