

## Causatives and (Un)Ergatives

### Abstract

This paper has two parts. It begins with a detailed examination of causatives in Niuean (Polynesian) that demonstrates that revisions are required to the causative typology of Pyllkkänen (2002) who develops a parameterization of the external and internal argument selections of causative morphemes. In the second part of the paper, theoretical implications of the causative data are explored. Niuean causatives show that an adjustment must be made to the widely accepted view that unergative verbs are concealed transitives. Once this adjustment is made, a new understanding of Niuean ergativity becomes possible. Niuean is described as a surface or morphologically ergative language, but the causative construction provides some evidence that ergative case instead directly reflects deep properties of argument mapping in this language.

Causatives are formed with a prefix *faka-*, as illustrated in (1). Several interesting extensions of this morpheme will be discussed. For example, *faka-* is also used to form adverbs (2) or to indicate deliberateness (3). In its canonical causative use, the causative prefix is added to an intransitive verb, to form a transitive verb, as in (1). A first assumption might be that the causative selects a state/event, and also licenses an additional external argument, the causer of this state/ event. In terms of Pyllkkänen's typology, we would say that Niuean *faka-* is voice bundling (that is, it merges in partnership with voice to assign an external theta role), and that it selects an intransitive complement - VP (or vP) - and not a transitive Voice Phrase (VcP) as a complement. But there are complications. First, with respect to the external argument, a causer is not required with *faka-*, as shown in (4). In such cases, *faka-* acts as much like a passive morpheme as a causative, in that it both introduces and binds the external argument, requiring a refinement of the options for causative/voice bundling parameters, which will be explored. Second, in terms of the internal argument, we examine the complement-taking properties of *faka-*. We show that it can take transitive complements as well as intransitive ones, as in (5), which seems to suggest that the maximum complement size is VcP, not VP.

However, following Kim (2008), we argue that the maximum complement size is indeed vP, but this vP can be topped with an optional (instrumental) ApplP, explaining the appearance of the applicative morpheme *aki* in (5). It is argued that the applicative licenses the patient/theme of the embedded clause, and not the agent, which is in a lower position (vs Korean in Kim 2008). A related interesting point here is that while Niuean causatives cannot take VcP complements, they can freely take unergative complements, as in (6), or in cases like (7a) of transitive embedded clauses where the theme/patient of the transitive verb (shown in 7b) remains unexpressed.

These facts argue that unergative arguments are not merged in VcP, that is, they are not merged in the same position as transitive agents. This requires revision to the claim that unergatives are concealed transitives (Hale and Keyser 1993, Chomsky 1995). Rather, unergative arguments are merged in a lower position than transitive agents and applied instruments. Whether this is the case across languages or only in some languages is discussed. Once this is established for Niuean, the ergative case system falls out naturally from its argument structure, and can be seen to reflect deep principles of clausal organization, rather than being a surface morphological oddity, as often assumed (recently, Legate 2005). In short, arguments in VcP are ergative, and other arguments are absolutive.

The paper concludes with a general overview of theoretical issues for further research raised by the Niuean causative construction, including those discussed in this abstract, as well as others, related to the general literature on causative constructions.

## Examples

1. Kua fakafuafuakelea e ia a mautolu.  
PERF *faka*-embarrassed ERG.P 3.SG ABS.P 1.PL.EXCL  
He caused us embarrassment.
2. Liu e tama mohe mo e tugolo faka-lahi.  
turn ABS.C child sleep and snore *faka*-big  
The son pretended to be asleep again and snored loudly.
3. Kua fakamanava aki e ia e moto haaku a mata.  
PERF *faka*-hit INSTR ERG.P 3.SG ABS.P fist 1.SG.GEN LIG eye  
He hit my eye with his fist.
4. Kua fakaahu e tau koloa.  
PERF *faka*-smoky ABS.C PL goods  
The goods were fumigated.
5. Kua fakatotō aki e ia e kato e tama haaku.  
PERF *faka*-hold INSTR ERG.P 3.SG ABS.C basket ABS.C child 1.SG.GEN  
She made my child hold the basket.
6. Kua fakalele e ia e manulele.  
PERF *faka*-fly ERG.P 3.SG ABS.C bird  
He made the bird fly.
7. a. Kua fakateka nī e ia haana a tama he tā kilikiki.  
PERF *faka*-bowl EMPH ABS.P 3.SG 3.SG.GEN LIG child LOC.C match cricket  
He made his own child bowl in the cricket game.  
b. (*teka*—vt. to bowl in cricket or similar games:  
Kua teka e ia e polo.  
PERF bowl ERG.P 3.SG ABS.C ball  
He bowled the ball.)

## References in Abstract

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