Unexpected Ā-movement in West Circassian

Theoretical implications for syntactic ergativity

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Stanford University

Princeton Symposium on Syntactic Theory 2022

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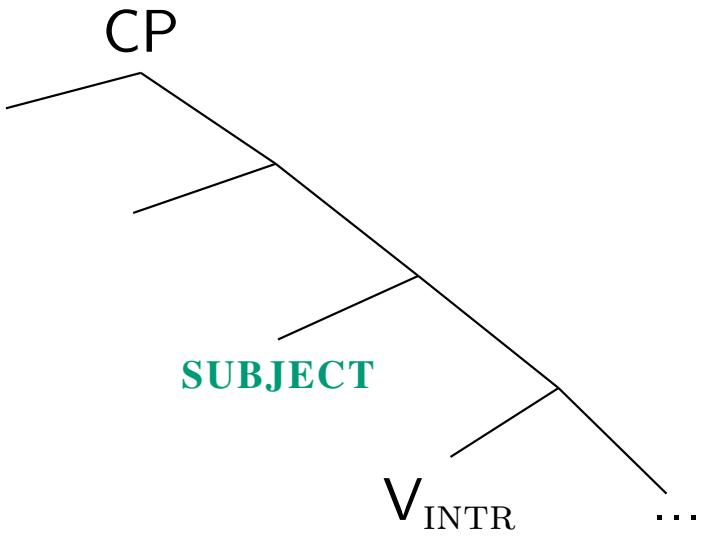

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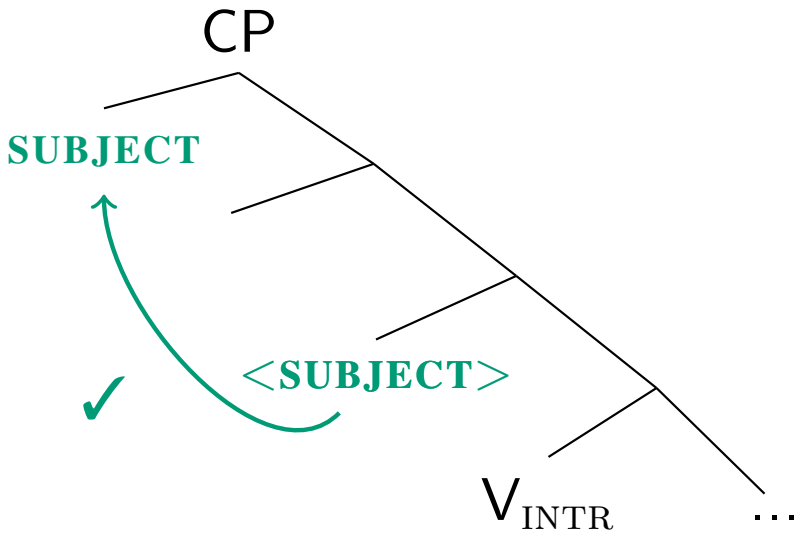

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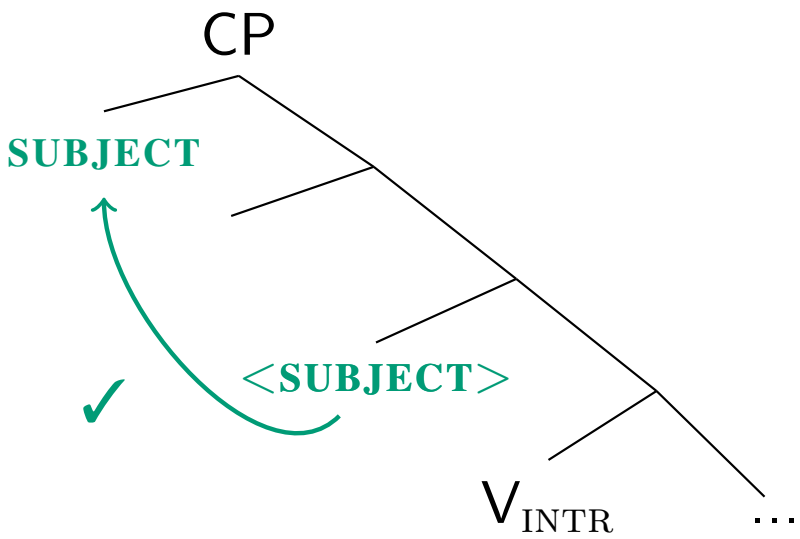

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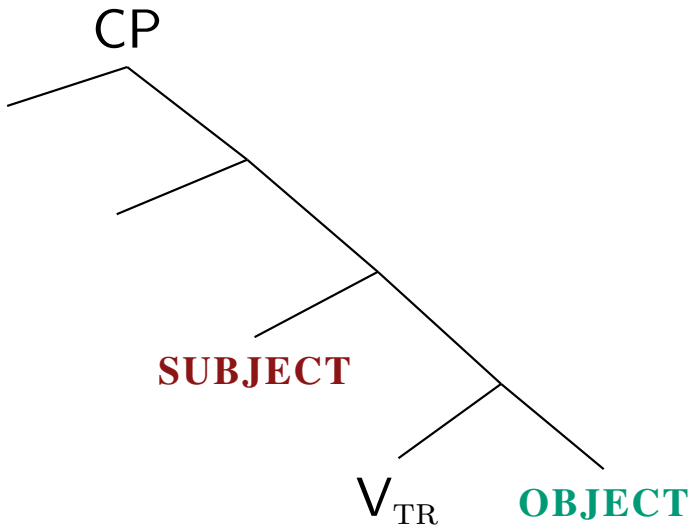

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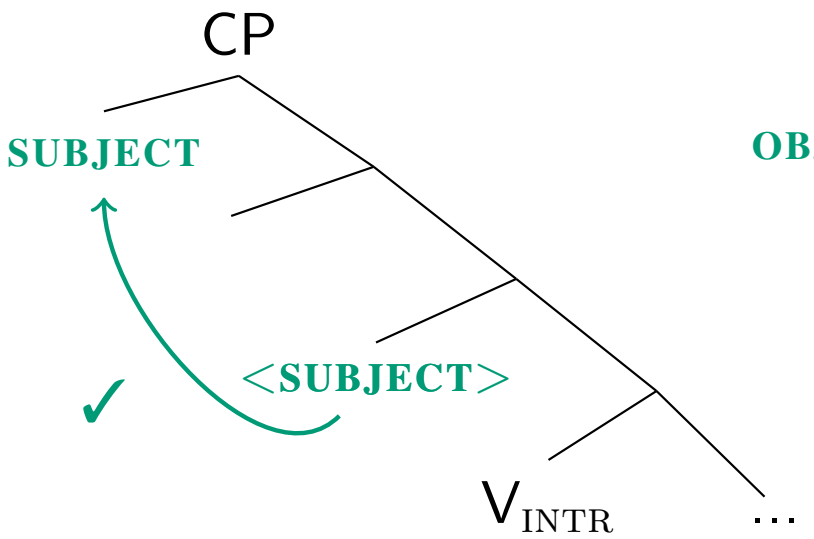

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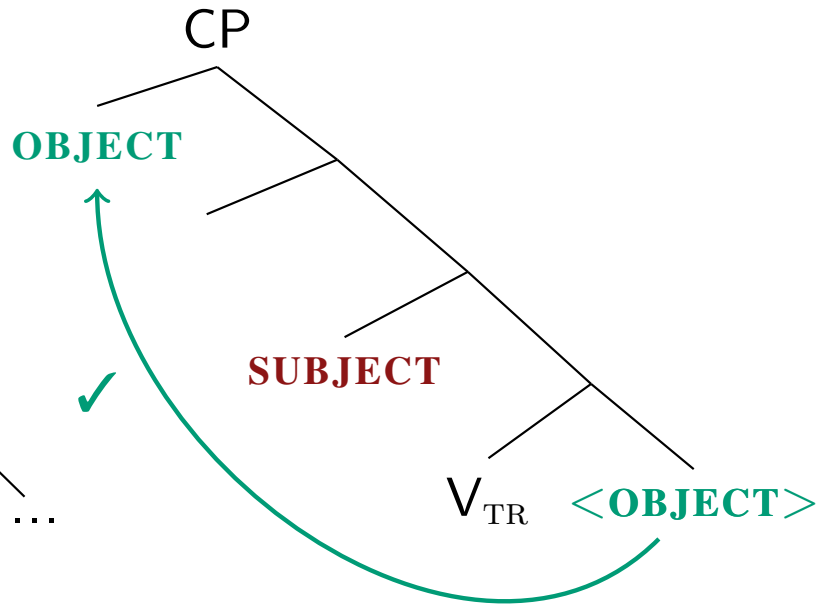

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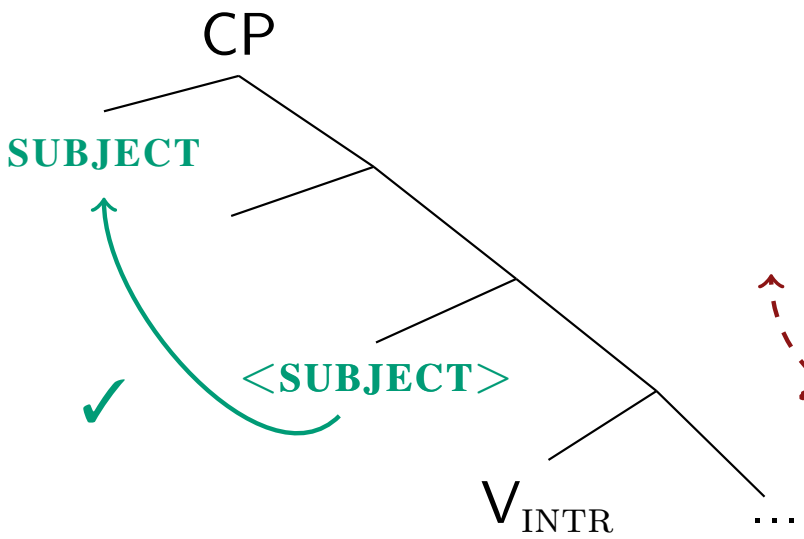

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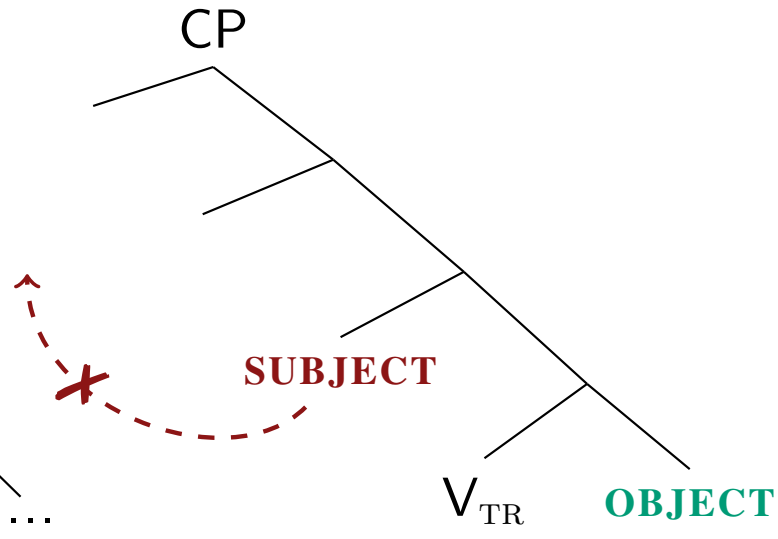

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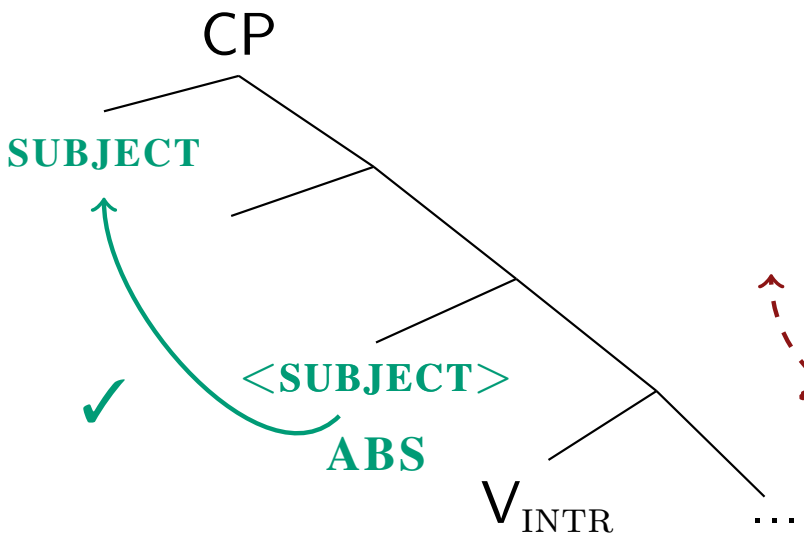

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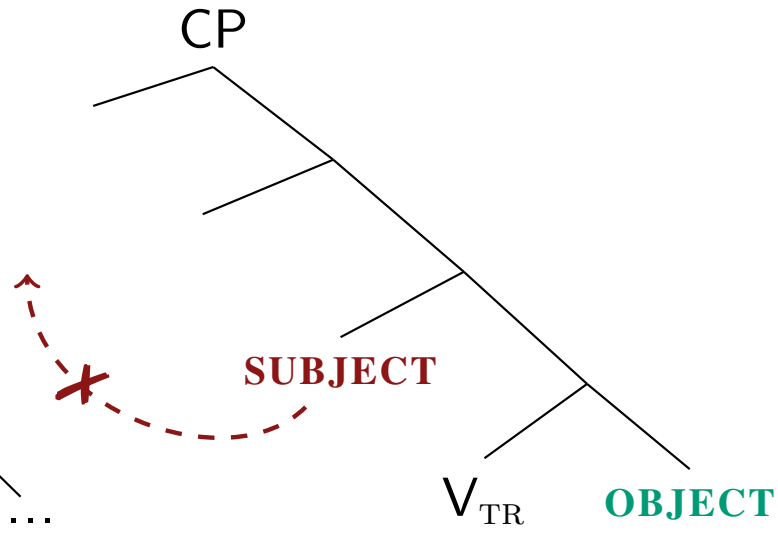

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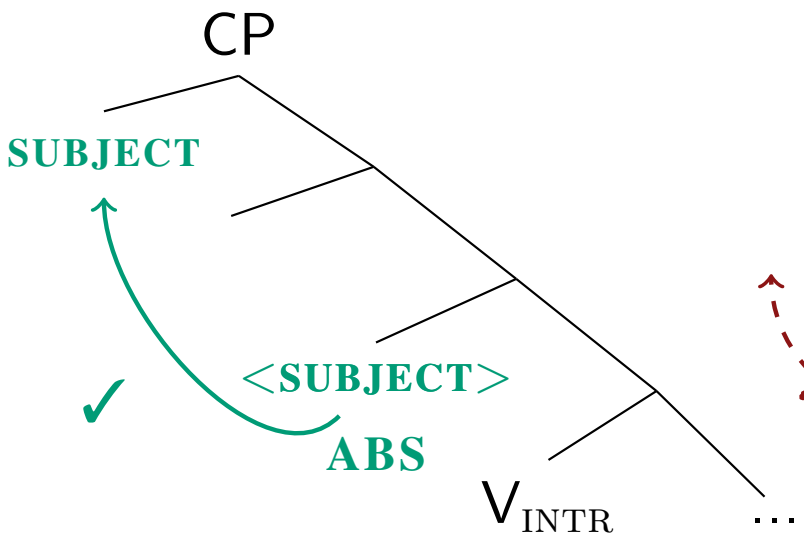

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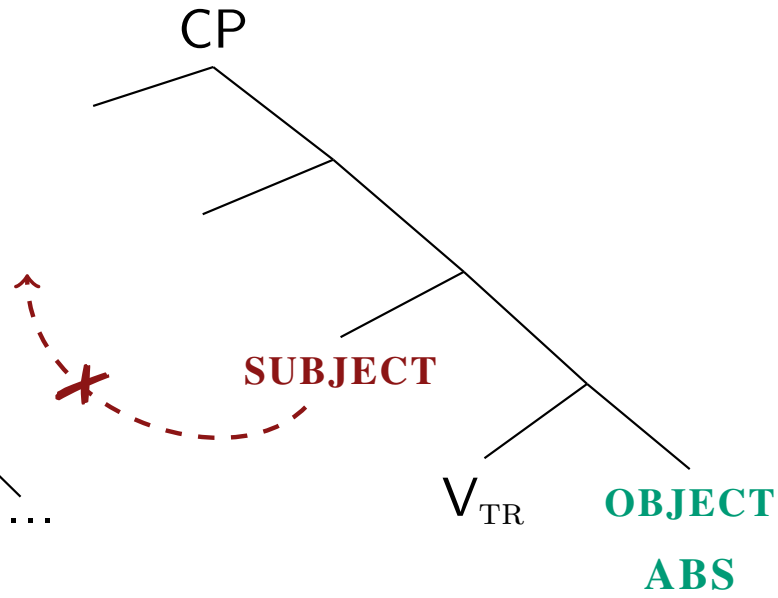

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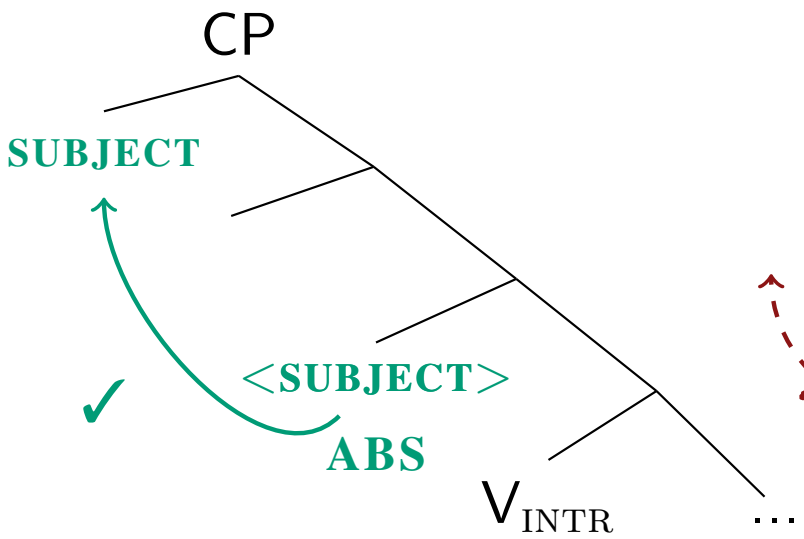

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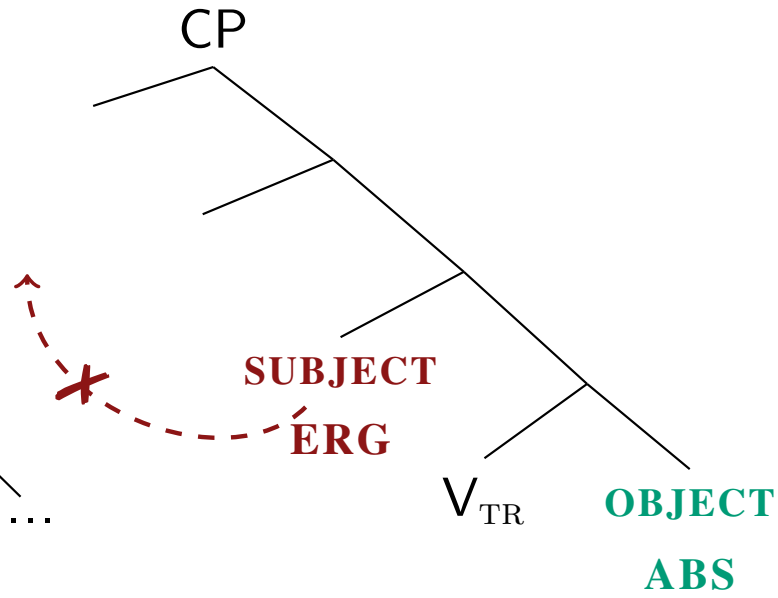

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'Who did the man see?' **✓ABS WH-MOVT**

(Coon et al. 2014, 2021; Tollan and Clemens 2021)

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A class of approaches accounts for syntactic ergativity effects with **movement of ABS to a high position**.

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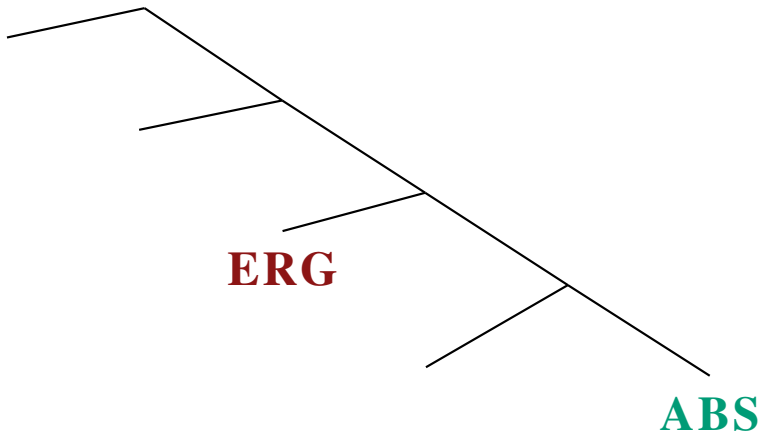

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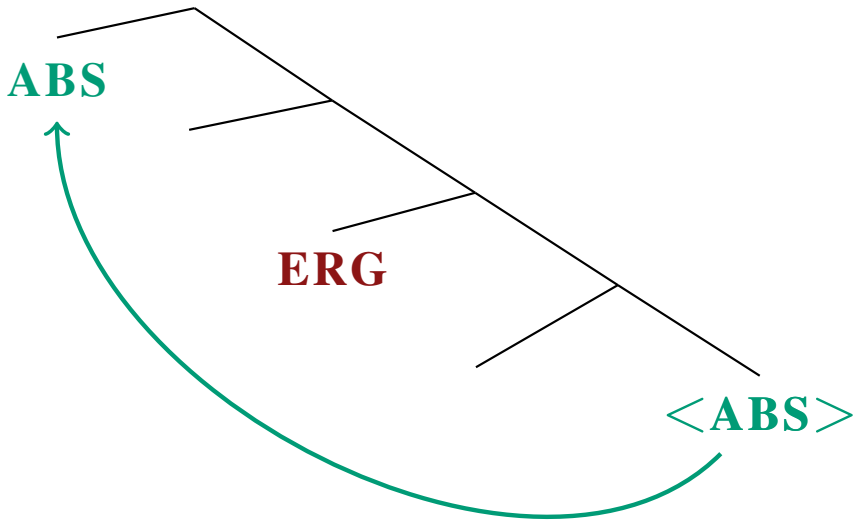

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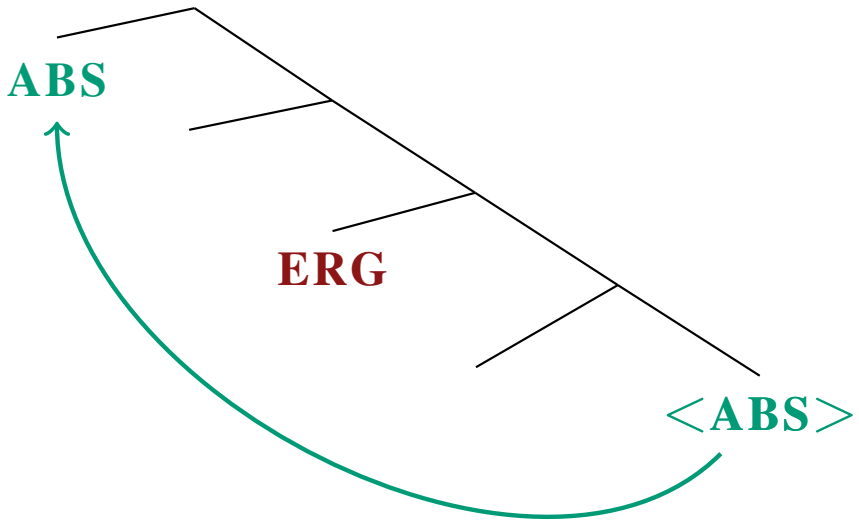

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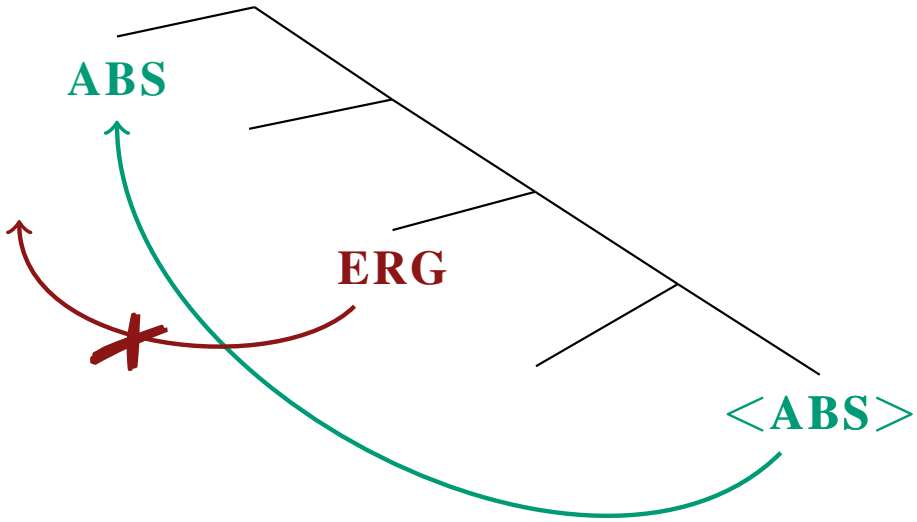

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Confirmed by West Circassian.

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Ø-Ø-je-**zə-**tə-ʁe]				-r
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BUT displays a number of other syntactic ergativity effects

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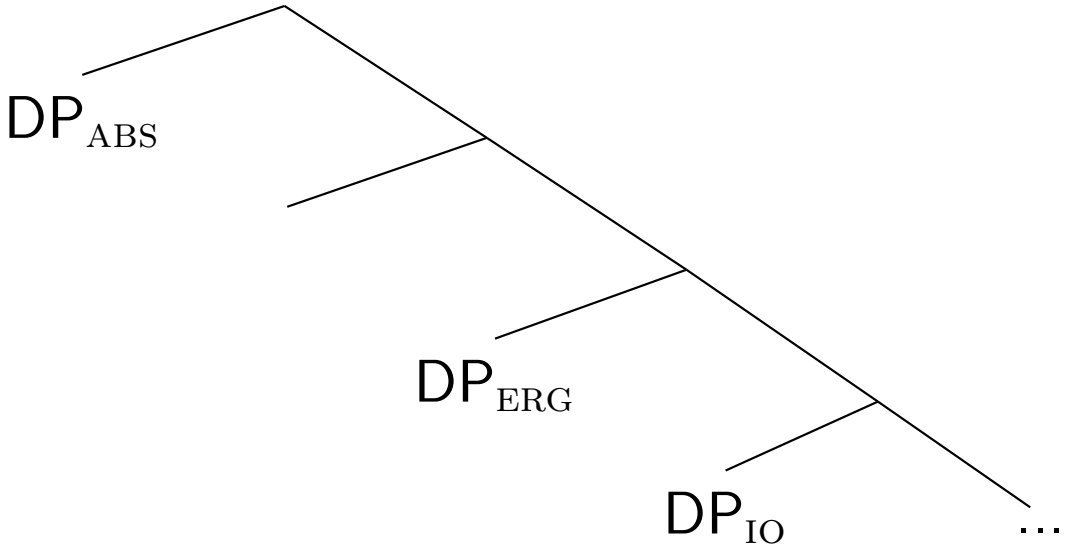

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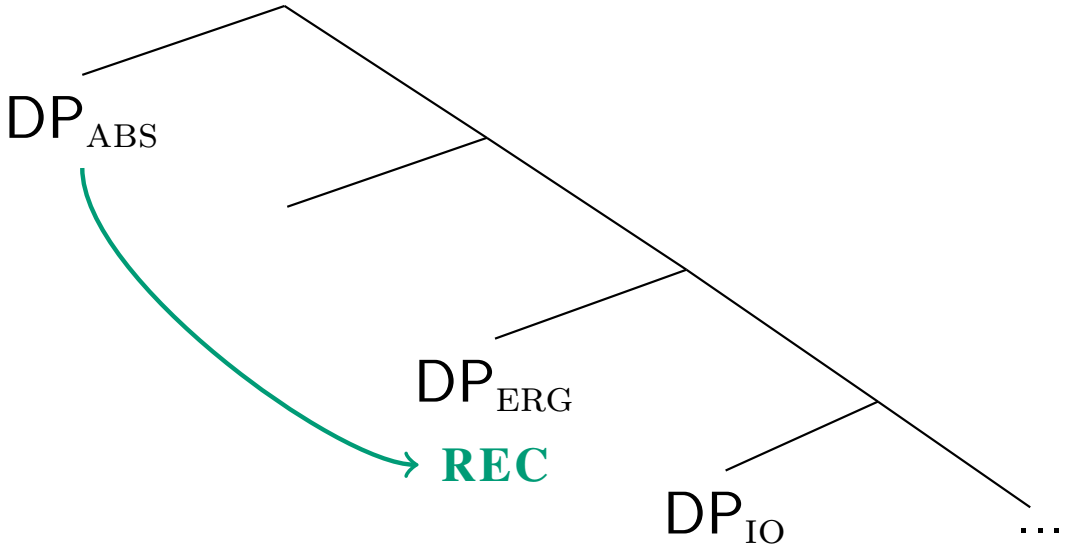

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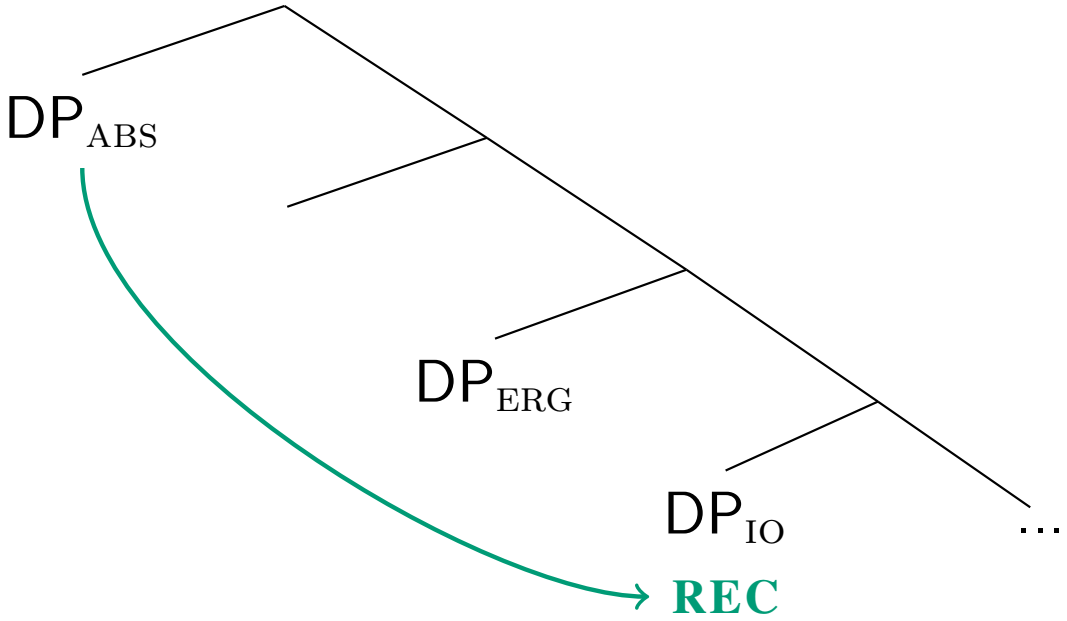

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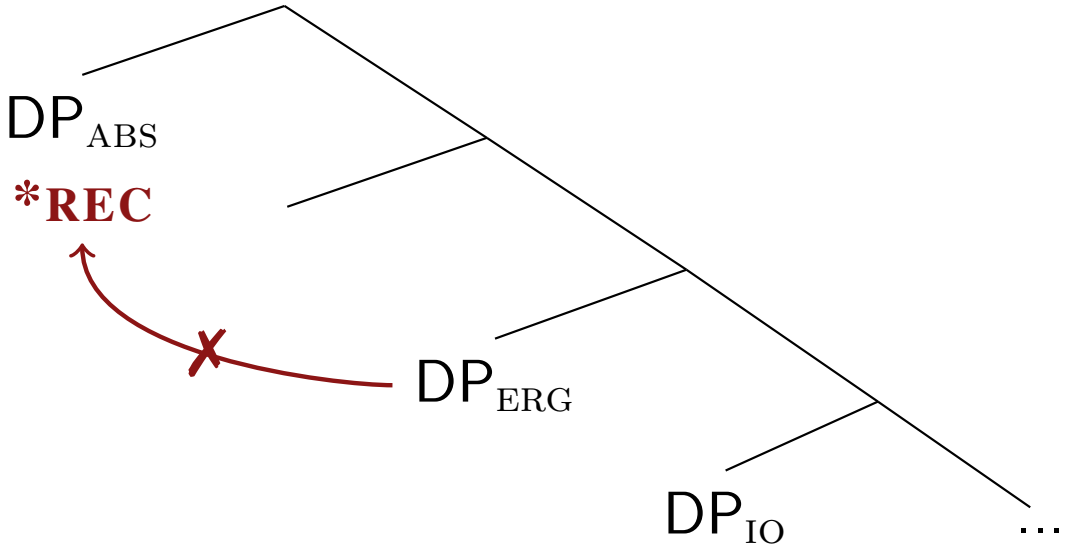

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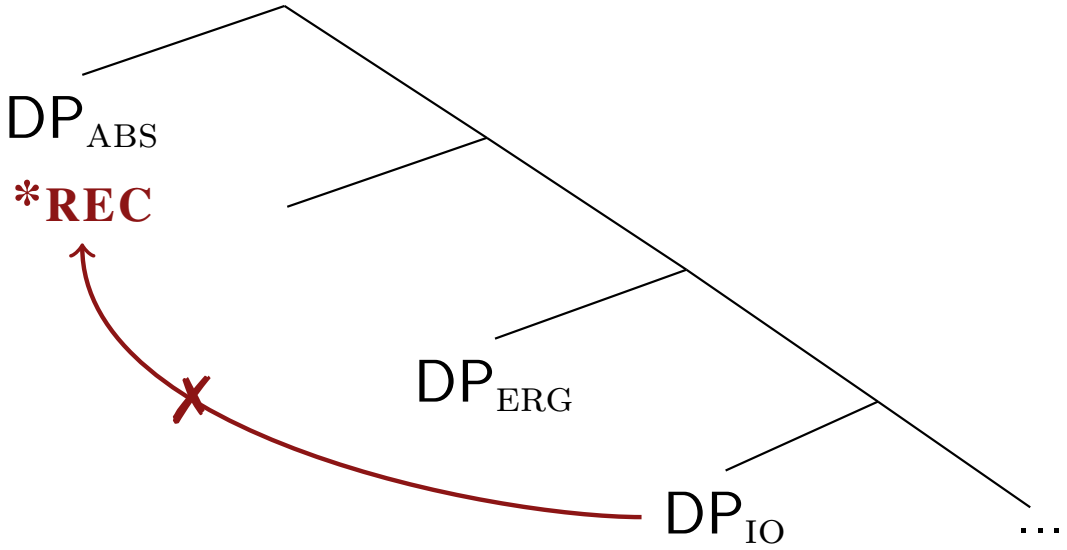

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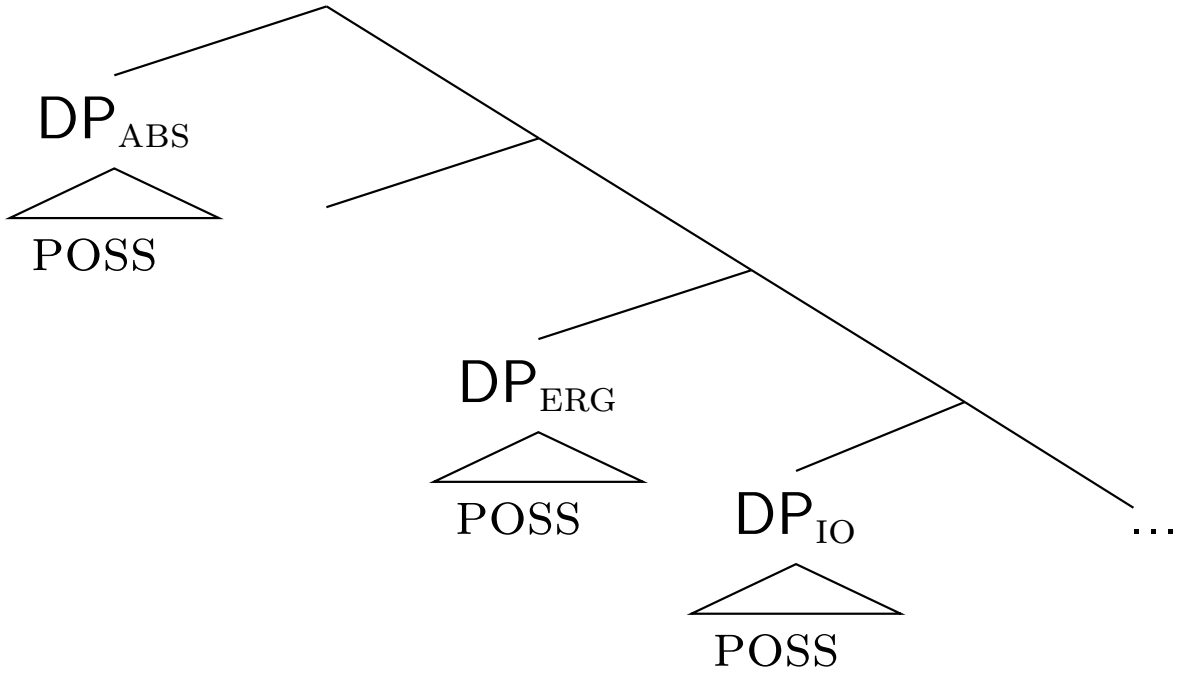

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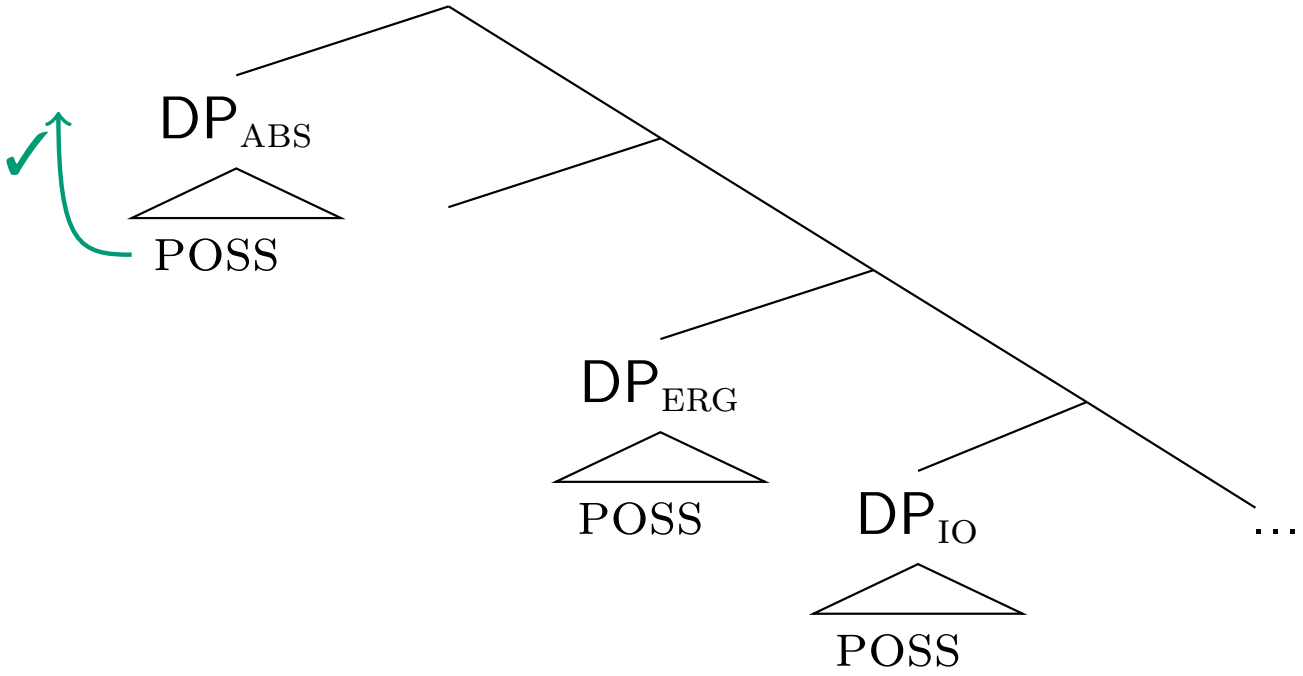

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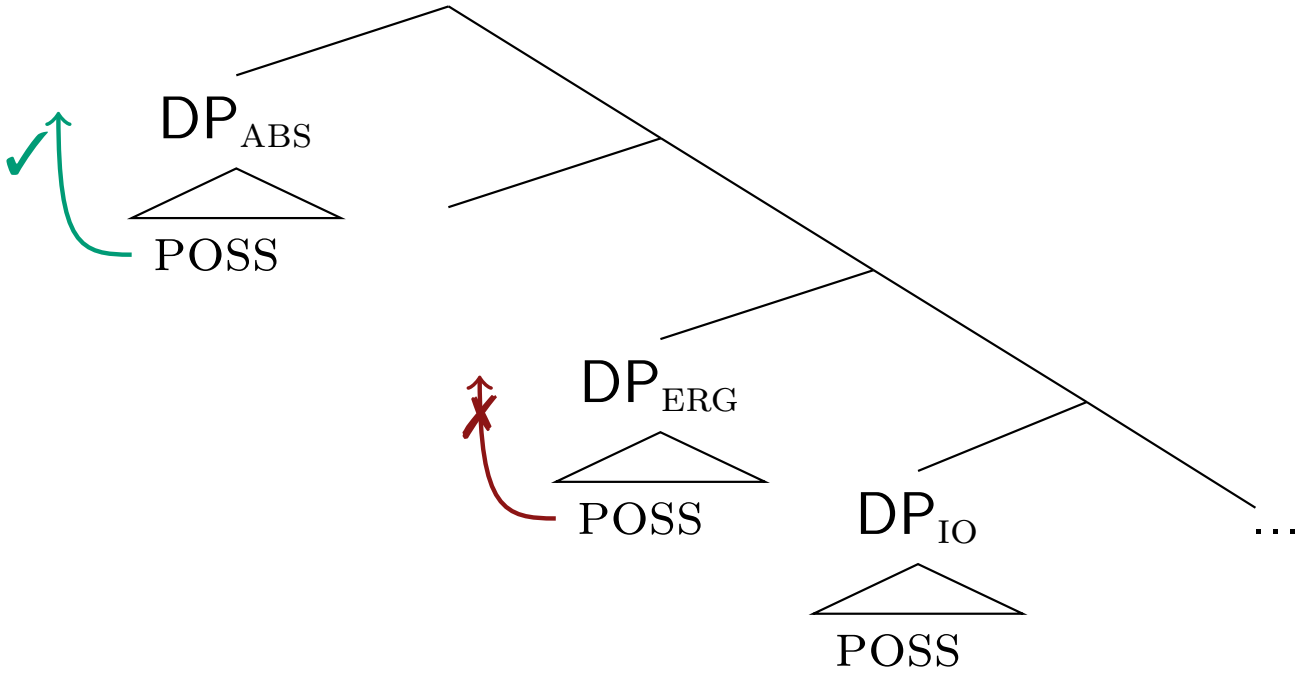

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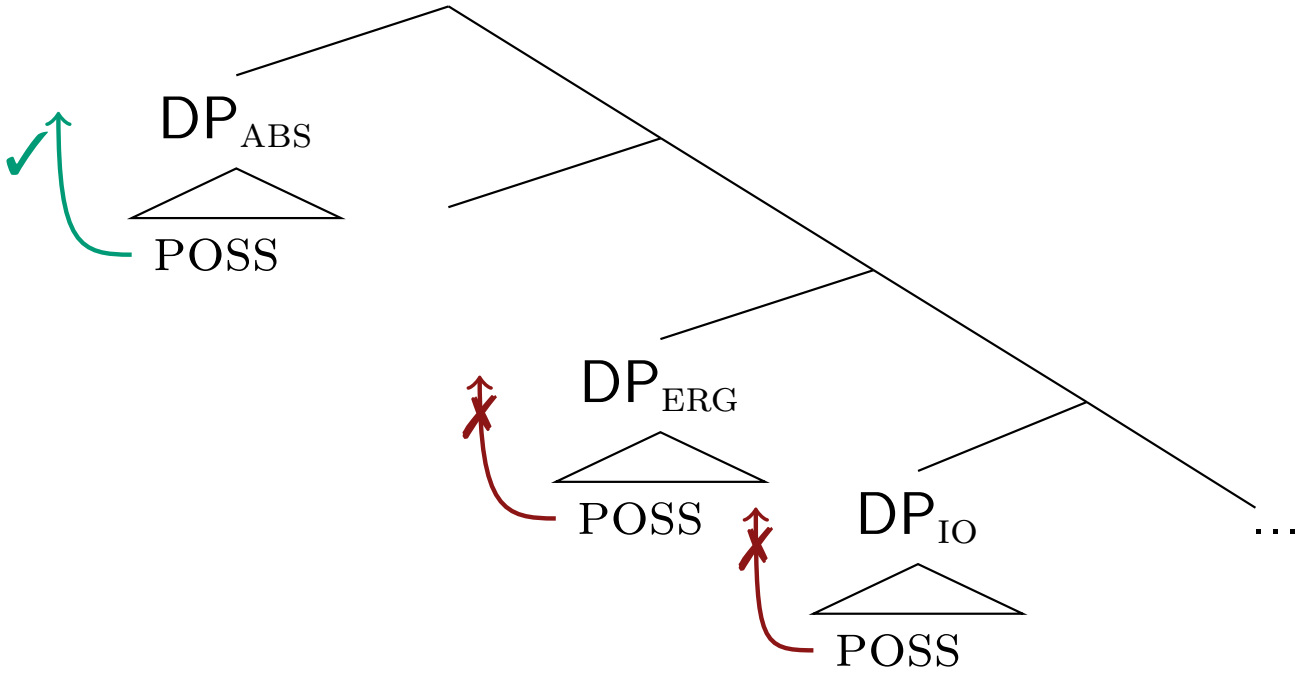

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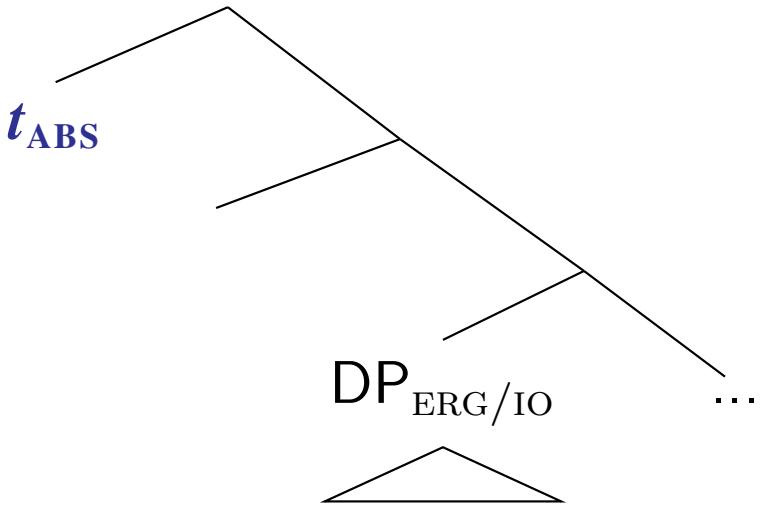

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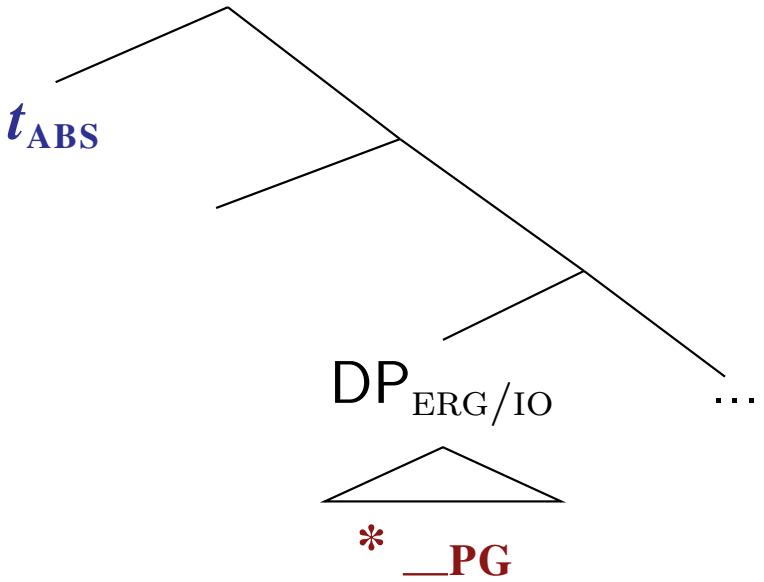

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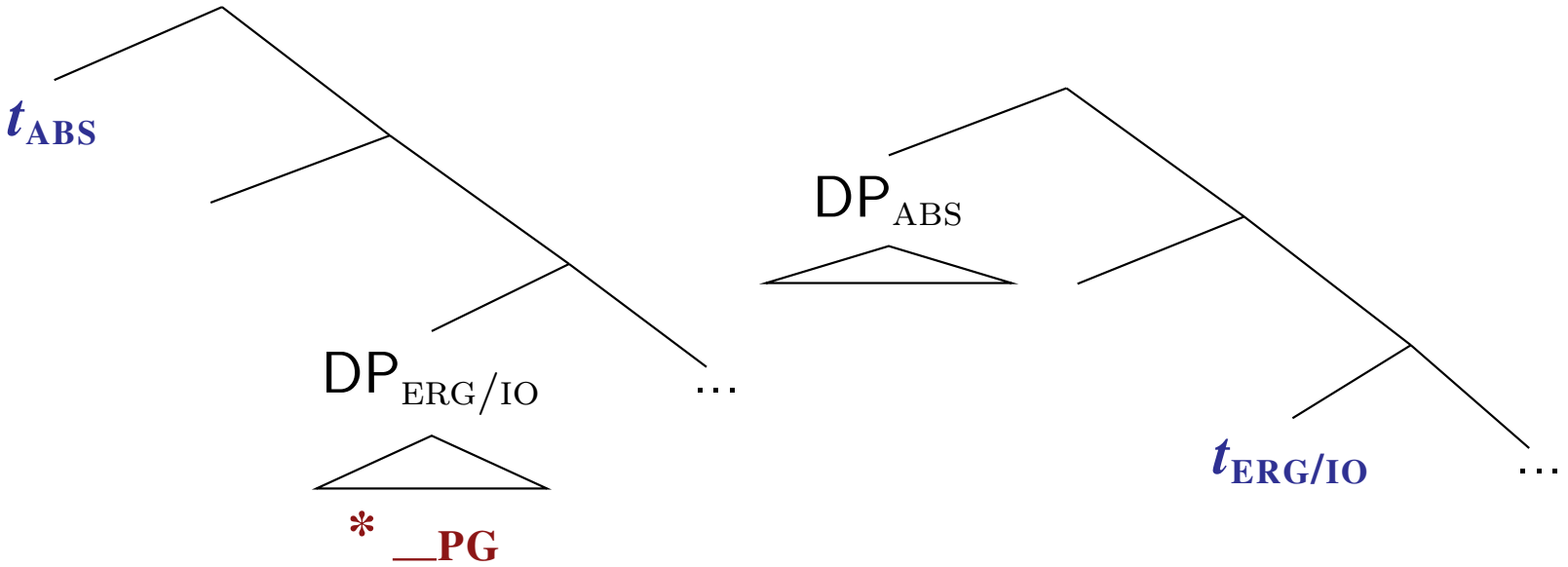

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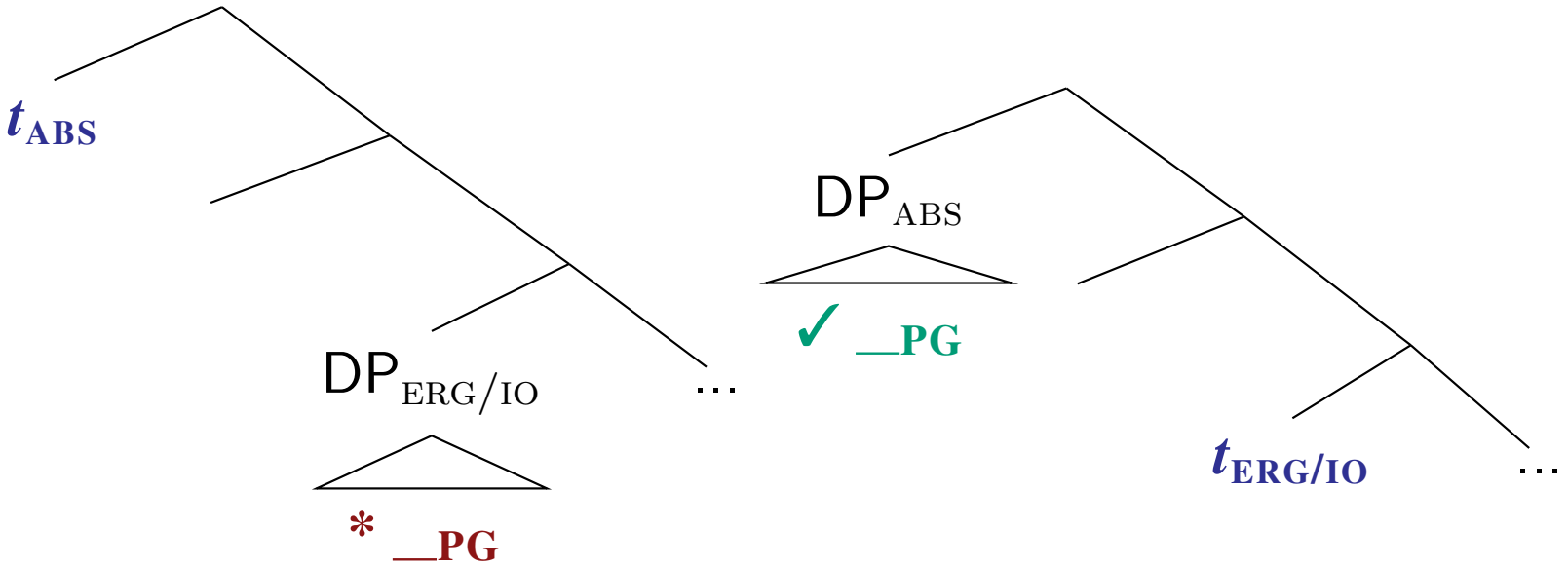

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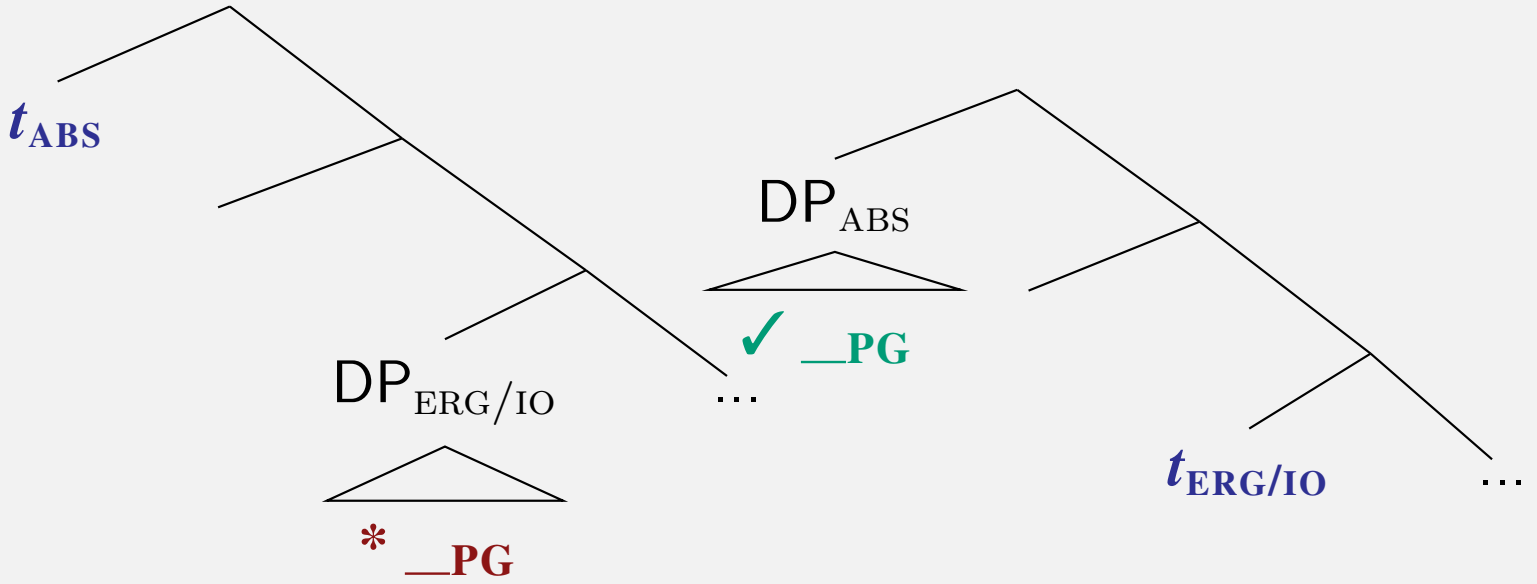
2. only ABS is transparent for possessor extraction (Ershova 2020)

3. anti-c-command condition: ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps (Ershova 2019, 2021a)



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Broad syntactic ergativity is evidence for **high absolutive** syntax.

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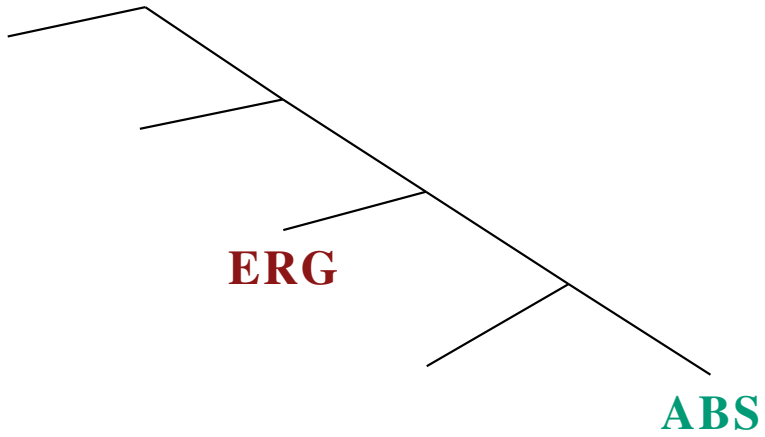

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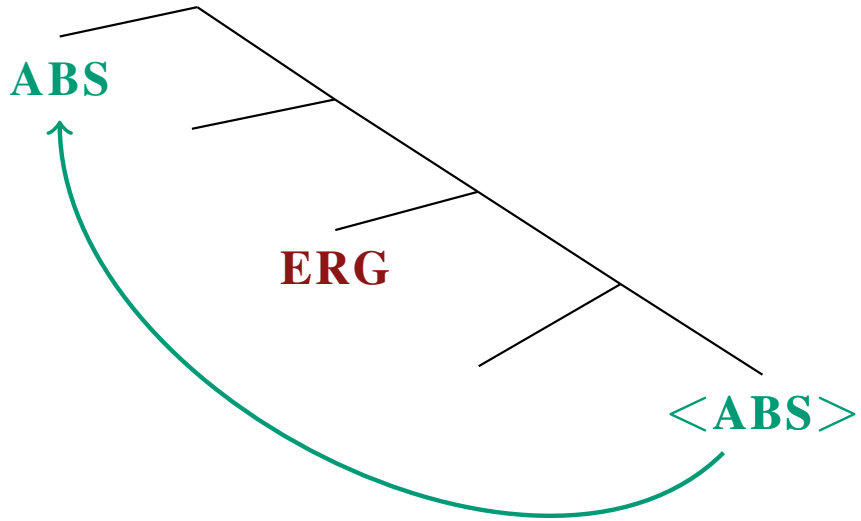

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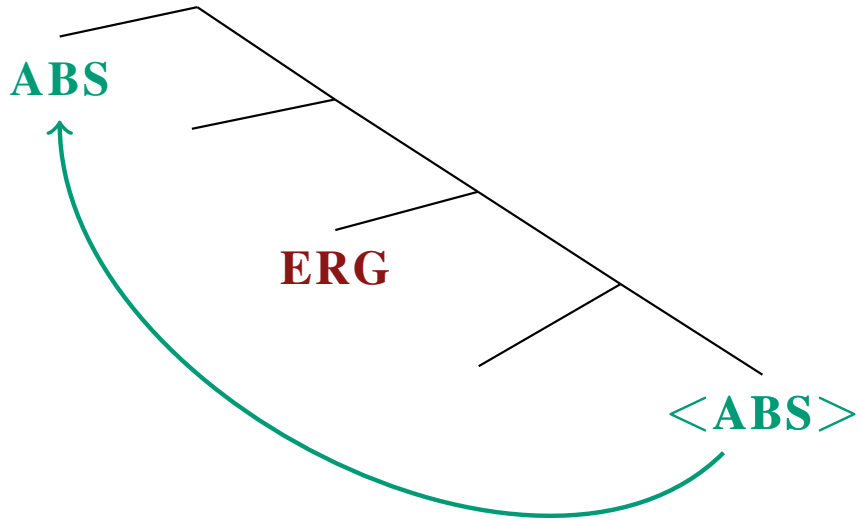

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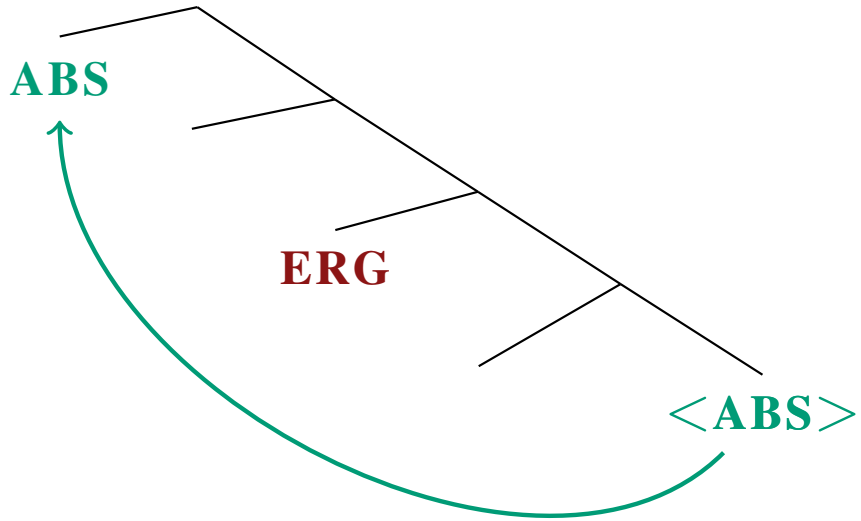

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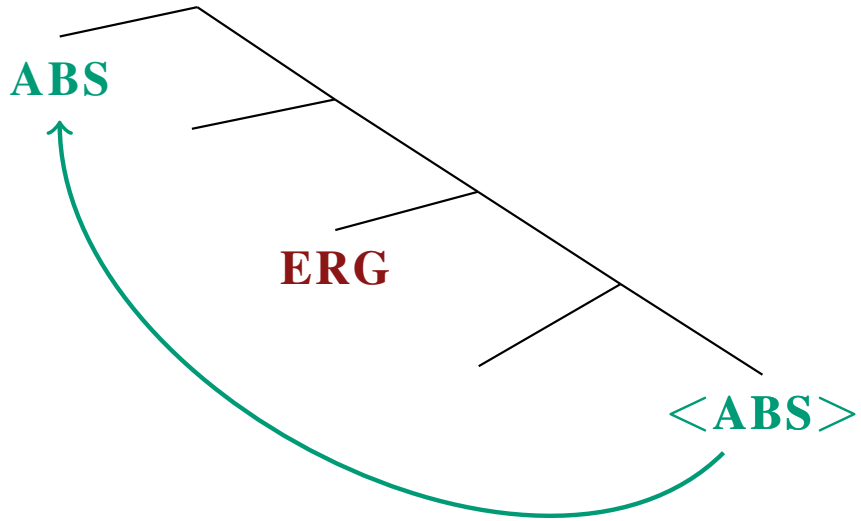

The raised absolutive:

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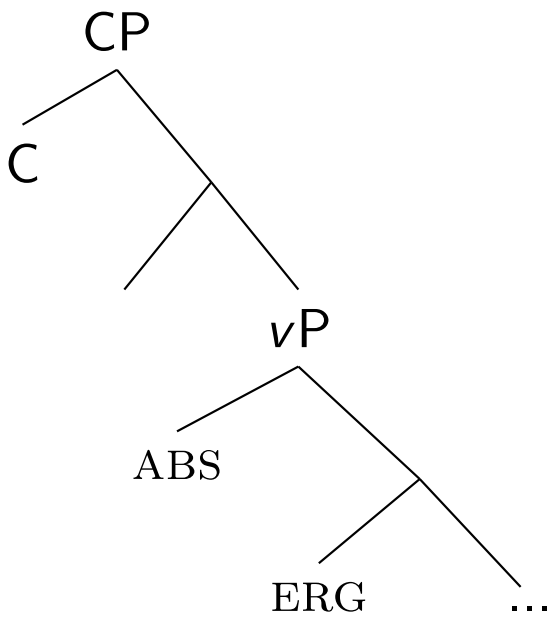

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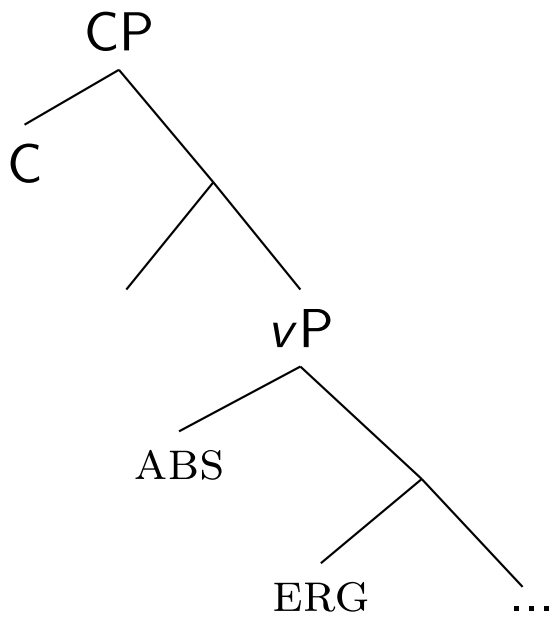

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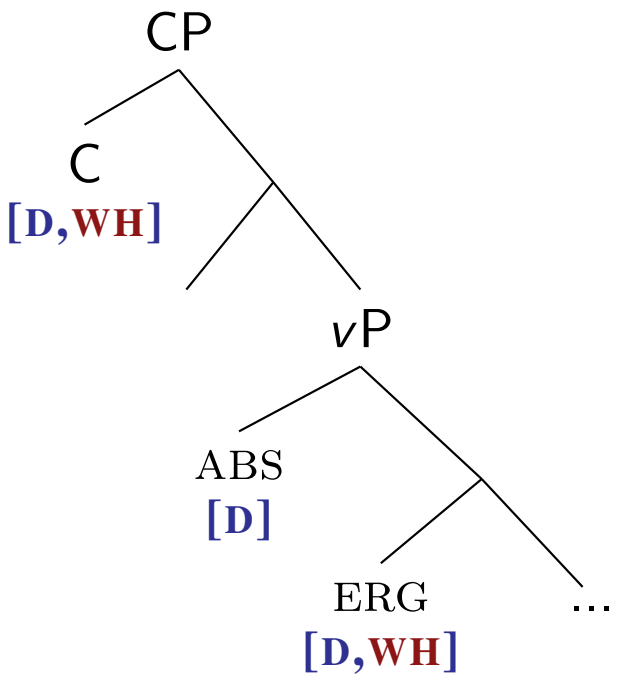

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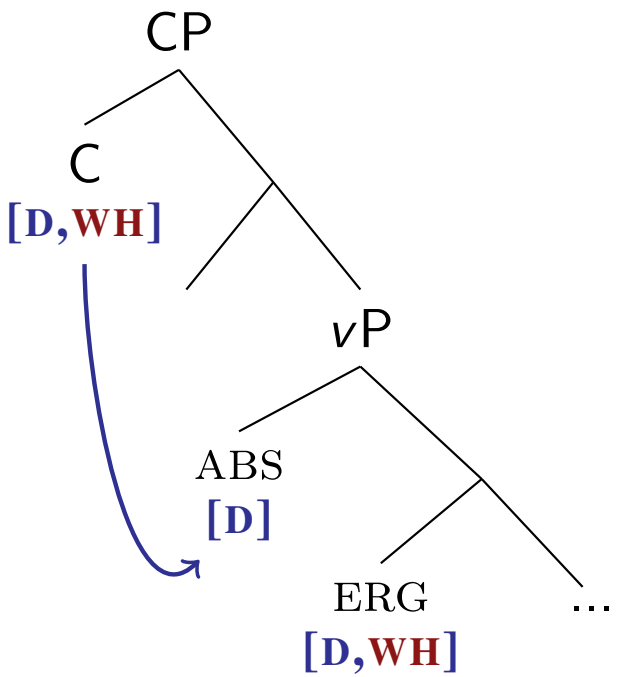

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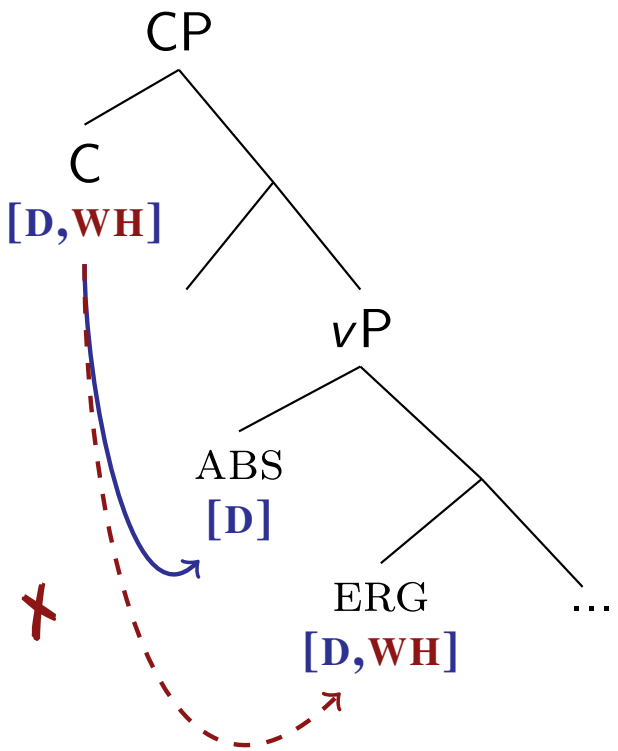

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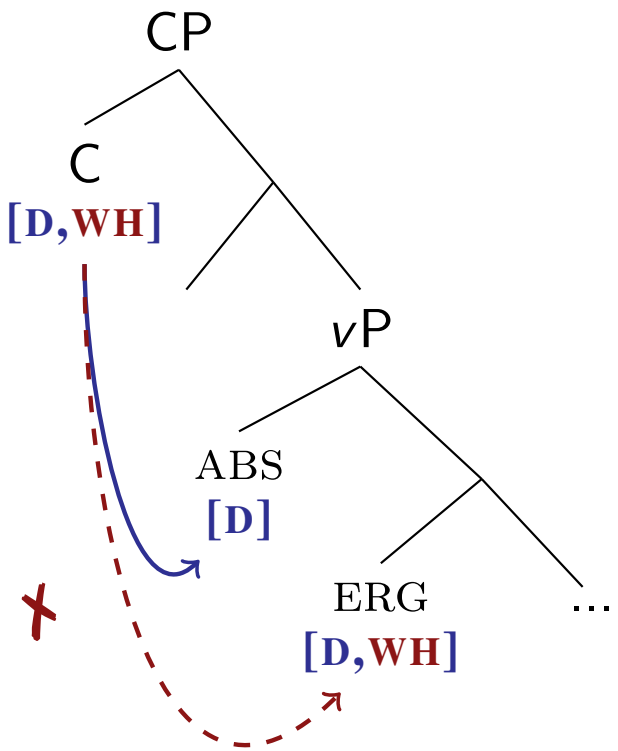

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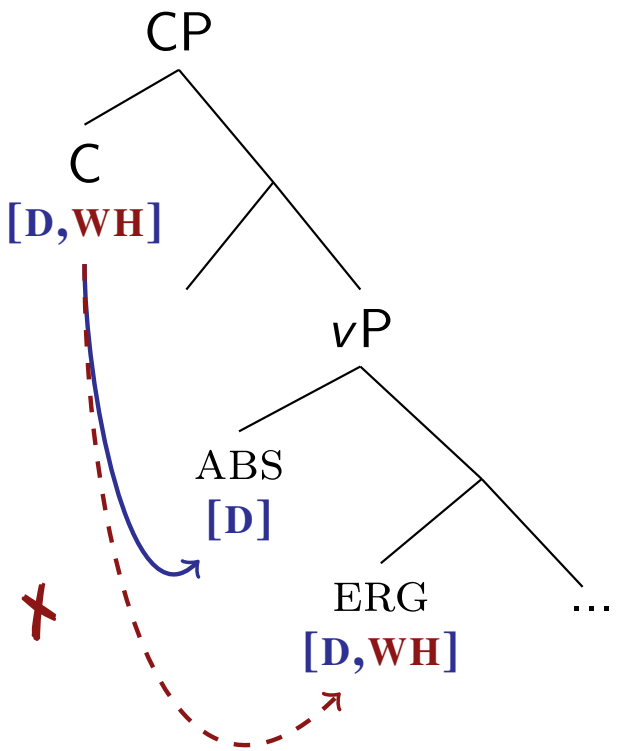

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In most languages, the wh-probe is not relativized for [D].
Predicts high ABS languages with no ban on ERG extraction.

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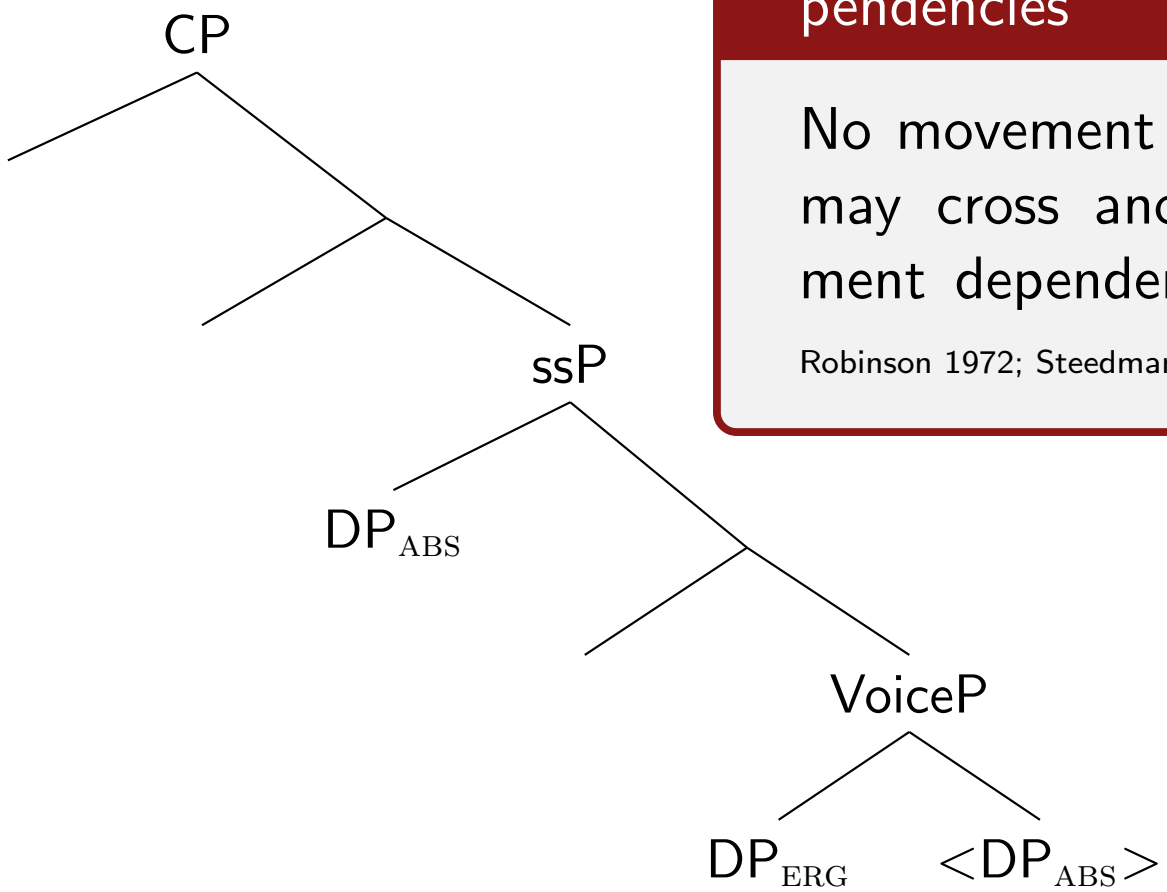

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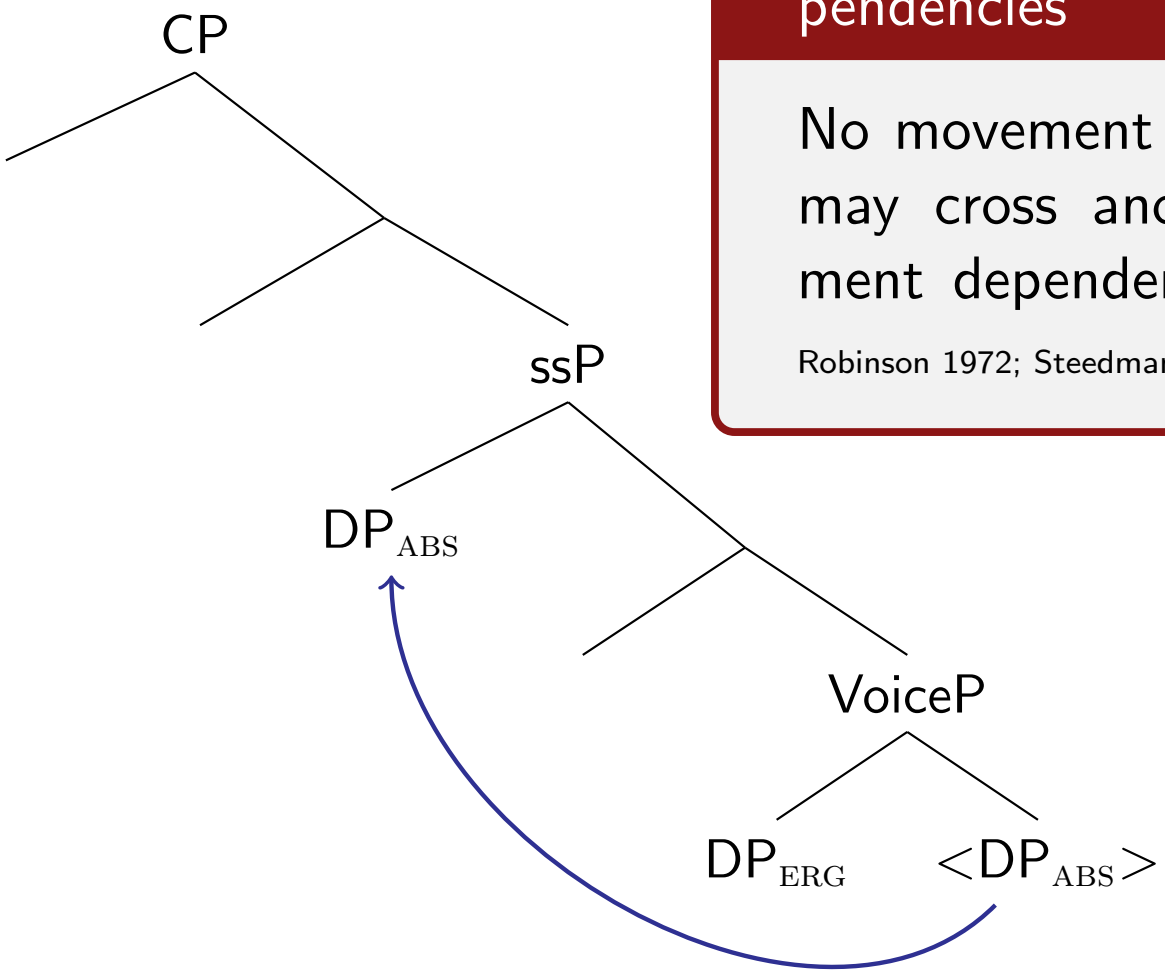

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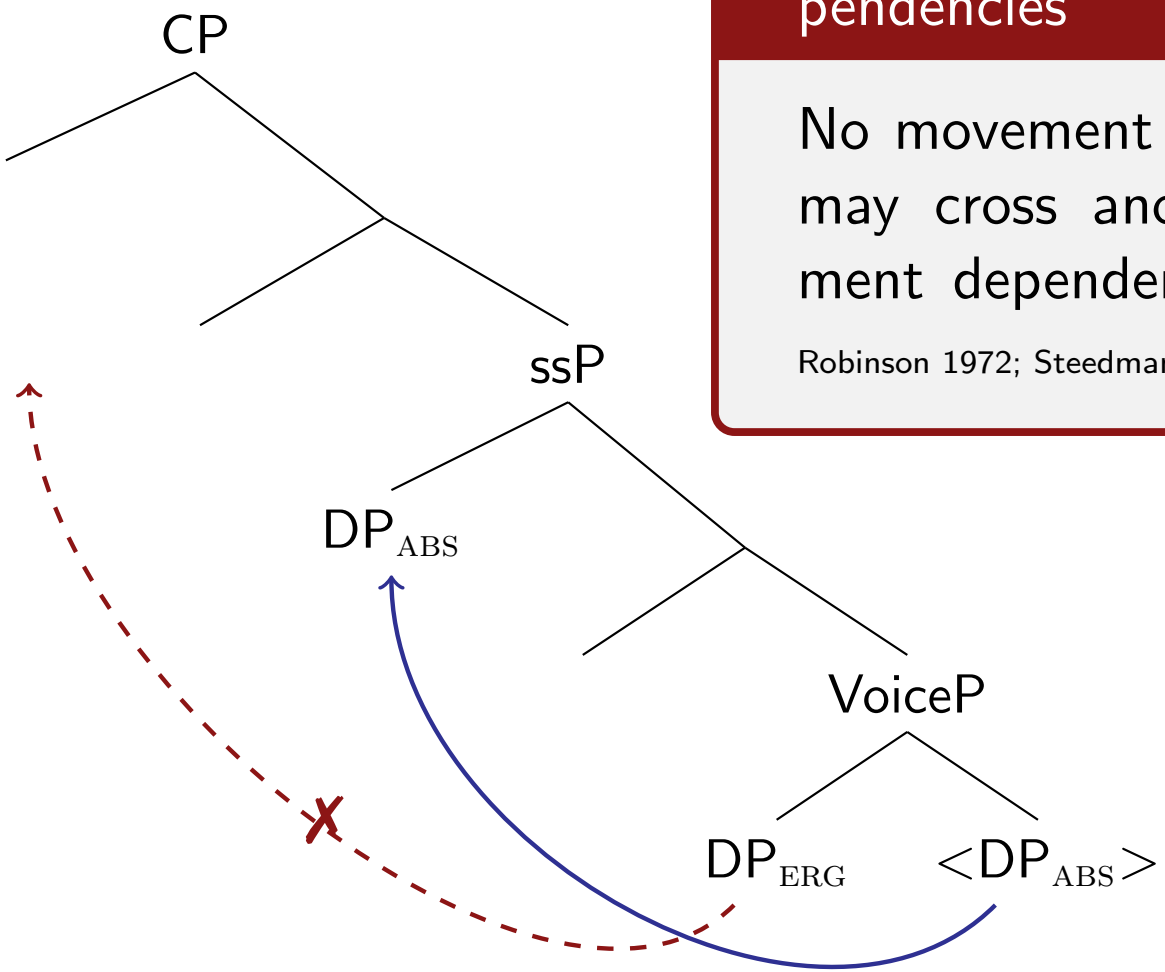

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Does not predict universal correlation between high absolutive and ergative extraction constraint.

> Allows for possibility of high ABS language without a ban on crossing dependencies, i.e. no ban ERG extraction.

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   > Predicts ***tendency*** for high absolutive to correlate with ergative extraction constraint.
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   > Leaves space for counterexamples.

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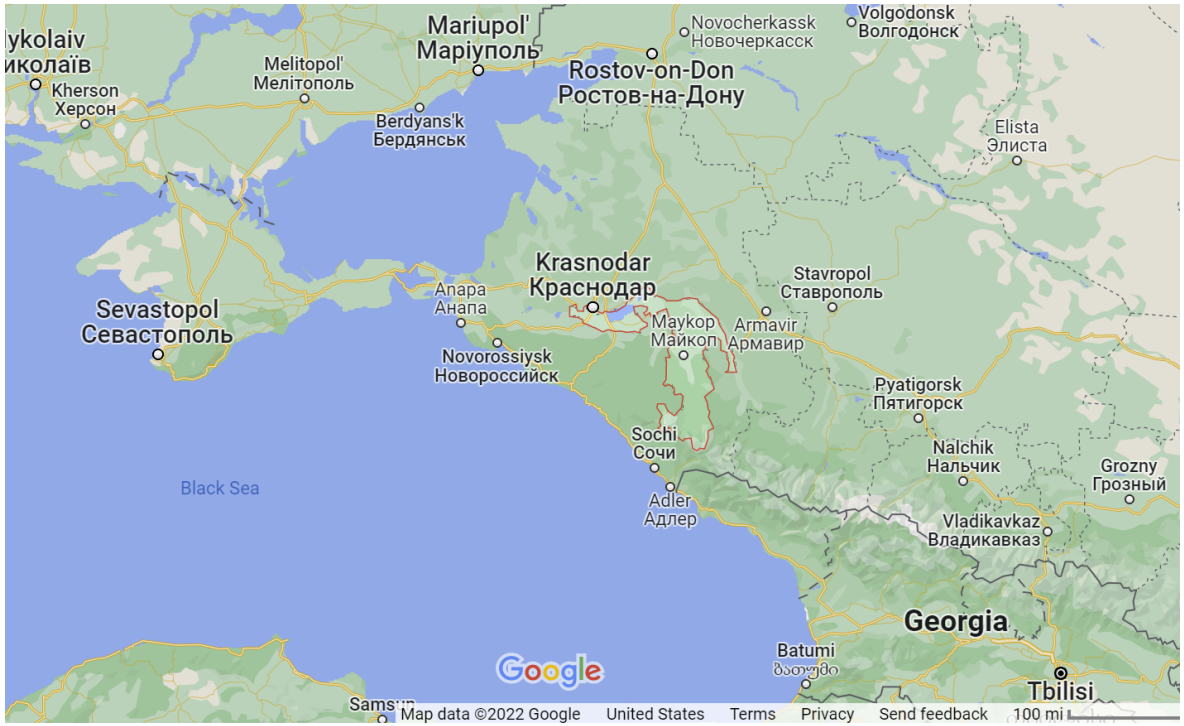

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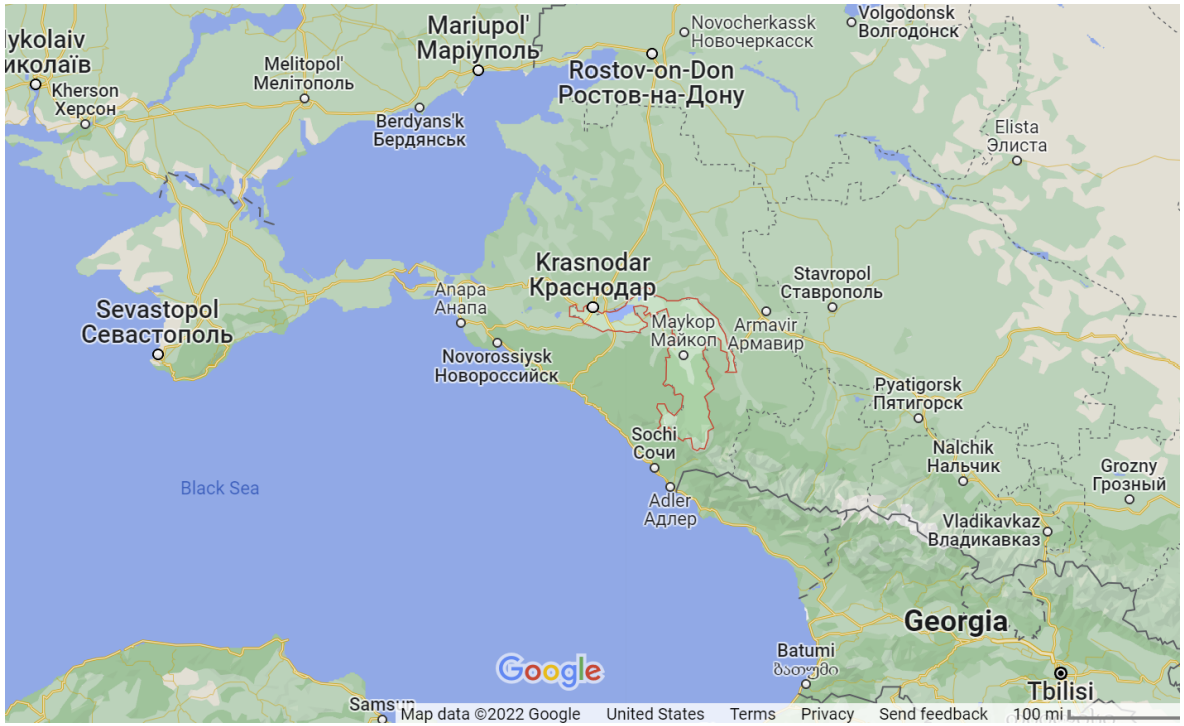

Data from fieldwork on **Temirgoy dialect** in the Shovgenovsky district of Adygea, collected during three trips in 2017-2019.

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Head marking and pro-drop:

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

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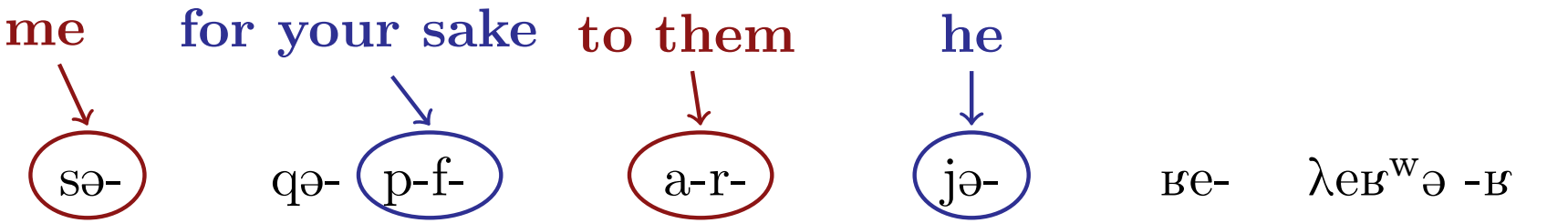

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sə-	qə-	p-f-	a-r-	jə-	ʁe-	λeʁʷə	-ʁ
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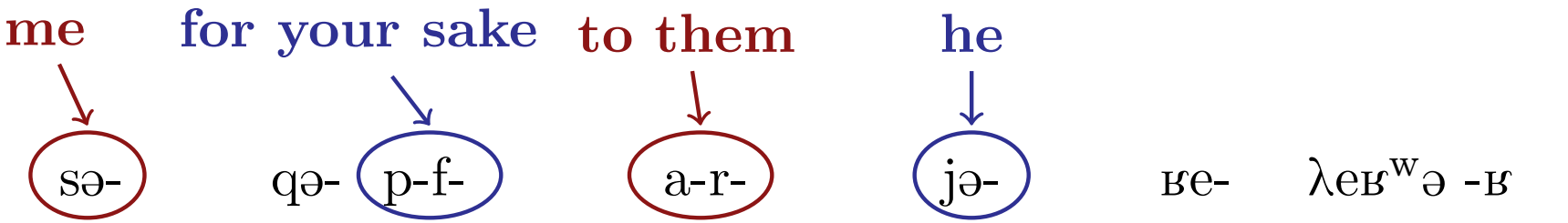

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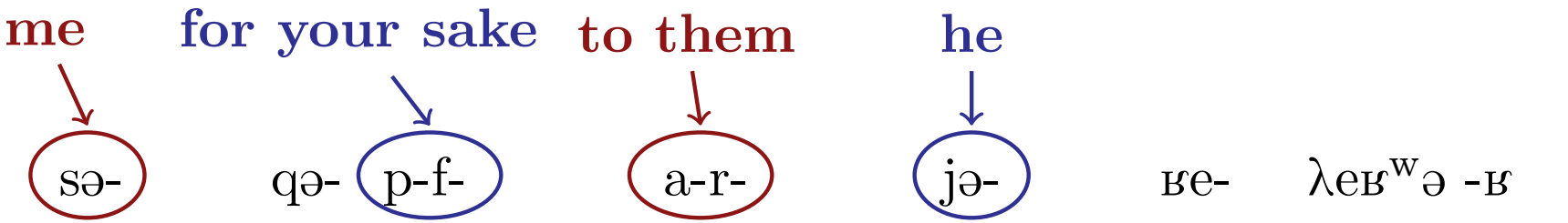

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Agreement order:

S/O-	**IO-**	**A-**
ABS-	**IO+APPL-**	**ERG-**

Head marking on nominals

Head marking on nominals

s-	šəpχ^{w}əxer
1sg.poss-	sister.PL.ABS

‘my sisters’

INALIENABLE

Head marking on nominals

s-	šəpχ^{w}əxer	
1SG.POSS-	sister.PL.ABS	
‘my sisters’		**INALIENABLE**
t-	**jə-**	ʁ^{w}əneʁ^{w}əxem
1PL.POSS-	**ALIEN-**	neighbor.PL.OBL
‘our neighbors’		**ALIENABLE**

Case marking is ergative

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):

Case marking is ergative

-r (ABS):

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

mə	pŝaŝe-**r**	daxew	qaŝ^{w}e
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):

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

-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**)

ǯeg^{w}ə-**m**	səqəš'əŝ^{w}aʁep
wedding-**OBL**	I didn't dance

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

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**)
- possessor

mə	ŝʷəzə-**m**	Ø-jə-pŝaŝe
this	woman-**OBL**	3SG.POSS-ALIEN-girl

'this woman's daughter'

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**)
- possessor
- complement of postposition

mə pŝaŝe-**m** paje
this girl-**OBL** for

'for this girl'

Structure of relative clauses

Structure of relative clauses

Relativization = only type of wh-movement

Structure of relative clauses

Relativization = only type of wh-movement

FINITE CLAUSE:

a-š’		txəλə-r			[	mə	ç̣əfə-m	]
that-OBL		book-ABS				this	person-OBL	
Ø-	**Ø-**	r-	jə-	tə-ʁ				
3ABS-	**3SG.IO-**	DAT-	3SG.ERG-	give-PST				

‘S/he gave a book to this person.’

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3ABS-	**3SG.IO-**	DAT-	3SG.ERG-	give-PST			

‘S/he gave a book to this person.’

RELATIVE CLAUSE:

[txəλə-r	**__IO**	Ø-	**ze-**	r-	jə-	tə-ʁe	]	ç̣əfə-r
book-ABS		3ABS-	**WH.IO-**	DAT-	3SG.ERG-	give-PST		person-ABS

‘the person to whom s/he gave the book’ **IO WH-MOVT**

Structure of relative clauses

Relativization = only type of wh-movement

FINITE CLAUSE:

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that-OBL	book-ABS		this person-OBL	

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3ABS- **3SG.IO-** DAT- 3SG.ERG- give-PST

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RELATIVE CLAUSE:

[txəλə-r **__IO**] Ø- **ze-** r- jə- tə-ʁe ç̣əfə-r

book-ABS 3ABS- **WH.IO-** DAT- 3SG.ERG- give-PST person-ABS

WH-MOVEMENT

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RELATIVE CLAUSE:

WH-AGREEMENT

[txəλə-r	**__IO**	Ø-	**ze-**	r-	jə-	tə-ʁe	]	ç̣əfə-r
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No ergative extraction constraint

(Lander 2012:274-276)

No ergative extraction constraint

χərbəzew	[	**___ABS**	a-š’	**Ø-**	ə-	bzə-ʁe-r]
watermellon			that-OBL	**WH.ABS-**	3SG.ERG-	cut-PST-ABS

‘the watermelon that he cut’

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book-ABS		3ABS-	**WH.IO-**	DAT-	3SG.ERG-	give-PST		person-ABS

‘the person to whom s/he gave the book’ **✓IO WH-MOVT**

č̣’alew	[	apč’ə-r	**__ERG**	Ø-	**zə-**	q^wəta-ʁe-m]	
boy		glass-ABS		3ABS-	**WH.ERG-**	break-PST-OBL	

‘the boy that broke the glass’

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watermellon			that-OBL	WH.ABS-	3SG.ERG-		cut-PST-ABS

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Broader syntactic ergativity in West Circassian

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Case study: constraints on parasitic gaps

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- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
- Background on West Circassian
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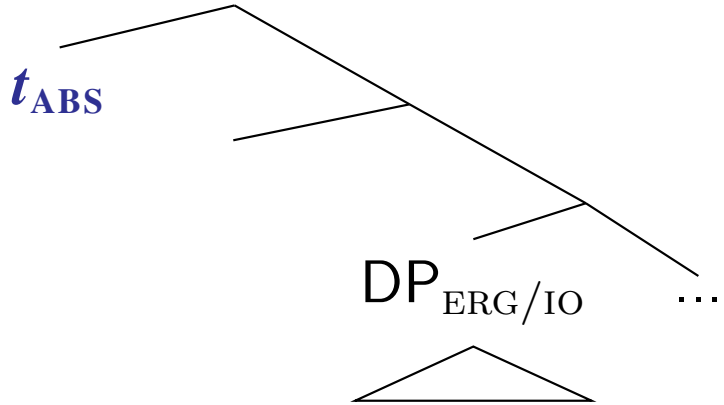

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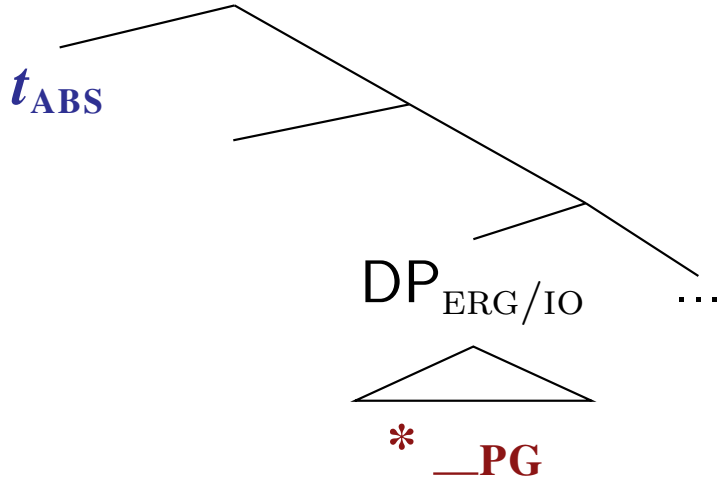

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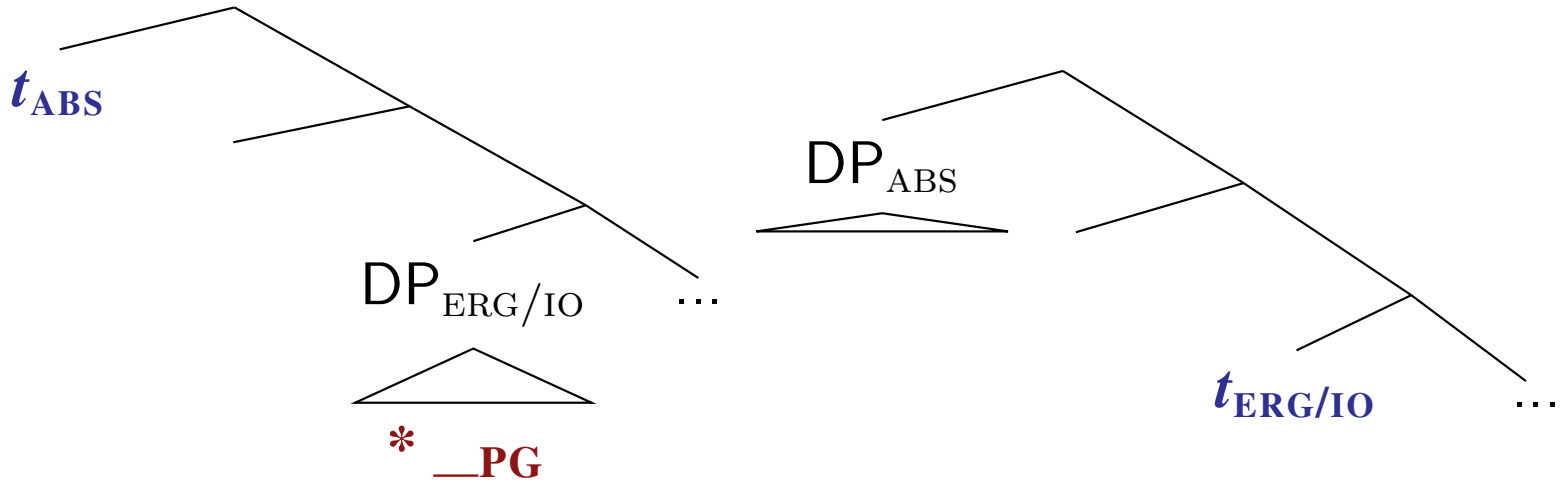

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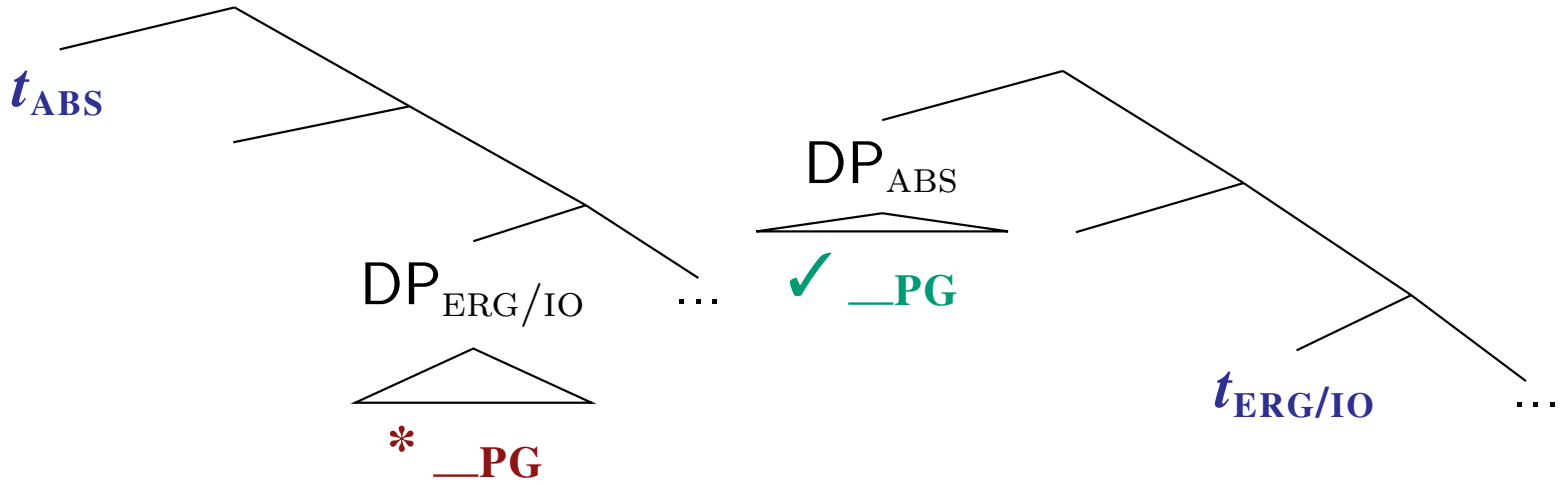

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The Anti-C-Command Condition

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"A parasitic gap may not be c-commanded by the real gap."

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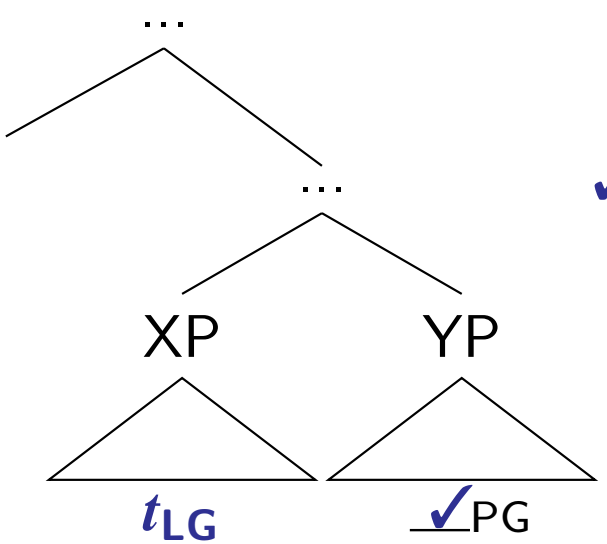

✓**parasitic gap**

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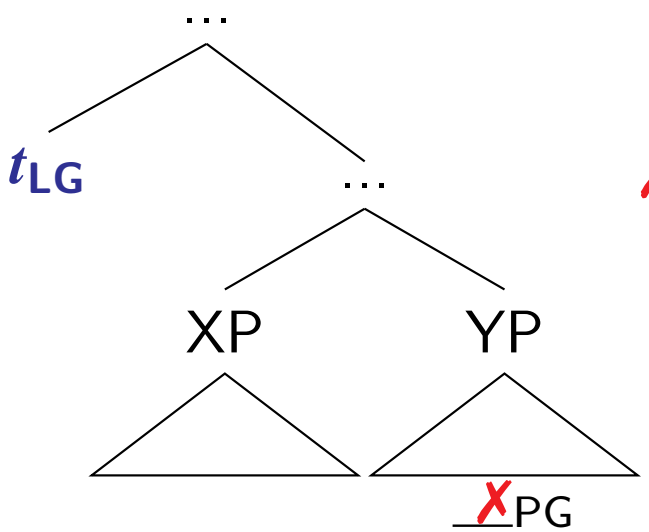

✗parasitic gap

The anti-c-command condition in English

object doesn't c-command adjunct ⇒ can license parasitic gap

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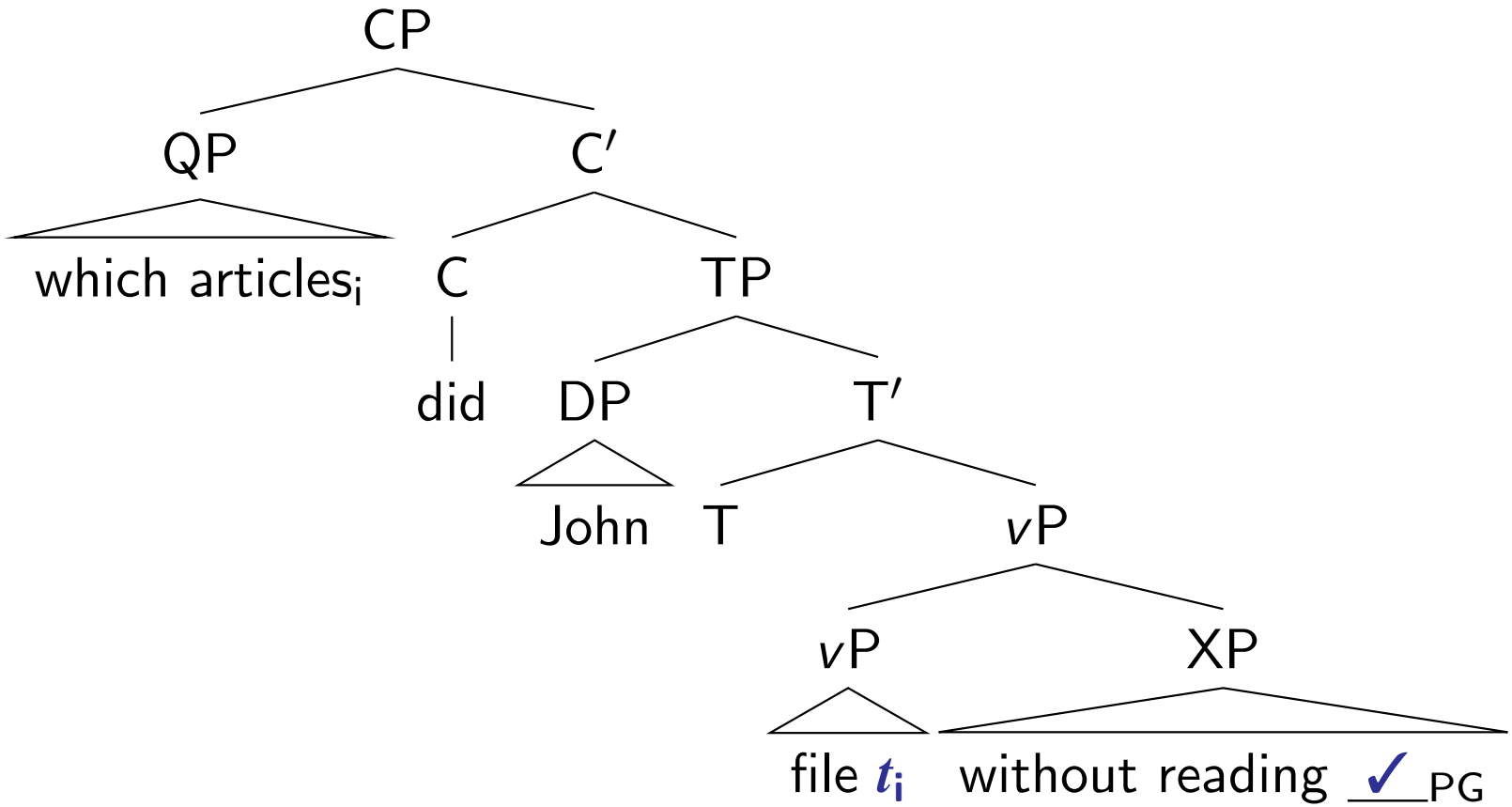

The anti-c-command condition in English

subject c-commands adjunct $\Rightarrow$ cannot license parasitic gap

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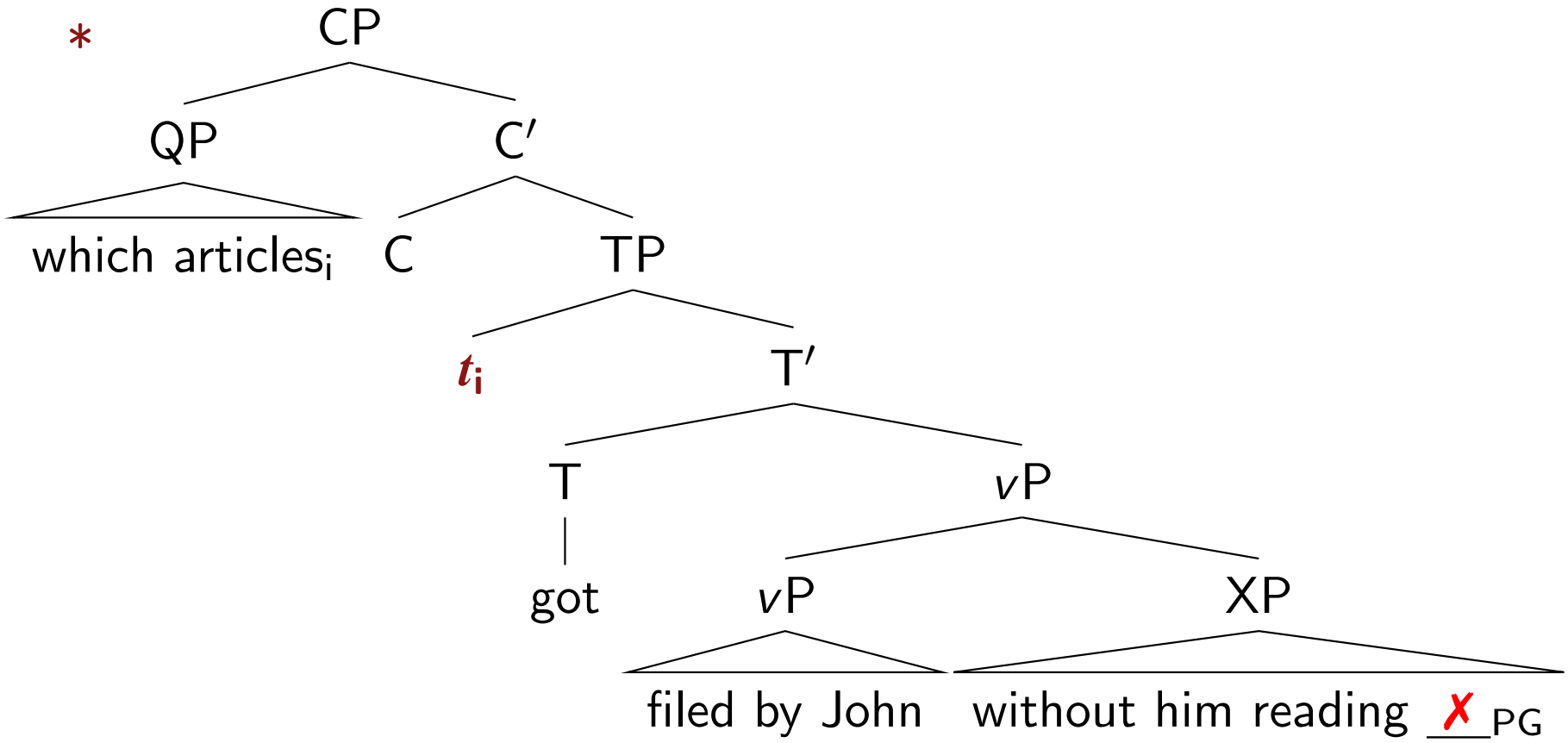
subject c-commands adjunct ⇒ cannot license parasitic gap



Parasitic gaps in West Circassian

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- A pronoun that is bound by relativized participant may be replaced by a parasitic gap

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‘the one Aslan plays with __ all day [without hitting **them**]’

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Op$_i$	asλan		mafem		rjene	
	Aslan		day		whole	
[CP	***pro*$_i$**	Ø-	**Ø-**	je-	məwew	]
		3ABS-	**3SG.IO-**	DAT-	NEG.hit.ADV	
***t*$_i$**	Ø-	**zə-**	de-	žeg^{w}ərer		
	3ABS-	**WH.IO-**	COM-	play.DYN.ABS		

'the one Aslan plays with __ all day [without hitting ___]'

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Possessor parasitic gaps

A relativized participant may license a parasitic gap in place of a bound possessor in a clausemate DP.

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četəwew$_i$	[***pro*$_i$**	**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'

Possessor parasitic gaps

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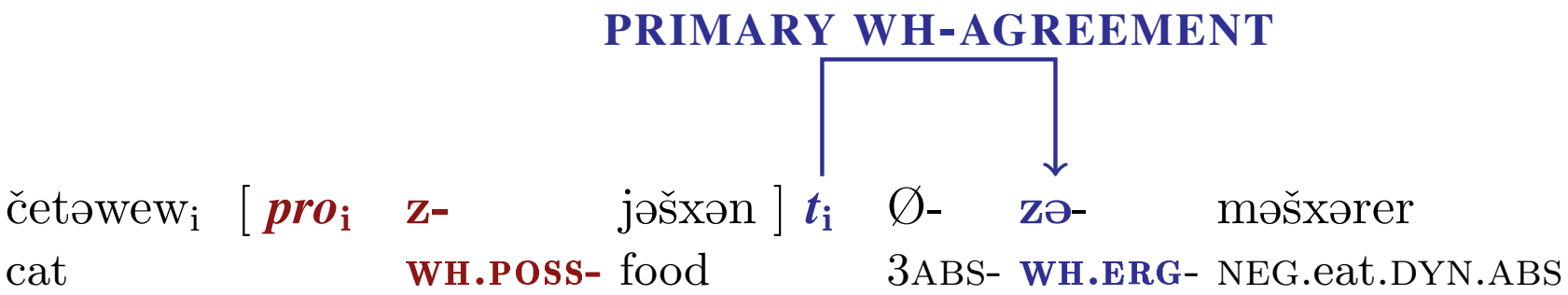

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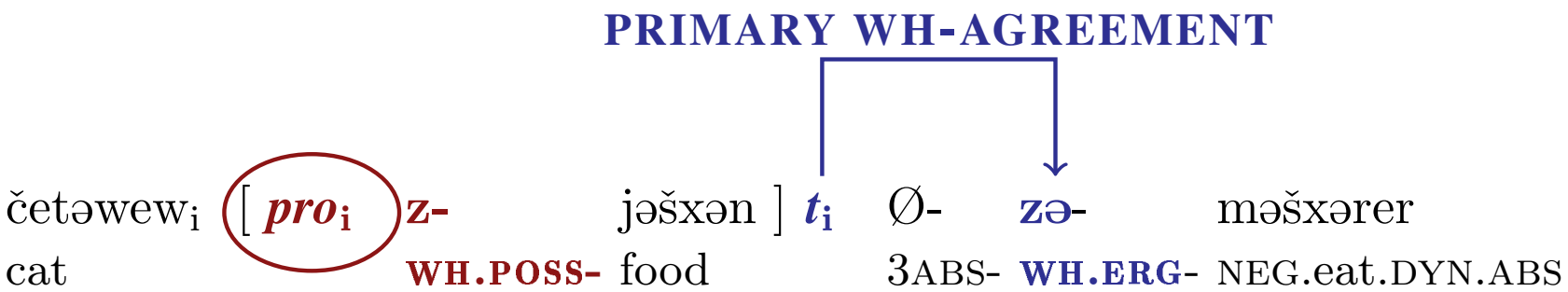

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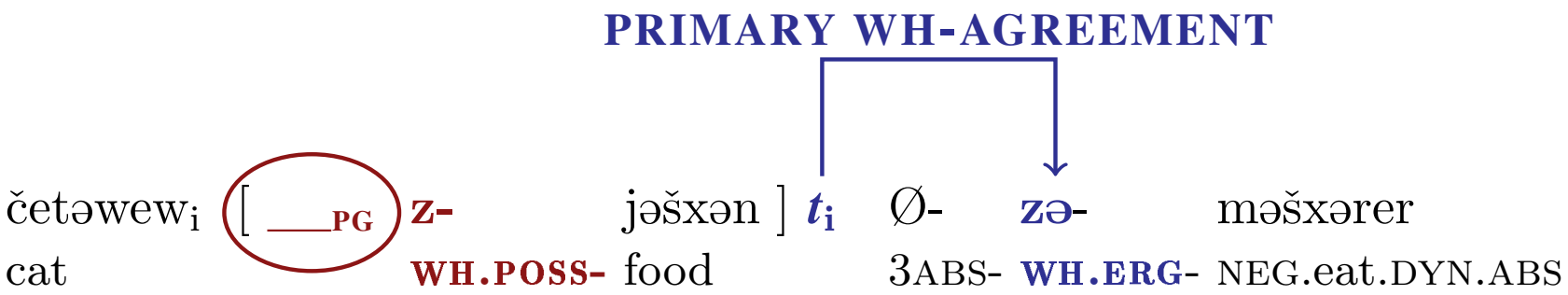

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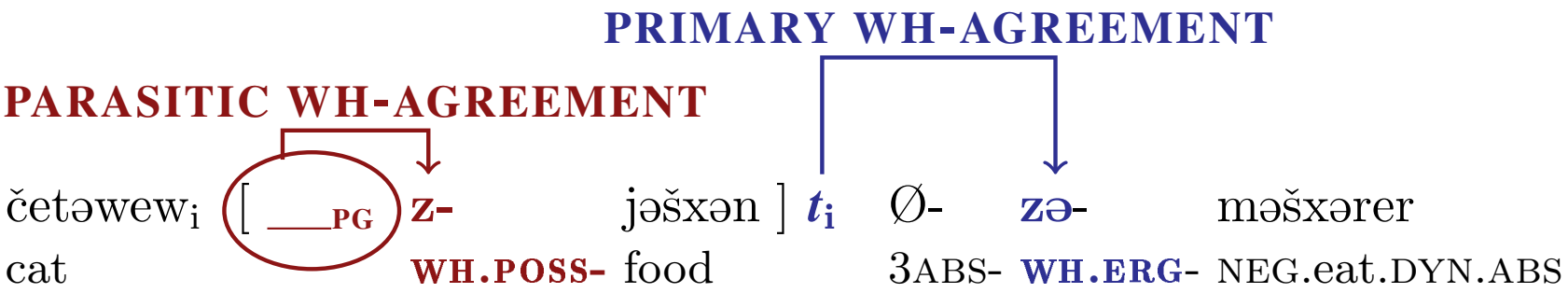

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ABS and the anti-c-command condition

An ABS trace cannot license parasitic gaps in clausemate NPs

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*	č̣’alew$_i$	t_i	[	__PG	ZƏ-	š]	Ø-	qədeḳ^{w}aʁer
	boy				WH.POSS-	brother	WH.ABS-	3SG.IO+COM.go.PST.ABS

‘the boy who arrived together with his brother’

ABS and the anti-c-command condition

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$\Longrightarrow$ **ABS c-commands the possessor**

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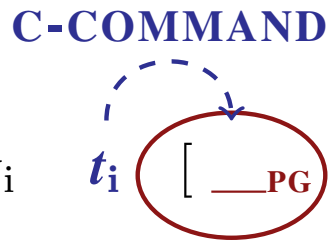

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‘the boy who arrived together with his brother’

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⇒ **ABS c-commands the possessor**

Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps

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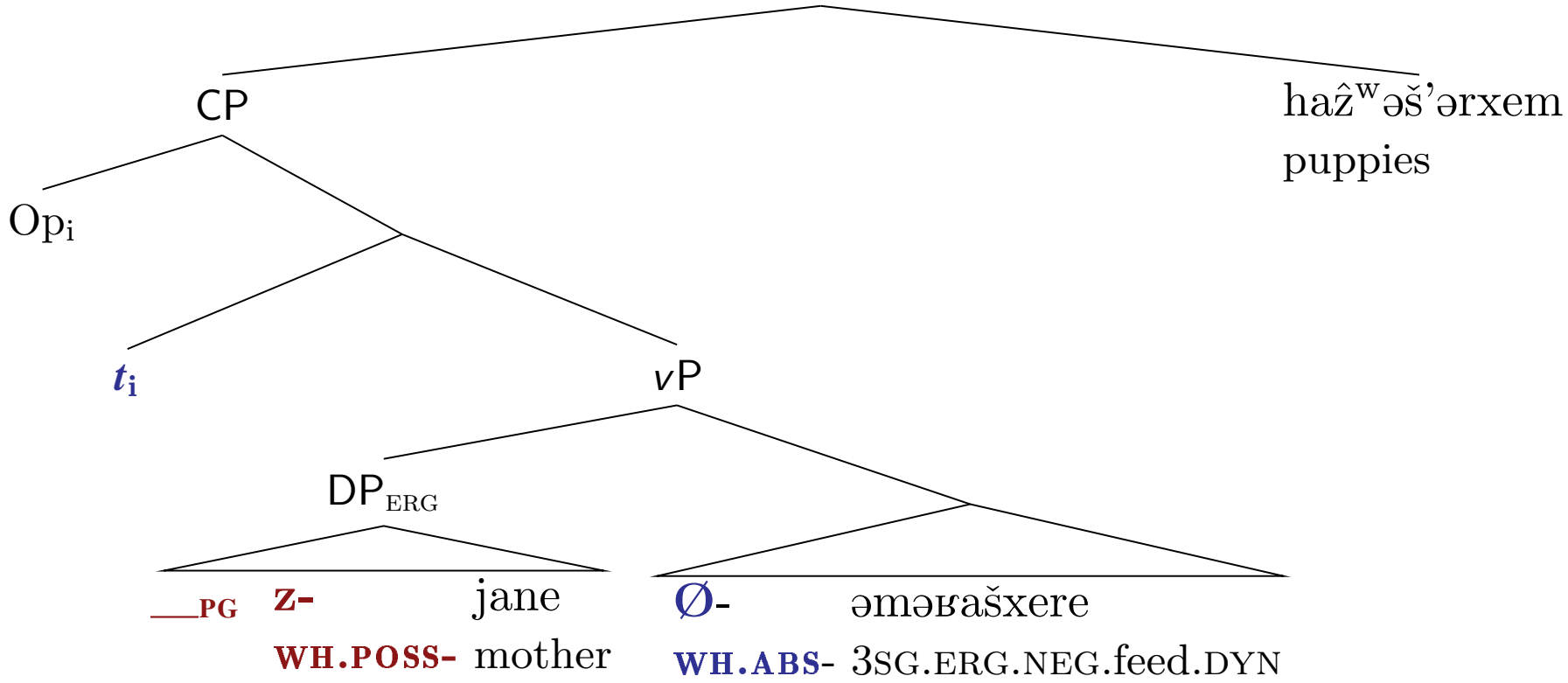
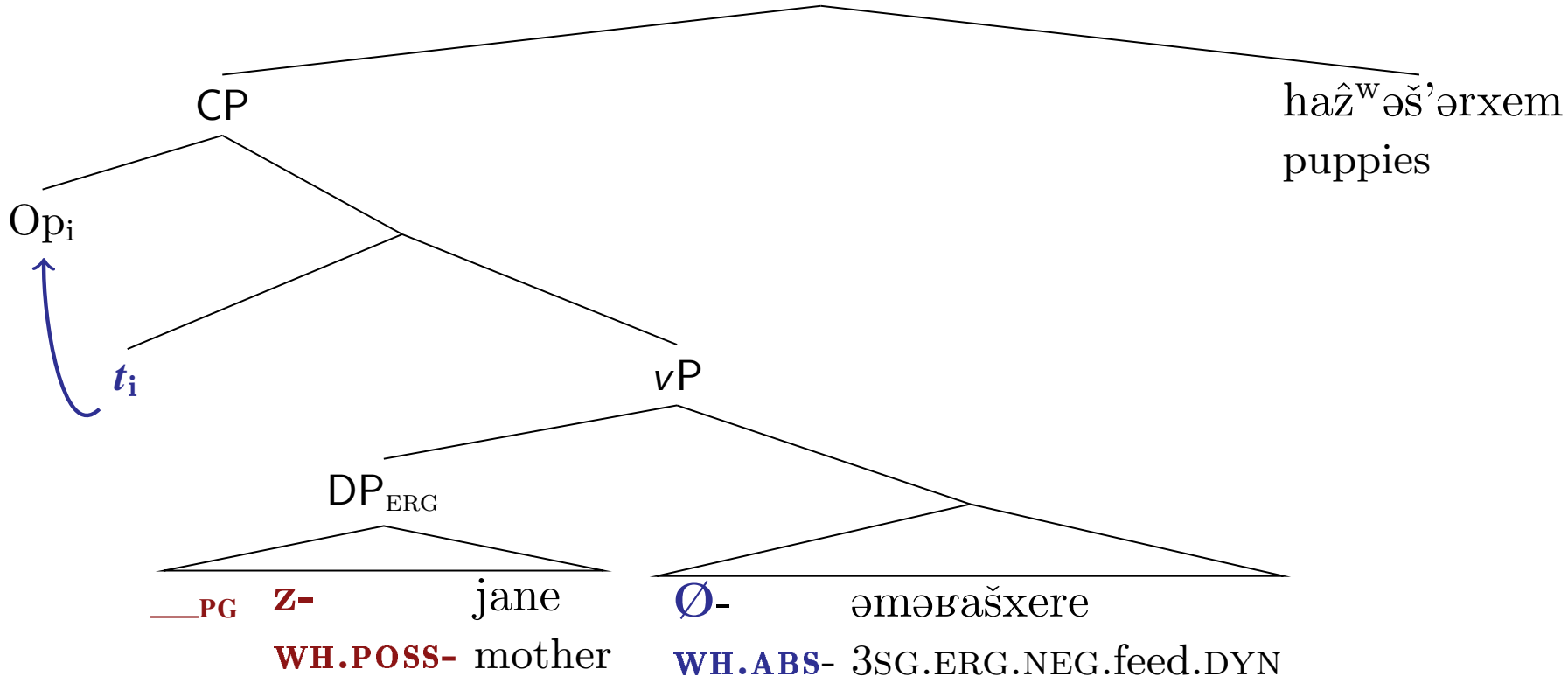
ABS theme cannot license parasitic gap in **ERG** DP:



Intended: 'the puppies whom their mother doesn't feed'

Absolutive trace cannot license parasitic gaps

ABS theme cannot license parasitic gap in **ERG** DP:



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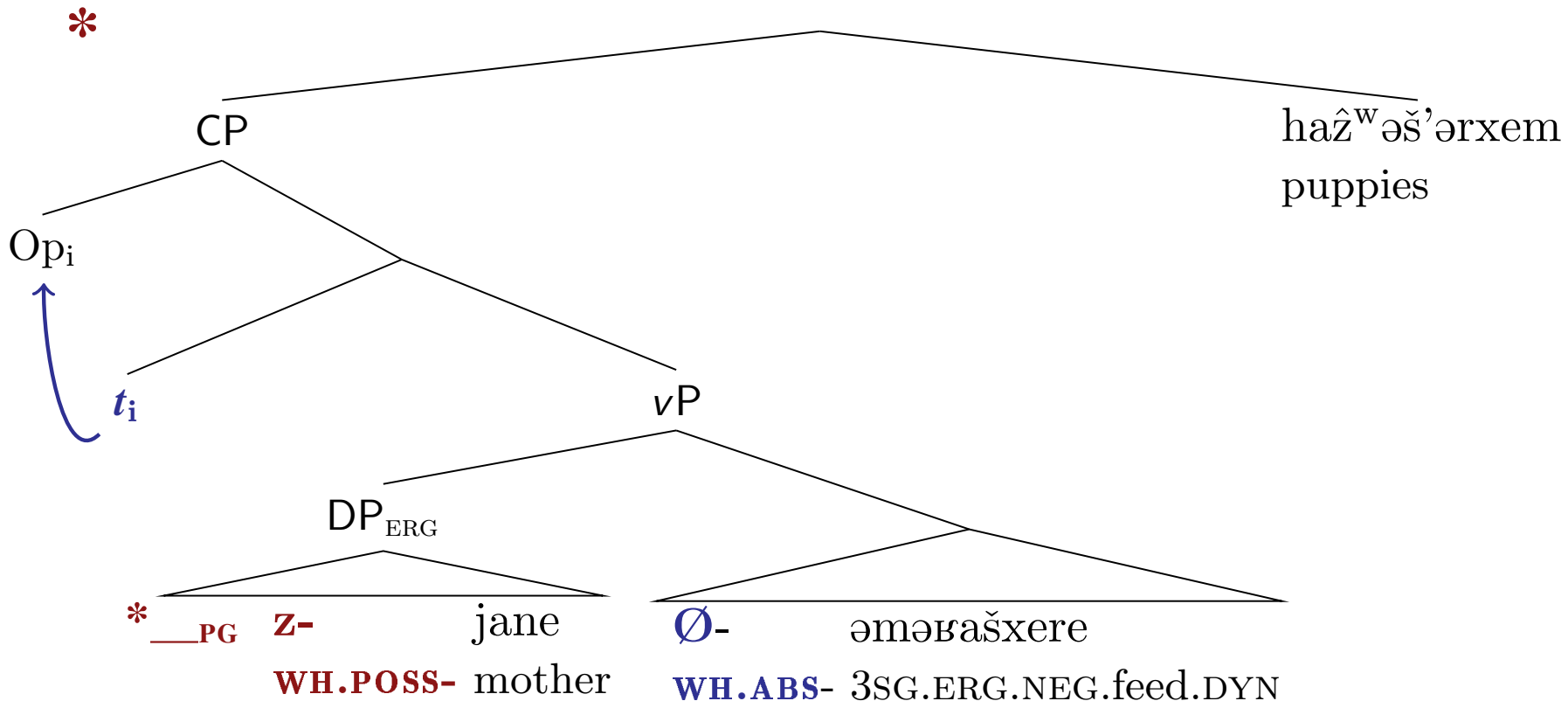

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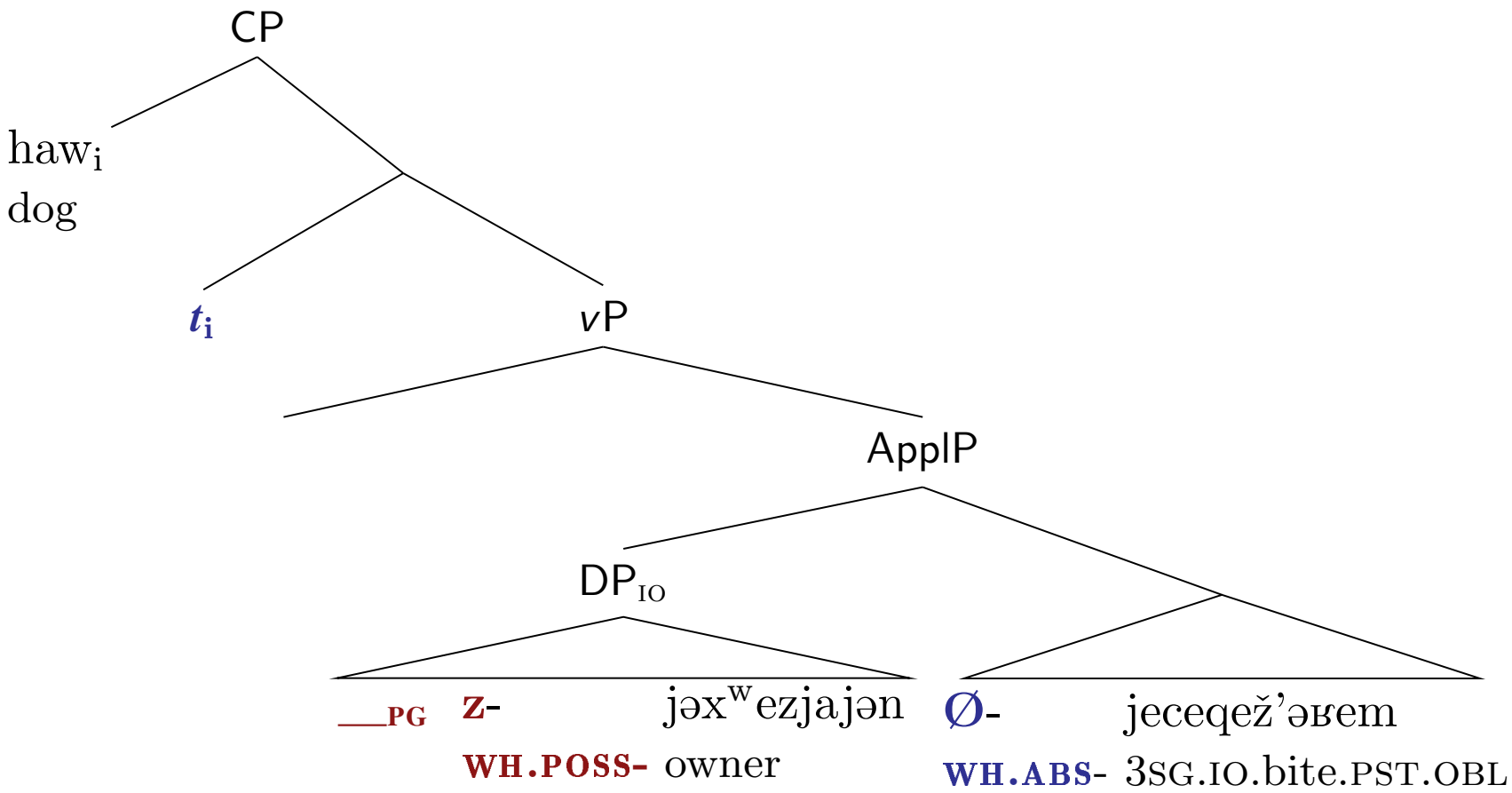

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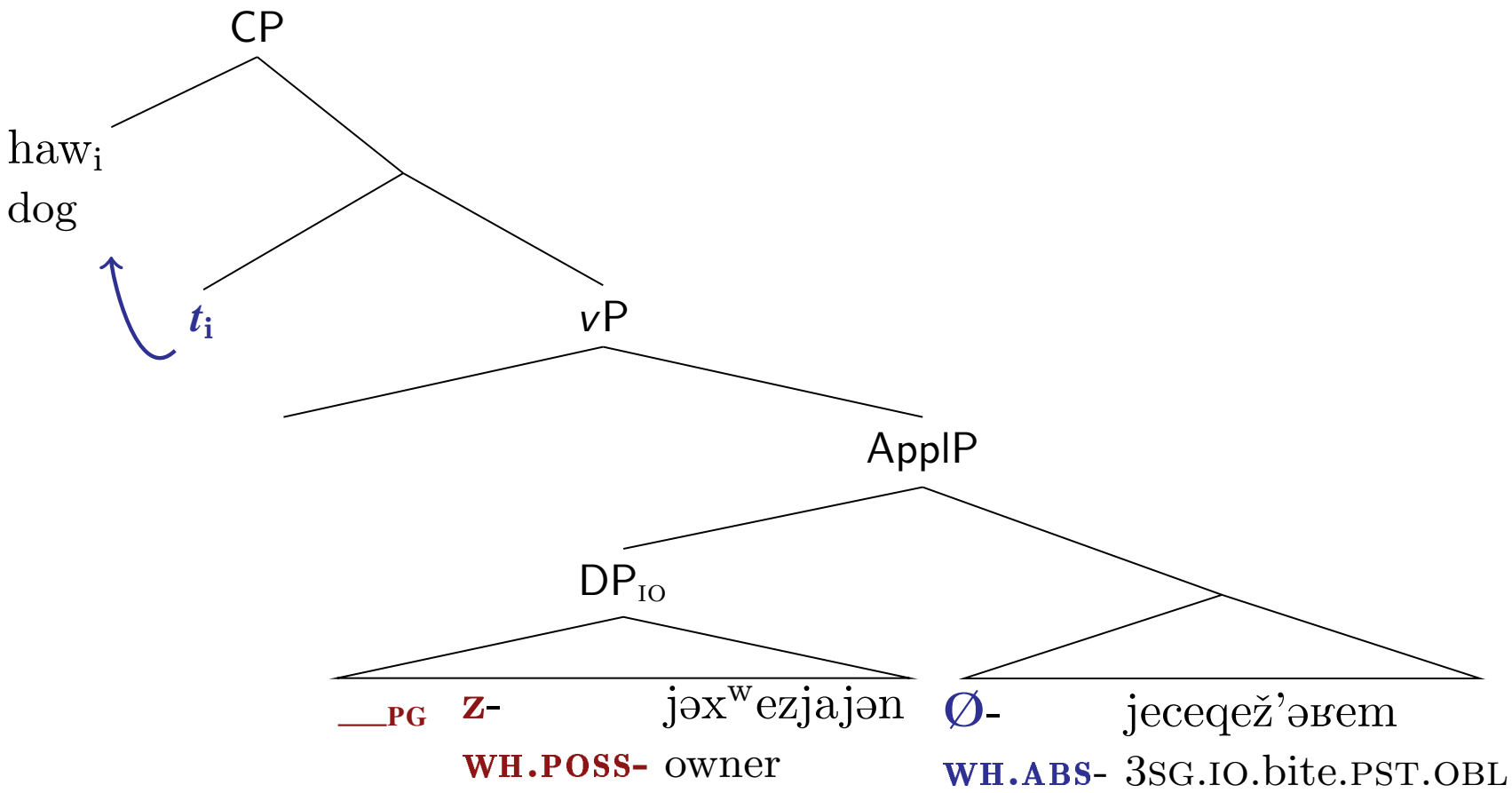

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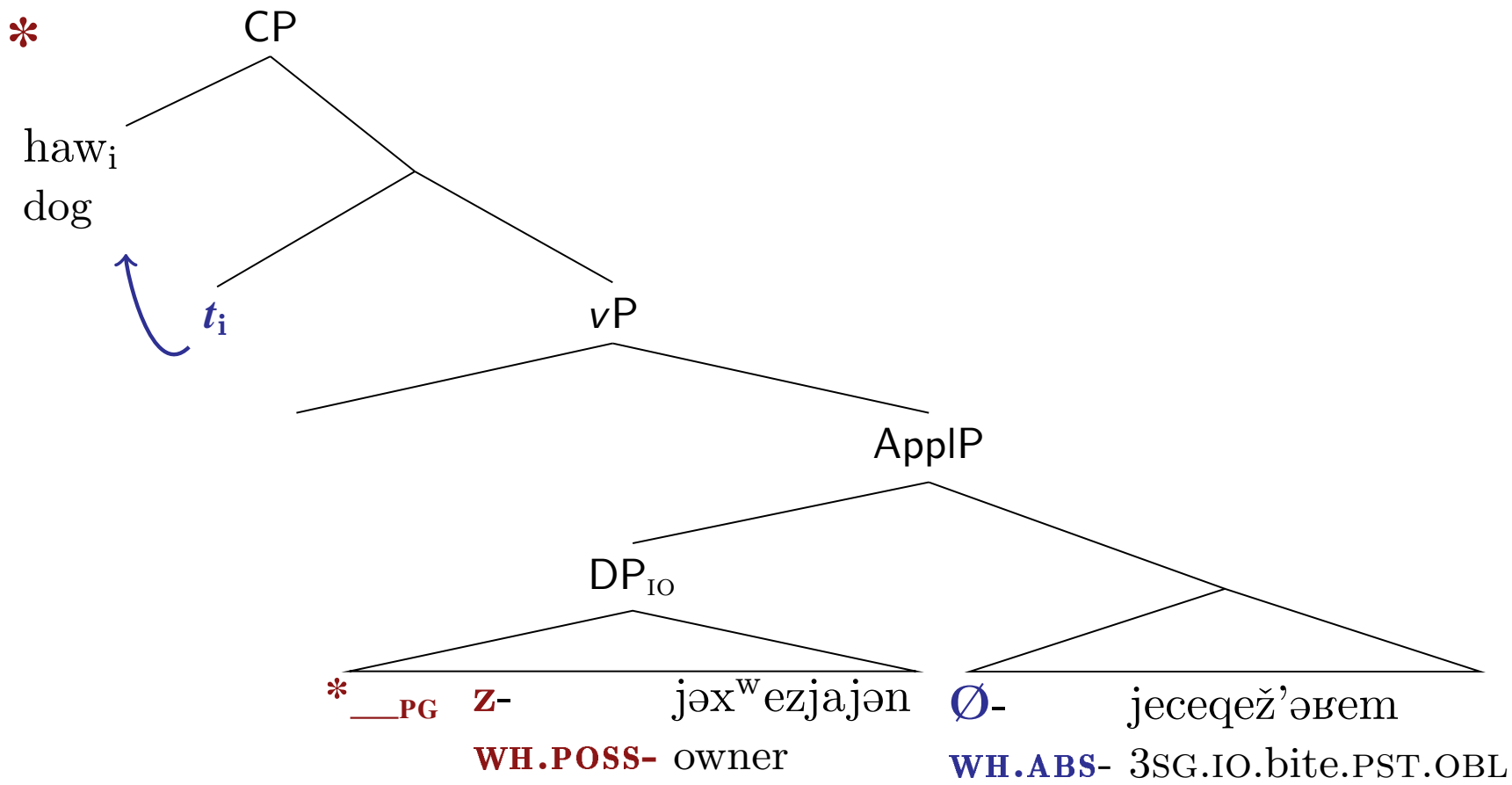

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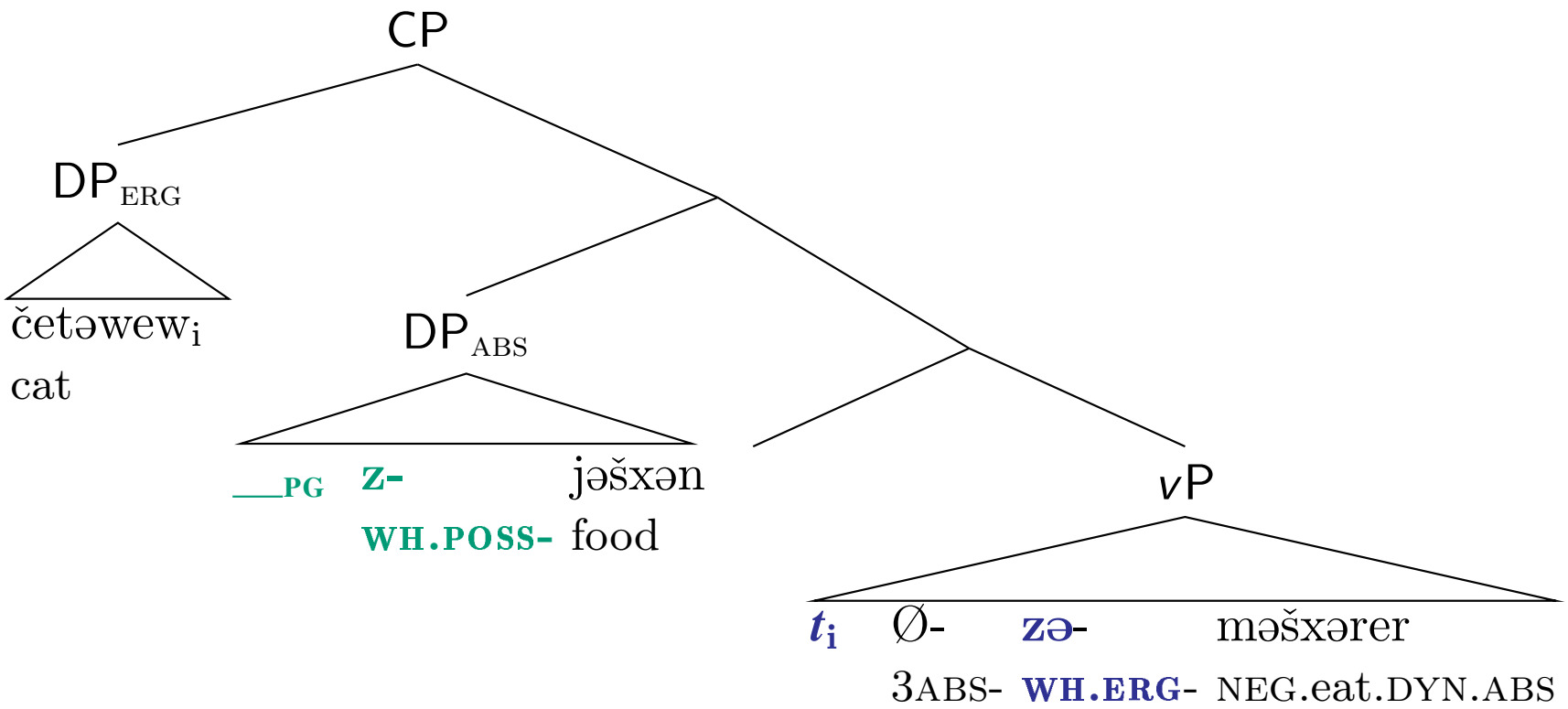

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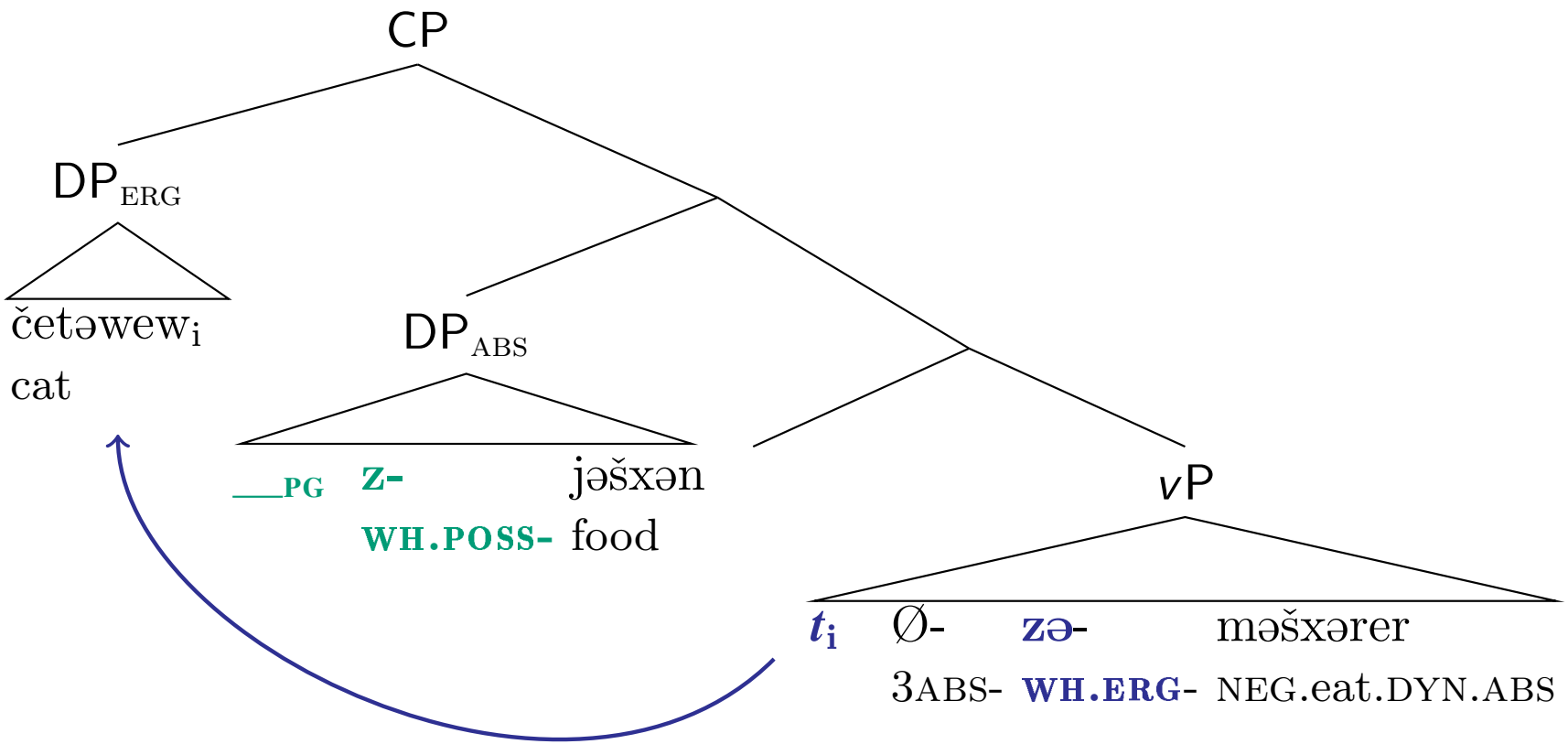

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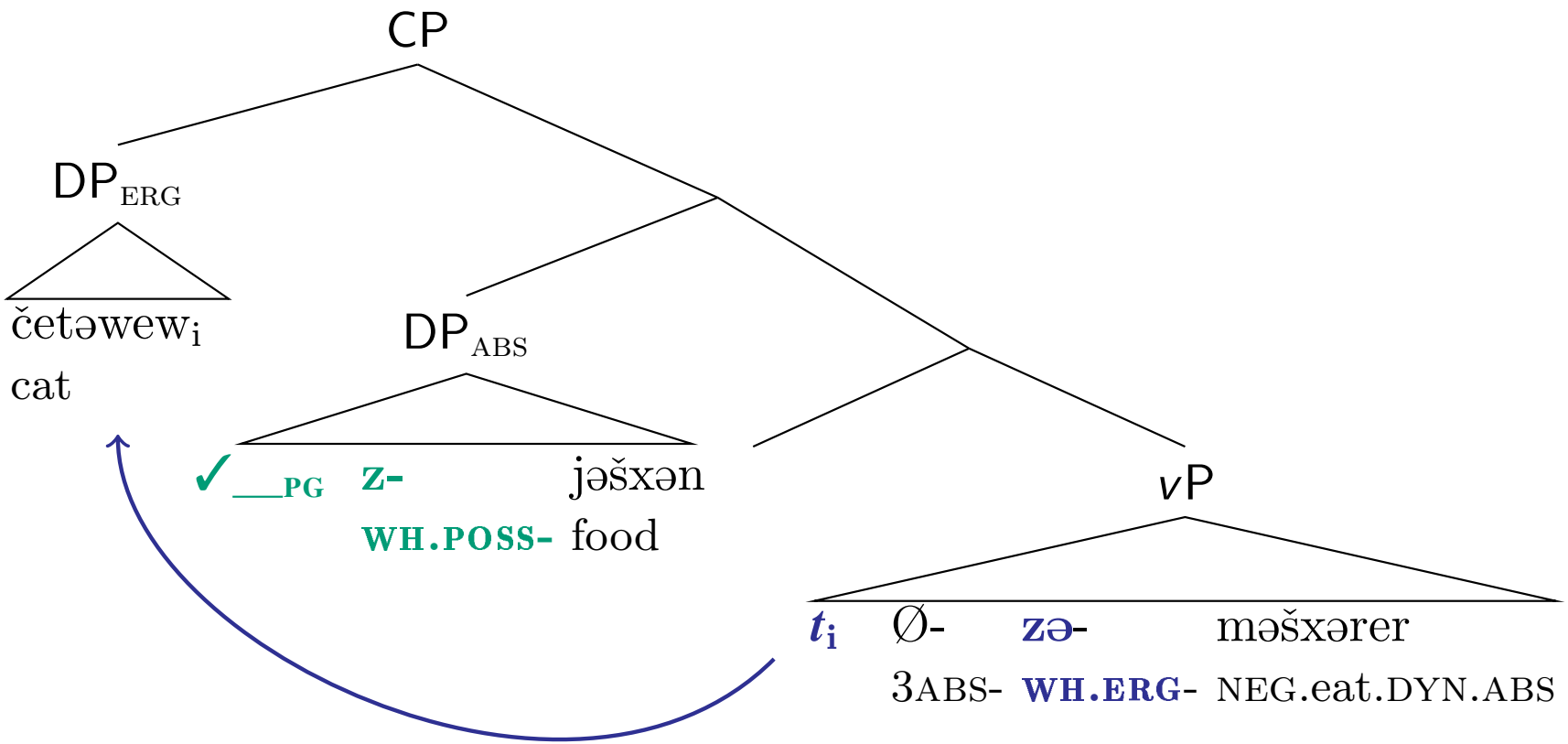

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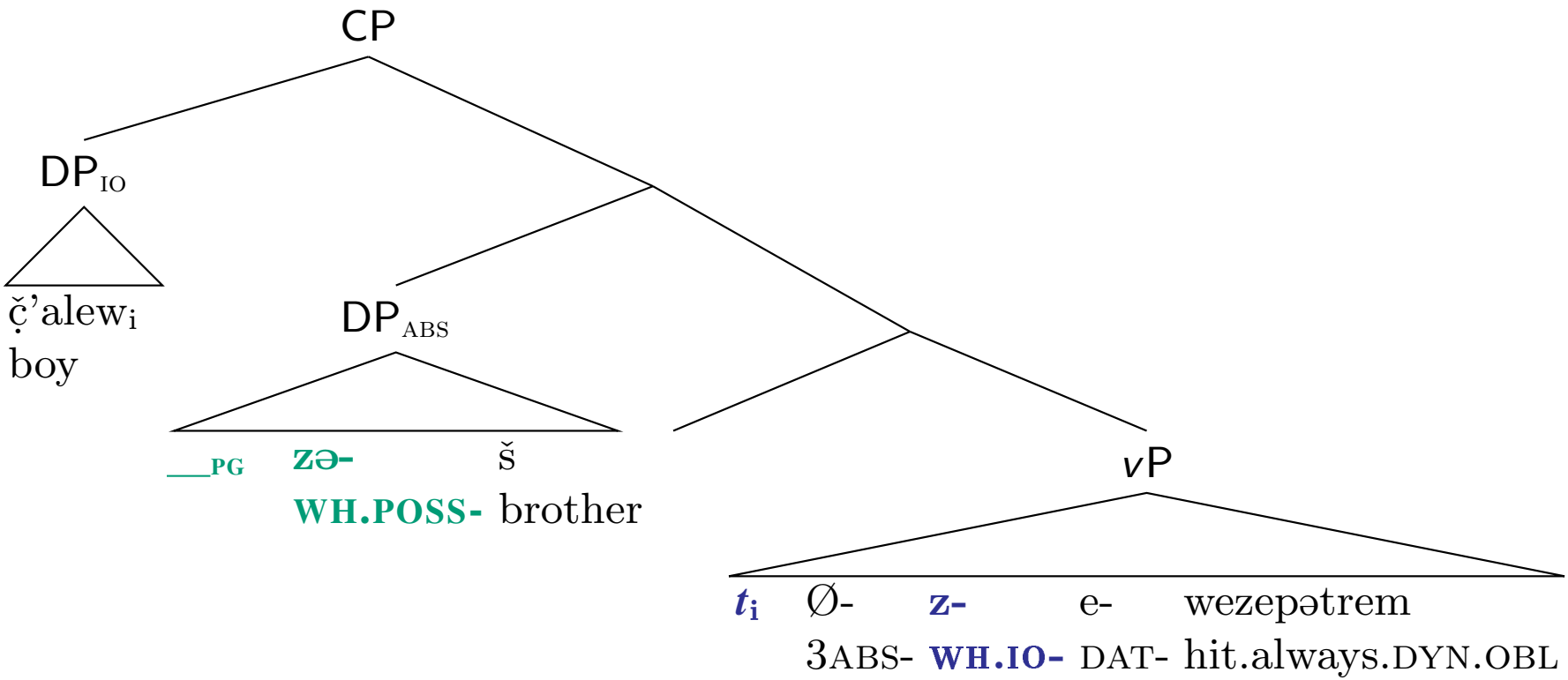

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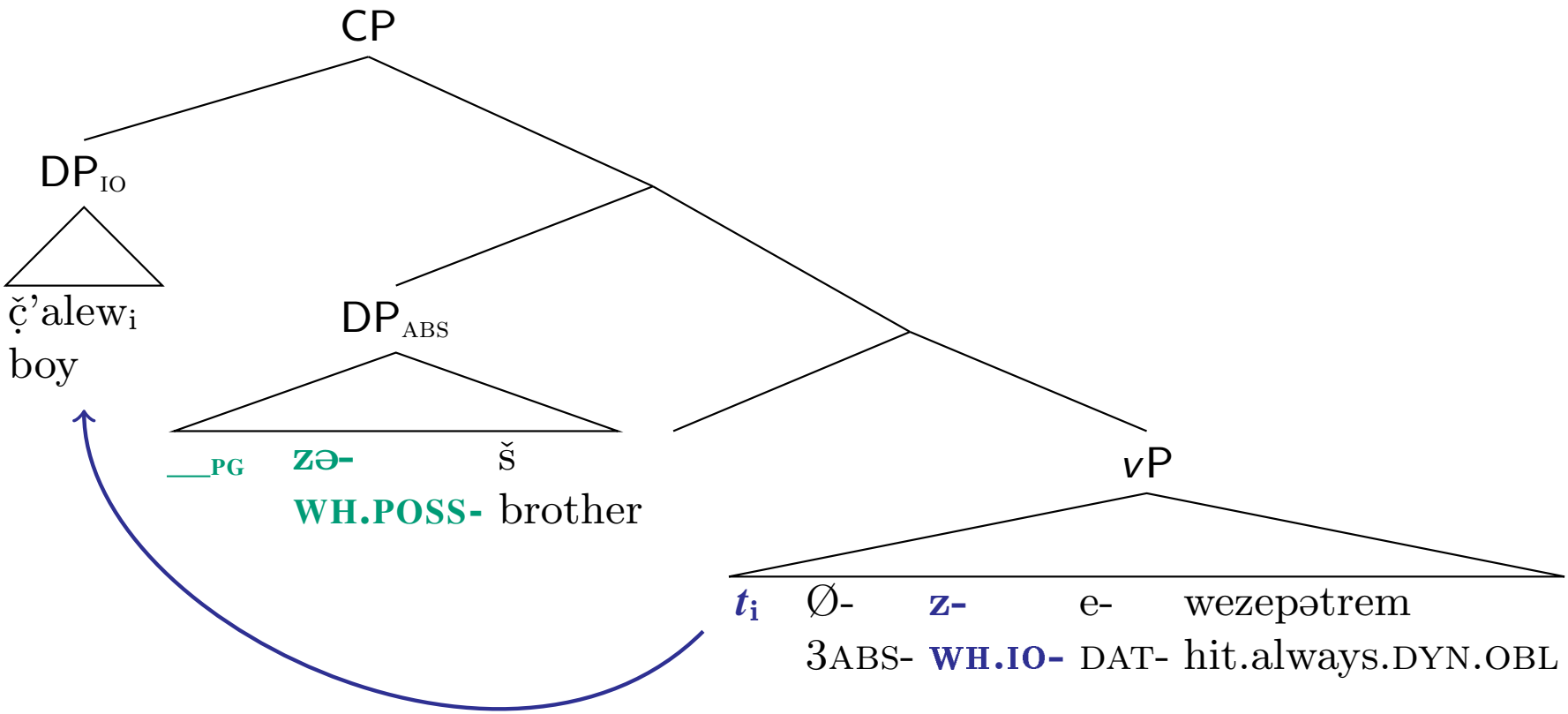

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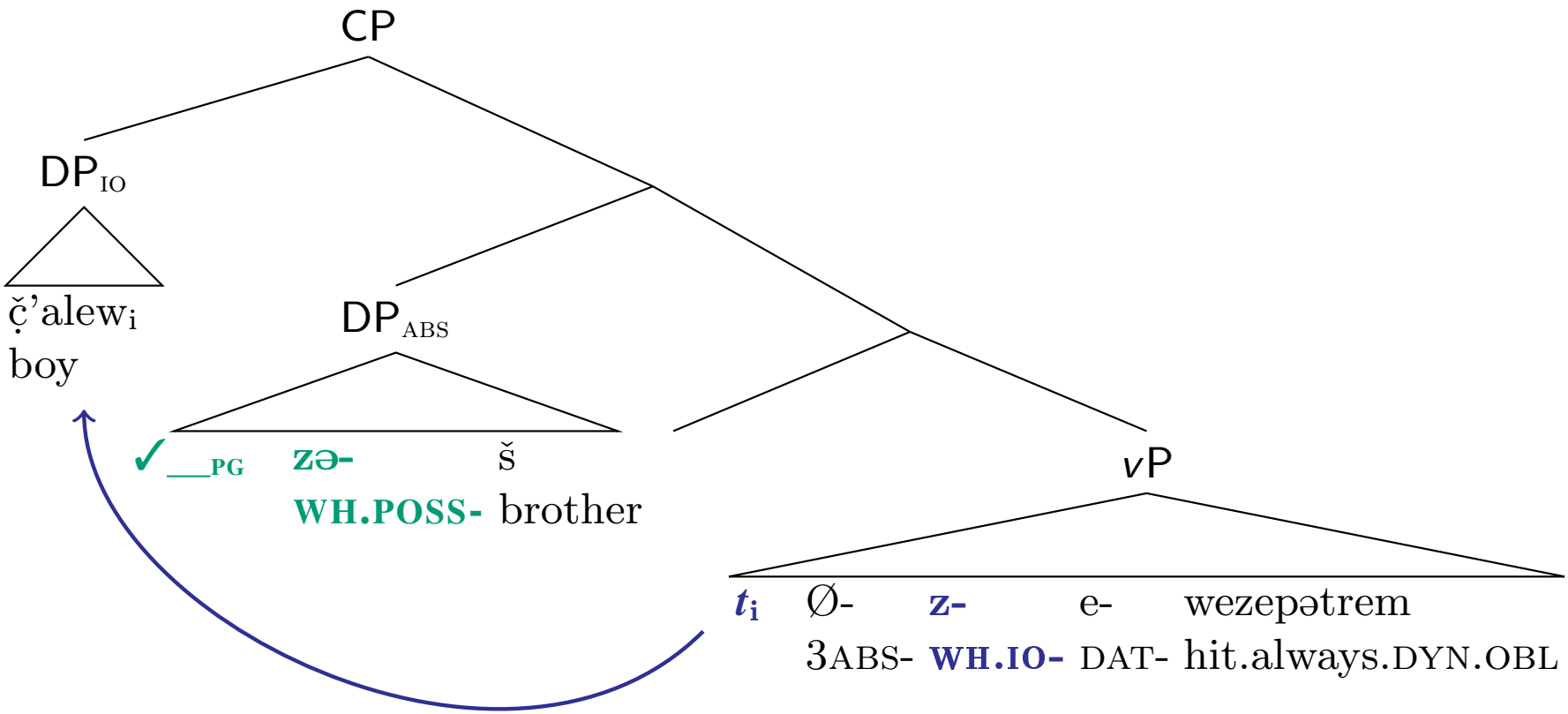

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> Parasitic gaps provide evidence for a high absolutive syntax.

Deconstructing syntactic ergativity: Roadmap

- Predictions of high absolutive syntax
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But no ergative extraction constraint!

Syntactic ergativity and ergative extraction

Ergative Extraction Constraint (Aissen 2017; Coon et al. 2021)

ERG may not undergo Ā-movement.

*See also Aldridge (2004, 2008); Coon et al. (2014, 2021); Deal (2016); Polinsky (2016, 2017); Tollan and Clemens (2021), a.o.

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Q'ANKOB'AL (MAYAN):

* Maktxel max y-il **__ERG** ix ix?
who PFV A3-see CLF woman

Intended: 'Who saw the woman?' ***ERG WH-MOVT**
(Coon et al. 2021)

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(but see Otsuka 2006, 2017; Deal 2016; Polinsky 2016)

This talk

The ergative extraction constraint is not necessarily ***predicted*** by high absolutive syntax, nor necessarily ***predicts*** high absolutive syntax.

High absolutive $\not\Rightarrow$ ergative extraction constraint

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This is a desirable prediction.

West Circassian is a high absolutive language without an ergative extraction constraint.

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The main takeaway

- The Ergative Extraction Constraint is possible in low absolutive languages.

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The main takeaway

- The Ergative Extraction Constraint is possible in low absolutive languages.
- High absolutive syntax does not predict the Ergative Extraction Constraint.

Thank you!

- West Circassian consultants: Svetlana K. Alishaeva, Saida Gisheva, Susana K. Khatkova, and Zarema Meretukova
- Karlos Arregi, Cleo Condoravdi, Itamar Francez, Vera Gribanova, Boris Harizanov, Ana Ilievska, Paul Kiparsky, Yury Lander, Beth Levin, Jason Merchant, and Yakov G. Testelets
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