

The attractions of agreement

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Agreement in specificational copular sentences is a complex matter, empirically as well as theoretically. Patterns that are attested are often not easy to make fall out from a restrictive theory of Agree relations; patterns that are *not* attested would sometimes seem hard to exclude. In this paper, I will try my hand at coming to terms with a number of *prima facie* problematic ϕ -feature agreement patterns in specificational copular sentences, with particular emphasis on pseudoclefts and their close relatives (though double-NP specificational copular sentences will also be addressed, in section 3). In section 2, the spotlight will be on specificational pseudoclefts and semi-clefts whose syntax arguably features a full clause in the complement of the copular pivot, and on the question of how to allow this copula to agree in ϕ -features with the focus of the construction (which is contained inside the copula's clausal complement), under specific circumstances that will be made more precise. We will see that the structural configuration in which the copula of such pseudoclefts and semi-clefts can ϕ -agree with the focus closely resemble the circumstances under which 'out of the ordinary' agreement phenomena are found elsewhere in Universal Grammar: circumstances which I will unify under the rubric of 'agreement attraction', defined as agreement with the finite verb controlled by a constituent that is not an A-dependent of that verb. By 'A-dependent' I mean a constituent that occupies an A-position *and* is a direct dependent of the agreeing verb or the clause that it projects. What unifies the cases of 'agreement attraction' that we will encounter in section 2 is that in none of these cases does the agreeing verb engage in an A-dependency with the constituent that it ϕ -agrees with; rather, in each of these cases, the agreeing constituent is in an A'-position at the point at which the Agree relation between it and the agreeing verb is established. It is these cases from which the paper derives its title.

The 'agreement attraction' cases that figure centrally in the discussion in section 2 are almost always confined to *number* (and sometimes *gender*) agreement. '*Person* agreement attraction' is extremely rare — though, if the analysis of a subtype of semi-clefts presented here is correct, not entirely nonexistent. That 'agreement attraction' is usually for number (and sometimes gender) and not for person falls out from what Baker (2008, 2011) has dubbed the Structural Condition on Person Agreement (SCOPA). I will derive SCOPA from the syntactic representation of person in the noun phrase and the workings of agreement in syntax, and carefully isolate the exception that proves the rule.

In section 3, the empirical scope of the investigation will be broadened to include ϕ -agreement in copular inversion constructions — constructions in which the predicate of the copular sentence raises into the structural subject position, and strands its subject in its base position. The special status of person will be seen to be very much in evidence in this domain as well. But in addition we will see (based on a detailed investigation of the facts of ϕ -feature agreement in Dutch copular inversion constructions, including clefts) that it is impossible for the inverted nominal predicate to control ϕ -agreement with the copula. This is made to fall out from a particular analysis of the fronted predicate of copular inversion constructions, as a pro-predicate unspecified for ϕ -features.

Key references

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