

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 | |
| | | | | | 'Can he cook rice? - He can.' (YEK) | | | | | | |
| | b. | * He still. | | | 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

(6). Assuming that *ka=* marks the left edge of NegP, *bisa* is inside NegP. In combination with the finding above that agreement is lower than *bisa*, this means that agreement is also lower than NegP.

- (6) Au **ka= bisa** 'korban a]'-nesi =f.
 1SG.NOM NEG= can 1SG-sacrifice EPEN|1SG-MORE =NEG
 'I couldn't offer any more.' (Edwards 2020: 388)

Agreement is above Voice: So far we have seen that agreement is lower than TAM markers and negation. Every lexical verb shows agreement, so one might suspect that agreement is on V, but evidence from the stative prefix *ma-* and nominalization suggest that agreement is higher than V. First, *ma-* intervenes between the agreement prefix and the verb root (7). If the ϕ probe were on V, this linear intervention would be unexpected. Second, verb roots do not show agreement when they are nominalized with *-t* (8). This is true even in nominalizations that include stative *ma-* (9). Assuming that *ma-* is a stative Voice head, this also means that agreement is higher than Voice.

- (7) a. Au 'haep koo. b. Au 'ma-haep 'ook koo.
 1SG.NOM 1SG-close 2SG.ACC 1SG.NOM 1SG-STAT-close 1SG-with 2SG.ACC
 'I (want to be) close with you.' (YEK) 'I'm close with you.' (YEK)
- (8) a. Ina **n-keen** faaf=jes. b. T-aem fua-f n-eu **kena-t**.
 3SG.NOM 3-shoot pig=one 1PL.INC-look.for fruit-INAL 3-for shoot-NMLZ
 'He shot a pig.' (YEK) 'We were looking for bullets for the guns.' (YEK)
- (9) a. iin neon **ma-hóin-t=e** b. Ii nitu mese' es **na-hóin** kai.
 3SG.NOM day STAT-birth-NMLZ=DEF this ancestor one FOC 3-birth 1PL.EXC.ACC
 'his birthday' (LTK) 'Here one ancestor birthed us.' (KSF)

Analysis: In order to capture that Uab Meto has consistent subject agreement that is higher than Voice but below negation and TAM markers, I propose that the ϕ probe in Uab Meto is located on an Agr head immediately above Voice that selects for VoiceP complements. I follow Harley (2013) and Legate (2014) in assuming that external arguments are introduced in Spec, VoiceP. Just like a ϕ probe on T, the ϕ probe on Agr probes into its c-command domain and agrees with the closest DP. A separate process then moves this DP to Spec, TP, to the left of negation and TAM markers (10).

- (10) [TP[DP_i][T_i \emptyset] ... [AgrP[Agr ϕ : ϕ_1][VoiceP[t₁][Voice [Voice \emptyset /ma-][VP [v \emptyset][VP [v V][DP₂]]]]]]]

Conclusion: Uab Meto broadens our understanding of the typology of agreement. While previous work has shown that absolutive-preference agreement can arise from a low ϕ probe on v (Béjar & Rezac 2009) or a high ϕ probe on T with case discrimination (Woolford 2010), nominative-preference agreement has been linked to a high ϕ probe on T. Uab Meto shows that nominative-preference agreement can also be low. More broadly, Uab Meto affirms the prediction of Minimalism and Distributed Morphology that a ϕ probe does not need to be on a particular head at a particular height in the clause (Chomsky 2000, Choi & Harley 2019). Nominative preference can be obtained with a ϕ probe anywhere above the Merge site of external arguments. Nothing requires that ϕ probes be located on particular heads; what matters is DP eligibility and closest c-command.

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