

### (Anti-)locality in Samoan nominalizations

**Introduction.** Deverbal nominalizations in many languages have been shown to exhibit an unaccusativity requirement, according to which the nominalizer *n* can only recategorize unaccusative verbal structures, i.e. unaccusatives and passives (Alexiadou 2017, 2001, Imanishi 2014, Salanova 2007). As a result, only internal arguments can be base-generated in the verbal domain, whereas external arguments of unergative and active transitive verbs must be base-generated in the nominal domain or as prepositional *by*-phrases. This restriction has been attributed to the selectional properties of *n* (Bruening 2013).

**Proposal.** Based on novel data from Samoan (Polynesian, Austronesian) which shows that the presence of aspectual and negative particle bleeds the unaccusativity requirement on nominalizations, we explore an alternative analysis that derives the unaccusativity requirement from (anti-)locality constraints on movement and case licensing. We propose that in the absence of T, DP arguments must move into the nominal domain to be visible for structural genitive case assignment. For external arguments, however, this movement is too short, violating Spec-to-Spec anti-locality (Bondarenko & Davis 2024, Deal 2019, Erlewine 2016), banning DP arguments from being merged in Spec, VoiceP in nominalizations.

**The unaccusativity requirement.** Cross-linguistically, deverbal nominalizations restrict how external arguments of nominalized verbs can be introduced and interpreted: External arguments of nominalized transitive verbs cannot be merged as genitive-marked DPs but only as passive *by*-phrase (1a) (Bruening 2013, Alexiadou 2001). In addition, if external arguments are marked by genitive case, they are interpreted as possessors instead of event participants (1b) (Alexiadou 2001), as illustrated for Greek below. This contrasts with internal arguments that take genitive case and are interpreted as event participants. Consequently, nominalizations have been argued to be generally unaccusative (2).

- (1) a. *i katastrofi tis polis apo tus varvarus* b. *i (\*siniditi) ergasia tu ipalilu*  
ART destruction ART city.GEN by ARTbarbarians ART conscious work ART employee.GEN  
'the destruction of the city by the barbarians' 'the (\*conscious) work of the employees'  
(Alexiadou 2001: 78) (Alexiadou 2001: 41)

The unaccusative restriction on nominalizations has been linked to the selectional properties of the nominalizer *n*, which selects only for VoiceP-complements with an empty (or non-DP) specifier (Bruening 2013, cf. Imanishi 2020, Alexiadou 2017), though this requirement may be parametrized (Imanishi 2020).

#### (2) THE UNACCUSATIVE REQUIREMENT ON NOMINALIZATIONS

Nominalized verbs must lack an external argument. (Imanishi 2020: 175)

**Samoan nominalizations.** Hopperdietzel and Alexiadou (2024, 2022) demonstrate that Samoan bare nominalizations obey the unaccusativity requirement: In the verbal domain, Samoan exhibits an ergative alignment with external arguments of transitive verbs marked by the preposition *e* (3a) (cf. Polinsky 2016, Mosel 1985).

- (3) a. *Sā solo e Malia le laulau* b. *Sā galue Malia* c. *Sā pa'ū Malia*  
PST wipe ERG Mary ART table.ABS PST work Mary.ABS PST fall Mary.ABS  
'Mary wiped the table.' 'Mary worked.' 'Mary fell.'

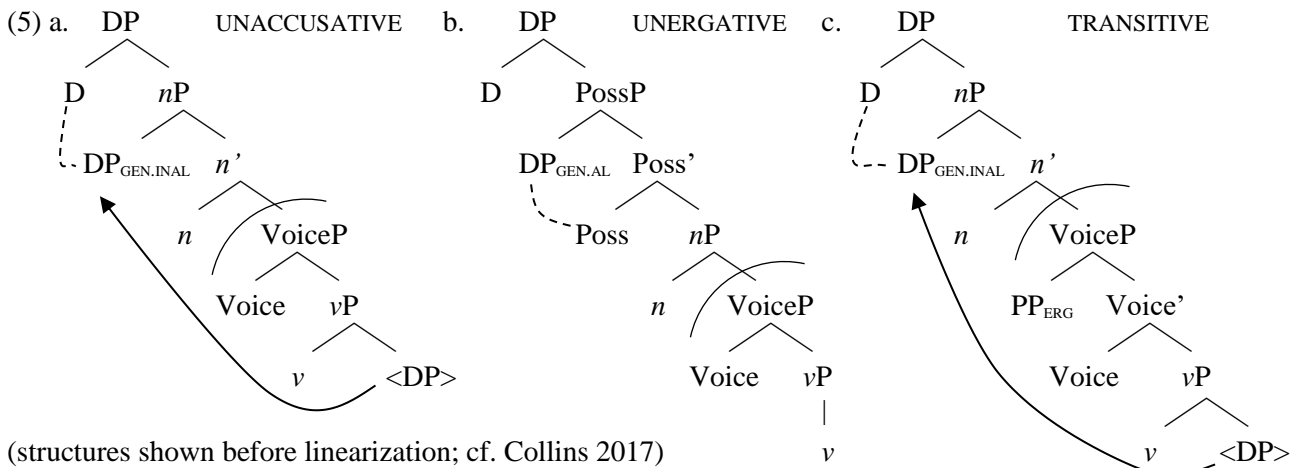
In nominalizations, Samoan shows a tripartite/inactive alignment with external arguments of nominalized transitive verbs maintaining their prepositional ergative case (2a) (Mosel 1992). In contrast, external arguments of nominalized unergative verbs are marked by alienable genitive case *a* (2b) and internal arguments, including those of nominalized unaccusative verbs, by inalienable genitive case *o* (3a/c).

- (3) a. *le solo e Malia o le laulau* b. *le galue a Malia* c. *le pa'ū o Malia*  
ART wipe ERGMary GEN.INAL ART table ART work GEN.AL Mary ARTfall GEN.INAL Mary  
'the wiping of the table by Mary' lit.: 'the working of Mary' 'the falling of Mary'

**Voice-under-*n*.** The absence of absolutive marking indicates the absence of T, while the presence of directional particles (e.g. directive *atu*) and Voice morphology (e.g. ergativizing *-(C)ia* and causativizing *fa'a-*) indicates that the verbal complement is of the size of VoiceP (4a) (cf. Hopperdietzel 2020, Tollan 2018, Collins 2017). The availability of various types of demonstratives (e.g. specific *le* and diminutive *si*) also suggests that bare nominalizations are nominalized by *n* (4b) (and not D; cf. Alexiadou 2020, Iordăchăia 2020).

- (4) a. *le fa'a-mamā e Malia o le laulau* b. *si solo-solo o le laulau*  
ART CAUS-clean ERG Mary GEN.INAL ARTtable.ABS ART.DIM RED~wipe GEN.INAL ART table  
'the cleaning of the table by Mary' 'a gentle wiping of the table'

**Split-alienability.** Adopting a structural analysis of split (in)alienability (Myler 2016, Alexiadou 2003), the authors argue that only unergative subjects must be introduced in the nominal domain (5b), where they receive inherent alienable possessive case from Poss to satisfy the unaccusativity requirement (cf. Tyler 2021 on inherent alienable dative case in Choctaw). Internal arguments instead can be licensed by structural inalienable genitive case from D, by moving into its local domain across the phase boundary established by *n*, i.e. to Spec, *n*P (5a/c). Being akin to passive *by*-phrases in languages like Greek, prepositional ergative is not affected (5c).



(structures shown before linearization; cf. Collins 2017)

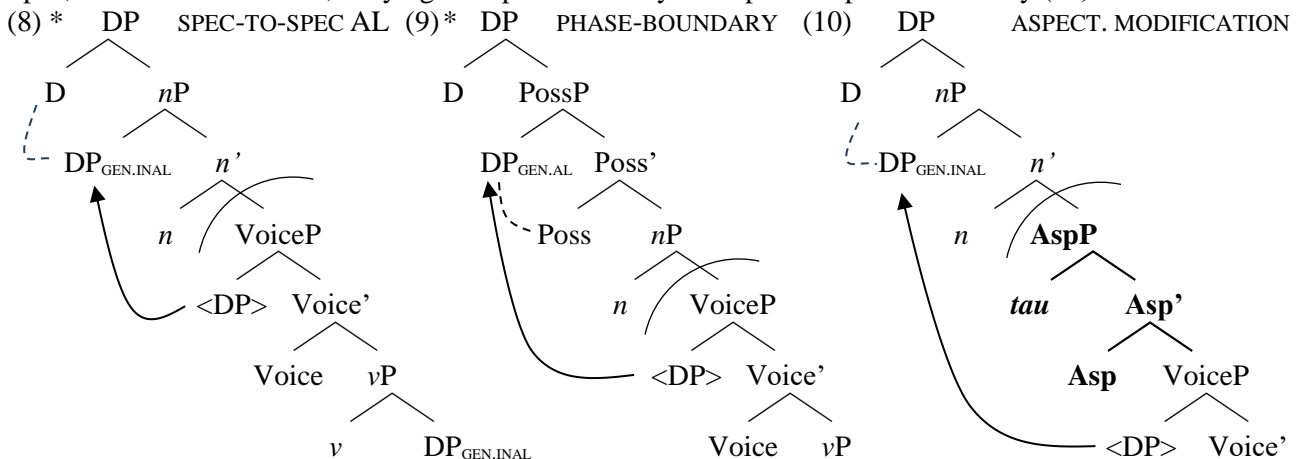
**Aspect in nominalizations.** In this talk, we present novel fieldwork data, which indicates that the presence of aspectual modifiers like *tau* ‘almost’, the negative particle *lē* (6a), and unaccusative restructuring verbs like *fia* ‘want’ (6b) cancels the unaccusativity requirement. As a result, external arguments of unergative verbs take inalienable genitive case, i.e. move from the verbal domain to Spec, *nP* in the nominal domain (10).

- (6) a. *le {lē / tau} galue {o / \*a} Malia*      b. *le fia galue {o / \*a} Malia*  
 ART NEG almost work GEN.INAL GEN.AL Mary      ART want work GEN.INAL GEN.AL Mary  
 lit.: ‘the {almost/not} working of Mary’      lit.: ‘the wanting to work of Mary’

**Spec-to-Spec Anti-locality.** The observation that additional structure feeds phrasal movement that is otherwise ungrammatical has been recently argued to follow from locality constraints (Bondarenko & Davis 2024, Deal 2019, Erlewine 2016). Accordingly, Spec-to-Spec anti-locality bans the movement of a phrasal constituent ZP from the specifier of XP to the specifier of another YP, if YP immediately dominates XP (7).

- (7) SPEC-TO-SPEC ANTI-LOCALITY:  $[_{YP} *ZP_1 Y [_{XP} <ZP_1> X [...]]]$  (Bondarenko & Davis 2024: 4)

**(Anti-)locality in nominalizations.** As in nominalizations, VoiceP-internal arguments must move to Spec, *nP* to be visible for genitive case assignment by D, the extraction of external arguments from Spec, VoiceP violates Spec-to-Spec anti-locality, as *nP* immediately dominates VoiceP (8). In addition, the phase boundary introduced by *n* rules out a movement of external arguments to Spec, PossP position, as external arguments are not invisible for Poss (9). As a result, external arguments can receive the agent theta role in Spec, VoiceP and must always be interpreted as true possessors. In contrast, if an additional aspectual layer, negation, or a restructuring verb intervenes in between VoiceP and *nP* (cf. Collins 2017), movement of external arguments to Spec, *nP* becomes available, obeying both phasal locality and Spec-to-Spec anti-locality (10).



We can therefore derive the unaccusativity requirement naturally from more general (anti-)locality constraints on syntactic structure building, without attributing it to selectional restrictions of the nominalizer *n*.

**Outlook.** In our talk, we sketch out further implications for nominalizations in other Polynesian languages. We demonstrate that nominalizations in Niuean and Māori obey the unaccusativity requirement on nominalizations (Massam 2020, Pearce 1997), despite showing different case alignment types (morph./synt. ergativity vs. accusative; cf. Tollan & Clemens 2022), suggesting that this requirement holds across Polynesian.

**Sel. References.** Alexiadou. 2001. *Functional structure in nominals*. OUP. • Davis&Bondarenko. 2024. Cross-clausal scrambling & subject case in Balkar. *Syntax*. • Bruening. 2013. *By-phrases in passives & nominal*. *Syntax*. • Hopperdietzel&Alexiadou. 2022. Tripartite case in Samoan nominalizations. *Proc NELS 53*. • Myler 2016. *Building & interpreting sentences*. MIT Press. • Polinsky. 2016. *Deconstructing ergativity*. OUP.