Is ergativity always a marker of agency? Toraja and Samoan grammar of action and the contribution of emancipatory pragmatics to social theory*

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This article argues that looking at the grammatical encoding of agency in languages other than English helps us understand vernacular theories of action and enhances our critical awareness of the influence played by Western linguistics on our interpretations of cultural realities and on the shaping of social theoretical categories.

Duranti's (1990, 1994) ethnopragmatic analysis on how agency is grammaticized in Samoan political oratory showed that the usage of ergative constructions was strongly associated with the attribution of agency and responsibility to the referent of the noun phrase to which the ergative preposition /e/ was prefaced. Drawing on a corpus of political meetings video-taped between 2002 and 2003 in upland Sulawesi (Indonesia), this article describes the linguistic encoding of agency in Toraja, a language that like Samoan belongs to the Austronesian language family and presents ergative features. Unlike what was shown by Duranti for Samoan, my data reveal that ergative constructions in Toraja mitigate instead of foregrounding the referent's agentivity and responsibility. While describing how agency is encoded in alternative grammatical patterns, the analysis shows how an understanding of agency informed by semantic notions of transitivity is not completely adequate for the Toraja ethnolinguistic context and invites a reflection on the relation between linguistic and anthropological theory.

Keywords: agency; emancipatory pragmatics; ergativity; political speech; Austronesian.

1. Introduction

During the last three decades, the notion of agency has become ubiquitous within empirical and theoretical discussions in the humanities and the social sciences (see Ahearn 2001a; Donzelli and Fasulo 2007; Duranti 2004; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Ortner 2006 for useful reviews). Much of this literature focuses primarily on the role of human action in the reproduction of social structure and on the debate between social determinism and individual voluntarism, effectively summarized by Archer (2000: 4–5) as the clash between "Downward Conflation" ("we are nothing beyond what society makes us") and "Upward Conflation" (where "the powers of the people are held to orchestrate those of the parts").

However, at a broader and more general level, the notion of agency refers to the human faculty to act and to the dialectics of control and affectedness, action and recognition, intentionality and responsibility, potentiality and actuality that underlies human action. Understood in this broader sense, the notion of agency captures the idea that humans cannot be studied in their own terms independently from the acts they perform and points to the fact that humans exist (and need to be understood) only in reference to other situated acting subjects.

Indeed, it is hardly questionable that humans, with different degrees of awareness and willingness, are constantly engaged in performing actions, evaluating the potential results or regretting the actual outcomes of their own or other people's deeds, assuming or disclaiming responsibility for the acts they actually perform or imagine to perform, debating whether to act or to refrain from action or whether they should act in a certain way or another. And even if it was the case that they could prevent themselves from been implicated in all this, they would still be in some way or another affected by other people's acts. Different ascetic schools, in different historical periods, in different parts of the world have devised technologies for escaping this never ending dynamic of actions, actuations, and projections, but the fact remains that being in the world mainly means to be caught up in multiple (and probably endless) temporal and spatial chains of action.

Several contemporary philosophical traditions have discussed human agency. Action theorists (Davidson 2001; Sewell 1992) highlighted the central role played by intentions in differentiating actions from events and "agency from routine practice" (Ortner 2006: 136), while German and French phenomenologists thematized the primacy of acts over objects and reformulated the question of being as a question about the experiential, existential, and perceptual accessibility of things. Martin Heidegger (1978) argued that humans as ontological entities (*Dasein*) only exist as embedded in relations with other entities (with

other humans and with other objects). Humans' involvement with the world is essentially manifested in what he termed care (*Sorge*) or concern (*Besorgen*), which appears under several specific and contingent forms such as "having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining . . . " (Heidegger 1978: 57).

Heidegger's point is that care and concern constitute fundamental ontological characteristics (*existentialia*) of the Being of human beings (*Dasein*). In this view, humans' Being-in-the-world (*In-der-welt-sein*) is understood as a being-towards-the-world. In other words, human life is mostly a matter of intentional action.[1] The idea that humans are not monadic entities, existing by themselves prior to their being projected towards the world through their actions, also shaped Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the dialectic of intersubjective recogniton (1964b, 1964c) and the metaphysics of the flesh that he elaborated in the *Visible and the Invisible* (1964a).

Indeed, agency constitutes a universal, intrinsic, and inevitable dimension of humanness (Archer 2000; Duranti 2004: 468; Ortner 2006: 136; Sewell 1992: 20). However, despite its cultural pervasiveness, social ubiquity, and existential inevitability, the notion of agency, apart from a few exceptions, has only rarely been thematized as a distinct object of ethnographic investigation,[2] hence remaining mostly confined to a theoretical level. The emphasis on theory at the expense of ethnographic investigation often resulted in conflating agency with other notions such as resistance, autonomy, choice, intentionality, and creativity and contributed to making the term rather ambiguous (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), thus weakening its heuristic potential for the exploration of native practical philosophies.

This paper wants to be an invitation to take a closer look at the intersection between grammar, pragmatics, and social theory. As Duranti (2004: 467) pointed out, "all languages have grammatical structures that seem designated to represent agency". Hence, studying how speakers of different languages use these grammatical structures to express agency can shed light on the many diverse "folk theories of action" (Jackendoff 2007) existing in the world. As I will try to show in the next pages, this cross-linguistic analysis of the "encoding" and "per-

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1. "Intentional" here should be understood in a phenomenological sense as "projecting" and as "being-towards". This could not be further from the idea of "having the intention to", or "choosing to", as the human condition is marked by the experience being thrown into the world.
2. The monographs by Ahearn (2001b), Duranti (1994), and Gell (1998) constitute rare cases in which the study of social change and emotions (Ahearn), art (Gell), and political practices (Duranti) is conducted from the vantage point of agency.

formance" (Duranti 2004) of agency can also help "provincialize" (Chakrabarty 2000) Western linguistic theory and denaturalize "views of language derived from Euro-American languages" (Hanks et al. 2009), thus contributing to the critical agenda of the newly emerging field of emancipatory pragmatics.

Moving from the idea that detailed ethnographic description of the pragmatics of political interaction will enhance our understanding of locally specific cognitive and practical structures of agency, this article aims at describing the micro-processes through which social actors in a Toraja village of upland Sulawesi (in Indonesia) used specific linguistic resources to represent their faculty to act and to assume on themselves or assign to (present or absent) others intentions and responsibility for the actions or the state of affairs being discussed.

Toraja[3], like most languages spoken in south Sulawesi, is characterized by an ergative-absolutive distribution of clitic particles, which index person, number and grammatical role on the verb, a pattern common to "Mayan languages of Mexico and Central America" (Comrie 1978: 339). This particular (ergative) morphological configuration of the system of verb-agreement entails the differential marking of the subject of transitive clause, as opposed to the alignment of patients and intransitive actors, which receive the same clitic marker on the verb. A key question is therefore whether this specific mode of marking grammatical relations plays a role either in the cognitive (Goldin-Meadow 2003) or pragmatic (Duranti 1990, 1994) pattering of semantic roles.

In his influential research on Samoan, Duranti (1990, 1994) showed that the usage of ergative markers by Samoan orators was strongly associated with the attribution of agency and responsibility. The present analysis shows that ergativity in Toraja oratory plays a very different role. Both Toraja and Samoan belong the Austronesian language family. However, the former is included in the Western Malayo-Polynesian branch (which is in turn a sub-ramification of the Malayo-Polynesian sub-family), while the latter is an Oceanic language within the Eastern Malayo-Polynesian branch (Blust 1977). Both languages present ergative features. However, in Toraja ergativity is expressed through the ergative-absolutive alignment of two different sets of pronominals that cliticize on the predicate and that have become "integrated" into a system of voice alternations, while in Samoan ergative-absolutive distinctions are expressed through a differential marking of the nouns (i.e. ergative preposition /e/ and absolutive zero marking).

Although these genetic relations and typological commonalities are worth mentioning, the point here is not to draw conclusions about the typological or

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3. Most of the participants in these interactions have competence in both Toraja and Indonesian (the national language). In this article however, I chose only to focus on material in Toraja.

genetic position of the two languages, but to examine and reflect on the different ethnopragmatic value of ergative constructions in Samoan and Toraja political discourse. As we will see, unlike Duranti's findings, ergative constructions in Toraja highlight the patient's affectedness and at the same time downplay the causative role of the agent. Quite surprisingly, both the metalinguistic under-standing and the semantico-pragmatic value of ergativity in Toraja oratory points toward a mitigation rather than a foregrounding of the role of agent. Indeed, the data drawn from political interactions reveal that ergative sentences constitute the unmarked and natural grammatical choice, while speakers rely on alternative resources to foreground the agentivity and responsibility of the referent of the noun phrase (and of the speaker).

This reappraisal of Duranti's work will not only provide pragmatically-grounded evidence against the cross-linguistic equivalence of agency and erga-tivity, but will also question the association between the notion of agency and that of (semantic) transitivity. As will be shown, the grammatical construction, which encodes the highest degree of agency in Toraja does not correspond to an increase of the valency (or semantic transitivity) of the sentence. The mismatch between agency and transitivity in the pragmatics of Toraja political speech trig-gers a broader reflection on how semantic and linguistic notions tacitly shape the interpretations of social realities within both linguistic and socio-cultural anthropology.

Linguists Hopper and Thompson (1980) proposed to understand transitivity on a semantic and pragmatic ground (rather than as a merely syntactic phe-nomenon) through a set of loosely co-occurring and co-varying parameters. In their view, higher degrees of transitivity correlate with an enhancement of the activeness and volitionality of the agent, as well as with higher levels of indi-viduation and affectedness of the object. According to their famous analysis, agency is thus one of the ten basic components of the notion of transitivity.

As it seems to me, social theorists seem to unwittingly rely on a notion of agency based on semantic ideas of volitionality, activeness, and effectiveness. In other words, the notion of agency used in the analysis of socio-cultural processes is patterned on an implicit idea of transitivity intended as a transfer of activity from an agent to a patient. However, the study of how grammars of non Euro-American languages deal with agency and transitivity can help question the naturalization of this equivalence. Problematizing the conflation between agency and transitivity can in turn contribute to elaborate a different philosophical understanding of the very notion of human agency.

As we will see below, one of the most interesting properties of Toraja grammar is that it allows two strategies for expressing a two arguments (i.e. transitive) clause, that is, to describe the interrelation between an acting subject (Agent)

and its object (Patient): The ergative construction (also called patient voice or PV) is endowed with a higher degree of transitivity and is used to foreground the ontological and pragmatic saliency of the object and its affectedness. The actor voice (or AV) instead is lower in transitivity and it enhances the assignment of agency and responsibility to the acting subject, back-grounding the saliency of the object and conveying the sense of an agent that is affected by its own actions.

As I will try to demonstrate, the way in which the representation of the relation between agent and patient through the performance of an action is encoded in Toraja along a centripetal/centrifugal continuum through the paradigmatic alternative between patient and actor voice constructions can tell something to social theorists and philosophers. Indeed, Toraja grammar of action highlights how every form of action does not only involve a centrifugal transfer of activity from an agent to a patient (as in PV), but also entails a centripetal feedback effect for the agent who aside from affecting the object/patient is also affected by the consequences of its own actions (as in AV). This, I believe, constitutes an important challenge the general understanding of agency and prompts a reflection on the relation between linguistic and anthropological/social theory.

The following analysis is based on a corpus of linguistic data collected in a series of political meetings and electoral rallies in which I participated during several periods of ethnographic research aimed at documenting Toraja political language and interaction. A large part of my fieldwork (2002–2004)[4] coincided with an important process of decentralization and administrative reform, which had started in Toraja at the end of 2001 after three decades of authoritarian regime under President Soeharto's rule. This particular historical conjecture gave me the chance to collect fifty hours of audio and thirty hours of video recording of electoral rallies (*kampanye*, *ma'pakande*), official (*rapat*) and more 'traditional' (*kombongan*) political meetings, as well as instances of formal and spontaneous interaction that occurred during ceremonies and rituals.

Before proceeding with analyzing my Toraja material, let me first provide a basic definition of the notion of ergativity, as well as an overview of Duranti's (1990, 1994) work on its encoding in Samoan.

2. Ergativity

In linguistic typology, the category of ergative is employed to classify a variety of historical-natural languages across the world, which, despite remarkable dif-

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4. The data were collected in the course of two major periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Toraja (ten consecutive months – between 2002 and 2003 – and five months – between May and October 2004), as well as during shorter stays in 1998, 2000, 2001, 2005–2006.

ferences in their morpho-syntactic or phonological structures, share a crucial similarity in their case-marking and/or verb agreement systems.[5] Dixon (1979: 60) provided a general and concise definition of this phenomenon: "A language is said to show ergative characteristics if intransitive subject is treated in the same manner as transitive object, and differently from transitive subject".[6]

Linguistic typologists are used to contrasting the ergative (or ergative-absolutive) pattern of case marking with the nominative-accusative one of which Latin constitutes an emblematic case. An example will make this clear:[7]

(1)   *Puer   venit*
       Boy.<u>NOM</u>   came
       'The boy came.'

(2)   *Puer   puellam   amat*
       Boy.<u>NOM</u>   girl.<u>ACC</u>   loves
       'The boy loves the girl.'

In the Latin sentences above (adapted from Comrie [1978: 331]), we can see how the subjects of the intransitive (1) and transitive (2) sentences have the

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5. The notion of ergativity I am dealing with here is restricted to morphological ergativity. I thus leave aside the issue of syntactic ergativity that concerns a significantly narrower number of languages.

6. In passing I would like to point out that many linguists have argued that the notion of Subject is hardly applicable to ergative constructions. Comrie (1978: 330–331) for example tries to avoid the use of the notion of Subject and proposes a tripartite distinction (A, S, P); where A is used to refer to what is generally called the subject of a transitive clause (or 'agent'), S refers to what is generally called the subject of an intransitive clause, and P stands for the direct object or 'patient'.

7. The abbreviations used for grammatical terms are based on the Leipzig Glossing Rules (http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/files/morpheme.html) with a few modifications:
1: 1st person; 2: 2nd person; 3: 3rd person; ABS: absolutive; ACC: accusative; ANTIP: antipassive; APPL: applicative; ART: article; AV: actor voice; BEN: benefactive; ber-: in Indonesian middle voice marker; CAUS: causative; CLF: classifier; COMP: complementizer; DEF: definite; DEM demonstrative; ERG: ergative; excl: exclusive; FUT: future; HES: hesitation; HON.: honorific; -In: end-point or applicative voice marker (Jakartan Indonesian); incl: inclusive; INTR: intransitive; IPF: imperfective; -Kan: in Indonesian has several functions, such as applicative, causative, benefactive, and transitivizer; -Lah: in Indonesian this particle expresses a variety of meanings (i.e. imperative, concessive, and contrastive focus); LIM: limitative; LK: linker; LOC: locative; meN-: in Indonesian marks AV; MUT: mutual; NEG: negator; NMZ: nominalizer; NOM: nominative; NP: noun phrase; NVOL: non-volitional; -Nya: in Indonesian marks possession, definiteness or a generalized relationship of association; PASS: passive; PFV: perfective; pl: plural; PV: patient voice construction; PROG: progressive; QM: question marker; RDP: reduplication; REL: relativizer/relative clause marker; s: singular; TOP: topicalizer; TA: tense aspect; TR: transitive; VET vetative; VBZ: verbalizer. - affix; = clitic

same morphological marker, while the direct object in (2) is marked differently. This pattern of case-marking, which, as we mentioned, is called nominative-accusative is common to most European languages, even though they may not be as flexive as Latin in their nominal morphology.

On the contrary, ergative-absolutive languages display a remarkably different morphology with respect to case-marking. This point becomes clear if we now contrast the two sentences (1) and (2) above with the Tongan examples below (adapted from Churchward [1953: 67–68]), which illustrate the differential marking of the grammatical role of subject in transitive (3) and intransitive (4) sentences typical of ergative morphologies:

(3)   *Na'e   tamate'i   'e   Tevita   'a   Kolaiate*
       PFV   kill   ERG   David   ABS   Goliath
       'David killed Goliath.'

(4)   *Na'e   lea   'a   Tolu*
       PFV   speak   ABS   Tolu
       'Tolu spoke.'

As we can see, Tongan morphology is clearly ergative: the absolutive particle /'a/ marks both the intransitive subject (4) and the direct object (3), while the transitive subject (3) is associated with the preposition /'e/.

Surprisingly, the considerable attention given to the issue of ergativity within linguistics since the beginning of the 1970s, has not been paralleled by an equal interest on the part of linguistic anthropologists. The work undertaken in the late 1970s by Alessandro Duranti (1990, 1994), Elinor Ochs (1982, 1988), and Martha Platt in Western Samoa (Upolu) is without any doubt the most comprehensive and thorough ethnographic research on the pragmatic and social value of ergative constructions among a community of Samoan speakers.[8] This research team was broadly concerned with exploring "the sociologiocal scope of ergative morpho-syntax within a language" (Ochs 1982: 651). While Ochs and Platt concentrated on documenting spontaneous interactions between adults and children, Duranti focused on language use among adults, paying particular attention to the formal and political speech used by chiefs and orators in the *fono* (politico-judiciary meeting). One of the most important findings of this collective enterprise consisted of the discovery that the use of ergative markers

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8. Other contributions to an ethnographic and pragmatic oriented analysis of ergativity were offered by: Jack Du Bois (1987), Clyfton Pye (1990), Bambi Schiefflin (1985, 1990). Susan Goldin-Meadow's (2003) research on how deaf children use spontaneous sign languages to encode semantic relations has addressed the cognitive and prelinguistic notion of ergativity.

among Samoan speakers was distributed according to differences in age, social status, and gender.

These findings had important implications. Ochs' research (1982, 1988) on child language showed for example that the late acquisition of ergative case-marking by Samoan children was mostly due to the fact that ergative case-marking rarely occurs in domestic language interaction among intimates, which drastically reduced the occasions in which children can acquire this structure. The analysis of the data clearly showed that expression of ergative case-marking among Samoan speakers was an index of social distance, formality, gender, social status, and thus was "sociolinguistically variable" (Ochs 1982: 646).

But it was Duranti's work on Samoan oratory to argue that this sociolinguistic distribution of ergative markers was deeply intertwined with the pragmatic assignment of agency and responsibility within the speech event. Duranti's original contribution consisted of showing the existence of a clear relation between the morphological expression of ergative case-marking and the semantic and pragmatic encoding of agency in Samoan political speech (and praxis). His ethno-pragmatic analysis of what kind of speech acts were accomplished through the use of ergative markers led him to conclude that besides being socially salient, ergative markers were also endowed with a particular semantic and pragmatic value. In this light, the scarcity of ergative constructions in Samoan adult speech appeared (at least partially) as a result of the semantico-pragmatic value of ergative markers. But let us take a closer look at the empirical and interpretative basis for this claim.

3.   Ergativity as a marker of agency in Samoan

Duranti's analysis of Samoan speechmaking moved from an interest in studying the unfolding of the politics of linguistic representation within situated interactions. This enterprise focused on a notion of semantic roles that he derived from functional grammar (Fillmore 1968) and aimed at exploring how speakers use different morpho-syntactic and grammatical resources to negotiate different representations of extra-linguistic reality. In other words, he believed that the grammatical choices made by participants to spell out the reasons for the organization of a politico-judiciary meeting (*fono*), or the way in which – through linguistic means – they define the agenda of the encounter convey different configurations of semantic roles and hence different modes for the attribution of agency and responsibility to key participants.

As already mentioned, Samoan has – like Tongan – an ergative-absolutive system of case-marking: the subject of the transitive clause (5) is marked by the

ergative particle /e/; while the subject of the intransitive clause (6) and the object of the transitive clause (5) are morphologically identical in not being marked by any preposition (adapted from Duranti 1990: 651):

(5)   *'ua fa'atau <u>e</u>   le   tama le   suka*
       TA buy   ERG ART boy ART sugar
       'The boy has bought the sugar.'

(6)   *'ua alu le   tama i le   maket*
       TA go ART boy to ART market
       'The boy has gone to the market.'

This differential marking for subjects of transitive clauses conveys a certain grammatical saliency to the encoding of the Agent role in Samoan, in that, it "offers ... the possibility of explicitly and unequivocally assigning to a particular referent the role of 'agent', that is the willful initiator of an event that has consequences for either an object or an human patient" (Duranti 1990: 651). At the same time, the rarity of ergative case-marking in spontaneous language provides an additional social saliency of this type of construction. As the analysis of transcribed material drawn from political and domestic interaction revealed, ergative markers are rarely deployed and "transitive clauses with ergative agents are not very frequent" (Duranti 1990: 652).

The data showed that Samoan speakers tend to encode the Agent role through other morpho-syntactical resources such as oblique objects and genitive modifiers. Quite interestingly, these alternative constructions seemed to be associated with semantic and pragmatic strategies to mitigate and downplay the assignment of agency and responsibility. For example, the use of oblique object case-marking represented the actor "as the initiator of an event ... as a source of a transitive act rather than as an ergative agent" (Duranti 1990: 655), with the effect that the causative relationship between the human actor expressed through the oblique object and the resulting action described by the predicate was inferred but not explicitly affirmed. Another strategy used "to deemphasize someone's contribution to a given task or achievement" (Duranti 1990: 656) consisted of the deployment of genitive modifiers, which provided the agent with the same morphological treatment of possessors, thus foregrounding the object (or patient) rather than the human agent (Duranti and Ochs 1990).

Duranti (1990) noted that Samoan speakers made ample deployment of grammatical devices, which mitigated and downplayed the agency of the referents, while transitive sentences with ergative markers mostly appeared in contexts where the actions of a group, an individual, or a deity were made accountable, or

when the execution of a task was assessed. Retrospective analysis of transcribed material showed that speech acts such as negative or positive assessments, complaints and accusations displayed a higher concentration of ergative markers (Duranti 1990: 655–656). Hence, drawing on this empirical base, Duranti argued that ergative markers constituted important indexes for the assignment of responsibility and agency to the referent of the noun phrase to which the ergative preposition /e/ was prefaced.

Moreover, tracking the distribution of the ergative markers in the speech of different chiefs and orators, he identified a sort of social division of labor among the speakers in the performance of speech acts in which agency and responsibility were assigned. The widest usage of ergative markers was associated not with the highest-ranking individuals but with orators of intermediate status. The higher ergative degree characterizing the orators' speeches offered an important insight into how diarchy and social hierarchy are reproduced in Samoan society through micro-processes of communicative interaction.

Duranti's analysis displays a harmonious articulation of different linguistic and cultural levels of analysis in which linguistic formal features, their semantico-pragmatic value, and their social distribution perfectly overlap. However, one may wonder whether the perfect coincidence between grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and social reality is contingent on the ethnographic reality described by Duranti, whether it is the effect of the specific theoretical and methodological framework he employed, and whether it could hold in other ethnolinguistic contexts.

Reflecting on the relation between agency and ergativity, Bernard Comrie (1978: 335), for example, argued that languages vary in the extent to which ergativity coincides with semantic agentivity. Comrie, however, grounded his claim against the equivalence between ergativity and agency on syntactic and semantic considerations, rather than on a pragmatic analysis of linguistic data drawn form spontaneous interaction. What is the pragmatic value of ergative constructions in Toraja political speech? Is ergativity in Toraja a marker of agency or does it have another pragmatic function?

4.   Ergativity in Toraja

The Toraja language (a.k.a. Toraja Tae', South Toraja, or Toraja Sa'dan) is spoken by the people dwelling in the central highlands of the southern province of Sulawesi and belongs to the South Sulawesi subgroup, which constitutes one of the nine main language sub-groups of the island of Sulawesi (Noorydun 1991).

Toraja is generally considered a morphologically ergative language in which two sets of pronominal clitics mark the person on the verb according to an ergative-absolutive pattern. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Ergative and absolutive clitics in Toraja

	Set 1 Proclitics Ergative	Set 2 Enclitics Absolutive
1s	*ku-*	*-na'*
1p INCL	*ta-*	*-ki'*
1p EXCL	*ki-*	*-kan* *-kanni*
2s	*mu-* *mi-*(honor.)	*-ko* *-mi*(honor.)
2p	*mi-* *ki-*(honor.)	*-kommi/komu*
3 s /p	*na-*	*-i* (or zero)

As is apparent from examples below, the proclitic set plays the A function (i.e. Subject of a transitive verb) and marks the ergative case – as in (9) and (10) – while the enclitic set combines the S (i.e. Subject of the intransitive) – examples (7) and (8) – and P (i.e. Object of the transitive verb) functions – as in (9) and (10) – and marks the absolutive case.[9]
Intransitive sentences with pronominal clitics:

(7)   *La=male=<u>na'</u>*   *lako pasa'*
       FUT=Go=<u>1.s.ABS</u> to   market
       'I am going/I go to the market.'

(8)   *Ma'-jama=<u>ko</u>*   *dio Rantepao*
       INT-Work–<u>2.s.ABS</u> in   Rantepao
       'You work in Rantepao.'

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9. The ergative-absolutive pattern is far from being perfectly coherent. Sometimes, negation or question markers, temporal or location adverbials, and certain conjunctions trigger the use of pronominal proclitics also on intransitive predicates. Another deviation from the ergative-absolutive distribution of pronominal clitics is displayed by antipassive constructions in which absolutive enclitics encode the A function and occur in transitive sentences. Scholars who work on other South Sulawesi languages such as Bugis, Mamasa, Mamuju, and Konjo noted similar exceptions to the ergative pattern (Friberg 1991; Matti 1994; Valkama 1995). This split pattern seems to be mostly based on syntactic grounds, even though the role of semantic factors should not be completely ruled out (see Valkama 1995: 47).

Transitive sentences with pronominal clitics:

(9)   *Na=kambei=ko*
       3.ERG=Beat=2.s.ABS
       'He beats you.'/ 'They beat you'.

(10)   *Na=sua=na'*
       3.ERG=Order=1.s.ABS
       'He orders me.'/ 'They order me'.

However, it should be noted that the label of 'pronouns' for these clitic sets can be partially misleading. Their status is between that of noun substitutes – as in the examples (7) to (10) above – and obligatory parts of the verb (see Valkama 1995: 49). In the latter case they occur with full NPs (noun phrases) and function as person markers that cross-reference an argument co-occurring in the same clause. In sentences with full nominal arguments – such as (11–13) – the proclitic set cross-references the NP that is in A function, while the absolutive set cross-references a NP that is in S and (optionally) P function.

(11)   *Puang Batu   na=plie=i   tau*
       Puang Batu   3.ERG=choose=3.ABS   people
       'The people chose/elected Puang Batu.'

(12)   *Na=tiro=i   Puang Matua tu   masiang kumua melo*
       3.ERG=See=3.ABS Puang Matua REL day   that   good
       'God saw the light, that it was good.'
       (Sura' Madatu 1995: 1 [Kadadian Genesis])

(13)   *Sule-m=i   tu   indo'=na   Tulang Didi lako*
       Return-PFV=3.ABS REL   mother=DEF   Tulang Didi to
       banua
       house
       'Tulang Didi's mother returned home.'

As apparent from this outline, the Toraja ergative pattern is different from Samoan. Unlike Samoan where ergative-absolutive distinctions are expressed through a differential marking of the nouns, in Toraja free nominals have no markers and ergativity is expressed through verbal morphology.[10]

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10. The Toraja ergative-absolutive pattern demonstrates a close similarity to ergative Mayan languages of Mexico, such as Tzeltal and Sacapultec (see Du Bois 1987). Both in Sulawesi and

Another very important difference between the two languages is that Toraja ergative verbal morphology intersects with a system of voice alternations, which lacks in Samoan.

Indeed, the examples of transitive clauses with pronominal clitics presented above illustrate only one (the patient voice or PV) of the two strategies available in Toraja for expressing a syntactically transitive clause (i.e. a two argument clause). Aside from the already discussed PV, a two argument clause can be expressed in Toraja by an alternative structure: the actor voice (AV).

These two main voices types exhibit very different morpho-syntactic structures. We already saw how the patient voice (PV) is characterized by the presence of proclitic pronoun hosted by the verb and indicating person and number of the actor and sometimes[11] an enclitic cross-referencing the patient. The actor voice (AV) is marked by the lack of ergative proclitics, the presence of the actor voice prefix *uN-* (where *N* is homorganic to the following first consonant of the verb root), and an optional enclitic cross-referencing P. The reminder of this article will offer examples of the pragmatic contexts where PV and AV are deployed in interaction, as well as of the metalinguistic treatment of the two clause types I observed during elicitation sessions with my Toraja consultants. In so doing my aim will be to analyze the pragmatics of Toraja ergative constructions. Looking at the actual use of ergative constructions by Toraja speakers reveals that the difference with Samoan is not only formal but also pragmatic.

5.   Pragmatic value and metalinguistic treatment of ergative constructions in Toraja

A first hint suggesting a lack of fit between the pragmatic function of ergativity in Toraja and in Samoan comes from the metalinguistic treatment of sentences with ergative subjects provided by my bilingual language assistants as we were

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in Maya languages ergativity is patterned in the verb-agreement. The similarity with Mayan ergative systems has been noted also by other scholars working on other Sulawesi languages. Martens (1988: 270) highlighted that Uma and Tzeltal have the same structure: ERG-verb-ABS for transitive clauses; and verb-ABS for intransitive clauses. Matti (1994: 67) noted that both in Mayan and in Sulawesi languages the ergative prefixes have the same form as the possessive set.

11. It should be noted that the third person enclitic /-i/ cross-referencing the object is often dropped. Valkama (1995: 53) observed a similar tendency to drop the object indexing enclitic in the neighboring Duri language and argued that this occurs when the object is previously mentioned in the discourse. Friberg (1991) noted a similar tendency in Konjo and correlated the appearance and disappearance of the object-indexing clitic to the specific versus generic status of the object and to its degree of affectedness.

engaged in translating the transcriptions of recorded speeches from Toraja into Indonesian.

As most of my language assistants in the field were bilingual in Toraja and Indonesia, it came quite naturally to use Indonesian as a meta-language as we were engaged in transcribing and glossing Toraja linguistic material. It was in the course of these linguistic sessions that I came across the first piece of evidence against the equivalence between agency and ergativity. Far from confirming the relation between ergative person marking and the attribution of agency and responsibility to the subject/agent, the Indonesian glosses provided by my bilingual assistants revealed an opposite pattern. Ergative clauses in Toraja were consistently turned into passives, patient voice[12], or impersonal constructions in Indonesian. The examples below illustrate this pattern of grammatical conversion, which appeared to be very consistent among all my language assistants.

The first excerpt (14) comes from a traditional political meeting (*kombongan*) held at one ancestral houses of the village where I was residing, a participant is re-evoking the story of a mythical sword (the *dosso*) which he claimed was lost by Puang Tumpa Patalangi' when he went to gamble in the village Buakayu. The Toraja line (14):

(14)   [December 23, 2002. Tape number 41]

94.   *Eh...   na=ala   to   Buakayu*
       Eh   3.ERG=take   people   Buakayu
       'Eh... the Buakayanese took it.'

was turned by my assistant into the following Indonesian gloss (14a):

(14a)   *Di-ambil   orang   Buakayu*
         PAS-Take   person   Buakayu
         'It was taken by the Buakayu people.'

During another state-sponsored political meeting (*rapat*), Pak Batara, a very influential and authoritative noble man, deprecated the near-slavery conditions

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12. The notion of the passive in Indonesian is particularly controversial in Austronesian linguistics. Chung (1976: 43) has no doubt in calling passive the process that "turns the direct object into a subject, removes the underlying subject to a prepositional phrase (with *oleh* 'by'), and adds a prefix *di-* to the verb. The prefix replaces the active transitive prefix *meng-*". However, Indonesian *di-*constructions are often analyzed as patient voice (Arka and Ross 2005; Austin and Musgrave 2008; Gil 2002; Himmelmann 2005; Wouk and Ross 2002). Space constraints prevent me from providing a detailed discussion of the debate. Therefore I opted for referring to Indonesian '*di-*' constructions as passive/patient voice constructions.

experienced by the Toraja who migrate in search for jobs to Malaysia and Sin-
gapore. Pak Batara's intervention was aimed at highlighting the importance of
building village schools and at the same time at emphasizing his merits in the
promotion of the villagers' education. In the excerpt below (15) he explains
that his efforts to construct schools in the countryside are grounded on the idea
that education is key to promoting local development and to preventing people
from a future of migration and exploitation under Chinese employers in foreign
countries. As he says: "I 'work my butt out' to build schools":

(15)   [February 24, 2003. Tape number 24]

2471.   *supaya andi'   na-po-kaunan-komu   baba'*
         So that NEG   3.ERG-CAUS-slave-2p.ABS   Chinese
         'So that the Chinese will not turn you into (their) slaves'

2471a.   *dio-lu   tondok=na   tau*
         In-there   village=DEF   people
         'in their villages.'

2472.   *Ia-mo-to   ku=mati-mati-an-n=i*
         That-PFV-DEM   1.s.ERG=die-RED-BEN-LK=3.ABS
         'Here (is the reason) I nearly kill myself (doing) it.'

2473.   *saba'   ianna baba'   um-po-kaunan=komu*
         Because if   Chinese AF-CAUS-slave-2p. ABS
         'Because if the Chinese enslave you'

2474.   *tae'   ra   na-sua-sua-manna=komu*
         NEG   LIM   3.ERG-give order-RED-LIM=2.p.ABS
         'they will not only give you orders'

2475.   *tapi sae   lako   pessirrikan=na*
         but   until to   toilet-3
         'but even their toilets'

2475a.   *na=sua=komu   um-base=i*
         3.ERG-give orders-2.p. ABS   AV[13]-clean-3
         'they will order you to clean!'

Here it is worth noticing how Batara conveyed a slightly victimized presenta-
tion of himself as an active agent of local development and education. While

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13. Note that /uN-/ prefixes in Toraja are also obligatorily used for complements corresponding to
    what in English would be infinitives.

foregrounding his efforts, he also hints at his being affected by them ("I nearly kill myself"). However, what is highlighted here is not so much his role in the promotion of village education or that of the Chinese in the enslavement of the migrants. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the affectedness of the patients, of the people in the audience Batara is addressing to, who are represented as potential victims of Chinese exploitation. This is clearly conveyed by the Indonesian translation of the excerpt (15a), where the ergative constructions are consistently turned into what has been variously analyzed as a canonical passive or as a patient voice:

(15a)

2471. *Supaya jangan kalian di-jadi-kan   hamba oleh cina*
So that   NEG   2.p PAS-become-CAUS   slave by Chinese
'So that <u>you will not be turned into slaves by the Chinese</u>'

2471a. *di kampung-nya orang*
In village-DEF   people
'in their villages.'

. . .

2474. *tidak hanya kamu di-suruh-suruh   saja*
NEG Only   you   PAS-order-RED   LIM
'<u>You will not just be given orders.</u>'

2475. *tapi sampai pada tempat kencing*
But until   to   place   piss
'But even (their) toilets'

2475a. *kamu   di-suruh   men-cuci-nya*
you   PAS-order meN-clean-DEF
'<u>you will be ordered</u> to clean.'

Interestingly, the Indonesian gloss above (15a) presents a series of agentless passive constructions. This tendency of transforming Toraja ergative sentences into passive/patient voice constructions emerged also in my work with another language assistant who was fluent in English and preferred to use English as a metalanguage. Example (16) is taken from an electoral rally in which the speaker is arguing that the candidate he is supporting was democratically selected:

(16)   [July 31, 2002. Tape number 48]

214.   *Dadi   karena   na=usul   to buda   aspirasi   to*
    So   because 3.ERG=propose   person many aspiration person
    buda
    many
    'So since <u>it was proposed by the many</u>, (by) the aspiration of the many'

214a.   *ki-noko-i   keluarga*
    1.p.ERG=Sit-LOC   family
    '<u>we gathered</u> the family in a meeting'

215.   *kumua Ponja mo   ta=pa-maju*
    That   Ponja PFV 1p.ERG=CAUS-push forward
    '(in which we decided) that <u>it is Ponja that we support</u> (we push for-
    ward)'

216.   saba'   nang <u>ia   na=ka-buda-i</u>   to   buda
    because really 3   3.ERG-VBZ-many-3.ABS   person many
    'because he is really the one who <u>is favored by the many.</u>'

As apparent in the excerpt above, two out of four transitive active sentences with
ergative proclitics are transformed into passives constructions in English (lines
214 and 216), in which Ponja (the candidate) is promoted from the position of
direct object to that of subject, while the original subject (*to buda*, 'the many
the crowd') expressed through ergative person markers in the Toraja original
is transformed into an oblique argument and postponed agent in the English
translation.

Rather than drawing conclusions on patterns of morpho-syntactic equiva-
lence between Toraja ergative constructions and their Indonesian or English
counterparts on the grounds of the speakers' metalinguistic analyses, what it
is important to observe in the examples presented above is that Toraja ergative
constructions clearly assign higher saliency to the patient noun phrase (NP^P).
The fact that ergative constructions should be understood as expressing patient's
higher saliency is suggested also by word order. Although word order is not fixed
in Toraja, NP^A always occurs in post-verbal position and NP^P is often fronted
or topicalized through right dislocation.

Moreover, it should be noted that in all the examples above, the ergative tran-
sitive subjects (NP^A) seem not to be marked for particular prominence (neither
ontologically nor discursively) in the sentence as they are all indeterminate and
generic: "the Buakayuese" in (14), "the Chinese" in (15), "the many/the crowd"
in (16). What is fore-grounded is instead the semantic patient: the candidate

chosen by the crowd in (16), the mythical sword in (14), the potential victims of the Chinese's exploitation (15). Ergative constructions in Toraja are thus clearly associated with a process of object topicalization and/or focalization.

In this respect they seem to share some functional properties of passive constructions. Indeed, as Shibatani[14] (1985) showed on the basis of cross-linguistic evidence, passive constructions are associated with the pragmatic function of "agent defocusing". While we should be cautious in drawing simplistic equations between ergative sentences in Toraja, *di-* passive constructions in Indonesian, and English passives, there is little doubt that, contrary to the Samoan case, the pragmatic value of ergative marking in Toraja is certainly not related to the enhancement of the agency of the NP[A].

As it was clear in the examples analyzed above, ergative constructions in Toraja seem to have a similar function to that of genitive modifiers in Samoan (Duranti 1990; Duranti and Ochs 1990), in that they convey an emphasis on the object (or patient) rather than the agent, thus resulting in a mitigation of the role of the agent as the cause of the event being described. The association between ergativity and object-focus constructions has already been argued for other neighboring languages with ergative morphology (see Friberg 1991; Himmelman 1996; Matti 1994: 72–73).[15]

Hence, the contrast with Samoan could not be more pronounced, while in Samoan ergative markers indexed the assignment of agency to the referent of the NP, in Toraja they correspond to strategies of agent-defocusing. While in Samoan, ergative case-marking was socially rare and pragmatically salient, in Toraja, rather than being exceptional, ergative proclitics on the verb (either cross-referencing a full NP or used in a pronominal function) are associated with the canonical and unmarked way of expressing a two arguments clause.

6.   Encoding and performance of agency in Toraja political speech

If ergative constructions described in the previous section represent the canonical unmarked choice in Toraja, how do Toraja speakers emphasize the agen-

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14. Advocating a pragmatic understanding of passive constructions, Shibatani (1985) showed that the main function of passives (shared by related constructions such as reflexive, reciprocal, honorific, potential and spontaneous formations) is that of backgrounding and defocusing the agent. Shibatani (1985: 834) insists that his view of passivization "as an agent-centered phenomenon" should not be confused with the idea that the main function of passive constructions is that of foregrounding the object.

15. This is also confirmed Cornelius Salombe'(1982), a Toraja linguist who in his description of Toraja grammar and verbal morphology called ergative constructions "the non-canonic passive" and assimilated it to the "object-preposing passive" in Indonesian (Salombe'1982: 88–91).

tivity of the NP^A and assign responsibility its referent? As mentioned above, the encoding of agency, which in Samoan was produced through ergative case-marking, in Toraja is realized by another construction (called the actor voice or AV) associated with the verbal prefix /uN-/ and characterized by the lack of ergative proclitics and the optional presence of the enclitic suffix /–i/ which cross-references or indicates the object.

AV appears much less frequently and constitutes the marked alternative to the canonical ergative transitive clause. A confirmation of the fact that /uN-/ type of clause expresses an emphatization of the Agent role is conveyed by the fact that my bilingual assistants consistently introduced a cleft sentences in the Indonesian translation of most Toraja /uN-/ constructions. The Toraja clause below (17) was for example turned into the Indonesian sentence (17a):

(17)   *Pak lurah*   *un-jama=i*   *te*   *sura'*
         Mr Mayor   AV-Work=3   DEF   document
         'The mayor compile(s/d) the document.'

(17a)   *Pak lurah*   *yang meng-erja-kan*   *surat*   *ini*
         Mr Mayor   REL meN-Work-Kan   document   this
         'It is the mayor who compiles the document.'

AV constructions rarely appear in Toraja political speech. They are undoubtedly the marked choice and are clearly associated with the assignment of agency and responsibility to oneself or to a third party. Let's consider a few examples drawn from naturalistic instances of political discourse.

In excerpt (18) we can see an interesting instance of self-attribution of agency through the use of an AV construction in a speech delivered by Pak Batara during a *rapat* (state-sponsored political meeting). The meeting was the first of a series of encounters aimed at merging the two villages (*desa*) of Lemo and Marinding into a bigger administrative unit. However, the proceeding of the meeting got soon blocked by the obstructionist intervention of the Lemo delegation, who complained of having been excluded and marginalized by the Marinding people and threatened to abandon the meeting if the proposed name for the new administrative unit was changed in order to incorporate the name of their village too. Seeking to re-establish control on the situation, Pak Batara argues that when he was the chief of an even bigger administrative unit (comprising the three villages of Lemo, Marinding, and Kandora) he had never favored either of the villages. He strongly emphasizes his impartiality as the ruler of the confederation of the three villages through the choice of a very strong construction with the /uN-/ prefix and the free personal pronoun, which strengthens the sense of his own personal agency (line 2237):

(18)   [February 24, 2003. Tape number 24]

2237.   *tonna   kebetulan   aku   un-parenta=i*
         When   really   1.s   AV-rule=3
         'At that time I ruled.'

Although not in the Toraja original, the sense of heightened personal agency conveyed by this sentence could be well rendered by a cleft-sentence: "when we the three villages belonged to a bigger administrative unit, at that time *I was the one who ruled*!"

   Aiming at re-establishing his control over the Lemonese secessionist attempt, Batara proceeds with reminding them that it was his grandfather who had actually bought the land where the village of Lemo is now located. Therefore instead of advancing autonomist claims, they should remember that their village is a creation of his noble and powerful family. Hence, as he reminded the Lemo delegation that they are basically his own vassals, he describes the actions of his ancestors in a very agentive way using AV constructions. At line 2253, for example, he declares that it was his father who increased the number of the *tongkonan* (ancestral houses) in Lemo from two to five:

2253.   *iatu   um-pa-lima=i   tongkonan   lo'   ambe'-ku.*
         That.TOP   AV-CAUS-five=3   ancestral house   there   father-1.s
         'The one who turned the *tongkonans* into five down there (who increased the number of *tongkonans* to five units) was my father!'

Another pragmatic context for the deployment of AV constructions is constituted by threats and accusations. In excerpt (19) for example, an absent party is accused through the use of an AV construction of having demonstrated blasphemous behavior:

(19)   [December 23, 2002. Tape number 41]

705.   *Dia mangka-mo   un-lutu   aluk*
        3.s PFV-PFV   AV-destroy   religion
        'He has already attacked religion'

Another interesting locus for the analysis of the encoding and performance of agency in Toraja political discourse is constituted by electoral speeches. As a general rule, Toraja political rallies are marked by a high degree of indirection and understatement. Speakers tend to deploy grammatical devices aimed at bracketing their own agency and the audience's responsibility. However, against this general tendency to restrain the use of the explicit linguistic foregrounding

of agency, it is worth noticing that the rare deployment of AV constructions in electoral rallies was generally related to an appeal to the emerging rhetoric of commitment and bottom-up democracy which characterized the process of administrative decentralization in the aftermath of the collapse of President Soeharto's long-term authoritarian regime in May 1998.

The excerpt below (20) was recorded at a village political rally in which several noble and authoritative supporters of Pong Jaka spoke in favor of his candidacy. Here we see how Massudi, the chief of a neighboring *lembang* and the son of a very powerful and noble man from Sangalla', conveys his family's support to the candidate (Pong Jaka) by arguing that he was selected through a democratic procedure. Making an explicit reference to the Indonesian term *tanggung jawab* ('responsibility'), Massudi emphasizes the audience's responsibility towards the candidate (line 82a) as a consequence of its involvement in the decisions that led to the candidate's selection. He thus exhorts the audience not to withdraw its support of the candidate, by reminding them – through the use of an AV construction (line 87) – that they played an active role in choosing the candidate:

(20)   [July 31, 2002. Tape number 48]

82.   *tae'mi-la   ul-lamba'=i*
       NEG 2.pl-FUT   AV-neglect=3
       'You will not neglect'

82a.   *kumua iato   tanggung jawab=na kale=na   ia Pong Jaka*
       That   that.TOP responsibility=DEF body=DEF   3   Pong Jaka
       'that it is really a matter of responsibility towards Pong Jaka (himself)'

. . .

85.   *Dadi yanna dako'to   ke-den-sia   upa'*
       So   if   later DEM   if-Exist-LIM   hope
       'So later if there is luck'

86.   *Tae'mi=la   un-tiro=i-tiro=i   tu   Pong Jaka*
       NEG 2.pl=FUT   AV-look=3-look=3   REL   Pong Jaka
       'you will not be reckless with Pong Jaka'

87.   *Saba'   kita   un-n-angka'=i*
       Because 2.p.HON   AV-LK-pick=3
       'because you picked him (i.e. it is you who have chosen him)'

7.   Conclusions

The analysis developed in the previous pages has offered a description of the ways in which, in the course of political interaction, Toraja speakers use two different grammatical patterns (with ergative proclitics or with /uN-/ prefixes) for the representation of their actions. This dual strategy for expressing the relationship between an acting subject and its object allows a differentiation between a "technical" and a "deontological" agent.[16]

The "technical" agent is expressed through ergative constructions. These are the unmarked way of realizing a two arguments clause. Unlike what Duranti described for Samoan ergativity, they are not endowed with a moral/pragmatic force and they do not entail the assignment of agency and responsibility to the speaker or to another party. The "deontological" agent is instead realized through AV constructions, which, like ergative case-marking in Samoan, play an important function within the local political debate, in that, they are associated with the implications of being a moral and accountable agent. As was revealed by examples drawn from the recording of political interaction, speakers use AV constructions (marked by the prefix /uN-/) in a variety of contexts to perform accusations – excerpt (19) – or to assign praise and responsibility to themselves or to their interlocutors – excerpts (18) and (20) – that is, to express deontological agency.

While presenting evidence against the cross-linguistic equivalence of semantic agentivity and morphological ergativity, the analysis corroborated the idea that the assignment of agency both to oneself and to a third party is a pragmatically salient act performed through specific morpho-syntactic resources. The relative rarity of this construction within spontaneous interaction may suggest that the assignment of agency constitutes a delicate matter, both in a cross-cultural and in a cross-linguistic perspective. Hinting at the fact that speech acts that entail the assessment of the participants' implication with certain state of affairs are universally bound to evoke careful political reasoning and linguistic behavior.

A final observation to be made with respect to this inquiry in the Toraja pragmatics of action has to do with the fact that although AV constructions are undoubtedly associated with an emphasis on the (deontological) agency of the referent, they do not encode a high degree of transitivity. While Hopper and Thompson (1980) explicitly defined agency as one of the ten components of transitivity, an implicit notion of transitivity seems to shape the common understanding of the notion of agency both in social theory and in anthropological thinking. In an article that effectively summarizes how agency is defined in

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16. I thank Elinor Ochs for having suggested to me this terminology to identify the two constructions.

social theory, Sewell (1992: 19) points out that "to be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree". Duranti's (2004: 453) working definition of agency also highlighted how agency entails "control over one's behavior", capacity to affect other's entities, and possibility of being evaluated for one's actions. These notions seem to be closely related to the "prototypical transitive event" which involves: a "volitional, controlling, actively-initiating agent who is responsible for the event, thus [functioning as its salient cause]" (Givón 1994: 7).

Indeed, as it seems to me, the general association of the notion of agency with the ideas of active-ness, voluntarism, and creativity is probably due to its tacit assimilation with conceptions and notions derived from Western semantic and linguistic theory, such as that of transitivity as a property of a clause which describes an action "which is carried over or transferred from an agent to a patient . . . [and] which is typically effective in someway" (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 251).

Toraja grammar offers an interesting vantage point from which to rethink this tacit equivalence. Indeed, it presents an apparent contradiction: the AV grammatical construction, which encodes the highest degree of agency does not correspond to an increase of the valence (or semantic transitivity) of the sentence. AV constructions instead tend to occur in clauses where transitivity has been mitigated. They foreground the role of the agent but at the same time they convey a backgrounding of the object, which is generally (but not always!) indefinite or only partially affected. Toraja AV constructions refer to a "centripetal" of action in which the actor appears to be more affected than the patient. In this sense, they resemble the semantics of middle voice, that is a form indicating that the subject is affected by the action of the verb (a phenomenon that has been described for deponent verbs in Georgian, Latin, and ancient Greek, see Klaiman [1991]).

The mismatch between agency and transitivity poses a challenge to the implicit equivalence between agency and transitivity understood as a transfer of activity or as a causative relation between the agent and the patient. This opens a critical reflection on how the interpretation of social realities may be unconsciously informed by semantic notions derived from Western linguistics and suggests that grounding our understanding of agency in terms of transitivity may be a partially misleading move for social theory. The idea of 'involvement' seems better suited to capture the dialectics of control and affectedness underlying human action, hence suggesting that agency implies being affected as much as being active.

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