

TOPICS IN SYNTACTIC AGREEMENT

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1. WHAT IS AGREEMENT?

(1) John eats an apple

The -s indicates agreement of the verb with the subject

(2) Ni-li-kuwa ni-ki-som-a

[Ashton 1949 in Baker 2008 :1]

1sS-PAST-be 1sS-CONT-read-FV

'I was reading'

where:

1s = 1st person singular

S = subject

Both the copula and the main verb agree with the understood 1st person singular subject. => there is an indication that the verb and the subject are in some kind of relation

Special syntactic relationship 'cross-linking' two or more elements in a given syntactic domain. This relationship is very often made explicit by means of a marker of some kind on one or all the elements between which it is established.

Is this all?

No!

What can agree with what?

- Verb and subject

- Verb and object
- Verb and indirect object?
- Noun and determiner
- Noun and adjective(s)
- Complementizer and verb?
- negative elements?
- topics and verbs?
- ...

WHAT WE WILL EXPLORE

We will explore argument-verb agreement and Agree.

1.1. SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Consider the following sentences:

(3) I eat an apple

(4) John eats an apple

Is there agreement between the verb and the subject in (3)? And in (4)?

The subject agrees with the verb in both cases; in (4) we see a morphological marker for agreement, in (3) we don't. English has a defective verbal paradigm.

Romance languages have a richer verbal paradigm:

(5) (Io) mangio una mela

(6) (Gianni) mangia una mela

SYNTACTIC CASE.

Case is also a form of agreement. It is for instance marked on Nouns, just like agreement. We will see how Case and agreement are strictly related.

SYNTACTIC CASE is a structural notion.

Nominative case is associated to a specific position in the syntactic structure (Spec, INFL)

In languages with morphological case: the structural position of a DP must correspond to a morphological mark on the noun (or on the DP)

Some specific structural positions are associated with specific **functions** (like subject, object etc.)

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF AGR(E) [AND CASE]

In the beginning was *Syntactic Structures*

Chomsky (1957): a position for auxiliaries:

(7) "We can state the occurrence of auxiliaries in declarative sentences by adding to the grammar the following rules:

(i) $Verb \rightarrow Aux + V$

(ii) $V \rightarrow hit, take, walk, read, etc.$

(iii) $Aux \rightarrow C (M) (have+en) (be+ing) (be+en)$

(iv) $M \rightarrow will, can, may, shall, must "$

(Chomsky 1957:39)

But then the idea was abandoned for a while until Chomsky (1981)

(8) $S \rightarrow NP INFL VP$

where INFL can have the values [\pm Tense].

If INFL is finite:

(9) "it will furthermore have the features person, gender and number; call this complex AGR ("agreement"). The element AGR is basically nominal in character; we might consider it to be identical with PRO and thus to have the

features [+N, -V]. If so, then we may revise the theory of government, taking AGR to be the governing element which assigns Case in INFL. Since [+N, -V] is not generally a Case-assigner, we must extend the theory of Case so that [+N, -V, + INFL] is a Case-assigner along with [-N], regarding [INFL] as basically “verbal”, if we take AGR to be nominal. INFL governs the subject if it contains AGR, then assigning nominative Case by virtue of the feature [+INFL]. It now follows that the only governors are categories of the form X^0 in the X-bar system (where $X = [\pm N, \pm V]$). Subjects are nominative when they agree with the matrix verb – technically, with its inflection.” [Chomsky 1981: 52]

What we need to know to understand (9):

i. [$\pm N$] [$\pm V$]: Categorial distinctive features characterizing the four main lexical categories N(oun), V(erb), A(djective), P(reposition)

A = +N, +V

N = +N, -V

V = -N, +V

P = -N, -V

-N categories are V and P (they are Case assigners)

ii. **syntactic Case**: a structural notion (see 1.1.)

Nominative case is associated to a specific position in the syntactic structure (Spec, INFL)

In languages with morphological case: the structural position of a DP must correspond to a morphological mark on the noun (or on the DP)

Some specific structural positions are associated with specific **functions** (like subject, object etc.)

iii. Government

α , a head, governs β IFF

- α c-commands β

- no barrier dominates β but not α

Barrier: any XP except IP

[Roberts 1997:64]

Chomsky (1981): X'-schema: no exocentric projections. So how do we deal with (8) [S → NP INFL VP]?

Solution: the clause is an endocentric projection with INFL as its head [why? Infl is selected by C, C a head, selection is a head-head relation, etc.]

The sentence is a projection of INFL. But what exactly IS in INFL?

Recall: AGR (nominal) and INFL (verbal) are both in INFL (Chomsky 1981).

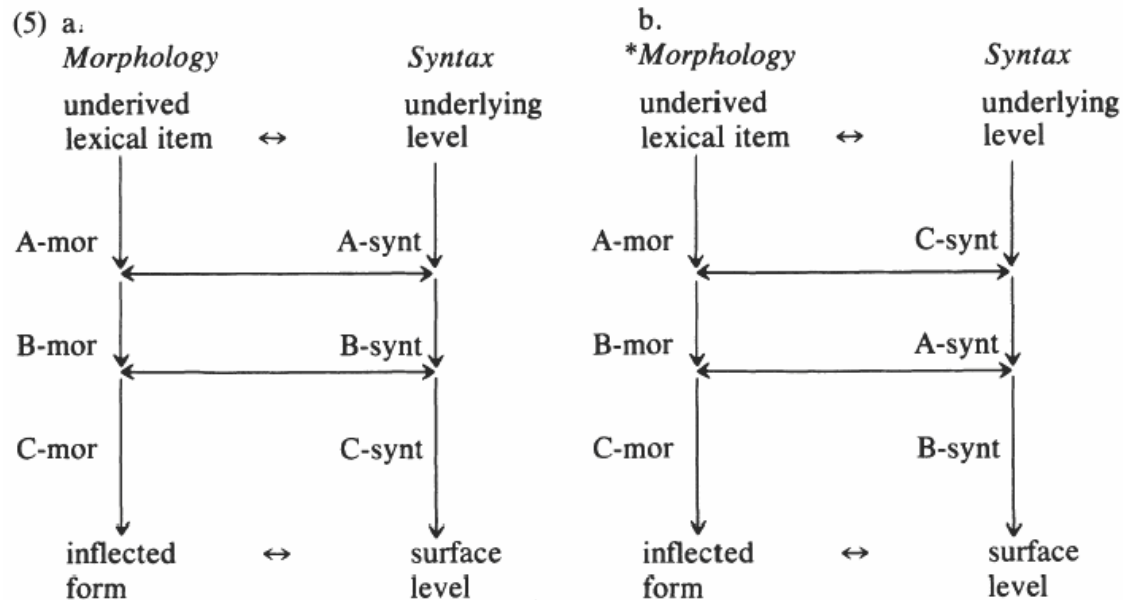
Two problems: a conceptual and an empirical one [from Belletti 2001]

CONCEPTUAL PROBLEM (which is still very much debated. See the origin of nanosyntax): a single head should not be allowed to contain more than one feature. Every head should correspond to one morpheme; if it contains more, this should be the result of head movement incorporation.

Baker (1985)'s Mirror Principle:

(10) *The Mirror Principle*

Morphological derivations must directly reflect syntactic derivations (and vice versa)



[Baker 1985: 376]

EMPIRICAL PROBLEM: Emonds (1978), the position of V with respect to negation in English and French can be given a straightforward account in terms of Verb movement

Pollock (1989): *The Split-Infl hypothesis*

Position of the verb with respect to negation. GENERALIZATION: the verb moves in French but not in English:

- (11) Jean n'aime pas Marie
- (12) *John likes not Mary
- (13) John does not like Mary
- (14) *Jean ne pas aime Marie [Pollock 1989 in Belletti 2001:484]

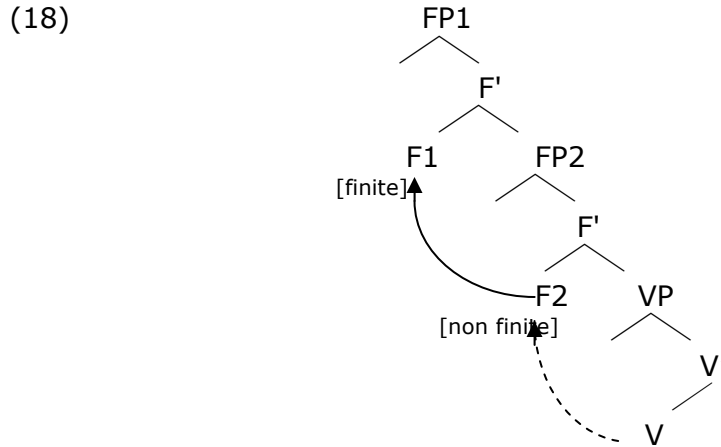
Not so fast! Look at these data now:

- (15) Jean essaye de rencontrer **souvent** Marie
- (16) Jean essaye de ne **pas** rencontrer souvent Marie
- (17) *Jean essaye de ne rencontrer **pas** Marie

So does the verb move in French or not?

SOLUTION: there is more than one head inflectional position where the verb moves or does not move.

Proposed structure:



The INFL must hence be split. But how do we split it? What goes in F1 and what in F2?

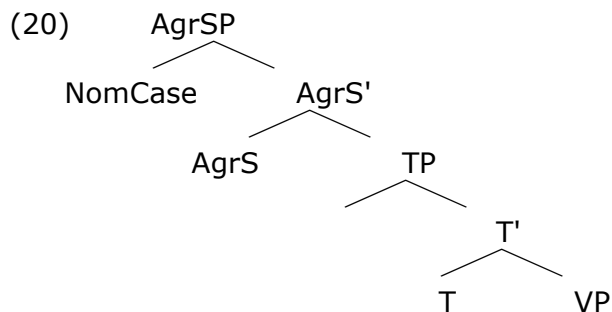
Pollock: let's observe verbal morphology. What does it encode?

(19)

parla-va-	no
parl- ai-	ent
V	pstimp agr

TENSE and AGREEMENT
 (What about aspect?)

Now AGREEMENT has its own projection!



The subject must move to Spec, AgrSP to receive Nominative Case.
 What determines this movement?
 EPP? Feature strength? We will return to this.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

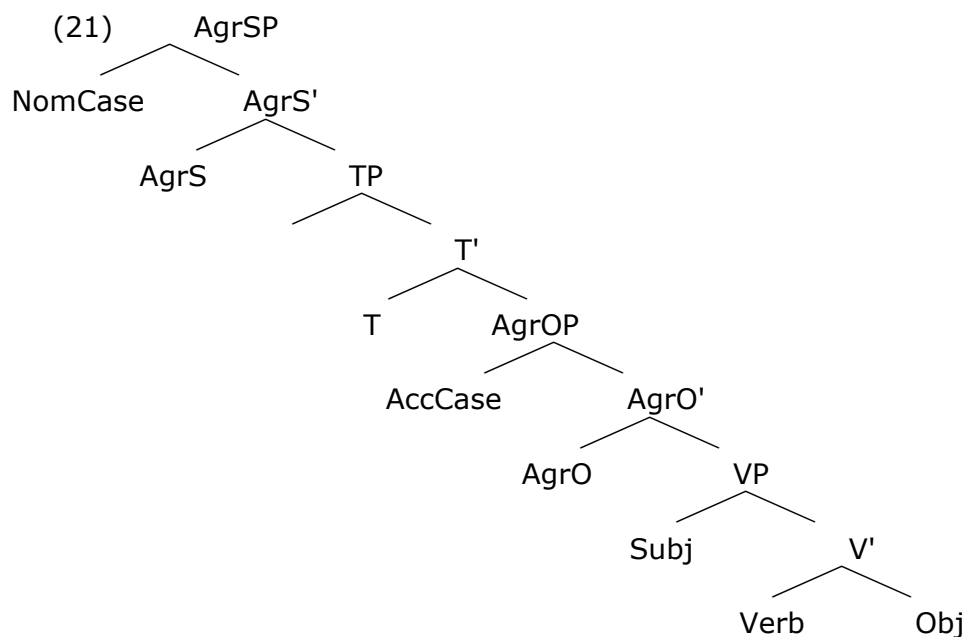
Two-step operation:

1. The subject MUST move to the spec, AgrSP to receive Nom
2. The verb MUST move to AgrS to get its agreement ending

Why is this Spec-Head relation necessary? [See below]

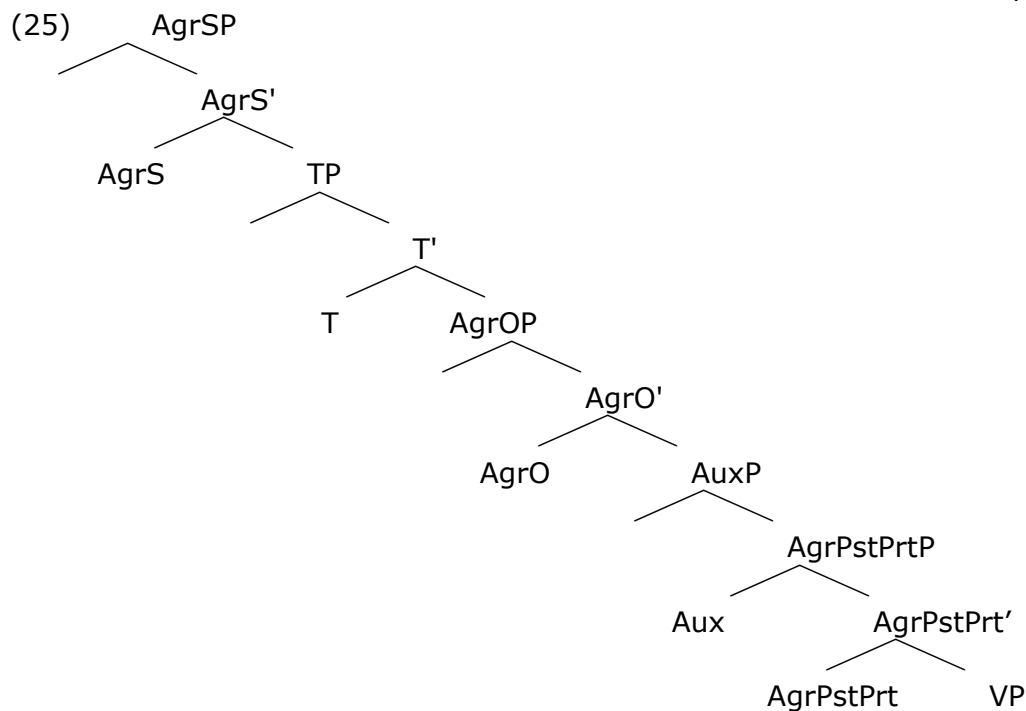
What happens in languages like English which don't have V-to-T? [we need to solve this too]

Question: how is Accusative Case assigned? For theoretical uniformity we need an AgrO head assigning Accusative to its Specifier:



(22) "[...] The basic assumption is that there is a symmetry between the subject and the object inflectional systems. In both positions the relation of NP to V is mediated by Agr, a collection of ϕ -features; in both positions agreement is determined by the ϕ -features of the Agr head of the Agrcomplex, and Case by an element that adjoins to Agr (T or V). An NP in the Spec-head relation to this Agr complex bears the associated Case and agreement features. The Spec-head and head-head relations are therefore the core configurations for inflectional morphology [...]" (Chomsky 1995, Chapter 3: 174)

BUT WHY SPEC-HEAD?



[Belletti 2001:491]

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