Split-S systems and unaccusativity

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Introducing split-S systems
S, A, P

• Possible to identify three basic grammatical roles in any language:
  – S, the only argument of a single-argument clause
    • Mary goes
  – A, the most agent-like argument of a multi-argument clause
    • Mary loves John
  – P, the most patient-like argument of a multi-argument clause
    • John loves Mary

(Payne 1997:133)
Alignment

• *Nominative-accusative* system:
  – S associated with same marking (e.g. case, agreement) as A
  – Separate marking for P

• *Ergative-absolutive* system:
  – S associated with same marking as P
  – Separate marking for A
“Split-S” languages

- *split-S, active(-inactive), active-stative, agentive(-patientive), split intransitive* (Dixon 1994:83)

- Two types of S distinguished, typically:
  - $S_a$, associated with the same marking as A
  - $S_p$, associated with the same marking as P
Split-S languages

• Here:

  – $S_a$ (and A) case/agreement: *agentive*

  – $S_p$ (and P) case/agreement: *patientive*
Central Pomo

- ʔa· qʰadé·č’
  1SG.AGT fight
  “I (S_a) fight”

- ʔa· mú·ʔu ṭé·čyadiw
  1SG.AGT 3SG.PAT chased_away
  “I (A) chased him (P) away”

- to· ló·ya
  1SG.PAT fell
  “I (S_p) fell”

- mu·l to· ṭé·čyadiw
  3SG.AGT 1SG.PAT chased_away
  “He (A) chased me (P) away”

(Mithun 1991:518-9)
“Fluid-S” languages

• Can be considered a subtype of split-S

• A significant number of intransitive verbs may be associated with either $S_a$ or $S_p$ marking
Eastern Pomo

• **há·** ba·téčki·
  1SG.AGT got_bumped
  “I (Sₐ) got bumped (on purpose)”

• **wí** ba·téčki·
  1SG.PAT got_bumped
  “I (Sₚ) got bumped (accidentally)”

(McLendon 1978:3)
Introducing unaccusativity
Unaccusativity

- Perlmutter (1978) – Relational Grammar

- Burzio (1986) and others later reformulate in standard generative terms ...
Unaccusativity

• Two types of intransitive:

• *Unaccusatives*: $S$ is base-generated as complement of VP [“internal argument”]

• *Unergatives*: $S$ is base-generated outside VP [“external argument”]
Unaccusativity

**Unaccusative:**

```
VP
  V
  arrived
  DP
  the professor
```

**Unergative:**

```
vP
  DP
  the professor
  v
  v'
  worked
  VP
```
Semantic classification of unaccusativity

• Sorace (2000): Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy (ASH)
• Auxiliary use in compound past tenses diagnostic of unaccusativity in many European languages
• Variation between BE and HAVE
• E.g. German:
  – sie ist gegangen “she has gone” (sein, “to be”)
  – sie hat gearbeitet “she has worked” (haben, “to have”)
Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy

- Verbs nearer top more likely to employ auxiliary *be*:
  - Change of location
  - Change of state
  - Continuation of a pre-existing state
  - Existence of state
  - Uncontrolled process
  - Controlled process (motional)
  - Controlled process (non-motional)
Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy

– Change of location: come, arrive, leave, fall ...
– Change of state: rise, become, be born, happen ...
– Continuation of a pre-existing state: stay, remain, survive, persist ...
– Existence of state: be, belong, sit, seem ...
– Uncontrolled process: tremble, skid, cough, rain ...
– Controlled process (motional): swim, run, walk ...
– Controlled process (non-motional): work, play, talk ...
Wider applicability of the ASH

• Sorace (2004:263-4): ASH plausibly applicable to other unaccusativity diagnostics:
  – *ne*-cliticisation in Italian
  – quantifier floating in Japanese?
  – diagnostics other than auxiliary selection in French?
Universal Alignment Hypothesis (UAH)

• “There exist principles of universal grammar which predict the initial relation borne by each nominal [= the position at which the nominal is base-generated] in a given clause from the meaning of the clause”

(Perlmutter & Postal 1984:97)
Universal Alignment Hypothesis

• Entailment:

  – semantic equivalents of the unergative verbs in one language will be unergative in all other languages

  – semantic equivalents of the unaccusative verbs in one language will be unaccusative in all other languages
Unaccusativity mismatches

• In some languages unaccusativity diagnostics do pick out separate sets of verbs

• E.g. Dutch:
  – Unergatives: disallow prenominal past participles
  – Unaccusatives: auxiliary BE, do not permit passivisation
  – Verbs like *blijven* “stay” and *bloeden* “bleed” share all these properties

(Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Everaert 2004:9)
Unaccusativity mismatches

• But not all proposed diagnostics are valid?
  – Kiparsky (2010:4-5): passivisation is not in fact a diagnostic of unaccusativity in Dutch

• Only a small number of mismatches in any given language?
Universal Alignment Hypothesis

• What about cross-linguistic variation such as that captured by the ASH?
  – e.g. “run” selects BE in German, HAVE in French/Dutch/Italian (Sorace 2000:875)
Universal Alignment Hypothesis

• However, it may still be possible to defend a weaker version of the UAH
• Variation is possible but constrained (e.g. by Sorace’s hierarchy)
Split-S systems and unaccusativity
Prediction (1)

• Split-S patterns are a reflex of unaccusativity:
  – $S_a$ arguments are *unergative*
  – $S_p$ arguments are *unaccusative*

• Existing literature making this claim:
  – Harris (1981:235ff.) – Georgian
  – Harris (1982:292) – Laz, Eastern Pomo, Hidatsa, Dakota, Mohawk ...
  – Rice (1991) – Slave
  – Legendre & Rood (1992) – Lakhota
Prediction (2)

- If the UAH holds (if only weakly), then Sorace’s ASH should capture $S_a / S_p$ patterning in split/fluid-S systems
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agentive</th>
<th>Patientive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of location</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>fall</em>, <em>go</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of state</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>grow</em>, <em>happen</em>, <em>be born</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation of a pre-existing state</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>remain</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of state</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled process</td>
<td><em>cough</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (motional)</td>
<td><em>swim</em>, <em>run</em>, <em>walk</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (non-motional)</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>play</em>, <em>talk</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Harris (1981:261-7)
Georgian

• Split-S patterning does seem to line up with the ASH

• This seems to be confirmed when many more verbs considered (data from Harris 1981:261-267)

• In other languages, however ...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Agentive</th>
<th>Patientive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of location</td>
<td></td>
<td>go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of state</td>
<td>grow, appear, die</td>
<td>appear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation of a pre-existing state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of state</td>
<td>be strong, be tall, be ugly</td>
<td>be sick, be full, be tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled process</td>
<td>cough</td>
<td>sneeze, tremble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (motional)</td>
<td>swim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (non-motional)</td>
<td>talk</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Mithun (1991:529-536) and Baker (1996:197, 212-3)
Central Pomo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agentive</th>
<th>Patientive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of location</td>
<td>arrive, go</td>
<td>fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of state</td>
<td></td>
<td>die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation of a pre-existing state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of state</td>
<td>be alive, be careful</td>
<td>be cold, be sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled process</td>
<td></td>
<td>sneeze, tremble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (motional)</td>
<td>swim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process (non-motional)</td>
<td>play, talk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Mithun (1991:518-522)
Other languages

• Similar results for other split-S languages: use of $S_a / S_p$ does not correlate with ASH

• Caddo, Yawa, Lakhota, Guaraní ...

• Note that semantic factors conditioning split-S vary between languages
  – see e.g. Mithun (1991)
Other evidence

- Baker (1996:212-3): other unaccusativity diagnostics in Mohawk do not pick out the agentive/patientive classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unaccusative</th>
<th>Unergative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agentive</td>
<td>fall, grow, break, appear, stink, be big, be lazy, be black</td>
<td>plant, cry, eat, sing, sit down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patientive</td>
<td>appear, be jealous, be heavy, be angry, be healthy, be wet, be hard</td>
<td>work, yell, eat one’s fill, laugh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fluid-S languages

• Similar results: some languages seem to fit the pattern quite well, others not so much
## Acehnese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agentive</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Patientive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>explode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation of a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-existing state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of state</td>
<td></td>
<td>be disgusted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrolled</td>
<td>cough, vomit,</td>
<td>suspect, be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process</td>
<td>dream, like</td>
<td>obedient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process</td>
<td>get up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(motion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled process</td>
<td>think</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-motion)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Dixon (1994:80)
## Tsova-Tush

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change of location</th>
<th>Always/mostly agentive</th>
<th>Equally agentive/patientive</th>
<th>Always/mostly patientive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>come, rise up</td>
<td>fall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Change of state          |                        | lose weight, get fat, hide  | die, drown, get tired, burn, grow |

| Continuation of a pre-existing state |                        |                            | freeze                      |

| Existence of state       | live                   |                            | be confused, be ripe, be afraid |

| Uncontrolled process     |                        | fall over, roll, slip/slide |                          |

| Controlled process (motional) | run, walk/wander, run very fast, sneak up on | “controlled processes” when used with the agentive, “uncontrolled processes” with the patientive | Data from Holisky (1987) |

| Controlled process (non-motional) | talk, play, say/swear/bark, gather, wash, prepare |                          | Data from Holisky (1987) |
Conclusions

• In many (though not all) split/fluid-S languages, pattern of variation is not that predicted by the ASH
Conclusions

• Therefore:
  – Split-S patterning does not always reflect unaccusativity?
    • (some independent evidence)
  – *And/or:* We need a better understanding of unaccusativity
    • What are the constraints on variation in “unaccusative” patterns across (and within) languages?
Thank you
References