

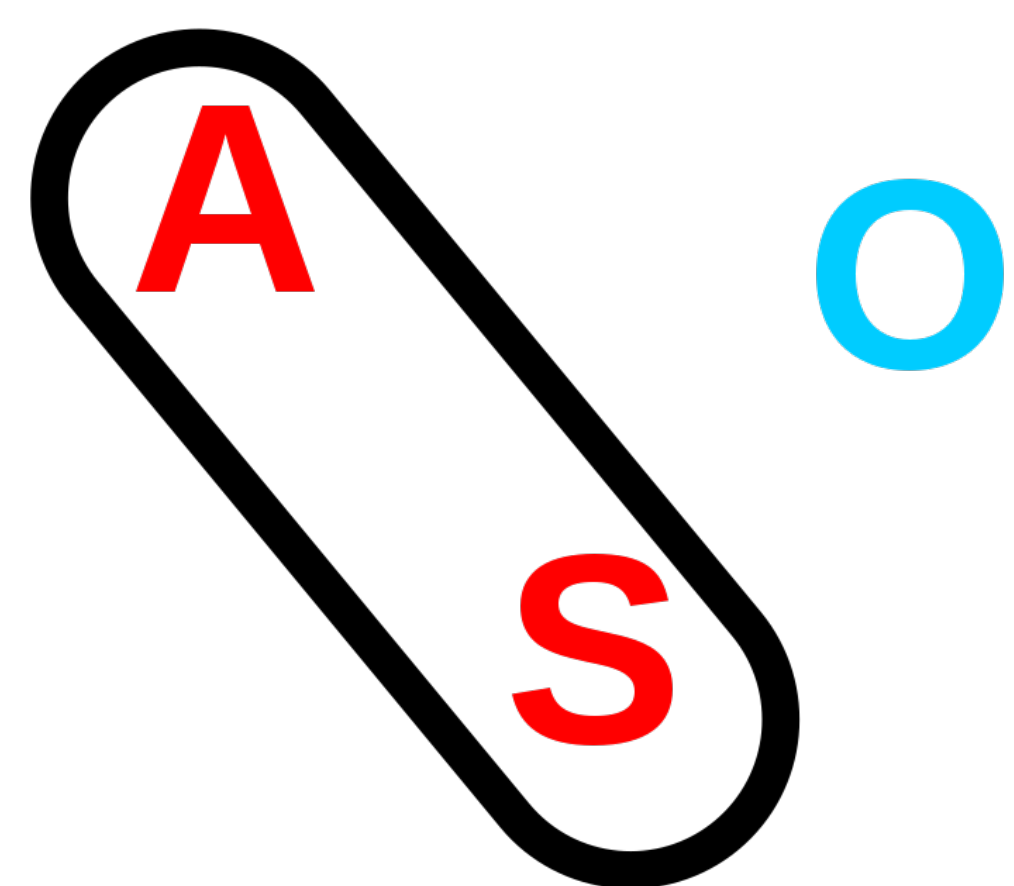
Algonquian languages are not ergative

Ergativity

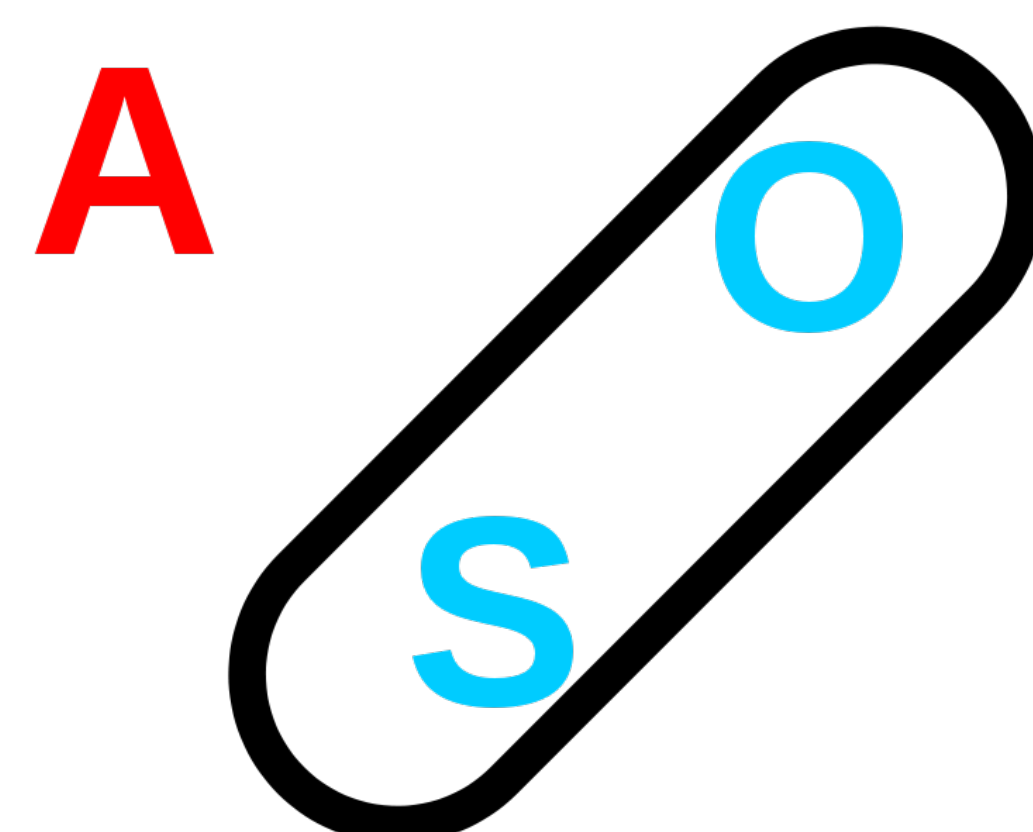
In most languages, intransitive **subjects** are treated the same as **agents**. These languages are known as **accusative**. However, in twenty-five percent of the world's languages, the roles are reversed, and intransitive **subjects** are treated the same as **objects**.

These languages are called **ergative**, and the phenomenon is known as **ergativity**. While some languages are “fully ergative,” others only have ergative structures and patterns.

In linguistics, ergativity is often illustrated by this image of alignment: accusative vs. ergative (where A stands for agent, S for intransitive subject, and O for object).



accusative alignment



ergative alignment

Approach

The goal of my research was to understand whether Algonquian languages are truly **ergative** or rather **accusative** languages that happen to have ergative patterns.

This was done by working with Algonquian data, examining the existing arguments for Algonquian languages being ergative, and critically evaluating these arguments based on what constitutes the fundamental ergativity of a language.

These are the existing arguments for Algonquian being ergative that were examined in my work:

Peripheral agreement

Hewson 1987,
Bruening 2007

TA absolute form

Hewson 1987

Coordination

Johnson & Rosen
2012

Verb stem agreement

Johnson & Rosen
2012

Findings

All the existing evidence for Algonquian languages being ergative seems to demonstrate:

- 1) **shallow ergative patterns** can't be used as a diagnosis for whether a language is ergative or not (which includes peripheral agreement, verb stem agreement, and coordination);
- 2) **patterns that aren't ergative**, just are common among ergative languages, which cannot be used as evidence for a language being ergative (such as the existence of TA absolute form and antipassives).

Based on this evidence and after examining the properties of the inverse, the pattern that does demonstrate deep ergative properties, I conclude that Algonquian languages are, in fact, **accusative**, despite having a number of ergative patterns.