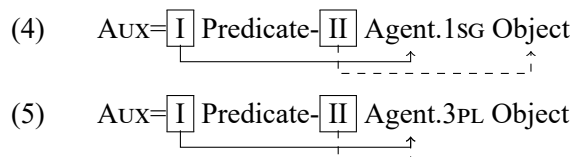




This pattern holds in direct contradiction of Silverstein’s (1976) hierarchy of nominal-type splits, which suggests that participants would be more likely to trigger a nominative/accusative alignment than elements lower in the hierarchy. Most recent proposals on the subject of nominal-type splits capitalize upon this hierarchy, utilizing structural superiority for participants (Coon and Preminger 2012) or featural markedness for participants and/or plurals (Legate 2014) to allow these arguments to escape from an ergative configuration. Neither of these approaches suffice in the Gitksan case, as an ergative configuration is essential on both sides of the split. Further, against the predictions of Legate’s (2014) feature markedness approach, the most ergative nominal type in this system is not the type with the most unmarked features.

PROPOSAL: Within the dependent clause type, I propose that pre-predicate ergative agreement on a transitive *v* probes first (Round I), consistently finding its ergative target. Once agreed with, the features of the ergative argument are deactivated, and become inert to future Agree operations that attempt to target them. That is, once the ergative has entered into an Agree relation with the pre-predicate agreement head, it becomes invisible to subsequent probing by the suffixal agreement head (Round II). Suffixal agreement aggressively seeks the highest target in its c-command domain with active features. An ergative argument which is fully inert, such as 1SG in (4), is not a viable target, allowing suffixal agreement to target the lower absolutive argument. By contrast, a 3PL ergative remains active, and is a target for both agreement probes as in (5).



The crux of the proposal lies in the relativization of each of the two agreement probes to a particular set of features. Pre-predicate agreement, I argue, is relativized to seek  $\phi$ -features (person and participant number), while suffixal agreement seeks a larger set of D-features. Pre-predicate agreement targets the third-person features of ergative third-plurals or DPs, but these arguments contain additional D-features and are therefore not left inert after Round I of agreement. Under this analysis, therefore, it is the ergative argument which is able to control the agreement pattern in the clause, but not by virtue of different nominal types varying in their structural position or spillover. The absolutive plays no role in the split; even the most marked absolutive object may only control suffixal agreement if the features of the ergative have been fully deactivated.

This solution utilizes a feature geometry which relies on a division between third person and participant plurals. This is well-motivated when considering the recent diachronic development of third-person plurality in Interior Tsimshianic. The success of the proposal thus stands as an argument in favor of emergent, rather than universal, feature hierarchies. Furthermore, the language itself serves as a case study in support of the increasingly common claim that ‘absolutive’ is not a syntactic primitive, while simultaneously highlighting the primacy of ergativity and ergative agreement across a structural split. ‘Ergative’ is a foundational notion, while ‘absolutive’ agreement can be visibly reanalyzed as a leftover class: the remnants of a generic agreement process which has been robbed of potential ergative targets.

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