

# Feature gluttony in Senaya differential object marking

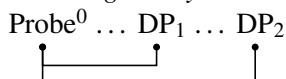
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## 1. Introduction

The Neo-Aramaic language Senaya exhibits a differential object marking (DOM) system that manifests in the verb agreement (Kalin 2014, 2018): specific objects must control agreement, resulting in ungrammaticality if they cannot do so. Kalin (2014, 2018) develops an insightful account of this DOM system in terms of *nominal licensing*. She proposes that specific DPs must be licensed through  $\phi$ -Agree. If such  $\phi$ -Agree is not established, ungrammaticality results.

In this paper, I propose a reanalysis of the Senaya DOM system that eschews nominal licensing. The core idea is that the restrictions on the distribution of certain nominals do not stem from special licensing needs that they are subject to, but instead find their source in the verbal  $\phi$ -agreement probe, building on the *feature-gluttony* system of Coon & Keine (2021) (also see Coon et al. 2021, Hoover 2021, Keine et al. 2022, Keine & Mendia 2022, and Bhatia & Bhatt 2023). In a nutshell, in feature-gluttony configurations, a single  $\phi$ -probe agrees with two DPs, as schematized in (1).

### (1) *Feature gluttony*



While this “one probe–two goals” configuration is not itself ungrammatical, it may give rise to irresolvably conflicting requirements for subsequent oper-

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\*Many thanks to Gereon for turning me into a syntactician. The first linguistics paper I wrote, under Gereon’s tutelage, grappled with differential object marking (Keine 2007), and so it is fitting for me to return to the phenomenon here, albeit in a very different domain and from a very different perspective.

ations, leading to ineffability. On this approach, ungrammaticality arises in Senaya whenever a single  $\varphi$ -probe has in its search space two DPs that are targeted by that probe. The result is a shift in perspective: instead of attributing the DOM restriction in Senaya to the presence of *too little*  $\varphi$ -Agree (two DPs need to be licensed but only one can be), the gluttony approach attributes the restriction to *too much*  $\varphi$ -Agree (a single  $\varphi$ -probe agrees with two DPs). In this paper, I will develop this line of analysis for Senaya and explore some of its consequences.

## 2. Differential object marking and aspect split in Senaya

Verbs in Senaya can in principle agree with both subject and object. There are up to two agreement markers in Senaya verbs, the so-called *S-suffix* and *L-suffix*. The availability of these suffixes differs across the imperfective and perfective aspect. The empirical presentation in this section is based on Kalin (2014, 2018).

### 2.1. Imperfectives

In the imperfective aspect, both the S-suffix and the L-suffix may occur. The subject (including the subject of an intransitive clause) controls the S-suffix; the object controls the L-suffix if it is specific. If the verb contains a past-tense marker, it appears between the two agreement suffixes, yielding the template in (2).

(2) V – S-suffix – past tense – (L-suffix)

(3) a. S-suffix: subject agreement

b. L-suffix: object agreement (if specific)

An example containing all the pieces in (2) is provided in (4).

(4) Molp            -ā            -wā    -lan.  
 teach.IMPERF -S.3SG.F -PST -L.1PL  
 ‘She used to teach us.’

[Kalin 2018:117, ex. (7)]

As noted, object agreement appears only if the object is specific. If the object is nonspecific, the L-suffix is absent. This contrast is illustrated in (5).

(5) *Imperfective: objects agree if specific*

a.  $\bar{A}na \ \bar{o} \ ks\bar{u}ta \ kasw \quad -an \quad -\bar{a}.$   
 I that book write.IMPERF -S.1PL -L.3SG.F  
 ‘I (will) write that book.’

b.  $\bar{A}na \ (xa) \ ks\bar{u}ta \ kasw \quad -an.$   
 I a book.F write.IMPERF -S.1SG.F  
 ‘I will write a book (e.g., someday, about something, I don’t know what).’

(Object is nonspecific, indefinite, inanimate, affected)’

[Kalin 2018:119, ex. (10b), (11a)]

2.2. Perfectives

In the perfective aspect, the L-suffix is controlled by the subject, and the S-suffix is altogether impossible, but otherwise the verbal template remains the same (6). As Kalin (2014, 2018) emphasizes, there is hence an agreement reversal here: subject agreement manifests as the S-suffix in the imperfective, but as the L-suffix in the perfective. The template is illustrated in (8).

(6) V – past tense – L-suffix

(7) a. S-suffix: *absent*

b. L-suffix: subject agreement

(8)  $\bar{A}yet \ ks\bar{u} \quad -w\bar{a} \ -lox.$   
 you write.PERF -PST -L.2SG.M

‘You wrote (a long time ago).’

[Kalin 2018:118, ex. (9b)]

In addition to this difference in the verb agreement, the perfective also exhibits a restriction on object DPs. Nonspecific objects are permitted in the perfective and do not control agreement, whereas specific objects are impossible, regardless of whether they control verb agreement or not. This is demonstrated in (9).

(9) *Perfective: no object agreement, object must be nonspecific*

a. \*Axnī ō ksūta ksū (-lā/-a) -lan (-lā/-a).  
 we that book.F write.PERF (-L/S.3SG.F) -L.1PL (-L/S.3SG.F)  
 ‘We wrote that book.’

b. Axnī xa ksūta ksū -lan.  
 we a book write.PERF -L.1PL  
 ‘We wrote a book (e.g., we have written many; not referring to a specific one).’ [Kalin 2018:120, ex. (12)]

Across the two aspects, there is hence a clear correlation between the (im)possibility of object agreement and the (im)possibility of specific objects: specific objects go hand in hand with verb agreement.

### 3. Nominal-licensing approach (Kalin 2014, 2018)

Kalin (2014, 2018) proposes an analysis of these facts in terms of nominal licensing (10): specific objects require licensing through  $\phi$ -Agree (to value their Case feature), and ungrammaticality results if they cannot be licensed in this way.

(10) *Licensing requirement*

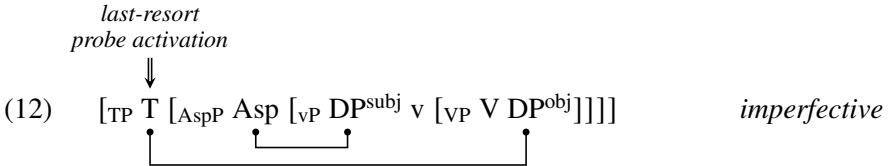
Specific DPs must be licensed through  $\phi$ -Agree with a verbal head.

Space prevents me from presenting Kalin’s account in full; I refer the reader to Kalin (2014, 2018) for in-depth discussion. The structure for perfective transitive clauses is given in (11). By assumption, T is the only verbal head that hosts a  $\phi$ -probe, which agrees with the subject (and is realized as the L-suffix). Because the object thus never agrees with a  $\phi$ -probe, the licensing requirement (10) is violated if the object is specific. Specific objects are therefore banned from occurring in (11). By contrast, if the object is nonspecific, it is not subject to (10) and therefore permitted.

(11) [TP T [<sub>AspP</sub> Asp [<sub>VP</sub> DP<sup>subj</sup> v [<sub>VP</sub> V DP<sup>obj</sup>]]]] *perfective*

Turning to the imperfective, Kalin’s (2014, 2018) clause structure is shown in (12). Here, the clause contains one primary  $\phi$ -probe (on Asp) and one

secondary, inactive  $\phi$ -probe (on T). The former is realized as the S-suffix; the latter as the L-suffix. Asp's  $\phi$ -probe always agrees with the subject; T's  $\phi$ -probe is activated in the imperfective only when it is necessary to license an object (i.e., if the object is specific), that is, as a last resort.



The reason for treating T's  $\phi$ -probe as inactive by default and activated as a last resort is that there is no object agreement in the imperfective if the object is nonspecific (i.e., the counterpart of (5b) with object agreement is ungrammatical if the object is nonspecific, Kalin 2018:119). Thus, T does not agree with nonspecific objects in (12). To restrict Agree by T in this way, Kalin proposes the Licensing Economy Principle in (13).<sup>1</sup>

(13) *Licensing Economy Principle*

A secondary licenser is activated iff the derivation will otherwise not converge. [Kalin 2018:139]

(13) mandates that the secondary licenser on T in (12) is activated only if the object is specific and hence in need of licensing. This limits object agreement to specific objects in the imperfective. Note that in order to account for the ban on specific objects in the perfective (11), it is necessary to assume that such clauses lack a potential secondary licenser.

This account is elegant and insightful, but at the same time computationally complex because (13) is a transderivational (or translocal) constraint (Müller 2000, 2011, Müller & Sternefeld 2001): a derivation in which the object-agreement probe is activated must be compared to one where it is not, with the former sanctioned only if the latter crashes. Thus, given a structure in which T's  $\phi$ -probe has been activated, it is not possible to determine compliance with (13) by inspecting only the properties of this structure. Instead, the structure must be compared to its counterpart in which probe activation has not taken place. The structure with the activated probe is then in com-

<sup>1</sup>See also Béjar & Rezac (2009) and Rezac (2011) for related proposals in other domains.

pliance with (13) only if the structure without the activated probe violates (10). Transderivational constraints are particularly complex because they require the construction and comparison of multiple syntactic structures and/or derivations, and they are therefore to be dispreferred on general grounds (see, e.g., Müller 2011). Furthermore, the account requires a stipulation that while T is by default inactive as a licenser in the imperfective, it is always active in the perfective (Kalin 2018:147).<sup>2</sup> In the next section, I will show that an account that does not employ transderivational constraints and last-resort probe activation becomes available if the burden of the analysis is shifted from nominal licensing to feature gluttony.

#### 4. Feature-gluttony approach

This section develops an alternative account that does not appeal to a nominal-licensing requirement or last-resort probe activation. Instead, it attributes the ban on specific objects in the perfective to an illicit configuration in which a single  $\phi$ -probe agrees with two DPs.

##### 4.1. Analysis of basic verb agreement

I will begin by considering the aspect split in the agreement system, following, in essence, many of the core structural assumptions of Kalin's (2014, 2018) account. As we saw, the imperfective exhibits a richer agreement system, comprising both agreement in the L-suffix and the S-suffix, than the perfective, which may only contain the L-suffix. The probe underlying the L-suffix is thus present in both aspects; I will simply locate it on an Agr head (the precise nature of the head is immaterial). To model the fact that the S-suffix is present only in the imperfective, I will adopt Laka's (2006), Coon's (2010, 2013), and Kalin & Urk's (2015) proposals that imperfective clauses contain more clause structure than perfective clauses. For the sake of concreteness, I will assume that imperfective clauses contain an additional Impf head (again, the precise nature of the difference is not material to the analysis), and that Impf hosts a probe that is realized as the S-suffix. The resulting clause structures are given in (14) for the perfective and in (15) for

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<sup>2</sup>This is because T agrees with the subject in the perfective even if this subject is nonspecific and hence not in need of licensing through  $\phi$ -Agree.

the imperfective. Assuming that the structural order of the heads corresponds to the order of morphemes, in accordance with the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985), the morpheme order is V-T-L in the perfective and V-S-T-L in the imperfective.

(14) *Clause structure in the perfective*

[AgrP Agr<sub>[uφ]</sub> (→ L) [TP T [vP ... V... ]]]

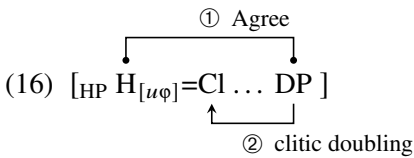
→ *morpheme order*: V-T-L

(15) *Clause structure in the imperfective*

[AgrP Agr<sub>[uφ]</sub> (→ L) [TP T [ImpfP Impf<sub>[uφ]</sub> (→ S) [vP ... V... ]]]]

→ *morpheme order*: V-S-T-L

I will analyze the L-suffix and the S-suffix as clitics rather than verbal agreement. In other words, both φ-probes trigger clitic doubling of the goal onto the head that hosts the probe once the Agree relationship is established (see Anagnostopoulou 2003, Preminger 2019, and the references cited there); the φ-probes themselves are not pronounced. This is schematized in (16).



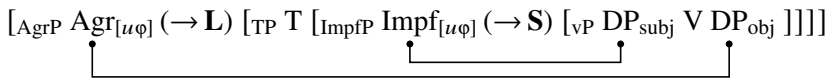
The view that the L- and S-suffix are clitics is consistent with Preminger’s (2009) heuristic for distinguishing agreement from clitic doubling. Preminger argues that failed agreement (that is, agreement that has failed to locate a goal) results in default agreement whereas failed clitic doubling results in the wholesale absence of a clitic. I will propose below that the absence of the L-suffix with nonspecific objects in the imperfective is an instance of failed agreement. The fact that the L-suffix disappears altogether (rather than surfacing with default features) thus provides theory-internal motivation for treating it as a clitic. Doron & Khan (2012), Kalin (2014), and Kalin & Urk (2015) likewise treat the L-suffix as a clitic. Note that no analogous reasoning

can be applied to the S-suffix, which always finds a goal, but I will assume that the S-suffix is a clitic as well (though this is not crucial for the account).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.2. Imperfectives

I first consider the imperfective with a specific object. Impf agrees with, and clitic-doubles, the subject DP. I assume, following Anagnostopoulou (2003), Béjar & Rezac (2003), Preminger (2009), and Coon & Keine (2021), that a DP that has been clitic-doubled is rendered invisible for subsequent Agree operations. As a result, subsequent probing by Agr skips the subject and agrees with, and clitic-doubles, the object. The resulting structure is shown in (17). The clitics themselves are not represented in (17) for readability.

(17) *Imperfective with specific object*



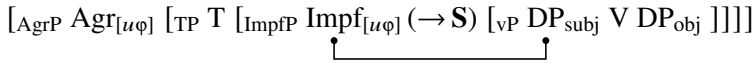
If the object is nonspecific, it does not trigger an L-suffix. Clitic doubling that is limited to specific objects is independently attested. For example, nonspecific objects may not be clitic-doubled in Porteño Spanish (Suñer 1988). This restriction may be implemented in a number of ways. One is to assume, following Preminger (2019) and the references there, that clitic doubling is not itself sensitive to specificity, but that it is phase-bounded. Specific objects undergo movement out of the VP (e.g., Diesing 1992, 1997, Diesing & Jelinek 1995), where they are then accessible to the probe on Agr. By contrast, nonspecific objects remain in a VP-internal position and are thus separated from Agr by a clause-internal phase, preventing Agree and thus clitic doubling. Subjects are always VP-external and thus always visible to the  $\phi$ -probe, regardless of whether they are specific or not. Thus, if the object

<sup>3</sup>Doron & Khan (2012) treat the L-suffix as a clitic but the S-suffix as agreement in Neo-Aramaic. Their reason (p. 228) is that the L-suffix follows the tense marker *-wa*, which they treat as an auxiliary, whereas the S-suffix precedes it (see (4)). However, this difference does not necessarily mean that the two suffixes differ in their status; it may only show that the probe that underlies the L-suffix is higher than *-wa* whereas the probe that underlies the S-suffix is lower.



is nonspecific, only the subject agrees, leading to only an S-suffix, as shown in (18).<sup>4</sup> Agr’s failure to find a goal is harmless (Preminger 2014).

(18) *Imperfective with nonspecific object*



4.3. Perfectives

Turning now to the perfective, recall that here the S-suffix never appears. Within the analysis developed so far, the reason is that perfective clauses lack the Impf layer present in imperfective clauses, and hence the  $\phi$ -probe associated with this head. What we have in perfectives, then, is a configuration in which there exists only a single  $\phi$ -probe (on Agr), but potentially two accessible DPs. In this respect, the perfectives crucially differ from imperfectives, which contain two probes. The “one probe–two goals” configuration in perfectives is precisely the configuration that may result in gluttony (see (1)), and indeed it is precisely in the perfective that ungrammaticality results if the object is specific and hence capable of being clitic-doubled.

To develop this approach, it is necessary that the  $\phi$ -probe on Agr agrees with more than one DP if its search space contains two licit goals (i.e., DPs that have not already been clitic-doubled). This requires an extension of the theory proposed in Coon & Keine (2021). The model of Agree adopted there decomposes  $\phi$ -probes into smaller, geometrically-organized segments, which probe independently (see, e.g., Béjar 2003 and Béjar & Rezac 2009 for decomposed probes of this kind, and Harley & Ritter 2002 for  $\phi$ -feature geometries more generally). This has the effect that an articulated probe, after having agreed with a DP<sub>1</sub>, will enter into Agree with a DP<sub>2</sub> only if DP<sub>2</sub> matches segments on the probe that have not been matched by DP<sub>1</sub>. A key consequence is that double Agree is never established if DP<sub>1</sub> bears more segments than DP<sub>2</sub> (e.g., in 1>3 configurations) or if they are equally specific (e.g., in 3>3 configurations). As it stands, this model does not extend to Senaya DOM because the ban on specific objects in the perfective holds regardless of the features of the subject. For example, we already saw based

<sup>4</sup>Alternatively, one might assume that the clitic-doubling process itself is subject to specificity—that is, the probe that underlies clitic-doubling may only agree with specific DPs, though in this case more needs to be said about why subjects always agree.

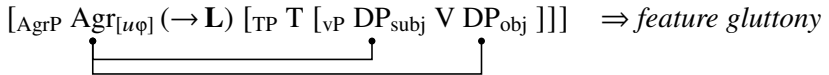
on (9b) that 1>3 configurations give rise to the restriction, and Laura Kalin (p.c.) informs me that 3>3 configurations do so as well. What is needed, then, is an Agree calculus that leads to double Agree by Agr if the object is specific regardless of the properties of the subject.

To achieve this behavior, I will draw on the literature on *Multiple Agree* (e.g., Hiraiwa 2001, 2005). By assumption, Agr's  $\varphi$ -probe is a Multiple-Agree probe, as stated in (19). In this respect, it differs from Impf's  $\varphi$ -probe.

- (19) Agr's  $\varphi$ -probe enters into Multiple Agree: it agrees with every available goal DP in its search space (i.e., every DP in the same phase that has not already been clitic-doubled).

The crucial consequence of (19) is that Agr will agree with both the subject and the object in the perfective if the object is specific, as shown in (20). The result is a gluttonous configuration.

- (20) *Perfective with specific object*



Hiraiwa (2001, 2005) argues that Multiple Agree is established *simultaneously*: the probe enters into Agree with all goals at the same time, rather than in order. I will adopt this assumption in what follows.

Coon & Keine (2021) propose that gluttonous configurations like (20) may give rise to irresolvably conflicting requirements for subsequent operations. What conflict arises depends on whether the probe induces clitic doubling or morphological  $\varphi$ -agreement. Assuming that the L-suffix is a clitic (see section 4.1) and that the probe on Agr is therefore a probe that induces clitic doubling, the conflict that arises from Agr having agreed with two DPs concerns the clitic-doubling process. Following Coon & Keine (2021:671), if a clitic-doubling probe has agreed with a DP, this DP must be clitic-doubled onto the head hosting the probe (commonly modeled as head movement). This requirement is stated in (21); also see Coon et al. (2021) for phrasal movement.

- (21) If a clitic-doubling probe on a head H has agreed with a DP, this DP must be clitic-doubled onto H.

Satisfying (21) is straightforward if Agr agrees with only a single DP. But if Agr has agreed with two DPs, (21) demands that both DPs must be clitic-doubled onto Agr. Coon & Keine (2021) argue that it is not possible to satisfy (21) in this case. The reason is that, in line with the assumption that syntax is strictly derivational and does not have access to look-ahead, (21) must be satisfied for every relevant DP immediately (i.e., temporary violations that are rectified at a later stage of the derivation are not permitted). In other words, (21) is an inviolable derivational requirement that must be satisfied whenever its structural description is met. As a result, it is not possible to clitic-double the two DPs in (20) sequentially as clitic doubling one would lead to a fatal violation of (21) for the other. Furthermore, it is not possible to clitic-double both DPs simultaneously because doing so would require Merge of three elements (the subject's clitic, the object's clitics, and Agr) in a single derivational step. Assuming, as is standard, that Merge is binary, this option is ruled out. Finally, a derivation in which Agr first agrees with the higher DP, which is then clitic-doubled, followed by Agree with the lower DP, which is then clitic-doubled, is likewise ruled out, given that Multiple Agree is established simultaneously rather than sequentially, as noted above (Hiraiwa 2001, 2005). There is hence no stage of the derivation in which Agr has agreed with the subject but not the object in (20).<sup>5</sup>

Putting these pieces together, the  $\varphi$ -probe on Agr must immediately agree with both the subject and the specific object DP in (20), which leads to an unavoidable violation of (21). Assuming that (21) is inviolable, this violation is fatal, making the structure in (20) ineffable—there is no grammatical continuation. As a result, specific objects are ungrammatical in the perfective.

By contrast, if the object is nonspecific in the perfective, no gluttony arises because nonspecific objects never trigger verb agreement or clitic doubling (as seen particularly clearly in the imperfective). Recall from the imperfective

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<sup>5</sup>Other options of ruling out such a derivation are available as well. Rezac (2003, 2004) and Béjar & Rezac (2009) argue that Agree is subject an *earliness requirement* (i), which demands that  $\varphi$ -Agree must be established right away if it can be (i.e., if the structural conditions for it are met). A derivation of (20) in which Agr agree with the subject DP followed by clitic doubling of the subject DP would violate (i) because the conditions for Agree with the object DP are met after Agree with the subject DP, yet this Agree is not established at this stage of the derivation.

(i) If  $\varphi$ -Agree is possible at a stage of the derivation, it must apply.

derivation in (18) that nonspecific objects are not available goals for the  $\phi$ -probe on Agr (because they remain within a lower phase, I have assumed). As a result, Agr in the perfective only agrees with the subject DP in this case, as in (22), and no gluttony arises.

(22) *Perfective with nonspecific object*

$$[\text{AgrP Agr}_{[\mu\phi]} (\rightarrow \mathbf{L}) [\text{TP T } [\text{vP DP}_{\text{subj}} \text{ V DP}_{\text{obj}} ]]]$$

Because Agr's  $\phi$ -probe only agrees with a single DP in (22), (21) is obeyed (as is (i) in fn. 5), and no conflict arises. This derives that nonspecific objects are grammatical in the perfective from the independently-observable fact that such objects do not participate in the verbal agreement/clitic system.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed a gluttony-based analysis of differential object marking (DOM) in Senaya. This account differs from Kalin's (2014, 2018) nominal-licensing-based account of Senaya DOM in a number of ways, both analytical and conceptual. The core idea behind a nominal-licensing account is that specific objects are subject to special licensing requirements that need to be met via  $\phi$ -Agree in order for these objects to be grammatical. As discussed in section 3, this model entails significant computational complexity. Most strikingly, to block object agreement/clitic doubling of nonspecific objects, the model must invoke a transderivational constraint (the Licensing Economy Principle (13)) that compares a derivation in which the secondary probe is activated to one where it is not, with the former licensed only if the latter leads to ungrammaticality. Moreover, this last-resort mechanism must only be available in the imperfective aspect.

I instead proposed an account of these facts in terms of feature gluttony. Nominal licensing plays no role in this account. What bans specific objects in the perfective is not that they must agree but cannot, but that they agree with Agr's  $\phi$ -probe alongside the subject. This leads to gluttony and thereby overwhelms the probe, with no way of satisfying (21). The fact that the restriction is found only in perfective clauses is attributed to the independently-motivated view that perfective clauses are structurally smaller than imperfective clauses: imperfective clauses contain an additional  $\phi$ -probe that clitic-

doubles the subject and thereby renders it invisible to Agr's  $\phi$ -probe, avoiding gluttony. Thus, while specific objects are always visible to verbal  $\phi$ -probes (directly observable in the imperfective), this visibility creates a "one probe–two goals" configuration only in the perfective. This reanalysis thus shifts the burden of the account away from the (licensing) requirements of nominals and instead views the restriction as arising from a problem in the  $\phi$ -probe.

In eschewing nominal licensing, the account also avoids the need for a transderivational constraint such as the Licensing Economy Principle (13). In fact, the gluttony account views syntactic requirements such as the clitic-doubling requirement in (21) as immediate, unranked, and inviolable (hence resulting in ineffability if violated), with no need to appeal to last-resort operations or transderivationality.

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