

## THE INTERPLAY OF SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC FACTORS IN NORTHERN CARIB ERGATIVITY

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### [RESUMEN]

Esta investigación parte del hecho de que el estudio del sujeto no es posible emprenderlo sin una paralela descripción de la objetivización (o marcación del objeto). Consecuencialmente, el asunto de la transitividad juega un rol central en esta discusión, pues deberemos manejar oraciones que contienen verbos y sujetos, y objetos directos bajo condiciones específicas. Otro punto de inicio de este análisis sintáctico es que la ergatividad está condicionada por (i) el contenido semántico del verbo (V de aquí en adelante) y las frases nominales (FN de aquí en adelante) que le sirven como argumentos y (ii) las relaciones sintácticas entre las cláusulas principales (CP) y subordinadas (CS) (Derbyshire, 1983). Datos recopilados entre los años 2001 y 2002 sugieren que el pemón posee una ergatividad de base sólidamente semántica, típica de la mayoría de las lenguas caribes amazónicas: las FN que actúan como sujeto de V transitivos (es decir, aquellos V que atraen otras FN como objetos directos) son marcadas por medio de un afijo (generalmente un sufijo) –llamado ergativo–, mientras que la FN que opera como sujeto de un V intransitivo (es decir, aquella estructura que no contiene una FN como objeto directo) –aun si es semánticamente agente– es marcada de manera diferente por medio del llamado absolutivo. El sistema de marcación nominal ergativa-acusativa del pemón se complementa con un conjunto de prefijos verbales que identifican simultáneamente el agente y el objeto directo –los marcadores verbales ergativos y absolutivos–. Este conjunto de prefijos verbales del pemón está claramente definido para los agentes y objetos correspondientes a las tres personas del singular, pero ese papel distintivo se neutraliza en las del plural. Esto causa una escisión del sistema ergativo-acusativo, el cual en plural se comporta como un sistema nominativo acusativo. Similares conjuntos de prefijos verbales ergativos-absolutivos los encontramos en kariña, panare, ye'kwana y yukpa, otras cuatro lenguas caribes habladas en territorio venezolano. En ninguna de estas últimas –en contraste con el pemón– hay marcación de ergatividad-absolutividad mediante elementos afijados al nombre que funciona como agente. En conclusión, las marcas pronominales de ergatividad-absolutividad prefijadas al verbo aparecen como un rasgo común de todas las lenguas caribes del norte, y aunque tales marcas tienen una notable motivación semántica, sobre todo porque dependen de niveles de referencialidad/topicalidad, y/o de grados de perfectividad, existen también algunos procesos sintácticos que parecen condicionarla, por ejemplo, la dislocación hacia la izquierda con omisión del objeto en las CS.

**[PALABRAS CLAVE]** Lenguas caribes, ergatividad, transitividad

## [ABSTRACT]

A premise of this research is that the study of subjectivization cannot be undertaken with a parallel description of objectivization (or object marking). In connection with the point above, the matter of transitivity would play a central role in the discussion given the fact that there is a need to handle with sentences containing verbs and subjects, and direct objects under specified condition. One more departing point for this syntactic analysis is that ergativity is conditioned by (i) the semantic content of the verb (V henceforth) and noun phrase (NP henceforth) performing as arguments, and (ii) the syntactic relations between main clauses (MC) and subordinate clauses (SC) (Derbyshire, 1983). Data collected in 2001 and 2002 suggest that Pemon possesses a solidly based semantic ergativity, typical of most Carib languages: NP's as subjects of transitive V's (that is, V's that attract FN'S as direct objects) are marked by means of an affix (generally a suffix)—known as ergative, whereas FN's functioning as subjects of intransitive V's (that is, V's that do not have FN's as direct objects)—even if semantically agents—is marked differently by means of the so-called absolutive. The nominal ergative-absolutive marking system of Pemon is supplemented with a set of verb prefixes that simultaneously identify agents and direct objects—ergative and absolutive verb markers. Pemon's ergative-absolutive verb marking system is quite well defined for first, second and third singular agents and objects, but distinctions are overridden in plural. This brings about a split of the ergative-absolutive system, which in plural behaves as an accusative-nominative system. Analogous ergative-absolutive verb markers are found in Kari'ña, Panare, Ye'kwana and Yukpa, all of them Carib languages spoken within the Venezuelan boundaries. Contrasting with Pemon, in them, there are no agent noun markers for the ergative. In conclusion, ergative-absolutive verb prefixes are common in all northern Carib languages, and regardless of their semantic motivation because their occurrences are often linked to referentiality/topicality levels and/or perfectivity degrees, there are also motivating syntactic processes, such as, left-dislocation with the omission of the object in a SC.

[KEY WORDS] Carib languages, ergativity, transitivity

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The matter of ergativity and related phenomena from a cross-linguistic typological perspective is thoroughly accounted for in Givón's *Syntax I* (1984). Givón (1984:145) points out that any attempt at typological description of subject marking demands the simultaneous consideration of a major portion of object marking. It is so, Givón (1984:145) writes, "because what is important in the syntax/grammar of case marking is not only the *absolute* marking of assigned case-roles (be these semantic or pragmatic), but above all the *differentiation* in marking between them. One may thus view the grammar of subjectivization, in large part, the grammar of differentiating the subject from the direct-object case role."

Further, Givón (1984:145) mentions that "it is possible to view the various types of coding of the same functional domain as alternative solutions to the same communicative tasks. In the case of subjectivization, one may define the task as a 'functional dilemma':

- (1) Functional dilemma in subjectivization  
 “How to express simultaneously the semantic case-role of an argument and its pragmatic case-role as subject.”

At first sight, one can say that there is no need to deal with a dilemma like Givón’s above because it is quite likely that world languages have developed noun double-marking mechanisms. In fact, Japanese seems to operate in such a fashion, as the following example taken from Kuno (1981) shows

- (2) John -ni -wa nihongo -ga nigate da  
 John DAT TOP Japanese SUBJ bad be  
 (lit.) ‘John Japanese is bad at’

In (2), *John* tags the dative marker *-ni*, which identifies it as the object (a semantic role); and additionally, the topic marker *-wa* which signals that it is the topic (a pragmatic role). It is important to notice that (2) is a sentence in which the object has been topicalized, that is, it has been promoted to initial position. (2) exhibits OSV order instead of the predominant SOV order of the language. This process obviously is optional in Japanese, and it seems to be so in all languages in which it takes place. The trend in most world languages, according to Givón, is to place one mark on the noun and the other on the verb.

The three major coding devices used elsewhere in syntax are also used to code the subject case-role:

- (3) a. Word order (pragmatic motivation = syntactic constituents)  
 b. Morphology (semantic motivation = case marking)  
 c. Intonation (phonological motivation = contours)

Givón (1984:146) reports that of the three, the role of intonation (or at least of ‘tone’) seems to be the most minor. In several Nilotic languages (Luo, Nandi, Maasai, Toposa, etc), a noun has a different tonal pattern depending on whether it is subject or object. All of these Nilotic languages are VSO languages where the subject and the object are immediate neighbors, with the verb not serving as a word-order device to separate them; and neither subject or object are morphologically marked. That might explain why a variation in the intonation contours is a necessary help for distinguishing subjects from objects in this group of languages. Givón (1984:147) adds that “tone, however, is not the only means of differentiating between subject and object in Nilotic languages. Some of them depend exclusively upon word order. These languages are rigidly VSO, which helps to accomplish such distinction.” Further, Givón (1984:147) points out that in the case of Nilotic languages, such as Maasai and Zulu, “there is some evidence that the present tonal distinction is a leftover from an earlier morphological distinction. In Maasai, for example, intonation is used to differentiate *new/surprising/unpredictable information* from *old/predictable information*. And since the subject grammaticalized case-role is more likely to be the *topic/leitmotif* and thus *continuous/predictable information*, there is

bound to be a high coincidence of “topic intonation” and “subject intonation.” However, this intonational phenomenon is not confined to the grammaticalized subject, but rather to the topic regardless of its grammaticalized case-role. Intonation, thus, tends to intersect with the case-marking devices.”

The use of “Maasai-like intonational contours” for case-marking, or the use of “Japanese-like word-order change” for the same purpose, as pointed out by Givón in his explanations of those matters, is in both cases linked to morphological processes. This seems to indicate that there is a need for morphological devices, to a lesser or greater degree, for solving the SUBJECTIVIZATION DILEMMA. In fact, it is morphological factors that have allowed to typologize case systems in world languages, namely, (a) nominative-accusative, (b) ergative-absolutive, (c) active-non active and (d) ergative-anti-passive.

As this research is basically concerned with the accusative and ergative case systems existing in Pemon, Panare, Kariña and Ye'kwana, some theoretical matters and practical issues about them are considered in the forthcoming.

**a. The nominative-accusative case-marking type**

According to Givón (1984:147), the nominative-accusative case-marking type solves the dilemma of subjectivización by resorting to syntactic traits (often word order) that contribute to identify the “subject” function, regardless of whether it appears within a transitive or an intransitive sentence, and regardless the semantic role of that subject, that is, if it is agent, or patient, or dative, etc. Additionally, the (direct) object of transitive sentences is also identified, either syntactically (by means of word order features) or in terms of morphological devices (addition of markers), or a combination of both. Givón (1984:147-8) characterizes a nominative-accusative language as follows

(4)

	The Nominative Coding	The Accusative Coding
Intransitive Sentence	SUBJECT	∅
Transitive Sentence	SUBJECT	OBJECT

A nominative-accusative (hereafter ‘nominative’) language may have both the subject and the object morphologically unmarked, as in English. Most commonly in such languages, rigid word-order is used to differentiate the two case-roles. Thus consider the following



(5) a. Intransitives

- a.1. The book is good (patient-of-state subject)
- a.2. The book fell (patient-of-change subject)
- a.3. The man was sad (dative subject)
- a.4. The man worked (agent subject)

b. Transitives

- b.1. The man kicked the mule (agent subject)

A nominative language may also have both object and subject marked, as in the case of Korean:

(6) a. Intransitive

- a.1. Park -I koyusu -ga toe -iss -da  
 Park NOM teacher NOM become PAST DECL  
 'Park became a teacher'

b. Transitive

- b.1. Park -I sonyin -il ci -ss -da  
 Park NOM boy ACC hit PAST DECL  
 'Park hit the boy'

A nominative language may also have an unmarked subject and marked object, as in the case of Hebrew. Thus consider:

(7) a. Intransitive

- a.1. ha- ísh avád  
 the man worked  
 'The man worked'

b. Transitive

- b.1. ha- ísh kará et- ha- sefer  
 the man read ACC the book  
 'The man read the book'

Finally, at least some nominative languages have a marked subject and an unmarked object. Thus, consider the following from Mojave:

(8) a. Intransitive

a.1. '- intay -č masde: -k  
 my mother SUBJ fear TNS  
 'My mother is afraid'

b. Transitive

b.1. '- intay -č ahvay ičo: -k  
 my mother SUBJ dress make TNS  
 'My mother made a dress'

b. The ergative-absolutive case-marking type and syntactic transitivity

Givón (1984:151) argues that the ergative-absolutive (hereafter 'ergative') case-marking type "displays a hybrid or intermediate solution to the functional dilemma, one which abides neither by the pragmatics of "subject" nor by the semantics of agent/non agent. Rather, it abides roughly—and with many intricate variations—by the transitivity of the sentence. In this system—as first approximation—the subject of the transitive sentence (i.e. the one which has a "direct object") is marked by one marker—called the ergative, while the subject of the intransitive sentence (i.e. the one that has no "direct object")—even when it is semantically agent—is marked differently, by the so-called absolutive. Most commonly, the ergative is a marked morpheme and the absolutive is unmarked or zero. And further, the direct object of the transitive clause is also marked by the absolutive form." Schematically, the ergative-absolutive marking system is summarized by Givón (1984:151) as follows

(9)

	The Ergative Coding	The Absolutive Coding
Intransitive Sentence	∅	SUBJECT
Transitive Sentence	SUBJECT	OBJECT

Briefly, then, in ergative languages the subject of the intransitive and the object of the transitive receives the same coding, the absolutive case, while the subject of the transitive receives its own ergative case-marking.

Most commonly in ergative languages, the ergative case is morphologically marked, while the absolutive is a morphologically unmarked (or zero) case. As an example, Givón (1984:151) presents some sentences from Inuktituk (Eskimo):

## (10) a. Intransitive

a.1. innuk -∅ takuvuq -∅  
 person ABS saw  
 'The person saw (something)'

## b. Transitive

b.1. pallu -up qimiq -∅ takuvaa  
 Paluk ERG dog ABS saw  
 'Paluk saw the dog'

As one can see from (10.b) above, semantic agent and semantically active verb are not necessary ingredients in determining the marking of clauses as “transitive” (and the subject as ergative). Givón (1984:152) notes that “in most ergative languages the presence of a direct object is itself enough to qualify the clause as a transitive one.” Givón (1984:152) adds that “In many ergative languages, however, some finer discrimination as to semantic role of the object are made—and influence the morphology of subject marking. Thus, for example, in Sherpa (and several other Tibetan languages) many *dative* subjects do not receive the ergative but rather the dative suffix, in spite of their having a direct object.” Thus, consider the following example taken from Givón (1984):

## (11) a. Intransitive

ti mi -ti cam -sung  
 the man DEF(ABS) dance PERF  
 'The man danced'

## b. Transitive, dative-subject

ti mi -ti -la cenyi go -kyaa -sung  
 the man DEF DAT cup want AUX PERF  
 'The man wanted the cup'

## c. Transitive, agent-subject

ti mi -ti -gi cenyi caaq -sung  
 the man DEF ERG cup break PERF  
 'The man broke the cup'

The phenomenon of dative subjects is obviously not confined to ergative languages. This also occurs in several Dravidian languages, particularly in Kannada.

The behavior of the Tibetan and Dravidian languages leads Givón (1984:152) to conclude that “the choice of ergative marking of sentential subjects in ergative languages is thus sensitive, in one manner or another, not simply to “absolute” semantic elements such as “prototypical patient object” and “prototypical agent subject”, but rather to a composite degree of transitivity of the sentence. However, individual languages are not sensitive to exactly the same sub-components of transitivity, nor do they divide transitive from intransitive at exactly the same point on the various scales of properties which, as a cluster, determine transitivity.” In this respect, Givón (1984:152) considers that the degrees of transitivity in languages correlates with the phenomenon known as *split ergativity*.

### c. Split ergativity

Even in the most conspicuous ergative languages where the ergative-absolutive pattern is most widely spread throughout the various grammatical paradigms, it is possible to observe some split patterns, whereby a non-ergative pattern is found in some grammatical contexts. Such a pattern may be a nominative-accusative one, or an anti-passive one. But there is an interesting way in which all the splits seem to be determined by the cluster of scalar properties that comprise transitivity.

The scales of transitivity-related properties along which *split ergativity* appears are summarized by Givón (1984:153) as follows:

(12)

<p>a. Degree of agent’s control or intent (agentivity)          controlled causation &gt; uncontrolled causation          intended causation &gt; unintended causation</p>
<p>b. Degree of obviousness/affectedness of the patient (patienthood)          more obvious patient &gt; less obvious patient          more affected patient &gt; less affected patient</p>
<p>c. Degree of perfectivity/completeness of the event (perfectivity)          perfective &gt; imperfective          past &gt; future &gt; present</p>
<p>d. Degree of referentiality/topicality of both agent and patient (referentiality)          anaphoric pronoun &gt; definite NP &gt; indefinite NP &gt; non-referential NP</p>

Givón (1984:153) explains that in the first type of split ergativity, if a clause is higher on any of the scales in (12), then it is more likely to receive ergative-absolutive case-marking. On the other hand, if it is lower on the scale, it is more likely to receive another marking pattern, be it nominative-accusative, anti-passive or passive.

The agentivity scale signals that in ergative languages, it is only the subjects of transitive sentences—i.e. ones which in some way conform to the prototype of “agent controller/deliberate initiator”—that receive the ergative marking. This property of the subject obviously goes to the heart of the definition of “transitive sentence” or “transitive event”. And sentences with a less agentive subject are less likely to have an ergative subject. In many ergative languages this scale may manifest itself even in intransitive (i.e. objectless) sentences. Givón illustrates with an example from Modern Tibetan:

(13) a. ...[the wind blew me this way, so]

ŋa -Ø tee leepa -ree  
I ABS here come NON VOL  
'I came here'

b. ...[I intend to come, and]

ŋεε lee -yoo  
I ERG come VOL  
'I will come'

In (13.a), the action of the subject is unintended, hence, the sentence does not bear any ergative marker; whereas in (13.b), the subject is performing an intended action, so receiving ergative coding.

As for the patienthood scale Givón (1984:155) mentions that the presence of an affected patient/object is just as important an ingredient in making sentences transitive as the presence of an agent. Thus, sentences that have a more prototypical patient/object are the obvious candidates for receiving an ergative-absolutive marking. And one is thus justified in considering this as another major “split pattern” in ergative languages. The degree of affectedness of the patient may create subtle variations in the spread of the ergative patterns within the verbal paradigm. As an example, Givón offers three sentences from Newari, a Tibetan language spoken in Nepal. In Newari, the verb ‘sing’—with a cognate object ‘song’—takes an obligatory ergative subject in the perfect, an obligatory nominative subject in the progressive, and an optional ERG/NOM variation in the future. Thus consider:

(14) a. wo manu -na me ha -la  
the man ERG song sing PERF  
'The man sang' (lit. '...sang a song')

- b. wo manu -Ø me ha -yi co -gu du  
the man ABS song sing IMPERF be NOM be  
'The man is singing'
- c. wo manu (-na) me ha -yi  
the man ERG/(ABS) song sing IMPERF  
'The man will sing'

The perfective scale has as its basis the intimate relation between perfectivity and transitivity of events. Givón (1984:156) says that a perfective/completive event is one whose boundaries—in terms of beginning and termination at precise, well-articulated points in time—are clearly specified. Most commonly this is particularly relevant to the time of termination of the event, i.e. the stipulation that the event has in fact occurred and has been successfully completed. The connection with transitivity lies in two obvious pragmatic inferences, which may be given as follows

- (15) a. Affectedness of patient: "The more completed an event is, the more likely it is that the patient in fact registers to the full the effects of the action" (Givón, 1980)
- b. Effectiveness of agent: "The more successfully completed the event is, the more likely it is that the agent was in fact a deliberate, direct, effective cause of that successful completion" (Givón, 1980)

As an example of split ergativity along the perfectivity parameter, consider the following from Sherpa:

- (16) a. Perfect, intransitive

ti mi -ti cam -sun  
the man DEF(ABS) dance PERF  
'The man dances'

- b. Perfect, transitive

ti mi -ti -gi cenyi caaq -sung  
the man DEF ERG cup break PERF  
'The man broke the cup'

- c. Imperfective, intransitive

ti mi -ti cam -ki -wi  
the man DEF(ABS) dance AUX IMPER  
'The man is dancing'

## d. Imperfective, transitive

ti mi -ti ceni caaq -ki -wi  
 the man DEF(ABS) cup break AUX IMPERF  
 'The man is breaking the cup'

About the referentiality/topicality scale, Givón (1984:158) points out that “the items higher on the scale—more to the left in (12)—are more likely to display ergative marking, while the items lower on the scale—more to the right—are more likely to display non-ergative (nominative, anti-passive or passive) marking. The trend is that full NP’s functioning as subjects and objects, either definite or indefinite, are often unmarked, so that they conform to the nominative-accusative pattern as in English or Spanish. But verb agreement, i.e. pronouns cliticized (at some historical time) on the verb and functioning as anaphoric pronouns, displays an ergative-absolutive pattern. As an example, Givón (1984:158) presents an example taken from Jacaltec

## (17) a. Intransitive

x- Ø- to pax naj winaj  
 ASP ABS3 go back cl the man  
 'The man returned'

## b. Transitive

x- Ø- y- acan naj winaj te' ñah  
 ASP ABS3 ERG3 build cl the man cl the house  
 'The man built the house'

## ERGATIVITY AND TRANSITIVITY IN NORTHERN CARIB LANGUAGES

## a. The Carib languages and its North branch

Derbyshire [In Dixon & Aikhenvald, 1999:23] notes that the Carib family contains the second largest number of languages (following Arawak) in South America. Hundreds of Carib language names can be found in the literature, but after eliminating different names that apply to only one language or to dialects of a language, the number of languages spoken today is probably 30. Carib languages are spoken in six South American countries, namely Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana and Brazil. They all are located in the upper west corner of this sub-continent, mainly above the Amazon River (the Guiana branch, the North Amazonian branch and the Central Branch), although there are some located further south, on both sides of the Xingu River (South Amazonian Branch). The data presented by Derbyshire [in Dixon & Aikhenvald, 1999: 24] is shown in (18):

(18)

CARIB (Kalija, Galibi)	
GUIANA BRANCH	Tiriyo, Karihona, Kaxuyana, Warikyana, Wai wai, Hixkaryana
NORTH AMAZONIAN BRANCH	Jawaperi, Macuxi, Pemong, Kapong
CENTRAL BRANCH	Wayana, Apalai, Makiritare (or Ye'kwana)
SOUTH AMAZONIAN BRANCH	Bakairi, Kuikuro, Txikão (or Ikpeng)
PANARE	

Derbyshire's data in (18) reflect Kauffman's putative four main branches of the Carib family. The data consider Carib and Panare to be separate groupings. However, new data gathered along the last 3 to 4 years suggests that Panare, as well as Pemon (Pemong) and other Carib languages spoken in the Venezuelan territory, all belong to the North Amazonian branch. Some common morpho-phonological traits of Makiritare (also known as Ye'kwana or Dekwana), Pemon, Kari'ña [a language very close to Kalija (if not the same), spoken north of the Orinoco], Panare and Yukpa strongly point into that direction. Ye'kwana spoken about 100 kilometers from the south bank of the Orinoco river, and Kari'ña spoken about 50 kilometers from its north bank exhibit remarkable similarities as far as phonetic inventories and sentential arrangements. In this latter respect, both are consistently verb final with dominant SOV order. Also, at a morphological level, Ye'kwana and Kari'ña show some striking resemblances. They have sets of personal ergative and absolutive markers which somewhat parallel in distribution and shaping. Let's compare the Ye'kwana and Kari'ña data in (19-21) below:



(19)

## YE'KWANA

## ERGATIVE MARKERS

mön	'1sA/2sO'
w-	'1sA/3sO'
kö-	'2s'
m-	'2s/3sO'
nña m-	'2s/1p.Exc.O'
y-	'3sA/1sO'
ö-	'3sA/2sO'
Ø- ~ n-	'3sA/3sO'
k-	'3sA/1p.Inc.O'
nña Ø-	'3sA/1p.Exc.O'
k-	'1p.Inc.A/3sO'
nña mö-	'1p.Inc.A/2sO'
nña n-	'1p.Exc.A/3sO'

(Based on Chavier, M., 1999)

(20)

## YE'KWANA

## ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS

(active verbs)	(stative verbs)	
y-	w-	'I'
a-	m-	'you'
n-	n-	'he/she/it'
k-	k-	'we.Inc.'
nña n-	nña n-	'we.Exc.'

(Based on Chavier, M., 1999)

(21)

PEMON	KARIÑA	PANARE	YUKPA
<p><b>FREE PRONOUN SYSTEM</b> (active and stative verbs)</p> <p>(y)ure 'I' amare 'you' muere 'he/she' ina 'we.Exc.' (y)ure- -to 'we.Inc' (y)ure- -kon 'we.Inc' amare- -nokon 'you' to 'they' ichanan 'they' mesemonan 'they'</p>	<p><b>FREE PRONOUN SYSTEM</b> (stative verbs)</p> <p>a:u 'I' amo:ro 'you' mohko 'he/she' na'na 'we.Exc.' kümüo:ro 'we.D' kümüoñ:a:ro 'we.Inc' amofñ:aro 'you' mohka:ro 'they'</p>	<p><b>FREE PRONOUN SYSTEM</b></p> <p>yu 'I' amën 'you' kën 'he/she' mën 'we.Exc.' ana 'we.D' yuto 'we.Inc.' yutakon 'you' amënton 'they' (p/a NV) kamënton 'they' (p/a V) mëhchanton 'they' (things) mënkon 'they' (things)</p>	<p><b>FREE PRONOUN SYSTEM</b> (Based on Meira, S., 2003)</p> <p>awü '1s' amo '2s' ma '3s' (near) mash '3s' (near) ake '3s' (far) nana '1pExc.' üpü '1p.Inc.' amora 'you' masha 'they' (near) aksha 'they' (far)</p>
<p><b>ERGATIVE MARKERS</b></p> <p>u- 1A → 2s, 3sO ~ uy s- 1A → 3sO ~ ch- a- 2A → 1s, 3sO ~ ad- ~ ay- ~ aß- ~ au- u- 2A → 1sO i- 3A → 1/2/3sO ~ y- ~ it- ina 1Exc. Ø- ... -(no)kon 1Inc. ~ Ø- ... -to 1Inc. a- ... -kon 2p ~ ad- ... -kon ~ ay- ... -kon ~ aß- ... -kon ~ au- ... -kon Ø- ... -kon 3p</p>	<p><b>ERGATIVE MARKERS</b></p> <p>s- '1sS/2,3spO' m- '2sS/2,3spO' rü- '3sS/1sO' ar- '3sS/2sO' - k_(n)- '3sS/3sO' (na'na) (k)n- '1p.Exc' k_(s)- '1p.D' k_(s)- ROOT -tu '1p.Inc' m- ROOT -tu '2p' k_(n)- ROOT -tu '3p'</p>	<p><b>ERGATIVE MARKERS</b></p> <p>y- '1sA → 3sO' ~ yi- ~ yï- ~ yu- ~ chu- t- '1sA → 2,3sO' a- '2sA → 3sO' ~ o- ~ ë- ~ au- m(i)- '2sA → 3sO' Ø- '3sA → 3sO' n- '3sA → 3sO' ~ ni- ~ nï- ~ ne- ~ në- ~ na- ~ no- ~ nu- y- '3sA → 1,2sO' ~ i- ~ yi- ~ yï- ~ yu- ~ chu- t- '3spA → 3spO' mën 'we.Exc.' ana 'we.D' n(i)- 'we.Inc.' yutakon 'you' amënton 'they' (p/a NV) kamënton 'they' (p/a V) mëhchanton 'they' (things) mënkon 'they' (things)'</p>	

ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS	ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS (active intransitive verbs)	ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS
u- 1s	β- 'I'	wë'- '1sA'
~ uy	m- 'you'	a- '2sA'
∅- 1s	∅-k_(n)- 'he/she'	~ o-
a- 2s	(na'na) (k_)n- 'we.Exc.'	~ ë
~ ad-	k_(t)- 'we.D'	~ au-
~ ay-	n-ROOT-tu 'you'	∅- '3sA'
~ aβ-	k_(n)-ROOT-tu 'they'	y- '3sA'
~ au-		~ i-
m- 2s		~ yi-
i- 3s		~ yï-
~ y-		~ yu-
~ it-		~ chu-
ina 1Exc.		t- '3spA'
∅- ... -(no)kon 1Inc.		mën 'we.Exc.'
~ ∅- ...-to ...-kon 2p		ana 'we.D'
~ ad- ... -kon		yuto 'we. Inc.'
~ ay- ... -kon		yutakon 'you'
~ aβ- ... -kon		amënton 'they' (p/a NV)'
~ au- ... -kon		kamënton 'they' (p/a V)'
∅- ... -kon 3p		mëhchanton 'they' (things)'
		mënkton 'they' (things)'

(19-20) make evident that for third singular persons both languages use n- '3sA/3sO', which is a marker also found in Panare for the same purpose. Analogous behavior is shown by Ye'kwana and Kariña with respect to k- '1p.Inc.'.

Other similarities in behavior among other Carib languages spoken within the Venezuelan boundaries are seen at the level of reflexive constructions. For example, in Pemon and Yukpa, as shown in (22), nouns reflexivize by respectively prefixing *te-* and *tü- ~ kü-* to nouns as a general rule. Incidentally, a common feature in Pemón, Panare, Kariña and Yukpa is the presence of the plural marker *-kon* (corresponding *-ko* in Yukpa). Yet, plural marking with *-kon* seems to be a widely-spread trait in Carib.

(22)

PEMON	KARI'ÑA	PANARE	YUKPA	
te- N/V (-kon)	a:u -roro amo:ro -ro mohko -ro:ro na'na -ro:ro -kon kumo:ro -ro -kon kumoñ:aro -ro -kon amoñ:aro -ro -kon mohka:ro -ro -kon	'I REF' 'you REF' 'he/she REF' 'we. Exc..REF' 'we. D.REF' 'we Inc. REF' 'you REF' 'they REF'	ach- V N -(n)kën (-kon)	tü- N kü- N (-ko) <small>(Taken from Meira, S., 2003)</small>

As far as demonstratives is concerned, Pemón and Kari'ña show also relevant likenesses. In (23) below, for example, it might be seen that Pemón *sere* 'this' is morphologically quite close to Kari'ña *e:ro* 'this ANIM', and so is the case with Pemón *muere* 'that' and kari'ña *moro* 'that ANIM'. Likenesses spread far to Yukpa *mash* 'that.sg.' and *masha* 'that.pl' and Panare *muku* 'that, yonder'.

(23)

PEMON		
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
sere/sena	'this'	sereten
muere	'that'	iyamore
chinek	'yonder'	ichanan/ichamo

  

KARI'ÑA		
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
e:ro	'this ANIM'	e:rokon
mohse	'thia INAN'	mohsekon
mo:ro	'that ANIM'	mo:rokon
mohko	'that INAN'	
mohka:ro	'that INAN'	
mo:nu	'yonder ANIM'	mo:nukon
moku	'yonder INAN'	mu:kukon

YUKPA		
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
ma	'this'	masha
mash	'that'	masha
ake	'yonder'	aksha
PANARE		
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
mě'nku	'pers./animal (near)'	měhchanton
sī ~ sīj	'thing (near)'	sikon (visible)
ëmë	'thing (near)'	ëmëkon (visible)
muku	'pers./animal (yonder)'	mukukon
mu	'thing (yonder)'	mehchanton nku (visible) kamonton nku (nonvisible)

The observations in the preceding lines—although quite limited to this point—must open the way for further analysis of the phonological and morphological behaviors of the Carib languages spoken along the northern rim of South America. The first results of the comparison of Pemon and Ye'kwana (or Dekwana, or Makiritare) with Kari'ña (or Kalijña), Panare and Yukpa, as conducted here, signal a trend towards considering Pemon, Panare, Ye'kwana, Kari'ña y Yukpa as all fitting the North Branch of the Carib family. So far, there seem not to be enough arguments in favor of splitting the Carib family into a North and a Central branch.

#### b. Some relevant typological features of the Carib languages

Some of the most relevant typological structural traits as far as the Carib inflectional morphology is concerned are found in (1) person-marking affixes on verbs and nouns, and on some adverbials and postpositions, (2) tense, aspect, mode and number affixes on verbs, (3) possession, tense and number suffixes on nouns, and (4) inflexional suffixes on locative postpositions.

A characteristic of the morphosyntax of these languages is that they show varying degrees of ergatively-organized morphology and syntax. In some, ergativity is strong, in others, it is weaker. The majority of the languages have split systems, partly ergative and partly nominative. The languages in which ergativity is dominant are Akawaio, Pemon, Makushi (all in the North Amazonian branch) and kuikuro and kalapalo (in the South Amazonian branch). In these languages there is a case marking in main and subordinate clauses, and

the person-marking systems and constituent order patterns are also ergatively-organized. Bakairi, another language in the South Amazonian branch, has been described as not having nominal ergative case marking system, which is intrinsically tied to a syntactic SO pivot in complex sentences, both coordinate and subordinate constructions. However, about Bakairi's ergativity, Souza (1991:33-4) introduces the following new elements:

O Bakairi apresenta várias construções gramaticais que são melhor entendidas quando se analisa o Bakairi como língua ergativa.

Uma construção é ergativa quando nela é assinalado o objeto-sintático da mesma forma que o sujeito-sintático dos verbos intransitivos. No caso do Bakairi, que parece ser uma língua sintaticamente ergativa, e não apresenta marcas nominais de caso, a ergatividade é expressa, por exemplo, através do sistema de marcadores de pessoa. O Bakairi tem um sistema de marcadores de pessoa onde as marcas do sujeito dos verbos intransitivos são iguais às marcas dos clíticos que se referem aos objetos dos verbos transitivos. Já as marcas de sujeito dos verbos transitivos compõem um elenco à parte, sendo totalmente diferenciadas das marcas do sujeito do verbo intransitivo. Esse sistema é problemático para as construções com correferencialidade: um sujeito de um verbo intransitivo, por exemplo, não pode ser a um só tempo, do ponto de vista sintático, sujeito de verbo transitivo: a língua ao equiparar o sujeito dos verbos intransitivos ao objeto, diferencia aquele do sujeito de verbo transitivo.

A respeito da ergatividade, acrescenta-se ainda que nas construções ergativas, o objeto-sintático estará sempre em evidência já que nas formas verbais há uma marca que lhe é co-indexada.

All the other languages described in Derbyshire's survey [In Dixon & Aikhevald, 1999:60] have mixed ergative-nominative systems, but differ in the degree of ergativity and nominativity. In most of them the ergativity does not occur in main clauses but it is restricted to subordinate constructions with verbs that have been nominalized or adverbialized.

Gildea (1998) considers that there are at least 5 dominantly-ergative Carib languages. He divides the rest into different groupings depending on the degrees of ergativity and nominativity they display in main clauses. These groupings of Gildea (1998) are based primarily on hypothesis concerning developments in the main clause person-marking and tense-aspect systems, constituent order changes, reanalysis of derivational suffixes as tense-aspect markers, and reanalysis of demonstrative pronouns as auxiliary verbs. Gildea's groupings are summarized by Derbyshire [In Dixon & Aikhevald, 1999: 60] as follows: (1) Carib, karihona, Ye'kwana, Hixkaryana and Wai wai are exclusively nominative/accusative in main clauses, (2) Apalai, Kashuyana, Tiriyo and Wayana, also Yukpa, Japreria and Kari'ña have at least one main clause construction that is ergative, but otherwise are dominantly nominative/accusative, and (3) Panare is a complex system of construction types, some of which are ergative/absolute and others nominative/accusative. He concludes that the dominantly nominative/accusative languages represent the earlier proto-Carib system.

Contrary to Gildea's view that the nominative/accusative system was that basically existing in Proto-Carib, Derbyshire [In Dixon & Aikhenvald, 1999:61] upholds the view that "the languages with dominant ergativity represent the earlier stage of Carib morphosyntax and that the other languages, with varying degrees of mixed ergative/absolute patterning, have developed from that earlier more 'pure' ergative stage." Derbyshire's view about the direction of the change in the Carib family rests on the fact that there is a "rampant ergativity in the Amazonian families (Arawá, Carib, Jé, Pano, Tacana, Tupí-Guaraní and Yanomami). This suggests a long history of ergativity in the area (Derbyshire, 1987)."

My data, as analyzed in this paper, strongly favors Derbyshire's view (or perhaps, I should say that it contradicts Gildea's) since Pemon, Kari'ña, and Ye'kwana possess either pronominal systems differentiated for ergative/absolute marking (morphological devices) or word order mechanisms (pragmatically-motivated ones) to regulate the identifying of subjects and objects. Both of these may equally operate on main and subordinate clauses. In these languages, ergative/absolute strategies share room with other strategies, let's say nominative/accusative ones, under focusing/topicalizing/highlighting conditions. The data suggest that ergativity in Northern Carib is a primeval trait that comes from very early stages in the formation of such languages.

### c. The ergative systems of North branch Carib languages

For the purposes of this study about ergativity in North Carib, I have taken as references only 4 languages: Pemon (Romero-Figueroa, 2000a; Visozo, 2004), Kari'ña (Romero-Figueroa, 2000b), Panare (Palmegiani, 2000), and Ye'kwana (Chavier, 1999).

#### c.1. Pemon

Pemon is predominantly OVS. It has an ergative case-marking system occurring in clauses having the basic OVS word order, and in clauses where a significant part of that basic pattern is preserved, mostly SOV. The nominative-accusative system occurs in clauses showing other types of arrangements. Thus, it might be said that in Pemon, the 'ergative' and the 'nominative/accusative' case mark systems co-exist. In conclusion, like almost all the rest of the Carib languages, Pemon possesses split-ergativity. The operation of this system is accounted for in the forthcoming. I use for the northern Carib split-ergativity analysis that follows the grammatical functions proposed by Dixon (1994): S (intransitive subject), A (transitive subject) and O (transitive object). Even though some linguists, such as Mithun and Chafe (1999), suggest that S, A and O are not proper for all languages, I find that they suffice for the cases of Pemon, Kari'ña, Panare and Ye'kwana.

Pemon transitive arrangements, O tends not to hold any morphological mark; thus, behaving in a manner very much like that of S in intransitives. Conversely, highly-topicalized A's in transitives tend to suffix *-da* ~ *-ya* 'ERG'. O in transitives remains unmarked. Furthermore, S in intransitives suffixes *-Ø* 'ABS'. This is illustrated in (24) below

(24) Intransitive, absolutive SV

- a. tapui -Ø ataremo -Ø kupui  
hut ABS fall down NON-PAST IMMINENT  
'The hut will soon fall down'  
(Armellada y Olza, 1999)

Transitive, ergative AOV

- b. u- rui -ya kaikuse we -pue  
1s.POS brother ERG jaguar kill PAST  
'My brother killed a jaguar'

Transitive, ergative AOV

- c. kaikuse -da u- rui we -pue  
jaguar ERG 1s.POS brother kill PAST  
A jaguar killed my brother'

The operation of the ergative-absolutive markers *-ya* ~ *-da* 'ERG' and *-Ø* 'ABS' in Pemon SV and AOV sentences, as shown in (24.a-c), is quite straight-forward. The ergative-absolutive markers are consistently found in SV and AOV patterns; they are also overwhelmingly seen in OVA patterns such as in (25)

(25) Transitive, ergative OVA

- kese kanka -pue rato yenchi -ton -da  
manioc pull out PAST Rató daughter PL ERG  
'The daughters of Rató pulled out manioc',  
(lit.) 'manioc pulled out of Rató the daughters'

Ergative OVA sentences in the language are of lesser frequency of occurrence than AOV sentences, which suggest that ergativity strongly correlates with topicalization. This matter is dealt with shortly.

Additionally, in Pemon-like in the rest of the Carib languages—there exists a set of verb prefixes simultaneously denoting the agent and the object of the sentence. An example is presented in (26) below

(26) Transitive, ergative OAV

- i- a s- ami -ku -Ø -ina  
3POS footstep 1pERG catch ASEVER NON PAST VOLUNT  
'I catch his/her/its footsteps', or  
'I follow him/her/it'



Such prefixal verb markers are ergative to the extent in which allow the morphological identification of A and O, which is the essence of the existing ergative-absolutive systems worldwide. The ergative-absolutive verb prefixes in Pemon seem to represent A's and/or O's which are very referential/topical, hence placed in a high level of a *scale of referentiality/topicality of the agent and the object* [anaphoric pronoun > definite NP > indefinite NP > non-referential devices] (Givón, 1984:158). Such verb prefixes often occur in the absence of overt NP's performing either as A's and/or O's.

Both the agentive and affected (or patient) roles expressed by the ergative-absolutive verb prefixes in Pemon are clearly set in the first, second and third singular forms, but the affected (or patient) roles are not encoded in the plural ones. The Pemon ergative-absolutive verb-prefix paradigms are presented in (27-28)

(27) ERGATIVE - ABSOLUTIVE PREFIXES (SINGULAR)

ABSOLUTIVE		ERGATIVE	
u-	1s	u-	1A → 2s, 3sO
~ uy		~ uy	
∅-	1s	s-	1A → 3sO
		~ ch-	
a-	2s	a-	2A → 1s, 3sO
~ ad-		~ ad-	
~ ay-		~ ay-	
~ aβ-		~ aβ-	
~ au-		~ au-	
m-	2s	u-	2A → 1sO
i-	3s	i-	3A → 1s, 2s, 3sO
~ y-		~ y-	
~ it-		~ it-	

(28) ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS (PLURAL)

ina	1Exc.
Ø- ... -(no)kon ~ Ø- ... -to	1Inc.
a- ... -kon ~ ad- ... -kon ~ ay- ... -kon ~ aβ- ... -kon ~ au- ... -kon	2p
Ø- ... -kon	3p

The verb prefixes in (27-28) may appear simultaneously with the noun ergative-absolutive markers *-da ~ -ya* 'ERG' and *-Ø* 'ABS' in corresponding transitive and intransitive sentences. In such cases, the ergative-absolutive markers *-da ~ -ya* 'ERG' and *-Ø* 'ABS' would appear as closing verb morphemes, as shown in (29)

(29) Intransitive

a-        wenu        -ma        -pue        -Ø  
2pABS    sleep    GERUND    PAST    ABS  
'You (were) sleeping (when something happened)'

(30) Transitive

i-        putu        -Ø        -ya  
3pERG    know    NON PAST    ERG  
'He/she knows him/her'  
(Armellada y Olza, 1999)

The coexistence of the *-da ~ -ya* 'ERG' and *-Ø* 'ABS' and ergative-absolutive verb prefixes illustrated in (27-28) gives support to the consideration of this analysis that ergativity and referentiality/topicalization are intertwined since sentences (29-30) are part of a discursive piece in which the A's and the O's represent new characters entering the scene being explained within a conversational exchange between the informant and the fieldworker. It is likely that the anaphoric relation between the verb prefix and a topical antecedent marked with *-da ~ -ya* 'ERG' in a preceding sentence is reassured by the verb closing *-da ~ -ya* 'ERG' suffix of the subsequent sentence.

On the other hand, in sentences exhibiting nominative-accusative marking, the identification of the agent and affected (or patient) roles depends on pragmatically motivated factors, mainly constituent-ordering. An example is shown in (31) below

## (31) Transitive

∅- nosan -ton panton -i kama -ina  
 3p.POS old woman PL tale POS. tell VOLIT.

(Ancient times)

'The old women wanted to tell their tale (referring to an ancient narrative)'

(Vizoso, 2004)

Also, mainly in copulative and stative sentences as well as in sentences containing BE in intransitive use (as when taking adverbial complements), A's might be encoded by means of free pronouns of highly deictic value. These appear in (32):

## (32) FREE PRONOUNS

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST	ure 'I' ~ yure	ina 'we, Ex.' ureto 'we, Inc.' ~ yureto yurenokon 'we, Inc.'
SECOND	amare 'you'	amarenokon 'you'
THIRD	muere 'this/that' mesere 'this/that'	(muere)to 'these/those' mesemonan 'these/those'

Some sentences including free pronouns are presented below in (33-36):

(33) tare ina man  
 here 1pEx BE  
 'We (exc.) are here'  
 (Romero-Figueroa, 2000)

(34) ina man tare  
 1pEx BE here  
 'We (exc.) are here'  
 (Romero-Figueroa, 2000)

(35) muere ich -pue sakoro -pe  
 That (one) seem PAST angry as if  
 'That (one) seems as if he were angry'  
 (Vizoso, 2004)

- (36) sakoro -pe muere ichi -pue  
 angry as if that (one) seem PAST  
 ‘That (one) seems as if he were angry’  
 (Visozo, 2004)

As (33-36) show, free pronouns tend to immediately precede verbs, complements moving freely around the AV core.

A very relevant feature of Pemon is that the use of its ergative-absolutive system keeps a straight forward connection with the degree of perfectivity/completeness of the action [Givón (1984:158)’s *scale of perfectivity/completeness of the event: perfective > imperfective; past > present > future*]. The data reveals that the ergative-absolutive pattern is overwhelmingly found in past contexts, mainly in pieces of discourse that narrate ancestral adventures of the ancient Pemon. Another trait of the language is that if the sentence contains a past tense indicator (time or mode), it would also exhibit an ergative (or an absolutive) verb prefix; but if it contains a non-past tense marker, the sentence may or may not be arranged ergatively. The data analyzed reveals the existence of a split-ergative marking system in the language and the presence of a pragmatically motivated nominative system.

## c.2. Kari’ña

Like Pemon, Kari’ña also exhibits split ergativity. The devices the latter uses for distinguishing agents and objects are not substantially-different from those used by the former. Kari’ña lacks noun affixes to mark ergativity-absolutivity, let’s say, in Kari’ña there is no such a suffix as *-da ~ -ya* ‘ERG’. Ergative coding takes place in verbs by means of corresponding sets of prefixes. These are shown in (37-38)

### (37) ERGATIVE PREFIXES

s-	1A → 2s, 3spO
m-	2A → 1s, 3spO
rü-	3A → 1sO
a(r)-	3A → 2sO
∅- k_(n)-	3A → 3sO
(na’na) ∅- (na’na) (k_)n-	1pExc.
k_(s)-	1pD
k_(s)- verb root -tu	1pInc.
m- verb root -tu	2p
∅- verb root -tu (k_)n- verb root -tu	3p

## (38) ABSOLUTE PREFIXES

β- ~ -w	1s
m-	2s
(k_)n-	3s
(na'na) Ø- (na'na) (k_)n-	1pEX.
k_(t)-	1pD.
k_(t)- verb root -tu	1pInc.
m- verb root -tu	2p
(k_)n- verb root -tu	3p

The set of prefixes in (37) are tagged to transitive verbs only. The set of prefixes in (38) may be used with intransitive and some transitive verbs. Transitive verbs in Kariña have infinitives that conform to the pattern (VERB)rü, thus, they take ergative prefixes only. As well, a few verbs with infinitives ending in -rü may attach absolute markers. Besides the (VERB)rü transitive verbs, some Kariña verbs have infinitives of the form (VERB)no. They are intransitives; therefore, they tag absolute markers.

Data collected in different fieldwork sessions lead to the conclusion that, at least for transitive sentences, Kariña consistently places S in initial position, keeping for the OV cluster—in that particular order—the succeeding slots. The order of these constituents is not rigid though, OSV and OVS arrangements are also frequent.

As shown below, in Kariña, the absolute prefixes may or may not coexist with coreferential NP's within sentence boundaries, as respectively presented in (39b) and (39a):

## (39) Intransitive, absolute SV

- a. n- e:ka -i  
3sABS bite PAST  
'It bit'

## Intransitive, absolute SV (anaphoric pronoun)

- b. mürüwüshü n- e:ka -i  
mosquito 3sABS bite PAST  
'The mosquito bit'

Also, as (40) shows, the ergative markers may or may not have anaphoric referents within sentential boundaries, as respectively in (40c) and (40ab):

(40) transitive, ergative AOV

- a. Ø- enosh -i -tu  
 3pERG peck PAST PL  
 'They pecked it'
- b. rü- enepoh -i  
 3sERG show PAST  
 'He/she showed me (something)'
- c. βo'mu ar- a:tok -i  
 cloth 3sERG sew PAST  
 'He/she sewed the piece of cloth'

The data above examined reveals that in Kari'ña, as it occurs in Pemon, the higher elements in the scale of referentiality/topicality (anaphoric pronouns) hold ergative-absolutive marking, which is concomitant with AOV sentential arrangements. The latter seems to be an obligatory condition given the remarkable contrasts observed with respect to the behavior of transitive sentences showing orders different from AOV which never get ergative-absolutive marking irrespective of the existence of high-referentiality conditions. This is seen in (41):

(41) Transitive OVA + OBLIQUE

- a. βe:βe n- ihshoto -i mohko saparo:te -kea  
 wood 3s cut PAST he/she machete INSTR  
 'He/she cut the wood with the machete'

Ditransitive OVA

- b. cho:to -kon -'wa are:pa Ø- epe:mapo:r -a -tu  
 criollo PL DAT manioc 3p sell NON PAST PL  
  
 kari'ña -kon  
 kariña PL  
 'The Kariña sell manioc to the 'criollos''

(41ab) evidences the existence of a nominative/accusative coding system that mainly operates upon non-AOV transitives. The verb prefixes of the nominative-accusative system overlap with the absolutive sub-set of the ergative-absolutive system as this is presented in (38) above, now as (42)

## (42) NOMINATIVE/ACCUSATIVE PREFIXES

β- ~ -w	1s
m-	2s
(k_)n-	3s
(na'na) Ø- (na'na) (k_)n-	1pEx.
k_(t)-	1pD.
k_(t)- verb root -tu	1pInc.
m- verb root -tu	2p
(k_)n- verb root -tu	3p

Returning to (41ab), obviously they are O-initial sentences, not conforming to the AOV pattern. The verbs in these kinds of sentences are marked by the same prefixes that are part of the absolutive set shown in (38). The dual set ABSOLUTIVE-NOMINATIVE/ACCUSATIVE for personal prefixes in Kariña signals the existence of two interacting case-marking systems in the language. This leads to conclude that besides semantic factors regulating ergative mechanisms in Kariña, there are also syntactic factors intervening in them, basically associated with sentential word order.

## c.3. Panare

Upon statistical basis, Palmegiani (2000:107) concludes that OVS is the dominant order in Panare, although with some middle range frequency VSO, SOV and SVO arrangements are also found in the language.

The examining of some of Palmegiani's examples suggests that Panare behaves like Kariña as far as the coding of the agent and object in intransitive and transitive sentences concerns. As seen in (37), Kariña possesses a set of ergative verb prefixes that simultaneously identifies both "the agent" and "the object". In Panare, differently from Pemón—for instance—in which -da ~ -ya 'ERG' is found—there is not any noun affix for marking ergativity-absolutivity. Also, in Panare, like in Pemón and Kariña, the set of ergative verb prefixes clearly operates with singular agents and objects. The language also possesses a set of free pronouns. These are shown in (43-44) below.

(43) ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE PREFIXES

ABSOLUTIVE		ERGATIVE	
wë'-	1s	y- ~ yi- ~ yĩ- ~ yu- ~ chu- t-	1sA → 3sO    1sA → 2,3sO
a- ~ o- ~ ë- ~ au-	2s	a- ~ o- ~ ë- ~ au- mi-	2sA → 3sO   2sA → 3sO
∅- y- ~ i- ~ yi- ~ yĩ- ~ yu- ~ chu- t-	3s 3s     3sp	∅- n- ~ ni- ~ nĩ- ~ ne- ~ në- ~ na- ~ no- ~ nu- y- ~ i- ~ yi- ~ yĩ- ~ yu- ~ chu- t-	3sA → 3sO 3sA → 3sO       3sA → 1,2sO    3spA → 3spO

(44) FREE PRONOUNS

yu ~ chu	1s
amen	2s
kën (humans and animals/visible and non-visible) më' (humans and animals/visible and non-visible) mën (things) ~ man	3s
ana	1p.Exc.
yuta- ... -kon	1p.Inc.
yuto	1p.D



amënton ~ anëmënton ~ añamënton ~ anamonton	2p
kamënton (humans and animals/visible and non-visible) ~ kamonton (humans and animals/visible and non-visible) ~ mëhchanton (humans and animals/only visible) ~ mënkon (things)	3p

The use of absolutive and ergative verb prefixes in Panare straightforwardly correlates with the presence of intransitive and transitive verbs. For example

(45) Intransitive, absolutive

wë- tē -yaj chu  
1sABS go PAST 1s  
'I went'

(46) Transitive, ergative

a. mi- petyu'ma -yaj (amën)  
2sERG hit PAST 2s  
'You hit him/her'

b. arakon Ø- 'petyu'ma -ya' kën  
monkey 3sERG hit PAST 3s.animal/nonvis.  
'He hit the monkey'

It is quite relevant to discuss here the very exceptional behavior of Panare as far as the strong ties set up between verb and subject (whether the latter be referred to as 'subject' or as 'agent'). The typological theory rather suggest the existence of a very tight bond between V and O (or O and V), being much freer the relationship between V and S or A. Strong S/AV cores are also found in Warao, a language with dominant OSV order (Romero-Figueroa, 1997). Panare is rigidly VS in intransitive sentences, which must contain NP's or free pronouns as agents (or subjects). These agentive free pronouns must keep a coreference with absolutive verb prefixes. An example appears in (45). On the other hand, when sentences are transitive without an overt object and possibly without an overt subject (or agent)—which is optional as shown in (46.a)—an ergative verb prefix ensures the identification of the characters. Both situations—in intransitive and transitive sentences—involve a high level of coreferentiality in and out sentence boundaries.

Also, variations of the basic OVA order in transitive sentences, particularly when the object is placed in postverbal position, imply the prefixation of ergative markers as (47) illustrates

- (47) ni- petyu'ma -ya' kën arakon  
 3sERG hit PAST 3s.animal/nonvis. monkey  
 'He hit the monkey'

As in the case of Kariña, the absolutive sub-set of verb prefixes in Panare, in (43) above, now in (48), is the same fitting for nominative-accusative arrangements:

(46) NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE MARKERS

wë'-	1s
a-	2s
~ o-	
~ ë	
~ au-	
Ø-	3s
y-	3s
~ i-	
~ yi-	
~ yĩ-	
~ yu-	
~ chu-	

In Panare, the nominative/accusative case marking system is mostly found in sentences with verbs in the imperfective aspect, such as in (47-48):

- (47) y- petyu'ma -mpë yu  
 3sA hit IMPERFECT 1s  
 'I am hitting it/him/her'

- (48) yi- 'petyu'ma -mpë kë më  
 3sA hit IMPERFECT animal/near animal/visib.  
 'He is hitting me'

In Panare, besides the semantic motivations of the absolutive-ergative patterns illustrated above, there is a syntactic factor playing an important role in the occurrence of it: the fact that most nouns in present-day Panare are verb-by products by means of nominalizations in the manner of subordinate structures. It seems that when a verb nominalization functions as the subject (or agent) of an independent sentence, the complexity grows; thus, the prefixing of ergative-absolutive markers to the verbs which are at the core of those nominalizations operate in favor of the identification of the subject (or agent) and object. This is seen in (49-50) below

- (49) ka'kè' ko'ki tikirinke kawè i- tē -n ya  
 up(wards) firefly glow height 3sABS go NOM when  
 (lit.) 'When a firefly going upwards it glows in the height', or  
 'A firefly glows in the height when it goes up(wards)'
- (50) marana t- i'ka -señ kè' e'ñepa tiwi' ch- ime to'pe  
 copaiba tree ATTRIB skin HABIT animal/near panare hut 3sERG build for  
 (lit.) 'For building a hut a panare skins copaiba trees', or  
 'A panare skins copaiba trees for building huts'

c.4. Ye'kwana

Ye'kwana shows a clear tendency towards SOV as its basic sentential arrangement. OSV and OVS sentences are also frequent in the language. In such a respect, Ye'kwana and Kari'ña behave likewise, a resemblance that extends far beyond up to the operations of the ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative case systems coexisting in them.

Ye'kwana possesses a well-defined set of verb prefixes encoding 'agent' and 'object' functions. When tagged to transitive verbs, a sub-set of corresponding verb prefixes turns into a group of ergative markers simultaneously ensuring the identification of sentential agents and objects. When added to intransitive verbs, the other sub-set of corresponding prefixes playing the role of absolutive markers allows the identification of sentential agents. The ergative-absolutive verb prefixes are seen in (51)

(51) SINGULAR ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE PREFIXES

ABSOLUTIVE MARKERS			ERGATIVE MARKERS	
(active verbs)	(stative verbs)		mön	'1sA/2sO'
y-	w-	'I'	w-	'1sA/3so'
a-	m-	'you'	kö-	'2s'
n-	n-	'he/she/it'	m-	'2s/3sO'
k-	k-	'we.Inc.'	nña m-	'2s/1p.Ex.O'
nña n-	nña n-	'we.Ex.'	y-	'3sA/1sO'
			ö-	'3sA/2sO'
			Ø- ~ n-	'3s'
			k-	'3sA/1p.Inc.O'
			nña Ø-	'3sA/1p.Ex.O'

As it occurs in Pemon, Kari'ña and Panare, the verb-prefixed ergative markers in Ye'kwana encode agents and affected (or patient) roles for first, second and third singular persons. In the case of plural persons, the affected (or patient) ones might only be identified from the context. The plural ergative-absolutive prefixes are shown in (52) below

(52) PLURAL ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE PREFIXES

k- verb root -to	1p INC
nña: mön- verb root -to	1p EXC
~nña: n- verb root -to	1p EXC
m- verb root -to	2p
n- verb root -to	3p

Some of Chavier (1999)'s Ye'kwana examples re-analyzed are included in the forthcoming. Examples of ergative-absolutive marked sentences in Ye'kwana are presented in (53) below

(53) Intransitive

- a. kuyuhani n- ünkü -I öwato -ho  
 Kuyuhani 3sABS sleep REC. PAST/PERF hammock in  
 'Kuyuhani slept in the hammock'

Transitive

- a. kuyuhani haaha n- ene -anö chu: -taka  
 Kuyuhani father 3sERG see REC. PAST/IMPERF bush inside  
 'My father saw Kuyuhani in the bush'
- b. uu w- eheme -I hata -ka  
 manioc 1sERG buy REC. PAST/PERF village in  
 (cooked)  
 'I bought manioc in the village'

The examples in (53) seem to indicate that the ergative-absolutive case system of Ye'kwana responds to high levels of referentiality [*anaphoric pronoun* > *definite NP* > *indefinite NP* > *non-referential devices*] and completeness in time [*past* > *present* > *future*]. Most of the sentences in which ergativity-absolutivity appears encoded also contain past tense markers, which suggest that the level of perfectivity may play a role in the Ye'kwana use of ergative patterns. It is worthwhile to point out that Ye'kwana has a complicated group of tense/aspect suffixes, which is summarized in (54)

## (54) TENSE/ASPECT VERB SUFFIXES

TENSE/ASPECT	SUFFIX
Present	-a
recent past perfective	-i
recent past imperfective	-anö
remote past perfective	-ne
remote past imperfective	-akene
imminent future	-ta
Future	-'de

(Taken from Chavier, M., 1999)

The Ye'kwana tense/aspect suffixes in (54) are quite systematic respecting their operations either on (VERB)dü [=transitives with infinitives ending in -dü] or (VERB)nö [=intransitives with infinitives ending in -nö]. As well, the ergative-absolutive prefixes in (51-52) are quite predictable regarding their relationships with the (VERB)dü and (VERB)nö types, since the ergative prefixes only get tagged to the former—particularly if past tense suffixes are also present—whereas the absolutive markers are prefixed to the latter.

Ye'kwana also has cases in which the arrangements of sentences fit a nominative-accusative pattern. For example, a sentence such as (55)

- (55) na'kukwano -komo -he üwü ha'ta -wo  
 fish COLL. ADVR. 1p.S village in  
 (lit.) 'I live where there are many fish',  
 (Chavier, 1999)

contains a free pronoun overtly-expressed, üwü 'I', which is the agent. On the other hand, the sentence is in the present, a tense that does not favor ergativity patterning in the language. Another example of nominative-accusative marking is presented in (56)

- (56) hoohe soto ñña a'deu'ha -a -to  
 a lot people 1p.PL (Exc.) welcome NON-PAST PL  
 'A lot of people welcome us'

In (56), the agent (or subject) of the sentence is hoohe soto 'a lot of people' and the object is the free pronoun ñña 'we'. From comparing (55-56) and (53), it might be concluded that two case marking systems co-exist in Ye'kwana, and that the ergative-absolutive one splits to give room to the nominative-accusative in some grammatical contexts.

## FINAL REMARKS

For conclusive results about “ergativity” in Northern Carib, as this genetic sub-branch has been re-arranged for this paper, further examination of new data must be carried out. This is under way right now. Irrespective of having presented here very preliminary analyses of ergativity in Pemon, Kari’ña, Panare and Ye’kwana, an important point is that to some extent this research has proven that the ergative-absolutive systems of these languages are deeply rooted in their particular grammars. It might be thought this way given that (a) the morpho-syntactic processes linked to their ergative systems spread uniformly along the extensive geographical area where they are located in Venezuela, (b) such morpho-syntactic processes operate in an analogous manner in all of them, being the most relevant feature that they have led to “a split ergative system” of quite homogeneous configuration, and (c) the events corresponding to ancestral activities as they are part of oral narrative show a profusion of uses of ergative mechanisms, not found nowadays in such a high intensity in everyday life conversation. Even though further investigation of diachronic nature must be conducted, everything in Pemon, Kari’ña, Panare and Ye’kwana seems to point out the changes undergone by these languages along their evolution, perhaps of endogenous motivation within the languages themselves, or perhaps triggered by exogenous factors (for example, extended Spanish and Portuguese contact for more than five centuries) allowed a nominative-accusative system to open a breach in their primal ergative-absolutive system. This situation strongly signals that ergativity represents the oldest stage in Northern Carib, and that the move to a (nominative-)accusative stage might have started later. Some traits of their existing marking systems favor the ergative to nominative direction of this change: Firstly, the ergative system is used more frequently than the accusative, and secondly, the ergative system works as an efficient meaning preserving means within a context characterized by a great freedom of sentential patterning.

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