4.

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"A team," definitely

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One well-known quirk of the British is their tolerance of verbal plural agreement with singular nouns referring to groups of people like *committee* and *team*. For example, British speakers find (1) acceptable.

(1)   A Northern team are arriving.

Elbourne (1999) and Sauerland and Elbourne (2001) discuss the fact that plural agreement interacts with total reconstruction of the subject. Consider the examples in (1): (1a) with singular verbal agreement allows the subject to take scope below or above *likely*. (1b), however, only allows the subject to take scope above *likely*.

(2)   a.   A Northern team is likely to be in the final. (a >> likely,   likely >> a)
      b.   A Northern team are likely to be in the final. (a >> likely,   *likely >> a)
           (Sauerland and Elbourne 2002: (14))

In this note, I argue that *a Northern team* when triggering plural agreement must in fact be part of a hidden definite. The impossibility of reconstruction then follows if reconstruction of definites is blocked in general, as can arguably be deduced from Fox's (2000) scope economy.

Consider what operations lead to the licensing of plural morphology on the verb in (1). Link (1991) introduces an ontology of singular and plural individuals. Groups like *a team* are represented as atomic individuals. The members of a team are represented as a distinct entity which is a plurality. Link furthermore assumes that there is an injective function Γ mapping a plurality x to the group whose members are x. The inverse function, Γ^{-1}, maps a group to the plurality of its members. Γ^{-1}, hence, maps a singular entity to a plural one. I propose that British English allows the structure in (3) where Γ^{-1} takes *a Northern team* as its argument.

(3)   ([Pl] Γ^{-1} ([Sg] a Northern team))

I assume the presuppositional semantics of number of Sauerland (2003). [Sg] presupposes that its complement refer to an atom, [Pl] presupposes that its complement refer to a plurality. The [Sg] feature is licensed above *a Northern team* because *a Northern team* is restricted to group-atoms. (More precisely, once *a Northern team* QRs, the [Sg] feature will combine with its trace, a variable, and be

licensed there.) To license [Pl], Γ^{-1} must apply mapping the group-atom to a plurality. The verb must agree with the higher [Pl] feature, while the noun agrees with the lower [Sg] feature.

In example (2b) the subject must have structure (3) as well to license plural verbal agreement. But then reconstruction is expected to be impossible if the reconstruction of definites is impossible: Γ^{-1} is a definite of the semantic type <e,e> presupposing the existence of a set of members of the team. (4) shows that Γ^{-1} is blocked in the *there*-existential construction.

(4)   *There were a committee holding a meeting in here.
       (Sauerland and Elbourne 2001: (26d))

The analysis proposed here is simpler than Sauerland and Elbourne's   proposal for (2), which relies on PF-movement and several assumptions about   feature checking. While Sauerland and Elbourne present two further arguments in favor of PF-movement that are not affected by the point raised in this snippet, the assumptions about feature checking they introduce to account for (2) become unnecessary if the account of (2) in this snippet is adopted.

References

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