# No logic in conflicting requirements: Reply to Branan 2023

Ksenia Ershova (k.ershova@ucl.ac.uk)

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**Abstract.** Branan (2023) proposes that locality constraints on A-movement may be obviated if movement of the closest goal would violate antilocality, a condition which prohibits movement from being too short. This reply argues that the account is not sufficiently supported by the data, raises a number of theoretical concerns and is incompatible with the broader literature on antilocality. The inefficacy of antilocality as an explanation for the patterns discussed in the paper and the number of ancillary assumptions it requires raise concerns for the validity of antilocality constraints more generally.

**Keywords:** locality, antilocality, intervention, A-movement, passive, scrambling

## 1 Introduction

Branan (2023) (henceforth: B23) provides an account for apparently symmetrical A-movement configurations wherein a c-commanding element does not behave as an intervener for a lower element, in violation of standard locality constraints like *Shortest* (1).[1]

(1) ***Shortest***: If a head H attracts an element of category X, move the element of category X that H c-commands and that is not c-commanded or dominated by another element of category X that is also c-commanded by H. (B23:1)

An example of such a symmetrical configuration is the passive in many Bantu languages, where either the applied argument (2a) or the theme (2b) may move to subject position.

(2)    a.   Omusawo$_i$ y-a-kwat-ir-w-a       __$_i$ eddagala.

         1.doctor    1-PST-hold-APPL-PASS-FV     5.medicine

         'The doctor had the medicine held for him.'     ✓*applied argument → subject*

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[1]The author thanks participants of the syntax seminar at MIT in Fall 2023 for fruitful discussion of this project, Elise Newman and Adam Singerman for feedback on the paper draft, and three anonymous reviewers. All mistakes and shortcomings are solely mine.

b. Eddagala<sub>i</sub>   ly-a-kwat-ir-w-a                omusawo   __<sub>i</sub>.

  5.medicine 5-PST-hold-APPL-PASS-FV 1.doctor

  'The medicine was held for the doctor.'                    ✓*theme → subject*

  (Luganda; Pak 2008:362 *via* B23:4)

B23 proposes that while (2a) is well-behaved in regards to locality, (2b) involves a licit violation of *Shortest* because movement of the structurally higher applied object would violate Spec-to-Spec Antilocality, building on Erlewine (2016) and Deal (2019) (3). This locality violation is made possible by the Principle of Conflicting Requirements (4) (both definitions are copied directly from B23:2).

(3)  **Generalized Spec-to-Spec Antilocality:** Movement of a phrase from Spec,XP must cross a maximal projection other than XP. Movement from position A to position B crosses C if and only if C dominates A but not B.

(4)  **Principle of Conflicting Requirements:**

  Elements do not count for Shortest if their movement would violate (3).

Evidence for the proposal comes from patterns of "noniterable symmetry": "an element may cross no more than one other internal argument when it is promoted to subject in the passive" or a possible site for A-scrambling (B23:2). Under this analysis only the highest element is inaccessible for movement due to Spec-to-Spec Antilocality and all other elements intervene for A-movement as predicted by standard locality constraints.

In this reply I argue that the proposal faces empirical and conceptual challenges. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis aims to salvage a strict notion of locality as in (1) by invoking two additional constraints: one building on prior research and the other completely novel. In regards to the former (Spec-to-Spec Antilocality), the proposal is incompatible with other literature which argues for this constraint, raising doubts about its generalizable nature. The latter constraint (the Principle of Conflicting Requirements) is difficult to reconcile with other antilocality research and makes false empirical predictions beyond

antilocality. Finally, the inadequacy of the present analysis and the required ancillary assumptions raise doubts about the explanatory power of antilocality more generally.

The conceptual issues would be less concerning if the empirical foundation for the proposal was more robust. Focusing on B23's first two case studies (scrambling in Tongan and passives in Luganda and Haya), I demonstrate that the empirical patterns are inconclusive, and the successful implementation of the analysis requires ancillary assumptions which are not supported by the data.[2] The available data are equally compatible with alternative implementations, which I demonstrate by presenting versions of such analyses for each pattern. Upon closer scrutiny some of the assumptions raised by B23 *may* prove to be correct, whilst some of the assumptions employed in this response may prove to be wrong. However, *compatibility* with an analysis does not constitute *positive support* for that analysis. This is an important argument regardless of available analytical alternatives: B23 is already utilized as evidence for the empirical robustness of this constraint (e.g. Fritzsche 2023; Takahashi 2023; Amaechi and Georgi 2024; Chen and Yip 2024; Erlewine and Sommerlot to appear, and discussion in Pietraszko 2023:fn.20), which—as this reply argues—is illusory, at least for the data in B23.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: §2 summarizes the analysis in B23; §3 discusses the conceptual issues; §4 discusses passives in Luganda and Haya and presents an alternative explanation based on Nie (2024); §5 focuses on scrambling in Tongan and how the data are explained by Polinsky and Potsdam (2021), and §6 concludes.

## 2 Noniterable symmetry and Spec-to-Spec Antilocality

B23 discusses several cases of noniterable symmetry and argues that each case involves the movement of a lower element across a higher element that is "too close". Under this account, symmetry is illusory: purportedly symmetrical derivations involve underlyingly different structures. The appeal of this account is that it (i) dispenses of the difficulty

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[2]The same concerns apply to the third case study (scrambling in Japanese), which I do not discuss due to constraints on space.

symmetrical patterns pose for theories of locality and (ii) explains why the symmetry no longer holds if there is more than two potential goals in the c-command domain of a probe.

An illustrative example is promotion to passive subject in Luganda. In an apparently symmetrical pattern, either the applied object (2a) or the theme (2b) may be promoted to subject. However, if there are three internal arguments, as with an applicative of a ditransitive, only the higher two arguments—the applied argument (5a) or the indirect object (5b)—may be promoted to subject, but the lowest argument—the theme (5c)—may not.
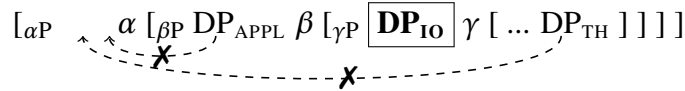
(5)   a.   Omuggo$_i$ gw-a-lag-is-ibw-a        __$_i$  omusomesa abaana.

3.stick     3-PST-show-APPL-PASS-FV      1.teacher    2.child

'A stick was used to show the children the teacher.'     ✓*applicative → subject*

b.   Omusomesa$_i$ y-a-lag-is-ibw-a        omuggo  __$_i$  abaana.

1.teacher     1-PST-show-APPL-PASS-FV 3.stick        2.child

'The teacher was shown the children using a stick.'          ✓*IO → subject*

c.   * Abaana$_i$ ba-a-lag-is-ibw-a        omuggo omusomesa  __$_i$.

2.child   2-PST-show-APPL-PASS-FV 3.stick   1.teacher

Intended: 'The children were shown to the teacher using a stick.'

(Luganda; Pak 2008:363 *via* B23:4-5)          **theme → subject*

The crucial contrast is between the grammatical promotion of the theme over the applied argument in (2b) and the ungrammatical promotion of the theme over the indirect object and applied argument in (5c). The structure below is abstract—as I elaborate below, the actual derivations are more complex and require additional assumptions. The applied argument in both (2b) and (5c) is in the specifier of the complement of the attracting head, which makes its movement to the higher position too local. In (2b) this frees up the lower theme to move instead, in violation of Shortest (6). In contrast, the theme in (5c) remains inaccessible due to the second intervening argument: the indirect object (7).
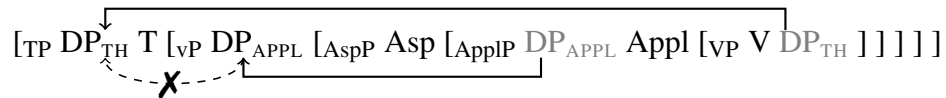
(6)   *Applicative is too local ⇒ theme can move:*

$$[_{\alpha P} \quad \alpha \; [_{\beta P} \; DP_{APPL} \; \beta \; [ \; ... \; DP_{TH} \;]\;]\;]$$

(7)  *Indirect object intervenes for movement of the theme:*

$$[_{\alpha P} \quad \alpha \; [_{\beta P} \; DP_{APPL} \; \beta \; [_{\gamma P} \; \boxed{\mathbf{DP_{IO}}} \; \gamma \; [ \; ... \; DP_{TH} \;]\;]\;]\;]$$

The impossibility of applicative raising in (7) raises an obvious question: how can the applied argument be promoted to subject at all, as in (2a)? B23 proposes that these two examples involve different derivations, with (2a) containing enough additional structure to allow for the movement of the applied argument without violating antilocality.

The analysis relies on several assumptions. Firstly, passives involve $v_{PASS}$, which has an EPP feature; this feature is satisfied either by movement or by external merge of the agent. Secondly, vP is directly selected by T and movement from Spec,vP to Spec,TP is antilocal. In contrast, ApplP is not selected directly by v—there is at least one projection between them, which B23 suggests to be Asp. The raising of a theme to passive subject in (2b) is derived as follows: the applied argument is merged in Spec,ApplP, but moves to Spec,vP to satisfy EPP on $v_{PASS}$—this movement is not too local because of AspP between ApplP and vP (8). Since movement of the applied argument from Spec,vP to Spec,TP would violate Spec-to-Spec Antilocality, the lower theme moves instead.

(8)  *Movement of applicative from Spec,vP to Spec,TP is too local $\Rightarrow$ theme can move:*

$$[_{TP} \; DP_{TH} \; T \; [_{vP} \; DP_{APPL} \; [_{AspP} \; Asp \; [_{ApplP} \; DP_{APPL} \; Appl \; [_{VP} \; V \; DP_{TH} \;]\;]\;]\;]\;]$$

To derive (2a) with the raising of the higher applied argument, B23 proposes that $v_{PASS}$ in Haya and Luganda may optionally host an agent in its specifier: in cases of theme raising to subject, the agent is fully absent, while in cases where the applied argument raises, the agent is phonologically null, but present. Since Spec,vP is already filled by the covert agent, the applied argument remains in-situ in Spec,ApplP. It is then no longer in an antilocal configuration with Spec,TP, allowing for its promotion to subject position (9).

(9)  *Agent blocks applicative movement to Spec,vP ⇒ applicative can move to Spec,TP:*

$$[_{\text{TP}} \text{DP}_{\text{APPL}} \text{ T } [_{\text{vP}} \textbf{Ø}_{\textbf{AGENT}} \text{ v } ... [_{\text{ApplP}} \text{DP}_{\text{APPL}} \text{ Appl } [_{\text{VP}} \text{ V DP}_{\text{TH}} ] ] ] ]$$

To summarize, the choice of whether an applied argument or a theme is able to undergo raising to passive subject relies on (i) whether there is a null agent in Spec,vP and the raising of the applied argument to Spec,vP when an agent is absent; (ii) the absence of any intervening structure between vP and TP, resulting in an antilocal configuration between Spec,vP and Spec,TP, and (iii) the presence of intervening structure between ApplP and vP, allowing for movement from Spec,ApplP to Spec,vP. I return to the inconclusiveness of the empirical support for these assumptions in section 4. The following section focuses on the more general conceptual issues the analysis faces.

## 3   The difficulties of antilocality and its repairs

This section outlines the conceptual challenges posed by the analysis in B23: it is incompatible with the research that forms the foundation for the theoretical proposal and makes false empirical predictions outside of the data discussed in the paper.

B23 cites Bošković (1997, 2016b)[3], Erlewine (2016), and Deal (2019) as precursors to the version of antilocality employed in the paper. Setting aside Bošković (1997), which only rules out phrase-internal specifier-to-adjunct movement, Bošković (2016b) and Erlewine (2016) employ Spec-to-Spec Antilocality to account for constraints on subject Ā-movement. In addition to the papers cited in B23, a growing body of work has taken up Erlewine's (2016) definition of antilocality (Brillman and Hirsch 2016; Amaechi and Georgi 2019; Erlewine 2020; Davis 2020, to appear; Bondarenko and Davis 2024). In line with the original paper, they are predominantly concerned with subject Ā-movement. For example, Bošković (2016b); Brillman and Hirsch (2016); Erlewine (2020) argue that the *that*-trace effect in English is the result of a ban on subject movement from Spec,TP to Spec,CP (10a) and antilocality may be obviated by inserting an adverbial phrase (10b).

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[3]The reference in the paper is to Bošković (2016a), which, I presume, is an error.

(10)  a.  \* Who$_i$ does John think [$_{CP}$ __$_i$ that [$_{TP}$ __$_i$ served as president?]]

  b.   Who$_i$ does John think [$_{CP}$ __$_i$ that  [$_{AdvP}$ **for all intents and purposes**

   [$_{TP}$ __$_i$ served as president?]]] (Brillman and Hirsch 2016:78)

A comprehensive critique of antilocality-based explanations for subject extraction warrants a separate paper, but this line of argumentation is controversial even if B23 is wholly set aside. Firstly, Spec-to-Spec antilocality was initially proposed for ergative Ā-movement in Kaqchikel (Erlewine 2016), which Henderson and Coon (2018) argue to be based on erroneous assumptions about the data. Secondly, numerous alternative analyses are available for these phenomena: *that*-trace effects may result from featural dissimilation (Pesetsky 2023), or C and T forming a composite probe which only splits when necessary (Martinović 2015, 2023). Alternatively, Kandybowicz (2006, 2007); Sato and Dobashi (2016) argue for a prosodic analysis (see also references in Pesetsky 2017). And finally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately ascertain the amount of left-peripheral structure in a clause, given the vast literature on the expanded left periphery (Iatridou 1991; Iatridou and Kroch 1992; Rizzi 1997; Grishin 2023, to appear, *i.a.*).

Granting that antilocality is the correct explanation for constraints on subject Ā-movement, the account proposed in B23 is incompatible with this literature. Firstly, if a potential antilocality violation may be obviated by moving a lower goal instead, this should be possible in other antilocal configurations as well, for example, to repair a *that*-trace effect: the proposal erroneously predicts that (11a), which violates Shortest, should be better than (11b) with the complementizer *that*, since movement of the subject wh-phrase would violate antilocality. Note that the ungrammaticality of (11a) cannot be attributed to islandhood of the subject: PP extraction from a derived passive or unaccusative subject, while marginal, is possible (11c; Chomsky 2008), whereas subextraction from a wh-phrase in subject position, regardless of the presence of *that*, is strikingly ungrammatical (11a).

(11)  a.  \* [From which country]$_i$ do you think (that) [which delegate __$_i$ ] will be nom-

inated for this position?

b.    [Which delegate from which country]$_j$ do you think (*that) __$_j$ will be nom-

inated for this position?

c.    ? [From which country]$_i$ do you think that [the delegate __$_i$ ] will be nominated

for this position?

This concern is also applicable to Deal (2019), who likewise employs Spec-to-Spec Antilocality to explain an apparent locality violation in A-movement.

Secondly, a critical aspect of the analysis in B23 is the absence of additional structure between vP and TP, which means that, all things being equal, the agent of an active clause cannot raise to Spec,TP. For the languages B23 discusses (Haya, Luganda, Tongan, and Japanese), the author proposes that an active subject either remains in Spec,vP or moves to a higher position in Spec,CP. For a language like English, where the position of the subject in Spec,TP has been extensively substantiated in prior literature, B23 suggests that it simply lacks antilocality effects, "at least for A-movement" (Branan 2023:32). Such a supposition leads to major difficulties, given that, modulo the paper under discussion, Spec-to-Spec Antilocality has been overwhelmingly employed to rule out subject movement from Spec,TP to Spec,CP, meaning that the vast majority of evidence for the existence of such a constraint comes precisely from languages which have productive subject raising to Spec,TP. The proposal that antilocality constraints are subject to cross-linguistic variation or may be parametrized to a particular type of movement (A- versus Ā-) raises questions about the universality of movement constraints: how could such a fundamental constraint on the nature of movement be meaningfully parametrized, and does that mean that other fundamental constraints like Shortest may likewise be language-specific? This possibility of parametrization renders the main exercise of the paper—explaining potential violations of Shortest without dispensing of the constraint—potentially superfluous.

Finally, as pointed out by Baier (2017:376), Spec-to-Spec Antilocality is "very sensitive

to minor differences in clause structure", meaning that the addition of a single projection can render a derivation grammatical which would have been ungrammatical otherwise. This additional structure, however, is frequently unpronounced, meaning that its presence is difficult to ascertain. This indeterminacy makes Spec-to-Spec Antilocality difficult to falsify. The brief discussion of Haya and Luganda in section 2 illustrates this point: there must be a covert projection between ApplP and vP because applied arguments are able to move to Spec,vP, whereas there must *not* be any additional structure between vP and TP because applied arguments cannot then move from Spec,vP to Spec,TP. In section 4 I demonstrate that the presented data, while compatible with these structural assumptions, do not provide positive evidence for them. A convincing argument in favor of Spec-to-Spec Antilocality requires a more fine-grained heuristic for identifying covert structure. Such a methodology could appeal to observable morphological effects: for example, instead of the insertion of an adverbial expression in (10b), which implies the addition of another phrasal projection only under very specific assumptions about adverbials, movement of the subject from Spec,TP to Spec,CP would result in the disruption of otherwise regular allomorphy between T and C, suggesting that there is an unpronounced intervening projection between the two heads (see Ershova and Bezrukov 2024 for an attempt to develop this type of diagnostic in West Circassian).

To summarize this section, the antilocality-based account in B23 faces a number of challenges when considered against the broader literature on antilocality: (i) it employs structural assumptions which are in conflict with that literature (namely, the absence of structure between vP and TP) and (ii) makes false predictions about how antilocality violations can be repaired. Finally, Spec-to-Spec Antilocality is more generally challenged by the absence of well-established diagnostics for covert structure.

All these conceptual concerns would be less pertinent if the data provided strong support for the proposed analysis. In the following section I demonstrate that the available data do

not provide support for the numerous assumptions which are required for the analysis to follow through and that alternative approaches are available, which, while stipulative in their own ways, do not raise fundamental conceptual challenges.

## 4  Passives in Luganda and Haya

This section lays out the questions raised by the first case study: promotion to passive subject in Luganda and Haya. In a nutshell, B23's proposed analysis relies on positing covert structure where necessary and the absence of structure where antilocality needs to be invoked, with neither assumption sufficiently motivated. Additionally, the analysis raises a number of questions about the syntactic status of the passive agent. The section concludes by presenting an alternative approach based on Nie (2024).

### 4.1  Confound #1: Where structure is and isn't

As discussed in section 2, the analysis of passives in Luganda and Haya crucially relies on the absence of additional structure between vP and TP and the presense of additional structure between ApplP and vP (8). Both of these assumptions are typologically unusual.

I have already elaborated in section 3 how the antilocal relationship between Spec,vP and Spec,TP raises questions about subject movement to Spec,TP in active sentences: the proposed structure predicts it to be ungrammatical. More pressingly, most accounts of the verbal extended projection include at least one, if not several projections between T and v: e.g. aspect (Cinque 1999; Iatridou et al. 2002; Svenonius 2004; Gribanova 2013; Harwood 2005) and voice (Collins 2005; Merchant 2013; Alexiadou 2014; Ramchand 2017; Roberts 2019; Angelopoulos et al. 2020). Newman (2020), for example, argues that active and passive (but not middle) clauses include Voice between vP and TP, which facilitates the raising of the subject from Spec,vP to Spec,TP, which would otherwise have been too local; see also Erlewine (2020:fn.1) on the same point. If Luganda and Haya (as well as Tongan and Japanese, which are also discussed in the paper) are typologically different in the way B23 assumes, this raises interesting predictions for the clause structure of these languages,

which need to be corroborated with evidence.

In regards to intervening structure between ApplP and vP, B23 suggests that it corresponds to aspect, since the aspectual suffix appears closer to the root than the passive (12).

(12)  Y-a-fuumb-ir-idd-[w]-a.

1-PST-cook-APPL-ASP-PASS-FV

'Something was cooked for her.'

(Luganda; McPherson and Paster 2009:61 *via* B23:12)

However, McPherson and Paster (2009), where the example is cited from, argue that the passive suffix regularly violates the Mirror Principle: it must appear further from the root than both applicative and causative suffixes, even when they semantically outscope it. The affix ordering in (12) is likely to be conditioned by the same constraint that requires the passive suffix to follow other verbal morphology and thus cannot be taken as indicative of underlying syntactic structure. Furthermore, vP-internal aspect denotes telicity and Aktionsart (MacDonald 2008; Travis 2010, *inter alia*), whereas the aspectual suffix in (12) is associated with perfectivity and interacts with tense, which are properties of high aspect that is merged between VoiceP and TP (Ferrari-Bridgers 2009).

To summarize, the analysis depends on two controversial assumptions, neither of which are supported by the available data: the absence of structure between v and T and the presence of structure between Appl and v. The following subsections address additional assumptions about the status of the passive agent.

## 4.2   Confound #2: Covert versus absent agent

Another crucial assumption that B23 relies on is the presence of a covert passive agent in (2a) and its absence in (2b): this contrast is necessary to explain why the applied argument is able to move in the former example and may not move in the latter.

The nature of this covert agent has theoretical implications which are not fully elaborated. B23 suggests that the agent may be phonologically null because Haya and Luganda generally allow pro-drop. On the other hand, if the agent is syntactically unexpressed, it is

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existentially bound, rendering the typical existential interpretation associated with passives (fn.10). There are thus two almost string-equivalent constructions: one with a referential pronominal agent that is covert and one which lacks a syntactically expressed agent altogether. The former results in the promotion of the applied argument to subject position (9) and the latter in the promotion of the theme (8). The evidence for this contrast is shown in (13): only the former is compatible with "agent-oriented adverbs".

(13)   a.   Akamyu$_i$ ka-a-lis-ibw-a      __$_i$   kasooli n'obwegendereza.
             12.rabbit 12-PST-feed-PASS-FV      1.corn   with.care
             'The rabbit was fed corn with care.'   ✓*applicative subject + agentive modifier*

       b.   * Kasooli$_i$ y-a-lis-ibw-a      akamyu   __$_i$ n'obwegendereza.
             1.corn   1-PST-feed-PASS-FV 12.rabbit      with.care
             Intended: 'Corn was fed to the rabbits with care.' (Luganda; B23:14)

*\*theme subject + agentive modifier*

The implications of the contrast in (13) are not straightforward. Agentive modification is indeed utilized to diagnose the presence of a thematic agent, for example, to differentiate between a passive and an anticausative construction (see discussion and references in Bhatt and Pancheva 2017). However, this diagnostic cannot distinguish between an implicit agent and a syntactically active external argument. If, as B23 suggests, a syntactically unexpressed agent is existentially bound, (13b) should be grammatical, since the agent theta-role and the structure associated with it (the passive vP) are present.

By extension, the grammaticality of (13a) does not indicate the presence of a null pronominal agent. If (13a) involves a pro-dropped argument in the position of the agent, one would expect it to have a referential interpretation and to behave like a pronominal in respect to binding conditions and crossover effects (see discussion in Legate 2012, 2014).

From a typological perspective, the status of the implicit agent in passives is contested (Wanner 2009; Bhatt and Pancheva 2017 and references therein). For example, the implicit agent of an English passive cannot bind PRO in complement clauses (14a), in contrast to

the agent of an active sentence (14b) (examples from Wanner 2009:118).

(14)  a.  \* John was promised Ø$_i$ [PRO$_i$ to wash the car]  *\*implicit agent binds PRO*

  b.  I$_i$ promised John [PRO$_i$ to wash the car]  ✓*active agent binds PRO*

The inability of an implicit agent to bind PRO in a complement clause (14a) necessitates an analysis which distinguishes it from the agent of an active clause. However, the structure proposed in B23 places the agent of both passive and active clauses in Spec,vP, predicting that they should behave the same way. This brings us to the last issue of the proposed structure for the passive: the position of the overtly expressed agent.

## 4.3  Confound #3: The position of the passive agent

B23 argues that v$_{PASS}$ in Luganda and Haya may optionally introduce the agent as its specifier. The previous subsection explains how this facilitates the promotion of the applied argument to Spec,TP: in the absence of the external argument, the applied argument is too local and the theme is promoted instead. On the assumption that the passive agent is indeed in Spec,vP, the analysis correctly explains another case of "noniterable symmetry" in the passive: if the agent is overtly expressed, only the highest of the internal arguments may be promoted to subject position. Thus, the theme of a two-place transitive predicate may be promoted (15), as may the applied argument of a ditransitive (16). However, the theme of a ditransitive is once again unable to move (17), analogous to (5c).

(15)  Ekinnyanja$_i$ ky-a-fuumb-ib-w-a  Nakato __$_i$.  ✓*theme promotion*
    7.fish  7-PST-cook-PST-PASS-FV Nakato
    'The fish was cooked by Nakato.' (Luganda; Pak 2008:366 *via* B23:12)

(16)  ? Omusawo$_i$ y-a-wandiik-ir-wa  Mukasa  __$_i$ ebbaluwa. ✓*appl. promotion*
    1.doctor  1-PST-write-APPL-PASS 1.Mukasa  9.letter
    'The doctor was written a letter by Mukasa.' (Luganda; Pak 2007:9 *via ibid.*)

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(17)   * Ekitabo<sub>i</sub> ky-a-w-ebw'      omusajja abaana __<sub>i</sub>.          *theme promotion

       7.book   7-PST-give-PASS 1.man     2.child

       Intended: 'The book was given to the children by the man.
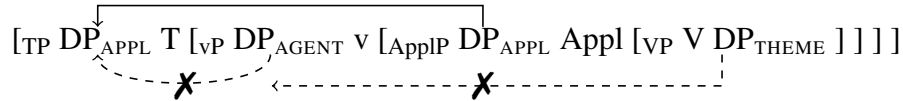
       (Luganda; Pak 2008:367 *via ibid.*)

Under B23's analysis, (15)-(16) are derived in a similar fashion: the agent in Spec,vP is too local to Spec,TP and thus cannot move, allowing the theme (18) and the applied argument (19) to move instead. However, if the applied argument is present, the lower theme may not move because the applied argument intervenes (19).

(18)   *Theme moves over overt agent:*

       [$_{TP}$ DP$_{THEME}$ T [$_{vP}$ DP$_{AGENT}$ v [$_{vP}$ V DP$_{THEME}$ ] ] ]

(19)   *Theme cannot move over overt agent and applied argument:*

       [$_{TP}$ DP$_{APPL}$ T [$_{vP}$ DP$_{AGENT}$ v [$_{ApplP}$ DP$_{APPL}$ Appl [$_{vP}$ V DP$_{THEME}$ ] ] ] ]

The main issue with the proposed structure is the position of the overt agent in Spec,vP—the same position where the agent of an active clause is introduced. This predicts that the agent should display similar properties in active and passive clauses, but evidence for this is lacking. B23 follows Pak (2008) in assuming this position for the passive agent; but the original paper, which in turn takes this assumption from Doggett (2004), only provides evidence that the agent forms a constituent with the predicate, based on required adjacency to the verb and the application of phrase-internal phonological rules.

Adjacency and constituency, however, are not evidence of an element having argument status or occupying a specific syntactic position. The position of the external argument should be identifiable through standard c-command diagnostics such as the possibility of binding the internal argument. For comparison, I present a similar construction in Standard Indonesian, where data are available which demonstrate that the adjacent passive agent does not occupy the position associated with external arguments. While these data cannot

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demonstrate that the agent behaves in the same manner in Luganda and Haya, they illustrate the limitations of the empirical arguments B23 relies on.

Passive agents in Standard Indonesian are subject to similar adjacency requirements to Luganda and Haya when they appear without a preposition (Chung 1975; Arka and Manning 1998; Cole et al. 2008; Kroeger 2014, a.o.). However, a verb-adjacent agent may not be an antecedent to the anaphor in the theme DP (20), unlike the agent of an active clause (21), indicating that the two types of agents do not occupy the same structural position.

(20) Amir$_i$ di-perlihatkan     Ayah$_j$ foto    dirinya$_{i/*j}$.

Amir PASS-show-APPL father picture self.3

'Amir$_i$ was shown a picture of himself$_{i/*j}$ by father$_j$.'

(Indonesian; Arka and Manning 1998:11)

(21) Saya$_i$ menyerahkan diri saya$_i$ ke polisi.

I     AV.surrender self 1SG  to police

'I surrendered myself to the police.' (Indonesian; *ibid.*:3)

I suggest that the passive agent is merged as an adjunct to the phrase headed by the passive voice head (VoiceP). In the absence of an overt preposition or other case licensor, the corresponding nominal must be licensed by adjacency to the predicate (Levin 2015; van Urk 2018; Branan 2022). As discussed by Clemens and Coon (2018), this may be achieved through postsyntactic reordering or rightward dislocation of the theme DP. The same logic can be extended to the verb-adjacent agent in Luganda and Haya. Such an account explains the postverbal position of the passive agent, as opposed to the preverbal position of the active agent, as well as Ssekiryango's (2006) observation that Luganda disallows overt agents with double object predicates regardless of which internal argument is promoted to derived subject position (the author reports that examples like (16) and (17) are equally ungrammatical): rightward dislocation and postsyntactic reordering are unavailable in this dialect, resulting in the agent remaining unlicensed.

In summary, the adjacency requirement is not sufficient evidence for placing the passive agent in Spec,vP in the absence of c-command diagnostics. However, if this assumption is discarded, the reasoning behind the patterns in (15)-(17) cannot be maintained.
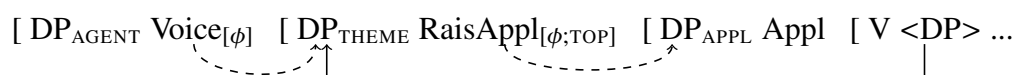
I have not provided direct evidence *against* analyzing the passive agent as a specifier of vP – I have merely demonstrated that the available data are not sufficient to warrant such a conclusion. If further research were to confirm this assumption, this would not constitute positive evidence for the proposal in B23 without an independent heuristic for diagnosing the absence of intervening structure between v and T, as discussed in §3. Furthermore, the alternative analysis below is compatible with such an assumed structure.

## 4.4 Alternative explanations: leapfrogging and case licensing

Two alternative analyses for symmetrical passives are dismissed by B23 as inadequate: leapfrogging (McGinnis 1998, 2000, 2001; Doggett 2004; Pak 2008) and optionality of case licensing (Holmberg et al. 2019), since—barring additional assumptions—these accounts predict that the symmetry observed in (2) should apply recursively.

However, both of these approaches may be amenable to the data in B23. For example, a recent analysis by Nie (2024) combines leapfrogging and case licensing by proposing that symmetrical applicatives are facilitated by a functional head (RaisAppl) which is merged between the applicative argument and Voice. RaisAppl has two functions: it licenses the applied argument through $\phi$-agreement, since it is the closest DP in its c-command domain, and it attracts a DP to its specifier, which is then subsequently licensed through $\phi$-agreement with Voice, thus deriving a structure wherein the theme c-commands the applied argument (22). Under this account, the raising of the theme is connected to its discourse prominence, implemented with the feature [TOP].

(22)  *Theme promotion over DP$_{\text{APPL}}$ with RaisAppl:*

[ DP$_{\text{AGENT}}$ Voice$_{[\phi]}$  [ DP$_{\text{THEME}}$ RaisAppl$_{[\phi;\text{TOP}]}$  [ DP$_{\text{APPL}}$ Appl  [ V <DP> ...
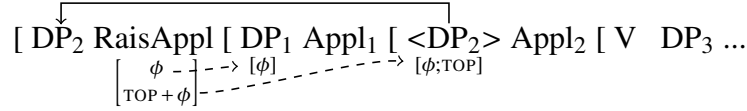
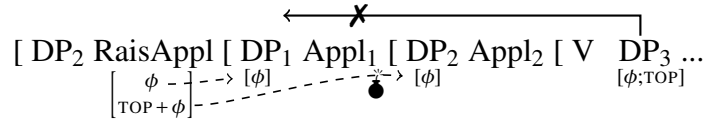Noniterative symmetry can be accommodated in this analysis with two independently

proposed assumptions: firstly, movement to the specifier of RaisAppl is triggered by a composite—or relativized—[TOP+$\phi$] probe (see e.g. Nevins 2007; Bobaljik 2008; Preminger 2014; Deal 2016; Coon et al. 2021 on relativized probing). This means that any DP which bears $\phi$-features counts as a potential goal, triggering defective intervention if it does not also bear [TOP]. Secondly, if a probe agrees with a goal in its c-command domain, that goal may be ignored for subsequent probing by the same probe (Richards's (1998) Principle of Minimal Compliance; see e.g. Rackowski and Richards 2005; van Urk and Richards 2015; Halpert 2019; Ershova 2024 for recent implementations). This derives the correct empirical pattern: RaisAppl first agrees with the closest goal in its c-command domain (the applied argument), and then attracts the next DP in its c-command domain to its specifier. If there is more than one DP below the applied argument, only the highest of those DPs will be able to move due to the relativized nature of the [TOP+$\phi$] probe (23).

(23)  a. *Second internal argument can move:*

[ DP$_2$ RaisAppl [ DP$_1$ Appl$_1$ [ <DP$_2$> Appl$_2$ [ V   DP$_3$ ...
$\begin{bmatrix} \phi - \\ \text{TOP}+\phi \end{bmatrix}$ $-->$ [$\phi$] $------>$ [$\phi$;TOP]

   b. *Third internal argument cannot move:*

[ DP$_2$ RaisAppl [ DP$_1$ Appl$_1$ [ DP$_2$ Appl$_2$ [ V   DP$_3$ ...
$\begin{bmatrix} \phi - \\ \text{TOP}+\phi \end{bmatrix}$ $-->$ [$\phi$] $-->$ [$\phi$]     [$\phi$;TOP]

This analysis could equally be applied to constructions with an overt agent if the assumptions in B23 are taken to be correct in terms of the position of the passive agent in Spec,vP: one could simply replace Appl$_1$ in (23) with v.

This account is also stipulative, but unlike B23, it does not rely on the presence or absence of particular projections within the verbal extended domain beyond RaisAppl (independently proposed for other languages; Georgala et al. 2008; Paul and Whitman 2010; Georgala 2012; Myler and Mali 2021), nor does it necessitate typologically unusual assumptions about the structure of passive voice or a significant theoretical reassessment of

locality constraints and how they interact with each other.

## 4.5 Passives in Luganda and Haya: Summary

B23's analysis of passives in Luganda and Haya relies on a number of assumptions which lack sufficient motivation given the evidence provided: (i) there are no additional projections between vP and TP; (ii) there *is* an additional projection between vP and ApplP; (iii) if there is no overt agent, it is either fully absent or covert; and (iv) overt passive agents are in Spec,vP. If any of these assumptions are discarded, the proposed analysis cannot be maintained. An alternative analysis based on Nie (2024) can capture the same data without requiring ancillary assumptions about passives or particular projections in the verbal extended domain and does not necessitate a reassessment of general locality constraints. The next section discusses the second case study: scrambling in Tongan.

## 5 Scrambling in Tongan

The second case study concerns what B23 analyzes as A-scrambling in Tongan. The main pattern is as follows. An absolutive object may A-scramble over an ergative subject (24) and an oblique case-marked object may scramble over an absolutive subject (25): A-movement of the lower argument is possible because the higher argument in Spec,vP is too close to the target position in Spec,TP. However, in a ditransitive clause with an ergative DP subject, only the higher absolutive object may be scrambled and the lower oblique may not: this is because the higher absolutive object may move without violating antilocality and correspondingly intervenes for the scrambling of the oblique (26).

(24) $[_{TP}$ DP$_{ABS}$ T $[_{vP}$ DP$_{ERG}$ v $[_{VP}$ V DP$_{ABS}$ ] ] ]     ✓*ABS moves over ERG*

(25) $[_{TP}$ DP$_{OBL}$ T $[_{vP}$ DP$_{ABS}$ v $[_{VP}$ V DP$_{OBL}$ ] ] ]     ✓*OBL moves over ABS*

(26) $[_{TP}$ DP$_{ABS}$ T $[_{vP}$ DP$_{ERG}$ v $[_{VP}$ DP$_{ABS}$ [ V DP$_{OBL}$ ] ] ] ] ]

    **OBL moves over ERG and ABS*

The proposal relies on four assumptions: (i) all word order permutations in Tongan

are achieved through leftward A-scrambling, (ii) A-scrambling is feature-driven, but may be triggered by any head which does not host an overt specifier, (iii) the absolutive case-marked object uniformly c-commands the oblique case-marked object.

The remainder of this section lays out the challenges for B23's theory of scrambling in Tongan and outlines Polinsky and Potsdam's (2021) analysis of the same word order alternations as a result of rightward dislocation of the subject.

## 5.1 Problem #1: Defining A-scrambling

B23 follows Otsuka (2005) in assuming that VSO is the basic word order in Tongan (27), and VOS is derived from VSO through (leftward) A-movement (28), rather than Ā-scrambling, since only the former is subject to strict locality which requires the highest nominal to move, regardless of any other features it may possess.

(27) Na'e fili     ['e  Sione] ['a  Pila].

PST  choose ERG Sione  ABS Pila

'Sione chose Pila.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:246 *via* B23:15)                    *VSO*

(28) Na'e fili     ['a  Pila]$_i$ ['e  Sione]  __$_i$.

PST  choose ABS Pila     ERG Sione

'Sione chose Pila.' (Tongan; *ibid.*)                    *VOS*

However, Polinsky and Potsdam (2021) argue that the data in Otsuka (2005) is more compatible with an analysis which derives the corresponding word order permutations through rightward Ā-movement of the subject. Thus, A-scrambling of the absolutive object to a position c-commanding the ergative subject erroneously predicts that the former may bind an ergative reflexive in a VOS clause (29).[4]

(29)  a. Na'e fili     'e  ia$_{i/*j}$ pē  'a  Sione$_j$.    *VSO: ABS cannot bind ERG*

PST  choose ERG s/he only ABS Sione

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[4]Otsuka (2005:252) suggests that there is a language-specific constraint requiring the reflexive antecedent to be ergative case-marked, incorrectly predicting that an absolutive case-marked subject cannot bind a reflexive pronoun (Polinsky and Potsdam 2021:71).

b. Na'e fili      'a   Sione_j 'e   ia_{i/*j} pē   __j.      *VOS: ABS cannot bind ERG*

PST  choose ABS Sione ERG s/he only

'He/*himself chose Sione.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:251-252)

Furthermore, Otsuka (2005) provides (30) as evidence that object scrambling does not

trigger a weak crossover violation—a property of A-movement. However, Polinsky and

Potsdam (2021) demonstrate that a weak crossover effect is absent even when the object

remains in situ, which means that it cannot be used as a diagnostic for A-scrambling (31).

(30)  Na'e fili      ['a   e    taha kotoa]_i ['e   he'ene_i tamai] __i.      *VOS: no WCO*

PST  choose ABS DEF one  every  ERG his      father

'His_i father chose everyone_i.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:250)

(31)  Na'e fili      ['e   he'ene_i tamai] ['a   e    taha kotoa]_i      *VSO: no WCO*

PST  choose ERG his      father  ABS  DEF one  every

'His_{i/k} father chose everyone_i.' (Tongan; Polinsky and Potsdam 2021:76)

In summary, there is reason to doubt that the VOS word order in Tongan is derived

through A-scrambling of the object. The analysis also faces issues with the implementation

of this movement, as discussed in the following subsection.

## 5.2   Problem #2: What drives A-scrambling and covert specifiers

The analysis of Tongan scrambling in B23 relies on several stipulations which appear to be

at odds with each other. B23 assumes that scrambling "must target the specifier position

of a phrase with no overt specifier" (B23:18). This means that, depending on the syntactic

configuration, A-scrambling may be triggered by a variety of functional heads—at least T

and v. A head may lack an 'overt specifier' because no specifier has been merged, as in the

case of T, or because its specifier is unpronounced due to being a trace of movement or a

null pronoun, as B23 suggests for v. This is meant to explain why an oblique argument of

a ditransitive may not be scrambled if the ergative argument is expressed as a full DP (32),

but may be scrambled if the ergative argument is a preverbal clitic (33).

(32) *Oblique cannot scramble over ergative DP:*

    a. Na'e tuku ['e Sione] ['a e tohi] ['i he loki].

       PST leave ERG Sione ABS DEF book in DEF room

    b. * Na'e tuku ['i he loki]$_i$ ['e Sione] ['a e tohi] __$_i$.

       PST leave in DEF room ERG Sione ABS DEF book

       'Sione left the book in the room.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:263 *via* B23:17)

(33) *Oblique can scramble over ergative clitic:*

    a. Na'a [ne] tuku ['a e tohi] ['i he loki].

       PST 3SG leave ABS DEF book in DEF room

    b. Na'a [ne] tuku ['i he loki]$_i$ ['a e tohi] __$_i$.

       PST 3SG leave in DEF room ABS DEF book

       'He/she left the book in the room.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:263 *via* B23:16-17)

In (32) v has an overt specifier, so scrambling is triggered by T. The absolute object moves because ergative DP in Spec,vP is too close to Spec,TP; the oblique DP, however, may not move because of the intervening absolutive DP (26). In (33) v triggers scrambling because it lacks an overt specifier—the ergative argument "either undergoes movement to some higher position or is linked to a null element in Spec,vP" (B23:19). The absolutive DP is too local to Spec,vP, so the oblique DP moves instead (34).

(34) *Oblique DP can scramble over unpronounced ergative:*

[$_{vP}$ DP$_{OBL}$ Ø$_{ERG}$ v [$_{vP}$ DP$_{ABS}$ [ V DP$_{OBL}$ ] ] ]

The proposed condition on scrambling is incompatible with probe-driven movement that is utilized in the paper: if feature-driven movement proceeds cyclically, how can the probe on v be sensitive to whether the ergative argument undergoes subsequent movement or does not have an overt exponent at PF?[5] Unfortunately, feature-driven probing is a fundamental

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[5]There are approaches which connect EPP properties to phonological or prosodic constraints on a given

part of the analysis in B23. This is encoded both in the definition of Shortest (1) and in the nature of the elements which participate in scrambling. In particular, B23 proposes that scrambling in Tongan is triggered by a probe which is relativized for [HUM] (the feature associated with animate nouns). Combined with Multitasking (35), this is meant to explain why the oblique case-marked argument in (36) may scramble to the left of the ergative DP, in contrast with the ungrammatical (32): the probe may attract the lower animate argument despite this being a violation of Shortest.[6]

(35) ***Multitasking:*** If two operations A and B are possible (independent of Shortest), and the features checked by A are a superset of those checked by B, the grammar prefers A. (van Urk 2015:353 *via* B23:20)

(36) Na'e 'oange [kia    Sione]$_i$ ['e  Mele] ['a  e    ika]  _$_i$.
     PST give    to.PERS Sione   ERG Mele  ABS DEF fish
     'Mele gave a fish to Sione.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:352 *via* B23:20)

There is another issue with the derivation in (34): it relies on the absence of any additional structure between VP and v. If there were at least one other projection above VP, the oblique argument would not be able to move to Spec,vP because the higher absolutive argument would always intervene. The absence of any other heads between V and v also explains why an oblique argument cannot be scrambled to a position between the ergative agent and the absolutive theme (37): there is no possible landing site for this movement.

head, e.g. Richards's (2016) Contiguity Theory. However, such theories do not assume sensitivity to the surface PF and are thus compatible with cyclic syntactic derivation. Another option would be to derive configurations with multiple overt specifiers, but rule them out at PF, but the analysis in B23 is not straightforwardly compatible with this, since an overtly filled Spec,vP feeds scrambling to an unfilled Spec,TP in the narrow syntax.

[6]Note that (32) and (36) involve different lexical verbs with potentially different subcategorization frames. The verb *tuku* 'leave' (32) is likely to select a theme c-commanding a locative phrase, whereas the goal argument of a verb like *'oange* 'give' (36) usually c-commands the theme (Larson 1988; Pylkkänen 2008; Citko et al. 2017, a.o.).

(37) * Na'e tuku ['e  Sione] ['i he   loki]$_i$ ['a  e    tohi]  _$_i$.

        PST  leave ERG Sione  in  DEF room ABS DEF book

        Int. 'Sione left the book in the room.' (Tongan; Otsuka 2005:262 *via* B23:19)

However, the analysis of passives in Luganda and Haya hinged on the assumption that there *is* an additional projection between v and ApplP (and by extension, between v and VP). In both cases, the presence or absence of these projections is unmotivated: for Luganda and Haya, the only evidence comes from suffix ordering (see 4.1) and for Tongan, the proposed structure is assumed without further discussion. And yet, these assumptions are fundamental to successfully arguing for the applicability of antilocality constraints. As discussed in section 3, the reliance of antilocality-based approaches on these types of assumptions about covert structure calls into question their explanatory efficacy.

## 5.3   Alternative explanation: Rightward dislocation of the subject

This subsection outlines an alternative approach to the word order permutations discussed in B23 based on Polinsky and Potsdam (2021). The authors argue that VOS word orders in Tongan are derived through rightward dislocation of the subject to a position in the high clausal periphery (38). This correlates with the information structural properties of the sentence-final subject, explains the absence of clear A-movement effects (as discussed in §5.1), and can account for the apparent noniterative symmetry effects.

(38)   *VOS derived by right dislocation of the subject:*

     [$_{XP}$ T+v+V [$_{TP}$ <Subj> ... [$_{VP}$ <V> Obj ] ] Subj ]

Polinsky and Potsdam (2021) treat the locative PP in (39) as a peripheral adjunct. (39b) is correspondingly grammatical because the peripheral PP may merge above the rightward dislocated subject, whereas (39c)—which B23 rules out as a violation of Shortest—is simply not derivable: rightward dislocation displaces the subject to a VP-external position, meaning that it cannot follow the PP, but precede the VP-internal object.

(39)  a.  Na'e tuku ['e Sione] ['a e tohi] ['i he loki].  ✓VSOPP
          PST leave ERG Sione ABS DEF book in DEF room

      b.  Na'e tuku ['a e tohi] ['e Sione] ['i he loki].  ✓VOSPP
          PST leave ABS DEF book ERG Sione in DEF room

      c.  * Na'e tuku ['i he loki] ['e Sione] ['a e tohi].  *VPPSO
          PST leave in DEF room ERG Sione ABS DEF book

'Sione left the book in the room.' (Otsuka 2005:262-263 *via* B23:17)

Polinsky and Potsdam (2021) additionally provide examples like (40), which are predicted to be possible under a rightward dislocation account, but are not explained by B23's analysis: in this case, the subject appears to the right of both the object and the PP.[7]

(40)  Na'e tuku ['a e tohi] ['i he loki] ['e Sione].  ✓VOPPS
      PST leave ABS DEF book in DEF room ERG Sione

'Sione left the book in the room.' (Polinsky and Potsdam 2021:72)

Polinsky and Potsdam (2021) do not discuss the interaction between word order and subject clitics, but their account can explain these data as well. If a single right-peripheral position is available for DPs and only full nominals may move there, the subject clitic would be ineligible, leaving open this position to the object instead, deriving (33).

The right dislocation analysis leaves open the possibility that some word order permutations are derived through leftward movement. Presumably, (36) is an example of such a case: the indirect object is merged as an argument of the verb, in contrast to the peripheral PP in (39-40), and is correspondingly able to undergo scrambling.

## 5.4  Scrambling in Tongan: summary

The antilocality-based analysis of scrambling in Tongan relies on the following assumptions: (i) all scrambling is derived through A-movement; (ii) scrambling is triggered by

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[7]The authors note that the appears to be variation in speakers' judgements regarding this word order, and Otsuka (2005) marks it as ungrammatical.

any head without an overt specifier, and (iii) scrambling is driven by a feature which is sensitive to animacy ([HUM]), but which may be satisfied by an inanimate nominal if no suitable goal is available. The first assumption is not sufficiently supported by the data and the latter two are incompatible with each other. The same data may be adequately explained by positing rightward dislocation of the subject (Polinsky and Potsdam 2021).

## 6   Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Principle of Conflicting Requirements, which ranks Spec-to-Spec Antilocality above Shortest, gives rise to conceptual inconsistencies and is incompatible with other work on antilocality. Additionally, the analysis relies on typologically unorthodox stipulations which are unsupported by the data.

I have mainly focused on the inability of antilocality and the Principle of Conflicting Requirements to explain the data in B23. However, even if the theory adequately captured the empirical facts, it would be a problematic addition to Universal Grammar. Spec-to-Spec Antilocality is difficult to falsify and thus theoretically ineffectual, unless it is paired with a theory which can systematically distinguish between covert and absent structure. The proposed interaction between antilocality and locality is also problematic: it is unclear why an eligible goal would not intervene even if it cannot move. This makes undesirable predictions for other purported antilocality effects cross-linguistically, as well as for other cases where a goal matches the features of the probe but is unable to move, e.g. with defective intervention by dative subjects (Preminger 2014) or in theories which connect the opacity of phases to their status as potential goals (Rackowski and Richards 2005; van Urk and Richards 2015; Halpert 2019; Ershova 2024). This casts doubt on the explanatory utility and theoretical appeal of the Principle of Conflicting Requirements.

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