

# Agreement and its failures

## PART ONE

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### 1. Overview

- In this course, we will deal with  $\varphi$ -agreement in natural language
- Right from the start, I'd like to highlight the following distinction:
  - $\varphi$ -agreement — an empirical phenomenon (we will provide a formal definition soon)
  - *Agree* — a particular theoretical device, put forth by Chomsky (2000, *et seq.*) to account for  $\varphi$ -agreement; but since exploited for many other purposes
- ▶ This course is about  $\varphi$ -agreement
  - in fact, one of the things I hope to show is that the *Agree*-based analysis is not a viable theory of  $\varphi$ -agreement
    - at least not without major emendation

⇒ Let us, then, define what we mean — empirically — when we say  $\varphi$ -agreement:

(1) host+[agreement-morpheme] $_{\varphi_1}$  ... (<other material>) ... [full noun-phrase] $_{\varphi_1}$

- where  $\varphi_1$  is a language-specific set of  $\varphi$ -features (along with their values)
  - its contents are language-dependent
  - normally, some non-empty subset of the following:
    - *person*
    - *number*
    - *gender*
    - *noun-class*
  - but it may include others, on a language-specific basis
- for example:

(2) a. Dina axl-a tapuax (Hebrew)  
Dina<sub>FEM</sub> ate-3sg.FEM apple<sub>MASC</sub>  
'Dina ate an apple.'

host=ax(a)l; agreement-morpheme=-a; full noun-phrase=Dina

b. anaxnu axal-nu tapuax  
we ate-1pl apple<sub>MASC</sub>  
'We ate an apple.'

host=ax(a)l; agreement-morpheme=-nu; full noun-phrase=anaxnu

- and just to demonstrate how nice and complicated things can get: ☺

(3) Guraso-e-k niri belarritako ederr-ak erosi (Basque)  
parent(s)-ART<sub>pl</sub>-ERG me.DAT earring(s) beautiful-ART<sub>pl</sub>(ABS) bought

d- i- zki- da- te.  
3.ABS- have- pl.ABS- 1sg.DAT- 3pl.ERG

‘(My) parents have bought me beautiful earrings.’

[Laka 2005]

host=-*i*;  
 (i) agreement-morpheme<sub>1</sub>=*d*-, *-zki*-; full noun-phrase<sub>1</sub>=*belarritako ederr-ak*;  
 (ii) agreement-morpheme<sub>2</sub>=*-da*-; full noun-phrase<sub>2</sub>=*niri*;  
 (iii) agreement-morpheme<sub>3</sub>=*-te*; full noun-phrase<sub>3</sub>=*guraso-e-k*

## 2. $\varphi$ -agreement, and things that look like $\varphi$ -agreement

- As some of you probably already know, it turns out that there is more than one way in which scenarios that look like (1) can come about

### I. a feature-valuation relation (e.g., *Agree*)

- some syntactic head — henceforth, the *probe* — has the capacity to morphologically reflect different values of the same feature
  - e.g., a verbal element that can inflect for [NUM=*sg.*], [NUM=*dual*], or [NUM=*pl.*]
- another element in the sentence — henceforth, the *goal* — determines which of these values the aforementioned head will actually reflect
  - e.g., a noun-phrase in the sentence determining, based on its own [NUM] value, which [NUM] value will be morphologically reflected on the verb
- this process can then reiterate:
  - the head, whose feature-value(s) has/have been determined in this fashion, can in turn determine the feature-values determine on some other head
    - **NOTICE:** This is an instance of *recursion* in natural language! (Usually, when people discuss *recursion* in language, they talk about sentential embedding — or, in other contexts, the very operation of *Merge*; but this is every bit as “recursive” as those examples.)
- such feature-valuation can be conceived of in various ways:
  - movement of features (Chomsky 1995)
  - transmission of feature-values (a.k.a., *Agree*; Chomsky 2000, *et seq.*)
  - sharing of a single feature-value across multiple syntactic elements/loci (Pesetsky and Torrego 2007)

### STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS:

- c-command:**

the *probe* must c-command the *goal*

- this requirement holds at the level of representation at which valuation occurs; these c-command relations might subsequently be disrupted

(ii) **locality:**

the *probe* and the *goal* must be sufficiently close to each other

- this is a fertile ground for theorizing (e.g., *phases*; Chomsky 2001, 2004, etc.) — but the empirical generalization is this:
  - the *probe* and the *goal* cannot be separated by the boundary of a finite clause

(iii) **minimality:**

a probe  $\mathcal{P}$  cannot enter into a feature-valuation relation with a goal  $\mathcal{G}$  if there is another suitable goal  $\mathcal{G}'$  within  $\mathcal{P}$ 's *domain*, and  $\mathcal{G}'$  asymmetrically c-commands  $\mathcal{G}$  (where *domain* refers to the combination of **c-command** and **locality**; i.e., (i)+(ii))

- the situation where such a  $\mathcal{G}'$  exists is called *intervention*
  - and  $\mathcal{G}'$  is called the *intervener*
- example:

(4) Manninum virðast [ hestarnir vera seinir ]. (Icelandic)  
 the.man.sg.DAT seem.pl the.horses.pl.NOM be slow  
 ‘The man finds the horses slow.’ [Holmberg and Hróarsdóttir 2003:(11)]

(5) það virðist/\*virðast einhverjum manni [ hestarnir vera seinir ].  
 EXPL seem.sg/\*seem.pl some man.sg.DAT the.horses.pl.NOM be slow  
 ‘A man finds the horses slow.’ [Holmberg and Hróarsdóttir 2003:(12)]

- **NOTE:** suppose that (4) is derived from a structure very similar to (5), except with A-movement to subject position, instead of expletive-insertion (and there is some evidence for this)

⇒ it looks like A-movement traces don't count for the purposes of **minimality**

- this has various interesting implications, particularly given the *Copy/Re-Merge Theories of Movement*

Finally, this kind of feature-valuation relation has also been implicated in certain accounts of *Case*-assignment:

- through the notion that *Case* is somehow “parasitic” on the valuation of the  $\varphi$ -features on certain kinds of probes (Chomsky 2000, 2001)
  - I hope to show you that this idea is quite plainly untenable

· · · **TERMINOLOGICAL NEWSFLASH** · · ·

From this point forward, when I say  *$\varphi$ -agreement*, I will be referring specifically to this type of feature-valuation relation (and not, for example, (II)–(III), below).

I will hereby stop italicizing the term “ *$\varphi$ -agreement*”, now that it has been introduced and defined.

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 II. the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (Jelinek 1984)

- (6) 'Awéé' bi- 'nii- sh- hóósh. (Navajo)  
baby 3- INCH- 1sg- tickle  
 'I (start to) tickle the baby.' [Hale 2003:(4)]

- the *agreement-morpheme* is the actual argument
  - it shows up affixed to the host
    - (i) for phonological/prosodic reasons
    - or -
    - (ii) via incorporation (Baker 1985, 1988)
- the *full noun-phrase*, to the extent that it can co-occur with the *agreement-morpheme*, is an **unselected modifier**

Syntactically, this entails the following:

- the so-called *agreement-morpheme* is actually a pronoun-like element, and it is the one that occupies an **argument-position/A-position**
- the so-called *full noun-phrase* is, syntactically speaking, an **adjunct**

⇒ this places these constructions roughly on par with with utterances such as (7)

- (7) He, the doctor, tells me, the patient, what to do. [Jelinek 1984:(50)]

**EMPIRICAL PROPERTIES:**

- the *agreement-morpheme* should — ideally — bear **some** resemblance to the series of strong pronouns in the language in question
- in the same vein, it would be surprising if the form of the *agreement-morphemes* depended on the tense/aspect of the host, in a way that is beyond reasonable phonological explanation (Arregi and Nevins 2008)
  - since we normally don't find pronouns behaving like (8):

- (8) UNATTESTED PATTERN IN PRONOMINAL ARGUMENTS:

- a. I SEE HIM.
- b. I SAW HOM.
- c. I WILL SEE HAM.
- d. I HAVE SEEN HUM.
- ∴ ∴

- we will refer to this property (i.e., the lack of alternations like (8)) as the **tense-invariance** of pronominals (following Arregi and Nevins 2008)
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 III. clitic-doubling (Anagnostopoulou 1999, 2003, Jaeggli 1982, Rezac 2008, Sportiche 1996, 1998, Suñer 1988, Torrego 1988, Uriagereka 1995, *i.a.*)

- (9) Lo vimos a Juan (Rioplátense Spanish)  
him saw.<sub>1pl</sub> DAT Juan  
 'We saw Juan.' [Jaeggli 1986:32]

- the *full noun-phrase* is in argument-position
- the *agreement-morpheme* is a clitic, which is either:
  - (i) base-generated in its surface position (Borer 1984, Bouchard 1982, Burzio 1986, Jaeggli 1982, 1986, Suñer 1988)
    - possibly: the *full noun-phrase* undergoes covert movement to the position of the clitic (Sportiche 1996, 1998)
  - (ii) the result of movement of the *full noun-phrase* (Kayne 1989, 1991)
    - normally, movement results in the moved element being pronounced only in its upstairs position
    - if at least some instances of *resumptive pronouns* are best analyzed in terms of movement (Aoun and Choueiri 1996, Aoun et al. 2001, Demirdache 1991, Engdahl 1985, Hornstein 2001), then these instances furnish an example of movement where the full noun-phrase is pronounced upstairs, and a pronoun-like element is pronounced downstairs
      - ▶ this instance of movement, then, would be the opposite of such *resumption-chains*: a pronoun-like element (the clitic) is pronounced upstairs, and the full noun-phrase is pronounced downstairs (Anagnostopoulou 2003:211)
  - (iii) the result of movement of a  $D^0$  out of a “*Big DP*” (Boeckx 2003, Torrego 1988, Uriagereka 1995), which originally contained both the clitic and the *full noun-phrase*
  - (iv) the result of feature-movement (Anagnostopoulou 1999, 2003)
    - NOTE: feature-movement has generally been subsumed by *Agree* (see above); crucially, the kind of feature-movement invoked by Anagnostopoulou cannot be subsumed in this way (Anagnostopoulou 2003:215)
- ▶ What all these approaches agree upon — and is, in fact, part of the empirical landscape they seek to explain — is this:

Once *clitic-doubling* has occurred, the *full noun-phrase* behaves like an A-movement trace (or, in more theory-neutral terms, a non-final link in an A-chain):

- for *intervention*
- for binding

- under the movement-based approach (in (ii), above), this is completely expected
  - the other 3 approaches must derive this some other way

#### **OTHER EMPIRICAL PROPERTIES:**

- (i) the *agreement-morpheme* and the *full noun-phrase* must be sufficiently local
  - modulo restructuring/“*clause-union*”, the two must be clause-mates (Burzio 1986, Rizzi 1982, Sportiche 1996)
    - NOTICE: this is more strict than the locality-condition for  $\varphi$ -agreement
      - in particular, the two relations differ in their ability to cross the boundary of an infinitival clause

- (ii) since a pronominal clitic is a kind of pronoun, we also have similar expectations to those generated under the *Pronominal Argument Hypothesis (PAH)* —
  - the *agreement-morpheme* should — ideally — bear **some** resemblance to the series of strong pronouns in the language in question
  - *tense-invariance* (Arregi and Nevins 2008)

A side-note: consider the following question —

- How would one distinguish whether a given agreement-morpheme falls under the purview of (i) the *Pronominal Argument Hypothesis*, or (ii) *clitic-doubling*?
  - On the one hand, the *full noun-phrase*, under the *PAH*, is an adjunct
    - ⇒ it should be optional
  - but what if a language has *pro-drop*?
    - then, the *agreement-morpheme* could be the result of *clitic-doubling* of **pro**
      - this is, in fact, Baker’s (1996) modification to Jelinek’s proposal
    - and notice: since clitic-doubled noun-phrases behave like lower links in an A-chain, it’s not entirely clear how the presence of this *pro* could be diagnosed
  - On the other hand, if the *full noun-phrase* is phonologically present:
    - the *PAH* predicts it should behave syntactically as an adjunct
    - a *clitic-doubling* account predicts it should behave as an A-trace
- ⇒ once again, these are quite similar — though not identical...!
  - **QUESTION:** how would we tell the two apart?

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