

# Argument Typology, p. 1

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## Basic terminology

Sole argument of intransitive verb: **S**  
 Agent-like argument of transitive: **A**  
 Patient-like argument of transitive: **P** (Dixon's O)

Case form used as citation form (and no morpheme in some languages): **unmarked Case**  
 Other core ("structural") Case(s): **marked Case(s)**

## Case marking

Not all languages use Case marking, and Case is only marginally related to the subjecthood issues we are addressing in this course. But the typology of Case marking is important background.

The usual situation is one where S and A have unmarked Case (traditionally called **nominative**) and P has a marked Case (traditionally called **accusative**).

Languages: English, Hebrew, Russian, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Malayalam, Hawaiian, Latin, Quechua, ...

Examples:

- (1) Imbabura Quechua (Quechuan; Imbabura, Ecuador)  
 Juan aicha- ta micu- rca.  
 Juan meat- ACC eat- PST.3  
 'Juan ate meat.'
- (2) Latin (Indo-European>Italic; extinct: Rome)
  - a. Domin- us veni- t  
 master- NOM come- 3SG  
 'The master comes.'
  - b. Serv- us domin- um audi- t  
 slave- NOM master- ACC hear- s  
 'The slave hears the master'

Such a language is called **nominative-accusative**.

In some languages, S and P have unmarked Case (usually called **absolutive**) and A has marked Case (usually called **ergative**).

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This is found in many languages of Australia (Dyirbal, Warlpiri, Diyari, Yidin<sup>y</sup>, etc.), Eskimo languages (Inuit, Yupik), Basque, Georgian, Avar, Chukchee, Hindi-Urdu, Tongan, Samoan, and many others.

Examples:

- (3) Dyirbal (Australian>Pama-Nyungan; central Queensland coast, Australia)
- a. Duma        banaga-    n<sup>y</sup>u  
father.ABS return-    NFUT  
'Father returned.'
- b. Duma        yabu-        ŋgu    bura-    n  
father.ABS mother-    ERG see-    NFUT  
'Mother saw father.'
- (4) Greenlandic Inuit (Eskimo-Aleut>Eskimo; Greenland)
- a. Anut-    ip        arnaq        taku-    vaa.  
man-    ERG woman.ABS see-    INDIC3sg3sg  
'The man saw the woman.'
- b. Anut        autlar-        puq.  
man.ABS go.away-    INDIC3sg  
'The man went away.'
- (5) Basque (generally considered an isolate; Pyrenees mountains, Spain and France)
- a. Miren-    ek        ni        jo    n-        au.  
Miren-    ERG me.NOM hit 1SG- have.3SG  
'Miren hit me.'
- b. Miren    erori    d-        a.  
Miren    fallen 3SG- be  
'Miren fell.'
- (6) Avar (North Caucasian>Daghestanian; Daghestan, Russia)
- a. Či        v-        ačʔ-        ula.  
man he- come- PRES  
'The man comes.'
- b. Ebél-    alda    či        v-        aɬ-        ula.  
mother- ERG man he- discover- PRES  
'Mother discovers the man.'

These languages are called **ergative**.

Some of these are **split ergative**, meaning that some types of NPs display an ergative pattern and others a nominative-accusative pattern, as discussed in the Dixon reading. But it is important to note that languages of that type have distinct ergative and accusative Cases, showing that the marked Cases differ from each other.

Also, the term "ergative language" is also generally used for languages in which there is no Case marking, but agreement groups S and P together as opposed to A. The Mayan languages (Tzotzil, K'ekchi, etc.) are like this.

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- (7) Tzotzil (Mayan; Chiapas, México)
- a. Č- i- bat.  
ASP- ABS1- go  
'I'm going.'
  - b. L- i- s- ma.  
ASP- ABS1- ERG3- hit  
'He hit me.'
  - c. Ta- Ø- h- mah.  
ASP- ABS3- ERG1- hit  
'I'm going to hit him.'

On the other hand, some ergative languages, like Warlpiri, have ergative Case marking but nominative-accusative agreement!

In a very few languages, there is a consistent pattern in which A and P both carry marked Case (ergative and accusative, respectively). S is unmarked (nominative/absolutive).

Examples:

- (8) Nez Perce (Penutian; Idaho, United States)
- a. Wewúkiye- ne pée- 'wi- ye háama- nm.  
elk- ACC 3SUBJ.3OBJ- shoot- PERF man- ERG  
'The man shot an elk.'
  - b. Hi- páayn- a háama.  
3SUBJ- arrive- PERF man  
'The man arrived.'
- (9) Antekerrepenhe (Australian>Pama-Nyungan>Arandic; s. Northern Territory, Australia)
- a. Arengke- le aye- nye ke- ke.  
dog- ERG me- ACC bite- PST  
'The dog bit me.'
  - b. Apwerte- le athe arengke- nye we- ke.  
stones- INSTR I.ERG dog- ACC pelt- PST  
'I pelted the dog with stones.'
  - c. Arengke nterre- ke.  
dog run- PST  
'The dog ran.'

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- (10) Wangkumara (Australian>Pama-Nyungan; western New South Wales/Queensland border area, Australia)
- a. Kaṇa- ulu kalka- ṇa tiṭi- ṇaṇa.  
man- ERG hit- PST dog- FEM.ACC  
'The man hit the (female) dog.'
  - b. Kaṇa- ia palu- ṇa.  
man- NOM die- PST  
'The man died.'

These are called **three-way** languages.

In another class of languages, primarily languages of the Philippines, any element of the clause can have unmarked Case; verbal morphology (often called "voice") marks which element it is.

Examples:

- (11) Tagalog (Austronesian>Malayo-Polynesian>Western; the Philippines)
- a. Mag- aalis ang tindero ng bigas sa sako para sa babae.  
AGT- take.out NOM storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack for DAT woman  
'The storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack for a/the woman.'
  - b. Aalis- in ng tindero ang bigas sa sako para sa babae.  
take.out- DO ERG storekeeper NOM rice DAT sack for DAT woman  
'A/the storekeeper will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the woman.'
  - c. Aalis- an ng tindero ng bigas ang sako para sa babae.  
take.out- IO ERG storekeeper ACC rice NOM sack for DAT woman  
'A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of the sack for a/the woman.'
  - d. Ipag- aalis ng tindero ng bigas sa sako ang babae.  
BEN- take.out ERG storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack NOM woman  
'A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack for the woman.'
  - e. Ipang- aalis ng tindero ng bigas sa sako ang sandok.  
INS- take.out ERG storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack NOM scoop  
'A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack with the scoop.'

These are called **Philippine-type** languages.

Finally, there are languages in which S is not treated uniformly. Instead, agentive Ss are Case-marked like A or trigger agreement like A and patientive Ss are Case-marked like P or trigger agreement like P.

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Examples:

(12) Manipuri (Sino-Tibetan>Tibeto-Burman; northeastern India)

- a. Əy- nə celli.  
I- ERG ran  
'I ran.'
- b. Əy sawwi.  
I got.angry  
'I got angry.'
- c. Əy- nə ma- bu phuy.  
I- ERG him- ACC beat  
'I beat him.'

(13) Lakhota (Siouan; Dakotas and surrounding area, United States)

- a. Wa- i'.  
1sgAGT- arrive  
'I arrived.'
- b. Ma- si'ca.  
1sgPAT- bad  
'I am bad.'
- c. Ma- ya- kte.  
1sgPAT- 2sgAGT- kill  
'You kill me.'

(14) Acehnese (Austronesian>Malayo-Polynesian>Western; Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia)

- a. Gopnyan ka= geu= jak u= keude.  
he already 3 go to market  
'He went to market.'
- b. Gopnyan sakêt= geuh.  
he sick 3  
'He is sick.'
- c. Ji= kap= keuh.  
3 bite 2  
'It'll bite you.'

These are called **active** languages.

## Subjects

In nominative-accusative languages, unmarked Case goes with SUBJ (S/A). One way to understand ergative languages would be to hypothesize that they have an S/P SUBJ instead of an S/A SUBJ. There are various ways to implement this; the earliest account was that in ergative languages all transitive clauses are passive, so ergative Case is like a *by* phrase.

If S/P is SUBJ in ergative languages, it has subject properties. Investigation has shown that things are not that simple.

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In some ergative languages, such as Hindi and Basque, subject properties work the same as in nominative-accusative languages. For languages of this kind, called **morphologically ergative**, the SUBJ is clearly S/A, and unmarked Case cannot be said to be a subject property.

For some ergative languages, such as Dyirbal and Inuit, some (but not all) subject properties are S/P properties. Since the ergative Case-marking seems to be in some sense related to syntactic properties, these languages are said to be **syntactically ergative**. But even in syntactically ergative languages, we cannot simply say that the SUBJ is S/P.