Patterns of agreement with coordinate phrases

The talk examines the agreement behavior of coordinate phrases (&Ps) on the basis of Hungarian data. It is argued that & having no φ-features of its own, &P assumes the φ-features projected by its conjuncts in formal agreement relations, and the features of its discourse referent in semantically motivated relations. In Hungarian – unlike in the well-known European languages – number agreement is formal agreement, elicited by a plural morpheme, whereas coreference is semantically determined.

Hungarian provides evidence against the claim that the φ-features of &P are those of its specifier. &P elicits plural agreement on the verb if and only if either the specifier or the complement of &, or both are plural. If both conjuncts are singular, i.e., if no plural feature is projected to &P, &P takes a singular verb. If one of the conjuncts projects a [plural] feature to &P, whereas the other conjunct is singular, no feature conflict arises because – as argued by Farkas and de Swart (2004) on the basis of Hungarian facts – only plural noun phrases have a number feature. Conjoined singulars that appear to elicit plural agreement have been shown to be left-peripheral elements represented in the subject–verb agreement relation by a resumptive pro. Pronominal coreference being determined by the semantic properties of the discourse referent of &P, the resumptive pro associated with &P is plural.

Conflicting person features in conjoined pronominal subjects will be shown to be eliminated either by lexical blocking, or by the resumptive pro(noun) strategy.

Hungarian conjoined objects participate in definiteness agreement with the verb. Both the specifier and the complement of & project a definiteness feature to &P. If they project different definiteness features, a feature conflict arises, which speakers resolve by employing one of two major strategies. Slightly more than half of the informants accept agreement with a resumptive pro. The most widely accepted strategy is for the verb to agree with the closest accusative noun phrase with a definiteness feature, i.e., closest conjunct agreement, presumably licensed at the syntax–PF interface.

It will be concluded that 'partial agreement' with &P, reported from many languages, is not a single phenomenon. & having no φ-features of its own, &P acquires agreement features from different sources across languages and across agreement relations. It may assume the semantic features of its discourse referent; it may be replaced in agreement by a resumptive pro; or it may participate in agreement relations with the φ-features of one of its conjuncts, the higher one in some languages, and the closer one in Hungarian.