

Low nominative agreement in Uab Meto

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1 Background & The main claim

- Across languages, agreement in transitive clauses may target the external argument (higher) or internal argument (lower). This correlates with the height of the ϕ -probe.
- Assuming that probes agree with the highest argument in their c-command domain (Chomsky 2000), a probe on T agrees with the higher argument (Woolford 2010, Legate 2014, Coon 2017), while a probe on v agrees with the lower one (Béjar & Rezac 2009).
- Notably, consistent agreement with the higher argument (i.e. nominative agreement) is almost always assumed to arise from a probe on T.

Claim: Nominative agreement may arise from a low probe immediately above Voice. The probe need not be on T.

2 Uab Meto: The basics

- Uab Meto (Austronesian; Indonesia) exhibits subject agreement on verbs and case marking on pronouns in a NOM-ACC alignment (Arka 2001).
- Unaccusative (1), unergative (2), and transitive (3-4) verbs all agree with nominative subjects.
- I gloss nominative as (N) and accusative as (A).

- (1) Ina n-móóf. (2) lin n-aen.
3SG.N 3-fall 3SG.N 3-run
'He/she falls.'¹⁰ 'He/she ran.'¹
- (3) lin na-tiik kau. (4) Au 'u-tiik=e.
3SG.N 3-kick 1SG.A 1SG.N 1SG-kick=3SG.A
'He/she kicked me.'¹ 'I kicked him/her.'¹

- These patterns are typical of a NOM-ACC language.

3 Agreement is below TAM/Neg

- The Uniformity Principle (Chomsky 2001) would place the ϕ -probe on T, but additional data suggest that it is lower.
- Only lexical verbs agree. Auxiliaries like *lof* (FUT) (5), *bisa* 'can' (6), *he* (irrealis mood) (7), *ka=*... (=f(a)) (NEG) (10), *lo* 'must', and *=en* (inceptive aspect) do not agree or block it.

(5) Atóin'-in-i ok~oke' **lof** na-tika-n bol.
man-PL-DEF all.RED~all FUT 3-kick-SFX ball
'All the boys will play soccer.'¹⁵

(6) Au **bisa** 'éék oto. (7) Hai **he** m-nao.
1SG.N can 1SG-bring car 1PL.EXC.N IRR 1PL.EXC-go
'I can drive a car.'¹⁴ 'We wanted to go.'¹⁴

- These elements are not adjuncts. Uab Meto auxiliaries and adjuncts can be distinguished via ellipsis licensing. *bisa* 'can' licenses ellipsis (8). The adjunct *fe* 'still' does not (9).

(8) lin **bisa** na-hana 'maka' ka? - lin **bisa**.
3SG.N can 3-cook rice NEG - 3SG.N can
'Can he cook rice? - He can.'¹⁵

(9) lin **fe** na-hana 'maka' ka? - *lin **fe**.
3SG.N still 3-cook rice NEG - 3SG.N still
'Is he still cooking rice? - *He still.'¹⁵

- Furthermore, *bisa* 'can' occurs inside of negation (10). Assuming *ka=* marks the left edge of NegP, *bisa* 'can' is inside/below NegP. Agreement must be below NegP too.

(10) Au **ka= bisa** 'korban a]'-nesi =f.
1SG.N NEG= can 1SG-sacrifice EPEN|1SG-more =NEG
'I couldn't offer any more.'⁶

5 Analysis

- Uab Meto has consistent subject agreement above Voice but below TAM markers and negation. I propose that the ϕ -probe is on an Agr head immediately above Voice that takes VoiceP complements.
- External arguments are introduced in Spec,VoiceP (Harley 2013, Legate 2014). The ϕ -probe on Agr probes into its c-command domain and agrees with the closest DP.
- The agreed-with DP moves to Spec,TP, to the left of TAM/Neg.

4 Agreement is above V, v, and Voice

- Agreement is low, but it is still higher than V, v, and Voice.
- First, the stative prefix *m(a)-* intervenes linearly between the agreement prefix and verb root (11-12). If agreement were on V, this intervention would be surprising.

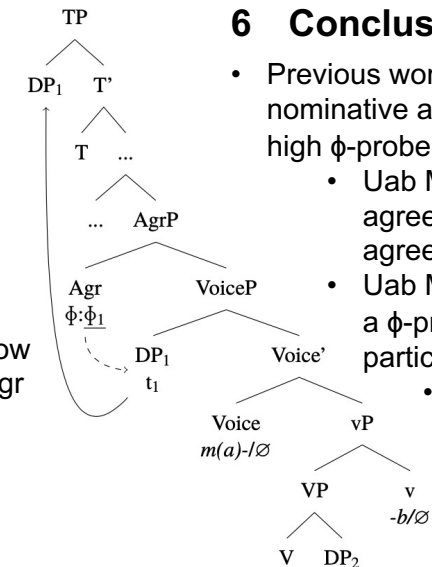
(11) lin ase na-m-iup. (12) Au 'iup pena' ii.
3SG.N axle 3-STAT-break 1SG.N 1SG-break corn this
'Its axle was broken.'¹⁴ 'I break off this corn.'¹¹

- Second, verbs transitivized with the suffix *-b* switch to agreeing with the external argument (13-14). This follows if the probe is higher than v but is surprising otherwise.

(13) Au 'sae. (14) Hoo **mu**-sae-b kau.
1SG.N 1SG-rise 2SG.N 2SG-rise-TR 1SG.A
'I rise.'¹⁵ 'You raise me.'¹⁵

- Third, nominalized verbs do not show agreement, including those with stative *m(a)-* (15-16). Assuming *m(a)-* is a stative Voice head, agreement is higher than Voice.

(15) Au 'u-hóin au aanh-in-i. (16) neon ma-hóni-t
1SG.N 1SG-birth 1SG.N child-PL-DEF day STAT-birth-NMZ
'I gave birth to my children.'¹³ 'birthday'⁷



6 Conclusion

- Previous work has generally assumed that nominative agreement is associated with a high ϕ -probe on T.
 - Uab Meto broadens the typology of agreement. It shows that nominative agreement can also be low.
- Uab Meto affirms the prediction that a ϕ -probe does not need to be on a particular head at a particular height.
 - Nominative agreement can be obtained with a ϕ -probe anywhere above the Merge site of external arguments.

[Link to references](#)