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Tense on D and (the Lack of) Nominative Case.¹

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1. Introduction

Pesetsky & Torrego (2000) (henceforth P&T) argue for the following assumption concerning the nature of Nominative Case:²

- (1) Nominative case is a [-interpretable] Tense feature (T) on the Determiner (D).

Given Chomsky's (1995) assumption that [-interpretable] features have to be deleted, (1) has the following effect. Since T on D is [-interpretable], it has to be deleted. This can be done by means of D entering into a local relation with T in the clausal domain. That is, DP has to move to SpecTP. P&T argue that this is the phenomenon that is standardly known as "nominative case" assignment. A sample derivation is given in (2) below:

- (2) [TP [DP Peter, $\bar{F}_{[-int]}$]_i [T] [t-Peter_i bought *the book*]]

The assumption in (1) has a crucial implication, which is the main concern of this paper. P&T's proposal amounts to saying that nominative case assignment and the Case Filter are not primitives of UG, rather they are derived concepts. Potentially,

¹ I would like to thank my Halkomelem consultants Rosaleen George and Elizabeth Herrling for sharing their knowledge of the Halkomelem language. Original data belongs to the Stó:lo Nation Language Program. I have benefited from discussions with Strang Burton, Henry Davis, Rose-Marie Déchaine, Lisa Matthewson and the Squamish research group: Leora Bar-el, Carrie Gillon, Peter Jacobs and Linda Watt. I would also like to thank the people in the audience at NELS 31, Georgetown, and in the UBC Research Seminar. All remaining errors are my own. Research on this paper was funded by the Academy of Science Austria (APART 435).

² see also Haerberli 1999, 2000

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that Halkomelem lacks the effects of “nominative case” assignment. In what follows, I will empirically justify this proposal.

3. Halkomelem Salish lacks Nominative Case

In this section, I will present arguments to the effect that Halkomelem lacks nominative case: Halkomelem lacks morphological case, infinitives and any kind of case-driven movement.

3.1. No Morphological Case

Halkomelem, like the other Salish languages, does not have morphological case (see among others Kroeber (1991)). Consider first the sentences in (6) involving full DPs:

- (6) a. iwólem [te stá:xwelh]_{subj}
 playing det children.pl
 ‘The children are playing.’ (Galloway 1980: 41)
- b. kw'éts-l-exw-es [te swíyeqe]_{subj} [te spá:th]_{obj}
 see-trans-3o-3s det man det bear
 ‘The man sees a bear.’ (Galloway 1980: 41)

Observe in the examples above that there is no morphological difference between DPs used as subjects or objects. In other words, there is no morphological case. The same point can be made on basis of pronouns (7) and wh-words (8):

- (7) a. lám [thú-tl'ò]_{subj}
 go det.fem-3Indep
 ‘She goes.’ (Galloway 1993: 173)
- b. óxwes-t-chexw [thú-tl'ò]_{obj}
 give-trans-2sg.s det.fem-3Indep
 ‘You give it to her.’ (Galloway 1993: 173)
- c. kw'éts-l-exw-es [tú-tl'ò]_{subj} [thú-tl'ò]_{obj}
 see-trans-3o-3s det-3Indep det.fem-3Indep
 ‘He sees her.’
- (8) a. [tewát]_{subj} kw'e le yéqweltsep
 who det aux light.fire
 ‘Who lit the fire?’ (Galloway 1993: 357)
- b. [tewát]_{obj} kw'e í-xw tháyelhtset te sléxwelh
 who det aux-2sg.s make det canoe
 ‘Who are you making the canoe for?’ (Galloway 1993: 357)

As shown above, in Halkomelem (like in English) there is no morphological case marking on full DPs and there is also no morphological case marking on pronouns or wh-words (contrary to English: *he/him; who/whom*).

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Of course, the absence of morphological case marking is a necessary consequence of the lack of abstract nominative case in Halkomelem Salish as claimed by the proposal in (5).

3.2. No Infinitives

Another piece of evidence for the claim that there is no nominative case in Halkomelem has to do with what we can call the “infinitival effect”. It is a well known fact that infinitives do not license overt subjects. Standardly, this is explained by saying that infinitives cannot assign nominative case (see Rouveret & Vergnaud 1980).

In a language without nominative case, we expect that the infinitival effect does not show up. For Halkomelem, this is indeed a correct prediction: Halkomelem like other Salish languages does not have infinitives as argued by Galloway (1993) for Halkomelem, and by Kroeber (1991) for a cross-Salish perspective. Relevant quotes are given below:

“The Pron[ominal] S[ubject] of the subordinate clause is never deleted, even if it is the same as that in the main clause.” (Galloway 1993: 453)

“No Salish languages possess inflectional categories comparable to the infinitives or gerunds of some European languages, which mark clauses from which subjects are obligatorily absent.” (Kroeber 1991: 36f.)⁶

3.3. No Case-driven A-movement

There are certain types of movement that are assumed to be triggered by the need for case. That is, an argument appearing in a position in which case cannot be realized (checked/assigned) has to move to an appropriate case position. Relevant constructions include passive, raising and unaccusative verbs.

In this section, I will show that Halkomelem lacks all the effects of case-driven A-movement as expected by our analysis.

3.3.1. Passive

Let us start by looking at passive in Halkomelem. It is not the case that Halkomelem lacks passive. Passives in Halkomelem has the following properties: a transitive verb which is obligatorily marked with a transitive marker is intransitivized by means of an intransitive suffix. As a result the underlying subject is removed. Like in English the underlying subject can reappear as an oblique. This is exemplified in the example in (9):

⁶ The lack of infinitivals and consequently the lack of the infinitival effect is pervasive in Salish. However, Davis & Matthewson (1996) argue that there are infinitives in St’át’imcets. I have to leave the properties of St’át’imcets infinitives for future research.

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- (9) ni ləm-ət-əm ʔə θə sténi? t^θə x^wənítəm
 aux look-trans-intrans obl det woman det white.man
 ‘The white man was looked at by the woman.’ (Gerdts 1988: 195: ex1)

The crucial question we have to ask in the present context is the following: Is the underlying object promoted to subject? Or in other words: Do we find case-driven A-movement?

In the remainder of this section, I will argue that the answer to both these questions is negative. In particular, there is evidence that the underlying object does not get promoted to subject (see Galloway 1993 and Gerdts 1989). In fact, Kroeber (1991) argues that this is the case across Salish:

“‘Passives’ in most Salish languages could equally well be regarded as indefinite-subject transitive verbs, as far as their morphology is concerned: they contain an object suffix (indicating person and number of the patient) followed by a ‘passive’ marker.” (Kroeber 1991: 21f)

This amounts to saying that passive in Halkomelem behaves like an impersonal construction. The morphological evidence referred to by Kroeber is as follows. In passives agreement with the underlying object has the same distribution as object agreement in active clauses, which is different from that of subject agreement. It can thus be concluded that agreement in passives is object agreement (see Kroeber 1991, Gerdts 1989, Galloway 1993 among others).

There is also syntactic evidence that allows for the same conclusion. Relevant evidence has to do with quantifier extraction. Gerdts (1988) observes that quantifier extraction in Halkomelem is only possible out of transitive objects ((10)a) and intransitive subjects (10)b. However, transitive subjects do not allow for quantifier extraction (10)c:

- (10) a. [mékw’]_Q lép’ex-es te pú:s [[t]_Q te sth’óqwi]_{QP}
 all eat-3s ‘det cat det fish
 ‘The cat ate all the fish.’
 b. [mékw’]_Q ítet [[t]_Q ye pú:s]
 all sleep det.pl cat
 ‘All the cats are sleeping.’
 c. *[mékw’]_Q hélp’ex [[t]_Q ye pú:s]_{QP} te sth’óqwi
 all eat.cont det.pl cat det fish
 ‘All the cats ate the fish.’

Crucially, quantifier extraction is possible out of the underlying object in passives:

- (11) [mékw’]_Q xwmékweth-et-em [[t]_Qye slhellhálf]_{QP}
 all kiss-trans-intrans det.pl woman.pl
 ‘All the women got kissed.’

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(11) shows that the argument DP in passive patterns with transitive objects, rather than transitive subjects.⁷

Finally, there is a piece of anecdotal evidence for the object status of passive arguments. This has to do with native speakers judgements. They consistently translate the passive as an impersonal. That is instead of ‘She was verbed’ they would say ‘Somebody verbed her.’

In sum, we have seen evidence that passive in Halkomelem does not involve promotion to subject. Consequently, there is no case driven A-movement in passives. This is of course expected under the assumption that there is no nominative case in Halkomelem.

3.3.2. Unaccusatives

This section provides evidence that there is no case-driven A movement in Halkomelem unaccusative verbs. Again, it is not true that Halkomelem lacks unaccusative verbs. That is, Halkomelem has a class of verbs that are associated with unaccusative semantics (see Gerdts 1991). A non-exhaustive list is given in (12):

(12)	ʔik ^w	‘get lost’	ʔiχ	‘get scratched on surface’
	ʔiyéʔq	‘change’	k ^w an	‘be born’
	k ^w es	‘get burnt’	ʔic’	‘get cut’
	məs	‘decrease in size’	məyaʔ	‘get smaller’
	pas	‘get hit’	pən	‘get buried’ ...

Gerdts 1991: 239

Again, in the light of the present proposal, we have to ask one crucial question: Do “unaccusative” verbs in Halkomelem have unaccusative syntax? or in other words: Do we find case-driven A-movement?

As in the case of passive above, I will again argue that the answer to these questions is negative. In particular, I will provide evidence to the effect that unaccusative verbs in Halkomelem are not associated with “unaccusative” syntax (see Wiltschko 2000, in preparation for a detailed discussion).

Again the evidence has to do with extraction. Recall from above that transitive objects and intransitive subjects allow for quantifier extraction whereas transitive subjects do not. Crucially, subjects of both unergative and unaccusative verbs allow for quantifier extraction:

⁷ Note that the possibility to say that the underlying object patterns with intransitive subjects can be dismissed since a passive verb is formally marked as transitive and formally transitive sentences are associated with a different syntactic structure than formally intransitive ones (see Wiltschko 2000, in prep).

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- (13) a. [mékw']_Q ítet [[t]_Q ye pú:s]
 all sleep det.pl cat
 'All the cats are sleeping.'
 b. [mékw']_Q íkw' [[t]_Q ye pú:s]
 all lost det.pl cat
 'All the cats got lost.'

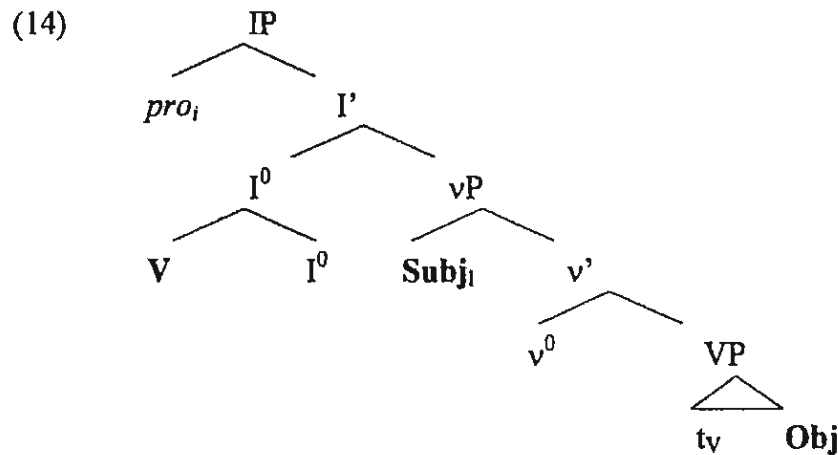
The lack of contrast in (13) shows that unergatives do not behave like concealed transitives.⁸ We can conclude that verbs with unaccusative semantics do not have unaccusative syntax. This is consistent with the assumption that there is no case-driven movement in Halkomelem.⁹

In the next section I will show that, Halkomelem lacks generalized case-driven movement as well.

3.4. No Generalized Case-driven Movement

According to the VP-internal subject hypothesis (Kitagawa (1986), Fukui & Speas (1986), Koopman & Sportiche (1991)) subjects are base-generated VP-internally. Accordingly, raising to SpecTP for reasons of case is not restricted to passive, raising and unaccusative verbs. Rather case-driven movement is generalized to all subjects (including underlying subjects). I refer to this phenomenon as *generalized case driven movement*. In the light of the present proposal we make the following prediction: Given the lack of case, we expect the lack of generalized case driven movement in Halkomelem.

I will now show, that this prediction is indeed borne out. The evidence is as follows. Verbs in Salish undergo movement to a functional head position which is at least higher than vP (see Wiltschko (2000) for Halkomelem and Davis (1998) for a cross-Salish perspective):



Full DPs stay in their base-generated position (the object appears within VP; and the subject appears in SpecvP (see Wiltschko 2000 for Halkomelem and Davis 1998 for a

⁸ For more evidence see Wiltschko (in prep.)

⁹ Note that there are no *seem*-type Raising verbs because there are no infinitives.

cross-Salish perspective). If there is no case, we predict that there cannot be any case-driven movement. Consequently, the lack of case-driven movement derives the strict VSO order of Halkomelem.¹⁰

3.5. Conclusion

In this section we have seen empirical evidence for the claim in (15):

(15) Halkomelem Salish lacks nominative case.

The fact that Halkomelem lacks nominative case sheds some light on the empirical and theoretical adequacy of different versions of the Case Theory. Consider first a GB-type Case Theory. Here, case and the Case Filter are viewed as primitives. Consequently, under this view there is no room for any kind of parametrization that would result in the lack of nominative case.

Within the minimalist program, the presence of an abstract [-interpretable] case feature on DP could in principle be parametrized. However, this approach would not capture the correlation between the presence of tense on nouns and the lack of nominative case.

Crucially, an analysis that makes use of P&T's proposal can capture this correlation. If nominative case reduces to a [-interpretable] T feature on D, we expect that languages with a [+interpretable] T feature on D lack the effect of nominative case.

The crucial proposal of the present paper is thus that the value of interpretability is subject to parametrization. This results in cross-linguistic variation as summarized in the table below:

(16) The value of interpretability of T on D

	ENGLISH	HALKOMELEM
T on D	[-interpretable]	[+interpretable]
Effects of Nominative Case	yes	no

In the next section, I will address the question as to what it means for T on D to be [+interpretable].

4. The Interpretability of T on D as a Locus of Parametrization

In a footnote P&T briefly address the question concerning the relation between a [+/-interpretable] T feature on D and the semantic interpretation of DP:

¹⁰ Note that the possibility for SVO exists across Salish including Halkomelem. However, there is significant evidence that this word order is derived by A'-movement and is therefore not case-driven. See Wiltschko (2000) for evidence for Halkomelem and Davis (1999) for a cross-Salish perspective.

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"Still, the dichotomy "interpretable"/"uninterpretable" may in the end turn out to be too crude. [...] DP does have tense properties of some subtlety and complexity, studied in Enç (1981), Musan (1995) and others. Furthermore, DPs in Somali (Lecarme (1997)) and in languages of the Salishan group (Demirdache (1997)) overtly express tense on DP in a variety of ways. [...] Thus the presence of tense features on DP in a language like English, while "uninterpretable" in some sense, might have some roots in the semantics of DP after all." (Pesetsky & Torrego: 37. n 17.)

In what follows I will argue that the notion of interpretability has to be strictly kept apart from the semantic interpretation of DPs.

4.1. The Temporal Interpretation of Nominals vs. T on D

It has been argued in a number of places that nouns are associated with a temporal argument (see Enç (1981, 1986), Musan (1995), Burton (1995) among others). Evidence for this claim comes from a number of phenomena. For example, the temporal interpretation of nouns can be manipulated by adjectival modifiers (Higginbotham 1985, 1987) as in the following cases:

- (17) a. my future husband
b. my late father

With this in mind there are two crucial questions we have to ask given our proposal. If English nouns have a temporal interpretation, then why is T on D [-interpretable]? And more generally, how does the temporal interpretation of nouns (in the sense of Enç 1981) relate to the value of interpretability of T on D?

The essence of the answer I have in mind is as follows. We have to strictly separate the notion of interpretability of T on D and the temporal interpretation of nouns.¹¹ In particular, I suggest that the temporal interpretation of nouns is a matter of semantics proper. As such it is universal. That is, it is not subject to parametrization. T on D on the other hand is a strictly syntactic (= categorical) feature. The value of interpretability is subject to parametrization. Note however, that it is not the case that there is no relation whatsoever between T on D and the temporal interpretation of nouns. Rather, a [+interpretable] T feature on D feeds into semantics proper. However, a [-interpretable] feature does not feed semantics. In fact it is deleted in the course of the syntactic derivation and consequently never reaches the semantic component.

Under this view the picture that arises for Halkomelem and English, respectively can be summarized as follows. In Halkomelem the tense markers (-*lh* 'past'/'-*cha* 'future') instantiate a [+interpretable] T feature. Therefore they feed directly into the semantic component as briefly sketched below:

¹¹ See Lecarme (1996, 1998) for a similar distinction.

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The difference between the semantic notion of temporal interpretation and the syntactic notion of T on D is quite reminiscent of the above discussed difference between natural and grammatical gender. That is, grammatical tense (T) is probably based on the temporal interpretation of nouns. In a language with grammatical tense on D we expect similar mismatches to show up. This is indeed the case in Halkomelem. Consider the following example:

- (30) lá:t-elh
 night-past
 'morning' (Galloway 1980: 61)

The word for 'morning' in Halkomelem is a complex word consisting of the word for 'night'¹² and the past tense marker *elh*. However, it is possible to talk about "tomorrow morning" in Halkomelem. Consequently, there is a mismatch between the tense morpheme and the temporal interpretation associated with this word. I am not aware of similar mismatches with temporal modifiers in English. Take for example the following sentence:

- (31) She will visit her late father's grave.

Here, the father has to be dead at the time of utterance, i.e. it cannot mean that the father is not yet dead, but if he dies she will visit his grave.

4.3. Conclusion

In this section, I have argued that there is a distinction between the semantic notion of temporal interpretation and the syntactic notion of a [+/-interpretable] T feature. The crucial semantic property of nominals is that they are universally associated with a temporal argument. In the syntax, nominals are associated with the categorial feature T and the value of [interpretability] of T is subject to parametrization. Consequently, we can say that the value of interpretability is an important locus of cross-linguistic variation: first, it effects the way the temporal interpretation of nouns is manipulated; and secondly, it effects the appearance of "nominative case".

With this assumption we have to address a last crucial question: How does the child know whether the value of interpretability of T on D is [+] or [-]? In this paper, I can only provide a tentative answer.

According to Chomsky 1995 verbal features are only [+interpretable] on verbal projections but are [-interpretable] on nominal projections. And nominal features are only [+interpretable] on nominal projections but not on verbal projections:

- (32) Value of [interpretability] according to Chomsky (1995)

¹² This is a slight simplification in that the word for 'night' is actually *s-lat*. It is prefixed with the nominalizer *s-*.

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FEATURE	PROJECTION	VALUE OF INTERPRETABILITY
nominal	verbal	[-interpretable]
	nominal	[+interpretable]
verbal	verbal	[+interpretable]
	nominal	[-interpretable]

Assume that the above view on the value of interpretability of features corresponds in fact to the unmarked value. That is the situation in (32) is the default situation the child acquires in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

Consequently, for the present problem we have to assume that the unmarked value for T on D is [-interpretable]. Furthermore, assume that the triggering experience for a [+interpretable] T on D is overt tense morphology on nouns. Accordingly, the child will start off with assuming that T on D is [-interpretable], since it is a verbal feature on a nominal category. No evidence will change this assumption in English. However, in Halkomelem, nouns can bear overt tense morphology. I argue that this suffices to change the value of T on D to [+interpretable].

Of course the validity of this picture of language variation remains to be determined in future research.

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