

# Privativity in Syntax

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# Introduction

## Central thesis

- There are several classes of expressions that are traditionally thought of as *one member in a set of “possible feature values”* —
  - *3rd person* (the presumed set: {1st, 2nd, 3rd})
  - *singular* (the presumed set: {sg., pl.})
  - *nominative* (the presumed set: {NOM, ACC, DAT, ...})
  - etc.
  
- but actually correspond to *the outright absence of valued features* of the relevant class
  - at the level of syntactic computation.

## Central thesis (*cont.*)

- Privativity has been argued to exist in other modules of grammar, of course
  - most famously, perhaps, in phonology (see, e.g., Clements 1985, Archangeli 1988)
  - but also in morphology (see Forchheimer 1953 on **person** features; Harley & Ritter 2002 on **nearly all  $\varphi$ -features**)
- What I want to argue today is that this kind of privativity —  
where certain things we're used to thinking of as “possible values”  
for a given feature are actually the absence of values  
— is common in **syntax** as well.

## *Super-Duper-Important Reminder...!*

- In a **realizational** model of morphology (e.g. Distributed Morphology), the absence of a feature can still be associated with an **overt exponent**
  - this would just reflect the most underspecified insertion rule applicable to given node
    - which kicks in in the absence of more specified feature values
  - cf. English /-z/
    - [NON-PAST, FINITE, 3rd person, singular(, non-auxiliary?)]

⇒ *The claims in this talk are not about nullness!*

# This talk is not about “defaults”

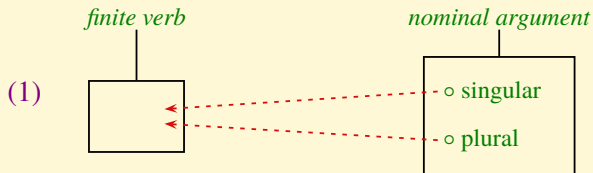
- The argument here is not that *3rd person / singular / nominative / etc.* are “defaults”
- Default values are still extant values;
- Whereas I will defend the thesis that these categories represent *the absence of any feature values whatsoever*
- I hope to show you that this distinction is not some notational nicety;
- It has testable empirical consequences.

## The traditional model

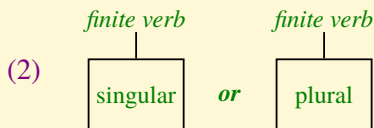


# “Multiple-choice”

- In number-agreement:



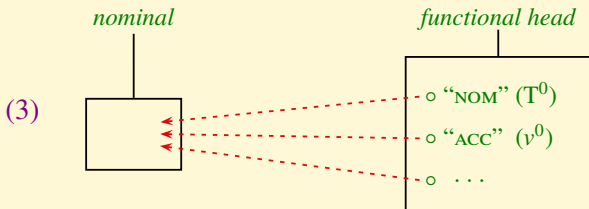
⇒ leading to:



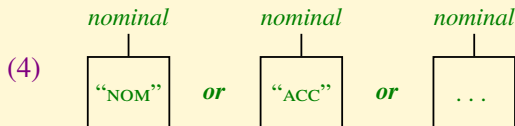
- depending on which feature value the *nominal argument*, above, actually carried

# “Multiple-choice” (cont.)

- In case-assignment:



⇒ leading to:



- depending on which feature value the *functional head*, above, actually carried

## Valuation $\neq$ “multiple-choice”: case study #1

# The K'ichean languages

- Part of the Mayan language family
- Spoken in Guatemala
- Narrowly construed, the K'ichean group consists of:  
Kaqchikel, K'iche', Tz'utujil, and Achi
- Approx. 3 million speakers in total
  
- I cannot possibly do justice to the substantial (and still evolving) knowledge we have about the grammar of these languages
- ➔ Instead, I'm going to zoom in on a particular corner of the grammar of these languages

## The K'ichean languages: the *Agent-Focus* construction

- These languages have a construction known as *Agent-Focus*(=AF)  
(Aissen 1999, 2011, Campbell 2000, Coon et al. 2014, Craig 1979, Davies & Sam-Colop 1990, Dayley 1978, 1985, López Ixcoy 1997, Mondloch 1981, Norman & Campbell 1978, Preminger 2014, Pye 1989, Sam-Colop 1988, Stiebels 2006)
- As a rough approximation, AF serves to circumvent the ban on extracting transitive subjects in K'ichean
- However, neither the “purpose” of AF nor its precise distribution are our primary interest here;
- ➔ Instead, I will treat the existence of AF as a given, and concentrate on the behavior of agreement *in those clauses where AF arises*.

# The K’ichean languages: the *Agent-Focus* construction (cont.)

## (5) OMNIVOROUS AGREEMENT

[Nevins 2011]

A descriptive term, referring to agreement patterns where a given verbal marker reflects the presence of a particular feature [F] on the SUBJECT *or* on the OBJECT (or both).

- K’ichean AF exhibits omnivorous agreement

(6) a. ja **yïn** x-**in**-ax-an ri achin (Kaqchikel)

FOC **me** COM-**1sg**-hear-AF the man

‘It was me that heard the man.’

b. ja ri achin x-**in**-ax-an **yïn**

FOC the man COM-**1sg**-hear-AF **me**

‘It was the man that heard me.’

**NB:** While clefts are used in translations of AF, the construction itself is decidedly *monoclausal* (see, e.g., Aissen 2011, Preminger 2014).

## The K'ichean languages: the *Agent-Focus* construction (*cont.*)

- The previous examples showed omnivorous agreement for PERSON;
- But it is also attested for NUMBER:

(7) a. ja **rje'** x-e-tz'et-ö rja'  
 FOC **them** COM-3pl-see-AF him  
 'It was them who saw him.'

b. ja rja' x-e-tz'et-ö **rje'**  
 FOC him COM-3pl-see-AF **them**  
 'It was him who saw them.'

## A brief note on “salience hierarchies” *et al.*

- These omnivorous agreement effects in K’ichean AF have often been described in terms of a “salience hierarchy” — along the lines of (8):

(8) 1st/2nd person  $\gg$  3rd person plural  $\gg$  3rd person singular

- see, e.g., Dayley 1978, Mondloch 1981, Norman & Campbell 1978, Smith-Stark 1978
- The idea is that the grammar consults (8) to determine which argument will be the target of agreement in a given AF clause



## A brief note on “salience hierarchies” *et al.* (cont.)

- These omnivorous agreement effects in K’ichean AF have often been described in terms of a “salience hierarchy” — along the lines of (8):

(8) 1st/2nd person  $\gg$  3rd person plural  $\gg$  3rd person singular

- While (8) might be a useful shorthand for thinking about these effects, it is quite clear that this is not actually how the grammar works
  - there are quite a few arguments against treating (8) as the mechanism behind omnivorous agreement in K’ichean AF
    - see Preminger (2014:123–128) for five such arguments

⇒ In what follows, I’m going to take it for granted that omnivorous agreement is a syntactic phenomenon that has nothing to do with “salience” (at least not synchronically).

*And now back to our regularly scheduled programming...*

## Viable and non-viable agreement targets in AF

- CLAIM:

- (9) *3rd person singular* noun phrases are not viable targets for agreement in K’ichean AF.
- to be precise, (9) actually follows from two slightly stronger claims, (10a–b):
    - (10) a. *3rd person* noun phrases are not viable targets for PERSON agreement in K’ichean AF.
    - b. *singular* noun phrases are not viable targets for NUMBER agreement in K’ichean AF.
  - but for the sake of simplicity, we’ll stick to *3rd person singular* ones

## Viable and non-viable agreement targets in AF *(cont.)*

- CLAIM:

(9) *3rd person singular noun phrases are not viable targets for agreement in K’ichean AF.*

- Suppose (9) were wrong —

- let  $H^0$  be the probe in a given AF agreement relation;
- since K’ichean exhibits the usual subject-object asymmetries (e.g. with respect to reflexives), it follows that:
  - either the subject will be unambiguously closer to  $H^0$  than the object is, or vice-versa
    - depending on where  $H^0$  is relative to the subject

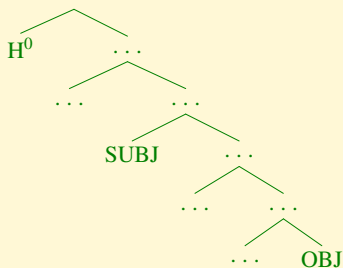
## Viable and non-viable agreement targets in AF *(cont.)*

- CLAIM:

(9) *3rd person singular noun phrases are not viable targets for agreement in K'ichean AF.*

- for expository purposes, let's assume that  $H^0$  is above both the subject and the object, and so the subject is closer

(11)



(this is likely the correct structure anyway; see Aissen 1992, *a.o.*)

## Viable and non-viable agreement targets in AF (*cont.*)

- CLAIM:

(9) *3rd person singular noun phrases are not viable targets for agreement in K’ichean AF.*

- consider now an AF clause with a *3sg* subject —
  - H<sup>0</sup> would encounter the subject prior to encountering the object
  - ➔ if (9) were wrong, and *3sg* nominals were viable targets, *3sg* agreement would be possible in such a case — but it is not:

(12) a. \*ja ri achin x-Ø-ax-an yin  
 FOC **the man** COM-**3sg**-hear-AF me  
 ‘It was the man that heard me.’

b. \*ja rja’ x-Ø-tz’et-ö rje’  
 FOC **him** COM-**3sg**-see-AF them  
 ‘It was him who saw them.’

## Excursus: *Multiple Agree?*

- Suppose that 3sg nominals are somehow “viable-but-insufficient” agreement targets —
  - they carry feature values, but those values are not enough to completely satisfy the needs of the probe
  - the probe then proceeds to search past the initial 3sg target
    - entering into a second agreement relation with a different, more specified target
      - i.e., one bearing a value like *1sg* or *3pl*

### ➡ OBSERVE:

- (i) this would already be a departure from the “multiple-choice” model
  - since different features values are no longer equivalent to one another, in the syntactic behavior they induce
    - e.g. 3sg is fundamentally different from *1sg* or *3pl* in the syntactic behavior it induces

Excursus: *Multiple Agree?* (cont.)

- (ii) this predicts something should go wrong (an “undervalued” probe?) if both the subject and object are of the ‘insufficient’ kind (i.e., 3sg) ...  
... but nothing does:

(13) ja **ri xoq** x-Ø-tz’et-ö **ri achin**  
 FOC **the woman** COM-3sg-see-AF **the man**  
 ‘It was the woman who saw the man.’

- And just to remind you: if we relax the assumption that 3sg targets are themselves ‘insufficient’, we falsely rule in 3sg agreement in exx. like:

(12) a. \* ja **ri achin** x-Ø-ax-an yin  
 FOC **the man** COM-3sg-hear-AF me  
 ‘It was the man that heard me.’

b. \* ja **rja’** x-Ø-tz’et-ö rje’  
 FOC **him** COM-3sg-see-AF them  
 ‘It was him who saw them.’

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome

Overall, our interim conclusion is this:

- *valuation*, in the sense used to describe e.g. (14a) or (14b) —

(14) a. ja **yin** x-in-ax-an ri achin [=(6a)]  
 FOC **me** COM-1sg-hear-AF the man  
 ‘It was me that heard the man.’

b. ja rja' x-e-tz'et-ö **rje'** [=(7b)]  
 FOC him COM-3pl-see-AF **them**  
 ‘It was him who saw them.’

— could not have taken place in an example like (13), repeated here:

(13) ja **ri** xoq x-Ø-tz'et-ö **ri** achin  
 FOC **the woman** COM-3sg-see-AF **the man**  
 ‘It was the woman who saw the man.’



## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome (*cont.*)

- Before moving on, let’s compare the state of affairs we’ve just seen with probe-goal relations involving *wh*-phrases

(15) a.  $[C^0 \text{ [who]}_{<+wh>} \text{ gave [this dish] to [Bob]}]$

→  $[C^0 \text{ [who]}_{<+wh>} \text{ gave [this dish] to [Bob]}]$

→ Who gave this dish to Bob?

b.  $[C^0 \text{ [John] gave [what]}_{<+wh>} \text{ to [Bob]}]$

→  $[C^0 \text{ [John] gave [what]}_{<+wh>} \text{ to [Bob]}]$

→ What did John give to Bob?

c.  $[C^0 \text{ [John] gave [this dish] to [who]}_{<+wh>}]$

→  $[C^0 \text{ [John] gave [this dish] to [who]}_{<+wh>}]$

→ Who did John give this dish to?

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome (*cont.*)

- (15) a. Who gave this dish to Bob?  
 b. What did John give to Bob?  
 c. Who did John give this dish to?

- ↪ In contrast to (15a–c), there really don’t seem to be probe-goal relations in natural language that target exclusively non-*wh*-phrases
- there are probes that just don’t care about *wh*-features —

- (16) a. This reporter thinks that [this promise]<sub>1</sub> was broken *t*<sub>1</sub>.  
 b. Which reporter thinks that [which promise]<sub>1</sub> was broken *t*<sub>1</sub>?
- 

— but there really don’t seem to be any probes that can be satisfied *only* by non-*wh*-phrases.

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome (*cont.*)

- A reasonable approach to these facts would be to say that there really aren't such things as “+*wh*” and “-*wh*”
  - there's just [*wh*], vs. the absence thereof
- Assume you can't probe for the *absence* of something
  - ⇒ you can probe for [*wh*], or you can probe for something else —
    - but there's no way to probe exclusively for non-*wh*-phrases
- That is an added assumption, of course —
  - but it's hard to see how to derive the non-*wh*-phrases probing gap without it

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome *(cont.)*

- If you find this treatment of *wh*-probing reasonable — *and I hope that you do!* — then consider:

(17) *omnivorous probing for...*

	✓	✗
<i>wh</i>	<i>wh</i> -phrases	non- <i>wh</i> -phrases
NUMBER	plural	singular
PERSON	1st/2nd	3rd

⇒ So, by the same logic, we can conclude:

- there is no such thing as “singular” (in syntax)
  - just [plural] vs. the absence thereof
- there is no such thing as “3rd person” (in syntax)
  - just [participant] vs. the absence thereof

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome *(cont.)*

- If you find this treatment of *wh*-probing reasonable — *and I hope that you do!* — then consider:

(17) *omnivorous probing for...*

	✓	✗
<i>wh</i>	<i>wh</i> -phrases	non- <i>wh</i> -phrases
NUMBER	plural	singular
PERSON	1st/2nd	3rd

- At the very least:
  - anyone who wishes to *deny* these conclusions concerning the representations of NUMBER and PERSON in syntax (as well as *wh*) —
    - is on the hook to provide an alternative explanation for (17).

## Non-valuation as a possible grammatical outcome (*cont.*)

- On the view proposed here:

- in a sentence like (13), there really hasn't been *valuation* at all:

(13) ja ri xoq x-Ø-tz'et-ö ri achin  
 FOC **the woman** COM-3sg-see-AF **the man**

‘It was the woman who saw the man.’

- the relevant probe (call it  $H^0$ ) has scanned the structure for constituents bearing [plural] and/or [participant]
  - and has found no such constituents.
- consequently, at the end of the derivation,  $H^0$  still does not bear any [plural] or [participant] values of its own
  - ⇒ the characteristic exponent associated with this *elsewhere* condition arises
  - (which, in this language family, happens to be null)

## A privative representation for $\varphi$ -features in syntax

- These results suggest a syntactic representation of  $\varphi$ -features along the same lines proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002) for morphology
  - examples:
    - “3rd person singular” =  $\emptyset$
    - “3rd person plural” = {plural}
    - “1st person singular” = {participant, author}
    - “1st person plural” = {participant, author, plural}
    - ...

## A privative representation for $\varphi$ -features in syntax (*cont.*)

- These results suggest a syntactic representation of  $\varphi$ -features along the same lines proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002) for morphology

**NB:** Since Harley & Ritter’s (2002) paper, there has been work showing that the privative treatment of PERSON features may not be correct *for the morphological component* (Nevins 2007).

- but note that, unless the syntactic representation of PERSON is indeed privative, as proposed here —
  - we lose our account for the typology of omnivorous probing:

(17)

<i>omnivorous probing for...</i>	✓	✗
<i>wh</i>	<i>wh</i> -phrases	non- <i>wh</i> -phrases
NUMBER	plural	singular
PERSON	1st/2nd	3rd



## Valuation ≠ “multiple-choice”: case study #2

## Case & finite agreement in Sakha

- Sakha (Turkic), like many other NOM-ACC languages, generally allows finite agreement with NOM noun phrases only

- (18) a. oloppos-tor aldjat-ylyn-ny-**lar** [Sakha; B&V:637]  
 chair-PL break-PASV-PST-**3pl.SUBJ**  
 ‘Chairs were broken.’
- b. oloppos-tor-**u** aldjat-ylyn-na  
 chair-PL-**ACC** break-PASV-PST(**3sg.SUBJ**)  
 ‘Chairs were broken.’
- (19) a. \*oloppos-tor-**u** aldjat-ylyn-ny-**lar**  
 chair-PL-**ACC** break-PASV-PST-**3pl.SUBJ**
- b. \*oloppos-tor aldjat-ylyn-na  
 chair-PL break-PASV-PST(**3sg.SUBJ**)

## Case & finite agreement in Sakha (*cont.*)

- There is, however, one class of exceptions to this **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr** correlation —

(20) a. min ehigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ бүгүн t<sub>1</sub> kyaj-yax-xyt ] dien erem-mit-im  
 I you-ACC today win-FUT-2pl.SUBJ that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hoped you would win today.’

b. ehigi bihigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ t<sub>1</sub> kyajtar-dy-byt ] dien xomoj-du-gut  
 you we-ACC lose-PST-1pl.SUBJ that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’ [V05:369, annotations added]

- Importantly, (20a–b) are instances of *raising*
  - i.e., the relation between the embedded subject position and the overtly ACC-marked nominal in the matrix clause is one of movement

## Case & finite agreement in Sakha (*cont.*)

- Evidence for movement (B&V:616–617):
  - the Sakha NPI *kim daqany* (“who PCL”) is only licensed by clausemate-or-higher negation;
- ⇒ an example like (21), where the ACC nominal is base-generated outside the clause that contains negation, is ungrammatical:

(21) \* **min kim-ŋe daqany** [ *pro* **kel-bet** ] **dien**  
 I **who-DAT PCL** **come-NEG.AOR(3sg.SUBJ)** **that**  
 et-ti-m  
 tell-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
*Intended:* ‘I told no one that he should come.’

Case & finite agreement in Sakha (*cont.*)

- But a similar example involving one of the matrix predicates in (20), *eren* (“hope”), is grammatical:

(22) min **kim-i**      **daqany<sub>1</sub>** [ **t<sub>1</sub>** kyaj-**ba-ta**                                  ] **dien**  
 I      **who-ACC** **PCL**                                  win-**NEG-PST(3sg.SUBJ)**      that  
 eren-e-bin  
 hope-AOR-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hope that nobody won.’

⇒ *raising*.

## Case & finite agreement in Sakha (*cont.*)

- Let’s get back, then, to the raising-based exception to **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr**:

(20) a. min ehigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ бүгүн *t*<sub>1</sub> kyaj-yax-xyt ] dien erem-mit-im  
 I you-ACC today win-FUT-2pl.SUBJ that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hoped you would win today.’

b. ehigi bihigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ *t*<sub>1</sub> kyajtar-dy-byt ] dien xomoj-du-gut  
 you we-ACC lose-PST-1pl.SUBJ that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’ [V05:369, annotations added]

- An appealing way to reconcile (20a–b) with the **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr** generalization that holds throughout the rest of the language:

(23) The raised subject *was* nominative at the point in the derivation when it was targeted for agreement.

## How do you change your case?

⇒ If we accept this, it leads to the following question:

*Q: How can a noun phrase go from nominative to accusative in the course of the derivation?*

- Note that this is not about structural vs. inherent cases;
  - both NOM and ACC are structural.

An attempt: case-stacking (B&V:603)

- The idea is that case can be assigned to a single nominal multiple times
  - each case “stacking” outside of the previously assigned one
    - e.g.:

(24) [[[DP]-NOM]-ACC]

- this is inspired by a particular analysis of suffixation patterns in Korean (Yoon 1996, 2004, Levin 2016 *a.o.*)

## Case-stacking in Sakha?

- Kornfilt & Preminger (2015):  
This case-stacking approach won't work for Sakha.
- To see why, we have to first acknowledge that ACC in Sakha cannot be assigned by a functional head like  $v^0$  (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001)
  - evidence (B&V:617–619):
    - (i) ACC can be assigned to raised subjects even if the raised-to clause is anchored by an unaccusative verb

(25) Masha Misha<sub>1</sub>-ny [ t<sub>1</sub> yaldj-ya ] dien tönün-ne  
 Masha Misha-ACC fall.sick-FUT.3sg.SUBJ that return-PAST.3sg.SUBJ  
 ‘Masha returned (for fear) that Misha would fall sick.’

[B&V:618]

- note: the matrix verb in (25) is the intrans. member of a classic transitivity alternation (tönün “return” ~ tönnör “make return”) 40



## Case-stacking in Sakha? (cont.)

- and, as you might expect, the intransitive member of a transitivity alternation in Sakha does not allow its sole argument to bear ACC:

- (26) a. min oloppoh-**u** aldjat-ty-m                      b. caakky(\*-**ny**) aldjan-na  
 I(NOM) chair-**ACC** break-PAST-1sg.SUBJ      cup(\*-**ACC**) break-PAST.3sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I broke the chair.’                                      ‘The cup broke.’                      [B&V:608]

⇒ the source of ACC in an example like (25) cannot be the verb or  $v^0$

- (25) Masha Misha<sub>1</sub>-**ny** [ *t*<sub>1</sub> yaldj-ya                                      ] dien tönün-ne  
 Masha Misha-**ACC**      fall.sick-FUT.3sg.SUBJ      that return-PAST.3sg.SUBJ  
 ‘Masha returned (for fear) that Misha would fall sick.’  
[B&V:618]

- ACC can, however, be *dependent case* (Bittner & Hale 1996, Marantz 1991, Yip et al. 1987)
  - assigned by virtue of structural proximity to the other noun phrase (*Masha*)

Case-stacking in Sakha? *(cont.)*

(ii) ACC can be assigned to raised subjects even if the raised-to clause already contains another ACC-marked argument:


(27) Masha Misha<sub>1</sub>-**ny** [**t**<sub>1</sub> kel-**ie**    dien] djie-**ni**      xomuj-da  
 Masha Misha-**ACC**      come-FUT.3sg.SUBJ that house-**ACC** tidy-PAST.3sg.SUBJ  
 ‘Masha tidied up the house (thinking) that Misha would come.’

[V05:368]

- crucially, it cannot be the case that the verb or  $v^0$  can simply assign multiple instances of ACC in Sakha;
- since that would falsely predict the existence of —
  - ACC-ACC case patterns with dyadic verbs
  - NOM-ACC-ACC case patterns with triadic verbs (neither of which is attested)

## Case-stacking in Sakha? (cont.)

- ➡ Conclusion: ACC in Sakha *dependent case*.
- ⇒ Next question: Do already-case-marked noun phrases count for the calculation of *dependent case*?
- K&P: If we allow already-case-marked noun phrases to participate in *dependent case* relations —
  - we predict that any noun phrase scrambled past the subject would result in ACC marking *on the subject*;
  - this does not happen:

(28)  deriebine-ni<sub>1</sub> orospuonnjuk-tar t<sub>1</sub> xalaa-byt-tar [B&V:604]  
 village-ACC robber-PL(NOM) raid-PRT-3pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Some robbers raided the village.’

**REMEMBER:** We cannot say NOM on the subject is what blocks it from later getting ACC; how NOM noun phrases turn into ACC ones is our very explanandum!

## In search of an alternative

- ↪ We can conclude that Sakha does not have case-stacking, at least not of ACC over NOM.
- ⇒ Consequently, that cannot be the account of our central explanandum, repeated here:

- (20) a. min ehigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ бүгүн t<sub>1</sub> kyaj-yax-xyt ] dien erem-mit-im  
 I you-ACC today win-FUT-2pl.SUBJ that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hoped you would win today.’
- b. ehigi bihigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ t<sub>1</sub> kyajtar-dy-byt ] dien xomoj-du-gut  
 you we-ACC lose-PST-1pl.SUBJ that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’ [V05:369, annotations added]

## In search of an alternative *(cont.)*

- Let’s review where we are:

- (i) ACC in Sakha is *dependent case*
- (ii) already-case-marked noun phrases do not count for subsequent *dependent case* relations

⇒ It follows that the raised subjects in (20a–b) were caseless, prior to receiving ACC case under case competition with the matrix subject.

(20) a. min ehigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ бүгүн *t*<sub>1</sub> kyaj-yax-xyt ] dien erem-mit-im  
 I you-ACC today win-FUT-2pl.SUBJ that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hoped you would win today.’

b. ehigi bihigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ *t*<sub>1</sub> kyajtar-dy-byt ] dien xomoj-du-gut  
 you we-ACC lose-PST-1pl.SUBJ that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’ [V05:369, annotations added]

## In search of an alternative *(cont.)*

- ⇒ Consequently, we can categorically rule out the idea that agreement results in the assignment of case
- that’s because the noun phrases in question were agreed with in the embedded clause (before raising)
  - and yet, they were subsequently candidates for the assignment of *dependent case*
    - which, we already know, cannot be assigned when the noun phrases entering into the relation are already case marked

## NOM as caselessness

- Interim summary:

- (i) prior to raising-to-ACC, the raised noun was caseless
  - (ii) agreement does not result in the assignment of case

⇒ The **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr** generalization cannot have anything to do with case *assignment*

- since at least some of the noun phrases involved *have not been assigned case at all*

- How can the **NOM** ⇔ **finite agr** generalization be captured, then?

- ➔ PROPOSAL:

(29) only caseless noun phrases can be targeted for agreement (in Sakha)

## NOM as caselessness (*cont.*)

◆ PROPOSAL:

(29) only caseless noun phrases can be targeted for agreement (in Sakha)

- If true, this entails that even in a simple example like (30) —

(30) *Masha tūrgennik salamaat sie-te.*

*Masha* quickly porridge eat-PST.3sg.SUBJ

‘Masha ate porridge quickly.’

[*B&V:625*]

- the “nominative” (and agreed with) phrase *Masha* is actually ...  
... **caseless**.



## A privative representation for case in syntax

- Here, we don't have the precise counterpart of Harley & Ritter 2002 as a model for our syntactic representations
- ➔ However, recent work by Zompí (2016) and others may provide exactly what we're looking for
  - Zompí takes, as his target of explanation, Caha's (2009) results concerning attested and unattested patterns of case syncretism
    - and their account in terms of containment relations among different kinds of case
  - he shows that Caha's results can be recouped using a simpler containment schema
    - based on Marantz's (1991) categories of case

(31) [[[UNMARKED] DEPENDENT] LEXICAL]

[Zompí 2016]

# A privative representation for case in syntax (*cont.*)

## 1) [[[UNMARKED] DEPENDENT] LEXICAL]

[Zoppi 2016]

- If you are unfamiliar with how Marantz’s (1991) case system works, here are the basics
  - **LEXICAL**: case assigned to a noun phrase by virtue of the lexical identity of the head that selects it  
(exx.: *instrumental, locative*)
  - **DEPENDENT**: case assigned to a noun phrase by virtue of structural proximity to another, as-of-yet caseless noun phrase  
(exx.: *accusative, ergative*)
  - **UNMARKED**: *elsewhere* (exx.: *nominative, absolutive*)
- And note: once again, “UNMARKED” ≠ phonologically null

# A privative representation for case in syntax *(cont.)*

## 1) [[[UNMARKED] DEPENDENT] LEXICAL]

[Zompí 2016]

- the same containment relations have been argued for by:
  - Bobaljik (2015) and Smith et al. (2016)
    - looking at attested and unattested patterns of suppletion in pronouns, in the vein of Bobaljik’s 2012 work on comparatives & superlatives
  - Demirok (2013)
    - reinterpreting Bobaljik’s (2008) observations regarding the agreement accessibility hierarchy (itself a refinement of Moravcsik 1978) in terms of containment

# A privative representation for case in syntax *(cont.)*

## 1) [[[UNMARKED] DEPENDENT] LEXICAL]

[Zompí 2016]

- Importantly, this proposal for containment relations is fully compatible with nominative (*viz.* UNMARKED case) being the complete absence of case values

  - set-theoretically, the empty set ( $\emptyset$ ) is in a containment relation with any other set
- ⇒ the containment statements UNMARKED  $\in$  DEPENDENT and UNMARKED  $\in$  LEXICAL are trivially derived

## Parallels between PERSON and case

- If we accept the results so far, a potentially interesting parallel arises between the structure of PERSON features and case features
- In both cases, we have:
  - a category of expressions traditionally considered a “possible value” of the relevant class of features (*3rd person*, *nominative*);
  - but which is in fact represented—at least in syntax—as the complete absence of feature values of the relevant class;
  - and which is part of a(n at least) 3-way containment structure

(32) [ [ [  $\emptyset$  ]<sup>“3rd person”</sup> participant ]<sup>“2nd person”</sup> speaker ]<sup>“1st person”</sup>

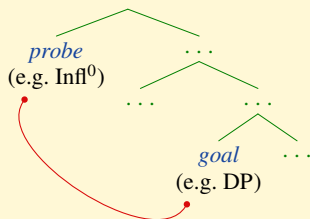
(33) [ [ [  $\emptyset$  ]<sup>“nominative”</sup> DEPENDENT ]<sup>“accusative”</sup> LEXICAL ]<sup>“<various>”</sup>

## Probe-goal relations in a privative syntax

# What needs fixing

- The *probe-goal* approach to syntactic relations (Chomsky 2000, 2001) is designed around the “multiple-choice” model of feature values

(34)



- features on the *probe* come into the derivation unvalued (or unchecked, or uninterpretable, or ...)
- they can then be valued (or checked, or made interpretable, or ...) by whatever is found on the *goal*
  - incl., for example, “3rd person” / “nominative” / etc.

## What needs fixing (*cont.*)

- Given the conclusions of the last two sections, this cannot possibly be how things work
  - recall, in particular, the argument that in K'ichean AF clauses with two 3sg nominals, there can't have been *valuation* at all —

(13) ja ri xoq x-Ø-tz'et-ö ri achin  
 FOC **the woman** COM-3sg-see-AF **the man**  
 'It was the woman who saw the man.'

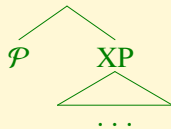
— because the relevant probes are looking for goals bearing [plural] and [participant] in particular (rather than just any nominal goal)

- ⇒ What we need is a framework for *probe-goal* relations where probes in syntax can (and quite often do) fail to find the features they seek —
- resulting in what we have come to call “3rd person”; “singular”; “nominative”; and so forth



# Assumptions & definitions: syntax

- **probe**: a syntactic element that carries a syncategorematic instruction to search for a valued instance of (at least one) feature [*f*]
  - the search may yield an actual instance of [*f*], or not;
  - what is obligatory is the **search**.
  
- Syntax is strictly cyclic ( $\equiv$  *impatient*)
  - $\Rightarrow$  as soon as a probe  $\mathcal{P}$  is merged, any syncategorematic instructions associated with it are immediately carried out
    - this means that what  $\mathcal{P}$  can scan is all and only the material that was already present in the derivation when it was merged
  - $\Rightarrow$  giving rise to the c-command condition on valuation:  
(cf. Béjar & Rezac 2009)



## Assumptions & definitions: syntax *(cont.)*

- The scanning implicated in the previous definitions refers to an iterative, top-to-bottom search algorithm
  - which meets (at least) the following adequacy conditions:

(35) *adequacy conditions on Iterative Downward Search (IDS) algorithm*

- a. If  $y$  asymmetrically c-commands  $x$ , then IDS algorithm will encounter  $y$  before it encounters  $x$ .
- b. If  $y$  asymmetrically dominates  $x$ , then IDS algorithm will encounter  $y$  before it encounters  $x$ .

## Assumptions & definitions: syntax *(cont.)*

- Here's an example of an algorithm that meets these adequacy criteria:

(36) a. Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be a syntactic probe, and let  $XP$  be  $\mathcal{P}$ 's sister

b. QUERY: Is  $XP$  a viable goal? If so, **halt**, with “ $XP$ ” as the search result

c. For every specifier  $ZP$  of  $XP$ :

QUERY: Is  $ZP$  a viable goal? If so, **halt**, with “ $ZP$ ” as the search result

d. QUERY: Is  $XP$  a phase? If so, **halt**, with **no goal**

e. QUERY: Does  $X^0$  have a complement? If not, **halt**, with **no goal**

f. Return to step (b), using the constituent in [Compl, $X$ ] as the new “ $XP$ ”

## Assumptions & definitions: morphology

- The spellout rules that apply to  $\mathcal{P}$  may include an ‘elsewhere’ rule
    - i.e., a spellout rule whose only specification is that it applies to  $\mathcal{P}$  nodes
    - such a rule will be preempted by spellout rules that are both applicable to  $\mathcal{P}$  and specify at least one  $[f]$  in the insertion environment
    - for example: a particular language could have —
      - a non-null exponent  $y$  for number probes bearing a [plural] value
      - and another non-null exponent  $x$  for number probes generally
- ⇒ resulting in what we would descriptively characterize as a “plural morpheme” ( $y$ ) and a “singular morpheme” ( $x$ )

## Case study #1 revisited: agreement in K'ichean AF

- I will focus here on number agreement in K'ichean AF
  - (the state of affairs w.r.t. person is similar, with some complications that ultimately prove innocuous; see Preminger 2014 for details)
- RECALL: It cannot be the case that K'ichean AF clauses with “3rd person singular agreement” involve *valuation* of  $\varphi$ -features
- Let  $\#^0$  be the head relevant to NUMBER agreement in K'ichean AF
  - suppose that  $\#^0$  bears an instruction to search for [plural]
  - and that it enters the derivation *after* both the subject and object have been introduced
- On the assumptions just stated:
  - the fate of non-[plural]-bearers (a.k.a. singular phrases) should be identical to the fate of, e.g., non-[*wh*]-bearers w.r.t. probing for [*wh*]
    - namely, they should be skipped

Case study #1 revisited: agreement in K'ichean AF (*cont.*)

⇒ This derives the *omnivorous agreement* behavior exemplified in (7a–b) (repeated from earlier)

(7) a. ja **rje'** x-e-tz'et-ö rja'  
 FOC **them** COM-3pl-see-AF him  
 'It was them who saw him.'

b. ja rja' x-e-tz'et-ö **rje'**  
 FOC him COM-3pl-see-AF **them**  
 'It was him who saw them.'

**NB:** Assume that the Agent in (7a–b) moves to a focus position (and out of the c-command domain of #<sup>0</sup>) only after agreement has already taken place.

Case study #1 revisited: agreement in K'ichean AF (*cont.*)

- On the other hand, when neither the subject nor object are plural:
  - there is no accessible bearer of [plural] that #<sup>0</sup> could find

⇒ Trivially, then, valuation could not have taken place:

- (13) ja **ri xoq** x-Ø-tz'et-ö **ri achin**  
 FOC **the woman** COM-3sg-see-AF **the man**  
 'It was the woman who saw the man.'

- This is what “singular agreement” is —
  - it is the absence of valued [plural] features on a probe.
- “3rd person agreement” in K'ichean arises in essentially the same way
  - as a failure to find an accessible bearer of valued [participant]

## Case study #2 revisited: case in Sakha

- RECALL: It cannot be that NOM noun phrases in Sakha have been *assigned case* in any meaningful sense
  - we need an account of case assignment that delivers this

**Proposal:** (following Levin & Preminger 2015, Preminger 2014, but modified)

- There are two kinds of case assignment (cf. Baker 2015, Baker & Vinokurova 2010, Bittner & Hale 1996, Marantz 1991, Yip et al. 1987) —
  - **LEXICAL**: for a designated head  $H^0$ , assign case  $c(H^0)$  to the noun phrase that is closest-under- $c$ -command and caseless  
(exx.: “*INSTR*”, “*P<sub>COMP</sub>*”, “*NOM*”(!) in English)
  - **DEPENDENT**: for a pair of noun phrases  $P = \langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$  that stand in a sufficiently local  $c$ -command relation, pick  $dir \in \{\text{HIGHER}, \text{LOWER}\}$ , and assign case  $c(dir)$  to the  $dir$  member of  $P$   
(exx.: “*ACC*”, “*ERG*”)



## Case study #2 revisited: case in Sakha (*cont.*)

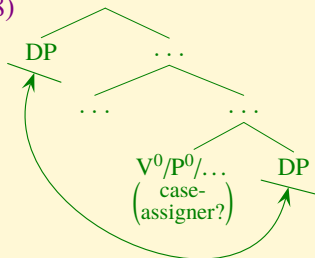
- There is no such thing as “**UNMARKED** case” (incl. “nominative”)
  - except in the same sense as there’s such a thing as “3rd person” and “singular”
  - i.e., it is simply the outright absence of valued case features
- Instead, noun phrases that have failed to receive **LEXICAL** or **DEPENDENT** case receive the morphology associated with the *elsewhere* case
- ⇒ This derives the ordering (stipulated in accounts like Marantz 1991) placing **UNMARKED** case after the two other types of case:

(37) **UNMARKED** >> **DEPENDENT** >> ...

## Case study #2 revisited: case in Sakha (*cont.*)

- As noted in Preminger 2014, in the special case in which **LEXICAL** case is assigned under sisterhood (a.k.a. “inherent case”) —
  - it is predicted to preempt **DEPENDENT** case
- That’s because, on a bottom-up model of structure building —

(38)



- the sisterhood relation in question will obtain before the necessary configuration for **DEPENDENT** case assignment

## Case study #2 revisited: case in Sakha (*cont.*)

- ⇒ This derives the ordering (again, stipulated in accounts like Marantz 1991) placing INHERENT/OBLIQUE case before DEPENDENT case
- and, by extension, before UNMARKED case as well

(39) UNMARKED ≫ DEPENDENT ≫ INHERENT/OBLIQUE

## Case study #2 revisited: case in Sakha (*cont.*)

Overall, this provides a picture of what “nominative” in Sakha is, such that:

- (i) we still have a way of capturing the **NOM**  $\Leftrightarrow$  **finite agr** generalization
- (29) only caseless noun phrases can be targeted for agreement (in Sakha)
- (ii) but we can also account for how noun phrases go from being “nominative” to being accusative —

(20) a. min ehigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ бүгүн t<sub>1</sub> kyaj-yax-xyt ] dien erem-mit-im  
 I you-ACC today win-FUT-2pl.SUBJ that hope-PST-1sg.SUBJ  
 ‘I hoped you would win today.’

b. ehigi bihigi<sub>1</sub>-ni [ t<sub>1</sub> kyajtar-dy-byt ] dien xomoj-du-gut  
 you we-ACC lose-PST-1pl.SUBJ that become.sad-PST-2pl.SUBJ  
 ‘Y’all were disappointed that we lost.’

[V05:369, annotations added]

- namely, they are caseless nominals (“nominative”) that are subsequently assigned **DEPENDENT** case (accusative) by virtue of their structural proximity to the matrix=subject

## What (else) privativity can do for you

## The lay of the land so far

- We've seen that adequate accounts of K'ichean AF and raising in Sakha require privative models of  $\varphi$ -features and case, respectively
- The way I see it, these are existence 'proofs' that such representations are necessary
- ➔ If this is correct, it means well-formed sentences in which some instance of *valuation* failed to occur could be lurking all over the place
- This, in turn, opens up analytical possibilities that were unavailable in the traditional, "multiple-choice" model of valuation
  - in particular: a kind of bleeding

## Bleeding-like interactions in syntax

- Suppose that some operation  $\textcircled{O}$  depends on *valuation* culminating successfully, in order to furnish its input
- Then, if there is a sentence where *valuation* could not have possibly culminated successfully —
  - but the sentence only has a parse in which  $\textcircled{O}$  has applied —
    - ➔ we expect ungrammaticality to arise.
- *In light of this, consider...*

Bleeding-like interactions in syntax (*cont.*)(40) PATTERNS OF CASE-DISCRIMINATION IN  $\varphi$ -AGREEMENT VS. MOVEMENT TO CANONICAL SUBJECT POSITION (MtoCSP)

- a. Hebrew: candidates for MtoCSP: {NOM} = candidates for finite  $\varphi$ -agreement: {NOM}
- b. Icelandic: candidates for MtoCSP: {NOM, ACC, DAT, ...}  $\supsetneq$  candidates for finite  $\varphi$ -agreement: {NOM}
- c. \*unattested: candidates for MtoCSP: {NOM}  $\subsetneq$  candidates for finite  $\varphi$ -agreement: {NOM, ACC}

⇒ movement to subject position can do only one of two things:

- grab the closest nominal regardless of case (40b)
- grab that nominal which was targeted for  $\varphi$ -agreement (40a)



Bleeding-like interactions in syntax (*cont.*)

- This, I have argued, provides an explanation for why intervention by dative nominals yields ungrammaticality in some languages (e.g. Icelandic) —
  - but a morphological ‘default’ in others (e.g. French)
- Icelandic:

(41) [Einhverjum stúdent]<sub>1</sub> finnast *t*<sub>1</sub> [<sub>SC</sub> tölvurnar ljótar ].  
 some student.DAT find.PL computers.the.NOM ugly  
 ‘Some student finds the computers ugly.’

(42) það finnst (/ \*finnast) [einhverjum stúdent]<sub>DAT</sub> [<sub>SC</sub> tölvurnar ljótar ].  
 EXPL find.SG / \*find.PL some student.DAT computers.the.NOM ugly  
 ‘Some student finds the computers ugly.’ [H&H:999–1000]

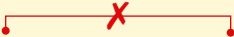
## Bleeding-like interactions in syntax (*cont.*)

- In Icelandic, no other operation depends on  $\varphi$ -feature valuation to furnish its input
- As argued earlier, failed valuation is a perfectly acceptable outcome for this particular operation
  - ⇒ dative intervention does nothing but interrupt what would otherwise be successful  $\varphi$ -feature valuation;
    - but other than that, everything else proceeds normally

Bleeding-like interactions in syntax (*cont.*)

- Cf. French(/Mod. Greek/...):

(43) \* Jean<sub>1</sub> semble [à Marie]<sub>DAT</sub> [ t<sub>1</sub> avoir du talent ].  
 Jean seems to Marie have.INF of talent  
 ‘Jean seems to Marie to have talent.’ [Anagnostopoulou 2003:38]



- French is a language in which movement to subject is set to:  
*grab the nominal that has been targeted for  $\varphi$ -agreement*
- but (43) only has a parse in which movement to subject has  
successfully applied;
- ➔ the grammar could never generate this string, since this input to  
 movement to subject was not available  
 ⇒ hence, ungrammaticality arises.

## Bleeding-like interactions in syntax *(cont.)*

- I've shown you this not because it's necessarily the right analysis of dative intervention in particular —  
    (though I think that it is)  
— but because I think it's a model for the interaction of syntactic operations that is underutilized / underexplored.

# Conclusion

# Conclusion










- At least some of what are traditionally considered “feature values” actually represent the wholesale absence of values
  - at least as far as syntax is concerned
- This includes, at the very least:
  - “3rd person”
  - “singular”
  - “nominative”
- This is not the (familiar) claim that these values are *defaults*; rather, it is the claim that there is no value there in the syntactic computation
  - with attendant consequences that are unavailable on a simple *defaults*-based view
    - incl.: agreement in K’ichean AF, case in Sakha, dative intervention cross-linguistically

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