

# The Antipassive in Jacaltec: A Last Resort Strategy

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## Abstract

This paper gives reasons to recover the notion of «last resort» found in Chomsky (1991) by examining two uses of the antipassive suffix *-ni* in Jacaltec, an ergative Mayan language. This suffix is inserted as a last resort where UG makes the assignment of case to the object (transitive aspectless embedded clauses) and the extraction of the subject with ergative agreement (aspectual main clauses) otherwise impossible. Therefore, this notion cannot be restricted to instances of movement, as in Chomsky (1994). Rather, it must also include lexical insertion of affixal material in the derivation, as in the broader view found in Chomsky (1991).

**Key words:** syntax, last resort strategies, antipassive, jacaltec.

## Resum. *L'antipassiva en jacaltec: una estratègia d'últim recurs*

Aquest treball proposa de recuperar la noció d'«últim recurs» que trobem a Chomsky (1991) tot inspirant-se en dos usos del sufix antipassiu *-ni* del jacaltec, una llengua ergativa de la família maia. Aquest sufix s'inserta com a últim recurs quan la GU fa impossible assignar cas a l'objecte (oracions subordinades transitives sense aspecte) i extreure el subjecte amb concordança ergativa (oracions matriu amb aspecte). Per tant, aquesta noció no es pot restringir a casos de moviment, com fa Chomsky (1994). Més aviat, ha d'incloure la inserció lèxica d'afixos durant la derivació, com trobem en la visió més àmplia de Chomsky (1991).

**Paraules clau:** sintaxi, estratègies d'últim recurs, antipassivitat, jacaltec.

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This paper gives a uniform account of the presence of the antipassive suffix *-ni* in Jacaltec, an ergative Mayan language.<sup>1</sup> This suffix appears in what seems to be two completely unrelated syntactic environments:

1. Transitive verbs in embedded clauses that lack aspect.
2. Transitive verbs in root clauses where the subject has been extracted.<sup>2</sup>

In both cases, it is shown that *-ni* suffixation is a last-resort strategy in the language in order to save configurations that could not give any output otherwise. In 1) the suffixation is motivated by the lack of source of case for the object in clauses without aspect. The suffix *-ni* is the provider of such case. In 2) the suffixation provides a way of escaping the ban on extraction of subjects with ergative agreement/case. The suffix *-ni* eliminates the ergative agreement on the subjects by «intransitivizing» them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the *-ni* suffix in both contexts acts as an intransitivizer for the subject and as a case assigner for the object. In order to make sense of this characterization, it is proposed that *-ni* is a prepositional affix, which takes the DO as its complement and assigns case to it. As a consequence, the configuration obtained is analogous to that of an intransitive verb which takes a prepositional complement.

### 1. General characteristics

Jacaltec is a Mayan language with a strict VSO order. Sentence (1) exemplifies the canonical order in the language:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) xil naj ix.  
saw he her  
'He saw her.'

As with many other Mayan languages, Jacaltec has two major sets of affixes: absolutive/nominative and ergative. The absolutive/nominative set cross-refers subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs. Subjects of transitive verbs are cross-referred by the ergative set of affixes.

Absolutive/nominative affixes are attached to an aspectual marker that precedes the verbal head.<sup>5</sup> First and second person absolutive/nominative affixes are

1. I take the definition of ergative language given by Dixon (1994: 1): «The term ergativity is used to describe a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from the transitive subject.»
2. Other related Mayan languages which also show the same suffix in 1) and 2) are Kanjobal and Chuj (Robertson, 1980) and Kekchí (Stewart, 1980).
3. I use the word intransitive to mean those verbs that do not assign case to their direct objects, i.e. verbs with one argument or verbs with prepositional complements.
4. All examples are extracted from Craig (1977).
5. In many instances the aspectual head amalgamates with the verb to form one phonological unit.

overt, but third person ones are either null or there is no affix at all.<sup>6</sup> Ergative affixes are overt for all persons and they always appear prefixed to the verb.

(2)	ergative set before consonant	ergative set before vowel	absolutive set
	1Sg hin	w-	hin
	2Sg ha	haw	hach
	3Sg s	y	∅
	1Pl cu	y	hoii
	2Pl hey	hey	hex
	3Pl s	y	∅

The typical shape of a verbal complex is represented in (3). Absolutive affixes always precede the ergative ones:<sup>7</sup>

- (3) x-∅-s-watx'e naj te' iiah.  
 Asp-A3-E3-make cl/he cl/the house  
 'He made the house.'

First and second person affixes behave differently from the third person ones in both the ergative and the absolutive set. They are incompatible with the realization of a first or second person pronoun in the subject or object position in the sentence. Example (4) shows this incompatibility with a first person absolutive affix in an intransitive verb; example (5) shows this incompatibility with an ergative first person affix in a transitive verb:

- (4) ch-in-axni (\*hayin).  
 Asp-A1-bathe I  
 'I bathe.'
- (5) x-∅-w-il (\*hayin) ha-man.  
 asp-A3-E1-see I your-father  
 'I saw your father.'

First and second person affixes incorporate, it seems, to the aspectual head or verb. However, overt third person affixes require the presence of the NP in a clausal position. This can be seen overtly in the ergative set for subjects of transitive verbs as in (6). No dropping of the NP subject is allowed. This affix can be plausibly thought of as an agreement element.

- (6) x-∅-s-watx'e \*(naj) e' iiah.  
 asp-A3-E3-make cl/he cl/the house  
 'He made the house.'

6. In the glosses for 3 person absolutive I use, for convenience, the ones by Craig (1977) where she assumes the existence of a ∅ affix. Nevertheless, I want to remain uncommitted with respect to whether such empty affixes exist.

7. E3= ergative 3rd person; A3=absolutive 3rd person; Asp=aspect.

## 2. The distribution of the antipassive suffix *-ni*

### 2.1. Transitive verbs of aspectless embedded clauses

The *-ni* suffix appears in what Craig (1977) calls «aspectless embedded clauses» with transitive verbs. These clauses do not have overt complementizers and they lack the aspectual marker that obligatorily appears in all the other types of embedded finite clauses. Aspectless embedded clauses are also rather peculiar with respect to the distribution of the ergative affixes: subjects of intransitive verbs take the ergative set of affixes as in (7), (8), contrary to what we described in the previous section. The suffix *-ni* must always be present.

- (7) x-Ø-w-i [ha-caiaalwi]  
asp-A3-E1 E2-dance  
'I saw you dance.'
- (8) x-Ø-w-abe [y-ok ix]  
Asp-A3-E1-hear E3-cry she  
'I heard her cry.'

Subjects of transitive verbs also require the ergative agreement. Objects always take the absolutive set of affixes. First and second person absolutive/nominative pronouns must appear to the left of the verb and to the left of the ergative marker in (9).<sup>8</sup> Third person NPs follow the verb as in (10).

- (9) x-Ø-w-ilwe [hach hin-col-ni]  
asp-A3-E1-try A2 E1-help-ni  
'I tried to help you.'
- (10) wohtaj [hin watx'e-n kap camixe]  
I know E1 make-ni the shirt  
'I know how to make shirts.'

That ergative affixes appear in subjects of intransitive verbs as well as transitive can be explained by examining possessor constructions with NPs. Possessor NPs are cross-referred by the same ergative affixes. First and second person possessors are exemplified in (11) and (12). The classifier determiner of the head noun appears to the left of the ergative affixes and is optional:<sup>9</sup>

- (11) (no') hin-txitam  
cl E1-pig  
'my pig'
- (12) haw-uxtaj  
E2-brother  
'your brother'

8. This ordering of affixes follows the one of regular main clauses where absolutive first and second person affixes precede the ergative ones.

9. Classifiers can be determiners and third person pronoun.

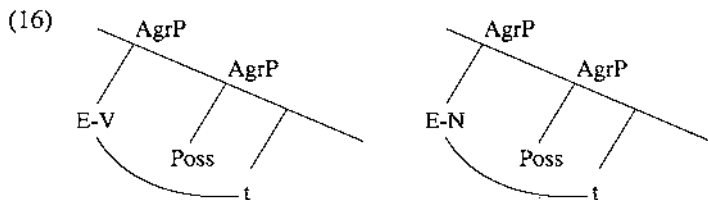
Example (13) shows how 3rd person NP possessors appear to the right of the head noun, which bears the ergative agreement.<sup>10</sup>

- (13) (no') s-txitam ix  
 cl(animal) E3-Pig cl(woman)  
 'her pig'

Given these facts, it is tempting to make an analogy between the subject of aspectless embedded clauses and possessors of nominal constructions. That way, aspectless embedded clauses can be treated as a nominalization construction of the *poss-ing* type for English (Reuland 1983). The subject of the gerund *poss-ing* bears the same genitive case as the possessor in a nominal. From this point of view, it is not surprising that subjects of intransitives and transitive are equally treated as possessors in Jacaltec. There is further empirical support for this nominalization hypothesis for aspectless embedded clauses. It is possible to find certain demonstratives modifying the whole embedded clause. These demonstratives occur exclusively with nominals. In (14) the demonstrative *this* modifies the embedded verb *I walk* and in (15) it modifies the embedded verb *You insult*.

- (14) caw ya' [ hin belwi ti].  
 very painful E1 walk this  
 'My walking was very painful.'
- (15) tx'of [ ha bahwa ti']  
 bad E2 insult this  
 'This insulting of yours is bad.'

The analysis proposed for these two constructions — nominals with possessors and aspectless embedded clauses — is similar. For third person, there is Spec-head agreement between the head (N for nominals or V for aspectless embedded clauses) and the possessor NP. This agreement would be reflected by the ergative set of affixes. The head N/V would move past the possessor in both cases and would attach to the AgrP responsible for the ergative agreement. For first and second person possessors, there would be direct incorporation to the V or N head.



10. Other languages show the same ergative pattern for the subject of transitive verbs and possessors in possessor constructions. One example is given by Alana Johns (1992:68) for Inuktitut.

Since this construction is nominal-like, the question arises as to why should *-ni* only attach to transitive verbs. I take as a point of departure that the aspectual head is responsible for the absolutive/nominative case for the subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs in main clauses.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, any aspectless clause should have an extra way of providing case to objects of transitive and subjects of intransitive verbs. Since the construction is nominal-like, the subject intransitives act as possessors and therefore enter into ergative agreement as in (7) and (8). However, for transitive verbs, the subject takes the ergative agreement, leaving the object without that possibility. The mechanism invoked is the suffixation of a morpheme to the verb that has the capacity of assigning case to the object: the suffix *-ni*. This morpheme could be thought of as a counterpart of insertion for English nominals or of the morpheme of inflected infinitives in Portuguese, which allows the exceptional assignment of nominative case. Thus, *-ni* is needed for the assignment of absolutive/nominative case to the object.

## 2.2. Transitive verbs in root clauses with extraction of third person subjects

Questions in Jacalteco are formed by the extraction of *wh*-words to the left of the initial verb. Example (17) shows the extraction of a subject of an intransitive clause, while (18) shows the extraction of the object of a transitive clause. Note that the extraction of the subject of a transitive clause in (19) requires the suffix *-ni*, and contrary to aspectless embedded clauses, there is no ergative agreement prefixed to the verb.

(17) mac<sub>j</sub> x-ul e<sub>j</sub> ewi?  
 who Asp-come yesterday  
 'Who came yesterday?'

(18) mac<sub>j</sub> x-y-il naj e<sub>j</sub>?  
 who asp-E3-see he  
 'Who did he see?'

(19) mac<sub>j</sub> x'ilni e<sub>j</sub> ix?  
 who Asp-see-ni she  
 'Who saw her?'

Clefting in Jacalteco also involves movement of the focused element to the left of the verb and the use of *-ni*. A special particle which indicates clefting shows on the left of the sentence. Example (20) exemplifies the extraction of the subject of a transitive clause which shows the lack of ergative agreement and the obligatory suffixation of *-ni*:

(20) ha' naj<sub>j</sub> x'ilni e<sub>j</sub> ix.  
 cleft he Asp-see-ni she  
 'It was him that saw her.'

11. This position follows Murasugi (1992) and Bittner and Hale (forthcoming) in that tense head is the ultimate source for nominative/absolutive in ergative languages. This point is elaborated in section 2.2.2.

Similar uses of *-ni* are found in relatives. These constructions lack an overt complementizer. Examples (21) and (22) show the relativization of the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive verb respectively.<sup>12</sup> Example (23) exemplifies the extraction of the subject of a transitive verb which again shows the suffix *-ni* and the lack of ergative agreement on the embedded verb.

- (21) xwil [naj winajj 'xapni ej ewi]  
 Asp-E1-see Cl man arrived yesterday  
 'I saw the man that arrived yesterday.'
- (22) Wohtaj [ixj xil naj ej]  
 Asp-E1-know she see he  
 'I know the woman that she saw.'
- (23) Wohtaj [najj x'ilni ej ix]  
 Asp-E1-know him see-ni she  
 'I know the man that saw her.'

### 2.2.1. *-ni*: the prepositional affix

It is evident that the insertion of the suffix *-ni* and the lack of the ergative agreement must be related. Extraction of subjects which enter into ergative agreement in main clauses is impossible as shown in (24) and (25):<sup>13</sup>

- (24) \*macj x-y-il ej naj?  
 who Asp-E3-sec he  
 'Who saw him?'
- (25) \*macj x-ach<sub>i</sub> s-mak ej?  
 who Asp-A2 E3-hit  
 'Who hit you?'

Jacaltec is not the only ergative language which shows this ban on the extraction of elements which show ergative agreement or ergative case marking. Dixon (1994) points out that relativization of the NP with the ergative case marking in Dyrbal is not allowed. Johns (1992) also shows that the relativization of an argument with the ergative case marking in Inuktitut yields an ungrammatical result. Example (26), from Inuktitut, can only be interpreted as the relativization of the object, not the subject.<sup>14</sup>

- (26) [Anguti-up nanuq kapi-ja-a] ani-juq.  
 man-erg bear stab-pass.part-3ss go out  
 '\*The man who stabbed the bear left.' (From Johns 1992)

12. The example with the intransitive verb involves an unaccusative verb. There is no different syntactic behaviour of unaccusative and unergative in the language. Subjects of unergatives and of unaccusatives show the same absolutive/nominative pattern.

13. In 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 there are various constructions that are exceptional in allowing the extraction of the argument with ergative agreement.

14. The theoretical explanation for the impossibility of the extraction of the subject with the ergative agreement is dealt with in the next section.

The existence of this constraint leaves the question as to why the *-ni* suffix permits the extraction of subjects in what looks like transitive verbs as in (19), (20) and (23). From the data from aspectless embedded clauses, it is apparent that *-ni* is the element responsible for the assignment of the case to the object. The lack of aspectual head, motivated this special mechanism of insertion of *-ni*. However, this is not the case with the extraction cases we are discussing: the aspectual head is available.

I would like to propose an answer to this puzzle that relies on the idea that the extracted subjects in (19), (20) and (23) are the ones taking the absolutive/nominative case made available by the aspectual head. This interpretation is supported by the lack of ergative agreement in the verbal complex. From this point of view, the object of these «transitive» verbs is still in need of a special mechanism for the assignment of case, as with aspectless embedded clauses.

However, in an ergative language, a subject can only take the absolutive/nominative case when the verb is intransitive. Therefore, it must be that contrary to all appearances all the cases of verbs containing the suffix *-ni* are intransitives: in other words, *-ni* acts as an intransitivizer, qualifying the construction as an antipassive. Note that the only difference between this antipassive in Jacaltec and other antipassives discussed by Baker (1988) is that in Jacaltec the object is not demoted. This analysis is still perfectly compatible with our previous analysis of aspectless embedded clauses with *-ni*: in those constructions, subjects of verbs taking *-ni* act like other subjects of clearly intransitive verbs —such as in (7) and (8). They all take ergative agreement since both act like possessors in this nominal type of construction.

There is also morphological evidence for the intransitive nature of verbs containing *-ni*. There is a special future morphology in Jacaltec. The suffix *-oj* only appears with intransitive verbs, whereas transitive verbs take future suffix *-o'*. Constructions with *-ni*, however, take *-oj* not *-o'*, as can be seen by comparing (27) with (28) where the subject is extracted, and *ni* is suffixed.

(27) x-s-lok-o'      naj    no'    cheh.  
 Asp-E3-buy-fut cl/he cl/the horse  
 'He will buy the horse.'

(28) w-hojtaj naj<sub>i</sub>    x-lok-n-**oj** e<sub>i</sub>    no'    cheh.  
 E1-know cl/him Asp-buy-*ni*-fut cl/the horse  
 'I know the man who will buy the horse.'

Example (29) shows *-ni* in an embedded aspectless clause, which again takes the intransitive suffix *-oj*:

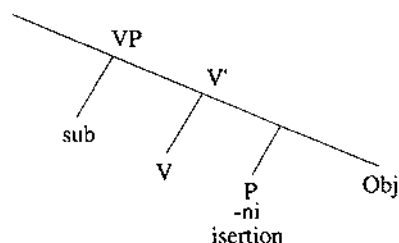
(29) mach ch-u    s-to naj<sub>j</sub> [hach<sub>j</sub>    y-il-**oj**    naj<sub>j</sub>]<sup>15</sup>  
 no    Asp-can E3-go he    A2(you) E3-see-*ni*-fut he  
 'He cannot go to see you.'

15. The second *naj* is deleted later on because it is coreferent with the subject *naj* in the main clause. This rule is called Noun Classifier Deletion Rule by C. Craig.



In order to reconcile the two roles of *-ni* as an intransitivizer and as case assigner to the object, it is necessary to suppose that *-ni* is a prepositional kind of affix that gets inserted in the derivation and takes the object as a complement. As a prepositional element it assigns case to the object (30):

(30) V S *-ni* + object



The configuration in (30) is, in essence, similar to a verb subcategorizing for a prepositional phrase as in (31). In both, the subject, as in other intransitive configurations, takes the nominative/absolute case. Therefore, it can also capture the intransitivizing properties of the suffix *-ni*.<sup>16</sup>

(31) x-Ø-ahtoj naj y-abaii no' cheh.<sup>17</sup>  
 go up he Agr-P the horse  
 'He went up with the horse.'

Later on in the derivation, *-ni* needs to be incorporated into the verb given its affix nature.

(32) V+*-ni*<sub>i</sub> S t<sub>j</sub> + object.

In conclusion, the insertion of *-ni* in these cases should be taken as a last resort strategy to overcome the ban on the extraction of an element with ergative case or agreement in main clauses. The extraction is possible with the suffix *-ni* because it intransitivizes the verb, making the subject take the absolute/nominative case.

16. We conclude that the assignment of ergative case for subjects is dependent of the existence of an inflectional source for the case of the object. This notion looks reminiscent of Bittner and Hale's (forthcoming) idea that the assignment of ergative case depends on the existence of a case competitor for it.

17. As we can see in the glosses of (31) non affixed prepositions agree with their objects in the language. This poses a problem to our proposal. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer it is possible to think that the incorporation of the prepositional affix *-ni* takes place in the lexical relational structures of Hale and Keyser (1994). The prepositional agreement in (31) takes place at the level of syntax, which could explain why incorporated *-ni* does not show agreement. This raises the more general question whether incorporated elements can show syntactic agreement.

### 2.2.2. Extraction of NP's with ergative agreement in main clauses

At the core of the proposal in the previous section is the fact that sentences (24) and (25) did not yield any output. In order to understand what triggers this ungrammaticality, it is helpful to compare these cases to others which seem to allow the extraction of the subject with the ergative agreement. One such case consists of sentences with reflexive objects as in (33):

- (33) a. w-ohtaj najj x-s-potx' s-ba.  
 E1-know cl/him Asp-E3-kill himself  
 'I know the man who killed himself.'
- b. macj x-s-potx' s-ba?  
 who Asp-E3-kill himself  
 'Who killed himself?'

Reflexives in the language are formed by prefixing the ergative affixes to a root *ba*: the equivalent of English *self*:

- (34) hin-ba ha-ba cu-ba s-ba  
 myself yourself ourselves himself/herself

One peculiar property of sentences with object reflexives is that they reverse the canonical order VSO to VOS:

- (35) xil s-ba naj Pei.  
 saw himself Peter  
 'Peter saw himself.'

There is some indirect evidence that reflexives in Jacalteco incorporate to the right of the verb.<sup>18</sup> The evidence comes from Tzotzil, a VOS language with similar reflexives.

Tzotzil

- (36) E-ba: s-ba (himself), j-ba (myself), a-ba (yourself)
- (37) 7i-s-mak la s-ba-ik ta na.  
 Asp-E3-close cl themselves in the house  
 'They shut themselves up inside.' (From Aissen 1987)

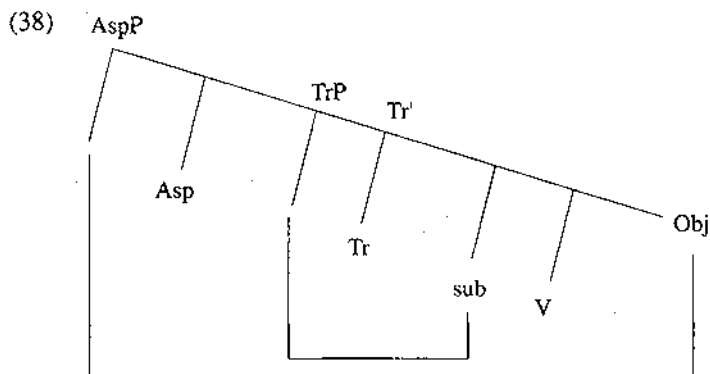
Aissen (1987) indicates that «one property which distinguishes the reflexive nominal from other objects is its position in the clause: It immediately follows the verb, and can be separated from it only by clause second clitics.» The fact that the Tzotzil reflexives are clitic-like can be transposed to Jacalteco and explain the reversal of the VSO order to VOS.<sup>19</sup>

18. Cliticization to the right has been taken as a case of incorporation by Rizzi and Roberts (1989).

19. Here I adopt Rizzi and Roberts' (1989) analysis on this type of cliticization to the right.

If Baker (1988) is right in concluding that incorporated elements do not need a structural source for case, we can obtain an explanation of the contrast between (24) and (25), on the one hand and (33), on the other, in terms of source for case for the object. It looks as if extraction of the element with the ergative agreement is plausible when the object has other means to satisfy its case, which does not involve AspP.

According to Murasugi's (1992) and Bittner and Hale's (forthcoming) analysis of how nominative/absolutive is assigned in ergative languages —adopted here—, subjects of intransitives and objects of transitives have to move to Spec of tense/aspect head. In Jacaltec, this movement would be covert. The assignment of case to subjects of transitive verbs involves movement to an agreement projection which is situated below aspect: what Murasugi (1992) calls TrP (transitivity phrase).<sup>20</sup> Ergative agreement obtains in this projection and is prefixed to the verb which moves past the TrP.<sup>21</sup>

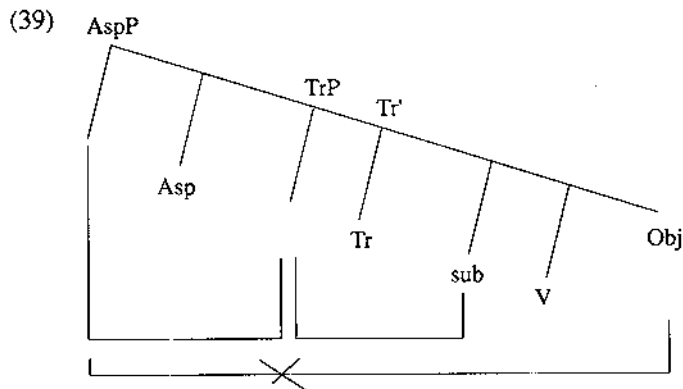


Several proposals have assumed that any extraction requires Spec of AspP as a landing site. For example, Goodall (1991) proposes that *wh*-movement in Spanish could take place through Spec of IP in order to explain the complementary distribution between certain *wh*-words and pre-verbal subjects. Guilfoyle, Hung and Travis (1992), from a different perspective, also conclude that Spec IP is necessarily

20. On this respect Murasugi's proposal differs from Chomsky (1994) and Bobaljik (1992), and it is similar to Johns' (1993). Chomsky (1994) and Bobaljik (1992) take the assignment of ergative case to involve AGRS, which is situated above the projection where the object takes case. From their perspective, ergative languages differ from accusative/nominative ones only with respect to which agreement projection is activated in intransitive clauses. Johns (1992) on the other hand takes a perspective where the nominal agreement responsible for the assignment of case of ergative to the subject is projected below the clausal agreement responsible for the absolutive case to the object.
21. Bittner and Hale treat ergative case assignment differently. Ergative case is a "marked structural case" which has to be instantiated by a KP. This marking only obtains when there is another element in need of a structural source for case in the same small clause, "a competitor". As a result ergative case is restricted to instances of subjects of transitive verbs in which objects also need structural case. In Jacaltec, this head of K would be the ergative agreement, which would later on cliticize onto the verb.

used as a landing site for overt extraction in many Austronesian languages (e.g. Tagalog, Bahasa and Malagasy).<sup>22</sup>

Given such a requirement, subjects with the ergative agreement in (24) and (25) have to land in Spec AspP. Consequently, the object is left without an structural source for case, and the sentence crashes at LF (39). However, this situation does not arise in instances with the reflexives in (33). The object reflexive directly incorporates into the verb without need for movement to Spec AspP, which is unavailable anyway.



### 2.2.3. Extraction of NPs with the ergative agreement in embedded clauses

Another exception to the extraction of subjects with ergative agreement are aspectless embedded clauses. Examples (40) and (41) are ambiguous between an interpretation where the subject has been extracted—with the post-verbal pronoun *ix* in object position—and an interpretation where the object has been extracted—with the pronoun in subject position. As we discussed in section 2.1, the anti-passive *-ni* always appears with «intransitivized» verbs.

relativization:

- (40) w-ohtaj [ naj laiiian<sup>23</sup> y-il-ni ix]  
 E1-know the man progr E3-see-ni she  
 'I know the man seeing her.'  
 'I know the man that she seeing.'

22. It is unclear why Spec, Asp should be a necessary landing site for extraction of any argument in Jacaltec. One possibility is that extraction of a subject of transitive verb skipping Spec, AspP could yield a violation of the economy condition on shortest move of Chomsky (1994), provided that it is an A' position. Another possibility is that AspP is a barrier for extraction, which requires Spec-head agreement in order to make the extraction through that barrier possible.

23. The Jacaltec progressive verb subcategorizes for an aspectless embedded clause headed by the verb *see*. This aspectual element can appear as the main verb as in example (41).

extraction of *wh*-element:

- (41) mac laian [ y-il-*ni* ix]?  
 who progr E3-see-*ni* she  
 'Who is looking at her?'  
 'Who is she looking at?'

The answer to this exceptional behaviour is clear from the point of view of this paper: there is no movement of the object to any aspectual head which could be blocked by the extraction of subject with the ergative agreement. The object obtains its case by the insertion of the antipassive suffix *-ni* as in (40) and (41). This fact reinforces the hypothesis that extraction of the element bearing the ergative agreement is not blocked as far as there is no necessity for the object to get its case structurally through AspP:<sup>24</sup>

- (42) [CP [ E-V t -ni+Obj]  
 \_\_\_\_\_]

Finally, it is possible the extraction of subjects of transitive verbs with ergative agreement in embedded tense clauses.<sup>25</sup>

- (43) w-ohtaj naj<sub>j</sub> x-(y)-al ix [ ta x-s-loko' e<sub>j</sub> no cheh]  
 E1-know cl/him Asp-E3-say she that asp-E3-buy-fut the horse  
 'I know the man that she said that will buy the horse.'
- (44) mac<sub>j</sub> x-y-al ix [ ta x-s-loko' e<sub>j</sub> no cheh]  
 who said she that Asp-E3-buy-fut the horse  
 'Who did she say that will buy the horse?'

The source for the asymmetry between the extraction of the matrix subject in (43) and (44), and that of the embedded subject is likely to be related to the intervention of a complementizer in the embedded clause. As pointed out earlier, there is no complementizer for root relative clauses in Jacaltec. It is possible that nominative case for objects in these embedded clauses is obtained by movement to Spec CP at LF, which could be and alternative source for case to AspP. This movement would avoid the conflict between extraction of the subject with ergative agreement and the movement of the object to AspP. However, I leave the issue open for further research.

24. The reason why there is ergative agreement in these cases of extraction of aspectless embedded clauses with the antipassive *-ni*, but not in the cases of main clauses with the antipassive *-ni* (19), (20), and (23) is independently explained by our nominalization analysis for the first type, but not the second.

25. As Craig (1977) points out the facts are not clear cut. For some speakers there is still suffixation of the antipassive and lack of ergative agreement as in main clauses.

### 3. Conclusion

The evidence cited here suggest that suffix *-ni* is inserted in syntactic configurations as a last resort. It restores the case for the object of transitive verb in aspectless embedded clauses, and it also allows the extraction of the subject of transitive verbs in main clauses by intransitivizing them. The suffix *-ni* is a prepositional affix, which meets these two requirements.

The notion of last resort invoked is the same one proposed in Chomsky (1991) where lexical insertion of an affix is triggered to save a configuration which otherwise would not yield any output. This connects *ni*-insertion to such concepts as *Do Support*. *Do Support* and «*ni*-insertion» are two language particular rules triggered when UG principles makes certain configuration unavailable otherwise.

In Chomsky (1994), however, the notion of last resort is restricted to movement. Movement applies as a last resort when some morphological properties of the moved element are satisfied (Greed). Obviously, the insertion of lexical material in a configuration does not comply with such a property. Part of the objective of this paper has been to recover the old notion of last resort in Chomsky (1991). I hope to have given interesting reasons in the domain of the distribution of antipassives in Jacaltec.

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