

# THE CASE OF POSSESSORS AND ‘SUBJECTS’\*

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Possessors have often been treated as the ‘subjects’ of the DPs in which they appear, being analyzed as surfacing in [spec, DP] by analogy with the standard analysis for clausal subjects in a configurational framework of grammar. In this paper, we present a new descriptive generalization showing that there is in fact much variation in the coding of genitive phrases, and that the simple equation of subjects to possessors fails to capture the range of variation attested cross-linguistically. Examining a broad selection of Austronesian languages, we conclude that an understanding of the systemic oppositions in a particular language is essential to understanding the syncretisms found in that language and that while the subject/possessor syncretisms are widespread, the only clear generalization that can be drawn about possessors in Austronesian is that they are marked using the ‘default’ case marker.

## 1. CASE SYNCRETISMS: SUBJECT = POSSESSOR?

It is widely, and generally uncontroversially, believed that the ‘subject’ of a clause and the possessor of an NP share many properties (e.g., Abney 1987, Chomsky 1970, Giorgi and Longobardi 1990, Szabolcsi 1994, among others), including the commonly found case syncretisms. It is because of this that possessors are often treated as subjects. We present data from a range of Austronesian languages illustrating different case syncretisms involving the genitive, and conclude that the terms used to describe the syncretisms (‘possessors as subjects’) must be reinterpreted to correctly account for the data, since other, apparently contradictory, syncretisms are also found. While some subjects can be syncretic with possessors, it is also true that some objects show syncretisms with possessors as well.

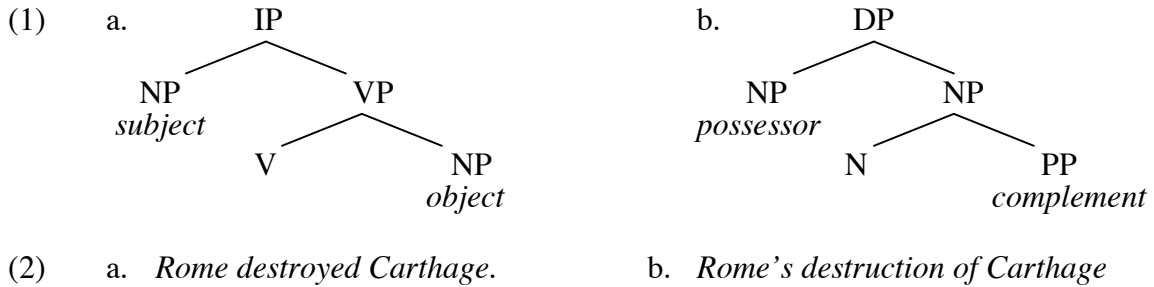
We discuss an analysis of these data that highlights the importance of considering case as part of the case system as a whole. While the cases used to mark ‘subjects’ and possessors are often the same, hence the proposed structural explanation, we argue that the correct generalization is purely morphological, that possessors are (often) syncretic with the *unmarked* (or default) argument in the system. We show how this cross-linguistic generalization can be naturally explained using Lexical Decomposition Grammar, a theory of case licensing within which it is straightforward to capture both the unmarkedness of the nominative in a nominative–accusative system, and the unmarkedness of the absolutive in an ergative–absolutive system.

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## 2. PREVIOUS ANALYSES

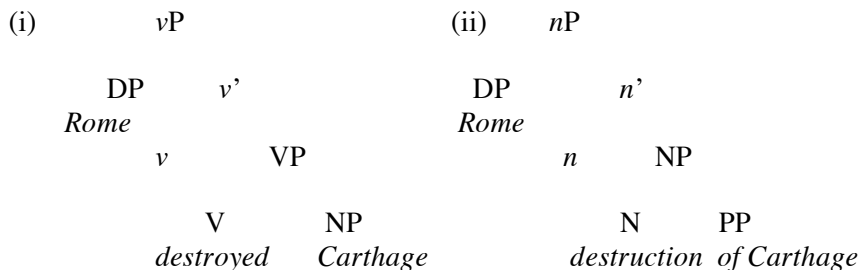
Syncretisms between the marking of the possessor in a noun phrase and the ‘subject’ of a clause, referring to either morphological or syntactic coding properties, have long been observed (e.g. Chomsky 1970, Abney 1987). It has been assumed that possessors are best conceptualised as structurally equivalent to subjects, perhaps in part due to the fact that the subject/possessor syncretism is widely attested. This analysis has been formally modeled by appealing to the parallel structures of subjects and possessors in the constituent structure (e.g. *Rome* in (2a) and (2b) respectively), as illustrated by the structures in (1) (we note that the morphological encoding of *Rome* is distinct in the two different phrases).<sup>1</sup>



Even in languages for which these precise phrase-structural relationships are not obvious, it is claimed that underlying similarities between subjects and possessors can be attested in other parts of the grammar, such as case or agreement. This pattern, however, is not as universal a tendency as it is thought to be. This is demonstrated by an examination of data from a variety of Austronesian languages. We show that when a language shows syncretisms between a core argument and the genitive case marker, the case of the possessor is syncretic with the *default* case marker. In this paper, we first present data from a selection of representative Austronesian languages to establish the different patterns observed, before proposing an alternative account to capture this broader range of data.

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<sup>1</sup> A more recent version of the structural relationships is shown in (i) and (ii). Although details of the architecture vary, the structural relationships remain essentially the same.



### 3. SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNCRETISM PATTERNS

The key feature common to the syncretisms between the genitive case and a core argument illustrated here is that if there is syncretism in the case system, it is between the case of the possessor and the case that can be considered to be the default or ‘unmarked’ case. This is a purely morphological generalization, and one which is hard, if not impossible, to capture configurationally. This notion of a default case captures all of the examples, illustrated below in (i) – (iii).

#### i. Possessor and the ‘subject’: A/S grouping.

Cross-linguistically the A/S, or ‘nominative’ category is often morphologically unmarked in a case system, and is certainly unmarked in terms of indicating two out of three core arguments. In Tinrin, of central New Caledonia (Osumi 1995), the case marker *nrâ* marks both the nominative and the possessive. Example (3) shows that the object of *nrorri*, *wake nrâ nrü* ‘your work’, does not take case marking, while the subject of *fwi* (as well as other subjects) must be case marked with *nrâ*. The same case marker is also used to indicate possession, as seen in the possessive phrase *nrâ nrü* and also in the phrases in (4), which show the use of *nrâ* to mark the arguments of a verb in a nominalisation.

#### Tinrin<sup>2</sup>

- (3) *Tro nrorri [wake [nrâ nrü]] tra wei=fwi [nrâ nrô].*  
AUG leave work POSS 2SG so.that 1SG.FUT=do NOM 1SG  
‘Just leave your work, so that I myself may do it.’
- (4) *Bee ta [nrâ pù] [nrâ ri]*  
COMP kill POSS flying.fox POSS 1PL.IN  
‘our killing of flying foxes’

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<sup>2</sup> The following abbreviations are used in this paper: A – most agentive argument of a bivalent verb; AUG – augment; AV – A-voice; CAUS – causative; COMP – completive; CORE – core case marker; D – recipient argument in a ditransitive verb; EX – exclusive; FUT – future; GEN – genitive; HR – highest role; IN – inclusive; LOC – locative; LR – lowest role; MUT – mutation; NOM – nominative; NONACT – non-active voice; OBJ – object; OBL – oblique; P – most patientive argument of a bivalent verb; PL – plural; POSS – possessive; PP – P-prefix; PV – P-voice; R – realis; REL – relativiser; S – single argument of a monovalent verb; SG – singular; 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person.

## ii. Possessors and the absolutive case: S/P grouping.

In a morphologically ergative language, the S/P grouping (absolutive) is considered the default, or unmarked case. In Nias, from western Indonesia, there is an overt absolutive case realised by ‘mutation’ (Brown 2001, Donohue and Brown 1999, Kähler 1936/7, Sundermann 1913). The mutation, realised on the vowel-initial words shown here as *n-*, is obligatory on a possessor.

### Nias

- (5) *bavi n-ama-gu*  
pig MUT-father-1SG.GEN  
‘my father’s pigs’

The same mutation that is used for a possessor is also obligatory with absolutive arguments, S or P, as seen in the two examples below.<sup>2</sup>

- (6) *Manavuli sui n-ama-da Tohönavanaetu ba Maenamölä.*  
return again MUT-father-1PL.IN.GEN Tohönavanaetu LOC Maenamölä  
‘Ama Tohönavanaetu came back again to Maenamölä.’
- (7) *I-a m-bavi ama Gumi.*  
3SG.R-eat MUT-pig father Gumi  
‘Ama Gumi is eating/eats pork.’

## iii. Possessors and the ‘object’

In Tagalog (and most other northern Austronesian languages) the *ng*-marked argument is considered to be an ‘object’, regardless of the voice selected (see Donohue 2002, 2007 for a discussion of the terms). Thus in (8), the object of the clause is the theme ‘book’, while in (9) the object is the agent, ‘child’. The same case marker that is used for objects is also used for genitives, shown in (10). It is crucial to note that ‘object’ can refer to the A in a non-Agent Voice (non-AV) verb and the P in a non-Patient Voice (non-PV) verb.<sup>3</sup>

### Tagalog

- (8) *B<um>asa ng libro ang bata.*  
read<AV> GEN book NOM child  
‘The child read a book.’
- (9) *B<in>asa ng bata ang libro.*  
read<PV> GEN child NOM book  
‘The child read the book.’

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<sup>2</sup> *Ama* ‘father’ is obligatorily used as part of male names in Nias. Similarly, the use of the 1PL.IN genitive suffix is customary, and does not necessarily indicate actual possession.

<sup>3</sup> Alternating voice data is not presented for most of the languages described here, since most Austronesian languages do not employ morphologically-marked voice systems.

- (10) *ang libro ng bata*  
 NOM book GEN child  
 ‘the child’s book’

Many, if not most, languages of the Philippines (and Formosa) display a distinct case marker for the non-subject non-agent in clauses such as (8). In this way, Tagalog is somewhat exceptional, and the more general characterisation of this northern Austronesian syncretism is that the genitive case is syncretic with the Agent object, but not with the Patient object. The morphological shape of the genitive case is the default in all Philippine languages, regardless of any syncretisms involved in the case system. Furthermore, in contrast to the other case markers in the Tagalog system, *ng* is the case marker that cannot be easily defined, but must be treated as an ‘elsewhere’ category: The nominative *ang* is simply defined as the case marker used with the single most pragmatically important argument (the subject) in the clause, and the dative *sa* is used to indicate either (i) obliques or adjuncts; or (ii) highly salient non-subject arguments (salient either inherently because of the semantic type of argument, inherently because of the verb’s lexical selection, or for pragmatic reasons). *Ng*, however, occurs in all other environments, and is the only core case marker that can occur multiple times in a single clause, marking terms, as in (11).

- (11) *P<in>a-basa ng guro ang bata ng libro.*  
 CAUS<PV>- read GEN teacher NOM child GEN book  
 ‘The teacher made the child read the book.’

#### iv. No possessive syncretism

There are numerous examples of languages in which there is no syncretism between the genitive and another case. In the simplest form, this is apparent when there are no case markers, as in Indonesian, from the south-west of the Austronesian area. Here we see that none of the direct arguments of transitive or intransitive clauses take case marking, with SVO order alone differentiating the different syntactic roles. Similarly, in the possessive construction, the possessor NP follows the possessed noun with no morphology on either the possessor or the possessum.

##### Indonesian

- (12) *Udin makan roti.*  
 Udin eat bread  
 ‘Udin ate bread.’
- (13) *Udin duduk di sana.*  
 Udin sit LOC there  
 ‘Udin sat over there.’
- (14) *kucing Udin*  
 cat Udin  
 ‘Udin’s cat’

In *Tukang Besi* the genitive *nu* is not syncretic with either the nominative *na*, the general core case *te*, or the oblique *i / di*, as shown in the following examples.

**Tukang Besi**

- (15) *Te beka nu ama=su*  
 CORE cat GEN father=1SG.GEN  
 ‘my father’s cat’
- (16) *No-mbule na La Udin di kampo=no.*  
 3R-return NOM Mr Udin OBL:R village=3GEN  
 ‘Udin returned to his village.’
- (17) *No-manga te roti na La Udin.*  
 3R-eat CORE bread NOM Mr Udin  
 ‘Udin ate bread.’
- (18) *No-manga=e na roti te La Udin.*  
 3R-eat=3P NOM bread CORE Mr Udin  
 ‘Udin ate the bread.’

In connection to this, however, we note that a syncretism between the genitive and the Agent is often preserved in subordinate forms. Compare the complete lack of syncretism in case marking in (15) to (18) with the appearance of the genitive case syncretic with the marking of an Agent in the relative clause in (19) below (see Donohue 1999: for arguments against simply treating forms such as (19) as nominalisations).

- (19) *te roti i-manga nu ama=su*  
 CORE bread PREL-eat GEN father=1SG.GEN  
 ‘the bread that was eaten by my father’

Similar to the use of genitive agreement clitics in subordinate clauses in *Tukang Besi*, in Indonesian we can see that the genitive is used to indicate a third person Agent in a non-active construction, such as (21) (identical constructions are found in main clauses in Indonesian, which is not the case in *Tukang Besi*). The prefix *di-* is multifunctional, marking both the inverse and the passive (see van den Berg 1996 for the history of the prefix).

**Indonesian**

- (20) *roti yang di-makan Udin*  
 bread REL NONACT-eat Udin  
 ‘the bread that was eaten by Udin’
- (21) *roti yang di-makan-nya*  
 bread REL NONACT-eat-3SG.GEN  
 ‘the bread that was eaten by her/him’

We also find this pattern appearing in subordinate clauses even in languages for which the genitive/Agent syncretism does not hold in main clauses. Palu’e does not use case or agreement morphology in main clauses (shown in (22) and (23)), and this lack of overt morphology is also

possible in relative clauses, such as (24). At the same time, an alternative strategy for relative clauses sees the Agent marked on the verb with the genitive clitics that index possessors. (25) shows the use of the genitive clitics on nouns to index a possessor. (26) shows the optional use of genitive clitics to indicate the third person agent in a relative clause headed by an object. More specifically, (26a) shows the standard use of a third person genitive clitic with a third person Agent, while (26b) shows that this same ‘third person’ clitic can also be used with a first person subject.<sup>4</sup> This reflects a wider pattern in which the ‘third person’ genitive clitic has extended its range to include a more general sense of modification. In (27), we see that it is also possible for the agreeing first person genitive clitic to be used with a first person subject (but the 1SG *-gu* may not be used with a non-first person subject).

**Palu’e**

- |      |    |                                                                                     |    |                                                                                |
|------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (22) | a. | <i>Lanu kha uvi.</i><br>Lanu eat tuber<br>‘Lanu ate tubers.’                        | b. | <i>Uvi Lanu kha.</i><br>tuber Lanu eat<br>‘Tubers were eaten by Lanu.’         |
| (23) | a. | <i>Aku kha uvi.</i><br>1SG eat tuber<br>‘I ate tubers.’                             | b. | <i>Uvi aku kha.</i><br>tuber 1SG eat<br>‘Tubers were eaten by me.’             |
| (24) | a. | <i>uvi (vo) Lanu kha-n</i><br>tuber REL Lanu eat-3GEN<br>‘the tubers that Lanu ate’ | b. | <i>uvi (vo) aku kha-n</i><br>tuber REL 1SG eat-3GEN<br>‘the tubers that I ate’ |
| (25) | a. | <i>Lanu uvi-n</i><br>Lanu tuber-3GEN<br>‘Lanu’s tubers’                             | b. | <i>uvi-gu</i><br>tuber-1GEN<br>‘my tubers’                                     |
| (26) | a. | <i>uvi (vo) Lanu kha-n</i><br>tuber REL Lanu eat-3GEN<br>‘the tubers that Lanu ate’ | b. | <i>uvi (vo) aku kha-n</i><br>tuber REL 1SG eat-3GEN<br>‘the tubers that I ate’ |
| (27) | a. | <i>uvi (vo) (aku) kha-gu</i><br>tuber REL 1SG eat-1GEN<br>‘the tubers that I ate’   | b. | * <i>uvi (vo) Lanu kha-gu</i>                                                  |

Table 1 summarizes the syncretisms that we have found in the Austronesian data. We do not exemplify the syncretisms found in agreement systems here, but simply summarize the results of the survey of case syncretism possibilities and note that the same syncretisms can be found in the domain of agreement systems (for further discussion, both diachronic and synchronic, see Donohue and Donohue [in preparation]). As suggested by the table, the languages that have been used for exemplification purposes here do not, by any means, exhaust the possible candidates displaying syncretisms in the Austronesian world, but a more complete survey of these patterns is beyond the scope of the current paper.

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<sup>4</sup> This is also possible with a second person Agent or with a 1+2 (‘local’) person Agent. These facts are not illustrated here.

Table 1. *Summary of syncretisms between genitive and other cases in Austronesian*

	Language
GEN = NOM	Tinrin
GEN = ABS	Nias, (Tongan, Niuean)
GEN = Agent OBJ	(Northern Philippine languages)
GEN = OBJ	Tagalog
GEN ≠ syncretic	Tukang Besi

#### 4. EXPLAINING THE FULL RANGE OF SYNCRETISMS

The notion of a default morphosyntactic case is intuitively easy to understand in any number of different systems of case oppositions. It is this concept which is crucial to understanding the full generalization about syncretisms that exist between the genitive case marker and core arguments as evidenced by the Austronesian data. This notion of ‘default’ case marker is readily modeled in frameworks that take into account the entire case system within which it occurs.

Lexical Decomposition Grammar (LDG; e.g. Wunderlich 1997, Kiparsky 2001) is a theory of case licensing that naturally accounts for the proposed generalization. Unlike most case theories which focus on the mapping between grammatical functions or structural configurations and thematic roles, LDG is a theory of case *licensing*, capturing the ternary relation between thematic roles (arguments), grammatical functions or ‘abstract case’ and morphosyntactic (and morphological) case. LDG has constrained principles for relating levels of abstract case and morphosyntactic case by defining them both with the same two relational features [ $\pm$ H(ighest) R(ole)] and [ $\pm$ L(owest) R(ole)]. The framework captures generalizations and predictions both about typologically diverse languages and highly complex phenomena within a specific language (e.g. see Donohue 2004). Additionally, positional licensing is also modeled in exactly the same way as morphological licensing in this framework (e.g. Kiparsky 1997) by defining certain configurations using the same features as one might for a case marker. In this way, LDG is a framework well suited to the investigation of the relation of subjects and possessors and possible case syncretisms.

We first outline LDG before returning to a discussion of how this theory enables us to capture the proposed generalization about possessor case syncretisms.

##### Semantic form

Following Bierwisch (1986 and elsewhere), LDG assumes a level of structure called semantic form (SF), which represents the grammatically relevant parts of a verb’s conceptual structure. It consists of minimally decomposed expressions formulated in predicate logic and expressed using lambda-categorial expressions. SF representations are thus constrained to two basic types: Propositions (predicates), or *constants*, and individuals, or *variables*. Consider the verb ‘show’.

$$(28) \text{ show: } [x \text{ CAUSE } [CAN [y \text{ SEE } z]]]$$

In (28), the constants are the units of meaning (e.g. CAUSE, CAN, SEE) into which the predicate *show* is decomposed, and the variables are  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , representing the participants. The variables are lambda-abstracted out of the SF, and the resulting lambdas are equivalent to thematic roles, where the (inside out) depth of embedding represents the thematic hierarchy for a given verb.

### Abstract case

Abstract case is defined using the two given relational features. These are assigned to the ‘thematic roles’ according to their relative position in the semantic form. Once [+HR] and [+LR] have been assigned, the rest can be assigned implicationally.

$$(29) \text{ show: } \lambda z \quad \lambda y \quad \lambda x \quad [x \text{ CAUSE } [CAN [y \text{ SEE } z]]]$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ +LR \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} +HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$$

With the highest and lowest roles identified, all other roles must be marked as non-highest role and non-lowest role to complete the feature specification. Once the abstract case is defined as in (30) below, the morphosyntactic case is assigned through simple unification. The relational case features cross-classify to define four abstract cases:

$$(30) \text{ i. A: } \begin{bmatrix} +HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{ii. S: } \begin{bmatrix} +HR \\ +LR \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{iii. P: } \begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ +LR \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{iv. D: } \begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$$

### Morphosyntactic case

These features ([±HR], [±LR]) are also used to specify the morphosyntactic *structural* case (note that semantic case is *not* defined in this way). Typically the unmarked case nominative/absolute is characterised by not having any specified features. The accusative is usually characterised as [-HR] and the ergative [-LR], while the dative is the most highly specified with a negative instance of both features. It is important to note that the presence or absence of features in the definition of the case marker does not imply the presence or absence of overt case morphology. Obviously these definitions must be tailored to suit the case system of the specific language. However, typical systems are shown below. In a typical morphologically ergative language with a structural dative, the structural case inventory would be as shown in (31).

- (31) i. Abs: [ ]  
 ii. Erg: [-LR]  
 iii. Dat:  $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$

A typical morphologically accusative language would have the case inventory shown in (32).

- (32) i. Nom: [ ]  
 ii. Acc: [-HR]  
 iii. Dat:  $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$

Two conditions govern the association of morphosyntactic case with abstract case. These are given in (33).

- (33) i. Unification: Associated feature matrices must be non-distinct.  
 ii. Specificity: Specific rules and morphemes block general rules and morphemes in the same context.

Thus, feature matrices will only unify if they are non-distinct. For example, typically the dative is defined as [-HR, -LR] and will unify with the middle role in a ditransitive verb:

- (34) *show*:  $\lambda z$      $\lambda y$      $\lambda x$     [x CAUSE [CAN [y SEE z]]]  
 $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ +LR \end{bmatrix}$      $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$      $\begin{bmatrix} +HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$

Dative morphosyntactic case [-HR, -LR] thus unifies with  $\lambda y$  [-HR, -LR]. The less specific nominative case ([ ]) and ergative case ([-LR]), while able to, will not unify with this abstract case due to specificity: The more highly specified case available in the inventory [-HR, -LR] blocks the use of a more general morpheme in the same context. The theory also allows for case to be licensed positionally (see, e.g., Kiparsky 1997).

What is central about this approach to case is that a case marker is defined within the whole system of cases. Moreover, taking into account the morphological case inventory and set of oppositions (for core arguments) is necessary for determining how each case should be defined for a given language. We have described the typical case systems for morphologically ergative and accusative languages. That is, a language such as Tinrin has morphological case markers identified as in (32), repeated below as (35):

- (35) i. Nom: [ ]  
 ii. Acc: [-HR]  
 iii. Dat:  $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$

This shows that the nominative case marker, the case of the A/S arguments, is the ‘default’ case marker. Note that the case marker need not be morphologically empty; we have seen that it

is in fact morphologically overt in Tinrin. The lack of feature specifications simply captures its morphosyntactic status as the default case marker.

Nias has a case system like that illustrated in (31), repeated here as (36).

- (36) i. Abs: [ ]  
 ii. Erg: [-LR]  
 iii. Dat:  $\begin{bmatrix} -HR \\ -LR \end{bmatrix}$

As a typical ergative case system with a structural dative case, we see in (36) that there is a case marker to identify the very specific ‘middle’ role (e.g. recipient in a ditransitive verb), the case of the A (never a [+LR] argument and not overtly marked in Nias), and the ‘elsewhere’ or default case marker, which in this system is born by the S/P arguments.

Tagalog, and Philippine-type languages generally, are harder to characterize due to their complex voice systems. However, as noted above, what is not controversial is that the genitive case marker is the default case irrespective of voice, and as such would be assigned the empty morphosyntactic feature description:

- (37) i. Gen: [ ]

In these languages, the genitive case marker is used to mark core arguments and *is* the morphosyntactic default case marker, not just syncretic with it.

It is important to note that this system of case licensing does not change the structural configuration in which possessors are generated (as [spec, *n*P]), nor is it at all incompatible with this. In fact, the theory allows for positional case licensing, so extra-clausal case markers such as special topic cases, would be assigned configurationally, along the usual assumptions. What this approach has in its favour for the data under consideration here, is that it is able to identify the natural class of case markers that show syncretism with the genitive case marker in Austronesian languages. What we do not address here is *why* we get the syncretisms, but plan to develop this in future work (Donohue and Donohue, in preparation).

To recap, the ‘default’ or unmarked case is different for the various language types: It is the absolutive case (S, P) in an ergative language and the nominative case (A, S) in an accusative language and we have seen here that it is the genitive case in other Austronesian languages. It is important to emphasise that we are not referring to overt morphological marking – that is, the presence or absence of a case marker. Rather, we refer to the morphosyntactic status of the case marker in its system of oppositions. The generalization that emerged from examining the Austronesian data is that if the genitive case marker (potentially a separate case with its own morphosyntactic definition) is syncretic with the case marker of a core argument, that case marker is the *default* case marker. That is, the correct generalization is a morphological one, not a configurational one, and LDG is a theory that readily accommodates such a generalization.

The genitive case marker can have its own definition and be used in addition to core arguments, but it is useful to consider case in a framework like LDG when making sense of this range of syncretisms and unearthing the commonality of these otherwise seemingly disparate classes that are syncretic with the genitive. This generalization also underscores the importance

of both taking morphology seriously and considering case markers as part of the system in which they occur (see also Donohue 2004, submitted).

## 5. SUMMARY

There are Austronesian languages for which the subject = possessor syncretism, as it is usually described, is valid. However, we have shown that there are additional patterns of syncretism in the data as illustrated in (38):

- (38) Possessor = nominative  
                  = absolutive  
                  = agent  
                  = object

These apparently conflicting patterns indicate that the simple syncretism shown structurally in (1) must be rethought in order to capture the syncretisms found in Austronesian languages. We have argued that the correct way of conceptualizing the syncretism is between the case of the possessors and the *default* case marker or the functionally unmarked case in the. This natural class is readily identified in LDG, although why, exactly, we find the syncretism remains to be explained.

We are currently examining Austronesian agreement systems that exhibit genitive syncretisms to see how these bear on our analysis and plan to investigate three-way case systems. Once we have established the patterns exhibited in this wider range of languages, we hope to explain the diachronic development of these case and agreement syncretisms.

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