

The Case for Concord: Multiple Agreement in Bantu

This talk argues for a syntactic relation ‘Concord’ that is distinct from the relation Agree(ment) in the grammar. Whereas the latter is a context-sensitive relation that makes reference to c-command and may take place ‘at a distance,’ the former is a context-free, strictly local relation. Both relations may result in the realization of phi-features, making it crucial to distinguish the two relations empirically. I accomplish this by examining compound tense (CT) structure in Bantu that display multiple instances of agreement.

Chomsky (2000, 2001) suggests that the case features of subjects are checked when a full set of phi-features are valued against it. This explains why many languages show incomplete agreement on participial verbs and full agreement on finite auxiliaries: since only the auxiliary has a full set of phi-features, only it may check the case of a subject, though a subject may trigger incomplete agreement on participials. Carstens (2001), however, points out that Bantu CT structures go against the cross-linguistic trend, arguing that this makes Chomsky’s system untenable. As illustrated in (1), Swahili shows full phi-feature agreement with the subject both on auxiliaries and participials. In Chomsky’s system, we would expect the lowest verb to check the case of the subject, making it unavailable for further operations.

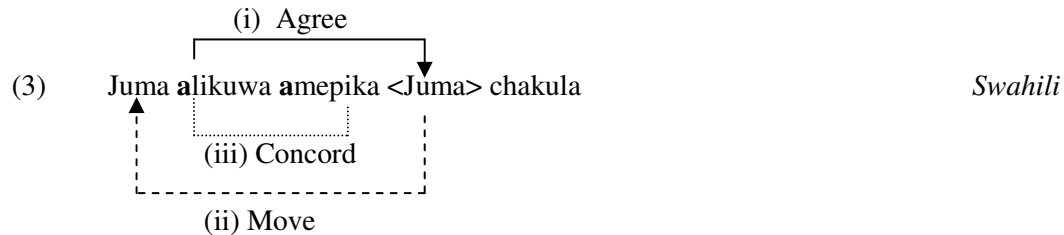
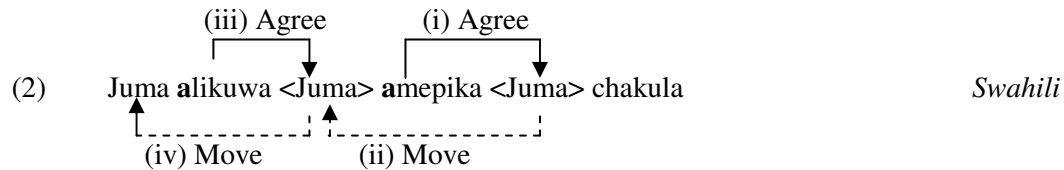
Carstens analyzes these sentences as raising structures: the subject moves through the specifier of each CT verb, triggering agreement via spec-head relation at each move (illustrated, with the operations ordered, in (2)). I demonstrate that this analysis is faulty and that a relation other than Agree is required to account for the facts. I argue that the participial verbs in (1) do not acquire their phi-features by virtue of an Agree relation with the subject, but via a Concord relation with the auxiliary, as illustrated in (3).

Two pieces of evidence are offered against (2) and in favor of (3). First, many Bantu languages require or allow subject-verb inversion in relative clauses. Interestingly, in clauses involving compound tenses, all of the verbs in the sequence must invert. A subject cannot intervene between the verbs as (4) illustrates. Furthermore, this adjacency restriction seems to depend upon the two verbs sharing agreement morphology. As (5) shows, languages which do not display multiple agreement in CT structures such as Dzamba do not show this restriction. Even within Swahili, structures can be found in which a verb sequence does not require multiple agreement, such as control structures. In these cases also, no adjacency restriction between the two verbs holds as illustrated in (6). Since the adjacency restrictions correlates strongly with the participial verb carrying agreement, I take this as evidence that such agreement is acquired through a local relation with the auxiliary.

The second piece of evidence comes from Kirundi which allows optional inversion. Unlike in Swahili, however, inversion is accompanied by agreement shift whereby an inverted verb agrees only with a relativized NP and not with the subject. This is illustrated in (7). Next, consider the relative CT structure in (8). Not only must both verbs invert as in Swahili, but both must agree with the relativized NP rather than the subject. These facts oppose the raising analysis of CT structures that Carstens assumes. Taking the standard assumption that relativized NPs move to Spec,CP directly via A-bar movement, there is no way for the relativized NP in (8b) to enter into the required spec-head relation with the participial verb.

The reanalysis I provide establishes that phi-features may be realized on a head via an Agree relation with an XP or via a Concord relation with another head. It has also remove Carstens’ argument against Chomsky’s system of case checking. However, I also have an independent argument that Chomsky’s system cannot be correct. Consider again the Dzamba example in (5). Here the verb agrees with the relativized NP. Nothing in the clause agrees with the subject, yet the subject is an argument of the verb, residing at least as high as Spec-vP. Therefore, it must receive structural case. The fact that it does so without triggering agreement is a strong argument that case checking and phi-feature valuation must be accomplished by distinct operations in the grammar.

- (1) Juma **a** – li – kuwa **a** – me – pika chakula *Swahili*
 Juma 3S-PAST-be 3S-PERF-cook food
 'Juma had cooked food.'



- (4) a. chakula **a** – li – cho – kuwa **a** – me – pika *Juma* *Swahili*
 food 3SG-PAST-REL-be 3SG-PERF-cook Juma
 'the food which Juma had cooked'

b. *chakula **a**-li-cho-kuwa *Juma* **a**-me-pika

- (5) e-etobo é – ba – aki *oPoso* o – lo – maa waabo *Dzamba*
 dress_j AGR_j-be-PST Poso DEF-INF-sow here (Bokamba 1976)
 'the dress that Poso was sowing here'

- (6) chakula **a** – li – cho – taka *Juma* ku-pika *Swahili*
 food 3S-PST-REL-want Juma INF-cook
 'the food that Juma wants to cook'

- (7) a. Ibitabo Yohani **a** – a – someye *Kirundi*
 books John 3SG-PST-read:PERF
 'the books that John read'

b. ibitabo **bi** – a – someye Yohani
 books_j AGR_j-PST-read:PERF John
 'the books that John read'

- (8) a. igitabo abana **ba** – a – riko **ba**-soma *Kirundi*
 book children 3PL-PST-be 3PL-read:IMP (Ndayiragije 1999)
 'the book the children were reading'

b. igitabo **ki** – a – riko **ki**-soma abana
 book_j AGR_j-PST-be AGR_j-read:IMP children
 'the book that children were reading'