Ergativity

Found in about 25% of the world's languages (Dixon's 1994 estimate), including in Basque, all Caucasian languages, Indic, Iranian, Burushaski, Tibeto-Burman, some Polynesian (Tongan, Samoan), some 'Papuan', most Pama-Nyungan, Paleo-Siberian, Eskimo-Aleut, Tsimshian, Chinook, Mayan, Jê, Awawak, Tupi-Guaraní, Carib, Chibchan, Päri (Western Nilotic)

(1) Terminology

\[ \text{A: subject of transitive} \]
\[ \text{S: subject of intransitive} \]
\[ \text{S}_a: \text{subject of unergative} \]
\[ \text{S}_o: \text{subject of unaccusative} \]
\[ \text{O: object of transitive} \]

Nominative-accusative languages: \( S \) is marked like \( A \)

(2) \( A \)
\( \text{nom} = \)
\( S \quad O = \text{acc} \)

Latin

(3) Puell-a femin-am audi-t. 'The girl hears the woman.'
\( \text{girl-NOM woman-ACC hear-3s.PRES} \)

(4) Puell-a veni-t. 'The girl is coming.'
\( \text{girl-NOM come-3s.PRES} \)

(5) \( A/S \quad O \)

\( \text{On nominals:} \)
\[ -a \quad -am \]
\[ "\text{NOM}" "\text{ACC}" \]

\( \text{On verbs:} \)
\[ -t \quad -- \]
\[ ("\text{subject agreement"}) \]

Swahili

(6) a. tu-ли-anguka 'We fell down.'
\( 1p-\text{PAST-fall.down} \)

b. m-ли-anguka 'You all fell down.'
\( 2p-\text{PAST-fall.down} \)

(7) a. m-ли-tu-ona 'You all saw us.'
\( 2p-\text{PAST-1p-see} \)

b. tu-ли-wa-ona 'We saw you all.'
\( 1p-\text{PAST-2p-see} \)

(8) \( A/S \quad O \)
\( \text{we} \quad \text{tu-} \quad \text{-tu-} \)
\( \text{you all} \quad m- \quad \text{-wa-} \)
**Ergative-absolutive** languages ("ergative"): S is marked like O

(9) \[ \begin{align*}
    \text{erg} & = \text{A} \\
    \text{S} & = \text{abs(olutive)}
\end{align*} \]

Dyirbal (north-east Australia)

(10) \[ \text{n}_g\text{uma} \quad \text{yabu-}
\text{n}_g\text{gu} \quad \text{bura-n} \quad \text{see-NONFUT} \]

'Mother saw father.'

(11) \[ \text{yabu} \quad \text{n}_g\text{uma-}
\text{n}_g\text{gu} \quad \text{bura-n} \quad \text{see-NONFUT} \]

'Father saw mother.'

(12) \[ \text{n}_g\text{uma} \quad \text{banaga-n'yu} \quad \text{see-NONFUT} \]

'Father returned'

(13) \[ \text{yabu} \quad \text{banaga-n'yu} \quad \text{see-NONFUT} \]

'Mother returned'

(14) **On nominals**

\[ \begin{align*}
    \text{A} & \quad \text{S/O} \\
    \text{-n}_g\text{gu} & \quad -- \\
    "\text{ERG}" & \quad "\text{ABS}" \\
\end{align*} \]

Sacapultec Maya  

(\text{sh}- marks 'completive aspect', -\text{ek/-ang} are transitivity markers)

(15) a. \[ \text{sh-at-ak-ek} \quad \text{you(sg.) entered}' \\
    \text{ASP-2s-enter-INTRAN} \\
\]

b. \[ \text{sh-∅-ak-ek} \quad \text{he/she entered}' \\
    \text{ASP-3s-enter-INTRAN} \\
\]

(16) a. \[ \text{sh-∅-a:-ch'iy-ang} \quad \text{you(sg.) hit him/her}' \\
    \text{ASP-3s-2s-hit-TRAN} \\
\]

b. \[ \text{sh-at-ri-ch'iy-ang} \quad \text{he/she hit you}' \\
    \text{ASP-2s-3s-hit-TRAN} \\
\]

(17) **On the verb**

\[ \begin{align*}
    \text{A} & \quad \text{S/O} \\
    \text{you(sg.)} & \quad \text{-a:-}\quad \text{-at-} \\
    \text{he/she} & \quad \text{-ri-}\quad \text{-∅-} \\
\end{align*} \]

Sapir's classification for Amerindian language (rev. of Uhlenbeck, *IJAL* 1:82-86, 1917)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>[Comments]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Chinook</td>
<td>pure ERG/ABS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td>&quot;split ergative&quot; (&quot;active-stative&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Takelma</td>
<td>fully differentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Paiute</td>
<td>pure NOM/ACC (Latin, Japanese, Korean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yana</td>
<td>undifferentiated (Eng. full NPs, Swahili, Chinese)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Split ergativity

Parameters of splits
- Tense/aspect (past tense or completive/perfective aspect erg/abs, others nom/acc) [e.g., Hindi-Urdu, Georgian]
- Semantics (agentive S erg, non-agentive S nom) [e.g., Chechen, Siouan languages]

Syntax:
- Case marking (erg/abs) vs. verb agreement (nom/acc)
- Case marking and verb agreement (erg/abs) vs. Reflexivization, Relativization, Equi, Conjunction Reduction, etc. (at least some nom/acc)
- Clause union constructions (case marking for causee may be ERG => 3, ABS => 2) even when everything else is nom/acc, e.g., French, Japanese, Turkish

Category
- nouns ERG/ABS vs. pronouns NOM/ACC [e.g., Alsea (Mithun 1999:230)]
- nouns ERG/ABS vs. determiners NOM/ACC [e.g., Kalaallisut]

Verb class [Georgian]

1. Tense/aspect split

(18) Hindi-Urdu

a. Jamiil larkii ko jagaegaa. 'Jamil will wake up the girl.'
   J(NOM) girl DAT wake.up.FUT

b. Jamiil ne larkii ko jagayaayaa. 'Jamil woke up the girl.'
   J. ERG/INST girl DAT wake.up.PAST

c. Jamiil khaanaa khau:nga:. 'Jamil will eat up the food.'
   J(NOM) food(NOM) eat.up-FUT

d. Jamiil ne khaanaa khaayaa. 'Jamil ate up the food.'
   J. ERG/INST food(ABS) eat.up-PAST

A in NOM (unmarked) case (=ABS) with non-perfective verbs, in ERG/INST case with past/perfective verbs
O in DAT with animate definite patients (cf. differential object marking in many languages: Spanish a, Rumanian pe, Farsi ra, Turkish -I), in nom (unmarked) case otherwise

Verb agreement:
- Verb agrees with A if it's NOM (unmarked)
- If subject has -ne (ERG/INST) postposition, verb agrees with O...
- ...unless O is marked (with DAT postposition -ko), in which case the verb will not agree with either. Thus similarly, in...

Gujarati (E = schwa)

(19) a. Ramesh pen khErid-t-o, hE-t-o. 'Ramesh was buying the pen.'
   R(M.) pen(f.) buy-IMPF-M AUX-IMPF-M

b. Ramesh-e pen khErid-y-i. 'Ramesh bought the pen.'
   R(M.)-ERG pen(f.) buy-PRF-F

2. Semantic split

Wichita
(20) a. ta-t-’i:y-s 'I saw (him).'
   NONFUT-1s-see-IMPF
b. ta-ki-’i:y-s '(He) saw me.'
   NONFUT-1s-see-IMPF
c. ta-t-hisa 'I went.'
   NONFUT-1s-go
d. ta-ki-hiya:s 'I am hungry.' (Cf. German Es hungert mich.)
   NONFUT-1s-hunger it(expletive) hunger.3s. PRES 1s.ACC

Manipuri (Tibeto-Burman) (E=schwa, N=engma) (cf. Central Pomo [Mithun 1999:218]
(21) a. Ey-nE celli. I(-nE) ran
b. Ey sawwi. I got angry
c. Ey-nE ma-bu phuy. I(-nE) beat him(-bu)
d. ma Ey-bu uy. He saw me(-bu).
e. Ey-nE TombE-bu theNNi. I(-nE) touched Tomba(-bu) intentionally.
f. Ey TombE-bu theNNi. I touched Tomba(-bu) unintentionally.

3. Syntax (French clause union)
(22) a. Georges lit le livre. 'George is reading the book'
   G. read.3s.pres the book
b. Georges pleure. 'George is crying.'
   G. cries
c. Marie donne le livre à Georges. 'Mary gives the book to Georges'
   M. gives the book DAT G.
d. Marie fait pleurer Georges. 'Mary makes George cry.'
   M. makes cry G.
e. Marie fait lire le livre à Georges. 'Mary makes George read the book.'
   M. makes read the book DAT G.

Three-way split
Nez Perce (Penutian: Oregon; Rude 1986, Bittner and Hale 1996; Mithun 1999:229)
(23) a. xáxaas-nim kitwekíixce. ‘Grizzly is chasing me.’
   grizzly-ERG he.is.chasing
b. xáxaac hiwéhyem. ‘Grizzly has come.’
   grizzly(NOM) he.has.come
c. ?óykalo-m titóóqan-m pááqa?ancix xáxaas-na.
   all-ERG people-ERG they.respect.him grizzly-ACC
   ‘All people respect grizzly.’
(24) Háama-nm hi-néec-'wi-ye wewúkiye-ne. 'The man shot (several) elk.'
   man-ERG 3-pl-shoot-PERF elk-ACC

References (all data is the above are from)