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Northwest Caucasian Languages: Grammar and Typology

IV. Grammatical relations and alignment(s)

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1. Introduction

- In the literature, NWC languages are considered ergative (Bossong 1982, Kumakhov & Vamling 1996, 2009, Letuchiy 2012 etc.).

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- In the literature, NWC languages are considered ergative (Bossong 1982, Kumakhov & Vamling 1996, 2009, Letuchiy 2012 etc.).
- This is certainly justified, but...
- What does it exactly mean?
- And is it all that can be said about grammatical relations in NWC?

1. Introduction

- What are grammatical relations?
- The “Zürich” approach (Bickel 2011, Witzlack-Makarevich 2010, Witzlack-Makarevich & Bickel eds. 2019):
- “A syntactic relation that an argument bears to a *specific construction or rule*” (Bickel 2011)
- “This means that an argument can bear as many GRs as it enters constructions in a given syntactic context, and these GRs need not be the same across constructions.” (ibid.)
- “Thus, grammatical relations are reconceptualized as equivalence sets of *arguments* which are treated the same way (i.e. “aligned”) by an *argument selector* (any morphosyntactic construction or pattern of marking or rule) under certain *conditions*.” (Witzlack-Makarevich 2019: 5)

2. Ingredients

- Argument roles: S, A, P, R, T
- Valency classes of verbs (transitive and intransitive).
- Indexing of arguments by pronominal markers on verbs.
- Flagging of arguments by case-markers (where available).
- Plural marking (Circassian, Ubykh).
- Reflexives and reciprocals.
- Voice constructions (e.g. antipassive).
- Direct-inverse marking.
- Cross-clausal dependencies (e.g. relativisation, control, ellipsis).
- etc

3. Valency classes

- Numerical valency vs. transitivity (Letuchiy 2013 etc.)
- Transitivity is understood morphosyntactically (as encoding of A and P in the way similar to the verb ‘break’, cf. Haspelmath 2011: 545)

	I	II	III	example
Intransitive	Abs			‘live’
transitive	Erg	Abs		‘break’
inverse	IO	Abs		‘forget’

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	I	II	III	example
intransitive	Abs	IO		‘hit’
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	I	II	III	example
intransitive	Abs	IO		‘hit’
transitive	Erg	Abs	IO	‘give’
inverse	IO	Abs		‘forget’

3. Valency classes

- Indexing

Abaza

(1) *h-bzáza-ṭ*

1PL.ABS-live-DCL

'we lived'

monovalent intransitive

(2) *hə-l-bá-ṭ*

1PL.ABS-3SG.F.ERG-see-DCL

'she saw us'

bivalent transitive

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Ergative alignment

S=P≠A

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'she saw us'

bivalent transitive

(3) *j-šá-s-t-ṭ*

3SG.N.ABS-2PL.IO-1SG.ERG-give-DCL

'I gave you it'

trivalent transitive

(4) *hə-l-q-áštəl-ṭ*

1SG.ABS-3SG.F.IO-PVB-forget-DCL

'she forgot us'

bivalent inverse

3. Valency classes

- Indexing

Abaza

(1) *h-bzáza-ṭ*

1PL.ABS-live-DCL

'we lived'

monovalent intransitive

(5) *hə-l-pšá-ṭ*

1PL.ABS-3SG.F.IO-look-DCL

'we looked at her'

bivalent intransitive

3. Valency classes

- Indexing

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bivalent intransitive



Accusative alignment
S=A≠P

3. Valency classes

- Flagging

West Circassian

- (6) *č'ale-r me-čəje* monovalent intransitive
boy-ABS DYN-sleep
'The boy is sleeping.'
- (7) *pšâše-m č'ale-r jə-λeβ^wə-β* bivalent transitive
girl-OBL boy-ABS 3SG.ERG-see-PST
'The girl saw the boy.'
- (8) *č'ale-r pšâše-m je-ža-β* bivalent intransitive
boy-ABS girl-OBL 3SG.IO+DAT-wait-PST
'The boy waited for the girl.'

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Ergative alignment
S=P≠A

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Accusative alignment
 $S=A \neq P$

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boy-ABS girl-OBL 3SG.IO+DAT-wait-PST
'The boy waited for the girl.'
- (9) *č'ale-m pšaše-m txələ-r r-j-e-tə* trivalent transitive
boy-OBL girl-OBL book-ABS 3SG.IO+DAT-3SG.ERG-DYN-give
'The boy is giving the book to the girl.'

4. Plural marking

- West Circassian

(10) *č'ale-xe-r* *me-čəje-x*
boy-PL-ABS DYN-sleep-PL
'The boys are sleeping.'

(11) *pšaše-m* *č'ale-xe-r* *jə-λeβ^wə-βe-x*
girl-OBL boy-PL-ABS 3SG.ERG-see-PST-PL
'The girl saw the boys.'

(11') *pšaše-xe-m* *č'ale-r* *ɑ-λeβ^wə-β(*e-x)*
girl-PL-OBL boy-ABS 3PL.ERG-see-PST(*-PL)
'The girls saw the boy.'

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'The girls saw the boy.'

Ergative alignment
S=P≠A

4. Plural marking

- Ubykh (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 161–162; Smeets 1997; Fenwick 2011: 135–136)

present	'go'		'see', 3PI Erg	
	Sg	Pl	Sg	Pl
1	<i>s-ḱ'e-n</i>	<i>š'-ḱ'-a-n</i>	<i>s-a-bje-n</i>	<i>š'-a-bj-a-n</i>
2	<i>w-ḱ'e-n</i>	<i>š^w-ḱ'-a-n</i>	<i>w-a-bje-n</i>	<i>š^w-a-bj-a-n</i>
3	<i>(a)-ḱ'e-n</i>	<i>a-ḱ'-a-n</i>	<i>a-bje-n</i>	<i>a-bj-a-n</i>

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3	<i>(a)-ḱ'e-n</i>	<i>a-ḱ'-a-n</i>	<i>a-bje-n</i>	<i>a-bj-a-n</i>

Ergative alignment
S=P≠A

4. Plural marking

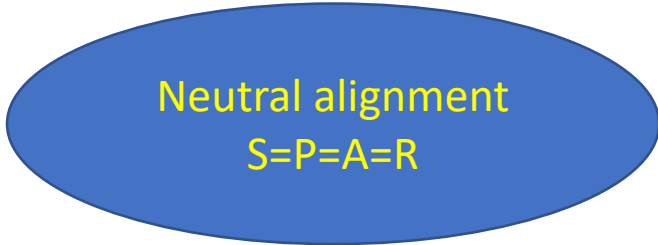
- Ubykh (Dumézil & Esenç 1975: 88; Smeets 1997; Fenwick 2011: 101-2):

- (12) a. *wə-ž'-bje-n*
2SG.ABS-1PL.ERG-see-PRS
'We see you (sg).'
- b. *sə-ž^w-bj-a-n*
1SG.ABS-2PL.ERG-see-PL-PRS
'You (pl) see me.'
- (13) a. *wə-ž'-be-χ^weč'e-n*
2SG.ABS-1PL.IO-LOC-search-PRS
'You (sg) are looking for us.'
- b. *sə-ž^w-be-χ^weč'-a-n*
1SG.ABS-2PL.IO-LOC-search-PL-PRS
'I am looking for you (pl).'

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- (12) a. *wə-ž'-bje-n*
2SG.ABS-1PL.ERG-see-PRS
'We see you (sg).'
- b. *sə-ž^w-bj-a-n*
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'You (pl) see me.'
- (13) a. *wə-ž'-be-χ^weč'e-n*
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Neutral alignment
S=P=A=R

4. Reflexives and reciprocals

West Circassian (cf. Letuchiy 2007, 2012, Ershova 2022)

- (14) *zə-sə-wəpsə-ʋ* bivalent transitive
RFL.ABS-1SG.ERG-shave-PST
'I shaved (myself).'
- (15) *sə-z-fe-g^wəbžə-ž'ə* bivalent intransitive
1SG.ABS-RFL.IO-BEN-angry-RE
'I am angry at myself.'
- (16) *wəne-r zə-fe-p-ŝə-ž'ə-ʋ* trivalent transitive
house-ABS RFL.IO-BEN-2SG.ERG-make-RE-PST
'You build a house for yourself.'

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- (14) *zə-sə-wəpsə-ɸ* bivalent transitive
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house-ABS RFL.IO-BEN-2SG.ERG-make-RE-PST
'You built a house for yourself.'

Reflexive is oriented towards the more agentive participant.
Basically, an accusative (S+A) orientation.

4. Reflexives and reciprocals

West Circassian (cf. Letuchiy 2007, 2012, Ershova 2022)

- (17) *tə-qə-ze-de-š^we* bivalent intransitive
1PL.ABS-CSL-REC.IO-COM-dance
'We are dancing with each other.'
- (18) *wəne-xe-r ze-fe-t-šə-ž'a-b* trivalent transitive IO>REC
house-PL-ABS REC.IO-BEN-1PL.ERG-make-RE-PST
'We built houses for each other.'

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house-PL-ABS REC.IO-BEN-1PL.ERG-make-RE-PST
'We built houses for each other.'

IO-reciprocal, like reflexive, is agent-oriented (S+A).

4. Reflexives and reciprocals

Abaza (similarly Abkhaz), Arkadiev & Durneva (2023):

- (20) *čə-j-χ^wə-ɬ* bivalent transitive
RFL.ABS-3SG.M.ERG-injure-DCL
'He injured himself.'
- (21) *č-s-čə-mav-χ-ɸ* bivalent inverse
RFL.ABS-1SG.IO-MAL-be.unpleasant-RE-NPST.DCL
'I hate myself.'
- (22) **čə-l-pš-əj-ɬ* bivalent intransitive
RFL.ABS-3SG.F.IO-look-PRS-DCL
intended: 'She looked at herself.'

4. Reflexives and reciprocals

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intended: 'She looked at herself.'

A + oblique A orientation

5. Relativisation

- Absolute vs. oblique in morphology
- Lander (2010, 2012), Ershova (2021): absolute is privileged also in syntax

5. Relativisation

West Circassian (Lander 2012: 251-252): the internal head cannot occur between the absolutive and the relativised predicate

(23) [*çəf-ew* *q^waje-r* *zə-šxə-re*]-r *be.reza.β-ew* *š'ə.t*
man-ADV cheese-ABS REL.ERG-eat-DYN-ABS content AUX
'The man who is eating cheese is content.'

(23') * [*q^waje-r* *çəf-ew* *zə-šxə-re*]-r *be.reza.β-ew* *š'ə.t*
cheese-ABS man-ADV REL.ERG-eat-DYN-ABS content AUX
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man-ADV *cheese-ABS* *REL.ERG-eat-DYN-ABS* content AUX
 'The man who is eating cheese is content.'

(23') * [*q^waje-r* *çəf-ew* *zə-šxə-re*]-r *be.reza.β-ew* *š'ə.t*
cheese-ABS *man-ADV* *REL.ERG-eat-DYN-ABS* content AUX
 'The man who is eating cheese is content.'

(24) [*se* *č'et-ew* *s-šxə-re*]-r *qe.ž^we.βa.p-ep*
1SG *chicken-ADV* *1SG.ERG-eat-DYN-ABS* good.cooked-NEG
 'The chicken that I am eating is not cooked properly.'

6. Voice-like phenomena

- Potential (based on the benefactive):

West Circassian (Letuchiy 2009: 355-358): A-orientation

(25) a. *se harəfə-xe-r* *s-e-txə* transitive
1SG character-PL-ABS 1SG.ERG-DYN-write
'I am writing characters.'

b. *se harəfə-xe-r* *s-fe-txə-r-ep*
1SG character-PL-ABS 1SG.IO-BEN-write-DYN-NEG
'I cannot write characters.'

(26) **č'ałe-r* /**č'ałe-m* *fa-ḵ^we-r-ep* intransitive
boy-ABS /boy-OBL BEN-go-DYN-NEG
intended 'The boy cannot go.'

6. Voice-like phenomena

- Potential (based on the benefactive):

Abaza (texts): S+A-orientation

(27) *knigá* *g'-s-zá-m-χ^wζ-əw-z-ɬ* transitive
book NEG-1SG.IO-POT-NEG-buy-IPF-PST.NFIN-DCL
'I could not buy books.'

(28) *jará* *d-g'ə-z-ζá-mə-j-ɬ* intransitive
3SG.M 3SG.H.ABS-NEG.EMP-POT-CSL-NEG-come-DCL
'He could not come himself.'

6. Voice-like phenomena

- Circassian antipassive (Arkadiev & Letuchiy 2021)

Kuban Kabardian (elicited): bivalent transitive

(29) a. *se ž'ane-r z-da-ne*
1SG dress-ABS 1SG.ERG-sew-FUT
'I will sew a dress.'

b. *zə-z-ve.psex^w-me jə-ɬane sə-de-ne*
RFL.IO-1SG.ERG-relax-COND POSS-then 1SG.ABS-sew.ANTIP-FUT
'I will take a rest and then will do my sewing.'

6. Voice-like phenomena

- Circassian antipassive (Arkadiev & Letuchiy 2021)

Kuban Kabardian (elicited): bivalent intransitive

- (30) a. *se* *ṣale-m* *s-je-ʔ^wənṣə-ne*
1SG boy-OBL 1SG.ABS-3SG.IO+DAT-push-FUT
'I will shove that guy.'
- b. *sabəj-xe-r* *me-ʔ^wənṣe*
child-PL-ABS DYN-push.ANTIP
'The children are jostling.'

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The antipassive is P-oriented regardless of transitivity.

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child-PL-ABS DYN-push.ANTIP
'The children are jostling.'

The antipassive is P-oriented regardless of transitivity.

And this in an apparently morphologically ergative language!

Cf. parallel patterning of “direct-inverse” marking (Arkadiev 2020).

Interim summary

- Alignment in different constructions:

argument selector	alignment
indexing	Abs vs. Erg vs. IO (ergative)
plural marking (Ubykh, default)	Abs vs. Erg vs. IO (ergative)
plural marking (Ubykh, 2PI)	Abs + Erg + IO (neutral)
flagging (Circassian)	Abs vs. Erg + IO (ergative)
relativisation	Abs vs. Erg + IO (ergative)
reflexive (Circassian)	S + Erg vs. P + IO (accusative)
reflexive (Abaza)	A + A _{OBL} (ergative)
reciprocal	Erg vs. Abs + IO (ergative)
potential (Circassian)	Erg vs. Abs + IO (ergative)
potential (Abaza)	S + Erg vs. P + IO (accusative)
antipassive (Circassian)	S + Erg vs. P + IO (accusative)

7. Cross-clausal relations

- Testelets (2009) and Ershova (2019: Ch. 5) on West Circassian.
- Co-reference relations between arguments of non-relative clauses are expressed by means of regular pronominal affixes (like e.g. in the Balkan languages).
- Obligatory control constructions with verbs like ‘start’, ‘forget’, ‘begin’, ‘finish’ behave more or less as expected, requiring identity between the semantic controller and the performer of the embedded event.

7. Cross-clausal relations

- West Circassian (Ershova 2019: 207-8):

(31) [*pše-r z-ʁe-pəte-n-ew*] *s-š'ə-ʁ^wəpšə-ʁ*
door-ABS 1SG.ERG-CAUS-close-POT-ADV 1SG.IO-LOC-forget-PST
'I forgot to lock the door.'

(32) [*mə meza-m sə-ḱ^we-n-ew*] *s-e-š'əne*
this forest-OBL 1SG.ABS-go-POT-ADV 1SG.ABS-DYN-fear
'I am afraid to go into this forest.'

7. Cross-clausal relations

- Testelets (2009) and Ershova (2019: Ch. 5) on West Circassian.
- The full NP expressing the controller/controllee can be expressed either in the matrix or in the embedded clause (cf. Polinsky & Potsdam 2002 on “backward control”).
- Even if the NP is quantified! (In which case an ellipsis analysis is impossible.)

7. Cross-clausal relations

- West Circassian (Ershova 2019: 211-212):

- (33) a. *pšaše-m* *qe.š^we-n-ew* *r-jə-be.ž'a-b*
girl-OBL dance-POT-ADV DAT-3SG.ERG-begin-PST
'The girl started to dance.'
- b. *pšaše-r* *qe.š^we-n-ew* *r-jə-be.ž'a-b*
girl-ABS dance-POT-ADV DAT-3SG.ERG-begin-PST
'id.'

7. Cross-clausal relations

- West Circassian (Ershova 2019: 211-212):

- (33) a. *pšaše-m* [\emptyset *qe.š^we-n-ew*] *r-jə-be.ž'a-b*
girl-OBL ABS dance-POT-ADV DAT-3SG.ERG-begin-PST
'The girl started to dance.'
- b. \emptyset [*pšaše-r* *qe.š^we-n-ew*] *r-jə-be.ž'a-b*
ERG girl-ABS dance-POT-ADV DAT-3SG.ERG-begin-PST
'id.'

7. Cross-clausal relations

- West Circassian (Ershova 2019: 214):

(34) a. [\emptyset *qe.š^we-n-ew*] *zeč'e-m-jə* *r-a-be.ž'a-b*
ABS dance-POT-ADV all-OBL-ADD DAT-3PL.ERG-begin-PST
'Everyone started to dance.'

b. [*zeč'e-r-jə* *qe.š^we-n-ew*] \emptyset *r-a-be.ž'a-b*
all-ABS-ADD dance-POT-ADV ERG DAT-3PL.ERG-begin-PST
'id.'

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