This paper examines the GIVE and TAKE verbs in Māori. Māori is the indigenous language of New Zealand, a member of the Eastern Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family. It has a VSO word order.

In Māori, GIVE is realised with two verbal forms which lexicalise directionality, namely hoatu and homai. The hoatu form of give shows how Māori verbs can elucidate the thematic role of an argument with preposition choice. The preposition following GIVE can plainly distinguish between recipient and goal as defined by Van Valin and LaPolla (1997, p85-86). The selection of either semantic role will alter the sense, and logical structure, of the verb. Pavey (2010, p204-205) explains that a choice of preposition indicates a predicative preposition. This raises the issue of the actual status of the recipient or goal in terms of a functional approach, explicitly Role and Reference Grammar from Van Valin (2005). As detailed by Bauer (1993), the prepositions themselves provide some insight into the conceptualisation of possession in Māori.

Harlow (2007, p24-28) explains that the case-system of Māori has been long disputed as it has both ergative-like and accusative-like constructions and marking. It has now been generally agreed that Māori is accusative with some ergative traces but the ambiguity permeates almost all areas of Māori syntax. For the purposes of this paper TAKE is also examined. TAKE in Māori is realised with two verbal forms, specifically tango and riro. In traditional terminology tango belongs to the transitive verb class. Harlow (2001, p31) explains that riro belongs to the neuter verb class. In linguistic terms, tango exhibits accusative marking and riro exhibits ergative marking. This has implications for the behaviour of these verbs when used in other constructions, such as the marked voice, nominalisations, and the unique Polynesian construction the actor-emphatic. The marking of each construction allows the speaker to choose which thematic roles are given prominence. As a result of this the syntactic and semantic valence may not be the same.

This analysis gives insight into Māori and the argument realisation of these verbs. In doing so, it throws into perspective the case system of Māori. It shows where the accusative and ergative elements of the grammar intersect in argument realisation.

References