Transitive subject relativization restriction in Northern Tujia and beyond

Introduction. Northern Tujia (tji; Sino-Tibetan, China) employs two relativization strategies. In externally headed RCs (EHRCs), all arguments can be relativized. Internally headed RCs (IHRCs), on the other hand, can relativize objects (O), intransitive subjects (S), but **not** transitive subjects (A). This ban on A-IHRCs is reminiscent of the Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC; Aissen 2017).

(1) a. tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} [(✔**sɪ^{21}**) ka^{21} ɕi^{44}] (✔**sɪ^{21}**) ka^{24} liaʊ^{44} — ✔S-IHRC ✔S-EHRC
Jinhua meat dry NOM eat SFP.PERF
'Jinhua ate **the meat** that ___ dried.'

b. tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} [ã^{24}ni^{44} (✔**sɪ^{21}**) lã^{21}nã^{24} ɕi^{44}] (✔**sɪ^{21}**) ka^{24} liaʊ^{44} — ✔O-IHRC ✔O-EHRC
Jinhua 1PL meat dry NOM eat SFP.PERF
'Jinhua ate **the meat** that we dried ___.'

c. tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} [(✘**pai^{44}**) sa^{44}mi^{44} ka^{24} ɕi^{44}] (✔**pai^{44}**) lo^{21} liaʊ^{21} — ✘A-IHRC ✔A-EHRC
Jinhua child tuansa eat NOM scold SFP.PERF
'Jinhua scolded **the child** that ___ ate tuansa.'

Preview. I argue that analyses along the lines of syntactic ergativity are **not** tenable for Northern Tujia—there is neither an [ERG] feature, nor inversion of the object over the subject. Instead, I propose that the relativization restriction arises due to **structural reduction** of IHRCs to TPs, combined with an assumption that transitive subjects occupy Spec,TP. A-IHRCs thus require covert Ā-movement of transitive subjects from Spec,TP to the adjacent Spec,*n*P, which is **antilocal** (Erlewine 2016, Erlewine 2020, *i.a.*). I also present evidence that EHRCs contain a CP layer that obviates antilocality violations. Cross-linguistically, my proposal captures similar relativization restrictions across alignment systems and RC types and offers more principled explanations for two curious generalizations about the EEC.

Northern Tujia RCs. Both EHRCs and IHRCs feature the nominalizer *ɕi^{44}* and can contain negation (2a) and modals (2b). However, they differ in clause size: only EHRCs can contain sentence-final particles (3a). In keeping with previous work on Mandarin sentence-final particles (Paul 2014, *i.a.*), I treat *la^{21}* as a low C head (Rizzi 1997). These facts suggest that EHRCs are CPs while IHRCs are TPs.

(2) a. ŋa^{24} [tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} (✔**ie^{21}**) xʊã^{44}ɕi^{44} ta^{24} ɕi^{44}] (✔**ie^{21}**) ka^{24}=i^{44} — NEGATION
1SG Jinhua thing like NEG NOM eat=PROSP
'I will eat **the things** that Jinhua does not like.'

b. ŋa^{24} [tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} (✔**ie^{21}**) ka^{24} t^{h}i^{44} ɕi^{44}] (✔**ie^{21}**) ka^{24}=i^{44} — MODAL
1SG Jinhua thing eat MODAL.NEG NOM eat=PROSP
'I will eat **the things** that Jinhua cannot eat.'

(3) a. tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} [ŋa^{24} tɕĩ^{44}tʊo^{44} i^{21} po^{21} (la^{21}) ɕi^{24}] **nie^{24}pi^{44}** a^{44} liaʊ^{44} — EHRC
Jinhua 1SG often see DUR SFP.IPFV NOM bird feed SFP.PERF

b. tɕĩ^{44}xʊa^{44} [ŋa^{24} tɕĩ^{44}tʊo^{44} **nie^{24}pi^{44}** i^{21} po^{21} (*la^{21}) ɕi^{24}] a^{44} liaʊ^{44} — IHRC
Jinhua 1SG often bird see DUR SFP.IPFV NOM feed SFP.PERF
'Jinhua fed **the birds** that I often see.'

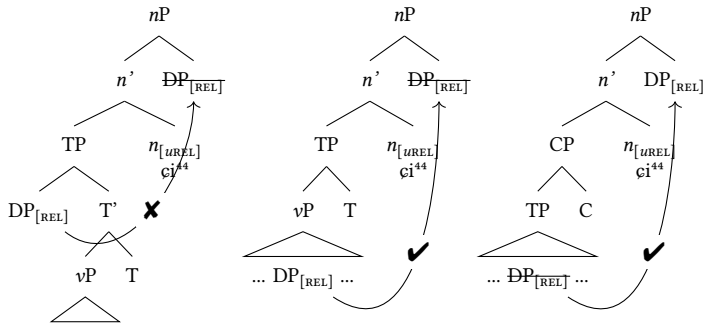
Moreover, both EHRCs and IHRCs exhibit island-sensitivity: relativizing out of RCs is illict (4). They also resist extraposition (5), suggesting a raising structure (Hulsey and Sauerland 2006). I therefore conclude that the head DP undergoes movement in both EHRCs (overtly) and IHRCs (covertly).

(4) *[ŋa^{24} [(**pʊo^{44}li^{21}**) **sõ^{24}** tsʊo^{24} ɕi^{44}] zɪ^{44} ɕi^{44}] (**pʊo^{44}li^{21}**) ɕiaʊ^{21}ɕiaʊ^{24} tsaʊ^{21} — ISLAND
1SG child fish catch NOM cook NOM school go.PERF
Intended: '[**The child**$_i$ such that I cooked [the fish that he$_i$ caught]] went to school.'

(5) *ã^{24} (**paʊ^{24}t^{h}i^{44}**) pã^{24} liaʊ^{44} [ŋa^{24} (**paʊ^{24}t^{h}i^{44}**) xa^{21} ɕi^{24}] — EXTRAPOSITION
1PL pheasant cook PERF 1SG hit NOM
Intended: 'We cooked **the pheasants** that I hunted.'

Proposal. I treat the nominalizer *ɕi^{44}* as an *n* head, which takes as its complement a CP in EHRCs and a TP in IHRCs. Both EHRCs and IHRCs involve Ā-movement of the head DP from its base position to Spec,*n*P—with the core difference being the (c)overtness of the Ā-movement (see also Erlewine 2019 for a similar treatment of Tibetan IHRCs). Additionally, I assume that transitive subjects are obligatorily licensed in Spec,TP, while intransitive subjects can be licensed lower (Erlewine 2016, Tollan 2018, *i.a.*).

(6) a. **A-IHRC** b. **S/O-IHRC** c. **EHRC**



On this analysis, relativization in A-IHRCs involves a step of Ā-movement from Spec,TP to Spec,*n*P that is 'too short'; it violates Spec-to-Spec Antilocality, which requires movement from Spec,XP to cross a maximal projection other than XP (Erlewine 2016, Deal 2019, Erlewine 2020, *i.a.*). Head raising in S/O-IHRCs is licit because the head DP does not need to transit through the offending Spec,TP position en route to Spec,*n*P. In a similar vein, antilocality violations are obviated in EHRCs because Ā-extracting TP-internal arguments obligatorily crosses an intervening CP. The privileged high position of transitive subjects therefore makes them more susceptible to antilocality violations in reduced clausal environments.

Alternative analyses. Similar relativization restrictions have been treated as syntactic ergativity, which is generally taken to require morphological ergativity (Dixon 1994). Northern Tujia is **not** morphologically ergative: it lacks all case marking and ϕ-agreement. Lu et al. (2019) claim that Northern Tujia has an optional ERG marker *kʊo*^{44}; I show that *kʊo*^{44} can appear on intransitive subjects (7) and does not form a constituent with the subject DP (8). Typological or historical evidence in support of ergativity is also lacking. On this basis, I reject a case-discrimination analysis (Deal 2017, Drummond 2023) of the observed relativization restriction as it relies on an [ERG] feature that blocks extraction.

(7) po^{55}li^{21} **ko^{35}** ŋie^{35}p^{h}ie^{55} liaʊ^{21}
child KUO sleep SFP.PERF
'The child has fallen asleep.' (Lu et al. 2019:58, citing Tian et al. 1986:93; glosses mine)

(8) ŋa^{24} lai^{44} **(kʊo^{44})** [p^{h}ʊ^{21}ni^{21} sɤ^{24} po^{44} ɕi^{44} wʊ^{24}] põ^{21} liaʊ^{21}
1SG today KUO yesterday die DUR NOM cow bury SFP.PERF
'I buried the cow that died yesterday today.'

Another prominent analysis of EEC patterns requires object inversion above the subject (Aldridge 2004, Coon et al. 2014, Yuan 2022, *i.a.*). Inversion **cannot** be the cause of the relativization restriction because Northern Tujia exhibits an unmarked SOV word order. There are also no patterns of inversion feeding a Condition C violation in the subject or bleeding a Condition C violation in the object (cf. Royer 2023).

(9) a. [tɕiɪ̃^{44}xʊa^{44} nie^{44} pai^{44}] kʊo^{24} lo^{21} liaʊ^{44}
Jinhua POSS child 3SG scold SFP.PERF
'Jinhua$_i$'s child scolded her$_{i/j}$.'

b. *kʊo^{24} [tɕiɪ̃^{44}xʊa^{44} nie^{44} pai^{44}] lo^{21} liaʊ^{21}
3SG Jinhua POSS child scold SFP.PERF
Intended: 'She$_i$ scolded Jinhua$_i$'s child.'

Extensions. My antilocality-based analysis, without reference to morphological case, predicts that EEC-like patterns specifically in reduced structures should **not** correlate with morphological ergativity cross-linguistically. This prediction is borne out: a similar ban on reduced A-IHRCs is found in other neutral-alignment languages (Lalo Yi, Qiang) and even NOM-ACC languages (Even, Tenyidie, Manipuri). It further predicts that similar relativization restrictions should arise only when there is **both** movement **and** structural reduction. As expected, relativizing transitive subjects is permitted in island-insensitive IHRCs (Washo, Mojave, Lakhota) and non-reduced IHRCs (Navajo, Japanese, Korean, Bùlì), but disallowed in non-finite/participial EHRCs (Kalaallisut, Katukina-Kanamari).

My analysis also straightforwardly explains two typological observations about **syntactic ergativity**. First, some languages show morphological ergativity but lack syntactic ergativity (Georgian, Adyghe, Basque, Tsez). These languages are not expected to exhibit the EEC because their RCs are not structurally reduced; they can contain finite TP/CP morphology or host foci or topics. Second, relativization is claimed to be the most cross-linguistically consistent manifestation of syntactic ergativity (Polinsky 2016). On my analysis, the special status of RCs in displaying the EEC directly follows from the fact that RCs are embedded and more likely to be structurally reduced than other Ā-environments, which are typically main-clause phenomena.

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