

LSA 2019 Linguistic Institute, University of California Davis

Course 160: Introduction to Language Typology

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Week 3 Notes (July 8, 11): Alignment

Acknowledgment: I have made use of several examples from: Tallerman, Maggie. 2014. *Understanding Syntax*, 4th ed. London/New York: Routledge, ch. 6.

### Definition

Comparison of the morphosyntactic properties of core arguments across clauses with different degrees of transitivity, e.g. intransitive and transitive clauses

>Basic clause structures (irrespective of constituent order):

Intransitive S Vi

Transitive A P Vt

### Abbreviations

the definitions should be taken as defining prototypes

Vi intransitive verb

Vt transitive verb

S **S**ingle argument of an intransitive verb

A most **A**gent-like argument of a transitive verb

P most **P**atient-like argument of a transitive verb

Note: Some linguists use O (mnemonic for “object”) where I use P. I prefer to avoid terms like “subject” and “object” in defining alignment types, as they presuppose particular syntactic analyses in terms of grammatical relations that may or may not turn out to be correct for individual languages.

### Flagging

aka Case marking (by morphological case or adpositions)

nominative-accusative (nom-acc; “accusative”) A = S ≠ P

English (some pronouns only)

I run

S

NOM

they run  
S  
NOM

I chase them  
A P  
NOM ACC

they chase me  
A P  
NOM ACC

	S	
A		P

ergative-absolutive (erg-abs; “ergative”)

$A \neq S = P$

Lezgian

zun ata-na  
I come-PST  
S  
ABS  
'I came'

za zi balk'an c'ud xipe-q<sup>h</sup> ga-na  
I my horse ten sheep-for give-PST  
A P  
ERG ABS  
'I gave my horse in exchange for ten sheep'

aburu zun ajib-da  
they I shame-FUT  
A P  
ERG ABS  
'they will shame me'

	S	
A		P

neutral

A = S = P

Chinese

wǒ qù  
I go  
S  
'I go'

wǒ xǐhuan tā  
I like s/he  
A P  
'I like her/him'

tā xǐhuan wǒ  
s/he like I  
A P  
's/he likes me'

	S	
A		P

tripartite

A ≠ S ≠ P

Pitta-Pitta (only in non-FUT)

nangka-ya ngan<sup>y</sup>t<sup>y</sup>a kunti-ina  
sit-PRS I.?? house-in  
S  
'I am sitting in the house'

nga-tu kat<sup>y</sup>u-na wat<sup>y</sup>ama-ka  
I-ERG clothes-ACC wash-PST  
A P  
'I washed the clothes'

tupu-lu ngan<sup>y</sup>a pat<sup>y</sup>a-pat<sup>y</sup>a-ya  
caterpillar-ERG I.ACC bite-bite-PRS  
A P  
'A caterpillar is biting me'

	S	
A		P

agent-patient (“split intransitivity”)  $A = S_A \neq S_P = P$   
 (also called “active-inactive”, “semantic alignment”)

Georgian (only in Aorist [past perfective])

nino-m ačvena surateb-i gia-s  
 Nino-AGT show.AOR.3SG pictures-PAT Gia-DAT  
 A P  
 ‘Nino showed the pictures to Gia’

k’ac-i mok’vda  
 man-PAT die.AOR.3SG  
 S<sub>P</sub>  
 ‘the man died’

nino-m daamtknara  
 Nino-AGT yawn.AOR.3SG  
 S<sub>A</sub>  
 ‘Nino yawned’

S <sub>A</sub>	S <sub>P</sub>
A	P

Horizontal

$A = P \neq S$

Roshani (pronouns only)

az=um pa xaray sut.  
 I.DIR=1SG to Khorog go.PST.F  
 S  
 ‘I (woman speaking) went to Khorog’

mu tā wunt.  
 I.OBL you.OBL see.PST  
 A P  
 ‘I saw you.’

[Source: Payne, J. R. 1980. The decay of ergativity in Pamir languages. *Lingua* 51: 147–186, pp. 158, 156]

S
A P

Functional explanation of frequency of different alignment types for flagging:  
 pressure to distinguish A from P

since co-occur in same clause  
no pressure to distinguish A from S, or P from S  
since do not co-occur in same clause

But note that the differentiation of A and P can also be by other means  
e.g. constituent order  
especially with neutral alignment

### Exercise

Tsez

zey b-eš-si  
bear III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the bear fell'

ʕomoy b-eš-si  
donkey III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the donkey fell'

zey-ã ʕomoy b-ok'-si  
bear-? donkey III-hit-PSTWIT  
'the bear hit the donkey'

ʕomoy-ã zey b-ok'-si  
donkey-? bear III-hit-PSTWIT  
'the donkey hit the bear'

zey b-eš-si  
S  
bear III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the bear fell'

ʕomoy b-eš-si  
S  
donkey III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the donkey fell'

zey-ã ʕomoy b-ok'-si  
bear-? donkey III-hit-PSTWIT  
A P  
'the bear hit the donkey'

ʕomoy-ã zey b-ok'-si  
donkey-? bear III-hit-PSTWIT  
A P

'the donkey hit the bear'

'bear' 'donkey'  
A zey-ā̄ ḡomoy-ā̄  
S zey ḡomoy  
P zey ḡomoy

	'bear'	'donkey'	
A	zey-ā̄	ḡomoy-ā̄	ERG
S	zey	ḡomoy	ABS
P	zey	ḡomoy	

zey b-eš-si  
bear.ABS III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the bear fell'

ḡomoy b-eš-si  
donkey.ABS III-fall-PSTWIT  
'the donkey fell'

zey-ā̄ ḡomoy b-ok'-si  
bear-ERG donkey.ABS III-hit-PSTWIT  
'the bear hit the donkey'

ḡomoy-ā̄ zey b-ok'-si  
donkey-ERG bear.ABS III-hit-PSTWIT  
'the donkey hit the bear'

## Voice

What about the English passive?

I run  
S  
NOM

they run  
S  
NOM

they are chased by me  
P A  
NOM OBL

I am chased by them  
 P A  
 NOM OBL

	S	
A		P

Why not?

Define alignment using the dominant/basic voice  
 i.e. in English the active, not the passive

The English active is more frequent in discourse  
 is simpler morphologically  
 is morphologically parallel to the intransitive

One can represent the “derived” nature of the passive clauses as follows:

they are chased by me  
 P→S A→OBL  
 NOM OBL

I am chased by them  
 P→S A→OBL  
 NOM OBL

Many languages lack derived voices (e.g. Haruai)  
 so the problem doesn’t even arise

Residual problem:

Some languages have been claimed to have “symmetrical voice”  
 i.e. two voices neither of which is dominant/basic to the other

Tagalog

na-bi-bingi ang Lolo  
 SFOC.IPFV-RED-go\_deaf NOM Grandfather  
 ‘Grandfather is going deaf’

h<um>awak ang Lolo ng libro  
 <AFOC>hold.PFV NOM Grandfather DIR book  
 ‘Grandfather held a book’

h<in>awak-an ng Lolo ang libro  
 <PFOC>hold.PFV-PFOC DIR Grandfather NOM book

'Grandfather held the book'

[Data source: Paul Schachter & Fe T. Otanes.1972. *Tagalog reference grammar*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 294 (slightly modified), 307]

## Splits

Dyirbal combines

ergative-absolutive with full noun phrases

nominative-accusative with independent personal pronouns

Note: Dyirbal has free order of major clause constituents

but most frequent order with full noun phrases is SV, PAV

personal pronouns usually precede full noun phrases

first person pronouns usually precede second person

## Nouns versus pronouns

nguma      banaga-nyu

father.ABS    return-TNS

S

'father returned'

yabu              banaga-nyu

mother.ABS    return-TNS

S

'mother returned'

nguma      yabu-nggu      bura-n

father.ABS    mother-ERG    see-TNS

P

A

'mother saw father'

yabu              nguma-nggu      bura-n

mother.ABS    father-ERG      see-TNS

P

A

'father saw mother'

ngaja    banaga-nyu

I.NOM    return-TNS

S

'I returned'

nyurra    banaga-nyu

you.NOM    return-TNS

S

'you returned'

ngayguna nyurra bura-n  
I.ACC you.NOM see-TNS  
P A  
'you saw me'

ngaja nginuna bura-n  
I.NOM you.ACC see-TNS  
A P  
'I saw you'

Test

'mother saw me'

P A  
'me mother saw'

ACC ERG  
P A  
'me mother saw'

ngayguna yabu-nggu bura-n  
IACC mother-ERG see-TNS  
P A  
'me mother saw'

Dyirbal has a split according to the "animacy hierarchy":

1/2 pronoun > 3 pronoun > human noun > animal noun > inanimate noun

This is frequent cross-linguistically

Other frequent alignment splits are according to

tense/aspect

main/subordinate clause

markedness

nom-acc usually nominative unmarked, accusative marked  
(e.g. Hungarian -Ø, -t)  
also equipollent (e.g. Latin second declension -us, -um)  
rare "marked nominative", e.g. Oromo  
erg-abs usually absolutive unmarked  
very rare "marked absolutive", e.g. Nias

## Cross-linguistic distribution

<https://wals.info/chapter/98>

<https://wals.info/chapter/99>

Practical decision taken on splits

favor rarer types, e.g. Hindi tripartite

only if verb is perfective, P is animate/definite

favor non-neutral alignment, e.g. Spanish “differential object marking”

only if object is human and specific:

el            estudiante    encontró    la            foto  
the.M.SG    student       find.PRET.3SG    the.F.SG    photo  
'the student found the photo'

el            estudiante    encontró    a    la            maestra  
the.M.SG    student       find.PRET.3SG    to    the.F.SG    professor  
'the student found the professor'

	<u>noun</u>	<u>pronoun</u>
neutral	98	79
nom-acc	52	64
erg-abs	32	20
tripartite	4	3
agt-pat	4	3
<u>none</u>		<u>3</u>
<i>n</i>	190	172

Exercise:

Compare flagging alignment of nouns and pronouns

In general, pronouns favor nom-acc flagging  
and disfavor erg-abs flagging

noun	pronoun			
tripartite	tripartite	3		
nom-acc	nom-acc	49		
neutral	none	3		
neutral	neutral	70		
erg-abs	erg-abs	19		
agt-pat	neutral	1		
agt-pat	agt-pat	3		
tripartite	nom-acc	1	√	
neutral	nom-acc	9	√	21
erg-abs	nom-acc	5	√	
erg-abs	neutral	6	√	
nom-acc	neutral	2	x	3
neutral	erg-abs	1	x	
<i>n</i>		172		

### Indexing

i.e. indexing of arguments of the verb within the verb morphology  
includes verb agreement

#### neutral

Chinese  
wǒ qù  
I go  
S  
'I go'

wǒ xǐhuan tā  
I like s/he  
A P  
'I like her/him'

tā xǐhuan wǒ  
s/he like I  
A P  
's/he likes me'

#### nom-acc

Spanish  
lo-s leon-es ruge-n  
the-PL lion-PL roar-3PL  
S  
'the lions roar'

el león come la-s cebra-s  
 the lion eat.3SG the-PL zebra-PL  
 A P  
 'the lion eats the zebras'

lo-s leon-es come-n la cebra  
 the-PL lion-PL eat-3PL the zebra  
 A P  
 'the lions eat the zebra'

erg-abs

Tzutujil  
 x-in-wari  
 PST-1SG.ABS-sleep  
 'I slept'

x-at-wari  
 PST-2SG.ABS-sleep  
 'you slept'

x-at-nuu-choy  
 PST-2SG.ABS-1SG.ERG-cut  
 'I cut you'

x-in-aa-choy  
 PST-1SG.ABS-2SG.ERG-cut  
 'you cut me'

mismatch case-marking and verb-indexing  
 e.g. Warlpiri

ngaju ka-rna wangka-mi  
 I.ABS PRS-1SG.NOM speak-nPST  
 'I am speaking'

ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku nyuntu nya-nyi  
 I-ERG PRS-1SG.NOM-2SG.ACC you.ABS see-nPST  
 'I see you'

Exercise

Tsez

Tsez has four genders (noun classes)  
 with corresponding indexing (agreement) prefixes

on (most) vowel-initial verbs

- I Ø- male human
- II y- female human; some inanimate
- III b- animal; some inanimate
- IV r- some inanimate

uži Ø-ik'i-x  
boy.ABS I-go-PRS  
'the boy goes'

kid y-ik'i-x  
girl.ABS II-go-PRS  
'the girl goes'

už-ä kid y-egir-xo  
boy-ERG girl.ABS II-send-PRS  
'the boy sends the girl'

kidb-ä uži Ø-egir-xo  
girl-ERG boy.ABS I-send-PRS  
'the girl sends the boy'

Indexing is consistently of the S or P, not of the A  
i.e. ergative-absolutive indexing

Tsez first and second person singular pronouns  
show a different flagging system

di Ø-ik'i-x  
I I-go-PRS  
'I (man speaking) go'

di y-ik'i-x  
I II-go-PRS  
'I (woman speaking) go'

mi y-ik'i-x  
you II-go-PRS  
'you (woman addressed) go'

di mi y-egir-xo  
I you II-send-PRS  
'I (man speaking) send you (woman addressed)'

di mi Ø-egir-xo  
I you I-send-PRS  
'I (woman speaking) send you (man addressed)'

di mi y-egir-xo  
I you II-send-PRS  
'I (woman speaking) send you (woman addressed)'

di mi Ø-egir-xo  
I you I-send-PRS  
'I (man speaking) send you (man addressed)'

mi di Ø-egir-xo  
you I I-send-PRS  
'you (woman addressed) send me (man speaking)'

mi di Ø-egir-xo  
you I I-send-PRS  
'you (man addressed) send me (man speaking)'

Flagging of these pronouns is neutral  
Indexing is still of S or P, not of A

### Syntactic ergativity

Many languages with morphological ergativity (flagging, indexing)  
nonetheless have accusative syntax

Tsez  
S and A are both omitted in the infinitival complement to a control verb  
like 'to want'

[Note: In Tsez, the Experiencer argument of 'to want' stands in the lative case]

ʕali-r [—<sub>S</sub> qoqoʕ-a] r-eti-x  
Ali-LAT laugh-INF IV-want-PRS  
'Ali wants to laugh'

ʕali-r [—<sub>A</sub> pat'imat y-egir-a] r-eti-x  
Ali-LAT Patimat.ABS II-send-INF IV-want-PRS  
'Ali wants to send Patimat'

English has nominative-accusative or neutral alignment  
but the syntax is consistently nominative-accusative  
e.g. conjunction reduction



ngaja nginuna bura-n, — baji-nyu  
 A P<sub>i</sub> S<sub>i</sub>  
 I.NOM you.ACC see-TNS fall-TNS  
 'I saw you, and (you) fell down'

Voice again

Passive (as in English) presents P as S (P→S)  
 thus making P accessible to conjunction reduction

the woman<sub>S</sub> fell down, and —<sub>P→S</sub> was seen by the man

Antipassive (as in Dyirbal) presents A as S (A→S)  
 thus making P accessible to conjunction reduction

yara baji-nyu, — jugumbil-gu bura-nga-nyu  
 S<sub>i</sub> A→S<sub>i</sub> P→OBL  
 man.ABS fall-TNS woman-DAT see-ANTIPASS-TNS  
 'the man fell down, and (the man) saw the woman'