

Implicit arguments and unaccusative syntax: Evidence from Palauan

Justin Nuger

University of California, Santa Cruz

I Framing the investigation

- This talk is about a morphological class of intransitive verbs and diagnosing differences in their syntactic behavior.
- Many Palauan transitive verbs have a corresponding intransitive *basic form* (Josephs 1997: 211–220).¹
 - Direct object of transitive variant (1) becomes subject of the basic variant (2).

(1) A chad a mla **meleseb** er a blai el me er a eou.
D person TOP AUX burn.IMPF ACC D building L come P D space.below
“Somebody has burned the building down.”

(2) A blai er a Ngerchemai a **me-seseb** el me er a eou.
D building P D Ngerchemai TOP ME-burn L come P D space.below
“Building in Ngerchemai Burns Down.” (Headline in *Roureor Belau*, 22 May 2002)

- A QUESTION: Is the alternation between *meleseb* and *meseseb* a voice alternation (active/passive)? (This question has continually puzzled Palauan researchers.)
- In the Palauan literature, basic forms have been analyzed as:
 - ergative (unaccusative) forms (Wilson 1972; Josephs 1975, 1990)

To my Palauan consultants on this project, kom mesulang er a kllourenge er kemiu me a klausechelei. In particular: Romana Anastacio, Theodoro Borja, Leilani Brel, Masa-Aki Emesiochl, Wilma Kumangai, Midori Mersai, Debra Neas, Nik Ngirailild, Albino Oda, Destin Penland, Faustina Rehuher-Marugg, Ted Rengulbai, Ebil Ruluked, Sharon Sakuma, Appolonia Sasao, Faith Swords, Patrick Tellei, Debbie Tkel-Sbal, Masaharu Tmodrang, and Noe Yalap — as well as the Palau College Library which gave me a nice, air-conditioned place to work. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support I received for this research, which has generously been provided by the National Science Foundation under Grant #BCS-0846979, the United States Department of Education under Grant #P170B050015 (Jacob K. Javits Fellowship), the Institute for Humanities Research at UCSC, and a Summer Research Grant from the UCSC Department of Linguistics. The findings expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding organizations.

¹This is also known as the *ergative form* in Josephs 1975: 131–136, 1990: xxx–xxxi.

- passives (Waters 1980; Georgopoulos 1986, 1991)
- a sort of hybrid between the two (Flora 1974; Lemaréchal 1991; Gibson 1993; Josephs 1997, 1999)
- MORPHOLOGY: basic forms contain the same roots as their corresponding transitive forms — e.g., $\sqrt{\text{SESEB}}$ “burn” in (1) and (2) — but different prefixes, as shown in Table 1.

(Imperfective) Transitive Prefix	Basic Form Prefix
<i>meN-</i>	<i>me-</i>
<i>oN-</i>	<i>o-</i>
<i>omek-</i>	<i>muk-</i>
<i>ol-</i>	<i>mo-</i>
<i>ou-</i>	<i>mo⁻²</i>

Table 1: Basic Form prefixes and their corresponding transitive prefixes

- The syntactic status of basic forms (*i.e.*, passive, unaccusative, etc.) is clearer if lexical semantics of the roots are taken into account.
 - Syntactic/semantic irregularities suggest that basic forms (which I also call *me-* verbs) do not constitute a homogeneous class of verbs.
 - *me-* verbs may be passives, unaccusatives, or statives.
 - Syntactic diagnostics can distinguish the three types.
- I propose an analysis like those of von Stechow 1995, Kratzer 1996, and Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 2004, in which the behavior of each subclass is traceable to the syntactic configurations in which the verbs appear.
- ROADMAP:
 - §2: Properties of (and diagnostics for) passives.
 - §3: *Di ngii*-predication as a diagnostic for unaccusatives.
 - §4: Analysis.
 - §5: Conclusion.

²Transitive verbs in *ou-* appear to be relatively idiosyncratic (indeed, many verbs in *ou-* are formed from roots borrowed from Japanese and English), and basic forms of transitive *ou-* verbs are not universally accepted among Palauan speakers. Those who accept them seem to prefer the *mo-* prefix for the basic form, though I have elicited data in which both transitive and basic forms are formed using the *ou-* prefix.

2 Implicit arguments in passives

- In this section I present evidence for a subclass of passive *me-* verbs, like those in (3).

(3) A tech-el a charm a kir-el mo me-dul.
 D flesh-3SGP D animal TOP obligation-3SGP AUX.FUT ME-roast
 “The meat is to be roasted.” (Chedaol Biblia, Exodus 12:8)

- AT ISSUE: How can we tell that the construction in (3), which includes the *me-* verb *medul* “roasted” (cf. *melul* “roast,” Josephs 1990: 170) is a passive construction?
 - Is the *me-* prefix a passive morpheme?
- In (3), *a techel a charm* “the meat” is the subject.
 - No agent argument is expressed overtly in (3).
 - But is there also a *covert* agent argument?
- Question has been raised for English (and other Indo-European) passives/unaccusatives (see, *i.a.*, Roberts 1986; Roeper 1987). Findings:
 1. Passives can express an agent overtly in a PP (unaccusatives can’t).
 2. Implicit agents of passives can license agent-oriented adverbials (bad with unaccusatives).
 3. Implicit agents of passives can bind PRO in purpose infinitivals (bad with unaccusatives).
- In Palauan, some members of the (morphological) class of *me-* verbs pass these tests more clearly than others.

2.1 The elusive *by*-phrase

- Researchers have reported mixed judgments for oblique agentive PPs (*er*-phrases) in sentences with *me-* verbs.
 - Josephs (1975: 134–135): some speakers find them “awkward.”
 - DeWolf (1979: 101): agent is “not usually indicated.”
 - DeWolf (1988: 171): specification of an agent argument in an *er*-phrase is “disallowed.”
 - Gibson (1993: Ch. 5): no problems eliciting *er*-phrases “beyond a preference to omit them.”
 - My own fieldwork: (un)acceptability of *er*-phrase depends largely on the verb.

- Probably not interference from English: *er*-phrases attested as early as the 1940s (Capell 1949).³
- Examples of *er*-phrases in (4).

- (4) a. A “Belau er Kid” a mo me-chitakl (**er a rengalek er a skuul**).
 D Palau P IPL.INCL TOP AUX.FUT ME-sing (P D children P D school)
 “*Belau er Kid* (the Palauan national anthem) will be sung (by the students).”
- b. Aike [el mlok-oad **er a tebelik el charm**] a dimlak
 those [L PAST.PASS.CAU-die P D wild L animals] TOP NEG.PAST
 kulab el eko omes-kau.
 ISGS.WH[O].PAST.carry L go bring.PF-2SGO
 “Those that were killed by wild animals, I didn’t take them to you.”
 (*Chedaol Biblia*, Genesis 31:39)
- c. Ng mo ua kerrekar el mla me-dul **er a ngau a**
 3PL.–HUM= AUX.FUT like trees L AUX ME-burn P D fire D
 rechel-el, me a bng-al a m-o-sebek **er a**
 branches-3PL.–HUMP and D flowers-3PL.–HUMP TOP ME-CAU-fly P D
eolt el mo cheroid.
 wind L go away
 “They will be like trees whose branches are burned by fire, whose blossoms are
 blown away by the wind.” (*Chedaol Biblia*, Job 15:30)
- d. Ng rul-leterir el mo meruul **er a bleob el okesi-ul** ngike el
 3SG= make.PF-3PLO L go make.IMPF ACC D idol L image-3SGP that L
 kot el charm el m-il-temall **er a saider e** ngdi ng *silobel*.
 first L beast L ME-PAST-wound P D sword then but 3SG= PAST.survive
 “The beast told them to build an image in honor of the beast that had been
 wounded by the sword and yet lived.” (*Chedaol Biblia*, Revelations 13:14)

- Like English *by*-phrases, the *er*-phrase can contain agents (4a–b), causers (4c), instruments (4d), and anything else that could serve as subject of the transitive variant.
- Co-occurrence with *er*-phrases suggests that (at least some) *me*- verbs are passives.

2.2 Agent-oriented adverbials and purpose infinitivals

- Agent-oriented adverbials (AOAs) and purpose infinitivals (PIs) are licensed by syntactic presence of an agent.

– Passives that can have implicit agents should license AOAs/PIs as well.

³Palau became a U.N. Trust Territory administered by the United States in 1944.

- But the results are somewhat mixed.
 - In some cases, agent-oriented adverbials/purpose infinitivals are perfectly acceptable, as in (5).

(5) A Belau er Kid a (blak a reng-rir el) mo me-chitakl (el
 a Palau of IPL.INC TOP (eager the hearts-3PLP L) AUX.FUT ME-sing (L
 oldeu er a reokiaksang PRO).
 make.happy ACC the guests they)
 “Our Palau will (eagerly) be sung (by the students) (to please the guests).”

(6) A blai a (?blak a reng-ul el) mil-seseb (er a rubak) (?el
 the house TOP (?eager the heart-3SGP L) PAST.ME-burn (by the old.man) (?L
 ngmai a udoud el insurance PRO).
 get the money L insurance he)
 “The house (was) (?eagerly) burned down (by the old man) (?to collect the insurance money).”

- Passives of verbs requiring agents (*e.g.*, creation verbs) always license AOAs/Pis: (5).
- Passives of verbs that optionally take agents show greater variability: (6).
 - For verbs like *meseseb* “be burned,” AOAs/Pis become much more acceptable if an agent is expressed overtly in an oblique *er*-phrase.
- But note that a stative *me*- verb like *mesaul* “tired” does not license AOAs/Pis.
 - Appears to correlate with the impossibility of expressing an agent in an *er*-phrase.

(7) Ng (*blak a reng-ul el) me-saul (*er a rengelek-el) (*el mo
 3SG= (*eager the heart-3SGP L) ME-tired (*by the children-3SGP) (*L go
 mechiuaiu PRO).
 sleep he)
 “He is (*eagerly) tired (*by his children) (*to go to bed).”

2.3 Intermediate Conclusions

- Some *me*- verbs, but not others, share the key properties of some Indo-European passives:
 - An external argument may be licensed in an oblique *er*-phrase.
 - Agent-oriented adverbials are licensed (with or without an associated *er*-phrase).
 - Control into purpose infinitival clauses is possible (with or without an associated *er*-phrase).

- Not all *me-* verbs pattern like passives. For these verbs:
 - An external argument in an oblique *er*-phrase may be awkward or ungrammatical.
 - Agent-oriented adverbials are impossible in the absence of an *er*-phrase.
 - Control into purpose infinitival clauses becomes impossible in the absence of an *er*-phrase.
- BIG QUESTION: *Why?*

3 Unaccusatives

- The *me-* verbs that do not pattern like passives appear to behave more like unaccusatives.
 - Failure to license *er*-phrases, agent-oriented adverbials, and purpose infinitivals suggests the lack of a syntactically realized external argument.
- Chierchia notes that (anticausative) unaccusatives can be distinguished from passives in Italian by the *da sé* “on its own” diagnostic.⁴
 - If there is no external causer or agent that initiates the event, then an *on its own*-type modifier can describe the subject of the unaccusative.⁵
- A TEST: Can we apply the diagnostic to Palauan?

3.1 Palauan *di ngii*-predication

- The relevant “without external help” interpretation of *on its own* is expressed with a reflexive pronoun as the main predicate modified by *di* “just/only.”
- I call this construction *di ngii*-predication.
 - The reflexive co-refers with the subject DP, which contains a non-restrictive relative clause that denotes the event.
 - *Di ngii*-predication seems to share some of the properties of clefts.⁶
 - An example is in (8) below.

⁴I adopt the English translation “on its own” rather than “by itself” to avoid unintended confusion with English *by*-phrases in passives.

⁵Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2004: 131) show that a Greek version of the *da sé* diagnostic may also distinguish passives and unaccusatives (which share the same verb morphology in Greek).

⁶I am hesitant to definitively classify the *di ngii*-predication construction as a cleft, however, for two reasons. First, Georgopoulos’s extensive research on Palauan clefts (1991) does not mention the construction, and second, there is a full DP in subject position which heads the relative clause, rather than an expletive subject. I have not investigated the syntactic properties of *di ngii*-predication thoroughly enough to ascertain whether it is derived by the same process that forms clefts. This task must be left aside for the time being.

- (8) Ng **di mle ngii**_i [a butiliang [el u/e-beu]]_i.
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D bottle [L ME.PAST-break]]
 “The bottle broke on its own.”

- Unlike English “on its own” or “by itself,” the *di ngii*-predication construction in (8) is not ambiguous (it does not mean “alone”). See (9).
 - To get the “alone” reading, a regular cleft of an argument DP modified by *el tang* “alone” must be formed. See (10).

- (9) “WITHOUT EXTERNAL HELP” INTERPRETATION:
 [Ngii el siseball]_i a **di mle ngii** ____i [el me-ngai a chesmer-el].
 [it L entrance] TOP only AUX.PAST itself [L ME-remove D door-3SGP]
 “The gate opened for them **by itself**.” (Chedaol Biblia, Acts 12:10)

- (10) “ALONE” INTERPRETATION:
 Ng ngera a uchul me ng **di mle kau el tang** [el me
 3SG= what? D reason so.that 3SG= only AUX.PAST yourself L alone [L come
 er tiang]?
 P here]
 “Why did you come here all by yourself?” (Chedaol Biblia, I Samuel 21:1)

- TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Palauan *di ngii*-predication unambiguously expresses the “without external help” interpretation of English “on its own.”

3.2 Distinguishing Unaccusatives from Passives

- *Di ngii*-predication does not apply uniformly to sentences containing *me-* verbs.
- *E.g.*, if *di ngii*-predication is applied to (2), the result is acceptable, as shown in (II).

- (2) A blai er a Ngerchemai a **me-seseb** el me er a eou.
 D building P D Ngerchemai TOP ME-burn L come P D space.below
 “Building in Ngerchemai Burns Down.” (Headline in *Roureor Belau*, 22 May 2002)

- (II) Ng **di mle ngii** [a blai er a Ngerchemai [el *mil-seseb* el
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D building P D Ngerchemai [L ME.PAST-burn L
 me er a eou]]].
 come P D space.below]]
 “The building in Ngerchemai burned down by itself.”

- (II) suggests that *meseseb* patterns like an unaccusative.
- But wait! *Meseseb* may also pattern like a passive:
 - We saw in (6) that in the presence of an agentive *er*-phrase, AOAs/PIs are licensed.

(12) A blai er a Ngerchemai a (kerekikl el) **mil-seseb** el me er a
 D building P D Ngerchemai TOP (carefully L) ME.PAST-burn L come P D
 eou er a rekelebus_i (el melai a techei PRO).
 space.below P D prisoners (L take.IMPFV D revenge they)
 “The building in Ngerchemai was (carefully) burned down by the prisoners (to
 take revenge).”

- But *di ngii*-predication is incompatible with external agents/causers arguments (implicit or overt).
 - *Di ngii*-predication blocks the presence of *er*-phrases (I3), AOAs (I4), and PIs (I5).

(13) *DI NGII*-PREDICATION BLOCKS *ER*-PHRASES:
 Ng di mle ngii [a blai er a Ngerchemai [el **mil-seseb** el
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D house P D Ngerchemai [L ME.PAST-burn L
 me er a eou (***er a rekelebus**)]].
 come P D space.below (***P D prisoners**)]]
 “The building in Ngerchemai burned down on its own (***by the prisoners**).”

(14) *DI NGII*-PREDICATION BLOCKS AGENT-ORIENTED ADVERBIALS:
 Ng di mle ngii [a blai er a Ngerchemai [el (***kerekikl el**)
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D house P D Ngerchemai [L (***carefully L**)
mil-seseb el me er a eou]].
 ME.PAST-burn L come P D space.below]]
 “The building in Ngerchemai (***carefully**) burned down on its own.”

(15) *DI NGII*-PREDICATION BLOCKS CONTROL INTO PURPOSE INFINITIVALS:
 Ng di mle ngii [a blai er a Ngerchemai [el **mil-seseb** el
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D house P D Ngerchemai [L ME.PAST-burn L
 me er a eou (***el melai a techei PRO**)]].
 come P D space.below (***L take.IMPFV D revenge**)]]
 “The building in Ngerchemai burned down on its own (***to take revenge**).”

- POSSIBLE EXPLANATION: Certain *me-* verbs, like *meseseb*, may sometimes be interpreted as passives (≈ “the building was burned down”) and other times as unaccusatives (≈ “the building burned down”).

3.3 Testing a prediction

- If *di ngii*-predication reliably identifies unaccusatives and is incompatible with external agents/causers:
 - PREDICTION: *di ngii*-predication should be impossible with *me*- verbs that require agents, such as creation predicates.
 - This is indeed what we find in (I6) and (I7).

- (I6) a. A sensei a *mi/ngesbereber* er a siasing.
 D teacher TOP *PAST.paint*.IMPV ACC D picture.
 “The teacher was painting a picture.” TRANSITIVE
- b. A siasing a *mi/-chesbereber* (er a sensei).
 D picture TOP *ME.PAST-paint* (P D teacher)
 “The picture was painted (by the teacher).” IMPLICIT AGENT OPTIONAL
- c. *Ng *di mle ngii* [a siasing [el *mi/-chesbereber*]].
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D picture [L *ME.PAST-paint*]]
 (“The picture (was) painted on its own.”) IMPLICIT AGENT BAD
- (I7) a. A dem-ak a *omekedechor* er a beches el bli-mam.
 D father-ISGP TOP build.IMPV ACC D new L house-IPL.EXCP.
 “My father is building our new house.” TRANSITIVE
- b. A beches el bli-mam a *mlukedechor* (er a dem-ak).
 D new L house-IPL.EXCP TOP *PAST.ME.build* (P D father-ISGP)
 “Our new house has been built (by my father).” IMPLICIT AGENT OPTIONAL
- c. *Ng *di mle ngii* [a beches el bli-mam [el *mlukedechor*]].
 3SG= only AUX.PAST itself [D new L house-IPL.EXCP [L *PAST.ME.build*]]
 (“Our new house (was) built on its own.”) IMPLICIT AGENT BAD

- (I6) and (I7) suggest that some *me*- verbs (e.g., verbs of creation) are interpreted unambiguously as passives.

3.4 *Di ngii*-predication also distinguishes unaccusatives from statives

- We saw at the end of §2.2 that stative *me*- verbs pass none of the tests for implicit agents.
- Perhaps unexpectedly, stative *me*- verbs are also incompatible with *di ngii*-predication, even though they don’t have implicit arguments.

- (18) a. *Ak di ngak [*pro* [el mle **me-saul**]].
 ISG= only myself [I [L AUX.PAST ME-tired]]
 (“I am tired on my own.”)
- b. *Ng di ngii [a chim-ak [el mle **me-ringel**]].
 3SG= only itself [D hand-ISGP [L AUX.PAST ME-painful]]
 (“My hand hurts on its own.”)
- c. *Te di tir [a rengalek [el mle **me-si-siich**]].
 3PL= only themselves [D children [L AUX.PAST ME-RED-strong]]
 (“The children are healthy on their own.”)

- However, the addition of the verb *mo* “become” transforms the stative predicate into a change-of-state achievement predicate (cf. Nuger 2010), which is compatible with *di ngii*-predication.

- (19) a. Ak di ngak [*pro* [el **m/o** **me-saul**]].
 ISG= only myself [I [L PAST.become ME-tired]]
 “I was getting tired on my own.”
- b. Ng di ngii [a chim-ak [el **m/o** **me-ringel**]].
 3SG= only itself [D hand-ISGP [L PAST.become ME-painful]]
 “My hand started hurting on its own.”
- c. Te di tir [a rengalek [el **m/o** **me-si-siich**]].
 3PL= only themselves [D children [L PAST.become ME-RED-strong]]
 “The children were becoming strong on their own.”

- Evidently, statives fail the *di ngii*-predication test, just as they fail the tests for implicit agents.

3.5 Intermediate Conclusions

- Some *me-* verbs (e.g., those that require agents, like creation verbs) are interpreted unambiguously as passives.
 - For these verbs, *di ngii*-predication is impossible.
- Other *me-* verbs may be interpreted either as passives or unaccusatives.
 - The acceptability of *di ngii*-predication reveals an unaccusative interpretation.
 - The acceptability of *er*-phrases, AOs, and PIs reveals a passive interpretation.
- And finally, other *me-* verbs are stative.

- Stative *me-* verbs do not pass the tests for implicit agents and is also incompatible with *di ngii*-predication.
- BIG QUESTION: How can we account for this variation across the class of *me-* verbs?

4 The (morpho)syntax of *me-*

- Where do we stand?
- Evidence for (at least) a three-way syntactic distinction among the class of intransitive *me-* verbs in Palauan.

	IMPLICIT AGENTS	<i>di ngii</i> -PREDICATION
PASSIVE <i>me-</i> verbs	✗	
UNACCUSATIVE <i>me-</i> verbs		✗
STATIVE <i>me-</i> verbs		

Table 2: Results of diagnostics

- I propose an articulated model of the verbal complex in which unaccusative verbs (as well as passives and statives) may project a functional category-defining *v/a* layer on top of a (category-neutral) lexical root (see Marantz 1997, 2001, 2007; Arad 2003, 2005; Borer 2005a, 2005b; Embick and Noyer 2007; Embick and Marantz 2008).
 - *Me*-verbs start off as roots (like $\sqrt{\text{SAUL}}$ “tired,” $\sqrt{\text{SESEB}}$ “burn,” or $\sqrt{\text{CHESBEREBER}}$ “paint”).
 - Each $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$ may only select a single internal argument as its complement.
 - The heads of the *v/a* projections are the loci of *me-* morphology in Palauan.
- Three different syntactic heads may be spelled out as *me-*:
 - $v_{[\text{PASSIVE}]}$ (to form passives): Figure 1.
 - $v_{[\text{UNACC}]}$ (to form unaccusatives): Figure 2.
 - *a* (to form statives): Figure 6.⁷

⁷It is still an open question whether statives in Palauan should be classified as verbs or adjectives. Recent research has suggested that the adjective category is universal (Baker 2003; Dixon 2004), and presumably the predicates that have been called stative verbs in the Palauan literature are the likely candidates for classification as adjectives. Despite the lack of evidence, I adopt the label *a* here, recognizing that it is essentially a notational variant of $v_{[\text{STATIVE}]}$ until evidence for a difference between the two can be uncovered.

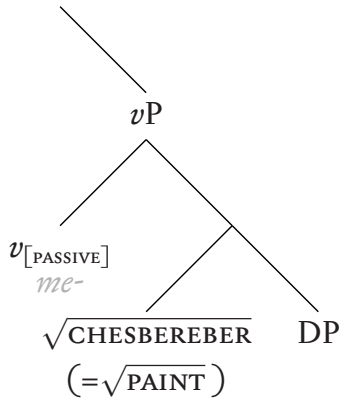


Figure 1: Passive argument structure

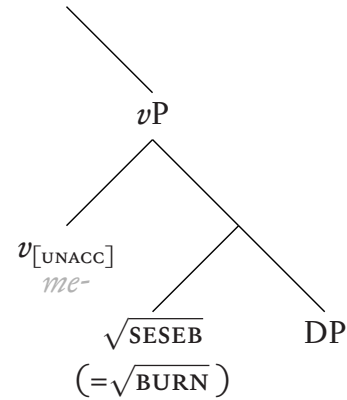


Figure 2: Unaccusative argument structure

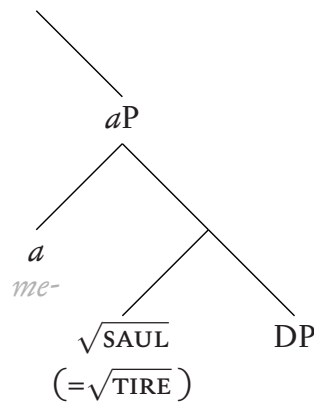


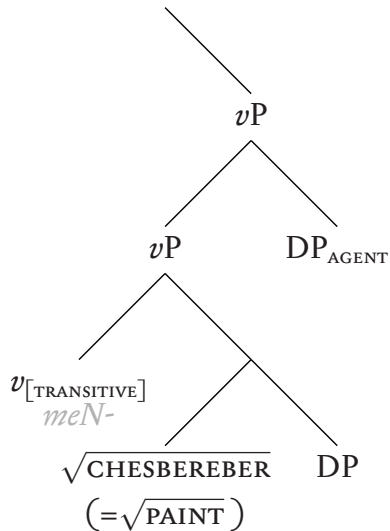
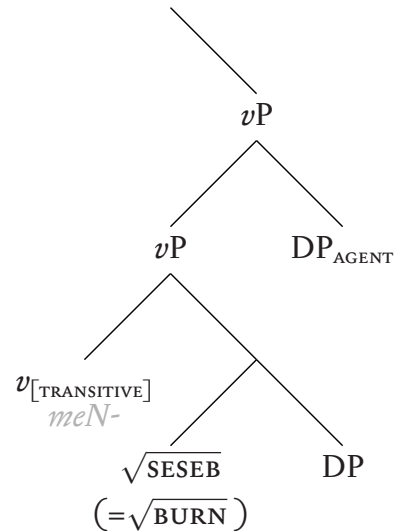
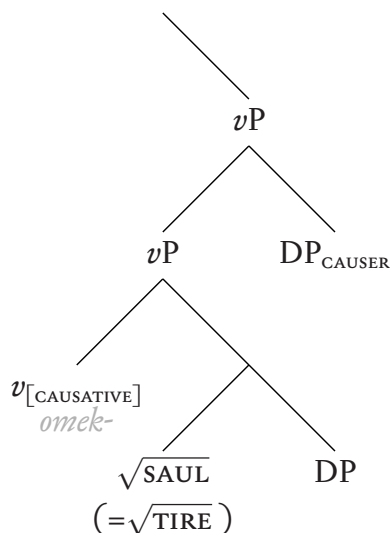
Figure 3: Stative argument structure

- Three subclasses of *me-* verbs: different flavors of an essentially unaccusative syntax.
 - The argument DP is uniformly introduced as complements to $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$ and subsequently promoted to subject.⁸
- Some roots may be able to merge with more than one category-defining head.
 - If, e.g., $v_{[\text{PASSIVE}]}$ and $v_{[\text{UNACC}]}$ select the same $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$, then two homophonous *me-* verbs can be created — one passive and the other unaccusative.
 - If an oblique *er*-phrase is present, it must be licensed by $v_{[\text{PASSIVE}]}$, which also licenses agent-oriented adverbials and control into purpose infinitivals.⁹
 - But if the *er*-phrase PP is absent, the verb could be interpreted as an unaccusative formed from $v_{[\text{UNACC}]}$, which would also allow *di ngii*-predication.

⁸Note that on this analysis, the DP complement to the $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$ must be accessible for further movement. If it turns out that merger of a category-defining head creates a spell-out domain (consisting of the complement of the $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$) along the lines of Marantz 2007; cf. Arad 2003, then this DP must necessarily be introduced higher in the structure. I cannot explore the ramifications of that move here.

⁹Licensing of these adverbials might proceed somehow according to the feature percolation principles in Grimshaw's (2005) Extended Projection Theory, for instance.

- TWO CONSEQUENCES:
 - Nothing should prevent intransitive *me-* verbs from covarying with a transitive form.
 - The subject of a *me-* verb bears the same thematic role as the direct object of its transitive counterpart.
- Transitives built from the same roots but with different verbalizer prefixes: e.g., *meN-* (which triggers nasal substitution) or *omek-*, a causative prefix (Josephs 1975).

Figure 4: Transitive *mengesbereber*Figure 5: Transitive *meleseb*Figure 6: (Transitive) causative *omeksaul*

- This correlation is predicted as the DP arguments are uniformly introduced as complements of the $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$.

- Makes no difference whether $\sqrt{\text{ROOT}}$ will later combine with an intransitive *me*-verbalizer or a transitive verbalizer like $v_{[\text{CAUSATIVE, ACC}]}$ (= *omek-* in *omeksaul* “exhaust (sb.)”) or $v_{[\text{TRANSITIVE, ACC}]}$ (= *meN-* in *meleseb* “burn (sthg.)”).

5 Conclusion

A morphological class of intransitive verbs was explored whose syntactic properties are puzzling when treated as homogeneous. However, I have shown that differences in the lexical semantics of particular predicates (*i.e.*, roots) partially determine which category-defining morphemes they can combine with. The result is that verbs and adjectives that are formed with the prefix *me-* can be derived with three different functional heads: $v_{[\text{PASSIVE}]}$, $v_{[\text{UNACC}]}$, and *a*.

The choice has syntactic consequences: diagnostics for implicit arguments in passives were shown to be incompatible with the *di ngii*-predication diagnostic for unaccusatives. The pattern can be explained if implicit agents are licensed by passive voice (treated formally as a feature on $v_{[\text{PASSIVE}]}$, on the present analysis), while *di ngii*-predication can only target internal arguments under a $v_{[\text{UNACC}]}$. And since multiple *v* and *a* heads may be spelled out as *me-*, ambiguities between passive and unaccusative interpretations of certain verbs are predicted — specifically those verbs which do not require an agent.

From a cross-linguistic standpoint, the fact that *me-* marks passives, unaccusative, and statives in Palauan is not entirely surprising. Haspelmath (1990: 36) identifies a range of typologically unrelated languages displaying syncretism between passive and unaccusative morphology (at least Danish, Modern Greek, Kanuri, Margi, Motu, Nimboran, O’odham, Tigre, and Udmurt, and possibly also Uyghur), as well as (some type of) stative and unaccusative morphology (at least Latin, Mwera, and Nimboran, and possibly also Tahitian and Uyghur).

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Justin Nuger
UCSC Dept. of Linguistics
1156 High Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

E-mail: !@ju-st.in