Dynamic locality, split ergativity and adposition agreement in Avar

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Introduction

Alignment splits often involve added structure (Coon & Preminger 2017):

(1) a. Ehiztari**ak** otsoa harrapatu d- ∅- u- ∅   **ERG ALIGNMENT**
     hunter.**ERG** wolf.ABS caught 3ABS-SG.ABS-AUX-3SG.ERG

     'The hunter has caught the wolf.'

  b. Emakume**a** ogi**a** ja- te- n ari d- a   **SPLIT ALIGNMENT**
     woman.**ABS** bread.**ABS** eat-NMLZ-LOC PROG 3ABS-AUX

     'The woman is eating the bread.'   (Basque; Laka 1996)

The additional locative structure "detransitivises" the clause.

Aims and claims

What do we do with languages where alignment splits are optional and structural differences not easily discernible?

Aims:

- examine the properties of an optional-split system in Avar
- focus on two patterns involving adposition agreement

Claims:

- an additional source for alignment splits: spellout

Avar: Background

- East Caucasian (Republic of Daghestan)
- ca. 700K speakers
- morphologically ergative in both agreement and case marking
- head-final
- free word order
- some vP-level adpositions and oblique objects agree with ABS-argument

Case and agreement in Avar

Avar agreement tracks unmarked case on S- and O-arguments:

(2) a. wasas   xer   b-ec- ana
         boy.ERG   hay.ABS   N-mow-PST

         'The boy has mowed (the) hay.'

     b. łimal   r- ač'- ana
         kids.ABS   PL-come-PST

         'The kids have come.'

Agreement is in number and gender/noun class; no person agreement.

The Avar biabsolutive construction (Forker 2012)

In periphrastic tenses, the A-argument can appear in unmarked case:

(3) a. **wasas**   xer   b-ec- ul- e- b b-uk'-ana   **ERGATIVE**
         boy.ERG hay.ABS N-mow-PRS-PTCP-N N-be- PST

         'The boy was mowing (the) hay.'

     b. **was**   xer   b-ec- ul- e- w w-uk'-ana   **BIABSOLUTIVE**
         boy.ABS hay.ABS N-mow-PRS-PTCP-M M-be- PST

         'The boy was mowing hay.'

→ reminiscent of TAM-based splits!

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The ABC as an alignment split?

Similarities

- doesn't occur in perfective or perfect

Differences

- optionality: IPF ↛ ABC
- no discernible locative morphosyntax
- or any other kind of added structure

The ABC: semantics

Also, semantic differences between the ABC and ERG constructions:

- O-argument in ABC can't be interpreted as topical/given/definite

Additionally, not all transitive verbs are compatible:

- transitive predicates with LOC and DAT experiencer subjects and ABS objects are banned from the ABC
- all ditransitive verbs are also banned

The ABC: key morphosyntactic properties

agreement with both subject and object

(4) **was**   xer   b-ec- ul- e- **w** w-uk'-ana
     boy.ABS hay.ABS N-mow-PRS-PTCP-**M** **M**-be- PST

'The boy was mowing hay.'

Os cannot precede As:

(5) *xer   **was**   b-ec- ul- e- **w** w-uk'-ana
     hay.ABS **boy.ABS** N-mow-PRS-PTCP-**M** **M**-be- PST

('Hay, the boy was mowing.')

Puzzle I: Restriction on Peripheral Extraction

Agreeing oblique arguments may not be extracted to vP-peripheral position:

(6) a. ɬimal   **ɬim**   ʕert'ini‹**b**›e t'o- l- e– l   r– ugo
         kids.ABS **water.ABS** ‹**N**›jug.ILL   pour-PRS-PTCP–PL PL–AUX.PRS

      'The kids are pouring water into a/the jug.'   [neutral order]

   b. *ʕert'ini‹**b**›e ɬimal   **ɬim**   t'o- l- e– l   r– ugo
       ‹**N**›jug.ILL   kids.ABS **water.ABS** pour-PRS-PTCP–PL PL–AUX.PRS

      'The kids are pouring water into a/the jug.'   [derived position]

Puzzle II: Agreement variability on adjuncts

Agreeing event-modifying adpositions (postpositions and adverbs) can agree with either ABS argument:

(7) a. hani–**w emen** (*hani–**w**) xer b–ec- ul- e– w w–uk'-ana
here–**M father.ABS** here–M hay.ABS N–mow-PRS-PTCP–M M–be- PST

   b. emen hani–**b xer** b–ec- ul- e– w w–uk'-ana
father.ABS here–**N hay.ABS** N–mow-PRS-PTCP–M M–be- PST

     'Father was mowing (the) hay here.'

Agreement possibilities correlate with linear placement.

Main ingredients

Patterns of adposition agreement are key to understanding the ABC

- case is assigned configurationally
- probes must c-command their goals
- bare phrase structure
- locality domains/spellout domains are emergent rather than 'fixed'

Motivating the proposal

Avar clause structure

Both case assignment and agreement licensing obtain low (Rudnev 2015):

- all cases are preserved in non-finite clauses
  - unexpected if a high head is responsible for assigning ABS case
- event nominalisations and infinitival clauses are incompatible with clausal negation
  - characteristic of T-less complementation (Wurmbrand 2001)
- morphological containment of infinitives within causatives and of event nominalisations within infinitivals
  - Caus° is a low head inside the event zone
- agreement in causatives

Approximate clausal syntax

(8)   (T > Asp >) v_{EVT} > NP_{subj} > v_{init} > V/$\sqrt{}$ > NP_{obj}

v_{EVT} is the progressive head (Ramchand & Svenonius 2014, Ramchand 2018), and the insertion site of the auxiliary

All v heads serve as φ-probes.

Configurational case assignment

Preliminaries (Levin & Preminger 2014, Kornfilt & Preminger 2015)

- all NPs carry [Case:_] features
- [Case:_] features are valued in the course of the derivation
- [Case:_] features remaining unvalued does not crash the derivation

Ways of valuing [Case:_] features

- from a functional head on first merger (e.g. complements of P)
- via **case competition** (Marantz 1991, Bittner & Hale 1996)

Case competition between caseless NPs

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

$NP^{\text{"ERG"}}_{[\text{CASE:}\_]}$ ... $NP_{[\text{CASE:}\_]}$

dependent case: *upwards* ⇒ ergative-absolutive alignment

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

'The son has sold the car.'

(11)   ... [$_{vP}$ NP$^{\text{"ERG"}}$ [NP$^{\text{"ABS"}}$ V] v]   → ABS = **caseless**

Case competition domain

Probes must c-command their goals

Conceptual considerations

- 'hybrid' approaches are less restrictive (e.g. Baker 2008, Carstens 2016) than strictly unidirectional ones,
- of which only the "Probe > Goal" one is suited to modelling ϕ-agreement (cf. Polinsky & Preminger 2019)

Empirical considerations (Avar-specific)

- Upwards probing (Zeijlstra 2012) struggles with
    - vP-internal object agreement
    - adposition agreement (Rudnev 2019)
- Upwards probing also incorrectly predicts subject agreement for PP^{ϕ}s occurring between NP^{ABS}_{subj} and NP^{ABS}_{obj}

Deficiencies of upwards probing: an illustration

(12) školalda   ask'o–w jasał   wac   w–uχ- ana
   school.LOC near– M girl.ERG brother.ABS M–beat-PST

'The girl beat her brother up next to the school.'
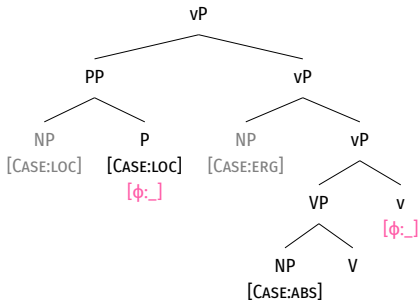
- because [φ:_] features on v and P can only probe upwards, they will never find the absolutive NP, which is situated lower in the structure than either of them

XPs as probes

Given Bare Phrase Structure (Chomsky 1995), maximal projections are indistinguishable from minimal projections, also as far as their featural specifications are concerned:

(13)

X^{max}
X^{min} ...
[F:_]
...

Z^{max}
X^{max} Z^{max}
[F:_]
Z^{min} ...
...
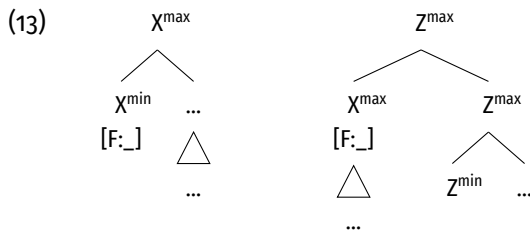
→ sufficient to derive adposition agreement via exclusively downwards probing (Rudnev 2019)

Proposal: Case domains are spellout domains

Recall that ERG is a dependent case assigned within a spellout domain (Levin & Preminger 2014):

(14) $[_{\text{Domain 1}} \text{NP}^{\text{ERG}}_{\text{subj}} [\text{NP}^{\text{ABS}}_{\text{obj}} \text{V}] \text{v}]$

The ABC arises due to optional early spellout:

(15) $[_{\text{Domain 2}} \text{NP}^{\text{ABS}}_{\text{subj}} [_{\text{Domain 1}} ... \text{NP}^{\text{ABS}}_{\text{obj}} \text{V}] \text{v}]$

(functionally equivalent to Coon & Preminger 2017 but, crucially, without appeals to added structure)

NB: If Domain 1 in (15) isn't spelled out, (14) obtains.

Optionality and periphrasis

Optional spellout predicts, incorrectly, that split alignment should be legitimate in the context of non-periphrastic TAM forms:

(16) a. *was   xer   b-ec- ana
       boy.ABS hay.ABS N-mow-PST

       'The boy has mowed (the) hay.'

   b. *was   xer   b-ec- ula
       boy.ABS hay.ABS N-mow-PRS

       'The boy mows (the) hay.'

   c. *was   xer   b-ec- ila
       boy.ABS hay.ABS N-mow-FUT

       'The boy will mow (the) hay.'

Interface constraint (tentative)

What prevents the ABC from occurring in non-periphrastic tenses?

- Mapping/correspondence rules
  - neither VP nor vP can be mapped onto a tensed verb form, as key elements haven't been introduced yet
  - both VP and vP can be mapped onto a participle (+auxiliary)

Proposal: Deriving the Restriction on Peripheral Extractions

Restriction on Peripheral Extractions:

(17) $*NP_{obj}^{ABS}\ NP_{subj}^{ABS}\ ...$ (18) $*PP^{\phi}\ NP_{subj}^{ABS}\ NP_{obj}^{ABS}\ ...$

I adopt the small-clause analysis of oblique objects (Hoekstra & Mulder 1990):

(19) $[_{vP}\ NP^{ERG}\ [_{vP}\ [_{VP}\ [_{SC}\ NP_{[\phi]}^{ABS}\ [_{PP}\ NP^{GEN}\ P_{[u\phi]}\ ]]\ V\ ]\ v_{[u\phi]}\ ]]$

The structure containing the direct and oblique argument must necessarily be spelled out:

(20) $[_{Domain\ 2}\ NP_{subj}^{ABS}\ [_{Domain\ 1}\ ...\ NP_{obj}^{ABS}\ PP^{\phi}\ V\ ]\ v\ ]$

There can therefore be no extraction of either NP_{obj}^{ABS} or PP^{ϕ}.

Agreement variability on event-modifying PP^ϕs

(21) PP^ϕ NP^{ABS}_{subj} NP^{ABS}_{obj} ...   (22) NP^{ABS}_{subj} PP^ϕ NP^{ABS}_{obj} ...

Solution: downwards phrasal probing (Carstens 2016, Clem 2019, Rudnev 2019)

(23) a. $[_{\text{Domain 2}} NP^{ABS}_{subj} [_{\text{Domain 1}} PP^\phi [_{\text{Domain 1}} ... NP^{ABS}_{obj} V] v]]$ [object agreement]

 b. $[_{\text{Domain 2}} PP^\phi [_{\text{Domain 2}} NP^{ABS}_{subj} [_{\text{Domain 1}} ... NP^{ABS}_{obj} V] v]]$ [subject agreement]

Object agreement obtains in Domain 1

- PP^ϕ cannot move to vP-peripheral position

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What of those experiencer verbs?

Dative and locative experiencer subjects are exempt from the ABC.

- follows from the configurational procedure of case assignment:
    - DAT and LOC instantiate **lexical case** assigned by v to its specifier
    - since this happens immediately on first merger, the subject NP never has a chance to appear caseless

Taking stock

The present analysis derives the following properties of the ABC:

- two absolutives
  - configurational case assignment + early spellout
- Restriction on Peripheral Extractions
  - early spellout
- Agreement Variability on Adjuncts
  - early spellout + phrasal probing
- experiencer subject exemption
  - configurational case assignment

Also compatible with how case and agreement work in the rest of the language!

Loose end: early spellout and wh-questions

The present analysis predicts that wh-phrases originating in the lowest
portion of the biabsolutive construction should be impossible.

(24) a. ɬimal **ɬim** ki‹b›e t'o- l- e- l r- ug- e- l
kids.ABS **water.ABS** ‹N›where.ILL pour-PRS-PTCP–PL PL–AUX.PRS-PTCP–PL

'What are the kids pouring water into?'

   b. ki‹b›e ɬimal **ɬim** t'o- l- e- l r- ug- e- l
‹N›where.ILL kids.ABS **water.ABS** pour-PRS-PTCP–PL PL–AUX.PRS-PTCP–PL

'What are the kids pouring water into?'

However, *ex-situ* wh-phrases show no evidence of having been in the gap
position (Rudnev 2015: §4).

Conclusions

- spellout domains play a crucial role in determining alignment in Avar
- this is an additional source of alignment splits, complementary to added structure (Coon & Preminger 2017)

Acknowledgement

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