Ergative Anaphors and High-Absolutive Syntax
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Key Claim: Constraints on Ergative Anaphors

In many syntactically-ergative languages, (reflexive) anaphors can't be ergative.
- Previous work: Evidence against "High-Abs" analysis of Syntactic Ergativity.
- We argue: This argument is **not valid**.

Syntactic Ergativity and High-Absolutive Syntax

Many morphologically-ergative languages show a restriction in the Ā-domain:

(1) *The Ergative Extraction Constraint* (EEC)   (Aissen 2017)
    In a transitive clause, the ergative argument cannot be Ā-extracted.

One prevalent analysis:

(2) *The Locality Analysis*   (Campana 1992; Shlonsky 1992)
    The EEC reflects *Highest-Only* constraint on extraction

(3) *"High-Absolutive Syntax"* → EEC   (e.g. Coon et al. 2014)

$$[_{CP} \; C \ldots [_{TP} \text{ ABSOLUTIVE } [_{vP} \text{ ERGATIVE } [_{vP} \text{ V ABSOLUTIVE }]]]]$$
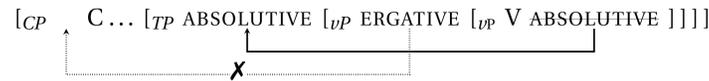
Problem: The Ban on Ergative Anaphors

The Classic observation:

(4) *The Ban on Ergative Anaphors*   (Anderson 1976)
    In nominative and ergative languages, anaphors are typically objects.
    → **There are no ergative anaphors.**

Common claim (Bobaljik & Branigan 2006; Legate 2006; Otsuka 2006, a.o.): the
pattern in (4) → evidence against locality approaches ((2)/(3)).

(5) *The (problematic) logic:*
    a. Language X shows the Ban on Ergative Anaphors.
    b. The High-Absolutive approach: the absolutive > the ergative.
    c. **Assumption**: this analysis predicts the presence of ergative anaphors.
    d. **Rejected claim**: The Ban on Ergative Anaphors → no High-Abs Syntax.

Response: No Connection

The Ban on Ergative Anaphors → **irrelevant** to the status of High-Abs Syntax.

Key Observation: Anaphor binding facts *regularly* run against other diagnostics for
hierarchical asymmetries between the ergative and absolutive arguments.

(6) *No Ergative Anaphors, but...*:
    a. The ERG cannot be Ā-extracted
    b. No condition C of ERG → ABS
    c. the ABS binds variables in the ERG

Anaphors vs. The World

	ERG > ABS	ABS > ERG
Anaphors	Extraction	
		Condition C
		Var. Binding

Distribution: Mayan (6a)-(6b); Western Austronesian (6a)-(6c) …

Result: the Ban on Ergative Anaphors arises from underlined independent constraints:

1. Anaphors = structurally unlike other arguments
2. Anaphor binding = subject to independent structural constraints

Chuj, Mandar: No ergative anaphors

Unrelated ERG-ABS languages; both show the EEC; both ban ergative anaphors.

(7) Ix-w-il   [hin-*b'a*]
     PFV-1ERG-see   my-self
     'I saw myself'   *Chuj*

(8) *Ix-in-y-il   [ERG hin-*b'a*]
     PFV-1ABS-3ERG-see   my-self
     BAD: 'Myself saw me'   *Chuj*

(9) Pura=i   u-ita   [ABS *alawe*-u].
     PFV=3ABS 1ERG-see   self-my
     'I saw myself'   *Mandar*

(10) *Pura=a'   na-ita   [ERG *alawe*-u].
     PFV=1ABS 3E-see   self-my
     BAD: 'Myself saw me.'   *Mandar*

But: Contradictory evidence suggests High-Abs syntax in both languages.

Evidence for High-Abs syntax in Chuj

Chuj: Mayan language; Q'anjob'alan Subgroup; Mexico/Guatemala

Ergative arguments can't extract

(11) Ix-ach-y-il   [ERG ix unin].
     PFV-2ABS-3ERG-see   the girl
     'The girl saw you.'

(12) *Mach ix-ach-y-ila'   [ERG *t*]?
     who   PFV-2ABS-3ERG-see
     'Who saw you?'

A Condition C effect: R-expressions inside the ABS can corefer with the ERG:

(13) Ol-y-awtej   [ABS ch'anh libro [sman **ix Ana**$_1$ ewi   ]] [ERG *pro*$_1$].
     FUT-3ERG-read   the   book bought the Ana   yesterday   PRON
     'Ana$_1$ will read the book that she$_1$ bought yesterday.'   (Royer 2021)
     Lit: 'She$_1$ will read the book that Ana$_1$ bought yesterday.'

- No violation of Condition C expected given High-Abs syntax (if A-movement doesn't reconstruct for binding; Chomsky 1995, Lasnik 1999):

(14) read [TP [ABS the book [that **Ana**$_1$ ...]]$_k$ [vP [ERG **she**$_1$] [VP t_k]]]

Evidence for High-Abs syntax in Mandar

Mandar: Austronesian language; South Sulawesi Subgroup; Central Indonesia

Ergative arguments can't extract: (Brodkin 2021)

(15) Na-itai=o   [ERG iAli].
     3ERG-seek=2ABS   Ali
     'Ali is looking for you.'

(16) *Innai na-itai=o   [ERG *t*] ?
     who   3ERG-seek=2ABS
     ('Who's looking for you?')

First Condition C effect: pronouns in the ERG *can* corefer with an R-expression ABS
Second Cond. C effect: a pronominal ABS *cannot* corefer with an R-exp. in the ERG

(17) a. Na-ita=i   [ABS **iNina**$_i$] [ERG kindoq-na$_i$]
        3A-see=3B   Nina   mom- her
        'Her$_i$ mom saw Nina$_i$.'

     b. *Na-ita=i   [ABS **ia**$_i$] [ERG kindoqna **iNina**$_i$]
        3A-see=3B   her   mom   NAME
        ('Nina$_i$'s mom saw her$_i$.')

Variable Binding Facts: Absolutive > Ergative
- Universal Quantification: absolutive argument + *nasang* 'every.'
- Absolutive + *nasang* → binds into the ergative argument (and others):

(18) Na-allai=nasang=i   [ERG guru-**nna**] [ABS **anaq**]
     3ERG-scold=every=3ABS   teacher-his   child
     'His$_i$ teacher scolded every child$_i$.'

Whence the Ban?

Two possibilities (at least):
1. Anaphors must be bound in a restricted domain
2. Anaphors are structurally different

First Possibility: Restricted Domain of Binding

Classic Intuition: Anaphor binding = in a small domain   (Chomsky 1986)
- One view: Domains of binding → phases   (Charnavel & Sportiche 2016)

Observation: This pattern derives the ban *on a specific view of High-Abs Syntax*

- **Background**: Two Approaches to Absolutive Inversion
  1. HIGH Inversion: ABS > ERG in TP   (Campana 1992, Guilfoyle et al. 1992)
  2. LOW Inversion: ABS > ERG in *v*P   (Aldridge 2004, Coon et al. to appear)
- **Proposal**: Anaphor binding → the *v*P phase.
  1. **Result**: If the ABS → below the ERG in the *v*P,   (HIGH Inversion)
  2. **Then**: This restriction derives the Ban on Ergative Anaphors

Second Possibility: Anaphors ≠ DPs

Chuj anaphors are syntactically-constrained in ways regular DPs aren't, e.g.:
1. they only ever appear in INT ARG position; no exempt uses
2. they cannot be coordinated with regular DPs (19)
3. they cannot themselves undergo A'-extraction (20)

(19) *Ix-h-il   [&P ha-b'a yet' ix].
     PFV-2ERG-see   your-self & her
     ('You saw yourself and her.')

(20) *[S-b'a] ix-y-il   [INT *t*] ix.
     her-self PFV-3ERG-see   she
     ('It's herself$_i$ that she$_i$ saw.')

4. They do **not** block ERG extraction —no EEC with anaphors   (Aissen 2017)

(21) Mach ix-y-il   [s-b'a]   [ERG *t*]?
     who   PFV-3ERG-see   him-self
     'Who saw himself?'
                                                            (cf. (12))

Observation: Reflexive anaphors are not DPs   (Ordoñez 1995; Hou 2011, a.o.)
- Mayan anaphors ≠ DPs → no High-Abs syntax   (Coon et al. to appear)

Connection: the Anaphor Agreement Effect

Observation: A Positional Constraint   (the AAE; Rizzi 1990; Woolford 1999)

(22) a. Anaphors systematically trigger default agreement (e.g. Albanian), *or*
     b. Anaphors are banned in positions linked to agreement (e.g. Icelandic)

1. Positional Constraints
   - If ergative arguments occupy a position associated with agreement,
   - **Then**: the Ban on Ergative Anaphors may arise from (22b).
2. Size Matters
   - Prior claim: The AAE arises because anaphors are too big   (Preminger 2021)
   - However: Mayan languages → anaphors appear to be too *small*.
   - **Result**: Possible link between *smallness* and the lack of agreement.

Conclusion

Key Claim: the Ban on Ergative Anaphors ≠ evidence against High-Abs Syntax.
- One option: Phase-Constrained Binding in the *v*P + High Inversion
- Other option: Anaphoric elements too small to raise or to trigger agreement (≈AAE)

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