The non-existence of a phi-feature dependency between C° and T°

1. Synopsis

Several proposals have been put forth suggesting that there is a phi-feature dependency between T° and C° (cf. a.o. Zwart 1993, 1997; Chomsky 2005). In most (if not all) of these proposals the core piece of supportive empirical evidence for this claim is Complementizer Agreement (CA), i.e. agreement between the complementizer and the embedded subject see () (cf. a.o. Haegeman 1992; Zwart 1993; Carstens 2002).

However, as the intervention of the adjuncts (2) a. in these examples sometimes the phi-features of C are morphologically expressed, as in the famous West Flemish examples”. Both types of approaches share the view that CA is an additional reflex of the feature checking relation between T° and the subject which results in verbal agreement morphology. As such, both analyses predict that CA and verbal agreement will realize the same argument relation and that C° and T° agree with the same Goal: the subject DP.

The idea that there is phi-feature dependency between T° and C° comes in two variants, depending on where the features originate. First of all, several analyses argue that the features originate in T° and that CA reflects the movement of T° to C° (cf. Zwart 1993, 1997; Hoekstra & Maracz 1989; Watanabe 2000). The features of T° are checked against the subject and get spelled out both on the finite verb and on the complementizer. A second interpretation of this phi-feature dependency, recently put forward in Chomsky (2005), suggests that the phi-features originate in C°, and are inherited and checked by T°. The fact that some languages actually display agreement morphology on a C°-related element like the complementizer is advanced in support of this idea. More precisely, Chomsky (2005) states that “sometimes the phi-features of C are morphologically expressed, as in the famous West Flemish examples”. Both types of approaches share the view that CA is an additional reflex of the feature checking relation between T° and the subject which results in verbal agreement morphology. As such, both analyses predict that CA and verbal agreement will realize the same argument relation and that C° and T° agree with the same Goal: the subject DP.

2. The theoretical debate

We present two contexts in which CA and verbal agreement do not result from the same feature checking relation; in both cases C agrees with a different Goal than T. In Limburgian (1) C° and T° agree with the same Goal. However, consider () where the subject is a coordination.

(1) a. Ich denk de-s doow Marie ontmoet-s.

‘I think that you will meet Marie.’ (Limburgian)

On the basis of two sets additional CA data this paper shows that there is no phi-feature dependency between T° and C°. The first evidence concerns CA with coordinated subjects in Limburg Dutch (cf. Van Koppen 2005) and the second evidence comes from agreement with so-called external possessors in West Flemish (cf. Haegeman 2004). We will conclude that CA results from an Agree relation initiated by unvalued phi-features in the CP-domain, whereas verbal agreement spells out the Agree relation between T° and the subject. We will also argue against the idea that CA results from adjacency at the PF-branch (cf. Ackema & Neeleman 2005, Miyagawa 2009, Fuss 2004).

3 The core data

We present two contexts in which CA and verbal agreement do not result from the same feature checking relation; in both cases C agrees with a different Goal than T. In Limburgian (1) C° and T° agree with the same Goal. However, consider () where the subject is a coordination.

(2) a. omdat/omda-n Andre tun juste zenen computers kapot *was/woaren because/because-ri Andre then just his computer s broken was/were-*ri

‘…because André’s computers broke down just then.’

b. omda-n/omdat Andre en Valère tun juste underen computer because/-ri/because André and Valère then just their computer kapot was/*woaren broken was/were-*ri

‘…because André (and Valère)’s computer broke down just then.’

In these examples André and André and Valère are interpreted as the possessor of computer(s). However, as the intervention of the adjuncts (tun juste, ‘just then’) between the possessor and the possessee shows, these DPs do not form a constituent. (The predicate kapot ‘broken’ is monovalent, which means that the possessor cannot be simply understood as the subject and the possessee as the object). Crucial for the main point of this paper is that the complementizer (omdat/(om)dan ‘because’ agrees with the possessor, whereas the finite verb was/woaren ‘was/were’ agrees with the possessee.
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Again this shows that CA cannot be taken simply as an additional reflex of the feature checking relation between T° and the subject which determines verb agreement.

4. Analysis Both sets of data can be accounted for if we assume that C° and T° have discrete sets of phi-features and that they independently probe for the closest available Goal (cf. also Carstens 2002, Van Koppen 2005). In (1) T° probes the coordinated subject, but it cannot agree with the first conjunct. The reason for this is that, besides its unvalued phi-features, T° has an EPP-feature. As Move is dependent on Agree (cf. Chomsky 2001), Agree with the first conjunct would lead to movement of the first conjunct to Spec,TP and hence to a CSC-violation (cf. Van Koppen 2008, Soltan 2004). As a result T° has to agree with the coordinate DP as a whole. C°, on the other hand, does not have an EPP-feature and can agree with the first conjunct in Spec,ConjP, resulting in CA with the first conjunct of the coordinated subject. As a consequence the complementizer, which realizes the features of C°, but not the finite verb, which spells out the features of T°, can agree with the first conjunct of the coordinated subject. This analysis correctly predicts that if C° has an EPP-feature, agreement with the first conjunct should be barred;

(1) Doow en Marie denk ik, *de/s/det het spel zull-e winnen.
    [You, and Marie] I think that the game will win.
    ‘You and Mary I think will win the game.’ (Limburgian)

Haegeman (2004) argues on the basis of island effects that the WF external possessor and possessee do not form a constituent at any point in the derivation and hence that the possessor has not moved to, but is base generated in its surface position. Since in (3) the external possessor has a contrastive topic interpretation, we assume it is merged in a TP-internal high topic position (Frey 2000, Grewendorf 2005). As a consequence the external possessor becomes the closest matching Goal for Probe C°, and determines CA. T°, on the other hand, agrees with the possessee in its c-command domain. The Agree relation between T° and the possessee is spelt out on the finite verb.

5. An alternative analysis: PF-adjacency An alternative account conceives of CA as the result of linear adjacency between the complementizer and a phi-feature Goal at the PF-level (cf. Ackema & Neeleman 2005, Miyagawa 2009, Fuss 2004, 2005). However, data such as (1) show that this analysis cannot be correct and that a syntactic analysis of CA is inevitable.

(2) * omda/*omda-n Andre en Valère under computer kapot was.
    because/because Andre and Valère their computer broken was
    ‘…because Andre and Valère’s computer was broken’.

The difference between (1) and (2) is that in (2) the possessor is merged internally to the possessed DP. In this case C° cannot agree with the possessor Andre and Valère. This is unexpected from in terms of a linear adjacency account, as both in (1) and (2) the complementizer and the possessor are linearly adjacent. We argue that there is a hierarchical, i.e. syntactic, reason that C° cannot agree with the possessor in (2): it is too deeply embedded in the DP (phase) to act as a Goal for C°.

Selective References

Fuß, E. (2005a). ‘Multiple agreement and the representation of inflectional features in the C-domain’.
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