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The existence of an implicit object in Georgian unergatives

The main question addressed in the presentation is whether the Georgian unergatives have implicit objects in the structure and if so, which syntactic factors determine their identification?

The existence or on the contrary the absence of phonologically null cognate objects in unergatives is a long-standing issue in syntactic theory and has been thoroughly studied cross-linguistically. Best discussed from this point of view are Basque unergatives used as evidence to support both the presence or the lack of the implicit arguments (see Bobaljik 1993; Laka 1993; Etxepare 2003; Preminger 2012; Berro & Etxepare 2017 among others).

Existing accounts of the Georgian unergatives also provide arguments to support both views. The claims in the literature are merely based on transitivity and the possibility to involve cognate objects. Thus, unergatives are treated either as intransitives, which lack covert theme objects (Chikobava 1950; Vogt 1971; Shanidze 1980; Nash 2021, etc.) or as underlyingly transitives (Schuchardt 1895; Hewitt 1987; 1995; Nash 1995; 2017; Melikishvili 2001; 2014; Melikishvili, Humphries & Kupunia 2008, etc.).

In this presentation, I introduce new arguments and argue that unergatives involve an implicit object. The arguments (old and new) provided in the presentation concern the transitive structure, agreement morphology for the implicit argument, the need for a second DP in the case-assignment domain (obligatory with ergative subjects), use of a D head as a residual of a DP with null objects, and the possibility to employ various valency increasing strategies to add theme argument, including use of cognate objects.

The key new arguments are (a) the agreement morphology in perfect tenses which reflects the presence of the implicit object (1);

(1	PRF.IND	m-i-k'amat-i-**a** 'I have argued'
)		1SG.SBJ-PV-argue-PRF-**3SG.OBJ**
	PLUPRF	m-e-k'amat-**a**
		1SG.SBJ-PV-argue-**3SG.OBJ**
	PRF.SBJV	m-e-k'amat-o-**s**
		1SG.SBJ-PV-argue-SBJV-**3SG.OBJ**

and, (b) the existence of the D head, which can be checked by adding a quantifier *bevri/tsota* 'many/few' to all unergative verbs. Crucially, this quantifier has the same case marking as a direct object (2).

(2) a. momkhsenebel-i   bevr-**s**   saubr-ob-d-a.

    presenter-NOM/ABS   a_lot-**DAT/ACC**   talk-THM-IPFV-3SG.SBJ:PST
    'The presenter was talking a lot.'

    b. momkhsenebel-ma   bevr-**i**   i-saubr-a.

    presenter-ERG   a-lot-**NOM/ABS**   PV-talk-3SG.SBJ:PFV.PST
    'The presenter talked a lot.'

Both instances (1 & 2) show that the implicit argument is syntactically projected, as it triggers agreement and has case. Moreover, the remnant D shows directly that there is an internal argument in the structure, as only DPs can function as an internal argument. It has been mentioned in the literature that as case is a property of DPs and case inflection is primarily visible on [D] elements, the implicit direct object must contain the [D] feature (see Landau 2010), and this is exactly what we observe in the Georgian unergative structure.

Though such a view in terms of null objects may not apply cross-linguistically, I show that existing counter-arguments for the absence of an implicit argument in other languages, such as lack of corresponding nominals, the adpositional complement of the verb, and agreement with low absolutives in LDA unergatives (as discussed by Preminger 2012 for Basque) do not extend to Georgian.

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