Antisymmetry and adpositional agreement

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> ***Disclaimer*** — The main empirical contribution in this snippet appears originally in Hinzen & Sheehan (2013:188); I found the reference about a week after writing the piece.

Kayne (1994:49–50) argues that the *Linear Correspondence Axiom* (LCA) is further supported by a putative correlation between agreement and adposition-NP order. The basic observation is that postpositions may manifest agreement with their NP complement, while prepositions never seem to do so. The LCA derives this pattern under the assumption that agreement takes place in a Spec-Head relation: complements of prepositions remain in their position, so no agreement is expected (1a); postpositional order is obtained by moving the complement NP to a specifier position, so agreement may arise (1b).

(1) a. $[_{PP}$ P NP$_\varphi]$　　　　　　　　PREPOSITION: *no movement $\longrightarrow$ no agreement*

　　 b. $[_{PP}$ NP$^i_\varphi$ $[_{P'}$ P$_\varphi$ t$^i]]$　　　POSTPOSITION: *movement $\longrightarrow$ may be agreement*

While there is no extended discussion of this observation in the literature, it is often taken as an empirically adequate result of the antisymmetric framework, e.g., Hornstein et al. (2005:124), Song (2012:127–128), Corver (2013:405–406).

　　A first thing to notice is that the observation is not exceptionless. There are a number of transparent examples showing agreement between a preposition and its NP.[1]

(2) a. k-irapɨt　　　wɨnak
　　　　3.NEUT.SG-next house
　　　　'next to the house'

　　 b. k-ɨriu　　　　nu
　　　　3.NEUT.SG-against tree
　　　　'against the tree'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Au (Scorza 1985:243)

(3) a. arnaf　i
　　　　on.1.SG me
　　　　'on me'

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[1]Kayne (1994:50) conjectures that agreement between a preposition and its complement is possible only in VS languages (i.e., VSO, VOS or OVS). While this would account for the Welsh (VSO) examples in (3), the Au (SVO) sentences in (2) fall beyond the prediction.

    b.   arnat   ti
           on.2.SG you.SG
           'on you'

    c.   arno   fo
           on.3.MASC.SG him
           'on him'   Welsh (Borsley et al. 2007:199)

What I would like to point out here is that Kayne's prediction does not seem to hold even as a statistical tendency. By combining the features 48A ('Person marking on adpositions') and 85A ('Order of adposition and noun phrase') in WALS (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013), no significant differences can be observed between the number of prepositional and postpositional languages that manifest person agreement in adpositions. The relevant results are summarized in Table 1.

	Agreement with pronouns	Agreement with pronouns and nouns	No agreement
Postpositions	35	13	95
Prepositions	32	9	76

Table 1: Number of languages that manifest person agreement in adpositions.

In fact, these results support a symmetric analysis of adpositions, i.e., the balanced distribution of adpositional agreement suggests that the hierarchical relation of prepositions and postpositions with respect to their NPs is the same.

References

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