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Argument Structure and Grammatical Relations

A crosslinguistic typology

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Preface

The first LENCA Symposium (International Symposium on Deixis and Quantification in Languages Spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia) was held at the Udmurt State University, Izhevsk, Udmurtia, Russia, on May 19–22, 2001 (<http://www.ling.helsinki.fi/uhlcs/projects/projects.html>). The second international symposium on the languages spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia (LENCA) took place at Kazan Federal University, Tatarstan, Russia, on May 11–14, 2004. The topics of the symposium were typology of argument structure and grammatical relations of languages spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia. The third LENCA Symposium (Grammar and Pragmatics of Complex Sentences (Subordination and Coordination) in Languages Spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia) took place at Tomsk State Pedagogical University on June 27–30, 2006. Although the focus of the symposia has been on the properties of languages spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia, typology of languages and linguistic typology have been the other main streams of the LENCA Symposia. Most of the articles in this volume consist of papers presented and distributed to the LENCA II Symposium at Kazan Federal University. The last article is based on the paper presented in the first LENCA symposium at Udmurt State University in 2004. The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Department of Linguistics has been one of the main organizers of all these LENCA Symposia. A distinctive part of editing this volume is done with the equipment of the University of Helsinki, General linguistics (Department of Modern Languages), including computers, the tools available on the Unix Operating System, and electronic dictionaries. Because of practical reasons, publication of this volume has been postponed several times. The editors want to express warmest thanks to the authors of the articles for their patience in waiting for the appearance of this publication. Sincerest thanks also go to the publisher for accepting this volume to be published in the Studies in Language Companion Series.

As this volume was about to go to press, we learned of the tragic death in a car accident of Anna Siewierska. We dedicate the volume to her memory.

Helsinki–Leipzig, November 2010 and April and September 2011

The editors

Introduction

Bernard Comrie

The theme chosen for the Second International Symposium on the Languages of Europe and North and Central Asia (LENCA 2) was “argument structure and grammatical relations”, and all papers selected for presentation at the symposium, including those selected for the present volume, relate directly or indirectly to this theme. However, since we believe that in order to understand a particular phenomenon, one must also understand neighboring and interacting phenomena, some of the contributions also concern some of these adjacent areas, especially in their interaction with argument structure and grammatical relations. Likewise, although the areal focus of the symposium was clearly on Europe and North and Central Asia, understanding of the properties of languages of this area calls for knowledge of the properties of languages spoken elsewhere, for comparison and contrast and for this reason the conference organizers and volume editors have welcomed two papers from across the Pacific, dealing with issues of argument structure and grammatical relations in languages of western North America.

In speaking of grammatical relations, a major part has been played in recent typological work by the notion of alignment typology, with the recognition of such systems as (nominative-)accusative, ergative(-absolutive), agent-patient (or split intransitive), initially for the marking (by means of case or adpositions) of noun phrase arguments. Several contributions to the present volume deal specifically with this topic. Basque is often a typological outlier in its Indo-European, more specifically Romance, geographical environment, but much controversy remains as to exactly how the typological characteristics of Basque should be analyzed. After an early period of considering Basque to illustrate ergative alignment of case marking, many recent studies have reanalyzed the language as having split intransitivity. Alcázar presents arguments against this position, in particular other criteria under which unergative verbs behave like transitive verbs, suggesting that they should perhaps be treated as transitive verbs, thus returning Basque to the ergative fold. Comrie, while staying within the general area of alignment typology, examines case marking in ditransitive clauses in comparison with monotransitive clauses, providing further empirical support in favor of the prevalence of indirective (indirect object) alignment as the predominant, indeed almost exclusive pattern with the verb ‘give’ in Europe and North and Central Asia.

Two articles deal with diachronic aspects of alignment systems, in particular the claim that alignment is a stable diachronic feature, though interestingly with opposite conclusions. Janhunen shows that close contact between Bodic and Turkic/Mongolic languages in the Amdo region, while leading to considerable structural convergence in some phenomena, has left intact the ergative and accusative alignments, respectively, of the two groups of languages. By contrast, Mithun shows that a group of languages in contact in northern California – Chimariko, Yana, Yurok, and Karuk – all illustrate a rare pattern of indexing of arguments in the verb through pronominal affixes, namely hierarchical alignment, whereby the verb indexes that argument that is highest on the hierarchy of grammatical relations. Hierarchical alignment has clearly spread through contact, although the languages retain different case marking alignments.

Two contributions deal with the argument structure of causative constructions, which have come to occupy an important place because of the shift in argument structure between non-causative and causative counterparts. These two articles also nicely complement each other because of their differing typological-functional and formal grammatical perspectives. Daniel et al. investigate the complex interplay of labile/lexical, compound, and periphrastic causatives in Agul in terms not only of structural differences – especially interesting in that compound and periphrastic causatives share the same grammaticalization source – but also in terms of productivity and, in the cases where a given verb has more than one corresponding causative, the semantic differences between the two. These semantic differences reflect the frequently cited distinction between direct and indirect causation, but the authors go further by showing how this opposition can be decomposed into finer semantic distinctions. Kim examines, on the basis of Korean and Japanese material, the oft noted parallelisms in structure between transitive, causative, and – surprisingly – passive constructions, for instance in terms of whether event control emanates from the subject, from both the subject and non-subject, or solely from the non-subject.

No fewer than six articles deal centrally with the interaction between argument structure/grammatical relations and other aspects of language structure. Corbett asks whether agreement can be handled cross-linguistically solely in terms of grammatical relations, concluding that in at least some instances reference must be made to semantic roles, information structure concepts such as topic, and morphological case. Hawkins starts from the observation that a number of asymmetries between the arguments of a predicate that have been captured descriptively in terms of hierarchies of grammatical relations, morphological cases, etc. find a more uniform explanation in terms of functional principles of efficiency and complexity. Kibrik argues even more radically with respect to pronominal affixes in the structure of the Athabaskan verb that such affixes encode neither

grammatical relations nor semantic roles, but should be treated as analogous to case in dependent-marking languages. Two contributions show the importance of information structure in its interaction with grammatical relations and argument structure: Filchenko examines a range of constructions in Eastern Khanty, showing how differences in the choice of morphosyntactic encoding of the arguments of a predicate are largely dependent on information structure, while possessive affixes also play a significant role in encoding properties of information structure. In their study of Xibe, Jang and Payne demonstrate the importance of an extended topic marker in the structuring of discourse, a phenomenon that goes beyond grammar in that its careful use is considered a hallmark of skilled story-telling. Finally in this group of articles, Suihkonen uses a corpus-based analysis of verbal derivation in Finnish and Udmurt to illustrate how aspectual properties and quantification interact with one another and with the argument structure of predicates in a particularly intricate way.

In the largely dependent-marking languages of Europe and North and Central Asia, an important role is played by case and adpositions, and Johanson demonstrates how Eastern Turkic languages display five distinct layers of encoding of spatial relations, ranging from absence of any marker to composite postpositions; interesting results include the observation that supposedly simple concepts such as 'in' and 'on' require the most explicit coding, by means of compound postpositions.

Finally, Siewierska and Bakker address directly the question of the nature of grammatical relations, by means of a comparison of three functional-typological approaches that are united by defining grammatical relations in terms of behavioral properties that are not reducible to other properties, in particular semantic roles and information structure status. This then leads to a classification of languages, and more specifically of languages of Europe and North and Central Asia, according to such parameters as the existence of grammatical relations (they are present in nearly all languages of the area), and whether or not grammatical relations are variable (e.g. through the presence of different voices providing different morphosyntactic encodings of the same semantic role) – on this latter criterion, there is a west–east cline from more to less variable grammatical relations.

In conclusion, the contributions to this volume show the importance of the consideration of argument structure and grammatical relations – however critically viewed – for our understanding of language, and the variety of insights that can be achieved more specifically through the investigation of languages of Europe and North and Central Asia. Crucially, the consideration of these phenomena and these languages relies also on an understanding of interaction with other linguistic phenomena and on comparison with languages spoken in other parts of the world.

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A deceptive case of split-intransitivity in Basque

Asier Alcázar

University of Missouri

Differences in case marking and auxiliary selection in Basque intransitive verbs (Levin 1983; Ortiz de Urbina 1989; Hale & Keyser 1993; Laka 1995) seem sufficient grounds for changing the current typological classification of Basque from ergative (Dixon 1994; Primus 1999) to split-intransitive. One subset of intransitive verbs is morphologically on a par with transitives. This subset has been identified as the unergative class in the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978). The morphological split rests on the key assumption that unergatives are intransitive in Basque (Alcázar 2008). In this paper I show that Basque unergatives pattern with transitives in the absolute construction and reduced relative clauses. This novel evidence tips the scale towards an ergative analysis of Basque and questions the universality of unergatives as syntactically intransitive.

1. Introduction

In this paper I expand on earlier work that seeks a better understanding of Basque split-intransitivity (Alcázar 2003, 2008). Should Basque be a split-intransitive language, it would instantiate a new lexical type (Alcázar 2003): comparison with split-intransitive languages (Merlan 1985) and languages with traces of split-intransitivity (Sorace 2000 on Western Indo-European) reveals that the Basque split is lexical, as it is pervasive across all grammatical categories.

The alternative to this label is to deny the split, namely, to treat Basque unergatives as transitive verbs. Then Basque would be a morphologically ergative language (Dixon 1994; Primus 1999). Data from the absolute construction and reduced relative clauses reveal an asymmetry between Basque and present day Romance that pushes us in this direction. The presentation of these data constitutes the core of this paper.

The application of the split-intransitive label to Basque is built on the assumption that unergatives are intransitive in this language, an idea in agreement with the Strong Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978; henceforth Strong UH) and

subsequent work (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, among many). The Strong UH predicts that intransitive verbs divide into unaccusatives (with an object/internal argument) and unergatives (with a subject/external argument). This assumption is controversial on semantic (Rosen 1981, 1984) and syntactic grounds (Hale & Keyser 1993, 2003; Rice 1991) for a wide range of languages surveyed.

Concerning Basque, unergatives are either verbs or light verbs. Basque unergatives appear to both refute and support the Strong UH. As light verbs (1), their object is linearly separable from *egin* 'do' (Levin 1983; Ortiz de Urbina 1989).¹ As verbs (2), they seem objectless. Both (1) and (2) have an ergative marked subject argument.

- (1) *Ume-ak dei egi-n du*
 child-ERG.SG call do-PER HAVE.3SG.3SG
 'The child called'
- (2) *Ume-ak dei-tu du*
 child-ERG.SG call-PER HAVE.3SG.3SG
 'The child called'

The lingering question is whether (2) is transitive or not.

A look at purely transitive (3) and intransitive (4) verbs in Basque is in order. The following two examples provide a visual of the morphological parallel between the unergatives above ((1)–(2)) and transitives ((3) below), which contrasts to unaccusatives (4), a verb type we can safely assume to be intransitive (Levin 1983).² Note the well-known transitive looks of (1)–(2):

1. The citation form *egin*, glossed as an infinitive here, is a perfective participle in Basque (Zubiri & Zubiri 2000), thus the gloss PER in (1). This form denotes perfectivity in contrast to an imperfective and an irrealis participle (Alcázar 2004). In addition to its use as a citation form, this form is also used in an aspectually neutral role, which we may deem an infinitival use, as the complement of a modal verb, the verb-in-focus structure, and in gerundival/participial absolute constructions (Ortiz de Urbina 1989; Alcázar & Saltarelli 2007), where the interpretation need not be perfective. In the following examples, the participial/infinitival form has different endings (-*tu*/-*du*, -*i*, and -*n*). These suffixes are morphologically conditioned on the verb root, and do not affect the selection of the auxiliary, case or person/number agreement.

2. When the object in the light verb unergative (1) is singular, it is not inflected with absolutive singular -*a*, unlike *katu-a* 'cat' in the transitive example (3). In (1), the object *dei* 'call' appears bare, with no case suffix. In the plural, the object would bear absolutive plural -*ak* and trigger plural agreement for the absolutive in the auxiliary (e.g. *bake-ak egin* [peace-ABS.PL do] 'reconcile' cf. Zabala 2002; notice that -*ak* is also the expression of ergative singular). In effect, when the object is plural, the parallelism between (1) and (3) is complete (i.e. *katu-ak* [cat-ABS.PL] 'cats'). Why does the object appear bare in the singular in (1)? The absolutive has

auxiliary HAVE ((1)–(3) vs. BE in (4)), ergative case for the subject ((1)–(3) vs. absolutive in (4)), and transitive (ergative) number/person agreement (not immediately apparent in 3rd person singular forms (*du* vs. *da*), but paradigmatically clear; see Zubiri & Zubiri 2000).

- (3) *Ume-ak katu-a ikus-i du*
 child-ERG.SG cat-ABS.SG see-PER HAVE.3SG.3SG
 ‘The child saw a cat’

- (4) *Ume-a ailega-tu da*
 child-ABS.SG arrive-PER BE.3SG
 ‘The child arrived’

If (2) is intransitive, Basque is a split-intransitive language by virtue of employing a suite of morphemes to mark case and indicate person and number agreement denoting transitivity with some intransitives (compare (4) with (2); (2) with (3) and (4)). However, if (2) is transitive, then “*Basque, the language isolate spoken in the Pyrenees, is fully ergative at the morphological level*” (Dixon 1994:2, and references therein). Thus, the typological label we assign to Basque crucially relies on the transitivity or intransitivity of unergatives (Alcázar 2008). For this reason the behavior of Basque unergatives merits further research insofar as it may help decide the typological label, advance our understanding of argument structure, and contribute to the unaccusative literature.

This paper probes unergatives in the domain of the absolute construction and reduced relative clauses, where Basque stands in opposition to present day Romance in that unergatives participate in these structures. Basque is not alone in this. In fact, there exist data from historical Romance that also allows unergatives (12th century Italian: Egerland 2004 cf. Alcázar & Saltarelli 2007). Basque and Old Italian resemble the late stages of the absolute construction in Latin, which evolved to become a complete non-finite sentence: “[...] the syntax of absolute constructions took characteristics of finite clauses including a subject and a direct object” (Bauer 2000:310). In this regard, the conclusions in this study support a gradient (Sorace 2000) or cross-linguistically accommodating version (Rosen 1984) of the Unaccusative Hypothesis (but see other recent proposals in Alexiadou et al. 2004).

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 introduces the absolute construction in Romance, where there is reason to believe unergatives are intransitive (Burzio 1981, 1986). Section 3 identifies the absolute construction in Basque and

a zero-morph for indefinite number forms (*lan egi-n* [work.ABS.IND DO-PER] ‘work’ vs. *lan-a(k) egi-n* [work-ABS.SG/PL DO-PER] ‘do some work(s)’).

contrasts it to Romance, where Basque accepts unergatives of type (1) and (2). Sections 4 and 5 mirror the previous two sections; this time treating reduced relative clauses with the same results. The conclusion is that Basque unergative verbs (2) are transitive predicates (with Hale & Keyser 2003). Hence, Basque lacks unergatives in the sense of the Strong UH. This being the case, *morphologically ergative* and not *split-intransitive* seems the right analysis of Basque.

2. The absolute construction in Romance

It is not possible to discuss the absolute construction in Romance without first referring to its parent language. In Latin, the argument and the participle agreed for case, which could be ablative (5 cf. Bauer 2000: 261), nominative or accusative (Ramat 1994).

- (5) *expugnatis oppidis Caesar statuit ...*
 take-PF.PART-ABL.PL towns-ABL Caesar-NOM decide-PF-3SG
 ‘when several towns were taken, Caesar decided ...’

The absolute construction is in essence an adverbial clause with a non-finite verb and an argument that is presumed to be directly inherited from Proto-Indo-European, given its prevalence among its daughter languages (Costello 1982; Coleman 1989). Example (5) shows that both elements agree in case, typically oblique across languages (Hristova 2004). In Latin, the choice of case has been claimed to bear on the intended interpretation, particularly with reference to the ablative case, which is often believed to prevent (or rather statistically disfavor) a joint interpretation of the subject of the main sentence as the subject of the absolute construction (Ramat 1994). This expectation has been qualified somewhat after close scrutiny of its use by authors such as Julius Caesar in *De Bello Gallico* and *De Bello Civili* and Plautus in his comedies *Captiva* and *Casina* (Bauer 2000: 300–301).

Absolutes may also be nominal or adjectival, types which we will ignore here as our interest is the role of unergative verbs. Regarding semantics, the construction is diverse, allowing for interpretations that are restrictive or non-restrictive, temporal, causal, locative, instrumental, concessive, conditional or manner (Mensink 1994, Ramat 1994).

After the demise of case, Romance languages show number and gender agreement between the participle and its argument. The following example from Spanish shows the contrast between a participle marked by default with a masculine (or neuter) singular suffix (6a) and the same participle agreeing for number and gender with its argument (6b):

- (6) a. *Juan ha vendi-d-o l-as casa-s*
 Juan HAVE.3SG sell-PER-MASC.SG the-FEM.PL house.FEM-PL
 'Juan has sold the houses'
- b. *Vendi-d-as l-as casa-s, Juan compr-ó*
 sell-PER-FEM.PL the-FEM.PL house.FEM-PL Juan buy-PST.3SG
un apartamento
 an apartment
 '[Having] sold the houses, Juan bought an apartment'

From a theoretical standpoint, in Relational Grammar (Perlmutter 1978; Perlmutter & Postal 1984) and Generative Grammar (Burzio 1981, 1986), the absolute construction became one of the cornerstone diagnostics to assess unaccusativity. The absolute construction rejects unergatives (7c), while it accepts unaccusatives (7a) and transitives ((7b); examples from Belletti 1992 cf. Alcázar & Saltarelli 2007).³

- (7) a. *Arriva-t-a Maria, Gianni tirò in sospiro*
 arrive-PER-FEM.SG Maria Gianni threw in whisper
di sollievo
 of relief
 'Maria [having] arrived, Gianni was relieved'
- b. *Conosciu-t-a Maria, Gianni ha cambiato vita.*
 know-PER-FEM.SG Maria Gianni has changed life
 '[Having] known Maria, Gianni changed lifestyle'
- c. **Telefona-t-o Gianni, Maria andò all' appuntamento*
 call-PER-MASC.SG Gianni Maria walked to.the' appointment
 'Gianni [having] called, Maria went to the appointment'

The absolute construction strengthens the connection between unaccusatives and transitives on the basis of both having an object or internal argument. These facts reflect the distribution of other well-known evidence adduced for Italian, such as auxiliary selection and partitive *ne*, for which parallels have been found in Romance and other language families (Sorace 2000).

In the case of transitives, the subject or external argument may be left unexpressed in the absolute construction, as in (7b) above. The subject may also be introduced by a *by*-phrase, as in (8a), or construed jointly with the subject of the main sentence, illustrated for Italian in (8b), which uses accusative case

3. Why ban unergatives in the absolute construction in Romance? See Belletti (1992) for a semantic analysis in Government & Binding; Alcázar and Saltarelli (2007) for a syntactic analysis in Minimalism.