

snippets

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In some constructions, an agreement target can optionally agree with one or another possible trigger. This is illustrated by the French example in (1) below, which presents a case of agreement between a VP and a quantitative subject involving two DPs ('a large number-<DP1> of my friends-<DP2>').

- (1) a. Un grand nombre de mes copains est génial.
 b. Un grand nombre de mes copains sont géniaux.

A large number_[sg,masc] of my friends_[pl,masc]

(a) is awesome_[sg,masc] / (b) are awesome_[pl,masc].

The VP (copula and predicative adjective) can agree with either DP: it can – syntactically it seems – agree with the singular head DP₁ as in (a), or – semantically it seems – with the plural embedded DP₂ as in (b). The need for both syntactically-based and semantically-based agreements has been discussed in the literature (a.o. Morgan 1984, Pullum 1985, Corbett 1991, Wechsler and Zlatić 2003, Sauerland 2004): in particular, similar cases of mixed agreement patterns such as polite plurals or *pluralia tantum* have been related to an Agreement Hierarchy (a.o. Comrie 1975, Corbett 1983, 2006, Wechsler and Hahm 2011).

The new observation that we make is that the VP can *simultaneously* agree with *both* triggers. When the two DPs that are possible agreement triggers vary in two features, the VP can agree in one feature with one DP and in the other feature with the other DP. Such hybrid agreement is illustrated in (2) for the case where the two DPs vary in number *and* gender.

- (2) a. (i) ? Un grand nombre de mes copines est folle.
 (ii) * Un grand nombre de mes copines sont fous.

A large number_[sg,masc] of my friends_[pl,fem]

(i) is crazy_[sg,fem] / (ii) are crazy_[pl,masc].

- b. (i) ? Une majorité de mes copains est fou.
 (ii) * Une majorité de mes copains sont folles.

A majority_[sg,fem] of my friends_[pl,masc]

(i) is crazy_[sg,masc] / (ii) are crazy_[pl,fem].

(2a-i) shows that the VP *est folle* (fem. ‘is crazy’) can agree in number with the masculine singular DP₁ *un grand nombre* (‘a large number’), but in gender with the feminine plural DP₂ *mes copines* (fem. ‘my friends’). Although possibly degraded (as indicated by ?), this sentence is clearly much better than (2a-ii), which involves the ‘reverse’ agreement - in gender with DP₁ and in number with DP₂. In (2b), we reproduce similar facts by exchanging the gender features on the DPs.

Note that the acceptability of (2{a/b}i) is not due to an agreement mismatch between the copula and the predicative adjective: even though there is no phonological difference between the singular form (*fou*) and the plural form (*fous*) of the adjective, the sentence (2bi) cannot be analyzed as *est*_[sg,fem] *fous*_[pl,masc] where the copula would agree with the head DP *une majorité*_[sg,fem] and the adjective with the embedded DP *mes copains*_[pl,masc]. This is demonstrated by example (3) below involving the adjective *génial* (‘awesome’), which takes a different form in the (masculine) singular and plural: the (masculine) plural form *géniaux* is unacceptable in the configuration of (2bi).

- (3) *Une majorité de mes copains est géniaux.

A majority_[sg,fem] of my friends_[pl,masc] is_[sg] awesome_[pl,masc].

Similarly, (4) exemplifies hybrid agreement for another pair of features, i.e. when the two DPs vary in number *and* person: (4i) where the VP agrees in person with DP₁ but in number with DP₂ is perfectly acceptable, as opposed to (4ii) with reverse agreement.

- (4) (i) Une majorité d’entre nous sont loyaux.

- (ii) *Une majorité d’entre nous suis loyal.

A major-part_[sg,3rd] among us_[pl,1st]

- (i) are loyal_[pl,3rd] / (ii) am loyal_[sg,1st]

We thus add a new empirical fact to the realm of hybrid agreement patterns. It is not only the case - as previously observed - that some constructions allow agreement to have several possible triggers. But we also observe that subject-VP agreement can be hybrid in the sense that different *phi*-features on a VP can be triggered by different DPs contained in the subject. Furthermore, not all hybrid agreements are acceptable, but we have observed different degrees of acceptability depending on the agreement configuration. All these facts remain mysterious under existing proposals.

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