

CALL FOR PAPERS
Configurations of Agreement
Brussels Conference in Generative Linguistics 6
CRISSP/GIST

1. INTRODUCTION

Empirically, agreement is the phenomenon whereby a word displays grammatical features (like gender, number, person, and case features) under the influence of another word. Agreement is universally asymmetrical: in subject-verb agreement, the verb displays the person and number features that are inherently present on the subject, and not the other way round. Agreement may take many guises, such as the agreement of a verb or a complementizer with its subject in person and number, the agreement of determiners with the noun in gender and number, the agreement of adjective with the noun in gender and number. Adjectival agreement is sometimes considered to be a separate phenomenon, and accordingly given a different name: concord (e.g. Chomsky 2001:34n; see also Baker 2008:65; see Schoorlemmer 2009 for an approach in terms of Agree)..

Theoretically, agreement is of interest in that it seems superfluous, and in this respect represents a departure from optimal design meeting the interface conditions. Chomsky (1995) has suggested linking the agreement property with the displacement property, which itself represents another departure from optimal design. In contrast, Chomsky (2001) has argued that displacement (EPP) and agreement are clearly to be distinguished. Various theories on agreement have been proposed in the literature.

2. AGREEMENT IS SYNTACTIC

Whereas agreement phenomena were accounted for by the mechanism of Spec-head agreement in Chomsky (1981), Chomsky (1995, 2001) proposes the operation Agree to account specifically for subject-verb agreement. Agree is an operation that is asymmetrical, in that it involves a probe (the head T°) seeking to acquire feature values from a goal (the subject) that has matching valued features. This operation of feature valuation operates at a distance in a local domain, and under c-command. Agree has been taken to involve the transmission of feature values (Chomsky 2000, 2001), or, alternatively, the sharing of a single feature (Frampton & Gutmann 2000, Pesetsky and Torrego 2007).

Miyagawa (2009) suggests that agreement is driven by the need to establish functional relations, and that movement is needed to keep a record of these agreement relations at the semantic interface level. He furthermore argues that topic and focus are computationally equivalent to ϕ -feature agreement, yielding two types of languages: subject-verb agreement languages and discourse-configurational languages.

Van Koppen (2005) claims that agreement is the result of a division of labour between the syntactic and the phonological components of the grammar. She argues that probe in subject-verb agreement can establish an agreement relation with two goals. Whenever the syntactic component makes two

goals available which are hierarchically equidistant to one probe, it is the phonological component that decides which relation is spelled out.

Řezáč's (2004) perspective on Agree has two basic features: restricted upward probing and a dynamic search space. It thereby differs both from Chomsky's (2001, 2007) and Baker's (2008:46) approaches. To keep the computational burden within bounds, Chomsky restricts the search space of a probing head to its complement. Baker (2008), on the other hand, maintains that agreement must be able to probe both upward and downward, with upward probing restricted by the phase-boundary. Řezáč's proposal holds the middle between these two hypotheses: while he argues that upward probing is sometimes required (pace Chomsky), it cannot reach up as far as the phase boundary (pace Baker). In his approach, a probe cannot probe further up than its specifier(s); secondly, upward expansion of the search space is only allowed if no goal is available in the complement of the probing head.

Preminger (2011b) suggests that agreement may fail to apply, basing his argument on cases of 'omivorous agreement', a phenomenon where the marked member of a given agreement paradigm (e.g. a marker of plurality) can be triggered by the relevant feature whether it appears on the subject or on the object, or both (Nevins 2010). Preminger (2011b) also agrees with Bobaljik's (2008) observation that phi-agreement tracks morphological case, rather than grammatical function. However, for him this does not mean that phi-agreement and morphological case are post-syntactic operations, arguing instead that they are part of the syntactic component.

3. AGREEMENT IS MORPHOLOGICAL.

Bobaljik (2006) argues that morphological agreement (m-agreement) is not subject to syntactic feature checking, but takes place in a post-syntactic morphological component. The finite verb agrees with 'the highest accessible DP'. This is the DP which bears an 'accessible m-case' in terms of Marantz' (1991) m-case hierarchy (usually nominative or absolutive). There is nevertheless a syntactic component to Bobaljik's analysis, in that the DP which bears accessible case must be the highest DP in the domain (i.e. the minimal clause) of the verbal element.

Keine (2010) (see also Bhatt 2005) argues that verbal ϕ -agreement and case assignment result from two distinct operations, ϕ -Agree and k-Agree, respectively. In addition, he assumes that the operation impoverishment may delete morpho-syntactic features in the syntax. These three operations (ϕ -Agree, k-Agree, impoverishment) may apply in different orders cross-linguistically, yielding the different agreement and case patterns. For example, if the feature [+oblique] is deleted before agreement takes place, the DP becomes a potential agreement trigger. Conversely, when the feature [+animate] is deleted, the DP might become unavailable for agreement.

4. AGREEMENT IS SEMANTIC

A number of semantic properties of the DP triggering Agreement are often seen to play a role in subject-verb agreement, such as definiteness, animacy, specificity, etc. This is unexpected both under the syntactic and the morphological accounts of agreement phenomena discussed so far, and suggests that agreement might actually require several different mechanisms.

5. AGREEMENT, PRO-DROP AND VERB MOVEMENT

It has been suggested that the possibility of pro-drop correlates with the morphological richness of subject-verb agreement (e.g. Taraldsen 1980, Rizzi 1982, Jelinek 1984). Similarly, it has been noted that rich agreement correlates with height of verb movement: Romance finite verbs, which show rich agreement, move higher than both English finite verbs and Romance participles, which agree less fully (Emonds 1978, Pollock 1989). The idea was thoroughly explored for a wide variety of Germanic languages (beginning with Platzack and Holmberg 1989). However, both in the case of pro-drop and verb movement, the biconditional correlation between rich agreement and pro-drop/verb movement proved to be too strong (Adger & Harbour 2006, Bobaljik 2003).

6. AGREEMENT ODDITIES

Agreement asymmetries. Many languages display different patterns of subject-verb agreement depending on the position of the subject (preverbal or postverbal). Such an asymmetry frequently takes the form of a contrast between full agreement on the one hand, and partial or default agreement on the other (see e.g. Hoekstra & Smits 1997, Fassi-Fehri 1993, Aoun, Benmamoun & Sportiche 1994, Harbert & Bahloul 2002). Such asymmetries pose a challenge to a feature-based account of agreement phenomena in terms of the operation Agree.

The Person Case Constraint (PCC). Perlmutter (1971) observes an intriguing restriction on the combination of dative and accusative clitics: the accusative in such a situation must be third person (e.g. *le lui* but not **me lui*; see Haspelmath 2004 for a survey). Bonet (1991, 1994) accounts for this phenomenon in terms of a filter. More recently, a range of syntactic analyses of the PCC have appeared, which have connected the PCC to various other phenomena. For example, Boeckx (2000) and Anagnostopoulou (2003) have proposed that it is connected to the restrictions on nominative objects in Icelandic; Richards (2005) connects it with cross-clausal extraction in Tagalog; Bianchi (2006) with inverse agreement systems found in languages like Plains Cree, and Bobaljik and Branigan (2006), with the Spurious Anti-Passive construction found in Chukchi; Ormazabal and Romero (2002) draw a connection with animacy on the basis of *leísta* dialects of Spanish, and Adger and Harbour (2007) with patterns of case syncretism. Nevins (2007) applies ideas from phonological feature formalisms in the syntax to tackle the full typological variety of the PCC.

Complex agreement. In Georgian, person agreement on a verb can arise from one argument whereas number agreement comes from another. Béjar (2004) argues that the separate features that make up the set of ϕ -features act independently in the syntax. Agreement is thus not determined by syntactic position or grammatical function, but rather by ϕ -featural richness.

7. QUESTIONS

Questions on the operation Agree

- What is the nature of the asymmetry between probe and goal? Does the probe always have to c-command the goal, or can a goal also c-command its probe (as argued in e.g. Neeleman & Van de Koot 2002, Adger 2003, Von Stechow 2005, Zeijlstra 2008, Baker 2008, Hicks 2009)?
- What are the features involved in the Agree operation?
- What is the precise relationship between (un)interpretability and (un)valuedness of features in the Agree operation?

- What criteria can be adduced to determine whether a feature is (un)interpretable?
- Can only heads function as probes, or can phrases probe too (as argued in Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011)?
- What is the exact nature of the locality constraint on Agree? Can it be derived from independent principles?
- In what way is the operation Agree linked to movement, if at all?
- Is concord a phenomenon distinct from agreement, and if so, how? What mechanisms underlie concord?
- Can Agree explain the morphological patterns of agreement that we find, or are additional assumptions about the morphology necessary? If so, how?
- Can Agree be applied to participle agreement; and how?
- Can Agree account for cases of Long-Distance Agreement (LDA) or cases of agreement with DPs bearing inherent case, and how?
- Can Agree account for definiteness agreement of the verb with its object, such as its is found in languages like Hungarian, and how?
- Is agreement enforced through (un/interpretable) features that need to be eliminated to obtain a well-formed representation, or does it work differently?
- Which phenomena involve (Single) Agree(ment) and Multiple Agree(ment) (for the latter, cf. Anagnostopoulou 2005, Béjar & Rezac 2003; Hiraiwa 2001,2004,...) and what are the restrictions on these operations?

More general questions on agreement.

- Does agreement apply in narrow-syntax or in the morphological component of the grammar?
- Can Bobaljik's theory of m-agreement be extended to other types of agreement than subject-verb agreement, such as participial agreement, complementizer agreement, adjectival agreement, etc.?
- Is agreement fallible and what does this mean for its status in the grammar?
- How do default agreement and omnivorous agreement fit into the picture?
- How can complementizer agreement be accounted for?
- How can agreement asymmetries be accounted for?
- How (if at all) does the morphological richness of agreement endings interact with syntactic phenomena such as verb movement or pro-drop?
- Can macrovariation (i.e. variation between historically unrelated languages) in subject-verb agreement be traced back to the same underlying parameters as microvariation (i.e. variation between closely related languages or dialects)?
- What are the diachronic aspects of agreement? To what extent can parameters be reset over time?
- Can phi-agreement and movement operations such as wh-movement, object shift, A-movement to subject position, etc. be linked, and how?
- How are agreement and clitic-doubling related and (how) should they be distinguished?
- How should the Person Case Constraint be accounted for?
- Why do verbs agree with subjects in person and number (and sometimes also in gender), and adjectives only in number and gender, never in person?

8. INVITED SPEAKERS

We are pleased to announce that the following invited speakers have agreed to give a talk at BCGL6:

Omer Preminger (MIT)
Milan Řezáč (Paris 8/CNRS)
Marjo van Koppen (Utrecht University)

9. ABSTRACT GUIDELINES

Abstracts should not exceed two pages, including data, references and diagrams. Abstracts should be typed in at least 11-point font, with one-inch margins (letter-size; 8" ½ by 11" or A4) and a maximum of 50 lines of text per page. Abstracts must be anonymous and submissions are limited to 2 per author, at least one of which is co-authored.

Only electronic submissions will be accepted. Please submit your abstract using the EasyAbs link for BCGL6: <http://bit.ly/rum6KI>

10. IMPORTANT DATES

First call for papers: June 30, 2011

Second call for papers: August 30, 2011

Abstract submission deadline: October 1, 2011

Notification of acceptance: November 15, 2011

Conference: December 19-20, 2011

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