Markedness and the Dominant Category

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Abstract

Based on a careful analysis of Georgian nominal and verbal markers, we propose a hierarchy governing their assignment. We introduce the 'principle of communicative act' to account for the dichotomy in I/II and III series. We argue that languages cannot simply be characterized as 'mixed ergative systems' but it is necessary to state of which hierarchical relations they make use.

1 Introduction

The concept of markedness has played a significant role in the linguistic theory. It developed from the work of Trubetzkoy through [11], [8], [7], [5] and others and nowadays is mostly used as a tool for cognitive explanations of morpho-syntactic markedness patterns. According to [7], grammar is the set of instructions on processing of discourse and structurally marked items are usually cognitively marked. The marked and unmarked values can be conceived of as paradigmatic alternatives, and the concept of markedness may consequently be regarded as the main concept in the strategy of mapping a conceptual representation into a linguistic representation. Linguistic and extralinguistic factors determine the markedness category differently in different languages, based on criteria such as the following:

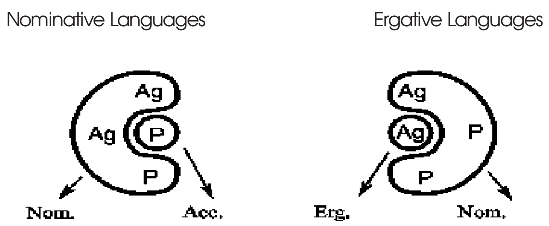
- socio-cultural - e.g., some languages with the grammatical category of gender distinguish feminine gender as the marked category, while masculine gender is frequently the unmarked one;
- cultural traditions - e.g., markedness of polite forms in Japanese;
- religious - e.g., in Batsbi, the word God never appears with ergative case marker;
- universal semantic oppositions - e.g., the formal opposition of singular (unmarked) vs. plural (marked) in numerous languages.[1]

[1] Note that the fact that the conceptually marked and unmarked categories are both for-

2 Markedness and cases

The markedness feature also determines case assignment: the unmarked noun is qualified as the functionally main one and represented by the unmarked, direct case (absolutive, nominative).[2] How can we explain the morphological equality and integrity of S-P (Subject-Patient) in the ergative languages?[3]

Figure 1.: Case distribution in nominative and ergative languages.



We can conceive the existence of a particular semantic category, which unites the S-P in one morphological class: the semantic orientation on patient for transitive verbs and on subjects for intransitive verbs. In intransitive semantics, the concrete lexical meaning of the verb is defined according to the semantics of the subject: e.g., a person *walks*, a bird *flies*, a snake *slithers*, a boat *sails*, etc. On the other hand, in case of general transitive semantics, the verb meaning is defined by the semantics of the object: *a letter → to write*, *a picture → to draw, a house → to build*, etc. Such semantic orientation of the verb may be called Semantic Agreement (SA). It can be further demonstrated by Georgian verb couples that differ only by animacy of the nouns: for transitive semantics, the decisive role is the Patient (more exactly its animacy). e. g. *caiqvana* 'took

mally marked (e.g., in Latvian, both sing. and pl. have non-zero markers, while in Mandarin Chinese sing,. and pl. have zero markers), or formally unmarked does not mean that the cognitively marked category is not universally marked (see [6] for a discussion about the markedness of the value plural). The only counterevidence would be posed by a language that has the opposite configuration of zero and non zero markers for number (or any other category).

[2]Nominative (or absolutive) is the case, that is employed in citation (viz [14]'s definition, p.55). Although nominative in Georgian has no zero marker, it is functionally 'main' (it is used as the citation form and governs verb agreement) and unmarked, especially in opposition with other cases, which indicate marked functions and roles of nouns.

[3]There are now several critical works on ergativity in the Kartvelian languages: [3], [15], [17].

somebody' (P is [+anim]) but *caiyo* 'took something' (P is [-anim]); for the Subject *cevs* 'somebody is lying' but *devs* 'something is lying'.

We can hypothesize that the passive and ergative constructions exclude each other because they both express grammaticalization of one category - Semantic Agreement, but on different levels.[4] The ergative construction implies the realization of the SA at the first stage of sentence generation, whereas the passive construction is, in the first place, associated with the expression of the S-O category and only in the second place with the SA realization. As a result, in both cases the same construction is derived: Ag (in indirect case) and P (in direct case).

These synchronic and diachronic contacts are traced in typological linguistics, the main aim of which is to define the deep, universal structures. However, which is the underlying structure, the nominative or the ergative one?

In our opinion, it would be better not to try to reduce these two constructions to one, but rather to describe them by those categories that are dominant in determining their semantics: for the nominative construction, it is the category S-O and for the ergative one - SA. Thus, in the system of grammatical categories of the nominative languages the dominant semantic category is S-O. All other categories are on a lower hierarchical level, thus S-O > SA. However, in the system of grammatical categories of the ergative languages, the most important feature is the marking of SA; thus SA > S-O. Therefore, we can say that the nominative and ergative constructions have the same underlying structure, but different dominant semantic category and hierarchies of grammatical categories.

Ergative constructions can emerge in nominative languages as a result of P actualization and usually are restricted to past, perfect and perfective aspect forms. In such cases the importance of P is increased: the result of the complete action is available and P actualization is more necessary than in the case of an incomplete action.

3 The notion of a Dominant Semantic Category

The categories S/O, SA and Activity seem to be cognitively universal concepts. Nevertheless, some languages prefer to grammaticalize S/O, while other languages choose either for SA or for Activity.

In general we can say that while the grammars of all human languages share a set of constraints in markedness, these constraints are so simple and general that they conflict in many contexts; they cannot all be satisfied simultaneously. The grammar of an individual language resolves these conflicts by ranking the universal constraints into a constraint hierarchy, conflicts being resolved in favor of higher-ranked constraints, with each constraint having absolute priority over all lower-ranked constraints.

[4]This idea originates from P. Uslar and was developed by other scholars. It was the favorite explanation of ergative constructions in XIX. century linguistics.

The dominant category further implicates the grammaticalisation of other semantic or functional categories. E.g., in languages with the dominant S/O category, we expect markedness in gender, definitness, present tense, imperfect, passive voice, dynamic verbs and so on, while in languages with the SA grammatical category class, it would be indefinitness, past tense, perfect, static verbs and so on. Obviously, the notation of the dominant category is very important for an adequate analysis of a given language. However, in Georgian (and other Kartvelian languages) neither O-S[5], nor SA, nor Activeness[6] is decisive. In the next section, we will have a look at the Georgian data in detail.

4 Georgian data

Formal analysis of the Georgian case patterns gives us the following information:

1. The I/II personal pronouns *me* (I), *en* (you-sing.), *even* (we), *tkven* (you-plural) never add case markers, they are always unmarked.
2. All other nouns show three main case patterns:
   (a) **NOM - (DAT) -** I series forms: present, imperfect, present subjunctive, future, conditional, future subjunctive
   K'ac-i *cxovrobs.* ('A man lives.')
   K'ac-i *surat-s xat'avs.* ('A man paints a picture.')
   K'ac-i *c'evs.* ('A man lies.')
   (b) **ERG-(NOM) -** II series forms: aorist, aorist subjunctive
   K'ac-ma *icxovra.* ('A man lived.')
   K'ac-ma *surat-i daxata.* ('A man painted a picture.')
   K'ac-i *dac'va.* ('A man lay.')
   (c) **DAT-(NOM) -** III series forms: perfect, pluperfect, III-subjunctive.
   K'ac-s *ucxovria.* ('A man has lived.')
   K'ac-s *surat-i dauxat'avs.* ('A man has painted a picture.')
   K'ac-i *dac'olila.* ('A man has lain.')

These systems prove the existence of the I/II - III formal dichotomy: the I/II person subsystem does not distinguish the roles of the nouns, since Ag and P (and Ad(dressee)) can all be unmarked. In the III person subsystem in the I series, S is always in nominative: *-i* (after consonants) // - Ø (after vowels),

[5]The reason is that no formal marking expresses the S-O category (See [16], [4] and others). Nevertheless S-O is relevant on the level of syntax, especially for the present tense verb forms (see [9]).

[6]It seems natural to define the Kartvelian languages as active languages ([13]), although some problems still remain ([9], [3]). In particular, there is a group of verbs like *igineba* - 'to curse' - which have active semantics, but passive morphology. Also, some active verbs do not trigger ergative: *kaci midis* ('A man-nom is walking'), *kaci cavida* ('A man-nom went').

and O in dative (-*s*).[7] It is thus a nominative system, while II and III are ergative systems: S of the transitive verb in II series appears with a special case represented by the suffix **ma** (after consonants) // **-m** (after vowels); in III series with the dative ending **-s**. All other nouns (S_{intr} and O_{tr}) are in nominative and trigger verb concord.

There are two types of verbal affixes, the V-type and the M-type:

	V-type		M-type	
	sing.	pl.	sing.	pl.
I.	**v-**	**v- -t**	**m-**	**gv-**
II.	**-t**	**g-**	**g-**	**-t**
III.	**-s, a, o**	**-n, en, an, nen, es** Ø	**h, s, Ø-**	**h, s, Ø- -t** Ø

Traditionally, the V-type endings are considered to be subject markers, while the M-type are object markers. Note, however, that this is not always the case: in the III series and also with affective verbs the subject appears with the M-type and object with the V-type: *mia* ('I am hungry'), *meinia* ('I am afraid'), *mciva* ('I am cold'), *mezineba* ('I want to sleep'), *minda* ('I want'). For that reason, most Georgian scholars traditionally qualify these forms as inversive ones.

In general, it seems better to analyze these markers without any functional qualification, simply by their relation to cases ([4]):

1. Noun in dative always triggers M-type affixes;
2. Noun in ergative always triggers V-type affixes;
3. Noun in nominative triggers either
   (a) V-type (if there is no ergative linked with the verb), or
   (b) M-type (in case there is an ergative linked with the verb), or
   (c) zero (if both ergative and dative appear in the construction).[8]

Based on the rules above, we can make the following generalizations:

1. The V-type affixes should be represented in the verb form even in cases when V-triggering noun is empty. [9]
2. From the point of view of the triggering V-type affixes, there are the following hierarchical relations: ergative (always) > nominative (sometimes)> dative (never). With respect to verb concord, I/II personal pronouns behave similarly as ergative, dative or nominative nouns. Consequently, we

[7]There is no special case for Patient; Addressee and Patient both have the same (dative) ending: *kaci ucers cign-s* (P) *deda-s* (Ad) ('A man- nom writes a book-dat for mother-dat').

[8]The zero allomorph is used when the nouns stands in dative with the I series forms, but in nominative with the II-III series.

[9]Empty" denotes such head-nouns which never occur in surface structures (e.g. *c'vims* 'It rains').

may speak about I/II ergative (always triggers V-), I/II dative (always triggers M-) and nominative (triggers either M-, or V-, or Ø).

3. I/II pronouns always trigger prefixes, while other nouns mostly suffixes.[10]

4. In case of several prefixes, a competitive situation arises, as there is no possibility of prefix clustering.[11]

When there is a competition among prefixes (both I/II persons are linked with the verb), the hierarchically weaker case wins? :[12]

1. I/II nominative and I/II dative → I/II dative

2. I/II ergative and I/II dative → I/II dative

3. I/II ergative and I/II nominative → I/II nominative

In case there is no competitive situation (this happens mostly when I/II meets III), both markers will be present on polypersonal verb form:[13]

4.1 Semantic and functional analysis of these forms

I/II personal pronouns are always unmarked by cases and they thus qualify as functionally 'main'. They are always represented on the verb form by V- or M-type person prefixes and the plural suffix *-t*. The difference in the opposition of V- and M-types may be explained by different semantics of the nouns: (a) if the volitionality of the agent (expressed by the noun) is implied by the action (e.g. 'I play', 'I work', 'I write'), it will be represented by the V-type markers; (b) if the volitionality of the agent is not implied by the verbal semantics (e.g., 'he writes to me', 'he paints me', 'I am afraid', 'I am hungry', 'It seems I have been here', and so on), it will trigger an M-type marker. The rule reflecting the competition between prefixes reveals that non-volitional I/II agents which are in dative and trigger M-type markers, always take precedence over other nouns. From this fact, we can conclude that they are marked. All other nouns (non-participants of the communicative act) behave differently. Depending on various tense forms (I, II or III series), they follow either the nominative or the ergative (extended to the activity category) case patterns. Differentiation by the roles of Ag, P or Ad is more relevant for them. Constraints which govern the choice of either ergative

[10] The III person dative is marked by the allomorphs: **h-** (before the sounds /b/, /p/, /g/, /k/, /q/, etc.); **s-**(before the sounds /d/, /t/, /t'/, /z/, /č/, /č'/, or Ø elsewhere).

[11] The only obvious exception is the combination of I person (nominative - ergative) plus III person (dative) marker in literary Modern Georgian: *v-s-cer* (cmp. spoken Georgian: **v-***er*) ('I write it (to) him').

[12] With affective verbs and with the III series verb forms, however, both nouns are represented: *me sen m-iqu 'var-x-ar* 'I love you' (I (dat) you (nom) I-love-you-is).

[13] If there are three nouns linked with the verb, more complex constructions with the reflexive *tav-* can arise: *man en emi tavi da-g-I-xat-a* (he (erg) you (dat) mine (nom) refl (nom) prev-you-version-wrote-he).

or nominative systems are simple: nominative (with S/O dominant category) for the present tense forms and extended ergative (with SA (Act) as the dominant category) for the past-perfect forms.[14] There is a direct correlation between case patterns and verb concord for I and III series:

- I series exhibit the nominative system:
  - S → V-type markers, which correspond to nominative noun;
  - Dir O → M-type markers, which correspond to dative noun;
  - Indir O → M-type markers, which correspond to dative noun.
- III series show ergative system (extended to the category of activity):
  - Ag → M-type markers, which correspond to dative noun;
  - P → V-type markers, which correspond to nominative noun.

A complex situation arises in the II-series, where noun cases exhibit the ergative system, while the verb concord is nominative.

This peculiar division of marked and unmarked nouns indicates that in the II series, there are two constraints at conflict. The I/II-III dichotomy defines the III person as marked, while the role opposition (Ag-P) most naturally for past tenses (such as the II series) selects for the SA category as dominant and consequently, P (which is prototypically III person) is unmarked. Thus, III person is conceptually unmarked (according to the roles) and marked (according to the I/II-III dichotomy) at the same time. (And vice versa: I/II person is cognitively unmarked according to the dichotomy). As we have seen, Georgian resolves this conflict peacefully, by division of the case patters and verb concord and by destroying the direct correlation between them: case marking reflects the unmarkedness of the Patient (which appears in nominative), while verb concord defines its markedness by M-type affixes. The zero allomorph for the III person Patient in M-type affixes shows that the III person (especially inanimate one, as a prototypical Patient) is cognitively unmarked and consequently formally unmarked.[15]

A functional analysis of the polypersonal verb forms can clarify the main function of polypersonality: the obligatory denotation of I/II persons (unmarked) in the verb form. That is, the I/II persons are always represented in verb concord

[14] If we don't distinguish nouns by the S/O functions and analyze them by the semantic feature 'volitionality' instead, so-called inversive verbs (which are semantically affective ones) do not differ from others in triggering verb concord : *m-ia* ('I am hungry'), *me-inia* ('I am afraid'), *m-civa* ('I am cold') and so on. The subject of these verbs appears in the dative and has to be expressed by the M-type affixes. E.g., the subject of the verb *miqvars* (to love) in Georgian stands in dative and triggers M-type markers. We could say that according to the Georgian language, love is an involuntary action - the subject loves independently of his/her will and the object causes the affection.

[15] Although there are some exceptions: *ga-s-ca* ('he gave something'), *ga-s-cia* ('he went).

without any constraints, while the III person only under certain circumstamces.[16]

4.2 Definition of the Dominant category in Georgian

The I/II-III dichotomy that has become obvious after our analysis of the marked-unmarked distinction among nouns (as indicated by case marking and verb concord and proved also by the main function of polypersonal verb forms) is strengthened by many other grammatical categories of Georgian:

- **the category of version**
  If the Patient belongs to the I/II persons, the verb has the prefix **i-**, e.g., *m-i-cer* ('you write to me'). If the Patient belongs to the III person, the verb has either the prefix **i-** (in case the III person is the subject), or **u-** (in case the III person is the indirect object): *i-ćer-s* ('he writes for himself') *u-ćer-s* ('he writes to him').

- **the category of direction**
  If the action is directed towards the III person, the verb forms are denoted by simple prefixes expressing direction: *a-dis* ('he goes up'), *ča-dis* ('he goes down'), *ga-dis* ('he goes out'), *še-dis* ('he goes into') and so on.

If the action is directed towards the I/II persons, the prefix **mo-** and its compounds are used: *amo-dis* ('he goes up to me/you'), *čamo-dis* ('he goes down to me/you'), *gamo-dis* ('he goes out to me/you'), *šemo-dis* ('he goes into to me/you') and so on.

These facts support the hypothesis that in Georgian the dominant category is the one which causes the I/II and III formal dichotomy. We propose that the relevant category is **participation in the communicative act** (CA).

According to this category, the participants in the communicative act (I/II persons, locutors) are unmarked and functionally main, while non-participants (III person, non-locutor) are marked and functionally minor. In other words, Georgian reflects the reality via the prism of a communicative act. This very category stands on the highest level in the hierarchy of grammatical categories and governs case patterns, as well as verb concord. From this particular perspective, the I/II persons are obligatory and consequently they are regarded as conceptually unmarked. The III person nouns, on the other hand, are regarded as marked.

The perspective can be made broader via a differentiation of III person roles. This differentiation is more restricted and complex: markedness is defined according to various tenses and moods and different hierarchies among the categories S/O, SA, Activity and Communicative Act can be observed:

[16]The III person is contained in portmanteau affixes: **-s** expresses subject of active verbs in present and subject of verbs in subjunctive mood; **-a** subject of passive verbs in present and subject of verbs in past; **-o** some verbs in aorist etc.

I series: CA > S/O > SA(Act)
II series: CA > S/O > SA(Act)
III series: CA > SA(Act)> S/O

In that manner, some units become more usual and frequent via turning marked units into unmarked ones.

5 Typological Perspectives of the Dominant Category

Through a careful analysis of the Georgian data, a new dominant category has been established. There could exist other types of languages with different dominant categories - e.g., in Japanese, Topic seems to be the dominant category, given that it governs verb agreement:

Topic is marked	by	**-wa**
S (nom)	by	**-ga**
Dir O(acc)	by	**-o**
Indir O (dat)	by	**-ni**

Competition rules: **-ga-wa** > **-wa**, **-o-wa** > **-wa**

From these facts we can conclude that topic is hierarchically stronger, i.e., Topic > S/O. [12] in his comprehensive relational typology proposes that the three main dimensions of relational structuring are those of semantic roles, information flow, and deistic anchoring. Languages can be divided into three major types, depending on the extent to which these dimensions are grammaticalised: "pivotless" languages, with no or little grammaticalization of any of these dimensions, "pure" languages, strongly grammaticalizing only one of them (usually that of semantic roles), and "mixed" languages, strongly grammaticalizing more than one dimension. According to this typology, Georgian is a mixed language, more precisely a role-deixis-oriented language, but the same qualification would appply to Batsbi (Tsova-Tush), where ergative construction is used provided that the noun is (i) Ag, (ii) I/II person, and (iii) acts according to his/her will and controls the action.[17] However, verb concord (class markers) is not restricted to I/II person and the Patient doesn't show the I/II versus III dichotomy either (no person markers for it). Therefore, it seems that in Tsova-Tush, SA is stronger and stands over the communicative act category: SA > Communicative Act > Activity. In Georgian, on the other hand, a different hierarchy should be used to arrive at adequate linguistic structures: CA > SA//S/O. To

[17] As [10] mentions: "When I constructed the first person form for the verb 'get poor' in Tsora-Tush using [Sa] (ergative noun) marking, my consultant did not say categorically that it wasn't possible. She said it isn't possible because you would never want to be poor" (p. 115).

summarize, although Batsbi is similar to Georgian in one respect, it also differs from it in a significant way. The same could be said about Basque, where there is a nominative system in the past tense verb concord, and an ergative system in the present. This seems unnatural and typologically unexpected, since most of the time ergative system is characteristic for the past, and nominative for the present tense forms. It is relevant to note that nominative constructions arise only in case the patient is the III person. This fact suggests that in Basque, the I/II versus III dichotomy plays a significant role, although the hierarchy among relevant categories seems to be different from Georgian: SA > CA > S/O.

We can conclude from the examples above that for purposes of a comprehensive description of languages, it is not enough to define languages as merely mixed systems, but also state of which hierarchies they make use.

The idea of defining the dominant category and hierarchies among grammatical categories should be further explored in further typological studies. The dominant category can be used as the qualifying criterion for identification of groups of typologically close languages and their classification, along with hierarchical oppositions between grammatical categories. The hierarchies are defined according to the priority given to marked categories during surface realizations.

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