

On the Relationship of Case to Agreement in Split-Ergative Kurmanji¹

Abstract: We argue that tense-based split ergativity in Adiyaman Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) is best accounted for by a theory in which nominative case is assigned by agreement, rather than a theory in which morphological case determines which NP the verb agrees with. In present tense sentences, the subject is nominative, the object oblique, and the verb agrees with the subject, whereas in past tense sentences, the subject is oblique, the object nominative, and the verb agrees with the object. To account for this, we develop a theory in which the agreement-bearing head is Voice (not T). In past tense, this undergoes cyclic Agree, agreeing downward with the object if there is one, otherwise upward with the subject. In present tense, however, VP is a distinct spell out domain, forcing Voice to always agree upward with the subject. Either way, Voice assigns nominative case to whatever it agrees with, and oblique is assigned to all other arguments. Additional support for this theory comes from the order of tense and agreement morphemes, from the passive nature of past stems but not present stems, from the special behavior of plural agreement, and from the fact that Kurmanji does not distinguish ergative, accusative, dative, and genitive cases, but uses a single oblique form for them all. We conclude with some remarks about how variation among Kurmanji dialects relates to our main line of argument.

Keywords: Kurmanji (Kurdish), split ergativity, agreement, case assignment, phases, Voice head

1. Introduction

There have been several contrasting views about the relationship of agreement and case within Universal Grammar in the recent generative literature. One prominent view has been that the two are closely related because (structural) case is assigned to a given DP (or NP) by a functional head F if and only if that functional head enters into an Agree relationship with the DP. This relationship also results in the DP's phi features being added to F, and this is manifested as overt agreement on the word containing F at PF often enough. This is the agreement-centric view of Chomsky (2000, 2001) and much related work. A second view is that morphological case is assigned prior to agreement, and it determines whether a functional head can agree with a given DP or not. For example, a functional head like T in Icelandic or Hindi might agree with a DP only if DP has nominative case. This rather traditional descriptive view has been proposed as part of the theory of Universal Grammar in an influential paper by Bobaljik (2008) and has also been adopted by Preminger (2011) and Levin and Preminger (to appear), among others. A third view is that case is simply independent of agreement, at least in some languages: case comes from rules of dependent case assignment that mark the higher of two DPs in a certain domain as ergative and/or the lower of two DPs in the domain as accusative (Marantz, 1991), leaving other DPs to have default case (nominative or absolutive). Agreement then operates by its own logic, possibly parallel to but independently of case (as in Marantz 1991, Baker 2008).

It is an important theoretical question which of these relationships UG requires, which it permits, and whether languages are parameterized along these lines. Baker and Vinokurova (2010) (B&V) take a somewhat eclectic approach, arguing that nominative is assigned by a functional head (T) by way of Agree in Sakha, whereas accusative is assigned as a dependent case, apart from agreement, whenever one DP is c-commanded by another within the same phase. In contrast, Levin and Preminger (to appear) (L&P) aim for a more uniform account of the same empirical phenomena. Like B&V, they hold that accusative in Sakha is dependent case, but they argue that nominative is default case, assigned to any DP that is not otherwise case marked. T then agrees with a DP only if it is nominative. Hence, B&V adopt the first and third views outlined above, whereas L&P adopt the second and third views. L&P's primary argument is a simplicity argument: we can do away with functional heads assigning case to DPs under

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Agree, therefore we should. How strong this simplicity argument for Sakha is then depends heavily on whether or not the situation of F assigning case to DP under agreement is well-attested in other languages.

In this paper, we present a new argument that functional heads assigning case to DPs by way of agreement is indeed a vital part of UG. This argument is based on patterns of case and agreement in a dialect of Kurmanji Kurdish, an Iranian language spoken in Southeastern Turkey; specifically we focus on the dialect of Adiyaman Kurmanji (AK), although this is the same as the so-called standard variety of Thackston (2006) except where noted. What is particularly instructive about AK, we claim, is that it is a split ergative language of a particular kind. In present tense sentences (we are more precise about what this means below), the subject is nominative, the object (if any) is accusative, and the verb shows full person and number agreement with the subject, regardless of whether the clause is transitive (as in (2)) or not (as in (1)).²

- (1) Ez d₁-rv-im-e. (Present tense, intransitive)
 I.NOM IMPF-run.PRES-1SG-PRES.COP
 ‘I am running.’
- (2) a. Ez te d₁-vun-im-e. (Present tense, transitive)
 I.NOM you.ACC IMPF-see.PRES-1SG-PRES.COP
 ‘I am seeing you.’
- b. T₁ m₁ d₁-vun-ê.
 You.NOM I.ACC IMPF-see.PRES-2SG.PRES.COP
 ‘You are seeing me.’
- c. Em te d₁-vun-in-e.
 We.NOM you.ACC IMPF-see.PRES-PL-PRES.COP
 ‘We are seeing you.’

In contrast, in past tense sentences, subjects of transitive clauses are ergative, while both objects of transitive clauses and subjects of intransitive clauses are nominative. The verb shows full person-number agreement with the object if the clause is transitive; otherwise it agrees with the subject. This is seen in (3) and (4). The verb ‘run’ is unergative, but unaccusatives show the same surface case and agreement patterns.

- (3) a. Ez r₁vi-m. (Past tense, intransitive)
 I.NOM run.PAST-1SG
 ‘I ran.’
- b. T₁ r₁vi-yi
 You.NOM run.PAST-2SG
 ‘You ran.’
- c. Hew r₁vi-Ø
 He.NOM run.PAST-3SG
 ‘He ran.’

² Abbreviations used in this paper include: 1, first person; 2, second person; 3, third person; ACC, accusative; AK, Adiyaman Kurmanji; B&V, Baker and Vinokurova (2010); COP, copula; DK, Diyarbakir Kurmanji; ERG, ergative; EZ, ezafe marker; IE, Indo-European; L&P, Levin and Preminger (to appear); IMPF, imperfective; MK, Muş Kurmanji; NOM, nominative; NOML, nominalizer; OBL, oblique case; PART, participle; PAST, past tense; PL, plural; PRES, present; SG, singular; SK, standard Kurmanji; SUBJ, subjunctive.

- (4) a. M_i t_i di-y_i. (Past tense, transitive)
 I.ERG you.NOM see.PAST-2SG
 ‘I saw you.’
- b. Te ez di-m.
 You.ERG I.NOM see.PAST-1SG
 ‘You(sg) saw me.’
- c. Te em di-n.
 You.ERG we.NOM see.PAST-PL
 ‘You(sg) saw us.’

An additional detail, to which we attach some significance, is that what we called ergative case in (4) and what we called accusative case in (2) are systematically homophonous in Kurmanji. This raises the possibility that they are actually somehow the same case, traditionally called oblique in Iranian linguistics.³ This morphological fact can be seen for pronouns in the data given above; (5) shows that it is also true for a nonpronominal DP. Henceforth we gloss both forms as OBL (for oblique).

- (5) a. Ez Eşxan-ê di-vun-**im**-e
 I.NOM Eşxan-**OBL** IMPF-see.PRES-1SG-PRES.COP
 ‘I am seeing Eşxan.’
- b. Eşxan-ê ez di-m.
 Eşxan-**OBL** I.NOM saw.PAST-1SG
 ‘Eşxan saw me.’

In this respect, split ergativity in Kurmanji and some nearby Iranian languages is at least superficially quite different from the otherwise-similar ergativity splits found in Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, which are also based on tense-aspect but in which the ergative marker is generally different from case markers used on direct objects (see, for example, Butt and Deo 2001/2005).

The opportunity afforded by these patterns for the theory of case and agreement is this. Kurmanji’s split ergativity means that case patterns vary across clause types, and the agreement patterns also vary across clause types. More than that, case and agreement clearly covary: in all clause types, the verb agrees with the nominative DP, even though which DP (the subject or the object) is nominative varies. Therefore Kurmanji is a language in which case and agreement are closely related in one way or another. The theoretical question, then, is whether agreement determines which DP has nominative case (first view), or whether agreement responds to which DP has nominative case (second view). If one of these views gives us a better explanation for how and why case and agreement vary with the tense-aspect of the clause, then we will have a reason to prefer that theory over the other one. In fact, we claim that the agreement-assigns-case view provides a deeper and fuller explanation of this phenomenon than a case-drives-agreement view can.

³ See also Atlamaz (2012) for a related effort to treat ergative and accusative as the same case in AK, although in a somewhat different framework. The traditional Iranian name for what we are calling nominative case is *direct* case. However, we continue to call it nominative because its origins are similar to those of nominative case in English, Icelandic, Hindi, and other languages on our analysis.

2. A case-drives-agreement account

2.1 The outline of an account

Let us begin by considering what a case-driven analysis might say about these data, as a way of seeing what the key issues are, and where that sort of analysis seems to reach its limits. The general strategy for such an approach would be to use dependent case rules like those of Marantz (1991) to assign accusative and ergative case, treat nominative/absolutive as a default case, and then say that the relevant functional head can agree with DP only if DP has default case. This is the approach that Bobaljik (2008) takes for Hindi and Icelandic (and, with a twist, for Nepali), to derive what he calls Moravcsik's Generalization. It is also the approach that L&P use to avoid B&V's conclusion that T assigns nominative under agreement in Sakha.

What is involved in developing this line for Kurmanji? The main new complication that this language presents is that we need different dependent case rules for different clauses: one to assign ergative, and another to assign accusative. Therefore, we need a system like the following.⁴

- (6)
- a. If DP1 c-commands DP2 in clause X and X is past, assign DP1 ergative.
 - b. If DP1 c-commands DP2 in clause X and X is present, assign DP2 accusative.
 - c. Otherwise DP is nominative.
 - d. F agrees with DP only if DP is nominative.

(6c) and (6d) are standard for this style of analysis, not different from what would be said for languages already considered in this literature (Icelandic, Hindi, Sakha, etc.). The puzzle is (6a) and (6b). Why should these particular cases be related to these particular tenses, and not some other way? There is no direct explanation at hand, beyond perhaps some kind of functional-historical one.⁵

2.2 A missed generalization: exactly one nominative argument

The case-driven approach also does not, to our mind, explain the robust generalization that all transitive clauses in Kurmanji (standard and AK) have one and only one nominative DP: either the subject or the object, but not both. To see that there is something worth explaining here, it is important to realize that Kurmanji has more than the two basic tense-aspect categories. Indeed, it has on the order of 8-10 (cf. Thackston 2006), the exact number perhaps depending somewhat on the dialect (see (23) below for some AK examples). Therefore, we need to generalize (6a) and (6b) so that they refer to sets of tense-aspects, not to single categories. Now the generalization that each transitive clause has one and only one nominative DP follows only if the set referred to by the revised (6a) is the exact complement of the set referred to by (6b), so that exactly one of these two rules applies to each clause. But why should that be? What guarantees on this approach that the two rules partition the overall set of tense-aspects? We know that UG allows both ergative subjects and accusative objects in the same clause, because there exist tripartite languages like Nez Perce (Deal, 2010). Kurmanji could be like this (in part) if some tense-aspect

⁴ Indeed, Gündoğdu (2011) proposes essentially (6a) and (6b) for standard Kurmanji—although she also holds that nominative is assigned under agreement, so her approach (like B&V's and ours) is a somewhat eclectic one.

⁵ Coon (2010) and Coon and Preminger (2012) offer a principled reason for why perfective clauses are ergative and imperfective or progressive ones are not in various languages in terms of the fact that many imperfective-progressive sentences are really biclausal (see also Laka, 2006 on Basque). But this proposal does not work for a view like (6) that tries to handle accusative as well as ergative as a dependent case, given that objects are accusative in the very clauses that do not have ergative subjects. Also, for what it is worth, there is no overt sign of biclausality in either present or past tense clauses in Kurmanji, in that both typically have only a single inflected verb form, as is evident in our examples.

category triggered both (6a) and (6b) – but that never happens in AK or standard Kurmanji.⁶ Conversely, we know that UG allows both the subject and the object to have default nominative case in languages like Hindi (Bobaljik 2008, among many others). Kurmanji could be like this if some tense-aspect category triggers neither (6a) and (6b)—but this never happens in any known dialect of Kurmanji. We would like to know why not.

There are some minor qualifications to make about these generalizations before going on. Adıyaman Kurmanji does have one sort of clause that lacks a nominative DP: namely, clauses with an intransitive predicate with an experiencer subject that bears quirky oblique case, like ‘feel cold’ in (7). The subject of such a verb is invariably oblique in present tense as well as past, and since there is no other DP, there is no nominative DP.

- (7) M₁ sor-e.
I.OBL cold-COP.PRES.3SG
‘I am cold.’

However, the existence of such examples does not detract from the need to explain why there is always a DP in nominative case in AK when there is at least one argument that does not bear quirky/lexical case.⁷

Another qualification to make here is that it is (not surprisingly) possible for Kurmanji clauses to have no *overt* nominative argument. They routinely do not if the subject of a present tense clause is pro-dropped, or if the object of a past tense clause is, for example (see, e.g. Dorleijn 1996:89, 95).⁸ This “exception” is common in many languages. Somewhat more subtly, null indefinite objects of verbs like ‘eat’ still have ergative subjects in the past tense in Kurmanji, as shown in (8).

- (8) M₁ (şiv) xor. (*Ez)
I.OBL (food.NOM) eat.PAST.3SG. (*I.NOM)
‘I ate.’

We therefore assume that such sentences do still have a syntactically represented object that is active for purposes of case and agreement (see Baker In Press:xx for the similar point in purely ergative Shipibo).

This is also how we propose to handle so-called indirect transitive clauses in Kurmanji, mentioned by Dorleijn (1996:91). These clauses seem to have a PP complement as well as a subject, the subject being ergative in the past tense, with the result that there is no (overt) nominative NP. An example from AK that is cognate with one of Dorleijn’s examples is (9).

- (9) M₁ lı Mehemed-ê xıst.
I.OBL at Mehmed-OBL beat.PAST(3SG)
‘I hit Mehmet.’

This raises the question of whether the PP argument somehow triggers oblique case on the subject, which would be surprising. However, all of the predicates of this type that we can think of in AK also easily

⁶ Indeed, something like this does happen even in the Kurmanji dialect of Muş described by Gündoğdu (2011), which has past tense clauses in which both the subject and the object are oblique. See section 6 for some discussion.

⁷ As far as we know, all predicates in AK that have quirky oblique subjects are monadic. Hence potentially interesting questions about how the object of such a construction is case marked and agreed with do not arise. (In some other dialects, the experiencer in examples like (7) is expressed as a PP, not an NP, including the Muş dialect (Songül Gündoğdu, personal communication).)

⁸ Although pro-drop of an agreed-with subject is relatively common in Kurmanji, pro-drop of an agreed-with object may be more limited in ways that suggest it might be a null topic rather than a simple pro (see, e.g., Dorleijn 1996:88-89, 95). This could be an interesting topic to pursue, but we do not do so here.

allow a nominative object. The verb *xist* in (9), for example, more generally means ‘drop’, and it can have a direct object as well, with or without a PP complement, as shown in (10).

- (10) a. M₁ kilit x₁st.
 I.OBL key.NOM drop.PAST.3SG
 ‘I dropped the key.’
- b. M₁ ker l₁ Mehemed-ê x₁st.
 I.OBL knife.NOM at Mehmed-OBL drop.PAST.3SG
 ‘I hit the knife at Mehmet.’ (i.e., ‘I stabbed Mehmet.’)

So the expression ‘to drop X at Y’ seems to be an idiom in Kurmanji for ‘to hit Y with Z’ and the argument X can be a null indefinite as in (9). The null indefinite nevertheless counts as the nominative nominal in the clause in (9), just as in (8).⁹

Examples like (8) and (9) should not, then, distract us from the fact that unergative verbs in general—verbs with agent subjects that have no ability to take an object—do *not* permit their subjects to be ergative/oblique in past tenses in Kurmanji (recall (3)). This is also recognized by Dorleijn. She writes (1996:83n.13) “Active intransitives that are not derived from transitive verbs do not trigger ergative case in Kurmanji, contrary to the situation in e.g., Georgian.” We conclude, then, that the generalization that all AK/SK clauses that have a nonquirky marked argument have a nominative argument holds true, despite some of the nominative nominals being null and thus harder to detect.¹⁰

There is also a qualification to make about the other side of our biconditional, the generalization that each Kurmanji clause has at most one nominative nominal. Like Persian and other languages of the region, Kurmanji has light verb constructions, in which a noun plus light verb ‘do’ collocation is the equivalent of a single verb in other languages. For example, Kurmanji has no simple verb ‘to pray’, but uses a light verb construction ‘to do prayer’. In the present tense, the subject and the noun part of the light verb construction are both in unmarked/nominative case, as shown in (11).

- (11) E nimê d₁-k-im-e.
 I.NOM prayer.NOM IMPF-do-1SG-COP.PRES
 ‘I am praying.’

Our claim about this is that ‘prayer’ here is not a true object; indeed is not an argument of the verb at all. Rather it is a noun adjoined to V to form a kind of complex predicate. As such, it falls outside the scope of case theory.¹¹ We thus draw a rather familiar distinction between NPs/DPs that are arguments and NPs/DPs that are not: nominals that are in argument position must have a case value (nominative or oblique), but nominals that are not in argument positions do not get a case value and they show up as bare

⁹ Dorleijn’s (1996:91) other example of an indirect transitive clause involves an expression meaning ‘to look at’. A corresponding example in AK uses the intransitive verb ‘to wander’, and its subject is nominative even in the past tense.

¹⁰ We also conclude from this that a theory in which oblique case is assigned as an inherent case by v to its specifier, as proposed by Woolford (2006) and many others for languages like Hindi, Georgian, and Basque, is not appropriate for Kurmanji. See AUTHOR for some general discussion.

¹¹ Interestingly, in the past tense version of a light verb example like (11) the subject is oblique, as seen in (i). For the theory we develop below, this means that the noun ‘prayer’ is visible for agreement, though it is not for case assignment. Hence Voice agrees with the noun part of the predicate, not with the subject, leaving the subject to become oblique. We would not necessarily have predicted this difference between case and agreement, but there it is.

- (i) M₁ nimê kir.
 I.OBL prayer.NOM do.PAST(3SG)
 ‘I prayed.’

noun roots. These bare noun roots are homophonous with the nominative, which has no distinctive suffix in Kurmanji. This way of formulating the issue also covers the fact that predicate nominals and DPs spoken in isolation from any clause (e.g. curses) are also in bare-nominative (direct) form, rather than oblique.

Taking note of these various qualifications, then, the more nuanced and accurate generalizations are summarized in (12).

- (12) a. Every Kurmanji clause that has at least one nominal argument without lexically determined case contains a nominative nominal (possibly null).
 b. Every Kurmanji clause has at most one argumental nominal that has nominative case.

(12a) holds for AK and Standard Kurmanji, but not certain Eastern dialects; (12b) hold for all known varieties. (We return briefly to the dialectal variation in section 6.) These generalizations come out as semi-coincidences according to the analysis in (6), inasmuch as there is no explanation for why the set of tenses that trigger ergative is the complement of the set of tenses that trigger accusative.

2.3 Another missed generalization: only one non-nominative case

The other important fact about Kurmanji that the case-driven approach does not explain, we claim, is why ergative and accusative are homophonous in Kurmanji. According to (6), the two cases are assigned by different rules, sensitive to different factors, so in this sense they must be fundamentally distinct cases in the syntax. Therefore it is more or less a coincidence of the morphology that they happen to be spelled out the same way. One might be tempted to think that this pattern is a highly marked one, which is due to some recent historical glitch, such as distinct accusative and ergative suffixes undergoing phonological erosion so that they became homophonous. But in fact the Kurmanji pattern has been quite stable in the Iranian languages of this area: Stilo (2009:701) says that it has been maintained for at least 2000 years (and both are extensions of an old genitive case marker, not neutralizations of markers that used to be distinct).

Furthermore, the homophony is entirely systematic, and goes beyond the use of one or two morphemes. It is not just the fact that *-ê* is the regular suffix for both ergative and accusative, which could be a coincidence. The case forms of pronouns in Kurmanji are partially suppletive, but nevertheless it holds true for them too that there is no ergative-accusative distinction, the same form being used both for objects in present tense and transitive subjects in past tense. This was seen in part in (2) and (4); (13) gives the complete set of forms.

(13) Case forms of pronouns:

Features	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
NOM	Ez	T ₁	Hew	Em	Un	Hewno
ERG=ACC	M ₁	Te	W ₁ /we	Me	We	Wono

AK also has some common nouns that have irregular inflection. For example, the nominative of ‘boy’ is *lawik* and the oblique form is *lêwîk*, with an ablaut-style stem change rather than suffixation. This same irregular form is also used as both the accusative and ergative, as shown in (14).

- (14) a. Eşxan lêwîk dî-vun-ê.
 Eşxan.NOM boy.OBL IMPF-see.PRES-3SG.PRES.COP
 ‘Eşxan sees the boy.’
 b. Lêwîk Eşxan di.
 Boy.OBL Eşxan.NOM see.PAST.3SG
 ‘The boy saw Eşxan.’

The identity of ergative and accusative is thus a pervasive pattern in Kurmanji, which transcends the distribution of one or two individual morphemes. This suggests that an account in terms of suppletion at PF is not general enough. Rather, it seems that the same case is assigned to the subjects of transitive verbs in the past and to the objects of transitive verbs in the present, and this cannot be accomplished by an analysis like (6), except by stipulation.¹²

In sum, then, it is not hard for a case-driven approach to reach a degree of descriptive adequacy along the lines of (6). But it depends on a number of coincidences, such that it has less explanatory value than one would like. Nor do we see any way to do much better along these lines—although we do not rule out the possibility that someone else may prove to be more resourceful than we have been in this respect.

3. An agreement-assigns-case analysis

3.1 The outline of the account

Let us then try developing an analysis based on the idea that the agreeing head F assigns nominative to the DP that it agrees with, seeing if we can go farther along this path. The bare bones of such an account would be as in (15).

- (15)
- a. In past tense clauses, F agrees with the object if there is one, otherwise with the subject.
 - b. In present tense clauses, F agrees with the subject.
 - c. F assigns nominative to the DP it agrees with.
 - d. Otherwise DP arguments get oblique case.

We can already see some potential here for the agreement-driven account to do better, we believe. For example, it might be possible to collapse (15a) and (15b) into some statement of the form “F agrees with the closest accessible NP” (where “accessible” is crucially not defined in terms of structural case; contrast Bobaljik 2008). If so, then we are well on our way to explaining why Kurmanji clauses robustly have only one nominative argument: this will follow from (15c,d) together with the fact that Kurmanji clauses have only one agreement-bearing head, and this head agrees only once. We can also envision a deeper explanation for the fact that ergative and accusative are homophonous in Kurmanji: there really is only one case, called oblique. This is a kind of default case that picks up any DP argument that has not been case-marked nominative under agreement.

Of course, in focusing on these potential advantages, we are putting off the hard work, which is explaining (15a) and (15b). These stipulations about agreement are arguably roughly on a par with the stipulations about dependent case assignment in (6a) and (6b), and they do similar work. The question then is whether we can give a deeper explanation of (15a) and (15b) that goes beyond these bald statements. Let us try.

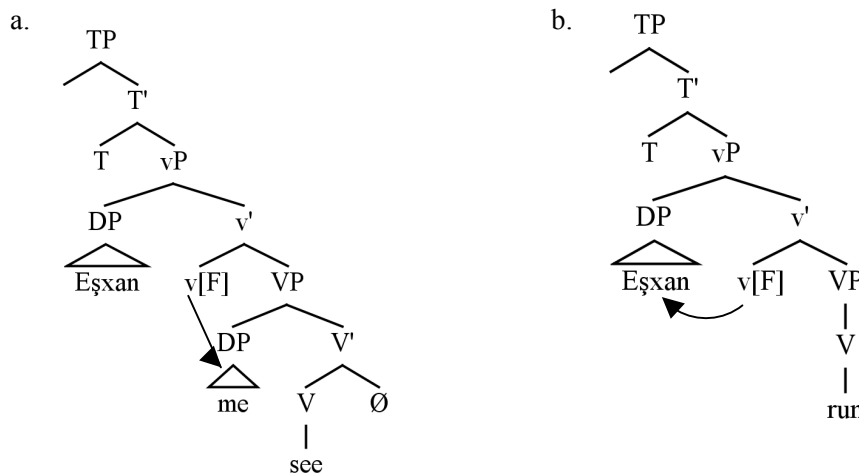
¹² Yet another complication in some dialects is the fact that oblique marking interacts with gender marking in certain ways. For example, although the affix *-ê* marks oblique on both masculine and feminine singular nouns in AK, in the standard variety and in Muş, *-ê* is found only on feminine nouns, whereas singular masculine nouns are zero-marked in the oblique. The important point for us is that this additional wrinkle holds equally for oblique case used as ergative and for oblique case used as accusative, showing again that those are deeply the same. Additional case-sensitive morphemes are found in nominals that are modified in various ways (e.g., the *ezafe* marker in (27)) and those too seem not to distinguish ergative from accusative, but these morphemes vary some across dialects, and we have not worked out all the forms for AK yet.

3.2 Deepening the account I: the position of F

We start with (15a): why does F prefer to agree with the object in a past tense clause? It is accurate to state this in terms of a preference, because F can perfectly well agree with the subject of the clause when there is no object—when the verb is an intransitive verb of the unergative class—as was shown back in (3). So F must be in a position to agree with the object if there is one, but also in a position to agree with the agentive subject if there is no object.

We take this to mean that the head F is really (approximately) *v*, and it undergoes cyclic Agree in the sense of Rezac (2003) and Bejar and Rezac (2009). (This will be refined somewhat below.) This *v* probes downward, as usual, to agree with the highest DP inside the VP complement of *v*, namely the object (see (16a)). If, however, there is no object in the c-command domain of *v*, then *v* can probe upward (at least slightly), to agree with a DP in Spec vP ((16b)).¹³

(16)



This is parallel to Rezac's (2003) analysis of so-called ergative displacement in Basque, among other things; see also his discussion of why this is a natural extension of Chomsky's agree within a cyclic, bare phrase structure style approach to syntax.

Part and parcel of this account of why the finite verb agrees with the object rather than the subject in past tenses in Kurmanji is the hypothesis that the agreeing head in Kurmanji is lower than it is in (say) English: it is on *v*, not on T. That is why the subject does not intervene between F and the object, blocking an Agree relationship between the two (an intervention affect). And indeed there is some morphological support for this assumption. An interesting fact about Kurmanji verb paradigms is that the agreement affix typically suffixes directly to the verb root, and other tense-aspect morphemes can come outside of it. In particular, the present perfect tense has the morpheme order Verb-Agr-Tense, as shown in (17) (compare with (5a), a simple past without the present affix *-e*).¹⁴

¹³ Word order presents some potentially difficult problems in Kurmanji. Although it is obviously an SOV language, most projections with overt heads other than VP seem to be head initial. Even in VP, the verb comes before a goal NP, although it comes after the theme argument and adverbs (including PPs) (see (42)). We tentatively assume, then, that Kurmanji is uniformly head-initial, but objects are always in SpecVP, not the complement of V, as shown in (16). The details of word order should not be particularly relevant to our proposal about case and agreement.

¹⁴ Historically the morpheme *-e* in (17) is a third person present tense form of the copular clitic (cf. (7)). We see no reason not to say that it has simply become a realization of a present T in these combinations, however. Even if it should still be regarded as a copula, it is still striking that person agreement surfaces low, on the participle, not high, on the auxiliary, as it does in Western IE.

- (17) rvi-m-e
run.PAST-1SG-COP.PRES
'I have run.'

Kurmanji is different in this respect from typical Western IE languages, where the morpheme order is Verb-Tense-Agr (Belletti, 1990), as in (18) from Spanish.

- (18) habl-aba-mos
speak-PAST.IMPF-1SG
'we were talking, used to talk'

This difference in morpheme order coheres with the claim that agreement is on a lower head in Kurmanji than in Spanish. This in turn fits with the fact that agreement follows an ergative pattern in Kurmanji (in the past) but not in Spanish.

3.3 Deepening the account II: the source of the split

So far, this is only a proposal about why agreement (and therefore case) is ergative in Kurmanji; it does not explain why it is split ergative. Now we need to say something about why F always agrees with the subject in present tense clauses in Kurmanji, even when there is an object present ((15b)).

One possibility that comes to mind is that F is higher in the structure in present tense clauses than in past tense clauses; it could be somewhere around T, such that the first DP it encounters probing downward is always the subject, not the object. We do not entirely rule out this possibility, but we have not found any positive evidence for it either. For example, the present tense morpheme *-e* that is seen in the present perfect in (17) (distinguishing it from the simple past) is also used in present progressive tense in (19), distinguishing it from simple present. In this variant of the present tense, we again observe V-Agr-Tense order, not V-Tense-Agr.¹⁵

- (19) di-rv-ım-e (compare: *di-rv-ım* 'I run (habitually)')
IMPF-run-1SG-COP.PRES
'I am running'

The similarity in the suffix orders between (17) and (19) thus suggests that F is relatively low in AK even in present tense clauses. If so, then we need a different reason why F agrees with the object if there is one in past tenses, but not in present tenses.

Instead, the proposal we pursue relies on phases and spell out domains. We took it for granted that the agreeing head F could see the object inside VP in (16a). But perhaps this should not be taken for granted. If *v* is a phase head, then it triggers the spell out of its VP complement. If the object is properly inside this VP complement, then the agreeing head F might not be able to see it in order to agree with it. To capitalize on this logical possibility, we propose the following:

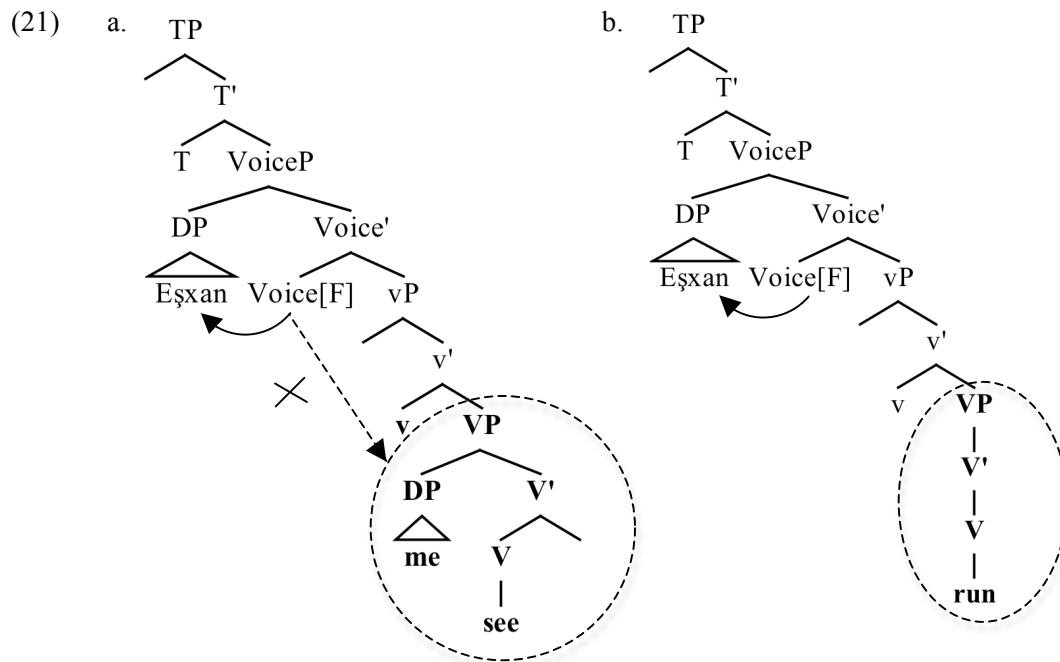
- (20) a. The VP in present tense clause is a spell out domain that does not contain the agreeing head.
b. The VP in a past tense clause is not a spell out domain.

We note also that this verb form does have both a past tense morpheme (the verb stem) and a present tense one (copular *-e*), so there is a potentially serious question of why both (6a) and (6b) wouldn't apply to clauses in this tense-aspect, giving both an oblique subject and an oblique object, contrary to fact.

¹⁵ This particular form is distinctive to AK; the standard and Muş dialects have simply *di-rv-ım* for both simple present and present progressive. We doubt that this difference affects the analysis much, however.

This distinction in phasehood is at the root of split ergativity in Kurmanji, we claim. Because the agreeing head F cannot see the object inside VP in the present tense, it agrees with the subject of a transitive clause in just the same way that it agrees with the subject of an intransitive clause, since as far as F knows, there is no object.

However, even granted that VP is a spell out domain in some clauses but not others, it should not block the phase head *v* itself from agreeing with something inside VP. After all, VPs are spell out domains in English too, but the *v* head is still assumed to agree with the object inside VP so as to assign it accusative case. Thus in the version of the Phase Impenetrability Condition in Chomsky (2000), nothing outside the phrase headed by phase head H can access the complement of H, but H itself can. What we need to get the full range of results then is an agreeing head that is lower than T (so it naturally undergoes cyclic Agree) but higher than *v* (so it cannot see into VP when *v* is a phase head). We therefore adopt the hypothesis that what Chomsky (2001) calls transitive *v** actually decomposes into two distinct heads as been claimed already in Baker and Stewart (1999), Pytkänen (2002), Harley (2013), Collins (2005), and Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou and Schäfer (2006), among others. The lower head we can call *v* proper; it creates a transitive event and licenses the object in languages like English. The higher head we can call Voice, following Kratzer (1996); it theta-licenses the subject. Given this, *v* is the phase head, but Voice is F, the bearer of agreement in AK. On this assumption, the present tense analogs of (16) are in (21), with the opaque domain in bold.



This then is a way of explaining why agreement follows a nominative pattern in the present but an absolutive pattern in the past—one that does not presuppose that the DPs have already been marked for case. We can then say that Voice assigns nominative to the DP it agrees with (like T does in Western IE languages, but different from *v* proper), and any other DP is oblique; in this way, we explain the case marking in these clauses as well. This achieves our goal of a deeper theory, where F always agrees with the closest accessible DP, accessibility defined in terms of phases (not in terms of case). (22) summarizes our fleshed-out system of assumptions.

- (22) a. F in AK is on Voice; it agrees with the closest visible DP probing downward, if any, otherwise with Spec, VoiceP (cyclic Agree).
 b. *v* is phase head in present clauses, but not in past clauses.
 c. F assigns nominative to the DP it agrees with.

- d. Otherwise a DP argument gets oblique case.

We have also found some independent support for (22a) from (17) and (19).

3.4 More on when *v* is a phase head

Not all readers might immediately see (22b) as progress over (6a, b) or (15a, b). It is fair to ask whether this is just as much a stipulation. In fact, there are other facts about the Kurmanji tense-aspect system that can further ground this assumption.

First of all, (22b) has the advantage of putting the responsibility for split ergativity at the right level of verb/clause structure. Inflected verbs in Kurmanji can consist of at least four morphemes: an aspect-mood prefix (imperfective *di-*, subjunctive *bi-*), a verb stem (past or present), an agreement suffix, and a tense suffix (present *-e*, past *-u*). (23) gives the major forms for AK; see also Thackston (2006).¹⁶

(23)	a.	<i>dı-her-ım</i>	IMPF-go-1SG	‘I go’ (simple present)
	b.	<i>dı-her-ım-e</i>	IMPF-go-1SG-COP.PRES	‘I am going’ (present continuous)
	c.	<i>çü-m</i>	went-1SG	‘I went’ (simple past)
	d.	<i>dı-çü-m</i>	IMPF-went-1SG	‘I was going; I used to go’ (past imperfective)
	e.	<i>çü-m-e</i>	went-1SG-PRES.COP	‘I have gone’ (present perfect)
	f.	<i>çü-vu-m</i>	went-be.PAST-1SG	‘I had gone’ (past perfect)
	g.	<i>her-ım</i> ¹⁷	SUBJ-go-1SG	‘for me to go’ (present subjunctive)

Now given these various tense-aspect components, it is clear and striking that it is the innermost one, the verb stem, that determines whether case and agreement are ergative or not.¹⁸ Thus the imperfective aspect prefix *di-* can go on a present stem to give simple present (habitual) or on a past stem to give past imperfective. If the stem is past, the clause is ergative; if it is present, the clause is accusative. Aspect per se (presence or absence of *di-*) has no influence on this.

(24)	Ez	<i>dı-k-ım.</i>	M ₁	<i>dı-kr.</i>
		I.NOM IMPF- <i>do.PRES</i> -1SG		I.ERG IMPF- <i>do.PAST(3SG)</i>
		‘I do (it).’		‘I did (it).’

Similarly, the subjunctive prefix *bi-* can attach to a present stem to give a present subjunctive (commonly used in embedded clauses) or to a past stem to give a past subjunctive (used primarily in conditionals in this variety). The former clause type is accusative, and the latter is ergative.

(25)	Ez	<i>bı-k-ım;</i>	M ₁	<i>bı-kr-u</i>
		I.NOM SUBJ- <i>do.PRES</i> -1SG		I.ERG SUBJ- <i>do.PAST-COP.PAST.3SG</i>
		‘I do (it).’		‘I did (it).’

¹⁶ Kurmanji also has a future tense, but it is periphrastic, consisting of the verb/particle (d)ê plus the present subjunctive verb form (Thackston 2006:42). Like the present subjunctive, case and agreement follows an accusative pattern. See also Thackston (2006:61) for a past conditional tense, which is based on the past stem and triggers ergative patterns.

¹⁷ Subjunctive form of the verb *herın* ‘to go’ does not take the subjunctive marker ‘*bi-*’. It can be clearly seen on other verbs like *krın* ‘to do’.

- (i) *bı-k-ım* SUBJ-go-1SG ‘for me to do’

¹⁸ Note that the verb stem also apparently gives the primary tense interpretation of an eventuality as occurring before the speech time or not—which is somewhat surprising for those who think that tense is always one of the outermost verbal affixes.

Not: ‘the frog which killed x’ (active interpretation)

- (29) merik-ê hat-i
man-EZ came-PART
‘the come man’ (i.e. ‘the man who came’)

Now these participle forms are clearly *passive* participles, in the sense that modified noun must be the internal argument of the verb form, its theme, not its agent. The participle can be used in this way with an unaccusative verb root as in (29), but not with an unergative verb root as in (30).²²

- (30) *merik-ê şığıl-i
man-EZ work-PART
‘the worked man’ (i.e. ‘the man who worked’)

Furthermore, when a transitive verb is used in participle form, the modified noun must be its theme, not its agent, as seen in the only possible interpretation of (28). To express an active meaning like ‘the frog that killed’ or ‘the working man’ the complementizer *ki* ‘that’ must precede the participial verb form. We take this as indicating that these are full relative clause CPs containing higher heads, hence less pure manifestations of a simple verb phrase with a past stem. So when we look at the smaller constructions, we see that the participle built from the past stem in Kurmanji is like a passive/past participle in English (*a murdered man, a fallen leaf, *a worked man*) and not like an active/present participle (*a working man*). In contrast, there is no bare participle form based on the present stem in Kurmanji, so there is no similar evidence that the present stem is passive-like.

The past stem and not the present stem is also used in nominalizations in Kurmanji: these are formed by attaching the affix *-in* to the past root. Two examples are:

- (31) a. Kuşt-in-a beq-ê nê rınd-e. (also Dorleijn 1996:107)
kill-NOML-EZ frog-OBL not good-COP.PRES
‘To kill (the) frog is not good.’ (Lit: The frog’s killing is not good)
Not: ‘For the frog to kill is not good.’
- b. Hat-in-a Eşxan-ê rınd bu
come-NOML-EZ Eşxan-OBL good became
‘Eşxan’s coming was good.’

These nominalizations are also intrinsically passive in that they allow the theme argument of the verb root to be expressed like a possessor in the larger DP, but they do not allow an agent argument to be expressed. Hence ‘the killing of the frog’ in (31a) means that the frog is killed, not that the frog has killed something. (In contrast, English nominalizations can be ambiguous between active and passive readings; see Grimshaw 1990.) Moreover, (31b) shows that the theme argument of an unaccusative root can be expressed inside this kind of DP, but (32) shows that the agent argument of an unergative root cannot be.

- (32) *Rv-in-a Eşxan-ê rınd bu.
run-NOML-EZ Eşxan-OBL good became
‘Eşxan’s running was good.’

²² We note also that (30) becomes good if a causative morpheme is added to the verb root (*şığıl-and-i*, ‘work-CAUS-PART’), in which case the example means ‘the man (who was) made to work’. This shows again the passive-like interpretation of the participle form: it is bad based on an unergative, but good based on the causative of an unergative, a special type of transitive clause. Similar remarks apply also to (32).

Kurmanji. In contrast, the agreement-driven theory does go somewhere. It leads us to posit that some VPs are separate spell out domains but others are not, and that connects with other facts about Kurmanji: the fact that agreement is an inner affix in this language, the fact that the stem is the crucial conditioning factor for split ergativity rather than the tense-aspect affixes, and the fact that the past stem is passive in a way that the present stem is not. All these facts fit together rather nicely, we believe.

When all this is added to the fact that the agreement-driven theory also explains why there is no more than one nominative argument in all Kurmanji clauses and the fact that it does not need to posit a syntactic distinction between ergative and accusative case that is never realized morphologically, we take this to be decisive.

4. Further consequences of oblique being the default case

Indeed, our agreement-driven approach has some further advantages in this last-mentioned area. These involve our claim that nominative is assigned under agreement, and all other nominals in argument positions get oblique case by default. In fact, there are several other places in which DPs can occur in a Kurmanji clause, where the verb cannot be expected to agree with them, and in all these places the nominal has the same oblique case marking, just as our account predicts.

4.1 Partially verbal domains with no agreeing head

Consider first the possibility of Kurmanji having a clause type in which the agreement-bearing functional head is absent, analogous to an infinitive in English and other Western IE languages. The agreement-driven view and the case-driven view make starkly different predictions for such a construction.²⁶ On the view in which all case is assigned apart from agreement as dependent case or default case, case marking in these clauses would not necessarily be any different from case marking in fully finite clauses—and that is true for some languages (see xxx for discussion). However, on the view in which nominative is assigned under agreement with the relevant functional head, the absence of that particular head should make a big difference. More specifically, our agreement-driven view predicts that in clause-like constituents with no agreeing head there should be no nominative DP; any DP should be in the default oblique case.

In fact, Kurmanji has no very close analog to the English infinitive. The sorts of verbs that select for infinitival complements in English generally take subjunctive clauses in Kurmanji, where subjunctive is a fully finite form, with agreement following the usual split ergative pattern and the agreed-with DP bearing nominative case (see (25) above). Moreover, even if Kurmanji did have a nonfinite T node, it is not clear that that would be relevant, since the agreement-bearing head is Voice on our account, not T. So there could be a kind of embedded clause that was the functional equivalent of the English infinitive, but in which agreement and (therefore) case were undisturbed.

Kurmanji does, however, have a kind of nominalized clause that can express an event and does not have agreement, which may be relevant to this prediction. These nominalizations are built around a word that consists of a past stem and the suffix *-ŋn*, illustrated briefly in (31) as part of our claim that past stems are passive in Kurmanji. Thackston (2006:32) calls these forms infinitives, although he is quick to add that their usage is often more like the English gerund in *-ing* than like the English infinitive. Although the constituents headed by these “infinitives” are nominal in many respects, they are not totally normal DPs. In particular, some sorts of adverbs can be used with them, and these are in pre-head position, just as adverbs come before the finite verb in Kurmanji matrix clauses. An example is (36).

- (36) [dhuni çü-n-ê Eşxan-ê] ne rind-e.
 Yesterday go-NOML-EZ Eşxan-OBL not good-COP.PRES
 ‘Eşxan’s going yesterday was not good.’

²⁶ We thank xx (personal communication) for raising this issue for us.

Other adverbs that can appear in these nominalizations include locatives, directionals, and instruments (although apparently not manner adverbs). In contrast, these adverbs cannot appear in unmarked form before a simple noun, as shown in (37a). They can only modify a simple noun if they follow it and are connected by an *ezafe* marker, as in (37b)—in other words, if they are treated like adjectives or possessors (compare (27)) rather than adverbs.

- (37) a. *[dhuni ders-ê Mehemed-ê] rind-e.
 Yesterday class-EZ Mehmet-OBL good-COP.PRES
 ‘Mehmet’s class yesterday was good.’
- b. [Ders-ê Mehemed-ê ê dhuni] rind-e.
 class-EZ Mehmet-OBL EZ yesterday good-COP.PRES
 Lit. ‘Mehmet’s class of yesterday was good.’

We infer from this that some verbal structure is present in nominalizations which is not present in ordinary DPs in Kurmanji. More specifically, these nominalizations might consist of (approximately) a vP constituent that is the complement of an N head, rather than a Voice or Auxiliary head, as in matrix clauses. The adverb can then be licensed inside the VP (or vP) in the usual way, whatever that is. But if there is a vP here, then there is room for a theme argument to be generated too (although not an agent argument; see (32) and (33) above). This structure is sketched in (38).

- (38) [NP [vP [VP Adv DP_{theme} V] v.PAST] NOML]

Now we ask what the case on the theme DP in (38) should be. On an unadorned dependent case theory, the answer could well be that it should be nominative, since it is inside a verbal projection (vP), there is only one DP in that projection, so dependent case is not an option, and the default case according to this way of looking at things is nominative. However, for our agreement-driven theory the prediction is clearly that the DP should be oblique, given that the Voice head that assigns nominative case under agreement is absent here, and for us the default case for arguments is oblique. And the right answer is indeed oblique, as can be seen in examples (36) and (31a) repeated here as (39).²⁷

- (39) Kuşt-in-a beq-ê nê rind-e.
 kill-NOML-EZ frog-OBL not good-COP.PRES
 ‘To kill (the) frog is not good.’ (Lit: ‘The frog’s killing is not good.’)

The point here is not that it would necessarily be hard for a case-driven approach to account for these facts. Presumably it can do so by capitalizing on the fact that the possessors of simple nouns in Kurmanji are also in oblique case, as shown in (40) (and (37)).

- (40) Mektew-ê mî
 school-EZ I.OBL
 ‘my school’

In other words, genitive case is available in NPs/DPs, so the theme argument in (39) gets genitive by virtue of being in a noun phrase (as well as in a vP). But even if we grant this, the case-driven approach has to say that genitive case in Kurmanji, though assigned by a different syntactic rule, is nevertheless

²⁷ There is certainly more to say about these constructions, including why the theme argument ends up after the nominalized verb, and why the *ezafe* marker is present. These details might indicate that the theme raises from its complement of V position in (38) to some specifier position in the extended projection of the nominal. We cannot pursue this matter here. But one of the charms of our analysis, we claim, is that no special structure is necessary for oblique case to be assigned.

syncretic with ergative and accusative at PF—another “coincidence”. In contrast, the agreement-driven account gets this essentially for free, by saying that all unagreed with DPs in argument positions are oblique. Our generalization automatically covers DPs inside DP as well as past tense subjects and present tense objects.

4.2 Goals in oblique case

A similar point can be made for DPs that express the goal argument of a ditransitive verb like ‘give’ in Kurmanji. There are two ways of expressing goals in this language. One is as a PP that is headed by the postposition *ra* and comes before the verb, as shown in (41).

- (41) M₁ te ra kitaw şond.
 I.OBL you.OBL to book.NOM send.PAST.3SG
 ‘I sent you a book.’

This is not directly relevant to our topic, because here the goal DP presumably gets case (oblique) assigned by P (but see section 4.3 below). The other expression of a goal is as a DP that follows the verb, as shown in (42).

- (42) M₁ kitaw do te. (**ti* you.NOM)
 I.OBL book.NOM give.PAST.3SG you.OBL
 ‘I gave you the book.’

First of all, the word order here shows that Kurmanji is not a straightforward head final language. We tentatively assume that the goal here is the complement of V, and the theme is its specifier, as in Larson (1988), so we have a structure like [_{VoiceP} Agent Voice [_{VP} v [_{VP} theme [V goal]]]]. What is interesting for our purposes is that these postverbal goal phrases are always in oblique case, regardless of the tense, even though there is no obvious P head to attribute this to. (42) shows this for a past tense, and (43) gives the corresponding present tense version.

- (43) Ez kitaw-ê d₁-d-*im*-e te. (**ti* you.NOM)
 I.NOM book-OBL IMPF-give.PRES-1SG-COP.PRES you.OBL
 ‘I am giving you the book.’

This additional fact about case in Kurmanji also follows immediately from our agreement-driven theory. Given the configuration of the clause, Voice is never in a position to agree with the goal argument, since the goal is deep down in the VP, lower than the theme argument. That the theme argument c-commands the goal argument is confirmed by the scope facts in (44), where the preverbal theme necessarily takes scope over the postverbal goal.²⁸

- (44) a. Eşxan-ê kitaw-*ik* do-ye herkes-i.
 Eşxan-OBL book-one.NOM give.PAST-3SG everyone-OBL
 ‘Eşxan gave a book to everyone.’ (only one book, $\exists >> \forall$)

²⁸ As an additional control, note that if the goal scrambles to a position before the theme, as in (i), the reading changes, such that the universal quantifier does get wide scope.

- (i) Eşxan-ê herkes-i kitaw-*ik* do-ye.
 Eşxan-OBL everyone-OBL book-one.NOM give.PAST-3SG
 ‘Eşxan gave everyone a book.’ (can be different books, $\forall >> \exists$)

- b. Eşxan-ê her kitaw do-ye telebe-k-i.
 Eşxan-OBL every book.NOM give.PAST-3SG student-one-OBL
 ‘Eşxan gave every book to a student.’ (can be different students; $\forall > \exists$)

So in present tenses, Voice cannot see the goal argument inside VP because VP is a spell out domain, and in past tenses, Voice can see into VP but the first phrase it finds probing downward is the theme, not the goal. Therefore Voice agrees with the theme in (42) and assigns it nominative, but not the goal. Therefore the goal gets the default case for arguments, which is oblique.²⁹ This is another illustration of a pervasive theme in this language: everything is oblique, except for the one DP that the verb agrees with.

Again, a case-driven alternative does not extend automatically to this new syntactic environment. How does the goal DP get oblique case in (42) according to a system like (6)? It cannot be by the ergative rule in (6a), because this low DP does not c-command any other DP. It cannot be by the accusative rule in (6b), because the clause is in past tense. It cannot be by the default rule in (6c), because the DP has oblique case, not nominative. We would need another new case assigning rule for this, something like that the complement of the verb gets a special case, call it dative. Then it is a semi-coincidence that this new case rule assigns the same case forms as all the others—that dative is syncretic with ergative, accusative, and genitive. What is missed here is that oblique case has a wider syntactic distribution than nominative, so it should be the default case. But then we need a positive rule for assigning nominative, and that comes best by capitalizing on its biconditional relationship with agreement.

4.3 Complements of P

For completeness, we mention one last fact along these lines, which is that the objects of Ps also consistently get oblique case in Kurmanji. That can be seen in (41), and again in (45).

- (45) B1 mî; lî Eşxan-ê
 with I.OBL at Eşxan-OBL
 ‘with me’ ‘at Eşxan’s’

Of course, we are used to the idea that the case assigned by Ps needs to be stipulated in the lexical entry of the P, particularly in many IE languages, so there needn’t be a big problem here. But again this detail follows immediately from the agreement-driven account. Overt Ps are almost always phase heads, such that no functional head outside of PP can agree with the complement of P inside PP (Baker 2008, etc.) In

²⁹ We might wonder what happens if there is a structure in which there is a goal DP but no theme: then could Voice in the past tense agree with the goal and assign it nominative, since there is no intervening theme? We suspect that the question cannot be answered, because the structure does not exist. There are certainly structures with theme subjects and postverbal goals, and in these the postverbal goal is oblique even in the past tenses:

- (i) Ez çû-m mektew-ê.
 I.NOM go.PAST-1SG school-OBL
 ‘I went to school.’

But ‘go’ here is presumably an unaccusative verb, whose subject is base-generated in the theme position. Therefore it intervenes between Voice and the goal prior to moving to the subject position, and thus prevent the former from agreeing with the latter, just as the object does in (42). Now (i) is also possible with a seeming unergative verb like *rivî-m* ‘run.PAST-1SG’ substituted for *çû-m*. The question then is whether ‘run’ is still unergative when it combines with a direction phrase; we know that specifying a goal makes similar manner of motion verbs unaccusative for purposes of auxiliary selection in Dutch and Italian, for example (Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 1995; Hoekstra, 1984; Rosen, 1984). Indeed it could be a theorem of theta theory that it is impossible for a verb to select a goal argument unless it also selects a theme argument, since there cannot be a goal unless there is something that is moving to that goal (at least metaphorically). That is what we tentatively assume.

particular, Voice in Kurmanji can never agree with the object of P. Therefore it cannot assign the object nominative case, and that object is left to get oblique case by default. Nothing special needs to be said about the case properties of Ps in Kurmanji on this view.

5. An extension: number agreement with ergatives

Although our primary line of argument is now in place, this section considers a further detail about the relationship of case and agreement in Adiyaman Kurmanji. It is of narrower scope than the first order effects we have considered so far, but nevertheless relevant to those who want to learn what they can about the relationship between case and agreement in this language. This is the fact that some agreement with an oblique subject is allowed after all—but only agreement in number, and only in limited circumstances. This new detail requires some qualification to our generalization that an NP argument X has nominative case if and only the verb agrees with X in Kurmanji. However, it is significant that under comparable morphological circumstances a verb cannot agree with an oblique object, even in number. We claim that this is further support for our fundamental hypothesis that it is the phasehood of *v* that drives split ergativity in this language.

The essential new fact is illustrated in (46): if the object is third person singular, and the subject is third plural, the verb can bear plural agreement.

- (46) Wono hew di-n
 They.ERG he.NOM saw-PL
 ‘They saw him.’

This additional possibility is not recognized for standard Kurmanji in Thackston (2006), but it is well-attested in the dialects surveyed by Dorleijn (1996:118-119); she observed 125 instances of agreement with an oblique third plural subject. Thus it is not entirely impossible for the verb to agree with an ergative subject in Kurmanji after all. This is potentially problematic for one of the pillars of the case-driven account that we have argued against, namely (6d). But of course it is a challenge to our (22c) as well.

It is important to recognize that the circumstances in which the verb can manifest agreement with the ergative subject are quite restricted. Plural agreement in AK seems to be impossible if the object is first singular or second singular rather than third; then the verb must have singular first or second person agreement with the object instead.

- (47) a. *Wono ez di-n (OK: di-m)
 They.ERG I.NOM saw-PL saw-1SG
 ‘They saw me.’
- b. *Wono ti di-n (OK: di)
 They.ERG you.NOM saw-PL saw-2SG
 ‘They saw you(sg).’

This asymmetry shows up in a somewhat gradient/noisy way in Dorleijn’s (1996:119) survey work: she reports 60 cases of agreement with the subject when the object is third singular, but only 7 when it is second singular and none when it is first singular. On this basis, she observes (1996:128) that “DIR [nominative] 3SG objects are apparently easily ignored as concerns agreement: agreement with an OBL subject occurs remarkably frequently when the object is DIR 3SG.”

Interestingly, agreement is also impossible in AK if the object is third singular but the subject is first plural or second plural:

separate heads, one which probes for person, and one which probes for number (Taraldsen 1995, Hiraiwa 2005, etc). These two heads could then agree with a different range of noun phrases, either because they occupy different structural positions (e.g. the number head could be above the ergative subject while the person head is below it) or because they are sensitive to different features.³¹ It would be rash for us to say that no account along these lines could be made to work for AK. However, we do not pursue this line, for three reasons. First, there is no morphological evidence for two different agreeing heads in AK: there is never more than one distinguishable morpheme on the Kurmanji verb, such that one morpheme realizes a person feature and the other realizes a number feature. Second, the plural exponent *-n* appears in exactly the same place in a morphological structure (suffixed directly to the verb stem) that a person exponent like 1SG *-m* or 2SG *-e* does, across the full range of Kurmanji forms. Third, the capacity of the verb to agree in number with the subject depends on what features are present on the object ((46) versus (47)). Although these facts could probably be expressed using readjustment rules at PF, such that one morpheme deletes in the context of another, they follow more naturally, we believe, from a view in which there is a single agreeing head F (Voice) that enters into Agree with *both* the subject and the object under certain very specific circumstances.

We develop this hypothesis as follows. We have already seen that, by virtue of its position in Voice, the agreement-bearing head agrees with the object if there is one, and with the subject if there is no object in Kurmanji (cyclic Agree). This is our way of getting the ergative pattern of agreement in past sentences, when there is no phase boundary to think about. Now consider the possibility of there being a direct object in the structure that has only a subset of the features that agreement is normally sensitive to in Kurmanji. In particular, suppose that third person nominals in Kurmanji can be specified as being singular or plural, but they can also lack a specified number value. In other words, suppose that a possible representation of phi-features for a Kurmanji nominal is as in (51).³²

- (51) $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Person: 3} \\ \text{Number: ____} \end{array} \right]$

This proposal fits with the fact that an unaffixed common noun can often be interpreted as singular or plural in Kurmanji, as shown in (52) (see also Thackston 2006:50).³³

- (52) a. M_i kurik di-(n)
I.ERG child.NOM saw-(PL)
'I saw a child/children.'
- b. Antên çe kır-in
antenna.NOM good did-PL
'They/he repaired the antenna; He repaired the antennas.'

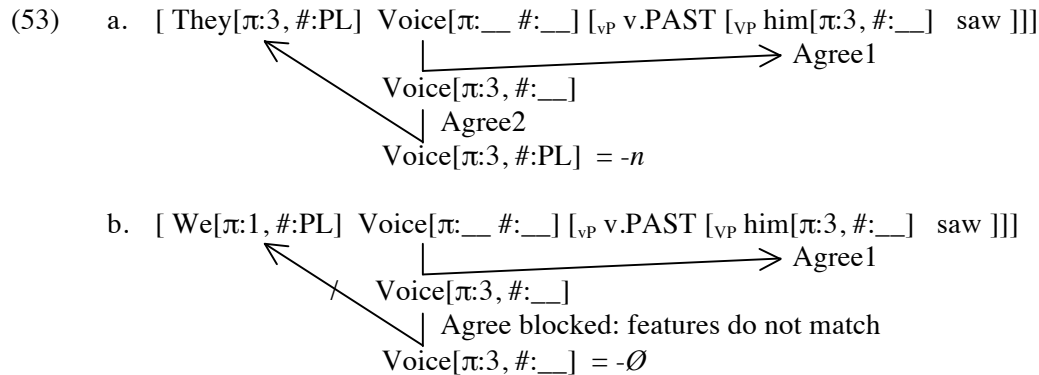
³¹ Another proposal in the literature is that of Nevins (2011), who claims that person features are binary, having both plus and minus values, whereas the plural feature is privative. Our account uses this idea, but in a very limited way; see note 26.

³² See Dorleijn (1996:130-131) for a conceptually similar idea, but she claims that third singular nominals lack a person feature rather than a number feature. Our proposal is also like Nevins's (2011) idea that number is a privative feature, but we restrict this to third person nominals and implement it in terms of cyclic Agree, rather than multiple Agree.

³³ There are some affixes in AK that can spell out plural number on a noun, but they also express other features. For example, there is a plural indefinite suffix *-in* that contrasts with singular indefinite *-ik*, and there is a plural oblique marker *-o* contrasting with *-e*. There is no plural marker for a definite nominative DP, however.

In contrast, first and second person nominals (pronouns) are never vague or ambiguous in their number interpretation, so there is no similar motivation for saying that a representation like [Person: 1, Number: ___] is possible in Kurmanji.

Now suppose that F=Voice agrees with a DP bearing the feature structure in (51) in object position in a past tense sentence. Then the person feature of F is set as [3], but its number feature is not set. When this happens, we may assume, following Bejar and Rezac (2009), that F can probe again, looking for a value for its missing feature. The next place it can look, by the logic of cyclic Agree, is upward, at the subject in Spec, VoiceP. As Béjar and Rezac put it (p. 38) “The IA [internal argument] values the probe *as much as it can*, and the EA [external argument] ends up controlling only if it can add to the value contributed by the internal argument.”³⁴ If the subject is third person plural, then F can get its missing number feature from it, resulting in the feature values [person: 3, number: PL]; these are spelled out at PF as *-n*. This accounts for (46).³⁵ Suppose, however, that the subject is a first or second person plural pronoun. We suggest that Voice can agree with the subject in number in AK only if the person feature that F already received by agreeing with the object matches the person feature of the subject.³⁶ That is true in (46), but not in (48). Therefore, F can pick up a plural feature from the subject in the former, but not in the latter. This is our solution to the puzzle of why nominative first and second person pronouns can trigger plural agreement on the verb when they are nominative ((49)) but not when they are ergative/oblique ((48)). When they are nominative, they are the first thing to agree with Voice, so there is no issue of compatibility with a feature already on Voice, but when they are oblique it is because there is another NP present (the object) that Voice prefers to agree with. This prior agreement has affected the probe, fixing one of its features, such that it is no longer free to agree with a subject that has distinct features. That is the most principled way of explaining these Kurmanji facts that we can come up with.³⁷ The crucial derivations are compared in (53).



³⁴ Note however that the specific features that are in play in our account are different from those in Béjar and Rezac (2009), who study instances of a probe (v) getting a basic person feature (third) from the object and then getting additional person values from the subject (first or second). Béjar and Rezac (2009:40) do suggest, however, that the principles they employ for person features should extend to number features as well, and AK is an instance of this, we claim.

³⁵ It is also possible, of course, that the subject would be third person singular, but then F would be [person: 3, number: SG], spelled out as *-∅*. In this case, we cannot tell if F is agreeing in number with the object or with the subject.

³⁶ This is different from Béjar and Rezac (2009) (who treat person features as essentially privative), but similar in spirit to Nevins’s (2007) “Matched Values” condition applied to the feature third person. It can also be thought of as a generalization of Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) Match condition on Agree, such that not only the feature attributes of the probe and the goal have to match, but also their values, if the probe has any values specified.

³⁷ Note in particular that we do not have to stipulate for AK that there is anything special about the phi-features of the oblique subjects, such as that they lack person-features, as Dorleijn (1996:133) does for Kurmanji, and as others have for languages like Icelandic. While we think this is an advantage, we will have to make a similar stipulation for another dialect below, so we cannot brag about this too much.

This accounts, then, for the very limited way that ergatives can agree in Kurmanji.

What implications does this analysis have for the theory of case and agreement? First, it shows that we must nuance our view about Voice assigning nominative case to the NP it agrees with. That is not entirely true in (46): Voice assigns nominative case to one of the NPs it agrees with, but not to the other. Therefore, we need to revise (22c) to either (54a) or (54b).

- (54) a. If F agrees with NP in person, F assigns nominative case to NP.
b. F assigns nominative case to the first NP that it enters into Agree with.

Either formulation works for the material we have, and we see no empirical way to choose between them; presumably the choice should be made on theoretical grounds. We do not claim that (54) is in any sense an improvement over our original (22c), but we do not take it to be a serious flaw either. In particular, this material does not give any important advantage to a case-driven account. The case-driven account could say that the verb in Kurmanji can agree in person and number with a nominative NP, but it can only agree in number with an ergative NP—but it does not say why, nor why the person features of both the subject and the object influence when this option exists.³⁸

Furthermore, there is an additional fact in this domain that we claim does give positive support to a key aspect of our analysis. We have seen that the past verb can show plural agreement with a third person oblique (ergative) subject when the object is third singular. Given this, we might wonder whether it is also possible for the present tense verb to show plural agreement with a third person oblique (accusative) object when the subject is third singular. In terms of surface morphology, the two situations are parallel: both could be described by saying that agreement with number is possible with the less preferred argument (the oblique) when the features of the more preferred argument (the nominative) do not exhaust the verb’s capacity to agree. Therefore, a simple case-driven approach to agreement does not necessarily expect an asymmetry here. But in fact there is an asymmetry: agreement in number with an oblique/accusative object is never possible in AK, even when the subject is third singular. This is shown in (55).

- (55) Hew wono d₁-vun-(*_{1n})-e
He.NOM they.OBL IMPF-see-(*_{PL})-PRES.COP
He sees them.

This asymmetry is also seen in Dorleijn (1996), albeit in a noisy way given that she surveys a wide range of speakers of different dialects. She observes 125 instances of agreement with 3p oblique subjects, but only 18 instances of agreement with plural oblique objects (p. 119), and she generalizes that “Agreed-with OBL subjects are markedly more frequent than agreed-with OBL objects” (p. 123).

In contrast to the case-driven approach, our agreement-driven theory does expect this asymmetry. A crucial assumption of our approach is that the agreement-bearing head Voice cannot see the object at all in the present tense, because the object is contained in the complement of a phase head (present/active *v*) and the agreeing head F (Voice) is outside this. This is perfectly general, and has nothing to do with particular combination of person and number features on either the subject or the object. We then take

³⁸ Note that plural agreement with the subject in (46) is optional; the sentence is also possible with the verb form *di*. One simple way to get this in our account is to say that the object may (but need not) be specified for number as [person: 3, Number: SG]. When it is so specified, then Voice agrees fully with the object and has no unspecified feature left to agree with the number of the subject. The apparent optionality of number agreement with the subject then reduces to the optionality of fully specifying the phi-features of the object.

However, it seems to be true that number agreement in Kurmanji is often optional anyway, even with third person NPs in nominative case. If so, then there is nothing special to explain about (46) in this regard – although the optionality of agreement in number as opposed to person remains to be understood better. This is an issue that arises in many non-European languages; see for example Aissen’s (1987:50-53) clear description of Tzotzil.

this subtle difference between present and past tense clauses to be additional support for our claim that vP is a phase in present tense but not in past tense in Kurmanji—and that drives how agreement happens, and that in turn drives how case assignment happens.

6. A note on variation across dialects of Kurmanji

Our analysis in this paper is based in the first instance on one dialect of Kurmanji, the one spoken in Adıyaman. This dialect is like the so-called standard (literary) dialect of Kurmanji in most respects, including all the ones that are important for our argument. However, there is a fair amount of variation within Kurmanji dialects, and some of this variation touches on matters that are important to our line of reasoning. Therefore, we include a few remarks on these variations and their apparent relevance to our theoretical concerns, although we do not pretend to be giving a complete analysis of other dialects.

The most robust and interesting alternative pattern is found in the “nonstandard” dialect spoken in Muş, described and analyzed by Gündoğdu (2011). This dialect (MK) is exactly like AK and SK in the present tense, but it is significantly different in the past tenses, in that the transitive subject and the direct object are both in oblique case. The verb then typically bears invariant third singular agreement by default, and there is no nominative DP in the clause.³⁹ Thus, (56a) and (56b) are like SK/AK, but (56c) is notably different.

- (56) a. Ez te di-bin-im.
 I.NOM you.SG.ACC IMPF-see.PRES-1SG
 ‘I see you.’
- b. Ez ket-im. (p. 77)
 I.NOM fall.PAST-1SG
 ‘I fell down.’
- c. Min te dit (Gündoğdu, 2011: p. 81)
 I.ERG you.SG.ACC see.PAST.3SG
 ‘I saw you.’

This pattern is also common in the dialect of Diyarbakır and surrounding areas (DK) studied by Dorleijn (1996). She observes that “Use of ‘double oblique’ constructions instead of ergative/absolute constructions [is] remarkably more frequent in Diyarbakır data” (compared to speakers from other areas; Dorleijn 1996:62, see also p. 118).

The most threatening question for us is whether this alternative pattern shows that the generalizations we have worked to explain are actually spurious ones. The answer, we claim, is that the case for our main theoretical conclusion is weaker in some respects for MK and DK than it is for AK and SK. However, the most crucial properties of our account are still valid for MK, and cross-dialect comparison makes it all the more striking that these properties do not vary even when many others do.

As a path into the MK system, we can observe a second, much more subtle difference between MK and AK that we take to be relevant. This concerns the possibility of plural agreement with DPs in oblique case, discussed for AK in the previous section. Like AK, MK allows such agreement with a third person oblique subject in the past tense ((57a)) but not with an oblique object in the present tense. However, unlike AK, MK allows plural agreement even with an oblique first person plural subject, as shown in (57b) (SG, personal communication).⁴⁰

³⁹ There are also nearby Iranian languages that are like this, except that in some the object is oblique only if it is specific (Stilo 2009:706, 709).

⁴⁰ We predict that MK would also allow plural agreement with a second person plural subject, but that datum has not been collected.

- (59) Ez wan dît-im. (Dorleijn 1996:117)
 1s.NOM 3p.OBL see.PAST-1.SG
 ‘I saw them.’

Basically, then, some speakers of this variety have lost (or are losing) split ergativity, and their Kurmanji has become a nominative-accusative language.⁴²

But the MK variety is not like this, and indeed the OBL-OBL-verb pattern is more common than the NOM-OBL-verb in past sentences even in the Diyarbakır area (Dorleijn 1996:118). For these dialects and speakers, then, we need a source of oblique case for the subjects of the transitive past tense clauses and only those. For this, we suggest the case rule in (60).

- (60) MK: Ergative case is assigned to DP in TP if it c-commands another DP in the same phase.

This is a version of the dependent case assignment rule for ergative case, like the one stated within the case-drives-agreement analysis back in (6a). There is one significant difference, though: (60) does not stipulate directly that ergative case assignment happens in past tense clauses but not in present tense clauses. Rather, it says that ergative case is assigned if and only the two nominals are in the same phase—a condition that is natural on both theoretical and empirical grounds. With this condition, (60) gives the right distribution of oblique case on subjects, given that vP is a phase in present tense clauses in Kurmanji but not in past tense clauses, as we argued above in section 3.4 (the data in that section do not vary across the dialects). On this view, the fact that present vPs are phases and past vPs are not (because of their passive quality) shapes split ergativity in both varieties, but it does so in different ways: in AK it makes the object in present tense clauses invisible for agreement with Voice and nominative case assignment; in MK it makes the object in present tense clauses invisible for purposes of triggering dependent case assignment on the subject. We then need for MK a system for the morphological spell out of case like that in (61), so that ergative case assigned by (60) and default case assigned by (22d) systematically receive the same expression at PF—a morphological “coincidence” that we managed to avoid for AK.

- (61) a. If DP is nominative, add $-\emptyset$ (and allomorphs).
 b. Otherwise, add $-\hat{e}$ (and allomorphs).

Finally, we need to make explicit the implications of a DP having ergative case for agreement. Clearly, the rule in (60) that assigns ergative must happen before Agree applies, so that it prevents F from assigning nominative to the subjects in question. Ergative case also apparently conceals the person feature of the subject from the probe F, but not its number feature—an assumption also made by Dorleijn (1996:133). (See also Hiraiwa (2005:50-53) and sources cited there for number features of dative NPs sometimes influencing agreement in Icelandic, whereas person features of datives never do.) However, it is crucial to our account that the ergative subject still counts as an intervener, blocking F from agreeing with the object in MK. The ergative subject is then a kind of defective intervener in Chomsky’s (2000) sense: it is only partially available to be agreed with itself, but it prevents a more remote NP from being agreed with at all.

The case and agreement system we suggest for MK is then summarized in (62).

- (62) a. Ergative case is assigned to DP in TP if it c-commands another DP in the same phase.

⁴² Dorleijn claims that the pattern in (59) has developed in this area under influence of Turkish, given that there has been a higher percentage of Turkish speakers and more intensive contact between the two languages in Diyarbakır than elsewhere in the Kurmanji area. That may well be, but here we can see that the possibility of this form does also arise naturally out of the parametric choices that are intrinsic to Kurmanji itself, so internal factors could be relevant as well as external ones.

- b. The agreeing probe F is above the base position of the subject.
- c. F agrees with the closest NP probing downward, assigning it nominative unless it is already case marked.
- d. All other NP arguments get oblique case by default.

In this system, most essential difference between MK and AK/SK is (62b). (62a) is also an apparent difference—but in fact if we wanted to minimize the differences between the dialects we could add this to the analysis of AK too and it will do no harm. Having an ergative rule for AK is superfluous, but it is not necessarily wrong. (62c) and (62d) are the same rules as in AK, although their results are somewhat different because they are in the context of the differences in (62a) and (62b).

What does this do to our argument? We do have to acknowledge that there is a degree of case-drivenness to agreement in MK, given that (62a) bleeds (62c). However, this sort of effect is not foreign to a case-assigns-agreement view: it is essentially the common view that DPs with pre-determined case (typically lexical case) are not targets for getting case and agreement in languages like Icelandic. Second, we have to concede that we cannot always infer from the fact that two DPs bear the same morphological form across the whole case paradigm that they received case by the same syntactic rule. Even if that is true for AK, it cannot be true for MK: ergative and oblique are assigned by different syntactic rules, but they are morphologically identical as a result of (61).

However, these differences should not distract us from the fact that MK, AK, DK, and indeed all known varieties of Kurmanji have something very important in common. Across the whole range of dialects, it is true that there can be at most one nominative argument per clause, and that an argument is nominative if and only if the verb agrees with it in person. Those generalizations are just as true for the MK data in (56) and for the DK example in (59) as they are for AK and SK. Thus, Gündoğdu (2011:73-80) observes that there are three patterns found across the Kurmanji dialects (NOM-OBL, OBL-NOM, and OBL-OBL) but not four (*NOM-NOM). Similarly, in Dorleijn's study no NOM-NOM-Verb pattern was used in more than 2.2% of the survey data she collected (1996:118). So the generalizations in (63) hold across the known dialects.⁴³

- (63) a. A DP argument is nominative only if the verb agrees with it in person.
 b. Clauses never have more than one nominative DP argument.

These are also the empirical generalizations that relate most immediately and organically to our claim that nominative case is assigned by a functional head under agreement in Kurmanji. Therefore, we think that our conclusion about the relationship between agreement and this particular case goes through even for the other dialects, although with some complications. Indeed, consideration of all the various ways that the dialects can vary make it that much more striking that there is little or no variation on these two crucial points.

We also do not want to retreat very far from our claim to have explained the fact that there is only one non-nominative case that is used in a wide range of syntactic environments in AK, even though MK does require a morphological account along the lines of (61). Recall that the AK/SK pattern has been stable in Iranian languages of the area for some 2000 years (Stilo 2009:701). Furthermore, both sides of AK's ergativity split are patterns that are robustly attested across languages: the present tense pattern is a normal looking nominative-accusative pattern, and the past tense pattern is a normal looking ergative-absolutive pattern. In contrast, the MK past tense pattern is an innovation by all accounts, a recent breakdown of canonical split ergativity, perhaps on the way toward developing standard accusativity (see

⁴³ Recall, however, from (11) above that nonargument nominals that are not agreed with are also nominative, namely the nominal part of a light verb construction and predicate nominals. The distinction between a true object and the nominal part of light verb construction might not always be obvious. This may account for the small number of examples with the NOM-NOM-verb pattern observed by Dorleijn (1996:118). See also below for a remark on DOM in DK.

(59)). Moreover, the pattern shown by Muş in the past tense is typologically anomalous: there are no known languages outside this family that use a special marked case on both the subject and the object of a transitive clause but not on the subject of an intransitive clause, probably for good functionalist reasons (Comrie 1981:118-119). Therefore, there is typological and diachronic reason to say that the case system defined by (61) and (62), where cases assigned by different syntactic rules are massively neutralized by the morphology, is a marked system that deserves to have a relatively complex and opaque analysis. In contrast, the more stable and typical AK/SK pattern should have the more natural and elegant explanation (ours). In particular, case in AK should not be radically reanalyzed in the light of case in MK.⁴⁴

6. Conclusion

Our overall conclusion, then, is that the details of split ergativity in Adıyaman Kurmanji show that a theory where agreement assigns case is better than a theory where case determines what is agreed with (for this language). Therefore, we do not want to eliminate case assigned by agreement from our theory of UG, contra the simplicity argument in Levin and Preminger (to appear). Fundamentally AK's split ergativity comes down to two main facts: first, *v* in present tense clauses is active, so a phase head, whereas *v* in past tense clauses is passive, so not a phase head; second, the agreeing head in AK is lower than the subject (in Voice) so it agrees with the object if there is one and it can see it, otherwise with the subject. Once we have developed this theory of agreement, then case marking is straightforward: whatever DP the verb agrees with is nominative, and all other DP arguments are oblique. This agreement-driven approach captures the fact that (standard) Kurmanji clauses have at least one nominative DP, that they have at most one nominative DP, and that so-called ergative case and accusative case are really the same case, namely oblique. That then is a close to optimal account of split ergativity in Adıyaman Kurmanji, and one that relates well to facts about its tense-aspect-voice system. Other varieties of Kurmanji may have additional case assignment rules, but the close relationship between nominative case on arguments and person agreement with those arguments can still be observed.

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⁴⁴ Xxx asks us whether Kurmanji has differential object marking (DOM) of the type found in Turkish and other Iranian languages of the area, where only definite objects bear overt case marking, and if so, how that interacts with our analysis. The short answer is no, at least for AK and MK. Indeed, Stilo (2009:701) says categorically that “all forms of Kurmanji lack DOM” and “obliques mark even non-specific objects.” Stilo does however identify related Iranian languages where the issue of DOM does arise, and Dorleijn (1996:62) reports some evidence of DOM in the DK of Kurmanji (again, perhaps, as a result of contact with Turkish). So there is probably an issue to investigate here, but we do not know nearly enough about the factors that condition DOM in these varieties or how DOM interacts with agreement to speculate as to its significance.

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