

Φ -features and Presupposition

Sylleptic agreement in English and French *

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We discuss agreement between a subject and a head, mostly T and its subject, exemplified by plural agreement below:

- (1) a. This northern team are playing
- b. Une majorité de sénateurs sont là
- a majority of senators are here

We conclude that such agreement on T is meaningful: Features on T carry presuppositions limiting the denotational possibilities of the subject.¹

Plan: (i) Some observations about English collective nouns; (ii) French (pseudo-)partitives; (iii) Conjunction; (iv) Proposal.

1 Patterns of Semantic Agreement

1.1 British Collective Nouns

1.1.1 Basic Data

Singular British collective nouns such as *team*, *committee*, *government* or *family* are able to trigger two different agreement patterns, singular and plural:²

- (2) a/this/*these northern team is/are playing (plural: \approx the team members are playing)

Singular agreement is standard syntactic agreement. Plural exemplifies ‘semantic agreement’ also called sylleptic or *ad sensum* agreement.

As a preliminary step, we adopt the following characterization for core cases:

- (3) Semantic agreement is a relation between a head and its subject with mismatching features (e.g. for a DP, the morphological ϕ -feature values of its Num node).

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¹ Throughout, we will say ‘features on T’, but it may well be that agreement features are properties of an independent head (AGR-S style) to which T raises.

² This is also found in some other varieties of English, e.g. Canadian English, Australian English, with variations in all varieties as to which collective nouns allow plural agreement, see [Levin \(2001\)](#). The English judgments reported here are from the literature and a set of British English speakers.

Challenges: Four asymmetries

1. **First asymmetry:** With such collective nouns, a singular DP external agreement can be singular or plural while DP internal agreement can only be singular. This is illustrated by the impossibility of having a plural determiner with a singular noun as shown in (2) (cf., *these team-sg = these team members).

2. **Second asymmetry:** (goes back to at least Barker 1992, probably earlier)
Such singular DPs can denote either a singleton (a committee, which is an abstract entity) or a plurality (the committee members) in a singular DP. With predicates applying equally well to the abstract entity or to its members, we observe:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|
| (4) | a. This committee is old | sg agr: subject singular or plural denoting |
| | b. *These committees is old | sg agr: subject cannot be plural denoting only |
| | c. This committee are old | pl agr : subject plural denoting only (members) |

Predicates only applying to the abstract entity, e.g. *be founded*, only allow singular agreement as in (5b).

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| (5) | a. This committee is/are tall | sg or pl: pred only applies to members |
| | b. This committee was/*were founded last year | *pl: pred applies to structure only |

This leads to the following descriptive generalization which characterizes the patterns in (4) and (5), and illustrates that semantic agreement has an interpretive component that syntactic agreement lacks:

(6) **Agreement-Denotation correlation:**

- a. Semantic plural agreement on T requires the subject to denote a plurality only.
- b. Singular syntactic agreement on T requires a subject denoting either a singleton or, if allowed as with collective nouns, a plurality.

3. **Third asymmetry: asymmetric simultaneously agreement**

A third asymmetry is illustrated by cases, some of which are discussed in Smith (2017) and Smith (2021), and others ((7a), (7f) and (7g)) discussed and some experimentally investigated in Sturt 2022): the two different agreement options can coexist within a single sentence; uniform agreement - that is both singular or both plural - is always fine (and is the default); mismatches behave asymmetrically (asterisk * indicating relative deviance):

- (7) a. Tense and anaphors
- (i) This team is promoting ?themselves
The government has offered ?themselves / each other up for criticism
 - (ii) *This team are promoting itself
*The government have offered itself up for criticism
- b. (i) The committee has decided to reward themselves.
(ii) *The committee have decided to reward itself.
- c. Tense and bound pronoun
- (i) No team_k is losing its_k/their_k way.
 - (ii) No team_k are losing *its_k/their_k way.
- d. Tense twice in conjoined clauses
- (i) The group is German and are famous.
 - (ii) *The group are German and is famous.
- e. Tense twice (relative/main clause)
- (i) The committee that is likely to be investigated are meeting at the moment.
 - (ii) *The committee that are likely to be investigated is meeting at the moment.
- f. Tense and reflexives in conjunction
- (i) The government defended itself from the scandal and were discussed on the news.
 - (ii) *The government defended themselves from the scandal and was discussed on the news.
- g. Tense and reflexives in relatives
- (i) The committee that gave itself a hefty payrise were charged for corruption.
 - (ii) *The committee that gave themselves a hefty payrise was charged for corruption.

4. Fourth asymmetry

Unlike syntactic agreement, semantic agreement is subject to distributional (Sobin 1997 and Munn 1999) and interpretive (Sauerland and Elbourne, 2002) restrictions.

- (8) a. There is/*are a northern team playing (✓ There are several people here)
b. A northern team is likely to be playing $a > \text{likely}; \text{likely} > a$
c. A northern team are likely to be playing $a > \text{likely}; * \text{likely} > a$
d. LF for $* \text{likely} > a$: ~~a northern team~~ are likely a northern team to be playing

(8a): semantic agreement is subject to distributional restrictions

Examples in (8b): ambiguous.

raised subject *a northern team* surface scope (*there is a team and it is likely to be playing*)

raised subject totally reconstructs (*It is likely that there is a team playing*)

(8c): non ambiguous.

Sauerland and Elbourne (2002) (in effect), and Smith (2017) and Sportiche (2016), conclude:

- (9) Semantic agreement requires (i) a Spec/Head relationship (ii) holding at LF.

(9) blocks total reconstruction in (8c) since it undoes the required Spec/head relation at LF (cf., (8d)).

Independently, we observe the following:

- (10) In existential constructions, the associate of *there* is scope frozen (see Heim, 1987), viz.
If there always is a soldier here.. $\checkmark \text{always} / \exists; * \exists > \text{always}$
✓ meaning: if it is always the case that there is a soldier here...
* meaning: if there is a soldier who is always here...
(cf. the ambiguous: *if a soldier is always here...*)

The observation in (10) (which needs to be derived) means that the goal cannot be in an LF Spec/Head relation with the probe: \rightarrow (9) derives the * in (8a).

1.1.2 Descriptive generalizations

1. Semantic agreement seems to be not agreement with the ϕ -feature values of the goal DP but rather with the ‘collective’ property of the collective noun (its mereological structure: the facts that it has multiple parts).
2. External agreement can be semantic but internal agreement can’t be (*these team-sg (= these team members)).
3. The facts in (4) correlating agreement or predicate denotation and DP interpretation, that is generalization (6): (in the cases discussed) plural agreement requires a plural denotation only; with singular agreement singular denotation is available but plural denotation is also allowed.
4. The availability of non uniform simultaneous agreement, and its asymmetric behavior documented above in (7), which we will refer to as **mismatched simultaneous agreement**.
5. (9)(i): Semantic agreement requires a Spec/Head relationship.
6. (9)(ii): This relationship must hold at LF

1.2 French (Pseudo-)Partitives Patterns

Semantic/sylleptic agreement³ is found in quantificational or pseudo partitive constructions, or partitive constructions in French and elsewhere (e.g., BCMS cf. Alsina and Arsenijević 2012 and references therein, Hebrew cf. Danon 2013). Here, we provide a small sample, but the pattern of agreement we discuss is generally found with proportional quantifiers such as *deux tiers*, *moitié*, *majorité* (*two thirds*, *half*, *majority*),

³ Sylleptic agreement is robustly present in both spoken and written French. It is easily documented in corpora, on line, in print, and elsewhere; it is extensively discussed online, often with a normative angle (which, as always with normative prescriptions, only goes to further document that such data are natural), is documented in descriptive grammars such as Grevisse and Goosse 2011, p. 544 ff, and is also discussed on the website of the Académie Française, which adopts a surprisingly permissive position as to its status.

count quantifiers such as *deux*, *douzaine* (*two*, *dozen*), combining optionally or obligatorily with a determiner, e.g. *un*, *le*, *ce* (*a*, *the*, *this*), followed by *de* (*of*) in pseudo partitives, e.g. *groupes d'électeurs* (*group of voters*), or partitives, e.g. *(les) deux tiers des étudiants* (*(the) two thirds of the students*), or *(une douzaine d'entre nous* (*a dozen among us*), with restrictions as to which combinations of these parts are allowed.⁴

1.2.1 Some basic cases

Pseudo partitives like English *a bunch of voters* are illustrated below with the quantifying noun *majorité/majority* (which could be modified by adjectives - e.g. *large*, *silent* - like any ordinary noun) in French which displays a richer set of agreement possibilities than English:

- (11) a. Une majorité d'électeurs est favorable à cette réforme
 A majority of voters is (3rdsg) in favor of this reform
 b. Une majorité d'électeurs sont favorables à cette réforme
 A majority of voters are (3rdpl) in favor of this reform

Partitive cases like English *a majority of the voters*, *two of the books* are illustrated in French below:

- (12) a. Une majorité de nous huit **est** toujours là
 A majority of us eight is (3rdsg) always here
 'A majority of us is always here'
 b. Une majorité de nous huit **sont** toujours là
 A majority of us eight are (3rdpl) always here
 c. Une majorité de nous huit **sommes** toujours là
 A majority of us eight are (1stpl) always here
- (13) a. Deux d'entre vous sont toujours là
 Two of you-pl are (3rdpl) always here
 b. Deux d'entre vous êtes toujours là
 Two of you-pl are (2ndpl) always here

Much like with collective nouns, more than one agreement option is available.

Singular agreement: syntactic (matching the sg determiner).

Plural agreement (could a priori be syntactic but semantic see below): if 1st person, speaker must be included in denotation, else (preferably) not. Same with 2nd person.

1.2.2 Diagnostic Properties

With French (pseudo-)partitives constructions, we observe asymmetries and restrictions similar to what was observed in the case of British collective nouns.

1. Sensitivity to choice of predicate:

- (14) a. Cette majorité d'électeurs s'est élargie /*se sont élargis progressivement *applies to majority*
 This majority of voters has/*have increased progressively
 b. Une majorité d'électeurs s'est moquée/se sont moqués de ce candidat *applies to voters*
 A majority of voters has/have made fun of this candidate
 c. Ce groupe d'enfants est petit / %?sont petits (this group of children is small)

2. Asymmetric dual agreement possibilities are harder to document.⁵

⁴ For example, a definite article with *majorité*, *moitié* is possible in a pseudo partitive only in the presence of a relative *la majorité d'électeurs *(qui est là) vient du nord/ the majority of voters *(which is here) comes from the north*. What matters for our purposes here is the existence of cases displaying this kind of agreement behavior.

⁵ Some are documented in Messick (2023) for English. Their French counterparts are unfortunately of variable status. In addition, the interpretation of the English examples provided in Messick (2023) is most of the time not explicit, raising unanswered analytical questions that could undermine the examples' significance.

- (15) a. Une moitié de ces fleurs a été placée dans son propre vase
 One half of these flowers has been placed in its own vase
 b. Une moitié de ces fleurs ont été placées dans leur propre vase
 One half of these flowers have been placed in their own vase
 c. Une moitié de ces fleurs a été placée dans leur propre vase
 One half of these flowers has been placed in their own vase
 d. *Une moitié de ces fleurs ont été placées dans son propre vase
 *One half of these flowers have been placed in its own vase

3. Interpretive restrictions: Paralleling the behavior of collective nouns, sylleptic agreement induces the same scopal restrictions:

- (16) a. Une bonne moitié d'entre nous est censée être là
 A good half of us is (3rdsg) is supposed to be here (un>censé, censé> un)
 b. Une bonne moitié d'entre nous sont censés être là
 A good half of us are (3rdpl) supposed to be here (un>censé, *censé> un)
 c. Une bonne moitié d'entre nous sommes censés être là
 A good half of us are (1stpl) supposed to be here (un>censé, *censé> un)

Semantic agreement degrades the narrow scope option (same with examples in (12) and (13)) This can also be illustrated with certain verbs/adjectives (*manquer*, *nécessaire*/ *miss*, *necessary*) which can outscope their subjects:

- (17) a. Si une moitié d'entre nous est nécessaire pour le vote
 If one half of us is (3rdsg) necessary for the vote ($\exists > \square, \square > \exists$)
 b. Si une moitié d'entre nous sont nécessaires pour le vote
 If one half of us are (3rdpl) necessary for the vote ($\exists > \square, * \square > \exists$)
 c. Si une moitié d'entre nous sommes nécessaires pour le vote
 If one half of us are (1stpl) necessary for the vote ($\exists > \square, * \square > \exists$)

It is also possible to replace this judgment about interpretation by a judgment about well formedness. Adding the modifier *quelconque* to an indefinite yields the meaning of free choice *any*: *une moitié quelconque* = *any half*.⁶ As such, it needs to be in an appropriate intensional context to be licensed viz.:

- (18) une moitié quelconque *a gagné/ ✓ aurait gagné
 any half *won/ ✓ would have won

Now consider:

- (19) une moitié quelconque d'entre nous ✓ aurait/ *aurions gagné
 any half of us ✓ would-have-sg/ *would-have-1st-pl won

With singular agreement, the subject can be understood in the scope of the modal and the sentence is fine. But first person plural agreement on the modal is ill-formed: indeed, this would be semantic agreement which cannot reconstruct.

4. Distributional restrictions: Semantic agreement unavailable in existentials. French lacks an equivalent of existential constructions to illustrate this restriction but see examples (27), (28) and (29) below.

Conclusion: Agreement possibilities in French (pseudo-)partitive constructions and in British collective nouns display the same properties: they illustrate the same phenomenon mandating the same treatment.⁷

⁶ Note that *quelconque* can also, irrelevantly, mean 'average, without distinguishing quality'.

⁷ Everything in this section extends to English (for example the facts in (16) hold of English too) except possibly, for reasons we do not understand, the distributional restrictions in existential constructions: while speakers typically rate sentences involving pseudo partitives such as *there are a majority of villagers here* as degraded, reports are more varied for partitives such as *there are a majority of the villagers here*. The examples in (28) discussed below support the conclusion that English pseudo-partitives and partitives display characteristic properties of semantic agreement in the relevant cases, so some further investigation is needed.

1.3 Conjunctions

This section briefly summarizes [Charnavel and Sportiche \(2025\)](#) which concludes in agreement with previous authors such as [Farkas and Zec \(1995\)](#), [Doron \(2000\)](#), or more recently [Kučerová \(2018\)](#) or [Harbour \(2020\)](#) (and [Adamson and Anagnostopoulou, 2024](#), for gender):

1. (Person and Number) Agreement with conjunction is necessarily semantic
2. There is no feature value resolution mechanism for person and number attributing ϕ -feature values for the whole conjunction from the properties of individual conjuncts.

- (20) a. Ophélie et Julia ont/*a bien ri
Ophélie and Julia have/*has laughed a lot
- b. Ophélie et Julia ont/*a chanté ensemble
Ophélie and Julia have/*has sung together
- (21) a. Un/le garçon et une/la fille *a/ont dansé ensemble. collective
'A/the boy and a/the girl *has/have danced together.'
- b. Un/le garçon et une/la fille *a/ont bien ri. distributive
'A/the boy and a girl/la *has/have laughed a lot.'

We see that the agreement pattern is insensitive to whether the predicate is collective or distributive. But if we conjoin DPs quantified with *chaque* / *each* or *aucun* / *no*, the pattern changes as singular agreement becomes acceptable with distributive predicates:

- (22) a. Chaque fille et chaque garçon *a/ont dansé ensemble. collective
'Each girl and each boy *has/have danced together.'
- b. Chaque fille et chaque garçon a/?ont bien ri. distributive
'Each girl and each boy has/?have laughed a lot.'
- (23) a. Aucune fille ni/et aucun garçon n'*a/ont dansé ensemble. collective
'No girl and no boy *has/have danced together.'
- b. Aucune fille ni/et aucun garçon n'a/?ont bien ri. distributive
'No girl and no boy has/?have laughed a lot.'

Why the contrast (21) vs. (22), (23)? follows from interpreted agreement:

$\llbracket \text{a boy and a girl} \rrbracket \neq \text{one of } \llbracket \text{boys} \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \text{girls} \rrbracket \approx \text{one boy or girl}$

$\llbracket \text{each boy and each girl} \rrbracket = \text{each one of } \llbracket \text{boys} \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \text{girls} \rrbracket \approx \text{each boy or girl}$

(non obvious how to get this compositionally: see e.g., [Heycock and Zamparelli 2005](#), [Schmitt 2019](#) or [Schmitt 2020](#))

Next: a contrast between the following cases of conjunction of (in)definites (24) and (25)

- (24) Un/Le célibataire et un/l' homme marié *a/ont bien ri. distributive
'A/The bachelor and a/the married man *has/have laughed a lot.'
- (25) a. Un père dévoué et un collègue sympathique va/vont lire cet article.
'A devoted father and a friendly colleague is/are going to read this article.'
- b. Le père dévoué que nous apprécions et le collègue sympathique que nous estimons tous va/vont lire cet article
'The devoted father that we value and the friendly colleague that we all respect is/*are going to read this article.'

Only difference: denotation of the conjunction of DPs.

in (24) but not in (25): must be two different individuals

Agreement correlates with denotation: sg \models singleton; pl \models two individuals (or guises)⁸

⁸ Similar examples are discussed in [Hoeksema 1988](#), p.36 and [Winter 2001](#), p.178 under the name of appositional conjunction. The latter's analysis in terms of conjunction of NPs (properties) type shifted to a single individual is insufficiently general as shown by the examples with *chaque*, *aucun/each*, *no* and also by the deviance of plural agreement as there is no reason why it could not be a conjunction of two DPs picking out the same individual.

Distributional restrictions: existentials

- (26) a. There i. %*was/ ii. were several people here
b. There i. was / ii. *were a woman and a girl here

Such contrasts supports the conclusion that agreement with conjunctions is always semantic.

Distributional restrictions: exceptional inverse specificational structures *In a specificational copular structure DP₁ be DP₂ (e.g. The culprit is/*am me, The real problem is/*are your parents), agreement is with DP₁.*

Exception: when initial DP is either a free relative or a relative introduced by all (Heycock (2012, p.212 footnote 3)):

- (27) a. What he saw behind him was/were two men/ the surging waves.
b. What makes something a pencil is/are (some/several) superficial characteristics.
c. All I could see was/were (the) two/many sparkling eyes.

Plural agreement is possible in the presence of a plural DP₂ (but not of a singular DP₂), whether indefinite, definite, quantified, etc..

Exception to exception when DP₂ is headed by a collective noun, when it is a partitive or pseudo partitive construction, or when it is a conjunction (of singulars):

- (28) a. All I could see was/*were a/the team.
b. All I could see was/*were a woman and a boy.
c. All I could see was/*were a majority of (the) senators in the hall.

Same in French for the speakers who can omit ce in the sentences below.

The French analog of the specificational DP₁ be DP₂ normally is DP₁, c'est DP₂ (DP₁, it's DP₂) with either singular default agreement or agreement with DP₂. But in the analog of the examples in (27), ce can be omitted and, with a plural DP₂, singular agreement is disallowed and plural agreement is required:

- (29) a. Ce qu'il voit *est/sont deux hommes/ les vagues déferlantes.
What he saw behind him was/were two men/ the surging waves.
b. Ce qui fait que quelque chose est un crayon *est/sont des (quelques/plusieurs) caractéristiques superficielles.
What makes something a pencil is/are (some/several) superficial characteristics.
c. Tout que je peux voir *est/sont (ces) deux yeux étincelants
All I can see is/are (these) two sparkling eyes.

But not with a conjunction of singulars, or a singular (pseudo)-partitive with plural restriction:

- (30) a. Tout que je peux voir ? est/*sont une femme et un garçon
All I can see is/*are a woman and a boy
b. Tout que je peux entendre est/*sont une moitié des instruments
All I can hear is/*are one half of the instruments

☞ collective nouns, (pseudo) partitives and conjunctions agreement pattern alike showing distributional restrictions.

Would fall out if the postverbal element and T are not (cannot be) in a Spec/Head configuration at LF (as some authors propose - see Heycock 2020).

2 Meaningful agreement

2.1 What needs to be accounted for

Agreement satisfies the following descriptive generalizations which should be derived:

- (31) a. The Agreement-Denotation correlation (6) repeated here for the cases under discussion:
- (i) Semantic plural agreement on T (or a head) requires the subject DP to denote a plurality only.
 - (ii) Singular syntactic agreement on T (or a head) requires a singular subject DP denoting a singleton or a plurality if the DP allows it.
- b. When both syntactic and semantic agreements cooccur in a given sentence, their distribution displays an asymmetric pattern.
- c. With a conjoined subject, agreement is sensitive to whether the denotation is singular or plural denoting.
- d. Semantic agreement between a head and a DP requires them to be in Spec/Head relationship.
- e. This Spec/Head relationship must hold at LF.

We are looking for an economical treatment of these descriptive generalizations, ideally one which requires no new assumptions or stipulations.

Proposal

1. Features of the probe can have interpretive import, more specifically presuppositional properties.
 2. Why: this is the null hypothesis! person and number ϕ features normally (cf., pronouns) carry presuppositions (cf., Heim 2008).
- (32) a. The feature 1st(/2nd/3rd) triggers the presupposition that the denotation of the minimal DP (reflexively) containing it includes a first person referent(/second person referent but not a first person referent / neither).
- b. The feature sg(/dual)/plural on a (pro)noun triggers the presupposition that the denotation of the minimal DP (reflexively) containing it is a singleton(/doubleton)/plurality (of greater than two cardinality).
- c. ϕ -features on T are near universally taken not to have interpretive import within generative syntax (the opposite is true in functionalist approaches! c.f., Levin (2001)), because it is unclear what they say about T. But presuppositions are taken to be functions constraining the interpretation of their argument; they are routinely about what these elements relate to (think for example of *again*).
- d. T takes two arguments: the subject and (say) a VP. Only the former can satisfy ϕ -feature presuppositions.
- (33) **Semantic Agreement:** In Number and Person semantic agreement on T, the ϕ features values on T trigger a presupposition restricting the domain over which the subject DP can range.

3. How does this come about?

Full Interpretation FI (Chomsky 1986): every symbol at some interface must be interpreted at this interface. Now suppose that T is marked with some ϕ -features. By FI, if these features are present at LF, they must be interpreted. This leads to **two** possible paths:

- As is standardly assumed in the Agree literature, if these features enter into a proper syntactic Agree relation with a Goal (however this is technically implemented), they (can) count as LF invisible. Or,
- They are interpreted at LF; this is what we call **Semantic Agreement**.

Semantic agreement is required if there is a T/DP feature mismatch.

A consequence for agreement: features values on the probe and the goal must be able to be generated independently of each other. Null hypothesis: agreement is feature matching rather than copying or valuing. And features are not born uninterpretable, they are semantically neutered under syntactic agreement.

Previous treatments: There are a number of distinct previous proposals regarding varying agreement with British collective nouns, a few for (pseudo)-partitive constructions, e.g., [Selkirk \(1977\)](#), [Barker \(1992\)](#), [Pollard and Sag \(1994\)](#), [Schwarzschild \(1996\)](#), [den Dikken \(2001\)](#), [Sauerland and Elbourne \(2002\)](#), [Sauerland \(2004\)](#), [Magri \(2008\)](#), [Pearson \(2011\)](#), [Danon \(2013\)](#), [Sportiche \(2016\)](#), [Smith \(2017\)](#) (similar to [Smith 2021](#) in relevant respects), [Thoms \(2019\)](#), [Messick \(2023\)](#), and references therein. In section ??, we discuss some of them.

Some proposals are syntax based, other semantics based or a mix.

For the syntax based ones, [Smith \(2017\)](#) convincingly critically reviews [den Dikken \(2001\)](#), [Sauerland and Elbourne \(2002\)](#) and [Sauerland \(2004\)](#); and fundamentally based on mismatched simultaneous agreement, [Sturt \(2022\)](#) convincingly critically reviews [Pollard and Sag \(1994\)](#) (and descendants such as [Wechsler 2011](#)), [den Dikken \(2001\)](#), [Sauerland and Elbourne \(2002\)](#) and [Smith \(2017\)](#). So we will limit our discussion in section ?? to [Smith \(2017\)](#) and [Thoms \(2019\)](#) which represent two different approaches (with some remarks about [Magri 2008](#), in effect similar to [Thoms 2019](#)).

For the semantics based ones, [Pearson \(2011\)](#) reviews aspects of [Barker \(1992\)](#), and [Schwarzschild \(1996\)](#), but none engages with the distributional and interpretive restrictions that are central here, so we will not discuss them.

Of all of the previous treatments engaging the restrictions mentioned, all other than [Sportiche \(2016\)](#) are syntactic. Syntactic treatment of such agreements between a T head probe and its DP subject goal G need the following assumptions:

1. Collective nouns or (pseudo)-partitives have two sets of number ϕ -features, say singular and plural, one for each agreement allowing a singular DP containing them to denote either a singleton (e.g. a committee) and trigger singular agreement, or a plurality (the committee members) and trigger plural agreement albeit with an apparently singular DP.
2. The T probe searches for the closest features and agrees with them.
3. Either one of the following two analytical options for a syntactic treatment of both agreements:
 - (a) Either the singular and plural ϕ -features on G are equidistant to the T probe.
 - (b) Or G is structurally ambiguous, so that under one structure singular is reachable but plural is not, and in the other plural is reachable but singular is not.

As far as we can tell, all syntactic approaches face problems with (31b); in general, they have little to say about generalization (31c) and none derives (rather than stipulate) generalizations (31d) and (31e) except for [Thoms \(2019\)](#): here is a (non exhaustive) list with some basic problems they face.

Equidistance approaches (EQAPP): [Sauerland and Elbourne \(2002\)](#), [Smith \(2017\)](#), [Smith \(2021\)](#) or [Messick \(2023\)](#). They can readily deal with mismatched simultaneous agreements, but are too permissive and thus can only handle asymmetries via stipulations for some, or not at all for others.

Structural ambiguities approaches come in two kinds:

Type 1 analyses (SAA1) postulate two completely independent structures, one for each agreement option operating under normal syntactic agreement rules. They go back at least to [Selkirk 1977](#)) and include [den Dikken \(2001\)](#) or [Sauerland \(2004\)](#). They can't deal with asymmetries and mismatched simultaneous agreements.

Type 2 (SAA2) analyses also postulate two distinct structures that are closely related derivationally. They include [Magri \(2008\)](#) and [Thoms \(2019\)](#). They face different problems depending on the version; they can handle the facts in (8) and derive (9) in some (but not all) cases, and deal with some asymmetries, but not all of them; they cannot handle the full range of semantic agreement cases (double movement as in (41)), and overgenerate in some cases.

In addition, none of these approaches deal with semantic agreement with conjunctions. If our conclusion that such agreement is part of a unique paradigm including collective nouns and (pseudo-) partitives, they all fail.

2.2 Remarks on Maximize Presupposition (MP)

If ϕ -features on T are presupposition triggers when agreement is semantic, we expect to see effects of Heim's 1991 Maximize Presupposition! - henceforth MP. For our present purpose, the following characterization (roughly from Singh, 2011) will suffice:

Given two sentences S and S' with the same content apart from presupposition triggers, MP requires for each parallel pair of triggers on the same scale the use of the strongest trigger whose presupposition is satisfied in the context. The use of a weaker trigger implicates that stronger triggers would yield falsehoods.

Intuitively: if there is a more transparent way to say it, use it. If you don't, you did not mean to say that.

For Sauerland (2008): Plural is unmarked, singular is marked atomic. Plural denotes pluralities because singular transparently codes atomicity.

- (36) a. This team is old
b. This team are old

Under Sauerland's proposal:

Syntactic treatment:

(i) plural agreement is allowed by the presence of a syntactically visible plural feature (cf., Sauerland and Elbourne, 2002, Sauerland, 2004).

(ii) Note: both the singular (there is only one team) and the plural (I am talking about members) are semantically interpreted.

Why is (36b) unambiguous? Is there a better way to convey that I am talking about the structure not the members)? The only other way is (36a), which is ambiguous.

☞ We can't explain b.

Our treatment: same problem but by looking at the features of T.

Plural agreement is unmarked so subject could either denote a plurality or a singleton. Is there a better way to have the singular interpretation. No.

Give up Sauerland? (cf. e.g. Harbour 2014, Mayr 2015, Harbour 2016 or Martí 2020):

- (37) An **interpreted** plural (resp. sg) presupposition requires a plurality (resp. atom) denoting argument.

Given (37), interpreted singular and plural do not compete.

But, interpreted plural and uninterpreted singular do, plural being more informative (only relevant for T). Syntactic treatment:

Why is (36a) ambiguous? (Unclear why but) (36a) is a better way to convey that I am talking about the the members?

So (36a) should not be ambiguous ☞ We can't explain (36a).

Our treatment: same problem but by looking at the features of T.

How to fix this? (compatible with Sauerland (2008) or (37))

Syntactic treatment:

team can optionally have a plural feature. So the meaning of the form (36a) is *the team or its membership is old*. Now (36b) means something different: *the team members are old*. So no competition.

But why is (36b) unambiguous? **Stipulation:** if plural is accessed for agreement, the DP must denote a plurality (all syntactic treatments make this stipulation).

Our treatment: *team* is lexically ambiguous (or vague): not the same meaning, no competition (as above).

But why is (36b) unambiguous? In (36b), mismatch in features, Plural on T is interpreted: must mean the team members (No stipulation). (and In (36a), agreement is uninterpreted, ambiguity stays).

Consequence: we expect to find MP effects in cases an interpreted (presuppositional) plural on T alternates with an uninterpreted singular on T. As we will see such effects are found.

2.3 Deriving the generalizations

Generalization (31a): The Agreement-Denotation correlation (6)

- (a) Semantic plural agreement on T (or a head) requires the subject DP to denote a plurality only.
- (b) Singular syntactic agreement on T (or a head) requires a singular subject DP denoting a singleton or a plurality if the DP allows it.
- Singular syntactic agreement on T is compatible with the subject being plurality denoting (if it can be as with collective nouns or partitives), as long as it is syntactically marked as singular.
- Semantic agreement encodes presuppositions. Plural marking on T requires its subject to be plurality denoting.
- ☞ This derives generalization (31a) (or (6)).

Generalizations (31d) and (31e):

- (d) Semantic agreement between a head and a DP requires them to be in Spec/Head relationship.
- (e) This Spec/Head relationship must hold at LF.

☞ (31e): presuppositions are interpretive properties they must be satisfied at LF.

☞ (31d) The former follows from general properties of presupposition satisfaction.

- a presupposition trigger is a function restricting the domain over which (one of) its argument(s) can range.
- ☞ a presupposition trigger imposes restrictions on its sister or its subject at LF.
- ☞ T takes two arguments: a DP subject and a non DP (say a VP) as complement
- ☞ Presuppositional ϕ -features on T constrain the denotational possibilities of the subject of T or of VP at LF.
- ☞ ϕ -features restrict the domain of individual denoting expressions, hence only of the subject.
- ☞ If there is no subject e.g. due to reconstruction, the presupposition trigger is a function without argument, which is ill formed.
- ☞ This derives generalization (31d).

Generalization (31b): When both syntactic and semantic agreements cooccur in a given sentence, their distribution displays an asymmetric pattern.

- (7) a. (i) This team is promoting [?]themselves
The government has offered [?]themselves / each other up for criticism.
- (ii) *This team are promoting itself
*The government have offered itself up for criticism
- b. (i) The committee has decided to reward themselves
- (ii) *The committee have decided to reward itself
- c. Tense and bound pronoun
- (i) No team_k is losing its_k/their_k way
- (ii) No team_k are losing *its_k/their_k way

➤ Singular syntactic agreement on T is compatible with the subject being plurality denoting, as long as it is syntactically marked as singular. Binding is about denotational covaluation.

➤ Semantic agreement the subject to be plurality denoting. Cannot be covalued with a singular pronoun.

Note that the contrasts in (7)a-c show that anaphors or pronouns bound by the subject can mismatch the agreement on T. This casts doubts on views taking the binding of anaphors (or of pronouns) as involving the same Agree process between anaphor and antecedent as subject/verb agreement. This shows that it is desirable to dissociate syntactic agreement or concord, which is about feature matching, from binding relations, taking the latter to involve denotational covaluation of independent expressions: for a pronoun to be bound, it suffices that its antecedent and the pronoun be covalued, that is, denote or range over the same entities.

Turn now to example (7d) (tense twice in conjoined clauses):

- (7d) a. The group is German and are famous

b. *The group are German and is famous

➤ Can't only be analyzed as involving a single DP subject of a conjoined T'. Must be as in (b) or (c):

- (38) a. The group [T' is German] and [T' are famous]]
 b. [The group]_k is German and e_k are famous
 c. *[The group]_m are German and e_m is famous

☞ The contrast now reduces to that seen in (7a), (7b) or (7c) as the silent pronoun is anaphoric on the main clause subject.

Examples (7e) (tense twice (relative/main clause)):

- (7e) i. The committee that is likely to be investigated are meeting at the moment
 ii. *The committee that are likely to be investigated is meeting at the moment

➤ In (i) the subject can either denote the team or the members. Plural agreement impose a plural denotation only.

☞ Why does not MP force *are* in the relative in (i)? MP applies cyclically (cf. Singh, 2011, or 'local context' in Schlenker, 2012).

➤ in (ii), the subject must denote a plurality. MP requires main clause *are*.

Examples (7f) (tense and reflexives in conjunction):

- (7f) i. The government defended itself from the scandal and e were discussed on the news.
 ii. *The government defended themselves from the scandal and e was discussed on the news.

➤ Can't only be analyzed as involving a single DP subject of a conjoined T'. Must be like in (38):

In (i), the first conjunct *the government defended itself from the scandal* can mean:

the institution or its members defended the institution or its members.

☞ The silent pronoun can choose to pick out the plurality denoting option as value (same remark as above about cyclic MP).

In(ii), the first conjunct must mean *the government members defended themselves*.

☞ The silent pronoun must be plural.

The last examples (7g) involving relative clauses, can be similarly analyzed (it is a combination of the two previous cases):

(7g) Tense and reflexives in a relative clause

- a. The committee that gave itself a hefty payrise were charged for corruption.
 b. *The committee that gave themselves a hefty payrise was charged for corruption.

☞ The above discussion extends to the parallel cases of partitive and pseudo partitives constructions.

☞ Correct prediction for French: Uniform agreement with two distinct heads is sometimes required (compare with (7g) or (7d)).

- (41) a. La majorité des soldats est ✓loyale/*loyaux
 the majority of the soldiers is ✓loyal-sg/*loyal-pl
 b. La majorité des soldats sont *loyal(e)/✓loyaux
 the majority of soldiers are *loyal-sg/✓loyal-pl

➤ the two heads must agree in ϕ -feature number values: both singular or both plural. Why?

➤ Agreement with the two heads is with a single moving DP. Plural marking on any head requires this DP to be interpreted as plural denoting. Now MP requires the use of the strongest trigger whose presupposition is satisfied in the context. Uninterpreted singular agreement on the other head would not maximally encode this presupposition. So plural on the other head is required too.

Generalization (31c): With a conjoined subject, agreement is sensitive to whether the denotation is singular or plural denoting.

This generalization follows from the hypothesis there is no syntactic feature resolution in conjunctions that yield ϕ -feature values for the whole conjunction. As a result, agreement with a conjunction is necessarily semantic. A conjoined subject has to satisfy the presuppositional properties of the ϕ -feature values appearing on T.

3 Conclusion

➤ Collective nouns, (pseudo-)partitives and DP conjunctions display a number of common properties regarding certain agreement patterns yielding a number of empirical generalizations.

- Current theories of agreement predict the existence of semantic agreement, cases in which ϕ -feature values (for person and number) found on a head are semantically interpreted.
- The observed generalizations can be accounted for if these ϕ -feature values are interpreted the way they are interpreted when they are uncontroversially interpreted, namely as presuppositional, subject to general (syntactic) constraints on how presuppositions are enforced at LF.

If successful, this treatment of these descriptive generalizations meets our goal of not requiring any new assumptions or stipulations.

Some outstanding questions:

- How do other proposals fare?
- What happens with semantic agreement and imposters (cf. **Daddy am here*)? A complex question with non uniform answer (which probably requires modifying how person presupposition are characterized).
- How exactly are person and number presuppositions satisfied with (collective nouns and) (pseudo)partitives. Hint: Person, like Number is encoded at the NP level (not the DP level) as in Harbour 2014, Mayr 2015, Harbour (2016) and Ackema and Neeleman (2018) pace Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002)).
- **There are a man and a women but also there ✓ is /* am always me: why?*
Person agreement is always semantic. Person does not participate in Agree making sense of Baker's 2008 or 2011 S(tructural) C(ondition) O(n) P(erson) A(greement), or den Dikken's 2019 (for whom it always requires a Spec/Head licensing configuration) and of neural evidence (from ERP and fMRI experiments) showing that violation of person but not (standard) number agreement induces e.g. N400 effects usually associated with interpretative problems (Mancini et al. 2011, Mancini et al. 2017).
(➤ many consequences, e.g. treatment of PCC effects).

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