

Workshop Synopsis

Extreme agreement: answers to the Archi challenge

Work in different syntactic theories tends to be somewhat isolated. This workshop aims to bring together proponents of major theories of syntax for a dialogue, based on some specific and challenging data, in order to evaluate the relative merits of the theories.

The specific area chosen is agreement, an essentially linguistic phenomenon. The language chosen is Archi, a Nakh-Daghestanian language where the agreement system is particularly rich. The syntactic theories being challenged with the Archi data are Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) and Minimalism. Archi proves to be problematic for some fundamental principles of the three syntactic theories under evaluation. To take just one instance, Archi appears to violate the principle that agreement must occur within syntactic domains. There are instances where there is no obvious syntactic link between target and controller: there is a postposition in Archi which governs the lative case of its noun complement, but agrees with the absolutive argument of the clause. Another example of agreement outside the immediate syntactic domain is the agreement of the first person pronoun: in the dative case it has a morphological position for agreement and takes the absolutive of the clause as the controller despite belonging to a different phrase (PP in the following example):

- (1) *tuw* *w-ez* *χir* *w-eqⁱi-ši* *i<w>di*
that-1.SG[ABS] 1.SG-1.SG.DAT behind 1.SG-come.POT-CVB <1.SG>BE.PST
'He was going to go after me.' (woman speaking)

Here the personal pronoun *wəz* refers to a woman (gender II in Archi) and takes the dative case, as determined by the postposition *χir* 'behind', but agrees with the absolutive of the clause, the pronoun *tuw* referring to a man (gender I in Archi).

These and other challenging phenomena presented by Archi agreement inspired the collaborative work between typologists and syntacticians. In January 2012 a project **From competing theories to fieldwork: the challenge of an extreme agreement system** started in the Surrey Morphology Group with collaboration between Essex, Harvard, Surrey and York. The main objective of the project was to provide a framework for comparing and evaluating syntactic theories: HPSG, LFG and Minimalism. During the lifetime of the project, experts representing these theories were challenged to give parallel syntactic accounts of the complex agreement facts of Archi. The proposed workshop brings together the results of this project.

The three syntactic accounts of the biabsolutive construction can serve as an example of the way theories coped with the complex data. To appreciate this construction we need to know that Archi is a morphologically ergative language, coding the subject of the transitive verb as the ergative and object as the absolutive. The absolutive also controls the agreement of all possible targets in the clause. But under certain conditions the following structure is allowed:

- (2) *But:a* *buq'* *b-er·k'u-r-ši* *w-i*
Butta(1)[SG.ABS] grain(III)[SG.ABS] III.SG-<IPFV>sort-IPFV-CVB 1.SG-be.PRS
'Butta is sorting grain.'

In (2) both subject (*But:a*, man's name) and object *buq'* 'grain' take the absolutive case. The periphrastic predicate *berk'urši wi* 'is sorting' agrees with both absolutives: the converb agrees with the object, the copula with the subject. The biabsolutive variant is available only for verbs based on the *imperfective* stem.

The Archi agreement facts are particularly interesting for the HPSG approach: since not only the verb, but also arguments and adjuncts agree with the absolutive of the clause; neither a constraint on ARG-ST lists nor a constraint on the features SUBJ and COMPS (used in

HPSG to define agreement) can provide a satisfactory account of the agreement. In this situation the Archi biabsolutives are a decisive factor for choosing a constraint on constituent structures over a constraint on order domains.

In LFG terms, syntactic agreement is about sharing or co-specification of f-structure features, and involves reference to f-structural relations. The agreement template in the biabsolutive construction is in accordance with the ordering of grammatical functions: the copula agrees with the highest absolutive argument, while the converb agrees with the lowest absolutive. Agreement of non-verbal targets may be captured by the use of inside-out constraints in this approach. Among the challenges posed by the Archi biabsolutive construction is handling the agreement of both absolutives: there is significant evidence that the Archi biabsolutive construction is monoclausal, and agreement targets involving different controllers may display interleaved ordering.

To account for the agreement facts of Archi biabsolutives, Minimalism suggests, first, that analyses which work for similar constructions in other languages (treating biabsolutives as pseudo-incorporation or as special kind of PP) do not work. The new proposal introduces an articulated vP structure where v heads can be null. Some v's have Case features and therefore account for case, agreement, and interpretation in the biabsolutive construction, and some v's have aspectual features, which accounts for a specific aspectual meaning characteristic of a certain type of Archi biabsolutives.

The papers proposed for the workshop are the papers from the typology team (Chumakina, Corbett), the three syntax experts (Borsley, Polinsky, Sadler) and a comparison team (Brown, Sells). The papers present the most interesting results of the project from the respective perspectives: the typology team will present previously unknown facts of Archi agreement obtained as a result of the fieldwork stimulated by the dialog with different theories; the syntax experts will present the specific challenges that Archi presented to their theory and how the solutions to these help moving the discipline along; the comparison team will discuss what the theories can learn about each other, including similarities hidden by notational differences, as well as points of divergence which were not so obvious before.

Submitted papers:

- Setting the scene: agreement in Archi (typology team: Chumakina, Corbett)
- HPSG and Archi agreement (HPSG syntax expert: Borsley)
- 'Agreement between arguments in Archi' (Minimalist team: Polinsky, Radkevich, and Chumakina as the Archi expert)
- 'Agreement in Archi: an LFG perspective' (LFG syntax expert: Sadler)
- 'The correlation of agreement domains and phrase structure: the Archi perspective on different frameworks' (comparison team: Brown and Sells))

The LAGB meeting is an ideal place for such workshop, as it brings together proponents of different theoretical approaches to language in general, and syntax in particular.

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