Ergativity in East Caucasian

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Avar

With an intransitive verb:
(1)  a. was  w-us:-ana
    boy  M.SG-come.back-PST
    ‘The boy came back.’
  b. jas  j-us:-ana
    girl  F.SG-come.back-PST
    ‘The girl came back.’

With a transitive verb:
(2)  a. was-as:  jas  j-ec:-ana
    boy-ERG  girl  F.SG-come.back-PST
    ‘The boy praised the girl.’
  b. jas-at:  was  w-ec:-ana
    girl-ERG  boy  M.SG-come.back-PST
    ‘The girl praised the boy.’
Archi

With an intransitive verb:

(3) a.  
\textit{dija} \quad \textit{w-akdi}  
\text{father.ABS} \quad \text{M.SG-leave.PST}  
\text{‘Father went away.’}  

b.  
\textit{buwa} \quad \textit{d-akdi}  
\text{mother.ABS} \quad \text{F.SG-leave.PST}  
\text{‘Mother went away.’}  

With a transitive verb:

(4) a.  
\textit{buwa-} \textit{mu} \quad \textit{dija} \quad \textit{o-w-ka}  
\text{mother-ERG} \quad \text{father.ABS} \quad \text{bring\textless M.SG\textgreater .PST}  
\text{‘Mother led Father.’}  

b.  
\textit{dija-} \textit{mu} \quad \textit{buwa} \quad \textit{o-r-ka}  
\text{father-ERG} \quad \text{mother.ABS} \quad \text{bring\textless F.SG\textgreater .PST}  
\text{‘Father led Mother.’}
Ergativity

Absolutive vs. Ergative

**Absolutive** (case, or controller of agreement, etc.)
- subject of an intransitive verb
- direct object of a transitive verb

**Ergative**
- subject of a transitive verb

Absolutive controls the number/gender agreement at the clause level (Marina Chumakina’s 2020 lecture; Maria Polinsky’s December 29 lecture)
Other uses of Ergative

Instrument:
Bagvalal
(5) $bes^{wan-d} \ qiq^{wan}i$ ‘(he) sawed (it) through with a knife-ERG’

Cause:
Archi
(6) $lib\chi kul-li \ jaIt'an$ ‘(he) blushed with shame-ERG’

Time:
Avar
(7) $co \ q'o-jał$: ‘one day-OBL.ERG’
Other uses of Absolutive (typical for Nominative)

Nominal predicate:
Tsakhur

(8) malharram jugna zurnači wo-r
Maharram.abs good zurna.player cop-I
‘Maharram is a good zurna player.’

Existential and possessive clauses:
Lak

(9) Kazbek-lu-l hunar b-ur
Kazbek-O-GEN talent.abs III-cop
‘Kazbek has a talent.’
Other uses of Absolutive (typical for Nominative)

Vocative:
Bezhta
(10) *kid, χisƛ’ak-na daughter.ABS morning.become-EVD
   ‘Daughter, it is morning!’

Appositions and parts of compounds:
Khwarshi
(11) *išu-obu-t’-es āq mother(.ABS)-father-OBL-GEN1 house
   ‘parents’ house’
The ergative-absolutive alignment

Transitive verb, ergative subject (A), absolutive object (O)

Intransitive verb, absolutive subject (S)
The earliest approach

“In Chechen, there are no active transitive verbs, only middle and passive ones” [Uslar 1888: 64]

“In Avar, there is no active verb to love, but only the passive to be loved” [Uslar 1889: 122]
Ergative recognized as Passive

Classical Tibetan (Sino-Tibetan, [von Gabelentz 1861])
Greenlandic Eskimo (Eskimo-Aleut, [Thalbitzer 1911])
Kāshmīrī (Indo-Iranian, [Grierson 1919])
Basque (isolate, [Schuchardt 1921])

A non-paradigmatic understanding of Passive, with no Active counterpart.
In fact, some Passive constructions have none:
The analytical resultative passive in Russian:
(12) *V pjat’ časov ofis byl vse ešče otkryt.*
    in five hours office was still opened
    ‘At five o’clock, the office was still open.’
The famous passage coining the new term


“It is obvious that the problem is extremely complex and I declare myself unable to solve it. Instead of speaking of passive construction, I will use the terms ergative construction (the logical subject is in the erg.) ... and nominative construction.”
A rare example in linguistics, when a successful and still generally accepted concept has been introduced on the basis of intuition alone, and the author explicitly stated that he could not substantiate it with analysis. Dirr claims, in fact, that the construction is not passive because it is obvious that it is not passive.

The term “absolutive case” occurs first probably in [Thalbitzer 1911]

Lack of voice oppositions and of Passive in particular is one of the fundamental typological characteristics of East Caucasian [Klimov, Alekseev 1980: 239]
Isn’t it Passive, after all?

It seems that Dirr and his many followers are right, it is not. By most definitions, B is a Passive counterpart of A, and A an Active counterpart of B, if A and B denote the same situation and what is Subject in A is not Subject in B (in an Active vs. Passive pair, the correspondence between roles and grammatical relations is switched [Xolodovič (ed.) 1974; Siewierska 1984]):

A: the enemy destroyed the city
   vs.
B: the city was destroyed by the enemy

There is no active counterpart to the Ergative construction in EC.
A different approach to voice [Fox, Hopper (ed.) 1994; Langacker 2006]:

Passive is a (peripheral) construction in which Agent is “de-focused”, i.e. obtains a less prominent rank in discourse (“the agent’s identity is unknown or irrelevant”).

In EC, the participant marked with Ergative is not “de-focused” in this sense.
Avar
two equally prominent characters in a folktale
(“Wolf and Fox”):

(13) bac’i-c:a žindir t’anč’i kir aralin hiq’arab
wolf-ERG its cubs where were asked
mex’-aľ:, c’ara-c:a abun bugo žindir anir rugin
time-LOC fox-ERG said AUX its here are
‘When Wolf asked where its cubs were, Fox said that they were at its place.’
Peripheral “Passive”

If it is Passive, it is a Passive counterpart to Ergative:

Avar

(14) \( di\text{-}q:a \quad (\text{*}di\text{-}c\text{:}a) \quad \ce\text{č} \quad k\text{wana}-n \text{ ana} \)

\( \text{I-POSS (I-ERG) apple.ABS eat-CVB go.PST} \)

‘It happened somehow that I ate the apple’

known since [Magomedova 2006]
Ergative with complex verbs

The verbal vocabulary expands mainly via combinations of non-inflected, often borrowed, elements with light (semi-auxiliary) verbs with meanings like ‘do’, ‘be(come)’, ‘give’, ‘bring’, ‘leave’, ‘say’ etc. The resulting meaning is sometimes compositional and sometimes idiomatic; phonological and grammatical integration varies.

Morphological derivations like
Avar $k^wač$ ‘cold’ $→$ $k^wač$-$a$-$ze$ ‘feel cold’; $t’eh$ ‘flower’ $→$ $t’eh$-$a$-$ze$ ‘blossom’ are rare (or less noticeable)
Ergative with complex verbs

(15) a. Tsez ḥukmu ‘decision, judgment’ + boda ‘do’ → ḥukmu boda ‘pass a judgment’
   b. Lezgi azad ‘free’ + xun ‘become’ → azad xun ‘free oneself’
   c. Archi ływ ‘water’ + as ‘do’ → ływ as ‘swim’

With transitive light verbs, Ergative is used:

Archi

(16) za-ri   ływ a-rši i
    I-ERG  water do-CVB AUX
    ‘I am swimming.’
Ergative with integrated non-inflected elements

Lezgi

(17) a. ruš-a χürekar har juq’uz hazur i-jizwa
girl-ERG food every day ready do-PRS

b. *ruš-a χürekar hazur har juq’uz i-jizwa
girl-ERG food ready every day do-PRS

‘The girl cooks food every day.’

[Kerimova 2020]

Partly incorporated Absolutive:

(18) malar-i sal rug aw-una
cattle-ERG vegetable.garden dust do-PST

‘The cattle ravaged (turned to dust) the vegetable garden.’
Ideophonic verbs: Archi

Combinations with bos ‘say’

Fully integrated stems: ziz-bos ‘buzz’, χu-bus ‘drink’, aInša-bos ‘sneeze’; the ideophonic element is ‘invisible’ for syntax

(19) t’ant’ ziz-war
   bee.ABS buzz-say.PRS
   ‘A bee buzzes’

(20) za-ri diq’ χu-bu
   I-ERG soup.ABS drink-say.PST
   ‘I ate the soup.’

8 less integrated stems, e.g. ḡiḷ-bos ‘hiss’, tu-bus ‘spit’:

(21) jaIt’i-li zat:i-k ḡiḷ-bo
   snake-ERG I-LOC hiss-say.PST
   ‘The snake hissed at me.’
Ideophonic verbs: Lak

With an animate argument, Ergative:

(22) č:it-ul  maIw ukunni
    cat-ERG meow-say.PST
    ‘The cat meowed.’

With an inanimate argument, Absolutive:

(23) granata  p’alq’  ukunni
    grenade.ABS  explode say.PST
    ‘The grenade exploded.’
Ideophonic verbs: Bezhta

With an animate argument, Ergative:

(24) is-t’i    hic-ƛo-jo
    brother-OBL.ERG  sneeze-say-PST
    ‘Brother sneezed.’

With an inanimate argument, Absolutive:

(25) okko    c’im-ƛo-jo
    coin.ABS  jingle-say-PST
    ‘The coin jingled.’
Obliterated elements that occur only as stems of complex verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Verb Stem</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archi</td>
<td>rig abas</td>
<td>X + do ‘find’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khwarshi</td>
<td>ᱠ粿u aha</td>
<td>X raise ‘rejoice’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lak</td>
<td>walk’ uĉin</td>
<td>X say ‘sway, reel’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lezgi</td>
<td>terg awun</td>
<td>X do ‘ruin’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Split S in Batsbi

With 1 and 2 person pronouns, the Nakh prefixal “Ergative” denotes Agent, and “Absolutive” Patient

(30) a. so wože
  I fell (involuntarily)

b. a-s wože
  ERG-I fell (deliberately)
Split-S in Tabasaran with person/number agreement

(31) kurcʷura-za-wu
    beat-1sgA-2sgP
    ‘I beat you.’

(32) a. aldakura-zu
    fall.down-1sgP
    ‘I fall down.’

           b. urgura-zu
    burn-1sgP
    ‘I burn.’

           c. kc:ʷuxura-zu
    slip-1sgP
    ‘I slip.’

(33) a. allqura-za
    laugh-1sgA
    ‘I laugh’

           b. kc:ʷuxura-za
    slip-1sgA
    ‘I skate.’
Hierarchical person-number agreement
Person&number agreement in the verb
Lak, Dargic, Tabasaran, Udi, Batsbi
to a lesser degree, in some Avar-Andic languages
1 and 2 persons > 3 person, with many intricate details
Nina Sumbatova’s December 22 lecture
Lak

(34) a. na ga at:a-\(ra\)
   ‘I beat(-1SG) him’
b. gana-l na at:a-\(ra\)
   ‘He(-ERG) beats(-1SG) me.’
c. gana-l ga at:a-\(j\)
   ‘He(-ERG) beats(-3SG) him.’
Biabsolutive construction

A cleft-like construction (cf. *It is John who left*) with analytical verb forms

Archi

(35) buwa-mu χ:walli b-a-rši b-i
    mother-ERG bread.ABS III-do-CVB III-AUX

(36) buwa χ:walli b-a-rši d-i
    mother.ABS bread.ABS III-do-CVB II-AUX

The biabsolutive construction (36) topicalizes A and marks the VP with focus (‘What is mother doing?’)

[Kibrik 1975]
"Accusative" marking in Udi

A tripartite alignment system. Personal pronouns, human proper names and definite nonhuman NPs are marked with Dative, not Absolutive, as direct objects:

(37) alič-en šuje-ne ak:-i
   Alik-ERG bear-3SG see-AOR
   ‘Alik saw a bear.’

(38) ke jan ak:-i te-jan alič-a
   today we see-AOR NEG-1PL Alik-DAT
   ‘We didn’t see Alik today.’

[Ganenkov 2008: 26]
Lack of Ergative/Absolutive contrast with 1 and 2 person pronouns

(39) Bezhta
Ergative=Absolutive *do* ‘I’, *mi* ‘you (sg.)’, *ile* ‘we’, *miže* ‘you (pl.)’

(40) Khwarshi
Absolutive *da* ‘I’, *ma* ‘you (sg.)’, *ila* ‘we’, *miža* ‘you (pl.)’
Ergative *de* ‘I’, *m-i* ‘you (sg.)’, *il-i* ‘we’, *miž-i* ‘you (pl.)’; 
-i is an ergative marker
“Role-dominated” languages?

The long-standing problem: ergative-absolutive alignment disagrees with structure (in terms of grammatical relations, or hierarchy of phrasal categories)

- No passive voice
  → the roles are mapped more or less uniformly
- Very few, if any at all, grammatical characteristics, other than case and gender/number agreement, show asymmetrical orientation like Subject vs. Object, Ergative vs. Absolutive, NP vs. VP... [Kibrik 1979; 1980]
Lack of orientation: reflexive pronouns

Khwarshi

(41) a. rasul-i is-i žuč q’warid uwā-te
   Rasul-ERG self-ERG self.ABS harm do-NEG
   ‘Rasul does no harm to himself’

b. rasul is-i žuč q’warid uwā-te
   Rasul.ABS self-ERG self.ABS harm do-NEG
   ‘Rasul does no harm to himself’, lit.: “Himself does no harm to Rasul”
Lack of orientation: ellipsis

Bezhta

(42) öže  ist’i-q-na  goc’oq-na  ___  eĥ’e-rö
boy.ABS  brother-LOC-ADD  look-CVB  go.away-AOR
‘The boy looked at his brother and (//his brother) left.’

Khwarshi

(43) už-a  es-na  žik’-na  ___  ičč-a
boy-ERG  brother-ADD  beat-CVB  run.away-AOR
‘The boy beat his brother and (//his brother) ran away.’
Lack of orientation: ellipsis

Lak

(44) a. [ ___ ninu   d-uruč:in-širul]   na u:k’u-ra
   (I) mother.ABS  FEM.SG-guard-PURP I came-1SG
   ‘I came to guard (my) mother.’

b. [nit:i-l   ___ uruč:in-širul]   na u:k’u-ra
   mother-ERG (me)  MASC.SG.guard-PURP I came-1SG
   ‘I came to be guarded by (my) mother [lit.: (for) my mother to guard me)].’
Linear precedence may be sufficient for a NP to be a pronouns’ antecedent

Khwarshi

(45) aw-si uža-lo ţdu ţu
this-OBL boy-GEN2 home.LOC he.ABS
televizor-qol gic’a-na gołe
TVset-LOC look-CVB AUX

‘In this boy’s room, he is watching TV.’

against [Reinhart 1983]:

   b. *Near Dan, he saw a snake.
Linear precedence may be sufficient for a NP to be a pronouns’ antecedent

Khwarshi

(47) muḥammad-es mašina is-i miχejk’-a
  Muhammad-GEN1 car.ABS he-ERG drive-AOR
  ‘He\textsubscript{1} drove Muhammad’s\textsubscript{i/j} car.’
Cases of subject oriented anaphora can be found

Avar

Reflexive:

(48) a.  \textit{rasul-ic:a ži\textit{w}go sijaḥ-alka q^w-ana}  
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\text{Rasul-ERG} & \text{self.ABS} & \text{list-LOC} & \text{write-AOR} \\
\end{tabular}

‘Rasul wrote himself down in the list.’

b. *\textit{rasul žin-c:ago sijaḥ-alka q^w-ana}  
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\text{Rasul.ABS} & \text{self-ERG} & \text{list-LOC} & \text{write-AOR} \\
\end{tabular}

*‘Himself wrote down Rasul in the list’
No grammatical relations?

[Kibrik 1980]: in the East Caucasian languages, morphosyntactic marking of arguments directly maps (hyper)roles, and there is no need in an intermediate level of grammatical relations, cf. [Van Valin, Foley 1980]:

role-dominated languages
Lakhota, Tunica, Enga, Walbiri...

No grammatical relations $\rightarrow$ no asymmetries
No grammatical relations?

There are some subject-object asymmetries in anaphora like (33);
Lexical conversives (different mappings with the same roles):
(49) a. Archi ŝ:ubus ‘buy’ vs. oñas ‘sell’
    b. Bezhta jizal ‘win’ vs. jüwäl ‘lose’ and the like.
Conversives with light verbs:
(50) Avar
dandeč’ej hab-ize resistance do-INF ‘offer resistance (to someone)’ vs.
dandeč’ej bix:-ize resistance see-INF ‘meet resistance (from someone)’
Prominent arguments vs. other arguments and adjuncts (Lyutikova 2021)

Khwarshi

**Group prominence:** Subject & high-ranking Objects NP in Absolutive (Intrans Subject, Trans Object) & Subjects in oblique cases (Ergative, Dative) vs. Other (non-Absolutive objects, NPs in postpositional phrases etc.)

- antecede anaphors (reflexives and reciprocals)
- cannot antecede coargument high-ranked pronominals
- in some constructions, e.g. nominalized clauses, can be replaced with Genitive (Lyutikova 2021)
- cannot be marked with Attributive, the form that produces modifiers (Lyutikova 2021)
Prominent arguments vs. other arguments and adjuncts

Khwarshi
Anaphora, High-ranked Dative Experiencer Subject:
(51) kəd i-li-l j-ajk-ə
  girl.ABS she-DAT FEM.SG-видеть-AOR
  ‘She saw the girl.’
  ‘*The girl saw herself.’

Low-ranked applicative Dative Object:
(52) kənd-i i-li-l čorpa laj-l-ə
  girl-ERG she-DAT soup.ABS cook-AOR
  ‘The girl cooked her(self) a soup.’

Low enough to be anteceded by Subject in Ergative
Prominent arguments vs. other arguments and adjuncts

Khwarshi nominalizations (Lyutikova 2021):

High-ranking Experiencer Dative Subject:
(53) \( \text{di-}l \ \text{goqq-a} \quad [\text{pat’imate-l}//\text{pat’imate-s}] \)
  I-DAT be.glad-AOR [Patimat-DAT//-GEN]
  \( iša \quad \text{jak}^₂\text{a-nu} \]
  mother.ABS see-MSD]
‘I am glad that Patimat saw Mother.’

Low-ranking Recipient Dative Object:
(54) \( \text{di-}l \ \text{goqq-a} \quad [iša-t’i \ \text{pat’imate-l}//*\text{pat’imate-s}] \)
  I-DAT be.glad-AOR \text{mother-ERG} [Patimat-DAT//*-GEN]
  \( tiƛ-nu \quad \text{kunta} \]
  give-MSD dress.ABS]
‘I am glad that Mother gave Patimat the dress.’


