What it means to be a subject
Evidence from a syntactically ergative language

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The main claim

- **SUBJECT** is not a syntactic primitive
- **syntactically ergative** languages provide particularly good evidence for this

**Syntactic ergativity:**

2 subject positions + occupied by 2 distinct
nominals

What is a subject?

Usually defined as the constituent displaying a constellation of syntactic properties (e.g. Keenan 1976):

1. binds reflexive pronouns and cannot itself be bound

```
The cat  washed herself.

SUBJECT

* Herself washed the cat.
```

What is a subject?

Usually defined as the constituent displaying a constellation of syntactic properties (e.g. Keenan 1976):

2. is **PRO** in control constructions

```
SUBJECT
The cat wants **PRO** to catch the mouse.

* The mouse wants **the cat** to catch **PRO**
```

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What is a subject?

Usually defined as the constituent displaying a constellation of syntactic properties (e.g. Keenan 1976):

3. takes wider scope than other elements

\[ \text{No one} \overset{\text{saw}}{\rightarrow} \text{anything}. \]

\[ \text{SUBJECT} \quad \text{NEG} \quad \overset{\text{NPI}}{\rightarrow} \]

\[ \text{Anyone} \overset{\text{saw}}{\rightarrow} \text{nothing}. \]

\[ \text{NPI} \quad \overset{\text{NEG}}{\rightarrow} \]

4. etc.

Deconstructed subjecthood

- Harley (1995); Bobaljik and Jonas (1996); McCloskey (1997), a.o.: A clause contains several subject positions.
- The subject moves through them in the course of the derivation.

Subjecthood properties are distributed across several positions

- A nominal "collects" subjecthood properties by moving through the different positions (e.g. Poole 2015).
Subjecthood properties are distributed across several positions

- A nominal “collects” subjecthood properties by moving through the different positions (e.g. Poole 2015).

A subject is not defined by its syntactic position

- A subject acquires subjecthood properties by moving through several syntactic positions.

The next question:
Can a subject be defined as a single nominal within a given clause?

A prediction of deconstructed subjecthood

- Generally, a single nominal moves through the different subject positions.

A prediction of deconstructed subjecthood

- Generally, a single nominal moves through the different subject positions.
- BUT what if the subject positions are occupied by different nominals?
Subjecthood properties are distributed across several nominals

Different nominals in different subject positions

If this is possible:

- confirmation for distributed subjecthood properties
- subject ≠ single syntactic position
- subject ≠ single nominal

Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion.

Different nominals in different subject positions

Main claim
Syntactically ergative languages confirm this prediction.

Syntactic ergativity:

- highest argument in clause ≠ highest argument in thematic domain
- ABSOLUTIVE
- S: intransitive subject
- O: transitive object
- ERGATIVE
- A: transitive subject

Syntactic ergativity:
Different nominals in different subject positions

Main claim
Syntactically ergative languages confirm this prediction.

Syntactic ergativity:

2 subject positions + occupied by 2 distinct nominals

⇒ SUBJECT is not a theoretically meaningful notion


Case Study: West Circassian

West Circassian (or Adyghe):

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

West Circassian is polysynthetic

Agglutinating prefixal and suffixal morphology:

fall -go.out -RE -POT -PST -PST -ABS

'that I was able to make you turn a somersault' (Lander and Testelets 2017:952)

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

West Circassian is polysynthetic

Head marking and pro-drop:

so-parjomeleb’о
me for your sake to them he
so-qo-př-r a-ř jo-še-1SG.ABS-DIR-2SG.IO+GEN-3PL.IO+DAT-3SG.ERG-CAUS-leb’о-ň see -PST

'He showed me to them for your sake.' (Korotkova and Lander 2010:301)
Verbal agreement is ergative

O IO A
w- a-de- s- s'as
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 kʷas
2SG.ABS- DIR- 3PL.IO+BEN- go.PST

‘You went for them.’ (Rogava and Keraševa 1966:138)

Case marking is ergative

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

-sabolxe-m haxe-r qałęwəwəs
children-OBL dogs-ABS saw

‘The children(A) saw the dogs(O).’

Case marking is ergative

-m (OBL):

-sabolxe-m haxe-r qałęwəwəs
children-OBL dogs-ABS saw

‘The children(A) saw the dogs(O).’
Case marking is ergative

-ř (ABS):
  ▶ subject of intransitive verb (S)
  ▶ object of transitive verb (O)
-ṃ (OBL):
  ▶ subject of transitive verb (A)

sabajxe-ṃ haxe-ř qalεwˤæ alterations
children-OBL dogs-ABS saw

‘The children(A) saw the dogs(O).’

-ř (ABS):
  ▶ subject of intransitive verb (S)
  ▶ object of transitive verb (O)
-ṃ (OBL):
  ▶ subject of transitive verb (A)
  ▶ applied object (IO)

 ngũwˤæ-ṃ suqasˤæwˤæ ep alterations
wedding-OBL I didn’t dance

‘I didn’t dance at the wedding(IO).’

Distributed subjeckthood and syntactic ergativity

Subjecthood diagnostics in West Circassian single out (at least)
two positions:
  ▶ the highest nominal in the theta-domain
  ▶ the highest nominal in the A-domain

\[ TP \]
\[ DP_1 \]
\[ DP_2 \]
\[ νP \]

Subjecthood diagnostics in West Circassian single out (at least)
two positions:
  ▶ the highest nominal in the theta-domain
  ▶ the highest nominal in the A-domain

\[ TP \]
\[ νP \]
\[ DP_1 \]
\[ DP_2 \]
\[ TP \]
\[ A-domain = TP \]
\[ theta-domain = νP \]
reciprocals
parasitic gaps
\[ S/O \]
ABS
\[ S/A \]
ERG
reflexives
control
High absolutive and two subjects

E.g. for a transitive (ERG-ABS) verb:

```
TP
  /\ 
DP(ABS)  T' 
  /\ 
vP  T
  /\ 
DP(ERG) v' 
  /\ 
VP  v
<DP(ABS)>  V
```

Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian

- reciprocals
- parasitic gaps
- reflexives
- control

A-domain

theta-domain

Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

Reciprocals provide evidence that ABS is the subject.
Reciprocal binding is diagnosed morphologically

\[ \text{ABS external argument binds IO} \]
\[ \Rightarrow \text{REC replaces IO agreement} \]
\[ \text{you} \quad \text{with us} \]
\[ \overset{s^w}{\text{qa-}} \quad \overset{d}{\text{de-}} \quad \overset{s^w}{\text{ešt}} \]
\[ 2PL.ABS- \text{ DIR-} \quad 1PL.IO- \text{ COM-} \quad \text{dance.FUT} \]

‘You(pl) will dance with us’

Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

Reciprocals provide evidence for high absolutive:

- reciprocals are bound by a c-commanding antecedent
- \( \text{ABS} \) binds \( \text{ERG} \) \Rightarrow \( \text{ABS} \) c-commands \( \text{ERG} \)
- \( \text{ABS} \) is the subject

\[ \text{ABS binds \text{ERG}:} \]
\[ \text{you} \quad \text{we} \]
\[ \overset{s^w}{\text{qa-}} \quad \overset{\lambda}{\text{leš}} \quad \overset{s^w}{\text{ešt}} \]
\[ 2PL.ABS- \quad 1PL.ERG- \quad \text{see.PST} \]

‘We saw you(pl).’
Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

Reciprocals provide evidence for high absolutive:
- reciprocals are bound by a c-commanding antecedent
- **ABS** binds **ERG** → **ABS** c-commands **ERG**
- **ABS** is the subject

**ABS** binds **ERG**:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
to- \quad \text{zere-} \\
\lambda_{ERG}\,\text{wh} \\
1PL.ABS- \quad \text{REC.ERG-} \quad \text{see.PST}
\end{array}
\]

'RECIPROCAL'

'We saw each other.'

Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

**ABS** binds reciprocals in **ERG** and **IO** positions:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{TP} \\
\downarrow \text{DP}_{ABS} \\
\text{antecedent} \\
\text{vP} \\
\downarrow \text{DP}_{ERG} \\
\text{reciprocal} \\
\text{AppI}\text{P} \\
\downarrow \text{DP}_{IO} \\
\text{reciprocal} \\
\end{array}
\]

Absolutive as the clause-level subject

- reciprocals → **ABS** c-commands **ERG** and **IO**
- other clause-level phenomena should single out **ABS** as the subject

**Parasitic gaps** confirm subjecthood of absolutive.
Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian

- reciprocals ✓
- parasitic gaps
- reflexives
- control

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{A-domain} & \quad \text{theta-domain} \\
\end{align*} \]

Parasitic gaps as a subjecthood diagnostics

**Anti-C-Command Condition** (Engdahl 1983:22): “A parasitic gap may not be c-commanded by the real gap.”

See also Engdahl (1983); Asun and Clark (1985); Chomsky (1986); Contreras (1987), a.o.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\checkmark parasitic gap} \\
\end{align*} \]

Parasitic gaps as a subjecthood diagnostic

E.g. in English:

**Object** doesn’t c-command adjunct ⇒ can license parasitic gap

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\checkmark ParT} \\
\end{align*} \]
Parasitic gaps as a subjecthood diagnostic

E.g. in English:

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

* CP
   QP
   C'
   which articles
   C
   TP

T
 got
 T'
 vP
 XP

filed by John
 without him reading
```

Possessor parasitic gaps in West Circassian (Ershova 2019a)

- wh-movement triggers wh-agreement on the predicate
- if there is a co-referent possessor pronoun

```
wh-movement

Op_i  pronoun_i  wh-trace_i

četawew₁ [ pro₁ Ø - jəšxən] f₁ Ø - zə - mašxorə
cat 3SG.Poss- food 3ABS- WH.ERG- NEG.DAT.DYN.ABS

‘the cat who doesn’t eat its food’
```

Possessor parasitic gaps in West Circassian (Ershova 2019a)

- wh-movement triggers wh-agreement on the predicate
- if there is a co-referent possessor pronoun
  it may be replaced by parasitic gap
- parasitic gap triggers additional wh-agreement

```
co-reference

Op_i  PG_i  wh-trace_i

četawew₁ [ -PG zə- jəšxən] f₁ Ø - zə - mašxorə
cat WH.Poss- food 3ABS- WH.ERG- NEG. DAT. DYN. ABS

‘the cat who doesn’t eat its food’
```

Parasitic gaps are subject to the anti-c-command condition

```
ERG or IO trace can license a parasitic gap in ABS DP:

CP
   Op_i
   C'
   TP
   C

DP(ABS)
   PG
   vP
   T'
   T

f₁
 v'

DP(IO)
 ApplP
 Appl'
```

‘the cat who doesn’t eat its food’
Parasitic gaps are subject to the anti-c-command condition

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

```
CP
   \( t_1 \)
  /\       \( \lambda \)-PG
TP
   \( vP \)
   \( v' \)
   \( \text{App}P \)
   \( v \)
   \( \text{App}l' \)
```

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

```
CP
   \( \lambda \)-PG
TP
   \( t_1 \)
   \( \lambda \)-PG
   \( \text{App}P \)
   \( v \)
   \( \text{App}l' \)
   \( \lambda \)-PG
   \( \text{Dep}P(\text{io}) \)
```

---

Parasitic gaps are subject to the anti-c-command condition

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

```
CP
   \( \lambda \)-PG
TP
   \( t_1 \)
   \( \lambda \)-PG
   \( \text{App}P \)
   \( v \)
   \( \text{App}l' \)
   \( \lambda \)-PG
   \( \text{Dep}P(\text{io}) \)
```

Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausal DP:

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

```
\* Op_1 \( t_1 \) [\( \lambda \)-PG \( z \)-WH-Poss- mother \( \lambda \)-WH-Abs- 3sg.ERG- Neg-feed.DYN
ha\( h \)-aš³'orxem
puppies
```

Intended: 'the puppies whom their mother doesn't feed'
Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausemate DPs

\textbf{ABS} agent cannot license parasitic gap in \textbf{IO} DP:

\begin{align*}
\text{ABS} & \quad \text{hawi} \quad \# (\text{ABS}) \\
\text{dog} & \quad \text{IO} \\
\varnothing & \quad \text{jaceqez\'awem} \\
\text{WH.ABS} & \quad \text{3SG.IO} \\
\text{WH.POSS} & \quad \text{bite.PST.OBL}
\end{align*}

Intended: ‘the dog that bit its owner’

Parasitic gaps confirm subjecthood of absolutive DP

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{ABS} trace cannot license parasitic gaps in \textbf{ERG} or \textbf{IO} DPs
\item \Rightarrow \textbf{ABS} c-commands \textbf{ERG} and \textbf{IO}
\item \textbf{ABS} is the clause-level subject
\end{itemize}

Diagnosing the lower subject

The \textbf{clause-level subject position} can be diagnosed by reciprocals and parasitic gaps.

\textbf{Diagnostics for the lower subject position – the highest position in the theta-domain}:

\begin{itemize}
\item reciprocals
\item parasitic gaps
\item reflexives
\item control
\end{itemize}

Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

\textbf{Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian}

\begin{itemize}
\item reciprocals
\item parasitic gaps
\item reflexives
\item control
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{A-domain}
\item \textbf{theta-domain}
\end{itemize}
Relexives contrast with reciprocals

\[
\text{RECIROCALS} \rightarrow \text{ABS binds ERG}
\]

you \quad we
\quad \lambda \epsilon \epsilon \omega \omega
2PL.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

\text{BASELINE}

‘We saw you(pl).’

we \quad each other
\quad \lambda \epsilon \epsilon \omega \omega
1PL.ABS- REC.ERG- see.PST

\text{RECIROCAL}

‘We saw each other.’

Relexives contrast with reciprocals

\[
\text{RECIROCALS} \rightarrow \text{ABS binds ERG}
\]

\[
\text{REFLEXIVES} \rightarrow \text{ERG binds ABS}
\]

ourselves \quad we
\quad \lambda \epsilon \epsilon \omega \omega
2PL.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

\text{REFLEXIVE}

‘We saw ourselves.’

Conflicting results for subjecthood diagnostics

- Reciprocals and parasitic gaps $\rightarrow$ ABS c-commands ERG + ABS is the subject
- Reflexives $\rightarrow$ ERG c-commands ABS + ERG is the subject

The explanation:

Reflexives are local subject oriented

must be bound by highest DP in the theta-domain
Local subject oriented reflexives

- See e.g. Rizzi (1986); Lidz (1996, 2001); Labelle (2008); Sportiche (2014); Ahn (2015); Bhatia and Poole (2016)
- Reflexives must be bound by highest argument in vP.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{DP(ERG)} \\
\downarrow \text{antecedent} \\
\text{DP(ABS)} \\
\downarrow \text{REFL}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{vP} \\
\downarrow \text{v} \\
\text{ApplP} \\
\downarrow \text{v}
\end{array} \]

Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (**ERG-IO-ABS**):
- reflexive in **ABS** position
- **ERG** binds the reflexive

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{ABS} \quad \text{IO} \quad \text{ERG}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
z- \quad \text{a-} \quad \text{fe-} \quad \text{s-} \quad \text{thaç'au}
\end{array} \]

REFL-ABS 3PL.IO- BEN- 1SG.ERG- wash.PST

‘I washed **myself** for them’ \( \checkmark \text{ERG} \) binds **ABS**

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{XBINDING}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{ABS} \quad \text{IO} \quad \text{ERG}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
z- \quad \text{a-} \quad \text{fe-} \quad \text{s-} \quad \text{thaç'au}
\end{array} \]

REFL-ABS 3PL.IO- BEN- 1SG.ERG- wash.PST

* ‘I washed for them **themselves**.’ \( X \text{IO} \) binds **ABS**
Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (\textbf{ERG-IO-ABS}):

\begin{itemize}
  \item reflexive in IO position
  \item \textbf{ERG} binds the reflexive
\end{itemize}

\textbf{✓BINDING}

\begin{tabular}{ccc}
ABS & IO & ERG \\
\empty & $\Rightarrow$ & fe- s- thač'ow
\end{tabular}

3ABS- REFL.IO- BEN- 1SG.ERG- wash.PST

\begin{quote}
‘I washed them \textit{for myself}’ \hspace{1cm} \textbf{✓} \textbf{ERG} binds IO
\end{quote}

\textbf{✗BINDING}

\begin{tabular}{ccc}
ABS & IO & ERG \\
\empty & $\Rightarrow$ & fe- s- thač'ow
\end{tabular}

3ABS- REFL.IO- BEN- 1SG.ERG- wash.PST

\begin{quote}
* ‘I washed \underline{them} \textit{for themselves}.’ \hspace{1cm} \textbf{✗} \textbf{ABS} binds IO
\end{quote}

Highest nominal in theta-domain as the subject

\begin{itemize}
  \item reflexives must be bound by \textit{highest nominal in VP}
  \item \Rightarrow \textit{highest nominal in VP behaves as the subject}
\end{itemize}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node (T) {TP};
  \node (DP) at (0,0) {DP(ABS)};
  \node (vP) at (1,0) {vP};
  \node (T') at (1.5,0) {T'};
  \node (T) at (2,0) {T};
  \node (v) at (1,1) {v};
  \node (v') at (1,0.5) {v'};
  \node (DP(ERG)) at (0.25,-1) {DP(ERG)};
  \node (VP) at (1,-1) {VP};
  \node (SUBJECT) at (-0.5,-2) {SUBJECT};
  \node (DP(ABS)) at (-1.5,-2) {\langle DP(ABS) \rangle};
  \draw (T) -- (DP);
  \draw (DP) -- (vP);
  \draw (vP) -- (T');
  \draw (T') -- (T);
  \draw (v') -- (v);
  \draw (DP(ERG)) -- (vP);
  \draw (SUBJECT) -- (DP(ERG));
  \draw (DP(ABS)) -- (DP(ERG));
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

The explanation

\textbf{Reflexive binding is constrained by Voice$^0$.}

\begin{itemize}
  \item See e.g. Labelle 2008; Ahn 2015; Bhatia and Poole 2016.
\end{itemize}
Reflexive Voice

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP

Reflexive Voice

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP

Reflexive Voice

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP

Reflexive Voice

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP
- licenses the reflexive pronoun
Reflexive Voice

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP \(\rightarrow\) antecedent
- licenses the reflexive pronoun \(\rightarrow\) reflexive

Voice and the theta-domain

- reflexives must be licensed by Voice
- Voice selects for vP = theta-domain
- Voice agrees with highest DP in theta-domain
- reflexives single out highest DP in theta-domain as the subject

Returning to contrast with reciprocals

**The question:** Why do reflexives and reciprocals behave differently?

**Reciprocals**
- ABS binds ERG
- A-domain

**Reflexives**
- ERG binds ABS
- theta-domain

**The answer:** Reciprocals are **not** licensed by Voice
\(\Rightarrow\) they are only sensitive to clause-level prominence

Any c-commanding nominal can bind reciprocal

E.g. for ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):
- ABS theme may bind reciprocal IO
Any c-commanding nominal can bind reciprocal

E.g. for ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):
- ABS theme may bind reciprocal IO
- IO may not bind ABS theme

Absolutive theme can bind applied object

'S/he brought us to each other (= together).'

Applied object cannot bind absolutive reciprocal

Intended: 'S/he brought to us each other.'

Reflexives versus reciprocals: summary

- reflexives are licensed by Voice
- reciprocals are not licensed by Voice

**RECIPROCALS**
- bound by c-commanding antecedent
- A-domain

**REFLEXIVES**
- bound by highest DP in vP
- theta-domain

- clause-level (A-domain) subjecthood is confirmed by parasitic gaps
- NEXT: theta-domain subjecthood is confirmed by control constructions
Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian
- reciprocals ✓
- parasitic gaps ✓
- reflexives ✓
- control

A-domain

theta-domain

Control singles out highest nominal in theta-domain

The explanation:
Control is mediated by Voice

parallels between reflexives and control

- confirms importance of Voice in subjecthood diagnostics
- explains lack of sensitivity to clause-level structural prominence

Control singles out ergative agent as subject

(Errshova 2019b): control verbs embed CP with high ABS
- for transitive verb (**ERG-ABS**):
  - **ERG** is controlled

![Diagram of DP, vP, TP, DP(ABS), DP(ERG), and v']

Control singles out ergative agent as subject

(Errshova 2019b): control verbs embed CP with high ABS
- for transitive verb (**ERG-ABS**):
  - **ERG** is controlled
  - **ABS** cannot be controlled

![Another diagram of DP, vP, TP, DP(ABS), DP(ERG), and v']
Control targets ergative agent

Controller | ABS | ERG
---|---|---
č’elejevaŋəm | CP č’alexə́r(ABS) | PROC(ERG) əɫətenew | *č’alexem | CP PROC(ABS) č’elejevaŋəm(ERG) əɫətenew |
teacher.OBL | boy.PL-ABS | to count | boys.OBL | boy.PL-ABS |
rjonež’ar | | | rjonež’ar |
began | | | to count | began | lit. 'The children began for the teacher to count [them].'

‘The teacher began to count the children.’

Control cannot target absolutive theme of transitive verb

Why does control target the ergative agent?

- Why is ERG eligible for control?
- Why doesn’t ABS act as an intervener?

Control is mediated by Voice

- Voice⁰ agrees with highest nominal in vP
- the controller agrees with Voice⁰ (a lá Landau 2000)
- nominals above Voice⁰ are invisible to control
Parallels between control and reflexives

- **Control** singles out highest argument in theta-domain as subject
- **Reflexives** single out highest argument in theta-domain as subject
- Both are constrained by Voice
- Support from parallel behavior with two-place unaccusative verbs

Two-place unaccusative verbs

E.g. ș’əb’əpšen ‘forget’:

[Diagram showing the construction with Voice, me, and you]

‘You forgot about me.’

Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant from Voice

- Absolutive theme moves to Spec, ApplP (McGinnis 2000, 2001)
- Both **ABS** and **IO** are in Spec, ApplP
- Therefore they are equidistant from Voice

[Diagram showing the structure with VoiceP, vP, ApplP, and v]

Both absorutive theme and applied argument can bind reflexive

- **ABS** and **IO** are equidistant from Voice
- + there is no higher DP in vP
- Therefore either argument can serve as antecedent for reflexive

**IO** binds **ABS**:

[Diagram showing the structure with myself and I]

‘I forgot about myself.’
Both absolutive theme and applied argument can bind reflexive

- **ABS** and **IO** are equidistant from Voice
- + there is no higher DP in vP
- ⇒ either argument can serve as antecedent for reflexive

**ABS** binds **IO**:

*me*  *myself*

\[\text{1sg.abs - refl.io - forgot.pst}\]

lit. ‘Myself forgot about me.’

---

Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control

**ABS** and **IO** are equidistant from Voice

**VOICE mediates control**

**ABS** and **IO** are equidistant for control

**CONTROL**

\[\text{pro: } [\text{cp sjanab} 'ač'ez'mam qass} 'ašāšexe-t}(\text{ABS}) \text{ PRG}_{i}(\text{IO})\]

my childhood happenings-ABS

\[\text{ss'oa} 'ašpšenew } \text{jeseraž'e}\]

to forget I am beginning

‘I am starting to forget events from my childhood.’

---

Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control

**IO** may be controlled

**CONTROL**

\[\text{pro: } [\text{cp sjanab} 'ač'ez'mam qass} 'ašāšexe-t}(\text{ABS}) \text{ PRG}_{i}(\text{IO})\]

my childhood happenings-ABS

\[\text{ss'oa} 'ašpšenew } \text{jeseraž'e}\]

to forget I am beginning

‘I am starting to forget events from my childhood.’
Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control

- IO may be controlled
- ABS may be controlled

```
gʷəəʔəχə̱shemɪ [CP PRO₃(ABS) səʃəu rməpənew]
```

long words
to forget

```
raəqəχəu
```

they are beginning

lit. ‘Long words are beginning for me to be forgetting [them].’

Control and reflexives versus reciprocals

- control and reflexives are constrained by Voice
- in two-place unaccusative verbs, ABS and IO are equidistant to Voice
- \(\Rightarrow\) either argument can be controlled or bind a reflexive
- **Contrast** with reciprocals \(\Rightarrow\) only sensitive to full clause structure

Reciprocals: absolutive theme binds applied argument

- at level of TP, ABS asymmetrically c-commands IO
- \(\Rightarrow\) ABS may bind IO reciprocal

```
\[ \text{DP(ABS)} \]
```

TP

```
\[ \text{\check{antecedent}} \]
```

```
\[ \text{AppIP} \]
```

```
\[ \text{<DP(ABS)>} \]
```

```
\[ \text{App’} \]
```

```
\[ \text{reciprocal} \]
```

Reciprocals: absolutive theme binds applied argument

- at level of TP, ABS asymmetrically c-commands IO
- \(\Rightarrow\) ABS may bind IO reciprocal
- IO may not bind ABS reciprocal

```
\[ \text{DP(ABS)} \]
```

TP

```
\[ \text{reciprocal} \]
```

```
\[ \text{AppIP} \]
```

```
\[ \text{<DP(ABS)>} \]
```

```
\[ \text{App’} \]
```

```
\[ \text{reciprocal} \]
```

\[ \text{\check{antecedent}} \]
Reciprocals: absolute theme binds applied argument

Two-place unaccusative verbs:
- **ABS** can bind reciprocal in **IO** position

```
we    each other
↓     ↓
ta-   z’e rectangles'ah
\text{IPL.ABS- REC.IO- forget.PST}
```

‘We forgot about each other.’

Reciprocals: absolute theme binds applied argument

Two-place unaccusative verbs:
- **ABS** can bind reciprocal in **IO** position
- **IO** cannot bind reciprocal in **ABS** position
- reciprocals are only sensitive to clause-level c-command
- **CONTRAST** with reflexives and control

```
each other    we
↓     ↓
* z’e rectangles'ah
\text{REC.ABS- IPL.IO- forget.PST}
```

Intended: ‘We forgot about each other.’

Voice and subjecthood: Recap

- sensitivity to c-command in theta-domain (vP) is conditioned by **Voice**
- control and reflexives employ **Voice** ⇒ single out highest DP in vP as subject

Implications:
- confirms importance of **Voice** for subjecthood diagnostics
- accounts for distribution of subjecthood properties across several positions
- possible explanation for rarity of syntactic ergativity in control and binding (see e.g. Dixon 1994; Deal 2016; Polinsky 2016)

Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian

- reciprocals ✓
- parasitic gaps ✓
- reflexives ✓
- control ✓

\text{A-domain}

\text{theta-domain}
Conclusion

In West Circassian, there are at least two subject positions:
- highest DP in the A-domain (TP)
- highest DP in the theta-domain (vP)

E.g. for a transitive (ERG-ABS) verb:

Subject defined in terms of structural prominence

Correlates with how subjecthood diagnostics operate:
- Anaphors must be bound by a **c-commanding antecedent**: antecedent cannot be defined by semantic role of specific syntactic position
- Conditions on parasitic gap licensing are stated in terms of **c-command**
- Control is sensitive to **structural prominence** rather than syntactic position.

Implications for syntactic ergativity

The high position of the absolutive argument is:
- derived
- a **subject** position (=A-position)

- support for previous analyses of derived high absolutive
  (Bittner and Hale 1996; Manning 1996; Baker 1997; Aldridge 2008; Coon et al. 2014; Yuan 2018, a.o.)
- novel evidence for A-position status of high absolutive

The notion of subjecthood

As a syntactically ergative language, West Circassian:

- provides support for theories of distributed subjecthood

- **in syntactically accusative languages**, the same nominal moves through the different subject positions
  ⇒ effects of distributed subjecthood only observable in limited contexts
- **in syntactically ergative languages**, the different subject positions are systematically occupied by distinct nominals
  ⇒ fruitful testing ground for distribution of subjecthood properties
The notion of subjecthood

As a syntactically ergative language, West Circassian:

**provides evidence for a radical decomposition of subjecthood**

- 2 subject positions + occupied by 2 distinct nominals

⇒ **SUBJECT** is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Local subject orientation and locality

**Local subject orientation of reflexives is reduced to constraints on locality.**

- support for locality-based analyses (Sportiche 2014; Ahn 2015; Bhatia and Poole 2016, a.o.): any argument may be antecedent, if it is the highest in the theta-domain
- confirms implicit prediction of Voice-based analyses:
  - in syntactically accusative languages, antecedent must be both deep and surface subject
  - this is epiphennomenal to syntax of Voice
  - in syntactically ergative languages, antecedent need not be the surface subject

The role of Voice in subjecthood diagnostics

**Voice plays an important role in a two classic subjecthood diagnostics:**

- reflexives
- control

- best observed in syntactically ergative languages
- in syntactically accusative languages, can be seen in limited contexts:
  - local subject oriented reflexives
    (Labelle 2008; Sportiche 2014; Ahn 2015, a.o.)
  - quirky subjects (Poole 2015)

Control and syntactic ergativity

- cross-linguistically, control very rarely (if at all) displays syntactic ergativity effects
  See e.g. Dixon (1994); Deal (2016); Polinsky (2016).
- explained by role of Voice in control: control is only sensitive to the organization of arguments in vP
Broader connections: typology of anaphor binding

- contrast between reflexives and reciprocals in binding restrictions is common: even in same language, reflexives are often subject-oriented and reciprocals are not
- West Circassian anaphors fit into this general typology
- The bigger question: why this contrast between reflexives and reciprocals?

Broader connections: Austronesian subjects

- Tagalog: subjecthood properties are distributed across two nominals
  - two types of subjects:
    - grammatical subject
    - argument structure subject
  
  See e.g. Schachter (1977); Guilfoyle et al. (1992); Manning (1996).

Current proposal:

- contribution to the empirical landscape
- dichotomy of subject types is not necessary
- subjecthood properties are defined by structural prominence and syntactic domain, not as primitives

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