

On the rise of ergative structures in Africa

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CASE

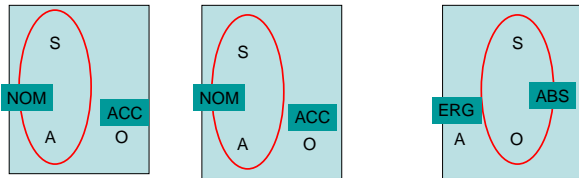
Definition

A case system is an inflexional **system** of marking nouns or noun phrases for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Inflexional systems are expressed by affixes, tone, accent shift, or root reduction; adpositional systems are included only in so far as they encode core participants such as S, A, and O. (König 2008)

Case systems

Functionally marked

- morphologically marked
- less functions
- not citation form

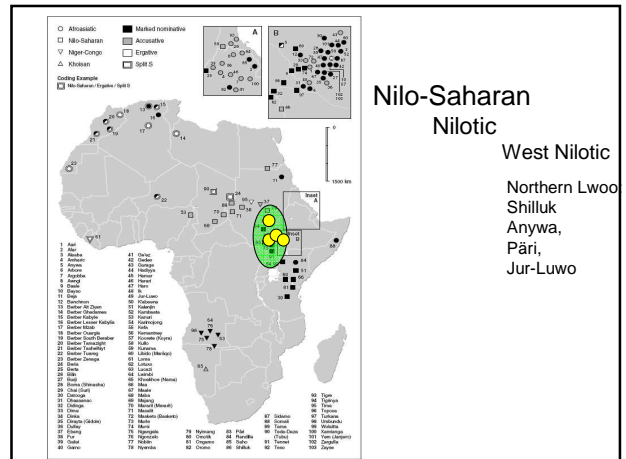


(Nominative-)Accusative: A and S are treated the same, and simultaneously different than O ($S = A \neq O$). ACC = functionally marked

Ergative(-Absolute): O and S are treated the same, and simultaneously different than A ($S = O \neq A$). ARG = functionally marked

Marked Nominative ($S = A \neq O$). NOM = functionally marked

S = intransitive subject function, A = transitive subject function, O = transitive object function, NOM = Nominative, ACC = Accusative, ARG = Ergative, ABS = Absolute



Nilo-Saharan Nilotic

West Nilotic

Northern Luo
Shilluk
Anywa,
Pāri,
Jur-Luo

Nilo-Saharan

South East Sudanic

Surmic ? Nilotic West

Tennet Northern Luo:
Majang Shilluk,
Anywa,
Pāri,
Jur-Luo

CASE in Africa

97 Case languages (König 2008)

Ergative – only 5, among them only 1 pure ergative

Marked nominative 64

(Nominative-)Accusative 30, among them 7 which in a strict sense are no case languages, case not obligatory

Exclusively tone – only marked nominative 25 tone, 18 exclusively tone, neither accusative, nor ergative

Ergativity Nilo-Saharan, Nilotic, West Nilotic

Shilluk (Northern Lwoo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

- Westermann (1912:78)
- Kohnen (1933:136)
- Tucker and Bryan (1966:424-425)
- Buth (1981:85-86)

Shilluk "tend to speak in the passive"

Shilluk (Northern Lwoo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

a a-pwot yī yan.
 PAST-strike by me
 He has been struck by me. (Kohnen 1933)

b bōl á-'cwōll yī cōl.
 Bol PAST.E-call.TR ERG Col
 Col called Bol. (Miller & Gilley 2001:49)

yī = yī PAS Kohnen
 yī PAS ≠ yī ERG Miller & Gilley

Päri (Northern Lwoo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

Absolutive/Accusative	Ergative/Marked-nominative	Meaning
übúr	übúr- i	Ubur
mʌʌn	mʌʌn- i	woman
tóŋ	tóŋ- i	spear
?áani	?áan- i	I

Table 1 Case inflexion in Päri (Andersen 1988:294, 297)

-i with the allomorphs -i, -i, -i, or -è, -e (Andersen 1988:294)

Päri

a übúr á-túuk'. S V
 Ubur COMP-play
 Ubur played. (Andersen 1988:292)

b jöobi à-kèel übürr-i. O V A-ERG
 buffalo COMP-shoot Ubur-ERG
 Ubur shot the buffalo. (Andersen 1988:293)

c übúr jöobi á-kèel-i. A ~~ERG~~ O V-A
 Ubur buffalo COMP-shoot-3.SG.A
 Ubur shot the buffalo. (Andersen 1988:294)

NP-initial clauses – ergative system

Päri

a pír ŋò ì pʌʌt cícù-e. V S-NOM
 matter what LINK jump man
 Why did the man jump? (Andersen 1988:318)

b pír ŋò ì cùol yí nípònd-e. V O A-NOM
 matter what LINK call 3.SG.O child
 Why did the child call her? (Andersen 1988:319)

c pír ŋò nípònd'-ò dháago ì cùol-e g ð. A ~~ERG~~ O V-A O PPRON
 matter what child woman LINK call-3.SG.A 3S.O
 Why did the child call the woman? (Andersen 1988:319)

Verb initial clauses – marked nominative system

Päri

- -i ERG A NP-initial clause, focus clause → ERG-system
- -i NOM S A Verb-initial clause → MNOM-system
- „No case before the verb“
- Split Ergative/Marked-Nominative language

- ERG-pattern constituent order: OVA, SV (NP-initial clause)

- Jur-Luwo similar case suffix -è Split Ergative/Marked-Nominative language

Anywa (Northern Lwoo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

a wáaŋi lwáar. V
grandmother.his be.afraid
His grandmother is afraid. (Reh 1996:311)

b dicáŋ áciél lúmmé á-wíŋ éri. V A-DEF
day one talk.P.mN.3SG.A PAST-hear she/he.DEF
One day she/he heard about her/him. (Reh 1996:312)

c ó dimó tóŋ wánní á-kwáa- A O V
son.mN Dimo spear.mN uncle.his PAST-ask.for-3SG.A
Dimo's son asked for his uncle's spear. (Reh 1996:311)

Definite marker *-Ci* (with its allomorphs *-Ci*, *-zi*, and *ø*)

NP initial clause ERG restricted to DEF

Anywa

a n-á-òò jòww[...]. V S.DEF
C-PAST-come people.DEF
When the people come [...] (Reh 1996:318)

b jiláál n-á-kéel líeé ki tóŋ, [...] A O V
child C-PAST-hit.3.SG.A elephant OBL spear
After the child had speared the elephant, [...] (Reh 1996:315)

c *n-á-kéel jiláál-li líeé ki tóŋ, [...] *V A O
C-PAST-hit.3SG.A child-DEF elephant OBL spear (Reh 1996:315)

VAO, only with pronominal O → V A-DEF O

Verb-initial Marked-Nominative restricted to DEF

-Ci

Definiteness is not obligatorily indicated in Anywa in the case of preverbal nominal participants and postverbal ones other than those in S- or A-function. (Reh 1996:137)

Andersen (1988:294) interprets the equivalent suffix in Pári as an ergative case marker.

- Comparison ERG-Suffix *-j* in Pári and DEF-Suffix *-Ci* in Anywa
- Both occur only after the verb (Anywa few exceptions)
- Alignment pattern: NP-initial only with A (=ergative-pattern) → ERG-system
- Verb-initial only with S and A (= accusative-pattern) → MNOM-system
- Andersen 1988 ERG
- Reh 1996 DEF
- König 2008: Anywa *-Ci* = Case, but restricted to definiteness;
- *-Ci* in NP-initial clauses = ERG
- *-Ci* in Verb-initial clauses = NOM
- Anywa Split ERG/MNOM restricted to definiteness

Shilluk (Northern Lwoo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

Independent clause = "NP-initial"

a twóŋ á-güt. S V
Twong PAST.E-drive.AP
Twong drove (a stake/stakes) for tethering cows. (Miller and Gilley 2001:42)

b úgik á-'kéel yí onóti. OVA-ERG
buffalo PAST.E-spear.TR ERG Onyoti
Onyoti speared the buffalo. (Miller and Gilley 2001:45)

c onóti úgik á-'kéel yí én. A OVA_{pp}-ERG
Onyoti buffalo PAST.E-spear.TR ERG 3.SG.A
As for Onyoti, he speared the buffalo. (Miller and Gilley 2001:45)

Dependent clause = "Verb-initial"

d á-kwáan gíncám yí jímén. V O A-ERG
SQ-take.TR food ERG sister
... and then the sister took the food. (Miller and Gilley 2001:57)

Shilluk

- *yí* ERG A „Independent-clause“ NP-initial focus clause → ERG-system
- *yí* ERG A „Dependent“-clause Verb-initial → ERG-system
- „No case before the verb“
- „pure“ Ergative language
- ERG-pattern constituent order: OVA, SV (independent clause)
- ERG-pattern Cross-reference: bound personal pronouns on verb (Independent clause)
- NOM-ACC-pattern Cross-reference (dependent clause)

Nilo-Saharan

Berta

South East Sudanic

Surmic Nilotic

West East South

Tehnet Majang

Northern Lwoo:
(a) Shilluk
(b) Anywa, Pári, Jur-Luwo

Sinka

Maa Ongamo Teso Turkana Toposa Karimojong Lotuxo

Kalenjin Datooga Omotik

Historical development Anywa, Pāri, Jur-Luwo

Verb-initial clauses > NP-initial clauses

Andersen (1988)

NOM > ERG

MNOM-system > ERG-system

- Dimmendaal ERG-system > MNOM-system
- Wappo Li Thompson 1976
- ERG > NOM
- ERG-system > MNOM-system
- -i Pre Wappo A
- Wappo S & A

Randal 2000	Unseth	König 2008
Majang = ERG	MNOM	MNOM
Tennet = ERG remnants		?
→ Proto-Surmic = ERG		

Tennet
Complement clause
VAO with A = case → ERG → NOM
SV, S no case → ABS → ACC
→ no case before the verb → MNOM

↓
subordinate clause

source Pāri target
situation Anywa Jur-Luwo situation

ERG > MNOM MNOM > ERG

Dímmendaal forthc.

Tennet (Surmic, Nilo-Saharan)

a ɔ́rɔŋ Lowór-ɪ kɔ́kút Lohám-ɪ ɔ́rɪz.
want Lower-NOM spear.SBJ Loham-NOM bull.ACC
Lower wants Loham to spear the bull. (Randal 2000:72)

b ɔ́rɔŋ Lowór-ɪ Lohám kíkíyá.
want Lower-NOM Loham come.SBJ
Lower wants Loham to come. (Randal 2000:72)

„No Case before the Verb“ S in SV-order = ACC

c anét deméz-óh-t. S.ACC N.PRED.ACC
1SG.ACC teach-person-SG.ACC
I'm the teacher. (Randal 2000:71)

d k-eém annd mót-tót-t. COP S.NOM N.PRED.ACC
1-be 1SG.NOM be.angry-AGNM-SG
I am a brave man (not bragging). (Randal 1998:233)

Turkana (East Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

a a-yoŋ e-ka-píl-a-ñi. S.ACC N.PRED
1.ACC witch.ACC
I am a witch. (Dimmendaal 1983a:75)

b mēere a-yoŋ e-ka-píl-a-ñi. COP S.NOM N.PRED
not 1.NOM witch.ACC
I am not a witch. (Dimmendaal 1983a:75)

Majang (North Surmic, Nilo-Saharan)

a útú-kɔ táng-ŋg máaw.
drink-PAST cow-ERG water.ABS
The cow drank water. (Randal 2000:74)

b Dám-kò tang.
eat-PAST cow.ABS
It ate a cow. (Randal 2000:74)

c rér-kò táng.
die-PAST cow.ABS
The cow died. (Randal 2000:74)

Randal 2000 Majang = ERG language with ERG = L tone

but

Unseth 1989 Majang = MNOM language with NOM = -ɛ; ACC = ø

Constituent order:

“in practically every ergative language A precedes O.” Mallinson and Blake (1981:123)

- Basic word order in ergative clauses in Anywa, Jur-Luwo, Pāri
- OVA
- SV
- AOV-A_{pp}

Mallinson, Graham & Barry J. Blake 1981. *Language typology: Cross-linguistic studies in syntax*. Amsterdam, New York, Oxford: North-Holland.

Historical development of OVA order

Passive clause		Active clause	
S V -yì Agent	>	OVA	> AOV
		NP-initial transitive	
Shilluk		Anywa	

Table. The emergence of OVA- constituent order in Anywa (Reh 1996).

Historical development of case

Proto Anywa, Pãri & Jur-Luwo	Anywa	Pãri	Pãri
-*Cì	> -Cì	> -i	> <i>low-extra low</i>
		Jur-Luwo	Jur-Luwo
		> -é	-é
Definite marker	(i) Definite marker (ii) Case marker MNOM/ERG with definite nouns only	Case marker MNOM/ERG with nouns definite & Indefinite	Case marker MNOM/ERG personal pronouns (kinship terms)

Table The emergence of an case marker in Anywa, Pãri & Jur-Luwo

Source	Case	Case	Languages
Definite marker	> NOM	> ERG	Anywa, Pãri
Definite determiner	> NOM		Berber, Burji
Topic marker	> NOM		Cushitic, in particular HEC Ometo: Masketo and Kullo still topic; in Wolaïtta, Gamo already NOM Western Bantu: Umbundu, Ngangela North Khoisan: W2 dialect of !Xun
Adposition for PP	> NOM		Dinka, Maa
Adposition for PP	> ERG		Shilluk
OBL ⁽¹⁾	> ACC		Omotiic
DAT	> ACC		Omotiic
FOC	> ACC		East Cushitic Central Khoisan: Khwe, Khoekhoe

⁽¹⁾ Oblique case means here case used for peripheral participants.

Source situation	Target situation	Languages
ACC	> MNOM	Omotiic, Cushitic
Proto-Omotiic Proto-Cushitic		
No case	> MNOM	> no case Berber
Proto-Berber		
MNOM	> ERG	Anywa, Pãri, Jur-Luwo

Table Development of case systems in Africa.

- Conclusions
- There are Ergative languages in Africa
 - but few, up to now 5 (of 103 case languages), among them is only one pure ERG-language
 - Ergativity as flexional case restricted to one region:
 - West Nilotic Northern Lwoo:
 - Pãri, Jur-Luwo, Anywa: Split ergative/marked-nominative Languages, CASE = NOM/ERG
 - Shilluk is the only pure ERG-language
 - DEF > NOM > ERG
 - MNOM-system > ERG-system (Anywa, Pãri, Jur-Luwo)

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	M	masculine
2	second person	MNOM	marked-nominative
3	third person	NOM	nominative
A	transitive subject function	O	transitive object function
ACC	accusative	O	object
AP	anti-passive (Andersen)	PAST	past tense
COMP	completive (Andersen)	PL	plural
COMP (Gilley)	complementizer (Miller & Gilley)	S	intransitive subject function
DEF	definite	SG	singular
DEM	demonstrative	SQ	sequential (Miller & Gilley)
E	evidential	SUF	suffix
ERG	ergative	TR	transitive
FOC	focus	>	grammaticalized to
LINK	linker	!	downstep
mN	modified noun (form)		

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