GRAMMATICAL CASE IN THE LANGUAGES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE

ACTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

VARIATIONS, CONCURRENCE ET EVOLUTION DES CAS
DANS DIVERS DOMAINES LINGUISTIQUES

Paris 2–4 April 2007

edited by

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STUDIES IN ANCIENT ORIENTAL CIVILIZATION • NUMBER 64
The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

Cover Image

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Printed by McNaughton & Gunn, Saline, Michigan

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THE PROBLEM OF THE ERGATIVE CASE IN HITTITE

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As established by Laroche (1962), a grammatically neuter noun cannot function in Hittite as the subject of a transitive verb, but must be replaced by a special form in *-anza* (/-ants/) in the singular and *-anteš* in the plural.[1] Thus the regular neuter nominative-accusative singular *kī tuppi* "this tablet" in [1] is replaced by *kāš tuppianza* in [2]:

[1] *kāša⸗kan kī tuppi kuedani* UD-*ti parā neḫḫun*

   "On the day on which I sent you this tablet"

[2] *maḫḫan⸗ta kāš tuppianza anda wemiyazzi*

   "When this tablet reaches you"

Likewise the regular neuter nominative-accusative plural *uddār* "words" in [3] is replaced by *uttanānteš* in [4]:[2]

[3] *kēl⸗kan tuppiyaš uddār waḫnuši*

   "(And if) you alter the words of this tablet"

[4] *namma⸗ya ammel* ŠA DUMU.LÚ.U₁₉.LU.MEŠ *uttanānteš* ᵈ*Telepinui karpin kardimmiyattan šāwar QATAMMA arandu*

   "Further may my, the mortal's, words likewise halt the ire, anger and resentment of Telipinu."[3]

All synchronic analyses of this phenomenon known to me take one of two basic approaches: (1) the forms in *-anza* and *-anteš* are nominatives of animate stems derived from the neuters with a suffix *-ant-*, (2) they are case forms of the underlying neuter nouns themselves. There are two versions of the derivational analysis. The first and most popular proposal claims that the *-ant-* suffix "animatizes" or "personifies" the concept expressed by the base noun: see among others Benveniste (1962: 47–48), Neu (1989: 1–3), and Tchékoff (1978: 229).

As already argued by Garrett (1990: 268–71), this analysis is patently false, because it makes wrong predictions in two directions. First, if the function of *-anza* and *-anteš* were to imbue with "active force" nouns with semantically inanimate referents, then all such nouns should appear in this form when functioning as agents. This is falsified by numerous examples such as [5]:

[5] *parnanza⸗at tarnau ištarniyaš⸗at annašnanza tarnau* ᴳᴵˢ*luttanza⸗at tarnau... ištarniyaš⸗at ḫilaš tarnau*

   "May the house release it, may the inner *a.* release it, may the window release it,... may the inner courtyard release it."

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[1] This study focuses solely on the synchronic status of "NP split ergativity" in Hittite. No stance is taken on its prehistory, for which besides Garrett 1990, see among others Benveniste 1962: 48–51, Tchékhoff 1978, Oettinger 2001b: 311–12 (with referemces), and especially Josephson 2004. See Rumsey 1987 against Proto-Indo-European as an ergative language.

[2] Neuter nouns also appear in their regular nominative-accusative form as the subjects of intransitive verbs. Illustrations seem unnecessary.

[3] There are also matching forms in Luvian (singular *-antiš*, plural *-antinzi*) and in Lycian (plural *-ẽti*). I know of no evidence in Palaic or Lydian to suggest that this feature is not already Proto-Anatolian.

All four subjects of the transitive verb *tarnau* "let release" refer to inanimate objects, a house, and various parts of the house. If the function of *-anza* were personifying, then it should appear on all four, and we would expect **ḫilanza* for the last. In fact, however, only grammatically neuter nouns appear in the form *-anza* when they are the subject of a transitive verb, while the grammatically animate noun *ḫila-* appears as an ordinary nominative singular.

The claim that the function of the suffix *-ant-* is to make a noun *semantically* animate, "active," or "personified" also predicts that nouns with animate referents should not require the suffix, since they are animate already. However, we find *antuḫšannanza* to *antuḫšatar* "populace," ᴹᵁᴺᵁˢ·ᴹᴱˢ̌*ḫazkara(ya)nza* to the collective ᴹᵁᴺᵁˢ·ᴹᴱˢ̌*ḫazkara(i)* "female musicians," and ᴸᵁ·ᴹᴱˢ̌*walwalla(n)za* to the collective ᴸᵁ·ᴹᴱˢ̌*walwalla* "lion-men" (see for the last two Hoffner 1998: 38–40). These examples confirm that it is the *grammatical* gender of the noun that is the determining factor, not the animacy of the referent (see the correct observation of Patri 2007: 22 n. 6). For an additional argument that the forms in *-anza* and *-anteš* cannot be animate, see immediately below.

Sporadic use of the *-anza/-anteš* forms for genuine personification is an entirely distinct matter that does not alter their fundamental grammatical status. The difference was quite clear to the Hittites. The word *lingāi-* "oath" (animate gender) was written Akkadographically as *NIŠ* DINGIR-*LIM* and had an ordinary nominative plural *lingāeš* "oaths." However, oaths as deities that pursue those who break an oath were *linkiyanteš*, written *NIŠ* DINGIR.MEŠ, a combination that makes no sense in Akkadian, but reflects the Hittites' sense that the *linkiyanteš* were personified deities, thus DINGIR.MEŠ (see Güterbock and Hoffner 1980: 67–68). As expected, grammatical animate gender is also used for the same purpose: ᴳᴵˢ̌*ḫatalkiš* "hawthorn" (neuter) is replaced by ᴳᴵˢ̌*ḫatalkišnaš* (animate) when addressed as an actor in a myth. I stress that neither of these uses is obligatory (see KUB 43 62 ii 5–7, where "fire, son of the Sun-god" appears as neuter *paḫḫur*), nor are they limited to the role of subject of transitive verb. These two features clearly distinguish such examples from the grammatically required substitution being analyzed here.

A further difficulty with the derivational analysis is that if the *-anza/-anteš* forms built to neuter nouns belong to a derived stem, then that stem should inflect freely in all cases and occur in all environments expected of a grammatically animate noun. Compare fully inflected *utne(y)ant-* "population" or names of seasons like *zenant-* "autumn." The latter may reflect the same suffix *diachronically* (see the references in note 1 above), but they cannot be equated synchronically due to their totally different behavior, contra Laroche (1962: 35–36), Benveniste (1962: 46), and others. Such forms in *-anza/-anteš* built to neuters occur only as subjects of transitive verbs. Furthermore, they are in strict complementary distribution with all (other) forms of the paradigm of the neuter noun.[4] The putative derived animate nouns would thus have a suspiciously defective paradigm. See Patri (2007: 23–25) for similar arguments.

The second version of the derivational analysis claims that the suffix *-ant-* seen in *-anza/-anteš* alters the grammatical gender of the base noun from neuter to animate. In the traditional terminology of Indo-European linguistics, it is thus a "motion suffix." Despite his use of the term "ergative," this is clearly the analysis of Laroche (1962: 41): "le suffix *-ant-* est le marque du *transfert d'un inanimé dans la classe animée*" (emphasis in the original). See likewise Luraghi (1997: 7 n. 9). This analysis is false for the same reason as the first proposal: a true animate gender noun should fully inflect as such (compare Latin *dea* "goddess" < *deus* "god" and other genuine motion suffixes). Once again there is no explanation for the complementary distribution with all other forms of the neuter noun.

There is a further argument against the claim that the transitive subject forms in *-anza* are animate gender. The only relevant examples of anaphoric reference affirm that the grammatical gender of the noun remains neuter. Garrett (1990: 291) cited one instance:

[6]   *šuḫḫa⹀ma⹀kan* **A-*az*** *ārri n⹀**at**⹀kan* GAM ᴳᴵˢ̌ŠEN-*az ārši*

"The water washes the roof, and it flows from the drainpipe."

A-*az* is a writing for *wetena(n)z*, the transitive subject form of neuter *wātar* "water," which is resumed by *-at*, neuter nominative-accusative singular of the enclitic anaphoric pronoun "it." Garrett expressed regret that he

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[4] The contrary claim by Luraghi (1997: 8) is patently false and is due to her failure to distinguish the examples restricted to the role of transitive subjects from the truly derived type.

could provide only a single example, but in fact there is at least one other that he overlooked (KUB 14 14 verso 10–12):

[7a]   *nu⹀kán ᵐDutḫaliyan kuiēš kuenner nu ēšḫar apūš šarni[inker]*

"Those who killed Tuthaliya have made restitution for the bloodshed."

[7b]   *nu* KUR ᵁᴿᵁ*Ḫatti⹀ya (Ḫattušaš utnē*) apāš* **išḫananza** *arḫa namma zinn[it]*

"That **bloodshed** further finished off the land of Hatti too,"

[7c]   *n⹀at* KUR ᵁᴿᵁ*Ḫatti⹀ya (Ḫattušaš utnēyanza*) karū šarnikta*

"so that the land of Hatti too has made restitution for **it**."

Any attempt to discount this example by claiming that the *-at* of clause [7c] is directly resuming the neuter form *ēšḫar* of [7a] is refuted by the overall rhetorical structure of the text. The repetition of the phrase KUR ᵁᴿᵁ*Ḫatti⹀ya* "and also the land of Hatti" — with fronting of the direct-object occurrence in [7b] so as to achieve a precise match in word order with the subject occurrence in [7c] — makes it absolutely clear that [7c] is resuming [7b]. Furthermore, since the Hittite would have read *Ḫattušaš utnē* išḫananza* in [7b] and *Ḫattušaš utnē(y)anza* ēšḫar* in [7c], the two clauses would also have been reciprocal in form as well as content.

Neither version of the derivational analysis is viable; however we are to explain the formal *resemblance* between the special transitive subject forms of neuter nouns and the nominatives of regular animate stems in *-ant-*, the former are neuter, not animate!

We turn now to the second alternative: *-anza/-anteš* in the forms under discussion are inflectional endings, marking a case of the neuter nouns. Here again we have two competing proposals. The first is that of Patri (2007: 34–49),[5] who argues that *-anza* is an allomorph of the ablative-instrumental ending. He cites extensive cross-linguistic evidence for the presumed syntax: that is, where one might expect an inanimate noun to appear as the subject of a transitive verb, it appears instead in the ablative-instrumental. This analysis is quite compatible with the Hittite facts in syntactic terms, but it is wholly impossible on formal grounds.

First, *-anza* is an allomorph of the Hittite ablative ending for only a handful of neuter nouns (securely fewer than ten). Patri's claim that *-anza* is the preferred ablative ending for Hittite neuter nouns is simply false. The vast majority of Hittite neuter nouns are attested only with the regular ending *-az*. The fact that due to "nasal reduction" the transitive subject ending *-anza* ([-ants]) occasionally appears as *-az* in no way alters the fact that its underlying form is /-ants/, while that of the regular ablative ending, including for almost all neuter nouns, is /-ats/.[6]

Second, the Hittite ablative is indifferent to number. The plural is also only *-az*, never *-anteš*. Hence a plural like *uttanānteš* in example [4] above cannot possibly be an ablative. The attempt of Patri (2007: 57) to treat such forms in *-anteš* as belonging to derived stems in *-ant-* is not remotely credible. All belong to neuter nouns that show no other case forms in *-ant-*. The relationship of regular neuter nominative-accusative plural *widār* "waters" to the exclusively transitive subject form *witenanteš* is absolutely parallel to that of regular nominative-accusative singular *wātar* "water" to transitive subject form *witenanza*. Any viable analysis of this phenomenon must treat them alike.

Third, the true Hittite ablative always shows regular agreement with pronominal and other modifiers. Contrast ablative *kēz tuppiyaz* "with/from this tablet" versus *kāš tuppianza* in [1] and *ištarniyaš annašnanza* in [4] above. I find Patri's attempt (2007: 52–53) to explain the latter pattern entirely circular. See further below on the agreement pattern of the transitive subject forms of neuter nouns.

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[6] Nasal reduction in Hittite affects /n/ before all stops and the affricate /ts/. It may reflect a pronunciation with a nasalized vowel (in the present instance [ãts]) or total loss ([ats]). In either case, the underlying form remains unaffected. Compare the case of the present indicative active third plural ending /-antsi/, which sometimes appears as *-Ca-zi*, in some stem classes homonymous (or merely homographic?) with the present third singular ending /-atsi/. No one would on this account seriously propose that the singular and plural endings are the same.

Finally, as indicated above (note 3), the appearance of special transitive subject forms for neuter nouns is a feature shared with Hittite by Luvian and Lycian. The only attested form of the ablative-instrumental in Luvian is /-adi/ and in Lycian *-e/adi*. It is quite impossible that the neuter transitive subject forms *-antis/-antinzi* of Luvian and *-ẽti* of Lycian are synchronic ablative-instrumentals. This fact and the others just cited definitively exclude Patri's analysis in terms of an ablative-instrumental.

We come finally to the analysis of Garrett (1990), by which the Hittite transitive subjects in *-anza/-anteš* and the matching forms in Luvian and Lycian are ergative case forms of neuter nouns — as part of a system of "NP split ergativity." Despite widespread but specious arguments to the contrary, all attested Hittite facts are fully compatible with such an analysis. First, neuter nouns do show the expected behavior of ergative alignment: they appear in one form in the role of transitive object and intransitive subject ("O" and "S" functions), but in another in the role of transitive subject ("A" function). One may without harm retain the traditional label nominative-accusative for the former, but Hittite forms like singular *wātar* "water" and plural *widār* "waters" are properly absolutives (with Garrett 1990), contrasting with the ergative singular and plural *witenanza/witenanteš*.[7]

Second, the Hittite alignment system follows the well-established animacy hierarchy of Silverstein (1976: 122) for NP split ergativity, by which the lower on the animacy scale, the more likely a nominal will follow an ergative-absolutive pattern, the higher the animacy, the more likely it will follow a nominative-accusative pattern (see also Dixon 1979: 86, repeated 1994: 85; and Lazard 1998: 194–95; contra Benveniste 1962: 45). As noted by Rumsey (1987: 312[12]), the Hittite pattern is thus typologically trivial. Hittite/Anatolian is unusual only in making the split at the very lowest possible point on the scale, with only neuter nouns taking ergative-absolutive alignment, while all other nominals take nominative-accusative alignment. Nevertheless, the Australian language Mangarayi furnishes a close parallel, likewise showing ergative-absolutive alignment only for inanimate nouns. Patri (2007: 27) denies the validity of this comparison, claiming that in Hittite the basis for the split is grammatical gender, while in Mangarayi the split reflects the semantic animacy/inanimacy of the noun. The validity of the latter claim is belied by the fact that in Mangarayi dogs and wind are grammatically animate, while children, dead people, wallabees, and kangaroos are not (I cite these examples at random from Merlan 1982). It is true that in Hittite, as in most Indo-European languages, the number of nouns with inanimate referents that show animate grammatical gender is unusually high, but the difference versus a language like Mangarayi is merely a matter of degree.

Mangarayi also confirms that a language can easily show NP split ergativity without any ergative verbal morphology (see the examples cited below). The absence of ergative verbal morphology in Hittite is thus not a valid argument against assuming NP split ergativity (contra Carruba 1992: 65).

Although few scholars have made the point explicit (apparently finding the matter self-evident), there can be little doubt that the key factor contributing to the widespread view that the transitive subjects in *-anza* are animate nominatives (despite the clear evidence to the contrary cited above) is the attested agreement pattern with demonstratives and adjectives. In *kāš tuppianza* "this tablet" in example [1], the form of *kāš* "this" is that of an animate nominative singular — likewise that of *ištarniyaš* "interior" in *ištarniyaš annašnanza* in example [5]. I follow Garrett (1990: 289–90) in regarding this agreement pattern as suppletive, reflecting paradigmatic gaps. Despite the protests of Patri (2007: 54), there is nothing problematic in this interpretation. One may compare for similar suppletion within Hittite itself the system of Old Hittite enclitic possessive adjectives, where the instrumental is used for the ablative and the neuter nominative-accusative singular for the plural: *iššaz⸗(s)mit* "from their mouths" (there being no ablative possessive form *-šmaz*) and *šākuwa⸗šmet* "their eyes" (for non-occurring *šākuwa⸗šma*). There is no basis for claiming that *iššaz* meaning "from the mouth" is an instrumental because the agreeing possessive *-šmit* is an instrumental (in Old Hittite the instrumental never means "from") — nor for supposing that *šākuwa* "eyes" is singular because *-šmet* is a formal singular. Likewise, then, there is also no justification for interpreting the neuter ergative *tuppianza* as animate noun because of the agreeing demonstrative *kāš*.[8]

In a language with NP split alignment, it is normal that each class of nominal follows its own alignment system, including mixing the two alignment systems *in the same clause*. That is, in a transitive sentence we expect to find all four logical combinations: animate subject (nominative) + animate direct object (accusative); animate subject

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[7] The contrary claim of Patri (2007: 17, 21, 26–27, 30–32) is based entirely on his presumption (for which he offers no explicit arguments) that the *-anza/-anteš* are grammatically animate, which we have seen above is false.

[8] I stress again that the arguments here are meant to apply purely to the synchronic status of the forms in question. I personally view the attested agreement pattern as problematic for the diachronic account of Garrett (1990), but that remains an entirely separate issue.

(nominative) + neuter direct object (absolutive); neuter subject (ergative) + animate direct object (accusative); neuter subject (ergative) + neuter direct object (absolutive). Since in my experience some colleagues appear to find this unnatural, I cite Mangarayi parallels for the respective Hittite constructions. I include also intransitive sentences, in part to show that in both languages the verbal morphology is the same for both nominative and ergative subjects. The Mangarayi facts are taken from Merlan (1982: 56–57 and passim):

S-function

Animate (Nominative)

Hittite: ᵈ*Telipinuš*   *lēlaniyanza*   *uet*
            Anim.Nom.Sing. Anim.Nom.Sing. Pret.3Sing.
            "Telipinu came in a fury." (lit. "Telipinu, furious, came.")

Mangarayi: *ŋaḷa-gaḍugu*   *Ø-ya-j*
            Fem.Nom.-woman   3Sing.-go-PP
            "The woman went."

Inanimate (Absolutive)

Hittite: ʙÀᴅ-*eššar≠ma*   *ŠA IṢṢI*   40 *gipeššar* *katta*   *uet*
            Neut.Abs.Sing.-part. of wood   measure   down   Pret.3Sing.
            "The fortification of wood came down (i.e., fell) 40 g."

Mangarayi: *Ø-wumbawa*   *Ø-ḷandi*   *jir*   *Ø-jaygi-ni*   *wuburga*   *ṇa-bundal-an*
            Neut.Abs.-one Neut.Abs.-tree stand 3Sing.-Aux.-PC halfway   NLoc.-billabong-NLoc.
            "One tree was standing in the middle of the billabong."

A-function and O-function

Animate Subject and Animate Object (Nominative and Accusative)

Hittite: *nu* *kuitman mēyawaš≠teš*   *ḫalkin*   *karippanzi*
            conj. while   Anim.Nom.Plur.-poss.   Anim.Acc.Sing. Ind.Pres.3Plur.
            "And while your four (horses) devour the grain …"

Mangarayi: *ŋaḷi-na*   *ŋaḷa-bugbug*   *wuran-jirag*   *malam-gara-ŋan*
            Fem.Nom.-Dis. Fem.Nom.-oldperson 3Sing./3Dual-eat-PP man-Dual-Acc.
            "That old woman ate the two men."

Animate Subject and Inanimate Object (Nominative and Absolutive)

Hittite: *nu≠za*   ᴸᵁ*patiliš*   *wātar*   ì.ᴅÙɢ.ɢᴀ   *dāi*
            conj.-refl. Anim.Nom.Sing. Neut.Abs.Sing. Neut.Abs.Sing. Pres.3Sing.
            "The *patili*-priest takes water (and) fine oil for himself."

Mangarayi: *Ø-ḷandi*   *mod* *Ø-may*   *ṇa-malam*
            Neut.Abs.-tree cut 3Sing./3Sing.-Aux.-PP Masc.Nom.-man
            "The man cut the tree down."

Inanimate Subject and Animate Object (Ergative and Accusative)

Hittite: *nu* ᵐ*Keššin*   *idālalawanza*   ɢɪɢ-*anza*   *ḫarzi*
            conj. Anim.Acc.Sing. Erg.Sing.   Neut.Erg.Sing. Pres.3Sing.
            "An evil sickness holds Kessi." (N.B. adjective also shows ergative ending)

Mangarayi: no example cited in Merlan 1982, but see comment on p. 148 and compare examples with animate pronominal objects:

            ṇa-baḍa   *ŋan-ga-ŋiñ*   *ṇa-ŋugu*   *ñim*   *ŋan-ga-ŋiñ*
            Masc.Nom.-father 3Sing./1Sing.-take-PP   Neut.Erg.-water submerge 3Sing./1Sing.-Aux.-PP
            "My father took **me**."   "The water covered **me**."

Hittite: *nu≠wa≠ta*   *kuedani mēḫuni* LÚ.MEŠ ṬEME   *anda*   *wemiyazi*
             conj.-part.-thee(ASing.)   at what time   messenger Anim.Plur. preverb   find Pres.3Plur.
             "When the <u>messengers</u> reach **you**…"

             maḫḫan≠ta   *kāš tuppianza*   *anda*   *wemiyazzi*
             when-thee(ASing.)   this tablet Erg.Sing.   preverb   find Pres.3Sing.
             "When <u>this tablet</u> (Erg.Sing.) reaches **you**…"

Inanimate Subject and Inanimate Object (Ergative and Absolutive)

Hittite: *nu*   *ḫannišnanza*   DI-*eššar*   EGIR-*pa*   *pēḫutet*
             conj.   Neut.Erg.Sing.   Neut.Abs.Sing.   back   Pret.3Sing.
             "The lawsuit brought a lawsuit in return." (i.e., a countersuit)

Mangarayi: *ṇa-ḷandi*   *ja-*o-*ṇidba*   o-*maṇ*
             Neut.Erg.-tree   3-3Sing./3Sing.-have   Neut.Abs.-gum
             "The tree has gum."

(N.B.: prefix *ṇa-* in Mangarayi marks Masc.Nom., Neut.Erg., and Neut.Instr.)

In sum, of the analyses presented thus far for Hittite transitive subjects in -*anza/-anteš* built to neuter nouns, only the NP split ergativity analysis of Garrett (1990) is compatible with all the attested facts.

Abbreviations

KUB 14   Albrecht Götze. *Historische Texte*. Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi 14. Berlin: Staatliche
              Museen, 1926
KUB 43   Kaspar K. Riemschneider. *Omina, Rituale und literarische Texte in hethitischer Sprache, zum Teil im
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