

Syntactic Ergativity
in
Coast Tsimshian (Sm'algyax)

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine a range of syntactic constructions in Coast Tsimshian to determine whether they are ergative or accusative. In accessing the typology of a language, it is a relatively straight-forward matter to determine whether it is ergative or accusative in terms of its morphological marking. However, at the syntactic level, making a decision as to whether a construction or process is ergative (S treated in the same way as O) or accusative (S treated like A) involves considering several different types of syntactic evidence which do not necessarily all give the same result. First, a distinction must be made as to syntactic operations which are universally accusative. That is, in those languages where they occur, they always treat the S like the A. This is true of imperatives, jussive complements, and 'want' and similar verbs. Even here, though, I show that with imperatives, for example, there is an ergative aspect to this construction in Coast Tsimshian.

Next a distinction must be made as to constructions and processes which have a universal basis that is not dependent on S and A, as in an accusative construction, or on S and O, as in an ergative construction. For example, in the case of causatives, the universal basis is dependent upon the A and with reflexives it is dependent on the O.

Then a distinction must be made with syntactic operations which are language-particular as to whether they are accusative or ergative. These include coordination, subordination, relativization and topicalization. In most languages it seems, these processes also function accusatively. But, it is definitely not the case that all of these processes in all languages work in terms of S and A. Some languages function in terms of S and O for part or all of these processes and it is these languages which can be said to show syntactic ergativity. The degree of syntactic ergativity is then dependent on the number of syntactic operations which treat the S like the O. It is demonstrated in this paper that Coast Tsimshian is syntactically, as well as morphologically, ergative.³

The final distinction to be made is syntactic operations which function to place an NP in an S function for a variety of syntactic and discourse purposes. These include passive and antipassive which place an O or A in an S 'slot', respectively, producing an intransitive sentence. It is also shown in this paper, that Coast Tsimshian lacks either of these operations and that functions which these operations typically serve in a language are handled in other ways in Coast Tsimshian.

The syntactic constructions and processes which have been categorized here are discussed in terms of the Coast Tsimshian language in the sections that follow. Sections 2-4 cover those operations which are universally accusative, Sections 5-6 - those which are universally neither accusative nor ergative, and Sections 7-10 - those which are language particular as to ergativity and accusativity. Then in Section 11, I consider the lack of a passive or antipassive process in Coast Tsimshian.

2. Imperatives

Imperatives, cross-linguistically, have a 2nd person pronoun as the stated or understood S or A NP who the speaker intends to get to perform

an action. Thus, as Dixon (1979:112) states:

...the fact that S and A have the same possibilities of reference for the imperative constructions of some particular language (and the fact that, say, either can be deleted from surface structure) is no evidence at all for the placement of that language on a continuum of syntactic 'ergativity' vs. 'accusativity'. Even the most ergative language will treat S and A NPs of imperatives the same. This follows from the meaning of imperatives (addressee is told to be agent)...

In Coast Tsimshian, there are five types of imperative constructions that are common in discourse and narratives and in each type the S or A is the addressee of the imperative and is a 2nd person. For example, one type is a periphrastic construction which can be translated as It would be good if you..., as in (1):

- (1)a. Aam dm k'yeexg-n -t.
good FUT escape -2SG-DEM

S
It would be good if you escaped.
(Boas 1911:407)

- b. Aam m -dm di -baal-t-ga, k'anayis, dm ganamn -t.
good 2SG-FUT also-try -3-DEM friend FUT be good-3

A O S
It would be good if you tried it too, my friend, it will be fun.

In (1a) which is intransitive and in (1b) which is transitive, the S or A is the addressee of the imperative and appears as a dependent pronoun.

In Sm'algyax, in addition to this universal S/A linkage, there is also one respect in which S and O are treated alike. In particular, in the imperative construction which could be termed a 'true' imperative, the S and A must be 2nd person (the universal rule), but when the A is 2nd person⁴ singular it is always deleted whereas the S, like the O, is retained:

- (2)a. Amuxs -n.
listen-2SG

S
Listen.

- b. Sm -gyit -dax -yagwa anis -it, damxl.
very-right-firmly-hold branch-DEM friend

there
Hold on to the branch tight, my friend.
(A = 2SG)

- (3)a. Yüü duus. (E)⁵
hide cat
Hide the cat. (A = 2SG)

- b. Sm yüü duus. (E)
2PL hide cat
Hide the cat.

-sda nah wil sa -aig -at-da.
 -CN PAST be make-fire-3 -DEM
 PREP wood S
 while he was getting wood.
 (Boas 1912:186)

(9) Maɪ -a n gun -sa -aig -a ɬams -u.
 tell-CN 1SG CAUS-make-fire-CN son-in-1SG
 PREP A wood PRED law POSS
 Tell my son-in-law that I order him to get
 firewood.
 (Boas 1912:100)

The jussive complement is a prepositional phrase in (8) and (9) as it is in the first type discussed above. In (8), Gunaxnesmggyad is the O of the main clause, nah ɬa maɪdida..Gunaxnesmggyad 'he told Gunaxnesmggyad to...' and the A of the jussive complement wila dzabadas Gunaxnesmggyad 'Gunaxnesmggyad do it'. In (9), ɬamsu 'my son-in-law' is the O of the main clause, maɪa..ɬamsu 'tell my son-in-law to...' and the O of the jussive complement n gunsa'aig ɬamsu 'I order my son-in-law to get firewood'. Here aig- 'firewood' is incorporated into the verb.

In summary, in the first type, the coreferential A or S is not reduced to a dependent pronoun or deleted in jussive complements where it is coreferential with the O, or indirect object, of the main clause. In the second type of jussive complement, deletion does occur and the coreferential NP is an O in the main clause and a S, A or O in the subordinate clause. Thus, in the first type where Coast Tsimshian follows the universal tendency whereby S and A have the same possibilities of reference, it does not allow the deletion of the coreferential element. In the second type, where deletion is allowed, the coreferential NP is an S, A or O and this type is, therefore, neither ergative or accusative.

4. 'Want' and Similar Verbs

In a number of languages, certain verbal forms that are dependent on another verb may lack an overt S, or A, if and only if the S, or A, of the dependent verb is the same as the S of the main verb. For example, in English, the verb want behaves in this way:

- (10)a. The baby wants to walk.
- b. The babysitter wants to watch the movie.

Where the S, or A, of the dependent verb is not the same as that of the main verb, as is possible with want, the S, or A, of the dependent verb must be expressed overtly (in English, as the O of want):

- (11)a. The man wants the salesman to leave.
- b. The salesman wants the man to buy his product.

As these examples illustrate, this condition treats the S and A of the dependent verb alike, in contrast to the O.

In Coast Tsimshian, there are two types of constructions with 'want' and similar verbs: if the agentive argument of a verb such as hasax 'to want' is coreferential with the S of the complement clause than this clause will occur as the object of hasax 'to want' and the agentive argument is an A. However, if the agentive argument of hasax 'to want' is coreferential with the A of the complement clause or is not coreferential with either the S or A, then the complement clause occurs as a prepositional phrase and the agentive argument is an S. The first situation

occurs in (12) and (14), whereas the second occurs in (13) and (15). With respect to deletion, when the agentive argument of hasax 'to want' is coreferential with the S or A of the dependent clause, there is no deletion, as in (12). There is no deletion even when the NP in the dependent clause is 3rd person, as in (13). But the S or A in the dependent clause does reduce to a dependent pronoun if it is a lexical NP, as in (14). With respect to a non-coreferential NP in the complement clause, it appears in the prepositional clause rather than as an O in the higher clause as in English. This is illustrated in (15) with an S:

- (12) Hasaq-u dm di galmiilg-u.
 want -1SG FUT on my play -1SG
 A part S
 I want to play.
- (13) Hasax-t-ga dm -t moga -n -t-ga.
 want -3-CN FUT-3 go -CAUS-3-DEM
 S PREP A aboard O
 He wanted to take him aboard.
 (Boas 1912:126)
- (14) Hasaq-a awta dm yeltg -it da lax galts'ap.
 want -CN porcupine FUT return-3 CN place village
 PRED S PREP
 Porcupine wanted to return to the mainland.
- (15) Ada hasaq-ayu da dm lu-hat'ak -ɬaatg-n.
 and want -1SG CN FUT in-lengthwise -move -2SG
 along middle S
 I want you to creep in. (Boas 1912:180)

In (12), the A of hasaq- 'to want' is a 1st singular dependent pronoun, the O is the complement clause, dm di galmiilgu 'I on my part will play', and the A is coreferential with the S, -u '1SG' in the complement clause. In (13), the S of hasaq- is a 3rd person dependent pronoun which is coreferential with the A, -t on dm 'FUT' in the prepositional clause ga dmt moga 'he will take him aboard'. The A of hasaq- 'to want' is a full lexical NP in (14) and is coreferential with the dependent pronoun -t '3' suffixed to yeltg- 'to return' in the object complement dm yeltgit da lax galts'ap 'he wanted to return to the mainland'. (The -i- before the dependent pronoun in yeltgit 'he return' is an epenthetic vowel.) The S of hasaq- in (15) is a 1st person singular dependent pronoun and is not coreferential with the S of the prepositional complement which is a 2nd singular dependent pronoun on the verb ɬaatg- 'to move'. (The -a- before the dependent pronoun in hasaqayu 'I want' is an epenthetic vowel.)

To summarize, verbs like 'want', in Coast Tsimshian, behave like similar verbs cross-linguistically, in that they take a complement in which the S or A of the dependent verb can be coreferential with the agentive argument of want. In this respect, Sm'algyax follows the universal tendency to group S with A as NPs that can be coreferential with the agentive argument of want. However, unlike a number of languages, this language does not allow deletion of the coreferential NP, but only a reduction to a pronoun if it is a full lexical NP. Similarly, a non-coreferential S or A stays in the complement clause and does not appear in the higher clause as an O, like in English.

However, counter to the universal tendency, Coast Tsimshian also shows some non-accusative tendencies with respect to this construction: if the argument of a verb like hasax 'to want' is coreferential with the S in the

or the O is replaced by a reflexive form and the A serves as the antecedent of the reflexivization 'from' the A 'to' the O. In cases where a direction can be determined, it is the O that undergoes reflexivization and this has been taken as evidence for accusative syntax (Anderson 1976: 14-6). However, I feel that the directionality from the A to the O is instead a universal tendency and does not provide evidence as to the syntactic ergativity or accusativity of a language.

In Coast Tsimshian, both types of reflexives are found with the deletion of the O being a further development of the reflexive construction in which the O is present. First, when the O is present it is an independent pronoun and the proclitic lap 'REFLX' occurs with the verb as in (22) and (23):

(22) Lap niidz-a ɣguwoomɣ-at 'niit. (E)
REFLX see -CN child -CN 3SG
PRED PRED
The child sees her/himself.

(23) Lap di-daalg-m dp 'nūūm. (E)
REFLX PL-talk -1PL PL 1PL
We are talking to ourselves.

In (22), the A is a lexical NP, ɣguwoomɣ- 'child', whereas, in (23), it is a dependent pronoun, -m '1PL'.

When the O is deleted in a reflexive construction, the proclitic gyilk 'REFLX', as well as the proclitic lap, occur with the verb:

(24) Lap gyilk niis-ga ɣguwoomɣk. (E)
REFLX REFLX see -CN child
PRED
The child sees her/himself.

(25) Lap gyilk di-daalg-nm. (E)
REFLX REFLX PL-talk -1PL
S
We are talking to ourselves.

In (24) and (25), which correspond to (23) and (24), respectively, the O has been deleted and the resulting sentence is intransitive. This is signaled by the change in predicative connective in (24) and the change from an objective to a definite objective pronoun in (25).

With respect to the universal characteristics of reflexives, then, the two types of reflexive constructions found in Coast Tsimshian are similar to the two types found cross-linguistically. Furthermore, Coast Tsimshian follows the universal tendency for the directionality of the reflexive to be from the A to the O, since when the O is present, it is an independent pronoun that is coreferential with the A which is a lexical NP or a dependent pronoun. However, as was noted in the beginning of this section, this should not be taken as evidence of syntactic accusativity since it is a universal tendency of reflexivization.

7. Coordination

Coordination is a syntactic process that relates two clauses which can have an NP in common. In some languages, there are restrictions on the syntactic role the coreferential NP can have in either clause, or there may be syntactic conditions on deletability of the second occurrence of this NP.

In Coast Tsimshian, coordination of clauses is indicated by ada 'and' and occasionally by a 'PREP'. With this type of clause linkage, there are no restrictions on the syntactic role of the coreferential NP and this NP is only reduced, not deleted, in the second clause. First, there is no change in the coreferential S or A in the second clause when it is a dependent pronoun in the first clause. This is the case regardless of whether both clauses are intransitive as in (26), transitive as in (27), or one is intransitive and the other is transitive as in (28):

(26) ɛa 'wileeks-u ada suuns-u.
PAST be old -1SG and be -1SG
S blind S
I am old and blind.

(27) Dawla-t sa -spiil gahuu -m noɬ da gayk
then -3 off-pull necklace-CN shell CN chest
A ADJ PREP
Then he pulled a shell necklace from his chest

-t ada-t gun -ooy -t da awa ts'u'uts.
3 and-3 toward-throw-3 CN near bird
POSS A O PREP
and threw it to the bird.

(28) Dawla 'naka -t ga-an'on ɣguɣ-m 'yuut ada haaytg-it.
then reach out-3 PL-hand young-CN man and stand -3
with hand A ADJ PREP up S
He reached for the boy's hands and stood up.

In (26), both clauses are intransitive and the S in each is -u '1SG', whereas, in (27), both clauses are transitive and the coreferential A in each is -t '3'. The first clause in (28) is transitive and the A, -t '3' is coreferential with the S, -it '3' in the second clause. (The -i- in the -it '3' is an epenthetic vowel.)

If the S or A of the first clause, however, is a lexical NP, then it is reduced to a dependent pronoun in the second clause. Again this is the case regardless of whether the clauses are intransitive as in (29), transitive as in (30), or a combination as in (31):

(29) Mo'mg-a hana'a ada miilk-t.
smile-CN woman and dance-3
PRED S
The woman smiled and danced.

(30) Gyiimkɨ-as Galganms Hayda ɣgu mati ada-t ludam -t.
wipe -CN kid mt. and-3 comfort-3
PRED goat A O
Galganms Hayda wiped the mountain goat kid dry and comforted it.

(31) Ada wil dzaga -yaa-sga awta -ga, ada-t
and then across-go -CN porcupine-DEM and-3
PRED A
Then porcupine walked across, and
dzaga -goo n -sm -lax-yuup-t -ga.
across-go POSS-real-on -land-3 -DEM
to POSS
went across to his country.

native speaker rather than being from a text or observed in natural discourse.

6. Connectives, which are roughly analogous to case markers, are an extensive system of suffixes that are always in word final position and mark words that are syntactically related in specific ways. There are adjectival, adverbial, predicative, possessive, and prepositional connectives. For a full discussion of the connectives and person agreement on the verb see Chapter 2 of Mulder (1987b) and for a detailed argument of the analysis of topicalization presented here see Section 3.2.9 of Mulder (1987b).

7. With a non-causative sense, the proclitic gun has a meaning of 'towards' and occurs with intransitive and transitive verbs. However, the occurrence of gun with this locative sense does not change a one-place predicate into a two-place one with the identification of S and O or a two-place predicate into a three-place one with the identification of the A and the indirect object.

8. The proclitic lap also occurs with an emphatic meaning in sentences which are not syntactically reflexive:

Gyiloo baas -n, di lap -naxnoox -a'nu.
don't be -2SG on my EMPH-have superna-1SG
afraid S part tural power S
Don't be afraid, I have supernatural power
myself.
(Boas 1912:100)

9. The proclitic gyilk, like lap, also occurs in sentences which are not reflexive. In this case it has a meaning of 'back':

Ndo, lu-yeltg-n, hawin na -gyilks-niidz-n.
go on in-turn -2SG before 1SG-back -look -2SG
= return S A at O
Go back, lest I look back upon you.

10. It should be noted that this sentence was not directly elicited but is the second line in a repetition story that is part of the primary level reading sereis developed for School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert, B.C). The two sentence frames in the story are:

Xsmasq-m ol, xsmasq-m ol, gooyu niidz-n?
brown -CN bear brown -CN bear what see -2SG
ADJ ADJ S
Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?

Niidz-u masq-m ts'u'uts, ada di -t niis-d -u.
see -1SG red -CN bird and on -3 see -TRANS-1SG
A ADJ its A =look at O
part
I see a red bird and it is looking at me.

(The underlined NPs are changed throughout the repetition story).

11. Dunn (1978b:342) claims that non-pronominal As can not be topicalized. However, I have found topicalized non-pronominal As occurring freely in texts.

12. I have not been able to find enough examples in texts of relative

clauses that contain a tense/aspect marker to determine if the occurrence of the person agreement marker -t is also conditioned the the tense/aspect of the sentence and by the semantic content of the A and O relative to each other as it is with topicalization.

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