Morphological boundary glottals in A'ingae: A new argument for [δ]*

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1. Introduction

This paper describes and analyzes patterns of allomorphy observed in the information structure (IS) domain of A'ingae (or Cofán, ISO 639-3: con). A'ingae has four IS suffixes: the new topic *-(ʔ)ta* NEW,[1] contrastive topic *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR, exclusive focus *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL, and additive focus *-ʔkhe* ADD. The first three of these markers show a regular alternation between plain (i. e. non-preglottalized; *-ta* NEW, *-ja* CNTR, *-yi* EXCL) and preglottalized (*-ʔta* NEW, *-ʔja* CNTR, *-ʔyi* EXCL) forms, conditioned by the syntactic category of the base of attachment.

When IS morphemes are attached to phrases of most syntactic categories, including—for example—noun phrases, overtly subordinated clauses, and adverbs, they are realized as plain. However, when they are attached to infinitive verbs, finite verbs, or non-verbal predicates in subordinate clauses, they are realized as preglottalized. This may give rise to striking minimal pairs, where non-verbal predicates (1b) may be distinguished from ar-

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[1]The following glossing abbreviations have been used: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ACC = accusative, ACC2 = accusative 2, ADD = additive focus, ADJ = adjectivizer, AIMP = attenuated imperative, ANIM = animate, APPR = apprehensional, ASSR = assertive, CAUS = causative, CNTR = contrastive topic, DAT = dative, DIST = distal, DS = different subject, EN = event nominalizer, EXCL = exclusive focus, FLAT = flat, FRST = frustrative, IF = conditional, IMP = imperative, INF = infinitive, INGR = ingressive, IPFV = imperfective, IRR = irrealis, ITER = iterative, LOC = locative, NEG = negative, NEW = new topic, PASS = passive, PERM = permissive, PL = plural, PLA = pluractional, PLS = plural subject, PROH = prohibitive, PROX = proximal, RCPR = reciprocal, SG = singular, SS = same subject, TENT = tentative, VDM = verbal diminutive, YNQ = polar interrogative.

guments (1a) solely by the presence of glottalization before the IS marker. Here, this is illustrated with the new topic *-(ʔ)ta* NEW (realized as *-(ʔ)nda* NEW after nasal vowels).[2] The information structural markers are underlined throughout the paper.[3]

(1) MINIMAL *(ʔ)TA*-PAIR ON A NOUN (NOMINAL ARGUMENT VS. PREDICATE + *-(ʔ)TA* NEW)

a. *tíse chán=da =tsû jí-ya-mbi*
3SG mother=NEW =3 come-IRR-NEG
"His/her mother will not come."

b. *tíse chán=ʔda =tsû jí-ya-mbi*
3SG mother=NEW =3 come-IRR-NEG
"If she is a mother, she won't come."

(2025-01-20(1)_mll)

The four markers under discussion (*-(ʔ)ta* NEW, *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR, *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL, *-ʔkhe* ADD) form a natural class—they all encode information structural meanings, attach to the same range of constituents, and always appear at the very end of a phrase. As such, the observed systematic alternation between the plain and preglottalized forms should not be understood as three independent instances of allomorphy, but rather attributed to an underlying morphosyntactic property shared by all the IS markers.

Concretely, I will propose that the glottal stop (*-ʔ*) is a realization of a T-head conditioned by linear adjacency to IS morphology. The conditioning environment is formalized as a generalized *discourse* feature [δ] (Bossi and Diercks 2019, Mikkelsen 2015), which dominates all the more specific information structural features.[4] In the previous literature, [δ] has been motivated by word-order facts; the current paper provides novel morphological evidence that discourse markers share a common morphosyntactic feature.

2. Language background

A'ingae (or Cofán ISO 639-3: con) is an endangered Amazonian isolate (AnderBois et al. 2019, Hammarström et al. 2020) spoken by ca. 1,500 Cofán people in Ecuador and Colombia. A'ingae syllable structure is (C)V(V)(ʔ)—onsets are optional, nuclei are maximally diphthongal, and glottal stops are the only licit coda (Dąbkowski 2024b).[5]

A'ingae is highly agglutinating, exclusively suffixing, and encliticizing. There are many lexically contrastive morphemes that constitute plain–preglottalized minimal pairs, e. g. the flat classifier *-je* FLAT vs. imperfective *-ʔje* IPFV. Only the discourse markers *-(ʔ)ta* NEW, *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR, and *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL participate in the specific alternation described in this paper.

The data presented in this paper comes from published materials written originally in A'ingae and fieldwork elicitation conducted by the author. Elicitation tasks included

[2]The morphemes *-(ʔ)ta* NEW, *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR, and *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL surface as *-(ʔ)nda* NEW, *-(ʔ)jan* CNTR, and *-(ʔ)ñi* EXCL after nasal vowels due to nasal spreading (Dąbkowski 2024b, Sanker and AnderBois 2024, Bennett et al. 2024). The oral-nasal alternation is orthogonal to the plain–glottal alternation under scrutiny.

[3]Depending on the base of attachment, I represent functional morphemes as affixes or clitics. This does not correlate with the plain–glottal alternation of interest. For further discussion, see Dąbkowski (in prep.).

[4]Notwithstanding, I represent the glottal stop as part of the following IS morpheme in line with general glossing conventions adopted in the literature on A'ingae.

[5]I use the practical orthography with two deviations: glottal stops are represented with the IPA symbol *(ʔ)*, not apostrophe *(')*, and stress is marked with the acute accent *(ˊ)*. For more on A'ingae orthography, see Dąbkowski (2024b), Repetti Ludlow et al. (2019), Fischer and Hengeveld (2023).

translation and grammaticality judgments. All the data drawn from previous publications are cited as such. All the fieldwork data has been deposited in the California Language Archive (CLA) as Dąbkowski (2020) and cited with a `YYYY-MM-DD(N)_ccc` identifier.

3. Description

A'ingae distinguishes two types of overtly marked topics. The new topic *-(ʔ)ta* NEW indicates that the topic was not previously present in the discourse (2a). The contrastive topic *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR is used in the presence of alternative topics in the discourse (2b). The contributions of the topic markers are often not reflected in translations to Spanish or English, and most sentences are also accepted as grammatical without them.

(2) TWO TOPIC MARKERS: *-(ʔ)TA* NEW AND *-(ʔ)JA* CNTR

a. *yáya=ta =tsû tsámpi=ni já*
dad=NEW =3 forest=LOC go
"Dad went hunting."
(2024-06-10(1)_mll)

b. *áʔtse=ja tsáʔu=nga =tsû káʔni*
h.bird=CNTR house=DAT =3 enter
"A hummingbird entered the house."
(2024-04-03(1)_sia)

A'ingae has two focus morphemes. The exclusive focus *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL indicates a proposition holds of the marked entity to the exclusion of the alternatives; it is often translated as "only," "just," "very (same)," or with cleft constructions (3a). The additive focus *-ʔkhe* ADD indicates that the proposition holds of the marked entity in addition to alternatives; it is often translated as "too," "as well" or "even" (3b). (Since the additive focus *-ʔkhe* ADD does not show the plain–glottal allomorphy of interest, I will not present further examples with it. However, its non-alternating behavior is explained in section 4.)

(3) TWO FOCUS MARKERS: *-(ʔ)YI* EXCL AND *-ʔKHE* ADD

a. *ñá=ñi já-ye ínʔjan*
1SG=EXCL go-INF want
"Only I want to go."
(2023-12-11(2)_rgq)

b. *ñá=ʔkhe jénʔtshi-ye atésû*
1SG=ADD sneeze-INF know
"I, too, usually sneeze."
(2023-08-29(3)_eol)

3.1 Non-predicates

The A'ingae IS morphemes are most frequently observed on various arguments and adjuncts, including e. g. bare nouns (2), pronouns (3), question words (4a), adjectives, and adverbs (4b). In all these cases, they are realized as plain (i. e. not preglottalized).

(4) PLAIN REALIZATION ON NON-PREDICATES

a. *junguésû=yi =tsû náʔen=ni kánse?*
what=EXCL =3 river=LOC live
"What is it that lives in the river?" (2024-06-10(1)_mll)

b. *tayúpi-ta =tsû Erisión tsáiʔmbi-ʔtshi teteté=ndekhû=ve fíthi~ʔthi*
long ago-NEW =3 Erisión many-ADJ Waorani=PL.ANIM=ACC2 kill~PLA
"Once upon a time, Erisión killed many Waoranis."
(Blaser and Chica Umenda 2008:152; 2024-06-07(1)_mll)

3.2 Predicates

In addition to arguments and adjuncts, the IS morphemes may appear on subordinate predicates, both verbal and non-verbal. A'ingae predicates can vary greatly in morphological complexity (Dąbkowski 2021, 2024c). On one end, the head of a finite TP may consist of a bare root. On the other end, a plethora of grammatical categories can be expressed on a verb by means of suffixation (5).

(5) VERBAL PREDICATE STRUCTURE

[[[[[[*kufi* *-án*]$_{VceP}$ *-ʔje* *-ngi*]$_{AspP}$ *-ʔfa* *-mbi*]$_{TP}$ *-ʔni*]$_{CP}$ *-nda*]$_{\Delta P}$

play -CAUS -IPFV -PROX -PLS -NEG -IF.DS -NEW

"now$_{NEW}$, if$_{IF}$ (they$_{PLS}$) do not$_{NEG}$ come$_{PROX}$ to be$_{IPFV}$ making$_{CAUS}$ play, (someone else$_{DS}$) ..." (2024-06-18(1)_mll)

The suffixes can be grouped into five major functional projections. The A'ingae verbal template is given in Table 1. The verbal root is at the bottom, and the subsequent morphosyntactic slots appear above it, mimicking the orientation of a syntax tree.

INFO STRUCTURAL SUFFIXES (ΔP)	
(xii)	TOPIC: *-(ʔ)ta* NEW, *-(ʔ)ja* CNTR
(xi)	ADDITIVITY: *-ʔkhe* ADD
(x)	EXCLUSIVITY: *-(ʔ)yi* EXCL
CLAUSE-LEVEL SUFFIXES (CP)	
(ix)	CLAUSE TYPE
	MATRIX: *-ja* IMP, *-kha* AIMP, *-ʔse* PERM, *-jama* PROH, *-ʔya* ASSR
	COSUBORDINATE: *-pa* SS, *-si* DS
	SUBORDINATE: *-saʔne* APPR, *-khen* TENT, *-ʔni* IF.DS, *-ʔma* FRST
SITUATION-LEVEL SUFFIXES (TP)	
(viii)	POLARITY: *-mbi* NEG
(vii)	REALITY/FINITENESS: *-ya* IRR, *-ye* INF
(vi)	SUBJECT NUMBER: *-ʔfa* PLS
VERBAL INFLECTIONAL SUFFIXES (AspP)	
(v)	ASSOC MOTION: *-ʔngi* PROX, *-ʔnga* DIST
(iv)	ASPECT: *-ʔje* IPFV, *-ji* INGR, *-kha* VDM, *-ʔñakha* ITER
VOICE SUFFIXES (VceP)	
(iii)	PASSIVE: *-ye* PASS
(ii)	RECIPROCAL: *-khu* RCPR
(i)	CAUSATIVE: *-ña*/*-an*/*-en* CAUS
VERBAL ROOT (√P)	
(o)	VERBAL ROOT: √

Table 1: Morphological template of the A'ingae verb (building on Dąbkowski 2024c)

A'ingae lacks a copula verb; as such, the TP, CP, and ΔD morphemes attach directly to non-verbal predicates. IS morphemes behave in similar ways on verbal and non-verbal predicates. As such, in the rest of the paper, I group and discuss them together.

A'ingae subordinate clauses can be inflected for features such as subject plurality (*-ʔfa* PLS), reality status (irrealis *-ya* IRR), polarity (negative *-mbi* NEG), and finiteness (infinitive *-ye* INF). This suggests that subordinate clauses consist of at least the TP layer (and also may have an overt or phonologically null CP layer).

3.2.1 Infinitive predicates

First, I considered the various uses of infinitive predicates. Infinitive clauses may, for example, function as subjects of stative predicates (6a), arguments selected by verbs such as the habitual auxiliary *atesû* 'know' (6b), or rationale clauses (6c).

(6) PREGLOTTALIZED REALIZATION ON INFINITIVES WITH *-YE* INF

a. *án-ñe-ʔnda =tsû injénge-ʔchu*
eat-INF-NEW =3 needed-EN
"Eating is important."
(2024-05-27(2)_sia)

b. *atésû =ngi guáʔthi-an-ñe-ʔjan*
know =1 boil-CAUS-INF-CNTR
"I (habitually) boil."
(2024-06-11(2)_mll)

c. *júsû afa-khú-ye-ʔyi-ta =ngi áʔingae=ma atésû-ʔje*
only speak-RCPR-INF-EXCL-NEW =1 A'ingae=ACC learn-IPFV
"I am studying A'ingae only so that I can argue (with people)."
(2025-01-20(1)_mll)

All of these uses are compatible with IS markers. When appearing on an infinitive verb, they are always realized as preglottalized (6a, 6b). If multiple IS markers appear on a predicate (such as an infinitive), a glottal stop is observed only before the first one (6c).

3.2.2 Finite predicates

Now, I will look at finite predicates with IS morphemes. A'ingae finite clauses may be (co)subordinated with morphemes such as the same-subject marker *-pa* SS (7a), different-subject marker *-si* DS (7b), apprehensional *-saʔne* APPR (7c), tentative *-khen* TENT (7d), different-subject conditional *-ʔni* IF.DS (7e), frustrative *-ʔma* FRST, or the same-subject conditional (to be discussed momentarily), which will be analyzed as phonologically null. The first five of these may (but need not) be followed by IS markers. After the overt subordinators, IS markers are realized as plain (i. e. non-preglottalized).

(7) PLAIN REALIZATION ON OVERTLY SUBORDINATED CLAUSES

a. *amphí-pa-ta =ti=ki tsífu=ja báthi-ʔchu-mbi?*
fall-SS-NEW =YNQ=2 neck=CNTR dislocate-EN-NEG
"Did you injure your neck by falling?"
(Borman et al. 1991:60; 2024-06-07(1)_mll)

b. *kéʔi atesű-ʔfa-mbi-si-ja* *kéʔi=nga teváen-mbi =ngi*
2PL know-PLS-NEG-DS-CNTR 2PL=DAT write-NEG =1
"I do not write to you because you do not know (the truth)."
(1 John 2:21; 2024-06-10(1)_mll)

c. *tíseʔpa ña yayá-ndekhû-ʔfa-saʔne-ñi =ngi dyúju*
3PL 1SG dad-PL.ANIM-PLS-APPR-EXCL =1 be afraid
"I fear only that they are my parents." (2024-06-11(1)_mll)

d. *athe-yé-khen-nda =ngi tsún-ʔjen*
see-PASS-TENT-NEW =1 do-IPFV
"I am trying to be seen." (2024-06-11(2)_mll)

e. *thési=ma áthe-ʔfa-ʔni-ñi =tsû bűthu*
jaguar=ACC see-PLS-IF.DS-EXCL =3 run
"As soon as they saw a jaguar, (sb else) ran." (2024-06-18(1)_mll)

A different pattern is seen with same-subject conditional antecedents, as they do not receive any dedicated overt marking. Rather, same-subject antecedents are marked only with an IS morpheme. When introducing a same-subject conditional antecedent, the first IS marker is always preglottalized (8a, 8b). The following IS markers, if present, surface without an additional glottal stop(8c). A same-subject antecedent is always introduced by at least one IS morpheme.

(8) PREGLOTTALIZED REALIZATION ON SAME-SUBJECT CONDITIONALS

a. *ña yáya=ʔta =tsû afé-ya fae regálo=ve ña=nga*
1SG dad=NEW =3 give-IRR one gift=ACC2 1SG=DAT
"If he's my dad, he'll give me a gift." (2024-06-10(1)_mll)

b. *afa-khú-ʔja sumbú-ya =ngi*
speak-RCPR-CNTR leave-IRR =1
"If I argue, I will leave." (2024-06-11(2)_mll)

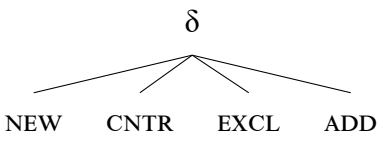
c. *thési=ma áfase-ʔyi-ja bûthú-ya =ngi*
jaguar=ACC criticize-EXCL-CNTR run-IRR =1
"Only if I criticize a jaguar, I will run." (2024-06-06(2)_mll)

In an interim summary, in most contexts, the IS markers are not preceded by a glottal stop. The glottal stop appears if an IS marker attaches directly to a predicate, including (i) infinitival clauses and (ii) morphologically unmarked same-subject conditional antecedents.

4. Analysis

I propose that the four IS morphemes (*-ta* NEW, *-ja* CNTR, *-yi* EXCL, *-ʔkhe* ADD) are the exponents of four discourse features: [NEW], [CNTR], [EXCL], and [ADD]. The discourse features are organized hierarchically, dominated by a superordinate *discourse* feature [δ] (9).

(9) DISCOURSE FEATURE HIERARCHY

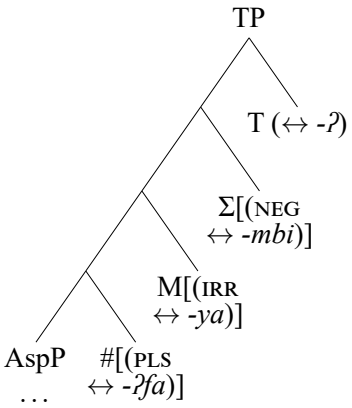


The above hierarchy draws on Mikkelsen (2015) and Bossi and Diercks (2019)'s accounts of word order in, respectively, Danish and Kipsigis. In Kipsigis (Nilo-Saharan, Kenya), the immediately post-verbal position is occupied by a discourse-prominent item (Bossi and Diercks 2019). To account for this pattern, Bossi and Diercks (2019) introduce "an underspecified [δ] (discourse) feature that can be satisfied by phrases of any information structure designation" (p. 30). My proposal adopts their feature hierarchy directly.

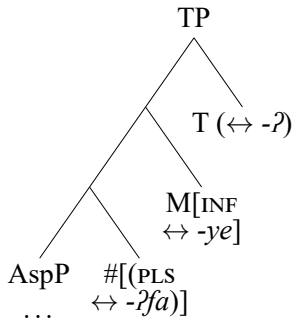
I assume a decompositional approach to T, where overt TAM suffixes are realized as heads below T. The specific hierarchies of projections are given in (10).[6]

(10) TP STRUCTURE

a. FINITE TPs



b. INFINITIVE TPs



Crucially, I propose that the glottal stop *-ʔ* is a contextual realization of T°. Specifically, T° is realized as a glottal stop *-ʔ* when linearly adjacent to the discourse feature [δ]. The critical vocabulary item (VI) is given in (11a). Since *-ta* NEW, *-ja* CNTR, *-yi* EXCL, and *-ʔkhe* ADD all inherit from [δ], they all satisfy this environment condition. Otherwise, T° is realized as phonologically null (11b). This derives the observed distribution of the IS-conditioned *-ʔ*. Some of the relevant vocabulary items are given in (11-13).

(11) FEATURES ≼ TP

a. T ↔ *-ʔ* / _ δ
b. T ↔ *-∅* / elsw.
c. PLS ↔ *-ʔfa*
d. IRR ↔ *-ya*
e. INF ↔ *-ye*

(12) FEATURES ≼ CP

a. IF, SS ↔ *-∅*
b. SS ↔ *-pa*
c. IF, DS ↔ *-ʔni*
d. DS ↔ *-si*
e. APPR ↔ *-saʔne*

(13) FEATURES ≼ ΔP

a. NEW ↔ *-ta*
b. CNTR ↔ *-ja*
c. EXCL ↔ *-yi*
d. ADD ↔ *-ʔkhe*

Now, I demonstrate how the analysis accounts for the data. When an IS marker attaches to most syntactic categories, such as DPs (14a), adjectives, or adverbs, there is no T° ad-

[6]I assume that every clause—by definition—contains the TP layer (Shlonsky 1997:3). Additionally, I assume that TP dominates the projections which realize negation (Laka Mugarza 1990, Pollock 1989), irrealis mood (Cinque 1999), and finiteness (Wurmbrand 1998). Finally, I assume that the hierarchical order of the number (#P), mood (MP), and polarity (ΣP) projections mirrors the linear order of suffixes they introduce (*-ʔfa* PLS, *-ya* IRR, and *-mbi* NEG). While T° is often silent, its presence correlates in A'ingae with specific temporal interpretations. For example, while uninflected stative and non-verbal TPs are interpreted as present, uninflected eventive verbs are interpreted as realis, perfective, and past. For more, see Dąbkowski (2024a).

jacent to a discourse-marked morpheme. As such, *-ʔ* is not realized. When an IS marker attaches immediately to an infinitive TP, such as a complement of a raising predicate (14b), the adjacent T-head is realized as *-ʔ* (11a). The base of attachment is bracketed [ ].

(14) *-ʔ* NOT REALIZED ON A DP VS. *-ʔ* REALIZED ON A RAISING PREDICATE COMPLEMENT

a. [*yáya*]$_{DP}$=*ta* =*tsû tsámpi*=*ni já*
dad=NEW =3 forest=LOC go
"Dad went hunting."
(2024-06-10(1)_mll)

b. [*ñúʔfa-ye-ʔ*]$_{TP}$-*ta* =*ngi atésû*
rest-INF-T-NEW =1 know
"I (habitually) rest."
(2024-10-08(1)_mll)

When an IS marker attaches to CP with overt subordinating C°, there is overt material intervening between T° and the IS marker (15a). Now, since environments conditioning allomorphy are strictly local (Embick 2010, 2015), *-ʔ* is not realized (11b).[7]

(15) OVERTLY-SUBORDINATED CLAUSE: *-ʔ* NOT REALIZED

a. [*já-ya-∅-pa*]$_{CP}$-*yi* =*ngi ína-ʔjen*
go-IRR-T-SS-EXCL =1 cry-IPFV
"I'm crying only because I will leave." (2024-10-08(1)_mll)

However, when an IS marker attaches to a CP with a null C°, such as a complement of a control predicate (16a), there is no overt morphology intervening between T° and the IS marker. Since phonologically unrealized material is ignored for purposes of satisfying allomorphy environments (*pruning* in Embick 2010, 2015), T° is realized as *-ʔ*.

I propose that same-subject conditional antecedents are likewise introduced by a head that is phonologically unrealized (12a).[8] Since, again, null material is ignored for the purposes of allomorphy (Embick 2010, 2015), T° is realized as *-ʔ* (16b).

(16) CONTROL PREDICATE COMPLEMENT OR SAME-SUBJECT ANTECEDENT: *-ʔ* REALIZED

a. [*kéʔi án-ʔfa-ye-ʔ-∅*]$_{CP}$-*ja séʔpi* =*ngi*
2PL eat-PL-INF-T-C-CNTR forbid =1
"I prohibit y'all from eating."
(2024-10-08(1)_mll)

b. [*afa-khú-ʔ-∅*]$_{CP}$-*ja sumbú-ya* =*ngi*
speak-RCPR-T-IF.SS-CNTR leave-IRR =1
"If I argue, I will leave."
(2024-06-11(2)_mll)

This derives the fact that preglottalization is realized on same-subject antecedents, but not on other types of subordinate clauses—only the same-subject antecedents are introduced by a phonologically unrealized feature bundle.[9]

5. Discussion and conclusions

The above analysis draws on the notion of a superordinate discourse feature [δ] (Bossi and Diercks 2019, Mikkelsen 2015), which has previously been motivated by word-order facts. A'ingae provides novel morphological evidence for [δ].

Descriptively, the proposed analysis makes a non-obvious claim: Even though same-subject (SS) conditionals are most often introduced by the preglottalized *-ʔta* NEW and *-ʔja*

[7] The assumption that infinitival morphology is TP-internal, while subordinating morphemes are C-heads, is accepted cross-linguistically (Adger 2003), and corroborated for A'ingae by Dąbkowski (2024c, 2022).

CNTR, neither morpheme is analyzed as contributing the conditional meaning. Rather, *-ʔ* is proposed to be a syntactically conditioned spell-out of a functional head, the IS marker contributes its regular discourse meaning, and the SS conditional morpheme is phonologically silent (16b). This shows that language description and theoretical analysis are not two separate endeavors, and that they must mutually inform each other.

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[8]Cross-linguistically, conditionals and topics are marked in similar, often identical, ways (Haiman 1978). In A'ingae, the IS morphemes appear optionally (though frequently) on different-subject antecedents (7e), and obligatorily on same-subject antecedents (8). Nonetheless, conditionality is expressed with dedicated morphosyntactic features (12a, 12c).

[9]The additive focus *-ʔkhe* ADD is always realized as preglottalized. I propose that *-ʔkhe* ADD is underlyingly preglottalized (13d). I assume that it participates in the same triggering of T-allomorphy as the other IS morphemes, but two contiguous glottal stops are later phonologically reduced to one.

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