

# The classification of $-n$ in Ninam

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# Introduction

- Ninam (aka Yanam, Shiriana)
- Speakers of all ages
- Influence from Portuguese and Spanish
- Isolated communities
- Linguistically under-described
  - Migliazza 1972
  - Gomez 1990



# Introduction

- (Re)classifying languages and linguistic phenomena is a core aspect of contemporary linguistics
- Hockett (1942) “the discipline of linguistics is a science of classification”
  - Perhaps true for some, but not all, practicing linguists
- In the Americas linguistic classification has been an on-going, important pursuit for a long time
  - Genetic, Areal, Typological

# Introduction

- The current resurgence in the concern of endangered languages and underdocumented languages has brought the ‘goal’ of classification to forefront.
- Knowing what we know now, how are the classifications setup before affected?
- Classifications are being questioned and refined.

*In my opinion this is one of the most important consequences of current discussions of language endangerment.*

# Introduction

- Two salient classifications of Ninam
  - Ergative-Absolutive alignment (Gomez 1990:129)
  - Amazonian linguistic area where languages change from Ergative to Accusative alignment (Derbyshire and Pullum 1987:316)
- CAIL Ninam project members have raised a lot of questions about alignment patterns
- An ergative classification has been propagated in every language catalog with Ninam information (i.e., WALS)
- Looking at these languages from the perspective of current theoretical notions of ergative alignment suggests other options.

# Introduction

- Ergative alignment
  - Languages which treat S and P the same, and A differently

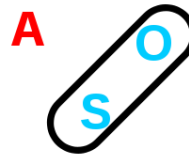


Figure 1. Ergativity. image taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergative%E2%80%93absolutive\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergative%E2%80%93absolutive_language)

- Accusative alignment
  - Languages which treat S and A the same, and P differently. (Payne 134)

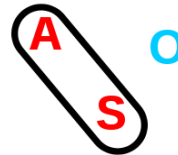


Figure 2. Accusativity. image taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergative%E2%80%93absolutive\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergative%E2%80%93absolutive_language)

# Introduction

- The world is never really that simple. Alignment patterns can be/are disrupted (split) by a number of linguistic elements.
  - TAM
  - Nominal Hierarchy/Relations between Speech-Act-Participants
  - Root Class/Semantics
  - Clause Type
  - Finite vs. Nonfinite

# Ninam Alignment

1. *Kori-n            šama štra-wei*

Kori-AGT tapir kill-NMLZ

‘Kori is killing the tapir’

2. *Kori hika-wei*

Kori smile-NMLZ

‘Kori is smiling’

- Ninam is an ergative languages - Migliazza (1972, pc)



# Ninam Alignment

- Gomez 1990:129
  - “Yanam has purely ergative sentences”
- Gomez 1990:130
  - “Accusative forms of the first and second person pronouns suggest a coexistence of ergative and accusative resulting in hybrid sentences”

# Ninam Alignment

3. *okoro-n*      *čee*                      *si-ware*              *kin*  
dog-AGT      1SG.ACC                      CLASS-bite      TAM  
'The dog bit me'

4. *ihi-n*                                      *čee*                      *nohima*              *keere*  
that.one-AGT                      1SG.ACC                      court                      TAM  
'He was courting me'

5. *ča*      *kēa=wii*                                      Gomez 1990:117  
I      work=NOMLZ  
'I was working'

# Ninam Alignment

- Gomez 1990:131
  - “Purely accusative sentences, however, do not occur. All this seems to indicate that Yanam may be in transition from an ergative to an accusative type of language”

# Ninam Alignment

- In all descriptions *-n* is assumed to mean ergative or agentivity.
- Problems
  - Not all subjects of transitive verbs (A) are marked with *-n*
  - In one sentence an intransitive verb subject (S) is marked with *-n*
  - Contrasts with Topic Marker
  - Instrumental meanings for this suffix
  - Accusative hybrids
  - Grammatical relations are determined via word order

# Transitive Subjects (A)

6.     *uhu-n wak  huraa-u*  
he-?  fire  blow-PROG  
‘He is blowing the fire’

7.     *tuhu-n  maup  koa-u*  
jaguar-? water drink-PROG  
‘The jaguar is drinking water’

# Transitive Subjects (A)

8. *čá-n yatena-k turua-u*

I-? leaf-PL gather-PROG

‘I am gathering leaves’

9. *kāho-n kama šu-u*

you-? him hit-PROG

‘You hit him’

## Transitive Subjects (A)

10.    *uh*    *yĩmka-k*    *hiorho-remi*  
he      ear.lobe-PL    pierce-TAM  
‘He pierces the ear lobes’

11.    *oruk*    *ninam*    *siwu-rema*  
snake    man      bite-TAM  
‘A snake bit a man’

# Transitive Subjects (A)

12.    *ča hik           hari*

I   cassava.bread bake

‘I bake cassava bread’

13.    *wa muk yaru-mo-n*

you face wash-REFL-PROG

‘You wash your face’



# Intransitive Subjects (S)

14.     *watori-n thičaara-u*  
          wind-?     blow-PROG  
          ‘The wind is blowing’

# Accusativity Hybrids

15. *okoro-n ča si-wua-u*

dog-? I.NOM CLASS-bite-PROG

‘The dog bit (at) me’

16. *okoro-n čee si-wa-re kin*

dog-AGT I.ACC CLASS-bite-COMP already

‘The dog bit me’

(Gomez 1990)

# Accusativity Hybrids

17. *kamača-n*      *wee-n*      *tapo-u*  
I-?                      You.ACC-?      see-PROG  
'I am looking at you'

18. *kama-n*    *wa*                      *šu-u*  
he-?              You.NOM              hit-PROG  
'He hit you'

# Contrasts with Topic Marker

19.     *wa-t*     *pe siwu-rara*  
          you-TOP it bite-INCOM  
          ‘It is you who are biting it’

20.     *ča-t*     *yāka-n*  
          I-TOP paddle-PROG  
          ‘It is I who paddle it’  
          ‘It is I who am paddling it’

\*\*SUBJECT-t-n

\*\*SUBJECT-n-t

# Word Order

- Basic word order in Ninam is *strictly* SOV - this is different from other Amazonian languages.
- Word order varies only with pragmatic function, otherwise it is fixed - just like in English.

# Basic Word Order

21.     *pa tih watita-u*  
          **he** wood chew-PROG  
          ‘He is chewing the wood’
22.     *kori-n šama xira-wei*  
          **kori-?** tapir kill-NMLZ  
          ‘Kori is killing the tapir’
23.     *šama kori šira-wei*  
          **tapir** kori kill-NMLZ  
          ‘The tapir is killing Kori’

# Word Order

- The first slot of a clause is reserved for focused constituents.

24. *kanaw ya šaya-u*

canoe I drag-PROG

‘It is the canoe that I am dragging’

# Instrumental Meanings for *-n*

25.     *wiitihī-n*       *ča*       *šī-mo-n*  
stick-INST       I       hit-REFL-PROG  
‘I hit myself with a stick’
26.     *tomana-n*       *ča*       *era-yom*  
knife-INST       I       cut-INCH  
‘I cut myself with a knife’
27.     *haro-n*       *mašit*   *wa*       *poa-u*  
hoe-INST       earth   you       smooth-PROG  
‘Smooth out the earth with the hoe’



# Instrumental Meanings for *-n*

28.     *parito-n*       *ča*       *tih*       *šaa-u*  
          matches-INST   I           wood   light-PROG  
          ‘I am lighting the sticks with matches’

29.     *mesi-n*           *čee-t*   *paaku-n*  
          Thorn-INST   I-TOP   poke-PROG  
          ‘It was I who poked me with a thorn’  
          ‘It was me who poked me with a thorn’

Garrett (1990) suggests that ergativity arises out of reanalysis of an instrumental marker when used with a null-subject transitive predicate.

# Conclusions

- It is not completely clear that *-n* marks ergative alignment
  - It is optional on transitive verbs
  - It is used on at least one intransitive verb
- Grammatical Relations such as Subject and Object are marked through a relatively fixed word order
  - Word order suggests a Nominative-Accusative alignment pattern
  - Semantic Roles are possibly unmarked

# Conclusions

- The inconsistencies and variation in use might be informative
  - Either change from or to the instrumental
  - The accusativity hybrids seem to indicate a split in the affectedness of the speech-act-participants (SAP = 1 and 2 persons). Nominative forms for completely affected and accusative forms for partially affected.
  - There is a definite nominative-accusative split between SAP and other participants.

# Conclusions

- Ergativity does not seem to be the best label for Ninam.
- Perhaps it is developing ergativity, or lost it, but it cannot be classified as an ergative language anymore.

# Future work

- We need much more data.
  - 2:1 transitive sentences
  - 1:2 transitive sentences
  - Plurals
  - Testing for pragmatic meaning
  - Unaccusativity

# References

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