

Agreement with Coordinated Subjects

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This talk consists of two parts, both dealing with agreement with coordinated (that is disjoined or conjoined) subjects: In the first part, we present experimental findings from a large acceptability judgment study showing that, in German, number agreement with disjoined subjects is special: If two singulars are disjoined, the verb can show plural or singular agreement (1-a) (see Foppolo and Staub 2020 for similar results in English). If there is at least one plural in the disjunction, the verb shows plural agreement (1-b).

- (1) a. *Das Regal oder der Tisch* **wird/werden** morgen geliefert.
the shelf.SG or the table.SG will.be.SG/PL tomorrow delivered
b. *Die Regale oder der Tisch* ***wird/werden** morgen geliefert.
the shelf.PL or the table.SG will.be.SG/PL tomorrow delivered

We argue that disjoined nominal phrases do not denote inherent pluralities, in contrast to conjoined NPs. For example, they cannot function as subjects to collective predicates.

While agreement with conjoined subjects has been analyzed in various ways (see e.g. Marušič et al. 2015, Nevins and Weisser 2019, Murphy and Puškar 2018 for overviews), it is unclear how these approaches can account for the agreement pattern of disjunctions described above.

We suggest that disjunctions are semantically plural in that they denote sets of alternatives (Alonso-Ovalle 2006) and that the verb has to match the disjunction as well as the disjuncts in number. In a nutshell, we propose an optimality-theoretic account based the following constraints: (i) Verbs have to show agreement. (ii) All disjuncts need to be matched and (iii) the disjunction as a whole needs to be matched (i.e. plural agreement).

The second part of the talk presents a broader typological study on agreement with conjoined and disjoined subjects. In previous language-specific studies, it has been observed that the presence of a coordinated subject can give rise to various agreement strategies: Most notably, there is resolved agreement (2-a), where the entire coordination seems to agree with the verb, and there is first or closest conjunct agreement (2-b), where only one conjunct agrees with the verb.

- (2) a. [ʕumar w ʕali] **mšaw**.
Omar and Ali left.3PL
'Omar and Ali left.'
b. **Mša** [ʕumar w ʕali].
left.3SG Omar and Ali
'Omar and Ali left.'
(Moroccan Arabic, Aoun et al. 1994:207f.)

Based on data collected via an online form, we could find so far that there are two factors that influence the probability of an agreement strategy: closest conjunct agreement is more prevalent in (i) verb-subject orders and in (ii) disjunctions.

References

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