Basic terminology

Sole argument of intransitive verb: \( S \)
Agent-like argument of transitive: \( A \)
Patient-like argument of transitive: \( P \) (Dixon’s O)

Case form used as citation form (and no morpheme in some languages): unmarked Case
Other core (“structural”) Case(s): marked Case(s)

Case marking

Not all languages use Case marking, and Case is only marginally related to the subjecthood issues we are addressing in this course. But the typology of Case marking is important background.

The usual situation is one where \( S \) and \( A \) have unmarked Case (traditionally called nominative) and \( P \) has a marked Case (traditionally called accusative).

Languages: English, Hebrew, Russian, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Malayalam, Hawaiian, Latin, Quechua, …

Examples:
(1) **Imbabura Quechua** (Quechuan; Imbabura, Ecuador)

Juan aicha- ta micu- rca.
Juan meat- ACC eat- PST.3
‘Juan ate meat.’

(2) **Latin** (Indo-European>Italic; extinct: Rome)

a. Domin- us veni- t
master- NOM come- 3SG
‘The master comes.’

b. Serv- us domin- um audi- t
slave- NOM master- ACC hear- s
‘The slave hears the master’

Such a language is called **nominative-accusative**.

In some languages, \( S \) and \( P \) have unmarked Case (usually called absolutive) and \( A \) has marked Case (usually called ergative).
This is found in many languages of Australia (Dyirbal, Warlpiri, Diyari, Yidin', etc.), Eskimo languages (Inuit, Yupik), Basque, Georgian, Avar, Chukchee, Hindi-Urdu, Tongan, Samoan, and many others.

Examples:

(3) **Dyirbal** *(Australian>Pama-Nyungan; central Queensland coast, Australia)*

a. Duma banaga- n'u
   father.ABS return- NFUT
   ‘Father returned.’

b. Duma yabu- ngu bura- n
   father.ABS mother- ERG see- NFUT
   ‘Mother saw father.’

(4) **Greenlandic Inuit** *(Eskimo-Aleut>Eskimo; Greenland)*

a. Anut- ip arnaq vaa.
   man- ERG woman.ABS see- INDIC3sg3sg
   ‘The man saw the woman.’

b. Anut autlar- puq.
   man.ABS go.away- INDIC3sg
   ‘The man went away.’

(5) **Basque** *(generally considered an isolate; Pyrenees mountains, Spain and France)*

a. Miren- ek ni jo n- au.
   Miren- ERG me.NOM hit 1SG- have.3SG
   ‘Miren hit me.’

b. Miren erori d- a.
   Miren fallen 3SG- be
   ‘Miren fell.’

(6) **Avar** *(North Caucasian>Daghestanian; Daghestan, Russia)*

a. Či v- ač'- ula.
   man he- come- PRES
   ‘The man comes.’

b. Ebél- ala či v- at- ula.
   mother- ERG man he- discover- PRES
   ‘Mother discovers the man.’

These languages are called **ergative**.

Some of these are **split ergative**, meaning that some types of NPs display an ergative pattern and others a nominative-accusative pattern, as discussed in the Dixon reading. But it is important to note that languages of that type have distinct ergative and accusative Cases, showing that the marked Cases differ from each other.

Also, the term “ergative language” is also generally used for languages in which there is no Case marking, but agreement groups S and P together as opposed to A. The Mayan languages (Tzotzil, K’ekchi, etc.) are like this.
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(7) **Tzotzil** (Mayan; Chiapas, México)
   a. Č- i- bat.  
      ASP- ABS1- go  
      ‘I'm going.’
   b. L- i- s- ma.  
      ASP- ABS1- ERG3- hit  
      ‘He hit me.’
   c. Ta- ø- h- mah.  
      ASP- ABS3- ERG1- hit  
      ‘I'm going to hit him.’

On the other hand, some ergative languages, like Warlpiri, have ergative Case marking but nominative-accusative agreement!

In a very few languages, there is a consistent pattern in which A and P both carry marked Case (ergative and accusative, respectively). S is unmarked (nominative/absolutive).

Examples:

(8) **Nez Perce** (Penutian; Idaho, United States)
   a. Wewůkiye- ne pée- 'wi- ye háama- nm.  
      elk- ACC 3SUBJ.3OBJ- shoot- PERF man- ERG  
      ‘The man shot an elk.’
   b. Hi- páayn- a háama.  
      3SUBJ- arrive- PERF man  
      ‘The man arrived.’

(9) **Antekerrepenhe** (Australian>Pama-Nyungan>Arandic; s. Northern Territory, Australia)
   a. Arengke- le aye- nhe ke- ke.  
      dog- ERG me- ACC bite- PST  
      ‘The dog bit me.’
   b. Apwerte- le athe arengke- nhe we- ke.  
      stones- INSTR I.ERG dog- ACC pelt- PST  
      ‘I pelted the dog with stones.’
   c. Arengke nterre- ke.  
      dog run- PST  
      ‘The dog ran.’
Wangkumara (Australian>Pama-Nyungan; western New South Wales/Queensland border area, Australia)
   man- ERG hit- PST dog- FEM.ACC  
   ‘The man hit the (female) dog.’  
b. Kana- iŋa palu- ŋa.  
   man- NOM die- PST  
   ‘The man died.’  

These are called three-way languages.

In another class of languages, primarily languages of the Philippines, any element of the clause can have unmarked Case; verbal morphology (often called “voice”) marks which element it is.

Examples:
Tagalog (Austronesian>Malayo-Polynesian>Western; the Philippines)
a. Mag- aalis ang tindero ng bigas sa sako para sa babae.  
   AGT- take.out NOM storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack for DAT woman  
   ‘The storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack for a/the woman.’  
b. Aalis- in ng tindero ang bigas sa sako para sa babae.  
   take.out- DO ERG storekeeper NOM rice DAT sack for DAT woman  
   ‘A/the storekeeper will take the rice out of a/the sack for a/the woman.’  
c. Aalis- an ng tindero ng bigas ang sako para sa babae.  
   take.out- IO ERG storekeeper ACC rice NOM sack for DAT woman  
   ‘A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of the sack for a/the woman.’  
d. Ipag- aalis ng tindero ng bigas sa sako ang babae.  
   BEN- take.out ERG storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack NOM woman  
   ‘A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack for the woman.’  
e. Ipang- aalis ng tindero ng bigas sa sako ang sandok.  
   INS- take.out ERG storekeeper ACC rice DAT sack NOM scoop  
   ‘A/the storekeeper will take some rice out of a/the sack with the scoop.’  

These are called Philippine-type languages.

Finally, there are languages in which S is not treated uniformly. Instead, agentive Ss are Case-marked like A or trigger agreement like A and patientive Ss are Case-marked like P or trigger agreement like P.
Examples:
(12) Manipuri (Sino-Tibetan>Tibeto-Burman; northeastern India)
   a. धय- नो खेली.
      I- ERG ran
      ‘I ran.’
   b. धय sawwi.
      I got.angry
      ‘I got.angry.’
   c. धय- नो मा- बु पहुँ.
      I- ERG him- ACC beat
      ‘I beat him.’
(13) Lakhota (Siouan; Dakotas and surrounding area, United States)
   a. दा- दु
      1sgAGT- arrive
      ‘I arrived.’
   b. मा- सिचा.
      1sgPAT- bad
      ‘I am bad.’
   c. मा- या- क्ते.
      1sgPAT- 2sgAGT- kill
      ‘You kill me.’
(14) Acehnese (Austronesian>Malayo-Polynesian>Western; Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia)
   a. घोप्यन खा= गू= जाक उ= क्वेडे.
      he already 3 go to market
      ‘He went to market.’
   b. घोप्यन सकेत= गूह.
      he sick 3
      ‘He is sick.’
   c. जी= कप= क्वेडे.
      3 bite 2
      ‘It’ll bite you.’

These are called active languages.

Subjects

In nominative-accusative languages, unmarked Case goes with SUBJ (S/A). One way to understand ergative languages would be to hypothesize that they have an S/P SUBJ instead of an S/A SUBJ. There are various ways to implement this; the earliest account was that in ergative languages all transitive clauses are passive, so ergative Case is like a by phrase.

If S/P is SUBJ in ergative languages, it has subject properties. Investigation has shown that things are not that simple.
In some ergative languages, such as Hindi and Basque, subject properties work the same as in nominative-accusative languages. For languages of this kind, called morphologically ergative, the \texttt{SUBJ} is clearly S/A, and unmarked Case cannot be said to be a subject property.

For some ergative languages, such as Dyirbal and Inuit, some (but not all) subject properties are S/P properties. Since the ergative Case-marking seems to be in some sense related to syntactic properties, these languages are said to be syntactically ergative. But even in syntactically ergative languages, we cannot simply say that the \texttt{SUBJ} is S/P.