A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT EXCEPTIVES IN TAHITIAN*

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This paper examines the syntactic expression of exceptive constructions (e.g., Sandy has worked on every Polynesian language except Tahitian) in Tahitian (Polynesian). Cross-linguistically, exceptives can be phrasal or clausal. We show that exceptives in Tahitian are clausal, despite the apparently reduced appearance of the relevant construction. Furthermore, exceptives in Tahitian are not expressed by a dedicated construction but rather by a juxtaposition of two clauses in which the first makes a generalization and the second explicitly states an exception to that generalization via a negative clause. We compare this strategy of “conjoined exceptives” to that of conjoined comparatives; a comparison between the two may be helpful for future work on the structure of exceptives.

1. Introduction

This paper is an initial investigation into the syntactic expression of exceptives in the Polynesian language Tahitian. An exceptive is a construction used to express exceptions to generalizations. A typical exceptive in English is (1).

(1) Everyone left except/but Bob.

We will use the term EXCEPTIVE CONSTRUCTION to refer to the entire sentence that expresses an exception. The EXCEPTIVE PHRASE is that part of the construction that identifies the sentence as an exceptive; it need not literally be a phrase. Except Bob is the exceptive phrase in (1). EXCEPTION XP refers to the exception itself, Bob in (1).

Our goals are modest: to present a basic description of the Tahitian patterns and to make some preliminary analytical claims. Our main conclusion is that exceptive phrases in Tahitian are strictly clausal in nature despite their apparently reduced appearance. Section 2 presents the basics of Tahitian word order, its exception constructions, and negation. Section 3 argues that the exceptive phrase in Tahitian is actually a (reduced) clause. Section 4 concludes.

* This work owes a great deal to Sandy Chung, who pioneered the comparative study of the syntax of Polynesian languages, starting with her seminal comparative work, published as Chung 1978. It touches on topics that Sandy has worked on: negation, ellipsis, clause structure, and, of course, Polynesian languages. We are grateful to Sandy’s friendship, mentoring, encouragement, and high standards of scholarship over the years.

We would like to thank our Tahitian consultants on Moorea and Raiatea: Mate Mahuta, Noeline Mahuta, Djeoma Maono, Tuterai, Maruhi, Odile Meyer, Hinano Murphy, Jean-Luc Tere, and Tévahine Tairua as well as Jacques Vernaudon for engaging discussions. Glossing follows Leipzig Glossing Conventions.
2. Tahitian

Tahitian is a Nuclear Polynesian language spoken by approximately 60,000 people in French Polynesia (Lewis et al. 2016). Its basic word order is VSO, (2), and VOS is ungrammatical. Case marking is nominative-accusative; however, the accusative marker is often dropped.

(2) 'Ua hōhoni te ma'ō 'i te tāvana

\[\text{PFV bite DET shark ACC DET chief}\]

'The shark bit the chief.'

The verb is preceded by tense-aspect-mood (TAM) particles, which vary between matrix and embedded clauses. These are given in Table 1 for perfective and imperfective clauses (see Tryon 1970:32–37, Markey 1976, Académie Tahitienne 1986:201–56, Lazard and Peltzer 2000:124–42).

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PERFECTIVE</th>
<th>IMPERFECTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MATRIX CLAUSE</td>
<td>'ua</td>
<td>tē ... DEIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEPENDENT CLAUSE</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>e</td>
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Table 1. Tahitian aspectual particles

Non-verbal clauses are predicate-initial, subject-final, (3).

(3) a. Mai te fare mai au

\[\text{PREP DET house DIR 1SG}\]

'I am coming from the house.'

(Lazard and Peltzer 2000:42)

b. 'E fa'ehau terā ta'ata

\[\text{PRED soldier DEM man}\]

'That man is a soldier.'

(Lazard and Peltzer 2000:36)

2.1. Exceptives

Exceptives in Tahitian take a number of forms. The three dominant forms of the exceptive phrase offered by our consultants are given in (4a, b, c).1

(4) 'Ua tae pauroa mai te mau tamari'i,

\[\text{PFV come all DET PL child}\]

'All the children came ...'

a. 'o Poe noa 'aita

\[\text{DET Poe just NEG}\]

b. 'aita rā 'o Poe

\[\text{NEG but DET Poe}\]

1 Other constructions were intermittently offered but space considerations prevent us from addressing them here.
In (4a), the exception XP Poe is followed by the particle noa, which Walroos 2002 indicates occurs “after nominal sequences, expressing the idea of restriction alone, only, just”. This XP noa is then followed by ‘aita ‘NEG’, the marker of sentential negation (see section 2.2). In (4b), the exceptive phrase begins with the sentential negation marker ‘aita and the particle rā, which Walroos 2002 translates as ‘but, although’. This is followed by the exception XP. In (4c), the exception XP is preceded by the imperfective form of the verb toe ‘remain, be left over’. We will not consider the form in (4c) here.

We will argue in the following section that the first two constructions are not exceptive specific. They do not parallel the English translation ‘All the children came, except for Poe’. Rather, better translations for (4a, b) would be ‘All the children came, only Poe didn’t’ and ‘All the children came, but Poe didn’t’. That is, there is no genuine exceptive-specific exceptive phrase; the exception is expressed using a juxtaposed negative clause which has the pragmatic force of providing an exception to the general statement made in the first clause. The main clause and the exceptive phrase are conjoined paratactically. Before we present our evidence for this proposal, it is necessary to briefly describe negative clauses in Tahitian.

2.2. Negation

Negation in Tahitian is a predicate (Lemaître 1973:17, Académie Tahitienne 1986:328–34, Lazard and Peltzer 2000:49–59, Peltzer 1996, Tryon 1970:46–48; see also Hohepa 1969 and Chung 1970 on Māori where the situation is comparable). It takes a clausal complement whose subject obligatorily raises to a position immediately following the negative marker. The TAM marker preceding the embedded verb is from the dependent series in Table 1.

(5)

a. 'Ua tai'o 'oe 'i terā puta
   PFV read 2SG ACC DEM book
   ‘You read that book.’

b. 'Aita 'oe i tai'o 'i terā puta
   NEG 2SG PFV.DEP read ACC DEM book
   ‘You didn’t read that book.’

c. *'Aita i tai'o 'oe 'i terā puta
   NEG PFV.DEP read 2SG ACC DEM book

The sentential negation marker varies in form with tense, aspect, and mood. Three forms are given in Table 2 (to simplify exposition, we have omitted other forms).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFECTIVE</th>
<th>'aita</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMPERFECTIVE</td>
<td>'e'ita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROHIBITIVE</td>
<td>'eiaha</td>
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Table 2. Tahitian negative particles
A distinct form, ‘ore, is used for constituent negation and non-finite clauses (Peltzer 1996). The former use is illustrated in (6). Note that ‘ore is not used in exceptives.

(6) a. ‘E rave tāua ‘i te ‘ohipa mai te fa'aea ‘ore FUT DO 1DU.INCL ACC DET work with DET rest NEG ‘We will do the work without stopping.’ (Tryon 1970:47)
   b. pinepine ‘ore often NEG
   c. nehenehe ‘ore ‘rarely’ NEG ‘impossible’ (Tryon 1970:48)

3. The Clausal Nature of Tahitian Exceptives

This section presents data supporting the position that the exceptive phrase in Tahitian is a (reduced) negative clause. The clausal status of these exceptive phrases is signaled by ‘aita in examples like (4), which we claim is the ordinary sentential negation marker and not a particle/preposition equivalent to English except. The phrases in (4) are negative clauses that have been reduced in some way, leaving an ordinary instance of sentential negation behind. More accurate translations for (4a, b) under our proposal are thus as in (7) and (8), respectively.

(7) ‘Ua tae pauroa mai te mau tamari'i, ‘o Poe noa ‘aita PFV come all DIR DET PL. child DET Poe just NEG ‘All the children came, just Poe didn’t.’
(8) ‘Ua tae pauroa mai te mau tamari'i, ‘aita rā ‘o Poe PFV come all DIR DET PL. child NEG but DET Poe ‘All the children came, but Poe didn’t.’

The following subsections offer evidence from various domains in support of our proposal.

3.1. Unreduced Exceptives

A straightforward piece of evidence for the clausal status of exceptive phrases is that they can be expressed in their unreduced form. Deletion of the embedded material seems to always be optional. (9) corresponds to (7) and (10) corresponds to (8).

(9) ‘Ua tae pauroa mai te mau tamari'i,
   PFV come all DIR DET PL. child
   ‘o Poe noa ‘aita (i tae mai)
   DET Poe just NEG PFV.DEP come DIR
   ‘All the children came, just Poe didn’t (come).’
(10) 'Ua tae pauroa mai te mau tamari'i,
PFV come all DIR DET PL child
'aita rā 'o Poe (i tae mai)
NEG but DET Poe PFV.DEP come DIR
‘All the children came, but Poe didn’t (come).’

3.2. Cross-Polynesian Comparison

A similar observation in support of our proposal comes from related Polynesian languages. In at least some of these languages, only the fully expressed versions of the negative clause, as in section 3.1, are possible. The reduction operations available in Tahitian seem to be unavailable. The examples in (11) are from Niuean,\(^2\) and the example in (12) is from Tongan.

(11)a. Kai oti e Mele e tau ika
eat all ERG Mary ABS PL fish
kae nākai/ai kai (e ia) e lahakula
but not/not eat ERG 3SG ABS tuna
lit. “Mary eats all fish but (she) does not eat tuna.”
‘Mary eats all fish except tuna.’

b. Ne hau (a) au he tau aho oti kaenākai/ai (a au) he tau ahu tapu
PRS work ABS 1SG OBL PL day all but not/not ABS 1SG OBL PL Sunday
lit. “I work all days but I do not work on Sundays.”
‘I work every day except Sunday.’

(12) 'Oku 'iloa 'e ia 'a e kakai katoa ka
PRS see ERG 3SG ABS DET people all but
'ikai ke 'iloa ('e ia) 'a Mele
NEG SBJ see ERG 3SG ABS Mary
‘He saw everybody except Mary.’

This micro-variation will no doubt ultimately provide an important window on the ellipsis operations taking place in Tahitian, as they seem to be unavailable in some related languages.

3.3. Form of the Negative Marker

If the negative marker in exceptives is the clausal negator found in sentential negation contexts, we expect that it should show the morphosyntactic variation in Table 2, which indicates that negation varies in form with different TAM. This is indeed the case. (13) illustrates an exceptive using the imperfective negative particle 'e'ita in the context of a future event and (14) shows the prohibitive marker 'eiaha in a directive speech act.

\(^2\) We would like to thank our Niuean consultants for help with these and other data: Grace Latoa, Mele Nemaia, Pat and Granby Siakimotu, and Kara Tukuitoga.
'The chief will help everyone but you.'

‘You must clean the house every day, except Sunday.’

3.4. Lack of Connected Exceptives

The literature on exceptives makes a distinction between connected exceptives and free exceptives (e.g. Hoeksema 1987, Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012). Connected exceptives are DP modifiers in which the exceptive phrase applies to the domain of quantification of the DP. Free exceptives are CP modifiers that are exceptions to propositions expressing a generalization. We tentatively assume that connected exceptives are phrasal modifiers of DPs and free exceptives are clauses (Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012). If the Tahitian exceptive phrase is a clause, it will not show behavior unique to connected exceptives, since the latter are phrasal. One characteristic of connected exceptives is that they can appear adjacent to the quantificational nominal that they modify. This is not possible in Tahitian, in contrast to the English translations:

3.5. Stripping

Our proposal is that exceptive phrases are simply (reduced) negative clauses. They do not semantically encode an exceptive meaning as in the English except. As a result, we do not expect such clauses to be restricted to exceptives. We expect to see such (reduced) negative clauses used elsewhere for a different purpose. This is what we find. These reduced negative clauses are also used in Stripping, (16b) shows that the same element is used to express stripped negative phrases.
Whatever the processes are that create Tahitian exceptive phrases, they are used to generate negative stripping as well.

3.6. Lack of Cross-Clausal Binding

Finally, claiming that Tahitian exceptive phrases are independent clauses means that there will be no c-command relations between the generalization in the first clause and the exceptive phrase because the two are only paratactically related—i.e. they are coordinated. For example, a quantifier in the first clause cannot bind a pronominal variable in the exceptive. In (17), the pronoun tōna ‘his’ in the second clause cannot be coindexed with the quantified DP ‘each child’ in the first clause. Such a relationship might be possible if the exceptive were a VP modifier attached low in the first clause.

(17) 'Ua rave maita'i te mau tamari'i tātaha'itahi i te 'ohipa,
PFV do well DET PL child each ACC DET work
a. 'i tōna mahana fānaura'a noa 'aita
PREP his day birth only NEG
b. 'aita rā 'i tōna mahana fānaura'a
NEG but PREP his day birth
‘Each child, worked hard, except on his, birthday.’

3.7. By Way of Summary

We conclude that the exceptive in Tahitian is not a dedicated construction but a juxtaposition of two clauses in which the first makes a generalization and the second explicitly states an exception (or exceptions) to that generalization via a negative clause.

If this conclusion is on the right track, Tahitian instantiates “conjoined exceptives”. This strategy can be compared to that of conjoined comparatives (Stassen 1985, Beck et al. 2010), where a gradable property is predicated of the subject of one conjunct, and asserted not to hold of the subject of the other conjunct. This is illustrated by (18) from Itelmen (Bobalijk 2012:19), where comparison is expressed indirectly via the juxtaposition of two contrasting clauses. As in the exceptive situation, languages that use conjoined comparatives do not have a dedicated comparative construction but, rather, express the intended meaning by employing clause juxtaposition, often with a negative clause in the second conjunct.

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We do not have data on exceptives in Itelmen. In the related language, Chukchi, comparatives are formed in a typical way by marking the standard of comparison with locative case, (19). Meanwhile, Chukchi exceptives are formed as in Tahitian, using a negative clause as the exceptive phrase, (20).³

³ We are grateful to Marusya Pupynina for her help with the data.
We leave a full answer to this question for future work; any such work should probably be preceded by a more solid empirical exploration of different possibilities across languages.

References


