

ICELANDIC QUIRKY AGREEMENT RESTRICTIONS*

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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

- Icelandic also has quirky case (Schütze 1993, Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000, Þráinsson 2007, among others)
- 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)

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- Nominative objects aren't quirky¹
- Accusative objects can be quirky²
- In quirky subject sentences, the verb agrees with the nominative object:

(5) Henni leiddust strákar.
 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?
2. Why are 1st and 2nd person nominative objects blocked in quirky subject sentences?

2 Framework

- Previous analyses: non-Minimalist, or otherwise undesirable
 - AgrS and AgrO (Schütze 1993, Sigurðsson 1996)
 - Distributed Morphology (Boeckx 2000)
 - Person-Case Constraint (Bonet 1994, Boeckx 2000)
- Activity Condition
- 1st/2nd person [+Person]; 3rd person no person (Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000)
- Relative φ -completeness

3 Analyses

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

I adopt the Defective T analysis for Icelandic

¹Schütze (1993) argues that nominative case is never quirky

²There are several ways to show this. Non-quirky accusative objects become nominative when passivized, but quirky accusative objects retain their accusative case.

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.'

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

Assumptions

- T must agree with multiple DPs in quirky subject sentences
- T can only agree with one DP in non-quirky sentences
- The quirky subject's [Person] feature is semantically interpretable (can't be replaced)

Derivations

- Quirky subject, 3rd person nominative object
 1. T checks φ with quirky subject
 2. T checks φ with nominative object
 3. T replaces [Number] and [Gender] with values from nominative object
- Quirky subject, 1st/2nd person nominative object
 1. T checks φ with quirky subject
 2. T tries to check φ with nominative object
 3. T can't replace [Person] with value from nominative object
 4. T can't value object's Case, derivation crashes

Summary

- φ -stacking seems (marginally) capable of explaining Icelandic quirky agreement facts
- Stipulative assumptions about φ -features on T and DPs³
- Creates asymmetry between quirky and non-quirky sentences

3.2 Complex Dependency

- López (2008) argues that T, the quirky subject, and the nominative object all form a complex dependency

³T's φ -features can agree with a second DP after being checked; that [Person] is semantically interpretable on quirky subject DPs but not on other DPs

Assumptions

- Full Sharing⁴
- Minimal Compliance⁵
- Extra layer K on top of quirky subject; no φ -features

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

Summary

- Stipulative assumptions:
 - Unvalued Case can be a probe
 - [Person] probes first because...
 - Vacuous satisfaction of Full Sharing?

3.3 Split φ Checking

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

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 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
 2. The subject still needs to value Case, so it remains active
 3. [Number] and [Gender] probe and find the subject as their goal

⁴Two features a and b in an Agree dependency must share the same value

⁵For any two elements in an Agree dependency, they must only minimally obey Full Sharing

Summary

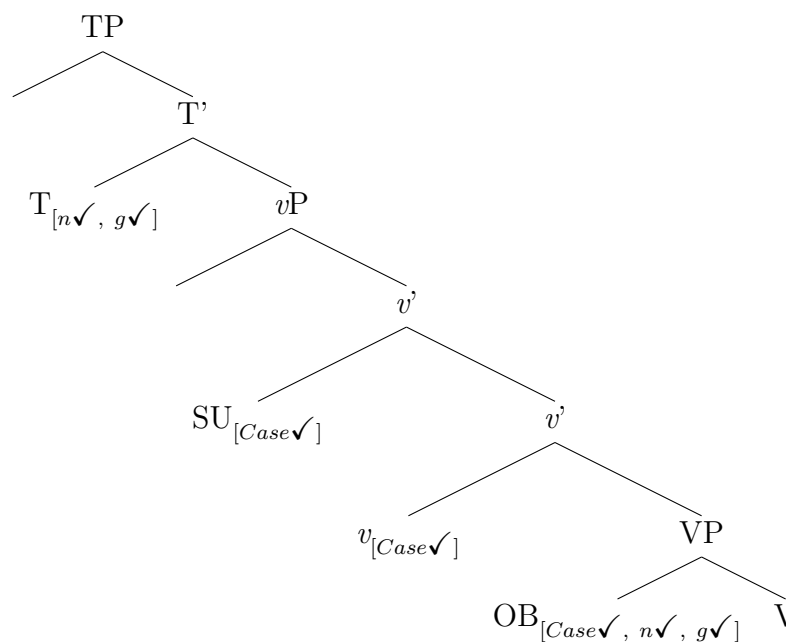
- Requires some feature [f] on the quirky subject to keep it active
- [Person] behaves differently than the other φ -features

3.4 Defective T

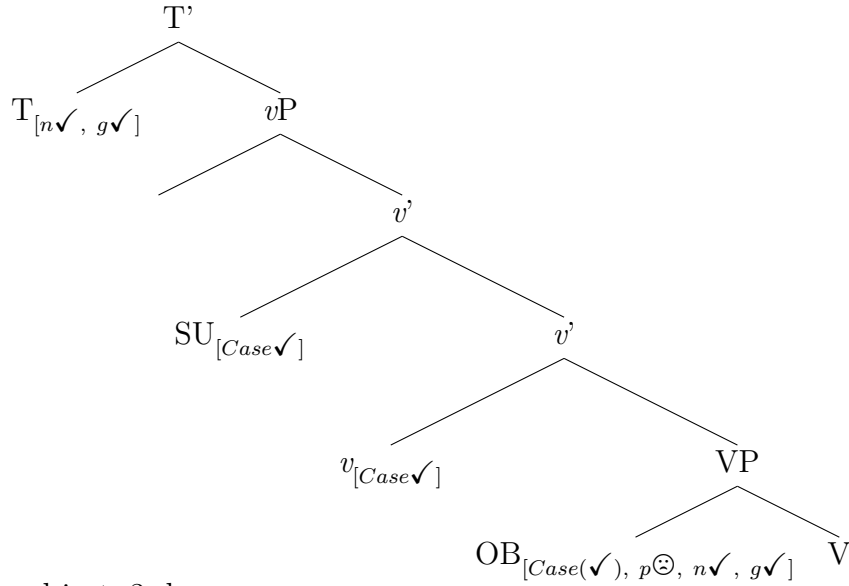
- T is φ -defective in quirky subject constructions, lacking [Person]
- T only agrees in [Number] and [Gender] with the nominative object

Derivations

- Quirky subject, 3rd person object
 1. Quirky subject values Case with the light verb
 2. T probes φ -features, finding the object as its goal
 3. T checks [Number] and [Gender], values objects Case as nominative

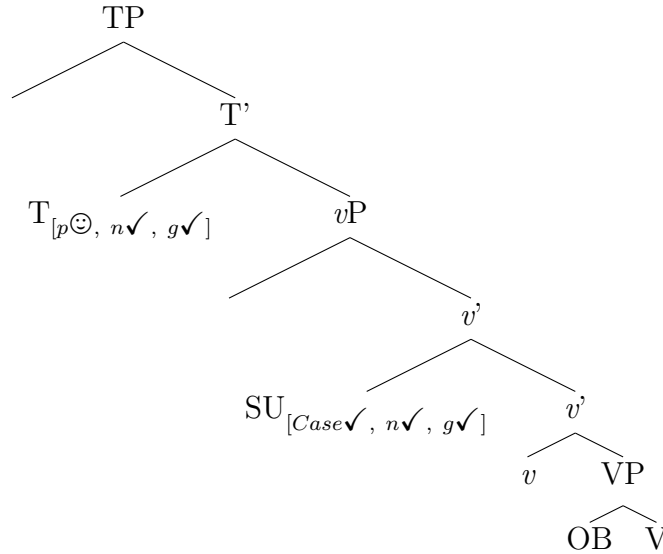


- Quirky subject, 1st/2nd person object
 1. Quirky subject values Case with the verb
 2. T probes φ -features, finds the object as its goal
 3. The object has [Person], but T lacks [Person], so they are not relatively φ -complete
 4. The derivation crashes



- Nominative subject, 3rd person

1. T probes φ features, finds the subject as its goal
2. The 3rd person subject has no [Person]
3. This is not a problem; T and the subject are still relatively φ -complete^{6,7}

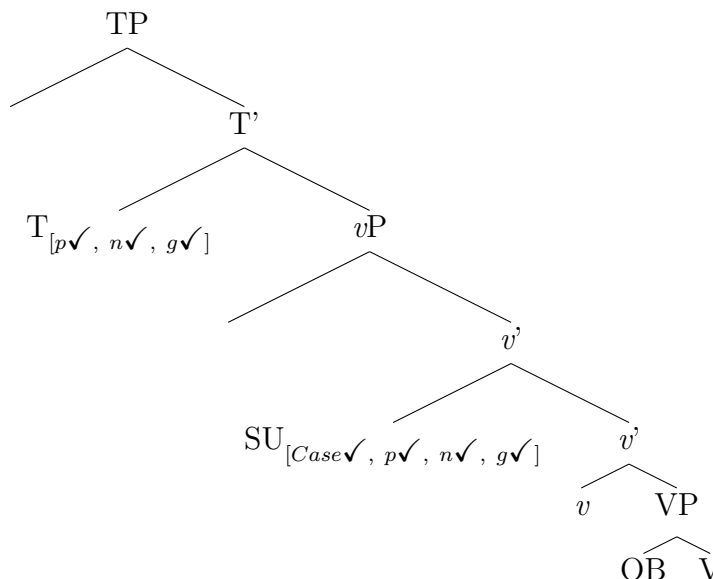


- Nominative subject, 1st/2nd person

1. T probes φ features, finds the subject as its goal
2. T checks [Person], [Number], and [Gender] with the subject, and values its Case as nominative

⁶Each φ -feature on the subject has a correlate on T, which is all that matters for relative φ -completeness

⁷Consider CP subjects, which have no φ -features but yield 3rd person agreement



Summary

- A defective T analysis can explain the object agreement facts, as well as the 1st/2nd person restrictions
- It doesn't require any crazy stipulative assumptions
 - T can be defective
 - DPs can lack φ -features
 - Unchecked [Person] on T in non-quirky sentences isn't a problem

4 Conclusion

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

(8) Henni leiddust strákar.
 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:

(9) 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 stipulative or non-Minimalist assumptions

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