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The anaphor agreement effect in Tamil

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The Anaphor Agreement Effect (AAE) in (1), formulated by Rizzi (1990), captures the fact that anaphors in many languages are barred from positions that trigger agreement, as in (2).

(1) Anaphors do not occur in syntactic positions construed with agreement.

(2) *They think that each other are happy.

Woolford (1999) considers agreeing anaphors in a few languages that appear to constitute counterexamples to the AAE. She categorizes them into three types illustrated by the configurations in (3).

(3) Type 1: [MATRIX CLAUSE [EMBEDDED CLAUSE ANAP. V-default Agr]]
Type 2: [MATRIX CLAUSE [EMBEDDED CLAUSE ANAP. V-anaphoric Agr]]
Type 3: [MATRIX CLAUSE [EMBEDDED CLAUSE [NP ANAP. [X] V-Agr]]]

In the first two configurations, agreement on V is atypical. It is either default agreement that does not match the phi-features of ANAP, or a special form of anaphoric agreement. In the third configuration, ANAP is embedded inside the subject as possessor and it is the whole NP that triggers agreement on V. Since there is no canonical agreement relationship between ANAP and V in all three cases, Woolford concludes that they do not constitute real counterexamples to AAE.

It has been noted in passing that Dravidian anaphors pose a genuine challenge to AAE (Kayne 1994). However, as far as we are aware of, no explicit discussion of the relevant data has been offered in the literature. We provide a relevant set of data from Tamil and note some of its implications for the AAE. Tamil anaphor taan can appear in (embedded) subject position and trigger agreement on V, as shown in (4):

(4) a. [taan varugir-aan/*-aal enru] Murukeecan conn-aan
self come-3sgm/3sgf comp Murugesan say-3sgm
'Murugesan said he is coming.'
b. [taan varugir-aal/*-aan enru] Mala conn-aal
self come-3sgf/3sgm comp Mala say-3sgf
'Mala said she is coming.'
(5) a. avan varugir-aan/*-aal.
   he  come-3sgm/3sgf
   ‘He is coming.’

   b. aval varugir-aal/*-aan.
   she  come-3sgf/3sgm
   ‘She is coming.’

The agreement on the embedded verb, varu ‘come’, in (4) must match the features of taan and its antecedent, ruling out the Type 1 possibility that this is default agreement. Pronoun avan in (5) triggers the same agreement marking on varu as taan. This excludes the Type 2 possibility that the agreement marking in (4) is something reserved just for agreeing anaphors. The mere fact that taan is a simple lexical item does not rule out the Type 3 possibility of positing a complex structure for it, i.e., [op taan [n ec]], but, if this structure cannot be motivated on independent grounds, a revision of the AAE seems necessary.

It is worth noting that Woolford also discusses Tamil sentences with taan which do not counterexemplify the AAE. (6) contains a finite embedded clause with subject agreement and here the agreement is atypically first person. There is something special about the first person agreement here: first person agreement may be used in a marked situation in which the embedded clause more or less sounds like a quotation. The natural choice of agreement when we have a finite embedded clause is third person, as in our (4). (Woolford claims that finite embedded clauses that show agreement are exceptional, and that normally embedded verbs are nonfinite and do not show agreement. We disagree. Finite embedded clauses, which are introduced by a complementizer as in (4) and (6) and must show agreement, are more frequently used than nonfinite embedded clauses, which are nominalized, cf. (7), also cited by Woolford.)

(6) Murukeecan taan varreen-¯¯u connaaru.
   Murugesan  self  come(pres.1sg)-quot./comp  say (past.3sg.hon.)
   ‘Murugesan said he (himself) was coming.’ (Asher 1985:(5))

(7) Taan varrataa Murukeecan connaaru.
   self  come (pres.nom.adv suff.) Murugesan  say (past.3sg.hon.)
   ‘Murugesan said he (himself) was coming.’ (Asher 1985:(13a))

References