

## A REANALYSIS OF PROTO POLYNESIAN NOUN PHRASE MARKING

S.P. HARRISON

### 1. INTRODUCTION: WHY RE-OPEN AN OLD ISSUE?<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1 THE ERGATIVE-ACCUSATIVE DEBATE

The history of Polynesian nominal marking, particularly case marking, was the subject of considerable debate throughout the 1970s, beginning with Hohepa (1969). In that paper, Hohepa, following a suggestion by Ken Hale, proposed that Proto Polynesian (PPN) had an accusative case-marking typology, much like that of the contemporary Eastern Polynesian languages.<sup>2</sup> In that account, PPN transitive verbs appeared in either active or passive frames, as in contemporary Maori:

MAORI      *Ka inu te tangata i/ki te wai.*  
              TNS V ART man ACC ART water  
              The man drank the water.

*Ka inumia te wai e te tangata.*  
              TNS V+PASS ART water AG ART man  
              The water was drunk by the man.

The ergative pattern:

SAMOAN    *Saa inu(mia) e le tagata le vai.*  
              TNS V(+CIA) ERG ART man ART water  
              The man drank the water.

in Tongic and in the Samoic-Outlier languages is held to be the result of a drift-like generalisation and, ultimately, a literal unmarking of the passive in those languages.

---

<sup>1</sup>I am pleased to dedicate this work to my teacher and friend, Prof. G.W. Grace. I have learned many things from him, not the least of which is how one should endeavour to cope with the pressures and frustrations of academic life. An early version of this paper was presented to the Honolulu Austronesian Circle in late 1983, after which it lay fallow for many years (not long enough, some might say!). I should like to thank Anthony Aristar for insightful discussion of the relationship between noun semantics and case marking, and Bob Blust for valuable critical comment on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup>Abbreviations used are as follows: ABS – absolutive, ACC – accusative, AG – agent, ART – article, BENF – benefactive, CN – common noun, DIR – directional, ERG – ergative, INST – instrument, LOC – locative, NSP – non-specific, PASS – passive, PERF – perfective, PN – proper noun, POSS – possessive, PRED – predicative, PST – past, SRC – source, TNS – transitive.

Robert Blust, ed. *Currents in Pacific linguistics: papers on Austronesian languages and ethnolinguistics in honour of George W. Grace*, 129-144. *Pacific Linguistics*, C-117, 1991.

© S.P. Harrison

Clark (1976:68ff.) objects to that reconstruction on the grounds that (1) it necessitates a change cutting across established Polynesian subgroups, that (2) Hohepa's account of the progress of the change, in terms of 'drift', is unmotivated, and that (3) it fails to account for all the facts of contemporary Polynesian case marking.

Clark's alternative account is initially appealing. He recognises a contrast in Polynesian between what he terms 'A- and B-verbs'. The former have experiencer subjects or locative objects, and are perhaps conceptually less transitive than the latter, which are 'typical' transitive verbs involving an agent and a patient. Clark then reconstructs three case-marking patterns for PPN:

Pattern 1:	V		S	<i>i/ki</i>	O
Pattern 2:	V+Suff		<i>e</i>	S	O
Pattern 3:	V		<i>e</i>	S	O

Patterns 1 and 2 were available for A-verbs, and patterns 2 and 3 for B-verbs. Pattern 1 is a transitive reinterpretation of an Oceanic intransitive construction (where *\*i* and *\*ki* are oblique prepositions). 'Suff' is the pair PPN *\*-Ci* and PPN *\*-a*, the former reflecting the Proto Oceanic transitive and the latter, the Proto Oceanic third person singular object suffix. The locus of internal Polynesian change, in Clark's analysis, is Eastern Polynesian. In those languages, pattern 3 was for the most part lost, and pattern 1 was extended from A-verbs to all transitive verbs (though in a number of languages, he claims, it remains more common with A-verbs).

The issue was not laid to rest by Clark's study, however. Chung (1978) presented a sophisticated formal argument for Hohepa's original claim that PPN was accusative. From the perspective of an early version of relational grammar, she argues that Clark's pattern 1 was definitely transitive (rather than oblique) in PPN, even for what she calls middle verbs (Clark's A-verbs). But her arguments have less to do with evidence that NPs flagged by *i* in Polynesian are direct objects than with evidence that subjects in clauses with *i* NP undergo rules otherwise restricted to *transitive* subjects. Therefore, the clauses in which such subjects appear are *transitive* clauses, *i* NPs are direct objects, and *i* is an accusative marker. It is not clear to me, given subsequent revisions to the formal model, how her arguments have stood the test of time.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 THE PPN NOUN PHRASE

How can one summarise the debate surrounding PPN case marking in the 1970s? First, I think, by observing that the debate seemed to have little to do with *nominal case marking* at all. With the exception of Chung's formal argument regarding the status of PPN *\*i*, the focus of the debate was the history of transitivity-related verbal suffixes in Polynesian, and not NP internal case marking at all. It was taken for granted that the basic structure of the PPN noun phrase was:

Prep Article Noun

that the prepositions marked case, and that the articles marked definiteness or number.

In the present paper, I will attempt to redress the balance somewhat by re-examining Polynesian NP marking itself. As my point of departure, I take Clark's (1976) reconstruction of Proto Polynesian prepositions and articles. I provide a critical evaluation of those reconstructions in section

<sup>3</sup> Chung was at least as concerned, if not more concerned, with arguments that PPN *\*-Cia* was a passive suffix as with arguments that *\*i* was an accusative marker. I cannot deal with those arguments here, however.

2. Section 3 treats noun marking in Tongic in some detail. Finally, in section 4, I make some new proposals regarding PPN nominal case marking and consider some lingering problems.

2. PPN PREPOSITIONS AND ARTICLES

2.1 THE INVENTORY

Clark (1976:36-61) reconstructs the following prepositions and articles for Proto Polynesian:

PREPOSITIONS		ARTICLES	
*∅	absolutive	*te	definite
*e	ergative	*sa	indefinite
*i	locative, cause	*a	pronominal/proper
*ki	directional	*∅	plural
*ko	topic		
*mai	source		
*a/*o	possessive		

PPN *\*ki* also marks instruments and recipients. As noted above, both PPN *\*i* and *\*ki* appear as ‘accusative’ markers for Clark’s A-verbs. Clark (pp.47f.) notes that apparent reflexes of *\*ko* occur in a variety of functions, but argues that most of these can be derived from an earlier topic or predicate nominal flagging function. He also reconstructs PPN *\*ʔaa* ‘paucal’ following either the PPN definite or the plural article.

2.2 CLARK’S ACCOUNT OF PPN ARTICLES

2.2.1 PPN *\*te* AND *\*sa*

Clark’s account of post-PPN developments in the form of his reconstructed article system is marred, in my view, by its frequent appeal to irregular sound changes, as the following diagrams suggest (where PTO represents Proto Tongic and PNP represents Proto Nuclear Polynesian):

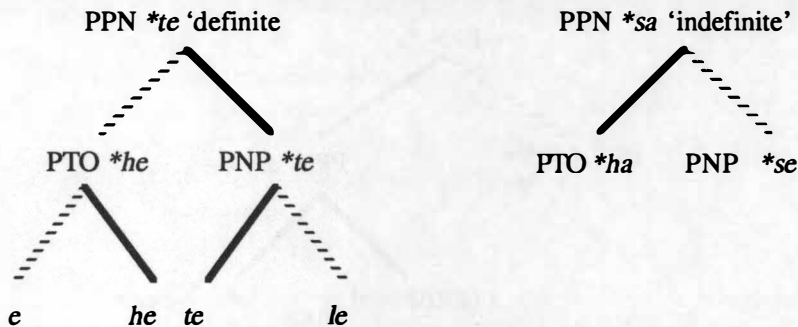


FIGURE 1: PPN DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES

In Figure 1, broken lines indicate irregular phonological developments:

- (a) PPN *\*t* is regularly [s] in Tongic before reflexes of PPN *\*e*. Tongan and Niuean *he* suggest a PPN *\*se*, rather than *\*te*.

- (b) In order to account for the distribution of the Tongan and Niuean definite articles *e* and *he* after various synchronic prepositions (see section 3), Clark assumes that the initial consonant of the definite article, whatever it was, was irregularly lost *after a back vowel* in Proto Tongic.
- (c) PPN *\*t* is reflected as */l/* in the definite article *le* of Samoan and East Futunan. While this is not an isolated reflex (being attested also in reflexes of PPN negative morphemes – see Clark 1976:85ff.), it is not a regular one.
- (d) PPN *\*a* is irregularly reflected as PNP *\*e* in Nuclear Polynesian reflexes of the indefinite article. (Clark reconstructs PPN *\*sa* rather than *\*se*, on account of the Proto Eastern Oceanic reconstruction *\*sa* ‘one’.)

### 2.2.2 PPN *\*a*

Clark (1976:58ff.) reconstructs a personal/pronominal article PPN *\*a* on the basis of the following reflexes:

- (a) proper and pronominal forms of the prepositions *\*i*, *\*ki* and *\*mai*, suggestive of *\*i a*, *\*ki a* and *\*mai a*, throughout Polynesia;
- (b) personal and pronominal (nominative) articles in a number of Nuclear Polynesian languages;
- (c) the Tongic absolutive marker PTO *\*qa*;
- (d) plural articles in several Samoic languages.

The first two of these functions he assumes to be derivative of the PPN form; the last two, he claims, are idiosyncratic post-PPN developments. In pre-PPN, Clark conjectures *\*a* was a simple personal/pronominal article. By PPN it was restricted to NPs with the prepositions *\*i*, *\*ki* or *\*mai*, or with no preposition. In order to account for this distribution, he postulates yet another irregular phonological change, a morphophonemic rule deleting *\*a* after prepositions ending in a non-high vowel (that is, after the possessive markers *\*a/\*o*, *\*ko* and *\*e*). The remaining reflexes of *\*a* fused with a preceding preposition. These developments can be diagrammed:

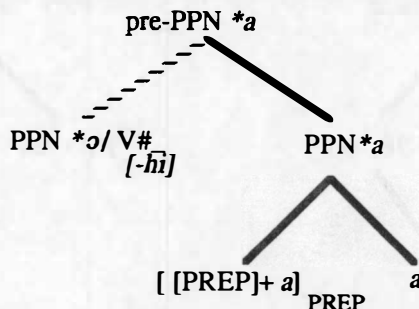


FIGURE 2: PPN *\*a* ‘PERSONAL, PRONOMINAL’

In a few Nuclear Polynesian languages (Maori, for example), PPN *\*a* survives as a proper noun nominative (and fossilised on some personal pronouns). In most of the remaining better-known Nuclear Polynesian languages (like Samoan, Tahitian and Hawaiian), ‘free’ *\*a* has been lost, but in a few Samoic languages, it (under Clark’s analysis) has been reanalysed as a plural article. He

conjectures that, following the fusion of \*a with a preceding preposition, 'free' \*a was reinterpreted as a sort of default noun marker, replacing PPN \*∅ as a plural article. He does not account for its subsequent loss in its original environment, with nominative proper names. Clark assumes a similar development in Tongic, in which the 'free' reflex of PPN \*a was reinterpreted as a nominative marker for both proper and common nouns. (A similar development appears in some Samoic languages, Rennellese for example – see Clark 1976:61.)

### 3. NOMINAL MARKING IN TONGIC

#### 3.1 NIUEAN PREPOSITIONS AND ARTICLES

The Niuean nominal-marking system is described in relative detail in Seiter (1980:27-60). The following table, adapted from Seiter (p.37), summarises noun marking in Niuean:

TABLE 1: NOMINAL MARKING IN NIUEAN

	ABS	ERG	LOC	DIR	INST	COM	BENF	POSS	PRED	SRC
CN	<i>e</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>ke he</i>	<i>akie</i>	<i>mo e</i>	<i>ma e</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>ko e</i>	<i>mai he</i>
PN	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i (a)<sup>4</sup></i>	<i>ki (a)</i>	<i>aki a</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>a/ha</i>	<i>ko</i>	<i>mai i</i>

What is immediately striking about Niuean is that:

- (a) case is always marked

that is, there is no zero case marking, and that:

- (b) there is only one prenominal slot for absolutive, ergative and locative nouns

that is, preposition and article are not distinguished for these three cases.

There are, however, some exceptions to each of these claims. Absolutive *e* is optional before a preposed possessive, cardinal number (or the quantifiers *loga* 'many' or *gahoa* 'few'), and *ha* 'non-specific' or *taha* 'indefinite':

NIUEAN    *Nofo (e) haana a    tupuna    fifine i    Avatele.*  
 live ABS his    POSS grandparent female LOC Avatele  
 His grandmother lives in Avatele.

*Mate tuai (e) ua e kuli.*  
 die PERF ABS two dog  
 Two dogs died.

*Ai fia loto (e) ha tagata i    Niu Silani    ki a    ia.*  
 not want want ABS NSP man    LOC New Zealand to ART him  
 Nobody in New Zealand wanted him.

<sup>4</sup>Blust (pers. comm.) reminds me that at least three distinct (non-affixal) morphemes of the form \*i have been reconstructed (at various levels in the Austronesian tree, at least as far down as POC): a locative preposition, a personal article and a genitive marker. He suggests that PPN \*i is the result of a (partial) merger of these morphemes. That may well be, though I've never been particularly disposed toward projecting grammatical homophones indefinitely far back in time. I would prefer attempting to motivate a single reconstruction, from which later homophones can be derived. But this issue can safely be sidestepped in the current context.

Locative personal names, as distinct from place names, take *a* when flagged by the prepositions *i* or *ki*:

*Malona tuai e kapiniu ē i a Maka.*  
 broken PERF ABS dish this LOC ART Maka  
 This dish got broken on account of Maka.

*Nofo e taokete haana i Hakupu.*  
 live ABS brother his LOC Hakupu  
 His brother lives in Hakupu.

*Ne fakafano e tohi ki a Sione.*  
 PST send ABS letter to ART Sione  
 The letter was sent to Sione.

*Ne fakafano e tohi ki Niuē.*  
 PST send ABS letter to Niue  
 The letter was sent to Niue.

Note also that instances of the non-specific article *ha* provide a class of exceptions to generalisation (b) above. The non-specific *ha* is one of a small number of items that may intervene, in Niuean, between a case marker and its noun. Others include *tau* 'plural', *kau* 'group (of people)', *lafu* 'group (of kin)' and *nā* 'pair'. The indefinite article *taha* 'some (individual)' is similar to *ha* in that the absolutive marker *e* is optional before it.

Pronominal and proper noun marking is identical in Niuean, except in the possessive and the (related) benefactive, but these details are irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion (see Seiter 1980:34-36).

### 3.2 TONGAN PREPOSITIONS AND ARTICLES

Proper/pronominal absolutive, ergative and locative markers all have an initial glottal stop in Tongan, and the locative and directional prepositions have pre-pronominal forms *'iate* and *kiate*. Otherwise, in most relevant respects, Tongan proper/pronominal noun marking is identical to Niuean:

TABLE 2: PROPER/PRONOMINAL NOUN MARKING IN NIUEAN AND TONGAN

	ABS	ERG	LOC	DIR	PRED	SRC
NIUEAN	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i (a)</i>	<i>ki (a)</i>	<i>ko</i>	<i>mai i</i>
TONGAN	<i>'a</i>	<i>'e</i>	<i>'i (a)</i>	<i>ki (a)</i>	<i>ko</i>	<i>mei (a)</i>

Note that the absolutive *'a* is rare with pronouns and demonstratives in Tongan.

Common noun marking differs markedly, however:

TABLE 3: COMMON NOUN MARKING IN NIUEAN AND TONGAN

	ABS	ERG	LOC	DIR	
NIUEAN	<i>e</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>ke he</i>	(SPECIFIC)
TONGAN	<i>(a) e</i>	<i>'e he</i>	<i>(i) he</i>	<i>ki he</i>	
NIUEAN	<i>(e) ha</i>	<i>he ha</i>	<i>he ha</i>	<i>ke he ha</i>	(NON-SPECIFIC)
TONGAN	<i>ha</i>	<i>'e ha</i>	<i>(i) ha</i>	<i>ki ha</i>	

Unlike Niuean (but like other Polynesian languages), Tongan has two distinct prenominal slots in common noun phrases. The first is occupied by a prepositional case marker, and the second by an article. The Tongan specific article is *e* in the absolutive, and *he* otherwise; the non-specific, like Niuean, is *ha*. The Tongan absolutive case marker 'a is optional with specific common nouns, and disallowed with non-specific; the locative 'i is always optional in common noun phrases. For other details of Tongan nominal marking, see Churchward (1953).

### 3.3 CLARK'S ACCOUNT OF NIUEAN NOUN MARKING

As noted above, Clark's (1976) account of the development of nominal marking in Tongic rests on two hypotheses. The first is the irregular development of PPN *\*te* 'definite article' into pre-PTO *\*se* > PTO *\*he/\*e*, the former after front vowels (*\*i* or *\*e*) and the latter after back vowels (*\*a* and *\*o* being the only relevant cases). Clark is not explicit, as Seiter (1980:342 fn.4) is, that the putative Tongic reflexes are *specific* articles, rather than *definite*. Clark's second hypothesis is that the PPN personal/pronominal article *\*a* was reinterpreted as an absolutive marker *\*a* in Proto Tongic,<sup>5</sup> and in that way spread from proper to common nouns.

Subsequent developments in Tongan are straightforward. Either the development of *\*a* as an absolutive marker is still in progress in Tongan, accounting for its optionality in specific common noun phrases and its absence in non-specific contexts, or it has begun to decline in those contexts. The former is perhaps more plausible on the basis of Tongan evidence alone. Clark, however, offers no account of the optionality of the Tongan locative 'i in common noun phrases or before demonstratives (see Churchward 1953:116).

The derivation of Niuean common noun phrase marking from this Proto Tongic system requires more ingenuity, however. Clark hypothesises yet another irregular phonological change to account for synchronic specific common noun phrase marking in Niuean – the loss of #V# prepositions before reflexes of pre-Tongic *\*se*.<sup>6</sup> The historical development of Niuean nominal marking under Clark's account can then be described in terms of the following sequence:

TABLE 4: DEVELOPMENT OF NIUEAN PRO-/PROPER NOUN PHRASE MARKING

	ABS	ERG	LOC	DIR
pre-PPN	<i>*∅ a</i>	<i>*e a</i>	<i>*i a</i>	<i>*ki a</i>
PPN	<i>*∅ a</i>	<i>*e ∅</i>	<i>*i a</i>	<i>*ki a</i>
PTO	<i>*a ∅</i>	<i>*e</i>	<i>*i a</i>	<i>*ki a</i>
NIU	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i a</i>	<i>ki a</i>

The evolution of Niuean pronominal/proper noun marking offers no surprises in Clark's account. One need only postulate the loss of the proper article *\*a* after non-high vowels and the (in this case vacuous) reinterpretation of 'free' *\*a* as an absolutive marker.

<sup>5</sup>The Tongan reflexes of PPN *\*e* and *\*i* have a glottal stop, as do at least some of the reflexes of PPN *\*a*. Since other Polynesian languages with non-zero reflexes of PPN *\*ʔ* do not show glottal stop in these forms, it is likely that their Tongan form is an innovation. It is not clear whether that innovation should be attributed to Proto Tongic, since Niuean reflects PPN *\*ʔ* as zero. Nor is it clear under what conditions the Tongan forms acquired their glottal stop, since no glottal stop appears in post-prepositional *a* before proper nouns and pronouns.

<sup>6</sup>Loss of single-vowel prepositions must be restricted to this environment, since reflexes of these prepositions remain before reflexes of PPN *\*a*.

TABLE 5: DEVELOPMENT OF NIUEAN SPECIFIC COMMON NOUN PHRASE MARKING

	ABS	ERG	LOC	DIR
PPN	* $\emptyset$ te	*e te	*i te	*ki te
pre-PTO1	* $\emptyset$ se	*e se	*i se	*ki se
pre-PTO2	*a he	*e he	*i he	*ki he
PTO	*a e	*e he	*i he	*ki he
NIU	e	he	he	ke he

The evolution of specific common noun phrase marking is not quite as straightforward. First, one requires the irregular development of PPN \*te into \*se in pre-Tongic. In order to obtain the PTO absolutive specific article \*e, one must assume the following chronology:

- (a) PPN \*a 'personal/pronominal article' > PTO \*a 'absolutive';
- (b) pre-PTO \*se 'specific article' > PTO \*e before back vowels;
- (c) PTO single segment prepositions >  $\emptyset$  before articles.

If the personal article had not been generalised to absolutive function ((a) above) early, then the morphophonemic solution to the e/he alternation ((b) above), as it is usually described, fails. Since the e alternate is assumed to have arisen when preceded by a non-high vowel final preposition, some appropriate preposition must have been present (unless one assumes that PTO \*he remains unchanged only after high vowel final prepositions, and not elsewhere).

Finally, note that the history provided by Clark gives no account whatsoever of Niuean non-specific common noun marking. Unless one assumes a period in which Niuean non-specific noun phrases, under Clark's analysis, had *two* articles (reflecting a putative sequence PPN \*te sa), one can only claim that Niuean specific noun phrase marking has spread relatively recently to non-specific noun phrases, replacing whatever role marking the latter had earlier carried. Such an account becomes strained, I think, if one is to claim that, synchronically, Niuean he and e are best viewed as articles rather than case markers.

#### 4. POLYNESIAN NOMINAL MARKING: AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

##### 4.1 THE EVALUATION OF LINGUISTIC HISTORIES

Let me begin by isolating four criteria in terms of which alternative linguistic histories can be evaluated. I will term these (a) simplicity, (b) completeness, (c) historicity and (d) plausibility. The *simplicity* and *completeness* criteria are straightforward. The first is simply Occam's Razor. The second says that the more state descriptions that are related in a history, the better that history.

*Historicity*, simply put, is the conviction that everything comes from somewhere. As a criterion for evaluating alternative histories of some item, it ranks those histories in direct relation to how far back in time or how high up the tree they trace the item in question. In short, the older, the better! The historicity criterion encourages the historian to favour histories that do *not* involve 'spontaneous coinage' over those that do. (The nature and justification of the historicity criterion is considered in greater detail, with respect to a particular instance of its use, in footnote 13 below.)

The criterion labelled *plausibility* might have been termed *naturalness* or *explanatory value*. There are two ways in which the criterion of plausibility can be brought to bear on the evaluation of linguistic histories. The first is the demand that any single change (relation between components of

adjacent historical states) conform to some (theoretically-sanctioned) view of what a possible change is. Plausibility in this sense is perhaps the most nebulous of the evaluation criteria, given that there is no complete, accepted, and explicit theory of linguistic change. Using plausibility to evaluate changes is to a great extent a matter of professional experience.

The second application of a plausibility criterion is in the evaluation of reconstructions – state descriptions in a history that are not attested/observable but are inferred from the evidence of subsequent states in the same historical system. Independent of any other criteria by which histories (whether involving reconstruction or not) are evaluated, most historical linguists would claim that a reconstructed state description must conform to the theoretical constraints on (synchronic) linguistic state descriptions; that is, a reconstruction must look like (a description of)<sup>7</sup> natural language.

Considerations of both simplicity and plausibility typically lead to comparative reconstructions that resemble one language or subgroup more than others. (The application of Teeter's Law is thus not without metatheoretical justification.) A reconstructed system that resembles an attested system is bound to be plausible, and the subsequent history of that system is bound to be simpler than possible alternatives, since at least one subsequent step is largely an identity map. This is certainly true of Clark's account of Polynesian nominal marking, to the extent that it is a generalisation on attested Nuclear Polynesian nominal marking.

#### 4.2 AN EVALUATION OF CLARK'S 'STANDARD' ACCOUNT

The PPN nominal-marking system Clark reconstructs is grounded in synchronic Nuclear Polynesian nominal-marking systems. Its salient characteristics are:

- (a) two distinct prenominal marker slots: *preposition* and *article*;
- (b) a distinction between *definite* and *indefinite* articles;
- (c) a contrast between *common* and *proper/pronominal* marking, reflected in the choice of article.

PNP nominal marking is identical to PPN, except for the form of the indefinite article (PPN *\*sa*, PNP *\*se*) and the fusion of PPN *\*a* 'personal article' with a preceding preposition in PNP. Post-PNP developments include the development of irregular reflexes of the PPN/PNP definite article *\*te* in some Samoic languages and the various changes affecting reflexes of PPN *\*a* 'personal/pronominal article', outlined above. The major change, in Clark's proposal, was the change toward accusative case-marking typology in Eastern Polynesian and in some Samoic-Outlier languages. The opposing camp, for whom PPN was accusative, does not dispute Clark's reconstructions of the internal structure of the PPN noun phrase, nor of the form of its prepositions and articles. It is only with respect to the functions of two of the reconstructed prepositional forms that there is any disagreement between the two camps.

The standard account does not fare well, particularly with respect to the criteria of simplicity and of plausibility, in deriving the synchronic Tongic nominal-marking systems. The standard account requires three lexical-specific changes in form (PPN *\*te* (pre-PTO *\*se*) > PTO *\*he*, PTO *\*he* > PTO *\*e* after a back vowel, and the loss of #V# prepositions before the specific article in Niuean), in

<sup>7</sup>It is not always easy to distinguish between a reconstruction that looks like natural language and one that conforms to some current theoretical descriptive standard. Some practitioners might, for example, regard a reconstruction more highly if it can be represented in terms of government-and-binding theory, or metrical phonology, or whatever.

addition to the loss of pre-PPN \*a 'personal/pronominal article' after non-high vowel final prepositions that Clark postulates to account for the distribution of the personal article in his PPN system. Not only are these changes less than completely general, but, as far as my own intuitions are concerned, most of them also lack plausibility. Clark's history of the development of Tongic nominal marking is simply a description of how one might arrive at Tongan and Niuean nominal marking from a PPN reconstruction grounded in Nuclear Polynesian. The Tongic data themselves do not appear to have had much influence on the PPN reconstructions.

#### 4.3 PREMISES FOR A NEW RECONSTRUCTION

The history of Polynesian nominal marking offered here is based on two premises:

- (a) As far as the shape of reconstructed lexical items is concerned, what you see should be what you get. Nonce form changes of the sort employed in the standard account are to receive strong negative weight in evaluating alternative histories. With respect to the forms in question, this premise casts doubt on the cognacy of:
- i. PNP \**te* and PTO \**he*
  - ii. PNP \**se* and PTO \**sa*

and on any allomorphic relation between PTO \**e* and PTO \**he*, as claimed in the standard account.

Rather, it suggests that one explore the possible cognacy of:

- i. PNP \**e* 'ergative' and PTO \**e*
  - ii. PNP \**se* 'indefinite article' and PTO \**he*
- (b) Tongic might provide as good a basis, if not a better basis, for the reconstruction of PPN nominal marking as does Nuclear Polynesian. No matter how many languages each subgroup contains, there is no reason, a priori, to give more weight to one than to the other in reconstructing PPN.

#### 4.4 A REANALYSIS OF NIUEAN NOMINAL MARKING

##### 4.4.1 NON-OBLIQUE NOUN PHRASES

The history to be developed here rests heavily on the synchronic analysis of Tongic, particularly Niuean, nominal marking. Consider first the marking of non-oblique noun phrases in Niuean. Such noun phrases are marked in one of three ways:

- (a) by *a*, if the noun is proper/pronominal and absolutive;
- (b) by *he*, if the noun is common and ergative;
- (c) by *e* otherwise.

For the non-oblique cases, the present account of Niuean nominal marking assumes a single prenominal slot filled by a marker that is perhaps more article than preposition, but is actually a bit of both (much like the construction markers of Philippine languages). The choice of marker is governed by two properties, the head noun's *class* and its *case* (grammatical relation). The primary case contrast is between *absolutive* and *ergative*. For reasons that will become apparent, it is also convenient to consider *locative* to be a (third) non-oblique case contrast. The primary class division

is between *proper* and *common* nouns. The former can be divided into three subclasses: *personal*, *pronominal* and *locative*. Niuean, like other Polynesian languages, has a class of nouns that are *locative* in terms of their inherent semantics. As in other Polynesian languages, Niuean locative nouns include place names, nouns denoting directions, and orientationally defined parts (such as 'inside', 'top', 'back').<sup>8</sup>

Relativising to noun class, the distribution of non-oblique noun markers in Niuean can be described as follows:

- (a) *e* flags the *unmarked* case for both common nouns and proper non-locative nouns – for common nouns, the unmarked case is *absolutive*; for proper (non-locative), it is *ergative*;
- (b) *i* flags the *unmarked* (locative) case for locative nouns;<sup>9</sup>
- (c) *a* flags the *marked* (absolutive) case for proper nouns;
- (d) *he* flags the *marked* (ergative or locative) cases for common nouns.

This analysis assumes that each noun class has a particular unmarked grammatical relation (case), and that noun-marker choice is to some degree governed by this property. (There may also be a sense in which the absolutive case can be described as, in some absolute sense, unmarked, in that every clause has at least one absolutive nominal. This property of the absolutive case may have had some influence on the history of PPN \*a – see section 4.5.)

TABLE 6: NOUN CLASS AND NON-OBLIQUE NOMINAL MARKING IN NIUEAN

		NOUN CLASS					
		COMMON		PROPER		LOCATIVE	
CASE	unmarked	ABS	<i>e</i>	ERG	<i>e</i>	LOC	<i>i</i>
	marked	ERG/LOC <i>he</i>		ABS	<i>a</i>	LOC <i>ia</i>	

#### 4.4.2 OBLIQUE NOUN PHRASES AND TWO-SLOT NOMINAL MARKING

As observed earlier (section 3.1), non-oblique (absolutive, ergative and non-personal locative) specific noun phrases in Niuean have the structure M N, where N is a noun and M is proclitic noun marker selected on the basis of both case and inherent referential semantics. The 'proto-typical' Polynesian noun phrase, with pronominal slots for both a preposition and an article, is evidenced only in Niuean oblique noun phrases. From Table 1, one observes that, for common nouns, the directional marker *ke* and the source marker *mai* are followed by the 'article' *he*, while other Niuean oblique case markers (instrumental *aki*, comitative *mo*, benefactive *ma* and predicative *ko*) take *e*. Clark offers a historical phonological account of the distribution of Niuean *e/he* after oblique case markers, where the consonant of the article *he* was lost after prepositions ending in a back vowel<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup>Clark (1976:54ff.) terms these the L-class. See Harrison (1989) for a discussion of a similar class in Gilbertese and other Micronesian languages.

<sup>9</sup> Locative case *is* marked for pronouns and personal names. For such nouns, the proper locative marker *i* (and the proper directional *ki*) require a noun in the absolutive case.

<sup>10</sup> Incorrectly predicting \**aki he*, rather than the observed *aki e*.

Let me suggest another account. The oblique locative markers *ke* (*ki* with proper nouns) 'to' and *mai* 'from' require a noun that is marked *locative*, while the other oblique case markers take nouns that are marked as *absolute*. On this account, one expects common nouns to be preceded by the common locative *he*, and proper nouns or pronouns to be preceded by the proper locative *i* after the directional and source oblique markers. These predictions are borne out except in the case of the proper/pronominal directional *ki*, which does not require a noun introduced by *i* (perhaps because the result would be two adjacent identical syllabic segments). Parallel predictions follow for the non-locative oblique markers, which one expects to be followed by either the absolute *e* or *a*, depending on the nature of the noun. These last predictions are less accurate; only the instrumental *aki* requires a following proper noun or pronoun to be marked absolute; other non-locative obliques precede proper nouns or pronouns directly.

Thus, while Niuean does have noun phrases that follow the canonical Polynesian pattern, with two slots preceding the noun itself, it is perhaps not accurate to label those slots 'preposition' and 'article', in the sense in which those categories are usually understood. The occupants of the Niuean 'article' slot are drawn from the same set as the Niuean non-oblique noun markers. Indeed, with the exception of those proper noun non-locatives noted above, one might perhaps best describe the structure of the Niuean two-slot noun phrase as a noun phrase NP preceded by an oblique role marker OBL,<sup>11</sup> where NP has the structure M N described above.

#### 4.4.3 NON-SPECIFIC NOUN PHRASES

The synchronic status of the Niuean non-specific article *ha* (see sections 3.1 and 3.2) deserves some comment here. Niuean *ha* regularly follows one of the common noun markers *e* or *he*. It is only to be regarded as an article in a preposition^article^noun construction if *e/he* are prepositions, an inappropriate label, as already suggested. In oblique noun phrases, *ha* follows both the oblique and the common noun marker:

NIUEAN      *Onoono e tama ke he ha gata.*  
               look    ABS child to LOC a snake  
               The child is looking at some snake.

On the basis of the information available to me concerning its syntax and semantics, I would prefer to analyse Niuean *ha* as one of a distinct set of pronominal number markers, syntactically and semantically distinct from the common noun markers *e/he*.

#### 4.4.4 SUMMARY

In the analysis proposed here, the Niuean noun phrase does not have the preposition (case)^article^noun structure typical of Polynesian languages, and proposed for Niuean itself by Seiter (1980:27). Rather, I suggest that the structure:

(oblique-marker) noun-marker (number-marker)

is more revealing. Cognates of the prepositions of other Polynesian languages come from both the oblique-marker and noun-marker sets in Niuean. Cognates of the articles of other Polynesian

<sup>11</sup> It is not obvious that members of OBL should be regarded as prepositions, in the usual sense of that term. It is more likely that they are verbs or conjunctions that are in the process of developing into prepositions.

languages can likewise be found in the Niuean noun-marker set. But the Niuean noun markers are neither prepositions nor articles, but a distinct category with some of the properties of both.

#### 4.5 A NEW RECONSTRUCTION OF PPN NOUN MARKING

##### 4.5.1 THE RECONSTRUCTED SYSTEM

I assume the Proto Polynesian noun-marking system is more transparently reflected in contemporary Tongic (particularly Niuean) than in Nuclear Polynesian. As in Niuean, the terms preposition and article are not particularly appropriate labels for the class of prenominal noun markers I will reconstruct for PPN. I prefer the neutral term *noun marker*. PPN non-oblique noun phrases had a single obligatory prenominal slot, occupied by a noun marker selected in accordance with both the case and the class of the head noun. (Though it is simplest to regard the case-marking system as ergative, that label is somewhat misleading in view of the theory of case markedness outlined in section 4.4.1). The noun markers I reconstruct are:

- \**se* marked common noun marker
- \**e* unmarked (common and proper) noun marker
- \**a* marked proper noun marker<sup>12</sup>
- \**i* unmarked locative noun marker

In oblique noun phrases, an oblique marker preceded the noun marker. The choice of noun marker in oblique noun phrases depended on the role flagged by the oblique marker. The oblique markers reconstructed include:<sup>13</sup>

- \**ki* goal
- \**mai* source
- \**aki* instrument
- \**ko* topic

(I ignore possessive marking and other related oblique markers.) Assuming that Niuean is conservative, it is problematic that:

- (a) some oblique markers, including NIU *ko* 'topic', do not take a noun marker with proper nouns, and that;

<sup>12</sup> This analysis of PPN \**a*, as a marked-case proper noun marker, may also be reflected in the use of \**a* as a marker of 'dominant' possession.

<sup>13</sup> Unlike Clark, I reconstruct \**aki* for PPN. That decision is motivated by the historicity criterion considered in section 4.1 and by the fact that the item is known to have a long history in Austronesian. I assume \**aki* was lost in Nuclear Polynesian.

In comments on an earlier version of this paper, in which the *historicity criterion* was defined rather more formally in section 4.1 than it is in the present version (and perhaps more opaquely as well!), Blust (pers. comm.) objects that, in the present context, the historicity criterion is simply what he has called 'reconstruction from the top down'. Let me make clear that there is a *co-ordinate* conjunction in the second sentence of the preceding paragraph, and that the historicity criterion is indeed distinct from any 'top-down' reconstruction argument. If anything, the historicity criterion is a 'bottom-up' criterion, since it holds that morphemes (and particularly *grammatical* morphemes – if I can permit myself the use of that *vague* term), are *less* likely to have risen whole from the foam at some node in a family tree than they are to have a longer history. One might object that the historicity criterion licences the attribution of some morpheme to any or all nodes in a family tree above the lowest node for which it can be reconstructed on the basis of extant reflexes. And, in its unqualified form, indeed it might. It argues that, in general, loss/replacement of a (grammatical) morpheme is more likely than spontaneous coinage. In the case in question, I would not be in the least uncomfortable reconstructing PPN \**aki* even if there were no evidence of the form outside Polynesia. Just how high up the tree one tries to project an item, using the historicity criterion, depends on at least three factors: the geometry of the tree, the shape of the reconstructed system, and one's 'theory' of grammatical/semantic change. In practice, I use the historicity criterion as a prod, to encourage myself to reconstruct *systems*, not just items, and to seek plausible histories by which items of diverse synchronic function might plausibly be linked.

- (b) the Niuean locative and directional oblique markers *i* and *ke* take (marked) absolutive pronouns and personal names.

I assume the latter to have been true of PPN as well, since that pattern is reflected in all Polynesian languages. One might want to assume that PPN common and proper nouns behaved differently after markers like PPN *\*ko* 'topic', as in contemporary Niuean, or that all PPN nouns required/did not require a noun marker after markers like *\*ko*. The decision depends on one's views regarding the benefits of symmetry in reconstructions.

In addition, I reconstruct a set of PPN noun number markers, including the (non-specific) number marker *\*sa* 'one, some'.

#### 4.5.2 CHANGES TO THE PPN NOUN-MARKING SYSTEM

##### 4.5.2.1 TONGAN

The principal post-PPN syntactic change in noun marking was the generalisation of a 'two-slot' pattern (reconstructed for PPN by Clark); that is, the emergence of distinct preposition and article categories and syntactic positions in all Polynesian languages but Niuean. I assume that PPN oblique noun phrase marking (and locative marking for non-locative proper nouns) served as a model for that pattern in PPN.

The Tongan system can be derived from the PPN reconstruction by, first, reanalysing (non-oblique) proper noun markers as prepositions and extending them to common nouns. In the resulting system, simple proper noun phrases are of the form:

prep PN

while simple common noun phrases are of the form:

(prep) ART CN

where the former common noun non-oblique markers are being reanalysed as (specific) articles. The emerging article class in Tongan is then augmented by the inclusion of (the Tongan reflex of) the PPN number marker *\*sa*.

##### 4.5.2.2 NUCLEAR POLYNESIAN

The noun-marking system of Nuclear Polynesian can be derived by extending the changes giving rise to the Tongan system. The two main Nuclear Polynesian innovations were:

- (a) modification/restriction of the function of the pre-PPN absolutive marker *\*a* (accompanied in Eastern Polynesian by the move toward accusative case marking);
- (b) development of a definite/indefinite article contrast from the PPN (and Tongic) specific/non-specific contrast, a change collateral with the development of a distinct article class (from earlier noun markers and number markers).

The principal change to the emerging preposition class of Nuclear Polynesian (apart from loss of PPN *\*aki* 'instrument') was the elimination of PNP *\*a* as an absolutive marker. I would, however, assert that that change is a post-PPN development, and that vestiges of the original function of PPN

\*a are to be found in a number of Nuclear Polynesian languages. For example, *a* is still an optional absolutive marker in Tuvaluan:<sup>14</sup>

TUVALUAN *E kai nee te fafine (a) te ika.*  
 TNS eat ERG ART woman ABS ART fish  
 The woman is eating the fish.

Clark (1976:60) observes that *a* is a plural nominative (absolutive-SPH) in Vaitupu (Tuvalu). That fact can, of course, be restated as the observation that PNP \**a* survives as an absolutive with a  $\emptyset$  plural marker.

The reanalysis of reflexes of PPN \**a* as a proper article (or a plural article in some Samoic/Outlier languages) is simply a generalisation on the residue of functions left for reflexes of \**a* as absolutive (or nominative in nominative-accusative Nuclear Polynesian languages) becomes  $\emptyset$ -marked. (As noted in section 1, I do not regard Chung's (1978) argument that PPN \**i* was an accusative marker as compelling, since it is grounded in facts regarding *nominalisations* of transitive clauses rather than true verbal clauses. I support Clark's original contention that the emergence of reflexes of \**i* as a general accusative marker is a post-PNP innovation.)

The definite and indefinite common noun articles of Nuclear Polynesian, PNP \**te* and PNP \**se*, pose the greatest problem for the reconstruction being proposed here, simply because items reflecting those shapes do not appear in those functions in Tongic. Clark assumes PPN \**sa* 'indefinite' (PTO \**ha*) is irregularly reflected as PNP \**se* 'indefinite'. In the what-you-see-is-what-you-get spirit to which I committed myself in section 4.1, I argue that PNP \**se* 'indefinite' is a reflex of PPN \**se*. The PPN \**sa* reflected as a (non-specific) number marker in Tongic is simply lost in Nuclear Polynesian. PNP \**se* is in fact cognate with PTO \**he* (< PPN \**se*). The function of PPN \**se* is not clear, however. Hitherto I have assumed, by default, that it was the marked-case common noun marker, as in Niuean. But the history of PPN \**se* may have been more complex than that. An interesting possibility is that the original function of \**se* was to introduce (specific indefinite) new referents, and that it became a member of the (specific) common noun marker set in Tongic, but a general indefinite marker in Nuclear Polynesian (displacing the reflex of PPN \**sa*).

PNP \**te* is even more of a problem, since there is no place for a definite common noun article in the PPN noun-marking system proposed here. Clark (1976:65) notes two possible Tongan reflexes of PPN \**te* (ignoring his claims about phonologically irregular reflexes); the first in the pre-pronominal oblique prepositions *'iate/kiate/meiate*, and the second, a fossilised prefix in numerals like TON *teau* 'hundred' and *tekau* 'twenty'. But PNP/PPN \**te* poses greater problems for a comparative-historical linguist committed to the concept of historicity, since clear extra-Polynesian cognates of \**te* are few. It is not obviously reflected in the Fijian languages or in Rotuman, languages that most Oceanists claim to be the nearest relatives of Polynesian. One likely cognate of PPN \**te* is PMC \**te*, reconstructed as a singular common noun article (and as a prefix to unit numerals) in Bender (1981), Harrison (1984) and Harrison and Jackson (1984).

I must confess that I am not sure what to do about PNP/PPN \**te*. Given the standard highest order subgrouping of Polynesian languages, and given that \**te* is *not* irregularly reflected as PTO \**se*/\**e*, the only reason for reconstructing it as a definite article in PPN seems to be that the subgroup of Polynesian in which it is so reflected has more members than the one in which its reflexes are problematic. Since the PPN reconstruction I propose is Tonga-centric, I must favour an analysis in

<sup>14</sup> This was brought to my attention by Niko Besnier.

which the emergence of \*te as a definite article (indeed, the emergence of the *category* definite article) is a Nuclear Polynesian innovation, and that PPN \*te was something other than a definite article – perhaps a number marker, perhaps a pronominal or demonstrative article. Given the evidence, I do not believe that reconstruction to be any less likely than the one proposed by Clark.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BENDER, B.W., 1981, A fossilized article in Marshallese. In J. Hollyman and A. Pawley, eds *Studies in Pacific languages & cultures in honour of Bruce Biggs*, 209-228. Auckland: Linguistic Society of New Zealand.
- CHUNG, S., 1978, *Case marking and grammatical relations in Polynesian*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- CHURCHWARD, C.M., 1953, *Tongan grammar*. London: OUP.
- CLARK, R., 1976, *Aspects of proto-Polynesian syntax*. Auckland: Linguistic Society of New Zealand.
- HARRISON, S.P., 1984, Some arguments for pronominal PMC \*te. *Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Hawaii* 16/2:39-61.
- 1989, Lexically-governed preposition choice in Gilbertese. In R. Harlow and R. Hooper, eds *VICALI: Oceanic languages: papers from the Fifth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics*, 211-236. Auckland: Linguistic Society of New Zealand.
- HARRISON, S.P. and F.H. JACKSON, 1984, Higher numerals in several Micronesian languages. In B.W. Bender, ed. *Studies in Micronesian linguistics*, 61-79. *PL*, C-80.
- HOHEPA, P., 1969, The accusative-to-ergative drift in Polynesian languages. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 78:295-329.
- SEITER, W.J., 1980, *Studies in Niuean syntax*. New York: Garland.