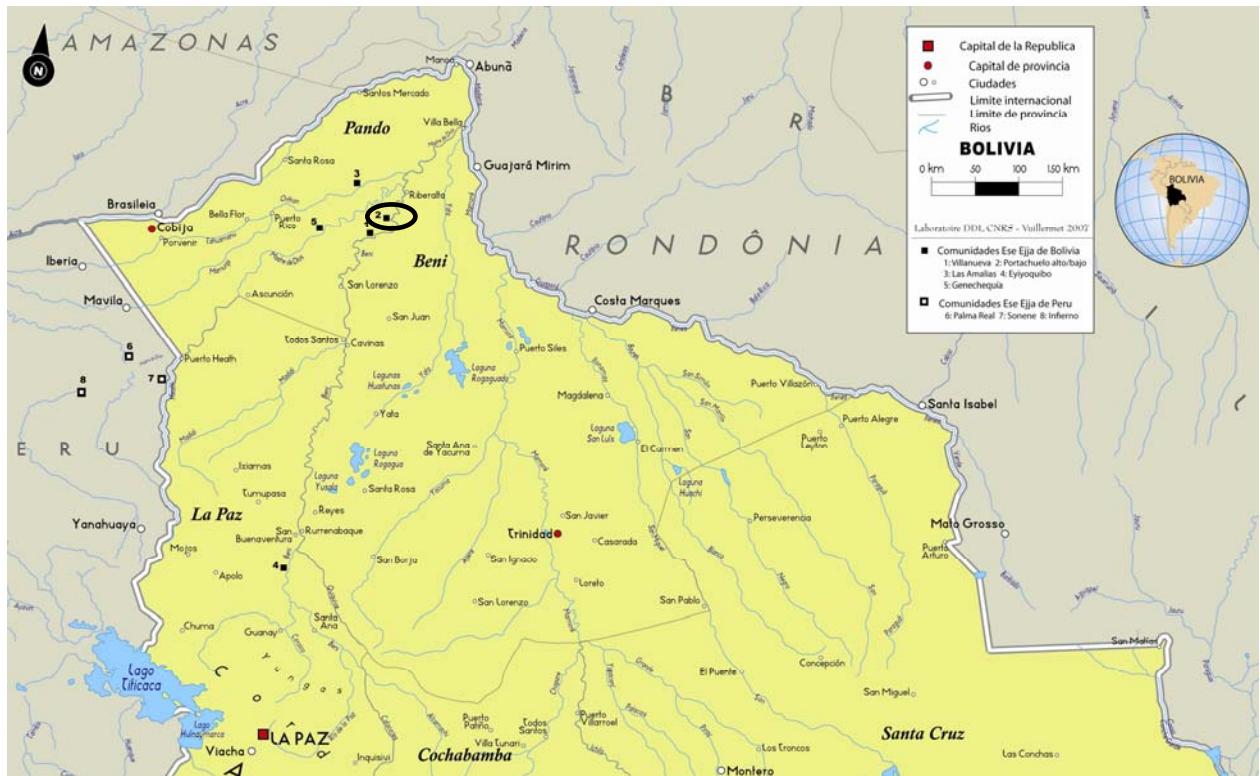# *Ese Ejja (Tacanan) double absolutive construction:*

Double the trouble for the progressive?

Marine Vuillermet
DDL/CNRS – Université de Lyon
marinevui@yahoo.fr

0. Introduction

0.1. Language data

- Ese Ejja (Tacanan): previously undescribed language spoken by around 1500 people in Amazonia, both in Peru and in Bolivia.
- Data collected in the **Bolivian** lowlands between 2005 and 2008[1]; they include spontaneous oral texts and material elicited with visual stimuli (Mayer 1969, Ishibashi & al. 2006).

Map 1: Ese Ejja communities in Bolivia and Peru (circled: Fieldwork site Portachuelo Alto & Bajo)

0.2. Double purpose

- Description of an unexpected construction with transitive verbs in this ergative language, called here the "double absolutive" construction.
- Analysis and interpretation of this construction through the reconstruction of its possible origin and the tracing of its possible evolution.

---

1. Ese Ejja characteristics

1.1. Generalities

- **Ergative** language:

	ABS	**ERG**
i. case marking (NP):	*-ø*	*-(y)a*
ii. indexation (V):	*-ø*	*-ka* (3rd person only)

Table 1: ABSolutive zero marking opposed to ERGative case marking and verbal indexation

(1)   **a**. *intransitive*
    …tres   esho'i-**ø**   jaaokeki-**ø**-naje besa-a
    three   child-**ABS**   go.down-**ø**-PAST   have.a.bath-MOT.PURP

'…*three children went down to have a bath*'. (KyBiñ.004)

    b. *transitive*
    Majoya Macario-**a**   daki-ø   wijyajya-**ka**-naje   e-besa-xi
    then   M.-**ERG**   garment-ABS   take.out-**3.ERG**-PAST   PURP-have.a.bath-PURP

'*Then Macario took off his clothes to have a bath*'. (KyBiñ.005)

- flexible word order
  UV / APV[2] however more neutral

(2)   a.   V   A   A   V
    …a-ka-ani dexa-a   como   dexa-a   a-ka-ani   ocho   día-jo...
    do-3-sit/PRS   man-ERG   like   man-ERG   do-3.ERG-sit/PRS   eight   jour-LOC

…as do Bolivian people, as do Bolivian people for 10 days…(KiWey.035)

    b.   P   A   V
    Jikyo   pya   esowi   eyaya   wowi-je.
    This   other   story   1sg.ERG   tell-FUT

I will tell this other story. (KaBab.001)

    c. A   V   P
    Owaya   baxani-ka-naje   Doe-má.
    man-ERG   name-3.ERG-PAST   older.brother-PRIV

He named (him) 'without-older-brother'. (soo_bax.039)

- Pro-drop language, as in (3)

(3)   Ba-ka-(a)ni**.**
    look-3.ERG-sit/PRS

He is looking at them. (SWAF.076)
Out of context: He/She/They is/are looking at me/you/him/her/us/them.

---

[2] U = Unique argument of an prototypical intransitive verb.
 A = Agent-like argument of a prototypical transitive verb.
 P = Patient-like argument of a prototypical transitive verb.

1.2. TAM-markers grammaticalized from posture verbs

- TAM-marking is **compulsory**: no bare roots
  (FUTure, (Remote) PAST, PRS suffixed on the verb root)
- an inventory of four posture verbs grammaticalized into present TAM-markers

	Verb	TAM
sit	*ani*	*-(a)ni*
stand	*neki*	*-ki*
lie	*jaa*	*-jaa*
float[3]	*ba'e*	*-ba'e*

Table 2: The four Ese Ejja posture-verbs and their correspondent grammaticalized morpheme

See Vuillermet (2008) for a detailed description of the **intricacies of posture assignment**, influenced by cultural specificities and for **other grammaticalizations** of these posture verbs**.**

- Semantics of the grammaticalized posture verbs: general present (progr., habitual, generic)

(4) a. *Progressive*
   Dexa-a   weshe-ø   ixya-ka-**(a)ni**
   man-ERG   banana-ABS   eat-3.ERG-**sit/PRS**

   The man is eating a banana. (SapV1.004)
   Ctx: Elicited with a video stimulus showing a man eating.

   b. *Habitual*
   Bobi   pya'ay ixya-ka-**(a)ni**.
   food   also   eat-3.ERG-**sit/PRS**

   (They) also eat food. (KiWey.036)
   Ctx: Enumeration of various activities during mourning and burial ceremonies.

   c. *Generic*
   Epoxajo pya'ay, mekaxyawa po'aeky-**(a)ni**.
   by.day   also   morning   go.for.a.walk-**sit/PRS**

   (Vipers) go for a walk by day, even in the morning. (KaPey.020)
   Ctx: Description of the vipers' way of living.

- **further grammaticalization: posture verbs for localization, existential, 'to live'**

(5) a. localization: Ebyo-jo   **neki**.   (Not: ani *'be.sitting'*)
                         forest-LOC   **stand/PRS**

   (The deer) is in the jungle. (lit:stands) (elicited)

   b. existential: Exawi   ke-jo   e-**ba'e**.
                    plantain   field-LOC   TAM-**float/PRS**

   There are plantains in the field (still in the tree, lit: floating) (elicited)

---

[3] *Ba'e* does not really mean 'float'; it rather refers to the fact that one does not have a contact with the ground, whether in the air or in the water (in a hammock, in a boat, in the water, etc.). For semantic extensions, see Vuillermet 2008.

   c. existential: Exawi   ke-jo   **y-ani.**
                     plantain field-LOC   TAM-**sit/PRS**

                   There are plantains in the field (cut on the ground, lit: sitting) (elicited)

   d. 'to live':   Xeyaney e-**neki-**tii   poki-ani.   (Not: ani *'be.sitting'*)
                     now   TAM-**stand/PRS**-only keep.on-sit/PRS

                   I am still living here (lit:standing, only male speaker) (KaVid.016)

1.3. TAM-bearing auxiliaries[4]

- A difference between   - **transitive** auxiliary: *a < a* 'do'
                               - **intransitive** auxiliary: *po ~ pwa ~ kwa*[5] *< po* 'be'[6]

(6)   Origin of the intransitive one: copula of equational sentence
        Ekwe-ya   professor   **pwa**   don David Reja.
        1sg.POSS-FOC teacher   **be.RPAST**   Don.David.Reja

        My teacher was don David Reja. (SoCre.017)

- TAM-bearer auxiliary/copula on **Predicative adjective**

(7) a. **Kyaaxaxa**-nee-nee **kwa**-(a)ni   ekwikya-jo.
        scared-very-very   **AUX.intr**-sit/PRS   ghost-LOC

        We are very afraid of ghosts.(SoCre.017)

    b. Ekwana-ø   xeya   **kyabiwi**   **pwa**-je.
        1pl-ABS   now   **happy**   **AUX.intr**-FUT

        We will be happy today.(PaBai.003)

- TAM-bearer auxiliary for **Negation**

(8) a. Jamatii oya-ø   siposipo-**áxa** **kwa**-naje.
        so   3sg-ABS breathe-**NEG**   **AUX.intr**-PAST

        So he was not able to / could not breathe.(BaFWA.010)

    b. Xa-koxomee-ki-**xima**   **kwa**-(a)ni.
        REFL-let.fornicate-REFL-**not.yet**   **AUX.intr**-sit/PRS

        We don't let them have sex with us.(SoCre.053)

- TAM-bearer auxiliary for **Passivized verbs**

(9)   **Ajya**-shay   jajajya-ø   **kwa**-naje?
        who.**GEN**-on.earth   cut-øTAM   **AUX.intr**-PAST

        Who on earth cut (it)? (lit: by whom on earth was (it) cut?).(KeBiñ.016)

---

[4] If the tense is already previously set, i.e. recoverable from discourse, the auxiliary does not need to be present.
[5] The [k] ~ [p] alternation is from dialectal origin, and the /poa/ ~ /po/ alternation depends on the tense-marker, /a/ being the more frequent epenthetic vowel in Ese Ejja.
[6] *po* 'be' does not have a location meaning, but an equative meaning. See example (6). Associated with the TAM-marker *–ya*, it means 'become'.

- TAM-bearer for **Spanish loanwords**

(10) a.… oxaña Ese Ejja-ø   **invitado**   **a-**ka-naje.
    … tous   Ese Ejja-ABS   **invite**   **AUX.tr**-3.ERG-PAST

    (he said that he) invited all the Ese Ejja.(KiDcam.013)

  b. Xeya   ekwana-ø **desfile**   **pwa**-je   meka-xe.
    now   1pl-ABS   **parade**   **AUX.intr**-FUT night-PERL

    We will march tonight. (MoDes.002)

1.4. Voice systems

- Passive: *see (9)*   1. demotion of the Agent, marked GEN
                              2. bare verb root (no TAM) with AUX.intr[7]

Note the presence of the GENitive, the predicate becoming more 'noun-like'.

- Antipassive: *(11b)*   1. patient deletion → Agent marked ABS
                                   2. reduplication of the transitive verb root

(11) a.<u>Dexa-**a**</u>   (…)   bobi-**ø**   pya'ay   **ixya-ka**-(a)ni.
    <u>man-**ERG**</u>   food-**ø**   also   **eat**-**3.ERG**-sit/PRS

    *<u>Bolivian people</u> also **eat** food. (KiWey.036)*

  b.**Ixya-ixya**-ña-naje   <u>ekwana-**ø**</u>   yowa-jo   ba'a… Santa Rosa.
    eat-RED-arriving-PAST   <u>1pl.EXCL.**ABS**</u>   thing-LOC   e.g   SR

    *<u>We</u> **ate** when we arrived in, what is it called again… Santa Rosa. (SoVia.026)*

2. Progressive double absolute construction

2.1. The 'absolutive' quirk: A_{ABS} P_{ABS} V AUX.intr-TAM

(12) Dexa-**ø**   weshe-**ø**   ixya   **po-**ani.
    man-**ABS**   banana-**ABS**   eat   **AUX.intr**-sit/PRS

    The man is eating a banana. (LevV2.004)

Note in (12):
    - **No ergative marking** (neither case nor indexation) → "double absolutive"
    - **Intransitive auxiliary** support
    - No **word order** flexibility: patient always precedes verb[8]

(13) a. *AUX.intr-float/PRS*
    Jackson-**ø**   oya-**ø**   **exawi**   eshe-**ø**   ixya   **po**-ba'e.
    J-**ABS**   3sg-**ABS**   banana   raw   eat   **AUX.intr**-float/PRS

    Jackson is eating banana – (suspended in the arms of his mum) (SoRad.006)

---

[7] See note 4 : if the tense is recoverable from discourse, the auxiliary might be absent.
[8] Interestingly, the only occurrences of this double absolutive constructions show a rather rigid word order: Patient-like argument is followed by the bare verb root, followed by the auxiliary.

b. *AUX.intr-lie/PRS*

Papeni-**ø**	ba	**po-**jaa**.**
book-**ABS**	read	**AUX.intr**-lie/PRS

(The man) is reading a book (lit: lying; then corrected: sitting). (WaV3.003)

c. *AUX.intr-FUT*

Jama-ya	xeya-ka	**eya**	ekwe	wo	ba	**pwa**-je
so-FOC	now-CONTR	1sg.**ABS**	1sg.POSS	chicken	look.at	**AUX.intr** -FUT

mekawaxe	e-dojo-xi	Riberalta	wasixe.	
tomorrow	PURP-bring-PURP	Riberalta	toward	*(KaBab.044)*

But for now I will be watching at my fowl so as to bring (them) tomorrow to Riberalta.

2.2. Alternation between ergative alignment and double absolutive construction

- Rare construction: out of 30 spontaneous texts, only 3 occurences (1 FUT, 2 PRES)
- However: while watching the same visual stimulus (Ishibashi & al 2006), alternation between ergative alignment (14a) and double absolutive constructions (14b).

(14) **a.** *Ergative construction*

Dexa-**a**	papeni-ø	ba-**ka**-(a)ni.
man-**ERG**	book-ABS	look-**3.ERG**-sit/PRS

The man is looking at a book. (SapV1.003)

b. *Double absolutive construction*

Dexa-ø	**papeni**-**ø**	a	**po**-ani**.**
man-**ABS**	book-**ABS**	read	**AUX.intr**-sit/PRS

The man is reading a book. (NilV2.003)

stimulus	ERG/ABS	**double ABS**	*antipassive*	Total speakers
man EAT (banana)	3	**3**	*1*	7
man READ book	2	**6**		8

Table 3: Distributions of the 2 construction types among the speakers.

2.3. Semantic interpretation

- A type of **progressive** for situations simultaneous with the moment of speech; commonly periphrastic (Bybee & al. 1994; Dahl: 2000), no exception for Ese Ejja, a language of the Amazonian region;
- The specificities for the double ABS construction
  - **highly marked**: periphrastic heavy and rare; *sometimes* obligatory (to stop sequentiality)?
    → similar to *'je suis en train de manger'*? (Mitko 1999, in Pusch 2003)
  - **constraints on the semantics**? only dynamic verbs (Bybee & al. 1994:126) like 'eat (banana)', 'read/look at (book, river)', 'pick (fruits)', 'play (the ball)'
    → Comrie's continuous **non-progressive category** for dynamic verbs (2001 [1976]:12)?
  - no **locative meaning** of *po*… (but in other sister languages)
    → Instantiation of Heine's hypothesis of an equative origin for progressives (1994), one refuted in Bybee & al. (1994: 131)?
    → further investigation needed for the semantics of *po*

6

2.4. Syntactic analysis

(15) *(repeated)*

Dexa-**ø**	weshe-**ø**	ixya	**po-**ani.
man-**ABS**	banana-**ABS**	eat	**AUX.intr**-sit/PRS

The man is eating a banana. (LevV2.004)

- Not another "voice"…
    - Not a second **passive**?
      - no demotion of Agent to GEN construction, often overtly expressed.

    - Not a second **antipassive**?
      - although the Agent is absolutive, it is sometimes not present;
      - there is no evidence of demotion of the Patient, instead it is in fact **consistently present** in all the occurrences.

- In Cavineña (Tacanan), similar construction called the 'Ø-marked auxiliary triggering process' by Guillaume (2008: 284ff; 342ff.)
  Analysed as **an antipassive derivation** but, unlike in Ese Ejja:
    - construction available for **both transitive and intransitive verbs**
    - **AUX.tr** available for the construction (unless O incorporated)
    - incorporation of the **Patient** (even specified) or of **other elements** (independent particle, general locative postpositional phrase)… *(to be investigated)*

- … but it could be a complex predicate for a periphrastic progressive aspect

    Hypothesis: a **clause union analysis** from originally **two clauses**,
      - the first intransitive and stative,
        the second transitive of action, passivised
      - sharing an Agent.

(16) *1st step: two clauses*

a.
Dexa-**ø**	**po-**ani	+	ojaya	weshe-**ø**	IXYA	**po-**ani
man-**ABS**	**be**-sit/PRS		3.**GEN**	banana-**ABS**	EAT	**AUX.intr**-sit/PRS

(previously: The man is + banana EAT(en) by him is).

2nd step: collapsing of the two sentences into one:
  2nd predicate raised before stative verb
    → **2nd predicate = copula complement**
  subject raising: *dexa*, semantically, dependent of two verbs: *po* 'be' + *ixya* 'eat'
    → but only one syntactic form (ABS)

b.
Dexa-**ø**	[(ojaya)	weshe-**ø**	IXYA	(po-ani)]	po-ani.
man-ABS	**(3.GEN)**	**banana-ABS**	**EAT**	**(AUX.intr-sit/PRS)**	**be-sit/PRS**

The man is [eating a banana]. (LevV2.004)

Arguments in pro of this analysis:
Deleted elements
- **GEN pronoun** (semantic agent of the passive construction) deleted because **raised**
- **auxiliary ellipsis**: *po-ani* not obligatory but (present only if TAM information is needed)

Syntax
- **flexible word order**: predicate raising → original second action predicate preceding the stative one, however… word order **not flexible any more**?
- same structure as the **predicate sentences** (see 7): complement predicate more V-like or N-like?

Semantics
- **equative** meaning of *po*: Cf Heine 1990 (in Bybee & al. 1994: 131): not all progressives derive from locative constructions, they can also be derived from **equational sentences**.

Cross-linguistically not rare: see Basque (Creissels 2006: 276-7; Creissels 2008)
- same kind of TAM periphrasis described in Creissels (2008):
  • "a temporal, aspectual or modal AUXILIARY [constitutes] the main predicate to which the AUXILIATED VERB is subordinated;"
  • "the construction [involves then] some **raising mechanism**" (ibid:20).
- such TAM driven 'quirky' constructions **might** result in unexpected alignment constructions "if the arguments of the auxiliated verb have different coding characteristics in the TAM periphrasis" (ibid: 21).
- → difficult to detect same constructions in a nominative-accusative language…
- → maybe even more frequent cross-linguistically

3. Conclusion

A very first step into the Ese Ejja double absolute construction:
• because the semantics (verb constraints, context & AUX origin) needs further investigation
• because of a few other similar double absolute construction in Ese Ejja
• especially a very similar one used to express the desiderative, currently being reanalysed?

GLOSSES

Example names
The 2 first letters which precedes the sentence's reference code identifies the speaker. This is followed by:
Bab: **Bab**akwana / Ancestors
Biñ: **Biñ**ani / Holy wood
Dcam: **D**ía del **cam**pesino / The farmer's day
Rad: **Rad**io with Sara
Vid: **Vid**a / Life
Via: **Via**je / Travel
FWA: **F**rog, **W**here **A**re **you**
V1, V2, V3: **1**st, **2**nd or **3**d **V**ersion of the Ishibashi & al. visual elicitation stimuli.

The number refers to the number of the sentence in the text.
SoFAW.029: the **29**th sentence of *Frog, Where Are You* told by **So**o'ay.

REFERENCES

Bybee, J. L., R. D. Perkins, et al. **1994**. *The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world.* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

Comrie, B. **2001** [1976]. *Aspect: An introduction to the study of verbal aspect and related problems*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Creissels, D. **2006** *Syntaxe générale, une introduction typologique*, Hermès.
  2008. "Direct and indirect explanations of typological regularities: The case of alignment variations." *Folia Linguistica* 42(1): 1-38.

Guillaume, A. **2008**. *A Grammar of Cavineña*, Mouton Grammar Library, Mouton de Gruyter.

Heine, B. **1994.** "Grammaticalization as an explanatory parameter". In W. Pagliuca (ed), *John Benjamins*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia, pp. 255-287.

Ishibashi, M., Kopecka, A. and Vuillermet, M. **2006** "Trajectoire : matériel visuel pour élicitation des données linguistiques". Laboratoire DDL, CNRS / Université Lyon 2.

Mayer, M. **1969**. *Frog, where are you?* New York, Dial Books.

Mitko, J. **1999**. Zur Herausbildung einer formalen Aspektopposition auf der temporalen Nullstufe: être en train de + Infinitiv als teilgrammatikalisierte Verlaufsform des Gegenwartsfranzösischen. *Reanalyse und Grammatikalisierung in den romanischen Sprachen.* J. Lang and I. Neumann-Holzschuh. Tübingen, Niemeyer: 75-95.

Pagliuca, W. (ed) **1994**. *Perspectives on grammaticalization*, Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Vuillermet, M. **2008**. *Ese ejja posture verbs do not just sit there:An inquiry into other ways they stand out.* Workshop for American Indigenous Languages, University of California, Santa Barbara.