Agreement Restrictions in Icelandic Quirky Subject Constructions

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1 Background

- Case can be structural or lexical
- In a nominative-accusative language like Icelandic, subjects usually take nominative case and objects usually take accusative case
- In nominative-accusative sentences, the verb agrees with the subject in person, number, and gender:

(1) Einhver keupti bókina
Someone.3SG.NOM bought.3SG the books.3PL.ACC
'Someone bought the books.'

- Icelandic also has quirky case (Schütze 1993, Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000, Þráinsson 2007)
- Schütze (1993): non-nominative subjects, non-accusative objects
- Þráinsson (2007): idiosyncratic lexical case marking

(2) Mér líkar þessir bílar.
me.DAT like these cars.NOM
'I like these cars.' (from Schütze 1993)

(3) Mig vantar peninga.
me.ACC lacks money.ACC
'I lack money.' (from Schütze 1993)

(4) Ég saknaði hans.
me.NOM missed him.GEN
'I missed him.' (from Schütze 1993)

- Nominative objects aren't quirky; accusative objects *can* be quirky (Schütze 1993)
- In quirky subject sentences, the verb agrees with the nominative object:

(5) Henni leiddust strákarnir.
her.3SG.DAT bored.3PL the boys.3PL.NOM
'She found the boys boring' (from Sigurðsson 1996)

- 1st and 2nd person nominative objects are blocked in quirky subject sentences:

(6) Henni leidd(*-umst/*?-ust/*?-ist) við.
her.3SG.DAT bored.1PL/3PL/DFT we.1PL.NOM
'She found us boring' (from Sigurðsson 1996)

Research Questions

1. Why does the finite verb agree with the nominative object, rather than with the quirky subject in quirky subject sentences?
2. Why are 1st and 2nd person nominative objects blocked in quirky subject sentences?

2 Framework

- Previous analyses make use of non-Minimalist or otherwise insufficient theoretical components
- I adopt a framework based in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004)
  - Agree
  - Probe-goal agreement
  - Activity Condition
  - Relative φ-completeness
- 1st/2nd person [+Person]; 3rd person no person (Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000, Preminger 2014)
- T can be φ-defective (Hornstein et al. 2005, Corbett 2006)

3 Analyses

1. φ-Stacking
2. Complex Dependency
3. Split φ Checking
4. Defective T

I adopt the Defective T analysis for Icelandic

3.1 φ-Stacking

- Richards (2013): Case-stacking in Lardil
- Semantically uninterpretable morphology can be replaced
- Semantically interpretable morphology cannot be replaced

(7) a. Anna pišet pis'mo ručkoj.
Anna writes letter.ACC pen.INSTR
'Anna is writing a letter with a pen.'

b. Anna ne pišet pis'ma ručkoj.
Anna not writes letter.GEN pen.INSTR
'Anna isn't writing a letter with a pen.'

c. *Anna ne pišet pis'ma ručki.
Anna not writes letter.GEN pen.GEN

- In Icelandic, T agrees with the quirky subject first, for all φ-features
- T agrees next with the nominative object

Assumptions

- T can agree with multiple DPs in quirky subject sentences[1]
- T can only agree with one DP in non-quirky sentences
- [Person] agreement on T is semantically interpretable à la Richards (2013) (can't be replaced)

[1]There appears to be a [Number] agreement asymmetry in quirky subject constructions depending on if the nominative object is topicalized. I don't focus on that here, so my derivations deal with constructions where we do see the agreement.

Derivations

- Quirky subject, 3rd person nominative object
  1. T checks φ with the quirky subject
  2. T checks φ with the nominative object
  3. T replaces [Number] and [Gender] with values from nominative object
- Quirky subject, 1st/2nd person nominative object (ungrammatical)
  1. T checks φ with quirky subject
  2. T tries to check φ with the nominative object
  3. T can't replace [Person] with a new value from the nominative object
  4. T and the object aren't relatively φ-complete, an Agree relation does not obtain, the object can't value its Case, and the derivation crashes
- Non-quirky subject, 1st/2nd person
  1. T checks all φ features with the nominative subject
  2. All goes according to plan
- Non-quirky subject, 3rd person
  1. T checks φ with the nominative subject
  2. T gains [Number] and [Gender] specifications from the subject
  3. T gets a default specification for [Person] (Corbett 2006)

Summary

- φ-stacking seems (marginally) capable of explaining Icelandic quirky agreement facts
- Stipulative assumptions about φ-features on T and DPs:
  - φ-features on T can agree multiple times, even after being checked
  - [Person] acts differently from other φ features
- Doesn't consider 3rd person quirky subjects
- Creates asymmetry between quirky and non-quirky sentences

3.2 Complex Dependency

- López (2008)
- T, the quirky subject, and the nominative object all form a complex dependency
- This complex dependency allows for object agreement, and forces default [Person] agreement

Assumptions

- Full Sharing
  Two features a and b in an Agree dependency must share the same value
- Minimal Compliance
  For any two elements in an Agree dependency, they must only minimally obey Full Sharing
- The quirky subject has an extra layer (K) that has no φ-features
- [Person] probes separately and first
- Unvalued Case can act as a probe

Derivations

1. K probes unvalued Case feature, finds object as its goal
2. To satisfy Full Sharing, K and object become coindexed (but remain unvalued)

(8) a. $\underset{\textit{Probe}}{\mathrm{K}_{[uC]}} \longrightarrow \underset{\textit{Goal}}{\mathrm{OB}_{[uC]}}$

b. $\mathrm{K}_{[u_iC]}$ $\mathrm{OB}_{[u_iC]}$

3. T's [Person] probes, finds the open dependency
4. Since K and the object must share the same value for [Person], and K has no [Person], the object must also have no [Person] value

(9) a. $\underset{\text{Probe}}{\mathrm{T}_{[p]}} \longrightarrow \underset{\text{Goal}}{\mathrm{K}_{[u_iC]} + \mathrm{OB}_{[u_iC,\ n,\ g]}}$

b. $\underset{\text{Probe}}{{}^{*}\mathrm{T}_{[p]}} \longrightarrow \underset{\text{Goal}}{\mathrm{K}_{[u_iC]} + \mathrm{OB}_{[u_iC,\ p,\ n,\ g]}}$

5. T's [Number] probes, finds the complex dependency; due to Minimal Compliance, the quirky subject and nominative object may have different [Number] values

(10) a. $\underset{\text{Probe}}{\mathrm{T}_{[n]}} \longrightarrow \underset{\text{Goal}}{\mathrm{K}_{[u_iC]} + \mathrm{OB}_{[u_iC,\ SG,\ g]}}$

b. $\underset{\text{Probe}}{\mathrm{T}_{[n]}} \longrightarrow \underset{\text{Goal}}{\mathrm{K}_{[u_iC]} + \mathrm{OB}_{[u_iC,\ PL,\ g]}}$

Summary

- López's analysis needs unjustified or non-standard assumptions to explain the Icelandic data
- Vacuous satisfaction of Full Sharing?

3.3 Split φ Checking

- [Person] probes separately from [Number] and [Gender]
- T checks [Person] with quirky subject
- T checks [Number] and [Gender] with nominative object
- Argued for independently by Sigurðsson & Holmberg (2008)

Assumptions

- Quirky subject remains active after valuing its Case
- Unorthodox treatment of φ-features on quirky subjects

Derivations

- Quirky subject
  1. [Person] probes first, checking with the quirky subject
  2. [Number] and [Gender] probe; the quirky subject is now inactive, so they find the object
  3. If the nominative object is 3rd person, it and T will be relatively φ-complete, so the derivation converges

4. If the nominative object is 1st/2nd person, it won't be relatively φ-complete with respect to T, and the derivation will crash

- Non-quirky
  1. [Person] probes and finds the nominative subject as its goal
  2. The subject still needs to value Case, so it remains active after checking [Person]
  3. [Number] and [Gender] probe and find the subject as their goal
  4. If the subject is 3rd person, T will show default [Person] agreement (Corbett 2006).

Summary

- Requires some feature [f] on the quirky subject to keep it active
- [Person] behaves differently than the other φ-features
- This analysis does require the Activity Condition, which other analyses (notably Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008) reject
- Problems with 3rd person quirky and non-quirky subjects; what does [Person] check with?

3.4 Defective T

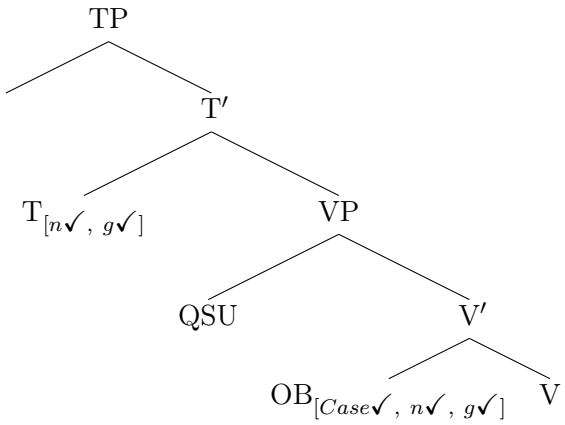
- T is φ-defective in quirky subject constructions, lacking [Person]
- T agrees only in [Number] and [Gender] with the nominative object

Assumptions

- T is φ-defective in quirky subject sentences

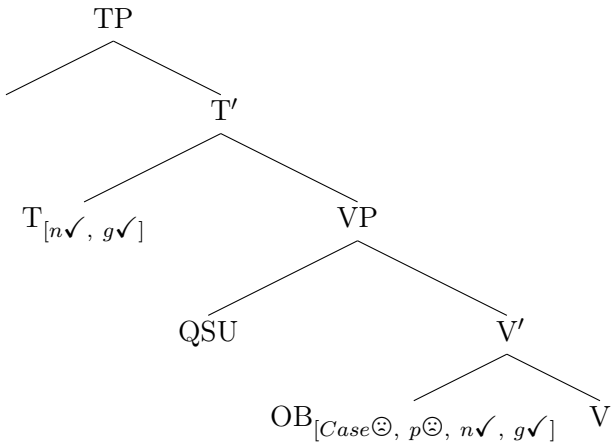
Derivations

- Quirky subject, 3rd person object
  1. Quirky subject values Case with the verb, becomes inactive
  2. T probes φ-features, finding the nominative object as its goal
  3. T checks [Number] and [Gender], values nominative object's Case as nominative
  4. The derivation converges

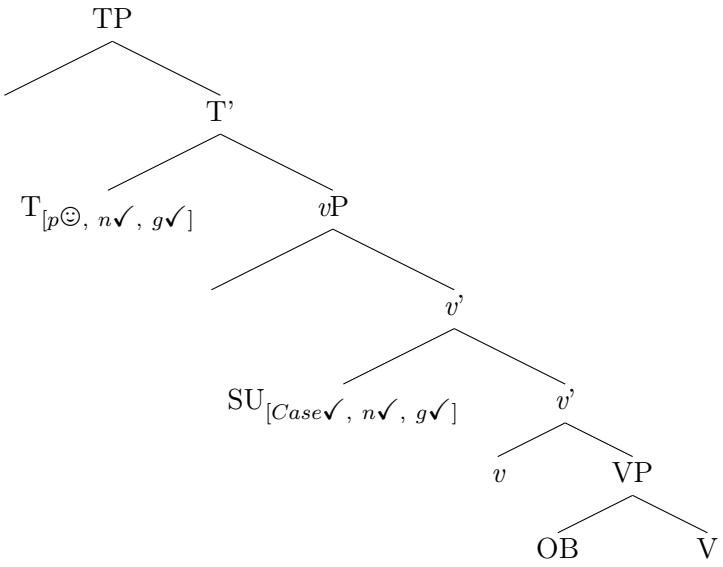


- Quirky subject, 1st/2nd person object (ungrammatical)
  1. Quirky subject values Case with the verb, becomes inactive
  2. T probes φ-features, finds the nominative object as its goal

3. The nominative object has [Person], but T lacks [Person], so they are not relatively φ-complete
4. The derivation crashes



- Nominative subject, 3rd person
  1. T probes φ features, finds the nominative subject as its goal
  2. The 3rd person nominative subject has no [Person]
  3. This is not a problem; T and the subject are still relatively φ-complete[2]
  4. The derivation converges

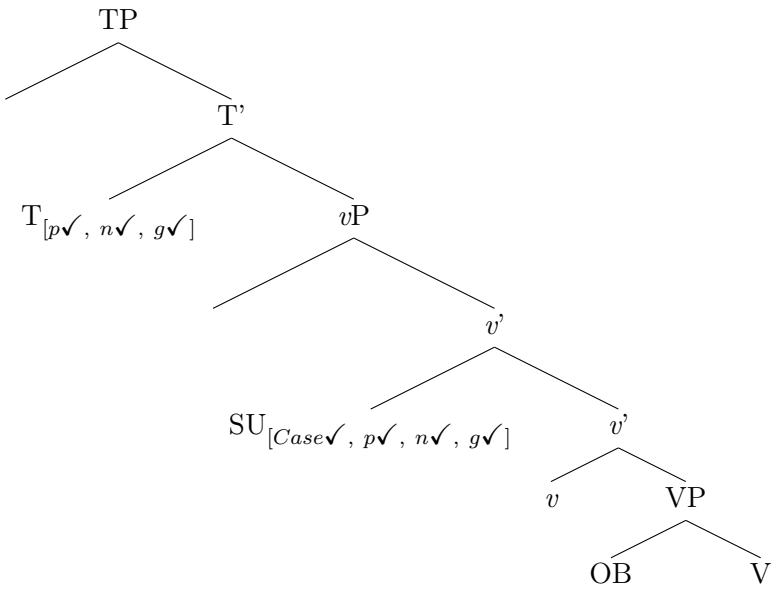


- Nominative subject, 1st/2nd person
  1. T probes φ-features, finds the nominative subject as its goal
  2. T checks [Person], [Number], and [Gender] with the nominative subject, and values its Case as nominative
  3. The derivation converges

[2]Consider CP and infinitive subjects, which have no φ-features but yield 3rd person singular agreement:

(i) [That he came so early] *was* very surprising. (Corbett 2006; ex 4, p 37)

(ii) [To err] *is* human. (Corbett 2006; ex 5, p 37)



Defective T in Quirky Subject Sentences

- T being [Person]-defective is the key novel assumption here
- Quirky verbs are never agentive (Schütze 1993)
- If T is a projection of the verb, a quirky verb may project its lack of agentivity into a lack of [Person] on T
- Link between agentivity and [Author], [Participant], or entire [Person] node?
- Alternatively, it may be a selection requirement; defective T cannot select a non-quirky verb
- There is an undeniable correlation between a quirky verb and defective T

Summary

- My novel defective T analysis can explain the object agreement facts (Research Question 1), as well as the 1st/2nd person restrictions on nominative objects (Research Question 2)
- The theoretical framework required by this analysis isn't as non-standard as in the other analyses (except for T being φ-defective):
  - T can be defective (non-finite T)
  - DPs can lack φ-features (R-expressions, &c.)
  - Unchecked [Person] on T in non-quirky sentences isn't a problem (Corbett 2006)
  - φ-defective T may relate to the nature of the quirky verb

4 Conclusion

4.1 Summary

- In Icelandic quirky subject sentences, the verb agrees with the nominative object:

(11) Henni leiddust strákarnir.
her.3SG.DAT bored.3PL the boys.3PL.NOM
'She found the boys boring'
(from Sigurðsson 1996)

- 1st and 2nd person nominative objects are blocked entirely in Icelandic quirky subject sentences:

(12) Henni leidd(*-umst/*?-ust/*?-ist) við.
her.3SG.DAT bored.1PL/3PL/DFT we.1PL.NOM
'She found us boring'
(from Sigurðsson 1996)

- A defective T analysis (where T lacks [Person]) can explain both of these facts without resorting to unjustified or non-Minimalist assumptions

4.2 Future Work

- Other Icelandic sentence types[3]
- Defective T explanation
- Alternative or more recent Minimalist frameworks[4]

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[3]I only focus on sentences with a quirky subject and nominative object. There are also sentences with only a quirky object, and sentences with both a quirky subject and quirky object. Furthermore, there is an optional number agreement asymmetry that I have ignored for these analyses.

[4]For example, getting rid of the Activity Condition, or using a system such as in Preminger (2014) where Case licensing conditions φ-agreement, rather than φ-agreement conditioning Case licensing.

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