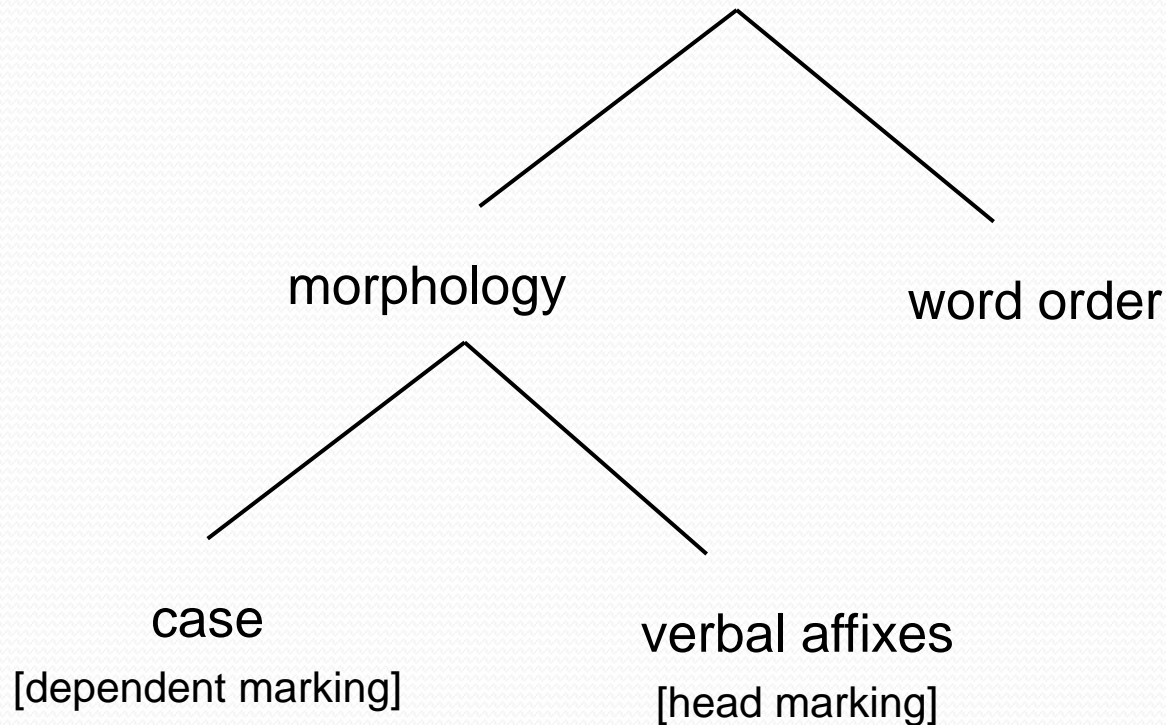


Ergativity

Holger Diessel
University of Jena

holger.diessel@uni-jena.de
<http://www.holger-diessel.de/>

Grammatical relations



Case marking

German

- (1) **Der** Mann schläft.
- (2) **Der** Mann sieht **den** Vogel.

English

- (1) The man is sleeping.
- (2) The man is watching the bird.

Dyirbal

(1) ɲuma banaga-ɲu
father return-NONFUT
'Father returned.'

(2) yabu banaga-ɲu
mother return-NONFUT
'Mother returned.'

(3) ɲuma yabu-**ɲgu** bura-n
father mother-CASE see-NONFUT
'Mother saw father.'

(4) yabu ɲuma-**ɲgu** bura-n
mother father-CASE see-NONFUT
'Father saw mother.'

Grammatical relations

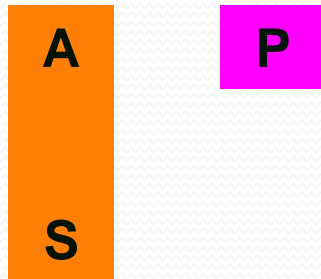
S = subject of intransitive clause

A = subject of transitive clause

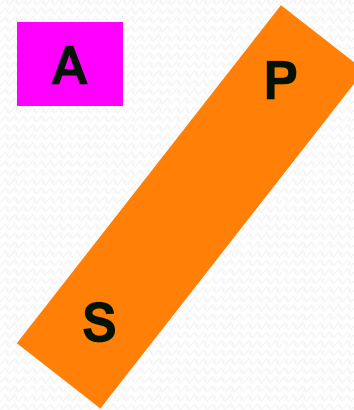
P = direct object

Alignment

nominative-accusative



ergative-absolutive



Avar

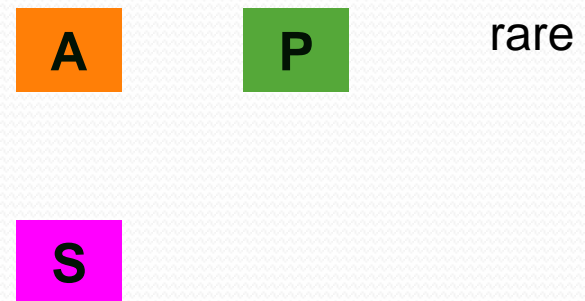
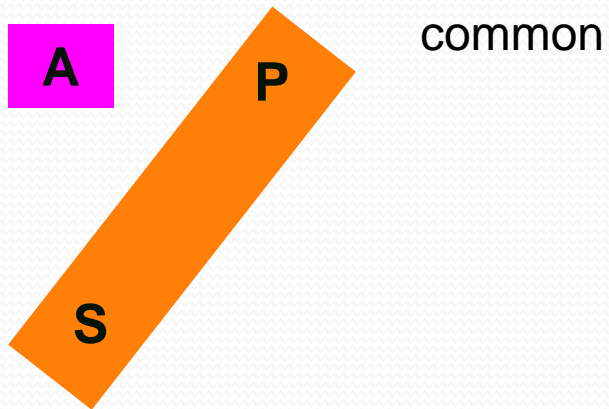
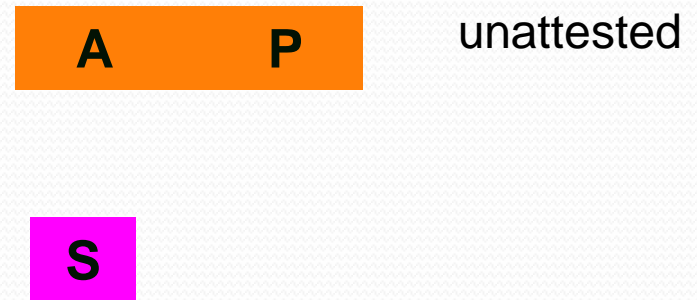
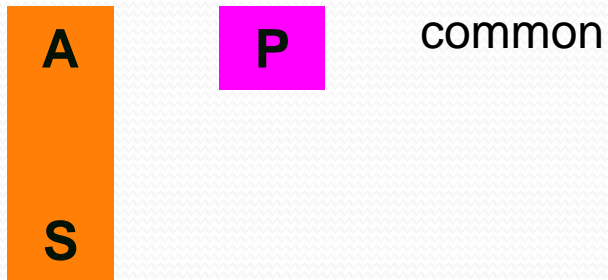
- (1) **w**-as-Ø **w**-eker-ula
M-child-CASE M-run-PRS
'The boy is running.'

- (2) inssu-cca **j**-as-Ø **j**-écc-ula
father-CASE F-child-CASE F-praise-PRS
'Father praises the girl.'

Päri

- (1) ùbúr á-túuk' SV
Ubur ASP-play
'Ubur played.'
- (2) jòobi á-kèel ùbúrr-i OVS
buffalo ASP-shoot Ubur-ERG
'Ubur shot the buffalo.'
- (3) ùbúr, jòobi á-kèel-é SOV
Ubur buffalo ASP-shoot-3SG.AG
'It was Ubur who shot the buffalo.'

Alignment



Wangkumara

(1) kana-**ulu**
man-ERG
'The man hit the bitch'

kalkana
hit

titi-**nana**
dog-ACC

(2) kana-**ia**
man-NOM
'The man died.'

paluna
died

A = **ulu**
P = **nana**
S = **ia**

Ergativity

- 25% of the world's languages employ an ergative pattern.
- Ergative case-marking and ergative-agreement marking are common, but ergative word order is rare.

Georgian

(1) Student-**i** midis PRESENT
student-NOM goes
'The student goes.'

(2) Student-**i** ceril-**s** cers
student-NOM letter-ACC writes
'The student is writing the letter.'

(3) Student-**i** mivida PERFECT
student-ABL went
'The student went.'

(4) Student-**ma** ceril-**i** dacera
Student-ERG letter-ABL wrote
'The student wrote the letter.'

Dyirbal

(1) ŋuma banaga-ŋu
father return-PST
'Father returned.'

(2) yabu ŋuma-**ŋgu** bura-n
mother father-CASE see-PST
'Father saw mother.'

Dyirbal

(1) ŋana banaga-ŋu
1PL return-PST
'We returned.'

(2) ɲura banaga-ŋu
2PL return-PST
'You returned.'

(3) ŋana ɲura-na bura-n
1PL 2PL-CASE see-PST
'We saw you.'

(4) ɲura ŋana-na bura-n
2PL 1PL-CASE see-PST
'You saw us.'

Animacy hierarchy

1st/2nd > 3rd > proper name/kin term > human NP > animate NP > inanimate NP

Nominative

Ergative

Dyirbal

1st / 2nd

3rd ...

Yidin

1st / 2nd / 3rd / DEM / proper name

common N ...

Eastern Pomo

- (1) **há:** xá:qákki
I bathe
'I bathed.' [other verbs: run, jump]
- (2) **há:** mí:pal sá:ka
I him killed
'I killed him.'
- (3) xá:su:là **wí** ko:kóya
Rattlesnake 1SG bit
'A rattlesnake bit me.'
- (4) **wí** qa:lálma
1SG sick
'I got sick.' [other verbs: fall, get unhappy]

Split intransitivity

A
 S_A

P
 S_P

Eastern Pomo

- (1) **wí** ce:xélka (accidentally)
1SG slip
'I am slipping.'
- (2) **há:** ce:xélka (deliberately)
1SG slip
'I am sliding.'

fluid split-intransitivity

German

- | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) | a. | Er hat das Bild gesehen. | transitive: <i>haben</i> |
| | b. | Er hat den Ball geschlagen. | |
| | c. | Er hat das Buch weggelegt. | |
| (2) | a. | Er hat gearbeitet. | a-telic |
| | b. | Er hat gelacht. | |
| | c. | Er hat geschlafen. | |
| (3) | a. | Er ist gekommen. | telic |
| | b. | Er ist losgefahren. | |
| | c. | Er ist eingeschlafen. | |
| (4) | a. | Die Blume hat geblüht. | a-telic |
| | b. | Die Blume ist aufgeblüht. | telic |



Syntactic ergativity

Passive

Active

John carried the bag.

Passive

The bag was carried (by John)

Active

She saw him.

Passive

He seen (by her)

Passive

Passive

Peter hit Mary

A-NOM V P-ACC

Mary was hit (by Peter)



Dyirbal

Active

yabu-Ø

mother-ABS

‘Father saw mother.’

ɲuma-**ɲgu** bura-n

father-CASE see-PST

Antipassive

ɲuma-Ø

father-ABS

‘Father saw mother.’

bural-**ɲa**-ɲu

see-ANTIPASS-NONFUT

yabu-**gu**

mother-DAT

Antipassive

Antipassive

Peter hit Mary.

Peter hit (Mary)



Syntactically nominative

(1) Mother saw father and ___ returned.

A verb P and ___ verb.

```
graph TD
    A[A] --- V1[verb]
    P[P] --- and[and]
    V2[verb.] --- blank[ ]
    A --- H[ ]
    blank --- H
    H --> and
```

Dyirbal

- (1) η uma- \emptyset banaga- η u miyandn- η u S
father-ABS return-NONFUT laugh-NONFUT
'Father returned' '(and) laughed.'
- (2) η uma- \emptyset yabu- η **gu** bura-n banaga- η u P
father-ABS mother-ERG saw-NONFUT return-NONFUT
'Mother saw father' '**(he)** returned.'
- (3) η uma-**gu** yabu- \emptyset bura- **η a**- η u
father-DAT mother-ABS saw-**ANTPAS**-NONFUT
'Mother saw father'
- banaga- η u A
return-NONFUT
and **(she)** returned.'

English

- (1) Peter saw the man who ___ was walking. S
- (2) Peter saw the man who Mary kissed ____ . P
- (3) Peter saw the man who ___ was driving the car. A

Kalkatunga

- (1) tuata pa-ji marapai icaji [injaninka-cin]
snake this-ERG woman bit go-REL
'The snake bit the woman who was walking.'

S

- (2) nkumaji naika tumpak-i
look.for 1SG.ABS tobacco-DAT
'I'm looking for the tobacco'

[pa-ji kupanjuru-tu utijakapi-nin-ku]
this-ERG old.man-ERG lose-REL-DAT
'(that) this old man lost.'

P

- (3) natu naja macumpa
1SG.ERG saw kangaroo
'I saw the kangaroo'

[ari-li-nin katir-ku]
eat-ANTPAS-REL grass-DAT
that is eating the grass.'

S

Syntactic ergativity in purpose clauses

(1) Peter went home [] in order to sleep. S

(2) Peter hit John in order [] to scare him. A

(3) Peter went home [] in order to sleep. S

(4) Peter helped John in order [for] to succeed. P

DuBois (1987)

- A nominative-accusative pattern is motivated by syntactic and pragmatic factors: The A/S-argument is topic and controller.
- An ergative pattern is motivated by the types of NPs that are typically encoded as A, S and P: Across languages S and P tend to be expressed by lexical NPs while A is overwhelmingly pronominal.

PRO

N

N

Preferred argument
structure

Historical explanations

(1) Schematic example (e.g. Hindi)

- | | | | | |
|----|----------------|------|------------------|----------------------|
| a. | Man | kick | ball-ACC. | active (frequent) |
| b. | Ball | kick | man- by . | passive (infrequent) |
| c. | Ball | kick | man- by . | passive (frequent) |
| d. | Man- by | kick | ball | active (by = ERG) |

(2) Schematic example (e.g. Hittite)

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------|
| a. | Man-Ø opened door-ACC key- INST . | |
| b. | ___ opened door-ACC key- INST . | |
| c. | key- INST opened door-ACC. | (INST = ERG) |