

I am me as you are you as him is he and we are all
accusative.

Elise Newman

December 20, 2016

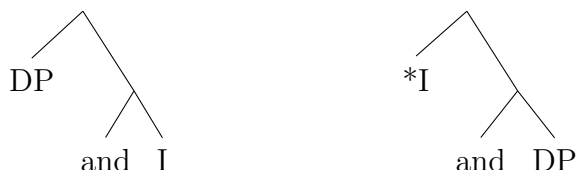
Native English speakers commonly feel inclined to deviate from prescriptive grammar when it comes to coordinated subjects. If we want to express a coordinated subject including a first person pronoun and any other type of noun or pronoun, we are taught to say, *DP and I verbed*. Many elementary and high school students struggle to reliably implement this rule in favor of other variants involving accusative *me*. However, they never produce the perfectly viable permutation *I and DP*. The paradigm is shown in (1).

- (1)
- a. John and I went to the store.
 - b. Me and John went to the store.
 - c. ? John and me went to the store.
 - d. * I and John went to the store.

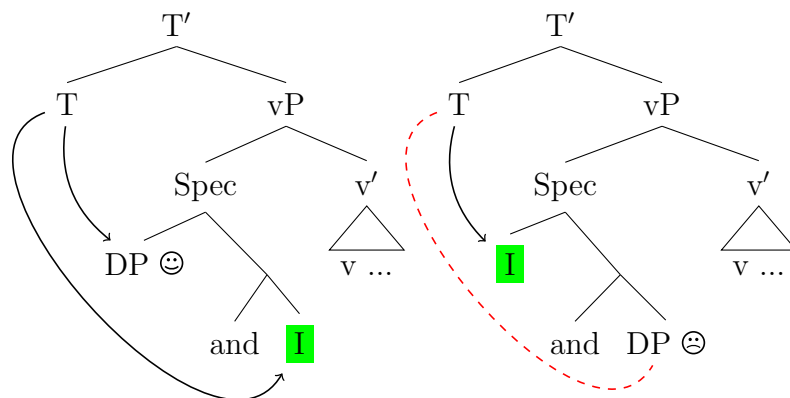
To explain this pattern, we might be inclined to say that speakers simply learn a prescriptive rule that makes them produce *DP and I*. Since they learn that *DP and I* is preferable, they infer that *I and DP* is dispreferred. I find this explanation unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. First, I wonder what motivated this prescriptive rule to begin with, if not a real syntactic process. Second, this account fails to explain why speakers must be reminded not to produce (1b-c), but not (1d). Finally, the data in (2) show us that English cares about the ordering of conjuncts even when there is no prescriptive rule (unless my school failed to teach me the *proper names after third person pronouns* rule). Perhaps whatever process governs the data in (2) is also responsible for the data in (1)!

- (2)
- a. * John and she went to the store.
 - b. John and her went to the store.
 - c. Her and John went to the store.
 - d. She and John went to the store.

The generalization that we see in (1) is that a nominative first person pronoun can only ever be the second conjunct in a coordinated subject. If we assume the following coordination structure, we can reformulate this to: **nominative first person pronouns may not c-command any other DP in the same case position**. I propose that this generalization can be explained by relatively familiar notions of case assignment, as opposed to a simple story of prescriptive rule application.



The analysis isn't completely fleshed out, but here is a sketch of what I have in mind. There is a nominative licensing probe on T that probes downward to license subjects merged in Spec vP. This probe searches for participant features, but will interact with and license other DP's it finds on the way. However, if the first thing the probe finds is a non-case marked participant, it will stop probing and fail to license lower DP's. This analysis predicts that (3a) must involve accusative *you*, which is conveniently homophonous with nominative *you*.



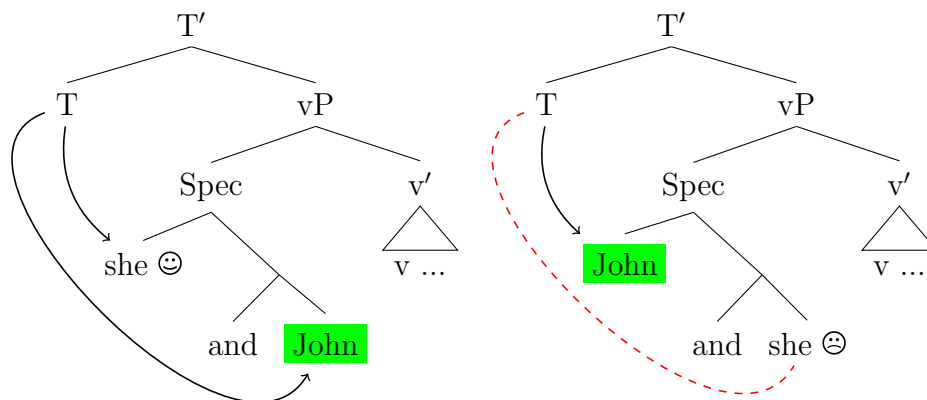
- (3) a. You and John went to the store.
b. John and you went to the store.

This idea accounts for the fact that *I* may not be the first DP in a coordinated subject. However, it doesn't capture all of the facts we just saw. In particular, we would like to be able to predict why *John and I* is fine but *John and she* is ungrammatical (2a). We can represent this development with a new generalization of the same form as the previous one: **proper names may not c-command third person nominative pronouns in the same case position**. It appears then, that there is a hierarchy for nominative licensing: *she/he* < **Proper Names** < **I** (where

$a < b$ means a must precede b).

To account for this broader generalization, I revise the prior analysis slightly. The nominative licenser prefers to only license the first nominal it finds, but may continue to probe if the next nominal's features are of greater strength. I define feature strength by the above hierarchy: I 's features are stronger than those of proper names, whose features are stronger than third person pronouns. Pronouns that have accusative case marking do not interact with the nominative licenser, so the grammar may produce them as a rescue strategy to change **I and John* to *me and John*¹.

This revised analysis now accounts for all of the data we have seen thus far. It predicts (as desired) orders *she and John*, *John and I*, and *she and I*, while outlawing **John and she*, **I and John*, and **I and she*.



While the analysis currently explains all the data we have discussed, there is still a lot of data we need to explore, namely what happens when coordinating just two pronouns, or a pronoun with something larger than a noun, how these things interact with verb agreement, etc. Starting with the first of these, the examples in (4) pose some issues for this analysis. If we want to coordinate a first person pronoun and a third person pronoun, we predict more possibilities than are actually available. For example, we should be able to rescue (4b) by changing *I* to *me*. However, as we see in (4f), this is not the case. Furthermore, (4h) should also be grammatical.

- (4) a. She and I went to the store.
 b. * I and she went to the store.
 c. ? Her and I went to the store.

¹Perhaps this also provides us with a way to explain the question mark on (1c). Given that *John and I* is perfectly grammatical, there is no need for the grammar to produce accusative case marking on the pronoun to produce *John and me*, which most speakers say is fine, but somewhat more marked than *me and John*.

- d. * I and her went to the store.
- e. Me and her went to the store.
- f. * Me and she went to the store.
- g. Her and me went to the store.
- h. * She and me went to the store.

I think these examples raise bigger questions about the nature of rescue accusative marking. It appears that accusative case can appear even when it shouldn't be necessary (4c,g, 1c). However, this optionality is only available in coordinated structures, never in isolation.

- (5) * Me went to the store.

I would like to be able to say that phi agreement on the verb can only be controlled by nominative marked subjects, which would explain why accusative subjects can never occur in isolation. This would predict that as long as there is some nominative DP in the coordinated subject, T (and the verb) will be happy. The problem is that (4e,g) show us that two coordinated accusative pronouns can be a perfectly acceptable subject. I am not sure what to make of this at the moment. I will revisit (4) later.

This analysis also predicts that two third person pronouns may not be coordinated. I unfortunately don't have intuitions about whether or not this is true, as I cannot think of a context in which I wouldn't just replace the two pronouns with one plural pronoun. However, I think there are contexts in which I might coordinate a plural pronoun with a singular one (though I still don't really have intuitions). Depending on how people feel about the following examples, we might need to revise our analysis to allow for DP's to precede other DP's of equal or greater strength (or include plurals into our hierarchy somewhere).

- (6) a. # He and she went to the store. (I would say *They went to the store*)
- b. (?) They and he...
- c. (?) He and they...
- d. (?) Them and he...
- e. (?) He and them...

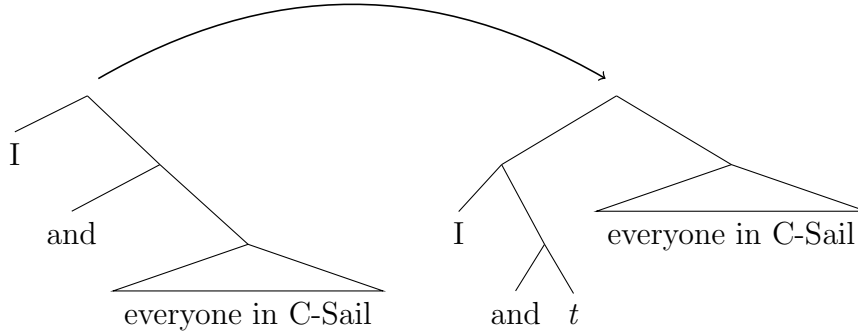
Now what happens when one of the conjuncts is really heavy or more structurally complex than just a noun or pronoun? (Note the plural agreement on the verb showing that these are not parentheticals.)

- (7) a. ? I and everyone in C-Sail are hungry.
- b. * I and the Archbishop of Canterbury are hungry.

It looks like the generalization that *I* cannot precede anything in a coordinated subject isn't completely true. If the second conjunct is appropriately heavy, suddenly it becomes marginally acceptable to say *I and XP*. However, it is unclear what it means to be “appropriately heavy”. The contrast in (7a-b) is interesting in its own right. I have the intuition that the quantifier somehow makes (7a) alright. Though perhaps it has to do with what kind of internal structure the second conjunct has.

- (8) a. ? I and anyone who likes cheese are going to like this restaurant.
 b. ? I and someone from my lab are going to the movies.
 c. * I and my mother's third cousin are getting ready for the party.
 d. ?? I and my mother's third cousin twice removed are getting ready for the party.

I propose that the marginally acceptable examples are the result of something like QR or heavy NP shift to a rightward specifier. This type of movement would allow the DP to no longer be c-commanded by *I*, and thus be licensed by the nominative licenser².



I return now to the mysteries of (4). I tried adding a third DP to see if it would give me any further insights (on the assumption that commas behave as conjunctions). Unfortunately the third DP has to be a proper name because a third or first person pronoun would add semantic complications (and 2nd person pronouns are opaque). My judgments are shown in (9), and they raise even more questions.

- (9) a. Bill, she and I went to the store.
 b. She, Bill and I went to the store.
 c. * Bill, I and she went to the store.
 d. * Bill, me and she went to the store.
 e. * She, I and Bill went to the store.

²This idea obviously needs to be made more precise. First, the way I have drawn the tree after movement, the DP in the moved XP doesn't c-command *I* so how does the probe know which one to license first? I also haven't really provided an explanation for what types of things trigger this movement. I leave that to future research. I also realize that movement out of a conjunction is unorthodox.

- f. * She, me and Bill went to the store.
- g. * I, she and Bill went to the store.
- h. * I, Bill and she went to the store.
- i. Me, her and Bill went to the store.
- j. Me, Bill and her went to the store.
- k. * Me, Bill and she went to the store.
- l. * Me, she and Bill went to the store.
- m. Her, me and Bill went to the store.
- n. Her, Bill and me went to the store.
- o. Her, Bill and I went to the store.

First, (9a) is unexpected because *Bill* should not be able to precede *she*³. Putting this aside, the generalization seems to be that if a first person pronoun is marked accusative, all the other pronouns must also be marked accusative. If just a third person pronoun is marked accusative, nothing else has to become accusative (as in (4c)). Since proper names don't have overt case marking, it is possible that this is even more general: if a first person pronoun is marked accusative, all other nominals must also be marked accusative. I'm not sure what kind of a mechanism could result in this generalization, but I think it is interesting.

To summarize, I think coordinated subjects are a very interesting and understudied area in syntax. This squib has offered an incomplete analysis that I think provides at least some perspective on the issue. The core feature of the analysis is that a nominative licenser will stop probing after the first nominal it finds, unless it is attracted by lower nominals with stronger features. However there is still much more work to be done. The more I look at these data, the more convinced I become that these facts cannot be accounted for by purely prescriptive rules. I also have the intuition that prosodic effects may explain some of the mysteries in (4) and (9). I leave you now with some data on coordinated possessive pronouns that I find interesting, as well as some data from Shakespeare on *thee* and *thou*.

- (10) a. ? Mary('s) and my book won a prize.
- b. ?? My and Mary's book won a prize.
- c. Me and Mary's book won a prize.
- d. * Mary and me's book won a prize.

- (11) a. ? Mary('s) and your book won a prize.

³If we do away with the assumption that commas behave as conjunctions, we can probably explain this easily. Maybe the first two DP's are equally accessible to the licenser. We could try all of these with two overt conjunctions, but I think those structures are somewhat marked in general so I'm not sure how useful the results would be. (E.g. ??*Bill and she and I...*)

- b. * Your and Mary('s) book won a prize.
 - c. You and Mary's book won a prize.
 - d. * Mary and you's book won a prize.
- (12)
- a. ? Mary(? 's) and his book won a prize.
 - b. His and Mary's book won a prize.
 - c. He and Mary's book won a prize.
 - d. Him and Mary's book won a prize.
 - e. * Mary and he's/him's book won a prize.
- (13)
- a. "Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably." - Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick
 - b. "Ay; and that thou and the proudest of you all shall find when he comes home." - Shakespeare, *Taming of the Shrew*, Grumio
 - c. "Thou and thy meaner fellows your last service did worthily perform." - Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Prospero
 - d. "how agrees the devil and thee about thy soul." - Shakespeare, *Henry IV, part 1*, Poins
 - e. "By this hand thou thinkest me as far in the devil's book as thou and Falstaff for obduracy and persistency: let the end try the man." - Shakespeare, *Henry IV part 2*
 - f. "We are alone; here's none but thee and I." - Shakespeare, *Henry VI, part 2*, Duchess
 - g. "Liker in feature to his father Geffrey than thou and John in manners" - Shakespeare, *King John*, Constance
 - h. "Thou and these woes were all for Rosaline" - Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence

References

- [1] Cardinaletti, Anna & Starke, Michal, *The Typology of Structural Deficiency*. MIT, 1994.
- [2] Bobaljik, Jonathon David, *Where's Phi? Agreement as a Postsyntactic Operation*. In *Phi-Theory: Phi features across interfaces and modules*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- [3] Deal, Amy Rose, *Interaction and satisfaction in phi-feature agreement*. NELS 45 Proceedings, 2015.