

Resolving alignment conflicts

Oral presentation

The question how to constrain possible alignment patterns have long concerned typologists, who noted, in particular, that case shows greater predisposition for ergative alignment as compared to agreement, as well as suggested a number of generalizations concerning preferences of certain syntactic constructions (control properties, reflexives, coordination, etc) for certain alignment patterns (see, e.g., Croft 2001). Yet such generalizations have been plagued by availability of counterexamples, which challenge their validity (cf. Bickel 2009). In my view, one way to account for both recurrent patterns and counterexamples is to acknowledge that alignment properties may be due to different factors.

Thus, while certain constructions may have certain alignment preferences for functional reasons these preferences may conflict with the basic alignment pattern of a language. For example, imperatives are known to show a general preference for accusative (or active) alignment to the dispreference of ergative alignment (Dixon 1994). In this context it is instructive to consider the behavior of imperatives in ergative languages. As it turns out, the imperatives in these languages either retain the ergative pattern, at least partially (as, e.g., in some Daghestanian languages, which retain the ergative-style verb agreement in imperatives), or switch to accusative alignment (as in Dyrirbal and some other languages discussed in Dixon 1994), or else imperative form can be blocked (as in Ket, where only the conjugation classes with accusative-style agreement have regular imperative forms). Such alignment changes can be taken as evidence for alignment preferences of certain constructions. Similar alignment conflicts are also observed in the ditransitive domain, where it is conventional to distinguish between indirective ($T=P \neq R$), neutral ($T=P=R$), and secundative ($T \neq P=R$) alignment (Haspelmath 2005; cf. Comrie 1982; Dryer 1986; Siewierska 2004). Also in the ditransitive domain, certain constructions may for functional reasons show either indirective preference (e.g., incorporation, antipassives), or secundative preference (e.g., formation of verbal reciprocals). Therefore, for example, formation of antipassives is more consistent in languages with indirective alignment (where antipassives, if available, always target T/P arguments) than in languages with secundative alignment. In the latter languages an antipassive may either target T (in accordance with the functional preference, as, e.g., in Northern Paiute), or R (in accordance with the alignment profile, as, e.g., in Eastern Ojibwa), or else be blocked altogether (as, e.g., in Tzotzil). In my paper I will discuss further examples of alignment conflicts both in monotransitive and ditransitive domains. Generally, it will be shown that when a construction-specific functional bias is consistent with the language profile (i.e. the basic alignment pattern) more cross-linguistic consistency is found, while there is room for more variation when the two factors are in conflict.

References (selected)

- Bickel, Balthasar 2009+. Grammatical relations typology. J. J. Song (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language Typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dixon, R.M.W. 1994. *Ergativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haspelmath, Martin. 2005. Argument marking in ditransitive alignment types. *Linguistic Discovery* 3.1:1-21 (free online journal, <http://linguistic-discovery.dartmouth.edu/>)