On the rise of ergative structures in Africa

Christa König
Osaka, March 4, 2009
Historical Linguistics Conference
Koenig@aa.tufs.ac.jp

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

Case systems

- Functionally marked
- Morphologically marked
- Less functions
- Not citation form

Case

Definition

A case system is an inflectional 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 in Africa

97 Case languages (König 2008)

Ergative – only 5, among them only 1 pure ergative
Marked nominative 64

(Nomina
tive)-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”

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Ablative/Accusative</th>
<th>Ergative/Marked-nominative</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>übur</td>
<td>übur</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ubur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miyan</td>
<td>miyan</td>
<td></td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tšy</td>
<td>tšy</td>
<td></td>
<td>spear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lám</td>
<td>lám</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

Päri

a pir gš i pšr cšzir.
matter what LINK jump man
Why did the man jump? (Andersen 1988:318)

b pir gš i col yi pipšād-
matter what LINK call 3.SG.O child
Why did the child call her? (Andersen 1988:319)

c pir gš pipšād-g lāar>1
matter what child LINK call 3.SG.A 3S.O
Why did the child call the woman? (Andersen 1988:319)

Verb initial clauses – marked nominative system

Päri

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

b bil à-cwøll
Col called Bel. (Miller & Gilley 2001:49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Ablative/Accusative</th>
<th>Ergative/Marked-nominative</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yi</td>
<td>yi</td>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Kohnen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi</td>
<td>yi</td>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>Miller &amp; Gilley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NP-initial clauses – ergative system

Päri

• “No case before the verb”
• Split Ergative/Marked-Nominative language
• Jur-Luwo similar case suffix –ê Split Ergative/Marked-Nominative language

• i ERG A NP-initial clause, focus clause → ERG-system
• i NOM S A Verb-initial clause → MNOM-system

Why did the child call the woman? (Andersen 1988:319)
Anywa (Northern Lwo, West Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan)

| a | wásapí | ləwá:r | V | ERG
|---|---|---|---|---
| b | dící | aćií lúmmí’ | A-wíp | V | DEF
| c | ó dímo tìq | wíí.nn | a-kwásí | A | O | V

Definite marker -Çí (with its allomorphs -Čí, -ː, and -ː)

NP initial clause ERG restricted to DEF

---

Anywa

| a | ná-bó | jíkwaí | V | S.DEF
|---|---|---|---|---
| b | pláát | ná-keél | lííkí | tóí | A | V | O
| c | *ná-keél | pláát-loss | lííkí | tóí | A | O

Verb-initial Marked-Nominalised restricted to DEF

---

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

Independent clause = “NP-initial”

| a | ná-bó | ñíi | ñíi | ñíi | V
|---|---|---|---|---|---
| b | úgík | a’-ká | úgík | úgík | A | V | ERG
| c | úgík | a’-ká | úgík | úgík | A | OVA | ERG
| d | a-ñíí | gííhíí | bííí | bííí | V | O | A | ERG

Shilluk

- 1yi ERG A „Independent-clause“ NP-initial focus clause ERG-system
- 1yi 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

- ñíí

South East Sudanic

Surmic Nilotic West

Northern Lwo:
- Shilluk
- Anywa, Páí, Jur-Lwuo

East

Northern Lwo:
- Shilluk
- Anywa

South

- ñíí

---

---
Historical development Anywa, Päri, 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
• ì Pre Wappo A
• Wappo S & A

Randal 2000 Majang = ERG MNOM
Tennet = ERG remnants
→ Proto-Surmic = ERG

König 2008 MNOM

Unseth Tenet = NOM

Majang = ERG language with ERG = L tone
but

Unseth 1989 Majang = MNOM language with NOM = ì; ACC = ø
Historical development of OVA order

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

Historical development of case

Table. The emergence of an case marker in Anywa, Päri & 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:
  - Päri, 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, Päri, Jur-Luwo)
ABREVIATIONS

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

References


