TOPICS IN DESCRIPTIVE AND AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

Essays in Honor of Distinguished Professor Paul Newman

Samuel Gyasi Obeng (ed.)
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CHAPTER 7
SYNTACTIC ERGATIVITY IN PAUMARÍ
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1 Core Syntactic Relations and Their Expression

In every language of the world, a clause consists of a predicate (typically a verb) and a number of arguments; some are obligatory, or ‘core’—that is, they have to be overtly stated or understood from the context—and others optional, or ‘non-core’ (or obliques). The world’s languages display two major clause structures: one intransitive, with one core argument, ‘intransitive subject’ (S), and the other transitive, with two core arguments, ‘transitive subject’ (A) and ‘transitive object’ (O).

To disambiguate ‘who did what to whom,’ languages have grammatical mechanisms showing which of the two core arguments of a transitive clause is in A and which is in O function. We distinguish:

• nominative-accusative system where one case, ‘nominative,’ is used to mark S and A function, and a further case, called ‘accusative,’ marks O function;

• absolutive-ergative system where there is one case, ‘ergative,’ for A function, and zero-marking for the absolutive-ergative function.

Numerous languages combine the two basic types of core argument marking in a number of ways. Pronouns may have a nominative-accusative and common nouns an absolutive-ergative inflection. Or some intransitive verbs mark S in the same way as A, and others mark S as O, thus producing a ‘split-S’ system. There is a full account of these and other varieties of ‘split’ systems of argument marking in Dixon (1994:70-110).

In a small minority of the world’s languages, the choice between the two co-existing construction types—one morphologically nominative-accusative and the other one morphologically absolutive-ergative—is based on discourse factors including topical continuity of arguments and their definiteness. Paumari, an endangered language from the Arawá family, spoken in Brazil, is the case in point.

I start with an overview of the distribution of the two transitive construction types in Paumari, and then turn to a brief discussion of some principles of syntactic alignment in this language, in terms of the constraints on coreferentiality of core arguments within complex sentences.

A word on Paumari itself: This language, a separate and quite innovative member of the small Arawá family (Dixon 1999, 2004), was traditionally spoken in several communities on the Purús, Ituxi, and Tapauá rivers. The number of Indians who identify themselves as Paumari is comparatively high (around 600 people), but the number of actual speakers is much lower and is rapidly declining (Chapman & Derbyshire 1991; Dixon 1999). According to Dixon (2004:9), not more than 200 people still speak the language. Most children speak Portuguese as their first language. People in their forties and younger are more comfortable speaking Portuguese than Paumari. And, if they use Paumari at all, they tend to simplify the linguistic structures. This is an example of gradual language obsolescence.
An excellent grammar by Chapman and Derbyshire (1991), with an additional sketch by Chapman and Salzer (1998), offers an outline of Traditional Paumari. My discussion of the traditional language is based on these sources and also on the analysis of Traditional Paumari stories (unpublished) kindly offered to me by Mary-Ann O'dmark (around 200 pages). In July–August 1993, I had the opportunity of working with representatives of the younger generation who are still fluent in their language, but whose Paumari is markedly different from that of older people. For ease of reference, I will use the term Y(younger people’s) P(paumari) to contrast the patterns of the language affected by its gradual loss to the documented language as it was spoken in the past by those who may have died monolingual.

We now turn to an overview of transitive constructions in Paumari.

2 Transitive Constructions in Paumari: An Overview

Paumari is a split ergative language, with two types of transitive constructions: ergative (or absolutive-ergative) and accusative (or nominative-accusative). Unlike in the vast majority of languages labeled as split ergative, the distribution of the two constructions is governed by discourse factors. The transitive constructions are discussed in §2.1-2.2. In §2.3 we briefly address the intransitive clauses. §2.4 features a comparison of transitive constructions.

2.1 Ergative construction

The ergative construction—used both in TP and YP under the same conditions—has the following features.

(a) Morphological case marking. The transitive subject (A) is marked by the ergative case enclitic -a; as expected, the object (O) is formally unmarked.

(b) Prefix bi- marks third person singular transitive subject (A).

(c) Constituent order is generally AVO, or, more rarely, O, AV. In the latter case, the O constituent is fronted, and a pause separates O from A.

(d) Gender and noun class agreement. Every noun in Paumari belongs to either feminine or masculine gender, and to one of the two noun classes: the ko-noun class or the zero-marked noun class. Gender and noun class are independent of each other, and are only partly semantically motivated; see Aikhenvald (2000) for a survey of co-existing gender and noun class systems and their assignment principles in Paumari and other languages.

In the ergative construction, the verb agrees with O in gender and in noun class (a list of verbal suffixes with gender distinctions in Paumari is presented in Chapman and Derbyshire (1991:288)). An example of noun class agreement with an O in the ergative construction is provided in the two clauses of (37).

(e) Definiteness requirements. The O constituent is always definite and marked with a demonstrative functioning as a definite article.
(f) Discourse properties. In Paumari discourse, a new participant is normally introduced in S or O function. Only topically continuous participants can be coded in A function. The ergative construction only occurs in clauses where O is an established topic.

The ergative construction is illustrated in (1) (TP) and (2) (YP) (constituent order AVO). Grammatical function of each constituent (A - transitive subject; O - object; or S - intransitive subject) is indicated with subscript letters throughout the paper.

(1) kodi-jomahi-aA bi-a-ka-kha-a-ka [ada jao'oro]O lag-dog(m)-ERG 3sgtr-get-TR-get-ASP-THm DEMm agouti(m)

‘Our dog caught an agouti.’ (TP)

(2) jora-ki-a jomahi-aA be quick-DESCR-OBL jaguar(m)-ERG

bi-ka-na-maisa-ka-a-ka [ada amakari]O 3sgtr-COM-CAUS-friend-VERB-ASP-THm DEMm monkey(m)

‘All of a sudden the jaguar began to befriend the monkey.’ (YP)

The object NP or both subject and object NP can be omitted if recoverable from the context—this is shown in (3) and (4). These examples come from a young speaker; unlike speakers of Traditional Paumari, he does not use the ergative case marker consistently. This is why the marker is in brackets.

(3) kabari amakari(-a)A bi-noki-i-hi then monkey(m)-ERG 3sgtr-see-ASP-THf

‘Then the monkey saw her (the turtle).’ (YP)

(4) oniaro-a bi-ni-gari-i-hi then-OB 3sgtr-CAUb-go.down-ASP-THf 3sgtr-take.up-ASP-THf

bi-ara'a'ara'iri-i-hi 3sgtr-put.between.branches-ASP-THf

‘Then he (the monkey) went down (onto the ground), took (her) (the turtle) up and put (it) between branches.’ (YP)

We return to the principles behind the omission of coreferential core arguments in clause combining in §3.2.

YP displays a number of ‘deviations’ from TP in (a) ergative case marking and (d) agreement. The properties listed under (b), (c), (e), and (f) are maintained.

(a) The ergative case marker -a is sometimes omitted, as illustrated in (5).

(5) ija'ariO jomahiA bi-gathi-ki person(f) jaguar(m) 3sgtr-catch-DESCR

‘Jaguar catches people.’ (YP)

In (3) above, the narrator, Aratzoa, did not use the ergative marker on A (amakari ‘monkey’). His wife Mamori—a more traditional speaker—corrected him when she heard him tell the same story
again. However, she did not always ‘correct’ him, and she herself frequently omitted -a in conversation. The marker -a was omitted in (6) - (8), from the same story as (3).

(6) jomahiai
    bi-na-na'dohi-i'-hi
    jaguar(m) 3sgTR-ask-ASP-THf DEMf turtle(f)
    ‘The jaguar asked the turtle.’ (YP)

(7) ojoroa
    bi-gathani-i'-hi
    turtle(f) 3sgTR-answer-ASP-THf yes
    ‘The turtle answered (him), “yes.”’ (YP)

(8) ojoroa
    bi-ni'a-ha
    [ada jomahiai]
    turtle(f) 3sgtr-say-THm DEMm jaguar(m)
    ‘The turtle said to the jaguar.’ (YP)

Note that the morpheme -a is never omitted when used to mark oblique constituents:

(9) jora-ki-a
    o'oi'-a-ha
    be.quick-DESCR-OBL enter-ASP-THm 3sg-hole-f-OBL
    ‘Suddenly he (the turtle) entered his hole.’ (YP)

(d) The agreement with O in the ka-noun class is sporadic. In (10) below, ojoro (‘turtle,’ in this instance, male) is a ka-class noun and should require the appearance of the agreement marker on the verb. The noun ojoro (‘turtle’) is used in the O function throughout the text; but the noun class agreement is inconsistent. The ka- agreement marker and its allomorph a in third line are in bold (see Chapman & Omdark 1973). The forms with missing agreement marker are underlined.

(10) kahi
    jomahiai
    bi-ka-mitha-ki
    oniaro-a
    then jaguar(m) 3sgTR-hear-ASP then-OB
    jora-ki-a
    bi-najor-a-ha'i'-ha
    be.quick-DESCR-OBL 3sgTR-follow-EP-ASP-THm far
    bi-a-noki-ha
    [ada ojoro]o itxo-ha-na
    3sgTR-NCL-see-THm DEMm turtle(m) play-EP-DEPm
    bi-na-ka'iri'-a-ha
    [ada ojoro]o
    3sgTR-CAUS-go.slowly-ASP-THm DEMm turtle(m)
    ‘The jaguar heard him (the turtle). Suddenly the jaguar followed him. He saw the turtle play (the flute) from afar. He went slowly to follow/to hunt the turtle.’ (YP)

Gender agreement with O is statistically more frequent. However, occasional substitution of gender agreement with O by gender agreement with A was attested in the stories told by Aratxos—examples are found in (3) and (11):

(11) ojoroa
    bi-gathani-i'-hi
    ha'a
    turtle(f) 3sgTR-answer-ASP-THf yes
    ‘The turtle answered (him) (i.e., the jaguar), “yes.”’ (YP)
These cases can be interpreted as a tendency towards a loss of an 'ergative' pattern of noun class and
gender agreement. Note that in intransitive constructions YP tends not to make the agreement with S
in the ko-noun class at all. This agreement is obligatory in the traditional language. In contrast, the
gender agreement of S with the verb is regular both in TP and YP. This phenomenon in Paumari may
be attributed to the influence of nominative-type agreement in Portuguese, which is gradually
becoming the major language of day-to-day communication for the younger generation.

2.2 Accusative construction

The accusative construction—used both in TP and YP—has the following features:

(a) Morphological case-marking. The object O is marked by objective -ra (this morpheme marks
either the 2nd argument of a transitive verb, or the 2nd or 3rd argument of a ditransitive verb).

(b) Cross-referencing used for third person singular is Ø.

(c) Constituent order involves the O preceding the predicate. OVA and AOV are the most frequent
constituent orders, but OAV also occurs.

(d) Gender and noun class agreement. The verb agrees in noun class and gender with O, if A is not
in a postverbal position. In the latter case, it agrees in gender with A.

(e) Definiteness requirements. The O cannot be marked with the definite article. The accusative
construction is always used with personal pronouns in O function. The A, if postposed to the verb,
has to take the definite article.

(f) Discourse properties. Accusative constructions are used when a new topic is introduced in O
function. They are comparatively rare in YP.

Examples below illustrate the accusative constructions in TP and YP.

(12) [ho-vani Mo xo O rahA jaboni]A kidi-arakava-ra0 va'o-ra0
     l-EMPH N i c e O rahA also 3sg-chicken(m)-OBJ they-OBJ
     a-vikha-misi-ki jaboni
     1sg-bring-JUST-DESCR also
     'I and Niece OrahA took her chickens also.' (TP)

As shown in (13), a personal pronoun triggers feminine gender agreement—this is a common feature
of Arawa languages (Dixon 2004). Note the AOV constituent order and the agreement with O in
gender in (12) and (13).

(13) Hota itiA ho-ra0 baranaha-'i-hi
     Rodolfo(m) 1sg(f)-OBJ call-ASP-THf
     'Rodolfo called me.' (YP)
The constituent order OVA is illustrated in (14) - (15). In (14), the verb agrees with the A ("rooster") in gender, and in (15) the agreement is in gender with the postposed A ("man") and with the O ("turtle") in ka- noun class. Agreement markers are in bold.

(14) siroi-raqa na-monaha-'a-ha [ada arakava]A
    garden(1)-OBJ CAUS-work-ASP-THm DEMm rooster(m)
    'The rooster worked the garden.' (YP)

(15) [ida ojoro-ra]A ka-karanga-'a-ha [ada makhira]A
    DEMf turtle(1)-OBJ NCL-find-ASP-THm DEMm man(m)
    'The man found the turtle.' (YP)

Gender agreement in accusative constructions in YP may differ from that expected in the Traditional language. An example is in (16). The verb a-rakha-'a-ha ("she threw herself") contains a masculine agreement form, in spite of its A ("she-turtle") being treated as feminine throughout the story; masculine agreement is also maintained in the verbal form veroni-'a-ha ("fell"). It is possible that the masculine gender assignment may have been influenced by the masculine gender of Portuguese fabul ("turtle", for which masculine is the functionally unmarked gender).

(16) oniaro-a abono-raqa a-rakha-'a-ha voroni-'a-ha
    then-OBL self-OBJ CAUS-motion-ASP-THm fall-ASP-THm
    [jomahi bodi-ni-a]
    jaguar(m) mouth-1-OBL
    'So she (the turtle) threw herself, she fell into the mouth of the jaguar.' (YP)

All other properties of accusative constructions are shared by both traditional and young people's varieties.

2.3 Intransitive constructions

Paumari has underived intransitive constructions (§2.3.1) and derived (passive) intransitive constructions (§2.3.2).

2.3.1 Underived intransitive constructions

Underived intransitive constructions in Paumari have the following properties:

(a) Ø case-marking on S (intransitive subject);
(b) Ø-cross-referencing for third person singular S;
(c) Constituent order is typically VS, with a definite S marked with the article. Constituent order S,V, with no restrictions on definiteness, is rarer. It is only possible if S is contrastive and a pause is inserted between S and V.
(d) Agreement: the verb agrees with S in gender and noun class.
Underived intransitive constructions are illustrated below. Gender and noun class agreement markers are in bold.

(17) ka-danodano-‘i-hi [ida ba’dana](s)
    NCL-squirm-ASP-THf DEMf lizard(f)
    ‘The lizard was squirming.’ (TP)

(18) oniaro-a adaha-ha [ada dikos](s)
    then-OB/per walk-THm DEMm monkey(m)
    ‘Then a monkey was walking.’ (YP)

Speakers of YP tend to lose noun class agreement with the intransitive subject, S. Example (19) illustrates the noun class agreement with the intransitive subject (‘turtle’) — this is considered correct by representatives of all generations.

(19) ka-voconi-`a-ha [ada ojoro
    NCL-fall-ASP-THm DEMm turtle(m)
    ‘The turtle fell down.’ (YP, TP)

However, younger speakers often omit the agreement marker — as is the case in (20):

(20) kafokajomani adaha-ki ida ojoro
    in.the.morrow go.out-DESCR DEMf turtle(f)
    ‘In the morning a turtle was walking.’ (YP)

The analysis of two ten-minute texts about a turtle ojoro (a member of the ka-class) (told by Aratxoa and corrected by both Aratxoa and Mamori) shows that out of six instances when the noun was used in the S function, the agreement in noun class never occurred. In contrast, gender agreement with S is regular. The loss of noun class agreement, alongside the survival of gender agreement, could be explained by the influence of Portuguese, which has two genders and gender agreement, but no category remotely reminiscent of Paumari noun class.

### 2.3.2 Derived intransitive construction: Passive

The passive in Paumari meets all the conditions of a derived intransitive construction (see Chapman & Derbyshire 1991:5; Dixon 1994:146):

(i) the underlying object, O, becomes derived S (which triggers the gender/noun class agreement);

(ii) the transitive subject A becomes an optional oblique constituent, marked by the oblique case -a;

(iii) a passivized verb has a special morphological form; this consists of a nominalized verb and the auxiliary hi.

Passive forms are infrequent in texts. The following example comes from a conversation with Mamori. Note that some of the young speakers of Paumari — such as Aratxoa — have difficulties in producing and recognizing passives.
(21) anana-hi  hi-'i-hi  [ida  isai]s  (jomahi-a)  
bite-NOM  AUX-ASP-THf  DEMf  child(f)  (dog(m)-OBL)  
'The girl (female child) was bitten (by a dog) (this is why she is crying).' (YP, TP)

The corresponding transitive ergative construction is (22):

(22) jomahi- ax  bi-anni-'i-hi  [ida  sai]o  
dog(m)-ERG  3sgt-bite-ASP-THf  DEMf  child(f)  
'The dog bit the child.' (YP, TP)

The major function of the passive in Paumari is to focus on the intransitive subject, which is new in discourse—the girl in (21) (also see §3.2 and (31)).

2.4 Two transitive constructions in Paumari: A comparison

The two transitive constructions in Paumari differ in their morphosyntactic features and discourse functions. We recall that in ergative constructions, the transitive subject (A) is marked with the ergative case (note that in YP it often appears unmarked). O is then an established topic of the discourse. These constructions are rather frequent in texts.

Accusative constructions introduce new participants in O function to be focused upon later in the discourse. They are rare, since new topics are more often introduced as intransitive subjects, that is, in S function.

A story about a rooster (told by Aratoka, a speaker of YP), provides an illustration of how the two construction types are used. This is a rare example of a story with quite a few accusative constructions.

The main participant of the story—arakava (‘rooster’)—is introduced in the title of the story, within a verbless clause:

(23) arakava  vara-ni  vi-hi-na  ida  
rooster(m)  tell-NOM  with-AUX-DEFm  DEMf  
'This is a story of a rooster.'

In the first sentence of the story, an accusative construction is used, since O is a personal pronoun and also a new topic:

(24) oniaro-a  arakavaA  va'o-<m>  baranaha-'n-ha  
then-OBL  rooster(m)  they-OBJ  call-ASP-THm  
adjuni  boro  hirari  va-bada-ni-ra  ka-imoni  
they  pig(f)  donkey(m)  3pl-work-NOM-OBJ GEN-for  
'The rooster called them to work, pig and donkey.'

The pig and the donkey refuse to work, and the rooster goes alone. A new participant—siroi (‘garden’)—is introduced, the accusative construction is used again:
(25) siroi-ra
na-monaha-‘a-ha
[ada
arakava]A
garden-OBJ
CAUS-work-ASP-THm
DEMm
rooster(m)

‘The rooster worked the garden.’

The rooster brings home food for the donkey and the pig to eat; the food (bail) is introduced as a new and important participant, and the accusative construction is used again:

(26) oniar-o
okha-‘a-ha
[ada
arakava
hoara-na]3
then-OBL
go-ASP-THm
DEMm
rooster(m)
one-masculine

oniaro-a
[bai-ra]0
vikha-‘a-ha
[ada
arakava]A
then-OBL
food(I)-OBJ
bring-ASP-THm
DEMm
rooster(m)

‘Then the rooster went alone, then the rooster brought food.’

Later in the text, when the rooster goes to work in the garden again, the ergative construction is used because the garden is now an established topic:

(27) akhano-‘a-ha
[ada
arakava]3
bi-noba-‘i-hi
MOT-ASP-THm
DEMm
rooster(m)
3sgt-work-ASP-THf

[ida
siroi]0
DEMF
garden(f)

‘The rooster went away, he worked the garden.’

Further on in the same story, a new participant—sakara (‘skunk’)—is introduced in 3 function:

(28) jora-ki-s
kha-‘a-ha
[ada
sakara]3
be quick-DESCR-OBL
MOT-ASP-THm
DEMm
skunk(m)

‘Suddenly the skunk came.’

In the final sentences of the story skunk grabs the rooster and kills him. Since both skunk and rooster are established topic of the narrative, the ergative construction is used:

(29) bi-gathi-‘a-ha
[ada
arakava]0
hari
3sgt-grab-ASP-THm
DEMm
rooster(m)
then

bi-na-hini-‘a-ha
3sgt-CAUS-die-ASP-THm

‘He (skunk) grabbed the rooster, then killed (him).’

That the new participants are introduced as S or O agrees with the principle of preferred argument structure introduced by Du Bois (1987). The A participant tends to be topically continuous, and is hardly ever a new topic. What makes Paumari typologically unusual is the correlation between the use of morphologically ergative and morphologically accusative structures, and discourse properties of the O. The accusative construction is used when O is a new topic.

We now turn to the issue of syntactic principles governing the omission of coreferential noun phrases in clause coordination.
3 Syntactic Ergativity and Pivot Restrictions in Paumari

3.1 Intraclausal, or syntactic, ergativity

The idea of ‘nominative-accusative’ and ‘absolutive-ergative’ alignment can be extended beyond purely morphological expression of core-arguments. It can extend to the syntactic level in terms of the constraints on treatment of core arguments within complex sentences.

If two clauses, be they coordinate or subordinate, require a common argument that has to be in the S or A function in each of these, the language is said to be syntactically nominative-accusative or to display a nominative-accusative (or ‘accusative’, for short) pivot. This can be illustrated by English. If two coordinated clauses have an argument in common, it can be omitted from the second clause only if it is in S or A function (called ‘pivot function’; see Aikhenvald & Dixon 2009; Dixon 1994:157). In the following four examples, Mary is in S or A function and can be either replaced with a pronoun or omitted from the second clause:

Mary$_S$ laughed and $\theta_S$ (=shes$_S$) ran away
   (shes$_A$) greeted Jane$_O$

Mary$_S$ laughed and $\theta_A$ (=shes$_A$) kissed Fred
   and $\theta_S$ (shes$_S$) sat down
   Mary$_A$ saw Fred$_O$ and $\theta_A$
   Mary$_A$ greeted Jane$_O$

If the common argument is not in pivot function, it cannot be omitted from the second clause. Consider the following:

Mary$_S$ laughed and Fred$_S$ heard her$_O$

Mary$_A$ saw Fred$_O$ and he$_S$ ran away

If one omits the pronouns, the result is either ungrammatical (as in *Mary laughed and Fred heard), or the meaning is different: Mary saw Fred and ran away means that Mary, not Fred, ran away). Hausa (Newman 2000:138-139) is among many languages with an S/A pivot.

A few languages of the world combine S and O as pivot functions in coordination. The Australian language Dyirbal has strong S/O pivot. Two clauses can only be coordinated if they share an argument which is in S or O function in each. Similar phenomena have been described for a number of South American languages from the Arawak language family (Warekusa and Baré; see Aikhenvald & Dixon 2009). Paumari also shows characteristics of an S/O pivot in its clause coordination.

3.2 Evidence for syntactic ergativity in Paumari

The analysis of over 400 clauses in TP and YP shows that if two clauses are coordinated, the S and the O are treated as pivot functions. Paumari has no conjunctions employed for clausal coordination; the pivot restrictions can be considered a major coordinating strategy. The evidence in favor of the S and O as pivot functions in Paumari is summarized as follows:
Table 1. A summary of pivot restrictions in Paumari (with relevant example numbers)\textsuperscript{x}

| S\textsubscript{1} = S\textsubscript{2}; S\textsubscript{2} is omitted | (30), (31) |
| S\textsubscript{1} = O\textsubscript{2}; O\textsubscript{2} is omitted | (32), (33) |
| O\textsubscript{1} = S\textsubscript{2}; S\textsubscript{2} is omitted | (33) (clauses 2 and 3), (34), (35) |
| O\textsubscript{1} = O\textsubscript{2}, A\textsubscript{1} = A\textsubscript{2}; O\textsubscript{2} and A\textsubscript{2} are omitted | (36) (cf. (29)); O\textsubscript{1} = O\textsubscript{2}, A\textsubscript{1} ≠ A\textsubscript{2}; O\textsubscript{2} is omitted | (37) |
| S\textsubscript{1} = A\textsubscript{2}, S\textsubscript{1} ≠ O\textsubscript{2}; no deletion | (30), (26), (38) |
| A\textsubscript{1} = S\textsubscript{2}; no deletion | (39), (40) |

In (30), the S of the first clause is coreferential with that of the second clause; its second occurrence is omitted. It is also coreferential with the A of the third clause—in agreement with S and O, rather than S and A as pivot functions, no omission takes place. Clause boundaries are indicated with braces throughout this section. Each clause starts on a separate line, and an indication of its transitivity and construction type (ACC for accusative and ERG for ergative) is provided:

(30) INTR \{jo-i-mi-ni-hi [ida karagoahi]\} go-back-up-THf DEMf manioc.four(f)

INTR \{tabo.toho ni-furi-‘i-hi [‘a-aaia] tabo.toho AUX-water-ASP-THf IDEOPH

ACC \{ho-ra ni-‘a-‘o-man-i-hi [ida karagoahi]\} 1sg-OBJ CAUS-1sg-without breath-THf DEMf manioc.four(f)

‘When the manioc flour came back up, (it) fell in the water with the sound of tabo-tabo, aasia sound, the manioc flour made me almost without breath.’ (TP)

The same principle applies to the derived intransitive subject of a passive (cf. example (21) above). Here, the girl is a new protagonist: the passive is employed as a way of introducing the new participant in S function (which is the preferred argument role for a new participant in Paumari):

(31) INTR \{anana-hi hi-‘i-hi [ida iasai] Derived S jomahi-‘i(Perm.4-Obligue)]\} bite-NOM AUX-ASP-THf DEMf child(f) jaguar(m)-OBL

INTR \{jora-ki-a bana-‘i-hi\} be.quick-DESCR-OBL sick-ASP-THf

‘The child was bitten by a dog and suddenly fell ill.’ (TP, YP)

The passive in Paumari can thus be considered primarily a way of introducing preferred ways of introducing arguments.

In (32), the S of the first clause is coreferential with the O of the second clause.
(32) INTR  {ma'o'hovadi-ni}  boro-'i-hi}  
            ma'o  arm-FOSSf  break-ASP-THf

ACC  {'o-gathi-'i-hi}  
     1sg-take-ASP-THf

'The branch of the ma'o hove broke, and I caught (it).' (TP, YP)

Example (33) illustrates a sequence of three clauses: the S of the first clause is coreferential with the O of the second clause (with an ergative construction), which in turn is coreferential with the S of the third clause:

(33) INTR  {jomahi}  a-nabo'a  boja-ma'o-'i-hi}  
            jaguar(f)  1pl-under  be-on.land-ASP-THf

ERG  {kodi-abit-a}  bi-kara'oha-'i-hi}  
     1sg-father-ERG  3sgt-shoot-ASP-THf

INTR  {kaba'i}  jora-ki-a  a-bini-'i-hi}  
     then  be.quick-DESCR-OBL  ITR-die-ASP-THF

'The jaguar was under us, my father shot (the jaguar), then it (the jaguar) died quickly.' (TP)

In (34) and in (35), the O of the first clause is coreferential with the S of the second clause (which is then omitted). The first clause in (34) contains an ergative construction:

(34) ERG  {makhira}  bi-noki-'a-ha  {ada  jomahi}  
          man(m)  3sgt-see-ASP-THm  DEMm  jaguar(m)

INTR  {kidaraha-'a-ha}  
     run-ASP-THm

'A man saw a jaguar, and ran (a jaguar).' (YP)

In contrast, the first clause of (35) contains an accusative construction. This was an answer to a question about what was wrong with the little Marisa and why she was crying.

(35) ACC  {moka'a}  Marisa-rao  ka-anani-i-ki}  
           spider(m)  Marisa-OBJ  POSS-bite-ASP-DESCR

INTR  {karafo}  
     swell

INTR  {jora-ki-a}  asara-'i-hi}  
     be.quick-DESCR-OBL  cry-ASP-THf

'A spider bit Marisa, (she) got swollen, immediately cried (Marisa).' (YP)

In (36), the O and the A of the two transitive clauses (each containing an ergative construction) are coreferential, and so the second occurrence of each of O and A is omitted:
(36) ERG (kodi-jomahi-a) bi-avi-kha-'a-ha [ada ja'oro]₀
    1sg-jaguar(m)-ERG 3sgtr-TR+get-MOT-ASP-THm DEMm agouti(m)

ERG (bi-obai-'a-ha)
    3sgtr-catch-ASP-THm

'Our dog caught an agouti, (he) caught (him).' (YP)

In (37), the O of the two transitive clauses is identical, and the A is different. The O of the second clause is omitted:

(37) ERG (kodisai-vani-a₄) bi-ka-noki-hi [ida aviao]₀
    1sg+child-EMPH-ERG 3sgtr-NCL-see-THf DEMf plane(f)

[kala-rada-ni]₀ NCL-pass-DEPf

ERG (kodi-gamo-a₄) vada bi-ka-ni-'a-hi
    1sg-brother(m)-ERG look 3sgtr-NCL-AUX-DIFTR-THf

'It was my child who saw the plane passing, my brother was watching (it).' (YP)

If the S of the first clause and the A of the second clause are coreferential, no deletion occurs. This is what we expect in a language with an S/O pivot:

(38) INTR (kaba'ti sakara₄ hihi-ha) suddenly skunk(m) come-THm

ERG (oniaro-a sakara₄ bi-na-bini-'a-ha)
    then-OBL skunk(m) 3sgtr-CAUS-kill-ASP-THm

[ada arakaba]₀

DEMm rooster(m)

'Suddenly the skunk came, then the skunk killed the rooster.' (YP)

If sakara were omitted from the second clause, the sentence would be understood as 'Suddenly the skunk came, then he (someone else) killed the rooster.'

Along similar lines, if A₁ and S₁ are coreferential, there is no deletion.

(39) ERG (va'ndama₄ bi-na-daha-ki)
    duck(m)+ERG 3sgtr-CAUS-look.for-DESCR

kidi-bai-hi-ki
    3sgtr-eat-NOM-DESCR

INTR (napa-ja ada-ha-ki) [ada va'ndama]₃
    far-DIR walk-DESCR DEMm duck(m)

'The duck was looking for his food, the duck went far.' (TP)
The S/O pivot operates for both ergative and accusative constructions; but the distribution and the frequency of examples is not the same due to the differences in the topicality of core arguments in each of these.

We saw above that the accusative construction in Paumari introduces a new participant in O function, whereas the ergative constructions provide information about topically established Os (previously introduced into discourse in S function, that is, within an intransitive clause). As a consequence, a common scenario in clause coordination with coreferential participants involves a sequence of an intransitive clause followed by a transitive clause with an ergative construction (as in (33) where the second clause is an ergative construction). Another common scenario involves an ergative construction followed by an intransitive clause (with a topically continuous shared participant in S/O function), as in (34) (from a story about a jaguar who was scared of people). Examples like (35), where an intransitive clause follows an accusative construction, are less common in the corpus. Examples with an accusative construction following an intransitive clause are rare (32). If two transitive constructions occur coordinated, they are usually of the ergative type, as in (36) and (37).

The S/O pivot constraints in clause coordination are strong in the traditional language and in the language as spoken by young people. The sentence in (40) was an answer to a question about what a cowardly man would do. Compare this with (34): the participant omitted in (34) can only refer back to the O, not to the A.

(40) ERG [makhira]  bi-noki-‘a-ha  [ada  jomahjjo]  
\( \text{man(m)+ERG} \) 3sgtr-see-ASP-THm DEMm jaguar(m) 

INTR [k’daraha-‘a-ha]  [ada  makhira]  
\( \text{run-ASP-THm} \) DEMm man(m) 

‘A man saw a jaguar, and the man ran.’ (YP)

However, coreferential S and A do undergo coreferential deletion in younger speakers’ language: this can be seen from (27) and (41). No such instances have been encountered in the traditional language. Note the omission of the ergative -a in the last clause of (41)—this is ungrammatical in the traditional language.

(41) ERG [oniaro-a]  bi-naka’iri-‘i-ki]  
then-OBL 3sgtr-follow.slowly-ASP-DESCR 

ERG [bi-noki-a-ha]  [ada  amakari]  
3sgtr-sec-THm DEMm monkey(m) 

INTR [oniaro-a]  ‘ba’i-a-ha  ‘ba’i-na]  
then-OBL eat-ASP-THm eat-NOM 

ERG [kabo’i]  amakari,  bi-noki-‘a-ha  
suddenly monkey(m) 3sgtr-sec-ASP-THm 

‘Then she (the turtle) followed (the path) slowly (and) saw the monkey, then it (the monkey) was eating food, then it (the monkey) saw her.’ (YP)
In (41), the A of the first clause ("turtle") is coreferential with the A of the second clause. The O of the second clause ("monkey") is coreferential with the A of the third and fourth clauses. The O of the fourth clause is coreferential with the A of the first and second clauses. This example demonstrates that the strict constraints on the function of omissible coreferential core arguments are being relaxed. In examples like (41)—infrequent as they are so far—the coreferentiality of the omitted constituents is determined by the context. That is, Paumari as spoken by the younger generation has a distinct tendency towards becoming a pivotless language—which is similar to the regional variety of Brazilian Portuguese spoken in the area.

4 What Can We Conclude?

The two generational varieties of Paumari display a complicated and unusual split-ergative system involving case-marking, cross-referencing affixes, noun class and gender agreement, and constituent order. The two transitive constructions—one ergative, the other accusative—share their discourse functions in Traditional Paumari and the Paumari spoken by younger generation. However, Young People’s Paumari has a tendency to simplify the marking of the ergative construction by omitting the ergative case marking. In addition, gender agreement and especially noun class agreement is also simplified and often avoided. This morphological reduction, typical of obsolescent languages, can be attributed to the influence of Portuguese, which is now the major language of communication for people younger than fifty. Neither the ergative case nor the noun class has any categorical similarity to a category in Portuguese. The relative stability of gender in Paumari is at least in part due to comparable agreement patterns in Portuguese.

Paumari is among the few languages of the world which display patterns of syntactic ergativity: two clauses can be coordinated to form a complex sentence only if they have a common core argument whose syntactic role satisfies the S/O pivot conditions (see Table 1). This unusual pattern is under threat in the Young People’s language, giving way to a pragmatically-based pivot in clause coordination.

Rapid loss of linguistic diversity and obsolescence of minority languages is a feature of our times; the disappearance of languages and linguistic diversity is—as Paul Newman (2003:1) put it—a “major loss to linguistic scholarship and science.” The gradual loss of the unusual typological features of Paumari confirms this statement.

References


Notes

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Abbreviations used are: A - transitive subject; ACC - accusative transitive construction; AGR - agreement form; ASP - aspect; AUX - auxiliary verb; CAUS - causative; COM - comitative; DEM - demonstrative; DEP - dependent verb; DESCR - descriptive; DIR - directional; Ditr - ditransitive verb; EMPH - emphatic; EP - epenthetic; ERG - ergative case; ergative transitive construction; f - feminine inherent gender; GEN - genitive; IDEOPH - ideophone; INTR - intransitive construction; ITR - intransitive; JUXT - juxtaposition 'also'; ka-class - noun belonging to the ka- noun class; LOC - locative; m - masculine inherent gender; MOT - motion; NCL - n - noun class; NEG - negative; NP - noun phrase; O - direct object; OBJ - object; OBL - oblique; pl - plural; POSS - possessive; S - intransitive subject; sg - singular; Sgr - singular transitive; TH - thematic; TP - Traditional Paumari; tr, TR - transitive; VERB - verbalizer; YP - younger speakers' Paumari. The Paumari examples are given in practical orthography.


3 My YP materials include around 60 pages of texts of various genres, and also conversations and fieldnotes. My consultants of YP include two men (Valdir, Carlito-Aruko) and one woman (Marilda-Mamori). They show different degree of language loss (yet none of them can be considered a semi-speaker). All of them are
highly proficient in the regional Portuguese. Marilda comes from a traditional Paumari family (Purús river, the community of Marahá; curiously, the majority of the TP texts are told either by her mother, Sioniro, or by her late grandfather, Segundo). Among the three speakers, she was considered the 'purest' of all. Carlito-Aratxoa was raised in Marahá as an orphan; his language shows a deeper degree of divergence from TP than that of Marilda. The third consultant, Valdir, comes originally from the Ituxi river area. Now he and his family live in Crispimbo (on the Purús river). He has been most exposed to contact with the local Portuguese-speaking population, and his Paumari is the weakest of all.

17 It corresponds to the O-construction in Madi and other languages from the same family (Dixon 2004).

A case with the same form -a marks oblique constituents (locative, temporal, instrumental; agent of the passive), and is often used on adverbs (e.g. jora-ki-a 'quickly, suddenly', oniaro-a 'then').

19 Just occasionally (see Chapman & Derbyshire 1991:250), the A can be dislocated to the right of the predicate, to indicate afterthought. Such examples are pragmatically marked.

20 It corresponds to A-constructions in Madi and other Arawá languages (Dixon 2004).

21 Paumari has a variety of dependent clauses. Potential pivot restrictions in each are a matter for further investigation.

22 No instances of O1=A2 or A2=O1 have been found in the corpus.

23 Paumari was the first Arawá language to have been recorded (by Johannas Natterer, 1833; see Dixon 2007). Chandless (1866) commented that at that point in time about half the Paumaris understood Língua Geral. We have no information about the age of Paumari-Portuguese bilingualism.