Deriving variation in ergativity across Eskimo-Aleut Michelle Yuan, UC San Diego

1. Overview. Although the Eskimo-Aleut (EA) language family is considered ergative, it has simultaneously been observed that the ergative patterning is more robust in certain EA languages than in others. What is the source of this variation, and what does it reveal about the grammatical underpinnings of case alignment? Through examining three languages—Kalaallisut (West Greenlandic), Inuktitut, and Aleut—I demonstrate that variation in ergativity across EA is systematically tied to ***variation in object shift*** (cf. Woolford 2017). Concretely, I propose that this connection motivates a *dependent* approach to ERG case: ERG case is uniformly assigned configurationally in the presence of a *v*P-external object (Baker 2015), with individual languages differing in what kinds of objects undergo this movement. This, in turn, motivates a dissociation between *morphological ergativity* (case) and *syntactic ergativity* (clausal organization), suggesting a more nuanced typology of alignment than usually assumed.

2. Ergativity across Eskimo-Aleut. EA has an ergative (ERG-ABS) construction with subj. and obj. ϕ-agreement, which alternates with a non-ergative (antipassive or bi-absolutive) construction with subj. ϕ-agreement only. However, EA languages vary in the *distribution* of the ergative vs. non-ergative constructions, leading to the impression that certain languages are overall more "ergative" than others (Johns 2006, 2017). Compare, for instance, Kalaallisut (strongly ergative) and Aleut (weakly ergative). In Kalaallisut, the antipassive and ergative constructions track the *specificity* of the object (Bittner 1994). Non-specific objects are OBL (= antipassive), while specific objects (both full DPs and pronouns) are ABS (= ergative), (1)-(2). In contrast, Aleut is generally bi-absolutive (non-ergative), with the ergative construction surfacing only when the object is a *pronoun* (realized as $\boxed{\phi\text{-morphology}}$ on the verb), (3)-(4) (Bergsland 1997; Sadock 2000). As Woolford (2017) observes, this contrast between Kalaallisut and Aleut is reminiscent of *Scandinavian object shift*, which similarly varies between specificity (Icelandic) and pronominality (Mainland Scandinavian). These data crucially also show that whether ERG case is assigned to the subject is contingent on properties of the object (Bittner & Hale 1996).

(1) **Juuna** atuakka-**mik** ataatsi-**mik** tigu-si-sima-nngi-laq
J.**ABS** book-**OBL** one-**OBL** get-AP-PERF-NEG-3S.S
'J. hasn't gotten even one book.' (antipassive: NEG>∃, *∃>NEG)

(2) Juuna-**p atuagaq ataasiq** tigu-sima-nngi-laa
J.-**ERG** book.**ABS** one.**ABS** get-PERF-NEG-3S.S/3S.O
'There's a particular book J. hasn't gotten.' (ergative: ∃>NEG, *NEG>∃) *Kalaallisut*

(3) **Piitraxˆ tayaĝuxˆ** kidu-ku-xˆ
Piitra.**ABS** man.**ABS** help-PRES-3S.S
'Peter is helping the man.' (bi-abs.)

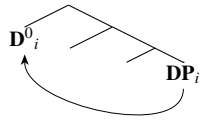
(4) Piitra-**m** kidu-ku-$\boxed{\text{u}}$
Peter-**ERG** help-PRES-3S.S/3S.O
'Peter is helping $\boxed{\text{him/her}}$.' (erg.) *Aleut*

3. Pronominal clitic doubling in Inuktitut. Novel support for the correlation between ergativity and object shift in EA comes from Inuktitut. *Strikingly, Inuktitut displays an intermediate patterning between Kalaallisut and Aleut along both axes*. First, it is already well-established that ergativity is weaker in Inuktitut and other Canadian Inuit languages than in Kalaallisut, with the antipassive construction surfacing regardless of the specificity of the object (Johns 2006, 2017; Murasugi 2014; Carrier 2017), (5). At the same time, the ergative construction in Inuktitut has a wider distribution than in Aleut, since it appears with non-pronominal ABS objects, (6). I further argue below that, while Inuktitut ABS objects remain in situ, *they co-occur with a structurally high pronoun*, as in (7). (Following Elbourne 2005, I take pronouns to be bare D^0s.) This creates a gradient in permissibility of object movement, (8). Both Kalaallisut and Inuktitut (though not Aleut) permit full DP object arguments; however, in both Aleut and Inuktitut (though not Kalaallisut) the structurally high object is necessarily pronominal.

(5) marruuk angutiit niri-lauq-tut pingasu-**nit** sivalaar-**nit**
two.ABS men.ABS eat-PST-3P.S three-**OBL** cookies-**OBL**
'Two men ate three cookies.' (antipass.: 2>3, 3>2)

(6) **kisu** pi-$\boxed{\text{viuk}}$
what.**ABS** get-2S.S/3S.O
'Which one did you get?' *Inuktitut*

(7)



(8)

	Kalaallisut	Inuktitut	Aleut
Ergativity	Strongly ergative	Less ergative	Weakly ergative
Object movement	Specific nouns	Pronouns doubling full nouns	Pronouns only

I propose that the intermediate patterning in Inuktitut is due to *pronominal clitic doubling*, wherein the clitic is realized as [ϕ-morphology] on the verb. (In contrast, its counterpart in Kalaallisut is genuine ϕ-agreement.) Evidence for this analysis comes from subtle yet systematic differences between Kalaallisut and Inuktitut. Though ABS objects in both languages are normally specific, as in (2) and (6), Bittner (1994) shows that raised ABS objects in Kalaallisut may reconstruct under negation for NPI-licensing, (9). However, this is not possible in Inuktitut, (10). (Omitted for space: This ill-formedness is particular to ABS objects in Inuktitut; high ABS subjects may reconstruct.) Crucially, NPIs notoriously resist clitic-doubling cross-linguistically (Suñer 1988; Dobrovie-Sorin 1990; Baker & Kramer 2018), suggesting a parallel analysis. In (11)-(12), we moreover see that the realization of pronouns as clitics in Inuktitut, though not in Kalaallisut, generalizes into the nominal domain (compare the form in (12) to (13)).

(9) **kina=luunniit** taku-nngi-laa
who.ABS=NPI see-NEG-3S.S/3S.O
'He didn't see anyone.' *Kalaallisut*

(10) *ilisa-ri-nngit-[tara] **kina=luunniit**
recognize-TR-NEG-1S.S/3S.O who.**ABS**=NPI
Intended: 'I don't recognize anyone.' *Inuktitut*

(11) kalaalliit **uagut**
Kalaalliit **1P.PRON**
'we Greenlanders' *Kalaallisut*

(12) arna-[tigut]
woman-1P.PRON
'we women' *Inuktitut*

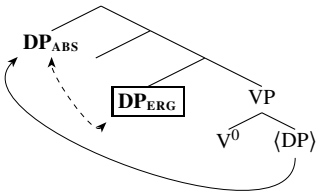
(13) taku-jaa[tigut]
see-3S.S/1P.O
'S/he saw [us].' *Inuktitut*

4. A configurational approach. The data shown so far demonstrate that Kalaallisut, Inuktitut, and Aleut altogether reveal a gradient in *both* the robustness of ergativity and availability of object shift, suggesting that these properties are connected. This, I argue, motivates a *dependent* approach to ERG case, based on the c-command relationship between two nouns within some syntactic domain (Marantz 1991). That ERG is dependent can be independently seen in unaccusative-applicative constructions like (14)-(15), which show that ERG case is not tied to agentivity or transitivity (Baker 2014, 2015). That object shift feeds dependent ERG case assignment moreover suggests that this domain is *v*P-external (Baker 2015). Put together, (16) shows how the ergative patterning is derived across EA. Crucially, this approach takes variation in ergativity to be independent of any properties of morphological ERG case, whose assignment mechanism is *uniform* across the language family.

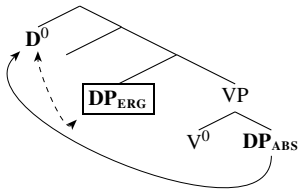
(14) **niuvirvik** matui-sarait-tuq
store.**ABS** open-early-3S.S
'The store opened early.'

(15) niuvirvi-**up** matui-sarai-gutigi-janga Miali
store-**ERG** open-early-APPL-3S.S/3S.O Miali.ABS
'The store opened early for Miali.' *Inuktitut*

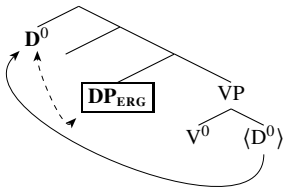
(16) a. ***Kalaallisut***



b. ***Inuktitut***



c. ***Aleut***



- - - = dependent case assignment; ← = movement

5. Morphological vs. syntactic ergativity. In (16), the ABS object (or pronominal element) is shown as raising to a position *above* the subject; ERG case is then assigned *downward* to the lower of the two *v*P-external nominals. While somewhat unorthodox (cf. Marantz 1991), this is consistent with the widely-held assumption that the EA languages are *syntactically ergative*, with ABS subjects and objects occupying a uniformly high position (e.g. Johns 1992; Bittner & Hale 1996). As EA displays variation only in syntactic ergativity and not morphological ergativity, the two must be *separable*. Moreover, in contrast to Coon et al. (2014) on Mayan, in which syntactic ergativity arises as a byproduct of ERG case assignment, EA shows that the opposite relationship is also attested in natural language.