Coordination Reduction in Yidiny and Feature-Driven Accounts of Syntactic Ergativity
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In syntactically ergative languages such as Dyirbal and Inuit syntactic processes such as extraction are restricted to the absolutive-marked NP (1). Previous work such as Aldridge (2007a,b, 2008) proposes a feature-driven analysis in which syntactic ergativity results from the presence of an EPP feature on transitive, but not intransitive, v. Aldridge (2008) sketches a treatment of ergatively-aligned coordination reduction (CR) in Dyirbal that relies upon the absolutive’s higher position in vP to render it available for further raising to position it outside the scope of coordination, thereby deriving the CR pattern.

(1) a. nanuq Piita-p tuqu-ta-a
polar.bear.abs Piita-erg kill-tr.part-3s
'a polar bear killed by Piita'
b. *angut allaat tigu-sima-sa-a
man.abs gun.abs take-perf-rel.tr-3s
for: ‘the man who took the gun’ (W. Greenlandic, Aldridge 2008)

This study investigates CR in the split-ergative, syntactically ergative language Yidiny (Dixon 1976, 1977) and shows that this phenomenon poses a problem for Aldridge’s transitivity approach to syntactic ergativity as it currently stands. Yidiny CR requires multiple transitive vs under the transitivity approach, introducing otherwise unmotivated complications into Aldridge’s treatment of syntactic ergativity. Building on Otsuka (2010), I demonstrate that the Yidiny facts can be accounted within the transitivity approach if the A’-movement restriction is a consequence of an EPP feature on transitive v, while CR results from an operation of deletion under case-identity in the PF-branch.

Yidiny shows NP-split-ergative case-marking with full nouns taking absolutive and ergative marking and pronouns taking nominative and accusative. In general, A’-movement such as relativization is restricted to (matrix and subordinate) absolutes. Yidiny CR, however, is ergatively aligned for full NPs and accusatively aligned for pronouns, following the morphology. That is, a pronoun argument may be shared between coordinated clauses if it is either a transitive or intransitive subject in both clauses (accusative CR) (ex. 2, 3), while a full noun argument may be shared if it is either an intransitive subject or transitive object in both clauses (ergative CR) (ex. 3, 4).

(2) ngayu nyuniny bandya:rr, wanda:ny
I-NOM you-ACC followed, fall.down-PAST
‘I followed you, and (I/*you) fell down.’ (adapted from Comrie 1989)

(3) ngayu bunya wurra:ny mangga:ny
I-NOM woman-ABS slap-PAST laugh-PAST
‘I slapped the woman and (I/she) laughed.’ (Dixon 1976)

(4) bimbi:ng gudygudyu wawa:l birri gundyi:ny
father-ERG rainbow-ABS saw, REP returned-PAST
‘Father saw the rainbow, and (it/*he) returned.’ (Dixon 1977:391)

Aldridge's transitivity approach proposes that the restriction of A’-movement to absolutive results from movement of the internal argument to v's outer specifier to satisfy its EPP feature, from which position it is visible to higher probes and intervenes between them and v’s external argument. Accounting for Yidiny CR in the transitivity approach requires positing additional coordination-specific vs with mutually
exclusive restrictions on the [±indexical] status of their internally or externally Merged specifiers to account for the split in behavior between pronoun and full noun arguments, to rule out impossible CRs (*ed alternatives in 2, 4; 5).

(5)  *bama:l  nganyany  bundya:ny,  wanda:ny
     person-ERG  I-ACC  hit-PAST,  fall.down-PAST
 ‘The person hit me and (*he/*I) fell down.’  (Comrie 1989, citing Dixon p.c.)

Alternatively, Yidiny CR can be analyzed as an operation of deletion under morphological feature identity in the PF branch, which does not require positing additional vs or enriching their featural power, but does permit the PF branch to define syntactic constraints over morphological, rather than morphosyntactic features (unlike Otsuka 2010’s treatment of Tongan). In example 2, for instance, ngayu ‘1p.sing’ is deleted from the second conjunct after abstract Case features are overwritten with morphological case-features but before indices are deleted, under identity with ngayu in the first conjunct. Since NP-split ergativity is a morphological phenomenon (see Aldridge 2007a, Legate 2007, 2008), this approach has the advantage of treating the parallel syntactic and morphological patterns as a uniform consequence of their being defined over the same features, while preserving, with Aldridge, the relevance of abstract structural position for A’-processes for which morphology is irrelevant.

In sum, Yidiny CR can be accommodated in a transitivity approach to syntactic ergativity at the cost of treating CR as a rather exceptional subsystem of Yidiny syntax, and increasing the expressive capabilities of the theory in terms of the featural restrictions of functional heads. A deletion analysis of this pattern better preserves the insight of Aldridge’s approach to syntactic ergativity while restricting its scope to a subset of ergative syntactic phenomena, and better predicts the cross-linguistic range of both CR types and morphology-sensitive syntactic phenomena.

References
Aldridge, Edith. 2007b. Phase-based account of extraction in Indonesian. Lingua 118.1440–1469.