Current Issues in Sign Language Linguistics/4

Josep Quer
ICREA-Universitat Pompeu Fabra

I Escuela de Lingüística de Buenos Aires
15-19 February, 2016

upf. Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona

LSC Lab
Laboratori de llengua de signes catalana

ICREA

Overview

- Characteristics of SL agreement systems
- Review of main analyses of SL agreement: syntactic vs. thematic approaches
- Arguments for SL agreement as linguistic agreement (morphosyntactic effects), not just deixis
- Issue of the agreement controller
- Syntactic accounts

SL Verb Typology

- SL verbs seem to fall into three morphosyntactic classes (Padden 1988/1983):
    - Plain verbs: no agreement
    - Spatial verbs: agreement with locative arguments
    - Agreeing verbs: agreement with subject and object

SL Verb Typology

- Plain verbs: FORGET

'Did you forget me?'

SL Verb Typology

- Agreeing verbs: they show agreement with their arguments by means of

  - the movement **path** and/or

  - the **facing** (orientation of palm and/or fingertips)

- Subtype of agreeing verbs: backwards agreeing verbs (TAKE, STEAL...) [vs. regular agreeing verbs (GIVE, HELP...)]

SL Agreement Morphology

- Sandler (1989): agreement template of path agreement Vs

```
                HC
              / | \
             /  |  \
            /   |   \
           L    M    L
      Agr locus     Agr locus
```
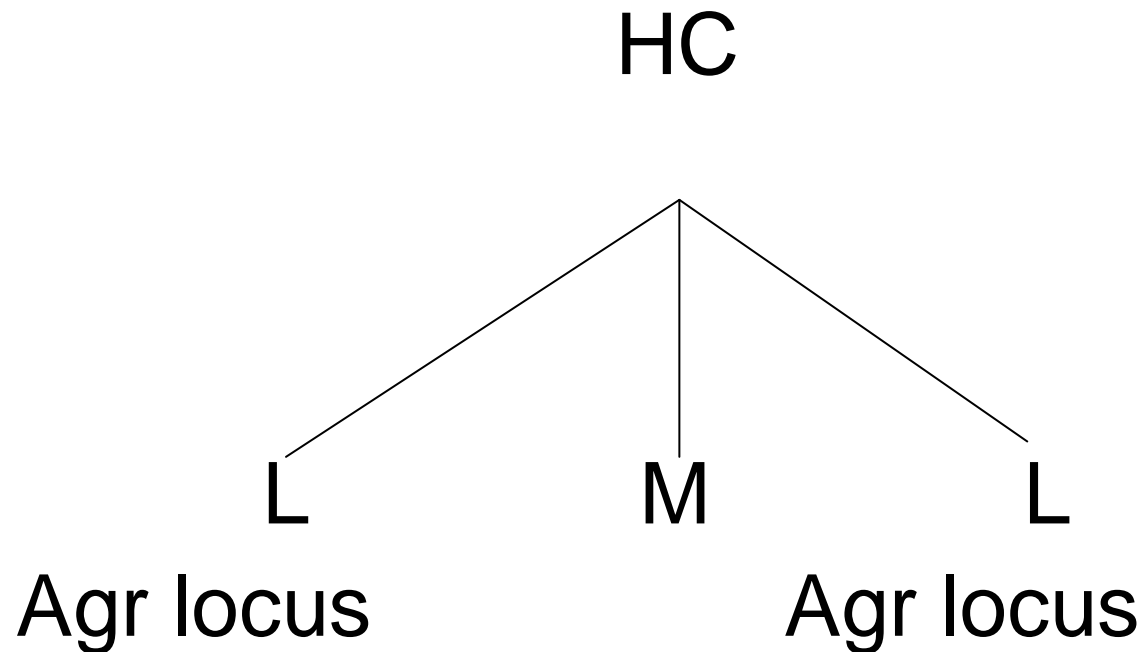
SL Verb Typology

- Spatial verbs: STAY, MOVE-TO

'My son stayed at Gallaudet University for two years. Then he moved to Bristol and when he finished there he moved to Barcelona. Now he works here'

SL Verb Typology

- Agreeing verbs (path): GIVE

'A girlfriend of mine gave me some money. Next week I'll give it back to her.'

SL Verb Typology

Agreeing verbs (facing): TAKE-CARE-OF (LSC)

'A long time ago my parents used to take care of me. Now that
has changed and I take care of them.'

SL Verb Typology

- Backwards agreeing verbs: UNDERSTAND

'Do you understand me?'

'The grampa doesn't understand the grandchild.'

Typological Peculiarities
(Lillo-Martin & Meier 2011)

- The agreement systems of different SLs are strikingly similar and make use of signing space

- Two groups of verbs within a single language; the role of phonological and semantic factors

- Subject agreement appears to be more marked than object agreement (optionality)

- There are in principle infinitely many realizations for agreement with a *non-first* referent ($\rightarrow$ listability problem)

Agreement Auxiliaries in SLs

- Attested in
  - Argentinean SL (LSA)
  - Brazilian SL (LSB/LIBRAS)
  - Catalan Sign Language (LSC)
  - German SL (DGS)
  - Indo-Pakistani SL (IPSL)
  - Japanese SL (NS)
  - SL of The Netherlands (NGT)
  - Taiwanese SL (TSL)

Agreement Auxiliaries in SLs

- Not attested in:
  - American SL (ASL)
  - Australian SL (Auslan)
  - British SL (BSL)
  - New Zealand SL (NZSL)
  - Russian SL
  - Swedish SL (SSL)

Properties of SL auxiliaries

- Express agreement morphology (subject/object)
- Do not realize tense or mood categories
- May realize aspect morphology in some languages
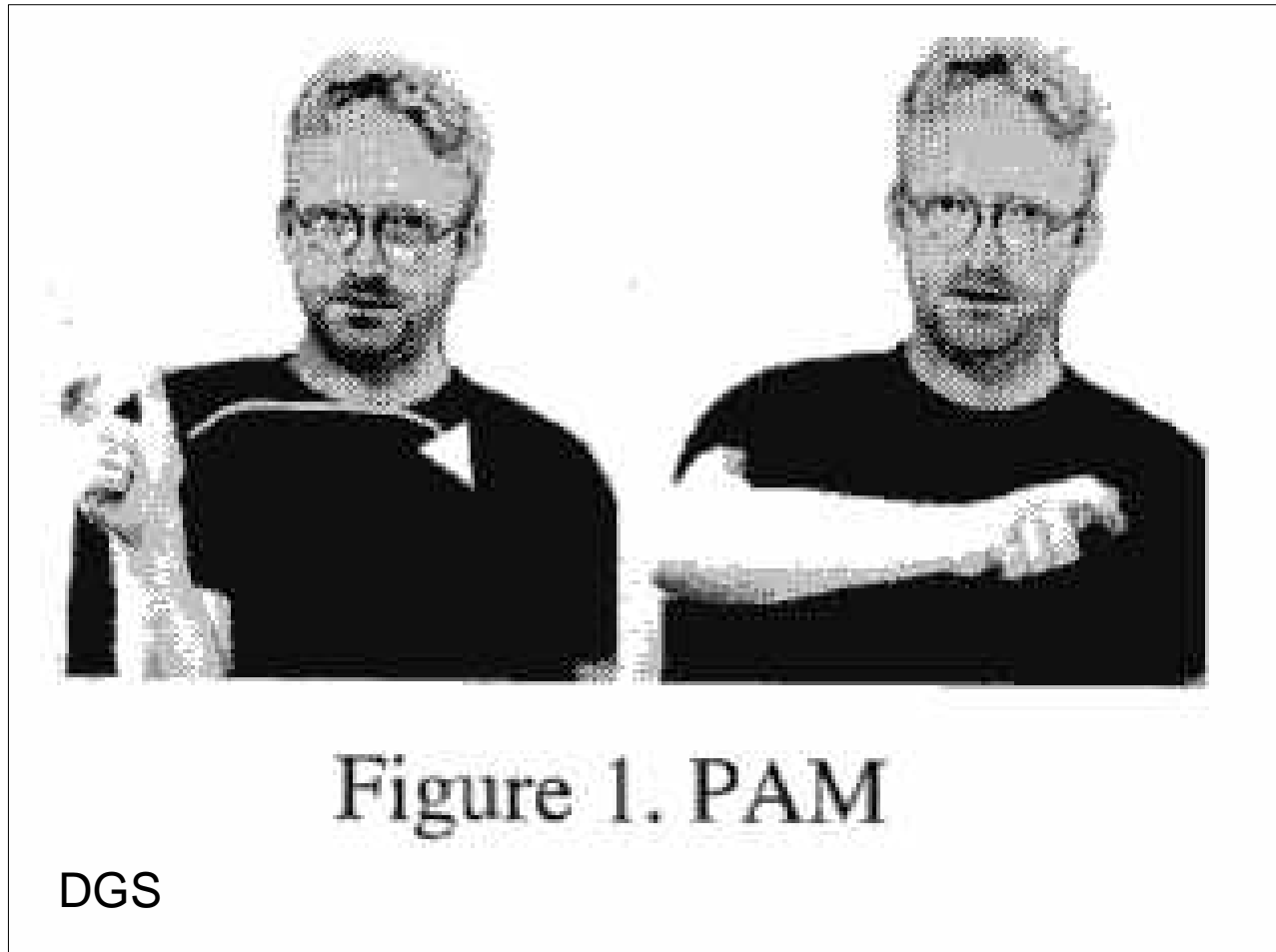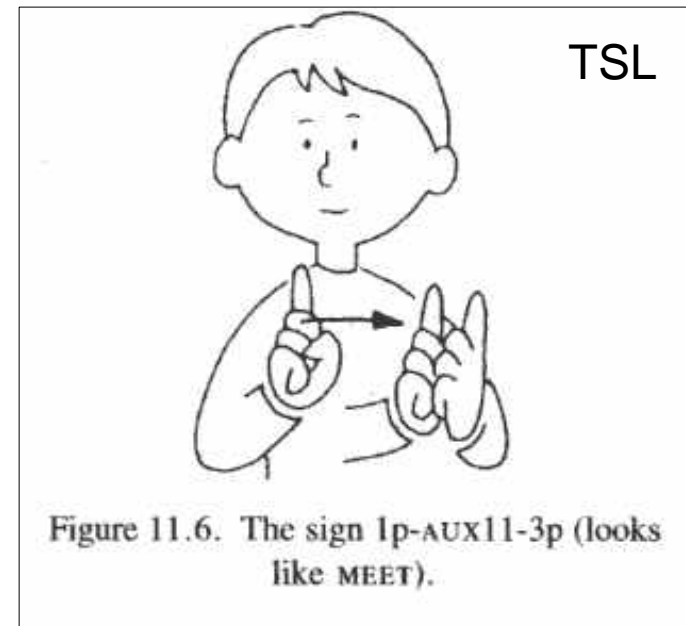- Mainly cooccur with plain verbs

Type 1

TSL

Figure 11.7. The sign 1p-AUX1-3p.

Type 2

Figure 1. PAM

DGS

Type 3

NGT

TSL

Figure 11.6. The sign 1p-AUX11-3p (looks like MEET).

LSC: AUX-IX

- LOVE 3IX1
- Index form that moves from subject to object locus.
- No restrictions in the agreement paradigm.
- Only with [+human] referents.
- Most general AUX in LSC. It appears with:
  - Plain verbs (mainly)
  - Agreement verbs
    - Uninflected
    - Inflected (marked): emphasis
  - Backwards agreement verbs

LSC: AUX-IX

1-IX-3

3-IX-1

Thematic analysis
of agreement

Principles of Sign Language Agreement Morphology (Meir 2002: 425):

a. The direction of the path movement of agreement verbs is from SOURCE to GOAL arguments.

b. The facing of the hand(s) is towards the object of the verb (whichever of source or goal is not subject).

Agreement verbs as morphologically complex.

Thematic analysis
of agreement

(7)   Lexical Conceptual Structure of Verbs of Transfer

motion

spatial tier: CAUSE $([\alpha], [GO_{poss} ([BOOK]^{\gamma}, [_{Path} FROM [\alpha/\beta] TO [\beta/\alpha]])])$

action tier: AFF $([I]^{\alpha}, [YOU]^{\beta})$

affectedness

Problems for the thematic view

- No transfer (change of possessor) interpretation:

  DEFEND, CHOOSE, SUMMON

- Transitive verbs (both regular and backwards) where the second agreeing argument is an animate THEME, not a GOAL: PRESS, INVITE

Problems for the thematic view

- With backwards verbs, agreement of AUX with subject-object, **not** with SOURCE-GOAL

  - IX1 CHILD 3-TAKE-1 1-AUX-3 (LSC)
  - GIRL 2-AUX-3 TAKE-3 (LSB)

- Agreement with inanimate arguments: two separate lexical entry analysis?

  - IX1 BOOK-x x-BUY-1 (LSC)
  - NOTES-x IX1 x-COPY-1 (LSB)

Auxiliary with backwards verbs

'As for the wedding, I don't know whether
he has invited me.'

Quadros & Quer (2006) on backwards verbs

- Backwards verbs fall into the class of (highly lexicalized) handling verbs, a subclass of transitive spatial verbs/classifiers.
  - Most backwards are not ditransitive (=handling)
  - Obligatory second argument is a THEME, not a SOURCE (=handling)

LSB: TAKE/GET/PICK-UP, CHOOSE, COPY, IMITATE, PERCEIVE, EXPLOIT, INVITE, SUMMON // ASK-FOR, BORROW, STEAL

LSC: TAKE/BUY, CHOOSE, GET/GUESS, SUMMON, COPY, INVITE, UNDERSTAND // ASK, STEAL, TAX

The controller issue

- Description: not the constituent that triggers agreement, normally a nominal argument, but a "locus associated with the referent of the argument".

- Which features does it control?
  – Person (despite proposals to the contrary, like Zwitserlood & van Gijn 2006 → feature [locus])
  – Number
  – Location
  – Identity (Costello 2016)

Referential indices
(Aronoff et al. 2000)

- In sign languages, referential indices are expressed directly.

- Realization of referential indices by R(eferential) loci (pointing or gazing).

- In agreement verbs, location specifications of R-loci are copied into location slots (2).

- Each referent is paired with a unique location in space.

Radical/ Literal alliterative agreement

- Literal alliterative agreement: part of the controller is copied onto the target (e.g. Bainouk):

  kata:ma-no in-**ka**   vs.   **da**pon-no   in-**da**
  river-DEF   this-CV   grass-DEF   this-CV
  'this river'   'this grass'

Radical/ Literal alliterative agreement

- It emerges when it is forced to do so, when there is no gender available. For Aronoff (1998), a sort of last resort, but one which is indicative of how agreement operates.

Revising basic assumptions

(Quadros & Quer 2006, 2009; Janis 1995; Quadros 1999)

- Non-plain verbs ("spatial"+"agreement") in general can agree either with locative arguments (spatial agreement), with personal arguments (person agreement).

- Non-plain verbs can in principle participate in both types of agreement.

- Ultimately, agreement possibilities depend on lexical class (plain vs. non-plain), lexical semantics and features associated with loci (location, person, etc.).

Revising basic assumptions
(Quadros & Quer 2006, 2009; Janis 1995; Quadros 1999)

(1)   TOM(a) a-TEACH-b [STUDENTS H-S](b)

        'Tom teaches high school students.'

(2)   TOM TEACH MATH

        'Tom teaches math.' (Janis 1995: 203)

        ____ _____t
(3)   IX-1 MY DAUGHTER IX-3 TEACH-3
        PORTUGUESE   (LSB)

        'I teach Portuguese to my daughter.'

Revising basic assumptions
(Quadros & Quer 2006, 2009; Janis 1995; Quadros 1999)

- Path and facing in both regular and backwards agreement verbs can agree with either spatial loci (location features) or person loci (person and number features), i.e. they can be interpreted as locative agreement as subject-object agreement.
- Backwards Vs
  - BOOK-x x-UNDERSTAND-1   (LSC)
  - 2-UNDERSTAND-1

  - BOOK-x x-TAKE-2   (LSC/LSB)
  - CHILD-3 3-TAKE-2

Revising basic assumptions (Quadros & Quer 2006, 2009; Janis 1995; Quadros 1999)

- Loci can carry more than one syntactically relevant feature

- Agreement auxiliaries in principle can only agree with personal/animate arguments (person agreement)

Syntactic effects of agreement

- Morphosyntactic agreement has syntactic effects in LSB: negation cannot appear preverbally with plain verbs in LSB (Quadros 1999)

$$\overline{\qquad\qquad\qquad}\text{neg}$$

(1)   IX JOHNa NO aGIVEb BOOK

$$\overline{\qquad\qquad\qquad}\text{neg}$$

(2)   *IX JOHNa NO DESIRE CAR

$$\overline{\qquad\qquad\qquad}\text{neg}$$

(3)   IX JOHNa DESIRE CAR NO

Syntactic effects of agreement

- LSB agreement auxiliary can only occur with plain verbs in principle.

(1)   IX JOHNa IX MARYb aAUXb LIKE

- Still, possible cooccurrence with agreeing Vs in LSB: with backwards verbs and in ellipsis contexts

(2)   GIRL 2-AUX-3 TAKE-3

(3)   GRANDMA-3x GRANDPA-3y 3x-AUX-3y TAKE-CARE-3y, 3y-AUX-3x NOT

GRANDMA-3x GRANDPA-3y 3x-AUXY-3y TAKE-CARE-3y, 3y-AUX-3x NOT

Syntactic effects of agreement

- In LSB and LSC, agreement verbs can cooccur with AUX in a reduced form displaying facing only → interplay between path and facing turns out to be relevant for the morphosyntactic marking of agreement and sensitive to morphological class (plain vs. non-plain).

Syntactic effects of agreement

Empty arguments are subject to syntactic licensing conditions (person features) (cf. Lillo-Martin 1986, 1991)

- <a+1>CARRY<b>

  'I carry it (from here) (to there).'
- *<a>CARRY<b>

(Quadros 1999, LSB)

Pfau et al 2011

- Plain and agreement Vs differ from each other with respect to incorporation of V into v:

  - agreement verbs: V $\rightarrow$ V+v $\rightarrow$ [V+v]+T
  - plain verbs: V; v+T $\rightarrow$ AUX is just the realization of the v+T complex (V is spelled-out separately)
  - backward agreement verbs involve ergative agreement

Pfau et al 2011: agreeing verbs
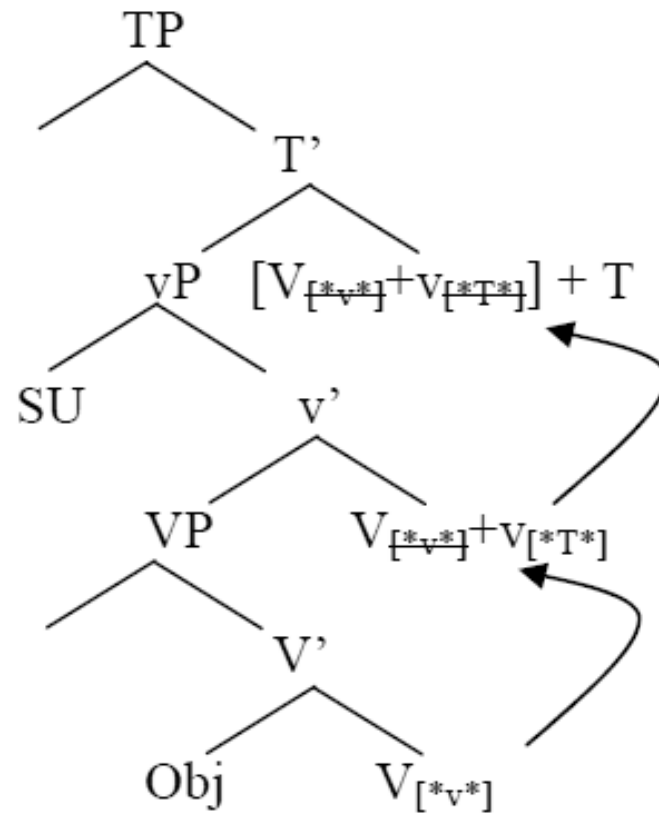
verb movement:
(i) V-to-v
(ii) [V+v] to T

Pfau et al 2011: plain verbs
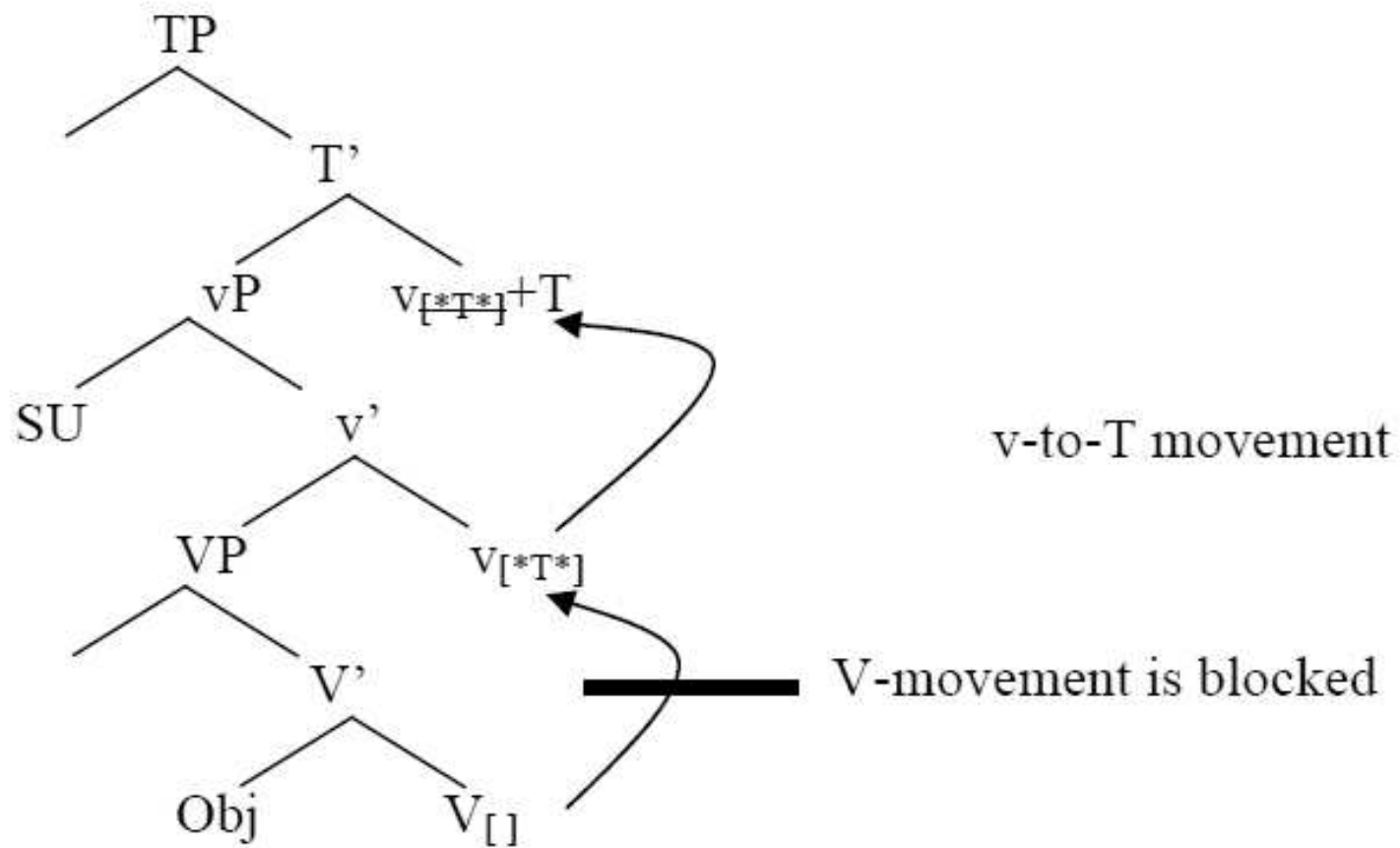
Pfau et al 2011:
split ergativity

)   a. Agree before Merge: accusative   b. Merge before Agree: ergative
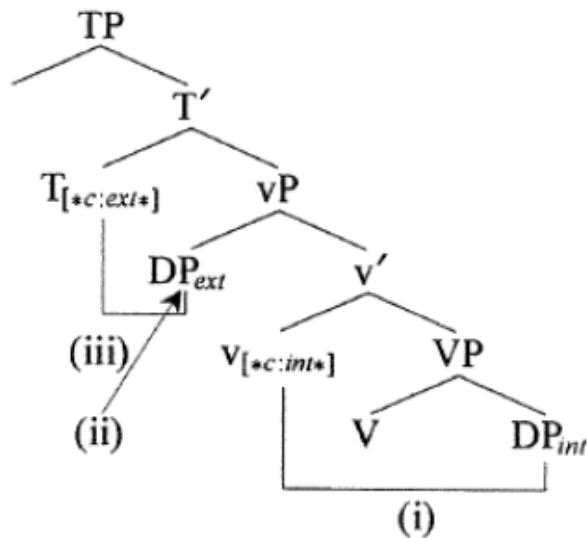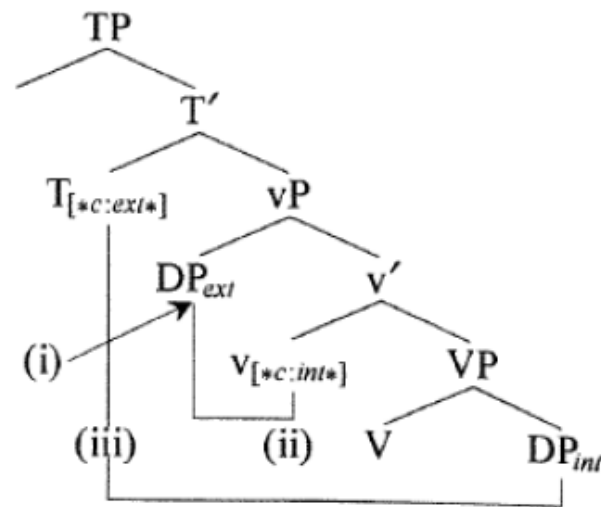
Two types of alignment are available:

- accusative alignment: SU-ext.case – DO-int.case: Nom – Acc.
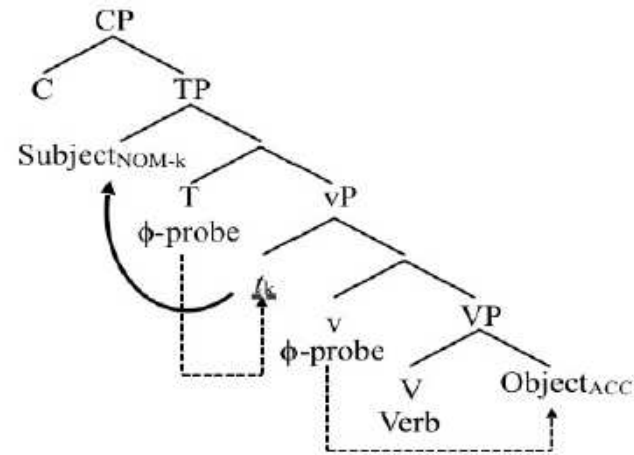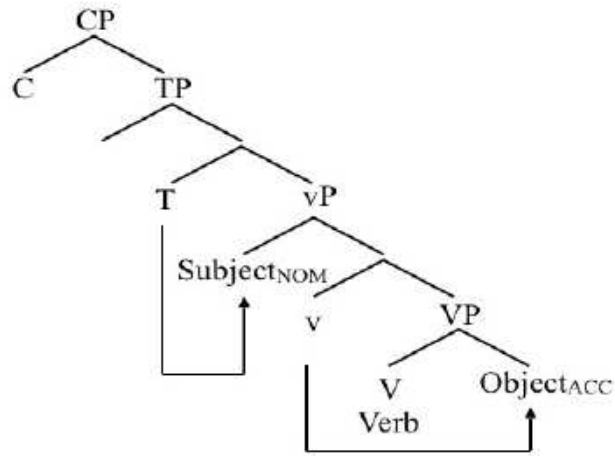- ergative alignment: SU-int.case – DO-ext.case: Erg – Nom(Abs)

What is special about SL: the ergative pattern is peculiar to certain verbs, it cannot be generalized to the entire language or certain tenses/aspects (split ergativity).
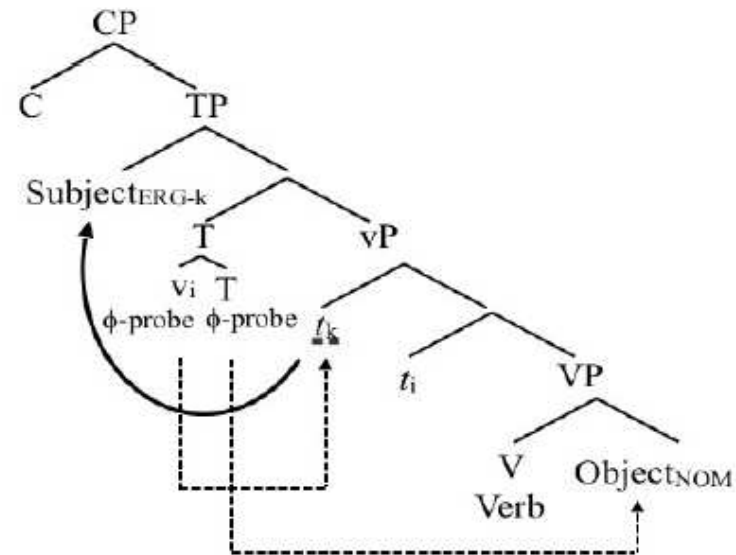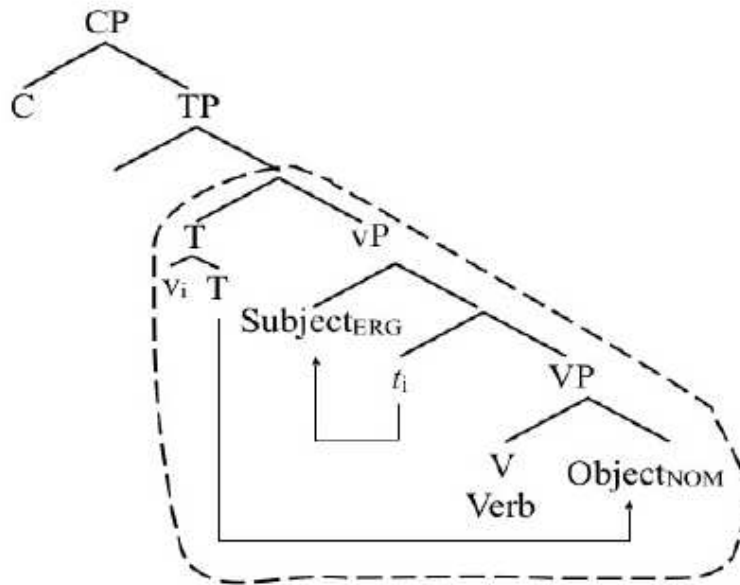
Lourenço Souza 2014

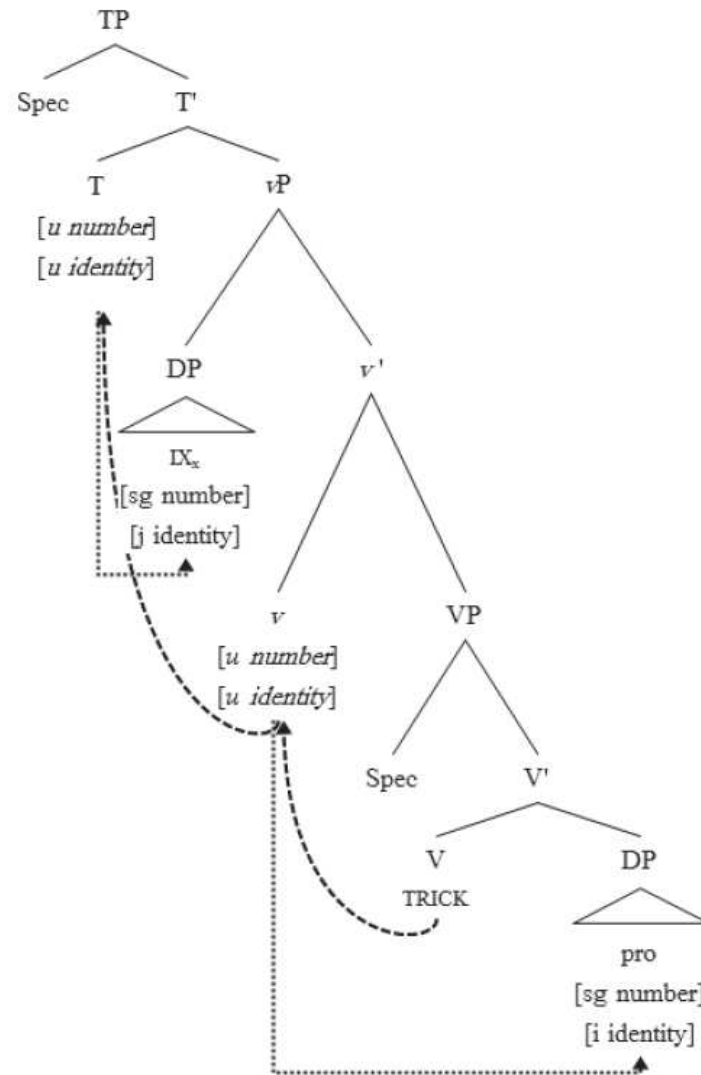# Lourenço Souza 2014

BAV: Case assignment   →   Agree relations followed by EPP

Costello 2016

Results

- Static tripartite classification of SL verbs is untenable.

- Thematic approach to argument referencing discarded as empirically inadequate.

- More complex picture where non-plain verbs enter agreement patterns with loci bearing [person] and [locative] features.

Results

- Rethinking SL agreement does not presuppose taking it out of the domain of grammar and interpreting it as a gestural mechanism.

- Strong indications that SL agreement systems are constrained by morphosyntactic properties of the specific language.

- Fine-grained analysis is required in order to attest and understand linguistic properties of SLs.

(Gràcies)