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The Oxford Handbook of
ERGATIVITY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

ERGATIVITY

Edited by

JESSICA COON, DIANE MASSAM,

and

LISA DEMENA TRAVIS

1. Introduction

2. Ergativity in Discourse and Grammar

3. Parameterizing Ergativity: An Informational Approach

4. Accusative and Ergative in Georgian

5. On Inherent and Dependent Ergativity

6. The Locus of Ergative Case

7. Ergative need not Split: An Exploration into the TotalErg Hypothesis

8. The Structural Source of Split Ergativity and Ergative Case in Georgian

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1. Introducing Ergativity

This volume tackles the phenomenon known as *ergativity*. The term “ergativity” has been most commonly used to refer to systems with one or both of the following properties: (i) transitive subject (A arguments in (1)) pattern differently from intransitive subjects (S arguments) and from transitive objects (P arguments); and (ii) transitive objects and intransitive subjects pattern alike (see Figure 1.1). In such a system, schematized in Figure 1.1(a), the A argument is referred to as the “ergative” argument, and the S and P arguments are the “absolutive” arguments. This type of system contrasts with a “nominative–accusative” systems, shown in Figure 1.1(b).

Just as there is more than one way to be “ergative,” it is important to point out that “ergativity” may refer to any characteristic which aligns arguments as in Figure 1.1(a)—this includes not only the more common morphological case marking and agreement, but also word order, discourse and information structure, or the extractability of arguments. A wide range of work across different traditions converges on the idea that “ergativity” is not a single unitary phenomenon, and is not realized in the same way across different languages. Dixon (1994: 219), for example suggests that “there is no necessary connection between ergative characteristics and any other linguistic feature,” and Johns (2000: 67) writes in a similar vein that there may be “little value in studying ergativity as a thing in itself.” In her recent survey of ergativity, Deal (2015b) suggests that “ergativity is not one but many phenomena.” Nonetheless, certain patterns and correlations emerge suggesting that while there is certainly diversity, there is also some unity—perhaps motivating the existence of this additional volume on the topic. The general themes of unity and diversity in and among ergative systems are touched on in the chapters that follow.

CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors

xi

1. Introduction

1

JESSICA COON, DIANE MASSAM, AND LISA DEMENA TRAVIS

PART I ACCOUNTING FOR ERGATIVITY

Representing Ergativity

2. Ergativity in Discourse and Grammar

23

JOHN W. DU BOIS

3. Parameterizing Ergativity: An Inherent Case Approach

59

MICHELLE SHEEHAN

4. Accusative and Ergative in Hindi

86

ANOOP MAHAJAN

The Nature of Ergative Case

5. On Inherent and Dependent Theories of Ergative Case

111

MARK C. BAKER AND JONATHAN DAVID BOBALJIK

6. The Locus of Ergative Case

135

JULIE ANNE LEGATE

7. Ergative *need* not Split: An Exploration into the *TotalErg* Hypothesis

159

ITZIAR LAKA

8. The Structural Source of Split Ergativity and Ergative Case in Georgian

175

LÉA NASH

PART II CHARACTERISTICS AND EXTENSIONS

Characteristics

9. Split Ergativity in Syntax and at Morphological Spellout 205
ELLEN WOOLFORD
10. Split Ergativity is not about Ergativity 226
JESSICA COON AND OMER PREMINGER
11. Ergativity and Differential Case Marking 253
ANDREJ MALCHUKOV
12. Three-Way Systems do not Exist 279
GEREON MÜLLER AND DANIELA THOMAS
13. Antipassive 308
MARIA POLINSKY
14. Remarks on the Relation between Case-Alignment
and Constituent Order 332
TARALD TARALDSEN

Extensions

15. Ergativity in Nominalization 355
ARTEMIS ALEXIADOU
16. Ergativity and Austronesian-Type Voice Systems 373
MICHAEL YOSHITAKA ERLEWINE, THEODORE LEVIN,
AND COPPE VAN URK
17. On the Morphosyntactic Reflexes of Information
Structure in the Ergative Patterning of Inuit Language 397
ALANA JOHNS AND IVONA KUČEROVÁ
18. Ergative Constellations in the Structure of Speech Acts 419
MARTINA WILTSCHKO

PART III APPROACHES TO ERGATIVITY

Diachronic

19. Grammaticalization of Ergative Case Marking 447
WILLIAM B. MCGREGOR
20. Deconstructing Iranian Ergativity 465
GEOFFREY HAIG
21. Intransitivity and the Development of Ergative Alignment 501
EDITH ALDRIDGE
22. Developments into and Out of Ergativity: Indo-Aryan diachrony 530
MIRIAM BUTT AND ASHWINI DEO
23. Ergativity and Language Change in Austronesian Languages 553
RITSUKO KIKUSAWA
24. Lexical Category and Alignment in Austronesian 589
DANIEL KAUFMAN

Acquisition

25. The Acquisition of Ergativity: An Overview 631
EDITH L. BAVIN
26. The Role of Defaults in the Acquisition of Basque Ergative
and Dative Morphology 646
JENNIFER AUSTIN
27. A Comparative Study of the Acquisition of Nominative
and Ergative Alignment in European and Mayan Languages 665
CLIFTON PYE AND BARBARA PFEILER

Experimental

28. Processing Ergativity: Behavioral and Electrophysiological Evidence 693
ADAM ZAWISZEWSKI