

# Competition for case and agreement – a study on the causee and indirect objects of Amharic

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Even if there are very few systematic investigations of the matter so far (to the best of my knowledge), the status of causee arguments in causative constructions is quite fascinating for many reasons. First, unlike the prototypical arguments, the causee arguments are always optional. In many languages which mark their causatives with morphologically, such as Hindi, Japanese, Oromo and Amharic, the overt presence of the causee is consistently optional. The causee arguments do their job of causing the event under their covert status (just like the subjects of pro-drop languages). Secondly, causee arguments in many languages display the properties of both arguments and adjuncts. While the instrumental cases they usually receive, and their optionality put them in par with prototypical adjuncts, their agentive semantics tells something different about them –argumenthood. Causee arguments also have marked similarities with indirect objects, syntactic objects themselves are suspect of both argumenthood and adjuncthood. In languages such as Japanese and Tigrinya, for example, the causee arguments act as prototypical indirect objects by receiving dative case.

Amharic causee arguments also have interesting properties. While instrumental and dative case marking are quite common for causee arguments across languages of the world, causee arguments in Amharic can also come with accusative case<sup>2</sup>.

What is specially interesting about the accusative case marking is not the fact that the arguments come up with uncommon case marking for the causee arguments per se, rather the effect of the case marking invokes on the verbal agreements. In this paper, I will attempt to investigate the syntactic properties of causee arguments in Amharic causative constructions. Juxtaposing them with middle and theme arguments, I will argue that all these periphrastic arguments can receive a unified analysis. Putting the

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<sup>1</sup>**Glosses:** 3 = third person, acc = accusative, ben = benefactive, CAUS = indirect causative, caus = direct causative, CM = clause marker, def = definite, f = feminine, foc = focus, m = masculine, O = Object, pl = plural, prog = progressive, S = Subject, sg = singular.

<sup>2</sup>In some other languages, such as Malayalam, for example, the case marking of the causee makes a clear-cut distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs. In the causativization of intransitive verbs, the causee seems to function as object. In transitive verbs, on the other hand, the causee functions as an adjunct by receiving instrumental case.

causee argument in to the picture, I will argue, Baker's (2012) recent analysis of the internal arguments in Amharic is on the right track, specially for the case markings, but insufficient to capture all the agreement facts. I will argue that the syntactic (relative) position of the arguments, countering his point, is crucial for the agreement of the internal and causee arguments.

But, before getting into the details on how causee arguments behave in the language, I will flesh out the general properties of causatives constructions in the language. For that end, I will first describe the basic patterns of morphological causativization. Relying on the currently available literature, I will then develop a simple sketch of how the causative constructions fit into the clausal fseq. And, finally, I will concentrate on the main purpose of the paper and argue for a specific syntactic position for causee arguments using evidences from agreement and locality.

## 2 The facts

Causativity can be encoded in two ways in Amharic—either with overt material or without it.

### 2.1 Lexical causatives:

Like most of English words, many Amharic verbs carry causative interpretation with no overt causative marking. Verbs like *gaddələ* ('kill') and *č'ərrəsə* ('finish') and many others do not require any over marking to encode causation.

### 2.2 Morphological Causatives:

Amharic has two causative prefixes each standing for external and internal causation.

**The internal causative marker A:** The internal causative marker *a* (also called direct causative) is a transitivity element; its main task is to convert the intransitive verbs into transitive. The internal causative marker *a* is one of the most productive morphemes in the language. Its distribution is mostly straightforward. It occurs on non-agentive (intransitive) verbs and turn them to agentive/causative/transitive.

(1) *wət't'a* → *a-wət't'a*  
go out → took out

(2) *mət't'a* → *a-mət't'a*  
came(int) → brought(tr)

- (3) k'əllət'ə → a-k'əllət'ə  
melt(int) → melt(tr)

Almost all unaccusative and majority of intransitive verbs can be turned into transitive by prefixing *a*<sup>3</sup>.

**The external causative marker AS:** The external causative is mainly related to the arguments of the predicates, rather than the verbs per se. It gives a sense of indirect causing– the external argument (the agent) causes or forces somebody else to do some event (action) on the patient. The distribution of the external causative marker is more varied than the the internal causative marker. It occurs on agentive (transitive) as well as non-agentive (intransitive) stems.

- (4) as-wət't'a  
CAUS-go out  
'make go out'
- (5) as-mət't'a  
CAUS-came  
'make (sb) to come/bring'
- (6) as-gəddələ  
CAUS-kill  
'made (sb) to kill/be killed'

To make the semantic difference between the two causative markers, let's now compare the derivatives of the two morphemes on a single verb such as *mət't'a* ('come').

- (7) yosef mət't'a  
*Josef came*  
'Josef came.'
- (8) yosef dəbdabe-u-n a-mət't'a  
*Josef letter-def-acc caus-came*  
'Josef brought the letter.'
- (9) yosef dəbdabe-u-n as-mət't'a  
*Josef letter-def-acc CAUS-came*  
'Josef have someone bring the letter.'

The first sentence in (7) is headed by a plain unaccusative verb. When the internal

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<sup>3</sup>Anticausatives and passives are also overly marked by a prefix *ta-* eg *tə-fəlla* ('been boiled'). The anticausative (passive) and causative markers can not co-occur on the same stem

causative marker *a* attaches on the verb in (8) the verb functions as transitive. It forces one more argument into the derivation. The verb in (9) is different from the one in (8) because of the fact that the latter is marked by the external causative AS. From the surface, the external causative marker doesn't seem to introduce additional argument further from the internal causativizer. We still have the external argument *Josef* and the internal argument *dəbdabe-u*. But, from the meaning of the sentences, it is clear that the latter one has one more implicit argument. The implicit argument functions as intermediate between the direct object (the book) and the external argument (*Josef*). This argument is what is known as causee argument in the literature<sup>4</sup>. Even if a prototypical causee argument remains implicit, as in the above example, it can also occur overtly, as in the following example.

- (10)    *yosef bə-təmari-očč-u dəbdabe-u-n as-mət't'a*  
           *Josef by-student-pl-def letter-def-acc CAUS-came*  
           ‘Josef have the letter brought by the students.’

### 3 Setting the ground: the syntax of causatives

Even though causative constructions are one of the most extensively investigated areas of syntax, there is no consensus on how they fit into the VP fseq. Since Hale & Keyser (1993), it has been customary to introduce different feature assigning heads in the L-syntax (the lexicon, contra to S-syntax, which is supposed to be the narrow syntax) such as CAUSE, DO, BECOME to derive intransitive clauses into transitive, or suppress the transitive/causative to derive the intransitive counterparts. They have shown that the English de-adjective verb *thin* is headed by BE and BECOME when inchoative, and CAUSE when transitive.

- (11)    a. The gravy thinned  
           b. The cook thinned the gravy.

Amberber has taken Hale and Keyser's idea and applied it to the Amharic causatives. First, he groups Amharic verbs into two classes—Pattern I and Pattern II. Pattern I verbs are basically the unaccusative class. They do not internally imply the transfer of causation from agent to patient. If the event is transitive, the transitivity is to the subject/agent itself. There may be a causation, but, the causation is not a causation initiated by entity X to inflict it on entity Y. The event rather applies from X to X or not transitive at all. If one says *abebaw fəkkə* ('The flower blossom.') it means, it is blossoming by itself or by its own inherent behavior. Blossoming is the property or nature of the flower,

<sup>4</sup>There is a confusion on terminology in the literature. Some people use the term causee to mean the intermediate argument, while others use it to mean the patient (the internal argument of the verb). I will preserve the term *causee* for the intermediate argument, and use *patient* or *caused* for the internal argument.

and has nobody control over it. Amberber assumes these verb classes to lack causative sub-event from their roots. It is then agentivizer head, morphologically realized as *a*, which transforms them to agentive/causative. His Pattern II verbs are basically transitive verbs. The causation of these verbs is transitive from agent entity X to entity Y. As they are inherently agentive verbs, they do not require agentivizer marker for transitivity. Some strictly agentive verbs, such *gəddələ* ('kill') and *gənəbba* ('build').

From this, he then proposes that the internal causative merges in the L-syntax while the external causative AS merges in the S-syntax. He then argues that the distinction between Pattern I and II verbs is in the fact that the latter group have Causative sub-event as part of their root while the latter get it in the L-syntax.

Recent works, such as [Ramchand \(1995\)](#); [Chomsky \(2001\)](#); [Harley \(2008\)](#); [Angelika \(1996\)](#) and many others, on the other hand, argued for all causative and inchoative alternations to proceed in the narrow syntax.

The standard analysis of the causatives that goes in line with Kratzer and Chomsky suggests that causativization is achieved by a single causative head, little *v* (Voice for Kratzer). According to [Chomsky \(2001\)](#), little *v* is not only the main source of causativization, it is also the source of accusative case assignment. He suggested that the accusative case marking is done by phi-complete *v* (he marks it as *v*\*). In cases where *v* is not phi-complete, it will not be assign accusative case to the object, leading to defective case assignment, as in passives, unaccusatives and anticausatives. He suggested that in passives and unaccusatives, *v* is defective that the direct object (patient) receives nominative case from T.

- (12) John sank the boat (*v*, Nom-acc)  
*The boat sank* (*v*, Nom)  
 The boat was sank (by John) (*v*, Nom)

Following the standard analysis of the VP-fseq and combining the ideas already developed in [Demeke \(2003\)](#), the big functional projection of Amharic VP, for a sentence as (13), looks like the following (fig. 1) tree structure:

- (13) Aster yosef-n iyyə-a-mət't'-ačč-iw nəw  
*Aster Josef-acc prog-caus-come-3fsgS-3msgO is*  
 'Aster is bringing Josef.' (causing/forcing him to come)

As shown in the tree structure, and standardly assumed in the literature, aspect (AspP) is independent of theta role and case assignment. Whether the verb is transitive or intransitive, whether it is causative or inchoative, aspect markers can prefix on the verb. The aspect markers are outside of the agentive marker. Tense is represented by the copula, which normally occurs at the end of the whole VP<sup>5</sup>. The most external

<sup>5</sup>Hence, if we have to follow the Kayne's 1994 style of Antisymmetric derivation, a further raising of

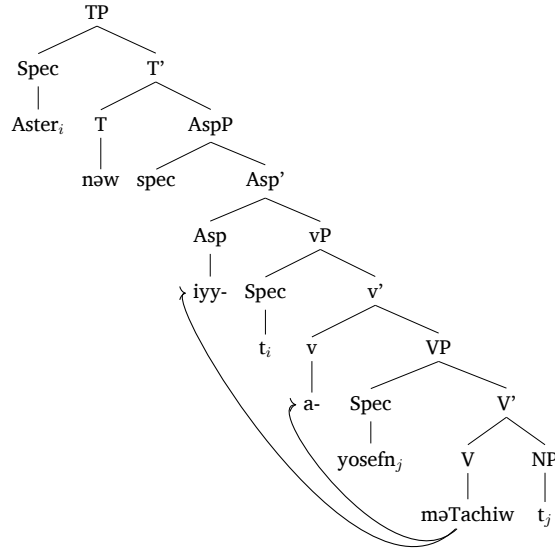


Figure 1: VP fseq according to the standard theory

subject (the causer) has nominative case (morphologically unmarked). By now, it is standard to assume that the nominative case of the subjects is assigned by the Tense head (T) (Chomsky, 2001). In this framework, the external argument merges in vP and moves to SpecTP for case assignment.

While the structure we have developed so far gives us a general framework for merging different functional items into the VP fseq, there are still a few problems left. First, the idea of little v has been used in various senses in different works that it is not clear which of the arguments exactly fit into it. Whether little v and Voice are the same projections with different designations, or different projections, it is not clear from the literature. In Kratzer’s and Chomsky’s works, it seems that the two projections actually are the same— a projection where the prototypical agent subject merges in. In other works these projections have been connected to other notions. Applicatives and their projections (ApplP), for instance, have been used in place of little v (Kim, 2011). That is, all the three projections such as VoiceP, ApplP and vP have been confusingly used to represent causatives/agentives.

Disregarding the standard view of causative projections, what I will rather follow in this paper would be the more elaborate causative functional sequences developed in (Pylkkänen, 2008). She, also Kim (2011) for follow up, proposes about seven layers of functional projections that introduce arguments.

*Voice [Phrase-selecting Cause[Verb selecting Cause [Root selecting Cause [Low Source appl*  
the whole AspP will be necessary to get the position of the copula right.

[Low recipient appl [High Applicative ]] ]]]

According to this framework, Voice is the projection where the external argument merges; while Cause projections are specifically preserved for causers and causee arguments. Source Appl and Recipient Appl are dedicated to source and recipient middle arguments respectively.

If we have a sentence as *Mary sent John a letter*, *Mary* merges in Voice projection while the recipient middle argument *John* merges in Low source Appl. For Amharic causative sentence like:

- (14) Mary John-n yəkərəmə-u-n siga as-bəl-ach-iw  
Mary John-acc old-def-acc meat CAUS-eat-3fsgS-3msgO  
'Mary made John eat the old meat.'

the external argument (the causer) *Mary* merges in Voice, while the causee *John* falls into one of the causative (she designates them as vCauseP) projections. That is, she has different flavors of applicatives merging below the causative domain; while the external argument is above both the applicatives and causatives.

This is a more refined and better system for it eschews confusion between the little v and Voice heads. Pylkkänen's approach to the voice and causative projection that the two head their own projection is also friendly to compositional approaches advocated in (Ramchand, 1995) and (Borer, 1995).

I would like to propose that while Cause and Voice are separate pieces in the universal inventory of functional heads, they can be grouped together into a morpheme in the lexicon of a particular language. In such a language, Voice and Cause form a feature bundle similar to the one formed by Tense and Agreement in languages that do not have a split Infl.

(Pylkkänen, 2008, p: 99)

Hence, I will follow her framework, and assume that the external argument (causer) always merges in Voice while the Causee merges in the Causative domains. For languages such as English, the Causative and the Voice projection can be assumed span together and lexicalize as a single item, while in languages such as Amharic and Japanese, they head independent projections. Applying her approach, then, the more refined Amharic TP looks like the following:

Introducing two independent heads for the external argument (causer) and the argument of the causative (cause) makes the system cleaner than the standard analysis. I will then base my analysis on this structure.

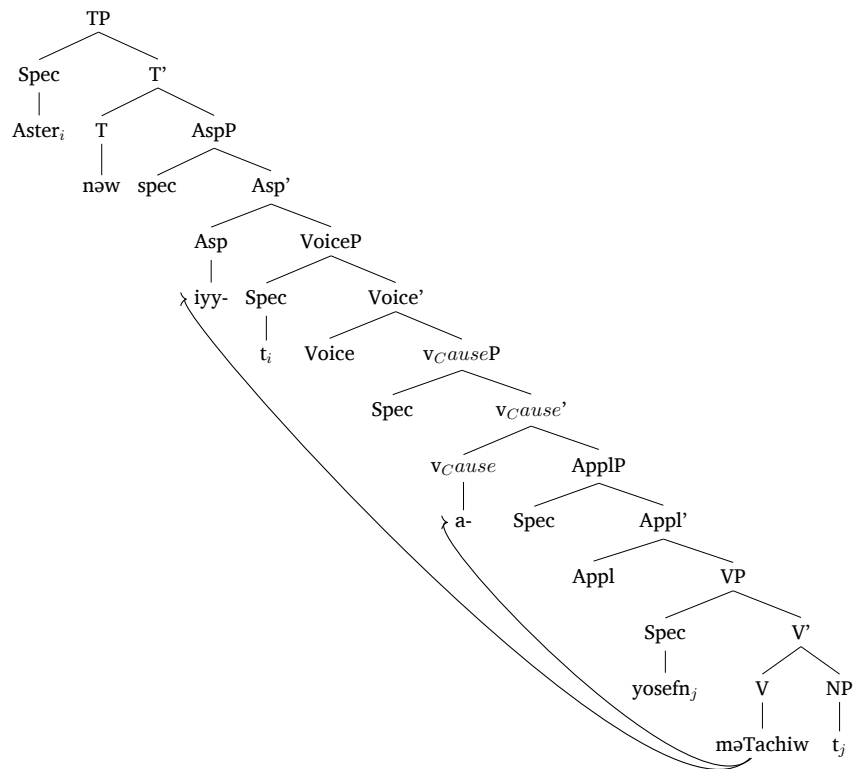


Figure 2: VP fseq according to Pylkkänen (2008)



## 4 The position of the causee

In the above sections, I have attempted to fit causatives into the basic architecture of the VP fseq. In this section, I will focus on the main agenda of the paper– the syntactic position of causee arguments.

What is the standard generative syntax say about the position of causee arguments?

I will start from what [Ramchand \(2011\)](#) calls the standard (“traditional”) analysis of intermediate agents (causee arguments). Verbs merge with their thematic values, either as transitive or intransitive. The causative morpheme then introduces one further argument as well as an event position.

Causative morpheme: E < Agent, Caused-Event >

When an intransitive verb like *laugh* for example, combines with the causative morpheme, the internal argument of the causative event identifies the event of the embedded verb, and the single argument of the unaccusative verb is marked as direct object.

- (15) lij-u sak'-ə (Amharic)  
*child-def laughed-3msgS*  
'The boy laughed.'

- (16) yosef lij-u-n as-sak-ə-w (Amharic)  
*Josef child-def-acc CAUS-laugh-3msgS-3msgO*  
'Josef make the boy laugh.'

- (17) bacca hās-aa  
*child laugh-perf.m*  
'The child laughed.' (Hindi, [Ramchand \(1995\)](#), p:55)

- (18) Anjum-ne bacce-ko hās-vaa-yaa (Hindi, [Ramchand \(1995\)](#))  
*Anjum-erg child-acc laugh-vaa-perf.m*  
'Anjum made the child laugh.'

In the (15) and (17) examples, the external causer is the only agent, and the sole argument of the unaccusative verb as the causee, the causativization marks the arguments of the unaccusative verb as direct object. This process is morphologically evident both in Hindi and Amharic causatives. In these sentences, the experiencer is the syntactic subject. But, in the other examples, (15) and (18), the experiencer is marked as object due to the introduction of the causative markers.

As the above example shows, the causee is marked by the accusative case. It also triggers object agreement with the verb.

As for the verbs that are already transitive in their lexicon, the literature on Hindi

causatives, as reported in Ramchand, further predicts that “The Agent/Causer argument introduced by the causative morpheme is linked to the subject, and any left over argument must be demoted (here, the agent of the embedded verb) and realized as a -*se* marked adjunct”. The point here is, as the two important argument positions, the subject and the object are satisfied, any left-over argument should be demoted to adjunct position. This story of demoting extra arguments to adjunct position also gives sense for Amharic causatives because, as in Hindi, one of the arguments of the transitive verb can be marked by the instrumental marker and arguably function as an adjunct<sup>6</sup>.

- (19)    yosef lij-u-n            bə-məmhīr-it-u    as-gərrəf-ə-w  
           Josef child-**def-acc** (by-teacher-f-**def**) CAUS-whip-3msgS-3msgO  
           ‘Josef have the boy whipped by the female teacher.’

The problem with Amharic is on the fact that the causee doesn’t have to be instrumental marked, and doesn’t have to be optional. Unlike the causee arguments in Hindi and Japanese, (Harley, 2008), the causee in Amharic can properly appear like all other arguments, receiving the accusative case and triggering the object agreement on the verb.

- (20)    yosef məmhīr-it-u-n lij-u-n            as-gərrəf-ə-at  
           Josef teacher-f-**def**    child-**def-acc** CAUS-whip-3msgS-3fsgO  
           ‘Josef make the (female) teacher whip the boy.’

Now, the question is, if our argument structure allows only external and internal arguments (which is presumably the reason why demotion happens in Hindi causatives), what is the position of the causee argument in Amharic causatives?

#### 4.1 Causee as oblique argument?

Amharic has a class of arguments which display quirky properties in agreement and case assignment. They are the affectees/experiencer arguments of unaccusative verbs as *t’əffa* (‘disappear’) and psych verbs as *təmməmə* (‘get sick’). They are quirky because they display the properties of objects even if they are supposed to act like regular subjects (as they are the sole arguments of the predicates).

- (21)    Astern-n amməm-at  
           Aster-**acc** sick-3fsgO  
           ‘Aster get sick.’

Looking at from the surface, if we take experiencer argument *Aster* in the above sen-

<sup>6</sup>Ramchand and Tungseth (2006) argued against the adjunction analysis-

tence, it seems the subject of the sentence as it is the sole argument in the sentence, as well as it appears in a position where prototypical subjects appear in. The agreement and case assignment however shows that the NP is rather more object-like. It is accusative case marked, and triggers object agreement on the verb. Observing this fact (Amberber, 1996) argued that the argument is actually the object of the sentence where the external argument is hidden from the overt syntax (Amberber calls it *Ambient causer*, following (Pesetsky, 1995)).

Mark (2012) further observed that the goal arguments of triadic verbs as *lakkə* ('send'), *sət'tə* ('give'), *nəggərə* ('tell') etc also behave in a similar fashion. He then challenged Amberber's analysis and argue that these arguments can not be like regular objects as they obligatorily trigger agreement, and optionally receive the accusative case (the exact reverse of the regular objects in the language).

"The affectee argument is not like the agent argument of a normal transitive verb in that it triggers object agreement, not subject agreement, and in that it (optionally) bears accusative case. At the same time, it is not like the theme argument of a normal transitive verb in that object agreement with it is obligatory (not optional), and accusative case is optional (not obligatory)".

From this, he then conclude that these arguments are oblique arguments just like Icelandic dative subjects. Stressing their obliqueness, Baker then proposed the existence of a null P projection on these arguments as the main culprit for the mixed property these arguments display. To exactly block these arguments from subject agreement and nominative case, and enable object agreement and accusative case, he claims:

- Null headed PPs can not satisfy EPP feature of T
- EPP satisfaction of T is dependent on agreement (ie, an NP that can not satisfy EPP of T can not agree with T)
- The NP arguments inside the PP can not move out of it
- FP has no EPP feature

If these goal/affectee arguments are headed by null PP which cannot satisfy EPP of T, these arguments cannot raise to T and build agreement with it. This assumption effectively blocks the possibility of subject agreement on the verb and nominative case with T. As the FP (the projection that the arguments merge in, also the source of object agreement) is assume to have no EPP feature, raising of the argument doesn't happen. As the PP can not satisfy the EPP feature of the T, a pro argument merges in SpecTP; leaving the argument NP in the lower position to agree only with F.

As shown in the tree structure, the goal argument *Aster* is headed by null PP. Hence, it can neither agree nor move to T. It is however close enough to agree with F, the projection which is responsible for the object agreement (Baker assumes F to be distinct from v from the observation that non-agentive verbs can have object agreement in Amharic).

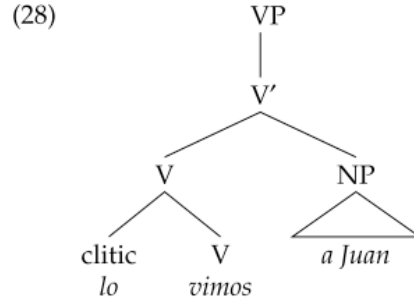


Figure 3: Object agreement according to Mark (2012, p: 26)

Then, the question is; can Baker’s analysis of the goal and affectee arguments directly capture the causee argument? or, in other words, can causee arguments be considered as oblique arguments.

The principal source of Baker’s proposal is the observation that affectee and goal arguments tend to display mixed properties of internal and external arguments. Next, I will show that causee arguments are strikingly similar to the goal arguments that Baker analyzed, that a unified analysis is required.

## 4.2 The causee and other internal arguments

There is a striking similarity between causee arguments and indirect objects of triadic verbs in Amharic.

1. Both the indirect object and the causee can be case marked by a preposition (imparting instrumental for the causative, (22) and genitive<sup>7</sup> for the IO, (23)). Of course, indirect objects and causee are the only arguments that receive case by prepositional marking.

- (22) yosef dābdabe-u-n bə-məmhīr-it-u as-nəbbəb-ə-w  
*Josef letter-def-acc by-teacher-f-def CAUS-read-3msgS-3msgO*  
 ‘Josef get the letter read by the (female) teacher.’

- (23) yosef dābdabe-u-n lə-məmhīr-it-u lakk-ə-w  
*Josef letter-def-acc for-teacher-f-def send-3msgS-3msgO*  
 ‘Josef send the letter to the (female) teacher.’

2. When both arguments are marked by the prepositional case markers, the preferred order is after the theme argument ((22) and (23); compare with 5).

<sup>7</sup>Even if the genitive and instrumental cased markers have different effect on the agreement of the arguments, as genitive case marked indirect object can trigger agreement on the verb while instrumental case marked causee can not, both of them can be considered as prepositions.

3. When they are marked by the preposition, they don't block the theme argument from agreeing with the verb (compare with 7)
4. Both the cause and the indirect object can be marked by the regular accusative case marker, in addition to the prepositional one ((24) and (25)).

(24)    yosef məmhir-it-u-n    dəbdabe-u-n as-nəbbəb-ə-at/\*əw  
*Josef teacher-f-def-acc letter-def-acc CAUS-read-3msgS-3fsgO/3msgO*  
 'Josef make the (female) teacher read the letter.'

(25)    yosef məmhir-it-u-n    dəbdabe-u-n lakk-ə-lat(\*əw)  
*Josef teacher-f-def-acc letter-def-acc lakk-3msgS-3fsgO*  
 'Josef send the the (female) teacher a letter.'

5. When they are marked by the accusative case, the preferred position for both classes of arguments is before the theme ((24) and (25)).
6. When they are marked by the accusative case, given that no other argument is blocking, they necessarily trigger object agreement on the verb ((24) and (25)).
7. When they are marked by the accusative case, both classes of arguments block the agreement of the theme argument ((24) and (25)).
8. The theme argument can precede both of them (object raising is possible in both cases) without much affecting the agreement paradigm ((26) and (27)).

(26)    yosef dəbdabe-u-n məmhir-it-u-n    as-nəbbəb-ə-at/\*w  
*Josef letter-def-acc teacher-f-def-acc CAUS-read-3msgS-3fsgO/3msgO*  
 'Josef make the (female) teacher read the letter.'

(27)    yosef dəbdabw-u-n məmhir-it-u-n    lakk-ə-ll-at/\*w  
*Josef letter-def-acc teacher-f-def-acc send-3msgS-ben-3fsgO/3msgO*  
 'Josef send the the (female) teacher a letter.'

All these similarities cannot be a matter of coincidence. This opens the possibility for unified analysis for both groups of arguments.

Following Baker's line of reasoning then, the causee can be taken as the NP merging under the null PP. Note at this point that even if Baker is presenting the indirect object merge inside the VP projection, in line with (Larson, 1988), he also suggests an alternative position in Spec-AppIP for other independent reasons<sup>8</sup>. As I have already mentioned, Pylkkänen's (Pylkkänen, 2008) research support this higher position for middle

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<sup>8</sup>He suggested Spec-AppIP as an alternative position for the indirect objects in response to the question why only indirect objects (middle arguments) are tend to be oblique arguments. He speculated that only AppIP might support null-headed PPs.

arguments<sup>9</sup>. Her theory is specially interesting; unlike all the previous approaches, it predicts distinct syntactic positions for middle and causee arguments. Assuming distinct projections for causee arguments and middle arguments is specially necessary for Amharic, as they still can co-occur in the same VP, even if the two arguments are similar in their syntactic properties.

- (28) Aster lij-it-u-n dābdabe-u-n lə-yosef as-lakk-əčč-at  
 Aster child-f-def-acc letter-def-acc for-Josef CAUS-send-3fsgS-3fsgO  
 ‘Aster made the girl send the letter to Josef.’

In this example, *Aster* is the external argument of both the indirect object and the causative construction. *dābdabewun* (‘the letter’) is the patient; *lij-it-u* (‘the girl’) is the causee while *yosef* is the indirect object. The interesting part is the verbal agreement. In all the literature available so far in Amharic literature, the indirect object is assumed as it obligatorily agrees with the verb. As the above example shows, however, the assumption is inaccurate. Whenever the causee merges into the derivation, neither the theme nor the middle argument (the indirect object) is able to trigger agreement on the verb.

- (29) Aster lij-it-u-n dābdabe-u-n lə-yosef as-lakk-əčč-at/\*iw/\*lat  
 Aster child-f-def-acc letter-def-acc for-Josef CAUS-send-3fsgS-3fsgO/3msgO/3fsgO  
 ‘Aster made the girl send the letter to Josef.’

But, if we remove the causee from the construction (make it silent), both the direct object and the indirect object are able to agree with the verb.

- (30) Aster dābdabe-u-n lə-yosef as-lakk-əčč-iw  
 Aster letter-def-acc for-Josef CAUS-send-3fsgS-3msgO  
 ‘Aster have the letter sent for Josef.’
- (31) Aster dābdabe-u-n lə-yosef as-lakk-əčč-lət  
 Aster letter-def-acc for-Josef CAUS-send-3fsgS-3msgO.ben  
 ‘Aster have the letter sent for Josef.’

This competition-based agreement style seems to undermine Baker’s project which mainly relies on the arguments’ own internal syntax (null PP). As the above examples show, it is not really the syntactic structure of the arguments themselves that determines their agreement; rather the competition they are involved in. If there is a causee

<sup>9</sup>It would also have been interesting to bring Ramchand’s (Ramchand and Tungseth, 2006; Ramchand, 1995, 2011) analysis of Hindi causatives and the general framework of her system into the picture. But, unfortunately, I didn’t understand her general system yet. Hence, I decide to keep myself away from it for now.

argument in the derivation, it tend to trigger agreement on the verb while blocking all other arguments.

How about the instrumental marked causee?

- (32) Aster bə-lij-it-u dəbdabe-u-n lə-yosef as-lakk-əčč-iw/lət/\*at  
 Aster by-child-f-def letter-def-acc for-Josef CAUS-send-3msgS/3msgO/3msg.ben/3fsgO  
 ‘Aster make the girl sent the letter for Josef.’

As expected, whenever the causee is marked by the instrumental, the causee is unable to trigger agreement on the verb. In this case, the two arguments can happily agree with the verb. Note that the instrumental case marker in Amharic is a preposition. This seems to support Baker’s hypothesis that prepositions can undermine the agreement of the arguments. But, the problem is that Baker’s null PP is designed to allow object agreement while blocking subject agreement, by failing to satisfy the needs of the EPP. If the reason why the middle arguments (affectee and goal) do not trigger subject agreement is because of the failure of the null-headed PP to satisfy the EPP of the T, then, we expect the instrumental causee to trigger object agreement<sup>10</sup>. This is, however impossible as the above example, (32), shows. We then need another explanation why the instrumental causee is failing to agree with the verb while the accusative case marked one is able to agree.

### 4.3 The proposal

My proposal for the instrumental marked causee is in line with [Rezac \(1995\)](#) where prepositions are taken to introduce phases, blocking any form of agreement out of the prepositional phrase.

As for the competition of the periphrastic arguments to trigger agreement on the object, I propose that locality effect applying at LF is the major culprit.

The relative position of the theme argument and the periphrastic argument doesn’t have effect on the verbal agreement. But, as we have seen above, the presence of the causee in the higher position blocks the agreement of the theme and the indirect object. This seemingly contradicting can be solved by devising a locality constraint apply at LF. In addition, I propose two major factors affecting the locality hierarchy at LF:

- the underlying (default) syntactic configuration
- topicalization

<sup>10</sup>Thinking of [Bresnan and McHombo \(1987\)](#) claim that anaphoric agreement markers are the arguments themselves; hence, the DP is merely an adjunct in such environments, the object agreement and adjunction facts here, that failure of the adjunct to trigger object agreement, corroborates Baker’s another hypothesis—that the object agreement in Amharic is grammatical rather than anaphoric. The validity of that hypothesis is also necessary for the current proposal in this paper, because if the agreement markers are taken as anaphoric, the whole story needs a completely different analysis

The root of locality effect on the syntactic configuration is well-known. Higher elements dominate lower elements in the syntactic hierarchy. But, the syntactic hierarchy by itself is not satisfactory as the above alternations clearly show that being higher in the surface hierarchy doesn't change the game. Therefore, I want to include the notion that the topicalized argument always dominates the non-topicalized arguments at LF, even if their surface structure could be in the reverse order in a similar spirit advanced in Polinsky and Potsdam (2001) . For that end, first, I will establish the fact that it is indeed the topicalized argument that triggers the agreement with the verb. I will then combine the topicalized argument dominating the other argument at LF with the syntactic locality to derive all the required outcomes in the agreement of the causee and other periphrastic arguments.

#### 4.3.1 Topicalization

Topicalization is usually attributed to the subject NP. Topic and subject are even taken as the same and one notion. As (Shibatani, 1991) noted, both in the philosophical and linguistic tradition, subjects are taken as a mere synonymy or equated with the topic; “the subject is what we are talking about” (Chafe, 1976, p: 43). And, as direct reflection of the long-standing tradition to associate subject with topics, generativists have argued for close proximity of subjecthood in the fseq with the topic-hood, (Rizzi, 1997). Objects are rarely taken to be topical items. Here, I want to argue that the periphrastic objects are indeed topicalized, without raising to the pre-subject position.

The first question in addressing topicalization is then the notion of what topicalization itself is. I assume Shibatani's description of topic is correct:

The grammatical topic functions as a powerful cohesive device that relates an event to the preceding event in such a way that the new event is presented as a further development of the preceding event by way of sharing the topic with it.

(Shibatani, 1991, p: 101)

The idea here is that topic is the notion that connects one event to the next event when there are series of events. The notion that transfers from the first sentence to the next, keeping the flow of the topic constant (without topic-shift) can then be considered as the topic.

Pronominal coreference facts in Amharic do show that the DP that agrees is the DP in topic position. We can test this phenomena by using the ambiguous pronoun, *essu* translated as ‘he’ as well as ‘it’.

- (33)    yosef lə-Aster   dābdabe lakk-ə.        essu-mm guwadəgnoččwan asdənək'-ə  
          Josef for-Aster letter   sent-3msgS. He/it-foc her.friends        surprise-3msgS  
          ‘Josef sent a letter to Aster. It/he surprised her friends.’



- (34) yosef lə-Aster dəbdabe-u-n lakk-ə-w. essu-mm guwadəgnoččwan asdənək-ə  
*Josef for-Aster letter-def-acc send-3msgS-3msgO. He/it her.friends surprise-3msgS*  
 ‘Josef sent the letter to Aster. It/he surprised her friends.’

There are events in each of these sentences. The first sentence of each of the example has the event of *sending a letter*, and the second sentences of the examples contain the event of *surprising her friends*.

Now, the point is what does the pronoun *essu-mm* (it/he-Focus) refers to. In each of the example, there are three candidates for the antecedence of the pronoun:

- the external argument, *yosef*
- the internal argument, the *letter*
- the event of sending itself

It turns out that in both of the examples, the event (of sending) is the most salient antecedent, while the external argument is the least (almost unavailable) one. When it comes to the appropriateness of the internal argument as antecedent of the topicalized pronoun, the two examples have clear distinction. While the direct object is almost unable to corefer with the pronoun in (33), it is easily available in (34).

The same can be said about the indirect object. Look at the following sentences.

- (35) aster lə-məmhīr-u<sub>j</sub> dəbdabe<sub>i</sub> lak<sub>h</sub>-əčč-lət. essu-mm<sub>h</sub>/j/??i təmariwəččun asasəbə  
*Aster for-teacher-def letter send-3fsg-3msg.ben. He/it-foc students bothered*  
 ‘Aster send a letter to the teacher. It/he bothered the students.’
- (36) aster lə-məmhīr-u<sub>j</sub> dəbdabe<sub>i</sub> lakk<sub>h</sub>-əčč. essu-mm<sub>h</sub>/??j/i təmari-očč-u-n asasəbə  
*Aster for-teacher-def letter send-3fsg. He/it-foc student-pl-def-acc bother*  
 ‘Aster send a letter to the teacher. It/he bothered the students.’

Even if the event is still the most salient topic, most appropriate to co-index with the pronoun, agreeing arguments can also be marginally available for co-referring with the pronoun. As the marks indicate, the indirect object is available to function as the topic of the next sentence more saliently in (35) than in (36). It is more appropriate for the indirect object to transfer as the subject of the next sentence (event) whenever it is in agreement with the verb of the first sentence.

Given the topic is the notion that connects the events of the two consecutive sentences, hence, taking the topic argument be the one saliently available to antecede a pronoun in the next sentence, Caramazza and Gupta (1979), and that “pronouns require that their referents be topical.” Kehler (2004), the co-indexation facts from the above examples shows that the object agreeing with the verb is the one in topic position<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup>At this point, one might argue that the agreement markers are pronominal; and, hence, induce prominence to the objects. The idea is plausible one. But, as Baker has rejected the pronominal (anaphora)

Digressing from the main point, an equally interesting fact is the case of an embedded object argument. When the object is embedded inside a matrix clause, it can no longer antecede the pronoun in the next sentence. The event, however, is still able to antecede it. This seems to suggest that the topicalized object is still below the event. If it is below the event boundary, how can it antecede the pronoun in the first place is a mystery to me.

- (37) aster lə-məmhīr-u<sub>j</sub> dəbdabe<sub>i</sub> ində-lak<sub>h</sub>-əčč-(lət) tənəgərə. essu-mm/h/\*j təmariwəččun asasəbə  
*Aster for-teacher-def letter CM-send-3fsg-(3msg.ben) told. it/\*he students bothered*  
 ‘It is reported that Aster sent a letter to the teacher. It/he bothered the students.’

If my argument for the topicalization of the agreeing arguments is successful, then, the next step is to establish the relationship between the syntactic positions of internal arguments and causee arguments, and develop how and why the agreement and case marking is possible in some positions, but not in others.

I have already claimed that middle arguments (indirect object) and causee arguments have similar syntactic properties. I also claimed that, even if they are similar, they do not hold the same position in the VP fseq. I have presented their co-occurrence as the main evidence for this. Following (Pylkkänen, 2008), I also claimed that causee arguments merge in SpecvCausP while middle arguments merge in Spec-ApplP.

Now, the main issue that I am concerned here is getting the agreement and the case assignment of the causee, and other internal arguments right.

#### 4.3.2 Agreement

My observation is that it is highest of the internal arguments triggers obligatory agreement with on the verb. Whenever the causee is not part of the derivation, the theme or the middle argument triggers agreement. Whenever the causee is part of the derivation, however, none of the other two internal arguments can trigger agreement. We can capture this fact by simple locality constraint as Relativized Minimality, Rizzi (1990). As the causee is the highest argument, it agrees with F and blocks the other arguments.

Baker’s analysis of the order of the arguments in Amharic in combination with the universal hierarchy proposed in (Pylkkänen, 2008) the following structure for the example given above, (22) repeated here.

- (38) Aster lij-it-u-n lə-yosef dəbdabe-u-n as-lakk-əčč-at (\*iw)( \*lat)  
 Aster child-f-def-acc for-Josef letter-def-acc CAUS-send-3fsgS-3fsgO (3msgO)(3fsgO)  
 ‘Aster made the girl send the letter for Josef.’

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possibility of object agreement markers in Amharic, I will not be worried about it in here. Look at footnote 14.

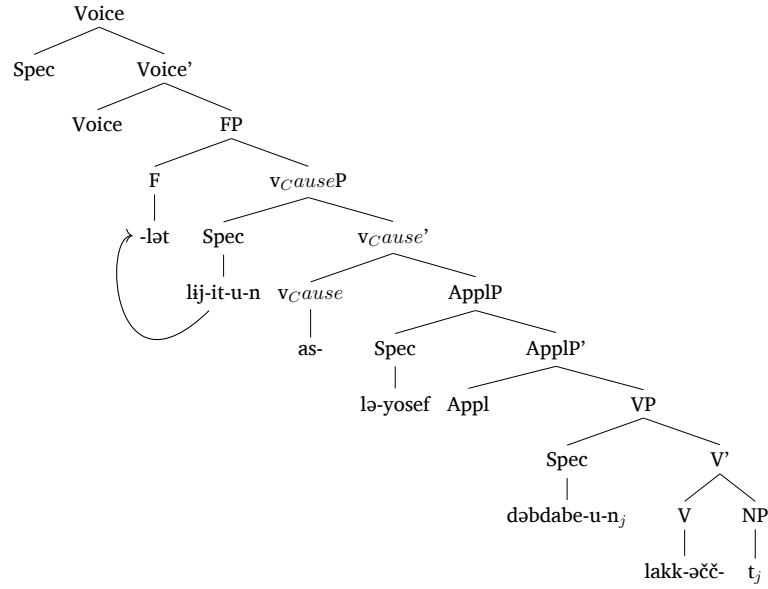


Figure 4: agreement of the causee argument

Now, take a situation where the causee doesn't merge. The empirical observation is any of the arguments can trigger object agreement, but never both of them at the same time. In the examples in (26) and (27), I have also shown that the surface order of the two arguments doesn't have effect on the agreement. It is also possible for any of the internal arguments to precede the causee argument, still without affecting the agreement. I have taken it as an evidence for the LF nature of agreement in Amharic. As is evident from those examples, even if the theme precedes the middle and the causee arguments, it can not trigger agreement on the verb.

Since the middle argument normally (in the underlying order) c-commands the theme argument, (Mark, 2012), according to the relativized minimality analysis, we expect the middle argument to trigger agreement. This is born out. Under normal conditions, it is always the middle argument that triggers the object agreement.

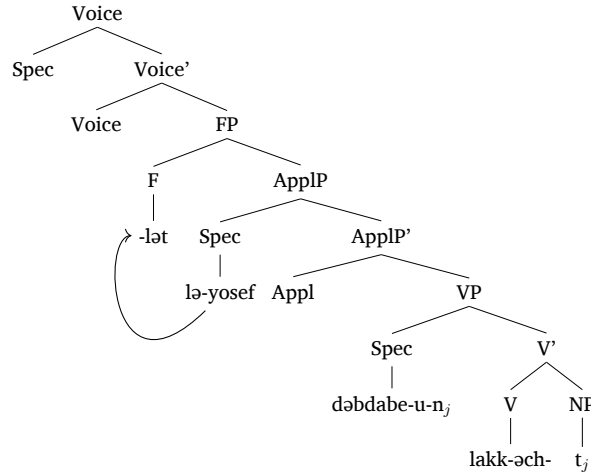


Figure 5: Indirect object agreement

That means, the relativized minimality story proposed for the causee argument then can easily capture the normal agreement facts of the middle argument and the theme argument.

The relativized minimality proposal however falls into problem when we consider the situations where the theme argument agrees with the verb, blocking the middle and causee arguments, partially presented in (22) and (23), repeated here.

- (39) yosef bə-məmhīr-it-u dəbdabe-u-n as-nəbəb-ə-w(\*at)  
*Josef letter-def-acc By-teacher-f-def CAUS-read-3msgS-3msgO (\*3fsgO)*  
 ‘Josef get the letter read by the (female) teacher.’
- (40) yosef lə-məmhīr-it-u dəbdabe-u-n lakk-ə-w(\*at)  
*Josef letter-def-acc for-teacher-f-def send-3msgS-3msgO (\*3fsgO)*  
 ‘Josef send the letter to the (female) teacher.’

I claim that this apparently reversed situation is the result of the topicalization process that the theme argument is undergoing at LF<sup>12</sup>. I have already shown that the object that triggers the agreement is the one in topic position; also claimed that the topicalized argument moves at LF to a higher position. The topicalization moves the theme argument to higher position at LF, regardless of the surface position, enabling the theme to block the middle agreement and trigger object agreement.

<sup>12</sup>An alternative analysis would be to assume the preposition marked arguments to merge in lower position than the theme argument. That is, to assume that the merging position of the arguments vary in accordance with their case marking. But, I am not entertaining such analysis for two main reasons. First, I believe the topicalization of the object is real, an independent fact. Secondly, I find Baker’s argument on the higher position of the middle arguments is convincing. Hence, there is no need stipulate that the middle argument merges lower than the theme whenever it comes with dative case.

One serious issue that immediately arises out of this kind of analysis is why theme happen to raise to higher position (topicalization), only when the other arguments are case marked by preposition. In other words, why is topicalization of the theme, and its follow up object agreement, impossible when the causee and the middle argument are in accusative case, as presented in (41) and (42).

- (41) yosef məmhir-it-u-n dəbdabe-u-n as-nəbəb-ə-at(\*əw)  
*Josef teacher-f-def-acc letter-def-acc CAUS-read-3msgS-3fsgO*  
 ‘Josef make the (female) teacher read the letter.’
- (42) yosef məmhir-it-u-n dəbdabe-u-n lakk-ə-lat (\*əw)  
*yosef teacher-f-def-acc letter-def-acc lakk-3msgS-3fsgO*  
 ‘Josef send the the (female) teacher a letter.’

I claim that topicalization at LF (any kind of movement for that matter) obeys the basic principles of syntax. In the topicalization raising above, we were raising accusative marked argument across genitive or instrumental marked arguments. If we take the more radical kind of relativized minimality, advocate in Stark’s (1995), raising of accusative case marked across non-accusative arguments is expected. Because the argument has carried at least one additional feature that the higher arguments do not have.  $[DP_{Causee} + \text{instrumental}] \dots [DP_I O + \text{dative}] \dots [DP_D O + \text{Accusative}]$  In this kind of feature, composition, we don’t expect any form of blocking. Hence, raising would be licit.

But, whenever all the arguments are marked by accusative case, the case composition of the arguments puts them into competition. The higher arguments block the lower arguments; making the LF raising of the theme argument illicit, as in (41) and (42).

### 4.3.3 Case

There are two major views on case assignment in the generative literature. I call them the fixed view and the relativized view. The fixed view is the mainstream view of case assignment where a specific fixed functional head is taken as a responsible organ for assigning certain kinds of case. In the earlier stages of P & P, Chomsky (1991), instance, nominative Case was assumed to be assigned by the IP via spec-head relationship between the case-assigning head (the I) and the the subject. The accusative case was again associated the lexical verb. In the latter versions, the case assigning heads have been evolving to T, AgrO and little v projections at different times. But, still, in all the history of the early and latter P & P, the mainstream GB maintains that specific heads are associated with specific Case values. Nominative is assigned by TP/IP; accusative is by vP/VP. A fixed head is responsible for a specific Case value. The second, while less-known, mainly motivated by Burzio’s Generalization, maintains that Case assignment is not associated with specific heads; rather a relativized process that nominative case can be assigned by either vP, in case of unaccusatives, or TP in case of causatives, Marantz

(2001); Sigurdsson (2000), nominative case assignment in Amharic internal arguments is not similar to agreement. As I have illustrated above, the agreement of one of the arguments is highly dependent on the positions and structures of the other arguments in the derivation. Higher arguments block the agreements of lower arguments. But, this kind of syntactic competition is not available in case assignment. Case assignment is rather dependent on the intra-DP properties. One such factor is the specificity of the DP. Accusative case marking is possible only on specific (morphologically marked by the definite article) DPs.

- (43) #yosef yəhon-ə-n təmari gərəf-ə(w)  
*Josef one-3msg-acc student whip-3msgS(3msgO)*  
 ‘Josef whipped a student.’ (unspecific)

‘Considering the in-ward looking nature of case, I assume that case is not specifically related to any functional projection. I assume that any of the functional projections related with agentive, Voice, vCause and Appl can assign case to the arguments in their specifier position. The theme can then receive case from V; the middle argument from Appl and the causee from Voice.

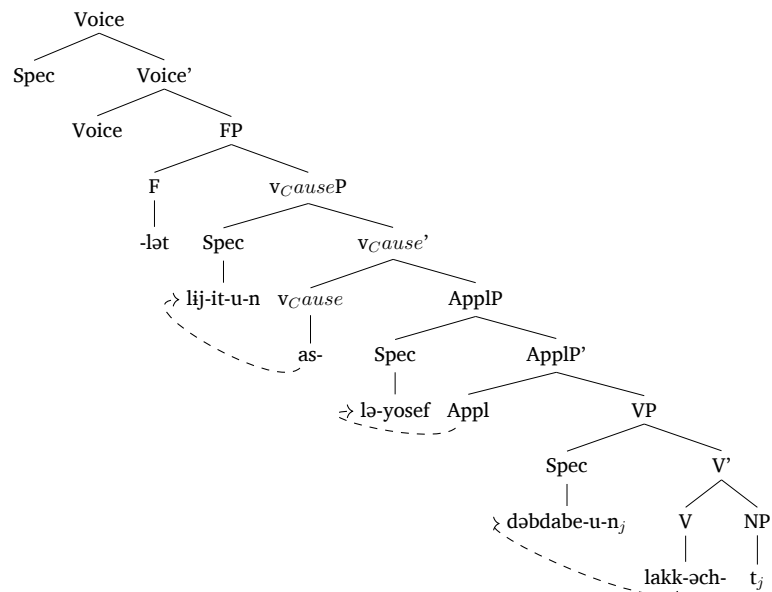


Figure 6: Case Assignment

## 5 Conclusion

In the above section, I have attempted to derive the case and object agreement phenomena in periphrastic arguments of Amharic VP. I argued that introducing the causee argument into the derivation challenges Baker's (Mark, 2012) recent analysis of the middle and theme arguments as headed by null PP projection. I have also attempted to capture the agreement and case facts using the usual locality constraints such as Relativized Minimality.

Relying on two basic assumptions that:

1. Relativized Minimality applies only at LF
2. Case assignment and object agreement are independent operations

I use the first to capture the agreement fact that the internal arguments and the causee arguments interplay. I have shown that the three periphrastic arguments compete for agreement. Whenever the causee argument is part of the derivation, it blocks the other two arguments, in accordance with the principles of relativized minimality, and takes control of the agreement. Whenever the causee argument is not part of the derivation, the theme and the goal/source arguments compete for agreement. If the goal has accusative, it dominates the accusative case marked theme. That is, if the middle argument is accusative case, the theme has no chance of controlling agreement in any way. If the goal is marked by the preposition (dative), the goal can still dominate the theme and control the agreement, or accusative marked theme can control the agreement by undergoing topicalization movement at LF.

Separating case assignments from the object agreement, I claimed that cases are assigned by separate projections, unlike agreement which is the reflex of the a single functional projection. I take the idiosyncratic nature of cases in accordance with the internal structure of the DPs as an evidence for this claim.

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