No case for agreement (as a causer of case)

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Three models of case

m1: case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ (Chomsky 2000, 2001)

m2: configurational case (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987, Marantz 1991, Bittner & Hale 1996)

m3: configurational case + case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ (Baker 2015)

Central claims:

- In terms of expressive power, **m1 < m2 = m3**
- Since **m1** is empirically inadequate;
- And since **m2** is simpler than **m3**;
- All should adopt **m2** forthwith (if they haven't already).

Secondary claims:

- This is <u>not</u> about “abstract” vs. “morphological” case
  - i.e., one cannot salvage **m1** by just giving up on making any predictions about morphological form

- For one thing, **m1** fails *even as a theory of nominal licensing alone*.
  - i.e., even if we absolve it of making any morphological predictions whatsoever

- Moreover, even **m2/m3** themselves cannot be understood as a theory of morphophonological case forms *per se* —
  - they can only be understood as a theory of case features that are intrinsically abstract;
  - and which <u>may or may not</u> receive distinct exponence in the morphophonology.

⇒ In short:

- **m2** is a theory of “abstract” case;
- in fact, pending further developments —
  - **m2** is <u>the</u> theory of “abstract” case;
- and abstract case is, generally speaking, unrelated to nominal licensing.

The structure of the theoretical space – part one

Claim: **m2 = m3**

- i.e., the empirical coverage of **m3** is identical, by definition, to that of **m2**.

Here's why:

- We can construct a "recipe" for translating any **m3** account into an extensionally-equivalent **m2** account.

- But before turning to this recipe —
  - a remark on prepositional complementizers and **m2(/m3)**...

Prepositional complementizers and configurational case

- Marantz's (1991) configurational theory of case <u>cannot</u> readily capture case assigned under prepositional complementizers:
  - it cannot be Marantz's DEPENDENT CASE —

(1) For him to be late would be rude.

  - *him* is the only DP in (1)

- and it cannot be Marantz's LEXICAL CASE —
  - since *him* in (1) is not an argument of *for*

⇒ Even a configurational theory of case must allow for case assigned by a designated X^0, <u>not</u> under *selection* —

- but instead under something like *closest-c-command*.

- Call this ***X^0-case***.

- So called "lexical case" can then be seen as:
  - an instance of X^0-case that happens to be assigned under sisterhood between X^0 and the case-marked DP

m2 = m3

- We can now demonstrate the equivalence between **m2** and **m3**
- <u>REMINDER:</u> the different between **m2** and **m3** is that the latter also countenances case assigned under *Agree*$_{\varphi}$
  - à la Chomsky (2000, 2001)

- Let C_X be an instance of case assigned under *Agree*$_{\varphi}$ with some head H^0
- *"Recipe" for redoing C_X within a purely **m2** system:*
  - assume H^0 enters the syntax with unvalued φ-features

    (as is also necessary on the **m3** account)

- and let H^0 be <u>case-relativized</u> to target bearers of C_X only
  - NB: case-relativization of φ-probes is necessary on independent grounds (Bobaljik 2008, Preminger 2014)
- finally, let C_X be case that is assigned configurationally in some **m2**-compliant way
  - possibly even as X^0-case assigned by H^0 itself

- <u>Predictions:</u>
  - we will see φ-agreement on H^0 **iff** there is a C_X-marked DP in H^0's domain
  - when there is no such DP, φ-probing by H^0 will simply fail
    - which, as we all know, causes no adverse effects
      - and certainly no "crashes"!

    (see Preminger 2014)

A quick demo:

English “nominative”

Consider the so-called “nominative” in English, and its interaction with φ-agreement:

(2) She/*Her arrived on time.

(3) It is possible for her/*she to arrive on time.

- Furthermore, following Sobin (1997) —
  - when we abstract away from prescriptive influences:
  - the forms of pronouns in coordinations reverts to their “objective” forms (*her/him/them/*etc.)

- The clearest way to abstract away from prescriptive edicts is to pick a coordination with a *1sg* pronoun as the first conjunct
  - since that places the utterance clearly outside the bounds of prescriptive norms

(4) Me and Kim / *ǃ I and Kim <u>are</u> coming over.

➤ So far, these data look like evidence in favor of *Agree*$_{\varphi}$ —

- it seems “nominative” is assigned under finite agreement
  - and what is targeted for finite agreement in (4) is not the individual conjuncts;
  - it is the coordination in its entirety.

⇒ <u>But let us now apply our recipe:</u>

- assume that so-called "nominative" in English is assigned configurationally under *closest c-command by finite T^0*
- carry over the assumption that T^0 comes into the derivation bearing unvalued φ-features
- if the coordination itself counts as a target for the computation of *closest c-command* —
  - we can recoup Sobin's account of the contrast between (2) and (4):

(2) She/*Her arrived on time.

(4) Me and Kim / *! I and Kim are coming over.

➤ *Okay, at this juncture you might be asking yourself…*

➤ *Isn't this just a bit of theory-internal rejiggering?*

- in one sense, the answer is an obvious "yes" —
  - I'm giving an argument for an equivalence in expressive power between two proposals (**m2** and **m3**)
- but, assuming you are now convinced of the equivalence in question:
  - when two formalisms are expressively equivalent, we usually adjudicate based on —

i. **simplicity of the proposal unto itself**
(cf. *Minimum Description Length*)

ii. **perspicuity / explanatory adequacy**
(i.e., how reasonable – and, crucially, straightforward to *acquire* – are the "maneuvers" needed to fit the proposal to attested data)

- It is a truism that **m2** beats **m3** on the *simplicity* metric
  - since **m3 = m2 + *Agree*$_{\varphi}$**

➤ What I'd like to show you now is that **m2** also beats **m3** on the *perspicuity / explanatory adequacy* metric

Consider the English subjunctive:

(5) I demanded that he/*him be on time.

(6) She demanded that me and Kim/*I and Kim be on time.

- Some points to keep in mind:
  - this construction is probably rare-to-nonexistent in child-directed speech
  - nevertheless, we all attain the same pattern of competence, exemplified by (5, 6)

- Crucially:
  The behavior of pronouns in (or inside) the subject position of subjunctives is identical to their finite-clause counterparts.

  ➤ However, in the subjunctive, there is no finite agreement morphology to speak of.

- Now, it is logically possible that subjunctives like (5, 6) have a phonologically-null counterpart of the overt agreement in (2, 4)

- But in taking such a view, we risk losing our account of the contrast between (2) and (3):

(2) She/*Her arrived on time.

(3) It is possible for her/*she to arrive on time.

- <u>Put another way:</u> an **m3**-style account (or any other case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ account) requires a distinction between:
  - *null agreement* (for subjunctives; (5, 6))
  - *no agreement at all* (for infinitives; (3))
- This looks like a rather dubious distinction, methodologically speaking

➤ And it also poses non-trivial challenges for language acquisition

- given that, cross-linguistically, there exist:
  - agreeing & non-agreeing subjunctives
  - agreeing & non-agreeing infinitives
- Finally, it runs afoul of the *no-null-agreement generalization* (Preminger 2017)

- Now consider the **m2** alternative:
  - the relevant cut is between —
    - <u>infinitival T^0:</u> lacks the ability to assign C_X (“nominative”) under closest c-command
    - <u>all other instances of T^0:</u> have the ability to assign C_X (“nominative”) under closest c-command
  - the learner still needs to figure out that subjunctive T^0 is not equipped with unvalued φ-features, while finite T^0 is
    - ➤ but, crucially, that fact is a surface-evident one

English “nominative”: epilogue

- So-called “nominative” in English (=C_X) is assigned configurationally
  - under closest c-command by any finite T^0
- This account is extensionally equivalent to an **m3**-style account, which avails itself of case-by-*Agree*$_\varphi$

➤ However, it is arguably:

- simpler (fewer ways to get case)
- better from an explanatory-adequacy perspective

- Interestingly, so-called “nominative” in English ends up looking nothing like UNMARKED CASE (in the Marantz/Bobaljik sense)
  - hence the scare-quotes around “nominative” throughout
- Instead, C_X in English is a dedicated finite-T^0 case
  - call it, e.g., *subjective*
- Whereas real nominative(=configurationally UNMARKED) case in English is the one typically called “accusative”
  - in line with the age-old observation that the case with the <u>elsewhere</u> distribution in English is the *her/him/them* case

The structure of the theoretical space – part two

Claim: **m1 < m2**

- i.e., anything that **m1** can generate can be generated by **m2**, but <u>not</u> vice versa

Here's why:

- The previous section ("part one") provided a recipe for redoing any instance of case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ in purely configurational, **m2** terms
  ⇒ m1 ≤ m2
- But we know of plenty of empirical domains that cannot be handled by a pure **m1** account
  - case on objects in Icelandic quirky-subject constructions (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987, Marantz 1991)
  - the distribution of accusative case in Sakha [Turkic] (Baker & Vinokurova 2010)

- I'd like to highlight, in particular, the latter empirical domain:
  - Sakha has unaccusatives, wherein the single argument cannot bear accusative
    - * DP-ACC V_{unacc}
    - i.e., there is no functional head associated with these verbs that can "assign accusative"
  - **however**, a clause headed by an unaccusative verb can host a DP raised out of an embedded clause
    - whereupon that DP is assigned accusative
    - ✓ DP_1 DP_2-ACC [… t_2 …] V_{unacc}

- turning to Sakha ditransitives, these never show a NOM-ACC-ACC case pattern:
  - * DP_1 DP_2-ACC DP_3-ACC $V_{ditrans}$
  - i.e., the functional material in a Sakha clause cannot "assign accusative" more than once
- **however**, raising into a monotransitive clause that already has an accusative argument in it yields:
  - ✓ DP_1 DP_2-ACC DP_3-ACC [… t_3 …] $V_{monotrans}$

➤ Overall:

- **m2** (configurational case) can do things that **m1** (case-by-*Agree*$_\varphi$) cannot;
- and the facts favor the less restrictive theory, i.e., **m2**.

Abstractness

Can we find a use for case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ by resorting to “abstractness”?

- We’ve seen that case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ should be discarded in favor of a configurational theory of case
  - in particular, **m2**

➤ A common refrain:

- yes yes, but that only holds for the actual case forms that we <u>see</u>
- behind the scenes / under the hood, case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ still churns along —
  - having no impact whatsoever on the forms of nominals (we know this to be the case);
  - but determining where (overt?) nominals can and cannot occur, i.e., determining <u>nominal licensing</u>.

- There are two main problems with this view:
  i. case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ is an inadequate theory of <u>nominal licensing</u>, too
  ii. the thing we just used **m2** to derive isn't "morphological case" (in any meaningful sense of the term "morphological")
    - it cannot be understood as a theory of forms *per se*;
    - and it must be computed within syntax proper.

- Regarding (i), we know that there are full DPs in positions that could not have been targeted by agreement of any kind
  - see Preminger 2011a, 2014 on K'ichean and, in particular, Preminger 2011b on Basque

- Regarding (ii), consider quirky-subject verbs in Icelandic, for example:
  - famously, these involve inhibiting the assignment of ACC to the direct object, in favor of NOM
    - as captured in the DEPENDENT CASE approach
  - as well as agreement with the NOM object instead of with the (non-NOM) subject
    - as captured in the *case-discrimination* approach (Bobaljik 2008)
  - now, consider:
    - there are nominals in Icelandic that are syncretic between NOM and another case (e.g. DAT)
    - when those nominals are placed in the subject position of a clause with a quirky-subject verb —
      - it is not suddenly possible to mark the object with ACC just because the subject is syncretic-with-NOM
      - and it is not suddenly possible to agree with the subject, just because it is syncretic-with-NOM

⇒ **m2** is a theory of “abstract” case

- insofar as it is not a theory of *case forms*;
- it is a theory of abstract case features
- which may or may not receive distinct morpho-phonological realization in the language (or the lexical item) in question

➤ Of course, **m2** is <u>not</u> an adequate theory of nominal licensing

- but neither is case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$…
  - so that isn’t an argument one way or another.

- Finally, as shown in Preminger 2014, **m2** must be computed within syntax proper
  - the argument goes as follows:
    i. Bobaljik 2008: φ-agreement tracks the outputs of **m2**;
    ii. Preminger 2014: φ-agreement is causally implicated in (some instances of) movement to canonical subject position;
    iii. movement to canonical subject position is necessarily syntactic (it affects both pronunciation and, e.g., scope);

    therefore –

    iv. **m2** must be computed within syntax, not "post-syntactically" or "at PF"

Conclusions

Conclusions

- In terms of expressive power —
  - **m2** (configurational case) **= m3** (case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$ + m2)
  - **m1** (case-by-*Agree*$_{\varphi}$) **< m2** (configurational case)
- In terms of the empirical landscape:
  - **m2** is required
- Neither **m1** nor **m2** is a(n adequate) theory of nominal licensing
- The primitives of **m2** are “abstract” in the sense that:
  - they may or may not be exponed in a particular language (or a particular derivation)
  - and they are computed within syntax proper

Thank you!