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# Review of: Non-canonical Marking of Subjects and Objects

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## BOOK NOTICES

**Non-canonical marking of subjects and objects.** Ed. by ALEXANDRA Y. AIKHENVALD, R. M. W. DIXON, and MASAYUKI ONISHI. (Typological studies in language 46.) Amsterdam & New York: John Benjamins, 2001. Pp. xi, 362. \$125.00.

This crosslinguistic study of patterns formed by exceptions to general typological rules governing the verb-external valence marking of grammatical terms investigates diverse languages—some familiar, others barely described in the literature at all. The results should be of interest to linguists of all theoretical persuasions as they impinge on our understanding of a core area of grammar.

The volume's main purpose is to uncover functional regularities in the minority of verbs in various languages that mark their core arguments using oblique cases. MASAYUKI ONISHI's introduction, 'Non-canonically marked subjects and objects: Parameters and properties' (1–53), establishes a framework for the crosslinguistic analysis of the phenomenon. Onishi summarizes the coding properties of grammatical terms, surveys the syntactic properties exhibited by noncanonically marked terms, and offers preliminary observations regarding the semantic groups of verbs most likely crosslinguistically to trigger special morphosyntactic treatment of subject or object NP. Because most of the studies deal with nonhead-marking languages, the discussion never fully extends to the issue of the noncanonical cross-referencing of terms verb internally—a topic worthy of similar investigation in the future. Both the introduction and the case studies that follow employ the useful notations of A (transitive subject), O (object), and S (intransitive subject), and what has come to be called 'basic linguistic theory' (R. M. W. Dixon, *Basic linguistic theory*, Canberra: Australian National University, MS, 1997). This makes the descriptive formalism extremely transparent and easy to follow from article to article.

The volume really consists of two parts: Onishi's introduction on the one hand, and the eight individual case studies on the other. 'Non-canonical marking of core arguments in European languages' (54–84), by MARTIN HASPELMATH, investigates case marking anomalies in conjunction with the notion of a broad European Sprachbund which he refers to as 'Standard Average European'. 'Non-canonical A/S marking in Icelandic' (85–112), by AVERY ANDREWS, discusses the surprisingly rich lexical variety in term marking found in this generally very 'nonexotic language'. 'Non-canonically marked A/S in Bengali' (113–48),

by Masayuki Onishi, is included as representative of many other South Asian languages. 'Non-canonically marked A/S in Imbabura Quechua' (149–76), by GABRIELLA HERMON, and 'Verb types, non-canonically marked arguments and grammatical relations: A Tariana perspective' (177–200), by ALEXANDRA Y. AIKHENVALD, extend the discussion to highland and lowland South America, respectively. 'Impersonal constructions in Amele' (201–50), by JOHN ROBERTS, investigates case marking in a Papuan language. More familiar languages are examined in KRISTINA SANDS and LYLE CAMPBELL's 'Non-canonical subjects and objects in Finnish' (251–306) and MASAYUKI SHIBATANI's 'Non-canonical constructions in Japanese' (307–54).

The value of this collection is two-fold. Individually, the articles provide lucid insights into a host of thorny case-marking problems that at best have received a less than adequate functional description in the past. Collectively, they point the way toward true insight into the cognitive underpinnings behind recurring patterns of exceptions to general morphosyntactic regularities. Although more case studies are needed before the volume's findings can be taken as definitive, the fact that such a study could be conducted with facility across so many unrelated languages attests to the value of 'basic linguistic theory' as both a descriptive device and as an assessment of our understanding of how grammars actually work. [EDWARD J. VAJDA, *Western Washington University.*]

**Introduzione alla glottologia Indoeuropea.** By RICCARDO AMBROSINI. Pisa: ETS, 1998. Pp. 329. €18.08.

Riccardo Ambrosini's latest book sums up his life's work as an historical linguist and provides a thorough, exhaustive, and reasoned introduction to the study of Indo-European comparative linguistics. The book is written in a magisterial prose whose tone is never didactic but succeeds in exciting the curiosity and interest of those who are not specialists in the subject. Unfortunately, the book has not been translated into English.

The Italian title of this work, *Glottologia indoeuropea*, suggests the scientific study of the historic relationships among the Indo-European languages, achieved in accordance with principles of regularity, verifiability, and consistency. Such a study also implies the presentation of hypotheses on the origin and diffusion of those languages that took place by means of ethnic migrations and other contacts that led generally to the supremacy of one language over another. On the contrary, *glottologia* without the adjective is