

## Prominence hierarchies and indexing of oblique participants

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It is commonly assumed that indexing (a.k.a. head-marking) preferentially applies to core grammatical roles (S of intransitive verbs, A and P of monotransitive verbs), also in many languages extending to the recipient (R) of ditransitive verbs (see e.g. Nichols 1986, Haspelmath 2005). It is thus unsurprising that indexing of participants expressing roles other than, and overtly flagged distinctly from core arguments, i.e. oblique objects and optional adjuncts, as in (1), has so far almost completely evaded the attention of typologists. The goal of my research is twofold. First, on the basis of a non-stratified convenience sample of more than 180 languages showing simultaneous indexing and flagging (a.k.a. dependent-marking) of at least some non-subject (S/A) participants, I offer a preliminary typology of indexing of obliques. Second, I explore how the familiar prominence hierarchies of person, animacy, definiteness/specificity and topicality shape the distribution of oblique indexing.

My sample includes 54 languages with indexing of obliques representing 29 language families from all macroareas, with a particularly high concentration (36 languages) in Australia (cf. Ennever & Browne 2023) and New Guinea. Semantic roles subject to oblique indexing include beneficiary (2) or maleficiary (3), comitative (4), instrument (5), goal (6), location (7) and more “exotic” ones like avoided participant (1). Indexed obliques can be flagged not only by affixal case-markers as in (1), (3), but also by (clitic) adpositions (2), (4). The indexes cross-referencing obliques can coincide with those employed for P and/or R (as e.g. in Panará and Macedonian), or be distinct from them (as e.g. in Pintupi and Itelmen).

My data reveal that prominence hierarchies constrain the phenomenon of oblique indexing in at least two respects. First, indexing of obliques is in most cases sensitive to the same factors that have been invoked in the discussions of (differential) object indexing (Nikolaeva 2011, Iemmolo 2011, Heusinger et al. 2024), i.e. person (e.g. only 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person obliques can be indexed in Tabasaran (8) and Quechuan languages), animacy (e.g. usually only human or animate obliques can be indexed in Australian languages), definiteness (e.g. only definite obliques can be indexed in Amharic, Amberber 2024), and topicality (e.g. only topical obliques are eligible for indexing in Itelmen and Manambu (9), Aikhenvald 2008: 62). Second, these factors reveal themselves also in the range of semantic roles that are subject to oblique indexing cross-linguistically: the semantic relation by far most frequent among those eligible for oblique indexing is that of beneficiary or maleficiary (attested in 38 languages), which is prototypically expressed by human or animate participants; the same concerns the comitative role found in oblique indexing constructions in 11 languages.

That the distribution of oblique indexing is shaped by prominence hierarchies is unsurprising, since these factors are known to constrain indexing in general (Just 2022, Haspelmath 2026). Besides, indexing, including oblique indexing, commonly arises from “pronominal doubling” of salient discourse participants (Givón 1976); this is clearly seen in Tabasaran (8), where the oblique verbal person markers are transparently related to case forms of pronouns and occur when the participant “makes a significant contribution to the situation” (Bogomolova 2018: 826). This preliminary survey suggests that oblique indexing is a valid, even if comparatively rare, typological phenomenon showing some genealogical and areal clustering and corroborating established generalisations related to prominence hierarchies.

- (1) Pintupi (Pama-Nyungan, Australia; Hansen & Hansen 1978: 61)

*malaku=latju-tjanampalura pitjangu malpu-ngkamarra patjal-tjakumarra*  
return=1PL.EX.S-3PL.AV      went      spirit-AV      biting-AV

‘We turned back to avoid the spirits biting us.’

- (2) Panará (Macro-Je > Je, Brasil; Bardagil-Mas 2018: 150)

*kwakriti jy=ra=pêê=ty inkjê pêê*  
spider.monkey INTR=1SG=MAL=die      1SG      MAL

‘My spider-monkey died (on me).’

- (3) Fore (Trans-New-Guinean, Papua New Guinea; Scott 1978: 112)

*na-ba:-ném-pá'-ti a-'ta-y-e*  
1SG-father-1SG-SG-ALLAT 3SG.O-put-3SG.S-IND

‘He puts it there for my father.’

- (4) Yurakaré (isolate, Bolivia; van Gijn 2005: 60)  
*më-jti lëtta-m ku-winani-shta-m mi-ye=tina*  
 you.SG-LIM one-2SG.S 3SG.AO-walk-FUT-2SG.S 2SG-sister=COM  
 ‘You will be the only one that is going to live together with your sister.’
- (5) Amharic (Semitic, Ethiopia; Leslau 1995: 430)  
*almaz b=addisu ärsasə-wa šaf-äčč-əbb-ät*  
 Almaz INS=new pencil-3SG.F write.PFV-3SG.F.S-INS-3SG.O  
 ‘Almaz wrote with her new pencil.’
- (6) Macedonian, dialectal (Indo-European, North Macedonia; Lunt 1952: 108)  
*Naizlego-a gluvci i mu=pojdo-a kaj adži mačor-ot...*  
 come.out-AOR.3PL.S rat-PL and 3SG.M.IO=go-AOR.3PL.S to haji cat-DEF  
 ‘The rats came out in crowds and went to Haji Cat...’
- (7) Itelmen (Chukotko-Kamchatkan, Russia; Bobaljik & Wurmbrand 2002: 23)  
*nt-čaja-kinen ənna-nk*  
 1PL.S-drink.tea-3SG.OBL 3SG-LOC  
 ‘We had tea at/by him (at his place).’
- (8) Tabasaran (Nakh-Daghestanian, Russia; Bogomolova 2018: 826)  
*rasul uzu-x-na ka-f-nu(=zu-x-na)*  
 Rasul 1SG-APUD-LAT PFV-come-PST(=1SG-APUD-LAT)  
 ‘Rasul came to me.’
- (9) Manambu (Ndu, Papua New Guinea; Aikhenvald 2008: 62)  
*wun a-də yab-a:r yi-tua-d*  
 1SG DIST-SG.M road-ALLAT go-1SG.S-3SG.M.BAS  
 ‘I went towards this road (that we are talking about).’

**Abbreviations:** ALLAT — allative; AO — applied object; AOR — aorist; APUD — localisation ‘at’; AV — avoidance; BAS — basic indexing set; COM — comitative; DEF — definite; DIST — distal; EX — exclusive; F — feminine; FUT — future; IND — indicative; INS — instrumental; INTR — intransitive; IO — indirect object; LAT — lative; LIM — limitive (‘only’); LOC — locative; M — masculine; MAL — malefactive; O — object; OBL — oblique; PFV — perfective; PL — plural; PST — past; S — subject; SG — singular.

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