Against Upwards Agree: A view from Dagestan

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Background

Agreement in minimalism

Mainstream minimalism

- central spot afforded to unvalued features in much of current theorising

Alternatives

- Agree-less minimalist theories of agreement (Zwart 2006)

Directionality of valuation: The debate

- **upward valuation/downward probing**: unvalued probe c-commands valued goal (Chomsky 2000, 2001, Carstens & Diercks 2013, Preminger 2013);
- **downward valuation/upward probing**: valued goal c-commands unvalued probe (Zeijlstra 2012);
- **Hybrid Agree**: normally valued goal c-commands unvalued probe but the reverse is allowed under certain conditions (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018);
- **bidirectional Agree**: Agree has no inherent directionality and can go either way (Baker 2008).

Plan for today

- outline Bjorkman & Zeijlstra's (2018) Hybrid Agree proposal
- adopt BZ's assumptions without contesting
  - show the account to fail
- examine BZ's assumptions
  - show them to be inconsistent with BZ's own analysis of Basque LDA
- advocate for a return to standard Agree (Probe c-commands Goal)

NB: My objections will primarily be empirical; for conceptual objections, see Preminger & Polinsky 2015.

Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018

BZ: Core assumptions

- interpretable and uninterpretable (Chomsky 1995) as well as valued and unvalued (Chomsky 2000) features
- checking is constrained by Upwards Agree (UA)
- valuation is subject to Accessibility
- unmarked (absolutive) case in ergative-absolutive languages is either structural accusative assigned by v or structural nominative assigned by T (Legate 2008)

Some definitions: Upward Agree (= feature checking)

(1) α checks an uninterpretable feature on β iff:

a. α carries a matching interpretable feature;

b. α c-commands β;

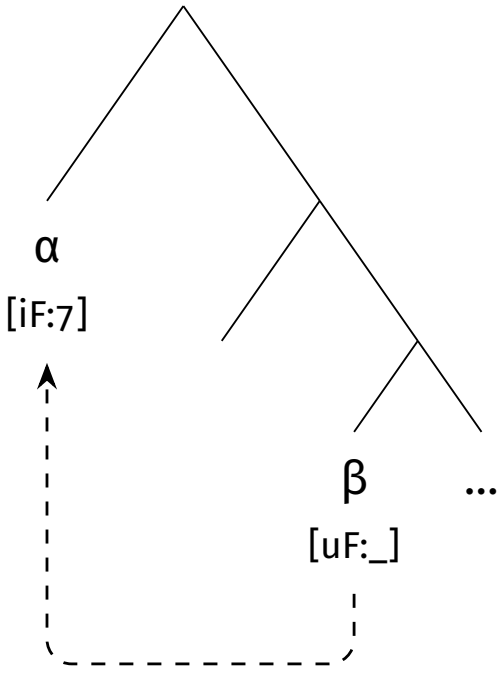
c. α is the closest goal to β (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018: 12)

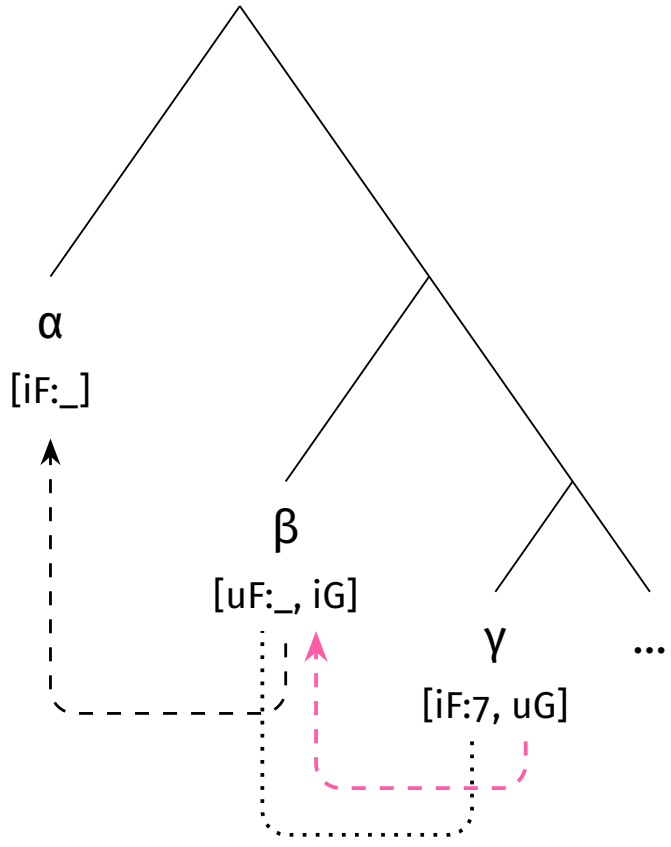
Some definitions: Valuation

(2) A valued feature on α can value a matching unvalued feature on β iff α and β are accessible to each other, and no other accessible element γ with a matching valued feature intervenes between α and β. (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018: 14)

(3) **Accessibility**
α and β are accessible to each other iff an uninterpretable feature (uF) on β has been checked (via UA) by a corresponding interpretable feature (iF) on α. (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018: 13)

Checking, valuation and accessibility in pictures





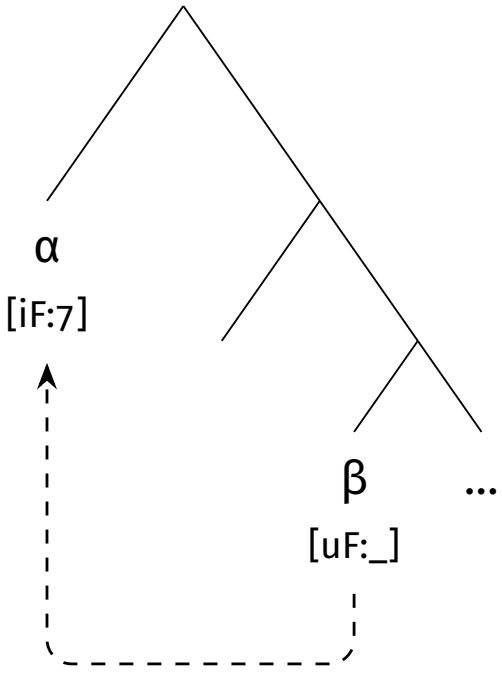
BZ: Predictions

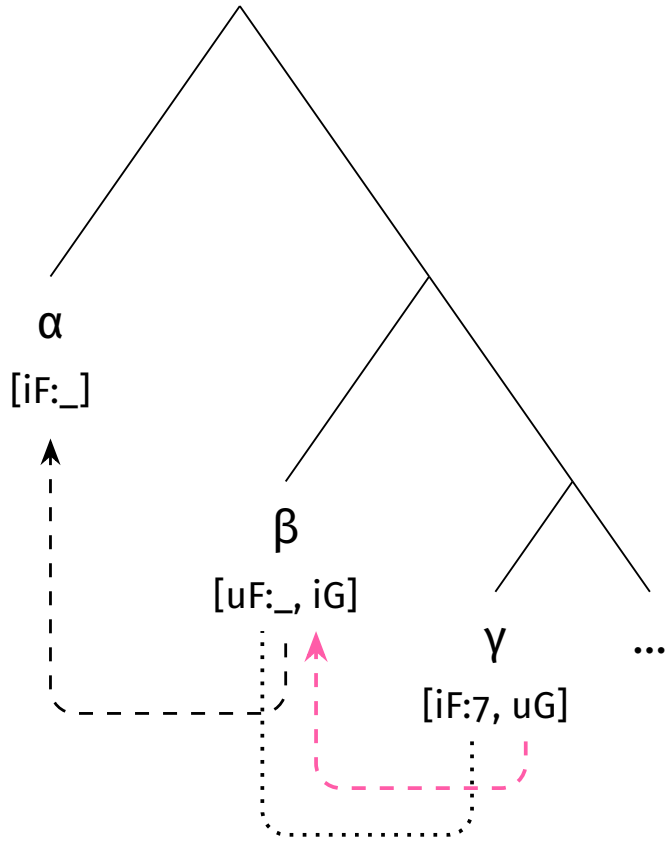
P1
all uFs must be checked by c-commanding iFs

P2
the reversal of the direction of valuation is only possible as a side effect of a prior UA-relation in a different feature, or if the feature in question has been checked by a c-commanding feature, both of which are only possible if the feature's checker is itself not fully valued

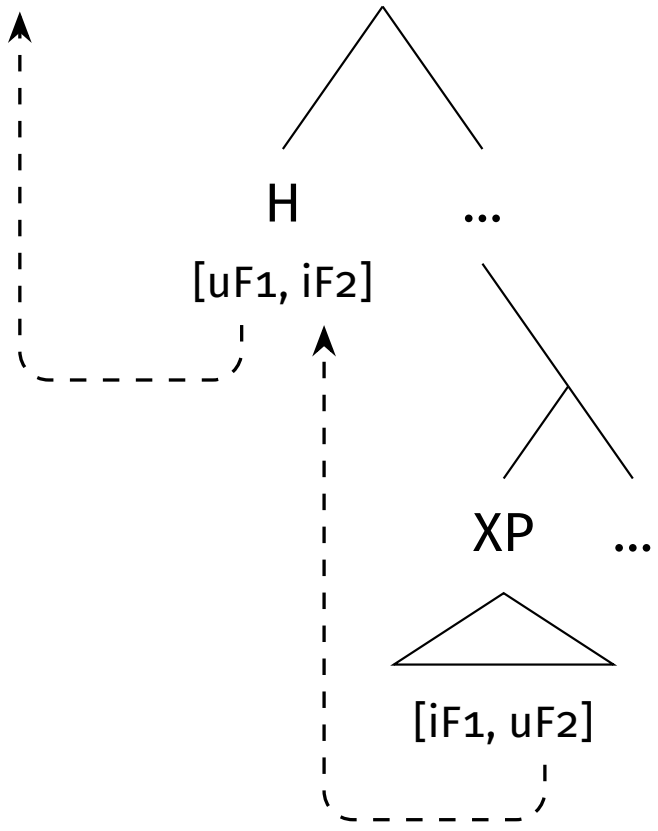
P3
raising an element to the specifier of a probing head for reasons of EPP is only possible in the context a prior UA-relation between the probe and the goal

P1 and P2 in pictures

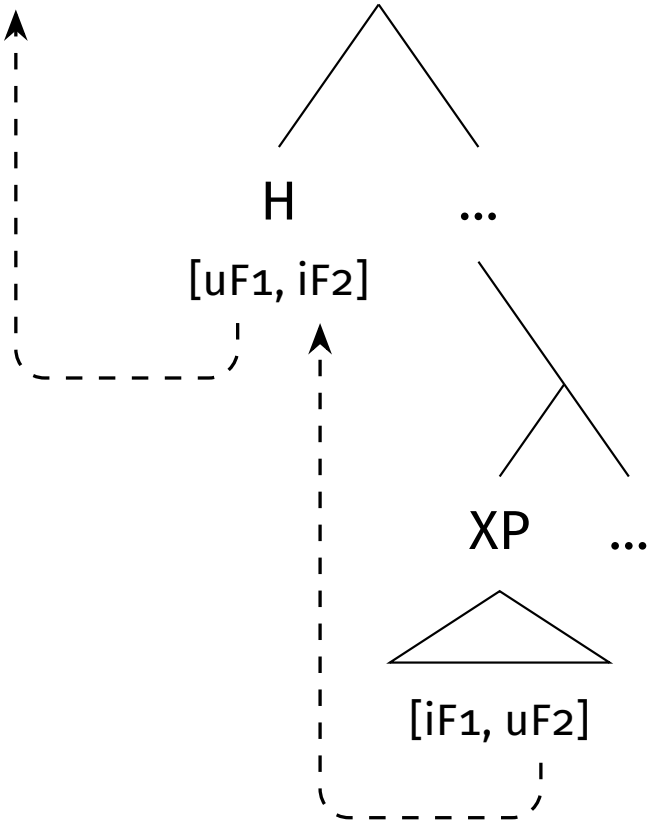


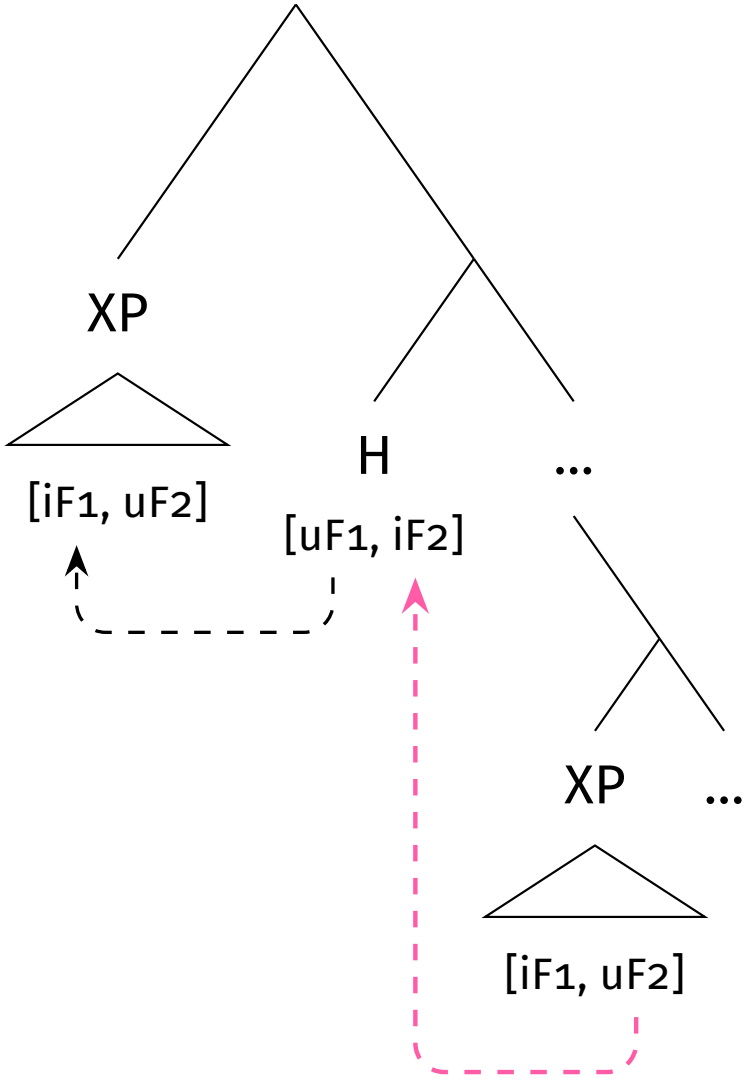


P3 in pictures



P3 in pictures





Case study: ergativity

Object agreement in Hindi-Urdu

In perfect(ive) clauses, Hindi-Urdu verbs display ergative alignment:

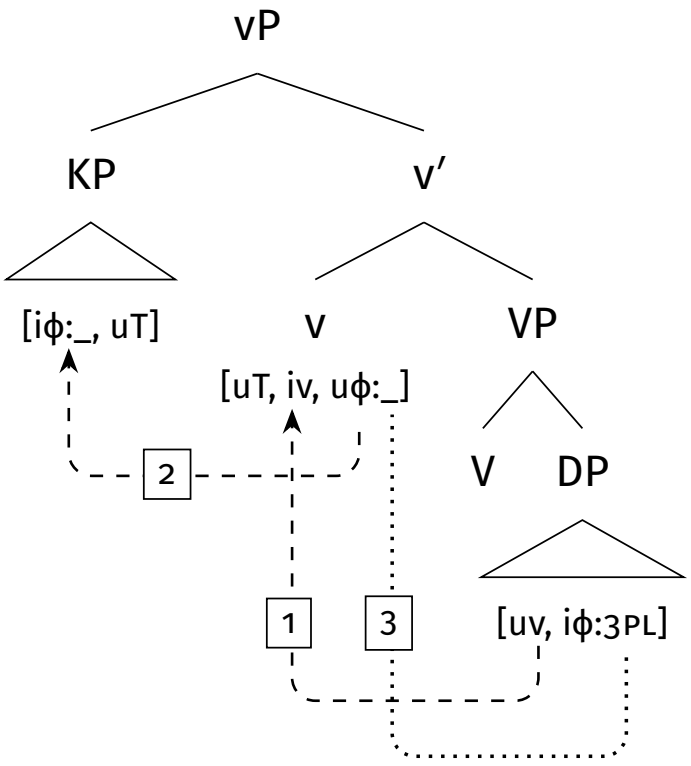
(4) Raam-ne **vah** **kitaabẽ** paṛ^{h}-**ii** th-**ĩĩ**
Raam-ERG those books(F) read-(PFV)F.PL be.PST-F.PL

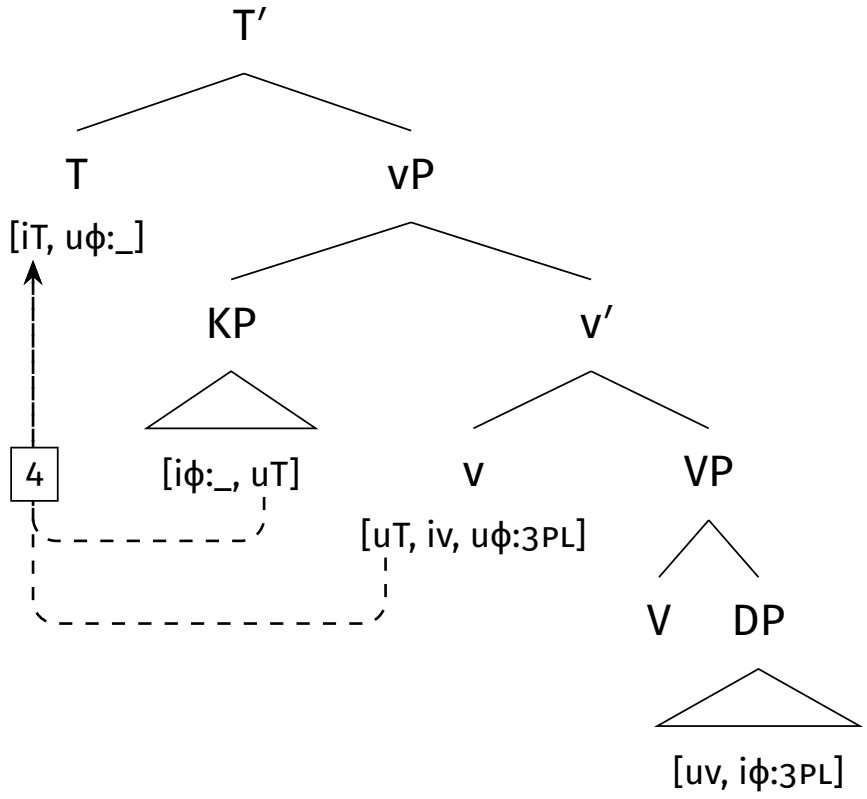
'Raam had read those books.' (Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018: 25)

Additional assumptions

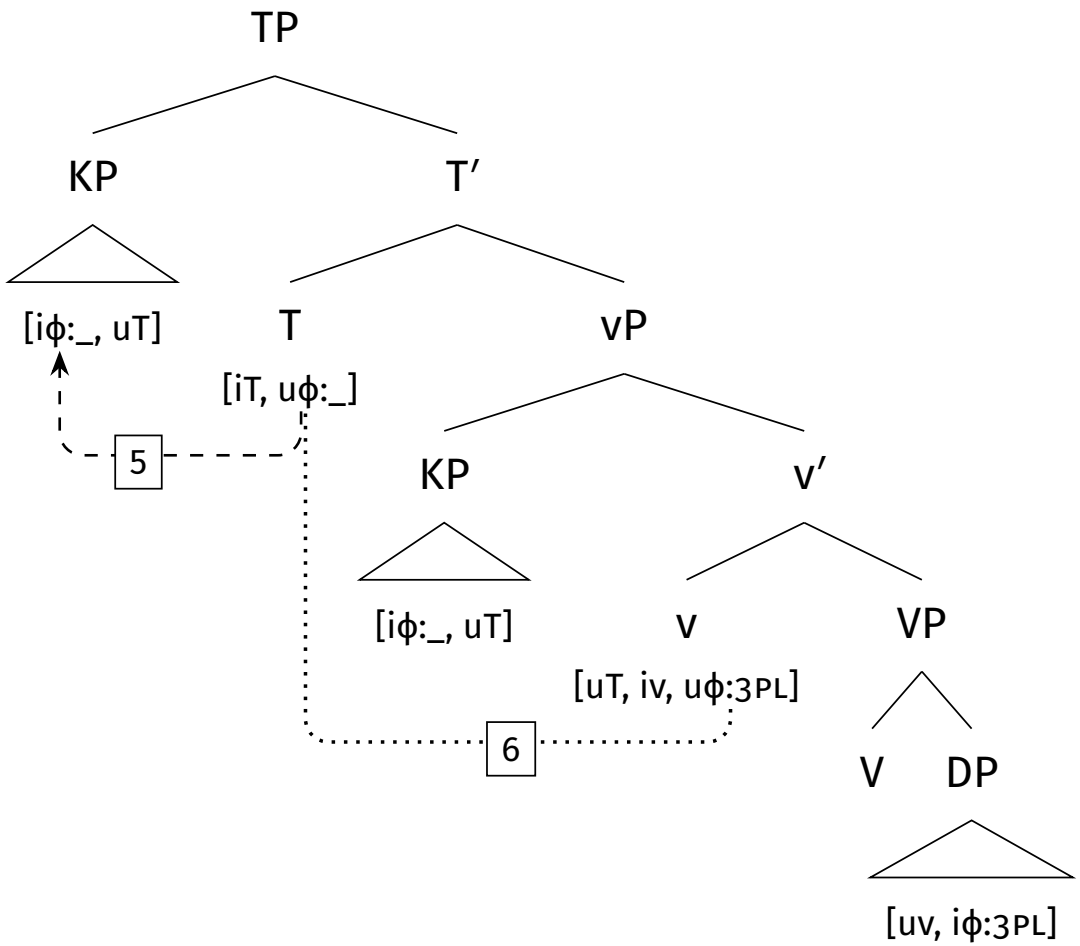
- two distinct types of structural case feature: [iv/uv] and [iT/uT]
- v carries an [uT] feature
- ERG is inherent case but ergative subjects also carry [uT]

Hindi agreement step by step





Hindi agreement step by step



Object agreement: Summary

- structural case guarantees Accessibility
- single [iT] can check multiple [uT]s
- movement to Spec,TP is parasitic on Accessibility
- KPs are ϕ-defective checkers
    - except for ergative languages with subject agreement (*e.g.* Nepali), whose ergatives are non-defective DPs

What about ergative languages with both SU and OBJ agreement?

Subject agreement in Mehweb

Basics of Mehweb agreement

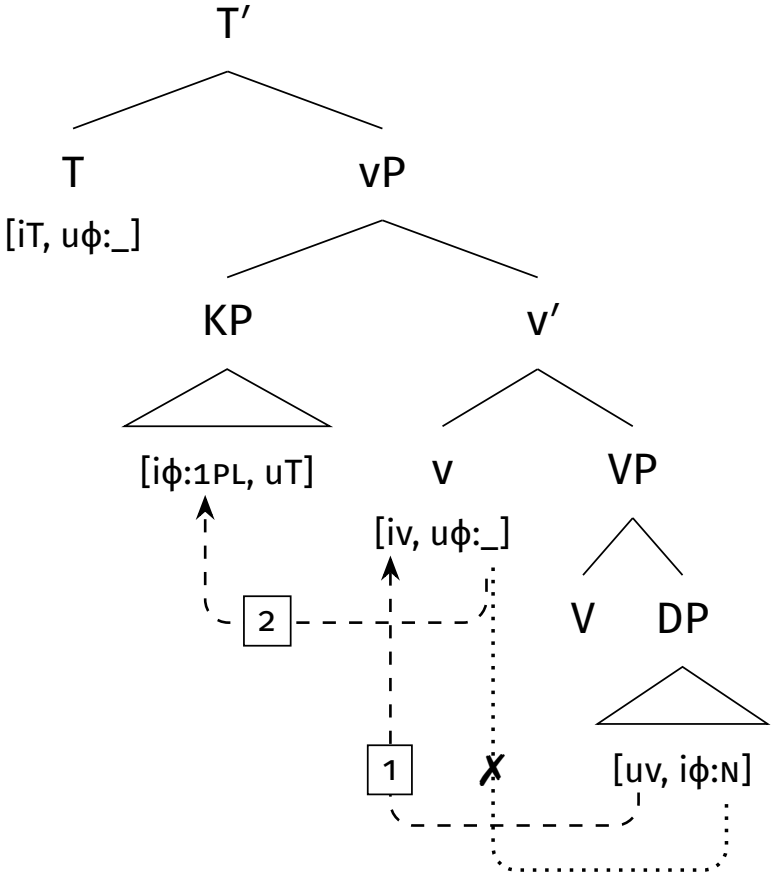
(5) **nuša**-jni qali b–aq'- i- **ra**
1PL-ERG house(N).ABS N–do:PFV-PST-**1/2**

'We built a house.' (adapted from Ganenkov 2016: 12)

(6) **ʔali**-ini nu w–it- ib /*w–it- i- ra
Ali(3)-ERG 1SG(M).ABS M–beat:PFV-PST M–beat:PFV-PST-1/2

'Ali beat me up.' (adapted from Ganenkov 2016: 13)

Mixed agreement in Mehweb BZ-style



Problem: for BZ, OBJ agreement is only possible if SU is ϕ-defective checker → SU agreement is predicted

Workaround 1: relax licensing conditions for upwards valuation under accessibility (value [uϕ:_] on v against OBJ before SU is merged) → lose account of EPP-effects (**P3**).

Workaround 2: move OBJ to inner Spec,vP to both check and value v's features; merge SU as outer Spec,vP → lose Merge-over-Move and BZ's own account of *there*-constructions.

Mehweb agreement BZ-style: Summary

- BZ's account doesn't work
- attempts to patch it are incompatible with BZ's original predictions

Agreement with subjects of intransitives

BZ's assumptions about absolutive case

ABS=NOM languages (Legate 2008: 69–70)

- ABS is assigned by T to both S and O arguments
  - → in non-finite contexts, ABS isn't preserved on either O or S

ABS=DEF languages

- ABS is ambiguous between structural NOM and structural ACC
  - → in non-finite contexts, ABS is preserved on O but not on S

BZ assume that subjects of intransitives (*e.g.* in Hindi-Urdu) receive structural NOM from T.

I now show this to be false in at least one language, Avar, where all case is negotiated internally to vP.

Avar: Language profile

- head final
- morphologically ergative (both agreement and case marking)
  - object of transitive (O) and subject of intransitive (S) are treated identically by the grammar;
  - subject of transitive (A) is treated differently
- extensive use of non-finite embedding
- ϕ-agreement is noun class/gender agreement
  - four noun classes: M, F, N, PL

Case and agreement across clause types: Transitive

(7) a. was- as mašina ‹b›ič- an- a
son(M)-ERG car(N).ABS ‹N›√sell-PST-FIN
'The son has sold the car.' [finite]

b. insu- e b–oł'- ana [was-as mašina ‹b›ič- ize]
father.OBL-DAT N–want-PST son-ERG car(N).ABS ‹N›√sell-INF
'Father wanted his son to sell the car.' [infinitive]

c. [was-as mašina ‹b›ič- i] łik'a– b iš b–ugo
son-ERG car(N).ABS ‹N›√sell-NMLZ good–N thing.ABS N-be.PRS
'The son selling the car is a good thing.' [nominalization]

Case and agreement across clause types: Intransitive

(8) a. was w–eker- an- a insuqe
boy(M).ABS M–√run-PST-FIN father.APL
'The boy ran to his father.' [finite]

b. [was insuqe w–eker- i] łik'a– b iš
boy(M).ABS father.APL M–√run-NMLZ good–N thing.ABS
b–ugo
N–be.PRS
'The boy running to his father is a good thing.' [nominalization]

c. kinazego b–oł'ana [was insuqe w–eker- ize]
everyone.DAT N–want.PST boy(M).ABS father.APL M–√run-INF
'Everyone wanted the boy to run to his father.' [infinitive]

Low locus of case & agreement: Take 1

- identity of patterns of case assignment and agreement across clause types is evidence of absence of T
- we now need to show the actual locus of case assignment and agreement

Low locus of case & agreement: Take 2

Incompatibility with negation

(9) muradi-ca mašinal r– ič- ul- a- ro
Murad- ERG cars.ABS PL–√sell-PRS-FIN-NEG
'Murad does not sell cars.'

(10) *[was-as mašinal r– ič- i- ro] łik'a– b iš b–ugo
son-ERG cars.ABS PL–√sell-NMLZ-NEG good–N thing.ABS N-be.PRS
('That the son does not sell cars is a good thing.')

(11) *insu- e b–oł'- ana [was-as mašinal r– ič- ize-ro]
father.OBL-DAT N–want-PST son-ERG cars.ABS PL–√sell-INF-NEG
('Father wanted his son not to sell the car.')

Low locus of case & agreement: Upshot

Case is assigned and agreement is licensed internally to vP and independently of T:

- infinitival complements instantiate restructuring
- low nominalisations are vP-level nominalisation

This is problematical for BZ and Accessibility.

Why is agreement with subjects of intransitives problematical?

On standard assumptions, intransitive verbs (or, more precisely, v heads)

- assign θ-roles to their sole arguments,
- but do not assign them structural case

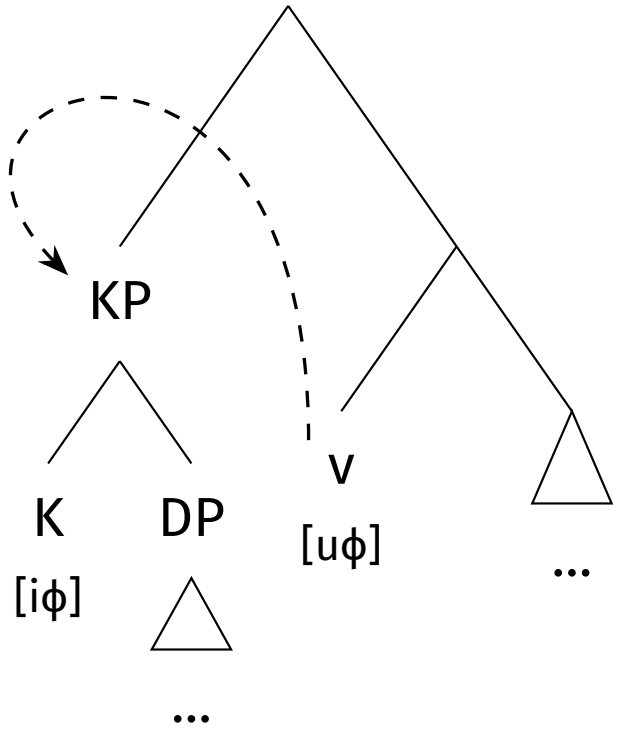
For BZ, structural case feeds Accessibility, but in Avar,

- ABS is assigned internally to vP,
- and there is no higher head to assign it

→ Accessibility cannot be established

Upwards probing and c-command

Subjects as checkers



- when $v_{[u\phi]}$ probes upwards, it cannot "see" $K_{[i\phi]}$
- for $K_{[i\phi]}$ to act as a checker (and for BZ's approach to work), [iϕ] must also be present on the maximal projection KP

BUT: this is inconsistent with BZ's own approach to long-distance agreement in Basque

LDA in Basque

Finite matrix verbs in Basque may agree with DPs inside embedded nominalised clauses:

(12) [[harri horiek] altxa-tze-n] probate d-it-u-zte
stones those.PL.ABS lift-NMLZ-LOC attempted 3.ABS-PL.ABS-AUX-3.PL.ERG

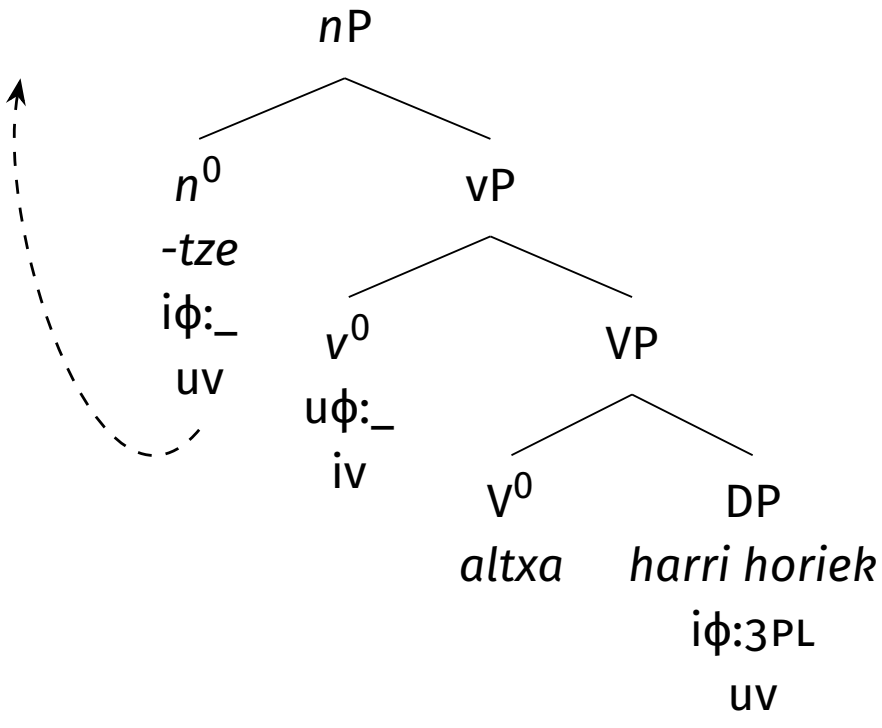
'They have attempted to lift those stones.'

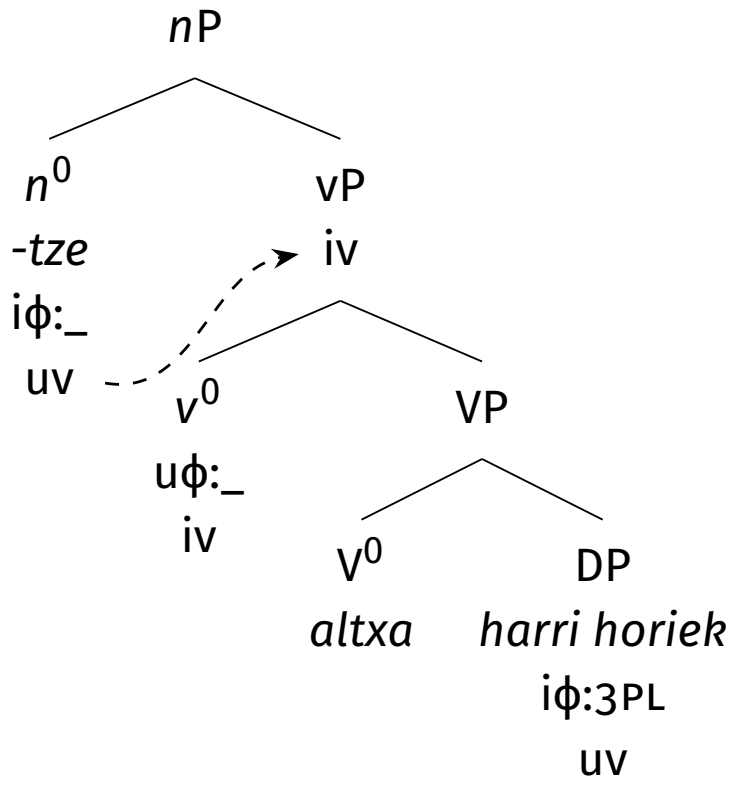
(Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2018: 32)

BZ make the following non-standard assumptions:

- the nominalised clause nP is the complement of P but receives case from matrix v (rather than its own selector)
- the nominalising head n carries [iϕ:_], acting as a defective goal for embedded v

BZ on LDA in Basque





very hard to rule out right-hand structure

BZ and ergative-absolutive languages: Summary

- adopting all of BZ's assumptions, I've shown their analysis to fail
- we've also seen it is inconsistent with their assumptions
- let's consider a more conservative alternative involving standard Agree

Solution: Away with UA

Dependent case theory (Marantz 1991)

Case reflects configurational relationships between a verb's arguments (Marantz 1991, Bittner & Hale 1996, Bobaljik 2008, Baker 2012, Preminger 2014).

(13) Disjunctive case hierarchy
lexical/oblique case ≫ dependent case ≫ unmarked case

(14) Case competition → dependent case (Levin & Preminger 2014: 233)

a. NP … NP"ACC"
dependent case: *downwards* ⇒ nominative-accusative alignment

b. NP"ERG" … NP
dependent case: *upwards* ⇒ ergative-absolutive alignment

Ergative and absolutive in Mehweb and Avar

(15) **nuša**-jni qali b–aq’- i- **ra** [Mehweb]
1PL-ERG house(N).ABS N–do:PFV-PST-**1/2**

‘We built a house.’

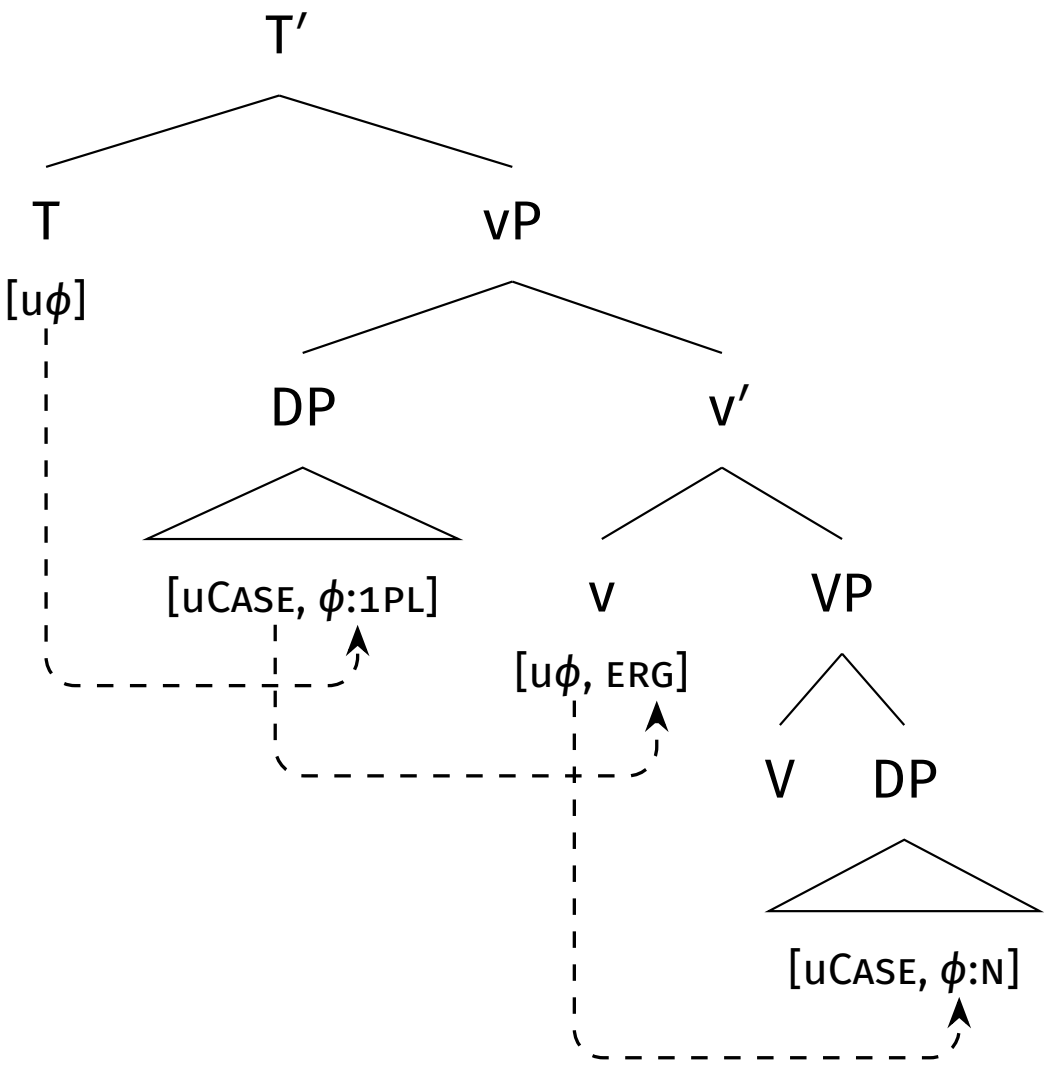
(16) was- as mašina ‹b›ič- an- a [Avar]
son(M)-ERG car(N).ABS ‹N›√sell-PST-FIN

‘The son has sold the car.’

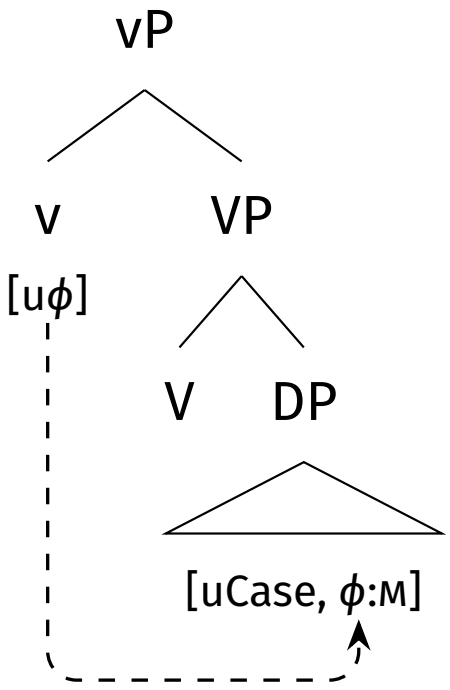
(17) … [$_{vP}$ DP$^{\text{“ERG”}}$ [DP$^{\text{“ABS”}}$ V] v]

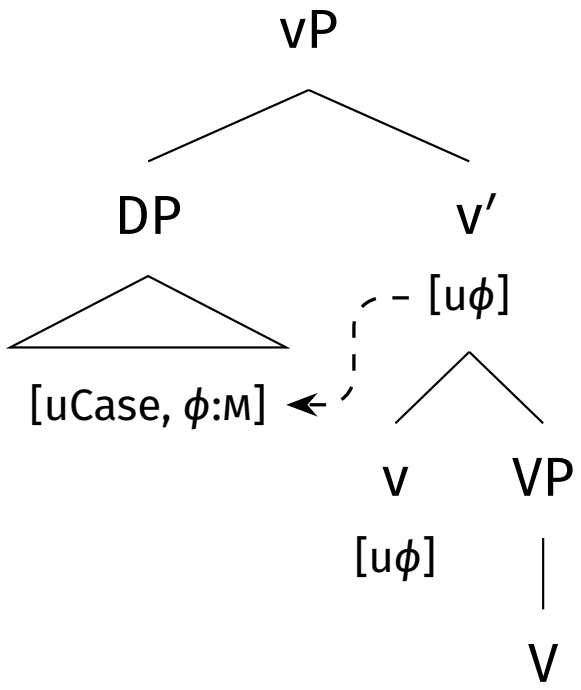
Case competition domain

Agreement in Mehweb transitives



Agreement in Avar intransitives





Summary

Naturally, things aren't as simple as they seem: standard Agree has manifold problems

- agreement facts across languages are enormously complicated

But because BZ cannot derive even the simplest of facts
(*e.g.* Mehweb and Avar above), it is doomed to fail there as well.

Why bother with UA?

BZ pursue a reductionist programme

Reduce as many featural dependencies to Agree as possible:

- anaphoric binding
- negative concord
- nominal concord
- …

But...

- primary evidence for anaphora-as-agreement—the Anaphor Agreement Effect—is flawed (Preminger 2019, Rudnev submitted)
- nominal concord doesn't need UA—phrasal probing suffices (Carstens 2011, 2015)
- negative concord—not sure yet but see Tiskin 2019 for arguments against UA-style analysis

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