

Subject Properties and Ergativity in North Russian and Lithuanian*

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1 Introduction

The goal of this paper is to resolve an apparent mismatch between the morphology and grammatical function of the subject and object NPs of the North Russian (NR) and Lithuanian (Lith) nonagreeing constructions in (1-2) below. On the surface, this construction consists of i) a nonagreeing participle functioning as the main predicate, ii) a preverbal oblique (or PP) constituent, and iii) a nominative object:

(1) NR

a. *-no/-to*

U lisicy uneseno kuročka.

at fox: GEN carried-off: *-no* chicken: NOM.F

‘A fox has carried off a chicken.’

[Kuz'mina and Nemčenko (= K&N) 1971:27]

b. *-n/-t*

U nas kadočka ogurcov posolen.

at us: GEN barrel: NOM.F cucumbers: GEN pickled: *-n*

‘We have pickled a barrel of cucumbers.’ [K&N 1971:77]

c. *-vši*

U menja už korova podoivši.

at me: GEN already cow: NOM.F milked: *-vši*

‘I have already milked the cow.’ [Filin 1969:72]

* For helpful discussion and criticism I would like to thank Leonard Babby, Stephanie Harves, Robert Orr, Edwin Williams, and my two reviewers for this volume. All conclusions and errors are, naturally, my own.

(2) Lith

a. *-ma*

Darbininkų vežama plytos.
workers: GEN being-carted: *-ma* bricks: NOM.PL
'Workers are evidently carting bricks.'

b. *-ta*

Jonuko tie grybai atnešta.
Jonukas: GEN [thesemushrooms]: NOM.PL brought: *-ta*
'Apparently Jonukas brought these mushrooms.'
[Ambrazas et al. 1997:281]

The predicates in both NR and Lith show frozen, invariant word-final morphology. In their inflectional function to mark agreement, NR *-no/-to* and *-n/-t* are the neuter and masculine singular short forms, respectively, of the past passive participle; *-vši* is the feminine singular form of an erstwhile agreeing short form past active participle.¹ Lith invariant *-ma* and *-ta* correspond to the “old” neuter singular forms of the present and past passive participles, respectively.² I will argue that these forms are no longer agreeing inflectional affixes, but rather derivational morphemes with their own argument structure.³ The dedicated function of these morphemes is to mark the perfect tense in NR and the evidential mood in Lith.⁴

¹ It should be noted that the three distinct NR forms in (1) do not share the same areal distribution (see K&N 1971, maps 1 and 4). I will refer to the *-no/-to* form as a catch-all for all three NR predicate types.

² Modern Lithuanian has assimilated all neuter nouns to the masculine and feminine declensions.

³ That is, the NR and Lith predicates in (1-2) do not co-occur with distinct neuter, masculine, and feminine agreeing null expletive pronouns. The purpose of such null expletives is generally to function as a “slot-filler” to satisfy the subject-positional requirement of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). If we assume the minimalist reinterpretation of the EPP as simply a strong D-feature in T (which makes reference neither to Case nor to category), it appears that the EPP in (1-2) is satisfied independently by overt lexical material bearing this feature (cf. Lavine 1998).

⁴ The perfect tense in NR is discussed in Petrova 1968, K&N 1971, and Trubinskij 1984. The evidential mood in Lith is discussed in Ambrazas et al. 1985:249-250, 1997:281. It denotes an action that is inferred or assumed to be true (which I try to indicate in the English glosses). Note that use of this construction with the neuter

A central claim of this paper is that the constructions in (1-2) display properties which are typical of morphologically-ergative languages.⁵ Thus, I will argue that these predicates are basic and active, rather than derived and passive. Morphological ergativity is confined to the marking of morphological case. In traditional terms, the object argument of a transitive verb appears in the absolutive case (= nominative case) along with the single argument of an intransitive verb, while the agent argument of a transitive verb is marked differently, by what is known as the ergative case (which is usually an oblique case that is used elsewhere in the language, most often to mark either a passive BY-PHRASE or possession). That is, I will claim that the preverbal oblique (or PP) argument in (1-2) is the ergative subject, while the nominative NP is the absolutive object.⁶ Morphologically-ergative languages are all **split**-ergatives, that is, languages in which ergativity is restricted to certain tenses, aspects, or moods (see Anderson 1976 and Trask 1979 for discussion).

The NR and Lith data considered in this paper contribute in an interesting way to the literature on positional licensing and the checking of morphosyntactic features. We will note, in particular, the lack of a straightforward correlation between morphological case and structural position. The minimalist framework, which will be adopted in this paper, is motivated by the distinct licensing relations (checking positions) it provides for subject properties such as the EPP⁷, nominative case, and subject-predicate agreement. In (1-2), for example, the preverbal constituent satisfying the EPP and the lower constituent bearing nominative case clearly cannot be treated

participle of transitive verbs is most characteristic of (though not limited to) eastern Lith dialects.

⁵ Ergativity in NR was first proposed by Orr (1989:11-17).

⁶ Syntactic relations in morphologically-ergative languages follow the pattern of accusative languages (see Anderson 1976). Alternatively, **syntactically**-ergative languages, such as Dyirbal (Australian), treat constituents marked in the same way morphologically as **syntactic**-likes. The subject of transitive verbs and the object of intransitives, for example, serve as a “syntactic pivot” for coordination, relativization, and other processes that are sensitive to a common grammatical function (See Dixon 1994 for a full description of these facts).

⁷ The E(xtended) P(rojection) P(rinciple) is the requirement that clauses have subjects. See section 3.3 for details and a more precise formulation.

as occupying the same position, nor can either be implicated in subject-predicate agreement.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2 I provide evidence against an impersonal passive analysis for these predicates. In section 3 I argue in favor of treating the preverbal argument as a non-displaced ergative subject (rather than a passive adjunct). Independent evidence for the ergative analysis from a typological perspective will be presented in section 4. Finally, the question of the formal implementation of the licensing mechanisms involved in the NR and Lith ergatives will be taken up in section 5.

2 The Impersonal Passive Analysis

The argument for treating (1-2) as impersonal passives is based on the passive-participial morphology of the main predicate and the homophony of the preverbal oblique element with the passive BY-PHRASE of these languages (Timberlake 1976 (NR) and 1982 (Lith)). The data in (3-11) provide evidence against the passive analysis. Here I follow the widely-held assumption that the single universal property of passivization is the dethematization of a verb's initial external theta role (see, e.g., Jaeggli 1986 and Grimshaw 1990).⁸

2.1 Unaccusative Predicates

According to this view of passivization, if a predicate such as an unaccusative or passive (the latter, itself, a derived unaccusative) lacks an external theta role, it cannot be passivized (or further passivized).

⁸ To be sure, Timberlake (1982) does not follow the assumption that passivization targets an external theta role. His view of passivization admits the unaccusative predicates in (3-8) and, thus, it might seem that the question of passiveness here is a mere terminological problem. Note, however, that the additional evidence in sections 2.2 and 3, plus the typological motivation for an alternative analysis in section 4, renders the impersonal passive analysis implausible under any view of passivization.

(3-7) are underlying unaccusatives to which *-no/-to* and *-ma/-ta* are attached, forming licit **non-passive** structures:⁹

(3) NR derived unaccusative

Gljadite- kas' u kotjat razvaleno- s' na polu.
look PRT at cats: GEN spread-out: *-no* REFL onfloor
'Look how the cats have spread themselves out on the floor.'
[Trubinskij 1984:143]

(4) NR unaccusative with existential 'be'

U menja ... na službe pobyvano, v trex službax byto.
at me: GEN in service been: *-no* in three divisions been: *-to*
'I have served... in three divisions.' [Šapiro 1953:143]

(5) Lith derived unaccusative

Visų keleivių iš- si- gelbėta su laivais.
all travelers: GEN PREF REFL saved: *-ta* with boats
'All the travelers were apparently saved by boats.'
[Ambrasas 1985:251]

(6) Lith unaccusative

Ko čia degta.
what: GEN here burnt: *-ta*
'What has burnt here?' [Matthews 1955:353]

⁹ An unaccusative predicate is one in which the base verb's sole argument is underlyingly internal. A derived unaccusative is one in which a verb's initial external theta role is suppressed by a pre-syntactic morpholexical operation on a verb's argument structure, often involving either passive or middle-voice formation. Note that, in part, I am relying on a notion of unaccusativity that is semantically-defined (Perlmutter and Postal 1984:97-100), whereby the status of an intransitive verb's sole theta role is predictable from the semantics of the predicate. The sole argument of intransitive 'burn', or existential 'be', for example, is internal and, thus, these predicates are unaccusative. (Rosen 1984 points out, however, that verbs with similar meanings cross-linguistically may be classified differently with respect to unaccusativity). Unaccusativity is more clearly established in cases where it is derived by overt morphology (i.e., REFL *-sja/-s'* in NR and *-si-* in Lith).

- (7) Lith unaccusative with existential ‘be’
 Čia grybų buta.
 here mushrooms: GEN been: *-ta*
 ‘Mushrooms evidently grew here.’ [Schmalstieg 1982:119]

(8c) is the Lith evidential ergative construction derived from the passive in (8b). (8a) is the underlying active construction.

- (8) a. Lith active
 Jos vyras paprašė jį [parašyti tą laišką].
 her man: NOM asked: 3.SG him: ACC to-write that letter
 ‘Her husband asked him to write that letter.’

- b. Lith passive
 Jis buvo paprašytas (jos vyro) [parašyti tą laišką].
 he: NOM was asked: M.SG her man: GEN
 ‘He was asked (by her husband) to write that letter.’

- c. Lith evidential ergative of (8b)
 Jo buvo paprašyta [parašyti tą laišką].
 him: GEN was asked: *-ta*
 ‘Evidently he was asked to write that letter.’
 [Timberlake 1982:519-520]

Note that the preverbal genitive pronoun in (8c), *jo* ‘him’, cannot be a passive BY-PHRASE: it is an initial **internal** argument. The initial **external** argument that was suppressed in the canonical passive in (8b) refers to the genitive BY-PHRASE, *jos vyro* ‘by her husband’.¹⁰

2.2 NR and Lith *Non-Passive-Participial Ergatives*

A second argument against treating the NR and Lith ergatives as passives is the fact that these constructions may occur with **active** participial forms as well. In (1c) we noted the NR ergative

¹⁰ The question of ergative marking on the subject of intransitive predicates is discussed in section 4.

construction in *-vši* (based initially on the F.SG past active participle), repeated below as (9)¹¹:

- (9) NR *-vši*
U menja už korova podoivši.
at me: GEN already cow: NOM.F milked: *-vši*
'I have already milked the cow.' [Filin 1969:72]

Schmalstieg (1982) notes a similar nonagreeing usage of the M.PL form of the past active participle (*-ę*) in Lith. (10) minimally differs from (7) in the selection of the main participle in *-ę* rather than *-ta*, with apparently the same meaning:

- (10) Lith *-ę*
Čia grybų buvę.
here mushrooms: GEN been: *-ę*
'Mushrooms evidently grew here.' [Schmalstieg 1982:119]

3. Subject Properties of the Ergative Argument

Having established that the preverbal constituent in the NR and Lith constructions under discussion cannot be considered a passive BY-PHRASE under standard assumptions of passivization, let us now pursue the possibility that these constructions are active, and that the preverbal constituent is a (non-displaced) subject.

3.1 Control of Reflexives

In (11a) we see that the NR ergative subject binds the reflexive *svoj*, in contrast to the BY-PHRASE in the CSR (Contemporary Standard Russian) example in (11b). Note in (11c) that in CSR only the derived subject can control the reflexive pronoun, suggesting that the binding of anaphors (in Russian) is established at Spell-Out. The

¹¹ See K&N (1971:139-142) for more examples.

NR ergative subject thus patterns with the grammatical subject in (11c) rather than with the “displaced” subject in (11b).¹²

(11) Control of reflexive *svoj*

a. NR ergative

U Šurki_i privedeno svoja_i staraja nevesta.
 at Šurka: GEN brought: -no [REFL old bride]: NOM.F
 ‘Šurka brought his old bride.’ [Timberlake 1976:559]

b. CSR canonical passive

Šurkoj_i byla privedena *svoja_i / ego_i nevesta.
 Šurka: INST [was brought]: F REFL his bride: NOM.F
 ‘(Lit) By Šurka was brought his bride.’

c. CSR canonical passive

Otec_i byl zabyt svoimi_i /*ego_i det’mi.
 father: NOM.M [was forgotten]: M REFL his children: INST
 ‘The father was forgotten by his own children.’

We find the same reflexivization facts in the Lith ergative construction. (12) shows that the ergative (GEN) subject functions as the antecedent of the subject-controlled possessive reflexive *savo*:

(12) Lith: control of reflexive *savo*

Mamoš_i jau esama savo_i / *jos_i kaime.
 mother: GEN already been: -ma REFL her village: LOC
 ‘Mother is presumably already in her own village.’
 [Timberlake 1982:516]

3.2 Subject Ellipsis in Conjoined Clauses

In the VP-conjunction structure in (13), the nominative subjects of the lower predicates are deleted under identity with the ergative (*u*+GEN) subject of the first conjunct. Note that subject ellipsis here

¹² These facts were first discussed in Timberlake 1976.

appears to be sensitive to a notion of subjecthood that crucially does not rely on morphological case.

(13) NR subject ellipsis

U ego vybežano na bereg, da napilsja vody,
at him: GEN run-out: -no to bank and had-his-fill water
da v les i ušel.
and into woods PRT left
'He ran out onto the bank, had his fill of water, and went
off into the woods.' [Šapiro 1953:143]

The example in (14) shows that a passive BY-PHRASE and an elided nominative subject cannot be coindexed in a coordinate structure in CSR:

(14) CSR

??? Im byla pročítana kniga i ušel domoj.
him: INST was read: F book: F and went home
'By him the book was read and went home.'

Evidence against treating the nominative object as a derived (nonagreeing) subject is provided in (15), where the elided subject of the second conjunct is coindexed with an elided subject of the first conjunct, rather than with the overt nominative argument:

(15) NR

Pečka zatopleno i ujdeno
stove: NOM lit: -no and left: -no
'They lit the stove and left.' [K&N 1971:29]

3.3 *The Extended Projection Principle*

In both NR and Lith the ergative subject appears obligatorily in the preverbal position (under neutral intonation), where it satisfies the

positional constraint referred to as the EPP.^{13, 14} Note that in current minimalist theory, the EPP position is not a Case position, nor is it devoted to a particular discourse status, such as theme or topic.¹⁵ In (2a), repeated below as (16a), the subject *darbininkų* ‘workers’ is optionally indefinite and non-D-linked, i.e., the subject ‘workers’ does not necessarily have a pre-established referent in the discourse.

- (16) a. Lith evidential ergative
 Darbininkų vežama plytos.
 workers: GEN being-carted: *-ma* bricks: NOM
 ‘Workers are evidently carting bricks.’

In (16b) we note that in the non-evidential canonical passive the BY-PHRASE is free to appear in any position, depending on the information structure of the sentence (below *D* = *Darbininkų*):

- b. Lith canonical passive
 (Darbininkų) Plytos (*D*) vežamos (*D*).
 workers: GEN bricks: NOM.F.PL being-carted: NOM.F.PL
 ‘Bricks are being carted by workers.’

In (16c), however, if the ergative subject is moved from the preverbal position, the evidential reading is no longer available and the sentence is no longer grammatical with the nonagreeing morphology on the predicate:

¹³ Word order facts in the NR *-no/-to* construction are discussed in Petrova 1968:123-124 and Timberlake 1976:560. Word order in the Lith *-ma/-ta* construction is discussed briefly in Ambrazas et al. 1985:249.

¹⁴ This is not to suggest that there is a predetermined syntactic position devoted exclusively to this checking function (such as [Spec,TP]). In section 5 I will pursue the idea (based on economy of representation) that there is no fixed structure for clauses and that features do not necessarily refer to specific functional projections. The EPP, then, is checked simply in the highest specifier of the verb’s extended projection (see Grimshaw 1997:390, 416-417).

¹⁵ There is abundant recent literature which seeks to separate the EPP-feature from the feature responsible for checking nominative case (based on independent data). See, in particular, the discussion of Icelandic in Sigurðsson 1992, Schütze 1993, and Harley 1995.

c. Lith evidential ergative

*Plytos vežama darbininkų.
bricks: NOM being-carted: *-ma* workers: GEN
'Workers are evidently carting bricks.'

The ungrammaticality of (16c) supports the claim that the oblique NP is Merged with the predicate as its subject.¹⁶ It is of higher thematic prominence and, thus, according to a theory of locality of movement, it should maintain its prominence in the functional domain of the derivation. According to Attract, which we will assume, a functional category attracts the closest feature that can enter into a checking relation with its head (Chomsky 1995:297).¹⁷ That is, movement is triggered by an unchecked feature of a head that “looks for” the closest available element with the corresponding feature.

4 Morphological Ergativity in the Typological Literature

The claim that NR and Lith exhibit morphological ergativity would reduce to an ad hoc stipulation if this type of ergativity were not shown to follow from properties in these languages that other morphologically-ergative languages share. In the following brief review of the typological literature, I will show that the NR and Lith ergatives conform to a unified characterization of morphological ergativity that relies crucially on a possessive predication.¹⁸

¹⁶ See section 5 for elaboration.

¹⁷ In the case of overt movement, the lexical material associated with the raised D-feature (i.e., the oblique subject) is “pied-piped” to satisfy interface conditions at PF (the D-feature itself at PF is uninterpretable).

¹⁸ I am grateful to David Pesetsky for pointing out that possessive *u*+GEN links the NR construction to a similar ergative construction in Hindi, discussed in Mahajan 1994. Hindi makes use of a possessive predication in which the ergative argument is marked by the postposition *-ne* (cf. the use of an adposition--rather than a “bare Case”--to mark this function in NR as well). The ergative in Hindi marks the perfect tense, as in the example from Mahajan below:

4.1 Trask's Type-B Ergativity

According to the typological survey provided in Trask 1979, split (or "Type B") ergativity is correlated with the absence in a particular language of the distinct lexeme 'have'. The leading idea is that in order to form periphrastic past/perfect tenses in split-ergative languages, the stative passive participle is predicated of an agent phrase by means of an oblique case used elsewhere in the language to mark possession. The oblique marking on the possessor is then reinterpreted as the ergative case marker.¹⁹ The distinct ergative pattern signifies either a tense/aspect split (where the ergative marks the perfect tense) or some other well-defined contrast in meaning with a competing accusative construction (Trask 1979:395-400).²⁰

The idea of treating NR *u*+GEN in nonagreeing passive participial clauses as a possessive marker rather than as a passive BY-PHRASE is suggested by Petrova (1968:124) and further developed by Trubinskij (1984:137-149). Note that the idea of *u*+GEN as an ergative marker in the sense of Trask's Type-B ergativity was first discussed by Orr (1989, 1991).²¹

- (i) Hindi perfect
Raam- ne vah kitaabē parī thī
Ram erg [those books]: F.PL read: PART.F.PL be: F.PL.PAST
'Ram had read those books.' [Mahajan 1994:318]

See Dixon (1994:41-42) for more on the use of adpositions (and particles) to mark the ergative case.

¹⁹ The fact that the ergative Case in NR is realized morphologically as a prepositional phrase (as in Hindi) need not complicate the present analysis. Prepositions are used to mark the same syntactic functions as case systems. They can also be "selected" as a lexical property of predicates and argument-bearing morphemes (see section 5.1).

²⁰ Ergative languages that do **not** contain such a split are believed to derive from passive constructions reinterpreted as active. Trask (1979) refers to this type of ergativity as "Type A".

²¹ As for Lith, Ambrasz (cited in Schmalstieg 1982:120, fn.1 as p.c.) notes that at an earlier stage in the language, the bare GEN subject was also initially a marker of possession. Note that for the periphrastic perfect Lith uses an agreeing form of 'be', following the pattern of other non-'have' languages:

4.2 On Deriving Ergative Subjects of Intransitive Predicates

In this section we briefly address the following typological difference between NR/Lith and more robust Type-B ergatives: in NR and Lith the subject of **intransitive** predicates is also marked “ergative”. Orr points out this typological anomaly (1989:20, fn. 18) but offers no explanation for it, suggesting only that it is common for the ergative argument “to extend its range” to intransitives. Note, however, that under a finer-grained analysis of intransitive predicates it has been shown that ergative subjects commonly appear with **unergative** intransitives, though only quite rarely with unaccusative intransitives (see Marantz 1991 and Bobaljik 1993). Marantz has formalized this observation in the following generalization (Marantz 1991:237):

(17) Marantz’s Ergative Generalization

If a verb does not assign an external theta role, it will not assign ergative case to its subject (i.e., though ergative case can be assigned to the subject of an intransitive verb, it will not appear on a derived subject).

This generalization is derived from Marantz’s (1991) theory of “Dependent Case”. In Marantz’s framework the assignment of a dependent case (ergative or accusative) relies on the crucial condition that the position to which this (abstract) case is assigned may be set in opposition to another (structural or, “environment sensitive”) case position that constitutes a distinct chain. In this way Marantz rules out the ergative on a derived subject NP: both positions are in the

(i) Lith perfect

Aš esu skaitęs tą knygą
[I am]: NOM.M read: NOM.M [that book]: ACC.F
'I have read that book.'

Thus in Lith the agreeing form of the passive participle + ‘be’ marks the perfect, in contrast to the evidential reading of the nonagreeing *-ma/-ta* form.

same chain.²² Note that case realization in Marantz’s framework is treated as a property of the clause, in the same spirit as the “Case in Tiers” model proposed in Yip et al 1987. The lack of “Dependent Case” effects in NR and Lith (i.e., the presence of ergative subjects of unaccusative predicates) suggests that the assignment of ergative case to the subject in NR and Lith is not a clausal property in the strict sense (which may be considered to indicate a certain “marginality” of the split-ergativity in these languages). In section 5 we will consider the possibility that ergative case assignment to the subject is a **lexical** property of the *-no/-to* / *-ma/-ta* morphemes rather than a clausal property of the relevant split (i.e., the perfect tense or the evidential mood).

5 Case and Structure

Data from the NR and Lith ergative constructions suggest that the realization of morphological case may not necessarily involve the features that are standardly assumed to be responsible for abstract Case licensing in Agr projections. A standard minimalist phrase structure is represented in (18):

(18) [_{AgrSP} Spec AgrS [_{TP} Spec T [_{AgrOP} Spec AgrO [_{VP} NP [V NP]]]]]

According to basic minimalist assumptions (Chomsky 1995, ch.3), T and V contain the nominative and accusative Case features, respectively. Case is checked in a uniform Spec-Head relation in the functional domain: abstract accusative is checked against V in AgrO while abstract nominative is checked against T in AgrS.

In what follows, (18) will be reworked in such a way that morphological nominative will be shown to be distinct both from the abstract nominative represented in AgrS, as well as from T(ense), more generally. The notion of abstract nominative is subsumed

²² The subject of unergative intransitives can bear ergative Case because the object position in such a configuration is empty and available to count as a distinct position in opposition to which the ergative Case can be assigned.

under “subject positional licensing”, an effect of the EPP, which is checked, as we have seen, by the morphological ergative.²³ Finally, the VP will be articulated (following Chomsky 1995, ch.4) to provide two distinct positions in which the morphological ergative can be assigned (i.e., to canonical external subjects, as well as to the internal argument of unaccusative predicates).

5.1 *The Ergative Subject: Quirky Case and Derivational Morphology*

In this section it will be argued that the trigger for the ergative construction in NR and Lith is the derivational morphology affixed to the participial main predicate. Following Di Sciullo and Williams (1987), let us assume that affixes head the stems to which they are attached, and that these affixes have their own lexical specification which determines the argument structure of the derived forms. The oblique (or PP) ergative, then, is assigned as a selectional property of the *-no/-to* and *-ma/-ta* derivational morphemes. It will be recalled that *-no/-to* and *-ma/-ta* (and their variants) no longer perform the inflectional function of marking agreement.

It should be noted that derivational affixes assign quirky case elsewhere in both NR and Lith. In NR (and CSR) the infinitival suffix *-ti* assigns dative case to the infinitive’s overt-NP or PRO subject (see Babby 1998:22-23). In Lith secondary predicates with gerunds, the gerundive suffix *-ant* assigns quirky dative to the secondary predicate’s subject. (19) is an example:

- (19) Lith gerund
 Saulei tekant, pasiekėm kryžkele.
 sun: DAT rising: GER we-reached crossing
 ‘When the sun rose we reached the crossing.’
 [Ambrazas et al. 1985:320]

If the ergative marking (*u*+GEN / GEN) is a lexical property of the

²³ Note that the absence of subject-predicate agreement in NR and Lith ergatives (and the fact that subject positional licensing can be checked in TP) forces the absence of an AgrS projection. If present in the structure, its functions would remain unchecked and the derivation would not converge.

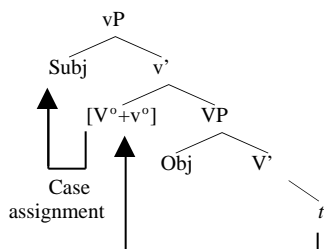
-no/-to / *-ma/-ta* affix, then the lack of Dependent Case effects in the assignment of ergative Case to subjects is explained in a straightforward manner. Rather than clausal ergativity in the more robust sense (cf. Georgian, Hindi, and Basque), NR and Lith exhibit a particular analogue of quirky case assignment, similar to the type known in Icelandic (see Zaenen et al. 1985, Sigurðsson 1992, Schütze 1993). The crucial difference is that in Icelandic quirky case is assigned as a lexical idiosyncrasy of particular verbs, while in NR and Lith, for the appropriate tense or mood, it is assigned in all instances, regardless of both the verb's lexical semantics and the larger clausal structure, as a lexical idiosyncrasy of a particular affix. It is precisely in this way that the ergative subject can be extended to subjects of unaccusative predicates (in violation of Marantz's Ergative Generalization in (17)).²⁴ Quirky case is assigned in the site of base-generation (i.e., at Merge). It enters the derivation [+interpretable]; there is no requirement that it be licensed in a structural position in the functional domain.

As I indicate below in (20a-b), the subjects of both transitive and unaccusative predicates are in a Spec-Head configuration with the verb allowing for the assignment of quirky ergative in the usual way (following standard assumptions of quirky case assignment independently motivated for Icelandic (see Schütze 1993 and Harley 1995)). The functional "light *v*" projection, which immediately dominates VP, is responsible for the assignment of the external theta role. It is headed by phonologically null "*v*", to which the lower V adjoins. Unaccusative structures, which, by definition, lack an external theta role, correspondingly lack the higher projection.²⁵

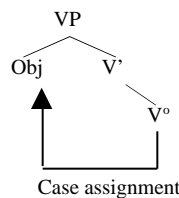
²⁴ It was pointed out at FASL 7 by Johanna Nichols that the absence of a strict distinction in case marking between the subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs renders use of the term "ergative," in the more rigorous sense, inappropriate. Though much recent work on ergativity (e.g., Marantz 1991 and Bobaljik 1993) has been concerned with accounting for the extension of ergative marking to the subject of intransitives, perhaps a more fitting term for NR and Lith *-no/-to* and *-ma/-ta* constructions is Orr's (1989, 1991) "**embryonic** ergativity" (emphasis JEL). See Nichols 1992 for a broad-based typological study of factors favoring robust ergativity in the traditional sense.

²⁵ See Bailyn 1995 for discussion of a similarly articulated VP for Russian.

(20) The assignment of quirky ergative
 a. transitives and unergatives



b. unaccusatives



5.2 The Nominative Object²⁶

The nominative object in NR and Lith transitive ergatives appears to be defined positionally, i.e., the argument bears a structural case. We must consider, then, whether all instances of the structural nominative are checked in the same position and related in the same way to the Tense projection and finiteness. We have already seen that the nominative object is positionally distinct from the argument that satisfies the EPP. The most convincing evidence for separating the nominative object from Tense (and finiteness) is that the former regularly appears in NR and Lith infinitival clauses (where a canonical nominative subject would ordinarily not be licensed). The relevant examples are provided in (21):

(21) a. NR infinitive + nominative object

Ne tebe na ètogo konja uzda nadevat'.
 NEG you: DAT on this horse bridle: NOM put-on: INF (= -ti)
 'It is not for you to put a bridle on that horse.'
 [Timberlake 1974:104-105]

b. Lith infinitive + nominative object

Kitiem laiškai rašyti buvo daug lengviau.
 others: DAT letters: NOM write: INF was much easier
 'For others letters were much easier to write.'
 [Schmalstieg 1982:128]

²⁶ Note that the analysis presented in this section is only preliminary.

Babby (1991) found that the distribution of nominative objects in NR can be reduced to control theory: the nominative object appears only when the PRO subject of infinitives is either uncontrolled or controlled by the matrix object.²⁷ Since PRO in NR (as well as in CSR and Lith) is assigned dative case (along with overt subjects of infinitives as in (21a)), Babby proposes that the nominative objects of NR infinitivals and Icelandic quirky-subject constructions are best treated as a unified phenomenon (1991:40-50). Note that both Babby (1991) and Yip et al. (1987) rely on a non-local, clausal analysis of nominative case assignment that does not refer to finiteness as the licensing mechanism. Nominative object assignment in their framework is dependent on the unavailability of morphological nominative case for the subject NP. That is, the nominative object is a result of a mismatch between abstract nominative Case and its non-nominative morphological realization on the subject NP (cf. Marantz's Dependent Case).

Let us therefore assume that the nominative object in NR and Lith is not licensed by finiteness (i.e., the abstract Case feature in T), but instead is a property of the clause, in contrast to the assignment of the ergative subject, which is a lexical property of the morpheme that triggers the ergative split. Harley (1995:150) refers to this type of nominative object licensing as "clause-bound case assignment". According to Harley's proposal, which we have been implicitly assuming, structural case realization is not related to specific functional heads, but rather to the clause as a whole. This is in contrast to the idea (proposed for Icelandic nominative objects in Schütze 1993) that T (or AgrS) obligatorily contains a nominative Case feature as an invariant selectional property of the head.

Having ruled out linking the licensing of NR and Lith nominative objects with a Case feature in finite T, what remains to be resolved is specifying where else nominative Case can be checked. Let us speculate that this may implicate functional structure between v P and TP (such as AgrO (or an adjoined v P)). Such a proposal rests on the

²⁷ Although Babby (1991) refers to Old Russian in his discussion of nominative objects, his data specifically reflect Old NR (see Timberlake 1974:5).

assumptions that the nominative object is indeed structural and that functional heads are not inherently associated with particular case morphology. That is, AgrO canonically licenses **abstract** accusative case, which may be taken to refer to a positional licensing requirement of direct objects, but it does not determine **morphological** case. A similar distinction was drawn above for abstract nominative case being realized morphologically by the “quirky” ergative. The evidence from NR and Lith provide empirical support for this “abstract” vs. “morphological” distinction. The projection of a nominative case feature in AgrO, however, remains a non-trivial matter for a minimalist system and requires the elaboration of a mechanism that would properly constrain clause-bound case checking. I will not attempt to resolve this problem here. The resulting structure for NR and Lith transitive ergatives is given in (22) (cf. (18)):²⁸

$$(22) \text{ [}_{\text{TP}} \text{ Spec T [}_{\text{AgrOP}} \text{ Spec AgrO [}_{\text{vP}} \text{ Subj v [}_{\text{vP}} \text{ Obj V]]]]]$$

6. Conclusion

The NR and Lith ergative constructions lend empirical support to the claim that subject properties cannot be linked universally to a single position. In particular, we have seen that nominative case can be checked in more than one position, and that the argument that bears nominative case is not obligatorily involved in subject positional licensing (the EPP), which may be checked by a distinct NP.

More generally, I have shown that treating the nonagreeing passive-participial structures in NR and Lith as ergative is typologically motivated, consistent with the subject properties of the preverbal oblique constituent, and, crucially, does not require amending a widely-held view of passivization just for these constructions. I

²⁸ In any event, the case feature in AgrO is weak and will be checked, accordingly, post-Spell-Out. We may note, however, that if we admit **all** local relations into the system as potential checking configurations (contra Chomsky 1993), case-checking of the nominative object may occur, without covert feature movement, against the lexical V in situ (cf. Bobaljik and Thráinsson 1998).

have also provided an explanation for the extension of ergative case marking to derived subjects of unaccusative predicates that follows from independently motivated theories of quirky-case assignment and argument structure.

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