The issue of the syntax-semantics interface

Semantic agreement is a particular instance of agreement mismatch:

In the most straightforward cases **syntactic agreement** (sometimes called 'agreement *ad formam*', 'formal agreement' or 'grammatical agreement') is agreement consistent with the form of the controller (*the committee* has *decided*). **Semantic agreement** (or 'agreement *ad sensum*', 'notional agreement', 'logical agreement' or 'synesis'*)* is agreement consistent with its meaning (*the committee* have *decided).* The distinction between syntactic and semantic agreement links to Steele's definition… in that the covariance involves a 'semantic or formal property' of the controller.

The terms syntactic and semantic agreement are used only when there is a potential choice.

Corbett 2006: 155

The Archi gender system is semantically driven (at least for genders I and II), and number agreement generally follows notional number. So the instances where there is a potential choice, with semantic agreement differing from syntactic agreement, are relatively few.

1. Semantic agreement with numerals

Normally, numerals require the head noun to be in the singular, and agree with it in gender and number independently of the case of the noun ((1) here, see handout (attached) for more detail). However, numeral phrases headed by nouns which denote humans allow semantic agreement in the verb (2).

(1) os **i‹w›di-li** **i‹w›di-t'u** ɬib-aw kulu lo
     one ‹I.SG›be.PST-EVID ‹I.SG›be.PST-NEG three-I.SG orphan lad(I)[SG.ABS]
     'Once upon a time there were three orphan boys.' (lit.: 'well, there was or there was not' – standard beginning of a tale) (T2:1)

(2) os **e‹b›di-li** **e‹b›di-t'u** ɬib-aw kulu lo
     one ‹I/II.PL›be.PST-EVID ‹I/II.PL›be.PST-NEG three-I.SG orphan lad(I)[SG.ABS]
     'Once upon a time there were three orphan boys.'

Note that the noun here remains in the singular, and the numeral agrees with it, while the verb takes singular agreement in (1) and plural (semantic) agreement in (2).

If noun is non-human, semantic agreement is not allowed (3b, 4b):

(3) a. os **e‹b›di-li** **e‹b›di-t'u** arša ɬippu doːzu-b ans
        one ‹III.SG›be.PST-EVID ‹III.SG›be.PST-NEG archi.LOC three.III.SG be.big.ATTR-III.SG bull(III)[ABS.SG]

    b. *os **edi-li** **edi-t'u** arša ɬippu doːzu-b ans
        one [III/IV.PL]be.PST-EVID [III/IV.PL]be.PST-NEG archi.LOC three.III.SG be.big.ATTR-III.SG bull(III)[ABS.SG]
        *'Once upon a time there were three big bulls in Archi.'

(4) a. os **e‹b›di-li** **e‹b›di-t'u** ɬippu qala
        one ‹III.SG›be.PST-EVID ‹III.SG›be.PST-NEG three.III.SG fortress(III)[ABS.SG]

b. *os **edi-li**   **edi-t'u**   ɬippu   qala

one   [III/IV.PL]be.PST-EVID   [III/IV.PL]be.PST-NEG three.III.SG   fortress(III)[ABS.SG]

*'Once upon a time there were three fortresses.'

Another example of semantic agreement involving numerals.

(5) nen   q'ˤwe‹r›u   **q'oc'o-li[1]**   **q'iˤjdi-li**

1PL.EXCL[ABS]   two‹II.SG›   [1PL]reconcile.PFV-CVB   [1PL]sit.PFV-EVID

'we two (girls) had made up (by then) and were sitting there...' (literally: 'we two having reconciled were sitting')

This example is from a spontaneous text. However, I discussed it with several speakers and got the following variants:

(6) nen   q'ˤwe‹r›u   **do-q'c'o-li**   **q'a‹r›di-li**

1PL.EXCL[ABS]   two‹II.SG›   II.SG-reconcile.PFV-CVB   ‹II.SG›sit.PFV-EVID

'we two (girls) had made up (by then) and were sitting there...

(7) nen   q'ˤwe‹r›u   **do-q'c'o-li**   **q'iˤjdi-li**

1PL.EXCL[ABS]   two‹II.SG›   II.SG-reconcile.PFV-CVB   [1PL]sit.PFV-EVID

'we two (girls) had made up (by then) and were sitting there...

(8) *nen   q'ˤwe‹r›u   **q'oc'o-li**   **q'a‹r›di-li**

1PL.EXCL[ABS]   two‹II.SG›   [1PL]reconcile.PFV-CVB   ‹II.SG›sit.PFV-EVID

*'we two (girls) had made up (by then) and were sitting there...

Here, the pronoun is 1st person plural exclusive, and the numeral always agrees in gender with the referent (girls). There are two predicates here: the converb ('reconcile') and the main verb ('sit'). Both can show semantic agreement and agree in the plural (5); or both can show the syntactic agreement (with the numeral or the presumed referent) and agree in the singular (6); another possibility is that the converb agrees in the singular and the main verb in the plural (7). The only ungrammatical variant is when the converb agrees in the plural and the main verb in the singular (8).

2. Semantic agreement when the controller comprises several nouns
These cases include three possibilities: conjoined arguments (A and B), discussed in Section 2.1, disjoined arguments (A or B) discussed in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 discusses a construction where there is a choice between A and B, but it is irrelevant for the speaker, which option will be chosen. In each case, there is a particle which attaches to both arguments.

2.1. Conjunction
The key choice is between agreement with one conjunct (syntactic agreement) and agreement with all (semantic agreement). For conjoined phrases, Archi strongly favours semantic agreement; the verb can be in the final or the initial position:

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[1] Note that this is a "wrong" agreement form, which we claim to be the first person plural form, see Chumakina, Kibort and Corbett (2007) or Corbett's presentation for Seminar 3, both on Archi WIKI site at http://fahs-wiki.soh.surrey.ac.uk/groups/fromcompetingtheoriestofieldworkarchi/wiki/1ccf3/person_paper.html

(9) ušdu-wu   došdur-u   χˤe e‹b›t:i-li
     brother(I)[SG.ABS]-and   sister(II)[SG.ABS]-and   cold   ‹I/II.PL›become.PFV-EVID
     'Brother and sister got cold.'

(10) χˤe e‹b›t:i-li   ušdu-wu   došdur-u
     cold   ‹I/II.PL›become.PFV-EVID   brother(I)[SG.ABS]-and   sister(II)[SG.ABS]-and
     'Brother and sister got cold.'

(11) zari   Aħma:d-u   Moħomma:d-u   χir   a‹b›u
     1SG.ERG   PN(I)[SG.ABS]-and   PN(I)[SG.ABS]-and   behind   ‹I/II.PL›do.PFV
     'I brought Akhmed and Magomed.'

(12) χir   a‹b›u   zari   Aħma:d-u   Moħomma:d-u
     behind   ‹I/II.PL›do.PFV   1SG.ERG   PN(I)[SG.ABS]-and   PN(I)[SG.ABS]-and
     'I brought Akhmed and Magomed.'

The other possibility, agreement with the closest conjunct (on the left) is allowed only if the verb follows the first conjunct:

(13) ušdu-wu   χˤe i‹w›t:i-li   došdur-u
     brother(I)[SG.ABS]-and   cold   ‹I.SG›become.PFV-EVID   sister(II)[SG.ABS]-and
     'Brother and sister got cold.'

It needs to be said that when presented with such examples, the speakers commented that the second verb must have been omitted here, and suggested full sentences such as (14):

(14) ušdu-wu   χˤe i‹w›t:i-li   došdur-u   χˤe e‹r›t:i-li
     brother(I)[SG.ABS]-and cold   ‹I.SG›become.PFV-EVID   sister(II)[SG.ABS]-and   cold ‹II.SG›become.PFV-EVID
     'Brother and sister got cold.'

In the favoured situation, where agreement is with all conjuncts, the feature specification of the target is determined by the resolution rules.

(15) dija-wu   dogi-wu   ł:ʷak   **b-i**
     father(I)[ABS.SG]-and   donkey(III)[ABS.SG]-and   near   I/II.PL-be.PRS
     'Father and the donkey are near.'

(16) dogi-wu   moto:l-u   ł:ʷak   **i**
     donkey(III)[ABS.SG]-and   goat.kid(IV)[ABS.SG]-and   near   [III/IV.PL]be.PRS
     'The donkey and goat kid are near.'

(17) k'urt'a-wu   ra:č-u   išik   **i**
     hammer(IV)[SG.ABS]-and   anvil(III)[SG.ABS]-and   here-LAT   [III/IV.PL]be.PRS
     'The anvil and hammer are here.'

As (15)-(17) demonstrate, the agreement resolution rules for conjoined phrases are straightforward and typologically familiar:

1. If there is a conjunct referring to a human, use gender I/II agreement.
2. Otherwise use gender III/IV agreement.

<div align="right">(based on Corbett 1991: 273)</div>

It might appear that we could give resolution rules according to gender; distinguishing genders I and II from III and IV. Example (18) shows that this is not the best approach:

(18) χalq'-u   dogi-wu   ɬ:ʷak   **b-i**
      people(III)[.SG.ABS]-and donkey(III)[NOM.SG]-and   near   I/II.PL-be.PRS
      'The people and the donkey are near.' (Kibrik 1977:187)

The noun χalq' is a third gender noun (χːˤonnub χalq 'wicked people, wicked nation', where the adjective is in the third gender singular), but for the resolution rules, it is its semantics which is decisive (as in the resolution rules given above): it denotes humans, so the verb uses gender I/II agreement.

2.2. Disjunction

When there is a choice between two arguments, semantic agreement is possible only for some speakers. Examples (19) and (20) were accepted as grammatical by 5 speakers and were rendered ungrammatical by 3 speakers:

(19) wa-ra-k   Rasul-i   Pat'i-ri   **χir**   **a‹b›u-qi**
      2SG-CONT-LAT   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-or   PATI(II)[SG.ABS]-or   behind   ‹I/II.PL›make-FUT
      'Shall I bring to you Rasul or Patimat?' (context: a grandmother agrees to look after only one grandchild at a time).

(20) wa-ra-k   **χir**   **a‹b›u-qi**   Rasul-i   Pat'i-ri
      2SG-CONT-LAT   behind   ‹I/II.PL›make-FUT   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-or   Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-or
      'Shall I bring to you Rasul or Patimat?'

Speakers preferred variants where the verb agrees with one of the arguments, but only if the verb is in non-final position:

(21) wa-ra-k   Rasul-i   **χir**   **uw-qi**   Pat'i-ri
      2SG-CONT-LAT   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-or   behind   [I.SG]make-FUT   Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-or
      'Shall I bring to you Rasul or Patimat?'

(22) wa-ra-k   **χir**   **uw-qi**   Rasul-i   Pat'i-ri
      2SG-CONT-LAT   behind   [I.SG]make-FUT   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-or   Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-or
      'Shall I bring to you Rasul or Patimat?'

If the verb is in the final position, the agreement with the closest argument is ungrammatical for 6 out 8 speakers:

(23) *wa-ra-k   Rasul-i   Pat'i-ri   **χir**   **a‹r›u-qi**
      2SG-CONT-LAT   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-or   PATI(II)[SG.ABS]-or   behind   ‹II.SG›make-FUT
      *'Shall I bring to you Rasul or Patimat?'

2.3. Disjunction with the concessive particle

The particle *-šaw*, when attached to a verbal stem, has concessive meaning:

(24) teb   hamaqˤda babuˤ-r-ši   **e‹b›di-šaw**   jaq'an etːi-li
     they.ABS in.Lak   talk-IPFV-CVB ‹I/II.PL›be.PST-CONC clear   IV.SG.become.PFV-EVID
     'Although they were speaking in Lak, (he) understood it (things they were saying).'

When this particle attaches to nouns, the resulting meaning is as follows: 'either A or B, I don't mind which':

(25) Rasul-**šaw**   χir   w-a   Pat'i-**šaw**
     Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-CONC   behind I.SG-make.IMP PATI(II)[SG.ABS]-CONC
     'Bring either Rasul or Patimat, I don't mind which.'

Here, semantic agreement is also possible (with verb in the final or initial position), but only for the animates:

(26) Rasul-šaw   Pat'i-šaw   **χir**   **b-a**
     Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-CONC   Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-CONC behind   I/II.PL-make.IMP
     'Bring either Rasul or Patimat, I don't mind which.'

(27) **χir**   **b-a**   Rasul-šaw   Pat'i-šaw
     behind I/II.PL-make.IMP Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-CONC   Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-CONC
     'Bring either Rasul or Patimat, I don't mind which.'

With inanimates, speakers were not happy to accept semantic agreement:

(28) *pečena-tːu-šaw   χʷalli-šaw   **še**[2]
     biscuit(IV)-PL.ABS-CONC bread(III)[SG.ABS]-CONC ‹III/IV.PL›bring.IMP
     *'Bring either biscuits or bread, I don't mind which.'

This construction allows agreement with the closest conjunct when the verb is non-final (25) and (29):

(29) **χir**   **d-a**   Pat'i-šaw   Rasul-šaw
     behind   II.SG-make.IMP Pati(II)[SG.ABS]-CONC   Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-CONC
     'Bring either Patimat or Rasul, I don't mind which.'

Unlike in two previous cases, this construction allows agreement with the closest conjunct when the verb is final:

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[2] Note that the verb 'bring' is translated differently in (27) and (28), this is determined by the lexical semantics of the verb: *χir as* lit.: 'behind make' means to bring to a certain location an object which can move itself (i.e. to make a person or an animal follow you somewhere) whereas the verb used in (28) is about carrying inanimate objects to a certain location.

(30) Rasul-šaw   Pat'i-šaw   **χir**   **d-a**
     Rasul(I)[SG.ABS]-CONC   PATI(II)[SG.ABS]-CONC   behind   II.SG-make.IMP
     'Bring either Rasul or Patimat, I don't mind which.'

(31) pečena-tːu-šaw   χ^{w}alli-šaw   **be-še**
     biscuit(IV)-PL.ABS-CONC   bread(III)[SG.ABS]-CONC III.SG-bring.IMP
     'Bring either biscuits or bread, I don't mind which.'

3. Nominal predicates: different agreement

When the predicate is a noun which has different gender to the gender of the subject, the copula can agree with either:

(32) to-r   ħajwan   d-i
     that-II.SG.ABS   animal(III)[SG.ABS]   II.SG-be.PRS
     She's an animal (pejorative)

(33) to-r   halhaʁ-du-b   č'an   b-i
     that-II.SG[ABS]   real-ATTR-III.SG   sheep(III)[SG.ABS]   III.SG-be.PRS
     'She is a real sheep.' (= she is very stupid)

Note that the adjective must agree in gender with its head (nominal predicate) independently of the copula agreement:

(34) to-r   **halhaʁ-du-b**   č'an   d-i
     that-II.SG[ABS]   real-ATTR-III.SG   sheep(III)[SG.ABS]   II.SG-be.PRS
     'She is a real sheep.' (= she is very stupid)

(35) *to-r   halhaʁ-du-r   č'an   b-i
     that-II.SG[ABS]   real-ATTR-II.SG   sheep(III)[SG.ABS]   III.SG-be.PRS
     *'She is a real sheep.' (= she is very stupid)

(36) *to-r   halhaʁ-du-r   č'an   d-i
     that-II.SG[ABS]   real-ATTR-II.SG   sheep(III)[SG.ABS]   II.SG-be.PRS
     *'She is a real sheep.' (= she is very stupid)

PLEASE PROVIDE SYNTACTIC ACCOUNT FOR SENTENCES (2), (5), (9)-(12), (18)-(20), (32), (34)