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Volume II, Number 2
July-September 1979

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SOME DISCOURSE SOURCES OF ERGATIVITY¹

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There can be little doubt that a possible, and perhaps frequent, historical source for ergativity is the extension and reanalysis of the passive (Hohepa 1969; Chung 1976, 1977; Anderson 1977; Comrie 1978). By this theory, the normal, discourse-unmarked 'canonical' form of the transitive sentence would be one corresponding formally to the passive, while the active would be reserved for some special discourse function. The frequency of the passive would be greater than that of the active transitive in discourse, and eventually the agent of the passive would be reanalyzed as subject. The passive-to-ergative reanalysis can thus be seen as a case of disparity between semantic relations and grammatical relations being resolved through a readjustment: the underlying subject, surface oblique agent becomes surface subject, and the underlying object, surface derived subject, 'once again' becomes the surface object. The case-marking of the NP's is now an ergative one, and the passive marker of the verb may be either lost, or else retained as a transitive morpheme.

It is apparent, however, that the motivation for this change must be sought in some special use of the passive in the parole of the society. If we accept Andersen's view of change (1972), the passive-to-ergative reanalysis must be seen as having already been accomplished at the time that the ergative (i.e., the oblique agent) begins to take on subject properties. Consequently the phrase and clause level accounts of the spread of these subject properties, and other morpho-syntactic changes associated with ergativity, cannot (and have never been seriously held to) account for the change, but only document its implementation (cf. Chung 1977). If we are to explain the change from an accusative to an ergative type of sentence structure, we must go beyond the level of the phrase or clause and look at the typical discourse function of transitive clauses in the language families under discussion.

In this paper, I examine discourse uses of the passive in three western Austronesian languages, Malay (colloquial and classical), Old Javanese, and Tagalog. I draw a typological parallel from Eskimo for the discourse function. I then make some remarks about the etymology of passive markers in Austronesian. My objective is to argue for a discourse function of the passive in this language group which allows a rather natural explanation of its textual frequency, and thus to place the synchronic basis for the presumed passive-to-ergative shift in a realistic context, i.e., a discourse context. I thus wish to emphasize the importance of dealing not solely with sentences and phrase-level data, but also with discourse functions, in describing and explaining syntactic changes. Although radical changes of the accusative-to-ergative kind can be shown to spread through syntax, the catalyst for this change, and hence its ultimate explanation, must be sought in a much wider linguistic context.

1.1 The starting point for a discourse explanation of the change from accusative to ergative via passive has been rightly sought in the fact that there is a predilection for the passive type of sentence in a number of documented Austronesian languages which can otherwise be described as accusative, in that the agent of the passive lacks criterial subject properties. In Malay, for example, transitive clauses which in Western languages would have to be rendered in the active are very often formulated as passives. The type of transitive clause which appears most frequently as a passive is that in which the event is perfective, that is, it is viewed from its end-point, and in which the notional object (referred to here as 0) is definite. The following example is from Perak Malay:

- A. Mana rumbu kamu?
 "Where is your fish-trap?"
- B. Dekor pulor tu.
 "At the other end of the island."
- A. Ha, idak-ka lagi dēsēbrang tu?
 "Oh, it's not at the other side of the river any more?"
- B. Udah saya ubah^P kēm̄arin.
 cmplt I move yesterday
 "[No], I moved it yesterday."

Brown 1956: 120

(The superscripts ^a, ^P will be used in this paper to indicate active and passive verb forms in cited passages.) The last sentence of this exchange, that of B, is formulated as a passive: the 1st person pronoun saya appears as a proclitic to the verb ubah, and the verb lacks the active prefix meng- or its dialectal equivalent. The completive adverb udah is displaced from its position adjacent to the verb by the proclitic pronoun.

The active, on the other hand, is used as a means of backgrounding events, and is especially common when the 0 is indefinite and when the event is presented as on-going or repeated:

Ini sambil-sambil mērapeh^a, sambil-sambil mēnyulam^a.

"It's a matter of pulling out dead plants and planting fresh ones the whole time."

Brown 1956: 107.

The chief grammatical signal of the active is, for most verbs, the presence of a nasal prefix meN- on the verb stem, as here with the verbs rapeh and sulam (nasal form -nyulam). The 0's, being implicit in the verb, are indefinite, and the adverbials sambil-sambil "the whole time" emphasize the repeated and on-going nature of the activity. In the active, the subject precedes any auxiliaries, and pronouns are never cliticized to the verb. If there is a special clitic form of the pronoun, therefore, this form is found only in the passive.

In discourse, the active clause type serves to introduce a series of events, i.e., as a stage-setting device. In the following passage, which is again from Perak Malay, a speaker is narrating a series of events which occurred the previous night. In response to his neighbor's question 'What was all the noise about last night? What happened?', he begins his story with a statement which summarizes the chief event and introduces the other participant (indefinite NP):

Orang nyolok^a dari bawah romah ngan
man thrust from beneath house with

punton api nyampang tak kěna saya.
brand fire almost not get me

"A man thrust up from under the house with a
fire-brand and all but got me!"

Brown 1956: 96.

After this introductory statement, the actual events of the evening are narrated in the passive:

Saya děngor-ti^P děgub-děgub bunyi-nya
I hear rattling noise its
kě-lantai. Atta saya kěleh^P merah aja
at floor then I saw red just
api. Apa-ta lagi? Saya ambek^P lěmbin,
fire What ? more I take spear
saya tujuh-ti^P kě-bawah romah dari
I thrust downward house through
chělah lantai. Lělama saya děngor^P
space floor soon I hear
běgědudub bunyi lari-nya.
scuttling noise running his

"I heard the brand rattling against the floor,
and then I saw the red of the fire. What
else could I do? I took a spear and I thrust
down with it through the floor. Soon I heard
him scuttling off."

Brown 1956: 96.

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In this dialect the enclitic particle -ti (Standard Malay -lah) singles out pivotal events for special prominence, cf. Hopper 1978. It will be noticed that although there is a correlation between the definiteness of the NP's (subject and object) and the appearance of active and passive, this correlation is not absolute. In the clause *saya ambek lěmbin* "I took a spear", the O is translated as an indefinite in English, but the structure in Malay is passive because a serial event is being narrated, i.e. the clause is foregrounded. In general, however, foregrounding is tied very closely to the definiteness of the O, and in fact most of the new material in the event line is located in the verb. When there is a focus on the agent or the object, as when, for example, a new participant is being introduced, we find the active clause:

Běgini weh. Sě-Manap ngurupkan^a ringgit
 it's like this. Manap change dollar

pěda sě-Amin. udah lima ěnam hari.
 with Amin ago five six days

"It's like this. Manap changed a dollar with Amin, five or six days ago."

Brown 1956: 110.

This expository clause, which explains and summarizes rather than narrates, is followed by the actual narrative, told in the passive:

Olah-nya baru tadi děpěntin^p dě-sě-Amin-nya
 apparently just now test by-Amin -him

ringgit itu...
 dollar the

"Apparently it was only just now that Amin tested the dollar..."

Brown 1956: 110.

A consistent semantic or syntactic function of the passive in Malay is virtually impossible to specify, but the discourse function is quite consistent in all styles of the language: The passive is the normal clause type found when transitive clauses are important serial events in the discourse. It correlates pragmatically with NP participants who are known entities, i.e., are coded as definite or presumed to be known to the hearer. The active clause type is found when the clause is in a less prominent position in the discourse--in the introduction, or when it otherwise serves to manoeuvre participants around rather than narrate their actions.

1.2 This contrast between active and passive in discourse is not restricted to colloquial Malay, but is found also in the classical language of the Hikayat ('sagas'). Thus in the Hikayat Hang Tuah, dating from the 16th century or earlier, an event with a 'new' Object is often coded in the active, while the subsequent events which include this NP are in the passive:

Maka saudagar itu pun mēngambil^a nujum-nya.
 then merchant the topic took horoscope-his

Maka di-lihat-nya^p dalam nujum-nya, sunggoh
 then pass. see he into horoscope-his truly

saperti kata anak raja ini...
 as word son king this

"The merchant took his horoscope, and he saw
 in his horoscope truly just as this prince
 had said..."

Kassim Ahman, ed., 1966: 72.

The effect is again to suggest that the first of these actions is preparatory, and does not actually narrate, but serves the function of bringing the horoscope on-stage so that in a subsequent clause it can be referred to as already given.

1.3 I move now to Old Javanese, a language which is closely related to Malay. The Old Javanese equivalent of the Malay passive is often called 'object-focus' (cf. Zurbuchen 1976: 89 for a summary of the forms involved). It is a construction in which the (usually definite) O is converted into the topic of the clause, and this conversion is recorded by an affix on the verb. In the following passage, superscripts ^o ^a mark verbs as object-focus or actor-focus respectively. The passage is from the collection of fables Tantri Kamandaka (approximately 1200 A.D.).

Ana sira sang brāhmana, datēng Pātāla,
 was he a-certain brahman coming Patala,

sang Dwiješwara ngaranira, masih ta
 he Dwijeswara name-his loving emph.

sireng sarwa satwa-satwa, karuṇa
 he-to all creatures compassionate

sira. Mahas^a ta sire ring giri
 he went emph. he to mountains

madewāśraya; mamanggih^a ta sira
 ask-help-of-gods found emph. he

yuyu ri śikharaning parwata, si
 crab at summit-of mountain art.

- -

Aṣṭapāda ngaranya. Sinambut^o ikang yuyu de
 Aṣṭapāda name-its took that crab agt.
 sang brāhmana, inēmban^o ing wēdihanira,
 the brahman carried in clothing-his
 tinorira^o prānāntaka.
 he saw nearly-dead

"There was a brahman from Patala, Dwijeswara his name. He was loving toward all creatures, and compassionate. He went into the mountains to request a boon from the gods. At the top of the mountain, he found a crab by the name of Astapada (Eightfoot). The brahman took the crab and carried it in his clothing, for he realized it was almost dead."

Zurbuchen 1976: 32-33.
 Translation slightly adapted.

As in Malay, the active verb forms (or 'actor-focus' verbs) are characteristically found in introductory sequences. More consistently than in Malay, perhaps, there is a correlation between object-focus clauses and definiteness of 0; the final clause of the passage cited, for example, is in the object-focus form even though it is backgrounded, because its 0 is referential. The discourse-functional division of labor between the two types of focus is, however, closely similar to that in Malay--the actor-focus (active) clause introduces new participants for subsequent deployment, the object-focus (passive) clause narrates what happens to these participants in the body of the discourse.

1.4 As a final example from the western Austronesian languages, Tagalog shows a very similar alignment of morphosyntactic structure with discourse function. The following (from a text recorded and published by Bloomfield (1917)) illustrates this:

Isa ng usa naginginain sa gubat ay
 a l. deer be-grazing in forest th.
 nakatagpo^a isa ng suso' na gumagapang^a
 chanced-to-meet a l. snail that crept
 sa dahon nang buho'. Ang usa ay naghinto^a
 on leaf of bamboo the deer the. ceased
 nang panginginain at pinagmasdan^o nya
 the grazing and watched he
 ang mabagal na paggapang nang suso'.
 the slow creeping of-the snail

- -

Makaraan ang ila sandali' ay sinabi^o nya
 went-by art. some moments th. said he
 sa suso^t: ...
 to-the snail:

"A deer, grazing in the forest, came upon a snail that was creeping over the leaf of a bamboo plant. The deer ceased from his grazing and watched the slow creeping of the snail. When a few moments had passed, he said: ...

Bloomfield 1917: 18-19.

(The abbreviation l. stands for a 'linking' morpheme, and th. is a particle which I will call a 'thematizer'.) As in Old Javanese, agent-focus forms are used to set the scene and to introduce new participants. Especially interesting here is the switch from A-focus to O-focus in mid-sentence when the deer looks up from his grazing and watches the snail. In general, however, there is a correlation between definiteness of O and object-focusing. Like the Malay passive, Tagalog object-focus is characteristically used to narrate sequential events which are presented as completed and in chronological succession. And like the Malay passive, the actor-focus clause type is found when events are either incomplete or in some sense preparatory. I will now move on to the next level of explanation, that of linking the function of the object-focus construction to its specific textual frequency in this language group.

2.00 This question is inseparable from the wider question of why it is that 'O-focus' (or 'passive') comes to have this narrative and other discourse function. We may begin by noting that in order for an NP to be 'focused' it must in some sense be an identified entity. It must in other words be 'referential', a term with a slightly wider application than 'definite' in that referential entities may be indefinite provided they are specific. Thus Bloomfield (1917: 154) not only points out that actor-focus verbs are interpreted as having indefinite O's, e.g. in

Pumutol^a siya nang kahoy
 cut agt. art. wood

"He cut some wood."

Pinutol^o niya ang kahoy
 cut agt. art. wood

"He cut the wood."

but also states explicitly that provided the O is identified it will become the topic, even if it is 'indefinite':

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"Even elements which we should look upon as somewhat indefinite are preferred as subjects to an actor: Kinuha nya ang isa ng aklat Was-taken (direct passive [=object-focus PJH]) by-him a book (subject), i.e. he took a (certain) book (he knew, or I know which one or what kind)."

Bloomfield: 1917, 154.

Continuing to use the older terminology active (for actor-focus) and passive (for object-focus), Bloomfield goes on to make the inevitable comparison between the 'active' and the intransitive, showing clearly that the vagueness of the 0 in actor-focus clauses brings it both formally and semantically close to clauses which lack an 0 altogether:

"The active construction is thus confined to instances in which the object-ideas other than the actor are entirely vague and undetermined or lacking: Umalis sya "He went away". Sya y kumuha nang aklat "He took a book" (no matter to him or to me which one or what kind). Sumusulat sya nang liham "He is writing a letter, letters". Sya y pumutol nang kahoy "He cut some wood." Kumain sya nang kanin "He ate some boiled rice.""

Bloomfield: 1917, 155.

The verb coding of actor-focus clauses in Tagalog is, as can be seen, the same whether the clause is transitive or intransitive, and this point is crucial for the discussion which follows. The truly transitive clause is the object-focus clause, and it is this clause type which possesses the greater number of morphosyntactic and semantic features which Thompson and myself have identified as being characteristic of high transitivity (Hopper and Thompson 1980): referentiality of 0, perfectivity of aspect, effectedness of 0 by the action of the verb. (Others of the transitivity properties are discussed in the same article.)

It thus seems that in Tagalog, and presumably in this group of Austronesian as a whole, object-focus has two closely interrelated functions: 1) to indicate discourse aspect, i.e. the discourse-imposed interpretation of an event as a completed entity, and 2) to indicate the referentiality of the object of the verb. To this may be added the comment that a discourse view of these two facets is essential. Events which may in some concrete (semantic?) sense be "completed" may yet be presented as not completed in terms of the discourse. For example, events which sum up a series of events, or which are introduced as a

prelude to other events, or to bring new participants on-stage, or which serve only to highlight other events, may not be provided with a psychological endpoint, since the question of whether they are completed or not is irrelevant to the discourse.

2.1 It is instructive to compare this situation in western Austronesian with that in a presumed ergative language, Eskimo. Ivan Kalmar has provided us with a description of the relationship between discourse and case-marking in this language in his paper of 1979. Like most ergative languages, the variety of Eskimo described by Kalmar has two main constructions for clauses having a notional A and O ("transitive" clauses). Typically, the constructions involve case-marking on the NP's and the coding of participants in the verb:

1) Ergative Construction.

Agent NP:	Ergative
Object NP:	Absolute
Verb:	Codes A and O

2) Antipassive Construction

Agent NP:	Absolutive
Object NP:	Oblique
Verb:	Codes A only

If we compare Eskimo and Tagalog for the circumstances under which O is coded (vs. not coded) in the verb, we must equate the Tagalog object-focus construction with the Eskimo ergative, and the Tagalog actor-focus construction with the Eskimo antipassive. In Tagalog the O is marked in the verb only when it is "in focus" (i.e. is referential-topic); when O is not "in focus", as we have seen, the verb behaves as if the O did not exist, and codes the Agent instead.

What is especially remarkable, however, is the similarity between the discourse functions of the Eskimo ergative and the Tagalog object-focus; and also between the Eskimo anti-passive and the Tagalog actor-focus. Kalmar shows how the anti-passive in Eskimo has an affinity with introductory events in a narrative in which new participants are being introduced. Conversely, the ergative is used for the narration of the on-going events themselves, and is found less often in the first few sentences of a discourse. Furthermore, the ergative signals referentiality of the O, while antipassive signals indefiniteness of the O.

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Of especial interest are Kalmar's memoranda concerning the elicitation of ergative as opposed to antipassive sentences from informants. In out-of-the-blue contexts, the 'normal' sentence-type elicited for transitive clauses was the anti-passive. But when both participants in the transitive clause were known and familiar entities, such as members of the informant's own family, the ergative would be elicited. Thus when a speaker of this language uses the ergative construction, he is signalling, among other things, that the object of the verb is an entity in the familiar environment ("in the discourse registry"); this object is then encoded in the verb, which is therefore in a transitive form. But when the verb's object is presented as something unfamiliar, then the verb is coded intransitively, without an object-marking affix, and the clause has the antipassive structure.

It follows that what is regarded as 'definite' and 'indefinite' must be determined from inside the culture, not outside it. We all recognize that certain participants in a discourse, even though they may be newly introduced, are always presented as if they were known; obvious examples are 'sun' and 'moon'. But frequently other entities are coded as definite even though they are just appearing on the scene. Thus in Eskimo features of the arctic landscape are treated as givens, i.e. as part of the discourse registry (Kalmar 1979: 127). This codability is not always predictable to an outsider. It happens, for example, that in many societies certain animals which are traditional antagonists are habitually referred to by nicknames; in the Perak Malay conversations recorded by Brown (1956: 107), the wild pig who tramples down the rice-field is called Tok Pandak Siku 'Old Short-Elbows', and the rat is referred to as Ekur Panjang 'Old Long-Tail'. (One thinks also of the recurrent Indo-European euphemisms for "bear": Hive-tearer, honey-eater, brown one.³) These and comparable ways of 'definitizing' features of the environment are probably typical of traditional societies, and it seems reasonable to suppose that in less complex cultures in which technology and mass communication are absent, a much greater proportion of the experiential universe of the language user will be codable as definite. Consequently a type of construction in which the referentiality of the object of the verb is a central feature will be that much more frequent.

3.00 In this section I shall discuss the morphological history of the passive/object focus construction in Malay.

3.1 In Modern Malay (and Indonesian) the passive has the following forms. In the 3rd person, the agent is indexed in the verb stem by the prefix di-; a pronominal agent is attached enclitically to the stem, and a full noun has an agentive preposition, which is oleh in the standard language. Example sentences:

Baju itu di-cuci oleh Fatima "Fatima washed the shirt"

Baju itu di-cuci-nya "She washed the shirt"

The word order here is in imitation of that of the Western passive; in narrative it is more common for the verb to precede the object:

Maka di-cuci-nya baju itu
"Then she washed the shirt."

Olah-nya baru tadi dēpeñtin
apparently only just-now tested

dē-sē-Amin-nya ringgit itu
by Amin dollar the

"Apparently it was only just now that
Amin tested the dollar"

(Perak Malay, from Brown 1956: 110)

In the latter example, the dialect has dē- for di and the agentive preposition (Standard Malay oleh) is also dē-.

The 1st and 2nd person pronominal agents present a slightly more complex picture, owing to the fact that some of these pronouns are etymologically nouns. Of the originally pronominal set, two exist in both clitic and full forms, and it is these which I will discuss. The 1st person has aku/ku "I", and the 2nd person has engkau/kau "thou":

Baju itu ku-cuci "I washed the shirt"

Baju itu kau-cuci "You washed the shirt"

Both of these sentences are possible also with the verb-initial word order, viz.

Ku-cuci baju itu

Kau-cuci baju itu.

3.2 It will be noticed that there is a positional similarity between the 1st/2nd proclitic pronouns and the di- prefix of the passive, in that they are prefixed to the verb stem, whilst the 3rd person pronoun is suffixed. The possibility therefore exists that the di- prefix of the passive was once itself a 3rd person pronoun. The non-clitic forms of this pronoun are indeed ia and dia, which as nominative pronouns do in fact alternate freely, so that a development dia-cuci > di-cuci parallel to aku-cuci > ku-cuci seems quite plausible. The passive morphology in Malay would then be seen as having its origins perhaps in an unspecified subject construction ("one washes the shirt" ⇒ "the shirt is washed [by someone unspecified]"). Such an explanation, although typologically compelling, runs counter to what is known about the earlier stages of the forms involved.

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Older forms of a language which is evidently very close to the ancestor of modern Malay are available through inscriptions of the Śrīvijaya Empire; some of these inscriptions can be dated accurately to the 7th century A. D. In them we find that the passive morpheme is a prefix ni-, which, unlike the modern di-, is found in all persons:

sabanyaknya yang ni-tānam disini
everything which is-planted here

"Everything which is planted here"

iyang ni-galar-ku sanyasa datūa
they-who are-named-by-me equally as-datu's

"those who are named equally by me as datu's"

Kähler² 1965: 22-30.

Thus for the form ni-galar-ku we would have in modern Malay not *di-gēlar-ku, but ku-gēlar. Such forms give us reason to reject the equation of di- with the pronoun dia, since (1) in older forms of Malay the prefix is not restricted to the 3rd person, and (2) it seems that originally all agentive pronouns, not just the 3rd person, were suffixed.

The change from ni- to di- is not problematical. In general, nasal consonants are poorly represented in the initial position in Malay, and the change from ni- to di- is exactly paralleled by that of another prefix which was nasal in Old Malay, namely bēr- (having the meaning 'reciprocal, reflexive'), whose Old Malay form is mar- (cf. Teeuw 1958, Roolvink 1956 for discussion).

3.3 In a number of related languages the prime verbal affix designating object-focus is either a prefix ni- or an infix -in-, and this alternation of prefix with CV/infix with VC is widespread (cf., Dahl 1973: 118-120). For Proto-Austronesian, Dahl reconstructs two sets of affixes involving -n-: (1) a perfective aspect infix -in-, and (2) an object-focus infix -ən-. In the body of this paper I have attempted to establish that in at least the western languages of this family the concepts object-focus and perfective aspect are not readily separable; in view of the phonological similarity between these two sets of affixes it could well be that they are etymologically related, if not identical.

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3.4 Looking now to more remote branches of the Austronesian family, we find persistent similarities in the discourse functions of the passive all the way to Polynesia. In Maori, for example, the passive is recognized as the canonical transitive sentence form (Clark 1973; Chung 1976 *passim*), and an argument has even been constructed (Sinclair 1976) that the language is in fact ergative. The active verb in this language is used when:

1. the verb is one of perception or psychological state;
2. the action is continuous or incomplete;
3. the verb is reflexive;
4. the object of the verb is cognate with the verb;
5. the verb is part of a reduced or subordinate clause.

All of these criteria have close parallels in Malay. With regard to 4, it is common to find the active verb form when the O is an 'expected' partner to the verb, as in phrases like 'drew his dagger' (*menghunas keris-nya*). In Malay also one of the commonest environments for the active verb is when the verb is dependent on a modal auxiliary or is in a reduced complement clause, or the like. Such a distribution is scarcely surprising, since any kind of dependent clause is necessarily backgrounded. The statistics brought together by Chung from Maori texts (Chung 1976: 97) show (a) the considerably higher proportion of passive to active verb forms, and (b) the heavily skewed distribution over main versus reduced clauses:

	ACTIVE	PASSIVE
Main clauses	8	85
Embedded clauses	7	17
Reduced clauses	54	0
Total	69	102

In Malay narrative texts there is a comparable distribution of active and passive forms. The earliest texts (Emeis 1945: 84) show the percentage of verbs with the active prefix meng- to be 25%, while the percentage of verbs with either the passive prefix di- (3rd person) or zero prefix (most of which are 1st or 2nd person passives) is 43% (combining Emeis' figures for the Hikayat Hung Tuah of 19% for di- forms and 24% for zero-affix forms). Thus in Malay the proportion of passive to active is approximately 1.5:1, and in Maori approximately 1.7:1.

3.5 When we consider languages which have gone further in the replacement of passive by ergative features, we find that the discourse conditions under which this implementation is taking place are again similar to those which favour passive over active in the accusative languages. In Samoan it is perfective and highly agentive (volitional) verbs which are spearheading ergativity (cf. Milner 1973, also Chung 1977: 39-40). Furthermore the ergative construction is 'easiest' when the clause is a simple sentence, and it is ungrammatical for certain verbs when the clause is clefted or the subject is otherwise topicalized. Now although these contexts are grammatically definable, they also have rather clear discourse correlates. In narrative, for example, the main events are likely to be related in simple clauses, without disruptive topicalizations and certainly not in reduced or dependent clauses.

4.0 About the morphology of the passive formative in the Polynesian languages, and its counterpart in Austronesian as a whole, there is relatively little research available. Pawley (1973) reconstructs for the verbal suffix -ia present in the Polynesian languages a proto-form *-i-a, of which the *-i part is a 'close transitivising suffix' and the -a indeterminate, possibly an article. Certainly this analysis is consistent with the discourse functions which I have been discussing: the 'passive' verb is highly transitive, and the O of the verb is definite, and if the -a were originally a definite article on the O which became reanalyzed as part of the transitivizing suffix, this would seem to be a natural way for the discourse-foregrounding function to continue. It is noticeable that the passive suffix in the Polynesian languages is often preceded by a consonant of some kind, and the morpheme is often referred to as *-Cia, although the C element is usually thought to be part of the stem (thus Pawley 1973: 180). The consonant is, however, more frequently than not a dental (t, n, r), and n is especially common (to the point that -(n)ia varies with -ina in some languages). It is conceivable, then, that the ni-/-in- affix of the western Austronesian languages was retained in the more distantly related branches. At all events, whether the old morphology was continued or not, the discourse function that went along with the 'passive' remained constant. As a construction associated with 'high transitivity' (cf. Hopper and Thompson: 1980) the so-called passive or O-focus functioned to highlight and foreground the main events of a discourse, and contrasted with a 'less transitive' construction whose morphology involved a focus on the agent and which functioned in discourse to background, slow down, and distance events and to introduce new participants.

NOTES

¹I am grateful to Lloyd Anderson and Sandra Thompson for the comments on the first version of this paper, which was read at the Fourth International Conference on Historical Linguistics at Stanford University, March 30, 1979.

²The Malay data in this paper are taken from Brown's Studies in Country Malay (1956), a set of dialogues in various Malay dialects. Brown states that "...these dialogues were composed entirely by Malays themselves, and what is more, by Malays with little or no knowledge of English" (p. ix); they were, however, "written a good many years ago, and may contain here and there words and expressions which have become archaisms..." (p. x). In my article of 1979 I discuss other sources of Malay narrative in which the discourse functions posited here are also found.

³Cf. Buck 1949: 186 for these and other Indo-European euphemisms for "bear".

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