Why is there NOM-NOM but no ERG-ERG?

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This paper investigates a typological gap in double case arrays, where two verbal arguments exhibit the same case marking. While languages permit NOM-NOM (Japanese), ACC-ACC (Icelandic) and ABS-ABS (Shipibo) case arrays, ERG-ERG is unattested. In this paper, I show that existing approaches to ergative case fail to capture this gap, which I call the Single Ergative Generalisation (SEG). I then provide an account of the SEG that requires verbal arguments to be introduced by syntactic heads which are interpreted and assign ergative case based on their syntactic context.

Ergative is not inherent: If we take ergative case to be inherent or lexical, then we would expect ERG-ERG to occur in causatives of transitives, yet these are unattested. In Niuean causatives (1), for example, the agent of the lower transitive clause (the causee) cannot be ergative (Massam 2009):

(1) Kua faka-totō aki e ia e kato **e** **tama** haaku.
PERF FAKA-hold INSTR ERG.P 3SG ABS.C basket **ABS.C** **child** 1SG.GEN
'She made my child hold the basket.'

(1) shows that there is no recursion of ergative structure in causatives (compare recursion of ACC in causatives which can occur in nominative-accusative languages, e.g. Korean), regardless of what predicate appears in the lower clause. Therefore if inherent cases are assigned consistently to the arguments of particular predicates, then ergative case cannot be inherent.

Ergative is not structural: If ergative case is structural, then we would expect it to be subject to syntactic operations that involve other structural cases, such as Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001) or any other mechanism that can derive, for example, Japanese NOM-NOM constructions as in (2):

(2) Hiromi-ga syuwa-ga deki-ru.
H-NOM sign.language-NOM capable-PRES
'Hiromi can use a sign language.'

However, since nothing in a structural case approach prevents the same operations from applying to ergative case, ERG-ERG is predicted to be possible, yet this is not borne out. Ergative case does not participate in these operations and thus should not be considered structural.

Ergative is not dependent: Ergative case as a dependent case has been proposed to be assigned to the higher of two DPs within a single cyclic domain (Baker & Vinokurova 2010, Coon & Preminger 2015). Baker (2014) stipulates that ergative case is keyed to CP but not to vP. However, nothing rules out the possibility of having multiple case domains, which may indeed be desirable for capturing genitive/ergative case syncretisms as found in Kaqchikel (Imanishi 2014):

(3) **R**-ixjayil **nu**-xb'al x-∅-pe.
ERG.3SG-wife **GEN/ERG.1SG**-brother PERF-ABS.3SG-come
'My brother's wife came.'

Similarly, two case domains seem necessary to derive ACC-ACC, also a dependent case, in Korean causatives. However, if we permit multiple case domains, then we allow dependent ergative case to be keyed to both CP and vP. This would predict ERG-ERG in causatives of transitives, which (1) showed does not occur. Thus a dependent case approach is similarly unable to derive the SEG.

A configurational approach: Adapting Wood & Marantz's (2015) configurational approach to the thematic interpretation of external arguments, I propose that ergative case is assigned to an argument on the basis of the content of the constituent it merges with. I assume that $i*$ is the sole external argument-introducing head, whose function is determined by its syntactic context (Wood & Marantz 2015). For example, Voice is what we call a bare $i*$ that merges with vP, while High

Appl is i* with an adjoined prepositional root. I claim that ergative case is assigned to an argument introduced by a bare i* with a vP complement (=Voice); this basic configurational requirement is met in transitive predicates (4a) but not unaccusative predicates (4b).

(4) a. Transitive predicates   b. Unaccusative predicates

Unergative predicates differ across ergative languages. For split-S languages like Basque, any argument whose sister constituent meets the basic requirement (bare i* merged with a vP) receives ergative marking. Non-split-S ergative languages such as Shipibo have an additional requirement: i* must merge with a vP containing an internal argument; we can say that languages like Shipibo require the features of the internal argument to be passed up through vP.

In this approach, the causee in the causative of a transitive clause does not receive ergative marking because it is not introduced by regular Voice (bare i*). The causee is an applied argument, introduced by High Appl (i* with a prepositional root) and an adjunct to vP such that the resulting constituent is still vP. Therefore when the causer is introduced by Voice (bare i*), we have the configuration of a transitive clause, which satisfies the requirements for ergative case assignment:

(5) [$_{\text{Voice*P}}$ Causer [$_{\text{Voice*P}}$ i*=Voice* [$_{v*P}$ Causee [$_{v*P}$ [$_{v*P}$ [$_{i*}$ i* $\sqrt{\text{FOR}}$] [$_{v*P}$ v Object]]]]]]

This account also extends to Shipibo derived ergative subjects (Baker 2014). In applicatives of unaccusatives (6), the theme raises to the specifier of Voice, with vP complement. The features of the applied argument are passed up through vP (independently required for non-split-S languages like Shipibo, noted earlier), which establishes the necessary configuration for ergative case assignment.

(6) Bimi-n-ra   Rosa   joshin-xon-ke.
     fruit-ERG-PL   Rosa(.ABS)   ripen-APPL-PRF

     'The fruit ripened for Rosa.'

A configurational approach to ergative case is able to derive the SEG because the function of each argument-introducing head (i* with or without an adjoined root) is determined by its syntactic context. Since the syntactic context changes each time a new argument is merged, ergative structure cannot 'recurse'. That is, ergative case is assigned to an argument whose sister constituent is composed of bare i* plus vP. The resulting constituent is Voice*P rather than vP, so no additional material that merges would be in the correct configuration to receive ergative case. Thus the SEG emerges because the configuration for ergative case assignment may only arise once in a clause.

The proposed configurational approach to ergative case also makes predictions for possessives. If possessors are external arguments introduced within the DP, then we have an explanation for why genitive and ergative case are often syncretic in ergative languages: ergative case reflects the sensitivity of a language to 'transitivity' in both verbal and nominal domains. This account also requires argument structure to be expressed by syntactically independent heads that become part of a single phonological word, e.g. overt Appl in Shipibo (6) and overt Voice in other languages.

Selected references: Baker 2014. On dependent ergative case (in Shipibo) and its derivation by phase. *LI* 45 | Imanishi 2014. *Default ergative*. MIT thesis | Massam 2009. The structure of (un)ergatives. *AFLA* 16 | Wood & Marantz 2015. On the interpretation of external arguments. lingbuzz/002487.