

Core arguments and oblique arguments

- Core arguments: indispensable semantic participants
 - Subject and object
Sam hit Pat.
- Oblique arguments
 - Object of a preposition
Sam hit Pat with a hammer.

Semantic roles and grammatical relations

- Mapping between semantic roles and grammatical relations
- Subject, Object vs. Agent, Patient

Subjects

- Subjects tend to express the agent of the action.
- Subjects tend to appear first. (SVO, SOV)
- Subjects are omitted argument in imperative construction.

Subjects

- Subjects control reflexive and reciprocal NPs.
 - They hate themselves/each other.
- Subjects control the referential properties of an NP in another clause.
 - [Chris_i phoned Lee_j] and [ø_i meet him_j later].
- Subjects control reference in equi subject construction.
 - They_i tried ø_i to finish it.

Relationships within the clause

- Word order (constituent order)
- Agreement (cross-referencing)
- Case marking

Not mutually exclusive

Word order

- The order of subject, object and verb
- Subjects are made distinct from objects by appearing in a fixed position.
- SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OVS, OSV
- Basic word order vs. marked order

Word order

- SVO and SOV – most frequent
- Two generalizations
 - Subject-initial order
 - V adjacent to O
- Head-initial vs. head-final
 - VO vs. OV

Agreement or cross-referencing

- A verb is marked to reflect properties of its NP arguments.
 - Person, number, gender

Agreement

- No agreement
- Agree with some of its arguments

French

Nous avons mangé des pommes.
we have:1PL eaten INDEF PL apples
'We have eaten apples.'

- Agree with all of its arguments

Inuktitut (Allen and Schröder 2003)

Qukiq-si-gakkit
shoot-prospective aspect-causative1st person singular subject-
2nd person singular object
'(I)'m shooting (you).'

Agreement

- If a language has object agreement, it also has subject agreement.

Case systems

- Relationship between verbs and arguments is indicated by case marking.
- Case is usually marked on the head noun.

Japanese

Kodomo-ga hon-o yon-da
child-NOM book-ACC read-PAST
'The child read the book.'

German

Der gross-e Hund knurrte
the-NOM big-NOM dog growled
'The big dog growled.'

Case-marking systems

- The need to code semantic roles
- The need to code pragmatic function
- The need to code transitivity

Active-stative system

- Three-way distinction in Chickasaw: Agent, Patient, Dative
- Two-way distinction in Seneca: Agent, Non-agent
- However, grammatical relations can still play a role.

Nominative-accusative system

- Nominative and accusative
 - He hit him.
 - He ran.

Ergative- absolutive system

- Dixon (1972, 1979, 1994): S, A, O
- Ergative and absolutive
 - He hit him.
 - Him ran.

Ergative language

Basque

Gixona-k liburua erosi dau
man: ERG book:ABS buy AUX:3SG
'The man (A) has bought the book (O).'

Gixona etorri da
man:ABS come AUX:3SG
'The man (S) has come.'

Gixona ikusi dot
man:ABS see AUX:1SG
'I (A) have seen the man (O).'

Split ergative

- Ergative case marking for some constructions and accusative case marking for others.
 - Dyirbal: nouns have ergative case marking; 1st and 2nd person pronouns have accusative case marking.

Grammatical relations in ergative-absolutive system

- It is not uncommon for a language with ergative case-marking to show accusative syntactic patterns.
- Warlpiri: ergative case marking, but accusative agreement pattern.
- No language with accusative case marking and ergative agreement pattern
- Accusative agreement pattern predominates cross-linguistically.

Case systems

- It is generally S that lacks any overt marking.
- Case marking on accusative NP and ergative NP

Word order in languages with case marking

Der Junge gab den Brief dem Lehrer.
Den Brief gab der Junge dem Lehrer.
Dem Lehrer gab der Junge den Brief.
Der Junge gab dem Lehrer den Brief.

‘The boy gave the letter (to) the teacher.’

Case marking and agreement

- Case marking can also be seen in verb agreement

Sacapultec Maya (Du Bois 1987)

s-ax-war-ek

CMP-1pl.ABS-sleep-IF

'We slept.'