

THE ACTOR EMPHATIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
EASTERN POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES

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1. Among the features which set the Eastern Polynesian (EP)<sup>1</sup> languages apart as a subgroup of the Polynesian (PN) language family is the productive use of a peculiar construction usually referred to as Actor Emphatic.<sup>2</sup> The general shape of this construction and the differences between it and unmarked sentence structures can be illustrated by means of these examples from Maori:

(1) I tiihore a Pita i te hipi.  
T skin art. Peter obj. art. sheep  
*Peter skinned the sheep.*

(2a) Na Pita i tiihore te hipi.  
Prep. Peter T skin art. sheep  
*It was Peter who skinned the sheep.*

(2b) Na Pita te hipi i tiihore.  
ditto

Similarly,

(3a) Ma Pita e tiihore te hipi.  
Prep. Peter T skin art. sheep  
*Peter will skin the sheep. or Peter is to skin the sheep.*

(3b) Ma Pita te hipi e tiihore.  
ditto (examples from Clark 1976:111)

Sentences (2a and b) and (3a and b) are examples of Actor Emphatic. As illustrated in sentence (1), the unmarked verbal sentence patterns in MAO (and similarly in the other EP languages) involve:

- (i) VSO order,
- (ii) unmarked subject, and
- (iii) an object marker *i* in transitive clauses.

Actor Emphatic sentences differ from these in that:

- (i) the order is SVO or SOV,
- (ii) the subject is marked with a preposition, and
- (iii) there is no object marker.

Obviously, this formulation begs a question or two, in particular, what exactly are the grammatical relations in this type of sentence,<sup>3</sup> and are sentences

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of this type derived from corresponding unmarked active (or passive)<sup>4</sup> sentences in the Transformational sense; I shall refer to the NPs in these constructions as NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub>. Thus, the pattern for Actor Emphatic in MAO is:

- (4) Na NP<sub>1</sub> i V NP<sub>2</sub>.  
           NP<sub>2</sub> i V.  
 -----  
 Ma NP<sub>1</sub> e V NP<sub>2</sub>.  
           NP<sub>2</sub> e V.

Further features of Actor Emphatic in MAO not revealed by these examples are the restriction of the tense-aspect markers to *i* and *e*, whereas in sentences of the type (1), there is a considerably more extensive paradigm available,<sup>5</sup> the corresponding semantic restriction to past or future-cum-modal uses and the restriction of the construction to transitive verbs (though see below). The prepositions used to mark NP<sub>1</sub> have other uses as well, primarily in predicative possessive constructions, e.g. (examples again from Clark 1976:112-113):

- (5) Na Pita te pukapuka.  
       Prep. *Peter* art. *book*  
       *The book belongs to Peter.*
- (6) Ma Pita te pukapuka.  
       Prep. *Peter* art. *book*  
       *The book is for Peter.*

The comparable constructions in the other EP languages agree with the MAO construction in having NP<sub>1</sub> in initial position marked with a preposition or prepositions otherwise used for predicative possessive constructions;<sup>6</sup> in other details, however, a certain amount of variation is evident.

In this paper, I want to hazard a reconstruction of the PEP innovation reflected in the Actor Emphatic sentence types of the EP languages, to give some account of the developments in the individual EP languages, and to speculate about the origin of the innovation. In doing so, I shall not be departing radically from the conclusions reached by Clark (1976), which is so far as I know the only previous treatment of this construction across several languages. Like Clark, I have relied almost entirely on published grammars and texts for the languages I looked at. More rigorous work with informants may well lead to amendments to some of the conclusions reached, but, I suspect, not to radical changes.

2. Allowing that the reconstruction of aspects of the syntax of non-attested proto-languages is fraught with controversy, being regarded by some as impossible in principle, and has not got well established techniques such as those associated with the reconstruction of phonological and morphological systems, it does not seem unreasonable to attribute to the proto-language at least those features on which all daughter languages agree. On this basis, sentences of the shapes (7) and (8) were grammatical in PEP:

- (7) 'a NP<sub>1</sub> i V NP<sub>2</sub>.  
 (8) Ma'a NP<sub>1</sub> e V NP<sub>2</sub>.

where NP<sub>1</sub> is [+human], V a canonical transitive verb, and NP<sub>2</sub> definite.

I want further to claim that at least at the time of the innovation which led to the existence of such sentences and probably in PEP itself these were the only such sentences. This claim is advanced on two unrelated grounds; firstly, these are the only patterns on which all EP languages surveyed agree, and it seems to me that the various departures from this pattern exemplified in the daughter languages (and we shall see that there are six types of such departure) are easily accounted for in terms of a reanalysis in at least some EP languages and plausible analogical extensions in all EP languages. The converse position, that the construction was less constrained in one or the other of these six ways in PEP and underwent restrictions in its development in one or more daughter languages, appears harder to justify. Secondly, the parallels I shall adduce below (section 4) seem to suggest a natural connection between possessive constructions and high transitivity in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980), and thus render more plausible this reconstruction of the initial innovation than one of lower transitivity.

Clark (1976:119) suggests a constituent structure for these sentences, taking the MAO sentence (2a) as an example, along these lines:

(9)  $[S_{\text{PRED}} [Na\ Pita][i\ tiihore]]_{\text{PRED}} [NP\ te\ hipi]_{\text{NP}} ]_S$

The exact structure of the Predicate remains obscure, in particular, whether the verbal expression *i tiihore* is a relative clause on *Pita* or some sort of non-finite, quasi-participial thing. However, the main thing here is the claim that  $NP_2$  is subject of some sort of extended possessive predicate. Again, this view is supported by the two arguments mentioned above. Firstly, for those languages which clearly treat  $NP_2$  as an object, a relatively straightforward reanalysis can be postulated to explain this (cf. Clark 1976:121), whereas the converse is not so. And secondly, the innovation generally, especially the use of the possessive prepositions, is intelligible only if Actor Emphatic arose initially from a predicative possessive construction.

3. As indicated above, all the EP languages surveyed exhibit departures from the patterns postulated as the original form of the innovation. In all cases, the original patterns remain grammatical, and the departures represent relaxations of restrictions on these patterns so that other types are grammatical as well. These developments seem to be of two types, each of which is readily understandable, though the intersection of these two types in any one language leads to a squishiness of grammatical relations, to which I shall return below.

The two types are:

(i) The grammatical relations and sentence structure remain the same as in the original pattern, but selectional restrictions on  $NP_1$ , and the restrictions of the tense-aspect markers to *i* and *e* and the aspect to telic are relaxed, and  $NP_2$  may be indefinite. That is, the availability of the construction in its original shape is extended to sentences of lower transitivity. Examples of the first such development can be found in RAR and MVA, where nominalisations occur as  $NP_1$ , and in MAO and RAR, where non-human and even non-animate nouns occur in this position, and the role of  $NP_1$  is clearly no longer purely agentive, but is extended to something like cause or force in the Case Grammar sense. Thus:

- (10) Na te 'akairo o te reta-topa (' ) e 'akapāpū mai ki a  
 Prep. art. *write* of art. *glottal stop* T *make certain* hither to art.  
 tātou i te tika'anga tikāi i te 'akatangi'anga o te reira  
 us obj. art. *correctness* just obj. art. *pronunciation* of art. *there*  
 tuatua. (RAR Simiona n.d.:iv)  
*word*  
*The writing of the glottal stop (' ) will make certain for us the correct*  
*pronunciation of that word.*

- (11) Na te ua rāua i 'akaara. (RAR Buse 1963b:401)  
 Prep. art. *rain* they<sub>2</sub> T *awaken*  
*It was the rain that woke them.*

Tense-aspect markers other than *i* and *e*, usually *e-ana* and *e-nei*, and usually in an habitual or imperfective sense, are possible in MVA, HAW, RAR, TAH, TUA and MRA, e.g.:

- (12) Na'ai e 'aka'oro ana i te rauti. (RAR Rere 1961:49)  
 Prep.-*who* T *drive* T obj. art. *launch*  
*Who drives the launch?*

And finally, in MAO, NP<sub>2</sub> may be indefinite. Thus:

- (13) Maa-ku e koorero he tikanga. (Chung 1978:179)  
 Prep.-*me* T *speak* art. *advice*  
*I will tell (you) a piece of advice.*

This type of development is consistent with the highly subject-like behaviour of NP<sub>2</sub> in MAO,<sup>7</sup> and the occurrence of an alternative order: NP<sub>2</sub> T V in HAW, MAO, RAR and TAH. Chung (1978:179), in discussing MAO, calls this Raising from an underlying structure of the form:

- (14) [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>PRED</sub> Prep. NP<sub>1</sub> ]<sub>PRED</sub> [<sub>S</sub> T V NP<sub>2</sub> ]<sub>S</sub> ]<sub>S</sub>

but Clark (1976:119), rightly, connects this alternative order to the more general phenomenon, "extraposition of the second constituent of a complex predicate over a short subject".

(ii) The second type of development is a reanalysis along the lines suggested by Clark (1976:121f). Clark proposes that in at least some EP languages a reanalysis has occurred such that from an unmarked active transitive sentence like the MAO one illustrated as (1), Actor Emphatic sentences are derived by a rule fronting the subject and marking it with the appropriate possessive preposition, leading to a structure like this:

- (15) [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>PRED</sub> Na Pita ]<sub>PRED</sub> [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>PRED</sub> i tiihore ]<sub>PRED</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> i te hipi ]<sub>PP</sub> ]<sub>S</sub> ]<sub>S</sub>.

Now, Actor Emphatic sentences like this, i.e. with NP<sub>2</sub> marked by *i* 'obj.' are not grammatical in MAO, but are in all the other EP languages surveyed except MQA. Indeed, in most of them this is the preferred pattern, though note that in the order NP<sub>2</sub> T V, if it occurs at all, NP<sub>2</sub> is never marked 'obj.'. Further, many of these languages have Actor Emphatic-like sentences involving intransitive

verbs like *go*, *speak*, whose subjects are agents. MVA has perhaps progressed furthest in this direction in allowing Actor Emphatic with verbs like pure *pray*, *meimata weep*, but similar sentences are possible in apparently all but MQA, TUA, and MRA. An interesting example from TUA (Stimson 1933a:35):

- (16) Na te tahuga anake e tika kia korero i te igoa tapu o Kio.  
 Prep. art. *priest only* T *right* comp. *speak* obj. art. *name holy of Kio*  
*Only the priest may pronounce the holy name of Kio.,*

shows that initial position and marking with *na* may be no more than a device for focussing agentive subject phrases, and have little more to do with the original construction.

I want to propose that what I have been calling two different types of development here are in fact the result of a single change in progress, namely the reanalysis, and that the development of Actor Emphatic in the EP languages is another example of gradual syntactic change of the sort discussed by Chung (1978:319) for Pukapukan, a Samoic PN language. During the course of such changes, in which a reanalysis occurs involving shifts in grammatical relations, the NPs concerned can show behaviour characteristic of both the old and the new grammatical relations. In the case of Pukapukan, it is contended, the reanalysis is of Passive as Ergative, in our case here, of an extended predicative possessive sentence with a patient NP as subject, as a transitive (or even intransitive) pattern with a fronted subject and, when present, the patient as object. The possibility that one is dealing with change in progress, at least in MAO, is suggested by the variability of native speaker judgements over sentence types at the forefront of the change. Thus, while there is no quarrel with sentences like (2a and b) and (3a and b) above, with sentences involving intransitive verbs, indefinite NP<sub>2</sub>s, or even occasionally with i 'obj.', opinions differ strongly.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, some languages have progressed further in this direction than others. MAO and MQA seem to be the most conservative (though see below for the possibility of a different reanalysis in MQA), whereas in others, such as TUA, TAH and RAR, the features reflecting the proposed original pattern are rather fewer. Striking is the fact that those languages which have expanded the tense-aspect paradigm for Actor Emphatic sentences to include markers used in unmarked main clauses in habitual or progressive senses are exactly those where NP<sub>2</sub> is more frequently marked with i 'obj.' than unmarked.<sup>9</sup>

Given this account, a question arises as to the time of the beginning of the reanalysis or better, of the development which may culminate in a complete reanalysis of Actor Emphatic patterns. One is I think faced with two equally unattractive possibilities; either it began in PEP, in which case it has been in progress for quite some time in languages like MAO, or it is a spontaneous independent development in at least a number of the daughter languages of PEP. Perhaps in favour of the second scenario is the fact that in MQA, a different reanalysis may be taking place. In a number of examples of Actor Emphatic given in Dordillon (1931), the verb is marked with the passive suffix, e.g. (p.66):

- (17) Na te Etua i pepena tia te áni.  
 Prep. art. *God* T *create* pass. art. *heaven*  
*Le ciel a été créé par Dieu.*

cf. also Lavondès (1966, vol.1:35):

- (18) 'u ke'ahi 'ia na to matou tuakana.  
 T kick pass. prep. art.-of us older SSS  
 nos soeurs aînées l'ont frappé à coups de pieds.

From such examples, it would appear possible that in MQA the original pattern has been reanalysed as derived from an unmarked passive with a (not even always) fronted agent marked with na. Not wanting to go into this further, I can do no more here than point to the similarity of this state of affairs to the well-known 'drift' of several Indo-European languages from synthetic to analytic.

4. It may ultimately be futile to speculate about the origin of the Actor Emphatic construction, but it is interesting to do so. Clark (1976:119-121) sketches a proposal, but is clearly unhappy with it. This consists in asserting that the Actor Emphatic construction is a simple predicative possessive construction, such as is found in all PN languages, with some sort of clausal elaboration related to the possessive-relative. In all PN languages a genitive with a clausal expansion of which the NP in the genitive can be understood as the subject can be used as a relative clause within a NP, and even as a headless relative clause, as:

- (19) ko e haa ho'o me'a 'oku kai. (Tongan, Clark 1976:118)  
 Topic art. what your thing T eat  
 What are you eating?

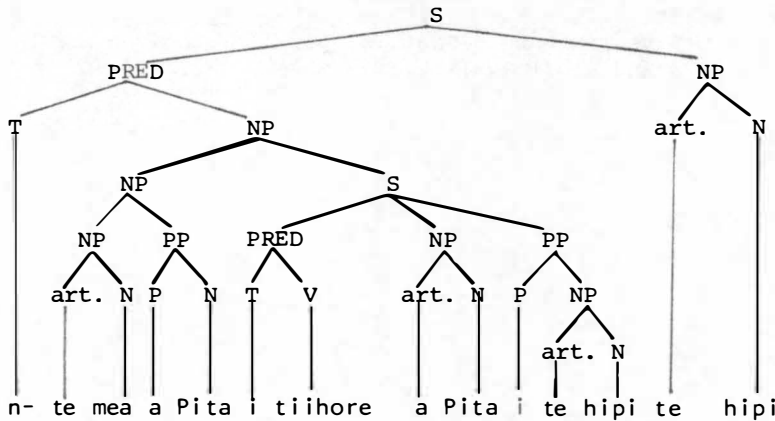
- (20) Ko eenei ngaa riiwai a Hata i kawe atu ai i te paakoro ki te  
 Topic these art. potato of H T carry away Pro. from art. shed to art.  
 rori. (MAO, Bauer n.d.:19)  
 road  
 These are the potatoes which Hata carried from the shed to the road.

However, Clark's analysis of these as coming from two independent relative clauses, one of which becomes the genitive, and the other of which becomes the clausal part by deletion of the coreferential subject, is unable to account for the superficially similar predicative use in the Actor Emphatic constructions of the EP languages. He attempts to remedy this inability of his analysis of genitives to account for Actor Emphatic by proposing that predicative genitives (from which his attributive ones are derived) are derived in turn from something like:

- (21) [<sub>PRED</sub> T [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> art. N] [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> a/o NP] ] ] ]<sub>PRED</sub>

where art. is deleted following a T and the N is semantically empty. According to this view, Actor Emphatic is derived from a structure like:

(22)



Apart from the misgivings expressed by Clark himself, there are two reasons why neither an historical nor a synchronic derivation of Actor Emphatic from such a structure is satisfactory. Firstly, this possessive-relative clause is not restricted to transitive objects, but may be used to relativise on a variety of NP relations which cannot be NP<sub>2</sub> in an Actor Emphatic sentence, e.g.

(23) Te 'aso o Mautikitiki noko hano ai ki tai. (Rennellese, Clark 1976:117)  
 art. day of M T go Pro. to sea  
 The day that Mautikitiki went to sea.

(24) Te vāhi tā'u e haere atu. (TAH, Coppenrath and Prévost 1974:272)  
 art. place art.-of-me T go away  
 l'endroit où j'irai.

Secondly, in many languages (though not all) a pronominal copy ai of the NP relativised on is present, something never found in Actor Emphatic; e.g. sentences (20) and (23) above.

It seems to me that despite their superficial similarity, the origins of the Actor Emphatic construction should not be sought in the possessive-relatives, but rather in another quarter, a phenomenon which can be frequently observed in a variety of languages, the relationship between possessivity and transitivity. It is striking how often transitive, especially perfective transitive, constructions involve auxiliaries, case markings, personal affixes, etc., which are otherwise used in possessive constructions. It suffices here to allude to the have perfects in Romance and Germanic languages and in Greek, which arguably developed independently, and the work of people like Allen (1964), Anderson (1977), Seiler (1983),<sup>10</sup> and other work cited there, which shows that this phenomenon is by no means restricted to these languages. A common feature of this type of thing is the formal parallelism of agent and possessor on the one hand and patient and possessum on the other. To my knowledge, no-one has tried to account for this, and I shan't try to myself, except to point out that these roles are at least extensionally very similar, in that those entities which are typically agents are exactly those which are typically possessors, and similarly for patients and possessa.

All I want to do here is to point to the parallelism of the Actor Emphatic construction in EP languages and the phenomenon I have mentioned and thus to explain Actor Emphatic as arising through some sort of universal possibility of

extending sentential possessive constructions with a verbal expression to form a (usually) perfective transitive sentence. That is, parallel to (25a and b) and (26a and b), there is (27a and b) (= (2a)).

(25a) nora tun ē  
 he-gen. house is  
 He has a house.

(25b) nora bereal ē  
 he-gen. carry non-fin. is  
 He has carried (something).

but

(25c) sa ekeal ē  
 he-nom. come non-fin. is  
 He has come. (Armenian)<sup>11</sup>

(26a) Mihi est filius / Filium habeo  
 Me-dat. is son-nom. / son-acc. I have.  
 I have a son.

(26b) Mihi est res tota provisa / Rem totam provisam habeo.<sup>12</sup>  
 Me-dat. is thing-nom. whole provided / thing-acc. whole provided I have  
 I have provided for the whole matter. (Latin)

(27a) Na Pita te hipi  
 Prep. P art. sheep  
 The sheep belongs to Peter.

(27b) Na Pita i tiihore te hipi (=2a) (MAO)

Against this as an 'explanation', there are no doubt several possible objections; for instance that it does not solve the question of the status of the VP in Actor Emphatic sentences. One possible line of attack, however, I do want to try to answer, and that is the point that the parallels adduced from Latin, Armenian, etc. are all translations of English *have*, whereas the PN possessive type of which Actor Emphatic is an extension is not, but rather a translation of English *belong to*. Oddly, constructions which have one of these uses in one language sometimes have the other in other languages, e.g. NP<sub>1</sub>-nom. is NP<sub>2</sub>-gen. in Armenian = 'NP<sub>2</sub> has a NP<sub>1</sub>', but in Latin = 'NP<sub>1</sub> is NP<sub>2</sub>'s' or 'NP<sub>1</sub> belongs to NP<sub>2</sub>'. Similarly, NP<sub>1</sub>-nom. is NP<sub>2</sub>-dat. in French or Swiss German = 'NP<sub>1</sub> belongs to NP<sub>2</sub>', but in Latin = 'NP<sub>2</sub> has a NP<sub>1</sub>'. I am aware that this is more a curiosity than a convincing proof, but want nonetheless to claim that the parallelism between the postulated origin of Actor Emphatic and the use of *have*-like possessives as transitives in other languages can be upheld, because the sole difference between *have a* sentences and *belong to* sentences is not a matter of the predicate but only of the topicality and rhematicity of the arguments. That is, that the only difference between the uses of sentences like Latin (26a) and MAO (27a) is that the Latin sentence is 'about' me, and asserts the owning of a son, while the MAO sentence is 'about' the sheep and asserts its being owned by Peter. If that is so, the claim that Actor Emphatic is like the *have* transitive perfects and related phenomena in a variety of languages can stand.

Clearly, even if right, this paper accounts for Actor Emphatic only by assigning it to a group of phenomena which need explaining as a whole. That this doesn't seem to have happened yet does not suffice to dispel the impression that there is something in the way of a widespread tendency or even universal possibility involved here.

## NOTES

1. On the subgrouping of the PN languages, see Pawley 1966 and 1967, and Green 1966. The EP languages used in this study, along with abbreviations and sources are:

Maori: MAO: Chung 1978, Bauer 1981 and n.d., Karaka Roberts, personal communication.

Rarotongan: RAR: Buse 1963a,b and c, Rere 1961, Simiona n.d.

Tahitian: TAH: Coppenrath and Prévost 1974.

Hawaiian: HAW: Elbert and Pukui 1979.

Marquesan: MQA: Lavondès 1966, Dordillon 1931.

Mangarevan: MVA: Janeau 1908.

Manihiki: MRA: Kauraka 1982.

Tuamotuan: TUA: Stimson 1933a and b.

Easter Island: EAS: Mulloy and Rapu 1977, Chapin 1978, Fuentes 1960.

All of these apart from EAS are believed to belong to a subgroup of EP called Central Eastern Polynesian (CEP), which in turn divides into Tahitic (TA), consisting of MAO, MRA, RAR, TAH, TUA, and Marquesic (MQ), consisting of HAW, MVA, MQA.

In the glosses of examples, the following abbreviations are used:

T = tense-aspect marker

art. = article, proper or common

obj. = object marker

prep. = preposition other than obj.

pass. = passive suffix

comp. = complementiser

Pro. = pronominal copy.

2. Two examples of superficially similar constructions in non-EP languages are known: Luangiua *maa ke poi i ŋamuŋamu ke ivi* *It is for the dog to chew the bone.* quoted in Clark 1976:123, and Tikopia *aaku ne taa* *I hit it* in Early 1981:97. There is at present simply not enough information to tell whether these are at all related to the EP construction under discussion here.
3. On this question, see Chung 1978:177ff and Bauer 1981:321ff.
4. cf. Hohepa 1967:102 and Buse 1963c:637.
5. As Chung 1978:177 points out, e as T occurs only in embedded clauses and is not available as T in main clauses. On MAO tense-aspect markers, cf. Bauer 1981:52ff.
6. The precise form of the prepositions varies. In EAS, the pair is 'aʷma, continuing the forms in '- and m- of PEP. PCE however innovated by introducing n- giving the pair nʷma as in MAO. This pair is preserved only in MAO, MVA and Penrhyn, merging in all other EP languages to na, both in Actor Emphatic constructions and in predicative possessive uses. Similarly, though without relevance here, with the o-class prepositions.
7. See esp. Chung 1978:177ff.
8. e.g. Chung 1978:180 quotes one example where NP<sub>2</sub> is marked with i and is reflexive, and (p.181) another in which NP<sub>2</sub> is marked with ki and is 'object' of titiro *look*, arguably not a canonical transitive, but a 'middle' verb, cf. Chung 1978:478. However, my informant rejects both of these in favour of unmarked NP<sub>2</sub>s, but allows the very similar: *Maa koutou e whakarongo mai ki a au* *You should listen to me.*

9. Apart from one possible example of Actor Emphatic where T = ka 'inceptive' in MVA, none of the other tense-aspect markers available in unmarked sentence types are attested.
10. On Greek, cf. also Aerts 1965.
11. Evidently, Armenian has undergone a reanalysis similar to that posited for EP languages, cf. Anderson 1977:340; the genitive form has been reanalysed as transitive subject and the patient of such sentences stands in the accusative.
12. The first sentence in (26b) is from Cicero Verr. IV 42, 91. The second is an unattested but grammatical Vulgar Latin sentence.

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