

Nominative agreement below TAM and negation in Uab Meto

Background: Among the diversity of verbal agreement systems in the world's languages, two of the most common are nominative (i.e. subject) preference and absolutive (i.e. object) preference. That is, in a transitive clause, agreement is preferentially with the higher subject or the lower object. These preferences are often thought to arise either from case discrimination or variation in the location of ϕ probes. More specifically, nominative/subject preference arises from a probe on T (Woolford 2010, Legate 2014, Coon 2017), while absolutive/object preference arises from a probe on v (Béjar & Rezac 2009) or from a probe on T with case discrimination that cannot agree with ergative arguments (Woolford 2010). The common principle is that a probe agrees with the highest eligible argument in its c-command domain (Chomsky 2000). Notably, nominative agreement is almost always assumed to result from a probe on T. I argue that this need not be the case. Nominative agreement may also arise from a low probe on an Agr head immediately above Voice.

The basics: Uab Meto is a Timoric language spoken in western Timor. It has subject agreement on verbs and case marking on pronouns in a NOM-ACC alignment (Arka 2001). Unaccusative (1a), unergative (1b), and transitive (2) verbs all agree with nominative subjects. Note <'> = [?].

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|-----|----|--|----------------|--|----|------------------------------------|------------------|
| (1) | a. | Ina | n-móóf. | | b. | Iin | n-aen. |
| | | 3SG.NOM | 3-fall | | | 3SG.NOM | 3-run |
| | | 'He/she falls.' (Steinhauer 1993: 135) | | | | 'He/she ran.' (Arka 2001: 1) | |
| (2) | a. | Iin | na-tiik kau. | | b. | Au | 'u-tiik=e. |
| | | 3SG.NOM | 3-kick 1SG.ACC | | | 1SG.NOM | 1SG-kick=3SG.ACC |
| | | 'He/she kicked me.' (Arka 2001: 1) | | | | 'I kicked him/her.' (Arka 2001: 1) | |

Agreement is below TAM/Neg: The case and agreement above look typical of a NOM-ACC language. An initially plausible analysis would have T handle agreement, but additional data suggest the probe is lower. Agreement only occurs on lexical verbs. Functors like *he* (irrealis mood) (3a), *lof* (FUT) (3b), *bisa* 'can' (5a), *ka=...*(=*f(a)*) (NEG) (6), *lo* 'must', and *=en* (inceptive aspect) do not agree. Unlike in English, these elements do not block agreement on verbs (e.g. *He will eat* (*s)).

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|-----|----|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|----|--|------------|-----------------|
| (3) | a. | He | m-nao m-óé mee? | | b. | Atóin'-in-i ok~oke' | lof | na-tika-n bol. |
| | | IRR | 2SG-go 2SG-to which | | | man-PL-DEF all.RED~all | FUT | 3-kick-SFX ball |
| | | 'Where do you want to go?' (LTK) | | | | 'All the boys will play soccer.' (YEK) | | |

One might think that these elements are adjuncts akin to English adverbs like *still*, which neither agree nor serve as interveners for agreement (4a). One way to contrast adjuncts and clausal-spine auxiliaries in English is that adjuncts do not license VP ellipsis (4b), but auxiliaries do (4c). Uab Meto displays the same contrast; auxiliaries like *bisa* 'can' license ellipsis (5a), but adjuncts like *fe'* 'still' do not (5b). If auxiliaries are heads in the clausal spine, do not take agreement themselves, and also do not block agreement on lexical verbs, this suggests that agreement is low in Uab Meto.

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|-----|----|--------------------|----------------|----|--|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----|---------------|--------------|
| (4) | a. | He still sing*(s). | (5) | a. | Iin | bisa | na-hana 'maka' ka? | - | Iin | bisa . | |
| | | | | | 3SG.NOM | can | 3-cook rice | NEG | - | 3SG.NOM can | |
| | | b. | * He still. | | 'Can he cook rice? - He can.' (YEK) | | | | | | |
| | | c. | He can (sing). | | b. | Iin | fe' | na-hana 'maka' ka? | - | * Iin | fe' . |
| | | | | | 3SG.NOM | still | 3-cook rice | NEG | - | 3SG.NOM | still |
| | | | | | 'Is he still cooking rice? - *He still.' (YEK) | | | | | | |

Further evidence for the low location of agreement comes from the placement of negation. Most auxiliaries like *he* (IRR) occur outside (to the left) of negation, but *bisa* 'can' occurs inside of it

