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Indefinite expressions and accessibility hierarchy to core argument functions in a sample of Austronesian languages (and beyond).

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In many languages, indefinite expressions are known to have restricted access to core argument functions. This article focuses on the accessibility hierarchy of indefinite expressions to subject and object functions in a sample of Austronesian languages. Aiming at some comparative analysis, some cross-linguistic perspectives on the differential encoding of \pm definite core arguments and other types of restrictions are discussed. The questions addressed are: (i) What type of indefinite nouns have core argument function? (ii) If barred from core argument function, how are indefinite arguments circumvented? (iii) Does existence or lack of indefinite articles correlate with access to core argument function, and in what way?

In Austronesian languages, one finding is that languages with indefinite articles display fewer restrictions on the access of indefinite NPs to core argument function. Another finding is that differences of definiteness, individuation and specificity of arguments tend to be expressed by distinct domains: the noun phrase in languages with indefinite articles, the verb phrase in languages without indefinite articles (via valency, voice alternations, alignment changes), with an intermediate situation in some Micronesian languages.

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1 Introduction

The factors influencing the distribution of definite and indefinite NPs, and the restrictions of some constructions to definite NPs, generally go under the label of ‘definiteness restriction’ or ‘definiteness effect’ (Milsark 1977, Keenan 2003, Abbott 2006). A case in point, which has been under close scrutiny, is the definiteness restriction on core argument marking and core argument functions.

Building on previous research and on available studies of some Austronesian languages (Keenan 1976, Keenan and Comrie 1977, Dryer 2014, Bauer 1983, Polinsky 1992, Chung 2008), some additional insights are presented. In Western Austronesian languages, the relations between definiteness and access to argument function via the voice system are well documented (Schachter & Otnes 1972, Mithun 1984, Wouk 1986).

In the Oceanic subgroup, the bulk of the literature bears on the status of object arguments and their relation to transitivity. Indefinite objects are known to correlate with low transitivity, semi-transitivity (e.g. Sugita 1973), or with intransitivisation, generally through antipassivisation and incorporation (Pawley and Reid 1980).

On the other hand, the accessibility hierarchy of indefinite expressions to subject functions has been comparatively less studied in the Austronesian area.

Starting with a restricted sample of languages, which future research will expand and enrich, new insights are presented.

1.1 The sample

This sample of Austronesian languages was guided by the availability of detailed analysis on this topic, permitting fine-grained enough comparison. The sample contains different and typologically diverse groups of Austronesian languages: Western Austronesian languages such as Amis (Formosan), Tagalog, Kapampangan (Philippines); Biak (South Halmahera Western New Guinea subgroup of Eastern Malayo-Polynesian); various Oceanic languages from different subgroups, Trukese and Marshallese (Micronesian), Saliba (a Western Oceanic language of the Papuan Tip cluster), Mavea (Vanuatu), Nêlêmwa (New Caledonia), Maori (Polynesian).

Since one of the questions under scrutiny is linked to the existence or lack of indefinite articles (more marginally of definite articles), the sample contains languages of both types: Amis, Tagalog, Kapampangan, Nêlêmwa, Saliba lack indefinite and definite articles. Marshallese has a singular indefinite individuating article ‘one’ and definite articles; Biak, Mavea, Maori have definite and indefinite (\pm specific) articles, with distinct singular and plural forms; these articles occur as bound or free forms, and are obligatory. Articles are defined, following Dryer (2013), as specifying some referential hierarchy and as being obligatory.²

1.2 The aims

The aim is to analyse under what conditions indefinite nouns have access to both core argument functions in Austronesian languages, and whether there are possible correlations with the existence or lack of indefinite articles. Two main features are discussed:

1. There is a **tendency** for Austronesian languages **without** indefinite articles to bar non-specific indefinite expressions from object function, and for some of them to bar subject

² In languages without definite articles, definite NPs are optionally marked by demonstratives expressing deictic distances, which are not articles.

function. On the other hand, languages with a determiner phrase, i.e. with \pm definite articles (like Biak, Mavea), tend to have much fewer restrictions on argument accessibility.

2. Restrictions on both core argument functions appear to be strongly correlated with notions of specificity, individuation and shared knowledge.

The analysis proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents and defines the notions of indefiniteness, specificity and genericity. Section 3 provides some background on the restrictions and differential marking relating to indefinite NPs in some non-Austronesian languages; it then moves on to Austronesian languages and to the conditions of access of indefinite NPs to core argument functions; it also puts forward some correlations to be discussed in the following sections. Section 4 to 6 focus on Oceanic languages, and analyse the restrictions of access to subject function (Section 4) and to object function (Section 5); Section 6 discusses generic expressions. Section 7 focuses on Western Austronesian languages, on their specific morpho-syntactic features displaying their accessibility hierarchy to argument function, and on the various devices used to avoid indefinite subjects, such as voice alternations, antipassive and deverbal derivations. Section 8 concludes.

2 Defining indefiniteness, specificity and genericity

The research literature on the topics of definiteness and indefiniteness is vast. Research angles are diverse, philosophers and logicians (Frege 1892, Russell 1905), syntacticians and semanticists, notably Strawson 1950, Givón 1978, Hawkins 1978, Keenan 1987, Gundel et al. 1993, Haspelmath 1997, Lyons 1999, Abbott 2004, Krifka 2004, Dryer 2013, to name but a few.

Since this study focuses on the properties of indefinite (\pm specific) NPs and of generic NPs, these terms are now briefly defined.

2.1.1 *Definiteness and indefiniteness*

Definiteness and indefiniteness are aspects of the construction of linguistic reference and linguistic discourse; they correlate with notions of identifiability, referentiality and knowledge processing (Prince 1981: 231).

A definite NP is identifiable and presuppositional, while an indefinite NP is referentially unanchored, not yet identified in discourse or situationally, and does not constitute shared knowledge (Enç 1991, Dryer 2014).

2.1.2 *Specific and non-specific indefinite NPs*

Specificity and non-specificity are categories that may apply to indefinite NPs or to NPs marked by definite markers or definite articles, but with generic reading, such as *l'éléphant est un mammifère* 'the elephant is a mammal', which is kind-denoting and non-specific.

Specific indefinite NPs (often glossed 'a certain x') have some presupposition of existence, at least for the speaker (Givón 1978, Haspelmath 1997: 38-45, von Heusinger 2002a: 246-248). In other approaches, rather than its relation to the speaker, a specific indefinite NP is taken to be identifiable and referentially anchored, either situationally as in *I saw a woman standing here yesterday*, or relative to some other contextual expression in bridging contexts, or relative to other discourse referents, as in *I met a lady, she's my neighbour's cousin* (von Heusinger 2002a: 253, 263, 268; Abbott 2004). By contrast, non-specific indefinite NPs have no referential anchor. They select some newly mentioned entity from the extension of the concept (von Heusinger 2003: 405); thus, *I want to buy a car* refers to any/one non-specific entity of the kind 'car', or which has the property 'car'.

Cross-linguistically, specificity distinctions are expressed by devices ranging from NP marking (i.e. as bare nouns or with distinct articles and determiners), to the case-marking of arguments, valency distinctions, and word order. Specificity distinctions also have an impact on the access to argument function.

2.1.3 *Generic NPs*

Generic NPs and generic statements constitute shared knowledge. They are non-specific since they do not refer to an individuated entity, but to some entity standing for the kind, or for a general concept.

These properties are mirrored by the exponents marking generic NPs, which range from bare nouns, to nouns marked by definite articles such as *the mouse is a rodent*, or by indefinite articles such as *a mouse is a rodent*, or by bare plural nouns, *mice are rodents*. In all such cases, the predicate *be a rodent* is a genus-denoting property that characterises the whole kind.

In this sample of Austronesian languages, generic NPs will be shown to be marked either (i) in the same way as non-specific indefinite NPs (i.e. as bare nouns, or by non-specific indefinite articles), or (ii) in the same way as specific indefinite NPs and definite NPs. Generic expressions also display asymmetrical access to core argument function in languages without indefinite articles: they are ‘better’ subjects than objects. Generic objects tend to be incorporated in the VP, or they occur in semi-transitive constructions in languages with such constructions (see Sections 5.1.2 and 6).

3 Indefinite NPs and restrictions on argument function

Before focusing on Austronesian languages from Section 3.3 onward, the two following Sections 3.1 and 3.2 briefly present some differential treatment of \pm definite core arguments in some non-

Austronesian languages with and without articles, showing some analogous features in their differential treatment, correlating with individuation, boundedness and telicity.

3.1 Cross-linguistic perspectives on the differential encoding of \pm definite core arguments

The referential status of core arguments is encoded in a variety of ways; among them are differential case-marking (indicating different argument status), word order, agreement pattern, incorporation.

3.1.1 *Differential object case-marking and ‘deobjectivisation’*

In Turkish (lacking definite articles), definite and specific indefinite objects are accusative, while non-specific indefinite objects are caseless (Enç 1991, Heusinger 2002a: 255). Caseless objects are lower in the syntactic structure than accusative objects, they are pseudo-incorporate (and phrasal), do not modify valency and have atelic interpretation (Kamali 2015: 109, 115).

In Finnish, an article-less language, differential object marking expresses distinctions of definiteness, quantitative determinacy and telicity. Accusative case is assigned to definite and specific objects of telic verbs in veridical contexts (1b, d). Partitive case is assigned to indefinite, non-specific, quantitatively indeterminate objects, and to all the objects of atelic verbs denoting some unbounded process (1a, b) (Kiparsky 2005). According to Lyons (1999: 201), partitive objects in Finnish “are not true direct objects”, and display “lower transitivity” (Huommo 2017: 437).

(1) Finnish

a. *Tyttö luki läksy-ä.*

girl.NOM did homework-PART

‘The girl was doing her homework.’ (Lyons 1999: 102)

b. *Tyttö luki läksy-n.*

girl.NOM did homework-ACC

‘The girl did her homework.’ (Lyons 1999: 102)

c. *Löys-i-n kirjo-j-a.*

find-PST-1SG book-PL-PART

‘I found some books.’ (Huommo 2017: 432)

d. *Löys-i-n kirja-n.*

find-PST-1SG book-ACC

‘I found a/the book.’ (Huommo 2017: 432)

The differential marking of \pm definite, \pm specific objects and the correlation with \pm telic verbs is also observed in some Micronesian languages (Section 5.1.2), in Biak and Mavea (Sections 5.2.2, 5.2.3) and in Amis (Section 7.2).

3.1.2 *Differential subject case-marking and ‘desubjectivisation’*

Differential subject marking also occurs in Finnish, correlating with transitivity and definiteness. The subjects of transitive verbs are nominative and have \pm definite reading (Kiparsky 2001); while the subjects of intransitive verbs have differential case-marking, with nominative (2a, b) or partitive case (2c) encoding distinctions of individuation and definiteness. In (2c), “the partitive refers to an indeterminate number of the set” (Kiparsky 2001: 345).

The subjects of intransitive verbs also display different word order as in (2a, b), a sign that indefinite subjects are avoided in initial position, which is the position of the definite subject.³ The agreement pattern is also distinctive, indefinite post-verbal subjects do not trigger agreement, thus do not have full subject properties, the verb has a third-person singular impersonal form (2b, c).

(2) Finnish (Kiparsky 2001: 348-349)

a. *Kaksose-t synty-i-vät.*

twin-PL.NOM be.born-PST-3PL

‘The twins were born.’

b. *(Liisa-lle) synty-i kaksose-t.*

(lisa-ALL) be.born-PST.3SG twin-PL.NOM

‘Twins were born (to Lisa).’

c. *Synty-i kaksos-i-a.*

be.born-PST.3SG twin-PL-PART

‘Twins were born.’ (one or more pairs)

3.1.3 Word order and patterns of subject agreement

In Finnish locative predications (3), word order, differential case-marking (nominative, partitive) and agreement pattern concur in showing that newly-mentioned, indefinite expressions have reduced subject properties, in contrast with definite subjects. Example (3b) has the reading of a locative existential predication.

³ VOS or VSO Austronesian languages, such as Nêlêmwa (Section 4.1.2), Maori (Section 4.2.1), Amis (Section 7.1), show a mirror effect, with the definite or indefinite specific subject in the subject’s standard post-verbal position. Non-specific indefinite referents are existentially predicated in sentence initial position.

(3) Finnish (Karlsson 1999: 66, 82-85)

a. *Auto-t ovat kadu-lla.*

car-PL.NOM are vase-ADESS

‘The cars are in the street.’

b. *Kadu-lla on auto-j-a.*

street-ADESS is car-PL-PART

‘There are some cars in the street.’

Thus, inverted word order and differential case-marking are ‘desubjectivisation’ devices occurring inthetic (i.e. all new) statements. They mark indefinite, newly-mentioned referents as non-canonical subjects and tend to anchor them with locative existential predication.

In Russian (without articles), the newly-mentioned, indefinite subjects of locative verbal predications, are also avoided in initial position and occur in inverted word order which foregrounds the definite, referential anchor.

(4) Russian (Abbott 2006: 397).

a. *Na stole lezhít karta.*

on table lies map

‘There is a map lying on the table.’

b. *Karta lezhít na stolé.*

Map lies on table

‘The map is lying on the table.’

It has been pointed out that languages often disprefer newly mentioned, referentially unanchored nominals in subject position, especially in subject prominent languages, whose grammatical

subject conflates semantic notions of actor/agent and pragmatic notions of topic (Li and Thompson 1976, Lambrecht 1987). Givón (1978) also points out that indefinite NPs in English are much less common in subject position than in object position.

3.1.4 *Incorporation of indefinite arguments*

Coming to incorporation, Sasse (1987: 546-548) discusses cases of indefinite ‘subject’ incorporation in various polysynthetic languages: in Chukchi (an article-less language), and in some Iroquoian languages, such as Mohawk (article-less, Mithun 1984), and Onondaga (without indefinite article).

In Onondaga, a transitive verb may incorporate its indefinite object, and an intransitive verb may incorporate its indefinite subject (Woodbury 1977: 10). Sentence (5a) illustrates the incorporation of the root *-hsaheʔt* ‘beans’ in athetic statement, while (5b) shows the definite noun form. Stress (ˈ) placement shows incorporation in (5a); the main stress is generally penultimate in a phrase-final word and ultimate otherwise.

(5) Onondaga (Iroquoian, Woodbury 1977:10)

a. *Ka-**hsaheʔta**-hí-hw-i.*

3NEUT-**bean**-spill-CAUS-ASP

‘Beans got spilled.’ (lit. it got bean-spilled)

b. *Ka-hi-hw-í neʔ o.hsaheʔt.a.*

3NEUT-spill-CAUS-ASP ART PREF.bean.NS

‘The beans got spilled.’

In sum, in the languages lacking indefinite articles reviewed in this Section, the referential status of core-arguments is encoded by differential case-marking and/or word order, verb agreement

pattern, incorporation. These devices concur in marking reduced argument function and lower transitivity.

Austronesian languages lacking indefinite articles will be shown to display similar strategies.

3.1.5 *Languages with articles: existential and stage-framing constructions*

On the other hand, in French, a language with obligatory definite and indefinite articles, access to core argument function is unrestricted, except in spontaneous oral interaction, where newly mentioned indefinite subject NPs are generally avoided and are existentially predicated. Discourse constraints are such that *un chien aboie* ‘a dog barks’ is highly improbable as out of the blue information, while *il y a un chien qui aboie*⁴ ‘there’s a dog barking’ creates felicitous anchoring.

Presentative impersonal constructions with unaccusative stage-framing verbs are also common for newly mentioned information, such as *il est arrivé une chose étrange* (lit. there occurred something strange), *il s’est produit des événements incroyables* (lit. there occurred incredible events). They display distinct word order, an impersonal pronoun, no agreement with the logical subject. Such constructions co-exist with declarative statements with an indefinite subject, but these require some background or presupposition to be felicitous, such as *tu es au courant? une chose étrange est arrivée* ‘have you heard the news? something strange has occurred’, *tu ne le croiras pas, des événements incroyables se sont produits* ‘you won’t believe it, some incredible events occurred’ (see Section 3.2).

⁴ Although the prescriptive grammar of written French holds *il y a* constructions as ‘incorrect’, they are actually the most natural productions in spoken French.

In conversational English, non-specific indefinite subjects such as *a volcano is spewing lava* are likewise not felicitous as brand new information, unless they are referentially anchored, or given some context such as *what's happening in Indonesia?*, which turns the referent into a pragmatically specific indefinite NP (see Dryer 2014: 237-238).⁵ Otherwise, locative existential constructions, *there's a volcano spewing lava*, create some referential anchor for brand new information (Lambrecht 1994, Creissels 2014).

This shows that even in languages with indefinite articles, in oral discourse, newly mentioned indefinite expressions tend to be avoided as subjects.

3.2 Constraints on indefinite subjects and existential predications

This brings in the question of the constraints bearing on grammatical subjects and of the status of indefinite NPs in existential constructions. Beaver et al. (2005) propose that

if NPs that do not occur often in existential constructions ([due to] the definiteness effect) are prototypical subjects, then we expect NPs that do occur often in existential constructions, not to be prototypical subjects. The definiteness effect has a flip side, in that certain NP types should be restricted in their capacity to occur as canonical subjects. These NPs should then be ‘attracted’ to the pivot position. (ibid. 2005: 19-23)

Existential predicates are defined as existential quantifiers predicating over indefinite expressions (Milsark 1974), they do not usually predicate over definite entities, this restriction is known as the “definiteness effect” of existential quantifiers. Thus, entity-oriented existential predications anchor the reference (spatio-temporal or otherwise) of new discourse referents. On

⁵ Dryer (2014) includes pragmatically specific indefinite such as *I met this guy yesterday, he lives in the neighbourhood*, in his reference hierarchy.

the other hand, event existentials do not assert “the existence of a new entity, but rather of a new event” (Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade 2012: 106-107), they are wholly rhematic, all new statements, as the answer to *what’s the matter? – there are people who complain* (Kuroda 1972, Sasse 1987: 526). They are discourse-new information, in which referents can be identifiable and referentially anchored (Abbott 1993, 1997), thus not submitted to the “definiteness effect”. The statements in (6) are event existentials in which the coda denoting the event is obligatorily expressed, they do not predicate the existence of “chimney” or “dog”, which are situationally and visually referential (6a), or definite (6b).

(6) French

- a. *il y a des cheminées qui s’écroulent* ‘there are chimneys falling down’
- b. *il y a ce chien qui aboie encore*⁶ (lit. there is this dog barking again)

The pervasive event existential constructions in spoken French (6) are discourse driven, they mark pragmatic saliency or reactivate known referents (McNally 2011). Event existentials providing discourse-new information or avoiding indefinite subjects are discussed in Amis (Section 7.1), Tagalog (Section 7.3.1) and Kapampangan (Section 7.4).

3.3 Austronesian-Oceanic languages

The differential treatment and interpretation of \pm definite core arguments presented above, have some parallels in Austronesian-Oceanic languages, despite their different typological features. The morphosyntactic encoding of such distinctions also shows some correlation with the existence or lack of indefinite articles.

⁶ Compare with the neutral declarative statement, *ce chien aboie encore*.

In Nêlêmwa (N. Caledonia), an article-less language, newly mentioned, indefinite entities must be existentially predicated. Only referentially anchored NPs can have subject function in the standard post-verbal position (VOS) (Section 4.1.2).

On the other hand, in languages with articles and a determiner phrase, such as Biak, Mavea, Maori, non-specific articles anchor brand-new, indefinite subject NPs and no other restriction applies to them (Sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2).

Coming to object NPs, in languages **without** indefinite articles, but with case-marking and antipassive constructions, non-specific indefinite objects are encoded as oblique, instead of absolutive NPs, and are thus deprived of full object status, resulting in lower transitivity or intransitivity (as in Nêlêmwa, Section 5.1.1, and in Western Austronesian languages, Section 7). In other languages, like Saliba (Section 5.1.2), reduced object status is encoded by caselessness and lack of verbal agreement in semi-transitive or intransitive constructions.

In Biak, a language **with** articles (Section 5.2.2.), distinctions of specificity of object NPs are not encoded by differential case-marking nor any transitivity cline, but by distinct \pm specific indefinite articles, without any restriction to their argument function. The use of \pm specific indefinite articles also correlates with \pm telic readings, which is **inferred** from the type of article.

Thus, in this sample of Austronesian languages, the existence or the lack of indefinite articles correlates with (i) the selection of distinct domains for the marking of indefiniteness (i.e. either the verb phrase or the noun phrase/ determiner phrase), and (ii) this results in different restrictions applying to indefinite expressions for argument function. The following generalisations appeared.

CORRELATION 1 – INDEFINITE ARTICLES & UNRESTRICTED ARGUMENT FUNCTIONS

Among languages **with** indefinite (and definite) articles (Biak, Mavea, Maori) where indefiniteness is marked by articles in the **noun phrase**, indefinite nouns tend to display unrestricted core argument functions.

Marshallese displays mixed features (Section 5.1.2): singular, individuated indefinite core arguments marked by *juon* ‘one, a’ do not undergo any restrictions, while non-individuated (i.e. plural), indefinite bare nouns show reduced object function and occur in ‘semi-transitive’ constructions.

CORRELATION 2 – NO INDEFINITE ARTICLES & RESTRICTED OR NULL ARGUMENT FUNCTIONS

Among languages without (in)definite articles (Nêlêmwa, Saliba, Amis, Tagalog), distinctions of definiteness are encoded in the verb phrase.

Tables 1a-b below spell out the hierarchy and cline of access of indefinite expressions to core argument functions in the languages **without** articles.

- (i) Newly mentioned, non-specific indefinite expressions have strongly restricted argument functions. They are existentially predicated in order to have the minimal referential anchoring required for subject function; while non-specific or non-individuated indefinite expressions are generally barred from full object/patient function and trigger intransitivation (Section 5).
- (ii) Generic (kind-denoting) expressions rank higher than specific indefinite ones for access to subject function (Table 1a).
- (iii) Conversely, generic expressions rank lower than specific indefinite ones for access to object function (Table 1b).

Tables 1a-b. Austronesian languages **without** indefinite articles.

Table 1a. Cline of access to SUBJECTHOOD

+	>	–	often excluded from subject function
Definite	generic (kind denoting)	specific indefinite	non-specific indefinite NPs (EXS constructions)

Table 1b. cline of access to OBJECTHOOD

+	>	–	often excluded from object function
Definite	specific indefinite	generic (kind denoting)	non-specific indefinite NPs (incorporation, detransitivisation, deverbalisation, etc.)

The behaviour of generic NPs in relation to core argument functions is further discussed in Section 6.

4 Restrictions of access to subject function in languages *with* and *without* indefinite articles

The following sections assess to what extent non-specific indefinite NPs can have subject function in languages **with** and **without** indefinite (and definite)⁷ articles.

4.1 Access to subject function in languages **without** indefinite articles

It will be argued below that in languages **without** indefinite articles serving to anchor the reference of newly mentioned entities (Nêlêmwa, Amis, Tagalog, Kapampangan), non-specific, non-individuated indefinite referents are generally barred from core argument functions. Newly mentioned entities must be existentially predicated to have the required referential anchor for access to subject⁸ function.

⁷ In article-less languages, definite NPs are optionally marked by demonstratives; thus bare nouns can have definite or indefinite reading depending on context, on verbal valency, and on voice selection for Western Austronesian languages.

⁸ Existential predications may also predicate over indefinite objects, as in *there's something I want to tell you*.

In Western Austronesian languages (Amis, Tagalog), subjects must be definite or at least specific. The referential status of arguments triggers voice alternations and variations of alignment and case-marking (see Section 7).

4.1.1 *Constraints on indefinite subjects and existential predications*

The case of Nêlêmwa is first analysed.

Nêlêmwa has no (in)definite articles; definiteness is optionally marked by deictic or anaphoric demonstratives. Only referentially anchored, i.e. specific, generic and definite NPs, can be the case-marked, post-verbal subjects of event-denoting or property-denoting verbs. Newly mentioned, non-specific indefinite nouns must be existentially predicated (example 8). Indefinite NPs do not have object function and are incorporated, as shown by the intransitive verb form and the absolutive case-marking of the subject argument (detailed in Section 5.1.1).

Since definiteness is optionally marked by demonstratives, post-verbal bare nominal subjects of event-denoting verbs can have definite (7b), specific indefinite (7c) and generic reading, depending on context. Optional definite determiners mostly signal contrast, reference-tracking, and anaphoric processes as in (7a). If no saliency is intended, definite and specific indefinite subjects occur as bare nouns, in their standard post-verbal position (7a, b, c, d). The subject NPs in (7c, d) are situationally anchored, specific indefinite entities. In (7d) the numeral *aax-iik* ‘HUM.CLF-one’ marks number, and is not an indefinite article; *agu aax-iik* ‘one person’ refers to a singled out character of the story, one with an impact on the following events.

(7) Nêlêmwa⁹

- a. *Hla taau thaamwa mahleeli.* b. *Hla taau thaamwa.*
 3PL wait ABS.woman those 3PL wait ABS.woman
 ‘Those women are waiting.’ ‘The women are waiting.’

- c. *Hli oda gi-hli mwada, i kuut le agu.*
 3DU go.up stand-3DU up.there 3SG stand there ABS.person
 ‘They went up, arrived up there, someone stood there.’ (Text Avulijaap)

- d. *I kuut le agu aax-iik.*
 3SG stand there ABS.person HUM.CLF-one
 ‘One person stood there.’

On the other hand, first-mentioned, indefinite entities must be existentially predicated by *fo*, as in (8). If they are count nouns, their reference is plural by default, like *thaamwa* (8b), as shown by the plural index *hla* in the relative clause, while the numeral *pwa-giik* ‘one’ in (8c) refers to a singled out entity.

(8) Nêlêmwa

- a. *Hangi fo agu o on.*
 perhaps EXS person LOC beach
 ‘Maybe there are people on the beach.’ (Text Avulijaap)

⁹ All the Nêlêmwa data come from Brill’s oral corpus and fieldwork data collected for some 12 months of fieldwork. The names of the texts are given in the translation line.

b. *Fo thaamwa xe hla taau.*

EXS woman REL.RL 3PL wait

‘Some women are waiting.’ (lit. there are some women who are waiting)

c. *Na fo pwâ-demwa pwa-giik xe tabö.*

but EXS fruit-liana ROUND.CLF-one REL.RL fall

‘But a/one liana fruit fell down.’ (lit. there was one liana fruit that fell down)

Fo cannot predicate over definite entities, thus displaying the definiteness restriction (as defined by Abbott 2004, 2006, Sabbagh 2009).

In (9a), existential *fo* also predicates over a first-mentioned, indefinite, caseless NP *agu*, quantified by the indefinite noun *ava-t* ‘part, some’. The relative clause in the coda restricts its reference. Compare with the standard transitive construction in (9b), where the exhaustive quantifier *roven* ‘all’ creates a definiteness effect and *agu* is marked as ergative.

The reading of the quantifier *ava-t* correlates with its position: as a post-nominal modifier, it is a weak¹⁰ indefinite quantifier (9a), but it is a partitive quantifier when it heads the NP (9c), *ava pwaxi-ny* ‘some of my children’. Yet (9c) is no counterexample to the definiteness restriction, since *fo* predicates over an indefinite subset partitioned over the definite set *pwaxi-ny*; compare with the construction with a definite subject in post-verbal position (9d).

(9) Nêlêmwa

a. *Fo agu ava-t xe hla hnayilî.*

EXS person some-C REL.RL 3PL surprise.TR

‘Some people were surprised by that.’ (lit. there were some people who were surprised)

¹⁰ After Milsark (1977), expressions like ‘some’ are weak, while ‘a’, ‘a few’ are strong.

b. *Hla hnayilî ru agu roven.*

3PL surprise.TR ERG person all

‘All the people were surprised by that.’

c. *Fo ava pwaxi-ny xe hla malep na hmwinny.*

EXS some child-POSS.1SG REL.RL 3PL live LOC here

‘Some of my children live here.’ (lit. there are some of my children who live here)

d. *Hla malep pwaxi-ny na hmwinny.*

3PL live ABS.child-POSS.1SG LOC here

‘My children live here.’

On the other hand, a sentence such as **fo pwaxi-ny xe hla malep na hmwinny* is ungrammatical, due to the clash between *fo* and the definite noun *pwaxi-ny*.¹¹ Only indefinite expressions are felicitous, such as *fo âlô xe hla malep na hmwinny* ‘there are children who live here’, or, as in (9c), where *fo* predicates over an indefinite subset in a partitive construction. Indefinite nouns with object function in the relative clause can also be existentially predicated (10):

(10) Nêlêmwa

Dua i uya Tyeeta, na fo yameewu xe i fûulî

when 3SG arrive Tieta CONJ EXS clan REL.RL 3SG found.TR

na le.

LOC there

‘When he arrived in Tieta, he founded a clan there.’ (lit. there was a clan that he founded there) (Text Thijjin.37)

¹¹ *Fo pwaxi-ny* is only acceptable as a possessive existential predication meaning ‘I have some children’.

Thus, in Nêlêmwa, existentially predicated NPs and subjects of other verbs are in complementary distribution in terms of their definiteness restrictions and word order. Maximally referential entities (i.e. the sun, the chief), definite, kind-denoting expressions, and specific indefinite NPs can be the subjects of event-denoting or property-denoting verbs in post-verbal position. First-mentioned indefinite referents must be existentially predicated, and the relative clause in the coda predicates some property or event about it. Indefinite nouns are also barred from object function, and are either existentially predicated (as in (10)), or incorporated (see Section 5.1.1).

4.2 Access to subject function in languages **with** \pm specific indefinite articles

By contrast, languages with distinct \pm specific indefinite articles (Maori, Mavea, Biak) display increased access to core argument function.

Heim and Kratzer (1998) analyse indefinite articles as existential quantifiers and type-shifters, shifting a property-denoting expression into an entity-denoting expression (De Hoop 2012). Indefinite articles are functional heads endowing expressions with minimal referential properties to have access to argument function. Like existential predicates, indefinite articles create a domain of quantification. Maori (Section 4.2.1) and Mavea (Section 4.2.2) both lack an existential predicate, but non-specific indefinite articles function as existential quantifiers for newly mentioned referents.

4.2.1 Maori: Argument function accessibility of indefinite nouns

In modern Maori, there is no dedicated existential predicate (affirmative or negative). The weak non-specific indefinite article *he* occurring in the sentence-initial position¹² of affirmative sentences existentially quantifies first-mentioned, non-specific referents, as in (11).

(11) Maori

He tangata ka haere ki te moana.

PRED.A man IPFV go to the ocean

‘A man went to the ocean.’ (Polinsky 1992: 232)

Only the article *he*, together with its sentence-initial constraint, has existential function. The strong indefinite articles *tētahi* (singular), *ētahi* (plural) do not occur in such position, nor do they have any existential-like function (Chung 2008: 187).

4.2.1.1 Thetic event sentences and episodic sentences

In contexts **other** than sentence-initial position, the weak indefinite article *he* stands in contrast with the strong indefinite articles *tētahi* (SG), *ētahi* (PL). Their distribution also differs; *he* is neutral for number (SG/PL), specificity and veridical contexts, while strong indefinite *tētahi*, *ētahi* only occur in veridical contexts, together with more individuated entities (Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 72-73). Both *he* NPs and *tētahi* ~ *ētahi* NPs can appear as indefinite, post-verbal subjects of all new, thetic sentences containing frame-setting verbs of arrival, appearance, but *he* NPs are less individuated, see (12a-b).

¹² Maori has verb/predicate initial order. Polinsky labels the article *he* in this position “predicative article”.

(12) Maori

a. *Tae noa mai he tāngata.*

arrive freely VENT NSP people

‘Some people arrived.’ (Jones & Biggs 1995: 81 [8.4], in Chung 2008: 187)

b. *Ka puta mai [tētahi tangata rangatira].*

IPFV come.out to.here ART.SG person chiefly

‘A man of high rank appeared.’ (Orbell 1992: 67, in Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 41)

He also marks indefinite subjects of locative predicate phrases which anchor brand new entities or events in a spatio-temporal frame, as in (12c).

c. ... *i te waka rā he wāhine kau.*

at ART canoe DIST NSP women EXCL

‘.. there were only women in the canoe.’ (Bauer 1997: 148)

He NPs may also denote generic reference to the kind, in accordance with their type-identifiable property:

(13) Maori

a. *E tahu horo he pepa.*

ATEL burn fast NSP paper

‘Paper burns well.’ (not *some paper burns well) (Polinsky 1992: 232)

b. *Ka makariri he tangata.*

IPFV cold NSP person

‘People (in general) get cold.’ (Chung 2008: 190)

The reading of *he* thus correlates with verb types, such as event-denoting, frame-setting, property, locative verbs.

Gundel et al. (1993: 289) also show that, depending on context, an < *a* NP > in English can be type-identifiable, i.e. non-specific, as in *she intends to buy a car*, or referential, i.e. specific, as in *she bought a car, it's a Corolla*.

4.2.1.2 *Event-denoting, episodic sentences with transitive and intransitive verbs*

An additional factor is the valency of event-denoting verbs in Maori, since the subjects of intransitive and transitive verbs behave differently (see Table 2).

This is reminiscent of the behaviour of (in)transitive verbs in Finnish (Section 3.1), though by different means.¹³

Transitive verbs and intransitive unergative verbs (of speech, communication, activity) only allow individuated *tētahi* NPs as subjects (Polinsky 1991: 1), whereas intransitive, unaccusative, frame-setting verbs such as ‘appear, occur, arrive’ inthetic statements, allow either non-specific indefinite *he* NPs or specific/individuated *tētahi* NPs subjects, as in examples (12a-b) above. By contrast with other Oceanic languages, intransitive and transitive verbs are not marked by distinct affixes or distinct forms.

¹³ In Finnish, subjects of transitive verbs must be nominative and have ± definite reading, while indefinite subjects of intransitive verbs display differential nominative or partitive case-marking which encode distinctions of individuation.

Table 2. Distribution of *tētahi* and *he* subjects

	<i>tētahi</i> subjects + SPEC + INDIV + REF	<i>he</i> subjects ± SPEC - REF
Transitive vbs	X	X
Intransitive vbs		
Unergative	X	
Unaccusative	X	X

4.2.1.2.1 *Subject accessibility: tētahi NPs only*

Only individuated indefinite *tētahi* NPs (not **he*) can be the subjects of active transitive verbs (Chung and Ladusaw 2001: 78).

(14) Maori

- a. *I whiu tētahi wahine i tāna mōkai ki te moana. (*he)*
 PST throw ART woman DO her pet into ART ocean

‘A woman threw her youngest child into the ocean.’ (Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 73)

Similarly, only individuated *tētahi* NPs (not **he*) can be the subjects of intransitive unergative verbs (Bauer 1997: 166; Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 73).

- b. *E kōrero ana tētahi wahine. (*he)*
 ATEL speak CONT ART woman

‘A woman was speaking.’ (Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 74)

Bauer (1997: 148) agrees that “when actions are agent-oriented as with transitives or agent intransitives, the agent is the focus of attention, thus incompatible with article *he*; but if the type of the agent is more important than its identity, *he* subjects are then acceptable by some consultants”.

He NPs also occur as Undergoer subjects of intransitive and state verbs, such as *mahue* ‘leave’ in (15).

(15) *Kua mahue he tamaiti i te pahi.*

PFV leave NSP child CAUSE ART bus

‘A child was left behind by the bus.’ (Bauer 1997: 148)

4.2.1.2.2 Subject accessibility: *tētahi* and *he* NPs

On the other hand, the subjects of intransitive, **unaccusative**, frame-setting verbs (occur, appear, arrive, etc.) can either be indefinite *tētahi* NPs or *he* NPs, varying with their degree of individuation and with \pm veridical contexts.

In veridical contexts, both *tētahi* and *he* subjects are allowed. The degree of individuation expectedly varies with semantic features such as abstract, low individuated natural phenomena (16a) vs. concrete and more individuated objects with spatial or shape delimitations as in (16b).

(16) Maori

a. *Kua puta [he rū nui] ki Pōneke.*

PFV come.out NSP earthquake big at Wellington

‘A severe earthquake occurred in Wellington.’ (Ngata 1926: 60, in Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 41)

b. *Ka tae mai [tētahi taraka tino nui].*

IPFV arrive VENT ART truck very big

‘A huge truck arrived.’ (Waititi 1974: 43, in Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 39)

Expectedly, in non-veridical contexts (17), indefinite subjects of unaccusative verbs are restricted to *he* NPs, highlighting the close link between non-specific expressions and non-veridical contexts.

- (17) *Ki te tae mai [he ope] ki tō kāinga ...*
 if arrive to.here NSP visitor at your house
 ‘If a visitor arrives at your house...’ (Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 45)

4.2.1.2.3 Subject accessibility of passive verbs: *tētahi* and *he* NPs

In realis, veridical contexts, the subjects of passive verbs allow both *he* NPs and *tētahi* NPs, with the same differences of individuation.

- (18) Maori

- a. *I konei ka whakatō-kia e Hoturoa [he pōhutukawa].*
 at here IPFV plant-PASS by hoturoa NSP pohutukawa
 ‘Here Hoturoa planted a/some pohutukawa.’ (Jones & Biggs 1995: 49, in Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 76)
- b. *Ka whakapā-ngia atu e Rewi [tētahi rākau] ki te waewae o Tamahae.*
 IPFV make.touch-PASS away by Rewi ART branch to the leg of Tamahae
 ‘Rewi touched a branch to Tamahae’s leg.’ (Waititi 1974: 6, in Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 41)

He NPs can denote indefinite non-specific mass nouns:

- c. *Kawe-a atu he wai ki a au!*
 fetch-PASS away NSP water to PERS.ART 1SG
 ‘Fetch me some water !’ (Bauer 1997: 147)

In non-veridical contexts, indefinite subjects of passive transitive verbs are also restricted to *he* NPs.

d. *Ka kite-a [he tohora] e [tētahi¹⁴ kaititiro], ka whakatū-ria*
 IPFV see-PASS NSP whale by ART lookout IPFV raise-PASS
te haki.

the flag

‘If/when a whale was spotted by a lookout, he would raise the flag.’ (Chung & Ladusaw 2001: 87)

In sum, in Maori, newly mentioned, referentially unanchored expressions are existentially predicated by the non-specific article *he* in sentence-**initial** position; while minimally individuated and referential subjects of verbs in active or passive voice occur in post-verbal positions. Interesting constraints on verb types appear: transitive verbs and unergative intransitive verbs mostly allow individuated *tētahi* NP subjects, while frame-setting unaccusative verbs (occur, appear, arrive) accept both indefinite *tētahi* and *he* nominal arguments, varying with individuation, concrete denotation, and veridical contexts. These frame-setting verbs have “emergence on the scene” properties (Givón 2001: 255), akin to locative existential verbs, as do verbs such as ‘sit, stand, stay’ in other languages.

4.2.2 *Mavea* (Vanuatu)

Mavea also has distinct ± specific indefinite articles, also correlating with realis and irrealis moods.

¹⁴ In this case, *tētahi* appears due to a syntactic constraint: the agent is prepositional, barring **he*. As a rule, prepositional nouns must be headed by *tēahi~ēahi* Ns (not **he*).

Indefinite	+VERID/+SPEC (SG)	N	<i>aite</i>	‘one, a’	realis
–	–VERID/–SPEC (SG)	<i>te</i>	N	<i>aite</i>	irrealis
–	–VERID/–SPEC (PL)	<i>te</i>	N		irrealis

Indefinite NPs (\pm specific) have unrestricted access to subject and object functions. The individuating specific indefinite article *aite* ‘one, a’ functions like an existential quantifier. In (19a, b) it anchors the reference of some newly mentioned entities.

(19) Mavea (Vanuatu)

a. *Sur pong aite, mala aite.*

about day one hawk one

‘One day, there was a hawk.’ (Guérin 2007: 542)

b. *Mo-on ma tamlese aite.*

3SG-look COMP old one

‘He saw that there was an old man.’ (Guérin 2011: 403)

In (c), *aite* introduces a new topic referent, which is then ascribed a property.

c. *Mas aite, ese=na malao.*

bird.fish one name=3SG.POSS megapode

‘(There is) one bird, his name (is) Megapode.’ (Guérin 2011: 287)

Definite expressions are marked by the definite article *le* (SG), *lere* (PL); but bare nouns also refer to various types of referential expressions such as (i) maximally and uniquely referential entities as in (20), (ii) definite nouns, and (iii) generic (kind-denoting) nouns (see Section 6.3).

(20) *matemase mo-l-sivo.*

sun 3SG-IPFV-go.down

‘The sun was going down.’ (Guérin 2011: 149)

5 Access to object function

Correlation 1 and 2 (in Section 3.3) stated that languages with indefinite articles tend to have much fewer restrictions on argument accessibility than those without indefinite articles. We now discuss correlation 2, repeated below.

CORRELATION 2 – NO INDEFINITE ARTICLES & RESTRICTED OR NULL ARGUMENT FUNCTIONS

In Austronesian languages **without** indefinite articles, differences of specificity and definiteness of objects/patients are encoded in the **verb phrase**, via valency operations, all of which signal the low referential status and reduced object function of the NP.

In Western Austronesian languages (Section 7), indefinite objects/patients also tend to be avoided, triggering voice alternations or deverbal constructions.

5.1 Languages without indefinite articles: access to object function

In languages without indefinite articles, non-specific indefinite NPs tend to be barred from object function by intransitivisation, antipassivisation, or they have reduced object function in semi-transitive constructions (Section 5.2).

5.1.1 *Nêlêmwa*

In *Nêlêmwa*, non-specific indefinite patients are incorporated (21a) or trigger antipassivisation (22b). *Nêlêmwa* has split alignment with accusative personal indexes and ergative-absolutive

nominal arguments (Brill 2002). Incorporation results in intransitivisation as in (21a, c), with an absolutive subject (marked zero), while transitive constructions display an absolutive patient and an ergative agent (21b, d).

(21) Nêlêmwa

a. *Hla u yo pânâât ak maleeli.*

3PL PFV pick.up.INTR stone ABS.man PL.ANAPH

‘Those men have picked up stones.’

b. *Hla u yovi pânâât ea ak maleeli.*

3PL PFV pick.up.TR ABS.stone ERG man PL.ANAPH

‘Those men have picked up the stones.’

c. *Hla wo dep thaama.*

3PL weave.INTR mat ABS.women

‘Women weave mats.’

d. *Hla wa dep mahleena (e)a thaamwa.*

3PL weave.TR ABS.mat these.DEIC ERG woman

‘The women wove these mats.’ (Brill 2000: 353)

Generic, non-specific patients trigger antipassive constructions marked by the detransitiviser *-wo*, an oblique patient and a demoted agent in the absolutive, as in (22b). Compare with the transitive construction with a specific or definite patient in (22a).

(22) Nêlêmwa

a. *I hobwaxe vaayi (e)a Pwayili.*

3SG look.after.TR ABS.cattle ERG Pwayili

‘Pwayili raises some cattle / looks after the cattle.’

b. *Hla hobwaxe-wo o vaayi agu Pum.*

3PL look.after-DETR OBL cattle ABS.person Poum

‘The people in Poum raise cattle / are cattle-raisers.’ (Bril 2002: 165)

Table 3 summarizes the hierarchy of access to argumenthood in Nêlêmwa.

Only non-specific indefinite NPs are barred from subject function and must be existentially predicated. On the other hand, access to object function is more restricted since both non-specific indefinite and generic patients are excluded, only allowing specific indefinite, partitive and definite objects/patients.

Table 3. Access to argument function for indefinite NPs in Nêlêmwa

	S function	O function
Non-specific indefinite	EXS <i>fo</i>	incorporation
Generic (kind-denoting)	+	incorporation antipassivisation
Specific indefinite	+	+
Partitives	+	+
Definite	+	+

Non-specific indefinite NPs are thus barred from core argument functions, though in different ways: non-specific subjects are existentially predicated, while non-specific objects are incorporated or demoted to obliques.

5.1.2 Access to object function in languages *with* or *without* articles and with semi-transitive constructions

The languages under discussion in this Section are mixed, i.e. with or without articles; they have distinct transitive and semi-transitive constructions and verb forms encoding the referential hierarchy of object NPs. They all belong to the Oceanic group.

5.1.2.1 *Saliba*

Saliba (OV) has no articles; semi-transitive constructions occur when the object is low-individuated, non-specific and when the action denotes some habitual activity. In semi-transitive constructions, the verb is intransitive, the object NP does not have full object status, yet it is not incorporated as shown in (23a), where it occurs before the subject index *ta*. Compare with the transitive construction in (23b).

(23) *Saliba* (Margetts 2008: 36)

a. *Kita hinage puwaka ta bahe ta lao.*
 1INCL also pig 1INCL carry 1INCL go

‘As for us, we also carry pigs and go.’

b. *Ka-na labiya ye bahe-i-∅.*
 CLF2-3SG.POSS sago 3SG carry-APPL-3SG.OBJ

‘He brought her sago.’

Semi-transitive constructions such as (23a, c) are different from incorporation (23d); the latter tend to occur in generic contexts or with non-specific indefinite nouns. Margetts (2008: 41-42) notes that “a consistent functional difference between the two constructions is not easy to establish”, and that noun incorporation is more restricted and tends to be more lexicalised.

c. *Kaiwa se bahe.*

wood 3PL carry

‘They carried wood.’ (ibid. 2008: 41)

d. *Se kaiwa-bahe.*

3PL wood-carry

‘They had a wedding feast.’ (lit. carried wood) (ibid. 2008: 41)

Only the object status¹⁵ is analysed in Margetts (1999, 2008).

5.1.2.2 *Trukese and Marshallese (Micronesian)*

In Trukese and Marshallese, two Micronesian languages with articles, the semi-transitive construction correlates with partitive reading and more generally with low object individuation (Sugita 1973).

Marshallese has definite articles (Bender 1969), a singular indefinite individuating article *juon* ‘one, a’, but no plural indefinite article, plural indefinites are marked by bare nouns. There are no restrictions on indefinite subjects as shown by (24):

(24) Marshallese (Willson 2008: 121)

E-ar kā-lək juon ek jān ʔoon.

3SG.AGR-PST jump-away a fish from boat

‘A fish jumped from the boat.’

In Marshallese, transitivity is sensitive to individuation and quantification. A verb with a singular indefinite object marked by *juon* is transitive as in (25a), while bare object NPs, which either

¹⁵ There are no available data on indefinite subjects in Saliba. Semi-transitive constructions are also discussed in other languages of the same sub-group, Sinaugoro, Tawala (which only has definite articles) (Margetts 1999: 257-265) or in languages of other groups like Manam (without articles, Lichtenberk 1983).

have indefinite plural reading (25b, c) or partitive, atelic meaning (25d, e), occur with the intransitive verb form. The possible insertion of adverbs, directionals (25e), show that these objects are not incorporated and that the constructions are semi-transitive.

(25) Marshallese

a. *Kuuj eo e-j jibwe juon kijdik.*

cat the.SG 3SG.AGR-PRES catch.TR a rat

‘The cat is catching a rat.’ (Willson 2008: 58)

b. *Kuuj eo e-j jebjeb kijdik.*

cat the.SG 3SG.AGR-PRES catch.INTR rat

‘The cat is catching rats.’ (Willson 2008: 58)

c. *Kōrā ro re-j keke nuknuk.*

woman the.PL.HUM 3PL.AGR-PRES sew.INTR dresses

‘The women are sewing dresses.’ (Willson 2008: 46)

d. *Na i-ar megay¹⁶ bao.*

1SG.ABS 1SG.AGR-PAST eat.INTR chicken

‘Me, I ate (some) chicken.’ (Willson 2008: 46)

e. *Ye-har megay-teq yek.*

3SG-PAST eat.INTR-hither fish

‘He came eating fish.’ (Bender 1969, cited in Sugita 1973: 403)

¹⁶ *Kag-ey* is the transitive form.

In Trukese, bare indefinite object NPs (denoting mass and plural entities) occur in semi-transitive constructions (26a, b). The possible insertion of adverbs between the verb and the object NP in (26a) argues against incorporation¹⁷ (Sugita, 1973: 401).

On the other hand, singular indefinite objects marked by a cardinal determiner consisting of the numeral *e-* ‘one’ and a classifier must occur with the transitive form (26c), **not** with the semi-transitive construction (Sugita 1973: 398). This strongly indicate that these determiners are quantity and individuation markers. In (26c), *e-mén* denotes ‘one animate being’¹⁸ (Benton 1968: 112).

(26) Trukese

a. *Wúpwe wún (chék) kkónik.*

1SG.FUT drink.INTR just water

‘I will (just) drink water.’ (Sugita 1973: 400)

b. *Wúpwe ppek macchang.*

1SG.FUT shoot.INTR bird

‘I will shoot birds.’ (Sugita 1973: 395)

c. *Wú mwochen pekkiy e-mén macchang.*

1SG want shoot.it one-CLF.ANIM bird

‘I want to shoot a bird.’ (Sugita 1973: 398)

¹⁷ But object incorporation is attested in other Micronesian languages: Ponapean, Kusaiean.

¹⁸ As in other Micronesian languages, nonspecific indefinite nouns are marked by the classifier without the numeral, i.e. without individuation. Cf. Ponapean, *seri-men* ‘a child’, *malek-emen* ‘a chicken’ (Regh 1981: 136-137).

The classifier *e-mén* only occurs with animate nouns; it is also the only numeral that is used as an indefinite pronoun: *e-mén a-a et-to* (one-CLF PRED.MKR-T.A proceed-here) ‘someone came’ (Benton 1968: 107).

With mass nouns, the semi-transitive construction with a bare indefinite noun has generic reading (27a), while the semi-transitive construction together with the definite article has partitive reading (27b), and the transitive construction has exhaustive reading (27c).

(27) Trukese (Sugita 1973: 397, 400)

a. *Wúpwe wún kkónik.*

1SG.FUT drink.INTR water

‘I will drink water.’

b. *Wúpwe wún ewe kkónik.*

1SG.FUT drink.INTR the water

‘I will drink some of the water.’

c. *Wúpwe wúnúmi ewe kkónik.*

1SG.FUT drink.it the water

‘I will drink up the water.’

The fact that only the (in)transitive verb form varies in (27b-c) shows that the transitivity cline is prevalent over the definite article *ewe* in interpreting the partitive vs. the definite, exhaustive readings of mass nouns. Though these languages have definite articles and some sort of indefinite singular individuator (*juon* ‘one, a’ in Marshallese and the *e-men* animate classifier in Trukese, which actually is a quantifier), still it is the transitive verb form which is the foremost indicator of the NP’s full object function and of its referential status.

Definite objects, as well as individuated singular objects (marked by ‘one’) correlate with high transitivity, while bare indefinite, plural and generic objects correlate with low transitivity, low object status, in semi-transitive constructions, without incorporation.

This suggests the following cline of individuation in Marshallese and Trukese.

Lower transitivity	>		Higher transitivity
low object function			full object function
indefinite plural N	indefinite mass N	Indefinite singular	definite N
± specific	generic	Individuated N	DEF.article
no article	partitive (+ article)	<i>juon</i> or <i>one</i> -CLF	

Telicity is another important feature ruling over the transitivity hierarchy in Trukese and Marshallese. Intransitive or semi-transitive constructions tend to denote atelic activities with partly affected objects, or partitive meaning (28a-b); while transitive verbs denote achievements, with definite or individuated, fully affected and bounded objects (28c).

(28) Marshallese (Bender 1969, cited in Sugita 1973: 403)

a. *Ye-har megay yek.*

3SG-PST eat.INTR fish

‘He was eating fish.’

b. *Ye-har megay yek yew.*

3SG-PAST eat.INTR fish the

‘He ate at the/some of the fish.’

c. *Ye-har kag(ey) yek yew.*

3SG-PST eat.TR(it) fish the

‘He ate up the fish.’

Telicity contrasts between verbs denoting atelic activities, with lower individuated patients, and telic events with fully affected, definite patients with exhaustive readings, also occur in Western Austronesian languages such as Amis, where this triggers voice alternations (see Section 7). Similar distinctions are expressed by differential case-marking in Finnish (Section 3.1).

In sum, in Saliba (article-less), distinctions of object specificity are marked in the verb phrase. In Trukese and Marshallese, which have a singular indefinite individuating article (‘a, one’), but bare nouns denoting plural, indefinite, mass and generic referents, distinctions of object specificity and individuation are also marked in the verb phrase. Non-specific, non-individuated and generic objects have low object status and occur in semi-transitive constructions.

Trukese and Marshallese stand between (i) the languages without articles (like Saliba and those discussed in Section 5.1.1), in which degrees of \pm specificity and \pm definiteness are crucially expressed in the **verb phrase**, and (ii) those analysed in Section 5.2 below, which have a strong determiner phrase with distinct \pm specific, singular and plural indefinite articles, and in which the referential status of objects is disconnected from transitivity hierarchy.

5.2 Languages with indefinite articles: access to object function

In languages with distinct \pm specific indefinite articles, transitivity is not central, and access to object function is generally much less restricted. Indefinite NPs are marked by indefinite articles and have access to core argument functions as will appear below. Among the languages

considered, Maori and Mavea are Oceanic languages, Biak is non-Oceanic (Eastern Malayo-Polynesian).

5.2.1 Maori: accessibility to object function

In the Ngāti Porou dialect of Maori,¹⁹ non-specific indefinite *he* NPs (29a) have access to core object function and the prepositional direct object marker *i* does not occur. Other dialects (29b-c) disallow the co-occurrence of the object marker *i* with *he* NPs, and only allow the article *tētahi* (marking specific, individuated or unique entities, see (29b)); thus in those other dialects, nonspecific indefinite NPs are incorporated as in (29c) (Bauer 1997: 168-69).

(29) Maori (Ngāti Porou dialect)

- a. *I takatū mātau [he hākari] m-ō to rātau hokinga mai.*
 PST prepare we ART feast INTD-POSS their coming to here
 ‘We prepared a feast for their home-coming.’ (Ngata 1994: 207, in Chung and Ladusaw 2001: 41)

Other dialects

- b. *I hoko mai ahau i tētahi pukapuka.*
 PST buy hither 1SG DO ART book
 ‘I bought a book.’ (Bauer 1997: 169)
- c. *E hiahia pukapuka ana ahau.*
 ATEL want book CONT 1SG
 ‘I want a book.’ (Bauer 1997: 169)

¹⁹ A reviewer noted that this possibility was restricted to the Ngāti Porou dialect of Māori.

Incorporation of non-specific indefinite NPs thus results from some morphosyntactic constraint in Maori (see more under Section 6.2).

5.2.2 Access to object function in Biak (Eastern Malayo-Polynesian)

Verb forms in Biak do not display any \pm transitive affixes. A transitive verb is defined as one occurring with an object (noun or pronoun) in immediate post-verbal position.

(30) Biak (van den Heuvel 2006:168)

a. *K<y>er i ro swan andíre.*

<3SG>plant 3SG LOC sea border

‘He planted it (tree) at the seaside.’

b. *Yáf an-ya k<y>er i kukru ifen.*

garden GIV-3SG.SPC <3SG>plant 3SG with <k.o.tuber>

‘This garden, he planted it with tubers.’

Non-specific indefinite objects are not incorporated, and do not trigger intransitivisation. The array of distinct \pm specific indefinite and definite articles, as well as bare nouns, signal distinctions of individuation, specificity, referentiality in the **noun phrase**, with no impact on the verb phrase and no restriction of access to argument function. Neither is existential predication used to introduce first mentioned subject NPs.

Table 4. Articles in Biak, access to argument functions

	Indefinite non-specific = <i>o</i> (SG), = <i>no</i> (PL)	\pm Indefinite specific = <i>ya</i>	\pm Definite, generic bare nouns	Definite <i>an</i> (= <i>ya</i>)
SUBJECT	+	+	+	+
OBJECT	+	+	+	+

The specific (\pm definite) article $=ya$ marks referents with presupposed existence, or entities that are referentially anchored in discourse. It also denotes entities with unique reference, as in (31), which do not need the maximally definite form $an=ya$ that cumulates definiteness and specificity.

(31) Biak

Or=ya i-kren.

sun=3SG.SPEC 3SG-aslant

‘The sun was close to setting.’ (van den Heuvel 2006: 201)

In realis, declarative contexts, non-specific indefinite NPs (marked by $=(y)o$, $=no$), but with presupposed existence, may have subject (32a) and object (32b) functions. In (32b), according to van den Heuvel, the verb is transitive, without object incorporation. In negative contexts such as (32c), in which the NP has no presupposed existence, the noun *dyapan* is a generic bare noun in object function, it is not incorporated, nor is the verb intransitivised.

(32) Biak (van den Heuvel 2006: 212, 222)

a. *Insandya romá=no s-mun-pám (...).*

just child=NSP.PL 3PL.ANIM-hit-net

‘A while ago some children were fishing with nets (...)’

b. *I-su ro=yo.*

3SG-stick.out thing=NSP.SG

‘He gave something.’

c. *K<y>er dyapan va.*

<3SG>plant taro NEG

‘He does not plant taro/he has not planted taro.’

Apart from illocutionary (affirmative, negative) factors, which have some impact on the entity’s referential status and presupposed existence, modal and aspectual features also come into play. Again, \pm specificity contrasts also correlate with \pm realis and \pm telic contexts. The crucial point is that, even though the verb itself has no aspect marker, as in (33a-b), its telic and realis reading is **inferred** from the \pm specific indefinite articles (=ya, =o, =no) marking the object. Specific indefinite object NPs have some presupposed existence and induce realis, telic reading (33a), while non-specific indefinite objects (33b) carry no presupposition of existence and have irrealis, atelic reading (with ongoing, future, conditional events).

(33) Biak (van den Heuvel 2006:71)

a. *I-für yuk=ya.*

3SG-make ukelele=SPC.SG

‘He has made a ukulele (...).’

b. *I-für yuk=o.*

3SG-make ukelele=NSP.SG

‘He’s making/will make a ukulele (...).’

Thus, in Biak, differences of referential status, definiteness and specificity are expressed in the noun phrase/determiner phrase, leaving the verb phrase untouched, to the extent that some aspect-mood correlations are inferred from the use of \pm specific articles in the noun phrase.

5.2.3 Access to object function in Mavea (Vanuatu)

In Mavea, some verbs have \pm transitive alternations restricted to personal object pronouns. There are thus no transitivity alternations correlating with the \pm definite status of nominal objects. As in Biak, indefinite objects are not incorporated and verbs are not intransitivised. The full range of \pm specific indefinite and definite articles, as well as bare nouns, signal distinctions of referential status in the **noun phrase**, with no restriction of access to argument function. Table 5 lists these articles and sums up the potential of access to argument functions.

Table 5. Articles in Mavea, access to argument functions

	Indefinite		\pm definite, generic	definite
	non-specific <i>te</i> N <i>aite</i> (SG), <i>te</i> N (PL)	specific N <i>aite</i> (SG)	bare nouns	<i>le</i> (SG), <i>lere</i> (PL)
SUBJECT	+	+	+	+
OBJECT	+	+	+	+

\pm Specific indefinite NPs can be objects as in (34): the first mention of *pasura* ‘papaya’ is specific indefinite, while the second one is a bare definite noun. In (34b), the bare definite NP *pua* ‘knife’ is modified by a relative clause.

(34) Mavea (Vanuatu, Guérin 2007: 549)

a. *Ra-r-la pasura aite, ro ra-r-songo pasura.*

3PL-DU-take papaya one then 3PL-DU-split papaya

‘They took a papaya, then split the papaya.’

- b. *Ro pua lavoā ma ki-r-lav=i=a ki-r-va*
 then knife big REL 1PL.EXCL-DU-take=TR=3SG 1PL.EXCL-DU-go
mo-l-tur ale.
 3SG-IPFV-stand there
 ‘Then the big knife that we had taken stayed there.’

Specificity contrasts for indefinite nouns also correlate with \pm realis contexts. The future-irrealis verb in (35a) selects the non-specific indefinite article, and the object preserves its core argument status. Compare with the realis context and the specific indefinite article in (35b), and with the bare definite NP in object function in (35c).

(35) Mavea (Guérin 2007: 53, 543)

- a. *Me ko-tar [te aka du aite].*
 FUT 2SG-chop NSP canoe good one
 ‘You will hew a canoe.’
- b. *Roale mo-~ma ro, mo-las [aka du aite].*
 then ale3SG-come then 3SG-fasten canoe good one
 ‘Then he came and lashed a canoe.’
- c. *Ra-las avua mo-ev.*
 3PL-fasten turtle 3SG-finish
 ‘They fastened the turtle.’

As in Biak, \pm specific indefinite NPs can be subjects and objects in Mavea. The same correlation holds between specificity and realis contexts, with one important difference: tense-mood is marked on the verb, not inferred from the noun phrase and the types of articles, as in Biak.

To sum up on Section 5, in languages with distinct \pm specific indefinite articles, and no verbal transitivity alternations, non-specific indefinite NPs can be core subject and object arguments.

6 Access of generic expressions to argument function

Generic NPs are now analysed. Generic statements predicate some property which is characteristic of their kind-denoting subject. In the generic statement *cows eat grass*, the VP *eat grass* denotes a type of diet and a characteristic property of the kind ‘cow’, also true for the whole herbivorous species. The VP containing the generic noun denotes a property which holds true for any item of the kind-denoting subject. Thus, in the statement *volcanoes spew lava*, the VP *spew lava* predicates a property of the kind-denoting NP ‘volcano’.

Generic subjects and objects thus have asymmetrical features; in many Oceanic languages, this asymmetry is mirrored by the fact that generic nouns are better subjects than objects. Generic NPs are higher than specific indefinite NPs on the cline of access to subject function, while generic NPs are lower than specific indefinite NPs and are more restricted in their access to object function. This is summarised in Tables 6a-6b.

Table 6a. Referential cline of access to **SUBJECT function**

(+)	>	(-)	often excluded
definite	generic kind-denoting	specific indefinite	non-specific indefinite NPs (EXS constr.)

Table 6b. Referential cline of access to **OBJECT function**

(+)	>	(-)	often excluded
definite	specific indefinite	generic kind-denoting	non-specific indefinite NPs (incorporation, voice alternations, deverbalisation, etc.)

The asymmetrical behaviour of generic NPs is mostly observed in languages **without** indefinite articles. This brings in correlation 3.

CORRELATION 3 – GENERIC NPs

(i) The asymmetrical access of generic NPs to subject and object functions tends to occur in languages **without** indefinite articles, where referential differences tend to be marked in the **verb phrase**, and where generic ‘objects’ tend to be incorporated, or undergo other valency changes (antipassivisation, semi-transitivisation) that deprive them of full argument status and result in low transitivity.

(ii) This asymmetry decreases or disappears in languages **with** distinct \pm specific, \pm definite articles.

In Mavea and Biak, generic NPs generally have unrestricted access to subject and object functions. Marshallese allows generic subjects, as well as generic NPs with lower object function in semi-transitive constructions.

In Maori, there is a slight asymmetry, in that generic objects are marked by definite articles or are incorporated in the VP (see Section 6.2).

6.1 Generic expressions and subjecthood in Nêlêmwa

In Nêlêmwa, generic NPs are full subjects, while non-specific indefinite NPs may not and must be existentially predicated. On the other hand, generic NPs and non-specific indefinite NPs are equally barred from object function and must be incorporated, no semi-transitive constructions are observed. Since Nêlêmwa has no articles, the \pm specific or generic reading of NPs depends on verbal valency. In (36a-b), the VP *thu ogo*, is an intransitive, aspectless verb with an

incorporated, generic noun *ogo*. *Thu ogo* denotes a universal, permanent property of the kind-denoting subject *wan* ‘turtle’ marked as absolutive.

(36) Nêlêmwa (Bril 2000: 259)

a. *Hla [thu ogo] wan.*

3PL do egg ABS.turtle

‘Turtles lay eggs.’

In (36b), due to the spatial specification, *bwa dau=eli* ‘on that island’, which partitions a subset of the kind ‘turtle’, the statement is characterising rather than generic. But the noun *ogo* is still not individuated enough for full object status and is incorporated in the VP.

b. *Hla [thu ogo] wan bwa dau=eli.*

3PL do egg ABS.turtle on island=ANAPH

‘Turtles lay eggs on that island.’

This nicely points out the asymmetry between generic subjects and generic incorporated nouns lacking object function.

6.2 Generic NPs in Maori

In Maori, generic subjects and objects are slightly asymmetrical, in that generic objects are marked by definite articles or are incorporated in the VP.

Table 7. Cline of access to argument function in Maori

	Indefinite		Definite	
	non-specific	specific		
	<i>he</i>	<i>tētahi</i> (SG), <i>ētahi</i> (PL)	<i>te</i> (SG), <i>ngā</i> (PL)	bare nouns
subject	+	+	+	
object	(+)	+	+	
generic S	+		+	
generic O			+	incorporated

Generic subjects are more commonly marked by the non-specific indefinite article *he*, or by the definite articles *te* (SG), *ngā* (PL); compare (37a, b, c).

(37) Maori

a. *E tahu horo he pepa.*²⁰

ATEL burn fast NSP paper

‘Paper burns well.’ (*Some paper burns well) (Polinsky 1992: 232)

b. *Tino turituri te/ngā wakarererangi.*

INTENS noisy the.SG/the.PL aeroplane

‘(the) aeroplanes are noisy.’ / ‘the aeroplane is noisy.’ (Bauer 1997: 171)

c. *Ka makariri he tangata.*

IPFV cold NSP person

‘People (in general) get cold.’ (Chung 2008: 190)

Generic ‘objects’ are marked by the definite article (37d) or are incorporated (37e).

d. ... *ka kohi i te hua o te miro hei hinu whakakara.*

IPFV gather DO the.SG fruit of the.SG miro for oil scented

‘(they) gathered miro berries to make scented oil.’ (Bauer 1997: 145)

²⁰ The functions of *he* are distinguished by position: existential *he* NPs are clause initial, while generic subject *he* NPs are in post-verbal argument position (Polinsky 1992: 232).

- e. *E kohi hua rākauana ia.*
 ATEL gather fruit tree CONT 3SG
 ‘She’s berry-picking.’ (Bauer 1997: 316)

6.3 Generic NPs in Biak and Mavea

Biak also has distinct \pm specific indefinite articles (see Section 5.2.2). Generic subject NPs are marked either as bare plural nouns (38a) or by the specific article *ya*, which actually marks identifiability (38b).

(38) Biak (van den Heuvel 2006: 223)

- a. *In s-an pyum.*
 fish 3PL.ANIM-eat good
 ‘Fish tastes good.’
- b. *In=s-ya s-an pyum.*
 fish=3PL.AN-SPC 3PL.ANIM-eat good
 ‘Fish tastes good.’

Generic, kind-denoting nouns are not incorporated, and have object function, according to van den Heuvel (2006:163).

- c. *Nko-kovs=u fas.*
 1PL.EXCL-buy=DISC rice
 ‘We buy rice.’

6.3.1 *Generic NPs in Mavea*

Mavea also has distinct \pm specific indefinite articles (see Section 5.2.3) and similar pattern; generic objects are encoded as bare nouns and are not incorporated according to Guérin.

(39) *Mavea* (Guérin, 2011: 151)

Da-r-alal "masi.²¹

1PL.INCL-DU-search fish

'We will look for fish.'

6.3.2 *Summary of Section 6*

- (i) On the cline to subjecthood, irrespective of the language type, i.e. **with** or **without** articles, generic subjects rank higher since they constitute shared knowledge; they behave like proper names of kinds (Carlson 1977) or definite expressions, and have unrestricted subject function. Shared knowledge ranks high, and their non-specific, non-individuated feature ranks low.
- (ii) Generic objects, on the other hand, behave differently in languages **with** and **without** articles.
 - (a) In languages **without** articles, where differences of individuation and specificity of objects are marked in the verb phrase, generic NPs are not individuated enough and tend to be incorporated in the VP or occur in semi-transitive constructions (Saliba). Individuation and specificity are thus the highest ranking features for an NP to have object function.

²¹ Graph <"m> indicates a linguo-labial consonant.

- (b) By contrast, in languages **with** articles, where distinctions of definiteness and specificity are expressed in the noun phrase, and where articles assign their referential status, the asymmetry between generic subjects and generic objects tends to decrease or disappear.
- (c) Marshallese and Trukese are transitional, differences of definiteness and individuation are marked **both** in the verb phrase and in the noun phrase. Individuated object NPs marked by the singular indefinite ‘one, a’ form and definite objects occur with transitive verbs. Plural indefinite objects and generic objects occur in low transitive constructions and are not incorporated (Section 5.1.2).
- (iii) More generally, this points out a hierarchy of features according to which specificity and individuation tend to rank higher for full object status, while presupposition, shared knowledge and referential properties rank higher for subject status.

7 Accessibility hierarchy in Western Austronesian

We now analyse some specific features of Western Austronesian languages, such as Amis (Formosan), Tagalog and Kapampangan (Philippine).

In these languages without indefinite articles, and in which definiteness is optionally marked by demonstratives, referential differences are mostly expressed in the verb phrase. The main difference between Oceanic and Western Austronesian languages is that, in the latter, (in)transitivity is not marked by distinct verb forms or suffixes, and that avoidance of indefinite arguments triggers voice alternations or nominalised verb forms, both of which correlate with valency and reduced argument function.

The cut-off point for access to subject function is again between specific and non-specific indefinite expressions. Specific indefinite NPs may be nominative subjects (to some variable

extent), while newly mentioned, non-specific indefinite NPs are avoided or barred from argument function; existential constructions and voice alternations generally come into play.

7.1 Thetic, existential predications in Northern Amis

In Northern Amis, first-mentioned referents are existentially predicated. The verb *ira* has locative and existential functions, it predicates over an NP marked as its nominative subject.

(40) Northern Amis²²

I kudul n-u sapad, ira k-u cacay a raang a
 LOC top GEN-NM table EXS NOM-NM one LNK female LNK
ayam-an.
 bird-COLL

‘On top of the table, there was one hen.’

In its locative and event existential functions, *ira* has no definiteness restrictions and predicates over ± specific indefinite NPs, and over definite NPs (41a-b), with the meaning ‘be there’ or ‘be alive’.

(41) Northern Amis

a. *Ira haw k-isu?*
 LOC.V Q NOM-2SG
 ‘Are you still (there)?’

²² All Amis examples originate from Brill’s collected oral corpus and notes over some 13 months of fieldwork. The names of the texts are given in the translation line.

- b. *Ira hen haw k-u baki=isu?*
 LOC.V still Q NOM-NM grandpa=GEN.2SG
 ‘Is your grandpa still alive?’

In its entity existential function, *ira* predicates over \pm specific indefinite expressions as in (42) where the nominative deictic determiner *k-iya* marks specificity (like this in English existential clauses).

(42) Northern Amis

- a. *Ira k-iya cacay a remiad.*
 EXS NOM-DEIC one LNK day
 ‘One/this (particular) day...’ (Text Lalagawan.018)

- b. *I 'a'ayaw ira k-iya wawa, ci Balah han k-u ngangan.*
 LOC before EXS NOM-DEIC child PN Balah be.thus NOM-NMname
 ‘Long ago, there was a/this child, his name was Balah.’ (Text Raraq.001)

Event existentials are discourse-new information, but their referents may be identifiable, as in (43a) which is a whole new statement with deictically identifiable and specific referents, *k-iya buis* ‘stars’. This statement achieves pragmatic saliency, it is uttered while pointing at the stars and drawing attention to them. Compare with the neutral declarative and descriptive statement with a voice-marked verb *ma-sadak* ‘rise’ in (43b).

(43) Northern Amis

- a. *Ira=tu k-iya buis a ma-sadak i kudul.*
 LOC.V=PFV NOM-DEIC star LNK NAV-rise LOC sky
 ‘[look] stars have arisen in the sky.’ (lit. there are stars that have arisen in the sky)

b. *Ma-sadak=tu k-ira²³ buis i kudul.*

NAV-rise=PFV NOM-DIST star LOC sky

‘The stars had arisen in the sky.’

In Amis, event existential constructions with *ira* are acceptable with identifiable, plural entities such as “stars”, but not with a unique, maximally referential entity such as *bulad* ‘moon’ (**ira ku bulad*). Maximally referential and definite entities (the sun, the moon, etc.) are the nominative arguments of voice-marked verbs in declarative statements such as (43c).

c. *Melaw-i saw! ma-sadak=tu k-u bulad i kudul.*

look-IMP.UV DISC NAV-rise=PFV NOM-NM moon LOC sky

‘Look! the moon has appeared in the sky!’

On the other hand, the presentational construction marked by a cataphoric determiner *iniyan* presenting new discourse referents in (44a) introduces the discourse specific NP *kungku* ‘story’. Also consider the presentational function of the deictic (ad)verb *ini* predicating over a definite NP in (44b), and expressing personal reaction (surprise, annoyance).

(44) Northern Amis

a. *Iniyan hantu u kungku n-i Dihang a t-iya wacu n-ira.*

DEIC FOC NM story GEN-PN Dihang with OBL-DEIC dog GEN-3SG

‘This is the story about Dihang and his dog.’ (Text Pililucan.001)

b. *Ini=tu k-isu!*

be.here=PFV NOM-2SG

‘Here you are!’

²³ The distal deictic *-ira* also has anaphoric function.

Since ongoing atmospheric and natural events are situationally anchored, and maximally referential, they are also expressed by voice-marked verbs as in (45), not as existential predications.

(45) Northern Amis

Ma-lelen.

NAV-earthquake

‘There is an earthquake.’ (lit. it’s ‘earthquaking’) (**ira ku lelen*)

If the event is specific, possibly witnessed in a given space and time anchored in discourse time, voice-marked verbal predications occur as in (46b), where the deictic marker *kira* marks specificity, like *this* in English *there was this man*.

(46) Northern Amis

a. *Ma-maan saw?*

NAV-what? DISC

‘What’s the matter?/what happened?’

b. *Ma-baletu n-u karireng k-ira babainay.*

UV-hit GEN-NM car NOM-DIST man

‘A man was hit by a car.’ (if specific, witnessed)

Thus, in Amis, all new statements with voice-marked verbs occur if the entity is maximally referential, and if the event is identifiable or witnessed. Otherwise, existential constructions must anchor first-mentioned, (\pm specific) indefinite referents or events.

This mirrors Prince’s familiarity scale (1981)

brand new > brand new anchored > inferable > (situationally) evoked

Avoidance strategies of non-specific indefinite subjects by elision and recourse to derived deverbal (property or event) nouns are now presented.

7.1.1 *Event existentials: elision of non-specific actor subjects*

Non-specific indefinite (pro)nouns, such as *something*, *some(one)*, cannot be the nominative arguments of finite verb constructions; they are generally left unexpressed, giving way to event existential predications whose subject is a derived deverbal noun denoting a property (47a) or an event (47b).

(47) Northern Amis

a. *Ira=tu k-u ma-lemed-ay.*

EXS=PFV NOM-NM NAV-luck-NMZ

‘Some were lucky.’ (lit. there were lucky ones) (Text Amis writing.120)

b. *Ira k-u tayni-y-ay.*

EXS NOM-NM arrive-EP-NMZ

‘Someone is coming/some people are coming.’ (lit. there’s a coming x)

The negative existential counterpart is marked by the predicate *awaay*, whose subject is a derived deverbal noun *tayni-y-ay* ‘comer’ modifying the optional indefinite ontological noun *tamdaw* ‘person’ in (47c):

c. *Awaay hen k-u tayni-y-ay (a tamdaw).*

NEG.EXS still NOM-NM arrive-EP-NMZ LNK person

‘Nobody has arrived yet.’ (lit. there’s still no coming person) (Bril 2017: 376)

Another construction combines the event existential operator *si*²⁴ with the derived deverbal noun *mi-kungkung-ay* ‘knocker’.

- d. *Si mi-kungkung-ay t-u panan.*
 EVT.EXS AV-knock-NMZ OBL-NM door

‘Somebody is knocking at the door.’ (lit. there’s a knocker at the door)

7.1.2 Event existentials: elision of non-specific undergoer subjects

In Undergoer Voice constructions (48), non-specific indefinite NPs are similarly barred from subject function. In the first part of (48a), the clause highlights the activity (*mi-kilim* ‘look for’) carried out by a definite Actor on some non-specific, indefinite theme/patient NP (*badal* ‘berries’); in the second part, which states the result, the non-specific indefinite NP ‘berries’ is not only barred from the subject function of a finite verb in locative voice (LV), it is also left unexpressed.²⁵ Instead, the existential predicate takes as its nominative argument a derived deverbal NP in Locative Voice (*ni-ka-tepa-an* ‘some finding’), with the perfective nominaliser *ni-* denoting the result or achievement.

(48) Northern Amis

- a. *Na mi-kilim k-aku t-u badal inacila,*
 PST AV-look.for NOM-1SG OBL-NM berry yesterday

‘Yesterday I looked for berries,

²⁴ Note that the *si* construction does not have a nominative argument, in contrast with the existential predicate *ira*. *Si* N constructions also have a possessive reading ‘have a N’.

²⁵ An Undergoer Voice construction with an indefinite patient is ungrammatical: **ma-tepa numaku ku badal inacila* (intended ‘I found some berries yesterday’); compare with a definite patient subject *cudad*: *ma-tepa numaku k-ira badal* ‘I found these berries’.

ira k-u ni-ka-tepa-an numaku.

EXS NOM-NM PFV.N-NFIN-find-LV GEN.1SG

I found (some).’ (lit. there was some finding by me)

Sentence (48b) is the negative counterpart, with the same properties. The negative existential predicate *awaay* selects the perfective deverbal NP (*ni-ka-tepa-an* ‘some finding’) as its subject, barring and deleting the non-specific indefinite undergoer ‘berries’.

b. *Na mi-kilim k-aku t-u badal inacila,*

‘Yesterday I looked for berries,

awaay k-u ni-ka-tepa-an numaku.

NEG.EXS NOM-NM PFV.NMZ-NFIN-find-LV GEN.1SG

I found none.’ (lit. there was no finding by me)

In (49), similar avoidance of a non-specific indefinite Undergoer subject triggers an existential predication whose subject is a derived deverbal noun in Undergoer voice (*sa-suwal-en*), with an unexpressed indefinite pronoun.

(49) Northern Amis

Ira k-u sa~suwal-en n-ira.

EXS NOM-NM CA.RDP~speak-UV GEN-3SG

‘She has something to tell you !’ (lit. there is x announced by her)

Similarly in (50a, c), the event existential predicate has a derived gerund verb form *pi-rasur* as subject, with an oblique non-specific indefinite patient *kakaenen* ‘food’. These event existentials convey wholly new information. Compare with the standard definite Undergoer subjects of UV construction in (50b) and LV construction in (50d).

(50) Northern Amis

- a. *Ira [k-u pi-rasur n-uhni t-u ka~kaen-en].*
 EXS NOM-NM NFIN-prepare GEN-3PL OBL-NM CA.RDP~EAT-UV

‘They prepared some food.’ (lit. there was their preparing food)

- b. *Ma-rasur k-u ka~kaen-en n-uhni.*
 UV-prepare NOM-NM CA.RDP~eat-UV GEN-3PL

‘They prepared their food.’ (lit. their food was prepared)

In (50c) the question bears on the existence of some chicken-raising activity. Since it is wholly new information, it occurs as an event existential predication, whose subject is a derived deverbal event noun *ni-pahabay-an* with an oblique NP *ayam*. Compare with the declarative construction with Locative Voice in (50d), with a definite Undergoer subject (*k-aku*).

- c. *Ira haw [k-u ni-pahabay-an=isu t-u ayam]?*
 EXS Q NOM-NM PFV.NMZ-raise-LV=GEN.2SG OBL-NM chicken

‘Do you raise chickens?’ (lit. is there raising chickens by you?)

- d. *Pahabay-an=isu k-aku.*
 prepare-LV=GEN.2SG NOM-1SG

‘You raised me.’ (lit. I was raised by you)

To sum up, the subjects of existential predicates and the subjects of voice-marked verbs are in complementary distribution; finite voice-marked verbs only allow specific and definite subject NPs, while non-specific indefinite NPs must be existentially predicated. Event existentials predicating over derived deverbal event nouns with unexpressed indefinite subjects and oblique indefinite NPs, are one way of circumventing non-specific indefinite arguments, as in examples

(47) to (50) above. Amis has no incorporating construction; argument elision and demotion of non-specific indefinite NPs is an equivalent device. Another strategy is voice alternations.

7.2 Voice alternations: avoiding indefinite subjects in Northern Amis

Voice alternations are commonly used to avoid non-specific indefinite subjects, which are ungrammatical. This consists in selecting a voice that instead promotes a definite, specific argument (if there is one) as subject. In (51a), the definite nominative Actor is selected as the subject, triggering the *mi*- Actor Voice, with antipassive alignment and with an oblique non-specific indefinite patient; while in (51b), the definite Undergoer is selected as the default nominative subject of a *ma*- Undergoer Voice (UV) with ergative alignment, and a genitive agent. The referential status of the Undergoer also correlates with telicity, boundedness and exhaustivity.

(51) Northern Amis

a. *Mi-takid=tu k-uhni t-u qepah.*

AV-pour=PFV NOM-3PL OBL-NM wine

‘They drank wine.’

b. *Ma-takid=tu n-uhni k-u qepah.*

UV-pour=PFV GEN-3PL NOM-NM wine

‘They drank the wine.’ (telic)

In (52), the definite Undergoer *lumaq* ‘house’ is the default nominative subject of a UV *ma*- Undergoer Voice. The genitive agent *taw* is indefinite, but the referential status of genitive agents of UV constructions is not central since agents are not co-indexed by the voice system.

(52) Northern Amis

Ma-cakay=tu n-u taw k-ina lumaq.

UV-buy=PFV GEN-NM foreigner NOM-DEIC house

‘This house was bought by some foreigners/some foreigners bought this house.’

An Actor Voice *mi-* verb disallows a non-specific indefinite subject such as *taw*:ungrammatical: **mi-cakay=tu k-u taw t-ina lumaq*

(intended meaning: ‘some foreigners bought this house’).

An individuated, specific indefinite Undergoer, such as *cacay a tamdaw* ‘one person’ (53a), can be the nominative argument of a UV construction, while a non-specific indefinite Undergoer like *tamdaw* cannot. Consequently, an abilitative voice marked by *maka-* with antipassive alignment must be used (53b), with an experiencer subject *k-aku* and an oblique patient *tamdaw*.

(53) Northern Amis

a. *Na ma-melaw numaku k-u cacay a tamdaw.*

PST UV-see GEN.1SG NOM-NM one LNK person

‘I saw one/a certain person.’ (specific reference; not *I saw someone)

b. *Na maka-melaw k-aku t-u tamdaw.*

PST ABILT-see NOM.1SG OBL-NM person

‘I saw someone.’ (non-specific)

Ungrammatical: **ma-melaw numaku k-u tamdaw*

(intended meaning: ‘I saw someone’).

In (53c), the abilitative voice construction also has a non-specific indefinite oblique patient *cima-an a tamdaw*, containing the interrogative pronoun *cima* ‘who?’.

c. *Na maka-melaw k-aku t-u cima-an a tamdaw.*

PST ABILT-see NOM.1SG OBL-NM WH-OBL LNK person

‘I saw someone.’ (context: but I don’t know who that may be)

The alternate way of avoiding an indefinite subject is to use a derived deverbal noun such as *ma-nanuwang-ay* ‘a mover/moving thing’ as the subject of the UV verb *ma-melaw* in (53d), leaving the indefinite NP unexpressed.

d. *Ma-melaw n-uhni k-u ma-nanuwang-ay.*

UV-see GEN-3PL NOM-NM NAV-move-NMZ

‘They saw something moving.’ (lit. they saw a moving x) (Text ci Mayaw a ci Calabad.015)

Thus, subjects of voice-marked verbs must be specific or definite; while non-subjects (i.e. oblique NPs and genitive agents) are less restricted and are compatible with \pm definite and \pm specific referents.

Du Bois (1987: 827), states that in Sacapultec and Aguacatec (Mayan), both ergative languages, new entities do not occur in ergative role; “the A (agent) is seven times less likely to contain new information than S or O”. This is related to notions of givenness and topic continuity: A roles tend to be GIVEN, while the S of intransitive verbs manage information flow. The GIVEN A constraint is such that if a new protagonist is the agent of a transitive verb, it cannot be first-mentioned in A role and will trigger its first introduction as an S role of an intransitive verb with a semantically empty verb, such as Sacapultec *k'o:(l)*- ‘there is’, or verbs like ‘come’, ‘arrive’, ‘appear’ (Du Bois 1987: 831). Du Bois then states that “the absolutive syntactic position is a sort of grammatically defined ‘staging area’... for activating a previously inactive entity

concept.” (Du Bois 1987: 834), he then draws some parallels with similar facts described in various Austronesian languages, Chamorro (Mariana Is.), Malay, Acehnese (Sumatra).

In Amis, the syntactic position marked by absolutive case does not have any ‘staging function’ for newly mentioned, indefinite entities. This is done by existential constructions (see examples 47 to 50 above). The nominative/absolutive argument of the various symmetrical voices (Actor, Undergoer, Abilitative, etc.) must be definite or at least specific. The *mi*- Actor Voice (51a) and the *maka*- Abilitative voice (53b), both with antipassive alignment, accept indefinite oblique themes/patients; while the UV *ma*- with ergative alignment and nominative/absolutive Undergoer (51b), allows indefinite genitive agents (52).

7.3 Voice alternations: avoiding indefinite arguments in Tagalog

In Tagalog, the Privileged Arguments²⁶ (P.A.) are marked by *ang*, while other inner arguments are marked by *ng*. As in Amis, only definite or specific nouns can be the P.A. of verbs that are inflected for the voice selected by the P.A.’s thematic role. Indefinite nouns cannot be P.A. If both arguments are definite as in (54), the patient is the default P.A. of a verb in Undergoer Voice (as in Amis).

(54) Tagalog

B<in>ili ng babae ang libro.

<PERF.UV>buy NON.P woman NOM book

‘The woman bought the book.’

²⁶ A reviewer suggested to use the neutral label “Privileged Argument” for the *ang*-marked NP in Tagalog, owing to its controversial characterization.

7.3.1 *Existential predications in Tagalog*

As in other languages without indefinite articles, newly-mentioned, indefinite arguments are existentially predicated. In Tagalog, existential constructions are “impersonal sentences formed on the basis of an unaccusative verb (the existential verb) that selects a noun phrase complement”, with no overt case-marked subject (Sabbagh 2009: 675-676); the coda may contain a relative clause that restricts its reference.

Thus in (55a), the non-specific indefinite NP *istudyante* is existentially predicated, caseless, and its actor role is encoded by the AV verb (*d<um>ating* ‘come’) in the relative clause. By contrast with Amis, the verb in the relative clause is finite and inflected for tense-aspect in Tagalog. Only definite nouns can be the nominative P.A. of voice marked verbs, as in (55b).

(55) Tagalog (Schachter & Otnes 1972: 279)

a. *May istudyante=ng d<um>ating.*

EXS student=LNK <AV>come

‘A student came.’ (lit. there was a student who came)

b. *D<um>ating ang istudyante.*

<AV>come NOM student

‘The student came.’

As in Amis, the thematic role of the existentially predicated indefinite NP in (56) is encoded on the verb of the relative clause.

(56) Tagalog (Sabbagh 2009: 679)

Mayroó=ng mga bata' na hindi' nag-aaral.

EXS.there-LNK PL child LNK NEG INTR.ASP-study

‘There are children who don’t study.’ (or: some children don’t study)

As in Amis, indefinite pronouns cannot be P.A. and trigger event existential constructions as in (57), with unexpressed indefinite pronouns. In (57a), this unexpressed indefinite pronoun is the null P.A. (labelled [NP *e*] by Sabbagh 2009), of a headless relative clause.

(57) Tagalog

a. *Mayroó-ng*²⁷ *[[NP e] [d<um>a~dating]]*.

EXS.there-LNK <AV>ASP~come

‘Someone is coming.’ (lit. there is someone (who is) coming) (Sabbagh 2009: 704)

b. *May d<um>ating kahapon.*

EXS <AV>come yesterday

‘Someone came yesterday.’ (Schachter & Otnes 1972: 276)

c. *May nakita ako.*

EXS see NOM.1SG

‘I saw someone’ (Kaufman, pers. comm.)

d. *May bi-bili nang=uling.*

EXS INCM-buy GEN=charcoal

‘Someone will buy charcoal.’ (Kaufman 2009: 194)

²⁷ *ng* is the realization of the linker *na* after vowels and nasal consonants (Sabbagh 2009).

If both arguments are indefinite, the existential verb anchors the reference of one of them. In (58a), it is *babae* ‘woman’ which is caseless, but whose Actor role is encoded on the AV verb inside the relative clause. Compare with the declarative sentence in (58b) with a definite Actor case-marked as P.A. by *ang*.

(58) Tagalog (Latrouite & van Valin 2014: 161-2)

a. *May babae=ng b<um>ili ng libro.*

EXS woman=LNK <AV>buy NON.P book

‘A woman bought a book/There’s a woman who bought a book.’

b. *B<um>ili ang babae ng libro.*

<AV>buy NOM woman NON.P book

‘The woman bought a book.’

7.3.2 Indefinite patients in Tagalog

In (59), the non-specific indefinite Undergoer *libro* ‘book’ is existentially predicated, caseless, and its Undergoer role is marked by the UV <*in*> verb form in the relative clause. Compare with the UV verb form in (59b) with a definite Undergoer P.A. *ang libro*.

(59) Tagalog (Latrouite & van Valin 2014: 161)

a. *May libro=ng b<in>ili ng babae.*

EXS book=LNK <PFV.UV>buy NON.P woman

‘The/a woman bought a book/There’s a book which the/a woman bought.’

b. *B<in>ili ng babae ang libro.*

<PFV.UV>buy NON.P woman NOM book

‘A/the woman bought the book.’

7.3.3 Oblique indefinite patients of non-factive verbs

As in other languages, non-factive verbs and non-veridical contexts are also sensitive to specificity distinctions. With non-factive verbs such as **look for**, constructions vary with specificity. Pragmatically salient, specific indefinite patients with presupposed existence, as in (60a), occur in presentational-existential constructions and head a relative clause; while non-specific indefinite patients, as in (60b), are marked as obliques in antipassive constructions.

(60) Tagalog (Aldridge 2004: 70-71)

- a. *Mayroón=akó=ng hina~hanáp na libró tungkól sa mga giraffe.*
 EXS.there=1SG.ABS=LNK RDP.TR~look.for LNK book about DAT
 PL giraffe

‘There’s a book about giraffes that I’m looking for.’

- b. *Nag-ha~hanáp=akó ng libró tungkól sa mga giraffe.*
 INTR-RDP~look.for=1SG.ABS OBL book about DAT PL giraffe

‘I’m looking for a(ny) book about giraffes.’ (non-specific)

Thus, in Tagalog as in Amis, indefinite NPs must be existentially predicated or demoted to obliques. But in contrast to Amis, where the existential predicate *ira* takes the indefinite NP as its nominative subject, in Tagalog, the existential operator predicates over a caseless NP. Only definite or specific nouns are case-marked as the P.A. of voice-marked verbs.

If both arguments are definite, the Undergoer is the default P.A. of a UV verb. If the Actor is the only specific or definite argument, it is chosen as the P.A. of an AV verb, with an oblique

non-specific patient, as in (58b). Alternately, the indefinite patient is existentially predicated as in (59a).

In sum, indefinite NPs in Tagalog are barred from P.A. status; this constraint is much stricter for non-specific than for specific indefinite expressions. As in Amis, the main avoidance strategies are existential constructions and voice alternations.

7.4 Existential predications in Kapampangan (Philippines)

The last case considered is Kapampangan, in which existential operators quantify over newly mentioned, non-specific, indefinite expressions that are caseless (as in Tagalog, but unlike Amis) like *asu* and *pusa* in (61a-b).

(61) Kapampangan (Mithun 1994: 251)

a. *Atin na namang datang a²⁸ asu.*

EXS.RL already again came LNK dog

‘A big dog came.’

b. *nyang atin lang biglang damdaman a pusa.*

when EXS.RL 3PL.ABS suddenly heard LNK cat

‘when suddenly they heard a cat.’ (lit. there was a cat they heard)

As in Northern Amis and Tagalog, indefinite pronouns are left unexpressed as in (61c-d). In order to be marked as absolutive, arguments must be specific or definite.

c. *Ating kakatuk.*

EXS.LNK knocking

‘There’s (someone) knocking.’ (Mithun 1994: 265)

²⁸ The sole functions of linkers *a*, *ng* is to connect components of a lexical item or constituent (Mithun 1994: 251).

d. *at potang atin yang e akit...*

and later EXS.RL 3ABS.LNK NEG see

‘and when she can’t find (something) ...’ (Mithun 1994: 267)

Complex predicates with non-specific indefinite expressions are another strategy: verbs are finite, but nouns are caseless, without argument status. In (62a-b), the sole arguments are the absolutive actor pronouns *ya(ng)* and *kami*, the caseless nouns *ugis-batuin a maragul* and *kandila* are part of the complex predicate.

(62) Kapampangan (Mithun 1994: 252)

a. *I nanang ku, gawa=yang ugis-batuin a maragul*

PERS.ABS aunt my make=3ABS.LNK shape-star LNK big

king palarang.

OBL foil

‘Then my Auntie will cut out a big star shape from the foil.’

b. *Potang sindi kami=ng kandila.*

later light 1EXCL.ABS=LNK candle

‘Then we light candles.’

8 Conclusion

Despite some variations in the Austronesian languages of this sample, the following generalisations hold. Access to core argument functions is generally restricted to expressions with minimal referential anchor, i.e. specific or individuated indefinite or definite NPs and generic subjects (but not generic objects).

In languages **with** distinct \pm specific indefinite and definite articles, the referential status of entities is marked in the **noun** or **determiner phrase**; these languages have **fewer restrictions** on argument accessibility. The distinct \pm specific indefinite articles create the referential conditions allowing non-specific indefinite referents to have argument functions (Biak, Mavea, Maori). Further evidence of the predominant role of the noun phrase appear in Biak and Mavea, where a non-specific indefinite object induces an atelic reading, and a specific indefinite object triggers a telic reading. In Biak, the verb has no aspectual marking, the \pm telic reading is inferred from the use of the \pm specific article.

Languages **without** indefinite articles display much more **restricted** argumenthood and generally bar non-specific indefinite arguments. Differences of definiteness and specificity are expressed in the **verb phrase**. The general tendency is to avoid newly mentioned indefinite subjects; existential verbs serve as type-shifters creating minimal referential anchor and individuation. Non-specific, non-individuated, indefinite objects/patients are mostly expressed via incorporation, intransitivisation, semi-transitive or antipassive constructions.

In Western Austronesian languages with multiple, symmetrical voices, and no indefinite articles, the definite, specific Undergoer is the default syntactic subject of a verb in Undergoer Voice. Actor Voice alternation occurs if the Undergoer is indefinite and if the Actor is specific or definite, it is then selected as the subject of the AV verb. Non-specific indefinite NPs are even more strongly avoided as subjects of voice-marked verbs: if they are nouns, they are existentially predicated; if they are indefinite pronouns, they are unexpressed (as null expressions), giving way to event existentials in Amis as in Tagalog.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow the Leipzig glosses.

1 first person	DAT dative	LNK linker
2 second person	DEIC deictic	LOC locative
3 third person	DETR detransitiviser	LOC.V locative verb
ABILTabilitative	DISC discourse	LV locative voice
ABS absolutive	DIST distal	MKR marker
ACC accusative	DOdirect object	NAV non-actor voice
ADESS adessive	DUdual	NEG negative
AGR agreement	EP epenthetic	NEUT neuter
ALL allative	ERG ergative	NFIN non-finite
ANAPH anaphoric	EVT event	NMZ nominaliser
ANIM animate	EXCL exclusive	NOM nominative
APPL applicative	EXS existential	NON.P non-pivot
ART article	FUT future	NM noun marker
ASP aspect	GEN genitive	NS noun suffix
ATEL atelic	GIV given	NSP non-specific
AVactor voice	HUM human	OBJ object
C construct affix	IMP imperative	OBL oblique
CA.RDP Ca-reduplication	INCL inclusive	PASS passive
CLF classifier	INCM incomplete	PART partitive
COLL collective	INTD-POSS intended possession	PERS personal article
COMP complementiser	INTENS intensifier	PFV perfective
CONJ conjunction	INTR intransitive	PL plural
CONT continuous marker	IPFV imperfective	PN personal article

POSS possessive	RDP reduplication	T.A tense.aspect
PRED predicative	REL relative clause	TR transitive
PRED.A predicative article	REL.RL relative realis clause	UVundergoer voice
PREF prefix		VENT ventive
PRES present	RL realis	VERID veridical
PST past	SG singular	WH interrogative marker
Q question marker	SPEC specific	

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