17 *Ergative case avoidance in East Futunan (EFu)*

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1 Introduction

Some of the structures that avoid ergative marking have been thoroughly described recently for Samoan by Duranti and Ochs (1990) and Duranti (1994:130-132) in relation to communication strategies and social structure. They mention two structures that avoid using an ergative nominal argument: one by pure omission and the other where an agent is marked as a possessor. Both constructions appear in Futunan, with the same effect of backgrounding the agent. I will describe them briefly before mentioning yet another type of structure which also avoids ergative marking, but which, on the contrary, highlights the agent's intention and will.

First, I will give a few general rules of Futunan argument structure.

2 Expression of nominal phrase arguments in a simple verb phrase

This is set in a dual, constrastive perspective of a transitive construction, defined as a two-argument syntactic structure – one in the absolute, the other in the ergative – and an intransitive construction with a sole absolutive argument.

The indirect transitive construction, which is specific to middle verbs, and which is a two-argument structure – one in the absolutive (the experiencer), the other in the oblique case (the goal, patient, beneficiary) – is not relevant here, since in Futunan the experiencer cannot be marked as an agent, as its case marking shows in the nominalised verbal clauses quoted further on (see §2.4.3).

We will put aside the indirect transitive construction, to concentrate on the intransitive construction and the transitive (or ergative) construction.

In Western Polynesian languages, a transitive verb is not obligatorily associated with a two-argument structure. In Samoan, only the absolutive argument is necessary (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992:426, 700) and when the verb is transitive, this argument refers to a patient. The ergative argument denoting the agent is an expansion.

A similar situation obtains in Futunan, but with two restrictions. On the one hand, some verbs may admit a unique ergative argument, and on the other hand, some unoriented transitive verbs may have a sole absolutive argument referring to an agent.

2.1 A sole absolutive argument

A sole argument is, in most cases, in the absolutive and refers to:

– the sole argument of an intransitive verb expressing an agent:

(1)   *E ifo   le   toe   mei le   ma'uga.*
         NS go down DEF child from DEF mountain
         'The child goes down from the mountain.'[1]

– or a patient:

(2)   *E   masaki loku tuaga'ane.*
         NS sick   my   brother
         'My brother is sick.'

– or the argument corresponding to the patient of a transitive verb (in which case, the ergative argument is merely omitted (see §2.3)):

(3)   *E valu le   niu.*
         NS grate DEF coconut
         'The coconut is grated.'

– or the syntactically complex argument (genitive construction), with a head noun referring to the patient, and a modifier referring to a participant readily interpretable as the agent of the process expressed by the transitive verb (see §2.4).

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[1]   Abbreviations:

ABS	absolutive		NP	noun phrase
ANAPH	anaphoric		NS	non-specific aspect
CLASS	noun classifier		OBL	oblique case marker
COMP	complementiser		PAST	past tense
DEF	singular definite article		PERF	perfective aspect
DEICT	deictic		PL	plural
DIR	directional		POSS	possessive
DU	dual		PRED	predicate marker
EM	end phrase marker		SG	singular
ERG	ergative case marker		SUCC	successive aspect
INCL	inclusive		TAM	tense-aspect-mode
lit.	literally		Vb	verb
NEG	negative marker		1, 2, 3	person

1.2 A sole ergative argument

In Futunan, a few transitive verbs optionally and frequently have a sole ergative argument.

These few verbs admit either a sole ergative argument or a sole absolutive argument. This is the case with verbs such as *mafai* 'be able to', *fakataga* 'allow', *tali* 'accept, be willing to', *iloa* 'know'. It is interesting to note that these verbs denote either a real power or a mere potential action.

Although a great majority of transitive Futunan verbs are 'goal oriented' (Biggs 1974:410), these verbs seem rather to be 'agent oriented'.

(4)   *E   mafai   e   Petelo.*
      NS   possible   ERG   Petelo
      'Petelo is able to do it /can do it.'

(5)   *Kua iloa   papau   e   le   temonio.*
      PERF know   certainly   ERG   DEF   demon
      'The devil is sure of it.'

(6)   *E   fakataga e   le   kau   aliki.*
      NS   allow   ERG   DEF   CLASS chief
      'The chiefs give authorisation.'

In such sentences, the absolutive argument is omitted.

Conversely, it should be noted that these verbs, like any Futunan verb, may have only one argument in the absolutive, with the agent being omitted.

(7)   *E   fakataga le   kakai ke   ano o   faifeua.*
      NS   allow   DEF   people so.that go   COMP fish
      'People are allowed to go fishing.'

Now, let's go back to the most common case where a transitive verb has only one argument in the absolutive.[2] In this restricted syntactic frame, two strategies allow the agent to be set aside: it may either be merely omitted, or it may be expressed as a possessor, the modifier of the head noun referring to the patient.

2.3 Omitted agent of a transitive verb

The omission of the ergative argument is one of the possible strategies. In Futunan as in Samoan, such deletion is structurally possible, as any verb may do without an ergative argument.

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[2]   We are not taking into consideration here the noun incorporation process, where the absolutive argument of a transitive verb is incorporated in the verb phrase; the detransitivised verb forms with the patient a verbal compound and the former ergative argument is changed into an absolutive argument:

   e gau le   tolo   e   le   toe   'The child is chewing the sugarcane'
   NS chewDEF sugarcane ERG DEF child

   e   gau   tolo   le   toe   'The child is chewing sugarcane'

But it should be realised that when a Futunan transitive verb has a sole argument in the absolute, it does not refer automatically to a patient. As some verbs are non-oriented, this argument may refer either to an agent or a patient, in one-argument structures. With ergative verbs such as *autalu* 'weed', *kai'ā* 'steal' or *kai* 'eat' the absolute argument may refer either to an agent or to a patient. For example: *e kai'ā le toe* means either 'the child is a thief' or 'a child has been stolen'.

With such transitive verbs, one must be careful not to assimilate an unexpressed ergative argument with an unexpressed agent.

Thus, in one of the two possible interpretations of such a sentence, the argument, though in the absolute, is the agent of a transitive verb.

To sum up, Futunan has three main strategies in order to omit one argument of a transitive verb:

– patient omission with verbs such as *mafai* 'be able to'
– agent omission with 'goal/patient oriented' verbs such as *valu* 'grate, be grated'
– omission of one of the arguments (patient or agent) with non-oriented verbs such as *kai'ā* 'steal, be stolen'.

2.4 Genitive constructions

As in Samoan, genitive constructions are used in Futunan for other semantic roles than possession. In verbal sentences, with transitive or intransitive verbs, they can express a certain degree of agentivity.

Marking the agent as the possessor in a genitive noun phrase is another way of avoiding ergative marking in Futunan.

The genitive constructions expressing a participant never appear with a middle verb, except in nominalised verb phrases (see §2.4.3); they are quite frequently used to express the agent, or an agent-like participant, with intransitive or transitive verbs.

2.4.1 Intransitive verb

The concept of agent is included in the expression of the possessor (the possessive adjective *lana*, as in example (8) below) but it expresses a low degree of agentivity, an involuntary process.

(8)   *Kua   puli   lana sele.*
       PERF   absent his   knife
       'He lost his knife.' (accidentally)

In (8), the loss of the knife is attributed to its possessor. If this were not the case, a causal adjunct (for example *ia Paulo* 'because of Paulo') referring to the causer of the loss, would be added.

The verb *puli* must have causative derivation to admit an ergative argument denoting conscious, real agentivity, but this argument is never obligatory :

(9)   *Kua   fakapuli (e   ia)   lana sele   talie   e   le'ese fia   ga'oi.*
       PERF lose   (ERG 3SG) his   knife because   NS   NEG   feel.like work
       'He (intentionally) lost his knife because he doesn't feel like working.'

The possessive construction is also very common with intransitive verbs denoting an aspectual or a stative meaning, followed by a nominalised verbal clause. See examples (10) to (12) below.

(10)   *Ka 'oki loa lau fufulu ne'a ti ke ano loa o   fagota.*
        when finish SUCC your wash thing then 2SG go SUCC COMP fish
        'When you finish washing the dishes you will go fishing.'

(11)   *E usoga le kai a   le fämili kae tä le lali.*
        NS last   DEF eat POSS DEF family but beat DEF drum
        'The family is eating as the drum is beaten.'

(12)   *E 'iki'iki le   taisigä fafie   a   Petelo.*
        NS small DEF cutting firewood POSS Petelo
        'Petelo chops lots of firewood into small pieces.'

2.4.2 Transitive verb

The example in (13)a is a possessive construction, and (13)b is the corresponding ergative construction.

(13)a. *E feave'aki a   fakapaku a   Atelea i lamatu'a.*
         NS peddle   ABS doughnut POSS Atelea on road
         'Atelea peddles his doughnuts along the road.'

    b. *E feave'aki e   Atelea ana fakapaku i   lamatu'a.*
         NS peddle   ERG Atelea his doughnut on road
         'Atelea peddles his doughnuts along the road.'

It must be noted that the possessive construction as in (13)a has two possible interpretations: the doughnuts (*fakapaku*) may be sold by Atelea, or they may be Atelea's doughnuts sold by someone else not mentioned in the sentence. But this latter interpretation is not primary.

In the next example, it is possible to add the ergative argument *e ia* just after the verb phrase to emphasise the agent, but this is not usually required.

(14)   *Na ta'o lana puaka lasi ke   ma'iloga ai*
        PAST cook his   pig   big so.that show   ANAPH

        lona tagata   i   le fakatasi.
        his   manhood OBL DEF feast
        'He baked a big pig for the feast to show what a fine man he is.'

2.4.3 Possessive constructions in nominalised verb phrases

In nominalised verb phrases, the participants are introduced either by a possessive marker (preposition *a* or *o*), or by verb argument markers (the ergative *e* or oblique *i* and *ki*). Here again, participant marking depends on the verb class.

Middle verb:

In nominal sentences with a nominalised middle verb, the experiencer is expressed as the modifier (introduced by *o*) in a genitive construction.

(15) *Ko   lenä   tio atu   o   lona tinana, ti   tagi atu   a   ia...*
      PRED DEICT see DIR   POSS his   mother then cry   DIR   ABS 3SG
      'His mother sees him, and she cries...' (lit. 'here is his mother's vision towards
      him, and she cries...')

The possessive preposition *o* required after the nominalised verb *tio* is the inalienable, non-agentive, object-like possession marker. In Futunan, an experiencer is not marked as an intentional agent.

Intransitive 'agent-oriented' verb:

The agent is marked by the alienable possessive marker *a*; the relation between the nominalised verb constituting the head noun and its modifier is agentive-like, but the agent's intentionality is low. His action is more accidental than intentional:

(16) *I   le   fäfä   a   le   toe ki   le   matapä na   kelekele.*
      OBL DEF touch POSS DEF child OBL DEF door   PAST dirty
      'Because of the boy's touching of the door, it was dirty.'

Transitive verb:

If the two arguments are present, the agent remains in the ergative case, the patient is the modifier of the nominalised verb functioning as a noun head and is introduced by the possessive marker *o*.

In (17), the ergative construction, related to the transitive verb *fāfā'i*, expresses greater intentionality on the part of the child: he has done it on purpose.

(17) *I   le   fäfä'i o   le   matapä e   le toe   na   kelekele.*
      OBL DEF touch POSS DEF door   ERG DEF child PAST dirty
      'The door was dirty because the child touched it.'

Transitive verb with only one argument present:

If this argument is the patient, it will be expressed as the modifier (introduced by *o*) of the nominalised verb as head noun; if it refers to an agent, it will be introduced either by the ergative marker *e* (example (18)), or by the possessive marker *a* as in (19), according to the degree of intentionality imputed to the agent:

(18) *I   le   fäfä'i e   le   toe   na   kelekele ai   le   matapä.*
      OBL DEF touch ERG DEF child PAST dirty   ANAPH DEF door
      'The door was dirty because the child touched it.'

(19) *Lolotoga le   ta'o a   Selelino, na   moe lona kautagata.*
      during   DEF cook POSS Selelino PAST sleep his   friend
      'While Selelino was busy watching the cooking, his pal was sleeping.'

3 Expression of nominal phrase arguments in an auxiliary construction

Besides the omission of the agent or the use of a genitive construction, another structure is used in Futunan to avoid using an ergative argument.

This is fairly different from what has been described up to now. First, this structure is relevant to aspectual and modal strategy, and second, the agent is not backgrounded, or expressed as less responsible; on the contrary, full agency is stressed.

In such constructions, there are two verbs related by a complementiser, and each verb may have an absolutive argument. The first tends to be grammaticised into an auxiliary verb:

Auxiliary construction:

(20)   TAM + Auxiliary Vb + ABS.NP (agent) + COMP *o* + Vb + ABS.NP (patient)

3.1 Auxiliary verbs

Three main verbs are frequently used as auxiliaries in such constructions: *'au* 'come' and *mafuli* 'turn round', which admit either ergative or non-ergative verbs after the complementiser, and *'aga* 'face', which requires ergative verbs only, whether they are followed by an argument or not. Occasionally, some other verbs of movement (*ano* 'go', *natu* 'come', *ifo* 'go down', and so on) may have the same function.

As auxiliaries, they all have the same aspectual or modal value, 'start doing something', meaning that the process is either imminent, beginning, or has at least been decided.

All the following examples come from oral tradition texts.[3]

The example in (21) shows the auxiliary function of *'au* 'come':

(21)   *'Au a   Safoka o   to'o le   fui   tuna la.*
         come ABS Safoka COMP take DEF bunch eel   EM
         'Safoka took the bunch of eels.'

The example in (22) has *mafuli* 'turn':

(22)   *Mafuli ake lätou o   pü   le   tasi a   'umu*
         turn   DIR 3PL   COMP light DEF one   POSS oven

         o   toe   ta'o ai   a   Lolomai.
         COMP again cook ANAPH ABS Lolomai
         'They prepared another oven to bake Lolomai.'

But the most frequent auxiliary construction is with *'aga* 'face':

(23)   *E   pati na   'aga le   aloa ko   Gututagi la   o   lü*
         NS   say PAST face DEF man PRED Gututagi EM   comp shake

         le   niu   la ti   vilo ake le   tagata la o   mate.
         DEF coconut-tree EM then fall DIR DEF man   EM COMP die
         'It is said that Gututagi shook the coconut-tree, and the man fell down and died.'

(24)   *Ti   'aga a   Kai'ola'ola o   tuki'i   a   Soko ki   fale.*
         then face ABS Kai'ola'ola COMP throw (stone) ABS Soko towards house
         'Kai'ola'ola threw a stone at Soko in the house.'

3.2 Semantic implications of the auxiliary construction

The auxiliary construction is also frequent in nominalised verb sentences, as shown in examples (25) and (26):

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[3]   Frimigacci et al. (1995).

(25)   *E   iai   le   . fakamä'oki o   lana 'aga o   tamate a   Petelo.*
NS   exist DEF   truth   POSS his   face COMP kill   ABS Petelo
'There is evidence that he killed Petelo.'

(26)   *O   'oki lenä lalä 'aga o   fai olä 'ulu la...*
COMP finish DEICT their face COMP do their hair EM
'After taking care of their hair...'

This auxiliary construction is possible with all tense-aspect markers, including *ka* which marks an imminent event.

This is not so much a question of locating an event on a tense-aspect axis, as a way of stressing the agent's intentionality or determination in carrying out the process, which may in certain cases connote obligation, as in (27):

(27)   *Ti   ko   le   fua   leia   a   Tavai na   'aga o   tuli*
then PRED DEF   fleet DEICT POSS Tavai PAST face COMP chase

le   vaka o   le   fakatautamana.
DEF   boat POSS DEF   father.and.sons
'The fleet of Tavai decided to chase the boat of the father and his sons.'

Consequently, when negative as in (28) and (29), this structure denotes that the agent is evading taking a decision:

(28)   *'Tuapese, nofo la   i   lou fenua nä   e   se   ke*
Tuapese stay EM in your village because NS NEG 2SG

'aga o   iloa laku 'au   o   käfiga   mai!'
face COMP know my   coming COMP ask.for.mariage DIR
'Tuapese, stay in your village, as you didn't want to listen to my marriage proposal!'

(29)   *Na to'o loa e   ia   a   tagata o   ifo   mai mo ia.*
PAST take SUCC ERG 3SG ABS man   COMP go.down DIR with 3SG

E   se   'aga a   ia   o   kai kae tuku e   ia   talie
NS   NEG face ABS 3SG COMP eat but let ERG 3SG because

e   'aoga kiate ia.
NS   useful OBL 3SG
'He captured the men and took them with him. He decided not to eat them, he saved their lives, because they might be useful to him.'

The construction with *'aga* may be considered more respectful. This is particularly the case at the very beginning of stories, as in example (30):

(30)   *E   kau fia   'aga mu'a o   fakamatala atu*
NS   1SG feel.like face first COMP tell   DIR

le   ano'aga o   le   velosaga lenä...
DEF   reason POSS DEF   battle DEICT
'I would like first to tell you why the battle took place...'

3.3 Contrastive use of the auxiliary construction and the ergative construction

The construction with *'aga* is sometimes glossed by fluent French-speaking Futunans as being the active counterpart of the ergative construction. Yet they are complementary constructions. They do not mark an active/passive contrast, rather, they seem to oppose a potential but decided event, to an achieved one: with *'aga* the process is decided, but with the ergative structure it is actually achieved and effective.

Here are a few examples of these alternating constructions, which give a very specific rhythm to story telling. All absolute or ergative agents as well as the auxiliary verbs are underlined:

(31)1. *Ti mafuli loa leia le aloa lenä ko Ma'uifa la o*
    then turn   SUCC DEICT DEF man DEICT PRED Ma'uifa EM COMP

    velo lona lima atamai la i lona fëtu'u atamai la'.
    plunge his   hand right EM in his side   right   EM
    'Then Ma'uifa plunged his right hand into his right side.'

2. *Velo e ia lona lima la o pü o kaku lona*
   plunge ERG 3SG his hand EM COMP hole and reach his

   lima la ki lona ate la.
   hand EM OBL his   liver EM
   'He plunged his hand, made a hole and reached for his liver.'

3. *Ti 'aga loa a ia o sa'u lona ate la*
   then face SUCC ABS 3SG COMP take.out his   liver EM

   o 'aga a ia o vaelua.
   and face ABS 3SG COMP divide.in.two
   'He took his liver out and shared it into two parts.'

4. *O soli mai loa e ia leia le maga 'i ate leia*
   and give DIR SUCC ERG 3SG DEICT DEF lobe of liver DEICT

   e tasi la o soli e ia ki Pomai, kae nofo loa a
   NS one EM and give ERG 3SG OBL Pomai but stay SUCC ABS

   ia mo le maga 'i ate maga lua la.
   3SG with DEF lobe of liver lobe two EM
   'He gave the smaller part of the liver to Pomai, and kept the bigger part with two lobes.'

5. *Ti 'aga loa a Pomai aia o to'o lenä le maga 'i ate*
   then face SUCC ABS Pomai DEICT COMP take DEICT DEF lobe of liver

   na soli mai la o velo ki lona fëtu'u atamai la kae
   PAST give DIR EM and plunge DIR his side   right   EM but

   sa'u e ia le fä masi na nofo i ai la.
   take.out ERG 3SG DEF CLASS breadfruit PAST stay OBL ANAPH EM
   'Pomai took the liver part that was given to him, inserted it under his right side and took out the fermented breadfruit he had put there.'

6. O   kai   ę   *ia*   le   fä   masi   la ti   kai   ę
   and eat   ERG 3SG   DEF CLASS breadfruit EM then eat   ERG

   le   *aliki* la   aia   a   le   maga 'i   ate la.
   DEF   chief EM   DEICT ABS   DEF   lobe of   liver EM
   'He (Pomai) ate this fermented breadfruit while the chief (Ma'uifa) ate
   his own part of the liver.'

In the last sentence, it is the *a*-possessive construction which is used, as is often the case with aspectual verbs:

(32) O   'oki   le   maga 'i   ate a   le   aliki la   ti   'oki
      and finish DEF lobe of   liver POSS DEF chief EM   then finish

      le   fä   masi   a   Pomai la.
      DEF CLASS breadfruit POSS Pomai EM
      'The chief ate up the liver, (lit. 'The lobe of liver of the chief was finished,)
      and Pomai ate up the fermented breadfruit.' (lit. then the breadfruit of Pomai
      was finished')

Example (33) highlights the fact that the use of the ergative structure is less an assignment of responsibility than an assignment of effectiveness:

(33) Ti   toe   makape mai mo   le   fafine Alo kua folo
      then again run   DIR also DEF woman Alo PERF swallow

      ę   *leia* *fafine* le   fä   pule   ti   *'aga*
      ERG   DEICT woman   DEF CLASS cowrie.shell then face

      a   *ia*   o   sae   le   gutu o   le   fafine kae
      ABS   3SG   COMP tear   DEF mouth POSS DEF woman but

      kua folo   'oki   le   fä   pule   ę   *le* *fafine*.
      PERF swallow finish DEF CLASS cowrie.shell ERG DEF woman
      'Then a woman from Alo came running up, [having seen] the other woman
      swallowing the cowrie shell; she rushed to open her mouth, but the woman had
      already swallowed it.'

In example (34), there seems to be an aspectual constrast between the two auxiliary constructions which are durative and the ergative one, which is punctual:

(34) Ti   *'aga* loa   *le* *tama*   la aia   o   laga le   tänuma
      then face   SUCC DEF young.man EM DEICT COMP lift   DEF tomb

      la   o   to'o fuli   ę   *ia*   le   siapo leia   na   nofo ai   le
      EM and take totally ERG 3SG   DEF tapa DEICT PAST stay ANAPH   DEF

      fafine la   o   *'aga* *a*   *ia*   o   kofu.
      woman EM and face ABS   3SG   COMP wrap
      'The young man lifted the tomb, took hold of the tapa on which the woman lay,
      and wrapped her in it.'

However, those constrasting structures may sometimes emphasise different levels of responsibility, as in example (35):

(35) *Io,   ko   koe   la, le'ese ko   lomä fänau; na   <u>mä</u>*
      yes   PRED 2SG   EM NEG   PRED our   child PAST 1DU.INCL

      <u>'aga</u>   fa'i o   'aumai a   koe o   tausi.
      face   only COMP   bring   ABS   2SG COMP   bring.up

      Na 'aumai a   koe <u>e</u>   <u>le</u>   <u>finematu'a</u> la.
      PAST bring   ABS   2SG ERG DEF old.woman EM
      'It's true, you are not our son; we have only brought you up. It's the old woman
      who has brought you here.'

This story is about a half-god character called Muni that a woman, on her way down to the sea, once discovered still wrapped in his placenta. She took him to her husband, and the childless couple were happy to bring him up. Yet, as Muni was growing up, his power became so great that it frightened his companions. His parents grew worried. Once, as they were discussing the trouble he was causing, Muni overheard their conversation, thus learning that he was an adopted child.

In example (35) the use of the ergative construction puts stress on the husband's reproaches to his wife who had brought the child home.

4 Conclusion

This auxiliary construction is characteristic of Futunan story telling, though it appears in other speech types. It is still another strategy to avoid ergative marking, with mostly modal values, assigning decision or initiation of the process, when ergative assigns effectiveness.

The role of the agent may thus be expressed morphosyntactically in various ways. Each strategy voices a different perception of agentivity, which may be voluntary, contextual or accidental:

— the agent expressed as a possessor rests on the conceptual link between an object and a process that the possessor is very likely to have conducted on it. This natural link underlines a potential but low and involuntary agentivity.

— the agent as an absolute argument may be the sole argument of an 'agent oriented' intransitive verb: the agentivity is total; it may also be the only expressed argument of a transitive and non-oriented verb: its interpretation as an agent depends on the context; finally, it may be the argument of an auxiliary verb, and is then always interpreted as an intentional agent.

— the agent as an ergative argument, be it the second argument of a transitive verb or its prime argument with verbs such as *mafai, fakataga* and so on, expresses above all the effectiveness, the achievement of the process.

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