The directionality of agreement and nominal concord in Zazaki

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1 Overview

Zazaki has nominal concord on the ezafe morpheme, which preferentially targets the goal that is available first in the derivation.

We conclude that nominal concord in Zazaki takes place in the course of the derivation. This follows if it arises from a syntactic operation (Carstens 2000, Baker 2008).

Nominal concord in Zazaki is syntactic because it exhibits the effects of derivational timing.

2 Ezafe in Zazaki

Zazaki (Northwest Iranian: Turkey) has an ezafe morpheme that introduces dependents of the noun — both adjectives and possessors — whose form varies in number and gender (ϕ-features) and in case.

About the ezafe morpheme, we assume that:

- it is a head that cliticizes to its left (Philip 2012)
- it hosts unvalued ϕ- and case features
- it forms a constituent with, and c-commands, a dependent at some derivational stage (cf. Samian 1983, den Dikken & Singhapreecha 2004, Larson & Yamakido 2009)

We also assume that the noun raises above the possessor, introduced as an oblique PP in Spec-PossP (Sportiche 1998), and above adjectives adjoined to NP.

3 Nominal concord with ezafe

When ezafe introduces an adjective (1) or possessor (2), it agrees in ϕ-features with the head noun N.

(1) a. [DP ju kutik =ez Alik=ii =gırs] =EZ.M.SG.M big
   one dog =EZ.M.OBL big ‘a big dog (m.)’

b. [DP a mang =e Alık=ii =spı] =e =EZ.F white=F
   that.F cow =EZ.M.OBL Alik=M.OBL ‘that white cow (f.)’

(2) a. [DP ga =e Alık=ii] =EZ.M.OBL Alik=M.OBL
   ‘Alik’s ox (m.)’

b. [DP gırs =e Alık=ii =gırs] =EZ.F
   ‘Alik’s goat (f.)’

When ezafe introduces adjectives, it agrees with the case of the maximal DP (3a-b).

(3) a. [DP kutik =e gısrs] =EZ.M.SG.M big
   ‘a big dog (m. nom.)’

b. [DP kutik =e gısrs] =EZ.M.OBL big ‘the big dog (m. obl.)’

But when ezafe introduces possessors, it always inflects for oblique case, even when the maximal DP is nominative:

(4) a. [DP Kutik =e Alık=ii ] =EZ.M.OBL Alik=M.OBL meat.eat.PRS-3SG.M
   ‘Alik’s dog (m. nom.) is eating meat.’

b. Ez [DP kutik =e Alık=ii] =EZ.M.OBL M see.PRS-1SG
   ‘I see Alik’s dog (m. obl.).’

We propose that in (4a–b) ezafe enters into a case concord relationship with the oblique possessor.

4 Proposal

- Nominal concord is syntactic in nature and is established by Agree (Mallen 1997, Carstens 2000, Baker 2008).
- Agree is bidirectional and must be established as early as possible, ensuring that downward Agree is preferred over upward Agree (Béjar & Rezac 2009).

Ezafe first agrees downward with the dependent, and only after this upward with the head noun or D.

(5) [DP D N [EzP [AP A] [N]]] (6) [DP D N [EzP [PP P DP]] [N]]

With adjectives (5)

Ezafe first probes its AP complement. Adjectives do not carry ϕ- or case features, so ezafe looks upward and values these features on N and D respectively.

With possessors (6)

Ezafe first probes its PP complement, where it finds the oblique case feature on P. But P prevents ezafe from accessing the possessor’s ϕ-features. (In Zazaki, oblique PPs cannot be the target of ϕ-agreement in general.) Instead, ezafe looks upward and finds the ϕ-features on N.

5 Conclusion

In nominal concord, the unvalued element is usually c-commanded by the valued element — while, in verbal agreement, the situation is typically reversed. As a consequence, we might think that nominal concord and verbal agreement use different mechanisms (e.g. Kramer 2009, Norris 2011).

In the right structural configuration, however, the logic of Agree emerges for nominal concord. With Zazaki ezafe, nominal concord can operate downward. This dovetails with recent work suggesting that verbal agreement, too, is flexible and can look upwards (Baker 2008, Béjar & Rezac 2009, Zeijlstra, to appear).