

Surprising Agreements at C and T

Shigeru Miyagawa, MIT

A linguistic theory should minimally tell us the following:

- How are natural languages the same?
- In what ways can they be different?

GB theory had a straightforward answer to these questions. All languages contain the same set of principles, which is the statement about linguistic uniformity; where languages may differ is in the setting of the parameters built into many of the principles, head parameter being one such example. As we learned more about the nature of these principles, it became evident that many, if not all, of them are a description of the problem they are supposed to solve. In MP effort is made to rid the theory of anything that does not have independent and intuitive motivation. Nevertheless, we still must answer the two questions posed above about what a linguistic theory should tell us. Recognizing the vacuum left by ridding the theory of universal principles, Chomsky suggests the Uniformity Principle in their place.

(1) Uniformity Principle (Chomsky 2001: 2)

In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, assume languages to be uniform, with variety restricted to easily detectable properties of utterances.

To understand the UP, we need to have more specificity to both parts of the statement. In assuming languages to be uniform, precisely what are the elements that are shared by all languages? In what ways can the languages vary within this uniform profile?

In Miyagawa (2010), I focus on grammatical features and proposed the Strong Uniformity.

(2) Strong Uniformity (Miyagawa 2010)

Every language shares the same set of grammatical features, and every language overtly manifests these features.

What Strong Uniformity states, in the spirit of UP, is that the same stock of grammatical features is found in every language. Right away, the question arises about languages that do not evidence agreement, such as Chinese and Japanese. I argue that there are two types of grammatical features, ϕ -feature agreement and what Kiss (1995) calls “discourse configurational” features, which are topic and focus. In some languages, topic/focus plays the same role as agreement in triggering movement to positions such as Spec,TP. By Strong Uniformity, every language has both ϕ -feature agreement and topic/focus, making all languages uniform.

To address the question of how languages differ in the domain of grammatical features, I adopt the idea that grammatical features originate at a phase head — C for the present discussion — and are inherited by T (Chomsky 2005, 2008; Richards 2007). So, C hosts both the ϕ -feature probe and topic/focus. If the ϕ -feature is inherited by T, it leads to agreement-based languages such as English and Romance; if topic/focus is inherited by T, it leads to discourse configurational languages such as Japanese.

Under Strong Uniformity, if topic/focus is inherited by T, as in Japanese, we predict that there ought to be ϕ -feature agreement at C. This would be surprising given that Japanese is a typical agreementless language. I will argue that Japanese has what in some languages is called “allocutive agreement” at C. This kind of agreement is found in some dialects of Basque. In Souletin, for example, along with the normal grammatical agreement, the allocutive agreement “agrees” with the addressee — 2nd person masculine/feminine, colloquial/formal (Oyharçabal 1993). This allocutive agreement, which has the function of indicating levels of politeness, is true agreement in that it competes with the 2nd person in the normal grammatical agreement. Occurrence of 2nd person in the regular grammatical agreement precludes the allocutive agreement from occurring in the same clause. What I will show is that in Japanese, the politeness marker *-des/-mas-* on the predicate has virtually the same distribution as the Souletin allocutive agreement at C, suggesting that the politeness marker is the ϕ -feature agreement that Strong Uniformity predicts to occur at C in a discourse-configurational language such as Japanese.

In order to implement a probe-goal analysis of allocutive agreement, we need representation minimally of the addressee in the structure. This calls for a Ross-style performative analysis; I adopt the modern version of performative analysis that Speas and Tenney propose (2003), with further refinement by Haegeman and Hill (2011). A striking property of allocutive agreement is that it has semantic content — it indicates levels of politeness. This is true in both Basque and Japanese. Using Richards (2007) as a starting point, I explore the idea that agreement implemented at C may take on semantic (interpretable) property, something that we also see in sentence particles at C in Romanian that show agreement (Haegeman and Hill 2011).

Finally, I will show that Chinese, unlike Japanese, is an agreement-based language in which ϕ -feature agreement is inherited by T. Although it is never pronounced, the fact that topicalization in Chinese is to C indicates that the topic feature stays at C. By implication, the ϕ -feature agreement must be inherited by T. I will give evidence using ellipsis to demonstrate ϕ -feature agreement at T in Chinese.

Selected bibliography

- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In Michael Kenstowicz, ed., *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, 1–52. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2005. Three factors in language design. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36:1–23.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2008. On phases. In Robert Freidin, Carlos Otero, and Maria-Luisa Zubizarreta, eds., *Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 133–166. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Haegeman, Liliane and Virginia Hill. 2011. The syntactization of discourse. Ms.
- Miyagawa, Shigeru. 2010. *Why Agree? Why Move? Unifying Agreement-based and Discourse Configurational Languages*. LI Monograph 54. MIT Press.
- Oyharçabal, Beñat. 1993. Verb agreement with non arguments: On Allocutive Agreement. In: José Ignacio Hualde and Jon Ortiz de Urbina (eds.), *Generative Studies in Basque Linguistics*, 89–114. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Richards, Mark D. 2007. On feature inheritance: an argument from the phase impenetrability condition. *Linguistic Inquiry* 38, 563–572.