THE ERGATIVE DRAGON

Ergativity is even more complex than it seems!
Sources


OUR ROADMAP

- The *very* basic pattern
- A different typology of ergativity
  - Active Ergative
  - Object Shift Ergative
- Does the stereotypical pattern actually exist?
- Syntactic versus morphological ergativity
it’s only the beginning...and may not actually be true...
**West Greenlandic**

Oli sinippoq.

‘Oli sleeps.’

**Chukchee**

**Transitive**

ətləg-ə ən-in l’ulqəl rə-gtəkwannen.

father-erg 3sg-posss face.abs cause-freeze

‘Father suffered frost-bite on his face.’

**Intransitive**

ətləg-ən l’o-nə-gtəkwatg’e.

father-abs face-cause-freeze3sg

‘Father got face frost-bitten.’

West Greenlandic is a dialect of Greenlandic (Inuktitut) and is spoken in Greenland by appr. 44,000 people.

Chukchee (Chukchi) is spoken in Eastern Russia by appr. 5,100 people.
Early on, we saw examples of ergative splits

(i) Regular nouns follow an ergative-absolutive system.

a. ŋuma banaga-n’u
   father.abs returned
   ‘Father returned.’

b. yabu banagan’u
   mother.abs returned
   ‘Mother returned.’

c. ŋuma yabu-ŋgu buran
   father.abs mother-erg saw
   ‘Mother saw father.’

d. yabu ŋuma-ŋgu buran
   mother.abs father-erg saw
   (Tallerman 2005:163-165)
   ‘Father saw mother.’

(ii) Pronouns follow a nominative-accusative system

a. ŋana banaga-n’u
   we all.nom return-nonfut
   ‘We returned.’

b. n’urra banagan’u
   you all.nom returned
   ‘You all returned.’

c. n’urra ŋana-na buran
   you all.nom we all-acc saw
   ‘You all saw us.’

d. ŋana n’urra-na buran
   we all.nom you all-acc saw
   ‘We saw you all.’

I’m not sure that Dyirbal is still with us. There were only 29 speakers in 2006.
Case depends on aspect

(i) Nominative subject: Not perfective. We don’t know if the action was completed.

Rahul kitaab parh-taa thaa
Rahul.masc. book.fem. read-hab.masc.sg be.past.masc.sg
‘Rahul used to read (a/the) book.’

(ii) Ergative subject: Perfective. The action has been completed.

Rahul-ne kitaab parh-ii thii
‘Rahul had read the book.’

[Bhatt 2005, EX 2-reglossed]

This is an ergative agreement pattern, which becomes relevant for Woolford’s discussion of languages that “look” ergative, even though there’s no ergative marker.
The argument put forth here will shatter our world. Woolford fails to find definitive evidence of the “stereotypical” ergative pattern.
Active Ergative Languages

- Any verb – transitive or intransitive – with an external argument marks ergative on the subject. The intransitives are unergative.

Object Shift Ergative Languages

- A direct object is necessary – but not sufficient – for ergative on the subject. The object has to move to a position higher in the clause, outside of the VP.

Woolford’s Goals:

- Build on Bittner and Hale’s work by adding other languages to this typology.
- Provide additional evidence for the Object Shift category.
- Explore whether the stereotypical pattern exists.
  - Each language she examines that could fit the stereotypical pattern might also fit the Object Shift category. Word order makes it difficult to tell in these languages.

**Important:** Woolford’s goal is not to provide a detailed technical account of how ergative case (and other case) is assigned.

Bittner and Hale (1996): There are two categories of ergative languages, neither of which fits the stereotypical model based on transitivity.
(1) Ngarrka-ngku ka yunpa-rni.
man-ERG PRES sing-NONPAST
‘The man is singing.’
(Levin 1983:149, (4.23b))

Warlpiri: Spoken in Australia by appr. 2,500 people
ACTIVE

(2) Juuna-p miiqqa-t paar(i-v)-a-i.
Juuna-ERG child-PL(NOM) look.after-IND-[+ TRANS]-3SG.3PL
‘Juuna is looking after the children.’
(Bittner and Hale 1996:544, (22b))

(3) Juuna atuakka-nik marlun-nik pi-si-v-u-q.
Juuna(NOM) book-PL.INSTR two-PL.INSTR paid.for-get-IND-[− TRANS]-3SG
‘Juuna bought two books.’
(Bittner 1994:72, (45b))

Inuit: Spoken by appr. 90,000 ppl in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia
OBJECT SHIFT

BITTNER AND HALE’S PROPOSAL

Warlpiri is an example of an active language.
For Bittner and Hale, ergative only appears in the context of an object – overt or semantically incorporated.

Inuit is an example of an object shift language.

(2): Object is definite and moves out of the VP.

(3): Object is indefinite and stays in the VP.
   man-erg aux:present kangaroo.abs spear-nonpast
   ‘The man is spearing the kangaroo.’

b. Wawirri ka panti-rni ngarrka-ngku.
   kangaroo.abs aux:present spear-nonpast man-erg
   ‘The man is spearing the kangaroo.’

c. Panti-rni ka ngarrka-ngku wawirri
   spear-nonpast aux:present man-erg kangaroo.abs
   ‘The man is spearing the kangaroo.’
   (Tallerman, Ch. 6, EX9)

Remember...
We saw Warlpiri before

It has free-ish word order.
These examples don’t tell the whole story...
Absolutive = Nominative: Both are assigned by T.
In languages that have an “ergative” agreement pattern, the verb agrees with the absolutive/nominative.

Ergative is assigned by a special v to the DP that is in its specifier.

Object shift moves the object to a position that is higher than the initial position of the subject (Spec, vP) and lower than T.
This is important to her discussion of why there seems to be an interaction between object shift and ergativity.
She speculates that the moved object blocks T from assigning case to the subject.
ACTIVE LANGUAGES

**Georgian**
Spoken by appr. 4.3 million ppl in Georgia, Russia, the US, Israel, Ukraine, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan

**Udi**
Spoken by appr. 6600 ppl in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Georgia

**Batsbi**
Spoken by appr. 3,000 ppl in Georgia

**Inguh**
Spoken by appr. 320,000 ppl in Russia and Kazakhstan

**Basque**
Spoken by appr. 720,000 ppl in Spain and France

**Kashmiri**
Spoken by appr. 5.6 million ppl in India and Pakistan
Previous work describes Georgian as active/inactive.

(36)/(37): Subjects that are external arguments are ergative.

(38)/(39): Subjects that are internal arguments are nominative.

Semantic properties of the object don’t affect ergative on subject.

(40): Object is indefinite (nom)

(41): Object is definite (dat)

Differential Object Marking

Semantic properties of the object are relevant for object-shift languages.
The case of the subject depends on volitionality.

(44): he just happened to see his wife.

(45): he made a special effort to see his wife
If we look just at 48/49, we're deceived into thinking Ingush is a stereotypical ergative language.
(53) Äyel-en one-ne-xa.
child-erg cry-3pl-say.pres
‘The child is crying.’
(Harris 2002:8, (7))

(54) Merab-en zavod-a aš-ne-b-sa.
Merab-erg factory-dat work-3sg-do-pres
‘Merab works in a factory.’
(Harris 2002:81, (23a))

(57) Xinār-en ṣum banest’a.
girl-erg bread.abs bake
‘The girl is baking bread.’
(Harris 2002:7, (5a))

(58) Xinār-en ṣum-ax banest’a.
girl-erg bread-dat bake
‘The girl is baking the bread.’
(Harris 2002:7, (5b))

UDI

(53): Intransitive with external argument
(54): Transitive

Differential Object Marking
(like Georgian), but no effect on ergative subject
(57): Object is indefinite (abs/nom)
(58): Object is definite (dat)
(59) Gizon-a etorri da.  
man-det.nom arrived is  
‘The man arrived.’  
(Laka 2013:133, (6b))

(60) Ekaitz-a sor-tu da.  
storm-det.nom arise-perf is  
‘A storm arose.’  
(Laka 2006:376, (4c))

(61) Gizon-ak kurritu du.  
man-erg run has  
‘The man ran.’  
(Levin 1989:57, (33))

(62) Eguzki-a-k disdira-tzen du.  
sun-det-erg shine-impf has  
‘The sun shines.’  
(Laka 2006:380, (9b))

(65) Miren-ek ni-ri erantzun dit.  
Miren-erg I-dat answer aux  
‘Miren answered me.’  
(Levin 1989:56, (31))

**BASQUE**

(59)/(60): Animate and inanimate internal arguments of intransitives get nom/abs

(61)/(62): Animate and inanimate external arguments of intransitives get ergative

(65): Transitive with a (human) dative object
(67) Tse vod-u-th.\textsuperscript{13}
you.\textsc{erg} cry-masc.sg-2sg
‘You cried.’
(Wali and Koul 1997:250, (9a))

I.\textsc{erg} wrote board.dat on chalk.abl.masc.sg with
‘I wrote on the board with a piece of chalk.’
(Wali and Koul 1997:162, (4b))

(71) Shi:shi phuṭ.
glass.nom broke
‘The glass broke.’
(Wali and Koul 1997:152, (3c))

(70) Me phuṭro:v du:n kan-i baga:r.
I.\textsc{erg} broke.masc.sg walnut stone-abl without
‘I broke a walnut without using a stone.’
(Wali and Koul 1997:162, (5a))

\textbf{KASHMIRI}

(67)/(68): External arguments in clauses with perfective aspect are ergative.
  - Like Hindi

(71): Internal argument is nom (I assume the aspect is perfective)

(70): An ergative subject can appear with an indefinite object
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- Transitivity is not required for ergative marking on a subject.
- The subject must be an external argument.
Objects that are definite/specific move to a position outside of the VP.

BUT, object shift is not necessarily related to ergativity…
a. Non-shifted Accusative Object
Hún hefur því sennilega ekki hitt þa um kvödið.
She.Nom has.3sg thus probably not met them.Acc in evening.the ‘She has probably not met them in the evening.’

b. Shifted Accusative Object
Hún hitt þa því sennilega ekki um kvödið.
She.Nom met.3sg them.Acc thus probably not in evening.the ‘She probably did not meet them in the evening.’

c. Non-shifted Nominative Object
Henni hafa því sennilega ekki leiðst þeir um kvödið.
Her.Dat have thus probably not bored.3sg they.Nom in evening.the ‘She has probably not felt bored by them in the evening.’

d. Shifted Nominative Object
Henni leiddust þeir því sennilega ekki um kvödið.
Her.Dat bored.3pl they.Nom thus probably not in evening.the ‘She has probably not been felt by them in the evening.’

(Boeckx 2008)
In all the examples, the object starts off inside the VP. It starts off lower than the adverbials.

In all the Scandinavian languages (except Icelandic), only pronouns can undergo object shift.

(b) would be good in Icelandic

(Vikner 2005, EX 3)

It’s complicated. There are lots of proposals re: when objects get case and where objects need to be in the structure in order to get case.

In Scandinavian languages, object shift is argued to be more of a syntactic phenomenon that is tied to verb movement.
That the object lands between T and the initial position of the subject is important for Woolford’s proposal about the relationship between object shift and ergativity.
(10) Ne inu e Sione e kofe.
PAST drink ERG Sione NOM coffee
‘Sione drank the coffee.’ (Massam 2000:98, (2a))
(11) Ne inu kofe a Sione.
PAST drink coffee NOM Sione
‘Sione drank coffee.’ (Massam 2000:98, (2b))

(12) a. Base order
    b. Order after VP-fronting
(13) a. Base order
    b. Order after object shift
    c. Order after VP-fronting

(7) Niuean case morphemes (from Massam 2006:28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper nouns/Pronouns</th>
<th>Common nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ergative e</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutive a</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The ergative for proper nouns/pronouns looks like the absolutive for common nouns.
(16) Neafi, ne [tō huli talo] a au he māla.
yesterday PAST [plant shoot taro] ABS I at plantation
‘Yesterday, I planted taro shoots at the plantation.’
(Seiter 1980:69, (184b))

(17) Neafi, ne [tō] e au e tau huli talo he māla.
yesterday PAST [plant] ERG I ABS PL shoot taro at plantation
‘Yesterday, I planted taro shoots at the plantation.’
(Seiter 1980:69, (183b))

(18) Ne kai [sipi mo e ika mitaki] a Sione.
PAST eat chip COM ACC fish good NOM Sione
‘Sione ate good fish and chips.’
(Massam 2000:106, (16a))

(19) Ne holoholo [kapiniu kiva] fakaeneena a Sione.
PAST wash dish dirty slowly NOM Sione
‘Sione washed dirty dishes slowly.’
(Massam 2000:106, (16b))

DOES NIUEAN FIT THE STEREOTYPIC PATTERN?

- (16) Involves some kind of incorporation (like we saw in Chukchee) and is intransitive.

- Only unmodified nouns can incorporate.
- The nouns in the VOS clauses in (18)/(19) are modified.
For many books, all the children read them.  
There’s a set of specific books.

For all the children, they read many books.
Possible evidence for object shift:

- Topical objects participate in agreement – 3/3 in (31)
- Topical objects have a case (?) marker, -ne.
- Topical objects participate in agreement and get case, suggesting they have a relationship with T.
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- Having an object is not sufficient for ergative marking on the subject.
- The object has to be definite/specific and move to a higher position in the structure.
Maybe the stereotypical pattern does exist…
Previous Literature:

Set A agreement cross-references transitive subjects

Set B agreement cross-references intransitive subjects and transitive objects
Opposite aspect split.

(113) Táan in-k’uč-ul.
   DUR 1.SETA-arrive-IMPF
   ‘I am arriving.’
   (Bricker 1981:84, (4))

(114) H-k’uč-eč.
   COMPL-arrive-2.SETB
   ‘You arrived.’
   (Bricker 1981:84, (5))

And only with intransitives.

(115) T-inw-il-ah-eč.
   COMPL-1.SETA-see-PERF-2.SETB
   ‘I saw you.’
   (Bricker 1981:83, (2))

(116) Táan uy-il-ik-en.
   DUR 3.SETA-see-IMPF-1.SETB
   ‘He is seeing me.’
   (Bricker 1981:83, (1))

[imperfective aspect] [Yucatec Maya]
[perfective aspect] [Yucatec Maya]
[perfective aspect] [Yucatec Maya]
[imperfective aspect] [Yucatec Maya]

Woolfords casts doubt

- The imperfective aspect is marked with the transitive subject (ergative) marker.
  - Perfective aspect is what’s been previously attested to trigger ergative.
- Only intransitive clauses have an aspect split.
  - Transitive clauses have the same agreement pattern.

Woolford speculates about “preferences” for different kinds of agreement markers being spelled out.
WHY IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBJECT SHIFT AND ERGATIVITY?

ERGATIVE CASE IS A LAST RESORT
Icelandic

1. a. Við lásum bókina.
   we.Nom read.1pl book.the.Acc
   ‘We read the book.’ (Sigurðsson 1996, Ex 14)
   --Normal v: assigns accusative to the object

2. b. Einum málfraðingi líkuðu/líkaði þessar hugmyndir.
   one.Dat linguist.Dat liked.3pl/3sg these.Nom ideas.Nom.pl
   ‘One linguist liked these ideas.’ (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 1)
   --Special v: assigns dative to the subject

Gujarati (spoken in India by about 50million ppl)

2. a. Sudha away-i.
   Sudha(fem).Abs came-fem
   ‘Sudha came.’
   --Normal v: there’s no object for v to assign case to

2. b. Sudha-e radio khāridy-o.
   Sudha(fem)-Erg radio(masc).Abs bought-masc
   ‘Sudha bought a radio.’ (Woolford 2006, EX 38c/39)
   --Special v: assigns ergative to the subject
When the object shifts, it intervenes between T and the initial position of the subject.

The subject, therefore, gets ergative from v.

There are lots of details to be worked out...
AND MORE COMPLEXITY: THERE’S A
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICAL
ERGATIVITY AND SYNTACTIC ERGATIVITY
Nominative Subject

(i) nadya \( \rightarrow \) sabina-ko \( \rightarrow \) skul \( \rightarrow \) ch\text{or-egi} \( \rightarrow \) or \( \rightarrow \) pil \( \rightarrow \) n\text{aha-yegi} \\
Nadya.fem.sg.nom Sabina.fem.sg.acc school leave-fut.fem3sg and then bathe-fut.fem.3sg  \\
‘Nadya will leave Sabina at school and [Nadya] will bathe.’  \\
*’Nadya will leave Sabina at school and [Sabina] will bathe.’

Ergative Subject

(ii) nadya-ne \( \rightarrow \) sabina-ko \( \rightarrow \) skul \( \rightarrow \) ch\text{or-a} \( \rightarrow \) or \( \rightarrow \) pil \( \rightarrow \) n\text{aha-ya}  \\
Nadya.fem.sg-erg Sabina.fem.sg.acc school leave-perf.masc.sg and then bathe-perf.masc.3sg  \\
‘Nadya left Sabina at school and [Nadya] then bathed.’  \\
*’Nadya left Sabina at school and [Sabina] then bathed.’  

(Butt, Chapter 6, EX 12)

- In each example, there are two sentences conjoined with and.
- In both (i) and (ii), the subject of the second sentence is silent. The silent subject is Nadya in both sentences even though the subject is nominative in the first sentence and ergative in the second sentence.

HINDI PATTERNS LIKE ENGLISH
(i) ŋuma yabu-ŋu buran banagan'yu
   father.abs mother-erg saw returned
   ‘Mother saw father and [father] returned.’
   *‘Mother saw father and [mother] returned.’

(ii) bayi burrbula bangul gubi-ŋu bara-n baji-gu
    dem.abs Burrbula.abs dem.erg gubi-erg punch-nonfuture fall.down
    ‘The gubi punched Burrbula and [Burrbula] fell down.’
    *‘The gubi punched Burrbula and [the gubi] fell down.’

(Butt, Chapter 6, EX 14)

- Here, we also have two conjoined sentences in (i) and (ii), BUT in the second sentence, the silent subject refers back to the object of the first sentence.

- The object of the first sentence is absolutive because the verb is transitive. If the subject of the second sentence were pronounced, it would be absolutive because the verb is intransitive.

- So, the silent subject refers back to the noun that is absolutive in the first sentence.

- Dyirbal is the only language known to pattern this way.
The stereotypic pattern of ergativity is a gross over-simplification, and may not even exist.

It is argued that there are two types of ergative languages:

- Ergative is marked on external arguments
- Ergative is marked when an object moves out of the VP
  - The ergative marking is a last-resort because the object intervenes between T and the subject.

There are some languages where the word order makes it difficult to tell if an object has moved.

Even in languages whose agreement pattern suggests they fit the stereotypic model are not so neatly explained.