

Binding and agreement in Avar support the encapsulation analysis of the Anaphor Agreement Effect

Abstract This paper discusses two analyses of the Anaphor Agreement Effect (AAE, [Rizzi 1990](#)) in light of novel data from Avar. By demonstrating that Avar anaphors trigger full, non-trivial agreement on the ϕ -probe, I argue that the Avar data instantiate a genuine exception to the AAE. I then compare two competing analyses of binding and the AAE: an account whereby anaphoric dependencies arise via the syntactic operation Agree ([Murugesan 2018](#)), and a theory deriving the inability of the anaphors' ϕ -features to trigger full agreement from the presence of additional structural layers inside the anaphors that render the features inaccessible ([Preminger 2019](#)). I claim that the absence of the AAE in Avar supports the encapsulation analysis.

Keywords: syntax; morphosyntax; AAE; binding; finiteness; agreement; Avar

1 Introduction

The Anaphor Agreement Effect (AAE) is an empirical observation underpinning a wide range of theories of anaphoric binding ([Kratzer 2009](#); [Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011](#)). Stated informally, it refers to the inability of reflexive pronouns to trigger ϕ -agreement on the verb; several more formal definitions are provided in (1) below.

(1) Anaphor Agreement Effect

- a. Anaphors do not occur in syntactic positions construed with agreement.
(Rizzi 1990: 26)
- b. Anaphors do not occur in syntactic positions construed with verbal agreement, unless the agreement does not vary for ϕ -features.
(Tucker 2012: 20)
- c. Anaphors cannot directly trigger covarying ϕ -agreement which results in covarying ϕ -morphology.
(Sundaresan 2016: 99)

Since it can diagnose agreeing positions, the AAE can also be used to test theories of case (Hornstein 2018). Given its crosslinguistic robustness, exceptions to the AAE—both real and apparent—provide insight into the nature of the phenomenon and deserve thorough scrutiny.

A major application of the AAE has been to support those theories of anaphoric relations which seek to derive the referential dependence of reflexive pronouns by postulating an inherent deficiency in ϕ -features that is eliminated in the course of the derivation via an application of the generalised agreement operation, Agree (Chomsky 2000). On this view, Agree is also the mechanism used to derive the AAE itself.

In this paper, I provide data from Avar showing the AAE not to arise in either finite or non-finite clauses (§2). I argue that, even though Avar is a genuine counterexample to the AAE, it does not warrant dismissing the AAE as a crosslinguistic principle, and the right account of the AAE should explain both the AAE and its exceptions in a systematic way. I compare the predictions of the Agree-based account (§3) with those of Preminger (2019), a novel analysis of the AAE deriving the defectiveness of agreement from the anaphors' ϕ -features being encapsulated in additional layers of syntactic structure (§4). I conclude that whilst the encapsulation view accommodates the Avar facts effortlessly, the ϕ -deficiency view based on Agree fails to do so.

2 Avar as a true exception to the AAE

For a language to qualify as a true exception to the AAE, three things are required.

Requirement I the anaphoric element involved in a ϕ -agreement relation with the verb is an anaphor;

Requirement II the ϕ -agreement relation between the verb and the anaphor is covarying/non-trivial (Preminger 2019);

Requirement III the ϕ -morphology is transferred to the ϕ -probe directly from the anaphor and is not attributable to a mediating element. In the remainder of this section I show that all three conditions hold for Avar.

2.1 Requirement I: Avar reflexives are anaphors

Rudnev (2017) demonstrates that the Avar semi-local reflexive *žiwo* is a *bona fide* anaphor sharing a host of properties with reflexive pronouns in other languages.

First, the reflexive pronoun *žiwo* in Avar requires a c-commanding antecedent in relative proximity (2), and cannot c-command it (3):¹

- (2) a. *ʕali-ca žiwo w-ecc- ana*
 Ali- ERG <M>REFL.ABS M-praise-PST
 ‘Ali has praised himself.’
- b. *ʕali-l insuca žiwo w-ecc- ana*
 Ali- GEN father.ERG <M>REFL.ABS M-praise-PST
 ‘Ali₁’s father₂ has praised himself_{*1/2}.’
- (3) **žincago ʕali w-ecc- ana*
 REFL.ERG Ali.ABS M-praise-PST
 (‘Ali has praised himself.’)

Second, Avar reflexives display a strong preference for sloppy readings in elliptical continuations:

- (4) *insuda žiwo mat’uʃu w-ix- ana, hedingo wasasda-gi*
 father.LOC <M>REFL.ABS <M>mirror.INESS M-see-PST also son.LOC-CNJ
 ‘Father saw himself in the mirror, and his son did too.’
 = the son saw himself in the mirror
 ≠ the son saw father in the mirror (Rudnev 2017: 158)

Just like its counterparts in English, the Avar reflexive *žiwo* is interpreted as a bound variable, the strict reading being dispreferred. I conclude that it is an anaphor that should fall under the purview of the AAE: Requirement I holds.

¹ All Avar examples in this paper without a literature reference come from my field notes.

2.2 Requirement II: Reflexives trigger covarying ϕ -agreement

We have already seen in the foregoing examples (2a), (4) that the verbs display agreement with the absolutive argument realised as a reflexive pronoun: in both cases, the absolutive reflexive *žiŋwgo* carries a masculine class marker, as do the finite verbs *weccana* ‘praised’ and *wixana* ‘saw’.

If the absolutive reflexive is specified with different ϕ -features, the verb’s ϕ -features covary with those of the pronoun:

- (5) a. *jasal žiŋgo j-ecc- ana*
 girl.ERG <F>REFL.ABS F-praise-PST
 ‘The girl has praised herself.’
 b. *himalaz žadgo r-ecc- ana*
 kids.ERG <PL>REFL.ABS PL-praise-PST
 ‘The kids have praised themselves.’

Before proceeding to discuss the nature of the agreement relation in the next subsection, let us also establish that the only agreement option that is not available is for the verb to carry default agreement morphology. Default agreement in Avar is invariably singular nonhuman/neuter; it is triggered in the absence of a local absolutive argument, when a transitive verb’s internal argument corresponds to an infinitival clause:

- (6) *die b-oŋ- ana [yoŋe t’ad-e j-aχ- ine]*
 1SG.DAT N-want-PST <F>DEM.LAT up- LAT F-move-INF
 ‘I wanted to go up there.’ (modelled on Forker 2018: (35a))

In the context of reflexivisation, however, default agreement on the verb is sharply unacceptable:

- (7) **wasas/jasal žiŋw/jgo b-ecc- ana*
 boy.ERG/girl.ERG <M/F>REFL.ABS N-praise-PST
 (‘The boy/girl praised himself/herself.’)

We can therefore conclude that Avar verbs display regular non-trivial agreement with absolutive reflexives, which is in principle compatible with the view, advocated by, amongst others, Sundaresan (2016), that the ϕ -probe gets the required feature values not from the reflexive itself but from a third party, either covert or overt. The next subsection shows that this option is not viable for Avar.

2.3 Requirement III: No mediator

To establish the absence of a mediating element between the ϕ -probe and the reflexive goal, we need to identify the ϕ -probe, which would require an excursus into the details of Avar case and agreement, as well as demonstrate that there is no potential agreement controller—other than the absolutive reflexive—within the same domain. Therefore, I will first show that the locus of both agreement and case in Avar is v and then argue that postulating a hidden left periphery inside structurally small syntactic objects is not plausible.

Avar is an ergative-absolutive language where verbal agreement uniformly tracks the unmarked (absolutive) case. Crucially, the Avar absolutive cannot be identified with either the high absolutive (ABS = NOM) or the low absolutive (ABS = DEF) as defined by Legate (2008). In particular, the unmarked S and O arguments of finite clauses remain unmarked in low nominalisations and infinitival clauses. The examples in (8) illustrate this for transitive clauses, and those in (9) for intransitive clauses.

(8) Case and agreement in finite and non-finite transitive clauses

- a. was-as mašin^{al} r- ič- ul- a
 son-ERG cars.ABS PL- $\sqrt{\text{sell}}$ -PRS-FIN
 ‘The son sells cars.’ [finite]
- b. [was-as mašin^{al} r- ič- i] ħik’a- b iš b-ugo
 son-ERG cars.ABS PL- $\sqrt{\text{sell}}$ -NMLZ good-N thing.ABS N-be.PRS
 ‘That the son sells cars is a good thing.’ [nominalisation]
- c. insu- e b-oł’- ana [was-as mašin^{al} r- ič- ize]
 father.OBL-DAT N-want-PST son-ERG cars.ABS PL- $\sqrt{\text{sell}}$ -INF
 ‘Father wanted his son to sell the car.’ [infinitive]

In all three clause types illustrated in (8) above, the agreeing transitive verb *CM-ič-* ‘sell’ takes on the plural agreement prefix *r-* coreferencing the noun class feature of the absolutive object DP *mašin^{al}* ‘cars.ABS’. The external argument uniformly carries ERG in all clause types.

(9) **Case and agreement in finite and non-finite intransitive clauses**

- a. was w-eker- an- a insuqe
 boy.ABS M- $\sqrt{\text{run}}$ -PST-FIN father.APL
 ‘The boy ran to his father.’ [finite]
- b. [was insuqe w-eker- i] hik’a- b iš b-ugo
 boy.ABS father.APL M- $\sqrt{\text{run}}$ -NMLZ good-N thing.ABS N-be.PRS
 ‘The boy running to his father is a good thing.’ [nominalisation]
- c. kinazego b-oł’ana [was insuqe w-eker- ize]
 everyone.DAT N-want.PST boy.ABS father.APL M- $\sqrt{\text{run}}$ -INF
 ‘Everyone wanted the boy to run to his father.’ [infinitive]

We can conclude from the identity of patterns of agreement and clause assignment across finite and non-finite clauses that high functional heads such as T are not implicated in negotiating either case or agreement.

Further evidence for v being the locus of agreement and case in all Avar clauses is to be found in the interaction of finiteness with negation. As [Rudnev \(2015\)](#) demonstrates, infinitival clauses in Avar are incompatible with clausal negation—a traditional diagnostic of T-less restructuring complements ([Wurmbrand 2001](#)).

Clausal negation in Avar is realised as a suffix on the verb: in (10a), the suffix *-ro* attaches to the present-tense form *ričula* ‘sell.PRS’ familiar from (8a) above. Attempting to directly negate a low nominalisation, as in (10b), or an infinitive, as in (10c), results in unacceptability.

(10) **Incompatibility with negation**

- a. muradi-ca mašinai r- ič- ul- a- ro
 Murad- ERG cars.ABS PL-sell-PRS-FIN-NEG
 ‘Murad does not sell cars.’
- b. *[was-as mašinai r- ič- i- ro] hik’a- b iš b-ugo
 son- ERG cars.ABS PL- $\sqrt{\text{sell}}$ -NMLZ-NEG good-N thing.ABS N-be.PRS
 (‘That the son does not sell cars is a good thing.’)
- c. *insu- e b-oł’- ana [was-as mašinai r- ič- ize- ro]
 father.OBL-DAT N-want-PST son- ERG cars.ABS PL- $\sqrt{\text{sell}}$ -INF-NEG
 (‘Father wanted his son not to sell the car.’)

[Wurmbrand \(2001\)](#) analyses restructuring complements as VPs; yet, given the presence of an external argument in Avar infinitival clauses and low nominalisations, I contend that v ought to be projected as well, as has in

fact been proposed for several neighbouring languages (see Gagliardi et al. 2014 for Lak and Tsez, and Polinsky 2016; Polinsky, Radkevich & Chumakina 2017 for Archi). Low nominalisations will then be vP-nominalisations formed, on this view, by the nominalising functional head *n* taking the vP as a complement, as sketched in (11).

(11) **Low nominalisations in Avar**

[_{TP} [_{VP} ...] *n*]

Having established *v* as the locus of ϕ -agreement in Avar, we are now in a position to show that the anaphors' ϕ -features are not inherited from the antecedent but must be present on the anaphor from the start. The relevant evidence comes from agreement accompanying long-distance reflexivisation.

Existing work on anaphoric dependencies in Northeast Caucasian languages references the possibility of the Avar reflexive *žiwgo* being bound across a non-finite clause boundary (Testelefs & Toldova 1998; Rudnev 2017). Example (12) involving a nominalised embedded clause is a case in point.

- (12) kinazdago lalaan [rasulie žadgo r- oʔun
all.LOC know.PRS Rasul.DAT <PL>REFL.ABS PL-love.CVB
 r- uk'in]
 PL-AUX.NMLZ

'Everyone knows Rasul loves them.' (adapted from Rudnev 2017: (18))

Since we have established that case and agreement in Avar are negotiated at the level of vP, and there is no plural antecedent for the plural reflexive within that domain in (12), I conclude that the reflexive is fully specified with ϕ -features. I return to this point in more detail in §3.²

To summarise this section, I have shown that Avar reflexivisation is a genuine counterexample to the AAE in all existing formulations: the reflexive pronoun triggering covarying ϕ -agreement on the verb is an anaphor, and the agreement relation is established internally to the vP directly between the anaphor and the ϕ -probe.

² Low agreement and case assignment in Avar also rule out potential explanations of the AAE violations in terms of silent pronominal perspective holders in the left periphery (e.g. Sundaesan 2016 for Tamil).

3 Against Agree-based analyses of the AAE

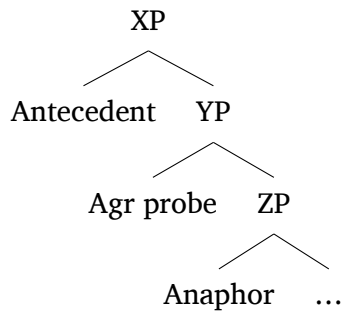
As stated in the introduction, Agree-based approaches to anaphora in general and the AAE in particular postulate an inherent featural deficiency for referentially dependent expressions: either a ϕ -deficiency in the case of anaphors, or a referential deficiency encoded in terms of a dedicated referential feature. What matters is that anaphors acquire their ϕ -feature specifications from their binders.³

To keep the discussion concrete, I begin this section by considering a recent Agree-based account of the AAE due to [Murugesan \(2018\)](#) since it formulates an especially clear set of predictions concerning the structural conditions for the AAE to arise. I show that the Avar data introduced in the preceding section falsify [Murugesan's \(2018\)](#) prediction. In §3.2, I demonstrate that attempts to salvage the analysis as formulated in §3.1 by appealing to differences in the timing of syntactic operations result in a contradiction. In doing so, I rely on [Preminger's \(2019\)](#) discussion of the deficiencies of timing-based approaches to the AAE.

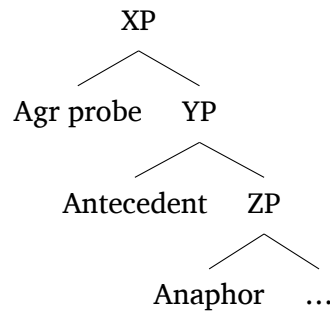
3.1 A false prediction

[Murugesan \(2018\)](#) discusses several purported exceptions to the AAE and develops an Agree-based analysis aiming to account both those languages that obey the AAE and the exceptions. His account capitalises on the structural position of the ϕ -probe with respect to the antecedent.

(13) **Pattern A:**



(14) **Pattern B:**



Taking anaphors to be ϕ -deficient, [Murugesan \(2018\)](#) suggests that it is the low position of the ϕ -probe with respect to the antecedent that gives

³ For the purposes of this paper I set aside the conceptual objections to upwards probing/downwards valuation and concentrate on the empirical challenges for the Agree-based approaches.

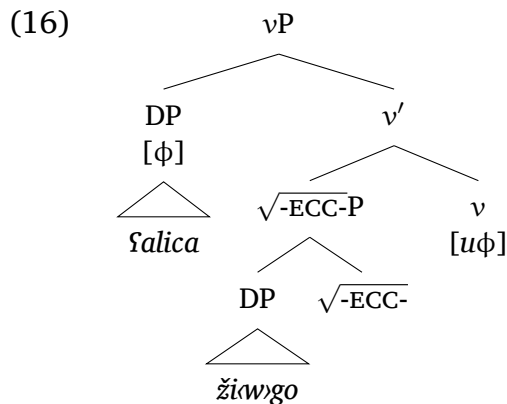
rise to the AAE in Pattern A: since in (13) the ϕ -probe appears earlier in the structure than the antecedent, ϕ -agreement obtains first, yielding default/trivial/deficient agreement, and only then does the anaphor acquire ϕ -features from the antecedent. Murugesan (2018) then goes on to show that the attested exceptions to the AAE (Tamil, Standard Gujarati) are in principle reconcilable with the approximate syntax in (14), whereby the anaphor will have valued its $[u\phi]$ against the antecedent before the verbal ϕ -probe is merged.

However, if the view of Avar agreement and case argued for in §2.3 is correct, the antecedent-Agr probe configuration in Avar is the one in (13): the Agr probe carrying the unvalued ϕ -features is v , which enters the derivation earlier than the (ergative) antecedent. The AAE is predicted to arise, yet, given what we have seen in §2, this prediction is false. An illustration follows immediately below.

Given the irrelevance of T for Avar agreement and case established in §2.3, and in the interests of space, let us abstract away from finiteness and consider instead the implications of the Agree-based analysis the binding-cum-agreement facts inside a low nominalisation such as (15), which is a nominalised counterpart of (2).

- (15) ζ ali-ca \check{z} i ω go w-ecc- i
 Ali- ERG $\langle M \rangle$ REFL.ABS M-praise-NMLZ
 ‘Ali praising himself’

Omitting the nominaliser from the representation, (15) will have the following rough structure, which is effectively a variant of (13) above: hierarchically speaking, the ϕ -probe is situated between the anaphor (\check{z} i ω go) and the antecedent ζ alica ‘Ali.ERG’.



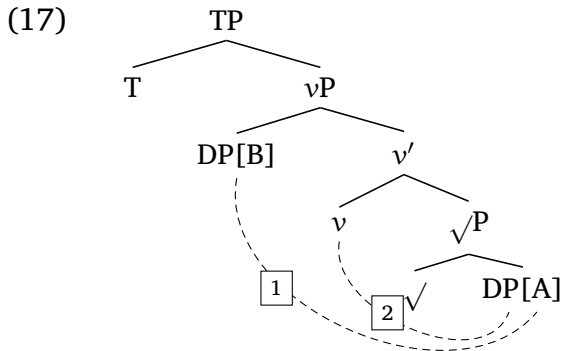
Crucially, there is no sensible way of reanalysing (15) as projecting the structure in (14), as there is no higher ϕ -probe available.

The following section shows that supplementing the Agree account with specific provision regarding derivational timing result in a theory lacking a principled way of predicting for a given language whether that language will display the AAE.

3.2 *Timing analyses predict AAE obeisance and violations*

Arguing that Agree-based analyses of the AAE are incompatible with appeals to the differential timing of syntactic operations, Preminger (2019) observes that in an imaginary ergative-absolutive language with a low ABS and v probing for ϕ -features, Agree must be able to apply countercyclically. Indeed, if anaphors obtain their ϕ -features from the antecedents, then they must do so after v has Agreed with the ϕ -deficient anaphor.

This scenario is schematised in (17), inspired by Preminger (2019: (23)), where DP[B] stands for the binder, and DP[A] the anaphor.



In the absence of an explicit prohibition to the contrary, the anaphor countercyclically valuing its ϕ -features against those of the antecedent *prior* to Agree obtaining between it and v (Step 1 in (17))

(...) would yield full, nontrivial ϕ -agreement with the anaphor,
in violation of the AAE. (Preminger 2019: 11)

Whilst Preminger (2019) labours under the assumption of this being an incorrect prediction, we have seen in the preceding subsection that the full agreement pattern in Avar arises under exactly these circumstances. The ability of the Agree analysis to derive the agreement pattern inside Avar

v Ps is, however, a blow to the Agree analysis rather than an argument in its favour, since the analysis now predicts both the presence of the AAE *and* its absence in essentially identical configurations.

On the one hand, if Agree applies (weakly) cyclically, then the $[u\phi]$ feature on v fails to get valued against the ϕ -defective anaphor *žiwgo*. Once the antecedent enters the derivation, it can value the anaphor's $[u\phi]$ feature, resulting in trivial agreement on the verb and full agreement on the anaphor, thus failing to derive the full agreement pattern, contrary to fact.

If, on the other hand, Agree applies countercyclically, then, as Preminger (2019) observes, the antecedent can first value the anaphor's $[u\phi]$ feature, which would subsequently go on to value v 's features, resulting in full agreement on the verb, in accordance with the observations about Avar, but failing to derive the AAE where it holds.

Summary

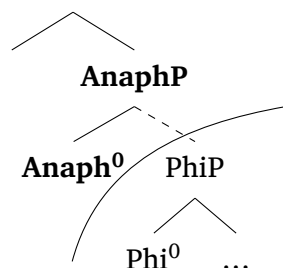
In this section, we have seen that timing-based analyses of the AAE predict the effect to arise and not to arise in exactly the same circumstances, revealing the accounts' internal inconsistency. The AAE, therefore, cannot be used in support of ϕ -deficiency analyses of anaphoric binding reducing it to an application of Agree.

4 AAE as a consequence of encapsulation

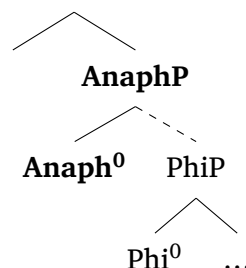
Preminger (2019) provides a novel analysis of the AAE designed to account for the existence of both the AAE-obedient languages and the offenders. The gist of the proposal is that anaphors are structurally complex expressions carrying their own sets of ϕ -features that are then encapsulated—and, consequently, hidden from the ϕ -probe—due to extra layers of structure (4a). Preminger's (2019) proposal is buttressed by a typological study of syncretism and containment patterns inside anaphoric expressions (Middleton 2018), although the exact reason behind the apparent inaccessibility of the anaphors' ϕ -features for probing from v/T in the case of the AAE-obeying languages still remains largely unclear.

(18) **The Encapsulation Hypothesis** (Preminger 2019)

a.



b.



Preminger confesses that, since his account of the AAE is universal, it predicts identical cross-linguistic behaviour of anaphors with respect to triggering the AAE, which makes it vulnerable in light of potential exceptions to the AAE. Rather than dismiss the AAE as effectively coincidental, Preminger takes the universalist stance and proposes instead that the opacity brought about by encapsulation need not be absolute. In particular, citing the crosslinguistic distribution of preposition stranding, he argues that a domain's opacity for syntactic operations in one language does not entail the opacity of comparable domains in other languages. This is essentially his account of the exceptions to the AAE: they arise when the anaphors' internal complexity extends the domain containing the ϕ -features (PhiP) thus keeping them accessible for probing (18b).

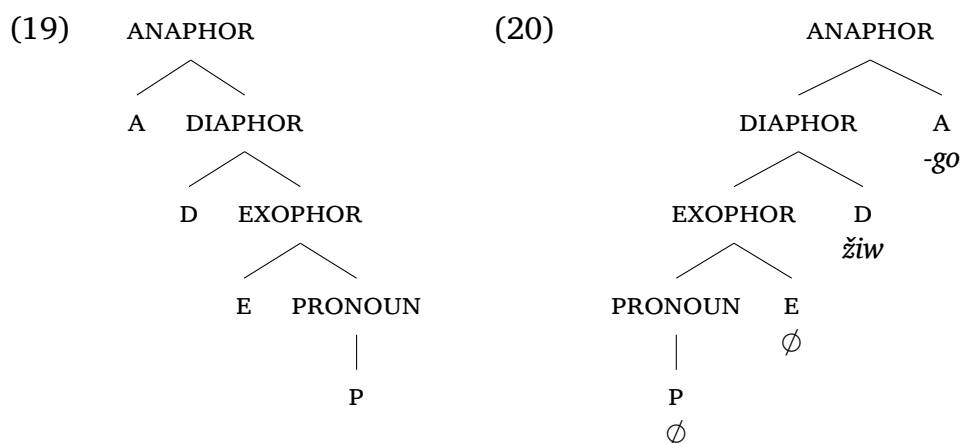
Even though Avar is a genuine exception to the AAE, as argued in §2, I contend that it is nevertheless compatible with the encapsulation view: *žiwgo*, by virtue of being an anaphor, is the source of the valued ϕ -features on *v*. However, for Preminger's (2019) theory to be a plausible account of the Avar facts under discussion, the premises upon which it itself rests should be shown to hold in that language as well. The key question here is whether the anaphor possesses the kind of internal complexity that Preminger's (2019) account demands.⁴

As a first approximation, and setting aside the issues of non-complementary distribution of the various types of anaphoric expression in Avar (though see Testelet & Toldova 1998; Rudnev 2017 for an overview and

⁴ An alternative view would be to claim that crosslinguistically, the anaphors need not contain all the structure attributed to them by Preminger's (2019) account as long as their ϕ -features are accessible for probing. As far as I can tell, this is also compatible with the encapsulation analysis of the AAE, even though it would entail a significant loss of restrictiveness of the resulting theory.

discussion), the internal composition of Avar anaphors, diaphors, exophors and pronouns are broadly in line with Middleton's (2018) approach.⁵

According to Middleton (2018), anaphors and pronouns across languages display systematic containment relations, either overt or covert, represented in (19). Pronouns, which occupy low positions inside the pronominal expression, are contained inside anaphors and are intrinsically specified with ϕ -features. Applying this system to the Avar pronominal forms yields (20), where both the pronoun and exophor receive phonologically null realisation as *pro*, the diaphor/long-distance reflexive is lexicalised as *žiw*, whereas the anaphor *žiwgo* consists of *žiw* and the emphatic particle *-go*.⁶



In summary, there is sufficient evidence to show that the full agreement patterns between the Avar reflexive *žiwgo* and the *v* probe are compatible with Preminger's (2019) encapsulation view, and thus do not threaten the validity of the AAE as a crosslinguistic generalisation.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have adduced novel data from the Northeast Caucasian language Avar showing them to be a real counterexample to the Anaphor Agreement Effect as formulated by Rizzi (1990), and subsequently reformulated by, amongst others, Woolford (1999); Sundaresan (2016): Avar

⁵ I thank Jane Middleton (p.c.) for an extensive discussion and helpful suggestions.

⁶ A different set of non-reflexive pronouns is instantiated by proximal, medial and distal demonstratives that can be used anaphorically. More work is required before any pronouncements can be made concerning the place of demonstrative and deictic pronouns in Middleton's (2018) approach.

reflexive pronouns are *bona fide* anaphors that can nevertheless appear in agreeing positions and trigger non-trivial, ϕ -covarying agreement in finite and non-finite clauses alike.

I have also demonstrated the non-viability of timing-based analyses of the AAE by pointing out the lack of a principled mechanism underlying the AAE and its violations as well as by elaborating on a false prediction such an account would inevitably make.

Finally, I have argued that the encapsulation analysis put forth by [Preminger \(2019\)](#) does not suffer from the deficiencies identified for the timing-based approach and accounts for the AAE and its exceptions in a systematic way.

Abbreviations

1 = First person, ABS = absolutive, APL = apudlative, AUX = auxiliary, CM = class marker, CNJ = conjunction, CVB = converb, DAT = dative, DEM = demonstrative, ERG = ergative, F = feminine, FIN = finiteness, GEN = genitive, INESS = inessive, INF = infinitive, LAT = lative, LOC = locative, M = masculine, N = neuter, NEG = negative, NMLZ = nominalizer, OBL = oblique, PL = plural, PRS = present, PST = past, REFL = reflexive, SG = singular.

Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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