

*Grammatical relations in areal perspective: Exotic patterns on the Northwest Coast of North America*

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It has been proposed that certain typological features are so resistant to borrowing that they can be considered indicators of deep genetic relationship, more ancient than those discoverable by the comparative method. Among these features are core argument structure patterns, such as nominative/accusative, ergative/absolutive, agent/patient, active/stative, tripartite, and hierarchical. Yet we find geographical areas in which neighboring but genetically unrelated languages share the same patterns, even where these patterns are otherwise rare cross-linguistically. The similarity cannot be due to common inheritance, but it is difficult to imagine how such a fundamental aspect of language structure could be borrowed. Here we shall look at some languages indigenous to the Northwest Coast of North America to see how seemingly 'unborrowable' typological traits could come to be shared.