

The typology of non-canonical subjects
Workshop proposal for ALT 2026, Lyon
convenors: Pierre-Yves Modicom, Joren Somers & Jóhanna Barðdal

At least since Keenan (1976), prototypical subjects have been defined in terms of coding and behavioral properties, such as case marking, clause-initial position, subject-verb inversion, conjunction reduction, raising, and control. These have been successfully applied to several languages and have thus led to the discovery of non-canonically case-marked subjects, starting with Icelandic (Andrews 1976, Thráinsson 1976, *inter alia*) and the South Asian languages (Masica 1976, Kachru, Kachru & Bhatia 1976, *inter alia*). Later, such non-nominative subjects have been documented in additional Germanic languages like Faroese (Barnes 1986) and German (Barðdal 2006, Somers et al. 2025, *inter alia*), alongside a substantial body of work on the early Germanic languages, like Gothic, Old English, Old Saxon, Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle High German (cf. Barðdal 2023 and the references therein).

Additional Indo-European languages featuring non-nominative subjects are Russian (Moore & Perlmutter 2000), Old French (Mathieu 2006), Romanian (Ilioaia 2023), and Latin and Ancient Greek (Barðdal et al. 2023, Cluyse, Somers & Barðdal 2025). Non-nominative subjects have also been documented in further languages around the globe, such as Japanese (Shibatani 1999) and Korean (Yoon 2004), Hebrew (Landau 2009, Pat-El 2018), native American languages (Hermon 1985), the Dravidian languages (Verma & Mohanan 1990), the Dardic languages (Steever 1998), the Tibeto-Burman languages (Bickel 2004) and the Cariban languages (Castro Alves 2018).

Today, 50 years after Keenan's monumental work, the aim of this workshop is to once more bring non-nominative subjects to the fore and to specifically focus on:

- a cross-linguistic typology of subjects
- the status of subject criteria in language comparison
- theories of argument structure and valency, e.g. lexical vs. non-lexical theories of argument structure constructions
- the mapping between semantic roles, information status and syntactic coding of subject arguments
- the similarities and differences between phenomena such as differential subject marking and split alignment across languages

The workshop is also open to any typological contribution to the following issues:

- the semantic motivation behind i) non-canonical case marking of subjects, ii) valency alternation in the selection of subject arguments iii) split alignment or iv) differential subject marking
- non-canonical subjects in languages with alignment systems other than nominative–accusative
- syntactic alternations involving non-nominative subjects, like oblique anticausativization (cf. Barðdal et al. 2020)
- alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat or Acc-Nom/Nom-Acc predicates
- non-canonically case-marked subjects in non-case languages, like Dutch (cf. Somers 2023)
- morphological variation in subject case marking

– the emergence, evolution and loss of non-canonical subjects in language history
Please submit your abstract of one page, excluding references, to pierre-yves.modicom (AT) univ-lyon3.fr before April 26th, 2025.

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