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# ARE PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES ERGATIVE? EVIDENCE FROM WESTERN SUBANON

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The issue of Philippine voice systems and morphosyntactic alignment is a controversial one and has implications not just for typological descriptions of languages but also for the theories of grammatical relations and voice. I argue that the ergative analysis does not provide an optimal description of grammatical relations in Western Subanon, a less studied Philippine language. By looking at Subanon, I hope to add to the wider debate of Philippine voice.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** The debate among Austronesianists and general typologists over how to analyze voice systems in Philippine languages is a fierce one, and it has implications not just for typological descriptions of languages but also for the theories of grammatical relations and voice. Inseparable from voice is the question of how to categorize the grammatical relations in these languages: as nominative-accusative verb alignment, ergative-absolutive, split, or unergative-unaccusative. Recently, some scholars (Foley 2008; Himmelman 2005; Kroeger 1998) have been arguing for a different system entirely, often called symmetrical voice. This issue is far from resolved and there are strong arguments on all sides.

Much of the research on voice and grammatical relations in Philippine languages has centered on Tagalog. In this paper, I give a preliminary analysis of case alignment in Western Subanon, first exploring the various analyses that others have proposed for languages such as Tagalog, and then examining parallel structures in Western Subanon. I discuss the evidence for these analyses and explore whether they can account for the data in Western Subanon. Ultimately I argue that the ergative analysis does not provide an adequate explanation of grammatical relations in this language. I briefly outline how symmetrical voice is a better description of the language and show how it can be used to explain two phenomena in Subanon, clefting and relative clauses. My hope is that by analyzing an understudied Philippine language we can find evidence that can sway the debate in one direction or another, or, at the very least, provide interesting insights. This paper does not attempt to refute the ergative analysis for Tagalog or any other Philippine language, only for Subanon.

All data for Western Subanon are from Sharon Estioca, a native speaker of the language, taken from a Field Methods course taught in Fall 2015 at University of Hawaii at Manoa.

**1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE.** The Philippine languages have posed a problem for the analysis of grammatical relations for decades. Howard McKaughan was the first researcher to describe Tagalog as marking topic rather than subject and object, as in the traditional European analysis of nominative-accusative (Kroeger 2007). McKaughan said there are case markers that corresponded to the topic, the argument being focused, and the morphology on the verb shows the syntactic relationship of the topic to the verb. In McKaughan's analysis, the agent, however, is always the syntactic subject of a verb phrase, even though the verbal morphology agrees with the focused argument. His terminology was extremely influential in Philippine linguistics, but also confusing because "topic" was never a well-defined term. Later, McKaughan changed his terminology to the more mainstream "subject" and reserved "topic" only for nouns that are shifted to precede the verb (Kroeger 2007). Regardless of his change of heart, the terms topic and focus for Philippine languages became entrenched in the literature for years. Later, people began questioning both the nominative-accusative analysis and the focus/topic analysis and began arguing for an ergative analysis. Edith Aldridge (2004; 2006; 2012) is the most influential in this camp, but Ann Cooreman (1994), Marianne Mithun (1994), and Donna Gerdts (1988), among others, also argue for the ergative analysis.

**1.2 SOME NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY.** To keep consistent with the literature on Philippine languages, I will refer to Western Subanon's *og* and *nog* as case markers (though I will not argue here whether they are indeed case markers or some other type of morpheme.) I will also use the terms agent focus, theme

focus, and locative focus. Occasionally I will use two terms to define a clause: agent focus with antipassive and theme focus with transitive in order to keep the arguments clear. I use actor-focus and agent-focus interchangeably; both are used in the literature on Philippine languages. My definition of focus here is primarily morphological, not semantic: the focused argument is the argument marked with the focus case marker and triggers the syntax of the language, including plural morphology, relativization, clefting, scope, and anaphora. In some other analyses, it is referred to as pivot (Foley and Van Valin:1984). I do not describe the semantic uses of the focus marking. I use underscore in the English glosses to highlight the focused element of Subanon sentences.

Here I rely on Dixon’s definition of ergativity: “a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from a transitive subject” (Dixon 1994:1). It is different from the nominative-accusative pattern found in most European languages. In ergative patterns, the subject of an intransitive clause and the object of a transitive clause are treated the same, called “absolute,” while the subject of a transitive clause is treated differently, called “ergative.” Languages can be morphologically ergative, syntactically ergative, or both, and they can also exhibit split ergative, where some constructions follow ergative patterns while others follow nominative-accusative patterns and the split is conditioned by different tenses, aspects, their status as nouns and pronouns, etc. (Dixon 1994).

Throughout this paper, I often refer to sentences as theme-focus/transitive or agent-focus/antipassive in order to keep both frameworks clear.

When the infixes <in> and <um> occur together, I gloss them as one unit <in.um> because taken together they indicate both agent-focus and realis, whereas separately <in> indicates theme-focus, realis and <um> indicates agent-focus, irrealis.

Finally, I translate irrealis sentences as future, although the meaning is more complex than just future.

**1.3 SUBANON.** Western Subanon is an Austronesian language spoken in the Southern Philippines by about 125,000 people (Lewis:2016). It is part of the Central branch of the Philippine language subfamily.

Western Subanon generally has VSO basic word order, or Verb Agent Theme, although there is some flexibility in word order. The verb can take a number of prefixes, and it agrees with the focused argument of the clause and also shows aspect, intentionality, and number. The theme is usually the default for focus, and definite nouns usually have to be followed by a determiner such as *koyon* or *kitu*’. When it is not a proper noun, the focused core argument is marked with *og* and the non-focused core argument with *nog*. Focused proper nouns are marked with *si* (rather than *og*) and non-focused proper nouns with *ni*, (rather than *nog*). Other nouns (non-core arguments) in a clause are marked as oblique with *sog* or *diani*. As we will see later, this poses some problems for an ergative-absolute analysis of the language.

Figure 1 shows the case marking for focused arguments, non-focused arguments, and obliques for common and proper nouns.

FIGURE 1. Subanon Case Marking

	Focus	Non-focus	Oblique
Common	og	nog	sog
Proper	si	ni	diani

In a Western Subanon transitive sentence (1), the theme is focused. *og* marks *koding* ‘cat’ as being the focused argument and *nog* marks *gayam* ‘dog’ as being non-focused. The *-in-* infix here tells us that the sentence has theme focus (i.e., ‘cat’ here) and is realis.

(1) g<in>upas      nog      gayam koyon og      koding      koyon      Subanon

<TF.REA>attack NFOC dog DET FOC cat DET  
 'The dog attacked the cat.'

The language can focus on the agent, theme, goal, or benefactive. Location can sometimes be focused depending on pragmatic and/or semantic constraints. The instrument cannot be focused without moving it before the verb in a pseudocleft construction. This is different from Tagalog, which does have instrument focus.

The verbal morphology in Subanon is complex, but agent-focus and theme-focus are approximately summarized in figure 2. For certain verbs, theme-focus is indicated by the infix <in> in the realis mood and the suffix -on in the irrealis; for other verbs, theme-focus is indicated by the prefix *pig-* in the realis and *pog-* in the irrealis. Agent-focus is more unusual in that in the realis, certain verbs take both the <in> and <um> infixes. This same class of verbs takes the infix <um> for irrealis. Other verbs take the prefix *mig-* or *mog-* for realis or irrealis, respectively. Some verbs can take either the prefixes or the infixes for certain different semantic meanings, but the following is a basic guideline for the verbal morphology of Subanon.

FIGURE 2. Subanon Verbal Morphology

	Realis	Irrealis
Agent Focus	<in.um>/mig-	<um>/mog-
Theme Focus	<in>/pig-	-on/pog-

In (2a), the <in> infix indicates theme focus in the realis, and the case marker *og* before *soda'* 'fish' is focused. Sentence (b) has the same word order, but *og* marks the agent, *libun* 'woman' as the focused argument. The verbal morphology agrees with the focused argument, so in (b) we see <inum> to indicate agent focus in the realis.

(2a) Theme Focus Subanon  
 s<in>aluy nog libun koyon og soda' koyon kolabung  
 <TF.REA>buy NFOC woman DET FOC fish DET yesterday  
 'That woman bought that/those fish yesterday.'

(2b) Agent Focus Subanon  
 s<in.um>aluy og libun koyon nog soda' koyon kolabung  
 <AF.REA>buy FOC woman DET NFOC fish DET yesterday  
 'That woman bought that/those fish yesterday.'

The combination of the infixes <in> and <um> in Subanon corresponds to the <um> in Tagalog, based on my observations of how the language works.

Other verbs take the prefixes *pig-* and *mig-* to show theme focus and agent focus, respectively. In (a) the theme argument *gomoy* 'rice' is the focus, indicated by *og*, and the verb has the corresponding morphology—the theme focus prefix *pig-*. In (b) the agent *laki* 'man' is the focus, indicated by *og*, and the verb has the corresponding morphology—the agent focus prefix *mig-*.

(3a) Theme focus  
**pig-**apuy-an nog laki koni **og gomoy** koyon  
 TF.REA -cook- TF.REA NFOC man DET FOC rice DET  
 'The man cooked the rice.'

(3b) Agent Focus





Now the language no longer appears to be marking an absolutive, because *og* can mark an agent as well as the subject of an intransitive sentence as seen in (7b).

Aldridge (2004; 2006; 2012) and Mithun (1994), among others, analyze structures like (7b) as antipassive. In order to fully understand the arguments for ergativity, we must explore the arguments for why the agent-focus clause is called an antipassive.

**3. ANTIPASSIVES.** The crucial part of the ergative argument involves analysis of the actor-focus sentence as an antipassive. Before we delve into the evidence, it is useful to define an antipassive.

In nominative-accusative languages there are typically active and passive voices, whereas in ergative languages the distinction is usually between transitive sentences and antipassives, which, like passives, are intransitive. In an antipassive, the agent (ergative) argument is promoted to an absolutive and the theme (absolutive) is demoted to an oblique. The verb is intransitive because it now has just one core argument: the agent (now an absolutive). Typically the verb carries extra morphology to show that it was derived from a transitive construction and is now intransitive. The most important points in the ergative analyses of this construction involve the claimed intransitivity of the verb and the status of the oblique.

**3.1 EXPLANATION OF THE “ANTIPASSIVE” IN TAGALOG.** In the Tagalog sentence (8a), the agent is marked with *ng* and the theme is marked with *ang*. In the intransitive sentence (8b), the subject is marked with *ang*, the same marker as the theme in (8a). In (8c), however, the agent is marked with *ang* and the theme with *ng*. This type of sentence is described as agent-focus in the traditional literature, with *ang* showing that the agent *babae* ‘woman’ is focused, but in Aldridge’s analysis, it is considered an antipassive.

(8a) Theme focus/Transitive

B<in>ili	ng	babae	ang	isda	Tagalog
<TR.PRV>buy	ERG	woman	ABS	fish	
‘The woman bought the fish.’					

(8b) Intransitive

D<um>ating	ang	babae	Tagalog
<INTR.PRV>arrive	ABS	woman	
‘The woman arrived.’			

(8c) Agent focus/Antipassive

B<um>ili	ang	babae	ng	isda	Tagalog
<INTR.PRV >buy	ABS	woman	OBL <sup>1</sup>	fish	
‘The woman bought a fish.’					(Aldridge 2012)

The argument goes like this: (8c) is intransitive, as seen by the <um> infix, which is the same as the infix in the intransitive sentence in (8b). The ergative argument in (8c), *babae* ‘woman’, has been promoted to the absolutive in this analysis. The theme, *isda* ‘fish’, formerly an absolutive, has been demoted to an oblique<sup>2</sup> (again, in this analysis). The perhaps confusing part is that ‘fish’ here is marked with *ng*, which in the first sentence (8a) was considered an ergative marker, but here it is supposedly functionally an oblique. This is an obvious flaw with the ergative analysis: the only evidence that the ergative marker is doing double-duty as an oblique marker is if we assume that the agent-focus constructions are intransitive with the themes in an oblique.

If we follow this line of argumentation, however, and grant that *ng* in Tagalog (*nog* in Subanon) is indeed both an ergative marker and an oblique marker, then the case marking and the transitivity infixes

<sup>1</sup> *ng* is glossed as an ergative marker an oblique in Aldridge’s work, depending on the function in the sentence, which will be discussed more below.

<sup>2</sup> Aldridge does not say the theme has been demoted to an oblique; rather, she states that the theme fails to be promoted. The distinction is not relevant to my discussion. I refer to the theme as being demoted.

seem to be consistent with an antipassive analysis. But, in order to support the argument that this construction is indeed an antipassive more evidence is needed: it should share characteristics with antipassives in other languages typologically. Aldridge argues that this construction in Tagalog does, indeed, share characteristics of antipassives in other languages: it is morphologically intransitive, the agent in it behaves like absolutes in other languages, and that the theme behaves like an oblique. In the following sections (3.2-3.5), I explain Aldridge's arguments for analyzing these clauses as antipassives in Tagalog and give counter-evidence for such an argument from Subanon.

**3.2 MORPHOLOGICALLY INTRANSITIVE.** In order for a construction like (8c) to be a true antipassive, the clause's verb must be morphologically intransitive because its only core argument is the agent with its logical patient now marked as oblique. The main piece of evidence for its intransitivity comes from the morphology; the affixes on a verb in a construction like (8c) are the same as the affixes on an intransitive verb. This runs into problems, however, due to the sheer complexity of affixes in these languages.

**3.2.1 ARGUMENTS FOR BEING MORPHOLOGICALLY INTRANSITIVE.** Aldridge states that Tagalog intransitive verbs have either the <um> infix or the *mag-* prefix. Two examples from Tagalog of intransitive verbs with the infix <um> are <um>*alis* 'leave' and <um>*upo* 'sit' (Aldridge 2012:3). Another, smaller class of verbs in Tagalog takes the prefix *mag-* for intransitives, such as *mag-trabaho* 'work' (Aldridge: 2013:3).

In example (8) above, (8b) and (8c) share the <um> infix, which Aldridge argues is an intransitive marker, along with the prefix *mag-*. As evidence, she says that in Tagalog, many intransitive verbs have the <um> infix or the *mag-* prefix, the two affixes also used in the so-called antipassives. Thus, according to Aldridge, the morphology on the antipassive/agent-focus clause is intransitive.

**3.2.2 ARGUMENTS AGAINST BEING MORPHOLOGICALLY INTRANSITIVE.** It is not clear that these affixes truly show or are related to transitivity. Furthermore, transitivity may not be the most useful category in Philippine-type languages. Rather, focus can give better explanations for some of the morphemes.

As seen in section 1.2, the verbal affixes in Subanon correspond to focus (theme, agent, and goal/location) and aspect (realis and irrealis) in the analysis I propose. The reasoning for saying that the corresponding Tagalog morphemes indicate transitivity is circular: the agent-focus clause is an antipassive if we assume these languages are ergative; the main evidence for their ergativity involves the assumption that the agent-focus clause is an antipassive. Likewise, the reasoning behind labeling the verbal affixes as transitive and intransitive is circular: the affixes in the agent-focus clause are considered intransitive if we assume that this sentence is an antipassive. If we do not assume that the agent-focus clause is an antipassive, however, these affixes no longer qualify to indicate intransitivity. Instead of saying that verbs with the <um> infix are necessarily transitive, we could say that they are by default agent focus, because the agent is the only argument.

In order to determine if the agent-focus sentence is an antipassive and morphologically intransitive it is useful to explore whether these affixes (<um> and *mag-* in Tagalog) are indeed markers for intransitivity at all or perhaps something different entirely. If they actually mark something other than intransitivity, then the agent-focus clause is not necessarily morphologically intransitive, one of the main arguments for labeling it an antipassive. According to Foley, the particular semantics supplied to roots by <um> is much more complicated: "<um> occurs in paradigmatic alternation with a number of other affixes for the derivation of verbal forms, all of which mark their sole core argument with ang" (2008:41). He gives several examples, including the following, where <um> functions as an inchoative:

- (9a) *pula* 'red'
- (9b) *ma-pula* 'be reddish'

- (9c) p<um>ula ‘become red’  
 (9d) mam-(pula) ‘blush’ Tagalog (Foley 2008:41)

In Subanon, as well, the infix <um> (which would be an intransitive marker under the ergative analysis) has other semantic functions such as in the following. In (10b) <um> shows a process.

- (10a) mo-lumbu’ og bata’ Subanon  
 AF.IRR-fat FOC child  
 ‘The child is fat’  
 (10b) l<um>ombu’ si Molia Subanon  
 <um>fat FOC maria  
 ‘Maria will get fat.’

Foley states that “simply glossing an affix like <um> or any of the other affixes ... as ‘intransitive’ ignores the rich derivational and semantic functions they serve” (2008:41). These morphemes do not necessarily mark intransitive compared to transitive, but could serve a complicated purpose.

Furthermore, in Subanon, the category of transitive may not be so useful. There are not many (if any) verbs that are completely semantically and/or morphologically inherently intransitive. Most verbs can take an extra argument depending on focus.

Many verbs that would typically be intransitive in other languages, such as ‘swim’ and ‘run’, can have two arguments in Subanon:

In (11a), the sentence looks intransitive. In (11b), however, the verb *languy* ‘swim’ has another argument, ‘sea’ and looks transitive. Similarly, in (12), example (12a) looks intransitive, with *bontud* ‘mountain’ in an oblique, marked with *sog*, while in (12b) *bontud* ‘mountain’ is the focused argument but is not necessarily more transitive.

- (11a) l<in.um>anguy og gotow koyon Subanon  
 <AF.REA>swim FOC man DET  
 ‘The man swam.’  
 (11b) l<in>anguy nog gotow og dagat Subanon  
 <TF.REA>swim NFOC man FOC sea  
 ‘The man swam in the sea.’  
 (12a) g<in.um>obok og gotow sog bontud kolabung Subanon  
 <AF.REA>run FOC man OBL mountain yesterday  
 ‘The man ran to the mountain yesterday.’  
 (12b) g<in>obok nog gotow og bontud kolabung Subanon  
 <TF.REA>run NFOC man FOC mountain yesterday  
 ‘The man ran (to) the mountain yesterday.’

This alone is not a sufficient argument against calling these verbal affixes transitivity markers; indeed, languages divide up transitive and intransitive verb differently, but it does hint that the category of transitivity may not be so useful in Subanon. Rather, many “intransitive” verbs can add another argument based on the focus of the sentence.

**3.3 OBJECT IS AN OBLIQUE.** By definition, the theme in an antipassive has to be considered an oblique rather than a core argument in that analysis. Because the sentence is considered intransitive, it cannot have two core arguments. In the ergative analysis, the ergative case marker is assumed to be polysemous with the oblique marker (Tagalog *ng* Subanon *nog*), as discussed above. Thus, whether a noun is a core argument or an oblique cannot be determined by the case maker; *nog* in Subanon marks both, according to this analysis. Because the case marking alone cannot tell us if the noun is a core argument or an

oblique, it is necessary to look at other criteria to determine whether or not the object is actually an oblique.

In the theme-focus sentence (13a), the agent *libun* 'woman' is marked with *nog* because it is the non-focused argument. In the agent focus sentence (13b), the theme *soda* 'fish' is marked with *nog* because it is the non-focused argument. If (13b) is considered an antipassive, then *soda* must be an oblique, not a core argument:

(13a) Theme Focus/Transitive Subanon  
 s<in>aluy    nog    libun    koyon    og    soda'    koyon    kolabung  
 <TF.REA>buy NFOC woman    DET    FOC    fish    DET    yesterday  
 'That woman bought that/those fish yesterday.'

(13b) Agent Focus/Antipassive Subanon  
 s<in.um>aluy    og    libun    koyon    nog    soda'    koyon    kolabung  
 <AF.REA>buy FOC woman DET    NFOC    fish    DET    yesterday  
 'That woman bought that/those fish yesterday.'

The main piece of evidence Aldridge (2004) provides involves specificity. Typically, the theme in an antipassive is often less specific and/or less definite than the theme in a normal transitive sentence, and she argues that this is the case for Tagalog. Subanon, however, can use a definite marker with anything, not just with arguments marked with *og*; the theme in the agent-focus/antipassive sentence can also be definite.

In addition, NPs marked with *nog* do not behave in the same way that other obliques in the language do; namely, other obliques can be clefted and NPs marked with *nog* cannot, even when they are in the agent-focus/antipassive construction.

**3.3.1 OBJECT IS INDEFINITE OR NONSPECIFIC.** According to Aldridge (2004), in the following pair of examples from Tagalog, the first sentence is a basic transitive, and the agent has ergative case, while the object has absolutive case. The absolutive, i.e., the theme *isda* 'fish' must receive a definite interpretation. In the second example, the sentence is considered intransitive, with the agent being promoted to absolutive case, while the object has been demoted to an oblique. The theme, *babae*, being part of an oblique, cannot be definite.

(14a) Transitive: Tagalog  
 B<in>ili        ng    babae    ang    isda  
 <TR.PRIV>buy ERG woman ABS    fish  
 'The woman bought the/\*a fish.'

(14b) Antipassive: Tagalog  
 B<um>ili        ang    babae    ng    isda  
 <INTR.PRIV>buy ABS woman OBL    fish  
 'The woman bought a/\*the fish.' (Aldridge:2004)

In Subanon, however, a theme in an agent-focus sentence can have a definite marker. In (15a), there is a Subanon sentence that has a parallel structure to (14b). The theme, *saging* 'banana', is marked with the determiner/demonstrative *koyon* 'this/that'.

(15a) k<um>an    si    uan    nog    saging    koyon    Subanon  
 <AF.IRR>eat    FOC    Juan    NFOC    banana    DET  
 'Juan will eat that banana.'

Indeed, in order to be an antipassive construction the theme does not have to be indefinite in Western Subanon, but Aldridge and others use the indefinite themes in these constructions as a main piece of evidence to support the ergative analysis for Tagalog.

**3.3.2 OBLIQUES IN SUBANON.** If the agent-focus clause were a true antipassive, the NP marked with *nog* (such as in 13b) should behave like an oblique. There are two reasons why this analysis does not quite work: (1) there is already a productive oblique in Subanon, *sog*, making this extra “oblique” unnecessary; and (2) NPs marked with *nog* behave differently from the other obliques in the language.

Subanon has the oblique marker *sog* for nouns, and *diani* for pronouns and proper nouns:

(16a) g<in.um>obok ilan **sog bontud** kolabung  
 <AF.REA>run 3.PL.FOC OBL mountain yesterday  
 ‘They ran to the mountain.’

(16b) t<in>alu’ ni uan **diani molia** og motud  
 <TF.REA>tell NFOC Juan OBL Maria FOC truth  
 ‘John told Maria the truth.’

NPs used with the oblique markers behave differently from nouns used with *nog* in the so-called antipassive construction; namely, true obliques can be clefted but arguments marked with *nog* cannot.

**3.3.3 FRONT: TRUE OBLIQUES CAN BE FRONTED.** Clauses with a true oblique in Subanon can be fronted, i.e., the oblique can move to the front of the sentence. This is true for both nouns and proper nouns. In (17a) *bontad* ‘beach’ is an oblique because it is marked with *sog*, and it has been moved to the preverbal position:

(17a) sog pontad non b<in>ogoy og ponganon kitu’ Subanon  
 OBL beach 3.SG <TF.REA>give FOC food DET  
 ‘It’s on the beach that he gave the food (to someone).’

Clauses with proper nouns in a true oblique can also be fronted. For example, *Molia* has taken the preverbal position in (17b):

(17b) diani Molia b<in>ogoy nog gotow kitu’ og ponganon kitu’ Subanon  
 OBL Maria <TF.REA>give NFOC man DET FOC food DET  
 ‘To Molia the man gave the food.’

Clauses with NPs marked with *nog* or *ni*, however, cannot be fronted. In (17c), *Molia* cannot be fronted when marked with *ni*, the non-focused marker, which is necessarily the oblique marker in the ergative analysis. Similarly, in (17d), *nog gotow* ‘the man’ cannot be fronted either.

(17c) \*ni molia d<in.um>api’ si Juan Subanon  
 NFOC maria <AF.REA>slap FOC Juan  
 ‘Juan slapped Maria.’

(17d) \*nog gotow d<in.um>api’ og libun Subanon  
 NFOC man <AF.REA>slap FOC woman  
 ‘The woman slapped the man.’

A simple explanation would be that the non-focused argument cannot be fronted in Subanon, while obliques (marked with *sog* or *diani* for nouns and proper nouns respectively) can. Otherwise, we have to argue that only certain kinds of obliques can be fronted (i.e., those marked with *sog* or *diani*), while other obliques (those marked with *nog* in antipassives) cannot be fronted.

The analysis that the *nog* marked NP is an oblique in agent-focus sentences is strange because the language already has an oblique marker, *sog*, that is used for true oblique NPs in the language. Furthermore, the NPs marked with *nog* in the agent-focus sentences do not behave as other obliques do in the language. It is unusual to say that all clauses with obliques in the language can be clefted except those in an antipassive.

**3.4 OMISSION OF OBJECT.** Another piece of evidence that Aldridge cites for these constructions being considered antipassives is that the object can be omitted. In many languages, themes in antipassive constructions can be omitted. One obvious problem with this argument is that the verb Aldridge uses is 'eat', which is not necessarily transitive in many languages. Given that this is the primary example that Aldridge uses, I provide it below, in (18a).

- (18a) k<um>ain=ako Tagalog  
 <PRV.INTR>eat =1.SG  
 'I eat.' (Aldridge 2012:6)

Likewise, the verb *kan* 'eat' in Subanon does not require a theme for the sentence to be grammatical. In the sentence in (18b), 'The woman ate', there is no theme. The verbal morphology agrees with the focused argument: *libun* 'woman' is focused, and <*in.um*> indicates agent-focus (realis), or intransitive (realis) in the ergative analysis.

- (18b) kinuman og libun (Subanon)  
 <AF.REA>eat FOC woman  
 'The woman ate.'

Using the verb 'eat' is problematic because in many languages it can be ambitransitive. Thus, it is useful to look at more transitive verbs. In Subanon, more transitive verbs cannot drop their object. Both (18b) and (18c) are ungrammatical without an object, even if they are marked with the agent-focus/antipassive morphemes.

- (18b) \*mi-nunu' og gotow (Subanon)  
 AF.REA-kill FOC man  
 'The man killed.'
- (18c) \*d<inum>api' og gotow (Subanon)  
 <AF.REA>slap FOC man  
 'The man slapped.'

Typologically, it is common for languages to allow the theme in antipassive constructions to be omitted. As with the specificity arguments, it is not necessary for the language to allow omitting the theme for it to be an antipassive, but it is another piece of evidence used to argue that the agent-focus constructions in Philippine languages are antipassives. In Subanon, the theme cannot be omitted with most semantically transitive verbs, such as 'slap' or 'kill', so this evidence cannot be applied to Subanon.

**3.5 ANTIPASSIVES AND OTHER INTRANSITIVES.** As noted by Foley (2008:32), antipassives and true intransitive verbs in a given language are almost never morphologically identical. Although the verb in an antipassive construction is intransitive, it also usually has some morphological marker to show that it has been derived from a transitive verb. It is unusual that the verb in the antipassive has exactly the same affixes as an intransitive verb.

Furthermore, in Subanon, for certain verbs in the irrealis mood, the verb in a theme focus construction (transitive) actually has more affixes than the verb in the agent-focus construction (antipassive). This is the opposite of what is expected in an antipassive construction, where the antipassive, not the transitive, should have extra morphology.

In the irrealis the theme-focus construction has a prefix *pog-* and a suffix *-an*, as seen in (19a). In the agent-focus/antipassive construction (19b) the verb has just a prefix, *mog-*. If the antipassive were being derived from the transitive, one would expect (19b) to have more verbal morphology than (19a). It would be highly unusual for a language to derive a transitive sentence from an antipassive.

- (19a) Theme focus/Transitive  
 pog-lombu'-on nog gina' og babuy koyon  
 TF.IRR-fat-TF NFOC mother FOC pig DET

‘Mother will fatten the pig.’

(19b) Agent-focus/Antipassive

mog-lombu’ og gina’ nog babuy  
 AF.REA-fat FOC mother NFOC pig  
 ‘Mother will fatten the pig.’

**4. SYMMETRICAL VOICE.** There are a few proponents of analyzing the voice systems of Philippine languages as symmetrical rather than active and passive (which this paper does not address) or transitive and antipassive (Foley 2008; Himmelman 2005; Kroeger 1998). Although there is not yet consensus within this approach, it is generally agreed by these authors that a more “radical” approach is needed (Kroeger 1998:2) to better explain the phenomena in Philippine-type languages.

As Foley points out, in Philippine-type languages there does not appear to be an unmarked voice. Rather, the two primary voices look very similar; the arguments exchange case markers for agent-focus and theme-focus (*nog* and *og* in Subanon, *ng* and *ang* in Tagalog) and trade verbal morphemes as well.

Symmetrical voice is appealing because often the constructions do indeed look symmetrical. There is no evidence that one argument is being promoted or demoted, or that there are valency-changing operations happening to derive the agent-focus constructions from the theme-focus constructions or vice versa. In addition, the evidence that agent-focus sentences are antipassive (and thus, intransitive) is weak when examined more closely. The case marking and verbal morphology can be explained by focus more easily than by transitivity. Furthermore, the evidence that the theme in an agent-focus sentence is truly an oblique is lacking.

In §5.1 I briefly suggest how symmetrical voice can explain relative clauses in Subanon. Relative clauses in a language are often used as evidence for explaining the alignment system. Tagalog relative clauses are often cited as evidence for the ergative analysis because only the absolutive can be relativized, although there is now evidence that the agent can be relativized in theme-focus clauses (Tanaka 2016:46). Subanon works similarly.

**5. RELATIVE CLAUSES IN SUBANON.** Any focused element in Subanon can be relativized: themes, agents, goals, and beneficiaries. Unfocused arguments, on the other hand, cannot be relativized in the language with one exception: agents in theme-focus clauses. These, however, employ a different strategy than other relative clauses, namely the use of retaining the third person singular pronoun.<sup>3</sup> Relative clauses are often used as evidence for alignment in languages because of the accessibility hierarchy of what can be relativized; specifically, if an object can be relativized in a language, so can a subject; if an indirect object can be relativized, so can the object and subject. With ergative languages, an absolutive is at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the ergative and then the oblique.

Relative clauses, like depictive predicates and (pseudo) clefting, depend on the default argument. For the most part, relative clauses in Subanon depend on the focused argument: only focused arguments can be relativized without an additional pronoun. Any focused element in Subanon can be relativized: themes, agents, goals, and beneficiaries. Non-focused arguments, on the other hand, cannot be relativized. (20a) shows a typical theme-focus sentence, ‘The man cooked the rice.’ Example (20b) shows the theme *gomoy* ‘rice’ being relativized. It moves to the front of the sentence, and *nog* is used as a complementizer. The verbal morphology is not changed.

(20a) Theme Focus

pig-apuy-an nog gotow koyon og gomoy  
 TF.REA-cook-TF NFOC man DET FOC rice

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<sup>3</sup> I do not have data for relative clauses with first or second person in the language.

'The man cooked the rice.'

(20b) Theme Focus, Relativized Theme

[**og gomoy** nog pig-apuy-an nog gotow kitu'] mi-tutung  
 FOC rice COMP TF.REA-cook-TF NFOC man DET AF.REA-burn  
 'The rice that the man cooked burned.'

In agent-focus constructions, only the agent can be relativized; the theme cannot be relativized. Example (21a) shows the standard agent-focus sentence. The agent *gotow* 'man' is marked with *og* to show focus, and the verb has the agent-focus prefix *mig-*. Example (21b) shows the relativization of the agent in the agent-focus sentence: *gotow* 'man' is fronted and the complementizer *nog* is used. The theme in an agent-focus sentence cannot be relativized, as shown in (21c) as an ungrammatical sentence with a relativized theme.

(21a) Agent Focus

mig-apuy og gotow koyon nog gomoy  
 AF.REA-cook FOC man DET NFOC rice  
 'The man cooked the rice.'

(21b) Agent Focus, Relativized Agent

[**og gotow koyon** nog mig-apuy nog gomoy] m<in>uli'  
 FOC man DET COMP AF.REA-cook NFOC rice <AF.REA>go.home  
 'The man who cooked the rice went home.'

(21c) Agent Focus, Relativized Theme: Ungrammatical

[\***og gomoy** nog mig-apuy og gotow koyon] mi-tutung  
 FOC rice COMP AF.REA -cook FOC man DET AF.REA -burn  
 'The rice that the man cooked burned.'

The only exception to the above observations about relative clauses occurs with agents in theme-focus clauses. In Subanon, agents can be relativized in theme-focus clauses with the use of a pronoun, as in (22).

(22) Theme Focus, Relativized Agent

og gotow kitu' nog pig-apuy-an non og gomoy m<in>uli'  
 FOC man DET COMP TF.REA-cook-TF 3.SG.NFOC FOC rice <AF.REA>go.home  
 'The man who cooked the rice went home.'

That a non-default argument can be relativized is unusual, but it can be explained, perhaps, by competing processing pressures. It seems that in Tagalog, it is preferred to relativize agents (Tanaka 2016). On the other hand, it is also preferred to relativize the focused argument. I have no evidence showing preferences for relativization in Subanon (whether the language prefers agents or themes), but it is possible that the language works in the same way. If that is the case, then the two processes pressures would be competing with one another, one side wanting to relativize the agent, the other wanting to relativize the focused argument, the theme.<sup>4</sup> The language then compromises and relativizes the agent but in a more restrictive way, with a pronoun.

**6. CONCLUSION.** At first glance ergativity may seem to describe some of the characteristics of Subanon, such as case marking and aspects of verbal morphology. However, there are serious problems with this analysis. The agent-focus construction in particular is problematic because the case marking does not match the ergative/absolute alignment. The solution to this inconsistency in the literature is to treat the agent-focus construction as an antipassive, and this does, indeed, seem to solve the problems of case

<sup>4</sup> I thank William O'Grady for his insights here.

marking and verbal morphology. This construction, however, does not seem to behave like an antipassive typologically. Both of the verb’s underlying core arguments seem still to be core arguments; the theme does not act like other obliques do in the language. Furthermore, labeling the verbal morphology as intransitive is problematic. Symmetrical voice provides a simpler analysis for these issues: *og* marks the focused argument, not the absolutive, and *nog* marks the non-focused argument, not the ergative and oblique. The agent-focus clause still has two arguments, a focused one and a non-focused one; the NP marked with *nog* is not an oblique. Symmetrical voice also explains structures like relative clauses, scope (not discussed in this paper), and clefting without having to employ notions of ergativity or antipassivization. More research is needed to determine exactly how voice functions in Subanon and related languages works, but it seems to interact with all syntactic processes in the language in interesting ways.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	absolutive	FOC	focus	OBL	oblique
ACT	Actor/Agent	IRR	irrealis	POSS	possessive
AF	Agent Focus	IT	intransitive	REA	realis
COMP	Complementizer	NFOC	Non-focused	TF	Theme Focus
DET	determiner	NOM	nominative	TR	transitive

S	subject of intransitive verb	1	1st person
A	subject of transitive verb	2	2nd person
P	object of transitive verb	3	3rd person

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