BASQUE AS A NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE LANGUAGE[*]

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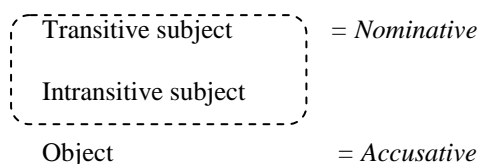*University of Toronto*

This paper considers how ergative alignment in Basque differs from that found in other ergative languages and how this system may be derived. In other ergative languages (E.g. Bandjalang, Warlpiri), all intransitive verbs have absolutive case subjects, regardless of any theta-related distinctions between agent and theme. In Basque, however, absolutive case appears only on subjects of unaccusative verbs. Unergative verbs pattern with transitive verbs in the sense that their sole (agent) argument is assigned ergative case. Previous analyses of ergativity (e.g. Chomsky 1991, Legate 2002) have related case marking to distinctions between transitive and intransitive verbs. Such analyses are not consistent with Basque data, however, given that the ergative-absolutive split in this language relates to verb agentivity rather than transitivity. I suggest that Basque can be analysed as a structural nominative-accusative language in which apparent ergative-absolutive patterning arises due to a particular property of non-agentive *v* (namely, the presence of Case).

1.   Introduction

One of the properties which set Basque apart from its neighbouring Indo-European languages is its Ergative-Absolutive case marking system. The main contrast between Ergative-Absolutive and Nominative-Accusative languages lies in subject-object patterning: in ergative languages (e.g. Basque, Inuktitut, Warlpiri) intransitive subjects pattern with transitive objects (generally speaking), whilst in accusative languages (E.g. English, French) transitive and intransitive subjects pattern together. This is summarized in Figure 1.
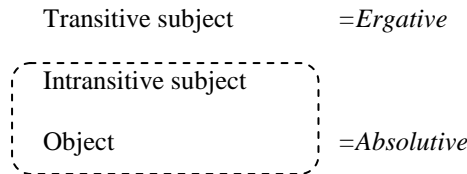

Figure 1: Ergative and Accusative alignment and case marking patterns

a.   Nominative-accusative

Transitive subject   = *Nominative*

Intransitive subject

Object   = *Accusative*

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b.   Ergative-absolutive

Transitive subject   =*Ergative*

Intransitive subject

Object   =*Absolutive*

Subjects of Basque transitive verbs are case marked ergative (suffix –*k*), whilst objects of transitives and subjects of (some) intransitives receive absolutive case (unmarked)[1]. Examples are given in (1). *Medikua* in (a) is case marked ergative as the subject of the transitive verb *beldurtzen*, whilst the object *pirata* has a null (absolutive) suffix. In the intransitive example in (b), the subject *pirata* again has absolutive case.

(1)   a. Medikua-k pirata-Ø   beldurtzen du
            doctor-ERG pirate-ABS frighten   Aux.
            'The doctor frightens the pirate'

         b. Pirata-Ø   abiatzen da
            pirate-ABS depart   Aux.
            'The pirate departs'   (Santesteban et al. 2010:1)

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 discusses how the unergative-unaccusative distinction in intransitives pertains to case marking in Basque, section 3 outlines relevant syntactic and morphological characteristics of the language, section 4 discusses the specifics of ergative-absolutive case assignment and section 5 considers the potential ramifications for theories of ergativity per se.
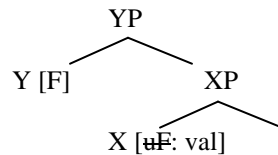
1.1   Assumptions Regarding Feature Valuation

As according to Chomsky (2000), I consider feature interpretability as synonymous with feature valuation. That is to say, all features bearing a value are interpretable and those features which are unvalued are also uninterpretable, and must receive a value from another syntactic item in order for the derivation to converge. Following Wurmbrand (2012) I assume that uninterpretable

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[1] A distinction is typically made in ergative literature between morphological and syntactic ergativity. In morphologically ergative languages such as Basque, ergativity is reflected merely in case marking patterns. 'Syntactic' ergativity refers to syntactic behaviour of absolutive DPs. In languages characterized as syntactically ergative (E.g. Dyirbal; Dixon 1994), absolutive DPs have properties typically associated with subjecthood and hence behave akin to nominative DPs in accusative languages such as English. Basque does not show any characteristics of syntactic ergativity and is hence characterized as morphologically ergative; for a more detailed discussion with relevant examples, see Tollan (2013).
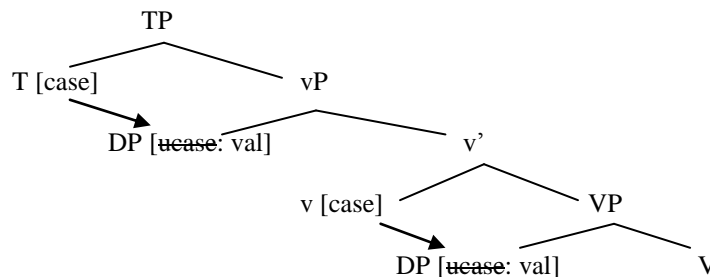
features on syntactic items are valued in a downward fashion via a mechanism of 'Reverse Agree', in which an item X bearing an uninterpretable feature F receives a value if and only if it is c-commanded by an item Y with a matching interpretable value, and there is no intervening item between Y and X which also requires a value F. Reverse Agree is illustrated in (2).

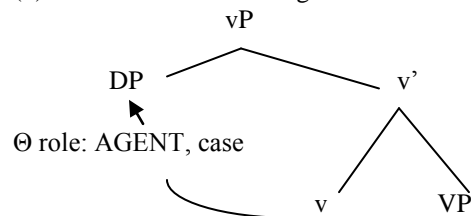(2)   Reverse Agree

YP
Y [F]   XP
          X [uF: val]

Following Legate (2002), I assume that a case value is uninterpretable on a DP upon entering a derivation, but interpretable on a case-assigning head such as *v* or T; (3).

(3)   Valuation of case

TP
T [case]   vP
          DP [ucase: val]   v'
                    v [case]   VP
                              DP [ucase: val]   V

I assume structural case to be assigned by Reverse Agree, whilst assignment of inherent case (i.e. that which is associated with theta-role rather than structural position) is synonymous with theta-role assignment and thereby assigned under any configuration under which a theta-role is assigned. This may not necessarily be a Reverse Agree configuration (e.g. assignment of agent theta role from *v* to its specifier; (4)).
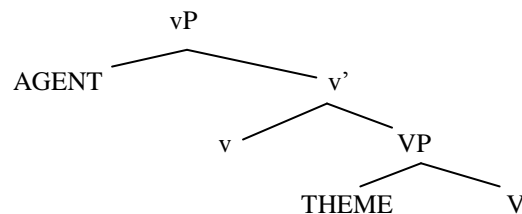
(4)   Inherent case assignment

vP
DP   v'
Θ role: AGENT, case
                    v   VP

§4.2 discuses whether case assignment in Basque is structural, as in (3) or

inherent, as in (4).

2.   The Unergative – Unaccusative Distinction

Whilst ergative case marking is found in approximately a quarter of the world's languages (Song, 2001), ergative languages may differ with regards to how they treat the unergative-unaccusative split. Unergative and absolutive verbs are akin in the sense that both take a single argument, but differ with regard to the theta role assigned to that single argument. The sole argument of unergative verbs is commonly considered as an *agent* or external argument, merged in (spec vP) (Larson 1988). The single argument of an unaccusative is an internal *theme* argument, merged a complement to V. This is shown in (5).

(5)   Merge sites of external (agent) argument and internal (theme) argument

```
                 vP
               /    \
        AGENT         v'
                    /    \
                  v        VP
                         /    \
                   THEME        V
```

Thus unergative verbs can be thought of as patterning *semantically* with transitive verbs (in terms of the theta role of the subject) and *transitively* with unaccusative verbs (in terms of the number of arguments present). In most ergative languages, all intransitive subjects, regardless of the unergative-unaccusative distinction, take absolutive case, as is shown in (6) with Bandjalang (Parna-Nyugan). In (6b) the verb *ba* ('eat') has an absolutive subject when it is unergative, as opposed to an ergative subject (6a) when transitive.

(6)   a.   mali-yu ba:bam-bu mala-Ø bulan-Ø   ba-ila
               that-ERG child-ERG that-ABS meat-ABS eat-PRS
             'The child is eating the meat'

         b. mala-Ø   ba:bam-Ø ba-le-ila
             that-ABS child-ABS eat-PRS
             'The child is eating'   (Song, 2001:185)

In Basque however, unergatives pattern with transitives in the sense that the sole (agent) argument is assigned ergative case, as is the subject of a transitive verb, as in (7).[2]

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[2] Some eastern dialects of Basque follow the pattern found in Bandjalang, i.e. absolutive case is assigned to subject of unergative verbs as well as unaccusatives. Examples discussed in this paper are from the Western dialect.

(7)   Medikua-k   igeri egiten du
        doctor-ERG swim   Aux.
        'The doctor swims'

<div align="right">(Santesteban et al. 2010:1)</div>

As was seen in the transitive sentence in (1a), the agentive subject is assigned ergative case, regardless of whether or not a theme argument is present. As was the case in (1b), when the sole argument of an (unaccusative) predicate is the theme, absolutive case is assigned.

3.   Overview of Basque Syntax and Verb Agreement

Ergativity in Basque is also reflected in agreement morphology in finite clauses. Basque typically has a periphrastic verbal form,[3] whereby subject and object agreement are hosted on a finite auxiliary. Two different auxiliary verbs are used in Basque: unaccusative verbs are conjugated with *izan* ('to be'), whilst transitive and unergative verbs are conjugated with *edun* ('to have'[4]). *Edun* is found when the subject of the clause is ergative; *izan* when the subject is absolutive. In other words, edun occurs where an ergative DP is present; if only an absolutive DP is present, *izan* is found instead. The auxiliary must agree in number, person and gender with the subject as well as in number with any object present. See examples in 8[5].

(8)   a. Jon-ek   dantzatu du
            Jon-ERG danced   Aux.3Sg.E
            'John danced'

        b. Nekane-k   Miren eta Jon   ikusi ditu
            Nekane-ERG Miren-ABS and Jon-ABS seen Aux.Pl.3Sg.E
            'Nekane saw Miren and Jon'

        c. Miren eta Jon   etorri dira
            Miren-ABS and Jon-ABS came Aux.3pl.A
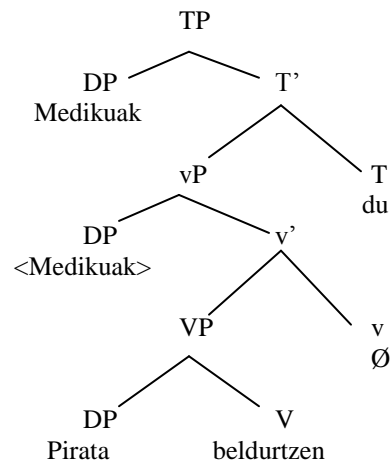   'Miren and Jon came'   (Rezac et al. 2010:5)

Basque is a head-final language which takes a specifier to the left of the head; see (9), for the transitive sentence in (1a) *Medikuak pirata beldurtzen du*. Basque is also pro-drop.

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[3] Basque also has a small number of synthetic verb forms which do not require an auxiliary to spell out tense/agreement

[4] For independent reasons relating to historical re-analysis, *edun* is never found in its non-finite form.

[5] I henceforth gloss auxiliaries as follows: [Aux. singular or plural object agreement (if present).subject agreement. E (ergative) or A (Absolutive)]

(9)[6]   Structure of Basque

```
                    TP
              ┌─────┴─────┐
            DP            T'
          Medikuak    ┌───┴───┐
                     vP        T
                 ┌───┴───┐     du
                DP       v'
             <Medikuak> ┌──┴──┐
                       VP      v
                   ┌───┴───┐   Ø
                  DP       V
                Pirata  beldurtzen
```

4.   Assignment of Ergative Case

4.1   Previous Account of Ergative-absolutive Case Marking

Chomsky (1991) proposes that the distinction between nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive languages lies in the selectional requirement of AgrS and AgrO. In a transitive clause, both AgrS and AgrO are present and assign case to the subject and object respectively. If only one DP is present, however, accusative and ergative language differ with respect to which Agr projection is 'active' and hence able to assign case. If AgrS is active, then the single DP has the same properties as the subject of a transitive clause, resulting in an accusative language. If AgrO is active, then the DP will share properties of objects of transitive clauses, hence the language is ergative. Bobaljik (1993) introduces the notion of the 'Obligatory Case Parameter' to refer to the functional projection which is active when only one argument is present. This is summarized in Table 2.

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[6] There is evidence from the Topic-focus word order found in Basque that the finite verb and topic (in this example *Medikuak*) raise to CP. I have shown here the structure as far as TP only for the sake of clarity. The issues concerning raising to CP are not relevant to my discussion or analyses. I will also be assuming TP as the locus of both tense and subject agreement. The locus of object agreement, whilst not relevant to the analysis which I will present, I assume to be *v*.
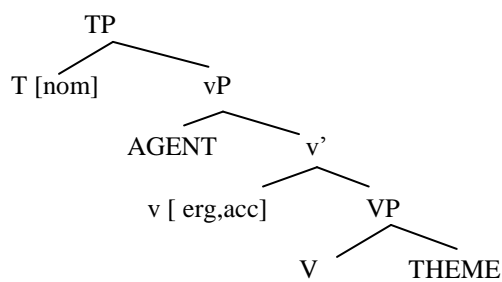
Table 2: Case assignment in ergative and accusative languages

	Case assigned by AgrS	Case assigned by AgrO	Obligatory Case Parameter (Bodalijk 1993)
Accusative languages	Nominative	Accusative	**AgrS**
Ergative languages	Ergative	Absolutive	**AgrO**

This analysis is however problematic for Basque since a single DP in an intransitive clause receives a different case value depending on the type on intransitive clause (i.e. the sole (agentive) argument of unergative predicates receives ergative case whilst the sole (theme) argument of unaccusatives receives absolutive case).
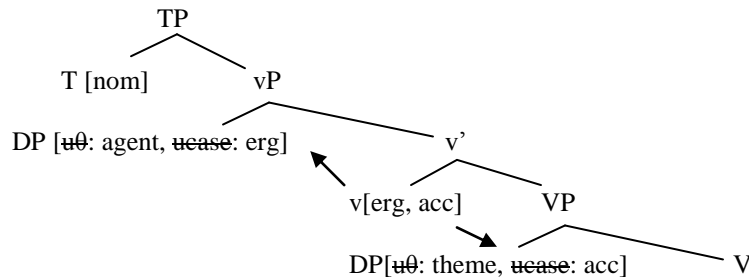
Legate's (2002, 2008) analysis of ergativity reduces ergative-absolutive case marking in part to a morphological phenomenon. Legate assumes that absolutive case is not assigned in the syntax, and that structural case is assigned in exactly the same way as in a nominative-accusative language, i.e. nominative by finite T and accusative by transitive v, as in (10).

(10)   Case values in Ergative languages (Legate 2002, 2008)

```
           TP
          /  \
    T [nom]   vP
             /  \
        AGENT    v'
                /  \
        v [ erg,acc]  VP
                     /  \
                    V    THEME
```
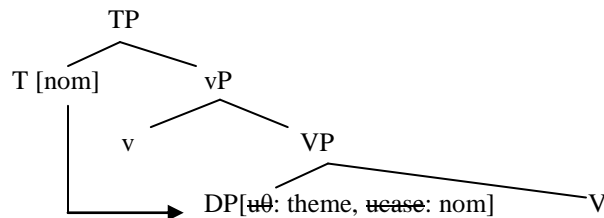
Ergative languages however differ from nominative-accusative languages in two ways. The first is morphological: nominative and accusative cases have the same spell-out form. The second distinction concerns transitive v, which, Legate claims assigns *two* case values in an ergative language. Transitive v inherently assigns ergative case to its specifier (i.e. to the external agent argument) and accusative case to direct object (i.e. the complement to V; the theme argument). In intransitive clauses, however, v has no case features. The theme argument therefore receives a nominative case value from T. Since nominative and accusative have the same spell-out form, the single theme DP has the same morphological surface form as it does when an agent DP is present. This is illustrated in (11)

(11)   a. Case assignment in a transitive clause

```
              TP
          ╱        ╲
      T [nom]       vP
              ╱          ╲
   DP [uθ: agent, ucase: erg]    v'
                        ╱      ╲
                 v[erg, acc]    VP
                            ╱        ╲
              DP[uθ: theme, ucase: acc]    V
```

b. Case assignment in an intransitive (unaccusative) clause

```
             TP
         ╱        ╲
     T [nom]       vP
                ╱        ╲
             v            VP
                      ╱        ╲
       DP[uθ: theme, ucase: nom]    V
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The problem with adopting Legate's analysis for Basque[7] is the same as that with Chomsky/Bobalijk model, namely, that it does not account for the unergative-unaccusative distinction. Nonetheless, a slight modification to Legate's analysis may account for the case marking patterns in Basque. If we are to reformulate the distinction between transitive *v* and intransitive *v* as a distinction between agentive *v* (i.e. that which assigns as agent theta-role) and non-agentive *v*, we could say instead that it is agentive *v* (present in transitive and unergative clauses) in Basque which has two case values (ergative and accusative) and non-agentive *v* (present only in unaccusative clauses) which has no case value. In a Basque transitive clause, therefore, ergative case is assigned to the subject DP and accusative to the object, as per Legate's original analysis.

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[7] Legate's analysis is based upon Warlpiri (Australian), which, like most ergative languages, sees absolutive case marking on the subjects of all intransitive (both unergative and unaccusative) verbs; (12).

(12)   a. Nyuntu-rlu-npa-ju   ngaju nya-ngu
             2-ERG-1SG.SUBJ-2SG.OBJ   1.ABS see-PAST
             'You saw me'

         b. Ngaju-rna   parnka-ja
             1.ABS-1SG.SUBJ run-PAST
             'I ran'   (Legate 2002:126)

In a Basque unergative clause such as (7) and (8a), ergative case is assigned to the subject by *v*, and accusative case is unassigned. This account implies that case marking in Basque is inherent as opposed to structural. Section 4.2 discusses evidence from gerund constructions which suggests that ergative case in Basque is in fact structural, such that neither Legate's original analysis nor the aforementioned adaptation of it can account for gerund data. An alternative analysis for Basque is proposed in §4.3.

4.2   Ergative Case in Basque: Structural or Inherent?

There is debate in the literature as to whether case in Basque is structural (i.e. dependent upon structural position of each case-valued DP) or inherent (dependent upon thematic role of the DP). Levin (1983) and Laka (2006) argue that case marking is Basque is inherent and is assigned by a theta role assigner to its assignee. As such, we would predict a direct correlation between thematic role and case assignment. This is indeed exactly what we find: as discussed at the end of the last subsection, a 'transitive-intransitive' distinction is not sufficient to account for case marking patterns in Basque. As shown by examples in (1), (7) and (8), case in Basque seems to be related to theta role: DPs assigned an agent theta role are also assigned ergative case (subjects of transitive and unergative constructions) and DPs assigned a theme role are assigned absolutive case (objects of transitive constructions and subjects of unaccusative constructions). Laka takes the unergative-unaccusative distinction as constituting evidence against a structural analysis of case in Basque: 'if the subject [of an unergative predicate] carries absoutive case, then we have a clear instance of case/theta role dissociation, and we can conclude that case is structural'….in intransitive clauses, therefore 'ergative case on the subject is not predicted' (p.377). Laka assumes that case values therefore are present on *v* (i.e. the assigner of theta roles), but does not present an exact analysis of how ergative and absolutive are assigned (although the adaptation of Legate's analysis for Basque discussed in §4.1 could work here). The problem is that there are certain structures in Basque (namely perceptive gerund constructions) in which the case marking patterns observed would *not* be predicted under such an analysis. Rezac et al. (2010) argue that case in Basque is structural on the basis of the correlation between ergative case and finiteness; namely that ergative case-marked DPs never appear in the Basque nonfinite *–tzen* perceptive gerund construction, even though an ergative DP appears in an equivalent finite construction. Of the two sentences in (13), only in (a) is the verb *harrapa* ('catch') finite (note the presence of the finite auxiliary *dituzte* which is lacking in the non-finite equivalent in (b)). And notably, it is only (a) in which the subject of *harrapa* (*katu* 'cat') takes ergative case marking. In (b), '*katu*' must be in absolutive case; ergative case is ungrammatical in this environment. (Note that the *–ak* suffix in Basque is a plural marker)

(13) a. [Katu-ek saguak harrapa-tu dituzte] la ikusi dut
          cats-ERG mice-ABS catch Aux.pl.3p.lE that seen Aux.sg.1sg.E
          'I saw that the cats caught the mice'

   b. [Katuak/*-ek saguak harrapa-tzen] ikusi ditut
       cats-ABS/*ERG mice-ABS catch-ing seen Aux.pl.1sg.E
       'I saw the cats catching the mice'

                                             (Rezac et al. 2010:4)

As 'catch' is a transitive verb, it is to be expected that its subject should be marked for ergative case. The DP '*katu'* is the agent regardless of whether its theta-role assigning verb is finite or not. This distinction is therefore not predicted under an analysis of inherent case, such as that of Laka or Legate. The phenomenon in (13b) is found in all –*tzen* perceptive gerunds; two further examples are given in (14) and (15).

(14)   Zer   ikusi duzu? [Miren   pianoa   jo-tzen]
          what-ABS seen Aux.sg.2plE [Miren-ABS piano-ABS play-ing]
          'What did you see? Miren playing the piano'

(15)   Azken hilabeteotan [gazteak   kale erdian   janz-ten] ikusi
          dut
          last   months-in   young.pl-ABS street middle-in dress-ing] seen
          Aux.sg.1sg.E
          'These last months, I have seen young people dressing in the middle
              of the street'

                                             (Rezac et al. 2010:8)

Rezac et al. conclude that 'the source of ergativity lies in the [T] system, since this is where *-tzen* gerunds differ from structures that license the ergative' (p.9). T must be missing (or impoverished) in the gerund construction, such that ergative case is not available. How, then, is absolutive case assigned? The short answer is: in the same way in which accusative case is assigned in equivalent gerund constructions in English such as 'I saw [*them* catching the mice]', i.e. by Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) from *v* on the perception verb (Basque *iku* 'see'). For Rezac et al., the clearest evidence for ECM is the inability of –*tzen* gerunds to license overt subjects in any other environment. Other than perception verbs such as 'see', they appear as control complements to verbs such as *utzi* 'let', *ahatzu* 'forget' and *lagundu* 'help' (Rezac et al. p.9). In all such constructions, however, the subject of the –*tzen* gerund can only be PRO. The overt subject (*katuak*, *Miren* and *gazteak* in (13b), (14) and (15) respectively) is therefore assigned case by the perception verb 'see' under ECM in the same way that *them* is case marked in the English gerund construction 'I

saw [*them* catching mice]'. ECM case assignment to the embedded subject *katuak* in (13b) is shown in (16).

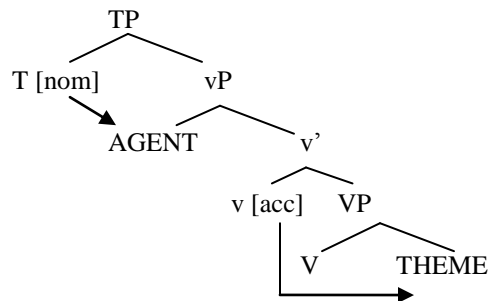(16)   ECM case assignment in *Katuak saguak harrapatzen ikusi ditut*

[*pro* [*<pro>* [[katuak [*<katuak>* saguak harrapa $_{vP}$] –tzen $_{TP}$] ikusi $_{VP}$] v_{abs} $_{vP}$]
ditut $_{TP}$]

As far as my discussion is concerned, what is most important is that ergative case in Basque must be associated with T (as is nominative case in English), such that ECM is required to license a subject of a gerund complement. We can conclude that ergative case is Basque is structural, and not inherent. As such, an analysis of case along the lines of that of Legate is ruled out. Some other factor must account for the apparent correlation between ergative-absolutive case and agent-theme theta roles.

4.3   An Alternative Analysis of Case Assignment for Basque

Something to note from the analysis of ECM in gerund constructions and the ergative-finiteness correlation is that, in these regards, the Basque case system is somewhat similar to nominative-accusative system of English. The difference between Basque and English however is that Basque theme DP, whether subjects or objects of their clause, always receive the same case (absolutive), whilst English theme DPs take accusative case only if they are objects of a transitive clause. Agent DPs are always assigned ergative case in finite clauses, just as they are always assigned nominative case in nominative-accusative languages. The properties giving rise to ergativity in Basque must therefore be associated with *v* (even though *v* is not responsible for assigning ergative case). My analysis is one in which ergative case is assigned by finite T and absolutive by *v*, just as nominative and accusative are assigned in English; (17).

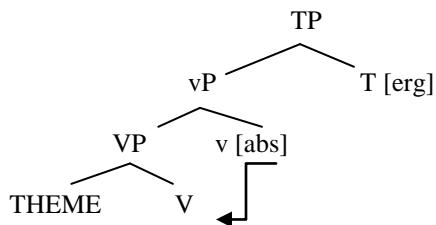(17)   Case assignment in English

In Nominative-Accusative languages, accusative case is available if and only if *v* is agentive (i.e. assigns an agent theta-role to its specifier). In an unaccusative, accusative case is not assigned due to the lacking of an (external) agent argument, as captured by Burzio's (1986) generalization (given in (18)).

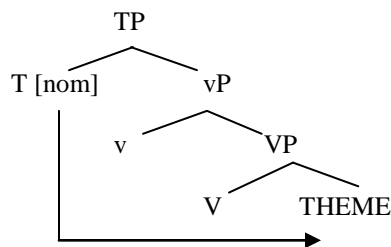(18)   Burzio's generalization (1986:178)

         All and only the verbs that can assign a theta-role to the subject can assign accusative Case to an object.

Basque can be said to differ from Nominative-Accusative languages (and constitute a counter-example to (18)) in that it *lacks a non-case assigning v*. As a result, absolutive case is always assigned to the complement of V (i.e. the theme/object), even in the absence of an agent in the specifier of *v*. Absolutive case is available but unassigned only in unergative constructions, where no theme is present. Similarly, ergative case is unassigned in unaccusative constructions, since the sole DP (the theme) receives its case value from the close case assigning head, which is *v*. The difference between case assignment in Basque unaccusatives and unaccusatives in Nominative-Accusative languages is shown in (19) (a) and (b) respectively.

(19)   a. Case assignment in an unaccusative in Basque

```
                        TP
                       /  \
                     vP    T [erg]
                    /  \
                  VP    v [abs]
                 /  \      |
            THEME    V  ___|
                       ←__|
```

         b.   Case assignment in an unaccusative in English

```
                     TP
                    /  \
             T [nom]    vP
                |      /  \
                |     v    VP
                |         /  \
                |        V    THEME
                |_____→
```

Finite T in both Basque and English assigns case (in English 'nominative'; in Basque 'ergative') to the closest DP requiring a case value. In transitive or

unergative constructions, this is the agent DP (subject). Case is assigned to the theme (or transitive object) by v (in English 'accusative'; in Basque 'absolutive'). In Basque, this case value is assigned regardless of whether v is agentive or not. In English, this case value is only assigned by agentive v. Non-agentive v lacks a case value, and as such the theme is reliant upon T for case. Since there is no intervening agent DP, case is assigned by T to the theme (subject) of an unaccusative construction. This analysis of case assignment in Basque can be summarized as in (20).

> (20)   Basque can be analyzed as a nominative-accusative language
>   which lacks a non-case assigning v.

As such, there is in fact no reason theoretically not to refer to 'ergative' and 'absolutive' case in Basque and nominative and accusative respectively, but in order to avoid confusion, I will continue to use the terms 'ergative' and 'absolutive' for the remainder of this paper.

5.   Accounting for Morphological Ergativity Elsewhere

The model of ergative-absolutive case assignment in Basque presented in §4.3 cannot account for ergative case marking patterns in languages Bandjalang and Warlpiri, in which an intransitive subject receives absolutive case regardless of its theta-role. This type of patterning can be explained by Legate's (2002, 2008) analysis for Warlpiri, but not by the analysis for Basque which I have put forward (likewise, the pattern observed in Basque can be explained by my analysis but not by Legate's).

One of the key distinctions between Legate's accounts of case assignment and that which I have proposed for Basque (besides differences in number of case values available on v) is the distinction between different v types. Legate's model distinguishes between transitive v and intransitive v in terms of availability of case values. Crucially, ergative and accusative case are available on transitive v but not on intransitive v. This suggests that the languages for which Legate's modal may account (e.g. Warlpiri, Bandjalang) show sensitivity to the *number* of arguments present (i.e. one or two). Case values (ergative and accusative) are available on v when two arguments are present, and absent when one argument is present. The distinction between unergative and unaccusative predicates is of no apparent import with respect to case. It can be said that v in these languages is sensitive to argument *valence*. On the other hand, languages whose case marking patterns are captured by Burzio's (1986) generalisation (see (18)) can be said instead to show a different kind of sensitivity. Recall that accusative case is assigned to a theme argument only when an external (agent) argument is present. Under such an analysis, v is sensitive to argument *type* in the sense that its case value is present when the verb has an external/agent argument and absent when it does not. For those languages which fit Burzio's generalisation, a distinction can be drawn between agentive and non-agentive v as opposed to transitive and intransitive v.

I have claimed that Basque differs from other nominative-accusative languages in terms of case on v. Critically, Basque v always has a case value. As such, there is nothing in terms of case marking alone to firmly suggest that the sensitivity of little v in these languages is argument type as opposed to argument valence. If the sensitivity of v were valence (clause transitivity), the same case marking patterns would still be found: case in Basque being structural (see §4.2), and thereby valued in a downwards fashion, it happens that accusative case is only ever assigned to a theme and that nominative is only ever assigned to an agent. Even if the sensitivity of v was to valence, therefore, the subject of an unergative verb would still be assigned nominative case by T. What, then, can determine sensitivity besides case-marking? Recall that Basque has two auxiliaries: *edun* (found when an ergative/nominative DPs is present) and *izan* (found when only an absolutive/accusative DP is present). Given that (in western dialects at least) *edun* is used with transitive verbs and unergative and *izan* with unaccusative verbs. This distinction suggests that v in (western)[8] Basque is indeed sensitive to argument type (although this is not reflected in case marking since the same case value is available on both agentive and non-agentive v).

6.   Summary

In this paper I have highlighted that the distinction between unergative and unaccusative predicates has important implications for ergative-absolutive case assignment in Basque. Whilst agent DPs are uniformly assigned ergative case and theme DPs absolutive case, the observation that ergative case marking is dependent upon finiteness of T shows that case assignment in Basque must be structural as opposed to inherent. I have suggested that ergative-absolutive case assignment in Basque is identical to nominative-accusative case assignment; with the exception that non-agentive v has a case value in Basque which is lacking in Nominative-Accusative languages. This analysis for Basque, however, cannot account for Ergative-Absolutive languages such as Warlpiri in which subjects of unergative and unaccusative predicates have the same case value; this type of patterning is best explained by Legate's (2002, 2008) theory of case assignment. One of the main distinctions between Basque and those ergative languages whose patterning is captured by Legate's analysis is one of sensitivity of v to argument *type* versus argument *valence* respectively.

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[8] Eastern dialects of Basque align with Warlpiri and Bandjalang in terms of case marking (i.e. subjects of both unergative and unaccusative verbs take absolutive case whilst only transitive subjects take ergative case); the ergative system in such dialects could hence be captured by Legate (2002, 2008). Furthermore, the auxiliary *izan* ('be') is used with all intransitive verbs whilst *edun* ('have') is used only with transitive verbs. Eastern Basque can therefore be said to show sensitivity to argument valence.

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