

Getting Rid of Number Features : 1 ↔ 2 agreement effects

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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)

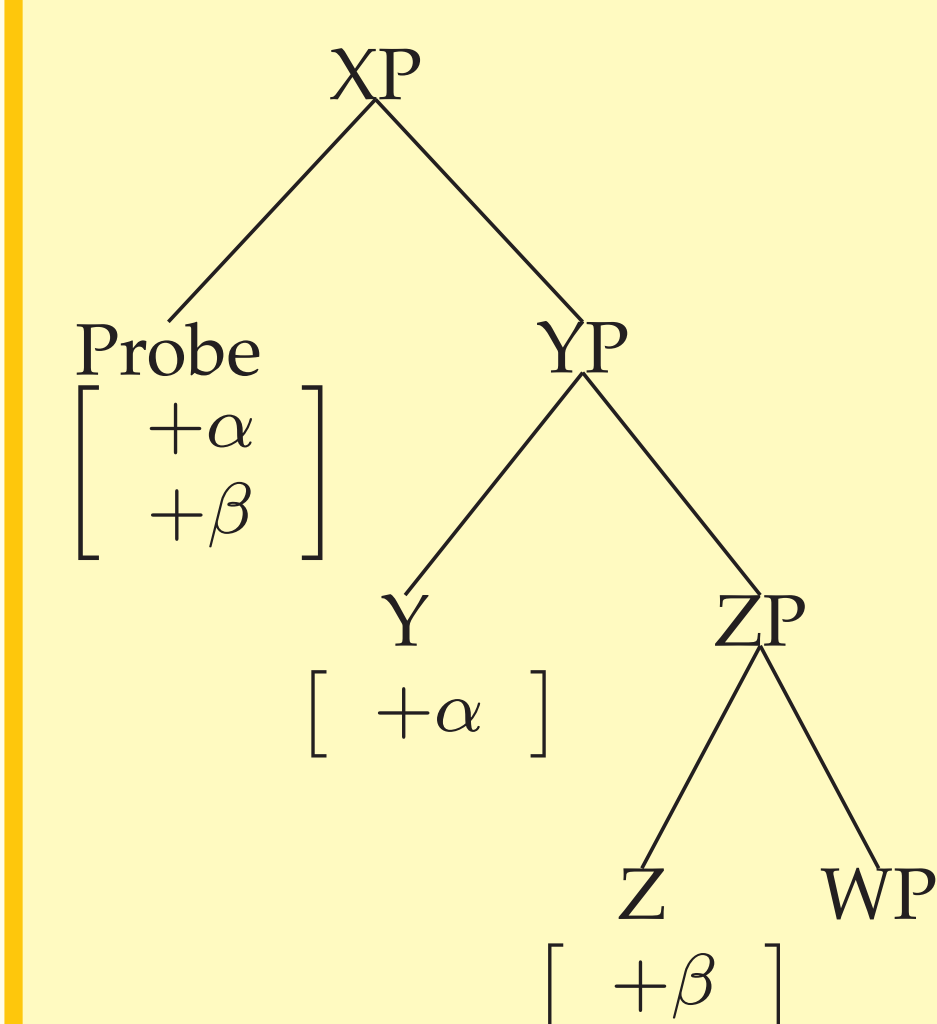
- i. both arguments realized normally
- ii. completely unanalyzable portmanteau form
- iii. partially unanalyzable portmanteau form
- iv. partially reduced feature set (of one argument)
- v. fully reduced feature set (of one argument)
- vi. **combined feature set**

1 ↔ 2 effects occur in languages which display a PERSON HIERARCHY with respect to agreement, in that some person features are “preferred” over others (universally 1/2 > 3, generally 1 > 2).

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 (Béjar and Řezáč, 2009))

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), Sirono (Tupi-Guarani), Mapuche (isolate), 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?

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.

(5) a. 1st singular

[Individual
Participant
Speaker]

b. 1st dual/plural

[Individual
Individual
Participant
Speaker]

c. 1st plural

[Individual
Individual
Individual
Participant
Speaker]

(6) a. 2nd singular

[Individual
Participant]

b. 2nd dual/plural

[Individual
Individual
Participant]

c. 2nd plural

[Individual
Individual
Individual
Participant]

(7) a. 3rd singular

[Individual]

b. 3rd dual/plural

[Individual
Individual]

c. 3rd plural

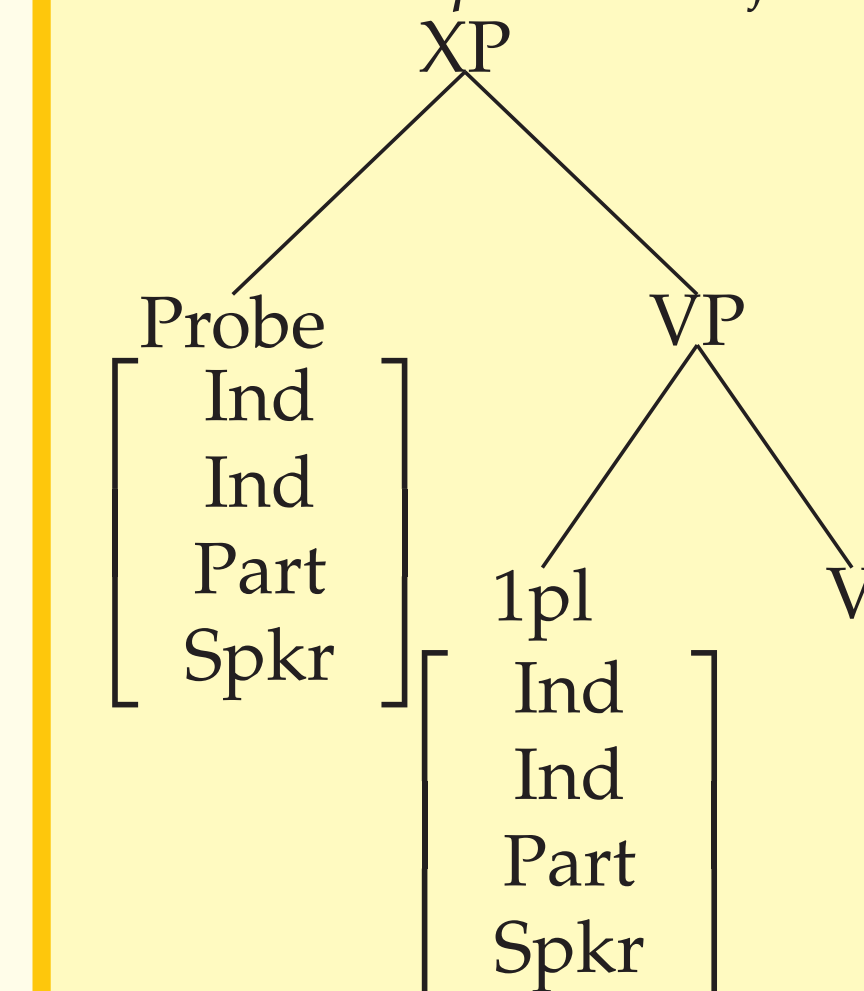
[Individual
Individual
Individual]

The proposed theory is meant to coincide with a standard semantics for nominal plurality, which composes plural entities from atomic elements (Link, 1983; Schwarzschild, 1992)

See also Trommer (2006, 2010) for a similar proposal, although I argue against his account for Nocte, which involves post-syntactic competition for morpheme insertion.

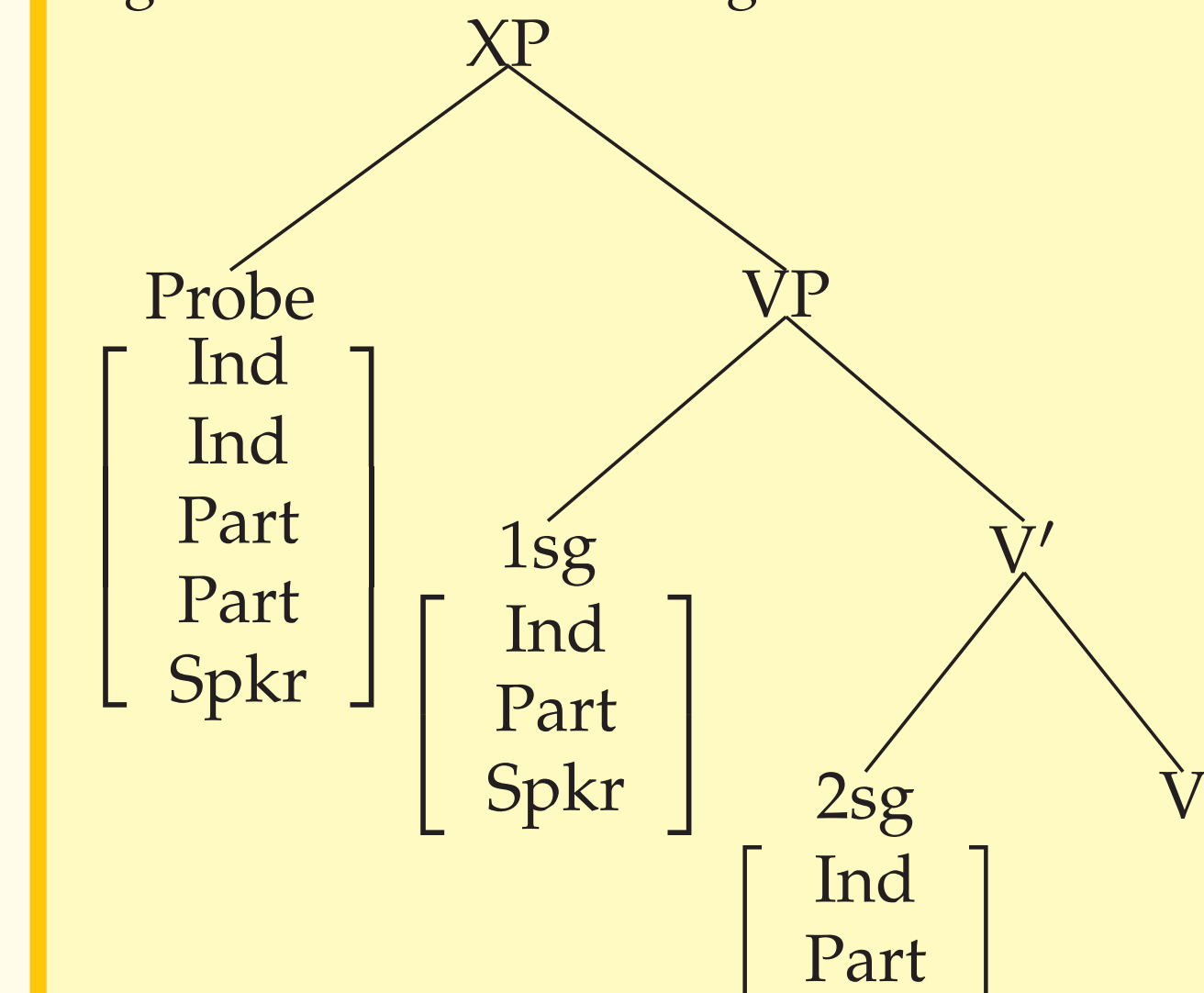
Plurals in 1 ↔ 2 effects

Intransitive plural subject



A plural argument bears (at least) two IND features

Agreement with two singulars



Agreement copies two IND features, but from different sources

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

Extensions

Resolved agreement

John and Mary are happy

Bound pronouns with split-antecedents

Each student_i told each professor_j that their_{i+j} their meeting was fun

A unified theory of morphology and semantics

Selected References

- Heath, J. (1998). Skewing in 1 ↔ 2 pronominal combinations in native American languages. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 64(2):83–104.; Link, G. (1983). The Logical Analysis of Plurals and Mass Terms: A lattice-theoretical approach. In Bäurle, R. and von Stechow, A., editors, *Meaning, Use, and Interpretation of Language*, pages 302–323. Walter de Gruyter.; Georgi, D. (2011). Local Person Portmanteaux and Hierarchy Effects: A unified approach. *handout from NELS 42*
- Thanks** Anoop Mahajan, Jessica Rett, Carson Schütze, Martin Walkow, Dave Embick, Jonathon Bobaljik, Pam Munro; participants in UCLA’s Minimalism seminar, and American Indian Seminar