

Toward an explanation for Person effects in Low Nominative Agreement

The issue: One of the striking features of the agreement possible in Icelandic with Nominative objects (“monoclausal L[ow] N[ominative] A[greement]”) and with the subjects of embedded non-finite and small clauses (“biclausal LNA”) is that agreement for Person and for Number behave differently. First, while agreement for Number is possible, agreement for Person is not. Second, failure to agree for Person with a low nominative in the monoclausal case results in ineffability, while for some speakers this is not the case for failure to agree in Number.

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in the theoretical literature concerning differences between Person and Number agreement (see among others Baker 2008; Béjar and Rezac 2009; Preminger 2011, 2014) in a wide range of languages. Within this literature, there have been numerous proposals, dating back at least to Boeckx (2000), that the Icelandic pattern should be assimilated to the Person Case Constraint (PCC), according to which in some languages 1st/2nd person objects are ungrammatical in the presence of an intervening indirect object. One part of the explanation for this pattern is the stipulation that 1st and 2nd person pronouns need to be licensed by entering into an *Agree* relation with an appropriate functional category (the Person Licensing Constraint=PLC of Béjar and Rezac 2003).

A problem for this account of the Person effect in LNA is the fact that in the biclausal construction, 1st and 2nd person LNA is grammatical as long as the verb appears in the 3rd singular form, necessitating at the least some revision of the PLC (Preminger 2011).

- (1) Kennarum fannst þið svo sniðug.
teacher.DEF.DAT found.3.S you.PL.NOM so clever
“The teacher considered you so clever.”

Even more problematic for a PCC-based account of the Icelandic Dative/Nominative constructions is the observation that agreement with a 1st or 2nd person nominative becomes grammatical if the agreeing form of the verb is syncretic with 3rd person (Sigurðsson, 1996):

- (2) *Henni leiddumst/leiddist við. b. Henni leiddist ég/þú.
her.DAT bored.1.PL/3.S we.NOM her.DAT bored.1/2/3.S I.NOM/you.S.NOM
‘She found us boring.’ ‘She found me/you boring.’

Schütze (2003) consequently proposes that the problem of 1st/2nd person LNA is one of morphological exponence. The probe seeks to agree simultaneously with the dative argument (which by hypothesis results in 3rd person agreement) and the nominative argument; the result is only grammatical if there is a morphological form that can spell-out the resulting feature combination (see Ackema and Neeleman (to appear) for a necessary adjustment).

In this talk we will provide three new sets of evidence for an approach to the Person effect in LNA in terms of multiple *Agree* and morphological exponence. First, we provide **experimental data from Icelandic** supporting the existence of the effect of syncretism just discussed, and also the grammaticality of non-agreement with 1st/2nd person low nominatives in the biclausal case—see (1) above. Second, we compare these Icelandic data to **new data from copular constructions in Faroese**: in a production study, native speakers showed a strong Person effect in the singular (agreement with the second of two nominative DPs was strongly dispreferred when this DP was 2nd singular) that did not appear in the plural (where all distinctive person marking on the verb has been lost). Third, we compare the Faroese data to **parallel data from a new experimental study on German**, which shows no Person effect, and we argue that this difference is to be accounted for in terms of differing possibilities for the first NP to evade agreement by moving to a position above the Probe.

Data: For Icelandic, we conducted a thermometer study (see Featherston 2008) testing both mono-clausal and biclausal Dat/Nom verbs with default (3sg) agreement, LNA and syncretic

agreement, see Table 1. The results clearly support the observation that default is possible in the biclausal case (A). Additionally, we observe an effect of syncretism in both the mono-clausal and biclausal structures (B vs. C: $t_1(58)=6.41^{***}$, $t_2(17)=8,646^{***}$; E vs. F: $t_1(58)=5.00^{***}$; $t_2(17)=3,66^{**}$). While the overall mean for the syncretic conditions improves compared to the non-syncretic condition, it is still low; note though that of a total of 60 participants there are 7 in the biclausal and 9 in the monoclausal condition with positive values.

Agreement		Biclausal		Monoclausal			
		z-score	Rating	z-score	Rating		
Default	Dat.3s V.3s (...) Nom.2pl	A	.70	26.7	D	-.44	17.6
Syncretic	Dat.3s V.2/3pl (...) Nom.2pl	B	-.33	18.2	E	-.33	18.6
Non-Syncretic	Dat.3s V.1pl (...) Nom.1pl	C	-.93	13.7	F	-.73	15.3

Table 1: Conditions and results of the rating study on Icelandic DAT-NOM verbs

For S[pecificational] C[opular] C[lause]s in Faroese we present data from a production study, where participants were asked to fill in the verbal gap in SCCs (and fillers). The relevant conditions and results are outlined in Table 2.

	DP Phi-Features		Verb agreement with			Total	%DP1agr
	DP1	DP2	DP1	DP2	DP2 (Syncretic)		
A	3s	3p	51	54	n.a.	105	49
B	3s	2s	100	14	n.a.	114	88
C	3s	2p	39	n.a.	976	115	34

Table 2: Conditions and results of the Faroese fill-in-the-blanks study

We calculated planned contrasts on the relative adjusted frequencies to investigate the influence of person agreement (A vs B), and the influence of syncretism (B vs. C). There is a clear preference for DP1 agreement when DP2 is 2nd person and person is morphologically marked on the verb ($F_1(1,40) = 25,0^{***}$ $F_2(1,14) = 29,5^{***}$); this preference is reversed when the verbal morphology is syncretic ($F_1(1,40) = 49,3^{***}$, $F_2(1,14) = 131,2^{***}$). In contrast, a comparable study on a different range of conditions in German shows an almost exclusive production of DP2 agreement independent of the (person) features of DP2.

Discussion and Conclusion: In our results we see both a person and syncretism effect in the Icelandic data (as reported in Sigurðsson 1996), but now also in Faroese SCCs. Both effects support a Multiple Agreement analysis allowing for the modeling of the effect of syncretism. German SCCs depart from this pattern, because of a syntactic difference in SCCs. Following the inversion analyses of SCCs (see Heggie 1988; Moro 1997; den Dikken 2006), we propose that grammars differ with respect to whether the inverted noun phrase (DP1) has a landing site below the agreement head (in Faroese) or above it. The latter leads to exclusive DP2 agreement as in German with DP1 simply being not visible to the probe. When both DP1 and DP2 are below the probe, both are in principle visible to it, leading to the effects that we observe. Thus, while Multiple Agreement seems to be a necessary ingredient to account for agreement possibilities, configurational prerequisites limit the domain of where these apply.

Selected References.

Baker 2008. *The syntax of agreement and concord*. • Béjar & Rezac 2003. Person licensing and the derivation of PCC effects. In *Romance Linguistics*. • Béjar & Rezac 2009. Cyclic agree. *LI* 40. • Preminger, Omer. 2011. Asymmetries between person and number in syntax. *NLLT* 29 • Preminger, Omer. 2014. *Agreement and its failures*. • Schütze, Carson. 2003. Syncretism and double agreement with Icelandic Nominative objects. In *Grammar in focus*. • Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 1996. Icelandic finite verb agreement. *WPSS* 57.