

Agreement as sisterhood
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Current analyses of the morphosyntax of the Germanic languages continue to assume that subject-verb agreement is mediated by a functional head **F** which represents features of the verb and enters into a relation **R** with the subject. In the classical implementation of this view, $F = \text{AGR}(\text{eement})$ and $R = \text{the specifier-head relation}$, in a recent revision (Chomsky 1998) $F = \text{T}(\text{ense})$ and $R = \text{local c-command ('AGREE')}$. This paper proposes to rethink the nature of the agreement configuration and the agreement process, starting from the assumption in (1):

(1) The grammar recognizes only one local relation, which is sisterhood

It follows from (1) that subject-verb agreement is a relation between the subject and its sister **S** (a projection of T/AGR), and that the appearance of subject agreement morphology on the verb or some auxiliary element is a consequence of the need to spell out the agreement features on some appropriate terminal element of S. It also follows that the subject is not in a direct agreement relation with F, and that F does not carry any (valued or unvalued) features associated with the agreement process which might trigger verb movement to it. The paper defends this view on subject-verb agreement based on agreement facts from various Germanic languages.

The assumption in (1) is motivated by (2):

(2) *Derivational approach to syntactic relations* (Epstein 1995)

The computational system of human language establishes grammatical relations only by merging the relevant entities in a sisterhood configuration

It can easily be seen that both the specifier-head relation and the c-command relation crucially involve the sisterhood configuration (essentially: sisterhood + some form of dominance), so that nothing is lost by pursuing (1). Secondly, the sisterhood approach is motivated by the observation that subject-verb agreement is an *asymmetric* relation, where the subject is the dominant element, triggering agreement on the verb (i.e. the gender/number/person features are inherent/interpretable on noun phrases, but not on verbs). Minimally, then, agreement is an asymmetric feature sharing mechanism between the subject and its sister, which then spells out the agreement features on an appropriate terminal element, and no functional heads need to be involved.

Unlike the specifier-head hypothesis of subject-verb agreement, the sisterhood hypothesis allows for the subject and the verb to be nonadjacent. This is instantiated in English (3a) and in embedded clauses in the Continental Westgermanic (CWG, 3b) and Mainland Scandinavian (MSC, 3c) languages:

- (3) a. John probably loves Mary / John probably does not love Mary
b. Dutch: ..dat Jan Marie niet kust [that John Mary not kisses]
c. Swedish: ..att Johan inte köpte boken [that John not bought book-the]

In English, the adjacency of verb and object suggests that both are inside VP, with VP moving leftward across certain adverbs (Cinque 1999, Koster 2000); given standard conditions on head movement, this makes association (via LF-movement?) of the finite verb with F problematic, but no such problems occur in the sisterhood/spell-out approach. In CWG and MSC, the distribution of adverbs suggests that the verb is inside VP, and association of the verb with F can only take place through some covert operation (to be avoided in the ideal case). The sisterhood/spell-out approach allows one to maintain that finite verb movement in main clauses in CWG/MS is conditioned by factors specifically relevant to the main clause configuration (i.e., some form of 'verb second').

The Kimball/Aissen facts (4) are shown to argue more specifically against the specifier-head hypothesis:

- (4) a. the people who Clark think(s) are in the garden
b. the person who the girls think(*s) is in the garden

In Kayne's (1989) analysis, the deviating plural agreement in (4a) is the result of AGR moving to C and entering into person agreement with *who* in Spec,CP. This analysis wrongly predicts a similar effect in (4b). The absence of such an effect shows that we are really dealing with a matching phenomenon, suggesting an analysis in terms of spell-out. In the sisterhood approach, there are two agreement relations (who-C' and subject-I') which need to be spelled out by a single, matching, form of the verb or auxiliary. The facts then follow on Kayne's assumption that speakers who allow (4a) may choose to ignore [person], yielding *think* as a matching SG/PL form.

The AGREE hypothesis (agreement via c-command) is motivated by phenomena of agreement in expletive constructions, where *are* c-commands the associate *many people*:
(5) There are many people in the room

On the sisterhood hypothesis, these facts follow immediately, assuming that at some point in the derivation the copula is contained within the sister constituent of *many people*, as it is overtly in CWG embedded clauses:

- (6) Dutch: ..dat er veel mensen in de tuin waren
that there many people in the garden were-PL

The same is true for more complex cases like (7a), cf. CWG (7b):

- (7) a. There seem to be many people in the room
b. Dutch: ..dat er veel mensen in de tuin schijnen te zijn
that there many people in the garden seem-PL to be

This can be taken to support the view, inherent to the sisterhood approach, that agreement is established derivationally, as soon as the subject is merged to the structure, so that agreement results even if the subject never appears in the structural subject position.

Icelandic defective agreement with quirky case subjects also supports the sisterhood approach over the AGREE/c-command approach.

- (8) a. henni likuðu þeir [she-DAT liked-3PL they-NOM] 'she liked them'
b. *henni likuðum við [she-DAT liked-1PL we-NOM] 'she liked us'
c. henni likaði eg [she-DAT liked-1/3SG I-NOM] 'she liked me'

Following Sigurdsson's (2000) analysis, these facts involve number agreement with the object and (default=3) person agreement with the subject. We are dealing, then, with agreement derived from more than a single source, and ensuing matching effects (8b vs 8c). The AGREE/c-command approach, which hinges on feature valuation of F by a single noun phrase c-commanded by F, is not equipped to deal with such phenomena, but they follow from the sisterhood approach, where agreement involves spell-out of possibly multiple relations of feature sharing under sisterhood.

On this view of agreement, parametric variation can be defined in terms of a requirement on the position inside S of the element spelling out the agreement features: in situ or at the edge of S (i.e. in the highest functional head), with Icelandic opting for the edge setting.

Time permitting, the paper presents an algorithm for identifying within S the element to spell out the agreement features, and discusses phenomena from outside Germanic supporting the sisterhood approach to agreement (past participle agreement in Romance, multiple agreement in Bantu, and defective subject agreement in Semitic).