

## The marked status of ergativity

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Ergative patterns are encountered in only a quarter of the world's languages. Often, the absolutive-ergative pattern co-occurs with a nominative-accusative pattern. Moreover, ergativity is not deeply rooted in the syntax of most languages. In this paper, I develop a theory that explains why ergativity is a marked phenomenon. The main hypothesis is that argument structure has a universal nominative-accusative basis. Two sub-hypotheses, called the *Second Pattern Hypothesis* (SPH) and the *Ergative as Passive Hypothesis* (EPH), derive ergativity. Both of them treat the ergative NP as an adjunct that doubles a pronominal argument. The ergative case is lexical rather than structural.

### 1. Introduction

Every natural language distinguishes between intransitive and transitive clauses. There are two main patterns in distinguishing the arguments in these clauses. A nominative-accusative pattern treats the sole argument of an intransitive predicate (S) and the subject of a transitive predicate (A) similarly. The direct object of a transitive predicate (O) is treated differently. In Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, for example, verbal marking generally refers to S and A in the same way; the corresponding noun phrases (henceforth: NPs) appear in the unmarked nominative case. A marked case, the accusative, is used for noun phrases in O-function. Absolutive-ergative patterns, on the other hand, treat S and O as the unmarked category (absolutive) and A as the marked one (ergative). Ergativity is estimated to play a role in approximately 25 percent of the world's languages (Dixon 1994:2). The sentences in (1) illustrate the absolutive-ergative pattern in the case system of Djaru:

- (1) Djaru (Australian, Pama-Nyungan (Tsunoda 1981:97)):
- a. mawun    jan-an  
   man.ABS go-PRES  
   'A man goes.'

- b. mawun-du guɲar buɲ-an  
 man-ERG dog.ABS hit-PRES  
 ‘A man hits a dog.’

In (1b), *mawundu* ‘man’ is in the ergative case because it is the subject of a transitive sentence (A). In the intransitive (1a), we find *mawun*, which is the unmarked equivalent of ‘man’. The direct object in the b-sentence, *guo̯ar* ‘dog’, appears in its unmarked case as well, giving rise to an absolutive-ergative case pattern. In (1), the verb is not overtly marked for any of its arguments. However, bound pronouns appear when the sentence contains any argument other than third person singular:<sup>1</sup>

(2) Djaru (Tsunoda 1981:201,103,194):

- a. ɲad<sup>y</sup>u ɲa-ɲa jan-an  
 1SG.ABS C-1SG.NOM go-PRES  
 ‘I go.’
- b. ɲad<sup>y</sup>u-ɲgu ɲa-ɲa-ɲgu ɲundu ɲaɲ-an  
 1SG-ERG C-1SG.NOM-2SG.ACC 2SG.ABS see-PRES  
 ‘I look at you.’
- c. ɲunuɲɲ-d<sup>y</sup>u jambi-gu guɲar-u ɲa-ji bajan-i  
 2SG.ABL1-ERG big-ERG dog-ERG C-1SG.ACC bite-PAST  
 ‘Your big dog bit me.’

The intransitive subject S in (2a) is realized twice: by an independent pronoun (*Nad<sup>y</sup>u* ‘1SG.ABS’) and by a bound pronoun (*-ɲa* ‘1SG.NOM’), which attaches to a catalyst (C), an otherwise meaningless morpheme hosting clitic elements. Neither of these pronouns is overtly marked for case. The transitive sentence in (2b) shows that the independent pronoun receives an ergative case-suffix when it is in A-function (*Nad<sup>y</sup>uɲgu*), but the bound pronoun does not change accordingly. The c-sentence contains a first person singular direct object (O). The independent pronoun would appear in its base form again if it were present, which suggests that these elements pattern in an absolutive-ergative way, just like the nouns in (1). The bound pronoun, however, appears in a marked form, *-ji* ‘1SG.ACC’, suggesting a nominative-accusative pattern.<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘bound pronouns’ is commonly used in the descriptive literature; it refers to verbal markers that often behave like pronominal clitics.

<sup>2</sup> As I consider nominatives to be caseless, they will be left out of the glosses in the remainder of this paper. This idea draws back on Jakobson (1936) and has been used by people advocating a theory of head and dependent marking (cf. Nichols 1986, Bittner & Hale 1996, Neeleman & Weerman 1999). According to this theory, arguments are licensed either by marking of the head (agreement) or by marking of the dependent (case). This means that in an ergative pattern, absolutives are licensed by head marking since they are caseless. In the next sections, I will argue that this is true for some (but not all) ergative languages.

<sup>3</sup> Although the morphological relation between the nominative and the accusative bound pronoun is not clear in this example, other members of the bound pronoun paradigm clearly show that accusative forms are derived from nominative forms, hence the accusative can be considered to be the marked form (Tsunoda 1981: 69-71).

Djaru turns out to be a so-called split ergative language: the absolutive-ergative distinction plays a role in only a part of the grammar, but a nominative-accusative pattern is found elsewhere. Ergativity in Djaru is restricted to case marking of independent pronouns and full NPs. Bound pronouns display a nominative-accusative pattern. A similar distribution of the two patterns is found in different geographic areas and language families and, in most cases, it is described as a split between case marking and agreement. An important generalization which has been made with respect to this particular kind of split ergativity is that there are no languages with an inverse distribution of the two patterns: an absolutive-ergative distinction in the bound forms and nominative-accusative case-marking of non-bound forms is not attested (Silverstein 1976:159; Blake 1977:7; 1987:186; Dixon 1994:95). The fact that in most of these languages, the independent pronouns and full NPs can be omitted but the bound pronouns cannot, provides strong evidence that the nominative-accusative pattern is more basic to natural language than the absolutive-ergative pattern.

In this paper, I will argue that the nominative-accusative pattern is basic to every natural language. Djaru (cf. (1) and (2)) will be analyzed along the lines of the Pronominal Argument Parameter (Jelinek 1984, 1993, 2001) which was primarily designed to account for Warlpiri. This analysis states that argument positions can only be filled by bound pronouns and that all other nominal constituents appear in adjunct positions in which they merely function as argument doubles. My *Second Pattern Hypothesis* (SPH), a sub-hypothesis that will be introduced in section 2, adopts this analysis in order to claim that absolutive-ergative case marking is only available for adjoined nominal constituents. It accounts for ergative languages with nominative-accusative verbal marking and it explains the absence of nominative-accusative case systems in combination with absolutive-ergative bound pronouns or agreement. In section 3, I will present a second sub-hypothesis in order to deal with languages with absolutive-ergative marking on the verb. These look like serious counterexamples to the claim that argument structure is always organized in a nominative-accusative pattern. The second sub-hypothesis, dubbed the *Ergative as Passive Hypothesis* (EPH), however, enables us to maintain the main hypothesis about argument structure. The ergative verbal markers are treated as a set of bound pronouns that only appear in transitive clauses, whereas the absolutive set is a real agreement paradigm. Section 4 concludes the paper and provides suggestions for future research.

## 2. Pronominal arguments

Jelinek (1984) develops a proposal in order to account for non-configurational languages like Warlpiri within Government & Binding-theory (Chomsky 1981). She takes issue with Hale (1983) who claims that Warlpiri is different from English because it has “free” constituent order, syntactically discontinuous expressions and “null anaphora”. Jelinek proposes that these characteristics follow from the fact that in this type of language, full NPs and independent pronouns are base-generated as adjuncts. Adjuncts order quite

freely and they can be omitted without rendering a sentence ungrammatical. The reason why these NPs may only appear in adjunct positions is that argument positions are obligatorily occupied by other material. Any Warlpiri sentence obligatorily contains pronominal clitics referring to the verbal arguments and Jelinek claims that these elements occupy the argument positions. This is clear in the case of first and second person: apart from independent pronouns, which are often omitted, these arguments are always referred to by bound pronouns (cf. the Djaru examples in (2)):

(3) Warlpiri (Australian, Pama-Nyungan (slightly adapted from Hale, Laughren & Simpson 1995:1430,1432)):

- a. *wangka-mi ka-rna*  
 speak-NPST IMPF-1SG  
 'I am speaking.'
- b. *ngaju ka-rna wangka-mi*  
 1SG IMPF-1SG speak-NPST  
 'I am speaking.'
- c. *nya-nyi ka-rna-ngku*  
 see-NPST IMPF-1SG-2SG.ACC  
 'I see you.'
- d. *ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku nyuntu nya-nyi*  
 1SG-ERG IMPF-1SG-2SG.ACC 2SG see-NPST  
 'I see you.'

The sentences in (3a) and (3b) are equally grammatical, the independent pronoun *ngaju* '1SG' is an optional constituent that may be added for pragmatic reasons (3b). The same is true for (3c) and (3d), where absence (3c) or presence (3d) of the independent pronouns *ngajulurlu* '1SG-ERG' and *nyuntu* '2SG' does not change the grammaticality of the sentence.

Third person singular subjects and objects, however, are not realized by overt clitics. They may appear as independent pronouns or full noun phrases, but again these are easily omitted without changing the sentence:

(4) Warlpiri (slightly adapted from Jelinek (1984:40), citing Hale (1983:6,7)):

- a. *ngarrka-ngku ka wawirri panti-rni*  
 man-ERG IMPF kangaroo spear-NPST  
 'The man is spearing the kangaroo.'
- b. *panti-rni ka*  
 spear-NPST IMPF  
 '(s)he is spearing him/her/it.'

Hale (1983) claims that the arguments in (4a) can be definite or indefinite, but that sentences like (4b) can only have definite arguments. Jelinek concludes that these sentences contain empty, third person singular pronouns that occupy the argument positions. This accounts for the fact that the full noun phrases in (4a) are optionally present, just like first and second person independent pronouns: they are adjuncts. Jelinek's Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (PAH, 1993) states that languages like Warlpiri obligatorily generate every core

argument as an agreement affix or clitic pronoun. This hypothesis implies that non-clitic NPs order freely with respect to the predicate and that they can always be omitted.

The same analysis can be applied to Djaru. Leaving out the independent pronouns in (2), repeated below as (6), would not lead to ungrammaticality. Omission of the full NP *ounuNiød'u jambigu guøaru* 'your big dog' in the (c) sentence is also possible, suggesting that third person singular arguments are primarily realized by empty clitics. Remember that in (6), the bound pronouns cliticize to a morpheme which Tsunoda (1981) calls a "catalyst". In (1), repeated below as (5), there are no overt clitics at all, hence the catalyst is absent as well. However, Tsunoda explicitly refers to the Njininj dialect of Djaru where, even in this type of sentence, the catalyst is present (1981:126). Tsunoda takes this to be evidence that third person singular arguments trigger empty bound pronouns.<sup>4</sup>

(5) Djaru (cf. 1):

- a. mawun jan-an  
man.ABS go-PRES  
'A man goes.'
- b. mawun-du guɲar buɲ-an  
man-ERG dog.ABS hit-PRES  
'A man hits a dog.'

(6) Djaru (cf. 2):

- a. ɲad<sup>y</sup>u ɲa-ɲa jan-an  
1SG.ABS C-1SG.NOM go-PRES  
'I go.'
- b. ɲad<sup>y</sup>u-ɲgu ɲa-ɲa-ɲgu ɲundu ɲaɲ-an  
1SG-ERG C-1SG.NOM-2SG.ACC 2SG.ABS see-PRES  
'I look at you.'
- c. ɲunuɲɲ-d<sup>y</sup>u jambi-gu guɲar-u ɲa-ji bajan-i  
2SG.ABL1-ERG big-ERG dog-ERG C-1SG.ACC bite-PAST  
'Your big dog bit me.'

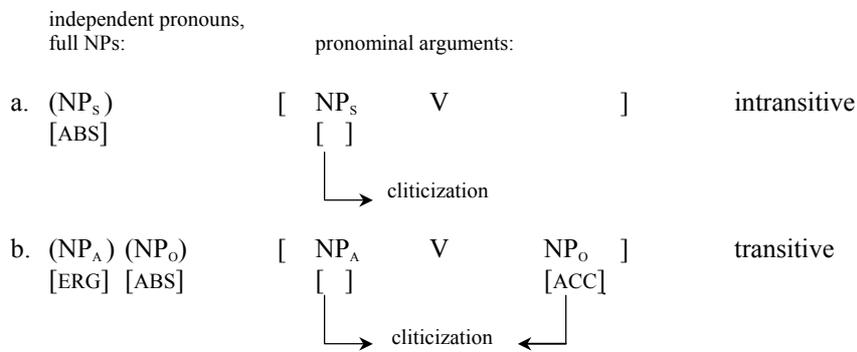
I conclude from this that, in Djaru, the verb and the clitic string function as a complete sentence. Independent pronouns and full NPs may be added but this is not required for grammaticality. I propose to analyze Djaru as a pronominal argument language in terms of Jelinek (1984). In this type of language, the pronominal arguments show a nominative-accusative pattern. It is striking that adjunct-NPs referring to the same arguments show absolutive-ergative case marking. Jelinek claims that pronominal argument languages are often split ergative. In the case of Warlpiri, nominative and accusative case (grammatical or G-cases) are assigned to elements in A-positions. NPs in  $\bar{A}$ -positions can

<sup>4</sup> I am not giving the examples without full NPs because they are not provided by Tsunoda in his grammar. The texts contained in this work, though, show ample evidence that third person free pronouns and full noun phrases are often omitted, unlike bound pronouns. The latter are clearly required for the grammaticality of the sentence.

only bear lexical case (L-cases), ergative being an overt instance of this (Jelinek 1984). I would like to push this analysis somewhat further and claim that this is, in fact, the only configuration where absolutive-ergative case marking can occur. This boils down to the claim that the ergative pattern really is a second pattern for distinguishing core verbal arguments. That is, only if a language is of the pronominal argument-type may an ergative pattern occur. Schematically, the first part of my proposal looks as in (7):

(7) Second Pattern Hypothesis (SPH):

*Absolutive-ergative case-patterns are only applied to adjunct-NPs in languages with pronominal arguments.*



The sole argument of an intransitive verb, S, is obligatorily realized as an unmarked pronoun which cliticizes to the predicate. This argument may (but need not) be doubled by an NP in adjunct position that is in the unmarked (lexical) case.<sup>5</sup> The subject of a transitive verb, A, and the object, O, are also realized as pronouns which cliticize. In most cases, A shares the unmarked form with S, whereas O appears in a marked form. This is because the verb assigns accusative case to its direct object. The pronominal arguments of a transitive clause may again be doubled by NP-adjuncts. In some pronominal argument languages, the lexical cases licensing these NPs show an ergative pattern, for instance if only the NP in A-function is overtly marked. The Second Pattern Hypothesis (SPH) assumes that the universal architecture of argument structure is nominative-accusative: only the object receives a case affix (accusative), all subjects appearing in the unmarked case (nominative). An absolutive-ergative system can only apply to argument-doubles in adjunct position, suggesting that ergative and absolutive are lexical cases. Jelinek's Pronominal Argument Hypothesis accounts for the case split in Warlpiri, but does not make any claim about ergativity in general. The SPH differs from that in assuming that this is actually the only configuration in which an ergative case system may occur.

The SPH is based on the assumption that in every natural language the internal role of a transitive verb is assigned to its complement and the external

<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, the arguments in Warlpiri and Djaru do not attach to the main verb. In (5), cliticization takes place within VP but I assume it may also apply within TP, as seems to be the case in Warlpiri.

role to its specifier (contra Marantz 1984, but in accordance with more recent analyses of ergativity, i.e. Murasugi 1992, Bobaljik 1993, Ura 2000). If the subject and the object are to be morphologically distinguished from each other, the verb will always assign accusative case to its object and agree with its subject. This is the nominative-accusative pattern attested in the majority of the world's languages that have been described so far. Adjunct-NPs in pronominal argument languages are expected to be licensed via lexical cases that do not necessarily show the same nominative-accusative pattern. Total absence of any pattern, absolutive-ergative and tripartite patterns occur as well.

Cross-linguistically, pronominal argument languages with nominative-accusative marking on their adjunct-NPs do not seem to be numerous (Anna Siewierska, p.c.). This could be explained by the fact that these NPs will be realized more often by a full NP than by an independent pronoun. Often, the latter are only available for first and second person, and they will generally only be used to signal a contrastive focus or topic. Full NPs, however, are used whenever new referents are introduced or when a sentence needs disambiguation. Du Bois (1987) observes that new referents are typically introduced in S or O-function. This corresponds to the generalization that in transitive clauses, subjects tend to encode old information, whereas objects typically encode new information. Du Bois concludes that discourse is organized in an ergative way: S and O are treated alike and differently from A. Remember that one of the problems of non-configurational languages is their apparent free ordering of constituents. This freedom, however, is not totally unrestricted: the order of constituents is determined by discourse pragmatic factors. Hence, non-configurational languages are often called discourse configurational. Du Bois reports that in an experiment he carried out with native speakers of Sacapultec, a Mayan language, lexicalized arguments appear less frequently in A-function compared to S and O-functions. New mentions even never occur as A. This is compatible with an absolutive-ergative distinction, where the ergative is morphologically marked: absolutives are more often overtly realized than ergatives, hence it is economical to treat absolutives as the morphologically unmarked category. If a language has pronominal arguments, each argument is realized within the predicate. A second realization is not needed for syntactic reasons, so it may be totally dependent on pragmatic rules. This explains why the ergative pattern is likely to appear in pronominal argument languages as a second way of distinguishing between the arguments of the verb.

I expect the SPH to apply to many Australian languages (including Warlpiri and Djaru); Austronesian languages like Djinang (Waters 1989); Chukotko-Kamchatkan (Bobaljik 1998); Papuan languages like Yéli Dnye (Levinson 2003) and Tauya (MacDonald 1990); as well as Tibeto-Burman languages like Kham (Watters 2002). Note that the SPH excludes languages with absolutive-ergative verbal marking. To a certain extent, this is a desirable result. Various researchers have pointed out that there does not seem to be a single language with absolutive-ergative patterning clitics and nominative-accusative case-marking on full NPs (Silverstein 1976:159; Blake 1977:7; 1987:186; Dixon 1994:95). The SPH predicts why this should be the case: the universal pattern found in argument structure is nominative-accusative, absolutive-ergative only

appears as a second pattern. This is, to the best of my knowledge, a new idea that deserves to be explored more deeply in several languages. However, we should be aware of the fact that we do find languages with absolutive-ergative verbal marking, as will be illustrated in the next section.

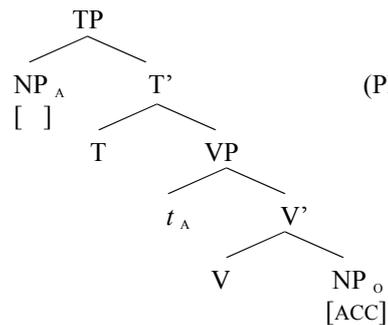
### 3. Ergative as Passive

Trask (1979) notes that in the past, linguists frequently analyzed ergative constructions as passive. Indeed, constructions like the Kurmanji example below thoroughly resemble passive sentences (8b):

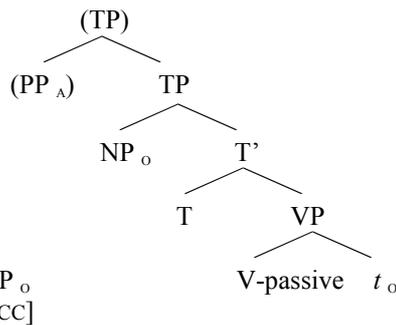
- (8) a. Kurmanji (Indo-European, Iranian, Kurdish (Subhî Ahmed, p.c.):  
*te em šû-št-in* (ergative)  
 2SG.ERG 1PL wash-PAST-PL  
 ‘You washed us.’  
 b. We were washed by you. (passive)

In both sentences, first person plural O (*em* ‘we’) is unmarked for case and triggers agreement on the verb, whereas second person singular A (*te* ‘(by) you’) is morphologically marked, in the ergative construction by marked case morphology and in the passive construction by a preposition. In nominative-accusative languages, the passive by-phrase is optionally present. Traditionally, this has been explained by assuming that the A-argument in passive constructions is realized as an adjunct. One way to obtain this result is to assume that the passive morphology turns a transitive verb into an intransitive one, demoting the external argument. The trees in (9) show what happens:

(9) a. active



b. passive



In active, transitive sentences, the verb assigns accusative case to O. A remains unmarked but raises to Spec TP in order to check the EPP-feature and its phi-features for agreement (9a). We call the latter nominative because in an intransitive sentence, S would receive the same treatment as A. The passive verb, on the other hand, is an intransitive predicate which does not take an external argument, so the internal argument with the same semantic role as the

direct object O is all there is. Intransitive verbs normally do not assign accusative case, so O stays unmarked and raises to Spec TP in order to become licensed. This triggers agreement with O. A is optionally added as an adjunct headed by the preposition *by* (9b). Even when it is not overtly realized, the existence of an agent is implied by the passive morphology, so in semantic terms the verb stays transitive.

I will propose an alternative analysis of the passive construction that allows the verb to stay transitive in syntactic terms as well, providing the key to understanding ergative constructions of the kind found in Kurmanji and Northwest Caucasian. The following data are from Abkhaz:

(10) Abkhaz (Northwest Caucasian, Khibla Amichba (p.c.)):

- a. *sara sy-cueit*  
1SG 1SG-walk.PRES  
'I am walking.'
- b. *uara uy-cueit*  
2SG 2SG-walk.PRES  
'You are walking.'
- c. *sara uara u-sy-dzvdzvoit*  
1SG 2SG 2SG-1SG.ERG-wash.PRES  
'I am washing you.'
- d. *uara sara s-u-dzvdzvoit*  
2SG 1SG 1SG-2SG.ERG-wash.PRES  
'You are washing me.'

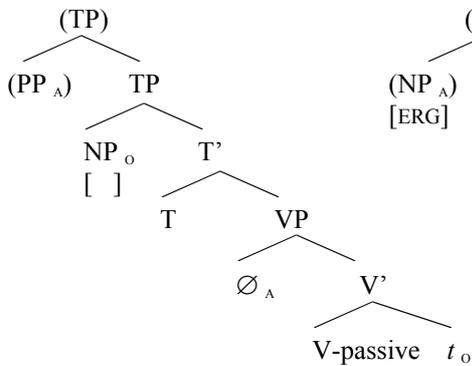
In Abkhaz, the verb agrees with subjects and objects. The independent pronouns in (10), *sara* '1SG' and *uara* '2SG' can be omitted, suggesting that the personal prefixes attached to the verb are pronominal arguments. These prefixes show an absolutive-ergative pattern: the initial prefix refers to either S or O (the absolutive), whereas the A-prefix appears closer to the verb stem.<sup>6</sup>

My treatment of passive constructions is based on Hoekstra (1986), Jaeggli (1986) and Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989). Compare (11a) with (9b):

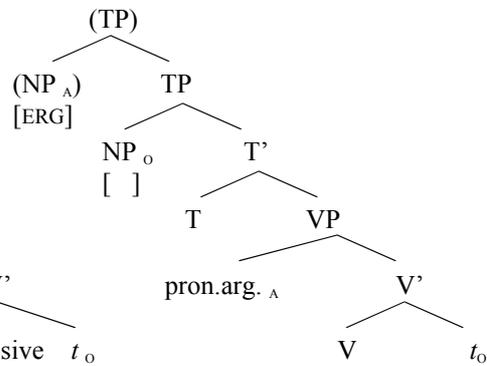
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<sup>6</sup> The verbal prefixes in (10) do not show any formal distinction between ergative and absolutive. As Abkhaz has a rich inventory of consonants and only a few vowels, 'y' often appears as a linking vowel. It may be combined with every possible personal prefix and, hence, does not make any distinction between syntactic functions. However, as I will show below, other members of the prefixal paradigms do formally distinguish between absolutive and ergative.

## (11) a. Passive



## b. Ergative



Suppose that passive verbs are transitive verbs that force A to be an empty argument by means of their passive morphology. By doing so, they morphologically distinguish A from O which might explain why accusative case is normally not assigned in these constructions.<sup>7</sup> The unmarked object raises to Spec TP in order to check its phi-features and the EPP-feature of T. To this structure, a by-phrase may adjoin in order to provide a specification for the empty subject. Suppose further that the goal of forming passive constructions is to present an event from the object's point of view. Leaving A unexpressed and treating O as a syntactic subject is one way of realizing this: the sentence is mainly about what is happening to O, not about what A is doing. An alternative means of presenting an event in this way might be to realize A as a pronominal argument which cliticizes to the verb (11b).<sup>8</sup> By doing so, A is automatically morphologically distinguished from O, which does not cliticize, so again there is no need to assign accusative case. As in canonical passive constructions, O raises to the TP-projection and a full NP or independent pronoun is optionally adjoined to the clause, doubling the cliticized A-pronoun. The adjunct NP may be licensed by a preposition or a case-particle, just like the by-phrase in canonical passive constructions. This preposition or case-particle will be perceived of as an instance of ergative case because it applies to transitive subjects. I will refer to this alternative account of ergativity with the term Ergative as Passive Hypothesis (EPH):

<sup>7</sup> Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989) assume that the passive morpheme (in languages like English) receives the external theta-role, prohibiting overt NPs to be base-generated as the subject. Due to the fact that theta-marked elements must be visible according to the Visibility Condition proposed by Chomsky (1981), the passive morpheme must receive case. This can only be the accusative case because the morpheme has been downgraded. Although different from the present proposal, this approach yields the same result, namely that the object has to move.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989) argue that the passive morpheme in English is syntactically a clitic but phonologically an affix.

(12) Ergative as Passive Hypothesis (EPH):

Passive verbs are syntactically transitive, either by base-generating the transitive subject as an empty element (canonical passive) or as a pronominal argument (ergative as passive). If either of these operations is obligatory, the language shows absolutive-ergative marking on the verb.

	independent pronoun, full NP:	independent pronoun, full NP:	independent pronoun, full NP:				
a.	[	NP <sub>s</sub>	V	]	intransitive		
		[ ]					
		pronominal argument:					
b.	(NP <sub>A</sub> )	[	NP <sub>A</sub>	V	NP <sub>o</sub>	]	transitive
	[ERG]	[ ]			[ ]		
			└─→	cliticization			

The main difference with the SPH is that under the EPH, absolutives are caseless NPs which are licensed by agreement, rather than adjuncts licensed by lexical absolutive case.

According to the EPH, there are languages where the passive operation is obligatory: all transitive constructions surface as passives. These are called canonical if the verb agrees with absolutive arguments and the transitive subject does not trigger any marking, like in Kurmanji and related languages.<sup>9</sup> In these languages, the argument position for A is occupied by an empty category. In other languages, however, a pronominal argument occupies this position. This appears to be the case in Northwest Caucasian. Abkhaz, for example, does not apply overt case marking. Each of S, A and O triggers verbal marking. Various researchers have shown that the Abkhaz verb uses one slot for marking S/O and another for marking A (Hewitt 1979, 1989; Chirikba 2003). The independent pronouns and the verbal markers, taken from Chirikba (2003:32,40), are given in (13):<sup>10</sup>

(13)	Abkhaz	verbal markers:		independent pronouns:
		S/O	A	S/A/O
				[ ] / [ERG]
SG	1 <sup>st</sup>	s(ə)-	s(ə)- /z(ə)	sa(rá)
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	w(ə)-	w(ə)-	wa(rá)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> .FEM.	b(ə)-	b(ə)-	ba(rá)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> .MASC.	d-	j(ə)-	ja(rá)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> .FEM	d-	l(ə)-	la(rá)

<sup>9</sup> In Kurmanji, like in many Iranian languages, the ergative construction only appears in past tense clauses, implying that passivization is only obligatory in past tense contexts.

<sup>10</sup> The spelling in (11) differs slightly from the examples in (8), because the latter were sent to me by an informant, whereas the former are from Chirikba (2003). The main difference is the spelling of the linking vowel (cf. footnote 6): in (8) it is represented by *y*, in (11) by *ə*.

	3 <sup>rd</sup> .NONHUM	<i>j(ə)-</i>	<i>(n)a-</i>	<i>ja(rá)</i>
PL	1 <sup>st</sup>	<i>h(a)-</i>	<i>h(a)- /aa-</i>	<i>ha(rá)</i>
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>š<sup>o</sup>(ə)-</i>	<i>š<sup>o</sup>(ə)- / ž<sup>o</sup>(ə)-</i>	<i>š<sup>o</sup>a(rá)</i>
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>j(ə)-</i>	<i>r(ə)- / d(ə)-</i>	<i>da(rá)</i>

The verbal markers for S and O belong to the same paradigm and they appear in the same position in the morphological template of the verb. The markers for A differ slightly from the S/O-paradigm and moreover they appear in a different position, closer to the verb-stem. This gives rise to a seemingly absolutive-ergative pattern. Notice, however, that the ‘ergative’ paradigm is more elaborate than the ‘absolutive’ one: there is a three-way gender distinction for third person singular, and there is also a separate third person plural form. The ‘absolutive’ paradigm only distinguishes between two genders with respect to third person and the plural form is homophonous to the form used for singular non-human. Above all, the forms that are present in the “ergative” paradigm but lacking in the “absolutive” one resemble the independent pronoun. These differences can be accounted for by the EPH: the “ergative” markers are cliticized pronouns, whereas the “absolutive” markers are agreement-affixes. Although the SPH cannot account for a language like Abkhaz, the EPH can.

In Abkhaz, as well as in the closely related Abaza, independent pronouns and full noun phrases are not marked for case. Hence, we need to assume that the ergative case is empty. However, the related Northwest Caucasian languages (Adyghe, Kabardian, Ubykh) do have overt instances of the ergative case (Smeets 1984). Moreover, they display a similar pattern of verbal marking as Abkhaz, although there are no gender distinctions. The verbal paradigms in Basque show similar evidence in favour of the EPH (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina (2003). Gitksan, a Tsimshian (Penutian) language from North America, has person marking for A-arguments, whereas S/O-arguments can be shown to trigger number-agreement in independent clauses (Peterson 2003).

Remember that the SPH was developed in order to account for the generalization that there are no languages with absolutive-ergative agreement and nominative-accusative case marking. This was ruled out by the main hypothesis that argument structure has a universal nominative-accusative basis, and this basis is always visible in pronominal argument languages. Languages with ergative verbal marking, however, cannot be accounted for by the SPH. The EPH complements the SPH in this respect, and at the same time makes the same prediction: it still excludes languages combining absolutive-ergative verbal marking with nominative-accusative case marking. The only possibility with respect to case marking under the EPH is absolutive-ergative, which may appear as neutral when the ergative case is not overt (cf. Abkhaz/Abaza). By hypothesis, the fact that the verb agrees with absolutive arguments in these languages is explained by the fact that it does not assign accusative case to its complement, which means that only the NP doubling the A-clitic may be overtly case-marked.

## 4. Conclusions and perspectives

In this paper, I have presented an analysis of the main absolutive-ergative patterns we encounter in natural language. The proposal treats nominatives as caseless; absolutives are either lexical (SPH) or caseless (EPH); accusative is a marked structural case and ergative a marked lexical case. The proposed universal architecture of argument structure assumes that a transitive verb may only assign structural accusative case to its complement, which receives the internal theta-role. The external role is assigned to the argument in the specifier, which moves to a higher functional category (TP) in order to become licensed. This invokes verbal agreement. The sole argument of an intransitive verb behaves like the external argument of a transitive verb, yielding an argument structure which patterns nominative-accusatively. This is the main hypothesis, which I take to be a universal principle of natural language. Ergative case is considered to be a lexical case, licensing transitive subject-NPs in  $\bar{A}$ -position. Two complementary sub-hypotheses account for a typologically motivated range of ergative languages.

Firstly, the *Second Pattern Hypothesis* (SPH) predicts that languages with pronominal arguments are likely to use the ergative pattern as a second pattern of distinguishing between the core arguments. A nominative-accusative pattern is less likely. In SPH-languages, all verbal arguments are obligatorily realized by pronominal arguments showing a nominative-accusative pattern. All full NPs and independent pronouns are necessarily generated as adjuncts because they cannot appear in argument position. In some languages, no morphological distinction is made between these NP-adjuncts. Very few other languages mark the object, resulting in a (second) nominative-accusative pattern. Yet other languages mark transitive subjects in a way such that an absolutive-ergative system obtains. This system is motivated by the fact that the adjuncts are most often third person and the fact that their presence or absence is determined by pragmatic factors. The SPH is closely related to Jelinek's Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (1993) and is expected to account for every language that has a split between case marking and "agreement". Pama-Nyungan languages like Warlpiri and Djaru, Austronesian languages like Djinang, the Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages, Tibeto-Burman languages like Kham and Papuan languages like Yéli Dnye and Tauya illustrate such a split.

The second hypothesis, the *Ergative as Passive Hypothesis* (EPH), accounts for languages that apply an absolutive-ergative pattern in their verbal marking. The EPH states that for reasons underlying passive formation, languages cliticize the transitive subject to the verb, resulting in a "canonical" passive construction or in an "ergative" set of verbal markers. Objects and intransitive subjects may trigger overt agreement that we conceive of as an "absolutive" set of verbal markers. The difference with the SPH is that according to this hypothesis, only transitive subject-NPs are adjuncts, whereas objects and intransitive subjects originate in argument positions. If NP-adjuncts in  $\bar{A}$ -function are licensed by an overt case-particle, the absolutive-ergative distinction will also be visible in the case system. The EPH is based on an analysis of canonical passives that treats passive verbs as transitive predicates obligatorily taking an empty subject, instead of treating them as intransitive

predicates. This analysis accounts for ergative languages with absolutive agreement on the verb, like many Indo-Iranian languages and Northeast Caucasian. The non-canonical part of the EPH applies to languages like Northwest Caucasian, Basque and Gitksan where both subjects and objects are marked on the verb in an absolutive-ergative pattern.

Future research should provide more evidence in favour of these two sub-hypotheses. The literature on the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis and the closely related Polysynthesis Parameter (Baker 1996) predict that full NPs are necessarily referential whenever they function as a double of a pronominal argument. This can be explained by the fact that they are in a syntactic binding relation with their pronominal argument. Weak Crossover effects show that pronouns cannot receive a variable interpretation when they are bound from an  $\bar{A}$ -position (cf. Rizzi 1986). This implies that lexical quantifiers are absent from pronominal argument languages, because they would be able to render the NPs non-referential. In this respect, pronominal arguments and their doubles appear in constructions similar to clitic-left dislocation in Romance, Slavic and Greek. My proposal naturally predicts the same for SPH-languages, since they are a subclass of the pronominal argument languages. The EPH is less strict: lexical quantifiers could exist in the languages at stake but they should not be able to occur in transitive subject position. More detailed research on the languages discussed in this paper will be needed in order to see whether these predictions are borne out.

In general, more research in languages other than the ones cited here will be needed in order to support the idea that ergativity is universally derived in the ways sketched in this paper.

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