

Ergativity

V NP₁ **Intransitive** sentence (only **1** noun phrase)

The dog walked. The door opened. Bill is asleep. Mary is a doctor.

V NP₁ NP₂ **Transitive** sentence (**2** noun phrases)

The man walked the dog. Bill opened the door. She read three books.

V NP₁ NP₂ NP₃ **Bitransitive** sentence (**3** noun phrases)

I sent Mary the book. Mary gave Bill a cold. We elected Tom chairman.

Accusative System

The dog-NOM walked.

The man-NOM walked the dog-ACC.

The door-NOM opened.

The man-NOM opened the door-ACC.

Ergative System

The dog-ABS walked.

The man-ERG walked the dog-ABS.

The door-ABS opened.

The man-ERG opened the door-ABS.

Ergativity even in English

- a) &They objected to the shooting of the hunters. (& = ambiguous)
= (1) ... the fact that somebody shot the hunters. (**Transitive** *shoot*)
= (2) ... the fact that the hunters shot. (**Intransitive** *shoot*)

In choosing the prepositional object to appear with *of* in an *-ing* nominalization phrase (e.g. *the V-ing of NP*), V chooses its Absolutive – i.e. a Transitive V chooses its Direct Object, while an Intransitive V chooses its Subject.

b) The *-ee* suffix.

Bill has retired → Bill is a *retiree*. **Intransitives**

Bill has escaped. → Bill is an *escapee*.

Bill is standing. → Bill is a *standee*.

They employ Mary → Mary is an *employee*. **Transitives**

They inducted Mary. → Mary is an *inductee*.

They appointed Mary. → Mary is an *appointee*.

Adding the suffix *-ee* to a verb produces a label for a person who is the Absolutive of the verb – i.e. a person who is the Direct Object of a Transitive verb, or the Subject of an Intransitive verb.
