Two Steps to High Absolutive Syntax

Dan Brodkin

April 17 2021

1 Ergativity: Crash Course

There are many different ways to mark the external and internal arguments (EXT/INT).

- NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE: $\text{EXT}_{\text{TRANS}} = \text{EXT}_{\text{INTRANS}} = \text{INT}_{\text{INTRANS}} \neq \mathbf{INT_{TRANS}}$
- ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE: $\mathbf{EXT_{TRANS}} \neq \text{EXT}_{\text{INTRANS}} = \text{INT}_{\text{INTRANS}} = \text{INT}_{\text{TRANS}}$

Nominative languages tend to show the following properties:

1. The NOM argument → triggers AGR on T^0.
2. The NOM argument → binds into other arguments.

These patterns suggest (1):

(1) In NOM/ACC languages, the NOM argument moves to SPEC,TP.

Ergative languages, however, show a split — Bittner & Hale 1996a,b

- HIGH-ABSOLUTIVE languages:
  1. The ABS argument → triggers AGR on T^0.
  2. The ABS argument → binds into other arguments.
  3. The ERG argument → no Ā-extraction.
- LOW-ABSOLUTIVE languages: *none of the above.*

These patterns suggest (2):

(2) In HIGH-ABS languages, the ABS argument moves above the ERG.

Today's Question: What is the nature of this process?

The Roadmap:

1. *Background*: Two Approaches to High-Abs Syntax
2. *The Empirical Terrain*: High-Abs Syntax in Mandar (South Sulawesi)
3. **The Key Claim**: High-Abs Syntax arises *through two distinct steps.*

2 Previous Approaches to High-Abs Syntax

Background: key regions for HIGH-ABS syntax

1. Inuit: the whole family	Bittner 1994, Yuan 2018
2. Salish: the whole family	Davis 1991, Brown 2016
3. Mayan: K'ichean, Q'anjob'alan, Mamean	Tada 1993, Coon et al. 2014
4. *Austronesian*: the Philippines, w.Indonesia	Keenan 1972, Guilfoyle et al. 1992

Stable Conclusion: ABS > ERG — (The HIGH-ABS Hypothesis; 2)

• Scope: ABS > ERG	Inuit, Austronesian
• Binding: ABS > ERG	(Mayan?), Austronesian
• Agreement: ABS → T^0	Inuit, Mayan, Salish, Austronesian
• Ā-Extraction: not for the ERG	Inuit, Mayan, Salish, Austronesian

---

Observation: everything is unclear beyond this point.

- The position of the ABS: cannot be extrapolated from word order.
  - Ergative languages → VSO or SOV, *not* SVO — Mahajan 1994
  - Non-SVO languages: word order → reveals little about syntactic positions
- **Result**: very few empirical arguments for the precise position of the ABS.
- **Therefore**: no consensus on the *nature* or *destination* of its movement.

Two Previous Approaches:

1. HIGH INVERSION: ABS → SPEC,TP;	"LICENSING MOVEMENT"	Campana 1992
2. LOW INVERSION: ABS → SPEC,*v*P;	"OBJECT SHIFT"	Rackowski 2002

2.1 The High Inversion Analysis

The Fundamental Intuition: ABS = NOM

1. The ABS argument → moves to a *subject position* to be licensed.
2. This process → the ABS argument moves to SPEC,TP like a NOM.

The Summary:

(3) HIGH-ABS syntax arises from licensing movement of the ABS to SPEC,TP.

This model → hegemonic through the 1990s.

- Key names: Bok-Bennema 1991, Campana 1992, Murasugi 1992, Guilfoyle, Hung, & Travis 1992, Bittner & Hale 1996a,b, Manning 1996, Baker 1997

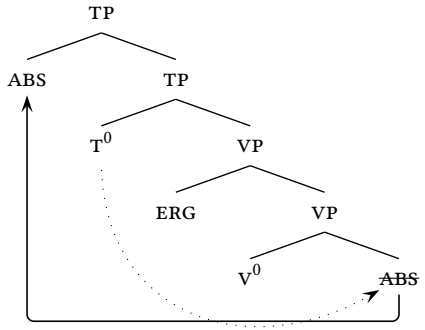
The Intellectual Context:

- Emergent and coherent theory of 'two distinct subject positions': Koopman & Sportiche 1985, Fukui & Speas 1986 (*pre*-McCloskey 1997)
- Strict correlation between agreement (with T^0) and movement (to SPEC,TP): Kayne 1989, Koopman 1987, Mahajan 1990, Kinyalolo 1992, Chomsky 1993
- Salient link from extraction restrictions to locality: Rizzi 1990, Shlonsky 1992

The High-Inversion Logic Bok-Bennema 1991, Guilfoyle et al. 1992

- HIGH-ABS languages: → ABS argument licensed by T^0.
- The licensing process → forces the ABS to move to SPEC,TP.

(4) *The High Inversion Approach*



2.2 The Low Inversion Analysis

The Fundamental Intuition: ABS → object shift

1. The ABS argument → undergoes definiteness-related movement in the *v*P.
2. This process → places the ABS above the ERG like a shifted object.

The Summary:

(5) HIGH-ABS syntax arises from object shift of the ABS to SPEC,*v*P.

This model → hegemonic from the early 2000s-present.

- Key names: Rackowski 2002, Aldridge 2004, Yuan 2018, Coon et al. 2021

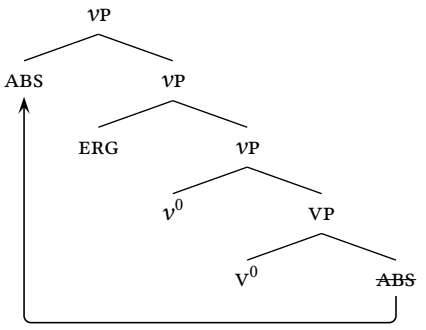
The Intellectual Context:

- Novel awareness and theoretical scrutiny of the process of object shift: Koopman & Sportiche 1985, Diesing 1992, Bobaljik & Thrainsson 1996
- The emergence of influential models which assume that object shift places the object above the subject in English: Chomsky 1995, 2001, McCloskey 2001
- The novel possibility of multiple specifiers: Chomsky 1995, Richards 1998
- The formal dissociation of MOVE and AGREE: Chomsky 1995, 2001

The Low-Inversion Logic Rackowski 2002, Yuan 2018

- HIGH-ABS languages: → ABS argument undergoes object shift to SPEC,*v*P.
- The process of object shift → the ABS in a higher specifier of *v*P than the ERG.

(6) *The Low Inversion Approach*



3 High Absolutive Syntax in Mandar

Mandar: Background Facts

- Austronesian language; South Sulawesi Subfamily
- 400,00 speakers; urban gen z → monolingual in Indonesian
- DATA: from elicitation + Indonesian descriptive work
- ELICITATION: two speakers from POLEWALI 2018-

Mandar Syntax

- Default VSO order
- No case-marking; *pro*-drop
- ERG-ABS agreement
  - ERG: prefix on the verb
  - ABS: enclitic in 2P

(7) **U**-ita=**o** *pro pro*
1ERG-see=2ABS
'I see you.'

(8) Na-ita=i [$_E$ iJohn] [$_A$ iMary]
3ERG-see=3ABS
'John saw Mary.'

The Voice System

- Verbs → prefixal alternation
  1. TRANSITIVE → ERG-
  2. ANTIPASSIVE → *maN-*
  3. COMITATIVE → *si-*
- This alternation = *voice system*
- Voice → determines the ABS argument
  - TRANSITIVE → ABS = INT
  - ANTIPASSIVE → ABS = EXT

(9) Da **mu**-ala=**i**!
DON'T! 2ERG-take=3ABS
'Don't take it!' TRANS

(10) **Maq**-ala=**aq** doiq
ANT-take=1ABS money
'I'm taking money.' ANT

(11) **Si**-ala=**aq** sola iNina
COM-take=1ABS with NAME
'I took up with Nina.' COM

The High-Abs System

- Mandar is a *High-Abs* language:
  - The ABS argument → AGR on T^0; binds into ERG; shows Ā-privilege
- **Key Claim**: HIGH-ABS syntax *arises in two steps.*
  1. OBJECT SHIFT: Definite INT moves from VP → SPEC,*v*P
  2. LICENSING MOVEMENT: ABS argument → SPEC,TP

3.1 High Absolutive Syntax

High-Abs Claim: the ABS moves to a position above all other arguments (2).

First Argument: High Agreement

- The ABS agreement probe sits above the ERG probe also: Mayan, Inuit
  1. LINEAR POSITION: ABS agreement in 2P; ERG agreement = verbal prefix
  2. DISTRIBUTION: ABS agreement absent in non-finite clauses; ERG remains.
  3. MORPHOLOGY: ABS agreement forms portmanteaux with ASP → complex X^0
- **Result**: ABS agreement → T^0 Béjar 1999, Brodkin 2021a,b

(12) *ABS Agreement → 2P*

Indang=**i** mala u-pau.
not=3ABS can 1ERG-say
'I can't say it.' F&J 2000: 240

(13) *ABS Agreement → not in NFCs*

Meload=i [$_{NFC}$ umande _]
may.want=3ABS eat
'He may want to eat.' S. 1987: 37

Second Argument: Extraction Asymmetries

- The ABS argument can undergo Ā-extraction; non-ABS arguments cannot.
  - TRANSITIVE: INT$_{ABS}$ can extract; EXT$_{ERG}$ cannot. Inuit, (HA) Mayan, Salish
  - COMITATIVE: EXT$_{ABS}$ can extract; INT$_{OBL}$ cannot. Austronesian
- **Result**: ABS argument > all other arguments Keenan 1972, Guilfoyle et al. 1992
  - The extraction constraint → LOCALITY in the Ā-domain Rizzi 1990

(14) *Transitive: INT$_{ABS}$ extracts; EXT$_{ERG}$ cannot*

a. Iqo$_{ABS}$ **u**-salili _
you 1ERG-miss
'I miss YOU.' M&S 1991: 157

b. *Yau$_{ERG}$ **u**-salili=o _
i 1ERG-miss=2ABS
('I miss you.') JT: 4.2, 295

(15) *Comitative: EXT$_{ABS}$ extracts; INT$_{OBL}$ cannot*

a. Yau$_{ABS}$ **si**-issang iNina$_{OBL}$!
i COM-know NAME
'I know Nina!' JT: 11.20, 55-82

b. *Innai$_{OBL}$ **si**-issang=o ?
who COM-know=2B
('Who do you know?)

Third Argument: Condition C

- *Classic view*: an R-expression cannot be commanded by a coreferent pronoun.
  - ENGLISH: only the ACC can be a pronoun coindexed with the NOM
    - *John's$_i$ mother loves him$_i$*; **His$_i$ mother loves John$_i$*;
  - RESULT: the NOM asymmetrically C-commands the ACC
- MANDAR: the reversed pattern.
  - The INT → **not** a pronoun coindexed with an R-expr in the EXT.
  - The EXT → *can* be a pronoun coindexed with an R-expr in the INT.

(16) *Transitive: INT cannot be a pronoun coindexed with an R-expr in the EXT.*

a. Na-ita=i [$_{ERG}$ kindoq-na *pro$_i$*] [$_{INT}$ iNina$_i$].
3ERG-see=3ABS mom-of her NAME
'Her mom saw Nina.' JT: 1.19, 21

b. *Na-ita=i [$_{EXT}$ kindoq-na **iNina**$_i$ annaq **iKacoq**] [$_{INT}$ *pro$_i$*].
3ERG-see=3ABS mom-of NAME and NAME *her*
('Nina$_i$ and Kacoq's mom saw her') JT: 4.16, 127

Fourth Argument: Variable Binding

- *The Classic view*: variable binding requires C-command
  - ENGLISH: only the ACC can contain a variable bound by the NOM
    - *Every$_i$ mother loves her$_i$ kid*; **Her$_i$ mother loves every$_i$ kid.*
  - RESULT: the NOM asymmetrically C-commands the ACC
- MANDAR: the ABS argument systematically binds into the ERG.
  - The Quantifier: *nasang* 'every' → floats to second-position

(17) *Transitive: quantified INT can bind a variable in the EXT.*

a. Na-salili=**nasang**$_i$=i [$_{EXT}$ kindoq-**nna** *pro$_i$*] [$_{INT}$ sanaeke$_i$]
3ERG-miss=every=3ABS mom-of *her* child
'Her$_i$ mom missed every$_i$ child.' JT: 11.23, 31

b. Na-allai=**nasang**$_i$=i [$_{EXT}$ guru-**nna** *pro$_i$*] [$_{INT}$ passikola$_i$]
3ERG-scold=every=3ABS teacher-of *his* student
'His$_i$ teacher scolded every$_i$ student.' JT: 3.11, 90

Further Note: Variable Binding → C-command

- **Objection**: variable-binding need not require C-command Barker 2012
- **Response**: this tracks something systematic here.
  - Ditransitives: INT does not trigger ABS agreement.
  - This context: the INT cannot bind into the EXT.
  - **Generalization**: *only the ABS argument can bind into the ERG.*

(18) *Ditransitive: INT ≠ ABS*

a. Na-bengan=**aq** [$_{INT}$ barras] [$_{GOAL}$ *pro*$_{ABS}$].
3ERG-give=1ABS rice me
'He gave me rice'

(19) *Ditransitive: quantified INT **cannot** bind into the EXT.*

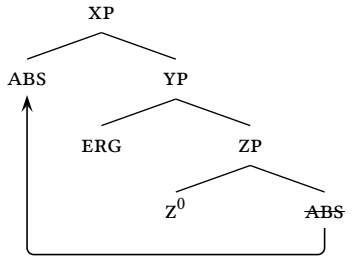
a. Na-pasissang=**nasang**$_i$=aq [$_{EXT}$ kindoq-na *pro*] [$_{INT}$ **sanaeke**].
3ERG-introduce=every=1ABS mom-of *her* child
'Her$_{*i,j}$ mom showed me every$_i$ child.' JT: 3.11, 100

b. Na-kiringang=**nasang**$_i$=aq [$_{EXT}$ panulis-na *pro*] [$_{INT}$ **buku**].
3ERG-send.to=every=1ABS author-of *it* book
'Its$_{*i,j}$ author sent me every$_i$ book.' JT: 4.17, 58

3.2 Interim Summary

- **Claim**: Mandar shows HIGH-ABS syntax.
  - The ABS argument → a position above all other arguments in the clause.
  - Parallel: the other languages of the Philippines & Western Indonesia Keenan 1972, Chung 1976, Guilfoyle et al. 1992, Aldridge 2004, Hsieh 2020
- **The Key Question**: how does this come about?

(20) *Mandar: High Absolutive Schema*



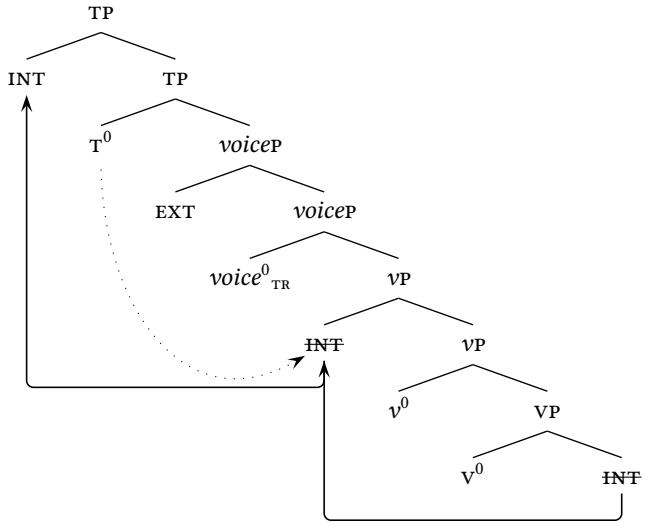
4 The Two-Step Model

- **The Fundamental Claim**: HIGH-ABS syntax arises in *two steps*.
  1. OBJECT SHIFT: Definite INT moves from VP → SPEC,*v*P
  2. LICENSING MOVEMENT: ABS argument → SPEC,TP

- **Object Shift** → NOT above the EXT.
  - Definiteness effect: Mandar requires definite arguments to leave the VP.
    - HIGH-INVERSION models → fail to recognize this step.
  - Surface evidence: restrictions on incorporation → VP-external position
  - **But**: arguments which undergo object shift *alone* → **beneath** the EXT.
    - LOW-INVERSION models → assume the opposite conclusion.
      (*pace*: Rackowski 2002, Aldridge 2004, Yuan 2018, Coon et al. 2020)

- **Licensing Movement** → ABS to SPEC,TP.
  - **Claim**: ABS arguments move to a high position for licensing ABS = NOM
  - Evidence: the link between ABS agreement, binding, and Ā-extraction.

(21) *The Two-Step Model: an Illustration*



4.1 The Definiteness Effect

- The Mandar voice system shows a definiteness effect:
  - When the INT is indefinite, the **antipassive** voice must be used.
  - When the INT is definite, the **transitive** voice must be used.
- The same pattern: holds generally across South Sulawesi + the region
  - Bloomfield 1917, Adams & Manaster-Ramer 1988, Friberg 1996, Jukes 2006

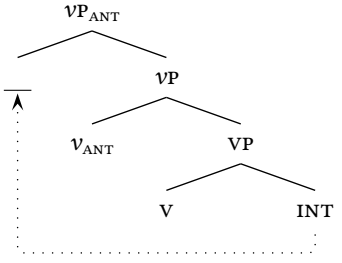
(22) *The Definiteness Effect*

a. **Me**-ala=i **bau** wattu diqo.
ANT-get=3B fish time that
'He got fish then. P1983:153

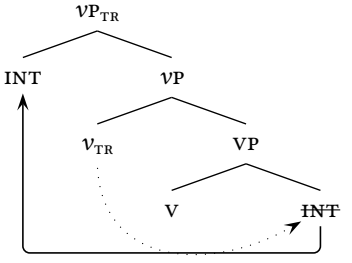
b. **Na**-ande **diqo bau**=o.
3A-eat that fish=there
'He ate the fish.' P1983:159

- Surface parallel: object shift + scrambling
  - TRANSITIVE: required when INT = definite; forces INT to move.
  - Result: connection between the definiteness of the INT and its position.
- Standard Analysis: the definiteness effect → Object Shift Rackowski 2002
  - Positional constraint: definite arguments → not in the VP Diesing 1992
  - The transitive v^0: allows the INT to leave the VP.
  - The antipassive v^0: forces the INT to remain in the VP.
  - **Result**: definite INT → the transitive v^0

(23) *Antipassive: No Movement*



(24) *Transitive: Movement*



4.2 Pseudo-Incorporation and Object Shift

- Common assumption: object shift does not exist without licensing movement.
  - Low-Inversion: "the arguments which undergo object shift → high."
  - **Result**: "no such thing as object shift without Absolutive Inversion."
- Mandar: object shift can be seen without licensing movement.
  - informally: there is a process which targets only vp-internal material.
  - Some arguments: cannot do this, **but** do not c-command the ext
  - **Result**: arguments that have left the vp can stay beneath the ext.
  - → **Object Shift** ≠ the process which yields abs > erg.

- The relevant diagnostic: "*pseudo-incorporation*" Massam 2001
  - Narrowly-focused vp-internal material → prosodic word with the verb.
  - Surface signature: v + incorporand > 2p encltics

(25) *Pseudo-Incorporation*

a. Matindo=aq **di ranjang**.
sleep=1b at bed
'I sleep in a bed.' JT: 3.25, 32

b. Matindo **di ranjang**=aq.
sleep at bed=1b
'I sleep in a bed.' M&S'91:136

- This process → vp-adjuncts; not tp-ones.

(26) *Pseudo-Incorporation: vp-adjuncts only*

a. Massikola **dini**=i.
ant-school here=3b
'They study here.' F&J'00:02

b. *Mam-eang **san-jang**=aq.
ant-fish one-hour=1b
('I fished for 1h.') T: 11.20, 3

- Moreover: antipassive int; *transitive ext

(27) *Pseudo-Incorporation: Antipassive int*

a. Maq-baluq **balenga**=i.
ant-sell pan=3b
'He's selling pans.' NH: 6.18

b. *Na-ande **posa**=i!
3a-eat cat=3b
('A cat ate it!') JT: 3.25, 89

4.3 Ditransitives and Object Shift

- Recap: the ditransitive construction → int ≠ the absolutive.
- Nevertheless: this context → the int can be definite.
  - → By hypothesis: the int undergoes object shift out of the vp
- **Confirmation**: the ditransitive int cannot be pseudo-incorporated.

(28) *Ditransitive: int ≠ abs*

a. Na-bengan=**aq** hapena.
3erg-give=1abs his.phone.
'He gave me his phone'
JT:3.5,27-8

b. *U-bengan hapeu=i.
1erg-give my.phone=3abs
('I gave him my phone)

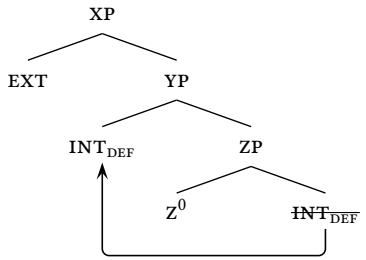
- This context → a testing-ground for the Low-Inversion hypothesis.
  - The ditransitive int is definite but does not trigger abs agreement.
  - if abs agreement is not relevant to the high position of the int,
  - then a definite but non-absolutive int should undergo object shift, and
  - **Prediction**: it should wind up in a position **above the ext**.
- Mandar: this prediction is false.
  - The ditransitive int does not c-command the ext for any metric above.
  - Example: when quantified, it cannot bind into the ext.

(29) *Ditransitive: quantified int **cannot** bind into the ext.*

a. Na-pasissang=**nasang**$_i$=aq [$_{ext}$ kindoq-na *pro*] [$_{int}$ **sanaeke**].
3erg-introduce=every=1abs mom-of *her* child
'Her$_{*i,j}$ mom showed me every$_i$ child.' JT: 3.11, 100

Result: object shift → a position beneath the ext

(30)



5 Licensing Movement and Low Absolutives

- The Two-Step Model → three predictions:
  1. Object Shift → NOT above the EXT — DITRANSITIVES → YES
  2. The INT to its high position → only if it interacts with T^0. — ?
  3. When the INT does NOT interact with T^0 → it is licensed low. — ?

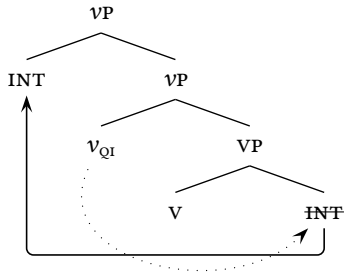
- **The Quirky Intransitive Construction**: provides evidence for 2-3.
- Many HIGH-ABS languages show the following pattern:
  - When the INT cannot interact with T^0,
  - The INT triggers agreement with v^0, and
  - The INT remains within the *v*P.
- The resultant construction: three properties.
  1. The verb → 'intransitive' morphology ("EXT → ABS")
  2. The ABS agreement → the INT
  3. v^0 → contains a special morpheme.
- This construction → most famous as the Mayan 'Agent Focus'
- Nevertheless: clear analogues across Austronesian.

(31) *Mandar: The Quirky Intransitive*

a. Meloq=aq [$_{NFC}$ **man**-dundu=**i**].
want=1B QI-drink=3B
'I want to drink it.'
JT: 4.2, 329

b. Apa **mam**-bokkoq=**aq**?
what QI-bite=1B
'What bit me?'
JT: 1.19.78

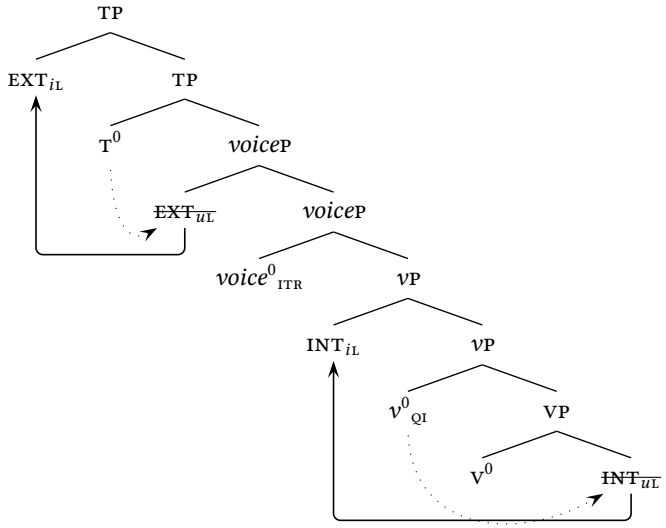
(32) *Quirky Intransitive: Agreement on v^0; Object Shift*:



5.1 The Quirky Intransitive Schema

- This construction → the classical signs of object shift.
  - The INT can be definite; cannot undergo incorporation.
- Nevertheless: the INT clearly remains beneath the EXT.
  - The EXT can undergo Ā-extraction; cannot be bound by the INT.
- **Result**: the INT undergoes Object Shift but not Licensing Movement.

(33) *The Quirky Intransitive Construction: Object Shift; No Licensing Movement*



- The agreement schema → the INT is licensed by v^0.
  - The INT → verb-adjacent ABS agreement — *cf. AGR in T^0.*
  - Moreover: this AGR → *only* in the context of a special v^0.
- This pattern → Licensing Movement called off *iff* the INT is licensed beneath T^0.

(34) *Quirky Intransitive: INT → AGR on v^0; requires the prefix maN-*

a. Innai indang mala man-dundu=**i**?
who NEG can QI-drink=3B
'Who can't drink it?' JT: 4.2, 262

b. *Meloq=band=i [$_{NFC}$ **si**-sara=**o**] ?
want=really=3B COM-split=2B
(*Does she want to divorce you?') JT: 11.20, 79

6 Conclusions

- High-Abs Syntax arises through two distinct steps:
  1. object shift: Definite int moves from vP → spec,*v*P
  2. licensing movement: abs argument → spec,TP
- **Previous Approaches**: fail to capture the facts.
  - High-Inv → fails to recognize the relevance of object shift.
  - Low-Inv → incorrect predictions with ditransitives; quirky intransitives
- **Mandar**: clear evidence that the two steps come apart.
  - Definite int + no agr with T^0 → beneath the ext.
  - This pattern → forces a theory where abs > erg is linked to T^0.

- **Observation**: this model → potential to generalize.
- The Quirky Intransitive → robust attestation in High-Abs languages.
  - Three key ingredients:
    1. The verb → 'intransitive' morphology ("ext → abs")
    2. The abs agreement → the int
    3. v^0 → contains a special morpheme.
  - The distribution:
    - The High-Abs Mayan languages: 'Agent Focus' Smith-Stark 1978
    - The South Sulawesi languages + relatives: exactly like Mandar.
    - The languages of the Philippines → parallels with case-marking.
    - Other High-Abs languages: to be determined.

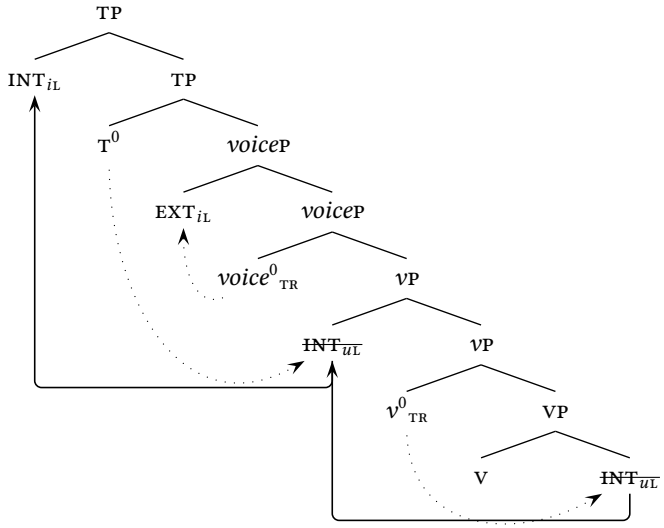
(35) *Chuj (Q'anjob'alan; Mayan): The Quirky Intransitive Construction*

a. Ix=**ach** ko-chel-a'
pfv=2b 1a-hug-tr
'We hugged you.' Coon 2018:9

b. Mach ix=**ach** mak'-**an**-**i**?
who pfv=2b hit-qi-itr
'Who hit you?' Hou 2013:13

7 Appendix: Two Trees

(36) *The Transitive: Object Shift; Licensing Movement*



(37) *The Quirky Intransitive: Object Shift; No Licensing Movement*