

**Why is ergativity often restricted to certain environments?
A look at the diachrony of Differential A Marking**

(Oral presentation)

The present paper aims at explaining why ergative case alignment often only occurs in a part of the grammar together with other instances of Differential A Marking (DAM), which here refers to a variation in the case-marking of the more agent-like argument of two- and three-argument constructions. (I follow Bickel's 2011 approach to grammatical relations.) DAM can be conditioned by the following factors:

- Referential properties of the A argument, such as person, number, animacy
- Predicate classes (or valence classes having different case frames)
- Clause properties: TAM values, polarity, clause type (main vs. non-main clauses), scenario (nature of co-arguments)
- Semantic and pragmatic function (including esp. agentivity and focus)

Many languages have more than one factor conditioning DAM and exhibit complex interaction patterns of these factors. For instance, in languages having different predicate classes, further splits are often restricted to only one predicate class (usually the one involving prototypical transitive constructions). Moreover, splits conditioned by information structure often only occur in a subset of agent arguments (i.e. agent arguments with specific referential properties) and/or only within certain TAM categories.

Languages having different kinds of A splits are generally also more likely to have an ergative case alignment pattern in some parts of the grammar, when some A arguments are morphologically marked, while S (single arguments of one-argument constructions) and P arguments (the more patient-like arguments of two-argument constructions) are unmarked, as are other A arguments. The present study shows that split ergativity is often the result of the diachronic emergence of DAM, which involves, among others, the following contexts and mechanisms:

- Reanalysis of complex NPs (or nominalized clauses) as full (main) clauses
- Emergence or extension of predicate classes
- Reanalysis of adjuncts as core arguments
- Reanalysis of focus markers as A markers

On the other hand, since DAM is often a precondition for the emergence of ergative patterns, languages lacking DAM usually also lack ergative patterns.

Some methodological prerequisites should also be mentioned here:

- Case marking is defined here in fairly broad terms, including any element of dependent marking on the clause level irrespective of their morphological nature (affixes, clitics and separate words), since the properties (and definitions) of words vary widely across languages (see Dixon and Aikhenvald 2002).
- Arguments (and valence) are defined in purely semantic terms (following the approach by Bickel 2011) since the application of syntactic criteria of argumenthood poses problems for the crosslinguistic investigation of arguments (cf. Witzlack-Makarevich 2011: 41-47).

Examples are drawn from a worldwide sample of languages. However, languages of Australia, New Guinea, the Himalayas and the Caucasus feature more prominently, since ergative patterns are found there more frequently.

References

- Bickel, Balthasar. 2011. Grammatical relations typology. In Jae Jung Song (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 399-444.
- Dixon, R. M. W. and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald. 2002. Word: a typological framework. In R. M. W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald (eds.), *Word: a Cross-Linguistic Typology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-41.
- Witzlack-Makarevich, Alena. 2011. *Typological Variation in Grammatical Relations*. Ph.D thesis, Universität Leipzig.