

Object Movement derives Object Preference

Justin Colley, MIT

Introduction: Certain languages exhibit a puzzling phenomenon I will call *object preference*. An object-preferring marker agrees with the object if possible; but if not, the subject controls agreement. These object-preferring markers are high in the clause, according to morpheme ordering and suppletion tests. I show that despite the complex constellation of facts associated with object preference and the challenges it has posed to previous accounts, the phenomenon permits a simple solution: the object moves above the subject at some stage of the derivation. I focus particularly on Erza Mordvinian, with additional evidence from Quechuan languages, Laz, Georgian, Itelmen, and inverse-marking languages like Passamaquoddy and Kadiwéu.

The Phenomenon: Erza Mordvin, a Uralic language, exemplifies object preference. In the perfective, verbal person agreement is with the object if it is a participant (1a), and with the subject if the object is 3rd person. Number agreement—marked only for plural—is with the object if the object is definite, and with the subject if the object is indefinite. No more than two agreement markers can appear, with the subject and object therefore competing for exponence.

- (1) a. *kunda* - *d* - *ad* - *yz* b. *kunda* - *s* - *y* - *k* (Béjar 2003)
catch - tns - **2:obj** - pl catch - tns - pl - **2:su**
I/we/(s)he/they catch you(pl) You(sg) catch us/them

The Puzzle: On the face of it, object preference poses a paradox, assuming Probes agree with the closest Goal in their c-command domain (Chomsky 2000). All things being equal, for a Probe to agree with the object, the Probe must be located below the subject, for example in *v*. If it is below the subject, however, then with an un-enriched Agree mechanism, the subject will never be able to control agreement, contrary to fact. Thus, for the object to be the preferred controller of agreement, the Probe must be low; for the subject to be able to control agreement, the Probe must be high.

Probe Height: One potential way to dissolve this paradox is to enrich the agreement mechanism. Béjar and Rezac (2009), for example, allow for an unsatisfied low Probe in *v* to percolate to a *v'* node, where it c-commands the subject. However, whenever evidence is available, it points to a Probe that is high in the clausal structure (the *Object-Preferring Probe Height Generalization*, OPHG). One source of evidence is morpheme ordering, assuming the Mirror Principle (Muyskens 1979, Baker 1985). For example, Erza Mordvin's object-preferring agreement marker appears outside of Tense (1a–b). The same is true for object-preferring markers in Itelmen (Bobaljik 2000) and various Quechuan languages (Myler 2016). For example, in Cuzco Quechuan, there is obligatorily agreement with an object Addressee (2a), and the subject otherwise. The relevant marker is again outside Tense. In no languages in which the relevant evidence is available does the object-preferring marker appear inside Tense (sometimes evidence is unavailable, as with the lone agreement prefix in Georgian).

Evidence from suppletion further supports the OPHG. In Erza Mordvin, the object-preferring marker suppletes with Tense; in Itelmen it suppletes with Mood. Given the local nature of suppletion (Pesetsky 1984, Bobaljik 2012), this suggests the relevant Probes are high in the clausal structure (*contra* Béjar and Rezac 2009).

The Solution: The apparent paradox of object preference must be solved in a way that is consistent with the OPHG. I argue that movement of the object to a position above the subject yields object preference (though since both SO and OS word orders are widely attested, there is no word order evidence). The participant π -Probe and plural #-Probe are located on T, as in (2a) (in contrast to the high #-Probe and low π -Probe in Béjar 2003 and Georgi 2010, shown in 2b). If the object is a plural participant, it will control both agreement slots; if the object is either singular or third-person, subject φ -features can be found by the high Probe. There is a range of converging evidence for this analysis.

Definiteness effect: Object agreement is limited to definite objects. This can be explained by a high Probe, together with Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis, according to which definite objects must vacate the VP to outside the scope of existential closure. That there is a definiteness effect in addition to a participant Probe can be shown by number agreement: a third-person definite plural object controls number agreement, while a third-person indefinite plural cannot.

Differential Object Marking:

Further evidence for object movement comes from differential object marking (DOM). Definite objects receive accusative case, while indefinite objects receive nominative (Zaicz 1998). This can be captured in a dependent case framework (Marantz 2000). Baker (2015) argues that in DOM languages, dependent case is calculated on nominals within the CP phase. Thus, only arguments that move out of the vP are in the domain of dependent case assignment. Movement of definite objects outside the vP therefore feeds accusative case assignment, explaining the correlation between definiteness, accusative case, and object preference.

Agreement suffix ordering: I show that any instance of object agreement precedes any instance of subject agreement. If the object is a participant, and thereby controls person agreement, it is always the first of the two agreement suffixes (as shown by 1a), preceding either object/subject number or subject person. If the object is plural, it will precede any other agreement suffix, except for object person. Thus in (1a), number follows object person, but in (1b), when the object is plural, it precedes subject person. These patterns are explained if the closest argument to the high Probe is the object. Any object φ -feature that can control agreement, will control agreement, with subject agreement only appearing when the object is third-person and/or singular. Linear ordering between subject and object agreement is then straightforwardly predicted by the derivational order in which the Goals are found. This explains otherwise unexpected syncretisms in the agreement system. For example, 1sg objects with 2pl/3pl subjects carry the same agreement morphology as 1pl objects with 2sg/3sg/2pl/3pl subjects (*am-iz/1-pl*).

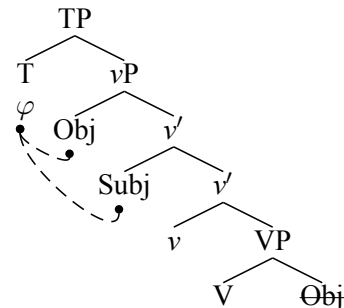
Other languages: I also argue that there is evidence in other object-preferring languages for movement of the object. In inverse-marking languages, there is evidence from variable-binding in Passamaquoddy (Bruening 2001), and word order in Kadiwéu (Sandolo 2010), that agreement-controlling objects have moved. In Quechuan languages such as Cuzco Quechuan, Addressee arguments that control agreement move above Tense, while other arguments appear below Tense.

A further puzzle: One important question is why, given the predicted ubiquity of object movement under the Mapping Hypothesis, object-preference configurations are relatively rare. This is because the object-preference requires several different conditions to be satisfied simultaneously. The language must allow agreement with both subjects and direct objects, already a minority possibility (Bobaljik 2008). The relevant Probe must be specified to agree with a subset of the person feature geometry, such as a participant Probe; otherwise, it will only agree with the highest nominal. And finally, the object must not tuck in under the subject. Only with these three conditions jointly satisfied will object preference emerge.

Previous approaches: Object preference has been argued to support the Cyclic Agree mechanism of Béjar and Rezac (2009). For them, object preference is the result of a low π -Probe in v that can, if unvalued by the object, percolate to v' to be valued by the subject. This low π -Probe is, however, inconsistent with evidence from morpheme ordering and suppletion. Cyclic Agree also has no explanation for the restriction of agreement to definite objects in accusative case. Georgi (2014) argues that this is because indefinites lack person features, however, this is contradicted by the availability of agreement with indefinite subjects. Cyclic Agree also makes the prediction that the ordering of agreement morphemes should follow from whether valuation takes place in T or v/v' (2b). However, as shown above, this is false: what matters instead is whether the controller of agreement is the object or the subject.

Enrichment of the agreement mechanism—as in Cyclic Agree—to allow for these patterns is both unnecessary, and makes incorrect empirical predictions. This provides support for a view in which the agreement mechanism is simple, consisting of Probe-Goal relations governed by minimal search.

(2) a. *High person Probe, with object movement*



b. *Low person Probe, with Cyclic Agree*

