1 Introduction

Linguists continue to debate the question of ergativity in Austronesian languages. Many have made a case for an ergative analysis (Payne 1982; Cooreman 1982; Hopper 1983; Gerdts 1988; De Guzman 1988; and Verhaar 1988; Gibson and Starosta 1990; Huang 1994; Liao 2002, 2004; Aldridge 2004), while others maintain an accusative perspective (Keenan 1976, Bell 1983, Davies 1991, Kroeger 1993, Rackowski 2002, Rackowski and Richards 2005). Yet others have put forth split-ergative proposals (Maclachlan 1996, Maclachlan and Nakamura 1997, Chang 1997, Wechsler and Arka 1998, Arka 1998, van de Visser 2003, Paul and Travis 2006) or relegate these languages to their own typological class (Schachter 1976, 1984, 1994). What I argue in this paper is that these languages do not all belong to a single typological class. Rather, some are ergative, many others exhibit a split-ergative system, and yet others are predominantly accusative. But what makes this variation interesting is that it can be accounted for in terms of a historical continuum: an ergative language evolves into a split-ergative language, which in turn eventually becomes an accusative language.

It is well-known that some accusative languages have developed an ergative case-marking pattern by reanalyzing passive clauses as active and transitive (Anderson 1977, Estival & Myhill 1988, and others). In a passive clause, an internal argument is promoted to subject status, while the underlying subject is treated as an oblique. If this clause type is reanalyzed as transitive, it takes on the appearance of a transitive clause in an ergative language. This progression can be
schematized as follows. Case-marker A is nominative or absolutive. Marker B represents non-nominative/absolutive, including oblique, ergative, and accusative.

(1) Accusative Transitive  =>  Passive  =>  Ergative

\[ V \text{ NP}_A \text{ NP}_B \quad V \ (\text{NP}_B) \text{ NP}_A \quad V \text{ NP}_B \text{ NP}_A \]

As for the transition from ergative to accusative, I propose that this process also begins in an intransitive construction, specifically an antipassive. An antipassive is semantically transitive, in that it contains two DP arguments. However, case-marking follows an intransitive pattern: the external argument has absolutive case, while the internal argument is marked as an oblique. This yields a mapping from semantic to grammatical relations which is parallel to transitive clauses in accusative languages.

(2) Intransitive Clauses in Ergative Languages

\[ V_1 \quad \text{NP}_A \]
\[ V_{AP} \quad \text{NP}_A \quad \text{NP}_B \]

I propose that an ergative language becomes split-ergative by reanalysis of its antipassive construction as syntactically transitive. A split-ergative language then can evolve into an accusative language through the further reanalysis of transitive ergative clauses as passive. I illustrate this continuum below with the ergative language Tagalog, the split-ergative languages Malagasy and Seediq, and the predominantly accusative standard Indonesian.
2 Analysis of ergativity

The analysis of case in an ergative language like Tagalog makes it particularly clear how the change from ergative to accusative syntax can begin in intransitive, especially antipassive clauses. Contra many well-known approaches to case in ergative languages, in which absolutive case is associated across the board with subject position (Murasugi 1992, Bittner and Hale 1996, Ura 2000, and others), I follow Aldridge (2004, 2008) in proposing that absolutive case-valuing is shared by T and $v^1$. Absolutive case is valued by T only in intransitive clauses. In a transitive clause, $v$ values absolutive case on the first DP in its c-command domain. Following Mahajan (1989), Woolford (1997, 2006), and Legate (2002, 2008), I assume that ergative is inherent case assigned by $v$ to the external argument.

(3) a B<in>ili ng babae ang isda.
   <Tr.Perf>buy Erg woman Abs fish
   ‘The woman bought the fish.’

b

In intransitive clauses, $v$ does not have a case feature, so case must be valued on the subject by T. The object receives inherent oblique case from the verb. Intuitively, this suggests that absolutives are expected to have the characteristics of direct objects in transitive clauses and
behave as subjects only in intransitive clauses. In terms of the historical analysis being
developed here, the prediction is that reanalysis of absolutes as subjects should take place in
intransitive, e.g. antipassive, constructions.

(4) a  B<um>ili ang babae ng isda.
    <Intr.Perf>buy Abs woman Obl fish
    ‘The woman bought a fish.

        b   TP
            vP
                DP[Case: ]
                     v
                          tV
                              VP
                                  DP[Obl]

The case features valued by T and transitive v are summarized below. Note that the absolutive
case feature on T is optional. Since this feature is uninterpretable, the derivation will converge
only if T has an absolutive case feature in intransitive clauses and does not have a case feature in
transitive clauses. This is because it is only in intransitive clauses that there will be a DP with an
unvalued case-feature to check the uninterpretable case feature on T.
(5) **Ergative language (Tagalog)**

\[ \nu_{Tr}: \text{Inherent ergative case} \]

\[ [u\text{Case}:\text{Abs}] \]

\[ \nu_{\text{Intr}}: \text{No case feature} \]

\[ T_{\text{Fin}}: \text{Optional}[u\text{Case}:\text{Abs}] \]

2.1 Subject properties of the external argument

The analysis sketched above accords well with the well-documented split in subject properties found in ergative languages. As shown by Anderson (1976), Larsen and Norman (1979), Payne (1982), Dixon (1994), Manning (1996), among many others, subject properties relating to binding and control reside with the ergative DP in a transitive clause and the absolutive in an intransitive clause. For example, (6a) shows that an ergative antecedent binds an absolutive reflexive. In the antipassive in (6b), the absolutive external argument is the binder.

(6) a P<in>igil **ng lalaki** ang sarili=niya.

\[<\text{Tr.Perf}>\text{control} \quad \text{Erg} \quad \text{man} \quad \text{Abs} \quad \text{self}=3\text{sg.Gen}\]

‘The man controlled himself.’

b Nag-pigil=**siya** sa sarili=niya.

\[\text{Intr.Perf}-\text{control}=3\text{sg.Abs} \quad \text{Dat} \quad \text{self}=3\text{sg.Gen}\]

‘He controlled himself.’

In (7), the ergative and absolutive external arguments serve as imperative and hortative addressees.
(7) a Bigy-an=mo=siya\ ng\ kape.
give-App=2sg.Erg=3sg.Abs ObI\ coffee
‘Give him the coffee.’

b K<um>ain=na=tayo.
<Intr.Perf>eat=now=1p.Abs
‘Let’s eat now!’

Controlled PRO also appears in external argument position.

(8) a Nagba-balak\ si\ Maria-ng [PRO\ tulung-an\ si\ Pedro]
Intr.Prog-plan\ Abs\ Maria-Lk\ (Erg)\ help-App\ Abs\ Pedro
‘Maria is planning to help Pedro.’

b Gusto\ ni\ Maria-ng [PRO\ b<um>ili\ ng\ libro]
want\ Erg\ Maria-Lk\ (Abs)\ <Intr.Perf>buy\ ObI\ book
‘Maria wants to buy a book.’
Note that both the matrix and embedded clauses in (8a) contain an overt absolutive DP, indicating that PRO need not appear in the slot reserved for absolutive DPs. This also provides further support for the analysis of case sketched above, i.e. that absolutive case in transitive clauses is valued by \( v \) and not T. If the source of absolutive case were uniformly T (or whatever \( v \)-P-external functional head responsible for case-licensing subjects), as proposed by Murasugi (1992), Bittner and Hale (1996), Ura (2000), and others, then we would not expect it to be available in nonfinite contexts, where T is defective and unable to value case.

### 2.2 Division of labor in case valuing

The preceding discussion has shown that ergative DPs in transitive clauses and absolutes in intransitive clauses exhibit syntactic behavior expected of subjects, indirectly supporting the case-valuing analysis proposed at the beginning of this section. This subsection provides direct evidence that absolutive case-valuing is shared by T and \( v \).

Recall first from (8a) above that absolutive case is available for an internal argument in a transitive nonfinite clause, indicating that T cannot be the source of this case. In contrast, (8b) shows that PRO appears in absolutive position in an intransitive nonfinite clause. This supports the current proposal that T values absolutive case in intransitive clauses, while \( v \) is the source of this case in transitive contexts.

It is possible, however, for an overt absolutive to appear in subject position in a nonfinite clause, provided that case is available exceptionally from matrix \( v \), i.e. when matrix \( v \) is transitive, as in (9a). Interestingly, antipassive, i.e. intransitive, \( v \) in (9b) is not able to case license the embedded subject.
This again demonstrates that the source of absolutive case is different in transitive and intransitive clauses. Specifically, absolutive case is not available from intransitive – even antipassive – \( v \). A similar asymmetry can be observed in Tagalog applicative constructions. Only transitive verbs can host applicative morphology, and the applied arguments always have absolutive status. This is expected, since transitive \( v \) has an absolutive case feature which can value case on the applied object. (10a) shows a transitive clause, with a benefactive PP argument. In (10b), with the benefactive applicative \( i- \) prefixed to the verb, the benefactive argument appears as the absolutive DP.

(10) a  B<in>ili=ko  ang libro para sa babae.

\(<\text{Tr.Perf} \text{buy}=1\text{sg.Erg} \text{ Abs book for Dat woman}\)

‘I bought the book for the woman.’
Tagalog antipassive verbs, on the other hand, cannot take applicative affixes. In the antipassive in (11a), the benefactive argument can appear as a PP, but it cannot appear as a DP, with the applicative prefix on the verb, as shown in (11b). This is unsurprising, since antipassive \( v \) is not capable of case-licensing the applied DP. Note further that inherent oblique case should not be available either, on the assumption that the applied argument is base merged in the specifier of ApplP (in the sense of Pylkkanen 2002), rather than being selected by the lexical verb.

(11)  

a  
\[
\text{B<um>ili=ako} \quad \text{ng libro para sa babae.}
\]

\[
<\text{Intr.Perf>buy=1sg.Abs Obl book for Dat woman}\]

‘I bought a book for the woman.’

b  
\[
\text{I-b<in>ili=ko} \quad \text{ng libro ang babae.}
\]

\[
\text{App-<Tr.Perf>buy=1sg.Erg Obl book Abs woman}\]

‘I bought the woman a book.’

The same point can be made with small clause subjects. Small clause subjects in Tagalog require transitive morphology on \( v \) in order to be case-licensed. 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. Therefore, the embedded subject is dependent on \( v \) for case-licensing.
This section has argued that absolutes behave as subjects only in intransitive clauses, suggesting that the reanalysis of the absolutive as a subject should begin in intransitive contexts. I have further shown that only transitive, but not intransitive or antipassive, \( v \) in Tagalog is capable of valuing absolutive case on an internal argument. The source of absolutive case in intransitive clauses must therefore be \( T \). In the next section, I show that the first step in the change from ergative to accusative syntax is the reanalysis of the antipassive construction as transitive. Specifically, I show in the next section that Malagasy is distinguished from Tagalog in that antipassive \( v \) is able to value structural accusative case.

### 3 First stage in the historical change - Malagasy

Malagasy is still predominantly ergative. (13) shows an ergative case-marking pattern. Malagasy is a VOS language. As (13) shows, absolutes appear in clause-final position.
Ergative clauses like (13a) are clearly transitive and have not been reanalyzed as passive. Evidence for this is that the ergative DP has the same subject properties as ergative nominals in Tagalog. For example, the ergative DP can antecede reflexives and serve as the addressee in an imperative construction, indicating that it has not been demoted to oblique status.

Controlled PRO also appears in the ergative slot in a transitive nonfinite clause.
(15) Kasain-dRasoa [PRO hosasana ny zaza]
    intend.TT.Gen.Rasoa Fut.TT.wash Det child
    ‘Rasoa intends to wash the child.’ (Paul and Travis 2006: 318)

However, Malagasy does not have an antipassive construction. The construction historically descended from the antipassive\(^2\) appears to have the characteristics of an active transitive clause. It is well known that objects in antipassive constructions cross-linguistically generally receive an indefinite, narrow scope interpretation (Bittner 1987, 1994, 1995; Bittner and Hale 1996; Kalmar 1979; Cooreman 1994; Campbell 2000). However, the direct object, in a Malagasy antipassive can be definite or can take wide scope over the external argument in Malagasy. Actor topic verbs are prefixed with \(maN-\) (\(naN-\) in the past tense), which is cognate with the Tagalog intransitive prefix \(maN-\).

(16) a Nanapaka ity hazo ity tamin’ny antsy i Sahondra.
    Past.AT.cut this tree this Past.P.Gen.Det knife Sahondra
    ‘Sahondra cut this tree with the knife.’

b Namaky ny boky roa ny mpianatra tsirairay.
    Past.AT.read Det book two Det student each
    ‘Each student read two books.’ (2>ALL) (Paul & Travis 2006: 323)

This contrasts with Tagalog, which as an ergative language retains its antipassive construction. Antipassive obliques in Tagalog are typically indefinite and nonspecific.
(17)  K<um>ain=ako ng isda.

       <Intr.Perf>eat=1sg.Abs Obl fish

   ‘I ate (a)/*the fish.’

Antipassive obliques in Tagalog also must take narrow scope with respect to the external argument, as shown in (18a). In transitive clauses, in contrast, an absolutive object will take wide scope over the ergative DP, as shown in (18b).

(18)  a Nag-basa ang [lahat ng bata] ng [marami-ng libro].

       -Intr.Perf-read Abs all Gen child Obl many-Lk book

   ‘All the children read many books.’

   ALL > MANY

   b Bin>asa ang [lahat ng bata] [marami-ng libro].

       <Tr.Perf>read Erg all Gen child Abs many-Lk book

   ‘All the children read many books.’

   MANY > ALL

Direct evidence that Malagasy active clauses are transitive and no longer antipassive comes from the fact that structural case is available for the direct object. Malagasy has a type of object promotion in active clauses whereby a PP can become a direct object. The PP in (19a) can be repackaged as a DP direct object in (19b). As a DP, it requires case, indicating that the active verb must have a case feature to value with it.
Further evidence comes from the fact that antipassive v in Malagasy can exceptionally case-mark an embedded subject. Note from section 2.2 that this was impossible in Tagalog.

We have seen that ergative clauses in Malagasy continue to function as active and transitive. I analyze Malagasy ergative clauses as parallel to their Tagalog counterparts. v values absolutive case with an internal argument, while ergative case is inherent. However, the Malagasy antipassive construction has been reanalyzed as transitive, i.e. antipassive v has acquired an accusative case feature. This is the distinguishing feature differentiating Malagasy from Tagalog in case-licensing.
Malagasy can therefore be characterized as a split-ergative language, with accusative syntax emerging in the former antipassive construction. The language otherwise remains ergative.

4. Second stage - Seediq

Further support for the proposal that change from ergative to accusative alignment begins in the antipassive construction comes from Seediq, an Ataylic language spoken in Taiwan. Not only has the antipassive construction been reanalyzed as transitive but the ergative construction has taken one step toward being reanalyzed as intransitive. (22) shows that Seediq retains an ergative case-marking pattern. Like Malagasy, Seediq is a VOS language and absolutes appear clause-finally.

(22) a Wada kudurjak ka qedin=na.

Past flee Abs wife=3sg.Gen

‘His wife ran away.’
b Wada bube-un na Pihu ka dangi=na.

Past hit-Tr Erg Pihu Abs friend=3sg.Gen

‘Pihu hit his friend.’

Also like Malagasy, Seediq has lost its antipassive construction. The direct object can be definite, as in (23).

(23) Wada beebu Pawan ka Awi-ni.

Past hit Pawan Abs Awi-Def

‘Awi hit Pawan.’

The object in an antipassive can also take wide scope with respect to the external argument, as in (24b). (24a) provides the preceding context for (24b).

(24) a Hatang=ku m-bari teru bale, bulequn=ku suburo.

plan=1sg.Abs Intr.Fut-buy three only well=1sg.Abs rotten

‘I planned to buy only three, but when I took a good look, they were rotten.’

b Kiyaka ini=ku bari kanna.

so Neg=1sg.Abs buy.Intr.Irr all

‘So I didn’t buy all of them.” (ALL > Neg’

Crucially, structural case is available for the object. (25) shows exceptional case-marking. Recall from section 2.2 that exceptional case-licensing is not available from antipassive v in Tagalog.
Likewise, structural case is available in an antipassive for a small clause subject. Again, this was shown to be impossible in Tagalog. Note that the bracketed constituent is clausal and not nominal. In a nominal phrase with an adjectival modifier, the adjective would follow the noun, e.g. *qutsurh meluk* ‘raw fish’.

What differentiates Seediq from Malagasy is the lack of a structural case feature on transitive \( v \). Evidence for this comes from the fact that absolutive case never appears in a nonfinite clause. If there were an absolutive case feature on transitive \( v \), then an absolutive DP should be licensed in a nonfinite clause and (27b) should be grammatical, contrary to fact. In other words, nonfinite clauses must all be intransitive or antipassive, with PRO occupying subject position. The fact that absolutive case does not surface in nonfinite clauses suggests that T is the sole source of this
Intr-Perf-go Intr-buy book Taipei Abs Ape
‘Ape went to buy books in Taipei.’

b *M-n-os [PRO burig-un taihoku (ka) patis] ka Ape.

Intr-Perf-go buy-Tr Taipei Abs book Abs Ape
‘Ape went to buy books in Taipei.’

The change from Malagasy to Seediq, then, is the loss of the case feature on transitive v. Consequently, the absolutive case feature has also become obligatory on finite T.

(28) Seediq: T-type split-ergative language

v_{Tr}: Inherent ergative case

No case feature

v_{AP}: [uCase:Acc]

v_{Intr}: No case feature

T_{Fin}: [uCase:Abs]

The fact that two changes have taken place in Seediq indicates that Seediq has developed further in the direction of accusative syntax. The fact that the transitivization of antipassive v in Malagasy is the sole parameter distinguishing the case system of Malagasy from Tagalog argues that reanalysis of the antipassive is the first stage in the historical continuum. This step can then
be followed by detransitivization of ergative v, as observed in Seediq.

Before turning to the next section, I point out that a word order change can be observed to have taken place in these languages concomitant with alignment change. Tagalog is a VSO language with relatively free word order. Malagasy and Seediq are both VOS. Particularly relevant is the fact that the absolutive DP must appear in clause-final position. Aldridge (2010) proposes that VOS order correlates high topicality of the absolutive DP, requiring this argument to move to a clause-peripheral topic position. Standard Indonesian, which I discuss in the next section, is an SVO language. The clause-initial DP has characteristics of both A’-position topics and A-position subjects, suggesting that it is presently in the process of being reanalyzed from topic to subject. I suggest here that this change is at least indirectly related to the alignment change. Since the change from ergative to accusative alignment begins in the antipassive construction, in which the absolutive argument is also a semantic subject, then one characteristic of alignment change is the emergence of a subject grammatical function. The reanalysis of the absolutive as subject is mediated by topicalization, i.e. by giving prominence to this grammatical function by dislocating it to a clause-peripheral topic position.

I additionally point out that Malagasy and Seediq also have relatively impoverished morphological case. Absolutives appear in clause-final topic position, but no morphological case-marking distinguishes the clause-final argument from a clause-internal direct object in Malagasy. This can be seen in (20) above. Ny is a determiner and does not mark case. Garrett (1990) has proposed that a change in a language’s case-marking pattern can play a role in accusative and ergative alignment change. It could be suggested for Malagasy that the structural reanalysis in the former antipassive construction is the result of the loss of oblique case-marking on the direct object. In theoretical terms, the disappearance of the case-marker might signal the
loss of inherent case and subsequent emergence of a structural case feature on \( v \) for the direct object.

However, if we look at the Seediq examples, the absolutive case-marker is retained. In this language, there is clearly a three-way case distinction: ergative (\( na \)), absolutive (\( ka \)), and accusative (null). Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that the presence or absence of morphological case-marking is the trigger for either alignment or word order change. Seediq makes it clear that changes in structural case features on T and \( v \), as well as the change to fixed VOS word order, took place before the loss of morphological case.

5 Third stage exemplified - Indonesian

The transition which reanalyses transitive ergative clauses as passive is exemplified by standard Indonesian. Indonesian is nearly a fully accusative language and has no antipassive construction. However, it retains some remnant aspects of ergative syntax in the passive construction.

Standard Indonesian exhibits a nominative/accusative case-marking pattern. Nominative subjects appear in clause-initial position. Note the \( meN- \) prefix on the active transitive verb in (29a). This \( meN- \) is again cognate with Malagasy \( maN- \) and intransitive \( maN- \) in Tagalog.

(29)  

a  Ali  \textit{mem}-beli  buku.  
\hspace{1cm} Ali  Act-buy  buku  
\hspace{1cm} ‘Ali bought a book.’

b  Ali  bekerja.  
\hspace{1cm} Ali  work  
\hspace{1cm} ‘Ali works.’
I showed in section 3 that *maN*-verbs in Malagasy are transitive; accusative case is available to value with an internal argument. This is also true in Indonesian. Applicatives can occur on active verbs. (30a) shows a mono-transitive clause with a DP direct object followed by a benefactive PP. In (30b), the benefactive has been promoted to direct object status and appears as a DP. Promotion of the object indicates that structural case must be available to license it.

(30)  

a  Ali **mem**-beli buku pada Nuri.  
Ali Act-buy book for Nuri  
‘Ali bought a book for Nuri.’

b  Ali **mem**-beli-kan Nuri buku.  
‘Ali bought Nuri a book.’

Note additionally that the applied object will become the subject if the clause is passivized. This provides additional evidence that this DP is the accusative case-marked direct object in (30b) above.

(31)  

Nuri **di**-beli-kan oleh Ali.  
Nuri Pass-buy-App buy Ali  
‘Nuri was bought a book by Ali.’
Passives are clearly intransitive in some instances: they occur freely without an agent, indicating that this argument has been demoted to oblique status.

(32) Banyak karya seni dapat di-beli di Indonesia.

many work art can Pass-buy in Indonesia

‘Many works of art can be bought in Indonesia.’ (Verhaar 1988: 350)

This indicates that active clauses are fully transitive in having structural case available for the direct object, while passives are clearly intransitive. There is also evidence that, as in Seediq, T is the sole source of nominative case. In nonfinite clauses, PRO will always occur in subject position. Overt nominatives will not appear in nonfinite embedded clauses.

(33) a Saya ingin [PRO mem-ilih dia sebagai presiden.

1s want Act-choose 3s as president

‘I want to choose him as president.’

b Saya ingin [PRO di-pilih sebagai presiden.

1s want Pass-choose as president

‘I want to be chosen as president.’

Clearly, then, Indonesian passive v lacks both a case feature and the ability to select an external argument.

The preceding discussion suggests that Indonesian is a fully accusative language, with T valuing nominative case and v valuing accusative case. However, there are still remnants of
ergative syntax in Indonesian. It is well-known that not all passives in Indonesian are of the canonical type seen in (32) (Arka and Manning, 1998; Chung, 1976; Cole and Hermon, 2005; Guilfyole, Hung, and Travis, 1992; Musgrave, 2001a, 2001b; Sneddon, 1996; among others). There is another type of passive\(^3\), in which the agent is expressed as a pronoun. The pronoun can be a free or bound form. The free form pronominals can express any person, as shown in (34a). 1\(^{st}\) and 2\(^{nd}\) person have alternate proclitic forms, as shown in (34b).

\[\text{Indonesian (Arka & Manning 1998:3)}\]

(34) a. Buku itu saya/kamu/dia baca.

book that 1sg/2sg/3sg read

‘The book, I/you/(s)he read.’

b. Buku itu ku-/kau-baca.

book that 1sg/2sg-read

‘The book, I/you read.’

Crucially, there is evidence that pronominal passives are transitive, i.e. can select an external argument. This is shown by the fact that these agents exhibit the behavior of subjects in that they can antecede reflexives. (35a) shows examples of all types of pronominal passive: preverbal free form, proclitic, and enclitic. These all pattern with subjects in active clauses with meN-, which also have the ability to bind reflexives, as shown in (35b). In contrast, the agent in the cannonical passives in (35c) is unable to bind a reflexive.
    self-1sg 1sg surrender-App to police
    ‘I surrendered myself to the police.’

    1sg Act-surrender-App self 1sg to police
    ‘I surrendered myself to the police.’

c. ?*Diri-nya di-serah-kan ke polisi oleh Amir.
    self-3sg.Gen Pass-surrender-App to police by Amir
    ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir.” (Arka & Manning 1998:5)

Further evidence of the transitivity of pronominal passives comes from the fact that agents can serve as imperative addressees,¹ a fact pointed out by Verhaar (1988).

(36) Kerja-kan hitungan itu!
    solve.Pass-App sum that
    ‘Solve those sums!’

The evidence presented above indicates that the Indonesian clause type which descends from antipassive is fully transitive. However, as shown above, remnant ergative syntax can still be observed in pronominal passive clauses. In terms of the historical continuum I have proposed in this paper, reanalysis of antipassive to transitive is complete. But reanalysis of transitive to

¹ When the agent is first or second person, a passive verb does not take the di- prefix but rather appears as the bare stem.
passive is still in progress. Again, this fact supports my position that the change from ergative to accusative syntax in Austronesian languages is initiated in the antipassive construction and only later extends to ergative clauses.

I will add before concluding this paper that historical change from ergative to accusative syntax originating in an antipassive construction has been independently demonstrated for languages outside of the Austronesian family. Harris (1985) shows that the direction of change in Kartvelian languages is from ergative to accusative or active and that the series I accusative case-marking pattern in modern Georgian has its historical origin in a derived intransitive construction which had the case-marking and aspectual properties generally associated with antipassives.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have proposed an account of varying degrees of ergative syntax among Western Austronesian languages in terms of a historical continuum. I have shown how an ergative language can evolve into a split-ergative language through the reanalysis of its antipassive construction as active and transitive. Subsequently, a split-ergative language can become accusative after the reanalysis of ergative clauses as passive.

I have suggested that the trigger for this change is the reinterpretation of the absolutive nominal as a subject, which is most directly accomplished in intransitive clauses, including antipassives, since intransitive absolutives have the syntactic properties generally attributed to subjects in accusative languages.
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1 Legate (2002, 2008) also proposes that T and v share the function of case licensing of absolutive arguments in Warlpiri. A crucial difference between Legate’s and the current approach, however, is that Legate assumes that the case features valued by T and v are different – nominative and accusative, respectively, as in an accusative language – but are spelled out morphologically as a single default form post-syntactically. However, this approach is not fully
satisfactory in accounting for the variation in case systems among the Austronesian languages, since the split-ergative languages make use of both absolutive and accusative case for objects.

2 This construction is generally referred to in the literature as the “active” or “actor topic” construction.

3 This construction has been referred to in various ways in the literature: ‘object preposing’ (Chung, 1976), ‘objective voice’ (Arka and Manning, 1998), ‘passive type two’ (Cole and Hermon, 2005; Sneddon, 1996), etc. I employ the descriptive term ‘pronominal passive’ for the expository part of the present section but adopt the formal designation ‘ergative’ later.