Unaccusativity and the Syntax of Imperatives in East Circassian

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1 Introduction

Observation: Causative construction with co-indexed causer and causee **only possible for imperative of unaccusative verbs**.

(1) z_i-**we_i**-mə-ʁe-gʷəbẑ   unaccusative
   REFL.ABS-2SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS-be.angry
   'Don't be angry.' (lit. don't **you$_i$** make **yourself$_i$** angry)

(2) *z_i-**we_i**-mə-ʁa-gʷe   unergative
   REFL.ABS-2SG.ERG-NEG-CAUS-yell
   Intended: 'Don't yell.' (lit. don't **you$_i$** make **yourself$_i$** yell)

Implications:
1. Language-internal evidence for unaccusative vs. unergative verbs.
2. Low position of imperative head, i.e. divorce of imperative syntax and force.

East Circassian (Northwest Caucasian) is a polysynthetic language with verbal and nominal indexing and ergative alignment (Bagov et al. 1970). The presented data is from the Kuban dialect, spoken in Aul Khodz (Koshekhablsky District, Republic of Adygea, Russia).

2 Imperative formation

2 strategies:

1. **Unmarked**: bare verbal stem, no special morphology

(3) a. **Unaccusative**   b. **Unergative**
   wə-mə-gʷəbẑ   wə-mə-gʷe
   2SG.ABS-NEG-be.angry   2SG.ABS-NEG-yell
   'Don't be angry.'   'Don't yell.'

2. **Reflexive causative**: causative **ʁe-** + co-indexed causer and causee – only available for unaccusative verbs (1)-(2)

Unaccusative: χʷəže 'get well', qjexʷexʷə 'fall', səmeǯe 'get sick', gʷəbẑə 'be angry', pṣenṭe 'sweat', xʷebeŝe 'overheat', š'əne 'be afraid'
Unergative: žje 'sleep', pseλe 'speak', gʷe 'yell', q̇efe 'dance', ŝəsə 'sit'

Reflexive causative is **unacceptable** in non-imperative contexts, even with unaccusative verbs.

(4) ??abə z_i-**ja_i**-ʁe-gʷəbẑ-a
   DEM.OBL   **REFL.ABS-3SG.ERG**-CAUS-be.angry-PST
   Intended: 'He became angry.' (lit. **he$_i$** made **himself$_i$** angry)

Causative **ʁe-** is generally very productive: (4) without reflexive is well-formed.

(4') abə   Ø$_j$-**ja_i**-ʁe-gʷəbẑ-a
   DEM.OBL   **3ABS-3SG.ERG**-CAUS-be.angry-PST
   '**S/he$_i$** angered **him/her$_j$**.'

Interim conclusion: reflexive causative is a strategy of forming imperatives from unaccusative verbs, i.e. it is **bleached of causative semantics**.

Questions:
• Why unaccusatives?
• What does this tell us about imperative syntax?

3 ʁe- is an imperative head

Causative **ʁe-** grammaticalized to mark imperative mood (cf. English *let us* > *let's* for cohortative)

⟹   No semantics of causation in (1)

BUT: Imperative **ʁe-** remains *syntactically* causative, i.e. licenses external argument in its specifier.

Why unaccusatives?

Imperative **ʁe-** is a type of transitive (ergative-assigning) *v* – selects for VP with internal argument.
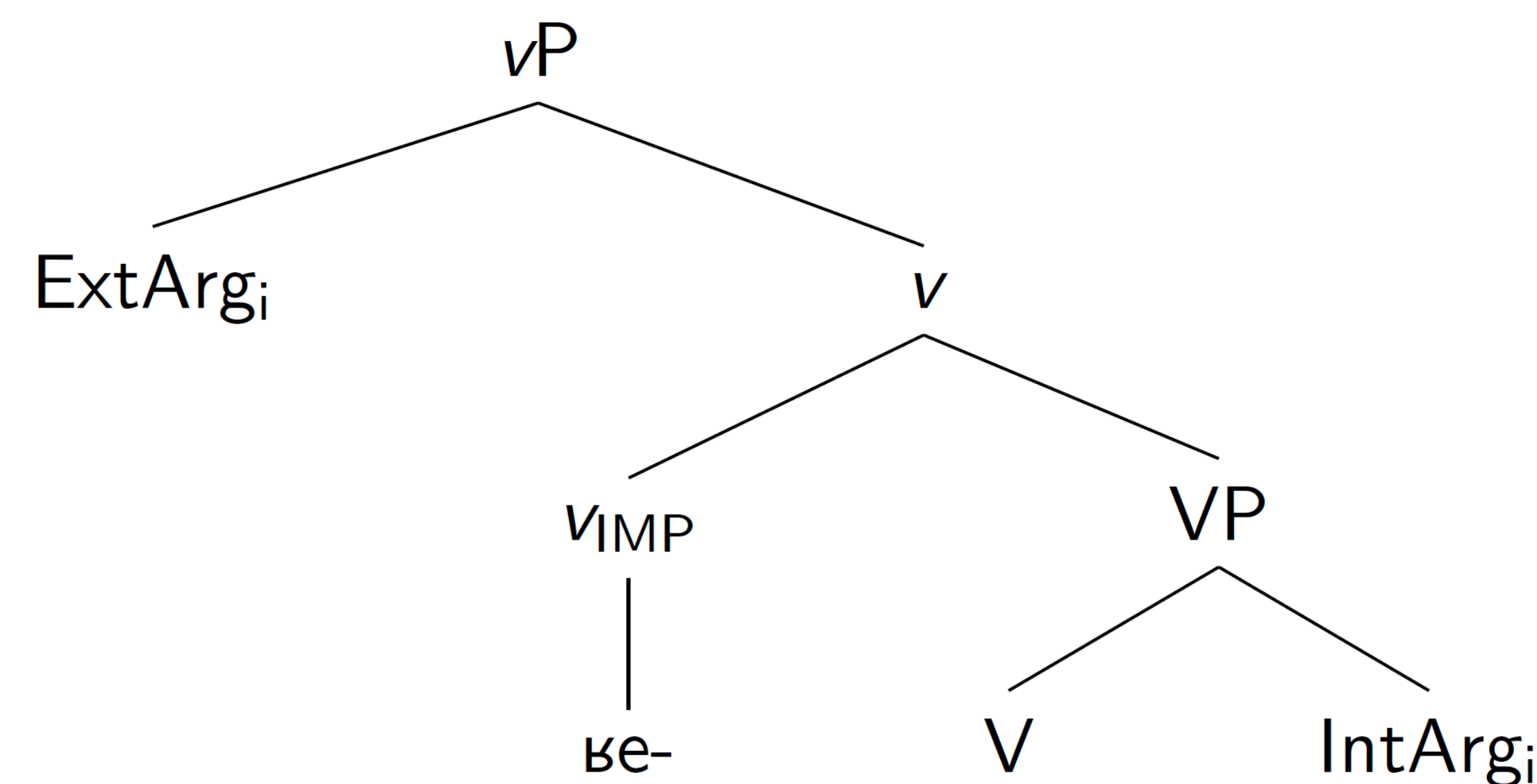

Figure 1: Structure of imperative formed with ʁe-

Imperative ʁe- is incompatible
• **With transitive verbs** because they require an agentive *v*
• **With unergative verbs** because VP in such cases has no internal argument

Why reflexive?

No argument structure-related semantics
⟹   no new participants introduced; external argument coindexed with internal DP.
Coindexation within vP is expressed via reflexivization.

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4 Implications

Imperative force is generally assumed to be introduced very high – in the CP-layer (see discussion in Portner to appear)

Motivation: force always has the highest semantic scope (Zeijlstra 2006), e.g. **IMP** > **NEG**

(5) Don't go!
   ≈ [I request/order [that you do not go]$_{NEG}$]$_{IMP}$
   ≠ [I do not [request/order that you go]$_{IMP}$]$_{NEG}$

Sensitivity of imperative force to structure of vP (presence vs absence of internal argument) **requires locality between IMP and vP**.

Solution: divorce force from head responsible for imperative morphology (as suggested by Portner to appear)

Motivation: imperative form ≠ imperative force
   e.g. infinitives w/ imperative force in Romance, imperative forms as conditionals in Russian

2 imperative heads:

1. **vP-local IMP** – responsible for morphological form
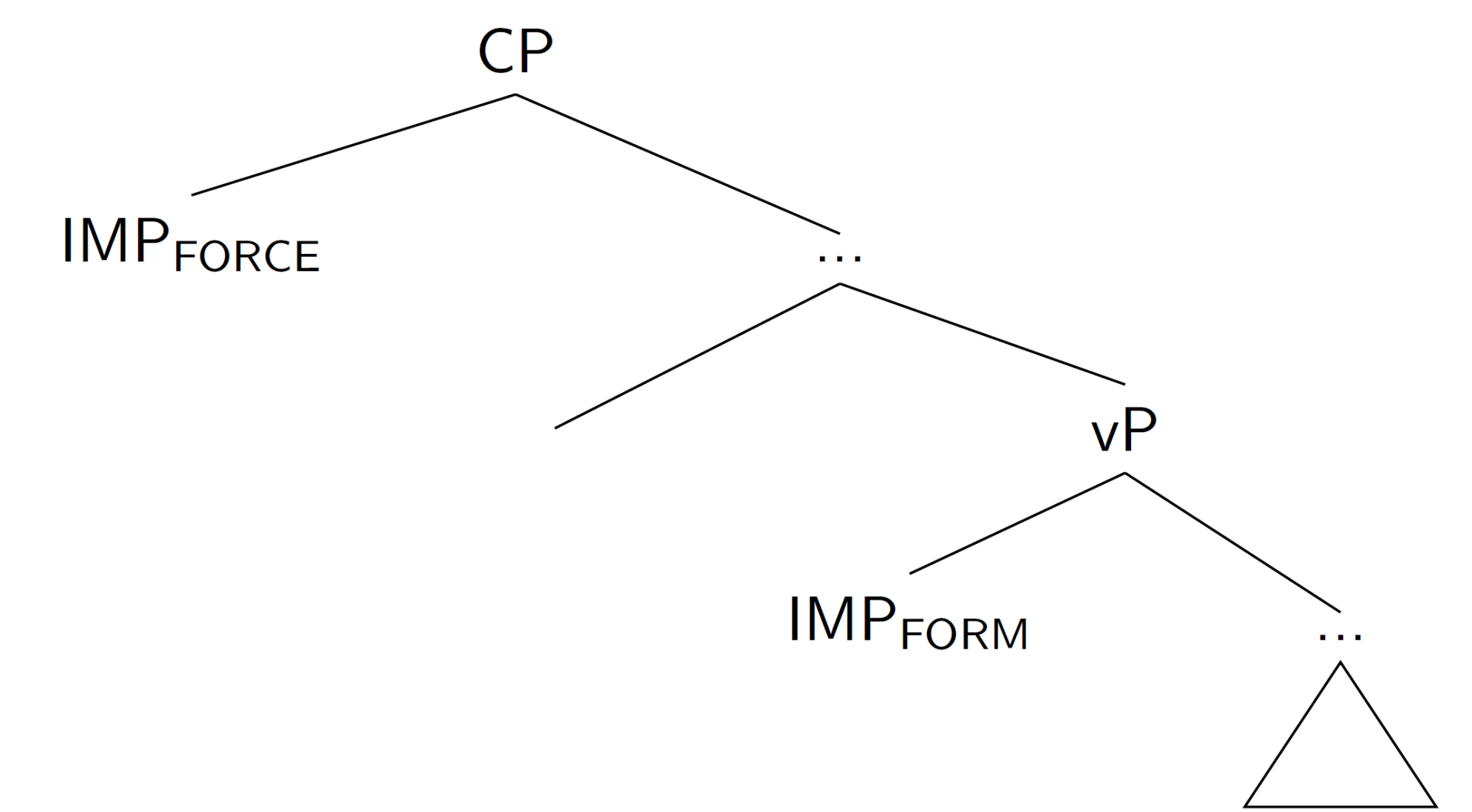2. **High IMP at CP-layer** – responsible for force

Figure 2: Two imperative heads

Conclusion: reflexive causative construction provides evidence for class of unaccusative verbs and low position of imperative head in East Circassian.

References   [1] Bagov et al. 1970. *Grammatika kabardino-čerkesskogo literaturnogo jazyka*. [2] Portner to appear. Imperatives. In *Handbook of Semantics*. [3] Zeijlstra 2006. The ban on true negative imperatives. In Empirical Issues in Syntax & Semantics 6.

Abbreviations ABS – absolutive, CAUS – causative, DEM – demonstrative, ERG – ergative, NEG – negation, OBL – oblique, REFL – reflexive, PST – past tense, SG – singular.