

Case Systems, Case Theory and Case in the Causative Constructions of Hungarian, Basque and Sakha

Syntax: Lecture 9

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Case

- Case is a morphological marking of nominal elements
 - E.g. Nouns, Determiners and (non-predicative) Adjectives
- Two basic kinds of case
 - Core case – typically related to grammatical function (subject, object)
 - Inherent case – typically related to the semantic role of the nominal (goal, location, path, etc.)
- We will be concerned only with Core cases here.
- E.g. Hungarian
 - Mari-Ø ajándéko-t adott János-nak.
M-CASE present-CASE gave J-CASE
'Mari gave János a present,'

Case Systems

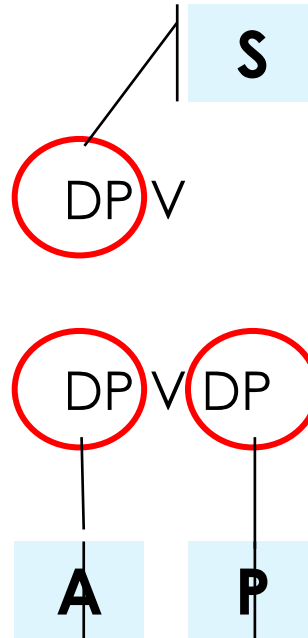
- Some languages do not have morphologically distinct cases
 - E.g. Mandarin, Swahili, Irish, Tagalog, etc.
 - Neutral Case System
- Other languages do make a morphological case distinctions
 - But they do it in one of two main ways

Case Alignments

- Sentences can contain one or more nominal phrases
 - Intransitive vs. Transitive
- Intransitive
 - The ship sank DP V
- Transitive
 - The sun scorched the field DP V DP

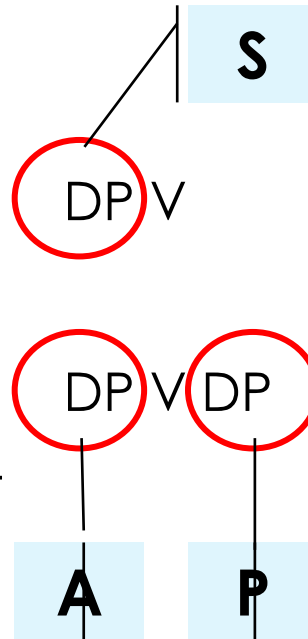
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Case Alignments

- Sentences can contain one or more nominal phrases
 - Intransitive vs. Transitive
- Intransitive
 - The ship sank
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 - The sun scorched the field
- One function of case might be to differentiate A and P



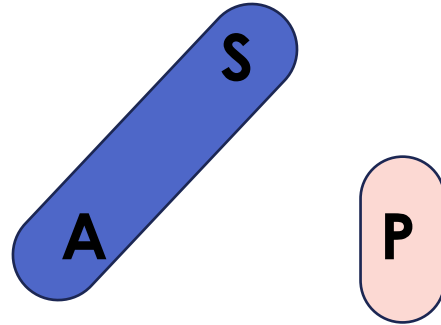
Nominative – Accusative alignment

S

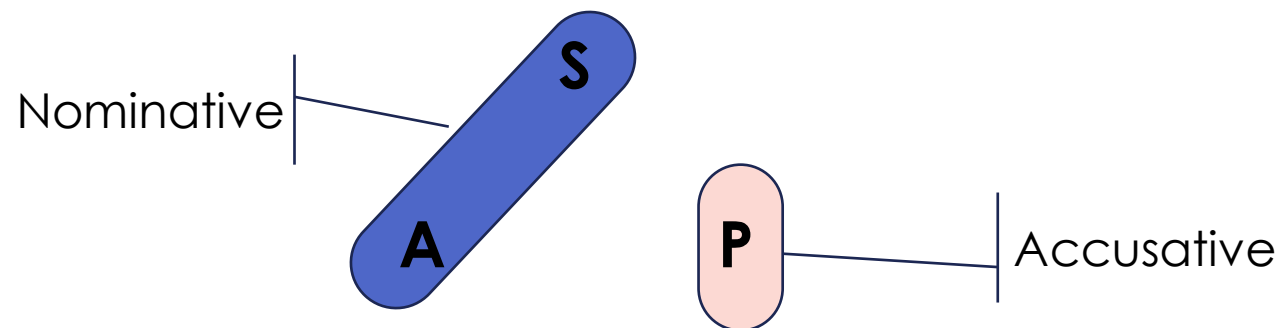
A

P

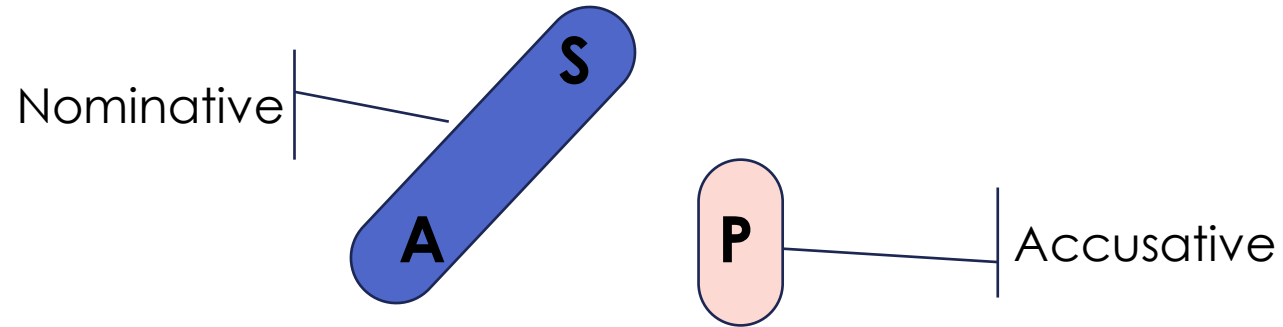
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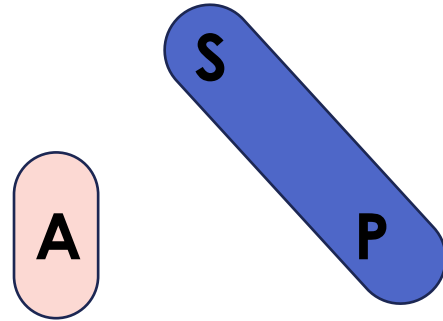


E,g, Hungarian, Japanese, Turkish, Polish, etc.

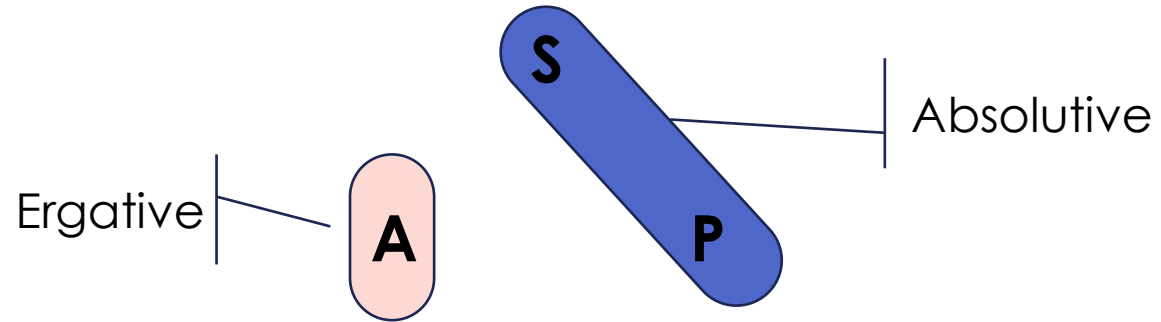
Ergative – Absolutive alignment

S
A P

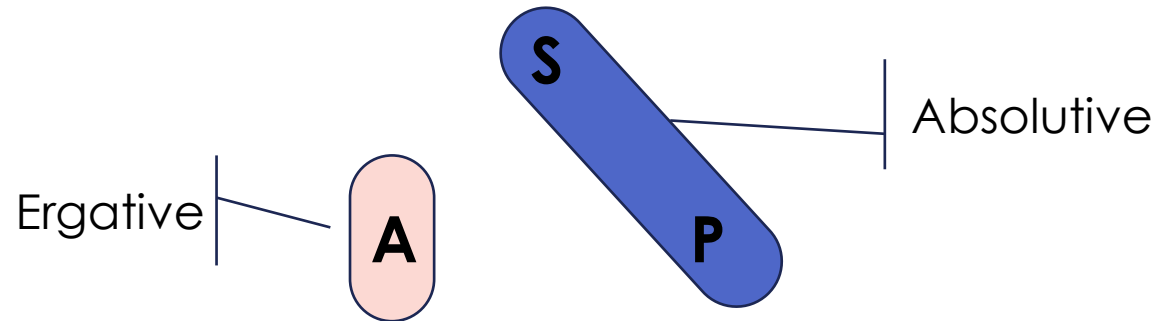
Ergative – Absolutive alignment



Ergative – Absolutive alignment



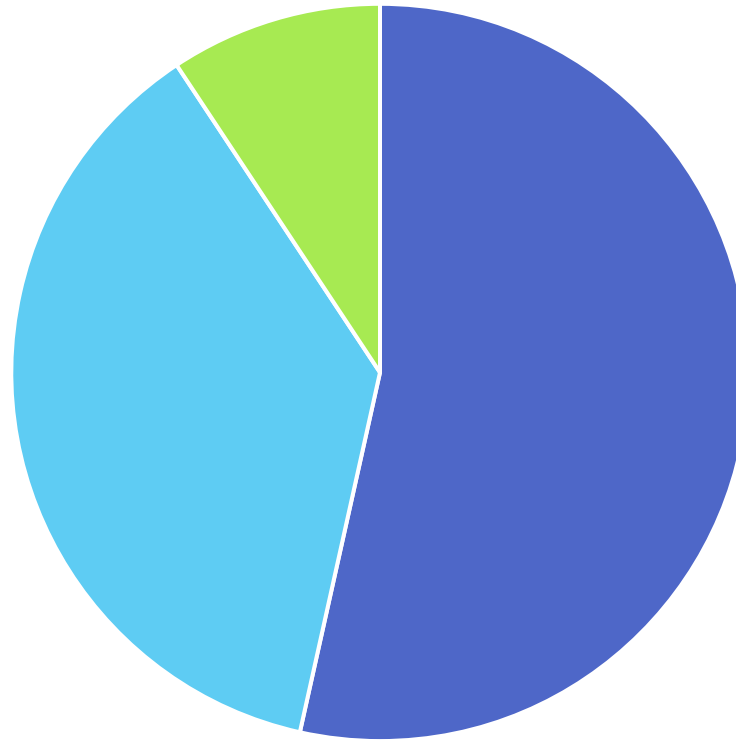
Ergative – Absolutive alignment



E,g, Basque, Chukchi, Pitjantjatjara, etc.

Case Systems in World's Languages

Morphologically Marked Case Systems



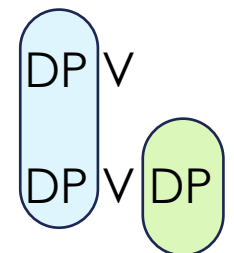
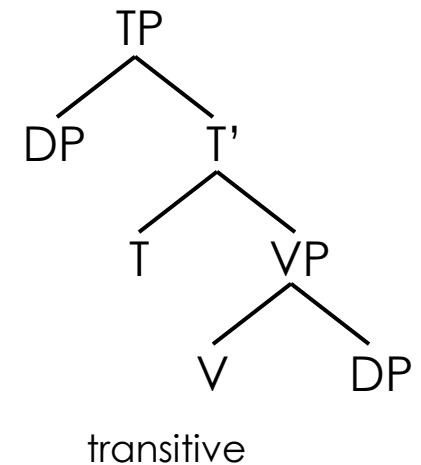
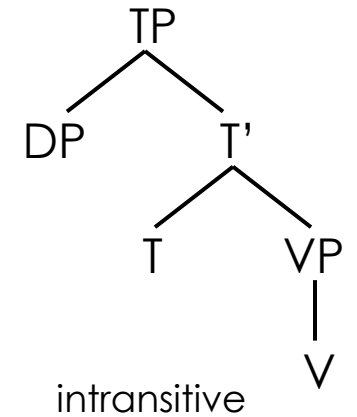
■ Accusative = 53.5% ■ Ergative = 37% ■ Other = 9.5%

Dependent Case Theory

- Dependent Case Theory (DCT) was devised specifically to account for the Nominative-Accusative / Ergative-Absolutive division
 - Proposed by Marantz 1991 but expanded on by Baker 2015
- It assumes that structural cases fall into two types
 - Dependent case
 - Unmarked case
 - In DCT, 'unmarked case' does not necessarily mean 'morphologically' unmarked
- These cases are assigned in a particular order
 - Dependent first
- Dependent case can only be assigned when there are two nominal phrases (i.e. in transitive contexts)
 - It can be assigned to one or the other of these
- Unmarked case is assigned to anything which is not assigned dependent case

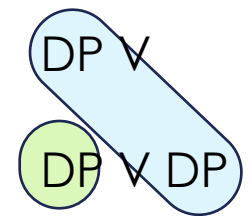
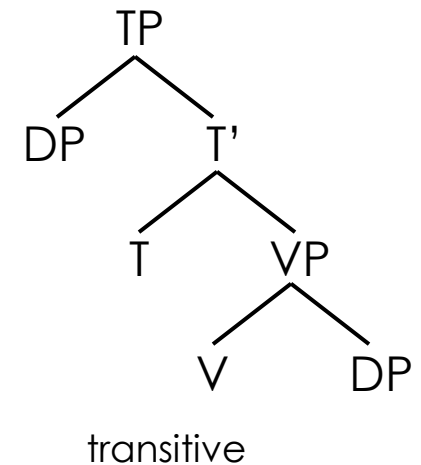
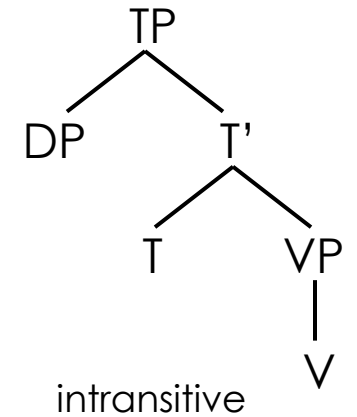
The Nominative – Accusative System

- Intransitive
 - There is only one DP
 - Dependent case cannot be assigned
 - The subject will be assigned unmarked case
- Transitive
 - There are two DPs
 - Dependent case can be assigned
 - Assign dependent case to the object
 - The remaining subject will be assigned unmarked case
- Result
 - Both subjects get unmarked case
 - The object gets dependent case
 - This is the nominative-accusative pattern



The Ergative – Absolutive System

- Intransitive
 - There is only one DP
 - Dependent case cannot be assigned
 - The subject will be assigned unmarked case
- Transitive
 - There are two DPs
 - Dependent case can be assigned
 - Assign dependent case to the subject
 - The remaining object will be assigned unmarked case
- Result
 - The intransitive subject and the object get unmarked case
 - The transitive subject gets dependent case
 - This is the ergative-absolutive pattern

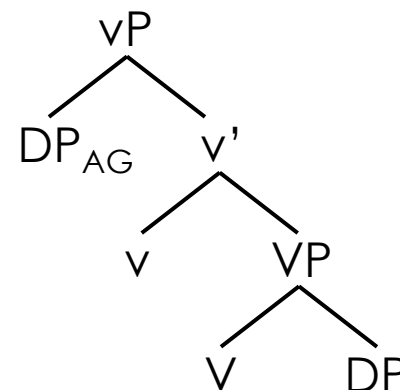


Baker and domains of application of case assignment

- Marantz's original proposals covered case assignment in clauses
 - The traditional view of case system differences
- Baker extended this to other 'domains' of application
 - TP
 - NP
 - VP
- This was based on current ideas about how syntactic structures are built
 - Phase Theory

Phase Theory

- Structures are built one step at a time, bottom up
- Structure building proceeds in chunks
 - 'phases'
- At the end of each phase, what has so far been built is fixed
 - 'spell-out'
 - The phase is 'interpreted' semantically and phonologically
- Each phase is initiated by the inclusion of particular elements
 - 'phase heads'
 - C, D, v
 - v = an independent verbal element responsible for introducing the agent and the voice (active/passive) of the VP
- When a 'little v' is added to the structure, VP is 'spelled-out'
 - Baker assumes spell-out domains are case domains
 - So VP is a case domain



VP as a Case Domain

- If principles of case assignment are restricted to domains, there is a problem for dependent case assignment in the clause
 - The object is inside the VP, the subject is not
 - As the object is the only DP inside the transitive VP, it can't be assigned dependent case
 - Both the subject and the object should be assigned unmarked case
- Baker claims that this is exactly what happens in some languages

Case assignment in Sakha (Turkic languages spoken in Northern Siberia)

- Sakha is a nominative-accusative language
- It is verb final
- The indefinite object gets nominative (unmarked) case
 - This is expected if VP is a case domain
- The definite object is not in the same position as the indefinite
 - It has moved out of the VP
 - It is in the same domain as the subject
 - It can be assigned dependent case
- Conclusion: the VP is a case domain

Masha salamaat-y sie-te.
Masha.NOM porridge.ACC eat-PAST.3S
'Masha ate the porridge.'

Masha salamaat sie-te.
Masha.NOM porridge.NOM eat-PAST.3S
'Masha ate porridge.'

Masha türgennik salamaat sie-te.
Masha.NOM quickly porridge.NOM eat-PAST.3S
'Masha ate porridge quickly.'

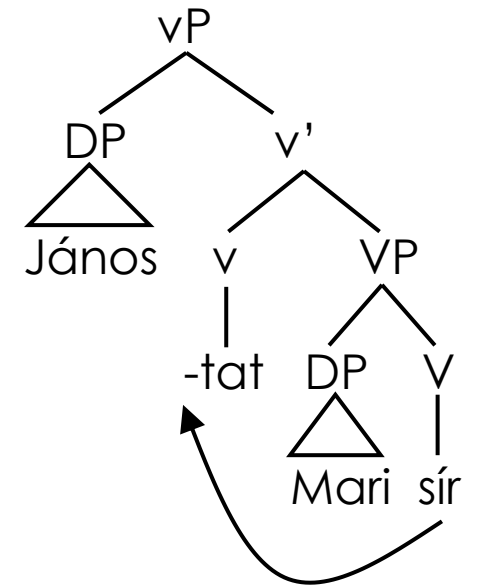
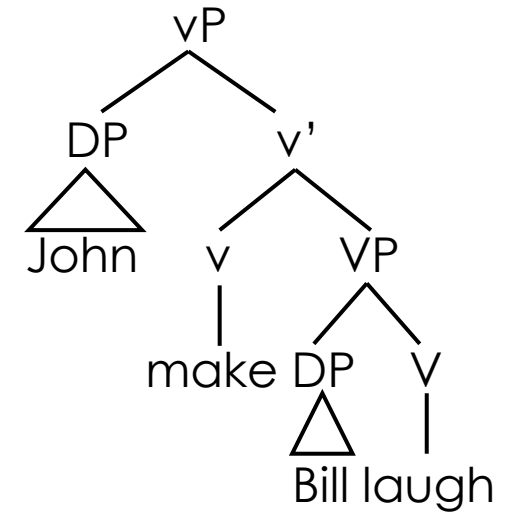
Masha salamaat-y türgennik sie-te.
Masha.NOM porridge.ACC quickly eat-PAST.3S
'Masha ate the porridge quickly.'

Not all languages work like Sakha

- Hungarian is a nominative-accusative language
- Its object is accusative with or without moving out of the VP
- So, VP can't be a case domain in Hungarian
- Baker proposes
 - Some languages have 'hard' VP domains
 - Spell-out domains and case domains
 - Some languages have 'soft' VP domains
 - Spell-out domains but not case domains
- This is not a particularly satisfactory solution
 - It turns out to be factually wrong

The Causatives

- Causative constructions involve
 - A base VP providing an event which is caused
 - A causative element introducing
 - The causative meaning
 - The causer
 - E.g. John made Bill laugh
- Some languages have a bound morpheme causative element
 - The verb moves to support the morpheme
 - E.g. János el- sír -tat -t -a Mari-t
J PERF cry-CAUS-PAST-3S M -ACC

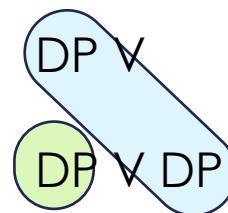


The Hungarian Causative in more detail

- When the base verb is intransitive
 - The causer is nominative
 - The subject of the base verb is accusative
- When the base verb is transitive
 - The causer is nominative
 - The subject of the base verb is instrumental
 - The object is accusative
- This is reminiscent of the ergative-absolutive pattern

Az orvos meg-vár -at -t -a Mari-t
The doctor PERF- wait-CAUS-PAST-3S Mary-ACC
'The doctor made Mary wait.'

Az orvos meg-it -at -t -a Mari-val a főzet-et.
The doctor PERF- drink-CAUS-PAST-3S Mary-INST the potion-ACC
'The doctor made Mary drink the potion.'



The Saka Causative

- Sakha is completely unrelated to Hungarian
- It is nominative-accusative at clause level
- But it shows a remarkably similar causative pattern
 - But the transitive base verb subject is dative

ejigin ylele -† -e -bin
2SG:ACC work-**CAUS**-PRES-1SG
'I make you work'.

sergej-ge son -u -n ket -**erd** -e -bin
S-DAT coat-POSS.3SG-ACC put.on-**CAUS**-PRES-1SG
'I make Sergej put on his coat'.

The Basque Causative

- Basque is a language isolate spoken in Northeastern Spain
 - Related to no known language, probably pre-dating Indo-European in Europe
- It is Ergative-Absolutive at clause level
- It has a very similar causative to Hungarian and Sakha
 - Causer = ergative
 - Base ontransitive subject = absolutive
 - Base transitive subject = dative
 - Base object = absolutive

Edurn -ek Jon garaiz etorri-**arazi** du.
Edurne-ERG Jon.ABS on.time arrive-**cause** aux
'Edurne made Jon arrive on time.'

Irakasle -ak ikaslee -i iburu hori irakurr-**arazi** die.
Teacher-ERG students.DAT book-ABS that read -**cause** aux
'The teacher made the students read that book.'

What we can conclude from these observation

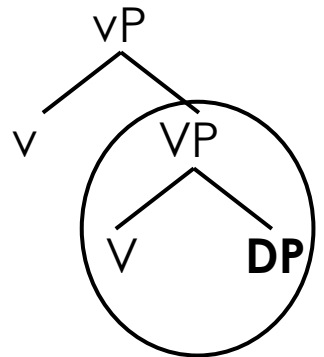
- In each language, the VP is a case domain for the base transitive subject
 - It gets assigned a dependent case in this domain
- The VP is not a case domain
 - For the base intransitive subject
 - For the object
 - These get cases assigned at clause level
 - dependent in nominative-accusative languages
 - unmarked in ergative-absolutive languages
- But a domain cannot be both 'soft' and 'hard' in the same construction in the same language!

A possible solution

- A DP remains 'active' in a system until it is assigned case
 - It is visible even in higher domains
- A DP which is not assigned a case in one domain can be case assigned in a higher domain
 - In accordance with the case principles operating at that domain
- Unmarked case is only 'earmarked' for assignment in the VP, but not actually assigned

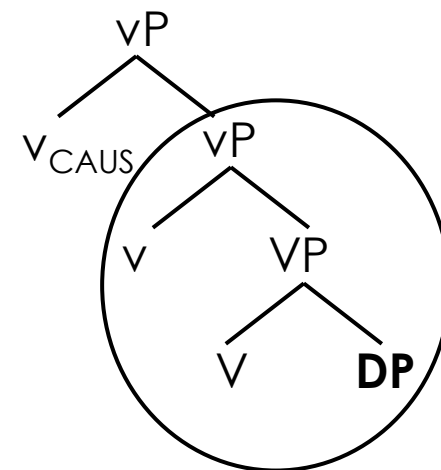
How this works

- The VP is the first phase built
 - This contains just one DP
 - This is 'earmarked' for (but not assigned) unmarked case
 - It is active



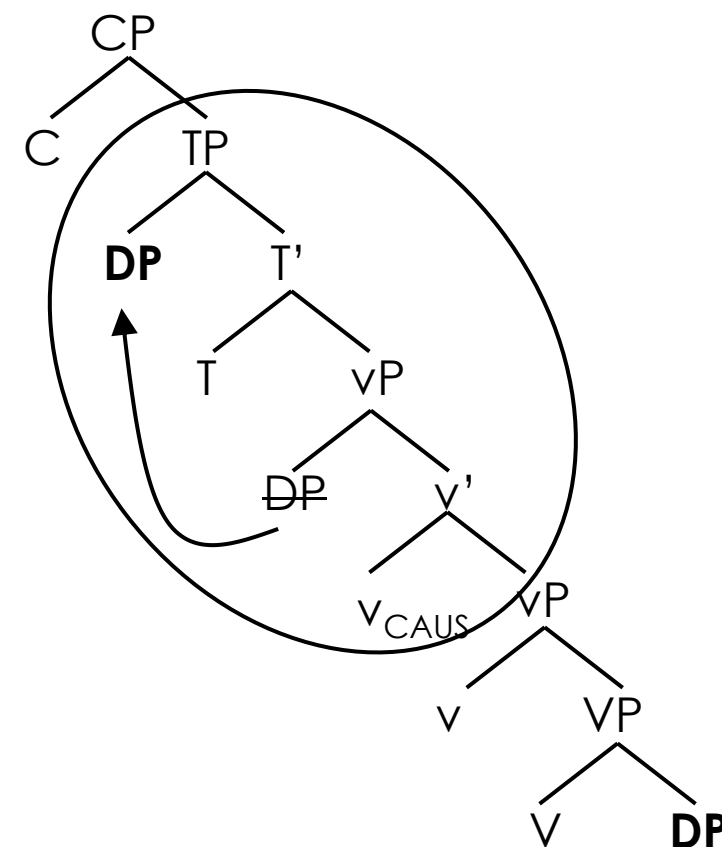
How this works

- If V is intransitive,
 - The causative will be inserted
 - This marked the end of the phase
 - The vP is a case domain
 - Nothing changes
 - The subject is still earmarked but not assigned unmarked case
 - It remains active



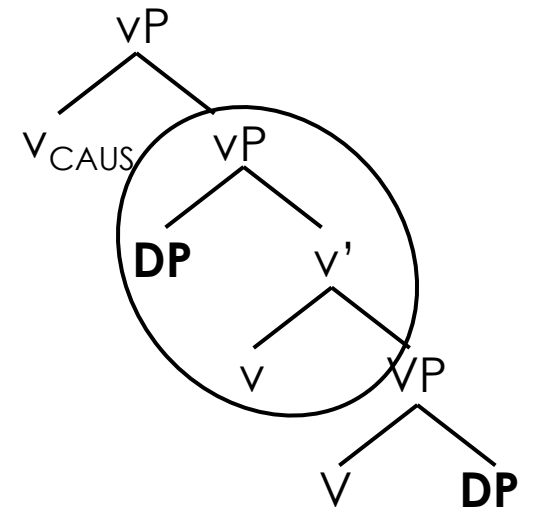
How this works

- Next the causer is added
- Tense is added
- The causer becomes the subject
- The phase ends when the complementiser is added
- Both DPs are active
 - Dependent case can be assigned
- Accusative (object) in Hungarian and Sakha
 - The causer gets nominative
- Ergative (causer) in Basque
 - The object keeps its unmarked case (=absolutive)



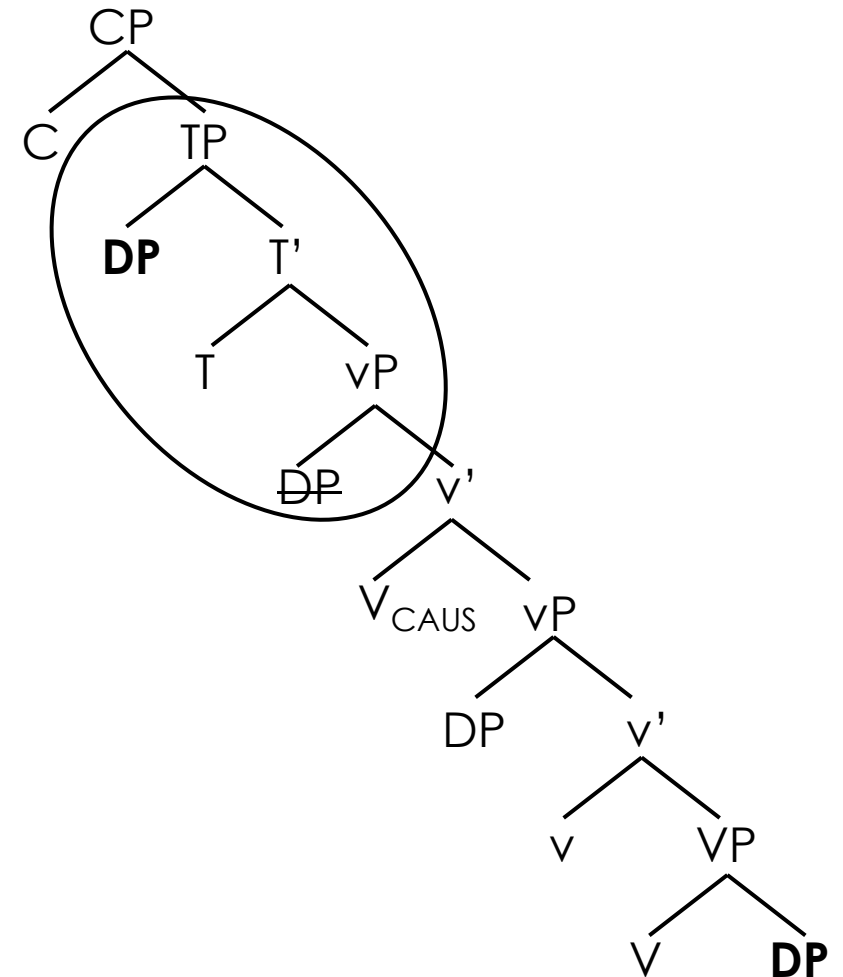
How this works

- If V is transitive,
 - The agent will be added
 - The causative will be added, marking the end of the phase
 - The vP is a case domain
 - There are two active DPs
 - Dependent case can be assigned
 - All 3 languages assign it to the agent
 - Dative in Basque and Sakha
 - Instrumental in Hungarian
 - The agent becomes inactive



How this works

- The causer and tense are added
- The causer moves to subject position
- The complementiser is added, marking the end of the phase
- There are two active DPs, so dependent case can be assigned
 - Accusative to the object (Hungarian and Sakha)
 - Ergative to the causer (Basque)
- Unmarked case is assigned to the remaining DP
 - Nominative to the causer (Hungarian and Sakha)
 - Absolutive to the object (Basque)



Conclusions

- The two most common case systems can be captured under Dependent Case Theory principles
 - Assign dependent case when there are two DPs (to either one)
 - Assign unmarked case to other DPs
- These principles can further account for other case patterns outside the clause domain
- The causative construction is very good testing ground for this
 - We can successfully account for case patterns within this with one simple assumption
 - Unmarked case is not assigned until clause level
 - This is more accurate than Baker's claim that VPs are case domains in some language, but not in others.