

## SVO ergativity and abstract ergativity

Joint paper with R.-M. Déchaine.

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Significant correction: A referential plural gloss is systematically and erroneously attributed to cased, bare animate *nPs* in Ìgbo. The interpretation 'rats' should be deleted wherever it appears in examples (18b), (19b,c), (20a), (22a,c), (25a), (28), (29), (36a), (40a). The mistake is not directly relevant to the argument of the paper.

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## SVO ERGATIVITY AND ABSTRACT ERGATIVITY<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Despite the consensus of the typological literature, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to admit the existence of ergative svo languages. Kashmiri (Bhatt 1994) has overt ergative case with svo order in one aspectual form. Ìgbo is an svo language that lacks overt case on arguments but – assuming with Bittner & Hale (1996a) that case represents surface scope relations – the existential and generic quantification of bare N arguments shows restrictions which are consistent with ergative syntax. We argue that the distribution of these readings is learnable on the twin hypotheses that (i) the interpretation of bare N is case-sensitive, and (ii) Ìgbo is ABSTRACTLY ergative. In Ìgbo, KP nominals (ergative subject, oblique object) are always existential. K-less nominals (object, intransitive subject) are usually generic (bare NPs), but can be forced to an existential reading (bare DPs). We conclude that these constructions require the Ìgbo learner to postulate ergative case which is not pronounced.

### KEYWORDS

Ergativity, svo language, null determiner, bare noun, Ìgbo (Kwa, Niger-Congo).

## 1. How concrete is case ?

The existence of ergative SVO languages is standardly denied (Schwartz, 1972 ; Trask, 1979 : 385 ; cf. Mahajan, 1993). This alleged gap, based on the absence of overt ergative case in SVO languages, is often explained as a functional tradeoff between case and linear order in encoding grammatical relations. Thus, a language with sv(o) order ought to be nominative/ accusative because SVO linearization groups intransitive subjects with transitive subjects as against objects (Blake, 1994 : 15f., 181). By similar reasoning, an SVO language with ergative/nominative alignment should have VS order for intransitive predicates – since intransitive subjects go with objects – but such languages are unattested (Dixon, 1994 : 50).

However, if one does not equate linearization and morphological case, then the nonoccurrence of « ergative linearization » (i.e. the absence of a language with SVO transitives and VS intransitives) is not decisive. Assuming on the contrary that morphological case is somehow related to abstract case, the question is whether the accusative/ergative distinction of overt morphology has an abstract counterpart. Theoretical and empirical considerations suggest a positive answer.

Theoretically, abstract case is a matter of licensing. In whatever way the direct object *John* gets abstract accusative in the English sentence *Mary<sub>NOM</sub> saw John<sub>ACC</sub>*, abstract ergative should work similarly. That overt case is a subset of case-binding configurations is also suggested by Japanese case-drop :

- |     |    |                      |           |         |      |
|-----|----|----------------------|-----------|---------|------|
| (1) | a. | John-ga              | dare- (o) | nagutta | no ? |
|     |    | -NOM                 | who-ACC   | hit     | Q    |
|     |    | ‘Who did John hit ?’ |           |         |      |
|     | b. | Dare-*(o)            | John-ga   | nagutta | no ? |
|     |    | who-ACC              | -NOM      | hit     | Q    |
|     |    | ‘Who did John hit ?’ |           |         |      |

The optional accusative in (1a) has been analyzed as an instance of case recoverability adjacent to V, contrasting with (1b) which shows forced spellout of case in nontrivial chains (Saito, 1985 ; Lamontagne & Travis, 1987). This raises the question of what allows covert case in general.

Besides the conceptual motivation for covert SVO ergativity, there is also an empirical reason : overt SVO ergativity exists. The Indo-Iranian language Kashmiri has an aspect-sensitive case split : the imperfective is accusative with [S AUX O V] order (2a), while the perfective is ergative and SVO (2b) <sup>2</sup>.

- |     |    |                          |              |                |            |
|-----|----|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------|
| (2) | a. | Lar̥k                    | ch-u         | tsoʃ           | khyv-aan.  |
|     |    | boy. NOM                 | AUX-MS       | bread. ACC. FS | eat-IMPERF |
|     |    | ‘The boy eats bread.’    |              |                |            |
|     | b. | Lar̥k-an                 | khe-yi       | tsoʃ.          |            |
|     |    | boy-ERG                  | eat-PERF. FS | bread. NOM. FS |            |
|     |    | ‘The boy ate the bread.’ |              |                |            |

Bhatt (1994) derives Kashmiri SVO by raising V to C. In Bittner & Hale’s terminology, Kashmiri SVO is ergative by virtue of government transparency : V-to-C brings the lexical VP into C’s head-government domain.

Abstract ergativity raises learnability issues. V-to-C is necessary but not sufficient for SVO ergativity (*vide* Germanic accusative verb-second). So, in a language that lacks overt morphological alignment, additional evidence must lead children to an ergative or accusative parse. Igbo (Kwa, Niger-Congo) is an SVO language allowing bare N arguments. After introducing Bittner & Hale’s case theory (§2), we suggest that the distribution of existential and generic bare N interpretations is a trigger for convergence on abstract case. Specifically, the construals attested in Igbo diagnose abstract SVO ergativity (§3) <sup>3</sup>. We end with some consequences for verb morphology and DP structure (§4).

## 2. Configurational case

Bittner & Hale (1996a) propose that case is determined by binding. They posit a functional head K as the nominal counterpart of C. Just as T and C extend the lexical projection VP into the functional domain, so D and K extend NP <sup>4</sup> :

- |     |    |                 |                 |                 |     |
|-----|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|
| (3) | a. | [ <sub>CP</sub> | [ <sub>TP</sub> | [ <sub>VP</sub> | ]]] |
|     | b. | [ <sub>KP</sub> | [ <sub>DP</sub> | [ <sub>NP</sub> | ]]] |

Bittner & Hale divide structural cases into marked and unmarked. A marked case (ergative, accusative, oblique) is a KP with an « empty K subject to the ECP ». An unmarked case (nominative) is a bare DP/NP c-commanded and governed by K or C <sup>5</sup>. Marked structural case involves a binding relation : ACC is realized in the domain of a lexical head (V or P) ; ERG is realized in the domain of a functional head (T or D). Case-binding has three elements : a predicate-head *H* ; an argument *A* that *H* case-binds ; a co-argument *B* that competes for case with *A*. Unmarked structural case is determined by the K filter which requires K-less nominals (DP or NP) to be c-commanded and governed by C or K. The definitions are given in (4).

- (4) a. *direct case* : If *H* case-binds *KP A*, then the *K* of *A* is realized as  
 (i) ACC, if *H* is *V* (or *P*) and has an adjoined *D* ;  
 (ii) ERG, if *H* is *T* (or *D*).  
 b. *case-binding* : A predicate-head *H* case-binds an argument *A*, iff  
 (i) *H* locally *c*-commands *A* ;  
 (ii) *H* governs a case competitor for *A*.  
 c. *case competitor* : *B* is a case competitor for an argument *A*, if *B* is a *K*-less nominal and if *B* is a co-argument of *A*.  
 d. *K-filter* : An argument chain headed by a *K*-less nominal (*DP* or *NP*) contains a position that is *c*-commanded and governed by *C* or *K*, and does not contain any case-bound position.

(4a) is satisfied either by (i) RAISING the nominative argument ; or (ii) raising *V* to *T* (and onward to *C*), making the *VP* TRANSPARENT to government by a higher functional head. This gives four types : raising ACC (English), transparent ACC (Japanese, Yiddish), raising ERG (Dyirbal, Inuit), transparent ERG (Samoan, Warlpiri). The raising/transparent distinction correlates with word order. Assuming uniform Spec-Head-Complement structure and VP-internal subjects, and abstracting from other movement operations, then raising ACC is minimally consistent with SVO (as in Greek), raising ERG with OSV (in Nadëb, Dixon 1994 : 51), transparent ACC and ERG with VSO (in Welsh and Samoan, respectively) <sup>6</sup> :

- (5) a.  $[_{CP} \quad [_{TP} DP_{NOM} \quad T_H \quad [_{VP} t_{DP} \quad [_{VP} V_H \quad KP_{ACC} \quad ]]] ]]$   
 b.  $[_{CP} \quad [_{TP} DP_{NOM} \quad T_H \quad [_{VP} KP_{ERG} \quad [_{VP} V \quad t_{DP} \quad ]]] ]]$   
 c.  $[_{CP} \quad V_H \quad [_{TP} \quad [_{VP} DP_{NOM} \quad [_{VP} t_V \quad KP_{ACC} \quad ]]] ]]$   
 d.  $[_{CP} \quad V \quad [_{TP} \quad T_H \quad [_{VP} KP_{ERG} \quad [_{VP} t_V \quad DP_{NOM} \quad ]]] ]]$

Since VSO languages usually have SVO as an alternative (Greenberg 1963), one also expects to find transparent ergative SVO syntax. Starting from (5d), ergative SVO could arise in two ways. The subject could raise past *C*, to [Spec, CP], (6a). Or else, overt V-to-C could fail to apply for some reason, with the subject remaining in VP-internal position or stopping in [Spec, TP], as in (6b). Thus, Bittner & Hale's formalism generates transparent ergative SVO structures.

- (6) a.  $[_{CP} KP_{ERG} [_C V] \quad [_{TP} \quad T_H \quad [_{VP} t_{KP} \quad [_{VP} t_V DP_{NOM} \quad ]]] ]]$   
 b.  $[_{CP} \quad [_{TP} KP_{ERG} [T_H V] \quad [_{VP} t_{KP} \quad [_{VP} t_V DP_{NOM} \quad ]]] ]]$

Movement of the ergative subject to [Spec, CP] as in (6a) corresponds to the analysis independently proposed for Kashmiri by Bhatt (1994) <sup>7</sup>. We will argue that Ìgbo conforms to (6b). In Ìgbo, VSO occurs in root contexts with certain subject clitics ; elsewhere the order is SVO, with *V* raising overtly to *T* and the ergative subject appearing at least as high as [Spec, TP].

### 3. Abstract ergative SVO

Ìgbo has V-to-T and arguably also V-to-C, so it is a transparent case system (§3.1). Except for small differences between subject and object pronominals, Ìgbo lacks any overt case besides genitive (§3.2). The question is whether Ìgbo is transparent accusative or transparent ergative. Absent morphological case, some other factor must be relevant. The existential quantification of bare Ns (§3.3) provides the required evidence ; its distribution is consistent with SVO ergativity (§3.4).

#### 3.1 V-to-C

V-to-T is evidenced by the fact that Ìgbo finite verbs are always inflected, the default being the underspecified *-rV* suffix (Déchaine 1992, 1993). Evidence for V-to-C is indirect. In most dialects, subject inversion is obligatory for 1s and 3p clitics in root clauses, and impossible elsewhere (Goldsmith, 1981 ; Ézè, 1995) <sup>8</sup> :

- (7) a. É-rí-ri m anụ.  
 AGR-eat-T 1s animal  
 'I ate meat.'  
 b. M-rí-ri anụ.  
 1s-eat-T animal  
 'I ate meat.'
- (8) a. \*[-sì] na [ é-rí-ri m anụ ].  
 2s-eat that AGR-eat-T 1s animal  
 b. [-sì] na [ m-rí-ri anụ ].  
 2s-eat that 1s-eat-T animal  
 'You said that I ate meat.'

Ìgbo thus has the requisites of transparent case-marking. However, V-to-C is not sufficient for ergativity, *vide* the overtly accusative verb-second Germanic languages. It remains to be shown that Ìgbo is transparent **ergative**.

#### 3.2 Diagnosing case

Ìgbo word order is with few exceptions sufficient to recover thematic relations <sup>9</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that lexical subjects and direct objects fail to be overtly casemarked or to trigger agreement <sup>10</sup> :

- (9) a. [Nwóké ahụ̀n] gbu-̀te-re [ákwụ ahụ̀n] [na ímà áhụ̀n].  
 man that cut-towards-T palmfruit that P knife that  
 'That man harvested those palmfruit with that machete.'

- b. [Nwóké ahụ̀n] fụ̀-ṭa-ra [n' ụ̀zọ́] áhụ̀n].  
 man that out-towards-T P. road that  
 'That man left (into or out of) that road.'

Pronominals display limited case distinctions, with four out of the six forms showing a subject-nonsubject contrast :

(10)	<i>transitive subject</i>	<i>intransitive subject</i>	<i>nonsubject (&amp; nonfinite subject)</i>
1P	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           ànyị́            ụ̀nụ̀         </div>		
2P			
2S	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           í            ọ́         </div>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           gí            yá         </div>
3S			
1S	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           m̄/m̄/m̄            há/há         </div>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           m̄            há         </div>
3P			

1P ànyị́ and 2P ụ̀nụ̀ are bisyllabic forms with the prosody of lexical nouns, and so predictably show no case. The 2s pronominal paradigm distinguishes subject í from object gí ; similarly for 3s, where subject ọ́ contrasts with object yá. A case distinction also shows up indirectly in 1s and 3p. As mentioned above, subject clitics with these  $\varphi$ -features optionally invert in matrix clauses if no C is present. Non-inverted, the items bear H tone, cf. (11) - (12), making them nondistinct from the corresponding object forms. But the inverted 1s and 3p subjects in (13) - (14) do not bear H. 1s [m] is either nonsyllabic or L, and 3p [ha] is L<sup>11</sup>.

- (11) a. M̄ hụ̀-rụ̀n Ézè. [m̄] = transitive subject  
 1s see-T  
 'I saw Ézè.'  
 b. M̄ fụ̀-rụ̀ a-fụ̀. [m̄] = intransitive subject  
 1s out-T NOM-out  
 'I exited.'  
 c. Ézè hụ̀-rụ̀n m̄. [m̄] = transitive object  
 see-T 1s  
 'Ézè saw me.'
- (12) a. Há hụ̀-rụ̀n Ézè. [há] = transitive subject  
 3p see-T  
 'They saw Ézè.'  
 b. Há fụ̀-rụ̀ a-fụ̀. [há] = intransitive subject  
 3p out-T NOM-out  
 'They exited.'

- c. Ézè hụ̀-rụ̀n há. [há] = transitive object  
 see-T 3p  
 'Ézè saw them.'
- (13) a. Á-hụ̀-rụ̀n m̄ Ézè. [m̄] or [m̄] = inverted transitive subject  
 AGR-see-T 1s  
 'I saw Ézè.'  
 b. Á-fụ̀-rụ̀ m̄ a-fụ̀. [m̄] or [m̄] = inverted intransitive subject  
 AGR-out-T 1s NOM-out  
 'I exited.'
- (14) a. Á-hụ̀-rụ̀n ha Ézè. [há] = inverted transitive subject  
 AGR-see-T 3p  
 'They saw Ézè.'  
 b. Á-fụ̀-rụ̀ ha a-fụ̀. [há] = inverted intransitive subject  
 AGR-out-T 3p NOM-out  
 'They exited.'

If both subject and object are 3p, subject inversion (in dialects that allow it) creates a [há há] string, illustrating the subject/object contrast in tonal terms :

- (15) Á-hụ̀-rụ̀n [ha há]. [L H]  
 AGR-see-T 3p 3p  
 'They saw them.'

In sum, only 2s and 3s show an accusative pattern. The question is how this bears on full DPs. Many Ìgbo grammarians assume a uniform accusative syntax, but split systems are not unknown, with an accusative pattern for pronominals and full Ns showing ergative (e.g. Warlpiri, Bittner & Hale, 1996b)<sup>12</sup>. Since Ìgbo nouns lack overt case, the question can only be decided on independent grounds.

There is one case marked on full Ns : genitive. This occurs on postnominal modifiers and on notional direct objects of a large class of aspectual forms. Pronunciation of genitive is tonal. For example, ákḥụ̀ (palm kernel) is lexically [HH] and surfaces as such as the head of a phrase, (16a). But as a modifier its second syllable is downstepped, giving the phonetic string [H<sup>1</sup> H], (16b)<sup>13</sup>.

- (16) a. [ákḥụ̀] Bèkèè [H H]  
 kernel European  
 'coconut'(literally, 'European palm-kernel')  
 b. ụ̀dé [akḥụ̀] [H<sup>1</sup> H]  
 pomade kernel. GEN  
 'pomade made from palm kernels'

Genitive is also relevant to Ìgbo verbforms, which divide in two sets according to the tone pattern assigned to the direct object. An object gets structural case – keeping its lexical tone – after a simple indicative verb with the aspectually neutral *-rv* suffix, (17a). The other possibility is for the notional object to bear genitive – e.g. for *ákhụ* to surface [H<sup>1</sup> H] – as after a perfective verb, (17b)<sup>14</sup>.

- (17) a. Òkéké ahùn ɾa-ra [ákhụ]. [HH]  
 rat that chew-T kernel  
 'The rat in question is palm-kernel-fed.'
- b. Òkéké ahùn a-ɾa-a-la [ákhụ]. [H<sup>1</sup> H]  
 rat that AGR-chew-DEL-PERF kernel.GEN  
 'The rat in question has chewed on (some) palm kernels.'

The contrast in (17) leads to two observations. (i) A notional direct object bearing oblique case fits the definition of antipassive, a property of ergative systems (Bittner & Hale, 1996a : 35ff.). (ii) Besides the case difference in (17), there is a correlated difference in the interpretation of the bare N object : generic in (17a), indefinite – i.e. existentially quantified – in (17b).

### 3.3 Interpreting bare N

The range of interpretations assigned to bare N arguments is structurally constrained. Evidence of such constraints could direct the child to structural hypotheses, and in particular to a case type. We argue that the interpretations are determined by case<sup>15</sup>.

Ìgbo bare count nouns are not overtly pluralized<sup>16</sup>. Consequently, a bare count noun (*òkéké* 'rat') is just as good in argument position as a bare mass noun (*ókàhà* 'corn'). (18b) shows that bare count nouns can be interpreted existentially, and are unspecified for number<sup>17</sup>.

- (18) a. Ókàhà ðì n'ébe ahùn.  
 corn COP at place that  
 'There is corn there.'
- b. Òkéké ðì n'ébe ahùn.  
 rat COP at place that  
 'There is a rat there.'/'There are rats there.'

Second, bare Ns occur freely as predicate nominals or as arguments :

- (19) a. Ó bù [ókéké].  
 3s is rat  
 'It is a rat.'

- b. [Òkéké] ðì n'ébe ahùn.  
 rat COP at place that  
 'There is a rat there.'/'There are rats there.'
- c. Ézè hụ-run [ókéké] (n'ébe ahùn).  
 see-T rat P place that  
 'Ézè saw a rat (there).'/'Ézè saw some rats (there).'
- d. Nwókéké ahùn gbu-ɾe-re ákwụ ahùn na [m̀m̀à].  
 man that cut-towards-T palmfruit that P knife  
 'That man harvested those palmfruit with a machete.'

Third, aspect is critical to bare N interpretation. (17) shows that the bare N object of an *-rv* (aspectually neutral, finite) verb is generic, but after a perfective verb the same bare N is existential. Bare N subjects show a mirror-image pattern. With the *-rv* form they are indefinite, with the perfective they are generic :

- (20) a. [Òkéké] ɾa-ra ókàhà ahùn.  
 rat chew-T maize that  
 'Regarding that corn, some rat(s) chewed on it.'
- b. [Òkéké] a-ɾa-a-la ókàhà ahùn.  
 rat AGR-chew-DEL-PERF maize that  
 'That corn is rat-chewed.'

Bare N interpretation is positional : **generic** as an *-rv* object or a perfective subject ; **existential** as an *-rv* subject or a perfective object. Genericity is unexpected if bare N arguments are automatically associated with an existential null D (Longobardi, 1994). Moreover, the possibility of bare N subjects challenges the idea that null D must be lexically governed, as argued by Longobardi for Italian. Evidently, lexical government is not the only way to license null D. While concurring with Longobardi that the distribution of bare N is structurally determined, we hypothesize that in Ìgbo the licensing of null D implicates case.

### 3.4 A case-theoretic account of bare N

If the above interpretive effects are case-driven, they constitute the evidence needed to case-type Ìgbo. Configurational case theory correctly predicts the contexts where Ìgbo bare Ns get indefinite or generic construal (§§3.4.1-2). Besides these case-sensitive effects, sometimes a bare N must be interpreted as a proper name. This occurs in contexts of ungoverned null D (§3.4.3).

## 3.4.1 Transitive clauses

We propose that even in a language where arguments are not overtly case-marked, bare Ns show case-effects. Marked structural case implies the presence of KP, and KP implies the presence of DP. Unmarked case may be realized as DP or NP. If null D is interpreted existentially, this makes two predictions. First, argument KP entails null D, forcing a default existential reading for a bare KP argument. However, K-less positions do not require D, so for reasons of economy D is absent. Thus a second prediction is that K-less arguments are generic<sup>18</sup>.

If bare N interpretation is case-sensitive, then in an ergative system bare N transitive subjects will be interpreted existentially, but bare N objects and bare N intransitive subjects will be generic, (21a). In an accusative system, one expects bare objects to be interpreted existentially, but bare transitive as well as intransitive subjects to be generic, (21b).

	<i>transitive subject</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>intransitive subject</i>
(21) a.	[KP] ERG ∃	[NP] NOM <i>generic</i>	[NP] NOM <i>generic</i>
b.	[NP] NOM <i>generic</i>	[KP] ACC ∃	[NP] NOM <i>generic</i>

Igbo bare N arguments conform to (21a), symptomatic of ergativity. In a transitive clause, a bare N subject is existential ; a bare N object generic :

- (22) a. [Òké] ɾà-ra ọ́k̀hà áhùn.  
rat chew-T maize that  
'Regarding that corn, some rat(s) chewed on it.'
- b. Òké ahùn ɾà-ra [ák̀hụ].  
rat that chew-T kernel  
'The rat in question is palm-kernel-fed.'
- c. [Òké] ɾà-ra [ọ́k̀hà].  
rat chew-T maize  
'Some rat is corn-fed./'Some rats are corn-fed.'

The genericity of a bare N object explains its failure to be a discourse antecedent :

- (23) a. \*Òké(ahùn) ɾà-ra ọ́k̀hà mana ọ́ fòdụ nwántìntì (yá).  
rat that chew-T maize but 3s remain a.little 3s.GEN  
['Some rat/the rat in question is corn-fed but a bit (of it) is left over']
- b. \*We had a clam-bake but most of them were burnt. (Postal)

These patterns conform to transparent ergative syntax, cf. (24). Marked structural case is borne by the subject : the KP projection implies a DP whose null D is existential. The K-less nominal corresponds to the object which may be DP or NP. Economy selects NP, yielding a kind-level (generic) interpretation.

- (24) [<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>KPERG</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> ∅<sub>D</sub> NP]]] T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub> NP<sub>NOM</sub> ]]
- ↓  
∃

As predicted, bare transitive objects are generic (NP). According to the theory, a K-less object may also be a DP, and indeed, bare N objects may be construed as existential if this is forced by some other lexical property, e.g. in (25a) the presence of a stage-level locative adjunct. A default existential takes narrow scope (Carlson, 1977 ; Longobardi, 1994 ; Chierchia 1996), as borne out by the existential bare object in (25b), which contrasts in this respect with inherent wide-scope items like *mádhụ* 'human being' and *íhe* 'thing', cf. (26).

- (25) a. Ézèhụ-rụn [oké] n'ebe ahùn.  
see-T rat p place that  
'Ézè saw a rat/some rats there.'
- b. Ézèa-hụ-ghịn [oke] n'ebe ahùn.  
AGR-see-NEG rat p place that  
= (i) 'Ézè didn't see a rat/any rats there.'  
≠ (ii) 'There's a rat/some rats that Ézè didn't see there.'
- (26) a. Òké ɾà-ra [mádhụ].  
rat chew-T human.being  
≠ (i) 'A rat bit someone.'  
= (ii) 'Someone got bitten by a rat.'
- b. Òké ɾà-ra [íhe].  
rat chew-T thing  
≠ (i) 'A rat chewed on something.'  
= (ii) 'Something got chewed on by a rat.'

Summarizing, a bare N transitive subject consistently has a default existential reading, as expected if it bears a marked structural case, i.e. ergative. A bare N object is generic unless forced to be indefinite, cf. (27).

This correlates with its K-less-ness : economy makes it an NP (i.e. a kind-denoting generic), but other factors may force a DP structure, accessing a (narrow-scope) default existential.

- (27)  $[_{CP} C_i [_{TP} [_{KPERG} [_{DP} \emptyset_D NP]] T_i [_{VP} V_i [_{DPNOM} \emptyset_D NP]]]]$   
 $\downarrow \qquad \qquad \qquad \downarrow$   
 $\exists \qquad \qquad \qquad \exists$

Independent evidence of narrow scope for bare N objects comes from focus-movement (Wold, 1994). An -rv sentence with a focused bare N object is ambiguous between predicate and argument focus, cf. (28). But if the focused object is definite, only the argument focus reading is available, cf. (29).

- (28)  $\dot{O}$  wú [naáni ɔkhà]<sub>i</sub> ka [oké ɬà-ra t<sub>i</sub>].  
 3s COP only maize COMP rat chew-T  
 = (i) ‘The only thing that happened is that a rat/rats chewed on some maize.’  
 = (ii) ‘The only thing that got chewed on by a rat/rats is maize.’
- (29)  $\dot{O}$  wú [naáni ɔkhà ahùn]<sub>i</sub> ka [oké ɬà-ra t<sub>i</sub>].  
 3s COP only maize that COMP rat chew-T  
 ≠ (i) ‘The only thing that happened is that a rat/rats chewed on the maize in question.’  
 = (ii) ‘The only thing that got chewed on by a rat/rats is the maize in question.’

If default existentials take narrow scope, then a focused bare N object must be interpreted *in situ*, i.e. reconstruct to the extraction site. If focus-projection applies to the reconstructed N, the focus value projects to VP, giving predicate-focus. If focus-projection does not apply, only the argument gets focus. This derives the ambiguity of (28). Definite DPs are not forced to reconstruct, so by economy they need not, leaving argument-focus the only option<sup>19</sup>.

**3.4.2. Intransitive clauses**

The K-less nominal in a transitive clause is the **object** ; in an intransitive clause it is the **subject**. Consequently, an intransitive bare N subject should be generic, with an existential interpretation only if forced.

An obvious place to test this is with lexically intransitive predicates, but apparently Ìgbo doesn’t have any (Éménanjo, 1984b). Notional unergatives as well as unaccusatives have a light V plus a nominal predicate :

- (30) a. Ézè chí-ri ɔchì.  
           V-T laughter  
           ‘Ézè laughed.’  
 b. Ézè rha-ra árhà.  
           V-T fall  
           ‘Ézè had a fall.’

Ìgbo does have **syntactic** intransitives. Recall the contrast between a transitive -rv verb and the corresponding perfective, the latter taking a genitive object. If the perfective is antipassive, then the subject is K-less and the internal argument is licensed in an oblique KP. This correctly predicts that a bare N subject of a perfective verb is generic, while a bare N notional object is existentially quantified.

- (31) a. [Òké] á-ɬa-a-la ɔkhà ahùn.  
           rat AGR-chew-DEL-PERF maize that  
           ‘That corn is rat-chewed.’  
 b. Òké ahùn a-ɬá-a-la [akhù].  
           rat that AGR-chew-DEL-PERF kernel.GEN  
           ‘The rat in question has chewed on (some) palm kernels.’

The standard analysis of antipassive involves a nominal element adjoined to V, detransitivizing V so the internal argument must receive oblique case (Baker, 1988 ; Bittner & Hale, 1996a). This applies to the Ìgbo perfective as in (32)<sup>20</sup>.

- (32)  $[_{CP} C_i [_{TP} NP_{NOM} T_i [_{ASPP} Asp_i [_{VP} V_i -AP [_{KPGEN} [_{DP} \emptyset_D NP]]]]]]$   
 $\downarrow$   
 $\exists$

Antipassive counts as a case-competitor **B** : it is a K-less nominal and a co-argument of **A** (the KP object). This forces **A** to take a marked structural case. Because its case-binder is not Infl, **A** does not satisfy the conditions for direct case, so it must take oblique case (Bittner & Hale, 1996a : 7) – in Ìgbo, the genitive :

- (33) *oblique case* (Ìgbo)  
 If **H** case-binds a KP **A** and does not meet the conditions of direct case realization, then the K of **A** is realized as GEN.

The interpretation of a definite notional object differs between an -rv verb and a perfective : it has wide scope with the former (34a), but not with the latter (34b). This is consistent with the observation that antipassive “may freeze the scope of the object” (Bittner & Hale, 1996a : 35).



- (34) a. Òké (ndì) ahùn ʦa-ra ókḥà áhùn.  
 rat those that chew-T maize that  
 = (i) 'Regarding that corn, the rat(s) in question chewed on it.'  
 = (ii) 'Regarding that corn, the rat(s) in question ate it up.'
- b. Òké (ndì) ahùn a-ʦa-a-la ókḥà áhùn.  
 rat those that AGR-chew-DEL-PERF maize that  
 'The rat(s) in question has/have eaten up the corn in question.'

In a transitive clause, both Ns can be bare. This should also work with a perfective verb, but instead of the expected pattern (generic subject and indefinite genitive object), a particular interpretation is required: the entire sentence becomes referentially opaque, as in a quotative context like a password or slogan, cf. (35).

- (35) #[Òké] á-ʦa-a-la [ókḥà].  
 rat AGR-chew-DEL-PERF corn  
 ≠ (i) 'Some corn is rat-chewed.'  
 = (ii) [password or slogan]  
 = (iii) 'Mr. Òké has chewed on some corn.'

The only way to escape the opacity of (35) is to reinterpret the bare N subject as a proper name (35-iii). This shift is part of a larger pattern that reveals the effect of the lexical government requirement on K-less intransitive subjects<sup>21</sup>.

### 3.4.3 D effects

Besides existential and generic construals, which reflect the respective presence and absence of KP, a bare N can always be a proper name. Consider (36).

- (36) a. [Òké] ðì n'ébe ahùn.  
 rat COP at place that  
 = (i) 'There is a rat there.'/'There are rats there.'  
 = (ii) 'Mr. Òké is there.'<sup>22</sup>
- b. Ó bụ [óké].  
 3s is rat  
 = (i) 'It is a rat'  
 = (ii) 'It is Mr. Òké.'
- c. [Òké] ʦa-ra ókḥà áhùn.  
 rat chew-T maize that  
 = (i) 'Regarding that corn, some rat(s) chewed on it.'  
 = (ii) 'Regarding that corn, Mr. Òké chewed on it/ate it up.'
- d. [Òké] á-ʦa-a-la ókḥà áhùn.  
 rat AGR-chew-DEL-T maize that  
 = (i) 'That corn is rat-chewed.'  
 = (ii) 'Mr. Òké has eaten up that corn.'

We analyze generics as bare NPs (37a). Following Longobardi (1994), default existentials are DPs with a null D (37b), and the proper name interpretation diagnoses raising of N-to-D by substitution, (37c)<sup>23</sup>.

- (37) a. [<sub>NP</sub> N]  
 b. [<sub>DP</sub> ∅<sub>D</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> N]]  
 ↓  
 ∃  
 c. [<sub>DP</sub> D [<sub>NP</sub> t]]  
 |  
 N ←

With K-less nominals, generic NP structure is the default. If a bare NP is not possible, then DP is the alternative; and if D is null, existential construal results. But certain intransitive verbs **require** proper name construal of a bare N subject, i.e. substitution of N for D is forced<sup>24</sup>. For example, with the affecting verb -rí 'consume', a bare N subject can only get a proper name interpretation<sup>25</sup>:

- (38) #[Òké] é-ri-e-le ókḥà áhùn.  
 rat AGR-consume-DEL-PERF maize that  
 ≠ (i) 'A rat/some rats have eaten that corn.'  
 ≠ (ii) 'The corn is rat-eaten.'  
 = (iii) 'Mr. Òké has eaten that corn.'

Setting aside the reason affecting verbs don't take generic subjects, it remains that this happens only with intransitives – a restriction that is predicted. A bare N subject is antecedent-governed by C and so is licensed as a K-less nominal, (39a). But the null D of a bare DP needs lexical government, ruling out (39b). If a bare N has DP structure, N must raise to D, forcing the DP subject of an intransitive verb to be construed as a proper name, (39c).

- (39) a. [<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> NP T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub>]]]  
 b. \*[[<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> ∅<sub>D</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> N]]] T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub>]]]  
 ↓  
 ∃  
 c. [<sub>CP</sub> C<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> D [<sub>NP</sub> t]]] T<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>i</sub>]]  
 |  
 N ←

The proper name effect is not restricted to perfectives ; it shows up whenever VP is syntactically intransitive. The *-rv* forms discussed thus far have been transitive, but *-rv* also occurs intransitively. The subject of a transitive *-rv* verb is a KP, and so is interpreted either as an indefinite or as a proper name (40a). But an *-rv* form behaves like an intransitive if it is followed by a bound nominalized copy (40b), and then a bare N subject can only be construed as a proper name (40c).

- (40) a. [Òké] rí-ri ọkà àhùn.  
 rat consume-T maize that  
 = (i) 'Regarding that corn, some rat(s) ate it.'  
 = (ii) 'Regarding that corn, Mr. Òké ate it.'
- b. Òké ahùn rí-ri e-ri.  
 rat that consume-T ING-consume  
 'The rat in question ate [what was expected to be eaten].'
- c. #[Òké] rí-ri e-ri.  
 rat consume-T ING-consume  
 ≠ (i) 'A rat/some rats ate [what was expected to be eaten].'  
 = (ii) 'Mr. Òké ate [what was expected to be eaten].'

The K-less analysis of bare N subjects of intransitives captures these patterns : it correctly predicts that if a bare N subject is not construable as generic, it can't be indefinite either because null D would not be lexically governed. This leaves the proper name interpretation as the only possibility.

### 3.5 Summary

The following interpretations emerge for bare N :

(41)

	KP arguments		K-less (DP or NP) arguments	
	ERG	OBL (GEN)	NOM	NOM
	<i>transitive</i>	<i>antipassive</i>	<i>intransitive</i>	<i>transitive</i>
	<i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>
∃	+	+	-	+
generic	-	-	+	+
« Mr. »	+	+	+	+

Three observations. (i) Existential construal requires governed null D, and thus fails with K-less subjects. (ii) Generic construal fails with KP arguments ; this follows from the absence of bare NP in these positions. (iii) A proper name reading is possible in any A-position ; this follows from the availability of D (always present with KP arguments, optionally present with K-less arguments), and accounts for the fact that if a K-less subject cannot be generic, only the proper name interpretation is convergent.

### 4. Consequences

We have argued that Ìgbo is abstractly ergative and that this situation is learnable because bare N interpretation is case-sensitive. We close by considering some consequences for morphology and semantics.

A general question is whether verb morphology bears a non-arbitrary relation to case. In our analysis, Ìgbo verbforms divide into two case types : ergative (*-rv*) and antipassive (perfective). However, the Ìgbo perfective in (42) contrasts with overtly ergative languages that show an aspectual split, and where the perfective has ergative syntax, cf. (43).

- (42) Òké ahùn a-ṭá-a-la [akhù]. Ìgbo  
 rat. NOM that AGR-chew-DEL-PERF kernel. GEN  
 'The rat in question has chewed on (some) palm kernels.'
- (43) a. Laṛk-an khe-yi tsoṭ. Kashmiri  
 boy-ERG eat-PERF. FS bread. NOM. FS  
 'The boy ate the bread.' (Bhatt, 1994)
- b. Raam-ne vah kitaabē paṛī thū. Hindi  
 -ERG those book.P.NOM read-PERF. FP be. FP. PAST  
 'Ram had read those books.' (Mahajan, 1993)
- c. Glex-ma datesa simind-i. Georgian  
 peasant-ERG sow.AOR corn-NOM  
 'The peasant has sown corn.' (Palmer, 1994 : 80)
- d. Māy-le shaw pe-ē. Nepali  
 I-ERG apple get-PAST.1  
 'I got an apple.' (Palmer, 1994 : 61)
- e. Na va'ai-a e le tama le i'a. Samoan  
 PAST look. at-PERF ERG the boy the fish  
 'The boy has spotted the fish.' (Palmer, 1994 : 58)

Notice that while the Ìgbo perfective involves two suffixes – a delimited suffix (DEL) followed by the perfective suffix proper (PERF) – the verbs in (43) are either participial (Kashmiri, Hindi) or marked by a single aspectual suffix (Nepali, Samoan, Georgian). This may be no accident, if Ìgbo PERF is not the cause of the genitive, but rather DEL. There is independent evidence for this idea.

Across all Ìgbo verbforms and all known dialects, whenever the DEL suffix is present, the notional object is genitive. In addition to the perfective, DEL also occurs in affirmative imperatives and in non-initial verbs of serial constructions, forms that always assign genitive<sup>26</sup>. All the other contexts in which genitive is assigned – the construct state and the 'participial' or auxiliated progressive and future – are nominal, suggesting that DEL is a nominalizer. It is also relevant that forms with DEL cannot be directly negated : a suppletive relationship holds between PERF in (44a) and *bè* 'yet' in (44c)<sup>27</sup>.

- (44) a.  $\dot{A}d\dot{h}\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$ - $\acute{t}a$ - $a$ - $la$                        $an\acute{u}$ .                       $\acute{O}wer\acute{e}$   $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$   
           AGR-chew-DEL-PERF                      animal. GEN  
           ‘ $\dot{A}d\dot{h}\acute{a}$  has eaten [the] meat.’ (cf.  $\acute{E}m\acute{e}nanj\acute{o}$ , 1984)  
   b. \* $\dot{A}d\dot{h}\acute{a}\acute{a}$ - $\acute{t}a$ - $a$ - $la$ - $h\acute{u}n$                        $an\acute{u}$ .  
           AGR-chew-DEL-PERF-NEG                      animal. GEN  
   c.  $\dot{A}d\dot{h}\acute{a}$   $\acute{a}$ - $\acute{t}\acute{a}$ - $b\acute{e}$ - $h\acute{u}n$                        $\acute{a}n\acute{u}$ .  
           AGR-chew-yet-NEG                      animal  
           ‘ $\dot{A}d\dot{h}\acute{a}$  hasn’t yet eaten any meat.’

The ill-formedness of (44b) is no surprise. If a morphologically perfective negative form existed, such a form would be antipassive with a K-less NOM subject and a genitive KP object. A bare N object of such a form would be interpreted existentially and take obligatory narrow scope, causing trouble for negative polarity which is generally possible for bare N objects as in the gloss of (44c). If (44b) existed, it would mean ‘I have not eaten some particular meat’, and if (44c) did not exist its gloss would be ineffable by (44b).

Finally, we proposed that generics are bare NPs while proper names are DPs where the N substitutes for D, (45a). This departs from Longobardi’s idea (45b) that generics and proper names have the same structure until LF: if the tail of the chain is LF-invisible, the expression is a proper name, otherwise it is generic.

- |                             | GENERIC                          | PROPER NAME                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (45) a. <i>our proposal</i> | $[_{NP} N]$                      | $[_{DP} [_D N_i] [_{NP} t_n]]$   |
| b. <i>copy analysis</i>     | $[_{DP} [_D (N_i)] [_{NP} N_i]]$ | $[_{DP} [_D N_i] [_{NP} (N_i)]]$ |

The copy analysis predicts that whenever a bare N can be generic, it can also be a proper name, but this is not true in  $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$ : generics are restricted to K-less contexts while the proper name effect is freely available. Even in Italian, nouns do not freely occur in one or the other of the two LF-structures derived by the copy analysis. Longobardi solves this by stipulating that nouns are lexically specified for being count nouns or proper names: if a count noun raises to D, the tail is LF-visible; but this is not true for a proper name. Such a solution is not available for  $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$ , a language where any noun may freely be used as a proper name. The generality of proper name construal follows in our theory<sup>28</sup>.

## NOTES

1. Thanks to H. Davis, E.’N.  $\acute{E}m\acute{e}nanj\acute{o}$ , E.  $\acute{E}z\acute{e}$ , K. Hale, U.  $\acute{I}h\acute{i}o\acute{n}\acute{u}$ , G. Longobardi, L. Nash, L. Nichols, P.A. Nwáchukwu, D. Wold. Abbreviations: ACCUSATIVE, AGREEMENT, ANTIPASSIVE, ASPECT, COPULA, DELIMITED, ERGATIVE, GENITIVE,

(IM)PERFECTIVE, INDIRECT OBJECT, NOMINATIVE, Q(UESTION), SUBJECT.  $\varphi$ -features are glossed 1/2/3, S/P, F/M. For tone orthography see note 8.

2. Examples from Bhatt (1994: 73, 223). Bhatt (1994: 72ff., 128f., 155) argues that Kashmiri has underlying OV (based on relative and adverbial clauses) and surface V2 in both root and embedded contexts. To maintain Hale & Bittner’s theory it is enough that embedded V2 does not exclude a V-to-C analysis (Vikner 1995: 129). Kashmiri accusative and nominative are homophonously null, but only nominative triggers agreement (Bhatt 1994: 31f.).

3. It remains open whether bare N arguments are a necessary condition for abstract sVO ergativity.

4. The KP hypothesis departs from the treatment of case as a property of particular categories: of lexical heads V and P (Chomsky 1981), of various functional heads labeled Agr (Chomsky 1993) or of (potentially) all functional heads (Fukui 1986). We translate Bittner & Hale’s I(P) as (T)P.

5. Nominative is the unmarked case. In an ergative paradigm, this is traditionally called absolutive.

6. « Minimally consistent ordering » is the linearization resulting only from case-driven movement, *i.e.* other movement operations like operator-driven *wh*-/focus movement are not relevant.

7. For a raising ergative language to have sVO order would require: raising the NOM object to [Spec, TP] (yielding ovs); raising V higher than T and raising the subject past C. This collapses the raising/transparent distinction because even a raising ergative sVO system requires V-to-C.

8. In the  $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$  tone orthography used here (cf. Swift *et al.* 1962, Welmers & Welmers 1968, Nwáchukwu 1976), a syllable without a tone mark has the tone value of the nearest preceding mark. A sequence of two H marks [... $\acute{x}_1$ ... $\acute{x}_2$ ...] indicates a downstep starting at  $\acute{x}_2$ . If L tone intervenes between  $\acute{x}_1$  and  $\acute{x}_2$ , their phonetic relationship is the same, but is traditionally labeled *downdrift*.

9. Nonfinite OV, with several instances in  $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$ , is arguably not case-based (Manfredi 1997: 98).

10. The examples in (9) each have an argument introduced by  $n(\acute{a})$ .  $N\acute{a}$  is the only nonaffix identifiable as P, but its broad thematic range – Instrument in (9a), Source and Goal in (9b) – makes it more plausibly a marker of inherent case. Candidates for contentful P are the bound items  $-f\acute{u}$  ‘out’ and  $-te/-\acute{t}a$  ‘towards’ in (9); these surface inside the inflected verb-word due to head movement (specifically, P-incorporation), cf. Hale *et al.* (1995). In other contexts  $n\acute{a}$  marks location, but its argument in those instances is locative inherently. If  $n\acute{a}$  marks inherent case, the optionality of the  $n\acute{a}$ -phrases in (9) is expected. There is a general  $\dot{I}gb\acute{o}$  constraint that every verb has a syntactic complement ( $\acute{E}m\acute{e}nanj\acute{o}$  1984b). Omission of the  $n\acute{a}$ -phrase in (9a) has no consequences, but omission in (9b) triggers insertion of a bound nominalized verb-copy, yielding (i):

- (i) Nwóké    ahù    fù- $\acute{t}a$ -ra                      a-fù- $\acute{t}\acute{a}$ .  
           man        that    exit-towards-ASP    NOM-exit-towards  
           ‘That man left (into or out of the place in question).’

The ambiguity of the  $n\acute{a}$ -phrase in (9b) – as Source or Goal – remains in (i).

11. Cf. Goldsmith (1981 : 543-46), Íhìònú (1985), Manfredi (1991 : 239f.), Ézè (1995).
12. « Warpiri agreement morphology is ‘pseudoaccusative’. Although the relative hierarchy of subject and object agreement is as expected for an ergative language, the morphology of agreement treats subjects as a natural class. » (Bittner & Hale, 1996b : 570.)
13. Cf. Voorhoeve *et al.* (1969), Welmers (1970), Goldsmith (1973), Williams (1976), Williamson (1986), Íhìònú (1988), Clark (1989), Manfredi (1992).
14. Other forms that assign structural case are the negative indicative and imperative, the affirmative infinitive and (in dialects that have it) the suffixal progressive. Besides perfective, forms assigning genitive are the auxiliated progressive (in dialects that have it), auxiliated habitual and future, conditional and affirmative imperative, cf. Green & Ígwè (1963), Williams (1976).
15. The Ígbo judgements reported in § 3.3 are subtle, and we invite corrections.
16. In this respect they contrast with the more widely-discussed bare plural count-nouns of Germanic and Romance (Carlson 1977, Longobardi 1994).
17. Following Chierchia (1995, 1996) we treat mass nouns as semantically plural.
18. Longobardi assumes that nominal arguments are DPs. We agree only for argument KPs, which leaves two exceptions : K-less arguments and adjunct KPs. The latter follows from the fact that nominal predicates need not be DPs. Our proposal departs from Bittner & Hale (1996b : 542), who fix the choice between NP and DP arguments for a given language.
19. Assuming that the trace of focus-movement does not license Focus-projection.
20. Cf. Manfredi (1991 : 167f.) We are tempted to identify antipassive as DEL, Green & Ígwè’s Open Vowel Suffix (1963 : 58f.), cf. § 4 below.
21. The hash-mark (#) in example (35) *et sqq.* means that the bracketed category requires a proper noun interpretation in order for the sentence to be felicitous. For the noun *òké* ‘rat’, the corresponding proper name in (35-iii) is glossed as ‘Mr. Òké’.
22. A small glitch exists for literary Ígbo as well as some natural dialects, where *-dí* is restricted to nonhumans, so (36a-ii) would have to be rendered with the copula *-nò*. In other dialects, *-dí* has no problem with human subjects and the ambiguity remains.
23. N-to-D substitution is the syntactic implementation of a type-shift from <e, t> to <e>, cf. Bittner & Hale (1995), Chierchia (1996). In Italian, proper name formation involves either N-to-D movement, yielding a surface bare N, or insertion of an expletive D (Longobardi 1994 : 622).
24. Also, certain experiencer arguments (Déchaine & Manfredi 1995).
25. *-Rí* ‘consume’ contrasts with *-a*, which is ambiguous between conative ‘chew on’ and affecting ‘eat by chewing’. With both verbs, a K-less subject cannot be interpreted existentially. Inasmuch as a generic construal is possible, it is possible only with the conative version of *-a*, cf. (i).
- (i) [Òké] á-ta-a-la òkhà áhùn.  
 rat AGR-chew-DEL-PERF maize that  
 ≠ (i) ‘Some rat has chewed on that corn.’  
 = (ii) ‘That corn is rat-chewed.’  
 = (iii) ‘Mr. Òké has eaten that corn (by chewing on it).’

26. In northern dialects like Ònìcha (Émènanjò 1975) and Ígboúzó (Émènanjò 1984a : 82ff.), DEL is absent from the perfective, but remains present in serial verbs and imperatives. In no known dialect does DEL cooccur with inflectional *-rv*. DEL also has a handful of lexical exceptions which are fairly stable across dialects (Nwachukwu 1976 : 75 ; Déchaine 1993 : 520).
27. In Ígboúzó (Émènanjò 1984 : 94f.), negative perfectives must take an auxiliated construction, with the negative affix rigorously separated from the lexical verb :
- (i) Àdá a-dí-ka à-tá-da anù. Ígboúzó Ígbo  
 AGR-COP-NEG. EVER AGR-chew- ? animal. GEN  
 ‘Àdá hasn’t yet eaten (any) meat.’
- Only a hybrid form of this kind could, we claim, remain antipassive with respect to the object.
28. In the Ígbological literature, proper name construal of bare N has hardly been noticed for arguments, but personification is extensively discussed for nominal modifiers – a context where it has phonetic consequences (see note 13).

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**RÉSUMÉ**

Malgré l'idée généralement acceptée dans la littérature sur la typologie des langues, il existe des raisons théoriques et empiriques pour admettre l'existence de langues ergatives svo. Le kashmiri (Bhatt, 1994) possède un cas ergatif manifeste dans une construction aspectuelle à ordre svo. L'Ìgbo est une langue svo qui ne marque pas les arguments pour le cas manifeste. Suivant l'hypothèse de Bittner & Hale (1996a) qui propose que le cas représente les relations de portée de surface, la quantification existentielle et générique des arguments N nus en Ìgbo présente des restrictions caractéristiques de la syntaxe ergative. Nous proposons que la distribution des ces lectures est acquise sur la base d'une double hypothèse : (i) l'interprétation des N nus est sensible au cas, et (ii) l'Ìgbo manifeste une ergativité abstraite. En Ìgbo, les arguments KP (sujet ergatif, objet oblique) sont toujours existentiels. Les arguments sans K (objet direct, sujet intransitif) sont normalement génériques (NP nus), mais peuvent avoir sous certaines conditions une lecture existentielle (DP nus). Nous en concluons que ces constructions exigent que la locuteur de l'Ìgbo postule un cas ergatif non-manifeste.

**MOTS-CLÉS**

Ergativité, langues svo, déterminant nul, noms nus, Ìgbo, (famille Kwa, Niger-Congo).

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