

# **Split-ergativity in the Hittite language and possible sources of ergativity**

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# Structure of the talk

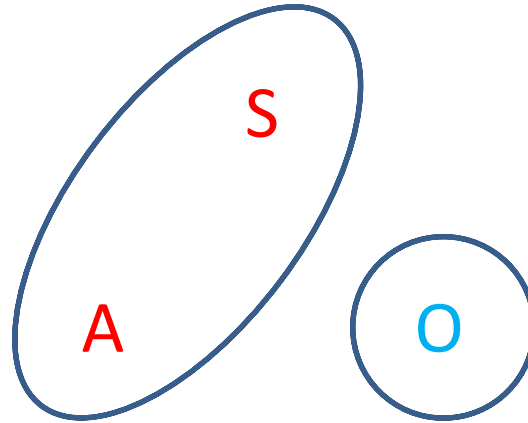
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# Introduction to ergativity

# Relational typology – subject alignment – ergativity

- Relational typology = identifying types of how grammatical relations (S, A, O, T, R) behave with respect to each other (Velupillai 2012:239-242)
- Subject alignment = ‘combinations of S, A, O’ (Velupillai 2012:239-242)
- A = S / O **NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE**
- S = O / A **ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE**
- S / A / O **TRIPARTITE**
- S = A = O **NEUTRAL**
- A = O / S **DOUBLE-OBLIQUE**

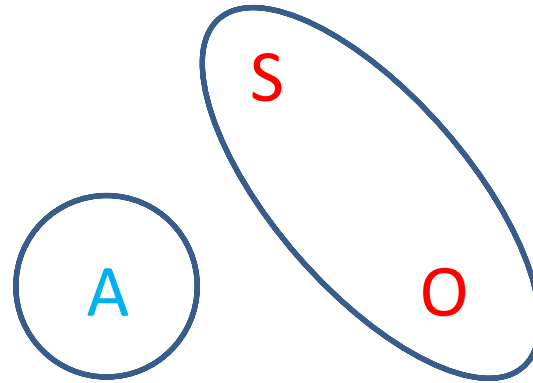
# Relational typology – subject alignment – ergativity



(1) **Dominus<sup>S</sup>** curri-t.  
master.NOM run-3SG  
The master runs.

(2) **Dominus<sup>A</sup>** **senator-em<sup>O</sup>** vide-t.  
master.NOM senator-AKK see-3SG  
The master sees the senator.

# Relational typology – subject alignment – ergativity



(3) **Dominus<sup>S</sup>** curri-t.  
master.ABS run-3SG  
The master runs.

(4) **Dominu-m<sup>A</sup>** **senator<sup>O</sup>** vide-t.  
master.ERG senator.ABS see-3SG  
The master sees the senator.

# Alignment split and alignment shift

- **Alignment split:** two or more types of alignment in a language
- Conditioned by one or more language-internal factors
- Typical splits: TAM split (tense, aspect, mood), NP split (mostly animacy/gender), clause type split (main clause, subordinate clause)  
(Dixon 1994: 70-104)
- Construction-based approach: alignment varies across constructions

# Alignment split and alignment shift

- **Alignment shift:** the change of alignment in a language's (sub)system
- E.g. accusative → neutral (Old English → contemporary English)

	Nominative	Accusative
Old English	cear	cear-e
Contemporary English	sorrow	sorrow



# Expressions of ergativity

- Morphematic marking

	<b>Synthetic marking</b>	<b>Analytic marking</b>
<b>Head-marking</b>	Ergative congruence marking on verbs	e.g. ergative sentence type markers
<b>Dependent-marking</b>	Ergative case	Ergative adpositions/particles

- Word order marking
- Suppletive stems

# Possible sources of ergativity

# Possible Sources: Ergative from passive

## Passive:

- Patient: (often unmarked) subject/nominative
- Agent: either omitted or surfacing as a marked oblique

## Ergative:

- Patient: (often unmarked) absolutive
- Agent: marked ergative

# Possible Sources: Ergative from passive

(6) Bili kama dene-m  
dog.NOM eat fish-ACC  
The dog eats the fish.

(7) Dene kama-la bili-se.  
fish.NOM eat-PASS dog-OBL  
The fish gets eaten by the dog.

(8) Bili-se kama-la dene.  
dog-ERG eat-??? fish  
The dog eats the fish.

→ *what's -la?*

# Possible Sources: Ergative from passive

Possible splits:

Bili-se          kama-la          dene.

dog-ERG        eat-tr          fish

eat-perf

eat-past

eat-3

...

→ -la as a marker of transitivity

→ aspect split

→ tense split

→ person split

The dog eats/has eaten/ate the fish.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from nominalisations

The dog eats the fish.

The fish is the dog's eating.



- The formerly unmarked agent is morphologically marked and removed from subject position.
- The patient is moved from its marked object position into the unmarked subject position.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from nominalisations

(9) Bili kama dene-m  
dog.NOM eat fish-ACC  
The dog eats the fish.

(10) Bili-se kama-t dene.  
dog-GEN eat-NOMI fish.NOM → *Zero-copula presumed*  
The dog's eating/food is the fish.

(11) Bili-se kama-t dene  
dog-ERG eat fish.ABS → *What's -t?*  
The dog eats the fish.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from nominalisations

Possible splits:

Bili-se      kama-t      dene

dog-ERG    eat-tr      fish      → -t as a marker of transitivity

eat-perf    → aspect split

eat-past    → tense split

eat-3      → person split

...

The dog eats/has eaten/ate the fish.



# Possible Sources: Ergative from instrumental

(12) Lik      satu-ke      lepa      kili-m  
3.NOM key-INST      open      door-ACC

They open the door with the key.

*If the language is pro-drop the subject can be omitted:*

(13) Satu-ke      lepa      kili-m  
key-INST      open      door-ACC

or: key-ERG      open      door-ACC

→ *tripartite*

The key opens the door.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from instrumental

(14) Satu-ke        lepa    kili-m  
key-ERG        open door-ACC  
The key opens the door.

→ High likelihood for animacy split

→ However, by analogy this might turn into a person split or result in an alignment shift

# Possible Sources: Ergative from indexical elements

(15) Bili kama dene  
dog eat fish  
The dog eats the fish.

(16) Dene lik kama bili  
fish 3 eat dog  
It's the fish that eats the dog. / The fish, it eats the dog.

(17) Bili-lik kama dene.  
dog-ERG eat fish  
The dog eats the fish.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from indexical elements

Possible splits:

- Animacy split
- Emphasis split

# Possible Sources: Ergative from directionality

(18) Ko kama ba.  
1 eat 2  
I eat you.

(19) Ko kama dene.  
1 eat fish  
I eat the fish.

(20) Dene kama ko.  
fish eat 1  
It's the fish I eat. / I eat *the fish*.

(21) Dene tul kama ko.  
fish hither eat 1  
ERG  
The fish eats me.

(22) Bili kama dene.  
dog eat fish  
The dog eats the fish.

# Possible Sources: Ergative from directionality

- a very specific person split: only 3rd person agents acting on 1st/2nd person patients get ergative marking
- similar to direct-inverse systems

# Interim conclusion

- The hypotheses for the origins of ergativity we examined are:
  - passive
  - nominalisations
  - instrumental
  - indexical elements
  - directionality
- These hypotheses are intertwined: **one split does not only have one possible origin** and one origin might lead to different splits
- There is not only one kind of ergativity – It can surface in many different forms, splits
- This has only been a simplified preview – reality is as per usual more complex.

# Split-ergativity in the Hittite language?



# The Hittite language 1: Basic facts

- Ancient Indo-European language (+)
- Spoken in Anatolia
- Language of the Hittite empire
- Written with cuneiform script on clay tablets



Map 1: Location of the Hittite empire around 1350BC (green line; CC BY-SA 4.0, created by Jan van der Crabben based on wikipedia).

# The Hittite language 2: Genealogy

- Ancient Indo-European language (†)
- Earliest attestation of IE:
  - 1550 B.C. (textual witness)
- Part of the Anatolian branch (†)

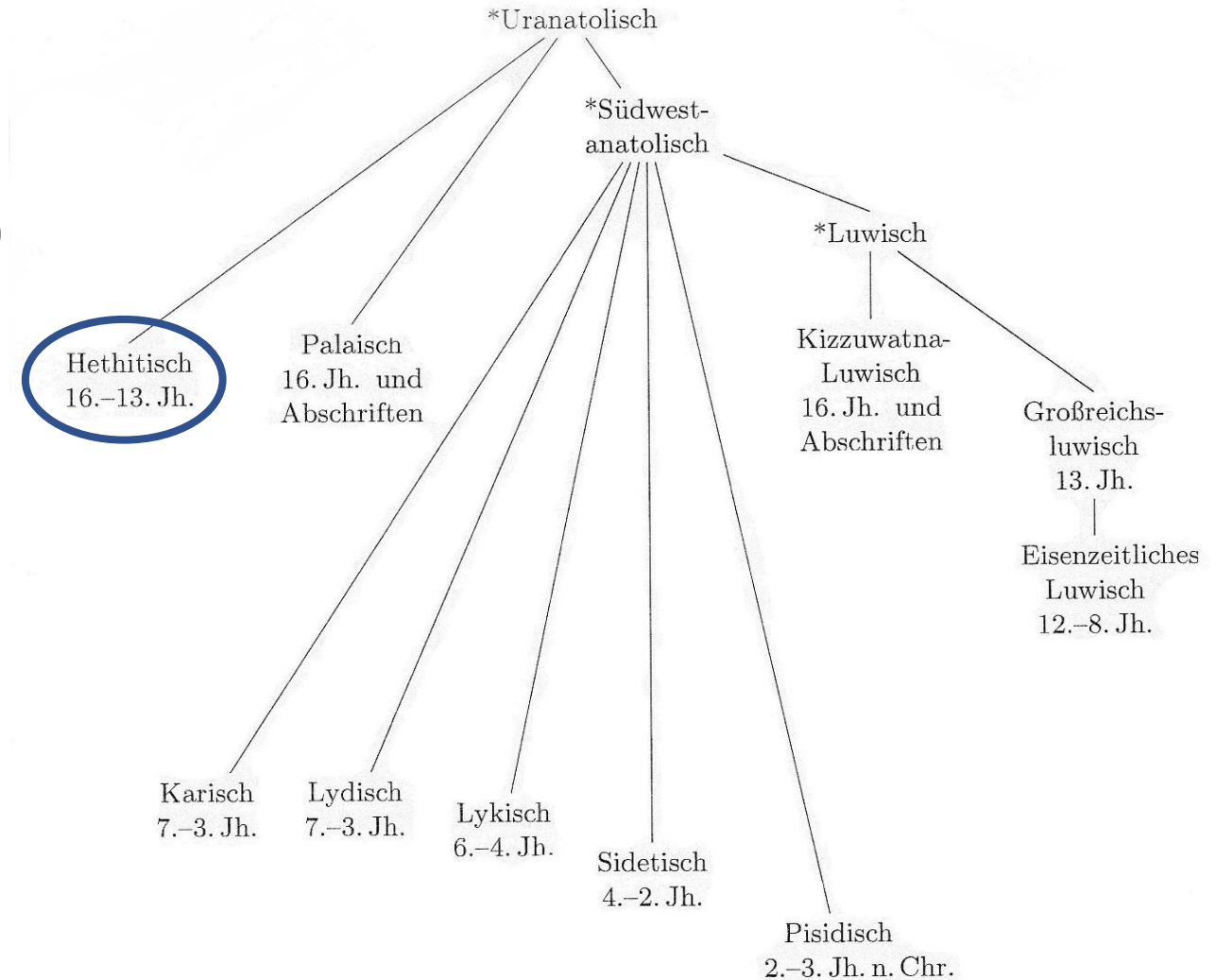


Figure 1: Structure of the Anatolian branch of Indo-European (Rieken 2015: 26).

# The Hittite language 3: Research history

- Cuneiform script known from Sumerian & Assyrian
- Deciphered and classified in the early 20th century:
  - 1902: tentative interpretation as Indo-European
  - 1906: excavations in Turkey find the capital Hattusa → large archives
  - 1917: classification affirmed
- Nowadays best-attested and most intensively studied Anatolian language (over 25.000 fragments of clay tablets)

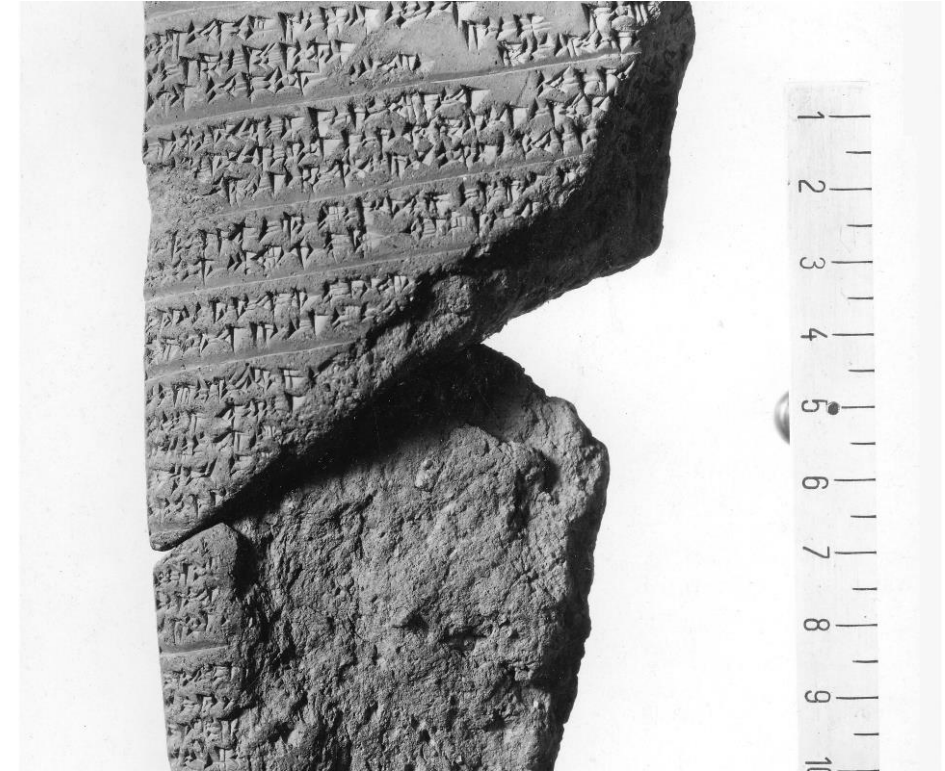


Figure 2: Anitta text ([hethiter.net/](http://hethiter.net/): fotarch BoFN01408).

# The Hittite language 4: Morphosyntax

Hittite is mostly...

- synthetic
  - suffixing
  - and shows relatively clear boundaries between nouns, verbs and adjectives
- 

- **Nominal forms:**

- **2 genera** (common, neuter)
- **2 numbers** (singular, plural)
- **8 cases** (vocative, nominative, accusative, genitive, allative, dative-locative, ablative, instrumental; with some syncretism)

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

Nominal declension in Old Hittite (Hoffner/Melchert 2008):

	SG (common)	PL (common)	SG (neuter)	PL (neuter)
Nominative*	<i>-š, -∅</i>	<i>-eš</i>	<i>-∅, -n</i>	<i>-∅, -a</i>
Accusative*	<i>-n, -an</i>	<i>-uš</i>	<i>-∅, -n</i>	<i>-∅, -a</i>
Ergative	-	-	<i>-anza</i>	<i>-anteš</i>

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

- Synopsis of subject alignment in Hittite (according to Hoffner/Melchert 2008):

Subclass	Old Hittite		New Hittite	
	Pronouns	Nouns	Pronouns	Nouns
SG (common)	ACCUSATIVE	ACCUSATIVE	ACCUSATIVE (NEUTRAL)	ACCUSATIVE
PL (common)	ACCUSATIVE	ACCUSATIVE	ACCUSATIVE/NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL
SG (neuter)	NEUTRAL	ERGATIVE	NEUTRAL	ERGATIVE
PL (neuter)	NEUTRAL	ERGATIVE	NEUTRAL	ERGATIVE

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

## Prior opinions of researchers

**Hoffner/Melchert** (2008: 72-73): „[...] when a neuter noun appears as the subject of a transitive verb, it takes an **ergative case** ending: -anza in the singular (rarely written -az [...] or -anteš in the plural.“

**Rieken** (2015: 42-44) states that functionally we in fact deal with an **ergative pattern**, but due to the derivational properties (genus-switch, polyfunctionality) **refuses to call it an ergative case**.

**Other authors** (Josephson 2004; Neu 1989; Oettinger 2001 and Zeilfelder 2001) claim that **individualizing and/or anthropomorphizing** is the main function of the morpheme in question.

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

## The morpheme *-ant-*

- (23) *ma-a-an-an*                      *pa-ah-hu-en-an-za*                      *ar-ha*                      *wa-ar-nu-zi*  
*man=an*                                      *pahhuen-anza*                                      *arha*                                      *warnuzi*  
OPT=3SG.ACC                      Fire.OBL-ERG.SG                                      away                                      burn.PRES.3SG  
'I wish fire would burn it up' (KBo 32.14 ii 6-7 [Neu 1988:101])



# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

## The morpheme *-ant-*

- the **pronunciation probably is /ants/**, only written *-anza* due to cuneiform script (syllabic)
- most scholars interpret:
  - ERG.SG: <-anza> = /-ant-s/
  - ERG.PL: <antes> = /-ant-es/

Hoffner/Melchert 2008	SG (common)	PL (common)
Nominative (Old Hittite)	-š, -∅	-eš

→ **ERG = *-ant-* + common gender NOM**

Fits together: The alleged ergative case has a **gender-switching effect** (neuter > common)

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

The problem: polyfunctionality and interpretability of *-ant-*

Participles (2)

- (2) *[wa-]al-ha-an-za e-es-du*  
*walh-ant-s es-du*  
hit-PTCPL-NOM be-IMP.3SG  
,Be it smashed!‘ (Bo 2533, I, 24-25)

denominal/deadjectival  
adjectives (3)

- (3) *tessumis natanza*  
*tessumi-s natant-s*  
mug-NOM of.reed-NOM  
,mug of reed‘ (*natti* ,reed‘; cf. Tischler 2001)

Rare ablative allomorph (4)

- (4) *GIŠlut-ta-an-za*  
*GIŠlutta-ants*  
Window-ABL  
,from the window‘  
(Hoffner/Melchert 2008)

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

The problem: polyfunctionality and interpretability of *-ant-*

2 unexplained contexts (maybe ergative extension)

neuter words with  
*-ant-* + other case suffix  
(5)

(5) [(*kā*)]*šata=šmaš=kan*      *utniy-and-an*      *lāluš*      *dāḥḥun*  
just.now=2PL.OBL=PTCL    land-**ant?**-GEN.PL    tongue.ACC.PL    take.1SG.PST  
'I have just taken the slanders of the inhabitants from you.' (Hoffner/Melchert 2008: 258)

some common gender  
nouns with *-ant-* (6)

(6) ... <sup>LU</sup>*sankunniy-anza*    **BAL-ahhun**  
... priest-**ERG.SG?**    offer.drink.to.the.gods-1.SG.PRT  
,... (and) the priest offers drinks to the god(s).' (KUB I 1, 18-20)

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

## The really important question

- Is **S = O ≠ A**?
- That is:
  - (i) Is *-anza/-antes* only used in A-position (and not in S- or P-function)?
  - (ii) Is *-anza/-antes* consistently used in A-position?
- Both can be answered easily: **YES** with only very few fringe cases (,become')
- (Even if the *-ant-* marker appears in other functions, another case marker is added; worst case is: *-ant-* + ACC, resulting in a marginal tripartite alignment pattern)

→ In short: There is **inflectional (split-)ergativity in Hittite**

# Split-ergativity in Hittite?

## Cognitive & Sociolinguistic factors

- **Cognitive:** Animacy hierarchy (Dixon 1994: 85):

1st person – 2nd person –DEM/ 3rd person – proper nouns – common nouns (**human** – animate – **inanimate**)

- ergative more probable to the right
- main function: marking the unexpected A-function use

- **Sociolinguistic:** Areal feature (Dixon 1994: 3):

The near-by languages Hattic (Anatolia), Hurro-Urartian (northern Mesopotamia), Sumerian (southern Mesopotamia) and Elamic (southern Mesopotamia) all show ergativity to varying degrees.

# Possible origins of Hittite split-ergativity

## 2 competing hypotheses

- **ergative from ablative** (Garrett 1990)
- **ergative from derivational marker**, i.e. participle or gender-changing derivational marker (Oettinger 2001, Dardano 2010)

# Possible origins of Hittite split-ergativity

## Ergative from ablative?

- **Similar** to Hittite ablative: -az /-ats/, -za /-ts/ (Garrett 1990: 266)
- **Partial Syncretism**: “There is a rare ablative ending *-anza*” (Hoffner/Melchert 2008: 77)
- Proto-Anatolian ablative-instrumental: \*-ati, \*-anti (Garrett 1990: 266)
- **Possible cognate** to putative ergatives in 2 other Anatolian languages:
  - a) Hittite: -ants (\*ti > \*tsi > ts; e.g. *lutta-ants* ‘window’)
  - b) Luwian: -antis (e.g. *parn-antis* ‘house’)
  - c) Lykian: -ēti (\*an > ē; e.g. *tes-ēti* ‘oath’)

# Possible origins of Hittite split-ergativity

## Ergative from ablative?

- Reinterpretation of instrument to agent in transitive clauses with 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero-subject (compare part 2: Possible origins of ergativity)
  - Subsequent reanalysis of *-ants* as *-ant-s*
  - *-ant-* + common gender nominative *-s* (sg) and *-es* (pl) can be seen from pl. *ant-es*
- reason for gender-switching property



# Possible origins of Hittite split-ergativity

## Ergative from derivational marker?

„[...] this formation is sometimes referred to as 'animatizing', to reflect the widespread view that it is characterized by a derivational suffix whose function is to transfer A-function neuter nouns to the common or 'animate' gender.“

(Garrett 1990: 266)

- Denominal adjectiviser (cf. Garrett 1990: 288):
  - *utne* ‚land‘ + *-ants* > *utniyanza* (/utniy-ant-s/)
  - meaning (i): ‚the one of the land > inhabitant‘
  - meaning (ii): ‚the one of the land > the land (itself) > the land (anthropomorphized) > the land (as an agent)‘
- Gender-switching property from animated semantics

# Possible origins of Hittite split-ergativity

## Ergative from derivational marker?

Anthropomorphising is not crucial, but might have been a bridging context:

- (24) *pár-ku-nu-ud-du*    *šū-up-pí-iš*    *A-an-za*    *HUL-lu-un*    *EME-an [...]*  
*parkunu-du*    *suppi-s*    *weten-ants*    *idalu-n*    *lala-n [...]*  
Cleanse-IMP.3SG    holy-NOM    Water-ERG    evil-ACC    tongue-ACC  
,The holy water shall cleanse the evil tongue [...].’ (Dardano 2010: 179)

→ Would explain the yet unexplained *-ant-* extension

# Conclusion

- Clear distribution: even despite the confusing polyfunctionality of *-ant-* it is clear that **neuter nouns require the endings *-anz(a)* or *-antes* in A function (→ split-ergativity affirmed)**
- Makes sense functionally (**distinctiveness, markedness**) and geographically (**areal feature**: Hattic, Hurro-Urartian, Sumerian)
- Derivational or inflectional: **ergative in Hittite is clearly inflectional**, since there is a grammatical rule triggered by **syntactic environment** and causes **no notable semantic differences** (gender-switch & allegedly metaphorical animacy are not required for)
- Exact **origin is unclear**, but **ablative-instrumental > ergative** is probable

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# Research history & etymology

- Etymology: ergative from Ancient Greek *ἔργον* 'achievement, work'

# Research history & etymology

- Etymology: ~~ergative from Ancient Greek ἔργον 'achievement, work'~~

Actual etymology: Latin preposition *ergā* 'right against, next to'



# Research history & etymology

- Etymology: ~~ergative from Ancient Greek ἔργον 'achievement, work'~~

Actual etymology: Latin preposition *ergā* 'right against, next to'

- First used (in the modern sense): Pater Wilhelm Schmidt (1902)

→ ergative case as the case of the subject in a transitive clause

(Earlier use meaning 'comitative' in the late 19th century)