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 –A-domain:
In a transitive clause, the ergative argument cannot be A-extracted.
One prevalent analysis:
2. The Locality Analysis (Campana 1992; Slabosky 1992) The EEC reflects Highest-Only constraint on extraction

Problem: The Ban on Ergative Anaphors
The Classic observation:
3. The Ban on Ergative Anaphors (Anderson 1976)
In nominative and ergative languages, anaphors are typically objects.
You can’t have an ergative anaphor.

Common claim: Anaphors are syntactically-constrained in ways regular DPs aren’t, e.g.:
• They can’t be coordinated with regular DPs (19)
• They only ever appear in INT ARG

   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.

Unrelated ERG –ABS languages: both show the EEC; both ban ergative anaphors.
(7) i.x-w-ill
   [+V-ﬂag] [myself]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   [TP]
   [iNina]
   ‘I saw myself’

(8) i.x-in-y-ill
   [+V-ﬂag] [myself]
   [ERG-1] [ABS-3]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   [TP]
   [iNina]
   ‘Myself saw me.

Evidence for High-Abs Syntax in Chuj
Chuj: Mayan language; Q’eqchi’alan Subgroup; Mexico/Guatemala

Ergative arguments can’t extract
(11) i.x-ach-yilla
   [+V-ﬂag] [unin]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   ‘She saw the girl.’
(12) i.x-mach-ach-yilla
   [+V-ﬂag] [unin]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   ‘The girl saw you.’

A Condition C effect: R-expressions inside the ABS can corefer with the ERG:
(13) Aa-n-ch’ani-libro
   [ERG-1] [ABS-2]
   ‘She read the book.’
(14) Aa-n-ch’ani-libro
   [ERG-1] [ABS-2]
   ‘She read the book that she bought yesterday.’

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

Second Condition C effect: The Ban on Ergative Anaphors
(15) i.x-in-y-illa
   [+V-ﬂag] [unin]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   ‘I saw myself.
(16) i.x-chun-illa
   [+V-ﬂag] [unin]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   [ABS] [ERG]
   ‘Who saw you?’

Evidence for High-Abs Syntax in Mandarin
Mandar: Austronesian language; South Sulawesi Subgroup; Central Indonesia

Ergative arguments can’t extract
(17) a. Na-ita=i
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   ‘Your-self’
(18) b. Na-ita=i
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   ‘Who saw yourself.’

First Condition C effect: pronominal ERG cannot corefer with an R-expression ABS
Second Cond. C: a pronominal ERG cannot corefer with an R-exp. in the ABS
(19) i.x-in-y-illa
   [+V-ﬂag] [unin]
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   ‘Who saw yourself.’

Variable Binding Facts: Absolutive > Ergative
• Universal Quantification: absolutive argument + nasaq ‘every’.
• Absolute + nasaq → binds into the ergative argument (and others):
(20) Na-alla-nasaq-i
   [ERG-3] [ABS-2]
   ‘Teacher his child every-day.

These facts show us the status of High-Abs Syntax.

When 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 & Spotiche 2016)
Observation: This pattern derives the ban on a specific view of High-Abs Syntax
• Background: Two Approaches to Absolute Inversion
  1. High Inversion: ABS > ERG in TP (Campana 1992, Guilfoyle et al. 1992)
  2. Low Inversion: ERG > ABS in VP (Altridge 2004, Coon et al. to appear)
• Proposal: Anaphor binding → the vp phase.
  1. Result: If the ABS → below the ERG in the vp.
  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)
4. They do not block ERG extraction —no EEC with anaphors

Mayan anaphors ≠ DPs → no High-Abs syntax

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
• 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 vp + High Inversion
• Other option: Anaphoric elements too small to raise or to trigger agreement

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