

# Interaction is reflected in Grammar (as you and I can see!)

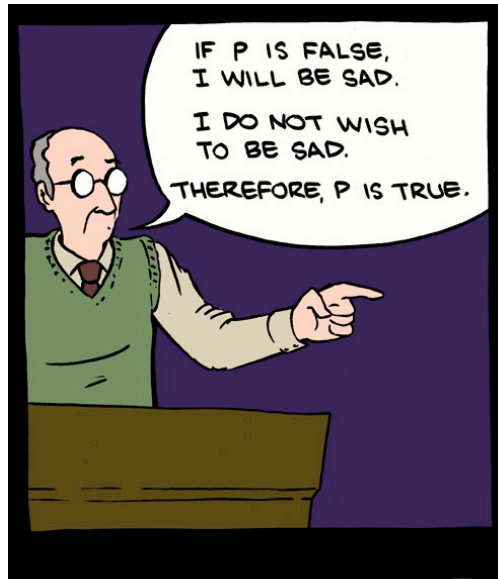
Eva Schultze-Berndt, University of Manchester

[eva.schultze-berndt@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:eva.schultze-berndt@manchester.ac.uk)

*Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory, 7 December 2013*

**Language is not properly regarded as a system of communication. It is a system for expressing thought, something quite different.** It can of course be used for communication, as can anything people do — manner of walking or style of clothes or hair, for example. But in any useful sense of the term, communication is not the function of language, and may even be of no unique significance for understanding the functions and nature of language.

(Chomsky 2002: 75; emphasis mine, ESB)



There. Now you can skip 99% of philosophical debates.

<http://arnoldzwick.org/2012/07/15/everyday-logic/#more-11264>

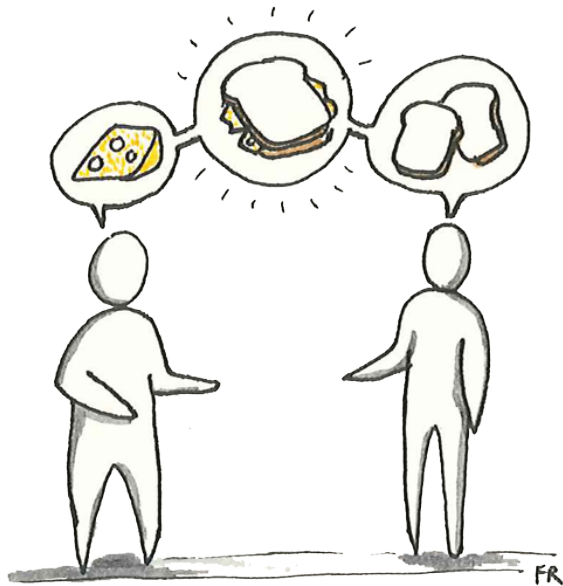
[T]he design of language—a mapping between meaning and sound—is precisely what one would expect in a system that evolved for the communication of propositions. We cannot convey recipes, hunting techniques, gossip, or reciprocal promises by “manner of walking or style of clothes or hair,” because these forms of behavior lack **grammatical devices that allow propositions to be encoded in a recoverable way** in details of the behavior. Though Chomsky denies the truism that language is “properly regarded as a system for communication,” he provides no compelling reasons to doubt it (...)

(Pinker & Jackendoff 2005: 224; emphasis mine, ESB)



**Language use is really a form of *joint action*. (...)**  
**Doing things with language is (...) different from**  
**the sum of a speaker speaking and a listener**  
**listening.** It is the joint action that emerges when  
speakers and listeners – or writers and readers –  
perform their individual actions in coordination,  
as ensembles.

(Clark 1996: 3; emphasis mine, ESB)



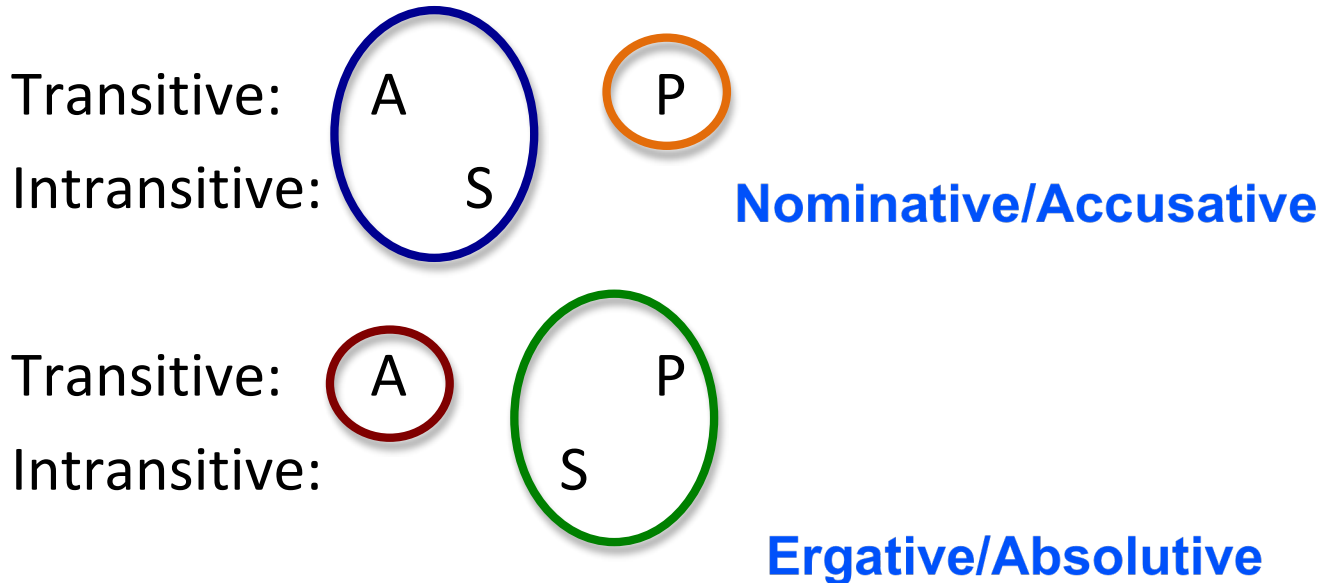
<http://ebiinterfaces.wordpress.com/2011/06/19/science-stories-and-better-design/>

## Main points

- Language use in interaction has traditionally played a limited role in “core linguistic” analyses of language
  - This includes much of the work taking a mainstream “typological-functional” perspective
- However, much recent research points to the fundamental relevance of interaction for “core” grammatical structure
  - Case study 1: Optional Ergativity and Information Structure
  - Case study 2: Intersubjective Evidentials
- Corpus-based / documentary linguists are at the forefront of analyses that incorporate the crucial role of interaction

**Case study 1:**  
**“Optional” Ergativity and  
Information Structure**

## Traditional definition of ergativity based on semantic macro-roles



# Split ergativity: restricted to “well-defined” grammatical contexts

(Subtype of Differential Case marking)

- based on tense-aspect
- based on verb semantics (effect on patient, volitionality, ...)
- based on position of A argument in referential (“animacy”) hierarchy

**=> recognised early on in the description of ergative systems**  
(e.g. Silverstein 1976; DeLancey 1981; Tsunoda 1981)

## “Optional” ergativity: variable case marking in (apparently) the same grammatical context

Ex 17a: khong mkhyen-gyi-mi-'dug  
he know-UNAC-NEG-EVID  
 “He doesn’t know (or understand).”

Ex 17b: khyed.rang gnyis grog.po yin tsang khong-gi  
 You two friend are since he-GEN  
 gnas.tshul khyed.rang-gis mkhyen-gyi yod.kylred  
 situation you-ERG know(HON)-UNAC+probably  
 “Since you two are friends, you probably know his situation.”  
 (Hu)

(Tournadre 1991: 103)

## *“Optional” ergativity found in ...*

- Australian languages (including two mixed languages)
- Papuan languages
- Tibeto-Burman languages, and
- Indo-Aryan languages in northern India – Nepal – Tibet  
– Western China area
- Some Oceanian languages
- Some languages of the Americas
- and others

see McGregor (2010) for an overview

## ***Factors correlating with variable ergative marking***

**Factors also responsible for “split” systems, but more variable:**

- tense-aspect
- verb semantics
- position of A argument in referential (“animacy”) hierarchy

**“Pragmatic” factors related to S / H common ground**

- expectedness of agent / action
- focus / contrastive focus
- contrastive or switched topic / actor
- “discourse prominence”

(overviews in McGregor 2010: 1616-1617; Chelliah & Hyslop 2011)

Detailed discussions of the discourse-pragmatic factors responsible for “optional” ergative marking e.g.

Tournadre (1991)

McGregor (1992; 1997; 1998; 2003; 2006, 2010)

Quesada (1999)

Chelliah (2009)

Meakins (2009, 2011, to appear); Meakins & O’Shannessy (2010)

Hyslop (2010); Chelliah & Hyslop (2011)

Gaby (2010)

Verstraete (2010)

Bond, Hildebrandt & Dhakal (2013)

**=> correlates with availability of corpora and affinity of authors with corpus-based analyses** (cf. Simpson 2012)

## **NB Parallels in the recognition of information structure as a factor responsible for variable object marking**

Nikolaeva (1999, 2001); Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011)

## **Factors related to S / H common ground in interaction: a closer look**

- expectedness of agent / action
- focus / contrastive focus
- contrastive or switched topic / actor
- “discourse prominence”

## **Factors related to S / H common ground in interaction: remaining issues**

- Difficult to operationalise: judgments often made on the basis of discourse context rather than properties of constructions (other than presence vs absence of ergative marking)
- Notions like topic / focus / contrast / prominence used variably and not always clearly distinguished in existing works
- More generally, categories of information structure are under debate and notoriously difficult to apply to discourse data (Cook & Bildhauer 2011, 2013)

**Optional ergativity in Jaminjung and  
information structure:  
a pilot study**

*“Discourse and Prosody across Language  
Family Boundaries” (VW Foundation)*

with Candide Simard (SOAS) and Claudia Wegener (Bielefeld)



## *Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru*

- Non-Pama-Nyungan language of the Western Mirndi group; few elderly speakers
- **Argument marking**
  - Pronominal indices on the verb for S (intr) and A/P (tr)
  - Nominal cases (optional ergative, dative, possessive, spatial cases)
- Structure of the verbal complex
  - Two “verbal” parts of speech: inflecting verbs (closed class) and uninflecting verbs (coverbs, preverbs ...) (open class)

## Marking possibilities for A: ERG, zero (=ABS), ABL

(1) **wirib** *gani-ngawu jalig*  
dog 3SG>3SG-see.PST child  
'the dog saw the child'

(2) **wirib-ni=gayi wib** *gani-ngawu janju buwuny*  
dog-ERG=also look.back 3SG>3SG-see.PST that marsupial.rat  
'the dog also looked back at that rat'

(3) *"nanggayan guny-bi-yarluga?" gani-yu=bunyag \*  
who 2DU>3SG-POT-spear 3SG>3SG-say/do.PST=3DU.OBL

**yangarra-ngunyi=marlang**  
kangaroo-ABL=GIVEN

"Who will you spear?" it said to them, the kangaroo did'

## *Earlier study of optional ergativity* (Schultze-Berndt 2006)

### **Frequency**

- Default (64%): Ergative case marking
- Fairly frequent (34%): Absolutive / zero marking
- Extremely rare (2%): Ablative case marking

### **Factors including**

- **Verb semantics:** zero marking more likely in case of low effectiveness of event ('have', 'see', 'say "...")
- **Referential (animacy) hierarchy:** ergative marking obligatory for inanimates; zero more likely for pronouns

## *Pilot study of information structure and agent marking*

### **Data**

- 9 texts, 1818 Intonation Units in total
- 110 overt As
  - 81 ERG 74%
  - 20 ABS 18 %
  - 9 ABL 8 % (but 6 in one text alone)

### **Information Structure annotation**

- based on prosodic criteria (Simard 2010), position, and context

## Information Structure categories

**FOCUS:** falling contour at left edge of constituent

*Argument focus*

*Comment* (“Predicate focus” in Lambrecht (1994))

*Thetic* (“sentence focus”)      multiple prosodic peaks

*Afterthought* follows final contour & focal contour

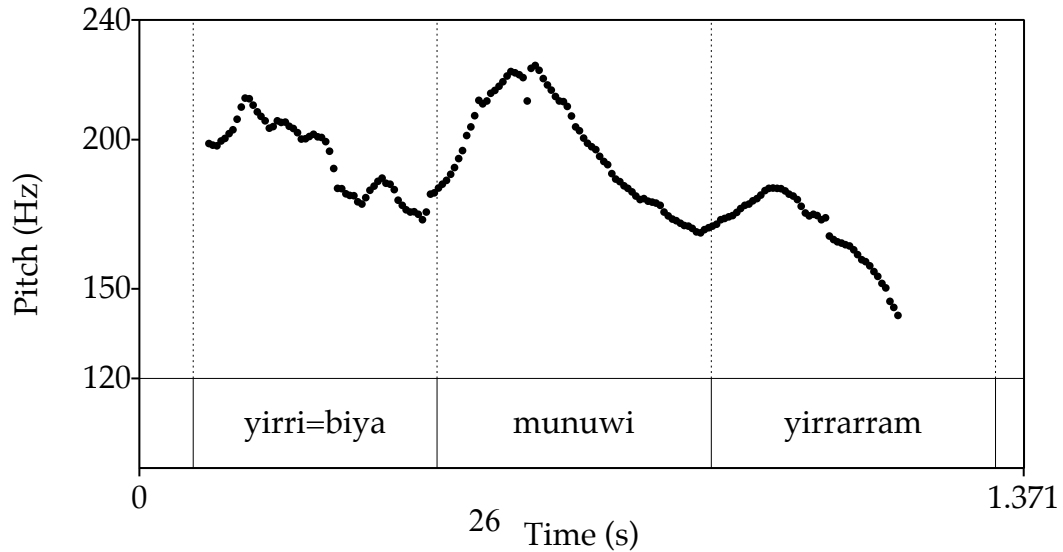
**TOPIC:** *TOP*      precedes focal fall  
(+ subtypes based on shift or contrast)

*TOP+rdet* follows final contour & flat contour

**FRAME:** frame of quotations (“...” *said the boy*)

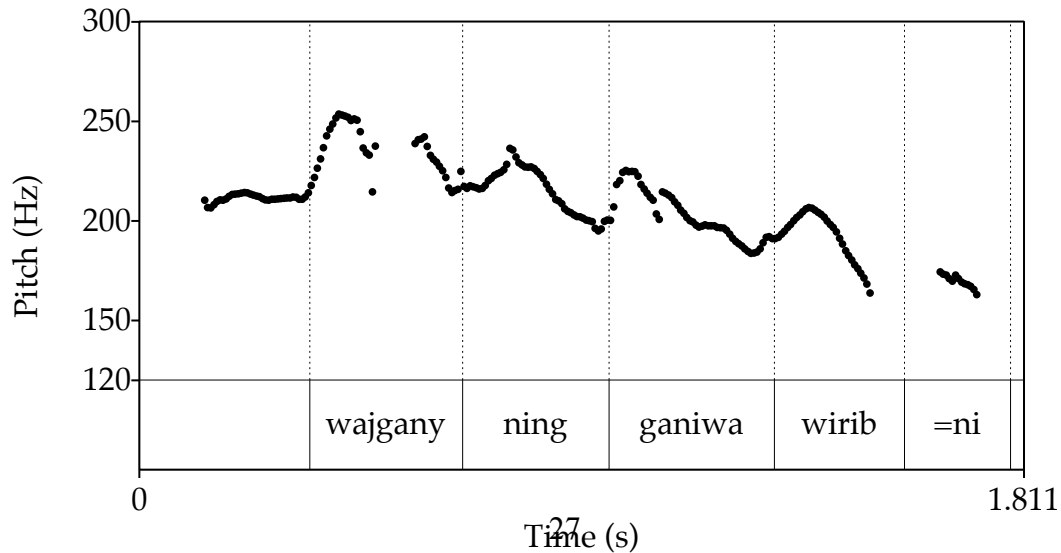
## Topic + Comment

- (4) [*yirri=biya*]<sub>TOP</sub>    [*munuwi*    *yirr-arra-m*]<sub>FOC</sub>  
1PL.EXCL=SEQ    sugarbag.bee    1PL.EXCL>3SG-put-PRS  
'we call them sugarbag bees'



## Sentence focus

(5) [*wajgany*      *ning*      *gani-wa*      ***wirib-ni***]<sub>FOC</sub>  
honey/beehive      break.off      3SG>3SG-bite.PST      dog-ERG  
'the dog bit off the beehive'



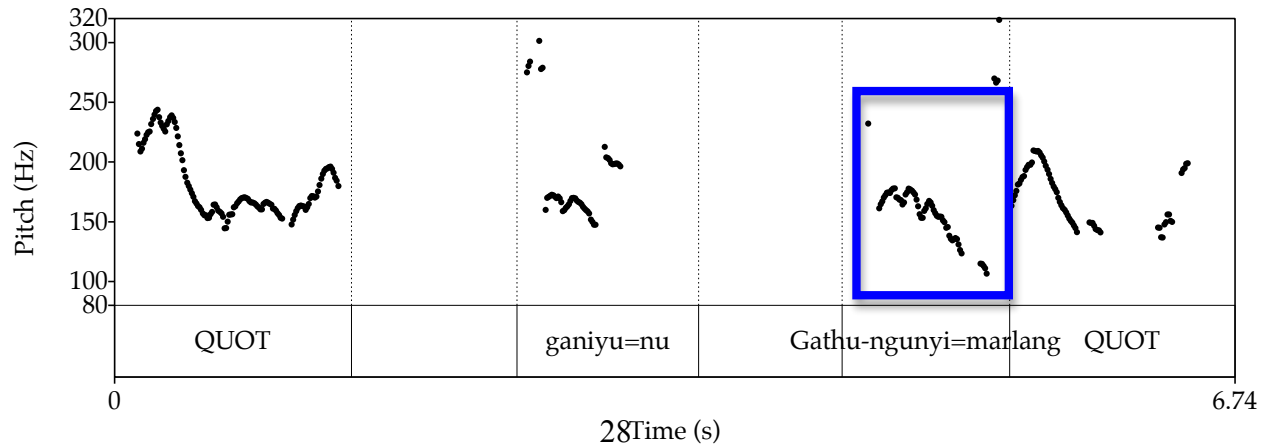
## Afterthought (focal)

(6) [*“wurrgurru=gun, Bulga”*]<sub>QUOT</sub> [*ganiyu=nu*]<sub>FRAME</sub> ||  
devil=CONTR Dad 3SG>3SG-say/do.PST

[*G.-ngunyi=marlang*]<sub>AFT</sub>

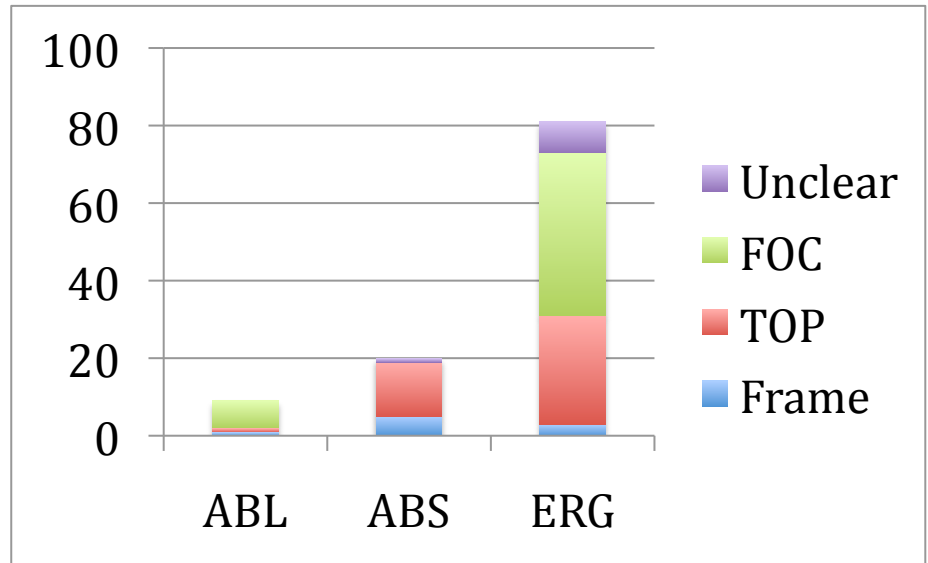
proper.name-ABL=GIVEN

“(They’re) really Devils, Dad!”... he said to him... G. did’



## Initial Results (broad overview)

- All focal As are marked ergative (or ablative)
- Topical As can be zero or ERG
  - other factors such as contrast/shift; animacy; verb class
  - will need multivariate analysis based on more data



# Optional ergativity and information structure: Conclusions

Findings for Jaminjung confirm broader cross-linguistic trends:  
Agents in focus and contrastive topic position are more likely to  
be ergative-marked

**Expectedness as overarching factor?** (cf. Verstraete 2010: 1649)

- **Referential hierarchy:** (lower) unexpected As are marked
- **Information structure:** As are marked if salient alternatives are present *in discourse*, i.e. A is less predictable as A

## The central role of information structure in grammar: Implications

- More difficult to account for in models of grammar based on “message transfer” model of communication
  - “take logical form of proposition as basis and use lexical features (semantic role, nominal properties) to compute sentence form”
- Instead: choice of constructions by speaker depending on current assumptions about background, expectations, presence of salient alternatives, etc. for the hearer

# **Case study 2: Intersubjective evidentials**

## Traditional, speaker-centred definition of evidentials

- “a morpheme specifying the speaker’s evidence or source of information” (Speas 2008: 940)
- evidentials mark “the relation between the speaker and the action s/he is describing” (...), e.g. a direct evidential indicates that the action takes/took place within the speaker’s deictic sphere (de Haan 2005: 379)

# Intersubjectivity and evidentials

## Intersubjectivity

- relation between one author's subjectivity and another's (Du Bois 2007: 140)
- mutual sharing of experiential-conceptual content between subjects of experience (Verhagen 2008: 307)

## Subtypes of intersubjectivity

- *Interaffectivity*
- *Interattentionality*: “the alignment of attention to the attention displayed by another agent in overt behaviour”
- *Interintentionality*: “sharing of information with another agent about the intentions and beliefs of the self and others”

(Brinck 2008: 132)

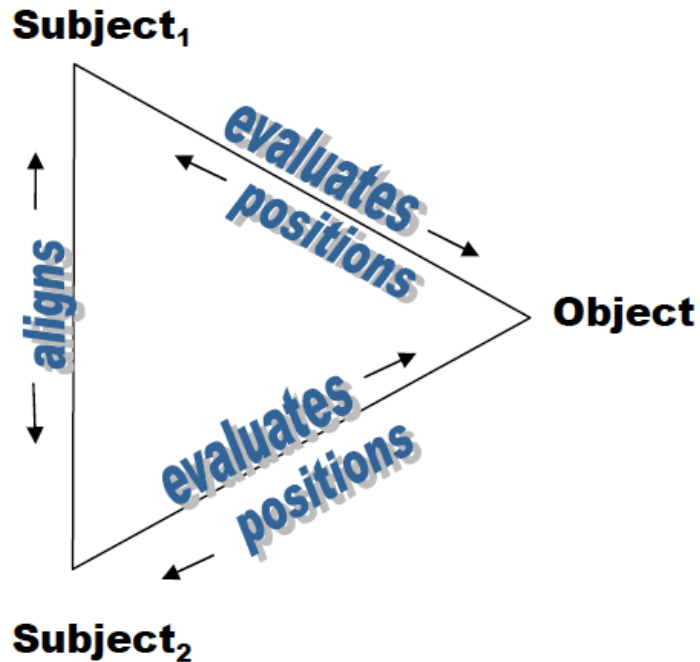
## Intersubjective epistemics

- encode distribution of knowledge (access to knowledge) between speaker and addressee (Kamio 1994, 1995; Franchetto 2007; Basso 2008; Hayano 2008; Bergqvist 2009; Heritage 2012; Hayano 2013)
  - “Territory of Information” (Kamio 1994, 1995)
  - a type of encoding of multiple perspective (Evans 2005: 106)

(7) *you should see that house Emma **you have no idea***

(8) *It's a beautiful day out **isn't it?***

(Heritage 2012: 4)



## The Stance Triangle

(adapted from  
Du Bois 2007)

<http://noellegaloszambrano.wordpress.com/2012/05/01/on-identity-construction-and-applications-to-politics/>

## Intersubjective evidentials

- dedicated grammatical markers indicating source of evidence **for the hearer**, or evidence **shared by speaker and hearer**
- attested e.g. in Korean (Chooi 1995), Chechen (Molochieva 2007), Andoke (Landaburu 2007), Yurakaré (Gipper 2011), South Conchucos Quechua (Hintz 2012), Kashibo-Kakataibo (Zariquiey 2013), Southern Nambikuara (Kroeker 2001), and several Papuan Highlands languages (San Roque & Loughnane 2012)  
(cf. also Mushin 2000; Bergqvist 2009)

## *Individual vs. mutual knowledge in S. Conchucos Quechua*

(9) a. *Tsay-pa-mi*      *qati-ya-ra-n*      *mama-yki-kuna*  
that-GEN-DIRECT follow-PL-PST-3 mother-2-PL

‘By that route your ancestors pastured animals (**I affirm**)’

b. *Tsay-pa-cha:*      *qati-ya-ra-n*      *mama-yki-kuna*  
that-GEN-MUTUAL follow-PL-PST-3 mother-2-PL

‘By that route your ancestors pastured animals (**as we all know**).’

(Hintz 2012)

- c. *May tamya tamya-ra-n-cha:*  
already rain rain-PST-3-MUTUAL  
'It already rained hard (as we all see).'

(Hintz 2012)

# Evidentials in Jaminjung

- No obligatory evidential (or mirative) system
- **Egophoric evidential** = *ngarndi*
  - Signals presence of a ‘primary knower’ who has privileged, personal experience of an event or situation (San Roque, Floyd & Norcliffe 2012)
  - = speaker in declaratives, addressee in questions
- **Intersubjective evidential** = *mindj*
  - Shared speaker & hearer evidence at speech time (new information only)

## ***Egophoric evidential* =ngarndi**

- personally witnessed event from past or present, fully integrated into speaker's knowledge
- speaker (decl) / addressee (qu) intention (future time reference)
- predictions based on firm experience (rare)
- not found in mythological texts

Similar to *yo* in Japanese (Hayano 2008, 2013); *ke-* in Andoke (Landaburu 2007), *-ma* ~ *-mvrra* in Enindhilyakwa (van Egmond 2012: 225-236), *karinganta* in Warlpiri (Laughren 1982)

Context: Jointly looking at photos depicting members of the speaker's family erecting a shed in their block of land; the speaker had been present:

- (10) *ngarrgina-ni=biya jayiny yirr gan-anthama*  
1SG:POSS-ERG=SEQ DaCh pull 3SG>3SG-bring.IPFV  
*trailer-mij warnda=ngarndi*  
trailer-COM grass=EGOPH

'my granddaughter was pulling grass with a trailer (I tell you!).' (IP, ES97\_A03\_09.001)

Context: narrative about station life

(11) *nenigot=biyang yirrurra-wardagarra-nyi=ngarndi garrb*  
goat=SEQ 1+3PL>3PL-follow-IPFV=EGOPH gather

‘we used to follow goats around, and gather (them)’ (IP,  
ES08\_A04\_03.003-4)

Context: situation arising at speech time; speaker is certain  
about its interpretation

(12) *mud-mud burru-wiri-m=ngardi ngarrgina wirib*  
RDP-make.hole 3PL>3SG-bite-PRS=EGOPH 1SG:POSS dog

‘they are biting my dog making holes in it,  
(... go and separate them)!’

## ***Intersubjective evidential* =mindi**

- Identical to a clitic form of the 1+2 (“1+2 minimal”, “1st person dual inclusive”) pronoun – but no referential function
- Indicates that the speech act participants have shared direct evidence of the proposition encoded (or of information that serves as the basis for an inference)
- Most frequent in out-of-the-blue observations on newly arising situations; also frequent first utterance in elicitation with unfamiliar visual stimuli

## Distribution in terms of TAM:

- verbless clauses with present time reference or present tense clauses (most examples)
- past perfective clauses with resultative perfect interpretation (i.e. results observable at speech time)
- (rare) future/potential marked clauses in case of evidence for imminent event

Context: spontaneous conversation, out-of-the-blue utterance unrelated to previous context. Speaker is observing a stranger's car coming down the river bank where Speaker and Hearer are sitting.

(13) *janyungbari yina motika jid ga-ram=**mind***  
another DIST car go.down 3SG-come.PRS=S+H

‘Another car is coming down there (as you and I can see)!’ (DB, ES97\_A01\_03)

Context: Speaker describing picture in elicitation.

(14) *yinju* *jungulug*, *gurlurl* *ga-yu=mindi* \  
here one be.on.top 3SG-be=S+H

‘Here there is one, it is on top (as you and I can see)’

(JM; ES01\_A06\_03.084)



21. ball (table)

Context: fictive dialogue elicited  
by means of cartoons  
(note resultative interpretation  
of past perfective)

(15) *yina burdujga-jga-ny=mindi*  
there go.up 3SG-go-PST=S+H

*janju wirib*  
DEM dog

‘ah, there it has gone up, that  
dog (as you and I can see)’

(JM, ES08\_A20\_03.073)



- In narratives =*mindī* is attested only in reported speech

Context: two hunters in a narrative had encountered “devil” kangaroos and were following them.

“Where are they?” one said to the other. The other said:

(16) “*ngiya=ga*      *bula*      *ga-yu=bunyag=mindī*”  
 here=YOU.KNOW    track      3SG-be.PRS=3DU.OBL=S+H

‘Here are tracks of the two (as you and I can see)!’

(DB, ES96\_A10\_A01)

- Attested in questions and compatible with epistemic modal *majani* ‘maybe’, indicating less than full commitment to the interpretation of an observed state of affairs

Context: describing toy figures in elicitation game.

(17) *majani=mindi*    *malyju* \    *yawayi yawayi* \

maybe=S+H            male            yes            yes

*yinyju=biya*    *het* *nga-ngayi-m* \    *malyju* \

this=SEQ            hat 1SG>3SG-see-PRS    male

‘maybe (it’s) a boy, yes yes, here I see the hat now, a boy’

(JM, ES09\_A01\_01.017)

## ***Intersubjective Evidential =mindi: Analysis***

- The source of evidence is a situation observable at speech time by both S and H
- S explicitly acknowledges shared and symmetric access by S and H to the information conveyed
  - as opposed to claiming status of ‘primary knower’ as indicated by egophoric =*ngarndi*
- Not used for established, shared facts (these remain unmarked), but only for observations not yet integrated into S or H’s common ground

- Serves as instruction for establishing joint attention (cf. Diessel 2006: on demonstratives)
- Furthermore serves as “invitation” to the addressee to participate in the joint construction of the common ground by integration of newly arisen information
  - Functional relationship to **mirative** if defined as indicating that information is not yet integrated into speaker’s overall representation of the world (DeLancey 1997: 35f.; Dickinson 2000)
  - In the context of “Territory of Information”: new information is less close to speaker until considerable processing has taken place (Kamio 1995: 238)

## ***Intersubjective Evidential =mindi: Grammaticalization***

- The use of a 1+2 person pronoun as an evidential has not previously been reported
  - though use of a 1st or a 2nd person pronoun as evidential is attested, if rarely – e.g. LaPolla (2003) on Qiang, Molochieva (2007) on Chechen.
- Intersubjectivity can hardly be signalled more transparently than by a 1+2 pronoun
- *Primary* intersubjective function, not result of subjectification (cf. e.g. Traugott & Dasher 2002)

## Interaction in grammar: the wider picture

- Management of common ground: **any information structure phenomena**
- Indication of relative epistemic rights of S and H: **epistemic stance markers and evidentials**
- **Spatial and textual deixis** (e.g. Hanks 1990, 2005; Diessel 2006; Ehlich 2007; Burenhult 2008)
- **Mimesis** (e.g. Clark 1996; Clark 2004)
- ...

### *Hanks (2005: 196) on Deixis*

The egocentric spatialist picture is more or less obvious in much of the English-language literature on deixis. (...) It is also the standard default for most modern linguistic descriptions, especially in typological and psycholinguistic work (...). It underwrites the linguistic notion that deictic oppositions (...) are best described in terms of relative proximity, where proximity is defined as spatial contiguity in relation to the [Speaker]. (...) This picture has wide appeal because it fits with the common-sense idea that speech is ultimately a matter of individual persons' expressing private experiences and thoughts to other individuals in a material world.

Like any other commonsense construct, this one has a history and a social distribution. It is hard to miss in it the modern Euro-American notions of the isolated individual, the universality of the body, and the naturalness of the physical (...). But this common sense obscures critical aspects of deixis, including the mutual orientation of interactants, all nonperceptual modes of access such as background knowledge, memory, and anticipation, and all that is part of a social setting and the relations between participants but not embodied in physical objects.

## Interaction in Linguistic Typology

While many typologists in principle subscribe to a “usage-based” model of language, comparatively little attention has been paid to the interactional nature of language in mainstream Typology, e.g.

- Notions of information structure often applied rather casually
- Prevalence of processing explanations based on an encoder / decoder model

## Information structure in (some) typological reference materials ...

- *WALS* (Dryer et al. 2013: [2005]): 56 word order features, 0 information structure features
- *Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Typology* (Song 2011): No separate chapter on information structure
  - briefly addressed in chapters by Bickel (2011) on Grammatical Relations and Hawkins (2011) on processing-based explanations
- Typology textbooks (Whaley 1997; Croft 2003; Moravcsik 2012; Velupillai 2012): only cursory mention of notions such as topic and focus in the context of particular constructions (passive, content questions, origin of agreement constructions ...)

## “Discourse”, “Hearer”, “Addressee” in Typology textbooks mostly in contexts of

- **Articles and demonstratives** (Croft 2003: 132-136; 245; Moravcsik 2012: 198; Velupillai 2012: 135-136; 144-145)
- **Speech acts** (Velupillai 2012: 220-222, 368-369)
- **Honorifics** (Moravcsik 2012: 8, 42; Velupillai 2012: 370-381)
- **Word order** (Whaley 1997: 80,73,81,97; Croft 2003: 66, 258)
- **Processing** (Croft 2003: 116; Moravcsik 2012: 240)
- **Frequency** (Croft 2003: 115; Moravcsik 2012: 212, 254)
- **General external explanations** (Whaley 1997: 46-47; Croft 2003; Velupillai 2012: 283)

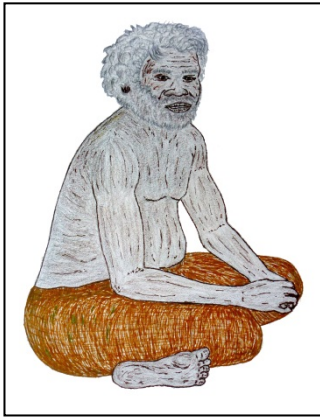
# Implications for Language Documentation: Analysis

- Somewhat paradoxically, the tools for analyses based on an interactional view of grammar are less likely to be found in mainstream typological works than e.g. in
  - Discourse analysis
  - Semantic analyses of modality, information structure etc.

## Implications for Language Documentation: Data

- Conversational data are the ultimate source for any observations on the interactional basis of grammatical phenomena
- However, recordings of naturally occurring conversations are not always realistic or even desirable in a fieldwork situation
  - linguist as language learner (if not speaker / community member)
  - ethical issues
  - time-consuming

- Other types of data can be valuable sources of information
  - Reaction of speakers to unfamiliar stimuli (in case of evidentials)
  - Questioning speakers about interpretation or appropriate contexts for utterances
  - Systematic elicitation, especially of low-frequency phenomena (e.g. fictitious question-answer pairs for different subtypes of focus)





# Abbreviations

	1+2	1 <sup>st</sup> & 2nd person dyad	MOD	modal
ABL		ablative	OBJ	object
ALL		allative	OBL	oblique
CONTR		contrastive focus	PL/pl	plural
DAT		dative	POSS	possessor
DEM		demonstrative	POT	potential modality
DIR		directional	PROPR	proprietary ('having')
DIST		distal demonstrative	PROX	proximal demonstrative
DU/du		dual	PRS	present tense
ERG		ergative	PST	past tense
EVID		Speaker authority evidential	RDP	reduplication

FS	False start	RESTR	restrictive marker ('just', 'only')
HS	hearsay evidential	SG/sg	singular
IMP	imperative	SUBORD	subordination marker
IMPF	(past) imperfective	TR	transitivity marker (Kriol)
INTERJ	interjection		
IRR	irrealis		
\	Final (falling) intonation		

Underline in Jaminjung examples marks Kriol words and passages

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