Agreement Morpheme Order: Window on the Syntax of LF

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1. Introduction

In this paper I investigate the relationship between agreement morpheme order and syntactic processes that take place at LF. That a relationship should exist at all follows from the premise that the function of agreement is to license NPs marked for abstract Case. The execution of this function ultimately requires movement, i.e. of Case-marked NPs to the agreement morphemes responsible for licensing them; this in turn potentially interacts with other instances of movement and the representations they derive.

The central claim is that the order of agreement morphemes can indicate whether a language is underlyingly ergative or accusative: if the subject agreement marker is closer to the verb stem than object agreement, the language will show signs of being ergative (conversely, accusative). This is discussed in Section one. In Section two, it is shown how morphologically ergative languages are also syntactically ergative. Usually this means that ergative NPs (usually transitive subjects) behave differently than absolutes (transitive objects, intransitive subjects) with respect to rules of syntax. This generalization apparently holds even in situations where both transitive and intransitive subjects trigger the same form of agreement—in other words, ergative NPs are still singled out for special treatment. Warlpiri is considered in Section three, with its split system of accusative agreement and ergative Case-marking on NPs. Although the pattern of agreement is accusative, the order of agreement morphemes is typical of an ergative language. It is then proposed that agreement in Warlpiri resembles a split-ergative situation in an otherwise ergative language, where subjects are uniformly checked for Case by the agreement morpheme closest to the verb. The proposal is tested in Section four, and partially confirmed by evidence indicating that transitive (ergative) subjects do not undergo QR. In Section five some of the issues that arise from this approach are discussed, in particular the split system of Case and agreement. Despite its superfluous character, it is argued that the Case/agreement system found in Warlpiri is the only kind that can exist, or that other systems are precluded by principles of Universal Grammar.

2. Agreement morpheme order

The focus of this section is agreement morpheme order, and its distribution in ergative and accusative languages. Attention is initially restricted to verbs with one or two direct arguments (typically 'Agent' or 'Agent/Patient' verbs), but others will be considered later on. Following the work of Sportiche (1988) and Bittner (in press), I assume that direct arguments are base-generated within VP, except for Agents which are VP-adjointed. Generally speaking, arguments conform to a universal hierarchy at D-structure. Dominating VP is a series of functional nodes, including projections of Tense and Agreement. This is essentially the structure proposed by Chomsky (1991, 1992), in which one agreement morpheme appears on either side of Tense. These are given in (1) and (2) below:

* Many thanks to Ken Hale, Edward Ikeda, Lisa Travis and all the participants of the Fourth Annual Canadian Workshop on Lexical Syntactic Relations—including the anonymous one who brought the Tsimshianic language family to my attention.
(1) Argument structure

(2) Structure of Inflection

Languages may be parameterized as to whether verbs assign structural (accusative) Case to their objects. In some theories (e.g. Chomsky, 1991), structural Case is assigned (or checked) exclusively in specifier-head configurations. Even in a language such as English then, objects would be licensed through agreement. This is not the view taken here, where verbs are considered as potential Case-assigners. In languages where verbs do not assign Case, both agreement morphemes may be necessary for Case-checking. Ultimately, this will require movement of the arguments to the appropriate projections of agreement at S-structure or LF, depending on the language or construction.¹

Of the two agreement morphemes, the highest (AGRsP) functions as a 'default', meaning that it plays an active role in every sentence. (This condition can be overridden in special circumstances, which will be discussed below.) The agreement morpheme responsible for checking the subject of a transitive verb thus determines the overall Case-marking pattern of a language: if this is AGRs, the language will be nominative-accusative, since both transitive and intransitive subjects will be checked by the same agreement morpheme.²,³ If transitive subjects are checked for Case by AGRo, on the other hand, the language will be ergative, since transitive objects and intransitive subjects (the absolutive relations) both get their Case from AGRs. The association of arguments and agreement morphemes in typical 'accusative' and ergative languages is illustrated below:

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¹ It is necessary to assume that Case-checking does not occur until LF in most ergative languages to account for non-object initial word-orders. Otherwise, the level at which Case-checking applies will not be an issue.

² I use the terms 'transitive subject', etc. liberally, but without implying that these are primitives. For the purposes of this paper, transitive subject can be understood to mean an Agent, transitive object a Theme or Patient, and intransitive subject any one of these roles.

³ By 'accusative', we mean that a unique Case-feature is associated with the transitive object through agreement. Otherwise, the terms refers to the unique marking on an NP as determined by a verb.
(3) Argument association in an 'accusative' language (±-TR)
(4) **Argument association in an ergative language ([+/-TR])**

It follows then that the agreement morpheme closest to the verb will be responsible for checking objects (Patients) for Case in a typically 'accusative' language, and subjects (Agents) in a language that is ergative. A brief survey of languages that utilize two agreement morphemes seems to confirm this generalization.

(5) **Agreement morpheme order in an 'accusative' language (Makua)**

Arráíma a-ho-n-tháum-a báásikeli
A. SM-Tns-OM-buy-tns bicycle
'Arráíma has bought a bicycle'

In Makua (Bantu), the object marker is closer to the verb stem ('buy') than the subject marker, indicative of a nominative-'accusative' language. Intransitive subjects (not shown) take the same form of agreement (and in the same position) as transitive subjects, which is consistent with the proposal.

In Abkhaz (Caucasian) and Mam (Mayan), subject agreement is closer to the verb stem than object agreement, so we expect these languages to be ergative. The marking on intransitive subjects will bear this out, taking the form of transitive object, rather than subject agreement.

(6) **Agreement morpheme order in an ergative language (Mam, Abkhaz)**

a. ma chin ok t-tzeeq'a-n-a
asp 1sA dir 2sE-hit-ds-C1.
'You hit me'

Mam
b. álá lara d-a-ba-yt’
dog(n) 3sf.pro A3s+hum-E3sn-see-PST
'A dog saw her’
Abkhaz

In a number of languages it is impossible to tell which agreement morpheme is closer to the verb stem, owing to the fact that one morpheme appears on either side of it. Examples are given here from Basque (which is ergative) and Palauan (‘accusative’):4

(7) Indeterminate argument association (Basque, Palauan)
   a. Nik liburu ekarri dut.
   I-ERG book-ABS bring A3s.PART.E1s
   'I brought a book’
   Basque (Erg.)

   b. ak-’iliu-ii [a buk er a ’ekabil]
   S1s-read.PERF-3s book P girl
   'I read the girl’s book’
   Palauan (Acc.)

Apparently then, there are no ergative languages in which object (=absolutive) agreement is innermost, or an ‘accusative’ language in which subject (=nominative) agreement is closer to the stem than object agreement. This is formulated in terms of the following:5

(8) The Argument-Agreement Parameter (AAP)
   In an ‘accusative’ language, AGRo checks Patients (of Agent-Patient verbs); in an ergative language AGRo checks Agents.

Warlpiri

Now consider Warlpiri, a language in which nominals follow an ergative pattern of Case-marking; transitive subjects are marked with the suffix -rlu-ngku, while transitive objects and intransitive subjects remain unmarked. At the same time agreement follows a classically accusative pattern in which transitive and intransitive subjects are cross-referenced by one form, transitive objects by another; the forms of agreement appear on the auxiliary or clause-initial element:6

(9) Warlpiri (basic)
      I-ABS PRES-S1s speak-N.PST
      'I am speaking’ [-TR]

   b. Nyuntu ka-npa mà wangka-mi.
      You-ABS PRES-S2s speak-N.PST
      'You are speaking’ [-TR]

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4 Speas (1991) claims that subject (=ergative) agreement is closer to the stem than object (=absolutive) agreement in Basque, which is predicted here.

5 There are some apparent exceptions to this (Tsimshian, Gitksan) which will be discussed in detail in Section five.

6 There is some debate as to whether the bound forms on the auxiliary represent clitics or agreement morphemes. For obvious reasons, our analysis rests on the latter assertion, a conclusion also reached by Hale (1973).
c. Ngarrka ka-∅ wangka-mi.
   man-ABS PRES-S3s speak-N.PST
   'The man is speaking' [-TR]

   I-ERG PRES-S1s-O2s you-ABS see-N.PST
   'I see you' [+TR]

e. Ngajulu-rlu ka-rna-(∅) marlu nya-nyi.
   I-ERG PRES-S1s-O3s kangaroo-ABS see-N.PST
   'I see the kangaroo' [+TR]

   kangaroo-ERG PRES-S3s-O1s I-ABS see-N.PST
   'The kangaroo sees me' [+TR]

For convenience, I will refer to the situation in Warlpiri as a Case/agreement split. Interestingly, the inverse of Warlpiri is not attested in natural language: accusative Case-marking on nominals never seems to co-occur with ergative agreement. We return to this in Section five.

A Case/agreement split is unexpected in a theory where Case-checking is regarded as the primary role of agreement. Even more surprising is the fact that subject agreement—construed with ergative NP's in transitive contexts—is closer to the host (Aux) than object agreement. This represents an apparent exception to the AAP as stated in (8), where in canonically 'accusative' languages the morpheme cross-referencing the object (Patient) is closer to the stem. We anticipate that this exception is only apparent, however, such that Warlpiri may still be ergative, in the sense of the AAP.

Suppose that intransitive subjects in Warlpiri are checked for Case by the lower of the two agreement morphemes (AGR), implying that independent factors override default Case-checking by AGRs. Perhaps it is the case that Aux in Warlpiri (including its non-phonetic reflex) subcategorizes for agreement; presumably, Aux would appear under Tense, such that only AGRo could satisfy it. The following trees represent the proposed association of arguments and agreement in Warlpiri transitive and intransitive sentences:

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7 Ouhalla (1988) proposes a similar relationship between Tense and agreement in VSO languages. In his theory, Tense dominates (subject) agreement.
(10) Argument association in Warlpiri (L+/-TR)

When an intransitive subject associates with AGRo a nominative-accusative pattern is produced: transitive and intransitive subjects are checked for Case by the same agreement morpheme, but this is AGRo instead of the expected AGRs—compare with (3). Similarly, the transitive object in (10) is associated with a unique agreement morpheme just as it would be in a 'accusative' language, but this is AGRs instead of AGRo. In short we propose that Warlpiri is underlyingly ergative—despite its pattern of agreement—as determined by the order of agreement morphemes.\(^8\) Still, there is a mismatch between agreement and nominal Case-marking: 'subject' agreement is responsible for checking NP's marked with ergative and absolutive Case (cf. Section five). For the time being it suffices to say that given this proposal, Warlpiri is not inconsistent with the AAP.

3. Split-ergativity

Before examining the consequences of argument association in Warlpiri, consider how syntactic ergativity could be manifested in the grammar. First, it has been amply demonstrated that processes like control and binding do not operate on an ergative basis, even though the language may be morphologically ergative (cf. Anderson, 1976; Bobaljik, 1992). This is true of Mam and Abkhaz (which are morphologically ergative), and it is also true of Warlpiri:

\(^8\) We assume that syntactic affixation is consistent—taking place through prefixing or suffixing, but never both. The reader is referred to Speas (1991) for some discussion of this point.
(11) Control & binding in Warlpiri

   seeds-IMP-S1s-03s grind-PST sit-INF-KARRA-ERG
   'I ground the seeds, while I was sitting down' [PRO=-TR.subj]

b. Ngarrka ka-Ø wirnpirl-ni-kari karli jarnti-minja-karra.
   man-ABS PRES-S3s whistle-N.PST boomerang trim-INF-KARRA
   'The man is whistling, while trimming the boomerang' [PRO=+TR.subj]

c. ngarka-tjara-rlu ka-pala-njau patji-rni
   man-DUAL-ERG PRES-PL-REFL cut-N.PST
   'The two men are cutting themselves' [REFL]

In (11a), the controlled NP corresponds to an intransitive subject, which would be Case-marked absolutive in a finite clause. In (11b) the controlled NP is a transitive subject, which would otherwise be an ergative. (11c) shows that reflexives in Warlpiri follow the transitive pattern, with a special reflexive agreement marker in the position associated with object agreement. Subject NPs control reflexives regardless of Case-marking.9

The nominative-accusative pattern in (11) can be regarded as a reflection of the inherent asymmetry between Agents and Patients at D- or S-structure, where a Patient is never closer to a potential controller than an Agent is (hence cannot be controlled), and never c-commands an Agent (hence could not bind one). Thus although Patients and single intransitive arguments are Case-marked the same in an ergative language, this sameness is not realized syntactically until the point where Case is checked, presumably at LF.

If syntactic ergativity is not manifested through control or binding, what evidence is there for it? The central fact about most, if not all ergative languages is the inability of transitive subjects to be questioned, relativized, or focussed without some concomitant change in verbal morphology. This is true of Mayan languages, as well as of Inuktitut, Chamorro and Dyirbal—all of which are unrelated. In Chamorro for example, ergative agreement is replaced by a 'wh-agreement' morpheme (-um-) when the transitive subject is questioned (Chung,1982):

(12) Wh-movement (Chamorro)

a. Hafa ha-fa'gas si Juan?
   what E3s-wash PN Juan
   'What did Juan wash?' [+Tr.obj.]

b. *Hayi ha-fa'gas i karet?
   who E3s-wash the car
   'Who washed the car?' [+Tr.subj.]

c. Hayi fuma'gas i karet
   who wash(UM) the car
   'Who washed the car?' [WH.AGR]

The same restriction does not apply to transitive objects, or to intransitive subjects. In Mam, transitive subjects may not be focussed unless they correspond to an absolutive NP; antipassive must apply first, in effect rendering the clause intransitive:

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9 When the subject is absolutive, object agreement may cross-reference dative NPs, in which case the reflexive marker would correspond to them.
(13) **Focus** (Mam)
   a. cheej chi kub' t-tzyu-7n xiinaq 
      horse asp/A3s dir E3s-grab-ds man 
      'The man grabbed THE HORSES' [TR.obj]
   b. *xiinaq chi-Ø kub' t-tzyu-7n cheej 
      man asp-A3s dir E3s-grab-ds horse 
      'THE MAN grabbed the horse' [+TR.subj]
   c. xiinaq x-Ø-kub' tzyu-n t-e cheej 
      man asp-A3s-dir grab-AP 3s-RN horse 
      'THE MAN grabbed the horse' [Antipassive]

Inuktut and Dyirbal follow a similar pattern with respect to relativization and topic-chaining, respectively:†

(14) **Relativization** (Inuktut)
   a. [anguti-up nanuq kapi-ja-a] ani-juq 
      man-ERG bear(ABS) stab-PASS-3s go.out-INTR.3s 
      'The man who stabbed the bear left' [+TR.subj]
   b. [anguti nanur-mik kapi-si-juq] ani-juq 
      man(ABS) bear-MOD stab-AP-INTR.3s go.out-INTR.3s 
      'The man who stabbed the bear left' [Antipassive]

(15) **Topic-chaining** (Dyirbal)
   a. bayi yara bangun djugumbiru balgan baninyu 
      man-ABS woman-ERG hit-N.FUT come-N.FUT 
      'Woman hit man, and (he/she) came here' [+TR.subj]
   b. bayi yara baninyu bagun djugumbilgu balgal-nga-nyu 
      man-ABS come-N.FUT woman-DAT hit-AP-N.FUT 
      'Man came here, and hit woman' [Antipassive]

Not only do they fail to undergo wh-movement, it appears that transitive subjects are banned from being quantified in ergative languages. Absolutive relations, on the other hand, can be freely quantified without a necessary change in verbal morphology. Craig (1977) gives examples of quantified NPs in Jacaltec (Mayan), but ergatives are unattested:

(16) **Quantification** (Jacaltec)
   a. x-Ø-ul hune' maca. 
      asp-A3-come someone 
      'Someone came' [-TR.subj.]
   b. x(a)-Ø-w-al hune' tzetet. 
      asp-A3-E2-say something 
      'You said something' [+TR.obj.]

† The claim that topic-chains in Dyirbal are formed in similar fashion to relatives is somewhat controversial; cf. Dixon (1972) and Marantz (1984) for some discussion. In Campana (1992) it is argued that each NP participating in a topic-chain (i.e., that is a topic) heads an A'-chain within its clause.
The prediction here is that quantification of an ergative NP (e.g. 'Someone said that ...') would be ungrammatical. Chung (1990) is more explicit in providing examples of ungrammatical ergative quantification as opposed to that of absolutes:

(17) Quantification (Chamorro)
   a. Man-gine’ti *todu* ni kandit
      Pl.-grip(Pass.) all Obl. electricity
      'Everyone got a shock from the electricity' [-TR.subj]

   b. In-ātan *todu* i sanhalom-ña i lugat
      Elp-see all the inside-3s the place
      'We saw all the interior of the place' [+TR.obj]

   c. *Ti ya-niňiha *todu* i medikus i manbaba na nengkanu'
      not like-3p all the doctors the bad L food
      'All doctors dislike bad food' [+TR.subj]

   It is standardly assumed that quantifiers undergo a process of movement at LF known as Quantifier Raising (May, 1985). If so, the pattern of quantification exhibited by ergative languages falls together with wh-movement, such that transitive subjects contrast with intransitive subjects and transitive objects. Syntactic ergativity, in other words, seems to be realized through a constraint on movement.

   Let us assume that this constraint pertains to the trace of the ergative NP in the specifier position of AGRs. So far we have assumed that an absolute NP moves to AGRs at some point in order to be checked for Case. Since ergative Case-checking involves a type of A movement (L-movement in the sense of Mahajan,1990)), it follows that the chain produced by absolute movement is of another type, i.e. an A-bar (or L-bar) chain. This is to avoid a violation of the Relativized Minimality Condition (RMC) proposed by Rizzi (1990). If an ergative NP moves to COMP (as in relativization) or adjoins to AGRsP (as in quantification), the chain produced by movement will cross another chain of the same type, in violation the RMC. Representations of ungrammatical wh-movement and quantification are given below.  

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12 In Rizzi's (1990) theory, traces must be both head- and antecedent-governed (the so-called 'conjunctive formulation' of the ECP). Thus although in many ergative languages subject agreement is rich enough to properly govern a trace in specifier position, this trace must still be antecedent governed.
(18) Ungrammatical wh-movement (LF)

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CP
  \---- Wh
     \---- AGR_{sP}
          \---- NP
               \---- AGR_{s'}
                    \---- (abs)
                         \---- TP
                              \---- tns
                                   \---- AGR_{oP}
                                        \---- [t']
                                             \---- AGR_{o'}
                                                  \---- (erg)
                                                       \---- VP
                                                            \---- t_i
                                                                \---- VP
                                                                    \---- V'
                                                                        \---- V
                                                                            \---- t_j
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(19) **Ungrammatical quantifier-movement**

The general ban on transitive subject movement is further seen as confirmation that ergative NPs are checked for Case by the agreement morpheme closest to the verb (AGRo), absolutive NPs by the higher AGRs.

Recall now that in certain situations a nominative-accusative pattern of agreement can obtain when the lower of the two agreement morphemes exceptionally checks the Case of intransitive subjects. This is known as a split-ergative situation, and is usually governed by changes in aspect, mood or discourse. Crucially, however, transitive objects are still associated with AGRs, so that movement or quantification of a transitive subject should be ruled out. This prediction is confirmed in both Dyirbal and Chamorro, where subjects of transitive verbs may not enter into topic chains or undergo wh-movement, respectively:

(20) **Pronoun topic-chaining (Dyirbal)**

a. ngadja baninyu
   I-'NOM' come-N.FUT
   'I came here'
   [-TR]

b. ngadja balan djugumbil balgan
   I-'NOM' woman-ABS hit-N.FUT
   'I hit woman'
   [+TR]
c. *ngadja balan djugumbil balgan baninyu
   I-"NOM' woman-ABS hit-NFUT come-NFUT
   'I hit woman, and (she/She) came here'  [TOP]

First- and second-person pronouns in Dyirbal have the same form in both transitive and intransitive contexts, hence they are glossed as 'nominative' by Dixon (1972). If both were checked for Case by AGRs, however, they would be expected to enter into topic-chains like other (absolutive) NPs associated with this morpheme. Transitive subjects do not, implying that 'nominative' subjects get their Case from AGRo instead.

In Chamorro, transitive and intransitive subjects are cross-referenced by the same form of agreement when the mood is irrealis (glossed as 'subject' agreement in the literature):

(21) **Irrealis subject movement** (Chamorro)
    a. Pàra u-fattu yó agupa'.
       Fut. S1s-arrive I tomorrow
       'I will arrive tomorrow' [-TR]
    b. Pàra bai u-taitai edyu na lepblu.
       Fut. S1s-read that L book
       'I am going to read that book' [+TR]
    c. *Hayi pàra u-taitai edyu na lepblu.
       who Fut. S3s-read that L book
       'Who is going to read that book' [WH]

Although a nominative-accusative pattern is established, subjects in the irrealis could not be checked for Case by AGRs, or else they would undergo extraction easily (only intransitive subjects do). As in Dyirbal, it seems that irrealis subjects in Chamorro must rely on AGRo for licensing, as do ergative NPs in the realis mood. Transitive subjects in split-ergative situations thus display the same effects of syntactic ergativity as their counterparts in a non-split situation.

4. **Syntactic effects (or non-effects)**

The morpheme order of Warlpiri indicates that it is an ergative language in the sense of the AAP (8). At the same time the nominative-accusative pattern of agreement means that intransitive, as well as transitive subjects get their Case from AGRo, just like first- and second-person subject pronouns in Dyirbal, and irrealis subjects in Chamorro. We thus predict that transitive subject NPs should not be able to undergo grammatical wh-movement or quantification in Warlpiri. As before, the reason is that a subject trace in Spec, of AGRo cannot be governed by its antecedent, owing to the intervention of an absolutive NP associated with AGRs. Here the results are mixed, splitting between wh-movement on the one hand, and quantification on another (K. Hale, pc):

(22) **Wh-questions** (Warlpiri)
    a. Niyi ka-Ø-Ø luwarmu ngarrka-ngku?
       what PRES-S3s-O3s shoot man-ERG
       'What is the man shooting?' [+TR.obj]

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13 In Campana (1992) I proposed that the absolutive NP adjoined to AGRsP, but little hinges on this, so long as some specifier positions can be understood as being A/A-bar (or L/L-bar). Cf. Diesing (1990) for a similar proposal.
b. Ngana-ngku ka-Ø-Ø marlu luwarmu?
   who-ERG PRES-S3s-O3s kangaroo shoot  
   'Who is shooting the kangaroo?' [+TR.subj]

(23) Quantification (Warlpiri)
      ANAPH-S3p all-NOT-sit-PST
      'They all died' [-TR.subj]

   b. Murrumurruru ka-lu muku-wangka.
      hornets PRES-S3p all-speak
      'The hornets are all buzzing' [-TR.subj]

   c. Muku-nga-rnu-rlua.
      all-eat-PST-S1p(in)
      'We ate it all up' [+TR.obj]

      slingshot-ERG-S1p(in)-O3p all-shoot-N.PST
      'Let's shoot them all with a slingshot' [+TR.obj]

(22) shows that ergative subjects can be questioned freely in Warlpiri without any change in verb morphology. Quantification by the preverb muku ('all') is restricted to absolutive NPs, however, even though these are licensed by different agreement morphemes (23). According to Hale (pc), quantification of ergative NPs never occurs. These data thus provide partial confirmation for the approach taken here, but question-formation remains something of a mystery.\footnote{Perhaps the difference lies in the nature of questions formed at S-structure, which depend on Spec. of CP. The question-words in (22) might then appear in this position without recourse to movement (a marked property of Warlpiri). Quantifiers do not make use of CP, hence underlining at least would have to undergo QR.}

To summarize, Warlpiri displays the kind of agreement morpheme order that typifies an ergative language. At the same time, quantification follows an ergative-absolutive pattern, suggesting that there is a correlation between agreement morpheme order and syntactic processes that apply at LF. Nevertheless, Warlpiri differs from ergative languages in which AGRs is responsible for checking intransitive subjects for Case; these are checked by AGRo instead. Given the pattern of nominal Case-marking, one agreement morpheme (AGRo) can check NPs marked with ergative or absolutive Case, and both agreement morphemes can check NPs marked with absolutive. This in turn implies that no formal relationship is necessary between Case-marked NPs and the agreement morphemes responsible for licensing them. In fact, Levin (1983), Simpson (1983) and others have shown that the various Case arrays of Warlpiri are determined lexically, bearing little relation to the syntax. For example, NPs marked with ergative Case denote a performer (or Agent), regardless of transitivity:

(24) Nominal Case (ergative)
   a. Marlu-ngku ka-Ø-Ø ngarrka nya-nyi
      kangaroo-ERG PRES-3s-O3s man see-N.PST
      'The kangaroo sees the man' [+TR]
b. Ngarrika-ngu ka-∅ ngungkurrupangi-mi
   man-ERG PRES-3s snorc-dig-N.PST
   'The man is snoring'      [-TR]

(24b) contains an intransitive verb whose single argument selects an NP marked for
ergative Case. If ergative Case-marking only satisfies lexical selection then, it makes sense
that ergative NPs would still be dependent on agreement. The conclusion is that
agreement morpheme order is the only true indicator of ergativity in Warlpiri.

Further evidence that overt marking on non-absolutive NPs is unrelated to abstract
Case can be seen in constructions involving datives:

(25) Lexically-selected & benefactive datives
a. ngatju ka-rna-ngku njuntu-ku wangi-mi.
   I-ABS PRES-S1-O2 you-DAT speak-N.PST
   'I am speaking to you'             [ABS-DAT]

b. ngatju ka-rna-rla ngarka-ku wangi-mi.
   I-ABS PRES-S1-O3 man-DAT speak-N.PST
   'I am speaking to the man'         [ABS-DAT]

c. ngatjulu-rlu ka-rna-rla karli-ki wari-mi.
   I-ERG PRES-S1-O3 boomerang-DAT seek-N.PST
   'I am looking for a boomerang'     [ERG-DAT]

d. ngatjulu-rlu ka-rna-ngku-rla karli-ki wari-mi njuntu-ku.
   I-ERG PRES-S1-O2-DAT boomerang-DAT seek-N.PST you-DAT
   'I am looking for a boomerang for you'   [BEN.DAT]

Like ergatives, NPs marked with dative Case also trigger agreement on the auxiliary—an
otherwise surprising fact if dative suffixes were indeed Case-assigners (e.g. like the
locative or instrumental; cf. Ft. 15). Moreover, even benefactive datives—which are
clearly not considered argumental—must be registered by object agreement. It seems likely
then that nominal 'Case-marking' does not play a major role in the licensing of NPs.

Finally, it has been claimed that Warlpiri cannot be considered ergative beyond
surface Case-marking because it doesn't have an antipassive construction like other ergative
languages (cf. Mam, Inuktitut and Dyirbal). It may be, however, that an antipassive
construction cannot surface for some other reason. In the derivation of a typical
antipassive, the Agent receives absolutive Case while the Patient is marked obliquely. As
(25d) indicates, however, even benefactive dative NPs must be licensed by agreement,
despite the presence of Case-marking. Conceivably then, Warlpiri simply does not have an
oblique Case-assigner, as found in typical antipassive sentences. Moreover, there is a
construction referred to as the 'conative' with certain antipassive-like semantic properties.
In it, a normally absolutive object NP is marked with dative Case:

(26) The Conative Construction
a.njuntu-rlu ∅-npa-tju pantu-ru ngatju
   you-ERG N.FUT-S2-O1 spear-PST me-ABS
   'You speared me'                    [ERG-ABS]

15 Compare ergatives with instrumental or locative NPs, which do not trigger any form of agreement.
Presumably the suffixes on these forms represent post-positions, or legitimate Case-assigners.
b. njuntulu-ulu Ø-npa-tju-rla pantu-mu ngatju-ku
   you-ERG N.FUT-S2-O1-DAT spear-PST me-DAT
   'You speared at me; you tried to spear me'

As indicated, the conative object is unaffected by the action of the verb, although it still triggers object agreement. Subjects continue to be marked with ergative Case, but this is not surprising given that AGRo is responsible for checking them. The surface form bears little (if any) resemblance to a typical antipassive, but the effect is essentially the same. The absence of a true antipassive in Warlpiri therefore does not constitute evidence against underlying ergativity, but rather may be used in support of it.

5. Split Case/agreement systems

So far we have seen how direct arguments can be licensed in an ergative language, depending on whether AGRo or AGRs is maximally utilized. In most ergative languages, intransitive subjects are checked for Case by AGRo, and the form of nominal Case-marking (if present) matches the form of agreement. Warlpiri is exceptional in that intransitive subjects are licensed by AGRo, resulting in a system of nominal Case-marking at odds with agreement. In both instances though, the transitive subject maps to AGRo for Case-checking, which is the definitive feature of an ergative language according to the AAP.

Although languages may tolerate ergative Case-marking alongside a nominative-accusative pattern of agreement (the latter being only illusory), they do not tolerate the converse. According to Dixon (1979), accusative Case-marking never coincides with an ergative-absolutive pattern of agreement. One reason might be that so-called marked relations (those that stand in opposition to the basic pattern) must align themselves with marked agreement. The latter is defined as AGRo, AGRs being the default by stipulation. Now in a typical ergative language, the transitive subject NP represents the marked relation, so it will be checked for Case by AGRo in accordance with the AAP. In an 'accusative' language, the transitive object represents the marked relation, so AGRo should be responsible for checking it. According to the AAP, however, this agreement morpheme is reserved for transitive subjects—that is, to produce an ergative-absolutive pattern of agreement. Assuming a one-to-one relation between NPs and agreement then, it follows that subjects and objects both cannot associate with AGRo. This state of affairs is schematized in the tree below.

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16 "Typical" here means that AGRs plays a role in every sentence, or that the ergative-absolutive pattern of agreement does not arise from exceptional Case-checking of intransitive subjects by AGRo, as in e.g. Tsimshian (cf. text below).
(27) Transitive subjects and marked [ACC] cannot both associate with AGRo
Consider next a language in which an ergative-absolutive agreement pattern arises from exceptional checking by AGRo, as schematized below:

(28) A derived ergative agreement system

The alignment shown in (28) has been proposed by Bobaljik (1992) for ergative languages generally, but does not represent ergativity in the sense of the AAP. Nevertheless, the prediction is that object agreement will be closer to the verb stem than subject agreement, and if movement of any argument requires a change in verbal morphology it will be the object, rather than the subject. As before, the reasoning is that a higher NP will function as a closer antecedent governor of a trace in Spec. of AGRo. Preliminary indications are that this prediction is borne out in Tsimshian, a language of Northwest B.C. First, only absolutive arguments trigger Number agreement (from Dunn, 1979):

(29) Number agreement (intransitives)
   a. Ladm baa-t
      TEMP run(sing.)-3
      'He's just now running' [+Sing.]

   b. Ladm k'ol-t
      TEMP run(pl.)-3
      'They're just now running' [Pl.]
(30) **Number agreement** (transitives)
   a. Nat 'niidza ol
      TEMP see(sing.) bear
      'The bear saw him/her/it' [+Sing.]
   b. Nat lu'niidza ol
      TEMP see(sing.) bear
      'The bear saw them' [Pl.]

Number agreement may even be so tightly bound up with the stem as to effect internal changes (29). When ergative agreement does occur (with a subset of temporal designations), it is affixed to the temporal element itself, rather than to the verb itself:

(31) **Agreement morpheme order** (Tsimshian)
   a. Yagwa-t niis-da ts'uu'ts-a laalt
      TEMP-E3 see(sing.)-det bird-det worm
      'The bird sees the worm' [+TR]
   b. La-dip-wil lu'niizda ol awaan
      TEMP(-1p-) see(pl.) bear by.you
      'Just now we've seen those bears by you' [+TR]

Apparently then, object agreement is closer to the verb stem than subject agreement, even though the latter is 'ergative' (i.e. only transitive subjects are cross-referenced by it).

In relativization (which involves wh-movement), transitive ('absolutive') objects require suppression of ergative agreement, whereas transitive ('ergative') subjects do not; compare this with the situation in Mam (Section three):

(32) **Relativization** (Tsimshian)
   a. Naa dm*(-t) in-baan boot
      REL TEMP-E3 IN-run(sing.) boat
      'He is the one who will run the boat' [+TR.sub]
   b. Nah guülda wineeya go dm*(-t) gaba-t
      TEMP harvest food REL TEMP eat-3
      'They used to harvest food they could eat' [+TR.obj]
   c. Gu na-di sunabaatag-a
      REL TEMP-encl. arrive-ABS
      'That is what recently arrived' [-TR.subj]

Thus although transitive subjects trigger a unique form of agreement in Tsimshian (and Gitksan, etc.), the order of agreement morphemes suggests an underlying 'accusative' alignment. The particulars of syntactic movement bear this out.

Still the generalization is that accusative Case-marking never co-occurs with an ergative agreement pattern, regardless of how the latter is derived. Perhaps this has to do with the nature of accusative Case-marking itself, whereby a governed argument (e.g. Theme or Patient) appears in basic opposition to others marked with structural, nominative Case. Essentially, this amounts to Case-checking by a verb, thereby obviating the need for checking by agreement. The same cannot be said for ergative NPs, even though they stand in basic opposition to others marked with absolutive Case: verbs can't check Agents because they are adjoined to VP, and ungoverned. Unlike accusative NPs then, ergatives **must** be licensed by agreement. If these intuitions are correct, we might dispense with the stipulation that marked NPs associate with marked agreement. Still it is a corollary of the
AAP, and as such may be useful in establishing the syntactic (if not the morphological) underpinnings of so-called 'two-agreement' systems.

To conclude, it has been argued that Warlpiri retains vestiges of ergativity beyond the simple Case-arrays selected by its verbs. This was motivated by observing the order of agreement morphemes attached to the auxiliary—an order that is patently uncharacteristic of accusative languages. Throughout, I have tried to show that agreement morpheme order is very closely linked with the syntactic behaviour of their related arguments, pace the level where Case-checking is localized (LP). In so doing some facts have been explained, while others (mysteriously) remain unaccounted for. They are the subject of ongoing research ...

References


________ (1983) 'Warlpiri and the Grammar of Non-configurational Languages'. In NLLT, vol. 1; 5-47.


