ERGATIVITY
WHEN TRANSITIVITY MATTERS

Matthew A. Tucker

Linguistics 105: Morphology
Fall 2012

November 7, 2012

Administrative Miscellany

HWs

- Should receive an email from me or Nate about HW 5 by Friday.
- HW 6 is posted and you should have started on it already.

Others

- Mohanan (1995) helpful background for today's lecture.
- No immediate reading but Marantz (1997) on the horizon.
- S-Circle this Friday, 3:30pm LCR (Bern Samko)
  "Topcaility and Root Phenomena in English"

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Anti-Causative Thoughts

Terminology

Martin Haspelmath (1987:9)

Authors of descriptive grammars, in particular, have often created terms ad hoc for their individual languages, without being aware that very similar phenomena exist in other languages too.

- Terms I've seen or Haspelmath lists include:
  - inchoative
  - middle
  - reflexive
  - middle passive, mediopassive, pseudopassive, derived intransitive, spontaneous intransitive, passive, notional passive, pseudo-reflexive, quasi-reflexive, illogical reflexive, decausative.

- Original use attributed by Haspelmath to Soviet linguists Nedjalkov & Sil'nickii (1969).

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Beyond Terminology

Knowing a Causative

When a transitivity alternation between two sentences involves addition/deletion of an agent/external argument, if the *transitive* is marked, it is the Causative. IF the *intransitive* is marked, it is the Anticausative.

(1) $\sqrt{\text{VERB}}$, V [__ DP]
       $\sqrt{\text{VERB}} + Aff_1$, V [DP [__ DP]]

(2) $\sqrt{\text{VERB}} + Aff_2$, V [__ DP]
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But Reflexives are Often Correlated

Reflexives denote that both the agent and patient are identical – why say the agent at all?

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ERGATIVITY: INTRODUCTION

MARKING ARGUMENT RELATIONS

- A lot of what follows uses the descriptive terminology of frameworks which take grammatical relations to be primitives of the theory.
- Dimensions of transitivity (ignoring ditransitives for now):
  1. TRANSITIVE: two arguments
  2. INTRANSITIVE: one argument.

- A different way of splitting grammatical relations:
  - SUBJECT of an intransitive clause (== S).
  - SUBJECT of a transitive clause (== A, for "actor").
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Nominative–Accusative Systems

Question

Are there patterns to the case marking seen on {S, A, O}?

(3) English:
    a. *She* laughs regularly at parties.
    b. *She* has seen **him**.

{S, A} ⟶ nominative case   O ⟶ accusative case.

(4) Japanese:
    a. Tanaka *ga* takushi **wo** tomemashita.
        Tanaka case taxi case stopped
        "Tanaka stopped the taxi."
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(5) Tongan:

  a. Na'e taamate'i ['e Teevita] ['a Koolaiate].
     PAST kill   David]   Golaith]
     "David killed Goliath."

  b. Na'e lea   ['a Tolu].
     PAST speak   Tolu]
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{S, O} ⟶ ABSOLUTIVE CASE   A ⟶ ERGATIVE CASE

(6) Basque:

  a. Haurr-a   ethorri da.
     Child-ABS came   AUX
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  b. Martin-ek haurr-a   igorri du.
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Ergative-Absolutive Systems

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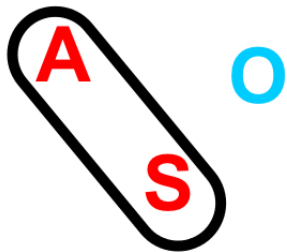# ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE SYSTEMS

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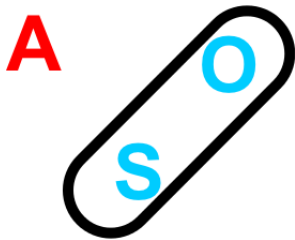   "Tolu speaks."

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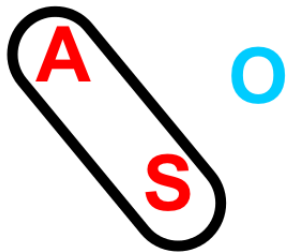   "Martin sent the child."

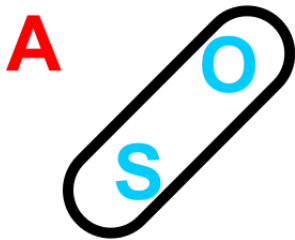# Pictoral Representation

Nomiative–Accusative

Ergative-Absolutive

- There are no {A, O} languages.
  - Not very useful marking for languages with SOV, OSV, VSO, and VOS word order. . .

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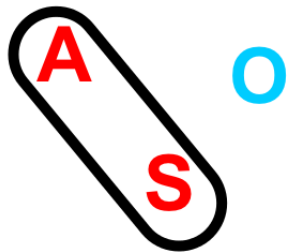
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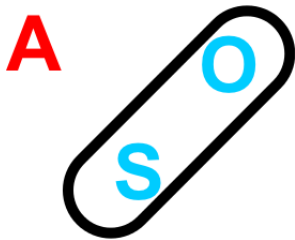# PICTORAL REPRESENTATION

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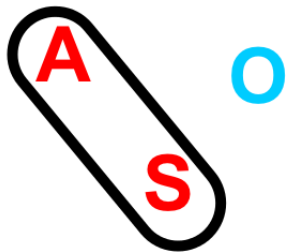
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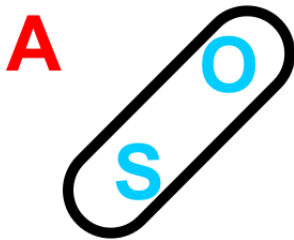

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- Not all *Ergative* languages are ergative all the time.

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A morphological system which changes from ergative to accusative or vice vers under controlled circumstances are known as SPLIT ERGATIVE systems.

(7) Georgian (Kartvelian; Republic of Georgia), Present Tense:

    a.   Sţudenţ-i midis.
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    b.   Sţudenţ-i ceril-s cers.
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Tripartite Languages

Mark all Three

- While rare, there are languages that mark all three:

(9) Motu (Austronesian; New Guinea):

    a.   Mero *na* e ginimu.
        boy case he stands
        "The boy is standing.

    b.   Mero ese   aniani Ø   e heni-gu
        boy   case food   case he gave-me
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- Often these aren't manifested for all nouns/verbs — Dyrbal (Pama-nyungan):
  - *wh*-Words: wan'a (S), wan'd\u (A), wan'una (O).
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Intransitives and Ergativity

ABSOLUTIVE INTRANSITIVES AND ERGATIVE INTRANSITIVES

- Most languages with ergativity *require* S to be absolutive:

(10)   Tongan:

    Na'e lea   'a/(*'e)   Tolu.
    PAST speak ABS/(*ERG) Tolu

    "Tolu speaks."

- Other languages allow ergative with intransitives:

(11)   Basque:

    a.   Ume-a etorri da.
        kid-ABS arrive AUX

        "The kid arrived."

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A SPLIT-S language has principles governing the choice between more than one case marking option on S.

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"DEEP" ERGATIVITY

Morphological Ergativity vs. Deep Ergativity

So far...

All our data is from *morphology.* What is the *syntax* of ergativity?

- "Syntax treats {S, O} as a natural class..."
  - for application of Passive
  - for *wh*-extraction
  - for the formation of Relative Clauses
  - if they have an ANTI-passive (Friday!)

As it turns out...

It is unclear if any truly syntactically ergative languages exist. The original popularizer of the term "ergative" only mentions a handful of possible languages (Dyirbal among them).

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