

## **Reversing grammatical relations: lessons from Reefs-Santa Cruz**

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The languages spoken in the western region of the territory covered by the Austronesian language family are famous for their “symmetrical voice” systems, which show at least two distinct transitive constructions, one where the actor argument is the subject and another where the undergoer argument is the subject. This system has been reconstructed to Proto Austronesian; however, in the Oceanic subgroup of Austronesian, it has been reanalysed into a system with accusative alignment where transitivity is morphologically marked on the verb, and voice alternations are rare. Crucially, it is the original undergoer voice that has been reanalysed as the transitive clause, with a simplified subset of the original voice morphology now having applicative functions.

This change requires two distinct steps of reanalysis. The first, the reanalysis of the transitive actor voice into an intransitive construction, is fairly straightforward; in many symmetrical voice languages, the actor voice shows semantic characteristics associated with low transitivity in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980), and some researchers have considered the actor voice in various western Austronesian languages a type of antipassive (e.g. Gerds 1988, Liao 2004, Aldridge 2012, Mithun 2021)

The second step is more intriguing: the reanalysis of the undergoer voice, with the undergoer argument as the subject, into a construction where the actor argument is the subject and the erstwhile voice morphology now functions to promote different types of arguments to object rather than subject status. How did such a reanalysis come about? In this paper, I will suggest a possible answer by examining the so-called Reefs-Santa Cruz group of Oceanic languages. One of these languages, Äiwoo or Reefs, is highly unusual for an Oceanic language in that it retains a symmetrical voice system (Næss 2015, 2021); the languages of Santa Cruz, on the other hand, are analysed as having systems of clausal organisation more like the canonical Oceanic pattern (Vaa 2013, Alfarano 2021). I will examine usage patterns of the actor voice in Äiwoo and show how they may give rise to an increased association between subject function and actor semantics, via an increased association between the actor voice and indefinite or generic undergoer arguments. This amounts to an increased weight of what Latrouite (2011) calls referential prominence, relative to other types of prominence (discourse-structural, information-structural, event-structural) which have been shown to influence voice choice in other symmetrical voice languages. Referential prominence involves an inherent actor bias, as actors are more often referential, animate and human than are undergoers, and so an increase of the importance of referential prominence in the system of voice choice may lead to an increased association between the actor role and subject function. In order to show how this development may lead to the gradual reanalysis of the system, I will compare Äiwoo to the structurally most similar Santa Cruz language, Engdewu, and point to two changes which between them consolidate the transition from one type of system to another: the decreased morphosyntactic independence of the O argument of the original actor voice, leading to a formally less transitive construction; and the rise of an innovated set of bound person markers on the verb, which mark S/A in the same way across construction types and so reinforce the association between subject function and actor semantics.

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