

13 *Aspects of ergativity and reported speech in Ku Waru*

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1 Introduction

This paper concerns questions of transitivity, ergativity and its role in the framing of reported speech in Ku Waru, a Papuan Language of the New Guinea Highlands. Beginning in 1981, our fieldwork on Ku Waru was a first foray into Papuan languages for both of us after earlier extensive work on Australian Aboriginal languages. Tom Dutton was instrumental in getting us started in that new project, as a wonderfully congenial colleague during our terms as visiting fellows at The Australian National University in 1981 and 1982. Having now moved to Canberra, we have felt fortunate to have been able to renew the friendship. We would like to offer this paper as a tribute to Tom and his pioneering work on Papuan languages.

As most readers of this volume will know, these languages are genetically diverse, but tend to have certain typological features in common. Almost all of them have verb-final syntax, and more or less extensive systems of verb serialisation, as will be exemplified from Ku Waru below. In almost all of them there is at least some person-and-number marking or pronominal affixation on at least some of the verbs, minimally for subject or object, and often for both. At least some local and adnominal case relations are usually signalled by suffixes or postpositions. And, most relevant to this paper, in many Papuan languages, especially those in the Highlands, there is often also a marker which is apparently used for a kind of **syntactic** case relation, i.e., on one of the NPs in association with predicates such as 'see', 'hit', 'eat' – namely, on the NP referring to actor doing the seeing, hitting, eating, and so on.

Should such a form be regarded as an ergative marker? At first glance it might appear obvious that the answer is yes. But on closer examination, the picture has always turned out to be more complicated than that – messier, and for some scholars perhaps even disappointing in comparison to the standard case of presumed 'deep', syntactic ergativity which Bob Dixon (1972) had found and so lucidly set forth in his grammar of Dyirbal, spoken but a few hundred miles to the south. Li and Lang (1979), for instance, in their analysis of this kind of marker in Enga, show that it is optional on some transitive subjects

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and can occur also on some kinds of intransitive subjects, and that Enga syntax operates in terms of a non-ergative notion of ‘subject’ (i.e. one which lumps transitive and intransitive subjects together as opposed to transitive objects). They argue in conclusion (1979:319) that “ergativity in Enga is merely a morphological phenomenon without any noticeable syntactic or semantic consequences”. John Haiman (1980:361) points out similar patterns in his grammar of Hua, and says that they “weaken ergativity in Hua to virtual insignificance”. And Foley (1986:96) in his typological summary of Papuan syntactic case systems argues that nominal case suffixes for core participants (including ergative marking for “agents” of “transitive verbs”) are only a “superficial embellishment” on the more basic Papuan case-marking schema, which uses “verbal affixation for core participants and nominal case for the peripheral ones”.

‘Inconsequential’, ‘superficial embellishment’, ‘weakened to significance’ – hardly neutral descriptive terms: the air of disappointment is palpable. But might all this be a little bit premature? Here, after all, is a very frequently used linguistic device in many Papuan languages, the **formal** identity and integrity of which is beyond question – unlike in Georgian for instance, where the complexity of the morphology itself leaves room for endless debate about how to analyse it even in strictly formal terms (Hewitt 1995), or Nunggubuyu, where the morphophonemic machinery necessary in order to reveal its (Algonquian-like) “direct-inverse” syntactic case-marking system (Heath 1984) is truly formidable. Indeed, the morphological transparency of this Papuan device, and the resulting easy identifiability of its syntactic association with transitive agent NPs, was no doubt one of the reasons why all these Papuanists working on otherwise diverse languages should so readily conclude that it **ought** to be serving a single, well-defined function, namely as an ergative marker.

But if their hopes on that score were too easily raised, we want to argue here that, having had them dashed, these scholars have been premature in leaping to the conclusions we have reported above. In particular, we want to argue strongly against Li and Lang’s sort of move – from the demonstration that something is not a straightforward ergative marker, directly to the conclusion that it has no “syntactic or semantic consequences”. Or rather, no “noticeable” syntactic or semantic consequences. The difference is important, because what we want to argue here is that what has really led people to such negative conclusions is not anything about this Papuan NP marker itself, but rather that there is a need to expand our understanding of the dimensions of contrast along which such a marker has its meaning. We will show that, while by no means a canonical ergative marker, this morpheme has a specifiable normal distribution, recognition of which leads to some new and interesting questions for the cross-linguistic study of syntactic case-marking systems. As necessary background for that discussion, we will now provide a brief general introduction to the syntax and semantics of Ku Waru clauses (for further details see Merlan & Rumsey 1991:322-343; Merlan et al. 1997).

2 Ku Waru clause types

Like most other Papuan languages Ku Waru is a rigorously verb-final one: the main verb in the clause always comes last. There is a small stock of verb roots which are strung together in serial combinations to yield more or less idiomatic meanings of a kind which in other languages are expressed by a single verb : ‘get’ + ‘carry’ + ‘go’ = ‘take’; ‘get’ + ‘carry’ +

'come' = 'bring' etc. (see Table 4 below for further examples). This process is facilitated by an extensive system of verb chaining using the so-called 'medial' or 'non-final' verbs, which are non-finite in that they do not inflect for tense, but for same-or-different subject, temporal sequencing, and so on.

There is a problem with trying to apply ergative/accusative typologies to Ku Waru in so far as these presuppose a basic division of verbs and/or clauses into transitive and intransitive classes. In English and many other languages (e.g. most Australian Aboriginal ones), there is a fundamental division between intransitive verbs and transitive ones, and a more or less clear-cut distinction between corresponding clause types: intransitive ones involving a single core, syntactic case role, and transitive ones involving two, one for the Agent of the action and one for the undergoer or Patient (Dixon 1979). The basic clause types in Ku Waru are not amenable to any such binary classification, because the great majority of Ku Waru verbs can occur in construction with either one or two NPs in core, syntactic case roles. Nor does the distribution of syntactic case-marked NPs provide evidence for a binary transitive/intransitive distinction.

The two core syntactic cases in Ku Waru are ergative, marked by the postposition *-n(i)*, and absolutive, marked by zero (i.e. by the absence of a case postposition). A clause may contain one absolutive NP in construction with the verb (i.e. one 'argument') or two. In the former case, the verb may or may not agree in person/number with the NP. Where there are two absolutive NPs in construction with the verb, it always agrees with one of them. Alternatively, the clause may contain one ergative NP argument and one absolutive, the verb agreeing with one or the other. The one it agrees with we call its subject.

Which clauses then are transitive and which intransitive? In Ku Waru this is best regarded as a matter of degree, again as per Hopper and Thompson (1980). Instead of a binary distinction, we can posit for Ku Waru a transitivity **scale** which has at least five distinct steps. These can be established, not by ranking the verbs themselves for transitivity, but by asking, for each clause: (1) how many NPs are there in core syntactic case roles? (2) for what roles are they marked? (3) with which, if any of these NPs does the verb agree?

According to these criteria, we can distinguish among at least the five clause types shown below. These formulae represent the main clause types in their most explicit form, as they occur in isolated, elicited clauses or sentences. In longer texts, any of these NP argument types may be deleted from the clause when its reference is clear from the linguistic context. The ergative case postposition is also 'optional', at least in clause Type V.

The connecting line below each clause shows which NP the verb agrees with. In the two-argument clause types, the two NPs are shown in the order in which they normally (but not invariably) occur.

TYPE I: NP-ABS V (always third person – no agreement)

In Type I, the verb shows no argument agreement, but is of impersonal type, always with third person singular ending:¹

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ABS – absolutive; CND – conditional; COL – collective; CSV – causative; DEF – definite; DU – dual; ERG – ergative; FUT – future; GEN – genitive; HAB – habitual; IDF – indefinite; NF – non-final verb; NSG – non-singular; PAUC – paucative; PL – plural; PPR – present progressive; PRF – perfective; Q – question marker; RP – remote past; SG – singular; 1, 2, 3 – first, second, third person

(4)a. *Na engl-n kolkur.*
 I hunger-ERG die.PPR.1SG
 'I'm very hungry.' (lit. 'I'm dying of hunger').

b. *Kolya yab-n pa sikim.*
 place people-ERG be.full do.PPR.3SG
 'The place is full of people.'

TYPE V: NP(-ERG) NP-ABS V
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Type V clauses in their full form also involve an ergative NP and an absolutive one, but are distinct from Type IV in that the verb agrees with the ergative NP rather than with the absolutive. Semantically, Type V clauses tend to be of the sort which are most commonly coded as highly transitive clauses in many other languages, i.e. with human or other higher animate agents who have a high degree of control over the action, and patients which do not (Hopper and Thompson 1980).

(5)a. *Koi-ni no bia nolym.*
 Koi-ERG water beer consume.HAB.3SG
 'Koi drinks beer.'

b. *Na-ni kera laima-yl tud.*
 I-ERG bird cassowary-DEF hit/kill.PRF.1SG
 'I killed the cassowary.'

3 Ku Waru ergative marking

In order to do searches of data on Ku Waru ergative marking, we have so far made use – among other things – of a published transcript of a local village court case which we attended and recorded (with permission) in the Nebilyer Valley in November 1983 (Merlan & Rumsey 1986). As a text, this turned out to be interestingly different from a corpus of narratives in various other local genres which we have analysed (see e.g. Merlan 1995; Rumsey 1995). The main difference is that there is considerable emphasis on the sourcing and reporting of speech on the part of all participants in the case, and so there are first and second persons referred to in reported speech situations where some of these correspond to parties in the present reporting situation. Thus, there appears a significant number of 'I said X', 'You (sg.) said X' (and also, of course, 'he/she said X'), while in comparison, in myth texts the first and second person perspectives of reporting events tend not to occur. Instead, though there is still a tendency in those text types for considerable use to be made of reported speech constructions, these are reports of intentions, speech, thoughts etc. of characters established in the narrative, and it tends to be only in the 'direct' discourse of such characters' reported speech, established by the narrator, that 'I' and 'you' appear, as in 'then the cannibal, climbing down the tree, "I will go chop wood", he said'. Again, the difference is that in the court-case text from which we have drawn much of the data for this chapter, there are people speaking (including reporting other speech events) in their own voices (as 'I'), and talking to addressees of whom they also make reports ('you'), as well as speaking

of, including reporting speech of, third persons. Thus, the nature of the material was such that we actually found examples of reporting events with speakers of all person types.

The court case involved a man and some of his tribesmen attempting to prosecute his wife and her parents and tribespeople for alleged adultery, so one can imagine how reports of things earlier said and otherwise done might loom large. We transcribed and analysed about an hour-and-a-half of the proceedings, which total 1,744 typescript lines.

The first five lines of Table 1 show the distribution of the ergative/instrumental marker *-n(i)* versus absolutive $-\emptyset$ on personal pronouns of various sorts in these data. The bottom line shows the number of instances of *-n(i)* on third person NPs, whether pronouns or (far more frequently in this sample) lexical nouns or complex noun-phrases. Third person types include all (three) numbers, singular, dual and plural; and the figure indicates that there were 93 'instances' of ergative/instrumental-marked NPs, where some parallelisms in the text were counted as only one instance ('whether her brother, or her father, or her mother does it', etc.). Within the third person category we did not count the instances of absolutive-marked NPs.

Table 1: Incidence of ergative/instrumental versus absolutive NP types in Merlan and Rumsey (1986)

	Ergative/Instrumental	Absolutive
1SG	22	82
2SG	7	67
1DU and PL	21	158
2DU and PL	12	109
3	93	?

We will now consider these data in more detail.

Of the 93 third person ergative-marked NPs, eight cannot be counted core syntactic arguments. Most of these are better interpreted as instrumental phrases, as they co-occur with other subject NPs as indicated by verb agreement. For example:

- (6) *Olyo kung kibulu-n tolymolu.*
 we pig stick-INST hit.HAB.1PL
 'We slaughter pigs with a stick.'

The following is a related example, with a human noun in a kind of 'secondary predicate' function:

- (7) *Ya wi namba tu-yl-n kuduyl-iyl molym.*
 here up number two-DEF-ERG? red-DEF be.HAB.3SG
 'He is there as number two European [in a hospital].'

Of the other 85 *-n(i)* marked third-person NPs in our textual sample – those that occur on NPs functioning as core arguments in the clause – the great majority occur on an NP which is the subject of a Type V clause such as (5)a and (5)b. But one also occasionally finds them on the sole argument in Type II 'intransitive' clauses, as noted above for other Papuan languages. For example:

- (8) *Kalya-te yu-n um-lum kanubu pukur.*
 thus-IDF he-ERG come.PRF.3SG-if see.FUT.1SG go.PPR.1SG
 'Thus I'm going to see if he's come.'

- (9) ...*akin mel-te-n lku-tuku oba...*
 then thing-IDF-ERG house-inside come.NF.3SG
 ‘...and then something came into the house...’

Seven of the third person *-n(i)* marked arguments occur with indefinite marker *-te*. Though the absolute number of instances is small, it is nevertheless significant because *-n(i)* marking is strongly correlated with *-te* wherever this occurs on a Type-V clause subject NP (and sometimes even a Type-II one as in examples (8) and (9)). For example, we once got an informant to construct 94 sentences, asking him simply to work a particular lexical item into each one for illustrative purposes (so these were not exactly the usual sort of elicitation sentence, in that the formulation of the example was otherwise left to him). In the 94 sentences, *-te* appears 24 times, partly reflecting the way in which the material was derived (i.e. there being no previous textual instantiation of a referent as there would be in normally flowing discourse, it is expressed as ‘an X’ rather than ‘the X’ that we know of, have spoken of, etc.). Of the 24, nine are in NPs in Type-II-clause subject NPs, five in Type-II clause object NPs, two in comitative-marked NPs (‘a man and a boy fought (with each other)’), the remaining eight in Type-V-clause subject NPs. Of these latter, in six there is an overtly expressed object, and in five of those instances *-te* is followed by the ergative marker. In other words, there is only one *-te* marked NP in a clause with expressed object which lacks an ergative postposition, confirming our impression that the ergative is nearly obligatory in this context. An example from that collection of sentences is:

- (10) *Kang-te-n kang tenga mong-na tum.*
 boy-INDEF-ERG boy other eye-LOC hit.PRF.3SG
 ‘A boy hit another in the eye.’

Complex NPs are another kind in which *-n(i)* is especially frequent (other things being equal). For example:

- (11) *Ola yi-yl-n kanapa molym.*
 above man-DEF-ERG see.NF.3SG be.HAB.3SG
 ‘The man above (God) is watching.’
- (12) *Eni ya abu-ma-n te nyai.*
 You(PL) here woman-COL-ERG one speak.IMP.PL
 ‘One of you women who are here speak.’
- (13) *Tap yi-kil-n kanak lku oi tontik tiring.*
 lead man-PAUC-ERG see.NF.3PI house divide do.CSV.NF.3PL do.RP.3PL
 ‘Some of the leading men saw and divided the house.’
- (14) *Na abu lyiyl pul yi-yl-n na ab-ayl kot*
 I woman taker base man-DEF-ERG I woman-DEF court
tensibu.
 do.CSV.FUT.1SG
 ‘I, head of those who take her (to wife), I will take the woman to court.’

The subject of (14) is ‘I woman-taking chief-man-ERG’, i.e. leading man of the tribe segment into which the woman is married (recruitment to tribes here is patrilineal, post-marital residence largely with the husband’s father and other close agnates, and there is a strong sense of group unity, hence men sometimes speak of the members of such a ‘group’

taking a wife collectively). Of the 85 instances of NPs in the court-case text of *-n(i)* on core-argument NPs, 31 of the NPs are complex ones such as (11)–(14). Such examples indicate that the ergative, like other postpositions, may have as one component of its textual significance a phrase-marking or phrase-bounding role.

This raises another question: does ergative-marking also otherwise have an important disambiguating role, helping to distinguish subject from object? It may be supposed that a crucial text environment for such a possible function would be just in clauses where both subject and object are overtly expressed. To test this, one might compare ergative-marked collocations of this kind with ones where no ergative marker is present. Thus we also have here the question of the strength of word-ordering, and we will briefly make some comments on the relation of ergative marking to word order here.

As Foley (1986:10) observes, Papuan languages are commonly classified as SOV, and should at least be regarded as strongly verb-final. Ku Waru normal order appears overwhelmingly SOV, both in the absence and in the presence of ergative marking. Of our third person ergative-marked sample of 85 cases, in only 28 are both S and O overtly specified. Out of these 28, 24 were S-ERG OV – thus of the ‘usual’ ordering pattern despite the presence of the ergative marker – and four were of the minor ordering Type O S-ERG V, exhausting the sample between them. Further, in the sample of 28 there were ten cases where S and O, in terms of a notional hierarchy of NP types, might be judged roughly ‘equivalent’ – both human, animate, one or both expressed by pronouns, and the like. Of those ten cases, fully three are of the minor ordering Type O S-ERG V, but in those cases it appears that what is involved in the ordering difference is the markedness as theme (in the sense of Halliday 1985) of the S-ERG (there is independent evidence for the association of marked themes with pre-verbal position); and the fourth case is that of a pleonastic (and fronted) O, repeated subsequently in a construction of SOV order. Taken together, all this indicates that: the majority of ergative-marked arguments occur within the ‘normal’ word-order pattern; and that the difference between SOV and the infrequent OSV, with which the ergative appears strongly correlated (but the sample size is too small to be conclusive) has to do with special theme–rheme effects, not with the disambiguation of subject–object relations *per se*.

Having here briefly reviewed some of our more general findings concerning the distribution of Ku Waru ergative marking, we will turn in §5 below to a more extensive analysis of its role in Ku Waru reported speech constructions. Before we do that, some background discussion is in order concerning the nature of ‘split’ or ‘mixed’ case-marking systems.

4 Ergativity and lexical hierarchy

In the ‘typical’ ergative–absolute systems such as those widely reported from Australia (see Silverstein 1976; Blake 1977; Dixon 1979, 1994) the case functions O and S are lumped together and receive the same morphological mark (typically $-\emptyset$) while, in contrast, the A function is positively and distinctively marked.

Silverstein (1976) showed how evidence from so-called ‘split’ systems, where some but not all NP types are marked according to a single system, allows us to effectively state the implicational relations according to which marking will be distributed over NP types in ergative–absolute systems as compared to nominative–accusative ones. All NP types

(including personal pronouns) may be characterised by a set of lexical features (+/- speaker, +/- animate, etc.) which may themselves be ranked along a single scale according to which we can construct universal implicational generalisations concerning which NP types are more or less likely to pattern ergative-absolutively versus nominative-accusatively, other things being equal. It is NPs specified by features lower down on this (e.g. -animate) hierarchy that, if any, will be marked according to an ergative-absolutive pattern relative to those higher up which, if any, will be marked according to a nominative-accusative pattern.

Lexical 'splits' occur at different places on the hierarchy in different languages, but these general implicational relations remain constant over language-specific differences. Thus, all noun and pronoun types may be marked according to an ergative-absolutive pattern in some languages, but in others the split occurs at the level of +/- participant (in the speech event) so that all lexical nouns are ergative-absolutive marked, and person pronouns nominative-accusative; or, if only some third person (noun) types are ergative-absolutive marked, it will be the lowest ranked ones, and so on. For these split systems, Silverstein (1976) argued that morphological markedness of NP types in transitive agent function corresponds to their functional markedness ('unnaturalness') as effectors or agents relative to other NP types.

At least one of our observations regarding third person types in Ku Waru must be seen in relation to relative agent 'naturalness' – that is, the fact that it is precisely **indefinite** marked agents which, nearly obligatorily, take ergative marking. In terms of notions of a cline of agent-naturalness, indefinite arguments are lower down on the scale than are definite ones; so that we see, here again, that relative markedness as agent, as defined in terms of hierarchically ordered NP features, is at least statistically correlated with morphological markedness as agent.

We now turn to our findings concerning the use of ergative marking in reported speech constructions.

5 Ku Waru reported speech

Ku Waru reported speech is framed within a construction which in terms of the five-way classification of clauses above is of Type v. There is in Ku Waru only one verb which can be used for framing reported speech, *nyi-* 'to say', which, like all Ku Waru verbs, agrees in person and number with its subject. The language being strictly verb-final, this verb always follows the reported speech complement. Examples follow. The framed material is shown in bold.

- (15) *Ne yi-kil-n ab eninga-yl kanakelkuk nyikimil.*
 there man-PL-ERG woman yours-DEF do.completely.NF.2/3PL say.PPR.3PL
 'Those men keep on saying, "She's yours".'
- (16) *Lapayl-n de yupuk kapola-ko tal kapola-ko mola*
 father-ERG day three o.k. two o.k. or
tripela fopela ilyi mada nyirim.
 three four that enough say.RP.3SG
 'The father said, "Three days, that's o.k., or two or three or four is enough".'

- (17) *Nu-n kalya tripela tep-kin miribul i nyikin.*
 you-ERG that three do-NF.1.COM bear.RP.1DU this say.PPR.2SG
 ‘You say, “We did it three times and conceived a child”.’
- (18)a. *Ab-ayl-n mol kangabola yi-yl-nga.*
 woman-DEF-ERG no child man-DEF-GEN
 ‘The woman [says]: “No, the child is the man’s”.’
- b. *Kang-yi-yl-n kangabola na-nga mol.*
 boy-man-DEF-ERG child I-GEN no
 ‘The young man [says]: “The child is not mine”.’
- c. *Ab-ayl-n kangabola nu-nga nyikim.*
 woman-DEF-ERG child you-GEN say.PPR.3SG
 ‘The woman says, “The child is yours”.’

Based on such examples, we can give a general formula for Ku Waru reported speech constructions as in Figure 1.

(Speaker NP(-ERG)) [framed locution] ((i ‘this’) (Verb of Saying based on *nyi-*))

Figure 1: General formula for framing reported speech in Ku Waru

Note that all elements in this construction are ‘optional’ except the framed locution. That this should be true of the Speaker NP should not be surprising in view of what we have shown regarding the role of verb agreement in §2. Perhaps more surprising is that the verb of saying may sometimes be omitted, as in examples (18)a and (18)b. Where this happens, there is always ergative-marked, lexical representation of the Speaker, and this form-type by itself signals the reported-speech construction. This tends to happen (as in 18) where there is rapid alternation of ergative-marked Speaker of the report (A-B-A-B, etc.), this making the activity type (reporting of speech) highly presupposable in context. As far as we know the verb *nyi-* is the only Ku Waru verb that may be omitted in this way.

This optionality of the verb in these reported-speech constructions can be related to the other anomalous aspect of them which we have dwelled on above, viz. the atypical distribution of ergative case-marking across the range of agent NPs that occur within such constructions. To show how these two things can be related, we must first take up some other anomalous aspects of these clauses.

Consider in this connection the kind of determination one finds between the verb and its object or complement in reported-speech constructions versus others. For most verbs in most languages, these relations tend to run mainly in the direction: verb to object. That is, for a large majority of verbs at least, there is a more or less limited set of nouns or NP types that the verb can take as its object. The limiting case of this is the so-called cognate-object construction, where the choice of verb totally determines the choice of possible object noun: *ask a question, breathe a breath, think a thought*, etc. Note that this determination works in one direction only: the choice of question as an object, for instance, does not limit the choice of verbs to ones of ‘asking’: we can **hear** a question, **expect** a question, and so on.

But where the object or complement is a locution, such as in examples we have discussed, there is a total determination in the opposite direction: the choice of verb is limited to only one possible one, viz., *nyi-* 'to say'. This verb *qua* lexical root is therefore entirely redundant in such contexts, and serves only to provide syntagmatic slots for the grammatical affixes marking tense, aspect, and so on, and the person and number of the 'subject', i.e. the agent of speaking. That the verb itself is **uniquely** redundant in this context is evinced by the fact that these are the **only** kind of predications where the verb is sometimes omitted altogether. In such cases, the agent of speaking is almost always ergatively marked, and there is an implicit carry-over of the tense, aspect etc. of other verbs in the adjacent text (not unlike the constructions one finds in Shakespeare: and he to me (...), and I to him (...) etc.); and also in German, where after a reported clause, the verb of saying is omitted: *so der Bundeskanzler* 'so [said] the Chancellor'.

We submit that the disproportionately high incidence of ergative marking on subjects of verbs of saying, for NPs of all types, is related to the relatively greater share of the information load which the subjects of such verbs bear in these constructions. Where the verb is omitted altogether, the ergative marker becomes obligatory, marking it categorically as an 'agent-of-speaking' NP, since the verb *nyi-* is the only one that permits such deletion.

The same general form shown by Figure 1 is also used when the grammatical object of *nyi-* is not a quote, but an NP referring to a locution without specifying what is said in it.

- (19) *Olyo-n ung kare nyimulu-i.*
 we-ERG word/speech some say.FUT.1PL-Q
 'Are we going to say a few words?'

This example is unusual in that, in general, when *nyi-* occurs without an explicit quotation as its object, the subject does not occur in ergative case but in absolutive. For example:

- (20) *Ne ung nyikim aki-yl nu nyini.*
 there words say.PPR.3SG that-DEF you speak/say.FUT.2SG
 'What he's saying there is just what you'll say.'

- (21) *Na nyab.*
 I speak/say.OPT
 'Let me talk.'

- (22) *Olyo ya kot-nga kupulanum-na pilyip kongunsip nyikimul.*
 we here court-GEN way-LOC hear.NF.1 work.CSV.NF.1 speak.PPR-1
 'We are deliberating about the court procedure here.'

To get some statistical evidence on the uses of ergative case marking in such constructions, we first tabulated the incidence of ergative- versus absolutive-marked subjects for agents of speaking, with the verb *nyi-* and with other verbs. These figures are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Incidence of agents of speaking among ergative-marked NPs in Merlan and Rumsey (1986)

	As speaker of framed locution	As other agent of speaking (w/o framed locution)	As other ergative-marked argument
1SG	12	4	6
2SG	3	3	1
1DU and PL	2	4	15
2DU and PL	5	2	5
3	19	8	58
Total	41	21	85

The first thing to note is how high a proportion of all uses of the ergative case are with agents of speaking, especially with the personal pronouns (35 out of 62, versus 27 out of 85 for third-person NPs). This no doubt has something to do with the nature of this particular text, which is a face-to-face interaction in which some of the most focal issues concern who said what to whom, and in which the parties refer often to what they and others have said in the course of the dispute. But it is not very different in that respect from much of the everyday conversation that goes on in Ku Waru, and certainly suffices to refute Munro's (1982:316-317) suggestion that verbs of speaking do not take ergative-marked subjects.

Second, in keeping with the converse claim we have made above regarding absolutive marking, these data show that ergative-marked subjects are more likely to occur with agents of speaking when the verb frames an actual locution. Across NPs of all types in this data, ergative marking occurs almost twice as often under those conditions as it does when the verb of speaking does not frame an actual locution. Table 3 provides evidence of the likelihood of absolutive marking under those conditions.

Table 3: Incidence of agents of speaking among three types of absolutive-marked pronouns

	As speaker of framed locution	As other agent of speaking (w/o framed locution)	As other absolutive-marked subject NP
1SG	8	21	53
2SG	5	6	56
1DU and PL	2	25	131
2DU and PL	10	19	80
Total	25	71	331

The figures in columns 1 and 2 show a reverse distribution to the corresponding ones in Table 2: across its range of occurrence on NPs which are the subject of verbs of speaking, absolutive marking occurs only about one third as often with a framed locution as it does in other clauses of saying.

So far we have been talking as though the distinction between framed locutions and other kinds of objects of the verb *nyi-* 'to say' were a simple two-way one. Actually there is a wide range of other complements to the verb *nyi-* besides reported speech ones. In order to understand the differences among them it is necessary now to say a little more about Ku

Waru compositional verb constructions, in particular those which include *nyi-*. An example has already been given in (22), which shows how the verbs *pilyi-* ‘hear’ and *kongun-si* ‘cause to work’ combine to mean ‘deliberate about’. Other examples are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Some Ku Waru compositional verb constructions with *nyi-* ‘speak’/‘say’

<i>nyi- pilyi-</i>	say+hear	‘think, believe’
<i>nyi- modu-</i>	say+send	‘relay news (about)’
<i>nyi- si-</i>	say+give	‘report, tell to’
<i>kodu- nyi-</i>	pull+say	‘refer to, mention’
<i>(ung) nyi- pensi-</i>	(word) say+put	‘propose’
<i>pilyi- nyi-</i>	hear+say	‘speak informedly (about)’
<i>pilyi- kongunsi- nyi-</i>	hear+work-CSV+say	‘deliberate about’

There follows another example of a compositional construction, illustrating the first combination shown on the table:

- (23) *Abu-n yi tokur nyiba pilyilym.*
 woman-ERG man.ABS do.to.PPR.1SG say.NF.SG hear.HAB.3SG
yi-n ab tokur nyiba pilyilym.
 man-ERG woman.ABS do.to.PPR.1SG say.NF.SG hear.HAB.3SG
 ‘[When a man and woman have sex] The woman thinks “I’m doing it to the man” and the man thinks “I’m doing it to the woman”.’

This example is intermediate between ones like (16) and (20)–(21) because there are complement clauses, *yi tokur* and *ab tokur*, but they do not frame an actual locution, but rather a thought that is (humorously) attributed to men and women in a general class of situations.

Another kind of intermediate case is the following:

Speaker A (in translation):

‘Let all the court men come out and we’ll hold court.
 We’re going to hold court now. Listen!’

Speaker B (one of the village court magistrates referred to by Speaker A):

- (24) *Barata na aku nyikir nyik pilyini.*
 brother I.ABS that say.PPR say.NF.2 hear.PRF.2SG.Q
 ‘Brother, is that what you think I’m saying?’

In (24) the speaker (B) points back to the entire utterance that speaker A has just made, with the anaphoric pronoun *aku*, which is typically used in this way for text-internal deixis (anaphora). A locution is still being framed, but indirectly so by anaphoric reference to it. Here as in most such examples, the subject of the framing verb appears in absolutive rather than ergative case.

Now consider the following:

- (25) *Na mol nyikir.*
 I no say.PPR.1SG
 ‘I say no.’

- (26) *Na aima age anumuyl nyikir.*
 I really thank.you very.big say.PPR.1SG
 'I thank you very much.'

These are examples of what J.L. Austin (1975) would have called the *performative* use of *nyi-* 'say', where the speaker frames what he is saying in the here and now with a verb which refers explicitly to the very speech act in which he is saying it. Note that the subject pronoun *na* here occurs in absolutive case rather than ergative. This is entirely typical. Unlike when *nyi-* is used to frame a location from another speech situation, in these performative uses it almost never takes the ergative marker.

Another less than fully quotation-like use of *nyi-* is to frame indirect discourse, i.e. reported speech in which the indexical categories of person, tense, spatial deixis, etc. are shifted so as to ground them in the speech situation of the 'reporting' event rather than the 'reported' one. The use of indirect discourse is rare in Ku Waru but it does occur. For example:

- (27) *Ab-ayl nunu-nga rong-te mol nyikim-ayl.*
 woman-DEF she.herself-GEN fault-IDF no say.SR.3SG-DEF
 'The woman says it was not her own fault.'
- (28) *Ya torukang nu-nga nyikin kera laime*
 here father.in.law you-GEN say.PPR.2SG bird cassowary
nyikin kung nyikin-o.
 say.PPR.2SG pig say-PPR
 '[The defendant's] father-in-law, yours, you say, the cassowary, you say,
 the pigs [are yours], you say.'

The corresponding direct-discourse version of example (27) would have had *nanu* 'I myself' in place of *nunu-nga* 'she herself', and (28) would have had *na-nga* 'my' in place of *nu-nga*. In all 1,744 lines of our textual sample, we found only nine examples of such indirect discourse, and only one of them had an ergative-marked subject in the framing clause.

Finally, there is a use of *nyi-* in which it frames an accompanying locution not only with respect to the here and now, but in terms of some more encompassing range of contexts, which include that of the framing event, but are not limited to it. For example:

- (29) *Maku-na nyikimil na kor nyilyo.*
 mark-LOC say.PPR.2/3PL I always say.HAB.1SG
 'I've always said that what you say is right on the mark [i.e. true, apposite].'

Such uses of *nyi-* have something in common with the performative ones in that the speaker is framing his utterance in the very act of making it. But unlike in the performative uses, he is here also positing a more or less indefinitely extended series of other speech situations in which he has said the same thing. In such uses, the subject *nyi-* sometimes takes the ergative and sometimes the absolutive.

6 Conclusion

Summing up the discussion of examples (15) to (29), we can say, at the very least, that there are systematic differences among the kinds of material framed by the Ku Waru verb *nyi-* and that these tend to correlate with differences in the likelihood of ergative versus absolutive case marking on its subject. While there are no doubt many different factors involved, we think that at least some of this covariation can be seen as implementing a distinction of the general kind we have come to expect in light of the principles of feature hierarchy developed in Silverstein (1976), as discussed in §5 above. But although the distinction is of that general kind, it is made along a somewhat different dimension than any heretofore reported, in that it is being made **within** the first and second person categories, not according to their lexical specifications (+/- addressee etc.), but according to the degree of overlap (up to full identity) between the act of speaking which is predicated and that **in** which it is being predicated.

At one end of this scale of overlap lie what we have called the performative uses of the verb *nyi-*, where it is used to frame the very act of speaking in which it is being used. In these uses of *nyi-*, the subject is almost never ergatively marked. At or near the other end of the scale, we have first person predications of speaking which are entirely distinct from the present one, containing indexical elements (tense, spatial deixis, etc.) that presuppose another speech situation in which someone spoke whose identity is historically continuous with that of the present speaker (they are 'co-referential', i.e. the 'same person'), but in a different situation – usually an assertedly 'past' one. These are the predications in which the first person subject is most frequently ergative-marked. Intermediate between these two poles are other kinds of 'reports' as exemplified above, viz.:

- (1) indirect discourse, where the deictic grounding of the reported locution is shifted to that of the reporting one;
- (2) cases of 'encompassment', where the locution contains deictic elements which seem to presuppose the same speech situation as the present, i.e. reporting one, but where the reporting clause contains tense/aspect marking which predicates an act of saying over a more extensive range of situations including the present one, but not limited to it (e.g. (29)); and
- (3) clauses where the verb of speaking takes a lexical object rather than a locutionary complement ((19), (20)), and hence where there are no 'reported' uses of deictic elements which would allow the option of their being grounded in either the 'reporting' or 'reported' speech situation.

In all these typologically intermediate cases, the ergative marker is used to some extent, but less frequently than in the polar case described above, where the speaker is predicating of himself the speaking of a locution which is explicitly grounded in a speech situation other than the present one and not overlapping with it.

Now, how is all this to be understood in terms of principles of feature-hierarchy? That question cannot be adequately tackled in terms of the framework proposed in Silverstein (1976), much less in terms of the popular interpretation of that framework which formulates it as a directly notional ranking of NP types according to inherent suitability of their referents for acting as 'real-world' 'agents', as opposed to 'patients' or 'undergoers' of actions described by transitive verbs (see e.g. Wierzbicka 1981; Dixon 1994). A more adequate formulation for our present purposes is the one made in Silverstein (1981),

whereby what the ranking was seen to correspond most closely to was not agency potential per se, but the degree of “UNAVOIDABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF METAPRAGMATIC REFERENCE” (Silverstein 1981:24), i.e. the degree to which an NP’s reference is presupposed by its use in a particular speech situation. Thus, for example, +EGO or first person forms are ranked highest, because “by the very act of speaking...we guarantee the existence of the filled role of speaker”, whereas there is no such referential guarantee for forms not referring to participants in the speech act, so that the –EGO, –TU forms are ranked lower than the +EGO or +TU ones, etc. (1981:24).

But what is especially interesting about the Ku Waru data is that while it is eminently consistent with this way of understanding the ranking of NP types, it subdivides a category which even Silverstein (1981) lists as a unitary one at the top of the scale, namely the +EGO, or first person feature. Here a distinction is being made *within* the first person category, whereby the more morphologically marked kind of agent of speaking is the one in speech situations other than the present one even where the actor assertedly filling that role is the same in the two situations (‘I said...’). This morphological markedness corresponds to a relative functional markedness in terms of degrees of ‘metapragmatic transparency’ of just the kind formulated in Silverstein (1981). By contrast, a directly notional account in terms of ‘agency potential’ would not permit us to understand the difference we find among kinds of first person usages, since there is no reason to assume that people are regarded, or regard themselves as potentially more agentive in the present situation than in others. The same goes for alternative explanations in terms of ‘empathy’ such as that of De Lancey (1981), which has been taken up as a way of explaining a case of so-called ‘split ergativity’ in Siane, a Papuan language of the Eastern Highlands (Potts & James 1988). Such explanations may have a certain intuitive appeal and may actually correspond to feelings we have as speakers of a language, but in so far as they posit those feelings as explanatory principles, they are unable to be tested in terms of the kind of textual evidence we have been able to cite in favour of the explanation we have proposed here.

In addition, the explanation in terms of metapragmatic transparency seems especially appropriate in this case, since it allows us to build a bridge between our analysis of reported speech constructions in particular, and the wider issues of transitivity and syntactic case marking in general. Far from being peripheral to syntax, they may provide a unique entrée into the understanding of those more general issues.

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