

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.'

Hindi : Unmarked > **Dependent** > **Lexical**
Nepali: Unmarked > Dependent > **Lexical**
 (Bobaljik, 2008)

- 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!

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