

# Anti-local Agree and Cyclicity

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## Abstract

This paper argues that the difference of potential agreement controllers in Lak (Nakh-Daghestanian, Russia) Biabsolutive Constructions (lexical verb agreement controlled by the internal argument and auxiliary agreement by the external argument) and Ergative Constructions (agreement controlled only by the internal argument) stems from *Generalized Anti-Locality* outlawing strictly local Agree relations. I propose that in Ergative Constructions, the external argument is too close to the probe, while in Biabsolutive Constructions it moves sufficiently far away from the probe to control (delayed) upward agreement. However, Generalized Anti-Locality restricting the search space of upward Agree leads to problems with cyclicity. I argue that these can be dealt with by Reciprocal Subcategorization applying before  $\varphi$ -Agree. Moreover, Strict Cyclicity will prevent downward auxiliary agreement in biabsolutive constructions, obviating the need for a language-specific directional bias of Agree.

## 1. Introduction

Standardly, Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001) is assumed to be a strictly local operation. A widely discussed challenge for this assumption comes from apparent cases of long-distance agreement suggesting, at first glance, that Agree *does not have to be* strictly local (Polinsky and Potsdam 2001, Bhatt 2005, Bobaljik and Wurmbrand 2005). Anti-local agreement phenomena challenge this standard approach to Agree in suggesting that Agree *must not be* strictly local. If on the right track, this line of reasoning suggests that anti-locality (Grohmann 2003, Abels 2003) emerges as a general constraint on syntax.

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One such anti-local agreement phenomenon is the Biabsolutive construction in Lak (Nakh-Daghestanian, Russia) in (1b), where the absolutive external argument controls agreement on the auxiliary (Kazenin 1998, Forker 2012, Gagliardi et al. 2014). This deviates from the baseline Ergative construction in (1a), where the absolutive internal argument controls agreement on the auxiliary, as well as on the lexical verb.

(1) *Ergative and biabsolutive constructions* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 144):

- a. A<sup>ʔ</sup>li-l q:ata b-ullaj b-ur.  
 Ali.I-ERG house.III.ABS III-do.PROG III-AUX  
 ‘Ali is building a house.’
- b. A<sup>ʔ</sup>li q:ata b-ullaj Ø-ur.  
 Ali.I.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX  
 ‘Ali is in the state of building a house.’

I propose that in Lak biabsolutives the external argument moves (motivated by agent topicalization) to a position from which it can control upward agreement on the auxiliary without violating anti-locality.

However, as anti-locality restricts the search space of a probe, Agree either has to reach deep into already-built structure (in the case of downward Agree) or it has to be delayed until sufficiently enough structure is built-up (in the case of upward Agree). This can lead to problems with cyclicity (e.g. PIC and Earliness), resulting in the possibility of no licit agreement step. As we will see, anti-locality and the PIC have the capacity to make the searchable space too narrow for Agree, while the Earliness Principle can outlaw anti-local upward agreement.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the background to an anti-locality constraint on Agree. Section 3 investigates the syntax of Lak biabsolutives and contains the proposal, as well as analysis. Finally, Section 4 deals with the problems for cyclicity arising as a consequence of the analysis. The paper concludes in Section 5.

## 2. Background: Anti-locality and Agree

Anti-locality (Grohmann 2003, Abels 2003) deals with too close relations in syntax in that syntactic dependencies must span a certain distance in order

to be grammatical.<sup>1</sup> Anti-locality is well-established for movement-related phenomena such as *that*-trace effect and *tough*-constructions (Brillman and Hisch 2016); agent-focus in Kaqchikel (Erlewine 2016); subject and adjunct condition (Bošković 2016); raising-to-ergative in Nez Perce (Deal 2019); non-iterable symmetry in A-movement (Branan 2022); and extractions from subjects (Zyman 2021).

On the other hand, the standard assumption that Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001) is strictly local is challenged by apparent cases of long-distance agreement (cf. Polinsky and Potsdam 2001, Bhatt 2005, Bobaljik and Wurmbrand 2005). Now, given that movement is constrained by both locality (i.e., minimality and cyclicity/PIC) as well as anti-locality, and agreement is also subject to the same notions of locality, a logical assumption would be that anti-locality also holds for agreement.

Parallel to what has been suggested for movement by e.g. Erlewine (2016), Bošković (2016), Deal (2019), Branan (2022), I propose that agreement dependencies that do not cross a full projection are outlawed by anti-locality. Thus, Generalized Anti-Locality (2) prohibits agreement between a head and its specifier or the specifier of its complement.<sup>2</sup>

(2) *Generalized Anti-Locality*:

\*[ ...  $\alpha$  ...  $\beta$  ... ] (where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are participants in an Agree relation) unless there is a  $\Gamma$  such that

- a.  $\Gamma$  is in the non-edge domain of a phrase XP.
- b.  $\alpha$  c-commands XP.
- c.  $\beta$  is reflexively included in  $\Gamma$ .

I take that the edge of a phrase XP consists of all specifiers of X and adjuncts to XP (Chomsky 2000, 2001). The non-edge domain of a phrase XP is everything excluding the edge (i.e., X and its complement).<sup>3</sup>

For now, I will not commit to the direction of Agree (3), but assume that

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<sup>1</sup>The term for the phenomena at hand goes back to Grohmann (2003) with theoretical predecessors in Bošković (1994) and Saito and Murasugi (1999); see Grohmann (2011) for an overview.

<sup>2</sup>The version of anti-locality in (2) is adapted from similar formulations in Müller (2020) and Lee (2020).

<sup>3</sup>Identifying  $\Gamma$  to be either the head or the complement of the c-commanded phrase would allow for head movement while still ruling out spec-to-spec movement as in e.g. Erlewine (2016).

Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001) is bidirectional – it can be downward or upward (cf. Baker 2008, Georgi 2014, Carstens 2016, Himmelreich 2016; see also Preminger and Polinsky 2015, Bjorkman and Zeijlstra 2019 for a debate on the direction of Agree) and that specific languages have a directional bias.

(3) *Agree*:

A probe  $\alpha_{[*F*]}$  triggers Agree and copies the feature-values of a goal  $\beta_{[F]}$  iff (a) to (c) hold. Call  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$  participants of the Agree relation.

- a.  $\alpha$  is unvalued and seeks the value of (a feature on)  $\beta$
- b.  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are in a c-command relation
- c.  $\beta$  is the closest available goal to  $\alpha$

Generalized Anti-Locality, thus, restricts the search space of a probe and expects a certain distance between the probe and a goal in order for a goal to be available. In the next section, I investigate one case of anti-local agreement in Lak, where I argue that auxiliary agreement can be controlled by external arguments only if they are sufficiently far away from the  $\varphi$ -probe in T.

### 3. Lak Biabsolutives

Lak (Nakh-Daghestanian, Russia) transitive Ergative constructions containing an ergative external argument and an absolutive internal argument can alternate with Biabsolutive constructions containing two absolutive arguments (Kazenin 1998, Forker 2012, Gagliardi et al. 2014, Ganenkov 2016, Radkevich 2017; see also Chumakina and Bond 2016, Polinsky 2016, Ganenkov 2019 for Biabsolutive constructions in other Nakh-Daghestanian languages).

In Ergative constructions, both the lexical verb (*bullaj*) and the auxiliary (*bur*) agree with the internal argument (*q:ata*) in gender/class (4a). In Biabsolutive constructions, on the other hand, agreement on the auxiliary (*ur*) is controlled by the external argument in the absolutive (*A<sup>3</sup>li*), while the internal argument still controls agreement on the lexical verb (4b).

(4) *Ergative and biabsolutive constructions* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 144):

- a. A<sup>3</sup>li-l      q:ata              b-ullaj              b-ur.  
           Ali.I-ERG house.III.ABS III-do.PROG III-AUX  
           ‘Ali is building a house.’

- b. A<sup>ʕ</sup>li      q:ata              b-ullaj      Ø-ur.  
 Ali.I.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX  
 ‘Ali is in the state of building a house.’

I argue that the difference of potential agreement controllers in Lak biabsolutives compared to ergative constructions stems from the anti-locality constraint on Agree: Arguments that are too close to the probe are not available as goals for Agree. In the ergative construction, the in-situ external argument is too local to the probe on T to control agreement on the auxiliary. In the biabsolutive construction, however, the external argument moves to a position from which it can control upward agreement on the auxiliary without violating anti-locality. This movement step is motivated by agent topicalization.

### 3.1. The Syntax of Biabsolutives

I assume a structure of (periphrastic) biabsolutives as in (5), where auxiliaries are located in T and not in Aux (contra Gagliardi et al. 2014, Ganenkov 2016). T bears a  $\varphi$ -probe [ $*\varphi*$ ] that agrees with the external argument in Biabsolutive constructions. TP is dominated by a topic phrase (TopP), which hosts the absolutive external argument in its specifier (after movement).

- (5) [TopP DP<sub>Ext</sub> [Top] [TP [T<sub>\* $\varphi$ \*</sub>] [vP *t*<sub>DP</sub> [v<sub>\* $\varphi$ \*</sub>] [VP V DP<sub>Int</sub>]]]]

Based on observations concerning deverbal nouns (so-called *masdars*), there is reason to assume biabsolutives always involve a layer higher than vP. In Lak, *masdars* are formed using either suffix *-awu* (6) or *-šiwu* (7). According to Gagliardi et al. (2014) and Radkevich (2017) *-awu*-*masdars* are vP nominalisations and express only Aktionsart, while *-šiwu*-*masdars* involve a TP layer as they also express tense, aspect and mood. Crucially for the argument, biabsolutive-based *-awu*-*masdars* (vP) are ungrammatical (6b): the external argument cannot show up with absolutive case marking. On the other hand, *-šiwu*-*masdars* can be formed on the basis of biabsolutives (7b) with the external argument in absolutive controlling agreement on the auxiliary.

- (6) *-awu masdars* (Radkevich 2017):
- a. A<sup>ʕ</sup>li-l              q:ata              b-ullal-awu  
 Ali.I.SG-ERG house.III.SG.ABS III.SG-do.PROG-MSDR  
 ‘Ali’s building of the house.’

- b. \*A<sup>ʕ</sup>li q:ata b-ullal-awu  
 Ali.I.SG.ABS house.III.SG.ABS III.SG-do.PROG-MSDR  
 ‘Ali’s building of the house.’

(7) -šiwu *masdars* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 155):

- a. ?A<sup>ʕ</sup>li-l q:ata b-ullaj b-aq:a-šiwu  
 Ali-ERG house.III.ABS III-do.PROG III-AUX.NEG-MSDR
- b. A<sup>ʕ</sup>li q:ata b-ullaj Ø-aq:a-šiwu  
 Ali.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX.NEG-MSDR  
 ‘Ali’s not building of the house.’

Data from person agreement and biabsolutives with a synthetic verb form (i.e., without a auxiliary) suggest that the probe relevant for agreement between the external argument and the auxiliary is located on T. As illustrated in (8), person agreement patterns alongside gender agreement in analytic (i.e., periphrastic) biabsolutive constructions.<sup>4</sup> As we would expect, the internal

<sup>4</sup>In the unmarked case, person agreement in Lak is controlled by an absolutive argument (i). Only finite clauses exhibit person agreement (Radkevich 2017; the same holds true for other Nakh-Daghestianian languages, such as Mehweb; see Ganenkov 2019).

(i) *Lak person agreement in perfective* (Radkevich 2017):

- a. Na ina Ø-uwhunu Ø-ur-a.  
 I.I.SG you.SG.I.ABS I.SG-I.SG.catch.PRF.GER I.SG-AUX-1/2SG  
 ‘I caught you.’
- b. Na ga Ø-uwhunu Ø-ur-Ø.  
 I.I.SG he.I.SG.ABS I.SG-I.SG.catch.PRF.GER I.SG-AUX-3  
 ‘I caught him.’

Note also that Lak personal pronouns exhibit case syncretism in 1st and 2nd person (+PARTICIPANT): the same form of the pronoun is used in absolutive and ergative contexts (*na* ↔ 1SG.ERG/ABS, *ina* ↔ 2SG.ERG/ABS). Ergative and biabsolutive constructions involving 1st or 2nd person external arguments can be differentiated on the basis of person agreement on the auxiliary with an absolutive argument, such as as in (iia) vs. (iib).

(ii) *Case syncretism and person agreement* (Kazenin 1998: 99):

- a. na qāṭa buw-nu bu-r  
 I.I.ERG house.III.ABS III.build-CON.PAST III.AUX-3SG  
 ‘I have built the house.’
- b. na qāṭa buw-nu u-ra  
 I.I.ABS house.III.ABS III.build-CON.PAST I.AUX-1SG  
 ‘I have built the house.’

argument controls gender agreement on the lexical verb, whereas the absolutive external argument controls both gender and person agreement on the auxiliary in the examples in (8).<sup>5</sup>

(8) *Person agreement in analytic Biabsolutives* (Kazenin 1998: 98-99):

- a.    rasul            ču                    buwh-u-nu            u-r  
       Rasul.I.ABS horse.III.ABS III.catch-PAST-CON I.AUX-3SG  
       ‘Rasul has caught the horse.’
- b.    na            ču                    buwh-u-nu            u-ra  
       I.I.ABS horse.III.ABS III.catch-PAST-CON I.AUX-1SG  
       ‘Rasul has caught the horse.’
- c.    ninu            na            uh-l-ej                    du-r  
       mother.II.ABS I.I.ABS I.catch-DUR-CON.PRES II.AUX-3SG  
       ‘Mother is catching me.’

If we turn now to synthetic ergative and biabsolutive constructions, we see that they exhibit the same basic agreement pattern as their respective analytic counterparts. The internal argument controls gender agreement in both instances and person agreement in the ergative constructions in (9a). However in biabsolutive constructions (9b), person agreement is with the absolutive external argument (paralleling agreement on auxiliaries in periphrastic biabsolutives). Provided that without an overt auxiliary there is no need to postulate Aux in synthetic biabsolutives and that synthetic and analytic biabsolutives show the same agreement pattern, I assume that they involve the same structure. I propose that AuxP can be dispensed with (contra Gagliardi et al. 2014, Ganenkov 2016) in the constructions at hand and that T hosts  $\varphi$ -probes in both synthetic and analytic biabsolutives (the only difference being that T spells out an overt auxiliary in the latter).

(9) *Synthetic Ergative and Biabsolutive constructions* (Kazenin 2013: 59):

- a.    Ga-n-al            na                    uhlahi-s:a-ra  
       3SG-OS-ERG 1SG.I.ABS catch.I.PROG-ASSRT-1SG  
       ‘He is catching me.’

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<sup>5</sup>Note that glossing of the examples is adopted from the literature and does not necessarily reflect on my view on the structure of auxiliaries.

- b. Ga            na            uhlahi-s:a-r  
 3SG.ABS 1SG.I.ABS catch.I.PROG-ASSRT-3SG  
 ‘He is catching me.’

Turning to case assignment in Lak, I follow Gagliardi et al. (2014), Ganenkov (2016) and Radkevich (2017) in assuming that ergative is assigned to the external argument inside of vP, while a second absolutive case assignment (i.e., to the external argument in biabsolutives) must come from outside the vP. This is supported by the availability of the respective cases in vP *-awu*-masdars (only ergative but no absolutive on the external argument) in (6) above and TP *-šiwu*-masdars (absolutive on the external argument) in (7) above.

Moreover, Radkevich (2017) suggests that, unlike dative, the ergative in Lak is not an inherent case. While subjects of ergative constructions can surface with absolutive in biabsolutives, dative subjects cannot show this alternation (10).

(10) *Dative constructions* (Radkevich 2017):

- a. A<sup>̂</sup>li-n            matematika            q:a-d-urč’laj  
 Ali.I.SG-DAT math.IV.SG.ABS NEG-IV.SG-understand.PROG  
 d-ur- $\emptyset$ .  
 IV.SG-AUX-3  
 ‘Ali does not understand math.’
- b. \*A<sup>̂</sup>li            matematika            q:a-d-urč’laj  
 Ali.I.SG.ABS math.IV.SG.ABS NEG-IV.SG-understand.PROG  
 $\emptyset$ -ur- $\emptyset$ .  
 I.SG-AUX-3

For the purpose of this paper, I follow Radkevich (2017) in assuming that case assignment in Lak is configurational (Marantz 1991, McFadden 2004, Bobaljik 2008, Levin 2017, i.a.). As illustrated in (11), dependent ergative is assigned to a DP which c-commands another DP within vP, provided the former did not receive inherent case before.

(11) *Disjunctive case hierarchy* (Radkevich 2017):

- a. inherent/lexical case is assigned  
 b. dependent case (ergative) is assigned to a DP which c-commands another DP in the minimal vP.



- c. default case (absolutive) is assigned

Tying in with the approaches by both Ganenkov (2016) and Radkevich (2017), who show that the external argument has to be dislocated from the vP in order to surface as absolutive subjects in biabsolutive constructions, I propose that the external argument moves to a position outside of TP, namely Spec,TopP, from which it can control agreement on the auxiliary.

Biabsolutives in Lak (and other Nakh-Daghestanian languages) are typically associated with agent topicalization (Kazenin 1998, Schulze 2007, Forker 2012, 2019) or at least agent emphasis (Gagliardi et al. 2014). Thus, the agent is interpreted as the “semantic centre of the construction [i.e., biabsolutives]” (Forker 2012: 80) and is affected by the progressive action (Gagliardi et al. 2014), as shown in the biabsolutive construction in (12).

- (12) *Biabsolutive agent emphasis* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 144):  
 A<sup>ʃ</sup>li q:ata b-ullaj Ø-ur.  
 Ali.I.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX  
 ‘Ali is in the state of building a house.’ (=house-building currently affects his life)

Moreover, Lak biabsolutives are not possible with inanimate external arguments. According to Forker (2012: 84), (13a) is rejected on the basis of an implied voluntary action by the wind, while the ergative construction in (13b) can host an inanimate external argument. Thus, Forker (2012) assumes a ban on inanimate subjects to be agent topicalized in Biabsolutive constructions.

- (13) *Inanimate subjects* (Forker 2012: 83):
- |    |              |             |              |             |
|----|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| a. | *marč        | nuz         | t’it’l-ej    | b-u-r       |
|    | wind.III.ABS | door.IV.ABS | open-DUR-CVB | III-AUX-3SG |
| b. | murčal       | nuz         | t’it’l-ej    | d-u-r       |
|    | wind.III.ERG | door.IV.ABS | open-DUR-CVB | IV-AUX-3SG  |
- ‘The wind is opening the door.’

Similar differences in interpretation are reported for other Nakh-Daghestanian languages, such as Inguish (14) where agents are topicalized in biabsolutives and Mehweb (15), where non-agentive subjects are also banned from biabsolutives.

(14) *Ingush Biabsolutives and agent topicalization* (Forker 2012: 80-81):

- a. txy                    naana                    maasha                    b-ezh  
 1PL.EX.GEN    mother(J)            homespun(B)    B-make.CVB  
 j-ar.  
 J-PROG.PST  
 ‘Our mother made homespun.’ (=‘Our mother was one of the  
 people who could make homespun’)
- b. txy                    naanaz                    maasha                    b-ezh  
 1PL.EX.GEN    mother.ERG            homespun(B)    B-make.CVB  
 b-ar                    (so dwachyvealcha).  
 B-PROG.PST 1SG PREV.in.V.go.TEMP.CVB  
 ‘Our mother was making homespun (when I came in).’

(15) *Mehweb non-agentive biabsolutive* (Ganenkov 2019: 228):

- a. ??<sup>B</sup>a<sup>1</sup>r                    Ɂut’-be                    šiš                    d-uk’-aq-uwe  
 wind.ABS    tree-PL.ABS    move    NPL-LV.IPF-CAUS-CVB.IPFV  
 le-b.  
 AUX-N  
 ‘The wind is shaking the trees.’
- b. \*c’a                    qul-le                    ig-uwe                    le-b.  
 fire.ABS    house-PL.ABS    burn.IPF-CVB.IPFV    AUX-N  
 ‘A fire is burning the house.’

Based on these data, it seems that external arguments in biabsolutives are the topic of the clause. Assuming that topic is reflected in syntactic representation (Polinsky and Potsdam 2001: 593 and references therein), I take the relevant position for biabsolutive subjects expressing topic to be the specifier of TopP immediately dominating TP (Culicover 1991, Müller and Sternefeld 1993, Hoekstra and Zwart 1994, Rizzi 1997, Polinsky and Potsdam 2001).

With the basic assumptions about the syntax of Lak biabsolutives in place, I will rule out two conceivable alternatives below before I turn to my analysis on the basis of anti-local Agree in Section 3.3.

### 3.2. Against Case-Based and Biclausal Approaches

Evidence against treating the biabsolutive constructions in Lak on the basis of (morphological) case (i.e., absolutive arguments control agreement on the

nearest verbal heads, while ergative arguments cannot control agreement) and in favour of a syntactic analysis comes from different dialects of closely-related Dargwa (Nakh-Dagestanian, Russia). Tanti Dargwa (Sumbatova 2014, 2019, Sumbatova and Lander 2014*a,b*, Belyaev 2016), Aquasha Dargwa (van den Berg 1999, Ganenkov 2018) and Sanzhi Dargwa (Forker 2019) exhibit so-called alternating agreement whereby in a periphrastic construction the ergative external argument optionally controls agreement on the auxiliary, while the lexical verb agrees with the absolutive internal argument. In (16a), (17a) and (18), the agreement morphology on the auxiliary corresponds to the ergative argument.

(16) *Tanti Dargwa* (Belyaev 2016: 88):

- a. murad-li t'ant'i-b qali b-irq'.u.le sa-j  
Murad.M-ERG in.Tanti-N house.N N-building AUX-M
- b. murad-li t'ant'i-b qali b-irq'.u.le sa-b  
Murad.M-ERG in.Tanti-N house.N N-building AUX-N  
'Murad is building the house.'

(17) *Aqusha Dargwa* (Ganenkov 2018: 531):

- a. unra-ni kaʁar b-uč'-uli saj  
neighbour-ERG letter.ABS N-read:IPF-CONV AUX.M
- b. unra-ni kaʁar b-uč'-uli sabi  
neighbour-ERG letter.ABS N-read:IPF-CONV AUX.N  
'The neighbour is reading a letter.'

(18) *Sanzhi Dargwa* (Forker 2019: 385):

- it-i-l di-c:e d-urs-ul ca-r  
that-OBL-ERG 1SG-IN NPL-tell-ICVB AUX-F  
'She tells (stories) to me.'

Structurally, the alternating agreement constructions in Dargwa and the biabsolutives in Lak bear a striking similarity: in periphrastic constructions auxiliary agreement alternates between different controllers, while agreement of the lexical verb is always with the internal argument. A further similarity is the reliance on topicality. As shown above in Section 3.1, biabsolutive constructions in Lak are only possible if the external argument receives an agentive topic reading (Kazenin 1998, Schulze 2007, Forker 2012); they are not possible with inanimate external arguments (Forker 2012). According

to Sumbatova (2014), Sumbatova and Lander (2014a), Belyaev (2016), the alternation between auxiliary agreement controllers in Tanti Dargwa is also conditioned by topicality and animacy. In (19), agreement between the ergative argument ('dog') and the auxiliary is ruled out because the absolutive internal argument ('brother') outranks it in animacy and topicality (Sumbatova and Lander 2014a, Belyaev 2016).

- (19) *Tanti Dargwa* (Sumbatova and Lander 2014a: 453):  
 ʕe<sup>s</sup>la uc:i.li-ž            se        b-it.arg.ur.se? – hi.t    ca    χ:<sup>w</sup>e-li  
 thy    brother.M-DAT what.N N-happened    that.M one dog.N-ERG  
 uc.ib =s:a-j / \*s:a-b  
 bite    AUX-M    AUX-N  
 'What happened to your brother? A dog bit him.'

Bearing in mind those similarities, it seems that Biabsolutive constructions and alternating agreement constructions are virtually the same phenomena with the exception of (morphological) case exponence. While in Biabsolutive constructions the external argument is assigned absolutive if it controls agreement on the auxiliary (in contrast to ergative in the baseline construction), the agreement-controlling external argument in alternating agreement constructions still receives ergative case-marking. Clearly, a case-based approach, whereby only absolutive arguments are possible goals for agreement, is not available for the latter construction. I conclude that this also excludes a case-based analysis for Biabsolutives in Lak. Given the common structural and semantic properties, the two phenomena in closely-related languages should receive the same theoretical explanation.

Another potential line of analysis assumes a biclausal structure for biabsolutive constructions. In these kinds of approaches, the external argument is the subject of a separate clause headed by the auxiliary, while the internal argument is the only argument of a clause headed by the lexical verb.<sup>6</sup> In such a structure, the external argument is assigned absolutive as it is the sole argument of the clause and thus can control agreement on the auxiliary.

Evidence against these kinds of approaches come from  $\bar{A}$ -movement. According to Gagliardi et al. (2014) and Radkevich (2017), Lak  $\bar{A}$ -movement

<sup>6</sup>I am aware of the fact that *external argument* and *internal argument* are somewhat unsuitable terms in this context. External argument refers to the subject of the (surface) sentence alternating between ergative and absolutive case, while internal argument refers to the absolutive object.

is always clause-bound. In (20a), the *wh*-pronoun *ci* is contained within the embedded clause. Moving *ci* out of the embedded clause into the matrix clause, as in (20b), results in ungrammaticality.

(20) *Lak wh-movement is clause-bound* (Radkevich 2017):

- a. Nit:i-n k'ul-s:a-r-iw, Rasul ci  
 mother-DAT know-ASSRT-PRS-Q Rasul.I.SG.ABS what.IV.ABS  
 d-ullaj-s:a-r-iw?  
 IV.SG-do.PRG-ASSRT-PRS-Q  
 'Does mother know what Rasul is building?'
- b. \*Ci<sub>i</sub> nit:i-n k'ul-s:a-r-iw, Rasul  
 what.IV.ABS mother-DAT know-ASSRT-PRS-Q Rasul.I.SG.ABS  
 t<sub>i</sub> d-ullaj-s:a-r-iw?  
 IV.SG-do.PRG-ASSRT-PRS-Q

In Lak Biabsolutive constructions, both arguments can undergo *wh*-movement: Thus in (21a), the external argument *cu* *wh*-moves to the edge of the clause. Crucially, the internal argument *ci* can also be  $\bar{A}$ -moved to the edge of the clause, as shown in (21b). Given the fact that  $\bar{A}$ -movement in Lak is clause-bound, we can conclude that this movement step does not cross a clause-boundary as it results in a grammatical expression.

(21)  $\bar{A}$ -movement in Biabsolutives (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 148):

- a. Cu<sub>i</sub> t<sub>i</sub> q:at:a b-ullaj  $\emptyset$ -ur?  
 who.I.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX  
 'Who is building the house?'
- b. Ci<sub>i</sub> A<sup>̂</sup>li t<sub>i</sub> b/d-ullaj  $\emptyset$ -ur?  
 what.ABS Ali.I.ABS III/IV-do.PROG I-AUX  
 'What is Ali building?'

This poses a problem for biclausal approaches (Kazenin 1998) or Basque-style analyses involving an embedded PP (Laka 2006). In both instances, the grammaticality of  $\bar{A}$ -movement of the internal argument in Biabsolutive constructions (such as in (21b)) would be unexpected, as this movement step would cross a clause boundary (see also Forker 2012: 93–96 and Gagliardi et al. 2014: 161–162 for discussion). Biclausal approaches, thus, would not be able to generate these examples without postulating construction-specific exceptions

for clause-bound  $\bar{A}$ -movement. It seems reasonable to assume Biabsolutive constructions not to involve two separate clauses. Furthermore, ergative marking of the external argument in alternating agreement constructions (see above) could not be explained straightforwardly if it was the sole argument of the clause.

### 3.3. Deriving Biabsolutives

I propose that the difference in agreement on the auxiliary between ergative and biabsolutive constructions in Lak stems from an anti-locality constraint on Agree, repeated here in (22). In ergative constructions, the external argument in Spec,vP is too close to the  $\varphi$ -probe on T to engage in an agreement relation. In biabsolutives, on the other hand, the external argument dislocates to Spec,TopP and is, thus, anti-local enough for agreement with T.

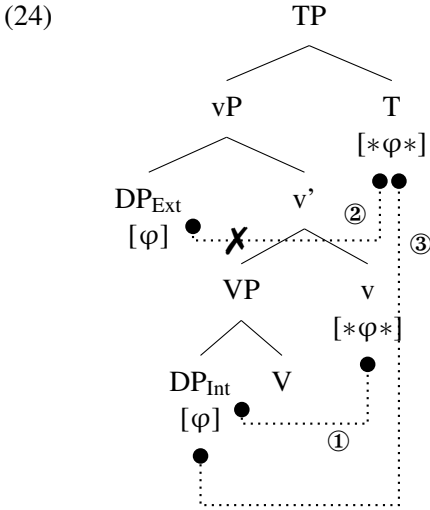
- (22) *Generalized Anti-Locality*: =(2)  
 \* $[\dots \alpha \dots \beta \dots]$  (where  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are participants in an Agree relation) unless there is a  $\Gamma$  such that
- a.  $\Gamma$  is in the non-edge domain of a phrase XP.
  - b.  $\alpha$  c-commands XP.
  - c.  $\beta$  is reflexively included in  $\Gamma$ .

To recap, in ergative constructions the internal argument controls agreement on both the lexical verb and the auxiliary; c.f. (23). In (24), we see that Agree between  $v$  and the internal Argument is not blocked by anti-locality as  $DP_{Int}$  is in the non-edge domain (the complement) of VP and  $v$  c-commands VP.<sup>7</sup> This successful derivational step yields agreement on the lexical verb. However, when the  $\varphi$ -probe on T (responsible for agreement on the auxiliary) triggers Agree, anti-locality excludes the in-situ external argument from being a possible goal. As  $DP_{Ext}$  is in the edge domain of vP, there is no  $\Gamma$  in the non-edge domain of a phrase c-commanded by T between the participants of the desired Agree relation. Instead, T also finds the internal argument in its c-command domain and agrees with it. According to the case hierarchy in

<sup>7</sup>The notation for the features triggering syntactic operations is adopted from Heck and Müller (2007): Agree is triggered by probe features on a head [ $*F*$ ], while (Internal) Merge is triggered by structure-building features [ $\bullet F \bullet$ ].

(11), the external argument is assigned ergative and the internal argument receives default absolutive.

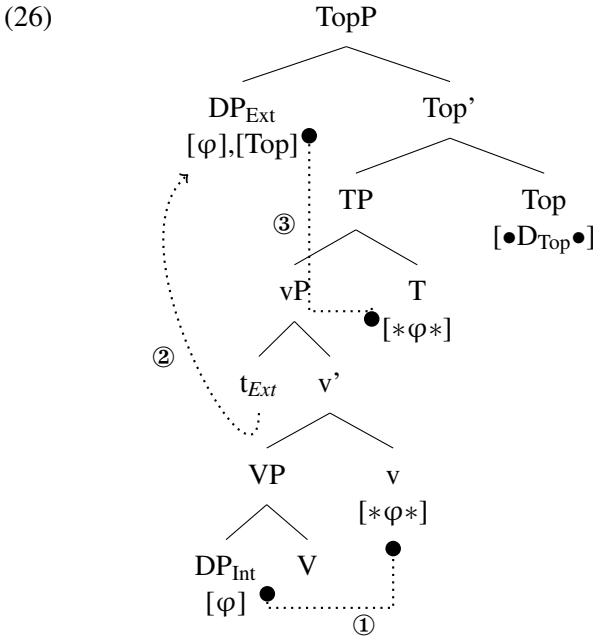
- (23) *Ergative construction* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 144): = (1a)  
 A<sup>δ</sup>li-l q:ata b-ullaj b-ur.  
 Ali.I-ERG house.III.ABS III-do.PROG III-AUX  
 ‘Ali is building a house.’



In biabsolutive constructions like (23), *v* again successfully probes for the  $\varphi$ -feature on the internal argument. Again, the probe in *T* would not be able to undergo Agree with the external argument in Spec,*vP* because of the anti-locality constraint. Suppose however, that probes in Lak have a directional bias for upward Agree (see Section 2) and that probing is suspended at least until the next functional head is merged to allow upward Agree to apply. When *Top* with a structure-building feature [ $\bullet D_{\text{Top}} \bullet$ ] is merged, it attracts  $DP_{\text{Ext}}$  to its specifier (we assumed in Section 3.1 that the external argument is topicalized in biabsolutive constructions). The external argument is now in a position to undergo Agree with *T*, as *T* is in the non-edge domain of TP c-commanded by  $DP_{\text{Ext}}$  (with  $DP_{\text{Ext}}$  and *T* being participants of the Agree relation in the sense of the definition in (22)). At this point, the external argument cannot receive

ergative as it is no longer in vP. Thus, both arguments are assigned absolutive; c.f. (26).<sup>8</sup>

- (25) *Biabsolutive construction* (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 144): = (1b)  
 A<sup>δ</sup>li q:ata b-ullaj Ø-ur.  
 Ali.I.ABS house.III.ABS III-do.PROG I-AUX  
 ‘Ali is in the state of building a house.’



We have seen that anti-local Agree correctly derives the observed differences in agreement on the auxiliary between ergative and biabsolutive constructions. This difference does not stem from varying probes on T (responsible for auxiliary agreement) or the inability of ergative arguments to control agreement (see the discussion in Section 3.2); rather, it can be traced back to the position that the external argument occupies in the respective constructions. In an ergative construction, agreement between T and the in-situ subject in Spec,vP is ruled out by anti-locality: the external argument is not a valid goal for Agree

<sup>8</sup>Note that for Dargwa dialects with alternate agreement where agreement-controlling subjects still bear ergative (Section 3.2), we would have to assume a case mechanism where the smallest case domain still includes includes TopP, not just vP, as in (11b).



as it is too close to the probe. In biabsolutives, on the other hand, the subject moves to Spec,TopP and controls upward agreement from this position while still satisfying the anti-locality constraint.

#### **4. Problems with Cyclicity**

There are, however, two problems concerning cyclicity that come with the approach outlined in Section 3.3. Firstly, the internal argument should already have undergone cyclic spell-out (in the sense of phases; Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004) before T probes and secondly, suspending bidirectional Agree on T until the external argument is dislocated to Spec,TopP violates the Cyclic Principle (Perlmutter and Soames 1979), and, accordingly, the Earliness Principle (Pesetsky 1989, Pesetsky and Torrego 2001) and Featural Cyclicity (Richards 2001). If taken seriously, auxiliary agreement should not be possible in Lak counter to the fact.

The first problem arises under a phase-based approach to syntax where phase complements are spelled out cyclically and, as per the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), only the phase head and edge are available to operations outside of the phase (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004; see also Richards 2012, Gallego 2020). If *v* is a phase head, as widely assumed, then its complement should be transferred upon merging the next functional head T. Consequently, the internal argument inside VP should be inaccessible for the  $\varphi$ -probe on T (step 3 in (24)). Thus, assuming downward probing as in this case, anti-locality defines the upper limit of T search space and the PIC the lower limit. In this scenario, both constraints conspire to make both arguments inaccessible for T, incorrectly predicting auxiliary agreement to be ungrammatical in Lak ergative constructions.

Fortunately, this problem can be solved trivially if T simply agrees with the valued  $\varphi$ -features on *v* instead of on any of the arguments. After successful probing (step 1 in (24)), *v* acquires the internal argument's  $\varphi$ -values and acts as a goal for Agree on T (similar to Cyclic Agree; Legate 2005). In fact, *v* is the only possible goal within the narrowed search space: it is a phase head (complying with the PIC) and in the non-edge domain of a phrase c-commanded by T (complying with Generalized Anti-Locality). Thus, auxiliary agreement in Lak ergative constructions is only seemingly with the internal

argument, more precisely it should be analyzed as an Agree relation between T and *v*.<sup>9</sup>

The second problem emerges from the bidirectionality of Agree that we assumed for the purpose of the analysis. T has to be able to probe downwards (to agree with the internal argument/*v*) and upwards (to agree with the external argument in Spec,TopP). Given the Cyclic Principle (Earliness Principle, Featural Cyclicity), Agree on T should apply as soon as possible. This would, in turn, mean that Agree on T is always downwards with *v*, considering *v* is available earlier (i.e., as soon as T is merged) than the desired goal in Spec,TopP. Delaying probing until the external argument is re-merged in Spec,TopP to derive auxiliary agreement via upward Agree thus violates cyclicity.

In Section 3.3, this problem was circumvented with the help of a directional bias: Earliness is not violated as the structural description of Agree (at least for Lak) includes that upward Agree is always favored over downward Agree. Probing on T, thus, applies only if enough structure is built-up to realize anti-locality-satisfying upward Agree that (i.e., after Top is merged).

Interestingly, the directional bias can be dispensed with if Top is merged cyclically before T can discharge its probing feature.<sup>10</sup> Then, agreement between T and *v* would be ruled out by the Strict Cycle Condition (SCC; Chomsky 1973) as this operation would apply to a proper subdomain of the current cycle (i.e., TopP). This state of affairs can be achieved if we tentatively assume that subcategorization can be triggered by a feature on the lower head: In biabsolutive constructions, T has among its features a structure-building feature [ $\bullet$ Top $\bullet$ ] that triggers subcategorization of Top at the root TP (reciprocal subcategorization; see Popp and Tebay 2019 and references therein). Suppose now that this structure-building feature is ordered before the probing feature on T [ $\bullet$ Top $\bullet$ ]  $\succ$  [ $\ast\varphi\ast$ ] (see Heck and Müller 2007, Müller 2009, Georgi 2014, 2017 for sequential ordering of features). Then, Top is merged before T has the chance to probe and agree with *v*. As downward Agree between T and *v* is now blocked by the SCC, successful Agree is effectively delayed until the external argument is re-merged in Spec,TopP and becomes a valid goal.

The supposed directional bias of Agree in Lak thus emerges as a consequence

<sup>9</sup>This type of analysis also lends itself to agreement between T and nominative objects in Icelandic quirky case constructions (Taraldsen 1995, Chomsky 2001) and German unaccusative constructions (Grewendorf 1989).

<sup>10</sup>Thanks to Sören Tebay (p.c.) for this idea; see also Privizentseva (2023).

of “early” subcategorization and strict cyclicity. Moreover, as the SCC blocks operations between T and v, “delayed” agreement between Spec,TopP and T no longer violates the Cyclic Principle, the Earliness Principle or Featural Cyclicity, given that Agree cannot apply earlier than after the movement step to Spec,TopP (there is no other possible goal in the derivation).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Generalized Anti-Locality constrains Agree and derives agreement phenomena where arguments more distant from the probe can be the controller of agreement, while arguments closer to the probe cannot trigger agreement.

The biabsolutive pattern in Lak is derived by movement of an agent external argument to Spec,TopP, from where it can control upward agreement on T restricted by Generalized Anti-Locality. In ergative constructions, on the other hand, the in-situ external argument in Spec,vP is too local for agreement with T in both possible positions. Thus, anti-locality rules out too-close syntactic dependencies also in regard to agreement. The emerging picture sees Agree being subject both to anti-locality (excluding extremely local controllers) and locality (selecting the closest anti-locality-obeying controller).

Problems with cyclicity arising from restricting the search space via anti-locality and delaying upward probing of T until an anti-local enough goal can be found (in Spec,TopP) are dealt with by “early” merging of Top via reciprocal subcategorization (Popp and Tebay 2019) ordered before  $\varphi$ -Agree on T. Consequently, strict cyclicity will prevent T from probing downward, paving the way for Agree between T and the external argument in Spec,TopP as the only remaining option.

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