

## SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON WALBIRI VERBS

2.1. The main features of Walbiri verbal sentences: the grammatical cases.

The minimal tensed sentence in Walbiri consists of an inflected verb, the nominal argument(s) thereof, and an auxiliary. The auxiliary (AUX) will be discussed in detail later -- it consists, abstractly speaking, of (i) a base, functioning in concert with the verbal inflections to mark tense, mood, and aspect, and (ii) suffixes construed with the principal arguments of the verb (i.e., subject, object). Our concern in this section is to present a brief overview of the structure of simple sentences from the point of view of the verb and its principle arguments. This will serve to introduce certain essential aspects of the Walbiri case system. We will restrict our attention just to the case marking of subjects and objects -- i.e., to the 'grammatical cases' -- ignoring for the time being the case marking associated with oblique arguments (e.g., locative, allative, elative, etc.), for which we will use the term 'semantic cases'. The distinction between grammatical and semantic cases -- whatever one may think of the terminology -- is real and fundamental in Walbiri, as will become clear ultimately.

In the course of these introductory remarks, the terms 'subject' and 'object' will be used in an informal, but intuitively clear way. The status of these notions in the grammar of Walbiri will be made precise in later sections.

Initially, we will simply present basic data concerning the grammatical cases selected by different classes of verbs in Walbiri -- proceeding from minimal to more elaborate case arrays. Following that, we will make certain observations about the position of

Walbiri in an elementary typology of case systems.

The subject of an intransitive sentence is unmarked -- that is to say, it is not accompanied by an overt case marker:

- (1) a. Karnta ka wangkami.  
(woman AUX speak)  
'The woman is speaking.'
- b. Ngarrka ka parnkami.  
'The man is running.'
- c. Kurdu ka yulami.  
'The child is crying.'

Transitive sentences -- i.e., sentences whose verbs require both a subject and an object -- do not present a unified picture with respect to the case marking exhibited by the two arguments. In one type -- in a sense the most prominent, and certainly the type most readily associated semantically with the label 'transitive' -- the subject is marked by suffix and the object is unmarked. Following established usage<sup>FN</sup>, we will refer to the suffix appearing on the subject in this type as the 'ergative' (ERG), and we will say that the subject is in the 'ergative case'. The sentences in (2) illustrate this pattern:

- (2) a. Karnta-ngku ka ngarrka nyanyi.  
(woman-ERG AUX man see)  
'The woman sees the man.'
- b. Kurdu-ngku ka minija pakarni.  
'The child is striking the cat.'
- c. Minija-rlu ka kuyu ngarni.  
'The cat is eating the meat.'

The alternants of the ergative ending are distributed as follows: /-ngka/ appears on disyllabic nominals, while /-rlu/ appears on polysyllabics. (But see section for further detail and for exceptions to this general principle.)

In the second type of transitive sentence, the subject is unmarked, while the object is marked by suffix. The suffix in this instance, i.e., /-ku/, is commonly labeled the 'dative' (DAT). Again, we will follow accepted usage and say that the object in a sentence of the type represented by (3a-c) is in the 'dative case':

- (3) a. Kurdu karla karnta-ku pardarni.  
(child AUX woman-DAT wait)  
'The child is waiting for the woman.'
- b. Karnta karla ngarrka-ku rdanparni.  
'The woman is accompanying the man.'
- c. Marlu karla jarntu-ku jijami.  
'The kangaroo is succumbing to the dog.'

To complete the set of labels associated with the grammatical case categories, we will apply the traditional term 'absolute' (ABS) to the unmarked case -- the term is chosen here more or less arbitrarily over the competing designation 'nominative'. Thus, we will say that the subjects in (1, 3) and the objects in (2) are in the 'absolute case'. We will assume, in general, that the type or subcategory to which a given Walbiri verb belongs is to be expressed by reference to the case array which it selects. The verbs of (2), for example, select the ERG-ABS array and may,

Therefore, be referred to as 'ERG-ABS verbs'. Similarly, the verbs of (3) may be referred to as 'ABS-DAT verbs'.

Strict ABS-DAT verbs, like those in (3), which require a dative object in all uses, are not themselves particularly numerous. However, a great many verbs of the type represented in (1) above are, strictly speaking, doubly subcategorized in that they may appear with an ABS argument alone or with the two-place case array ABS-DAT. The sentences of (4) exemplify this dual subcategorization:

- (4) a. Ngarrka ka wangkami.  
'The man is speaking.'  
Ngarrka karla kurdu-ku wangkami.  
'The man is speaking to the child.'
- b. Karnta ka purlami.  
'The woman is shouting.'  
Karnta karla ngarrka-ku purlami.  
'The woman is shouting to the man.'
- c. Purlka ka ngarlarrimi.  
'The old man is laughing.'  
Purlka karla nyalali-ki ngarlarrimi.  
'The old man is laughing at the girl.'

(See section for a discussion of the progressive vowel assimilation affecting the dative ending in (4c).)

For the most part, two-place transitive verbs select either the ERG-ABS array or the ABS-DAT array. The ERG-DAT array also exists as a marginal type, however. It is characteristic of the Walbiri verbs of seeking, for example, as illustrated by the following sentences:

- (5) a. Ngarrka-ngku karla karli-ki warrirni.  
(man-ERG AUX boomerang-DAT seek)  
'The man is looking for the boomerang.'
- b. Karnta-ngku karla yarla-ku wapalkarlami.  
'The woman is digging-in-search-of yams.'
- c. Kurdu-ngku karla jarntu-ku nyanyi.  
'The child is looking around for the dog.'

The verb in (5b) is morphologically complex, consisting of the pre-verb /wapal-/ 'seeking, in search of' preposed to the transitive verb /karla-/ 'to dig up (as yams)', which otherwise takes the ERG-ABS array. The perception verb /nya-/ 'to see', normally an ERG-ABS verb, is used here as a verb of seeking ('to look around, glance around, in search of'), in which usage it selects the ERG-DAT array, as in (5c). (An additional use of the ERG-DAT array is discussed in section below.)

Walbiri also has verbs which select the three-place array ERG-ABS-DAT, with the absolutive and dative arguments corresponding semantically to the traditional notions 'direct object' and 'indirect object', respectively. The sentences of (6) exemplify this 'double transitive' type:

- (6) a. Karnta-ngku karla kurdu-ku miyi yinyi.  
(woman-ERG AUX child-DAT food give)  
'The woman is giving food to the child.'
- b. Ngarrka-ngku karla karnta-ku jaru yilyami.  
'The man is sending the woman a message (lit. words).'
- c. Kurdu-ngku karla purlka-ku karli puntarni.  
'The child is taking the boomerang from the old man.'

The dative case has certain uses which can justifiably be considered less 'basic' than those illustrated heretofore. These will be discussed in detail in later sections, but we will briefly introduce the 'adjunct dative' at this point, since it involves amplifications of the basic grammatical case arrays enumerated above. The adjunct dative is so called because it involves the adjunction, so to speak, of an 'extra' argument to the basic case array selected by a verb. It figures prominently in Walbiri by virtue of its involvement in certain grammatical devices which introduce elaborations upon the propositional meanings of 'simplex' or 'basic' sentences of the sort discussed in this section. For expository purposes, when such a 'basic' sentence is elaborated by inclusion of an adjunct dative, we will refer to it as the 'host' of the adjunct.

The simplest type of adjunct dative, speaking from the morphological point of view, is the so-called 'benefactive'. This involves the mere addition of a dative argument to the case array selected by the verb of the host sentence. The meaning of the benefactive is somewhat broader than the term suggests, embracing a considerable range of possible semantic connections which may hold between an entity and an event or process described by the host sentence. Consider, for example, the sentences of (7) below. The 'benefactive' and 'adversative' senses appropriately associated with (7a) and (7b), respectively, are very typical, but the 'possessive' sense reflected by the alternative English translations is also quite consistent with the Walbiri usage:

- (7) a. Ngarrka-ngku karla kurdu-ku karli jarntirni.  
(man-ERG AUX child-DAT boomerang trim)  
'The man is trimming the boomerang for the child.'  
'The man is trimming the child's boomerang.'
- b. Nantuwu karla Japanangka-ku matajarrimi.  
(horse AUX Japanangka-DAT tire)  
'The horse is tiring on Japanangka.'  
'Japanangka's horse is tiring.'

The host sentences in (7a-b) are presented autonomously below as (8a-b):

- (8) a. Ngarrka-ngku ka karli jarntirni.  
'The man is trimming the boomerang.'
- b. Nantuwu ka matajarrimi.  
'The horse is tiring.'

Not surprisingly, an adjunct dative may co-occur with an 'inherent' dative -- that is to say, with a dative appearing in a host sentence by virtue of being a part of the case array selected by the verb.<sup>FN</sup> In (9) below, a benefactive argument is adjunct to the verb /warri-/ 'to seek', which selects the ERG-DAT array (see (5a) above):

- (9) Ngarrka-ngku karlajinta kurdu-ku karli-ki warrirni.  
(man-ERG AUX child-DAT boomerang-DAT seek)  
'The man is looking for the boomerang for the child.'

In addition to this morphologically simple usage, the adjunct dative is also employed in concert with the members of a special set of pre-verbs (see section below) to express much more specific semantic connections between an adjunct argument and a host sentence. In (10a), for example, the dative functions in

concert with the pre-verb /marlaja-/ to express a causal connection between the entity denoted by the adjunct argument (the child, in this instance) and the event described by the host sentence (given separately as (10b)):

- (10) a. Maliki-rli karla kurdu-ku kuyu marlaja-ngarni.  
(dog-ERG AUX child-DAT meat causal-eat)  
'The dog is eating meat because of the child.'  
'The child brought it about that the dog is eating meat.'
- b. Maliki-rli ka kuyu ngarni.  
'The dog is eating meat.'

We turn now to a brief consideration of Walbiri grammatical cases from a typological perspective.

The case-marking pattern represented jointly by the sentences of (1) and (2) above conforms to the type commonly labelled 'ergative' in the literature on Australian languages.<sup>FN</sup> In that context, the term is used typically to characterize the situation in which the nominal argument bearing the semantic relation 'agent' to a transitive verb is opposed, with respect to the operation of a given principle of grammar, to the following two linguistic entities: (a) the nominal argument bearing the semantic relation 'patient' to a transitive verb, and (b) the nominal functioning as the subject of an intransitive sentence (regardless of the semantic relation that nominal bears to the intransitive verb). In the 'paradigm' ergative situation, these latter two categories are treated alike and are, therefore, opposed as a block to the transitive agent.

Walbiri case-marking is classically ergative in this sense.



Transitive verbs whose semantic argument structures clearly involve an agent and a patient are standardly ERG-ABS verbs -- with the ergative subject corresponding to agent, the absolutive object to patient. This conforms to the paradigm ergative pattern, since the agent, being especially marked for case, stands opposed to the patient and to the intransitive subject, both of which are unmarked.

The ERG-ABS verbs listed in (11) below can be said to represent the semantic ideal of their type -- each denotes an action, performed by an agent, which produces a direct and immediate physical effect upon a patient:

- (11) tirlpi- (I) 'to chip by percussion (as stone tool)'  
nyurla- (I) 'to knead (as dough)'  
paka- (II) 'to strike, chop'  
paji- (II) 'to cut; tear with tooth or claw'  
panti- (II) 'to pierce, spear'  
kati- (II) 'to step on, press on'  
luwa- (II) 'to shoot, hit with missile'  
yurupa- (II) 'to grind (as seeds)'  
maja- (II) 'to straighten'  
jarnti- (II) 'to trim (as boomerang), shave; scratch'  
yarlki- (II) 'to bite'  
kiji- (II) 'to throw, drop, cause to fall'  
yirra- (II) 'to put, place'  
yirrupi- (II) 'to put in, insert'  
marda- (II) 'to hold'  
pu- (III) 'to hit, kill, damage'  
rdilyki-pu- (III) 'to break'  
ka- (III) 'to carry, transport'  
rarra-ka- (III) 'to drag, tow'

nga- (IV) 'to eat, drink'

ma- (V) 'to take, get; act on'

ngurrju-ma- (V) 'to make, fix, make good'

maju-ma- (V) 'to ruin, make bad'

wiri-ma- (V) 'to enlarge, make big; raise (as child)'

wirki-ma- (V) 'to bend, make crooked'

The parenthetic roman numerals here refer to the conjugation membership of the verbs (see section for a discussion of the conjugation system).

It is usual in languages employing an ergative case system for there to exist a formally distinct class of object-taking verbs which represent the semantic antithesis of the notion 'direct physical effect upon a patient'. And it is typical of this class that it partakes of certain formal characteristics associated with intransitive verbs -- in fact, they are often referred to as 'intransitive verbs *taking an indirect object*'. In Walbiri, this second class of object-taking verbs comprises the ABS-DAT subcategory. The verbs listed in (12) below represent fairly well the semantic *range* of this type. They describe actions, processes, or states predicated of an 'agent', 'actor', or 'experiencer' (represented by the absolutive subject) and involving an additional participant (represented by the dative object) *bearing any of a wide variety of semantic relations to the verb* -- e.g., the addressee of a linguistic communication; the object of an encounter; the object of a search; the object or source of an emotion such as affection, <sup>joy</sup> antipathy, <sup>pity</sup> anger, anxiety, uneasiness; the object of a threat; and other indirect modes of participation;

- (12) wangka- (I) 'to speak to'  
purla- (I) 'to shout to'  
ngurnturri- (I) 'to scold, grumble at'  
rdipi- (I) 'to encounter, come upon'  
wapal-wangka- (I) 'to guess at, verbally search for'  
wapalwapal-wapa- (I) 'to move about in search of'  
japirdi- (I) 'to make a threat against (behind  
person's back, not face to face)'  
yulka- (I) 'to love, hold dear, cherish'  
wardinyi-jarri- (I) 'to rejoice in'  
nyurunyuru-jarri- (I) 'to hate, despise'  
mari-jarri- (I) 'to pity, feel sorry for'  
kulu-jarri- (I) 'to be angry at, become angry at'  
wajampa-jarri- (I) 'to worry about, become anxious about'  
yirraru-jarri- (I) 'to pine for, become homesick for'  
kapatl- (I) 'to feel uneasy in (a place)'  
parda- (II) 'to wait for'  
rdanpa- (II) 'to accompany, go along with'  
yura-ka- (III) 'to stalk, sneak up on'

The tradition which considers these verbs to be basically intransitive is supported by certain morphosyntactic considerations. Like intransitives, they take absolute subjects. Many of them can be, and in the majority of occurrences are in fact, used intransitively, i.e., without the dative object -- e.g., /wangka-/, /purla-/, /kulu-jarri-/, /yirraru-jarri-/. Finally, notice that the overwhelming majority of ABS-DAT verb <sup>stems</sup> belong to the first conjugation, i.e., the one primarily associated with intransitive verbs. By contrast, the majority of

ERG-ABS verb stems belong to the second conjugation. Although there is justification for the view that ABS-DAT verbs are basically intransitive, we will continue to refer to the subcategorization of verbs by means of their case arrays and to employ the more general terms 'transitive' and 'intransitive' in their alternative (equally traditional) senses of, respectively, 'taking an object' and 'not taking an object'.

It is difficult to epitomize <sup>in positive terms</sup> the semantic relations which the dative object bears to the verbs in (12), or to ABS-DAT verbs generally. But the association of the dative with the <sup>negative</sup> notion 'lack of direct physical effect' is a genuine theme in Walbiri grammar. The dative case is centrally involved in a grammatical process (described more fully in section below) which specifically cancels the 'physical effect' associated with the meanings of ERG-ABS verbs conforming to the semantic ideal. The process consists in changing the case of the object from absolutive to dative (with a concomitant special adjustment in the auxiliary). This is not a wholesale change of case array, however, since the subject remains ergative. The following pair of sentences illustrates the 'basic' (ERG-ABS) and the 'derived' (ERG-DAT) forms:

- (13) a. Ngarrka-ngku ka maliki pakarni.  
(Man-ERG AUX dog strike)  
'The man is striking the dog.'
- b. Ngarrka-ngku karlajinta maliki-ki pakarni.  
(man-ERG AUX dog-DAT strike)  
'The man is striking at the dog.'

The implication in (13b) is that the physical effect normally associated with the meaning of /paka-/ 'to strike' -- and presumably

achieved in (13a) -- is aborted for some reason, e.g., inaccuracy  
or simply because the agent did not intend that the effect be achieved -  
of the blow, or interception thereof, ^ The meaning associated with this  
use of the dative (roughly, 'unachieved goal') is entirely consistent  
with the widely varying semantic relations borne by dative objects  
generally -- including not only those involved in the semantic argument  
structures of the verbs listed in (12) but also those involved in  
sentences cited earlier in this section, e.g., 'goal' or 'recipient'  
in (6a, b), 'source' or 'victim of dispossession' in (6c), 'bene-  
ficiary' in (7a), 'object of search' in (5), and so on. There is  
a common characteristic in all of these uses. The dative argument  
regularly denotes an entity which, although genuinely involved in specifiable  
ways in the overall propositional content of a given verb-argument  
complex, is not physically affected in any direct or immediate way.

We have now identified certain semantic correlates of the  
grammatical case arrays -- in particular, a positive association  
of the notional complex agent-effect-patient with the ERG-ABS array,  
and a negative association of that notional complex with the ABS-DAT  
array. The discussion to this point implies that the semantic  
domain, divided in this way, is more or less rigorously aligned with  
the case arrays. This is not true, however, as is shown by  
certain contradictory evidence, such as the existence of  
synonymous verbal themes differing in the case arrays they select  
(e.g., the ABS-DAT theme /kanginy-karri-/ and the ERG-ABS theme  
/kanginy-pu-/, both meaning 'not to know, to fail to recognize').

As in most (perhaps all) ergative systems, so also in the

Galbiri system of case-marking, the association of the ergative construction with the agent-effect-patient complex is an idealization.<sup>FN</sup> The correlation holds reasonably well in one direction, far less well in the other. While verbs whose meanings involve the notional complex agent-effect-patient are typically ERG-ABS verbs, the reverse correlation does not hold with anything like the same degree of consistency, particularly if the semantic notions are taken in a strict or literal sense.

A rather typical departure from the idealization is to be observed in connection with the correlation of the ergative case with agentivity. It is not necessary that the ergative subject correspond to the notion 'agent' in the strict sense of 'willful performer of an activity'. In fact the majority of ERG-ABS verbs are used freely with inanimate (and therefore not literally 'willful') subjects, as exemplified in the sentences of (14):

- (14) a. Pirriya-rlu ka kurdu pantirni.  
'The cold (air) is piercing (causing discomfort to) the child.'
- b. Kuntulpa-rlu ka karnta pinyi.  
'The cough/catarrh is hitting (tormenting) the woman.'
- c. Warlu-ngku ka ngarrka katirni.  
'The firewood is pressing (weighing down) the man.'
- d. Pirlu-ngki kalu murdukayi luwarni.  
'The stones are hitting the car (like missiles).'
- e. Ngapa-ngku kajana kurdukurdu yarlirni.  
'The rain is wetting the children.'
- f. Marna-ngku ka nantuwu jinarnkijirni.  
'The spinifex grass is tripping the horse (causing it to stumble).'

This is not peculiar to Walbiri, by any means. It is true generally in case systems of the Walbiri type that ergative arguments can refer not only to animate entities, capable of functioning as agents in the strict sense, but also to inanimate entities, functioning 'passively' to induce a physical effect upon a patient.

Agents, in the strict sense, exercise control over their actions and the effects thereof. This is, however, another ideal from which ergative subjects may depart. Consider, for example, the Walbiri sentences of (15) below. These contain derived ERG-ABS themes formed from basic ERG-ABS verbs by means of the pre-verb /ramparl-/ (also pronounced /rampal-/) 'accidentally, by mistake', which negates or severely attenuates the element of control ideally associated with animate ergative subjects:

- (15) a. Kurdu-ngku ka maliki ramparl-pantirni.  
'The child is accidentally jabbing (or spearing) the dog.'
- b. Ngarrka-ngku ka pulyku ramparl-pajirni.  
'The man is accidentally cutting the sinew.'
- c. Purika-ngku ka kurdu ramparl-katirni.  
'The old man is accidentally stepping on (or crushing) the child.'

When the question is considered in relation to the notion 'patient', there are further departures from the idealized semantic characterization of ERG-ABS verbs. Again, however, these departures are not at all unusual from a typological perspective. With certain Walbiri verbs, the absolutive object fails to correspond to patient in the strict sense of an entity physically affected by an action. In fact, many ERG-ABS verbs simply do not denote actions in a literal sense. A prominent example is provided by a relatively large set of

morphologically interrelated ERG-ABS verbal themes dealing with sensory perception and mental manipulation. The absolutive objects of these verbs correspond to entities perceived or processed mentally -- not literally 'patients', therefore -- and the ergative subject corresponds to the perceiver or mental processor:

- (16) nya- (III) 'to see, look at'  
purda-nya- (III) 'to hear, listen to; feel (perceive sensation); understand (grasp meaning); remember, think about'  
kanginy-purda-nya- (III) 'to mishear, misunderstand'  
manngi-nya- (III) 'to figure out; to recall to mind'  
kari-nya- (III) 'to fail to recognize by sight, misapprehend visually'  
miyimiyi-nya- (III) 'to inspect, scrutinize; take aim at'  
parnti-nya- (III) 'to smell, perceive odor of'  
parnti-pura- (I) 'to follow the scent of (as bees follow scent of blossoms)'  
milya-pu- (III) 'to know, recognize'  
kanginy-pu (III) 'not to know, to fail to recognize'  
parlu-pu- (III) 'to see, catch sight of'

The verbs of (16) by no means exhaust the observed deviations from the ideal association of absolutive object with the notion 'patient'. They are, however, sufficient to exemplify the failure of that association in the strict and literal sense.

In general, the evidence indicates rather clearly that the association of the ergative construction with the notional complex agent-effect-patient fails in many specific instances. However, we feel that it would be a serious mistake to deny entirely the reality



of the association. It does not seem at all unreasonable to maintain that notional correlates of morphosyntactically defined lexical categories (i.e., parts of speech and subcategories thereof) constitute genuine principles of grammar, greatly facilitating acquisition of the system as a whole, and that they are organized primarily around 'ideal types' or 'clear cases'. If this much is correct, then the existence of 'unclear cases', not conforming to an ideal association, is virtually guaranteed by the fact that the totality of distinguishable semantic relations and categories far outnumbers the distinct syntactic categories found in individual languages.<sup>FN</sup> It is to be expected, then, that the boundaries of a syntactic category will exhibit a degree of flexibility, permitting extensions beyond the domain defined by an ideal syntactic-semantic association.

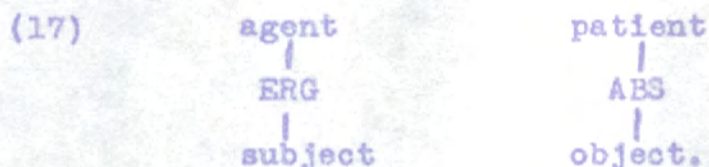
Continuing along this line of thought, and applying it to the problem at hand, let us assume that the clear cases or ideal types in Walbiri are represented by the association of the ergative construction with the notional complex agent-effect-patient and the association of the dative case with a limited set of positively specifiable and recurrent concrete meanings -- e.g., goal or recipient, source, beneficiary. Assuming also that syntactic-semantic alignments are generally based on positive rather than negative associations, the range of meanings expressed by verbal themes is only partially covered by the ideal types. Where, for example, do verbs of perception and mental manipulation belong? Speculating further, it does not seem unreasonable to imagine that universal principles of metaphors or simile underly alignments not conforming to an ideal type -- e.g., the widespread theme according to which apprehension by the senses or mind is likened to physical apprehension (cf.

English uses of get, grasp). We hasten to say, however, that putative metaphorical extensions underlying given alignments are not necessarily 'live' in particular synchronic grammatical systems; rather, we intend to suggest that certain metaphorical principles are universally available to the language-learning child and that they serve to facilitate the acquisition of actual syntactic-semantic alignments in cases not conforming to an ideal type. Such alignments must be specially learned, but some are more natural than others -- some are 'easy' to learn, others are 'hard' to learn, and the degree of difficulty correlates inversely with the relative applicability of a metaphorical principle. Of course, it remains to determine what the putative universal metaphorical principles are and to determine the relative naturalness of alignments -- this enterprise would, for example, seek to explain why it is far more usual, in languages of the world, for perception verbs to be aligned syntactically with the 'ideal transitive' verbs rather than with intransitive-like verbs taking a dative or oblique object, why the reverse alignment is relatively popular for verbs of expectation (cf. English wait, Walbiri /parda-/ (II)), and so on. This is only a part of the total enterprise, however. A full treatment of this aspect of grammar would also necessarily incorporate an account of the relative naturalness of alignments of semantic relations with the grammatical relations 'subject' and 'object' -- e.g., the objective fact that the alignment of agent with subject and patient with object is greatly favored over the opposite alignment, for basic verbs at least. It would also incorporate an account of the interaction between these principles of alignment and the principles which underly the accessibility hierarchy (cf. Chapter ).

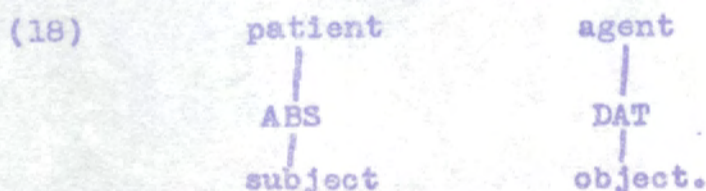
The foregoing is, to be sure, extremely speculative. It proceeds along quite traditional lines, however, in that it assumes that notional correlates of syntactic categories are real and that the problem is to explain the deviations. We strongly suspect, moreover, that a picture roughly like that sketched above will eventually emerge from a detailed study of this as yet imperfectly understood aspect of linguistic competence. The language-learning child is faced with the task of acquiring the proper alignment of essentially autonomous semantic and syntactic systems. The child is, however, equipt with certain principles for relating linguistic systems -- including, we suspect, principles of ideal alignment and principles of metaphorical extension. The actual alignments which the child must learn, however, are never absolute or entirely perfect, since on the one hand semantic shift or slippage, over time, disrupts particular alignments, and on the other hand, very probably, it is often the case that competing alternative metaphorical principles are available and equally apt. Where the principles fail to apply unambiguously, the actual alignments must be learned as 'brute facts' about the grammar being acquired. This picture is rather consistent with the fact that, precisely in semantic domains not clearly within an area covered by an ideal type, there exist synonymous or closely paraphrastic verbal themes belonging to different syntactic subcategories -- e.g., the pair /kanginy-karri-, kanginy-pu-/ cited earlier; uses of the ERG-ABS verb /liwarr-pu-/(III) 'to miss (as absent kinsman or child), to worry about (a person)' closely paraphrased by the ABS-DAT verb /wajampa-jarri-/<sup>(I)</sup> 'to worry about, become anxious about (a person or thing)'; the ABS-DAT verb /ngurnturri-/<sup>(I)</sup> 'to scold, grumble at' closely paraphrased by the ERG-ABS verb /ji-/ (V) 'to

scold' and by one of the uses of the ERG-ABS verb /ngarri-/ (II) 'to tell, ... , to scold, rail at'.

In the synchronic description of Walbiri grammar, we might assume that the actual syntactic-semantic alignments are given as a part of the lexical representation of verbs and that there exists an evaluation procedure for the lexicon which makes reference to general principles of natural alignment in assigning a relative cost to individual lexical items. A particular alignment is 'unmarked' or 'natural' to the extent that it conforms to general principles; it is 'marked' or 'costly' to the extent that it fails to conform. Thus, for example, the verbs of (11) above are presumably all relatively unmarked with respect to their syntactic-semantic alignments:



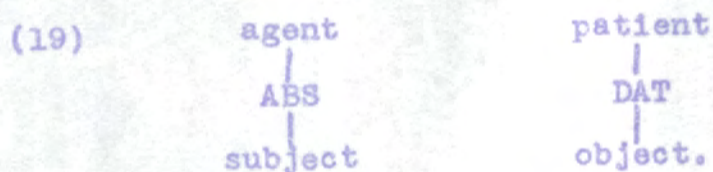
By contrast, the verb /jija-/ (I), appearing in sentence (3c) above, and glossed there as 'succumb to', almost certainly represents a relatively marked alignment, in some of its uses at least. This ABS-DAT verb serves as the principal Walbiri-based way of referring to the defeat of one entity (the 'patient') by another (the 'agent'), with the following passive-like syntactic-semantic alignment:



In current Walbiri usage, this sense of /jija-/ is closely (if not exactly) paraphrased by the loan-based ERG-ABS verb /pitiyi-ma-/ (V)

'to beat' (< English beat), with the usual alignment associated with ERG-ABS verbs. The verb /jija-/ is marked relative to ERG-ABS verbs in the same way that the passive form of a verb is marked relative to the active (a relative markedness often paralleled by relative morphosyntactic complexity in languages which, like English but unlike Walbiri, have a productive passive rule). Examples of this type reveal the tension which exists between the principles underlying the accessibility hierarchy and those inhering in ideal syntactic-semantic alignments. The advantage gained by permitting the patient to bear the relatively more accessible and prominent subject relation is obtained at the expense of the relatively favored alignment of patient with the object relation.

An idiomatic use of the intransitive verb /yarnka-/ (I) 'to set out (on a journey), set forth, depart' will serve to exemplify a relatively marked alignment of a slightly different sort. The idiom is an ABS-DAT verb, meaning 'to grab hold of', with the following unusual alignment:



Verbs of seizure are ordinarily straightforward ERG-ABS verbs -- e.g., /puuly-marda-/ (II) 'to catch, capture', /ma-/ (V) 'to take, get, catch'.

We have digressed somewhat in order to qualify the definition of ergativity with which we began. Let us proceed with the understanding that when we associate ergative case with agent and absolutive with patient, we are employing an idealization -- we are, as it were, pretending that all ERG-ABS verbs correspond to the ideal which we assume is represented by those listed in (11). With this understanding, we will turn now to a consideration of the typological position of Walbiri vis-à-vis other languages of the world. In the ensuing discussion, we will ~~employ~~ employ the alphabetic notation according to which A represents the agent of a transitive sentence, P the patient of a transitive sentence, and S the subject of an intransitive sentence.<sup>FN</sup>

Walbiri case-marking, as we have said, is classically ergative, since it opposes A to P and S, and these latter are jointly opposed to A:

(20)	<u>ergative case</u>	<u>absolutive case</u>
	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>
		<u>P</u>

In this respect, the Walbiri case system contrasts typologically with the other major case system -- variously called 'accusative' or 'nominative-accusative' -- in which P, rather than A, is accorded special treatment. In an accusative case system, P is distinguished -- often by means of a distinct 'accusative' (ACC) case, sometimes by means of a generalized 'oblique' (OBL) case -- from A and S. These latter are normally treated alike and are customarily said to be in the 'nominative' (NOM) case (often phonologically unmarked). The accusative pattern of case-marking can be represented as follows:

(21)	<u>nominative case</u>	<u>accusative (or oblique) case</u>
	<u>S</u>	<u>P</u>
	<u>A</u>	

Notice that if all transitive verbs of Walbiri exhibited the alignment depicted in (19) above -- i.e., if they merged entirely with the ABS-DAT verbs -- the Walbiri case system would be accusative rather than ergative. The alignment of (19) is essentially the same as that exhibited by transitive verbs in accusative languages -- i.e., (22) below -- differing therefrom only in the manner in which the case categories are labeled:

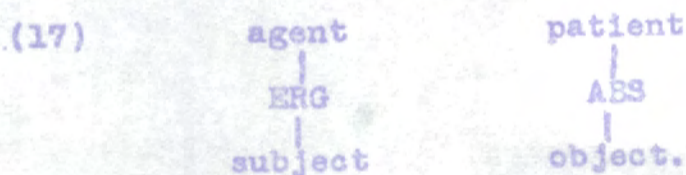
(22)	agent	patient
	NOM	ACC/OBL
	subject	object.

Thus, while (19) is a marked alignment in an ergative case system, like that of Walbiri, it corresponds to the prevailing unmarked or natural alignment in an accusative case system. In Australia, the accusative system is relatively rare. It is attested for the languages of the Wellesley Islands (Lardil, Gayardilt, Yanggal) in the Gulf of Carpentaria, North Queensland, and in the languages of the Pilbara region of the Northwest (Ngarluma/Kariera, Yindjibarndi/Gurrama).<sup>FN</sup> In both areas, it is evidently a recent development from the ergative system which predominates in Australia.<sup>FN</sup> In the northwestern group, the development of the accusative system almost certainly involved a merger of the sort alluded to above -- i.e., extension of the ABS-DAT case array to all object-taking verbs -- since the modern accusative, or oblique, case ending continues (in one of its phonologically conditioned alternants, at least) the ancestral dative \*-ku, as does the Walbiri dative ending.

This is sufficient to position Walbiri within a typology of major case systems. We must now ask how Walbiri is to be classified within the ergative type. To what extent is it ergative?

To answer this question, for any language, it is necessary to determine the extent to which P behaves like S with respect to principles of grammar <sup>and the extent to which it contrasts with A in that behavior</sup>. Or, to put this another way, let us assume that there is a collection of properties -- call them 'subject properties' -- which can be identified by cataloguing the roles which S plays in the functioning of grammatical principles, e.g., agreement, reflexive formation, imperative formation, and so forth. <sup>FN</sup> A language is ergative to the extent that P exhibits subject properties. And applying the contrasting designation in similar fashion, a language is accusative to the extent that A exhibits subject properties.

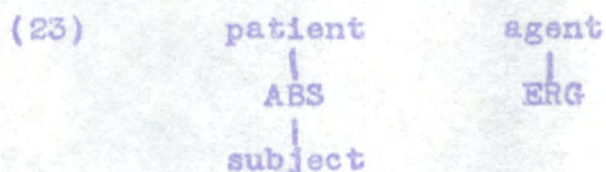
As we have seen, Walbiri is ergative with respect to case-marking. Absolutive case is a 'subject property', since S is absolutive; and P shares in that property <sup>while A does not.</sup>. The question now is whether ergativity extends beyond the case system in Walbiri. If not, then Walbiri is adequately characterized by the syntactic-semantic alignment depicted in (17), repeated here for convenience:



Consider the opposite extreme, however -- i.e., a language which is fully ergative. In such a language, the patient would exhibit all of the subject properties; it would <sup>therefore</sup> in fact be the subject in transitive sentences. In a fully ergative language, all transitive verbs <sup>involving the semantic relations A and P</sup> would be essentially like Walbiri /jija-/ and would, therefore,



exhibit a passive-like alignment similar to (18), but differing therefrom not only in the case category associated with the non-subject but also, very probably, in that the latter argument would not bear a grammatical relation to the verb.<sup>FN</sup> That is to say, the alignment would be as in (23) below:



We have not as yet defined the notions 'subject' and 'object' for Walbiri; we have simply asserted in passing that the ERG argument of an ERG-ABS verb corresponds to 'subject' and that the ABS argument corresponds to 'object', implying thereby that Walbiri is indeed adequately characterized by the alignment (17). We maintain that this is in fact the case. The justification for this position will be given in a later section (0.00 below), but we will offer a foretaste of our reasoning by considering briefly the phenomenon of agreement, which operates accusatively rather than ergatively.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the auxiliary consists of a base followed by suffixes construed with the principal arguments of the verb. (This must be understood as an abstraction, however, since third person singular arguments are typically not represented overtly in the auxiliary, and certain auxiliary bases are also phonologically null.) Simplifying the picture somewhat, the suffixes occur in two sets, one of which is construed with subjects, the other of which is construed with objects. Consider now the following intransitive sentences, in which the subject person markers /-rna/ 'first person singular subject' and /-npsa/ 'second person singular subject' are construed with the S arguments

/ngaju/ 'I' and /nyuntu/ 'you (singular)', respectively:

- (24) a. Ngaju ka-rna wangkami.  
(I PRES-I speak)  
'I am speaking.'
- b. Nyuntu ka-npa wangkami.  
(you PRES-you speak)  
'You are speaking.'

Contrast the subject person markers appearing in these sentences with the corresponding object person markers in (25), /-ju/ and /-ngku/, construed with the P arguments /ngaju/ and /nyuntu/, respectively:

- (25) a. Ngarrka-ngku ka-ju ngaju pakarni.  
(man-ERG PRES-me me strike)  
'The man is striking me.'
- b. Ngarrka-ngku ka-ngku nyuntu pakarni.  
(man-ERG PRES-you you strike)  
'The man is striking you.'

Now notice that the subject person markers are construed with the A arguments in the sentences of (26) -- these latter are in their ergative forms /ngajulu-rlu/ and /nyuntulu-rlu/:

- (26) a. Ngajulu-rlu ka-rna maliki pakarni.  
(I-ERG PRES-I dog strike)  
'I am striking the dog.'
- b. Nyuntulu-rlu ka-npa maliki pakarni.  
(you-ERG PRES-you dog strike)  
'You are striking the dog.'

The grammatical principles governing the construal of person markers, then, treat S and A alike, opposing them to P. S and A are construed with person markers belonging to the subject set,

while P is construed with person markers belonging to the object set. Unlike Walbiri case-marking, this agreement system conforms to the accusative pattern, as depicted in (27):

(27)	<u>subject construal</u>	<u>object construal</u>
	<u>S</u>	<u>P</u>
	<u>A</u>	

In general, with the exception of the assignment of absolutive case, where 'subject properties' can be identified <sup>in Walbiri</sup>, they associate A with S, not P with S. Walbiri is therefore predominantly an accusative language but with ergative case-marking -- i.e., a language in which (17) is the unmarked or natural alignment for transitive verbs involving the semantic relations A and P. Fully ergative languages, if they exist at all, are extremely rare. Evidently, then, while an alignment like (18) or (23) -- i.e., aligning the patient with the subject relation -- would be unmarked in a fully ergative language, the type as a whole would be highly marked. Most Australian languages which employ ergative case-marking are predominantly accusative in their overall syntax, like Walbiri. The superbly documented Dyirbal language of the Queensland rain forest area, however, is predominantly ergative. <sup>FN</sup>

In concluding this section, we will make a final brief comparative observation concerning the typological position of Walbiri among Australian languages employing the ergative system of case-marking. In many Australian languages of this type, perhaps the majority, in fact, first and second person pronouns differ from nouns in that they exhibit an accusative pattern of case marking. In Walbiri, however, all nominals, including first and second person pronouns, conform in their case-marking to the ergative pattern. There is one slight

qualification to this. The first and second person singular pronouns, when functioning as subject of an ERG-ABS verb, are not obligatorily marked with the ergative ending. Thus, the ergative forms seen in (26) above alternate freely with corresponding uninflected forms, hence:

- (26') a. Ngaju ka-rna maliki pakarni.  
b. Nyuntu ka-mpa maliki pakarni.

This is, however, merely a morphological peculiarity of these singular pronouns, not extending beyond these two. An additional morphological peculiarity of these pronouns consists in the fact that the <sup>pronominal</sup> bases themselves exhibit an alternation between a short form /ngaju, nyuntu/ and an augmented form /ngajulu, nyuntulu/. The latter alternates freely with the former when the pronoun is uninflected; but the augmented form is required before certain endings, including the ergative (as exemplified in (26)).