Unexpected ergativity
Wh-agreeing possessors in West Circassian

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What is syntactic ergativity

Defined broadly (Polinsky 2017:3):

“The presence of *syntactic rules* that group S and O (the absolutive) together, to the exclusion of A (the ergative).”

\[
\begin{align*}
S &= \text{subject of intransitive verb} \\
O &= \text{object of transitive verb} \\
A &= \text{subject of transitive verb}
\end{align*}
\]

\{ ABS \}

\{ ERG \}
What makes a language syntactically ergative?

**Trademark property:**
ban on wh-movement of the ergative agent

**Intransitive clause:**

```
CP
  SUBJECT
    <SUBJECT>
      ABS
        V_{INTR}
```

**Transitive clause:**

```
CP
  OBJECT
    <OBJECT>
      V_{TR}
```

Dixon (1994); Manning (1996); Aldridge (2004, 2008); Coon et al. (2014, 2021); Deal (2016); Polinsky (2016, 2017); Tollan and Clemens (2021), a.o.
ERG cannot move in Q’an kob’al (Mayan)

* Maktxel max y-il _ERG ix ix?
  who PFV A3-see CLF woman

Intended: ‘Who saw the woman?’

*Maktxel max y-il naq winaq _ABS ?
who PFV A3-see CLF man

‘Who did the man see?’

(Coon et al. 2014, 2021; Tollan and Clemens 2021)
ERG cannot move in Tagalog (Austronesian)

* Sino ang b-in-ilí __ERG ang libró?
   who ABS -PERF-buy ABS book

Intended: ‘Who bought the book?’

*ERG WH-MOV'T

Anó ang b-in-ilí ni Maria __ABS?
what ABS -PERF-buy ERG Maria

‘What did Maria buy?’

✓ABS WH-MOV'T

(Aldridge 2004, 2008)
ERG cannot move in Kalaallisut (Inuit)

* angut [ __ERG aallaat tigu-sima-sa-a ]
  man gun.ABS take-PFV-REL.[+TR]-3SG:SG

Intended: ‘the man who took the gun’

miiqqa-t [ __ABS sila-mi pinnguar-tu-t ]
  child-PL outdoors-LOC play-REL.[-TR]-PL

‘the children who are playing outdoors’

(Bittner 1994)
A class of approaches accounts for syntactic ergativity effects with movement of ABS to a high position.

Aldridge (2004, 2008); Coon et al. (2014, 2021); Tollan and Clemens (2021), a.o.

Raised ABS **blocks** ERG Ā-movement:
The main claim

- The ban on ergative wh-movement is taken to be the **defining property** of syntactically ergative languages.

- Under existing accounts, ABS raising alone is **insufficient** to derive blocking of ERG.

  Additional assumptions or analytical tools are required.

- **This is a desirable aspect of high absolutive analyses.**

  The ban on ergative extraction is not necessarily **predicted** by high absolutive syntax, nor necessarily **predicts** high absolutive syntax.
High absolutive syntax:

- predicts other syntactic reflexes of high ABS
- does not readily predict a ban on ERG wh-movement

Both predictions are confirmed by West Circassian

A language can be syntactically ergative without ‘standard syntactic ergativity’.
Syntactic ergativity in West Circassian

The ergative can Ā-move in West Circassian:

č’alew [ _ERG əš velosjəped
boy his brother bicycle
Ø-Ø-je-zə-tə-ŋe ] -r
3ABS-3SG.IO-DAT-WH.ERG-give-PST -ABS

‘the boy who gave a bicycle to his brother’ ✓ERG WH-MOV

BUT displays a number of other syntactic ergativity effects
Syntactic ergativity in West Circassian wh-movement

1. only ABS is transparent for possessor extraction (Ershova 2020a)

2. anti-c-command condition: ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps (Ershova 2019, 2021a)
Two syntactic rules which group S and O together, to the exclusion of A

Both require S and O to be structurally distinct from A

⇒ S and O must share the same position

This position is outside vP, and c-commands ERG

**Broad syntactic ergativity** is evidence for **high absolutive** syntax.
The syntactic ergativity parameter

**Syntactic accusativity:**
A c-commands O

**Syntactic ergativity:**
O raises to c-command A

LOW ABSOLUTIVE

HIGH ABSOLUTIVE
Expanding high absolutive analyses

▶ **Proposals for high absolutive:** Bittner and Hale 1996; Manning 1996; Baker 1997; Aldridge 2004, 2008; Coon et al. 2014, 2021; Yuan 2018; Drummond 2021, a.o.

▶ **Key diagnostic for high absolutive:** ban on ergative wh-movement.

▶ **Additional reflexes of high absolutive** in quantifier scope, cross-clausal coreference, word order, and agreement morphology.

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**This talk**

▶ High absolutive syntax confirmed with **novel structural diagnostics**.

▶ **Counter to prior literature:** high absolutive does not predict a ban on ergative wh-movement.
Methodological lesson

- typologically unusual and theoretically challenging phenomena derived from well-understood and well-attested microparameters ‘conspiring’ together

**REQUIRES**

- understanding of the language as a whole
- careful study of its core components
Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
- West Circassian:
  - background on the language
  - possessor extraction
  - parasitic gaps
- Conclusion and implications
In **high absolutive** languages, the ABS object raises to a position above the ERG agent:

![Diagram showing the structure of a sentence with an ABS object raised above the ERG agent.

The raised absolutive:

- should be detectable by syntactic rules that are sensitive to structural superiority
- does not necessarily block ergative extraction
How the high absolutive blocks ergative extraction

Two prominent approaches:

1. *raised ABS intervenes between wh-probe and ERG* 
   (Aldridge 2004, 2008; Coon et al. 2021)

2. **ERG** movement over raised **ABS** is a violation of the 
   Constraint on Crossing Dependencies (Tollan and Clemens 2021)

Ergative extraction is blocked by a combination of
raised absolutive + additional language-specific assumptions.
High absolutive intervenes

Coon et al. (2021):

- ABS object raises to Spec, vP
- ABS intervenes for ERG wh-movement because wh-C is relativized for [WH] and [D]
- relativized probe is language-specific

In most languages, the wh-probe is not relativized for [D]. Predicts high ABS languages with no ban on ERG extraction.
How the high absolutive blocks ergative extraction

Two prominent approaches:

1. raised **ABS** intervenes between wh-probe and **ERG**
   (Aldridge 2004, 2008; Coon et al. 2021)

   Does not predict that **ERG** extraction constraint is necessary property of high absolutive languages.

2. **ERG** movement over raised **ABS** is a violation of the Constraint on Crossing Dependencies (Tollan and Clemens 2021)
Constraint on Crossing Dependencies

Tollan and Clemens (2021):

CP

ssP

DP_{ABS}

VoiceP

DP_{ERG} \langle DP_{ABS} \rangle

Constraint on Crossing Dependencies

No movement dependency may cross another movement dependency. (Kuno and Robinson 1972; Steedman 1985, a.o.)
Tollan and Clemens (2021): there are well-known counterexamples

- Dutch clause-final verb clusters
- Bulgarian multiple wh-movement

⇒ Predicts *tendency* for high absolutive languages to display ergative extraction constraint.

Does not predict universal correlation between high absolutive and ergative extraction constraint.

Allows for possibility of high ABS language without a ban on crossing dependencies, i.e. no ban ERG extraction.
Two prominent approaches:

1. raised ABS intervenes between wh-probe and ERG (Aldridge 2004, 2008; Coon et al. 2021)

   Does not predict that ERG extraction constraint is necessary property of high absolutive languages.

2. ERG movement over raised ABS is a violation of the Constraint on Crossing Dependencies (Tollan and Clemens 2021)

   Predicts *tendency* for high absolutive to correlate with ergative extraction constraint.

   Leaves space for counterexamples.
High absolutive in the broader syntax

- Raised absolutive does not necessarily block ergative extraction.
- High position of ABS should affect syntactic rules which are sensitive to **c-command** or **syntactic position**.
West Circassian is a high absolutive language

West Circassian confirms both predictions of high absolutive analyses:

▶ no ban on ergative extraction
▶ high absolutive diagnosed in two novel domains:
  ▶ parasitic gaps → sensitive to c-command
  ▶ possessor extraction → sensitive to structural position
Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

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- **West Circassian:**
  - background on the language
  - possessor extraction
  - parasitic gaps
- Conclusion and implications
Case Study: West Circassian

**West Circassian** (or Adyghe):

- Northwest Caucasian
- primarily spoken in the Republic of Adygea, Russia

Data from fieldwork on **Temirgoy dialect** in the Shovgenovsky district of Adygea, collected during three trips in 2017-2019.
Exploring the whole language

The analysis builds on 11 years of fieldwork and language study.

Background

Piece of bigger project on **argument alignment**:

- anaphor binding (Ershova 2019, 2021c)
- control (Ershova 2019)
- argument encoding in nominalizations (Ershova 2015, 2020b)
- agreement and nominal licensing (Ershova 2021b)
- weak crossover (Ershova to appear)
West Circassian is polysynthetic

Agglutinating prefixal and suffixal morphology:

\[ w\text{ə}q\text{ə}zere\text{stem}w\text{ə}reje\text{trans}w\text{ə}kaber \]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wə-} & \quad \text{qə-} \quad \text{zere-} \quad \text{šha-} \quad \text{pə-} \quad \text{rə-} \quad \text{z-} \quad \text{be-} \\
\text{2SG.ABS-} & \quad \text{DIR-} \quad \text{FACT-} \quad \text{head-} \quad \text{LOC-} \quad \text{TRANS-} \quad \text{1SG.ERG-} \quad \text{CAUS-} \\
\text{wək} & \quad \text{wereje} \quad -č’ə \quad -ž’ə -š\text{wə} -\text{va} -\text{be} -\text{r} \\
\text{fall} & \quad -\text{go.out} -\text{RE} -\text{POT} -\text{PST} -\text{PST} -\text{ABS}
\end{align*}
\]

‘that I was able to make you turn a somersault’

(Lander and Testelets 2017:952)
West Circassian is polysynthetic

Head marking and pro-drop:

\[s\omega p\varphi f\varphi r j\omega k e\lambda \epsilon \nu \omega \theta\]

me \hspace{1cm} for your sake \hspace{1cm} to them \hspace{1cm} he

1SG.ABS \hspace{1cm} DIR \hspace{1cm} 2SG.IO-BEN \hspace{1cm} 3PL.IO-DAT \hspace{1cm} 3SG.ERG \hspace{1cm} CAUS \hspace{1cm} see \hspace{1cm} -PST

‘He showed me to them for your sake.’

(Korotkova and Lander 2010:301)
Head marking on nominals

\[ s- \quad \text{šəpχʷəxer} \]
\[ 1\text{sg.poss} - \text{sister.PL.ABS} \]

‘my sisters’ \hspace{0.5in} \text{INALIENABLE}

\[ t- \quad \text{jə-} \quad \text{βʷəneβʷəxem} \]
\[ 1\text{pl.poss} - \text{ALIEN} - \text{neighbor.PL.OBL} \]

‘our neighbors’ \hspace{0.5in} \text{ALIENABLE}
Verbal agreement is ergative

O   IO   A
w-   a-de-   s-   š’aβ
2SG.ABS- 3PL.IO-COM- 1SG.ERG- bring.PST

‘I brought you with them.’ (Rogava and Keraševa 1966:160)

S   IO
wə-   q-   a-fe-   k’w’αβ
2SG.ABS- DIR- 3PL.IO+BEN- go.PST

‘You went for them.’ (Rogava and Keraševa 1966:138)
Applied objects (IO) cross-referenced by agreement + APPL prefix.

wə- qə- z- de- ᵈʷेš’ta?
1SG.ABS- DIR- 1SG.IO- COM- dance.FUT.Q

‘Will you dance with me?’

HIGH APPLICATIVE

te mə txəɬə-r Ø- qə- w- e- t- təʔ’əb
we this book-ABS 3ABS- DIR- 2SG.IO- DAT- 1PL.ERG- give.PST

‘We gave this book to you.’

INDIRECT OBJECT
Case marking is ergative

- **r (ABS):**
  - subject of intransitive verb (S)
  - object of transitive verb (O)

- **m (OBL):**
  - subject of transitive verb (A)
  - applied object (IO)
  - possessor
  - complement of postposition
Case marking is ergative

mə p̥sañe-r daxew qašʷwe
this girl-ABS well dances

‘This girl(S) dances well.’

sabəjxe-m haxe-r qaλebeʷəb
children-OBL dogs-ABS saw

‘The children(A) saw the dogs(O).’

žegʷə-m səpq̥əš’əšʷənep
wedding-OBL I didn’t dance

‘I didn’t dance at the wedding(IO).’

mə s̥wəz̥e-m Ø-jə-p̥sañe
this woman-OBL 3SG.POSS-ALIEN-girl

‘this woman’s daughter’
**Finite clause:**

\[ \text{a-š’} \quad \text{txəɬə-r} \quad [ \text{mə ʧəʃə-m} ] \]
\[ \text{that-OBL} \quad \text{book-ABS} \quad \text{this person-OBL} \]
\[ \emptyset- \quad \emptyset- \quad \text{r-} \quad \text{jə-} \quad \text{tə-β} \]
\[ \text{3ABS- 3SG.IO- DAT- 3SG.ERG- give-PST} \]

’S/he gave a book to this person.’

**Relative clause:**

\[ [ \text{txəɬə-r} \quad _{\text{IO}} \quad \emptyset- \quad \text{ze-} \quad \text{r-} \quad \text{jə-} \quad \text{tə-βε} ] \quad \text{ʧəʃə-r} \]
\[ \text{book-ABS} \quad \text{3ABS- WH.IO- DAT- 3SG.ERG- give-PST} \quad \text{person-ABS} \]

\[ \text{WH-MOVEMENT} \]

‘the person to whom s/he gave the book’

IO WH-MOVMT

(Lander 2012:276)
No ergative extraction constraint

\( \chi\text{erb\text{\text{"a}}}\text{zew} \quad [\text{___ABS a-Š’} \quad \emptyset- \quad \emptyset- \quad \text{bz\text{\text{"a}}-ve-r}] \)

watermelon \quad \text{that-OBL} \quad \text{WH.ABS-} \quad \text{3SG.ERG-} \quad \text{cut-PST-ABS}

‘the watermelon that he cut’ \quad \checkmark \text{ABS WH-MOVVT}

\[ \text{tx\text{\text{"a}}}\text{λ\text{\text{"a}}-r} \quad [\text{___io \emptyset- ze- r- j\text{\text{"a}}- t\text{\text{"a}}-ve}] \quad \text{ç\text{\text{"e}}}\text{ř\text{\text{"a}}-r} \]

book-ABS \quad \text{3ABS-} \quad \text{WH.IO-} \quad \text{DAT-} \quad \text{3SG.ERG-} \quad \text{give-PST} \quad \text{person-ABS}

‘the person to whom s/he gave the book’ \quad \checkmark \text{IO WH-MOVVT}

\( \text{č’alew} \quad [\text{apč’\text{\text{"a}}-r} \quad [\text{___ERG \emptyset- ze- q’w\text{\text{"a}}}\text{ta-ve-m}] \]

boy \quad \text{glass-ABS} \quad \text{3ABS-} \quad \text{WH.ERG-} \quad \text{break-PST-OBL}

‘the boy that broke the glass’ \quad \checkmark \text{ERG WH-MOVVT}

(Lander 2012:274-276)
Broader syntactic ergativity in West Circassian

West Circassian does not display a ban on ergative extraction.

However, West Circassian is a high absolutive language.

**Evidence:**

- constraints on possessor extraction
- conditions on parasitic gap licensing
Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
- West Circassian:
  - background on the language
  - possessor extraction
  - parasitic gaps
- Conclusion and implications
Syntactic ergativity in possessor extraction

- Only $\text{ABS}$ is transparent for possessor extraction
- $\text{ERG}$ and $\text{IO}$ are islands

(Ershova 2020a)
ABS external argument is transparent for subextraction

\[ t_i \quad z- \quad jəpəsə\hskip \text{ABS} \quad daxew \quad Ø- \quad qəs\hskip \text{wh} \hskip \text{erer} \]

woman \quad WH.POSS- \quad girl \quad well \quad 3ABS- \quad dance.DYN.ABS

‘the woman whose daughter dances well’
ABS internal argument is transparent for subextraction

\[ \hat{s}^w_\omega zew_t [ t_i \ z\omega- q^w e ](ABS) \text{ hapsem} \]

woman \[ WH.\text{POSS-} \text{ son} \text{ prison.OBL} \]

Ø- Ø-č-a-ʒaže-r

3ABS- 3io.sg-loc-3pl.erg-throw.pst.abs

‘the woman whose son they threw in jail’
Possessor of ERG or IO cannot be relativized directly

POSS WH-AGREEMENT

\[ \text{Op}_i \quad [ \; t_i \; z-j\omega-\check{c}'ale \; ](\text{ERG}) \; \text{daxew} \; \text{wered} (\text{ABS}) \]
\[ \text{WH.POSS-ALIEN-boy} \quad \text{well} \quad \text{song} \]
\[ \emptyset- \quad \text{qe-} \quad \text{z\omega-} \quad \text{?werer} \]
\[ 3\text{ABS-} \quad \text{DIR-} \quad \text{WH.ERG-} \quad \text{sing.DYN.ABS} \]

ERG WH-AGREEMENT

POSS WH-AGREEMENT

\[ * \; \text{Op}_i \quad [ \; t_i \; z-j\omega-\check{c}'ale \; ](\text{ERG}) \; \text{daxew} \; \text{wered} (\text{ABS}) \]
\[ \text{WH.POSS-ALIEN-boy} \quad \text{well} \quad \text{song} \]
\[ \emptyset- \quad \text{q-} \quad \text{\omega-} \quad \text{?werer} \]
\[ 3\text{ABS-} \quad \text{DIR-} \quad 3\text{SG.ERG-} \quad \text{sing.DYN.ABS} \]
\[ * \; \text{REGULAR} \; \varphi-\text{AGREEMENT} \]

‘the one whose son sings well’
Multiple wh-agreement as a pseudocleft

Evidence: case connectivity effects (Ershova 2020a)
Possessor of ERG cannot be extracted

**PSEUDOCLEFT REPAIR:**

\[ \text{Op}_i \left[ t_i \ z- \ jəč’ale \right] (\text{ABS}) \quad \text{Op}_j \ t_j \ \text{daxew} \]

\[ \text{wered} \ \Ø- \ qe- \ zə- \ \text{werer} \]

\[ \text{song} \ 3\text{ABS}- \ \text{DIR}- \ \text{WH.ERG}- \ \text{sing.DYN.ABS} \]

\[ \text{ERG WH-MOVEMENT} \]

**DIRECT RELATIVIZATION:**

\[ \ast \ \text{Op}_i \left[ t_i \ z- \ jəč’ale \right] (\text{ERG}) \quad \text{daxew} \ \text{wered} (\text{ABS}) \]

\[ \Ø- \ q- \ ə- \ \text{werer} \]

\[ 3\text{ABS}- \ \text{DIR}- \ 3\text{SG.ERG}- \ \text{sing.DYN.ABS} \]

\[ \text{REGULAR } \varphi-\text{AGREEMENT} \]

‘the one whose son sings well’
Possessor of IO cannot be extracted

**PSEUDOCLEFT REPAIR:**

\[ \hat{s}^w \text{ezew}_i \quad [ \ t_i \quad z\text{-} \quad q^w \text{e} \ ](\text{ABS}) \quad [ \ O_p \ j \quad t_j \quad \text{čelejebažer} \quad \text{teacher.ABS} \]  

IO WH-MOVEMENT

\[ \text{Ø-} \quad z\text{-} \quad e\text{-} \quad \text{čečažer} \quad 3\text{ABS-} \quad \text{WH.IO-} \quad \text{DAT- scold.PST.ABS} \]  

IO WH-AGREEMENT

**DIRECT RELATIVIZATION:**

\[ \* \hat{s}^w \text{ezew}_i \quad [ \ t_i \quad z\text{-} \quad q^w \text{e} \ ](\text{IO}) \quad \text{čelejebažer} \quad \text{teacher.ABS} \]  

\[ \text{Ø-} \quad \text{Ø-} \quad \text{je-} \quad \text{čečažer} \quad 3\text{ABS-} \quad 3\text{SG.IO-} \quad \text{DAT- scold.PST.ABS} \]  

REGULAR φ-AGREEMENT

‘the woman whose son the teacher scolded’
Possessor extraction: summary

▶ possessor of $\text{ABS}$ may be relativized directly
▶ possessor of $\text{ERG}$ or $\text{IO}$ may not be relativized

**repair:** pseudocleft to promote possessed NP to $\text{ABS}$ position

▶ **Only part of the story:** no islandhood effects with long-distance wh-movement.
▶ Details in Ershova (2020a)
The proposal: phase edges are islands

- **vP** is merged and assigned case in Spec, vP
  (Woolford 1997, 2006; Legate 2008, a.o.)

- **IO** is merged and assigned case in Spec, ApplP
  (Pylkkänen 2008)

- **vP** is a phase
  (Chomsky 2001; Legate 2003, a.o.)

- **ApplP** is a phase
  (McGinnis 2000, 2001)

- **Phase edges are opaque for subextraction**
  (Chomsky 2000, 2001)

⇒ **ERG** and **IO** are islands.
ABS moves out of phase

- ABS arguments are transparent for POSS extraction
- $\Rightarrow$ S and O move to the same position: Spec,TP
- TP is not a phase

$\text{DP}_{\text{ABS}}$ is not an island.
Possessor extraction: summary

- Possessor of \textit{ERG} / \textit{IO} is relativized with pseudocleft repair strategy.

- Possessor of \textit{ABS} is relativized directly.

The proposal

- \textit{ERG} and \textit{IO} are merged at phase edges
  - $\Rightarrow$ opaque for subextraction

- \textit{ABS} moves to Spec,TP
  - $\Rightarrow$ transparent for subextraction
Possessor extraction and high absolutive

- A novel type of syntactic ergativity effect: only ABS is transparent for possessor extraction.
- Predicted by high absolutive syntax:

  ERG and IO are merged and licensed at phase edges
  ABS moves out of the vP phase – to Spec,TP

Further prediction: high absolutive should affect rules which are sensitive to c-command

Confirmed by parasitic gaps.
Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
- **West Circassian:**
  - background on the language
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  - parasitic gaps
- Conclusion and implications
Prediction of high absolutive syntax:

An ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps in ERG or IO, per the anti-c-command condition (Engdahl 1983).

(Ershova 2019, 2021a)
The Anti-C-Command Condition

Anti-C-Command Condition (Engdahl 1983:22)

“A parasitic gap may not be c-commanded by the real gap.”

See also Aoun and Clark (1985); Chomsky (1986); Contreras (1987), a.o.

Parasitic gaps
The anti-c-command condition in English

**object** doesn’t c-command adjunct $\Rightarrow$ can license parasitic gap

```
CP
  QP  C’
    which articles
  C  TP
    did  DP
        John T
  vP
    vP
      file $t_i$
      without reading $\checkmark_{PG}$
```
The anti-c-command condition in English

**subject** c-commands adjunct ⇒ cannot license parasitic gap

*  
  CP
  QP
  which articles

  C
  T
  t

  T
  vP
  got

  vP
  filed by John

  XP
  without him reading ___PG
Parasitic gaps in West Circassian

- A pronoun that is bound by relativized participant may be replaced by a parasitic gap

- the parasitic gap triggers **parasitic wh-agreement**

\[
\text{Op}_i \quad \text{as\text{"an}} \quad \text{mafem} \quad \text{rjene} \\
\text{Aslan} \quad \text{day} \quad \text{whole} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \frac{\text{CP} } {\text{PG}} \quad \text{Ø-} \quad \boxed{\text{z-} \quad \text{e-} \quad \text{məwew}} \quad \text{[} \text{3ABS-} \quad \boxed{\text{WH.IO-}} \quad \text{DAT-} \quad \text{NEG.hit.ADV} \text{]} \quad \text{[} \text{3ABS-} \quad \boxed{\text{WH.IO-}} \quad \text{COM-} \quad \text{play.DYN.ABS} \text{]} \\
\text{t}_i \quad \text{Ø-} \quad \text{zə-} \quad \text{de-} \quad \text{ʒegʷəɾer} \\
\text{3ABS-} \quad \boxed{\text{WH.IO-}} \quad \text{COM-} \quad \text{play.DYN.ABS} \\

‘the one Aslan plays with __ all day [ without hitting __ ]’
A relativized participant may license a parasitic gap in place of a bound possessor in a clausemate DP.

The parasitic gap triggers **parasitic possessor wh-agreement**.

\[ \text{PARASITIC WH-AGREEMENT} \quad \text{PRIMARY WH-AGREEMENT} \]

\[ \text{četwewi} [ \_PG z- } jēsən ]  t_i  \Ø- zə- məşər \]
\[ \text{cat WH.POSS- food} \quad 3\text{ABS- WH.ERG- NEG.eat.DYN.ABS} \]

‘the cat who doesn’t eat its food’
**ABS and the anti-c-command condition**

An ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausemate NPs

\[ \text{C-COMMAND} \]

\[ * \text{č’alew}_i \bigcirc \bigcirc t_i [ \_ \_ \_ \_ ] \text{žə-} \, \text{š } \, \text{Ø-} \, \text{qədekʷaże} \ \]  
boy  
\text{WH.POSS-}  
brother  
\text{WH.ABS-}  
3SG.IO+COM.go.PST.ABS

‘the boy who arrived together with his brother’

**Anti-C-Command Condition (Engdahl 1983:22)**

“\( A \) parasitic gap may not be c-commanded by the real gap.”

\[ \Rightarrow \text{ABS c-command} \text{s the coreferent possessor} \]
ERG or IO trace can license a parasitic gap in ABS DP:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\text{C'} \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{C} \\
\text{vP} \\
\text{v'} \\
\text{ApplP} \\
\text{v} \\
\text{Appl'} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP(ABS)} \\
\text{Op}_i \\
\text{PG} \\
\end{array}
\]
The anti-c-command condition and syntactic ergativity

**ABS** trace cannot license a parasitic gap in **ERG** or **IO** DP:

![Diagram]

**Parasitic gaps**
ERG trace licenses parasitic gap in ABS DP

‘the cat who doesn’t eat its food’
IO trace licenses parasitic gap in ABS DP

‘the boy whom his brother always hits’
Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps

**ABS** theme cannot license parasitic gap in **ERG** DP:

* Opi $t_i$ [ ___PG $z$- jane] $\emptyset$- $\emptyset$- $\text{məvašxere}$
  
  $\text{WH.POSS}$- mother $\text{WH.ABS}$- 3SG.ERG- NEG.feed.DYN

hažʷəšʼərxem

puppies

Intended: ‘the puppies whom their mother doesn’t feed’
**ABS** agent cannot license parasitic gap in **IO** DP:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{ABS} & \text{IO} \\
{^* \text{haw}_i} & \text{[} {^* \text{PG}} \quad \text{z-} & \text{jæx}^{\text{wezjajən}} \text{]} \\
\text{dog} & \text{WH.POSS- } \text{owner} \\
\emptyset - \emptyset & \text{jeceqež’əvəm} \\
\text{WH.ABS- } 3\text{SG.IO- } \text{bite.PST.OBL}
\end{array}
\]

Intended: ‘the dog that bit its owner’
a pronoun that is bound by a relativized participant may be replaced by a **parasitic gap**

the parasitic gap triggers **parasitic wh-agreement**

ERG or IO trace can license parasitic gaps in ABS

ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps in ERG or IO DPs

Per the anti-c-command condition

⇒ ABS c-commands ERG and IO

Parasitic gaps provide evidence for a high absolutive syntax.
Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
- West Circassian:
  - background on the language
  - possessor extraction
  - parasitic gaps
- Conclusion and implications
Putting the puzzle pieces together

Wh-agreeing possessors in West Circassian display two types of syntactic ergativity effects:

- possessor relativization is grammatical only out of the ABS DP
- a possessor may not be replaced with a parasitic gap if it is bound by an ABS trace

Taken together, these generalizations form a unified picture:

The absolutive DP moves high.

Other aspects of the grammar fit this bigger picture:
E.g. reciprocal binding (Ershova 2019, 2021c)
Ergative Extraction Constraint (Aissen 2017; Coon et al. 2021)

ERG may not undergo Ā-movement.

*See also Aldridge (2004, 2008); Coon et al. (2014, 2021); Deal (2016); Polinsky (2016, 2017); Tollan and Clemens (2021), a.o.

**Q’ankob’al (Mayan):**

* Maktxel max y-il __ERG ix ix? who PFV A3-see CLF woman

Intended: ‘Who saw the woman?’

(Coon et al. 2021)

*ERG WH-MOV T
The status quo: the ergative extraction constraint is a trademark property of high absolutive languages
& high absolutive syntax is required to derive the ergative extraction constraint
(but see Otsuka 2006, 2017; Deal 2016; Polinsky 2016)

This talk

The ergative extraction constraint is not necessarily predicted by high absolutive syntax, nor necessarily predicts high absolutive syntax.
The movement of \textsc{Abs} to a position higher than \textsc{Erg} does not straightforwardly predict the ergative extraction constraint.

Additional assumptions are required:

- relativized wh-probe (Coon et al. 2021)
- constraint on crossing dependencies (Tollan and Clemens 2021)

This is a desirable prediction.

West Circassian is a high absolutive language without an ergative extraction constraint.
Raised ABS is not the only way to derive the ban on ergative wh-movement.

**Approaches based on properties of ERG:**
- ERG cannot move because of case or structural position
- ABS remains low and does not interact with ergative extraction

(Otsuka 2006, 2017; Deal 2016; Polinsky 2016)
Moving forward

▶ **This talk:** two previously undiscussed reflexes of high absolutive syntax

1. subextraction asymmetries
2. conditions on parasitic gap licensing

▶ **Future direction:** similar effects are predicted for other high absolutive languages

Main takeaway

High absolutive syntax permeates a language’s grammar and should be observable in multiple domains.

The ergative extraction constraint is not necessarily *predicted* by high absolutive syntax, nor necessarily *predicts* high absolutive syntax.
Thank you!

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