

Revisiting Ergative Case in Laz

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1 Preview

- We investigate the case system of Pazar Laz (Öztürk and Pöchtrager, 2011), focusing on the status of the **ERGATIVE** case.
 - Baker and Bobaljik (2017): ergative case is uniformly a dependent case that is assigned to an NP in the presence of a case competitor in its scope.
 - This paper: analyzing **ERGATIVE** in Laz as a dependent case faces additional challenges beyond what Baker and Bobaljik (2017) have addressed.

2 Overview of the case system of Laz

- On the surface, case marking in Laz¹ differentiates external vs. internal arguments rather than making reference to transitivity (Perlmutter, 1978).
 - The **ERG** marker **-k** is used for external arguments whereas internal arguments are unmarked.

- (1) a. Bere-**k** urdzenepe ç'inaxu
child-**ERG** grapes crush.PST.3SG
'The child crushed the grapes.' [transitive: EA= **ERG** - IA =caseless]
- b. Bere-**k** k'iu
child-**ERG** scream.PST.3SG
'The child screamed.' [unergative: EA=**ERG**]
- c. Bere idu
child go.PST.3SG
'The child went.' [unaccusative: IA=caseless]

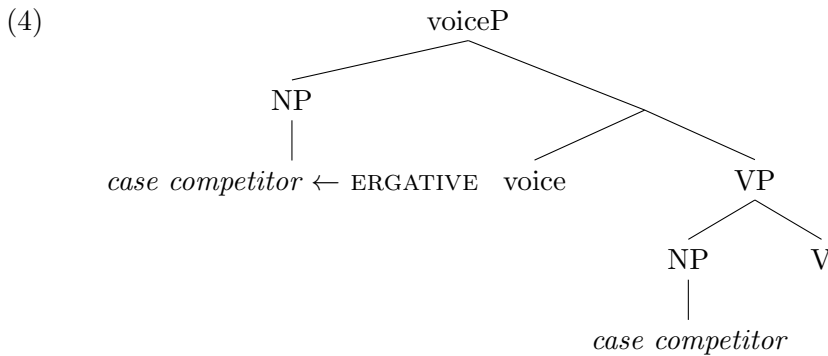
- Accordingly, Laz appears to be a language with true **active-ergative alignment** where ergative is not linked to transitivity (Woolford, 2015).

¹Our data comes from the Pazar (At'ina) dialect of Laz, which has preserved its case formatives unlike the neighboring Ardesheni dialect. We are grateful to our consultant İsmail Avcı Bucaklışı.

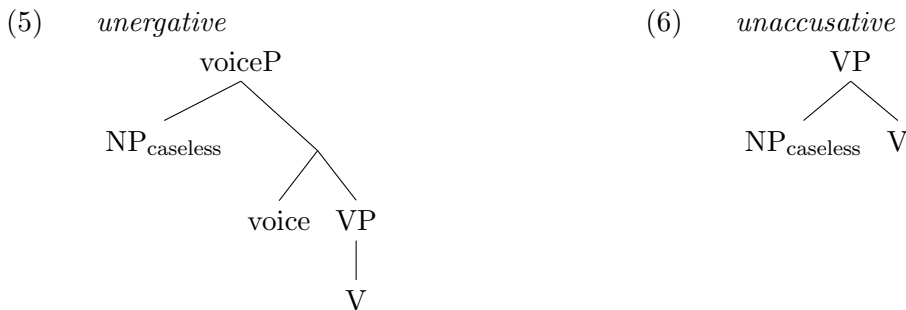
- (2) active-ergative alignment
- a. mono-transitive: EA: ERGATIVE IA: caseless
 - b. unaccusative: IA: caseless
 - c. unergative: EA: ergative
- (3) canonical ergative alignment
- a. mono-transitive: EA: ERGATIVE IA: caseless
 - b. unaccusative: IA: caseless
 - c. unergative: EA: caseless

3 A dependent-case theoretic account

- Under the Dependent Case Theory (Marantz, 1991; Baker and Vinokurova, 2010; Baker, 2014; Kornfilt and Preminger, 2015; Levin and Preminger, 2015; Baker, 2015; Baker and Bobaljik, 2017), ERGATIVE is a dependent case assigned to the higher of the two caseless NPs in a clause, hence constituting the mirror of the ACCUSATIVE case.



- This uniformly predicts that ERGATIVE will be absent on the sole argument of all intransitives, for there is no additional NP that can trigger ERGATIVE assignment.



- This basic prediction of the system is not borne out in Laz, for it has an active-ergative alignment, which splits intransitives for case-marking purposes.

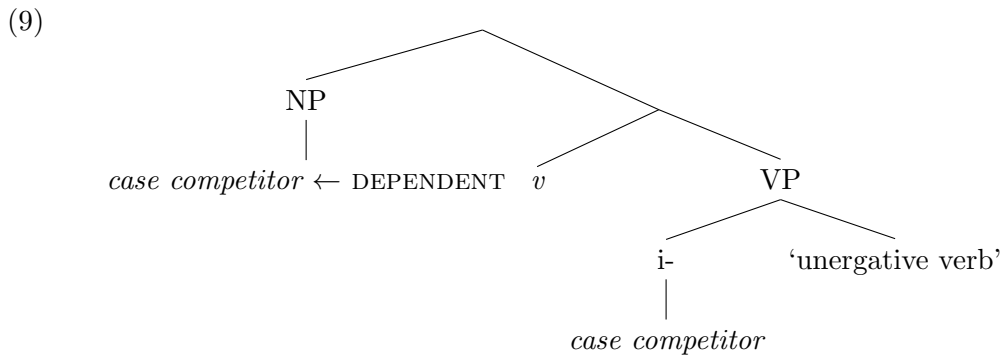
- (7) a. Layç'i-k ts'umin-am-s
 dog-ERG bark-IMPF-PRS.3SG
 'The dog is barking.' [unergative: EA=ERG]
- b. Badi ğur-un
 old.man die-IMPF-PRS.3SG
 'The old man is dying.' [unaccusative: IA=caseless]

- Baker and Bobaljik (2017) set out to address the general problem posed by active-ergative alignment systems.

- Main proposal: Unergatives in active-ergative systems are **concealed transitives**.
- Baker and Bobaljik (2017); Öztürk and Taylan (2017); Öztürk (2021) argue that some unergatives in Laz co-occur with the reflexive prefix *i-*, bringing evidence for the transitivity of unergatives. (See also Nash (2017) on the cognate system in Georgian.)

- (8) Bere-k i-gzal-s
 child-ERG REFL-walk-PRS.3SG
 'The child is walking.' [unergative: EA= ERG - IA[realized by *i-*]=caseless]

- Indeed, if the reflexive prefix *i-* is visible to the case calculus, ERGATIVE on the external argument of unergatives can be analyzed as a dependent case:



- While this proposal is reasonable, further data from Laz challenge the idea that ERGATIVE is a dependent case in Laz.

4 Challenges against the DCT account

- In this section, we discuss three types of evidence against analyzing ERGATIVE in Laz as a dependent case.

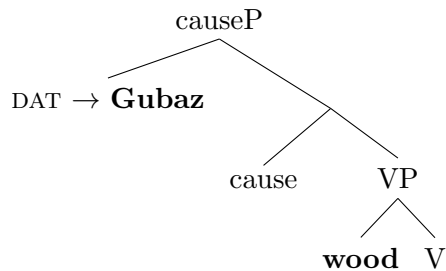
4.1 Causativization patterns

- Structural DATIVE has also been analyzed as a dependent case, in particular a case that is assigned to the higher of the two NPs in the VP cycle (Baker and Vinokurova, 2010; Baker, 2014, 2015).
- The case calculus within the VP cycle considers the NPs inside the complement of voice, i.e. the head that brings in the external argument.
- Causativization of mono-transitive verbs creates a configuration where we get to see DATIVE being assigned.

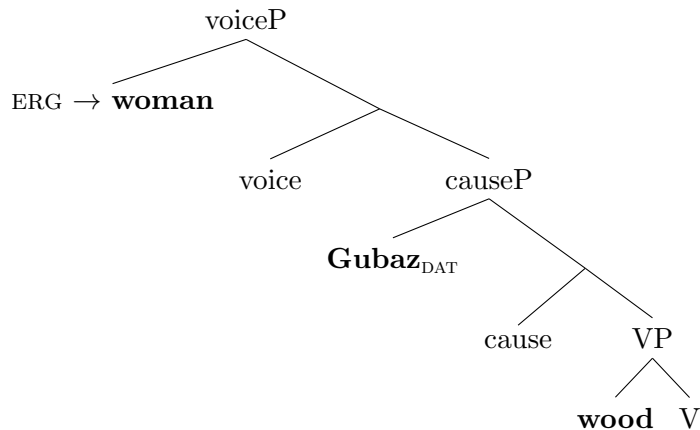
(10) Xordza-**k** dişk'a çit-u
 woman-ERG wood.NOM chop-PST.3SG
 'The woman chopped wood.'

(11) Xordza-**k** Gubazi-s dişk'a o-çit-ap-u
 woman-ERG Gubaz-DAT wood.NOM CAUS-chop-CAUS-PST.3SG
 'The woman made Gubaz chop wood.'

(12) VP Cycle: **Gubaz** c-commands **wood**: assign DAT to **Gubaz**



(13) CP Cycle: **woman** c-commands **wood**: assign ERG to **woman**



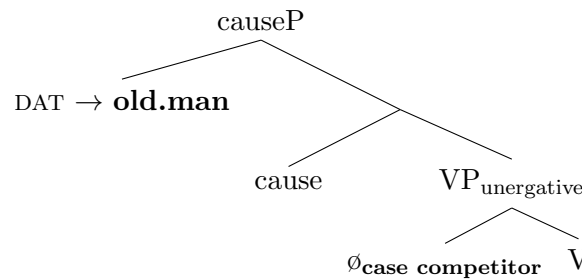
- Assuming that structural DAT is a dependent case in Laz, we can now try to verify if unergatives provide an internal argument visible to the case calculus.
- Test configuration: causativization of unergatives
 - Prediction: if unergatives provide an internal argument visible to the case calculus, that internal argument must also trigger DAT on the causee.
 - This is indeed possible in Laz, but DAT on the causee is optional, as shown in (15).

(14) Badi-k barbal-am-s
 old.man-ERG speak.a.lot-IMPf-PRs.3SG
 ‘The old man is speaking a lot (nagging).’

(15) Bere-k badi-(s) o-barbal-ap-am-s
 child-ERG old.man-DAT CAUS-speak-CAUS-IMPf-PRs.3SG
 ‘The child is making the old man speak a lot.’

- If it were the hypothesized case competitor that triggers ERG in (14), we would expect to see DAT uniformly on the causee in (15).

(16) VP Cycle



- What is crucial here is the fact that ERG is not optional in (17) and DAT is not optional in (18).

(17) Badi-*(k) barbal-am-s
 old.man-ERG speak.a.lot-IMPf-PRs.3SG
 ‘The old man is speaking a lot (nagging).’

(18) Xordza-k Gubazi-*(s) dişk’a o-çit-ap-u
 woman-ERG Gubaz-DAT wood.NOM CAUS-chop-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘The woman made Gubaz chop wood.’

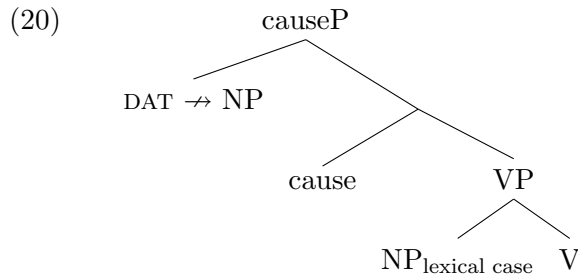
- These facts when considered together point to an inconsistency in the case calculus, challenging the idea that the source of the ERG that appears on the subjects of unergatives is an invisible case competitor within the VP.

4.2 Lexically case-marked objects

- It is commonly assumed that case marked NPs are invisible to the case calculus (Baker and Vinokurova, 2010).
- In derivational terms, *lexical case* assignment (locally, under sisterhood) will precede any subsequent case calculus and therefore render a lexically case marked NP invisible to the case calculus.
- There is cross-linguistic evidence in support of this prediction.
 - For example in Turkish, just like in Laz, when a mono-transitive verb is causativized, the causee seems to get dependent DAT.

- (19) a. Pelin kitab-ı oku-du
 Pelin.NOM book-ACC read-PST
 ‘Pelin read the book.’
- b. Aylin Pelin-e kitab-ı oku-t-tu
 Aylin.NOM Pelin-DAT book-ACC read-CAUS-PST
 ‘Aylin made Pelin read the book.’

- However, causativizing a mono-transitive verb whose complement receives a lexical case yields a different result. Since the oblique NP is not visible to the case calculus, the condition for the assignment of DAT is not met:



- (21) a. Aysun reklam-lar-**dan** bıktı-tı.
 Aysun.NOM ad-PL-ABL fed.up.with-PST
 ‘Aysun is fed up with ads.’
- b. Reklam-lar Aysun-**u** YouTube-dan bıktır-dı
 ad-PL.NOM Aysun-ACC YouTube-ABL fed.up.with-CAUS-PST
 ‘Ads caused Aysun to be fed up with YouTube.’
- c. *Reklam-lar Aysun-**a** YouTube-dan bıktır-dı
 ad-PL.NOM Aysun-DAT YouTube-ABL fed.up.with-CAUS-PST
 ‘Ads caused Aysun to be fed up with YouTube.’

- Therefore, if ERG is a dependent case in Laz, we predict it to be absent on subjects of transitive verbs with oblique objects. Yet, this prediction is not borne out.
 - For example, the lexically transitive root for ‘hit’ requires DAT on its internal argument. If ERG were licensed only when there is a case competitor in its scope, we would expect the subject *Arte* in (22) to remain caseless, contrary to fact.

(22) Arte-*(k) bere-s ce-ç-am-s.
 Arte-ERG child-DAT PV-hit-IMPf-3SG
 ‘Arte is beating a child.’

4.3 Fine-grained distribution of ERG on intransitives

- A more thorough investigation of single argument verbs reveals that the distribution of ERG seems more fine-grained (or possibly idiosyncratic) than it seems at first sight.
 - There are contexts where ERGATIVE is optional as in (23).

(23) a. Ayna-(k) tan-um-s
 mirror-ERG shine-IMPf-3.SG
 ‘The mirror is shining.’
 b. Ayna-(k) farfal-am-s
 mirror-ERG sparkle-IMPf-3.SG
 ‘The mirror is sparkling.’

- There are contexts where it is optional only with inanimate NPs as in (27)

(24) a. Şuse-(k) i-nçir-s
 bottle-ERG REFL-swim-3.SG
 ‘The bottle is swimming.’
 b. Bere-*(k) i-nçir-s
 child-ERG REFL-swim-3.SG
 ‘The child is swimming.’

- There are contexts where it is obligatory regardless of animacy (25).

(25) a. Badi-*(k) xval-um-s
 old.man-ERG cough-IMPf-3.SG
 ‘The old man is coughing.’
 b. Motori-*(k) xval-um-s
 engine-ERG cough-IMPf-3.SG
 ‘The engine is coughing.’

- These data directly challenge an analysis where ERG simply expones a dependent case licensed only when there is a case competitor in its scope.

5 Summary and Discussion

- We have identified three challenges against analyzing ERGATIVE in Laz as a dependent case.
 - We used the structural DAT on causee NPs to test the purported transitivity of unergatives. Finding: DAT is optional on the causee NP in causativized unergatives, which remains as an unresolved question. Nevertheless, it is *prima facie* at odds with the obligatoriness of ERG with unergatives.

alternative thought to save the DCT account:
two distinct structures for causativized unergatives:

- (26) a. causee NP is introduced by a distinct head → causee gets dependent DAT
b. causee NP fills the theme position → causee remains caseless

We don't know how to test for this.

- We have shown that subjects of mono-transitives with lexically case-marked objects get ERG. This is *prima facie* a false prediction, as lexically case marked NPs should be invisible to the case calculus.

alternative thought to save the DCT account:
Lexically case-marked NPs may be parametrically visible to the case calculus in some languages.

- We have shown that ERG with single argument verbs has a more fine-grained distribution. With a subset of single argument verbs, animacy seems to play a role in whether ERG surfaces or not. Notably, these verbs include canonical unergatives that come with the reflexive prefix *i-*. If *i-* were uniformly a case competitor, we would not expect case determination to be related to factors like animacy.

- (27) a. Şuse-(k) i-nçir-s
bottle-ERG REFL-swim-3.SG
'The bottle is swimming.'
- b. Bere-*(k) i-nçir-s
child-ERG REFL-swim-3.SG
'The child is swimming.'

alternative thought to save the DCT account:
i-nçirs might be ambiguous between an unergative and an unaccusative construal (e.g. swim vs. float). In that case, *i-* in the unaccusative reading would have to be idiosyncratic.

- If it is right to conclude that ERG is not a dependent case in Laz, then what is it?
 - The most straightforward answer would be that ERG is assigned to the external argument by the voice head (Woolford, 2015).
 - Nevertheless, this analysis, too, faces some challenges.
 - * For example, nominalizations borrowed into Laz from Turkish does not permit any ERG NP in them, marking all subjects GEN and requiring possessive agreement.
- (28) Xordza-k [Ali-**ḡi** oxori okosu-muḡi] gor-um-s
 woman-ERG Ali-GEN house.NOM clean-INF-POS.3SG want-IMP-F-PRS.3SG
 ‘The woman wants Ali to clean the house.’
- (29) Kadın [Ali-**nin** ev-i temizle-me-sin]-i istiyor
 woman.NOM Ali-GEN house-ACC clean-INF-POS.3SG ACC wants
 ‘The woman wants Ali to clean the house.’ Turkish
- * Assuming that these nominalizations are high enough to contain a voice layer, it is noteworthy (and unexpected) that GEN ends up ‘overriding’ ERG.
- In short, a comprehensive theory of ergative case in Laz awaits further research.

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