Spell-out of Agree depends on your Personal Goal

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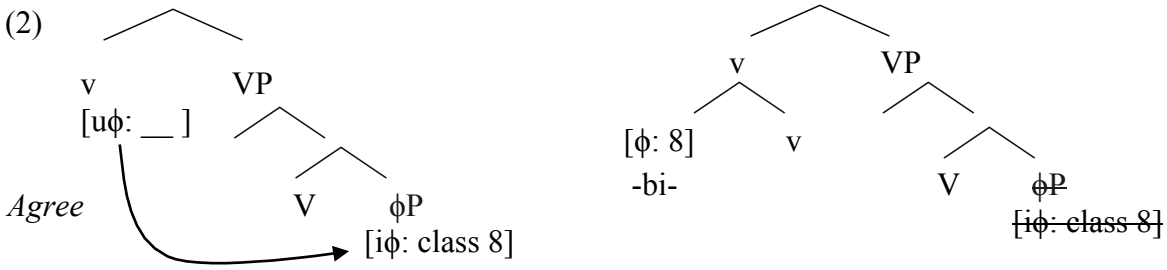
Bantu languages (spoken in sub-Saharan Africa) can mark subjects and objects on the verb by a prefix, e.g. *b-* and *-bi-* in (1):

(1) Baana b-a-bi-kol-a. [Bembe, Iorio 2014]
2children 2SM-T-8OM-buy-FV
'The children have bought them.' [class 8, the books]

There is, however, a lot of **microvariation within the Bantu languages** with respect to the status of these markers. In this talk I present a unified approach that takes the Agree mechanism to stay constant and the spell-out of the prefixes to be dependent on the structure of the Goal phrase. I tackle three challenges for the approach and identify 5 parameters crucially involving both Probe and Goal to account for the variation.

Following Roberts (2010), I take object markers to be the result of little v agreeing with a **defective Goal**. That is, if the Goal has a subset of the features on the Probe (i.e. is defective), this is indistinguishable from a movement chain, where only the highest copy is normally spelled out (Nunes 2004). Concretely, if v agrees with a defective object pronoun (a ϕP), the spell-out on v results in an object marker (2). If v agrees with a DP (no subset), no marker can be spelled out.

(2)



This predicts a complementary distribution between DP and ϕP objects, which is true for the Bantu language Bembe (Iorio 2014). However, a first challenge for this approach are languages that allow spell-out of both the DP and the object marker in the same domain, so-called 'doubling'. For example, object marking is obligatory in (3), where it is clear that the DP is not dislocated.

(3) U-*(mw)-ene ndayi? [Sambaa, Riedel 2009: 155]
2SG.SM-1OM-see.PERF.CJ who
'Who did you see?'

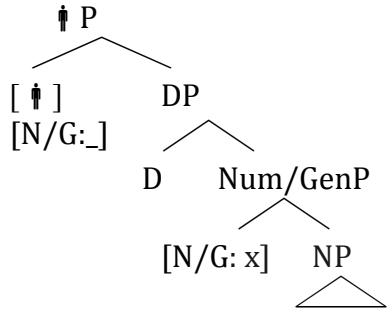
This can be accounted for if objects in doubling languages can have an extra ϕ layer to form a '**big DP**' (Uriagereka 1995, Cechetto 1999 among others; Bax & Diercks 2012 for Manyika). The same Probe on v now agrees only with the outer ϕ features of the Goal: this is a subset and hence spells out as an object marker, while the DP is also spelled out.

A second and related challenge is the differential nature of Bantu object marking, where only objects high in animacy, definiteness or givenness are doubled (4).

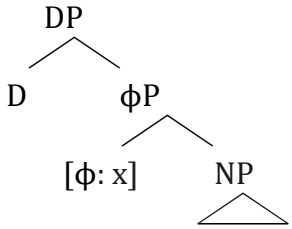
(4) a. N-a-mʊ-onaa mwalimu. [Nyaturu, Hualde 1989: 182]
1SG.SM-PAST1-1OM-see 1teacher
'I saw *the* teacher.'
b. N-a-onaa mwalimu.
1SG.SM-PAST1-see 1teacher
'I saw *a* teacher.'

Following Richards (2008), I assume that this is due to the **presence of a [Person] feature** in (the extra layer of) these objects. Varying across languages, [Person] on non-participants (i.e. 3rd persons) is associated with animacy or definiteness, or, as I will add, givenness. The object-marked (doubled) objects will thus be a bigDP with a Person feature. In fact, [Person] can itself *be* the extra layer: doubled objects project a separate [Person] layer (5), whereas non-doubled objects do not and are DPs (6). Again, Agree is the same, but the Goal varies.

(5)



(6)



A third challenge is whether subject marking works in the same way. If spell-out of ϕ features on v or T depends on the structure of the Goal, and if having a separate Person layer or not is parameterised for the *whole* language, subject and object marking should behave the same. This is true for some languages, but not others: in Sambaa both are doubling, in Bembe both are non-doubling, but in Zulu and Sotho subject marking is doubling (like Sambaa) whereas object marking is non-doubling (like Bembe). I propose that this can be understood again in the interaction between Probe and Goal: if the Probe has a **movement trigger**, it will always have a superset of the features of the Goal and thus spell out regardless of the spell-out of the (moved) DP/ϕP.

The variation in subject and object marking is thus located in the following **parameters** for features on clausal heads (external, 1-2), and the structure of nominals (internal, 3-5), deriving a featural typology of cross-Bantu agreement (to be illustrated in the talk):

1) the presence/absence of a ϕ Probe;
2) the presence/absence of a movement trigger on the Probe;
3) whether the Goal is a DP or ϕP;
4) whether the Goal can project a separate Person layer;
5) what Person connects to (Case, topic, animacy, definiteness, givenness).

The approach is in line with the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture (Baker 2008) where all parameters of variation are attributable to differences in the features of heads in the lexicon. This holds both at the clausal and phrasal level, but only in the *interaction* between Probe and Goal can we understand the microvariation in agreement.

Key references

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