

The Actor-Emphatic: A minimalist portrayal.

The Actor-Emphatic (AE) is a construction found in Māori whose properties have proven resistant to a unified syntactic analysis. Several salient properties are listed below:

- a) An agent (henceforth, ‘actor’) appears to the left of the predicate (2), rather than its canonical post-predicate position (1), and receives main stress. The actor is interpreted as a causer or manipulator of the event denoted by the predicate, as well as a participant in the event.
- b) The actor is preceded by a complex prepositional marker that marks both tense (*n*- [+past], *m*- [-past]), and dominant possession (*-a*). Temporal specification must agree with the pre-predicate Tense/Aspect marker (*i* [+past], *e* [-past]) (3-4).
- c) The AE clause is negated using the negative *ehara*, which is typically used to negate non-verbal clauses, rather than *kaore*, the usual verbal negator (5-6). It can also be followed by particles that typically only appear after nominal predicates.
- d) The patient surfaces with zero (nominative) case (2), and displays qualities characteristic of subjects – it may undergo topicalization with the topic marker *ko*, be relativised upon, and may be preceded by the determiner *he*.

In my analysis of the AE I follow Bauer 1997 in proposing the AE to be a variant of common possessive clauses (7). I argue that (7) differs from the AE in that the latter takes as subject a bare event, rather than a nominal. Dominant possession marks the actor as manipulator or causer of the bare event. Viewing the AE as a non-verbal structure accounts for why the AE patterns with possessive clauses with respects to negation.

Following Cowper 2004, bare events lack the feature [Proposition]. According to Cowper’s Infl. feature geometry, this entails that they also lack the feature [Finite], the feature responsible for assigning nominative case, and [Deixis]. The lack of [Deixis] means the bare event cannot have an independent temporal specification. This specification must be supplied by a deictic centre introduced elsewhere - in the case of the AE, by the Proposition node in the possessive clause, explaining the obligatory agreement in tense markers.

The nominal within the possessive predicate is coindexed with the agentive argument within the event clause. This argument is assumed to be inherently case-marked, hence inaccessible to any higher case-valuing probes, and is deleted under coreference with the nominal within the possessive predicate. Since the clausal subject in the AE is phi-deficient (lacking [Finite], according to the definition in Chomsky 1999), it does not constitute a phase. For reasons listed in Herd 2002, light-*v* in Maori also does not constitute a phase. Thus the internal argument in the bare event clause is accessible to the matrix T-probe. Following discussion of Niuean in Bejar & Massam 1999 (B&M), this argument may undergo multiple case-checking against both the bare event light-*v* and matrix T. B&M argue that in cases of multiple case checking, the last valuation is spelled out (possibly a parametric choice), thus the patient surfaces with nominative case. The agreement relation between the patient and matrix T also explains why the internal argument is accessible to higher probes (Topic, etc).

This analysis has the advantage of explaining why the Actor is at once interpreted as a ‘causer’ of the action denoted by the verb within the relative clause, as well as a participant within the event, a problem faced by several non-verbal approaches to the AE, notably Clark 1976, Chung 1978 and Harlow 1986. It also accounts for why the AE is negated by *ehara*, since – like other possessive clauses – it is a non-verbal predicate. This had constituted a major problem for ‘focus-movement’ approaches such as Waite 1989, Pearce 1999 and Herd 2002, who had understood the actor to be an A’-raised nominal argument. Stress placement is also explained, since both the Actor and verbal element head clausal predicates.

- (1) I whāngai a Hera i ngā heihei
Pst. feed pers. Hera ACC the.pl. hen
'Hera fed the chickens' FN:2003
- (2) Nā Hera i whāngai ngā heihei
Belong.pst Hera Pst. feed the.pl. hen
'It was Hera that fed the chickens' FN:2003
- (3) Nā Hera i/*e whāngai ngā heihei
Belong.pst Hera Pst./-Pst. feed the.pl. hen
'Hera fed the chickens' FN:2003
- (4) Mā Hera e/*i whāngai ngā heihei
Belong.-pst Hera -Pst/Pst. feed the.pl. hen
'Hera will feed the chickens' FN:2003
- (5) a. I tahae a Pita i tēnei pene
Pst. steal pers. Peter ACC this pen
'Peter stole this pen'
- b. Kāore / *Ēhara a Pita i tahae i tēnei pene
Neg pers. Peter Pst. Steal ACC this pen
'Peter didn't steal this pen'
- (6) a. Nā Pita i tahae tēnei pene
Nā Peter Pst. steal the pen
'Peter stole this pen'
- b. Ēhara / *Kāore nā Pita i tahae tēnei pene
Neg Nā Peter Pst. steal this pen
'Peter didn't steal this pen'
- (7) Mā Hera ngā putiputi nei
Belong.-pst Hera the.pl flower here
'There flowers are for Hera' Bauer 1997: 32

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