High Absolutive in West Circassian: Evidence from Parasitic Gaps

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West Circassian (Adyghe): Northwest Caucasian, polysynthetic, ergative alignment
Data from Khatazhukaj rural settlement, Republic of Adygea, Russia, unless otherwise indicated.

Main claim

- **Multiple wh-agreement** in West Circassian is the realization of a **parasitic gap dependency**.
- **Anti-c-command condition** on parasitic gaps singles out absolutive DP as highest argument, i.e. **provides evidence for syntactic ergativity**.

Multiple wh-agreement is a parasitic gap dependency

Wh-agreement $z(ə)$- replaces ɸ-agreement with the relativized participant on the predicate heading the relative clause.

Relativization of ergative DP (Lander 2009a:619)

(1) a. **č'ale-m** apč'ə-r Ø- **ə-** qʷəta -ʁ **Finite clause:**
 boy-OBL glass-ABS 3ABS- **3SG.ERG-** break -PST 'The boy broke the glass.'

 b. [t(ERG) apč'ə-r Ø- **zə-** qʷəta -ʁe] č'ale-r **Relative clause:**
 glass-ABS 3ABS- **WH.ERG-** break -PST boy-ABS 'the boy that broke the glass'

Prefix $z(ə)$- marks agreement with a trace in [WH] feature (O'Herin 2002 on related Abaza; Caponigro & Polinsky 2011).

Wh-agreement is optionally triggered by pronoun coreferent with relativized participant (Lander 2009a, b, 2012; Caponigro & Polinsky 2011) ⟹ **multiple wh-agreement**.

Multiple wh-agreement: ergative DP + possessor of absolutive DP

(2) marə č'etəw-ew [t(ERG) {**z-**,Ø-}jə-šxən **zə-**mə-šxə-re] -r
 here cat-ADV {**WH-**,3SG.POSS-}ALP-food **WH.ERG**-NEG-eat-DYN -ABS
 'Here is the cat that doesn't eat its food.'

Multiple wh-agreement can appear both intra- and **cross-clausally**.

Cross-clausal multiple wh-agreement: IO in matrix clause + IO in embedded clause

(3) xet-a [Asλan mafe-m rjene [Ø-{**ze-**,je}-mə-w-ew] t(IO) Ø-zə-de-ʒegʷə-re] -r
 who-Q Aslan day-OBL whole 3ABS-{**WH-**,3SG.IO}-NEG-hit-ADV 3ABS-WH.IO-COM-play-DYN -ABS
 'Who is the one Aslan plays with __ all day without hitting {__, him/her}?'

Cross-clausal multiple wh-agreement displays classic **parasitic gap properties** (Engdahl 1983):

- Wh-agreement in the dependent clause is **optional**; cf. English translation in (3).
- The dependent clause may be a **syntactic island**: direct relativization is ungrammatical.

*Relativization out of adjunct

(4) * xet-a [Asλan mafe-m rjene [t(IO) Ø-**ze-**mə-w-ew] Ø-(Ø-de-)ʒegʷə-re] -r
 who-Q Aslan day-OBL whole 3ABS-**WH.IO**-NEG-hit-ADV 3ABS-3SG.IO-COM-play-DYN -ABS

(3') [Op$_i$ [__$_{PG}$ WH$_i$]$_{adjunct}$ t_i] ✓ (4') [Op$_i$ [t_i WH$_i$]$_{adjunct}$] ✗

- The trace in the matrix clause does not c-command the parasitic gap (**anti-c-command condition**).

Multiple wh-agreement with clausemate DPs is also **parasitic**: the optionally wh-agreeing pronoun cannot be directly relativized.

*Relativization of possessor of absolutive DP with coreferent ergative DP

(2') * marə č'etəw-ew [pro_i [t_i(POSS) **z-**jə-šxən] ə-mə-šxə-re] -r
 here cat-ADV **WH.POSS**-ALP-food 3SG.ERG-NEG-eat-DYN -ABS

Unified analysis for wh-agreement

- Wh-agreement in West Circassian is **always** agreement with a wh-trace.
- Multiple wh-agreement is realization of agreement with a **parasitic** wh-trace.

Basic assumptions

- Relativization = movement of null Op to Spec,CP (Caponigro & Polinsky 2011).
- Argument DPs trigger ɸ-agreement on predicate via Agree (Chomsky 2000).
- Wh-agreement = ɸ-agreement with a wh-trace (Chung 1998; Baier 2016).
- Parasitic gap (PG) = wh-trace of null Op in Spec of YP containing PG (Chomsky 1986; Postal 1998; Nissenbaum 2000).

Basic structure of parasitic gap construction
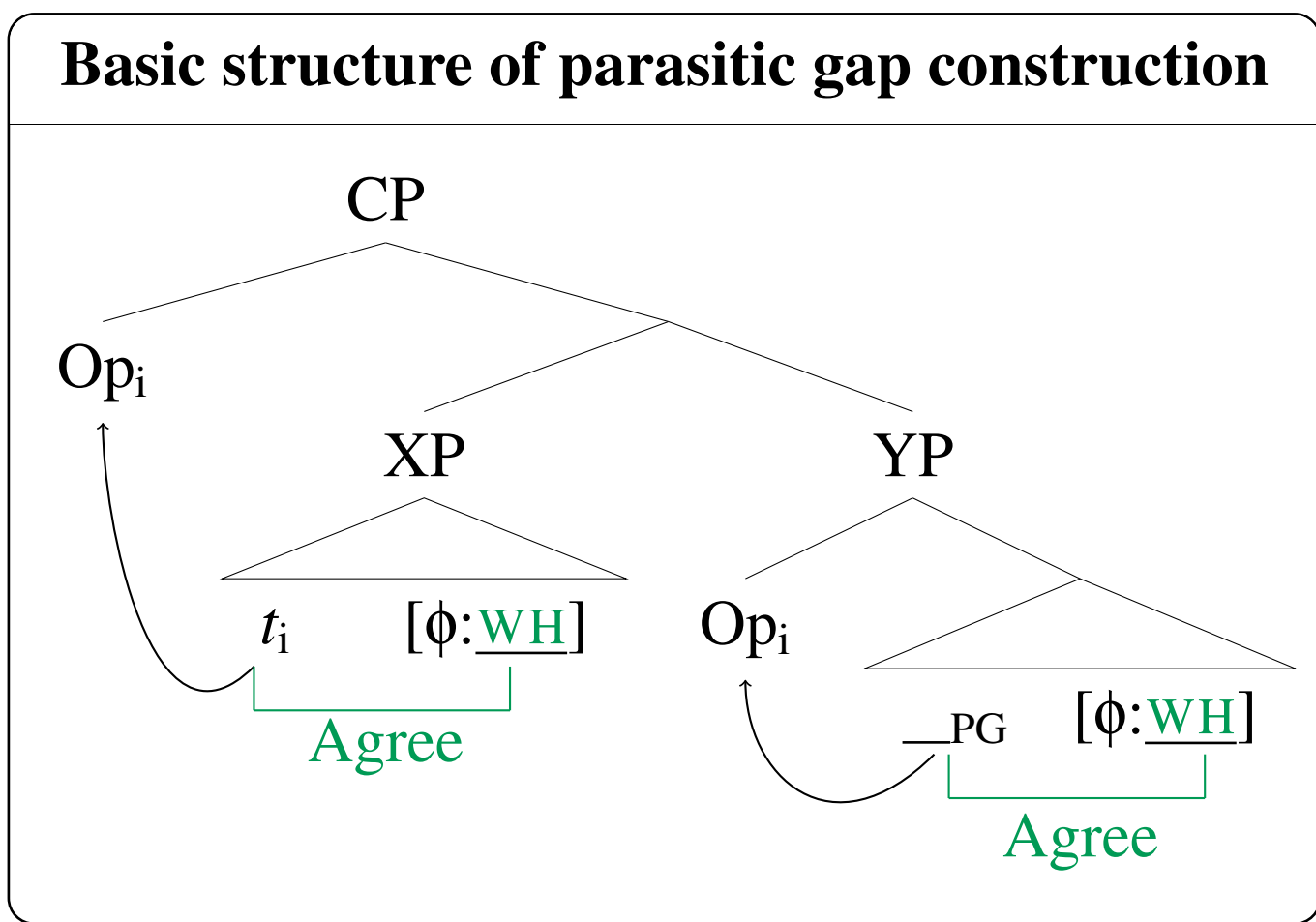
Constraints on multiple wh-agreement and syntactic ergativity

ABSOLUTIVE CONSTRAINT ON MULTIPLE WH-AGREEMENT

(5) Intra-clausal multiple wh-agreement is ungrammatical **if the relativized participant is the absolutive DP** (Lander 2009a, b, 2012).

In terms of parasitic gaps:

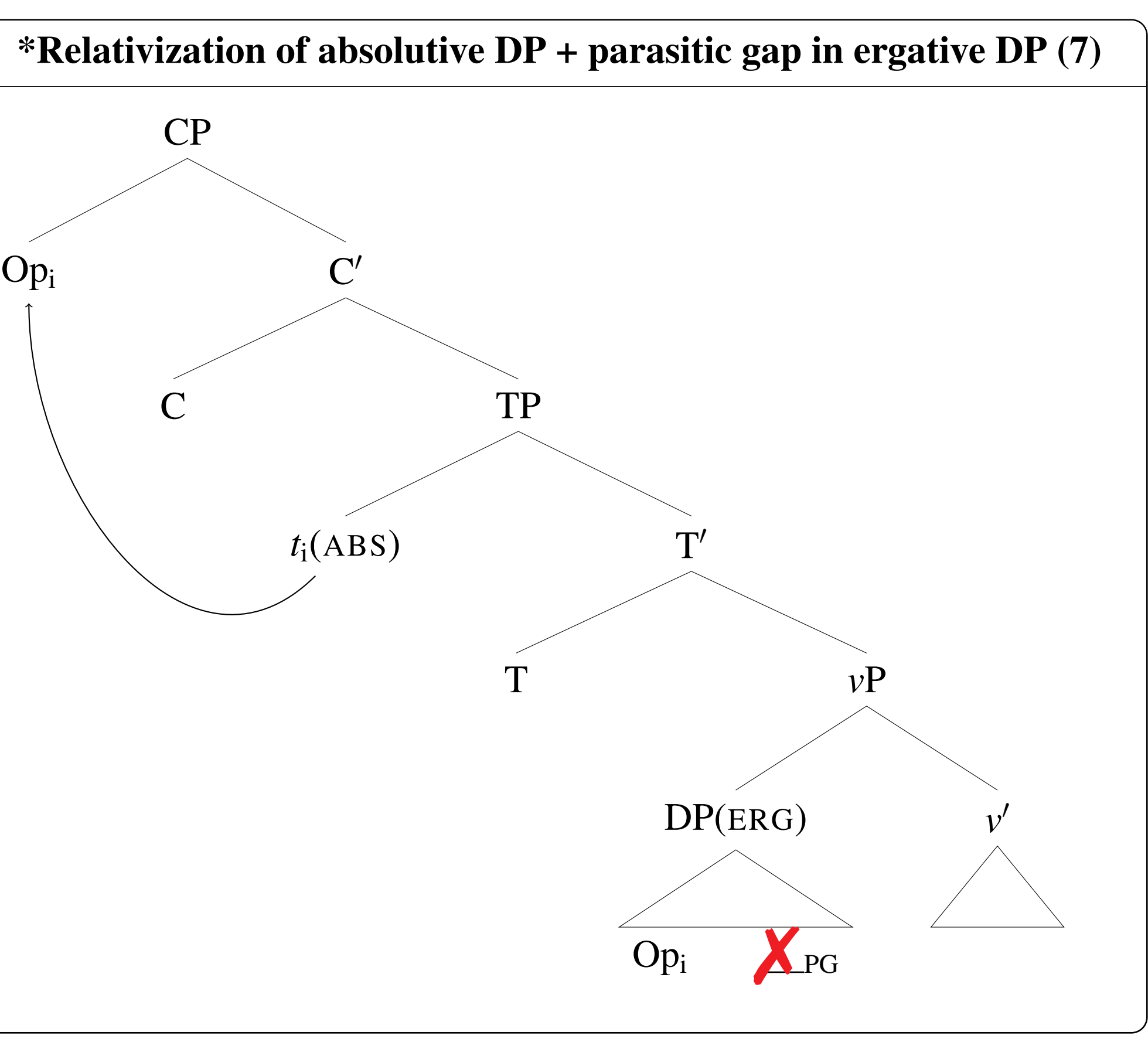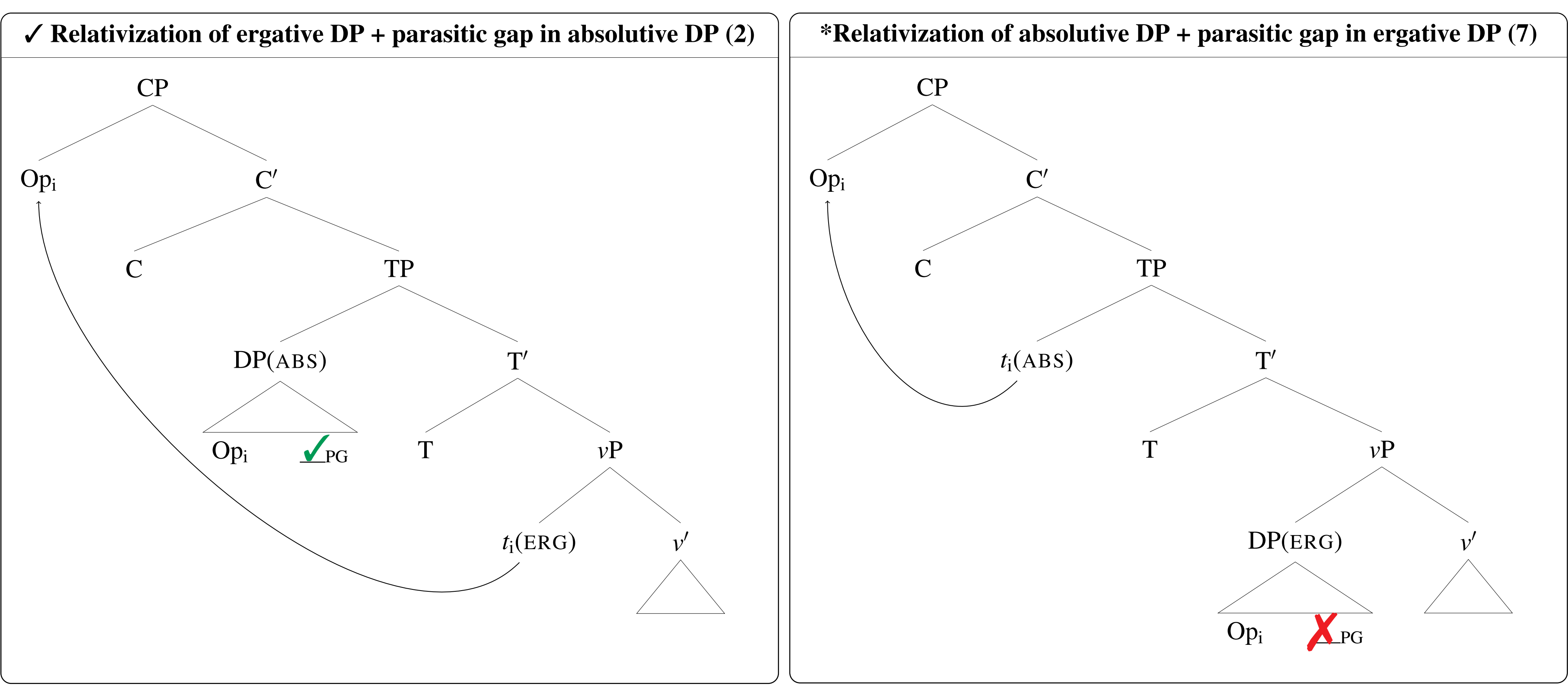(6) An absolutive trace cannot license a parasitic gap in a clausemate DP.

Absolutive Constraint in a transitive clause (ERG-ABS)

(7) marə [{✓ə-,***zə-**}qʷe t(ABS) Ø-q-ə-ə-š'a-ʁe] bzəλfəʁe-r
 here {3SG-,WH.POSS-}son(ERG) WH.ABS-DIR-3SG.ERG-bring-PST woman-ABS
 'Here is the woman whom$_i$ her$_i$ son brought __.'

Absolutive Constraint in an intransitive clause (ABS-IO)

(8) marə pŝaŝ-ew [t(ABS) {✓Ø-,***z-**}jane Ø-qə-Ø-fe-ŝʷa-ʁe] -r
 here girl-ADV {3SG-,WH.POSS-}mother(IO) 3ABS-DIR-3SG.IO-BEN-dance-PST -ABS
 'Here is the girl who$_i$ __ danced for her$_i$ mother.'

Anti-c-command condition on parasitic gaps (Engdahl 1983; Culicover & Postal 2001, i.a.)

(9) "A parasitic gap may not be c-commanded by the real gap." (Engdahl 1983:22)

⟹ **The absolutive DP c-commands other argument DPs**, including the ergative subject.

Parasitic gap licensing

✓ Relativization of ergative DP + parasitic gap in absolutive DP (2)

*Relativization of absolutive DP + parasitic gap in ergative DP (7)

GLOSSES
ABSolutive; ADVerbial; ALP–alienable possession; BENefactive; COMitative; DIRective; DYNamic verb; ERGative; IO–indirect object; NEGation; OBLique; POSSessor; PST–past tense; Q–Question; SG–singular.

## West Circassian is syntactically ergative

- **Ergative DP and IO** are assigned inherent case by v^0 and Appl^0 and **remain in-situ within vP** (Legate 2008; Pylkkänen 2008).
- **Absolutive DP** is assigned structural case by T and **raises to Spec,TP** to satisfy [EPP].
- Previous proposals of high ABS: Bittner & Hale (1996); Aldridge (2008); Coon et al. (2014), i.a.

Multiple wh-agreement is not pronominal binding

Caponigro & Polinsky (2011): multiple wh-agreement = Op and bound possessor pronoun agree in [WH].

Absolutive Constraint is evidence for accusativity:

absolutive DP does not c-command possessor of ergative DP

⟹ relativization of ABS + binding/Agree with possessor of ERG renders Weak Crossover violation.

Multiple wh-agreement w/ABS as WCO violation
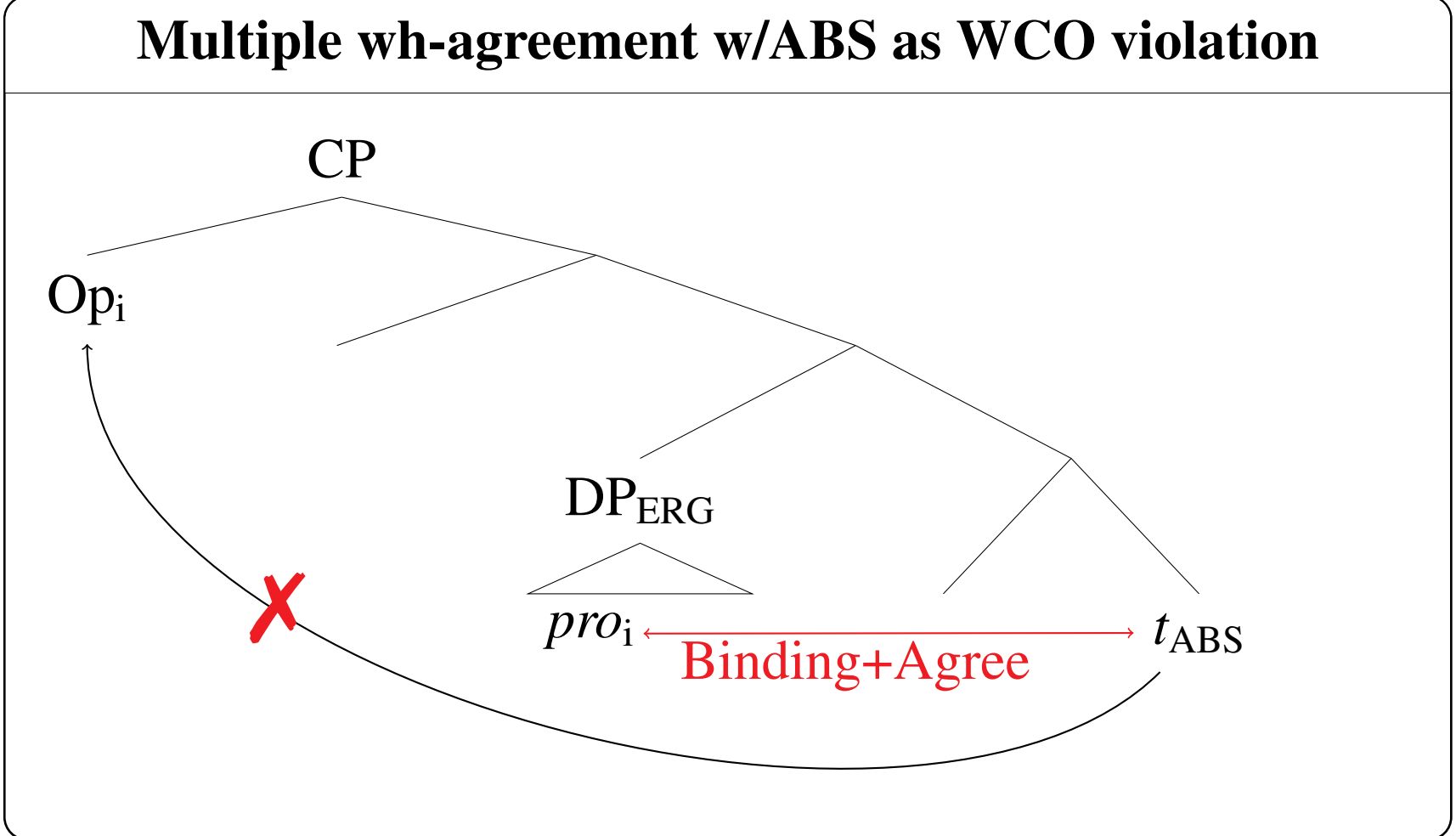
Counterarguments:

- Weak Crossover is not ungrammatical with regular pronominal agreement (7).
- Doesn't account for optionality of multiple wh-agreement (2).
- Cannot be extended to Absolutive Constraint with absolutive subject (8).

Implications & Questions

1. Reflexive binding and control/raising (Potsdam & Polinsky 2012) follow an accusative pattern (ERG>ABS):
   - Reflexives are local subject oriented (Ahn 2015).
   - Control/raising clauses are smaller than TP or lack [EPP] on T.

2. **Expectation:** DP(ERG) cannot license PG in DP(IO).

   [Op$_i$ [$_{vP}$ t_i(ERG) [$_{ApplP}$ ✗$_{PG}$](IO)]]]

   — Not confirmed. A-scrambling?

3. Absolutive Constraint absent in cross-clausal contexts (Lander 2009a, 2012).
   Embedded clauses attach higher than TP?

SELECT REFERENCES ● Baier 2016. Unifying antiagreement and wh-agreement. Ms. ● Caponigro & Polinsky 2011. *NLLT*. ● Coon et al. 2014. *Linguistic Variation*. ● Lander 2009a. In *Aspekty polisintesisa*. ● Lander 2012. RSUH dissertation.