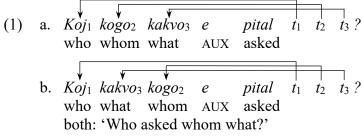# Object agreement in South Caucasian via the Principle of Minimal Compliance
Steven Foley, UC Santa Cruz

Overview • The Principle of Minimal Compliance (PMC; Richards 1997, 1998) allows a syntactic constraint to be ignored just in case it had been complied with at a previous stage in the derivation. This paper explores a prediction of the PMC — that a high φ-probe like T^0 may interact with the object (thereby violating standard locality conditions on Agree) just in case a previous φ-probe interacts with the subject — and argues that this prediction is borne out in the South Caucasian languages. Combined with a post-syntactic filtering mechanism that compares derivations with identical numerations, this approach captures key generalizations about South Caucasian agreement and offers better empirical coverage than alternatives (e.g., Béjar & Rezac 2009).

Background on the PMC • An example of a PMC effect comes from Bulgarian (Richards 1997, via Bošković 1995). In this language's multiple *wh*-questions, all *wh*-phrases move to the clause periphery. While the structurally highest *wh*P must be linearly first, the lower ones are freely ordered with respect to each other (1).
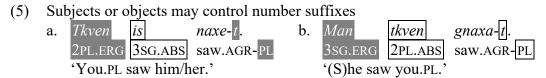
(1)   a.   *Koj₁ kogo₂ kakvo₃   e   pital   t₁ t₂ t₃ ?*
         who   whom   what   AUX   asked

   b.   *Koj₁ kakvo₃ kogo₂   e   pital   t₁ t₂ t₃ ?*
         who   what   whom   AUX   asked
         both: 'Who asked whom what?'

Richards derives this word order flexibility in the following way. When C^0 first probes for a *wh*P, it is subject to standard locality conditions (e.g., Attract Closest, AC), and therefore can only attract the highest one. Having now minimally complied with AC, C^0 is free to ignore the constraint on subsequent rounds of probing. This leads to derivational optionality. C^0 may next attract the middle *wh*P (tucking it into a lower specifier) and thereby continue to obey AC (1a). Alternatively, it may attract the lowest *wh*P and violate AC (1b).

South Caucasian agreement • Verbs in the South Caucasian languages have several morphological slots that register arguments' φ-features: a prefixal slot filled by morphemes I assume to be pronominal clitics (following Halle & Marantz 1993); an inner suffixal slot that expresses tense–aspect–mood (TAM) features along with an argument's φ-features; and an outer suffixal slot for number agreement. However, these agreement loci do not all behave alike: the TAM suffix slot is dedicated to (non-dative) subject agreement, while the other slots might covary with either the subject or the object. Table (2) summarizes the patterns, and data from Georgian illustrate (3–5).
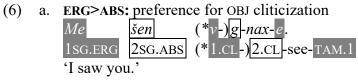
(2)

Slot	Clitic	Verb Stem	TAM.AGR	#.AGR
Controller	SUBJ or OBJ		SUBJ only	SUBJ or OBJ

(3)   Only subjects can control TAM suffixes
   a.   *Man*   *isini*   {*nax-a*,   *nax-es}.
         3SG.ERG   3PL.ABS   see-TAM.3SG,   see-TAM.3PL
         '(S)he saw them.'

   a.   *Mat*   *is*   {*nax-es*,   *nax-a}.
         3PL.ERG   3SG.ABS   see-TAM.3PL,   see-TAM.3SG
         'They saw him/her.'

(4)   Subjects or objects may procliticize
   a.   *Me*   *is*   *v-naxe*.   b.   *Man*   *me*   *m-naxa*.
         1SG.ERG   3SG.ABS   1SUBJ.CL-saw.AGR   3SG.ERG   1SG.ABS   1OBJ.CL-saw.AGR
         'I saw him/her.'   '(S)he saw me.'

(5) Subjects or objects may control number suffixes

a. *Tkven* *is* *naxe-t*.
   2PL.ERG 3SG.ABS saw.AGR-PL
   'You.PL saw him/her.'

b. *Man* *tkven* *gnaxa-t*.
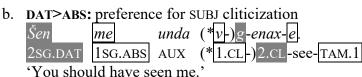   3SG.ERG 2PL.ABS saw.AGR-PL
   '(S)he saw you.PL.'

Analysis • South Caucasian agreement parallels Bulgarian multiple *wh*-movement in the following way. In South Caucasian verbs, one agreement slot is fixed (it must covary with the subject) while others are flexible (they may covary with the subject or object, depending on their features). Likewise, in Bulgarian one *wh*-'slot' is fixed (the leftmost peripheral position must be occupied by the highest *wh*P), while others are flexible (subsequent peripheral positions may be occupied by any lower *wh*P). Cashing in on this parallel, I propose that T^0 in South Caucasian bears three probes: one for person features (*u*π, exponed by TAM suffixes), one for number features (*u*#, exponed by number suffixes), and one which triggers clitic doubling (call it *u*CL). These are crucially ordered, such that *u*π probes first. Thus, this probe is rigidly constrained by locality conditions; the subject is its only possible goal. When *u*# and *u*CL probe, though, the PMC allows them to ignore locality constraints and Agree with the object, around the subject.

Derivational filtration • The PMC can result in more than one well-formed syntactic output for a single numeration. This manifests in Bulgarian multiple *wh*-questions as free variation in the order of lower *wh*Ps (1). However, we do not observe free variation in South Caucasian agreement. Just what rules out, for example, the derivations where *u*CL triggers clitic doubling of the object in (4a), or the subject in (4b)? I suggest that derivations with identical numerations compete for realization; post-syntactic constraints filter out those whose morphology is not optimally economical and expressive (Kiparsky 2005). Object cliticization loses to subject cliticization in (4a), for instance, because third-person object clitics in Georgian happen to be null; consequently, the attested form *v-naxe* is more expressive than the alternative *Ø-naxe. There is no filtration in Bulgarian because alternative word orders for multiple *wh*-questions tie along these morphological dimensions.

Against an alternative • Béjar & Rezac (2009) explore another way to capture South Caucasian's flexible proclitic system. For them, these morphemes expone v^0, which bears a *φ*-probe relativized to search for [+PART] (i.e., first- or second-person) arguments. v^0 first probes downward. If it finds a [+PART] object, it will be satisfied, and cease probing. If it instead finds a [–PART] object, v^0 will Agree a second time 'upwards', probing the subject merged in its specifier. This analysis elegantly captures the fact that, should the subject and object both be exponable with an overt clitic, the South Caucasian languages prefer an object clitic (6a).

(6) a. **ERG>ABS:** preference for OBJ cliticization
   Me *šen* (*v-)*g-nax-e*.
   1SG.ERG 2SG.ABS (*1.CL-)2.CL-see-TAM.1
   'I saw you.'

   b. **DAT>ABS:** preference for SUBJ cliticization
   Šen *me* *unda* (*v-)*g-enax-e*.
   2SG.DAT 1SG.ABS AUX (*1.CL-)2.CL-see-TAM.1
   'You should have seen me.'

However, the object clitic preference only holds for clauses with ERG or ABS subjects. In DAT subject constructions, we instead observe a *subject* clitic preference (6b). This fact is a sticking point for Béjar & Rezac's analysis, but it follows straightforwardly under the present account. An object clitic is preferable to a subject clitic in (6a) because it makes the verb as a whole more expressive, indexing features of the argument not reflected by the suffix. But because in South Caucasian DAT subjects are inaccessible to *u*π (as they are in many languages), the suffix in (6b) actually tracks the object. Therefore, in this case *subject* cliticization makes for a more expressive verb.