

A Crosslinguistic Approach to Double Nominative and Biabsolute Constructions: Evidence from Korean and Daghestanian

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1. Introduction

Distribution of case among distinct grammatical relations is one of the most frequently studied topics in the syntactic theory. Canonical cases are, in accusative languages, subjects of both intransitive and transitive verbs being nominative, while direct objects of transitive verbs are usually marked accusative. In ergative languages, subjects of intransitive verbs share properties with direct objects of transitive verbs, and are marked absolutive. Subjects of transitive verbs are usually ergative. When you look into world languages, however, there are ‘non-canonical’ case patterns too. Probably the most extreme kind of non-canonical case system would be so-called *Quirky Subject* constructions in Icelandic (see Sigurðsson 2002).

This paper concerns constructions, in which two nominals are identically case-marked in a clause, as observed in Korean and Daghestanian languages. Daghestanian languages belong to Nakh-Daghestanian branch of North Caucasian family. Nakh-Daghestanian languages are informally divided into Nakh languages, such as Chechen and Ingush, spoken in Chechnya and the Republic of Ingushetia, respectively; and Daghestanian languages, spoken in the Republic of Daghestan. Those regions are located in the Caucasian part of Russian Federation. Some Daghestanian languages are also spoken in Azerbaijan and Georgia. This study focuses on Daghestanian languages, such as Archi, Avar, Dargwa, Hinuq, Khwarshi, Lak and Tsez, due to similar behaviors of them with respect to the described phenomenon.

2. Ergativity in Daghestanian

Aldridge (2004) proposes that there are two types of syntactically ergative languages, based on which argument is performing functions typical for subjects. Being an antecedent for

* The following is a list of abbreviations that are used throughout the paper:

I, II, III, IV, V, D, B, J class markers, ABL ablative, ABS absolutive, ACC accusative, AOR aorist, AUX auxiliary, CAUS causative, CM class marker, CVB converb, DAT dative, DECL declarative, EMPH emphatic, ERG ergative, EVID evidential, GEN genitive, INF infinitive, INTR intransitive, IPFV imperfective, OBL oblique, PFV, PERF perfective, PL plural, POSS possessive, PREV preverb, PROG progressive, PRS present, PST past, PTCP, PRT participle, SG singular, TEMP temporal, TOP topic, TRANS transitive, W witnessed

In the matrix clause (2a), the agent of the verb *to make* is marked with ergative case, and the internal argument is marked with absolutive case. Now, what happens when one attempts to construct a control construction with the infinitival complement clause parallel to the one in (2a)? Two possibilities are considered by Aldridge for ergative languages. For the first group of languages the occurrence of PRO is possible in position of the external argument, regardless of the fact that it is marked with the ERG case in finite sentence; it is similar to the situation in nominative/accusative languages, where the external argument is the only one which can undergo PRO substitution, see English example (3). For the second group of languages, occurrence of PRO is limited to positions occupied only by ABS arguments in the corresponding finite sentence. In such languages, the external argument of a transitive verb cannot be substituted with a PRO, see Seediq example (4b), and one needs to use a special intransitive form of the verb in order to be able to use PRO for the external argument, (4a).

- (3) a. Bill kissed Mary.
 b. John told Bill [PRO to kiss Mary].
- (4) a. *M-n-osa* [*PRO m-ari patis taihoku*] *ka Ape*
 INTR-PERF-go INTR-buy book Taipei TOP Ape
 ‘Ape goes to buy books in Taipei’
- b. * *M-n-osa* [*PRO burig-um taihoku (ka) patis*] *ka Ape*
 INTR-PERF-go buy-TRANS Taipei TOP book TOP Ape
 ‘Ape goes to buy books in Taipei’ (Seediq, Aldridge, 2004:111-112)

As one can see from the Archi example (2b), the agentive argument can undergo PRO-substitution and is controlled by the subject of the matrix clause, regardless of the fact that it is marked with ERG case in the corresponding finite sentence.

Based on these two characteristics, we conclude that Daghestanian languages are of *v*-type under Aldridge’s classification. According to her analysis, absolutive case checking is split between T in intransitive clauses and *v* in transitive and that is seemingly what happens in Daghestanian languages.

3. Phenomena

3.1. Biabsolutive Construction in Daghestanian Languages

Most (if not all) Daghestanian languages allow *Biabsolutive* construction (BAC), where

both arguments of a transitive verb are marked with absolutive case. In this section, we outline the basic properties of BAC in Daghestanian, and show that Aldridge's analysis of case checking in ergative languages cannot be directly applied to Daghestanian languages.¹

Examples of the BAC in several Daghestanian languages are given below in (5)-(6).

- (5) a. *hel nux ha-b-ule-l r-ugo*
 they.ABS way(III).ABS make-III-PRT-PL PL-AUX
 'They are in the state of building a road'
- b. *hez nux ha-b-ule-b b-ugo*
 they.ERG way(III).ABS make-III-PRT-III III-AUX
 'They are building the road' (Avar, Bokarev 1949: 113)
- (6) a. *buwa-mu xx^walli b-ar-ši b-i*
 mother-ERG bread(III).ABS III-make-CVB III-be
 'Mother is baking the bread.'
- b. *buwa xx^walli b-ar-ši d-i*
 mother(II).ABS bread(III).ABS III-make-CVB II-be
 'Mother is baking the bread.' (Archi, Kibrik 1979:67-69)

Forker (2010) observes that in most Daghestanian languages, BAC's have periphrastic verbs, composed on a non-finite participle or a converb followed by a finite auxiliary, as shown in the examples above.

Verbs often agree in noun class² with their absolutive arguments in Daghestanian, among which languages have two to eight noun classes. In ergative constructions, both finite and non-finite verbs agree with the absolutive argument, and no agreement with the ergative argument is realized, see (5a) and (6a). In biabsolutive constructions, however, the auxiliary uniformly agrees with the external argument of the verb, while the non-finite form of the verb demonstrates prefixal agreement with the theme argument, and potential suffixal agreement with the external argument. In the examples above, Avar data demonstrate agreement with both arguments on the participle, while in Archi the converb only agrees with the theme.

According to previous studies on BAC's in Caucasian, they have particular semantic interpretation. As noted in Forker (2010), Bokarev (1949), Khalilova (2009) a.o., the main function of BAC construction is *demotion* or *deindividuation* of the patient, emphasizing the

1 See Forker (2010) for an extensive typological study of BAC in Nakh-Daghestanian.

2 Similar to gender in other languages. It is traditionally marked with Roman numerals in the gloss.

property of the agent. For instance, in Avar example (5), the emphasis is on the property of the subject, in this case ‘the property of building a road’, and the object is demoted.

- (7) a. What is the mother doing?
 b. *išu t'amsa bac'atak'-še goli*
 mother.ABS carpet.ABS clean-PRS be.PRS
 ‘The mother is carpet-cleaning.’
- (8) a. What is the mother cleaning?
 b. *išet'-i t'amsa bac'atak'-še goli*
 mother.OBL-ERG carpet.ABS clean-PRS be.PRS
 ‘The mother is cleaning a carpet.’ (Khwarshi, Khalilova 2009:309)

Examples (7)-(8) from Khalilova (2009) demonstrate this semantic difference in Khwarshi. When the *wh*-question targets the object, the tentative answer may not be in BAC form, as it would imply deindividuation of the patient, contrary to the semantic nature of the question, while the information it conveys is supposed to be the focus of the clause. On the other hand, BAC is the preferred way of answering a predicate question, as in (7).

While many of the previous studies propose biclausal status of BAC in Daghestanian (Kazenin 1998, Kazenin and Testelec 1999), we follow Forker’s (2010) monoclausal view, which we believe makes more sense, considering the simple event structure of the BAC. She compares regular complement clauses in Daghestanian with BAC, and demonstrates a number of dissimilarities between them. First of all, while there are no restrictions on predicate type inside complement clauses, only certain types of predicates are allowed in BAC. Second of all, BAC restricts types of arguments (usually to human Agents), while no such restriction is present in general complement clauses. Third, lexical verbs cannot be separated from patient in BAC, whereas scrambling is restricted by some factors but allowed in complement clauses. Lastly, only auxiliaries can be negated in BAC, which is also the case in (monoclausal) ergative constructions, as opposed to complement clauses, which allow negation of either matrix or embedded verbs; and BAC only allow one adverb, while two adverbs are usually allowed in true biclausal constructions.

Given that BAC’s are, in fact, monoclausal, a remaining question is ‘Can Aldridge (2004) account for the BAC?’ Two problems arise with respect to the data mentioned above. First, she claims that in transitive sentences, the absolutive case is assigned by *v*. That would mean that the same head *v* assigns two absolutive cases. In order to claim that, we would need to consider how it is possible within the current theory of Agree, and what would prohibit

multiple case assignment by the same head for languages where such constructions are impossible. Second, Aldridge claims that ergative case is an inherent case assigned by v in transitive clauses. If that is the case, it is unclear why in BAC this case is lost. We will attempt to resolve these problems in section 4.

3.2. Double Nominative Construction in Korean

Similar pattern is found in Korean too, although Korean is an accusative language. Korean allows two nominatives in external possession constructions, where the possessor (arguably) moves out of a subject DP, and receives nominative case along with the host DP.³

- (9) a. *Mary-uy nwun-i / ttal-i yeyppu-ta*
M-GEN eye-NOM daughter-NOM pretty-DECL
‘Mary’s eyes are / daughter is pretty.’
- b. *Mary-ka nwun-i / ttal-i yeyppu-ta*
M-NOM eye-NOM daughter-NOM pretty-DECL
‘Mary’s eyes are / daughter is pretty.’

(9b) displays *Double Nominative Constructions* (DNC) in Korean, which is derived from corresponding genitive constructions in (9a). DNC is often analyzed to be licensed by *Inalienable Possession* (Yoon 1989 and Ura 1996 among many others). If we include kinship relations in defining inalienable possession, patterns in (9) seems to fit the generalization. However, such analyses are not borne out, regarding the ungrammaticality of (10b). Even though the possessor and the possessee are still inalienable, the DNC in (10b) is ruled out.

- (10) a. *Mary-uy ttal-i wuncenhay-ss-ta*
M-GEN daughter-NOM drive-PST-DECL
‘Mary’s daughter drove.’
- b. * *Mary-ka ttal-i wuncenhay-ss-ta*
M-NOM daughter-NOM drive-PST-DECL

One might say that DNC is licensed depending on the types of predicates. In (9), *yeyppu*

3 We consider this an instance of *Possessor Raising* (Landau 1999), even though this study is not committed to justifying such an analysis, and there are researchers, who claim that Double Nominative Constructions in Korean do not involve possessor raising (Yoon 2009 among others).

‘pretty’ is an I(ndividual)-level predicate that describes a property of an individual, whereas *wuncenha* ‘drive’ in (10) is a S(tage)-level predicate that indicates the temporal stage of an event. The generalization would be that DNC is licensed, only if the main predicate is of I-level. However, this generalization is also falsified by the following examples.

- (11) a. *Mary-uy kwutwu-ka yeppu-ta*
M-GEN shoe-NOM pretty-DECL
‘Mary’s shoes are pretty.’
- b. * *Mary-ka kwutwu-ka yeppu-ta*
M-NOM shoe-NOM pretty-DECL
Intended Meaning: ‘Mary’s shoes are pretty.’
- (12) a. *Jean-uy atul-i chwukku-lul ha-n-ta*
J-GEN son-NOM soccer-ACC do-PRS-DECL
(i) ‘Jean’s son plays/is playing soccer (now).’
(ii) ‘Jean’s son is a soccer player.’
- b. *Jean-i atul-i chwukku-lul ha-n-ta*
J-NOM son-NOM soccer-ACC do-PRS-DECL
(i) *‘Jean’s son plays/is playing soccer.’
(ii) ‘Jean’s son is a soccer player.’

The DNC in (11b) is ill-formed, although the predicate is the same I-level predicate ‘pretty’ as in (9). This is because the aspectual character of the sentence does not fit the relation represented by the subject, not simply because the predicate selection is not right or it does not include an inalienable possession relationship. Example (12) shows that the licensing condition is not as simple as it appeared. Although ‘play soccer’ is an S-level predicate, the DNC’s in (12b) is saved, which clearly shows it is not all about predicate selection.

The interpretations given in (12) provide a clue for the true licensing condition of the DNC. (12a) can be read either *episodically* such that Jean’s son plays soccer at a certain time point, or *generically* such that he is a professional athlete or at least plays regularly. In the DNC (12b), however, the episodic reading is not available. The sentence may only be interpreted that Jean’s son plays soccer as a profession or regularly. This observation supports the current idea that the DNC is licensed by the sentence’s aspectual characteristics on the phrasal level, rather than its lexical properties. We call this aspectual property *gnomic*, which is a term used by Carlson (1982) to refer to *genericity* and *habituality* together. In (9) also, the DNC’s are licensed, not because the possessor and possessee are inalienable or an I-level predicate is

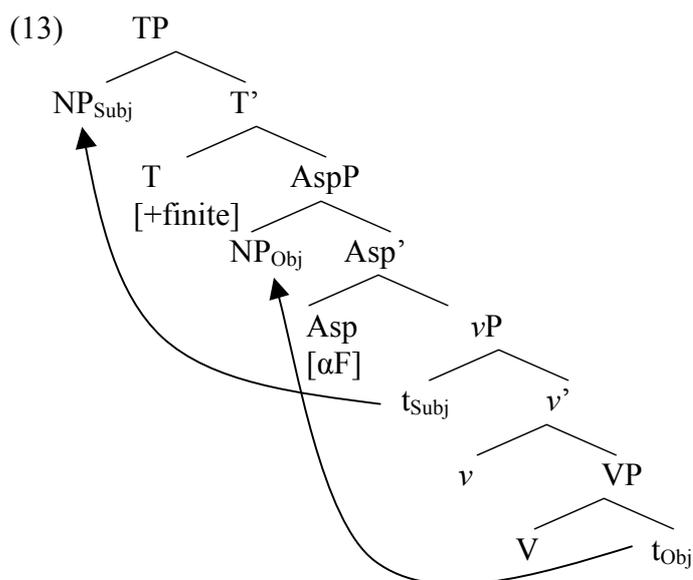
used, but because the sentences have the *gnomic* property that matches that of the predicate.

As illustrated in (12), predicates that are inherently episodic may also have the gnomic reading, and when they do, DNC formation is allowed. Even ones that are normally not accepted, such as (11b), may improve, if the context provides a sufficient ground, where the extension of the predicate or the predicative phrase can be understood as a property of an individual. We believe this can be another supplementary piece of evidence for the proposed idea. If (11b), for instance, is said in a conversation among New York City girls who are chatting about their friends' fashion sense, it could be more acceptable, even though some speaker variation is expected on judgment.

4. Syntax of DNC and BAC

4.1. Another Case Assigner

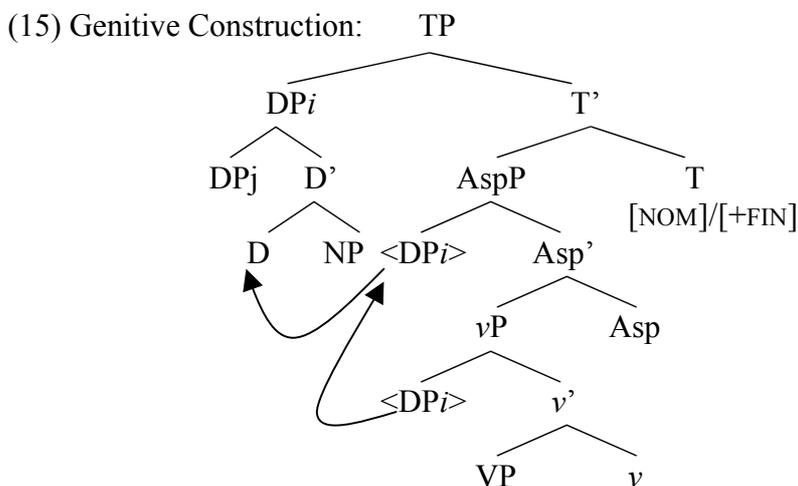
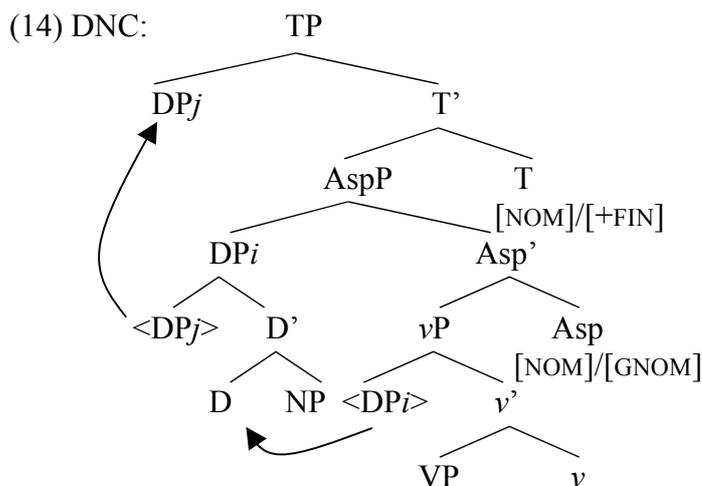
In modern generative syntactic theory, it is widely assumed that finite T(ense) head is the nominative case-assigner. However, in quirky subject constructions in several languages, objects are assigned nominative case. Moreover, the Korean data from the previous section show that more than one nominative argument is allowed. We could say, from this fact, that T is not the only one potential nominative case-assigner. Alexiadou (2003) has raised this possibility, introducing some instances of nominative object in Greek and proposing that Asp(ect) head can be an alternative nominative case-assigner.



In normal cases, T with [+finite] feature assigns nominative case to the moved NP to its specifier position. However, when a certain feature [αF] is introduced on Asp, Asp becomes

the nominative case-assigner itself. Alexiadou (2003) proposes [-person] feature on Asp makes it a nominative case-assigner, since only third person nominals are allowed for nominative objects in Greek. This gives rise to so-called *Quirky Subject Constructions* in many languages (Icelandic, Lithuanian, etc.). However, Alexiadou (2003) does not mention what happens to T, the canonical NOM-assigner. It is not clear how T and Asp alternate for assigning NOM case. Fortunately, in Korean, T and Asp do not alternate, but both work in DNC. In non-DNC's, only T assigns NOM, while in DNC T and Asp are both NOM-assigners.

Then, what feature enables Asp to assign NOM in DNC and BAC? In the previous section, we observed that DNC's and BAC's are interpreted generically or habitually. From this fact, we propose that an aspectual feature [GNOM] on Asp head does the job in Korean and Daghestanian languages. [GNOM] is a syntactic realization of the gnomic aspect, and shows unary feature specification. Its presence drives/licenses DNC or BAC, enabling Asp to be a NOM/ABS case-assigner. When it's absent, normal non-DNC is realized as in (15), and its gnomic interpretation is due to the predicate's lexical aspect.



In both derivations (14) and (15), movements (spec-*v*P to spec-AspP and spec-AspP to spec-TP) are triggered by EPP on T, which is activated when (case feature) agreement happens. Asp checks off the uninterpretable NOM feature on DP_i, the closest potential goal. When T probes down for agreement, case feature on DP_i has already been checked off. So, it probes further down to DP_j, the next closest one.

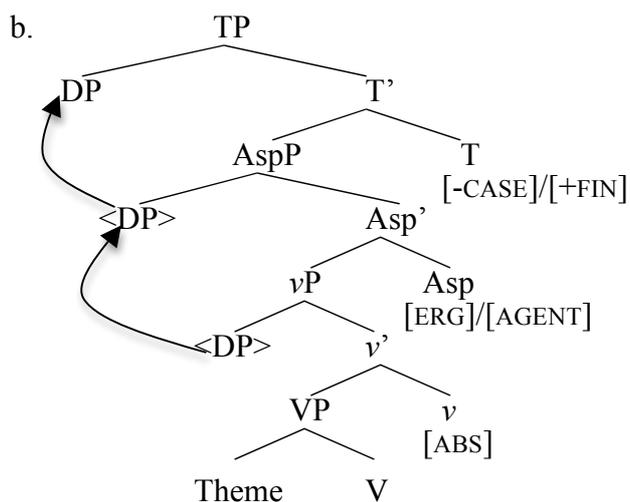
4.2. Derivation of BAC in Daghestanian

We demonstrated above that the analysis of Aldridge (2004) cannot be directly applied to Daghestanian as it is, since it cannot account for the occurrence of biabsolute constructions. While maintaining that in transitive sentences, *v* is responsible for assignment of the absolute case to the internal argument, and T is not responsible for case assignment in transitive clauses, we propose that ergative case is not an inherent case assigned by *v*, but it is assigned by the Aspectual head in the projection directly above *v*P. This is reminiscent of our adaptation of Alexiadou (2003) proposal which we argued for above. Therefore, in ergative languages, it is Asp head, which is responsible for presence or absence of ergative case. Now, arguments similar to those provided above for Korean, apply to Daghestanian. As shown above, normal ERG-ABS sentences have standard agentive interpretation, while in BACs the property of the external argument is important. We conclude that BACs, and therefore the suppression of ergative case assignment, are possible when Asp head is marked with the [GNOM] feature, while when it is marked with [AGENT] feature, we would observe traditional ERG-ABS case assignment. To summarize our extension go Aldridge (2004) proposal, when Asp is marked with an [AGENT] feature, Asp assigns ergative case to the external argument of the predicate, and assigns a nominative case in case it is marked with [GNOM] feature.

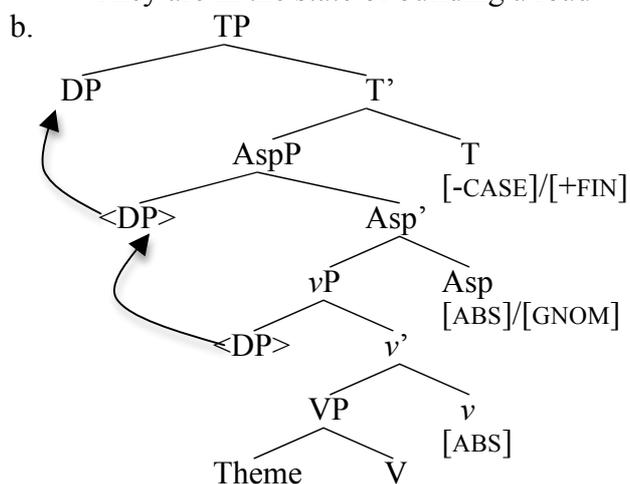
Consider a transitive sentence (5b), repeated in (16). Adopting Aldridge (2004) analysis as described above, *v* assigns ABS to Theme, and T is inactive and does not participate in case assignment. Agent receives its case from Asp: following the proposed modification, if it is specified with [AGENT] feature, it assigns ERG. If it is [GNOM], it assigns ABS. Two possible patterns are ERG(Agt)-ABS(Th) and ABS(Agt)-ABS(Th), shown in (16) and (17), respectively⁴.

- (16) a. *hez nux ha-b-ule-b b-ugo*
 they.ERG way(III).ABS make-III-PRT-III III-AUX
 ‘They are building the road’

4 Notice that majority of Daghestanian languages have SOV word order. Without committing to details of the analysis, we assume that TP and VP are head-final projections, and AUXs occupy T-position. For further research on word order in Daghestanian, see Testelets, 1998.



- (17) a. *hel nux ha-b-u-le-l r-ugo*
 they.ABS way(III).ABS make-III-PRT-PL PL-AUX
 ‘They are in the state of building a road’

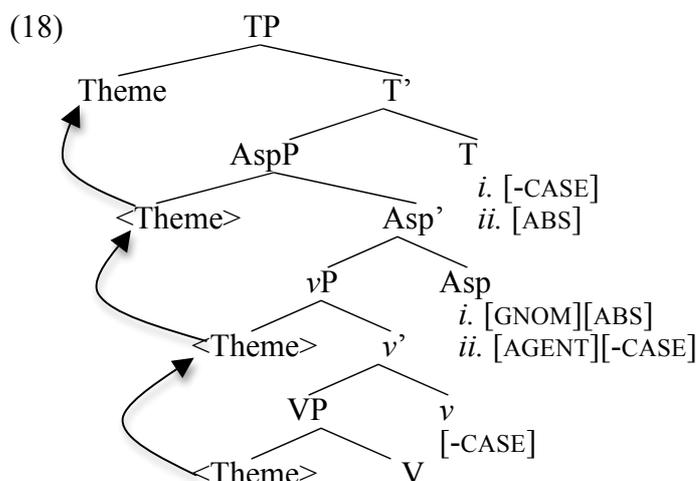


Now, we will consider intransitive sentences. As suggested by Aldridge (2004), an absolutive case is no longer assigned by *v*. We adopt her analysis that ABS is assigned to the argument of an intransitive verb by T. However, according to our analysis, according to which Asp acts as a potential second case assigner, there exists another possibility. If Asp head is activated, and is marked with [GNOM] feature, it also acts as an absolutive case assigner. However, there exists a potential problem: existence of two absolutive case assigners in a sentence with only one argument.

In order to solve this problem, we argue that there is a selectional restriction according to which active T cannot select [GNOM] aspectual head. If this is true, in order to have Asp head assign absolutive case, T needs to be defective, and therefore, there will be only one ABS case assigner; the derivation will not crash.

The result of the derivation is the following: the only argument of the intransitive verb receives absolutive case, no matter whether the interpretation of the sentence is agentive or

gnomic. The only difference between these two possibilities is which head is responsible for absolutive case assignment: Asp, marked with *i.* in (18), or T, marked with *ii.* in (18).



The last category of sentences one has to consider is experiencer constructions. Following our analysis, it is not transitivity but agentivity that determines case patterns, and experiencer verbs pattern with intransitives. As we claimed previously, ERG is assigned by [AGENT] Asp head. This analysis correctly predicts that in experiencer constructions, ERG is unavailable, see (19), and instead the experiencer argument is marked DAT.

- (19) a. *wex wit ušdu w-ak:u-r-ši*
 I.DAT you.GEN brother(I).SG.ABS I-see-IPFV-CVB
 ‘I (can) see your brother’
- b. *un dez beχ:ʰe e<r>t:i-li*
 you.ABS.F(II) I.DAT be.black(hate) become<II>.PFV-CVB
 ‘I hate you (to a woman)’

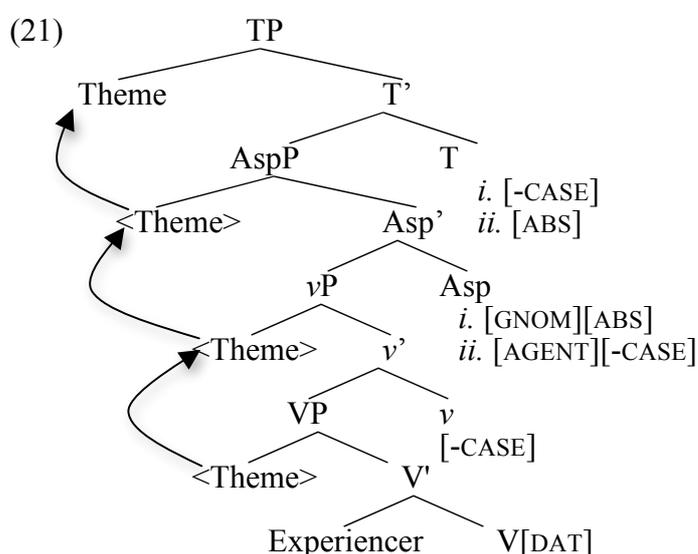
(Archi, Chumakina et. al, 2007 entries *ák:us*, *keχ:ʰé kes*)

Following Landau (2010), we assume that experiencers are generated in a position lower than a theme, as a complement of V. We also argue that DAT is assigned by a V to its experiencer argument. Notice that this is a crucial assumption. As we demonstrated before, either Asp (if it is [GNOM]), or T (if Asp is not [GNOM]), but not both, assign absolutive case. If dative case is not assigned by V, there will be no other source of case for the experiencer; the derivation would crash. Therefore, our analysis makes a strong prediction: biabsolutive constructions must be ungrammatical for experiencer verbs in Daghestanian languages. This prediction is borne out, as claimed in Forker, 2010, pg. 7. She mentions that Archi, Bezhta,

Khwarshi, Tsez, Hinuq, Avar, Godoberi, Lak and Icari Dargwa all lack BAC with experiencer subjects. The Hinuq data is given in (20).

- (20) * *ked hago ø-ik-o got*
 girl.ABS he(I).ABS I-see-IPFV.CVB be.PRS
 ‘The girl is seeing him.’ (Hinuq, Forker 2010)

If V assigns DAT to the Experiencer, the remaining case assigner (Asp or T) assigns ABS to the Theme. Therefore, the only possible pattern for experiencer constructions is DAT(Exp)-ABS(Th), although it can be derived in two ways (*i.* and *ii.* in (21)), and will receive gnomic or agentive interpretations, respectively.



Interestingly in Korean, experiencer verbs can have either dative or nominative subject. If the (experiencer) subject is dative, the construction would look roughly like DAT(Exp)-NOM(Th), the pattern that is found in dative subject constructions in many other languages. If the subject is nominative, we would end up with a double nominative construction, as NOM(Exp)-NOM(Th). The question is where this Nominative-Dative alternation is from in (22).

- (22) *Bill-i/eykey holangi-ka mwusep-ta*
 B-NOM/DAT tiger-NOM afraid-DECL
 ‘Bill is afraid of tigers.’ (Korean)

As we have shown above, in Korean, T does not become defective even if Asp is active, but remains a NOM assigner, this is how double-nominative constructions are derived in

Korean. Therefore, Korean allows for two possible derivations in experiencer construction. First derivation would be parallel to Daghestanian BAC, and will result in DAT(Exp)-NOM(Th) pattern. In this case, dative case is assigned to the experiencer by the verb, and the theme receives a nominative case from T.

However, even if V does not assign DAT to the Experiencer, the derivation could still succeed in Korean, if both T and Asp assign NOM. This derivation will give rise to the DNC pattern, absent in Daghestanian for experiencer constructions.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we examined non-canonical case patterns, where two arguments in a single clause are marked with the same case. In Korean, raised possessors sometimes receive nominative case, which turns the sentence into a Double Nominative Construction, while in Daghestanian languages, subjects of transitive sentences are assigned absolutive case under a certain circumstance, which is called the Biabsolutive Construction. We argued that an aspectual property, namely *gnomicity*, causes the non-canonicity in both constructions.

Traditional analyses of case assignment in both nominative/accusative and ergative/absolutive languages fail to provide an explanation of what acts as a second nominative or absolutive case assigner, and why ergative case may be suppressed. Extending the work of Alexiadou (2003), we proposed that [GNOM] feature on Asp head motivates the formation of the double identical case marking constructions by activating an extra case assigner. In the accusative case system, Asp head with [GNOM] feature specification serves as a nominative case assigner, while in the ergative case system, Asp head assigns ergative case, when it is agentive, and absolutive case, when it is gnomic. This proposal also allows us to explain why case alternation is possible in the experiencer construction in Korean, but ungrammatical in Daghestanian.

This study suggests that non-canonical case patterns are related to aspectual properties of the construction in unrelated languages, such as Korean and Daghestanian, which supports the potential of this proposal to be extended to cross-linguistic paradigms of non-canonical cases.

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