

Nominative-Accusative or Accusative Languages

The basic knowledge about the CASE entails that there can not be a Noun(Phrase) in a sentence without a case,

If this is so, we can go on listing different cases with different nouns(NPs) in the following ways in English sentences:

1. The man_{Nom} is a teacher_{Eqt}.
2. He_{Nom} is going to school_{Loc}.
3. He_{Nom} hates the principal_{Acc}.
4. He_{Nom} teaches math_{Acc} to the students_{Dat}.

EQUATIVE (also equational), which involves two noun phrases (NPs). For example, "My daughter is a teacher" (some languages require copula, i.e. copular verb, like English is; others do not) in which the subject and complement refer to the same person;

Let us see some similar examples in Hindi:

1.	<u>ve</u>	<u>ek</u>	<u>šɪks^hək</u>	<u>hẽ</u>
	he-3MS-Hon-Nom	one	<u>teacher-Eqt.</u>	be-Pres-3MS-Hon
	‘He is a teacher’.			

2.	<u>ve</u>	<u>vidyaləy</u>	<u>ja</u>	<u>rəhe</u>	<u>hẽ</u>
	he-3MS-Hon-Nom	one	go	stay-3MS-Hon	be-Pres-3MS-Hon
	‘He is going to school’.				

3.	<u>ve</u>	<u>prəd^hanačarya-se</u>	<u>gɾɪna</u>	<u>kərtə</u>	<u>hẽ</u>
	he-3MS-Hon-Nom	principal-Dat	hate	do-3S-Hon	be-Pres-3MS-Hon
	‘He hates the principal’.				

4.	<u>ve</u>	<u>prəd^hanačarya-ko</u>	<u>pəsənd</u>	<u>nəhĩ</u>	<u>kərtə</u>	<u>hẽ</u>
	he-3MS-H-Nom	principal-Dat	like	not	do-3S-H	be-Pres-3S-Hon
	‘He doesn’t like the principal’.					

5.	<u>ve</u>	<u>vidyart^hiyō-ko</u>	<u>gəɳɪt</u>	<u>pəɾ^hate</u>	<u>hẽ</u>
	he-3MS-H-Nom	principal-Dat	math	teach-3S-Hon	be-Pres-3S-Hon
	‘He teaches mathematics to students’.				

Let us further see these examples in German:

- I.

Er

he-Nom

ist

be-3MS-pres

Lehrer

teacher-3M

‘He is a teacher’.
- II.

Er

he-Nom-Hon

geht

go-3S

in

Pre-Loc

die Schule

Art-F school

‘He is going to school’.
- III.

Er

he-Nom-Hon

hasst

hate-3S

den

Det-Acc

Rektor

principal

‘He hates the principal’
- IV.

Er

he-Nom-Hon

unterrichtet

teach-3S

Mathematik

math-Acc

an

Pre-Dat

die Studenten

students-Pl-Dat???

‘He teaches math to the students.’

All the above examples from English, Hindi and German say almost the same thing about the case marking.

The **subject** of a clause must be given Nominative case in an intransitive clause, a transitive clause and even in a ditransitive clause.

If the verb is a transitive or a ditransitive one, the **Direct object** must get an Accusative case.

If this is regular across the board in the language (in all constructions), we would call that language as '**Nominative-Accusative**' type of language.

So, a language, termed as 'Nominative-Accusative' type, does not make any distinction between the subject of different types of clauses (i.e. intransitive, transitive or ditransitive clauses).

And if the verb is transitive or ditransitive, the DO will get an accusative case (either covert or overt).

So, Subj=Nominative and DO=Accusative(Nom-Acc type).

Now, examine the following sentences from Basque.

Txalupa hondora-tu da.
boat_{det.abs} sink_{perf} is
'The boat sank.'

Gizon-a aharrausi egiten ari da.
Man_{det.abs} yawn making PROG is
'The man is yawning.'

Erloju-a-k ondo funtziona-tzen du.
Watch_{det.erg} well work_{impf} has
'The watch works well.'

gazteri-a-k pilota uz-ten ari du
youth-DET-E ball-DET leave-IMPf PROG has
'the youth is leaving the ball'

emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-ten d-it-u
woman- DET-E bread-DET.PL eat-IMPf 3A-PL
'The woman eats (the) breads.'

emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-n d-it-u
woman-DET-E bread-DET.PL eat-PRF 3A-PL.
'The woman has eaten (the) breads.'

emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-ngo d-it-u
woman- DET-E bread-DET.PL eat- IRR 3A-PL
'the woman will eat the breads.'

These examples are from Itziar Laka's two papers on different topics of Ergativity in Basque.

These examples from Basque show a very different pattern of 'Ergative case marking'.

I will gradually tell you as to why and how these examples are important.

This will help us to understand and differentiate the systems of 'full ergative' VS. 'split-ergative' in different languages and what are the factors of parameterization.

Subject of different types of clauses might not be given the same CASE in other languages.

In the earlier examples, the subjects of INTRANSITIVE clauses are case marked in Absolutive-way (zero case marked for Nominative).

While, in the rest of the examples, we find some special marker ‘-ak’ that has been added to the subject of a transitive or a ditransitive clause.

In linguistics, this marker that has been used in Basque is called ‘Ergative case’ marker.

So, we must make a distinction between the languages that mark all the subject as Nominative, and the ones which mark **Subj (S) of an intransitive clause** different than the **Subj (A) a transitive or ditransitive clause**.

Let us see some more examples from Georgian and Dyirbal:

Georgian:

student-i mivida
student-ABS went
'The student went.'

student-ma ceril-i daçera
student-ERG letter-ABS wrote
'The student wrote the letter.'

Dyirbal:

ŋinda bani-ju
2.NOM come-NFUT
'You are coming.'

bayi yaŋa-Ø bani-ju
CLF1.ABSman-ABS come-NFUT
'The man is coming.'

balan dugumbil-Ø bangul yaŋa-ŋu balga-n
CLF2.ABS woman-ABS CLF1.ERG man-ERG hit-NFUT
'The man is hitting the woman.'

bayi yaŋa-Ø bangun dugumbi-ru balga-n
CLF1.ABS man-ABS CLF2.ERG woman-ERG hit-NFUT
'The woman is hitting the man.'

So, what is this Ergative case?

- Usually, the term 'ergative case' or the phenomenon 'ergativity' is associated with Robert Malcolm Ward Dixon.
- However, we must know that there have been some researchers before Dixon who contributed into making this phenomenon possible.
- Fabricius was probably the first one to notice this phenomenon.
- He termed this as nominativus transitivus in Greenlandic Eskimo in 1801.
- Later, Adolf Dirr replaced this term with 'ergative' (based upon the Greek word "ergon", plural or "erga", 'task') in 1912.
- 'Ergativity' is like an umbrella term that is used for marking various kinds of grammatical relationship in language typology.
- In the simplest term, ergativity is a grammatical patterning of subject noun phrases and their case markings in different types of clauses (+/- transitive clauses) .

What is so big deal about this 'ergativity'

'Ergativity' as a grammatical pattern of different treatments for the subject of different clauses poses a threat to any universal characterization of the notion of "subject".

Thousands of languages from Asia, Australia, America have been attested for the phenomenon i.e. 'Ergativity'.

However, we must wonder over the fact that except 'Basque' no other language from Europe or Africa has this grammatical marking of 'ergative case'.

Moreover, we also must mention that 'ergativity' as a grammatical pattern is still being searched-for in different languages of the world,

It won't be a surprise if we are reported to have found the features of 'ergativity' in some European and African languages tomorrow!

Ergativity: Definition

Dixon (1972/1994) defines 'ergativity' as :

- ***'....a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject. (Dixon 1994:1)***
- Dixon's definition can be interpreted as the subject of an intransitive verb (clause) is case marked in Absolutive way i.e. with zero case marker, of course for Nominative,
- While the subject of a transitive/ditransitive clause is marked with an overt/covert case which has got a name called 'ergative'.
- The object (i.e. the direct object) of a transitive or ditransitive clause is case marked in the similar way to the subject of an intransitive verb i.e. Absolutive way or zero case marked.
- Let's see what Dixon has to say about 'absolutive case'.

Dixon's take on 'Absolutive' case

1 *Introduction*

The term 'ergativity' is, in its most generally accepted sense, used to describe a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject. The term was first used to refer to the case marking on constituents of a noun phrase: 'ergative' is the case marking transitive subject, contrasting with another case – originally called 'nominative' but nowadays 'absolutive' – marking intransitive subject and transitive object. Dixon, 1994. *Ergativity* Cambridge, CUP: Pp-1

Tagalog: VSO

- a. d-un-ating ang babae.
-tr.Perf-arrive Abs woman
“The woman arrived.”
- b. b-in-ili ng babae ang isda.
Tr.Perf-buy Erg woman Abs fish
“The woman bought the fish.”

Eskimo: SOV

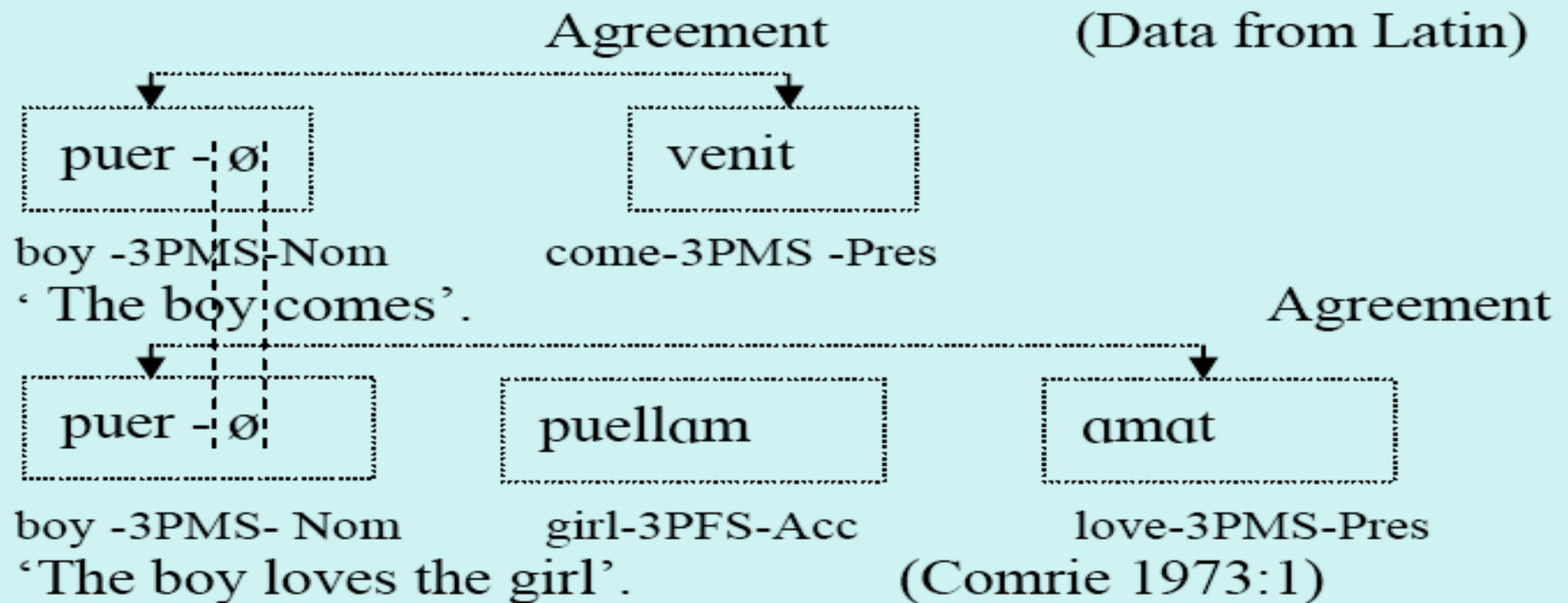
- a. Jaani tikit -juq
Johnny(**ABS**) arrive -MOOD&AGR
‘Johnny arrived.’ (from Allen (1994: 15))
- b. arnaq -up qimiq taku -vaa
woman -**ERG** dog(**ABS**) see -MOOD&AGR
‘A/the woman saw the dog.’ (from Kalmár (1979: 87))

‘Nominative-Accusative’ VS ‘Ergative-Absolutive’ languages

‘Nominative-Accusative’ type of languages are those which always mark the subjects (+/-transitive verb) with a ‘Nominative case’ (i.e. covert or overt).

If there is an object (DO) it gets marked with an accusative case.

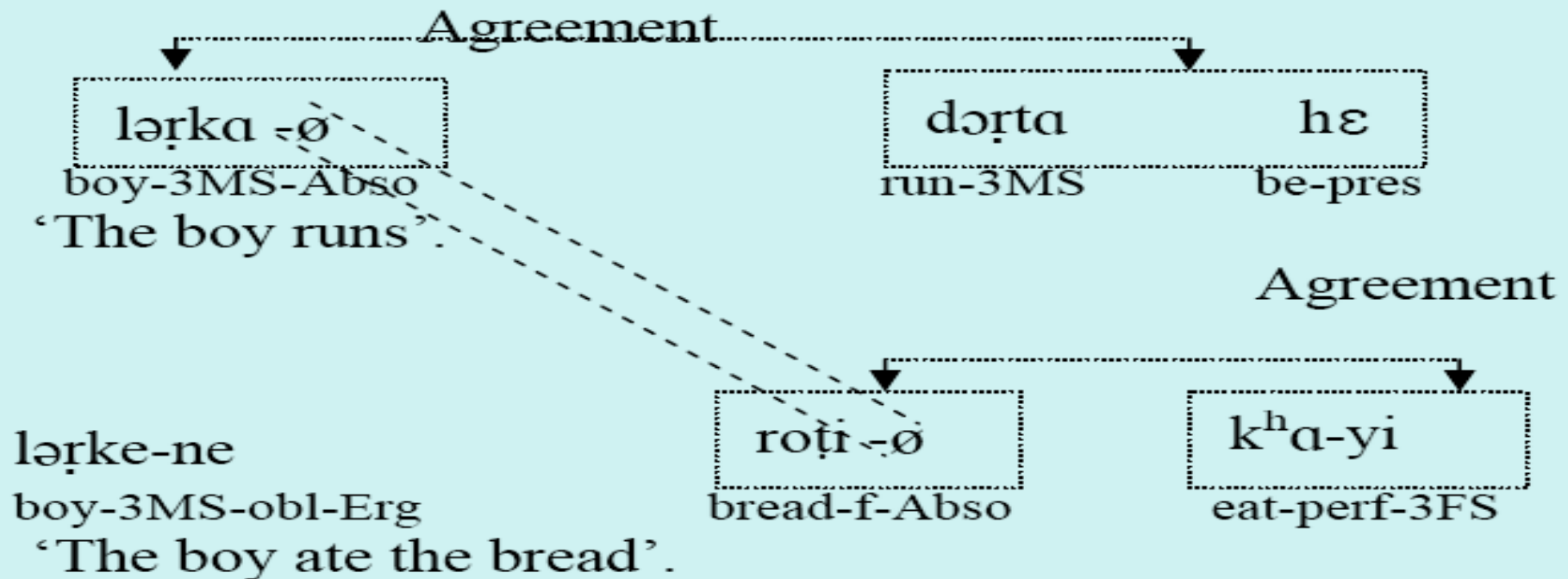
Thus, we have the following structure in Latin:



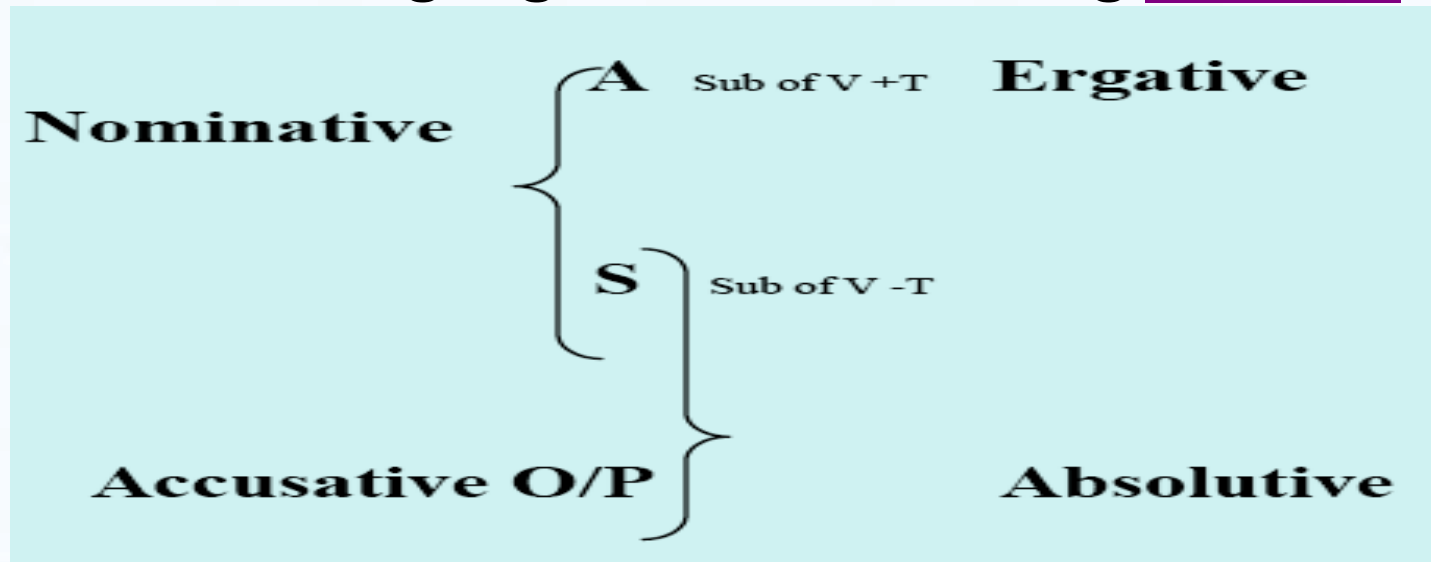
However, the 'Ergative-Absolutive' type of languages mark the subject of an intransitive clause and the object (DO) of a transitive or ditransitive clause with an Absolutive (zero) case.

And the subject of a transitive or ditransitive clause is case marked with a different case suffix i.e. the ergative case (covert/overt). For example:

Ergative-Absolutive:



We can summarize the two types of case-marking system in different languages in the following diagram as:



So, far so good. However, we must make another distinction for the marking of ergativity in the languages.

This distinction is based on the adaptation of the term 'ergativity' across the board in the language and,

Applying this schema sporadically/partially in the language and thus 'Split' away from the overall application of the term.

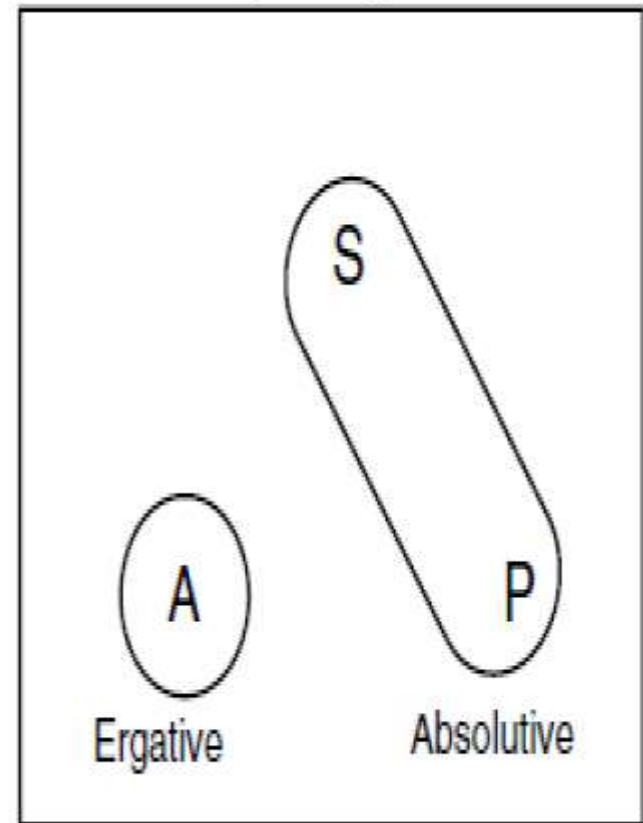
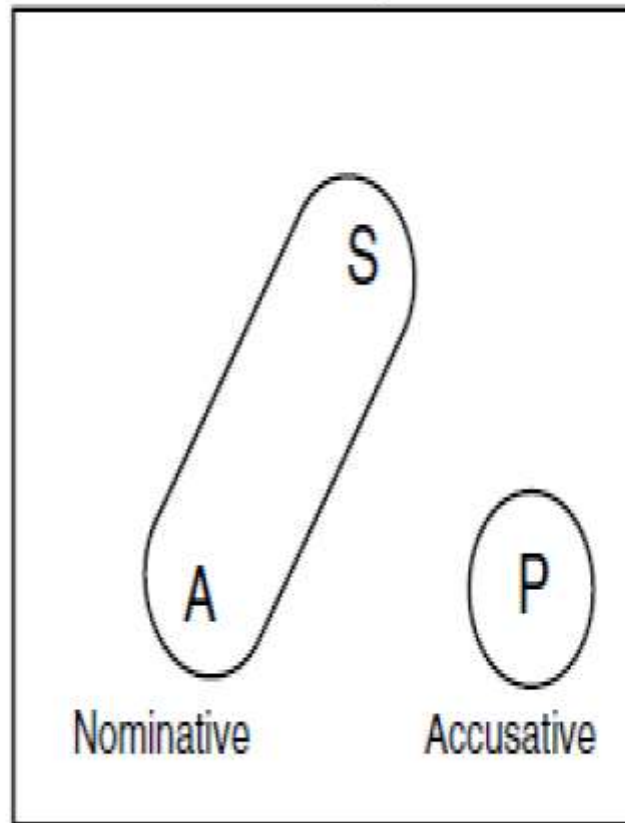
Nom-Acc VS. Erg-Abs

Accusative system

Ergative system

Intransitive
clause

Transitive
clause



Fully ergative VS split ergative

The motivation for the classification of 'fully/ full' VS 'Split' ergative is based on the fact that the grammatical patterning of the subject in different types of clauses even in the languages being exemplified as 'ergative' is not uniform.

If we examine the patterns for ergativity in Basque and Dyirbal, Hmar, Mizo, Halam etc. on the one hand, and in Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Nepali, Kangri on the other hand, we get a clear picture of this classification.

It is very clear from the examples of Basque and Dyirbal, that the pattern of 'ergativity' is obeyed/applied across all tenses and aspects of the verb.

The pattern of 'ergativity' is also applied with all persons and numbers and genders (if it is Grammatically important) of the subject.

The only condition for marking the subject with an ergative case is +/- transitivity of the verb.

Let us again examine the data from Basque and discuss them.

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'The woman eats (the) breads.'

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Let me show you some examples of ‘ergativity’ in different languages:

Warlpiri :

Ngati-nyanu-rlu ka-rla kurdu-ku nyanungu-nyangu-ku warru jinka-mi.
mother-Anaph-ERG PresImpf-3Dat child-DAT 3-Poss-DAT around help.to.walk-NPast
'The mother is propping up her child as he walks around.'

Wati-ngki ka-rla punpun-ngarri-rni kurdu-ku, yinga ngurrju nyina-mi.
man-ERG PresImpf-3Dat advice-tell-NPast child-DAT RelC good sit-NPast
'The man is advising the child to be good.'

Kurdu-ngku ka-rla miyi-ki riwarri-ma-ni warrarda.
child-ERG PresImpf-3Dat plant.food-DAT finish-get-NPast always
'The child always eats up all the food.'

Wati-ngki ka-rla kurduku warri-rni.
man-ERG PresImpf-3Dat child-DAT seek-NPast
'The man is looking for the child.'

These examples from Warlpiri show that ‘ergative’ case is given to the subject of transitive clause in all tenses and aspects.

Basque:

Basque is also another language that shows 'ergative' case with the subject as soon as there is change of the verb in the sentence i.e. the change of an intransitive to a transitive or a di-transitive verb;

Jainkoak laguntzen dauku.
God-def.sg.-erg. helping abs.3d.sg.-aux.-dat.1st.pl.-erg.3d.sg.
'God is helping us.'

Nik zakurra maite dut.
I-erg. dog-def.sg.-abs. love abs.3d.sg.-aux.-erg.1st.sg.
'I love the dog.'

Hil-eraziren dituzte.
die-cause-fut. abs.3d.pl.-aux.-abs.3d.pl.-erg.3d.pl.
'They will kill them.'

Gizonak emakumeari liburua eman dio.
man-def.sg.-erg. woman-def.sg.-dat. book-def.sg.-abs. given
abs.-aux.-dat.3sg.-erg.3sg.
'The man has given the book to the woman.'

Hmar (Tibeto-Burman)

kɛi-in lek^hat^hɔn ka zi:k
I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-impf
'I write a letter.'

kɛi-in lek^hat^hɔn ka zi:k-diŋ
I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-fut
'I will write a letter.'

aʃi-nəw na aʃ^hao -we
ashi.ERG clothes wash.PROG.NON-FUT
'Ashi was washing clothes/ Ashi is washing clothes'.

kɛi-in lek^hat^hɔn ka zi:k-laime:k-anih
I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr write-cont-be
'I am writing a letter.'

kɛi-in lek^hat^hɔn ka zi:k-jiŋ-diŋ
I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-cont-fut
'I will be writing a letter.'

Liagmai (Tibeto-Burman)

ben-niu	c ^h agan	lan-bam	e
Ben.3FS-ERG	curry-ACC	cook-PROG	DECL
‘Ben is cooking curry.’			

jon-niu	ben-tu	ariak	pi	e
john.3MS-ERG	Ben-3FS-ACC	book	give	DECL
‘John gives a book to Ben.’				

i-niu	ben-len	c ^h alui	t ^h iu	e
I.1PS-ERG	Ben-3FS-DAT	song	sing	DECL
‘I sing a song for Ben.’				

i-niu	tarua	tiu	rabo	e
I.1PS-ERG	bread-ACC	eat	FUT	DECL
‘I will eat bread.’				

əliu-niu	c ^h alui	t ^h iu	rabo	e
We.1Pl-ERG	song	sing	FUT	DECL
‘We will sing a song’				

Thado-Kuki (Tibeto-Berman)

kà=pá=ìn keí eĩ=lũṅsèt=è

1=father=ERG 1 1CLT=love=DECL

‘My father loves me.’

lũn lè mǎṅ=ìn eí=ṇáʔ-tòn=è

lun and mang=ERG 1CLT=wait-DL=DECL

‘Lun and Mang are waiting for me.’

náṅ=ìn léxá ná=sĩm=è

2SG=ERG book 2CLT=read=DECL

‘You are reading a book.’

keí=ìn tũi ká=dõn=è

1=ERG tea 1CLT=drink=DECL

‘I am drinking water.’

lulùn=ìn lá à=sáʔ dǐṅ a=hĩ

lulun=ERG song 3CLT=sing FUT 3CLT=COP

‘Lulun will sing a song.’

Dyirbal: OSV

a. Intransitive Subject (S)

<u>bayi</u>	<u>yaóá</u>	<u>walmanyu</u>
<u>NCI.there.ABS</u>	<u>man.ABS</u>	<u>got.up</u>

"Man got up".

b. Transitive Subject (A) present progressive

<u>ngayguna</u>	<u>banggul</u>	<u>yaóá-nggu</u>	<u>balgan</u>
<u>me.ACC</u>	<u>NC1there.ERG</u>	<u>man-ERG</u>	<u>hit.NFut</u>

"Man is hitting me".

c. Transitive Subject (A) past simple

<u>yabu</u>	<u>nguma-nggu</u>	<u>gigan</u>	<u>[banagay-gu]</u>
<u>mother.ABS</u>	<u>father-ERG</u>	<u>tell.to.do.NFut</u>	<u>return-Purp</u>

"father told mother to return".

All above examples that we saw, from different languages, tell us that the marker of ergativity comes with the subject in present, past and future and all kinds of aspects.

The only decisive factor is the +/- transitivity of the verb in the sentence. We also know that this marker for ergativity comes with the subject in all number, person, (gender) and tense, aspect, mood as well. The only requirement for this marker is the transitivity of the verb.

So, these languages where ergative marker comes just by the of intransitive to transitive verb is called 'full ergative language'.

The split-system of ergativity

Let us reiterate the definition of ergativity here:

‘....a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject. (Dixon 1994:1)

Let us examine the following sentences in Hindi:

a. राम रोटी खता है

<u>ram</u>	<u>roti</u>	<u>kha</u> - ta	he
Ram-3MS-Nom	bread-3F-Acc	eat-V+tra.pres.indf-3MS	be-pres-3MS
‘Ram eats bread’.			

b. राम रोटी खा रहा है / था

<u>ram</u>	<u>roti</u>	<u>kha</u>	rəha	he/t ^h a
Ram-3MS-Nom	bread-3F-Acc	eat-V+tra	imp-3MS	be-pres/pst-3MS
‘Ram is/was eating bread’.				

c. राम रोटी खा-ये-गा

<u>ram</u>	<u>roti</u>	<u>kha</u> -ye-ga
Ram-3MS-Nom	bread-3F-Acc	eat-V+tra.indf.fut-3MS
‘Ram will eat bread’.		

Hindi which is often quoted as an ‘ergative-absolutive’ language fails to demonstrate the adaptation of grammatical patterning of ergativity that has been articulated in Dixon’s definition.

However, this would be a fallacious decision that we have taken without examining other instances in Hindi, where we actually find ‘ergative markers’.

For examples:

a. राम-ने रोटी खा-यी / खा-यी है

<u>ram-ne</u>	<u>roti</u>	$k^h a-y-i / k^h -y-i$	$h\epsilon$
Ram-3MS-Erg	bread-3F-Abs	eat-V+tra.pst/perf-3FS	be-pres-3S
‘Ram ate/ has eaten the bread’.			

b. राम-ने रोटी खा-यी थी

<u>ram-ne</u>	<u>roti</u>	$k^h a-y-i$	$t^h -i$
Ram-3MS-Erg	bread-3F-Abs	eat-V+tra.perf-3FS	be-pst-3S
‘Ram had eaten the bread’.			

c. राम-ने रोटी खा-यी हो-गी

<u>ram-ne</u>	<u>roti</u>	$k^h a-y-i$	$hog-i$
Ram-3MS-Erg	bread-3F-Abs	eat-V+tra.perf-3FS	be-Fut-3S
‘Ram will have eaten the bread’.			

Conditions for Split-ergativity in Hindi

From the conditions that are laid out by Dixon, Hindi and other ergative languages from Indian subcontinent deviate/split in the following ways:

- a. The ergativity marker occurs with the subject in a transitive or ditransitive sentence only when the verb is in either **Past simple tense** or in **perfect aspect**.
- b. The perfectivity of verb should be of the main verb.
- c. So, if the verb is imperfect (i.e. either present simple or future simple and all continuous), the subject can not get the ergative case despite the fact that the verb is transitive or ditransitive.

The above deviation is the instance of parameterization of the general principle of ergativity in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages where we have ergativity.

Split-Ergativity in Punjabi, Kangri and Marathi

Let us see some examples from Punjabi:

1.	tusi	me-nũ	ek	kɪtəb	dɪtɪ-si
	You-2MS-???	I-1MS-Dat	one	book-3FS	give-Pst-3FS
	'You gave me a book'.				

2.	mẽ	te-nũ	ek	kɪtəb	dɪtɪ-si
	I-1MS-???	you-2MS	one	book-3FS	give-Pst-3FS
	'I gave you a book'.				

Is the subject case marked with ergative-case here? If we say 'yes', we have to prove this with some other factors!!

3.	oŋɑ-ne	me-nũ	ek	kɪtəb	dɪtɪ-si
	he-3SM.H-Erg	I-1MS-Dat	one	book-3FS	give-Pst-3FS
	'He gave me a book'.				

If we say 'no', we have to explain it as to why not!!

Split-ergativity in Punjabi, Kangri and Marathi

Punjabi, Kangri and Marathi have similar parameterization with regard to allow the ergative case with the subject.

a. munda dɔɾɔ ε
boy-3MS-Nom run-3MS be-pres
'The boy runs'.

b. kuri dɔɾdi ε
girl-3FS-Nom run-3FS be-pres
'The girl runs'.

c. o-ne me-nũ sərk-te vekⁿ-ya
he-3MS-Erg I-Acc road-Loc see-perf-3MS
'He saw me on the road'.

d. mẽ-ø te-nũ ərk-te vek^h-ya
I-1MS-Erg you-Acc road-Loc see-perf-3MS
'I saw you on the road.'

e. tusi-ø me-nũ kɪtab deti-si
 you-2MS-Erg I-Dat book-F give-3FS-perf
 ‘You gave a book to me’.

f. onq-ne me-nũ kɪtab deti-si
 they-3MP1-Erg I-Dat book-F give-3FS-perf
 ‘They gave me a book’.

g. mẽ-ø te-nũ kɪtab deti-si
 I-1MS-Erg you-Dat book-F give-3FS-perf
 ‘I gave you a book’.

Marathi:

1.	mi-ø	roṭi/ <u>čapati</u>	k ^h alli	
	I-1MS-Erg	bread-3SF-Acc	eat-Perf-3FS	
	‘I ate <u>chappati</u> ’.			

2.	am ^h i-ø	k ^h ir	k ^h alli	
	we-1MP1-Excl-Erg	porridge-3F	eat-Perf-3FS	
	‘We ate the porridge’.			

3.	tu-ø	roṭi/čapati	k ^h alli	
	You-2MS-Erg	bread-3SF-Acc	eat-Perf-3FS	
	‘You ate <u>chappati</u> ’.			
4.	tya-ne	roṭi/čapati	k ^h alli	
	He-3MS-Erg	bread-3SF-Acc	eat-Perf-3FS	
	‘He ate <u>chappati</u> ’.			
5.	tya-ne	muli-la	mar-l-ə	
	he-3MS-Erg	girl-3SF-Acc	hit-Perf-3NS	
	‘He hit the girl’.			

The above examples from Punjabi and Marathi say the following facts:

- The ergativity is parameterized in Punjabi and Marathi on the basis of +/- transitivity of the verb
- The ergativity also demands the past simple tense and all perfect aspects and;
- The overt marking of ergative case is displayed only when the subject is in third person.

c. So, even when there is no overt marking of ergativity with other pronominal forms, we should not think of them as Nominative-subject!

d. Because, had it been a 'nominative-subject', it should have shown agreement with the verb in these sentences.

e. So, the covert marking of ergative case and thus confirming the ergative-pattern in Punjabi, Kangari and Marathi is proven by other grammatical factor i.e. agreement.

f. The object-verb agreement in Punjabi and Marathi proves the point that the subject is case marked with ergative-case and thus not available for the verb to agree with it.

That's all 😊