



University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst

## Nominative, Absolutive and Dative Languages

Item Type	article;article
Authors	Austin, Jennifer;López, Luis
Download date	2024-08-14 11:32:42
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/36783">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/36783</a>

## Nominative, Absolutive and Dative Languages

Jennifer Austin and Luis López

Cornell University

### 1. What is ergativity (or nominativity)

The empirical goal of this paper is to provide an analysis of split intransitive case systems, or case systems that divide the subjects of intransitive predicates in two classes. One class patterns with subjects of transitive predicates, the other, with objects. Through our analysis, we show that so-called split intransitive languages belong to a case system of their own, and are not a hybrid of nominative and ergative case systems (see Mithun 1991). As a result of our analysis, we conclude that the traditional contrast between ergative and nominative languages should be replaced by a three way distinction.

As a starting point, let us assume (as is standard) that there are two structural cases C1 and C2:

(1)  $I_{C1}$  bought the book $_{C2}$

Given this assumption, two choices are available for an intransitive subject. If C1 is chosen, we obtain the pattern seen in (2a), whereas if C2 is chosen, we obtain what is usually called an ergative language<sup>1</sup>:

(2) a.  $NP_{C1}$  arrived           nominative languages (English)  
b.  $NP_{C2}$  arrived           ergative languages (Inuit, Tzotzil)

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus, we equate nominative and ergative case, and absolutive and accusative case. This assumption is not universally held, for example see Bittner (1994), Bittner and Hale (1994), Marantz (1984) and Murasugi (1992), among others.

Following a suggestion in Chomsky (1993), Bobaljik (1993) proposes the formalization of the distinction between ergative and nominative languages, as represented in (3). First, he claims that there is a UG principle that forces at least one of the two structural cases to be checked. The structural case chosen as obligatory is a matter of parametric variation; this is called the Obligatory Case Parameter.

- (3) a. Case X is obligatorily checked  
 b. Obligatory Case Parameter (OCP):  
 case X is nominative nominative lgs  
 case X is absolutive ergative lgs

In the Principles and Parameters theory that Bobaljik assumes, structural case is checked in the spec of an agreement phrase. Consider (4), a structural representation of the nominative/ergative distinction according to Bobaljik. In (4a) we see that in nominative languages the subjects of monadic verbs have their features checked in the spec of AgrP1, regardless of where they are base generated. In (4b), we can see that in ergative languages the subjects of intransitive verbs go to spec,AgrP2, where they get absolutive case:

- (4) a. nominative languages  
 [AgrP1 DP<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP2 [VP t<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP3 [VP t<sub>i</sub> ]]]]]]]]  
 b. ergative languages  
 [AgrP1 [TP [AgrP2 DP<sub>i</sub> [VP t<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP3 [VP t<sub>i</sub> ]]]]]]]]

In this analysis, nominative and ergative cases are checked in spec,AgrP1, whereas absolutive and accusative cases are checked in spec,AgrP2.

However, there are some recalcitrant languages which do not fit into this neat and clear paradigm. We are referring to split intransitive languages like Basque, in which the subject of unergative verbs gets ergative case (please excuse the notoriously confusing terminology.)

- (5) a. NP<sub>C2</sub> arrive (unaccusative verbs)  
 b. NP<sub>C1</sub> work (unergative verbs)

It is clear that if some subjects of monadic verbs get C1 and others get C2, then the predictions of the OCP are not borne out. The solution proposed by both Laka (1993) and Bobaljik (1993) is to claim that unergative verbs actually have a complement that gets absolutive case.

- (6) NP<sub>C1</sub> work NP<sub>C2</sub>

Their argument is based on Basque, and we will focus our attention on this language in the next section. We do not believe there is strong evidence for the claim that there is a second argument in all Basque unergatives, and in fact we show that there is good evidence that some of these verbs cannot have a covert argument that gets assigned absolutive case. This has been argued by Addis (1989) and Martínez (1993).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: in section 2 we discuss the syntax of Basque unergative predicates. In section 3 we outline the theory of clause structure and case feature checking that we assume. In subsequent sections we discuss the case parameters that our theory predicts should exist. Due to space constraints, we limit ourselves to presenting an outline of our system, without discussion of ramifications to larger issues like case theory, clause structure configuration etc. - see Austin and López (1995).

## 2. Basque Unergatives: are they transitive?

### 2.1 Type 1 Unergatives

There are two types of unergative verbs in Basque. The first type, exemplified in (7a) is a garden variety unergative, exemplified with *dantzatu* here. The second type, represented in (7b), is composed of a light verb, typically *egin* meaning ‘do’, and a bare noun.

- |     |    |  |        |
|-----|----|--|--------|
| (7) | a. | Emakume-a-k <b>dantzatu</b> du<br>woman-det-ERG danced aux<br>‘The woman danced’     | Type 1 |
|     | b. | Zu-k ondo <b>lan egin</b> duzu<br>You-ERG well work do aux<br>‘You have worked well’ | Type 2 |

Let us examine them in turn, beginning with type 1. Laka points out that *dantzatu* is a verb that takes an optional object, as shown in (8). From this evidence, she concludes that in (7a) there is a cognate null *pro* in *dantzatu* and in all the other type 1 unergatives.

- (8) Emakume-a-k dantza hau- $\emptyset$  dantzatu du  
woman-det-ERG dance this-ABS danced aux  
‘The woman danced this dance’

However, not all type 1 unergatives can have a cognate object, as pointed out by Addis (1989) and Martínez (1993). For instance, in Basque a star can’t sparkle a sparkle, even though the subject gets ergative case, as represented in (9):

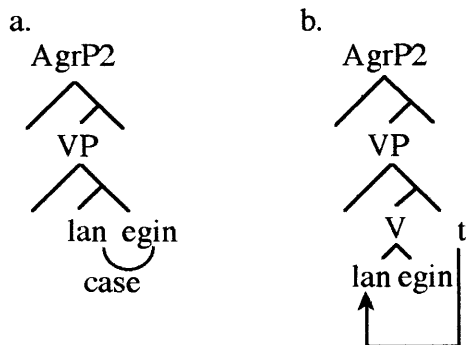
- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| (9) | a. | Izarr-a-k disdiratu du<br>Star-det-ERG sparkle aux<br>‘The star has sparkled’   |
|     | b. | *Izarr-a-k disdira disdiratu du<br>Star-det-ERG sparkle sparkle aux<br>‘The star has sparkled a sparkle’ [Addis, 1993: 436] |

Addis cites some twenty of these verbs, including: *irakin* ‘boil’, *korritu* ‘run’, *funtzionatu* ‘work’ (said of a machine), *iraun* ‘last’, (from Addis 1993). Some of these words are recent borrowings from Spanish – like *bazilatu* ‘flirt’ (from Martínez 1993) –, indicating that this type of structure is productive. These verbs pose the following problem: why should they license a null *pro* but never an overt NP? Without further evidence, we conclude that type 1 unergative verbs do not necessarily have an object and consequently the ergative case on the subject remains unexplained. Therefore, in Basque ergative case can be checked with the subjects of at least some monadic verbs.

### 2.2 Type 2 Unergatives

Consideration of type 2 unergatives (as in 7b) reinforces this conclusion. Laka (1993) claims that the bare noun receives absolutive case, a non trivial statement, given that absolutive case in Basque is a zero morpheme. In her analysis, the bare NP is in a VP internal position and checks absolutive case without moving to spec,AgrP2. She adopts this analysis due to the limited mobility of the NP, an issue that we will discuss momentarily. This is represented in (10a). However, we argue that the bare NP is incorporated, as represented in (10b).

(10)



Laka's proposal

Our proposal

Laka follows Hale and Keyser (1993) in that unergative predicates are underlyingly or pre-syntactically transitive and the complement incorporates into the verb. Further, she proposes that there is a parameter affecting unergative predicates such that in languages like English the complement incorporates, whereas in languages like Basque it does not. Instead, we argue that the complement of a Basque unergative verb incorporates at a later stage than it does in English. Thus, English is not different from Basque in that a certain process – incorporation – takes place in one language and not the other but on when or where it takes place. Since familiar parameters have been defined in these terms – i.e.: LF movement or overt movement of *wh* words – our proposal fits naturally in the Principles and Parameters approach, whereas Laka's cannot be so easily accommodated.

Before we discuss our arguments for incorporation of the bare NP, notice that there is a class of examples that Laka does not discuss and that pose a serious problem for her approach. These examples are predicates formed of an adverb + *egin* ('do') and the subject of the sentence is in the ergative case:

- (11) a. Txoria-k hega-z egin du  
bird-ERG by flying do aux  
'The bird has flown'
- b. Oinazez bizi arren, aurrera egin zuen andra alargun hura-k.  
in pain live although forward do aux woman widow that-ERG  
'Although she was in pain, that widow kept going' [Aulestia, 1989:71]

Since adverbs do not get any case whatsoever, it is hard to explain why the subject does not get absolutive case, as Laka's theory would predict.

Let us now present our arguments for incorporation of the NP. First, a short introduction to the structure of the Basque DP. NPs in Basque are not independent syntactic constituents. Instead, DPs are. That is, an NP must have an attached determiner or a demonstrative to be an independent syntactic constituent. NPs in Basque normally have a determiner, demonstrative or quantifier attached in order to be acceptable constituents. This is shown in (12):

- (12) a. **Liburu-a-Ø** mahai gainean dago.  
book-det-ABS table on top is  
'the book is on the table'
- b. \***Liburu** mahai gainean dago.  
book table on top is  
'a book is on the table'
- c. Beren asto-a-k **astojabe asko-Ø** astintzen du.  
Their donkey-det-ERG donkey owner a lot-ABS beats aux  
'Their donkey beats many donkey owners'
- d. \*Beren asto-a-k **astojabe** astintzen du.  
Their donkey-det-ERG donkey owner beats aux  
'Their donkey beats a donkey owner'
- [ examples c and d, Ortiz de Urbina, 1989:114]

In fact, the only time that bare nouns are acceptable is when they are members of a compound, as seen in (13). In (13a) we see that the first noun of the compound can't get a determiner, and in (13b) that it can't get partitive case:

- (13) a. kafe + esne =kafe(\*a)sne-a  
coffee+milk =coffeemilk-det  
'coffee with milk'
- b. kafe(\*rik)esne-rik  
coffee milk-part  
'any coffee with milk'

Thus, the bare NPs in (13) are not independent syntactic constituents. The issue is whether a bare noun in an unergative predicate is a full-fledged constituent. It seems that it is not; this bare noun cannot be used to answer a question, something that any other constituent can do. For example, the proper answers to (14a) are (14b) or (14c), but not (14d):

- (14) a. Zer egin duzu?  
What done aux-you  
'What have you done?'
- b. Lan egin.  
work do  
'work'
- c. Lan-a.  
work-det  
'a work (or job)'
- d. ?? Lan.  
work  
'work'

[Martínez, 1993:26]

Two of these bare nouns cannot be conjoined, as seen in (15). This behavior is reminiscent of another well known example of adjoined arguments: Romance pronominal clitics. In (16a) we see that the Spanish object pronouns cannot be conjoined, whereas their English equivalents can.

- (15) \* Lan eta lo egin dut  
work and sleep do aux  
'I work and sleep'

- (16) a. \*Tu lo y la viste  
 You him and her saw  
 b. You saw him and her

The ungrammaticality of (15) can naturally be accounted for if the bare nouns *lan* and *lo* are incorporated into the verb.

Additionally, this bare noun has very limited mobility, in contrast with a normal constituent, which can be scrambled freely. In (17) we see how the DP *lana*, meaning ‘work’, can be scrambled to virtually any position.

- (17) a. Har-k **lan-a-ø** ondo egin du.  
 s/he-erg work-det-ABS well do aux  
 ‘S/he did a work’  
 b. **Lan-a** hark ondo egin du.  
 c. Egin du ondo hark **lan-a**.  
 d. Hark ondo egin du **lan-a**

In contrast, in (18) we see that the bare noun cannot be moved freely and in particular, that nothing can stand between it and the verb. In fact, the bare noun can only occur in two positions: either adjacent to the verb or to the auxiliary.

- (18) a. Zu-k ondo **lan** egin duzu  
 You-ERG well work do aux  
 ‘You have worked well’  
 b. Nor-k *egin* du **lan**?  
 who-ERG done aux work  
 ‘Who has worked?’ (Who has done work?) [Laka 1993:153]  
 c. Oso ondo *egin* duzu **lan**.  
 very well done aux work.  
 ‘You have worked *very well*.’ [Laka 1993:153]  
 d. \*?**Lan** etxean egiten dut.  
 work home -at do aux  
 ‘Work I do at home’ [Laka 1993:163]  
 e. \***Lan** oso ondo egin dute.  
 work very well do they aux  
 ‘They worked very well’  
 f. \*Egin du Bilbon **lan**  
 do aux in Bilbao work  
 ‘S/he worked in Bilbao’

Laka uses (18a,b) as an argument that this bare noun can move, hence that it is not incorporated. However, we believe it is plausible to assume that the bare noun has two possible incorporation sites. In this respect, its behavior is again identical to that of Romance clitics. In (19), we see that in some tenses the pronominal clitic can attach to the tensed auxiliary or to the non-tensed main verb:

- (19) a. Juan **la** está comprando en la tienda  
 b. Juan está comprándola en la tienda  
 ‘Juan is buying it in the shop’

Furthermore, Laka points out that the bare noun receives partitive case in a negative sentence. As noted earlier, partitive case is the negative counterpart of absolutive case.

She infers that since the bare NP gets partitive case in a negative sentence, then the bare NP should get absolutive case in a positive sentence. We can see an example of a positive sentence in (20a) and an example of its negative counterpart in (20b):

- (20) a. **Lan** egin dut  
 b. **Ez** dut **lan-ik** egin  
 neg aux work-part to do  
 ‘I haven’t worked’ [Laka 1993:153]

However, many of these bare nouns have the option of remaining bare in the negative and there are even a few others that can never exhibit partitive case morphology. This is shown in (21):

- (21) a. Ez dute **lo** egin. / Ez dute **lo-rik** egin  
 neg aux sleep do neg aux sleep-part do  
 ‘They haven’t slept’  
 b. Ez duzue **eztul** egin / Ez duzue **eztul-ik** egin  
 neg aux cough do neg aux pl.cough-part do  
 ‘You pl. haven’t coughed’  
 c. Ez du **hitz** egin. / Ez du **hitz-ik** egin.  
 neg aux word make neg aux word-part to do  
 ‘S/he hasn’t spoken’ / ‘S/he hasn’t made a word’  
 ?\* ‘S/he hasn’t spoken’  
 d. Irakazleak **ez** du **alde** egin.  
 teacher-Erg neg aux region do  
 ‘The teacher hasn’t run away’  
 \* Irakasleak **ez** du **alderik** egin.  
 teacher-Erg neg aux region-any to do  
 ‘The teacher hasn’t run away’ [Martínez,1993:31]

Following Laka’s logic, those bare nouns that do not get partitive case in the negative should never get absolutive in the affirmative. And those that get it only optionally should optionally get absolutive case. Since for every DP that gets partitive in a negative sentence there is a positive counterpart with a determiner, we would suggest that the partitive case corresponds to an argument marked with a determiner, which explains the alternation in (21). We have *egin* + DP and *egin* + bare NP: partitive is, in our opinion, the counterpart of the DP.

Finally, Laka shows that there can’t be an absolutive argument in the *egin* + bare NP predicates. This is shown in (22):

- (22) \*Ametz hau amets egin dut  
 Dream this dream do aux  
 ‘I have dreamt this dream’

Laka argues that the reason for the ungrammaticality of (22) is that the bare noun gets absolutive case; since absolutive is a structural case, there can only be one absolutive marked argument in a sentence. The ungrammaticality of (22), however, admits an alternative explanation: though the bare noun does not receive case, it does get a theta role from the light verb and, consequently, there is no theta role left for another argument. In this respect, the ungrammaticality of (22) is close to the ungrammaticality of (23a):



- (23) a. \*I work with a hammer with a screwdriver  
 b. I work with a hammer with my brother

We conclude that there are no convincing arguments to claim that the bare noun is an independent constituent that checks case with the verb. On the other hand, since the bare NP does not behave as a constituent should behave, there are good reasons to claim that this is an instance of noun or adverb incorporation; hence, the null hypothesis is that no case is checked. Our conclusion is that Basque unergative verbs are not transitive, in violation of the OCP.

### 3. What is ergativity (or nominativity, or dativity)

At this point we seem to have reached an impasse; on the one hand, we support the structural approach as sketched in the previous section. Nevertheless, we have shown that it is insufficient to account for the Basque data.

Our solution is to change the initial assumption that there are two structural cases and instead assume that there are three: C1, C2 and C3, as represented in (24).

- (24) I<sub>C1</sub> gave John<sub>C2</sub> the book<sub>C3</sub>

This leaves us with three choices of structural case for the subject of an intransitive verb, as seen below:

- (25) NP<sub>C1</sub> arrive  
 NP<sub>C2</sub> arrive  
 NP<sub>C3</sub> arrive

We show that all three of these choices are instantiated; concretely, English and in general, nominative languages, are C1 languages, Inuit and canonical ergative languages are C2 languages and Basque and the other split intransitive languages are C3 languages.

At this point, we need a theory of clause structure that provides a representation of these three cases. With this aim in mind, we adopt Collins and Thráinsson's (1993) analysis, shown in (26):

- (26) [AgrP<sub>1</sub> [TP [AgrP<sub>2</sub> [VP [TP [AgrP<sub>3</sub> [VP ]]]]]]]]

In this theory, each of the available structural cases is checked in the spec position of an Agreement Phrase. With respect to standard trees, it includes as a novelty an AgrP between the two VP shells. The need for some functional projection between the two VP shells has been put forward by Koizumi (1993), Travis (1992) and Zagona (1994), among others. Collins and Thráinsson have argued extensively that such a complex structure is needed to account for Double Object Constructions (henceforth DOCs) in Icelandic. Their analysis of a DOC is as in (27) (verb traces omitted for clarity):

- (27) [AgrP<sub>1</sub> Eg<sub>i</sub> lana [TP [AgrP<sub>2</sub> Maríu<sub>j</sub> [VP ekki [VP t<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP<sub>3</sub> baekurnar<sub>k</sub> [VP t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>k</sub> ]]]]]]]]

[Collins and Thráinsson 1993:142]

We propose that (26) is the Universal Base. Adapting Belletti and Rizzi (1988) to our present framework, we also assume that the subjects of psych verbs are generated in the spec of the lower VP. Furthermore, we propose that Bobaljik's principle (3a) that forces

a structural case to be checked can be recast in the following manner: since DPs are base generated with  $\phi$  features, they must be checked against a predicate in an AgrP. This entails that at least one of the spec,AgrPs must be occupied. We conceive of morphological case as one of the  $\phi$  features, as a spell-out of an agreement relationship between a DP and a feature-bearing predicate.

(28)  $\phi$  feature requirement: a spec,AgrP must be filled

We believe this has a crucial advantage over Bobaljik's conception: whereas (3a) is an independent principle, (28) is already implicit in the theory. In the spirit of a maximally constrained theory, (28) should be preferred. Furthermore, one of the AgrPs is chosen as unmarked, which is a matter of parametric variation:

(29) Unmarked Agreement Parameter (UAP): one of the AgrPs is chosen as unmarked.

AgrP1 is unmarked in nominative languages, so C1 is checked. AgrP2 is the unmarked one for ergative languages, so C2 is checked. Similarly, C3 must be checked in Basque, if possible. We call these three types of languages Agr1, Agr2 and Agr3.

We assume that the UAP forces subjects of intransitive verbs to check case in the spec of the unmarked AgrP only if it does not entail a violation of a UG principle. If the UAP can't be met, the derivation does not crash; rather, another spec,AgrP is targeted. Thus, the UAP is weaker than the OCP; whereas the OCP is inviolable, a violation of the UAP does not lead to a crashed derivation. We will see that in the case of Basque, checking case in the unmarked AgrP may lead to a violation of the Proper Binding Condition (PBC), as defined in Fiengo (1977) which, since it has been subsumed under Economy by Collins (1994) should be considered a fundamental principle of grammar. Since the DP can't be violated, the DP checks case in another spec,AgrP.

#### 4. Agr1 Languages

Let us first look into Agr1 languages, or languages in which Agr1 is unmarked. As a result, subjects of intransitive verbs have their structural case checked in AgrP1. This includes the only argument of an unaccusative verb, of a psych verb or of a passive verb, thus deriving the effects of Burzio's generalization (see Laka 1993, Bobaljik 1993). Passive is simply defined as the construction in which the external theta role is not assigned to spec,VP as usual; the fact that the object has its features checked in AgrP1 is a consequence of the UAP.

Subjects of transitives also have their case checked in spec,AgrP1. Another logical possibility, in which the subject is assigned the case associated to AgrP2 and the object is assigned the case associated with AgrP1, would give rise to a minimality violation (see Chomsky 1993).

As for the object, several possibilities exist, but here we discuss only one which is relevant to our subsequent discussion of Basque. Spanish distributes its objects in AgrP2 and AgrP3. Recipient objects check case in spec,AgrP2, the rest in spec,AgrP3.

- (30) a. Juan loc<sub>C3</sub> vio  
Juan him-saw  
b. Juan le<sub>C2</sub> robó  
Juan him-robbed

This distribution is permissible because the UAP has been met by the subject and no UG principle is violated.

### 5. Agr2 Languages

At this point we examine Agr2 languages, which are comprised of the ‘canonical’ ergative languages such as Inuit. In this type of language, the subjects of intransitives all get the same case, which is different from the case of transitive subjects. We suggest they get their case in spec,AgrP2. Examples of intransitive predicates are in (31a) and (31b).

- (31) Inuit
- a. Jaani- $\emptyset$  tikit-tuq  
Jaani- $\emptyset$  arrive-3rd  
‘Jaani arrives’
  - b. Arnaq- $\emptyset$  imngiq-tuq  
A/the woman- $\emptyset$  sing-3rd  
‘The woman sings’
- [Bok-Bennema 1991:47]

Transitive predicates can distribute their cases in two ways; if the object raises to Spec,AgrP2, then the subject must raise to Spec,AgrP1 because no other position is available. However, there is another logical possibility; if the subject raises to spec,AgrP2, then the object can only go to spec,AgrP3 or receive oblique case. This is what is referred to as the antipassive construction, which can be defined as the mirror image of the passive, in the sense that the internal theta role is suppressed and the object may surface as oblique. In this construction, the UAP forces the subject to check its features in spec,AgrP2 and receive absolutive case. Examples are in (32a) and (32b):

- (32) a. anguti-up arnaq taku-vaa  
man-ERG a woman- $\emptyset$  see-3rd:3rd  
‘A/The man sees a woman’
- b. anguti- $\emptyset$  arnar-mik taku-vuk  
man- $\emptyset$  a woman-*mik* see-3rd  
‘A/The man sees a woman’
- [Johnson, 1980:12,16]

In (32a) the subject is assigned ergative case and the object is assigned the zero morpheme that the literature calls absolutive and which we will simply call C2. Sentence (32b) is an example of the antipassive structure, where the subject gets C2 and the object gets the -mik morpheme, generally assumed to be oblique. The transitive and the intransitive and antipassive constructions are depicted below, in (33):

- (33) a. Inuit transitives:  
[AgrP1 DP<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP2 DP<sub>j</sub> [VP t<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP3 [VP t<sub>j</sub> ]]]]]]]]
- b. Inuit antipassives:  
[AgrP1 [TP [AgrP2 DP<sub>i</sub> [VP t<sub>i</sub> [TP [AgrP3 DP<sub>j</sub> [VP t<sub>j</sub> ]]]]]]]]

Finally, Inuit DOCs provide a striking confirmation for our proposal. If the subjects of intransitives and the objects of transitives check their case in AgrP2 rather than AgrP1 or AgrP3, then we would predict that the indirect object of DOCs should get the same case. This is precisely what happens: in (34) the indirect object exhibits the zero morpheme that we claim to be associated with C2:

- (34) anguti-up titirauti-mik nutaraq- $\emptyset$  tuni-vaa  
 man-ERG the pencil-*mik* the child- $\emptyset$  give-3rd:3rd  
 'A/the man gives the child the pencil'

To give further support to our analysis we have also checked our predictions with another canonical ergative language which is not genetically related to Eskimo. Tzotzil is such a language. In Tzotzil ergativity is not seen in the case marking of the DPs but rather in verbal agreement. So in (35a,b) we see that subjects of intransitives all share the same set of agreement markers on the verb. (35c) is an example of an antipassive, where the subject governs the verbal agreement marker that would normally associated with the object. Finally, (35d) is a DOC and we can see that the indirect object triggers object agreement.

- (35) Tzotzil
- a. c- i- bat  
 ASP-ABS1st - go  
 'I'm going'
- b.  $\emptyset$ - k'opoj-em  
 ABS3rd-speak- perfect  
 'S/he has spoken'
- c. i-  $\emptyset$ - s- mil Xun li Petul e  
 asp-ABS3rd-ERG3rd-Kill John the Peter  
 'Peter killed John'
- d. Petul i-  $\emptyset$ - mil-on (li Xun e)  
 Peter asp-ABS3rd-kill-apas (the John)  
 'Peter killed (John)' [Haviland 1978:255,272]
- e. l- i- y- ak'- be tak'in li Sune  
 Asp-ABS:1st ERG:3rd give-suff money the Sun  
 'Sun gave me the money' [Aissen, 1987:104-124]

Our conclusion is that the case traditionally labeled 'absolute' is the case checked at spec,AgrP2. For this reason, we have chosen to refer to these as 'dative' languages, in the belief that our findings may be robust enough to warrant this departure from tradition.

## 6. Agr3 Languages

In this section we will show that the case pattern of Basque and Georgian is different from Inuit and the other well-behaved ergative languages. We will further show that this difference is a consequence of setting the UAP on AgrP3 rather than AgrP2.

First, we shall investigate the mechanics of an Agr3 language. We predict that since the lowest AgrP is the unmarked one, then objects, unaccusative subjects and subjects of intransitive psych verbs should check case in spec,AgrP3 and be assigned absolutive case. We can see this prediction is borne out in (36):

- (36) a. Edu-k liburu-a- $\emptyset$  erosi du  
 Edu-ERG book-det-ABS buy aux  
 'Edu has bought the book'
- b. ni eseri naiz  
 I-ABS sit aux  
 'I sat'

- (36) c. Ni kezkatzen naiz  
 I-ABS worry aux  
 ‘I worry’

In contrast, the subjects of unergatives, which are arguments generated in the spec of the upper VP, cannot check their case features in spec,AgrP3. In order to do so, they would have to lower, in violation of the PBC. Consequently, the subjects of unergative verbs need to target a higher AgrP. Although two AgrPs are available, these subjects always check their features in spec,AgrP1, and check C1, called ergative case. This can be seen in example (37) below:

- (37) Makina hon-ek funtzionatu du  
 machine this-ERG function aux  
 ‘This machine has functioned’

Regarding subjects of transitive verbs, two possibilities must be distinguished; subjects generated in the spec of the upper VP go to spec,AgrP1 to get C1. Subjects of psych verbs, generated in the spec of the lower VP, go to spec,AgrP2 to get C2, referred to as dative case.

- (38) a. Ni-ri zure oinetako-a-k- $\emptyset$  gustatzen zaizkit  
 I-DAT your shoes-det--ABS like aux  
 ‘I like your shoes’  
 b. Edurne-k liburu-a- $\emptyset$  erosi du  
 Edurne-ERG book-det-ABS buy aux  
 ‘Edurne has bought the book’

A remaining question is why the arguments generated in the spec of the upper VP cannot go to spec,AgrP2. It seems that in Basque, spec,AgrP2 is reserved for the subjects of transitive psych verbs: it is a real dative, in the sense that an agentive subject cannot check its features there. Basque, then, imposes a language-specific condition on the use of AgrP2, which can be done because it does not violate any principle and the UAP is satisfied by filling spec, AgrP3. Thus, AgrP2 in Basque and Spanish has identical properties; it is reserved for the same class of arguments, generated in the spec of the lower VP.

Compare (36c) with (38a). Both the subject of “worry” and the subject of “like” are candidates for the position spec, AgrP2. However, only the transitive subject gets dative case; this shows that the UAP is active in Basque and overrides the language specific preference for subjects of psych verbs to get their case checked in spec, AgrP2. Now, recall what happened in Spanish. In Spanish, subjects of psych verbs, transitive or intransitive, must get nominative case, that is, C1. Nevertheless, recipient objects get dative case, or C2. Thus, the UAP is also at work in Spanish. Notice that Basque is the mirror image of Spanish. In Basque, once absolutive case is checked by the object, subjects can be distributed in a dative class and an ergative class. In Spanish, subjects get nominative case and objects can be distributed in two classes: dative and accusative. As far as we know, this parallelism has not yet been noticed, and receives a natural account under our analysis.

Consider then the picture that emerges from our analysis. There is an inviolable principle, Economy, as instantiated by the PBC. The UAP, a lower level/ranked parameter, can be violated if it conflicts with this principle: we have seen an example of this when subjects of Basque unergatives raised to spec, AgrP1 instead of lowering to spec,AgrP3 (as in (37)). Finally, language particular constraints can be satisfied if they do

not conflict with any of the above constraints. For example, the subject of an intransitive psych verb in Basque gets absolutive case because of the requirements of the UAP (as we saw in (36c)). However when the psych verb is transitive, the object gets absolutive to satisfy the UAP and the subject gets dative (as in (38a)): this shows that the requirement of the Basque language to send the psych arguments to spec AgrP2 is only obeyed if the UAP has already been satisfied. In our analysis, there are inviolable principles, parameters that can only be violated by those principles, and language particular specifics that fill in the gaps.

Our analysis makes further predictions with respect to antipassives and DOCs in Basque; let us consider them in turn. We predict that case distribution in DOCs should be very different from what you find in Inuit. In effect, since indirect objects in Basque get C2 and subjects of unaccusatives and objects of transitives get C3, it follows that they should exhibit a different morphology. This prediction again is confirmed, as can be seen in example (39), and you are invited to compare this example with the Inuit and Tzotzil counterparts in (34) and (35e):

- (39) Basque:  
 Zu-ek guri liburu-a-k eman dizkiguzue  
 You-ERG us-DAT book-det-ABS give have  
 ‘You guys have given us the books’

We predict that antipassives should not exist in Basque. The reason is clear: if antipassive is the construction in which the subject gets the unmarked case, then a Basque antipassive would entail lowering of the argument generated in the upper VP, in violation of the PBC. That antipassives do not exist in Basque is certainly the case, as noted before by the literature (Ortiz de Urbina 1986, Laka 1993). In (40) is an example of a failed antipassive:

- (40) \*Ni- $\emptyset$  liburu-z erosi naiz  
 I-ABS book-INST buy aux  
 ‘I bought a book’

To further confirm the predictions of our analysis, we present some Georgian sentences in (41). In the Georgian Aorist Series, subjects of unaccusatives and of unergatives get different cases, as in Basque in all tenses. This is seen in (41a,b). The morpheme *-i* is the absolutive marker. (41c) is an example of a transitive sentence. In (41d) we see that the indirect object does not get the *-i* case, but a very different one. Harris (p.c.) has informed us that there is no antipassive in Georgian, exactly as our theory would predict.

- (41) Georgian  
 a. namcvar-i gamocxva  
 pastry-ABS baked  
 b. Nino-m daamtknara  
 Nino-ERG yawned  
 c. Ia-m pova satval-i  
 Ia-ERG found glasses-ABS  
 d. Nino-m acvena surateb-i Gia-s  
 Nino-ERG showed picture-ABS Gia-DAT  
 ‘Nino showed Gia the pictures’ [Harris, 1982]

## 7. Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that Basque and Inuit have different case marking patterns, contrary to the widely held belief that they are members of the same typological class. Concretely, we have shown that the difference between these types of languages, as well as nominative languages, is due to parametric variation in the selection of an unmarked AgrP to check *f* features, a parameter which we refer to as the UAP. We have shown that all of the predictions of this analysis regarding possible case marking systems are instantiated. Crucially, our analysis rests on the assumption that there are three, and not two, structural cases, and on our adopting the structure proposed by Collins and Thráinsson (1993) for DOCs in Icelandic. Insofar as it is successful, our analysis provides independent corroboration for Collins and Thráinsson's approach, as well as an account of split intransitive case systems.

## References

- Addis, Kristin (1993) Paradigm Trimming in Basque. *Linguistics* 31, 431-474.
- Aissen, Judith (1987) *Tzotzil Clause Structure*. Foris, Dordrecht, Holland.
- Aulestia, Gorka (1989) *Basque-English Dictionary*. University of Nevada Press, Reno.
- Austin, Jennifer and Luis López (1995) Nominative, Absolutive and Dative Languages. ms, Cornell University.
- Baker, Mark (1988) *Incorporation*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Belletti, Adriana and Luigi Rizzi (1988) Psych Verbs and Theta Theory. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 6, 291-352.
- Bittner, Maria (1994) *Case, Scope and Binding*. Kluwer, Dordrecht.
- Bittner, Maria and Ken Hale (1994) The Structural Determination of Case and Agreement. ms, Rutgers University and MIT.
- Bobaljik, Jonathan (1993) On Ergativity and Ergative Unergatives. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 18, MIT.
- Chomsky, Noam (1993) A Minimalist Program for Linguistic Theory. *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvain Bromberger*. MIT Press.
- Collins, Chris (1994) Economy of Derivation and the Generalized Proper Binding Condition. *Linguistic Inquiry* 25, 45-61.
- Collins, Chris and Thráinsson, Höskaldur (1993) Object Shift in Double Object Constructions and the Theory of Case. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 19, MIT.
- Fiengo, Robert (1979). On Trace Theory. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8, 35-61.
- Hale, Kenneth and Samuel Jay Keyser (1993) On Argument Structure and the Lexical Expression of Syntactic Relations. *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvain Bromberger*. MIT Press.
- Harris, Alice (1982) *Georgian Syntax*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Haviland, John (1981) *El Tzotzil de San Lorenzo Zinacantan*. Universidad Autónoma de México.
- Koizumi, Masatoshi (1993) Object Agreement Phrases and the Split VP Hypothesis. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 15, MIT.
- Laka, Itziar (1993) Unergatives that Assign Ergative, Unaccusatives that Assign Accusative. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics* 18, MIT
- Martínez, Arantzazu (in progress) *Unergative Structures in Basque*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Deusto.
- Marantz, Alec (1984) *On the Nature of Grammatical Relations* MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Mithun, Marianne (1991) Active/Agentive Case Marking and its Motivations. *Language*, 551-546.

- Murasugi, Kumiko (1992) *Crossing and Nested Paths: NP Movement in Ergative and Accusative Languages*. PhD Dissertation, MIT.
- Ortiz de Urbina, Jon (1989) *Parameters in the Grammar of Basque*. Foris, Dordrecht.
- Travis, Lisa (1992) *Inner Aspect and the Structure of VP*. ms, McGill University.
- Zagona, Karen (1994) Perfectivity and Temporal Arguments. In Michael Mazzola, ed. *Theory and Issues in Romance Linguistics*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C.

203 Morrill Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853

LL26@cornell.edu  
ja20@cornell.edu



