

## **Ergativity in comprehension and production: Language typology and processing**

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Research on the distribution of grammatical structures in the world (language typology) suggests that certain structures are preferred because they fit better with the strategies employed by the language processing system in the brain. While methodological advances now allow for a detailed analysis of distributional preferences in time and space, a continuing challenge relates to the assumed universality of the relevant processing conditions. Experimental evidence tends to be limited to a few Indoeuropean languages, with similar structures. Our project addresses this challenge by focusing on one promising candidate of a processing universal that also appears to be correlated with a distributional preference: the „subject preference“.

This bias lets the comprehension system interpret unmarked sentence-initial noun phrases as the sole (S) argument of intransitives or as agents (A) of transitives. When the sentence completion demands reanalysis of the initial NP as a patient (P), this elicits various reanalysis effects (e.g. in terms of event-related brain potentials in electroencephalograms, ERPs). A possible explanation is that A arguments involve less and less complex dependencies than P arguments, hence representing a simpler option. The bias is well-established for several languages and persists across various information-structural and semantic conditions. If truly universal, the bias would explain why case systems tend to favor unmarked NPs to cover S and A („accusative“) rather than S and P („ergative“).

Here, we explore to which extent the anti-ergative bias is universal and persists under unfavorable grammar conditions, i.e. when a language has ergative case alignment or prefers P-initial sentences. Does the anti-ergative bias persist or does the system adapt to the demands of language-specific structures? Using Basque as the research language for my thesis, I am working on an EEG sentence comprehension experiment, an eye-tracking and EEG sentence production experiment, and a corpus analysis to answer these questions.