Interpretable agreement in Uyghur and Buryat

We discuss two cases in Altaic languages where a failure of syntactic agreement results in the presence of a semantically interpretable feature on the agreement probe. One case amounts to a solution of a puzzle in verbal person agreement in Uyghur attitude reports, while the other concerns nominal number concord in Buryat. Both cases support the view of "semantic agreement" in Wechsler 2011 and Wechsler and Hahm 2011.

| **Semantic agreement as response to agreement failure** | In Wechsler 2011 and Wechsler and Hahm 2011 it is argued that "semantic agreement", i.e. the presence of a semantically interpretable feature value on the agreement probe, arises as a response to syntactic agreement failure. This claim is potentially in conflict with a different idea: that failure to agree results in the absence of a feature value on the probe in syntax and in the default form in morphology, cf. Preminger 2014, among others. However, it could be the case that it is determined by properties of particular heads: whether they can host an interpretable feature value or not. If they can, failed agreement will result in an insertion of an interpretable feature value. A particularly clear-cut case can be found in Podobryaev 2014, reinterpreting the facts first observed in Collins & Postal 2012. In languages like French and Russian conjunctions where one of the conjuncts is a "speaker-imposter" and the other is a third person non-imposter can trigger either 3rd person plural or 1st person plural agreement:

(1) Katja, Maša i   vaš pokornyj sluga sčitaj-ut/-em čto èta teorija verna.
     K.   M.   and your obedient   servant believe-3PL/-1PL that this theory correct
     'K., M. and your faithful servant believe that this theory is correct.' (Rus., Podobryaev 2014)

By hypothesis, the first option illustrates syntactic person agreement in a Multiple Agree fashion. The probe on top of the conjunction agrees in person with both conjuncts simultaneously. The second option is a case of inserting a semantically interpretable person feature value: 1st person to signal the inclusion of the speaker in the referent of the conjunction. When Multiple Agree fails (which happens when the conjuncts have different person features), the feature on the conjunction is not the default, but rather, again, a semantically interpretable feature value, in (2) it is the 1st person:

(2) vy i   vaš pokornyj sluga sčitaj-em/*-ut/*-ete   čto èta teorija verna.
     you and your obedient   servant believe-1PL/*-3PL/*-2PL that this theory   correct
     'You and your faithful servant believe that this theory is correct.'   (Rus., Podobryaev 2014)

In the present paper we analyze two cases of apparent semantic agreement in Altaic languages as an insertion of semantically interpretable feature values in case of agreement failure.

| **Case study 1: verbal agreement in Uyghur attitude reports** | Like many other Altaic languages Uyghur exhibits a construction with accusative subjects in finite clause embedding. When the subject of the embedded clause is in the accusative case, the main verb of the embedded clause does not agree with it, but it also does not appear in the default form. Rather, its person features surface *as if* there were a null pronoun controlling the agreement (this pronoun would have to undergo indexical shifting, which in Uyghur is obligatory for all person pronouns in finite complement clauses below the position of the monster operator 👻):

(3) Ahmet [Aygül-ni (👻) nan   ye-isen   ] di-di.
     Ahmet   Aygül-ACC   bread   eat-IMPF.2   say-PAST.3
     'Ahmet said to Aygül that she ate bread.'   (Uyg., Shklovsky & Sudo 2014)

The problem is that, as Shklovsky & Sudo (2014) demonstrate, there is no independent evidence that a null pronoun controlling the agreement is there.

We propose that this is a case of agreement failure, when the person feature on the verb is directly interpeted. The feature is attached to a constituent of type $\langle e,t \rangle$ contributing a presupposition: a restriction on the domain of the function. For example, the meaning of the 2nd person feature could be as follows:

(4) $[\![2^{nd}]\!]^{c,g} = \lambda P_{\langle e,t \rangle}. \lambda x_e$: x includes the addressee in c and excludes the author in c. $P(x) = 1$

In the scope of the monster operator responsible for indexical shifting, the context parameter is manipulated (see a proposal for the Uyghur monster in Sudo 2012: 214–215), the presupposition being that only those individuals that contain the attitude holder's addressee and exclude the attitude holder herself are in the domain of the function. Accusative subjects are outside of the scope of the indexical shifting operator (Shklovsky & Sudo 2014), hence they may have different person features. Crucially, accusative subjects fail to agree with the verb, which is why we observe a "semantic agreement" pattern.

| Case study 2: nominal concord and numberless DPs in Buryat | In Buryat, some morphologically unmarked noun phrases have been argued to be numberless, that is, they do not project a NumP and are consistently interpreted as number neutral. However, when such nouns are embedded in larger DPs containing demonstratives, these DPs cannot be number neutral anymore, with the morphological form of the demonstrative (singular or plural) directly reflecting the interpretation (atom- or sum-denoting):

(5) a. basaga:-d xurgu:li-da: ədə   nom   asar-a:.
       girl-pl   school-dat.refl this.pl book   bring-past
       'The girls brought these books/*this book to their school.'

    b. basaga:-d xurgu:li-da: ənə   nom   asar-a:.
       girl-pl   school-dat.refl this.sg book   bring-past
       'The girls brought this book/*these books to their school.' (Bur., Bylinina & Podobryaev 2017)

Interestingly, when demonstratives are used with plural noun forms, they can either the singular or the plural form. This looks like an instance of optional number concord:

(6) bji ədə/ənə   xubu:-d-i:jə xar-a:-b.
    I   this.pl/sg boy-pl-acc   see-past-1sg
    'I saw these boys.'   (Bur., Bylinina & Podobryaev 2017)

Leaving out the discussion of the precise mechanism of optional concord, this is clearly *not* what is going on in examples like (5a) – if it were optional concord with a plural feature, we would expect to be optional the same way it is optional with morphologically plural nouns.

These concord facts establish another instance of "semantic agreement" as a response to agreement failure: the NP lacks the number feature, so a probe carrying an unvalued number feature cannot agree with it, and, in response to this, the feature gets a value that is semantically appropriate.

This must be possible due to the fact that an option of having an interpretable feature is available for the particular probe. Not all probes are alike in this respect. For example, verbal number agreement in Buryat works differently: when the subject doesn't have a number feature, the only possibility is the default (unmarked/singular) form of the verb, which must indicate that the T probe doesn't have an option of getting an interpretable feature value without syntactic agreement:

(7) nom stol də:rə xəbtə-nə(*-d)
    book table on   lie-pres(*-3pl)
    'The book(s) is/are lying on the table.'   (Bur., Bylinina & Podobryaev 2018)

| References | **Bylinina, L. & A. Podobryaev (2017)** 'Plurality in Buriat and structurally constrained alternatives', in *Proceedings of the 21st Amsterdam Colloquium.* **Bylinina, L. & A. Podobryaev (2018)** 'Number neutrality and the structure of DPs in Buriat', a poster presented at WAFL 14. **Collins, C. & P. Postal (2012)** *Imposters,* MIT Press. **Podobryaev, A. (2014)** 'Persons, imposters, and monsters', MIT doctoral dissertation. **Preminger, O. (2014)** *Agreement and its failures,* MIT Press. **Shklovsky, K. & Y. Sudo (2014)** 'The syntax of monsters', *LI* 45: 381–402 . **Sudo, Y. (2012)** 'On the semantics of phi features on pronouns', MIT doctoral dissertation. **Wechsler, S. (2011)** 'Mixed agreement, the person feature, and the index/concord distinction', *NLLT* 29: 999–1031. **Wechsler, S. & H.-J. Hahm** 'Polite plurals and adjective agreement', *Morphology* 21: 247–281.