

# Multiple Agrees?\*

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## 1 Valuation and Agree

**Morphological Agreement:** (very general version)

Properties (features) of one element determine the realization of another element.

**Minimalist Perspective:**

- Morphological agreement reflects existence of **uninterpretable features**.
- Syntax is driven by the need to associate these with valued and interpretable counterparts.
- **All** displacement phenomena result from drive to eliminate uninterpretable features.  
→ Feature valuation optionally followed by movement.

Syntax is an engine of valuation.

Mechanism of valuation is **Agree** (Chomsky, 1998)

## 2 The Debate

- **Agree** is an operation that licenses unvalued/uninterpretable features (**uF<sub>\_\_</sub>**) by relating them to valued/interpretable features (**iF<sub>val</sub>**).
- In what **configuration** does licensing/valuation occur?

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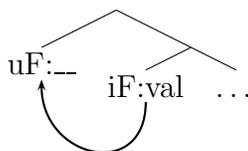
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**Original answer: “Standard” Agree**  
(Chomsky, 1998)

**Agree:** an unvalued and uninterpretable feature  $uF\_$  on  $\alpha$  can be valued/rendered interpretable by a matching valued and interpretable feature  $iF_{val}$  on  $\beta$  iff:

- i.  $\alpha$  c-commands  $\beta$
- ii. There is no  $\gamma$ ,  $\gamma$  distinct from  $\beta$ , with a valued interpretable feature  $F$  such that  $\gamma$  c-commands  $\beta$  and is c-commanded by  $\alpha$ .

(Following Chomsky, 1998, 2001)



feature values always passed **upwards**

**Core motivation:** finite agreement with post-verbal subjects.

- Icelandic agreement with *in situ* nominative objects:

- (1) Henni        **leiddust**    *strákarnir*.  
3SG.F.DAT bored.3PL the.boys  
“She found the boys boring.”

(Sigurdsson, 1996, 3)

- (2) Konunginum **voru gefnar**    *ambáttir*.  
the.king.DAT were given.PL.F maidservants.PL.F.NOM  
“The king was given female slaves.” (Zaenen et al., 1985, 44a)

- Arabic (partial) agreement with post-verbal subjects:

- (3) **qadim-a**    (/ \*qadim-uu) *al-ʔawlaadu*.  
came-3SG.M came-3PL.M the-boys-3PL.M  
“The boys came.”

(Harbert and Bahloul, 2002, 45)

- Long distance agreement in Tsez and Basque with absolutive DPs “trapped” in embedded clauses (Preminger, 2012): movement above agreement target uniformly ungrammatical.

- (4) eni-r            [už-ā        magalu            b-āc?-ru-ʔi]                    b-iy-xo  
mother-DAT boy-ERG bread.III.ABS III-eat-PAST.PTCP-NMZ III-know-PRES  
“The mother knows that as for the bread, the boy ate it.”            (Tsez: Polinsky and  
Potsdam, 2001, 606)

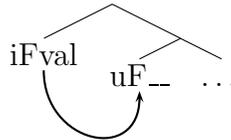
- (5) [  $\_$  T<sup>0</sup> [<sub>CP</sub> ... DP<sub>abs</sub> ... ] ]

**Recent alternative: “Reverse” Agree**  
(Zeijlstra, 2012; Wurmbrand, 2011, a.o)

**Reverse Agree:** A feature  $F:_{\dots}$  on  $\alpha$  is valued by a feature  $F: \text{val}$  on  $\beta$ , iff:

- i.  $\beta$  asymmetrically c-commands  $\alpha$  AND
- ii. There is no  $\gamma$ ,  $\gamma$  distinct from  $\beta$ , with a valued interpretable feature  $F$  such that  $\gamma$  commands  $\alpha$  and is c-commanded by  $\beta$ .

(Wurmbrand, 2012, p. 5)



feature values always passed **downwards**

**Core motivation:** cases where a semantic operator licenses *multiple* lower morphological realizations.

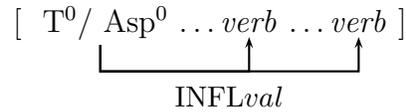
- Negative concord: no specific instance of morphological negation is consistently associated with negative interpretation; Zeijlstra (2008, 2012) argues that this is most naturally explained if high interpretable feature ( $i\text{NEG}$ ) can license uninterpretable counterparts on lower negative quantifiers ( $u\text{NEG}$ ).

- (6) Dnes nikdo nevolá nikomu  
 Today n-body NEG.calls n-body?  
 “Today nobody is calling anybody?” (Czech: Zeijlstra, 2012, 14c)
- (6) [  $Op_{neg}$  ... NEG-WORD ... NEG-WORD ]

- Inflectional “doubling” / “parasitic” inflection: cases where the same inflection appears on more than one verb in a clause. Wiklund (2007) for Scandinavian languages and Wurmbrand (2012) more broadly for Germanic argue that such cases involve downwards valuation of verbal inflectional features by a higher functional head such as  $T^0$  or  $Asp^0$ .

- (7) Han hade kunnat skrivit.  
 he had can.PTCP write.PTCP  
 “He had been able to write.” (Swedish: Wiklund, 2007, 1)
- (8) hy soe it **dien** (/ dwaan) wollen ha  
 he would it do.PTCP (/ do.INF) want.PTCP have.INF

“He would have liked to do it.”  
 (Frisian: Den Dikken and Hoekstra, 1997, 3)



- In sum: there seems to be clear evidence on both sides that both upwards and downwards valuation are attested.
- **Preliminary conclusion:** Agree must be **bifurcated** into two different operations of valuation.

### 3 Independent Operations?

- Is there a principled distinction in where Standard Agree and Reverse Agree apply?  
 → Core cases seem promising: Standard and Reverse Agree each originally proposed to account for very different empirical domains.

**Standard Agree:** relationships between arguments and clause structure

**Reverse Agree:** relationships between functional elements in a sequence

“It might therefore be a good idea for theorizers working on the formal relation underpinning phenomena such as negative concord and sequence-of-tense to find a new term for the formal mechanism they are researching, one that does not appeal to what traditional grammarians had termed ‘agreement’.”  
 (Preminger, 2012, 7)

- Unfortunately, this neat division breaks down elsewhere, and alternatives fare no better:
  1. The two operations can’t be distinguished by **position** of features:
    - We might propose that Standard Agree applies between heads and phrases; Reverse Agree between heads themselves.
    - But as seen already, negative concord involves phrases *and* downwards valuation.
  2. They also can’t be distinguished by **type** of features:
    - Here we might propose that Standard Agree applies to features interpretable on DPs ( $\varphi$ , WH); Reverse Agree elsewhere.
    - But cf. Baker (2008): downwards  $\varphi$ -valuation in Bantu subject agreement.

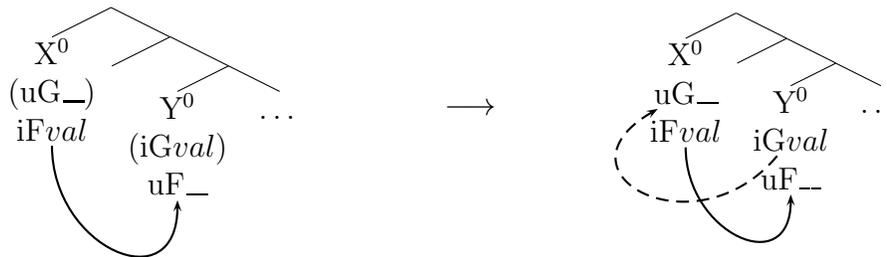
- (9) a. Omo-mulongo mw-a-hik-a mukali.  
 LOC.18-village.3 18S-PAST-arrive-FV woman.1  
 “At the village arrived a woman.”  
 b. Oko-mesa kw-a-hir-aw-a ehilanga.  
 LOC.17-table 17S-PAST-put-PASS-FV peanuts.19  
 “On the table were put peanuts.” (Kinande: Baker, 2008, p. 158)

3. Direction of valuation could be **parameterized**, by language or by feature (Baker, 2008; Merchant, 2011) → but this would weaken the predictions of the theory.

## 4 Towards (partial) unification

- A stronger theory is available: upwards and downwards valuation are not equivalent:  
**Asymmetry:** upwards  $\varphi$ -valuation is often **defective**; downwards  $\varphi$ -valuation is not.
  - English: optional agreement with expletive *there*
  - Icelandic: quirky agreement only for number (Sigurdsson, 1996; Taraldsen, 1996)
  - Arabic: post-verbal agreement only for person and gender (Fassi Fehri, 1993).

**Zeijlstra (2013):** upwards valuation (i.e. Standard Agree) is **parasitic** on pre-existing downwards valuation (i.e. Reverse Agree).



- **Remaining question:** why would parasitic valuation be defective?
  - Possible answer: only features accessible to upwards valuation are those on the head that is itself receiving features (i.e.  $D^0/K^0$  for Case-valuation).
  - Much work establishes cross-linguistic variation in distribution of  $\varphi$ -features within DP: plausible that  $\varphi$ -feature content of a Case head will vary.

## Conclusions:

- Upwards and downwards valuation involve separate operations in one sense: they do not apply in the same structural configurations, and do not necessarily yield the same effects.
- In another sense, however, there is a single mechanism of valuation: downwards valuation is **basic**, while upwards valuation is simply a potential reflex of that relation (reversing Chomsky (1998)'s approach to Case).
- Predictions to be pursued: link between upwards agreement and Case; direction of any asymmetries between upwards and downwards valuation.

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