# Case assignment in Tuvaluan causatives
Mike Clauss

Much of the literature in the tradition of generative syntax has discussed the relationship between sentences before and after valency-changing grammatical operations such as passivization and causativization. Tuvaluan (Oceanic, Western Polynesia) lacks anything that might be called a passive, but has a robust morphological causative. The goal of this paper will be to examine the data in Tuvaluan and determine how they may be fit into a contemporary syntactic theory. Specifically, I will discuss case and word order alternations between causative and non-causative sentences, and how analysis of these facts may be influenced by a treatment of causatives based on Harley (2006), and borrow some assumptions about case from Marantz (2000).

Section 1 will discuss the general facts about word order and case in Tuvaluan. Section 2 will discuss the effects on the latter of morphological causativization. Finally, section 3 will discuss a theoretical framework under which these facts may be explained.

## 1 Case and word order in Tuvaluan
Tuvaluan exhibits an ergative case marking pattern common to other Western Polynesian languages. The sole argument of intransitive verbs and the patient of transitive verbs are in the unmarked, or Absolutive case. The agent-like argument of transitive verbs is marked by the Ergative particle *nee*. The particle *ki* marks goals and some obliques.

(1)     ne  foki   teika  ki tena fenua[1]
        Pst return Teika to  his   island
        'Teika returned to his island'

(2)     Ne  ffuti nee Niu te   atu      teelaa
        Pst pull  Erg Niu the bonito that
        'Niu landed that bonito'

(3)     Ne  fakamatala mai nee ia    tena tala  ki au
        Pst  explain     Dxs Erg 3Sg  her  story to me
        'She told the story to me'

(4)     Au koo kaitaua kia Tevaka
        I   Inc angry  to  Tevaka
        'I am angry at Tevaka'

While Besnier (2000) describes Tuvaluan as having generally free word order, with a caveat against verb final orders, this description seems to miss a generalization about case on preverbal arguments – specifically, that it doesn't exist. Further, preverbal items are frequently accompanied by a (resumptive?) pronoun post verbally which does get case where applicable (5). Further, only *one* argument may occur preverbally (7).

(5)     Preverbal Subjects
a.      *nee tevasa ne   inu   taku kao
       Erg Tevasa Pst drink  my   toddy

---

b.　　　tevasa  ne  inu  (nee  ia) taku kao
　　　　Tevasa Pst drink Erg he my　　toddy
　　　　'Tevasa, he drank my sour toddy'

(6)　　Preverbal Objects
　　　　Te  atu　　teelaa ne  ffuti nee Niu
　　　　the bonito that　Pst  pull Erg  Niu
　　　　'Niu landed that bonito'

(7)　　*Two preverbal items
　　　　*(*nee) tevasa taku kao　　ne  inu
　　　　　Erg　Tevasa my  toddy  Pst drink

These facts suggest that the preverbal items are in fact topics, rather than scrambled arguments. This is fitting with the common analysis of Polynesian VSO languages as being derived from underlying SVO, with V raising to T and T raising to V (cf Otsuka 1999 for Tongan); with the verb in C, there would be room for only one item before the verb. An open question about these topics is whether they are raised from lower positions, or generated in topic position. The possibility of null arguments in Tuvaluan, as well as the optionality of spoken, case-marked, post-verbal pronouns in sentences like (5b), would seem to suggest that the topics are generated as such.
　　　　This analysis may be complicated by the facts about causativization, however.

## 2 Morphological Causatives

The morpheme *faka-* is used to create causative forms of different sorts of verbs. Intransitive, transitive, and stative verbs may be marked by *faka* to create transitives or ditransitives. Ditransitives, however, may not be marked by *faka*.

(8)　　teika  ne  faka-foki　　nee pulisimani ki tena fenua
　　　　Teika Pst Caus-return Erg police　　　to his　island
　　　　'The police sent Teika back to his island'

(9)　　tevasa  ne  faka-inu　　nee maatou ki taku kao
　　　　Tevasa Pst Caus-drink  Erg we　　to my  toddy
　　　　'We made Tevasa drink my sour toddy'

(10)　　au koo fak-kaitaua nee  tito kia tevaka
　　　　I  Inc  Caus-angry Erg Tito to  Tevaka
　　　　'Tito is making me angry at Tevaka'

The causer argument introduced by *faka* is marked with the Ergative case; causees may not receive Ergative. Causative forms of normally transitive verbs resemble ditransitives in that they include one Ergative argument, one Absolutive, and one marked by *ki*. However, there is optionality in the latter two: *ki* may mark either the agent or patient of the verb. The argument not marked *ki* is frequently topicalized. This optionality does not exist for normal ditransitives, nor does it exist for intransitives; an argument marked by *ki* in the non-causative version of a sentence must be marked by *ki* in the causative version. So, while (9) may be paraphrased by (11), (12-13) are not valid paraphrases of (8) and (10), nor is (14) of (3).

(11)    taku kao  ne faka-inu    nee maataou ki tevasa
        my  toddy Pst Caus-drink Erg we        to Tevasa
        'We made Tevasa drink my sour toddy'
        or, 'We made the toddy be drunk by him'

(12)    *tena fenua ne  faka-foki    nee pulisimani ki teika
         his   island Pst Caus-return Erg police      to Teika

(13)    *tevaka koo fak-kaitaua nee  tito ki au
         Tevaka Inc  Caus-angy Erg Tito to I

(14)    *Au ne  fakamatala  nee ia     (ki) tena tala
         I   Pst explain      Erg 3Sg to   her story

The limits of this optionality on *ki* suggest two distinct and separable functions of the morpheme: A case function and a semantic function. In ditransitive sentences like (3), as well as sentences like (1) and (8), *ki* marks a goal argument of the verb. Goals must bear this *ki* marking in both causative and non-causative sentences. In sentences like (9) and (11), *ki* contributes no semantic value; in (9), *ki* marks the patient of the stem verb *inu*, and in (11) it marks the agent of *inu* (that is, the causee). Assuming, as discussed above, that the fronted arguments in these causative structures are topics and thus not assigned case, a noteworthy fact about this pattern is that absolutive case appears to go unassigned.

        Optionality of case assignment in causatives can also be seen in Japanese, but with different results. The interpretive result of the inversion in Tuvaluan seems to relate to the semantics of topicalization; the fronted item is more topical than the *ki*-marked item. In Japanese, accusative versus dative case marking results in different amounts of directness/affectedness of the causation:

(15)    Japanese causative case alternation (from Harley 2006)
a.      Hanako-wa  Yoshi-o    ik-ase-ta
        Hanako-Top Yoshi-Acc go-Caus-Pst
        'Hanako *made* Yoshi go'
b.      Hanako-wa  Yoshi-ni  ik-ase-ta
        Hanako-Top Yoshi-Dat go-Caus-Pst
        'Hanako *let* Yoshi go'

In (15a), the accusative case indicates direct causation, and the dative indirect causation. But the causative morphology does not prohibit or require either assignment.

        What seems to emerge from the above facts is that in Tuvaluan causativizations of transitive verbs, the unavailability of the absolutive case requires the arguments of the stem verb to each do one of two things to receive case: either take the *ki* marker or move to the case-inaccessible topic positition. In the following section, we will see how these facts may be explained within theories of case and argument structure.

## 3. Case and Argument Structure

As to what Tuvaluan syntax in general may look like, I assume an analysis similar to those made for other VSO Polynesian languages (such as Otsuka 1999 for Tongan); specifically, that verb-initial word order is derived by raising the verb to T and then to C. Indeed, this seems to be a necessary assumption facts outlined in section 1 about preverbal objects: that they are topics, and thus located in the specifier

position of CP. Thus, a transitive sentence like (5b) (repeated below) probably has a structure something like (16).

(5b)  tevasa  ne  inu  nee  ia taku kao
      Tevasa Pst drink Erg he my     toddy
      'Tevasa, he drank my sour toddy'

(16)
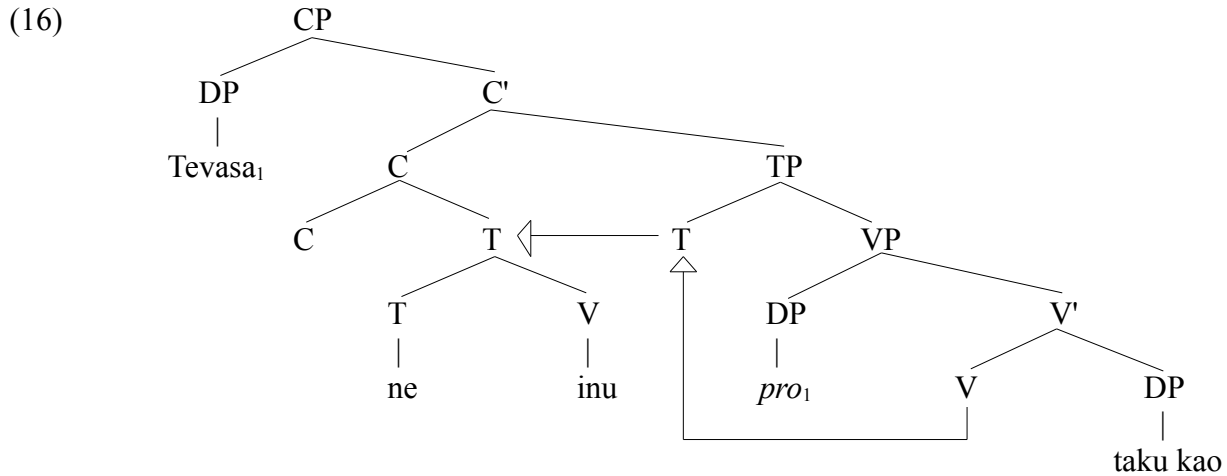


This analysis makes the assumption that topics are generated as such, rather than being fronted. This may be problematic.

Regarding the structure of the causative construction, I follow Harley (2006) in adopting an analysis per Hale and Keyser (1993) that all transitive verbs consist of a lexical V head and a functional (argument-introducing) *v* head (*v*AGT), further assuming that the causative morpheme is the spellout of an additional functional *v* head which introduces a causer argument (*v*CAUS). This gives a structure something like (17).

(17)
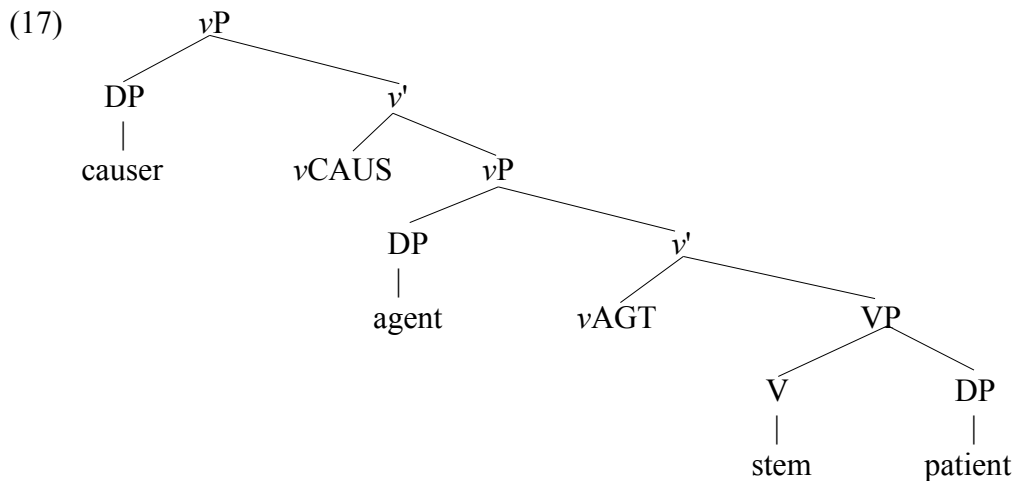


The facts in 2 indicate that for Japanese, this structure allows the regular assignment of case to the causer, the agent, and the patient, but in Tuvaluan, only the causer (the highest DP) receives case normally while the lower arguments may not. We thus must adopt theories of case and causativization which may account for this.

Marantz (2000) discusses a model of case assignment in which case in general is assigned generically in the syntax – that is, a DP is licensed by a case assigning head – and the particular

morphological manifestation of the case feature is realized post-syntactically in the morphological structure (MS). For ergative languages (such as Tuvaluan), this model assumes that the absolutive case is "default" – if one item is assigned case, it is the absolutive – and that the ergative case is "dependent" on absolutive having first been assigned. This, however, seems to be challenged by the Tuvaluan data: the causative morpheme allows the ergative to be assigned and absolutive is not.

　　　Comparing these data to passives in English could possibly shed light on the issue: in English (and other languages), passivization correlates to the inability to assign accusative case (or at least, the inability of certain DPs to *receive* accusative). A common modern analysis of passives is that they involve a functional head similar in nature to causative (Harley 2006, Svenonius 2005, inter alia). But, languages and constructions vary as to whether these functional heads dominating other *v* heads causes a loss of a case feature. A thorough cross-linguistic study of examples of *v* stacking correlating to case alternations could potentially shed light on what, if any, factors unite these phenomena. A factor could be whether V moves to adjoin to higher *v* heads; Harley (2006) does not seem to assume this for Japanese, though it appears necessary to get verb-initial order in Tuvaluan.
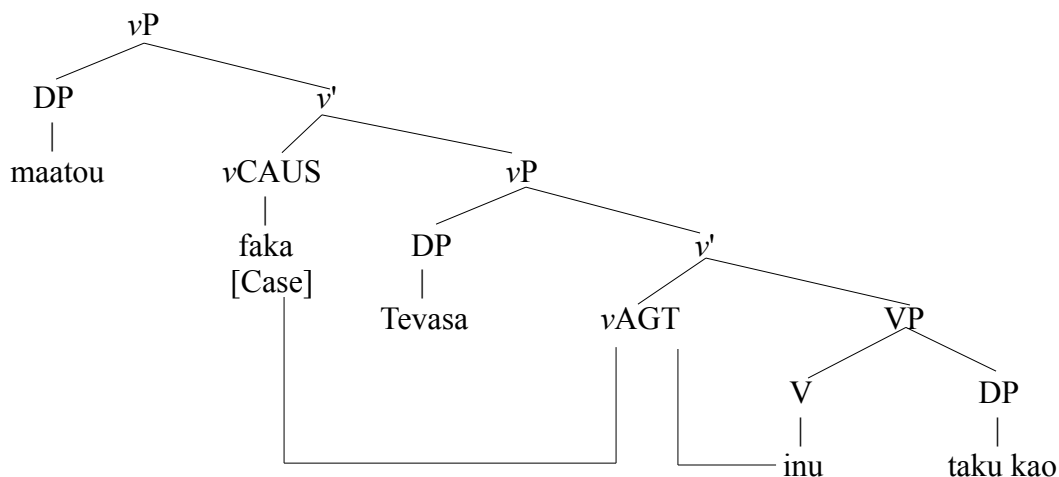
　　　For the *ki*-marked DPs in Tuvaluan, one of two ideas from Marantz (2000) might be assumed. *Ki* could be viewed as either a P head, in which the case is unmarked ("environment sensitive"), or the case assigned at MS to a DP in the scope of *v*CAUS, essentially lexically-governed or "quirky" case. Aside from the fact that *ki* also functions in a more P-like fashion in other constructions, I see no particular advantage to either of options over the other.

　　　The nature of the fronted DPs follows from certain assumptions already made. Under this Marantzian view of case, case is applied to chains; as such, if DPs may be *raised* to topic position, they should still be assigned case per the position from which they originated. But, under the current model, the position of their origin is not assigned any case. Further, under Marantz's theory, case itself does not license DPs. Thus, the fact that these particular chains represent items in two caseless positions does not adversely effect their well-formedness. While the question of whether topics in Tuvaluan are raised or generated as such suddenly becomes more difficult on this view, this does not necessarily hurt the current argument, as a language may allow both, as in the case of English:
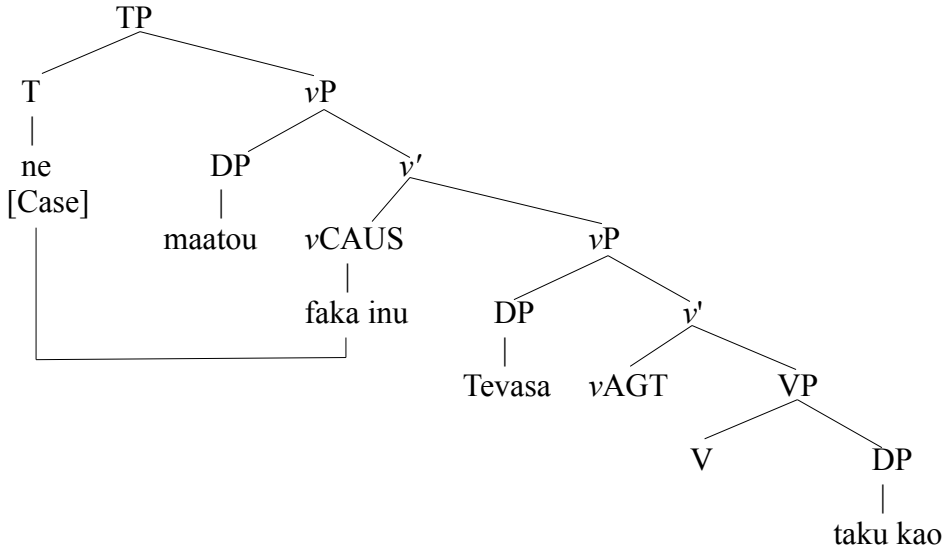
(18)　English topics
a.　　John, I like
b.　　John, he's a good guy.

Assuming for now a raising analysis of topics, we may approximate the derivation of the causative in Tuvluan as follows:

(19)
a.
```
                vP
          ┌──────┴──────┐
         DP             v'
          |       ┌──────┴──────┐
       maatou   vCAUS          vP
                  |       ┌──────┴──────┐
                faka     DP            v'
               [Case]     |       ┌─────┴─────┐
                       Tevasa    vAGT        VP
                                        ┌─────┴─────┐
                                        V          DP
                                        |           |
                                       inu      taku kao
```

b.

TP
- T: ne [Case]
- vP
  - DP: maatou
  - v'
    - vCAUS: faka inu
    - vP
      - DP: Tevasa
      - v'
        - vAGT
        - VP
          - V
          - DP: taku kao

c.

CP
- DP
- C'
  - C
  - TP
    - T: ne fakainu
    - vP
      - DP: maatou
      - v'
        - vCAUS
        - vP
          - DP: Tevasa
          - v'
            - vAGT
            - VP
              - V
              - DP: taku kao
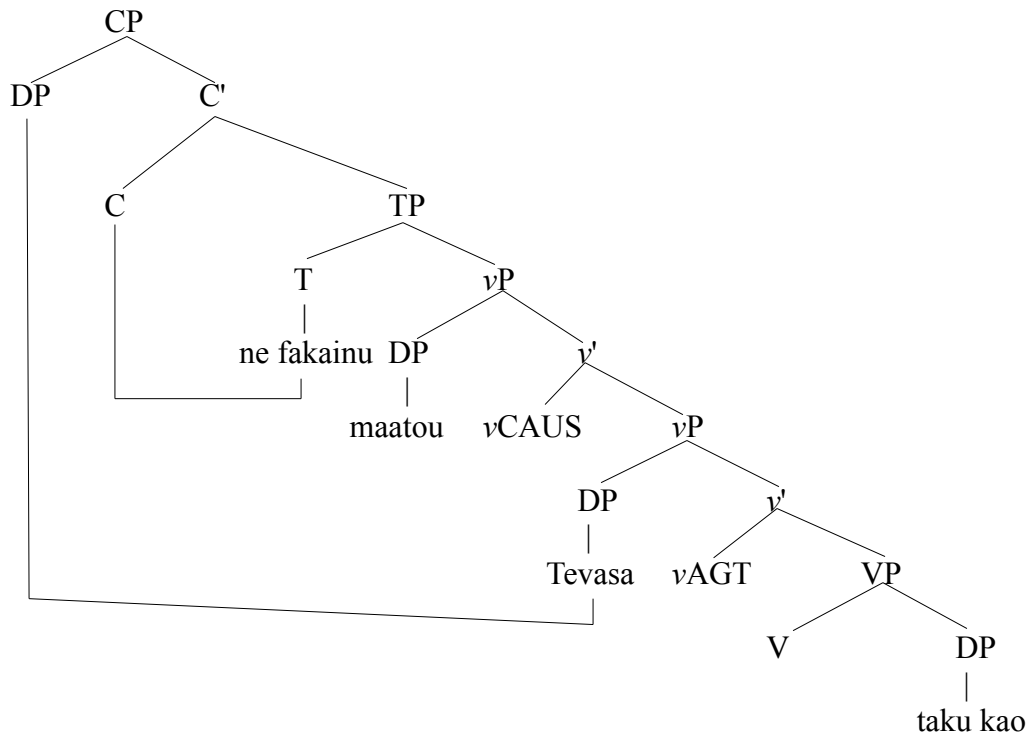
In (a), the stem V moves to *v*AGT and then to *v*CAUS. It is assumed (as above) that this movement has some relation to the loss of case-assigning ability for the lower *v* head. Now, one of the arguments in the lower part of the sentence will be able to receive case. In (b), *v*CAUS moves to T, which is able to assign (dependent, ergative) case to the highest DP, *maatou*. Finally, in (c), T moves to C, and either of the lower arguments may move to CP, so that only one of the lower arguments will be in case-assigning position. This is the syntactic structure that is sent to MS, such that the lowest argument will be assigned *ki* marking, the post-verbal argument will receive ergative, and the highest argument will be unmarked.

To sum, the data in Tuvaluan may be explained if the assumptions about case made in Marantz

(2000) are augmented with assumptions about the nature of *v*CAUS (that it may, in some cases, preclude case assignment by a lower *v* head), default case (that it is *less default* in some sense than Marantz assumes), and topics (the topic position licenses caselessness). What sort of model may capture these assumptions is an open question, but we might look to ranked constraints as a possibility. The Tuvaluan data give the appearance of a system where a highly ranked constraint requiring the assignment of absolutive (giving it its default appearance) is outranked by another barring absolutive under *v*CAUS, and a constraint that DPs be marked for case is outranked by another barring case in Spec-CP. Such a model would make particular predictions about what sort of typology should exist as in terms of causativization and case marking, and a great deal more data would be needed to see how good these are.

**References:**

Besnier, N. 2000. *Tuvaluan: A Polynesian Language of the Central Pacific*. London: Routledge.

Hale, K., and S. J. Keyser. 1993. On argument structure and the lexical expression of syntactic relations. In Hale and Keyser (eds.), *The View from Building 20.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Harley, H. 2006. On the causative construction. In Miyagawa and Saito (eds.), *The Handbook of Japanese Linguistics.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marantz, A. 2000. Case and licensing. In Reuland (ed.), *Arguments and Case: Explaining Burzio's Generalization* pp11-30. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Otsuka, Y. 1999. Ergativity in Tongan. Oxford: Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Svenonius, P. 2005. Case alternations in the Icelandic Passive. Ms., University of Tromsø.