Making the Remarkable Regular: 'Marked Absolutive' in Nias

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1 Introduction

This paper concerns the unusual distribution of argument marking in Nias Selatan (Austronesian; Indonesia). Nias arguments participate in a mutation system (i.e. a phonological change to the initial segment of the stem), where intransitive subjects (1) and objects (2) are marked with mutation to the exclusion of transitive subjects (2), which are unmarked.[1]

(1) ma=aso?a **d**uhituhi
PERF=fall MUT.trivet
'The trivet stone fell.' (559)
***t**uhituhi* → ***d**uhituhi*

(2) ʔi-a **ʙ**avi ʔama Gumi
3SG.RLS-eat MUT.pig father Gumi
'Father Gumi eats pig.'
b**avi* → **ʙavi* (D&B 1999, 61)

While mutation systems are attested cross-linguistically (e.g. Celtic Pyatt 1997), what makes Nias' system interesting is the distribution of mutated arguments. Descriptive work on Nias has observed that, regarding core arguments, mutation appears to correlate with the grammatical role of the nominal (Donohue and Brown 1999, Brown 2001, 2005). As shown above in (1,2), nominals which are prototypical absolutive arguments (i.e. intransitive subjects and objects) mutate, while prototypical ergative arguments (i.e. transitive subjects) do not. Due to this correlation, in Baker 2015, Nias' mutation pattern is analyzed in terms of a instantiating a 'marked absolutive' case system, where ABS is realized as mutation and ERG is the unmarked case.

In this paper, I argue that a mutation-as-case approach faces several challenges. Empirically, I show that the correlation between mutation and absolutivity systematically breaks down. I argue that an analysis of mutation in terms of case realization, as in Baker 2015, cannot straightforwardly account for the distribution of mutated nominals. Given these challenges, I advance an alternative analysis of Nias' mutation system. I conjecture that mutation is a purely phonological process and, crucially, is not connected to grammatical role—i.e. case. I propose that the distribution of mutated nominals is a reflection of the nominal's structural position when it is sent to PF, which I argue affects whether the nominal is spelled-out in a mutation triggering context. Further, I show that the apparent 'marked absolutive' mutation pattern for core arguments, which is key data point supporting the mutation-as-case approach, is due to a difference in structural positions the arguments are spelled-out in, which is reflected by a difference in whether the nominal mutates.

2 Nias Word Order

As (3) shows, Nias default word order is VOS, where internal arguments surface clause-medially and the subject surfaces clause-finally. Additionally, Nias allows null subjects, as in (4).

(3) ʔi-beʔe gefe xö zodʳöröu ʔama Dali
3SG.RLS-give MUT.money DAT MUT.healer Ama Dali
'Ama Dali gave money to the village healer.' (269)

(4) ʔu-sura zura
1SG-write MUT.letter
'I wrote a letter.' (319)

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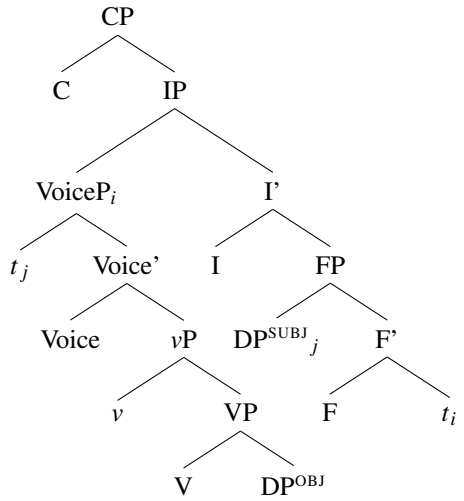
[1] All Nias data is from Brown 2001, with page number beside examples, unless otherwise indicated. Glosses follow Leipzig glossing conventions; MUT = mutated argument. Note in some cases Nias sentence transcription has been slightly modified from the orthography in Brown 2001 to more transparently reflect phonological form.

I propose that VOS word order is derived by: (i) subject DP raising from SpecVoiceP to the Spec of a low functional projection (FP), and (ii) fronting of the VoiceP remnant to the IP-field, pied-piping VoiceP-internal arguments (cf. Cole and Hermon 2008 on Toba Batak), as in (5).

(5)



Evidence for VoiceP-fronting comes from the surface order of VoiceP-internal elements and binding. As (6a,6b) show, frequency adverbs must precede the main verb clause-initially.

(6) a. **to?ölö** la-agö xö d^{r}a-Gusti
usually 3PL.RLS-stay DAT MUT.COLL-Gusti
'Usually they stay with Gusti's family.' (484)

b. **?asese** la-fake gorokoro ?ira-ina meföna
often 3PL.RLS-use MUT.scoop COLL-mother in.early.days
'In the early days, women often used scoops.' (485)

Assuming that frequency adverbs are located low in the verbal field (Jackendoff 1972, Cinque 1999, *i.a.*), the observation that such adverbs must surface clause-initially, preceding the main verb, indicates that the V-initial order is due to XP-movement—i.e. VoiceP-fronting. If such adverbs are located within the verbal field (i.e. within VoiceP), then those adverbs are predicted to be pied-piped under VoiceP-fronting, thus, surfacing clause-initially (see Chung 2005 for discussion on pied-piping tests).

Further evidence for VoiceP-fronting comes from binding facts. While Nias lacks dedicated reflexive anaphors, proforms can be ambiguous between a reflexive and pronominal interpretation. As (7a,7b) show, the 3SG proform may be co-referential with the (null) subject.

(7) a. ?i-bunu ja$_{i/j}$ ja?ia$_i$.
3SG.RLS-kill 3SG.MUT 3SG
'He killed him/himself.' (542)

b. ?i-bini-?o ja$_{i/j}$ *pro*$_i$
3SG.RLS-hide-TR MUT.3SG
'He hid him/himself.' (253)

I interpret the availability of a reflexive interpretation in (7a,7b) as further indicating that Nias' VOS order involves VoiceP-fronting. Assuming the objects in (7a,7b) remain *in situ* and front with VoiceP to SpecIP, the object and subject (in SpecFP) will not c-command each other. Thus, the pronouns can be co-indexed without a Condition B violation—i.e. allowing a reflexive interpretation.

3 A Closer Look at Nias Mutation

As Table 1 shows, mutation on lexical nouns is realized as either: (i) a prothetic [n] on vowel-initial stems; (ii) lenition on consonant-initial stems, where initial segments that are voiceless undergo

voicing and voiced obstruent segments undergo trilling.[2] Sonorant initial segments do not mutate.

unmutated	V	f	t	s	c[ʧ]	k	ʔ	b	d	m	n	l	r	d^r
mutated	n-V	v	d	z[ʤ]	z[ʤ]	g	g	ʙ	d^r	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1: Nias Mutation.

For core arguments, intransitive subjects and direct objects mutate to the exclusion of transitive subjects, which surface unmarked. As shown for intransitive clauses, in (8a) the unergative subject *iβania* ('her sister') surfaces with a prothetic nasal, i.e. *niβania*. In (8b) the initial [t] of unaccusative subject *tuhituhi* ('trivet stone') undergoes voicing, i.e. *duhituhi*.

(8) a. m-eʔe **n**iβa-nia
DYN-cry MUT.sibling-3SG.POSS
'Her sister is crying.' (118)

b. ma=asoʔa **d**uhituhi
PERF=fall MUT.trivet
'The trivet stone fell.' (559)

Turning to transitive clauses, in (9a) the object *sawi* undergoes lenition surfacing as *zawi* and in (9b) the object *bavi* undergoes trilling surfacing as *ʙavi*. Importantly, in both (9a, 9b) the transitive subjects, i.e. *Fasui* and *ʔama Gumi*, do not mutate.

(9) a. ma=i-uri **z**awi Fasui.
PERF=3SG.RLS-keep MUT.cattle Fasui
'Fasui kept cattle.' (366)

b. ʔi-a **ʙ**avi ʔama Gumi
3SG.RLS-eat MUT.pig father Gumi
'Father Gumi eats pig.' (D&B, 61)

In this respect, Nias' mutation pattern bears a resemblance to absolutive case patterns cross-linguistically. That is, intransitive subjects and objects are grouped to the exclusion of transitive subjects (Dixon 1994). For example, in Warlpiri intransitive subjects (10a) and objects (10b) are unmarked, while transitive subjects are ERG-marked with *-ngku* (10b) (Hale 1983).

(10) a. kurdu ka wanka-mi.
child.ABS PRS.IMPF speak-NPST
'The child is speaking.'

b. ngarrka-**ngku** ka wawirri panti-rni.
man-ERG PRS.IMPF kangaroo.ABS spear-NPST
'The man is spearing the kangaroo.'

In both Warlpiri and Nias absolutive arguments are morphologically distinguished from ergative arguments. The key difference is that while in Warlpiri ergatives are marked and absolutives are unmarked, in Nias absolutives are marked and ergatives are unmarked.

3.1 Mutation-as-Case Analysis

Given the surface similarity between Nias' mutation system and absolutive case patterns (e.g. Warlpiri), Nias is described as exhibiting a 'marked absolutive' case system, where mutation is the morphological realization of ABS and ERG is the unmarked case (Donohue and Brown 1999, *i.a.*).

Building on this description, in Baker 2015, Nias' mutation pattern is analyzed in terms of a specific parameterization of a dependent case algorithm, where ABS is the marked case assigned

[2] In Brown 2001, 2005 pronouns are described as participating in a mutation pattern (and following Brown 2001, 2005 are glossed as such in this paper). However, as discussed in Jenkins 2024, there is considerable evidence indicating that the type of alternation exhibited by pronouns in Nias is not the same as with lexical nouns, i.e. alternation of the initial segment of the stem. Rather the alternation between mutated and unmmutated pronouns is a matter of distinct pronoun types, namely, clitic and prosodically independent pronouns, respectively. Due to space limitations, I omit discussion of 'pronoun mutation' in this paper, restricting discussion to mutation on lexical nouns, and refer the reader to Jenkins 2024.

to an NP in environments where it does not c-command another NP within the case assignment domain (elsewhere the NP is not assigned case—i.e. it is unmarked). Concretely, this proposal is implemented in terms of the case algorithm in (11).[3]

(11) a. Assign NP_1 ABS, if there is no other NP_2 in the same dependent case domain as NP_1, such that, NP_1 c-commands NP_2;
b. Otherwise, NP_1 is ergative, i.e. unmarked. (Syntax)

(12) [ABS] → Mutation (PF)

On this approach, the case algorithm (i.e. (11)) assigns ABS (which is realized as mutation) to intransitive subjects and objects due to not c-commanding another NP inside the case assignment domain. Since transitive subjects c-command the object, no case is assigned and are unmarked.[4]

Importantly, as argued for in Baker 2015, the case algorithm in (11) closely parallels the algorithm that is operative in languages where ERG is the marked case, e.g. Warlpiri, as in (13). In both (13) and (11), the case algorithm is sensitive to the c-command relations between arguments. The key difference is that while in Nias the algorithm is parameterized to mark arguments that do not c-command other arguments, i.e. absolutives; in marked ergative languages, the algorithm is parameterized to mark arguments that do c-command another argument, i.e. ergatives.

(13) a. Assign NP_1 ERG only if, there is an NP_2 in the same case domain as NP_1, such that, NP_1 c-commands NP_2;
b. Otherwise, NP_1 is absolutive.

Thus, under the mutation-as-case approach, the surface pattern observed with mutated core arguments is derived in terms of an underlying absolutive case system paralleling other absolutive case systems, e.g. Warlpiri. On this analysis, the difference is that in Nias ABS is the marked case and in other languages ERG is.

3.2 Beyond Core Arguments

As was shown, for core arguments, mutation marks absolutive arguments and ergatives are unmarked. In this section, I show that this correlation between mutation and grammatical role breaks down for non-core arguments. That is, nominals that are not prototypical absolutive arguments are consistently marked with mutation. As shown in (14a,14b), oblique arguments quite generally surface with mutation. In (14a) the dative argument mutates; in (14b) the locative argument does.

(14) a. ʔi-beʔe gefe [xö **z**odʳöröu] ʔama Dali
3SG.RLS-give MUT.money DAT MUT.healer Ama Dali
'Ama Dali gave money to the village healer.' (269)
b. ʔu-fa-cibo zexula [ba **z**umo]
1SG.RLS-DO-throw MUT.coconut LOC MUT.well
'I threw the coconut into the well.' (229)

Further, genitive nominals consistently surface with mutation, as in (15a,15b).

(15) a. bulu **n**ohi
leaf MUT.coconut.tree
'Leaf of coconut tree' (348)

b. ʔono **ʙ**anua
child MUT.village
'Child of the village' (374)

In experiencer constructions, as in (16), both experiencer and stimulus are marked with mutation.

[3] In Baker 2015 IP is the case domain in Nias. However, see fn. 4 for additional complications on this.

[4] Note that there is an issue concerning when the algorithm in (11) applies in the derivation. Namely, if (5) is the final representation of the structure for transitive clauses in Nias, then (11) must apply early in the derivation, i.e. prior to VoiceP-fronting, such that the relevant c-command relation between arguments holds bleeding ABS-assignment to the subject DP.

(16) ʔa-taʔu [**в**aʔe]$_{EXP}$ [**n**ono matua]$_{STIM}$
ST-fear MUT.monkey MUT.child male
'The monkey is afraid of the boy.' (344)

In (14a-16) the nominals are marked with mutation despite not being prototypical ABS-marked arguments, i.e. not absolutive arguments. Specifically, obliques, genitives, and subject experiencers all surface with mutation (i.e. ABS on the case approach) instead of surfacing as a morphologically distinct form, e.g. with a distinct OBL, GEN (or unmarked ERG in (16)).

Further, the absence of mutation does not strictly correlate with prototypical ergativity. As (17) shows, clause-initial nominals quite generally do not surface with mutation— independent of their grammatical role. In (17) the object, i.e. a putative absolutive argument, is clause-initial and is unmarked. If mutation is the realization of ABS and the absence of mutation is the realization of ERG, then topicalization of an argument, as in (17), should not result in a change in case form.

(17) [siʔo höʔö] ma=i-taruʔ-ö ba danö
stick DIST.DEM PERF=3SG.RLS-plant-TR LOC MUT.ground
'That stick, he planted in the ground.' (361)

To summarize, the data in (14a-17) clearly show that Nias' mutation distribution does not pattern with the typical distribution of ABS-marking. As summarized in Table 2, while prototypical absolutive arguments (i.e. intransitive subjects and direct objects) surface with mutation, mutation also surfaces on arguments not typically associated with ABS-marking, i.e. obliques, genitives, and subject experiencers. Moreover, as (17) showed with the topicalized object, in certain contexts absolutive argumenthood and mutation dissociate.

CONTEXT	MUTATION
Intransitive subjects	✓
Direct objects	✓
Oblique arguments	✓
Genitive arguments	✓
Experiencer subjects	✓
Trans. subject	✗
Clause-initial nominals	✗

Table 2: MUTATION ENVIRONMENTS.

Given the distribution of mutated arguments in Nias, I argue that approaches that analyze mutation in terms of the realization of a 'marked absolutive' case system face several challenges. First, since mutation is visible on arguments that are not prototypical absolutive arguments (and, thus, typically ABS-marked), approaches that tie mutation to ABS must also stipulate a high degree of case syncretism in Nias. Specifically, given that mutation is visible on obliques (14a,14b) and genitives (26,15b), such approaches must posit that Nias' case system involves GEN=OBL=ABS case syncretism. Although case syncretism is attested in absolutive case systems ((Dixon 1994), *i.a.*), the key issue is that for Nias this requires positing, syncretism between all cases except for unmarked ERG. A second issue, specifically for the dependent case analysis in Baker 2015, is that in order for the dependent case algorithm in (11) to assign the marked case (i.e. mutation) to obliques, genitives, and subject experiencers, the analysis must posit, without independent motivation, that such arguments are located in distinct case assignment domains from other arguments in the clause in order to avoid these arguments from standing in c-command relations that would bleed case assignment.[5] A third issue concerns the typologically rarity of 'marked absolutive' case systems. Specifically, if Nias exhibits a marked ABS/ unmarked ERG case system, it would be the sole exception to the otherwise robust typological generalization that: in ergative-absolutive case systems, if there is an

[5]In Baker 2015 it is stipulated that obliques are in distinct case domains due to being located within a PP. However, in cases like subject experiencers, this requires positing covert XP-shells which close off such arguments from the clausal case domain.

unmarked case, ABS is unmarked (Dixon 1994, Deal 2014). Given the typologically exceptional status of a 'marked absolutive' case system and that Nias' mutation pattern does not clearly conform to the typical distribution of ABS case-marking, this is strong motivation for a reevaluation of analyzing Nias' mutation system in terms of an underlying absolutive case system.[6]

4 Mutation as a Regular Phonological Process

In this section, I propose an alternative approach to the mutation-as-case analysis. I conjecture that mutation is a regular phonological process that is regulated by the structural position that the nominal is spelled-out in at PF. In this respect, mutation does not correlate with grammatical role, i.e. case. Further, I show that this approach straightforwardly captures the distribution of mutated arguments.

First, as Table 1 showed, mutation occurs as either: (i) a prothetic [n] on vowel-initial stems; (ii) lenition on consonant-initial stems (realized as either voicing or trilling). I conjecture that both (i) and (ii) mutation types are due to a single underlying phonological process. Specifically, in mutation contexts the process in (18) is triggered where a nasal is inserted to the mutating nominal stem.[7]

(18) $\emptyset \rightarrow$ n / $\{M\}$_[ω

In contexts with a vowel-initial stem, (18) results in the stem surfacing with a prothetic [n] (19):[8]

(19) **Vowel mutation:** *ohi→nohi* 'coconut tree'
  a. /ohi/
  b. **n**ohi Output after *n*-insertion (18)

In contexts where the stem is consonant-initial, I propose that nasal insertion triggers lenition on the stem. When the initial segment is a voiced obstruent, the segment becomes sonorant (which is realized as trilling) (20a) and in contexts where the initial segment is voiceless, the segment undergoes voicing (20b).[9] Importantly, Nias disallows complex onsets, in contexts where such sequences are present the rule in (21) applies—i.e. deletion of the first C (Brown 2001).

(20) a. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{+CONS} \\ \text{-SONORANT} \\ \text{+VOICE} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow$ [+SONORANT] / [+NASAL]_

  b. $\begin{bmatrix} \text{+CONS} \\ \text{-SONORANT} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow$ [+VOICE] / [+NASAL]_

(21) ***Complex Onset:** C $\rightarrow \emptyset$ / _C

Subsequently, after the relevant lenition rule applies to the segment adjacent to [n] (i.e. (20a,20b)), [n] deletes, and the nominal surfaces in its mutated form. Derivations are sketched below in (22, 23).

(22) **Voicing Mutation:** *faxe→vaxe* 'rice'
  a. /faxe/

[6] A further issue arises specifically for the dependent case approach (i.e. Baker 2015). Assuming that Nias' putative 'marked absolutive' pattern is due to a parameterization of the case algorithm in (11), cf. (13), it is reasonable to expect to find other languages involving the same parameterization. Thus, the observation that no other languages (except potentially Nias) exhibit case patterns indicating such a parameter setting is highly unexpected.

[7] *M* is used a placeholder diacritic for the mutation triggering feature in (18).

[8] Note that in non-mutation environments vowel-initial nominals undergo ʔ-insertion to the initial segment to avoid an onsetless syllable, e.g. *amagu→ʔamagu*. Given that this process is regular and occurs on all elements (i.e. not only nominals), it is independent of the mutation processes under discussion. See Brown 2001.

[9] For exposition, I state Nias' mutation process in terms of SPE-style rules, however, nothing crucial hinges on this point.

b. nfaxe — *n*-insertion (18)
c. nvaxe — Voicing (20b)
d. **v**axe — CC resolution and output (21)

(23) **Trilling Mutation** *bavi*→*ʙavi* 'pig'

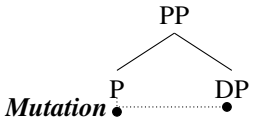
a. /bavi/
b. nbavi — *n*-insertion (18)
c. nʙavi — Trilling (20a)
d. **ʙ**avi — CC resolution and output (21)

Turning to the contexts where mutation occurs, as Table 2 summarizes, mutation occurs on all nominals except in contexts where the nominal is either an agentive transitive subject or surfaces in a clause-initial position, e.g. topicalization. Importantly, the factor common to all mutation contexts is that the mutating nominal surfaces in a position where it is immediately preceded by an element that is the realization of a head belonging to a core lexical category, i.e. P, N, V.[10] Thus, I propose that what underlies this observation is that mutation, i.e. the application of (18), is triggered in contexts where the following holds:

(24) If a DP is preceded by an overt lexical X^o in the same PF domain, then the DP mutates.

In the case of oblique arguments (14a,14b), which always mutate, these arguments always are preceded by a preposition (i.e. P) and, thus, (24) straightforwardly applies, as in (25). Similarly, for genitives (15a,15b), which always mutate, they are always preceded by another nominal, e.g. possessee. Assuming that these complex nominals instantiate the structure in (26), (24) applies to genitives. In the case of clause-initial nominals (17), which never undergo mutation, given that such elements occur on the clausal edge (presumably in SpecCP, as in (27) or a dedicated SpecTopP) and are not preceded by a lexical head, then (24) does not hold and mutation, i.e. (18), does not apply.

(25)



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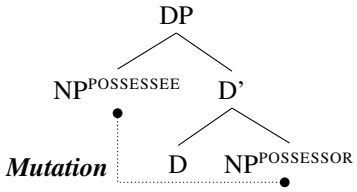

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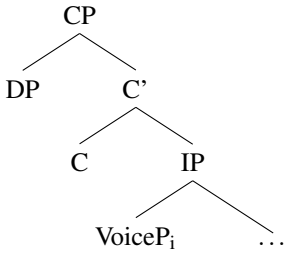
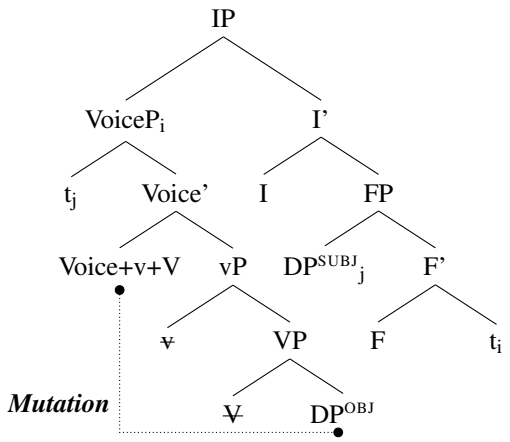


Consider the mutation patterns for core arguments of intransitive and transitive clauses. In Section 2, transitives (e.g. (9a,9b)) were argued to have the structure in (28), where the object DP is VoiceP-internal and is spelled-out V-adjacent. Thus, (24) holds and the object mutates. Meanwhile, the transitive subject is VoiceP-external in SpecFP. Following Newell 2009, Fenger 2020, *i.a.*, I adopt the assumption that PF domains correspond to syntactic phases and that phonological processes are restricted to occur between elements within a PF domain. I also adopt the assumption that VoiceP is a phase in Nias. Subsequently, the transitive subject is in a PF domain distinct from V (and the object DP) due to being in SpecFP. Thus, (24) does not hold and no mutation occurs. For intransitives, the key observation is that the subject always mutates (e.g. (8b,8a)). Given the hypothesis that mutation requires adjacency with a lexical head within a PF domain (i.e. (24)), I propose that the presence of mutation indicates that intransitive subjects are base-generated VoiceP-internally and remain within VoiceP (in contrast to transitive subjects), as in (29). Due to being VoiceP-internal, intransitive subjects are spelled-out V-adjacent in the VoiceP phase, and, thus, (24) holds and mutation occurs.

[10] I omit A^o due to evidence in Brown 2001, 2005 that suggests Nias lacks adjectives as a lexical category.

(28)



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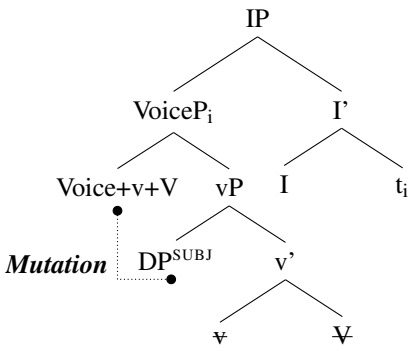
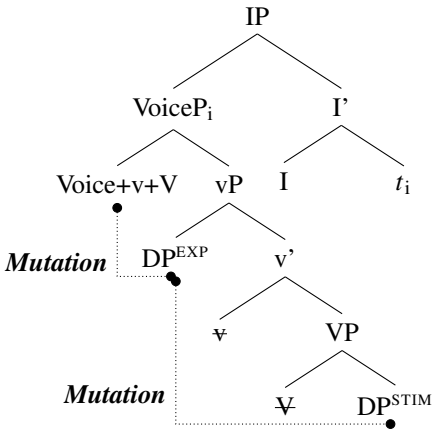


Thus, on the present proposal Nias' 'marked absolutive' mutation pattern is due to the interaction of a regular phonological process with an underlying syntactic difference regarding the structural position of arguments. Intransitive subjects are adjacent to a lexical head in VoiceP phase and, thus, mutate; transitive subjects are outside of the VoiceP phase and, thus, in a distinct domain from a triggering head and do not.

Consider now experiencers, as in (16), which are the exception to the generalization that transitive subjects do not mutate. I suggest that experiencers are base-generated lower than agentive transitive subjects (cf. Belletti and Rizzi 1988) and are VoiceP-internal, as in (30). Since the experiencer is spelled-out V-adjacent, the nominal mutates. Further, since the stimulus is base-generated below the experiencer, the stimulus is adjacent to the experiencer at PF and will mutate.

(30)



Interestingly, the present proposal, where transitive and intransitive subjects occupy distinct structural positions, explains an interpretive contrastive observed in Nias. As (31a), the Nias quantificational adverb *ʔoi*, can associate with arguments deriving a quantificational interpretation. Given that *ʔoi* must scope below negation, as in (31a), I interpret this as indicating *ʔoi* adjoins low in the clause, i.e. VoiceP, and can associate with an argument in its scope. As (31b) shows, intransitive subjects can associate with the quantificational adverb. But in transitive clauses (31c), while objects can associate with *ʔoi*, transitive subjects cannot.

(31) a. löna ʔoi man-a ʔira
NEG all IMPV-eat MUT.3PL
'Not all of them ate.'/ *'None of them ate.' (493)

b. ʔoi to-kia dʳaga
all RES-shock MUT.1P.EXCL

'We all were shocked.' (493)

c. ʔoi d^{r}a-mbe v-a-nolo-ra xö d^{r}a-ono
all 3PL.IRR-give MUT.NMLZ-IMPV-help DAT MUT.COL-child
'They will give all of their help to the children./*All of them will give help. . . .' (492)

I suggest that this interpretative split between subjects further supports a difference in structural positions. Given that intransitive subjects can associate with *ʔoi* (and, thus, must be structurally lower than VoiceP-adjoining *ʔoi*, this further supports intransitive subjects being VoiceP-internal. Conversely, since transitive subjects cannot associate with *ʔoi*, this indicates that such arguments are structurally superior to *ʔoi*—i.e. VoiceP-external in SpecFP.[11]

5 Conclusion

This paper examined mutation in Nias and argued for a reevaluation of characterizing mutation as the realization of ABS case (as in Donohue and Brown 1999, Brown 2001, 2005, Baker 2015). I showed that the distribution of mutation on core and non-core arguments provides strong evidence that mutation is not the realization of ABS case. Moreover, I showed that analyses which aim to situate mutation in terms of case realization (i.e. Baker 2015) face several challenges, both from a theoretical and typological standpoint. Instead, I propose an alternative analysis of Nias' mutation system that does not face these challenges. On this proposal, mutation is a regular PF process, where its distribution is regulated by the structural position of nominals at PF. Further, I argued that the putative 'marked absolutive' mutation pattern observed with core arguments is due to the interaction of this regular PF process with independent syntactic factors that determine the structural position of nominals at PF. On this new analysis Nias' mutation system can be explained in a theoretically parsimonious way.

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[11] Interestingly, subject experiencers can associate with *ʔoi* (unlike agentive transitive subjects), as in (i.). Thus, further confirming that experiencers are VoiceP-internal.

i. ʔoi ʔomasi d^{r}aga nasu
all like MUT.1P.EXCL MUT.dog
'We all like dogs.' (491)

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