

snippets

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On variable agreement and scope reconstruction in Russian

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Sauerland and Elbourne (2002) (S&E) famously discovered cases where group nouns that may trigger singular or plural number agreement in some English dialects (British English) have different scopal behavior. They have shown that group nouns cannot undergo scope reconstruction (at least with some raising predicates like *likely*) when they trigger plural agreement on the verb. When they trigger singular agreement, they are free to reconstruct, as in (1), which is S&E's (14).

- (1) a. A Northern team is likely to be in the final. $a \gg \textit{likely} ; \textit{likely} \gg a$
b. A Northern team are likely to be in the final. $a \gg \textit{likely} ; *\textit{likely} \gg a$

In Russian, group nouns like *gruppa* 'group', *komitet* 'committee', *komanda* 'team' may only trigger singular agreement. However, there is a class of noun phrases with numerals and some other quantifiers that can either trigger plural agreement or surface with the default neuter singular morphology on the verb (variable agreement QPs, or VAQPs). And just as it is the case with group nouns in British English, it is the plural variant that limits scope possibilities: in Russian these nouns preclude reconstruction.

In (2b), the VAQP with plural agreement necessarily outscopes clausal negation, in contrast to the non-agreeing variant (2a), where scope reconstruction below negation is possible:

- (2) a. Bol'she pjati pisem do adresata ne došl-o
more.than five letters to addressee not reached-N.SG
'There were more than 5 letters that didn't reach the addressee.'
 $\textit{more than 5} \gg \textit{not}$
'At most 5 letters reached the addressee.'
 $\textit{not} \gg \textit{more than 5}$
b. Bol'she pjati pisem do adresata ne došl-i
more.than five letters to addressee not reached-PL
'There were more than 5 letters that didn't reach the addressee.'
 $\textit{more than 5} \gg \textit{not} ; *\textit{not} \gg \textit{more than 5}$

In this respect Russian may seem not that different from English. As a reviewer points out, negation in British English precludes reconstruction of plural-agreeing group DPs, just as it does in Russian (which is corroborated by examples with NPIs in S&E's (32)). But apparently, there is no consensus about the judgements, with Thoms (2013) reporting both scope possibilities to be available for plural-agreeing group DPs and negation in British English.

Russian facts resist an analysis along the lines of Sauerland 2004, where anti-reconstruction properties are derived from the definiteness of plural-agreeing group nouns. Russian plural-agree-

ing VAQPs are not necessarily definite and may take scope below some raising predicates like the modal *dolžen* ‘must’ in its deontic use (though in the epistemic uses of *dolžen*, the scope pattern seems to be different, with plural-agreeing VAQPs only scoping above the modal):

- (3) Po protokolu, s takoj travmoj xotja by dva vrača dolžn-y byl-i /
 according.to protocol with this injury XOTJA BY two doctors must-PL be.PAST-PL /
 ?dolžn-o byl-o ego osmotret’.
 must-N.SG be.PAST-N.SG him examine
 ‘According to the protocol, with an injury of this kind, at least two doctors must examine him.’

Xotja by dva vrača (‘at least two doctors’) in (3) is clearly not a definite, with *xotja by* ‘at least’, a modifier with special licensing conditions, forcing the scope below the modal.

The environments where the plural agreement has an anti-reconstruction effect may be different in British English and Russian. However, the two languages are still strikingly similar: it is always plural agreement that precludes reconstruction. Moreover, the plural features triggering this reconstruction-precluding agreement could be viewed as optional in both languages: in Russian, it is an optional feature on a numberless QP; in British English, it might be an optional feature on top of a singular DP. Whether a unified account that relates these properties is feasible remains to be seen.

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