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# Accusative Case Assignment to the Verbal Internal Argument in the Albanian Language and the Corresponding Case Assigning Model

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**Abstract**--The following paper aims at shedding some light on the Albanian language case system with a special focus on the assignment of the accusative case. As a member of the vast Indo-European family Albanian language is characterized by an inflected case system and as so a free word order. Traditionally, we are taught and we still teach to the coming generations that accusative case is assigned mostly by the verb to that sentence noun phrase syntactically representing the direct object and semantically introducing the Theme or the Patient. Moreover in Albanian accusative is also assigned by another morphological category bearing the distinctive features [+noun;+verb], namely the proposition. Furthermore, as a researcher in the field of generative syntax, I have a stake in analyzing certain exceptional cases of accusative case assignment to the subject NP of the Albanian subjunctive clause. In conclusion, I was tempted to adopt Chomsky's reconciling proposal in accusative case assignment under the specifier-head structural and schematic relation.

**Keywords**--accusative, Agr<sub>o</sub>P, exceptional case, government, specifier, subjunctive clause.

## Introduction

At present, the case category of the Albanian language is made up of five morphologically distinctive cases fulfilling various syntactic functions within the sentence structure. Furthermore, when it comes to case forms Albanian nouns display two differentiated case forms depending on definiteness/indefiniteness and number paradigm.

Example:

**Djali / boy-the (case inflected)**

	<b>Indefinite/sing indefinite/plural</b>	<b>Definite/sing</b>	<b>indefinite/plural</b>
<b>Nom.</b>	<i>nje djale</i> (a boy) (boys-the)	djali (boy-the)	<i>disa djem</i> (some boys)djem <b>te</b>
<b>Gen.</b>	i e te se <i>nje djali</i> i, e, te, se djem <b>ve</b>	i, e, te, se djali <b>t</b>	i, e, te, se <i>disa djem</i> <b>ve</b>
<b>Dat.</b>	<i>nje djali</i> djem <b>ve</b>	djali <b>t</b>	<i>disa djem</i> <b>ve</b>
<b>Acc.</b>	<i>nje djale</i> djem <b>te</b>	djali <b>n</b>	<i>disa djem</i>
<b>Abl.</b>	prej <i>nje djali</i> djem <b>ve</b>	prej djali <b>t</b>	prej <i>disa djem</i> <b>ve</b>

The bolted endings above are seen by the generative grammarians as surface structure reflexes introduced by rules of various kinds of deep structure and surface syntactic relations (Fillmore, 1969). Traditionally the various uses of the case have been examined in more semantic terms referring to the semantic properties of the Agent (doer of the action), Theme, Recipient, etc. Recently, attention has veered away into the analysis of the case system of given languages, under the assumption suggested by the word system (Fillmore, 1969). There have also been attempts to relate case forms to different syntactic functions as:

Nominative → Subject;

Accusative → Direct Object;

Ablative → Indirect prepositional object.

Dative → Indirect Object;

Genitive → Noun Modifier;

In this context, Diver (1964), as referred by (Fillmore, 1969), regarding the verb as the organizing center of the sentence, stated that: “A verb can have one, two or three nouns associated with it, corresponding generally to the intransitive, normal transitive and transitive indirect object sentence types respectively” (double object constructions) the nouns are in the nominative (being the case of the agent), accusative (the case of patient) and dative capable of expressing notions compatible with the meaning of the remainder of the sentence” In a two-noun sentence, in other words, the accusative is not limited to the meaning of the patient, it can express any number of other meanings as well (Fillmore, 1969).

Lyons (1996), as referred by Fillmore (1969), states that a case in other languages (in which the category is to be found) is not present in deep structure, but is merely the inflectional realization of particular syntactic relations. These relations may in fact be the ones that are defined only in surface structure. There are examples of elaborate case languages combining the use of prepositions with the inflected case forms (Albanian ablative case) and that some prepositions have independent semantic content. Due to their distinctive semantic meaning, Albanian language prepositions are subdivided as follows:

- Nominative case marking prepositions: nga, te, tek (nga shkolla – from school)

- Accusative case marking prepositions: ne, mbi, permbi, neper, per etc (ne shkollën time – in school-the-Acc my / in my school)
- Ablative case marking prepositions: prej, pertej, perballe (perballe shkollës – in front of school-the-Abl / in front of the school)

### **The assignment of accusative case in by the verbal and prepositional grammatical units**

According to the above brief introduction, we state that the lexical categories of transitive verb and preposition are likely to assign accusative cases in the corresponding Albanian sentences or clauses. Both assign the accusative case to their internal argument (NP) characterized by the following distributive syntactic functions:

#### 1.a Gruaja puthi djalin.

Woman-the-nom kissed boy-the-acc  
The woman (she) kissed the boy (him)

The internal argument of the VP, the NP “djalin/boy-the acc”, bearing the syntactic function of the direct object, is assigned accusative case by the transitive verb “puthi/ kissed).

#### 1.b Nena fliste *per* djalin

Mother-the-nom worried talked always about boy-the-acc.  
The worried mother always talked about the boy.

The NP “djalin/ boy-the-acc”, bearing the syntactic function of the indirect prepositional object, is assigned accusative case by the preposition “per/ about”

#### 1.c Per *ate* te sulmonte Billin do te ishte e papranueshme.

For him- acc to attack Bill-acc would be unacceptable  
For him to attack Bill would be unacceptable.

This represents exceptional accusative case assignment to the subject NP of the Albanian subjunctive clause.

Our attention, for the moment, will be focused on the first two examples (1.a; 1.b) and their following X-bar generation.

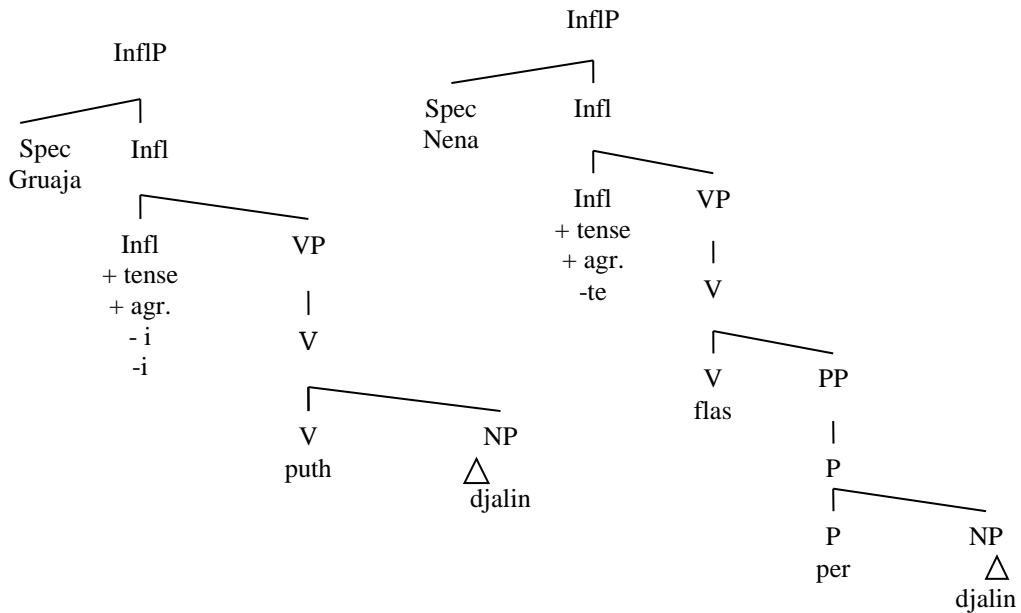


Figure 1. X-bar scheme

As it can be perceived by the above X-bar scheme the NP “djalín/ boy-the-acc” is base-generated within the VP maximal projection under the [NP-VP] sisterhood relations, denoting the internal argument of the transitive head  $V^0$ . In this context the direct object NP is denied government and as such case assignment by the inflectional head  $\text{Infl}^0$  of the functional projection InflP (more specifically by the tense and agreement features of the  $\text{Infl}^0$  comparatively with the nominative case assignment model) (Pollock, 1989; Abney, 1986; Adger, 2003).

The structural notion of “**government**” which focuses mostly on the assignment of Accusative case concerns the configuration where the case assigners govern the case-marking position. Such a notion dated back to Weerman (1996), as referred by Cook & Newson (2014), according to whom the government is a unique relation holding between two close elements, so that if X governs Y then Z cannot govern Y if Z is further from Y than X is.

Later Chomsky (2009), as referred by Cook & Newson (2014), defined government as follows (aiming to propose the notion of barriers):

### **Government (Barrier version)**

$\alpha$  governs  $\beta$

- if  $\alpha$  is a governor
- $\alpha$  m-commands  $\beta$
- there is no barrier between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$

Such a similar proposition was viewed also at [Rizzi \(1990\)](#), notion of Relativized Minimality as an attempt to unify locality restrictions on movement and government.

### **Relativize minimality condition**

A governs B if there is no head Z such as

- Z be a potential governor
- Z m-commands B

Based on these principled conditions the NP internal argument is denied accusative assignment from the  $\text{Infl}^0$  head of the  $\text{InflP}$  as the VP projection intervenes making the governing process unrealizable. So in the above 1.a example the NP “djalín/ boy-the-acc” is case marked by the lexical head  $V^0$  of the VP represented by a transitive verb which governs the NP “djalín/ boy-the-acc” fulfilling the government condition ([Rohrbacher, 1999](#); [Vikner, 1990](#); [Suryasa et al., 2019](#)).

Whereas, in the 1.b example is the prepositional head  $P^0$  of PP that governs the NP “djalín/ boy-the-acc” and assigns it accusative case. Consequently the maximal prepositional projection PP serves as a barrier for the NP “djalín/ boy-the-acc” to be governed by the verbal head  $V^0$  of the VP. In this context, [Buxheli \(2014\)](#), proposes the Adjacency Condition, a generative principle most encountered in inflectionless languages, distinguished for their fixed word order. On the other hand it encounters restricted application in the prepositional phrases (PP) of Albanian languages that do not allow interfering lexical categories among the head  $P^0$  of the PP and the accusative NP.

- 2.a Nena fliste gjithmon për djalin.  
 Mother-the-Nom talked always about boy-the-acc  
 The mother always talked about the boy.

The PP of Albanian marks an exceptional usage as in other clause constructions Albanian allows free order due to the fact that it is an inflectional language characterized by the morphological assignment of the case ([Yani et al., 2018](#); [Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021](#)).

### **The assignment of exceptional accusative case**

In Albanian there exist certain syntactic structures where accusative case is assigned to the NP subject of the subjunctive clause<sup>ii</sup>.

- 3.a Per **ate** të sulmonte Billin do të ishte e papranueshme.  
 For him- acc to attack Bill-acc would be unacceptable  
 For him to attack Bill would be unacceptable.

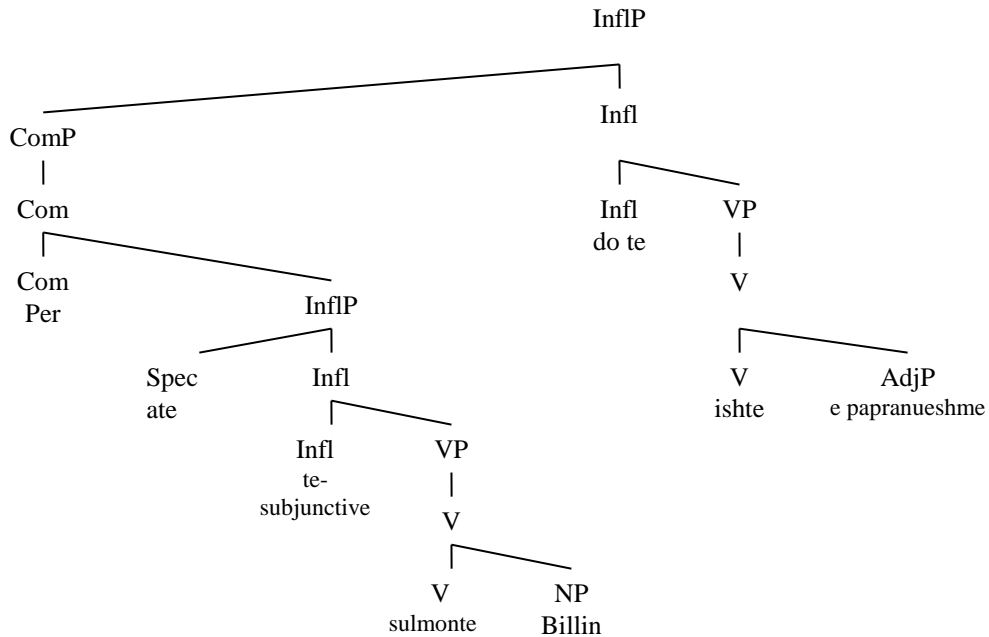


Figure 2. Syntactic structure

Considering the syntactic structure and constituent distribution in the above example Albanian and English clauses share striking similarities apart from the fact that the English dependent clause predicate involves a non-finite form of the verb “to attack” (to-infinitive) whereas the Albanian counterpart is represented by the verb “te sulmosh”, a finite form of the verb in the subjunctive mood. [Buxheli \(2014\)](#), argues that the Albanian subjunctive, even though it fall into the finite form of the verb subdivision, behaves as a non finite or semi-finite one, characterized by the binary verbal features [+Agr; -T]. Let us get back to the illustrative examples above and omit the initial linking word “per/ for” which heads the complementizer head of the ComP projection.

- 3.b \*Ate te sulmonte Billin do te ishte e papranueshme. (ungrammatical)  
 Him-acc to attack Bill-the-acc would be unacceptable.  
 \*Him to attack Bill would be unacceptable. (ungrammatical)

The absence of the linking prepositional word “per/ for” changes the Albanian and even the English sentence into an ungrammatical one.

Subsequently, we take it for granted that the “per/ for” presence yields grammaticality to the sentence. The structural analyses go further deeper in admitting that prepositions being characterized by the binary features [+verb;+noun] are also defined as case assigners. In the above example, they assign accusative case to the NP “ate/ him” complement of the ComP projection.

In addition, the pronominal NP “ate/ him” in accusative case assigned by the  $\text{Com}^0$  head of the  $\text{ComP}$  represent the subject argument of the subjunctive clause. Such an accusative case assigning model raised the most debated question: How come that the subject NP is assigned accusative and not nominative respectively? [Heageman \(2020\)](#), based on Rizzi’s “Relativized Minimality Condition” argues that  $\text{InflP}$  governing the pronominal NP “ate/ him”, which infinite clauses will behave as a barrier for the preposition to govern the NP “ate/ him” in non finite clauses will not.

In other words, the  $\text{Infl}^0$  head of the subjunctive clause, characterized by the verbal features [+Agr;-T] (similar to the negative agreement and tense features of the English to-infinitive in the same comparative example) is defined as a weak verbal head for governing and case marking the NP “ate/ him”. In order for the case features to be checked and licensed the insertion of the preposition “per/ for” is morphologically and syntactically legitimated. The subjunctive verb of the  $\text{InflP}$  projection due to the above analysis enables the subject NP “ate/ him” of the subjunctive clause to be governed and case marked by the prepositional linking word ([Moravcsik, 1978](#); [Avram et al., 2015](#)).

### **Assignment of the accusative case to the internal argument in the specifier node**

According to the Internal Subject Hypothesis and Chomsky’s revolutionary attempts to divide and define the specific functions of the lexical and inflectional layers it was proposed for verbal (internal and external) arguments to be first realized within the lexical layer to license their thematic features, whereas the morphological and syntactic feature be licensed within the inflectional layer. It is universally accepted that verbal arguments are base-generated in a lower position to check the  $\theta$ -features and afterward they move towards upper positions of functional projections ([Nakipoğlu, 2009](#); [Ylinärä & Frascarelli, 2021](#)).

In this context verbal arguments check and license their morpho-syntactic case features under a specifier position. The above reconciling proposal is regarded as a commendable attempt to make the structural existing disparities between the internal and external argument less discernible. In this context, [Abney \(1996\)](#), as referred by [McCloskey \(1997\)](#), according to the statement that the subject NP realizes its semantic properties within the maximal projection VP and to to the fact that this NP is featured as the external argument she proposes the generation of a functional projection  $vP$  (v-voice).

Subsequently, [Chomsky \(1993, 1995\)](#), argues that the lexical projection VP headed by a verbal category is further governed by a functional projection  $\text{InflP}$  headed by inflectional elements. Both these proposals were deemed successful in the division of the VP in two respective projections (a lower and higher projection in the X-bar scheme). The subject NP licenses its thematic features in the specifier position of the lower VP, a projection of the lexical layer.

Furthermore, [Chomsky \(1995\)](#), argued that the subject NP licenses its morpho-syntactic features in derived positions marking the launching of a recent theoretical proposition treating the split of  $\text{InflP}$  into two functional projections TP

and AgrP respectively. Chomsky stated that verbal arguments (internal and external) after being  $\theta$ -marked within the lexical VP projection, licenses the case features (Nom, Acc, Dat,) under the specifier node of the functional agreement projection.

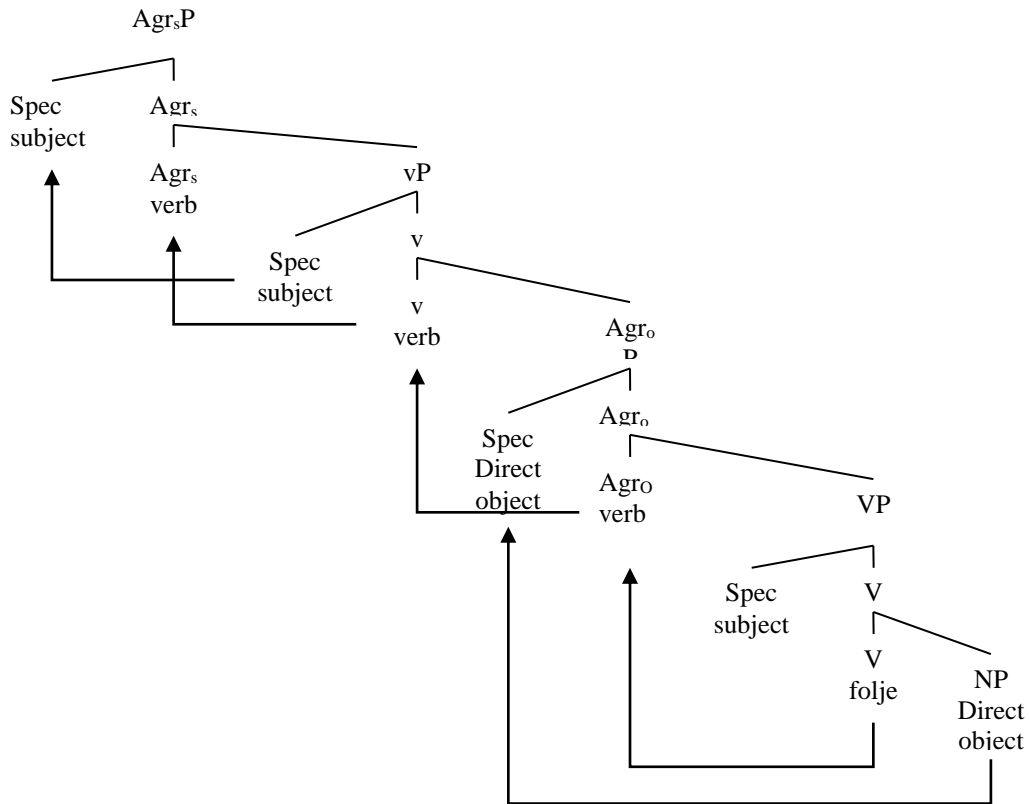


Figure 3. X-bar scheme the direct object NP

As it is also displayed in the above X-bar scheme the direct object NP which is base-generated in the internal argument position [NP; VP] to be assigned the thematic role by the head  $V^0$  moves toward the specifier position of the  $Agr_oP$  (object agreement) to check and license the morpho-syntactic features and consequently be assigned accusative case from the  $Agr_o^0$  head (a position occupied by the moved verb) (Giannakidou, 2009; Viner, 2018; Darlina, 2016). To sum it up the verbal internal argument moves from a base-generated position of S-structure [NP; VP] to a derived position (Spec $Agr_oP$ ) of the LF (Logic Form)

The example below clearly demonstrates and displays how Chomsky's revolutionary theories of Split InflP and functional projection generation should be successfully applied to the double argument sentences of the Albanian language.

- 4.a Djali puthi vajzen  
 Boy-the-nom kissed girl-the-acc.  
 The boy kissed the girl.

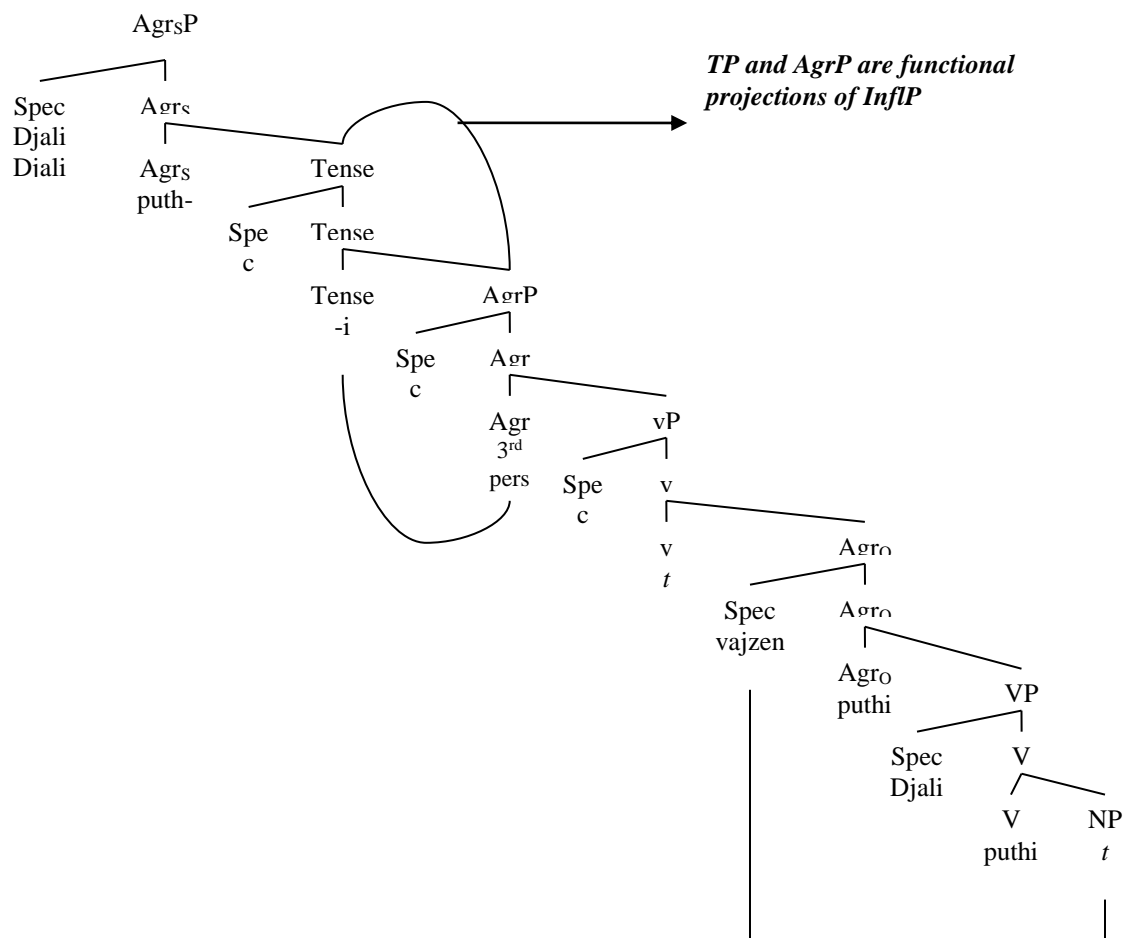


Figure 4. Structural achievement

However, perfect it would have seemed, the above structural achievement was faced with controversial arguments on direct object NP movement from [NP; VP] to the SpecAgr<sub>o</sub>P crossing the subject or its trace. Emonds (1978), and Bobaljik (1995), as referred by Heageman (1997), suggest that the subject NP external argument should be base-generated within the specifier position of the lower vP whereas in the specifier node of the upper VP the direct object NP should be base-generated. The generation of both arguments in verbal projection satisfies the semantic features interpretation process. Once  $\theta$ -marked the direct object NP moves to SpecAgr<sub>o</sub>P to check and license the case features.

Chomsky (1995), in his Minimalist Program, adopts such a structural generation of sentential constituents by agreeing that the movement of  $V^0$  to Agr<sub>o</sub><sup>0</sup> is realized under the head-to-head configuration fulfilling the equidistance condition and legitimating the movement of the object NP from SpecVP to SpecAgr<sub>o</sub>P where it is assigned the accusative case (Yamadori, 2000; Kempchinsky, 2009; Giorgi, 2009; Darzi & Kwak, 2015).

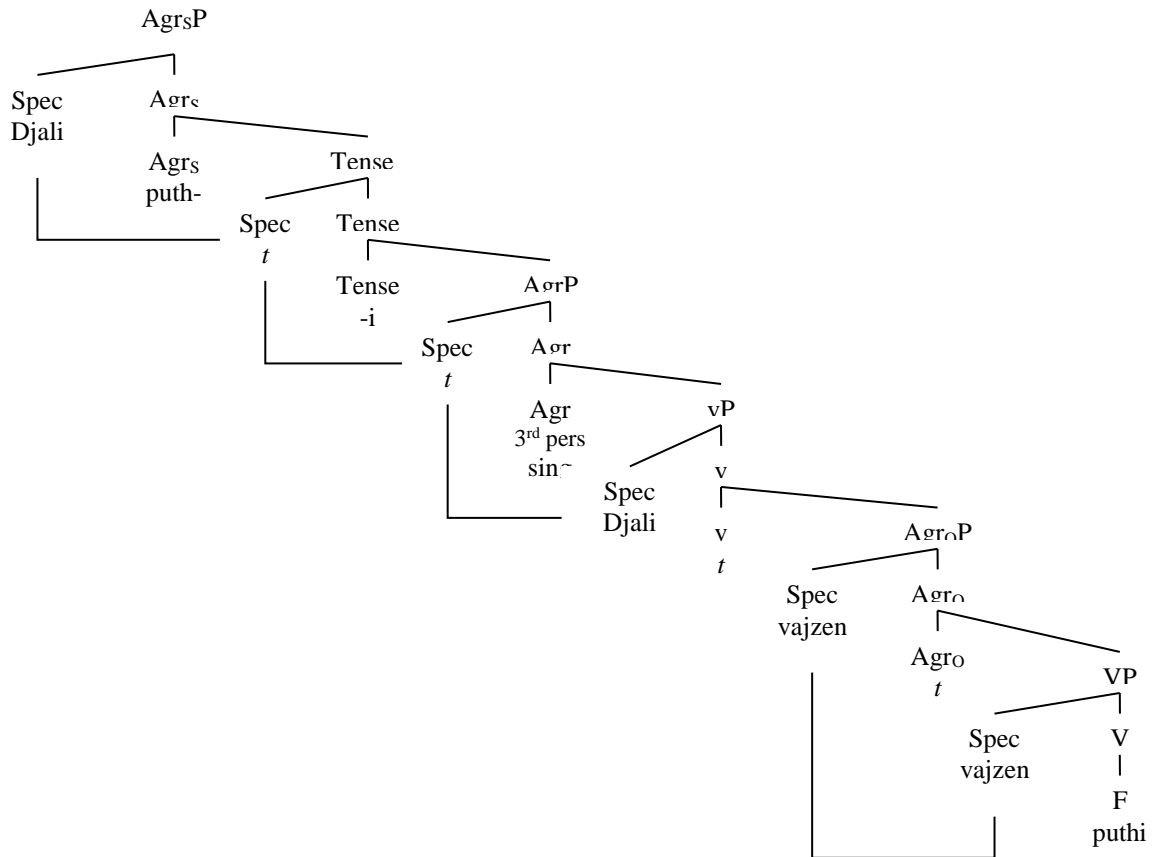


Figure 5. Structural generation of sentential constituents

## Conclusion

We aim to unfold to the readers a brief description of Albanian accusative and its case assignment model but acquiescently we ended up with an elaborate analysis of the syntactic and semantic properties of the NP in the accusative case (Rietveld & Hormelen, 2019; Hlebova et al., 2021). From the above comprehensive study we concur that no matter its semantic properties (theme or patient) or syntactic distribution (direct or prepositional object), the accusative case marker must be characterized by the positive verbal and nominal features [+verb; +noun] which refer to morphological categories of “verb” and “preposition”. Furthermore, both verbal and prepositional categories assign the accusative case to their internal argument in the positional configuration of [VP;NP] and [PP;NP].

Apart from the above transitive and prepositional constructions which are seen as the best representatives of the accusative case, comparatively in both Albanian and English cases of exceptional assignment of accusative, namely the English to-infinitive clauses and subjunctive ones of Albanian. In these clauses the insertion of a prepositional complementizer “per/for” enables the assignment of the accusative case to the subject NP of both to-infinitive and subjunctive clauses where the verb weakness (as it either belongs to the non-finite forms of the verb

or behaves as such) attributed to the negative features of tense allows government and as so case features checking and licensing from the preposition “per/ for” (3.b ex).

In conclusion, Chomsky (1995), in his “The minimalist program” proposed a reconciling approach to the case assignment model striving to offer a general model of case assignment for the three verbal arguments (subject, direct object, and indirect object). He propounded the assignment of the case to the verbal arguments in the positional configuration of specifier-head. It was and still is crystal clear that Chomsky’s Generative Grammar put a lot of emphasis on the syntactic properties of languages without overlooking the semantic ones. Subsequently, according to Chomsky’s (1995), proposal, the verbal arguments are first realized within a lower (VP) or higher (vP) verbal projection to interpret their semantic properties and later they move toward the specifier positions of agreement functional projections (Agr<sub>S</sub>P, Agr<sub>O</sub>P, Agr<sub>Ino</sub>P) to license their morphological features of the case and so be assigned Nominative, Accusative, and Dative respectively.

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<sup>i</sup> Example from Latin

1. Senatus Imperium mihi dedit (The Senate gave me supreme power)

Senatus – Subject/Nominative/Agent

Dedit – direct object/ Accusative/ Patient

Mihi – indirect object/ Dative/ Receiver as it is neither the giver nor the gift.

<sup>ii</sup> Subjunctive clauses/sentences have the verb in one of the tenses of the subjunctive mood. The Albanian language verbs are conjugated and used in six moods: indicative; subjunctive; admirative; conditional; optative; imperative.