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P-lability and radical P-alignment

Abstract: The study of P-lability in languages in which the relationship be-
tween transitive and intransitive predication can be characterized as *radical
P-alignment* must take into account the formal distinction between *weak* and
strong lability, and the semantic distinction between *argument structure modify-
ing* and *argument structure preserving* lability. Radical P-alignment is particularly
common among Daghestanian languages in which some authors operating with
a loose definition of P-lability have argued that P-lability is pervasive, whereas
others have argued that, in the same languages, P-lability is exceptional. On the
basis of more precise definitions, it is shown that, in the languages in question,
all transitive verbs exhibit a behavior whose characterization as a type of lability
may be controversial, depending on the definition of lability, whereas some of
them only show a behavior that stands closer to prototypical lability. This paper
argues that the observation of causativization is particularly relevant to the anal-
ysis of lability in such languages.

Keywords: lability, alignment, ergativity, unmarked passive, transitivization

1 Introduction

Labile is the most commonly used label for verbs which can be used transitively
or intransitively without any formal change.[1] Dixon (1994) introduced a distinc-
tion between *P-lability* (or *patient-preserving* lability: *I broke the stick / The stick
broke*) and *A-lability* (or *agent-preserving* lability: *John drinks tea / John drinks*).[2] A

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1 Note however that some authors use the same label with a much more restricted meaning,
reserving it for what Letuchiy (2009) calls *anticausative lability* (also known as *inchoative/
causative alternation*).
2 Throughout this paper, A and P are used as abbreviations for the grammatical relations char-
acteristic of the agent and the patient in clauses describing prototypical two-participant actions,
i.e., manipulations exerted by an agent on a patient and resulting in a change of state of the pa-
tient, and S refers to the sole core term of clauses encoding one-participant events.

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finer-grained classification of labile verbs according to the semantic relationship   1
between their transitive and intransitive uses has been elaborated by Letuchiy   2
(2006, 2009), and this classification provides a convenient starting point for the   3
study of lability in general. It is however not sufficient for the purpose of the pres-   4
ent article, and Section 1 is devoted to a critical examination of this classification   5
and to the presentation of a new typology of lability that provides a better basis   6
for the discussion of the questions dealt with in this article.   7

   The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 3 discusses the   8
parallelism between P-lability and agent demoting or removing derivations.   9
Section 4 puts forward some preliminary remarks about the relationship be-   10
tween lability and syntactic alignment. Section 5 introduces the notions of con-   11
sistent alignment and radical alignment. Section 6 discusses the relationship   12
between radical alignment and lability. Section 7 presents a type of lability sys-   13
tem typically found among Daghestanian languages. Section 8 consists of a criti-   14
cal evaluation of previous attempts at capturing the specificity of such systems.   15
In Section 9, I show that observations on causativization provide a clue to a typo-   16
logical characterization of the variations observed among languages that have   17
lability systems comparable to that of Akhvakh. Section 10 summarizes the   18
conclusions.   19

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2 Refining the typology of lability

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Letuchiy (2009) puts forward a first distinction between *lability proper* (in which   24
the syntactically privileged argument (subject) has different semantic roles in the   25
different uses of the labile verb) and *quasi-lability* (in which the change in syn-   26
tactic transitivity does not correlate with a difference in the semantic role as-   27
signed to the syntactically privileged argument). He then recognizes the follow-   28
ing five types of lability: *anticausative* lability, *reflexive* lability, *reciprocal* lability,   29
passive lability, and *converse* lability. Note that in this classification: 30
–   anticausative lability and passive lability constitute two subtypes of patient   31
    preserving lability as defined by Dixon (1994);   32
–   the other three types are lability types that were not clearly recognized in   33
    most of the previous accounts of lability;   34
–   none of the five types corresponds to Dixon's agent-preserving lability, which   35
    implies that Letuchiy considers the illustrations of A-lability proposed in the   36
    literature as being rather instances of what he calls quasi-lability.   37

   38

Letuchiy's proposal constitutes an important advancement in lability typology,   39
which however neglects several crucial questions: 40

1 – What exactly do we mean by "change in syntactic transitivity"? Or to put it
2   differently: is it reasonable to assume that a notion of "change in syntactic
3   transitivity" can be dealt with without first typologizing the morphosyntactic
4   manifestations of the distinction between clauses encoding prototypical
5   two-participant events and clauses encoding one-participant events?
6 – How can definitions that crucially rely on the notion of "syntactically privi-
7   leged argument (subject)" apply to languages for which this notion is prob-
8   lematic? It should be obvious that a typological approach to lability in lan-
9   guages in which P-alignment (*alias* ergative alignment) predominates cannot
10   rely on such definitions.
11 – What exactly do we mean by "different semantic roles"? For example, should
12   we consider that the role assigned to the subject in the English clause *The*
13   *vase broke* is the same as the role assigned to the object in *The child broke the*
14   *vase* (since they refer to participants undergoing the same change of state), or
15   is it better to posit two different semantic roles (since in *The child broke the*
16   *vase*, but not in *The vase broke*, the vase is explicitly presented as undergoing
17   the action of an agent)?
18
19 In this paper, I use a typology of lability based on two logically independent
20 parameters (in addition to the classical distinction between A-lability and P-
21 lability), defined in such a way as to avoid the ambiguities signaled in Letuchiy's
22 definitions: a semantic distinction between *argument structure preserving* and
23 *argument structure modifying lability*, and a formal distinction between *weak* and
24 *strong* lability.
25   The semantic distinction between *argument structure preserving* and *argu-*
26 *ment structure modifying lability* is defined as follows:
27 – in *argument structure preserving* lability, the verb in its intransitive use im-
28   plies the same participants with the same roles as in its transitive use, but
29   in the intransitive use, one of the participants is not expressed and is inter-
30   preted as non-specific;
31 – in *argument structure modifying* lability, the intransitive use of the labile verb
32   implies a single participant whose role may be related in various ways to the
33   roles the labile verb assigns to two distinct participants in its transitive use.
34
35 According to this definition, contrary to *John drinks tea / John drinks*, which illus-
36 trates argument structure preserving lability, *The child broke the vase / The vase*
37 *broke* is undoubtedly an instance of argument structure modifying lability, in
38 spite of the fact that it is not clear whether there is a change in the semantic role
39 assigned to *the vase* or not.
40   The formal distinction between *weak* and *strong* lability is defined as follows:

914 —— Denis Creissels   **DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

– in *weak* lability, the only core argument of the intransitive construction is
   encoded exactly like the argument with a similar or identical role in the tran-
   sitive construction, and superficially, the two constructions show no other
   formal distinction than the presence vs. absence of a noun phrase (as in
   English *John drinks tea / John drinks*);
– in *strong* lability, either the only core argument of the intransitive construc-
   tion is encoded differently form the argument with a similar or identical role
   in the transitive construction (as *the vase* in English *The vase broke / The child*
   broke the vase), or the two constructions differ formally in other respects than
   the mere absence of a nominal term, as in Mandinka *Mǒolu tee-ta / Mǒolu ye*
   báa tee 'The people crossed (the river)' (Example (1)).

(1) Mandinka
    a. *Mǒo-lu   ye   báa   tee.*
       people.DEF-PL   PF.POS.TR   river.DEF   cross
       'The people crossed the river.'
    b. *Mǒo-lu   tee-ta.*
       people.DEF-PL   cross-PF.POS.INTR
       'The people crossed.'
       (Creissels forthcoming)

In (1a) and (1b), *mǒolu* 'the people' is equally in the syntactic role of subject, but
Mandinka has two distinct sets of TAM and polarity markers in transitive and in-
transitive constructions, and consequently "perfective positive" is marked by *yé*
in the transitive use of *těe* 'cross' and *-tá* in its intransitive use.

Note that the examples mentioned in the definition above show the indepen-
dence of the two parameters *argument structure preserving* vs. *modifying* and
weak vs. *strong*: the English example *John drinks (tea)* and the Mandinka example
Mǒolu teeta / Mǒolu ye báa tee are two instances of argument structure preserv-
ing lability, but *John drinks (tea)* is a case of weak lability, whereas *Mǒolu teeta /*
Mǒolu ye báa tee illustrates strong lability.

Moreover, Letuchiy's typology does not consider the possibility of construc-
tions ambiguous between what I call argument structure preserving and argu-
ment structure modifying lability. This ambiguity, illustrated by Example (2), is
indeed a crucial aspect of the transitivity system of languages with otherwise
quite different typological profiles.

(2) Mandinka
    a. *Kew-ó   ye   saajíy-o   faa.*
       man-DEF   PF.POS.TR   sheep-DEF   kill
       'The man killed the sheep.'

b. *Saajíy-o   faa-ta.*
    sheep-DEF   kill/die-PF.POS.INTR
    1. The sheep died.
    2. The sheep was killed.
    (Creissels forthcoming)

Irrespective of its precise interpretation, the Mandinka sentence (2b) is an instance of strong lability, since TAM and polarity marking unambiguously designates *saajíyo* 'the sheep' as the subject of an intransitive construction, but this sentence can be equally found in contexts unambiguously triggering an anticausative interpretation, and in others unambiguously triggering a passive interpretation.

To summarize, in addition to the distinction between A-lability and P-lability,[3] I recognize six types of situations involving lability:
– argument structure preserving strong lability,
– argument structure modifying strong lability,
– strong lability ambiguous between agent structure preserving and agent structure modifying readings,
– argument structure preserving weak lability,
– argument structure modifying weak lability,
– weak lability ambiguous between agent structure preserving and agent structure modifying readings.

This article focuses on the analysis of anticausative lability in languages in which passive lability is not a lexical property of a more or less restricted class of verbs, but a general property of transitive verbs. This situation is found in some Mande languages and in some Daghestanian languages. In Mande languages, as illustrated by Example (2) above, the analysis is facilitated by the fact that, due to other aspects of the transitivity system of Mande languages, the existence of passive lability is uncontroversial. In Daghestanian languages such as Lezgi, Avar or Akhvakh, the situation is more complex, and can only be captured if the specificity of weak lability is explicitly recognized: on the basis of current definitions that do not clarify the notion of "change in syntactic transitivity", a linguist analyzing Akhvakh may with equally good reasons conclude, either that lability is pervasive in Akhvakh, or that it is limited to a very small set of verbs.

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3 In this article, I leave open the question of a possible correlation between *A-* vs. *P-lability* and *argument structure preserving* vs. *modifying lability*. What is sure is that each of the six types I propose is compatible with P-lability.

The distinction between anticausative lability and passive lability has rarely been discussed, at least in terms comparable to those proposed in the present article, and this is probably due to the fact that anticausative lability (also known as inchoative / causative alternation) constitutes an extremely widespread phenomenon, whereas uncontroversial instances of passive lability (i.e., instances of passive lability that qualify as "strong" lability according to the definition formulated above) are extremely rare in the languages of the world.

As convincingly shown by Letuchiy (2006) on the basis of a sample of over 100 languages, the claim that anticausative lability is characteristic for ergative languages is false. What I will try to show here is in particular that the illusion of a correlation between ergativity and anticausative lability is precisely due to the fact that the predicative constructions of so-called ergative languages are frequently organized in such a way that weak lability of the passive type is in those languages trivial, and anticausative readings of transitive verbs used intransitively, if they exist, are always ambiguous with passive readings. The point is that weak lability of the passive type may be the mere consequence of P-alignment (*alias* ergative alignment) combined with a certain set of other typological features. In languages showing this combination of features, all transitive verbs simply qualify as P-labile, if one operates on the basis of a broad definition of lability formulated in such a way that it does not distinguishes agent structure modifying from agent structure preserving lability, and strong lability from weak lability.

3 Agent demoting or removing derivations and P-lability

Since I will argue that, in languages with a certain combination of typological features, some distinctions relevant to the transitivity system of other languages are neutralized, it is useful to briefly present the situation of languages that have formally distinct agent demoting and agent removing devices, and of languages in which there is clear morphosyntactic evidence of a distinction between patients encoded as the S term of an intransitive predication and patients encoded as the P term of a transitive predication involving a missing agent with an arbitrary reading.

3.1 Agent demoting and agent removing derivations

Some languages have formally distinct passive and anticausative derivations. In principle, passive derivation simply *demotes* the agent, i.e., it encodes a *prag-*

1 *matic* change in perspective without however modifying the *semantic* roles that
2 constitute the argument structure of the verb, whereas anticausative derivation
3 *removes* the agent from argument structure, presenting therefore the only remain-
4 ing core argument as undergoing a process without implying anything about the
5 causality chain that may be involved.

6 　However, contrary to what could have been expected, it turns out that, even
7 in languages that have both a passive derivation and an anticausative derivation,
8 there is no straightforward correlation between the use of anticausative forms
9 and the possibility of conceiving the process independently of a more or less
10 clearly identifiable external cause. Rather, anticausative forms are available for a
11 range of uses involving various semantic types of agent back-grounding not nec-
12 essarily implying that no agent is present in the situation referred to. For example
13 the "facilitative" use of anticausative forms, illustrated by Example (3) from the
14 Bantu language Tswana, emphasizes the predisposition of a patient to lend itself
15 to a manipulation exerted by an agent.

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17 (3) Tswana
18 　　a. *Mosimane o   tlaa kwala lokwalo.*   (transitive
19 　　　 CL1.boy   CL1 FUT write CL11.letter   predication)
20 　　　 'The boy will write the letter.'
21 　　b. *Lokwalo   lo   tlaa kwalwa.*   (passive)
22 　　　 CL11.letter CL11 FUT write.PASS
23 　　　 'The letter will be written.'
24 　　c. *Lokwalo   lo   tlaa kwalega   motlhofo.* (anticausative with a
25 　　　 CL11.letter CL11 FUT write.ANTICAUS easily   facilitative reading)[4]
26 　　　 'The letter will be easy to write.'
27 　　　 (Creissels 2002)

28

29 It is also very common that languages having an overt distinction between pas-
30 sive and middle forms use middle rather than passive forms to express habits,
31 often with a normative flavor, even if agents are obligatorily involved in the event
32 referred to, as illustrated by Example (4) from French.

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4 'Write' is a creation verb rather than a change-of-state verb, but in Tswana, the use of the anti-
38 causative marker *-eg-* typically used with change-of-state verbs extends to other transitive verbs
39 with the same possibility of a facilitative reading (in the case of 'write': the letter under consider-
40 ation is such that it will not be difficult to write it).

918 —— Denis Creissels   **DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

(4) French

    a. *Le*   *vin*   *blanc*   *se*   *boit*   *frais.*

       DEF.M.SG   wine.SG   white.M.SG   MID   drink.PRS.3SG   cool.M.SG

       'White wine is (to be) drunk cool.'

       (middle)

    b. **Le*   *vin*   *blanc*   *est*   *bu*

       DEF.M.SG   wine.SG   white.M.SG   be.PRS.3SG   drink.PTCP.M.SG

       frais

       cool.M.SG

       (passive)

Nahuatl can also be mentioned as illustrating a particularly clear case of neutralization of a distinction between middle and passive verb forms. In Nahuatl (Launey 1981), there is a clear contrast between middle and passive forms in the presence of human subjects, as in Example (5a)–(5b), but non-human NPs cannot be subjects of passive verb forms, and middle forms are used to encode agent demotion if the patient is non-human, even if an agent clearly remains involved in the event referred to, as in Example (6c)–(6d).[5]

(5) Nahuatl

    a. *Mo-tta-c*   *in*   *cihuātl.*   (middle form with a reflexive reading)

       MID-see-PF   DEF   woman

       'The woman saw herself.'

    b. *Itta-lō-c*   *in*   *cihuātl.*   (passive)

       see-PASS-PF   DEF   woman

       'The woman has been seen.'

    c. *Mo-tta-c*   *in*   *calli.*   (middle form with a passive reading)

       MID-see-PF   DEF   house

       'The house has been seen.'

    d. **Itta-lō-c*   *in*   *calli.*

       see-PASS-PF   DEF   house

       (Launey 1981)

Consequently, the choice between overtly distinct passive and anticausative forms of transitive verbs in languages such as Tswana, French or Nahuatl,

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5 Nahuatl passive blocks the expression of the agent, which is semantically implied but cannot be expressed by an adposition phrase. As in other languages that have the same particularity, the equivalent of English sentences such as 'The woman was seen by the man' is a biclausal construction, something like 'The woman was seen, it was the man (who saw her)'.

1 although obviously motivated by differences in conceptualization, has no straight-
2 forward correlation with the fact that an agent is obligatorily involved or not in a
3 given process. The subtleties in the choice between passive and middle forms
4 within a single language and the variations observed between languages contra-
5 dict the idea of a clear-cut distinction between demoting and removing the agent,
6 and this must be kept in mind when analyzing the situation of languages in which
7 there are at least some clear cases of unmarked agentless constructions ambig-
8 uous between two such interpretations, which constitutes a typical feature of the
9 Daghestanian languages whose lability system constitutes the main topic of this
10 article.

3.2 Argument structure modifying P-lability and argument structure preserving P-lability

Argument structure *modifying* P-lability can be defined as the possibility of using
an otherwise transitive verb in constructions encoding an argument structure
from which the A argument of the transitive construction is absent; this kind of
P-lability involves an interpretation of the transitivity alternation semantically
comparable to causative and anticausative derivations.

    Unambiguous cases of argument structure modifying P-lability can be found
in languages like English, in which the intransitive use of P-labile verbs contrasts
with a morphologically marked passive construction, as in Example (6).

(6) English
    a. *The child broke the glass*
       (canonical transitive predication)
    b. *The glass was broken (by the child)*
       (passivization)
    c. *The glass broke*
       (intransitive predication encoding the absence of an agent in the argument
       structure of *break*)

Argument structure *preserving* P-lability involves a semantic interpretation of the
transitivity alternation similar to that encoded by passive derivations. Uncontro-
versial examples of this type of P-lability are not easy to find. Bambara (Creissels
2007) and Mandinka (Creissels forthcoming) provide however convincing illus-
trations, and a similar situation has been described in other Mande languages
(see among others Lüpke 2007 on Jalonke).

In Bambara, the choice between two possible markers of the TAM value "perfective positive" (*yé* and *-ra ~ -la ~ -na*) unambiguously identifies predicative constructions as transitive (triggering the choice of *yé*, as in Example (7a)) or intransitive (triggering the choice of *-ra ~ -la ~ -na*, as in Example (7b)). More generally, "predicative markers" common to transitive and intransitive predications such as *má* "perfective negative" occur between A and P in transitive predication (as in Example (7c)), and after S in intransitive predication (as in Example (7d)), which eliminates any possibility of confusion between intransitive constructions and transitive constructions with a missing A. Consequently, the construction illustrated by Example (7e)–(7f) is clearly an intransitive construction, and the possibility of encoding the agent as an optional postposition phrase in oblique role implies that the agent is not deleted from argument structure.[6]

(7) Bambara
   a. *Wùlu*   *yé*   *sògo*   *dún.*
      dog.DEF   PF.POS.TR   meat.DEF   eat
      'The dog has eaten the meat.'
   b. *Sògo*   *tòli-la.*
      meat.DEF   get_rotten-PF.POS.INTR
      'The meat got rotten.'
   c. *Wùlu*   *má*   *sògo*   *dún.*
      dog.DEF   PF.NEG   meat.DEF   eat
      'The dog has not eaten the meat.'
   d. *Sògo*   *má*   *tòli.*
      meat.DEF   PF.NEG   get_rotten
      'The meat did not get rotten.'
   e. *Sògo*   *dún-na*   (*wùlu*   *fὲ*).
      meat.DEF   eat-PF.POS.INTR   dog.DEF   by
      'The meat has been eaten (by the dog).'
   f. *Sògo*   *má*   *dún* (*wùlu*   *fὲ*).
      meat.DEF   PF.NEG   eat   dog.DEF   by
      'The meat has not been eaten (by the dog).'
      (Creissels 2007)

The construction of sentences (7e)–(7f) is clearly passive, although it involves no passive morphology and relies entirely on the possibility of encoding the agent of

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6 For more details on the transitivity system of Bambara, see Creissels (2007).

a transitive verb as the S term of a formally intransitive predication without mod-
ifying the argument structure of the verb.

However, this is only part of the story. As illustrated by Example (8), Bambara
also has clear cases in which a formally identical alternation implies a change in
argument structure of the causative/anticausative type.

(8) Bambara

    a. *Jòli   bɛ́na   sìmi   jóona.*
       blood.DEF   FUT.POS coagulate   soon
       'The blood will coagulate soon.'
    b. *Fínyɛ   bɛ́na   jòli   sìmi   jóona.*
       wind.DEF   FUT.POS blood.DEF   coagulate   soon
       'The wind will coagulate the blood soon.'
       (Creissels 2007)

In other words, P-lability in Bambara, although it invariably qualifies as strong
P-lability according to the definitions proposed here, shows the same kind of
ambiguity as mediopassive forms of verbs in languages in which the same mor-
phological marking is used to encode agent demoting and removing. In Bambara,
there are many cases in which semantics favors a spontaneous event reading
of the intransitive construction of P-labile verbs, but clearly ambiguous cases
similar to that mentioned for Mandinka in Example (2) above can be found, and
trying to find tests that would always unambiguously characterize the intransi-
tive uses of the P-labile verbs of Bambara as passive-like or anticausative-like
would be as fruitless as trying to establish a strict dichotomy between passive-like
and anticausative-like uses of mediopassive verb forms, in languages that have
this type of forms.

3.3 P-lability and unmarked passive-like uses
of transitive verbs

Insofar as intransitive constructions can be distinguished from transitive con-
structions with a missing agent, argument structure preserving P-lability as at-
tested in Bambara, in which the unmarked passive construction is clearly intran-
sitive, must be distinguished from the *unmarked passive-like use of transitive
verbs* attested in other languages. This notion applies to constructions that en-
code the same argument structure as the canonical transitive construction of the
same verbs, and have the formal characteristics of transitive constructions, ex-
cept that they involve a lexically unexpressed A argument receiving an arbitrary

interpretation. Russian provides a particularly clear illustration. Like many other
languages, Russian has an impersonal use of 3rd person plural, without however
the ambiguities commonly associated with this use of 3rd person plural, due to
the fact that Russian is not (or is only to a limited extent) a pro-drop language,
and no subject pronoun is present in the arbitrary subject construction (Example
(9)).

(9) Russian[7]
    a. *Oni   ego   ubili.*
       3PL   3SG.M.ACC kill.PFV.PST.PL
       'They (specific) killed him.'
    b. *Ego   ubili.*
       3SG.M.ACC kill.PFV.PST.PL
       'They (arbitrary) killed him.', 'He was killed.'

Consequently, with transitive verbs, the construction illustrated by Example (9b)
is formally a transitive predication with a missing A (since the only core NP pres-
ent in the construction is in the accusative case).

    Interestingly, a diachronic shift from this type of construction to construc-
tions that become more and more similar to prototypical passive constructions
in attested among others in several Bantu languages that have lost the Bantu
passive marked by a suffix inherited from Proto-Bantu, and in which the func-
tionally equivalent active construction with an impersonal use of the subject
marker of class 2 (human plural) tends to acquire characteristics typical of pas-
sive constructions. The case of Lunda has been presented in detail by Kawasha
(2007). For a more general discussion of this relatively widespread phenomenon,
see (Siewierska 2010).

4 Lability and syntactic alignment: preliminary remarks

Letuchiy (2009: 226) rightly observes that the recognition of *John drinks / John
drinks tea* as an instance of A-lability is problematic. His comment is that the rec-
ognition of *drink* as A-labile implies that lability is defined on the basis of syntac-

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7 In languages that have case inflection of nouns, the absence of gloss for case means that the
noun (or pronoun) is in a form identical to its quotation form and including no overt case mark-
ing (*nominative* or *absolutive*).

1 tic transitivity change only; on the basis of his own definition, according to
2 which labile verbs assign different semantic roles to their subject in their transi-
3 tive and intransitive uses, *drink* "is regarded as 'quasi-labile', since the intransi-
4 tive use differs from the transitive use only by its transitivity". Crucially, "as the
5 patient in *John drinks* is semantically obligatory, both uses have two semantic
6 arguments".

7   The problem with *John drinks / John drinks tea* is however not only that the
8 two constructions imply the same participants. The notion of "change of transi-
9 tivity" is also problematic here, since recognizing a change of transitivity in *John*
10 *drinks / John drinks tea* implies defining a syntactically transitive construction
11 as a construction in which both A and P are overtly expressed. This is of course
12 a possible option, which however implies applying the notion of transitivity not
13 really to predicative *constructions*, but rather to their realizations.

14   The question that arises is then: what can be the usefulness of a definition
15 of syntactic transitivity that excludes clauses headed by a transitive verb in
16 which the mere absence of an object phrase acts as an instruction to interpret the
17 second argument of the transitive verb as unspecified, or to identify it anaphori-
18 cally to a discursively salient entity? In a language like English, it is more than
19 tempting to analyze *John drinks* and *John drinks tea* as instantiating the same con-
20 struction *Subject Verb (Object)*. According to this analysis, as a construction, *Sub-*
21 *ject Verb (Object)* cannot be straightforwardly characterized as transitive or in-
22 transitive, and superficial transitivity (i.e., the instantiation of the object phrase)
23 depends on the valency properties of the verb and on language-specific rules that
24 may license unexpressed arguments, either with an unspecified or anaphoric
25 reading.

26   To summarize, in a language like English, starting from the current definition
27 of lability, the recognition of A-lability depends on the understanding one has of
28 syntactic transitivity. The question of the level at which syntactic transitivity op-
29 erates (constructions, or their realization) is crucial, but rarely (if ever) explicitly
30 addressed by syntacticians. The only absolutely uncontroversial things are that
31 English verbs like *drink* are semantically bivalent in all their uses, and that their
32 second argument can be left unexpressed (with an unspecified reading) without
33 modifying anything in the expression of the first argument or in other formal
34 characteristics of the construction. The notions of argument structure preserving
35 lability and weak lability introduced in Section 2 conveniently capture the speci-
36 ficity of such situations.

37   In this paper, I will not try to go further in the analysis of A-lability. I
38 would however like to emphasize that the question I address can be viewed to
39 some extent as the mirror image of the question of A-lability in languages like
40 English.

The definition of P-labile verbs as verbs that can be used transitively or in- 1
transitively with the same participant encoded as P in a transitive construction 2
and S in an intransitive construction is particularly problematic for languages 3
combining the following three typological features: 4

– radical P-alignment in the coding of core syntactic roles (see Section 3), 5
– absence of agent-demoting or agent removing derivations, 6
– unrestricted possibility of an arbitrary reading of null A's. 7
8

This combination of features, particularly common among Nakh-Daghestanian 9
languages, will be illustrated by Akhvakh and Avar, two languages belonging to 10
the Avar-Andic-Tsezic branch of this family. Such languages have phenomena 11
that unquestionably have to do with the broad notion of P-lability, but cannot be 12
captured properly within the frame of a definition of P-lability that presupposes 13
the existence of a distinction between intransitive and transitive predicative *con-* 14
structions and does not take into account the distinctions between argument 15
structure preserving and argument structure modifying lability, and between 16
weak and strong lability. In languages of this type, 17

– P-lability can only exist as weak lability, and is therefore problematic as far as 18
　this notion has not been clarified, 19
– argument structure preserving P-lability (or passive lability) is trivial, 20
– argument structure modifying P-lability (or anticausative lability) may exist 21
　as a lexical property of a more or less important class of verbs, but its precise 22
　extent is difficult to establish, due to the systematic ambiguity with passive 23
　lability. 24
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26
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5　Alignment, consistent alignment, 28
　 and radical alignment 29
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5.1　A-alignment vs. P-alignment 32
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In this paper, I use the transparent terms of *A-alignment* and *P-alignment* instead 34
of the more familiar terms of *accusative / ergative alignment*. This terminological 35
change is motivated by the desire to avoid some widespread confusions about the 36
notion of accusativity / ergativity. The point is that, although recent definitions of 37
accusativity / ergativity, for example in (Dixon 1994), are formulated exclusively 38
in terms of alignment proper, many linguists associate these notions with a host 39
of properties like asymmetries in marking or indexation patterns, coincidence 40

between the quotation form of nouns and the form they show in some of their syntactic uses, presence of passive or antipassive, etc.[8] Since it is crucial for the questions addressed in the present paper to dissociate alignment proper from other phenomena commonly associated to the notion of accusativity/ergativity, I have preferred to use *A-alignment* and *P-alignment* as labels for the types of alignment (this term being taken in its strictest sense) commonly associated with the notions of accusativity and ergativity, respectively. *Ergative* and *accusative* will be used here only with their traditional morphological meaning, in reference to case forms of nouns.

As can be expected from the preceding comments, A-alignment and P-alignment are defined in the following way: for every (coding or behavioral) property marking a contrast between the core terms of the transitive predication, the single core argument S of an intransitive predication may show:

– A-alignment, if it behaves like A with respect to the property in question,
– P-alignment, if it behaves like P with respect to the property in question.

5.2 Consistency in alignment

In the terminology used in this paper, a language is considered as having consistent alignment if it does not combine A-alignment in some coding property of core syntactic terms with P-alignment in some other coding property.

Consistency in alignment does not necessarily imply that the same alignment is apparent in case-marking, indexation, and constituent order. Not all languages have a case contrast between A and P, not all languages have indexation, indexation in languages that index both A and P may be sensitive to an indexability hierarchy rather that to the A *vs.* P contrast, and constituent order may be pragmatically rather than syntactically driven. The notion of consistency in alignment only implies that the relevant features in the language in question do not contradict each other in this respect (as they do in languages that combine P-alignment in case-marking with A-alignment in indexation).

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8 An approach to ergativity based on transitive coding rather than alignment proper is explicitly advocated by DeLancey (1981). See also (Mallison and Blake 1981) for interesting clarifications about the distinction between transitive coding typology and alignment typology, a question on which most of the recent literature is highly confusing.

5.3 Radical alignment

I introduce the notion of *radical alignment*, more restricted than the notion of consistent alignment just defined, in order to make explicit the intuition that, even among the languages that consistently follow a given type of alignment, some are more systematic than others. As will be commented in more detail below, the notion of radical alignment accounts for the fact that some languages organize predicative constructions in such a way that the *transitive* vs. *intransitive* distinction, instead of being made straightforwardly apparent, is in some respects blurred, which has important consequences for the analysis of questions related to transitivity, including lability.

Radical alignment is defined in the following way: in languages that have radical alignment, the transitive and intransitive predications can be described as instances of a single predicative construction including an obligatory morphosyntactic slot shared by S and one of the core terms of the transitive predication (either A or P), and an optional morphosyntactic slot whose instantiation depends on the transitivity properties of the verb, for the other core term of the transitive predication, as schematized in (10).

(10) *The predicative construction in languages with radical alignment:*
　　　a. Radical A-alignment: *(P) S/A V*
　　　b. Radical P-alignment: *(A) S/P V*

Note that the formulas in (10) are intended to imply nothing more than the mere fact that the presence of the term between parentheses has no incidence on the make-up of the other elements of the construction. In particular, they imply no decision about constituency, the linear order is not relevant, and nothing is implied about possible alignments in behavioral properties. It must also be clear that the possibility of positing a single predicative construction is perfectly compatible with the recognition of a distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs.

6 Radical alignment and lability

In languages that do not have radical alignment (i.e. in languages in which the formal distinction between transitive and intransitive predications involves more than the mere presence *vs.* absence of a noun phrase), strong A-lability and strong P-lability (i.e. uncontroversial cases of both A- and P-lability) may coexist. This situation has already been illustrated in Section 2 by Example (1) and (2) from

Mandinka, a language in which TAM-polarity marking distinguishes transitive from intransitive constructions: in Example (1b), the agent of *tĕe* 'cross' is encoded as the S term of an intransitive construction, whereas in Example (2b), the patient of *fǎa* 'kill' is encoded as the S term of an intransitive construction, and in both cases, TAM-polarity marking rules out an analysis in terms of transitive constructions with a missing term.

In Mandinka, as illustrated by Example (11), it is even possible to find verbs such as *wúlúu* 'give birth to', with two intransitive uses that are equally uncontroversial from a formal point of view, but differ in the semantic role assigned to the NP encoded as the S term of an intransitive predication.

(11) Mandinka

     a. *Ń   ná   mus-óo   ye   dímmús-ôo   wúluu.*
        1SG   GEN   wife-DEF   PF.POS.TR   daughter.DEF   give_birth
        'My wife gave birth to a daughter.'

     b. *Ń   dímmús-ôo   wúlúu-tá   Seejo.*
        1SG   daughter-DEF   give_birth/be_born-PF.POS.INTR   Sédhiou
        1. 'My daughter was born in Sédhiou.'
        2. 'My daughter gave birth to a child in Sédhiou.'
        (Creissels, forthcoming)

Basque is very different from Mandinka from the point of view of alignment typology, but it shares with Mandinka a clear-cut distinction between transitive predications and intransitive predications that rules out the possibility of a confusion between an intransitive construction and a transitive construction with a null argument.

In Basque, the choice of the auxiliary in analytic verb forms straightforwardly identifies clauses headed by bivalent verbs and including a single expressed argument as transitive or intransitive, irrespective of the case marking of the expressed arguments and of the possible readings of missing arguments. In its two possible readings, (12a) is identified as a transitive clause with a missing P both by the ergative marking of the agent and by the presence of the transitive auxiliary *du*. In (12b), case marking is not decisive, since in Basque, the absolute form of nouns is used for both S and P. What is crucial is the presence of the intransitive auxiliary *da*, which unambiguously indicates that *mendia* fulfills the S role in an intransitive clause, not the P role in a transitive clause with a missing A.

(12) Basque

     a. *Gizon-ak   ikus-ten   du.*
        man-SG.ERG   see-IPF   AUX.TR.PRS.3SG.3SG
        'The man sees him/her/it/them.' or 'The man can see.'

    b. *Mendi-a   ikus-ten   da.*
       mountain-SG   see-IPF   AUX.INTR.PRS.3SG
       'The mountain can be seen.'

In Nahuatl, the transitive construction is characterized by the obligatory indexation of both A and P, and the general rule is that every valency change is morphologically encoded, so that the few labile verbs (P-labile, as in Example (13), as well as A-labile, as in Example (14)) are immediately recognizable from the mere fact that the number of participants they index may vary without any other change in the verb form.

(13) Nahuatl
    a. *Ni-qu-in-tomāwa in   pitsōmê.*
       1SG-3-PL-fatten   DEF   pig.PL
       'I am fattening pigs.'
    b. *Ø-tomāwâ in   pitsōmê.*
       3-fatten.PL   DEF   pig.PL
       'The pigs are fattening.'
       (Launey 1981)

(14) Nahuatl
    a. *Ni-c-tesi   in   tlaolli.*
       1SG-3-grind   DEF   maize
       'I am grinding the maize.'
    b. *Ni-tesi.*
       1SG-grind
       'I am making flour.'
       (Launey 1981)

North West Caucasian languages are in this respect quite similar to Nahuatl, although they are very different from the point of view of alignment typology.

    In Mayan languages, the distinction between transitive and intransitive predications is made particularly apparent by the obligatory agreement of the verb with both A and P in the transitive construction combined with other inflectional markers of verbs sensitive to the transitive *vs.* intransitive distinction.

    Things are different in languages with radical alignment.

    Leaving aside the constraints following from the valency properties of individual verbs, in a language with radical A-alignment like English, a transitive clause looks like an intransitive clause to which a patient NP would have been added without triggering any readjustment in the make-up of the construction.

In English, the term traditionally designated as the subject can be the A argument of a transitive verb or the S argument of an intransitive verb, and the presence of a term representing the P argument of a transitive verb has no incidence on the other terms of the construction. Such languages cannot have transitive constructions with an unexpressed P formally distinct from intransitive constructions. In other words, there is no possibility to distinguish agents encoded as the A term of a transitive construction with a missing patient form agents encoded as the S term of an intransitive construction, which in the terminology proposed here means that A-lability can only be of the weak type.

Symmetrically, in a language with radical P-alignment, a transitive clause looks like an intransitive clause to which an agent NP would have been added without triggering any readjustment. Such languages cannot have transitive constructions with an unexpressed A formally distinct from intransitive constructions. In other words, there is no possibility to distinguish patients encoded as the P term of a transitive construction with a missing agent form patients encoded as the S term of an intransitive construction, which in the terminology proposed here means that P-lability can only be of the weak type.

For example, in Akhvakh, *biχuruʟa* 'remain' and *beɫuruʟa* 'leave' are distinct verbs, but in constructional terms, sentences (15a) and (15b) can be described as instantiating the same construction, in which the same morphosyntactic slot of the absolute argument obligatorily cross-referenced on the verb is occupied by the S argument of 'remain' in (15a) and the P argument of 'leave' in (15b), whereas the presence or absence of an ergative NP depends on the argument structure of the verb and has no impact on the make-up of the other terms of the construction.

(15) Northern Akhvakh

     a. *q'ẽʟe isto-g-e ʟ'a b-iχ̃w-ē godi.*
           bag table-CFG$_1$-LOC on.LOC N.SG-remain-CVB.N.SG COP.N.SG
           'The bag remained on the table.'

     b. *wašo-de q'ẽʟe isto-g-e ʟ'a b-eɫ̄-ē godi.*
           boy-ERG bag table-CFG$_1$-LOC on.LOC N.SG-leave-CVB.N.SG COP.N.SG
           'The boy left the bag on the table.'
           (Magomedova and Abdulaeva 2007 and author's field notes)

Moreover, as illustrated by Example (15c), even in the presence of a transitive verb, the ergative NP is not necessarily present, and its absence does not necessarily trigger an anaphoric reading involving a specific agent whose identity should be retrieved from the context. An anaphoric reading of the missing ergative argument is possible, but an arbitrary reading is possible too, depending

exclusively on pragmatic factors.[9] The result is that a construction of the transitive verb that nothing distinguishes from a standard intransitive predication may constitute the translational equivalent of the agentless passive of English.

(15) c. *q'ĕʟe isto-g-e   ʟ'a   b-eɫ̄-ē   godi.*
       bag   table-CFG_1-LOC on.LOC N.SG-leave-CVB.N.SG COP.N.SG
       1. 'I/we/you/he/she/they left the bag on the table.'
       2. 'The bag was left on the table.'
       (author's field notes)

Note that Akhvakh has no passive morphology and no syntactic constraints on constituent order, and consequently the functional equivalent of English 'The bag was left on the table by the boy' in terms of information structure would be a sentence differing from (15b) in constituent order and intonation only (*q'ĕʟe WAŠODE beɫē godi istoge ʟ'a*).

7 P-lability in Akhvakh

In languages with radical A-alignment like English, if the NP in P role can be omitted without necessarily triggering an anaphoric reading, i.e., if the absence of an NP representing the P argument does not necessarily imply identifying P with some discursively salient entity, the distinction between intransitive predications and transitive predications with a null-P becomes problematic.

Similarly, in languages with radical P-alignment, the existence of a distinction between intransitive predications and transitive predications with a null-A is ensured only if there are transitive verbs with which, either an NP in A role is obligatorily present, or the absence of an NP in A role, if not licensed by a de-transitivizing derivation, obligatorily triggers an anaphoric reading.

In languages with radical P-alignment, P-lability can only be of the weak type, and if P-alignment combines with the lack of A-demoting or removing derivation and the absence of restrictions on the use of null-A's with an arbitrary reading, P-lability of the passive type (i.e., argument structure preserving P-lability) is trivial. But P-lability of the anticausative type (i.e., argument structure modifying P-lability) may also exist as a lexical property of individual verbs,

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9 Akhvakh is not a typical pro-drop language since in narrative texts, pronouns are regularly used to refer to already introduced participants. However, the omission of arguments retrievable from the context, irrespective of their syntactic function, is usual in conversation, and there is no restriction to the possibility of argument omission with an arbitrary reading.

1 which in the absence of an noun phrase morphologically identifiable as the A
2 term of a transitive predication lend themselves, depending on the context, to
3 anticausative as well as passive readings.

4   For example, in Akhvakh, with a verb such as *aχuruɫa* 'open', there is no for-
5 mal clue to the distinction between a passive-like reading and various shades of
6 agent back-grounding expressed via the use of middle forms in languages like
7 French or Russian, as illustrated by Example (16b). The impossibility (or rather
8 unnaturalness) of the understood agent and passive-like readings in (16c) does
9 not follow from morphosyntax, but from semantic restrictions on the possible
10 ways of conceiving an opening event, depending on the nature of the entity pre-
11 sented as undergoing this process.

12

13 (16) Northern Akhvakh
14   a. *wašo-de   ĩc̄'o   aχ-ē   godi.*
15   boy-ERG   door open-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG
16   'The boy opened the door.'
17   b. *ĩc̄'o   aχ-ē   godi.*
18   door open-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG
19   1. 'I/we/you/he/she/they opened the door.'
20   2. 'The door was opened.'[10]
21   3. 'The door opened.'[11]
22   c. *c̄ĩc̄i   aχ-ē   godi.*
23   flower   open-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG
24   'The flower opened.'
25   (Magomedova and Abdulaeva 2007 and author's field notes)

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8 P-lability tests in languages of the type illustrated by Akhvakh

It follows from the data just presented that, in Akhvakh, all transitive verbs are in
some sense P-labile, if one does not exclude argument structure preserving weak
lability from the very notion of lability. But at the same time, it may be argued that

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10 In the same way as in the case of Example (2) above, the functional equivalent of English
'The door was opened by the boy' in terms of information structure would be a sentence differing
from (3a) in constituent order and intonation only (*ĩc̄'o WAŠODE aχē godi*).
11 This possible interpretation of *ĩc̄'o aχē godi* could be made explicit ('The door opened by
itself') by simply adding to *ĩc̄'o* 'door' the intensive pronoun *žibeda* 'itself'.

932 —— Denis Creissels   **DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

no Akhvakh verb can really be P-labile, if the notion of lability is restricted to   1
what has been defined here as strong lability.   2

In some sense, this is a purely terminological question. What is however not   3
a purely terminological matter is that, whatever the terms used to describe this   4
situation, one must recognize that, semantically, not all Akhvakh verbs are P-   5
labile to the same degree: *aχuruʟa* 'open', which in the absence of an ergative NP   6
allows for an anticausative reading, is clearly more labile than *beƚuruʟa* 'leave',   7
which allows only for an unspecified agent reading.   8

Several authors have tried to capture this distinction by means of syntactic   9
tests delimiting a subclass of transitive verbs lending themselves to anticausative   10
lability in languages similar in the relevant respects to Akhvakh, but the possibil-   11
ity of finding such tests is highly dubious, since in such languages, P-lability can   12
only be of the weak type, and argument structure preserving weak lability is   13
pervasive.   14

In the literature on other Andic languages that share the relevant typological   15
features with Akhvakh, anticausative lability has been discussed by Kibrik (1996)   16
for Godoberi and Ljutikova (2001) for Bagvalal. Both authors put forward tests   17
aiming at delimiting a class of verbs characterized by this type of lability, but the   18
tests in question do not really make apparent syntactic distinctions between the   19
transitive verbs that can be used intransitively with an anticausative meaning   20
and the other transitive verbs.   21

The two tests proposed by Kibrik (1996) and Ljutikova (2001) rely on varia-   22
tions in the use of imperative forms and in the interpretation of the reflexive-   23
intensive pronoun. It is striking that both tests involve mechanisms that have   24
been repeatedly claimed to have a semantic rather than syntactic conditioning,   25
i.e., to be directly sensitive to the semantic feature of agentivity rather than to   26
syntactic functions. In fact, a closer look at Kibrik's discussion of P-lability in   27
Godoberi and Ljutikova's discussion of P-lability in Bagvalal shows that the only   28
conclusion that can be drawn from the tests they use is that, with some transitive   29
verbs, the involvement of the patient in the process is such that, in the absence of   30
an expressed agent, the patient can be viewed as exerting some degree of control   31
on the process, and consequently can show an agent-like behavior in mechan-   32
isms sensitive to the semantic feature of agentivity. This is an interesting observa-   33
tion, which however rather supports the view expressed here, according to which   34
the distinction between "more labile" and "less labile" transitive verbs in such   35
languages is of a rather semantic than syntactic nature, all transitive verbs being   36
syntactically speaking weakly labile.   37

The test of the involuntary agent construction proposed by Haspelmath (1991:   38
17–19) for Lezgi and transposable to Akhvakh is more interesting, since it unques-   39
tionably reveals differences in the codification of the transitivity properties of   40

verbs. In the involuntary agent construction, the NP representing an involuntary agent is marked by a spatial case (in Akhvakh, the ablative of the 1st series of spatial cases, primarily used to encode the most natural spatial configuration with respect to a given orienter). The point is that this construction is not possible with all verbs that can combine with ergative NPs representing canonical agents, and selects the non-derived form of verbs that must undergo causative deriva-tion before combining with ergative NPs representing canonical agents. In other words, this test can be viewed as a particular manifestation of the causativization parameter that will be proposed in Section 9 as the main clue to the distinction between "more labile" and "less labile" transitive verbs in languages of the type illustrated by Akhvakh.

An anonymous reviewer proposes the following test to detect the presence of a non-overt "agent subject": in a clause consisting of a nominative NP and a verb, the addition of a possessive reflexive must only be possible if the verb is bivalent. This is true, but this test only confirms the existence of argument-structure *pre-serving* P-lability. It could be used to detect a distinction between two subclasses of transitive verbs if anticausative lability and passive lability were mutually ex-clusive, but this is clearly not the case in languages showing a combination of typological features that makes passive lability trivial.[12]

To conclude this section, I would like to emphasize that, even when they make interesting suggestions, previous analyses of P-lability in Daghestanian languages are flawed by the lack of recognition of the fact that P-lability in languages like Akhvakh can only be of the weak type, and by the lack of explicit-ness on the necessity of distinguishing between argument structure preserving (passive) and argument structure modifying (anticausative) P-lability, and conse-quently of operating with definitions more precise than the current definition of P-lability. In languages of the type illustrated by Akhvakh, argument structure *preserving* P-lability is trivial in the sense that with all verbs compatible with an ergative NP representing an agent, the agent NP can be omitted with an unspeci-fied agent reading, and argument structure *modifying* P-lability cannot be of a different syntactic type. Consequently, claims that the transitive verbs of such languages are all P-labile, or that the very notion of P-lability is not relevant to the analysis of such languages, are equally justified, and equally unsatisfactory.

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12 The same reviewer asks whether tests based on the coreference properties of converbs could be considered. In Akhvakh at least, converbs do not have constraints on argument sharing mak-ing it possible to use this kind of test. And here again, tests based on coreference constraints can be used to justify positing unexpressed arguments, but I fail to see how they could be used as tests for anticausative lability in languages in which passive lability is pervasive.

9 The causativization parameter

The observation of causativization supports the idea that, although in languages like Akhvakh, from a strictly syntactic point of view, all transitive verbs are weakly P-labile, the fact that some of them only lend themselves to argument structure modifying P-lability has important consequences for the overall organization of the language.

It follows from the preceding discussion that none of the previous analyses of P-lability in languages of the type represented by Akhvakh seems to me fully satisfactory. However, the following discussion will make it clear that I basically agree with authors like Haspelmath, Kibrik, Ljutikova and Letuchiy on the conclusion that Daghestanian languages have more or less restricted (sometimes very restricted) subclasses of transitive verbs whose lability properties go beyond the passive lability which is in such languages trivial, and that my point is about the precise definitions and criteria on which this view can be grounded.[13]

In Akhvakh and other languages that share the relevant typological features, the only obvious distinction is between two classes of verbs, those that combine with an ergative NP in their non-derived form, and those with which the presence of an ergative NP representing an agent must be licensed by causative derivation.[14] As can be expected, with causative verbs, the passive-like reading is the only possible interpretation of the absence of the agent NP, since causative verbs explicitly encode in their morphology the presence of an agent in argument structure, and the non-derived form of such verbs specifically encodes the same event viewed as a spontaneous change-of-state. By contrast, verbs that

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13 In particular, my insistence on the inexistence of formal criteria identifying *constructions* as transitive or intransitive does not mean that I follow the views expressed by Mel'čuk (1988) about Lezgi, according to which all predications in this language are intransitive, and ergative NPs commonly analyzed as representing agents of transitive verbs are just adjuncts in an intransitive predication. In my view, Mel'čuk's theory about transitivity in Lezgi is just a modern version of the old story about the passive nature of transitive predication in ergative languages. My own position is that Akhvakh and other Nakh-Daghestanian languages do have subclasses of verbs differing in their transitivity properties, which however cannot be delimited properly on the basis of definitions that presuppose a straightforward *transitive* vs. *intransitive* distinction at construction level, do not take into account the distinction between argument structure preserving and argument structure modifying P-lability, and do not explicitly acknowledge the fact that such languages can only have weak P-lability.

14 Akhvakh also has a handful of verbs, including *mūnuʟa* 'go' and *beq'uruʟa* 'come', which can be used in non-derived form as transitive verbs equivalent to English 'take away' and 'bring' respectively, but also have transitive uses that require the use of a causative form. Establishing their exact status with respect to transitivity would deserve special investigation.

combine with agent NPs in their non-derived form do not have this limitation, and in the absence of a strictly intransitive verb describing the same process without any hint at the causality chain, may lend themselves to a spontaneous event interpretation.

This does not mean that the languages of the type illustrated here by Akhvakh are uniform with respect to transitivity. There are in particular important variations with respect to the transitivization typology proposed by Nichols et al. (2004), i.e., in the relative extension of the two classes of verbal lexemes (those that combine with agent NPs in their non-derived form, and those with which agent NPs must be licensed by causative derivation). For example, like Akhvakh, Avar is a language with radical P-alignment, unrestricted use of null agents with an arbitrary reading, and no agent demoting or agent removing derivation, but it is striking that many Akhvakh verbs that must undergo causative derivation before combining with agent NPs correspond to Avar verbs that combine with agent NPs in non-derived form. For example, in Avar, as illustrated by Example (17), *ħulize* 'lose hair or feathers' combined with an agent NP means 'pluck (poultry)', whereas in Akhvakh, as illustrated by Example (18), *ħulōruʟa* 'pluck (poultry)' is a causative verb derived from the strictly intransitive verb *ħuluruʟa* 'lose hair or feathers'. Note that, although this is not obvious from the surface forms, the morphophonological analysis shows that the stem of *ħulōruʟa* is |ħul-a(j)-|, derived from the stem of *ħuluruʟa* |ħul-| by the addition of the causative suffix |-a(j)-|. In many verb forms, the causative suffix merges with the first vowel of the inflectional suffix, but it occurs as a separate segment in at least some forms, for example the imperative, as in *q̄'am-a* 'eat!' vs. *q̄'am-aj-a* 'feed him/her/it/them!'.[15]

(17) Avar

    a. *bet'er   ħul-ana   di-r.*
       head   lose_hair/feathers-PF   1SG-GEN
       'I got bald.' (lit. 'In my personal sphere, the head lost its hair.')

    b. *qaz   ħul-ana.*
       goose   lose_hair/feathers-PF
       1. 'The goose lost its feathers.'
       2. 'The goose was plucked.'
       3. 'I/we/you/he/she/they plucked the goose.'

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15 See (Creissels 2009) for a detailed account of the relevant aspects of Akhvakh morphophonology.

936 —— Denis Creissels　　　　　　　　　　　　**DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

c. *di-c̄a　　qaz　　ħul-ana.*
1SG.ERG　　goose　　lose_hair/feathers-PF
'I plucked the goose.'
(Magomedova 2006; Saidov 1967; Mallaeva 2007)

(18) Northern Akhvakh
a. *keto　　ħul-ē　　　　　　　　　　godi.*
cat　　lose_hair/feathers-CVB.N.SG　　COP.N.SG
'The cat has lost its hair.'
b. *q̄azi　　ħul-ē　　　　　　　　　　godi.*
goose　　lose_hair/feathers-CVB.N.SG　　COP.N.SG
'The goose has lost its feathers.'
c. *q̄azi　　ħul-aj-ē　　　　　　　　　　godi.*
goose　　lose_hair/feathers-CAUS-CVB.N.SG　　COP.N.SG
1. 'The goose has been plucked.'
2. 'I/we/you/he/she/they plucked the goose.'
d. *ak̓a-ɬ-e　　　q̄azi　　ħul-aj-ē　　　　　　　　　　godi*
woman-F.SG-ERG　　goose　　lose_hair/feathers-CAUS-CVB.N.SG　　COP.N.SG
'The woman has plucked the goose.'
(Magomedova and Abdulaeva 2007 and author's field notes)

Similarly, as can be seen from the comparison of Example (19) and (20), a single Avar verb *bekize* corresponds to Akhvakh *biq'uruʟa* (stem |-iq'ʷ-|) 'break (intr.)' and *biq'ōruʟa* (stem |-iq'ʷ-a(j)-|) 'break (tr.)'.

(19) Avar
a. *stakan　　bek-ana.*
glass　　break-PF
1. 'The glass broke.'
2. 'The glass has been broken.'
3. 'I/we/you/he/she/they broke the glass.'
b. *di-c̄a　　stakan　　bek-ana.*
1SG-ERG　　glass　　break-PF
'I broke the glass.'
c. *horo-c̄a　　ʁʷet' bek-ana.*
wind-ERG　　tree　　break-PF
'The wind broke the tree.'
(Magomedova 2006; Saidov 1967; Mallaeva 2007)

(20) Northern Akhvakh

     a. *ĩgo-ƚi*   *žari*   *b-iq'ʷ-ē*   *godi.*

       window-GEN   pane   N.SG-break-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG

       'The window pane broke.', NOT *'Someone broke the window pane.'

     b. *ĩgo-ƚi*   *žari*   *b-iq'ʷ-aj-ē*   *godi.*

       window-GEN   pane   N.SG-break-CAUS-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG

       1. 'The window pane has been broken.'

       2. 'I/we/you/he/she/they have broken the window pane.'[16]

     c. *mik'e-lo-de*   *ĩgo-ƚi*   *žari* *b-iq'ʷ-aj-ē*   *godi.*

       child-HPL-ERG   window-GEN   pane N.SG-break-CAUS-CVB.N.SG   COP.N.SG

       'The children have broken the window pane.'

       (Magomedova and Abdulaeva 2007 and author's field notes)

In languages of the type illustrated by Akhvakh, argument structure preserving P-lability is trivial, and argument-structure modifying P-lability can only manifest itself in intransitive constructions that are in principle ambiguous between a passive and an anticausative reading. This potential ambiguity is however limited by the existence of a greater or lesser number of verbs with which the presence of an agent in argument structure is obligatorily encoded by causative derivation.

     Nichols et al. (2004) propose to characterize languages as more or less transitivizing or de-transitivizing. Typical transitivizing languages tend to encode events controlled by agents by means of verbs derived from verbs encoding events that do not involve agents, whereas de-transitivizing languages tend to encode events that do not involve agents by means of verbs derived from verbs encoding events controlled by agents. The diagnostic list of 18 pairs of notions proposed by Nichols et al. (2004) can be used in order to make apparent this contrast in the transitivity systems of languages that share with Akhvakh the typological features impeding the use of the current definition of P-lability. Let us first examine the Nichols list in Akhvakh, given in (21).

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16 A superficial look at this example could suggest an interpretation according to which the same suffix *-aj-* would cumulate the roles of causative and passive markers. However, the mere fact that *biq'uruƚa* 'break' is a strictly intransitive verb rules out this analysis. The addition of *-aj-* transitivizes an otherwise strictly intransitive verb, and the passive reading is made possible by the combination of transitivizing morphology and lack of overtly expressed agent.

938 —— Denis Creissels   **DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

(21) The Nichols list in Akhvakh[17]

a.	'laugh'	*badaʟuruʟa*	|-adaʟ-|		
	'make laugh, amuse'	*badaʟōruʟa*	|-adaʟ-a(j)-|		
b.	'die'	*biʟ'uruʟa*	|-iʟ'-|		
	'kill'	*biʟ'ōruʟa*	|-iʟ'-a(j)-|		
c.	'sit'	*duk'uruʟa*	|-duk'-|		
	'make sit, seat'	*duk'ōruʟa*	|-duk'-a(j)-|		
d.	'eat'	*q̄'ōnuʟa* (tr.)	|q̄'a(m)-|	*ũkunuʟa* (intr.)	|ũk-|
	'feed, give food'	*q̄'amōnuʟa*	|q̄'am-a(j)-|	*ũkōnuʟa*	|ũk-a(j)-|
e.	'learn'	*žōruʟa*	|-ža(b)-|	*rehẽ̄ʟuruʟa*	|rehẽ̄ʟ-|
	'teach'	*maʟ̄unuʟa*	|-maʟ̄-|	*rehenōruʟa*	|rehena(j)-|
f.	'see'	*hariguruʟa*	|harigʷ-|		
	'show'	*harigōruʟa*	|harigʷ-aj-|		
g.	'be/become angry'	*s̄imalaχuruʟa*	|s̄imalaχ-|		
	'anger, make angry'	*s̄imalaχōruʟa*	|s̄imalaχ-a(j)-|		
h.	'fear, be afraid'	*ʟūruʟa*	|ʟi(b)-|		
	'frighten, scare'	*ʟibōruʟa*	|ʟib-a(j)-|		
i.	'hide, go into hiding'	*šinuruʟa*	|šin-|		
	'hide, put into hiding'	*šinōruʟa*	|šin-a(j)-|		
j.	'(come to) boil'	*ãχunuʟa*	|ãχ-|		
	'(bring to) boil'	*ãχōnuʟa*	|ãχ-a(j)-|		
k.	'burn, catch fire'	*č'ōruʟa*	|č'a(j)-|		
	'burn, set fire'	*č'ajōruʟa*	|č'aj-a(j)-|		
l.	'break (intr.)'	*biq'uruʟa*	|-iq'ʷ-|		
	'break (tr.)'	*biq'ōruʟa*	|-iq'ʷ-a(j)-|		
m.	'open (intr.)'	*aχuruʟa*	|aχ-|		
	'open (tr.)'	*aχuruʟa*	|aχ-|		
n.	'dry'	*buq̄'uruʟa*	|-uq̄'-|		
	'make dry'	*buq̄'ōruʟa*	|-uq̄'-a(j)-|		
o.	'be/become straight'	*bit'uruʟa*	|-it'-|		
	'straighten, make straight'	*bit'ōruʟa*	|-it'-a(j)-|		
p.	'hang (intr.)'	*gimunuʟa*	|gim-|		
	'hang (tr.)'	*gimōnuʟa*	|gim-a(j)-|		

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17 In this list, verbs are given both in their quotation form (the infinitive) and with the underlying representation of their stem, because in the infinitive, due to morphophonological processes, the addition of the causative suffix |-a(j)-| surfaces as an alternation between u and ō. For a detailed justification of this analysis, see (Creissels 2009).

1	q.	'turn over (intr.)'	s̄oruruʟa	|s̄or-|
2		'turn over (tr.)'	s̄orōruʟa	|s̄or-a(j)-|
3	r.	'fall'	buχuruʟa	|-ux̄-|
4		'drop, let fall'	buχē mūnuʟa	lit. 'let go having fallen'
5				(caus. *buχōruʟa* exists with the meaning 'make
6				fall')

It follows from this list that, according to the typology proposed by Nichols et al. (2004), Akhvakh is an extremely transitivizing language, since correspondences of the type they call "augmented" are found in 14 cases out of 18.

The difference with Avar is striking: as can be seen in (22), the same list in Avar includes only 10 correspondences of the "augmented type" (involving the causative suffix *-izab-* ~ *-inab-*), and it includes 6 correspondences of the type labeled "ambitransitive" by Nichols et al. (2004), whereas there is only one correspondence of this type in the Akhvakh list.

(22) The Nichols list in Avar

a.	'laugh'	*beɬize*	
	'make laugh, amuse'	*beɬizabize*	(caus. < *beɬize*)
b.	'die'	*χʷeze*	
	'kill'	*č'ʷaze*	
c.	'sit'	*k'usize*	
	'make sit, seat'	*k'usizabize*	(caus. < *k'usize*)
d.	'eat'	*kʷanaze*	
	'feed, give food'	*kʷanazabize*	(caus. < *kʷanaze*)
e.	'know'	*ɬaze*	
	'teach'	*maɬ̄ize*	
f.	'see'	*bixize*	
	'show'	*bixizabize*	(caus. < *bixize*)
g.	'be/become angry'	*c̄indaχine*	
	'anger, make angry'	*c̄indaχinabize*	(caus. < *c̄indaχine*)
h.	'fear, be afraid'	*ħinq'ize*	
	'frighten, scare'	*ħinq'izabize*	(caus. < *ħinq'ize*)
i.	'hide, go into hiding'	*baχčize*	
	'hide, put into hiding'	*baχčize*	
j.	'(come to) boil'	*halize*	
	'(bring to) boil'	*halizabize*	(caus. < *halize*)
k.	'burn, catch fire'	*buħize*	
	'burn, set fire'	*buħize*	

940 —— Denis Creissels

DE GRUYTER MOUTON

l.	'break (intr.)'	*bekize*	1
	'break (tr.)'	*bekize*	2
m.	'open (intr.)'	*rič'ize*	3
	'open (tr.)'	*rič'ize*	4
n.	'dry'	*baq'ʷaze*	5
	'make dry'	*baq'ʷazabize* (caus. < *baq'ʷaze*)	6
o.	'be/become straight'	*bit'ize*	7
	'straighten, make straight'	*bit'izabize* (caus. < *bit'ize*)	8
p.	'hang (intr.)'	*baze*	9
	'hang (tr.)'	*baze*	10
q.	'turn over (intr.)'	*begize*	11
	'turn over (tr.)'	*begize*	12
r.	'fall'	*bortize*	13
	'drop, let fall'	*bortizabize* (caus. < *bortize*)	14
			15

Historically, the Avar causative suffix *-izab-* ~ *-inab-* consists of two formatives whose etymology is still quite transparent: *-iz-* ~ *-in-*, reflex of the infinitive suffix *-ize* ~ *-ine*, and *-ab-*, reflex of the verb stem *hab-* 'make'. Consequently, historically, the contrast observed between Akhvakh and Avar with respect to the causativization parameter may be related to the fact that the causative suffix of Avar is probably a relatively "young" suffix (since its etymology is still transparent), whereas the causative suffix of Akhvakh is probably an "old" suffix, as suggested by the existence of morphophonological processes making it fuse with the suffix it precedes.

There is also a difference between Akhvakh and Avar which is not apparent in the lists given above, but constitutes an important contrast between the transitivity systems of these two languages clearly related to the question of P-lability, and would deserve further investigation: the possibility of using both the non-derived form of a verb and the causative form of the same verb with an overtly expressed agent, depending on the nature of the agent's involvement in the event, is quite exceptional in Akhvakh, but constitutes a very common phenomenon in Avar. The same typological feature is found for example in Bambara, a language in which, as illustrated by Example (23), the use of the causative prefix *lá-* correlates with distinctions in the precise type of causation involved (indirect causation, assistive causation, etc.).

(23) Bambara
    a. *Dímɔgɔ sìgi-ra*   *à*   *bólo*   *lá.*
        fly.DEF settle-PF.POS.INTR   3SG   arm.DEF   POSTP
        'The fly settled on his arm.'

    b. *Mùso*   *yé*   *bárama*   *sìgi*   *tá*   *kàn.*
        woman.DEF   PF.POS.TR   cooking_pot.DEF   settle   fire.DEF POSTP
        'The woman put the cooking-pot on the fire.'

    c. *Cɛ̀*   *yé*   *dén*   *lá-sigi*   *sò*   *kàn.*
        man.DEF   PF.POS.TR   child.DEF   CAUS-settle   horse.DEF   POSTP
        'The man made the child sit on the horse.'

        (Creissels 2007)

10 Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that the analysis of lability in a given language crucially depends on the alignment properties of core syntactic terms in the language in question, a fact largely neglected so far in general accounts of lability. More precisely, using the notions I have defined in this paper, languages with radical A-alignment cannot have strong A-lability, and languages with radical P-alignment cannot have strong P-lability.

Concentrating on the analysis of P-lability in languages with radical P-alignment, I have shown that definitions of P-lability presupposing that intransitive predications can be unambiguously distinguished from transitive predications with an unexpressed agent cannot be applied to languages of the type illustrated by Akhvakh, and definitions that do not take into account the distinction between argument structure preserving and argument structure modifying P-lability can only lead to confusions. In such languages, with verbs that have transitive uses, the mere omission of the agent NP, without any other readjustment, is always possible with a passive-like reading. However, the question whether this is really an instance of P-lability or not cannot be decided without first introducing more precise definitions, and the current definition of P-lability does not permit capturing the link between this phenomenon and the phenomena dealt with in other languages in terms of P-lability.

The use of a relatively loose definition of P-lability is not problematic for languages with A-alignment, or for languages with P-alignment in which predicative constructions can always be formally identified as transitive of intransitive, but faces serious difficulties in languages with P-alignment that lack this property. What is relevant for such languages is the variety of possible readings of potentially transitive verbs in the absence of an agent NP, mainly in connection with the extension of causative marking, i.e., the division of verbs into those with which the presence of an agent NP must be licensed by causative derivation, and those whose non-derived form can combine with an agent NP.

DE GRUYTER MOUTON

Synchronically, the extent of argument structure modifying P-lability in languages with radical P-alignment that do not have valency reducing derivations is in inverse proportion to the productivity of causative derivation. I have compared two languages belonging to the Avar-Andic branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian family: Akhvakh (a language with an old causative suffix and a relatively high proportion of strictly intransitive verbs encoding changes of state) and Avar (which has a young causative suffix and many verbs encoding changes of state that can also combine with an NP representing an agent in their non-derived form). This comparison suggests that, in languages in which argument structure preserving P-lability is trivial, the scarcity of verbs showing argument structure modifying P-lability may result from the evolution of a causative marker that, at a late stage of its evolution, tends to systematically encode the introduction of an agent in the argument structure of verbs representing events that can be conceptualized as spontaneous changes of state.

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Appendix. Abbreviations

ACC   accusative
ANTICAUS   anticausative
CFG   spatial configuration marker
CL   noun class
COP   copula
CVB   converb
DEF   definite
ERG   ergative
FUT   future
INTR   intransitive
LOC   locative
M   masculine
MID   middle

944 —— Denis Creissels   **DE GRUYTER** MOUTON

N	neuter
PASS	passive
PF	perfective (inflectional)
PFV	perfective (derivational)
PL	plural
POS	positive
POST	postposition
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
SG	singular
TR	transitive