The Role of Voice in Establishing Control: Evidence from a Syntactically Ergative Language

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1 The puzzle

- **Obligatory control constructions** are universally (or overwhelmingly) constrained: even in **syntactically ergative languages**, control is syntactically accusative (Dixon 1994; Deal 2016; Polinsky 2016).
- Most analyses of control appeal to the **structural prominence of the controlled argument** (Landau 2013:108-123, a.o.).
- In **syntactically ergative languages** the surface subject position is occupied by the absolutive theme, but control targets the lower ergative agent ⇒ **challenge for existing analyses**.

2 Case study

West Circassian (Adyghe): Northwest Caucasian, polysynthetic, ergative, radical pro-drop[1]

Data collected by author in Maykop and Khatazhukay, Republic of Adygea, Russia, unless otherwise indicated.

Syntactic ergativity: ABS c-commands ERG and IO.

Evidence: reciprocal binding.

3 Φ-agreement as a diagnostic for clause structure

- Position of cross-reference morphology directly reflects syntactic role of verbal argument.

ERG-IO-ABS frame

(1)

ABS-		**IO-**		**ERG-**	
tə-	qə-	**p-**	f-	**jə-**	š'aʁ
1PL.ABS-	DIR-	2SG.IO-	BEN-	3SG.ERG-	bring.PST

'S/he brought us to you.'

ABS-IO frame

(2)

ABS-		**IO-**		
ŝʷə-	qə-	**d-**	de-	ŝʷeš't
2PL.ABS-	DIR-	1PL.IO-	COM-	dance.FUT

'You(pl) will dance with us.'

[1] **GLOSSES** ABSolutive; ADVerbial; BENefactive; COMitative; DIRective; ERGative; FUTure tense; IO–indirect object; LOCative; MODal future; OBLique; PLural; PRS–present tense; PST–past tense; RECiprocal; REFLexive; SG–singular.

- Position of reciprocal marking ***ze(re)-*** correlates with the position of the bound argument.

(3) **ERG-IO-ABS frame: ERG binds IO**

			ABS-	**IO-**		**ERG-**	
a.	te	wənexer	Ø-	**ze-**	fe-	t-	ṣ̂əž'əʁ
	we	house.PL.ABS	3ABS-	**REC.IO-**	BEN-	1PL.ERG-	do.PST
b. *	te	wənexer	Ø-	t-	fe-	**ze(re)-**	ṣ̂əž'əʁ
	we	house.PL.ABS	3ABS-	1PL.IO-	BEN-	**REC.ERG-**	do.PST

'We built houses for each other' **ERG>IO;*IO>ERG**

(4) **ABS-IO frame: ABS binds IO**

	ABS-		**IO-**			
a.	ŝʷə-	qə-	**ze-**	de-	ŝʷeš't	**ABS>IO**
	2PL.ABS-	DIR-	**REC.IO-**	COM-	dance.FUT	
b. *	**ze-**	qə-	ẑʷə-	de-	ŝʷeš't	***IO>ABS**
	REC.ABS-	DIR-	2PL.IO-	COM-	dance.FUT	

'You(pl) will dance with each other.'

Other evidence **REC is not voice or de-transitivizing operator (cf. Labelle 2008; Bruening 2004):

(i) possibility of overt REC pronoun

(ii) case marking of antecedent

⇒ **reciprocal agreement can be used to diagnose argument asymmetries.**

4 Reciprocals provide evidence for syntactic ergativity

- ABS binds both ERG and IO, regardless of theta-role (Letuchiy 2010; Ershova 2019).

(5) **ERG-ABS frame: ABS binds ERG**

	ABS-	**ERG-**	
a.	tə-	**zere-**	λeʁʷəʁ
	1PL.ABS-	**REC.ERG-**	see.PST
b. *	**ze(re)-**	t-	λeʁʷəʁ
	REC.ABS-	1PL.ERG-	see.PST

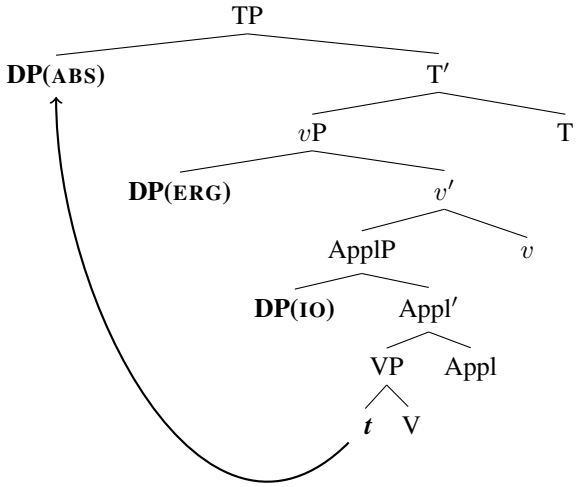
'We saw each other.'

(6) **ERG-IO-ABS frame: ABS binds IO**

	ABS-	**IO-**		**ERG-**	
a.	tə-	**ze-**	f-	jə-	š'aʁ
	1PL.ABS-	**REC.IO-**	BEN-	3SG.ERG-	bring.PST
b. *	**ze-**	t-	f-	jə-	š'aʁ
	REC.ABS-	1PL.IO-	BEN-	3SG.ERG-	bring.PST

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

ABS moves to Spec,TP:



5 Obligatory control is syntactically accusative

(7) **ERG-ABS frame: ERG is controlled, not ABS**

a. **ç̣'elejeʁaǯe-m$_i$** [$_{CP}$ **PRO$_i$(ERG)** ç̣'alexe-r(ABS)
teacher.OBL boy.PL-ABS
Ø-ə-λəte-n-ew] rjəʁež'aʁ
3ABS-3SG.ERG-count-MOD-ADV 3SG.ERG.begin.PST

'The teacher began to count the children.' **ERG=PRO**

b. * **ç̣'ale-xe-m$_i$** [$_{CP}$ **PRO$_i$(ABS)** ç̣'elejeʁaǯe-m(ERG)
boy-PL-OBL teacher-OBL
Ø-ə-λəte-n-ew] raʁež'aʁ
3ABS-3SG.ERG-count-MOD-ADV 3PL.ERG.begin.PST

lit. 'The children began for the teacher to count [them].' ***ABS=PRO**

Embedded clause is a CP (Ershova 2019); cf. restructuring (Grano 2015) or raising out of TP (Potsdam and Polinsky 2012): same distributional properties and internal structure as non-control clauses.

+ No true PRO in embedded clause: (i) triggers regular ϕ-agreement; (ii) can be expressed as full DP (possible in non-control clauses too; cf. 'backward control'; Farrell 1995; Polinsky and Potsdam 2002,a.o.).

Controlled argument is spelled out as DP

(8) *pro*$_i$**(ERG)** [$_{CP}$ sabjəxe-**r(ABS)** Ø-zezewe-n-ew]
child.PL-**ABS** 3ABS-REC.IO.hit-MOD-ADV
raʁež'aʁ
3PL.ERG.begin.PST
'The children began to compete with each other.'

6 Embedded CP has a syntactically ergative clause structure

Reciprocal binding in control CP: ABS binds ERG

(9) [$_{CP}$ ***pro*$_i$(ABS)** ***rec*$_i$(ERG)** Ø-**zere-**wəç̣'əž'ə-n-x-ew] ç̣'əfxe-m$_i$
3ABS-**REC.ERG-**kill-MOD-PL-ADV person.PL-OBL
raʁež'aʁ
3PL.ERG.begin.PST
'People began to kill each other.' **Control CP: ABS>ERG**

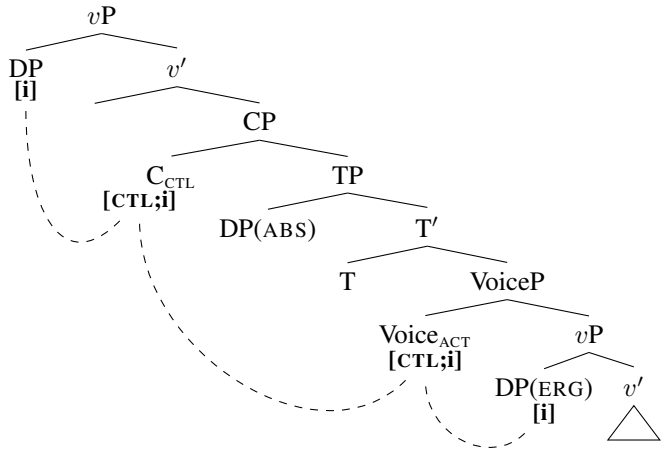
The puzzle: ABS (i) is not eligible for control and (ii) does not act as an intervener

(10) Controller$_{i/*j}$ ... [$_{CP}$ ... **DP$_j$(ABS)** ... [$_{vP}$ **DP$_i$(ERG)** ...
✓control
✗

7 Main claim: Control is mediated by Voice

- Following Landau (2000), control is established via Agree.
- Agree-based control involves agreement in an index (**ID**) feature.
See e.g. Rezac (2004); Grosz (2015); Arregi and Hanink (2018) for ID-agreement in other domains.
- ID-agreement is an implementation of control as binding (Chomsky 1981; Borer 1989; Landau 2015).

Control as ID-agreement via Voice



Syntax of Voice^0:

- selects for vP
- agrees with highest DP in vP in [ID]
- carries the feature [CTL]

Establishing control:

- C_{CTL} is a relativized ID-probe: [ID_{CTL}:__].
  See e.g. Bobaljik (2008) on relativized probes.
- ABS doesn't bear [CTL] ⇒ ABS isn't an eligible goal for C_{CTL}.
- C_{CTL} agrees with Voice^0 in [ID].
- Controller agrees with C_{CTL} in [ID].
  Result: feature matching with embedded ERG= **control**.

8 Why Voice? Parallels between control and reflexives

Ershova (2019): WC reflexives are **local subject oriented**, i.e. must be bound by highest DP in vP.

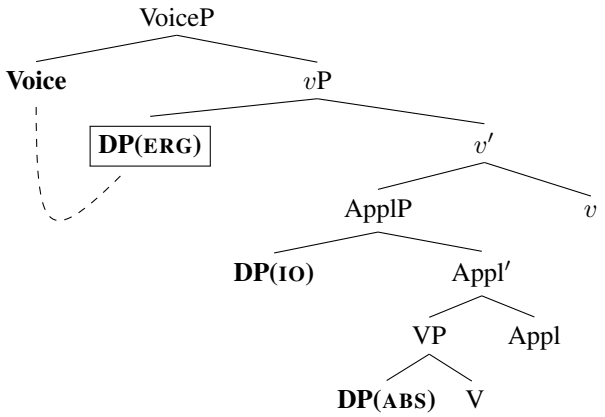
⇒ The choice of antecedent for reflexives is **constrained by Voice^0**.

See e.g. Labelle (2008); Ahn (2015); Bhatia and Poole (2016) on Voice and LSO reflexives.

How it works:

- Voice^0 agrees with a DP in its c-command domain.
- Per standard locality constraints, only the highest DP is an eligible goal.
- ⇒ correctly constrains REFL antecedent to highest DP in vP.

REFL antecedent constrained by Voice^0



Control is similarly constrained: Evidence from two-place unaccusative verbs

š'əʁʷəpšen 'forget': IO-ABS frame

(11) **ABS-** **IO-**
sə- **p-** š'ə- ʁʷəpša -ʁ
SG.ABS- 2SG.IO- LOC- forget -PST
'You(**IO**) forgot about me(**ABS**).'

(12) ABS may scramble over IO:
[ApplP **DP(ABS)** **DP(IO)** ... [VP ***t*** ...

⇒ABS and IO are equidistant to Voice^0.

REFL: IO binds ABS or ABS binds IO

(13)

	ABS-	IO-		
a.	**zə-**	**s-**	š'ə-	ʁʷəpšež'əʁ
	REFL.ABS-	**1SG.IO-**	LOC-	forget.PST
b.	**sə-**	**z-**	š'ə-	ʁʷəpšež'əʁ
	1SG.ABS-	**REFL.IO-**	LOC-	forget.PST

'I forgot about myself.'

(14) Voice [$_{vP}$ ... [$_{ApplP}$ **DP(ABS)** **DP(IO)** ... ✓AGREE ✓AGREE

**Cf. REC only allow ABS antecedent.

Prediction of Voice-mediated control: both ABS and IO can be controlled → **confirmed**.

(15) **š'əʁʷəpšen 'forget': both IO and ABS can be controlled**

a. *pro*$_i$(ERG) [$_{CP}$ **PRO$_i$(IO)** [sjənəbž'əç̣'eʁʷəm
1SG.POSS.youth.OBL
qəsš'əŝəʁexe-r](ABS) Ø-s-š'ə-ʁʷəpše-n-ew]
1SG.IO.happen.PST.PL-ABS 3ABS-1SG.IO-LOC-forget-MOD-ADV
jeseʁaž'e
1SG.ERG.begin.PRS
'I am starting to forget events from my childhood.' **IO=PRO**

b. gʷəš'əʔeç̣'əhaxe-m$_i$(ERG) [$_{CP}$ **PRO$_i$(ABS)**
word.long.PL-OBL
Ø-s-š'ə-ʁʷəpše-n-ew] raʁež'aʁ]
3ABS-1SG.IO-LOC-forget-MOD-ADV 3PL.ERG.begin.PST
'Long words are beginning to be forgotten by me.' **ABS=PRO**

9 Implications

- Importance of Voice^0 in two classic subjecthood diagnostics (reflexives and control) ⇒ no single subject position per e.g. McCloskey (1997) and no uniform notion of subjecthood.
- Possible explanation for universal lack of syntactic ergativity in control.

Alternative account of control and syntactic ergativity (Polinsky 2016):
ERG=PP; syntactically ergative languages lack obligatory control of ERG.
∼ Applicable only to languages where ABS stays low: if ABS c-commands ERG, why is only ERG eligible for non-obligatory control?

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