Privative [participant] and partial agreement displacement
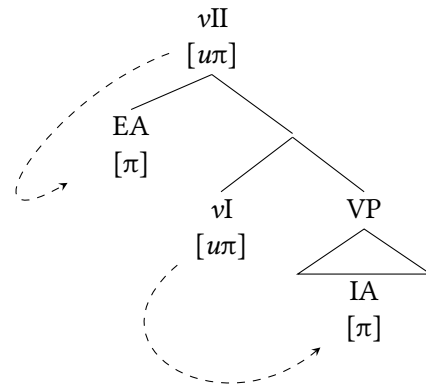
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his talk adresses a superficially simple agreement displacement pattern that, upon closer scrutiny, becomes problematic for a formal derivation of the phoenomenon. I argue that such a pattern is problematic due to the widely adopted locuphoric participant [prt] feature for 1st and 2nd persons. he analysis of an instance of partial agreement displacement in Mẽbêngôkre supports the adoption of binary person features.

Mẽbêngôkre partial agreement displacement Mẽbêngôkre (Northern Jê, Brazil) has a small system of cross-reference morphology on the predicate head (Reis Silva 2001). Accusative and absolutive pronouns cliticize on the verb and show alternance with lexical noun phrases (prodrop, displacement) in the canonical object position. Accusative clitics present a 2>3 person hierarchy: the object clitic is second person in the presence of a second person subject when the object is third person (1). However, this does not extend to a 1>2/3 effect (2).

(1) a. *2→3 = 2*

Ga	a=	bĩ.
2SG.NOM	2SG.ACC	kill.SH

  'You killed it.'

  b. * *2→3 = 3*

*Ga	ku=	bĩ.
2SG.NOM	3SG.ACC	kill.SH

  'You killed it.'

(2) a. *1→2 = 2*

Ba	a=	pumũ.
1SG.NOM	2SG.ACC	see.SH

  'I see you.'

  b. *1→3 = 3*

Ba	ku=	bĩ.
1SG.NOM	3SG.ACC	kill.SH

  'I killed it.'

Cyclic Agree Béjar & Rezac (2009) provide a probe-goal Agree mechanism designed to capture person hierarchy effects. The language-specific settings determine if the person feature hierarchy is 1>2>3 or 2>1>3. After probing once into the VP and the internal argument (IA), unchecked features on the probe vI can project to the vII level and probe a second time in a domain that includes the external argument (EA). If successful, Agree will reflect morphological agreement with the EA. In Cyclic Agree terms, Mẽbêngôkre is a low probe language: the IA is the canonical controller of agreement with the accusative proclitic. The ellided object DP is cross-referenced with a proclitic matching its features, with the single exception of the inverse 2>3 context.

(3)

In the entailment hierarchy of privative person features that they adopt from Harley & Ritter (2002), Béjar & Rezac (2009) clearly distinguish locuphoric participants from 3rd person, which is the most underspecified person. Among participants, either speaker ([π[prt[spk]]]) or addressee ([π[prt[adr]]]) are more specified, in what is language-specific variation between me-languages and you-languages. A bare [π] is interpreted as third person. Agreement displacement takes place whenever the person feature on the EA is more informative than the feature on the IA in the entailment hierarchy, and there is a vocabulary item that can be inserted to reflect the features valued on the probe.

When [prt] gets in the way   Mẽbêngôkre inverse agreement challenges a Cyclic Agree approach (3), as a probe that bypasses third person would also overgeneralize and predict hierarchy effects between event participants. If such a probe is [π[prt[spk]]], in a 1/2 configuration the *v*I probe will check the [prt] IA and, on the second cycle, the *v*II probe will Agree with the more highly specified [spk] EA, contradicting the pattern in (2a). Alternatively, if the probe is [π[prt[adr]]], in a 1/3 configuration *v*I will first check the [π] IA, after which *v*II will Agree with the [prt] EA, once more failing to predict the pattern in (2b). Additionally, this type of probe also predicts a 2>1 effect, which is not the attested pattern in Mẽbêngôkre (4).

(4)   a.   *2→1 = 1*

        Ga | i= | pumũ.
        2SG.NOM   1SG.ACC   see.SH
        'You see me.'

    b.   **2→1 = 2*

        *Ga | a= | pumũ.
        2SG.NOM   2SG.ACC   kill.SH
        'You see me.'

Within a Cyclic Agree approach, positing a partially articulated [*u*π–*u*prt] probe that ignores any [adr] participant also fails to predict the observed 2>3 pattern, since not only 2nd but also 1st person EAs would trigger agreement displacement from a 3rd person IA.

Discussion   What the Mẽbêngôkre data tell us about the mechanisms like Cyclic Agree that we need to derive complex phenomena regarding the morphosyntax of person, such as the hierarchy-driven inverse agreement effects discussed here, is that it is necessary for the system to be able to separate 1st and 2nd person to the point that they can be manipulated independently against 3rd person while still remaining present in the system as a natural class.

This can be accomplished with a binary version of the person geometry proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002), rather than a system that manipulates privative features. The natural class of 2nd and 3rd person is [−spk]. In a Cyclic Agree mechanism as described above, a 3rd person IA [−prt, −spk] and a 2nd person EA [+prt, −spk] will result in the cyclic probe receiving two contradicting values for a participant feature [−prt +prt]. Adopting the proposal by Harbour (2011) that an overspecified feature value is equivalent to an unvalued instance of the same feature ([+F −F] = [*u*F]), this results in the probe receiving a [*u*prt, −spk] value. Given the specification of the Vocabulary Items in (5), this results in *a=* being inserted as the accusative clitic:

(5)   /i/ ↔ [+spk]
    /a/ ↔ [−spk]
    /ku/ ↔ [−prt]

I claim that the Agree analysis of Mẽbêngôkre partial agreement displacement presented here instantiates an argument for a less rigid formalization of locuphoric participant features. This can be accomplished by adopting a binary approach to person feature geometries. While the Mẽbêngôkre person hierarchy privileges both locuphoric participants over 3rd person, which was problematic for a standard Cyclic Agree approach, adopting binary person features allows for [−spk], which doubles as a flat probe that, unlike privative features, is able to split 1st and 2nd person and place 2nd person in competition with 3rd in a Cyclic Agree framework.

References   Béjar, Susana & Milan Rezac. 2009. Cyclic Agree. Linguistic Inquiry 40(1). · Harbour, Daniel. 2011. Valence and atomic number. Linguistic Inquiry 42(4). · Harley, Heidi & Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Person and number in pronouns: a feature-geometric analysis. Language 78(3). · Reis Silva, Maria Amélia. 2001. Pronomes, ordem e ergatividade em Mẽbêngôkre. Campinas: Universidade Estadual de Campinas MA thesis.