

Theory and Typology of Split-S languages

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- 1 Definition
- 2 Subcategories
- 3 What are S, A and P?
- 4 The bigger picture

- Semantic Primitives: **S**, **A** and **P** (Dixon 1994, he calls it S, A and O)
- **S** is the sole argument of the intransitive clause
- In transitive clauses, **A** is “the role which is most likely to be relevant to the success of the activity”
- **P** is the argument that is most saliently affected by the verbal action

S
A **P**

Latin

domin-**us** venit

'**The master** comes'

domin-**us** serv-**um** audit

'**The master** hears **the slave**'



Dyirbal

ɲuma-∅ banaga-n^y u
father-ABS return-NONFUT

'Father returned.'

Numa-∅ yabu-ɲu
father-ABS mother-ERG
bura-n
see-NONFUT

'Mother saw father.'



Lakhota

wa-psíča
1A-jump

'I jump.' (S_a)

ma-ištime
1P-sleep

'I sleep.' (S_p)

Ma-ya-kte
1P-2A-kill

'You kill me.'

- Split-S vs. fluid-S
- Accusative vs. ergative base
- Pivot
- Different marking strategies: head-marking, dependent-marking, word order
- Languages with threeway splits
- Semantic base of the split

- **S_a** verbs: *wapsíča* 'I jumped', *wahí* 'I came', *wat^hí* 'I live'
- **S_p**-Verben: *mak^húže* 'I'm sick', *mahíxpaye* 'I fell', *maxwá* 'I'm sleepy'
- Semantic base: agentivity
- Performance/effect/instigation > control: *wapšá* 'I sneezed'
(**S_a**)

- **S_a** verbs: *yaní* 'run', *yemosarái* 'play', *ma.apó* 'work' – *manó* 'die', *ké* 'sleep', *yepasurú* 'sink'
- **S_p** verbs: *mareté* 'be strong', *akwá* 'be fast', *moriahú* 'be poor'
- Semantic base: lexical aspect (dynamicity)

- Georgian: Telicity
- Central Pomo: Only [*-control*, *+affected*] are marked as **S_p**

- What are grammatical relations? Are they universal?
- Are S, A and P really semantic primitives?
- Mithun & Chafe (1999): "... referents can be related to the events or states in which they participate in several quite different and incommensurable ways."
- Starting point – agent vs. patient – immediacy of involvement
- S, A and P as 'descriptive a priori' (Haspelmath)?
- Is transitivity a binary category after all?

- *Split S, split intransitivity, active-stative, semantic alignment, unaccusativity, etc.*
- *active-stative* as a subtype (Guaraní)?
- *Semantic alignment* as a supertype? Or as an orthogonal category?

- **The eaten glutton* (**A**)
- **The sung choir* (**S_a**)
- *The fallen leaves* (**S_p**)
- *The beaten protesters* (**P**)

Stelpurnar hláu
the.girls.NOM laughed.PL

'The girls laughed.'

Mér er kalt
1SG.DAT is cold

'I'm cold.'

Drengina rak á land
the.boys.ACC drifted to land

'The boys drifted to land.'

Vindins gætir ekki
the.wind.GEN matters not

'The wind doesn't matter.'

- Transitivity
- Grammatical relations
- Non-Canonical Subjects, Quirky Cases, etc.
- Differential Case Marking

Dixon, R.M.W. 1994. Ergativity. Cambridge: University Press.

Donohue, Mark & Søren Wichmann (eds.). 2008. The Typology of Semantic Alignment. Oxford: University Press. (Sammelband)

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