Active/Stative systems

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The final type of language that we have so far not paid any (theoretical) attention to is an active–stative alignment.

Most — or all, depending on who you ask — other tpyes of case system, can be brought under a dependency view of case assignment. Of all of the ones that we have looked at, most are simple to accommodate under this view, with marked-nominative/marked absolutive systems being perhaps a little difficult.

The biggest challenge for the dependency view approach, I think, would be an active–stative alignment. These languages have been claimed to exist, as shown below. Sections 1 and 2summarise the discussion in **mithun1991**

1 What is active–stative?

active–stative alignments refer to alignments where the case marking is determined by properties of the verb. Active verbs (roughly, those of action) take one type of case system, whereas stative verbs (verbs denoting states) take another.

(1)

Active		Stative	
a-xá	'I go'	**šé**-rasí	'I am sick.'
a-puʔá	'I got up.'	**še**-ropehíí	'I am sleepy.'

The pronominal prefix on the Active verbs is *a*, which is the form of the prefix that is used for the semantic agent of a transitive, (2), whereas the *še* prefix is that which is used to mark the patient of a transitive (3)

(2) **a**-gwerú aína 'I am bringing them now.'
ha upépe **a**-gařá šupé 'and there I caught him.'

(3) **še**-rerahá 'It will carry me off.'
še-yukà varà moʔá 'He would have killed me.'

The problem that all of this creates for **baker2015**'s theory is that the difference in case assignment doesn't seem to be related to the relation between DPs. Rather, the case that is assigned is dependent on the verbal type.

This is then coming alarmingly close to having the situation where functional heads assign case ...

However:

> "Intransitive verbs that appear with the first, or *a-*, set of pronouns include not only 'go' and 'get up' but also *gwatá* 'walk', *gweyí* 'descend, get off', *ú* 'come', *yaní* 'run', *ità* 'swim', *ŋwahẽ* 'arrive', *hasá* 'pass', *vevé* 'fly', *yemoŋetá* 'chat', *yeré* 'turn around' *yerokí* 'dance', *mokapú* 'fire a gun', *pitá* 'smoke', *yemosarái* 'play', *ma.aoó* 'work', and many more."

These are verbs that take Agents. However, Mihtun further notes that there are non-agentive verbs that fall into the *a-* class:

fall, die, sink, stagger, get lost, sleep, get stuck, wake up, split/crack/burst, come loose/lose one's job, go out/die away.

> "The primary feature underlying this categorization is lexicl aspect, or Aktionsart. Verbs in the first class denote events. [...] Verbs in the second class denote states and imply time stability. *Thie distinction is quite transparent and regular through the lexicon in* ***gregoressuarez1967***." (emphasis mine, PWS)

There are some cool aspects to this. Some verbs can appear with either prefix. Then we get a shift in meaning.

"The verb *karú* means 'to have lunch or supper/to dine", with the first case (*-a*, PWS) but 'to be a glutton' with the second (*še*, PWS)."

2 Lakhota

Lakhota shows an active–stative alignment too.

(4)

Active		Stative	
wapsíča	'I jumped'	**ma**k^{h}úže	'I'm sick'
wahí	'I came'	**ma**xwá	'I'm sleepy'

wa- is the prefix used for agents in transitive clauses.

(5) a**wa**ʔu 'I bought it'
waktékte 'I'll kill him'

ma- is the prefix used for patients in a transitive.

(6) a**ma**ʔu 'He brought me.'
makt´kte 'He'll kill me.'

3 Is this a real pattern?

Such facts do not seem so easily amenable to a dependent case theory. The question then becomes, is it a real one?

bakerbobaljik2016 argue that we may be looking at somewhat of a compound.

One of the key observations to be made about active–stative systems is that we do not see them with case *per se*, but rather, they overhelmingly seem to show up in agreement systems.

Both of the languages given above have different agreement alignments according to whether they are active or stative. The forms of the prefixes on the verb change, but there is not a change in the case on the nouns themselves.

With Lakhota in particular, this is not so surprising: Lakhota is a polysynthetic language which marks arguments on the verb, and full noun phrases tend to be optional and are happily left out. Guaraní is perhaps not polysynthetic, but the same pattern arises as with Lakhota - the active–stative system shows up only in terms of the agreement prefixes on the verb.

How does this help anything?

Firstly, if one dissociates case assignment from agreement, then case theory itself doesn't face a problem any more. This is a good result for Baker, since he does not need to modify his theory in any way to accommodate these facts. We need to find a way to explain the agreement differences - but that's independent from case.

However, as they note, there are a few languages which show case marking that apparently show active–stative alignment. These languages fall into two types:

3.1 Inconsistent active–stative patterns

Secondly, they note that even though there are a handful of languages that show case marking, that seems to show an active–stative alignment, this is often only in a sub-part of the paradigm.

(7) a. ŋa-s Seattle-la phyin-pa-yin
I-ERG Seattle-to went-PERF-VOL
'I went to Seattle.'
b. ŋ-(*s) Seattle-la 'gro-gi-yin
I.NOM(*ERG Seattle-to go-FUT-VOL
'I will go to Seattle.'

Batsbi also has a split, this time in terms of person. "Only first and second person pronouns may bear ergative in intransitives; third person pronouns and NPs are always nominative in this role, though they must be ergative as transitive subjects."

3.2 Active languages with unmarked 'ergative'

The Pomo languages and Imonda have also been held as an active–stative pattern, but here the problem that Baker and Bobaljik point out, is that "these languages are all quite ismilar in that the putative ergative case on agentive subjects is actually morphologically unmarked; what is overtly marked is a kind of nonagentive case found on (some) direct objects and (some) nonagentive subjects of intrasitive verbs."

They then fit the Nias pattern of being marked absolutive.

Baker and Bobaljik's suggestion is that the case marking which was thought to be absolutive is actually inherent dative case, since they mostly seem to mark the goal argument if ditransitives.

3.3 Hidden Transitives

The final type of language that shows an active–stative alignment is exemplified by Laz:

(8) a. Himu-k i-bgar-s
s/he-ERG VAL-cry-PRES.3SG
'S/he is crying.'

b. Him ulu-n
s/he.NOM go-PRES.3.SG
'S/he is going.'

Baker and Bobaljik here argue that these languages actually involve a hidden object in (a) configurations, which can serve as the dependency needed for ergative to appear. This is suggested by the presence of the *i-* prefix which shows up in these environments, which has a cognate in Georgian that expresses transtivity.