Dmitry Ganenkov

LAK BIABSOLUTIVES ARE RAISING STRUCTURES

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This article introduces new empirical data on the syntax of the biabsolutive construction in Lak that sheds new light on the analysis of this construction presented in Gagliardi et al. (2014). Some case-agreeing elements, such as compound anaphors, are shown to be able to bear ergative case despite the fact that no ergative DP is overtly present in the biabsolutive construction; this evidence necessitates a refinement of the structural analysis presented by Gagliardi et al., which precludes the possibility of ergative marking within the biabsolutive construction. I propose to capture the difference between ergative and biabsolutive constructions by exploiting a potential ambiguity in the content of the functional head Aux above AspP. On my account, the biabsolutive construction is understood as an instance of subject-to-subject raising with a reduced non-restructuring complement: the raising predicate 'be involved in' sits in Aux, assigning absolutive case to the closest DP in its c-command domain. All functional heads above AuxP thus bear gender agreement with the absolutive subject.

Keywords: ergativity; biabsolutive construction; restructruring; raising; Nakh-Daghestanian; Lak

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[1] National Research University Higher School of Economics , Institute of Linguistics, Moscow, d.ganenkov@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Gagliardi et al. (2014) present a formal analysis of the biabsolutive construction in the Nakh-Daghestanian language Lak that accounts for both the syntactic properties and semantic interpretation of this construction and constitutes an important step in the formal study of Nakh-Daghestanian syntax. In this short article, I will discuss Gagliardi et al.'s analysis and introduce new data that require us to modify and refine their original proposal. Section 2 provides a brief overview of Gagliardi et al.'s proposal, focusing in particular on the components that I propose to modify and refine. In Section 3, I introduce new empirical evidence crucial to our understanding of the covert syntax of the biabsolutive construction in Lak. These data, I argue, speak against the case assignment mechanisms developed by Gagliardi et al. to account for the pattern of case marking and agreement in the biabsolutive construction. In Section 4, I sketch a modified analysis of the biabsolutive construction in Lak that takes into account the new empirical evidence.

2. Overview of the original proposal

Gagliardi et al. (2014) present a minimalist analysis of the so-called "biabsolutive" construction in Lak. The biabsolutive construction features a transitive verb that requires both its core arguments, subject and direct object, to be expressed in the absolutive case; this case configuration contrasts with that of the normal ergative construction, in which the subject is expressed by the ergative and only the direct object receives absolutive case. Preliminary examples from Avar and Lak are given in (1) and (2).[3]

(1) Avar (Forker 2012: 79, glosses changed)

a.   Ergative construction

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[3] Here and below, the direct object and its corresponding agreement markers are underlined; the subject and its agreement markers are bold-faced.

niže-ca <u>xer</u>   <u>b</u>-eg-ule-<u>b</u>   <u>b</u>-ugo.

we-ERG   hay(N)   N-fork-PTCP.PRS-N   N-be.PRS

'We are forking the hay.'

b.   Biabsolutive construction

emen   <u>ču</u>   <u>b</u>-ecc-ule-**w**   **w**-ugo.

father(ABS.M)   horse(ABS.N)   N-praise-PTCP.PRS-M   M-be.PRS

'Father praises the horse.'

(2) Lak (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 137-138, glosses changed)

a.   Ergative construction

Aˤli-l   <u>čawaxulu</u>   <u>t'it'laj</u>   <u>b</u>-u-r.

Ali-ERG   window.III.SG.ABS   III.open.PROG   III-AUX-3

'Ali is opening a/the window.'

b.   Biabsolutive construction

Aˤli   <u>čawaxulu</u>   <u>t'it'laj</u>   **u**-r.

Ali-I.ABS   window.III.SG.ABS   III.open.PROG   (I)AUX-3
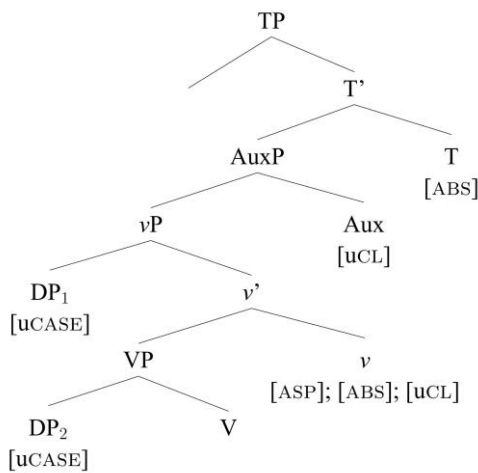
'Ali is opening a/the window.'

Sentences (1a) and (2a) exemplify the standard ergative alignment with transitive verbs: the agent is in the ergative; the patient is in the absolutive. In contrast, sentences (1b) and (2b) illustrate the biabsolutive construction: in each case, both core transitive arguments show up in the absolutive. Aside from case marking, the two constructions differ with respect to gender agreement on the auxiliary: in the ergative construction, it is the direct object that is cross-referenced on the auxiliary, while in the biabsolutive construction, it is the subject that

controls auxiliary agreement. The lexical verb in both constructions shows agreement with the direct object.

The ergative pattern of core argument marking is considered basic to Lak, appearing across all tense-aspect-mood combinations without any restrictions. The biabsolutive construction, by contrast, may only occur in the progressive aspect. The meanings of the two constructions are similar; however, Forker (2012) indicates that the biabsolutive typically emphasizes the state of the agent and backgrounds the patient.

Gagliardi et al. (2014) isolate and provide evidence for three important facts about the behavior of Lak biabsolutives. First, biabsolutive constructions are always interpreted as progressive or durative. Second, the use of this construction is always optional. Third, the biabsolutive construction can be formed with both synthetic and periphrastic verb forms. On the basis of these three facts, the authors suggest that Lak biabsolutives involve restructuring. Specifically, they propose that the functional head v of the biabsolutive construction is specified for the aspectual feature [progressive], which is responsible for the difference in tense-aspect-mood between the ergative construction and the biabsolutive. This progressive v selects a VP containing the lexical verb and its complements, but does not select an external argument or any higher functional heads. The object is assigned absolutive case by the functional head v, just as in ergative constructions. When the thematic subject merges into Spec,vP, however, it can receive no inherent ergative case, and thus must be assigned absolutive case by T. The proposed derivation is shown in (3); see Gagliardi et al. (2014: 154) for further details.

(3)

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                    TP
                   /  \
                      T'
                     /  \
                 AuxP      T
                /   \    [ABS]
              vP      Aux
             /  \    [uCL]
          DP₁     v'
       [uCASE]   /  \
               VP      v
              /  \  [ASP]; [ABS]; [uCL]
          DP₂     V
       [uCASE]
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Gagliardi et al. (2014) support their proposed analysis with evidence from low nominalizations, the morphology of aspectual marking in verb forms, word order, and negation, all of which point to the monoclausal nature of Lak biabsolutives. In the discussion that follows, I set aside these broader aspects of the original proposal and confine myself to the consideration of case assignment.

3. Case assignment in Lak biabsolutives: new empirical data

In this section, I introduce empirical data indicating that the functional head *v* does indeed assign ergative case in the biabsolutive construction, *pace* Gagliardi et al. (2014). The crucial evidence comes from examples in which the ergative case — which typically remains unexpressed in biabsolutives — is visible on certain overt material.

The logic of the argument I develop here is very similar to that employed in the analysis of control structures in Icelandic, Russian, and other languages with rich case systems. In such languages, it is possible to ascertain the underlying assigned case of an unexpressed infinitival subject by observing case concord with depictives, emphatic pronouns, and floating quantifiers. Each of these types of modifiers bears the morphological case of the argument it

is associated with, thus revealing the "hidden" case of the unexpressed subject; see Landau (2006) and references therein for a summary of evidence that PRO in obligatory control bears standard case.

Example (4) from Icelandic shows the essence of the argument (Landau 2006: 155).

(4) Strákarnir   vonast til [að PRO   vanta   ekki alla   í   skólann].

the boys.NOM   hope   for   PRO.ACC to-lack   not all.ACC in   the-school

'The boys hope not to be all absent from school.'

Two observations allow us to detect accusative case on PRO in the infinitival clause in (4). First, we know that in Icelandic, the verb 'lack' requires quirky accusative case marking on its subject. Second, accusative case is visible on the floating quantifier *alla*, which is semantically associated with the understood subject of the clause. Combining these two facts, we can plausibly conclude that the subject PRO bears accusative case.

In the same vein, it is possible to identify the presence of ergative case in Lak biabsolutives by considering case agreement on the following elements: (i) compound reflexives and (ii) two variants of compound reciprocal. Before presenting the necessary evidence, some brief remarks on the structure and case marking of compound anaphors in Lak are in order.

Lak compound anaphors consist of two components, which vary according to the type of the anaphor: compound reflexive anaphors contain two simple reflexive pronouns; compound reciprocal anaphors contain two instances of either the numeral *ca* 'one' or the pronoun *ku* 'one (of both)'. In each instance, the first component of the compound anaphor agrees in case with the subject of the clause, while the second component bears case marking appropriate to the anaphor's position in the clause; cf. Belletti (1983) on compound reciprocals in Romance.

The sentences in (5)–(7) provide baseline examples of compound anaphors in Lak transitive clauses.

(5) Compound reflexive (Gagliardi et al. 2014: 141)

Rasul-l-ul   cala   cuwa   awtː-un-ni.

Rasul-OS-ERG   self.I.ERG   self.I.ABS   I.beat-PST-3

'Rasul beat himself up.'

(6) Compound reciprocal with *ca* (original prose)

las   wa   šːar-nil=gu   canni-l   ca   χːira   b-u-w-na.

husband and   wife-ERG=ADD one-ERG one.ABS darling HPL-do-HPL-PST

'Husband and wife caressed each other.'

(7) Compound reciprocal with *ku* (elicited)

usː-urwa-ral   kunna-l   ku   qaˤwrin   b-u-nni.

brother-PL-ERG one-ERG   one.ABS deceive   HPL-do-AOR

'Brothers deceived each other.'

Following the general rule described above, the first part of each compound anaphor above bears ergative case — the case of the transitive subject — while the second component bears absolutive case, in compliance with the anaphor's role as clausal direct object.

Now consider examples (8)–(10), which illustrate the case marking of compound anaphors within the Lak biabsolutive construction.

(8) Compound reflexive (Kazenin 2013: 267, original prose)

mukunssa	insan	[...]	cala	cuwa	qaˤwrin	ullaj	u-sːa-r.
such	person.ABS		self.I.**ERG**	self.I.ABS	deceive	(I)do.PROG	(I)AUX-ASSRT-3

'Such a man deceives himself.'

To begin with, in (8), we see a biabsolutive construction with the transitive verb *qaˤwrin ban* 'to deceive'. As expected, both the subject and the object are in the absolutive case. The first part of the reflexive pronoun, however, bears ergative case. Thus, a mismatch arises between the morphological case of the overt lexical subject and that of the compound reflexive. Following other accounts of case concord (see references above), I propose that the ergative reflexive is licensed by an unexpressed ergative subject of the lexical verb. Further evidence is presented in (9)-(10).

(9) Compound reciprocal with *ca* (original prose)

gaj	d-ija	canni-l	ca	d-aχːana	d-ullaj.
they.ABS	NPL-AUX.PST	one-**ERG**	one.ABS	NPL-change	NPL-do.PROG

'They were changing each other.'

(10) Compound reciprocal with *ku* (original prose)

harca	q'ini	insan-tal	kunna-l	kuw	q'at'	b-ullaj	b-ija.
every	day	person-PL.ABS	one-**ERG**	one.ABS	destroy	HPL-do.PROG	HPL-AUX.PST

'Every day people were destroying one another.'

In these examples, as in (8), the first part of each compound anaphor is again in the ergative, despite the fact that both constructions are biabsolutive and no overt ergative lexical DPs are in evidence. It seems natural to conclude that the functional head *v* in the thematic layer of the

clause assigns this ergative case. Note, crucially, that the ergative marking in these and similar constructions is not default or "frozen" case marking: other verb classes show different case-marking patterns with compound anaphors, as illustrated in example (11) (cf. (8)).

(11) Compound reflexive with the dative subject verb *č'an* 'to see' (Kazenin 2013: 267, original prose)

oˤrč'-ru   canma   ciwpːa   jatin-tal-nu   qːa-č'alaj   b-ija.

boy-PL.ABS self.HPL.**DAT** self.HPL.ABS orphan-PL.ABS-PTCL NEG-see.PROG HPL-AUX.PST

'The kids did not see themselves as orphans.'

(11) presents a biabsolutive construction with the dative subject verb *č'an* 'to see'. In this case, although the subject of the entire sentence is again in the absolutive, the first component of the compound reflexive bears dative case — the inherent case assigned by *č'an* to its external argument. Thus, we can see that the functional head *v* assigns to the thematic subject in its specifier precisely the case that is required by the lexical verb.

To sum up, in this section I have provided empirical support for the claim that the functional head *v* does indeed assign case in Lak biabsolutives. Evidence comes from case marking on compound anaphors which, in contrast to the overt subject of the sentence (which must appear in the absolutive), shows the inherent case (ergative/dative) assigned in the thematic layer of the construction. The evidence provided compels a reconsideration of the mechanism of case assignment in biabsolutives proposed by Gagliardi et al. (2014). In the next section, I sketch out a modified derivation that captures all relevant facts.

4. Proposal

The main difficulty for Gagliardi et al.'s (2014) analysis arises from the fact that ergative case can, in fact, surface in the biabsolutive construction; as a result, it is necessary that two separate case-assigning functional heads be identified in the clause structure of the Lak biabsolutive. The thematic subject, which usually remains unexpressed in the biabsolutive construction, is in fact covertly present, receiving case from the functional head v; as a result, the overt subject, which shows up in the absolutive, must be assigned case by a separate functional head located higher up the clausal spine. This situation superficially resembles the distribution of overt and unexpressed material in control and raising constructions, in which the subject of the control/raising predicate typically shows up on the surface while the subject of the embedded predicate remains unexpressed but detectable; cf. Section 2.

I propose that the biabsolutive construction in Lak is a *raising construction with a reduced non-restructuring complement* (Wurmbrand 2001: 115). Syntactically, as Wurmbrand (2001) discusses, reduced non-restructuring complements are represented as vPs or TPs. I contend that the biabsolutive in Lak may be analyzed as a subject-to-subject raising construction with an AspP complement.

I propose that, up to AspP, the derivation of the biabsolutive and ergative constructions proceeds in exactly the same fashion. Recall from Section 2 that Gagliardi et al. assume an aspectual feature [progressive] and the absence of an ergative case feature on the functional head v in the biabsolutive structure; by contrast, my analysis assumes no special 'flavor' of this functional head. The derivation of the two constructions on my account proceeds as follows (cf. Gagliardi et al. (2014: 153):

Transitive v is specified for two case features — ABSolutive and ERGative — and for the unvalued CLass feature responsible for gender agreement on the lexical verb (Woolford 2006). Transitive v assigns ergative case to the DP in its specifier (thematic subject) and absolutive
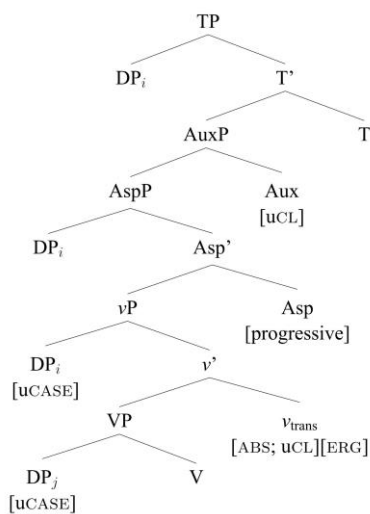
case to the DP in its complement (thematic object); the latter DP values [uCL] on transitive *v*. The locus of difference between ergative and biabsolutive constructions is the functional head Aux that takes AspP as its complement.

In the ergative construction, Aux is an ordinary functional head on the clausal spine that introduces verbal inflectional categories; see (12).

(12) Ergative construction

a. **Aˤli-l** <u>čawaxulu</u> <u>tʼitʼlaj</u> <u>b</u>-ur.

Ali-ERG window.III.SG.ABS III.open.PROG III-AUX

'Ali is opening a/the window.'

b.

However, as an alternative to this standard configuration, Aux may serve as a functional head hosting an aspectual raising predicate, 'be involved in V-ing' (see Fukuda 2012 on aspectual verbs as functional heads). In this case, the derivation proceeds in the following way. After AspP is constructed, the thematic subject moves from Spec,*v*P (where it has already received ergative case) to Spec,AspP. AspP, specified for the feature [progressive], is now selected by

the aspectual raising predicate sitting in Aux. Note that, in addition to the unvalued CLass feature that is always present on Aux, the raising predicate also bears the [ABS] feature. Following Potsdam and Polinsky (2012), I assume the viability of multiple case checking within raising structures; thus, Aux may assign its absolutive case feature to the closest DP in its c-command domain — i.e. to the DP in Spec,AspP that later ends up appearing overtly in Spec,TP. The full derivation of the biabsolutive is shown in (13).
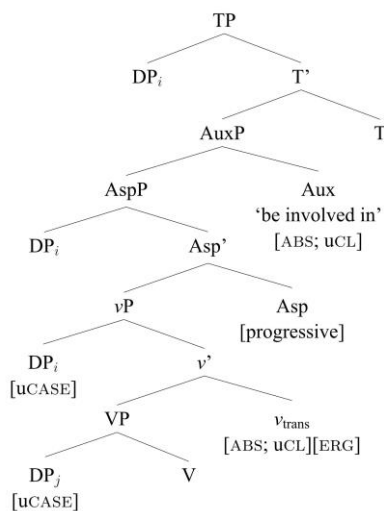
(13)

a. **Aʕli**   <u>čawaxulu</u>   <u>ťiťlaʝ</u>   **u**-r.

   Ali-I.ABS   window.III.SG.ABS   III.open.PROG   (I)AUX-3

   'Ali is opening a/the window.'

b.

The fact that the DP in Spec,AspP gets assigned case not by T, but by a lower functional head, is illustrated most clearly in sentences with multiple auxiliary constructions. In (14), for example, multiple functional heads below T agree with the subject DP. Since the DP in

Spec,AspP is the highest available DP in the absolutive, it serves to value the [uCL] features on the functional heads corresponding to auxiliaries all the way up from AspP.[4]

(14) Biabsolutive with multiple auxiliaries

ina	[...]	χːišalasːa	<u>dišala-rdu</u>	tʼalaw	<u>d</u>-ullaj	**u**-sːa	**u**-ra.
you.SG.ABS		excessive	tax-PL.ABS	require	NPL-do.PROG	(I)AUX-ASSRT	(I)AUX-2

'You require excessive taxes.'

The derivation proposed here adequately captures the facts presented in Section 3. On the surface, we see an absolutive direct object that receives absolutive case from *v*, and an absolutive subject that receives absolutive case from Aux. Within *v*P, the direct object is the only absolutive-marked argument, and thus the only possible controller of gender agreement on the lexical verb. The thematic subject in the ergative, however, is still covertly present, and can be uncovered using diagnostics like agreeing compound anaphors.[5] Note that the account proposed here remains compatible with all the evidence provided by Gagliardi et al. in support of their analysis (low nominalizations, periphrastic verb forms, word order, and negation).

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[4] Note that the derivation of the biabsolutive construction proposed by Gagliardi et al. (2014) shown in (3) also suffers from a derivational timing problem. On the one hand, the authors propose that the absolutive is assigned by T. On the other hand, lower functional Aux heads bear unvalued CLass features. By the Earliness Principle, which states that an unvalued feature must be valued as soon in the derivation as possible (Pesetsky and Torrego 2001), Aux will start probing a c-commanded DP in the absolutive to value its CLass feature as soon as it is merged. At this point in the derivation, however, the only absolutive DP is the direct object, since T has not been merged yet and thus cannot assign the absolutive to the derived subject DP. The derivation in (3) therefore predicts, contrary to the observed evidence, that auxiliaries in Lak biabsolutives will have subject agreement.

[5] A similar account seems to be appropriate for the biabsolutive construction in Avar, a representative of a different branch within the same Nakh-Daghestanian family, see example (1) above. In this language, ergative case in biabsolutives may be diagnosed, for instance, from case marking on intensifiers, see (i).

(i) žin-ca=go   ʕaka   b-eč'č'-ule-j   j-igo   jasː.
    REFL-ERG=EMPH   cow(ABS)   N-milk-PTCP.PRS-F   F-COP   girl(ABS)
    'The girl is milking the cow by herself.'

Here, both the subject (*jasː* 'girl') and the object (*ʕaka* 'cow') are in the absolutive case. The reflexive pronoun, however — which functions here as an intensifier associated with the subject position of the lexical verb — bears ergative case. Again, as in Lak, a mismatch is observed between the morphological case of the overt lexical subject and that of the intensifier.

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented empirical evidence demonstrating that the presence of the ergative can be diagnosed in Lak biabsolutive constructions. This evidence calls for refinement of the earlier analysis proposed by Gagliardi et al. (2014). Accordingly, I have proposed a variant of their derivational analysis that captures the new data by assuming a covert functional ambiguity within the Aux head. In the standard case, the Aux head is just one of the functional heads responsible for the introduction of verbal inflectional categories in the clause, a situation that produces the default ergative construction. However, when Aux hosts the unaccusative raising predicate 'be involved in', absolutive case is assigned downward to the closest DP, ultimately yielding the pattern of case marking and agreement observed in the biabsolutive construction. It remains to be determined whether this analysis may be extended to other languages of the Nakh-Daghestanian family.

Abbreviations

I, II, III – gender, 1, 2, 3 – person, ABS – absolutive, ACC – accusative, ADD – additive, AOR – aorist, ASSRT – assertive, AUX – auxiliary, ERG – ergative, HPL – human plural, M – masculine, N – neuter, NEG – negative, NOM – nominative, NPL – neuter plural, OS – oblique stem, PROG – progressive, PRS – present, PST – past, PTCL – particle, PTCP – participle, SG – singular

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Dmitry Ganenkov
National Research University Higher School of Economics ,   Institute   of   Linguistics, Moscow, d.ganenkov@gmail.com