Complexities

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1   Brief summary of the direction of Agree

- Before the holidays, we introduced the notion of AGREE, and how it works in Minimalism.

- It is a method of feature transmission that can happen at a distance.

- Classical 'Chomskian' versions of AGREEposit that it works uniformly downwards.

- This is motivated by various phenomena, including existential constructions, nominative objects and long-distance agreement, among others.

- However, there are other proposals that suggest that it goes upwards, motivated by parasitic agreement, negative concord and sequence of tense, among others.

- Crucial in all (almost) was that agreement is an operation that takes place in the narrow syntax.

2   Agreement takes place in syntax, obviously.

Agreement has by and large been taken to be a syntactic operation.[1] This is largely due to the minimalist view that held agreement to be related to feature checking/licensing, which in some languages forced movement in overt syntax.

Agreement was explicitly linked to processes like case assignment in terms of checking off (or licensing) uninterpretable features.

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[1]Within GB/Minimalism at least, though other frameworks differ.

2.1 Review: Case Assignment in syntax

That case is syntactic is motivated mostly by its apparent use in the licensing of arguments.

(1) The Case Filter
    *NP if NP has phonetic content and does not receive case.

This is an old version of the case filter. Newer versions posit that DPs have case features that must be checked off in the syntax, by virtue of being 'strong.'

Raising constructions seem to show this, with the lower subject DP raising into the higher subject position when the embedded verb is non-finite.

(2) It seems that Nathan is running for office.

(3) Nathan seems to be running for office.

The only way that a DP can occur in non-finite Spec,TP in English is if case is assigned from the higher verb, through Exceptional Case Marking (ECM).

(4) I expect **Nathan** to be President.

(5) I believe **Ando** to be the funniest.

Finally, Case is thought to be the driving force of A-movement, so that the DP can be licensed:

(6) The train$_i$ arrived t_i

(7) The ball$_i$ was kicked t_i

3 Is case really syntactic? Marantz (1991)

Many of the arguments for case being a syntactic process center around instances where an apparent failure to license case forces movement.

It is a minimalist conjecture that all movements happen for a reason.[2] Case is what is thought to drive A-movement.[3]

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[2]Though not everyone fully adheres to this.

[3]A'-movement is forced due to other reasons, such as information structure considerations.

3.1 Case ≠ licensing

Marantz points out various instances whereby morphological case does not line up with syntactic case.

(8) BURZIO'S GENERALISATION: If a verb's subject position in non-thematic, the verb will not assign accusative case.

Put another way: if a verb doesn't assign an external θ-role, then it doesn't license an object.

However, Marantz shows that, whilst widely held, this is not entirely true:

(9) It struck **me** that I should have used "Elmer" in this sentence.

(10) Hanako$_i$-ga   (dorobo-ni) [t$_i$ **yubiwa-o**] to-rare-ta.
Hanako-NOM (thief-by)   [ring-ACC]   steal-PASS-PAST

[Japanese]

'Hanako had a thief steal her ring on her.'

Marantz, citing relevant literature, says that accusative case is licensed in (10), even though the verb is passive.

Finally, Marantz (citing Bresnan & Moshi 1990) shows that in Kichaga, one can passivise a double object verb and leave all object properties on either argument.

(11) a.   N-ä-ï-lyì-í-à   'm-kà k-élyà
(He-$_i$) AgrS$_i$-AgrO$_j$-AgrOk-eat-BEN wife$_j$ food$_k$
'He is eating food for his wife.'
b.   M-ká   n-ä-ï-lyì-í-ò k-élyà
food$_k$ AgrS$_k$-AgrO$_j$-eat-BEN-PASS wide$_j$
'Food is being eaten for the wife.'
c.   k-élyà   k-ï-lyì-í-ò 'm-kà
wife$_j$ AgrS$_j$-AgrO$_k$-eat-BEN-PASS food$_k$
'The wife is being beneficially/adversely affected by someone eating food.'

So, we see various instances of verbs without a thematic subject licensing accusative case. The connection between accusative case and non-thematicity of the subject position isn't as strong as it should be.

Marantz concludes that Burzio's Generalization can simply be restated as a requirement that sentences have subjects, not about case at all.

(12)   Nominal arguments are licensed by (extended) projection, not by Case or by morphological properties.

3.2   Morphological case isn't licensing

(13)   a. María   óskaði (Ólafi)   alls   goðs.
           Mary-NOM wished Olaf-DAT everything-GEN good-GEN
           'Mary wished everything good for Olaf.'
       b. Þess   vas óskað
           this-GEN was wished
           'This was wished.'

Genitive case is retained under passivation. There doesn't then seem to be a direct link between the licensing and case here.

3.3   Different types of alignment

Indo-European style languages are just one case system found. Abstractly, it can be referred to as a nominative-accusative alignment. What does this mean?

In a nominative-accusative alignment, all else being equal, subjects will always receive nominative case, and direct objects accusative case. Crucially, whether the verb is intransitive or transitive, the subject will be in the same case.

Another case alignment that is found is ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE. Languages like these differ from NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE style languages in that internal arguments all pattern together. Thus, an intransitive subject (S) will show the same case marking as a direct object (O) of a transitive verb. A transitive subject (A) will be marked differently.

(14)   Groupings of case marking

NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE   ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE

A   O   A   O

S   S

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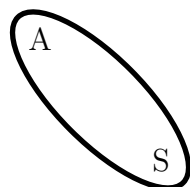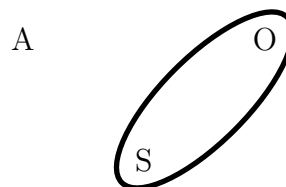
3.4 Configurational case licensing

What Marantz claims is that case is assigned **configurationally**. That is, the grammar looks at a clause as a whole, and assigns cases based on how the cases relate to one another.

Case comes in four types:

(15) Case Realisation Disjunctive Hierarchy
1. Lexically governed case
2. "Dependent" case (accusative and ergative)
3. Unmarked case (environment sensitive)
4. Default case

- Lexically governed case is case that is licensed by a particular verb, to a particular semantic argument. This takes priority over everything![4]

- Dependent case is next.

- Unmarked case is assigned to arguments which receive neither of the other cases.

- Default case is assigned when there is no other mechanism of case assignment available, for instance with hanging topics.

Dependent Case:

It is defined by Marantz as follows:

(16) Dependent Case is assigned by V+I (i.e. the verb - PWS) to a position governed by V+I when a distinct position governed by V+I is:
a. not "marked" (not part of a chain governed by a lexical case determiner)
b. distinct from the chain being assigned dependent case.

What this means is that dependent case is not assigned to a lexically governed argument (a), and can only be assigned to an argument when there is a distinct argument in opposition to it (b). (b) is a little bit complicated to read. It essentially boils down to dependent case only being assigned when there are two distinct arguments in a clause. Note it also says that lexically governed case is ignored for the purposes of dependent case.

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[4]See also Zaenen et al. (1985) for a similar view about lexically governed case, though working in a different framework.

(17)   Dependent case assigned up to student = Ergative
        Dependent case assigned down to object = Accusative

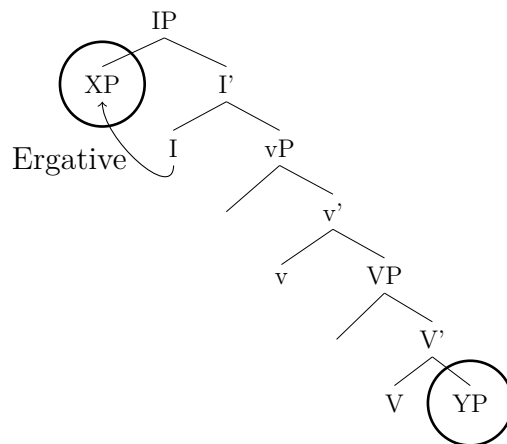Thus in the following, since there are two distinct arguments XP and YP, Dependent Case will work as follows:

(18)   *Where Dependent Case is Accusative*

```
            IP
       ╱        ╲
    (XP)        I'
            ╱        ╲
          I            vP
                   ╱        ╲
                            v'
                        ╱        ╲
                      v            VP
                               ╱        ╲
                                        V'
                                    ╱        ╲
           Accusative             V        (YP)
```
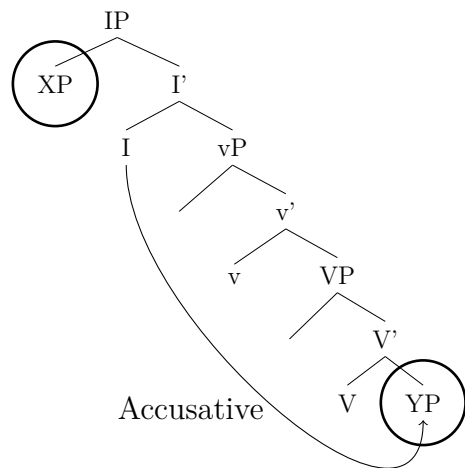
(19)   *Where Dependent Case is Ergative*

```
            IP
       ╱        ╲
    (XP)        I'
            ╱        ╲
  Ergative  I          vP
                   ╱        ╲
                            v'
                        ╱        ╲
                      v            VP
                               ╱        ╲
                                        V'
                                    ╱        ╲
                                  V        (YP)
```

4 The relevance of all this for Agreement

4.1 Agreement is case discriminating

Bobaljik (2008) shows that agreement appears to 'piggyback' on the case assignment mechanism.

(20) The Moravcsik Hierarchy
subject > object > indirect object > adverb

The Moravcsik Hiearchy is a set of implicational universals. If a language has verbal agreement, subjects will always be agreed with, but not necessarily objects. If a language allows something other than subjects to control agreement, then it will be direct objects.

(21)

No Agreement	23	IO only	0
S only	20	DO only	0
S-DO	31	IO,DO only	0
S-IO-DO	25	S-IO, not DO	0

Bobaljik argues that Moravcsik's hierarchy ought to be formulated in terms of morphological case:

(22) The Revised Moravcsik Hierarchy
Unmarked Case > Dependent Case > Lexical/Oblique Case

Bobaljik formulates the hierarchy in terms of case, rather than Grammatical function, because of the following:

(23) When case and GF diverge, it is m-case, not GF, that defines accessibility for agreement.

This is illustrated by ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE systems. Looking at the agreement potential, we get the following:

(24)

No Agreement	(Dyirbal, Lezgian)	*Erg Only	n/a
Abs only	(Tsez, Hindi)	*Erg, Dat, no Abs	n/a
Abs, Erg	(Eskimo-Inuit, Mayan)	*Dat only	n/a
Abs, Erg, Dat	(Basque, Abkhaz)	*Abs, Dat, w/o Erg)	n/a

Bobaljik notes then that wherever Ergative agreement is attested, then Absolutive agreement is also attested.

Note that in Moravcsik's original hierarchy, it is not possible to isolate Absolutive or Ergative. Absolutive appears on both subjects and objects. But, Absolutive can be the only thing targeted for agreement, as in Tsez and Hindi.

The implications that can be taken away from ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE languages, is the following:

(25) $\underbrace{Absolutive}_{\text{Tsez, Hindi}} > Ergative > Dative$

$\underbrace{}_{\text{Eskimo-Inuit, Mayan}}$

$\underbrace{}_{\text{Basque,Abkhaz}}$

However, up to this point, we don't learn anything about agreement itself other than it is case discriminating.

4.2 Agreement is late. Very late.

Bobaljik goes on to show that agreement should be seen as a late process, one that takes place in PF, since where there are mulitple candidates for controlling agreement, it is the structurally highest one that 'wins.'

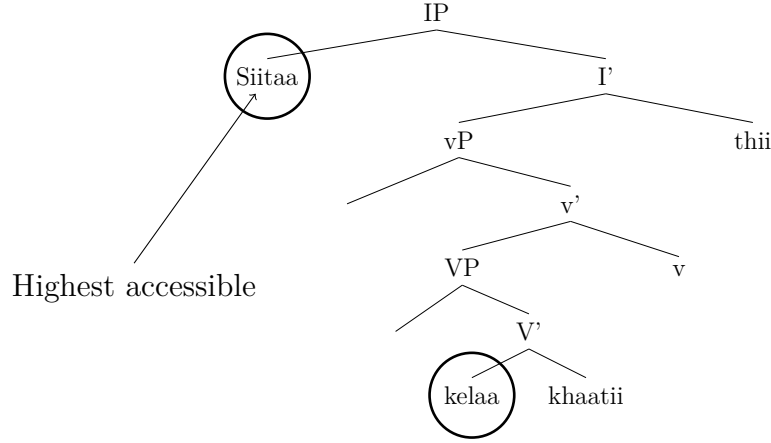### 4.2.1 Multiple absolutives: Hindi

Hindi allows nouns that are unmarked for case to control agreement. Non-marking is ABSOLUTIVE (see Bhatt 2005, Legate 2008 among many others). Nouns marked with ergative 'ne' or dative 'ko' cannot control agreement.

(26) a. Ramm-ne **Rotii** khaayii   thii
Ram-ERG bread eat.PERF.FEM be.PAST.FEM
'Ram had eaten bread.'

  b. siitaa-ne laRkii-ko dekhaa
Sita-ERG girl-ACC see.PERF.MASC
'Sita saw the girl'

  c. **siitaa** kelaa   khaatii   thii
Sita   banana eat.IMPERF.FEM be.PAST.FEM
'Sita (habitually) ate bananas.'

  d. siita-ko   **larke** pasand the
Dita-DAT boys   like   be.PAST.MASC.PL
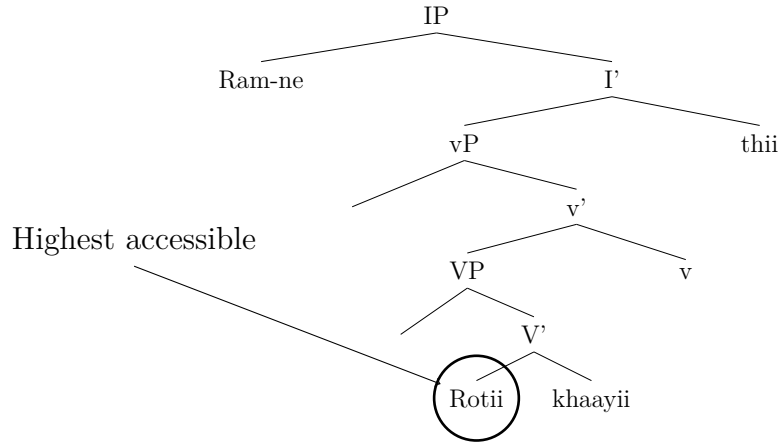
'Sita likes the boys.'

In (26c) we see that both arguments are not marked for case, and so are accessible for agreement. But it is the structurally higher DP that wins, as the agreement is feminine.

(27)

```
                              IP
                  ╱────────────────────╲
             ⟨Siitaa⟩                    I'
               ↑              ╱──────────────╲
               │            vP                thii
               │      ╱──────────╲
               │                  v'
               │            ╱──────────╲
               │          VP            v
               │      ╱──────╲
  Highest accessible        V'
                        ╱──────╲
                   ⟨kelaa⟩     khaatii
```

Importantly, (26a) shows that objects can control agreement, but only when the subject is not available.

(28)

```
                              IP
                  ╱────────────────────╲
            Ram-ne                      I'
                              ╱──────────────╲
                            vP                thii
                      ╱──────────╲
                                  v'
                            ╱──────────╲
                          VP            v
                      ╱──────╲
  Highest accessible        V'
                        ╱──────╲
                    ⟨Rotii⟩    khaayii
```

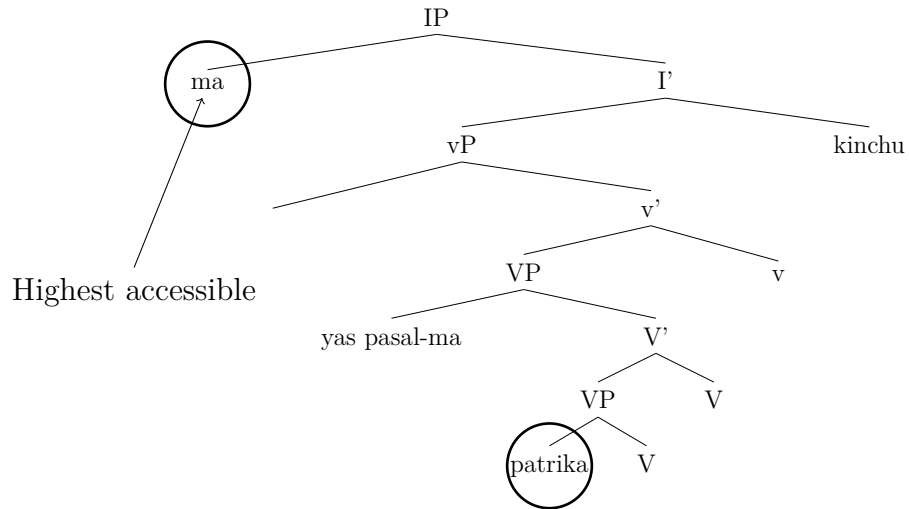### 4.2.2   Nepali

Nepali allows for both ergative and absolutive arguments to control agreement:

(29) a. ma   yas   pasal-mā   patrikā   kin-ch-u.
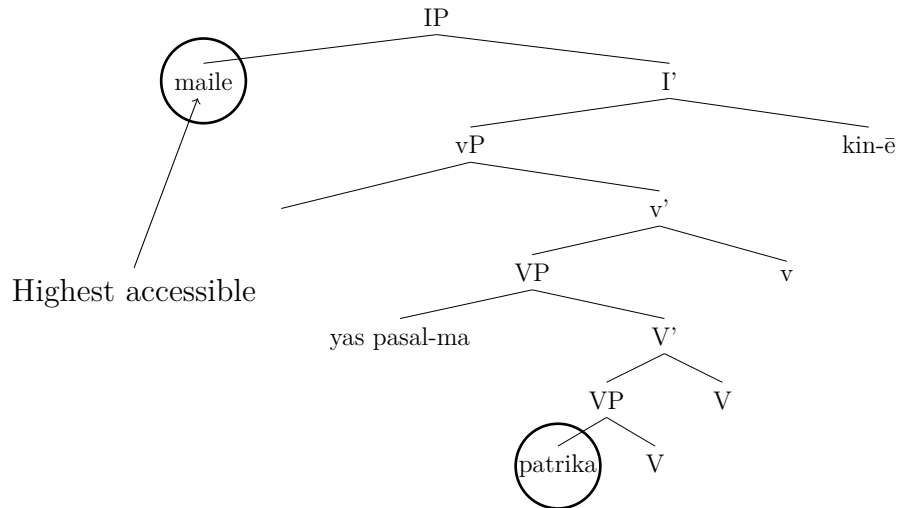   1SG.NOM   DEM.OBL   store-LOC newspaper.NOM   buy-NPT-1SG

9

I buy the newspaper in this store.'

b. maile ya pasal-mā patrikā kin-ē
1SG.ERG DEM.OBL store-LOC newspaper.NOM buy-PT-1SG
(*kin-yo).
(buy.PT.3SG.M
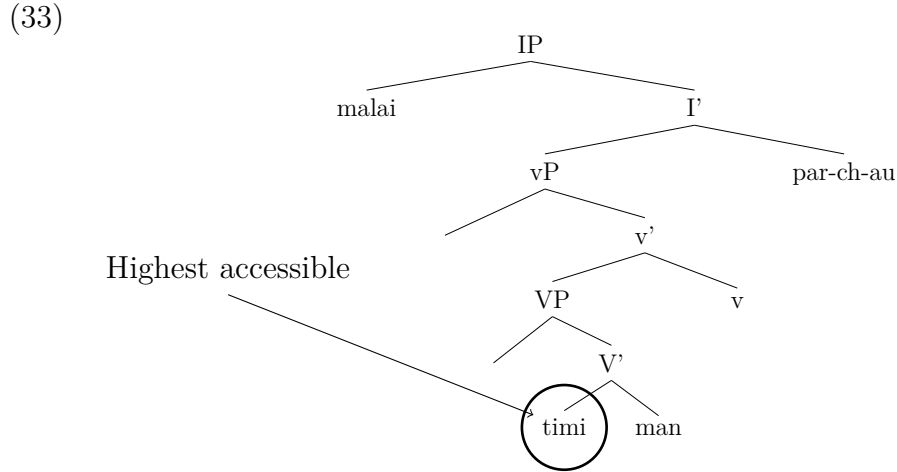'I bought the newspaper in this store.'

(30)

(31)

But, when the subject is in an inaccessible case, for instance dative, then it cannot control agreement. In that case, the object (if it is in absolute) will control agreement.

(32) malāi   timī̄   man par-ch-au   (*parch-u).
      1SG.DAT 2MH.NOM liking occur-NPT-2MH occur-NPT-1SG
      'I like you.'

(33)

```
                              IP
                   ╱                    ╲
              malai                      I'
                              ╱                    ╲
                            vP                      par-ch-au
                      ╱              ╲
                                      v'
                               ╱            ╲
                             VP              v
                         ╱        ╲
      Highest accessible            V'
                                ╱        ╲
                             (timi)      man
```

4.3   Relevance

If agreement is dependent on (morphological) case assignment AND morphological case is assigned post-syntactically, then agreement must also be post-syntactic.

This paints a very different picture to what was commonly assumed in early iterations of minimalism, namely that the need to check off features is a syntactic process.

Note that it also needs a different conception of licensing, something already pointed out by Marantz (see above).

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