

**KATUKINA-KANAMARI AND SIKUANI:  
SUBJECT AND OBJECT WITHIN THE ERGATIVITY / ACCUSATIVITY ARENAS**

Francesc Queixalós

CNRS France

"Mmm... Then, what is a subject?"  
Spike Gildea, Belem 1994

"These ideas are coming back."  
Noam Chomsky, Belem 1996

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**0 INTRODUCTION**

In this article<sup>1</sup> I argue that grammatical relations tell us about the *hierarchising* of clause arguments at the *syntactic* level of structure. The latter is understood as the formal relations, besides coding, that the major constituents of a clause mutually entertain inside the clause and, beyond, between clauses as bound by coordination / subordination linkages.

*Argument* is a formal entity: the coding (linear order included; Mel'čuk 1987:195) that a predicate stipulates for the expression of the semantic *participants* it brings into service on account of its inherent lexical structure. Shunning tangential details proper to popular theoretical options (e.g. Baker 2001 on one side /vs./ Jelinek 1993, Mithun 2003 and Haspelmath 2013 on the other), I will say that arguments may be expounded either by noun

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<sup>1</sup> The two quotes above are the earliest feedbacks I got from professional linguists after, respectively, my first and second fieldworks on Katukina-Kanamari.

For sparing the reader the back and forth between examples and the list of abbreviations, I will keep the latter to the minimum: ACC accusative; ANTIP antipassive; COMIT comitative; FEM feminine; INCL inclusive; INST instrumental; NOM nominative; SING singular.

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phrases — including free standing personal pronouns —, or by predicate indexes, or by *both* concomitantly (*cf.* Steele 1989 on Luiseño, and Baker 2001 with reference to Mohawk: "chain-like entities with elements in more than one syntactic position"). Zeros count as silent argument positions. Predicates denote the *manners-of-existing* of their participants. The notion of *predicate* is two-fold. On one hand, the lexicon encompasses a class of entries that are inherently predicates, that is, unsaturated *functions* with arity properties (Frege 1891; *cf.* the more up-to-date *argument-taking lexical entry*). The prototypical element of this class is the verb. Nouns are also predicates in this sense — more or less visibly depending on the language. On the other hand, the natural status of these lexical entries in the information hierarchy of the realised clause is that of a *rheme* (František 1970, harkening back to Aristotle's *rhema* as opposed to *onoma*). We will resume this distinction further below. (In order to avoid wordy phrasings repeated over and over, I will sometimes indulge in shortcuts like *agent argument* for what is properly *the argument that expresses the agent participant*, etc.).

Since the architecture of what follows is likely to seem a bit convolute at first sight, I will here provide a brief outline of it.

After a synoptic view of the main grammatical features of the languages in focus, Sikuani and Katukina-Kanamari (section 1), I undertake to show how one can unveil a set of formal properties that single out one top-ranked argument in syntactical accessibility, here called *distinguished argument* (2.1), first in Sikuani, where these properties are rather tenuous (2.1.1), then in Katukina-Kanamari, which on the contrary makes a strong case for the existence of a syntactically-defined subject (2.1.2). From there I proceed with the notion of object (2.2), contrasting Sikuani — with its direct / indirect objects (2.2.1) — and Katukina-Kanamari, deprived as it is of the "bitransitive" type of trivalent verbs (2.2.2). Sections 1 and 2 are thus about the contribution that these two languages can make to the issue at stake.

At the opposite of my contention stand those approaches, here represented by Shibatani (2021) and Dryer (1986), which favour nonsyntactic properties for feeding into the *definition* of grammatical relations, (3). In 3.1 and 3.2 I will retrieve the previous findings on Katukina-Kanamari and Sikuani to address the issue of whether positing double sets of grammatical relations on account of the semantic / pragmatic / coding correlates of arguments should be seen as a legitimate move. Then follows section 4, factoring in the notion of *split syntax* which, as suggested by the diachrony of ergativity, provides an interesting cue to the idea that the status of subject is not something that appertains to a language as a whole but, instead, to a given construction. Finally, 5 sews up the quest by hinting at universality and prototypicality as rather ancillary topics *vis-à-vis* the point under discussion.

## 1 TYPOLOGICAL PROFILES

### 1.1 SIKUANI

This language is spoken in the grasslands west of the mid-Orinoco river, Colombia, and also in Venezuela on the eastern banks of the Orinoco and on the Manapiare river, a tributary of the Ventuari, itself a northern tributary of the upper Orinoco. It belongs to the small Guahiban family.

Word classes comprise nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, postpositions and particles. The basic word order is, in pre-theoretical terms, S(O)V, with some flexibility allowed for pragmatic reasons. Coding, constituency and other formal patterns display nominative-accusative alignment together with head-final order. Nouns feature clusivity and alienability distinctions, as well as a rich assortment of quantifying and classifying devices. Two arguments are indexed in verb morphology. Clusivity surfaces there too, and also in

noun morphology and noun phrase internal structure. Third person has zero exponence in verbs, as well as in nouns in predicate position. The latter occur with no copula. In verbs, the inclusive index undergoes a broad-ranging process of grammaticalisation, including honorific uses and voice change. Tense is bipartite: future / nonfuture, with only the former triggering overt expression. Two profuse sets of verb-bound forms, auxiliaries and applicative preverbs, wrap up the essentials of verb morphology. Valence properties yield two subclasses of nouns and three subclasses of verbs. Monovalent verbs split into unergatives and unaccusatives. Trivalent verbs have the recipient participant as direct object. Verbs also divide between prototypical ones, featuring a realis / irrealis contrast, and those that share some of their properties with nouns as predicates. Other remarkable subclasses of verbs include a set of body-posture verbs and a set of directional verbs, both with far reaching impact on grammar. Noun incorporation and nominalisation are highly productive, the latter supplying the bulk of subordinate clauses.

## 1.2 KATUKINA-KANAMARI

Katukina-Kanamari, thus named after its two dialects and henceforth abridged to Katukina, is spoken on both sides of the middle Amazon, between the Javari and the Purus rivers and on the lower Japura. It is part — or the sole member — of the Katukinan family, the other potential member being Katawixi, nowadays of dubious existence.

Limited morphology, strong constituency — head-final —, and starkly asymmetric form of divalent ("transitive") verb arguments are major distinctive features of Katukina. Parts of speech are nouns, verbs, adverbs, postpositions, and particles. Subclasses include monovalent and divalent nouns and verbs, with an additional partition of monovalent verbs into unergatives and unaccusatives. Particles do not head complex phrases, which all other parts of speech do, predicate phrases included. Nonverbal predicates do not require a copula, but an existential copula can optionally occur in natural speech. Arguments in baseline clauses pattern an absolutive-ergative alignment at the coding and syntactic levels. The unmarked linear order of argument noun phrases is chiefly a function of constituency. Valence properties yield two subclasses of nouns and two subclasses of verbs. Only one argument occurs as indexed on divalent verbs. The same index occurs on postpositions and divalent nouns. Divalent verbs display a transitivity split: by dint of the patient participant being generic / nonreferential, a nominative-accusative clause arises (this pattern is, putatively, a relic of the pre-ergative era, see below 2.1.2). A derived voice reduces the valence of divalent verbs, promoting the agent participant exponence and leaving the patient participant either unrealised or surfacing as adjunct. Other argument structure changing mechanisms include applicative, causative, and noun incorporation. Subordination also resorts to nominalisation, though in a much less transparent fashion than in Sikuani.

## 2 SEVERING LAYERS OF STRUCTURE

The sole interest of the notion of grammatical relations — and especially that of subject — rests on the possibility to capture operant generalisations that neither the semantic roles of participants nor the information hierarchy of referents nor the mere form of arguments can afford on their own (Givón 1997).

I hasten to add that this by no means precludes the existence, between these layers of structure, of interdependencies affording nontrivial insights into the way the functional roots of language — cognition, communication — shape the form of the grammar. Ensuing relevant questions among others should then be, for instance: Can an agent participant surface as object (*cf.* Mel'čuk 1988 on Dyirbal /*vs.*/ Givón 2001:200)? Can a location surface as subject

(*cf.* **This bed sleeps three persons**)? Can the focus of attention trigger the syntactic promotion of the patient exponence (*cf.* Tomlin 1995 on English and other languages)? Along with: Can a dative argument have subject status (*cf.* Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005 on Icelandic)? Can the exponence of the patient be the only argument indexed on the divalent verb in basic clauses (*cf.* Launey 2003 on Palikur)? And so on. Now, there is every reason to think that such issues will only be carried somewhat further provided the mentioned layers of structure are kept analytically disjointed from the onset, much in the spirit of Givón (1983) text counts on topicality, or DuBois (1987) on discourse techniques for introducing new referents.

## 2.1 SUBJECTS

### 2.1.1 SIKUANI: A LOOSE SUBJECT

Argument noun phrases are unmarked for case, which allows to tell apart arguments from adjuncts more thoroughly than verb-indexing since third person is phonologically covert. The nominative and accusative indexes occur as suffixed / prefixed series on the predicate, respectively. The first-person plural splits into exclusive / inclusive. (For a full account of the grammar, see Oueixalós 2024.)

- (1) Hialai<sub>1</sub>    pewi<sub>2</sub>    ø<sub>2</sub>-seta-ø<sub>1</sub>                      pamono-nexa  
H.       meat     3ACCUSATIVE-cook-3NOMINATIVE   HerHusband-FOR  
'Hialai<sub>1</sub> cooked the meat<sub>2</sub> for her husband.'

Semantically the nominative encompasses

agents of unergative, di- and trivalent verbs,  
experiencers of unaccusative and deponent verbs,  
patients of medio-passive verbs,

whilst the accusative stands for

experiencers, patients and recipients of di- and trivalent verbs,  
agents — the causee — of causativised unergative, divalent and trivalent verbs.

A passive voice arises given a di- or trivalent clause with all third persons and a salient participant (animacy, topicality) in accusative position. The nominative index freezes as a totally dereferentiated first person inclusive. The agent participant may surface in the guise of a caseless adjunct (see an example in (4-d) hereafter).

- (2) **Hialai<sub>i</sub>** **Ø<sub>1</sub>-hunata-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 H. 3ACCUSATIVE-call-1INCLUSIVENOMINATIVE  
 'Someone<sub>0</sub> called Hialai<sub>i</sub> / Hialai<sub>i</sub> was called.'

The attributes that point to the nominative as the syntactically distinguished argument are often gradual rather than categorical.

Clause coordination is achieved through asyndetic juxtaposition — one example is made available in (10-a) below — or by an overt coordinating suffix. The latter can attach to either both nominative noun phrases or just one. In this latter case it *invariably* joins the second-clause nominative noun phrase, (3-a). When coordinated noun phrases share the same verb the nominative is only *favoured*, b.

- (3) a. **Pharansiku<sub>1</sub> merayo<sub>2</sub> Ø<sub>3</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub>...**

F.                    A Little Water    3ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE  
'Francisco<sub>1</sub> gave him<sub>3</sub> a little water<sub>2</sub>,...'

...[Kasaruru<sub>4</sub>]-behe    Ø<sub>3</sub>-tokaria-[Ø<sub>4</sub>]                    merayo<sub>5</sub>  
K.-COORDINATIVE    3ACCUSATIVE-bring-3NOMINATIVE    A Little Water  
'...and Kasaruru<sub>4</sub> too brought him<sub>3</sub> a little water<sub>5</sub>.'

b.    mapaliwaisi<sub>1</sub>    [Maikusiawünüwa<sub>2</sub>]...  
This Story            The Woman Named Maikusia  
'This story, the woman named Maikusia...'

...[Kenahiwünü<sub>3</sub>]-behe                    Ø<sub>1</sub>-tsipaeba-[Ø<sub>2&3</sub>]-behe  
The Man Named Kenahi-COORDINATIVE    3ACCUSATIVE-tell-3NOMINATIVE-DUAL  
'...and the man named Kenahi told it.'

The corrective focus **baitsi** in divalent clauses categorially selects the nominative. From (4-a) one can have b., but c. will be interpreted as nonsensical since with all third persons the focussed noun phrase *must* be nominative. When I pressed the speaker to focus on the porcupine as patient argument while keeping both noun phrases overt, I got d., a passive with no **baitsi**,

(4) a.    newüthü<sub>1</sub>    tsala<sub>2</sub>            Ø<sub>2</sub>-xane-Ø<sub>1</sub>  
          jaguar        porcupine    3ACCUSATIVE-eat-3NOMINATIVE  
'Jaguars eat porcupines.'

Play-acting debate on who eats who:

b.    [newüthü<sub>1</sub>]    baitsi            tsala<sub>2</sub>            Ø<sub>2</sub>-xane-Ø<sub>1</sub>  
          jaguar        CORRECTIVE    porcupine    3ACCUSATIVE-eat-3NOMINATIVE  
'Rather, *jaguars* eat porcupines.'

c.    ?[tsala<sub>1</sub>]        baitsi            newüthü<sub>2</sub>        Ø<sub>2</sub>-xane-Ø<sub>1</sub>  
          porcupine    CORRECTIVE    jaguar            3ACCUSATIVE-eat-3NOMINATIVE  
'Rather, *porcupines* eat jaguars.'

d.    [tsala<sub>1</sub>]        Ø<sub>1</sub>-xane-tsi<sub>0</sub>                    newüthü  
          porcupine    3ACCUSATIVE-eat-1 INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE    jaguar  
'*Porcupines* are eaten by jaguars.'

In a second and perhaps less frequent form of clause coordination — using the particle **nua** instead of **-behe** —, the nominative is *favoured* in "equi-NP deletion".

(5)    [amo<sub>1</sub>]            owebi<sub>2</sub>    Ø<sub>2</sub>-upaxuaba-[Ø<sub>1</sub>]...  
          grand-father    deer        3ACCUSATIVE-kill-3NOMINATIVE  
'Grand-father<sub>1</sub> killed a deer<sub>2</sub>,...'

...[metsaha<sub>3</sub>        nua                    Ø<sub>3</sub>-upaxuaba-[Ø<sub>1</sub>]  
          tapir            COORDINATIVE    3ACCUSATIVE-kill-3NOMINATIVE  
'...and he<sub>1</sub> killed a tapir<sub>3</sub> too.'

In subordination more clearly-syntactic requirements are at work, selecting the main clause nominative as controller. Complement clauses, (6), are plain nominalisations, where a "possessive" prefix stands for the referent that in the corresponding finite verb would surface as the nominative argument. (Subordinate "clauses" appear between square brackets in the examples.)

- (6) [**pe**<sub>1</sub>-**tüpae-hawa**]<sub>2</sub>                      **ikuli**<sub>1</sub>                      **apo-ø<sub>2</sub>-hitsipae-ø<sub>1</sub>**  
          3INTRINSICLINKEE-die-NONANIMATE    Turtle<sub>Sp.</sub>    NEGATION-3ACCUSATIVE-want-3NOM  
          'The turtle *Sp.*<sub>1</sub> didn't want to die [lit. ...its<sub>1</sub> dying<sub>2</sub>].'

(For the gloss *intrinsic linkee* in a context of "inalienable possession" see Queixalós 2024:97.)

(7) exhibits a subordinate adverbial clause nominative — first line — getting its reference from a main clause nominative.

- (7) [**hiwi**<sub>1</sub>    **metha**                      **ø<sub>1</sub>-bihianae-hitsia-ø<sub>2</sub>**]<sub>2</sub>...  
          people    ASSUMPTIVE    3ACCUSATIVE-damage-PURPOSE-3NOMINATIVE  
          ...**baharaponü**<sub>2</sub>                      **Tsawaliwali**<sub>2</sub>                      **pitsapa-ø<sub>2</sub>**  
          ThatOne                      Ts.                      ShowUp-3NOMINATIVE  
          'In all likelihood that individual<sub>2</sub>, Tsawaliwali<sub>2</sub>, came forth<sub>2</sub> planning to harm<sub>2</sub> humans<sub>1</sub>.'

I will now adduce, complementing the above, one statistical fact related to topicality: in an active, divalent, dependent clause the accusative argument surfaces as an overt noun phrase / free pronoun *strikingly more* oftentimes than the nominative argument does, thus disclosing a clear bias toward a nominative pivot having the nominative as the unmarked controlee. This is tantamount to: the nominative embodies the more readily available referent in the dependent clause.

So far, we have nonfrivolous grounds for a nominative argument as the syntactically distinguished argument:

- (8)    - corrective focus  
          - locus of the noun-phrase coordinative morpheme  
          - reference control in clause-combining.

Comparatively modest as it is, such evidence puts forward the existence of a *syntactic* hierarchy of arguments.

Now, one question arises. What can be made, in terms of the generalisations that afford a better insight into the language's syntax, of a *subject* whose properties equal those of a *nominative* argument? As far as one can see, there is little to recommend such a move unless we take the issue of generality a step further, something like disclosing, based on (8), a neutralisation between the nominative argument and at least another argument (in the spirit of Givón's 2001:174 dissociation test; see also Mel'čuk 1987:160). Follows some available evidence for such neutralisation involving the accusative argument.

Recall that the example (2) above displays the passive construction: a divalent verb featuring its patient participant as an accusative index at its left and a stand-in nominative index — semantically and referentially void — at its right. The accusative argument thus turns into the sole argument of a detransitivised verb. The retention by default of the accusative indexation makes such passive a nonpromotional one within the *morphology* compass.

Turning to syntax, (9-a) shows that argument coordination in one and the same clause includes the passive accusative. However, it also does so regarding the active accusative, b., something that should weaken the passive accusative as the other selected argument in noun phrase coordination ...wasn't it that the example in b. came about as an elicited utterance and has no equivalent in the currently available naturalistic data.

- (9) a. **paduhainüyo<sub>1</sub>-behe** **merawipihinüyo<sub>2</sub>-behe...**  
 ThatLittleWildAnimal-COORDINATIVE TheNocturnalLittleOne-COORDINATIVE  
 'That little wild animal and the nocturnal one...'
- ...**Ø<sub>1&2</sub>-tane-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-see-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE  
 '...became visible [lit. were seen].'
- b. **Ø<sub>1&2</sub>-koniba-hü** **awiri<sub>1</sub>-behe** **marano<sub>2</sub>-behe**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-whip-1NOMINATIVE dog-COORDINATIVE pig-COORDINATIVE  
 'I whipped both the dog<sub>1</sub> and the pig<sub>2</sub>.'

A less hazy picture emerges from the passive accusative as coreference controller in *complex* sentences (*i.e.* more than one clause belonging to a higher syntactic constituent). We discern a passive clause accusative as antecedent of

- a divalent-verb nominative in the asyndetic coordination displayed in (10-a),
- a divalent-verb nominative in the complement clause of b.,
- another passive accusative in the adverbial clause in c.

- (10) a. **Ø<sub>1</sub>-rahuta-tsi<sub>0</sub>** **baharaxuaxi<sub>2</sub>]...**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-give-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE ThoseLittleThings  
 'They<sub>1</sub> were given those little things<sub>2</sub>,...'
- ...**Ø<sub>2</sub>-kapona-Ø<sub>1</sub>**, **pekaponawei<sub>1</sub>]**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-carry-3NOMINATIVE carriers  
 '...and they<sub>1</sub> carried them<sub>2</sub> away, the carriers<sub>1</sub>.'
- b. **[pe<sub>1</sub>-Ø<sub>2</sub>-püyana-tsi-nü]<sub>1</sub>...**  
 3INTRINSIC LINKEE-3ACCUSATIVE-follow-IRREALIS-MASCULINE  
 'The follower<sub>1</sub>...'
- ...**Ø<sub>1</sub>-bihat-ane-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-scold-REALIS-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE  
 '...was scolded.'
- c. **pehewaxi<sub>1</sub>** **ba-Ø<sub>1</sub>-to-matawahi-ba-tsi<sub>0</sub>...**  
 children HABITUAL-INVOLVING-pray-REALIS-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE  
 'Children<sub>1</sub> must be subjected to immunising invocations...'
- ...**[pe<sub>0</sub>-Ø<sub>1</sub>-ainawibi-tsi<sub>0</sub>-yaniwa]**  
 INTRINSIC LINKEE-3ACCUSATIVE-GetVampirised-1INCLUSIVE NOM-PREVENTIVE  
 '...lest they fall victims<sub>1</sub> of the evil spirits.'

(On the modality drift of the habitual see Queixalós 2024:38.)

One thing to be noticed in the preceding examples is that the linear order of clauses is immaterial regarding the mutual controller / controlee status of the arguments (rather pointing, thus, to a syntactic hierarchy of the C-command type; see, however, a reappraisal of this issue in Zwart 2015).

Left-dislocation — understood as the occurrence, initially *and* outside its basic locus, of an argument noun phrase abiding by some communicative strategy such as emphatic introduction of a new referent in discourse — favours the nominative and the passive accusative arguments, respectively (11-a) and b. (In the examples, basic locus as X. No commitment here to *trace* as resulting from movement.)

- (11) a. **marapowa<sub>1</sub>**                      [itsa]                      **panasitamebehe<sub>2</sub>**...  
 ThatWhat's-her-name      TEMPORAL/CONDITIONAL      YouBothGetFat  
 'Regarding that What's-her-name<sub>1</sub>, as you<sub>2</sub> both get fat...'  
  
 ...X<sub>1</sub>      **pa-ka<sub>2</sub>-hayabiana-Ø<sub>1</sub>-behe**  
                  PLURAL-2ACCUSATIVE-WillPalpate-3NOMINATIVE-DUAL  
 '...she<sub>1</sub> will palpate you<sub>2</sub>.'

(Warning local Hansel and Gretel against the cannibal witch.)

- b. **bahara-powa<sub>1</sub>**                      **pakuenia**                      X<sub>1</sub>                      **Ø<sub>1</sub>-nakobetoxotapona-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 DISTAL-3FEM                      InThatWay                      3ACC-KidnapDURATIVE-1INCLUSIVE NOM  
 'The woman<sub>1</sub> was being abducted in such wise.'

In the main, afterthought noun phrases access nominative and passive accusative referents, respectively (12-a) (also (10-a) above) and b.

- (12) a. **ponüyo<sub>1</sub>**                      **upitsaebia-Ø<sub>1</sub>**                      **tsekae,**                      **Sireyo<sub>1</sub>**  
 ThatLittleOne      HaveBlackLips-3NOM      'SIT      LittleSquirrelMonkey  
 'That little one<sub>1</sub> kept up with its black muzzle, little Squirrel-Monkey<sub>1</sub>.'

(Origin of to-day's physical aspect of animals.)

- b. **pakuhirutha**                      **Ø<sub>1</sub>-barüpona-tsi<sub>0</sub>,**                      **Bakatsulowa<sub>1</sub>**  
 ThatWay                      3ACC-TakeWithOneself-1INCLUSIVE NOM      B.  
 'This is how she<sub>1</sub> was kidnapped, Bakatsulowa<sub>1</sub>.'

Relativisation is evenly open to all arguments, and control of the reflexive by the nominative comes as a mechanical consequence of verb morphology: one single reflexive prefix for all persons fills the accusative index slot.

- (13) a. **ne<sub>1</sub>-tahuita-me<sub>2</sub>**                      b. **na-tahuita-me<sub>1</sub>**  
                  1ACCUSATIVE-burn-2NOMINATIVE                      REFLEXIVE-burn-2NOMINATIVE  
                  'You burnt me.'                      'You burnt yourself.'

All in all, 1. arguments are singled out following soft constraints; that is, the generalisations one would expect to capture through the notion of subject do not straightforwardly ensue from discrete syntactic properties; and 2. such generalisations, low-key as they are, neutralise the



nominative and the accusative arguments as per the latter's syntactic promotion in passive voice.

### 2.1.2 KATUKINA-KANAMARI: A STRONG SUBJECT

A very different picture arises in Katukina, provided one accepts to set aside the typological eurocentrism that suffuses the ergativity guild in the lines of

Ergativity consists in having the object of the transitive verb and the subject of the intransitive verb display identical formal properties whereas the subject of the transitive verb displays different properties.

Praiseworthy exceptions, in spite of the distance between the mutual theoretical backgrounds, are Marantz (1984, chapter 'The Ergativity Parameter') and Mel'čuk (1987, chapter 'Is there an ergative construction in dyirbal?').

Consistently with these premises, I will say that in Katukina we have a divalent pattern in which one argument is distinguished with regard to its response to syntactic properties (though less clearly as to coreference control, see section 4.2 below for a cogent surmise), thus abiding by the behaviour and control attributes of *subjects*. Moreover, such argument aligns with the sole argument in the monovalent pattern in being post-verbal and unmarked for case. Finally, it is, on constituency grounds, external. The other argument displays — to say it in a nutshell — the mirror image of all these properties, thus qualifying as *object*. As a first approximation this can be seen in the following baseline clauses:

- (14) a. [ [Ino-na=]            dyuman ] [tahi<sub>i</sub>]  
           Ino-ERGATIVE=    pour            water  
           'Ino poured the water<sub>1</sub>.'
- b. [datikan] [pi:na<sub>i</sub>]  
           sink            hook  
           'The hook<sub>1</sub> sank.'

(The colon stands for vowel length.)

As the glosses allow to see, the agent participant maps onto the internal, marked argument, and the patient participant onto the external, unmarked argument. Two caveats are necessary before the discussion proceeds.

As said, the language is head-final regarding constituency. The morpheme **-na=** has the subsequent word as its phonological host, but the preceding word as its grammatical host. This morphological mechanics, elsewhere known as head-attraction (Haig 2008:226), is borne out in Queixalós (2022 section 5). (The clitic **-na=** also serves as differential marking for the argument of postpositions, compare (19-b) and (21-b) below; it will merely be glossed CASE in such capacity.)

Taking the risk of repetition: for ease of processing the examples and the companion discussions, it is advisable from the start to set aside the commonplace pairings subject-agent / object-patient. As Levin (1983) puts it:

<u>Accusative language</u>		[syntactically, FQ] <u>Ergative language</u>	
agent	subject	agent	object
patient	object	patient	subject

Building on (14) to the extent it allows for, I will now review the asymmetries granting a syntactic hierarchy between both arguments of the divalent clause, using familiar case-terminology *ergative* / *absolutive* instead of the constituency-based asymmetry *internal* / *external*.

Free particles can be inserted between the absolutive noun phrase and the verb phrase. Nothing is allowed between the ergative noun phrase and the verb.

- (15) a. **[Ino-na= dyuman]<sub>VP</sub> niama tahi**  
 I.-ERGATIVE= pour then water  
 'Then Ino poured the water.'
- b. **[datikan]<sub>VP</sub> niama pi:na**  
 sink then hook  
 'The hook sank.'
- c. \***[Ino-na= niama dyuman]<sub>VP</sub> tahi**  
 I.-ERGATIVE= then pour water

(Neither is **Ino niama na=dyuman tahi** allowed.)

The absolutive argument can be freely elided (pro-drop). The ergative argument is mandatorily overt inside the verb phrase, either lexically, a., or indexically, c.

- (16) a. **[Ino<sub>1</sub>-na= dyuman Ø<sub>2</sub>**  
 I.-ERGATIVE= pour  
 'Ino<sub>1</sub> poured it<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. **datikan Ø<sub>1</sub>**  
 sink  
 'It<sub>1</sub> sank.'
- c. **[a<sub>1</sub>-dyuman tahi<sub>2</sub>**  
 3ERGATIVE-pour water  
 'She<sub>1</sub> poured the water<sub>2</sub>.'

The absolutive noun phrase can be left-dislocated with no other overt consequence, (17-a) and b. The ergative noun phrase can also be left-dislocated. It then loses its argument status and is replaced inside the verb phrase by the ergative index, c.

- (17) a. **[tahi<sub>1</sub>] [Ino<sub>2</sub>-na= dyuman]**  
 water I.-ERGATIVE= pour  
 'Ino<sub>2</sub> poured the water<sub>1</sub>.'
- b. **[pi:na<sub>1</sub>] [datikan]**  
 hook sink  
 'The hook<sub>1</sub> sank.'
- c. **[Ino<sub>1</sub>] [a<sub>1</sub>-dyuman] [tahi<sub>2</sub>]**  
 I. 3ERGATIVE-pour water  
 'Ino<sub>1</sub>, she<sub>1</sub> poured the water<sub>2</sub>.'

The list of limitations imposed on the ergative noun phrase though not on the absolutive one encompasses five more syntactic processes. For now it suffices for my purposes to itemise those limitations and refer the reader to Queixalós (2017, section 4.2.4) for an in-depth account. The absolutive noun phrase has exclusive access to

- (18) - argument extraction:
- interrogation
  - relativisation
  - focus (for analogous constraints on extraction in several Mayan languages, *cf.* Grinevald & Peake 2012)
- raising:
- in auxiliarisation
  - in complementation with **tiko:k**, 'know', as main verb
- coordination
- participant-oriented nominalisation (*i.e.* the most basic form of a divalent-verb nominalisation is patient-oriented)
- negation of a nonpredicate constituent
- pronominalisation or determination by a demonstrative.

I take the evidence in (18) as supplying solid grounds for the absolutive as the distinguished argument in syntax and, hence, fit for being sanctioned as *subject*. A corollary of such assessment is that the agent argument of divalent clauses — internal to the verb phrase, marked as ergative, and expressing the agent participant — should be seen as *object*.

Reference-tracking is less conclusive, except in lexical adverbs and postpositional adjuncts where absolutive control obtains. Respectively:

- (19) a. [ [Kontan<sub>1</sub>-na=] tohi:k] pi:da<sub>2</sub> kododi<sub>2</sub>  
 K.-ERGATIVE= see jaguar UpThere  
 'Kontan<sub>1</sub> saw the jaguar<sub>2</sub> up there<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. [ [Dyomi<sub>1</sub>-na=] tohi:k] Aro<sub>2</sub> a<sub>2</sub>-wa hak naki  
 Dy.-ERGATIVE= see A. 3SING-POSSESSEDTHING house INESSIVE  
 'Dyomi<sub>1</sub> saw Aro<sub>2</sub> in his<sub>2</sub> house.'

(The morpheme **-wa**, here glossed POSSESSEDTHING, is dubbed *generic relational noun* in Queixalós 2016.)

Similarly, speakers exhibit a slight preference for the absolutive as controller in adverbial clauses, (20-a). And so do they in coordinate clauses, b.

- (20) a. a<sub>1</sub>-makaudyaran Ø<sub>2</sub> dyahian-nin= ama Ø<sub>2</sub>  
 3SINGULAR-StrideOver StandUp-DEPENDENCE= GOAL  
 'He<sub>1</sub> strode over her<sub>2</sub> to have her<sub>2</sub> stand up.'
- b. [ [Kontan<sub>1</sub>-na=] tudiok] Dyan<sub>2</sub> tona niama Ø<sub>2</sub>  
 K.-ERGATIVE= scold Dy. go then  
 'Kontan<sub>1</sub> scolded Dyan<sub>2</sub> then she<sub>2</sub> went away.'

(The morpheme **-nin=**, here glossed DEPENDENCE, is pivotal to the emergence of ergativity in the language; its diachronic history develops from nominaliser to subordinator to durative aspect; Queixalós 2022.)

The ergative argument only accesses (18) — thus advancing to subject — by means of a detransitivising voice. The antipassive outcome features

1. an invariable morpheme **wa-** preempting the person prefix slot that in the basic verb morphology hosts the pronominalised object;
2. hence no object argument — internal, case-marked or indexed, semantically agent;
3. no possible patient exponence aside from an adjunct with or without oblique flagging;
4. the agent participant exponence as external, unmarked and post-verbal, that is, an absolutive.

I will merely supply here two instances of the argument-promoting effect prompted by antipassive. First, in (21-a) the baseline divalent clause. In b. the antipassivised clause. In c. the resultant antipassive subject accessing focus and negation.

- (21) a. [ [takara<sub>1</sub>-na=]      biwi:k ]      [kapayo<sub>2</sub>]  
           hen-ERGATIVE=      eat                      papaya  
           'The hen<sub>1</sub> ate the papaya<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. [ [wa-wü]      [dyara<sub>1</sub>] ]      [ [tukuna      anya]<sub>2</sub>-na=      katu]  
           ANTIP-want      NonIndian      HumanBeing      woman-CASE=      COMMITINST  
           'White men<sub>1</sub> are fond of Indian women<sub>2</sub>.'
- c. [Dapoma      tu      kana]      [wa-man]  
           D.                      NEGATION      FOCUS      ANTIPASSIVE-do  
           'Dapoma is not the one who did (it [a murder]).'

Second, in (23) the unmarked relative clause, targetting the absolutive argument. Before that, I supply in (22) the basic clause-patterns, divalent in a., monovalent in b., that appear as relatives in (23-a) and b., respectively. In (24), the antipassivised relative clause targetting the former ergative argument, "the man", now promoted to absolutive, and the former absolutive argument, **Warohan**, now demoted to adjunct. (First-person singular **hi-** / **yo-** are dialectal variants. For a detailed account of antipassive, see Queixalós 2012)

- (22) a. **yo-toman**      **dyara**  
           1SINGULAR-kill      WhiteMan  
           'I killed the white man.'
- b. **waukdi**      **dyara**  
           arrive      WhiteMan  
           'The white man arrived.'
- (23) a. **hi-tohi:k**      [nyan      tukuna      [Kadai-na=      dahudyi-nin] ]  
           1SINGULAR-see      DEICTIC      Indian      Kadai-ERGATIVE=      bring-DEPENDENCE  
           'I saw the Indian that Kadai brought.'
- b. **yo-tiok**      [dyara      waukdi-nin]  
           1SINGULAR-know      WhiteMan      arrive-DEPENDENCE

'I know the white man who arrived.'

- (24) **hi-tohi:k**      [ [nyan    piya    **wa**-dahudyi-nin]      **Warohan** ]  
 1SINGULAR-see    DEICTIC    man    ANTIPASSIVE-bring-DEPENDENCE    W.  
 'I saw the man who brought Warohan.'

*Two interim comments.* 1. The weakening of the absolutive as controller of coreference — see comment *circa* (20) — as well as the emergence of a functionally motivated antipassive — generic "patient" in example (21-b) —, are assumed in Queixalós (2013 74, 78) to be diagnostic of a declining syntactic ergativity in diachrony (see 4.2 THE REACCUSATISATION PATH below). 2. As stated in Queixalós (2017), no clear instance of PRO has so far been detected (PRO: an unrealised nongoverned position in the nonfinite clause of control constructions, Chomsky 1981; the hallmark of subjecthood in the generative tradition). This should not come as a surprise given Comrie's (1985) and Falk's (2006:135 *ff.*) view that, semantically, PRO is agent-biased, something which makes it — or so I surmise — more naturally foreseeable in nominative-accusative syntaxes. At issue is the likelihood of an absolutive PRO in the realm of a radically ergative syntax. Dyirbal may be a case in point. Based on an example excerpted from Dixon (1994:134), Bittner & Hale (1996b) detect an ergative-agent PRO — thus "verifying" the universality of (the agent-coloured) PRO — by way of projecting on the example a different structure than the one suggested in Dixon's text (details in Queixalós 2007). The truth is, Dyirbal does feature an absolutive-patient PRO — seemingly flying under the radar except for Aldridge (2008). The same holds for several Austronesian languages (Toba-Batak in Manning & Sag 1999; South Tama in Trick 2006; Nehan in Glennon 2014:102; plausible others in Givón 1997: endnotes 32 and 39, pp. 78 and 79 respectively).

Likewise in Sikuani but for different morphological reasons, control of the reflexive is of little help in disclosing any syntactic hierarchy between arguments. The reflexive is attained by appending a suffix **-(h)i(k)** (dialectal / morphophonological variation) to the divalent verb deprived of any exponence for the ergative argument. In other words, the verb gets intransitivised, featuring the absolutive as the single extant argument (something common in strongly ergative languages, see Dixon 1994:138 on Dyirbal and Macuxi).

- (25) a. **Kirak<sub>1</sub>-na= tohi:k Nodia<sub>2</sub>**  
           K.-ERGATIVE= LookAt N.  
           'Kirak<sub>1</sub> looked at Nodia.'
- b. **a<sub>1</sub>-tohi:k Nodia<sub>2</sub>**  
           3SINGULAR-LookAt  
           'He<sub>1</sub> looked at Nodia<sub>2</sub>.'
- c. **tohi:k-i Nodia<sub>1</sub>**  
           LookAt-REFLEXIVE  
           'Nodia<sub>1</sub> looked at himself.'

To round off the present section, a few words on a second pattern displayed by divalent clauses may prove useful. As an instance of *split transitivity* (less accurately dubbed "split ergativity"), an accusatively-aligned clause emerges with a nonindividuated (generic, noncount) patient participant. The latter, banned from occurring as an external noun phrase, must surface internally and pre-verbally. The verb is deprived of any indexing morphology,

and an external, post-verbal, noun phrase realises the agent participant. See (26-a) and b. for constituency in the ergative and the accusative patterns, respectively (examples with more prototypical agents and patients are available):

- (26) a. **panihan** [ **[Hi:wuk-na=]** **ohiya**]<sub>VP</sub> **[pi:da]**  
 yesterday H.-ERGATIVE= fear jaguar  
 'Yesterday, Hi:wuk feared a/the jaguar.'
- b. [ **[pi:da]** **ohiya**]<sub>VP</sub> **[Hi:wuk]**  
 jaguar fear H.  
 'Hi:wuk fears jaguars.'

Several syntactic processes single out the external argument of (26-b) exclusively — now nominative —: elision, fronting, focus, raising in auxiliary constructions, control of coreference in coordination and subordination. (See Queixalós 2017 for 1. a more comprehensive account, 2. additional examples, and 3. the claim that clauses such as (26-b) pattern differently from noun incorporation in several aspects.) In sum, on the same syntactic basis the ergative clause has its absolutive argument — semantically patient — as distinguished, whilst the accusative clause exclusively selects the nominative — agent — argument. In Queixalós (2022) the accusative pattern is held to be vestigial: as the patient nominalisation brought about the basic, ergative pattern for finite clauses, the nominative-accusative clauses featuring generic / nonreferential accusatives (section 1.2) were left untouched since such participants make poor subjects.

## 2.2 OBJECTS

Once admitted the purely syntactic definition of *subject* as the highest argument, it remains to endow the other argument in the divalent clause with more substantial properties than merely "the other argument" so oft alluded to.

### 2.2.1 SIKUANI: TWO OBJECTS

Recall section 2.1.1: the coding of argument noun phrases contrasts with that of adjuncts as unmarked for case, and the divalent verb hosts two argument indexes, nominative as suffix and accusative as prefix. The trivalent verb behaves identically, now with the recipient participant emerging as the accusative prefix. The patient participant is thereupon left with the case-unmarked noun phrase as its sole — and dispensable — coding device. Let us for now dub it *third argument*. The subject properties (2.1.1) remain unchanged.

- (27) a. **duhai<sub>1</sub>** **ne<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-me<sub>3</sub>**  
 fish 1ACCUSATIVE-give-2NOMINATIVE  
 'You<sub>3</sub> gave me<sub>2</sub> some fish<sub>1</sub>.'
- b. **ne<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-me<sub>3</sub>**  
 1ACCUSATIVE-give-2NOMINATIVE  
 'You<sub>3</sub> gave it<sub>1</sub> to me<sub>2</sub>.'

In what follows I will chiefly use the prototypical trivalent verb 'give'. (The lexical inventory of verbs encompasses three more subclasses of trivalents, see one of these verbs in (31) below.)

The basic linear order in divalent clauses displays the accusative noun phrase in immediate preverbal position, (28) resumed and renumbered from (4-a) above, whereas in baseline trivalent clauses it is the third argument — semantically patient — that occurs preverbally, (29), having the accusative — semantically recipient — materialise postverbally, b. resumed and renumbered from (3-a). That said, with a missing accusative noun phrase the third argument can freely occur postverbally, c.

- (28) **newüthü<sub>1</sub>** **tsala<sub>2</sub>** **Ø<sub>2</sub>-xane-Ø<sub>1</sub>**  
 jaguar porcupine 3ACCUSATIVE-eat-3NOMINATIVE  
 'Jaguars<sub>1</sub> eat porcupines<sub>2</sub>.'
- (29) a. **Pharansiku<sub>1</sub>** **merayo<sub>2</sub>** **Ø<sub>3</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub>**  
 F. A Little Water 3ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE  
 'Francisco<sub>1</sub> gave him<sub>3</sub> a little water<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. **penamaruekaponaponaehawayo<sub>1</sub>...**  
 The Little Provisions That He Brought
- ...**Ø<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>3</sub>** **peruhuwayo<sub>2</sub>**  
 3ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE Old Woman  
 'He<sub>3</sub> gave the old woman<sub>2</sub> [the little provisions that he brought]<sub>1</sub>.'
- c. **nihamonae<sub>1</sub>** **ka<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub>** **duhai<sub>3</sub>**  
 Your Family 2ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE fish  
 'Your family<sub>1</sub> gave you<sub>2</sub> some fish<sub>3</sub>.'

As one can see, the nonnominative arguments of a 'give'-type verb align differently according to the coding device taken into account: the recipient-argument index tallies with the divalent-verb accusative index, whilst regarding the linear order it is the patient-argument noun phrase that tends to align with the divalent-verb accusative noun phrase. (The extent to which this can be correlated to the well known splits between noun phrases *vs.* indexes in ergative languages remains to be seen.)

The set of nonnominative arguments of 'give'-type trivalent verbs will henceforth be alluded to as the *object zone*, featuring internal asymmetry in that one argument is formally singled out for accessing subjecthood through passivation, namely the argument which, as accusative, realises the recipient participant. In (30), renumbered from (2) above, we have a divalent verb passive (section 2.1.1); in (31) a trivalent verb in active and passive voice, a. and b. respectively.

- (30) **Hialai<sub>1</sub>** **Ø<sub>1</sub>-hunata-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 H. 3ACCUSATIVE-call-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE  
 'Someone<sub>0</sub> called Hialai<sub>1</sub> / Hialai<sub>1</sub> was called.'
- (31) a. **Nusalia<sub>1</sub>** **bitsabi<sub>2</sub>** **Ø<sub>3</sub>-kowaita-Ø<sub>1</sub>** **Yokopi<sub>3</sub>**  
 N. bow 3ACCUSATIVE-lend-3NOMINATIVE Y.  
 'Nusalia<sub>1</sub> lent the bow<sub>2</sub> to Yokopi<sub>3</sub>.'
- b. **Yokopi<sub>1</sub>** **bitsabi<sub>2</sub>** **Ø<sub>1</sub>-kowaita-tsi<sub>0</sub>**  
 Y. bow 3ACCUSATIVE-give-1INCLUSIVE NOMINATIVE  
 'Someone<sub>0</sub> lent the bow<sub>2</sub> to Yokopi<sub>1</sub> / Yokopi<sub>1</sub> was lent the bow<sub>2</sub>.'

The object zone then consists of two objects syntactically hierarchised: one *direct*, mapping onto the recipient participant, one *indirect* (above referred to as *third argument*) mapping onto the patient-transferred participant. The direct object is advanced to subject in passive clauses — while retaining its accusative index, as we know from 2.1.1. The indirect object position absorbs the participant demoted from direct object of the divalent verb undergoing causative and applicative alternations (I eschew details; see Queixalós 2024:180, 184).

The competition inside the object zone is palpable in a topicality-driven alternation (Givón 1984) whereby an "antidative" pattern (Dryer 1986) is triggered by the occurrence of a speech-act participant as the — ordinarily nonanimate — patient-transferred. Such participant preempts the accusative index on the verb while evicting the recipient off the direct object position. The demoted participant lands in a noun phrase doubly-marked as adjunct: a nonanimate suffix **-hawa** turning animate entities into spatial locations plus a complex directional postposition, neutral for orientation other than 'away from speaker'. We are thus left with a divalent clause, (32-b) and c. (These are elicited examples, though not too difficult to come by.) Plausibly, a mere swap of objects — direct / indirect — involving two highly prominent participants in animacy and topicality scales would give rise to a construction onerous for the addressee to process (a situation, though, detected in Lakhota and, according to Van Valin 1977:47, remedied by the context).

- (32) a. **axa<sub>1</sub> tsema<sub>2</sub> ka<sub>3</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub>**  
 father tobacco 2ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE  
 'Father<sub>1</sub> gave you<sub>3</sub> (some) tobacco<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. **axa<sub>1</sub> ne<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub> xamü<sub>3</sub>-hawa be-ria**  
 father 1ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOMINATIVE 2-NONANIMATE ALLATIVE-THITHER  
 'Father<sub>1</sub> gave me<sub>2</sub> to you<sub>3</sub> [lit. ...gave<sub>1</sub> me<sub>2</sub> toward you<sub>3</sub>].'
- c. **axa<sub>1</sub> ne<sub>2</sub>-rahuta-Ø<sub>1</sub> Kawiri<sub>3</sub>-hawa be-ria**  
 father 1ACCUSATIVE-give-3NOM K.-NONANIMATE ALLATIVE-THITHER  
 'Father<sub>1</sub> gave me<sub>2</sub> to the Kawiri<sub>3</sub> (hostile tribe).'

Alternatively, such valency decreasing premise — whereby the recipient participant is assumed to leave the object zone — might boil down to Bittner & Hale's (1996a) notion of "structural oblique", reminiscent of Dixon's (1994:123) *extended intransitive*: a constituent, adjunct-like on account of flagging, is nevertheless required by the semantic structure of the verb. The fact is, however, that the lexical counterpart of the verbs in (32-b) and c. — *i.e.* three-place verbs projecting an obliquewise-marked object in their basic clause pattern — are missing in the language. The same holds for two-place verbs, *i.e.* the genuine Dixon's extended intransitives.

### 2.2.2 KATUKINA-KANAMARI: ONE OBJECT

According to Manning (1996:42), the syntactically ergative language displaying 'give'-type *trivalent* verbs remains so far unattested (...at least until the mid-nineties). Katukina is no exception. Neither are Dyirbal (Dixon 1972), Central Alaska Yupi'k (Mithun 2000), and Movima (Haude 2012). **Nuhuk**, 'give, trade', is divalent, having as its arguments the ergative as agent-giver and the absolutive as patient-transferred. Nothing observable points to any syntactic status attached to the recipient exponence that would make it distinct from other obliquely-marked adjuncts.



The flagging varies according to the dialect, allative suffix **-na** in Katukina, locative postposition **ton** in Kanamari.

- (33) a. [ [Ayobi<sub>1</sub>-na=]      nuhuk]      [poako<sub>2</sub>]      [Kontan<sub>3</sub>-na]  
           A,-ERGATIVE=      give            paddle            K.-ALLATIVE  
           'Ayobi<sub>1</sub> gave the paddle<sub>2</sub> to Kontan<sub>3</sub>.'
- b. [ [Oki<sub>1</sub>-na=]      nuhuk]      [poako<sub>2</sub>]      [Yao<sub>3</sub>-na=      ton]  
           O,-ERGATIVE=      give            paddle            Y.-CASE=      LOCATIVE  
           'Oki<sub>1</sub> gave the paddle<sub>2</sub> to Yao<sub>3</sub>.'

(Recall that the clitic **-na=** is also used for differential marking on the argument of postpositions, 2.1.2 *circa* (14) above.)

Since the patient is the sole nonagent participant surfacing as argument, there could not exist any competition between two objects that the syntax might / should set apart in the vein of what Kozinsky & Polinsky (1993:225) sought to uncover regarding the purported "double object" in Korean.

And expectedly the applicative alternation on divalent verbs triggers no valence increase: it simply expels the original patient to the adjunct periphery while reallocating the emptied argument position — the absolutive — to the promoted participant.

- (34) a. yo<sub>1</sub>-wando:ki      don<sub>2</sub>      wa  
           1SINGULAR-cook      fish      FUTURE  
           'I<sub>1</sub> am going to cook the fish<sub>2</sub>.'
- b. yo<sub>1</sub>-ama-wando:ki      idi:k<sub>3</sub>      don<sub>2</sub>-katu      wa  
           1SING-APPLICATIVE-cook      2SING      fish-COMITATIVEINSTRUMENTAL      FUTURE  
           'I<sub>1</sub> am going to cook the fish<sub>2</sub> for you<sub>3</sub>.'

The lack of an object zone in a syntactically ergative language thus ensues as a natural consequence of the hierarchy of arguments obtaining in the divalent clause: if the ergative-agent and the absolutive-patient are entitled to formal objecthood and subjecthood respectively (2.1.2 above), a grouping of nonsubject arguments — *i.e.* an object zone made of the roles agent and recipient — has, semantically, nothing to recommend it (see Queixalós 2021 for some justification).

Of course, neither the lack of trivalent verbs is diagnostic of ergative syntax, *e.g.* !Xun (König & Heine 2011), nor morphological-only ergativity discards trivalent verbs, *e.g.* Inuit (Bittner & Hale 1996b) and Matsés (Fleck 2003:864 *ff.*). Commenting on the syntactically ergative Dyrbal and Central Arctic Eskimo, Marantz (1984:209) bans any interdependence between ergative-absolutive case marking and the lack of trivalent verbs. (Now, putting these languages on an equal footing with Inuit and Matsés on the mere commonality of case marking seems a rather surprising appraisal on the part of an author who credits *syntax* with exclusive reliance as to ergatively-oriented grammatical relations.)

### 3 BLENDING LAYERS OF STRUCTURE

A corollary of unequivocally confining grammatical relations to the realm of syntax should be that neither in languages like Katukina an alternative set of grammatical relations different from subject / object is called for, nor languages like Sikuani need a set of grammatical

relations different from direct / indirect object. For expository convenience I will start up the present section with the trivalent-verb object zone.

I can briefly anticipate the spirit of the hereafter discussion by reminding Dixon's contention that subject is "a universal deep-syntactic / semantic category" (1979; 1994:12) and his subsequent ascription to *pivot* of the inter-clause properties commonly credited to subjects (1979; 1994:11, 154).

### 3.1 DRYER'S OBJECTS

Clearly, Sikuani is one of those languages — another is Ojibwa — endowed with trivalent verbs that may abide by Dryer's (1986) proposal for a novel typology of objects. In this section I probe the extent to which such a move can be seen as convictive when delving into the nature of grammatical relations.

In his contribution, the author recurrently draws cross-linguistic parallels between alignment-types of divalent-verb arguments on one side and, on the other, alignment-types in the object zone of trivalent verbs (my terminology, 2.2.1): pp. 808, 820, 828, 835, 840, 841, 842. Synoptically (and adapting):

1. In nominative-accusative languages one posits a set of grammatical relations consisting of subject and object, whereas in absolutive-ergative languages one posits a separate set of *grammatical relations*, absolutive / ergative;
2. Likewise, regarding the object zone in, say, French, one posits a set of grammatical relations consisting of direct and indirect object, whereas in such languages as Sikuani one posits a separate set of *grammatical relations*, primary / secondary.

Thus, the traditional terminology for grammatical relations — subject / object — only fits nominative-accusative alignments. As for absolutive-ergative alignments one must resort to case-marking terminology. In other words, *morphology appropriately defines grammatical relations*.

Now, let us presume that this is nothing but a terminological timesaver due to the lack, in ergative contexts, of an available *ad hoc* syntactic terminology for the counterparts of subject / object.

Let us further suppose that what is involved is indeed syntactic alignments. In that case, the reason for disregarding the distinction between the two main types of ergative languages, morphologically-only vs. syntactically (which entails morphologically) remains unclear.

Relying exclusively on syntax has led me, in 2.1.2 above, to posit the couple subject / object as genuine grammatical relations in a syntactically ergative alignment. In the same vein, my account of the Sikuani facts, 2.2.1, showed that the recipient argument in trivalent verbs aligns with the object of divalent verbs based on its promotion to subject in passive voice. To which I now add that in this same language demotion to adjunct in the antidative alternation — *cf.* above *circa* example (32) — points to the same picture of hierarchically ranked arguments (see Queixalós 2024:189). This recipient argument should therefore be a direct object, yielding to the patient argument the indirect object status.

If across languages the essence of the mentioned hierarchy in the object zone is the same for direct / indirect objects and for primary / secondary objects, namely: syntax, one should admit that we are dealing with the same grammatical entities, hence wonder about what underpins Dryer's contention. The answer is two-fold.

First, the semantic bias, whereby the roles of patient and recipient are recast, respectively, "notional direct object" and "notional indirect object", leading to a statement like: "[...] a Primary object is an Indirect Object in a ditransitive clause [...], while a Secondary

Object is the Direct Object in a ditransitive clause [...]" (p. 808), in which "Indirect Object" merely means *recipient* and "Direct Object", *patient*. In the words of Kaswanti Purwo (1997): "What the data of all these languages [KinyaRwanda, Tzotzil, English; FQ] suggest is that Dryer's (1986) characterization of both direct and indirect objects [...] is semantic rather than grammatical."

Second though first logically, the overarching rationale for all this hinges on the author's endeavour at working out an account of how semantic roles map onto arguments that fits in with Relational Grammar, a rather trendy theory at that time (Johnson & Postal 1980; Perlmutter 1982; Perlmutter & Postal 1984; Rosen 1984). Now, despite some indications to the contrary in Rosen's article, the *a priori* grammatical relations labelled *initial subject* / *direct object* / *indirect object* or, alternatively, *1* / *2* / *3*, seem to be unequivocally anchored in semantic intuitions, as some followers of the same theoretical framework acknowledge (Harris 1982:299, 303, as well as the mentioned Perlmutter & Postal; see DeLancey 2001:7 for a general assessment on Relational Grammar).

To conclude the present section, chiefly by pleading to parsimony in concepts and terminology, I will quote Storto & Rocha (2014) on Karitiana: "The ditransitive verb agrees with *its direct object, which is the goal* argument [italics mine, FQ]", entailing that the typology of the object zone in trivalent verbs does not call for two cross-linguistically distinct sets of grammatical relations. Once that admitted — it is my proposal —, Haspelmath's (2005) alignment terminology *indirective* / *secondative* can also be obviated: inspired in Mel'čuk's (1987:181) *pathetive* as a case name for Dyirbal's divalent patient argument, and in line with the semantically motivated name *ergative*, the alignment labels *recipientive* / *pathetive* present themselves as a workable option.

### 3.2 SHIBATANI'S SUBJECT

In this section I will examine a proposal quite parallel to Dryer's on objects but this time bearing on the clause distinguished argument. Alongside the just mentioned author's opinion that different languages abide by distinct sets of grammatical relations befitting objects, Shibatani (2021) contends that two sets of grammatical relations can be needed in accounting for a single language. His concern regards Western Austronesian languages — Philippine type included. In essence, this author enters the fray initiated by Schachter (1976) regarding the differential properties of the syntactically distinguished argument — *subject* in Schachter's terms — and the label(s) best suiting it.

Shibatani's contribution consists in positing that a double set of grammatical relations can characterise one and the same language: a set in which the distinguished argument is the *topic*, and a set in which such argument is the *subject*. In the face of it this seems to be not so different from the previous proposals by Schachter and by Payne (1982), except these authors deal with syntax-based diverging properties of *subjects*. Shibatani's account owns little to — not to say: opposes — these authors, strictly due, as we will see in more detail hereafter, to Shibatani's contention that *subject* entails *agent*, from which statements like the following ensue: "There are [...] phenomena that require a separation between the two [topic, subject] and that are at odds with Kroeger's and others' position of identifying the topic as a grammatical subject in these languages."

Based on a motley battery of genetically-related languages and varieties, this author aims at showing that in divalent clauses, whose verb morphology orients the predicate toward a given argument bearing a given semantic role, the notion of *subject* can only correlate to the argument that codes the role of agent. For simplicity's sake I will eschew the established *actor* since this term — a *macro-role* in Role and Reference Grammar parlance — hardly looks like more than a shortcut for the participant somehow akin to an agent or coded

analogously to the agent, *cf.* Schachter "[...] nominals are commonly given *quasi*-semantic labels such as actor, [...] [*italics mine, FQ*]".

Follow three additional excerpts from Shibatani's article.

"Subject, as used in the European grammatical tradition, is the notion developed to capture a syntactic generalization displayed by a language when S is assimilated to and is treated like A for morphosyntactic purposes."

"[...] look for a phenomenon that treats S and A as a unit. If a language shows no such phenomenon, then it does not have a grammatical subject."

"[...] grouping of S and P as subjects, as proposed for Dyirbal by Anderson (1976), Keenan (1976), and others is at best misappropriation of the term subject."

The mention of the most celebrated ergative syntax in typology deserves a few comments.

1. Ergative systems seem to unremittingly shroud approaches of whatever obedience, recall Dryer's appeal to ergativity for substantiating his view that a semantically recipient *direct object* (my wording) of a 'give' verb cannot be a *direct object* (Dryer's wording).
2. The use of a semantic-role based notion of subject — *i.e.* agent — even in systems where syntax is positively ergative takes us back to Dixon's quote at the outset of section 3 above: subject is "a universal deep-syntactic / semantic category" (1979; 1994:12).
3. The Austronesian languages under study are acknowledgedly ergative (4.1 hereafter), something however still at stake among many scholars — Shibatani is elusive in this respect — but in my view plainly driven home by Payne (1982) as he compares Tagalog and Yup'ik Eskimo.
4. In Keenan (1976), one single mention of Dyirbal results in an utterly inconclusive remark as to which argument features subject properties. It is rather in Keenan and Comrie (1977) that the issue is forthrightly addressed: "[...] (very few transformations mention ergatives, but very many mention *absolutives*), it turns out that the most *subject*-like NP in basic transitive sentences is the absolutive and does not express the agent [*italics mine, FQ*]."
5. Anderson (1976) makes a more interesting — and singular — case. We will get back to this author's ideas below (section 5).

Let us now revisit Katukina on subject (section 2.1.2). Recall that I endorsed the subject status of the external argument, absolutive in the ergative pattern but nominative in the accusative pattern. Should we emulate the authors who resort to the semantic level of structure so as to biunivocally link, in divalent clauses, agenthood and subjecthood, we would be led to assume that in Katukina only the external, nominative argument of accusatively aligned clauses — the *nonbasic* clause type — is entitled to the subject status, whereas the external, absolutive argument of ergatively aligned clauses — the *basic* clause type — is not. This, *despite both patterns undergo the same syntactic processes with the same outputs*. And, logically, we would further say that in Katukina we must allow for two distinct sets of *grammatical relations*, one comprising a *subject*, the other an *absolutive*. Likely, with such line of reasoning the range of languages endowed with a double set of grammatical relations would considerably inflate.

*Excursus.* In all honesty I must admit that I have been unable to scrutinise down into every detail the many examples exhibited by Shibatani from a profusion of languages, dialects and sub-dialects. Enough, however, to engage in isolating a construction that would *simultaneously* display 1. a nonagent argument targeted by the verb plus 2. an agent argument — that is, one that would display a nonactor "topic" plus a "subject" —, in which each of the two appears as distinguished by a dedicated syntactic process. No occurrence of such construction could be spotted. Though, this is a logically credible setting and on this it is hard to be conclusive. Thus 1. Van Valin (2005:78) seems to have detected it in some Philippine-type language: "the subject properties [...] need not converge on a single NP *within a single sentence* [italics mine, FQ]." (No language name nor example provided.) Perhaps Van Valin is here echoing Schachter's (1976) comment on *coding* in Kampanpangan: "in nonactor-topic sentences there are two particles, one agreeing with the topic, the other with the actor." 2. Schachter (1976) mentions — again on *coding* — that in Pangasinan and Cebuano "the actor is the leftmost nominal regardless of whether or not it is also the topic". It does go without saying that in constructions — routinely recorded — where both converge on one and the same noun phrase, *i.e.* "agent topic", the issue turns vacuous. Alternatively, should Shibatani's "topic" and "subject" actually occur in *different* constructions — putatively incurring Schachter's (19-a) and 19-b) rules — we would be entitled to construe both distinguished arguments as standing in complementary distribution (in the old autonomous phonology sense), and hence hold them to be nothing but the two facets of a single concept, conceivably the *subject* in the vein of Payne, Van Valin and others.

*End of excursus.*

To this point I have concentrated on two approaches that derive grammatical relations from interwoven layers of structure, in an attempt at showing that they do not present themselves as a sensible posit.

#### 4 SPLIT SYNTAX: THE HINDRANCE OF SYNTACTIC ERGATIVITY

The issue of the alledged two sets of grammatical relations with regard to the clause-distinguished argument — discussed in the previous section, 3.2 — will now be tackled under the assumption that some head way can be made by taking into account the diachrony of syntactic ergativity, a grammatical architecture inherently bound to undergo a process of decline through the emergence of, mainly, some diversely implemented accusative alignment (Queixalós 2013). But with that on top of mind I will first examine the extent to which Austronesian languages can be variously ascribed to a certain degree of ergativity (4.1). An assessment of the rationale behind the assumed diachronic process will then follow (4.2).

##### 4.1 THE CASE FOR ERGATIVITY IN AUSTRONESIAN

In deference to the space it would take to review the relevant literature in full, I will refrain from providing extensive quotes of the authors that for such and such language assume as basic — in my view concludingly — the divalent clause oriented toward the patient argument. Most references bear on Philippine languages, chiefly Tagalog. A representative sample might include, in chronological order:

Keenan (1976)	Samoan
Cena (1977)	Tagalog
Cooreman (1982)	Chamorro
Payne (1982)	Tagalog

Hopper (1983)	Malay
Rowse (1983)	Kapampangan
Gerds (1988)	Ilokano
Verhaar (1988)	Indonesian
Gibson & Starosta (1990)	Austronesian
Shibatani (1991)	Philippines, Tagalog
De Guzmán (1992)	Philippines
Kroeger (1993 and 2014)	Tagalog
Brainard (1994)	Karao
Huang (1994)	Atayal
Mithun (1994)	Kapampangan
Aldridge (2004)	Austronesian; follow a number of articles: on Tagalog (2012); on how to accommodate ergativity into the generative framework, <i>e.g.</i> (2008); and, more importantly for the present purposes, on the evolution of alignments (2014; see below 4.2)
Liao (2004)	Formosa, Philippines

Ergativity is of no concern to Schachter (1976) and he thereupon remains thoroughly silent about it. Shibatani (2021) stands in stark contrast to this.

Let us recollect that Dryer (1986) invokes ergativity to an appreciable extent (section 3.1 above) when setting out to sustain that 'give'-type verbs distribute over languages on the basis of two distinct sets of the grammatical relation *object* (either direct / indirect or primary / secondary).

Equivalently, Shibatani (2021) devotes a whole section (2.1) to uphold that "syntax of ergative languages appears to typically require two sets of grammatical relations, one grouping S and P as a unit, and the other grouping S and A as a unit", and thus that "ergative and Philippine-type languages [...] have at their disposal two primary grammatical relations of *subject* and *absolutive* in [one set, ergative languages] and of *subject* and *topic* in the [other set, Philippine languages] [italics and square brackets mine, FQ]." Note that the point of ergative grammars backing up the claim for two sets of grammatical relations in Philippine languages rests upon the upgrading of the absolutive *case* to the *grammatical relation* status, something that departs from the same author's earlier contention (Shibatani 1977): "This paper shows that grammatical relations and cases must be clearly distinguished."

Now, De Guzmán (1992) underscores that, among the morphological apparatus orienting the verb toward a particular noun phrase in the clause, the less marked form distinguishes the patient argument in Tagalog, something blindingly obvious in one of Shibatani's examples from Standard Malay (number as in original):

- (14) a. **dia**            **men-beli**            **buku ini**  
           3SINGULAR   AGENTORIENTED-buy   book   this  
           'He bought this book.'
- b. **buku ini dia**            **beli**  
           book   this   3SINGULAR   PATIENTORIENTEDBuy  
           'He bought this book.'

The examples stand without comment in the text. Meanwhile, Shibatani (1991) makes mention of the verb *unmarked* orientation targetting the patient argument 1. preferentially in Philippine languages, and 2. mandatorily in Tagalog (section 4).

What could reasonably be got by accruing, on top of two sets of grammatical relations — one encompassing the "topic", the other the "subject" —, two more sets — one encompassing the "absolutive", the other the "subject"? There should be an element of truth (or just of arithmetic) in assuming that, as it were, Philippine languages are vested with *three* sets of grammatical relations.

#### 4.2 THE REACCUSATISATION PATH

Shibatani (2021) is assertive on that: the category of subject, rather than being the attribute of a language as a whole, is one of specific constructions as exposed to specific syntactic processes. Other authors make a similar claim, for instance Van Valin & LaPolla (1997:277 *ff.*, 282, 284), LaPolla (2023) and Bickel (2013). It stands to reason that such view accommodates quite naturally the possibility of a language displaying a split syntax as regards which argument is singled out for subjecthood in which clause-type by which control / behaviour mechanism.

Split is inherent to ergative syntax. On synchronic grounds, one can gather its ongoing effects in Shibatani's text itself. Malay speakers submitted to a questionnaire as for which argument — "subject" / "topic" — is distinguished by such and such syntactic process return divergent choices. Likewise, Indonesian speakers facing the same questionnaire also diverge mutually. Moreover, the bulk of predominant choices as a whole also differs from one language to the other. The author does not mention the generational factor, which could have completed by much the scene. Nevertheless, these results undeniably suggest that one and the same diachronic trend is at work when we consider either a given language or a group of genetically related languages. In other words, split syntax in a given language displays differential phases of change along a drift that mirrors the mutually differential rates of change instantiated by separate but kin languages.

Queixalós (2013) results from an attempt at investigating the extent to which ergativity across languages is more than a miscellany of disparate grammatical phenomena unworthy of interest (Wilbur 1970; DeLancey 2004). The story of ergative syntax boils down to the speakers' successive endeavours at responding to interwoven or even antagonistic functional forces.

On the one hand human cognition imposes radical asymmetries with respect to the participants involved in a given manner-of-existing. Agents would stand on top of the semantic-role hierarchies thus generated (Foley & Van Valin 1984:55, 59; Bresnan & Kanerva 1989; Dowty 1991:578, 601), thus making them preferential as to the topicality hierarchy (simplifying: attention worthiness / persistence in discourse) with, in turn, its repercussions on syntactic prominence (Givón 2001:200, 426, and 2018:154).

On the other hand, and because of such communicative prominence, pragmatic strategies may induce speakers to downplay or obliterate the identity of divalent verb agents, as showed by Givón's (1979:58), Shibatani's (1985), and Queixalós's (2024:204) counts on agentless passives (English; English and Japanese; and Sikuani respectively). Queixalós (2013:41 *ff.*) provides a cross-linguistic sample of devices fulfilling equivalent purposes.

A "society of intimates" (Givón & Young 2002) — small size and spatial proximity favouring frequent interaction between its members — offers a privileged scene for an entanglement of notions like [agency / accountability / guilt] to emerge as a far more frequent setting than in the opposite type of society (Givón 1980:59). Pacific (Austronesian) languages exhibit multiple instances of that (Foley 1986:108; also Moyse-Faurie 2000 and references therein).

The shift to an ergative alignment eventually takes place when the nonbasic pattern used to formally downgrade the mention of the agent turns basic, a situation that 1.

intransitivises the verb; 2. flies in the face of the agent-role prominence with verbs that lexically require an agent; 3. yields a diachronically unstable phase (*cf.* the "self-defeating" character of ergativity in Givón 1980; also Estival & Myhill 1988); and 4. launches, before long in *diachronic time*, the reaccusativisation path.

What ensues is the agent's exponents first enlisting back in argumenthood as a nondistinguished argument — the case of present-day Katukina — then recapturing the syntactic privileges attached to subjects (Queixalós 2013:69-87). Of course other routes are equally possible in re-aligning away from ergativity, for instance split intransitivity (Plank 1995; Vapnarsky *et al.* 2012 for Mayan languages), or an antipassive reanalysed as the basic divalent clause (Western Inuktitut, Johns 2007). A third option will promptly be evoked.

The unavoidably gradative character of such process coupled with dissimilar speeds of change between either 1. related languages or, within a single language, 2-a. generations of speakers, or even 2-b. coexisting idiolects, gives rise to contrasting patterns of alignment in each of the 1. and 2. spheres.

To resume Austronesian, we have

- regarding 1.: Moyse-Faurie (2003) for the whole family, and (2008) for the Polynesian Outliers where reaccusativisation has been brought to an end; along with the contrast, in Shibatani's article (section 3.2 above), between the conservative Indonesian, rather clinging on the "topic" as distinguished argument *vs.* the innovative Malay, rather favouring the "subject" (Shibatani's usage); and further, Balinese and Malagasy displaying a more conservative pattern than those two;
- regarding 2.: split syntax as understood in the present article, the case of Futunan (Moyse-Faurie 1992-93), Tongan (Tchekhoff 1978), and the outcomes of Shibatani's questionnaires on Indonesian and Malay themselves, since the sample of speakers in each of these languages divides between the conservative and the innovative options (see Gildea 1998:42-44 on competing conservative /*vs.*/ innovative patterns mutually contemporary in a given phase of diachronic change).

Let us also notice that, interestingly, Shibatani is careful at setting apart the clause as headed by the patient-oriented verb morphology from a derived passive clause. This should suggest that the purported "symmetrical voice" architecture, commonly held as highly distinctive of these languages, is simply unrelated to *voice*. In Shibatani's words: "Though it is currently fashionable to speak of focus [*sic*, FQ] alternations in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages as a symmetrical voice system, [...], they do not actually constitute a voice phenomenon."

I argue in Queixalós (2022, section 6.2 *in fine*) that Austronesian grants us the opportunity to set apart *voice* from *diathesis*, the latter term being more frequently than felicitously used as a synonym for voice (Mel'čuk & Xolodovič 1970, cited in Billings 2010; Kulikov 2013). These authors, though less unequivocally than Bickel (2013), expand it so as to include all kinds of valency alternations.

However, diathesis can be a useful notion inasmuch as it is kept distinct from either voice or any argument structure change like causation, applicativity, incorporation, reflexive and the like. Consistently with Haudricourt (1979) tackling Formosan languages, I uphold the dissociation of *diathesis*, the primary — *i.e.* lexical — orientation of verbs, and *voice*, the synchronic productive remodeling of the basic — diathetic — orientation of verbs.

Synoptically: in addition to its semantic structure, *i.e.* 1. the temporal fabric (*Aktionsart*), 2. the number of participants, 3. the attributes of these participants that will trigger their exponents' coding, so, in addition to 1. 2. and 3., a lexical verb shapes its clause according to which participant it is *oriented to*. This might be appraised as pragmatics permeating into the verb lexicon since that participant is fated to become not only an



argument but also the clause topic (Givón's sense, *e.g.* 2001:196, 277) and, in case of a hierarchising syntax, the subject (on the diachronic facet of the connection topic / subject — namely: grammaticalisation — see Mithun 1991b and Shibatani 1991).

Typically, the morphology that in Austronesian orients a given verb toward one specific participant appears as highly intricate formally, not to say fused, that is — or so I would assume —, lexicalised to a nonnull extent, thus providing the baseline clause on which, secondarily, a synchronically derived alternation — *i.e.* voice proper — may *re-orient* the predicate to another participant. Something of this order motivates Himmelmann (2005), in resonance with Haudricourt, to put forth the notion of *asymmetrical* voice for voice proper (passive in Standard Indonesian; antipassive in Mori Bawah). As well, this secondary re-orientation is what Shibatani accurately dubs *passive voice* in Malay / Indonesian.

All this leaves us with a Philippine-type language based not so much on the alledged *symmetrical voices* but on *multiple diatheses*, thus banning from the story not only "voice" but also "symmetrical" since the patient-oriented diathesis is preferential.

Focussing now on voice proper, in an ergative syntax the *existence* of an antipassive is quite natural — *cf.* Katukina above —, as may be the *emergence* of a passive inasmuch that one significant step in the unescapable process of reaccusativisation consists in creating a functionally motivated passive that ends taking over syntactic motivations as the course keeps moving onward, like such exhibited by Inuktitut and the West varieties of Groenland Eskimo (Tersis 2004; Carrier 2012 118; *cf.* also, rephrasing Trask 1979: a passive in an ergative syntax is always younger than the ergative pattern).

By the way, the reader will have noticed that, regarding splits, at no moment do I mention morphological case. In diachronic evolution, morphology lingers rather far behind syntax (Givón 1973, 1997; Kibrik 1997), not to mention the rise of the so-called optional ergative marker: upon a nonergative pattern an oblique-like flagging happens to be used on the agent argument for differential pragmatic coding (McGregor 2006; Valenzuela 2011 on Shiwilu).

This section has sustained that split syntax is an omnipresent feature of syntactically ergative languages, and that it should be seen — excepted in cases like the Katukina vestigial accusative pattern — as an avatar of the reaccusativisation diachronic scenario whereby the overt exponence of the agent participant gradually gains the formal properties appurtenant to subjects in the realm of accusativity — the innovative facet of the split. In the intervening time, the argument formerly distinguished by purely ergative-fashioned rules retains some of its subject properties — the conservative facet of the split. In Queixalós (2013:74-76) I conjecture — based on quantitatively *modest* cross-linguistic observations — that the order of syntactic privileges shifting away from the ergative toward the accusative pattern starts with reference-tracking and ends up with relativisation. In this respect, it is noteworthy that in Katukina the absolutive control in reference-tracking is already declining except on same-clause adverbial expressions — section 2.1.2 *circa* (19).

Though, in Austronesian the picture is slightly more complex. The synchronic comparative evidence shows that the reappropriation of subject properties by the agent argument proceeds to the detriment of not only ergativity but also another conservative facet of the split: the verb diathetic orientation toward the so-called "topic". Hence the above *ad absurdum* augury of three sets of grammatical relations (section 4.2 *in fine*).

Moreover, if the nominalist hypothesis (Himmelmann 1991, 2009; Kaufman 2009) is right as the diachronic scenario that catalised the present-day state of affairs (let us note how Himmelmann's 2009 "almost all differences between nominal and verbal predicates have disappeared and given rise to the exclusive use of the equational clause type" echoes Haudricourt's 1979 title 'Importance de la relation équative [...]', both explicitly vindicating

verb nominalisations as precursors), then a reaccusativisation path different from those sketched just above suggests itself as having taken place over whole sectors of the family in some remote time depth: once the patient-oriented nominalisation gets firmed as the finite basic clause — ergative pattern —, a rivalling agent-oriented nominalisation enters the scene generating an accusatively aligned clause. In Queixalós (2022) I argue that this must have been the case in Philippine languages and Movima (Amazonian isolate), and is currently developing in Katukina: the Katukina-proper dialect exhibits an agent-oriented nominalisation unknown to Kanamari. (Comrie 1978 calls into question the patient-oriented nominalisation as diachronic precursor of the ergative clause since it parallelly should — but does not — involve the monovalent clause; a natural answer to that hinges on the pragmatic source of such nominalisation — downgrading the agent —, as broached in section 4.2.)

Rounding off the design of this section — multiple diatheses / ergativity / reaccusativisation — I see virtue in saying that split syntax merely entails the enactment of a syntactic rule [A] yielding as *subject* an argument [a] and the enactment of another syntactic rule [B] yielding as *subject* an argument [b]. And, what is more, that resorting straightway to some semantic role in order to posit [a] as subject and [b] as nonsubject yet syntactically distinguished — "absolute", "topic", or what have you —, does not turn the issue more fathomable.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Grammatical relations exist as a separate layer of structure as long as they disclose generalisations over a range of phenomena that neither semantics nor pragmatics nor coding can, as such, supply (in the same vein, *cf.* Van Valin & LaPolla 1997:274).

This needs not be a logical necessity. The syntactic rules that single out an argument as subject — not only control but also behaviour rules — result from tacit conventions aimed at enabling speakers / addressees to univocally track a specific referent over the concatenation of constituents and clauses, thus maintaining the disambiguation arsenal — indexing, gender, classes, number, cases, word order — within the limits of processability. However, it might be worth considering the possibility that semantics or pragmatics or a mix of both can carry out the task in certain languages, hence making such regulations expendable (*cf.* LaPolla 1993 for Mandarin Chinese, and Davis & Saunders 1997 for Bella Coola).

In the same line of reasoning, one would expect that a grammar provided with 1. split intransitivity — *i.e.* no coding conflation of *one* divalent-clause argument and the monovalent-clause unique argument —, plus 2. rich morphology, allocates little service for the mentioned conventions. It is in this sense that Lakhota (Van Valin 1985), Cayuga (Mithun 1991a), Kannada and Manipuri (Bhat 1991) may actually lack grammatical relations, let alone voice. Note, in this respect, that Mithun points up such contribution by rich morphology with regard to Selayarese, not an active language. (The metric by which the just mentioned limits of processability could be measured with respect to rich morphology remains an open issue.)

Hence the universality concern regarding the *existence* of grammatical relations is not so much an issue for linguistic typology. What matters, rather, is the *universality of their definition*. Likely, after almost three dozen pages my own contention in this respect is clear. It has, moreover, remained unchanged since my first publication on Katukina (1995), a fact that can, here, explain the rather profuse self-quotes (for which I should perhaps apologise; incidentally, let me allude to where these works can be found: <http://qxls.free.fr/QxlsProf/publ.htm>). Not to mention Queixalós (2010), by virtue of which I seem to qualify as a typologist for whom "subject has no theoretical status, but is simply a descriptive construct". Still, from that article:

"In my view, the syntactic functions (or grammatical relations) of *subject* and *object* as such are purely formal entities, based strictly on the hierarchies between arguments which behavioural and control properties highlight [...]."

"I maintain that a level of formal structure has to be taken into account [...]. In a language like Katukina, this leads to the conclusion that, in the basic active divalent verbal clause, the patient is a subject, and the agent is an object."

"[...] a set of grammatical relations where the patient maps to the subject (a picture already outlined by Marantz [1984] and a few others, be it in formal frameworks or not)"

With the "few others" in footnote 55:

"Johns (1984), Kibrik (1985), Mel'čuk (1987), Levin (1983), Jacquesson (1994), Manning (1996). Of course, differences in frameworks may lead to differences in proposals. More noteworthy, however, is the fact that along with the assumption that the transitive patient is a subject, we face a pervasive reluctance to draw the conclusion that the transitive agent, while clearly a core argument, is an object (Marantz 1984 and, to a lesser extent, Dowty 1991 and Mahieu 2004 counting among the exceptions)."

Hopefully, those excerpts will not sound as endorsing model-oriented deductive approaches but, much on the contrary, as advocating serious concern with linguistic diversity ...without desisting from theoretical issues.

The successive versions of the generative enterprise remain constant in maintaining a configurational definition of grammatical relations. In the words of Paul (2010): "Broadly Chomskian approaches claim that grammatical relations such as subject are not primitives of the grammar and can be derived from phrase structure. As such, testing for the subject involves constituency tests (more recent versions of Chomskian syntax, however, abstract away from constituency.)" [*sic*], somehow nullifying the afore mentioned concern. Nonetheless, some proposals more sympathetic to diversity like Van Valin & LaPolla (1997:244-245) note that phrase structure is not equipped to deal with typologically dissimilar languages.

Probing further into the outgrowths of generative obedience, let us now turn to what I will dub *The Anderson's paradox*. In his 1976 contribution, this author undertakes to straight-out address ergativity so as to demonstrate that radical linguistic exotism (my wording, FQ) does not hamper the basic tenets of his coeval theoretical model. Grounding his demonstration in a wealth of ergative languages, he shows that since these languages behave syntactically like English, ergativity is a shallow phenomenon restricted to case marking and hence of little theoretical interest. Then, Dyirbal pulls up onto the stage with its disconfirming evidence. The fifth to last line of the article concludes that this language "is in fact the exception which proves the rule." Yet, we know that ten or more years earlier "the rule" had entered the picture as universal grammar (see Postal 1970 and references therein to Chomsky's prior publications, noticeably 1965 and 1975; strictly, it was christened Universal Grammar with capitals in Chomsky 1981). Insofar as these considerations go, Anderson's verdict sounds like either shooting one's theory in the foot or casting doubt on Dyirbal speakers' humanity.

At the opposite, the basket-of-properties approaches suggest that subjecthood is, in Keenan's (1976) words, "a matter of degree". The method will then consist in "collect[ing] a large and diverse set of cases from different L[anguage]s in which our pretheoretical judgments of subjecthood are clear. Then [...] to abstract a set of properties which are characteristic of subject NPs". Such set "will be [...] necessary and sufficient to pick out the subject" in the empirical cross-linguistic data. The richer the set of properties the more

conclusive the subject status. While resorting to some aspect of prototype theory is not unsound outside purely deductive paradigms (Givón 1997), the clarity — nature and relevance — of our "pretheoretical judgments of subjecthood" seems flimsy. An equivalent of such "pretheoretical judgments" seems to come up in Givón's (1997:3) "what would pass for subject in English" as applied to Lakhota and Choctaw.

The intrinsic heterogeneity of such approaches is made patent by Bickel (2013) in "discussing how GRs can be defined". This author situates on an equal footing the properties that characterise arguments *qua* arguments— animacy of the participants, topicality, semantic roles, flagging, indexing, constituency — and those that, by virtue of syntactic control and behaviour rules, distinguish one given (set of) argument(s) thus returning one given grammatical relation. (Importantly, Bickel provides a befitting critical assessment of the commonly adduced deletion in imperatives and control of the reflexive as properties of subjects; p. 441).

In summation, the existence of grammatical relations in a given language is not presupposed *and then* justified by a collection of properties detected in the data. It is laid bare by exerting on arguments the array of syntactic filters discussed at length through the pages above. The (possible) output arises as a cluster of properties converging toward a given argument in a given construction. Inescapably, since such output may not be identical from one language to the other, a relative amount of prototypicality is predictable. Yet, the backbone remains the form of the syntax.

Far from being a shortcoming, prototypicality finds its *raison d'être* in telling us about the cross-linguistic ubiquity of functional motivations. Human cognition and communication, transposed to language as semantics and pragmatics, are universally bound to determine the form of the grammar. More specifically regarding syntax: "Syntactic behavior-and-control properties of grammatical relations [...] are more universal precisely because they are more transparently motivated by the pragmatic function of subjects and objects." (Givón 1997:29-30).

But, yet again, *motivation-for-form* — explanatory as it forcibly is — and *form* are ontologically distinct categories of things.

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