

## Absolutive Case in Tagalog

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### 1. Tagalog Morphology and ANG Case

There is an ongoing debate concerning the relationship between verbal morphology and marking on nominal arguments in Tagalog. In the two examples in (1), when the verb takes the *-in-* inflection, ANG case appears on the direct object. When the verb takes *-um-* marking, ANG case appears on the subject.

- (1) a. **B-in-**ili          ng      babae                  *ang*    *isda*.  
      -??-Perf-buy    NG      woman                  ANG    fish  
      ‘The woman bought the fish.’
- b. **B-um-**ili          *ang*    *babae*                  ng      *isda*.  
      -??-Perf-buy    ANG    woman                  NG      fish  
      ‘The woman bought a/\*the fish.’

One important characteristic of ANG-marked nominals is this is the only DP which is able to undergo A'-movement<sup>1</sup>. For example, a relative clause can be formed on a direct object when the verb takes the *-in-* affix. In order to relativize on the subject, the verb must be affixed with *-um-*.

- (2) a. *Ano*    *ang*    **b-in-**ili                  ng      *babae*?  
      what    ANG    -Asp.??-buy    NG      woman  
      ‘What did Maria buy?’
- b. \**Sino*    *ang*    **b-in-**ili                  *ang*    *isda*?  
      who    ANG    -Asp.??-buy    ANG    book  
      ‘Who bought a/the book?’

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<sup>1</sup> This restriction applies only to DPs and not constituents of different categories. Aldridge (2002, 2004) presents a detailed account of this asymmetry, as well as differences in extraction restrictions between Tagalog and other Austronesian languages. This paper focuses only on DP extraction in Tagalog.

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- c. Sino ang b-**um**-ili ng isda?  
who ANG -Asp.??-buy NG book  
'Who bought a/the book?'

Under an ergative approach to Tagalog syntax, this phenomenon comes as no surprise. *-in-* clauses are transitive, while *-um-* clauses are intransitive or antipassive. ANG marks structural absolutive case, while NG marks inherent case (either ergative or oblique). The restriction that only absolutives are eligible to undergo A'-extraction is common property of syntactically ergative languages (Payne 1982; England 1983; Dixon 1979, 1994; Bittner 1994; Manning 1996; Campana 1996; Aldridge 2004, 2005; among many others).

This paper proposes an ergative analysis of Tagalog verbal morphology and A'-extraction. However, I first consider and argue against an alternative view of Tagalog as an accusative language.

## 2. The Case Agreement Analysis

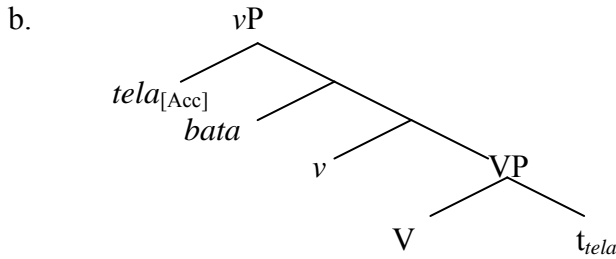
Rackowski (2002) and Rackowski and Richards (2005), which I refer to here as the case agreement analysis, propose that ANG and NG are not case markers, per se. Rather, nominative and accusative case are checked and valued by T and *v*, respectively, in the usual way. ANG marks the DP which undergoes an Agree relation with the verb and copying its case feature to the verb. This is realized morphologically as *-in-*, for the accusative case feature of a direct object, or as *-um-*, for the nominative case feature of a subject.

The examples in (3) and (4) show the case agreement process. In a finite clause with two DP arguments, T values nominative case on the external argument, while *v* values accusative case on the theme or patient argument. A VP-internal DP raises to the *v*P phase edge when it is specific. As the highest DP in the *v*P phase edge, it triggers case agreement on the verb and is marked by ANG.

In (3), the object *tela* 'cloth' raises to the outer specifier of *v*, where it receives a specific interpretation at LF. Agreement with its accusative case feature is registered as the *-in-* inflection on the verb.

- (3) a. B-**in**-ili ng bata ang tela.  
-Asp.Acc-buy CS child ANG cloth  
'The child bought *the cloth*.'

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In (4), the nonspecific object does not shift to the phase edge, leaving the external argument in the highest position in  $vP$ . This is now the highest DP in the  $vP$  phase edge and registers nominative case agreement on the verb in the form of *-um-*.

- (4) **B-um-ili**            *ang*   *bata*   *ng*   *tela*.  
 -Asp.Nom-buy    ANG   child   CS   cloth  
 ‘The child bought the cloth.’

As noted above, only ANG-marked DPs can be A'-extracted. From the standpoint of the case agreement analysis, this is the DP which undergoes case agreement with  $v$ . In structural terms, as just illustrated, this will always be the highest DP in the  $vP$  phase edge. Rackowski and Richards (2005) derive this generalization from their notion of locality specified by the following definition of ‘closest’ goal (p. 579).

- (5)    A goal  $\alpha$  is the closest one to a given probe if there is no distinct goal  $\beta$  such that for some X (X a head or maximal projection), X c-commands  $\alpha$  but does not c-command  $\beta$ .

From this definition, only the highest specifier in  $vP$  can undergo an Agree relation with a probe on C, as in (6a). In (6b), a higher specifier blocks movement of a lower one, since the higher specifier c-commands the lower one.

- (6) a. [<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>[+wh]</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>vP</sub> *whP* [<sub>v'</sub> XP [<sub>v'</sub> ... ]]]]]  
 b. \*[[<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>[+wh]</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>vP</sub> XP [<sub>v'</sub> *whP* [<sub>v'</sub> ... ]]]]]]]

Extraction facts in Tagalog fall out naturally from this proposal. As the highest DP in  $vP$ , only the agreeing DP can be attracted by a probe on C. In (7a), the accusative argument undergoes object shift to the highest specifier of  $vP$ . This DP can then be attracted by the probe on C.

- (7) a. **Ano**   *ang*   **b-in-ili**        *ng*   *babae?*  
 what   ANG   -Asp.Acc-buy   NG   woman  
 ‘What did Maria buy?’

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- b. \*Sino ang b-in-ili ang isda?  
who ANG -Asp.Acc-buy ANG book  
'Who bought the book?'

In this paper, I argue against the case agreement analysis of the facts given above and present an alternative account based on the view that *-um-* and *-in-* are markers of transitivity. I first show that the case agreement approach incorrectly predicts the distribution of agreement and structural case in the language. Two key assumptions of the case agreement analysis are: 1) the verb always undergoes an Agree relation with the ANG-marked DP; and 2) structural case is always available for a direct object. However, I show in section 3 that there is compelling evidence that verbs do not always agree with the ANG-marked DP, but rather agreement takes place only in *-um-* (intransitive) clauses. I additionally show that it is only in transitive (*-in-*) clauses that *v* can value structural case on an internal argument.

My account of the extraction facts also differs from the case agreement analysis in some crucial respects. Movement of the ANG DP to the *v*P phase edge is not contingent on the information status of the nominal but is forced by an EPP feature which is merged as part of the feature bundle of transitive *v* (accompanying *-in-* verbal morphology).

### 3. Distribution of Case and Agreement

This section shows that the case agreement analysis incorrectly predicts the distribution of case and agreement in Tagalog. I first show that verbs agree with plural ANG DPs, but this agreement takes place only in *-um-* clauses and not with every ANG DP. I next show that *v* in a semantically transitive clause is not always able to assign structural case.

#### 3.1. Plural Agreement

In this subsection, I show that the distribution of  $\phi$ -feature agreement in Tagalog does not correlate with the case agreement proposal that verbs undergo agreement with ANG DPs in every clause in Tagalog. In Tagalog, a verb can agree with a plural ANG-marked DP. But this only takes place in 'nominative agreement' contexts and not with every ANG DP<sup>2</sup>. (8a) shows agreement on the verb with a plural ANG-marked subject. (8b) shows that this agreement does not take place with a NG-marked object.

- (8) a. Nag<sup>3</sup>-si-basa ang mga bata ng liham.  
Nom.Asp-Pl-read ANG Pl child CS letter  
'The children read a letter.'

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<sup>2</sup> See Schachter and Otones (1972), Schachter (1976), and Schachter (1996) for additional examples and discussion.

<sup>3</sup> *Mag-* and *nag-* are variants of *-um-* 'nominative agreement' markers. These appear on unergative intransitive or agentive antipassive verbs. *Nag-* is the perfective form of *mag-*. *Mag-* itself is derived from the combination of a causative prefix *pag-* and the *-um-* infix.





subject, contradicting the inherent assumption of the case agreement analysis that availability of accusative case cannot itself be dependent upon the appearance of the accusative agreement marker. The second problem is that, when the subject of an embedded nonfinite clause does get case-licensed, since the source of this case is matrix *v* and accordingly the case should be accusative, then the case agreement analysis has no way to account for the appearance of ‘nominative’ agreement on the embedded verb in (11b).

#### 4. Ergative Analysis

In the preceding section, I presented evidence that a verb agrees in number features with the ANG-marked DP only in clauses with *-um-* or *mag-* inflection on the verb. I also showed that matrix *v* can assign case to an embedded subject only when it has *-in-* or *-in* inflection. In this section, I present an analysis of Tagalog case and agreement, in which the difference between *-um-/mag-* and *-in-/in*<sup>4</sup> is not one of case agreement but rather of case assignment. I propose that these markers are merged in *v* and are associated with transitivity, *-in-/in* being transitive and *-um-/mag-* intransitive. Transitive *v* carries a structural case feature, while intransitive *v* does not. Transitive *v* additionally carries an EPP feature. This forces movement of the ANG DP to the *v*P phase edge, where it receives a presuppositional interpretation and is eligible to undergo further movement to [Spec, CP].

- (13)  $v_{Tr}$ : [uCase:Abs] feature to value with a DP in its c-command domain.  
Inherent ergative case to assign to the external argument.  
[EPP] feature to draw the absolutive DP to the *v*P phase edge.
- $v_{Intr}$ : No case feature.  
No [EPP] feature.
- $T_{Fin}$ : [uCase:Abs] feature in intransitive clauses.  
[uNum: ] feature for agreement with a DP T assigns case to.

It is ensured that T has an absolutive case feature exactly when *v* is intransitive, via selection between finite T and *v*. Finite T with an absolutive case feature selects intransitive *v*. It cannot select transitive *v*<sup>5</sup>.

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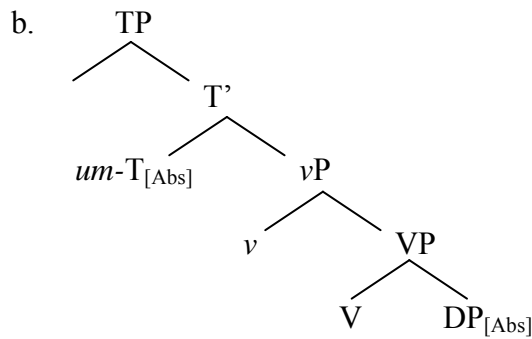
<sup>4</sup> *-in-* and *-in* both appear on transitive verbs. The infix is used in the perfective and progressive aspects, while the suffix is used in future and nonfinite contexts.

<sup>5</sup> The proposal that absolutive case assignment is divided between the subject and object case-checking functional heads is not new. Aldridge (2004) proposes that this is one of two types of syntactic ergativity found cross-linguistically. The proposal in this paper is based on Aldridge (2004), which is itself an updated version Aldridge’s (1998) original analysis of Tagalog. See Legate (2003) for a similar analysis of Warlpiri.

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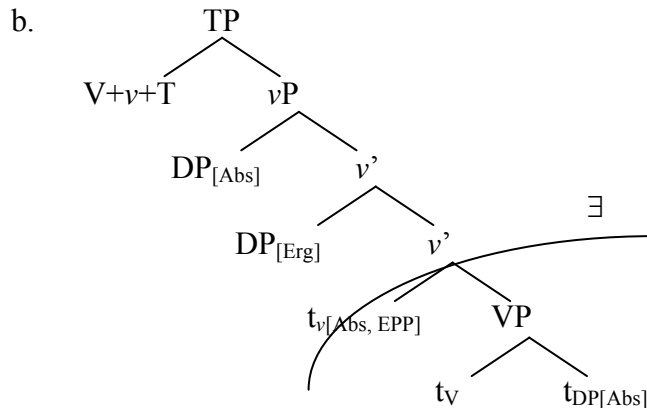
I begin illustrating the analysis in (13) with the intransitive example in (14). As seen in section 3.1, intransitive verbs take either *-um-* or *mag-*. *Mag-* generally attaches to unergative verbs, while *-um-* can attach to either unaccusative or unergative verbs. (14) shows an unaccusative. Since *v* is intransitive, T has an absolutive case to check a value with the subject. I assume with Chomsky (2001) that unaccusative *vP* is a weak phase, allowing T to probe down into VP without violating the Phase Impenetrability Condition.

- (14) a. D-**um**-ating      *ang*    *babae*.  
 -Intr.Perf-arrive    Abs    woman  
 ‘The woman arrived.’



In a transitive clause, *v* values absolutive case on the object. The absolutive object then raises to the *vP* phase edge by EPP feature on *v*.

- (15) a. B-**in**-ili      *ng*    *babae*      *ang*    *isda*.  
 -Tr.Perf-buy      Erg    woman      Abs    fish  
 ‘The woman bought the fish.’



This yields a wide scope, presuppositional interpretation for the absolutive, as per

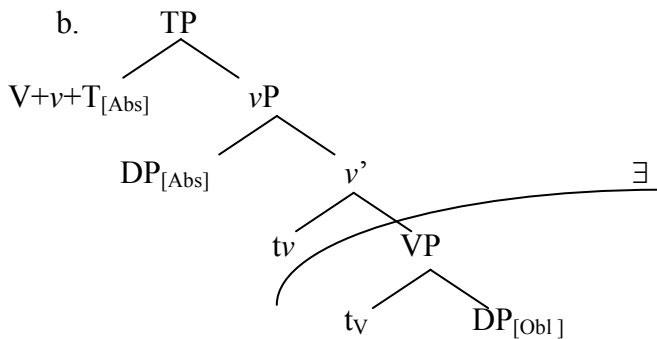
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Diesing's (1992) proposal that material external to the VP at LF is mapped to the restrictive clause, while VP-internal material is mapped to the nuclear scope. The absolutive object is also eligible to undergo further movement.

Comparing (14) and (15), a clear ergative pattern<sup>6</sup> can be observed in terms of case-marking: the intransitive subject has the same ANG marking as the transitive object. ANG-marked DPs also exhibit the syntactic behavior of absolutes: only these DPs can undergo A'-extraction.

A semantically transitive clause with *mag-/um-* marking on the verb is an antipassive. Since *v* is intransitive, T values absolutive case on the external argument. The object receives inherent oblique case from the verb. This intransitive *v* also has no EPP feature, so the object remains in its base position in VP.

- (16) a. **B-um-ili**            *ang babae*            *ng isda.*  
 -Intr.Perf-buy        Abs    woman            Obl    fish  
 'The woman bought a fish.'



This analysis accounts for the classic antipassive characteristics of this clause type. As shown by Kalmar (1979), Cooreman (1994), Bittner (1994), Basilico (2003), and numerous others, the direct object in an antipassive receives an indefinite, nonspecific, narrow scope interpretation, and absolutive case appears on the external argument instead of the object. The external argument is also the DP which is eligible for A'-extraction.

In this way, limiting the appearance of an EPP feature to transitive *v* automatically establishes the correlation between *-in-* and *-um-* verbal marking and the information status of the direct object. The interpretation is read off the structure, in the spirit of Diesing (1992), and there is no need to assume that semantic notions like specificity are responsible for driving syntactic operations like case agreement, as Rackowski and Richards propose. In fact, the correlation between specificity of the object and case agreement breaks down in applicative constructions. (17) shows three examples with a benefactive argument. The benefactive argument is packaged as a PP in the transitive

<sup>6</sup> Sever ergative analyses has been put forth for Tagalog or other Philippine languages, including Payne (1982), Gerdts (1988), de Guzman (1988), Aldridge (2004), and Liao (2004).

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clause in (17a) and the antipassive in (17b). (17c) is an applicative construction, in which the benefactive argument is the ANG-marked nominal. Rackowski (2002) and Rackowski and Richards (2005) assume (following Pylkkanen 2002) that applicative heads assign oblique case to their arguments. The applicative affix *i-* for the case agreement analysis, then, is the reflex of agreement with this oblique case.

- (17) a. B-in-ili=ko                      ang    libro    *para*    *sa*        *babae*.  
      -Tr.Perf-buy=1s.Erg            Abs    book    for      Dat      woman  
      ‘I bought the book for the woman.’
- b. B-um-ili=ako                     ng     libro    *para*    *sa*        *babae*.  
      -Intr.Perf-buy =1s.Abs        Obl    book    for      Dat      woman  
      ‘I bought a book for the woman.’
- c. **I**-b-in-ili=ko                    [<sub>AppIP</sub>    *ang*    *babae*    [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>V</sub>*    ng     libro]]  
      App-Tr.Perf-buy=1s.Erg            Abs    woman            Obl    book  
      ‘I bought the woman a book.’

The question at this point is the ungrammaticality of the examples in (21). Since, by the assumptions of the case agreement analysis, the applied argument is case-licensed by the applicative head, it should be able to appear as a DP, even when it does not trigger agreement on the verb. However, this is not the case. When an applied argument is packaged as a DP, it must be the ANG-marked argument. Under the case agreement approach, this means that applied objects must always undergo ‘specificity’ shift, regardless of their information status.

- (18) a. \*B-in-ili=ko                      ang    libro    *ng*        *babae*.  
      -Tr.Perf-buy=1s.Erg            Abs    book    Obl      woman  
      ‘I bought the book for a woman.’
- b. \*B-um-ili=ako                     ng     libro    *ng*        *babae*.  
      -Intr.Perf-buy =1s.Abs        Obl    book    Obl      woman  
      ‘I bought a book for a woman.’

Rackowski and Richards note that this is a potential problem for their analysis, but they do not offer a serious treatment of it. They merely concede that applied objects are required to undergo object shift and agree with the verb. This stipulation, however, not only contradicts their claim that object specificity is the mechanism which feeds case agreement.

Under the ergative approach, the contrast between (17a, b) and (18a, b) is accounted for straightforwardly. Although I adopt the structural aspect of Pylkkanen’s proposal that applicatives are functional heads which select the applied object and project an AppIP,

there is no reason to assume that the Appl head assigns case to this object<sup>7</sup>. Under the proposal put forth in this section, the applied object checks absolutive case with transitive  $v$ . It is also attracted to the  $v$ P phase edge by the EPP feature on this  $v$ . This accounts for the ungrammatical examples in (18). In (18a), the applied object is merged higher than the theme, so the applied object will be the one to be case-marked by transitive  $v$ , while the theme receives inherent case from the lexical verb. Intransitive  $v$  in (18b) has no case feature, so the applied object is not case-licensed.

The distribution of case and agreement in Tagalog observed in section 3 is accounted for in the following way. The number feature on T copies the agreement features of a plural subject. The number and case features on T are bundled together so that agreement takes place only with a DP that T assigns case to, i.e. in *-um-/mag-* intransitive clauses but not *-in-* transitive clauses.

Concerning the ECM facts, the feature bundle on  $v$  includes a case feature only when it is transitive. This accounts for ANG-marking on internal argument DPs in *-in-* clauses (ANG marks the structural absolutive case assigned by transitive  $v$ ). In intransitive clauses, the ANG case is supplied by T. By standard assumptions, nonfinite T is defective and does not have a case feature. Therefore, an embedded subject must rely on matrix  $v$  for exceptional case marking. This is only possible when matrix  $v$  is transitive, as in (11b), but not when it is intransitive, as in (12b).

## 5. Structural Versus Inherent Case

This section presents additional evidence against the case agreement analysis and in favor of the proposal in section 4. Specifically, I show that structural case is available for an object only in transitive *-in-/in* clauses, while objects in *-um-/mag-* clauses are dependent on inherent case from the lexical verb.

(19) shows the verb *gamit* ‘use’ with *-in-* marking and with *-um-* marking. For the case agreement analysis, *-in-* in (19a) marks accusative agreement with the object *lalaki* ‘man’; *-um-* in (19b) is nominative agreement with the subject *siya* ‘he/she’. Both clauses are assumed to be transitive, with nominative case assigned by T to the subject and accusative provided by  $v$  to the object. Under the transitivity analysis, *lalaki* receives absolutive case from transitive  $v$  in (19a), while the object is given inherent oblique case in (19b).

- (19) a. **Gina-gamit=niya**            ang    lalaki.  
           Tr.Prog-use=3s.Erg        Abs    man  
           ‘He/she uses the man.’
- b. **Guma-gamit=siya**        ng     lalaki.  
           Intr.Prog-use=3s.Abs    Obl    man  
           ‘He/she uses a man.’

<sup>7</sup> Pyllkkanen (2002) also does not offer strong argumentation that Appl assigns case.

I next show that *-in-*, but not *-um-*, verbs are possible when the complement of *gamit* is not a DP but a small clause. The verbs in (20) take *-in-* perfective marking. Under the current proposal, these verbs are transitive: *v* assigns case to the small clause subject, which is marked by ANG. Under the case agreement analysis, *v* assigns accusative case to the small clause subject in each example and then agrees with this same case feature.

- (20) a. **Gina-gamit=niya** [ang lalaki-ng alipin].  
 Tr.Prog-use=3s.Erg Abs man-Lk slave  
 ‘He/she uses the man as a slave.’  
 b. **Tina-tawag=niya** [ako-ng rebelde].  
 Tr.Prog-call=3s.Erg 1s.Abs-Lk rebel  
 ‘He/she calls me a rebel.’

In contrast to this, a small clause is not possible as complement of an *-um-* verb. Under the case agreement analysis, there should be no substantive difference between (20) and (21): structural case would be available from *v* for the ANG or NG-marked DP. Only the agreement is different.

The current proposal, however, accounts for the asymmetry straightforwardly. *-um-* shows that the verbs in (21) are intransitive. *v* therefore has no structural case feature to assign to the small clause subject. The question at this point is whether inherent case is available from the lexical verb in (21), as it is in (19). Under Hoekstra’s (1988, 1992) analysis of small clauses, in which the embedded subject is a constituent of the small clause and not selected by the lexical verb, inherent case is not available. The ungrammaticality of the examples in (21) is accounted for by the Case Filter.

- (21) a. \***Guma-gamit=siya** [ng lalaki-ng alipin].  
 Intr.Prog-use=3s.Abs Obl man-Lk slave  
 ‘He/she uses the man as a slave.’  
 b. \***Tuma-tawag=siya** [sa akin-g rebelde].  
 Intr.Prog-call=3s.Abs Obl 1s-Lk rebel  
 ‘He/she calls me a rebel.’

Whether Hoekstra’s structural analysis is accepted or not, the contrast between (19) and (21) clearly show that *-in-* and *-um-* verbs do not have equal ability to license VP-internal DPs.

A similar situation is revealed by causative constructions. When *-in* transitive marking appears on the verb, structural case is available for the causee, as in (22a). However, when intransitive *m-* appears on the verb, the causee can only take dative marking, as in (22b). NG-marking is not possible, as shown in and (22c). This is accounted for straightforwardly under the ergative analysis, since *v* in (22b) and (22c) is

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intransitive, and structural case is not available for the causee. Furthermore, NG would only be available for a theme or patient selected by a lexical verb. As an external argument merged in a specifier of  $v$ , a causee can only be given a prepositional case, like dative, if structural case is not available<sup>8</sup>.

- (22) a. Pag-da-dalh-**in**=ko      [<sub>vP</sub>    *ang*    *katulong*      ng      pagkain]  
          Caus-Fut-bring-Tr=1s.Erg      Abs    maid            Obl    food  
          ‘I will have the maid bring some food.’
- b. **Mag**-pa-pa-dala=ako    [<sub>vP</sub>    *sa*      *katulong*      ng      pagkain]  
          Intr-Fut-Caus-bring=1s.Abs    Dat    maid            Obl    food  
          ‘I will have the maid bring some food.’
- c. \***Mag**-pa-pa-dala=ako    [<sub>vP</sub>    *ng*      *katulong*      ng      pagkain]  
          Intr-Fut-Caus-bring=1s.Abs    Obl    maid            Obl    food  
          ‘I will have the maid bring some food.’

There are two problems posed by (22) for the case agreement analysis. One is the fact that NG-marking is not possible on the causee, since the same structural case should be available in both (22a) and (22c), with the sole difference being the case agreement. The other problem is the fact that it is dative case which is assigned to the causee when it is not the ANG DP. This leads us to believe that when a causee does agree with the verb, then the applicative *-an* (which Rackowski and Richards claim is the reflex of dative case agreement) should appear on the verb. Instead, it is *-in-* accusative agreement, for which there is no basis in the case agreement analysis.

**6. Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued against the case agreement analysis of Tagalog ANG-marking and extraction based on case agreement. I have presented an alternative analysis which treats verbal markers *-in-* and *-um-* as markers of transitivity. The transitivity analysis provides a straightforward account of the distribution of structural case and  $\phi$ -feature agreement in Tagalog. The dichotomy between transitive and intransitive  $v$  also accounts for the extraction asymmetry, by limiting the appearance of an EPP feature to transitive (but not intransitive)  $v$ .

The analysis of Tagalog syntax which I have presented yields an ergative view of this language, which is a welcome result, both empirically as well as theoretically. I have noted in section 4 the parallel behavior between Tagalog and well-known ergative languages in terms of case-marking, the absolutive extraction restriction, and the

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<sup>8</sup> This fact fits precisely with Woolford’s (2006) division of inherent case into two types. Case assigned by a lexical verb to its complement theme or patient is called ‘lexical’ case. In Tagalog this is NG-marking on a direct object. Woolford distinguishes lexical case from inherent case assigned to a specifier of  $v$ . The latter includes the case of ergative subjects and dative goals. The contrast between (22b) and (22c) also supports the analysis in which dative inherent case is assigned to a specifier of  $v$ .

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characteristics of antipassive constructions. I have also pointed out that the theoretical mechanisms which I propose therein place Tagalog within a broader Generative analysis of ergativity currently being developed for Australian, Eskimo, and other Austronesian languages.

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