On the left periphery in Inuktitut

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Background: Since Bittner and Hale's (1996a,b) analysis of case and agreement in West Greenlandic, the exponents of Inuit verbal inflections have been argued to correspond to different functional projections at the left periphery (e.g., T, C, AgrS, AgrO) (Johns 1992; Compton 2018; Yuan 2018, 2022; Carrier 2021). Yet, the exact location of these elements in the syntax remains the subject of debate. In fact, Inuit verbal inflections encode both clause-type and agreement and their morphological exponents are often subject to allomorphy or combined into portmanteau morphs. There exist two major asymmetries in the clause typing system. First, there is a distinction between independent and dependent clause types, which are commonly called moods in the literature (e.g., Dorais 1988; Lowe 1985). (In)dependent status can be diagnosed by their availability for use in isolation (out of context) and with respect to switch reference marking that arises only on dependent clause types (Pittman 2005; Mauro 2018). Next, one clause-type, the so-called participial, is ambiguous between a declarative or a nominalized clause (see Johns 1992; Sadock 1999; Yuan 2013).

Analysis: We claim that these asymmetries can be explained by two factors: (i) the syntactic size of the left periphery of each clause type and (ii) the height of attachment of dependent clauses. Importantly, both of these factors also correlate with the ability or inability of the verb to assign the absolutive case to one of its arguments. **Syntactic Size:** First, we propose that the ambiguity in Inuktitut participials arises from the presence or absence of a Force projection (Rizzi 1997; Rizzi & Bocci 2017). When Force is present, participials are interpreted as having assertive illocutionary force and can assign absolutive case. When absent, participials are instead nominalized by a null D (or n) and cannot assign absolutive case. **Attachment Height:** Other types of nominalized clauses also vary in their ability to assign the absolutive case to one of the verb's arguments, depending now on whether they are used adverbially or appear in an argument position (cf. Beach 2011). Haegeman (2012) proposes that adverbial clauses in English vary in the syntactic size of their left periphery as well as their position of attachment, by being external or internal to TP, based on their syntactic properties, such as allowing topicalization and hence having illocutionary force. Assuming that the absolutive case marks aboutness topics and requires a Force projection, we argue that nominalized clauses used adverbially can assign absolutive case as they are attached high (i.e. adjoined to the main clause CP) whereas nominalized clauses in argument positions cannot assign absolutive case, as they are attached low (i.e. internal to vP). Dependent clause types in Inuktitut, which can all assign the absolutive case to one of the verb's arguments, also exhibit properties of high attachment. We argue that switch reference provides evidence for high attachment insofar dependent clauses must be able to c-command into the main clause to probe for the correct matching arguments (Compton 2018; Arregi & Hanink 2021). In addition, we carry out tests for high attachment of adverbial clauses presented in Haegeman (2012), like temporal subordination and scope.

Summary: While previous work on root clause phenomena has focused on properties found in European languages, this study expands coverage to a typologically distinct language family, arguing that absolutive case (in a language where absolutive case is endowed with discourse features) can be a heuristic for root clause status. Furthermore, asymmetries in Inuit clause types with respect to case assignment, categorial flexibility, and switch reference

are explained as a function of the size of the left periphery (i.e. articulated CP) and the relative height of attachment of embedded clauses.

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