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Antipassive constructions in Oceanic languages

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Abstract

This article will discuss the different constructions which could be relevant for identifying antipassives in Oceanic languages, in spite of the fact that there is no dedicated antipassive marker. Some of these constructions involve the backgrounding of the object, but are associated with different syntactic devices, discursive strategies and semantic functions, giving rise to either incompleteness of the action, low individuation of the patient, or restrictions on its uses.

Looking at their semantic and pragmatic specificities, I will investigate what these types of construction have in common and to which extent they can be labelled ‘antipassive’, as has been done *inter alia* by Cooreman (1994), Dixon (1992) and Janic (2013, 2016).

1. Introduction

This article aims to identify and describe different constructions in Oceanic languages which may be instances of what is known as ‘antipassive constructions’.

There are more than 450 languages belonging to the Oceanic subgroup, which is about half of the Austronesian languages family. Common innovations - lexical, phonological and syntactic - which distinguish Oceanic languages from the other Austronesian languages are numerous and several of them are well described (Pawley 1972). In spite of their common origin, however, Oceanic languages exhibit a large variety of linguistic structures, such as variation in constituent order (SVO for a majority of the languages, but also, VOS or VSO as in most Polynesian and New Caledonian languages, and SOV in the Papuan Tip Linkage (Western Oceania). Morphosyntactic alignment is primarily of the accusative type, but quite a lot of languages exhibit different types of ergativity. Linguistic structures also differ in the syntactic expression of possession, reciprocity and reflexivity, spatial orientation, or in the delimitation of the different lexical categories. The languages taken into consideration in this article belong to different Oceanic subgroups: Southeast Solomonic (Toqabaqita), Papuan Tip (Saliba), Meso-Melanesian (Kokota), New Caledonian Mainland (Nêlêmwa, Xârâcùù), Loyalty islands (Drehu, Iai), Fijian (Boumaa Fijian), Nuclear Polynesian (East Futunan, East Uvean, Samoan, Fagauvea), Tongic (Niuean).

The article is organized as follows. I will first discuss the terminology used in descriptions of Oceanic languages which could be relevant to the antipassive domain. I am personally unconvinced in this matter, since I do not consider a construction as relevant to antipassive if only a few characteristics of the construction are similar to the prototypical antipassive.

The definition of antipassive taking into account by the editors of this volume is similar to the one developed by Polinsky (2013): “An antipassive construction is a derived detransitivized construction with a two-place predicate, related to a corresponding transitive construction whose predicate is the same lexical item. In the basic transitive construction, the patient-like argument is realized as a direct object; in the antipassive construction, that argument is either suppressed (left implicit) or realized as an oblique complement.”

Apart from this definition, the ‘demotion’ or the ‘low individuation’ of the patient has been proposed as defining characteristics. Can different marking, an omission, an inclusion in the verb phrase of the patient be described as a ‘demotion’? I will discuss this point in each of the following sections, devoted to the different constructions I found in Oceanic languages in which the patient expressed as the object of a transitive verb can be omitted, or expressed in different ways.

In section 2, I present the constructions in which the object of a transitive verb is omitted, without any marking on the predicate and modification of the verbal valency. In some cases, there is no demotion of the patient, since the former patient can become the subject, if the verb is labile. In other cases, the subject does not change and the object is simply not expressed, but not strictly speaking demoted, since it is semantically implicitly given.

In section 3, I will examine different types of object incorporation found in Oceanic languages.

Here, the patient is not obligatorily demoted: either it is integrated in the verb phrase, modifying its meaning, or it is only partly incorporated, and keeps some object argument properties.

In section 4, two cases of object peripherization will be investigated, one in Nêlêmwa (New Caledonia, North of the Mainland), the other in several Polynesian languages. In both cases, the argument marking system is modified, but the verb remains bivalent. I will discuss the valency of these verbs, which can occur with different types of argument. In the so-called ergative construction, only the absolutive argument is compulsory, referring, when occurring by itself, either to a patient or to an agent. When two arguments are expressed, the absolutive argument refers to the patient, the ergative to the agent. In the other construction, the verb takes the same alignment as the so-called middle verbs (verbs of emotion, sensation, etc.), with two compulsory arguments, one in the absolutive (the experiencer), the other one in the oblique case (the partially affected patient). The choice of ergative *vs.* oblique construction with the same underived verb is only available for a few verbs, and the patient is not less, but more specifically affected, which makes it difficult to interpret it as a case of antipassive.

In section 5, what is often called ‘middle voice constructions’ will be presented, in the way they typically occur in Oceanic languages (cf. Moyse-Faurie 2008). The middle domain, as Kemmer (1993) defines it, includes grooming actions, movements and change in body positions, spontaneous events and ‘naturally reciprocal’ situations, along with a certain indistinguishability of participants. In Oceanic languages, constructions relevant to the middle domain have tight links with the reciprocal domain, but very rarely with the reflexive domain. A middle/reciprocal prefix (*paRi-) has been reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. Lichtenberk (2000:31) lists several different functions for this POC prefix, which fall within the semantic domain described by Pawley (1973) as “combined or repeated actions by a plurality of actors”. Indistinguishability between the agent and the patient doesn't mean demotion of the patient, and I will not consider middle voice constructions as belonging to the antipassive domain; besides, the middle/reciprocal prefix is not an antipassive marker, it has wider uses, semantically well defined.

It is worth mentioning that in general the term ‘antipassive’ is not found in the available descriptions of Oceanic languages.¹ This is mainly due to the following reasons: (i) there is no dedicated antipassive marker in these languages; (ii) other terms have been used in the descriptions, covering constructions that are only partly relevant to what is crosslinguistically now labelled ‘antipassive’ (cf. Janic 2013 and 2016 for a discussion of the antipassive in Oceanic languages). Some of the original terms found in Oceanic grammars are the following:

- ‘transitivity discord’ and ‘pseudo incorporation’

Margetts (2008) discusses a very interesting Saliba structure, half way between object incorporation and direct object, implying the occurrence of a reflex of the POC prefix *paRi- (cf. section 3.3), while Massam (2001) presents cases of pseudo-incorporation in Niuean (cf. section 3.2).

- ‘recessive voice’

In Nêlêmwa (North of New Caledonia), Bril (1997) describes a construction in which the object is peripherized and indirectly marked as a case of ‘recessive voice’. (cf. section 4.2).

- ‘depatientive’

There is no mention of antipassives (nor passives) in Lichtenberk’s Toqabaqita Grammar (2008). He prefers the term ‘depatientive’ instead for a construction that has several functions linked to the expression of middle situations. Typically, the depatientive construction is used when the identity of the patient (etc.) is not relevant. It expresses a type of situation rather than a specific occurrence of that type of situation" (Lichtenberk 2007: 1560).

- ‘unergative derivation’ are the terms used by Palmer (1999) (cf. section 5.3) to describe a type

¹ A few descriptions on Austronesian languages belonging to the higher Malayo-Polynesian subgroup do mention the existence of widespread antipassive constructions. For example, it is the case for Tagalog, or for Ilokano (Gerds 1988), and Polinsky (2013) lists Chamorro as having antipassive constructions. This article, however, will only consider the languages belonging to the Oceanic subgroup.

of derivation conveying a middle meaning.

It is, however, problematic to subsume all these different constructions under the label ‘antipassive’, in the absence of a specific marker, especially since these constructions often overlap with or deviate from typical antipassives. Noticeable is the fact that ‘depatientive’ and ‘unergative derivation’ are both linked to the expression of middle situations. I will examine this conflation in details in section 5.1.

In most Polynesian language grammars, the authors even state that there is no antipassive (nor passive, as in Samoan or Tuvaluan) constructions. In Tuvaluan, according to Besnier (2000:438), “Nothing in the morphosyntactic structure of the language can be identified as a voice contrast in the usual sense of the term. Verb morphology is not marked for a passive or antipassive category, and there is no evidence of passive or antipassive processes”. There is no mention of antipassives either in Māori (Bauer 1993) (but passive, yes), with the exception of Gibson and Starosta’s analysis (1990), as summarized in Harlow (1997:171-172): “This very high frequency of passives in comparison to actives was among the considerations which led Gibson and Starosta to claim that the passive form is in fact the basic transitive construction, the ‘active’ is thus an antipassive, and Māori is an ergative language”. Discussing this last statement, i.e. the fact that Māori has sometimes been described as an ergative language, would lead us to examine a long and controversial discussion about the syntactic structure of Proto Oceanic and Proto Austronesian, which would take us too far away from antipassive considerations. Besides, we now know that antipassive is not exclusively linked to ergativity (Janic 2013, *inter alia*), as it mostly used to be, with ‘antipassive’ found in constructions in which the agent, ergative in the original construction, is put into the absolutive and the object, previously in the absolutive, becomes an optional oblique term or is dropped altogether. The ‘antipassive’ was thus presented as the counterpart of ergative languages to passive in accusative languages (cf. Silverstein 1972, 1976).²

I will now successively examine several different constructions allowing the omission of the patient, or its inclusion in the verb phrase, or a differential marking of the patient. Each involves different syntactic devices, discursive strategies and semantic functions, giving rise to either incompleteness of the action, restrictions on its type, low individuation of the patient or, by contrast, higher specificity. As I will show, none of these constructions are relevant to be labelled true ‘antipassive’ construction, and this for the following reasons:

1. There is no specific antipassive marker
 - (i) ‘object peripherization’ or obliquely marked object, does not involve any marking on the predicate, and doesn’t intransitivize the verb.
 - (ii) object incorporation may imply a modification of the verb, at least in some languages, but mainly reduces the scope of the verb by incorporating the meaning of the object into the verb or, in the case of pseudo-incorporation or ‘transitivity discord’, reduces the scope of the object.
 - (iii) object omission is not obligatorily linked to patient demotion, since the former patient can become the unique expressed argument.
 - (iv) middle derivation, in most cases, involves a marker on the predicate, which has several other motivations than the backgrounding of the object, and for this reason cannot be assimilated to an antipassive marker.
2. The detransitivization process is partly attested in the (ii), (iii) and (iv) constructions, but doesn’t obligatorily imply a demotion of the patient.

In conclusion, I will summarize the arguments against the inclusion of all the different constructions investigated in this paper in the antipassive domain. These constructions do share some semantic or syntactic characteristics generally assigned to the antipassive domain. I will, however, choose to point out the possible links between each of them and the antipassive prototypic

² In Lazard (1994:180), only Añun (Venezuela) was described as an exception.

East Uvean (Wallis, Western Nuclear Polynesian) (Moyses-Faurie 2016:137)

- 4a. 'E huo e Soane tana gāue'aga 'ufi.
 NPST weed ERG Soane 3SGPOSS.A field yam
 'Soane is weeding his yam field.'
- 4b. 'E huo tana gāue'aga 'ufi.
 NPST weed 3SGPOSS.A field yam
 '(Someone/he) is weeding his yam field.'
- 4c. 'E huo ia Soane.
 NPST weed ABS Soane
 'Soane is weeding.'

In all these examples, there is no formal change on the verb, which remains potentially transitive, whatever the degree of animacy of the arguments. Since either the agent or the patient can remain unexpressed, it makes no sense to analyze these one argument constructions as antipassive.

3. Different types of object incorporation

I will now consider the different object incorporation strategies, particularly those resulting in the formation of a complex verb phrase. In general, incorporation implies that the patient loses its status as core argument, cannot be separated from the predicate, can no longer be definite or specific, and the construction, which was transitive, changes to intransitive. In Oceanic languages, however, different types of object incorporation exist, depending on the degree of incorporation it involves, and on the grammatical category to which the object argument belongs. In what follows, I will first present a few examples of complete object incorporation (section 3.1). Then, I will pass on to two cases of partial incorporations, which might share some characteristics with antipassive: pseudo-incorporation (section 3.2) and transitivity discord (section 3.3.), as labelled by the authors, Massam (2001) for the former, and Margetts (2008) for the latter. These constructions, however, remain partly transitive, and cannot be considered as a case of antipassive.

3.1. Complete object incorporation

Complete incorporation has often considered as a case of antipassive (Foley and Van Valin 1985:343, *inter alia*); Foley (2007:436-437), however, claims that 'Noun incorporation, while related in its effects on the [-A] argument, must be distinguished from antipassivization', adding that in the case of noun incorporation 'there is no lexical derivation on the verb, and no overt antipassive suffix'. Such constructions are not relevant to the antipassive domain, since the participant referring to the patient in the transitive construction is neither a peripherized nor a non-expressed object. . Object incorporation is found in accusative as well as in ergative Oceanic languages. In an accusative language such as Xârâcùù, the incorporated object illustrated in (5b) loses its determiner, is immediately postposed to the predicate, and triggers a generic reading, while the form of the subject does not change.

Xârâcùù (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia) (Moyses-Faurie 2015:1048)

- 5a. Chaa kamûrû nã tuu rè chaa kwâ.
 one man IPFV step.on IPFV one boat
 'The man steps on the boat.'
- 5b. Chaa kamûrû nã tuu kwâ.
 one man IPFV step.on boat
 'The man goes on board.'

Besides, complete incorporation tends to modify the meaning of the predicate, forming with it a verbal compound or a complex verb. This is the case in the Loyalty island languages, as in the following Iaaï example in which the verbal compound *xuc-bwee* can even be transitivized with the

transitive suffix *-ö*.

Iaai (Ouvéa, Loyalty islands) (Ozanne-Rivierre 1976:232)

6. *A-me xuc-bwee-ö ke komok.*
3SG-NPST beat-leaf-TR ART patient
'He is nursing a patient by spitting leaves on him.' (Lit. he is beating leaves the patient)

In Drehu, there are two different types of object incorporation (Moyses-Faurie, 1985). When the object is a pronoun or a proper noun, the incorporation is purely morphological, i.e. the object keeps its status as a core argument even if it cannot be separated from the verb, which often takes a personal suffix as in (7b). When the incorporated object is a nominal, by contrast, incorporation is syntactic; the transitive verb *humuth* [humuθ] 'kill' loses its final consonant, as in (7c), the reading becomes generic, leading to lexical compounding.

Drehu (Lifou, Loyalty islands)

- 7a. *Troa humuth hnyawa la puaka.*
OBLIG kill.TR well ART pig
'You must kill the pig properly.'
- 7b. *Troa humuthi angeic.*
OBLIG kill.TR.PERS 3SG
'You must kill him/it.'
- 7c. *Troa humu puaka hnyawa.*
OBLIG kill pig well
'You must kill pigs properly.'

Note that the adverb *hnyawa* 'well' in (7c) has to be postposed to the incorporated object *puaka* which is no longer considered as an argument.

In ergative Polynesian languages, the object incorporation has similar implications, in the way that nothing can separate the verb and its incorporated object. In addition, the former ergative argument *le tama* in (8a) switches to the absolutive case, marked with the preposition *a*, as in (8b), the compound verb is then intransitive and its meaning becomes generic or habitual.

East Futunan (Western Nuclear Polynesian)

- 8a. *E inu le fā piele e le tama.*
NPST drink SPC CLS beer ERG SPC boy
'The boy is drinking a beer.'
- 8b. *E inu piele a le tama.*
NPST drink beer ABS SPC boy
'The boy is a beer drinker.'

Similarly in Samoan, the patient *le tusi* occurs in a transitive construction as an absolutive (unmarked) argument along with an ergative argument *e le taine* referring to the agent (9a); in object incorporation construction (9b), it is the agent which occurs as the absolutive (unmarked) argument, and the former patient becomes a part of the verb phrase, constituting a verb-noun compound.

Samoan (Western Nuclear Polynesian) (Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992:393)

9a. *Sā faitau ('uma) e le taine le tusi.*
 PST read (all) ERG SPC girl SPC letter/book
 'The girl read the [whole] letter/book.'

9b. *Sā faitau tusi le teine.*
 PST read letter/book SPC girl
 'The girl was reading [and not counting].'

Complete incorporation changes the status of the patient, which is no longer an argument, and modifies the meaning of the verb, forming with it a verbal compound.

3.2. Pseudo noun incorporation

In another Polynesian language, Niuean, Massam (2001) describes a construction she calls pseudo noun incorporation. This construction is different from complete noun incorporation "wherein a nominal head is incorporated into a verbal head". In the pseudo noun incorporation, there is only a partial detransitivization process, and nominal objects can occur with modifiers or grammatical morphemes. In example (10a), the agent occurs as a subject marked in the absolutive case; the object is unmarked, but consists in a complex nominal phrase; the first noun occurs by itself without any preceding morpheme, but is followed by a nominal phrase introduced by the comitative *mo*; the noun *ika* 'fish' is then determined by the specific article *e* and a modifier, *mitaki* 'good'. In (10b) by contrast, the agent is in the ergative case, the patient in the absolutive case, and the verb is fully transitive:

Niuean (Polynesian, Tongic subgroup)

10a. *Ne kai sipi mo e ika mitaki a Sione.*
 PST eat chip and/with SPC fish good ABS Sione
 'Sione ate good fish and chips.' (Massam 2001:160)

10b. *Ne hapo he tama e polo.*
 PST catch ERG child SPC ball
 'The child caught the ball.' (Sperlich 1997:111)

Pseudo noun incorporation shares with the total noun incorporation the fact that the construction has only one marked argument (the agent) in both cases, but instead of leading to lexical compounding, it allows the patient to keep some modifiers.

3.3. Transitivity discord

Another case of partial incorporation is described by Margetts (2008) under the terms 'transitivity discord', which she found in several Oceanic languages such as Saliba, a Western Oceanic language belonging to the Papuan Tip Linkage (Margetts 1999), with verbs prefixed by *kai-*, a reflex of POc **paRi-*. The objects are limited in their choice of modifiers, for example they can never be modified by numerals or modifiers that promote the individuation of the object noun (Margetts 1999:186). On the other hand they can occur with possessive modifiers, contrasting in this respect with complete object incorporation.

Saliba (Papuan Tip) Margetts 1999:186)

11. *Ya-lao yo-gu lulu ya-kai-deuli.*
 1SG-go CLS1-1SG.POS shirt 1SG-KAI-wash
 'I go and wash my shirts.'

The numeral restriction is explained by the fact that in transitivity discord constructions, "The objects must allow a plural interpretation which can be attributed to their non-individuated status" (Margetts 1999:186). One of the functions of the prefix *kai-* is said to be similar to that of antipassive markers in ergative languages, in the way that it backgrounds the object argument (Margetts 2008:37).

Saliba, like a few other Oceanic languages, display at least four different morphosyntactic constructions on the semantic transitivity cline, summarized by Margetts (2008:43) and reproduced



below:

transitive clause with accord	HIGH SEMANTIC TRANSITIVITY
transitive clauses with discord	
intransitive clauses with noun incorporation	
intransitive clauses	LOW SEMANTIC TRANSITIVITY

Not all the transitive verbs can occur in the discord construction, but in Saliba, at least 35 verbs of high frequency are attested in this construction, even if they do not belong to a semantically coherent class (Margetts 2008:42), whereas according to Lichtenberk (1983), in Manam, an Oceanic language spoken on the North coast of New Guinea, this discord construction concerns verbs of mental disposition along with verbs of excretion and secretion.

I now have to consider whether this discord transitivity construction belongs to the antipassive domain, or whether it is just a specific case of noun incorporation, or whether it is relevant to the middle voice domain (further discussed in section 5). The fact that “Discord clauses often describe habitual activities, and the objects denote the kind of entities that are typically involved” (Margetts 2008:39) would lead us to consider it as a marginal case of the middle voice, even though the discord construction remains transitive, contrasting in this point with the middle voice. I will return to this discussion and comparison in section 5, when I will examine the depatientive construction belonging to the middle domain.

I will go now to section 4 where I will present three instances of peripherization of the object without any verbal derivation.

4. Peripherization of the object

This section will examine different cases of peripherization of the object, which do not have the effect of demoting the object as argument, but change its syntactic expression, from absolutive or unmarked case to oblique case. In section 4.1, I will discuss the Samoan case of the already well-known peripherization of the absolutive argument referring to the patient, comparing it in detail to other Polynesian languages in which quite different semantic issues are attested. Section 4.2 will present a case of peripherization of the object in Nêlêmwa, a Kanak language spoken in New Caledonia, leading to the loss of the indirect object specificity. Section 4.3 deals with a recent argument marking evolution observed in another Kanak language, the Polynesian Outlier spoken in the Loyalty islands: both arguments used to be introduced by the same marker and, recently, the argument referring to the patient came to be expressed in the oblique case.

4.1. Object peripherization in Polynesian languages

In Section 2, I already mentioned the two different transitive verb classes attested in Western Nuclear Polynesian languages: the ergative verb class, and the middle verb class. The ergative verb class may have two arguments, the agent in the ergative case, and the patient in the absolutive case. The middle verb class has two compulsory arguments: the experiencer in the absolutive case, the patient in the oblique case.

Ergative Polynesian languages have, at least for some of their ergative verbs, a choice between the two constructions. Object peripherization occurs when the absolutive argument, referring to the patient, is marked as oblique, while the ergative argument is marked as absolutive. Here again, no specific verbal marker is attested. The oblique marking of the patient has different semantic effects, depending on the language. In some cases, the patient is less affected when expressed in the oblique case, and this is indeed close to the antipassive core meaning. For instance, in Samoan, the demoted argument *le i'a* involves the partitive reading (12c). The choice between the two constructions (ergative or oblique transitive) is described by Mosel & Hovdhaugen (1992: 108) as an inherent characteristic of the ‘labile verbs’. The examples in (12) illustrate three uses of the verb ‘*ai* ‘eat’. Occurring in an intransitive construction (12a), the meaning of the verb is ambiguous, non-oriented, and can signify ‘eat’ as well as ‘be eaten’. In the two transitive constructions, (12b and 12c), the meaning of the verb ‘*ai* is ‘eat’, but the degree of affectedness of the patient and the implication of

the agent differ. In (12b), the ergative argument is a full agent that completely affects the absolutive argument, the patient. By contrast in (12c), the patient is an oblique argument, only partially affected, and the agent is now expressed in the absolutive case.

Samoan (Western Nuclear Polynesian)

- 12a. *Sā 'ai le i'a.*
 PST eat SPC fish
 'The fish ate' or 'the fish was eaten' (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992:718)
- 12b. *Sā 'ai e le teine le i'a.*
 PST eat ERG SPC girl SPC fish
 'The girl ate the fish.' (Hovdhaugen 1992:108)
- 12c. *Sā 'ai le teine i le i'a.*
 PST eat SPC girl OBL SPC fish
 'The girl ate some fish.' (Lit. the girl ate from the fish) (Hovdhaugen 1992:108)

Cooreman (1994:61) analyses the use of the oblique construction, contrasting with the ergative construction, as a case of antipassive. Building on the definition given by Dixon (1992: 136), Cooreman then notes: "The antipassive derivation: deep A becomes surface S, deep O is marked by an oblique case (dative, locative, or instrumental, in different languages), and the verb bears an antipassive derivational suffix". Dixon, however, does not include in his definition the occurrence of an obligatorily derivational suffix. Shibatani (2006:238), in turn, comments on the Samoan examples, saying that "the antipassive voice presents a situation as NOT affecting the patient in totality".

When I first encountered such object peripherization in East Uvean and East Futunan, I considered it to be a marginal construction since I was familiar with the instances in which it only occurred with a few ingestion verbs, such as *kai* 'eat' and *inu* 'drink', as it is the case in Samoan. In East Uvean and East Futunan however, verbs with other meanings can enter this construction. Besides, the peripherized patient is not less affected, but specifically and exclusively affected, as shown in (13b), as in the other examples below (14b, 15b and 16b). Such a semantic restrictive function of the antipassive construction seems to be quite unusual from a cross-linguistic perspective, and this is one of the reasons I hesitate to use the label 'antipassive' for such a patient-oblique alternation:

East Uvean (Wallis Island, Western Nuclear Polynesian) (Moyses-Faurie 2010:473)

- 13a. *Vaka'i ia te pāsina faka'osí!*
 examine ABS SPC page last
 'Examine the last page!'
- 13b. *Vaka'i ki te pāsina faka'osí!*
 examine OBL SPC page last
 'Only look attentively at the last page.' / 'Examine specifically the last page.'

In another example, however, with the verb *inu* 'drink', two translations were given for (14b), the second one corresponding to the Samoan meaning described earlier:

East Uvean (Wallis Island)

- 14a. *'E inu te fo'i niu e Paulo.*
 NPST drink SPC CLS coco ERG Paulo
 'Paulo is drinking coconut juice.'

- 14b. 'E inu ia Paulo ki te fo'i niu o Soane.
 NPST drink ABS Paulo OBL SPC CLS coco POSS Soane
 (i) 'Paulo only drinks the juice from Soane's coconut.'
 (ii) 'Paulo drinks some of the juice of Soane's coconut.'

The first translation is the most spontaneous one. The second translation, introducing a less affected patient related to the partitive meaning, as it was the case in the Samoan examples, was only obtained when I suggested it.

Again, this example mainly illustrates the exclusive specification of the patient (the coconut juice is drunk, and the coconut flesh is left over).

In the following examples, still in East Uvean, the translations given in (15b) and (16b) are of the type (i) mentioned above, focusing on the specificity of the oblique object but also on the intentionality of the agent. Thus, they contrast with the translation given for the corresponding ergative construction in (15a) and (16a) respectively.

East Uvean

- 15a. Ne'e fai e Soane ia te me'a ne'e au fakatotonu.
 PST make ERG Soane ABS SPC thing NPST 1SG order
 'Soane did what I had ordered him to do.'
- 15b. Ne'e fai pē ia Soane ki te me'a ne'e au fakatotonu.
 PST make RESTR ABS Soane OBL SPC chose NPST 1SG order
 'Soane did exactly what I had ordered him to do.'
- 16a. 'E au kai pē ia te me'a lelei 'ātea.
 NPST 1SG eat RESTR ABS SPC thing good only
 'I am only eating good food.'
- 16b. 'E au kai pē ki te me'a lelei 'ātea.
 NPST 1SG eat RESTR OBL SPC thing good only
 'I am specifically only eating good food.'

The oblique construction does involve a semantic reduction, which is, however, not related to the affectedness of the patient. It reduces the choice on the patient, focusing on the patient or part of it, making it exclusive. This exclusiveness given to the patient is sometimes associated with the aspectual meaning of immediateness, as shown in (17b).

East Uvean

- 17a. 'E pāui e Pētelō ia te motokā mahakí ke ha'u ki henī.
 NPST call ERG Petelo ABS SPC car sick that come OBL here
 Petelo is calling an ambulance so that it comes here.'
- 17b. 'E pāui ia Pētelō ki te motokā mahakí ke ha'u lā ki henī
 NPST call ABS Petelo OBL SPC car sick that come EMPH OBL here
 'Petelo is calling an ambulance so that it comes here immediately.'

Further investigation of East Futunan showed indeed that ergative verbs occurring in the oblique object construction were not as semantically restricted as initially assumed (cf. Moyse-Faurie 2010) but could concern quite a few other verbs, as mentioned earlier. More surprisingly, the choice between the ergative and the oblique constructions among the youngest speakers was first said to be deprived of any motivation, but after a deeper analysis of some speakers, the conclusion was that there was no diminution of the affectedness of the patient, but, again, a more specific scope: "le ki,

c'est précis" ("with *ki*, it is precise").

I can now compare the basic transitive/ergative construction in examples (a), followed by the peripherized patient in examples (b), and its incorporation in the verb phrase in examples (c), again with ingestion verbs (18) but also with verbs such as 'wear' (19) and *tākai* 'smear' (20), both verbs expressing body care. In (18c) and (19c) are given the corresponding constructions with the incorporated object.

East Futunan (Futuna, Western Nuclear Polynesian)

- 18a. *Na momi a le fā lole e le ta'ine.*
 PST suck ABS SPC CLS sweet ERG SPC girl
 'The girl sucked a sweet (exclusively).'
- 18b. *Na momi a le ta'ine ki lana fā lole.*
 PST suck ABS SPC girl OBL 3SGPOSS.A CLS sweet
 'The girl sucked her sweet (specifically given to her).'
- 18c. *Na momi lole a le ta'ine.*
 PST suck sweet ABS SPC girl
 'The girl is a sweet sucker.'
- 19a. *Kua sulu a le kie e le toe.*
 PFV wear ABS SPC loincloth ERG SPC boy
 'The boy (now) wears a loincloth.'
- 19b. *Kua sulu a le toe ki le kie.*
 PFV wear ABS SPC boy OBL SPC loincloth
 'The boy (now) wears a loincloth (and not trousers).'
- 19c. *Kua sulu kie a le toe.*
 PFV wear loincloth ABS SPC boy
 'The boy has become a loincloth wearer.'
- 20a. *E kau tākai loku fā'ulu.*
 NPST 1SG smear 1SGPOSS.O hair
 'I am oiling my hair (and eventually elsewhere on the body).'
- 20b. *E kau tākai ki loku fā'ulu.*
 NPST 1SG smear OBL 1SGPOSS.O hair
 'I am only oiling my hair.'

Thus in East Futunan, the following verbs enter both types of construction, ergative and oblique transitive: *inu* 'drink', *kai* 'eat', *momi* 'suck sweet', *sue* 'nose for food (pig)', *tau* 'wear (watch, necklace)', *tui* 'wear (cloth)', *sole* 'carry with a piece of wood', *to'o* 'take' and *tākai* 'smear (with oil)'.

The shared meaning for these verbs is that they are mostly concerned with different kinds of body care (ingestion, wearing or body care) on the one hand, or 'carry/put' events, on the other.

In the oblique construction, the patient is specifically, and exclusively affected, but strictly speaking, not less than in the corresponding ergative construction. Two of the main characteristics of 'antipassives' – less affectedness of the patient and markers on the verb – are not manifested in East Futunan and East Uvean. Concerning the syntactic constraints, the ergative construction and the peripherized object construction are both available with any tense-aspect marker, perfective as well as imperfective. In East Futunan as in East Uvean, the specific article occurs freely in front of the oblique object.

Tsunoda (1988:633), following Lazard (1986:206), mentions a correlation between imperfective/continuative/progressive and antipassive in which the latter often expresses an imperfective event, or a common activity. This is not obligatorily the case in East Futunan and East

Uvean. On the pragmatic level, Lazard (1994:211) mentions that “Most often, passive voice focuses on the agent, while antipassive focuses on the object”⁶.

Another important characteristic linked to the oblique object construction is that it renders the expression of the agent compulsory, since it is expressed in the absolute case, whereas in the ergative construction, the agent is not compulsory, and is even often avoided for pragmatic reasons (cf. Duranti & Ochs 1990, Duranti 1994, Moyse-Faurie 2000). The main difference between an oblique marking of the object and complete object incorporation (§3.1 above) relies on either the partially affected object or the specifically affected object. However, the remaining argument is still definite in the oblique object construction, whereas in the incorporated object construction, the former object loses its argument status, being no more definite or specific in itself, it only qualifies the event, reducing its scope. If incorporation generally results in the backgrounding of the incorporated noun (cf. Heath 1976; Givón 1990), its fusion within the verb phrase often makes it indistinguishable as a constituent (except in the constructions discussed in §3.2 and §3.3, concerned with partial incorporation). The patient in the oblique object construction, by contrast, is semantically selected by the verb and therefore remains a core argument. The non-referential, indefiniteness criterion then concerns object incorporation, and not the construction with an oblique object. Even if antipassive is often said to be linked with the generic, indefinite, non-referential features, what we have seen are constructions that should not be called antipassives in the first place. They do not show the semantic, syntactic or pragmatic specificities usually associated with the prototypical antipassive.

Comparable semantic effects between ergative and peripherization of the object constructions are available if we consider another verb category, the so-called Polynesian middle verbs. These verbs all belong to the same semantic fields: emotion, sensation, perception or communication and enter specific constructions, with an argument - the experiencer - in the absolute case and another argument - the patient or stimulus - in the oblique case. They can only occur in the ergative construction after derivation involving the transitive suffix *-i*, as shown in (21b). The experiencer *Paulo* is then in the ergative case, having more control over the patient, *tona* ‘*ohoaná*’ ‘his wife’, now marked in the absolute case.

East Uvean

21a. *I tana hifo mai te vaká ne'e sio ia Paulo ki tona 'ohoaná.*
 OBL 3SGPOSS.A go down from SPC boat PST see ABS Paulo OBL 3SGPOSS.O wife
 ‘When he went off the boat, Paulo saw his wife.’ (Lit. in his going down from the boat Paulo look at his wife)

21b. *I tana hifo mai te vaká ne'e sio-'i e Paulo ia tona 'ohoaná.*
 OBL 3SGPOSS.A go down from SPC boat PST see-TR ERG Paulo ABS 3SGPOSS.O wife
 ‘When he went off the boat, Paulo observed his wife.’ (Lit. in his going down from the boat Paulo observed his wife)

4.2. Recessive voice

In Nêlêmwa (North of New Caledonia), Bril (2010) describes a construction (called ‘*diathèse recessive*’ in French), in which the object is peripherized and marked with the morpheme *wo* introducing a non-human/non-specific object argument with transitive verbs, followed by the preposition *o* which introduces indirect objects. The agent marker *a*, required with a direct object (22a), does not occur when the object is peripherized (22b). The construction is then transitive with an oblique object, and the constituent order is strictly V _{wo}O S:

Nêlêmwa (New Caledonia, North of the Mainland) Bril 2002:165; p.c.)

⁶ “Thématisation de l’objet et rhématisation de l’agent font partie des fonctions du passif en français et sans doute dans beaucoup d’autres langues accusatives.” (Lazard 1994:209).

- 22a. *Hla hobwaxe vaayi a agu Poum.*
 3PL keep cattle AGT people Poum
 ‘Poum people raise these cattle.’
- 22b. *Hla hobwaxe wo o vaayi agu Poum.*
 3PL keep OBJ PREP cattle people Poum
 ‘Poum people raise cattle.’

In an earlier article, Brill (1997:380) described what she further on called ‘recessive voice’ construction as a case of valence reduction, an “antipassive-like construction marked by *wo* and an oblique object”. Still, this Nêlêmwa construction is not a good candidate for an antipassive analysis: it includes an indefinite object, but this object is not less affected, and keeps its argument status.

4.3 Marking of the object to avoid ambiguity

A different evolution occurred in a Polynesian Outlier, Fagauvea/West Uvean, spoken on Ouvéa (Loyalty islands), showing the apparition of an oblique marking on the patient, starting from a two-unmarked argument construction. Fagauvea completely lost the ergative/agent marker: Proto Polynesian (PPn) **e*, but uses a reflex of the PPn personal article **a*, reinterpreted in some cases as an agent marker and resulting in a V Oa S word order as illustrated in examples (23) and (24).

Fagauvea (Ouvéa, Loyalty islands; Nuclear Polynesian)

23. *Goa oti kai-na de ulu-ika a de kovi.*
 PFV finish eat-TR SPC head-fish PERS SPC human being
 ‘The man has finished eating the fish head.’
24. *Goa tuku-a ie ia a de ika, odi goa mānu nā de fafine.*
 PFV swallow-TR ABS 3SG PERS SPC fish then PFV float there SPC woman
i loto o de ika.
 OBL inside POSS ART fish
 ‘The fish swallowed her (the woman), and the woman started to float in its belly.’

The marker *a*, however, is still used as the personal article, occurring in front of proper nouns whatever their functions; consequently, with two proper noun arguments, there is potential ambiguity:

Fagauvea

- 25 *E sola-kina a Soane a Paulo.*
 NPST flee-TR PERS Soane PERS Paulo
 (i) ‘Paulo is running away from Soane.’
 (ii) ‘Soane is running away from Paulo.’ (A. Djoupa pers.com.)

Both translations are acceptable. However, more spontaneously and outside of context, speakers consider the immediately postverbal argument as preferentially the patient, hence privileging translation (i) along with the VOS word order.

According to Dixon, the same situation is found in Boumaa Fijian, even if, again, the preferable word-order is VOS⁷.

Boumaa Fijian

⁷ Similarly, according to Ochs (1982:660), Samoan “young children tend to reserve the location immediately following the verb for absolutive constituents (transitive patients and intransitive major arguments)”.

26. *E rai-ca a gone a qase.*
 NPST see-TR ART child ART old person
 (i) The old person saw the child.
 (ii) The child saw the old person. (Dixon 1988:35, 243)

Such a ‘neutral alignment’ is of course not unusual in the world’s languages: it is found in more or less half of the languages taken into account in the World Atlas of Language Structures (Comrie 2013). The absence of morphosyntactic marking on the arguments is usually not a real problem, since the contextual situation is often non-ambiguous. Besides, clauses in which both arguments are realized as noun phrases are rare in discourse.

According to Djoupa, however, disambiguation can be achieved through morphological means. One of these means is the use of an oblique construction, with the patient introduced by an oblique marker, either *gi* (*gia* + *proper noun*) or *i* (*ia* + *proper noun*) as in (27); the verb no longer bears the transitive/applicative suffix; the two word-orders are semantically equivalent, but the more basic one, here again, is with object first, even if it is expressed as an indirect argument (V OBL O S):

Fagauvea (Ouvéa, Loyalty islands)

27. *E sola ia Paulo a Soane.* (\cong *E sola a Soane ia Paulo.*)
 NPST flee OBL.PERS Paulo PERS Soane
 ‘Soane is running away from Paulo.’ (A. Djoupa pers.com.)

The intransitive form of the verb followed by an oblique argument does resemble an ‘antipassive’ construction, even though the main function of this construction is said to disambiguate the role of the arguments.

5. Middle derivation

In Oceanic languages, it is well known that there is an affinity between reciprocity and middle, on the one hand, and between reflexive and intensifier, on the other (Lichtenberk 1991, Moysse-Faurie 2008). Such middle derivation is attested in quite a few Oceanic languages, as for example in Toqabaqita (Lichtenberk 2008:864-866) or in Saliba (Margetts 1999:191-192), in which the middle/reciprocal prefixes (respectively *kwai-* and *kai-*), also express habitual situations with some verbs. This type of construction, however, only applies to a small number of verbs, and is preferentially labelled ‘depatientive’ rather than ‘antipassive’ by these authors, since it cannot be considered as a voice alternation. In what follows, I will examine in details such middle derivations in two other Oceanic languages in order to point out their similar values.

5.1. With reflexes of the POc *paRi- prefix

‘Depatientive’ is the term used by most Oceanist linguists to refer to one of the meanings of a construction built with reflexes of the Proto Oceanic (POc) prefix **paRi-*. This derivation has several functions, including the followings, as stated by Lichtenberk (1999:55): “reciprocal, chaining, collective, converse, distributed, repetitive, depatientive, middle, kinship relations, and collective plurals” and “two basic notions that underlie the polysemy: plurality of relations and a low degree of elaboration of situations”. Lichtenberk (1991:181) presents arguments of a later development for the depatientive function, even if it implies independent development in different first-order subgroups of Oceanic. However, the author also agrees that the extension reciprocal > depatientive could have happened the other way round.

I also find in Lichtenberk (2007: 1560) a quotation that could have a link with the ‘antipassive’: “With depatientive verbs, the patient [...] is backgrounded, not expressed. Typically, the depatientive construction is used when the identity of the *patient is not relevant*. It expresses a type of situation rather than a specific occurrence of that type of situation”. In the depatientive construction, the focus is then on the subject participant.

This definition also recalls what happens when the object is incorporated in the verbal phrase,

expressing a type of situation in which only an agent is implied. The main difference between the depatientive and object incorporation constructions is that with object incorporation, the focus is on the type of event while in the depatientive construction the focus is on the Initiator (self-directed body action, or individual characteristics,). Both constructions, however, are intransitive, and usually encode habitual, general situations. Either the patient is backgrounded, but not necessarily demoted, or, in the case of grooming actions, agent and patient are undistinguishable.

In Drehu (Lifou, Loyalty islands) the *i-* prefix, a reflex of POc *paRi-, exhibits several middle values:

- grooming actions: *sej* ‘comb’, *i-sej* ‘comb one’s hair’; *cin* ‘shave’, *i-ciny* ‘shave oneself’;
- spontaneous actions: *dreuth* ‘burn something’, *i-dreuth* ‘burn (fire)’;
- depatientive function (the event only concerns the initiator, giving him a generic or habitual characteristic): *xumuth* ‘pinch’, *i-xumuth* ‘to be a pincher’; *drei* ‘obey’, *i-drei* ‘to be obedient’;
- collective: *jun* ‘bone’, *i-jun* ‘skeleton’; *koko* ‘yam’, *i-koko* ‘heap of yams’;
- reciprocal limited to 2 participants: *aba* ‘kiss’, *i-aba* ‘kiss each other’.

In Drehu, the construction in example (28a) is transitive, while in (28b), the derived verb enters an intransitive construction, in which no syntactic object is allowed, and the clause expresses a general, habitual situation or a non-completed action. The event then only concerns the initiator, giving it a generic or habitual quality.

Drehu (Lifou, Loyalty Islands) (Moyse-Faurie, 1983)

28a. *Eni a drei nēnē.*

1SG IPFV obey mother
‘I obey my mother.’

28b. *Haa nekōnatr a i-drei e koilo hnaini.*

PL child IPFV MID-obey LOC there school
‘Children are obedient at school.’

It is also the case in East Futunan, with the prefix *fe-*, also a reflex of POc *paRi-. In (29a) *vaku* ‘to scratch’ takes two arguments, while the derivative with the prefix takes only one in (29b) and conveys a middle meaning.

East Futunan (Western Nuclear Polynesian)

29a. *E ke vaku le tu'a o lou toe.*

NPST 2SG scratch SPC back POSS 2SGPOSS.O child
‘You are scratching your child's back.’

29b. *E ke fe-vaku i le kai e namu.*

IPFV 2SG MID-scratch OBL SPC eat ERG mosquito
‘You are scratching because of mosquito bites.’

In (29b), the body part affected by the scratching is not specified, but it necessarily belongs to the subject's body.

Two more marginal constructions, auto-causative construction (section 5.2) and unergative derivation construction (section 5.3), will be mentioned below, also relevant to the middle and the antipassive domains, as the ‘neighboring’ relationship between the spontaneous, the middle, and the antipassive are well-known (cf. *interalia* Shibatani 2006:225).

5.2. “Auto-causative” constructions with POc prefix *paka-

The Samoan verb *fa'apa'ū* ‘cause sth to fall down, fell, cut down, throw oneself down’ (causative prefix *fa'a* + intransitive verb *pa'ū* ‘fall, drop, fall on’) is described by Mosel and

Hovdhaugen (1992:726-727) as a ‘causative labile verb’. In (30a), the construction includes an ergative argument (*Seu*, the agent) and an absolutive argument (*le niu*, the patient); in (30b), without the expression of the patient, the meaning is auto-reflexive and the remaining argument (*Miliama*) is in the (unmarked) absolutive.

Samoa (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992: 110)

30a. *Na fa'a-pa'ū e Seu le niu.*
 PST CAUS-fall ERG Seu SPC coconut tree
 ‘Seu fell the coconut tree.’

30b. *Na fa'a-pa'ū Miliama i luga o le moega.*
 PST CAUS-fall Miliama OBL top POSS SPC bed
 ‘Miliama threw herself down on the bed.’

The omission of the object confers an auto-causative meaning to the construction. Here again, although the patient is not syntactically expressed, it is clear that it is the same human being as the one occurring as the subject. The semantic role distinction is neutralized in S, and the construction in (30a) just expresses a ‘higher degree of transitivity’ (id.:109) than the one in (30b).

5.3. ‘Unergative derivation’, a type of derivation with a middle meaning.

Palmer (1999:193) calls ‘unergative derivation’ a type of reduplication found in Kokota (Santa Isabel, Solomon islands). The reduplicated verb in (31b) is intransitive, and its meaning focuses on the activity, not on the participants.

Kokota (Meso Melanesian) (Palmer 1999:193)

31a. *Manei neke dupa=nau ara.*
 he realis.3SG.PFV punch=1SG.O I
 ‘He punched me.’

31b. *Manei ne du-dupa bla.*
 he REALIS3SG RED-punch LMT
 ‘He was just punching.’

This type of derivation is also found in Boumaa Fijian, conferring a habitual meaning, a sense of multiplicity of action, or action done over a long period. The reduplicated form in (32b) is intransitive: “Reduplication is most useful and most used with O verbs since it is the only way of deriving an intransitive form that has the underlying A noun phrase in S function” (Dixon 1988:48).

Boumaa Fijian (Dixon 1988:48)

32a. *E cula-a ai sulu yai o Maria.*
 3SG sew-TR ART garment DEIC PERS.ART Maria
 ‘Maria is sewing this garment.’

32b. *E cula-cula o Maria.*
 3SG RED-sew PERS.ART Maria
 ‘Maria is sewing away.’

6. Conclusion

Throughout the presentation of all the different constructions I found as having some aspects in common with the prototypical antipassive constructions, some semantic, pragmatic or syntactic features have appeared to be more recurrent than others.

- these constructions are all either intransitive or less transitive on the semantic transitivity scale than the prototypical transitive construction, which includes two core semantic arguments, even if

these arguments are not always expressed (optional direct object argument in accusative languages, optional ergative argument in ergative languages, as shown in Section 2).

- the habitual meaning is found in most of these constructions. In Proto Oceanic, according to Lynch et al. (2002:84), the habitual meaning was obtained just with the incorporation of the object, meaning taken over with the middle derivation in most nowadays languages, even if there are exceptions as we have seen in Kokota or Boumaa Fijian in which it is the reduplication that confers an habitual meaning.

- the lower degree of individuation concerning the patient usually found in the antipassive construction, along with the fact that “the antipassive is preferred or required if the object is: a plural, indefinite, non-specific, generic, implicit argument” (Polinsky 2013) is a less prominent feature, and does not correspond at all to the peripherized object construction found in East Futunan and East Uvean, which on the contrary appears in a way more specific than the direct object construction, and is also more rhematic.

In the languages I investigated, even if “the semantic and discourse functions of antipassives can and do differ across languages” (Polinsky 2013), I can wonder if there no limit to labelling ‘antipassive’ any construction that changes the type or the function of the patient. Can all the different constructions I presented here – object omission (Section 2), object incorporation (Section 3), object peripherization (Section 4), middle constructions (Section 5) – be relevant to what is called ‘antipassive’, even though there is no dedicated antipassive marker in these languages? But then, what is the need for bringing together under the same label such different constructions, even if they overlap with some of the meanings of antipassive constructions described in other languages? I would rather stick to Denis Creissels’s notion of ambitransitivity for the constructions implying labile verbs discussed in section 2, and to the ‘depatientive’ label for the middle derivation explored in section 5. Besides, I would go on speaking of ergative construction instead of passive, although, in some cases the derivation of middle verbs does resemble the meaning usually carried on by the passive voice.

The remaining construction - the peripherization of the object described in Section 4 - is not a good candidate to be subsumed under the antipassive label, since the object keeps its argument status, and it does not imply a greater affectedness of the patient.

Abbreviations (other than found in the Leipzig glossing rules): LMT limiter, MID middle prefix; NSPC non-specific article, OBLIG obligative, PERS personal article, POSS.A alienable possessive marker, POSS.O inalienable possessive marker, RED reduplication, SPC specific article.

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