

Dynamic phases, split ergativity and adposition agreement in Avar

Pavel Rudnev

National Research University Higher School of Economics

pasha.rudnev@gmail.com

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Introduction

Alignment splits, both TAM- and argument-marking based, often postulate **added structure** (e.g. Coon & Preminger 2017):

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

'The hunter has caught the wolf.'

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

'The woman is eating the bread.'

[Basque; Laka (1996)]

The additional locative structure “hides” the internal argument from the configurational procedure of case assignment.

What do we do with languages where alignment splits are optional?

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. insuca xer b-ec- ul- e- b b-uk'-ana
father.ERG hay.ABS N-mow-PRS-PTCP-N N-be- PST

'Father was mowing (the) hay.'

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

'The kids have come.'

No intransitive verbs with ERG-subjects are attested.

The Avar biabsolute construction

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

(3) emen xer b-ec- ul- e- w w-uk'-ana
father.ABS hay.ABS N-MOW-PRS-PTCP-M M-be- PST

'Father was mowing hay.'

Key properties:

- object cannot precede subject
- agreement with both subject and object

Puzzle II:

Variable agreement on agreeing vP-level adpositions:

(5) 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.'

Towards an analysis: Background assumptions

In Avar, vP is the locus of both case assignment and agreement licensing (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
- morphological containment of infinitives within causatives and of event nominalisations within infinitivals
 - Caus^o is a low head inside the event zone

Towards an analysis: Case

ERG is a dependent case assigned within a spellout domain:

$$(6) \quad [_{\text{Phase 1}} \text{DP}_{\text{subj}}^{\text{ERG}} [\text{DP}_{\text{obj}}^{\text{ABS}} \text{PP}^{\phi} \text{V}] \text{v}]$$

The biabsolute construction arises due to **opportunistic early spellout**:

$$(7) \quad [_{\text{Phase 2}} \text{DP}_{\text{subj}}^{\text{ABS}} [_{\text{Phase 1}} \dots \text{DP}_{\text{obj}}^{\text{ABS}} \text{PP}^{\phi} \text{V}] \text{v}]$$

(similar in spirit to Coon & Preminger 2017)

Towards an analysis: Puzzle I

Puzzle I: rigidity of constituent order in biabsolute construction

(8) *DP_{obj}^{ABS} DP_{subj}^{ABS} ...

(9) *PP^φ DP_{subj}^{ABS} DP_{obj}^{ABS} ...

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

(10) [_{Phase 2} DP_{subj}^{ABS} [_{Phase 1} ... DP_{obj}^{ABS} PP^φ V] v]

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

Towards an analysis: Puzzle II

Puzzle II: Agreement variability

(11) $PP^\phi DP_{subj}^{ABS} DP_{obj}^{ABS} \dots$

(12) $DP_{subj}^{ABS} PP^\phi DP_{obj}^{ABS} \dots$

Solution: downwards phrasal probing (Carstens 2015)

- (13) a. $[_{Phase\ 2} DP_{subj}^{ABS} [_{Phase\ 1} PP^\phi [_{Phase\ 1} \dots DP_{obj}^{ABS} V] v]]$ [object agreement]
- b. $[_{Phase\ 2} PP^\phi [_{Phase\ 2} DP_{subj}^{ABS} [_{Phase\ 1} \dots DP_{obj}^{ABS} V] v]]$ [subject agreement]

Object agreement obtains in Phase 1

- PP^ϕ cannot move to vP-peripheral position

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)