

Georgian ergative: inherent or dependent case?

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Keywords: inherent case; dependent case; ergative; unergatives; Georgian

The paper addresses the question whether the Georgian ergative is an inherent or structural case. It applies a number of widely accepted diagnostics (see Zaenen, Maling and Tráinsson 1985, Woolford 2006, Bobaljik 2008, and Sigurðsson 2012 among others), to test structural vs. non-structural case in order to determine the status of ergative being inherent or structural. Existing accounts of the Georgian ergative provide arguments supporting both views (see Marantz [1991] 2000, Nash 1996, 2017, Ura 2006, and Legate 2008). The arguments (old and new) provided in the paper concerning the ability to control agreement, the need for a second DP in the case-assignment domain and case alternations in different syntactic environments lead to the conclusion that Georgian ergative is structural. The claim is that being structural Georgian ergative is best analyzed under the Dependent Case Theory (DCT), and not in Chomskyan way as Case assigned/checked by a functional head under agreement (Chomsky 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001). To be more precise, Georgian ergative is a case assigned to a higher DP when the lower DP bears an unmarked case (1).

- (1) *p'ropesor-ma ts'eril-i da-ts'er-a.*
professor-ERG letter-NOM/ABS PR-write-3SG.SBJ:PFV.PST
'The professor wrote a letter.'

Problematic for this view, however, are two types of verbs which either lack second DP argument (unergative verbs) (2), or where the second DP does not carry unmarked case (predicates with ergative-dative pairings) (3).

- (2) *jarisk'ats-ma bolomde i-brdzol-a.*
soldier-ERG end_till PV-fight-3SG.SBJ:PFV.PST
'The soldier fought till the end.'

- (3) *k'ats-ma she-khed-a kal-s.*
man-ERG PR-look_at-3SG.SBJ:PFV.PST woman-DAT
'The man looked at the woman.'

I argue that both these cases involve a covert object in the nominative/absolute, based on the argumentation, that they have transitive structure, exhibit agreement morphology for this implicit argument, use a D head as a residual of a DP with null objects and can employ cognate objects. Some of these arguments such as transitive structure of unergatives and possibility to employ cognate objects were already presented in the literature (Schuchardt 1895, Hewitt 1987, 1995, Lazard 1998, Melikishvili

2001, Melikishvili, Humphries and Kupunia 2008, Nash 2017, etc.). The one not discussed so far is the existence of the D head, which can be checked by adding a quantifier *bevri/tsota* ‘many/few’ to all unergative verbs. Crucially, this quantifier has the same case marking as a direct object (4).

(4) *momkhsenebel-ma* *bevr-i* *i-saubr-a*.
presenter-ERG many-NOM/ABS PV-talk-3SG.SBJ:PFV.PST
‘Presenter talked a lot.’

It can be analyzed either as a residual of a DP with a cognate object, or as an independent determiner, which at the moment of derivation has unvalued case features, and after assigning DC, is realized as nominative/absolutive. Thus, it can be counted as a case competitor for DC calculus.

Although the existence of the implicit argument in the structure of unergatives is not uncontroversial cross-linguistically, I show that existing counter-arguments for the absence of an implicit argument for other languages (for instance, Basque, as presented by Preminger 2012) do not hold for Georgian.

All claims are based on large empirical domain obtained from the existed on-line corpora (Gippert, Meurer and Tandashvili 2011-2021, and Doborjginidze, Lobzhanidze and Gunia 2012) and the additional spoken data collection created as a result of the original fieldwork.

Acknowledgements: This work is part of the joint project of the Georg August University of Göttingen and the Ilia State University (2018-2022) funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG) [grant number N04/46, project number N93569]. The author acknowledges support provided for this research and thanks Hedde Zeijlstra, without whom this work would not have been possible. Special thanks are also due to Michael Job, Sascha Alexeyenko and Gurmeet Kaur for their helpful comments and discussions related to this topic.

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