Unergative vP, transitive VoiceP: two types of external argument

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Context

- Recent work: verbalizing **v** distinct from external argument- introducing **Voice** (Pylkkänen 2008; Harley 2013; Legate 2014).
  - *Opportunity to reassess transitive-unergative relationship.*

- If unergatives are **concealed transitives** (Hale & Keyser 1993), then unergative subjects should originate in **VoiceP**, like transitive subjects.

$$[_{VP} \, V \, [_N \, dance \,]]$$

- Massam 2009 argues that this is not the case in Niuean:
  - *VoiceP introduces **transitive Agent***
  - *vP introduces **unergative "Doer"***

- **TODAY: Unergatives contain less phrasal structure that full transitives.**
  - **Transitivized unergatives** do not exhibit the morphosyntactic features associated with full **transitives** (even though they are now overtly transitive).
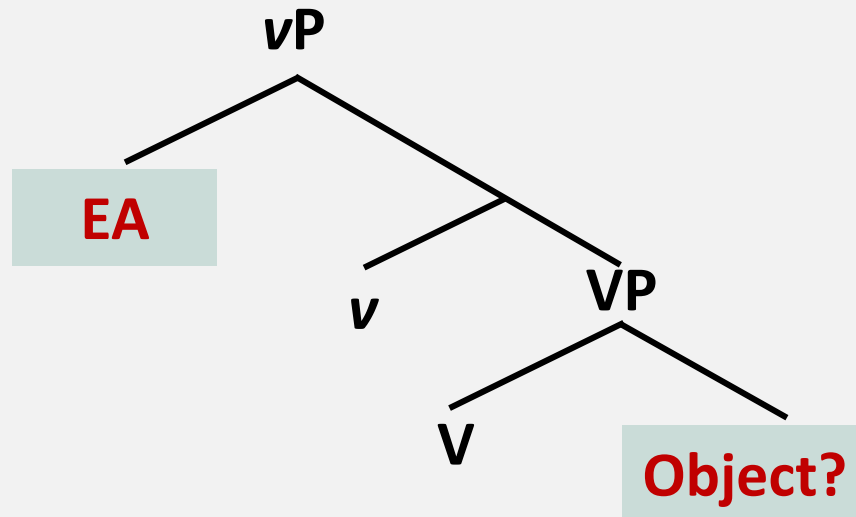
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Plan

1. Split v-Voice structure.
2. Cross-Linguistic evidence
   1. *Algonquian theme sign morphology*
   2. *Samoan ergative case.*
3. Unified analysis of Algonquian and Samoan
   – *Pseudo-transitives*
   – *Roles of v and Voice*
   – *Causatives*
4. The typological space
5. Conclusion

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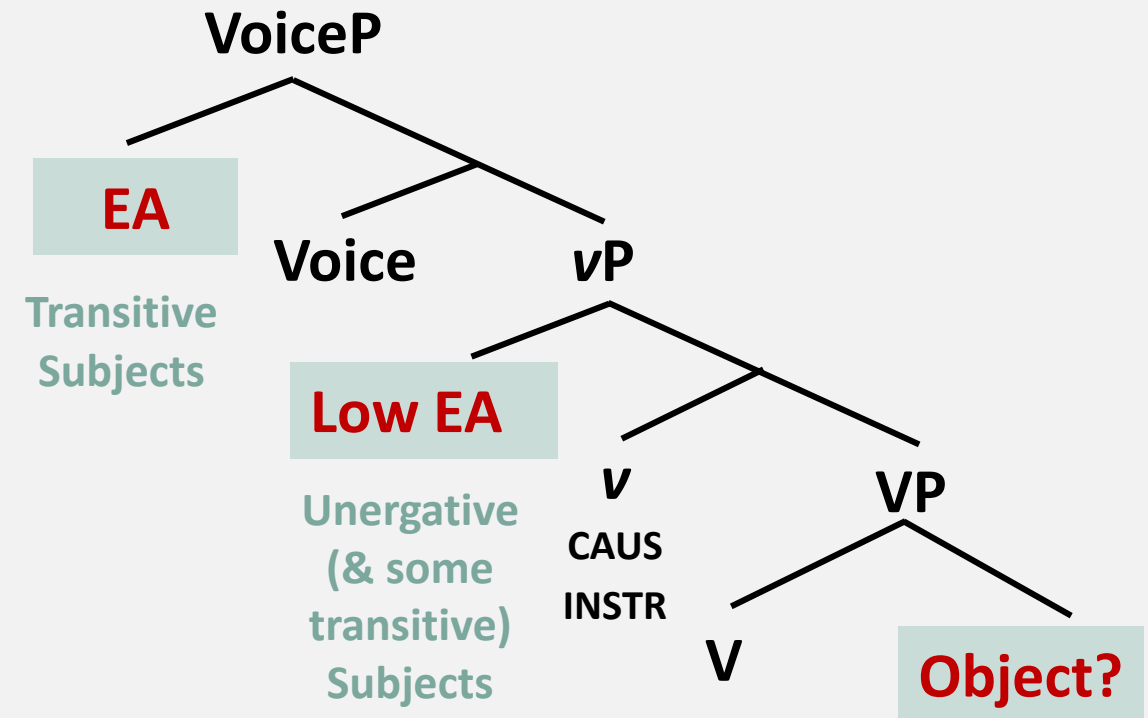# Unergatives in the verbal projection

Split VP

(Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996, Marantz 1997, a.o.)

Split VP + Split v/Voice

Pylkkännen 2008, Harley 2013, Legate 2014, a.o.

1. Algonquian

v and Voice are both realized overtly...

■ Minimal verb stem: acategorial root + verbalizing "**final**"
(light verb meaning, derivational, determines transitivity of stem)

■ Finals are widely analyzed as **v**:

- Bruening 2001:122
- Brittain 2003
- Hirose 2003
- Branigan et al. 2005
- Piggott & Newell 2006
- Mathieu 2007
- Slavin 2012
- etc.

Stems with intransitive finals	Stems with transitive finals
*miyo-**si-*** good-**be** 'to be good' *miyo-**payi-*** good-**go** 'to go well'	*miyo-**h-*** good-**cause** 'to make *x* good' *miyo-**n-*** good-**hold** 'to hold *x* well'

Plains Cree (Wolfart 1973)

Voice = theme sign

■ The stem is followed by an inflectional "theme sign":

nimiyonāw 'I hold it well'

ni-	miyo	**-n**		**-ā**	-w
1-	good	**-do.by.hand**		**-3OBJ**	-3

= T agreement (always present)

Final = v

- derivational
- present on all verbs
- differs for trans / intrans
- light verb meaning

Theme sign = Voice

- inflectional
- present on some (mostly transitive) verbs
- Φ-agrees with object
- absent in unaccusatives
- 'inverse *-ikw*, impersonal "passive" *–ikawi*
- ➢ Head that introduces EA and licenses IA: **Voice** (Bruening 2005; Bejar & Rezac 2009; Oxford 2017, a.o.)

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Unergatives lack a theme sign

- If unergative subjects are introduced in Voice, as in full-fledged transitives, then we should see a **theme sign**.

  - *Possibly a **default** theme sign:* **-am** INAN.OBJ *or* **-ekw** INV

- But in fact, no theme sign appears on an unergative:

Transitive	**Unergative**
[*miyo*-**n**]-**am**-*w*	[*ni:m*-**i**] (***-am**) -*w*
good-**hold** -IN.OBJ -3	dance-**do(-IN.OBJ)** -3
'she holds it well'	'she dances'

- **Conclusion:** no theme sign, no VoiceP

- **Alternative conclusion:** VoiceP is present, but Voice appears in a **null** default form because there's no object to agree with?

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Transitivized unergatives

- We can test the alternative by **adding an object**:

Unerg + cognate obj	**Unerg + hyponymous object**
[*niim*-**i**]-*w* *niimiwin*-***ini***	[*niim*-**i**]-*w* *Maahkaniina-niimiwin*-***ini***
dance-**do** -3 dance.NOM-**OBV**	dance-**do** -3 Macarena-dance.NOM **-OBV**
'She's dancing a dance'	'She's dancing the Macarena'

Tollan & Oxford 2017

- **No theme sign** even with a viable target for object agreement

  – *Obviation on the (obligatorily 3rd-person) object indicates that it is a referential argument, not an incorporated nominal.*

- **Conclusion:** the absence of a theme sign is **not** because of the lack of an object to agree with. **Better analysis: no VoiceP.**

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2. Samoan

Samoan (Polynesian)

- VSO, ergative-absolutive alignment, dependent marking (data from Tollan *to appear*).

Transitive

Sa:	fau	[e	le	tama:loa]	[le	fale]
PAST	build	ERG	DET	man	DET	house.ABS

'The man built the house'

Unergative

Sa:	siva	[le	teine]
PAST	dance	DET	girl.ABS

'The girl danced'

Unergative + object

Sa:	siva	[le teine]	[i	le	siva / uosi]
PAST	dance	DET girl.ABS	ACC	DET	dance / waltz

'The girl danced a dance/waltz'

Unaccusative

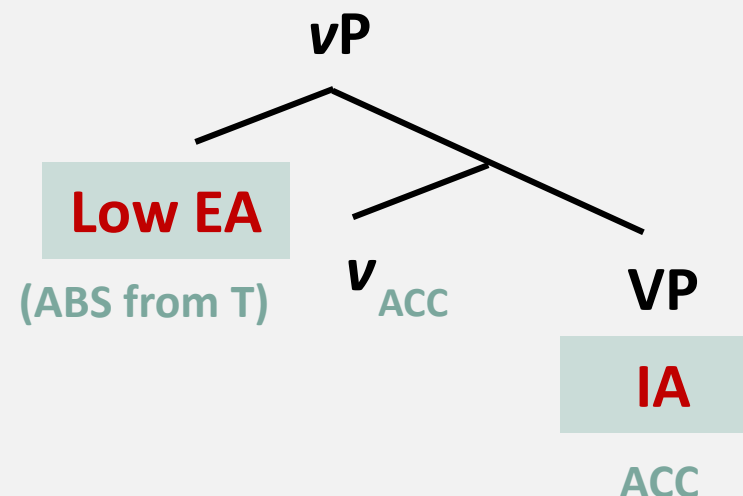| Sa:	asulu	[le	teine]
PAST	fall	DET	girl.ABS

'The girl fell'

- Unergative object behaves as direct object; *i*-case behaves as structural, not lexical case (Tollan *to appear*).
- Samoan ERG case ~ Algonquian Theme sign = **VoiceP**

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Transitives in Samoan

■ ERG-ABS 'full' transitive
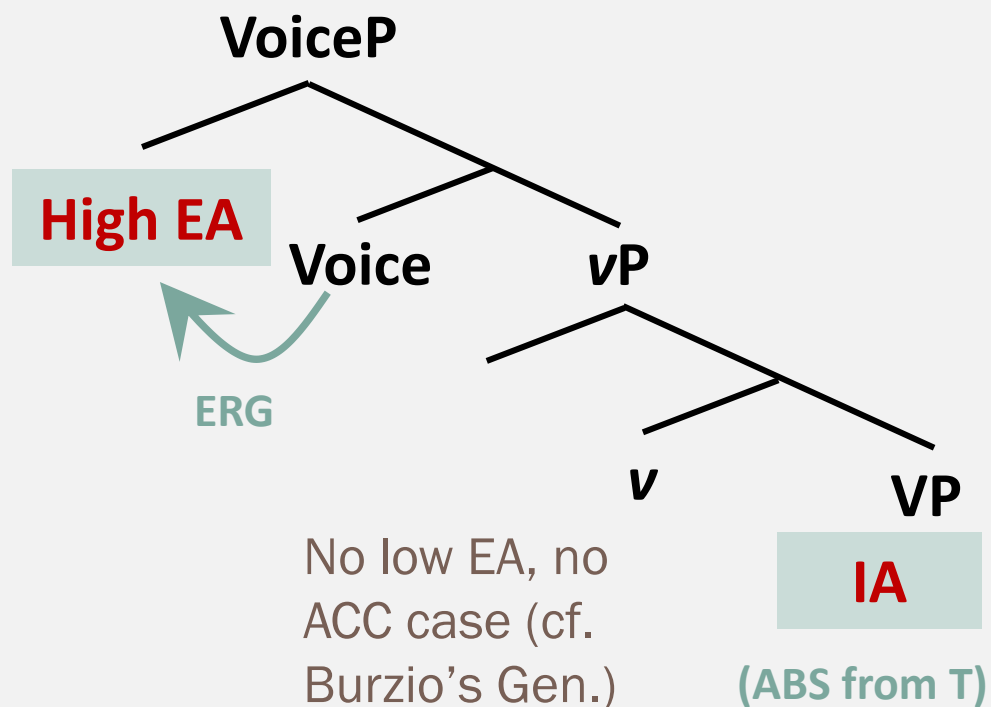
■ ABS-ACC 'semi' transitive – transitivized unergative

■ **No VoiceP** (and therefore, no ERG case)

VoiceP

High EA

Voice   vP

ERG

v   VP

No low EA, no ACC case (cf. Burzio's Gen.)

IA

(ABS from T)

vP

Low EA   v$_{ACC}$ VP

(ABS from T)

IA

ACC

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Unifying Algonquian and Samoan

Summary

- Unergatives in Algonquian and Samoan lack morphosyntactic ('Voice') features of full transitives:

Algonquian: Theme sign = Voice　　　　　*Samoan: ERG = (assigned by) Voice*

Transitive

nimiyonāw

miyo	-n	-ā	-w
good	-do.by.hand	-3OBJ	-3

'She holds it well'

Sā fau e le tamāloa le fale

Sa:	fau	e	le	tama:loa	le	fale
PAST	build	ERG	DET	man	DET	house.ABS

'The man built the house'

Unergative

niimiw niimiwinini

niim	-i	🚫	-w	niimiwinini
dance	-do		-3	dance.obv

'She's dancing a dance'

Sā siva le tamāloa i le siva

Sa:	siva	🚫	le	tama:loa	i	le	siva
PAST	dance		DET	man.ABS	ACC	DET	dance

'The man danced a dance'

- Unergative subjects introduced by v, not by Voice (see Massam 2009).

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Pseudo-transitives

- Algonquian and Samoan both have a class of 'pseudo-transitive' (Polynesian: 'middle') verbs.

    - *Canonically transitive, but do not have Voice (theme sign/ERG) morphology.*

    - *Identical to unergative + object constructions.*

Algonquian

wanikiskisiw

wanikik -isi **(*a)** -w
forget -be **(*3OBJ)** -3
'She forgets it'

> e.g., 'remember', 'rely on', 'buy', 'sell', 'look at', 'wear', 'release' (Dahlstrom 2013)
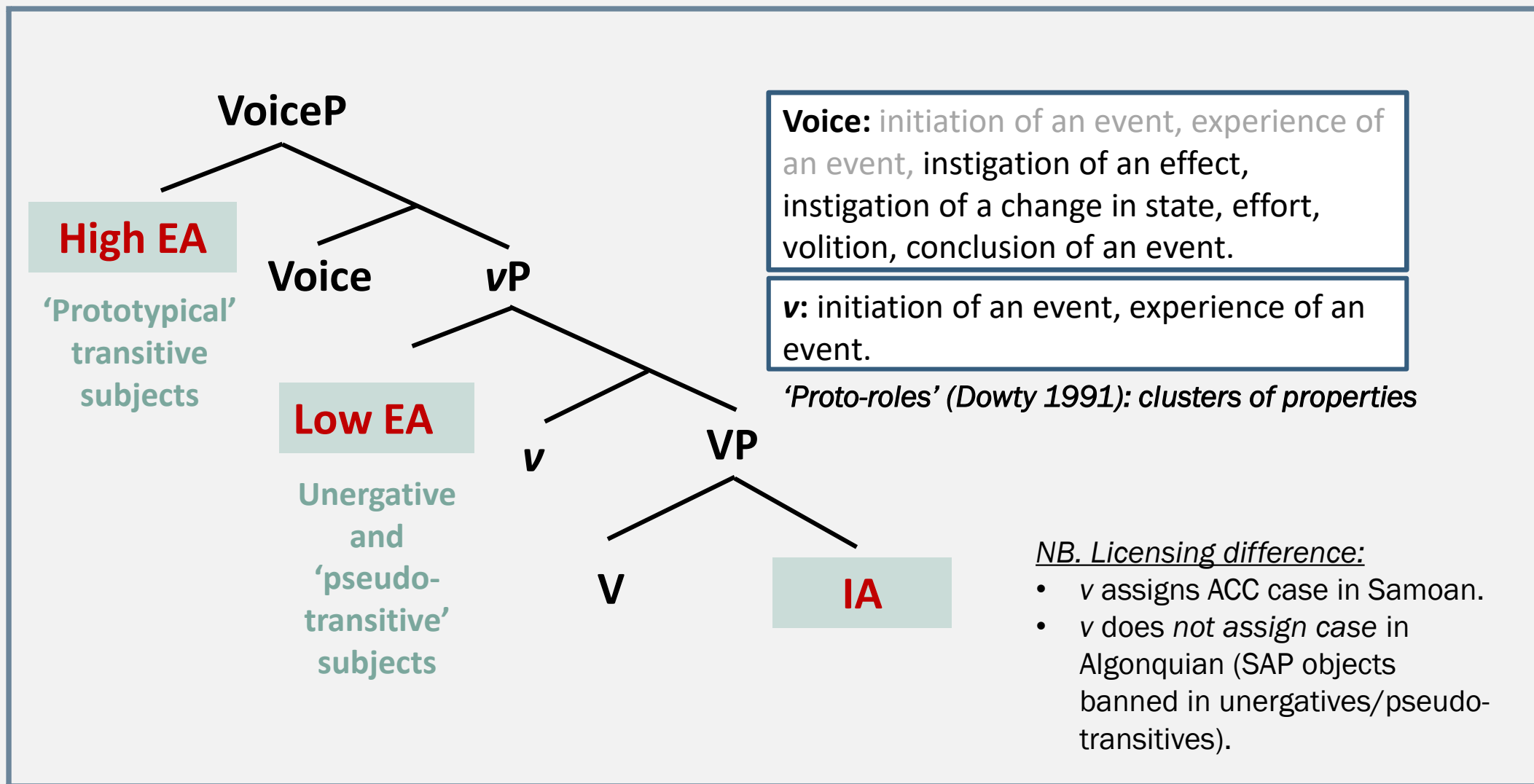
Samoan

Na galo le teine i le keke

Na galo **(*e)** le teine *(i) le masi
PAST forget **(*ERG)** DET girl.ABS *(ACC) DET cookie
'The girl forgets the cookie'

> e.g., 'follow', 'hear', 'enjoy', , 'look at', 'ask', 'scold' (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992)

    - *Agent is less agentive, object is less affected (cf. Dahlstrom 2013, Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992, a.o).*

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Two types of external argument

VoiceP

High EA

'Prototypical' transitive subjects

Voice   ***v*P**

Low EA

Unergative and 'pseudo-transitive' subjects

v   **VP**

V   **IA**

Voice: initiation of an event, experience of an event, instigation of an effect, instigation of a change in state, effort, volition, conclusion of an event.

***v*:** initiation of an event, experience of an event.

'Proto-roles' (Dowty 1991): clusters of properties

NB. Licensing difference:
- *v* assigns ACC case in Samoan.
- *v* does *not assign case* in Algonquian (SAP objects banned in unergatives/pseudo-transitives).

Causatives

■ Further evidence that full transitives are more structurally complex: monoclausal causativization of pseudo-transitives/unergatives is possible....

Algonquian

nīm-i-
dance-do
'to dance'

nīm-i-**h-**
dance-do-**CAUS**
'to make x dance'

Samoan

Sā siva le teine i le uosi
PAST dance DET girl.ABS ACC DET waltz
'The girl danced a waltz'

Sā **fa'a**siva **e** Ioana le teine i le uosi
PAST **CAUS.**dance **ERG** Ioana DET girl.ABS ACC DET waltz
'Ioana made the girl dance a waltz'

> Causativization = **adding VoiceP.**

.....but full transitives cannot be causativized in the same way.

| Causative *-h* is not added to transitive stems (Bloomfield 1946); biclausal structure is needed. | Causative *fa'a* is not added to ergative verbs (Mosel & Hovdhaugen 1992; Tollan *to appear*); biclausal structure is needed. |

> VoiceP is **already present:** no further thematic structure can be added.

Implications

The typological space

- Not necessarily the case that unergatives lack VoiceP in *all* languages.
- Several possibilities:
  - *Some languages lack unergative verbs altogether*
    - **Mayan** (Coon 2013): light verb + NP construction.
  - *Some languages may bundle vP and VoiceP as a single projection, in which case transitive and unergative subjects would pattern together.*
    - **Basque** (western dialects): ERG case on unergative subjects.
  - *Some languages may exhibit a v/Voice split in which all external arguments are introduced by Voice*
    - **Acehnese** (Legate 2014): *v* does not introduce an EA.
  - *Cross-linguistic differences in licensing capacities of v/Voice may constrain outputs for transitive configurations.*
    - **Niuean** (Tollan 2015): no ACC case on *v*; all DPs require licensing → ERG-ABS as a 'last resort' strategy for objects of unergatives.

The nature of ergative case

- Inherent vs dependent case (Baker & Bobaljik 2017)
  - *Inherent: assigned hand-in-hand with theta role (e.g., by Voice)*
  - *Dependent: assigned configurationally, to the higher of 2 non-oblique DPs in a specified domain.*

- Baker and Bobaljik: non-ergative unergatives pose a problem for inherent approaches – if ERG is inherent, then both unergative and transitive subjects should bear ERG case, if they are merged in the same VP-external specifier.

- But – if unergative subjects are merged lower than (some) transitive subjects, then this difference is not surprising (Tollan *to appear*).
  - *ERG case assigned inherently by Voice, and associated with more (semantically) marked features of high agents.*

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Conclusions

- In Algonquian and Samoan, unergative predicates are structurally less complex than full transitives (see Massam 2009, Tollan 2015, Polinsky 2016).

  - Unergative (and pseudo-transitive): [*v*P [VP]]

    - External argument in Spec of vP

  - Full transitive: [VoiceP [*v*P [VP]]]

    - External argument in Spec of VoiceP

- v introduces most basic properties of agents (initiation/experience of event)

- Voice encompasses more marked properties of agents (e.g., high effort, volition, instigation of an affect/change in state).

  - Morphosyntactically realized as theme sign (Algonquian), via ERG case marking (Samoan).

  - Transitivization of an unergative does not restore this morphology → the presence/absence of an object is not the only factor at play.

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Eskerrik asko!
¡Gracias!
Thank you!

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