

Recent developments in (the theory of) ergativity

BLOCK B

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1. Deriving ergative alignment in Case-morphology

- Two central approaches:
 - I. ERG as *dependent case* (case-competition; Marantz 1991)
 - II. ERG as *inherent Case* (Woolford 1997, 2006, Legate 2008, Aldridge 2004)
- + a third approach (which is, in a sense, a variation on (I)):
 - III. ERG as *structural Case* (Bobaljik and Branigan 2006)
(if we have time)

1.1. Case-competition (Marantz 1991)

1.1.1. Reinterpreting Burzio's Generalization

- (1) Burzio's Generalization, VERSION 1.0 (Burzio 1986)
A verb can assign accusative Case to a direct object only if it has a thematic external argument (i.e., a non-derived subject)

Problems:

- “doubly/multiply unaccusative” verbs:
 - (2) a. [The solution]_i escaped **him** t_i.
b. It strikes **me** as silly that you would leave.
- passives of double-object constructions:
 - (3) a. John gave Mary these books.
b. [Mary]_i was given t_i **these books**.
- (4) Burzio's Generalization, VERSION 1.1
A verb can assign accusative Case to its object only if the subject has nominative Case

Problems:

- (5) Mary believes [John to have misled her].
- (6) Burzio's Generalization, VERSION 1.2
A verb can assign accusative Case to its object only if there is a (Case-marked) subject

Problems:

We want to prevent one and the same DP from satisfying the *subject* requirement, and getting accusative Case by virtue of (6):

- (7) * Him won.

(8) Burzio's Generalization, VERSION 2.0

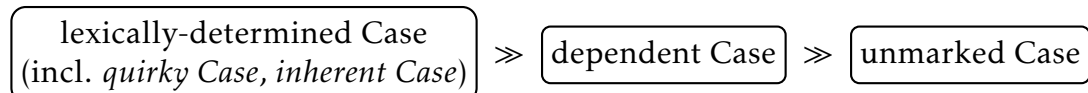
A verb can assign accusative Case to its object only if there is a *distinct* (Case-marked) subject

... where α and β count as *distinct* if α and β are not links in the same movement chain (**possibly also required:** that α and β are not in a dominance relation with one another)

1.1.2. From Burzio to Marantz

- Read (8) again —
 - what it's telling us is really that ACC is a kind of Case-marking that depends on another Case being assigned first
 - could be NOM, as in simple *She met him* sentences
 - but it also could be **another DP that receives ACC** (as in ECM examples, such as (5), above)
- Now let's think back to ergative Case-alignment:
 - is there any parallel to (8) in the ERG/ABS world?
 - i.e., does either ABS or ERG appear to depend on the presence of another (*distinct*) Case-marked DP?

Proposal: (Marantz 1991)

(9) DISJUNCTIVE M(ORPHOLOGICAL)-CASE HIERARCHY

- **dependent Case:**
 assigned to a DP when there is a *distinct* as-of-yet-unmarked DP (i.e., another DP without *lexically-determined Case*) within the local domain of the same V+I complex
RECALL: another instance of the same DP—i.e., a trace/copy of the a given DP—does not count as a *distinct* DP
- the “ergativity parameter”:
 - NOM/ACC languages: *dependent Case* is assigned by V+I **downwards** (to “object”)
 - *dependent Case* ≡ “accusative”
 - ERG/ABS languages: *dependent Case* is assigned by V+I **upwards** (to “subject”)
 - *dependent Case* ≡ “ergative”

Exercise #1

Calculate the case-marking given to each DP in the following sentence—once assuming it is a NOM/ACC language, and once assuming it is ERG/ABS:

(10) [John] believes [Mary] to have met [Kim].

Exercise #2

Calculate the case-marking given to each DP in the following sentence—once assuming it is a NOM/ACC language, and once assuming it is ERG/ABS—and assuming that the embedded verb (*talk*) assigns lexically-determined dative to its complement:

(11) [John] believes [Mary] to have talked [(to) Kim].

1.2. ERG as *Inherent Case* (Woolford 1997, 2006; Legate 2008; Aldridge 2004)

- *External Argument* (EA) is introduced by a dedicated head (v^0)
 - separate from the lexical verb (V^0)
 (following Bowers 1993, Chomsky 1995, Collins 1997, Kratzer 1996)
 - Cross-linguistically, it is the case that given heads can sometimes impose specific, idiosyncratic Case-marking on the argument they introduce
 - For example:¹
 - (i) different prepositions idiosyncratically selecting for different Case-markings on their nominal complements
 - (ii) applicative heads introduce an additional argument into the verb-phrase, and normally mandate that this new argument be marked with *dative* Case
 - If we take the *Split-VP Hypothesis* (a.k.a. the *Little-v Hypothesis*) seriously, then v^0 is **just another lexical item**
- ⇒ it is conceivable for v^0 , in a given language, to be an assigner of such idiosyncratic Case to the argument that it introduces—namely, the *external argument*
- if we call this idiosyncratic Case-marking *ergative*, the result is quite close to an ergative Case-alignment:
 - subjects of unaccusatives will be marked just like objects of transitives (**P**), and contrast with subjects of transitives (**A**)
 - what about unergatives?

2. Intransitives and Ergativity

- At the outset, we defined *argument alignments* in terms of these 3 argument groups:
 - **S**: the SUBJECT of an intransitive verb
 - **A**: the AGENT of a transitive verb
 - **P**: the PATIENT of a transitive verb

¹Woolford (1997, 2006) draws a distinction between cases like (i) and cases like (ii). For her, case that is subject to per-lexical-item idiosyncrasy (e.g., (i)) is *lexical case*, whereas case licensed by v^0 is *inherent case*. It is not clear to me that this is a substantive difference: consider languages such as Chol (Mayan), which has only one preposition—what would the *lexical*-vs.*inherent* case distinction boil down to in such a language (particularly, given that prepositions are often considered problematic to classify along the lexical-functional scale, in the first place)?

- While the definitions of **A** and **P** might be overly narrow (there are transitive verbs whose external argument is an EXPERIENCER, not an AGENT), they are at least non-equivocating

- but S conflates two categories

⇒ instead of (12), the typology we actually have is more like (13):

(12)	S patterns with:	\Rightarrow we call the resulting alignment:
	A	NOM/ACC
	P	ERG/ABS

(13)	unergative subjects pattern with:	unaccusative subjects pattern with:	\Rightarrow we call the resulting alignment:
	A	A	NOM/ACC
	A	P	“Split-S” or “active(-inactive)” [different names for the same thing]
	P	P	ERG/ABS
	P	A	<i>unattested</i>

NOTE: Many languages with the *Split-S/active* pattern are considered to be “ergative languages”; and moreover, the study of this pattern is part and parcel of the study of ergativity as a phenomenon (though notice that the pattern itself is intrinsically no more “ergative” than it is “accusative” or “nominative”).

Holisky (1987):

- (14) a. as q'iul yéł-n-as (Batsbi/Tsova-Tush)
1sg.ERG weight lose-AOR-1sg.ERG
'I lost weight (intentionally).' (e.g., *by going on a diet*)
b. so q'iul yáł-e-s
1sg.ABS weight lose-AOR-1sg.ABS
'I lost weight (unintentionally).' (e.g., *by getting sick*)
- (15) a. txabus zoreš yéx-n-as
last.night very be.drunk-AOR-1sg.ERG
'I got very drunk last night (intentionally).' (e.g., *by hanging out with EGGers*)
b. txabus zoreš yáx-i-s
last.night very be.drunk-AOR-1sg.ABS
'I got very drunk last night (unintentionally).' (e.g., *I didn't know they were EGGers*)

QUESTION: For each of the proposals in §1.1–§1.2, consider—does the proposal predict the existence of “Split-S” languages? Strictly ERG/ABS languages? Both?

*** AN IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGICAL NOTE ***

- Many descriptive grammars (and, unfortunately, quite a few theoretical linguists as well) use the term “unergative” to refer to something else, too
 - namely, predicates that have one “logical argument” or “semantic argument”
- so, for example, the following construction in Basque is sometimes also referred to as “unergative”:

(16) Jon-ek dantza egin d- ϕ -u- ϕ . (Basque)
 Jon-ERG dance do 3.ABS-sg.ABS-have-3sg.ERG
 ‘Jon danced.’

- we might have *semantic/thematic* reasons to view *dantza* (‘dance’) as the “main predicate” in (16)
 - and if *dantza* (‘dance’) is indeed a predicate, it is clear that it takes exactly one argument (namely, *Jon*)

► but as far as its **syntax** is concerned, (16) is no more *intransitive* than (17):

(17) John likes himself.

- both (16) and (17) can be viewed as having only one open “argument slot”
 - if we conceive of the predicates as ‘dance’ and ‘self-like’, respectively
- their syntax, however, is unequivocally *transitive*
 - in particular, in (16), the main verb—syntactically—is the light-verb *egin* (‘do’)
 - which takes two arguments: *dantza* (‘dance’) and *Jon*

NOTE: It is by now well-established that the complement of the light-verb in (16) is not—or does not have to be—*incorporated*, in the sense of Baker (1988). For arguments to this effect, see Ortiz de Urbina (1989), Laka (1993), and Etxepare (2003).²

⇒ it is entirely misleading—and one might say, flat out *wrong*—to call (16) an “unergative”

- In contrast — (18), below, is truly an *unergative*:

(18) Jon-ek dantzatu d- ϕ -u- ϕ .
 Jon-ERG dance-PRT 3.ABS-sg.ABS-have-3sg.ERG
 ‘Jon danced.’

- while it has historically been taken for granted that examples like (18) contain an *implicit object*, I have recently demonstrated (Preminger 2009, in prep.) that as far as the syntactic component is concerned, examples like (18) do not involve an implicit object (at least not obligatorily)

²Oyharçabal (2007) shows that in central and eastern dialects of Basque, light-verb constructions such as (16) admit an incorporation structure, along side a full-fledged transitive syntax. This does not, of course, affect the impropriety of using the term “unergative” to refer to instances of the light-verb construction in which the clause maintains its transitive syntax—which are available for speakers of central and eastern dialects as well, and are apparently the only option for speakers of western dialects.

- Interestingly, once we clean up the terminology, it turns out that there are languages that lack actual *unergatives* altogether
 - Chol (Mayan) is one such language:

(19) Tyi a-cha'l-e k'ay (Chol)
 PRFV SETA2-do-DTV song
 'You sang.' [Coon 2010:56]

- the construction in (19) mirrors the Basque (16):
 - while we might have reason to view *k'ay* ('song') as the main *symantic/thematic* predicate, the construction in (19) is plainly *transitive*, as far as its syntax is concerned
 - the main verb is *cha'l* ('do'), which takes two arguments (*k'ay* 'song', and a 2nd-person cliticized pronominal)
- However, Chol lacks anything along the lines of the Basque (18)
 - all intransitives in Chol are *unaccusative*, along the lines of (20):

(20) Tyi k'oty-i-yety
 PRFV arrive.there-ITV-SETB2
 'You arrived there.' [Coon 2010:56]

⇒ Chol might be "Split-S" or strictly ERG/ABS—we just can't tell which

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