

The role of the absolutive object in agreement and displacement

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Overview

- The Accessibility hierarchy: certain types of NPs are more accessible than others....
 - as targets for **displacement, a.k.a. A-bar movement** (Keenan & Comrie, 1978)
 -as targets for **phi-agreement** (Moravcsik, 1978)

Subject^x > Direct Object[✓] > Indirect objects > Oblique > [...]

- In recent years, this has been recast as a hierarchy of morphological case.
- Bobaljik 2008: most accessible targets for phi-agreement are **unmarked NPs** (but not necessarily subjects).

→ Unmarked (nom, abs)[✓] > Dependent (erg, acc)^x > Lexical/Oblique (dat)

(1) ICELANDIC (Jónsson '96, via Bobaljik '08)

Jóni líkuðu þessir sokkar
 Jon.DAT like.PL these socks.PL.NOM
 'Jon likes these socks.'

(2) HINDI (Mahajan 1990)

Raam-ne roTii khayii
 Raam.MASC-ERG bread.FEM.ABS eat.PERF.FEM.3SG
 'Raam ate bread'

- The morphological AH has recently been extended to capture A-bar movement (Deal 2016).
→ **'Syntactic ergativity'**
- The most easily displaced arguments are those with unmarked case.

(3) WEST GREENLANDIC (Bittner, 1994; 55, 58)

a. miiqqa-t [Juuna-p ___ paari-sa-i]

✓ **ABSOLUTE OBJECT RELATIVE**

child-PL Juuna-ERG ___ look.after-REL.TRANS-3SG.PL

"The children that Juuna is looking after"

b. *angut [___ aallaat tigu-sima-sa-a]

* **ERGATIVE SUBJECT RELATIVE**

man gun.ABS take-PRF-REL.TRANS.3SG

"The man who took the gun"

✓ **Unmarked (nom, abs)** > **Dependent (erg, acc)** > Lexical/Oblique (dat)

Today

- A-bar movement and phi-agreement are **not** completely analogous with respect to the AH (morphological or otherwise).
- **Ergative languages**
 - Object is unmarked (absolutive); subject bears dependent case (ergative).
Unmarked (ABS) > Dependent (ERG)
- When there is no absolutive object.....
 - In most cases, the subject isn't ergative, so not much to tell.
 - But some languages allow **intransitive ergative subjects**.
 - **Split ergative environments** – extended ergative pattern (e.g., Mayan languages)
 - **Active ergative languages** - ergative unergatives (e.g., Hindi, Mayan caseless objects).

A contrast!

- **Movement:** ERG subject **can** be **displaced** when no ABS object, *but*
- **Agreement:** ERG subject is **not** a target for **agreement**, even when no ABS object.

→ A-bar movement (of the ergative argument) is **not** governed by the AH.

Roadmap

1. Displacement

- **ABS-only A-bar movement** ('Syntactic ergativity') and the Accessibility Hierarchy.
- Mayan – inaccessibility of ERG argument depends on ABS co-argument.

2. Phi-agreement

- **ABS-only agreement** and the Accessibility Hierarchy
- Hindi, Basque – ERG argument is always inaccessible (in the relevant conditions).

3. Implications

- AH for agreement, not displacement.

4. Conclusions

1. Displacement

Syntactic ergativity

Syntactic ergativity

(Data from Coon et al, 2014)

(4) Q'anjob'al: ABS only movement

a. ABS object question

Maktxel max Ø-y-il-a' [naq winaq] []?
who ASP 3ABS-3ERG-see-TV the man
"Who did the man see?"

b. ERG subject question

*Maktxel max Ø-y-il-a' [] [ix ix]?
who ASP 3ABS-3ERG-see-TV the woman
"Who saw the woman?"

c. ABS (intrans) subject question

Maktxel max Ø-way-i []?
who ASP 3ABS- sleep-ITV
"Who slept?"

(5) Ch'ol: ERG and ABS movement

a. ABS object question

Maxki tyi y-il-ä-Ø [] jiñi wiñik?
who ASP 3ERG-see-TV-3ABS the man
"Who did the man see?"

b. ERG subject question

Maxki tyi y-il-ä-Ø jiñi wiñik []?
who ASP 3ERG-see-TV-3ABS the man
"Who saw the man?"

c. ABS (intrans) subject question

Maxki tyi wäy-i-Ø []?
who ASP sleep-ITV-3ABS
"Who slept?"

- Unmarked (ABS) > Dependent (ERG)
- No co-argument? For the most part – ABS subject.
- But not always.

Intransitive ergatives

- A subset of Mayan languages: **Ixil, K'ichee'** (among others).
 1. Are syntactically ergative:
 - (6) *Ixil ERG fronting* (Ayres, 8'1) (7) *K'ichee' ERG wh-questions* (Mondloch '81)
*Ye'l **in** kat **w-il** ex ***Jachiin** x-**u**-paxi-j lee laq?
NEG **1SG** PUNC **1ERG**-see 2ABS.PL **who** P-**3ERG**-break-ACT DET bowl
'I didn't see you (pl.)' 'Who broke the bowl?'
 2. Allow intransitive ergative subjects in certain environments
 - **Split 'extended ergative' pattern;**
 - **Caseless objects;**
 - Reflexives.

(NB. No active language is known to display syntactic ergativity (see Sheehan '14)).

Movement of ERG subject

- When ERG case marking is retained in the absence of an ABS object, **the ERG subject can undergo A-bar movement**.
- Extended ergative pattern in **Ixil**: progressive aspect split, *all* subjects are cross-referenced with ERG marking (data from Ayres, 1981).

(8) a. Transitive: ERG + ABS

*Ye'l **in** in **w-il** **ex**
 NEG **1SG** DUR **1ERG**-see 2ABS.PL
 'I'm not seeing you (pl.)'

b. Intransitive: ERG only

Ye'l **in** in **w-ok-e'**
 NEG **1SG** DUR **1ERG**-enter-SUF
 'I'm not entering'

- Bare objects in **K'ichee'**: bare object is caseless (cf. Coon et al., 2014; Clemens & Coon, to appear; data from Aissen, 2011).

(9) a. ERG + full ABS object

***Jachiin** x-u-loq' **rii uuq** ?
 who ASP-3ERG-buy DET cloth
 'Who bought the cloth?'

b. ERG + bare (caseless) object.

Jachiin x-u-loq' **uuq** ?
 who ASP-3ERG-buy cloth
 'Who bought cloth?'

See also: reflexives in **Q'anjob'al** and **Chuj** (Coon et al. 2014).

Implications

- Coon et al. (2014), Assmann et al. (2015) - syntactic ergativity arises from the presence of an (ABS) *co-argument*.
 - Cannot be attributed solely to the properties of the ERG NP.
- A way in which these facts *could* be accounted for under the morphological markedness Accessibility Hierarchy (cf. Deal 2016): the AH is **optimality based**.
 - The target for A-bar movement in syntactically ergative languages not necessarily an *unmarked* NP, but rather, the *least* marked NP.
 - E.g., via a Cyclic Agree approach (Bejar & Rezac, 2009) - if an \bar{A} -probe *fails* to find an unmarked NP – it may probe again, this time for a *more* marked NP.
- If the AH operates in this manner, we could expect to find parallel patterns with agreement.
 - Absence of an ABS co-argument should **restore ERG agreement**.

2. ϕ -agreement

Absolutive-only agreement languages

ABS-only agreement

(10) Hindi: ABS only

a. Transitive: ABS object agreement

Raam-ne roTii khayii
Ram.M-ERG bread.F.ABS eat.PERF.F.SG
'Ram ate bread'

b. Intransitive: ABS subject agreement

Siitaa aayii
Sita.F.ABS arrived.PERF.F.3SG
"Sita arrived"

(Mahajan, 1990:74-78)

(11) Nepali: ERG and ABS

a. Transitive: ERG subject agreement

Meri-le luga dhui sakaki che
Mary.F-ERG cloth.MPL wash PERF.F.SG. be.F.SG.
'Mary has washed the clothes.'

(Chandra & Udaar, 2015: 65)

b. Intransitive: ABS subject agreement

keti dherai degureki tshe.
girl.F.ABS much run.PERF PRES.F.SG
'The girl has run a lot.'

(Li, 2007:1465)

Compare: Q'anjob'al, Ixil, K'ichee'

Compare: Ch'ol

- Unmarked (ABS) > Dependent (ERG)
- No co-argument? Subject is often ABS.

Unergatives in Hindi

- Hindi (among other Indo-Aryan languages) has an **active** alignment.
 - Subjects of unergative verbs are (sometimes optionally) marked with ERG.

(12) a. Vivek-**ne** nacha
Vivek.M-**ERG** danced.M.SG
'Vivek danced'
b. Kutte-**ne** bhonkaa
dog.M.SG-**ERG** barked.M.SG
'The dog barked'
(Kinza Mahoon, p.c.)

- Recall: if the AH is optimality-based (cf. intransitive ERG movement in syntactically ergative Mayan languages (8,9)), **we would expect the absence of an ABS object to restore ERG agreement.**
 - In contrast, however, agreement in ergative unergative is always default **MASC 3SG.**
 - Indicative of **failed agreement** (Preminger, 2011) → **no unergative ERG agreement.**

(13) a. Anya-ne nacha(/*-i)
Anya.F-**ERG** danced.M.SG(/*F.SG)
'Anya danced'
(Kinza Mahoon, p.c.)
b. Kutton-**ne** bhonkaa
dog.M.PL-**ERG** barked.M.SG
'The dogs barked'
(Mahajan 1990: 74)

Not covert object agreement

- An alternative possibility: agreement in (8a, b) is not default agreement, but agreement with a covert ABS cognate object.

- Implicit Object Conjecture (Hale & Keyser, 1993; Bobaljik, 1993; Laka, 1993, a.o.)

- However, some unergative verbs have **feminine cognate objects** (when overt, FEM agreement appears).

(14) a. Anya-ne (bhurhi awaz se) **chik** chik-**hi/*-ha**
Anya.F-ERG (big voice with) **scream.F.ABS** scream-**F/*-M**
'Anya screamed a (loud) scream'

b. Anya-ne (xubsurat si) **muskurahaat** muskurah-i/*-a
Anya.F-ERG (beauty with) **smile.F.ABS** smiled-**F/*M**
'Anya smiled a (beautiful) smile'

- But: still **MASC** default agreement when cognate object is not overly present.

(15) a. Anya-ne chik-**ha/*-hi**
Anya.F-ERG scream-**M/*-F**
'Anya screamed'

b. Anya-ne muskurah-**a/*i**
Anya.F-ERG smile-**M/*-F**
'Anya smiled'

(data from Kinza Mahoon, p.c.)

= True default agreement!

Basque 1st/2nd ABS agreement

- Some further evidence that intransitive ergatives cannot be targeted for agreement: Basque 1st/2nd ABS agreement ('Ergative displacement'; cf. Laka, 1993 et seq.).
- Basque auxiliaries express agreement with **both** ERG and ABS (among other) NPs.

(16) a. Ni-k hi aurkitu h-ind-u-da-n
I-ERG you.ABS find 2s.ABS-EP-have-1s.ERG.PAST
'I found you'

- But: no ergative agreement when the following conditions are met (simultaneously):
 1. Tense is non present
 2. 1st/2nd person ergative subject
 3. 3rd person absolutive object

b. Ni-k hura aurkitu n-Ø-u-en
I-ERG he/she.ABS find 1s.ABS-3s.ABS-have-PAST
'I found him/her'

(data from Fernandez & Albizu, 2000)

→ No ERG exponent: ERG argument cross-referenced with ABS person agreement.

Summary

- ABS-only movement ('syntactically ergative')
Mayan languages:
 - ✓ **Intransitive ERG movement;**
but
- ABS-only agreement in Hindi and Basque:
 - ✗ **Intransitive ERG agreement.**

3. Implications

- **One possibility:** movement and phi-agreement are parametrized differently with respect to accessibility.
 - Unsatisfying.
- **Alternative:** syntactic ergativity adheres to the AH, phi-agreement is not about accessibility.
 - In ABS-only agreement languages (e.g., Hindi) - (Unmarked) case and agreement are the same: NP which is assigned case (e.g., by T^0) gets targeted *simultaneously* for phi-agreement.
 - In ERG/ABS agreement languages (e.g. Nepali) - case and agreement are separate operations – the closest NP to T^0 (the subject, regardless of its case) - is targeted for agreement.

- PROBLEM: wouldn't work for Nepali, as dative subjects, unlike ergative subjects, **cannot** control agreement (Bickel & Yādava, 2000, via Bobaljik, '08).

(20) malāī **timī** man parch-**au**. (*parch-**u**)
 1SG.DAT **2SG.ABS** liking occur.NPT-**2SG** (occur.NPT-**1SG**)
 'I like you.'

<p>Hindi : Unmarked > Dependent > Lexical Nepali: Unmarked > Dependent > Lexical (Bobaljik, 2008)</p>
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- Agreement in Nepali does not consistently track either **unmarked case** or **subjecthood**. (→ Morphological AH)
- **Better alternative:** phi-agreement adheres to the AH, syntactic ergativity is not about AH.
 - Coon et al. (2014), Assmann et al. (2015) – Syntactic ergativity arises from ABS case assignment, not from the properties of the ERG argument directly.
 - Evidence that 'syntactic accusativity' is very rare compared with syntactic ergativity (see Polinsky 2015); the AH predicts roughly equal proportions.

Conclusions

- Morphological Accessibility Hierarchy (Bobaljik, 2008):
 - **Unmarked (nom, abs) > Dependent (erg, acc) > Lexical/Oblique (dat)**
- Lower accessibility of ERG NPs relative to ABS NPs with respect to **A-bar movement** (Deal, '16) and **phi-agreement** (Bobaljik, '08).
- However, the behaviour of intransitive ergative NPs suggests that movement and agreement are not truly analogous with respect to the AH.
 - ABS-only movement ('syntactically ergative') Mayan languages:
 - ✓ **Intransitive ERG movement**; *but*
 - ABS-only agreement in Hindi and Basque:
 - ✗ **Intransitive ERG agreement**.
- Morphological AH for agreement, but not for A-bar movement.

Thank you!

Takk fyrir!

I would especially like to thank Kinza Mahoon for judgements of Hindi sentences, and Saioa Larraza for Basque judgements. With thanks also to Diane Massam, Lauren Clemens, the Syntax reading group at the University of Toronto, and four reviewers for helpful feedback.

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