

Apparent last resort agreement in Senaya ditransitives*

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1. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of novel data from Senaya (Neo-Aramaic, originally spoken in Iran) that reveal one “last resort” strategy that the language employs to satisfy a strict requirement for object agreement. In Senaya, all definite, specific, and/or pronominal objects must trigger agreement within the verbal complex. When there is only one such object, an imperfective verb can host all relevant agreement morphemes, (1a) (object agreement bolded). However, when there are two such objects, it appears that the verb is unable to directly host both object agreement morphemes. Instead, agreement with one of the objects appears on the enclitic auxiliary (underlined below), which is usually found cliticizing to verbs only in progressive aspect; the result is a semantic imperfective/progressive aspectual ambiguity in these ditransitives, (1b).¹

- (1) a. Aana on yaale molp-an-**uu**.
I the children teach.IMPF-S.1FS-**O.3PL**
'I (will) teach the children.'
- b. Aana oo ksuuta maxw-an-**ox=ii-laa**.
I the book show.IMPF-S.1FS-**IO.2MS=AUX-DO.3FS**
'I (will) show you the book.' ~ 'I am showing you the book.'

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¹ Abbreviations: 1,2,3 = first, second, third person, AUX = auxiliary, DO = direct object, DFLT = default, F = feminine, INDIC = indicative, IMPF = imperfective, IO = indirect object, M = masculine, O = object, PL = plural, Prog₀ = non-progressive Prog, Prog_{PROG} = progressive Prog, PST = past, S = subject, S(G) = singular.

Giving a linguistic phenomenon the label “last resort” is crucially tied to the following two properties. First, the phenomenon must appear in response to an impending failure at some level of the derivation. Second, the phenomenon can *only* appear in precisely these environments (where otherwise there would be ungrammaticality), and is not a freely-available strategy. For example, when there is a stranded affix, an auxiliary may be inserted to provide a host for it, but the auxiliary cannot be freely inserted without such a motivation (Lasnik 1981, Chomsky 1991, Halle and Marantz 1993, Schütze 2003, Bjorkman 2011).

Senaya’s imperfective ditransitives, like that in (1b), are “last resort” in the classical sense: without the auxiliary and additional agreement morpheme, one of the objects would not be able to agree, resulting in ungrammaticality. Further, the auxiliary and extra agreement morpheme are banned in regular (non-ditransitive) imperfectives. Such data fit in well with recent conceptions of more powerful last resort mechanisms, e.g., that proposed by Rezac (2011). However, in this paper I will argue that this data can be accounted for without invoking any special “last resort” mechanism at all.

The paper is laid out as follows. In §2 I lay out the data of interest. In §3 I motivate a syntactic analysis of basic clauses in Senaya. Finally, in §4 I present an analysis of the phenomenon, concluding and discussing further directions for research in §5.

2. Basic clauses and ditransitives in Senaya

Senaya is an SOV language which, characteristic of Semitic languages, uses ‘root and pattern’ morphology. There are two basic aspectual bases, the perfective and the imperfective:²

(2) Aspectual Bases in Senaya

ROOT	IMPERFECTIVE BASE	PERFECTIVE BASE	GLOSS
r-k-w	raakw	rkuu	‘ride’
q-t-l	qaatl	qteel	‘kill’
sh-t-y	shaaty	shtee	‘drink’

Additional (concatenative) morphology that can be added onto these verb bases includes agreement marking and the auxiliary/copula BE (in progressives and ditransitives), which I discuss below. There are no overt case distinctions on DPs in Senaya.

All subjects as well as definite, specific, or pronominal objects obligatorily trigger agreement in the verbal complex. The precise way that agreement appears in the verbal complex depends on two factors: how many arguments there are to license, and what the aspect of the clause is. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on imperfective aspect and progressive aspect, which I will illustrate in turn, beginning with the imperfective.

The imperfective verb base can host up to two agreement morphemes. Thus, in a simple intransitive or transitive imperfective, both arguments may be cross-referenced as suffixes directly on the verb. The first agreement morpheme marks subject agreement, while the

²Since it is not crucial to the topic at hand, I do not discuss the distinction between Neo-Aramaic’s so-called S-suffixes and L-suffixes here. See, e.g., Doron and Khan (2012).

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second marks object agreement (when there is an object of the relevant type, i.e., definite, specific, or pronominal); agreement is bolded below.

(3) Imperfective

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| a. Axnii damx- ox .
we sleep.IMPF-S. 1PL
'We sleep.' | INTRANSITIVE |
| b. Axnii xa ksuuta kasw- ox .
we one book write.IMPF-S. 1PL
'We write a book(fem.).' | TRANSITIVE, INDEF. OBJ. |
| c. Axnii oo ksuuta kasw- ox-laa .
we that book write.IMPF-S. 1PL-O.3FS
'We write that book(fem.).' | TRANSITIVE, DEF. OBJ. |

Progressive aspect is formed by adding the enclitic auxiliary onto an imperfective verb base, introducing an additional agreement slot on the auxiliary itself. The auxiliary has three phonologically conditioned allomorphs: *y*, *ii*, and *Ø*. The simplest instance of agreement in the progressive is seen in an intransitive progressive, (4).

(4) Progressive intransitive

- Axnii damx-**ox=y-ox**.
we sleep.IMPF-S.**1PL=AUX-S.1PL**
'We are sleeping.'

The subject is marked twice, once on the verb base, and once on the enclitic auxiliary. This is the only grammatical configuration.

When there is an agreeing object, the agreement configuration in a progressive is much more complicated. The precise agreement morpheme that appears on the auxiliary in transitive progressives can vary in three ways: (i) Aux can host default agreement, (5a); (ii) Aux can host a second instance of agreement with the subject, (5b); or (iii) Aux can host agreement with the object, (5c). (In (5), subject agreement is bold, object agreement is in bold italics, and default agreement is italicized.)

(5) Progressive transitive

- | |
|---|
| a. Aana maxy- an-aa=Ø-lee .
I hit.IMPF-S. 1FS-O.3FS=be-DFLT
'I(fem.) am hitting her.' |
| b. Aana maxy- an-aa=y-an .
I hit.IMPF-S. 1FS-O.3FS=be-S.1FS |
| c. Aana maxy- an-ee=Ø-laa .
I hit.IMPF-S. 1FS-DFLT=be-O.3FS |

Object agreement on Aux is limited to third person, so correspondingly, the configuration in (5c) can only be employed when the object is third person (Kalin and McPherson 2012).

So far we have seen that the imperfective verb base on its own may host two agreement morphemes, (3). The enclitic auxiliary, which canonically surfaces in progressives (regardless of how many arguments there are), introduces its own agreement slot, (4)/(5). In transitive progressives, there are thus three agreement slots: the two on the imperfective verb base, plus the third agreement slot on the auxiliary, (5). Is it possible for all three agreement slots in a progressive to cross-reference different arguments? The answer to this question is yes, and the evidence is found in certain types of ditransitives.

Ditransitives with two agreeing objects (i.e., two definite, specific, or pronominal objects) look somewhat surprising. First, such ditransitives employ the enclitic auxiliary, making the ditransitive verbal complex look like the progressive verbal complex. Second, Aux agrees with the direct object, which is, in my analysis, the structurally lowest argument (following, e.g., Anagnostopoulou (2003)). Finally, these ditransitives are aspectually ambiguous: they can receive either an imperfective or progressive interpretation. All of these properties can be seen in (1b) in the introduction as well as in (6) (object agreement bolded).

(6) Ditransitive

- Aanii an klooche k-eew-ii-**lii=0-luu**
 they those cookies INDIC-give.IMPF-S.3PL-**IO.1SG=AUX-DO.3PL**
 ‘They (will) give me the cookies.’ (imperfective)
 ~ ‘They are giving me the cookies.’ (progressive)

The subject is marked first, directly on the verb base. Agreement with the indirect object appears next, again marked on the verb base. Finally, the enclitic auxiliary surfaces and hosts agreement with the direct object. Just as in transitive progressives, (5c), object agreement on Aux is limited to third person.³

That such ditransitives are indeed aspectually ambiguous is confirmed by the adverbs that these clauses are compatible with. Canonical imperfectives are compatible with the adverbial *qoome* ('tomorrow'), but not the adverbial *da^faana* ('right now'), (7a). Conversely, progressives are not compatible with *qoome* but are compatible with *da^faana*, (7b).

- (7) a. Aana (*qoome* /**da^faana*) on talmiide molp-an-uu.
 I tomorrow/*right.now the students teach.IMPF-S.1FS-O.3PL
 ‘I (will) teach the students (tomorrow).’
 ↗ *‘I teach the students right now.’
- b. Aana (**qoome* /*da^faana*) on talmiide molp-an-uu=y-an.
 I *tomorrow/right.now the students teach.IMPF-S.1FS-O.3PL=AUX-1FS
 ‘I am teaching the students (right now).’
 ↗ *‘I am teaching the students tomorrow.’

³When the direct object is first or second person, the indirect object is expressed in a PP (even if definite, specific, or pronominal) and no longer agrees on the verb at all. The direct object is then able to be marked on the verb base directly, and no Aux appears.

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Ditransitives are grammatical with either *qoome* (good in the imperfective, (7a)) or *da^faana* (good in the progressive, (7b)), as can be seen in (8).

- (8) Aana (qoome /da^faana) oo ksuuta maxw-an-ox=ii-laa.
 I tomorrow/right.now the book show.IMPF-S.1FS-IO.2MS=AUX-DO.3FS
 ‘I (will) show you the book (tomorrow).’ (imperfective)
 ~ ‘I am showing you the book (right now).’ (progressive)

Intuitively, we can make sense of Senaya’s ditransitives in terms of the tension between argument licensing requirements and the number of agreement morphemes a verb can carry. In a ditransitive with two objects that require agreement, there must be three agreement morphemes – one each for the subject, direct object, and indirect object. However, the imperfective base is not able to host more than two agreement morphemes. Thus, when the clause would be ungrammatical without a third agreement morpheme (i.e., when this agreement morpheme is needed for licensing), the enclitic auxiliary is recruited to host this morpheme. Empirically, then, it looks like Aux surfaces in ditransitives as a last resort so that agreement with an additional argument can be expressed in the verbal complex.

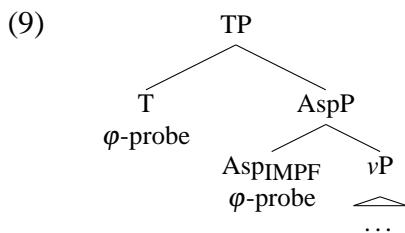
3. Basic syntactic structures

I will adopt the basic structures for imperfectives and progressives in Senaya that are proposed by Kalin and van Urk (2012) and Kalin and McPherson (2012), respectively.

3.1 Imperfective syntax

To start with, Kalin and van Urk (2012) argue that the strict requirement for all subjects as well as definite, specific, and/or pronominal objects to agree is the reflex of a DP-licensing mechanism requiring agreement with a unique φ -probe, e.g., for Case. They further propose that nonspecific/indefinite objects are exempt from this licensing due to pseudoincorporating into the verb, along the lines of Massam (2001). I adopt these proposals here.

Next, Kalin and van Urk (2012) propose that a canonical imperfective has two φ -probes in the derivation, one on T and one on Asp. They take *v*, on the other hand, to be completely inactive, neither instantiating agreement nor inducing spellout of a *vP/VP* phase.

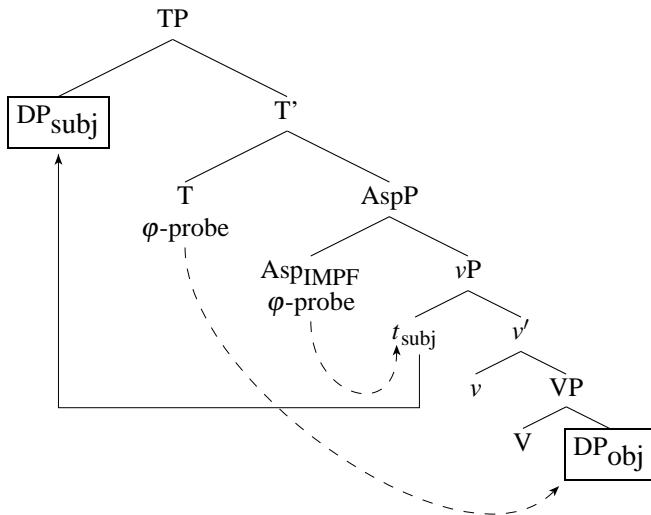


The main motivation behind this structure and the location of the probes is an aspect-based agreement split in the language (between the perfective and imperfective), which will not

be discussed further here. In addition, since this paper is concerned with object agreement, I consider only transitives and ditransitives in the following derivations.

For Kalin and van Urk (2012), in an imperfective transitive, both the φ -probe on Asp and the φ -probe on T come into play, since both the subject and object need licensing, (10). Since Asp is merged first, it probes and agrees with the highest argument, the subject. Next, T is merged, and T's EPP feature targets the subject and the subject raises to spec-TP. Finally, T probes and encounters the object, resulting in object agreement.

(10)



Kalin and van Urk note that the morpheme order – subject agreement closest to the verb base – reflects the syntactic structure, where Asp is closer to V than T is. Further, subject agreement appears inside of the past tense morpheme, (11), a fact also predicted by (10).

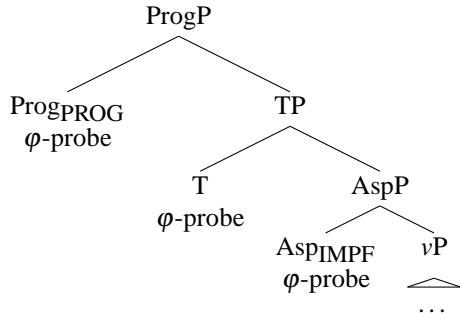
- (11) Ooya k-axl-aa-waa-lee.
she INDIC-eat.IMPF-S.3FS-PAST-O.3MS
‘She used to eat it.’

3.2 Progressive syntax

Kalin and McPherson (2012) argue for another layer of structure, above TP, overtly realized in progressives. Kalin and McPherson pretheoretically label this projection AuxP, which I will call ProgP.⁴ Progressive Prog, annotated ProgPROG, carries a φ -probe, (12), leading to its overt expression either upon agreement or via dummy agreement *lee-*. Non-progressive (i.e., semantically empty) Prog, annotated Prog₀, does not (canonically) carry a φ -probe, and so is not overtly realized in (canonical) non-progressive derivations.

⁴The strongest evidence for the high location of Prog, above T, is that Prog obligatorily agrees with the direct object in a ditransitive, the lowest argument and the only one left after both T and Asp have agreed with the higher arguments. An independent question here involves whether it is desirable to posit Prog above T. It may turn out that the nature of Prog is different from that of Asp; for example, perhaps Prog constitutes a higher aspectual verb and not simply a functional projection on the spine. I put aside this question here and treat Prog, T, and Asp alike, as functional heads that are part of the extended inflectional domain of T.

(12)



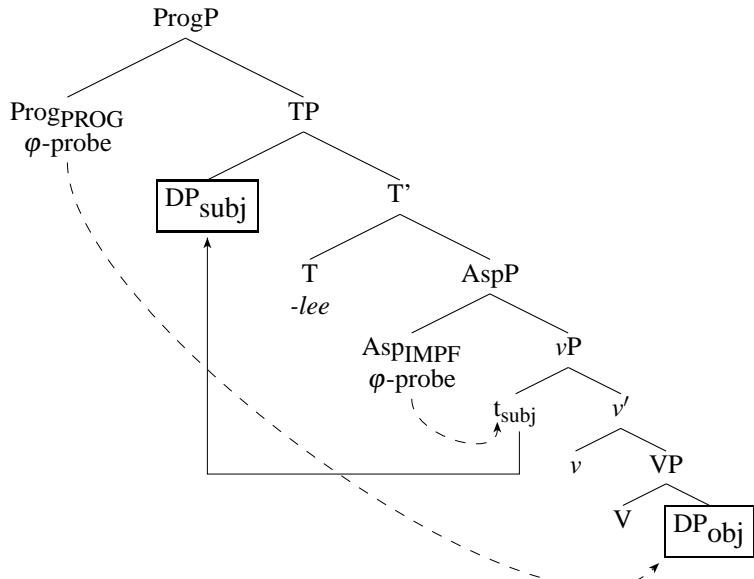
I assume (following, e.g., Schütze 2003, Bjorkman 2011) that the appearance of the auxiliary in general is governed by something like Lasnik's (1981) Stranded Affix Filter, i.e., Aux is inserted to host stranded material. To account for the fact that the auxiliary appears in progressives, but not imperfectives and perfectives, I propose that the Prog head (unlike T and Asp) is not able to unify with the verb, and so whenever there is an agreement morpheme on Prog, that material will be stranded and necessitate Aux insertion. More precisely stated, there is head movement of V to Asp to T, but not any higher, and so any morpheme generated on Prog will not have a host.

Relevant for this paper is the structure of transitive progressives in which object agreement appears on the Aux/Prog. Kalin and McPherson propose the structure in (14) for the derivation of such a sentence, shown in (13).

(13) Axnii oo ksuuta kasw-ox-lee=0-laa.

we that book write.IMPF-S.1PL-DFLT=AUX-O.3FS
'We are writing that book(fem.).'

(14)



Asp agrees with the subject, as usual. T is filled with the dummy agreement morpheme *-lee*, and as a result does not do any probing/agreeing. Prog probes the object, resulting in object agreement on Prog, and the insertion of the auxiliary to host this agreement.

Additionally, the object in (13)/(14) is restricted to third person. Kalin and McPherson argue that this is a Person Case Constraint effect (Bonet 1991, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Béjar and Rezac 2003), resulting from defective intervention of the already-licensed subject on Prog's probing path to the object. Abstracting away from the precise mechanics of this intervention (though see Kalin and McPherson (2012:182-183)), the defective intervention blocks person-licensing of the object, such that first or second person objects cannot be licensed by Prog. As will be seen in the following section, a similar configuration arises in ditransitives, again restricting the argument licensed by Prog to third person.

In sum, there are two active φ -probes in a canonical imperfective: one on Asp, one on T. Since both T and Asp are able to unify with the verb (via head movement of V), morphemes generated on these heads appear directly on the verb base. In the progressive, on the other hand, there are three active φ -probes: one on Asp, one on T, one on Prog. Prog is stranded above the final landing site of the verb (in T), and so Aux always gets inserted to host any material generated on Prog.

One final note here, before turning to the last resort phenomena, concerns Senaya's word order. I assume a very simple account of Senaya's verb-finality: Senaya is head-final, and so when the verb raises to (head final) T, it naturally will follow the subject, object, and any adverbs. This also accounts for the position of the Aux in Prog: ProgP, too, is head final, and so Aux follows the rest of the verbal complex.

4. Ditransitive syntax: “last resort”?

Despite the apparent last resort behavior of the auxiliary and additional agreement in ditransitives, in this section I propose a non-last resort account of this data. As a reminder, the basic facts are thus. Ditransitives with two agreeing objects look progressive in that they always involve the enclitic auxiliary with an additional agreement morpheme. As a result, ditransitives are semantically ambiguous between a progressive and imperfective interpretation, (15) (repeated from (1b)).

- (15) Aana oo ksuuta maxw-an-**ox=ii-laa**.
I the book show.IMPF-S.1FS-**IO.2MS=AUX-DO.3FS**
'I (will) show you the book.' ~ 'I am showing you the book.'

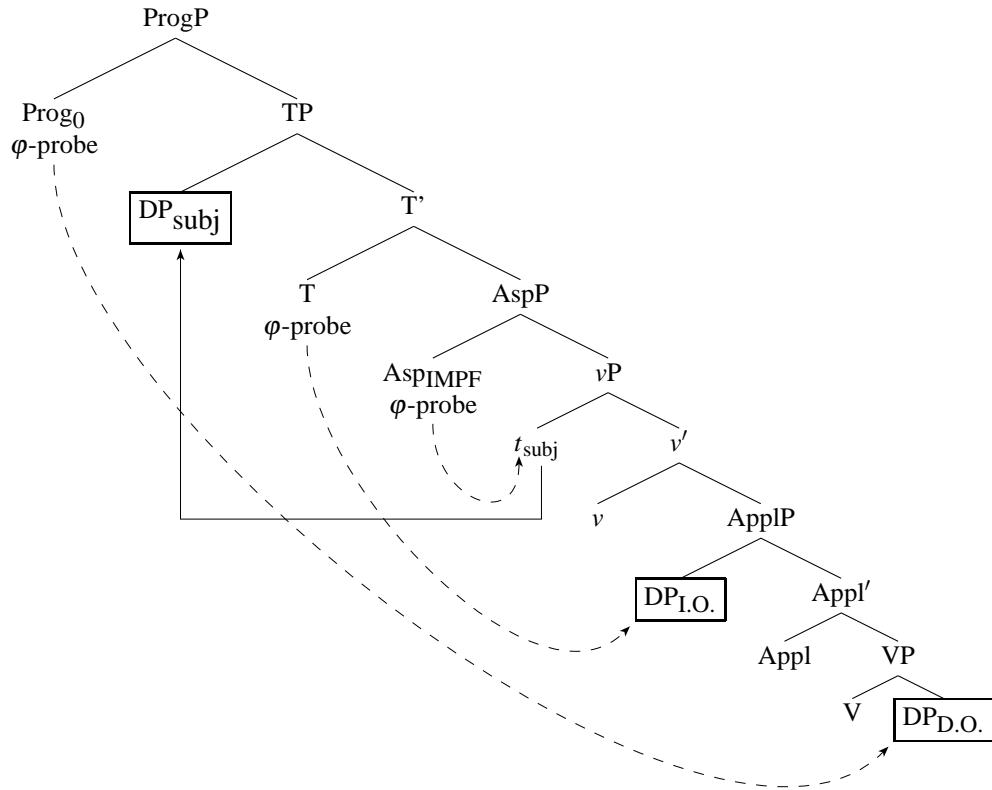
The first agreement morpheme references the subject, as is usual in all imperfectives and progressives. The next agreement morpheme references the indirect object. Finally, the enclitic auxiliary appears and hosts agreement with the direct object.

Given the syntactic accounts from §3, a fundamental grammatical problem arises in an imperfective ditransitive (with two objects that require agreement): the only canonically active φ -probes in an imperfective are on Asp and T; these probes will license only the subject and the higher object, leaving the lower object unlicensed. I propose that what is happening to produce the clause in (15) is that, in certain instances (discussed in detail

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below), Prog_0 bears a φ -probe that enables licensing of the second object. Prog_0 agrees with the lowest argument, the direct object, since Asp and T will have already agreed with/licensed the subject and indirect object, respectively. This derivation is shown in (16).

(16)



Further, just as in a progressive transitive, (14), defective intervention along Prog 's probing path results in Prog only being able to license a third person argument.

Though Prog_0 does not canonically carry a φ -probe, it does so in ditransitives like (16). In (16), we see that Asp , T , and Prog all instantiate agreement with a unique argument. While the agreement morphemes on T and Asp are able to unify with the verb, the agreement morpheme on Prog is not, necessitating the insertion of Aux, just as in progressives, §3.2. Note that in a progressive ditransitive, ProgPROG canonically carries a φ -probe, and so nothing special needs to be said about the appearance of the auxiliary and second instance of object agreement in progressive aspect.

It is clear that non-progressive Prog (Prog_0) does not freely carry a φ -probe; if this were the case, we would expect imperfectives to be able to freely have an auxiliary and additional agreement morpheme, e.g., with Aux hosting doubled subject agreement, as is possible in intransitive and transitive progressives, (4)/(5b). However, this is empirically false: an imperfective can only ever have an auxiliary and additional agreement in a ditransitive. How, then, is the presence of a φ -probe on Prog_0 regulated?

This can be accomplished rather simply, in fact, by following standard assumptions about how φ -agreement works and adding a scalar implicature-like condition for avoiding ambiguity. To begin, it is necessary to posit two different lexical entries for Prog_0 (non-

progressive Prog): one which bears a φ -probe, and one which does not. Adding in the lexical entry for ProgPROG, this results in three lexical entries for Prog, (17).

- (17) Lexical entries for Prog heads in Senaya
- a. Prog₀: selects TP
 - b. Prog_{0 φ} : selects TP, carries [u φ]
 - c. ProgPROG _{φ} : selects TP, carries [u φ]

There is only one lexical entry for ProgPROG because there is always an additional agreement morpheme in the progressive whether or not there are any objects at all, (4).

It is standard to assume that when a φ -probe fails to agree, the derivation will crash (e.g., Chomsky (2001)). This then restricts which Prog₀ head can enter the derivation. If a derivation like that in (16) proceeds (Prog_{0 φ} is chosen), but without a second object (i.e., in a transitive or intransitive imperfective, or in a ditransitive with one pseudoincorporated object), and Prog_{0 φ} fails to agree, then the derivation will crash.⁵ Alternatively, if there is no φ -probe on Prog₀ and a derivation like (16) proceeds (including the second object), then a crash will also happen, but this time because one object has failed to be licensed.

However, saying that Prog₀ can only bear a φ -probe when there is an argument for it to agree with is not quite enough. Transitive and intransitive progressives show that a φ -probe on ProgPROG can double subject agreement or even register object agreement with the single object of a transitive, (4)/(5). Prog₀ with a φ -probe, then, should be able to do so as well, contrary to fact. Crucially, however, if Prog₀ were to bear a φ -probe in an intransitive or transitive imperfective, with the φ -probe agreeing with the subject or object, the result would be homophonous with a progressive form, e.g., one like (4)/(5).

To account for this, I propose that while such a derivation (where Prog_{0 φ} agrees with the subject, or with the object of a transitive) will in fact converge, the imperfective interpretation is ruled out by a condition for ambiguity avoidance modeled after scalar implicature:⁶

- (18) **Aspectual Ambiguity Implicature:** If a speaker uses a verbal form that is potentially aspectually ambiguous (could have been derived from different underlying aspects), and one of its aspectual readings could also be expressed unambiguously with a different form, then the speaker implies that that reading is not intended.

Scalar implicature functions as follows: if a speaker says “X” and not “Y”, with “Y” being a stronger term on the same scale or more informative form of “X”, then “X” implicates “not Y”. In (18), this is relativized for ambiguity – “unambiguous” instead of “stronger”/“more informative”. For Senaya, (18) restricts Senaya verbs with Aux to a progressive interpretation, except when (18) does not rule out an imperfective interpretation, i.e., in ditransitives.

⁵A completely different way to achieve the same effect, proposed by Kalin and van Urk (2012), is to assume that failure of agreement in Senaya results in a null default morpheme; this would mean that Prog₀ may carry a φ -probe freely, but its form would be null and thus undetectable if it failed to agree.

⁶Thank you to Carson Schütze for helping me with the formulation of this implicature.

The account proposed in this section makes use of a standard assumption about φ -probes (that they need to successfully agree) and introduces an intuitive ambiguity implicature (avoid aspectual ambiguity). This account does not make use of any last resort mechanism at all, yet is able to account for data that are quite classically “last resort”.

5. Conclusion, last resort literature, and further directions

In this paper I have proposed that an apparent “last resort” ditransitive phenomenon in Senaya does not, in fact, require any special last resort mechanism. Rather, this phenomenon can be accounted for with standard assumptions about agreement and an additional condition on aspectual implicature.

Last resort mechanisms in general pose a number of crucial questions about how last resort phenomena interact with the syntax. What triggers a last resort mechanism? Conditions on the morphology, on PF, on LF, on spell out, on numerations? Intimately related with the answer to the previous question is how last resort mechanisms ‘fix’ a derivation: in the post-syntax, dynamically in the syntax, or directly in the numeration (from the start, or after a crash)? An additional question raised by this paper is whether last resort mechanisms need to exist at all, at least for certain so-called last resort phenomena.

Perhaps the best-known last resort phenomenon is *do-support*, which has been argued to take place in the post-syntax, triggered by a morphological well-formedness filter like the ‘Stranded Affix Filter’ (Lasnik 1981, Chomsky 1991, Halle and Marantz 1993). While this works well for *do-support* or a more general notion of Aux insertion triggered by morphological needs (Schütze 2003, Bjorkman 2011), it falls short of explaining how an argument that needs licensing in the narrow syntax could be helped in the post-syntax.

The “last resort” ditransitive phenomenon in Senaya seems to require a more powerful last resort mechanism than post-syntactic insertion, one where a last resort item can enter the narrow syntax and affect argument licensing configurations. Rezac (2011) offers just such a last resort mechanism, triggered precisely by an argument licensing failure. Rezac proposes \mathfrak{R} , (19), which rescues derivations by activating a potential Agree/Case locus in a numeration that has already run its course once and crashed.

- (19) \mathfrak{R} (for Agree/Case): A[n] uninterpretable feature (probe) may enter the numeration on a potential Agree/Case locus if needed for Case-licensing. (Rezac 2011:219)

What \mathfrak{R} states is that an uninterpretable feature (e.g., a φ -probe) can be added to the numeration (onto a head with Case-licensing potential that is already in the original derivation’s numeration) when this uninterpretable feature is needed for convergence at spellout. The addition of this φ -probe is triggered in response to a crash at the interface of the syntax with LF or PF, where DPs that have not been Case-licensed are ‘illegible’.

While implementing \mathfrak{R} can largely account for Senaya, it requires a relatively powerful addition to the grammar: a way to ‘fix’ the narrow syntax of a derivation. The appealing component of the account that I have presented here is that no special mechanism needs to be invoked, but rather the phenomenon can be shown to fall out from independently motivated components of the grammar. It remains to be seen whether such an account can

extend to other instances of “last resort” argument licensing, or whether we do, after all, need a stronger mechanism like \mathfrak{R} .

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