

The Syntax of Non-canonical Agreement: Default Case-marking and Subject-verb Disagreement in English*

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Park, Myung-Kwan. 2006. The Syntax of Non-canonical Agreement: Default Case-marking and Subject-verb Disagreement in English. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 14(2), 133-150. This paper examines non-canonical default agreement (=disagreement) and default Case phenomena in English, arguing that *Move* is a composite operation consisting of *Agree*, *Pied-piping* and *Re-merge*, which apply even in default agreement and Case environments. Along this line of argument, we show that *Agree* can be divided into two sub-operations: one for person feature and the other for Case feature, and that Case and agreement go hand in hand even in the default agreement/Case environments, as in canonical agreement/Case environments. We also argue that *Agree* via person feature between a Probe and a Goal is a necessary condition to satisfy the EPP requirement.

Key Words: default Case, default agreement, agreement, Case, disagreement, Agree, Move, the EPP

1. Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to examine non-canonical default agreement (alias, disagreement) and default Case environments of English, investigating into how agreement and Case features come into

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existence, and how the syntactic operation of *Agree* is associated with that of *Move* in these environments. We are also going to explore what theoretical implications we can deduce from the discussion of the default Case and agreement environments in English where the expected realization of agreement/Case ‘breaks down.’

We argue along the line of analysis by Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b) that *Move*, which is construed as a composite operation consisting of *Agree*, *Pied-piping* and *Re-merge*, applies even in default agreement and Case environments. Furthermore, we argue that although *Agree* for Case apparently is dissociated from *Agree* for ϕ -features in default Case environments, they are still dependent upon each other. Put differently, when agreement/Case feature fails to be valued for some reasons (e.g., either due to lack of a relevant functional category or of a relevant structural relation that permits a certain agreement or Case) in these environments, the default agreement and Case forms are realized on the Infl and the DP associated it, respectively. We also argue endorsing Chomsky’s (2000, 2001a) suggestion that *Move* is triggered by the EPP and its requirement can be satisfied by the *person* feature that T (or *v*) carries. In other words, departing from Chomsky’s (2001b) suggestion of the EPP as a selectional requirement which can be satisfied by any category, we suggest that *Agree* via person feature, not full *Agree* (i.e., *Agree* for all the *person*, *number* and *gender* features in one fell swoop), suffices to trigger *Move*.

2. Patterns of Case and Agreement in Default Case Environments

According to Chomsky’s (2000, 2001a, b) definition of *Move*, *Move* of β targeting α has the following three components:

- (1)a. A probe P in the label L of α locates the closest matching goal G in its domain. (*Agree*)
- b. A feature G’ of the label containing G selects a phrase β as a

- candidate for “pied piping.” (*Pied piping*)
 c. β is merged to a category K. (*Re-merge*)

There seem to be, however, a number of cases where *Move* does apparently not require canonical *Agree* as its sub-operation, and among the cases are default agreement and Case environments. In the ensuing sub-sections will be examined some patterns of Case and agreement in these environments.

2.1. Case in Default Case Environments

In this sub-section we are going to provide some paradigms of evidence showing that in default Case environments, *Move* proceeds independently of valuation of canonical nominative Case. The first set of examples that illustrate the occurrence of subject pronouns without expected nominative Case morphology are found in the adjunct absolutive *V-ing* construction in (2).

- (2)a. If I'd shut my mouth, absolutely they'd have used that to support their story [**me** being a very large holder of North Atlantic]. (Arnold Bennett, *Imperial palace*, London (1930: 260))
 b. But you see, [**him** being here in the room] - I had to be careful. (Arnold Bennett, *Lord Raingo*, London (1926: 140))
 c. Why didn't you say so before? and [**us** losing our time listening to your silliness]! (George Bernard Shaw, *Androcles and the lion*, London (1916: 113)) (Quinn (2002: 250))

In addition, the following example in (3) also illustrates the occurrence of an accusative form subject pronoun as the subject of a clause in the *V-ing* construction, though genitive form subject pronouns are also allowed in this construction as in (4).

- (3) [**Him** hanging around like this, just messing things up], don't fit in anywheres that I can see. (Dashiell Hammett, *The Thin Man*,

London 1934: 252) (Quinn (2002: 251))

- (4)a. [**his** being a prisoner here], renders it impossible. (Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, London 1980 (Chapman & Hall [1987f]: 498))
- b. It cannot be wondered at that [**their** retiring all to sleep at so unusual an hour] should excite his curiosity. (Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, London 1782[1749]: 3.71) (Quinn (2002: 250))

In short, in absolutive *V-ing* constructions a pronominal subject surfaces in accusative form (2). In addition, when a *V-ing* clause occurs as a sentential subject, its pronominal subject is realized either in accusative form (3) or genitive form (4). Given that the predicate internal subject hypothesis is correct, the sentences in (2), (3) and (4) show that the subject DPs can undergo *Move*, even though they does not undergo a canonical realization of Case (i.e., nominative Case). In consequence, these examples are taken as evidence showing that movement to Spec of TP is not always preceded by valuation of nominative Case.

Second, the following set of sentences provide additional evidence confirming the dissociation of nominative Case from *Move*.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (5)a. him is fixing dinner. | b. him 's going to drive. |
| c. him 's getting food. | d. him 's got to go home. |
| e. him 's going. | f. because her 's duty. |
| g. her 's done. | h. her is done eating. |
- (Schütze (1997: 241-2))

Examining the corpus data of pronoun frequency, Schütze (1997) notes that children with Specific Language Impairment or SLI normally use the accusative form of pronoun, which is identical with default Case form of pronoun in adult language. Apart from an account of why SLI children display this tendency, these examples show that *Move* can apply to a DP moving to Spec of TP without undergoing canonical nominative Case valuation.

Third, the examples in (6) also show the absence of a linkage between nominative Case and the EPP.

- (6)a. [He and I] won all the medals at the last tournament. (54)
 b. [**Him** and I] won all the medals at the last tournament. (29)
 c. [**Him** and **me**] won all the medals at the last tournament. (6)
 d. [**Me** and **him**] won all the medals at the last tournament. (1)
 (Quinn (2002))

According to Quinn's (2002) report of the cloze test he assigned to native speakers of English, although most native speakers (54/90) chose as a coordinate subject *he and I*, some other native speakers (35/90) also chose as a coordinate subject *him and I* and *him and me* too. It seems that the latter instances of coordinate subject fail to receive an appropriate account under Chomsky's (2000, 2001a, b) assumption that Case valuation takes place in the narrow syntax before *Move* applies. In consequence, the examples in (6) are also taken to show that Case valuation does not always occur before movement to Spec of TP.

To summarize, the arrays of data examined in this sub-section show that a subject DP can undergo *Move* from its base position to the Spec TP position without obtaining an expected form of nominative Case. Accordingly, we argue contrary to Bošković's (2001) and Chomsky's (2000, 2001a, b) suggestion that *Move* is not always contingent on valuation of canonical nominative Case. The discussion so far, however, do not deny Case valuation in default Case environments completely. One possibility apart from valuation of canonical nominative Case is that not canonical but non-canonical default Case valuation applies before movement proceeds, which will be argued for below.

2.2. Agreement in Default Agreement and Case Environments

In this sub-section, we show some pieces of evidence showing that there is a close association between ϕ -feature agreement and Case in default Case environments. As the first set of evidence, let us look at

the examples in (7).

- (7) a. **Him** fall down. (2;3.14, File 17)
 b. **Her** have a big mouth. (2;2.6, File 13) (Schütze (1997: 189))

According to Schütze (1997), the data of *Optional Infinitives* or OI utterances with non-nominative subjects do not result from mere truncation of any adult sentences.¹⁾ In other words, they do not follow from phonological reduction of adult sentences. Rather than imperfectly imitating what they hear, children at the OI stage generate them by rule.

If so, the examples in (7a-b) constitute supporting evidence for a close linkage between Case and agreement, in that when the subject DP moving to Spec of TP fails to take nominative Case, the Infl associated with it also fails to have canonical agreement realized. In other words, it obtains default agreement or disagreement (i.e., infinitival form). In short, *Agree* for Case interacts closely with *Agree* for ϕ -features in default agreement/Case environments, as attested in canonical Case environments.

The coordinate DP construction in Belfast English renders further supporting evidence for the hypothesis that Case and ϕ -feature agreement are always dependent upon each other.

- (8) [**Us** and **them**] is always arguing.
 (9) [**We** and **they**] are/*is always arguing.
 (10) [**Him** and **me**] goes there every week.
 (11) [**He** and **I**] go/*goes there very week.
 (12) [**Her** and her mother] works there.

1) It has been observed in the literature of language acquisition that children around age two usually produce utterances whose verbal inflection is not identical with that of synonymous adult utterances. For example, they typically drop tense/agreement marking. These structures are called *Optional Infinitives* (OI). For a relevant discussion, see Schütze (1997) and Schütze and Wexler (1996).

- (13) [**She and her mother**] work/*works there. (Henry (1995: 18))
 (14) ***[John and me]** am going.
 (15) **[John and me]** is going.
 (16) ***[Me and you]** am supposed to go.
 (17) **[Me and you]** is supposed to go.
 (18) **[John and me]** kicks ourselves.
 (19) **[Me and you]** is supposed to help ourselves. (Henry (1995: 21))

As Henry (1995: 20) notes, pronouns which are part of a coordination can have a singular verb, provided that they are not nominative, as in (8) through (13).

Henry argues that singular agreement in this environment does not involve merely substituting the appropriate singular verb for a plural one; rather, it involves lack of agreement marking. The reasoning is this. If singular agreement simply involved substituting the appropriate singular verb for the plural, we would expect a first person plural subject to have a first person singular verb. We can test for this with *be*, the only verb in English to have a first person singular which differs from the first person plural. What we find is that the first person singular never occurs with a plural subject as in (14) and (16). Apart from the first person plural form, the only form we find is the third person singular as in (15) and (17). That these are indeed first person plural subjects is seen from their corresponding forms as in (18) and (19), where the first person reflexive pronoun takes as its antecedent the first person plural subject.

Singular agreement attested in Belfast English provides additional evidence that agreement interacts closely with Case. When the subject with coordinated pronouns is realized with default accusative Case, the Infl simply requires singular agreement. It is to be noted that, as Henry argues, singular agreement in this language does not result from morphological readjustment of substituting it for plural agreement. Rather it is understood as a realization of non-canonical agreement with a default Case subject DP.

The third set of evidence in favor of a linkage between Case and ϕ

-features agreement is adduced from the patterns of Case and agreement in the *it*-cleft construction as in (20) and (21).

- (20) Examples of accusative pronoun forms in *it*-clefts where the cleft clause is introduced by a *wh*-pronoun functioning as the subject of the clause.
- a. It's **me** [who's to blame]. (Quirk et al. 1985: 339)
 - b. *It's **me** who **am** to blame.
 - c. It was **him** [who telephoned]? (R. Lehmann, *The Echoing Grove*, (Collins) 1968 [1953]: 314) (Quinn (2002: 233))
- (21) Examples of *it*-clefts where the verb in the cleft clause agrees in person and number with a 1st singular nominative focus, and where it fails to agree in person
- a. For it is **I** [that **am** come down]. (Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose*: 4365)
 - b. It is **I** [who **am** having to do with material things]. (Ivy Compton Burnett, *More Women than Men*, (Gollancz) 1971 [1933]: 131)
 - c. It isn't **I** [that **wants** to spoil your home]. (John Galsworthy, *Plays*, London 1910 14: 12.41) (Quinn (2002: 233))

Comparing the sentence in (20a) with the one in (21b), we learn that when the focus DP in the *it*-cleft construction is marked with non-nominative Case form, the verb in the cleft clause is not marked with an expected agreement morpheme but with a default one (i.e., 3rd person singular). The ungrammaticality of (20b) in contrast to the grammaticality of (21a-b) confirms that when the focus DP appears with default Case in the *it*-cleft construction, the canonical agreement cannot be realized. These examples are taken to show that *Agree* for Case is closely associated with *Agree* for ϕ -features.

What we have demonstrated in this sub-section is that when a displaced subject DP is marked with non-canonical default non-nominative Case form, the Infl associated with it is realized with a non-canonical, default agreement morpheme (3rd person singular or

infinitival). This fact in turn leads us to a conclusion that default Case environments behave in parallel fashion with canonical Case environments, in that Case agreement is in tandem with ϕ -feature agreement. Put differently, we argue à la Henry (1995) that there exists a close linkage between *Agree* for Case agreement and *Agree* for ϕ -feature agreement in both canonical and default Case environments²⁾. There is full agreement between a Probe and a Goal in canonical agreement/Case environments, whereas there is partial deficient agreement between them in non-canonical default agreement/Case environments.

3. Proposal

3.1. Default Case is Unvalued Case

The examples where pronouns in subject position have non-nominative Case form cannot be accounted for under the standard theory of Case. Here we argue that they are realized with non-canonical Case form either when a relevant functional category is lacking or when a relevant structural relation fails to be established.

One of the possible approaches to subject DPs with non-nominative Case is to suppose that non-canonical form of Case on a subject DP is a realization of default Case. Cho and Park (2004), Radford and Ramos (2001), and Sigurðsson (1996), among others, suggest that default agreement/Case form is a manifestation of a feature value derivationally ending up unspecified. In other words, they propose that default Case form is not actually caseless, but rather it has an unvalued and uninterpretable Case feature [*uCase*]. In this respect, any item carrying

2) The close linkage between a probe and a goal is often expressed in the following way: "Case-checking/specification [...] is analyzed as the reflex of the agreement relation involving the [+interpretable] ϕ -features of the noun and the [-interpretable] ϕ -features of the relevant Case checker" (Horroten et al. (2005: 318)).

singular agreement shows up on a verb adjoined to T. We suggest that this type of 3rd *person singular* agreement does not mean that there is no agreement relation established. Rather, the 3rd *person singular* feature default agreement or disagreement is still regarded as partial or deficient agreement. In other words, *Agree* is involved in establishing partial agreement realized on a verb in default Case environments.

Our conception of default agreement/Case as partial agreement is attributed to Boeckx's (1999, 2000) new formulation of the Person Case Constraint or PCC. By drawing on Bonet's (1994) PCC in (23), Boeckx proposes the following reformulation of it as in (24) in order to capture the quirky or default agreement phenomena in Icelandic.

(23) Person Case Constraint (PCC)

If Dative (agreement), Accusative (agreement) = 3rd

(Bonet (1994: 36))

- (24) If a verb agrees with a dative element and an accusative element, the morphology of the agreement relation with the accusative element is necessarily 3rd person. (Boeckx (1999: 237))

Boeckx ascribes the ungrammaticality in (26a) to a violation of the PCC in (24). The person feature of the finite T in (26a) -- let us leave aside the number feature of the finite T for the sake of discussion -- is valued as 3rd person by the dative subject in Spec TP. This leads to feature clash with 1st person feature of the nominative object within VP when the finite T possibly undergoes secondary number agreement with the latter.

- (25) Stelpunum var hjálpað
 The girls.Dat.3pl. was.3sg. helped.3sg.
 'The girls were helped.'
- (26) a. *?Henni leiddust við
 Her.Dat.3sg. bored.3pl. we.Nom.1pl.
 b. Henni leiddist við

the former blocks the latter from moving into the matrix Spec of TP. The blocking effect of the former constitutes another piece of evidence showing that it undergoes agreement, in that the blocking effect obtains when two elements undergoing agreement compete for movement.

To summarize, both the PCC and the intervention and blocking effects in the Icelandic dative nominative construction provide additional evidence showing that in default agreement/Case environments, a subject DP with non-canonical default Case undergoes *Agree* in person feature with a finite T. The discussion in this sub-section leads us to another question of what agreement via person feature has to do with the EPP in default agreement/Case environments, which will be a topic of the next section.

4. How to Meet the EPP Requirement?

At this moment we are left with a question: what triggers *Move* in default agreement/Case environments? In other words, how should the traditional notion of the EPP be understood in the more recent framework of grammar by Chomsky (2000, 2001a, b)? This section will show that the discussions so far shed new light on this question.

With the advent of the minimalist theory, Chomsky (1993) proposes that movement is driven for a Case reason. This idea is also advanced further by Bošković (2001). Chomsky (1995), however, turns to pursue an alternative view that the EPP is a kind of strength feature, i.e., strong EPP feature, which should be checked off before entering Spell-Out; otherwise, a given derivation ends up being crashed at PF. Departing from this line of analysis, Chomsky (2000, 2001a) advances a different proposal that the EPP requirement is to satisfy one of the unspecified ϕ features, i.e., *person* feature of T (or *v*). Most recently, Chomsky (2001b) takes the EPP as a configurational requirement, assuming that the following features are uninterpretable ones that exist in human language.³⁾

3) Chomsky (2001b) assumes it is necessary to introduce into the grammar

- (31)a. the OCC feature
 b. structural Case for nouns
 c. phi-features for categories that agree with nouns

The OCC feature corresponds to the EPP feature which the previous works by Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001a) assume to be what triggers movement. This version of EPP that Chomsky (2001b) proposes can be understood as a return to the earlier version of EPP in Chomsky (1981), which is defined as in (32) below.

(32) *Extended Projection Principle*

Clauses must have subjects.

Among the various approaches to the EPP given here, we argue endorsing Chomsky (2000, 2001a) but departing from Chomsky (2001b) that *Move* is triggered to satisfy an unvalued person feature. This conception of the EPP gains support, in that it is more restrictive than Chomsky's (2001b) configurational view of the EPP. This version of the EPP states that the EPP requirement cannot be met by all the categories, but only by the categories that are able to value a person feature of T. In addition, this version of EPP has both theory internal and empirical advantages. On the theoretical side, the grammar seems to be simpler, because we do not have to postulate an additional feature other than Case and agreement features. On the empirical side, the default agreement/Case phenomena in English and the PCC effects in Icelandic we discussed in the previous subsections can receive an

those three uninterpretable features, since human language has 'multiplicity' or 'duality' of semantic properties in (i) and (ii) that the semantic component SEM expresses.

- (i) Theta theoretic argument structures: base structures created by *external Merge* (i.e., *pure Merge*)
 (ii) Everything else (=other kinds of semantic information), including scopal and discourse oriented properties (new/old information, specificity, etc.): derived structures created by *internal Merge* (i.e., *Move*).

appropriate account under this view of the EPP; as argued, partial agreement in person feature obtains even in default agreement/Case environments.

5. Conclusion

By examining default agreement and Case phenomena in English, we come to a conclusion that *Move* is a composite operation consisting of *Agree*, *Pied piping* and *Re Merge*, which apply even in default agreement and Case environments. This conclusion hinges on the supposition that *Agree* can be divided into two sub-operations: one for person feature and the other for Case feature, and that Case and agreement go hand in hand even in default agreement/Case environments, as in canonical agreement/Case environments. The paper also shows that person *Agree* is a necessary condition to satisfy the EPP requirement.

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