TYPOLOGY OF CASE ALIGNMENTS IN NENA DIALECTS

Alessandra BAROTTO

ABSTRACT • The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze different alignment types attested in North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialects. NENA dialects can be divided into three alignment types according to their degree of ergativity: Split-S, Dynamic-Stative and Extended-Ergative dialects. This research will provide an analysis of Extended-ergative system in comparison with instances of marked nominative alignment and a possible explanation for the diachronic changes in the alignment pattern.

KEYWORDS • ergativity, split ergativity, Neo-Aramaic, alignment

1. Split ergativity in NENA dialects

NENA dialects[1] exhibit different types of morphological ergativity. Although historically Aramaic is nominative-accusative, some ergative phenomena developed early through the influence of Iranian languages, which exhibit or have exhibited at some stage of their history what is known as split ergativity conditioned by the expression of tense and aspect of the verbal phrase. Thus, only clauses using tenses based on the past stem of the verb take the ergative construction. NENA dialects follow the same split ergative pattern: while the present base of verbs keeps the classical Aramaic accusative alignment, ergativity developed in the perfective aspect.

The second type of split ergativity concerns the extension of the ergative suffix to intransitive verbs. In NENA dialects, some intransitive verbs behave like the transitive ones taking the ergative marking. This phenomenon does not occur in any Iranian or Kurdish dialect of the same area (Khan, 2008: 21) and is peculiar to Aramaic.

The extension of the ergative marker is not uniform. Dialects exhibit varying degrees of ergativity because of the differences in the distribution of the ergative suffix among intransitive verbs. We can divide NENA dialects into three types according to the extension of the ergative suffix, following the categorization made by Doron and Khan (2012:225). We call Split-S those dialects in which the ergative marker is extended to transitive and unergative verbs.

---

[1] The dialects I have compared for the present studies are the Jewish dialect of Sanandaj (Khan, 2009), Sulemaniyya and Halabja (Khan, 2004), Urmi (Khan, 2008b), Challa (Fassberg, 2010), Betanure (Mutzafi, 2008), Amadiya (Hoberman, 2000), Arbel (Khan 1999), and Christian dialects of Barwar (Khan, 2008a), Hertevin (Jastrow 1988), Qaraqosh (Khan, 2002), Bohtan (Fox, 2010), Koy Sanjaq (Mutzafi, 2004).

Jewish Sanandaj (Doron & Khan 2012:230)

Transitive:
> *barux-awal-i*   *brat-i*   *gərš -a-lu*
> friend-PL-my   daughter-my   pull$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS-ERG.3PL
> "My friends pulled my daughter."

Intransitive inergative:
> *kalba*   *nwəx -le*
> dog   bark$_{PERF}$-ERG.3MS
> "The dog barked."

Intransitive inaccusative:
> *brat-i*   *qim-a*
> daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS
> "My daughter rose."

In the second type, the Dynamic-Stative dialects, the ergative marker is extended to all intransitive verbs and the absolutive marking of inaccusative verbs survives as a perfective stative.

Jewish Urmi (Doron & Khan 2012:233)

Transitive:
> *barux-aw-i*   *brat-i*   *gərš -a-lu*
> friend-PL-my   daughter-my   pull$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS-ERG.3PL
> "My friends pulled my daughter."

Intransitive inergative:
> *ayné*   *rqə̀l-lu*
> they   dance$_{PERF}$- ERG.3PL
> "They danced."

Intransitive inaccusative:
> *brat-i*   *qəm -la*
> daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ERG.3FS
> "My daughter rose."

Finally, we call Extended-Ergative those dialects in which ergative marker is extended to all intransitive verbs and the absolutive marker is no longer used. Although the marking system in these dialects appears more uniform (all intransitive verbs take the same marking), their theoretical status is ambiguous. Even if the markedness proportions are those of a classical ergative system (with the ergative "case" more marked than the absolutive one), the case alignment follows the nominative pattern, where S (the subject of intransitive verbs) shares the same morphological coding of A (the agent of transitive verbs).

Christian Barwar (Doron & Khan 2012:231)

Transitive:
> *xawr-awaθ-i*   *brat-i*   *griš-a-la*
> friend-PL-my   daughter-my   pull$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS-ERG.3PL
> "My friends pulled my daughter."

Intransitive inergative:

    kalba   *nwix-le*

    dog   bark$_{PERF}$- ERG.3MS

    "The dog barked."

Intransitive inaccusative:

    brat-i   *qim-la*

    daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ERG.3FS

    "My daughter rose."

The linguistic status of this alignment is problematic and, in this regard, NENA dialects display peculiarities which are not found elsewhere.

These alignment types will be the central focus of our essay, especially the Extended-Ergative type which is worthy of being investigated further from the point of view of linguistic typology because of its peculiarity.

NENA dialects exhibit also a third type of split ergativity which is characterized by the use of new accusative markers[2]. These accusative markers do not replace radically the absolutive ones to cross-reference the object, but became, e.g., the only acceptable way to express 1st- and 2nd- person objects in some dialects. The creation of new accusative markers is worthy of being investigated further from the point of view of linguistic typology, however it will be only briefly mentioned in this paper.

2. Typology of split ergativity in Neo-Aramaic

2.1. Split-S dialects

In Split-S dialects, intransitive verbs are divided into two sets. One takes the ergative marker (as the agent in transitive verbs) and the other the absolutive one (as the patient). Dialects operate this division according to the grade of transitivity shown by verbs.

Following Hopper and Thomson (1980), transitivity is not a discrete parameter determined only by the presence of an object, but it is a graduated parameter. We can see it as a hierarchy. One extremity is what we can call "cardinal transitivity", and the other represents full intransitivity. In between there are verbs with different grades of transitivity according to some parameters like the volitionality and the agency of the first participant of the clause or agent. The presence of an explicit patient is only one of these parameters and it is fundamental only for cardinal transitivity.

Khan (2004) recognizes some of Hopper and Thomson's transitivity parameters in the way NENA dialects separate intransitive verbs which take the ergative marking from those which take the absolutive one. In particular, the volitionality and the animacy of the subjects seem to have a leading role. Although it is not always possible to anticipate which marker a dialect would choose for intransitive verbs, we can outline some tendencies:

---

[2] There is also a minor fourth type of split ergativity which is confined to a small group of NENA dialects, the so-called "Hertevin paradigm". It concerns the expression of the pronominal subject. The oblique series of preterite endings in the 1st and 2nd person used to cross-reference the subject is replaced by the direct endings preceded by *l-* whenever the pronominal object is explicit. This change does not take place with 3rd person subject pronouns

- The grammatical subject marked ergatively has the agent properties such as being the instigator of the event and shows control over it.

- The verb is punctual.

- The predicate is dynamic. It describes an action, not a state of affairs.

These tendencies explain the reason why a verb like *nwx* "to bark", which doesn't take an object, shows ergative marking in most NENA dialects. The grammatical subject is perceived as the agent of the action exerting control over it.

nwx 'to bark'	Transitive	Intransitive
	J. Sanandaj (*nwəxle*)	J. Urmi (*nwix*)
	J. Sulemaniyya (*nwəxle*)	
	J. Qar Hasan (*noxle*)	
	J. Kerend (*noxle*)	

Some verbs show a more debatable position on the transitivity scale. The effects can be seen in the way dialects cross-reference intransitive subjects. For example, *šhl* "to sneeze" describes an action in which the subject is the instigator of the event but shows no control or volitionality over it. Because of this, *šhl* can be seen as less "transitive" than *nwx* and NENA dialects behave differently in marking it:

šhl 'to sneeze'	Transitive	Intransitive
	J. Sanandaj (*šəhle*)	J. Qar Hasan (*šhil*)
	J. Sulemaniyya (*šhəlle*)	J. Bokan (*šhil*)
	J. Tikab (*šhəlle*)	
	J. Kerend (*šhəlle*)	

Other tendencies can be culturally motivated. A verb like *rql* "to dance" should be perceived as more transitive than others. The subject controls the action and it is the instigator of it. However, some NENA dialects code it as an intransitive verb with the absolutive marking. The subject is conceived as the undergoer of the event:

rql 'to dance'	Transitive	Intransitive
	J. Urmi (*rqile*)	J. Sanandaj (*nqil*)
	J. Sulemaniyya (*rqil*)	

Another interesting example is the intransitive coding of the verb *mšlm* 'to convert to Islam'. The subject is conceived as the undergoer rather than the instigator of the event.

Jewish Sanandaj (Khan 2009:307)
> *baxtăke*   *məšlìm -a*
> woman.DET   convert$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS
> "The woman converted to Islam."

These example shows that the absence of a grammatical object is not a crucial feature in encoding a verb as intransitive. On the contrary, its presence is enough to encode verbs as transitive without considering any semantic property of the verb or grammatical subject. As Khan (2004) noted, verbs like *xØy* 'to see' and *šmy* 'to hear' take an object and the transitive coding even if the subjects are not instigators of the event or shows any control over it.

To sum up, intransitive verbs are divided in two sets which show different syntactic behaviour. The first set collects intransitive verbs which are higher in the transitivity scale and take ergative marking to cross-reference the subject. The second collects intransitive verbs which are lower in the transitivity scale and take the absolutive marking to cross-reference the subject. Hopper and Thomson's scale of transitivity provides an accurate theoretical background to explain the different categorizations of intransitive verbs in Split-S dialects.

2.2. Dynamic-Stative dialects

Transitivity scale plays an important role also in Dynamic-Stative dialects. In this second type, all intransitive verbs take the ergative marking to express the preterite. The absolutive marking survives in a set of intransitive verbs as a perfective stative (present perfect).

Jewish Urmi (Khan 2008b)

Perfect stative
brat-i   *qim-a*
daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS
"My daughter has risen."

Preterite
brat-i   *qəm -la*
daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ERG.3FS
"My daughter rose."

In the past preterite, intransitive verbs behave in a uniform manner, without internal divisions. Transitive and intransitive subjects (whether inergative or inaccusative) are cross-referenced solely by L-suffixes, the ergative marking:

Jewish Urmi (Doron & Khan 2012:233)

Transitive:
barux-aw-i   *brat-i*   *gərš -a-lu*
friend-PL-my   daughter-my   pull$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS-ERG.3PL
"My friends pulled my daughter."

Intransitive inergative:
ayné   *rqə̀l-lu*
they   dance$_{PERF}$- ERG.3PL
"They danced."

Intransitive inaccusative:
brat-i   *qəm -la*
daughter-my   rise$_{PERF}$-ERG.3FS
"My daughter rose."

Because of this uniformity in the preterite, transitivity scale shows its effects only when it comes to mark the subject in perfective stative phrases. A set of intransitive verbs, along with the transitive ones, use a compound verbal forms consisting of a resultative participle and a cliticized copula or a form of the verb *hwy* ("to be"). Other intransitive verbs express the resultative perfect with the past base inflected by suffix-S, the absolutive marking.

As for Split-S dialects, transitivity scale offers some motivations about the splitting of intransitive verbs in two sets with different case marking.

In regard to this splitting, NENA dialects do not behave in the same way. Each dialect seems to assign arbitrarily different importance to these parameters. The result is a different treatment of the same verb in the various dialects. For example, in Jewish Urmi, subject volitionality seems to be more relevant than control. This may explain why *rql* "to dance" o *mqy* "to speak" take the ergative marking.

Obviously, these are not fixed rules, but tendencies. In fact, it is possible to find some exceptions. As previously noted, Jewish Urmi is the only NENA dialect in which *nwx* "to bark" is treated as an intransitive verb with the absolutive marking. In general, in this dialect, verbs describing animal noises take the absolutive marking even if they have volitional subjects.

Jewish Urmi (Khan 2008)

> *kalba*   *nwix-Ø*
> dog   bark$_{PERF}$- ABS.3MS
> "The dog barked"

One possible linguistic explanation for this exception may lie in the animacy hierarchy. Animals are perceived as less animated (and consequentially also less agentive) than humans. Because of that, the degree to which they want and control the action can be considered weaker.

Even if sometimes linguistic explanation or tendencies can be useful to clarify exceptions, in other circumstances it is hard to predict how a dialect would treat a specific verb: *šlx* "to undress" has a human volitional subject but it is treated as an intransitive verb with absolutive marking.

Dynamic-Stative dialects generalize L-suffixes to cross-reference the subject in the preterite but maintain the absolutive marking to express the non-dynamic resultative perfect for inaccusative intransitive verbs. As previously noted, two parameters which affect high transitivity are the dynamism and the punctuality of the action. Verbs with a more dynamic prototypical meaning are considered more transitive than other which describes states of affairs or more stative events. However, in Dynamic-Stative dialects, the dynamism and the punctuality parameters are not linked to the inherent actionality of verbs (as in Split-S dialects), but to the way in which actions are described, i.e. the aspectuality of verbs. In these dialects, "ergative" transitive coding (L-suffixes to cross-reference the subject) is extended to all verbs to express dynamic, punctual actions, which are the kind of events the preterite tense usually describes. In fact, as Khan (2008) noted, "a preterite, which directly asserts an action, is naturally more dynamic and punctual than a resultative perfect, which expresses a state resulting from an action but does not directly assert the action." (Khan 2008:74-5). Accordingly, intransitive coding with absolutive marking is retained to express the non-dynamic resultative perfect.

2.3. Extended-Ergative dialects

The Extended-Ergative dialects extend the ergative marking to all verbs in the preterite. Although the marking system in these dialects appears more uniform and consequently less problematic than the other two types (all intransitive verbs take the same marking), their theoretical status is ambiguous. Even if the markedness proportions are those of a classical ergative system (with the ergative "case" more marked than the absolutive one), the alignment follows the accusative system, where S (the subject of intransitive verbs) shares the same morphological coding of A (the agent of transitive verbs).

This alignment type – which is apparently rare across languages, but rather common or we could even say dominant in NENA – is labelled either as "marked nominative" or "extended ergative". In his monograph on *Ergativity,* Dixon (1994:64) shows some preference for "marked nominative": "ergative" is a tricky term and its presence can generate some confusion, especially in dealing with "border" types of alignment. Moreover, most of the attested cases of marked nominative systems – such as those documented in Africa by Christa König (2008) – are not linked to ergativity or split ergativity.

In regard to the criteria that can be used to recognized a system as an instance of "marked nominative" alignment, there are different positions. According to Dixon (1979: 76), the only important parameter is the presence of morphological markedness. Other scholars such as Creissels (2004) and König (2008) focused more on functional or syntactical markedness. The most comprehensive definition of "marked nominative" is provided by König:

> A marked nominative language is present when at least two cases are distinguished, namely an accusative covering O, and a nominative covering S and A. The accusative must be the functionally unmarked form; it is the default case, that is, the case which is used with the widest range of functions. If one of the two cases is derived from the other, it must be the nominative which is derived from the accusative and never the other way round. (König 2008: 9)

In the totality of cases collected and analyzed by König, the accusative (the unmarked case) is used as a form of default in a great number of constructions than the marked nominative. According to König, this would be one of the tests to support of non-functional markedness of the accusative case and it would be an essential feature to determine if a system belongs to the category of marked nominative alignment.

In spite of this, the choice made by Doron and Khan (2012) to label "Extended-Ergative" and not "marked nominative" this particular alignment type in NENA dialect can be sustained on the basis of various considerations.

First of all, in the African examples the unmarked case covers several basic functions which are very different from each others, being e.g. the bare citation form of the noun. In NENA dialects, we find a very different alignment pattern, because syntactical cases are not marked by case inflections (as in the African examples) but by verbal agreement. The Aramaic absolutive marker (S-suffixes in the preterite) is not used in citation or in other typical functions of the unmarked nominative case. Moreover, S-suffixes are employed only to mark the patient in the preterite and the subject in the present tense.

Second, in NENA dialects this alignment is the result of an extension of the ergative marking to all intransitive verbs. We cannot deny the role of split ergativity as the prominent factor in the development of this particular alignment. On the contrary, as previously noted, König (2008) describes nominative marked systems with no link to ergativity and with heterogeneous origins.

The most cautious approach we can adopt in order to analyze the matter is to follow Dixon's neutral position. For this kind of alignments, none of the terms "nominative", "accusative", "ergative" or "absolutive" are really appropriate.

A useful perspective is to consider the NENA extended ergativity as a phase in a diachronic process from a split ergative pattern to a nominative-accusative one. Following the idea stated by Khan and Doron (2012) that the degree of ergativity changes accordingly to the distribution of the ergative marking on intransitive verbs, we can interpret these different alignment types from a diachronic point of view. In order to develop from an ergativity alignment to an accusative one, languages pass through intermediate passages, represented by the different types of alignments we can find in NENA dialects. Since they can be seen as a

hybrid between ergative and accusative systems, Extended-Ergative dialects represent an important intermediate stage.

This follows Dixon's hypothetical origin of an extended ergative system (1994:201-4) through the gradual extension of the ergative marking, at first only to cross-reference a specific set of intransitive subjects which show more agentive force, then for all of them.

According to Pennacchietti (1988:15), the transition from a passive construction to an "essentially, but not formally" active ergative one must have occurred early, when the predicative participle was still an apocopate form. Ergativity is therefore a rather old fact in NENA dialects, as well as the first Aramaic attempt to minimize it. As stated before, the extension of L-suffixes to intransitive verbs is an original Aramaic innovation. Already in late Aramaic, e.g. in Classic Syriac, the preposition *l-* is quite commonly used for representing the subject of an intransitive perfect participle (Nöldeke, 1898:210). This extension (even if it is not homogeneous among NENA dialects) can be considered the first real antidote against split ergativity.

The first stage of this development is represented by Split-S dialects, which still exhibit the highest degree of ergativity. From a prototypical and hypothetical ergative system (S shares the same absolutive marking with O) in the past tense[3], the ergative marking is extended to cover some intransitive verbs with a higher position in the transitivity scale.

Ergativity		Split-S
	>	
A – L-suffixes		A – L-suffixes
S – S-suffixes		SA – L-suffixes
O – S-suffixes		SO – S-suffixes
		O – S-suffixes

The second stage is less pervasive, but it shows the progressive decay of the absolutive marking. The ergative marking is extended to all intransitive verbs to express the preterite while the absolutive ones is maintained only for a set of intransitive verbs as a means to express a perfective stative.

Dynamic-Stative dialects are intermediate stage between Split-S and Extended-Ergative dialects. In the preterite, they behave like the Extended-Ergative ones. When it comes to express the perfect tense, intransitive verbs splits in two sets according to their agentive force. Inergative intransitive and transitive verbs use periphrastic compound forms, while inaccusative intransitive verbs maintain the absolutive marking.

Split-S		Dynamic-Stative (preterite)		Dynamic-Stative (perfect)
	>		>	
A – L-suffixes		A – L-suffixes		SA = A - compound forms
SA – L-suffixes		S – L-suffixes		SO – S-suffixes
SO – S-suffixes		O – S-suffixes		
O – S-suffixes				

---

[3] There is no historical evidence that the past base of verbs has known a perfectly split-ergative system at least in some NENA dialects. However, due to the lack of data and historical evidence, we can not exclude the possibility.

The extended ergativity is the third stage of this development. The ergative marking is extended to all intransitive verbs. The absolute marker is maintained only to cross-reference the object[4].

Split-S		Dynamic-Stative (preterite)		Extended-Erg
	>		>	
A – L-suffixes		A – L-suffixes		A – L-suffixes
SA – L-suffixes		S – L-suffixes		S – L-suffixes
SO – S-suffixes		O – S-suffixes		O – S-suffixes
O – S-suffixes		(S-suffixes survives as perfective stative markers for SO)		

Obviously we are illustrating only a hypothetical diachronic development. In fact, we have no evidence that any NENA dialects went through all these stages. On the contrary, there is evidence suggesting that Split-S dialects are developing towards an accusative system skipping the extended ergative stage. However, giving a systematic coherence to these different stages as a unitary on-going process helps us to clarify the development and its final direction. Moreover, this framework allows us to formulate some assumptions about possible or expected development patterns.

Although, from the point of view of alignment pattern, the extended ergative stage represents a step towards an accusative system, evidence from some dialects shows that it is not the final stage of this development. For example, like many other dialects, the Christian dialect of Qaraqosh shows an extended ergative pattern only with 3fs. or 3pl. objects. In all other circumstances, we find a complete different construction:

Christian Qaraqosh (Khan 2002)

> *nqəš-lə*
> hit$_{PERF}$-ERG.3MS
> "He hit."

> *kəm-naqəš -Ø-la*
> PASS-hit$_{IMPF}$-NOM.3MS-ACC.3FS
> "He hit her."

In the Jewish dialect of Arbel, extended ergative system is found only with 3fs. or 3pl. objects. In all other circumstances (and optionally also with 3fs. or 3pl. objects), a new specific accusative marking is required.

Jewish Arbel (Khan 1999)

> *ġizy-ā-le*
> see$_{PERF}$-ABS.3FS-ERG.3MS
> "He saw her."

---

[4] Actually most dialects used the absolute marker to cross-reference only 3rd person objects. 1st- and 2nd- person objects are cross-referenced with dedicated accusative markers.

ġzé-le   'illáx
see_PERF-NOM.3MS   ACC.2FS
"He saw you."

We cannot speak properly of ergativity describing such a system. Even if the present and past bases use different case endings to cross-reference subject and object, the alignment pattern is very close to the accusative one: S shares the same marker of A, different from the one used to mark O.

Once the extended ergative stage is seen as an intermediate stage of a diachronic process, we can formulate some suppositions.

One hypothesis regards the possible reaction of Aramaic dialects, which are historically accusative, when they have had to face a complex situation such as split ergativity. Following the economy and analogy principles, they extended the ergative case to all intransitive subjects in order to re-create an alignment pattern symmetrical (although specular due to the inversion of the set of suffixes) to the canonical accusative one still used in the present tense. However, this stage is not stable. Dialects tend to replace it with alternatives, to fully re-establish the accusative system and re-align the past to the present tense.

Following this interpretation, extended ergativity in NENA dialects can be seen as a hybrid and constantly evolving system and not a stable independent alignment (such as the African marked nominatives). We cannot consider this alignment ergative, because the very basic feature of ergativity is missing. The intransitive subjects share the same case markers with the transitive subjects, and not with the objects. On the other hand, we cannot consider the extended ergative alignment as being nominative-accusative proper. In the first place, the set of case endings which cross-reference the subject is marked. Furthermore, this alignment too seems to be rather unstable and trigger further anti-ergative constructions.

A similar analysis was formulated by Payne (1980) and Comrie (1989) in order to explain the anti-economy of the "double oblique" system in Pamir languages[5]. Rather than consider it a real alignment, Payne and Comrie treat it as "an intermediate diachronic stage in the breakdown of an earlier ergative-absolute case marking system in the direction of a nominative-accusative system" (Comrie, 1989:125). Despite the fact that extended ergativity in NENA dialects is less problematic, from a diachronic point of view, it can be seen as an intermediate stage of a process in which the last traces of the ergative alignment are regularly replaced.

Finally, this perspective follows some assumptions about alignment changes by Frans Plank. According to Plank (1985), this kind of hybrid alignment can be considered a possible intermediate stage of development between an ergative pattern and an accusative one. From this point of view, a split-S system can be considered in the same way:

> The kind of transition is aptly referred to as an extension of the ergative, originally comprising only the transitive agent relation […]. On the assumption that such changes tend to be gradual, intermediate stages of this kind of development could be expected to conform to the active-inactive pattern, with some intransitive actants already realigned with transitive agents, white other continue to align with transitive patients. (Plank 1985: 272-3)

Furthermore, Plank noted how this process could be facilitated from the coexistence with pure accusative patterns used in other levels of the language taken as a model to build an analogy: that is exactly what happens in NENA dialects.

---

[5] This alignment is a very rare system, in which an "oblique" case encodes both the agent and the patient, while S is marked with the "absolute" case.

Dixon (1994:201-4) provides some instances in which the transition from an accusative pattern to an ergative one occurs through the extension of the ergative case. In this regard, split ergativity proved to be a good intermediate phase in this diachronic change. While in Africa, König (2008:178) did not find any empirical instances of this transition, NENA dialects may prove to be a solid empirical demonstration of the theories formulated by Dixon (1994) and Plank (1985).

3. Conclusion

NENA dialects are developing from a split ergative pattern to a new accusative alignment through the extension of the ergative marker.

The transition is not uniform. In the first place, it does not happen in one single step, but there is at least one intermediate Split-S stage in which only subjects of unergative verbs take the ergative marker, since perceived as more agentive. NENA dialects separate intransitive verbs which take the ergative marking from those which take the absolute one following some of Hopper and Thomson's transitivity parameters. Although it is not always possible to anticipate which marker a dialect would choose for intransitive verbs, the main criteria are the volitionality and the animacy of the subjects.

Not all dialects take part in this transition following the same route. NENA dialects stabilized at different stages of the process. Depending on the extension of L-suffixes to encode the subject, we can isolate three different diachronic types: Split-S, Dynamic-Stative, and finally Extended-Ergative.

Among these types, the linguistic status of extended ergativity is the most problematic. The only linguistic analysis on the matter was formulated by Doron and Khan (2012: 235-239). They tried to demonstrate that it is still possible to detect a certain degree of ergativity in Extended-Ergative dialects based on generativist theories about morphological markedness. Although there is a partial truth behind their analysis (in particular, it is impossible to ignore ergativity as the source of the change), labelling Extended-Ergative just as a particular type of ergativity prevents from noticing its linguistic peculiarity and the diachronic change NENA dialects are undertaking through it. The peculiarity of extended ergative alignment in NENA dialects deserves an independent analysis for several reasons. First of all, generally speaking, extended ergativity is a rare type of alignment: every instances of it should be analyzed in order to understand if it is a homogeneous phenomenon or there are different tendencies inside it. In this regard, the fact that NENA Extended-Ergative dialects are substantially different from the African marked nominative instances is in favour of the second hypothesis. As a result of this, extended ergativity in NENA dialects are worthy being investigated as an autonomous phenomenon.

According to our analysis, extended ergativity is not a stable and independent alignment but an intermediate stage between an ergativity system and a classical accusative alignment. Through an analogous mechanism, NENA dialects try to re-create the accusative alignment in the perfective paradigm through the extension of the ergative mark. This perspective is in line with Plank (1985) and Dixon (1994)'s theories about the diachronic role of extended ergativity in alignment changes.

Further research is required from the point of view of linguistic typology in that NENA dialects could provide useful insights for alignment change studies.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Comrie B. (1989), *Language universals and linguistic typology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press
Creissels D. (2009), *Uncommon patterns of core term marking and case terminology*, in "Lingua", 119: 445-459
Dixon R.M.W. (1979), *Ergativity*, in " Language", 55: 59-138
Dixon R.M.W. (1994), *Ergativity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
Fassberg S.E. (2010), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Challa*, Leiden, Brill
Doron E., Khan G. (2012), *The Typology of Morphological Ergativity in Neo-Aramaic*, in "Lingua", 122: 225-240
Fox S.E. (2010), *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Bohtan*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press
Goldenberg G. (1993), *Otto Jastrow, Der neuostaramäische Dialekt von Hertevin — A Review Article*, in "Journal of Semitic Studies", 38: 295-308
Hoberman R.D. (1989), *The syntax and semantics of verb morphology in modern Aramaic. A Jewish Dialect of Iraqi Kurdistan*, New Haven, American Oriental Society
Hopper P.J., Thompson S.A. (1980), *Transitivity in grammar and discourse*, in "Language", 56: 251-299
Jastrow O. (1988), *Der neuostaramäische Dialekt von Hertevin (Provinz Siirt)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz
Khan G. (1999), *A Grammar of Neo-Aramaic: The Dialect of the Jews of Arbel*, Leiden, Brill
Khan G. (2002), *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Qaraqosh*, Leiden, Brill
Khan G. (2004), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sulemaniyya and Halabja*, Leiden, Brill
Khan G. (2008a), *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Barwar*, Leiden, Brill
Khan G. (2008b), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Urmi*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press
Khan G. (2009), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sanandaj*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press
König C. (2008), *Case in Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
Mutzafi H. (2004), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Koy Sanjaq (Iraqi Kurdistan)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz
Mutzafi H. (2008), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Betanure (province of Dihok)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz
Nöldeke T. (1898), *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik*, Leipzig, T.O. Weigel
Payne J. R. (1980), *The dacay of ergativity in Pamir languages*, in "Lingua", 51: 147-186.
Pennacchietti F. (1988), *Verbo neo-aramaico e verbo neo-iranico*, in V. Orioles (ed.), *Tipologie della convergenza linguistica. Atti del Convegno della Società Italiana di Glottologia. Bergamo 17-19 dicembre 1987*, Pisa, Giardini Editori e Stampatori: 93-110
Plank F. (1985), *The extended accusative/restricted nominative in perspective*, in F. Planck (ed.), *Relational typology*, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, Mouton de Gruyter: 269-311

ALESSANDRA BAROTTO • Ph.D. student in Linguistics at University of Bergamo and University of Pavia (Italy). She received her master degree from University of Turin. Her dissertation was about split ergative phenomena in NENA dialects. Her research interests include linguistic typology, cognitive linguistics, ergative and split ergative patterns, Semitic languages, East and mainland Southeast Asian languages (especially Japanese and Chinese).

E-MAIL • alessandra.barotto@gmail.com