

**High Absolutive in West Circassian: Evidence from Parasitic Gaps**  
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**INTRODUCTION** This paper argues that in West Circassian (WC; or Adyghe), a morphologically ergative language, the absolutive DP occupies a position c-commanding other arguments – Spec,TP. Evidence for the high position of the absolutive DP comes from parasitic gap licensing in relative clauses: a parasitic gap is impossible in the context of absolutive relativization due to the Anti-C-Command condition.

**WH-AGREEMENT AND THE ABSOLUTIVE WH-CONSTRAINT** The formation of relative clauses in WC involves the use of a special morpheme that replaces the agreement morphology corresponding to the relativized argument:  $z(\emptyset)$ - for non-absolutive arguments and  $\emptyset$ - for the absolutive (Lander 2009a,b, 2012; Caponigro & Polinsky 2011). For example, the agreement prefix corresponding to the ergative DP in (1a) is replaced by  $z\emptyset$  if that DP is relativized (1b).

- (1) a. **č'ale-m** apč'ə-r  $\emptyset$ -ə-q<sup>w</sup>əta-β 'The boy broke the glass.'  
**boy-OBL** glass-ABS 3ABS-3SG.ERG-break-PST
- b. [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub>  $t_i$ (ERG) apč'ə-r  $\emptyset$ -zə-q<sup>w</sup>əta-βe] č'ale-r  
glass-ABS 3ABS-WH.ERG-break-PST boy-ABS  
'the boy that broke the glass' (Lander 2009b)

Following work by O'Herin (2002) on a similar pattern in the related language Abaza and Caponigro & Polinsky's (2011) analysis of WC relativization, I propose to treat this morpheme as a case of agreement in a [WH] feature with a trace bound by a relative operator, i.e. wh-agreement. Multiple instances of this agreement morpheme may surface within a single clause if the relativized argument binds a pronoun within another DP, thus giving rise to multiple wh-agreement. For example, in (2), if the possessive pronoun on the absolutive DP is bound by the relativized ergative participant, this pronoun may optionally trigger wh-agreement on the possessive head, replacing regular 3<sup>rd</sup> person agreement.

- (2) [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub>  $t_i$ (ERG) [<sub>DP</sub>  $pro_{i/}$ (PR) {z-, $\emptyset$ -}jə-β<sup>w</sup>əneβ<sup>w</sup>ə pšaše-r] še zə-λeβ<sup>w</sup>ə-βe] -r  
{WH.PR-,3SG.PR-}POSS-neighbor girl-ABS good WH.ERG-see-PST -ABS  
'the one who<sub>i</sub> fell in love with (lit. saw good in) his<sub>i/\*j</sub> female neighbor' (Lander 2009b)

While a possessor within an absolutive DP may trigger this additional wh-agreement when it is bound by a relativized ergative DP, the inverse is not possible. Thus, an absolutive direct object may bind a pronoun within the ergative DP, but that pronoun may not in this case trigger wh-agreement in place of regular possessive agreement (3).

- (3) [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub> [<sub>DP</sub>  $pro_{i/j}$ (PR)  $\emptyset$ -/\*z-jate]  $t_i$ (ABS)  $\emptyset$ -ə-λeβ<sup>w</sup>ə-βe] -r  
3SG.PR-/WH.PR-POSS+father WH.ABS-3SG.ERG-see-PST -ABS  
'the one whom<sub>i</sub> his<sub>i/j</sub> father saw' (Lander 2009b)

In line with Lander (2012), the restriction can be framed as follows:

- (4) **THE ABSOLUTIVE WH-CONSTRAINT:**  
In a relative clause in which an argument X is relativized, a possessor pronoun coindexed with X may trigger additional wh-agreement on its head iff X is *not* absolutive.

**AGAINST WEAK CROSSOVER** Caponigro & Polinsky (2011) propose that multiple wh-agreement is the result of agreement in the [WH] feature between the relativized DP and the bound possessive pronoun. Within their analysis the Absolutive Wh-Constraint is due to a Weak Crossover (WCO) violation. In particular, the absolutive direct object in (3) may not undergo A'-movement over the coindexed possessive pronoun contained in the higher ergative DP, as this is a case of WCO. In (2), no WCO arises since the A'-moved ergative DP is higher than the absolutive object containing the coindexed pronoun.

The authors appeal to this pattern as evidence that WC is syntactically accusative, with the ergative DP occupying a position that is structurally superior to the absolutive direct object. As Lander (2012) points out, however, it is unclear why a coindexed interpretation is still possible in the absence of possessor wh-agreement in (3), given that this is precisely the configuration that should be ruled out by a ban on WCO. Furthermore, Lander (2012) provides additional data indicating that the Absolutive Wh-Constraint is not limited to direct object extraction, but may be generalized to all cases of relativization of the absolutive, including ones where the absolutive DP is the subject. For example, in (5) the verb *je-caqe* 'bite' takes as arguments an absolutive subject (the agent) and an indirect object (the patient). This verb can further take

an additional malefactive applied object, indexed on the verb with the prefix  $\xi^w$ - (none of these arguments are overtly case-marked in (5)). In (5) the wh-agreeing possessor cannot be interpreted as coreferent with a relativized absolutive subject (5a); the only available interpretation is one where the possessor is relativized directly (5b).

- (5) [CP Op<sub>i</sub> [DP t<sub>i</sub> zə-š] məʔerəse pro<sub>j</sub>\*<sub>i</sub> Ø-Ø-ξ-Ø-je-caqe-re] -r  
 WH.PR-brother apple 3ABS/\*WH.ABS-3SG.IO-MAL-3SG.IO-DAT-bite-PRS -ABS  
 a. \* ‘the one who<sub>i</sub>(ABS) is biting the apple(IO) against his<sub>i</sub> brother’s will(IO)’  
 b. ‘the one whose<sub>i</sub> brother(ABS) is biting an apple(IO) against his<sub>j</sub> will(IO)’ (Lander 2012)

In summary, the Absolutive Constraint cannot be adequately accounted for as a WCO violation and thus does not provide evidence for syntactic accusativity.

**PARASITIC GAPS** I propose that multiple wh-agreement is best analysed as a parasitic gap (PG) construction and restrictions on this pattern are a direct consequence of general restrictions on PGs. In particular, the wh-agreement tracking the possessor within the absolutive DP in (2) is a reflex of agreement with an additional wh-trace (a PG), rather than with a pronoun. The Absolutive Wh-Constraint is then a condition on PGs and can be restated in the following way: *a PG cannot be licensed if the licensing gap is the absolutive DP*. A well-known property of PGs is the Anti-C-Command condition: PGs may not be licensed in a position that is c-commanded by the licensing gap (Culicover 2001). This means that in a relative clause with a relativized absolutive, e.g. (5a), the absolutive trace c-commands the coreferent possessor within the other DP, thus failing to license a PG in that position. Importantly, this structural configuration must be extended to cases like (3), where relativization of the absolutive DP blocks the licensing of a PG (and wh-agreement) within the ergative DP, but not a bound pronoun (which therefore triggers normal possessor agreement instead of wh-agreement). This leads us to conclude that **the absolutive DP occupies a position that c-commands other arguments**, including the ergative DP in (3) (see e.g. Aldridge 2008; Coon et al. 2014 for similar proposals). I propose that this position is the specifier of T – the locus of absolutive case assignment. The absolutive DP moves to Spec,TP to satisfy an [EPP] feature on T. The ergative DP, on the other hand, receives inherent case in Spec,vP (Legate 2008) and thus remains in-situ within vP. The structure of (3) and (5) is illustrated in (6): the absolutive DP c-commands both the ergative DP of (3) and the indirect object of (5), hence, if the absolutive DP is relativized, PGs are not possible in either of these DPs.

- (6) [CP Op<sub>i</sub> [TP t<sub>i</sub>(ABS) [vP [DP(ERG) X<sub>PG</sub>] [v' [DP(IO) X<sub>PG</sub>] ] ] ] ] ]

On the other hand, if the licensing gap originates as the ergative DP, a PG may be successfully licensed within the absolutive DP, since the licensing gap in this case does not c-command the PG (7).

- (7) [CP Op<sub>i</sub> [TP [DP(ABS) ✓<sub>PG</sub>] [vP t<sub>i</sub>(ERG) ] ] ] ]

Unlike Caponigro & Polinsky’s (2011) WCO-based account, the PG analysis explains the optionality of wh-agreement in (2), in terms of the well-known alternation between PGs and bound pronouns: the former triggers wh-agreement, and the latter, regular possessor agreement. The PG analysis is additionally supported by the fact that this pattern also appears cross-clausally, even in syntactic islands such as adjuncts. For example, if the indirect object in a temporal adverbial clause is coreferent to the relativized indirect object in the matrix clause, it may trigger wh-agreement within the embedded clause (8).

- (8) [CP Op<sub>i</sub> [CP t<sub>i</sub>(IO) sə-z-a-we-ze] se [vP ək<sup>w</sup>eç s-jə-fe-new t<sub>i</sub>(IO)  
 1SG.ABS-WH.IO-DAT-hit-CNV I inside 1SG.ABS-LOC-fall-INF  
 sə-z-tje-neçə.ha-š’tə-be] ] š’χanB<sup>w</sup>əpč’e-r  
 1SG.ABS-WH.IO-LOC-rely-IPF-PST window-ABS

‘the window which I was relying on \_\_ to get inside by hitting \_\_’ (Lander 2012)

The relative clause in (8) is the classic configuration of a PG dependency (Culicover 2001): (i) the PG is in a syntactic island, (ii) Op binds the PG, and (iii) the licensing gap does not c-command the PG.

**CONCLUSION** The Absolutive Wh-Constraint can be readily accounted for as an application of the Anti-C-Command condition on PGs. The behavior of PGs in WC provides evidence for syntactic ergativity in WC: the absolutive DP is in Spec,TP in all clauses.

**SELECT REFERENCES** • Caponigro & Polinsky 2011. *NLLT*. • Coon, Mateo Pedro, & Preminger 2014. *Linguistic Variation* 14(2). • Lander 2009. Subjecthood properties of the Adyghé absolutive. Ms. • Lander 2012. RSUH dissertation. • O’Herin 2002. *SIL*.