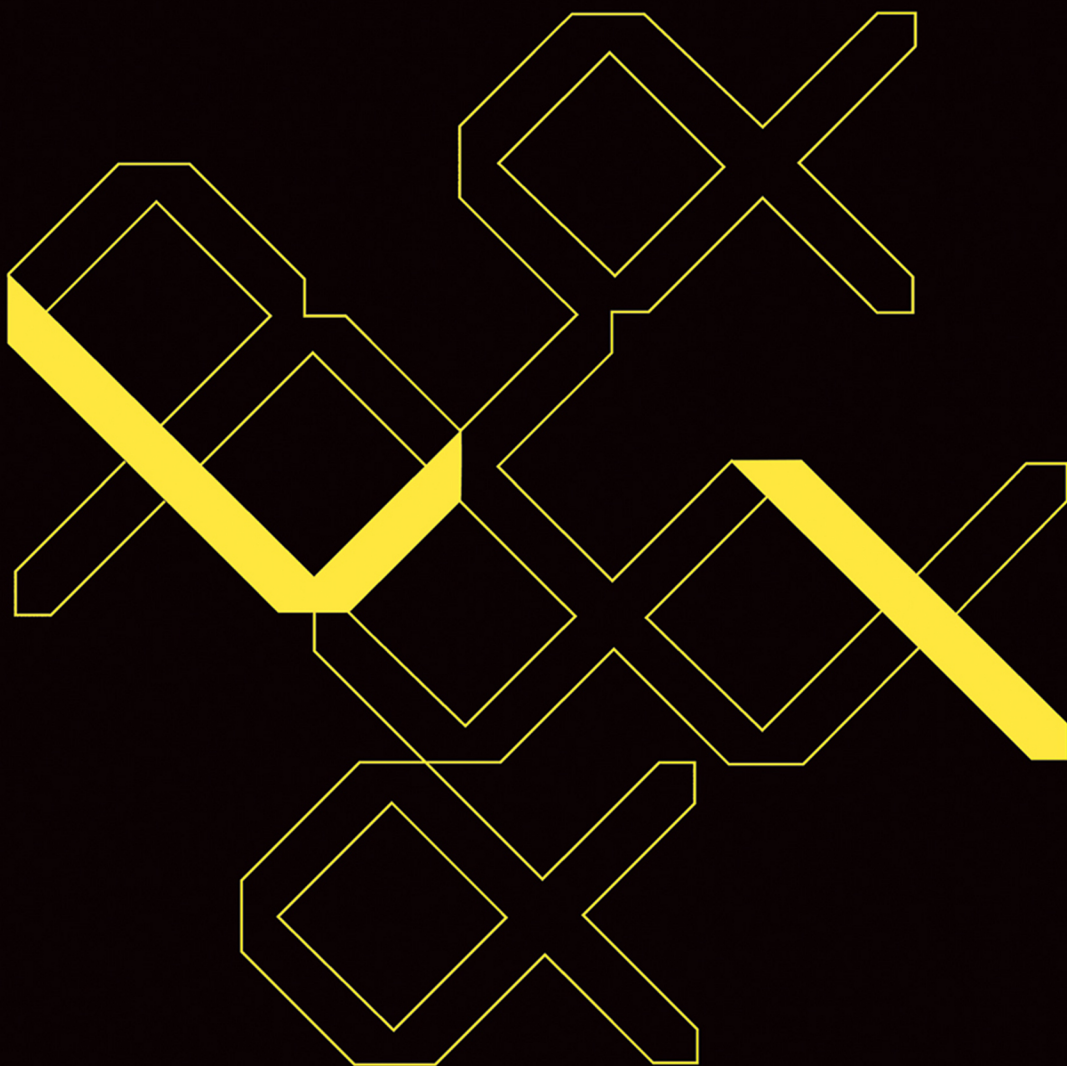




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Agreement and Its Failures

Omer Preminger



Agreement and Its Failures

Linguistic Inquiry Monographs
Samuel Jay Keyser, General Editor

A complete list of books published in the Linguistic Inquiry Monographs series appears at the back of this book.

Agreement and Its Failures

Omer Preminger

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To Safta Yaffa

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Series Foreword

We are pleased to present the sixty-eighth volume in the series *Linguistic Inquiry Monographs*. These monographs present new and original research beyond the scope of the article. We hope they will benefit our field by bringing to it perspectives that will stimulate further research and insight.

Originally published in limited edition, the *Linguistic Inquiry Monographs* are now more widely available. This change is due to the great interest engendered by the series and by the needs of a growing readership. The editors thank the readers for their support and welcome suggestions about future directions for the series.

Samuel Jay Keyser
for the Editorial Board

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Abbreviations

ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
ACT	active voice
ADV	adverbial
AF	Agent-Focus
AOR	aorist
AP	antipassive
APPL	applicative
ART	article
ASP	aspect
AUG	augment
AUX	auxiliary
CL	clitic
CLF	classifier
COM	completive aspect
CONJ	conjoint
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
DISJ	disjoint
ERG	ergative
EVID	evidential
EXCL	exclusive
EXPL	expletive
FEM	feminine

FOC	focus
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual
HON	honorific
IMPF	imperfective
INC	incompletive aspect
INCL	inclusive
INF	infinitive
INST	instrumental
LOC	locative
MASC	masculine
NEG	negation
NMZ	nominalization
NOM	nominative
OBJ	object
OBL	oblique
PASV	passive
PCL	particle
PERF	perfect
pl/PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PRES	present
PRFV	perfective
PROG	progressive
PRT	participle
RN	relational noun
SC	small clause
sg/SG	singular
SUBJ	subject

1 Introduction

The central question investigated in this book is how the obligatory nature of predicate-argument agreement (henceforth, φ -agreement) is enforced by the grammar.¹ The central claim is that an empirically adequate theory of φ -agreement requires recourse to an operation whose obligatory triggering is a grammatical primitive, not reducible to representational properties, but whose successful culmination is not enforced by the grammar.

In many contemporary treatments of φ -agreement, its obligatoriness is enforced through representational means. Perhaps most prominent is Chomsky's (2000, 2001) "interpretability"-based proposal, in which the obligatoriness of φ -agreement is enforced through *derivational time-bombs*: elements of the initial representation that cannot be part of a well-formed end-of-the-derivation structure (Chomsky's "uninterpretable features"). These derivational time-bombs are defused, so to speak, by the application of φ -agreement itself; thus, derivations in which φ -agreement has not applied cannot be well-formed, which in turn renders φ -agreement obligatory.

This book presents an empirical argument against approaches that seek to derive the obligatory nature of φ -agreement exclusively from derivational time-bombs, and it offers an alternative account of φ -agreement based on the notion of *obligatory operations*, which is better suited to handle the facts at hand. The crucial data consist of utterances that inescapably involve attempted-but-failed agreement and are nonetheless fully grammatical.

I begin, in chapter 2, by presenting three competing models that could in principle be used to capture the obligatoriness of φ -agreement: the *derivational time-bombs* approach, the *violable-constraints* approach, and the *obligatory-operations* approach (which is the one I will ultimately argue in favor of). I then discuss how each of these models would fare in handling tolerated failed agreement in grammatical utterances.

In chapter 3, I present the patterns of φ -agreement found in the Agent-Focus construction in the Kichean languages of the Mayan family. The agreement

patterns observed in Kichean Agent-Focus have been claimed to instantiate a grammaticalization of a “salience” hierarchy (e.g., Dayley 1978, 1985, Mondloch 1981, Norman and Campbell 1978, Smith-Stark 1978). In chapter 4, I demonstrate that the same facts actually adhere to more familiar syntactic principles—primarily, the *probe-goal* mechanisms that emerged in the wake of Rizzi’s (1990) Relativized Minimality (as articulated in Chomsky 2000).

Crucially, while compatible with a probe-goal analysis, these facts prove quite problematic for approaches that seek to capture the obligatoriness of φ -agreement using only derivational time-bombs (e.g., Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) “interpretability”-based proposal), because they necessarily involve attempted agreement that has not culminated successfully. I discuss this in detail in chapter 5. I also discuss several ways in which one might try to salvage the derivational time-bombs approach in light of these facts, and I demonstrate the shortcomings of each.

In chapter 6, I discuss two other empirical domains that provide converging evidence for the same conclusion, that tolerated failed agreement exists: the *conjoint/disjoint* alternation in Zulu and its interaction with nominal *augment* morphology (building on Halpert 2012), and the morphosyntax of unergative constructions in Basque (building on Preminger 2012).

In chapter 7, I reexamine the status of “salience” hierarchies or scales as grammatical primitives in possible accounts of the phenomena discussed so far. I present several arguments against the use of such primitives in the account of φ -agreement in Kichean Agent-Focus in particular. I then discuss a typological argument against the use of such hierarchies/scales, from the juxtaposition of Kichean Agent-Focus with the Zulu facts discussed earlier.

I then turn, in chapter 8, to a discussion of “defective intervention” by dative nominals. The existence of tolerated failed agreement, as established in the preceding chapters, gives rise to an analytical possibility that was unavailable under the derivational time-bombs approach: that intervention by dative nominals results in the outright failure of φ -agreement, as opposed to some form of “defective” or “partial” agreement. Taking as a starting point Bobaljik’s (2008) observation that φ -agreement is *case-discriminating* (i.e., that agreement probes filter possible targets on the basis of their case marking), I show that viewing intervention as failed agreement per se provides us with a previously unavailable account for when intervention will cause outright ungrammaticality and when it simply results in “default” morphology. The same facts, involving outright ungrammaticality caused by certain instances of dative intervention, also furnish an argument against a violable-constraints approach to φ -agreement and in favor of φ -agreement as an obligatory operation.

In chapter 9, I turn to the question of where this obligatory φ -agreement operation is located in terms of the modular organization of the grammar. As Bobaljik (2008) has shown in the course of arguing for the case discrimination property of φ -agreement, the notion of case relevant to this computation is “morphological case” (Marantz 1991). I show that, coupled with the results of chapter 8, Bobaljik’s result entails that both “morphological case” and φ -agreement necessarily operate within syntax itself—contrary to Bobaljik’s own claims concerning the relevant modular loci—and that the term *morphological case* is therefore something of a misnomer (though still accurate insofar as it refers to a notion of case that is faithful to the observable morphology). Converging evidence for the conclusion that Marantz’s (1991) case calculus actually belongs within syntax is presented from Baker and Vinokurova’s (2010) and Levin and Preminger’s (to appear) analysis of case in Sakha (Turkic). Finally, I revisit the original analysis of φ -agreement in the Kichean Agent-Focus construction, put forth in chapter 4, and discuss it in light of the issues explored in these last two chapters.

From a broader perspective, the obligatory-operations logic that φ -agreement is shown to adhere to might appear to cast φ -agreement as an outlier among syntactic phenomena; and crucially, given the results of chapter 9, relegating φ -agreement to some other module of the grammar (e.g., the postsyntactic/morphological component) is impossible. However, it turns out that the logic of obligatory operations is not all that rare in the syntactic landscape, after all. In chapter 10, I briefly discuss three other syntactic phenomena that all prove extremely amenable to treatment as operations, which must be triggered but whose failure is systematically tolerated by the grammar: long-distance *wh*-movement, the interaction of specificity and object shift, and the interaction of the definiteness effect and movement to canonical subject position. I then discuss the prospects for a completely operations-based syntax and the outlook for doing away with any residual recourse to derivational time-bombs (e.g., “uninterpretable features”) in the grammatical apparatus.

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