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Agent-Patient Languages and Split Case Marking Systems*
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This paper addresses two points regarding the agent-patient case marking system and split systems of case marking. [1] First of all, the agent-patient system has often been mistaken for "split ergativity", which is a split between the ergative system and the accusative system of case marking. It will be shown that the agent-patient system and ergative/accusative splits are, in fact, distinct phenomena. Second, languages where case marking is split between the agent-patient system and another system will be examined, and compared to the ergative/accusative splits.

Before beginning this discussion, though, a couple preliminary points must be made. It is important to keep in mind that reflexes of a language's case marking system may include not only affixes attached to nouns, as in Latin or Russian, but also forms of person markers on the verb, other types of verb agreement, word order patterns, clitics on nouns or verbs -- or any other means a language may have to indicate the relationship a nominal argument bears to its verb. Also, note that this paper follows Dixon's (1979) terminology for the core arguments of verbs. The schema in (1) displays the three labels used, where S refers to the subject of an intransitive verb, A to the subject of a transitive verb, and O to the object of a transitive verb. Accusative case marking, as in English, is defined as A and S patterning together to form one category, often unmarked, opposed to O, which is distinguished by special marking. The union of A and S is called "nominative"; the marked case of O is "accusative". Ergative case marking, represented in (3), is defined by O and S patterning together ("absolutive" case), leaving A as the marked, "ergative" case.

(1)	intrans:	S	S = subject of intransitive
	trans:	A O	A = subject of transitive O = object of transitive

	(2) Accusative system	(3) Ergative system	(4) Agent-patient system
intrans:	NOM	ABS	AG PAT
trans:	ACC	ERG	

1. The topic of this paper is a third system of casemarking, the agent-patient system, represented in (4). This system has also been called stative-active, active, or split-S. If (4) is compared to (2) and (3), it can be seen that the accusative and ergative systems are alike in one respect: all subjects of intransitive verbs get marked in the same way. In contrast, in the agent-patient system, two classes of intransitive verbs may be distinguished by their case marking pattern. Furthermore, one

class of intransitive verbs marks its subject identically to the subject of transitive verbs, while the other marks its subject identically to the object of transitive verbs. The names of the two cases in this system are "agent" and "patient".

Examination of the two classes of intransitive verbs often reveals a semantic motivation for this pattern. Intransitive verbs that take the agent case are typically active ones such as 'jump' and 'dance', while the intransitive verbs that take the patient case include statives such as 'be big' and 'feel pain', as well as change of state verbs such as 'die' and 'grow'. [2]

(5), taken from Heath (1977), shows the agent-patient system which operates in the bound person markers of Choctaw verbs. In the first sentence, the A is 1st person and is marked by the agent case, while the O is 2nd person and is marked by the patient case. The second sentence contains a stative intransitive verb, so the subject of this verb is marked by the patient case. The third sentence contains an active intransitive, the subject of which is in the agent case.

- | | | |
|------|----------------------|-----------------|
| (5a) | či - pī:sa - li - h | 'I see you' |
| | 2PAT see 1AG present | |
| (b) | či - (y)abi:ka - h | 'you are sick' |
| | 2PAT be sick pres | |
| (c) | iš - iya - h | 'you are going' |
| | 2AG go pres | |

From a slightly different standpoint, the three types of case marking systems may be considered in the following way. Languages have two parameters which they may make use of in assigning surface case to core arguments of verbs. One parameter is valence of the verb: intransitive verbs may be treated in a different manner than transitive verbs are. This distinction is made by the accusative and ergative systems, which code all arguments of intransitive verbs in a single way. Once the transitive verbs have been distinguished from the intransitives, accusative and ergative languages make a further distinction between A and O, the two arguments of the transitive verb.

The second parameter, the one that distinguishes A from O, is based upon semantic notions. Although there is no single semantic property (e.g., animacy, agency, etc.) true of all NP's appearing as A, one may say that A is much more likely than O is to be an agent, or to be animate. A cluster of such properties will characterize the clear cases where A is to be distinguished from O; individual languages may differ in their treatment of the less clear cases.

While the accusative and ergative systems make use of both of these parameters in assigning nominative and accusative, or ergative and absolutive case, the agent-patient system only employs the second, semantically-based, parameter. NP arguments are divided into two classes, one more agent-like than the other. This semantically-based distinction is made regardless of the

transitivity of the verb.

The Choctaw sentences in (5) illustrate the prototypical agent-patient case marking system. Some other languages, however, deviate somewhat from this prototypical pattern. A few languages with agent-patient case marking seem to allow a conscious manipulation of the semantic difference between the agent case and the patient case. This is the phenomenon of "fluid-S" verbs that has been reported in the Caucasian language of Batsbi, and in the Pomo languages of Northern California. [3] (6), from McLendon (1978), illustrates an Eastern Pomo fluid-S verb:

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-----------|----------------|
| (6a) | wí | c'e:xelka | 'I'm slipping' |
| | I-PAT | slip | |
| (b) | há: | c'e:xelka | 'I'm sliding' |
| | I-AG | slip | |

In these languages, there is a restricted class of intransitive verbs that may take either agent marking or patient marking. The gloss of the verb will vary according to which marking is chosen for the subject of the verb. Though this is probably a special sub-case of agent-patient marking, it is not typical of agent-patient languages in general.

Another pattern probably related to agent-patient case marking can be seen in languages like Lotha, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in India. Here, at least in the perfective aspect, there seems to be an opposition of clitics: one marking subjects of active verbs, the other marking subjects of stative verbs. These clitics are illustrated below in (7), from Teixeira (1982). However, notice that the 0 of the transitive verb in (7a) is not marked by a clitic. Since the marker of the stative verb is not identical to that of 0, it does not correspond exactly to the prototypical pattern of agent-patient case marking.

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-------|---------|-----------|-----------------|
| (7a) | John | <u>nà</u> | fáró | cì | ekhó | chò | |
| | | subj | dog | det | hit | perf | |
| | 'John hit the dog' | | | | | | |
| (b) | mpó | <u>nà</u> | okí | nà | hapoi | cí | yi chò |
| | he | subj | house | from | outside | det | go perf |
| | 'He went outside (from the house)' | | | | | | |
| (c) | nkóló | có | a | wapan | cɛaŋ | <u>có</u> | Wokka-e van chò |
| | long ago | I | family | det | subj | W. loc | live perf |
| | 'Long ago my family lived in Wokka' | | | | | | |

2. Recently, much attention has been paid to those languages characterized as "split ergative" -- that is, where part of the language operates on the ergative case marking system, while another part operates on the accusative system. Typically, such splits occur between person categories, between tense or aspect oppositions, or between main and subordinate clauses. (8), taken

from Comrie (1981), illustrates this sort of split in Dyirbal, where 1st and 2nd person display an accusative pattern, while 3rd person is ergative.

- | | | | | | |
|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|
| (8a) | ɟadya | bayi | yaɾa | balgan | 'I hit the man' |
| | I | NOM | man | ABS hit | |
| (b) | ɟayguna | baŋgul | yaɾangu | balgan | 'the man hit me' |
| | I | ACC | man | ERG hit | |
| (c) | ɟadya | baninyu | | | 'I came here' |
| | I | NOM | come | here | |
| (d) | bayi | yaɾa | baninyu | | 'the man came here' |
| | man | ABS | come | here | |

The agent-patient case marking system has sometimes been mistaken for an ergative/accusative split. It is easy to see how this might happen: if one's theory admits only two possible case marking systems -- ergative and accusative -- then the procedure for classifying a new language is simply to look at the case marking of S (subject of intransitive verb), and determine whether S is identical to A, or to O. If the language in question, however, is one where some S's look like A, while other S's look like O, the temptation is to call it a split system. This is the motivation behind the use of the term, "split-S". In fact, the agent-patient system is not split between ergative and accusative, but is actually a coherent system in its own right.

The true ergative/accusative splits vary the case marking of NP's within the paradigm of any given verb. As can be seen in the Dyirbal example, the subject of 'hit' is ergative if it happens to be in 3rd person, but nominative if it happens to be 1st person. Or, in a language that splits ergative and accusative along tense/aspect lines, the subject of 'hit' would be marked ergative if the verb is in past tense or perfective aspect, but if the verb is in present tense or imperfective aspect, the subject of 'hit' would be marked nominative. Thus, for any given verb, either transitive or intransitive, there will be case marking variation, and the choice of surface case is conditioned by factors other than the verb itself.

The agent-patient system differs in several respects from the pattern of split ergativity. First of all, there is never any variation of case marking for the transitive verbs (unless the language itself is split between the agent-patient system and another case marking system). Subjects of all transitive verbs are always marked as agents, and objects of all transitive verbs are always marked as patients. Although there is no uniform representation of S, the selection of case for the subject of an intransitive is determined by lexical properties of the verb itself, not by additional properties such as aspect or tense, nor by any features of the NP argument such as person. An individual intransitive verb, in a language which is consistently agent-patient, will never exhibit variation in case marking. [4]

Looking further at the intransitive verbs, another difference between the agent-patient system and actual instances of split ergativity may be seen. In the latter, S is always a unified category, either absolutive or nominative, depending upon the conditioning factor of tense, aspect, person, etc. The agent-patient system, on the other hand, never displays a unified category of S.

A final point arguing against analyzing agent-patient case marking as a type of ergative/accusative split, is that the agent-patient system may participate in split case marking systems itself -- as will be seen below.

3. A well-known analysis of split ergative/accusative languages is that in Silverstein (1976), which examines ergative/accusative splits sensitive to features of person, number, and animacy, showing that they pattern in a non-random fashion. More recently, DeLancey (1981) has provided a slightly different motivation in terms of viewpoint and attention flow, for not only the person/number type of split, but also tense/aspect splits, and fluid-S marking.

To summarize Silverstein's argument briefly, he sets up a hierarchy of NP's, where 1st or 2nd person is at the top, being most animate, followed by 3rd person [+human], then [-human, +animate], and so on. His claim is that accusative case marking is favored by NP's at the top of the hierarchy, while ergativity is more likely at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus in (8), Dyrbal 1st and 2nd persons are accusative because they are most animate, and 3rd person is ergative because it is less animate. The "semantic naturalness" of various NP's to be agents or patients is the motivation for this hierarchy.

Although Silverstein does not consider the agent-patient type of case marking system, reflexes of his nominal hierarchy -- or something like it -- may be observed in agent-patient languages.

Lakhota. Lakhota is an example of a language whose case marking system is only partially agent-patient. Nouns in Lakhota are not marked for case, but person markers affixed to the verb reveal a split system, sensitive to features of person/number and animacy. This results in three types of case oppositions.

The person markers have the following case oppositions: 2nd person, both singular and plural, and 1st person singular display an agent-patient system, as can be seen in the examples in (9).

- | | | |
|------|----------------------|----------------------|
| (9a) | wa - lowã | |
| | 1sg.AG sing | 'I sing' |
| (b) | ma - hãska | |
| | 1sg.PAT be tall | 'I'm tall' |
| (c) | ma - ya - gnyã - pi | |
| | 1sg.PAT 2AG trick pl | 'you pl. tricked me' |

There is also a nominative-accusative opposition, which is found only in 3rd person animate plurals. As can be seen in (10d), the prefix wiĉha- marks O, with A and S marked by Ø-

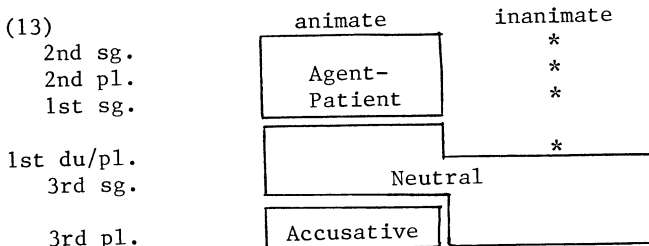
prefix, and by the plural suffix -pi. 3rd person animate plural O's are further marked by the fact that they are the only animate plural that will not trigger the suffix -pi upon a verb.

- | | | |
|-------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| (10a) | lowã - pi | 'they sing' |
| | sing pl | |
| (b) | hãska - pi | 'they (anim.) are tall' |
| | be tall pl | |
| (c) | ma - gñayã - pi | 'they tricked me' |
| | 1sg.PAT trick pl | |
| (d) | wiçha - wa - gñayã | 'I tricked them' |
| | anim.3pl.ACC 1sgAG trick | |

The remaining person/number categories in Lakhota -- 1st person dual and plural, 3rd person singular, and 3rd person inanimate plural -- have what can only be called neutral case marking. Examples are shown in (11) and (12). In a neutral system, there is no formal distinction between A, O, or S. Both of the 3rd person categories have \emptyset - in all cases, while 1st person dual and plural is ũ- for all cases.

- | | | |
|-------|----------------|----------------------|
| (11a) | ũ - lowã - pi | 'we sing' |
| (b) | ũ - hãska - pi | 'we're tall' |
| (c) | ũ - gñayã - pi | 'we tricked him' |
| | | OR 'he tricked us' |
| | | OR 'they tricked us' |
| (12a) | lowã | 'he sings' |
| (b) | hãska | 'he's tall' |
| (c) | gñayã | 'he tricked him' |

The chart in (13) provides a schematic representation of the three types of case marking in Lakhota. The neutral system seems to be a gap between agent-patient and accusative. Note especially that the accusative system -- which Silverstein claims is always at the top of the NP hierarchy -- is here outranked by the agent-patient system.



Wichita. Another example of a language with a split case marking system is Wichita. Like Lakhota, it has agent-patient case marking in 1st and 2nd person, as can be seen in (14). [5]

- (14a) ta - s - ki? - ?i::s 'you sg. saw me'
 indic 2AG 1PAT see [taski?i::s]
 (b) ta - t - á: - ?i::s 'I saw you sg.'
 ind 1AG 2PAT see [tatá:~?i::s]
 (c) ta - t - hisha 'I went'
 ind 1AG go [tachish]
 (d) ta - ki? - hiya:s 'I'm hungry'
 ind 1PAT be hungry [takihiya:s]

In 3rd person, the agent-patient opposition is neutralized:

- (15a) ta - t - Ø - ?i::s 'I saw him'
 ind 1AG 3 see [tac?i::s]
 (b) ta - Ø - ki? - ?i::s 'he saw me'
 ind 3 1PAT see [taki?i::s]

The only overt marking of 3rd person is that some of the tense/mood prefixes have a special form if there is no 1st or 2nd person argument. So, for intransitives with 3rd person subjects, or transitives where both arguments are 3rd person, the indicative marker ta- becomes ti-.

- (16a) ti - Ø - Ø - ?i::s 'he saw him'
 ind 3 3 see [ti?i::s]
 (b) ti - Ø - hisha 'he went'
 ind 3 go [tihish]
 (c) ti - Ø - he:c?i 'he's fat'
 ind 3 be fat [tihe:c?]

However, there is also evidence for ergativity in 3rd person, especially in the marking of non-singular. (Here, it should be noted that another difference between 1st and 2nd persons and 3rd person in Wichita is the number of number categories that are marked for each on the verb. 1st and 2nd persons distinguish three numbers: singular, dual, and plural. For 3rd person arguments, however, only two categories are distinguished: singular and non-singular. In this discussion of Wichita, "non-singular" will mean "two or more", as distinct from "plural", which is "three or more".)

The non-singular category of 3rd person is marked ergatively: the morpheme -?ak- (and other allomorphs) marks a 3rd person O or S as being non-singular. 3rd person A can only be marked non-singular by using the prefix hi?- and leaving the person marker slot empty.

- (17a) hiʔ - ta - ∅ - kiʔ - ʔi::s 'they saw me'
 pl A ind 3 1PAT see [hitakiʔi::s]
- (b) ta - t - ʔak - ʔi::s 'I saw them'
 ind 1AG 3plABS see [tacʔakʔi::s]
- (c) ti - ʔak - hisha 'they went'
 ind 3plABS go [taʔakhish]
- (d) néʔaʔ aki - uc - ʔak - hahris 'they were angry'
 bad aor 3plABS be in mood [néʔaʔ akí:cʔakháris]

In contrast, the morpheme -ra:k- marks plurality of either 1st or 2nd persons, and either agent or patient.

- (18a) ta - s - ra:k - ʔi::s 'you all saw him'
 ind 2AG 1,2pl see [tasá:kʔi::s]
- (b) ta - kiʔ - ra:k - ʔi::s 'he saw us all'
 ind 1PAT 1,2pl see [takirá:kʔi::s]

There are other reflexes of ergativity that extend throughout 3rd person, including the pattern of noun incorporation, which occurs frequently in Wichita. The objects of transitive verbs, and subjects of both active and stative intransitives, may be incorporated within the verbal complex. Here, the ergativity is not restricted to 3rd person non-singular, but operates in the singular as well.

- (19a) ti - wi:c - ʔi::s ka:hi:kʔa 'the woman saw the man'
 ind man see woman [tiwi:cʔi::s ka:hi:kʔa]
- (b) ti - wi:c - hisha 'the man went'
 ind man go [tiwi:chish]
- (c) néʔaʔ ta - kiʔ - uR - uR - ta:ras - uʔakhirʔis
 bad ind 1PAT poss horse feel
 'my horse is not feeling well'
 [néʔaʔ taki:rí:ta:rasiʔakhirʔi:s]

Thus, there are several manifestations in Wichita of 3rd person behaving distinctly from 1st and 2nd persons. The one of most interest in this discussion of case marking systems is that the agent-patient system shows up in 1st and 2nd persons, but not in 3rd. 3rd person, instead, has ∅-marking for person, and an ergative means of marking non-singular.

4. One of the most intriguing similarities between Lakhota and Wichita, as well as several other languages with case marking splits involving the agent-patient system, is that 3rd person displays a neutral system of case marking. Most Siouan languages, for example, have no distinction between A, O, or S in 3rd person. In Choctaw, a Muskogean language, 3rd person is neutralized not only in terms of case, but also lacks the number distinctions found in 1st and 2nd person. It is puzzling why 3rd person should show a preference for neutral case marking, and why this should correlate with agent-patient marking in 1st and 2nd person. However, these splits provide evidence for DeLancey's

(1981) claim that 1st and 2nd person, as Speech Act Participants, enjoy special grammatical status not extended to 3rd person.

I suggest that Silverstein's hierarchy applies to agent-patient languages in the following way: if the agent-patient system is used in a language, then it will always outrank any other case marking system, be it accusative, ergative, or neutral. From that, the implication follows that if a language has agent-patient case marking in 3rd person (as Iroquoian and Paraguayan Guarani do), it will also have agent-patient marking in 1st and 2nd persons.

There are other types of agent-patient splits that deserve attention. Tupinamba, a 16th century Tupi-Guarani language of Brazil, displays a particularly interesting type of split. [6] Although there are several other complicating factors in Tupinamba, there is a clear difference in case marking between indicative mood and subjunctive mood. Indicative verbs follow the agent-patient pattern, while subjunctive verbs are ergative. DeLancey (to appear) reports another type of split in Lhasa Tibetan: perfective aspect displays an agent-patient pattern, with what DeLancey calls the ergative case obligatory for subjects of active intransitives and subjects of transitives. In the imperfective aspect and future tense, however, the ergative case is optional: here the pattern seems to be "fluid-S", with semantic information conveyed by choice of case.

It seems that there are at least as many possibilities for split case marking involving the agent-patient system, as have been observed for splits between the ergative and accusative systems.

Footnotes

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[1] The case marking typology discussed in this paper is one of morphological case, not syntactic case.

[2] The inclusion of a specific lexical item, such as 'die' in the stative/change-of-state class of intransitive verbs, should not be considered a necessary criterion for calling a particular case marking system "agent-patient". Rather, the claim is that most of the verbs in one class will be active intransitives, while most of the verbs in the other class will have non-agent subjects.

[3] Scott DeLancey (to appear) has reported "fluid-S" verbs in Tibeto-Burman languages, as well. See the discussion in section 4. of this paper.

- [4] Unless the language is one of the few agent-patient languages that allows "fluid-S" marking, discussed above.
- [5] All the Wichita examples are from Rood (1971, 1976), and are given in the form used there. The strings on the left represent underlying forms of morphemes, with the phonemic representation given in the square brackets.
- [6] I am indebted to Aryon Rodrigues for providing the Tupinamba data.

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