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# STUDIES IN LANGUAGE

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OBITUARY

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov

1928, Odessa – 2009, St.Petersburg

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov, a great Russian linguist and typologist, died July 21, 2009 in St. Petersburg, at age 81, after a few months of heavy illness.

His name marks an epoch in the history of linguistic typology.

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov graduated from the Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages in 1950. He started his academic career in 1959 when he embarked on graduate studies (*aspirantura*) at the Department of German Philology of the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute (*Pedagogičeskij Institut imeni Gercena*). His early works concentrated on German grammar and pedagogical aspects of teaching German.

The scope of his interests crucially extended in 1961, when, after defending his Candidate dissertation (*kandidatskaja dissertacija*), he joined the Research Group for the typological study of languages at the Leningrad Institute of Linguistics, founded and directed by Aleksandr Xolodovich.

Vladimir Petrovich Nedjalkov became one of the most brilliant representatives of what is now known as the famous Leningrad/St. Petersburg Typological School, greatly contributing to the development of the methodology, achievements, and successes of the Research Group. During the years of the Iron Curtain, when many eminent linguists left the Soviet Union, Vladimir Nedjalkov remained and contributed to the development of the unique typological tradition in the country. His interests mainly focused on the typology of verbal categories, such as voice and valency changing (causatives, reciprocals, reflexives, passives), aspect and actionality (resultatives, inchoatives/inceptives), converbs, etc.<sup>1</sup> We owe Nedjalkov comprehensive descriptions and minute analyses of several categories both from a typological viewpoint and in individual languages — German, Chukchi, Nivkh, Evenki, and numerous others. His works of the last decade mostly concentrated on a typological study of reciprocal constructions — a long-term project. It has found its outcome in the fundamental five-volume work,<sup>2</sup> a true Encyclopedia of reciprocals — an impressive monument to his scientific life.

Nedjalkov's linguistic intuition, typological horizon and sharp eye made him a unique editor — every volume published under his editorship became a remarkable event within our field.

Nedjalkov was a man of rare integrity. He did not draw much of a difference between life and scientific work. His exuberant energy was the subject of legends and helped him to launch and realize the most fantastic collective projects. He literally 'infected' his colleagues with his energy, making possible endeavors which otherwise would never have been brought to their end. He liberally shared his ideas and insights with people who surrounded him. Many talented young researchers were attracted into his 'magnetic linguistic' field, being greatly helped by Nedjalkov to develop their professional skills and to find their place within the scientific and academic infrastructure.

Vladimir Nedjalkov's charming personality, his sense of humor, his sharp criticism, and his friendly invaluable help to colleagues will be sorely missed. But he survives in his fundamental works, in his students, and in his colleagues and their works.

## Notes

1. A comprehensive bibliography of Nedjalkov's works published before 1999 can be found in: Werner Abraham & Leonid Kulikov (eds), *Tense-aspect, transitivity and causativity. Essays in honour of Vladimir Nedjalkov*. [Studies in Language Companion Series; 50]. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999, pp. xix-xxxiii.
2. Vladimir P. Nedjalkov, with the assistance of Emma Š. Geniušienė and Zlatka Guentchéva (eds.), *Reciprocal constructions*. 5 vols. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007. [Typological studies in language; 71].

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## Is Basque morphologically ergative?

### Western Basque vs. Eastern Basque\*

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Although Basque's case-marking pattern has conventionally been regarded as ergative, I argue in this article that it is not straightforward to determine whether this pattern is actually ergative or rather semantically-based. Several factors make this one a complex issue. Perhaps the most important factor among these, and one which has gone largely unnoticed in the literature, is the fact that there are clear dialectal differences regarding the behavior of lexically-simple unergative verbs. Another complication comes from establishing the specific contrast underlying the putative semantic split among Basque intransitives. With these questions in mind, I propose that the case-marking system of Western Basque should be considered semantically aligned instead of ergative. This system is based on a contrast patientive / non-patientive. Conversely, Eastern and Central Basque may be considered to have an ergative case-marking system, but one which differs in some respects from that of the most typical ergative languages and which is not too different from a semantic system.

## 1. Introduction

Basque has traditionally been considered to be a morphologically ergative language. Indeed, Basque is often cited as an example of a language with thoroughgoing ergative morphology (cf. Trask 2002:282; Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina eds. 2003:v). Yet, while it is clear that Basque case-marking follows almost systematically a dominant pattern that is not accusative, it is not obvious that this pattern is actually ergative. In truth, it is not easy to determine whether the case-marking pattern of Basque is ergative (i.e. valence-based) or rather semantically-based (i.e. split-intransitive). In order to distinguish between these two types of case-marking, one needs to look at the behavior of unergative predicates. However, in the Basque case there are at least three factors which make this issue very difficult and which have posed difficulties for scholars working on the subject.