

## FROM TOPICS TO SUBJECTS: AN A'-A SCALE OF AUSTRONESIAN PIVOTS

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- **Synopsis:** We present a typological investigation of Austronesian voice-marking, and propose that, instead of being a syntactically uniform phenomenon, Austronesian pivots divide into three types given their behaviour wrt. i) the choice of controllee in obligatory control, ii) reconstruction, weak crossover and quantifier-variable binding, iii) definiteness/ specificity restrictions. We argue that pivothood should be understood as a continuum that ranges from topic-like A'-pivots to subject-like A-pivots, with A'/A-pivots in-between the two poles, and results from an ongoing topic-to-subject grammaticalization in Austronesian languages (cf. Chen and Patrianto 2023), yielding different syntactic derivations of voice-marking.

- **Austronesian pivots:** Austronesian languages promote one (any) argument in a transitive clause as *pivot* (also *trigger*), which obtains a specific morphological marking (e.g. the *ang* marker in Tagalog) or position in the clause (e.g. clause-final in Malagasy), is cross-referenced by verbal morphology (*voice-marking*, here referred to as AV (agent voice), OV (object voice), PV (patient voice)) and acquires a privileged status wrt. syntactic operations, like A'-extraction. Whether a pivot classifies as a true subject or topic, alternating argument or information structure, respectively, is debated, though it is usually distinguished from standard (anti)passivization. We present a structural-comparative investigation of pivots in nine Austronesian languages from different subfamilies (mainly, Philippine-type and Indonesian-type), and show that they exhibit different behaviour wrt. subjecthood tests as well as A'/A-properties, eventually maintaining that the phenomenon of "pivothood" reduces to a cluster of configurations across languages. We suggest that pivots should rather be understood as a scale that ranges from topics to true subjects; some languages align at the middle of the scale, with pivots being between A'-topics and A-subjects (or both). Some interesting correlations then arise: (i) Indonesian languages (mostly) pattern with A-like pivots and display a morphologically impoverished voice system; (ii) topic-to-subject grammaticalization is accompanied by strict adjacency between non-pivot agents and the verb; (iii) any A-like pivot must serve as PRO in obligatory control, whereas non-agent A'-like pivots cannot.

- **Choice of controllee:** Control has long been employed as a major diagnostic for subjecthood (Dixon 1994): in an embedded clause, the controllee should correspond to the external argument or highest A-element. Austronesian languages fall into two classes wrt. obligatory control (OC) constructions: type A, in which the controllee corresponds to the embedded pivot, irrespective of its  $\theta$ -role (e.g., Acehnese, Amis, Balinese, Malagasy, (Standard) Indonesian, Javanese (?), see (1a)), versus type B, in which control targets the embedded agent, irrespective of voice-marking on the embedded verb (e.g., Tagalog, Madurese, Cebuano (?), see (1b)). The picture gets murkier through the existence of voice restructuring (involving default use of AV morphology or voice matching) as well as backward- and crossed control in several Austronesian languages. Hence, we only consider examples with AV-marked matrix verbs (blocking crossed control) and irrealis/future interpretation of the embedded clause (at least TP-sized complements), and exclude restructuring predicates like *try*, *begin*, *finish*, thereby singling out constructions of standard/ forward OC (cf. Potsdam 2009). We observe a clear-cut contrast between type A (pivot control) and type B (agent control) which, under a uniform syntactic analysis of pivots, comes as a surprise.

- (1) a. *nanery ny zaza [ PRO h-ozahan' ny dokotera ] aho*  
 force.AV the child [ PRO IRR-examine.PV the doctor ] 1SG.DFLT **PRO = pivot; doctor = agent**  
 'I forced the child to be examined by the doctor.' Type A: Malagasy [Potsdam 2009: 761]
- b. *Nagatubili siyang [ PRO hiram in ang pera sa bangko ]*  
 AV-hesitated he [ PRO PV-borrow PIV money OBL bank ] **PRO = agent; money = pivot**  
 'He hesitated to borrow the money from the bank.' Type B: Tagalog [Guilfoyle, Hung, and Travis 1992: 390]

- **Reconstruction:** Austronesian pivots differ wrt. whether or not promotion to pivot bleeds Condition A and C effects, exhibits WCO and permits quantifier-variable binding (the latter in light of Ruys' 2000 *Scope Licensing Principle*). We observe language type C, where pivots reconstruct into their base-position (Amis, Cebuano, Javanese, Madurese, Tagalog, see (2a)) versus type D where promotion to pivot of any non-agent argument alters binding relations (Acehnese, Balinese, Indonesian, Malagasy, see (2b)). Notably, in languages like Balinese (which we will further down classify as a mixed topic-subject type), promotion to pivot combines properties of A-movement (a theme anaphor pivot induces Condition C violation with an R-agent) and A'-movement (a pivot anaphor may move over its antecedent as long as the latter is pronominal).

- (2) a. *Minamahal ni Juan ang kanyang sarili*  
 PV-loves GEN Juan PIVOT his self **✓ agent > pivot**  
 'Juan loves himself.' Type C: Tagalog [Richards 2000: 107]
- b. *\*Awakne gugut cicing*  
self OV-bite dog **\* agent > pivot**  
 Int.: 'The dog bit itself.' Type D: Balinese [Wechsler and Arka 1998: 407]

- **Definiteness requirement and non-pivot licensing:** Pivots further differ in their discourse requirements: in language

type E, all pivots must receive a definite/specific interpretation (Amis, Balinese, Cebuano, Javanese, Madurese, Malagasy, Tagalog, see (3a)), while type F exhibits no restriction on the interpretation of any pivot (Acehnese, Indonesian, see (3b)).

- (3) a. *\*(Badha) burus ngekke' tokang pos*  
 \*(EXST) dog AV.bite worker postal = a specific dog  
 'A dog bit the mail carrier.' (= There was a dog who bit the mail carrier) Type E: Madurese [Davies 2010: 180]
- b. *Se-seorang/seorang pria mem.anggil Rani*  
 one-CLF/CLF man AV.call Rani = anyone/ any man  
 'Someone/a man called Rani.' Type F: Indonesian [Chen and Patrianto 2023: 11]

Moreover, the position of non-pivot agents tends to be flexible in languages like Tagalog & Madurese, whereas in Acehnese, Balinese, Indonesian, Javanese & Malagasy, the pivot's (highest) nominal head must be adjacent to the verb, undergoing "N-bonding" (Keenan 2000) *qua* phonological incorporation (Erlewine, Levin, and Urk 2017), with no intervener in-between.

• **Pivothood as A'-to-A continuum:** Controllee choice, (non-)reconstruction and definiteness group Austronesian languages into three types, classified in the table below. The systematic distribution of these empirical properties leads to the conclusion that the A'/A-nature of pivots is neither consistent nor absolute, but spreads over a continuum. Some pivots are A'/topic-like elements (top of the table), some are A/subject-like elements (bottom of the table), and some are in-between topic- and subjecthood (or cover both), displaying mixed A'/A properties (middle of the table). This typological correlation is novel and has, to our knowledge, not been investigated before: assuming that OC targets the highest A-element in the embedded clause, Austronesian languages where the agent functions as PRO (regardless of pivot status) treat pivots as A'-elements, while languages where the pivot functions as PRO (regardless of agentivity) treat pivots as (partly or fully) A-elements.

	Language	controllee	definiteness requirement	principle A/C reconstr.	Q-variable binding re-constr.	WCO	non-pivot agent
A'-topic	Tagalog	agent	✓	✓	✓	×	free
A'-topic	Madurese	agent	✓	✓			free (?)
A'-topic	Cebuano	agent (?)	✓	✓			
CONTROL							
A'/A	Amis	pivot	✓	✓	✓	✓	
A'/A	Javanese	pivot (?)	✓	✓	✓	×	R-adjac.
RECONSTRUCTION							
A'/A	Balinese	pivot	✓	×	×		R-adjac.
A'/A	Malagasy	pivot	✓	×	✓ (?)	×	R-adjac.
DEFINITENESS REQUIREMENT							
A-subject	Acehnese	pivot	×	×	×	×	L-adjac.
A-subject	Indonesian	pivot	×	×	×	×	L-adjac.

• **Diachronic transition from topics to subjects:** We argue that the A'/A-differences in pivothood stem from a diachronic transition from A'-to-A syntax of voice-marking (cf. Chen and Patrianto 2023), correlating with aspects of the clausal structure like word order, position of the non-pivot agent and voice-mood allomorphy. The transition is comparable to the diachronic loss of V2 structure in French or English by topic lowering (Lightfoot 2003; Walkden 2012) or to a grammaticalization cline of topic markers into nominative markers (Bennett 1974; Givón 1977). We conclude that the notion of pivot is a structural epiphenomenon, subject to variation, rendering a uniform syntactic analysis of voice-marking untenable.

• **The syntax of pivots:** The status of Austronesian voice-marking can be subsumed under three analyses: (i) pivots are established in *v*P/VoiceP via object shift, followed by subsequent Agree with a higher head spelling-out its case; (ii) voice-marking reflects ABS-assignment in a (split-)ergative system; (iii) pivots are (base-generated or moving) topics and voice-marking reflects extraction to CP. These accounts succeed in describing single languages but are not able to capture the bigger typological picture. Provided that the A'/A'-distinction is contingent on the types of features driving Agree/movement (van Urk 2015), we present an account that combines existing approaches and from which all three possibilities unfold straightforwardly: A'-pivothood is driven by a (flat) A'-probe in the left periphery, hence pivot-promotion requires definiteness as an information-structural effect, may cross finite clausal boundaries (e.g. in Tagalog), competes with *wh*-extraction, and  $\lambda$ -abstracts over choice functions; it thus fails to feed binding of *e*-type pronominals/anaphors, its lower copy being fully interpreted. A-pivothood is driven by a lower A-probe (akin to [ $\phi$ ] and/or [Case]), responsible for argument re-ordering within *v*/VoiceP and (ERG-like) case-licensing. Pivot-movement thereby does not trigger discourse effects, and  $\lambda$ -abstracts over individuals, permitting variable/anaphor binding from the landing site. Mixed pivothood is driven by a composite A'/A probe on C, simultaneously licensing the argument and triggering topicalization or *wh*-extraction (typically in complemen-

tary distribution cross-linguistically); hence, movement displays A-properties in terms of binding, but can be long-distance (e.g., in Malagasy), and imposes discourse requirements on the pivot. Particularly languages of the two latter types differ wrt. licensing of non-pivot arguments via: i) structural case assigned within VoiceP or ii) strict verb-adjacency (Levin 2015).

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