Ergativity in Tabasaran: A Reply to Woolford 2015

Natalia Bogomolova

Woolford (2015) distinguishes two types of ergativity—active and object shift—whereas ergativity is not governed by transitivity in any of the languages she examines. However, several languages remain unclassified in Woolford’s typology, among them two Nakh-Daghestanian languages, Archi and Tsez. Woolford inquires whether they belong to the active or object shift type or whether ergativity in these languages depends on transitivity. This article presents data from another Nakh-Daghestanian language, Tabasaran, and shows that this language is best analyzed as an example of traditional transitivity-based ergativity.

Keywords: ergativity, object shift, transitivity, Tabasaran

1 Introduction

On the basis of work by Bittner and Hale (1996), Woolford (2015) proposes that ergative languages fall into two types distinguished by the behavior of the direct object. In the first type, commonly called active ergative since Dixon 1994, the presence of the ergative argument in a clause does not depend on the presence of an object. Ergative case presumably marks any external argument regardless of whether the object is present, and it has no relation to transitivity: intransitive verbs can also mark their external argument with ergative case. Woolford cites Basque, Kashmiri, Warlpiri, and several languages of the Caucasus as examples of the active ergative type.

By contrast, in the second type of ergative language the presence of an object is necessary for the ergative to be licensed. However, this is not sufficient: the subject receives ergative case only if the object moves out of the VP. Evidence for object movement in these languages comes from a strong correlation between the structural position of the object and its definiteness/specificity, topicality, or a certain word order. Bittner and Hale (1996) were the first to identify Inuit as an ergative language of the object shift type. Woolford indicates that Niuean, Tagalog, and Nez Perce also display this type of ergativity.

Bittner and Hale’s (1996) analysis apparently does not derive a third type of ergativity that would be primarily associated with transitivity (transitivity-based ergativity), where only transitive verbs have ergative subjects. On the one hand, this type of ergativity would not allow intransitive verbs to have an ergative subject. On the other hand, the appearance of the ergative would not be related to the presence of the object on the surface or to its movement. All that would matter would be the presence of a direct object somewhere in the syntax.

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Woolford (2015) shows that the languages in her sample belong to either of the two types proposed by Bittner and Hale (1996); languages that demonstrate properties of the third type are not attested. Woolford also mentions a few languages, such as the Nakh-Daghestanian languages Archi and Tsez, that clearly do not belong to the active type, thus predicting that they must belong to the object shift type. The question, then, is whether this is true or whether these languages demonstrate properties of a third type of ergativity.

In this article, I present new data from Tabasaran and argue that this language fits into neither the active type nor the object shift type and is best analyzed as an example of traditional transitivity-based ergativity.

Tabasaran, with around 100,000 native speakers, belongs to the Lezgic branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian family. In this article, I use data from the southern dialect as spoken by about 1,400 residents in the village of Meżgül (Khivskij district, Republic of Daghestan, Russian Federation). The data reported below come from my own fieldwork.

The article is organized as follows. In section 2, I examine the properties Woolford uses to identify languages of the active ergative type and show that Tabasaran does not display them. In section 3, I discuss languages with object shift and demonstrate that Tabasaran shows no obvious traits typical for languages of this type. I consider syntactic phenomena that seem to exclude the possibility of object shift in Tabasaran transitive clauses. In section 4, I look into nominalizations in Tabasaran and show that object shift, if it ever occurs, cannot have a landing site beyond vP. In sections 5, 6, and 7, I explore in more detail the possibility that object shift could occur within vP. In section 5, using binding facts in transitive and ditransitive constructions, I show that binding gives no evidence that the direct object stays above the subject, as Woolford assumes. Ditransitive clauses show that the indirect object can c-command the direct object, with the subject receiving ergative case even in environments with low direct objects. In section 6, I examine gender-number agreement with the direct object and show that it occurs at an earlier stage of clause derivation and cannot be associated with object shift. In section 7, I introduce clitic doubling in Tabasaran, providing another piece of evidence, independent of binding and gender-number agreement, that the direct object is very likely associated with the same position within VP as the subject of unaccusative verbs. In section 8, I briefly discuss the Tabasaran data in light of dependent case theory and show that even though Tabasaran fits better with this theory than it does with the typology of ergativity proposed by Woolford, many details in Tabasaran also remain unexplained under that approach. In section 9, I conclude that the constellation of facts reported in this article suggests that Tabasaran cannot be characterized as either an active or an object shift ergative language and should instead be considered a language with transitivity-based ergativity.

2 Tabasaran Is Not an Active Ergative Language

At the heart of Woolford’s (2015) analysis lie at least two criteria that allow us to diagnose active ergativity, the most important criterion being that any external argument receives ergative case regardless of the presence or absence of the object.

In the typological literature, the definition of ergativity is based on the notion of transitivity: in ergative languages, the transitive subject is marked differently from the intransitive subject
and the transitive object (Comrie 1978, Dixon 1979). At the same time, the main criterion for transitivity is traditionally considered to be the presence of an object: a clause is transitive if a direct object is syntactically present. Thus, under the traditional definition, ergativity directly depends on the presence of an object in the clause.

However, Bittner and Hale (1996) identify two types of ergative languages that do not fall under the traditional notion of ergativity. For the active type of ergative language, they demonstrate that the overt presence of the object is not a necessary criterion for assigning ergative case to the subject. Using examples from Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan), as in (1), they show that the subject can be ergative even when there is no overt object. To account for this, they propose that another criterion relevant for assignment of ergative case is the position of the subject: it is marked by the ergative because it is in a VP-external position. The object is not overtly expressed in a sentence like (1), being incorporated into the verb, and the subject in the VP-external position receives ergative case.1

(1) Warlpiri
Ngarrka-ngku ka yunpa-rni.
man-ERG PRS sing-NONPST
‘The man is singing.’
(Levin 1983:149, (4.23b))

Thus, the subject of an apparently intransitive verb can be in an external position, since it still has an unexpressed object—that is, since it is covertly transitive.

However, as Dixon (1994) shows, pure intransitive clauses can also have an ergative subject. Woolford (2015) cites Batsbi, Basque, and Kashmiri, showing that the structural position of the subject can indeed play a role in the assignment of ergative case in intransitive clauses too. Unergative intransitive verbs with a VP-external subject mark it with ergative case, whereas with unaccusative verbs the subject does not receive ergative case, being the internal argument (patient/theme). Moreover, as Woolford shows with examples from Batsbi, the same intransitive lexical verb may or may not take an external argument, with associated changes in the semantic interpretation of the subject. In Batsbi, the nonvolitional subject of the verb ‘fall down’ is presumably an internal argument marked by the absolutive, while the volitional subject of that same verb, assumed to be external, is marked by the ergative (Woolford 2015:503), as (2a–b) illustrate.

(2) Batsbi
a. (As) vuiA-n-as.
1SG(ERG) fall-AOR-1SG:ERG
‘I fell down, on purpose.’

1 Hale and Keyser (1993) also consider verbs with a VP-external subject position as transitive, assuming they have a semantically incorporated object.
b. (So) voA-en-sO.
1SG(ABS) fall-AOR-1SG:ABS
‘I fell down, by accident.’
(Holisky 1987:105, (5a–b))

Thus, in an active ergative language the external argument of an intransitive verb can be marked by ergative case; an internal subject cannot.

The second criterion for identifying active ergativity is that the object plays no role in the assignment of ergative: neither the position of the object nor its properties affect the appearance of the ergative subject. This feature differentiates ergative languages of the active and object shift types (see below).

So, a language belongs to the active type if there is a strong correlation between the presence of an argument in Spec,vP and its being marked with ergative case, but no correspondence between ergativity and the presence/absence of an object.

Before I diagnose Tabasaran as not belonging to the active ergative type, some information on the morphology of verbs in Tabasaran is in order.²

Morphologically, verbs can be divided into two classes: simple and complex. Simple verbs consist of a verbal root and the required inflectional morphology. Most verbs have a prefixal or infixed gender-number agreement marker (see section 6 for more details). See the second column of table 1 for several roots of simple verbs, all of which have a gender-number agreement slot marked CL- in the prefixal position or (CL) within the root, to which inflectional morphology is attached: he(CL)g- ‘run’, ja(CL)g- ‘jump’, CL-ik’- ‘write’, CL-is- ‘catch’.

By contrast, complex verbs are two-word combinations consisting of a noninflected part and a light verb, as shown in the third column of table 1. Complex verbs can be compared to English verbs such as have breakfast, take a look, and make an appointment. The noninflected part can be a noun or an adjective. The verbs ap’- ‘do’ and x- ‘become’ function as light verbs responsible for (in)transitivity and bearing inflectional morphology. For example, the complex verb fikir ap’- ‘think’ consists of the noun fikir ‘thought, idea’ and the light verb ap’- ‘do’. In verbal inflection,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflection</th>
<th>Simple verb</th>
<th>Complex verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-nu ‘AOR’</td>
<td>he(CL)g-nu ‘ran’</td>
<td>fikir x-ap’-nu ‘thought’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ura ‘PRS’</td>
<td>he(CL)g-ura ‘is running’</td>
<td>fikir ap’-ura ‘is thinking’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-uru ‘FUT’</td>
<td>he(CL)g-uru ‘will run’</td>
<td>fikir ap’-uru ‘will think’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

it is only the light verb that changes its form, bearing the necessary affixes; the first part remains invariant.

Let us first look at how simple verbs behave with respect to the case marking of external subjects and at whether ergative case is available for both transitive subjects and external arguments of intransitive clauses.

In Southern Tabasaran (to which the Mežgül dialect belongs), unergative and unaccusative intransitive verbs are distinguished by person clitics (see section 7 for more detail). Personal subjects are obligatorily cliticized on the finite verb. There are two series of pronominal clitics: those from the $a$-series mark the subject of unergative intransitive verbs and are glossed as $AG(ENT)$; those from the $u$-series mark the subject of unaccusative intransitive verbs and are glossed as $PAT(ENT)$. The unergative verb $\nu$- ‘go’ bears the 1SG unergative clitic $=za$ (see (3a)); the 1SG unaccusative clitic $=zu$ is impossible here. By contrast, the unaccusative verb $a(\text{CL})q$- ‘fall down’ bears the clitic $=zu$ (see (3b)); here, the clitic $=za$ is ungrammatical.

\begin{enumerate}[2021 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology]
\item a. $uzu \nu$-uš-un=$za$ \quad /\ *\nu$-uš-un=$zu$.
\hspace{1cm} I PF-(H.SG)go-AOR=1SG:AG \quad PF-(H.SG)go-AOR=1SG:PAT
\hspace{1cm} ‘I went away.’
\item b. $uzu aq$-un=$zu$ \quad /\ *aq$-un=$za$.
\hspace{1cm} I (H.SG)fall.down-AOR=1SG:PAT \quad (H.SG)fall.down-AOR=1SG:AG
\hspace{1cm} ‘I fell down.’
\end{enumerate}

As in Batsbi, a few intransitive verbs in Tabasaran can be either unaccusative or unergative, as the choice of person clitics clearly shows. The verb $alda(\text{CL})k$- ‘fall flat (as after stumbling)’, for example, can bear a $u$-series clitic, like an unaccusative verb; see (4a). However, the verb can also bear an $a$-series clitic, like an unergative verb; see (4b). The difference between the two sentences is semantic: the action is understood as unintentional in (4a) and as instigated deliberately in (4b).

\begin{enumerate}[2021 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology]
\item a. $uzu aldak$-un=$zu$.
\hspace{1cm} I (H.SG)fall-AOR=1SG:PAT
\hspace{1cm} ‘I fell flat (on the ground).’ (accidentally)
\item b. $uzu aldak$-un=$za$.
\hspace{1cm} I (H.SG)fall-AOR=1SG:AG
\hspace{1cm} ‘I fell flat (on the ground).’ (intentionally)
\end{enumerate}

Although Tabasaran personal pronouns have identical forms for ergative and absolutive case, sentences with third person NP subjects clearly show that the verb $alda(\text{CL})k$- ‘fall flat’ does not allow an ergative subject, as the ungrammaticality of (5b) shows; their subject must always be in the absolutive case, regardless of the semantics and the subject’s internal/external position.

\begin{enumerate}[2021 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology]
\item a. $rasul aldak$-nu.
\hspace{1cm} Rasul(ABS) (H.SG)fall-AOR
\hspace{1cm} ‘Rasul fell flat.’ (accidentally/intentionally)
\end{enumerate}
b. *rasul-i aldak-nu.
   Rasul-ERG (H.SG)fall-AOR
   Intended: ‘Rasul fell flat.’ (intentionally)

To summarize the facts of case marking in intransitive clauses with simple verbs: In Tabasaran, no simple unergative verb allows an ergative subject. By contrast, the subject of transitive verbs is always ergative. This is not the behavior we expect of the external argument in the active type of ergativity.

With complex verbs, the case marking of the subject is based on the transitivity/intransitivity of the light verb. Complex verbs that use the light verb ap’- ‘do’ function as transitive and take an ergative subject, whereas those that use the light verb x- ‘become’ function as intransitive and take an absolutive subject. In (6a), for example, the light verb is ap’- ‘do’, the sentence is transitive, and the subject is marked by the ergative. In (6b), the light verb is x- ‘become’, the sentence is intransitive, and the subject is marked by the absolutive.

(6) a. rasul-i fikir ap’-ura-dar.
   Rasul-ERG thought do-PRS-NEG
   ‘Rasul does not think.’ (lit. ‘does not do thought’)

   b. rasul [dumu ap’u-z] razi ka-x-nu.
   Rasul(ABS) 3.P(ABS) do-INF agree PF-(H.SG)become-AOR
   ‘Rasul agreed to do it.’

In the minimal pair in (7), the same nominal part, the adjective gergmi ‘round’, combines with the light verbs ap’- ‘do’ and x- ‘become’. In (7a) with the transitive light verb ap’- ‘do’, the subject receives ergative case, whereas in (7b) with the intransitive light verb x- ‘become’, the subject receives absolutive case.

(7) a. rasul-i tup: gergmi ka-ap’-nu.
   Rasul-ERG ball(ABS) round PF-do-AOR
   ‘Rasul blew up a ball.’ (lit. ‘made a ball round’)

   b. rasul gizaf gergmi ka-x-nu.
   Rasul(ABS) much round PF-(H.SG)become-AOR
   ‘Rasul gained a lot of weight.’ (lit. ‘became very round’)

An intransitive sentence with the light verb x- ‘become’ can also be either unergative or unaccusative, as the behavior of person clitics shows. In (8a), the a-series clitic marks the subject, indicating that the event ‘become rich’ is under the participant’s control. In (8b), the u-series clitic marks the subject, indicating that the same situation occurred independently of the participant. It seems reasonable to assume that the subject is VP-external in (8a), but VP-internal in (8b). As (8c–d) show, regardless of the semantics and the position of the subject, the latter cannot be marked by ergative case (cf. (4)–(5)), similar to the situation with intransitive simple verbs.

(8) a. uvu devletlu ka-x-u=va.
   you.SG rich PF-(H.SG)become-AOR=2SG:AG
   ‘You became rich.’ (intentionally)
b. uvu devletlu ʰa-x-u=vu.
   you.SG rich PF-(H.SG)become-AOR=2SG:PAT
   ‘You became rich.’ (accidentally)

c. rasul devletlu ʰa-x-nu.
   Rasul(ABS) rich PF-(H.SG)become-AOR
   ‘Rasul became rich.’ (intentionally/accidentally)

d. *rasul-i devletlu ʰa-x-nu.
   Rasul-ERG rich PF-(H.SG)become-AOR
   ‘Rasul became rich.’

Let us now look more closely at complex verbs with the light verb \( ap’ \) - ‘do’, as in (6a). One can assume that they are monovalent verbs, where the noninflected part is not a real object visible to the syntax. If this is so, then examples like (6a) demonstrate the pattern diagnostic of an active ergative language. This is exactly how Woolford (2015:504–506) views similar examples from Ingush and Udi (both Northeast Caucasian). For instance, according to Woolford’s glosses, in Ingush the meaning ‘sleep’ is expressed by combining ‘sleep’ and ‘do’, while in Udi the meaning ‘cry’ is expressed by the plural noun ‘cry’ and the verb ‘say’. Woolford analyzes these examples as sentences with external arguments that receive ergative case regardless of the presence of an object in the sentence and therefore diagnoses both languages as active ergative. This phenomenon, where the object is not visible to the syntax, is crosslinguistically well-known as noun incorporation. It is discussed extensively by Baker (1988), who presents a typologically large sample of languages (see references therein), and by Baker and Bobaljik (2017), who illustrate it with examples from Chukchi, referencing Polinskaja and Nedjalkov 1987, and from Kalaallisut. Baker (1988) shows that the clearest surface manifestation of incorporation satisfies three conditions: first, the unmodified object must be strictly adjacent to the verb; second, the incorporated noun need not be case-marked; and third, the incorporated noun does not participate in verbal agreement. Referring to Massam 2001 and Dayal 2011, Baker (2014b) discusses a similar complex structure in several unrelated languages—Sakha, Tamil, Hindi, and Hungarian—and shows that languages can also demonstrate the opposite phenomenon: pseudo–noun incorporation, where the apparent incorporated object behaves like a regular direct object. The behavior of pseudo-incorporated objects is exactly the opposite of their incorporated counterparts’. First, they can be modified and expressed by plural nouns. Second, they can be separated from the verb by an adverb, a PP, or a dative NP. In addition to these properties, Hungarian gives evidence that pseudo-incorporated objects are visible to case assignment. Finally, Hindi shows that pseudo-incorporated objects trigger agreement on the verb and in this respect do not differ from regular direct objects. Referring to Öztürk 2005, Baker also mentions light verb constructions in Turkish and considers that the theme object of such a complex predicate can be pseudo-incorporated.

Let us look more closely at the behavior of the noun part of the complex verbs in Tabasaran. Tabasaran complex verbs demonstrate properties typical for languages in the family (see Polinsky 2015 and Forker 2013 regarding similar structures in Tsez and Hinuq, respectively): namely, predicate nouns within the complex verb act like any other argument and do not display any
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particular behavior. For instance, they can be modified as in (9a), used in their plural form as in (9b), or separated from the light verb by other material as in (9c).

(9) a. rasul-i p:ap:i-z a^i\chi u^i k\u{u}mek k-ap'-nu.
   Rasul-ERG father-DAT big help PF-do-AOR
   ‘Rasul helped the father a lot.’

b. rasul-i ma^i\hspace{0.25em}ha^i\hspace{0.25em}mad.\hspace{0.25em}ji-q-\hspace{0.25em}ji gaf-ar ap’-ura.
   Rasul-ERG Mahamad-POST-DIR word-PL do-PRS
   ‘Rasul is talking with Mahamad.’

c. rasul-i gaf-ar ma^i\hspace{0.25em}ha^i\hspace{0.25em}mad.\hspace{0.25em}ji-q-\hspace{0.25em}ji ap’-ura.
   Rasul-ERG word-PL Mahamad-POST-DIR do-PRS
   (same)

Gender-number agreement in Tabasaran is always controlled by the absolutive argument in a clause (see section 6 for details). The verb ap’- ‘do’ is not morphologically specified to bear a gender-number agreement slot and does not show agreement with either regular direct objects or nouns within complex verbs. The verb x- ‘become’ in its perfective forms, however, does have a prefixal agreement slot, meaning that the light verb x- ‘become’ agrees with its nominal part. Sentences (10a–b) illustrate the verb giran x- ‘get offended’ (lit. ‘insult become’). In (10a), the light verb agrees with the nonhuman singular noun giran ‘insult’, taking the nonhuman singular agreement marker b-. However, the nominal part can also be expressed with the same noun in its plural form, as shown in (10b), in which case the light verb bears a zero agreement prefix, used for plural nouns.

(10) a. rasul.i-z giran k\alpha-b-x-nu.
   Rasul-DAT insult pf-N.SG-become-AOR
   ‘Rasul got offended.’

b. rasul.i-z girn-ar k\alpha-x-nu.
   Rasul-DAT insult-PL pf-(PL)become-AOR
   ‘Rasul got offended.’

Examples (10a–b) clearly demonstrate that the nominal part within the complex predicate should receive absolutive case since it participates in verbal gender-number agreement. Thus, examples like those in (9)–(10) show that in Tabasaran the object of complex verbs demonstrates the behavior specific to pseudo-incorporation and therefore participates in the syntax like any regular object.

What is important for the current discussion is that in clauses with transitive complex verbs—that is, those with the light verb ap’- ‘do’—the subject receives the case it would receive in a sentence with a fully featured object NP. By way of example, let us consider a pair of Tabasaran verbs. The simple verb li\chi- ‘work’ is intransitive and only allows an absolutive subject.

(11) rasul / *rasul-i li\chi-ura.
   Rasul(ABS) Rasul-ERG work-PRS
   ‘Rasul is working.’
The complex verb *laź* in *ap’* is very close to this simple verb semantically, but differs morphosyntactically, consisting of a noninflected part—the noun *laź* ‘work’—and the light verb *ap’* ‘do’. *Ap’* ‘do’ can be used as a lexical transitive verb and always has an ergative subject, as in (12a). When used as a light verb, it preserves transitivity, with the noun *laź* ‘work’ formally acting as a direct object; the subject is marked by the ergative case, as in (12b).

(12) a. rasul-i dars-ar ap’-ura.  
   Rasul-ERG lesson-PL(ABS) do-PRS  
   ‘Rasul is doing homework.’

b. rasul-i laź in ap’-ura.  
   Rasul-ERG work do-PRS  
   ‘Rasul is working.’ (lit. ‘is doing work’)

Thus, the first diagnostic proposed by Woolford (2015) shows no properties of the active ergative type in Tabasaran. Only the external argument of a transitive verb is marked by the ergative; the external argument of an intransitive verb is not.

The second criterion for the active ergative type discussed by Woolford is the behavior of the object: the presence of the object should not be obligatory for licensing ergative case. By contrast, other types of ergative languages show a strong correlation between the appearance of ergative case and the presence/absence of the object.

Woolford (2015) cites Tsez (Nakh-Daghestanian) as a language that shows a strong correlation between the ergative subject and the presence of the object. According to Woolford, the external argument of the Tsez verb ‘eat’ requires the absolutive when there is no object, whereas it takes the ergative when there is one. The presence of the object, she concludes, is necessary for licensing ergative case on the subject. However, to be precise, Tsez has two different verbs meaning ‘eat’: one, *cl-iš*-, is intransitive and never has an object; the other, *cl-ac’*-, is transitive and usually has one. It is not clear whether there are any other such pairs in Tsez, so this variation seems to be an exception rather than a property consistently reflected in the case marking of the external argument across the verbal lexicon.

In addition, Tsez allows any recoverable argument to be omitted. As examples given by Polinsky show (2015:32, (116)), the transitive verb *cl-ac’* ‘eat’ can also be used with the unexpressed object, which, however, does not lead to a shift in the case marking of the subject: it is always marked with the ergative, even when the object is not expressed overtly. It is reasonable to assume that in these cases the object is still present in the syntactic structure.

Below, I show that the absence/presence of the object cannot be considered a diagnostic in Tabasaran, since the language freely allows omission of arguments, including objects (both definite specific and nonspecific), which, however, does not affect subject case marking. To draw a parallel between Tsez and Tabasaran, let us look at the Tabasaran verb *ip’* ‘eat’. This verb can be used with either an expressed or an unexpressed object; the subject, though, always retains ergative case.

(13) a. rasul-i aš ip’-ura.  
   Rasul-ERG pilaf(ABS) N.SG.eat-PRS  
   ‘Rasul is eating pilaf.’
Remarks and Replies

b. rasul-i / *rasul ip'-ura.
   Rasul-ERG Rasul(ABS) N.SG.eat-PRS
   ‘Rasul is eating.’

One could assume that (13) instantiates the active type of ergativity, since the ergative does not depend on the presence of an object and can appear in objectless clauses. However, I suggest that this is not the case either. In sentences with no expressed direct object, gender-number agreement on the verb nonetheless allows us to detect the presence of an object, since the verb still has a marker corresponding to that object’s gender-number features. For example, if the notional object is singular nonhuman, the verb has a singular nonhuman marker, just as in (13b). Note also that this singular nonhuman marker is not a default marker; rather, it indicates that the omitted object is conceptualized as singular nonhuman (possibly, the omitted noun 溆 ‘bread’ that often appears with this verb as a kind of generic object).

Examples (14a–c) with the verb ‘wash’ show that the null generic object can also trigger plural agreement. In (14a) with the expressed object buluš:k’a ‘dress’, the verb has the expected singular nonhuman infix 〈b〉. In (14b), the object is plural and the verb has the plural agreement infix 〈r〉. In (14c), where the object is not only unexpressed but also semantically unspecified, the verb still has plural marking, which is expected since washing machines are usually used to wash multiple things.

(14) a. mam-i buluš:k’a u(b)čː-ura.
   mother-ERG dress(ABS) 〈N.SG〉wash-PRS
   ‘The mother is washing the dress.’

b. mam-i buluš:kː-jar u(ř)čː-ura.
   mother-ERG dress-PL(ABS) 〈PL〉wash-PRS
   ‘The mother is washing the dress.’

c. mašink-i uži u(ř)čː-ura / *u(b)čː-ura.
   machine-ERG good 〈PL〉wash-PRS 〈N.SG〉wash-PRS
   ‘The washing machine washes well.’

To sum up, Tabasaran does not belong to the active ergative language type, since it does not have unergative intransitive clauses with ergative case on the external argument. Even though Tabasaran allows objectless clauses with an ergative subject, we can detect either an overt object in the form of the noninflected part of a complex verb or a covert one indexed via verbal agreement.

3 Tabasaran Is Not an Object Shift Ergative Language

The second type of ergativity identified by Woolford (2015) is contingent upon the direct object moving out of its Merge position in VP.

As Bittner and Hale (1996) show, object shift in Inuit (Eskimo-Aleut) correlates with the semantic properties of the object: only specific objects move out of the VP, in which case the subject is ergative; nonspecific objects remain in situ within VP, in which case the subject is nominative. Woolford identifies a few more types of object shift languages. Apart from specificity/
nonspecificity of the object, she points out other factors that can be involved in object shift: (a) definiteness of the object, (b) topicality of the object, (c) a change in word order, (d) the ability of the object to trigger agreement, and (e) a change in the case marking of the object. For example, in Tagalog (Philippine), object shift depends on the definiteness of the object. Only with a definite object is the subject ergative; when the object is indefinite, the subject is absolutive/nominative. Other languages from Woolford’s sample demonstrate that object shift can be associated with a combination of two or more factors mentioned above. In Niuean (Polynesian), object shift correlates not only with specificity, but also with word order. The subject is ergative in VSO clauses where the object is specific, but nominative in VOS clauses where the object is nonspecific. In Dyirbal (Pama-Nyungan), three factors are involved in the case marking of the subject: word order, the topicality of the object, and its case marking. The basic word order in clauses with a topical absolutive object and an ergative subject is OSV. However, if the subject is the sentence topic, the object is dative, the word order changes to SVO, and the subject is nominative. Finally, Nez Perce (Sahaptian) demonstrates that object shift can also be reflected in verbal agreement. In this language, a topical object undergoing shift takes a morphologically marked case and triggers verbal agreement; the subject is marked with ergative case. However, a nontopical object takes a morphologically unmarked case and does not participate in verbal agreement; in this case, the subject is nominative.3

Thus, there are two options for transitive clauses in morphologically ergative languages with object shift: the subject can be either nominative or ergative. Movement of the object can be reflected in changes of case marking; verbal agreement can also be sensitive to object shift.

Turning to Tabasaran, we can note first of all that it has no transitive verbs that allow parallel constructions, with either an ergative or an absolutive subject and, possibly, a different case marking for the direct object. Second, there is no correlation between case marking and word order in Tabasaran. Although the neutral word order is SOV, all logically possible permutations are allowed. However, none of the possible word orders leads to a change in the case marking of the arguments. Third, there is no correlation between argument case marking and specificity, definiteness, or topicality of the direct object. Any transitive object, be it definite or indefinite, topical or focal, can only cooccur with an ergative subject. Finally, in Tabasaran, neither the position of the object nor its properties (definite, specific) affect agreement on the verb (see more on verbal agreement in section 6).

However, even though Tabasaran does not show any variation in subject case marking depending on the properties of the object, one could still suggest that it belongs to the object shift

3 Deal (2010) analyzes Nez Perce differently. In contrast to Woolford (2015), Deal shows that referentiality/definiteness does not directly correlate with ergativity. Identifying two types of objects—antipassive objects that are predicative and indefinite, and extended reflexive objects that are typically referential—Deal demonstrates that although the objects differ with respect to definiteness, in neither case does the subject appear in the ergative. Moreover, reflexive objects and transitive objects both leave VP, moving to Spec,Dist. Deal concludes that only a fully specified object agreeing with the verb leads to the assignment of ergative case on the subject. Thus, ergativity in Nez Perce depends on verbal agreement, but the agreement does not directly correlate with object shift in Deal’s analysis.
type, assuming that object shift is obligatory and does not depend on the properties of the object. This assumption would give us the necessary ergative case marking on the subject, given Woolford’s (2015) starting point that object shift puts the object in a position that changes the conditions for case marking of the subject.

The next four sections demonstrate that the direct object does not move in Tabasaran and that it stays in its original Merge position within VP. In section 4, I review evidence that all clausal arguments in Tabasaran receive case below T, which plays no role in case assignment. In section 5, I discuss anaphor binding in transitive clauses. In sections 6 and 7, I provide arguments from gender-number agreement and clitic doubling.

4 vP-Internal Case Assignment in Tabasaran

Following Bittner and Hale (1996), Woolford (2015) assumes that in languages with object shift, the latter operation places the object in a syntactic position that changes the conditions for case assignment of the subject. However, although their starting points are similar, Woolford’s and Bittner and Hale’s analyses differ in how they account for assignment of ergative case.

Bittner and Hale basically develop their analysis within the framework of dependent case theory. In this theory, which has advanced significantly over the past decade, especially in Mark Baker’s work (Baker 2014a, 2015, 2017, Baker and Bobaljik 2017), ergative case is considered to be licensed on a higher NP when there is a lower NP in the same local domain. In this way, the main factor responsible for ergative case assignment is the presence of another argument that serves as a competitor for case. According to Bittner and Hale, in languages like Inuit, when the object does not shift but rather stays in situ, VP constitutes a barrier and the object does not compete for case assignment with the subject outside VP. However, as soon as object shift occurs, the object occupies a position within the same domain as the subject, thus becoming a competitor; as a result, the object is assigned the unmarked absolutive case, while the subject is assigned marked ergative case. In contrast to Bittner and Hale’s proposal, Woolford argues against treating ergative case as a dependent case and rejects the idea that the ergative is licensed only in the presence of another argument that serves as a case competitor. Woolford’s analysis assumes that ergative case is inherent and licensed by the v head (Woolford 2007, 2015).

When object shift takes place, the object appears in the position between T and the base position of the subject; as a result, the shifted object blocks the relationship between T and the subject, thus interfering with assignment of nominative case to the external argument. Ergative case is assigned instead of nominative as a “last resort.” The shifted object—now the closest argument to T—receives nominative case. The analysis is represented schematically in (15).

(15) a. [T Obji [NOM] [Subj v [V ti]]]
   b. [T Obji [NOM] [Subj[ERG] v [V ti]]]

As Woolford herself notes, the details of this particular formalization can differ. (This is evident in her own work; compare Woolford 2007 with Woolford 2015.) What is crucial here is that after
object shift, the object intervenes between the subject and the head that licenses nominative case. It is the object that receives nominative case instead of the subject, for which only ergative case remains available.

To summarize, in dependent case theory, ergative case results from the presence of a lower argument in the structure, while in Woolford’s (2015) analysis, it results from T’s interaction with the object that blocks its relationship with the subject. Next, I show that in Tabasaran, higher clausal projections, such as T, do not participate in case licensing and that all case assignment takes place within the thematic layer, that is, within vP.

Unlike in nominative-accusative languages, where the subject’s case is assigned by T, previous work on Tsez, Archi, and Lak (Polinsky and Potsdam 2001, Polinsky 2003, 2015, 2016, Gagliardi et al. 2014, Polinsky, Radkevich, and Chumakina 2017) has shown that in these Nahk-Dagestanian languages, case assignment occurs at an earlier stage of clause derivation. The main evidence for this conclusion comes from the behavior of clausal arguments in nominalizations. Although low nominalizations in Tsez, Archi, and Lak are small structures lacking aspect, tense, and mood projections, they demonstrate the same ergative-absolutive marking as in any finite transitive clause. The availability of all argument cases in tenseless environments indicates that they are licensed inside vP rather than later by T.

In a similar way, Tabasaran nominalization in -ub is best analyzed as vP-nominalization. It lacks tense and aspect morphology, consisting of the verbal root and the nominalization suffix -ub. Semantically, although this type of nominalization can be modified by vP-level adverbs, as in (16a), it cannot combine with temporal adverbs (16b), suggesting the lack of clausal structure above vP.

(16) a. rasul-i maʰhaˈmad ʒiˈniːʒi ʊ(ɾ)χ-ub
   Rasul-ERG Mahamad(ABS) secret-ADV (H.SG)save-MASD
   ‘Rasul’s saving of Mahamad secretly’

   b. *rasul-i maʰhaˈmad naqˈ / ʊi ʊ(ɾ)χ-ub
   Rasul-ERG Mahamad(ABS) yesterday today (H.SG)save-MASD
   Intended: ‘Rasul’s saving of Mahamad yesterday/today’

Like finite clauses, nominalized transitive clauses have no counterpart with the subject in a case other than ergative. In (16a), for example, the nominalized clause with the transitive verb ʊ(ɾ)χ-‘save’ preserves the regular ergative-absolutive case-marking pattern, even though it lexicalizes a structure smaller than a finite clause. Given that all cases are present within vP, we can conclude that T plays no role in case assignment. Since all cases are assigned within vP in Tabasaran, the assignment of ergative case cannot correlate with moving the object outside vP. However, it is theoretically possible that even in small structures like a nominalization in -ub, the direct object moves out of VP to a vP-internal position and intervenes between v and the subject, which, on Woolford’s (2015) view, would lead to assigning ergative case to the latter. In the following section, I present some binding facts that shed light on the structural relationship between the subject and the direct object as well as between the direct object and the indirect object.
5 Reciprocal Clauses

5.1 The Relationship between the Subject and the Direct Object

Woolford’s (2015) proposed architecture of clauses with a shifted object assumes that the object moves from its Merge position and occurs between the subject and a head that assigns nominative case. In other words, in this new configuration the shifted object must be structurally higher than the subject, since it is the object rather than the subject that must receive nominative case from a head (see the schematic representation in (15b)). One of the most powerful ways to diagnose the structural position of an argument is syntactic binding. Below, I discuss binding of the reciprocal pronoun in transitive clauses.

In Tabasaran, the reciprocal pronoun *sarsar* consists of two instances of the numeral *sar* ‘one’ and inflects for the case appropriate in the position of the reciprocalized argument. Consider the parallel sentences in (17). The transitive sentence (17a), with the verb *kümek ap*’- ‘help’, has an ergative subject, *bažari* ‘boys’, and an indirect object/recipient in dative case expressed by the NP *mamiz* ‘to/for mother’. In (17b), with the same verb ‘help’, the reciprocal occupies the indirect object position.

(17) a. baž-ar-i mam.i-z kümek ap’-nu.
   boy-PL-ERG mother-DAT help PF-do-AOR
   ‘The boys helped the mother.’

b. baž-ar-i sarsar.i-z kümek ap’-nu.
   boy-PL-ERG REC-DAT help PF-do-AOR
   ‘The boys helped each other.’

Next, consider (18), which presents variants of a transitive sentence with the reciprocal in the direct object position. Example (18a) shows that the ergative subject can control the reciprocal in the direct object position. Example (18b) shows that the reverse configuration, where the antecedent is in the direct object position (in absolutive case) and controls the reciprocal in the subject position (in ergative case), is ungrammatical. Example (18c) shows that word order can be factored out here.

(18) a. baž-ar-i sarsar_i k-u(r)c₁-nu.
   boy-PL-ERG REC(ABS) PF-〈H.SG〉beat-AOR
   ‘The boys beat each other.’

b. *sarsar-ši baž-ar_i k-u(r)c₁-nu.
   REC-ERG boy-PL(ABS) PF-〈H.SG〉beat-AOR
   Intended: ‘The boys beat each other.’

c. *baž-ar_i sarsar-ši k-u(r)c₁-nu.
   boy-PL(ABS) REC-ERG PF-〈H.SG〉beat-AOR
   Intended: ‘The boys beat each other.’

Thus, the binding facts give evidence that the absolutive object is c-commanded by the ergative subject and thus cannot intervene between the subject and a case-assigning head (recall that this is v in Tabasaran). However, this fact can be interpreted in two different ways.
one hand, it could be that after object shift the subject also moves farther above the object, and binding only detects the resulting relationship between the arguments. On the other hand, the binding could in fact reflect the original Merge position of the object, the possibility I argue for here. To more accurately identify the position of the direct object, let us consider the structural relationship between the direct and indirect objects in the ditransitive construction.

5.2 The Relationship between the Direct and Indirect Objects in Ditransitives

The ditransitive construction in Tabasaran features the direct object in absolutive case and the indirect object in the dative. The subject is marked by the ergative just as with regular transitive verbs. Word order is free, though the neutral order is subject–indirect object–direct object as in (19).

(19) mam-i baž-ar.i-z kitab ulup-nu.
    mother-ERG boy-PL-DAT book(ABS) show-AOR
    ‘The mother showed a/the book to the boys.’

As in many typologically different languages, the direct and indirect objects in the ditransitive construction can appear in two different configurations (see, e.g., McGinnis 2001, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Pylkkänen 2008, Baker and Vinokurova 2010, Baker 2014a, an overview in Ormazabal and Romero 2010, and a survey of crosslinguistic data on ditransitive constructions in Manzini and Franco 2016). On the one hand, the direct object can be merged higher than the indirect object, as argued for example by Bailyn (2012), who shows that in Russian, the dative indirect object is located below the accusative direct object within VP. On the other hand, the asymmetry could be viewed as evidence that the indirect object c-commands the direct object, as shown, for example, by Polinsky (2016) for Archi (Nakh-Daghestanian).

However, some languages demonstrate both options: the direct object can bind the indirect object, but the converse is also possible. English provides a good example. The sentences in (20)–(21), cited from one of the earliest papers on the topic (Larson 1988:336), illustrate the two options. In (20a), where the indirect object/recipient is expressed by the prepositional dative construction, the direct object/theme binds the indirect object, whereas the reverse is not possible, (20b). By contrast, in (21a), instantiating the double object construction, the recipient binds the theme; again, the reverse is not possible, (21b).

(20) a. I sent every paycheck to its owner.
    b. *I sent his paycheck to every worker.

(21) a. I sent every worker his paycheck.
    b. *I sent its owner every paycheck.

Analyses of this kind of the relationship between the direct and indirect objects commonly assume the presence of some kind of applicative head in the double object construction. If the recipient argument occupies a position below the direct object, the relationship in (20) results; if the recipient is an argument of the applicative head merged above the direct object, we find the relationship in (21) (see Larson 1988, Marantz 1993; also see Bruening 2010 and references
In both cases, it is assumed that the direct object occupies a position within VP, while the indirect object shifts or merges above the direct object.

Let us turn to Tabasaran. As in English, there are two ways to express the reciprocal relationship in the ditransitive construction. In (22), the antecedent bažar ‘boys’ in the direct object position binds the reciprocal in the indirect object position.

(22) mam-i baž-arl sarsari-zulup-nu.
mother-ERG boy-PLABS REC-DAT show-AOR
‘The mother showed the boys to each other.’

However, the reverse option is also grammatical. In (23), the antecedent bažar ‘boys’ in the indirect object position binds the reciprocal in the direct object position.

(23) mam-i baž-ar.i-zulup-nu.
mother-ERG boy-PL-DAT RECABS show-AOR
‘The mother showed the boys each other.’

The difference between the ditransitive constructions in English and Tabasaran is that in English the recipient argument is marked differently in these two structures, while in Tabasaran it is not.

Note that scrambling does not generally feed binding in Tabasaran, as (18c) shows, so the grammaticality of both (22) and (23) cannot be explained by linear order.

Let us first assume that in Tabasaran, as in other languages with two possible direct- and indirect-object configurations, it is the indirect object that shifts from its original position or merges above the direct object (which it is, is irrelevant for the current discussion) while the direct object stays in situ. Two possible configurations of the direct and indirect objects in Tabasaran are as follows:

(24) a. Abs / Dat
    b. Dat / Abs

As generalized by Holmberg (1999:15) for Scandinavian languages, object shift cannot apply across a phonologically visible category that asymmetrically c-commands the object position. In the vast literature on object shift in Scandinavian languages, it is commonly accepted that object shift is blocked in the presence of the indirect object that c-commands the direct object (Holmberg 1999, Vikner 2005, Vikner and Engels 2006, and references therein).4

If we take Holmberg’s Generalization into account, configuration (24a) cannot be a result of the direct object shifting above the dative indirect object: *Absi > Dat > ti. Thus, (24a) is possible if the direct object is originally higher than the indirect object. If so, configuration (24b) is a result of the indirect object moving above the direct object: Dati > Abs > ti (or of the dative object itself merging higher than the direct object).

4 As discussed in the literature (Vikner 2005), identifying the object’s original position may be hindered only by the fact that object shift becomes possible when the elements that precede the object within VP also move. In Tabasaran, the dative indirect object is c-commanded by the direct object (see (22)), so the sequential movement of indirect and direct objects, if at all possible, cannot be as simple as in Scandinavian languages, where the indirect object precedes the direct object.
However, it is theoretically still possible that similar configurations of arguments could occur if object shift took place. For example, in (24a) the direct object, being higher than the indirect object, could move farther from its original position: \( \text{Abs}_i > t_i > \text{Dat} \). In (24b), first the direct object could move out of its original position; then after this the indirect object could move above the direct object: \( \text{Dat}_j > \text{Abs}_i > t_i > t_j \).\(^5\) However, superficially there are no indications that these movements take place. Recall that the binding facts involving the subject give no evidence that the direct object can move above the subject either. I therefore argue that in both configurations (24a–b), the direct object occupies its original position within VP.

If this analysis is on the right track, (24b) is a key schematic for the current discussion. It shows that in a clause with a low direct object and in which the dative indirect object preserves the direct object from further movement (because of Holmberg’s Generalization), the subject still takes ergative case (see also (23)). In other words, the low position of the object does not lead to assignment of another case to the subject, contrary to Woolford’s prediction.

To recap, the previous and current sections have shown that binding facts give no evidence that the direct object can be higher than the subject, as required for Woolford’s mechanism of assigning ergative case. Furthermore, there are no superficial indications that the direct object moves from its original position within VP. The ditransitive clause where the indirect object c-commands the direct object demonstrates that even in sentences with a lower direct object, the subject receives ergative case.

In the following section, I look more closely at object gender-number agreement in Tabasaran and show that in contrast to Woolford’s analysis of Nez Perce, where object agreement can be evidence of object shift, gender-number agreement in Tabasaran occurs at an early stage of clause derivation and therefore indicates that the direct object occupies a low position. Together with binding facts, gender-number agreement constitutes additional support for the idea that the appearance of ergative case does not correlate with object shift.

6 Gender-Number Agreement in Tabasaran

An anonymous reviewer points out that verbal agreement with the object in a transitive clause can signal object shift. As discussed in section 3, in Woolford’s (2015) analysis Nez Perce exhibits a correlation between the shifted topical object and verbal agreement: specifically, shifted topical objects in the ergative subject construction participate in verbal agreement, while in-situ nontopical objects do not (for an alternative analysis, see Deal 2010 and footnote 3 above). In Tabasaran,

\[^5\] An anonymous reviewer proposes that in the construction where \( \text{Dat} \rightarrow \text{Abs} \), the object is outside of VP, but \( \text{Dat} \) also moves out of VP and scopes over the object because of its topical properties. However, I have found no correlation between topicality of the indirect object and its ability to c-command the direct object; even a focal indirect object can control a reciprocal in direct object position, as (i) illustrates.

(i) mam-i šli-zį sarsarį ulup-nu?
mother-ERG who-DAT REC(ABS) show-AOR
“Whom did the mother show each other?”
object agreement is obligatory, which would mean that object shift is obligatory in transitive clauses, thus leading to the appearance of ergative case on the subject.

As in most other Daghestanian languages, only the absolutive argument can control gender-number agreement in Tabasaran. Nouns distinguish two genders, nonhuman and human, reflected in an agreement slot on verbs. With most verbs, gender-number agreement contrasts nonhuman singular nouns (N.SG in glosses) with all other nouns, that is, human singular and plural (H.SG and PL in glosses), since morphological marking of plural nouns typically coincides with the human singular marking. Some verbs have no morphological slot for gender-number agreement.

In transitive clauses, agreement is controlled by the absolutive (direct) object, as shown in (25). In (25a), the direct object is nonhuman singular $\chi u$ ‘dog’, triggering the nonhuman singular agreement infix $\langle b \rangle$ on the verb (N.SG in glosses). By contrast, in (25b), the direct object is the human singular $ba\z$ ‘boy’, triggering the human singular agreement infix $\langle r \rangle$ on the verb (H.SG in glosses).

(25) a. rasul-i $\chi u$ $\kappa-u(b)\check{c}:-nu$.  
Rasul-ERG dog(ABS) PF-(N.SG)beat-AOR  
‘Rasul beat the dog.’

b. rasul-i $ba\z$ $\kappa-u(t)\check{c}:-nu$.  
Rasul-ERG boy(ABS) PF-(H.SG)beat-AOR  
‘Rasul beat the boy.’

In linguistic typology, it is also known that object marking is not a very strong argument for object shift. Following Riedel (2009), Baker (2018) and Baker and Kramer (2018) discuss a representative sample of Bantu languages, Amharic (Semitic), and Burushaski (an isolate spoken in Northern Pakistan) and show that object marking on the verb does not correlate with object dislocation. Applying standard tests to these languages to ascertain whether the direct object has shifted yields negative results (the verbal object agreement displays no effect for (in)definiteness or (in)animacy, nor does it lead to a change in word order). Apart from these diagnostics, the authors use the morphological position of object markers as an indicator of direct object position and conclude that the direct object stays in situ. Even though object markers in Bantu, Amharic, and Burushaski display different syntactic behaviors (cliticization or agreement), they share morphological properties. Agreement markers occupy a morphological position closest to the verbal root (Bantu and Amharic) or the prefixal position (Burushaski) and do not depend on tense inflections. The authors assume that the morphological position of verbal markers indicates that object agreement takes place at an earlier stage of the clause’s derivation and that it therefore signals that the direct object is in a low position.

As in the languages cited above, gender-number agreement in Tabasaran does not depend on definiteness, animacy, topicality, or a change in word order; any direct object must agree with the verb. Moreover, Tabasaran demonstrates morphological properties of verbal agreement very similar to those found in these languages. Gender-number agreement appears in an infixal position inside the verbal root (see (25)) or in a prefixal position closest to the root (see (30a)) and does not associate with tense inflections. Even in a tenseless nominalized clause, the verb agrees with
the direct object and bears gender-number agreement (see (16a)), which also indicates that gender-number agreement appears very early and that the direct object agreeing with the verb stays in its original low position.

Now let us look at both binding and gender-number agreement. Example (26) (= (18a)) is a reciprocal sentence where the direct object agrees with the verb following general rules. The direct object, specified for [human, singular], triggers the gender-number infix ⟨r⟩ on the verb (cf. (25a–b)), which signals a low direct object position. The binding facts also show that the direct object is lower than the subject, since the subject c-commands the direct object.

(26) baž-ar-i, sarsar, k-u(r)c-ː-nu.
   boy-PL-ERG REC(ABS) PF-⟨H.SG⟩beat-AOR
   ‘The boys beat each other.’

Binding facts and gender-number agreement in ditransitive clauses make it even less likely that object movement is possible in Tabasaran. First, let us look at gender-number agreement in ditransitive clauses. In the ditransitive sentences in (27a) with the verb ˚ada(ːcl)˚- ‘take’, the nonhuman singular direct object kitab ‘book’—in direct object position—triggers nonhuman singular gender-number agreement on the verb, ⟨b⟩ (⟨N.SG⟩ in glosses); human singular gender-number agreement (zero marker, ⟨H.SG⟩ in glosses) is impossible. In the sentences in (27b), with the same verb ˚ada(ːcl)˚- ‘take’ but with the human singular direct object Rasul, the verb has a zero human singular marker; the nonhuman singular marker ⟨b⟩ is ungrammatical.

(27) a. mam-i rasul.i-z kitab ˚ada(ːb)k-ː-nu / *˚adak-ː-nu.
   mother-ERG Rasul-DAT book(ABS) ⟨N.SG⟩take-AOR (⟨H.SG⟩take-AOR
   ‘The mother bought Rasul a/the book.’

   b. ˚uji-i rasul ˚adak-ː-nu / *˚ada(ːb)k-ː-nu.
   dog-ERG Rasul(ABS) (⟨H.SG⟩take-AOR ⟨N.SG⟩take-AOR
   ‘The dog caught Rasul.’

(28) is a reciprocal sentence parallel to (23). The direct object, which is the reciprocal specified for [human, singular], triggers human singular agreement on the verb (zero marker, ⟨H.SG⟩ in glosses). Meanwhile, binding shows that the direct object is lower than the indirect object. Therefore, both gender-number agreement and binding indicate that the direct object is in a low position.

(28) mam-i bic’i-dar.i-z sarsar ˚ada-k-ː-nu.
   mother-ERG small-PL-DAT REC(ABS) ⟨H.SG⟩take-AOR
   ‘The mother took children for each other.’

To sum up, in support of binding facts, gender-number agreement with a direct object that occurs in an early stage of the clause derivation signals that the direct object is in a low position.

The next section provides one more argument that the object in a transitive clause remains in its original position. Person clitics in Tabasaran give evidence that in a transitive clause, the direct object stays in the same position as an unaccusative theme argument, in situ within VP, but the subject is nevertheless marked with ergative case.
7 The Direct Object and the Theme Argument of Unaccusatives: Evidence from Person Clitics

Tabasaran person clitics originally derived from personal pronouns and are still similar or even identical to full pronouns. Person clitics obligatorily mark subjects, while nonsubject arguments are only optionally clitic-doubled.6 The intransitive sentence in (29) (= (3a)) has a first person singular subject, which must be marked by the corresponding person clitic; otherwise, the sentence is ungrammatical. Person clitics in Tabasaran appear above tense markers, indicating their association with a higher clausal projection.

(29) uzu ˛-uš-un=za / *˛-uš-nu.
   I PF-(H.SG)go-AOR=1SG:AG PF-(H.SG)go-AOR
   ‘I went away.’

Any nonsubject argument can also be optionally doubled by the corresponding clitic, as illustrated in (30). The transitive sentence in (30a) has an optionally cliticized direct object; (30b) shows the optional cliticization of an indirect object; (30c) illustrates the cliticization—again, optional—of an argument in one of the locative cases.

(30) a. rasul-i uzu ˛i-d-is-nu / ˛i-d-is-un=zu.
    ‘Rasul caught me.’

b. rasul-i uzu-z kümek ap’-uru / ap’-uru=zu-z.
    Rasul-ERG I-DAT help do-FUT do-FUT=1SG-DAT
    ‘Rasul will help me.’

c. rasul-i uzu-q-ţi gafar ap’-uru / ap’-uru=zu-q-ţi.
    Rasul-ERG I-POST-DIR word-PL do-FUT do-FUT=1SG-POST-DIR
    ‘Rasul will talk with me.’

It should be noted that object cliticization is also used in the literature as a diagnostic for object shift. Languages differ in the ability of full DPs and pronominal clitics to undergo object shift (see Vikner 2005 and references therein), which superficially is manifested in differences in case assignment or changes in word order in sentences with full DPs and weak or strong pronominal DPs.7 However, it has been shown for several Bantu languages and Amharic that clitic doubling is also possible when the object stays in situ (Baker 2017, Baker and Kramer 2018). In these languages, cliticization does not affect word order and there is no difference between clitic-doubled and non-clitic-doubled objects with respect to case marking.

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6 Kibrik and Seleznev (1982) provided the first analysis of person clitics in Tabasaran, treating subject clitics as syntactic agreement and nonsubject clitic doubling as semantic agreement.

7 Scandinavian languages provide one of the best-known examples. For instance, Icelandic allows both pronominal objects and full DP objects to move from their original position. However, in other Scandinavian languages, such as Danish, only pronominal objects may undergo object shift; full DP objects may not. In languages like Icelandic, strong pronouns behave like full NPs in that both optionally undergo object shift. Vikner (2005:416–420) also notes that in languages where full DPs are blocked from shifting, strong pronouns may not shift either.
According to these diagnostics, person cliticization in Tabasaran is best analyzed in terms of a cliticized argument that stays in situ, doubled higher in the structure by the corresponding clitic. First, full DPs and clitic-doubled pronominal DPs do not differ either in word order or in argument case marking. Second, cliticized and noncliticized arguments do not differ with respect to their syntactic position in the clause. For instance, objects that are cliticized canonically occupy the same position between the subject and the verb. Third, as the examples above illustrate, the case marking of cliticized and noncliticized objects also remains invariant. Fourth, Tabasaran has a very elaborate system of nominal cases to express locative relations of various kinds. As the examples in (30c) show, there are no restrictions on cliticization of arguments in locative cases, which are more like prepositional phrases. However, for Scandinavian languages it has been shown that an argument within the prepositional phrase cannot undergo object shift (Vikner 2005). If clitic doubling correlated with a dislocation of arguments in Tabasaran, an argument in a locative case would not be able to cliticize, contrary to fact. Finally, the morphological position of the clitic demonstrates that even if clitic doubling involves a shift, the clitic appears later in the derivation, above T. For example, person clitics cannot attach to tenseless nominalizations (see section 4), as shown in (31).

(31) rasul-i uzu u / *u$_{\alpha}$-ub

Rasul-ERG I (H.SG$\backslash$save-MASD (H.SG$\backslash$save-MASD=1SG$\backslash$PAT

‘Rasul’s saving of me’

Considering that all case assignment happens within vP, while higher projections, such as T, do not participate in it, it is unlikely that clitic doubling affects subject case marking that occurs within vP. I thus conclude that clitic doubling does not involve argument shifting in Tabasaran, including object shift.

Now let us look more closely at marking of the direct object by person clitics in a transitive clause. In a transitive clause, the direct object can optionally be marked by clitics from the u-series, as shown in (32). In (32a), the first person direct object is marked by the clitic =zu on the verb (1SG$\backslash$PAT(IENT) in glosses). In (32b), the second person direct object is doubled by the clitic =vu (2SG$\backslash$PAT in glosses). What is interesting is that the direct object of a transitive clause is marked by the same u-series clitics as the subject of an unaccusative verb. In the unaccusative sentence (33a), the first person subject is obligatorily marked by the clitic =zu; in (33b), the second person subject is marked by the clitic =vu.

(32) a. χuij-i uzu ʔi-di-is-un=zu.
dog-ERG I PF-H.SG-catch-AOR=1SG$\backslash$PAT
‘The dog caught me.’

b. χuij-i uvu ʔi-di-is-un=vu.
dog-ERG you(SG) PF-H.SG-catch-AOR=2SG$\backslash$PAT
‘The dog caught you.’

(33) a. uzu aq-un=zu.
I (H.SG$\backslash$fall.down-AOR=1SG$\backslash$PAT
‘I fell down.’
Thus, direct objects of transitive verbs and subjects of unaccusative verbs are marked identically with person clitics from the $u$-series. By contrast, subjects of unergative and transitive verbs are always marked by clitics from the $a$-series, never by those from the $u$-series. In the transitive clause in (34a), the first person subject is obligatorily marked by the $a$-series clitic $=za\ (AG\ (ENT))$ in glosses; the $u$-series clitic $=zu$ is impossible here. In the unergative intransitive clause in (35a) (= (3a)), the first person subject is also marked by $=za$; again, $=zu$ is ungrammatical. Examples (34b) and (35b) demonstrate the same contrast but with a second person subject.  

By contrast, direct objects and subjects of unaccusative verbs cannot be marked with clitics from the $a$-series, as shown in (36) and (37) with first person subjects.

To sum up, clitics mark transitive objects and unaccusative subjects identically and distinguish them from transitive and unergative subjects.

If we take into account Perlmutter’s (1978) Unaccusative Hypothesis, according to which the direct object of transitive verbs and the theme argument of unaccusative verbs are merged in

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8 As discussed in section 2 (see (4a–b)), a few verbs in Tabasaran allow both $u$-series clitics and $a$-series clitics; this correlates with a difference in interpretation concerning whether the action occurs accidentally or voluntarily. I assume that syntactically, these verbs can behave as unaccusative or unergative, their subject located within VP or in an external position above VP, respectively.
the same position, it is reasonable to assume that direct objects and subjects of unaccusative verbs are marked alike with \( u \)-series clitics, since they occupy the same position in the clause structure: they are located within VP. By contrast, subjects of transitive and unergative verbs are marked with \( a \)-series clitics, since they occupy a different position: they are located outside VP. Therefore, the distinction between \( a \)-series and \( u \)-series clitics can be considered an additional diagnostic in that the direct object of a transitive verb is associated with a low position similar to that of the subject of an unaccusative verb. Examples (30) and (32) show that in all cases where the direct object is marked by a clitic from the \( u \)-series and is presumably located within VP, the subject receives ergative case. Thus, the behavior of clitic doubling also fails to support the hypothesis that Tabasaran can be an ergative language with an object shift.

To conclude my discussion of ergativity in Tabasaran, in the next section I briefly present the Tabasaran facts in light of dependent case theory.

8 Tabasaran Data and Dependent Case Theory

Dependent case theory—which Woolford (2015) disagrees with and which Baker and coauthors have elaborated and applied to several unrelated languages (see references in section 4)—claims that case assignment is not determined by any individual functional head; rather, it is defined by the configuration of arguments occupying the same domain. Tabasaran is a good example for testing the theory, since case licensing is carried out independently of \( T \) (see section 4).

According to the theory, if there is only one NP in a given domain, then it bears unmarked case (Nom/Abs) (as in an intransitive clause); if there are two NPs in the same domain, then at least one of them may bear a dependent case. For two arguments, being in the same phase (domain) is a prerequisite for establishing dependent case rules between them. Therefore, even though it does not directly affect the assignment of a dependent case, a functional head can still play an indirect role whether it is a phase head or not.

On this view, nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive/nominative systems differ only in which of two NPs in the same domain gets marked with a dependent case, the lower one or the higher one. When the lower NP is marked, it receives dependent accusative case; when the higher one is marked, it receives dependent ergative case. To validate dependent case theory, Baker and coauthors examine the ditransitive construction in several languages. Recall that in ditransitive sentences, Tabasaran allows two configurations, schematized in (38a–b) (see (22)–(23)).

\[
\begin{align*}
(38) & \quad a. \text{Erg} > \text{Abs} (\text{DO}) > \text{Dat} (\text{IO}) \\
& \quad b. \text{Erg} > \text{Dat} (\text{IO}) > \text{Abs} (\text{DO})
\end{align*}
\]

Baker and coauthors propose several scenarios for the relationship between the indirect and direct objects. One emerges from two ergative languages: Shipibo (Panoan) (Baker 2014a) and Burushaski (Northern Pakistan) (Baker 2017). In these two languages, the goal argument c-commands the theme, but both arguments are marked by the absolutive, yielding the configuration Erg > Abs (IO) > Abs > (DO). Baker proposes that in these languages vP is a soft phase; that
is, all arguments remain visible in the subsequent stage of the derivation. In this configuration, the highest NP receives dependent ergative case, while the two lower NPs remain unmarked. As we have seen, that is not the case for Tabasaran, where the indirect object retains dative case when it moves to a position above the direct object.

Baker and Vinokurova (2010) discuss another scenario, illustrated by the ditransitive construction in the nominative-accusative language Sakha (Turkic). In this language, the indirect object is always marked by dative case, while the case of a direct object depends on its position. Sakha allows three argument configurations in the ditransitive construction.

(39) *Sakha*

a. \[ CP \text{ Subj (Nom) } \succ \text{ VP IO (Dat) } \succ \text{ DO (unmarked)} \]

b. \[ CP \text{ Subj (Nom) } \succ \text{ DOi (Acc)} \succ \text{ VP IO (Dat) } t_1 \]

c. \[ CP \text{ Subj (Nom) } \succ \text{ IO2 (Dat) } \succ \text{ DOi (Acc)} \] \[ \text{ VP } t_2 \]

(according to Baker and Vinokurova 2010)

For configuration (39a), Baker and Vinokurova propose distinguishing two phases: VP and CP. The configurational rules are first applied within VP, where the indirect object c-commands the direct object. The higher, indirect object receives dependent dative case, while the direct object—being in the same domain—is unmarked. The direct object does not receive accusative case since it is not in the same domain as the subject. Here, the authors deviate from the traditional view that the inventory of phases consists of vP and CP (Chomsky 2001): they consider that even VP can be a separate domain for the implementation of dependent case assignment. They base this claim on the case marking of two objects, but do not give independent evidence that VP is a separate domain. For configuration (39b), they propose that the direct object moves to the domain of the subject and therefore receives dependent accusative case, while the highest argument, the subject, remains unmarked.

We can say that Tabasaran configuration (38a) is parallel to Sakha configuration (39b), assuming that the ergative and absolutive fall within the same domain. The only differences are that in Tabasaran (a) the direct object does not move but stays within VP, and (b) the subject—the highest argument—receives dependent ergative case, while the direct object remains unmarked. If this is so, for this configuration we should show that the two arguments are in the same domain and that VP is not a separate domain, as Baker and Vinokurova propose for Sakha. Even though Tabasaran does not demonstrate the object-marking alternation that Baker and Vinokurova view as signaling a separate domain, Tabasaran, like many Nakh-Daghestanian languages, has gender-number object agreement within VP, which could be an independent indication of a boundary in the clause structure. It seems that since Tabasaran has unaccusative clauses with the subject argument in the same position as the object (see diagnostics using clitics in (3a–b) and (32)–(33)), VP can be a domain independent from the next level, vP. This leads to the legitimate question, why is VP with object agreement not taken into account as a boundary in implementing dependent case rules in a transitive clause?

Finally, Baker and Vinokurova (2010) treat configuration (39c) as the result of the indirect object moving after the direct object moves. In this configuration, the indirect object appears in
the same domain as the subject and the direct object, but does not obey the case distribution rules according to dependent case theory and retains the original dative case. Tabasaran (38b) can be a schematic example parallel to the configuration in (39c), where the indirect object moves above the absolutive direct object and also retains its dative case.

Baker and Vinokurova (2010), as well as Baker (2015:263–272), discuss the interaction of movement and case assignment but do not give a ready-made solution, noting that this interaction is somewhat complicated. One of their assumptions is that a moved NP that receives its case from the lowest position either becomes ineligible for further case assignment or receives two cases, only one of which is overtly expressed. If we take this seriously, the configuration presented in (39b) is not problematic for dependent case theory. However, in my view it requires additional assumptions in the theory and would seem to require closer examination. Other Daghestanian languages like Archi and Tsez (Gagliardi et al. 2014, Polinsky, Radkevich, and Chumakina 2017), which have a similar grammatical profile, do not demonstrate an alternation in the relative structural position of the direct and indirect objects, only diagnosing the indirect object as c-commanding the direct object, and thus do not show any sign of a lower position of the indirect object and its moving past the direct object. Therefore, a movement analysis would not explain why the indirect object located between the subject and the direct object is not involved in this mechanism of dependent case licensing.9

Last of all, assuming that in ergative languages the highest argument receives dependent ergative case, while the lower argument remains unmarked, dependent case theory should be able to explain other clause types available in Tabasaran, like many other Daghestanian languages; in these languages, the subject can appear not only in ergative case but also in the dative (in experiencial constructions), as well as in several locative cases (e.g., in possessive and involuntary agent constructions), while the lower argument is still in the absolutive. Thus, overall, it seems that dependent case theory is a good candidate for explaining case assignment in Tabasaran, since, indeed, the ergative subject appears only in the presence of an absolutive object. Additional research will determine whether the theory can be adapted to Tabasaran.

9 Conclusions

Woolford (2015) examines several ergative languages, concluding that all of them fall into one of two types, as predicted by Bittner and Hale (1996): either active ergative or object shift ergative. She asks whether ergative languages also exist in which appearance of the ergative subject depends only on the presence of a direct object (transitivity-based ergativity).

The data presented here show that Tabasaran belongs to neither the active nor the object shift type of ergative languages. First, I argued that ergativity in this language strongly correlates with syntactic transitivity. No intransitive verb has an ergative subject, whereas the subject of a

9 Baker (2015) and Baker and Bobaljik (2017) also discuss why the dative argument is not visible for syntax when the dative is a prepositional phrase. This argumentation does not work for Tabasaran, since the dative indirect object can move, while a prepositional phrase cannot.
transitive clause is always ergative, showing that Tabasaran does not belong to the active type. Second, I provided arguments against including Tabasaran in the object shift type, showing that the subject bears ergative case even when the direct object stays in its Merge position. The arguments rested on binding facts, the behavior of gender-number agreement, and clitic doubling. None of these facts indicates that object shift occurs in an ergative clause; by contrast, they do give evidence that the direct object is very likely associated with the lower position within VP. Therefore, Tabasaran instantiates transitivity-based ergativity, whose existence Woolford (2007, 2015) calls into question.

Finally, I also discussed the Tabasaran data in view of dependent case theory and showed that, even though in general the theory can explain the pattern of ergativity presented in Tabasaran, many details (such as ditransitive constructions, dative and locative subjects in the presence of the absolutive object) do not fit completely into that theoretical model and will probably require the introduction of several new assumptions to apply this theory to Tabasaran.

References


Natalia Bogomolova
Department of Caucasian Languages
Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences
Laboratory for Languages of the Caucasus
National Research University Higher School of Economics
n.k.bogomolova@gmail.com
n.bogomolova@mail.ru