

Placing Atayal on the Ergativity Continuum

Zong-Rong Huang and Kuo-Chiao Jason Lin

Atayal, a Formosan language, has long been regarded as an ergative language (Huang 1994; Starosta 1999). If Atayal is a typical ergative language as claimed by Huang and Starosta, it is supposed to manifest the A vs. S/O distinction in its linguistic behavior (i.e. syntax, morphology, and semantics) like other ergative languages: sentences of Agent Voice (intransitive) should behave as antipassives, and those of Non-Agent Voices (transitive) should resemble ergative transitives. Three research objectives are pursued in this study: (i) re-examination of the ergative status of Atayal syntax, (ii) placement of Atayal on the ergativity continuum if it is not purely ergative, and (iii) further implications and alignment of the language fact with current ergative research.

Indeed, Atayal patterns with other ergative languages in some aspects: the ergative DP can bind an anaphor in the absolutive position or in the oblique position (1a & 1b); the A can be the imperative addressee (2); the A appears with the same case marker as the possessor (3a vs. 3b); the absolutive DP is the only element that can be A-bar extracted (4a vs. 4b); the O is demoted and can be omitted in an antipassive (5); the O in an antipassive cannot take wide scope with respect to the external argument (6); the absolutive DP in an antipassive is relatively free in positioning (7).

- (1) a. [Savalaiq-un ni Limuy_i] i hiya nanak_i
 be.good.to-PV ERG Limuy ABS 3SG self
 ‘Limuy treated herself nice.’
- b. [si-baiq ni Limuy_i i hiya nanak_i] ku pila
 IV-give ERG Limuy OBL 3SG self ABS money
 ‘Limuy gave herself money.’
- (2) palalu cku ’ulaqi
 AV.rock.IMP OBL. DEF child
 ‘Rock the child.’
- (3) a. tuting-un nku ’ulaqi i Yumin
 hit-PV ERG child ABS Yumin
 ‘The child hit Yumin.’
- b. xuil nku ’ulaqi
 dog ERG child

‘The child’s dog’

- (4) a. * nanuan ku t<um>uting i Limuy
 what ABS hit<AV> ABS Limuy
 ‘Intended: What is Limuy beating/killing?’
- b. nanuan ku tuting-un ni Limuy
 what ABS hit-PV ERG Limuy
 ‘What did Limuy hit?’
- (5) t<um>uting (cu xuil) i yaya
 <AV>hit OBL dog ABS mother
 ‘The mother hit a dog.’
- (6) m<in>bainay cu tugal ka guqiluh ku ’ulaqi ru ’ini=cu i
 AV<PERF>give OBL three LNK bananas ABS child CONJ NEG=1SG.ABS LNK
 ma-niq kahavag
 AV-eat all
 ‘The child gave away three bananas and I didn’t eat all of them (but only one or two).’ (NEG > ALL; #ALL > NEG)
- (7) a. t<um>uting cu bawaq i Limuy
 beat<AV> OBL pig ABS Limuy
 ‘Limuy is hitting pigs.’
- b. t<um>uting i Limuy cu bawaq

Despite the aforementioned ergativity, Atayal exhibits many syntactic behaviors that would raise a problem for an ergative analysis. First, the object absolutive need not be the pivot in coordination (8). Moreover, the direct object in an antipassive can be definite (9), as in (2). Third, the O has a syntactic status that is unlike obliques: in (10a), either structural Case is available in an antipassive for a small clause subject, or the O can control a depictive secondary predicate; in (10b), the O can control PRO of the embedded predicate. Fourth, an ergative PRO of the lower predicate cannot be controlled (11). Finally, the absolutive quantified DP seems to occupy an A’-position and can bind a pronoun in the ergative DP without inducing weak crossover effect commonly observed in ergative languages (12).

- (8) Kasaang-un ni Limuy ku ’ulaqi ru ma-ngilis la
 scold-PV ERG Limuy ABS child CONJ AV-cry PART
 ‘Limuy scolded the child and Limuy/the child cried.’

- (9) Pa-'agal cku pila ku 'ulaqi
 FUT.AV-take OBL.DEF money ABS child
 'The child will take the money.'
- (10) a. Ma-niq [matiloq qulih] i Yumin
 AV-eat raw fish ABS Yumin
 'Yumin ate fish raw.'
- b. Pasivaq cu 'ulaqi_i [PRO_i g<um>hahapuy] i Limuy
 AV.teach OBL child <AV>cook ABS Limuy
 'Limuy taught a child to cook.'
- (11) * Naqru-un=mi_i/m-naqru=mi_i i [PRO_i tuting-un ku bawaq]
 finish-PV=1SG.ERG/AV-finish=1SG.ABS LNK hit-PV ABS pig
 'Intended: I finished hitting the pigs.'
- (12) Ima_i ku tuting-un ni yaya=nia_i
 who ABS hit-PV ERG mother=3SG.GEN
 'Who_i did his_i mother hit ?'

Based on similar syntactic observations, Paul & Travis (2006) and Aldridge (2011) claim that Tagalog is more ergative than Malagasy, which in turn is more ergative than Indonesian. Aldridge (2011) further points out that Seediq, another Formosan language, is situated between Malagasy and Indonesian. Compared with the aforementioned languages, Atayal is undoubtedly sandwiched between Tagalog and Indonesian: Tagalog patterns the same with Atayal in regard to (1-7) but disagrees with Atayal with respect to (8-12) (cf. Aldridge 2011; Paul & Travis 2006); Indonesian exhibits degenerating antipassives and English-like passives/binding, and determines PRO by structure/case relation rather than thematic relation (cf. Aldridge 2011; Arka & Manning 1998; Paul & Travis 2006). As for Malagasy and Seediq, although the former, unlike Atayal, permits a controlled ergative PRO (cf. (10)) (Paul & Travis 2006), both of them, in contrast to Atayal, demonstrate relatively strict VOS word order (cf. (7)) and allow the O in an antipassive to scope over the external argument (cf. (6)) (Aldridge 2011; Paul & Travis 2006). Otherwise, both Seediq and Malagasy pattern alike with Atayal in other respects (cf. Aldridge 2011; Paul & Travis 2006). Therefore, we conclude that while being less ergative than Tagalog, Atayal is more ergative than Malagasy. The extended ergativity continuum of the five languages is presented below:

- (13) The extended ergativity continuum (high ergativity > low ergativity)
 Tagalog > Atayal > Malagasy > Seediq > Indonesian

In sum, by examining Atayal's ergativity and comparing it with that in other

languages, this paper supports Paul & Travis's (2006) claims that ergativity and accusativity vary not only across typologically diverse languages but also across constructions within a particular language, and that the ergativity-macroparameter questionable since it's difficult to link ergativity to certain properties in a natural class of languages or constructions.

Selected References

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Zong-Rong Huang
National Taiwan University
Graduate Institute of Linguistics
3F, Le-xue Building, No.1, Sec. 4,
Roosevelt Road, Taipei, Taiwan.

r99142002@ntu.edu.tw

Kuo-Chiao Jason Lin
New York University
Department of Linguistics
10 Washington Place
New York, NY 10003

kcl299@nyu.edu