

# Ergativity in the Adyghe system of valency-changing derivations

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I will analyse the syntactic properties of valency-changing derivations and other syntactic processes in Adyghe (a language of the West Caucasian family spoken in the Republic of Adygheya and the Krasnodar region of Russia, and also in some countries of western Asia such as Turkey). My aim is to determine whether these processes testify to syntactic ergativity or accusativity in Adyghe, or whether they in fact shed no light at all on the question of Adyghe alignment behaviour.

In traditional descriptions, such as Rogava and Keraševa (1966), Kumakhov (1971), and Zekox (2002), it is taken for granted that Adyghe has ergative alignment. This is due to the fact that Adyghe is a morphologically ergative language (see below). As I will show, the case marking of verb arguments and the system of cross-reference markers are indeed organized ergatively. However, with the exceptions of Serdobol'skaya (2007) and Lander (2009), scholars have not considered the syntactic aspects of ergativity in Adyghe.

In the present paper, I base my analysis of syntactic ergativity on the evidence of valency-changing derivation only. I choose not to consider other pivot properties related to ergativity/accusativity (coordination reduction, relativization, subordinate clauses etc.; see Dixon 1994; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997). It seems to me more justifiable to restrict myself to the data presented by derivational behaviour alone, since in a single article it is impossible to analyse the whole range of data related to ergativity in a polysynthetic language like Adyghe; moreover, the valency-changing derivational system may be organized ergatively, for example, while other syntactic processes are organized accusatively, or vice versa.

We assume that voice systems and syntactic alignment are closely related. On one hand, many linguists (e.g. Shibatani 1985, Dixon 1994) claim that syntactic alignment is crucial for the the voice system of a language. For instance, it has long been thought that the passive is not a characteristic feature of ergative languages. Though this formulation may

be too strong, it is at least true that the passive is more characteristic of accusative than of ergative languages.

Moreover, the precise nature of ergativity in a given language can be relevant for the description and classification of voice-like phenomena. For instance, if we are able to prove that the agent argument of transitive verbs has syntactic pivot properties (in other words, that the language is syntactically accusative), and there is a syntactic alternation which demotes the agent to indirect object while leaving the absolutive argument unaffected, we can describe this alternation as a prototypical passive. However, if the language is syntactically ergative (the absolutive argument has subject properties with both transitive and intransitive verbs), the same alternation should be described differently: in this case it lacks the main property of the passive, in that it does not decrease the syntactic status of the subject argument. We will see that there is a problematic case of this type in Adyghe: two of the derivations found in the language (the potential, marked with *fe-*, and the inadvertitive (involitional), marked with *ʔeç'e-*) seem similar to the passive voice in syntactic terms. However, this similarity disappears if we assume that Adyghe is a syntactically ergative language.

On the other hand, the accurate description of valency-changing mechanisms is a prerequisite for the analysis of syntactic alignment. Some voices and valency-changing derivations systematically show dependence on the subject properties of arguments: for instance, in the majority of languages, reflexives are controlled by the subject argument. Therefore, a description of the voice system allows us to define whether the language is syntactically accusative or ergative.

In section 2, I will sketch the most important features of Adyghe grammar, such as polysynthesis, pro-drop and morphological ergativity. In what follows, each valency-changing derivation is considered. What is crucial for the present analysis is that each derivation will be considered in terms of its relation to syntactic alignment: whether the particular type of syntactic alternation is more characteristic of ergative or accusative languages, and whether or not it shows pivot properties of one argument or another.

Note that a similar type of analysis has been carried out for Adyghe in a previous paper (Paris 1987). The important difference between the earlier paper and the present article is that Paris adopts a semantic point of view: she examines which mechanisms in Adyghe play the same functional role as passives in European languages. My aim is to analyse the valency-changing devices of Adyghe not only from the semantic,

also, and perhaps more importantly, from the syntactic point of view in order to see which derivational mechanisms are syntactically similar to voice alternations.

Matasović (2008) proposes an analysis of transitivity in Kabardian, a language of the West Caucasian family closely related to Adyghe. However, though his analysis is similar in many respects to the present work, Matasović takes into account only causative and antipassive derivations.

In section 3, Adyghe valency-changing operations and their ergative/accusative behaviour are considered. Finally, in section 4 I draw some conclusions concerning the nature of ergativity in Adyghe.

Taking into account the fact that Adyghe is a polysynthetic language, we use a non-canonical notion of valency-changing derivation throughout this article. Inasmuch as NPs are not obligatory in Adyghe, whereas all core arguments have to be cross-referenced in the verb, we will mostly describe the impact of each derivation upon the expression of arguments inside the verb form, i.e. upon the system of cross-reference prefixes, although traditionally, as in Comrie (1976), Dixon (1994), Plungian (2000), Testelefs (2001), valency-changing derivations are often described in terms of their impact upon the expression of free NP arguments.

Let us now review the notions of morphological and syntactic ergativity/accusativity. A language is morphologically ergative (or accusative) if the morphological coding of verbal arguments, i.e. case-marking and the system of verbal personal prefixes, follows the ergative (or accusative) strategy. For instance, if a language is morphologically ergative, the Actor/Agent (A) of transitive verbs must be case-marked and cross-referenced on the verb form in a different way from the Patient (P) of transitive verbs and Single argument (S) of monovalent intransitive verbs. The Patient and the Single argument must, in turn, receive the same case marker and be cross-referenced in the same way.

The notion of syntactic ergativity/accusativity refers to the organization of syntactic processes. If the language is syntactically ergative, this means that S and P show the same set of syntactic properties, distinct from those displayed by A in the same syntactic processes (for instance, only S and P, but not A, can be relativized). It is usually required that in a syntactically ergative language, S and P must show more syntactic subject properties than A. In contrast, in a syntactically accusative language, S and A show the same set of syntactic properties, distinct from the properties of P. S and A, but not P, must show subject properties in syntactically accusative languages.

The term 'morphological ergativity' is used in the standard way throughout this paper: Adyghe is a morphologically ergative language because its argument coding system follows the ergative strategy (a specific case marks the agent of transitive verbs,<sup>1</sup> while another case form is used both for direct objects and subjects of intransitive verbs). However, I choose to understand the term 'syntactic ergativity/accusativity' in a specialized sense: I will say that the given phenomenon displays syntactic ergativity/accusativity if the absolutive argument/the agent of transitive verbs is the pivot for the morphological process involved (and thus, for instance, that morphological reciprocalization provides one piece of evidence for syntactic ergativity because the absolutive argument is in most cases the antecedent of morphological reciprocals). Although the valency-changing derivations under analysis here occur inside the word, the tendencies observed in the present paper are parallel to syntactic processes and tendencies in many other, non-polysynthetic languages.

## 2. Essentials of Adyghe grammar

### 2.1. Polysynthesis and pro-drop

The most salient feature of Adyghe morphosyntax is polysynthesis. Adyghe is a canonical polysynthetic language. The verb form can encompass a large number of locative, temporal, and modal markers. All verb arguments are cross-referenced on the verb form, which can also take a large number of derivational affixes. The language therefore apparently represents the head-marking type, in the terminology of (Nichols 1986). The following example illustrates the richness of Adyghe verb forms:

(1) *Sə-qə-t-de-p-fə-r-a-ka-že-š'tə-κ.*

1SG.ABS-DIR-1PL.IO-COM-2SG.IO-BEN-3SG.IO-3PL.A-CAUS-read:AP-AUX-PL

'They were making me read it to you together with us.'<sup>2</sup>

In (1), the verb contains two applicative markers (*fə-* 'benefactive' and *de-* 'comitative'), the causative marker *κe-*, the complex imperfect marker *-š'tə-κ(e)* (which includes auxiliary stem *-š'tə* and past marker *-κ(e)*).

1. Here and below I use the term 'agent' to denote the ergative (oblique) argument of transitive verbs, including verbs like *лєвѡѡн* 'see' for which the argument does not really have the semantic role of agent.

2. I am grateful to Yuri Lander for this example.

and four personal cross-reference prefixes (*sə-* '1SG.ABS', *t-* '1PL.IO', *p-* '2SG.IO', *a-* '3PL.A').

The personal (and all other) markers are organized in slots: each marker has its own position (slot) in the verb form. These positions are not interchangeable, except in some very special cases. The general scheme is very complicated, which is why we restrict ourselves to the prefixal zone for present purposes. Following Smeets (1984) we can represent it as follows:

Table 1. Prefixal slots of the Adyghe verb form

-9	-8	-7	-6
absolutive argument cross-reference marker	directive prefix	temporal prefix	applicative prefixes together with markers of oblique indirect applicative object

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0
oblique indirect object cross-reference marker	oblique agent cross-reference marker	optative	negation	causative	root

Henceforth we will refer to slot -9 as the 'absolutive slot', and slots -6, -5 and -4 as 'oblique slots', sometimes specifying whether the given argument is an agent or an indirect object.

The personal markers introduced by applicative derivations are paired with derivational markers: each personal prefix must occur immediately before the marker by which it is introduced. All arguments introduced by applicatives are indirect objects. For instance, in (1) the 2SG indirect object prefix *p-* is before the benefactive marker *fə-* ('for you'), whereas the 1PL IO prefix *t-* is before the comitative marker *de-* ('with us').

It is also important to note that Adyghe is a pro-drop language. The participants are not obligatorily expressed by separate referential phrases – what is genuinely obligatory is their cross-referencing on the verb form by means of personal prefixes. Any pronoun in an argument position (absolutive argument, agent, indirect object) can be dropped.

### 2.2. Morphological ergativity

Adyghe is a morphologically ergative language – in other words, case-marking and the system of verbal cross-reference markers are organized

ergatively. In the domain of case-marking, intransitive subjects and direct objects can both be marked with the absolutive marker *-r*, whereas transitive agents take the marker *-m*; the latter is traditionally called ergative (see Kumakhov 1971; Kumakhov and Vamling 2006), but in what follows we will label it 'oblique', with the gloss OBL, because the range of its functions is not limited to canonical functions of the ergative.

Cross-reference prefixes also group S and P together, as distinct from A: the former roles are indexed by a series of prefixes occupying the leftmost position in the verb form. Third person singular absolutive arguments are cross-referenced with a zero prefix, as *pšāše-r* 'girl (absolutive)' in (2) and (3). The agent argument is cross-referenced in the -4 position of the verb form. Third person singular agents are cross-referenced with the prefix *ə-*.

- (2) *Č'ale-m pšāše-r ə-ə-λeB<sup>W</sup>ə-κ.*  
 boy-OBL girl-ABS 3SG.ABS-3SG.A-see-PST  
 'The boy saw the girl.' (transitive verb)
- (3) *Pšāše-r ə-ma-κ<sup>W</sup>e.*  
 girl-ABS 3SG.ABS-DYN-go  
 'The girl goes.' (intransitive verb)

Almost all verbs have an absolutive argument. Two minor verb classes constitute an exception: the so-called impersonal verbs, which have an oblique argument only, and the facilitives/difficultives, which are analysed in detail in 4.5.

Notably, Adyghe possesses a class of bivalent intransitive verbs – a rather atypical feature for some morphologically ergative languages. These verbs have a subject and an indirect object. The subject of intransitive verbs takes absolutive marking, as is typical for morphologically ergative languages. The indirect object, just like the agent of transitive verbs, is marked with oblique case and takes the suffix *-m*:

- (4) *Č'ale-r pšāše-m ə-ə-je-bewə-κ.*  
 boy-ABS girl-OBL 3SG.ABS-3SG.IO-OBLIQUE-kiss-PST  
 'The boy (intransitive subject, absolutive) kissed the girl (IO, oblique).'

In a sense, the syntactic type of the verbal construction represented in (4) is the reverse of the canonically transitive one (cf. (2)) as regards marking.

The verb form in (4) is intransitive because it does not bear the agentive 3SG prefix *ə-* (cf. (2) with a transitive verb). I will show below that reflexivization and reciprocalization also distinguish between bivalent intransitive and bivalent transitive verbs.

The verbal marker *je-* glossed in (4) and below as 'OBLIQUE' is not a cross-reference marker. It is a special type of applicative prefix: for many bivalent intransitive verbs, the indirect object is introduced by means of this prefix, though the precise semantics of this marker is very vague – in other words, its function seems to be just to add an indirect object.

The oblique case has a wide range of semantic functions. It marks not only agents of transitive verbs and indirect objects, but also complements of postpositions, possessors, and temporal and locative adjuncts:

- (5) *Č'ale-m paje*  
 boy-OBL for  
 'for the boy (complement of postposition, oblique)'
- (6) *çəfə-m jə-čətəw*  
 man-OBL 3SG.PR+POSS-cat  
 'The man's (possessor, oblique) cat'

Finally, both the oblique and the absolutive case markers can be dropped when an argument is non-specific or indefinite, as in *čətəw qe-κ<sup>W</sup>a-R* 'a cat came' (cat DIR-go-PST) where the absolutive ending is dropped, or *č'ale čətəw ə-λeB<sup>W</sup>ə-κ* 'a boy saw a cat' (boy cat 3SG.A-see-PST) where the oblique ending on *č'ale* 'boy' and the absolutive ending on *čətəw* 'cat' are both omitted. They thus encode not only the syntactic position of the noun, but also its value in terms of definiteness. This is not typical of morphologically ergative languages.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, all core arguments, including oblique-marked agents and indirect objects as well as absolutive-marked direct objects, are cross-referenced on the verb form. The system of personal prefixes also follows ergative alignment: intransitive S and the DO of transitive verbs are cross-referenced with the same set of prefixes occupying the first position in the verb form. The 3SG absolutive argument is cross-referenced with a zero

3. Of course, the core cases (chiefly the absolutive) can be expressed with zero endings (for instance, the absolutive in Tsakhur). However, if a case form bears non-zero marking, this marker usually cannot be omitted (see Dixon 1994 and Kibrik 2002 for examples).

prefix (or, alternatively, is simply not cross-referenced on the verb form at all). The 3PL absolutive argument does not control an agreement prefix but is cross-referenced with the (optional) absolutive plural suffix *-x*.

Transitive agents are cross-referenced by means of a different set of prefixes from indirect objects and absolutive direct objects: agent markers are situated in the -4 slot in the terms of Smeets 1984. Only agent prefixes have the 3SG form *ə- / jə-*.

We are now in a position to analyse the system of valency-changing derivations in Adyghe. We will not analyse each derivation in detail. Our purpose will be to say a few words about each derivation and to determine whether a given derivation can be regarded as a manifestation of semantic/syntactic ergativity, or whether, by contrast, it represents an argument against the analysis of Adyghe as an ergative language.

### 3. Adyghe derivations

The system of valency-changing derivations in Adyghe includes both means of valency and transitivity increase (causative, benefactive, malefactive, locative) and means of valency and transitivity decrease (potential, antipassive, facilitive and difficilitive). As I have mentioned, although I focus on only derivations, but also some other syntactic processes can be used as diagnostics of ergativity, in this paper I consider valency-changing derivations only.

Let me begin by noting that the causative formation will be analysed from the following analysis. The causative in Adyghe corresponds to what is often called the 'paradigm case' of the formation, already discussed in Comrie (1976): the causative derivation introduces a new argument (causer) which becomes a syntactic subject. The subject of the base transitive verb (causee) occupies the highest vacant position in the hierarchy S > DO > IO > Oblique objects. This rule is not related to ergativity and cannot be used as a diagnostic for syntactic alignment.

#### 3.1. Antipassive

Like many ergative languages (Alutor, Mayan languages, Dyak, etc.), Adyghe has an antipassive construction (see Arkadiev and Letuchiy 2007 for details). Before describing it, we need to discuss the definition of antipassive.

For Cooreman (1994), the antipassive is a voice alternation which operates on transitive verbs and decreases the syntactic status of the initial direct object. The object is either eliminated and cannot be expressed or is demoted to an indirect/oblique object, the verb thus becoming intransitive. The subject (agent) of the initial transitive verb becomes the subject of a derived intransitive verb: in ergative languages this leads to a change in case-marking, as the agent which was marked with the ergative in the base construction receives accusative marking in the new antipassive construction. Cooreman (1994), Testelefs (2001), Say (2007) and others claim that one possible motivation for the use of the antipassive is to demote a non-salient or indefinite patient which occupies the privileged direct object position of the base verb.

Plungian (2000) distinguishes between two very similar operations which are not always easy to tell apart in a given language. The first is the antipassive proper – a voice which decreases the syntactic status of the direct object, making the verb a bivalent intransitive. The second is the object impersonal – this transformation eliminates the object, making the verb monovalent. In Cooreman's (1994) sample, there are many examples where the agent can be either expressed or left unexpressed: thus, Plungian's distinction is not irreproachable for all languages. However, it is useful for Adyghe: some morphological antipassives admit expression of the initial direct object as an oblique indirect object triggering indirect object agreement on the verb, but others do not admit the initial DO expression, or permit it to be expressed only as a non-argument NP.

In Plungian's terms, most Adyghe verbs form the object impersonal, but not the antipassive proper. This means that most verbs are morphologically monovalent in their antipassive form: thus, the initial direct object does not control any cross-referencing prefixes. The verb *šxen* 'eat (antipassive)' is morphologically monovalent: the initial direct object can only be marked with the instrumental, as in (7b), and instrumental-marked NPs do not trigger verbal cross-referencing prefixes. The variant *šxen* in (7a) is a bivalent transitive.

- 7) a) *Se lə ə-s-e-šxə.*  
 I meat 3SG.ABS-1SG.A-DYN-eat.TR  
 'I eat meat.'
- b) *Se lə-č'e ə-s-e-šxe.*  
 I meat-INS 3SG.ABS-1SG.A-DYN-eat.AP  
 'I eat meat (feed myself with meat).'

With some verbs, just as *šxən* and *xən* (8), the object impersonal is marked by means of a stem vowel change from *-ə* to *-e*:

- (8) a. *Se pjəs'me Ø-s-e-txə.*  
I letter 3SG.ABS-1SG.A-DYN-write.TR  
'I write a letter.'
- b. *Se s-e-txe.*  
I 1SG.S-DYN-write.AP  
'I write.' (Arkadiev and Letuchiy 2008)

Although pairs like (8a) vs. (8b) can be analysed as two (equally basic) morphological variants, I find it more plausible to regard (8b) as derived from (8a): there are transitive verbs which do not form variants of the (8b) type, but there are no intransitive verbs with a generic or indefinite object which do not have a transitive variant of the type seen in (8a).

This group includes the following lexemes (throughout this article, all verbs will be cited in the masdar (verbal noun) form with the suffix *-n*):

- (9) *txən* 'write' *wəqebzən* 'clean'  
*šxən* 'eat' *pxən* 'sow'  
*thač'ən* 'wash' *g<sup>w</sup>ən* 'pound'  
*hažən* 'mill' *tən* 'sew'  
etc.

Some verbs use Agent-preserving lability to express the same meanings:

- (10) a. *Xate-r Ø-ə-pč'a-κ.*  
garden-ABS 3SG.ABS-3SG.A-weed-PST  
'He weeded the garden.'
- b. *Čəfə-r mefe.rjenə-m Ø-pč'a-κe.*  
man-ABS day.whole-OBL 3SG.ABS-weed-PST  
'The man weeded all day.' (Arkadiev and Letuchiy 2008)

In general, lability is very frequent in Adyghe<sup>4</sup> (see Gišev 1988, 1982, Letuchiy 2009b). In (10), the two verb forms differ only in the presence/absence of the agentive 3SG prefix *ə-*.

The list of Agent-preserving labile verbs includes, for instance:

- (11) *pč'en* 'weed' *ž<sup>w</sup>en* 'plough'  
*wəpč'en* 'mow' *pəwəpč'ən* 'chop'  
*š'en* 'sell' *č'ečən* 'lay (eggs)'

As we can see, in (7b), (8b) and (10b) the verb is morphologically monovalent, although in (7b) there is a peripheral object which is not cross-referenced in the verb form. Thus, the second argument cannot be expressed in the verb form; for the verbs listed so far, Adyghe does not have constructions equivalent to 'I plough at the field' or 'I write at a letter' in which the second argument controls an indirect object slot.

However, two verbs (*jež'en* 'read (intransitive)' / *žən* 'read (transitive)' and *ješ<sup>w</sup>en* 'drink (intransitive)' / *ješ<sup>w</sup>ən* 'drink (transitive)') retain a bivalent structure in the antipassive form:

- (12) a. *Čəfə-m txələ-xe-r Ø-ə-žə-κ.*  
man-OBL book-PL-ABS 3SG.ABS-3SG.A-read-PST  
'A man read the book through.'
- b. *Se txələ-m s-Ø-je-ža-κ.*  
I(ABS) book-OBL 1SG.ABS-3SG.IO-OBL-read.AP-PST  
'I read a book (for some time).' (Arkadiev and Letuchiy 2008)

The verb has two agreement slots in both (12a) and (12b). In (12a) we observe transitive morphology: one of the affixes occupies the agent slot, and the other is found in the direct object slot. In (12b), one of the affixes (*s-*) is in the absolutive slot, while the zero affix marks the indirect object; thus, the construction is literally 'I read at/on a book' (the verb has the same structure as seen in (4), where the strictly intransitive verb *bewən* 'be' has a subject and an indirect object).

It is not clear why the prototypical bivalent antipassive is compatible with these two verbs only. For instance, the verbs 'eat' and 'write', which are semantically close to 'drink' and 'read' respectively, form object impersonals and not antipassives. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that for 'read' and 'drink', the antipassive variant is more frequent than the transitive counterpart: the transitive variants *žən* 'read through' and *ješ<sup>w</sup>ən* 'drink up' are used relatively rarely. Moreover, the transitive variants of 'drink' and 'read' have a narrow meaning: they express that the situation is either finished or is to finish soon after the moment of action. This is not obligatorily the case with all other transitive variants

4. I do not take into account P-lability, in the terminology of Paris (1987), which is taken to be a voice-like mechanism by Paris (1987). In Letuchiy (2006), I show that the existence of P-lability does not characterize Adyghe as ergative or accusative.

of antipassive verbs: for instance, *ǰxən* 'eat' and *ixən* 'eat' do not necessarily imply that the situation is or will soon be finished (see Arkadiev and Letuchiy 2008 for details). In order to state simply that someone is drinking tea or reading a book, the intransitive variant will be used (this fact is in accordance with Hopper and Thompson (1980), where the authors show that perfective situations are semantically more transitive than those which are ongoing).

In principle, the existence of the antipassive could be regarded as an argument for syntactic ergativity (see, for instance, Cooreman 1994, Shibatani 1985). This valency-changing derivation is more productive in syntactically ergative languages like Dyrbal than in semantically and morphologically ergative languages such as Nakh-Daghestanian. However, this argument is weakened by the fact that the antipassive is not at all productive in Adyghe. A canonical ergative language should have a productive antipassive which is able to detransitivize most transitive verbs when the need is felt to decrease the status of the absolutive direct object or to eliminate it altogether.

Moreover, the same stem alternation *-ə / -e* can also mark other valency-changing derivations which are only indirectly related to antipassive formation, as in *bewən* 'kiss sb.' vs. *bewen* 'kiss (in general)':

- (13) a. *Č'ale-r pšaše-m Ø-Ø-je-bewə-κ.*  
 boy-ABS girl-OBL 3SG.ABS-3SG.IO-OBLIQUE-KISS-PST  
 'The boy kissed the girl.'
- b. *Bewe-n-ər jə-č'as.*  
 kiss-MSD-ABS 3SG.PR+POSS-love  
 'He likes kissing.' (lit. 'To kiss is his love'). (Тхакъахъ 199)

This class also includes *wənč'ən* 'push sb.' vs. *wənč'en* 'push', and 'look at sth.' vs. *plen* 'look (in a particular direction)'. In this class forms are intransitive. The *ə*-variant is a bivalent intransitive verb: for instance, in (13a) the fact that the verb has two arguments is due to the presence of the oblique indirect object *pšaše-m* and the absolutive argument prefix *je-*. The *e*-variant is also intransitive, but monovalent. For instance, in (13b), the verb contains no oblique argument. In examples like (13), *-e* marks not a canonical antipassive, but the demotion of the indirect object. Therefore, the motivation proposed by Dixon (1994), Testelets (2001) and Say (2007) for the antipassive in

functions (demotion of the direct object, the most syntactically privileged argument) is not applicable to (13), where the indirect object is eliminated.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in most cases the stem alternation *-ə / -e* eliminates an argument, but this is not obligatorily a direct object. This feature shows that the antipassive construction in Adyghe cannot serve as evidence for syntactic ergativity. While in many languages the antipassive formation shows the privileged status of the absolutive argument, the antipassive in Adyghe can eliminate different types of objects, and is not exclusively related to the status of the absolutive argument.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2. Passive-like valency-changing operations

Adyghe does not have a passive in the strict sense of the word. Following Shibatani (1985), and the definition proposed by Aikhenvald and Dixon (2000), I take prototypical passivization to be a voice alternation which demotes the initial subject and often, though not necessarily, raises the initial direct object to the subject position. Passive is considered to be a voice and not a valency-changing derivation since it does not change either the number of arguments or their semantic properties. Passivization is supposed to be a 'syntactico-pragmatic' change: simplifying somewhat, it can be said that this syntactic process reflects the fact that the patient is more pragmatically salient than the agent. This is the rationale for the use of the passive construction, and, thus, the patient occupies the subject position.

According to Dixon (1994: 147), syntactically ergative languages are often characterized by the lack of a passive. Passive constructions seem to be more widespread in accusative languages, where they serve to decrease the status of the most salient participant (=the agent argument of transitive verbs). See, however, several papers in this volume where it is demonstrated that passivization is not as uncommon in ergative languages as it is often considered to be.

The Adyghe system includes some derivations which can be considered passive-like in nature. They are semantically distinct from the passive: unlike the passive, they add new components to the semantics of the situation. However, syntactically they are very similar to passives in the

<sup>5</sup> Of course, as we have already said, the morphological nature of the antipassive marker makes it possible to consider examples like (12) to involve pairs of verbs neither of which is genuinely derived from the other.

<sup>6</sup> Matasović (2008: 62), arguing that the antipassive in Kabardian is not a typical antipassive, notes also that many *e*-stems, as well as *ə*-stems, do not have an *ə*- or *e*-variant respectively.

'Standard Average European' (SAE) accusative languages, in that they demote the initial subject to a non-subject argument (in Adyghe, it becomes an oblique indirect object).

### 3.2.1. Potential and inadvertitive

Two valency-changing operations – the potential and the inadvertitive (referring to involuntary action) – are syntactically similar to a canonical passive: they decrease the status of the agent argument, making it an indirect object (figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

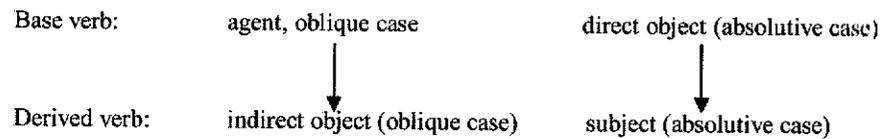


Figure 1. Syntactic effect of potential and inadvertitive

I call 'inadvertitive' or 'involitional' the operation marked with the prefix *ʔeč'e-*, which transforms the oblique-marked agent of the basic transitive verb into an indirect object, while the initial direct object retains its absolutive marking but presumably changes its syntactic status to that of subject. The semantic effect of this derivation is the following: the derived form means that the initial agent carries out the action involuntarily.

The potential derivation is marked with the prefix *fe-*.<sup>8</sup> Its syntactic effect is the same as that of the inadvertitive. The meaning of the derived form is that the initial agent is capable of carrying out the action denoted by the base verb.

As we can see, the syntactic effect of these derivations is equivalent to that of passivization in SAE languages, except that the absolutive argument, which is usually patientive, and the oblique argument (the intransitive subject are marked with absolutive case in Adyghe, while both the agent and the indirect object receive oblique marking). What changes is only the structure of the verb form and the syntactic properties of the arguments (see below on the reciprocalization of potential derivation).

7. Here I illustrate with examples only the potential derivation; the inadvertitive (involitional) derivation, expressed with the prefix *ʔeč'e-*, seems to be very rare and to have additional syntactic properties which lie outside the scope of the present article.

8. The same prefix also expresses benefactive meaning.

- (14) a. *č'ale-xe-m bukva-xe-r Ø-a-lex<sup>w</sup>ə-xe-re-p.*  
 boy-PL-OBL letter-PL-ABS 3SG.ABS-3PL.A-see-PL(ABS)-DYN-NEG  
 'The boys do not see the letters.'
- b. *č'ale-xe-m bukva-xe-r Ø-a-fe-lex<sup>w</sup>ə-xe-re-p.*  
 boy-PL-OBL letter-PL-ABS 3SG.ABS-3PL.IO-BEN-see-PL(ABS)-DYN-NEG  
 'The boys cannot see the letters.'

The transitive verb *lex<sup>w</sup>ən* 'see' (14a) has an oblique agent argument (subject), cross-referenced with the agent prefix *a-*, and an absolutive object, cross-referenced with the zero third person prefix and controlling the absolutive plural suffix *-xe*. In (14b), the marking of the patient does not change; however, the oblique prefix *a-* now marks an indirect object, an argument of the potential/benefactive prefix *fe-*. This is evident from the fact that *a-* occupies the position immediately before *fe-*: as was mentioned above, the position immediately before the applicative prefix is reserved for an IO introduced by the applicative derivation. Interestingly, the agent NP does not change its case-marking, since both agents and indirect objects take oblique marking in Adyghe.

That the verb in (14b) is indeed intransitive follows from two considerations: first of all, the oblique prefix *a-* cannot be an agent marker, since it depends on the potential prefix. As I have shown, all arguments introduced by the applicative derivations are indirect objects – thus, the verb in (14b) does not have an agent prefix and cannot be transitive. Second, potential derivatives cannot form reciprocals with *zere-*, while this is always possible for transitive verbs independently of their semantics (see section 3.4).

Crucially for our analysis, the potential and involitional derivations are compatible only with transitive verbs. Neither monovalent nor bivalent intransitive verbs can form derivatives as in (14b) (see (14c) for a monovalent verb and (14d) for a bivalent intransitive):

- (14) c. *\*č'ale-xe-m a-fe-k<sup>w</sup>e-re-p.*  
 boy-PL-OBL 3PL.IO-BEN-go-DYN-NEG  
 'The boys cannot go.'
- d. *\*č'ale-xe-m pšaše-xe-m a-fe-bewə-xe-re-p.*  
 boy-PL-OBL letter-PL-ABS 3SG.IO-BEN-see-PL(ABS)-DYN-NEG  
 'The boys cannot kiss the girls.'

This restriction does not seem to be related to the nature of potential or involitional meaning. Sentences like 'I cannot go' (monovalent intransitive verb) or 'I cannot kiss a girl' (bivalent intransitive verb) which

patible with the potential construction under analysis, are semantically unobjectionable, their English translations being fully grammatical.

We could in principle say that this is a manifestation of syntactic accusativity. If the oblique agent is the most syntactically privileged argument, the function of passive-like derivations can be to decrease its status: thus, they are compatible only with verbs which have an agent argument, i.e. transitive verbs. However, this explanation is valid only for passives proper. The potential in Adyghe has a semantic function, distinct from demotion of the agent argument: it expresses the modal meaning of possibility. Thus, there is no natural reason for the valency-changing mechanism to be incompatible with bivalent intransitive verbs possessing an agentive subject: why should it be impossible to form a sentence like 'The boys cannot kiss the girls', as in (14d)?<sup>9</sup>

In our opinion, the situation is just the reverse: the incompatibility of the potential with intransitive verbs is an argument for syntactic ergativity in other words, it confirms that the absolutive argument of transitive verbs is the most syntactically privileged argument (the subject, the pivot of the sentence). Note that a construction of the type (14d) 'The boys cannot kiss the girls' would require a change of case-marking. The absolutive subject 'the boys' would become the indirect object of the potential prefix, whereas the patient which occupies the position of an oblique-marked indirect object of the base verb ('girls') would take on absolutive case (because almost<sup>10</sup> no verb can exist without an absolutive argument):

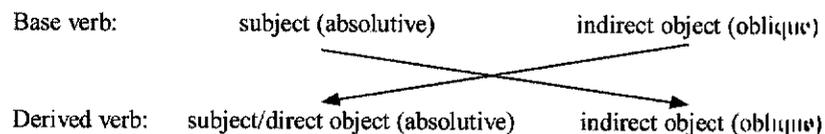


Figure 2. Syntactic effect of potential and inadvertitive with intransitive verb (hypothesis)

9. The question why structures like (14c) are impossible is simpler to answer if a monovalent verb were to undergo a potential derivation, it would lose its absolutive argument. However, any Adyghe verb, except those belonging to a very small class (see note 10), must have an absolutive argument.

10. I do not mention here the small class of so-called *bezličnyje* (subjectless) verbs described by Kumakhov (1971) inter alia, which have only an oblique-marked absolutive argument.

The Adyghe derivational system in fact obeys a general restriction: *no derivation can affect the absolutive argument*. For instance, all valency-increasing derivations add oblique arguments only (Adyghe does not have a canonical applicative which introduces a new direct object). Moreover, the antipassive which eliminates the absolutive argument is not highly productive and is marked with a stem alternation rather than simply a grammatical marker.

### 3.2.2. Quasi-passive (resultative)

Adyghe has two productive resultatives, one of them unmarked, and the other marked with the prefix *zere-*. We do not consider the *zere*-resultative here.

The unmarked resultative in Adyghe functions syntactically as a quasi-passive construction: in the resultative construction based on transitive verbs, as in (15b), the agent cannot be expressed. The structure of examples of the same construction based on intransitive verbs, as in (16), remains less clear.

The unmarked resultative eliminates the oblique agent argument and the agent cross-reference prefix, as in (15b):

- (15) a. *Se qebaske Ø-z-ke-žwa-κ.*  
1.OBL cabbage 3SG.ABS-1SG.A-CAUS-COOK-PST  
'I cooked cabbage.'
- b. *Qebaske Ø-ke-žwa-κe.*  
cabbage 3SG.ABS-CAUS-COOK-PST  
'The cabbage is cooked.' (Nikolaeva 2003)
- (16) a. *Ha-r λə-me Ø-ja-ceqa-κ.*  
dog-OBL man-OBL.PL 3SG.ABS-3PL.IO+OBLIQUE-bite-PST  
'The dog bit the men.'
- b. *λə-me Ø-q-ja-ceqa-κ.*  
man-OBL.PL 3SG.ABS-DIR-3PL.IO+OBLIQUE-bite-PST  
'The men are bitten / have been bitten.' (Nikolaeva 2003)

In (15a), the causative verb *ke-žwen* 'cook' is transitive: it bears the agentive cross-reference marker *z-*. In the resultative construction in (15b), the agent prefix and the agent NP are eliminated. The verb has only a patient absolutive argument, which is cross-referenced with a zero prefix.

In example (16), the verb *cegen* 'bite' is intransitive: this is evident from the fact that the third person singular agent cross-reference marker  $\emptyset$ - is absent. The agent (dog) takes the absolutive case, whereas the patient (men) is in the oblique form.

Despite the existence of examples like (16b), where the resultative construction is seemingly built on the basis of intransitive verbs, we cannot claim that this construction has the same morphological structure as that in (15b). It would be tempting to say that (16b) is an example of resultative formation from an intransitive verb: the absolutive subject of the bivalent intransitive verb *cegen* 'bite' is eliminated. However, let us recall that the 3SG absolutive argument is cross-referenced with the zero prefix. Thus, it is impossible to prove that the absolutive argument is eliminated in (16b) in the same sense as the agent in (15b): we cannot say whether the zero prefix is present or absent. Therefore, up to this point we do not have any evidence that resultatives are formed in the same way from both intransitive and transitive verbs.

The crucial question is whether the presence of a resultative construction represents an argument for or against syntactic ergativity in Adyghe. Although passivization seems to be characteristic primarily of accusative languages, it should be borne in mind that resultative formation is different from passivization. It is generally accepted that the resultative has primarily aspectual function. Thus, we should not take (15) and (16) as evidence that Adyghe has a passive proper (a feature which is not characteristic of syntactically ergative languages).

The same line of argumentation is plausible for the passive-like potential derivation in (14): the functional motivation for the potential is different from that for a canonical passive. In (14), we are not dealing with a semantically motivated agent demotion (as in the case of passivization) but with a semantically motivated demotion. The agent is demoted because it is no longer a prototypical agent: (14b) does not refer to the fact of doing about a transitive situation, but only to the potential to do so. In the terms of Hopper and Thompson (1980), (14b) is less semantically agentive than (14a), because the situation is unreal, and the agent is less agentive.

Thus, the potential and inadvertive derivations are syntactically similar to passives. They demote the agent, which is often the syntactic subject in morphologically ergative languages<sup>11</sup>.

11. However, below I will show that some criteria allow us to prove that the subject of Adyghe transitive verbs is the absolutive argument rather than the agent.

However, all passive-like derivations in Adyghe have a semantic motivation distinct from the motivation for canonical passives in accusative languages. In contrast, the use of the antipassive in Adyghe is motivated by principles relevant for canonical antipassives in ergative languages: for instance, the antipassive pattern is used when the direct object is indefinite or is not important for the speaker. Therefore, antipassives and 'passives' do not occupy the same place in the Adyghe derivational system: only antipassive is a canonical voice. Thus, the evidence for syntactic ergativity (the antipassive) is more important than the arguments for syntactic accusativity (the passive-like derivations), since there is no canonical passive in Adyghe.

### 3.3. Reflexive and reciprocal: semantic or syntactic motivation?

Reflexive and reciprocal are traditionally viewed as valency-rearranging derivations. They do not change the number of arguments, but introduce the requirement that the arguments display co-reference to each other.

In fact, Adyghe reflexives and reciprocals are not derivations in the proper sense of the term. That is, markers of reflexivization in Adyghe should be described as personal markers, rather than derivational markers. In accusative languages which seem to represent the Standard Average European type, there are cases when morphological reflexivization is genuinely derivational: for instance, it often changes the inflectional type of the verb:

French:

- (17) a. *J'ai lavé la vaisselle.*  
b. *Je me suis lavé.*

The verb *laver* 'wash' in (17a) is transitive. The reflexive marker *me* in (17b) changes its syntactic characteristics: now the verb takes the auxiliary *être* 'be' in the past, which signals that it has become syntactically intransitive – all French transitive verbs use another auxiliary, *avoir*, in the formation of the complex past (17a). We find no effects of this type in Adyghe.

In Adyghe, the reflexive and reciprocal morphemes represent personal cross-reference markers rather than derivational markers (see Rogava and Letuchiy 1966: 265–269, 271–276, Smeets 1992: 115–117, Letuchiy 2007 for details), but with the additional requirement that the argument cross-referenced with one of these markers must be co-referent with another argument. The reflexive/reciprocal marker always occupies the slot corre-

sponding to one of the co-referent arguments (the -9 absolutive slot, the -6 or -5 oblique IO slot or the -4 agent slot):

- (18) a. *Wə-sə-wəpsə-ɛ.*  
2SG.ABS-1SG.A-shave-PST  
'I shave you.'
- b. *Zə-sə-wəpsə-ɛ.*  
REFL.ABS-1SG.A-shave-PST  
'I shave (myself).'

In (18a), the verb *wəpsən* 'shave' bears two personal markers: the agentive prefix *sə-* (1SG) and the absolutive prefix *wə-* (2SG). In (18b), the reflexive marker occupies the absolutive slot. The verb form in (18b) differs from the form in (18a) only in that the absolutive slot is occupied by a special 'reflexive marker' – the derivation does not change the transitivity or the number of arguments of the base verb. In this sense the Adyghe reflexives and reciprocals are analogous to reflexive pronouns such as *sich* in German or *pozyn* 'oneself' in Khakas (Turkic, author's field data), which also 'substitute' for one of the co-referent arguments. In French, the situation is roughly the same, except that the addition of *se* changes an important morphosyntactic property of the verb, namely its complex past formation.

In what follows, the glosses for reflexive and reciprocal markers include the designation of the slot occupied by the marker. For instance, the gloss REFL.ABS in (18) means that the reflexive marker *zə-* is in the absolutive slot of the absolutive argument (-9).

It may seem that the position of the markers under analysis can be used to ascertain which argument of the base verb is the subject and which is the object. Indeed, in many languages (such as the East Caucasian languages and most languages of Europe) reflexives are subject-oriented: they are bound by the syntactic subject and are never found in the object position (for instance, the Russian *sebja* 'oneself' does not have a transitive form even theoretically).

However, this prediction is not entirely borne out. First of all, for transitive verbs it is notable that reflexives and reciprocals are bound differently from each other. The complex reciprocal marker *zere-* occupies the agentive oblique slot -4 (see also Rogava and Kernadova 1999, 2007), whereas the reflexive marker *zə-* is in the absolutive slot -9:

Reciprocal:

- (19) *Zeč'e çəf-xe-r* *Ø-zere-λeɛ<sup>wə-ž'ə-x</sup>.*  
all man-PL-ABS 3SG.ABS-REC.A-SEE-RE-PL.ABS  
'All the people see each other (i.e. meet up).'

Reflexive:

- (20) *Zeč'e çəf-xe-r* *z-a-λeɛ<sup>wə-ž'ə</sup>.*  
all man-PL-ABS REFL.ABS-3PL.A-SEE-RE  
'All the people see themselves.'

The picture which emerges in the domain of reflexivity and reciprocity is shown in table 2. It reflects the position and the form of both markers for the transitive and the intransitive class of verbs. For each marker, the slot it occupies is specified.

Table 2. Positions of reflexive and reciprocal markers in transitive and intransitive verbs

	Transitive	Intransitive
Reflexive	<i>zə-</i> , absolutive slot <sup>12</sup>	<i>ze-</i> / <i>zə-</i> + preverb of oblique argument, oblique (IO) slot
Reciprocal	<i>zere-</i> , oblique slot	<i>ze-</i> / <i>zə-</i> + preverb of oblique argument, oblique (IO) slot

It may seem that in Adyghe both reflexive and reciprocal marking (the marker *zere-* aside) are organized as in semantically and morphologically ergative languages such as the East Caucasian languages. In these, reflexives are always bound by the agent of the transitive verb and the absolutive argument of the intransitive verb. If we adopt the hypothesis that the reflexive marker is always controlled by the syntactic pivot/subject, as is the case in most of the world's languages, this means that some syntactic subject properties characterize the oblique agent of transitive verbs and the absolutive argument of intransitive verbs. This is the case in many

<sup>12</sup> I do not consider here the distribution of *ze-* vs. *zə-*, which seems to be purely morphophonemic, and not directly related to the syntactic status of the verb arguments, according to (Arkadiev and Testelets 2009). However, it may be noted that *zə-* mostly cross-references absolutive arguments, and *ze-* is used in most examples for oblique arguments (see also (21) vs. (22) for the difference between reciprocal and reflexive forms).

other Caucasian languages where the ergative argument (agent) of transitive verbs and the absolutive argument of intransitive verbs possess most subject properties (see Testelets and Toldova 1998).

However, this explanation is problematic for some minor verb classes, such as inverse verbs<sup>13</sup>, the verb *zexexən* 'hear' and potential derivatives in *fe-*. For all of these the position of *ze-* / *zə-* is defined in a more complex way than in transitive and intransitive verbs.

First of all, in inverse verbs the reflexive and reciprocal markers can occupy either the absolutive slot or one of the oblique slots. In other words, both reflexive and reciprocal forms can have *ze-* / *zə-* either in the absolutive slot or in the oblique.

- (21) *Tə-zə-š'ə-g<sup>W</sup>əpša-k* / *zə-t-š'ə-g<sup>W</sup>əpša-k*  
 1PL.ABS-REFL.IO-LOC-forget-PST REFL.ABS-1PL.IO-LOC-forget-PST  
 'We forgot ourselves.'
- (22) *A-xe-m ze-š'ə-g<sup>W</sup>əpše-ž'ə-ke-x* /  
 that-PL-OB REC.IO-LOC-forget-RE-PAST-PL.ABS  
*z-a-š'ə-g<sup>W</sup>əpše-ž'ə-k*  
 REC.ABS-3PL.IO-LOC-forget-RE-PAST  
 'They forgot each other.'

The distribution of *ze-* vs. *zə-* is sensitive to morphophonological conditioning (see note 12). At the same time, as the comparison of the two variants in (21) vs. (22) shows, reflexives tend to choose *zə-* even in cases where reciprocals choose *ze-* (for instance, when cross-referencing the indirect object).

Second, in derivatives with potential meaning *ze-* / *zə-* can only be found in the oblique slot when used reciprocally, but only in the absolutive when used reflexively see (24) below:

- (23) *S-ʔe me-wəzə-š' zə-s-fe-wəpsə-š't-ep*  
 1SG-hand DYN-hurt-CONV REFL.ABS-1SG.IO-BEN-shave FUT-NEG  
 'My hand hurts, so I cannot shave (myself).'

13. I use this traditional term of Caucasian linguistics (see, for instance, and Keraševa 1966, and Kumakhov 1971) for bivalent emotional verbs such as *š'əg<sup>W</sup>əpšen* 'forget', whose absolutive argument is the agent and the oblique argument is the experiencer (the sentence 'I forgot' literally translated into Adyghe as 'You were forgotten to me').

This variation in behaviour prevents us from considering reflexivization to be a syntactic test. What is relevant for these derivations is the agentivity of the arguments involved. The rule for reflexivization can be stated as follows: *the reflexive marker always occupies the slot of the least agentive of the co-referent arguments* (this explanation was first proposed in Smeets 1992 for the Shapsug dialect of Adyghe). The most agentive argument is the oblique argument of transitive and potential derivatives, and the absolutive argument of intransitive verbs.

Note that the behaviour of *š'əg<sup>W</sup>əpšen* 'forget' in example (21) confirms the semantic explanation. Situations like 'forget' involve neither an agent nor a patient; both arguments (stimulus and experiencer) have properties intermediate between those of agent and patient. For instance, neither acts volitionally (like an agent), and neither is affected by the situation (like a patient). This is why the position of the reflexive marker is variable in inverse verbs.

Therefore, reflexives cannot give us any information on ergativity in Adyghe. The choice of the argument which controls the reflexive marker is motivated semantically and not syntactically: it is the most agentive argument, whether this is marked with absolutive or oblique case.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, the reciprocal marker is much more informative from our point of view. The Adyghe reciprocal is clearly absolutive-oriented, as is evident from four facts:

- in inverse verbs, the reciprocal marker *ze-* most commonly occupies the oblique indirect object slot -5, as in the first variant of (22), and can only rarely occupy the absolutive slot, as in the second variant of (22). Conversely, the reflexive marker usually occupies the absolutive slot in these derivatives, as in the second variant of (21). This difference between reflexivization and reciprocalization is not taken into account in Smeets (1984) and Smeets (1992);
- in derivatives with potential meaning, the reciprocal marker *ze-* occupies the oblique slot -5 (24), whereas the reflexive marker occupies the absolutive slot, as in (23):

- (24) *A-xe-r Ø-ze-fe-ʔek<sup>W</sup>ə-xe-r-ep*  
 (s)hc-ABS 3SG.ABS-REC.IO-BEN-SEC-PL-DYN-NEG

'They hate each other' (lit. 'They cannot see each other').

14. Semantically motivated agent orientation of reflexives is not unique to Adyghe: a similar situation is found in the ergative languages Tsakhur (Kibrik et al. 1999) and Warlpiri (Legate 2006) and many other languages (including some which, like Warlpiri, are syntactically creative according to ...)

- in intransitive verbs, the reciprocal marker occupies the oblique IO slot -5;
- in transitive verbs, the reciprocal marker (though in another variant) also occupies an oblique slot, namely the agent slot -4, as in (18), though the oblique argument is the most agentive for transitive verbs.

Thus, the reciprocal marker is generally found in one of the oblique slots and it is controlled by an absolutive personal marker. The only verb which admits reciprocalization exclusively in the absolutive slot is *zexexən* 'hear'.

The absolutive orientation of reciprocals in most verb classes (except for the inverse verbs, where variation is observed as in (22)) cannot be accounted for in semantic terms. The reciprocal prefixes occupy the oblique slot of most bivalent verbs, irrespective of whether the oblique argument is more agentive than the absolutive one (as with transitive and potential verbs) or less agentive (as with intransitive verbs where the oblique argument is an indirect object). In other words, the motivation for the choice of the controller is not the degree of agentivity of the arguments, but rather the location of absolutive marking.

Thus, we take the absolutive orientation of reciprocals as evidence for syntactic ergativity in Adyghe: reciprocal markers are bound with the syntactically privileged absolutive argument, whereas the behaviour of the reflexive marker is semantically motivated.

### 3.4. Facilitive and difficultive: semantic motivation

Two more valency-decreasing derivations in Adyghe, namely the facilitive (*-B<sup>W</sup>eš<sup>W</sup>ə*) and difficultive (*-B<sup>W</sup>aje*), are treated in syntactic terms by Rogava and Keraševa 1966, and Kumakhov 1971. These authors claim that in the derivations in question, the personal marker in subject position of the absolutive argument of intransitive verbs, and the ergative (oblique argument in our terminology) of transitive verbs is eliminated, and the non-agentive marker is retained. This is indeed the case with transitive and intransitive verbs: in (25) the verb does not bear an agentive marker, which normally be *jə-*. In (26) the situation is less straightforward since the absolutive subject prefix is zero in 3SG (this is why Smeets (1992) does not analyse the status of absolutive subjects in facilitive constructions at all). However, the indirect object prefix *jə-* is obviously present in (25) and we can judge that the absolutive prefix is absent from the absolutive argument. It is impossible for most native speakers to express an absolutive argument without using an agentive prefix.

Transitive verb:

- (25) *Mə č'ale-r* *ke-š'əne-B<sup>W</sup>eš<sup>W</sup>ə*.  
this boy-OBL CAUS-fear-FCL

'It is easy to frighten this boy.' (lit. 'This boy is easy to frighten').

Intransitive verb:

- (26) *Mə č'ale-m* *Ø-je-wənč'ə-B<sup>W</sup>eš<sup>W</sup>ə*.  
this boy-OBL 3SG.ABS-3SG.IO+OBLIQUE-push-FCL

'It is easy to push this boy.'

However, this derivation can also be analysed in semantic terms: it is always the most agentive argument which is eliminated. This explanation seems more plausible, because sensation verbs, such as *zexexən* 'hear' and *leB<sup>W</sup>ən* 'see', often admit expression of an agent. While the case of *zexexən* 'hear' is complicated, because this verb is neither a canonical transitive nor a canonical intransitive verb, *leB<sup>W</sup>ən* 'see' is a canonically transitive verb: the reciprocal formation indisputably demonstrates its transitivity. The experiencer of verbs like these is in a sense more agentive than the stimulus (see Dowty 1991 for details): only the experiencer, but not the stimulus, is animate.

Sensation verb:

- (27) *Te tə-zere-leB<sup>W</sup>ə-B<sup>W</sup>eš<sup>W</sup>ə*.  
we 1PL.ABS-REC.A-SEE-FCL

'It is easy for us to see (to meet) each other.'

In (27), the verb includes both an agent and an absolutive personal prefix (note that the verb *leB<sup>W</sup>ən* 'see' is syntactically transitive, and therefore the agent prefix should be eliminated, according to Smeets (1992)). Hence, it is not only the most agentive argument, but usually a prototypical agent which is *obligatorily* eliminated in the facilitive/difficultive form - while non-agentive animate arguments can be expressed. In this sense the facilitive derivation provides evidence against syntactic accusativity in Adyghe.

## 4. Conclusions

The processes analysed in this paper can be divided into two groups, based on the kind of information they provide about ergativity in Adyghe.

First of all, there are derivations which can be regarded as semantically motivated (though syntactic motivation can also be proposed for these processes). This is the case with reflexive marking, since the reflexive marker always seems to be bound by the most agentive argument; the facilitative and difficilitive always require the omission of the most agentive argument (though this is generally the agent of transitive verbs or the absolutive argument of intransitive verbs); the resultative is also semantically motivated. These derivations could in principle be taken as evidence that Adyghe is syntactically accusative, but in fact this is not the case.

Secondly, there are derivations which are only compatible with transitive verbs, namely the inadvertitive and potential. These transformations are more significant for our analysis, since they show that Adyghe is syntactically ergative. This fact manifests itself in a simple rule which regulates all 'passive-like' derivations: they can only change properties of the oblique (Agent), but not the absolutive argument. The reciprocal formation, which is absolutive-oriented, also demonstrates that the absolutive has subject properties (at least the orientation of reciprocals towards the absolutive cannot be explained in semantic terms).

The conclusion that Adyghe is syntactically ergative seems to be contradicted by the fact that the antipassive is not productive in Adyghe and does not fully correspond to the prototypical antipassive construction. However, there is in fact no contradiction. What is essential is that the Adyghe system forces us to modify our assumptions about the function served by verbal derivation in an ergative language.

Usually authors implicitly or explicitly adopt the following view on the function of voices: they change the status of the most syntactically privileged participant. For instance, in Dixon (1994), the observation that the passive is characteristic of accusative languages, and the antipassive of ergative languages, is explained by the fact that passives decrease the syntactic status of the agent (which is privileged in accusative languages) whereas antipassives decrease the status of the absolutive object (which is privileged in ergative languages).

However, the Adyghe data lead us to adopt the opposite hypothesis for this language: derivations can change the status of any participant, not just the most privileged one. As we have shown, no derivation in Adyghe can change the status of the direct object or intransitive subject, with the exception of the antipassive. But the antipassive is not productive and expressed by means of stem alternation rather than a grammatical marker *sensu stricto*, and it violates the general principles which apply to the system of valency-changing derivations in Adyghe.

Thus, Adyghe seems to be syntactically ergative and not syntactically accusative. This syntactic ergativity manifests itself in the derivational domain. We think that the view adopted by Matasović (2008: 64), that the absolutive case marks "the lowest ranking macrorole argument", may be true from the semantic point of view. However, the morphosyntactic processes we have examined do not show that the ergative argument is syntactically privileged over the absolutive.

However, some other syntactic processes, such as co-referent deletion, are not at all restrictive in Adyghe, which makes the question of syntactic alignment and the subject/object status of participants impossible to answer. The question why the derivational system in Adyghe is much stricter than many other syntactic processes requires further research, which is undertaken, for instance, in Letuchiy (2009a).

Note that the hypothesis that Adyghe is syntactically ergative makes the case of the potential and inadvertitive (see 3.3.1) more problematic. Since the agent is not the syntactic subject of the underlying transitive verb, these two passive-like derivations are not entirely similar to the passive voice: they do not demote the initial subject. In any case, we should suppose that the agent is a syntactically privileged argument, even if it is not a subject. The passive-like derivations demote a privileged argument to the status of indirect object. In other words, provided that Adyghe is a syntactically ergative language, the two passive-like derivations are similar to voice alternations in that they rearrange the syntactic status and change the pragmatic values of the arguments, but this voice alternation differs from the passive formation in that the demoted argument is not a syntactic subject.

These data from Adyghe are also useful because they show that syntactic accusativity in some morphologically ergative languages can in fact be determined by semantic factors. Many processes which seem to be motivated accusatively, such as the formation of the reflexive, facilitative or difficilitive, may in fact be motivated in semantic terms rather than being directly related to syntactic alignment.

#### Abbreviations

- 1st, 2nd, 3rd person
- agent cross-reference prefix
- absolutive case; absolutive argument cross-reference prefix
- antipassive variant of the verb stem

BEN	benefactive
CAUS	causative
COM	comitative
FCL	facilitive
INS	instrumental case
IO	indirect object cross-reference prefix
OBL	oblique case
OBLIQUE	oblique indirect object prefix
RE	refactive
REC	reciprocal
REFL	reflexive
SG	singular
PL	plural
PST	past tense
TR	transitive variant of the verb stem

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