

Restrictions on transitivity in Inuktitut subordinate clauses

Introduction: This paper examines restrictions on the availability of transitive argument licensing in Inuktitut subordinate clauses. Although Case licensing is often associated with agreement with particular heads, but approaches such as Dependent Case Theory (Marantz 1991) have complicated this picture. Inuktitut has a construction where ergative availability does not depend on verb agreement, but on whether the subjects of the two clauses are coreferential. I contribute to the debate over argument licensing by proposing that this coreferential construction places the subordinate subject in the licensing domain of matrix T, giving the appearance of transitivity in the subordinate clause. **Data:** Inuktitut has a subordinate clause type termed the conjunctive mood (Lowe 1985). Conjunctive clauses behave like converbs, in the sense of Haspelmath (1995): the verb form may be used to mark a temporal adjunct clause with the meaning “while” or a coordinated clause construction. Temporal adjunct conjunctives are shown in (1a-b). In (1a), the conjunctive clause is intransitive, and verb agreement tracks the absolutive subject.

(1)	a.	[Nigi-llu-nga]		te-tu-nia-kKu-nga.	
		eat-CONJ-1S.ABS		tea-consume-N.FUT-IND-1S.ABS	
		‘While I’m eating, I’ll drink tea.’			Labrador (Johns & Smallwood 1999)
	b.	[Alana-up	ujagak	atja-tlu-gu]	ani-vu-k.
		Alana-ERG	rock(ABS)	carry-P.CONJ-3S.ABS	go.out-IND-3S.ABS
		‘While Alana was carrying the rock, she went out.’			Labrador (Johns & Smallwood 1999)

(1b) shows that conjunctive clauses can also be transitive: the subject has ergative case marking, and again we see verb agreement with the absolutive argument (object). In (1b), ‘Alana’ is the logical subject of both clauses, but only the conjunctive clause is logically transitive, i.e. the ergative argument appears to be pronounced inside the conjunctive clause. This is the situation when both subjects co-refer. With disjoint subjects, transitivity is no longer possible. A disjoint conjunctive clause can be intransitive and agree with the subject (2a), but a logically transitive sentence like (2b) is ungrammatical. The meaning of (2b) can only be expressed by a detransitized/oblique construction. Thus, there is a correlation between the

(2)	a.	[Taami	sinik-ti-llu-gu]		ani-lauq-tu-ŋa.
		Taami(ABS)	sleep-tit-CONJ-3S.ABS		go.out-D.PAST-PART-1S.ABS
		‘While Taami was sleeping, I went out.’			Baffin (Mallon 1991)
	b.	*[Ujaraq	uasa-ti-llu-gu]		inŋir-niar-tu-tit.
		rock(ABS)	wash-tit-CONJ-3S.ABS		sing-N.FUT-PART-2S.ABS
		Intended: ‘While I’m washing the rock, you will sing.’			N. Baffin (Pittman 2005a)

availability of ergative case licensing and the reference of the subject. The discrepancy between (1b) and (2b) raises the question of whether the ergative argument in (1b) is licensed through agreement inside the clause (and the disjoint construction lacks this agreement), or whether neither the coreferential nor the disjoint constructions are capable of agreeing with ergative arguments, and the overt ergative in (1b) is licensed other than through agreement in the clause. **Analysis:** Previous syntactic analyses of the transitive behaviour of conjunctive clauses have treated their subject restrictions as a straightforward binding violation (Bok-Bennema 1991) or as a result of a licensing-defective T that can be repaired under certain syntactic circumstances. (Pittman 2005a,b). I argue that the relative grammaticality of (1b) vs. the ungrammaticality of (2b) is a licensing phenomenon: the conjunctive clause only has a single agreement probe (corresponding to the absolutive argument), as reflected by its absolutive agreement. A second argument (ergative subject) is never licensed within the conjunctive clause. Instead, I propose that the ergative subject in (1b) is licensed directly by matrix T, which is able to act as a last-resort licenser because the coreferential clause is penetrable to binding. **Conclusion:** This analysis brings data to bear on the nature of argument licensing. The construction in which the conjunctive and matrix subjects are coreferential is also the configuration in which matrix T can license a subordinate subject.

References

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