

Persistent ergativity and split-absolutive agreement in Gitksan*

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses persistent ergative alignment across a typologically unusual *nominal-type split* in Gitksan, an endangered Tsimshianic language of the British Columbia northern interior region. While consistent ergative agreement is always present in a transitive clause, this nominal-type split conditions a split-absolutive distribution for secondary agreement. Suffixal agreement (Series II) in the language exhibits an absolutive distribution in a subset of clauses (agreeing with the intransitive subject and transitive object), and on the other side of the split, exhibits a nominative distribution (agreeing with both intransitive and transitive subjects).¹ The distribution of each of the three person-marking series in the language is summarized in Table (1).

(1) *Agreement across the Gitksan nominal type split*

ERG is →	Most Pron.	3PL/DP
Series I	A	A
Series II	O, S	A, S
Series III		O

What makes the Gitksan split-absolutive agreement pattern typologically unusual is its conditioning factor. Clauses with first- or second-person or third-singular pronominal subjects, display the absolutive agreement pattern, while clauses with third-person plural or

*'Wii t'isim ha'müyaa 'nii'y as my generous and helpful language teachers Barbara Sennott, Vince Gogag, Hector Hill, and others on the *laxyip*. This work was otherwise made possible thanks to the supervision and advice of Elizabeth Cowper, Susana Béjar, Diane Massam, and Henry Davis, as well as to the UofT syntax project for feedback on this presentation. Thanks go to the UBC Gitksan Lab for assistance with data collection and their commitment to collaboration. Financial support for this research was provided by the Jacob's Research Fund and a SSHRC CGS award.

¹ In this paper I will use the S/A/O notation for the three core grammatical roles: S(subject) for intransitive subject, A(gent) for transitive subject, and O(bject) for transitive object.

full-DP subjects trigger the nominative agreement pattern (Hunt 1993). Ultimately, it is the nature of the ergative argument which triggers the split between absolutive and nominative alignment. The presence of additional ergative agreement results in double agreement on the A argument in the nominative agreement context; that is, DP ergatives and third-plural ergatives receive two simultaneous instances of agreement, both ergative and nominative. However, the nominal types conditioning the split cannot be picked out simply on the basis of person, number, or DP/pronominal status.

In this paper I argue that φ -features alone are inadequate to differentiate the nominal types on each side of the agreement split. Instead, I suggest that the pattern can only be arrived at by capitalizing on the interaction of two individual agreement probes in the clause. I draw upon a distinction between φ -features and general nominal D-features, and propose that an agreement probe is relativized to each set. The set-superset relation between φ -features and D-features allows split-absolutive agreement to be understood as highest-argument agreement, which in some circumstances is robbed of its most local target by ergative agreement.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 lays out the data with a complete description of agreement and splits in Gitksan. Section 3 discusses problems with accounting for this data by way of an approach utilizing strictly φ -feature markedness (e.g. Legate 2014). Section 4 presents my proposal splitting φ - and D-features. Section 5 discusses some additional data from another member of the Tsimshianic language family, and a variant pattern within Gitksan that seems to suggest a person-split, and shows how these patterns support the proposed analysis. Finally, section 6 concludes.

2. Gitksan and the data

Gitksan (*Gitksanimx/Gitksenimx/Gyaanimx*) is an endangered language of the Tsimshianic family spoken in the northern interior of British Columbia, Canada. There are 346 estimated remaining speakers (FPCC 2015), with the youngest speakers in their fifties. Gitksan (Rigsby 1986) is a member of the Interior branch of Tsimshianic, and is mutually intelligible with its western neighbor Nisga'a (Tarpent 1987). More distantly related are Coast Tsimshian (Dunn 1979) and the recently extinct Sgüüxs, of the Coastal branch.

The Tsimshianic languages are predicate-initial, with Gitksan exhibiting the strictest VSO ordering of arguments. The languages are head-marking and ergative; Gitksan in particular is consistently ergative in its agreement alignment across multiple syntactic splits. These include an overarching clause-type split, and a secondary nominal-type split found within only one of the two clause-types. Neither of these splits affects ergative agreement.

In this section I first present the Gitksan pronominal paradigms (section 2.1), then discuss the clause-type split (section 2.2). The nominal-type split that serves as this paper's primary topic of discussion is presented in section 2.3.

2.1 Pronominal paradigms

Gitksan has three pronominal paradigms, each with different phonological characteristics. These are a set of phonological clitics (Series I), a set of verbal suffixes (Series II), and a set of pronouns that appear as independent words (Series III). These are given in (2).

(2) *Gitksan pronominal paradigms*

	I: Pre-pred clitics		II: Suffixes		III: Independent/full	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	n	(n) dip	-’y	-’m	’nii’y	’nuu’m
2	m	m sim	-n	-si’m	’niin	’nisi’m
3		t	-t	-diit	’nit	’nidiit

The I/II/III labels indicate the order of each paradigm with respect to a VSO sentential template (Rigsby 1986). The clitics appear pre-predicatively (I), the suffixes appear after the predicate (II), and the full pronouns appear in the place of arguments, following the predicate complex (III).

Syntactically, I analyze both the Series I clitics and Series II suffixes as true agreement paradigms, and neither as a set of syntactic clitics. That is, both constitute (uninterpretable) feature bundles copied onto a functional head as a reflex of an agreement operation, and neither are (interpretable) feature bundles of category D (Oxford 2014). This is based on the fact that, while most tests for agreementhood versus cliticness are inconclusive for these sets (Forbes 2016 based on Kramer 2014), neither series demonstrates a D-like sensitivity to specificity or definiteness. Both sets obligatorily double indefinite arguments, despite Gitksan *pro* and pronouns disallowing an indefinite interpretation (Brown 2014, Forbes 2016).

I analyze the independent Series III set as true pronouns.

2.2 Clause-type split

Gitksan exhibits a primary syntactic split based on clause-type, with agreement patterns and some other verbal morphology changing based on whether the clause is categorized as ‘Independent’ or ‘Dependent’.² The Independent clause type is generally predicate-initial, while Dependent clause predicates are preceded by one or more of a set of ‘dependent markers’: auxiliaries or clausal operators such as complementizers, negation, coordinators, aspect markers (imperfective, perfective, inceptive), irrealis, imperative, and others. These do not form a simple morphological, syntactic, or semantic set.

An ‘agreement-switch’ pattern (Kalin & van Urk 2015) across the three pronominal paradigms appears across the clause types. In summary, the alignment of agreement re-

² The Independent/Dependent terminology is drawn from Rigsby (1986), as it is the most neutral with respect to an analysis. Alternate terminology for the clause-type split across Tsimshianic includes Indicative/Subjunctive (Boas 1911) and Predicate-Focused/Normal (Tarpent 1987).

mains fixed, but the paradigms that are used to spell out this alignment switches across the Dependent versus Independent context. This is sketched out in Table (3).

(3) Agreement distributions across clause types (simplified)

	Dependent	Independent
Series I (clitic)	A	
Series II (suffix)	O, S	A
Series III (full)		O, S

This can also be described as a ‘pivoting ergative’ pattern, due to the fact that one paradigm (the suffixal Series II) switches its alignment from ergative to absolutive. This can be seen in the examples in (4) and (5); with ergative agreement in boxes and absolutive agreement bolded, it can be seen that Series II suffixal agreement has an absolutive alignment in Dependent clauses (4), and an ergative alignment in Independent clauses (5).

(4) *Dependent clauses*³

- a. Nee=dii **ba**x-**a**'y.
NEG=FOC run-1 SG.II
'I didn't run.'
- b. Nee=dii=n yats-t.
NEG=FOC=1.I hit-3.II
'I didn't hit him.'

(5) *Independent clauses*

- a. **Ba**x '**ni**'y.
run 1 SG.III
'I ran.'
- b. Yaj-i-'y '**ni**t.
hit-TR-1 SG.II 3.III
'I hit him.'

Independent clauses have a secondary morphosyntactic marker: an additional vowel, glossed TR, is present on transitive verb stems (Hunt 1993). This can be seen in (5b).

2.3 Nominal-type split

The split of interest for this paper – a secondary split across nominal type – appears only within Dependent clauses. This split is conditioned by the nature of the subject (specifically the transitive subject), and affects the alignment of suffixal agreement.

Two agreement patterns can be identified (Hunt 1993):

- (6) a. Suffixal (II) agreement targets the arguments not indexed by ergative Series I agreement, resulting in a complementary ERGATIVE/ABSOLUTIVE agreement pattern in transitive clauses.

³ Uncited examples are from my primary fieldwork. Abbreviations are as follows: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ABS = absolutive, CN = common noun determiner, DN = determinate noun determiner, ERG = ergative, FOC = focus, IPFV = imperfective, IRR = irrealis, NEG = negative, NOM = nominative, PL = plural, PROSP = prospective, RECP = reciprocal, SG = singular, SPT = spatiotemporal, SX = intransitive subject extraction, TR = transitive.

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- b. Suffixal (II) agreement targets the subject, even though it may have already been indexed by ergative Series I agreement, resulting in a DOUBLE ERGATIVE agreement pattern in transitive clauses.

The Ergative/Absolutive pattern occurs whenever the A argument is pronominal and *not* third-person plural; that is, when it is a third-singular pronoun, or a first- or second-person pronoun regardless of number. This is exemplified in (7) with a third-singular subject.

- (7) Nee=dii=[t] yats-t.
 NEG=FOC=3.I hit-3.II
 ‘S/he didn’t hit him/her.’

The Double Ergative pattern occurs whenever the A argument is a third-person plural pronoun (8), or a DP (9).⁴ Under these circumstances, the O argument, which has not been indexed by either agreement paradigm, may be spelled out as a Series III full pronoun.

- (8) Nee=dii=[t] yats-[diit] ’nit.
 NEG=FOC=3.I hit-3PL.II 3.III
 ‘They didn’t hit him/her.’
- (9) Nee=dii=[t] gya’a-[t]=s Aidan ’nit.
 NEG=FOC=3.I see-[3.II]=DN Aidan 3.III
 ‘Aidan didn’t see her.’

This results in a picture wherein third-plural and DP ergative arguments must be agreed with twice, by both forms of agreement, but other pronouns may not be. The Series II suffixal paradigm itself is split between an absolutive and nominative distribution for this reason.

A revised distribution of agreement across all syntactic splits is given in Table (10).

(10) *Agreement distributions, by paradigm (revised)*

ERG is →	Dependent		Independent
	Most Pron.	3PL/DP	
Series I (clitic)	A	A	
Series II (suffix)	O, S	A, S	A
Series III (full)		O	O, S

⁴ I assume following Hunt (1993) and Davis & Forbes (2015) (building on findings by Tarpent 1987, 1988) that suffixal agreement occurs with the ergative argument in these contexts, but that it is obscured due to subsequent encliticization of the DP determiner.

The Series II suffixes see the most variability in alignment overall; they have an ergative alignment in Independent clauses, and then a distribution split between absolutive and nominative in Dependent clauses.

The rest of this paper aims to account for this paradigm's split-absolutive pattern within Dependent clauses (the Independent ergative pattern being left for future work). It is therefore necessary to identify why third-plural and DP arguments condition a nominative agreement distribution, while other pronouns condition an absolutive one.

3. Problems with feature markedness

In order to account for the split-absolutive agreement system I have identified within the Dependent clause type, it is necessary to understand the groups of nominals which lie on either side of the split.

Crosslinguistically, nominal-type splits can be conditioned by a variety of nominal properties: DOM and object-shift patterns are generally conditioned by definiteness, animacy, or topicality (de Hoop & de Swart 2008a, Kornfilt 2008), while split-ergative patterns (where case or agreement varies between ergative and nominative alignment, by contrast), have been described as referencing features such as person, DP/pronoun, or occasionally number. The latter type of split has frequently been analyzed as conditioned based on a nominal's place within a nominal *hierarchy*; two examples ranging from more 'ergative' to more 'nominative' are given in (11) and (12).

(11) Addr > Spkr > Pron > Proper > Human > Anim > ... (Silverstein 1976)

(12) 1PL > 1SG > 2PL > 2SG > 3PL.hum > 3SG.hum > 3PL.anim > 3PL.inan > 3PL.inan > 3SG.inan (Woolford 2008)

Attempting to superimpose either of these markedness-based hierarchies upon the Gitksan nominal-type split results in a problem, illustrated in (13). Under all accounts, third-singular pronouns fit in any natural class where third-plural pronouns and DPs are grouped together. The Gitksan split requires that third-singulars be grouped with participants.

(13) Participants > 3PL > 3SG > DP

We may then reject an approach driven strictly by a nominal hierarchy and instead consider an approach which formally references marked ϕ -features. If only individual features instead are considered, the same problem arises; no single feature can be used to characterize either group. The property distinguishing DP/PRONOUN is insufficient, given that third-person plural pronouns group with DPs. The [PERSON] feature is insufficient, given that third-person singulars group with participants. Finally, the [NUMBER] feature is insufficient, given that third-person plurals pattern together with singular DPs, and differently than first- or second-person plurals.

We may then consider an approach which references multiple features. Assuming a syntactic approach to agreement, an agreement split is the result of relativizing agreement

to a particular marked φ -feature (e.g. Béjar 2003, Coon & Preminger 2012)⁵ in order to target a class of marked, split-inducing arguments. This is often accomplished by assuming that [PERSON] and [NUMBER] probe independently on a split probe (Nevins 2011, Preminger 2012); such a split probe would predict ‘omnivorous’ agreement effects, where a less-marked subject is passed over for agreement in favor of a more-marked object. This is demonstrated abstractly in (14).

- (14) a. **AgrF** Subject.F Object.G
 ↑
 b. **AgrF** Subject.G Object.F
 ↑

In Gitksan, this is the case neither for marked person features (15)⁶, nor marked number features (16).

- (15) *No omnivorous person: 3A over 2O*
 a. Nee=dii=**t** 'wa-**diit** 'niin.
 NEG=FOC=3.I find-3PL.II 2SG.III
 ‘They didn’t find you.’
 b. *Nee=dii=**t** 'wa-**n** 'nidiit.
 NEG=FOC=3.I find-2SG.II 3PL.III

- (16) *No omnivorous number: singular A over plural O*
 a. Nee=dii=**t** gya'a-**[t]**=s Mary 'nidiit.
 NEG=FOC=3.I see-[3.II]=DN 3PL.III
 ‘Mary didn’t see them.’
 b. *Nee=dii=**t** gya'a-**diit** Mary.
 NEG=FOC=3.I see=3PL.II Mary
 (Only ‘They didn’t see Mary.’)

In order for a φ -probe to target the relevant set of arguments, some singular configuration of features including all of person, number, and DP/pronoun properties would have to be referenced. For this to happen on a single probe, the arrangement of features would be little more than stipulation. In the next section, I propose that this is accomplished not via picking out the third-plural/DP group as a marked set, but via the interaction of the Series I clitic and Series II suffixal agreement probes.

⁵ A morphological account of the nominal-type split along the lines of (Legate 2014) would run into difficulty first because the split is in agreement, rather than zero-marked case, and secondly because of the third agreement pattern present in the Independent clause type. Characterization of Series II agreement via syncretism in Distributed Morphology would minimally require morphological reference to a [DEPENDENT] or [INDEPENDENT] feature. I choose to avoid this problem by assuming that whatever structural difference exists between the clause types need not produce a specific feature.

⁶ It is possible for a participant object to be agreed with over a DP subject; this is discussed in section 5.2.

4. Proposal: feature sets and agreement probe interaction

The primary proposal of this paper is that third-person plurality and the property of being a DP are not features able to be targeted by a φ -probe; they are not φ -properties. In this way, third-person plurality contrasts with participant plurality. This abstract division of third-person plurality and participant-plurality is empirically grounded in the lack of a number contrast in the Series I clitic paradigm. A number contrast in the third person is exhibited only in Series II and III; this contrast was recently innovated in the Interior Tsimshianic branch.⁷ The paradigms are presented again in (17).

(17) *Gitksan agreement paradigms*

	I: Clitics		II: Suffixes	
	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	n	(n) dip	-’y	-’m
2	m	m sim	-n	-si’m
3		t	-t	-diit

I propose that the Series I clitic paradigm can be represented as an agreement probe relativized to φ -features; it spells out all φ -contrasts. The Series II suffixal paradigm, in contrast, can be represented as an agreement probe relativized to D-features, where ‘D’ is understood to stand for all nominal features, including both φ -features and other nominal features including third-person plurality and an additional feature carried by full DPs. D-features are therefore a superset, and φ -features a subset, of formal features that may be held by nominals.

I further suggest that the Series I clitic probe, which may only index ergative arguments, is located on v (Woolford 1997, 2006).⁸ The Series II suffix probe, which may have an ergative, nominative, or absolutive distribution, is located higher, on T. In Dependent clauses it is active in both transitive and intransitive clauses. The Series I probe, being lower in the structure, will probe for an agreement target first, and the higher Series II probe will agree second.

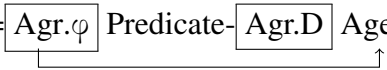
As the final piece of the analysis, I assume that individual features are deactivated upon being successfully agreed with, in line with some understanding of the Activity Condition (Chomsky 2000, 2001, Baker 2008). As a consequence, nominals with a single type of feature (e.g. φ -features) may be agreed with once, while nominals with two types of features (e.g. both D- and φ -features) may be agreed with twice.

The stages of the derivation proceed as follows. First, ergative agreement on a transitive v (the Series I clitic paradigm) probes for a target. It always finds and agrees with the φ -features on the ergative A argument, rendering them inaccessible for future agreement probing. This is demonstrated in the string-based representation in (18).

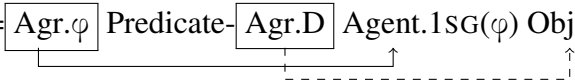
⁷ Coast Tsimshian, which lacks a third-person number contrast, is examined in section 5.1.

⁸ This paradigm is located far to the left in the sentence, suggesting that it might be located higher in the structure. I abstract away from this linear cue and focus on the alignment properties of the paradigm for now, but how this clitic paradigm is linearized constitutes an interesting domain for further research.

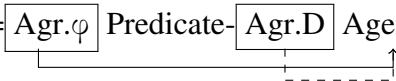
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(18) DEP=Agr. φ Predicate-Agr.D Agent Object


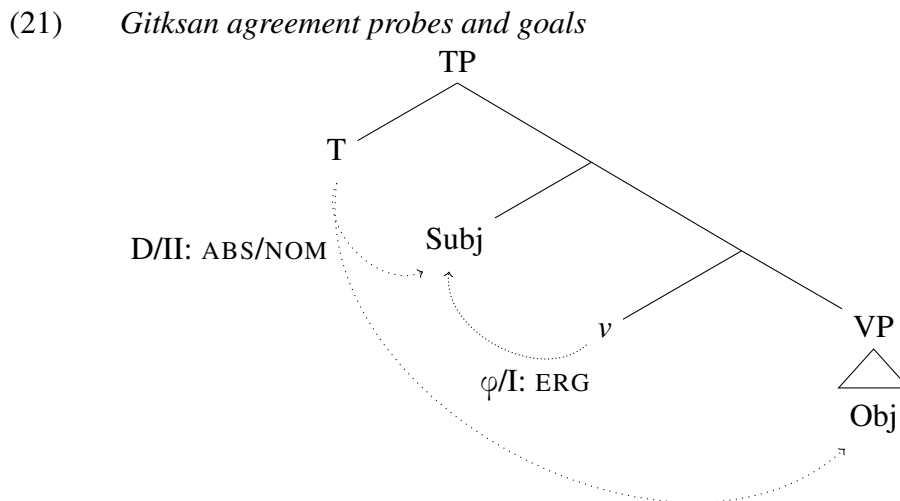
Second, the Series II suffixes probe for a target. This agreement probe is sensitive to a superset of nominal features (D-features), and enters into an agreement relation with the highest nominal with active D- or φ -features. The outcome of this agreement operation is therefore dependent on whether all the features of the A argument have been exhausted by prior Series I agreement. If the A argument only has φ -features, as in (19), which models the situation with a first-singular ergative, then this D-agreement probe must look further to the object. This instantiates the Ergative/Absolutive agreement pattern.

(19) *Ergative/Absolutive*
 DEP=Agr. φ Predicate-Agr.D Agent.1SG(φ) Object


If the A argument has both φ - and D-features, as in (20), which models the situation with a third-plural ergative, then the D-agreement probe may agree with it, even though it has already been the target of a previous agreement operation. This instantiates the Double Ergative agreement pattern.

(20) *Double Ergative*
 DEP=Agr. φ Predicate-Agr.D Agent.3PL(φ ,D) Object


The proposed structure is represented hierarchically in (21).



The split-absolutive alignment exhibited by the Series II suffixes can therefore be understood as highest-argument agreement (i.e. nominative alignment) which may be bled by intervening ergative Series I agreement (resulting in absolutive alignment).

The precise representation of the non- φ D-features (3rd-plural and DP) merits some discussion. It might be predicted that these features appear on a D projection not present

in the other pronouns (1st/2nd person, or 3rd-singular). Following Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002), we might therefore expect only third-plural pronouns to exhibit the characteristics of D-type pronouns, such as strict referentiality – that is, an inability to function as a bound variable. This prediction does not appear to be borne out; third-plural agreement and pronouns may function as bound variables, as in (22).

- (22) Mahla k'i'y=hl na-niinixsxw-it ha'niigoot-**diit** dim 'nidiit dim xsdaa-t.
 each one=CN RECP-marry.PL-SX thought-3PL.II PROSP 3PL.III PROSP win-SX
 'Each married couple thought that they would win.'

It is worth noting, however, that third-person plural-marking is restricted to animates, as for example in Dene languages (Lochbihler et al. 2015), and unlike the general plurality of languages like English (see further discussion in Forbes to appear). I leave the exact formalization of these features for future work.

5. Extensions

This section considers some points of variation from the agreement patterns described to this point. Section 5.1 discusses cross-Tsimshianic variation in Dependent-clause agreement, and section 5.2 discusses some language-internal variation regarding an alternate agreement pattern with participant objects.

5.1 Third-plural in diachrony

As noted in section 4, the split between third-person number and participant number is justified by the different evolution of this contrast. 3PL is an innovation of the Interior Tsimshianic subfamily, and is lacking in Coast Tsimshian. Table (23) presents the Coast Tsimshian independent pronouns, cognate to the Gitksan Series III set. A single pronoun is used for all third persons regardless of number.⁹

- (23) *Coast Tsimshian pronouns (Mulder 1994)*

	I: Pre-pred clitics (‘Subjective’)		II: Suffixes (‘Objective’)		III: Free pronouns (‘Independent’)	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	n	dp	-u	-m	'nüüyu	'nüüm
2	m	m sm	-n	-sm	'nüün	'nüüsm
3		t		-t		'niit

Along with a third-person number contrast, Coast Tsimshian also lacks the Double Ergative agreement pattern. Only the Ergative/Absolutive agreement pattern, across the cognate Series I and Series II paradigms, appears. Even clauses with DP ergatives, which receive double agreement in Interior Tsimshianic, see complementary Ergative/Absolutive

⁹ A fourth ‘Definite Objective’ paradigm is not included here, but demonstrates the same pattern.

agreement in Coast Tsimshian. The two patterns are presented for comparison below, with Series II agreement indexing the object in Coast (24) and the ergative in Interior (25).

- (24) Yagwa= \boxed{t} hmoom-**d**=it Meli.
IPFV=3.I help-3.II=DN Mary
'Mary is helping him.' (Bach 2004)
- (25) Yukw= \boxed{t} hlimoo- $\boxed{[t]}$ =s Mary ('nit).
IPFV=3.I help-[3.II]=DN Mary 3.III
'Mary is helping him.' (Bach 2004)

This demonstrates that the development of third person plurality not only affected agreement patterns with those third-plural arguments, but also the class of DPs. This supports my analysis: a third-plural contrast was innovated and incorporated to the same group of features that characterized a distinction between DPs and pronouns, which I have referred to as D-features. The Series II suffixal paradigm, now sensitive to one of these contrasts, expanded the scope of its relativization to be sensitive to both, while the Series I clitics remained sensitive to only ϕ -features.

5.2 DPs with participant objects

There is a final note of variability in the picture of agreement that I have presented here. In situations with DP ergatives and participant objects, Series II suffixal agreement has the option of agreeing with either the subject or object. That is, either the Ergative/Absolutive or Double Ergative agreement pattern is possible. Speakers do not note any difference between the two options and appear to switch between them freely; a large-scale analysis has yet to be conducted.

- (26) a. Ji-daa= \boxed{t} 'maj-**i**'m=hl lo'op, ...
IRR-SPT=3.I hit-1PL.II=CN rock ...
'If a rock hits us ...'
- b. Ji-daa= \boxed{t} 'mats- $\boxed{[t]}$ =hl lo'op '**nuu**'m, ...
IRR-SPT=3.I hit-[3.II]=CN rock 1PL.III ...
'If a rock hits us ...'

This variable pattern might be taken as an indication that the Series II suffixal agreement probe is indeed specially relativized to the feature [PERSON] in some way. However, there are three reasons why such a proposal is not tenable.

First, the Ergative/Absolutive pattern is not available in clauses featuring third-plural ergatives over participant objects, as already demonstrated in (15). Second, the claim that participants should in some way outrank DPs on a scale of markedness for agreement would lead to a paradox in argument ranking. Third-plurals are preferred for agreement over participants, and yet DPs are preferred over third-plurals. This is demonstrated in (27).

(27) 1/2 > DP > 3PL > 1/2 > DP > 3PL ...

Third, and finally, the favorability of participant objects cannot be strictly attributed to relativization on the Series II suffixal agreement probe. Older sources demonstrate similar VOS/VSO alternations with participant objects in Independent clauses, where suffixal agreement is fixed on the ergative argument (Rigsby 1986, Jelinek 1986). The pattern remains in Nisga'a as well (Tarpent 1987:224).

- (28) a. Hlimoo-yi-t 'nuu'm t Mary.
 help-TR-3.II 1PL.III DN Mary
 'Mary helped us.'
- b. Hlimoo-yi-[t]=s Mary 'nuu'm.
 help-TR-[3.II]=DN Mary 1PL.III
 'Mary helped us.' (Rigsby 1986:263-4)

This points to a prior special syntax for participant objects regardless of clause type or indexation by any particular agreement pattern, which in modern Gitksan persists only in Independent clauses, optionally. This can perhaps be interpreted as a second kind of syntactic nominal-type split, this time a true person split.

This person split is of some interest to theories of split-ergativity on the basis of person. Syntactic analyses of person-based split ergativity specifically utilize constructions to pick out the marked persons which disrupt ergative configurations or ergative case assignment (Coon & Preminger 2012, Deal 2015). By contrast, the syntactic split sketched here leaves the ergative alignment of agreement intact. An alternate analysis is therefore required, which will allow for the desired movement of marked persons without disrupting the ergative agreement configuration.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed an unusual nominal type split in Gitksan, which picks out third-plural pronouns and DPs and contrasts them with other pronouns, including third-singul-

The groups of nominals involved demand that we come to a more nuanced understanding of φ -features and other nominal features. I have done this by proposing a distinction between φ - and D-features, which fall in a subset-superset relation to one another, and relativizing one agreement probe to each set. Agreement by the subset (φ) probe followed by the superset (D) probe allows for a split-absolutive pattern whereby some nominals may be agreed with twice, when they bear both D- and φ -features, but only once otherwise. The split-absolutive pattern can therefore be characterized as highest-argument agreement which is sometimes bled by prior ergative agreement. This is a syntactic approach to a nominal-type split which does not demand raising one group of arguments to a prominent syntactic position; ergative agreement therefore proceeds uninhibited.

The persistent ergative pattern in Gitksan hammers home the oft-cited point that ergativity, as well as the splits that may or may not affect it, demand different formal expla-

nations in different languages. The route that I have taken in accounting for Gitksan split-absolutivity is line with recent proposals on the emergent nature of features (Cowper & Hall 2015), and raises questions about the underlying representation of nominal features and how these may be reanalyzed over time. Here, I have proposed that third-person number in Gitksan, while now a formal contrast in the pronominal system, is not part of the language's φ -feature inventory. At what point may a new pronominal contrast become fully incorporated into an existing syntactic system on par with preexisting features? This issue remains for further exploration.

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