Case competition and case domains: Evidence from Yimas*

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1 Introduction

- This talk concerns the case/agreement system of Yimas (Lower Sepik; Papua New Guinea) and its broader implications for case theory.
- In Yimas, case/agreement is realized over a series of optional preverbal clitics.
  - The optionality of clitic doubling affects the case patterns that surface.

**Central claim:** The distributions of these case patterns parallel the distributions of morphological case (m-case), as predicted under the Marantzian (1991) system of case assignment.
  - The Yimas facts thus motivate and, in turn, support an analysis in which case is assigned on the basis of competition between case-requiring elements.

However, in Yimas, m-case distinctions are made *only on the clitics*, not the nominals doubled by these clitics.

**Implication:** Case assignment processes operate over different spaces (domains) across languages. In some languages, the domain of case assignment is a syntactic phase or clause; in Yimas, it is the span of proclitics.

2 The Yimas agreement system

- All data in this talk is from Foley’s (1991) grammar of Yimas.
- Yimas generally encodes grammatical relations on verbal agreement morphology, which may be organized into the following paradigms:¹

¹There is some disagreement in the literature about whether the paradigms encode both case and agreement, or just agreement. While some previous analyses make reference to case (Phillips, 1993, 1995; Wunderlich, 2001), others do not (Foley, 1991; Woolford, 2003; Gluckman, 2014). As I will show, however, the distributions of the individual paradigms map to the levels of the case realization hierarchy proposed by Marantz (1991). Case therefore offers an explanation for why the distributions of the paradigms are what they are. All this is lost under a case-free account.
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(1) **The Yimas agreement paradigms:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ergative</th>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Absolutive</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1sg</td>
<td>ka-</td>
<td>ηa-</td>
<td>ama-</td>
<td>ama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1dl</td>
<td>ηkra-</td>
<td>kra-</td>
<td>kap-</td>
<td>kapu-</td>
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<td>1pl</td>
<td>kay-</td>
<td>kra-</td>
<td>ipa-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2sg</td>
<td>n-</td>
<td>nan-</td>
<td>ma-</td>
<td>mi</td>
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<tr>
<td>2dl</td>
<td>ηkran-</td>
<td>kul-</td>
<td>kapwa-</td>
<td>kapwa</td>
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<td>2pl</td>
<td>nan-</td>
<td>kul-</td>
<td>ipwa-</td>
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<tr>
<td>3sg</td>
<td>n-</td>
<td>-(n)akn</td>
<td>na-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3dl</td>
<td>mpi-</td>
<td>-mpn</td>
<td>impa-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pl</td>
<td>mpu-</td>
<td>-mpun</td>
<td>pu-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Note-worthy details:**
  - Three paradigms: ERG, DAT, and ABS.
  - Whereas the 1st/2nd person ([+PARTICIPANT]) dative agreement morphology is prefixal, 3rd person (not discussed today) is suffixal.
  - The absolutive paradigm is (nearly) morphologically identical to the independent pronouns of the language, and, though not shown here, is the only paradigm to also make distinctions for non-human nominals.²

- In the straightforward cases, Yimas behaves like a typical ergative language: ERG on A; ABS on S/O; DAT on IO.
  - Note the morpheme order: strictly ABS-ERG-DAT.³

(2) a. **pu**-wa-t
    3SG.ABS-go-PERF
    ‘They went.’ (F195)

b. **pu**-n-tay
    3PL.ABS-3SG.ERG-see
    ‘He saw them.’ (F195)

c. **k**-mpu-ηa-tkam-t
    VL3SG.ABS-3PL.ERG-1SG.DAT-show-PERF
    ‘They showed me it (the coconut).’ (F208)

- I take these agreement morphemes to be clitics, rather than exponents of true agreement.⁴ Two arguments for this:
  1. The ABS paradigm is identical to the independent pronouns of the language.
  2. The agreement morphology is optional.

(i) **Morphological form:** Identity between clitics and pronouns is attested elsewhere, e.g. in Kichean (Preminger, 2011), and is generally assumed to be a diagnostic for clitic-hood rather than true agreement.

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²The ABS paradigm also cross-references inanimate nouns (separated into seven additional noun classes) and four types of embedded complements.
³I assume that this order, which is never violated, is due to a linearization process.
⁴See Preminger (2009) and Kramer (2014) for discussions of the clitic vs. agreement distinction.
Optionality: The agreement morphology is not obligatory. Yimas therefore allows verbs with no clitic doubling (3a), partial clitic doubling (3b), and full clitic doubling (3c).

(3) a. numn-mat Kampramanan wapal-cap-mpi villager-PL place name climb-CMPL-IRR ‘The villagers all climbed Kampramanan.’ (F471)

b. m-n impa-tay-mpi-kwalca-k paympan DEM-SG 3DL.ABS-see-SEQ-rise-IRR eagle ‘He, the eagle, saw them both and took off.’ (F453)

c. kacmpt payum ya-mpu-yamal-wat canoe.VIII.PL man.PL VIII.PL.ABS-3PL.ERG-carve-HAB ‘The men usually carve the canoes.’ (F228)

Whether clitic doubling takes place is regulated by discourse factors. The clitics typically cross-reference discourse-established referents, and may thus be omitted with new referents (Foley, 1991, p.227).

– Consider the following minimal pair:

(4) a. [impram pay-cu-mpwi] na-kacapal [basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP] 3SG.ABS-forget ‘He forgot to carry the basket’ (F389)

b. [impram pay-cu-mpwi] pia-n-kacapal [basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP] COMP.ABS-3SG.ERG-forget ‘He forgot to carry the basket’ (and he had expressed his intention to carry it) (F389)

– The two sentences above differ in that (4a) encodes only the matrix subject, while in (4b) both the subject and the embedded complement are cross-referenced.5

– The data also have subtly different meanings that map roughly to the new/established distinction.

– While this is atypical of true agreement, clitics by contrast have been noted to be sensitive to anaphoric effects, e.g. in the Aleut languages (Merchant, 2011; Johns, 2013).

* Why partial clitic doubling is important in this talk:

– Partial doubling yields a mismatch between the number of clitics on the verb and the total number of nominals in the syntax.

– Crucially, the case patterns differ in full vs. partial doubling constructions, revealing that case is directly calculated over the span of clitics after clitic doubling takes place.

– Moreover, how individual cases behave in these constructions may be used to determine where they fit on the Marantzian case realization hierarchy.

5Note also that ‘basket’ is not agreed with in either construction.
3 Case competition

3.1 Marantz (1991)

Marantz (1991): Case is a morphological (postsyntactic) phenomenon. Exactly how case is realized is determined on the basis of competition between case-requiring elements.

- Runs counter to the ‘traditional’ view of case as assigned by functional heads in the syntax proper (e.g. Chomsky, 2000).

- Nominals are in competition to be spelled out with one of the cases below, in the order given. Once a nominal is assigned case, it no longer counts as a case competitor.

(5) *The case realization disjunctive hierarchy:*

a. lexically governed case (quirky/inherent case)

b. dependent case (ERG, ACC)

c. unmarked/default case (NOM, ABS) (from Halle, 1989)

Lexical case: Overrides other expected case specifications due to its idiosyncrasy; retained in different syntactic environments.

- Often assumed to be assigned under sisterhood by a lexical head, e.g. P⁰ (e.g. McFadden, 2004).

(6) *Icelandic*

- Ég hjálpaði honum
  I.NOM helped him.DAT
  ‘I helped him.’ (Zaenen et al., 1985)

- Honum var hjálpað
  him.DAT was helped
  ‘They/he were/was helped.’ (Zaenen et al., 1985)

- Because lexical case is assigned earliest in this system, it can bleed the assignment of cases lower in the hierarchy, e.g. dependent case...

Dependent case: Assigned based on the structural (c-command) relationship between two case-requiring DPs.

- In an ergative language, ERG is assigned to the higher of two nominals (the c-commander) in a case assignment domain.

- Dependent case may surface on a nominal only if it has a case competitor (in (7), the object receives NOM because dependent ACC case is bled by the presence of the quirky subject).

(7) *Icelandic*

eg tel [henni hafa alltaf þótt Olafur leipinlegur]
I believe [her.DAT to-have always thought Olafur.NOM boring.NOM]
‘I believe her to have always thought Olafur boring.’ (Marantz, 1991)

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6 Though see Baker & Vinokurova (2010); Preminger (2011); Levin & Preminger (to appear); Poole (to appear); a.o. for syntactic reformulations of this system.

7 In an accusative language, dependent ACC case is assigned downwards to the lower of two nominals (the c-commandee).
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– On the flipside, adding case competitors to the structure feeds dependent case assignment (e.g. GEN case in Finnish below):

(8) **Finnish**

  a. Kekkose-en [yksi vuosi] [kolmannen kerran]
     Kekkonen-ILL trust-PASS.PST one.NOM year.NOM [third GEN time GEN]
     ‘Kekkonen was trusted for a year for a third time.’
  b. Tarja [yhden vuoden] [kolmannen kerran]
     Tarja.NOM trusted.3SG Kekkosen-ILL [one GEN year GEN] [third GEN time GEN]
     ‘Tarja trusted Kekkonen for a year for a third time.’ (Poole, to appear)

■ Finally, **unmarked case**: Assigned to any DPs that have not yet received case at this point.

– Some recent analyses equate unmarked case with *caseless* (e.g. Kornfilt & Preminger, to appear); that is, what we call ‘unmarked case’ is not actually case.

■ In what follows, I show that the Marantzian case hierarchy exists in Yimas.

– However, since the purview of the case calculation contains only the span of clitics and excludes the nominals in the syntax proper, m-case assignment rules in Yimas do not make reference to structural notions such as c-command.

– This runs counter to most proposals of m-case,8 but we will see that it is empirically motivated.

### 3.2 Dependent case

■ I start with ERG, because it best illustrates the competition-driven nature of case in Yimas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realization hierarchy</th>
<th>M-case in Yimas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="graphic" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>ERG ←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarked/default</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ **Main point**: Ergative case in Yimas is a dependent case, assigned to subject clitics in the presence of a case competitor.

■ In Yimas, A and S are generally cross-referenced with ERG and ABS morphology, respectively:

(9) a. **pu-wa-t**
    3SG.ABS-go-PERF
    ‘They went.’ (F195)

b. **pu-n-tay**
    3PL.ABS-3SG.ERG-see
    ‘He saw them.’ (F195)

■ ...but there are multiple contexts in which this ergative alignment pattern fails to surface.
First, 1st/2nd person ([+PARTICIPANT]) internal arguments are always cross-referenced with DAT morphology. Here, the clitic cross-referencing the agent is ABS, not ERG.

- **Proposal:** DAT case on the object clitic bleeds dependent ERG case assignment on the subject clitic, causing it to be realized as ABS instead.

\[(10)\]

a. na-[mpu]-tay
\[3SG.ABS\rightarrow3PL.ERG\]-see

‘They saw him.’ (F195)

b. pu-na-tay
\[3PL.ABS\rightarrow1SG.DAT\]-see

‘They saw me.’ (F196)

Though the data resembles a transitivity alternation or a person-based ergative split (cf. Coon & Preminger, 2012, to appear), it is neither!

- True detransitivization in Yimas involves oblique case on the argument, which, in turn, blocks clitic doubling (it also blocks pro drop):

\[(11)\]

a. irpm \[mu-n\]-wapal
cocoanut palm. IV.SG IV.SG.ABS-3SG.ERG-climb

‘He climbed the coconut palm.’ (F234)

b. irpm-[un] na-wapal
cocoanut palm-[OBL] 3SG.ABS-climb

‘He climbed up on the coconut palm.’ (F234)

Moreover, these approaches cannot explain the covariance of the case patterns with the (non-)occurrence of clitic doubling.

- As shown earlier, clitic doubling is optional. The case realization of a particular clitic fluctuates with whether the verb exhibits full or partial clitic doubling:

\[(12)\]

a. [impram pay-cu-mpwi] \[pia-[m]\]-kacapal
[basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP] COMB.ABS-3SG.ERG-forget

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’ (F389)

b. [impram pay-cu-mpwi] \[na]\]-kacapal
[basket.VII.SG carry-NFN-COMP] 3SG.ABS-forget

‘He forgot to carry the basket.’ (F389)

- The subject clitic is ERG with full doubling but ABS with partial doubling. The key difference is that, in the latter, the subject clitic is the only clitic present.

- This is again characteristic of dependent case—it is unavailable in the absence of a case competitor.

Finally, introducing a case competitor feeds ERG case assignment. As a result, we see unaccusative subjects cross-referenced by ERG morphology (rather than the expected ABS).

- In applicative constructions, an oblique is promoted to core status, and can thus be clitic doubled; this allows ERG case assignment to be assigned.
(13) a. impa-n kantk [na]-kwalca-t
    3DL-FR.DIST with [3SG.ABS]-rise-PERF
    ‘He got up with them both.’ (F303)

b. impa-[m]-tan-kwalca-t
    3DL.ABS-[3SG.ERG]-APPL-rise-PERF
    ‘He got up with them both.’ (F303)

– Unlike the previous data, applicativization is a transitivity-changing process. However, as we have seen, transitivity is not the sole cause for the case alternations shown throughout this section.

More generally, these data reveal a dissociation between case and argument structure. Subjects of transitive clauses are not inherently ERG, and ERG case is not always, or exclusively, assigned in transitive clauses.

– Problematic for ‘ERG is inherent’ analyses (e.g. Woolford, 1997, 2006; Aldridge, 2008; Legate, 2012).
– Also problematic for ‘ERG is assigned by a dedicated functional head’ analyses (e.g. Bobaljik, 1993; Laka, 2000; Rezac et al., 2014).
– But supports a dependent case analysis of ERG!

3.3 Lexical case

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Unmarked/default</td>
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</table>

Main point: DAT case is lexically assigned to clitics encoding 1st/2nd person ([+PARTICIPANT]) objects.

– We may diagnose a case as lexical by contrasting it with dependent case in the partial doubling constructions.

* In these contexts, lexical case is retained where dependent case is lost.

Recall from earlier that [+PART] IAs are cross-referenced with DAT morphology, not ABS.9

– DAT case on the object clitic bleeds ERG case on the subject clitic, causing it to be ABS. Conversely, ERG never bleeds DAT.

(14) a. na-mpu-tay
    3SG.ABS-3PL.ERG-see
    ‘They saw him.’ (F195)

b. pu-[lA]-tay
    3PL.ABS-[1SG.DAT]-see
    ‘They saw me.’ (F196)

9In this way, DAT case in Yimas seems to be person-driven Differential Object Marking. If this is so, and if DAT is indeed lexically-assigned as I am arguing for here, then this contradicts recent proposals that DOM is always assigned configurationally (Baker, 2015; Coon & Preminger, to appear).
— This follows if DAT is a lexical case, assigned earliest in the case realization hierarchy.

Moreover, unlike ERG, DAT is retained in partial doubling constructions, i.e. when case competitors are removed (William Foley, p.c.):

(15) a. na-[kra]-tay
    3SG.ABS-[1PL.DAT]-see
    ‘He saw us.’ (F205)

b. Mitchell [kra]-tay
    Mitchell [1PL.DAT]-see
    ‘Mitchell saw us.’ (F,p.c.)

— The retention of DAT case is reminiscent of the retention of quirky case in different syntactic environments (e.g. quirky case is insensitive to A-movement in Icelandic).

However, while lexical case in other languages is generally taken to be oblique case assigned by $P^0$ to its sister, this is not a possible analysis for Yimas.

— In Yimas, $P^0$ does exist—but, as we saw earlier, arguments enclosed in PPs cannot be clitic doubled.

(16) ipa kantk pu-mampi-wa-k
    1PL with 3PL.ABS-again-go-IRR
    ‘They went with us.’ (F303)

— That DAT case is realizable on a clitic at all shows that it is not associated with $P^0$. It must therefore be assigned by different means.

— Proposal: Lexical case in Yimas is assigned in the presence of certain features. For example, a clitic bearing the features [+PART, +OBJ] will always be realized as DAT.

In conclusion, DAT and ERG case assignment are not alike.

— DAT case is retained in partial doubling contexts, while ERG case is lost.

— Moreover, the two may interact: DAT case bleeds ERG case.

— The contrasting behaviour of DAT and ERG provides supports for the Marantzian system of case assignment, because they map onto distinct levels of the case realization hierarchy.

### 3.4 Unmarked case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>DAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>ERG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarked/default</td>
<td>ABS ←</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— Finally, elements that still have not received case at this point in the case calculus are realized with unmarked case. In Yimas, this is ABS:

10I am using the [+OBJ] feature somewhat as a placeholder. I will discuss this in §3.5.
The data here is also compatible with the Big DP analysis (Uriagereka, 1995; Cecchetto, 2000; Arregi & Nevins, 2012). The movement + reduction analysis, however, readily accounts for certain movement-like properties of clitic doubling in Yimas not discussed in this talk.
– Crucially, subjects and objects are never simultaneously ABS, because ERG case surfaces in such contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(19)</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>[-PART] OBJECT</th>
<th>[+PART] OBJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No competitor</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>DAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has competitor</td>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>DAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This motivates the following case assignment rules (abstracting away from the fact that the clitics also encode $\phi$-features):

(20) **Case assignment rules in Yimas:**

a. \([+\text{SUBJ}] / \text{Cl \_} \rightarrow \text{ERG}\)

b. \([+\text{OBJ}, +\text{PART}] \rightarrow \text{DAT}\)

c. (Everything else $\rightarrow$ caseless/ABS)

– Crucially, the rules in (20) are *morphological*, i.e. formulated without direct reference to the structural configuration of the arguments in the syntax.

– The one stipulation (albeit not very controversial) is that grammatical function may be featurally encoded.\(^{12}\)

4 **Case domains**

**A broader implication of this talk:** Yimas shows that the domain of the case assignment varies across languages, and moreover shows that the domain need not be part of the syntactic structure.

– *But why is Yimas different?*

**Proposal:** The locus of the case assignment domain is fundamentally different in Yimas, due to a combination of *language-specific properties* and *universal morphotactics*.

– *Language-specific properties:* No case distinctions on nominals and discourse-driven clitic doubling.

– *Universal morphotactics:* An OCP (or, anti-identity) constraint against consecutive morphosyntactically identical objects.\(^{13}\)

* M-case assignment repairs illicit *ABS-ABS* clitic sequences that inevitably surface whenever multiple clitic doubling occurs. In other words, m-case is a strategy used to ensure *morphosyntactic dissimilation*.

**Prediction 1:** We expect other languages to use m-case for similar purposes. This is borne out.

– *Malayalam:* DOM on [+ANIMATE] objects may also mark inanimate ([−ANIMATE]) objects to avoid ambiguity (De Swart, 2007).

\(^{12}\)There are various ways to capture this. For example, Yuan (in prep) provides evidence for an additional tier of abstract case assignment over the syntactic arguments, in which the features [+SUBJ] and [+OBJ] may be reformulated as abstract case features [NOM] and [ACC].
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– Yongren Lolo (Tibeto-Burman): DOM is fully ambiguity-driven, used solely to differentiate subjects and objects in ambiguous constructions (Gerner, 2008).
– (See Appendix A for data.)

**Prediction 2:** We moreover expect m-case to coexist with other OCP repairs (e.g. displacement, impoverishment, deletion). This, again, is borne out in Yimas (see Appendix B).

5 Conclusion

■ In Yimas, case is realized on a series of preverbal clitics. The realization of case on a given clitic is determined by case competition between clitics.

■ I argued that this can be captured by adopting the system of case assignment proposed by Marantz (1991).
– This, in turn, provides support for his system. In particular, the availability of partial clitic doubling constructions in Yimas constitutes a novel diagnostic for competition-based case assignment.

■ This talk more generally demonstrates that case assignment may be purely morphological, and not universally limited to the syntactic component of the grammar.
– This, however, comes with a caveat: case assignment over clitics in Yimas is somewhat of an epiphenomenon. Perhaps unlike other languages with m-case, in Yimas it is driven by morphotactic considerations.

References


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Yuan, M. (in prep). *Case competition and morphosyntactic dissimilation*.


A  M-case dissimilates cross-linguistically

- Malayalam:
  - Objects that are [+ANIMATE] are obligatorily marked ACC.
  - While inanimate ([-ANIMATE]) objects are normally unable to be ACC, they are obligatorily case-marked ACC when both arguments are inanimate and grammatical function is not obvious from semantics (De Swart, 2007):
(21)  a. Raman kappal-(*)ine  piLarthi
    Raman ship-(*)ACC  split.PST
    Intended: ‘Raman split the ship.’

   b. kappal  tiramaalakaL-e  piLarthi
      ship.NOM  waves-ACC  split.PST
      ‘The ship split the waves.’

   c. tiramaalakaL  kappal-ine  piLarthi
      waves.NOM  ship-ACC  split.PST
      ‘The waves split the ship.’

Yongren Lolo (Tibeto-Burman):

– Yongren Lolo has free word order and a large degree of scrambling, so ambiguity readily arises.
– The object case marker t\^ie is used to disambiguate between subjects and objects; this is its sole function. In fact, Gerner (2008) calls this ‘ambiguity-driven DOM.’

(22)  a. ɲo  çemo  tsɔ  zi
    I  snake  follow  go
    ‘I follow the snake.’ / ‘The snake follows me.’

   b. ɲo  [çemo  t\^ie]  tsɔ  zi
      I  [snake  OBJ]  follow  go
      ‘I follow the snake.’ (*‘The snake follows me.’)  

B  M-case as a repair

Yimas has a small set of what Foley (1991) calls ‘modality prefixes’ (I’ll call these MODS). These clitics, when present, yield the morpheme order MOD-AGR-VERB. I illustrate with ta- ‘negation’ throughout.

The MODS trigger different, apparently idiosyncratic, effects on the adjacent agreement clitic, depending on a number of factors that I set aside here: 14

(23)  a.  ta-[ka]-wa-t
    NEG-[1SG.ERG]-go-PERF
    ‘I didn’t go.’ (→ ERG)  (F251)

   b.  ta-[pu]-wa-t
      NEG-[3]-go-PERF
      ‘He didn’t go.’ (→ impoverished)  (F258)

   c.  ta-[∅]-mpu-tpull-c-[rm]
      NEG-[3DL.DAT]-3PL.ERG-hit-PERF-[DL]
      ‘They didn’t hit those two.’ (→ displaced)  (F255)

Important generalization: The MODS never co-occur with an ABS clitic; the ABS morphology is made ERG (23a), impoverished (23b), or displaced (23c).

– Important fact: Impoverishment/deletion and displacement are strategies for morphosyntactic dissimilation cross-linguistically.

14Specifically, the factors include the feature specifications of the agreement clitic, as well as the choice of MOD.
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* Spanish ‘spurious se’: dissimilation among two adjacent clitics is ensured by impoverishing the features of the first clitic (Nevins, 2007).
* Ancient Greek: dissimilation among two adjacent determiners ensured by displacing one of the DPs (Golston, 1995).

(24) Spanish:
   a. *A Pedro, el premio, **le lo** dieron ayer
to Pedro the prize **3SG.DAT 3SG.ACC** gave-PL yesterday
   Intended: ‘To Pedro, the prize, they gave it to him yesterday.’
   b. A Pedro, el premio, **se lo** dieron ayer
to Pedro the prize **3SG.ACC** gave-PL yesterday
   ‘To Pedro, the prize, they gave it to him yesterday.’ (Nevins, 2007)

(25) Ancient Greek:
   a. *[t-één [t-óu prosoóp-ou] phús-in]*
      [the-ACC.F [the-GEN.M face-GEN.M] nature-ACC.F]
      ‘the nature of the face’
   b. *[t-ées [t-ées pól-eeos] arkh-ées]*
      [the-GEN.F [the-GEN.F city-GEN.F] dominion-GEN.F]
      Intended: ‘of the dominion of the city’
   c. *[t-ées arkh-ées] [t-ées pól-eeos]*
      [[the-GEN.F dominion-GEN.F] [the-GEN.F city-GEN.F]]
      ‘of the dominion of the city’ (Golston, 1995)

Going back to Yimas (and focusing now on the pattern in (23a)), a second (related) generalization: The presence of a MOD also feeds dependent case assignment. It allows ERG and DAT (dependent on two case competitors, not shown in this talk) to be realized, where they would otherwise be bled.

(26) a. ta-[ka]-wa-t
    NEG-1SG.ERG-go-PERF
    ‘I didn’t go.’ (F251)
   b. ta-ka-tkam-r-[ak]-η
    NEG-1SG.ERG-show-PERF-3SG.DAT-VI.SG
    ‘I didn’t show him the coconut.’ (F259)

In summary, the presence of a MOD triggers various dissimilatory effects, including changes in case.

Proposal: All sequences of clitics (whether agreement or modal) in Yimas are indistinguishable morphosyntactic objects upon being adjoined to a verb.

This could be a condition on linearization, as proposed by Richards (2010), whereby elements must be sufficiently morphosyntactically distinct in order to be linearized. Crucially, what is ‘sufficiently distinct’ depends on the level of intelligence of the linearization algorithm.\textsuperscript{15}

   \textsuperscript{15}For example, Richards argues that the linearization statement <DP,DP> in English is unlinearizable and thus banned. However, this does not mean that DPs are indistinguishable at every level of English grammar.
The default repair strategy for this is differential/dependent case marking: \*<Cl,Cl> → <Cl,Cl_{+DEP}>.

However, specific (contextually-determined) combinations of MOD-AGR trigger impoverishment and displacement instead, overriding the default strategy.

If this characterization of the MODS (and their interaction with the agreement clitics) is correct, then m-case assignment is simply one of many dissimilatory operations available in the language.