Morphological Ergativity, Accusative Syntax and Voice in
Djambarrpuyŋgu

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It is not always easy to assess the degree of syntactic ergativity (Dixon 1979a: 115 and ff., 1979b, 1980; Heath 1979, 1980) of a language, or, on the contrary, its accusativity.

This paper will examine some facts of coordination, subordination and voice in Djambarrpuyŋgu (Yolngu), a language of Arnhemland, Australia, from this point of view.

1. As in most Australian languages (Dixon 1980), verbs in Djambarrpuyŋgu fall into two distinct categories, transitive and intransitive. Indeed, with a transitive verb, both Agent and Patient N or Pron. Participants must generally be expressed. With an intransitive verb, only one of these participants is acceptable. Djambarrpuyŋgu has ergative morphology for constructions involving inanimates and non-totemic or lower (henceforth N.T.) animates (Tchekhoff and Zorc 1984 forthcoming); this means that the Subject of an intransitive verb has the same form as the Patient of a transitive one. On the contrary, higher and totemic animates (TO.) and humans have a three-way construction: the
Subject of a transitive verb construes differently from the Subject of an intransitive, and differently again from the Object of a transitive verb. As for pronouns of all persons, they construe according to an accusative construction, i.e. the Subject of a transitive and of an intransitive verb both show the same formal case, a different one from the Object. If we equate Agent with \( S_t \), and Patient with \( O_t \), the above relations can be diagrammed as in Chart I.

Inanimates and N.T. animates: \[ S_t \parallel S_i = O_t \] (ergative)

Humans, personal names, kin terms and also higher or TO. animates: \[ S_t \parallel S_i \parallel O_t \] (3-way)

Pronouns: \[ S_t = S_i \parallel O_t \] (accusative)

Chart I. Grammatical Relations

| Inanimates etc. | Erg | Abs | Abs |
| Humans, etc. | Erg | Abs | Acc |
| Pronouns | Abs | Abs | Acc |

Chart 2. Ergative and Accusative Marking
The middle column \( S_1 \) in Chart I and their identical (=) forms are unmarked phrases. All other forms are marked phrases. All unmarked NPs will be said to be in the Absolutive (henceforth Abs.). I prefer this name to nominative, for Abs. covers all unmarked cases including Subject of an accusative-type construction, as it does for pronouns in Djamarrpuyŋgu, whereas the reverse does not have to be true.³

Here are some examples of each of these constructions:

(1) Dirramu-y bumar weṭi
   man-Erg kill-past wallaby-Abs
   'The man killed a wallaby (N.T.).'

(2) Dirramu marrtji-n guya-lil
   man-Abs go-past fish-Ablative
   'The man went towards fishing.'

(3) barpurru linyu nhāma dirramu-ny
    yesterday we-du. saw boy-Acc
    'Yesterday we saw a boy.'

Now weṭi 'wallaby' is a Totem animal for some speakers; they will consequently give the word an accusative case ending, when it is Object of a transitive verb:
(4) Dirramu-y bumar weti-ny
    man-Erg kill-past Acc
'The man killed a wallaby (TO.).'

Interestingly, my informant gave me two sentences as follows:

(5) *garr̂a bumar weti  'I killed a wallaby.'

and added 'to eat', but

(6) *garr̂a bumar watu  'I killed a dog'

is unacceptable 'because, he said, you don't eat dog'. The proper way to say 'I killed a dog' is:

(7) watu-ny garr̂a bumar

with dog in the Acc. This shows us that dogs belong to higher or Totemic animates. It has a tripartite construction just as kin-terms do:

(8) napipi-ny dharpunjal yuku'yuku-ya, muka?
    uncle-Acc speared yg.bro.-Erg question
    'Was it Uncle whom Younger Brother speared?'

(9) yuku'yuku-ny dharpunjal napipi-ya
    yg.bro.-Acc speared uncle-Erg
    'Younger Brother, Uncle speared (him).'