

Successive-Cyclic *Wh*-Movement Feeds Dependent Case Competition

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Introduction Recent debate surrounding theories of ergative case has centered on two types of analyses: ergative as a dependent (configurational) case (Yip et. al. 1987, Marantz 1991, Baker 2015, a.o.), and ergative as an inherent case (Nash 1996, Woolford 1997, a.o.). On the former, ergative case is assigned to the external argument of a transitive verb by case competition: it ‘competes’ for case assignment with another nominal in the same phase, and is assigned ergative because it is the higher of the two. On the latter, ergative is assigned to the external argument of a transitive verb by being merged as the specifier of an agentive *v*P. In this paper, I present new evidence for the configurational analysis of ergative case from Koryak (Chukotko-Kamchatkan), arguing that successive-cyclic *wh*-movement causes ergative marking on the subjects of intransitive verbs. This is predicted on the dependent case analysis, but is much harder to account for if ergative is an inherent case.

Ergative as Dependent To set up the analysis of *wh*-movement feeding case competition, I will first demonstrate that ergative behaves as a dependent case in standard transitive clauses with no *wh*-movement by showing that ergative marking on the subject correlates exactly with the presence of a lower argument that does not have a lexical case. First, agentive subjects of intransitive verbs may not appear with ergative case (1a). Two-argument verbs may either have an ergative subject and an absolutive object, or an absolutive subject and a lexical case (oblique) object, but never an ergative subject and a lexical case object. In fact, though some verbs like *peŋŋ-* ‘attack’ can have either a lexical case-marked object or an ergative subject (1b), the two may not appear simultaneously (1c).

- (1) a. ʔewŋəto / *ʔewŋətonak aŋaŋjaj
Hewngyto.**ABS** / Hewngyto.**ERG** sing.2/3SG.AOR
‘Hewngyto sang.’
- b. kajŋən peŋŋe ʔəlvajtəŋ / kajŋa peŋŋənən ʔəlvəʔəl
bear.**ABS.SG** attack.2/3SG.AOR reindeer.**ALL** / bear.**ERG** attack.3SG.A>3.O reindeer.**ABS.SG**
‘The bear attacked the reindeer.’
- c. *kajŋa peŋŋənən ʔəlvajtəŋ
bear.**ERG** attack.3SG.A>3.O reindeer.**ALL**
‘The bear attacked the reindeer.’

Modifying a verb so that it no longer has an absolutive-marked internal argument, such as by incorporating the object, causes it to lose ergative case-marking on the subject, as shown by the comparison between (2a) and (2b). This can feed dative shift (2c), which causes the goal to be marked with absolutive, and causes the subject to reappear as ergative.

- (2) a. ʔəmnan tətəvin uttəut akəkanəŋ
1SG.**ERG** cut.1SG.A>3SG.O tree.**ABS.SG** son.**DAT**
‘I chopped down a tree for my son.’
- b. ʔəmno / *ʔəmnan t-utt-ə-təvi-k akəkanəŋ
1SG.**ABS** / *1SG.**ERG** 1SG.S/A-tree-EP-cut-1SG.S son.**DAT**
‘I chopped down a tree for my son.’
- c. ʔəmnan t-utt-ə-təvi-n akək
1SG.**ERG** 1SG.S/A-tree-EP-cut-3SG.O son.**ABS.SG**
‘I chopped down a tree for my son.’

The evidence presented above argues in favor of a dependent case account of ergative case in Koryak rather than inherent case one: the presence of ergative case on the subject is tied to a lower argument with absolutive case, not to the external argument position of any particular class of verbs.

***Wh*-movement and case** The triggering of ergative case marking by *wh*-movement occurs least two different syntactic contexts. The first involves *wh*-movement of an object in an embedded finite clause to the matrix

[Spec,CP]. As shown in (3), the matrix subject is ergative when the absolutive *wh*-word *jeju* ‘what all’ has moved into the matrix clause. However, in (4), the answer to the question in (3), the subject is absolutive: there is no other noun phrase in the matrix clause for the subject to compete for case with.

- (3) *jeju_i yənan / *yətətēi valomnaw, əno ʔewŋətonak jətēimawnin t_i*
 what.ABS.PL 2SG.ERG / 2SG.ABS hear.2SG.A>3PL.O that Hewngyto.ERG break.3SG.A>3.O
 ‘What all did you hear that Hewngyto broke?’
- (4) *yəmmo təvalomək, əno ʔewŋətonak jətēimawnin kojŋo*
 1SG.ABS hear.1SG.S that Hewngyto.ERG break.3SG.A>3.O cup.ABS.PL
 ‘I heard that Hewngyto broke cups.’

The second is when the object of a verb embedded under an object control verb *wh*-moves to matrix [Spec,CP]. This is seen with the verb *wijŋnet*- ‘help’, which allows both an ERG-ABS and ABS-DAT case pattern on nominals in the matrix clause (5a-5b). However, when the object of the embedded verb *wh*-moves into the matrix clause, only the case pattern in (5c) is allowed.

- (5) a. *ʔewŋətonak wijŋnennin meλλo kalik pison*
 Hewngyto.ERG help.3SG.A>3.O Melljo.ABS write.INF letter.ABS.SG
 ‘Hewngyto helped Melljo write the letter.’
- b. *ʔewŋəto wijŋnet-i meλλonaŋ kalik pison*
 Hewngyto.ABS help.2/3.S Melljo.DAT write.INF letter.ABS.SG
 ‘Hewngyto helped Melljo write the letter.’
- c. *jənnə_i ʔewŋətonak wijŋnennin meλλonaŋ kalik t_i*
 what.ABS Hewngyto.ERG help.3SG.A>3.O Melljo.DAT write.INF
 ‘What did Hewngyto help Melljo write?’

Proposal I assume that dative is a dependent case assigned to the higher of two caseless nominals within a VP, and that ergative is a dependent case assigned to the higher of two caseless nominals within TP. The data seen above fall out straightforwardly from these assumptions if the *wh*-word can trigger dependent case at each of its intermediate landing sites. Consider the derivation of the sentence in (3) shown in (6). First, the *wh*-word triggers dependent ergative on the embedded subject, after which point it moves to the embedded [Spec,CP]. From there, it moves to the matrix [Spec,vP], at which point it is in the same phase as the matrix subject, causing the latter to receive ergative case. It subsequently moves to the matrix [Spec,CP], with no effect on case.

- (6) a. $[_{CP} C_{[+wh]} [_{TP} \text{you} [_{vP} [_{VP} \text{hear} [_{CP} \text{what} [\text{that} [_{TP} \text{Hewngyto.ERG} [_{VP} \text{stole } \text{what}]]]]]]]]$
 b. $[_{CP} C_{[+wh]} [_{TP} \text{you.ERG} [_{vP} \text{what} [_{VP} \text{hear} [_{CP} \text{what} [\text{that} [_{TP} \text{Hewngyto.ERG} [_{VP} \text{stole } \text{what}]]]]]]]]$

The derivation of the sentence in (5c) shows the crucial part successive cyclicity plays in this analysis, as the moving *wh*-word triggers two different dependent cases in different positions. First, having moved from its base position to the embedded [Spec,CP], it triggers dependent dative case on *Melljo*, as the two are within VP and not separated by a phase boundary. Subsequently, it moves to the matrix [Spec,vP], where it triggers dependent ergative on the matrix subject.

- (7) a. $[_{CP} C_{[+wh]} [_{TP} \text{Hewngyto} [_{vP} [_{VP} \text{Melljo.DAT} [\text{help} [_{CP} \text{what} [C [_{TP} \text{PRO} [_{VP} \text{write } \text{what}]]]]]]]]]]$
 b. $[_{CP} C_{[+wh]} [_{TP} \text{Hewngyto.ERG} [_{vP} \text{what} [_{VP} \text{Melljo.DAT} [\text{help} [_{CP} \text{what} [C [_{TP} \text{PRO} [_{VP} \text{write } \text{what}]]]]]]]]]]$

Conclusion I have proposed that successive cyclic *wh*-movement feeds dependent case competition in Koryak, as it causes nominals that otherwise would not (have to) have ergative or dative case to surface with it. This is difficult to reconcile with an inherent case analysis, as long-distance movement of a *wh*-element should not affect the agentivity of a subject and, by extension, whether or not it gets ergative case. However, this is compatible with a dependent case analysis of the ergative, as ergative (and dative) marking is triggered by the appearance of a caseless nominal in a domain that already contains one.