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# SEMANTIC CASE MARKING IN AKHA<sup>1</sup>

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Previous analyses of case in Akha (a Lolo-Burmese language) vary dramatically, with proposals ranging from ergative to anti-ergative, and even accusative case systems. The confusion surrounding earlier attempts to describe case in Akha originates from the functions of two important morphemes: *ne* ‘with, by, from’; and *á* ‘at, in, on, to’. The inclusion or exclusion of either one as a case marker is not based solely on grammatical relations. One must also take into consideration the degree of semantic similarity between the arguments of the verb by means of an animacy hierarchy that includes human, animal, and inanimate entities. It is easy to miss the significance of the animacy hierarchy if one concentrates only on case marking as it pertains to grammatical relations. Doing so has promoted conflicting interpretations of case in Akha in the past. This study shows that the language has semantic case marking and nominative-accusative syntax with passive and causative-passive voice.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** The purpose of this paper is to describe the case and voice system in Akha, a Tibeto-Burman language belonging to the Lolo-Burmese subgroup. Previous analyses of case in Akha vary dramatically, leaving little room for a consensus. For example, Egerod (1985) suggests that Akha is an ergative language, but that ergativity is only manifested in sentences with third person subject and perfective aspect. On the other hand, LaPolla (1992, 1995) groups Akha with a number of other Tibeto-Burman languages that have what he calls anti-ergative case. However, Kya Heh (2002) interprets the anti-ergative marker identified by LaPolla as the accusative marker. Last, Hansson (2003) treats the case markers as noun-particles, and describes them as having a function similar to that which is found in ergative languages, but does not categorize the language as either ergative or accusative. The numerous interpretations above raise a few questions. First, what is the syntactic case system in Akha? Second, what role do case markers have in the grammar? Finally, how does case (syntactic and morphological) interact with the voice system in the language?

To address these issues, section 2 begins by providing some background information on Akha. Section 3 is devoted to a brief review of previous proposals regarding the case system. Next, section 4 outlines the basic functions of *á* as a locative and *ne* as an oblique. Then, section 5 examines the distributions of these morphemes according to animacy, and their relationships between the agent argument of a transitive verb (A), the patient argument of a transitive verb (O), and the subject of an intransitive verb (S). Here, it becomes evident that case marking in Akha has more to do with semantics than grammatical relations. Finally, in section 6, passive and causative constructions are analyzed to illustrate that the language has nominative-accusative syntax along with semantic case marking.

**2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION.** Akha is spoken in five countries in mainland Southeast Asia. Most speakers live in Burma and southern China, but there are sizable communities in Thailand and Laos. There are a few Akha villages in the extreme northwestern area of Vietnam as well. Exact demographic data are difficult to come by. According to *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005) there are around 450,000 speakers of Akha, though community leaders from various countries place the population at around 700,000. Akha’s closest relative is Hani, a language spoken in China, Laos, and Vietnam.

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Other relatives on the Lolo side of this Tibeto-Burman subgroup include Lahu, Lisu, Mpi, Bisu, Phunoi, Naxi, and Yi (Bradley 1979).

A detailed description of Akha typology is beyond the scope of this study, but basic knowledge of word order should help with interpreting the data. Akha is an SOV language, with modifiers following the head of the noun phrase (NP) in the order of stative verb, degree word, determiner, and then classifier. The language has postpositions rather than prepositions. A few modal verbs may precede the main verb of a clause, but most follow it. Also, Akha has a rich evidential system whereby a number of evidential particles occur after the main verb.

**3. PREVIOUS STUDIES.** As mentioned above, there are conflicting reports concerning the case and voice system in Akha. For example, Egerod (1985:99) claims that Akha is an ergative language, but that ergativity is manifested only in clauses with third person subjects and perfective aspect:

The tendency for ergative constructions to concentrate on past or perfect statements is universal. Notice that the Classical Chinese “ergative verb” constructions are not thus restricted, whereas the ergative noun constructions in Modern Chinese and Akha (as well as Indo-Aryan, Caucasian, and Basque) are.

Egerod offers two contrasting Akha sentences to illustrate this. The low tone on the relativizer ə in (2) signals perfective aspect.

- (1) àjò    m̄    ə    já    jɔ    m̄    ɲá  
 3S    make    REL    field    SV    good    SP  
 ‘The field he is doing looks good.’ Egerod 1985:99<sup>2</sup>
- (2) àjò    nɛ    m̄    ə    já    jɔ    m̄    ɲá  
 3S    nɛ<sup>3</sup>    make    REL.PFT    field    SV    good    SP  
 ‘The field which was done by him looks good.’ Egerod 1985:99

To continue, LaPolla (1992) identifies sixty-four languages in the Tibeto-Burman family that mark the patient of a clause in order to disambiguate which noun phrase (NP) is the agent of the sentence. In other words, a semantic distinction between agent and patient is made by marking the referent that is not the agent. He uses the term “anti-ergative” as a means of describing this phenomenon. Later, in a similar study, LaPolla (1995) presents data from one hundred and fifty-one Tibeto-Burman languages with agentive marking in order to explore the possibility of reconstructing an ergative case marker for Proto-Tibeto-Burman. Akha is included in both of these studies (though no data at the sentence or phrase level is presented), and is classified as having both anti-ergative and agentive case markers. The data in this paper do support LaPolla’s claims to some extent. However, it should be noted that, as LaPolla (1994:66) points out, the agentive and anti-ergative case markers do not behave the same throughout the Tibeto-Burman language family, or even across closely related languages.

Although Kya Heh (2002) focuses on the sentence-final evidential morphemes in Akha, he consistently interprets the anti-ergative marker á mentioned by LaPolla as the accusative case marker in Akha.

- (3) ʔàjòʔ    ɲà    -á    tʃ<sup>h</sup>ē    lá    -əb̄ə  
 3S    1S    ACC    challenge    ABL    2/3FS<sup>4</sup>  
 ‘(Because) he challenged me!’ Kya Heh 2002:31

<sup>2</sup> I have altered this data from its original presentation by adding glosses and correcting word boundaries.

<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how *nɛ* or *á* interact with the case and voice system in Akha. Therefore I will provide a gloss for these morphemes only when they are used as a locative or postposition.

<sup>4</sup> Where possible, I follow the conventions laid out in Kya Heh 2002 for glossing the sentence-final evidential morphemes. Evidential particles that were not described in his study are marked as SP, sentence particle.

- (4) zà -ǎ t<sup>h</sup>à q<sup>h</sup>ε lǝt<sup>h</sup>ɔ  
 child ACC PRHB torture 2NIS  
 ‘(You) should not torture the child (like that).’ Kya Heh 2002:96

Finally, Hansson (2003:242) notes that “[n]ouns and noun phrases *may* be marked for function by postpositional noun particles (NP)” (my emphasis). She goes on to describe some uses of *nε* and *ǎ*, observing that inanimate subjects and objects are generally unmarked, but “in some cases marking is required” (2003:242). Furthermore, she states that animate subjects of transitive sentences are marked with *nε* in past tense. Last, she shows that an animate object may be marked with *ǎ* for purposes of clarification. However, she does not imply that Akha has ergative or accusative case, and in line with her previous work (see Hansson 1989, 1996 for a few examples), *ǎ* and *nε* are glossed as noun particles. No distinction is made between their grammaticalized function as case markers and their basic functions: *ǎ* as a locative and *nε* as an oblique.

As one can see, the analyses are quite divergent. This confusion stems from three patterns commonly found in active sentences, as in (5) below. Structures (5a) and (5b) appear similar to ergativity, grouping the subject of an intransitive verb with the direct object of a transitive verb, while treating the subject of a transitive verb differently. On the other hand, in (5b) and (5c) the subjects of both transitive and intransitive verbs are grouped together, while the direct object is marked, as is found in accusative languages.

- (5) a. A-nε O V  
 b. S V  
 c. A O-ǎ V

These conflicting previous interpretations raise three main questions, which are the focus of this paper. First, what roles do the morphemes *ǎ* and *nε* have in the grammar? Second, what is the correct account of the case system in Akha? And last, how do these case markers interact with the voice system in the language? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to start by describing the basic functions of the morphemes *ǎ* and *nε*. Then, it will be possible to look at the relationship among these morphemes, case marking, and syntactic voice in Akha.

**4. BASIC FUNCTIONS OF *ǎ* AND *nε*.** The locative morpheme *ǎ* is a postposition with a similar distribution as ‘in’, ‘on’, and ‘to’ in English, as in (6) through (8). Also, (9) and (10) show this morpheme marking an indirect object/goal (again, like ‘to’ in English), as well as a benefactive expressing the English equivalent of ‘for’.<sup>5</sup>

- (6) ηá dzihā ǎ dzɔ γ  
 1S Chiang Rai in live SP  
 ‘I live in Chiang Rai.’
- (7) padzε ápyà ǎ tʃu ηà  
 towel branch on hang 1PSS  
 ‘The towel hung on the branch.’
- (8) inǎ ηá gɔdzɔ ǎ í mà  
 today 1S mountains to go 1PSS  
 ‘Today I went to the mountains.’
- (9) ámi ηà ǎ ηàsà b̥i mɛ  
 Armiq 1S to fish give 2/3PSS  
 ‘Armiq gave some fish to me.’

<sup>5</sup> Example sentences throughout the remainder of this paper are from data that I collected during the summer of 2008 in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

- (10) ádzɛ    ámì    á    lóʔò    pǎ    mɛ̀  
 Arje    Armiq    for door    open    2/3PSS  
 ‘Arje opened the door for Armiq.’

The morpheme *nɛ* is used with instruments and can be translated as ‘by’ or ‘with’. It can also function as a locative, similar to ‘from’.

- (11) ɲá    lòkʁ    nɛ    lá    ɛ  
 1S    motorbike    by come.up    SP  
 ‘I came by motorbike.’
- (12) ɲá    mibɣ    nɛ    ádzí    bɣ    sɛ̀ ɣ  
 1S    gun    with    bird    shoot    kill SP  
 ‘I shot (and killed) the bird with the gun.’
- (13) ɲá    dzihã    nɛ    lá    ɣ  
 1S    Chiang Rai    from    come.up    SP  
 ‘I’m from Chiang Rai.’

Aside from their basic functions as postpositions, these morphemes and their relationship with agents and patients play an important role in Akha syntax. The locative *á* is often found on the O of a clause, but only when it appears outside of the subject position. The morpheme *nɛ* has a function similar to that of *á*, but rather than marking a *potential* agent, it marks the *actual* agent when it appears outside the subject position. Nevertheless, subjecthood is not the only restriction on the occurrence of these case markers; some clauses contain neither morpheme, some warrant only *á*, and others can only opt for *nɛ*. Additionally, in some cases both morphemes appear in a transitive sentence. In turn, this allows for the following four possible alternations of case marking on a basic transitive sentence in Akha:

- (14) a. A    O    V  
 b. A    O-á    V  
 c. A-nɛ    O    V  
 d. A-nɛ    O-á    V

**5. SEMANTIC MARKING.** The inclusion or exclusion of either case marker is not based solely on grammatical relations, but also on the semantic relationship between the A and the O according to an animacy hierarchy that involves human, animal, and inanimate entities. The conflicting interpretations of case in Akha have been possible only because the animacy hierarchy has been overlooked, which is easy to do if the analysis focuses strictly on case marking pertaining to grammatical relations, as outlined in section 3. A clearer picture can be provided by exploring which of the options in (14) are permissible according to the animacy hierarchy.

**5.1 ZERO MARKING.** In sentences where neither the A nor O of a transitive verb is marked, the arguments of the verb are semantically distinct to the point that there is no confusion between which entity carries out the action denoted by the verb, or which one is affected by the action. In other words, in the sentences below it is not conceivable for a book to do the reading (15), nor is it likely that stockings could wear Armiq in (16), that corn would eat a pig in (17), or that a fish would do the frying in (18). In such cases, the O is unmarked. In fact, attaching the morpheme *á* to the O in the sentences below renders them ungrammatical. Again, this is because the semantic classes that the arguments belong to do not allow for any ambiguity as to who is performing or who is undergoing the action denoted by the verb.

- (15) ɲá    sàbò    (\*á)    gu    ɣ  
 1S    book    á    read    SP  
 ‘I read books.’

- (16) ámi kúbà (\*á) b̃à ɣ  
 Armiq stockings á wear SP  
 ‘Armiq wears stockings.’
- (17) àzà ádu (\*á) dzà  
 pig corn á eat  
 ‘The pig eats corn.’
- (18) ɲá ɲàsà (\*á) lú ɣ̃  
 1S fish á fry SP  
 ‘I fried fish.’

**5.2 MARKING PATIENTS WITH  $\acute{a}$ .** If A and O are both capable of performing or undergoing the action denoted by the verb, the O in a basic transitive sentence must be marked with  $\acute{a}$ . In sentences (19a) and (19b), the arguments of the verb are both [+HUMAN]; therefore, it is necessary to mark the O with  $\acute{a}$ . If O is not marked with  $\acute{a}$  the sentence is ungrammatical. Although the arguments in (20a) and (20b) differ in category in terms of [+HUMAN] versus [+ANIMAL],  $\acute{a}$  is still required, since either entity is capable of carrying out the action of the verb.<sup>6</sup> The same is true for (21), which contains two [+ANIMAL] arguments.

- (19)a. ɣó -ɣà ádzɛ \*(á) dì ɣ  
 that CL.PERS Arje á hit SP  
 ‘He hit Arje.’
- b. àli àbú \*(á) mɛsɔ sɔ ɣ  
 boy girl á kiss kiss SP  
 ‘The boy kissed the girl.’
- (20)a. ádzɛ mà \*(á) bɛ a  
 Arje horse á kick SP  
 ‘Arje kicked the horse.’
- b. mà ádzɛ \*(á) bɛ a  
 horse Arje á kick SP  
 ‘The horse kicked Arje.’
- (21) àlɔ hotʃa \*(á) dzà ɣ  
 snake mouse á eat SP  
 ‘The snake ate the mouse.’

To conclude, if the A and O are semantically similar to one another—that is to say that both could be considered potential agents—O must be marked with  $\acute{a}$ . Note that this morpheme is not an accusative marker. Its function is not one of marking the direct object of a sentence, as shown in (15)–(18) above. Instead,  $\acute{a}$  is used to mark the patient of a sentence if it can potentially be interpreted as the agent of the verb. This accounts for the alternating patterns whereby the O may or may not be marked, as shown in (14a) and (14b).

**5.3 MARKING AGENTS WITH *ne*.** Aside from the uses outlined in section 4, *ne* may also be applied to highlight the agent of the verb. In (22)–(24) below, the marker is optional, but its inclusion signals that it was the agent, not another entity, that performed the action denoted by the verb.

<sup>6</sup> I use the feature ANIMAL rather than ANIMATE since not all animate NPs can be marked in this environment. For example, there is morphological evidence that trees are animate, but since they are semantically unable to carry out the action of the verb they are not marked with  $\acute{a}$ .

- (22)a.  $\eta\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $s\grave{a}b\grave{o}$   $gu$   $\gamma$   
 1S  $n\epsilon$  book read SP  
 ‘I (am the one who) read(s) books.’
- b.  $\eta\acute{a}$   $s\grave{a}b\grave{o}$   $gu$   $\gamma$   
 ‘I read books.’
- (23)a.  $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$   $n\epsilon$   $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$   $b\grave{a}$   $\gamma$   
 Armiq  $n\epsilon$  stockings wear SP  
 ‘Armiq (is the one who) wears stockings.’
- b.  $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$   $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$   $b\grave{a}$   $\gamma$   
 ‘Armiq wears stockings.’
- (24)a.  $\chi\acute{o}$   $-y\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $\acute{i}c\grave{u}$   $u\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $m\grave{e}$   $\acute{\epsilon}$   
 that CL.PERS  $n\epsilon$  water warm.water boil SP SP  
 ‘He (is the one who) boiled the water.’
- b.  $\chi\acute{o}$   $-y\grave{a}$   $\acute{i}c\grave{u}$   $u\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $m\grave{e}$   $\acute{\epsilon}$   
 ‘He boiled the water.’

Note that  $n\epsilon$  is limited to agents, and is not purely a marker of contrast, as shown in (25). This morpheme cannot mark the patient even if emphasis is intended.

- (25) \* $\eta\acute{a}$   $s\grave{a}b\grave{o}$   $n\epsilon$   $gu$   $\gamma$   
 1S book  $n\epsilon$  read SP  
 Intended: ‘I read books.’ (Not something else.)

Rather than interpreting this morpheme as an ergative marker, labeling  $n\epsilon$  as an optional morpheme that is used to highlight the agent can account for the alternating sentence patterns where A may or may not be marked, as in (14a) and (14b) versus (14c) and (14d). Likewise, notice that the O in the sentences above cannot be marked with  $\acute{a}$ , since there is no uncertainty as to which entity performs the action of the verb. The data below show that it is possible to mark both A and O in a basic transitive sentence, as in (14d). Moreover, although marking A with  $n\epsilon$  is optional, marking the O with  $\acute{a}$  is required below, as explained in section 5.2.

- (26)  $\chi\acute{o}$   $-y\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $\acute{a}d\acute{z}e$   $\acute{a}$   $d\grave{i}$   $\gamma$   
 that CL.PERS  $n\epsilon$  Arje  $\acute{a}$  hit SP  
 ‘He (is the one who) hit Arje.’
- (27)  $\grave{a}li$   $n\epsilon$   $\grave{a}b\acute{u}$   $\acute{a}$   $m\epsilon s\grave{o}$   $s\grave{o}$   $\gamma$   
 boy  $n\epsilon$  girl  $\acute{a}$  kiss kiss SP  
 ‘The boy (is the one who) kissed the girl.’
- (28)  $\acute{a}d\acute{z}e$   $n\epsilon$   $m\grave{a}$   $\acute{a}$   $b\grave{e}$   $a$   
 Arje  $n\epsilon$  horse  $\acute{a}$  kick SP  
 ‘Arje (is the one who) kicked the horse.’
- (29)  $m\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $\acute{a}d\acute{z}e$   $\acute{a}$   $b\grave{e}$   $a$   
 horse  $n\epsilon$  Arje  $\acute{a}$  kick SP  
 ‘The horse (is the one who) kicked Arje.’
- (30)  $\grave{a}l\grave{o}$   $n\epsilon$   $h\acute{o}t\acute{f}\grave{a}$   $\acute{a}$   $d\acute{z}\grave{a}$   $\gamma$   
 snake  $n\epsilon$  mouse  $\acute{a}$  eat SP  
 ‘The snake (is the one who) ate the mouse.’



Finally, contrary to previous claims (see Hansson 2003), the use of emphatic *nɛ* is not limited to the A of transitive verbs or perfective tense; it can also accompany the S of intransitive verbs. However, some restrictions do apply when using *nɛ* in this environment. Namely, emphatic *nɛ* on S is often limited to first person subject, as in (31) and (32). Still, it may be used with other subjects as long as the sentence implies first person knowledge, as in (33) and (34). Although the sentence-final evidential morphemes are identical for (33) and (34) in contrast to (31) and (32), it is the morpheme *nɛ* that implies the first person knowledge. The evidential markers *mè é* are used by a first person subject when providing a generic, non-evident statement about a second or third person entity. Nonetheless, since this morpheme can mark S of an unaccusative stative verb, as in (34), it cannot be interpreted as an ergative case marker.

- (31)  $\eta\grave{a}$  *nɛ*  $d\zeta ih\grave{a}$        $\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$   
 1S *nɛ* Chiang Rai to go SP  
 ‘I (am the one who) will go to Chiang Rai.’
- (32)  $\eta\grave{a}$  *nɛ*  $\acute{u}$        $s\grave{e}$   $ma$   $\acute{a}$   
 1S *nɛ* laugh die SP SP  
 ‘I (am the one who) laughed to death.’
- (33)  $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$     *nɛ*  $\acute{u}$        $s\grave{e}$   $m\grave{e}$   $\acute{e}$   
 Armiq *nɛ* laugh die SP SP  
 ‘Armiq (is the one who) laughed to death.’ (I know this because I witnessed it.)
- (34)  $\chi\acute{o}$        $-y\grave{a}$       *nɛ*  $g\acute{o}$   $d\zeta\acute{i}$        $m\grave{e}$   $\acute{e}$   
 that CL.PERS *nɛ* tall finish SP SP  
 ‘He is (the one who is) tallest.’ (I know this because I witnessed it.)

**5.4 SUMMARY.** In summary, it is necessary to mark the O of a transitive sentence with  $\acute{a}$  when both the A and O are semantically alike to the extent that either is capable of performing the action noted by the verb. If the O is semantically dissimilar from the A to the point that it cannot be interpreted as a potential agent, it cannot be marked with  $\acute{a}$ . Accordingly, there are some sentences where the object is marked and other sentences with no object marking. Therefore, the inclusion or exclusion of  $\acute{a}$  is not related to grammatical relations, but semantics.

As for *nɛ*, it may appear on the A of a sentence and is used to highlight the agent. This morpheme is not limited to transitive verbs or perfective aspect. However, when used with the S of intransitive verbs, it is constrained to either first person subjects or implying first person knowledge about a non-first person S. Furthermore, since *nɛ* is optional on basic transitive verbs and found (although with restrictions) on intransitive verbs, including unaccusatives, it cannot be viewed as an ergative case marker.

This is not to say that these morphemes have nothing to do with the case and voice system. Instead, the previous sections have illustrated that one must also consider the semantics of the arguments of the verb and the occurrence of these markers in addition to looking at grammatical relations. Doing so makes it clear that  $\acute{a}$  is a semantic case marker, and that *nɛ* is associated with the agent. Nonetheless, these morphemes do play a part in grammatical relations, which is the topic of the following section.

**6. VOICE IN AKHA.** Now that the basic functions and semantic roles of *nɛ* and  $\acute{a}$  have been established, it is possible to turn to their uses in syntactic operations. Here, the tasks of these morphemes in the voice system are discussed. Causative constructions are considered alongside passive sentences, since the developments of the two are often related in many of the world’s languages.

**6.1 PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS.** It has been shown that the role of the agent can be highlighted by attaching *nɛ* to it when it appears in the subject position. Although *nɛ* in this setting is optional, the marker is obligatory when the agent appears in a position other than the subject. Passive sentences

best illustrate this point. In passive constructions in Akha the patient is promoted to the subject position, and the agent is demoted to an oblique. The patient-subject in passive voice may not be marked with  $\acute{a}$ , regardless of its semantic class. Additionally, the oblique agent in passives must be marked with  $n\epsilon$ . For example, in an active, transitive construction, such as (35a), both the subject/agent and object/patient are unmarked. If the patient is promoted to the subject position through derivation, as in (35b), it cannot take  $\acute{a}$ . Moreover, non-argument agent *Armiq* must be tagged with  $n\epsilon$ . Thus, in (35b) *kúúbǎ*, ‘stockings’ has been promoted to the subject, and *Armiq* is now an oblique. The same principles hold true for the corresponding sentences in (36) through (38).

- (35)a.  $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$   $kúúb\grave{a}$   $b\grave{a}$   $\gamma$   
 Armiq stockings wear SP  
 ‘Armiq wears stockings.’
- b.  $kúúb\grave{a}$   $(*\acute{a})$   $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$   $*(n\epsilon)$   $b\grave{a}$   $\gamma$   
 stockings  $\acute{a}$  Armi  $n\epsilon$  wear SP  
 ‘The stockings are worn by Armiq.’
- (36)  $\chi\theta$   $-y\grave{a}$   $\acute{a}d\zeta e$   $n\epsilon$   $d\grave{i}$   $\gamma$   
 that CL.PERS Arje  $n\epsilon$  hit SP  
 ‘He was hit by Arje.’
- (37)  $\acute{a}d\zeta e$   $m\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $b\grave{\epsilon}$   $a$   
 Arje horse  $n\epsilon$  kick sp  
 ‘Arje was kicked by the horse.’
- (38)  $\acute{i}c\grave{u}$   $\eta\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $\acute{i}l\acute{a}$   $\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $\gamma$   
 water 1S  $n\epsilon$  hot.water boil SP  
 ‘The water was boiled by me.’

Although  $\acute{a}$  is a semantic case marker and  $n\epsilon$  is used to highlight the agent, both morphemes are used in the voice system. Just as  $\acute{a}$  marks a potential agent in a non-subject position (active voice),  $n\epsilon$  marks the actual agent when it is found outside the subject position (passive voice). In both instances the morphemes mark something for what it is not, rather than what it is: marking a potential non-agent that is not the subject in active sentence with  $\acute{a}$ , or marking the true agent that is not the subject in passive sentences with  $n\epsilon$ . Additionally, while it may seem that there are two separate functions of  $n\epsilon$ —one having to do with emphatic constructions in active sentences (as explained in section 5.3) and the other with passivization—it is important to note that they are in fact the same insofar as both are employed to highlight which entity is the agent of the verb—be it an argument or an oblique.

**6.2 CAUSATIVES.** Causative constructions in Akha are created by the use of either *bi* or *la*. The former is more common, while the latter is used when there is greater difficulty in attempting to make the causee do something against its will. As in passives, causative constructions also require that  $n\epsilon$  accompany the agent of the verb. However, in causatives, the agent retains its subject position. In the examples below, (39) is a simple intransitive sentence and (40) is the corresponding transitive sentence. In (41),  $n\epsilon$  is used as an optional emphatic marker, and yet in (42) it is required for the causative construction. Furthermore, if the agent in a causative construction is not marked with  $n\epsilon$ , as in (43), the sentence is ungrammatical.

- (39)  $\acute{i}c\grave{u}$   $\acute{i}l\acute{a}$   $\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $m\grave{\epsilon}$   $\acute{\epsilon}$   
 water hot.water boil SP SP  
 ‘The hot water boiled.’
- (40)  $\eta\acute{a}$   $\acute{i}c\grave{u}$   $\acute{i}l\acute{a}$   $\acute{l}\acute{a}$   $\gamma$   
 1S water hot.water boil SP  
 ‘I boiled the hot water.’

- (41)     $\eta\grave{a}$   $ne$   $\acute{ic}\grave{u}$      $\acute{il}\acute{a}$              $\acute{l}\acute{a}$      $\gamma$   
 1S  $ne$  water hot.water boil SP  
 ‘I (am the one who) boiled the hot water.’
- (42)     $\eta\grave{a}$   $ne$   $\acute{ic}\grave{u}$      $\acute{il}\acute{a}$              $bi$      $\acute{l}\acute{a}$      $\gamma$   
 1S  $ne$  water hot.water CAUS boil SP  
 ‘I made the hot water boil.’
- (43)    \* $\eta\acute{a}$      $\acute{ic}\grave{u}$      $\acute{il}\acute{a}$              $bi$      $\acute{l}\acute{a}$      $\gamma$   
 1S    water hot.water CAUS boil SP  
 ‘I made the hot water boil.’

On the surface, it may not seem as if causative constructions are not related to passives, or even the voice system. Still, the point behind outlining the structures of causatives above is that the association of *ne* with argument and non-argument agents allows for an additional type of voice in Akha, causative-passive voice. This involves a pattern similar to, but slightly different than, what has been presented in sections 6.1 and 6.2.

**6.3 CAUSITIVE-PASSIVES.** There is one more type of voice in Akha, which I call causative-passive, as exemplified in (44) below.

- (44)     $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$      $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$      $ne$   $bi$      $b\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 stockings Armiq  $ne$  CAUS wear SP  
 ‘The stockings are made/caused to be worn by Armiq.’

The free translation for (44) seems unnatural in English, yet this is the best representation of the data. Compare (44) above with (45), an active sentence; (46), an emphatic construction; and (47), passive voice.

- (45)     $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$      $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$      $b\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 Armiq stockings wear SP  
 ‘Armiq wears stockings.’
- (46)     $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$      $ne$   $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$      $b\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 Armiq  $ne$  stockings wear SP  
 ‘Armiq (is the one who) wears stockings.’
- (47)     $k\acute{u}b\grave{a}$      $\acute{a}m\grave{i}$      $ne$      $b\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 stockings Armi  $ne$  wear SP  
 ‘The stockings are worn by Armiq.’

A comparable pattern can be found in causative constructions that have three predicates. For example, sentence (48) is a simple transitive sentence. As discussed above, to make a causative construction, *bi* is inserted before the main verb, as in (49).

- (48)     $n\acute{o}$   $\eta\grave{a}s\grave{a}$      $dz\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 2S fish eat SP  
 ‘You eat fish.’
- (49)     $\eta\acute{a}$   $n\grave{o}$   $\acute{a}$      $\eta\grave{a}s\grave{a}$      $bi$      $dz\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
 1S 2S to fish CAUS eat SP  
 ‘I made you eat fish.’

Note that in (49), the causee is marked with  $\acute{a}$  in order to disambiguate it from the causer, since both are [+HUMAN]. Consequently, it is not necessary to mark 1S with *ne* in this causative construction, since the patient who is a potential agent has been identified (cross reference this with (42) and (43) above). However, *ne* may be added to the agent here to create an emphatic construction, as in (50).

- (50)     $\eta\grave{a}$   $n\epsilon$   $n\grave{o}$   $\acute{a}$      $\eta\grave{a}s\grave{a}$      $bi$      $dz\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
          1S  $n\epsilon$  2S to fish    CAUS eat    SP  
          ‘I (am the one who) made you eat fish.’

This causative construction can be converted to passive voice by promoting the causee to the subject position. In doing so, the causee loses  $\acute{a}$ , and the causer must now be marked with  $n\epsilon$ .

- (51)     $n\acute{o}$   $\eta\grave{a}$      $*(n\epsilon)$      $\eta\grave{a}s\grave{a}$      $bi$      $dz\grave{a}$      $\gamma$   
          2S 1S     $n\epsilon$     fish    CAUS eat    SP  
          ‘You were made to eat fish by me.’

**7. REMAINING QUESTIONS.** There are structures in Akha that seem to violate what has been presented thus far. For example, it is possible to find  $\acute{a}$  accompanying an O, even if there is no possibility that the O could perform the action of the verb. In these cases, if the O is not followed by  $\acute{a}$ , the sentence is ungrammatical.

- (52)     $\grave{a}li$      $\grave{a}t\grave{i}mat\grave{i}$      $*(\acute{a})$      $my\grave{\gamma}$      $\grave{a}$   
          boy    ice cream     $\acute{a}$     lick    SP  
          ‘The boy licked the ice cream.’

- (53)     $\grave{a}k\grave{u}$      $s\grave{a}j\grave{o}$      $*(\acute{a})$      $k\grave{o}$      $\grave{a}$   
          dog    bone     $\acute{a}$     bite    SP  
          ‘The dog bit the bone.’

Initially, it appears that these sentences do not behave as expected. It is not imaginable that ice cream would lick the boy, or that a bone would bite a dog. However, this problem can be resolved by making a distinction between the two functions of  $\acute{a}$ , one as a semantic case marker and the other as a locative. The morpheme acts as a locative in sentences (52) and (53). Moreover, these verbs may have a lower valency, requiring the use of a locative. If so, a better free translation for these sentences would be ‘The boy licked on the ice cream.’ for (52), and ‘The dog bit on the bone.’ in (53).

The morpheme  $n\epsilon$  has a richer array of functions than what has been presented here. It is often found in coordinate constructions, it can be used in some word-derivation processes, and it is required in relative clauses. Each of these topics still needs to be explored.

**8. CONCLUSION.** This paper has shown that Akha has nominative-accusative syntax, as evidenced by passive voice, and that the case markers have more to do with semantics than grammatical relations. In active sentences,  $\acute{a}$  marks a potential agent that appears outside the A position for purposes of disambiguation.  $n\epsilon$  is optional in active sentences and is used to highlight or focus on the agent. At the same time, in passive voice  $n\epsilon$  must mark the non-argument agent, since it appears outside of the subject position. Likewise, the patient may not receive  $\acute{a}$  in passive voice, since it is promoted to subject. Additionally, in a causative construction with only two arguments,  $n\epsilon$  is required to mark the causer. However, when there are three arguments, the causee is marked with  $\acute{a}$ , and  $n\epsilon$  is then optional. Finally, Akha has a second type of voice, causative-passives. As is the case with passives, these constructions require that the agent be marked with  $n\epsilon$ , since it appears outside of the subject position, and marking the patient argument in the subject position is not allowed.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- A        agent argument of a transitive verb  
 ABL     ablative  
 ACC     accusative.  
 CAUS    causative  
 CL      classifier  
 O        patient argument of a transitive verb

PERS	person
PRHB	prohibitive/negative imperative
PFT	perfective
REL	relativizer
S	subject of an intransitive verb
SP	sentence final evidential morpheme
SV	stative verbalizer
1PSS	first person generic positive statement evidential marker
1NIS	first person critical disapproval evidential marker
1S	first person singular
2S	second person singular
2/3FS	second or third person justifying confrontation evidential marker
2/3PSS	second or third person generic positive statement evidential marker

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