A New Perspective on The WAn Alignment Debate

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Overview

- Western Austronesian languages are known to have **symmetrical voice -** or alternations in the **mappings of arguments to functions** *without* changes in **syntactic transitivity.**

- This has led to a debate as to whether the languages are **accusative**, **ergative** or have a **different system of alignment** altogether...

Overview

- In this talk, I will present evidence to show that languages can be **syntactically symmetrical** and nonetheless differ in the **semantic/discourse** properties of the voices.

- This makes some languages appear more **"ergative"** and others appear more **"accusative"** despite very similar structural properties.

- Consequently, I will argue that symmetrical voice and ergative/accusative alignment are not necessarily **mutually exclusive**

Overview

- Instead, determining alignment in symmetrical voice languages involves identifying the most proto-typical transitive clause using **semantic** and **discourse** means. (Kroeger 1993, 2004).

- This allows us to plot voice systems on a **scale** from ergative to accusative

- Hence, we can capture both the **symmetrical** nature of the alternations, and the **semantic/discourse differences** between WAn languages.

Roadmap

- Symmetrical Voice
- The Alignment Debate
- Semantic and Discourse Differences between WAn Voice Systems
- A Scalar Model of Alignment
- Conclusions

Symmetrical Voice

Western Austronesian

- Western Austronesian (WAn) voice alternations are **symmetrical –** in the sense that the alternations are equally syntactically transitive:
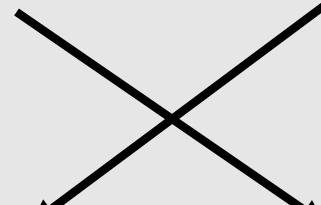
Actor Voice   **Undergoer Voice**

Semantic Roles   **A**   **U**   **A**   **U**

Syntactic Functions   **SUBJ**   **CORE**   **SUBJ**   **CORE**

Transitive   **Transitive**

Kelabit

(1a) **Actor Voice**

Nengelaak   *nuba'*   **tesineh nedih**

PFV.AV.cook   rice   mother 3SG.POSS

'Her mother cooked rice'

privileged argument/subject

Root = *laak*
AV = ne*N*-
UV = *-in-*

(1b) **Undergoer Voice**

Linaak   *tesineh nedih*   **nuba'**

PFV.UV.cook   mother 3SG.POSS   rice

'Her mother cooked rice'

privileged argument/subject

Evidence for Symmetrical Analysis

- **Morphology**
  - Actor and Undergoer in both AV and UV are **NPs**, whereas obliques are otherwise **PPs**:

(2) **La'ih sineh** nemerey *nuba'* [ngen anak nedih]$_{PP}$

man DEM PFV.AV.give rice to child 3SG.POSS

'The man gave rice to his child'

- **Syntax**
  - Actor and Undergoer behave like core arguments in both AV and UV
  - NB. does not mean that there are no morphosyntactic differences between the voices…

Relativisation

(3a) **Actor Voice**

Seni'er	kuh	**la'ih**	[suk	nenekul	nuba'	ngen seduk]
UV.PFV.see	1SG	man	REL	PFV.AV.spoon	rice	with spoon

'I saw the man who spooned up rice with a spoon'

CORE PROPERTY: *AV actor can be relativized on*

(3c) **Undergoer Voice**

Seni'er	kuh	**nuba'**	[suk	sikul	la'ih sineh	ngen seduk]
UV.PFV.see	1SG	rice	REL	UV.PFV.spoon	man DEM	with spoon

'I saw the rice that the man spooned up with a spoon'

CORE PROPERTY: *UV undergoer can be relativized on*

Raising

(4a)   **Actor Voice**

Uih	ngelinuh	**ieh**	*tu'uh-tu'uh*	[nekuman	*nuba'*	ngimalem]
1SG	AV.think	3SG	real-REDUP	AV.PFV.eat	rice	yesterday

'I thought him truly to have eaten his rice yesterday'

CORE PROPERTY: *AV actor can be raised*

(4c)   **Undergoer Voice**

Uih	ngelinuh	**nuba'**	*tu'uh-tu'uh*	[kinan	*neh*	ngimalem]
1SG	AV.PFV.think	rice	real-REDUP	UV.PFV.eat	3SG.GEN	yesterday

'I thought the rice truly to have been eaten by him yesterday'

CORE PROPERTY: *UV undergoer can be raised*

Time Adverbials

(5a) **Actor Voice**

La'ih	sineh	[nekuman	bua'	kaber]	ngimalem
man	DEM	PFV.UV.eat	fruit	pineapple	yesterday

'The man ate pineapple yesterday'

CORE PROPERTY: *AV undergoer and verb form a constituent*

(5c) **Undergoer Voice**

[Kinan	la'ih	sineh]	ngimalem	bua'	kaber	sineh
PFV.UV.eat	man	DEM	yesterday	fruit	pineapple	DEM

'The man ate that pineapple yesterday'

CORE PROPERTY: *UV actor and verb form a constituent*

Adjunct Fronting

(6a)   **Fronted AV Oblique**

Ngen   tekul,   **la'ih sineh**   **nen**ekul   *nuba'*

with   spoon   man DEM   AV.PFV.spoon   rice

'With a spoon, the man spooned up rice'

> **CORE PROPERTY: *AV undergoer cannot be fronted (unlike AV oblique)***

(6c)   **Fronted UV Oblique**

Ngen   tekul,   **nuba'**   s**i**kul   *la'ih*   *sineh*

with   spoon   rice   UV.PFV.spoon   man   DEM

'With a spoon, the rice was spooned up by the man'

> **CORE PROPERTY: *UV actor cannot be fronted (unlike UV oblique)***

Kelabit

Actor Voice
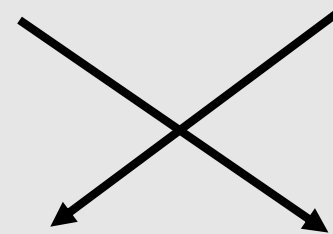
Undergoer Voice

Semantic Roles   A   U   A   U

- Relativisation
- Raising

Syntactic Functions   SUBJ   CORE   SUBJ   CORE

- Post-verbal position
- Adjunct fronting

Transitive   **Transitive**

Symmetrical Alternations Across WAn

- Kelabit is **not unique** in this respect – similar arguments can be made for a wide range of WAn languages:

Language	AV **actor &** UV **undergoer**	AV **undergoer and** UV **actor**
Sa'ban	Relativisation	Post-verbal position
		Adjunct fronting
Tagalog (Kroeger 1993, Schachter 1976)	Relativisation	Adjunct fronting
	Quantifier Float	Participial *nang* clauses
Indonesian (Riesberg 2014, Musgrave 2002)	Relativisation	Quantifier float
	Raising	
Balinese (Riesberg 2014, Arka 2003)	Relativisation	Quantifier float

Symmetrical Alternations Across WAn

Conclusion: *Both AV and UV are transitive!*
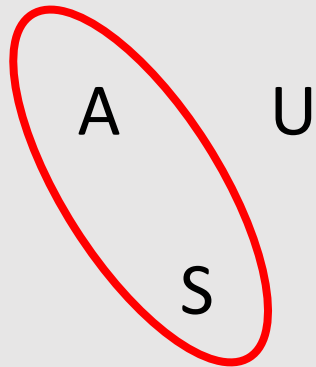
Q: What does this mean for alignment?
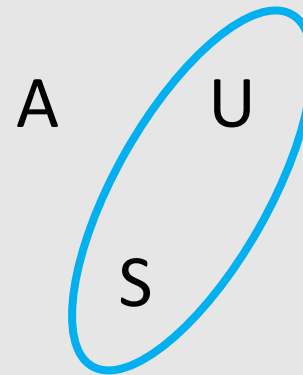
The Alignment Debate

Symmetrical Voice and Alignment

- The symmetrical nature of alternations has led to considerable debate over their **alignment** (Kroeger 1993).

- Alignment is typically determined by comparing **transitive** and **intransitive** clauses:

- What happens if there is **more than one** transitive clause type?

Symmetrical Voice and Alignment

- If we compare with AV alignment looks **accusative**:

(7a)   **Uku'**   tudo   lem   bakul   nedih

          dog   sit   in   basket   3SG.POSS

          S

          'The dog is sitting in its basket'

(7b)   **La'ih sineh**   nekuman   *bua' kaber*
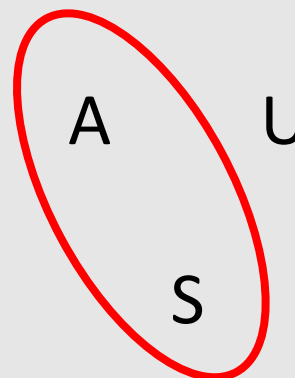
          man DEM   AV.PFV.eat   pineapple

          A   U

          'The man eats pineapple'

Accusative

A   U

S

Symmetrical Voice and Alignment

- If we compare with UV alignment looks **ergative:**
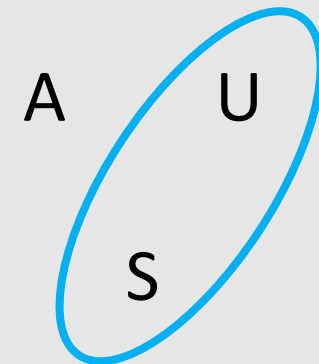
(7a) **Uku'** tudo lem bakul nedih

dog sit in basket 3SG.POSS

S

'The dog is sitting in its basket'

Ergative

A   U

(7c) **bua' kaber** kinan *la'ih sineh*

pineapple UV.PFV.eat man DEM

U A

'The man eats pineapple'

S

Analyses in the Literature...

1. AV is the basic transitive clause (UV is a passive) = **accusative alignment**

2. UV is the basic transitive clause (AV is an antipassive) = **ergative alignment**

3. Both AV and UV are equally basic = **symmetrical alignment**

- The morphosyntactic facts suggest that UV is not a passive and AV is not an antipassive which would seem to rule out 1 and 2...

- But 3 **disassociates** WAn from other voice systems & would suggest that all symmetrical voice systems are alike...

An alternative?

- Deciding on **alignment** is equivalent to deciding which transitive clause type to compare with.

- Identifying the basic transitive clause in terms of **morphosyntax** is difficult but…

> **…transitivity** is also defined in terms **semantics** and **discourse**

- What if we compare WAn voices in these terms?

Semantic and Discourse Variation

Semantic Transitivity

- The basic transitive clause typically has certain **semantic characteristics** (Hopper & Thompson 1980):

ergative active

	High	Low
a. No. of Arguments	two or more participants	one participant
b. Kinesis	action	state
c. Aspect	telic	atelic
d. Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
e. Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
f. Affirmation	affirmative	negative
g. Mode	realis	irrealis
h. Agency	A high in agency	A low in agency
i. Affectedness of U	U totally affected	U not affected
j. Individuation of U	U highly individuated	U non-individuated

antipassive

passive

Tagalog

- The AV undergoer is typically interpreted as **indefinite/non-specific**:

(8a)   **Actor Voice**
Nagluto   **ang babae**   ng/*sa   manok.
AV.PFV.cook   SUBJ woman   a/*the   chicken
'The woman cooked a/*the chicken.'

(8b)   **Undergoer Voice**
Niluto   ng babae   **ang manok**.
UV.PFV.cook   CORE woman   SUBJ chicken
'The woman cooked the chicken.' (Katagiri 2005: 167)

Tagalog

- The AV undergoer is typically interpreted as **less-affected**:

(9a)   **Actor Voice**
      *Pumatay   **si Juan**   ng aso
      AV.PFV.kill   SUBJ Juan   CORE dog
      For: 'Juan killed a dog'

(9b)   **Undergoer Voice**
      Pinatay   ni Juan   **ang aso**
      UV.PFV.kill   CORE Juan   SUBJ dog
      'Juan killed the/a dog' (Katagiri 2005: 169)

Tagalog

- AV is associated with **atelic activities**, whilst UV clauses are interpreted as **telic accomplishments** (Latrouite 2011)

(11a)   **Actor Voice**

nang	mainit	na		ang mantika**,**	nagprito	siya	ng kamote
when	hot	already		SUBJ cooking oil	PFV.AV.fry	3SG.NOM	CORE camote

'When the oil was already hot, she fried camote.' **(focus on activity of frying)**

Conclusion: *UV has the semantics of a basic transitive clause*
AV resembles an antipassive

Balinese

- **No definiteness restriction** on the AV undergoer (see also Pastika 2003):

(12a)　**Actor Voice**

　　Tiang　　　　　nyepak　　　　　　　*cicing-e.*

　　1SG　　　　　　AV.kick　　　　　　dog-DEF

　　'I kicked the dog.'

(12b)　**Undergoer Voice**

　　Cicing-e　　　sepak　　　　*tiang*.

　　dog-DEF　　　　UV.kick　　　1SG

　　'The dog was kicked by me.' (Artawa 1998: 8)

Kelabit

- The AV undergoer is often indefinite but can also be **definite/highly affected**:

(13c) **Indefinite Undergoer**
        Doo'   **tuih**   **n**aru' *edteh ebpung*.
        good   PT=1SG.1   AV.do   one   trap
        'I'd better make a trap.'

(13d) **Definite Undergoer**
        neh   **nieh**   **m**uwer   *ieh*
        DEM   PT=3SG.NOM   AV.butcher   3SG.NOM
        'Then she butchered it [the yellow-throated marten]'

Kelabit

- But there may be a **telicity** distinction?

(14a) **Actor Voice**

neh   **nieh**   nipa~nipa   lem   takub

then   PT=3SG.NOM   REDUP~AV.pack   in   pocket

'Then he puts [pears] into a pocket (action ongoing).'

(14b) **Undergoer Voice**

Senipa   *neh*   neh   bua'   nuk   ineh.

UV.PFV.pack   3SG.GEN   PT   fruit   REL   DEM

'And put that fruit away (action completed).'

> **Conclusion:**
> *Not all AV constructions are like antipassives!*

Discourse Transitivity

- The basic transitive clause typically has certain **discourse characteristics** (Givón 1994, 2017):

1. It is likely to be **more frequent** that non-basic voices

2. It is likely to have a **topical actor and undergoer** in contrast to other voices

	Topicality of Arguments		
Active/Ergative	Actor	>	Undergoer
Inverse	Undergoer	>	Actor
Passive	Undergoer	>>	Actor
Antipassive	Actor	>>	Undergoer

Tagalog

- Cooreman, Fox, and Givón (1984) applied the tests of RD and TP to Tagalog and found:

  1. UV is more frequent than AV

  2. UV has high RD and TP values for both actor and undergoer

  3. AV has high RD and TP for the actor, but low values for the undergoer

Conclusion: *UV appears most basic in discourse terms in Tagalog = ergative?*

Indonesian

- In many Indonesian-type languages, AV is at least equal to UV if not more **discourse frequent** (Pastika 1999, Davies 2005, Cumming 1995).

- Wouk (1996) examined RD and TP in **Spoken Jakarta Indonesian**:

  1. In AV, the actor is topical and undergoer either topical or non-topical

  2. In UV, the undergoer is (slightly) more topical than the actor

Conclusion: *AV looks like the more basic transitive clause in discourse = accusative?*

Northern Sarawak

- Interestingly, even structurally very similar languages (such as Kelabit and Sa'ban) may differ in the **discourse properties** of the voices:

		Actor Voice (AV)		Undergoer Voice (UV)	
		1-3 (High)	>3 (Low)	1-3 (High)	>3 (Low)
Kelabit RD	Actor	89%	11%	92%	8%
	Undergoer	64%	36%	68%	32%
Sa'ban RD	Actor	94%	6%	95%	5%
	Undergoer	50%	50%	80%	20%

Summary

- Although WAn languages shared the feature of symmetrical voice alternations, they differ in **discourse** and **semantic** terms:
  - ➢ Languages like Tagalog have much in common with ERGATIVE languages
  - ➢ Languages like Indonesian look much more ACCUSATIVE
  - ➢ And languages like those of Northern Sarawak appear to fall somewhere **in-between**.

- Canonical ergative/accusative accounts do not reflect the **symmetrical nature** of the alternations

- But symmetrical alignment does not capture the **differences** between Tagalog, Indonesian, Kelabit and Sa'ban.

A Scalar Model of Alignment

A Scalar Model of Alignment

ERGATIVE ⟷ **ACCUSATIVE**

ERGATIVE				ACCUSATIVE
UV IS BASIC ON ALL LEVELS OF MORPHOLOGY, SYNTAX, SEMANTICS AND DISCOURSE	**TAGALOG** UV AND AV ARE MORPHO-SYNTACTICALLY SYMMETRICAL UV IS BASIC IN SEMANTICS AND DISCOURSE	**KELABIT** UV AND AV ARE MORPHO-SYNTACTICALLY SYMMETRICAL UV AND AV HAVE A MIXTURE OF PROPERTIES	**INDONESIAN** UV AND AV ARE MORPHO-SYNTACTICALLY SYMMETRICAL AV IS BASIC IN SEMANTICS AND DISCOURSE	**AV IS BASIC ON ALL LEVELS OF MORPHOLOGY, SYNTAX, SEMANTICS AND DISCOURSE**

Conclusion

Conclusion

- SYMMETRICAL VOICE languages pose a challenge to canonical models of (morphosyntactic) alignment since they have **multiple transitive clauses**.

- This has led to a debate as to whether they have ERGATIVE alignment, ACCUSATIVE alignment or a DIFFERENT SYSTEM of alignment altogether.

- I presented a number of **morphosyntactic tests** that support the identification of both AV and UV as **transitive** in a range of WAn languages – and hence argue against a canonical ergative or canonical accusative account.

Conclusion

- However, I have also shown that there are a number of semantic and discourse **differences** between AV and UV in WAn languages.

- Consequently, I proposed that we instead **widen our understanding of alignment** to include not only **morphosyntactic**, but also the **semantic** and **discourse** properties of the different voices

- This allows us to position WAn languages on a scale from ergative to accusative and capture both the **similarities** and the **differences** between WAn voice systems and other voice alternations cross-linguistically.

Many Thanks!