What it means to be a subject

Evidence from a syntactically ergative language

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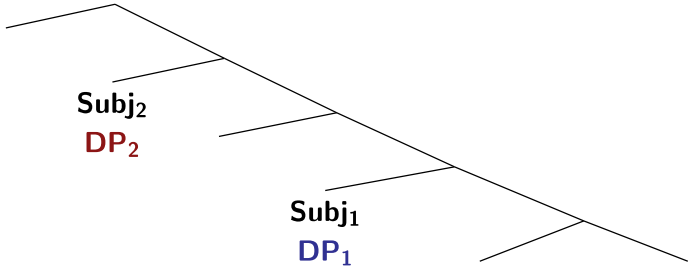
The main claim

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

Syntactic ergativity:

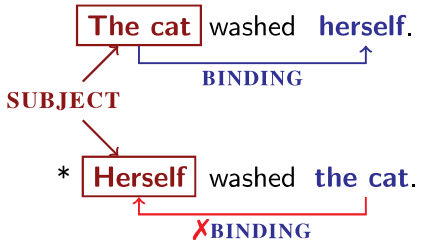
2 subject positions + occupied by 2 distinct nominals



What is a subject?

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

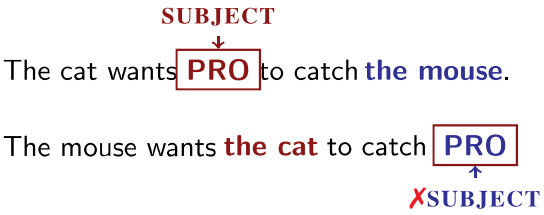
1. binds reflexive pronouns and cannot itself be bound



What is a subject?

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

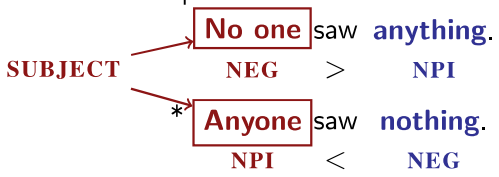
2. is PRO in control constructions



What is a subject?

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

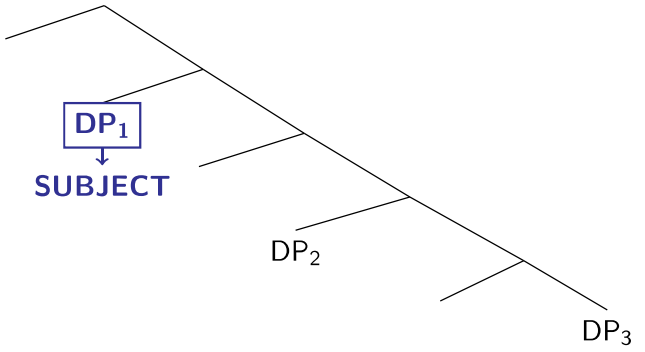
3. takes wider scope than other elements



4. etc.

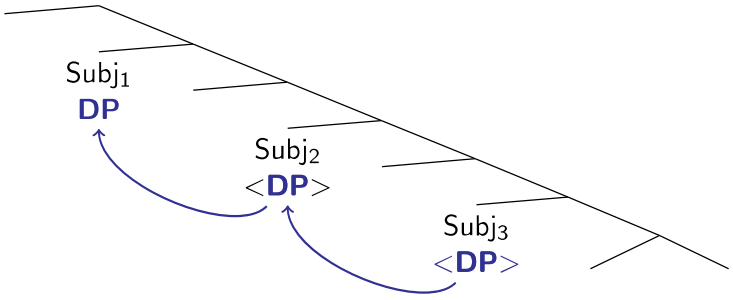
What is a subject?

In tree-geometric terms, implemented as **structural prominence**:



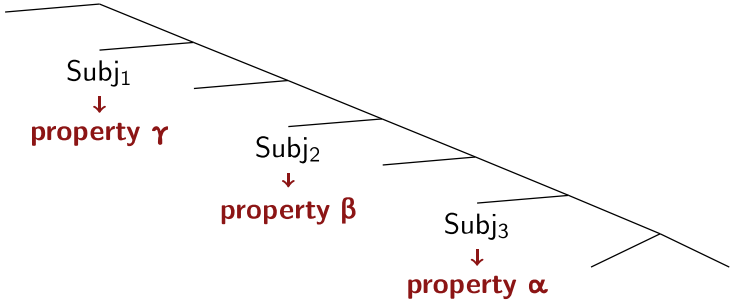
Deconstructed subjecthood

- 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).



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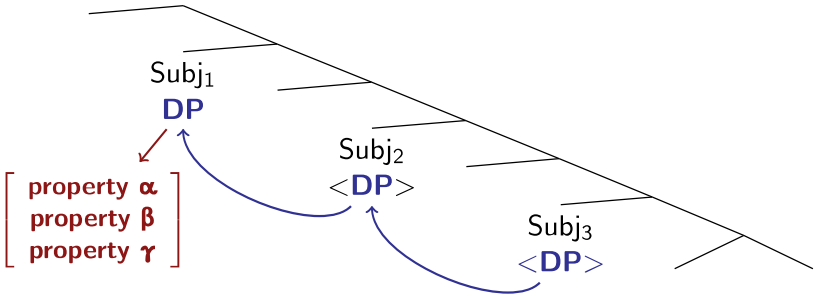


single nominal moves through the subject positions

↓

obscures connection between syntactic position and subjecthood properties

A subject is not defined by its syntactic position

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

⇓

A subject cannot be defined by a single syntactic position.

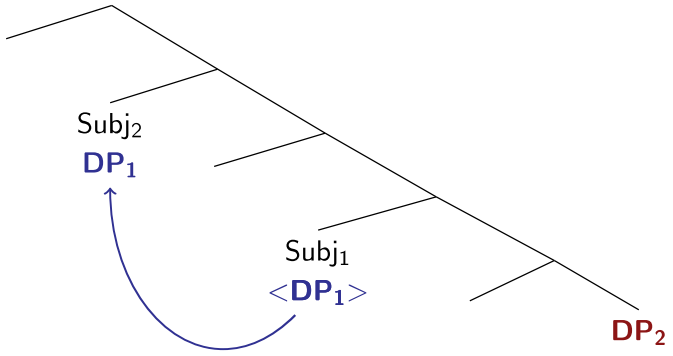
The next question:
Can a subject be defined as **a single nominal** within a given clause?

[clause DP_1 DP_2 DP_3 ...]

✓SUBJECT ✗SUBJECT ✗SUBJECT

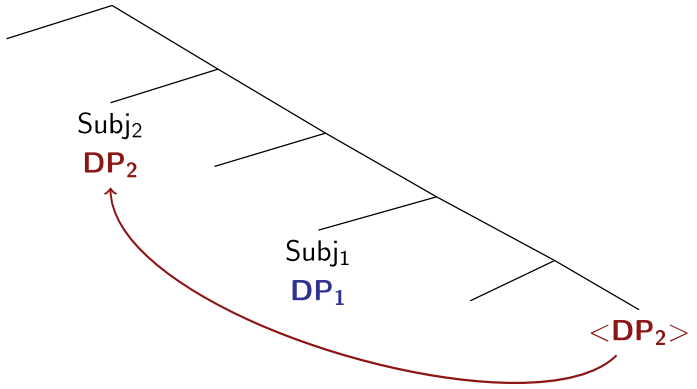
A prediction of deconstructed subjecthood

- 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?



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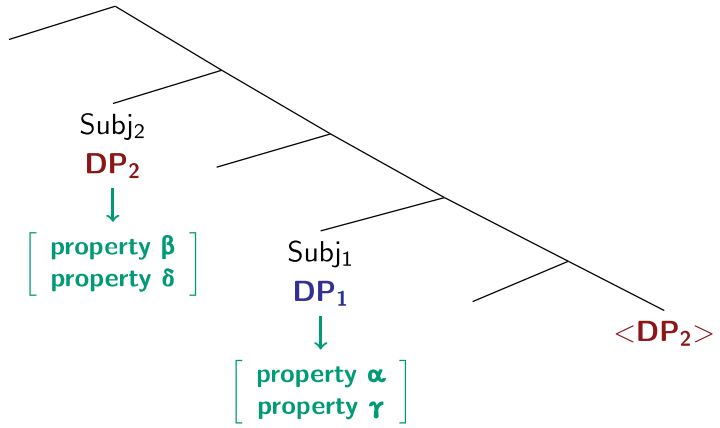

Different nominals in different subject positions

If this is possible:

- **confirmation** for distributed subjecthood properties
- subject $\neq$ single syntactic position
- subject $\neq$ single nominal

$\Downarrow$

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 $\neq$ highest argument in thematic domain

↑ ABSOLUTIVE
S: intransitive subject
O: transitive object

↑ ERGATIVE
A: transitive subject

Different nominals in different subject positions

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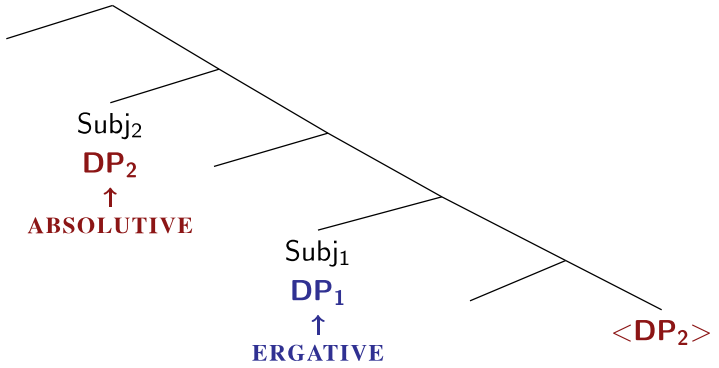


Different nominals in different subject positions

Main claim
Syntactically ergative languages confirm this prediction.

Syntactic ergativity:

2 subject positions + occupied by 2 distinct nominals

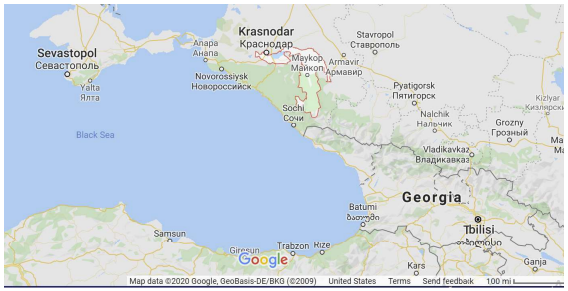
⇒ SUBJECT is not a theoretically meaningful notion

See e.g. Bittner and Hale (1996); Coon et al. (2014); Deal (2016, 2017); Polinsky (2016, 2017); Yuan (2018) on syntactic ergativity effects.

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.

West Circassian is polysynthetic

Agglutinating prefixal and suffixal morphology:

wəqəzereŝhapərəzʁewəkʲʷəreječ'əž'əŝʷəʁaʁer

wə-	qə-	zere-	ŝha-	pə-	rə-	z-	ʁe-
2SG.ABS-	DIR-	FACT-	head-	LOC-	TRANS-	1SG.ERG-	CAUS-
wəkʲʷereje	-č'ə	-ž'ə	-ŝʷə	-ʁa	-ʁe	-r	
fall	-go.out	-RE	-POT	-PST	-PST	-ABS	

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

West Circassian is polysynthetic

Head marking and pro-drop:

səqəpfarjəʁeʎeʁʷəʁ

sə-	qə-	p-f-	a-r-	jə-	ʁe-		
1SG.ABS-	DIR-	2SG.IO+BEN-	3PL.IO+DAT-	3SG.ERG-	CAUS-		
ʎeʁʷə	-ʁ						
see	-PST						

me — for your sake — to them — he

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

Verbal agreement is ergative

O	IO	A	
w-	a-de-	s-	šʼaʁ
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-	kʲʷaʁ
2SG.ABS-	DIR-	3PL.IO+BEN-	go.PST

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

Agreement order:

S/O- IO- A-
ABS- IO- ERG-

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):

- subject of intransitive verb (**S**)

mə pŝaŝe-**r** daxew qaŝʷe
this girl-**ABS** well dances

'This girl(S) dances well.'

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):

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

sabəjxe-m haxe-**r** qaλeʁʷəʁ
children-OBL dogs-**ABS** saw

'The children(A) saw the dogs(O).'

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):

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

-m (OBL):

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

'The children(A) saw the dogs(O).'

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):
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-m (OBL):
- subject of transitive verb (**A**)

sabəjxe-**m** haxe-r qaλeʁʷəʁ
children-OBL dogs-ABS saw

'The children(A) saw the dogs(O).'

Case marking is ergative

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

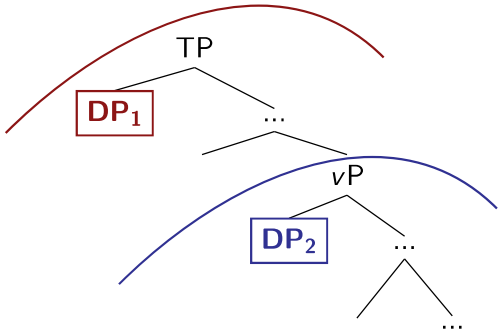
-m (OBL):
- subject of transitive verb (**A**)
- applied object (**IO**)

ǯegʷə-**m** səqəš'əŝʷaʁep
wedding-OBL I didn't dance

'I didn't dance at the wedding(IO).'

Distributed subjecthood and syntactic ergativity

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



Distributed subjecthood and syntactic ergativity

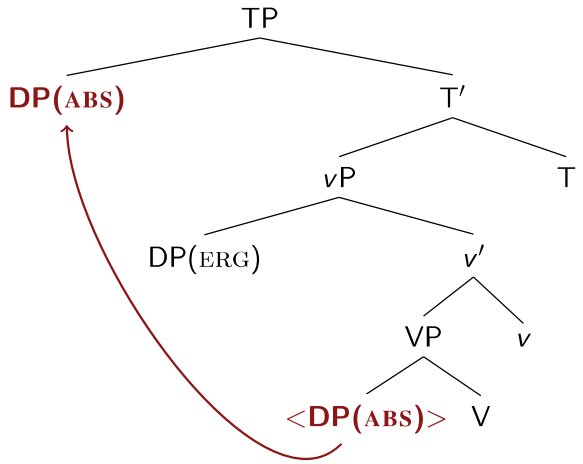
Subjecthood diagnostics in West Circassian single out (at least) **two positions**:
- the highest nominal in the theta-domain *v*P
- the highest nominal in the A-domain TP

A-domain=TP
reciprocals
parasitic gaps
↓
S/O
ABS

theta-domain=*v*P
reflexives
control
↓
S/A
ERG

High absolutive and two subjects

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



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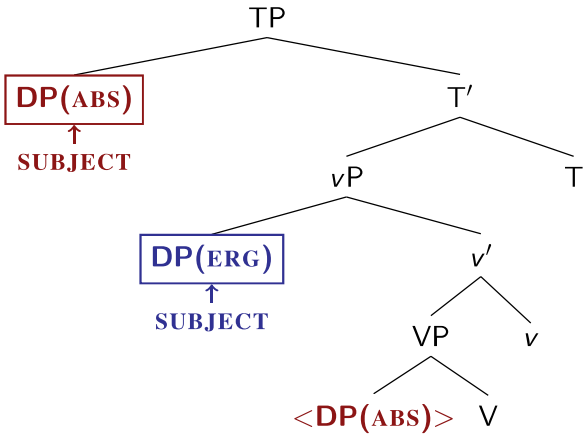


Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian

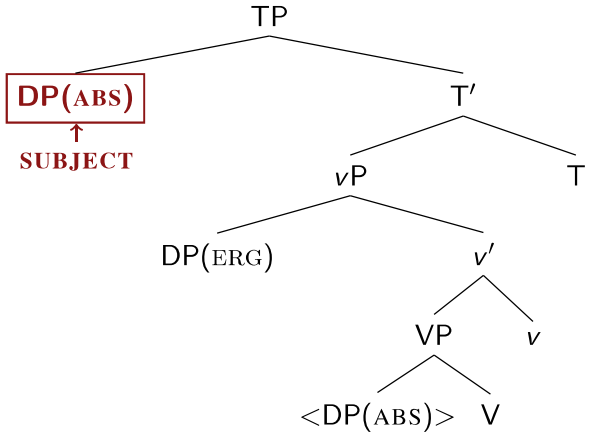
- reciprocals
- parasitic gaps
- reflexives
- control

} **A-domain**

} **theta-domain**

Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

Reciprocals provide evidence that ABS is the subject.



Reciprocal binding is diagnosed morphologically

ABS external argument binds **IO**
⇒ REC replaces IO agreement

you — with us

ŝʷə- qə- d- de- ŝʷešʼt
2PL.ABS- DIR- 1PL.IO- COM- dance.FUT

BASELINE

'You(pl) will dance with us'

Reciprocal binding is diagnosed morphologically

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you — with each other

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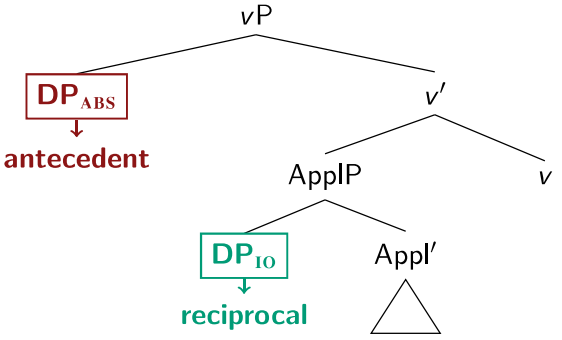
RECIPROCAL

'You(pl) will dance with each other'

Reciprocal binding is established via c-command

ABS external argument binds **IO**:



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**:

you — we

ŝʷə- t- ɬeʁʷəʁ
2PL.ABS- 1PL.ERG- see.PST

BASELINE

'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:

we — each other

tə- — zere- — λeʁʷəʁ

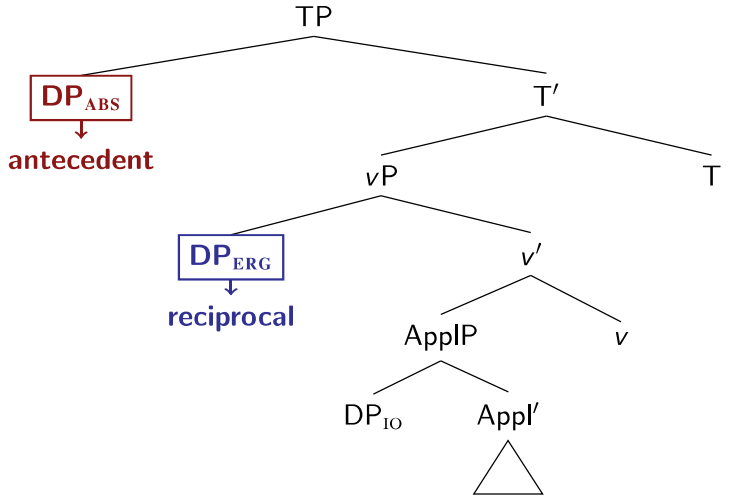
1PL.ABS- REC.ERG- see.PST

RECIPROCAL

'We saw each other.'

Reciprocals and syntactic ergativity

ABS binds reciprocals in ERG and IO positions:



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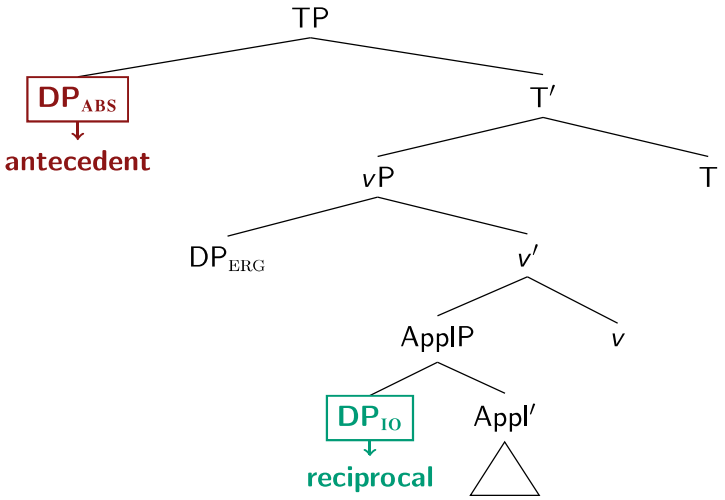


Absolutive as the clause-level subject

- 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

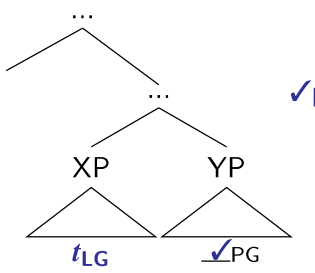
} **A-domain**

} **theta-domain**

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



✓parasitic gap

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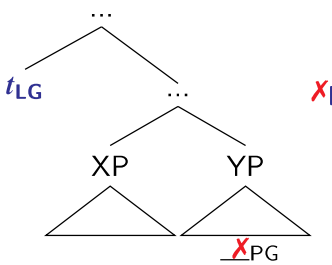
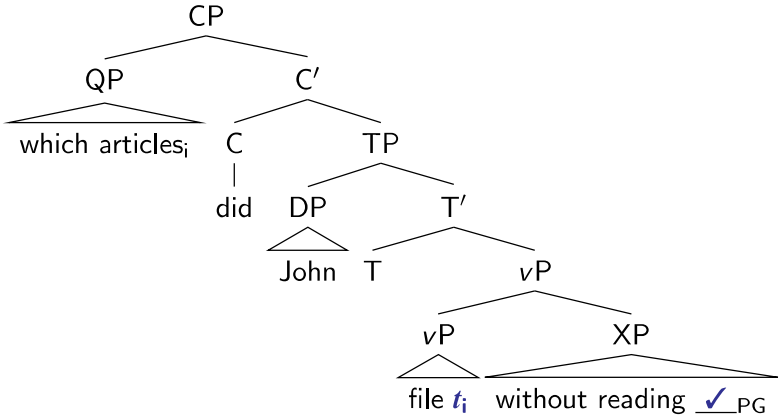


✗parasitic gap

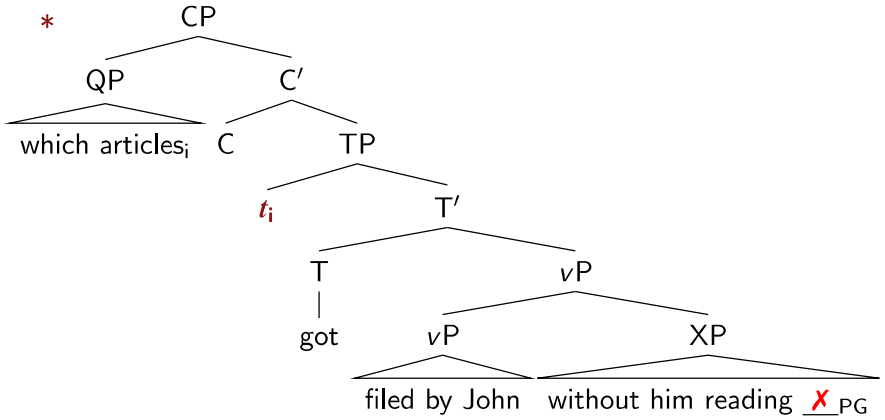
Parasitic gaps as a subjecthood diagnostic

E.g. in English:
object doesn't c-command adjunct ⇒ can license parasitic gap



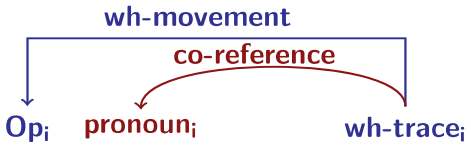
Parasitic gaps as a subjecthood diagnostic

E.g. in English:
subject c-commands adjunct ⇒ cannot license parasitic gap



Possessor parasitic gaps in West Circassian (Ershova 2019a)

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



četəwew$_i$	[*pro*$_i$	Ø-	jəšxən] t_i	Ø-	zə-	məšxərer
cat		3SG.POSS-	food	3ABS-	WH.ERG-	NEG.eat.DYN.ABS

'the cat who doesn't eat its food'

Possessor parasitic gaps in West Circassian (Ershova 2019a)

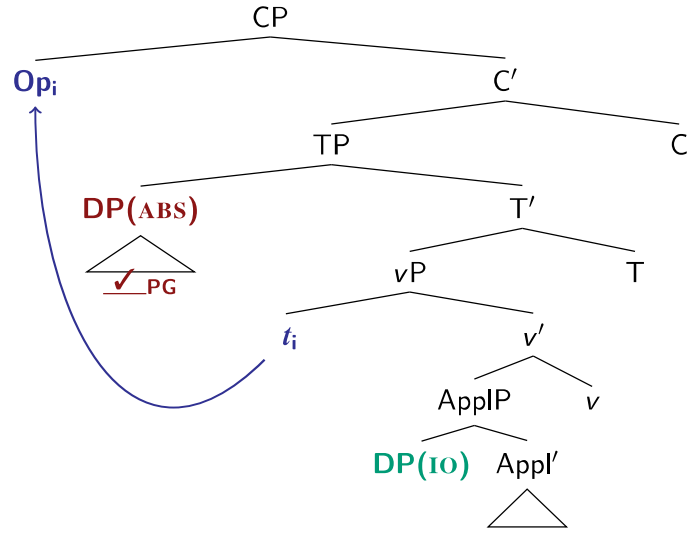
- wh-movement triggers wh-agreement on the predicate
- if there is a co-referent possessor pronoun
  it may be replaced by parasitic gap
- parasitic gap triggers **additional wh-agreement**

četəwew$_i$	[_PG	z-	jəšxən] t_i	Ø-	zə-	məšxərer
cat		WH.POSS-	food	3ABS-	WH.ERG-	NEG.eat.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:



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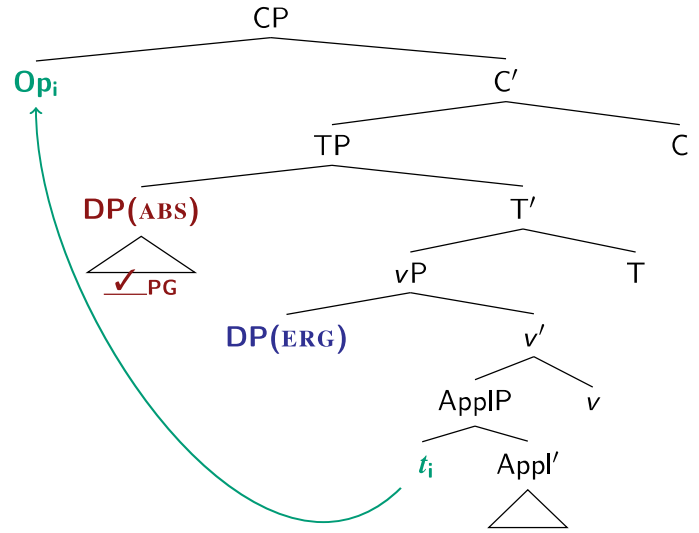

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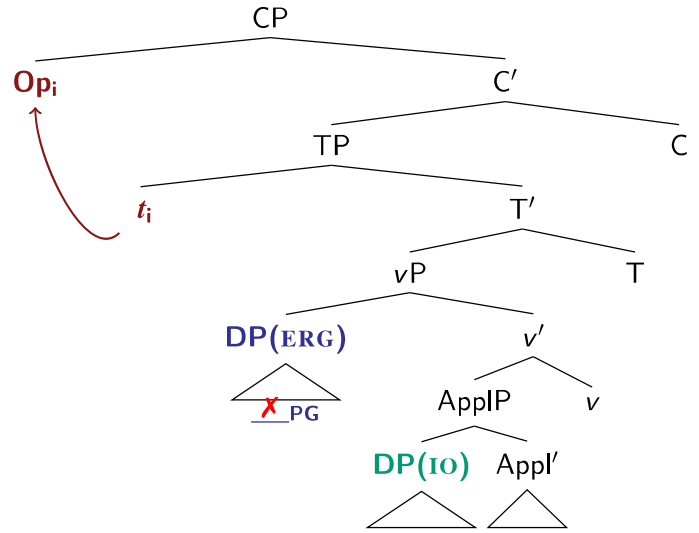

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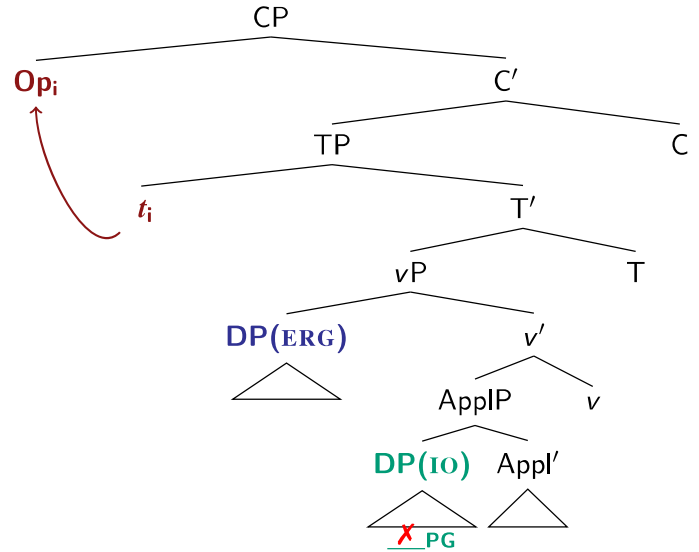


Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausemate DPs

ABS theme cannot license parasitic gap in ERG DP:

	ABS	ERG					
* Op$_i$ t_i	[_PG	z-	jane]	Ø-	ə-	məʁašxere	
		WH.POSS-	mother	WH.ABS-	3SG.ERG-	NEG.feed.DYN	

haẑʷəš’ərxem
puppies

Intended: ‘the puppies whom their mother doesn’t feed’

Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausemate DPs

ABS agent cannot license parasitic gap in **IO** DP:

	ABS	**IO**	
* haw$_i$	t_i(**ABS**)	[*_**PG**	**Z-** jəx^{w}ezjajən]
dog			**WH.POSS-** owner

Ø- Ø- jeceqež'əʁem
WH.ABS- 3SG.IO- bite.PST.OBL

Intended: 'the dog that bit its owner'

Parasitic gaps confirm subjecthood of absolutive DP

- **ABS** trace cannot license parasitic gaps in **ERG** or **IO** DPs
- ⇒ **ABS** c-commands **ERG** and **IO**
- **ABS is the clause-level subject**

Diagnosing the lower subject

The **clause-level subject position** can be diagnosed by reciprocals and parasitic gaps.

Diagnostics for the lower subject position – the highest position in the theta-domain:

- reflexives
- control constructions

Subject is not a theoretically meaningful notion

Roadmap: distributed subjecthood in West Circassian

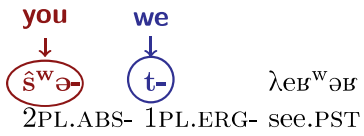
- reciprocals ✓
- parasitic gaps ✓
- reflexives
- control

} **A-domain**

} **theta-domain**

Reflexives contrast with reciprocals

RECIPROCALS → **ABS** binds **ERG**

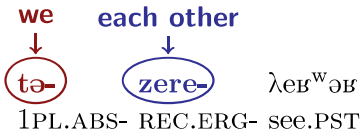


BASELINE

'We saw you(pl).'

Reflexives contrast with reciprocals

RECIPROCALS → **ABS** binds **ERG**

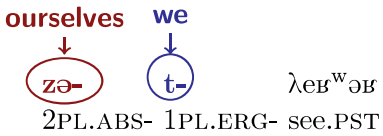


RECIPROCAL

'We saw each other.'

Reflexives contrast with reciprocals

RECIPROCALS → **ABS** binds **ERG**
REFLEXIVES → **ERG** binds **ABS**



REFLEXIVE

'We saw ourselves.'

Conflicting results for subjecthood diagnostics

- Reciprocals and parasitic gaps → ABS c-commands ERG + **ABS is the subject**
- Reflexives → ERG c-commands ABS + **ERG is the subject**

The explanation:

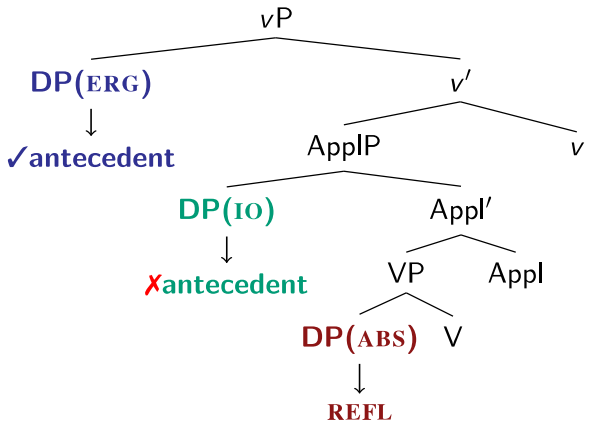
Reflexives are local subject oriented

⇓

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 *v*P.



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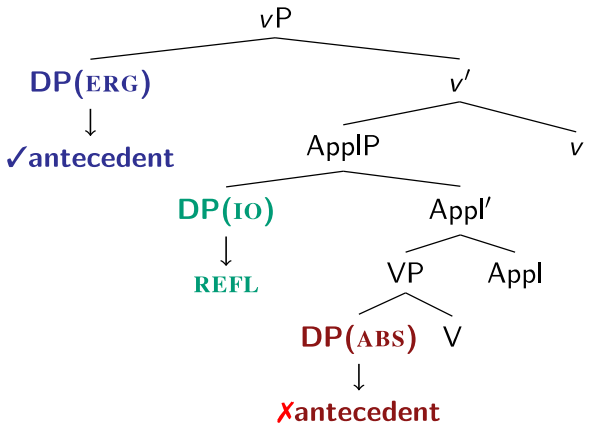

Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

- reflexive in ABS position
- ERG binds the reflexive

✓BINDING

ABS	IO		ERG	
z-	a-	fe-	s-	thač'əʁ
REFL.ABS-	3PL.IO-	BEN-	1SG.ERG-	wash.PST

'I washed **myself** for them'

✓ ERG binds ABS

Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

- reflexive in ABS position
- ERG binds the reflexive
- IO cannot bind reflexive

✗BINDING

ABS	IO		ERG	
z-	a-	fe-	s-	thač'əʁ
REFL.ABS-	3PL.IO-	BEN-	1SG.ERG-	wash.PST

* 'I washed **for them themselves**.'

✗ IO binds ABS

Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

- reflexive in IO position
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✓BINDING

ABS	IO		ERG	
Ø-	zə-	fe-	s-	thaç'əʁ
3ABS-	REFL.IO-	BEN-	1SG.ERG-	wash.PST

'I washed them **for myself**'

✓ ERG binds IO

Only highest argument in theta-domain can bind reflexive

E.g. ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

- reflexive in IO position
- ERG binds the reflexive
- ABS cannot bind reflexive

✗BINDING

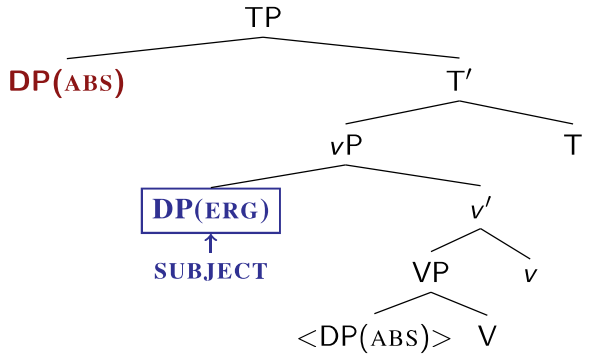
ABS	IO		ERG	
Ø-	zə-	fe-	s-	thaç'əʁ
3ABS-	REFL.IO-	BEN-	1SG.ERG-	wash.PST

* 'I washed **them for themselves**.'

✗ ABS binds IO

Highest nominal in theta-domain as the subject

- reflexives must be bound by **highest nominal in *v*P**
- ⇒ highest nominal in *v*P behaves as the **subject**



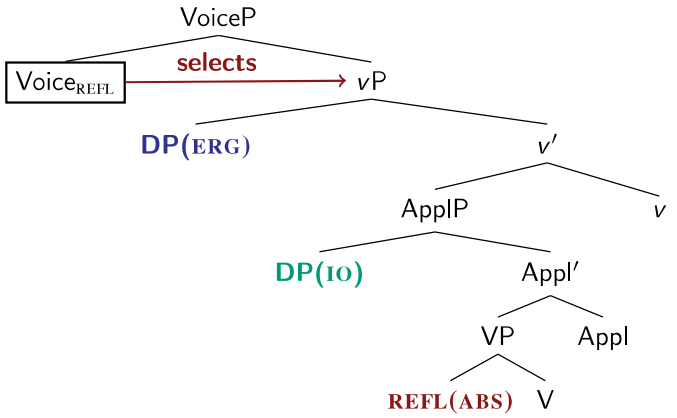
The explanation

Reflexive binding is constrained by Voice^0.

- See e.g. Labelle 2008; Ahn 2015; Bhatia and Poole 2016.

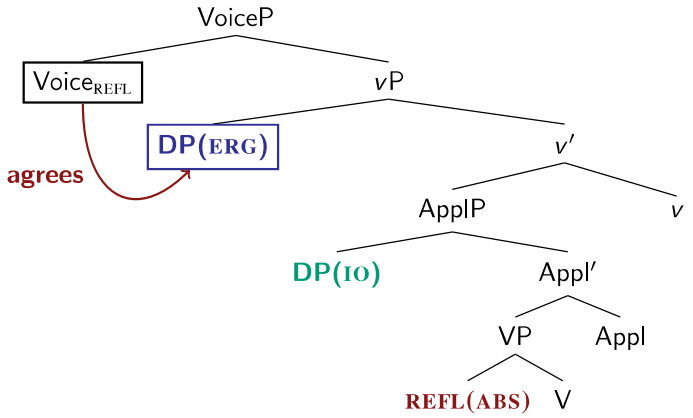
Reflexive Voice

- selects for *v*P



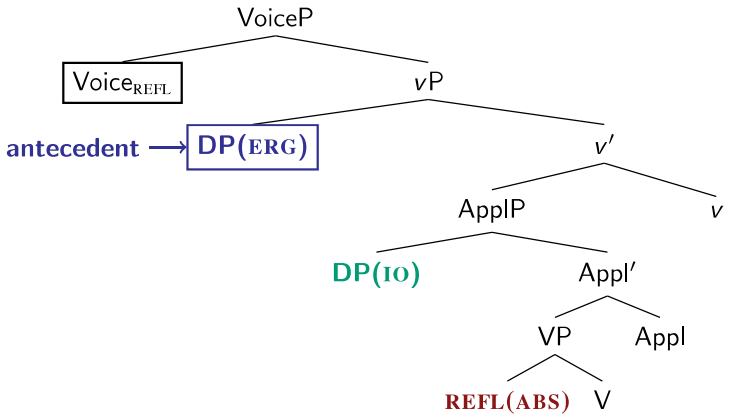
Reflexive Voice

- selects for *v*P
- agrees with **highest DP in *v*P**



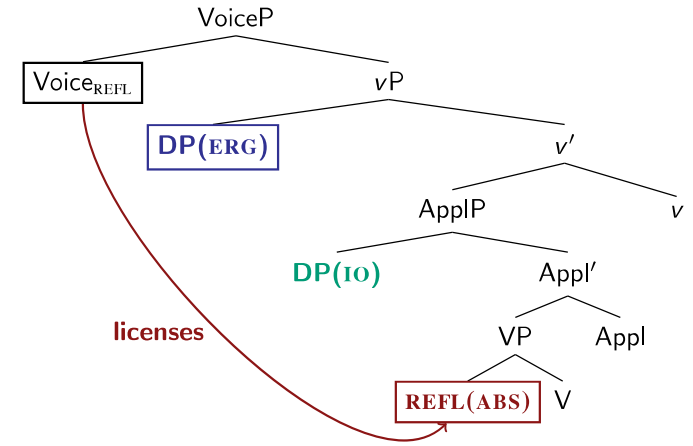
Reflexive Voice

- selects for *v*P
- agrees with **highest DP in *v*P** → **antecedent**



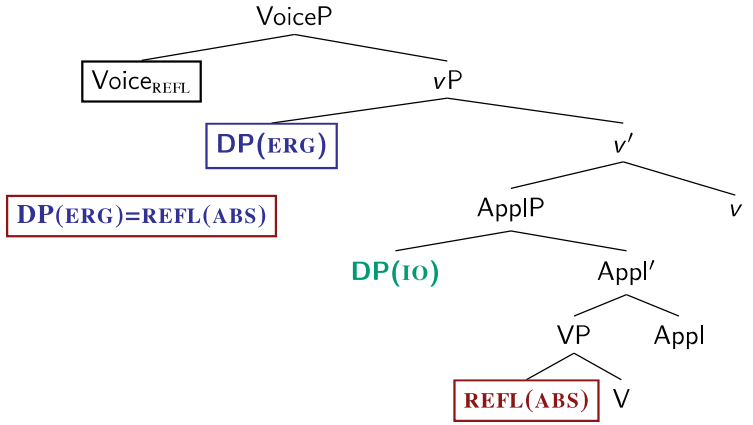
Reflexive Voice

- selects for *v*P
- agrees with **highest DP in *v*P** → **antecedent**
- licenses the reflexive pronoun

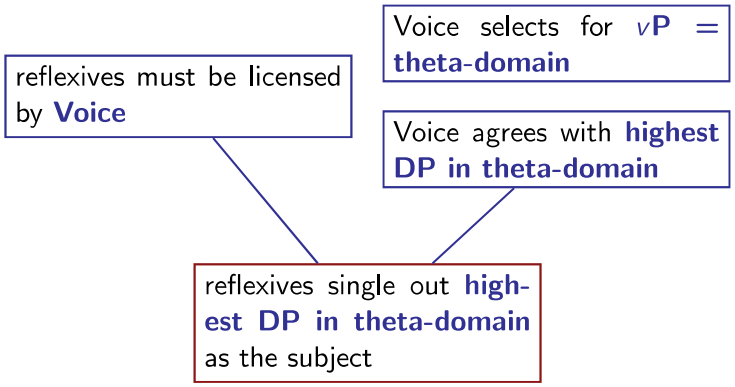


Reflexive Voice

- selects for *v*P
- agrees with **highest DP in *v*P** → **antecedent**
- licenses the reflexive pronoun → **reflexive**
- imposes co-identity on the two arguments



Voice and the theta-domain



Returning to contrast with reciprocals

The question: Why do reflexives and reciprocals behave differently?

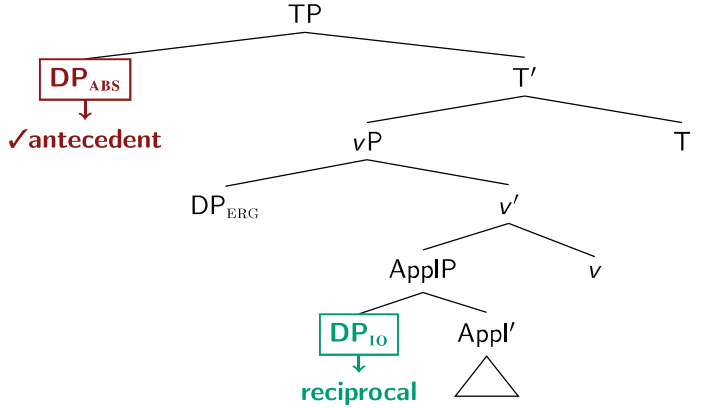
RECIPROCALS	**REFLEXIVES**
ABS binds ERG	ERG binds ABS
A-domain	**theta-domain**

The answer: Reciprocals are **not** licensed by Voice
⇒ they are only sensitive to clause-level prominence

Any c-commanding nominal can bind reciprocal

E.g. for ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

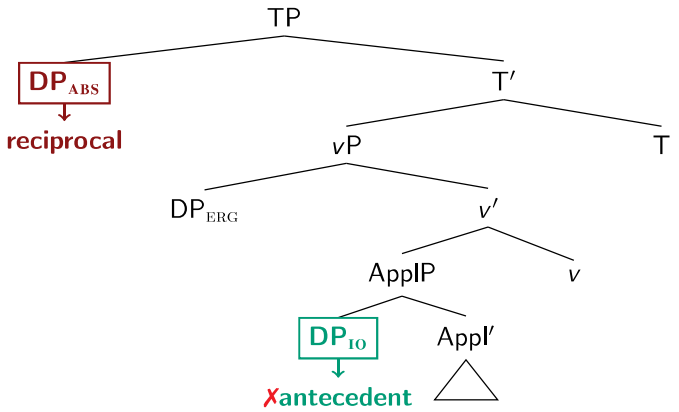
- ABS theme may bind reciprocal IO



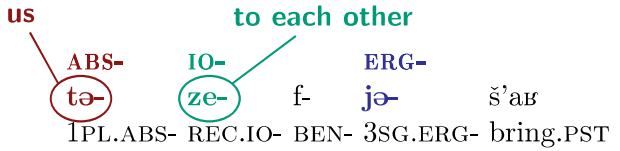
Any c-commanding nominal can bind reciprocal

E.g. for ditransitive verb (ERG-IO-ABS):

- ABS theme may bind reciprocal IO
- IO may not bind ABS theme

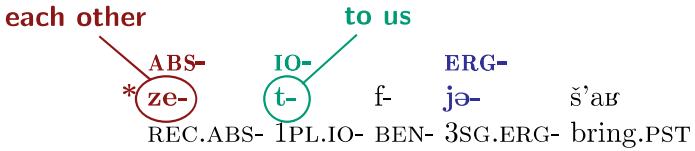


Absolutive theme can bind applied object



'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	REFLEXIVES
bound by c-commanding antecedent	bound by highest DP in *v*P
A-domain	**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

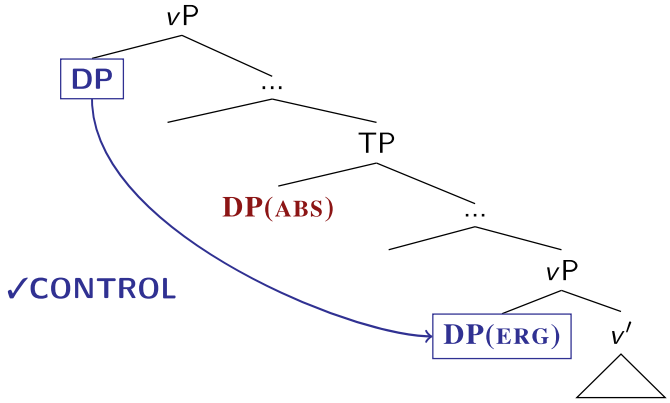
↑

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

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



Control singles out ergative agent as subject

- (Ershova 2019b): control verbs embed CP with high ABS
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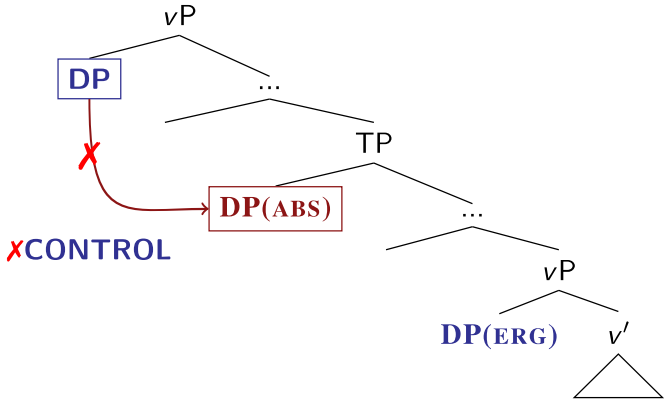
  - ABS cannot be controlled



Control targets ergative agent

controller	ABS	ERG	
ç̣’elejeʁaǯem$_i$	[CP ç̣’alexe-r(ABS)	**PRO$_i$(ERG)**	ələtenew]
teacher.OBL	boy.PL-ABS		to count
rjəʁež’aʁ			
began			

‘The teacher began to count the children.’

Control cannot target absolutive theme of transitive verb

controller	ABS	ERG	
* **ç̣’alexem$_i$**	[CP **PRO$_i$(ABS)**	ç̣’elejeʁaǯe-m(ERG)	ələtenew]
boys.OBL		boy.PL-ABS	
raʁež’aʁ			
to count began			

lit. ‘The children began for the teacher to count [them].’

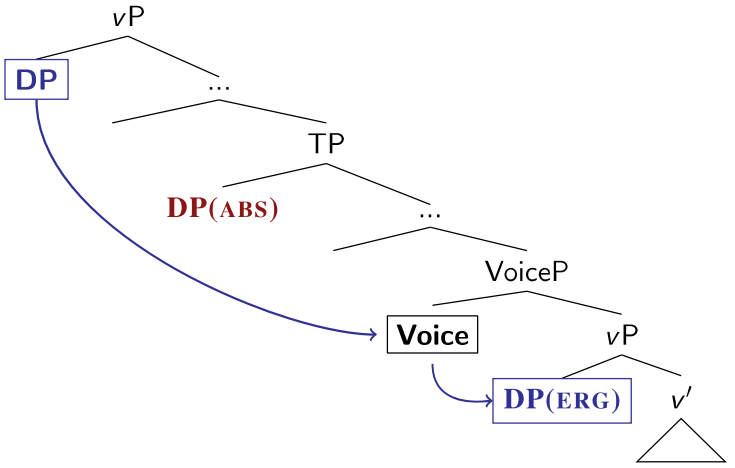
Why does control target the ergative agent?

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

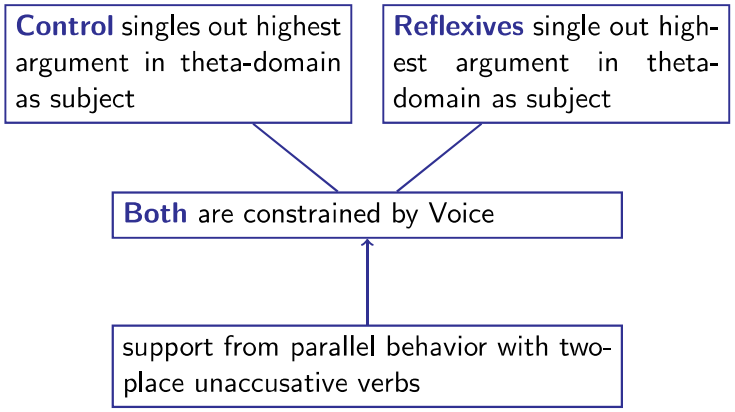
Control is mediated by Voice

Control is mediated by Voice

- Voice^0 agrees with highest nominal in *v*P
- the controller agrees with Voice^0 (a lá Landau 2000)
- nominals above Voice^0 are invisible to control



Parallels between control and reflexives



Two-place unaccusative verbs

E.g. *š'əʁʷəpšen* 'forget':

me **you**

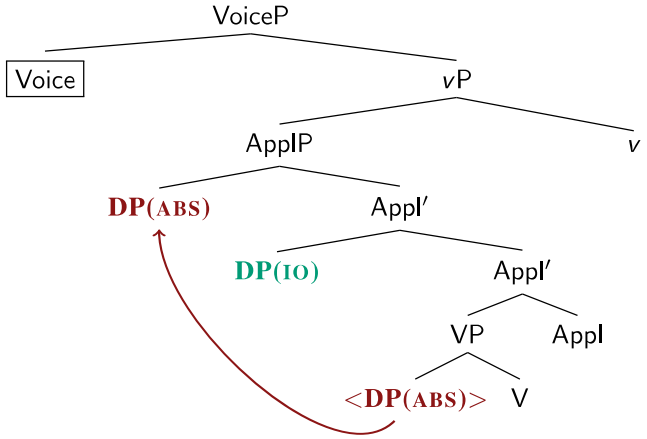
sə- p- š'əʁʷəpšaʁ

1SG.ABS- 2SG.IO- forget.PST

'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
- ⇒ they are equidistant from Voice



Both absolutive theme and applied argument can bind reflexive

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

IO binds **ABS**:

myself **I**

zə- s- š'əʁʷəpšež'əʁ

REFL.ABS- 1SG.IO- forgot.PST

'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 *v*P
- ⇒ either argument can serve as antecedent for reflexive

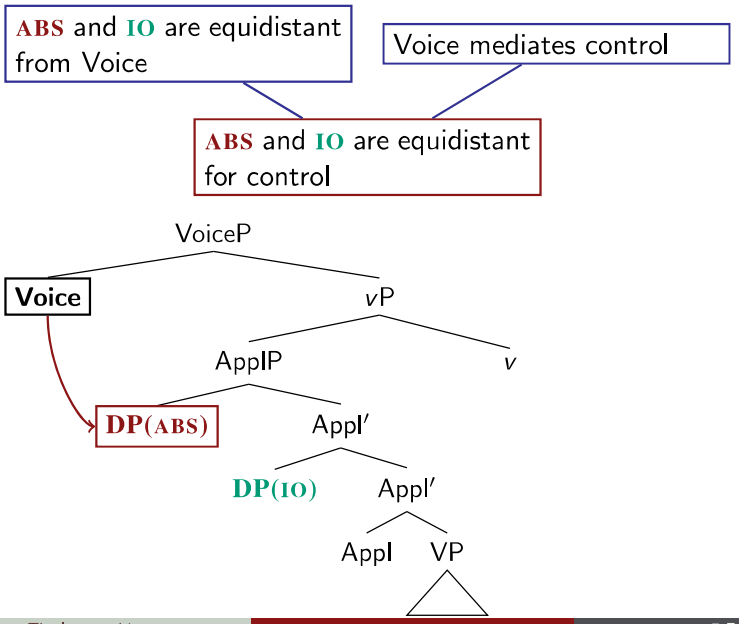
ABS binds **IO**:

me **myself**

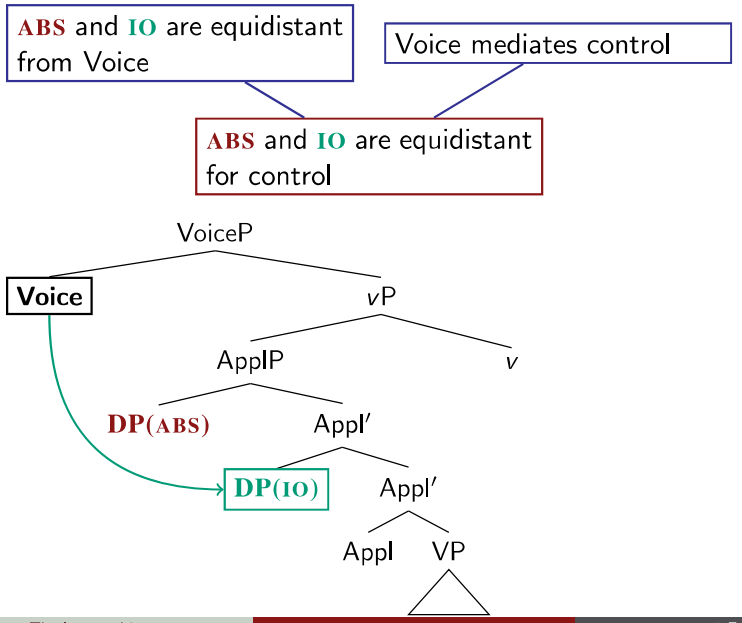
sə-	z-	š'əʁʷəpšež'əʁ
1SG.ABS-	REFL.IO-	forgot.PST

lit. 'Myself forgot about me.'

Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control



Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control



Absolutive theme and applied argument are equidistant for control

- **IO** may be controlled

CONTROL

*pro*ᵢ [CP sjənəbž'əč'eʁʷəm	qəsš'əŝəʁexe-r](ABS)	PROᵢ(IO)
my childhood	happenings-ABS	
sš'əʁʷəpšenew]	jeseʁaž'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

CONTROL

gʷəš'ə̀ʔeč'əhaxem$_i$ [$_{CP}$ PRO$_i$(ABS) sš'əʁʷəpšenew]
long words to forget
raʁež'aʁ]
they are beginning

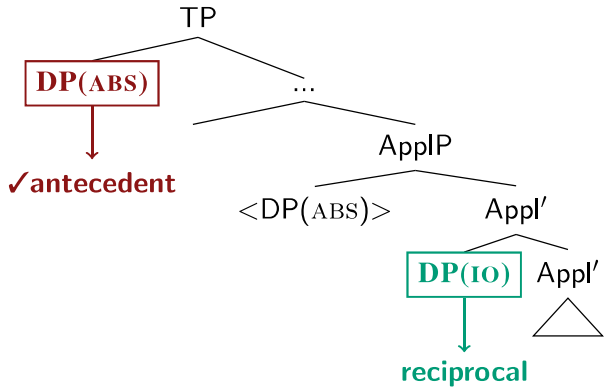
lit. 'Long words are beginning for me to be forgetting [them].'

Control and reflexives versus reciprocals

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

Reciprocals: absolutive theme binds applied argument

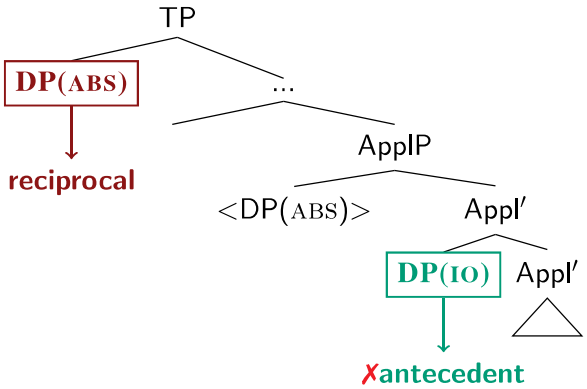
- at level of TP, ABS asymmetrically c-commands IO
- ⇒ ABS may bind IO reciprocal



Reciprocals: absolutive theme binds applied argument

- at level of TP, ABS asymmetrically c-commands IO
- ⇒ ABS may bind IO reciprocal
- IO may not bind ABS reciprocal

*



Reciprocals: absolutive theme binds applied argument

Two-place unaccusative verbs:

- ABS can bind reciprocal in IO position

we (↓) each other (↓)

tə- ze- š'əʁʷəpšež'əʁ

1PL.ABS- REC.IO- forget.PST

'We forgot about each other.'

Reciprocals: absolutive 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 (↓)

* ze- t- š'əʁʷəpšež'əʁ

REC.ABS- 1PL.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 ✓

} **A-domain**

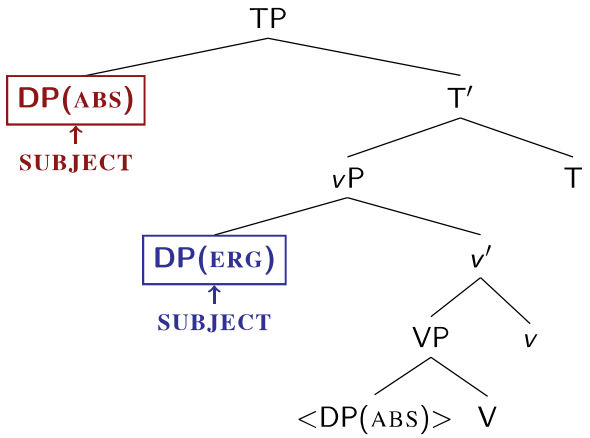
} **theta-domain**

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
  $\Rightarrow$ effects of distributed subjecthood only observable in limited contexts
- in **syntactically ergative languages**, the different subject positions are systematically occupied by distinct nominals
  $\Rightarrow$ 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

$\Rightarrow$ SUBJECT is not a theoretically meaningful notion

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)

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 epiphenomenal to syntax of Voice
  - in syntactically ergative languages, antecedent **need not** be the surface subject

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
- $\Rightarrow$ 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

Thank you!

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