
Split Ergativity (is not about ergativity)

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1 Introduction

- About 25% of the world's languages show ergative patterns (Dixon 1979, 1994), and ergativity is geographically widespread, found in a number of language families across the world (Basque, Tibeto-Burman, Polynesian, Indo-Iranian, Mayan, Eskimo-Aleut, Nilotic, Caucasian, Pama-Nyungan, Arawak, Tupí Guaraní. . .)

- While many languages are consistent in showing a nominative-accusative pattern, the reverse is not true:

“[N]o ergative language is fully consistent in carrying through the ergative principle throughout its entire morphology, syntax, and lexicon: **all languages that exhibit ergative patterning in their commonest case-marking system also exhibit some accusative pattern somewhere in the rest of their grammar**” (Moravcsik 1978, 237)

- It is not uncommon for a *morphologically* ergative language to still behave syntactically in a nominative-accusative fashion (i.e. syntactic operations trigger both **A** and **S** subjects)
- We also find languages where a division is found within the same phenomenon in different domains
 - For example, in some portion of the grammar case marking will follow an ergative pattern, in another it will follow a nominative-accusative pattern
 - This is commonly referred to as “**split ergativity**”, the focus of this handout

Questions:

- ◊ What triggers split ergativity?

- ◊ Why do we find consistently nominative-accusative languages but few or no consistently ergative languages?

Proposal:

- The different factors that trigger split ergativity boil down to a **reduction in transitivity**
 - Subjects of split systems do not receive ergative marking because they are no longer transitive subjects
- These factors are present in *all* languages; they are obscured in nominative-accusative systems because transitive and intransitive subjects (by definition) pattern alike

Take home message:

- The large number of splits in ergative systems *does not* reflect any underlying instability in ergativity (contra van de Visser 2006)
- Languages follow either a consistently ergative or consistently accusative pattern (see e.g. Laka 2006 on Basque); no special rules are needed to derive splits

2 Split ergativity

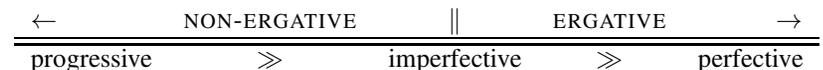
Splits are typically triggered by one of two main factors in (1)

- (1) TYPES OF SPLIT ERGATIVITY (DIXON 1994)
 1. Aspect splits
 2. NP splits

What both of these splits have in common is that the splits follow a universal directionality:

- In aspect splits, the ergative pattern is always retained in the *perfective* aspect;

- (2) DIRECTIONALITY OF ASPECTUAL SPLITS



- In NP splits, the ergative pattern is always retained with nominals *lower* on a universal salience scale

(3) SILVERSTEIN’S HIERARCHY (SILVERSTEIN 1976)

| Pronouns: | Nouns: | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------|
| 1st, 2nd | 3rd | kinship, proper | human | animate | inanimate |
| —————non-ergative marking—————> | | | <—————ergative marking————— | | |

DeLancey (1981, 630):

“...general linguistic theory must account for the association of ergative morphology with, on the one hand, perfective aspect, and, on the other, lower position of the agent on the [prominence hierarchy]; and for the association of accusative morphology with imperfective aspect and high [prominence] agents.”

| | ergative-patterning | split-patterning |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| (4) aspect-split | perfective | non-perfective |
| NP-split | low prominence | high prominence |

2.1 Functionalist accounts

Functionalist work accounts for the universal directionality of splits in terms of notions of **naturalness** and **markedness** (Silverstein 1976; Dixon 1979; DeLancey 1981)

• **Person splits:**

- Highly salient NPs are more “natural” subjects than NPs low on the salience hierarchy (e.g. Dixon 1979)
- Recall that in an ergative system, ergativity is frequently marked, absolutive is unmarked
- ⇨ Ergative marking marks the low-salient subjects to flag this unnatural configuration

- (5) a. “NATURAL”
I saw the man.
b. MARKED
[The rock]_{ERG} hit the man.

• **Aspect splits:**

- The “attention flow” of an event most naturally proceeds from the subject at the beginning of an event to the object at the end of an event
- DeLancey proposes that there is an association between *perfective aspect* and the *termination* of an event, and hence “terminal viewpoint”
- ⇨ Since attention flow proceeds *naturally* from the beginning of an event, in the perfective the **A** subject must be marked to indicate that it is, nonetheless, the starting point

- (6) a. “NATURAL”
☺ → Erin is eating the apple.
b. MARKED
[Erin]_{ERG} ate the apple. ← ☺

• **Questions:**

- What does it mean for something to be a more “natural” subject? Are first persons really more natural subjects than third persons? see e.g. Wierzbicka 1981; Silverstein 1981
- “Counter-universal” splits, discussed below

3 Aspect splits

Splits are commonly described as a system switching from an ergative pattern to a nominative-accusative pattern, as in (7):

(7) ERGATIVE TO ACCUSATIVE

| <i>ergative</i> | | | <i>“split”</i> | |
|------------------------|------------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| A_{ERG} | P_{ABS} | ➡ | A_{NOM} | P_{ACC} |
| | S_{ABS} | | | S_{NOM} |

This is actually *not* what we find...

- Rather, an ergative system will split into one of several non-ergative patterns in non-perfective aspects
- These patterns are consistent and provide clues to the trigger of the splits, which fall into two main types

1. added structure in the non-perfective aspects
 2. demotion of objects in the non-perfective aspects
-

3.1 Added structure

Basque’s ergative pattern is shown in (8):

- (8) BASQUE PERFECTIVE
- a. [A Ehiztari-**ak**] [P otso-**a**] harrapatu du.
 hunter-DET.ERG wolf-DET.ABS caught AUX(have)
 ‘The hunter has caught the wolf.’
 - b. [S Otso-**a**] etorri da.
 wolf-DET.ABS arrived AUX(be)
 ‘The wolf has arrived.’

(Laka 1996)

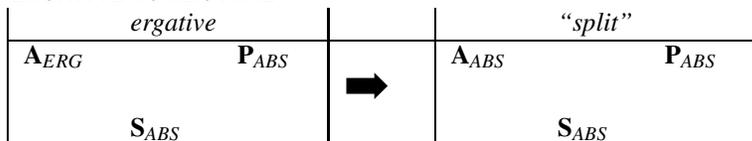
A split is seen in the progressive:

- (9) BASQUE PROGRESSIVE
- a. [A emakume-**a**] [P ogi-**a**] ja-te-n ari da.
 woman-ART.ABS bread-ART.ABS eat-NML-LOC PROG AUX(be)
 ‘The woman is eating the bread.’
 - b. [S emakume-**a**] dantza-n ari da.
 woman-ART.ABS dance-LOC PROG AUX(be)
 ‘The woman is dancing.’

(Laka 1996)

- The split in the Basque progressive does *not* involve the language switching from an ergative-absolutive to a *nominative-accusative* pattern
 - While it is the case that both subjects pattern alike in (9), the pattern seen there is more accurately described as “neutral”—all core arguments are in the unmarked absolutive form
 - often called a “bi-absolutive” pattern

(10) ERGATIVE TO NEUTRAL



This same pattern is seen in Nakh-Daghestanian languages like Tsez:

- (11) TSEZ (NAKH-DAGHESTANIAN)
- a. REGULAR TRANSITIVE
 [A uʒ-**ā**] [P čorpa_i] b-iš-xo_i
 boy(I)-ERG soup.III(ABS) III-eat-PRES
 ‘The boy is eating soup.’
 - b. BI-ABSOLUTIVE TRANSITIVE
 [A uʒi_i] [P čorpa] b-iš-xosi Ø-ič-āsi_i yoʃ
 boy.I.ABS soup.III(ABS) III-eat-PTCP I-stay-PTCP be.PRES
 ‘The boy is eating soup.’ (Maria Polinsky, p.c.)

... and in Gujarati (Indo-Iranian)...

- (12) GUJARATI (INDO-IRANIAN)
- a. PAST PERFECTIVE
 [A ramesh-**e**] [P pen_i] khərid-y-_i.
 Ramesh.MASC-ERG pen.FEM(ABS) buy-PRFV-FEM
 ‘Ramesh bought the pen.’
 - b. PAST IMPERFECTIVE
 [A ramesh_i] [P pen] khərid-t-o
 Ramesh.MASC(ABS) pen.FEM(ABS) buy-IMPF-MASC
 hə-t-o_i.
 AUX-IMPF-MASC
 ‘Ramesh was buying the pen.’ (Mistry 1976, in DeLancey 1981)

A striking pattern emerges in all three of these unrelated languages

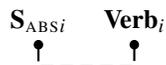
- In the **ergative-patterning** transitives, represented in (13a)...
 - The transitive subject, **A**, receives a special ergative marking, while the **P** argument is in the unmarked absolutive
 - The verb stem agrees with the absolutive **P** argument
- In the **split-patterning transitives**, schematized in (14a), we find three main differences:
 1. the **A** argument no longer receives ergative, but is now also in the unmarked absolutive
 2. we find a more complex *verb + auxiliary* construction;
 3. the agreement pattern changes. In Basque and Indo-Aryan, the **P** no longer triggers any agreement, while in Tsez the lexical verb (*eat* in (11b)) agrees with **P** and the auxiliary agrees with **A**

(13) ERGATIVE-PATTERNING

a. TRANSITIVE



b. INTRANSITIVE

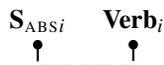


(14) SPLIT-PATTERNING

a. TRANSITIVE



b. INTRANSITIVE



- Similar analyses can be extended to Nakh-Daghestanian and Indo-Iranian splits; see Coon 2010a, 2013 and references there

➡ Added structure in non-perfective aspects is not limited to ergative languages:

(16) a. FRENCH

Zazie est *en train de* jouer.
Zazie is in along of play
'Zazie is playing.'

b. DUTCH

Ik ben het huis *aan* het bouwen.
I am the house at the build
'I am building the house.' (Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria 2000, 178)

c. WELSH

Mae Rhiannon *yn* cysgu.
is Rhiannon in sleep
'Rhiannon is sleeping.'

d. MIDDLE ENGLISH

He is *on* hunting.

(Laka 2006, 188)

e. GERMAN (NONSTANDARD)

Ich bin *am* Buch lesen.
I am on book reading
'I'm reading the book.'

What's going on here?

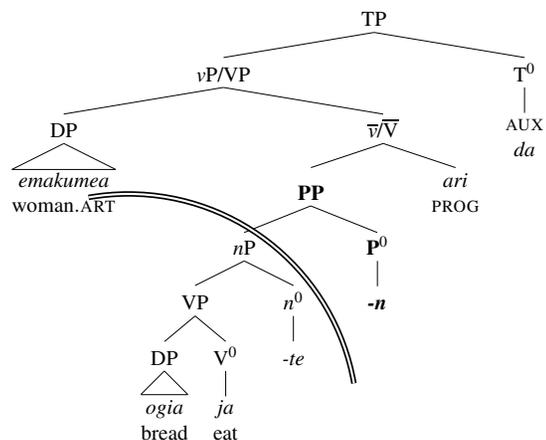
- The "split" patterns involve added structure
- The subjects of these "split" forms are subjects of *intransitive auxiliaries*; the auxiliaries embed the lexical/contentful verbs
- Intransitive subjects do not take ergative marking, so we get the appearance of a split

For Basque, Laka (2006) argues for a structure like the one in (15b):

(15) BASQUE NEUTRAL "SPLIT"

- a. emakume-a [ogi-a ja-te-n] ari da.
woman-ART.ABS bread-ART.ABS eat-NML-LOC PROG AUX(be)
'The woman is eating the bread.'
~ 'The woman is at eating bread.'

b.



- **What is special about the nominative-accusative languages?:** Both transitive and intransitive subjects pattern alike, so we don't see any evidence for the added structure when we look at the subject marking (i.e. nothing is actually so special)

(17) ENGLISH

- a. I_{NOM} read the book.
b. I_{NOM} am [PP at book reading].

(18) IMAGINARY "ERGATIVE ENGLISH"

- a. I_{ERG} read the book.
b. I_{ABS} am [PP at book reading].

3.2 Reduced transitivity

Above languages switched from ergative to neutral patterns. In Georgian (Kartvelian) we see something different:

(19) GEORGIAN AORIST

- a. [A Sṭudent-**ma**] [P çeril-**i**] daçera.
student-ERG letter-ABS wrote
'The student wrote the letter.'
- b. [P Sṭudent-**i**] mivida.
student-ABS went
'The student went.'

(20) GEORGIAN NON-AORIST

- a. [A Sṭudent-**i**] [P çeril-**s**] çers.
student-ABS letter-DAT writes
'The student writes the letter.'
- b. [S Sṭudent-**i**] midis.
student-ABS goes
'The student goes.'

(Comrie 1978, 351)

The same type of pattern is found in Samoan (Polynesian):

(21) a. PERFECTIVE

na va'ai-a [A e le tama] [P le i'a]
PST look.at-PRFV ERG the boy the fish
'The boy spotted the fish.'

b. IMPERFECTIVE

na va'ai [A le tama] [P i le i'a]
PST look.at the boy OBL the fish
'The boy looked at the fish.'

(Milner 1973)

... and in Warrungu (Pama-Nyungan, Australia)

(22) WARRUNGU

- a. [A pama-**ngku**] [P yuri] nyaka-n.
man-ERG kangaroo(ABS) see-NONFUT
'A man saw a kangaroo.'

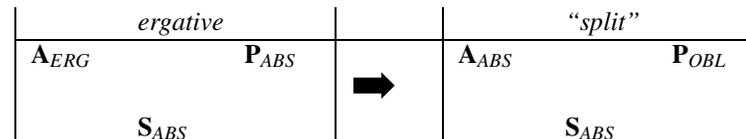
- b. [A pama] [P yuri-**wu**] naka-kali-n.
man(ABS) kangaroo-DAT see-kali-NONFUT
'A man was (or is) looking for a kangaroo.'

(Tsunoda 1981, 417)

All of these languages split to an ABS-OBL pattern; again this pattern can be described as “nominative-accusative” only insofar as both subjects pattern alike...

- ...but the marking on transitive objects is found on other obliques (e.g. locatives) in the languages

(23) ERGATIVE TO ABS-OBL



The Georgian, Samoan, and Warrungu case marking patterns look formally similar to the pattern in Adyghe (NW Caucasian) in (24), discussed in Tsunoda 1981 (citing Anderson 1976)

- Note, however, that here the difference between (24a) and (24b) is not one in aspect, but rather in the choice of **lexical verb**: *kill* follows an ergative pattern, while *stab* follows the ABS-OBL pattern

(24) ADYGHE

- a. [A bojetsi-**m**] qamemk'e [P piji-**r**] iwik'is
warrior-ERG dagger-INST enemy-ABS killed
'The warrior killed the enemy with his dagger.'
- b. [A bojetsi-**r**] qamemk'e [P piji-**m**] jcpidzır
warrior-ABS dagger-INST enemy-OBL stabbed
'The warrior stabbed the enemy with his dagger.' (Tsunoda 1981, 415)

Tsunoda (1981): an “Effectiveness Condition” (EF-CON), which governs the “effectiveness” of transitive constructions can account for both aspectual splits, like those in (20)–(22) and verb-type splits as in (24)

- Aspectual and verb-type splits share common properties: both a failure to meet some portion of the EF-CON criteria on the right side in (25)
- ➔ Essentially, both are lacking some property associated with *canonical transitivity*

(25) EFFECTIVENESS CONDITION (TSUNODA 1981, 393)

| IS MET: ...ergative | IS NOT MET: ...non-ergative/split |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| a. action | state |
| b. impingement on P | non-impingement on P |
| c. P attained | P not attained |
| d. P totally affected | P partially affected |
| e. completed | uncompleted, or in progress |
| f. punctual | durative |
| g. telic | atelic |
| h. resultative | non-resultative |
| i. specific or single activity/situation | customary/general/habitual activity/situation |
| j. P definite/specific/referential | P indefinite/non-specific/non-referential |
| ... | ... |

Again this is not limited to ergative languages—take English “conative alternations”, as in in (26):

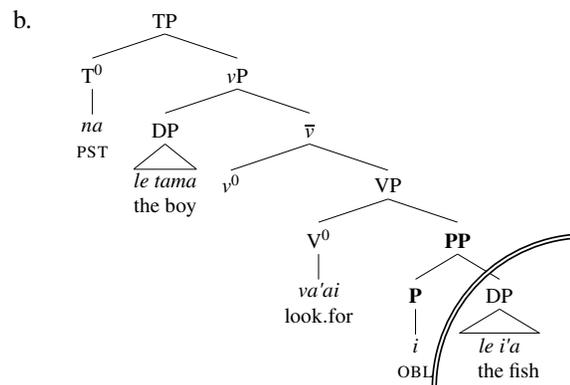
- (26) a. Sam shot [**p** the bear].
 b. Sam shot [**p** at the bear].

- See for example Levin 1993 and Borer 2005 on conative alternations
- Whatever analysis accounts for alternations like those in (26) can also account for the “split ergative” patterns seen in this section—namely, the object is demoted, resulting in an *intransitive* subject

Again the absence of ergative marking on the subject of these split constructions simply reflects the fact that the **A** argument *is no longer a transitive subject*

(27) SAMOAN ABS-OBL “SPLIT”

- a. IMPERFECTIVE
 na va'ai [A le tama] [P i le i'a]
 PST look.at the boy OBL the fish
 ‘The boy looked at the fish.’



Recapping so far...

- In Basque, Tsez, and Gujarati, the **A** argument was the subject of an intransitive aspectual auxiliary selecting for a PP;
 - In Samoan, Warrungu, and Georgian the main lexical verb selects for a PP (rather than a DP) complement
- ➡ Both result in reduced transitivity and hence a non-ergative subject

- (28) MORE STRUCTURE
 a. I_A read the book
 b. I_S am [at reading **the book**_{abs}]
- (29) DEMOTED OBJECT
 a. I_A ate the apple
 b. I_S ate [at **the apple**_{obl}]

3.3 Extended-ergative

- Aspectual splits are found in a number of languages of the Mayan family: Yucatec (Bricker 1981), Ch'ol (Vázquez Álvarez 2002; Coon 2010a), Q'anjob'al (Mateo Toledo 2003; Mateo Pedro 2009); Chuj (Coon and Carolan 2017); see Larsen and Norman 1979, Dayley 1981, Coon 2016 for overviews

- o In all of these languages, the “split” follows the same type of pattern seen in Ch’ol:

(30) CH’OL PERFECTIVE

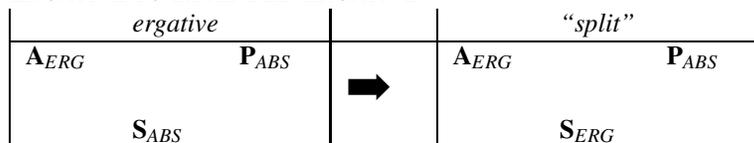
- a. Tyi i-k’el-e-yety.
PRFV 3ERG-see-TV-2ABS
‘She saw you.’
- b. Tyi wäy-i-yety.
PRFV sleep-ITV-2ABS
‘You slept.’

(31) CH’OL IMPERFECTIVE

- a. Choñkol i-k’el-ety.
PROG 3ERG-watch-2ABS
‘She’s looking at you.’
- b. Choñkol i-wäy-el.
PROG 3ERG-sleep-NML
‘She’s sleeping.’

- Perfective clauses show an ergative-absolutive pattern;
- In non-perfective (imperfective and progressive) aspects, we find a split:
 - o Unlike Basque, Indo-Iranian, and Nakh-Daghestanian, however, the marking on transitives like (31) remains identical;
 - o It is the *intransitive* marker that changes: (30b) vs. (31b)
- This is called an “extended ergative” pattern (Dixon 1994): the marking normally reserved for transitive subjects (*ergative*) is *extended* to mark intransitive subjects

(32) ERGATIVE TO EXTENDED-ERGATIVE



- Again, as above, differences between the ergative (30) and “split” (31) patterns is more than just person marking; it is structural
 - o In the perfective, the root appears with a verbal “status suffix”, absent in the non-perfective (split) forms;
 - o Here the transitive appears with no suffix, and the intransitive is suffixed with *-el*, a common *nominalizing* suffix across the Mayan family (see e.g. Bricker 1981)

➔ The split patterning in the Mayan family can be accounted for under an analysis in which **non-perfective aspect markers are predicates** embedding a *nominal or nominalized* form (Larsen and Norman 1979; Bricker 1981; Coon 2010b; Mateo Pedro 2009)

- o The unexpected “ergative” marker on the intransitive **S** argument is in fact marking a grammatical possessor—
- o Ergative and possessive prefixes are identical in Mayan (“Set A”)

(33) Choñkol-Ø_i [_{NP} i-wäy-el **aj-Maria**]_i.
PROG-3ABS 3POSS-sleep-NML DET-Maria
‘Maria is sleeping.’ (~ ‘Maria’s sleeping is happening.’)

(34) Buch-ul-Ø_i [_{NP} i-mama **aj-Maria**]_i
seated-POS-3ABS 3POSS-mother DET-Maria
‘Maria’s mother is seated.’

- ➔ Just as in the *absolutive-to-neutral* splits above, here the crucial difference between split and non-split aspects is the use of **an aspectual predicate in the non-perfective forms**
 - o In (34a) the progressive predicate embeds a nominal form; since third person absolutive is null, and nominalized forms are always third person, we see no overt reflex of the agreement
- In (35a) we see that *choñkol* can also combine with simple event-denoting nouns like *ja`al* ‘rain’, and in (35b) we find evidence that *choñkol* can take a thematic subject

(35) CHOÑKOL IS A VERB

- a. Choñkol ja`al.
PROG rain
‘It’s raining.’
- b. Choñkol-oñ tyi k`ay.
PROG-1ABS PREP song
‘I’m singing.’ (~ ‘I am at/engaged in song.’)

- ➔ Just as above, the “split” is not a split in how grammatical relations are marked:
 - o Throughout the language **S** and **P** are marked absolutive;
 - o **A** arguments and possessors are marked ergative

3.4 Summary

- In Basque, Tsez, Gujarati, and Ch’ol **non-perfective aspects are expressed by predicates**

- (36) a. Basque-like: ~ *I am at [book-reading]*
 b. Ch'ol-like: ~ *[My book-reading] is happening*

- In both *ergative-to-neutral* and *ergative-to-extended-ergative* splits, the apparent split is then reduced to the fact that **the notional A argument is no longer the subject of a transitive verb**
- Cross-linguistic similarity between progressive/imperfective forms on the one hand, and locatives on the other—also discussed for Basque in [Laka 2006](#)—compare (35b) with (37)

- (37) Añ-oñ tyi bij.
 LOC-1ABS PREP path
 ‘I’m in the path.’

- ▶ The formal similarity found cross-linguistically between progressive and imperfective aspects, on the one hand, and locative expressions on the other, receives a natural account:
 - These aspects focus on the *internal structure* of the event, or represent the event “viewed from within”
 - Just as a physical entity is located in space with a locative expression like (37), an aspectual viewpoint is located *in* a temporal event with the imperfective/progressive aspects (e.g. [Bybee et al. 1994](#), [Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria 2000](#))

3.5 Structure and “counter-universal” splits

Evidence in favour of a structural approach may come from languages of the Amazon, as described in [Gildea and de Castro Alves 2010](#)—in particular their description of “counter-universal” splits

- These authors examine what they call *nominative-absolutive* constructions in five different languages
- For example, in the Canela (Jê) NOM-ABS pattern, both **A** and **S** arguments (=nominatives) are marked by a pronominal element, *wa* in (38)
- However, **S** and **A** (=absolutives, bold-faced) both trigger agreement marking on the verb

- (38) CANELA (Jê)
 a. wa ha **i-wrik** narɛ
 1 IRR 1-descend.NF NEG
 ‘I will not descend.’

- b. wa ha **iʔ-pir** na
 1 IRR 3-grab.NF NEG
 ‘I will not grab it (e.g., the knife).’ ([Castro Alves 2004](#))

If the absolutive agreement portion of this construction is taken to represent an “ergative” pattern, the nominative-absolutive constructions are not distributed as one would expect...

- “It is remarkable that the nominative-absolutive construction is on the wrong side of every single one of the semantic values expected to condition non-ergative alignment” ([Gildea and de Castro Alves 2010](#), 191)
- A functional story is going to encounter problems accounting for this

A *structural analysis* allows us to better handle the facts

- ▶ Crucially, the NOM-ABS patterns are **always conditioned by auxiliaries and the inflecting part of the lexical verb stem behaves as a subordinate clause:**

“at least in the five languages surveyed here, the absolutive pattern is not created in main clauses as a part of a semantically driven diachronic process—it is merely the default pattern inherited from subordinate clauses” ([Gildea and de Castro Alves 2010](#), 195).

- The authors suggest that these forms are in fact subordinate clauses; the auxiliary takes the nominative-marked pronoun as its subject, and the embedded clause is nominalized and appears as the complement
- See [Salanova 2009](#) on related Mëbengokre

As [Gildea and de Castro Alves \(2010\)](#) express—a functionalist account has a difficult time accounting for the range of constructions which show the nominative-absolutive pattern

- If, on the other hand, splits are simply a reflection of differences in structure, these so-called “counter-universal” splits are exactly what we expect
- While it may be the case that the *progressive* aspect is frequently expressed as a complex (e.g. auxiliary) construction, there is nothing which would prohibit this from occurring in a “completive” aspect, so long as the completive involved a matrix auxiliary with a meaning like ‘finish’

- ▶ ... which is exactly what we find in the “counter-universal” splits in Canela

4 Person splits (Coon and Preminger 2017)

Person splits are conditioned by the properties of the **A**, **P**, and **S** arguments themselves

- While language vary as to whether and where they make these splits, person splits are generally described as following a universal pattern:
 - Arguments ranked lower on a “prominence hierarchy” follow an ergative-absolutive pattern;
 - those ranked higher follow a nominative-accusative pattern
- Dixon’s version of the prominence scale, based on Silverstein, is given in (39)

(39) PROMINENCE Hierarchy (DIXON 1994, 85)

| | | | | <i>common nouns</i> | |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1st person pronouns | 2nd person pronouns | demonstratives 3rd person pronouns | proper nouns | human | animate >> inanimate |
| ←—————more likely to be A than P—————→ | | | | | |

Dyirbal (Pama-Nyungan, Australia) has one of the most widely-discussed person splits

- The case marking on both **A** and **P** varies with their respective status on the hierarchy, as shown in (40)
 - **A** receives special (*ergative*) marking only when it is a third person pronoun or a common noun
 - **P** receives special marking (*accusative*) only when it is a first or second person pronoun
 - Note that **S** is consistently unmarked

(40) DYIRBAL (DIXON 1994, 86)

| | 1/2 pronouns | 3 pronouns | other nouns |
|----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| A | -Ø | - <i>ɲgu</i> | - <i>ɲgu</i> |
| S | -Ø | -Ø | -Ø |
| P | - <i>na</i> | -Ø | -Ø |

In (41) we find all third person arguments and the ergative-absolutive pattern emerges:

- (41) DYIRBAL
- [**P** Numa] [**A** yabu-**ɲgu**] bura-n
father.ABS mother-ERG see-NONFUT
‘Mother saw father.’
 - [**S** yabu] banaga-n^yu
mother.ABS return-NONFUT
‘Mother returned.’

In (42), all arguments are now local first or second persons and a nominative-accusative pattern emerges:

- (42) a. [**A** Nana] [**P** n^yurra-**na**] bura-n
we.NOM you.PL-ACC see-NONFUT
‘We saw you_{pl}.’
- b. [**S** Nana] banaga-n^yu
we.NOM return-NONFUT
‘We returned.’ (Dixon 1994, 161)

- What happens when we mix local and non-local nominals?
- Dyirbal has what Silverstein (1976) called a “bivalent” split: the marking of subjects and the marking of objects is calculated independently:

- (43) [**P** ɲana-**na**] [**A** ɲuma-**ɲgu**] bura-n
we-ACC father-ERG see-NONFUT
‘Father saw us.’ (Dixon 1994, 130)

► If the functionalist scale story is on the right track, we expect to find languages which make splits in different points along (39), e.g. subjects and objects showing...

- a split between 1st and 2nd person pronouns
- or between animate and inanimate nouns
- However, as other authors have noted, this prediction is not borne out (Woolford 2001; Cocchi 1999)...

Instead we find a picture more like this... (stay tuned for Dyirbal)

(44) BINARY SPLIT GENERALIZATION

In a split system...

- a. Ergative marking of **A** is based on the presence or absence of 1/2 person features (“split ergativity”)
- b. Accusative marking of **P** is governed by definiteness, specificity, and animacy (“differential object marking”)

4.1 The data

In some languages, the split is only apparent on subjects—the split always appears to be about local 1/2 vs. other subjects

- In Halkomelem (Salish) third person subjects trigger an ergative agreement pattern, but first and second person subjects follow a non-ergative pattern
- A similar 1/2 vs. 3 pattern is seen in Mocho’ (Mayan) (Larsen and Norman 1979)

In other languages, both subjects and objects show split patterns, but the subject split is 1/2 vs. 3, while objects track *definiteness, specificity, or animacy*

- This is true in Kham (Tibeto-Burman): only third person subjects are marked ergative:

(45) KHAM (TIBETO-BURMAN)

- a. [A no-ye] [P la:] səih-ke-o
 he-ERG leopard.ABS kill-PRFV-3
 ‘He killed a leopard.’
- b. [A ŋa:] [P la:] ŋa-səih-ke
 I leopard.ABS 1-kill-PRFV
 ‘I killed a leopard.’

(Watters 2002, 66)

- Objects are marked with *-lai* when they are definite:

- (46) [A gē:h-ye] [P ŋa-lai] duhp-na-ke-o
 ox-ERG I-OBJ butt-1-PRFV-3
 ‘The ox butted me.’

(Watters 2002, 68)

- This is summarized in (47)—including pronouns and definite third person nouns:

(47) KHAM (WATTERS 2002)

| | 1/2 pronouns | 3 pronouns & definite nouns | indefinite nouns |
|----------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| A | -Ø | -(y)e | -(y)e |
| S | -Ø | -Ø | -Ø |
| P | -lai | -lai | -Ø |

- ▶ The same pattern—in which subjects split along 1/2 vs. 3, but objects split along definiteness—is seen in Balochi (NW Iranian, Farrell 1995) and Cashinawa (Panoan, Dixon 1994)

Wait... what about Dyirbal?

- Though the split is commonly described as above, repeated in (48), this is not the complete picture: **Dyirbal simply lacks third person pronouns**

(48) DYIRBAL (DIXON 1994, 86)

| | 1/2 pronouns | 3 pronouns | other nouns |
|----------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| A | -Ø | -ŋg# | -ŋgu |
| S | -Ø | -Ø | -Ø |
| P | -na | -Ø | -Ø |

- The split in object marking can trivially be described as one that is about person—i.e. only first and second person pronouns are marked—but it would be equally fair to say that the split is just as in Catalan; see Dixon 1972, 43

4.2 Proposal

4.2.1 Part I: Objects

Objects participate in Differential Object Marking—this is *not* about ergativity

(49) HEBREW

- a. Ha-seret her’a ’et-ha-milxama.
 the-movie showed ACC-the-war
 ‘The movie showed the war.’
- b. Ha-seret her’a (*’et-) milxama.
 the-movie showed ACC- war
 ‘The movie showed a war.’

(Givón 1978 in Aissen 2003)

(50) FEATURES OF DOM (FROM AISSEN 2003, 450)

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Kalkatungu (Pama-Nyungan) | no objects case-marked |
| Catalan (Romance) | only pronouns case-marked |
| Pitjantjatjara (Pama-Nyungan) | only pronouns and proper names case-marked |
| Hebrew (Semitic) | only pronouns, proper names, and definite objects |
| Turkish (Turkic) | all objects except non-specifics |
| Japanese | all objects case marked |

► None of the attested DOM patterns make reference to person features

- Here we don't account for the formal or functional mechanisms underlying DOM (on this see Diesing 1992; Torrego 1998; Aissen 2003; Merchant 2006; Kalin 2018, and others), but simply emphasize that...
 - The differential marking of objects is independent of the ergative vs. non-ergative marking of subjects (i.e. Silverstein's *binary split*)
 - NP-based "split-ergativity" (i.e. the absence of ergative marking on certain A arguments) tracks different features from those relevant to DOM

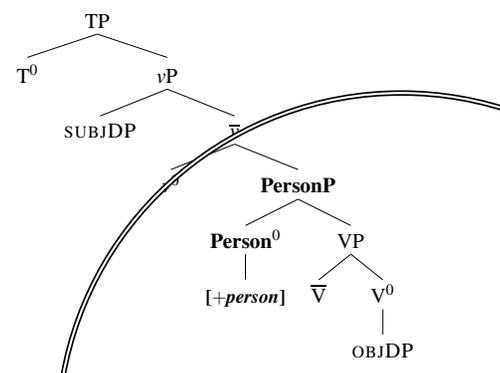
4.2.2 Part II: Subjects

- In the domain of aspect: splits are the result of some *clausal bifurcation*, which severs the transitive subject from the object, resulting in a subject that is effectively *intransitive*
- If this type of clausal bifurcation can also account for the lack of ergative morphology on first and second person A arguments, the question we must then ask is: **What is it about 1st and 2nd person (local) arguments, that would entail additional structure?**

One option: Recent work argues that a "local" (1/2 person) DP must be licensed by a special functional projection in the clause (Béjar and Rezac 2003; Merchant 2006)

- Suppose this functional projection—call it *PersonP*—in some languages disrupts the case calculus, similar to the Basque progressive
- The result would be that in a language that was normally ergative, the presence of a *1st/2nd-person* pronoun would result in a "shift" out of the normal ergative pattern in exactly the same way outlined for aspectual splits above

(51)



4.2.3 Auxiliary selection

If this is right, we expect to see evidence of this bifurcation both in ergative and non-ergative systems

- Coon and Preminger (2012) propose that this system can be used to account for the auxiliary selection splits found in certain Romance dialects (D'Alessandro and Roberts 2010)
- In these auxiliary splits, *have* is used with 3rd person subjects, while *be* is used with 1st/2nd person subjects, as shown for Abruzzese in (52)

(52) ABRUZZESE

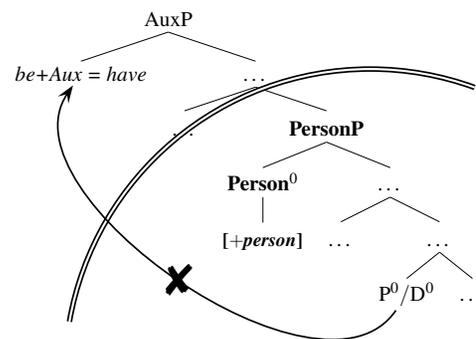
- Ji **so'** magnate.
I am eaten.SG
'I have eaten.'
- Esse **a** magnate.
she has eaten
'She has eaten.'

(D'Alessandro and Roberts 2010, 54–55)

We adopt the proposal that *have* comes about as the result of *synthesis* or *incorporation* of another particle in the clause into *be* (Benveniste 1966; Freeze 1992; Kayne 1993)

- Processes such as *incorporation* are disrupted by the presence of a functional projection in between the source and target position (e.g. NPs incorporate, DPs don't)
- The presence of a boundary-inducing PersonP projection in the clause will disrupt incorporation of the relevant element into *be*

(53)



Related recent work:

- Legate (2014): person-based split ergativity is handled in the morphology
- Deal (2016): person-based split ergativity in Nez Perce is syntactic and based on person-sensitive structural differences (Bianchi 2006; Merchant 2006)

5 Conclusion

- There is nothing about “split ergativity” which requires any kind of special mechanism of agreement or case assignment (cf. Ura 2006)
 - Namely, some kind of division in the clause renders an otherwise transitive subject effectively an *intransitive subject*
 - Since intransitive subjects don’t take ergative marking, the absence of ergative here is unsurprising
- The factors which trigger splits are not limited to ergative systems

- (54)
1. Non-perfective aspects are built on complex constructions; the object is in an embedded clause (§3)
 - Ergative: *Basque, Tsez, Mayan*
 - Non-ergative: *Dutch, French, Welsh*
 2. First and second person subjects must be licensed by a phrase, *PersonP*, which serves as a boundary for case assignment (§4)
 - Ergative: *Dyirbal, Kham, Cashinawa*
 - Non-ergative: *Abruzzese, French*

This contributes to work which suggests that there is no ergative “macro-parameter”, which would group together ergativity and split ergativity under a single setting

- There is nothing “marked” about ergativity (cf. van de Visser 2006)

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