Rethinking alignment typology

Jan-Wouter Zwart and Charlotte Lindenbergh
University of Groningen

TIN-dag, Utrecht, 7 february 2015

1. Alignment

(1) *Alignment*
     The grouping of **grammatical functions** across **clause types**

(2) *Grammatical functions*
     subject
     object

(3) *Clause types*
     intransitive
     transitive

Figure 1, Alignment patterns
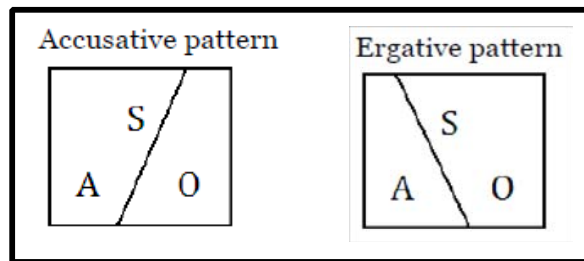
(4) A = transitive subject
     S = intransitive subject
     O = object

(5) 'grouping': identical behaviour for some grammatical phenomenon
     (typically case, agreement, but also position, movement possibilities, etc.)

(6) *Accusative alignment: German case*
     a. de-**r**   mann   schwimm-t   (High German)
        DET.M-NOM   man$_M$ swim-3SG
        'The man is swimming.'
     b. de-**r**   mann   sieh-t   de-**n**   hund
        DET.M-NOM   man$_M$ see-3SG DET.N-ACC dog
        'The man sees the dog.'

(7) *Ergative alignment: Coast Tsimshian predicate connectives*
     a. yagwa   hadiks   **a**   üüla   (Coast Tsimshian, Mulder 1994:32)
        PRES   swim   ABS   seal
        'The seal is swimming.'
     b. yagwa-t   huum   **da**   duus   **a**   hoon
        PRES-3SG.SUBJ smell   ERG   cat   ABS   fish
        'The cat is sniffing the fish.'

(8) *Known issues*
     a. What is the 'ergativity parameter'?
     b. Is ergative case inherent or structural?
     c. Are aligment features for the various phenomena (case, agreement) correlated?
     d. What is the status of 'syntactic ergativity'?

(9) *Typological correlation*
     When agreement is ergative, so is case (or case is absent); not the other way around.

(10) Bobaljik's explanation
a. Case hierarchy (Marantz 1991) adapted into agreement hierarchy: unmarked >
   dependent > lexical/oblique
b. dependent case: accusative/ergative, unmarked case: nominative/absolutive
c. (9) explained because agreement tracks highest accesible element (determined by
   hierarchy)
     e.g. if dependent is accessible, agreement will be with nominative, even if case
     marking is ergative, but never vica versa

(11) No language is ergative all the way (Moravcsik 1978), there are lots of splits
     (depending on grammatical phenomenon, NP-type, tense/aspect, clause type, etc.)

(12) To investigate correlations, we need a more fine-grained alignment typology.

2.   Current alignment typology

(13) 1. accusative   (A/S : O)
      2. ergative   (A : S/O)
      3. tripartite   (A : S : O)

(14) *Tripartite*
      a. yūlŋu-ṯ**u**   taykka-**ṉa**   pūyan   (Dhangu, Schebeck 1976)
         man-ERG woman-ACC   hit
         'The man hit the woman.'
      b. taykka   yatyṯuwan
         woman:NOM screamed
         'The woman screamed.'

(15) *Deal 2012: two ways of understanding ergativity*
      a. ergative property: A behaves different from O
      b. absolutive property: S behaves the same as O

	+ ERGATIVE	– ERGATIVE
+ ABSOLUTIVE	Coast Tsimshian (7)	Chinese [no case at all]
– ABSOLUTIVE	Dhangu (13)	High German (6)

Figure 2, interaction of ergative and absolutive properties

3. A taste of the problem

(16) Paumarí (Arauan, Chapman and Derbyshire 1991)
- looks ergative (special case for A)
- but: case-marking only with immediate preverbal NP
  (NB, in marked AOV order, O is case-marked and A is not)

(17) a. Dono-**a**   bi-ko'diraha-'a-ha   ada   isai   hoariha
       Dono-ERG 3SG.TR-pinch-ASP-THEME:MASC   DEM:MASC child   other
       'Dono pinched the other boy.'
    b. soko-a-ki   hida   mamai
       wash-DETRANS-NONTHEME DEM:FEM   mother
       'Mother is washing.'

(18) *Marked AOV order*
    bano   pa'isi   o-sa'a-**ra**   anani-hi
    piranha   small   1SG-finger-OBJ   bite-THEME
    'A small piranha bit my finger.'

(19) We need a distinction between elements that **do and do not participate** in a grammatical phenomenon:
    - Paumarí immediate preverbal NP: participates in case-marking (**S**V, **A**VO)
    - Paumarí other NPs: do not participate in case-marking   (AV**O**, **A**OV)

(20) Unmarked clauses in Paumarí (SV and AVO): O does not participate in case-marking
    > the zero marking for S is fundamentally different from the zero marking for O
    > S = zero in opposition to A (= **-a**); O = zero because it doesn't participate

(21) Opposition A : S, but not A : S/O
(22) In Deal's system: [+ERG, –ABS], i.e. tripartite,
    but that obscures the fact that O does not participate.
(23) Alignment typology should be a two-step process:
    1. decide which elements participate
    2. align participating elements

4. Proposal

(24) Questions to ask
    i)   does a grammatical process apply to all of { A, S, O } ?
    ii)   is the process realized identically in those of { A, S, O } to which it applies ?

(25) Step 1 : completeness
    a. yes   > **complete**   (26a)
    b. no   > **incomplete** (26b)
    c. d.n.a.   > **neutral**

(26) Step 2 : alignment
    a. complete types   b. incomplete types
       A = S = O **identical**   only A/S same   **subjective**
       A = S ≠ O **accusative**   different **(in)transitive subjective**
       A ≠ S = O **ergative**   only S/O same   **absolutive**
       A = O ≠ S **intransitive**   different **(in)transitive absolutive**
       A ≠ S ≠ O **tripartite**   only A/O same   **transitive (tr.)**
                                  different **subjective/objective tr.**
                              only O   **narrow accusative**

                              only A   **narrow ergative**
(> 18 types)   only S   **narrow intransitive**
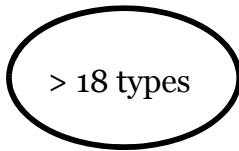
5.   Illustrations

(27) Dutch/English verbal agreement = incomplete, in fact **subjective**

(28) High German case (6) = complete, in fact **accusative**

(29) Coast Tsimshian predicate connectives (7) = complete, in fact **ergative**

(30) Dhangu case (14) = complete, in fact **tripartite** (or incomplete?)

(31) Paumarí case [in AVO clauses] (17) = incomplete, in fact **transitive subjective**
    (even though it looks ergative!)
    Paumarí case [in preverbal position] (17-18) = complete, in fact **tripartite**

(32) Chinese case = **neutral**

6.   Application: split systems

(31) Coast Tsimshian is in fact much more complicated (Mulder 1994):
    a. NP-type split: NPs/free pronouns (**ergative**) vs. names (**accusative**)
    b. tense split: NPs/free pronouns elsewhere (**ergative**) vs. past (**identical**),
        names elsewhere (**accusative**) vs. imperfect (**tripartite**)
    c. mood split: clitics organized differently in subjunctive (**ergative**) vs. elsewhere
        (**ergative**, **tripartite**, or **intransitive**, depending on animacy hierarchy)
    d. agreement is poor: either **narrow ergative** or **neutral**
      > you might test whether that is sensitive to case: it doesn't look like it

(32) Wambaya (West Barkly, Nordlinger 1998) has a quasi-ergative agreement pattern.

	TR.SUBJECT	INTR.SUBJECT	OBJECT
1SG	*ngi-*		*-ng-*
2SG	*nyi-*		*-ny-*
3SG.MASC	*gini-*	*gi-*	
3SG.NONMASC	*ngiyi-*		

Figure 3, Wambaya agreement markers (singular only)

   a. Nordlinger (1998:146) argues that object agreement in 3SG is not zero but absent
   b. If so, agreement in 1/2SG = complete, and **accusative**,
   c. and agreement in 3SG = incomplete, and **transitive subjective** (only A/S, and
      marked differently)

   > how can we tell 3SG object agreement is absent?
   - when object agreement is present, you get PAST/PRESENT morphology syncretisme
   - you don't get that with intransitives and with 3SG objects

7. Is there an ergative *system*?

(33) With 18 alignment types, it's hard to say.
     > Rough grouping into four major types:

EQUAL	ACCUSATIVE	ERGATIVE	WEIRD
neutral	accusative (A=S≠O)	ergative (A ≠S=O)	intransitive (A=O ≠S)
identical (A=S=O)	3 x subjective (A=or ≠S)	3 x absolutive (S=or ≠O)	3 x transitive (A=or ≠O)
tripartite (A ≠S ≠O)	objective (O)	narrow ergative (A)	narrow intransitive (S)

Figure 4, alignment type families

(34) There are too many patterns to expect a single parameter to derive 'ergativity'

(35) Moreover, what looks 'ergative' often is not:
   - 'Ergative' agreement is very often transitivity-sensitive **subjective** agreement (e.g.
     Wambaya [32]), so not in the ergative family
   - The **tripartite** pattern is not a subcase of the ergative pattern, but part of the
     'equal' family
   - In all 'ergative languages', splits are normal and the truly **ergative** pattern is often
     restricted (though highly visible, e.g. by appearing with 3SG subjects)

(36) This supports the (contentious) position of DeLancey (2004), that 'ergativity' cannot be viewed as a common property, worthy of study, of languages showing ergative-like phenomena (any more than 'blueness' can be viewed as a common property of birds showing the color blue)

(37) The question of case-agreement correlations (Bobaljik 2008) needs to be studied anew.

References

Bobaljik, Jonathan D. 2008. Where's Phi? Agreement as a postsyntactic operation. In *Phi theory*, Daniel Harbour, David Adger, and Susana Béjar, eds., pp. 295-328. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapman , Shirley and Desmond C. Derbyshire. 1991. Paumari. In Desmond C. Derbyshire and Geoffrey K. Pullum, eds., *Handbook of Amazonian languages 3*, 161-352. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Deal, Amy Rose. 2012. Ergativity. To appear in *Syntax—theory and analysis: an international handbook*. Berlin: de Gruyter,

DeLancey, Scott. 2004. The blue bird of ergativity. In Francesc Queixalós, ed., *Ergativity in Amazonia III*, pp. 1-15. Paris: CNRS.

Lindenbergh, Charlotte. In preparation. Deconstructing ergativity: a fine-grained analysis of ergative phenomena. Research Master thesis, University of Groningen.

Marantz, Alec. 1991. Case and licensing. *ESCOL* 8, 234-253.

Moravcsik, Edith. 1978. On the distribution of ergative and accusative patterns. *Lingua* 45, 233-279.

Mulder, Jean Gail. 1994. *Ergativity in Coast Tsimshian (Sm'algyax)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nordlinger, Rachel. 1998. *A grammar of Wambaya, Northern Territory (Australia)*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

Schebeck, Bernard. 1976. Tanghu and Atjnjamathanha. In R.M.W. Dixon, ed., *Grammatical Categories in Australian Languages*, pp. 516-550. New Jersey: Humanities Press.

Zwart, Jan-Wouter. 2006. Structural case and dependency marking: a neo-Jakobsonian view. *CLS* 42.2, 77-92.

Department of Linguistics/Center for Language and Cognition Groningen
Faculty of Arts, PO Box 716, Groningen
www.let.rug.nl/zwart ● c.j.w.zwart AT rug.nl ● charlottelindenbergh AT gmail.com