Truly Long-distance Agreement with Internal Possessors in Maithili

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1. Introduction

We present new data from ongoing work on a variety of Maithili (Indo-Aryan, Nepal), with striking implications for theories of phase impenetrability, minimal search, and anti-agreement. We find a number of patterns overlooked in previous work on this variety (Yadava et al. 2019, Alam and Kumaran 2022). Notably:

- in some cases, a verb agrees with the possessor of an argument without the possessor undergoing focus movement to the argument's edge (suggesting that arguments are not impenetrable phases)

- the object seems to have priority over the possessor of the subject for agreement (posing a challenge for minimal search – why should the object count as closer to the probe than the subject's possessor?)

- focused non-subjects can condition mismatched / default subject agreement (which can be thought of as a special case of anti-agreement, building on Baier 2018).

It has long been noted that Maithili verbs can agree with argument-internal possessors, in seeming violation of standard syntactic locality conditions on agreement (e.g. Stump and Yadav 1988). Alam and Kumaran (2022) argue that in at least one Maithili variety, the data are in accordance with a phase-based theory of locality (Chomsky 2000), proposing that agreeing possessors undergo overt focus movement to the edge of the possessum constituent. In this paper, we present novel evidence against this analysis. We find that in particular configurations, possessors agree without moving to the edge. We conclude that it is not the case that arguments are DPs *and* DPs are phases *and* phases are strictly impenetrable for Agree – at least one of these three assumptions must be relaxed.

A likely contributing factor to this being overlooked in previous work is that agreement with an in situ possessor of the subject only occurs under very specific circumstances: it requires specific combinations of person and honorificity of the subject, object, and possessor. In particular, our data are compatible with the generalization that agreement with an in situ possessor of the subject is possible *only in configurations in which the object cannot Agree*. Alam and Kumaran's (2022) account of subject and object agreement, involving a probe that Agrees with the subject first and the object second, straightforwardly extends to our data if we assume that the probe encounters the subject's possessor third, after the object. This is surprising under the assumption that Agree relies on minimal search (e.g. Chomsky 2000) – we would have make creative assumptions about the minimal search algorithm in order to predict that the verb's probe encounters the subject, the object, and the possessor of the subject in that order – though we note that from a more theory-neutral perspective, one might find it altogether natural that a non-argument is less preferred for agreement than an argument.

Section 2 gives a brief overview of the agreement system as described in Yadava et al. 2019 and makes some amendments and clarifications to the description. Section 3 discusses agreement with possessors and is the main contribution of our paper. Section 4 discusses an interesting pattern of mismatched subject agreement conditioned by particular combinations of ϕ-features of the subject and a focused non-subject; we cast this as a type of anti-agreement, following Baier's (2018) conception of anti-agreement as involving Impoverishment. Section 5 concludes.

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2. Overview of the agreement system

Maithili is an Indo-Aryan language of India and Nepal. The agreement system of the language varies significantly between lects. In this paper, we focus on a high-prestige sociolect associated with Brahmins, a small minority group with high social status. This variety is also spoken by non-Brahmin multilectal speakers when in the presence of Brahmins or in formal settings, e.g. at school. For previous work on the agreement system of this variety, see e.g. Yadava 1999, Bickel et al. 1999, Yadava et al. 2019, Alam and Kumaran 2022; for other varieties, see e.g. Stump and Yadav 1988 (Janakpur, Nepal), Kumari 2022 (Darbhanga, India).

All judgments in this paper (cited and uncited) are from Yogendra P. Yadava, a linguist and multilectal native speaker of the Maithili language from Siraha District, Madhesh Province, Nepal. Yadava is also the source of the dataset in Yadava et al. 2019, which forms the basis of the analysis in Alam and Kumaran 2022. In this section, we provide a brief overview of the agreement system as described in this past work. We also make some corrections: we fix transcription inconsistencies, clarify the status of optional agreement in some configurations, and present an apparent counterexample to the generalization that possessors always surface in a possessum-internal position.

The agreement morphology is sensitive to person features and honorific features[1] (as well as gender, in the case of third person honorific agreement in the past and future tenses). There are four honorific grades for 2nd person: L(ow), M(ID), H(IGH), and R(ESPECTED) in ascending order. (Most authors use HH rather than R; we follow Yadava et al.'s (2019) notation here.) This four-way contrast is reflected in the nominative pronoun morphology (2L = tu / 2M = to / 2H = əhã / 2R = əpne) as well as in the agreement system. For 3rd person, there are only two respect grades, 3.non-R and 3R.

Yadava et al. (2019) focus on three types of agreement (though see e.g. Bickel et al. 1999 for other possibilities):[2] agreement with a nominative subject, as in (1); agreement with a single non-nominative controller, as in (2); and agreement co-controlled by a nominative subject and a non-subject, as in (3). Note that nominative subject agreement is in general morphologically distinct from single non-nominative agreement (1-2).

(1)   tu   ae   -l   -æ
       2L.NOM come -PST -2L
       'You.L came'   (Yadava et al. 2019:49)

(2)   tora   bhukh ləg -l   -əu
       2L/M.ACC hunger feel -PST -2L.non-NOM
       'You.L were hungry.'   (Yadava et al. 2019:50[3])

(3)   a.   həm   tora   piṭ -əl   -iəu
           1.NOM 2L/M.ACC hit -PST -1>2L
           'I hit you.L.'   (Yadava et al. 2019:64)

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[1] Although Wang (2023) argues that almost all languages with grammaticalized honorificity actually lack dedicated honorific features, she notes that Maithili seems to be an exception.

[2] Other possibilities discussed in Bickel et al. 1999 include agreement with three controllers (only possible in one very specific configuration) as well as honorific agreement with entities that are not explicitly mentioned (called *allocutive agreement* if with the addressee and *deictic agreement* if with a third person – though see section 3.3. for a brief note on why long distance possessor agreement cannot simply be reduced to this). We will also mention that in our sessions, we have come across the following apparent case of agreement controlled solely by two non-subjects (with a 3R accusative-marked object somehow licensing the agreement suffix *kunh-*, which would typically require a 3R nominative subject), though this is something we have not investigated further:

(i)   tohər   bəcha   sikshak   -ke dekh -əl -kunh
     2L/M.GEN baby(non-R) teacher(R) -ACC see   -PST -3R>2
     'Your.L baby saw the teacher.'

[3] The source lists the suffix as "-əu(k)", but this is incorrect – the final consonant is not available.

b. tu   həmra piṭ -l   -əhi(k)
    2L.NOM 1.ACC hit -PST -2L>3.non-R
    'You.L hit me.FOC' (requires focused object)   (Yadava et al. 2019:73)

For some subject-object combinations, agreement is co-controlled by the subject and object only if the object has a focus interpretation, as in (3b), with agreement solely with the subject otherwise. For other subject-object combinations, co-control of agreement by the subject does not require a focused object, as in (3a). The full pattern is shown in (4), following Yadava et al. (2019), with one small change: we clarify that 1st person objects optionally co-control agreement with 3R subjects (marked with *), and that this does not require a focused object. This is shown in (5), where the object can agree even though the focus is elsewhere (as indicated via overt focus marking – focused elements are optionally morphologically marked in Maithili), without a multiple focus interpretation.

(4)

subject	object	agreement controller
3.non-R	any	subject + object
1	3R or 2	subject + object
1	3.non-R	subject
3R	2L/M or 1*	subject + object
3R	2H/R, 3, or 1*	subject
2	any	subject

(5) a. sikshək -e   həmra dekh -əl   -əith / -əinh
        teacher -FOC 1.ACC see   -PST -3R / -3R>1
        'The teacher.FOC saw me.' (object is not focused)
    b. sikshək həmra iskul   -e   me dekh -əl   -əith / -əinh
        teacher 1.ACC school -FOC in see   -PST -3R / -3R>1
        'The teacher saw me in school.FOC.' (object is not focused)

An inventory of agreement suffixes, based on Yadava et al. 2019:45-46,48-49 with some revisions, is provided in (6). Yadava et al.'s use of <-iəinh> vs. <-iænh> and <n(h)> vs. <nh> appears to be arbitrary, rather than reflective of any contrast; we consistently use <-iəinh> and <nh>. We also add options for 3R>2H and 3R>2R that were not listed in Yadava et al. 2019. (We have not systematically checked the accuracy of the entire table – this would be a valuable descriptive project, but is outside of scope for us.)

(6)   *Single-controller agreement*

Controller	NOM subject	non-NOM
1	-i,-aũ(h)	-∅
2L	-æ,-ahi	-əu(k)
2M	-i,-ə(h)	-ə(h)
2H	-i,-aũ(h)	-∅,-əi
2R	-i,-aũ(h), -∅ AUX-∅, -kinh	-∅
3.non-R	-∅,-əi	-∅,-əi
3R	-ah (MASC), -ih (FEM), -əith, -kinh	-əinh

Co-controlled agreement						
non-subject → / subject ↓	1	2L	2M	2H	2R	3.non-R	3R
1		-iəu(k)	-iəh	-i,-aũ(h)	-iəinh	-iæ(k)	-iəinh
2L	-əhi(k)					-əhi(k)	-əhunh, -əhinh
2M	-əhə(k)					-əhə(k)	-əhunh
2H	-i,-aũ(h)					-iæ(k)	-iəinh
2R	-iæ(k)					-iæ(k)	-iəinh
3.non-R	-ək,-kəi(k)	-kəu(k)	-kəh	-əinh	-(k)əinh	-ək,-kəi(k)	-(k)əinh
3R	-əinh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh, -(k)əinh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh -(k)əinh	-thin	-(k)əinh

Objects are not the only non-subject agreement controllers in Maithili. Other arguments such as locatives and comitatives, and even argument-internal possessors, are able to control agreement. An example of possessor agreement is given in (7).[4]

(7) həm tohər sikshək -ke bəcha de -l -iəu
1.NOM 2L/M.GEN teacher -ACC baby give -PST -1>2L
'I gave a baby to your.L.FOC teacher(R).' (requires focused possessor)   (Yadava et al. 2019:75)

Linguists have long claimed that possessors are always argument-internal in Maithili, citing the purported fact that the possessor and possessum must be linearly adjacent (Stump and Yadav 1998, Yadava et al. 2019). We find the evidence unclear. For instance, Yadava et al. provide (8) as evidence, but this only seems to show that the possessor cannot move to a position between the subject and adverb, not that it cannot be extracted at all. We have come across one apparent example of a possessor focus-moved to a clause peripheral position in our sessions, shown in (9b). This question deserves further investigation. (On the other hand, we do not mean to cast any doubt on the *existence* of agreeing, truly internal possessors. This will be made abundantly clear in the next section.)

(8) *həm tohər kailh nokər -ke piṭ -əl -iəu
1.NOM 2L/M.GEN yesterday/tomorrow servant -ACC hit -PST -1>2L
intended: 'I hit your.L servant yesterday.'   (Yadava et al. 2019:61)

(9) a. kailh tohər kitab həræ -l
yesterday/tomorrow 2L/M.GEN book get.lost -PST
'Your.L book got lost yesterday.' (possessor is not focused)
b. tore kailh kitab həre -l -əu
2L/M.FOC yesterday/tomorrow book get.lost -PST -2L.non-NOM
'Your.L.FOC book got lost yesterday.' (clause-peripheral focused possessor)

3. Agreement with internal possessors

3.1. Past work

Yadava et al. (2019) observe that possessors with a focus interpretation are able to control agreement, and that this focus interpretation is accompanied by overt movement to the edge of the possessum. This is can be seen in (10b), where the focused possessor moves past the demonstrative and agrees.

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[4] The marker glossed as accusative in this language is a differential object marker that appears on indirect objects and some direct objects.

(10) a. i   tohər   bəcha həmra piṭ -l   -ək
       this 2L/M.GEN baby 1.ACC hit -PST -3.non-R>1
       'This child of yours.L hit me.' (possessor is not focused)   (Yadava et al. 2019:76)

    b. tohər   i   bəcha həmra piṭ -əl   -kəu
       2L/M.GEN this baby 1.ACC hit -PST -3.non-R>2L
       'This child of yours.L.FOC hit me.' (possessor is focused)   (Yadava et al. 2019:76)

Alam and Kumaran (2022) observe that this pattern seems to align very neatly with a phase-based theory of locality (e.g. Chomsky 2000): if we assume the possessum is headed by a phase head, phase theory predicts that this head's specifier is accessible for Agree with an external probe (10b), whereas material in the complement of the head is inaccessible. This analysis echoes the standard analysis (e.g. Polinsky and Potsdam 2001) of cross-clausal long-distance agreement in other languages in which the agreement controller has an interpretation argued to be associated with (overt or covert) syntactic movement to the clausal left periphery (e.g. topic or focus).

In the next subsection, we present evidence against this analysis. We find that it is not impossible for unfocused, in-situ possessors to agree.

3.2. New data: agreement with unfocused internal possessors

In the remainder of section 3, we discuss agreement with unfocused possessors. Our novel data involving *focused* possessors will not be introduced until section 4.

In the configuration in (10a), the in-situ, unfocused possessor is not a possible agreement controller. Agreement is acceptable if the in-situ possessor is focused, as shown in (11) (a possibility not reported in Yadava et al. 2019), but the unfocused interpretation is unavailable. This would seem to fit Alam and Kumaran's (2022) analysis if we were to analyze the acceptability of (11) as due to covert syntactic focus movement.

(11) i   tohər   bəcha həmra dekh -əl   -kəu
     this 2L/M.GEN baby 1.ACC see -PST -3.non-R>2L
     'This child of yours.L.FOC saw me.' (possessor is focused; infelicitous without focus)

It turns out, though, that Alam and Kumaran's (2022) analysis does not hold up across all ϕ-feature combinations. For instance, if we use the ϕ-feature combination from (10a) except with a 3R subject instead of a 3.non-R subject, agreement with the possessor is optionally available even without a focus interpretation, as shown in (12). (In fact, an unfocused interpretation of the possessor is *obligatory* with the agreement used in (12), due to an effect of focus on agreement that will be discussed in section 4.)

(12) i   tohər   sikshək həmra dekh -əl   -kunh / -əinh
     this 2L/M.GEN teacher 1.ACC see -PST -3R>2 / -3R>1
     'This teacher(R) of yours.L saw me.' (possessor is not focused)

As far as we can tell, whether or not a given unfocused possessor agrees is predicted by the following two principles: 1. the object has priority for control of agreement and 2. the restrictions on ϕ-features of an agreeing object (listed in (4)) also apply to the possessor.

A restatement of principle 1 is *unfocused possessors do not interfere with object agreement*. When the subject is 3.non-R, the object always agrees (see (4)). This remains true if the 3.non-R subject has an unfocused possessor, as in (10a).

If the subject is instead 3R, though, the object agrees if 2L/M, optionally agrees if 1st person, and does not agree otherwise (see (4-5)); if the object does not agree, an unfocused possessor of the 3R subject agrees following principle 2, i.e. the unfocused possessor agrees if it is 2L/M (as in (12), where object agreement is optional, but if object agreement does not occur possessor agreement occurs), optionally agrees if it is 1st person (as in (13)), and does not agree otherwise (as in (14)).

(13) i   həmər sikshək ahãke   dekh -əl -əinh / -əith
     this 1.GEN teacher 2H.ACC see   -PST -3R>1 / -3R
     'This teacher(R) of mine saw you.H.' (no focus)

(14) i   ahãk   sikshək bəcha -ke dekh -əl -əith / *-kunh
     this 2H.GEN teacher baby -ACC see   -PST -3R   / *-3R>2
     'This teacher(R) of yours.H saw the baby.' (no focus)

3.3. Discussion

Examples such as (13) contradict Alam and Kumaran's (2022) analysis which assumes that arguments are phases, material inside of which (other than the specifier) is inaccessible to the relevant probe. It is hard to think of a plausible way to save the analysis. For instance, one could stipulate a silent proleptic pronoun external to the possessum that corefers with the possessor and controls agreement, or one could stipulate that despite the linear order (demonstrative-possessor-possessum) and unfocused interpretation, the possessor is actually at the phase edge (maybe due to semantically vacuous covert movement, or maybe the demonstrative and possessor are both specifiers of the phase head). These stipulations are otherwise unmotivated, and perhaps more importantly, by collapsing the distinction between focused and unfocused possessors, they leave it unclear why unfocused possessors are unable to agree in most configurations, while focused possesors are able to (e.g. (10-11)).

It is also worth noting that the agreeing first person possessor in (13) rules out an allocutive agreement analysis. See e.g. Bickel et al. 1999 for discussion of allocutive agreement (i.e. agreement with an addressee that is not otherwise overtly mentioned) in Maithili. Most of the examples we have shown involve a second person possessor, so one could imagine that agreement in these cases does not involve Agree with the possessor, but instead involves whatver mechanism is responsible for allocutive agreement. But first person unfocused possessor agreement cannot be explained in this way. We pursue a unified analysis of first and second person, since the behavior of both second person and first person is captured by the same generalization (formulated in terms of principles 1 and 2 above).

We propose that agreement with unfocused possessors is truly long-distance. Focused possessors are in the specifier of the possessum; unfocused possessors are deeper inside the possessum. This contradicts the phase-based theory of locality assumed by Alam and Kumaran (2022). One response could be to adopt a weaker phase-based theory of locality – for instance, one could assume that Agreeing with a phase unlocks it (e.g. Rackowski and Richards 2005); that phases start unlocked and only lock when the next phase is Merged (e.g. Chomsky 2001); that nominal arguments in languages without definite articles (like Maithili) are non-phasal (e.g. Bošković 2005); or that phases simply do not contrain Agree (e.g. Fox and Pesetsky 2005). Another response would be to abandon phase theory entirely, of course – as phase theory becomes weaker and more complex, the less clear it becomes that phase theory is useful at all.

Assuming we relax or abandon phase theory (and setting aside focus agreement for the moment), Alam and Kumaran's (2022) account of the subject/object data extends straightforwardly to the subject/object/unfocused-possessor data – *provided we assume that the subject Agrees before the object and the object Agrees before the subject's possessor*. Alam and Kumaran's account involves a probe that Agrees with the subject first, then potentially the object second depending on the subject and object features; they are able to make the right predictions within a modified version of Deal's (2024) interaction-and-satisfaction Agree model; we will not spell out the specifics of how this works here, but we encourage you to check that paper out.[5] Since the subject's possessor shows the same ϕ-feature restrictions as the object but has lower priority for control of agreement, if the search algorithm were such that the object is encountered after the subject and before the subject's possessor, the correct pattern would be derived. The problem with this is that Agree is assumed to involve minimal search downward from the probe, and no matter what creative syntactic structures and stipulative movement steps one might try to come up with, it would be very difficult to set up (and argue for) a configuration where the object is positioned between the subject and the subject's internal possessor (for any reasonable definition

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[5] Footnote for the imaginary close reader of both papers: the optional availability of co-controlled agreement in 3R>1 configurations can be accommodated by assuming SPKR is optionally an INT feature.

of "positioned between" for the purpose of search).

One possibility worth considering is parallel minimal search down each branch of the tree, where the subject's possessor and the object cannot act as interveners for one another and can potentially both Agree. This would require a postsyntactic account of competition between the object and the possessor. Such an account would not seem to be compatible with standard Vocabulary Insertion based on the Subset Principle (e.g. Halle 1997): the non-subject controller of agreement can in general have any case (unmarked, accusative, genitive, or even oblique cases like comitative) and the agreement morphology does not encode case of the non-subject controller, so it is unclear how to give objects priority over genitives without preventing genitives from ever controlling agreement. One might instead try a pre-morphology Best Match algorithm that chooses the best of two possible goals (see e.g Hammerly 2024 and references therein), but again, this would require a somewhat creative, ad hoc algorithm to get the right facts.

In any case, all of this discussion fails to capture the following relatively simple picture: long-distance agreement across CP or DP boundaries is crosslinguistically very rare, but not unattested; agreement across a CP or DP boundary with a controller that has not undergone Ā-movement to the edge of the CP or DP is even more restricted, but apparently not impossible either. None of this is surprising if one assumes that the pressure against Agreeing across C and D nodes is violable and gradient (i.e. stronger the more nodes are crossed) and is weighed in parallel against the pressures for and against agreeing with goals with particular features. Kumaran (2022) proposes such a violable-contraint-based Agree framework, and provides an alternative to Alam and Kumaran's (2022) account of Maithili agreement in this framework (which is independently motivated by several other case studies in the paper). The fact that Kumaran's (2022) framework does not rule out the possibility of a language allowing unfocused internal possessor agreement is the type of prediction that may have seemed undesirable in the absence of the novel data in the current paper.

4. Mismatched subject agreement conditioned by focused non-subjects

Before concluding, we want to mention another interesting phenomenon that we have come across. In some cases with a 3ʀ subject, agreement with a focused non-subject leads to the use of an agreement marker that would normally only be used for a 3.non-ʀ subject. For instance, in (15) the subject is 3ʀ, but the agreeing focused 2ʟ possessor somehow causes mismatched subject agreement.

(15)   tore   sikshək həmra dekh -əl -kəu   / *-kunh
       2ʟ/ᴍ.ꜰᴏᴄ teacher 1.ᴀᴄᴄ see   -ᴘsᴛ -3.non-ʀ>2ʟ / *-3ʀ>2
       'Your.ʟ.ꜰᴏᴄ teacher(ʀ) saw me.' (possessor is focused)

Note that there is not a complete lack of subject agreement in this example. When agreement is controlled by a single non-nominative 2ʟ controller as in (16), the suffix is different. Cases of mismatched/default agreement are often analyzed as involving a lack of Agree altogether (e.g. Preminger 2014), but it seems that in the case of (15), mismatched subject agreement does involve Agree with the subject since the subject's presence affects the form of the agreement suffix.

(16)   tora   bhukh ləg -l -əu
       2ʟ/ᴍ.ᴀᴄᴄ hunger feel -ᴘsᴛ -2ʟ.non-ɴᴏᴍ
       'You.ʟ were hungry.'   (Yadava et. al 2019:50[6])

The effect of focused non-subjects on subject agreement is not limited to possessors of the subject. In (17), the object agrees and if it is focused, it causes mismatched subject agreement.

(17)   a.   i   okər   sikshək =ta tora   dekh -əl -kunh
            this 3.non-ʀ.ᴅɪsᴛ.ɢᴇɴ teacher =ᴛᴏᴘ 2ᴍ/ʟ.ᴀᴄᴄ see   -ᴘsᴛ -3ʀ>2
            'This teacher of hers saw you.ʟ.' (no focus)

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[6] The source lists the suffix as "-əu(k)", but this is incorrect – the final consonant is not available.

b. i   okər   siksha̍k =ta   tore   dekh -əl -kəu
    this 3.non-R.DIST.GEN teacher =TOP 2M/L.FOC see   -PST -3.non-R>2L
    'This teacher of hers saw you.L.FOC.' (object is focused)

At this stage we have not looked into the full distribution of when mismatched agreement occurs and when it does not. It seems that 2L focused non-subject agreement causes mismatched agreement with a 3R subject, but 2R and 1 do not:

(18) a. i   əpnek siksha̍k bəcha -ke   dekh -əl -kunh
          this 2R.GEN teacher baby -ACC see   -PST -3R>2
          'This teacher of yours.R.FOC saw the baby.' (in-situ focused possessor)
      b. həmre siksha̍k ahãke   dekh -əl -əinh
          1.FOC teacher 2H.ACC see   -PST -3R>1
          'My.FOC teacher saw you.H.' (focused possessor)

This can be thought as a special case of anti-agreement, building on Baier 2018. The cases of anti-agreement discussed by Baier involve mismatched agreement with an agreement controller that bears an Ā feature (such as focus). Baier models these using Impoverishment rules that delete ϕ-features in the presence of the relevant Ā feature. Crucially, in order to account for the typological diversity of patterns, he allows these rules to reference specific ϕ-features. The Maithili subject mismatch cases could be analyzed as a generalization of this phenomenon to the case of multi-controller agreement, where the relevant Impoverishment rule deletes features of the subject when the non-subject controller is focused (for specific ϕ-feature combinations).

5. Conclusion

Maithili possessor agreement has long been thought to pose a problem for syntactic theories of agreement (e.g. Stump and Yadav 1988). Alam and Kumaran (2022) recently argued that, at least in one variety, the data are actually compatible with standard phase theory and are analogous to well known cases of cross-clausal agreement (e.g. Polinsky and Potsdam 2001). We have provided novel data here that invalidate this argument, reestablishing possessor agreement as truly long-distance in a way that challenges standard phase theory (and also challenges the minimal-search-based analysis of ϕ-feature hierarchy effects).

There is great deal of work left to be done here. Since this agreement system is sensitive to so many morphosyntactic variables, simply documenting the full range of patterns would require much more work than we will personally be able to put in. But we hope that others will take up this work, and similar work on other languages. The project of developing a theory of agreement in natural language should ideally culminate in a theory that predicts what agreement can look like in the most general case. Documenting complex agreement systems and comparing them against hypotheses would seem to be essential to that project.

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