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ON THE MEANING OF ALLOMORPHY: THE CASE OF THE ERGATIVE

1. Preliminaries

Ergativity is understood as a pattern of alignment of core relations S, A and P (in the sense of Comrie 1978) whereby S is treated similarly to P and differently from A.

Ergative case is a grammatical marker (bound affix or free-standing adposition) appearing on As in ergative alignment.

BASQUE (isolate, Europe; Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina (eds.) 2003: 180, 181)

- (1) a. *Zakurr-a etorri da.*
dog-DEF(ABS) come AUX.ITR.3SG
'The dog has come.'
- b. *Gizon-a-k zakurr-a ikusi du.*
man-DEF-ERG dog-DEF(ABS) see AUX.TR.3SG > 3SG
'The man has seen the dog.'

NB This definition does not imply that A-marking should be the only or even the primary function of the ergative case.

Allomorphy is understood as the co-existence of a number of distinct overt realizations of a gram (here, of the ergative case) not reducible to automatic phonological alternations (Booij 1997; cf. Spencer's (2006, 2009) distinction between syntactic and morphological case).

That different realizations of the same morphosyntactic feature or feature bundle can actually differ in their "meaning", has been argued e.g. by Andrew Carstairs-MacCarthy (1994, 1998, 2001, 2010), who claimed that such purely morphological information as inflection-class specification may be a part of the "lexical" representation of grammatical markers. A somewhat similar approach, despite all technical and conceptual divergences, is assumed in Distributed Morphology (e.g. Halle & Marantz 1993, Bobaljik 2000).

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2. The scope of the study

In this paper I deal with the allomorphy of the ergative case conditioned solely by features which can be considered "meaningful" on theory-neutral grounds, i.e. lexical-semantic content of the base the marker attaches to, or grammatical meanings such as definiteness, number, tense etc.

I will not deal with the following kinds of phenomena:

- ☛ allomorphy determined by phonological properties of the stem (see Paster 2006);
- ☛ allomorphy determined by arbitrary lexical features of the base (declension class);
- ☛ distinct realizations of the agentive participant which in fact involve alternations between a canonical transitive construction and an intransitive two-place construction, and thus an alternation between an ergative case and some other case (e.g. 'involuntary agent constructions', see Kittilä 2005; Ganenkov et al. 2008; Fauconnier 2011).

AGUL (North-Caucasian > Nakh-Daghestanian > Lezxic, Russia; Ganenkov et al. 2008: 177)

- (2) a. *baw-a nek̄ ātuzu-ne.*
 mother-ERG milk(ABS) pour.out-PST
 ‘Mother (A) poured out the milk (P).’
- b. *baw-afas nek̄ ātuzu-ne.*
 mother-ADELAT milk(ABS) pour.out-PST
 ‘Mother (Obl) accidentally spilled the milk (S).’

☞ For borderline cases between ergative allomorphy proper and intricate pragmatically conditioned differential agent marking in Nyulnyulan languages see McGregor 2006.

The phenomenon of non-phonologically determined ergative allomorphy does not seem to be widespread: Palancar (2002: 262) reports less than 8 % of the ergative languages of his sample to have more than one ergative marker. My “sample” includes the following languages from Eurasia, North America, Oceania and Australia:

North-Caucasian: Adyghe, Kabardian, Tsakhur, Avar, Khwarshi, Tsova-Tush, Chechen
 Indo-European: Shina Kohistani
 Chukotko-Kamchatkan: Chukchi, Koryak
 Sahaptian: Yakima
 Austronesian: Nêlêmwa, Niuean
 Pama-Nyungan: Kuku-Yalanji, Diyari
 West-Barkly: Jingulu

3. The overview of the typology

In the languages of the sample, the following types of conditioning of ergative allomorphy are attested:

- 1) semantic and referential properties of the lexeme/word/noun phrase to which the case marker attaches, e.g. such distinctions as pronoun vs. noun, animate vs. inanimate, proper noun vs. common noun (for more details, see Arkadiev 2011) — section 6;
- 2) morphosyntactic features of the nominal, e.g. number — section 5;
- 3) clause-level features such as tense-aspect or properties of co-arguments — section 4.

Of the four types, only type (1) is systematically attested cross-linguistically, while other types are instantiated by sporadic individual cases. This, however, does not make them less interesting from a theoretical point of view.

4. Ergative allomorphy determined by clause-level features

☞ Tense-aspect (cf. much more widespread instances of the so-called TAM-split ergativity, see Malchukov & de Hoop 2011 for a recent overview).

SHINA KOHISTANI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Dardic, Pakistan; Schmidt & Kohistani 2008: 53, 57)

- (3) a. *judráa-s paár xod-ée núum-i wy-áa-n-i.*
 snake-ERG1 over.there god-GEN name-PL drop-IPF-PRS-3SG
 ‘The snake over there is reciting God’s names.’
- b. *dij-ó salám d-éeg-i.*
 daughter-ERG2 greeting give-PFV-3SG
 ‘(His) daughter greeted (him).’

Cf. “regular” aspect-based alignment split in other Indo-Iranian languages:

HINDI (Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Indo-Aryan, India; Mohanan 1994: 59)

- (4) a. *Ravī kelā khā rahā thā.*
 Ravi(NOM) banana(NOM) eat DUR AUX.PST
 ‘Ravi was eating a banana’.
- b. *bacce-ne kitāb paḍhī.*
 child.OBL-ERG book read.PFV
 ‘The child read a book’.

Or a not-so-regular split not involving a change in alignment, similarly to Shina:

MINGRELIAN (Kartvelian, Georgia; Harris 1991: 365–366):

- (5) a. *baγana ḡude-s skid-u.*
 child(NOM) house-DAT stay-3SG.SBJ.PRS
 ‘The child is staying in the house.’
- b. *muma arzen-s cxen-s skua-s.*
 father(NOM) give-3SG.SBJ.PRS horse-DAT child-DAT
 ‘The father is giving a horse to his child.’
- (6) a. *koč-k doγor-u.*
 man-NAR die-3SG.SBJ.AOR
 ‘The man died.’
- b. *muma-k cxen-i ki-me-č-u skua-s.*
 father-NAR horse-NOM PVB-PVB-give-3SG.SBJ.AOR child-DAT
 ‘The father gave a horse to his son.’

☛ person of the other argument (instance of “global” case-marking rules, cf. Silverstein 1976 or Malchukov 2006)

YAKIMA (Sahaptian, Washington, USA; Jansen 2010: 134, 136): 1st + 2nd vs. 3rd person object

- (7) a. *tamánwit-nim = nash i-nápayun-ta.*
 law-ERG1 = 1SG.P 3SG.SBJ-defend-FUT
 ‘The law will support me.’
- b. *pá-k’inu-sha Máali-yin Sám-nan.*
 INV-see-IPF Mary-ERG2 Sam-ACC
 ‘Mary sees Sam.’

Cf. an opposite situation with accusative case allomorphy:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR (isolate, Russia; Maslova 2003: 89, 93–95): 1st + 2nd vs. 3rd person subject

- (8) a. *met-ul amde-l-get polde-mek*
 1sg-ACC1 die-PRF-ABL save-TR:2SG
 ‘You have saved me from death.’
- b. *tet kimnī met-kele kudede-m*
 2SG whip 1sg-ACC2 kill-TR:3SG
 ‘Your whip has killed me.’

☞ Though rare, such instances of case-marker allomorphy nicely supplement the more general picture of case variation and in particular suggest that this phenomenon is not limited to the more familiar alternations of “alignment”.

5. Ergative allomorphy conditioned by nominal morphosyntactic features

Situations when the choice of the marker of one morphosyntactic feature/value is dependent on the value of another feature in the representation of the same wordform have been widely discussed in the literature (e.g. Plank 1986; Carstairs 1987, Carstairs-McCarthy 1998, 2001; Bobaljik 2000; Adger et al. 2003), but have not been subject to large-scale typological investigations.

☞ Grammatically conditioned allomorphy should be distinguished from cumulative exponence

SPANISH ‘speak’			LATIN ‘decorate’	
	Presente	Preterito	Praesens	Perfectum
1Sg	<i>habl-o</i>	<i>habl-é</i>	<i>orn-o</i>	<i>orn-ā-v-i</i>
2Sg	<i>habl-as</i>	<i>habl-aste</i>	<i>orn-ā-s</i>	<i>orn-ā-v-isti</i>
3Sg	<i>habl-a</i>	<i>habl-ó</i>	<i>orn-a-t</i>	<i>orn-ā-v-it</i>

In the expression of case, including the ergative, cumulation is fairly widespread.

CHUKCHI (Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Russian Far East; Dunn 1999: 101; Skorik 1961: 180): cumulation with number for higher animates

- (9) *Rintəŋe-ne* vs. *Rintəŋe-rək*
 PN-ERG.SG PN-ERG.PL
 ‘Rintyna’ (a person) ‘the Rintynas’ (a family)

KORYAK (Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Russian Far East, Žukova 1972: 95–103): choice of the ergative marker depends on the presence of the definiteness affix with kinship terms.

- (10) *an’a-ta* vs. *an’a-na-k*
 grandmother-ERG2 grandmother-DEF-ERG1
 ‘some grandmother’ ‘the grandmother’ (ibid.: 99)

☞ However, cumulation and “pure” allomorphy can be available as options for one and the same marker!

ADYGHE, standard variety (North-Caucasian > Abkhaz-Adyghe; own fieldwork): number

- (11) a. *č’ale-m* *č’ale-xe-m* no allomorphy
 boy-ERG boy-PL-ERG
 b. *č’ale-me* ~ *č’ale-xe-me* cumulation vs. allomorphy
 boy-ERG.PL boy-PL-ERG.PL (or — extended exponence)

6. Ergative allomorphy conditioned by lexical-semantic class of the nominal

Arkadiev 2011: Cross-linguistically, the distribution of different allomorphs of the ergative case tends to follow the classes defined by the well-known referential hierarchy (Silverstein 1976):

- (12) local pronouns > non-local pronouns/demonstratives > proper names and/or kinship terms > humans > non-human animates > inanimates

- (13) If a language possesses several ergative markers distributed according to the lexical-semantic class of nominals, different markers cover contiguous areas on the hierarchy.

☞ Pronouns vs. others

KABARDIAN, standard variety (North-Caucasian > Abkhaz-Adyghe; Kumakhov & Vamling 2006: 19, 20): common nouns vs. demonstratives (locutor pronouns and most proper names do not distinguish Abs and Erg)

- (14) a. *šak^we-m* *dəB^wežə-r* *jə-wəč-a-š.*
 hunter-ERG1 wolf-ABS 3SG.A-kill-PST-DCL
 ‘The hunter killed the wolf.’ (Kumakhov & Vamling 2006: 19)
 b. *a-bə* *wəne-r* *j-e-šə-r.*
 DEM-ERG2 house-ABS 3SG.A-PRS-make-DCL
 ‘He is building the house.’ (ibid.: 20)

To this type also belong Adyghe (own data) and Khwarshi (Khalilova 2009: 68, 143–145).

⇒ Proper names vs. others

NIUEAN (Austronesian > Oceanic > Polynesian, Niue; Massam 1996): different sets of case prepositions, including Ergative, for pronouns and proper names vs. common nouns.

- (15) a. *Koe tele e Sione a Sefa.*
 PRS kick ERG1 PN ABS1 PN
 ‘Sione is kicking Sefa.’ (Massam 1996: 93)
- b. *Kua hahala he tagata e akau.*
 PRF chop ERG2 man ABS2 tree
 ‘The man is chopping the tree.’ (ibid.: 84)

To this type also belongs Diyari — with complications involving gender and number (Austin 1981: 48–49 via Paster 2006: 179).

⇒ Kinship terms vs. others

CHECHEN (North-Caucasian > Nakh-Daghestanian > Nakh, Russia; Nichols 1994: 24): a special ergative allomorph *-s* reserved for personal names and kin terms vs. the regular allomorph *-uo*, cf. *da:-s* ‘father-ERG1’ (ibid. 72) vs. *a:xarxuo-č-uo* ‘peasant-OBL-ERG2’.

⇒ Humans vs. non-humans

TSAKHUR (North-Caucasian > Nakh-Daghestanian > Lezgi; Kibrik & Testeleets (eds.) 1999: 350)

- (16) a. *za-s ham-ni anna wasilewn-ē dars hiwo.*
 I-DAT that-OBL PN PN-ERG1 lesson give:PFV
 ‘This Anna Vasiljevna has taught me.’
- b. *balkan-i-n balkan-na iš=i hā?-a.*
 horse-OBL-ERG2 horse-ATR work=EVD do-IPF
 ‘The horse was doing horse’s work.’

To this type also belongs Nêlêmwa (Bril 2002: 128–136).

⇒ Animates vs. inanimates

KUKU-YALANJI (Pama-Nyungan > Yalandyic, Queensland; Patz 2002: 129)

- (17) a. *yinya-ngka kubarr-angka yalbay-ngka maral bayka-ny.*
 that-ERG1 eel-ERG1 big-ERG1 girl bite-PST
 ‘That big eel bit the girl.’
- b. *nganya bambaybunga-ny kubarr-da.*
 I:ACC sick-PST eel-ERG2
 ‘The eel [meat] made me sick.’

⇒ A different parameter: gender

AVAR (North-Caucasian > Nakh-Daghestanian > Avar-Andic; Alekseev & Ataev 42–43, 50–52): productive markers of the oblique stem coincide with the Ergative and distinguish gender: *-aš* masculine vs. *-aļ* feminine + inanimate, thus *durc-aš* ‘son-in-law-ERG.SG’ vs. *ebel-aļ* ‘mother-ERG.SG’, *kalam-aļ* ‘word-ERG.SG’. See also Jingulu below.

⇒ More than two-way systems

TSOVA-TUSH a.k.a. Batsbi (North-Caucasian > Nakh-Daghestanian > Nakh, Georgia; Holisky & Gagaa 1994: 165, 173–175): local pronouns form Erg by metathesis; demonstratives and singular human nouns attach *-s*; other nominals attach *-v*.

(18)

	Abs	Erg
‘we(excl)’	<i>txo</i>	<i>atx</i>
‘that’	<i>o</i>	<i>oqu-s</i>
‘father’	<i>dad</i>	<i>dada-s</i>
‘fox’	<i>cok'al</i>	<i>cok'le-v</i>
‘knife’	<i>nek'</i>	<i>nek'e-v</i>

CHUKCHI (Dunn 1999: 100–101): personal pronouns *-(n)an* vs. proper nouns *-ne* vs. common nouns *-e*.

- (19) a. *γəm-nan tə-n-walom-at-ənat ənpənacγ-ət.*
I-ERG1 1SG.A-CAUS-understand-CAUS-3PL.P old.man-3PL.ABS
'I informed the old men.' (Dunn 1999: 212)
- b. *Nutekew-ne Majkələ-na rə-jp-annen cinitkin witəcγ-ən.*
PN-erg2 PN-ALL CAUS-wear-3SG>3SG REFL.POSS overtunic-3SG.ABS
'Nutekew put his overtunic on Michael.' (ibid.: 135)
- c. *taŋqonpə ənqen ʔeqe-njiw-e n-in-iw-qin...*
always that(ABS) bad-uncle-ERG3 HAB-TR-say-3SG
'The bad uncle always said to him...' (speech of non-relative) (ibid.: 103)

ADYGHE, Bdzhedug dialect (Zekox 1969: 93–94): a special Erg marker *-ə* for proper names, in addition to the markers for common names *-m* and for demonstratives *-š'*.

DIYARI (Pama-Nyungan > Karnic; Southern Australia, Austin 1981: 48–49 via Paster 2006: 179): female proper names *-ndu*, masculine proper names *-li*, non-Sg common nouns *-li*, other common nouns *-li* or *-yali* depending on phonological shape of the stem.

JINGULU (West-Barkly, Northern Australia; Pensalfini 1997: 244, 273): a system with four Erg markers!

(20)	female kinship terms (21a)	<i>-ka</i>
	other female nominals (including personal pronouns and certain inanimates) (21a)	<i>-nga</i>
	other animate nominals (including personal pronouns) (21b)	<i>-rni</i>
	inanimate nouns (21c)	<i>-(C)arndi = Ins</i>

- (21) a. *kunyangulanama ya-miki ngaja-nga-nu lala-ka ngarri-ninga.*
other.day 3SG-came see-1SG-PST aunt-ERG:FKIN my-ERG:F
'The other day my father's sister came to visit me.' (Pensalfini 1997: 273)
- b. *babi-rni ikiya-rnarna-nu ibilkini.*
older.brother-ERG:M wet-3SG>1SG-PST water
'My brother wet me.' (ibid.)
- c. *darrangku-wardni maya-ngarna-nu.*
tree-ERG:INAN/INS hit-3SG>1SG-PST
'I ran into a tree.' (lit. 'a tree hit me', ibid.: 284)

⇒ Multidimensional systems, where ergative allomorphy depends not only on the position of the nominal on the referential hierarchy (12), but also on such independent parameters as gender (Jingulu) or number (Adyghe), may actually violate the generalization in (13).

ADYGHE: plural demonstratives use the general Erg suffix and not the special one (cf. 'that-ERG' *a-š'* vs. 'that-PL-ERG' *a-xe-m* / **a-xe-š'*).

7. Discussion

Non-phonologically conditioned allomorphy of case-markers is fairly widespread, however, it has not been really studied from a typological point of view, and the distinction between allomorphy based on arbitrary lexical features such as declension class and allomorphy conditioned by morphosyntactic or lexical-semantic features is rarely made.

The phenomena I discussed are clearly rare from a typological perspective, but are they "marginal"? Cf. a strong point for the relevance of typological *rara* made by Cysouw & Wohlgemuth 2010.

- Ergative allomorphy conditioned by noun-external features such as tense-aspect or person/number features of the object are instructive for the typology of case-marking alternations and “split ergativity”.
- In addition, they pose non-trivial problems for the theories of syntax-morphology interface, representing clearly non-canonical behaviour, cf. Corbett (2008: 12): “Canonical use of morphosyntactic features and their values does not admit syntactic conditions”.
- Ergative allomorphy conditioned by the lexical-semantic class of the nominal adds an unexpected perspective to the study of the well-known and not undisputed (cf. Bickel & Witzlack-Makarevich 2008) effects of the referential hierarchies on case-marking and grammatical relations, cf. also Aristar 1997.

Further issues:

- To what extent the patterns of allomorphy attested for the ergative case is paralleled by allomorphy of other cases, such as nominative, accusative, or dative?
- What are possible diachronic sources of case-systems with multiple ergative markers? E.g. in Chukotko-Kamchatkan, the “lower-animate” ergative coincides with the instrumental, whereas the “higher-animate” ergative is syncretic with the locative.

Abbreviations

1 – 1st person, 2 – 2nd person, 3 – 3rd person, A – agent, ABL – ablative, ABS – absolutive, ACC – accusative, ADELAT – adelative, ALL – allative, AOR – aorist, ATR – attributive, AUX – auxiliary, CAUS – causative, DAT – dative, DCL – declarative, DEF – definite, DUR – durative, ERG – ergative, EVD – evidential, F – feminine, FKIN – feminine kin, FUT – future tense, GEN – genitive, HAB – habitual, INAN – inanimate, INS – instrumental, INV – inverse, IPF – imperfective, ITR – intransitive, M – masculine, NAR – narrative, NOM – nominative, OBL – oblique (case/stem), P – patient, PFV – perfective, PL – plural, PN – proper name, POSS – possessive, PRF – perfect, PRS – present tense, PST – past tense, PVB – preverb, REFL – reflexive, SBJ – subject, SG – singular, TR – transitive

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