

# SA. Alignment of Verbal Person Marking

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## 1. Defining the values

Languages differ not only in regard to the number and nature of the arguments displaying verbal person marking (see chapter SV), but also in the alignment of the person markers. The term **alignment** may be intuitively understood as reflecting how the two arguments of the transitive verb, the agentive argument (A) and the more patient-like argument (P), align with the sole argument of the intransitive verb, the S. In map SA the alignments of verbal person markers are represented by the following six values:

@	1. Neutral alignment (no verbal person marking)	84
@	2. Accusative alignment	213
@	3. Ergative alignment	19
@	4. Active alignment	26
@	5. Hierarchical alignment	11
@	6. Split alignment	28
	total	381

**Neutral alignment** corresponds to absence of verbal person marking.

By **accusative alignment** is understood a common treatment of the S and A and a different treatment of the P as in (1) from Tawala (Western Oceanic; Papua New Guinea), where the S and A markers are prefixes and the P markers are suffixes.

(1) Tawala (Ezard 1997: 289, 116)

- a. *i-bowi-ye-ya*  
 3SG.A-deny-TRV-3SG.P  
 'He denied him.'

- 30           b.    *apo l-na-nae*  
 31                    FUT   3SG.S-POT-go  
 32                    ‘He will go.’  
 33

34 Observe that the form of the third person singular marker is /-  
 35 for both the A in (1a) and S in (1b), but *-ya* for the P in (1a).

36           In **ergative alignment**, by contrast, it is the S and P that are  
 37 treated alike, while the A is treated in another way. This is  
 38 illustrated in (2) from Konjo (Western Malayo-Polynesian; South  
 39 Sulawesi).

40  
 41 (2) Konjo (Friberg 1996: 141)

- 42           a.    *na-peppe’-i       Amir   asung-ku*  
 43                    3.A-hit-3.P       Amir   dog-1  
 44                    ‘Amir hit my dog.’  
 45           b.    *a’-lampa-i       Amir*  
 46                    INTR-go-3.S       Amir  
 47                    ‘Amir goes.’  
 48

49 Note that the 3rd person markers of the P in (2a) and of the S in  
 50 (2b) are the same and are distinct from that of the A in (2a).

51           In **active alignment** there are two patterns of identification  
 52 of the S; sometimes it is treated like the A and sometimes like  
 53 the P, depending on a range of semantic factors such as  
 54 eventhood, performance/effect, instigation, control and  
 55 significant affectedness (Mithun 1991). A language manifesting  
 56 active alignment of verbal person forms is Koasati (Muskogean;  
 57 Louisiana).

58  
 59 (3) Koasati (Kimball 1991: 189, 204, 120, 118)

- 60           a.    *Okolca       hihca-li-halpi:s*  
 61                    well           dig-1SG.A-ability  
 62                    ‘I can dig a well.’  
 63           b.    *Talwa-li-mp*  
 64                    sing-1SG.S-HEARSAY  
 65                    ‘(He says) I sing.’  
 66           c.    *Ca-pa:-batapli-t*

- 67 1 SG.S-LOC-hit-PST  
 68 'He hit me on the back.'  
 69 d. *Ca-o:w-illi-laho-V*  
 70 1 SG.S-LOC-die-IRR-PHR.TERM  
 71 'I will die.'

72  
 73 Observe that the form of the 1st person singular s marker in (3b)  
 74 is the same as that of the A marker in (3a), while that of the S in  
 75 (3d) is the same as that of the P in (3c).

76 In **tripartite alignment** each of the three arguments S, A  
 77 and P is treated differently. Tripartite verbal person marking is  
 78 rare, and when it occurs it is manifested only for part of the  
 79 person paradigm. For instance, in Yukulta (Tanglic;  
 80 Queensland/Australia) it is exhibited only by second person  
 81 singular and all first person forms.

82  
 83 (4) Yukulta (Keen 1983: 239, 237, 215)

- 84 a. *WaranaNkulu-ka-ti*  
 85 go.NEG.DES-1 SG.S-FUT  
 86 'I don't want to go.'  
 87 b. *Talmata-Na-nti* *Nita*  
 88 chop.IND-1 SG.A-FUT wood  
 89 'I'll chop the wood.'  
 90 c. *Tyinkaka-nki* *Nata*  
 91 follow.IMP-1 SG.P me  
 92 'Follow me.'

93  
 94 And finally in **hierarchical alignment** the treatment of the A and  
 95 P is dependent on their relative ranking on the referential and/or  
 96 ontological hierarchies. Whichever is the higher ranking receives  
 97 special treatment, the details of which vary from language to  
 98 language. The following example is from Plains Cree  
 99 (Algonquian; Canada), in which person marking is determined by  
 100 the hierarchy 2 > 1 > 3.

- 101  
 102 (5) Plains Cree (Wolfart and Carroll 1981: 70)  
 103 a. *Ki-wapam-i-n*  
 104 2.A-see-DIR-1

- 105                   ‘You see me.’  
 106           b.    *Ki-wapam-iti-n*  
 107                   2.P-see-INV-1.A  
 108                   ‘I see you.’  
 109           c.    *Ki-wapam-ikw-ak*  
 110                   2.P-see-INV-3PL.A  
 111                   ‘They see you.’

112

113 We see in (5) that the second person is always marked by a  
 114 prefix (*ki-*) irrespective of whether its referent is in A function as  
 115 in (5a) or in P function as in (5b–c). In Cree, as in many other  
 116 languages which have hierarchical verbal person marking, if the  
 117 higher ranking argument is a P rather than an A, a special  
 118 inverse marker occurs on the verb, *iti* in (5b) and *ikw* in (5c). As  
 119 we see in (5a), Cree also has a special marker for when A  
 120 outranks the P, called a *direct marker*. This is rather unusual.

121

122           In the examples of the various types of alignments given  
 123 above, all three constituents, the S, A and P were overtly marked.  
 124 However, this need not be the case. For instance, accusative  
 125 alignment may involve overt marking of the S and A and no  
 126 marking of the P or alternatively overt marking of the P and no  
 127 marking of the S and A. The same in principle holds for the  
 other types of alignment.

128

129           While in many languages the verbal person markers  
 130 always manifest one type of alignment, in others several  
 131 alignments may be observed. The **splits in alignment** may  
 132 involve two or more non-neutral alignments or a non-neutral  
 133 alignment and neutral alignment. Since the term *neutral*  
 134 *alignment* is interpreted here as meaning absence of verbal  
 135 person marking, the two types of splits have been treated  
 136 differently. Languages displaying splits involving two or more  
 137 non-neutral alignments, for instance, accusative and ergative, or  
 138 active and accusative or ergative and tripartite have all been  
 139 classified in terms of value 6, split alignment. Internal splits in  
 140 alignment involving combinations of neutral and non-neutral  
 141 alignment, on the other hand, have been grouped under the  
 non-neutral alignment.

142 Both types of splits in alignment, those involving non-  
 143 neutral alignments and those involving a non-neutral and a  
 144 neutral alignment, may be conditioned by a range of factors.  
 145 One of the factors which commonly determines alignment is  
 146 person. Quite often the alignment of the first and second person  
 147 differs from that of the third. For example, in many languages  
 148 with active alignment, this alignment is confined to the first and  
 149 second person while the third person displays neutral alignment.  
 150 This is in fact the case in the previously mentioned Koasati as  
 151 well as in Amuesha (Arawakan; Peru), Tlingit (Na-Dene; British  
 152 Columbia) and Wichita (Caddoan; Oklahoma). The converse  
 153 situation, neutral alignment of the first and second person and  
 154 non-neutral of the third is also attested, but only rarely. In  
 155 Trumai (isolate; Upper Xingu/Brazil) there is ergative marking of  
 156 third person S and P by means of a verbal enclitic *e(n)*, but no  
 157 marking of either the first or second person. Compare (6a-b)  
 158 with (6c-d).

159

160 (6) Trumai (Guirardello 1999: 95, 99, 29)

161 a. *lyi watkan-e*

162 PRT cry-3SG.S

163 'She cried.'

164 b. *Hai-ts ka-in iyi midoxos-e*

165 I-ERG PST-FOC PRT call-3SG.P

166 'I called him.'

167 c. *Ha pita ka-in*

168 I go.out PST-FOC

169 'I go out.'

170 d. *Ka'natl-ek ha midoxos*

171 that-ERG I call

172 'That one called me.'

173

174 A similar first and second person as opposed to third person  
 175 split involving neutral and non-neutral alignment, though this  
 176 time accusative rather than ergative, is also found in a restricted  
 177 way in English. Note that the *-s* marking of the verb in *(S)he*  
 178 *come-s* and *(S)he like-s apples*, is a manifestation of accusative  
 179 verbal alignment restricted to the third person.

180 Person splits involving two non-neutral alignments are  
181 also to be found. One case in point is the previously mentioned  
182 Yukulta, in which the first person singular and nonsingular and  
183 the second person singular display tripartite alignment,  
184 contrasting with the accusative alignment of the second person  
185 non-singular and third person.

186 Another common factor influencing the alignment of  
187 verbal person marking is tense and aspect. For instance, in Itzaj  
188 (Mayan; Guatemala) the verbal person markers align ergatively in  
189 the completive aspect and in dependent clauses, but  
190 accusatively in the non-completive aspect. Yet other factors  
191 which may influence alignment include mood, polarity,  
192 humanness, animacy, definiteness, word order and main vs  
193 subordinate clause status. Typically they distinguish between  
194 non-neutral and neutral alignment. Thus, for example, Estonian,  
195 Manambu (Sepik; Papua New Guinea), Sentani (Trans-New  
196 Guinea; West Papua/Indonesia) and Tariana (Arawak; Brazil) have  
197 non-neutral alignment in positive clauses but neutral in negative  
198 ones. In Ika (Chibchan; northeastern Colombia), Koegu (Surmic,  
199 Nilo-Saharan; Ethiopia) and Siuslawan (Penutian; Oregon) the  
200 normal non-neutral alignment contrasts with neutral alignment  
201 in imperatives. And in the following languages there is neutral  
202 alignment in relative clauses but non-neutral in main clauses:  
203 Barasano (Tucanoan; Colombia, Brazil), Gimira (Omotic, Afro-  
204 Asiatic; Ethiopia), West Greenlandic (Eskimo), Kobon (Trans-New  
205 Guinea; Papua New Guinea), Limbu (Kiranti, Tibeto-Burman;  
206 Nepal), and Turkish (Cristofaro 2003). As these examples  
207 suggest, the neutral alignment tends to occur in non-  
208 declaratives, negatives or subordinate clauses, the non-neutral  
209 in main, positive declarative clauses. Occasionally, however, the  
210 reverse is the case. For instance in Nivkh (isolate; Sakhalin  
211 Island/Russia) accusative alignment is confined to imperatives.  
212 The classification of the alignments of verbal person markers  
213 depicted in map SA is based only on the alignments found in  
214 main, positive, declarative clauses.

215

## 216 **2. Geographical distribution**

217

218 The most common alignment of verbal person markers is  
219 accusative. It occurs in around 55% of the languages in the  
220 sample. It is not only the dominant alignment overall but also in  
221 every major geographical area. The next most common  
222 alignment is neutral which occurs in just over one fifth of the  
223 languages in the sample. Neutral alignment is found mainly in  
224 West Africa, the Caucasus, and South and Southeast Asia. The  
225 frequency of each of the other alignment types among the  
226 languages in the sample is under ten per cent, with split  
227 alignment being the most common (8%) and hierarchical the  
228 least (3%). The vast majority of the split alignments involve  
229 ergative/accusative splits. Such splits are not characteristic of a  
230 particular area or areas. They are, however, more common in  
231 areas with languages manifesting some form of ergative  
232 alignment, be it of verbal person forms or of free pronouns (see  
233 chapters QA and QS). Ergative alignment of verbal person forms  
234 is attested mainly in South America, Southeast Asia (Taiwan,  
235 Sulawesi and the Philippines) and Mesoamerica (the Mayan  
236 languages). It is also found in Eurasia in several Caucasian  
237 languages and in Basque, as well as in the north of North  
238 America, where the Eskimo–Aleut languages are spoken.  
239 Ergative alignment of verbal person markers is absent in New  
240 Guinea, Australia and the Pacific. One does, however, encounter  
241 sporadic instances of split accusative/ergative alignment in  
242 these areas. The area virtually devoid of ergativity is Africa.  
243 Turning to active alignment, most instances of active alignment  
244 come from the Americas. Active alignment also occurs in  
245 Southeast Asia and New Guinea. It is not attested in Australia or  
246 Africa nor, apart from the isolate language Ket, in Eurasia.  
247 Hierarchical alignment, like active, features primarily in the  
248 languages of the Americas. The only other area in which it is in  
249 evidence, more than just sporadically, is among the Tibetan  
250 languages of India and Nepal.

251 The above data on the distribution of the alignment of  
252 verbal person forms correspond closely to the data presented in  
253 Nichols (1992) based on a smaller sample of 173 languages.

254

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