

Kurdish as an Ergative Language

ئەم باسە لە گۆڤاری ئەکادیمیای کوردی
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Introduction:

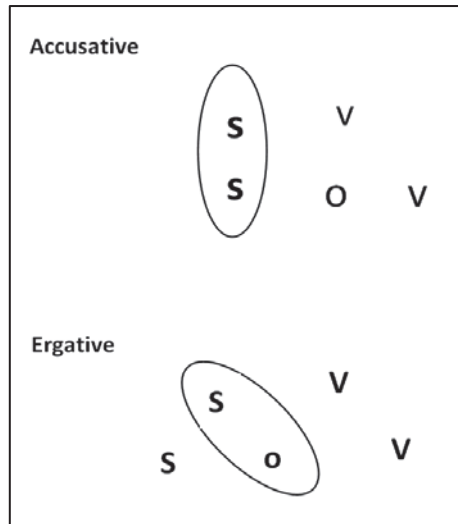
This paper is a section taken from the dissertation entitled (Aspects of Verbal Construction in Kurdish) which was presented to SOAS London University 1979, PP 135-138. It is the first attempt to analyze Kurdish language theoretically within the Chomsky's Transformation Grammar TG framework. This part of the work shows that northern Kurdish dialect is an ergative system, and it presents its rules accurately for the first time.

To see whether Kurdish is an ergative language, first we have to be familiar with the term ergativity.

In an accusative language, the surface subject is marked, in an identical manner in the transitive and intransitive sentences, while the object of the transitive sentence may be marked for the objective case as in Persian*.

In an ergative construction, the surface subject of the intransitive sentence and the object of the transitive sentence are marked in an identical manner, while the subject of the transitive verb may be marked for ergative case. To be precise, there is a morphological identity between the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of a transitive verb, as in Basque. The following diagrams show the difference between these two kinds of systems respectively.

Ergativity may be realized by case marking on Noun Phrases NPs, in which the subject NP of the transitive verb is marked for the ergative. The intransitive subject and transitive object occur in the nominative, as in Georgian in an Aorist group of tenses.



Ergativity may be realized by verbal agreement. In such a language, -the -transitive object and the intransitive subject agree with their verbs in number and person, as in Pashto. It may be realized by both case marker on NPs and verbal agreement, as in Punjabi.

As the analysis presented the body of the thesis shows, such surface structure properties, which specify ergativity, cannot be found in Southern Kurdish. However, according to the definition of ergativity, which states that: "the subject of an intransitive verb becomes the object of a corresponding transitive verb"1 ' Kurdish is an ergative language in the past tense within the verbal construction. The personal suffixes, which occur with intransitive verbs having a subject function, occurs with transitive verbs in verbal construction to function as an object in the past tense.

V S
 e - nû - îñ. we sleep
 Impf sleep we

V S O
 bîñî - ît - îñ. you saw us
 see Past you we

On the other hand, the verbal agreement in the past tense in Northern Kurdish is the one noted as typical of ergative languages. An intransitive verb agrees with the subject.

em dbîn - îîn. we see

we see 1P1

A transitive verb agrees with the direct object.

wî em dît - îîn. he saw us

he we see Past 1P1

Northern Kurdish has two sets of independent personal pronouns and one set of personal suffixes. They are:

Set No 1	Set No 2	Personal suffixes	
Min	ez	-m	I
Te	tû	-î	you
wî, wê	ew	- ϕ / -t, -ît ⁽¹⁾	he, she
Me	em	-îîn	we
We	hûn	-n	You(pl)
Wan	ew	-n	they

The pronouns of set No 1 occur with the transitive verbs only (as a nucleus). They function as a subject in the past tense and as a direct object in the present tense. The verb never agrees with them. When they function as a subject the verb agrees with the object of the sentence and vice versa*.

The pronouns of set No 2 always agree with the verb whether functioning as its subject or direct object of the sentence.

⁽¹⁾ As in Southern Kurdish, the two sets of personal suffixes which differ only in the 3rd singular could be treated as a single set since the two 3rd singular forms are distributed complementarily. The variation between (t) and (it) in the present tense is due to the phonological environment

They function as a subject of the intransitive verb in the past and as the subject of the transitive and intransitive in the present*. They also function as a direct object of the transitive verb in the past. The following table and diagram illustrate the functions of the pronouns and the nature of their agreement with the verb.

	Past		Pres	
	S	0	S	0
Vt	1	2	2	1
Vi	2		2	

