

PCC repair in Basque and Choctaw transitive unaccusatives

Matthew Tyler
Yale University

1 Introduction

Person Case Constraint (PCC) restrictions are bans on certain combinations of internal argument clitics. The original, ‘strong’ form of the PCC, first analyzed in detail by Bonet (1991) can be stated as in (1).

- (1) The Person Case Constraint (Adger & Harbour 2007:4)
In a ditransitive, where both internal arguments are realized as phonologically weak elements, the direct object must be third person.

Basque (eus), one of the two languages discussed in this paper, exhibits strong PCC effects. Example (2) shows a PCC-violating ditransitive—the direct object is 1st-person and the indirect object 2nd-person. Furthermore, both are clitic-doubled on the auxiliary—that is, they are realized as ‘phonologically weak elements’.¹

- (2) *Eurak suri neu presenta **n** -a **-tzu** -e.
they.ERG you.DAT me.ABS introduced **1SG.ABS** -AUX **-2SG.DAT** -PL.ERG
intended: ‘They introduced **me to you.**’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)

While the sentence in (2) is ditransitive, PCC effects are found elsewhere in Basque: in particular, they are found with certain monotransitive verbs, which feature a dative experiencer argument and an absolutive theme or source argument—a type of *transitive unaccusative* verb. One such verb, found in Basque dialects in contact with Spanish, is *ondo jausi* ‘like’ (literally ‘fall well’). (3a) shows that this verb can happily take a 1st-person (dative) experiencer and a 3rd-person (absolutive) theme, but when the theme is made 2nd-person as in (3b), the resulting sentence is ungrammatical, consistent with this verb exhibiting PCC effects.

- (3) a. Niri **Jon** ondo jaus-ten gasta.
me.DAT **Jon.ABS** well fall-IMPF AUX
‘I like Jon.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)
b. *Niri **su** ondo jaus-ten sasta.
me.DAT **you.ABS** well fall-IMPF AUX
intended: ‘I like you.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)

In this paper, I first show that Choctaw (cho) also has strong PCC effects in a semantically-similar class of transitive unaccusative verbs. Second, I show that

¹Example (2) should also convince the reader that Basque does not exhibit *weak* PCC effects (Bonet 1991, Anagnostopoulou 2005). The weak PCC does not rule out combinations of internal argument clitics where both arguments are 1st or 2nd-person.

Choctaw and some Basque dialects make use of the same mechanism to repair PCC violations on these verbs, termed *Absolutive Promotion* (Arregi & Nevins 2012).² Absolutive Promotion involves ‘promoting’ an absolutive argument by giving it ergative case. As a result, it is doubled by a different clitic, and there is no PCC violation. Finally, I show that a different argument is targeted for promotion in each of the two languages. The crucial difference, I argue, is the presence vs. absence of dative case on the highest argument in the syntactic structure.

2 Clitics and case in Basque and Choctaw

In this section, I show that both Basque and Choctaw have argument-doubling clitics, and that these clitics spell out the case features of the arguments they double.

2.1 Basque

Basque marks DPs for ergative, absolutive and dative case. All three are shown in a single sentence in (4).

- (4) Eur-**ak** su-**ri** liburu bixaldu tzue
 they-**ERG** you-**DAT** book.**ABS** sent AUX
 ‘They have sent the book to you.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:79)

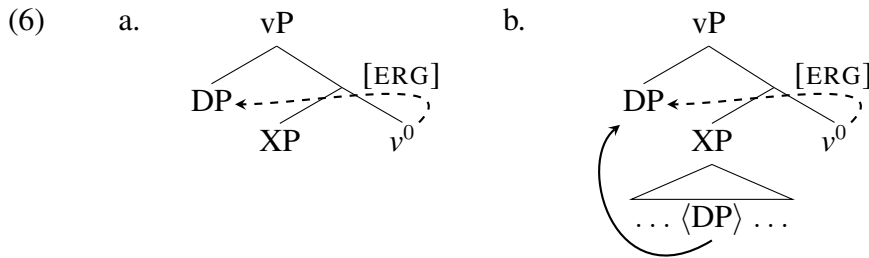
Furthermore, Arregi & Nevins (2012) argue that the Basque auxiliary can be morphologically decomposed into a number of component morphemes, which crucially include *argument-doubling clitics* cross-referencing ergative, absolutive and dative arguments. The auxiliary *tzue* in (4) is decomposed in (5), showing the ergative and dative clitics from which it is composed.³

- (5) d -o -tzu -e. (>tzue)
 L -T.AGR -2SG.DAT -PL.ERG

I follow Artiagoitia (2001), Arregi & Nevins (2012) and Rezac *et al.* (2014) in assuming that Basque ergative is a *structural* case associated with the Spec-vP position (at least in the Western Basque dialects considered here). Firstly, this captures how all external arguments receive ergative case—they are base-generated in Spec-vP, as in (6a). Secondly it captures how some internal arguments come to receive ergative case too—they move from an internal position to Spec-vP, as in (6b).

²Henceforth, when I use the name ‘Basque’ I am in fact referring only to those Western dialects of Basque which exhibit Absolutive Promotion.

³Arregi & Nevins propose a sequence of morphological and phonological operations that turn underlying *dotzue* into *tzue*. I gloss their proposed underlying representation rather than the surface form.



A corollary of this analysis, which I follow here, is that ‘absolutive’ case is in fact the morphological realization of a lack of syntactic case features (McFadden 2004, Arregi & Nevins 2012).

2.2 Choctaw

The picture for Choctaw is somewhat more complex. We can say with reasonable certainty that Choctaw has argument-doubling clitics, as shown in (7). See Tyler (to appear) for arguments that these morphemes are clitics rather than agreement affixes.

- (7) is- sa- p̄isah-a?
 2SG.ERG- 1SG.ABS- see-PST.Q
 ‘Did you see me?’ (cho)

However, clitics do not seem to be directly indexing the case features of the arguments they double, as in Basque. (8) shows that Choctaw’s overt nominal case is nominative-accusative, with intransitive subjects patterning like transitive subjects.

- (8) a. alikchi-**at** ofi-**ma** lhiyooli-tok
 doctor-NOM dog-DEM.ACC chase-PAST
 ‘The doctor chased that dog.’ (cho)
 b. alikchi-**at** abiika-tok
 doctor-NOM sick-PST
 ‘The doctor got sick.’ (cho)

But if we examine Choctaw’s clitic system, the form of the clitic seems to be closely linked to the thematic role of the argument: in (9a) the subject is a theme, and is doubled by an ‘ABS’-series clitic, while in (9b) the subject is an agent, and is doubled by an ‘ERG’-series clitic. This type of alignment has several names, including *active-stative*, *split-S* or *semantic alignment*.

- (9) a. **pi**- ttola-tok
 1PL.ABS- fall-PST
 ‘We fell.’ (cho)
 b. **ii**- baliili-tok
 1PL.ERG- run-PST
 ‘We ran.’ (cho)

So Choctaw has a nominative-accusative case system and an active-stative clitic system. It is therefore not at all obvious that Choctaw clitics are indexing the case of arguments. Nonetheless, I propose that Choctaw’s clitics *are* in fact spelling out case features of the argument that they double—they are just not spelling out the nominative/accusative case feature(s).

Specifically, I propose that what distinguishes ERG from ABS clitics is the presence vs. absence of an ergative case feature. Just as in Basque, this is a structural ergative case feature, associated with the Spec-vP position (see (6)). External arguments, base-generated in Spec-vP, are assigned ergative and so get doubled by ERG clitics, as in (9a). Internal arguments, on the other hand, generally do not move to Spec-vP and so are doubled by ABS clitics instead, as in (9b).

Nominative or accusative case features are then assigned to arguments regardless of whether or not they have an ergative case feature (Baker 2015 discusses Choctaw’s nominative-accusative case system in more detail). (10) shows that it is possible for a single argument to have both a nominative case feature (indicated by nominative case-marking) and an ergative feature (indicated by the ERG clitic).

- (10) chishnak-**oosh ish-** baliilih
 you.FOC-NOM **2SG.ERG-** run
 ‘It’s YOU who runs.’ (cho)

Support for the claim that Choctaw ERG/ABS clitics are reflecting an underlying case system (as opposed to, for instance, directly spelling out the thematic roles of arguments, Broadwell 1988) comes from the existence of unaccusative verbs that nonetheless double their argument with ERG clitics, as in (11).

- (11) a. **ish-** ittola-tok-o?
2SG.ERG- fall-PST-Q
 ‘Did you fall?’ (cho)
 b. **ii-** tochch_inah
1PL.ERG- three
 ‘There are three of us.’ (cho)

We can account for these mismatches by positing that these arguments are base-generated in internal argument positions and subsequently move to Spec-vP.⁴ Tellingly, the opposite mismatch—with unergative verbs cross-referencing their arguments with ABS clitics—is unattested. This can be accounted for as a consequence of probably-universal restrictions on syntactic movement: it is possible for an internal argument to raise to Spec-vP, but not for an external argument to ‘lower’ out of Spec-vP, such that it fails to receive structural ergative case.

In summary, Choctaw clitics *do* index the case of the arguments they double, just as in Basque. But in Choctaw, an additional round of nominative-accusative case-assignment provides arguments with an extra set of case features, and it is these features that are spelled out on the overt arguments themselves.

Finally, note that Choctaw has third series of clitics, known as the ‘Class III’

⁴Preminger (2012) proposes a similar derivation for Basque unaccusative verbs which nonetheless assign ergative to their external argument, e.g. *irakin* ‘boil’.

forms (terminology from Munro & Gordon 1982). These clitics cross-reference arguments which, cross-linguistically, tend to carry dative/oblique cases or be introduced by prepositions, as shown in (12).

- (12) a. Bill-at wak nipi **chi-** hopoonih
 Bill-NOM cow meat **2SG.III-** cook
 ‘Bill is cooking steak **for you.**’ (cho)
- b. **a-** nokshoopah
1SG.III- scared
 ‘She’s scared **of me.**’ (cho)

I assume, following a similar analysis in Ulrich (1986) and Broadwell (2006) that Class III clitics are in fact ABS clitics attached to an incorporated preposition *im-*. Nevertheless I continue to gloss them as ‘III-’ in this paper, in keeping with previous work on Choctaw.

We have now seen that both Choctaw and Basque index their arguments with clitics, which realize arguments’ case features. However, in the introduction we saw that not all logically possible combinations of clitics in Basque are grammatical—the class of possible clusters is constrained by the PCC. The next section investigates the effects of the PCC on transitive unaccusatives verbs in both languages

3 Clitic co-occurrence restrictions in transitive unaccusatives

It was shown in the introduction that in Basque, certain combinations of clitics result in ungrammaticality, a result of a surprisingly widespread restriction on clitic clusters known as the *Person Case Constraint* (PCC). In this section I concentrate on the subcase of PCC effects that involve verbs with two internal arguments and *no* external argument, henceforth *transitive unaccusatives*. I first provide the generalization on clitic co-occurrence restrictions in transitive unaccusatives in Basque, taken wholesale from Arregi & Nevins (2012), before detailing the restrictions on transitive unaccusatives in Choctaw.

3.1 Clitic co-occurrence restrictions in Basque

The class of transitive unaccusative constructions under consideration is those verbs whose subject is dative and whose object is absolutive.⁵ (3b), showing an ungrammatical combination of absolutive and dative clitics, is repeated in (13).

- (13) *Niri su ondo jaus-ten s -a -t. (>sasta).
 me.DAT you.ABS well fall-IMP 2SG.ABS -T -1SG.DAT
 intended: ‘I like you.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)

⁵It is important to distinguish DAT>>ABS transitive unaccusatives, which uniformly display the restrictions discussed, and ABS>>DAT transitive unaccusatives, which do not display these restrictions in all dialects (Rezac 2008, Arregi & Nevins 2012). Here I concentrate on DAT>>ABS verbs, as ABS>>DAT verbs cannot be repaired by Absolutive Promotion, even in those dialects where they are afflicted by PCC restrictions (Arregi & Nevins 2012:77).

Arregi & Nevins (2012) show that, for these verbs, *all* combinations of arguments that would give rise to both an absolutive clitic and a dative clitic cause ungrammaticality. Taking the intuition that absolutive and dative clitics must therefore be competing for the same ‘slot’, they provide this restriction on Basque clitic-doubling:

- (14) Condition on Clitic Hosts (Arregi & Nevins 2012:60)
 A clitic host in Basque ([T⁰ or C⁰]) can only attract one clitic.

Both absolutive and dative clitics are attracted to the same clitic host (T⁰), and so having multiple clitic-doubled arguments causes ungrammaticality.⁶ Next, I show that a modified version of (14) can derive the restrictions on clitic clusters in Choctaw too.

3.2 Clitic co-occurrence restrictions in Choctaw

Choctaw has three classes of transitive unaccusative predicate. First, there are verbs which cross-reference their subject with a ABS clitic and their object with a III clitic, as in (15a). Second, there are verbs (perhaps just one) which cross-reference both arguments with ABS clitics, as in (15b). Third, there are verbs which cross-reference their subject with a III clitic and their object with an ABS clitic, as in (15c).

- (15) a. *chi-* *sa-* *nokshoopah*
 2SG.III- 1SG.ABS- scared
 ‘I’m scared of you.’ (cho)
- b. *chi-* *sa-* *nnaḥ*
 2SG.ABS- 1SG.ABS- want
 ‘I want you.’ (cho)
- c. *chi-* *(s)am-* *ihaksi-tok*
 2SG.ABS- 1SG.III- forget-PST.
 ‘I forgot you.’ (cho)

Here, I concentrate on the first two kinds of transitive unaccusative, as they seem to pattern together with respect to PCC restrictions and repairs.⁷ The generalization governing possible and impossible clitic clusters on these verbs is stated in (16).

- (16) Choctaw clitic co-occurrence restrictions
 All combinations of internal argument clitics (ABS and III) are banned, unless the inner (subject) clitic is 1SG.

To illustrate, if the subject of *nokshoopa* ‘be scared’ is 2nd-person singular and doubled by an ABS clitic (*chi-*), it is impossible for the verb *nokshoopa* ‘be scared’ to take an object, as in (17). This is because any object would be clitic-doubled, thus creating a clitic cluster that violates (16).

⁶Arregi & Nevins conceive of clitics as undergoing syntactic movement from their associated arguments to their landing sites on the clausal spine, but the idea could be just as easily captured by stating limits on possible multiple agreement relations.

⁷The kind of transitive unaccusative in (15c) abides by the restrictions in (16) too, and preliminary investigation suggests these verbs may also be repairable by Absolutive Promotion. However, a detailed study is a task for future work.

- (17) { *a- / *pi- / *i- } chi- nokshoopah
 1SG.III- 1PL.III- 3.III- 2SG.ABS- scared
 ‘You’re scared { *of me / *of us / *of her }.’ (cho)

Similarly, if the subject of *banna* ‘want’ is 2nd-person singular, its object *must* be 3rd-person. This is because a non-3rd-person object would have to be clitic-doubled, thus creating an illegal clitic cluster. By contrast, there is no 3rd-person ABS clitic, and so 3rd-person objects of *banna* do not create clusters:

- (18) { *sa- / *pi- } chi- nnah
 1SG.ABS- 1PL.ABS- 2SG.ABS- want
 ‘You want { *me / *us / her }.’ (cho)

The exception for 1st-person singular subjects, shown in (19), is unusual. I do not attempt to account for it here—see Tyler (2017) for more discussion.

- (19) { chi- / i- } sa- nokshoopah
 2SG.III- 3.III- 1SG.ABS- scared
 ‘I’m scared of { you / her }.’ (cho)

It is worth noting that clitics introduced by applicative arguments—for example, comitative arguments indicated by the COM morpheme in (20)—are similarly incompatible with other ABS clitics, yet also display the ‘1SG exception’.

- (20) a. chi- baa- hottopah
 2SG.ABS- COM- hurt
 ‘She’s hurting with you.’ (i.e. ‘She feels empathy with you’) (cho)
 b. ??sa- baa- chi- hottopah
 1SG.ABS- COM- 2SG.ABS- hurt
 intended: ‘You’re hurting with me.’ (cho)
 c. chi- baa- sa- hottopah
 2SG.ABS- COM- 1SG.ABS- hurt
 ‘I’m hurting with you.’ (cho)

We have seen that both Basque and Choctaw impose restrictions on possible clitic clusters on transitive unaccusatives. In the next section, I describe a repair strategy that both languages use to obviate these restrictions—Absolute Promotion.

4 Absolute Promotion

Absolute Promotion, termed *Absolute Displacement* by Rezac (2008), is a repair strategy that is used to fix illegal clitic clusters on some transitive unaccusative verbs. This section first provides a description of the phenomenon in both Basque and Choctaw, and shows that it truly deserves to be called a *repair* strategy. Section 4.2 then provides a syntactic analysis, based on Arregi & Nevins (2012), and section 4.3 argues against a possible morphological account.

4.1 Description of Absolutive Promotion

The recipe for Absolutive Promotion in Basque is to take the argument that would ordinarily be absolutive, and make it ergative instead. This is shown in (21).

- (21) a. *Niri su ondo jaus-ten s -a -t. (>sasta)
 me.DAT you.ABS well fall-IMPV 2SG.ABS -T -1SG.DAT
 intended: ‘I like you.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)
- b. Niri su-(k) ondo jaus-te d -o -t -su. (>stasu)
 me.DAT you-(ERG) well fall-IMPV L -T -1SG.DAT -2SG.ERG
 ‘I like you.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:69)

The process in Choctaw is essentially the same, with some additional complexities. In particular: while in a Basque transitive unaccusative there is only one absolutive argument available for promotion (the other argument being dative), in Choctaw transitive unaccusatives there are *two* available absolutive arguments. This is clearest with *banna* ‘want’, where both arguments are doubled by ABS clitics, but is also true of verbs like *nokshoopa* ‘be scared’, where the subject is doubled by an ABS clitic and the object by a III clitic (recall from section 2.2 that III clitics are underlyingly ABS clitics followed by an incorporated preposition).

For both *banna* ‘want’ and psych verbs like *nokshoopa* ‘be scared (of)’, the argument targeted for promotion is the argument that typically functions as the subject. This is shown for *banna* in (22) and *nokshoopa* in (23).

- (22) a. *sa- **chi-** nnah-o?
 1SG.ABS- 2SG.ABS- want-Q
- b. **is-** sa- bannah-o?
 2SG.ERG- 1SG.ABS- want-Q
 ‘Do you want me?’ (cho)
- (23) a. *pi- **chi-** nokshoopah
 1PL.III- 2SG.ABS- scared
- b. **ish-** pi- nokshoopah
 2SG.ERG- 1PL.III- scared
 ‘You are scared of us.’ (cho)

Interestingly, even those clitic clusters involving applicative arguments, such as (20b), can be rescued by Absolutive Promotion:

- (24) a. ??sa- baa- **chi-** hottopah
 1SG.ABS- COM- 2SG.ABS- hurt
- b. **is-** sa- baa- hottopah
 2SG.ERG- COM- hurt
 ‘You’re hurting with me.’ (cho)

As shown in (25), attempting to promote the lower argument in any of these environments results in an unwanted interpretation or outright unacceptability.

- (25) a. #chi- banna -lih -o?
 2SG.ABS- want -1SG.ERG -Q
 ‘*Do you want me?’ (interpretation: ‘Do I want you?’) (cho)
- b. *ii- chi- (i-) nokshoopah
 1PL.ERG- 2SG.ABS- (III-) scared
 ‘*You are scared of us.’ (cho)
- c. *ibaa- chi- hottopa -lih
 COM- 2SG.ABS- hurt -1SG.ERG
 ‘*You’re hurting with me.’ (cho)

At this point, the reader may have noticed a crucial difference between how Absolute Promotion operates in Basque and in Choctaw. In Basque, it is the object (theme) argument of the predicate that is targeted for promotion, while in Choctaw it is the subject (experiencer) argument. Section 5 offers a syntactic account of this difference, in terms of the presence vs. absence of dative case-assignment.

Before moving on to the analysis, I briefly illustrate that Absolute Promotion really is a repair strategy. The alternative position would be that the Absolute Promotion structures, in which one of the arguments of a transitive unaccusative receives ergative case, is simply an alternative structure that’s generally available, even outside of contexts where an illegal clitic cluster would require it.

Arregi & Nevins (2012) show that Absolute Promotion in Basque truly is a repair strategy by showing that outside of those environments where it is required, promoting the absolutive argument to ergative is ungrammatical:

- (26) a. Niri Jon ondo jaus-ten g -a -t. (>gasta)
 me.DAT Jon.ABS well fall-IMP F L -T -1SG.DAT
 ‘I like Jon.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)
- b. *Niri Jon-(ek) ondo jaus-ten d -o -t -Ø. (>sta)
 me.DAT Jon-(ERG) well fall-IMP F L -T -1SG.DAT -3SG.ERG
 ‘I like Jon.’ (eus, Arregi & Nevins 2012:65)

We can apply similar logic to Choctaw. In most cases, where repair is not needed, it is ungrammatical.⁸ For instance, where *banna* ‘want’ takes a 3rd-person object, no clitic cluster results, and promoting the subject ABS clitic to ERG leads to unacceptability:⁹

⁸There is a complication where the subject is 1st-person singular. Even though it is perfectly grammatical to *not* promote a 1SG ABS clitic *sa-* to ergative in the presence of another clitic (see (15a)), it is also grammatical to promote the 1SG subject to ergative, as shown in (i). The pervasive exceptionality of 1SG agreement and clitic-doubling in Choctaw (see also Broadwell & Martin 1993) requires more research.

(i) chi- nokshoopa -lih
 2SG.III- scared -1SG.ERG
 ‘I’m scared of you. (cho)

⁹In fact, (27b) may be acceptable under an obligatory taboo reading, which is absent from the standard cases of Absolute Promotion with *banna* ‘want’ as in (22).

- (27) a. hapi- nnah
 1PL.ABS- want
 ‘We want it.’ (cho)
 b. *ii- bannah
 1PL.ERG- want

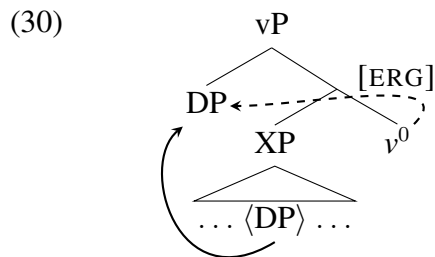
Similarly, where *nokshoopa* ‘be scared (of)’ takes no object or where *hottopa* ‘hurt’ takes no comitative argument (meaning in both cases that there is no clitic cluster) Absolutive Promotion is ungrammatical:

- (28) a. chi- nokshoopah-o?
 2SG.ABS- scared-Q
 ‘Are you scared?’ (cho)
 b. *ish- nokshoopah-o?
 2SG.ERG- scared-Q
- (29) a. chi- hottopah-o?
 2SG.ABS- hurt-Q
 ‘Are you hurt?’ (cho)
 b. *ish- hottopah-o?
 2SG.ERG- hurt-Q

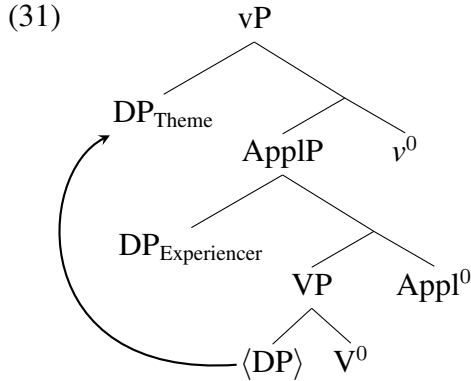
We have therefore seen that Absolutive Promotion has essentially the same character in Basque and Choctaw, despite the numerous morphosyntactic differences between the languages. Next, I provide a unified analysis of the phenomenon.

4.2 The raising-to-ergative analysis

I essentially follow Arregi & Nevins’s (2012) analysis that Absolutive Promotion is raising-to-ergative as a *Last Resort*, in the sense of Chomsky (1991). This builds on the analysis in section 2, that ergative in both Basque and Choctaw is a *structural* case assigned to all arguments that end up in Spec-vP. This includes not only arguments base-generated in Spec-vP—i.e. external arguments—but also arguments which undergo A-movement into Spec-vP (as in (11)). Absolutive Promotion therefore has the derivation in (30), identical to what was proposed for the sentences in (11). Note that this does not involve *overwriting* a case feature—it simply involves adding a case feature to an otherwise caseless DP (‘absolutive’ being a term for syntactic caselessness, see section 2.1).

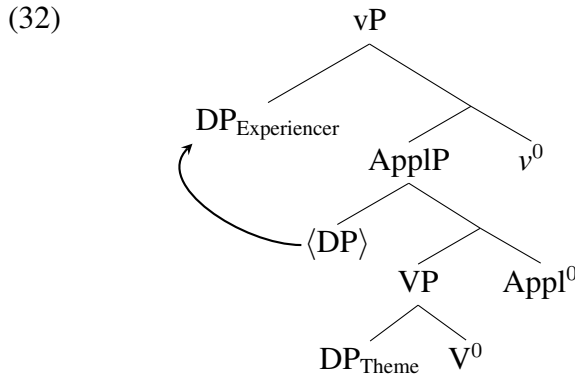


Fleshing out the structure, Arregi & Nevins propose the derivation in (31) for Absolutive Promotion in Basque. The dative experiencer argument is introduced in the specifier of an Appl(icative)P, and the absolutive theme argument raises over it.



If Absolutive Promotion is to involve raising-to-ergative, then having the theme pass over the experiencer is necessary: Rezac (2008), using well-established c-command tests for Basque, shows that in DAT>>ABS transitive unaccusatives, the experiencer is base-generated in a position from which it c-commands the theme.

Taking Arregi & Nevins's analysis of Basque to be essentially correct, I propose the following derivation for Absolutive Promotion in Choctaw:



The initial structure is the same as in Basque, with the experiencer base-generated above the theme in the specifier of a high ApplP. And as in Basque, Absolutive Promotion involves an internal argument raising to Spec-vP to receive ergative case, thereby obviating the illegal cluster that would otherwise be generated. The difference is that in Choctaw, the higher argument, the experiencer, is promoted, instead of the lower argument, the theme. I propose a case-based account of this distinction in section 5. Note that in both languages, raising-to-ergative is lexically specified for some verbs (e.g. the Choctaw unaccusative verbs in (11)), but is also a generally available Last Resort mechanism for obviating PCC violations. I am unsure of the theoretical significance of this connection and I leave it for future work.

In the final part of this section, I argue against a potential alternative analysis of Absolutive Promotion in Choctaw, in which it is a purely *morphological* operation that does not involve syntactic movement.

4.3 Against a purely morphological analysis

In Basque, the ‘extra’ ergative case that is assigned under Absolutive Promotion is fairly clear to see: it’s possible to overtly mark the promoted argument with an ergative case morpheme. It therefore doesn’t make sense to say that Absolutive Promotion in Basque is a purely morphological repair operation. By contrast in Choctaw, all the action is on the verb: overt Choctaw DPs do not spell out the presence or absence of an ergative case feature. For this reason one might plausibly claim that Absolutive Promotion in Choctaw *is* a purely morphological operation that does not involve syntax.

One theoretical objection to this analysis is that we would no longer be able to unify the repair mechanism for PCC violations in transitive unaccusatives in Basque and Choctaw, and we would have to say that the resemblances are coincidental. A more empirically-minded counterargument to the morphological analysis is that the putative ‘morphological Absolutive Promotion’ operation would have to know which clitic cross-references the subject and which clitic cross-references the object, so that it only promotes the subject clitic and does not promote the object clitic instead—we saw in (27) that promoting an object is impossible. This is particularly a problem for *banna*, where both arguments are cross-referenced by ABS clitics and so are morphologically identical.

A further argument against a morphological analysis of Choctaw Absolutive Promotion is in the nature of the operation itself: it appears to involve changing a *less* marked feature value (ABS) into a *more* marked feature value (ERG). This runs counter to how morphological operations typically manipulate features, which is by deleting them or changing them to their unmarked value (Noyer 1992, Bobaljik 2002).¹⁰ Evidence that the ERG series is more marked than the ABS series in Choctaw can be found in (33), which provides three other ϕ -expressing paradigms (inalienable possession markers, negative ERG clitics, and full pronouns) and we can see that almost every cell in those paradigms resembles its equivalent cell in the ABS paradigm, and *not* its equivalent in the ERG paradigm.¹¹

(33)		ERG	ABS	Inalien. poss.	Negative ERG	Pronoun
	1SG	-li	sa-	sa-	a-k-	a-no
	2SG	ish-	chi-	chi-	chi-k-	chi-shno
	1PL	ii-/il-	pi-	pi-	kii-/kil-	pi-shno
	1PL+	ii-/il-	hapi-	hapi-	kii-/kil-	hapi-shno
	2PL	hash-	hachi	hachi-	hachi-k-	hachi-shno
	3	–	–	(i-)	ik-	–

If Absolutive Promotion therefore involves a ‘retreat *from* the unmarked’, we should be wary of giving it a morphological rather than syntactic analysis.¹² In the next section, I provide an account of the difference between Basque and Choctaw in

¹⁰Hence the ubiquity of *impoverishment* within Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), compared with the comparatively smaller uptake of ‘enrichment’, though cf. Johnson (2014).

¹¹The negative ERG series is particularly notable: usually-ERG clitics resemble ABS clitics when adjacent to the exponent of negation (-k)—this a good candidate for an impoverishment operation.

¹²In fact, it better fits Rezac’s (2010) characterization of syntactic PCC repairs as involving ‘strengthening by Case’.

terms of which argument is targeted by Absolute Promotion.

5 Deriving variation in the target of Absolute Promotion

We saw in the previous section that Absolute Promotion in Choctaw involves the highest internal argument (the experiencer) raising to Spec-vP (32), while the same operation in Basque involves a lower internal argument (the theme) raising to Spec-vP (31). What causes this difference? Here, I briefly offer a case-based account.

The basic idea is that Absolute Promotion is the merging of a raising-to-ergative v^0 . In order for a raising-to-ergative v^0 to attract a DP into its specifier (where it assigns it ergative case), it must be equipped with an agreement probe. v^0 's probe, and just like any other probe, is constrained by Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990). This means that it can only attract the most local accessible goal. I propose that in Choctaw, both internal arguments are accessible to v^0 's probe, but the experiencer is forced to move because it is more local to v^0 than the theme argument. By contrast, in Basque, the higher experiencer argument is *not* accessible to v^0 's probe, forcing the lower theme argument to raise instead.

What renders the experiencer argument inaccessible in Basque, yet accessible in Choctaw? Essentially, the experiencer argument has dative case in Basque, and is caseless in Choctaw. In particular, Basque experiencers have *inherent* dative case, which, following research such as McGinnis (1998), McFadden (2004), Woolford (2006), Alexiadou *et al.* (2014) renders them invisible to agreement probes.¹³ Consequently, the v^0 probe in Basque sees straight past the dative experiencer and agrees with the absolutive (i.e. caseless) theme.

6 Conclusions

We have seen that PCC violations in transitive unaccusative clauses in two unrelated languages are repaired in *almost* the same way. In both Basque and Choctaw, the repair involves Absolute Promotion, with a difference emerging in terms of which argument is targeted by the operation. I linked this difference to the presence vs. absence of inherent dative case on the experiencer.

At this point, it is worth taking a step back to consider what the requirements are for Absolute Promotion to emerge in the grammar of a particular language. First, there must be structural ergative case: in Choctaw and Western Basque, this manifests itself in the form of an active-stative case-marking and/or agreement system. Second, the language must have obligatory clitic-doubling of non-ergative arguments (so that PCC violations cannot be obviated simply by choosing not to clitic-double one of the arguments). Third, we require that combinations of internal argument clitics are restricted by the PCC (this may well be universal). And finally, the language must have transitive unaccusative verbs, where neither argument is ordinarily assigned structural ergative case and both arguments are clitic-doubled.

¹³There is an unsolved problem regarding the status of intervention here: why doesn't the Basque dative count as a (defective) intervener, in the sense of Chomsky (2000), and block the agreement relation between v^0 and the theme argument? I do not have an answer, although this problem is found wherever we find A-movement over a dative argument—see McGinnis (2008) for an overview.

Yet despite these requirements, there is some flexibility as to how the operation proceeds: by comparing Basque and Choctaw, we saw that arguments in different positions within the vP may be targeted for promotion. We also saw, by comparing the PCC restrictions themselves across the two languages, that the repair may be triggered by slightly different combinations of clitics in different languages.

Finally, notice that the conditions listed above are necessary for Absolutive Promotion to emerge, but they are not sufficient: of the Western Basque dialects that Arregi & Nevins (2012:74) investigate, only one (spoken in Ondarru) makes use of Absolutive Promotion. It remains for future work to determine what the extra factor is that licenses the operation, if it is indeed predictable. Getting a handle on the cross-linguistic and cross-dialectal distribution of Absolutive Promotion will be a crucial part of this.

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