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TREE-GEOMETRIC RELATIONAL HIERARCHIES AND NUUMIIPUUTÍMT (NEZ PERCE) CASE*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most languages that have an ergative pattern of case marking show a “split”, where some argument types are marked with ergative/absolute (ERG/ABS), and others are marked with a nominative/accusative pattern (NOM/ACC). In the typological literature¹, these splits are determined by reference to markedness hierarchies (also known as relational, accessibility and semantic hierarchies): If a given nominal has certain semantic or pragmatic features and appears “high” on a markedness hierarchy, then it is more likely to be indicated by a NOM/ACC pattern². For example, in his classic work on split case marking in Dyirbal, Dixon (1979) argues that local persons (1st and 2nd person) are ranked more highly on the person hierarchy and thus receive a NOM/ACC pattern; by contrast, third person and referential NPs are low on the hierarchy and receive ERG/ABS case.

We propose a purely formal account of such phenomena with particular reference to the so-called four-way case system of Nuumiipuutímt (known more commonly as Nez Perce), a Sahaptian language spoken in Idaho. We make a number of claims: First and foremost, in the spirit of Jelinek (1993) and Jelinek and Carnie (2003), we claim that relational hierarchies are epiphenomena. Semantic prominence of arguments with particular case markings is seen as an artifact of the surface position of the argument, as triggered by formal feature checking requirements, and are thus tree-geometric. The semantic effects are due to the interpretation of the tree structure when it is submitted to the semantic component. The labor of the relational hierarchy is divided into two parts here. On one hand, we have the lexical semantic and selectional properties of the formal features that drive the syntax. These restrictions make extensive use of formal feature variation in the ‘little’ *v* category (see Ura, this volume and Wiltschko, this volume, for similar approaches to splits). On the other hand, we also have the semantic interpretation of the final tree. We will argue, contra Jelinek and Carnie (2003), that the semantics is not the driving force in determining the surface position of the argument; instead, felicitous semantic interpretations are the result of the proper positioning of arguments as governed by the formal and selectional properties of the tree. In particular, we claim that the fact that syntactic considerations place certain arguments high in the phrase structure tree

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corresponds directly with the appearance of such argument as high in relational hierarchies, particularly in the case of Nuumiipuutímt.

2. TWO NOTIONS OF “HIERARCHY” IN SYNTACTIC THEORY

The term “hierarchy” in linguistics has at least two uses in current linguistic practice, maybe more. One use represents the relationships that exist among constituents. Constituent hierarchies can be represented a number of ways (phrase structure trees, box notation, brackets, sets, etc.), but they all represent facts about the behaviour of words and groups of words in a sentence, such that groups of words seem to form distinct subparts of other groups of words. Such hierarchies are motivated by the behaviours we commonly use to test for constituency, such as movement, coordination, replacement, pronominalization, ellipsis, fragmenthood, etc. While these tests aren’t without their problems, constituent hierarchies are widely accepted within the generative paradigm.

Other kinds of hierarchies include the markedness hierarchies such as that seen in (1) (taken from Dixon 1994):

- 1) 1st > 2nd > 3rd > Proper nouns > Humans > Animates > Inanimates

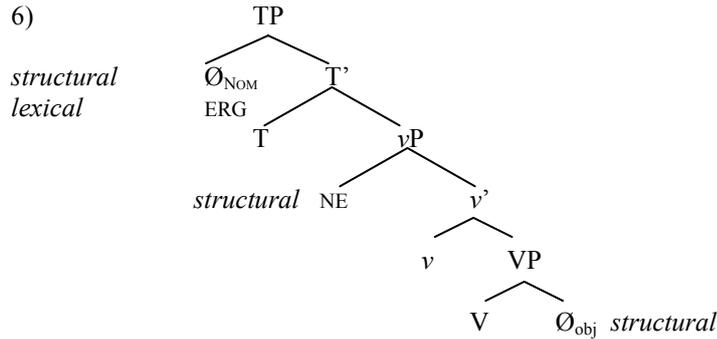
Within generative grammar this kind of hierarchy has been formalized a number of ways. For example, the “Theta Hierarchy” and the conditions for its implementation in early GB theory: UTAH (Baker 1988), and relational grammar: UAH (Perlmutter and Postal 1984), reflect that nouns bearing semantic relations such as agenthood are at an underlying level more syntactically prominent than those bearing relations like theme and experiencer.

In the principles and parameters tradition, particularly in Minimalism, however, it has been the trend to derive relational information from the constituent hierarchies. Constituency is viewed as the road map to semantic interpretation. For example, grammatical relations are usually defined in terms of placement in the tree. Subjects are in the specifier of TP. Objects are usually the sister to the verb (or more recently the specifier of AgrOP or vP). Coreference and binding relations are frequently defined in terms of tree geometry such as government or c-command. Another good example is the body of work produced by Hale and Keyser (1992, 1993, 2002 and others). They claim that theta roles are defined by the structural positions occupied by NPs in the VP at D-structure. Agents are in the specifier of VP, patients are defined as the complement to V etc. Any “hierarchical” effects among thematic relations are due to their underlying position in the tree. In this paper, we attempt a similar account of the more surface-oriented relational hierarchies; claiming that they are merely reflections of surface position in the constituent tree.

3. NUUMIIPUUTÍMT SPLIT CASE MARKING

According to Woolford (1997), Nuumiipuutímt exhibits four cases, summarized in the chart in (2). For reasons that will become clear below, in this paper we refer to

All the other cases mentioned here are structurally assigned. The position of each of these structural cases is given in (6)⁵.



3.2 A reanalysis

We offer a slightly different take on the \emptyset/\emptyset pattern and the agreement facts. We note that the interpretations of the two patterns are not identical. For example, our native speaker gave us different translations for the two sentences above in (3) (repeated here for convenience with the correct glosses).

- 3') a. Háama + \emptyset hi+'wi+ye wewúkiye+ \emptyset \emptyset/\emptyset pattern
 man+ \emptyset_{SUBJ} 3+shoot+ASP elk+ \emptyset_{OBJ}
 'The man shot an elk' (Rude 1988's gloss)
 'A man shot an elk' (Native speaker consultant)
- b. Háama+nm pée+'wi+ye wewúkiye+ne NM/NE pattern
 man+ERG 3/3+shoot+ASP elk+NE
 'The man shot an elk' (Rude 1988's gloss)
 'The man shot the elk' (Native speaker consultant)

Similarly in footnote 9 of her paper, Woolford notes (following the descriptive work of Rude 1982, 1985, 1986a, 1986b) that there appears to be a semantic/pragmatic difference between NE and \emptyset_{OBJ} -marked objects: NE-marked objects are taken to be more topical than \emptyset_{OBJ} -marked ones. She speculates that this may be due to the Mapping Principle of Diesing (1992), where specific (highly presuppositional or topical) objects move out of the VP and non-specific (non-presuppositional or focal) objects remain inside (as discussed at length below in section 4, we argue for a variant of this analysis.)

We claim that these two constructions have very different syntactic structures. Note two things about the sentences in (3'): (i) The case morphology on the object is null in \emptyset/\emptyset constructions and (ii) the \emptyset/\emptyset pattern is fairly clearly intransitive, as shown by the agreement morphology. The agreement morphology (8) and case

marking (all \emptyset) of these constructions are essentially identical to that of true intransitives (7).

- 7) 'ipí + \emptyset hi +kú +ye
 he+ \emptyset_{subj} 3 +go+ ASP
 'He went' (Rude, 1982)
- 8) Intransitive & $\emptyset_{\text{SUBJ}}/\emptyset_{\text{OBJ}}$ 1,2⁶ 3
 \emptyset hi
- ERG/NE 1,2/1,2 1/3 2/3 3/3 3/1,2
 \emptyset 'e 'aw péé hi⁷

We argue this relationship is no accident. Ergative case only shows up in those situations where the construction is truly transitive. In the \emptyset/\emptyset constructions, the objects are caseless. Further evidence for the intransitivity of \emptyset/\emptyset constructions comes from the fact that they cannot be passivized, as is predicted if they were intransitive (Perlmutter and Postal 1983). Passives are exceedingly rare in Nuumiiputímt. They are so rare in the spoken language that native speakers are hard pressed to identify them. Rude (1985:171) shows that only 4% of sentences in a written corpus were passive. Of these, all of the theme subjects were highly topical, indicating that they could not be derived from the \emptyset/\emptyset incorporated structure, which requires non-topical themes. Indeed Rude (1985:172) draws an explicit parallel between the pragmatic function of ERG/NE constructions and passives, distinguishing them from the \emptyset/\emptyset structures. Like passives, the ERG/NE construction involves topical presuppositional objects; on the current account, this common property derives from the fact that the objects are outside the VP in both passives and ERG/NE constructions.

There are at least two plausible (possibly not incompatible) views of how intransitivity in the \emptyset/\emptyset constructions arises. First is the possibility that these \emptyset/\emptyset constructions are antipassives, as is claimed by one original field worker on the language: Rude (1988). Woolford (1997) argues that these constructions lack the usual hallmarks of antipassives: There is no overt voice morphology, and the object does not appear in an oblique case. Nevertheless, they have the typical semantic properties of antipassives (including allowing non-specifics in the object position as noted above), at least in the 'extended' sense of antipassive discussed by Hopper and Thompson (1980:268)⁸. An alternative detransitivizing operation worth considering is incorporation. These constructions are well known in the literature on the indigenous languages of the Americas. Baker's (1988) work focused on constructions in the Iroquoian language Mohawk (9).

- 9) a. Yaowira'a ye-nuhwe's ne kanuhsa'
 Baby 3fs-like the house
 'The baby likes the house.'

- b. Yaowira'a ye-**nuhs**-nuhwe's
 Baby 3fs-house-like
 'The baby likes houses.' (Baker 1988)

In Mohawk, presupposed NPs show up as full NPs, whereas generic asserted nominals are incorporated into the verb root. Presumably, this is one means of licensing a nominal that is caseless. However, there is an important difference between Mohawk incorporated objects and Nuumiipuutímt \emptyset_{obj} NPs. In Mohawk the NPs must be bare N heads. In Nuumiipuutímt, \emptyset_{obj} NPs can be full NPs⁹.

- 10) ...met'éete [ilsteemqet líwnin] hiwaya'npqáawnima
 ...but burned-wood burned 3.grabbed
 '...but he grabbed a piece of burnt wood' (Aoki 1979)¹⁰

This obviously points away from a head-incorporated structure. We are left then with the problem that this "incorporation" doesn't bear the standard hallmarks of head-incorporation either. Interestingly, in the Polynesian language Niuean, we find a very similar phenomenon, commonly called "pseudo-incorporation" (Massam 2001, see also Massam, this volume). Niuean is an ergative/absolutive, predicate initial language.

- 11) Ne inu e Sione e kofe.
 PAST drink ERG Sione ABS coffee
 'Sione drank the coffee.'

Massam (2001) has argued, following the standard take on verb initial languages, that predicate initial order derives from fronting the predicate. Interestingly, under circumstances similar to the situation in Nuumiipuutímt, objects can lose their absolutive case marking and shift with the verb to the front of the sentence. The sentence then becomes intransitive (as seen by the shift from ergative to absolutive case on the subject).

- 12) Ne inu kofe a Sione.
 PAST drink coffee ABS Sione
 'Sione drank coffee'

Again as in Nuumiipuutímt these "incorporated" objects need not be limited to N^o heads:

- 13) Ne kai [sipi mo e ika mitaki] a Sione.
 PAST eat chip COM ABS fish good ABS Sione
 'Sione ate good fish and chips.'

Massam encodes this in the syntax by distinguishing between NPs and DPs. DPs require case and NPs do not. Pseudo-incorporation constructions have NP objects, not DPs. Due to the fact that proper names and possessive constructions—typical DP

- 16) a. $v_{\text{TRAN}} \langle \text{ag}, \text{VP}_{[+D]} \rangle [+acc]$
 |
 ERG
 b. $[_{\text{TP}} T_{[+nom]} [_{\text{VP}} \text{ERG} [_{\text{VP}} \text{ACC}_i v_{\text{tran}} [_{\text{VP}} V t_i]]]]$

Nuumiipuu_timt v_{INTRAN} (which selects for both regular intransitive VPs and derived intransitive VPs) lacks both these features so agent DPs must shift to the specifier of TP for case reasons to get NOM/ABS case (\emptyset_{SUBJ} marking).

- 17) a. $v_{\text{INTRAN}} \langle \text{ag}, \text{VP}_{[-D]} \rangle^{13}$
 b. $[_{\text{TP}} \text{NOM/ABS}_i T_{[+nom]} [_{\text{VP}} t_i v_{\text{intran}} [_{\text{VP}} \dots]]]]$

One fact still requires explanation: why both NOM/ABS and ERG DPs in Nuumiipuu_timt trigger subject agreement. Let us assume that subject agreement features are intimately tied to TP. Further let's assume that T has a D-feature associated with the extended projection principle [+EPP]. T thus has the requirement that it be filled, even in structures where both DPs have their case checked in the vP. For reasons of derivational economy, the higher of the two arguments,¹⁴ the ergative, shifts to satisfy this EPP requirement, and consequently triggers subject agreement (cf. Ura, this volume, and Anand and Nevins, this volume, who both claim that only ergative-marked NPs move to the specifier of TP for EPP reasons, and Massam, this volume who dismisses an EPP account of argument prominence). We thus get an essentially nominative/accusative pattern of agreement with a lexical subject case.

This predicts that Nuumiipuu_timt is not syntactically ergative in the sense of Dixon (1994). Syntactic ergativity usually refers to situations where the absolutive counts as the subject for extra-clausal relations (such as which element governs PRO in conjunction etc.). Those languages that treat subjects of intransitives and objects of intransitives as the "pivot" (governor or binder) are "syntactically ergative". Compare the Dyirbal and English sentences in (18).

- 18) a. $[\text{Mother}_i \text{ saw Father}_j \text{ and } [\text{PRO}_i \text{ returned }] \text{ (i.e., she returned)}$
 b. $[\eta\text{uma}_i \quad \text{yabuŋgu}_j \quad \text{buran}] [\text{PRO}_j \text{ banaganyu}]$
 father.ABS mother.ERG saw returned
 'Mother saw father and he returned.' (Dixon 1979)

English (18a) is syntactically accusative; the nominative argument is the pivot. Dyirbal (18b) by contrast is syntactically ergative; the absolutive object argument controls the PRO. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to test this in Nuumiipuu_timt, since pronominal arguments are expressed in the verbal agreement morphology.

- 19) ... púuyewkunya kaa péetemesitke
 ...3/3-dashed.to.meet and 3/3-lasso
 'He dashed to meet him and he lassoed him' (Aoki 1979)¹⁵

Following Stenson (1989), we assume that in null subject languages PRO and *pro* are identical with respect to binding and control properties. The interpretation of (19) is consistent with an accusative pattern:

- 20) a. ‘He_i dashed to meet him_j and he_i lassoed him_j’
 b.* ‘He_ç dashed to meet him_ç and he_ç lassoed him_ç’

This seems to point towards a syntactically accusative structure, as might be expected from the analysis presented here.

4. THE INFORMATION STRUCTURE OF NUUMIIPUUTÍMT NOMINALS

Thus far in this paper, we have presented a purely formal account of the positioning of nominals in Nuumiipuutímt. The surface position of nominals is determined solely by their featural content and the features associated with the various functional categories that introduce and license them. What is needed now is a theory of the relationship between the surface position and the information structure status of the arguments. We survey first the view of Jelinek and her co-authors, where the appropriate device is the Mapping Principle of Diesing (1992). While we adopt the spirit of this approach, we show how the semantic range of nominals is greater than that predicted by the Mapping Principle. Instead, we adopt the view of Carlson (2000) where certain kinds of nominals are themselves part of the same semantic type as verbs, and do not move for case.

4.1 *Jelinek’s conjecture*

One important attempt to derive all relational hierarchies from constituent hierarchies is the single and joint work by Jelinek (Jelinek 1993, Diesing and Jelinek 1995, Jelinek and Carnie 2003). We summarize the basic intuition behind this approach in (21):

21) *Jelinek’s conjecture*:

All relational hierarchies can be mapped from constituency hierarchies. Elements that are higher in a relational hierarchy are higher in the constituent at some level of representation.

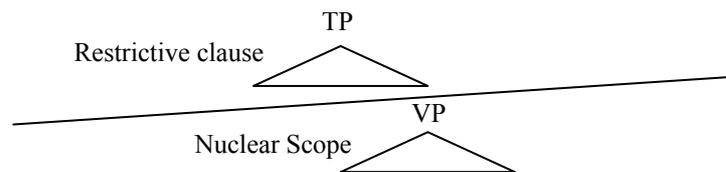
Jelinek has analyzed a number of phenomena—including person/number splits in Lummi, voice alternations in Navajo, dative constructions in English, clitic raising in Arabic—with this kind of theoretical assumption in mind. (See Jelinek & Carnie 2003 for a survey.) In particular, Jelinek uses the approach first advocated in Diesing (1992), where there is a direct mapping (encoded in a semantic mapping principle) between syntactic constituent structure (at some level of representation) and semantic structures¹⁶. The view advocated by Diesing assumes the Kamp (1981)/Heim (1982) approach to the interpretation of nominals. Oversimplifying

somewhat, the sentence (or proposition) is divided up into three parts: (a) a quantifier which asserts the number of entities participating in the action or state; this corresponds roughly to the CP portion of the clause. (b) A restrictor, which asserts the presupposed information about the participants; this roughly correlates with the TP or IP portion of the clause and (c) a nuclear scope, corresponding to the VP, which asserts what is true of the entities and provides the new information to the clause. A very simplistic example is given in (22):

- 22) (Quantifier_{x,y} [Restrictor (x,y)] [Nuclear Scope (x,y)])
 Every person loves cookies

These tripartite structures are derived directly from the syntax via the Mapping Principle:

- 23) *The Mapping Principle* (Diesing 1992)
 1) By LF, the material from TP and above maps into the restriction on some operator.
 2) The material from VP maps into the nuclear scope.



On a more formal level, only variables are allowed in the nuclear scope. These variables can be of two sorts: i) the traces of NPs that have moved out of the VP; ii) a non-quantificational, non-presuppositional NP, which is bound by Existential Closure (i.e., will be as a default taken to mean “there is an X”.) In terms of the syntax, what this means is that (at LF) Quantificational (Presuppositional) NPs (such as definites) cannot be inside the VP. Such DPs have to move to create a variable; only non-presuppositional ones (such non-specific indefinites) can remain in situ.

Jelinek (1993) extends the Mapping Principle to account for ergative splits based on person, such as that found in the Salishan language Lummi. The analysis she gives is very much in the spirit of the analyses by Abraham (1996), Dubois (1987), and Delancy (1981), who give a discourse basis to split ergativity. Jelinek, however, formalizes these intuitive characterizations in terms of the Mapping Principle. She claims that nominative local persons (1st and 2nd person) are inherently presuppositional, and thus must raise out of the domain of existential closure. Ergative non-local persons, by contrast, remain VP internal. She assumes that ergative case is a lexical case and is VP-internal. VPs you will recall, define the domain of existential closure. Local NPs are thus disallowed from this position, since they are presuppositional. So no local NP would ever take ergative case.

are also related to one another with \leq . (e.g. $\llbracket \text{robin} \rrbracket \leq \llbracket \text{bird} \rrbracket$ but $\llbracket \text{bird} \rrbracket \leq \llbracket \text{dog} \rrbracket$). Carlson notes that when verbs are combined with property-denoting nominals, they inherit the ‘part-of’ relations:

“If N and N' are property-denoting arguments, and $\llbracket N \rrbracket \leq \llbracket N' \rrbracket$ both in \mathbf{P} , and $\llbracket V \rrbracket$ is a member of \mathbf{E} , then $\llbracket V N \rrbracket \leq \llbracket V N' \rrbracket$ and both are in \mathbf{E} . (And ... if $\neg \llbracket N \rrbracket \leq \llbracket N' \rrbracket$, then $\llbracket V N \rrbracket \leq \llbracket V N' \rrbracket$)” (Carlson 2000:5)

Carlson gives us the intuitive example that $\llbracket \text{eat cake} \rrbracket \leq \llbracket \text{eat food} \rrbracket$

This can be contrasted with arguments that are not kinds/properties (for example, those that are strongly quantified). It is not the case that $\llbracket \text{fed every dog} \rrbracket \leq \llbracket \text{fed every mammal} \rrbracket$ even though $\llbracket \text{dog} \rrbracket \leq \llbracket \text{mammal} \rrbracket$ is in \mathbf{P} . Carlson explains this by appealing to the differing denotations of VPs and TPs. What is crucial here is that the denotations of VPs are contextless; they are merely the extensions of the elements in \mathbf{E} . As such only elements that are not evaluated with respect to possible worlds and truth can appear VP internally. The denotation of TP involves a propositional context; as such nominals that are presupposed (such as strongly quantified nominals) and require evaluation with respect to a particular context appear outside the VP. This explains the common distinction between specific and non-specifics in terms of their position in the tree.

Recall, however, that in Nuumiipuu^tim^t \emptyset -marked nominals are not limited to indefinites. Proper names and possessive constructions appear with the \emptyset case. (Relatedly, in Jelinek’s analysis of Lummi, 3rd person pronouns can take the V(v)P-internal ergative case marking.) On the surface this appears to contradict Carlson’s characterization, because such nominals typically require a context in order to be interpreted. However, recall our native speaker’s characterization of \emptyset -marked objects. He characterized them as being of “no-consequence”. By contrast arguments with NE-marking are “highly salient”. We attribute this marking to a kind of evidentiality. ERG/NE marking indicates that the nominals are to be interpreted given the context. \emptyset/\emptyset marked nominals by contrast are not given a contextual interpretation. While Carlson explicitly excludes individuals from \mathbf{P} , it may well be the case that non-evidentially interpreted nominals (in languages with evidential marking) are part of \mathbf{P} . This seems consistent with his characterization of the members of \mathbf{U} , which are the extensions of \mathbf{P} :

“These entities are best understood as property-instantiations and not as individuals proper. The problem is that the same individual may have different properties at different times and in different worlds. The same individual may be a child then an adult; a student, then a lawyer, and so forth, so the members of \mathbf{U} might be looked upon as individuals-while-they-are-an-N, and not individuals proper.” (Carlson 2000:6)

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this short paper, we have suggested that relational hierarchies can be formalized into the feature checking properties of types of little v . We have claimed that the interpretative/semantic appearance of the hierarchies is due to the fact that nominals in particular syntactic positions must receive certain types of semantic interpretation as governed by Carlson’s recasting of Diesing’s Mapping Principle (1992) and we

have shown how this explains the restrictions on the so-called four way case system of the Sahaptian language Nuumiipuuftimt.

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¹ For example, Dixon (1979, 1994), Silverstein (1976), DuBois (1987), Delancy (1981), and Aissen (1999, forthcoming) among others, including a number of papers in this volume.

² Among the types of such hierarchies we find splits based in terms of aspect or tense. We will not attempt to deal with this kind of split in this paper. However, see Ura (this volume), Anand and Nevins (this volume), and Legate (this volume) for analyses of splits that uses very similar technology

to the one we propose here. See also Abraham (1996), Ritter and Rosen (1998), Hopper and Thompson (1980), Laka (this volume).

³ This surfaces as *péewiye*. The reader will find throughout that the *pée* prefix changes form due to various phonological processes including vowel harmony. We leave these details aside here.

⁴ Woolford accounts for the non-existence of the patterns in (4) with the Maximum Accusatives Generalization⁷

i) *Maximum Accusative Generalization*

$$\text{Max ACC} = \# \text{Arguments} - \# \text{lexical cases} - 1$$

The number of accusatives (\emptyset_{OBJ}) found in a clause is a function of the number of arguments, less any lexically marked arguments (such as ergative NPs), less 1. The evidence for this generalization comes mainly from ditransitive and double object verbs, which need not concern us here. The effect of this generalization is that in a simple transitive when an Ergative subject is present, a \emptyset_{OBJ} is not allowed (2 arguments – 1 lexical ergative – 1 = 0 \emptyset_{OBJ} cases). The non-co-occurrence of the \emptyset_{SUBJ} and NE cases is described in the following passage from Woolford, the material in square brackets was added by us:

“The ungrammaticality of sentences with a nominative[\emptyset_{SUBJ}]-objective[-NE] Case pattern in Nez Perce is attributed to the notion that accusative Case [\emptyset_{OBJ}] assignment is obligatory in Nez Perce, unless interfered with by the [Max ACC] generalization” (p. 202)

It is unclear to us how accusative case is marked as “obligatory” in the grammar and Woolford offers no further explanation. Further it is uncertain how the Max ACC generalization actually interferes in the case marking of the arguments. To be fair, the Max ACC Generalization is not meant to be a syntactic constraint, but merely a descriptive statement. The exact means of implementing it in the grammar are left open by Woolford. We offer a different analysis below.

⁵ This is actually a modern translation of Woolford’s tree, which makes use of AgrPs. Nothing crucial appears to ride on whether we use AgrPs or not.

⁶ 1, 2 and 3 stand for first, second and third person respectively. In the ERG/NE cases the first number represents the ergative, the second the NE argument.

⁷ The observant reader will note that with 1/2 objects, we also get an agreement pattern identical to that of intransitives (with \emptyset and *hi*). In these cases, however, the ERG/NE pattern of case marking still shows up. We leave study of this pattern to future research.

⁸ For more on antipassives, see Spreng, Johns, Bobaljik and Branigan, and Ndayiragije (all in this volume).

⁹ Nuumiiputimt also has unproductive head-incorporation:

- i) ‘ipna+tams:as+iyayi-k-sa
3SG.REFL-wild.roseberries-move.around.in.order.to-V-PST
‘picking berries’

Here, the incorporated noun is *táamsas* ‘wild roseberries’. It is often the case that the suffix *-k* is obligatory in these constructions; the analysis of such forms lies beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁰ From “Feathering Place” as told by Mr. Harry Wheeler, 1961.

¹¹ We are not making any claims about all types of ergative/absolute languages here, only those that seem to take a lexical ergative on agents.

¹² For alternative views see the extensive literature on ergativity including, but not limited to: the various papers in this volume, Bittner and Hale 1996a, 1996b, Bobaljik 1993, Bok-Bennema 1991, Campana 1992, Dixon 1979, 1994, Johns 1992, Levin and Massam 1985, Mahajan 1997, Nash 1995, Phillips 1993, Yip, Maling and Jackendoff 1987. Ura’s analysis (2001, this volume), actually involves absolute checking via the AGREE function rather than through movement; but the basic idea is similar.

¹³ [-D] is not meant here as a means of encoding some kind of long distance selection. We assume it to be a featural property of Vs (and thus the VPs headed by these Vs). It is necessarily the case that verbs are classed into groups representing their argument structure properties, thus the selection here is for the VP type, as encoded in the head V; it is not selection for the complement of the V.

¹⁴ This option is not allowed in “regular” ergative/absolute languages for reasons of convergence. In Nuumiiputimt, the specifier of TP serves only to check EPP, as both arguments have had their case checked in vP. In regular ERG/ABS systems, by contrast, the object’s case features remain unchecked.

Movement of the object around the ergative subject thus serves a dual function: EPP checking for the TP and case checking for the object. Failure to move this NP would result in a non-convergent derivation, and thus overrides economy considerations.

¹⁵ From "Cannibal" told by Mrs. Elizabeth P. Wilson, 1962.

¹⁶ In many ways, this kind of approach mirrors formally the intuitions of many functional accounts of hierarchies and ergativity: DeLancy's (1981), given in terms of figure/ground viewpoint and attention flow mechanisms (a.k.a. voice marking and case marking) and DuBois's (1987) discourse based account.

¹⁷ A fact supported indirectly by the fact that there are universal trends in the structure of markedness hierarchies, in that while not all languages make reference to animacy hierarchies, there are no languages which rank inanimates more highly than animates.

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of case marking in Nuumiipuuṭimt and the semantic associations of that case marking, see Woolford (1997) or Rude (1988).