

## Anti-locality in Samoan nominalizations

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**Introduction.** Deverbal nominalizations in many languages have been shown to exhibit an unaccusativity restriction, 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 either base-generated in the nominal domain or as passive *by*-phrases. While this restriction has been attributed to the selectional properties of *n* (Bruening 2013), recent work by (Imanishi 2020) suggests that it does not hold in all languages, suggesting a parametrized view.

**Proposal.** Based on novel data from Samoan (Polynesian), we explore an alternative analysis that derives the unaccusativity restriction on nominalizations 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). This predicts that the unaccusativity requirement should not hold in languages that license all their arguments VoiceP-internally, a prediction borne out by data from Mayan (Berger 2024, Imanishi 2020, Coon et al. 2014).

**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. This observation 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).

- (1) a. *i katastrofi tis polis apo tus varvarus* b. *i (\*siniditi) ergasia tu ipalilu*  
ART destruction ART city.GEN by ART barbarians 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)

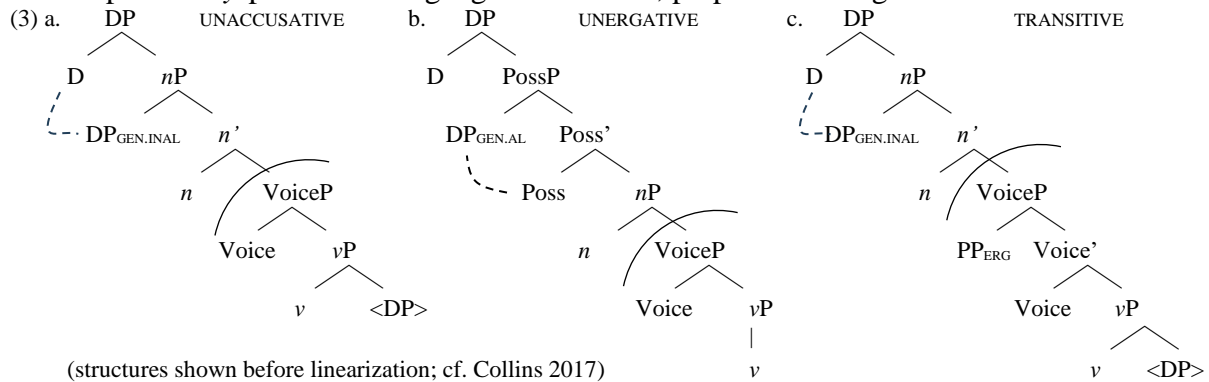
Focusing on Mayan languages, Imanishi (2020) shows however that some languages like Chol violate the unaccusativity restriction and allow nominalizations of transitive and unergative VoicePs (also Berger 2024, Coon et al. 2014), challenging a universal selectional account.

**Samoan nominalizations.** Hopperdietzel and Alexiadou (2022) demonstrate that Samoan bare nominalizations obey the unaccusativity restriction. While in the verbal domain, Samoan exhibits an ergative alignment, in which external arguments of transitive verbs are introduced by the ergative preposition *e* (cf. Polinsky 2016), it shows a tripartite/inactive alignment in deverbal nominalizations 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, are marked by inalienable genitive case *o* (2a/c).

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

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, where they receive inherent alienable possessive case from Poss to satisfy the unaccusativity restriction. 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, *nP*. Being akin to passive *by*-phrases in languages like Greek, prepositional ergative is not affected.



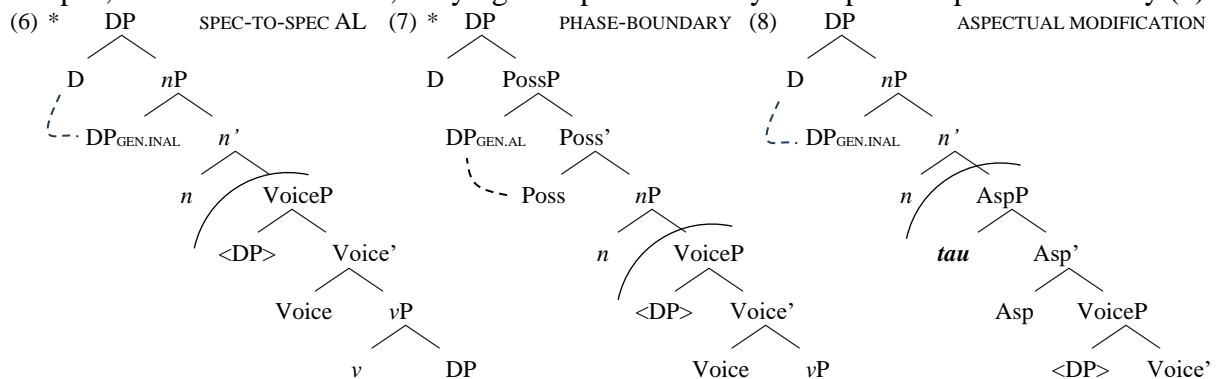
**Aspect in nominalizations.** In this talk, we present novel data from Samoan nominalizations, which indicates that the presence of aspectual modifiers like *tau* ‘almost’, the negative particle *lē* (4a), and unaccusative restructuring verbs like *fia* ‘want’ (4b) cancels the unaccusativity restriction. As a result, external arguments of unergative verbs take inalienable genitive case, i.e. move from their VoiceP-internal position to Spec, *nP* in the nominal domain (8).

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

**Anti-locality.** The observation that additional structure feeds phrasal movement that is otherwise ungrammatical has been argued to follow from locality constraints (Bondarenko & Davis 2024, Deal 2019, Erlewine 2016). In particular, Spec-to-Spec anti-locality is thought to ban movement from the edge of a phrase XP to the edge of YP, if YP immediately dominate XP.

(5) SPEC-TO-SPEC ANTI-LOCALITY: [YP \*ZP<sub>1</sub> Y [XP <ZP<sub>1</sub>> X [...]]] (Bondarenko & Davis 2024: 4)

As in nominalizations, VoiceP-internal arguments must move to Spec, *nP* to be visible for genitive case assignment by D, the extraction of *vP*-external arguments from Spec, VoiceP violates Spec-to-Spec anti-locality, as *nP* immediately dominates VoiceP (6). In addition, the phase boundary introduced by *n* rules out a movement of external arguments to Spec, PossP position, as external arguments are not located at the phase edge, and are hence invisible for Poss (7). As a result, external arguments can receive the agent theta role in Spec, VoiceP and must always be interpreted as true possessors. Yet, if an additional aspectual layer 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 (8).



**Outlook.** While a selection account may attribute the absence of the unaccusativity constraint in the above contexts to a break in the selectional relationship between *n* and VoiceP, we will show that only a locality account naturally explains the cross-linguistic variation, as observed by Imanishi (2020) in Mayan language. Crucially, languages that seem to lack the unaccusativity restriction are also low absolutive ergative, i.e. license all their DP arguments VoiceP-internally. Thus, arguments do not need to move out of the verbal domain in nominalizations

and locality issues do not arise. Our account therefore reduces the cross-linguistic variation to a single parameter (high vs. low structural case; Coon et al. 2014), unifying the two phenomena.