Some evidence for structural ergative case

Introduction. Ergative case has largely been analyzed either as inherent, meaning it is tied to a particular thematic role (Aldridge 2004 et seq., Woolford 1997 et seq., Legate 2006 et seq.), or dependent, meaning it emerges only in the presence of a clausemate NP, serving as its 'case competitor' (Marantz 1991, Baker 2014 et seq.). In this talk, I use novel data from Choctaw to argue for a third analysis: *structural* ergative (Rezac et al. 2014, Deal forthcoming). I show that in Choctaw, some internal arguments are marked as ergative—a known problem for inherent ergative—and that this may happen even in the absence of a potential case competitor, making these configurations problematic for dependent ergative too. To show this, I identify some tests for unaccusativity, and show that several ergative-subject verbs nonetheless pass these tests. I propose that this data can be accounted for by positing that ergative case is assigned both to external arguments base-generated in Spec-VoiceP *and* to some internal arguments which raise to Spec-VoiceP.

Clitics in Choctaw. Arguments are cross-referenced on the verb by clitics which, broadly, indicate the argument's thematic role (Munro & Gordon 1982, Davies 1986, Broadwell 1988, Tyler forthcoming). That is, they show *active* alignment. **ERG**ative clitics cross-reference agents, state-holders and other external arguments (1-3); **ABS**olutive clitics cross-reference direct objects and unaccusative subjects (4-5); **DAT**ive clitics cross-reference oblique arguments, e.g. beneficiaries (6).

(1) **ii**-hilh-aachĩh
    1PL.ERG-dance-FUT
    'We will dance.'

(2) **ish**-kooli-tok
    2SG.ERG-break-PST
    'You broke it.'

(3) ala-kã ikkãna-**li**-h
    arrive-COMP know-**1SG.ERG**-TNS
    'I know he arrived.'

(4) **sa**-pĩsa-h-õ?
    1SG.ABS-see-TNS-Q
    'Is he looking at me?'

(5) **chi**-nokoowa-h-õ?
    2SG.ABS-angry-TNS-Q
    'Are you angry?'

(6) **pĩ**-hopoon-aachĩh
    1PL.DAT-cook-FUT
    'He will cook for us.'

Following Arregi & Nevins's (2012) analysis of active case in Western Basque, I propose that arguments cross-referenced by ERG clitics have an ergative case feature, assigned to external arguments in Spec-VoiceP. ABS arguments are generated lower than Spec-VoiceP, so lack this feature. Note also: all overt subjects in Choctaw carry a nominative case-marker, which mostly does not interact with the clitic system.

Three properties of unaccusative verbs. In addition to cross-referencing their subject with ABS clitics (5), unaccusative verbs display certain other identifying properties.

Auxiliary selection. Unaccusative verbs ((7), cf. (5)) require a different class of auxiliaries to unergative verbs ((8), cf. (1)) (Broadwell 1988, 2006).

(7) sa-nokoowa-t **taha**-h
    2SG.ABS-angry-PTCP **AUX.ABS**-TNS
    'I've gotten really angry.'/'I'm really angry.'

(8) hilha-t ish-**tahli**-h-õ?
    dance-PTCP 2SG.ERG-**AUX.ERG**-TNS-Q
    'Have you finished dancing?'

Plural allomorphy. Some intransitive verbs display plural allomorphy (9-11) (Broadwell 1993, 2006). This class only contains unaccusative verbs (cf. Harley 2014).

(9) kobaafah/kobahlih 'to break (of {one/multiple} objects)'
(10) bokaafa/bokahlih 'to burst (of {one/multiple} objects)'
(11) ãshah/mãyah 'to exist (of {one/multiple} objects)'

Compatibility with dative subjects. Dative subjects, cross-referenced by a DAT clitic on the verb, introduce affected experiencers (12), external possessors (13) and indirect causers (14).

(12) J.-at ofõsik im-ittola-tok
     J.-NOM puppy 3.DAT-fall-PT
     'John dropped the puppy.'

(13) ofi am-illi-tok
     pro dog 1SG.DAT-die-PT
     'My dog died.'

(14) M.-at im-alla ĩ-masaali-tok
     M.-NOM her-kid 3.DAT-heal-PT
     'Mary got her kids cured.'

Only unaccusative verbs may have dative subjects added—(15-17) show the same verbs as in (12-14), minus their dative subjects. We see that they all cross-reference their subject with ABS clitics.

(15) sa-ttola-tok
     1SG.ABS-fall-PT
     'I fell.'

(16) sa-ll-aachĩh
     1SG.ABS-die-FUT
     'I will die.'

(17) sa-masaal-aachĩh
     1SG.ABS-heal-FUT
     'I will get better.'

In contrast, unergative verbs reject dative subjects (18-19).

(18) *John-at   alla tiik ĩ-hilha-h (cf. (1)) (19) *Mary-at   im-alla im-ĩpa-tok
     John-NOM kid girl 3.DAT-dance-TNS   Mary-NOM her-kid 3.DAT-eat-PT
     ('John's daughter is dancing.')   ('Mary got her kids to eat.')

Unaccusative verbs with ERG subjects. Three classes of verb have their subject cross-referenced by an ERG clitic, but behave like unaccusative verbs according to at least some of the properties above.

Quantifier and positional verbs. These verbs take ERG subjects (20-21). Yet they are compatible with dative subjects (23-24) and many exhibit plural allomorphy (21-22).

(20) ii-lawa-h   (21) hikĩya-li-tok   (22) ii-hiyohmãya-tok
     1PL.ERG-many-TNS   stand-1SG.ERG-PST   1SG.ERG-stand.PL-PST
     'We are many.'   'I was standing.'   'We were standing.'

(23) Anaak-oosh ofi ã-lawa-h   (24)   car ã-hikĩya-tok
     I.FOC-NOM dog 1SG.DAT-many-TNS   *pro₁ₛg* car 1SG.DAT-stand-PST
     'I have a lot of dogs.'   'I had a car.'

Motion verbs. These verbs take ERG subjects (25-26). Yet they select absolutive-class auxiliaries (27), many exhibit plural allomorphy (28-30), and for some speakers they are compatible with dative subjects (31).

(25) nowa-li-tok   (26) iya-li-tok   (27) iya-t   ii-taha-h
     walk-1SG.ERG-PT   go-1SG.ERG-PT   go-PTCP 1PL.ERG-AUX.ABS-TNS
     'I walked.'   'I went.'   'We all went.'

(28) iyah/ilhkoolih   'she/they go(es)'   (31) %Pam-at   katos-at ĩ-baliili-h
(29) baliilih/yilhiipah   'she/they run(s)'   Pam-NOM cat-NOM DAT-run-TNS
(30) alah/aayalah   'she/they come(s)'   'Pam's cat is running.' (Broadwell 2006:307)

Transitive psych verbs following PCC repair. Some psych verbs take multiple ABS/DAT arguments, but clitic co-occurrence is restricted by the Person Case Constraint (PCC), as in (32). PCC violations force a repair to take place, in which the ABS clitic is 'promoted' to ERG, as in (33) (Tyler, in press). Psych verbs with promoted ERG subjects still take absolutive-class auxiliaries (34).

(32) pĩ-(***chi**)-nokshoopa-h   (33) **ish**-pĩ-nokshoopa-h
     1PL.DAT-(***2SG.ABS**)-scared-TNS   **2SG.ERG**-1PL.DAT-scared-TNS
     'She(/*you) is scared of us.'   'You are scared of us.'

(34) ish-pĩ-nokshoopa-t   {**taha/*tahli**}-h
     2SG.ERG-1PL.DAT-scared-PRT {**AUX.ABS/*AUX.ERG**}-TNS
     'You're really scared of us.'

Summary. Many verbs with ERG-marked subjects behave in other ways like unaccusatives:

verb type	subject = ABS	ABS aux	pl allomorphy	allows DAT subj
unaccusative	✓	✓	(✓)	✓
unergative	*	*	*	*
quantifier/positional	*	–	(✓)	✓
motion	*	✓	(✓)	%
psych	*/✓	✓	*	*

Analysis. There is more than one way to get an ergative case feature. External arguments, base-generated in Spec-VoiceP, receive it automatically. But in addition, arguments may raise to Spec-VoiceP from an internal-argument position—complement of V, or Spec-ApplP—and receive *structural* ergative case in their derived position. (35) shows the structure of motion, quantifier and positional verbs, and (36) shows 'repaired' transitive psych verbs (from Tyler, in press).

(35) [$_{VoiceP}$ DP$_i$ Voice^0 [$_{VP}$ V^0 ~~DP$_i$~~]]   (36) [$_{VoiceP}$ DP$_i$ Voice^0 [$_{ApplP}$ ~~DP$_i$~~ Appl^0 [$_{VP}$ V DP$_k$]]]

Implications. Configurations such as (35), in which an internal argument is marked like an external argument in the absence of a case competitor, are problematic for both dependent and inherent theories of ergative case, but predicted with a structural theory of ergative. What's more, configurations like (36), in which ergative shows up on one internal argument in the presence of a fellow internal argument, are often seized upon as evidence for dependent ergative case (Baker 2014, 2015, Baker & Bobaljik 2017, Yuan 2018). But the fact that this pattern is found in Choctaw, a language where ergative *cannot* be dependent, means that we should be wary of using the existence of this pattern as evidence for dependent ergative.