Overview

In many languages, verbs exhibit plural agreement morphology in the presence of two singular local (1st/2nd person) arguments. Based on these data, I argue that plural morphology does not rely on number features such as ±plural, etc., rather, plural morphology is dependent on multiple instances of “atomic” INDIVIDUAL features.

1↔2 effects

1↔2 effects result from a 1st/2nd person acting on another 1st/2nd person (Heath, 1991, 1998)

i. both arguments realized normally
ii. completely unanalyzable portmanteau form
iii. partially unanalyzable portmanteau form
iv. partially reduced feature set (of one argument)
vi. fully reduced feature set (of one argument)
vi. combined feature set

Agreement assumptions

A single probe can agree with multiple arguments copying features from each (Anagnostopoulou, 2005, Georgi, 2011)

After agreement

Agreement can “build” a feature bundle if the probe manages to agree with two arguments

Probes are RELATIVIZED to look for person features, so that if there are two arguments with person features in the derivation, it is possible to agree with both. NB: 3rd person lacks person features. (cf. PERSON LICENSING (Bijar and Rezai, 2009))

Decomposing number

I propose a theory of number features which relies on “atomic” instances of INDIVIDUAL features. Multiple INDIVIDUAL features are mapped to non-singular exponents.

Resolved agreement

John and Mary are happy

Bound pronouns with split-antecedents

Each student, told each professor, that their class was fun

A unified theory of morphology and semantics

Selected References


Thanks

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An example from Nocte (Tibeto-Burman)

In Nocte, when 1sg→2sg, the morpheme -e appears (1), which is otherwise used to reference 1pl (e.g., on intransitives, (2))

(1) 1sg→2sg ⇒ 1pl

 nga ma nang hetho -e

1sg -ERG 2sg teach -1pl

‘I shall teach you(sg)’

(2) 1pl intransitive

ni we -ik -e

1pl read -PROG -1pl

‘We are reading’

Elsewhere, the verbal morphology adheres to a strict PERSON HIERARCHY where 1>2>3. The higher ranked argument references all its features on the verb.

(3) 2→1 ⇒ 1

nang -ma nga hetho -h -ang

2sg -ERG 1sg teach -INV -1sg

‘You (sg) shall teach me’

(4) 2→3 ⇒ 2

nang -ma thannin -nang hetho -o

2sg -ERG 3pl -ACC teach -2sg

‘You shall teach them’

Thus, in precisely one configuration of features (1→2), the verbal morphology deviates from the expected pattern, and marks a number feature which is not present on either argument.

An (incomplete) list of other languages where plural morphology surfaces in the same contexts is, Yimas (Papuan), Siri-an (incomplete), Anindilyakwa (Australian), Karuk (Hokan), Bolinao (Austronesian), Surinam-Carib (Cariban)

There are two questions: i) Why does the pattern deviate from the person hierarchy in one configuration of features. ii) Why does the resulting morphology reflect plural morphology?

Plurals in 1↔2 effects

Intransitive plural subject

XP

A plural argument bears (at least) two IND features

Agreement with two singulars

XP

A subset of the features of the bundle in the 1↔2 scenario are spell-out as 1pl (Halle and Marantz, 1993)