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Note (added 2003): The term 'ergative verbs' and 'ergativity' stand here for 'unaccusative verbs' and 'unaccusativity'.

1. ABSTRACT

Tanya Reinhart
Tel Aviv University

LEXICAL PROPERTIES OF ERGATIVITY

Much of the current research regarding the lexical typology of ergative verbs has tried to relate ergativity to aspect (van Valin (1990), Hoekstra (ms, 1990) Levin and Rappaport (ms, 1990)). I will argue, first, that this direction is mistaken. The class of ergative verbs is not reducible to any of the known (and semantically solid) aspectual classes. Despite the liberal introduction of novel aspectual distinctions in this literature, they are not yet sufficient to define the ergative class. Rather, some of the other parameters explored by Levin and Rappaport prove to be more useful for the task.

I will follow a line proposed in Chierchia (1990), which stresses the similarity between the lexical process of intrinsic reflexivization and ergativity: In both, a verb has two theta roles (which may or may not be realized in transitive alternates of the verb), but they are identified in the lexicon. I pursue this line further, arguing that there is no need to distinguish the two semantically, and it is not an accident that 'the door opened' is truth conditionally equivalent to its intrinsic reflexive version in e.g. the German 'Die Tur offnete sich', or that Hebrew uses in some cases the same morphology ('hitpael') for both types.

Ergatives and intrinsic reflexive differ syntactically, though. While in the case of the intrinsic reflexives it is the external argument which must be syntactically realized, in the ergatives it may be the internal one. The major question I explore here is what this difference follows from. I.e. what are the lexical properties which determine when a verb allows for an ergative structure. Under Chierchia's approach, above, checking this should focus not on the ergative version of the verb, but on its transitive alternate, or an abstract parallel verb with two roles. The question is, then, when is it possible for a two-roles verb to absorb the external one in the lexicon.

The transitive alternates of ergative verbs always allow also instrument or non agent cause as subject, as in (1). This is not so with the transitive alternate of unergatives, as in (2), and some other transitive verbs not allowing such alternations are illustrated in (3).

- 1)
 - a. Max / the stick / the blast rolled the ball.
 - b. The painter / the brush / autumn reddened the leaves.
 - c. Max / the storm / the stone broke the window.
 - d. The enemy / the waves / the bomb sank the boat

- 2)
 - a. Max / *the leash / *the storm ran the dog.
 - b. Max / ?the whip / *the rain galloped the horse.

- 3)
 - a. The pianist /*the piano played the sonata
 - b. Max /*the spoon ate the soup
 - c. The gangster /? the money bribed the judge

To capture the class which allows such alternations, it is useful to classify thematic roles by features rather than by primitive roles. Two central features are +/- CAUSING CHANGE and +/- MENTAL STATE. The way these features, when combined, define some standard roles, is illustrated in (4).

4) AGENT CAUSE/instrument PATIENT/theme,benefic. EXPERIENCE

CAUSING CHANGE: +	+	-	-
MENTAL STATE INVOLVED:	+	-	+

The verbs which allow various thematic external roles, as (1) are specified only for +CAUSING CHANGE, which is consistent with the three roles of agent, cause and instrument. The verbs in (2) and (3) are specified for both +CAUSING CHANGE and +MENTAL STATE (i.e. for the agent role).

Now, given a case where two roles are identified in the lexicon, as in both ergatives and intrinsic reflexives, our question was when the syntactically realized argument must be the external one. A generalization observed by Fillmore and by Williams is that agent arguments must be realized universally in external argument position. It follows, then, that only the intrinsic reflexivization form is available for verbs with this role. In the other cases, where the verb is only specified for +CAUSING CHANGE, there are no restrictions on where the argument should be realised. Hence it can either take the ergative form, realizing the internal argument, or the intrinsic reflexive form as in the case of the German 'Die Tur offnete sich'. This claim can be easily checked in languages like Dutch and German, where intrinsic reflexivization is marked syntactically with a simplex anaphor (as 'sich' above). The relevant verbs occurring with no such anaphor can therefore only be ergative,

and they are only those specified for +CAUSING CHANGE.

2. HANDOUT

Tanya Reinhart
Tel Aviv University

LEXICAL PROPERTIES OF ERGATIVITY

1. The Problem.

1) Some ergative verbs (and the irrelevance of aspect):

STATES		EVENTS		
<u>Statives</u>	<u>Activities</u>	<u>Accomplishments</u>	<u>Achievements</u>	
be	roll	freeze	fall	
stay	move	wrinkle	drown	
remain	spin	redden	blush	
	rise	wither	arrive	
	slide	open	break	

2) A word-order test for ergatives in Hebrew:

I think that

- a. fell a child/*ran a child
- b. collapsed someone /*washed someone

2. Some non-controversial background assumptions.

- 3) a. Some version of the Theta Criterion: Every Theta-role must be realized/assigned.
- b. (Ideally,) The Theta-structure of a verb is preserved in its different syntactic forms.

- 4) Operations on **O** roles: (Chierchia (1990) and others).
- wash **O**₁, **O**₂
 - Non syntactic realization: x was washed - Ey (y washed x)
 - Role absorption: x washed - (R(wash))(x) <--> (x wash x)

3. Levin and Rappaport (1990):

5)	+DIR			-DIR
	+EXTERNAL CAUSE	-EXT. CAUSE	+EXT. CAUSE	-EXT.
CAUSE				
	arrive	run to the park	run	
	fall		roll	
	jump			
	=All verbs of the event group		=All verbs of the state group	

ERGATIVES

UNERGATIVES

+External Cause (slightly modified)= Allowing the event to be initiated by a cause other than that denoted by the subject.

- 6) Consequences (3b cannot be maintained):
- roll <**O**₁, **O**₂>: Lucie rolled the stone
 - roll **O**₂: The stone rolled
 - roll **O**₁: Lucie rolled (down the hill)

4. Ergatives and intrinsic reflexivization

- 7)
- wash, dress, shave, comb
 -

roll, collapse, faint, wrinkle

- 8) Chierchia 1990:
a. roll <O₁, O₂>
b. R'(roll) (O₂) (The stone rolled)
- 9) a. Die T_r_ffnete sich /The door opened, German
b. Die T_r zerbroch / The door broke
c. La porte se cassa

Ergative-reflexive alternations in Dutch

- 10) a. De suiker loste onmiddelijk op in de thee.
The sugar dissolved immediately -- in the tea.
b. De suiker is opgelost
The sugar BE dissolved
c. De suiker heeft zich opgelost.
The sugar HAVE dissolved SE (itself)
- 11) Max schammt zich /*Lucie
Max shamed SE (= Max is ashamed)

5. The problem restated: Which transitive verbs allow an ergative alternation?

Sumamry of the analysis so far:

- 12) a. roll <O₁, O₂>: Lucie rolled the stone
b. R(roll) O₂: The stone/Lucie rolled /hitgalgela
c. R(roll) O₁: Lucie rolled (in order to attract attention)
- 13) a. wash <O₁, O₂>: Max washed the dishes
b. R(wash) (O₁): Max washed / Max hitraxec
c. *R(wash) (O₂)
- 14) a. ...Rolled a boy -
b. *..washed a boy -
- 15) a. Max wast zich (Dutch)
b. *Max wast

Possible directions:

- a. Type of the internal role (patient versus theme)

