THE SAMOAN CIA SUFFIX
AS AN INDICATOR OF AGENT DEFOCUSING

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1. Introduction [1]

The role of the Samoan Cia suffix, illustrated in (1), has remained a mystery for over a century. Pratt, in his pioneering Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language (first written in 1862), proposed that Cia marks passive in Samoan (just as it does in some other Polynesian languages). Churchward 1951, Milner 1962, and Chung 1978 have claimed that Cia is not a passive suffix. I took the same stance in Cook 1978 and Cook 1988.

(1) Na ú-tia lona vae e le atualoa.
PAST bite-Cia his foot ERG the centipede
'His foot was stung by a centipede.'
(Milner 1955:294)

Shibatani 1985 has argued that the primary pragmatic function of passive is 'agent defocusing', under which rubric he includes those items in (2). Shibatani also motivates why (in a number of languages) the same verbal morphology appears in both passive clauses and honorific clauses as well as in those describing potentiality and/or events that occur spontaneously.

(2) Manifestations of agent defocusing:
(a) omission of an agent
(b) mention of an agent in a non-prominent syntactic slot
(c) blurring of the identity of an agent by the use of plural forms
(d) indirect reference to an agent by the use of an oblique case

In this paper, I will argue that although it may not be possible to correlate Cia with a particular configuration of grammatical relations that might be considered passive, the
suffix is passive-like to the extent that it is used in a number of agent-defocusing contexts and in the clause types mentioned above. This is not to say that these are the only functions of Cia, but it should become apparent that this rubric of agent defocusing goes a long way in explaining occurrences of the suffix. For more uses of the Cia suffix, see Cook 1989.

2. Basic Samoan clauses

Let us begin with some observations concerning basic Samoan clauses. Samoan is a morphologically ergative language. The central participant of an intransitive clause is encoded as an absolutive. As can be seen in examples (3a&b), this is true whether such a participant is agent-like or patient-like. Absolutives are usually unmarked but sometimes marked 'o or ia. [2]

(3) a. 'Ua alu le tama 'i Sāmoa.
   PERF go the boy to Samoa
   'The boy has gone to Samoa.'

b. 'Ua manu'a le tamâloa.
   PERF wound the man
   'The man has been wounded.'

The agent of a transitive clause is encoded as an ergative and the patient as an absolutive. Ergatives are marked e.

(4) a. Na sasa e le tinâ lana tama.
   PAST beat ERG the mother her boy
   'The mother beat her boy.'

b. Na sasa 'o ia e lona tinâ.
   PAST beat ABS he ERG his mother
   'He was beaten by his mother.' [3]

As illustrated in (4), transitive clauses occur in both verb-erg-abs and verb-abs-erg word order. Ochs 1982:649 (fn. 1) reports that the two orders occur with nearly equal frequency. A sampling of 45 transitive clauses from Milner 1966 supports this observation and also reveals the fact illustrated in (4b) that verb-abs-erg order tends to be used when the absolutive is a pronoun. Ochs 1982:664 also shows that men use verb-erg-abs word order more than women and that both men and women use verb-erg-abs word order more frequently when they are talking to people outside (rather than inside) their household. Ochs 1982:660 makes a similar
observation concerning the ergative marker: men use the ergative marker more than women and both men and women use it more frequently when speaking to outsiders than to household members.

In addition to the canonical transitive and intransitive clauses exhibited in (3) and (4), Samoan has so-called 'middle' clauses, exemplified in (5). Middle verbs (i.e. verbs that occur in middle clauses) are intransitive verbs of emotion, perception, cognition, communication and social interaction. The agent-like participant of a middle clause is encoded as an absolutive and the patient-like participant as an oblique (usually in the directional case but sometimes in the locative). Although the ergative and absolutive of a transitive clause occur in either order, the absolutive and oblique complement of a middle clause normally occur in the order illustrated in (5). Some verbs belong to both classes, i.e. they can occur in either middle or transitive clauses.

(5) a. 'O lo'o manatu le tama 'i lona tinå.
   PROG think the boy DIR his mother
   'The boy is thinking about his mother.'

A second type of "special clause" that I will need to refer to in this paper is what in Cook 1988:79 I have called galo clauses, i.e. clauses containing galo verbs, which are a particular set of intransitive verbs of understanding, forgetting, and responsibility. One thing that is special about these clauses (as opposed to other intransitive clauses) is that either the absolutive or the obliquely marked experiencer can occur leftmost after the verb. This fact is exemplified in (6).

(6) a. 'Ua galo le tusi i le tama.
   PERF forget the book LOC the boy
   'The book has been forgotten by the boy.'

   b. 'Ua galo i le tama le tusi.
   PERF forget LOC the boy the book
   'The boy has forgotten the book.'

Which nominal of a Samoan clause is subject is a controversial question, especially when it comes to transitive clauses, i.e. clauses containing transitive verbs. At present there are about three theories concerning grammatical relations in Samoan. Chung 1978 argues for the standard analysis of ergative languages: the absolutive of an intransitive clause and the ergative of a transitive
clause are subjects. Mosel 1987 claims that Samoan does not have the category subject. In Cook 1988 and in Cook (to appear), I have argued that the subject of a clause containing a transitive verb is either the ergative or the absolutive, whichever comes first after the verb, and except in certain specifiable cases, the absolutive is the subject of an intransitive clause.

Since subjecthood is controversial in Samoan, in this paper I will attempt to approach the question of whether the Cia suffix is, to any extent, a passive suffix without making any claims about subjecthood. The traditional definition of passive as a construction which selects a patient rather than an agent as subject requires the identification of one nominal as subject; however, Shibatani's pragmatic definition of passive as an agent-defocusing device will allow us to test the Cia suffix without needing to determine whether a nominal is or is not a subject.

3. The Cia suffix

Since the Cia suffix tends to appear in a wider variety of linguistic environments in formal than in informal contexts, I will be describing a formal level of usage in order to investigate the widest possible range of contexts in which the suffix occurs. Many of my example sentences are from Milner 1966, which contains more than a thousand sentences in which the Cia suffix appears. Some of my data is also from Duranti 1990 and Chung 1978. The rest of my sentences are from my own fieldwork on Samoan. [4]

The Cia suffix takes the forms given in (7): optional consonant, optional i, obligatory a, or simply ina. When the suffixation of Cia to transitive verbs is motivated by a negative context, the presence of a clitic pronoun or a fronted ergative nominal (mentioned below) Cia generally takes the form of a or ina. In its other uses, the form of Cia is lexically selected by the stem to which it attaches.

(7) Cia = (consonant)(i)a, or ina

The Cia suffix is involved in a number of lexical derivations. The suffix is attached to intransitive, middle, and transitive verbs. This is illustrated in (8).
(8) a. 'Ua nōfo-ia le fale fou.  
PERF live-Cia the house new  
'The new house is occupied.'  
(Milner 1966:157) from intr. verb nofo 'live'

b. 'Ua mana'o-mia 'oe e le ali'i.  
PERF want-Cia you ERG the chief  
'You are wanted by the chief.'  
(Milner 1966:128) from middle verb mana'o 'want'

c. Na ū-tia Iona vae e le atualoa. (=1)  
PAST bite-Cia his foot ERG the centipede  
'His foot was stung by a centipede.'  
(Milner 1966:294) from trans. verb ū 'bite'

The suffix also derives intransitive verbs from nouns and adjectives. Consider afātia 'be struck by a storm' and máfatia 'be burdened' in (9a&b), which are respectively derived from afā 'storm' and mamafa 'heavy'. [5]

(9) a. 'Ua afā-tia le malaga.  
PERF storm-Cia the traveling party  
'The traveling party was struck by a storm.'  
(Milner 1966:4) from afā 'storm'

b. 'Ua máfa-tia a'u i au 'upu.  
PERF heavy-Cia I LOC your words  
'I am burdened by your words.'  
(Milner 1966:119) from mamafa 'heavy'

4. Agent omission

At this point, I will attempt to show that occurrences of Cia correlate with the manifestations of agent defocusing given in (2). The first is that of omission of an agent. (10) illustrates clauses containing Cia in which the agent is omitted.

(10) a. Sā ā'e-a le mauga.  
PAST climb-Cia the mountain  
'The mountain was climbed.'  
(Milner 1966:4) from intrans. verb a'e 'climb'

b. 'Ua fesili-gia le pāgotā.  
PERF ask-Cia the prisoner  
'The prisoner has been questioned.'  
(Milner 1966:63) from middle verb fesili 'ask'
The idea here is that the most obvious way of defocusing an agent is simply not to encode it. Of the 1068 full sentences in Milner 1966 that contain a Cia form, 778 or 72.8% lack an agent. This fairly high statistical correlation shows that Cia certainly occurs in clauses that do not contain an agent. It should be pointed out, however, that Cia is not required in all clauses lacking an agent. As exemplified in (11), plain transitive verbs also occur in clauses lacking an agent.

(11) 'Ole'á fa'a'aitiiiti lana togi.
FUT reduce his salary
'His salary will be reduced.'
(Milner 1966:88)

5. Removal of an agent from a clause

Related to the phenomenon of agent omission is that of agent removal. Several extraction phenomena in Samoan involve Cia and the removal of an agent from a clause. Specifically, Cia tends to be suffixed to a transitive verb when an ergative is extracted in the formation of a relative clause (12b), a cleft question (12c), or a cleft sentence (12d). Compare the simple sentence (12a). When an ergative is extracted, it loses its characteristic marker e, and in the formation of a cleft question or sentence, it is preceded by the predicative marker 'o.

(12) a. Na fufulu e le tama le ta'avale.
PAST wash ERG the boy the car
'The boy washed the car.'

b. 'O fea le tama na fufulu-ina le ta'avale?
PRED where the boy PAST wash-Cia the car
'Where is the boy who washed the car?'

c. 'O ai na fufulu-ina le ta'avale?
PRED who PAST wash-Cia the car
'Who washed the car?'
(lit. Who is it that washed the car?)
If we think of agent removal as an extension of agent omission, then we can understand why Cia would appear in clauses like (12b-d). At first glance, it may seem that clauses like (12c&d) argue against an analysis of Cia as an agent defocusing device since cleft items are usually in focus. I would agree that the cleft nominals ai and le tama in (12c&d) are in focus. However, assuming that the cleft construction involved here is a two-clause construction, these nominals are in focus because of their position in the "upper" or leftmost clause of this construction; they are not in focus in the clauses from which they originate (i.e. the "lower" or rightmost clauses). In fact, they are actually absent from their clauses of origin, and, hence, it is very plausible that their absence is indicated by the presence of the Cia suffix. Chung 1978:83 offers a similar explanation for the presence of Cia in these clauses; for her, Cia in these clauses is a "flag" for a missing transitive subject.

Related to the topic of agentless sentences, is that of spontaneous events. As characterized by Shibatani 1985:835, "an event dissociated from an agent is one occurring spontaneously." Agentless sentences with suffixed verbs are used in Samoan to describe spontaneous events such as those in (13).

(13) a. 'Ua agi-na mai le fu'a.
   PERF blow-Cia hence the flag
   'The flag is unfurled (by the wind).'
   (Milner 1966:8)

b. 'Ua pa'i-a lona mata.
   PERF touch-Cia his eye
   'His eye has been (accidentally) touched.'
   (Milner 1966:172)

Shibatani 1985:828 also notes that a number of languages "have the same form for passive and potential constructions." In Samoan, the Cia forms 'aina and inumia, which are derived from 'ai and inu, 'eat' and 'drink', are used like the English potential adjectives edible and drinkable. See (14a&b).
(14) a.  E 'ai-na le talo.
IMP eat-Cia the taro
'Taro is edible.'
(Milner 1966:9)

b.  E lé inu-mia le vai 'i le 'o'ona.
IMP NEG drink-Cia the water due=to the bitterness
'The water is not drunk because of its bitterness.'

Speaking crosslinguistically, Shibatani 1985:839 also observes that "the potential reading of passives is more frequently seen in the negative context," and he cites Hindi as an example language. Samoan has what I will call a negative potential construction, exhibited in (15), which employs the potential verbal prefix ma and, in the case of transitive verbs, the Cia suffix.

(15) a.  E lé ma fa'amatala-ina le Atua.
IMP NEG POT explain-Cia the God
'God cannot be explained.'
(Milner 1966:116)

In fact, as pointed out by Chung 1978:90, in Samoan there is a tendency for Cia to appear in negative clauses containing transitive verbs. This is generally true of negative imperatives (as opposed to affirmative imperatives, in which the suffix does not appear). In Milner 1966, 51 out of 58 (i.e. 88%) of the negative commands of transitive verbs with the word 'aua 'don't' have the Cia suffix. Compare, for example, the affirmative and negative imperatives in (16):

(16) a.  Fufulu le ta'avale.
wash the car
'Wash the car.'

b.  'Aua le fufulu-ina le ta'avale.
don't the wash-Cia the car
'Don't wash the car.'

c.  'Aua ne'i fufulu-ina le ta'avale.
don't even wash-Cia the car
'Don't even wash the car.'

d.  'Aua 'e te fufulu-ina le ta'avale.
don't you IMP wash-Cia the car
'Don't you wash the car.'
Cia also appears regularly in clauses containing the emphatic negative particle le'i. This particle occurs with the imperfect tense marker e in clauses which are translatable as either past or present perfect. Compare (17a&b):

(17) a. Na tatala e le tama le faitoto'a.  
PAST open ERG the boy the door  
'The boy opened the door.'

b. E le'i tatala-ina e le tama le faitoto'a.  
IMP NEG open-Cia ERG the boy the door  
'The boy has not opened/did not open the door.'

According to Chung 1978:91, Cia also has the tendency to appear in generic negative clauses like (18).

(18) E lē loka-ina e leoleo tagata gaoi.  
IMP NEG lock-Cia ERG police person steal  
'Policemen do not arrest burglars.'  
(Chung 1978:91)

As for what agent defocusing and the negation of transitive events have in common, I propose the following. A transitive event requires an agent in order to evolve in what might be considered the "normal way." If the event lacks an agent, under normal circumstances, the event will fail to take place. Thus it makes sense that the same morphology could come to be associated with the absence of an agent and the negation of a transitive event. [6]

6. Mention of an agent in a non-prominent syntactic slot

Let us turn now to (2b), "mention of an agent in a non-prominent syntactic slot." In what follows, I will divide what Shibatani 1985:832 refers to as "syntactic slot" into two categories: syntactic relation per se and syntactic position within the clause.

Let us assume that ergative and absolutive are syntactic relations in Samoan and that the nominals that are marked with ergative and absolutive case bear those relations. Let us also assume that a nominal is prominent if it can be bound by a floating quantifier. [7] What I will now attempt to show with the facts of quantifier float in Samoan is that the absolutive relation is a prominent syntactic relation and that the leftmost position among postverbal nominals
is a prominent position.

The Samoan version of quantifier float relates sentences like (19a&b). The quantifier 'uma 'all' moves from its position inside a noun phrase to a position immediately after the verb.

(19) a. 'Ua ʻo tamaiti 'uma i Sāmoa.  
PERF go(PL) children all DIR Samoa  
'All the children have gone to Samoa.'

b. 'Ua ʻo 'uma tamaiti i Sāmoa.  
PERF go(PL) all children DIR Samoa  
'The children have all gone to Samoa.'

What is of interest to us is which nominal or nominals of a clause can be bound by the quantifier 'uma when the quantifier is in postverbal position, such as it is in clause (19b). Absolutives can be bound by postverbal 'uma no matter where they occur in a clause and regardless of the clause type in which they occur. This fact argues that the absolutive relation is a prominent one. (19b) and (20a) illustrate that absolutes in intransitive and middle clauses, respectively, can be bound by postverbal 'uma. (20b&c) show that absolutes in both verb-erg-abs and verb-abs-erg transitive clauses can also be bound by the postverbal quantifier. [8]

(20) a. E ālolofo 'uma tamaiti iā Sina.  
IMP love(PL) all children DIR Sina  
'The children all love Sina.'

b. Na 'ave 'uma e le tama tusi.  
PAST take all ERG the boy book  
'The boy took all the books.'

c. Na 'ave 'uma tusi e le tama.  
PAST take all book ERG the boy  
'The books were all taken by the boy.'

Ergatives, in contrast, are not so easily bound by postverbal 'uma. As illustrated in (21), an ergative must occur as the leftmost nominal after the verb in order to be bound by the quantifier. This argues that the leftmost postverbal position is a syntactically prominent position.
This claim is supported by the fact that the experiencer of a galo clause can be bound by postverbal 'uma only when the experiencer occurs in leftmost position. As would be expected, the absolutive of such a clause can be bound by the postverbal quantifier no matter where the absolutive occurs. These facts are illustrated in (22).

(22) a. 'Ua galo 'uma; i tamaii i le tal. 
PERF forget all LOC children the answer
'The children have all forgotten the answer.'

b. 'Ua galo (*'uma; ) le tal i i tamaii .
PERF forget all the answer LOC children
'The answer has been forgotten by (all) the children.'

c. 'Ua galo 'uma; talii i le tama .
PERF forget all answer LOC the boy
'The answers have all been forgotten by the boy.'

d. 'Ua galo 'uma; i le tama talii .
PERF forget all LOC the boy answer
'The boy has forgotten all the answers.'

In sum, these facts concerning quantifier float show that with respect to syntactic relations, the absolutive is a prominent relation, and that leftmost among postverbal nominals is a prominent position. In what follows, I will assume that relations other than absolutive and positions other than leftmost (among postverbal nominals) are not prominent.

Let us return now to the question of whether the presence of Cia correlates with the encoding of an agent in a "non-prominent syntactic slot." Regarding which syntactic relation a nominal bears, we can observe in sentences such as (23) and (24), for example, the following: the agent of a clause containing a plain intransitive or middle verb is encoded as a (prominent) absolutive while the agent of a clause containing a suffixed intransitive or middle verb is
encoded as a (non-prominent) ergative. Thus there is a
correlation here between the presence of the suffix and the
encoding of an agent in a non-prominent relation.

(23) a. 'Ua oso le maile 'i le pua'a.
PERF jump the dog DIR the pig
'The dog has jumped on the pig.'
(Milner 1966:168)

b. 'Ua oso-fia le fa'ato'aga e manu 'âivao.
PERF jump-Cia the plantation ERG animal wild
'Wild animals have broken into the plantation.'
(Milner 1956:158) from intrans. verb oso 'jump'

(24) a. E fa'aaloalo le tama 'i le ali'i.
IMP respect the boy DIR the chief
'The boy respects the chief.'

b. E fa'aaloalo-gia le ali'i e le nu'u.
IMP respect-Cia the chief ERG the village
'The chief is respected by the village.'
from middle verb fa'aaloalo 'respect'

Example sentences (23b) and (24b) also have the agent in a
non-prominent position in that the agent is not leftmost.
However, as witnessed by (25a&b), the agent can also occur
in leftmost position when the verb is a suffixed
intransitive or middle verb.

(25) a. 'Ua ofi-a e le toa le matuâmoa.
PERF mate-Cia ERG the rooster the hen
'The rooster has mated with the hen.'
(Milner 1966:160) from intrans. verb ofi 'fit'

b. Na mana'o-mia e ia lana tama.
PAST want-Cia ERG she her child
'She wanted her child.'
(Milner 1966:81) from middle verb mana'o 'want'

With respect to suffixed transitive verbs, there is no
change in syntactic relations. The agent is in the ergative
in both clauses with plain forms and in those with suffixed
forms. This can be seen in (26).

(26) a. 'Ua a'a e le tama le polo.
PERF kick ERG the boy the ball
'The boy has kicked the ball.'
(Milner 1966:2)
b. 'Ua a'a-sia le tama e le solofanua.
PERF kick-Cia the boy ERG the horse
'The boy has been kicked by the horse.'
(Milner 1966:2)

There is a tendency, however, for the agent of a clause containing a suffixed transitive verb to appear in a position other than the prominent leftmost position. Of the 47 clauses in Milner 1966 which contain suffixed transitive verbs followed by both an absolutive and an ergative, 36 have verb-abs-erg word order and 11 have verb-erg-abs. This means that approximately 77% have the structure exemplified by (26b) and 23% are structurally similar to (27). Thus there is some correlation between the presence of the suffix and the placement of an ergative agent in a non-prominent syntactic position.

(27) E mātau-lia lelei e tagata lau ta'avale.
IMP recognize-Cia well ERG people your car
'People recognize your car easily.'
(Milner 1966:137)

7. Clitic pronouns

If an ergative pronoun is moved into the so-called "clitic position" between the tense/aspect marker and the verb, the pronoun loses its case marker and Cia tends to be suffixed to the verb. Compare, for example, clauses (28a&b). For some pronouns, such as the one in (28), the clitic pronoun is phonologically reduced. As for the tendency for Cia to occur in this environment, the suffix appears in 88 out of 159, i.e. in 55% of the instances of clitics with transitive verbs in Milner 1966.

(28) a. 'Ua futī e 'oe le moa?
PERF pluck ERG you the chicken
'Have you plucked the chicken?'

b. 'Ua 'e futi-a le moa?
PERF you pluck-Cia the chicken?
'Have you plucked the chicken?'
(Milner 1966:73)

In contrast to what happens in (28a&b), if the verb is intransitive, the absolutive (if anything) moves into clitic position, and the verb is not suffixed with Cia. Compare (28a&b) with (29a&b).
As exemplified in (30), ergative clitic pronouns are not bound by postverbal 'uma. This fact indicates that the clitic position is a non-prominent position.

(30) a. Na uli 'umaI e mätouI lau ta'avale.
PAST drive all ERG we your car 'We all drove your car.'

b. Na mätouI uli-a (*'umaI) lau ta'avale.
PAST we drive-Cia all your car 'We (all) drove your car.'

If we assume that phonological reduction correlates with lack of syntactic prominence, then this analysis is also supported by the fact that (at least some) pronouns are phonologically reduced in clitic position. Also in support of the claim that the clitic position is non-prominent is Chung's 1978:35 observation that clitic pronouns are not contrastive or emphatic.

8. Blurring of the identity of an agent

Let us return now to (27), and ask why Cia occurs in that clause even though the agent is in the prominent leftmost position. The answer to this question, I believe, lies in the third manifestation of agent defocusing, (2c), "blurring of the identity of an agent by the use of plural forms."

Blurring the identity of a participant has to do with the 'distinctness of arguments' as described in Langacker 1975 and Langacker and Munro 1975. The parameters of distinctness which I would claim are relevant for the Samoan data are those given in (31). With respect to number and mass/count contrasts, singular agents are more distinct (and hence more easily brought into focus) than plural or collective agents. (To simplify matters, I will refer to both of these as "collective agents"). Collective agents are non-distinct; they are made up of a diffuse mass of individuals rather than a single, compact individual.
In Samoan, there is a correlation between the Cia suffix and collective agents, such as tagata 'people' in (27), nu'u 'village' in (24b), and fili 'enemy' in (32). Other collective agents that co-occur with Cia are malaga 'traveling party', mālō 'government', mālō 'guests', váega, 'group', ā'oga 'school', and ā'iga family.

Assuming language, like human thinking, is anthropocentric, it makes sense that people would focus on humans to a greater extent than on nonhumans. Thus I propose in (31b) that humans are inherently more distinct than nonhumans. As would be expected, Cia co-occurs with non-human agents such as animals and natural forces. We have already seen animals as agents in examples (8c), (23b), (25a) and (26b). (33) provides an example of an agent which is a natural force.

While on the subject of non-human agents, it should be noted that in the case of intransitive suffixed verbs which are derived from nouns, several of which are listed in (34), the inanimate agent responsible for the event designated by the suffixed verb forms the stem to which the Cia suffix is attached. For example, afātia 'to be struck by a storm', which we saw in (9a), contains the inanimate agent afā 'storm'. What is of interest here is that the form is suffixed with Cia even when the inanimate agent is the stem of the derived verb.
I will have more to say about the animacy contrast in (31c) below, but first, with respect to (31d), I would claim that people who are socially close to us are more distinct than those who are thought of in terms of their remote social roles, such as that of God, king, governor, chief or pastor. This has to do with Shibatani's 1985:829 observation that in several languages the same morphology is used for honorifics as for passive. These two uses have agent defocusing in common. In Samoan, we find the Cia suffix in clauses with agents that are socially remote, such as the doctor and king in (35) and the supernatural agents in (36). Some collective agents that were mentioned in our discussion of (31a) would also fall into this category of socially remote agents.

(35) a. Na fa'atonu-ina e le fôma'i se mâlólôga.  
PAST order-Cia ERG the doctor some rest  
'The doctor ordered some rest.'  
(Milner 1966:276)

b. Sâ pûle-a e le tupu le atunu'u  
PAST rule-Cia ERG the king the country  
'The king ruled the country  
ma le fa'autauta.  
with the care  
with care.'  
(Milner 1966:191)

(36) a. 'Ia fa'asao-ina e le Atua le tupu.  
OPT save-Cia ERG the God the Queen  
'God save the queen.'  
(Milner 1966:199)
b. 'Ua uluitino-ina 'o ia e le ti'âpolo.
PERF possess-Cia ABS he ERG the demon
'He has been possessed by a demon.'
(Milner 1966:300)

Let us turn now to the fourth manifestation of agent
defocusing, (2d), "indirect reference to an agent by the use
of an oblique case." We have already seen that there is a
contrast between clauses containing plain intransitive or
middle verbs and those containing suffixed intransitive or
middle verbs in that the agent is in the absolutive in the
case of the plain verbs and it is in the ergative in the
case of suffixed forms. Since absolutes are generally
unmarked and ergatives bear the marker e, this contrast
could also be said to fit the category of "indirect
reference to an agent by the use of an oblique case." I'm
not so sure, however, that I want to classify the ergative
as an oblique case.

The locative, however, is clearly an oblique case. The
locative marker i has, as its most concrete function, that
of marking locations as in i le fale 'in the house'. We have
also seen, in (6) and (22), that i marks the agents of galo
clauses. I is also used to mark the agents of intransitive
Cia forms that are derived from nouns and adjectives. I au
upu 'by your words' in (9b) exemplifies this usage. These
agents are usually not human.

In Milner 1966 there are also many sentences like (37a&b) in
which an inanimate agent is in the locative and a transitive
verb is suffixed with Cia. In these cases we see the animacy
contrast of (31c) coming into play.

(37) a. Sā puni-tia le lā i ao.
PAST block-Cia the sun LOC cloud
'The sun was blocked by the clouds.'
(Milner 1966:193)

b. 'Ua o'o-tia 'o ia i le fa'anoanoa.
PERF reach-Cia ABS he LOC the sadness
'He has been struck by sorrow.'
(Milner 1966:166)

Recently, however, there is a tendency to use the ergative
rather than the locative to mark agents in clauses like
(37a&b), although the locative is still used to mark the
agent of (at least) the intransitive Cia form lavea 'to be
hurt, hit or cut', which is derived from lavelave 'to be
entangled or complicated'. (38) illustrates that this verb takes an agent in the locative and not one in the ergative. This is true even if the agent is a distinct human. The use of the locative to mark agents is indeed a case of "indirect reference to an agent by the use of an oblique case."

(38) 'Ua lave-a le teine i/*e le tama.
PERF entangled-Cia the girl LOC/ERG the boy
'The girl has been hurt by the boy.'

9. Duranti’s observations and proposals

Duranti 1990 has made a number of observations and proposals that concern the encoding of agency in the context of the Samoan fono, i.e. the village meeting. One of his observations is that agents are expressed as ergative nominals when "a party...is held or made accountable for some act or way of doing something", i.e. in accusations, complaints, and instances of praise.

Duranti proposes that Samoans use certain strategies in fono to reframe or mitigate negative responsibility, i.e. to "mention while at the same time de-emphasize someone's contribution to a given task or achievement." These strategies are the mentioning of an agent through alternate case marking, specifically the encoding of an agent as the object of an oblique preposition or as a genitive modifier. Other strategies are the mentioning of an agent through abasement terms (in the ergative) and the embedding of a transitive clause containing an accusation within reported speech.

Although there are not many instances of the Cia suffix in Duranti's data, the few cases that there are fit the proposal that Cia is also a device by which agents can be downplayed. The first thing to notice, however, is that in the cases of non-mitigated accusations, cases in which the agent would be expected to be in focus, the suffix does not appear. This is at least consistent with the claim that Cia indicates agent defocusing. For example, an orator who is trying to convince the council that a man named Loa should be fined for what he did concludes his speech with the accusatory statement in (39).

(39) Mea lea 'ua fa' e Loa.
thing this PERF do ERG Loa
'This is what Loa has done.'
(Duranti 1990:654)
The contrast in (40a&b), however, is more interesting. A certain orator and chief have been charged with using offensive language on a particular occasion. In (40a), the orator denies that he said anything, and, in (40b), he later denies that his chief said anything. In (40a), he encodes himself as a genitive rather than an ergative and uses no suffix on the verb. In (40b), he not only encodes his chief as a genitive, but goes a step further and suffixes the verb with Cia. In other words, according to my analysis, he is not only downplaying the role of the agent by coding it as a genitive, but also by suffixing the verb with Cia.

(40) a. E augapiu ma sa'u 'upu na fai. 
IMP devoid with my word PAST say 'No word of mine was said.'
(Duranti 1990:557)

b. E leai se 'upu a A.[name] na fai-a. 
IMP nonexistent a word of A. PAST say-Cia
'No word of A. was said.'
(Duranti 1990:557)

Duranti 1981 (Chapter 5) observes that Cia appears in a wider range of forms and in a wider range of syntactic contexts during (rather than before) a fono. This higher than normal frequency of Cia could be accounted for if, as I am proposing, Cia is another device by which agency can be mitigated. Plausibly, one would wish to mitigate agency in village meetings in order to portray chiefs as respected (hence socially remote) agents and, at times, to avoid sounding like one is praising oneself or accusing others.

10. Summary and conclusion

It is a controversial question which nominal, if any, of a Samoan transitive clause is subject. Traditional and relational approaches to passive require identifying subjects. Without a definition for subject in Samoan, passive as a certain configuration of grammatical relations cannot be identified. Shibatani 1985 has proposed that the primary pragmatic function of passive is that of agent defocusing, a function which can be tested for without identifying a certain nominal as subject. The Cia suffix, which is said to mark passive in some other Polynesian languages, can be shown to involve agent defocusing in Samoan and, to this extent, can be identified as a passive suffix.
The distribution of the suffix is interesting in that its presence can be motivated not only in the syntactic realm, but also in semantic and social domains. With respect to the syntactic realm, Cia tends to occur in clauses in which an ergative fails to appear in the syntactically prominent leftmost slot because it appears later in the clause or in clitic position, or because it has been moved out of the clause into a higher clause in the formation of a cleft question or statement or in that of a relative clause.

With regards to semantics, clauses containing Cia describe spontaneous, potential, and non-occurring events. The suffix also correlates with non-distinct agents, a category which includes collective, non-human, inanimate, and socially remote agents. The use of the suffix with socially remote agents is similar to the use of passive morphology as an honorific device in other languages. Cia also occurs in clauses in which agents are indirectly mentioned in an oblique case (i.e. the locative case).

Duranti 1990 has shown that speakers use certain strategies to downplay agents in Samoan village meetings. In this paper I have suggested that it is plausible that the Cia suffix is also used in such meetings for the same purpose.

In sum, there are a number of linguistic contexts in which Cia involves agent defocusing. If we take the pragmatic function of agent defocusing to be an identifying characteristic of passive morphology, then we are lead to the conclusion that Cia in Samoan is a passive suffix.
NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1990 International Pragmatics Conference in Barcelona. Thanks to Niko Besnier and Ulrike Mosel for comments on that earlier version. All errors in this paper, of course, are my own.

2. The orthography is that of Milner 1966 except that long vowels are marked with a circumflex rather than a macron. An apostrophe indicates a glottal stop and a g indicates a velar nasal. Abbreviations are as follows: ABS = absolutive; CAUS = causative; DIR = directional; ERG = ergative; FUT = future; IMP = imperfect; LOC = locative; NEG = negative; OPT = optative; PERF = perfect; PL = plural; POT = potential; PRED = predicative; PROG = progressive.

3. I will gloss sentences such as (4b) in the passive in order to maintain the left-to-right order of the nominals in the Samoan sentence.

4. I will at times alter Milner's and Duranti's glosses. The majority of my consultants were Samoans from American Samoa who are presently living in southern California.

5. As can be seen in (9b), reduplication which appears in a stem often fails to appear in the suffixed form.

6. Agent defocusing and negativity can also be related as two manifestations of reduced transitivity as per the transitivity parameters of Hopper and Thompson 1980.

7. Since only subjects can be bound by a floating quantifier in a number of languages (including English), and subjects are generally considered to be syntactically prominent, I am using quantifier float here as a test for syntactic prominence in Samoan.

8. Note that the lack of a determiner indicates a plural noun.
REFERENCES


