

Split Intransitivity in Kambera¹

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0. Introduction

An enormously influential idea which has now been adopted into several syntactic theories is the Unaccusative Hypothesis of Perlmutter (1978). According to this hypothesis, some surface intransitive clauses, the so-called *unaccusative* ones, derive from underlying clauses with grammatical objects but no subjects, while others, the *unergatives*, derive from underlying clauses with grammatical subjects but no objects.

Thus the unaccusative/ unergative distinction is seen as a lexical, subcategorical distinction reflected in syntactic properties.

Despite the claim of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis, however, unaccusative and unergative verbs are often not entirely discrete subclasses. In many languages intransitive verbs can be found in both unaccusative and unergative configurations.

In this paper I will show that in Kambera intransitive verbs may occur in various constructions where their subject is marked with different morpho-syntactic cases.² The intransitive subject may be morphologically marked as a transitive subject, namely with Nominative case. Depending on the aspectual properties of the clause however, it may also be marked with other cases, the most interesting of which is the Accusative case. If the intransitive subject is Accusative, it patterns with the transitive object. This may be called 'Split intransitivity' (cf. Merlan 1985, Dixon 1987, Van Valin 1990). In this paper I will discuss the split behaviour of intransitive verbs and the semantic basis for it.³

Before doing this, however, I will first briefly illustrate the canonical subject and object marking in Kambera. In Kambera, the pronominal clitics mark *person*, *number* and *case* on the

1. Kambera is an Austronesian language, spoken by approx. 150.000 speakers on the eastern part of the island Sumba, East Indonesia. A reference grammar of the Phonology and Morphology of this language is in preparation (Klamer, to appear). The present paper is a part of an ongoing research project which included periods of fieldwork in 1991 and 1992. It is supported by The Netherlands Fund for Research in Tropical Regions, fund number W38-47. I wish to thank Geert Booij, Marcel Den Dikken, Teun Hoekstra, Harry van der Hulst, Beth Levin, Robert Van Valin, Jan Voskuil and the audience at the Autumn Meeting of the Linguistic Association of Great Britain (Bangor, sept. 1993) for their useful comments and suggestions on various versions of this paper. Many thanks also to Umbu Maramba Hau, the principal informant.

2. Morphological case marking of verbal arguments in Kambera is not isomorphic to either their syntactic or their semantic function. For example, Accusative morphological case is not always the syntactic object, nor the semantic PATIENT, as will argue in this paper.

3. The subjects of transitive verbs do not show this variable behaviour. They are Nominative or Genitive, but never Accusative.

verb. The pronominal clitics are *not* agreement markers but have argument status, whereas (definite) NPs are optional adjuncts.⁴ Consider the sentence in (1):

- (1) Hi ku- palu -ya
 CNJ 1SN- hit -3SA
 So I hit him

In a main clause like this, the subject of the transitive verb *palu* 'hit', the semantic Agent, is morphologically encoded as the Nominative proclitic *na-*. The object of this verb, the semantic Patient, is marked with Accusative case, the enclitic *-ya* in (1) above.

This is the unmarked, canonical ways to mark transitive subjects and objects, and here the morphological case corresponds to the syntactic and thematic functions of the arguments.⁵

The clitic that is used to mark the transitive object, the Accusative *-ya* in (1), can also be used for an intransitive subject. This is illustrated in (2) below. If the intransitive subject is Accusative it 'looks' like a transitive object, as can be seen in (2)(a), where the subject of the intransitive verb *hangàtar* 'be amazed' is marked Accusatively: with the enclitic *-ha*, indicating 'being in a situation of amazement'. In (2)(b), on the other hand, the subject is marked with the Nominative case, proclitic *da-*, and the sentence now means 'they are amazing themselves'.

- (2) a. Ka dirá hangàtar -ha -ka
 CNJ to limit be amazed -3pA PRF
 So they were extremely amazed (i.e. 'perfective')
- b. "Iss..." wà-da ba da-hangàtar
 EXC say-3pG CNJ 3pN-be amazed
 "Wow", they said, amazing (themselves) (i.e. 'imperfective')

How can we account for this variable subject marking which corresponds to a variation in the meaning of the sentence? Different approaches have been used. The first is the lexical approach (e.g. Levin and Rappaport 1992) which would account for a difference like the one in (2) by giving the verb *hangàtar* 'be amazed' two different lexical entries, one subcategorizing an Accusative subject, the other a Nominative. The second is the semantico/ syntactic approach (e.g. Van Valin 1990, Dowty 1991, Hoekstra and Mulder 1990) which considers the variable behaviour of these verbs a result of their variable interpretations that depend on the construction the verb appears in.

In this paper I will present some empirical evidence against the former and in favour of the latter approach. I will do this by illustrating that the meaning of the Kambera split intransitive

4. This has been motivated in Klammer 1993.

5. This is not always the case. This picture, although it is correct, is a simplification for the sake of clarity. The details of Kambera pronominal clitic are very complicated and I refer to Klammer (to appear) for a full account.

verbs is compatible with a variety of constructions, and the variation in meaning is derived from the construction the verb appears in.

1. Kambera intransitive verbs have a thematically underspecified subject

Kambera intransitive verbs have one underspecified lexical argument. The thematic interpretation of this unspecified argument (as Agentive or Patientive) depends on the construction of the clause and not on the lexical specification of the verb. The following two arguments led to this claim.

First, the subject of an intransitive verb may have five different morphological markings, depending on the context of the clause. This is illustrated with the sentences in (3). They illustrate various possible morphological markings for the subject: Nominative *ku-* in (3)(a), Genitive *-mu* in (3)(b) and Accusative in (3)(c). Another possibility to mark the subject is to use a pronominal morpheme that expresses Continuative aspect, illustrated in (3)(d). Finally, it is also possible to use both a Nominative and an Accusative clitic at the same time to refer to an intransitive subject. In (3)(e) there is one referent *I Miri Yehu* 'the Lord Jesus' which is marked twice on the verb.⁶

- (3) a. *Ku-* njorung, nda *ku-* manua
1SN-fall NEG 1SN-be injured
I fell (but) I was not injured

- b. Bidi njoru -na na ài
newly fall over -3SG ART wood
The tree has just fallen over

- c. Jàka nda nyumu, meti-ya -ka làti
CNJ NEG you die -3SA PRF in fact
Without you, he/we/everyone would have been dead (lit.: if not you it/one would have been dead)

- d. "Manjú -ma -nggunya ina", wà-na
be hungry EMP -1s CONT mother, say-3SG
"I am (feeling) hungry mother", he said

6. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to give a full account of the functional differences between these various subject markings, but in general the facts are as follows. Nominative is the unmarked case for subjects. A Genitive subject ((3)(b)) can attach to a verbal predicate and thereby derive a 'nominal clause' which has specific properties, e.g. that it is often governed by an adverbial (such as *bidi* in (3)(b)). Nominal clauses are often used as a 'circumstantial clause' to set the stage in discourse. When the Continuative aspect marker of the subject (as in (3)(d)) is attached to action verbs, the action is continuing. If it is attached to stative verbs, the state continues or endures. (A similar type of marking is used in Lakhota (Van Valin, p.c.). The double marking of the subject (as in (3)(e)) is a construction especially used in poetic and religious language, and is more or less archaic.

- e. I Miri Yehu na- mài-ya la pinu tana
 ART Lord Jesus 3sN- come-3sa LOC top earth
The Lord Jesus came (down) to earth (lit.: the Lord Jesus he came to the top/surface of the earth)

So the subject of intransitive verbs may be marked in five different ways. In other words, the construction with an Accusative subject, is only one of five possible constructions. A lexical account of this would amount to giving each intransitive verb five different lexical entries. Obviously this misses some generalization.

The second argument for the idea that intransitive verbs have a thematically unspecified argument is that there is no single semantic or lexical property that determines which intransitive verbs have an Accusative subject. In other words, all intransitive verbs can in principle have an Accusative subject.⁷ Examples are given in (4).

(4)

activity:		stative:	
bànjär	<i>talk, chatter</i>	jangga	<i>be high</i>
rèm	<i>hesitate, stop</i>	hàmu	<i>be good</i>
ngangu	<i>eat</i>	kudu	<i>be small</i>
laku	<i>go</i>	tembang	<i>be stupid</i>
directional:		kahingir	<i>be clean/clear</i>
mài	<i>come</i>		<i>(water)</i>
luhu	<i>leave</i>	mayila	<i>be poor</i>
event:		haledak	<i>be clear (weather)</i>
tàka	<i>arrive</i>	harui	<i>be in trouble</i>
hí	<i>cry</i>	handuka	<i>have problems</i>
meti	<i>die</i>	hangunja	<i>sit idly</i>
kalit	<i>grow dark</i>	hangàtar	<i>be amazed</i>

The intransitive verbs given in (4) can all have an Accusative subject. They include activity verbs, directional verbs, event verbs and stative verbs. It appears that there is no single semantic or lexical property that determines which verbs may or may not occur in an ergative construction. That is, the verbs are agentive or non-agentive, telic or atelic, directional or adirectional, to name some semantic properties that are often mentioned as relevant in this

7. There are three groups of Kambera intransitive verbs that do *not* behave like the majority of intransitives: (1) There are a few intransitive verbs that are *lexically* subcategorized for an Accusative subject. Those can *only* have an Accusative subject, and do not have the other possibilities (for example, *hàla* '(be) finish(ed)', *màtu* 'be complete'). (2) Directional verbs, derived from deictic elements, may *only* have a Dative subject (for example, *ningu* 'be where speaker is', *nàlung* 'moving towards speaker'). (3) Unintentional, agentless achievement verbs, derived with prefix *ta*, *never* have an Accusative subject, but do have the other subject markings.

respect⁸. That such different types of verbs may be used with an Accusative subject suggests that it is not the lexical nature of the verb that determines the morphological marking of the argument. Having established this, the question is: what *does* determine the Accusative marking of an intransitive subject and the variation in meaning it induces? This will be discussed in section 3.

3. Descriptive aspect

In this section I will show that the meaning of Kambera intransitive verbs is detailed by their syntactic environment, more particularly: the aspectual properties of the clause play a role in the Accusative marking of the intransitive subject. In (5) the notion of aspect is specified:

- (5) *Aspect* 'represents different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of an action or state' (Comrie 1976:3)

In essence, aspect is a *non-lexical* property of *sentence structure*, as Verkuyl (1972:42, 1989:40) has motivated. So the variable behaviour of intransitive verbs in the case marking of their subjects is determined by their syntactic environment and is not an inherent feature of these verbs.

Constructions with an intransitive verb that have an Accusative subject in Kambera have 'descriptive aspect'. Descriptive aspect 'restricts the meaning of a verb root to a continuous action or state' (Chafe 1967:147)⁹. This is similar to Perfective aspect, which 'denotes a situation viewed in its entirety, without regard to its internal temporal constituency' (Comrie 1976:13).

The Accusative subject of the verb is part of the situation without explicitly controlling it. In descriptive aspect, the relation between the subject and the verb is *non-active*, *non-volitional*, *non-controlled*. In other words, the contrast in subject marking in Kambera is used to distinguish semantic differences like the ones in (6):

(6) *Descriptive aspect vs. other aspects*

situation vs. action/event	-
non-control vs. control	-> use as impersonal vs. personal pronoun
non-volitional vs. volitional	-> use in impolite vs. polite imperatives
non-agency vs. agency	-

8. That is, crosslinguistically, it appears that non-agentive, atelic or directional verbs are more liable to occur in ergative constructions.

9. Chafe 1967 writes about Seneca, where this aspect is expressed by an inflectional morpheme on verbal root. Other labels that have been used for comparable morphemes in other Iroquian languages are 'perfect' (Postal 1962 on Mohawk) or 'perfective' (Lounsbury 1952 on Oneida).

In other words, descriptive aspect constitutes a cross-cutting inflectional category by which Accusative subject marking in descriptive aspect is opposed to other markings in other aspects.¹⁰ Consider the sentences in (7) below. (7)(a) has an Accusative subject, (7)(b) has a subject with a morphological case expressing Continuative aspect:

- (7) a. Ka paba- banjar dú -ya -ka
 CNJ RDP- talk EMP -3sA PRF
 So there was some talking being done (Lit. So that it/he/one talked)

- b. Ka paba- banjar dú -danya -ka
 CNJ RDP talk EMP -3pCONT -PRF
 So they talked for a while

The semantic contrast between these two sentences is the contrast of the pronominal clitic having an impersonal versus having a personal referent. Sentence (7)(a) with the Accusative clitic -ya has as its English equivalent that 'some talking is being done', whereas (7)(b) has a personal referent (i.e. specific people are talking).

The impersonal use of the Accusative clitic may also express a certain distance or politeness. In a polite question, for instance, the subject of the directional verb may be expressed as an impersonal 'Undergoer' that is not in control of the situation, by giving it Accusative case. In (8) below the same question is asked politely in (8)(a) and informally in (8)(b):

- (8) a. Nggàra mài -ya -i nú ?
 what come -3sA -MOD DEI
 What (does) one come (for) i.e. why do you come, is there something that you want from me? (polite)

- b. Nggàra mài -mu ?
 what come -2sG
 Why (do) you come; i.e. what do you want from me ? (familiar)

On Sumba, visiting someone is an accepted way to indirectly ask for material help. However, the subject of what the visitor wants can only be brought up by the host asking this question, which has a polite/formal and a familiar/informal variant. In (8)(a) the subject -ya is presented as impersonal by using the third person sg. Accusative, thereby making the question less personal and perhaps in some sense suggesting that the subject is not active, but 'undergoer' of the situation, i.e. not not be blamed for volitionally coming to get something. This makes the

10. Note that Kambera is not unique in this respect. As Merlan (1985) reports, in Eastern Pomo (Hokan) split intransitivity results in such meaning contrasts as 'I'm slipping' (objective) versus 'I'm sliding' (subjective). Variable inflection of the same stem is correlated with a semantic distinction of *relative control*, *purposefulness*, *volition* or *agency* vs. *non-agency*. In its semantics of volition vs. non-volition and its inflectional nature, the Pomo opposition is reminiscent of that of Batsbi (Holisky 1983).

question sound less blunt. In (8)(b) the clitic has a personal referent, this is a more direct familiar question. The contrast between (8)(a) and (b) illustrates a clearly *pragmatic* use of the ergative construction. This is another indication that the ergative use of an intransitive verb (*mài* 'come' in this example) is not lexically determined.

The Accusative clitic may also be used to refer to the time of day, or to a situation or state, including the weather. Obviously, verbs indicating the time of day or the weather always have an impersonal referent, which is not a volitional, controlling Agent.

In (9) below a verb is used that describes clear weather (i.e. wind and no clouds). In (9)(a), where the subject is Accusative, it is used for the weather, in (9)(b) it is used metaphorically for the disappearance of worries/confusion. Sentence (9)(a) describes a situation or state, whereas (9)(b), where the subject is in Continuative aspect form, is a process.¹¹

- (9) a. Haledak hāmu -ya -ka nú
 be clear be good -3SA -PRF DEI
 It's nice and clear (i.e. the weather)

- b. Ba da- hāla -ka, haledak -nanya -ka na katiku-na na maramba
 CNJ 3SA- finish-PRF be clear-3SCONT -PRF ART head -3SG ART king
 When they had finished, the king's worries disappeared (lit.: his head became clear)

In the next example, (10)(a) describes that in the situation that there was an earthquake, we got home, while in (10)(b) the (imperfective) event is indicated. The verb used for the occurrence of an earthquake is used with an Accusative or a Nominative clitic, respectively ¹²:

- (10) a. Upung -ya ba ta- kabeli
 earthquake -3SA CNJ 1pN- return
 There was an earthquake when we returned (perfective)

- b. Na- upung
 3sN earthquake
 'It earthquakes/d', i.e. there is/ was an earthquake

In the examples discussed so far, the Accusative clitic was either used as an impersonal pronoun or describing a situation. This contrasted with personal reference and describing a process/event. That is, certain aspects of the meaning of the verbs change when they occur with an Accusative subject: actions or events are presented more like situations of which the subject is a non-active part.

This volitional vs. non-volitional meaning difference can also be seen in (11) below. In (11)(a)

11. The presence of the perfective clitic *-ka* makes that the process has reached an endpoint (i.e. that it is an achievement predicate). Without *-ka* the meaning of the sentence would be 'the king's worries are disappearing'.

12. Note that *Na-upung* 'it earthquakes' shows that an impersonal referent is not obligatorily Accusative.

the subject is described as being in a state of crying all the time, having no control on it, and is marked Accusatively, whereas in (11)(b) the verb appears in a Continuative aspect construction, and has a referent that has more control on what is happening.

- (11) a. Hí mànu -ma-a -ya -ka nyuna i Umbu Mada úna
 cry all the time -EMP-MOD -3SA -PRF he ART Sir Mada EMP.3s
Sir Mada just cried all the time (i.e. was in a continuous state of crying, could do nothing else)

- b. Hí mànu -ma -nanya -ka úna
 cry all the time -EMP -3sCONT -PRF EMP.3s
He was/has been crying all the time (although he could have chosen not to)

Volitional versus non-volitional meaning difference can also be seen in (12)(a,b). Sentence (12)(a) describes a situation of not being able to eat (non-volitional), sentence (12)(b) a temporary situation of not wanting to eat (volitional).

- (12) a. Ngangu, nda ngangu-ya -pa na ina -na
 eat NEG eat -3SA -IMPF ART mother-3sg
As for eating, his mother doesn't eat anymore (e.g. because of serious illness)

- b. Nda na- ngangu -a
 NEG 3sN- eat -MOD
She doesn't (want to) eat (e.g. baby that is not hungry)

The generalization here is that a subject which is marked with an Accusative clitic is presented as *relatively* non-active, non-volitional. This idea is supported by the fact that the same semantic property plays a role in imperatives of intransitive verbs and the subject of other constructions, which will be the topic of the next section.

4. Accusative subjects in other constructions

As noted above, the canonical semantic role of an Accusative clitic is to be the Patient of a transitive predicate, as -ya in sentence (1)(a) above. This formal similarity between Accusatively marked intransitive subjects and Accusative transitive objects is a reflection of the semantic property that these arguments share, namely that they are non-agentive. The same semantic property also determines the Accusative marking of the addressee of intransitive imperative clauses.

Consider the sentences in (13). In (13)(a) the person ordered to *hide*, the addressee, is marked with an Accusative clitic. In contrast, in (13)(b) it is marked with Nominative.

- (13) a. Kapàndi-kau yohu la lumbu kahembi!
 Hide -2sA here LOC cover bush
Hide here under the bushes!

- b. (Ka) u- kapàndi yohu la lumbu kahembi!
 CNJ 2sN- hide here LOC cover bush
(That) you hide here under the bushes!

The difference here is politeness.¹³ (13)(a) is a command which is less polite than the one in (13)(b), which has a Nominative addressee. Using Accusative case for the addressee, makes it sound more like an order, when a Nominative is used, it is more like a request. The Nominative expresses extra respect for the addressee, probably because when you give a command, it is politer to speak to the Addressee as if he were more or less in control of the event (Nominative) instead of a non-active Accusative that does not control the event.

Non-verbal predicates, such as *king, nice, a lot* in 'He is king, he is nice, it's a lot) are almost by definition 'descriptive' predicates that have a non-active subject. The argument of a Kambera non-verbal predicate always has Accusative case. Again we can see a formal and semantic parallel between the Accusative marking in different constructions, namely, both non-verbal predicates and intransitive verbs with an Accusative subject are descriptive predicates, with a non-active argument. In (14)-(17) below illustrations are given of non-verbal predicates. The predicate is an NP in (14), a Question word in (15), a Deictic element in (16), and a Locative phrase in (17) respectively. The arguments of these non-verbal predicates are always expressed Accusatively.

- (14) Tau mini -ya
 person male -3sA
It/He's a man

- (15) Ka nggi -ya ka úna?
 CNJ where -3sA PRF EMP.3s
Where is he/she/it?

- (16) Nú dú -ya¹⁴
 DEI EMP 3sA
Yes, indeed (Lit. so / thus it is)

13. The conjunction *ka* is optional. It does not introduce a subjunctive clause.

14. The deictic element *nú* in sentence (16) is a spatial/temporal deictic that refers to space/time remote from the speaker. Here it has a discourse function, referring to something that has been said previously. Its argument is marked Accusatively.

- (17) Lai nú -ya
 LOC DEI -3sa
He is there

These are all descriptive predicates, with a non-active argument. Transitive objects, the arguments of non-verbal clause and the Accusative intransitive subjects share this semantic property - they are all non-actors.

5. Conclusions

I have argued that split intransitivity in Kambera is best accounted for in a semantico-syntactic approach, in which the meaning of the verb has to be compatible with a variety of constructions. I presented some arguments why the meaning difference between on the one hand constructions with Accusative subjects and, on the other hand, various other types of clauses (with different cases for their subjects) should not be accounted for in a lexical approach.

I suggested that the Accusative marking of intransitive subjects is determined by the aspectual properties of the clause *as a whole*. The aspect expressed by these ergative constructions I have named 'descriptive aspect', to express the fact that the semantic relation between the verb and its arguments is the description of a situation and that the subject is presented as being part of that situation rather than controlling it.

The Kambera data give evidence that in general, the meaning of a verb may be influenced by its syntactic environment because there is a close relationship between syntactic structure and aspectual properties. Generalizing this idea, one could say that in many cases, syntactic structure is built with the help of aspectual information, rather than on lexical argument structure.

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Notations & abbreviations

Accent indicates phonemic (length) contrast between segments.

A=Accusative, ART=Article (*na* = singular, *da* = plural), CAU=Causative, CNJ=Conjunction, D=Dative, DEI=Deictic element (space/time), DEM=Demonstrative, DER=Derogative, DIM=Diminutive, EMP=Emphasis marker (EMP.2s: 2nd person sg. emphatic pronoun etc.), EXC=Exclamation, G=Genitive, IMP=Imperative, IMPF=Imperfective, LOC=Locative preposition, MOD=Modality marker, N=Nominative, NEG=Negation, PRF=Perfective, CONT=pronominal marking for Continuative aspect, RDP=Reduplication.

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