

Two ways to AGREE in Neo-Aramaic*

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This talk is about φ -agreement and, in particular, the factors that determine when and where agreement will appear within a language.

- **φ -agreement** = Agreement on a verb or TAM element that reflects the person, number, and/or gender of a nominal in the clause.

(1) φ -agreement in Spanish

- Tu escrib-**iste** un libro.
you write-**2SG.PST** a book
'You wrote a book.'
- Mi amiga escrib-**ió** un libro.
my friend.F write-**3SG.PST** a book
'My friend wrote a book.'

- In many languages (Spanish being one of them), φ -agreement is consistently located high in the clause and is related directly to finiteness.

– Agreement is always with the syntactically highest argument of the verb:

- (2) Tu ca-**iste**.
you fall-**2SG.PST**
'You fell.'

– Agreement is hosted on the highest TAM or verbal element:

- (3) Yo pued-**o** escrib-ir un libro.
I be.able-**1SG.PRES** write-INF a book
'I can write a book.'

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– There is no agreement in non-finite clauses:

- (4) Yo hic-e a Pedro escrib-**ir** un libro.
I make-1SG.PST DAT Pedro write-**INF** a book
'I made Pedro write a book.'

- In other languages, however, it is not so easy to figure out where agreement is located and what determines its appearance.

– In Kaqchikel, verbs can potentially agree with two different arguments:

- (5) Ri achin x-**a-r**-axa-j rat.
the man PFV-**2SG.B-3SG.A**-hear-ACT you.SG
'The man heard you(sg.).' (Preminger 2011:26)

– However, in intransitives, (6a), and in Agent Focus constructions, (6b), only the B agreement surfaces (and consequently only one nominal agrees):

- (6) a. Rat x-**at**-uk'lun.
you.SG PFV-**2SG.B**-arrive
'You(sg.) arrived.' (Preminger 2011:26)
- b. Ja rat x-**at**-axa-n ri achin.
FOC you.SG PFV-**2SG.B**-hear-AF the man
'It was you(sg.) that heard the man.' (Preminger 2011:28)

- A little terminology:

- An **agreement locus** is the location where agreement appears.
- More specifically, an agreement locus contains a φ -**probe**, which searches its c-command domain for the closest nominal (the **goal**), and copies its φ -features.
- An agreement locus is **active** if it agrees (or attempts to agree) with a nominal.

→ **What determines which agreement loci will be active in a given derivation?**

- We'll explore this question by looking at three different agreement patterns in Neo-Aramaic—Senaya (fieldwork), Jewish Amadiya (Hoberman 1989, Greenblatt 2011), Jewish Zakho (fieldwork; Cohen 2012), and Christian Barwar (Khan 2008).

- Proposal:

- Some lexical items carry agreement loci that are **always active**.
 - ◊ E.g., finite T in Spanish.
- Some lexical items carry agreement loci that are **activated during the course of the derivation, i.e., in certain morphosyntactic configurations**.
 - ◊ E.g., *v* in Neo-Aramaic.

ROADMAP

- §1 Background on Neo-Aramaic
- §2 Senaya
- §3 Jewish Amadiya
- §4 Jewish Zakho and Christian Barwar
- §5 Conclusion and future directions

1 Neo-Aramaic languages

Neo-Aramaic languages¹ are Semitic languages that developed from Old/Middle Aramaic vernacular dialects and survived to the modern day (Coghill 1999).

The largest surviving group of Neo-Aramaic languages are the Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) languages, comprising over 100 languages (Coghill 1999, Doron and Khan 2012).

- Originally spoken mainly in Kurdish areas of the Middle East.
- Diaspora in 1900s and continuing today → language endangerment

Northeastern Neo-Aramaic languages share many grammatical characteristics. (Much of the information in this section is adapted from Coghill (1999) and Doron and Khan (2012).)



Map from Coghill (1999)

¹While these languages are often referred to as dialects, many are non-mutually-intelligible and have differences at all grammatical levels; for this reason I refer to them as languages throughout the talk.

1.1 Basic grammar of Neo-Aramaic

Word order: NENA languages either have basic SOV or SVO word order; head-initial.

Nouns: Noun phrases are often determinerless and do not inflect for case. Pronouns are typically null in both subject and object position.

Verbs: Verbal morphology in Neo-Aramaic involves both non-concatenative (root-and-template) morphology and concatenative (affixal) morphology.

- Root-and-template verb forms = “verb bases”; encode aspect, tense, or mood

(7) Verb bases in Senaya

Root	Imperfective	Perfective	Imperative	Infinitive
r-k-w (‘ride’)	rakw	rkuu	rkuu	rkaawa
q-t-l (‘kill’)	qaṭl	qṭel	qṭol	qṭaala
s-m-x (‘wait’)	samx	smex	smox	smaaxa

- Some affixes further encode grammatical distinctions.

- *-waa* = past tense
- *k-* = indicative mood

★★ Other affixal morphology marks agreement with the verb’s argument(s). ★★

- Across NENA, there are **two paradigms of agreement morphemes**, S-suffixes and L-suffixes; mark person, number, and gender of arguments (Coghill 1999).²

(8) Agreement morphemes in Senaya

S-suffixes

	Singular	Plural
1st p.	-en(m.)/-an(f.)	-ox
2nd p.	-et(m.)/-at(f.)	-iiton
3rd p.	-∅(m.)/-a(f.)	-ii

L-suffixes

	Singular	Plural
1st p.	-lii	-lan
2nd p.	-lox(m.)/-lax(f.)	-looxon
3rd p.	-lee(m.)/-laa(f.)	-luu/-lun

- Across all NENA languages, S-suffixes always precede L-suffixes (when they co-occur):³

(9) V – S-suffix – L-suffix

(10) Molp *-aa* **-lan.**
 teach.IMPF *-S.3FS* **-L.1PL**
 ‘She teaches **us.**’ (Senaya)

²There is evidence in some Neo-Aramaic languages that L-suffixes are in fact clitics, resulting from clitic-doubling (Doron and Khan 2012, Kalin and van Urk To Appear).

³1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person, F = feminine, IMPF = imperfective, IND = indicative, L = L-suffix, M = masculine, NEG = negation, PST = past, PFV = perfective, PL = plural, S = S-suffix, s(G) = singular.

- Which arguments agree?
 - All subjects
 - Only some objects (= Differential Object Marking; Coghill 2014)
 - Specific objects trigger agreement
 - Specificity = speaker presupposes existence of referent
- **The agreement configuration varies by aspect.**
 - ⇒ All NENA languages have an aspect-based agreement split between (canonical) imperfective aspect and perfective aspect.

A note on aspect:

- The notion of aspect that is relevant here is so-called “viewpoint aspect” (also known as “outer aspect”, “high aspect”, or “grammatical aspect”), which provides a certain perspective (hence, “viewpoint”) on an event that is distinct from tense (Comrie 1976).
 - Imperfective aspect: Views an event from within the event
 - Perfective aspect: Views an event as a whole (event is completed or terminated)
- It has been argued extensively that the choice of verb base truly does correlate with aspect in Neo-Aramaic (Krotkoff 1982, Hoberman 1989, Coghill 1999).
 - **NENA imperfective base**: habitual, ongoing, durative, or generic events
 - **NENA perfective base**: completed events as a whole

1.2 Interim summary

The crucial components:

- Two finite verb bases in Neo-Aramaic: imperfective and perfective
- Two paradigms of suffixal agreement morphology: S-suffixes and L-suffixes
- Verbs bear agreement with subjects and specific objects
- All NENA languages have an aspect-based agreement split between the (canonical) perfective and imperfective, which manifests somewhat differently across the languages.

The three aspect-based agreement splits we will look at:

- Senaya: partial agreement reversal
- J. Amadiya: complete agreement reversal (symmetric)
- J. Zakho and C. Barwar: complete agreement reversal (asymmetric)

2 Partial agreement reversal in Senaya

Senaya has a unique aspect split among Neo-Aramaic languages.⁴

→ Throughout, *subject agreement is italicized* and **object agreement is bolded**.

(11) PERFECTIVE L-suffix for subject; no object agreement possible

- a. Axnii dmex-*lan*.
 we sleep.PFV-*L.1PL*
 ‘We slept.’
- b. Axnii ksuuta ksuu-*lan*.
 we book write.PFV-*L.1PL*
 ‘We wrote a book.’ (object is nonspecific)

- Object agreement is completely banned on the perfective base. Correspondingly, specific objects cannot appear with the perfective base, (12).

(12) *Axnii oo ksuuta ksuu(-**laa**/**-a**)-*lan*(-**laa**/**-a**).
 we that book write.PFV(-**L**/**S.3FS**)-*L.1PL*(-**L**/**S.3FS**)
 Intended: ‘We wrote **that book**.’

In the imperfective, object agreement takes the form that subject agreement had in the perfective (L-suffixes), and subject agreement surfaces uniquely (S-suffixes).

(13) IMPERFECTIVE S-suffix for subject; L-suffix for object

- a. Axnii damx-*ox*.
 we sleep.IMPF-*S.1PL*
 ‘We sleep.’
- b. Axnii ksuuta kasw-*ox*.
 we book write.IMPF-*S.1PL*
 ‘We write a book.’ (object is nonspecific)
- c. Axnii (oo) ksuuta kasw-*ox*-**laa**.
 we that book write.IMPF-*S.1PL*-**L.3FS**
 ‘We write **a specific(/that) book**.’

- In Senaya, specific objects can only appear with the imperfective verb base (and not the perfective verb base), since they require agreement marking.

Senaya’s aspect/agreement alignment, schematically (Nom/Acc):

- Canonical perfective: $V_{\text{PFV}} - L\text{-suffix}(\text{subj})$
- Canonical imperfective: $V_{\text{IMPF}} - S\text{-suffix}(\text{subj}) - L\text{-suffix}(\text{obj})$

⁴This section builds off of joint work with Coppe van Urk (Kalin and van Urk To Appear).

2.1 Analysis: What is behind partial agreement reversal?

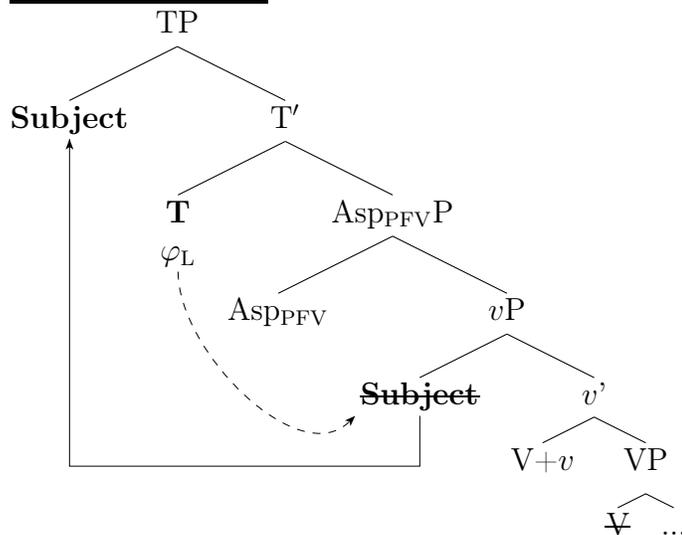
Assumptions:

- Viewpoint aspect lives in the “middlefield”: $T > Asp > v > V$
- There is a one-to-one relation between licensing and agreement (Chomsky 2000, 2001).
- Nonspecific objects pseudo-incorporate into the verb and so do not need licensing/agreement.
- Nominals that have been agreed with are “inactive” (invisible for further agreement).

Proposal:

1. Finite T is always an agreement locus (across Neo-Aramaic).
2. v is an agreement locus when it raises to Asp, which only happens in the imperfective.
 - There are two aspect projections: ASP_{IMPF} and ASP_{PFV} .
 - ASP_{IMPF} triggers activation of the φ -probe on v .
3. The morphological form of agreement depends on the licenser/agreement locus:
 - Arguments that agree with v trigger S-suffix agreement. ($= \varphi_S$)
 - Arguments that agree with T trigger L-suffix agreement. ($= \varphi_L$)

(14) Senaya Perfective L-suffix for subject; no object agreement possible



- T is finite and therefore an active agreement locus.
 - v is not an active agreement locus because it has not raised to (imperfective) Asp.
- Only one nominal can be licensed/trigger agreement in perfective aspect.

In imperfective aspect, there is an additional licenser, seen by the fact that an additional argument can agree (the object is allowed to be specific), (15):

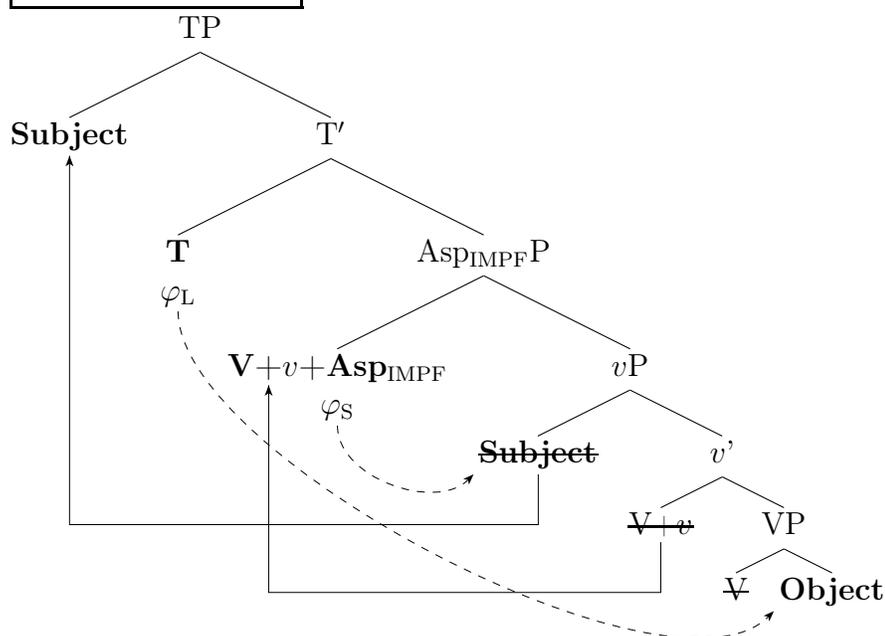
- (15) Axnii oo ksuuta kasw-ox-**laa**.
 we that book write.IMPF-*S.1PL*-**L.3FS**
 ‘We write that book.’

- In imperfective aspect, *v* raises to Asp, and therefore is activated such that it can license/agree with the subject (\rightarrow S-suffix).

– Note that *v*’s φ -probe now probes from its higher position, Asp.

- The subject raises to spec-TP; T agrees with the object (\rightarrow L-suffix).

- (16) Senaya Imperfective S-suffix for subject; L-suffix for object



- Note that the past tense morpheme (*-waa*) is further from the verb than subject agreement in the imperfective, (17a), but not in the perfective, (17b), as predicted.

- (17) a. Axnii oo ksuuta kasw-ox-waa-**laa**
 we that book write.IMPF-*S.1PL*-PST-**L.3FS**
 ‘We write that book.’
- b. Axnii xa ksuuta ksuu-waa-lan.
 we one book write.PFV-PST-*L.1PL*
 ‘We wrote a book.’

- Finally, I posit that the form of the verb base is determined by the identity of Asp:

– AspPFV \rightarrow perfective base; AspIMPF \rightarrow imperfective base

2.2 Why should Asp_{IMPF} “activate” *v*’s φ -probe?

Recall, the proposal: the source of Senaya’s aspect split is imperfective Asp, which triggers movement of *v* and activates *v*’s φ -probe.

- Imperfective aspect is complex both semantically and syntactically.
 - ◊ Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria (2000), Laka (2006), Coon (2010), Arregui et al. (2014), *i.a.*
- Further, imperfective aspect is more complex both semantically and syntactically than perfective aspect crosslinguistically.
 - ◊ Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria (2000, 2007), Laka (2006), Coon (2010), Coon and Preminger (2011, 2012)
 - Imperfective and progressive aspects often involve an additional predicate (preposition or verb); perfective never does.
 - This additional complexity may bring about an aspect split.

(18) Basque progressive is biclausal (Laka 2006:174-5)

Emakume-a [ogi-a ja-te-**n**] **ari** da
woman-DET.SG [bread-DET.SG eat-NOMZR-**LOC**] **engaged** 3ABS.be.PRES
‘The woman is eating bread.’ (Lit: ‘The woman is engaged in the eating of bread.’)

- Proposal: Though there is no biclausality or clearly prepositional element in Senaya’s imperfective, the additional predicate surfaces through φ -probe activation.

2.3 Interim summary

Aspect plays a crucial role in clause structure and licensing/agreement in Senaya.

- When *v* raises to imperfective Asp, *v* becomes an active agreement locus.
- Additionally, finite T is always an active agreement locus.
- A clause’s aspect determines how many arguments can be licensed/agree in that clause.
 - Canonical perfective: 1 (only T is active)
 - Canonical imperfective: 2 (T and *v* are both active)

Up next:

- Complete agreement reversal in J. Amadiya
- Exactly one difference from Senaya
 - An additional way to activate *v*’s φ -probe

3 Complete agreement reversal in Jewish Amadiya

Across both Senaya and J. Amadiya:

- Alignment on both sides of the split is nominative/accusative.
- Across aspects, the subject always c-commands the object (Hoberman 1989).
- There is an aspect-based agreement split.
 - The aspect-based agreement split in Senaya is **asymmetric**:
 - ◊ No object marking (S-suffix) allowed on perfective verb base.
 - The aspect-based agreement split in Amadiya is **symmetric**:
 - ◊ Full range of object marking (S-suffix) allowed on perfective verb base.

Amadiya’s aspect split (Hoberman 1989):

(19) PERFECTIVE **S-suffix for object; L-suffix for subject**

- a. xă=yoma, θel-*u* tre darwiše.
 one=day come.PFV-*L.3PL* two beggars
 ‘One day, *two beggars* came.’ (p. 72)
- b. ʔani min ʔilil šrux-*lu*.
 they from above call.PFV-*L.3PL*
 ‘*They* called down from above.’ (p. 72)
- c. ʔe baxta mpułt-**i-la** ʔanna gure.
 this woman remove.PFV-**S.3PL-L.3FS** these men
 ‘*This woman* removed **these men**.’ (p. 98)

(20) IMPERFECTIVE *S-suffix for subject; L-suffix for object*

- a. naše g-meθ-*i-wa* gū kolane.
 people IND-die.IMPF-*S.3PL-PST* in streets
 ‘*People* used to die in the streets.’ (p. 50)
- b. ... u g-bax-*in* u k-šarx-*in*.
 and IND-cry.IMPF-*S.1MS* and scream.IMPF-*S.1MS*
 ‘... and *I* cry and *I* scream.’ (p. 47)
- c. ʔe baxta gi-mpałt-**a-lu** ʔanna gure.
 this woman IND-remove.IMPF-*S.3FS-L.3PL* these men
 ‘*This woman* removes **these men**.’ (p. 98)

- **Agreement reversal in Amadiya:**
 S- and L-suffixes reverse function across
 imperfective and perfective aspect.

	SUBJECT	OBJECT
PFV	L-suffix	S-suffix
IMPF	S-suffix	L-suffix

3.1 Syntactic analysis of complete reversal

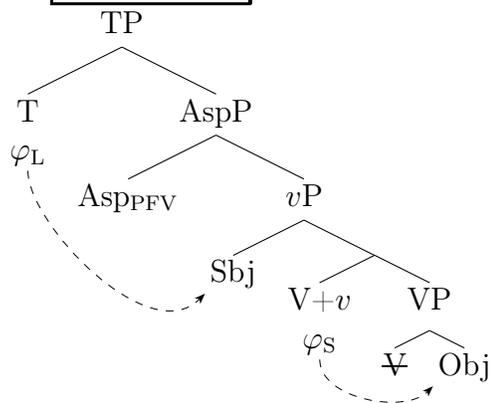
Amadiya is the same as Senaya, with the addition of a context-sensitive rule for v .

Components of the analysis: (same as Senaya except for boxed element)

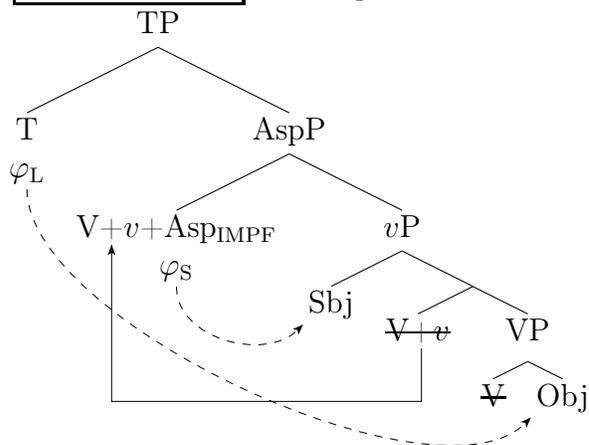
1. Finite T is always an agreement locus (across Neo-Aramaic).
2. v is an agreement locus when...
 - (i) v raises to Asp, which only happens in the imperfective.
 - (ii) v projects an external argument (transitives and unergatives).
3. The morphological form of agreement depends on the licenser/agreement locus:
 - Arguments that agree with v trigger S-suffix agreement. (= φ_S)
 - Arguments that agree with T trigger L-suffix agreement. (= φ_L)

(21) **Transitives**

a. **PERFECTIVE** v in situ



b. **IMPERFECTIVE** v -to-Asp

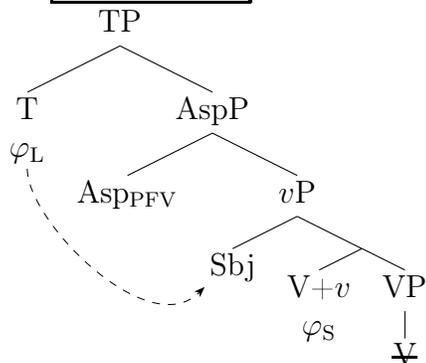


→ PFV, (21a)/(22a): v is an agreement locus because it projects a specifier.

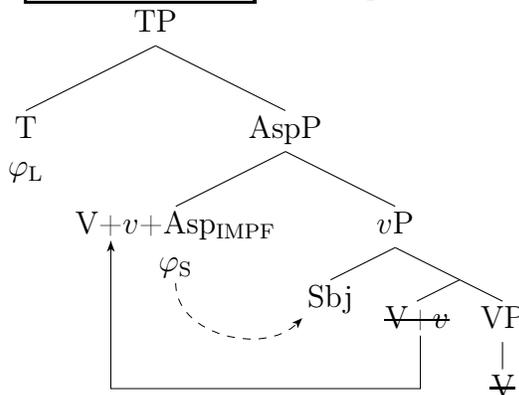
→ IMPF, (21b)/(22b): v is an agreement locus because it is raises to Asp (and projects).

(22) **Intransitives (unergatives)**

a. **PERFECTIVE** v in situ

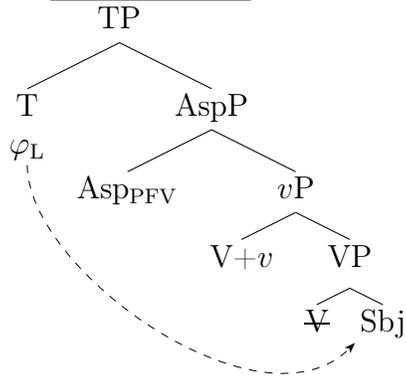


b. **IMPERFECTIVE** v -to-Asp

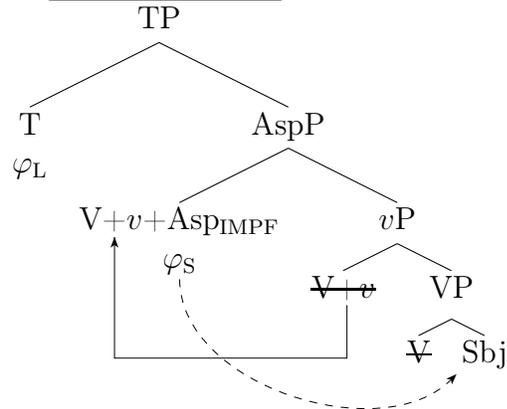


(23) **Intransitives (unaccusative)**

a. **PERFECTIVE** v in situ



b. **IMPERFECTIVE** v -to-Asp



→ PFV, (23a): v is not an agreement locus because it does not project a specifier.

→ IMPF, (23b): v is an agreement locus because it raises to Asp.

This derives Amadiya's complete symmetric reversal.

- In imperfective aspect, v is displaced to Asp and so is always an agreement locus.
 - The highest nominal will always agree with v /Asp (S-suffix).
- In perfective aspect, v is not displaced and so is only active if there is an ext. arg.
 - The highest nominal will always agree with T (L-suffix), and S-suffixes surface only for transitive objects.

3.2 Taking stock: Implications for the architecture of the grammar

For these accounts of Senaya and Amadiya to go through...

- Agreement loci must be able to be contextually activated during the derivation.
 - If v projects a specifier, v becomes an agreement locus.
 - If v is in a local context with (imperfective) Asp, it becomes an agreement locus.
- Head movement must happen in the narrow syntax (Pesetsky and Torrego 2001, den Dikken 2006, *i.a.*).
 - Head movement can syntactically displace a φ -probe.
 - The resulting configuration of head movement can trigger activation of a φ -probe.
- AGREE must be delayed until after head movement (or perhaps more generally: until spell-out of a phase (Chomsky 2005), with phase extension via head movement (den Dikken 2006, Bobaljik and Wurmbrand 2013, Bošković 2014, *i.a.*)).
 - φ -probes do not attempt to AGREE immediately upon merge.

4 Complete reversal in J. Zakho and C. Barwar

In Jewish Zakho and Christian Barwar, there is complete agreement reversal like Amadiya's, except that objects in the perfective are limited to third person.

The basic pattern:

(24) **IMPERFECTIVE** (Christian Barwar; Khan 2008:115,132,135)

- a. Mey-*ən*-**na** 'ay-bàxta.
bring.IMPF-*S.1sg*-**L.3FS** DEM-woman
'I shall bring **that woman**.'
- b. Xošéba lá-palx-*i* nàše.
Sunday NEG-work.IMPF-*S.3pl* people
'On Sunday, *people* do not work.'
- c. 'ána méθ-*en* 'ašòrta.
I die.IMPF-*S.1sg* evening
'I shall die in the evening.'

(25) **PERFECTIVE** (Christian Barwar; Doron and Khan 2012:230)

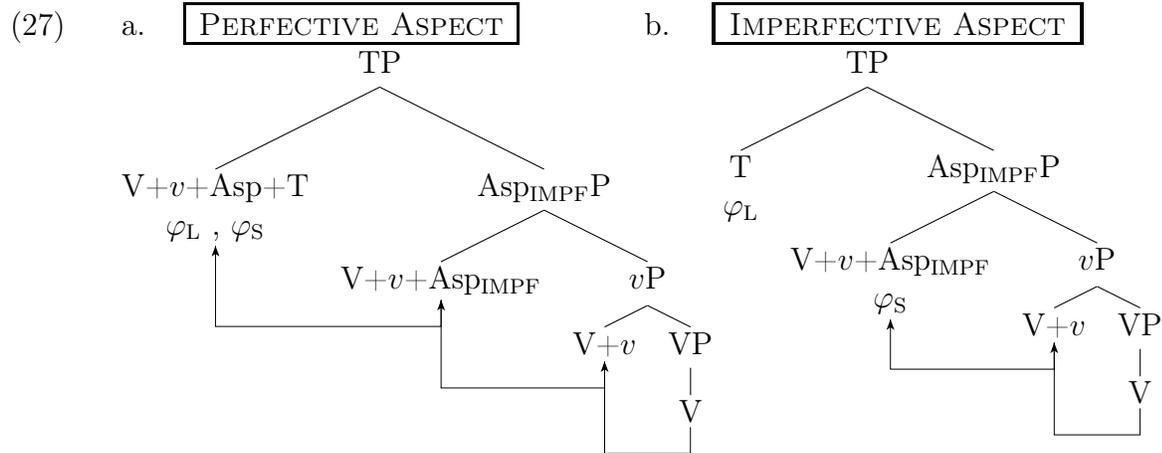
- a. Xawr-*āwaθ*-*i* brat-*i* griš-**a**-*la*.
friend-PL-1SG.GEN daughter-1SG pull.PFV-**S.3FS**-*L.3pl*
'*My friends* pulled **my daughter**.'
- b. Kalba nwix-*le*.
dog bark.PERF-*L.3ms*
'*The dog* barked.'
- c. Brat-*i* qim-*la*.
daughter-1SG.GEN rise.PFV-*L.3fs*
'*My daughter* rose.'

Third person objects can be marked on the perfective base (with an S-suffix), (25a), but not non-third person objects, (26).

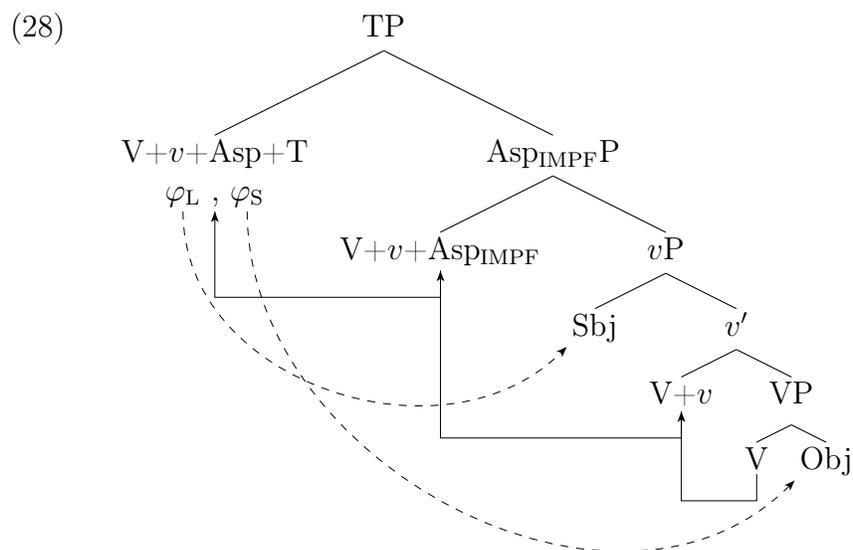
- (26) a. *Griš-**an**-*ne*.
pull.PFV-**S.1FS**-*L.3ms*
'*He* pulled **me**.'
- b. *Griš-**at**-*te*.
pull.PFV-**S.2FS**-*L.3ms*
'*He* pulled **you**.' (C. Barwar; adapted from Doron and Khan 2012:232)

4.1 Syntactic analysis

Proposal: Zakho and Barwar are just like Amadiya, except that *v* raises to T in the perfective.



- Additional component: What happens when two φ -probes end up occupying the same complex head?
 - Induces a Person Case Constraint effect (Bonet 1991).
 - ⇒ Lower of two arguments is restricted to third person.
 - Many have proposed that, in some way, it is agreement with a single agreement locus that results in the PCC (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Béjar and Rezac 2003, Nevins 2007, Rezac 2008, 2011).
- In imperfective aspect, then, Zakho and Barwar look just like Amadiya.
- In perfective aspect, all agreement comes from T:



5 Conclusions and future directions

I proposed an account for 3 different aspect splits in Neo-Aramaic, with the same ingredients:

1. Finite T is always an agreement locus (across Neo-Aramaic).
2. v is an agreement locus when...
 - (i) v raises to Asp, which only happens in the imperfective. (Senaya)
 - (ii) v projects an external argument. (Amadiya, Zakho, Barwar)
3. The morphological form of agreement depends on the licenser/agreement locus:
 - Arguments that agree with v trigger S-suffix agreement. ($= \varphi_S$)
 - Arguments that agree with T trigger L-suffix agreement. ($= \varphi_L$)

What varied across the languages:

- Contextual triggers for v 's φ -probe
- Head movement

⇒ Big picture: Agreement loci can be contextually activated during the derivation.

The data and ideas explored here are part of several other long-term research projects.

1. Investigations into the role of aspect in clause structure

- The conditioning and structures of all five aspect splits attested in Neo-Aramaic.
- The conditioning and structures of aspect splits in Indo-Iranian.

2. Teasing apart licensing, agreement, and case

- Prediction: Movement of a nominal should *bleed* agreement; can it bleed case/licensing?
- Where morphological case and licensing fits into this picture.

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