Focus and multiple agreement in Maithili

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1 Introduction

Maithili is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken by around 34 million people, primarily in India and Nepal (Yadava et al. 2019:41). Its agreement system, which includes portmanteau morphemes sensitive to the subject plus a non-subject secondary controller, is known for exhibiting some crosslinguistically rare properties. Notably, argument-internal possessors can control agreement, in seeming violation of standardly-assumed locality restrictions on agreement (Stump and Yadav 1988). In addition, agreement involves an intricate system of dedicated honorific features – as opposed to non-honorific features recruited into an honorific system, which are the typical means of honorification crosslinguistically (see e.g. Wang 2020).

In this paper, we present an Agree-based analysis of the agreement system of one particular variety of Maithili, spoken in Siraha District of Province 2, Nepal (relying on data from Yadava et al. 2019). Our main claims are the following:

(1) a. Maithili agreement exhibits a person/honorificity hierarchy effect which challenges standard cyclic Agree models (e.g. Béjar 2003, Deal 2015), and motivates a novel implementation of dynamic interaction (Deal 2021).
b. The language's four-way respect scale is split into two-way honorific and dishonorific systems.
c. Agreement with argument-internal possessors and PP-internal nominals is facilitated by focus-driven movement to the phase edge, analogous to the standard Agree-based analysis of cross-CP agreement (e.g. Polinsky and Potsdam 2001).

2 Restrictions on multiargument agreement

In transitives, agreement displays a ϕ-feature hierarchy effect: the subject always agrees, but whether or not the object also agrees depends on the subject and object's features. In this section, we argue that the hierarchy effect challenges existing models of Agree, and we present an account couched in a new, modified version of Deal's (2021) dynamic interaction model. We also propose, as part of the argument, that the four-way respect scale is split into a two-way honorific scale and two-way dishonorific scale.

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2.1 Diagnosing multiargument agreement

Agreement is sensitive to person and honorificity. There are two degrees of honorificity for 3rd person (3R > 3.non-R) and four degrees for 2nd person (2R > 2H > 2M > 2L).[1] In some cases, agreement is with a single controller (either the nominative subject or a non-nominative controller); in other cases agreement is with the subject plus a secondary controller. The full set of agreement suffixes is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Agreement morpheme inventory. This reproduces the tables provided by Yadava et al. (2019). It is important to note, however, that there are some discrepancies between their tables and the glossed examples they provide in the text – see footnote.[2]

Single Agreement (Yadava et al. 2019:45-46)

Controller	NOM subject	non-NOM
1	-i,-aũ(h)	-∅
2L	-æ,-ahi	-əu(k)
2M	-i,ə(h)	-ə(h)
2H	-i,-aũ(h)	-∅,-əi
2R	-i,-aũ(h), -∅ AUX-∅, -kin(h)	-∅
3.non-R	-∅,-əi	-∅,-əi
3R	-ah (MASC), -ih (FEM), -əith, -kin(h)	-əin(h)

Double Agreement (Yadava et al. 2019:48-49)

non-subject → subject ↓	1	2L	2M	2H	2R	3.non-R	3R
1		-iəu(k)	-iəh	-i,-aũ(h)	-iænh	-iæ(k)	-iəinh
2L	-əhi(k)					-əhi(k)	-əhunh, -əhinh
2M	-əhə(k)					-əhə(k)	-əhunh
2H	-i,-aũ(h)					-iæ(k)	-iəinh
2R	-iæ(k)					-iæ(k)	-iəinh
3.non-R	-ək,-kəi(k)	-kəu(k)	-kəh	-əin(h)	-(k)əinh	-ək,-kəi(k)	-(k)əinh
3R	-əin(h)	-k(əh)unh, -thunh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh	-k(əh)unh, -thunh	-(k)əinh	-thin	-(k)əinh

Agreement also depends on whether or not the object bears a contrastive focus interpretation. Focused objects always agree; non-focused objects agree in some cases but not all. Yadava et al. (2019) observe that whether or not a given non-focused object agrees can be diagnosed via comparison with focused object agreement, as follows.

[1] Some varieties use a smaller set of honorific features – see Yadava et al. 2019:41. We follow Yadava et al.'s notation for respect degrees – R is meant to stand for 'respected'.

[2] We are grateful to Yash Sinha for bringing this to our attention. The discrepancies that we are aware of are as follows – some examples just look like minor typos, but others are more significant. (None of them affect our analysis in this paper.) In Yadava et al.'s example (19), the 1>3R suffix is transcribed as "-iæn(h)". In their table, it's listed as "-iəinh". In example (29), the 1>2R suffix is transcribed as "-iəinh". In the table, it's listed as "-iænh". In example (30), the 3.non-R>2H suffix is transcribed as "-əih(n)". In the table, it's listed as "-əin(h)". In example (31), the 3R>2H suffix is transcribed as "-kəinh". In the table, it's listed as "-k(əh)unh/-thunh". In example (33), the 2R>3R suffix is transcribed as "-iænh". In the table, it's listed as "-iəinh".

In transitives with a focused object, there is always subject + object portmanteau agreement.[3] In transitives with a non-focused object, the agreement marker is always identical to either intransitive subject agreement (as in (2)) or object focus portmanteau agreement (as in (3)).

(2) *2L>1 agreement (a.): Same as intransitive agreement (b.), different from object focus agreement (c.)*

a. tu həm -ra piṭ -l -æ
2L.NOM 1 -ACC hit -PAST -2L
'You.L hit me.' (Yadava et al. 2019:49)

b. tu ae -l -æ
2L.NOM come -PAST -2L
'You.L came.' (Yadava et al. 2019:49)

c. tu həm -ra piṭ -l -əhi
2L.NOM 1 -ACC hit -PAST -2L>1
'You.L hit me$_{FOC}$' (Yadava et al. 2019:63)

(3) *1>2L agreement (a.): Different from intransitive agreement (b.), same as object focus agreement (c.)*

a. həm tora piṭ -əl -iəu
1.NOM 2L.ACC hit -PAST -1>2L
'I hit you.L.' (Yadava et al. 2019:29)

b. həm ae -l -aũ
1.NOM come -PAST -1
'I came.' (constructed based on Yadava et al. 2019)

c. həm tora piṭ -əl -iəu
1.NOM 2L.ACC hit -PAST -1>2L
'I hit you.L$_{FOC}$.' (Yadava et al. 2019:29)

This provides a clear diagnostic for multiargument agreement in transitives with a non-focused object. Multiargument agreement is agreement which matches object focus agreement, as in (3a). Single-argument agreement is agreement which matches intransitive agreement, as in (2a).

2.2 Lack of object agreement as blocked Agree

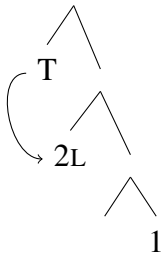
In cases like (2a), we take the lack of object agreement to be an instance of true blocked Agree, as opposed to emerging postsyntactically. The Vocabulary evidently contains portmanteau agreement morphemes for all subject+object combinations, since these appear when the object is focused – these are listed in the 'Double Agreement' portion of Table 1.[4] Thus non-agreeing non-focused objects should not

[3] In this paper, 'transitives' generally refers to transitives with a nominative subject. If the subject is not nominative, the only option is single-argument agreement with a non-nominative controller, which uses a different set of agreement markers than intransitive nominative subject agreement, shown in Table 1 (Yadava et al. 2019:2.3.2.).

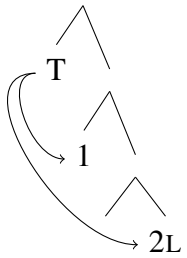
[4] There is one subject>object combination whose agreement is identical to intransitive agreeement even when the object is focused: 2H>1. Following Yadava et al. (2019:93), we take this to be a postsyntactic morphological gap rather than a case of syntactic blocking.

be taken as Agreeing in the syntax, as this would leave unclear why the appropriate portmanteau morpheme fails to be inserted. One could stipulate that in cases like (2c) (but not (3c)), the portmanteau morpheme actually expones a FOCUS feature, making it ineligible for insertion in (2a). But this misses the generalization that agreement in non-focused-object constructions always matches either intransitive agreement or focused-object agreement – this has to be treated as due to an accidental lack of dedicated non-focused-object portmanteau morphemes in the Vocabulary in all these cases. Accordingly, we reject this option, and assume that lack of object agreement results from blocked Agree, schematized in (4).

(4) *2L>1: blocked Agree*



(5) *1>2L: double Agree*



The data shown so far are consistent with existing models of blocked Agree, such as standard cyclic Agree (e.g. Béjar 2003) and the basic interaction/satisfaction model in Deal 2015. (Problematic data are coming up in the next subsection, 2.3.) Let us assume person is feature-geometrically encoded (e.g. Harley and Ritter 2002) as in (6).

(6) *Feature representation of person*
3rd person → [ϕ]
2nd person → [ϕ, PART(ICIPANT), ADDR(ESSEE)]
1st person → [ϕ, PART(ICIPANT), SP(EA)K(E)R]

In a standard (downward) cyclic Agree framework, the lexical specification of probes consists of a set of probe features [uF, uG, ...]. Agree with the object only takes place if the object bears at least one feature which a) is absent on the subject and b) matches one of the probe features. A provisional standard cyclic Agree account of the pattern in (6) would be as follows. The probe is addressee-relativized: [uϕ, uPART, uADDR]. In 2>1 constructions, the subject checks all the probe's features, so the probe does not need to Agree with the object. In 1>2 constructions, the subject fails to check uADDR, allowing the object to Agree. (Translation: the probe Agrees with the object only if the object outranks the subject on the person hierarchy 2nd > 1st > 3rd.)

In the basic interaction/satisfaction framework (Deal 2015), the lexical specification of probes consists of a set of interaction (INT) features (features which trigger Agree when encountered during search) and a set of satisfaction (SAT) features (features which halt search when encountered). A provisional account within the basic interaction/satisfaction model would treat the probe as able to interact with any argument ([INT:Φ]), but only *satisfied* by 2nd person, [SAT:ADDR]. In 2>1

constructions, the subject satisfies the probe, blocking Agree with object; in 1>2 constructions, the subject does not satisfy the probe, so the probe also Agrees with the object. (Translation: the probe Agrees with the object only if the subject is not 2nd person.)

2.3 A complex ϕ-feature hierarchy effect

By the diagnostic in 2.1., here is the distribution of blocked agreement across all subject>object combinations when there is no focus (Yadava et al. 2019:68-69):

(7) subject agreement only: 2>any ; 3R>2R,2H,1,3 ; 1>3.non-R
subject + object agreement: 3R>2M,2L ; 1>3R,2 ; 3.non-R>any

The pattern is complex. Yadava et al. (2019:69) note: 'it is difficult to model the relevant generalizations in terms of one unidirectional hierarchy'.

Neither standard cyclic Agree nor the basic interaction/satisfaction model in Deal 2015 allow a probe with the desired behavior. Consider e.g. the data in (8), schematized in (9):

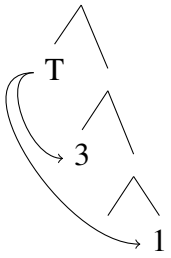
(8) *Object Agree is blocked in 3*R*>1, but not 3.non*R*>1 or 3*R*>2*L

a. o həmra piṭ -l -<u>əith</u>
3R.NOM 1.ACC hit -PAST -<u>3R</u>
'He.R hit me.' (Yadava et al. 2019:63)

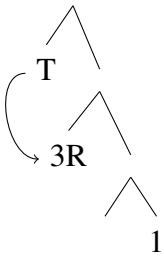
b. u həmra piṭ -l -<u>ək</u>
3.NOM 1.ACC hit -PAST -<u>3>1</u>
'He.NON-R hit me.' (Yadava et al. 2019:63)

c. o tora piṭ -əl -<u>k(əh)unh</u>
3R.NOM 2L.ACC hit -PAST -<u>3R>2</u>
'He.R hit you.L.' (Yadava et al. 2019: 64)

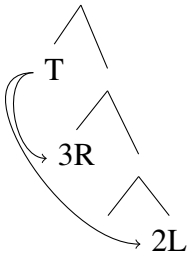
(9) a. *3.non-R+1*



b. *3R blocks Agree w/ 1*



c. *3R+2L*



A problem for standard cyclic Agree is posed by (9a) and (9b). The object Agrees in (9a), the 3.non-R>1 case. Thus the hierarchy 1st > 3rd is active – i.e. the probe is searching for some feature entailed by 1st person but not 3rd person, e.g. uPART. But this falsely predicts that the object should also Agree in (9b), the 3R>1 case.

A problem for the basic interaction/satisfaction model is posed by (9b) and (9c). In (9b), the 3R>1 case, the 3R subject blocks Agree with the object. Thus 3R must

have satisfied the probe. But this falsely predicts that the object should fail to Agree in (9c), the 3R>2L case.

2.4 A dynamic interaction account

We present an analysis which makes the correct predictions. We rely on a modified version of Deal's (2021) interaction/satisfaction + dynamic interaction model.

In the basic interaction/satisfaction model (Deal 2015), probes are specified for interaction (INT) features (features which trigger Agree when encountered during search) and satisfaction (SAT) features (features which halt search when encountered). We assume that when an interaction feature triggers copying, the entire ϕ-feature bundle is always copied. This is different from the assumption in Deal 2015, which is that only interaction features are copied. For Deal that assumption is only a presentational choice – nothing hinges on it, since Deal only considers ϕ-probes which have the set of all ϕ-features in their interaction criteria.

In Deal 2021, a parameter is added to the model: dynamic features. In each language, it must be specified which features are dynamic, i.e. alter the probe's interaction condition when Agreed with, and which features are not dynamic. We implement dynamic features as follows.

(10) *Dynamic interaction (our version):*
If a feature F is dynamic (written $F^{\downarrow}$), when a probe Agrees with a goal bearing F, all features entailed by F are deleted from the probe's INT features.

This is slightly different from Deal's implementation. Deal proposes that Agree with a dynamic feature F (written $F^{\uparrow}$)[5] imposes a requirement that subsequent goals bear F. Note that a probe with [INT:ϕ,PART,SPKR,ADDR] and a dynamic PART feature will behave identically regardless of whether Deal's version or ours is adopted. This is in fact the only type of probe which motivates the dynamic interaction model in the first place – see Deal 2021.

To see the advantage of our implementation over Deal's, consider the data in (11). 3R subjects evidently do not satisfy the probe, since the object in (11b) Agrees. Since satisfaction is out, the only remaining possible cause for blocked Agree with the object in (11a) is dynamic interaction with the subject. Following Deal's definition of dynamic interaction, this means that 3R arguments must bear some dynamic feature $X^{\uparrow}$ which is also borne by 2L arguments, but absent on 2R arguments. But there is no reason to expect such a feature to exist – if anything, 2R should have *more* in common with 3R, featurally, than 2L, not less.

(11) *Object Agree is blocked in 3*R*>2*R *but not 3*R*>2*L
a. o apne -ke piṭ -əl -kinh
3R.NOM 2R -ACC hit -PAST -3R
'He.R hit you.R.' (Yadava et al. 2019: 65)

[5]To differentiate between our implementation and Deal's, we use a down arrow for ours instead of an up arrow, as in (10).

b. o tora piṭ -əl -k(əh)unh
3R.NOM 2L.ACC hit -PAST -3R>2
'He.R hit you.L.' (Yadava et al. 2019: 64)

Our definition of dynamic interaction, by contrast, makes the right prediction. Whereas Deal's version of dynamic interaction imposes a *similarity* requirement on subsequent goals (i.e. they must match the first goal's dynamic feature), our version imposes a *novelty* requirement:[6] once a probe Agrees with a dynamic feature (in this case R), this feature is no longer sufficient to trigger Agree on subsequent potential goals. We propose that this drives the pattern in (11), and present an analysis along these lines of the full system.

We propose that the probe specification is [INT:ϕ, L, M, H, R], [SAT: ADDR], with dynamic features R$^{\downarrow}$, PART$^{\downarrow}$.[7] This accounts for the full system, assuming honorification is split into honorific (R, H) and dishonorific (M, L) features, such that honorific does not entail dishonorific or vice versa:

(12) *Feature representation of person*
3rd person $\rightarrow$ [ϕ]
2nd person $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, PART, ADDR]
1st person $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, PART, SPKR]

(13) *Feature representation of honorificity*
R $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, H, R]
H $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, H]
M $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, M]
L $\rightarrow$ [ϕ, L, M]

(14) *(Rough) feature meanings*
PART = speech act participant
ADDR = addressee
SPKR = speaker
H = respected
R = very respected
M = disrespected
L = very disrespected

Our description of the dishonorific features as denoting disrespect is meant to be loose – we have not done the work necessary to figure out the precise meanings of these features. What matters, for our purposes, is that their meaning is not in an entailment relation with the true honorific features.

This splitting up of the respect features is necessary to account for the fact that R subjects block R/H object agreement but not L/M object agreement (as in (11)). Since R does not entail L or M, interaction with the dynamic R$^{\downarrow}$ feature on the subject does not bleed subsequent agreement with an L or M object.[8] The idea of

[6]This can be thought of as preserving an idea from the standard cyclic Agree model: that an active probe can stop looking for certain features once it receives them.

[7]We have no particular reason for choosing this over other viable options, e.g. [SAT: M], H$^{\downarrow}$, R$^{\downarrow}$, PART$^{\downarrow}$.

[8]Deal (2021:fn.9) states: 'On the empirical side, the set-conception of interaction specifications

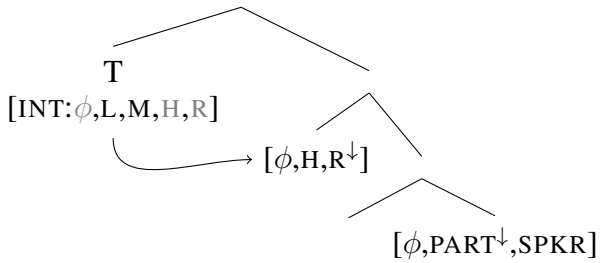
separating R/H from M/L is validated by morphological patterns, e.g. in the pronoun morphology (Yadava et al. 2019:44):

(15) *2nd person pronouns exhibit an honorific vs. dishonorific split*
2R = əpne (NOM) / əpnẽkẽ (ACC) / əpnek (GEN)
2H = əhã (NOM) / əhãkẽ (ACC) / əhãk (GEN)
2M = to∼tõ (NOM) / tora (ACC) / tohər (GEN)
2L = tu∼tũ (NOM) / tora (ACC) / tohər (GEN)

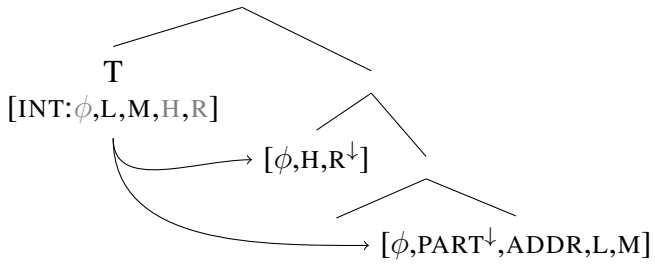
To illustrate the workings of our analysis, we return to the pattern in (9). There is no blocked Agree with the object in the 3.non-R>1 case, because 3rd person non-R subjects bear neither a dynamic feature nor a SAT feature. There is blocked Agree with the object in the 3R>1 case, because the dynamic feature $R^{\downarrow}$ deletes ϕ from the probe's INT features – so 1st person ends up not bearing any of the probe's INT features, as shown in (16a). In the 3R>2L case, however, the object is able to Agree because L is an INT feature, as shown in (16b).

(16) *Dynamic interaction: Agree with* R *deletes* R, H, *and* ϕ *from* INT

a. *3*R *subject blocks Agree with 1st person object* (gray = deleted)



b. *3*R *subject does not block Agree with 2*L *object* (gray = deleted)



is less restrictive than the feature-conception in that it makes it perfectly possible to define probes that interact with ad hoc sets of features (e.g. INT:{[SPKR], [FEM]}). One proposal along these lines is made by Alam and Kumaran (2021). It remains to be seen whether any cases of apparent interaction with non-natural classes of features can be reanalyzed in terms of classes that are suitable for recognition as nodes in a feature geometry.' For our purposes, though, it is absolutely crucial that a) R entails H and b) M/L are not entailed by R/H. This indicates that the INT set cannot be a single node in the geometry (unless we were to assume an implausible entailment hierarchy such as L → M → R → H). On the other hand, there is indeed a clear sense – though we have not formalized this – in which the INT set we have posited, [ϕ,L,M,H,R], is a natural class, as it consists of all features entailed by respect features (anywhere on the respect scale). The same goes for the INT set [ϕ,PART,SPKR,ADDR] (which, as we noted, would be necessary to port the type of probe Deal's paper argues for into our model): it is the set of all features entailed by any person features.

3 Focus obviates restrictions on agreement

In this section we show that focus obviates restrictions on agreement. The hierarchy effect is obviated by focus: focused objects always agree (as we saw in section 2.1). Focus also obviates the argumenthood requirement on agreement: focused nominals other than the subject and object can agree. To account for the obviation of the hierarchy effect, we posit a focus probe on a dedicated clause-peripheral Focus head. To account for the obviation of the argumenthood requirement, we propose that overt focus movement to the edge of a DP/PP phase renders otherwise-inaccessible nominals visible to the Focus probe.

3.1 Focus obviates the hierarchy effect

If an object in a transitive construction has a contrastive focus interpretation, the hierarchy effect disappears. Contrastively focused objects are always tracked by agreement, regardless of ϕ-features. In (17a), for instance, the verb does not agree with the object, since the subject>object configuration is 2L>1. But in (17b), with the same subject>object configuration, the verb mandatorily agrees, due to the contrastively focused object. (Bold indicates focus.)

(17) *Focus obviates blocked Agree with the object*

a. tu həmra piṭ -l -æ / #-əhi(k)
2L.NOM 1.ACC hit -PAST -2L / #-2L>1
'You hit me.' (Yadava et al. 2019:63)

b. tu **həmra** piṭ -l -əhi(k) / #-æ
2L.NOM 1.ACC hit -PAST -2L>1 / #-2L
'You hit me$_{FOC}$.' (Yadava et al. 2019:63)

The alternate agreement shown in each of (17a-b), which is incompatible with the focus status of the object, is reported to be infelicitous rather than ungrammatical. This is because focus is not overtly marked in these sentences. With overt focus marking on an object through a vowel change on some accusative forms as in (18b), optionally coupled with focus movement to the clausal left periphery as in (18c), verbal agreement that doesn't track the object is not merely infelictious, but ungrammatical, as a non-contrastive interpretation cannot be coerced when focus marking is present.

(18) *Overtly focused nominals obligatorily Agree*

a. o hunka dekh -l -əith /*-kəinh
3R.NOM 3R.ACC see -PAST -3R /*3R>3R
'He.R saw him.R (Yadava et al. 2019:72)

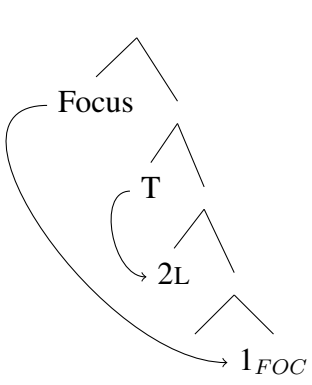
b. o hunk **-e** dekh -əl -kəinh /*-əith
3R.NOM 3R.ACC -FOC see -PAST -3R>3R /*-3R
'He.R saw him.R$_{FOC}$ (Yadava et al. 2019:72)

c. hunk **-e** o dekh -əl -kəinh /*-əith
3R.ACC -FOC 3R.NOM see -PAST -3R>3R /*-3R
'He.R saw him.R$_{FOC}$ (Yadava et al. 2019:72)

Our account so far does not predict the obviation of hierarchy effects in the presence of focus. Even if we added FOCUS to the probe's INT features, this would still incorrectly rule out object agreement when the subject is 2nd person, because ADDR is a SAT feature.[9]

To account for focus agreement, we posit a dedicated [INT:FOCUS] probe on a Focus head, separate from the T probe responsible for non-focus agreement. This is shown in (19), which represents (17b). This probe is not subject to any hierarchy effect: it copies all of the features from any argument which bears FOCUS. We propose that the Focus head and T undergo Fusion, allowing them to spell out jointly.[10]. This ensures that the agreement morphology always tracks features of focused arguments, even if they are not copied to T.[11]

(19) *A dedicated Focus probe obviates blocked Agree with the object*



Focus probe = [INT:FOC]
T probe = [INT: ϕ, L, M, H, R]
dynamic features = R$^{\downarrow}$, PART$^{\downarrow}$

[9]In other words, the problem is that SAT constraints are inviolable. See Kumaran 2022 for a proposal that they are violable, which resolves the problem.

[10]The assumption that agreement is the spell-out of a Fused head may be independently necessary, as this is a standard analysis of agreement with extra-clausal referents such as the speech act addressee, which is attested in Maithili (see Bickel et al. 1999). See e.g. Alok's (2021) analysis of allocutive agreement in the closely related language Magahi.

[11]One data point which seems to favor this analysis: ditransitive direct objects, which fail to agree when non-focused (as in (ia)), do agree when focused (as in (ib)).

(i) a. həm **tora** bəcha de -l -iəu / #-iæ
1.NOM 2L.ACC baby give -PAST -1>2L / #-1>3
'I gave a baby to you.L.' (Yadava et al. 2019: 73)
b. həm tora **bəcha** de -l -iæ / #-iəu
1.NOM 2L.ACC baby give -PAST -1>3 / #-1>2L
'I gave a baby$_{FOC}$ to you.L.' (Yadava et al. 2019: 73)

We do not, however, have an explanation for why ditransitive direct objects are inaccessible to the T probe but not to the Focus probe. Keine (2020) proposes, primarily drawing evidence from the related language Hindi-Urdu, that different probes within a language can have different, idiosyncratic locality conditions – which appears to be the situation here. However, Keine's model only predicts blocked agreement across clause boundaries, so it cannot account for this pattern. Thus, although the different locality conditions for the two probes seem to validate the idea that they are indeed two separate probes, more work needs to be done here. (But see Kumaran 2022 for an account of these facts using only one probe, within a more powerful, constraint-based model of Agree.)

3.2 Focus obviates the argumenthood requirement for agreement

Some focused nominals agree even though they are not arguments of the verb. Agreement tracks focused possessors internal to argument DPs (20b) as well as focused nominals internal to some PPs (21).[12]

(20) *Focused DP-internal possessor agrees*

a. tohər **nokər** ae -l -ai /#-əu
2L.GEN servant come -PAST -3 /#-2L.NN
'Your.L servant came.' (Yadava et al. 2019:51)

b. **tohər** nokər ae -l -əu /#æ-l-əi
2L.GEN servant come -PAST -2L.NN /#-3
'Your.L$_{FOC}$ servant came.' (Yadava et al. 2019:51)

(21) *Focused PP-internal nominal agrees*

həm **tohər** səŋe khana pəkəu -l -iəu
1.NOM 2L.GEN with food cook -PAST -1>2L
'I cooked food with you.L$_{FOC}$' (Yadava et al. 2019:53)

Following Yadava et al. (2019:2.5.), we assume that possessor control of agreement as in (20) is not a possessor raising construction. Various constituency tests indicate that the possessor and possessum form a constituent – see Stump and Yadav 1988. In general, linear ordering of constituents is fairly free in Maithili. For instance, numeral classifiers and nouns are separable, as in (22) (data from a variety of Maithili spoken in Janakpur):

(22) a. həmra pacʈa beʈa aich
me.dat five-CL son are(3NH)
'I have five sons' (Stump & Yadav 1988:34)

b. beʈa həmra pacʈa aich
son me.dat five-CL are(3NH)

c. həmra aich beʈa pacʈa
me.dat are(3NH) son five-CL

d. beʈa həmra aich pacʈa
son me.dat are(3NH) five-CL

However, any constituent reordering which breaks up a possessor and possessum is

[12]The gloss 'NN' denotes agreement with a single non-nominative controller, which is morphologically distinct from nominative intransitive agreement – see Table 1. In transitives, portmanteau agreement with the nominative subject plus a focused possessor of the subject or object is possible – see Yadava et al. 2019:74 for examples. We lack full paradigms detailing the agreement patterns for all possible constructions involving argument-internal possessors. Documenting and analyzing these patterns should be an interesting area for future work. Our discussion in this paper only addresses a single generalization: that focused argument-internal material is able to Agree but non-focused argument-internal material never Agrees.

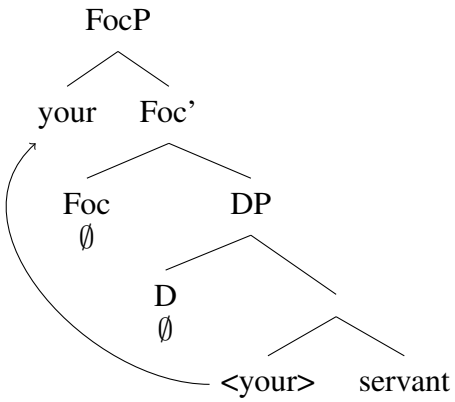
ungrammatical, as shown in (23) (see also Yadava et al. 2019:60-61):

(23) a. həm dekhaliau [**tora** beʈa-ke]
I saw-1>2L your son
'I saw your$_{FOC}$ son' (Stump & Yadav 1988:36)
b. *həm tora dekhaliau beʈa-ke
I your saw-1>3H son
c. *həm beʈa-ke tora dekhaliau
I son your saw-1>2L
d. *həm beʈa-ke dekhaliau tora
I son saw-1>2L your
e. *həm dekhaliau beʈa-ke tora
I saw-1>2L son your

Agreement with material internal to DPs and PPs is predicted to be impossible according to the Phase Impenetrability Condition (Chomsky 2000) – unless it is at the phase edge (i.e. the specifier of the highest head in the extended projection). We propose that non-argument agreement as in (20)-(21) does in fact conform to this prediction: the focused material does (overtly) move to the phase edge. It has been argued that in languages with agreement across a CP boundary, this agreement is only licensed if the agreement controller moves to the CP phase edge (e.g. Polinsky and Potsdam's (2001) analysis of cross-clausal topic agreement in Tsez). The same appears to be true of agreement across a DP/PP boundary in Maithili. Following Simpson and Syed's (2016) proposal for the related Eastern Indo-Aryan language Bangla, we propose that Maithili nominals include a peripheral functional head Foc, which attracts focused material to its specifier. (This nominal Foc head should not be confused with the clausal Focus head.) This specifier position is the phase edge and is therefore accessible for agreement.

Given the data shown so far, this movement may seem like a stipulation to fit the agreement facts to the predictions of phase theory. In (20), it is not obvious that movement has taken place in (20b), as the the possessor is already leftmost in (20a). Movement is string-vacuous, as shown in (24). (The same applies in PPs, since P heads surface as postpositions.)

(24) *String-vacuous possessor movement*



However, the presence of focus movement is apparent in constructions where the possessum nominal phrase includes overt elements base-generated higher than the possessor. In particular, Maithili allows constructions with both a possessor and a demonstrative. In pragmatically neutral contexts, the demonstrative precedes the possessor, as in (25). With this word order, agreement cannot track the possessor. However, when the possessor is focused, it precedes the demonstrative, and mandatorily controls agreement, as in (26).

(25) *Non-focused possessor: pronounced after demonstrative, cannot agree*

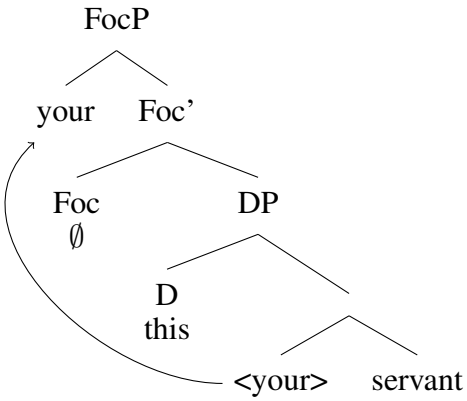
i tohər nokər ae -l -əi /*-əu
this 2L.GEN servant come -PAST -3 /*-2L.NN
'This servant of yours.L came' (Yadava et al. 2019:75)

(26) *Focused possessor: pronounced before demonstrative, must agree*

tohər i nokər ae -l -əu /*-əi
2L.GEN this servant come -PAST -2L.NN /*-3
'This servant of yours.L_{FOC} came' (Yadava et al. 2019:75)

We take these examples as evidence for overt focus movement of the possessor past the demonstrative to the phase edge (Spec,FocP), as shown in (27).

(27) *Possessor movement across a demonstrative*



The obligatory movement of the focused possessor in (27) allows it to Agree with the verb – as predicted by phase theory. In light of this data, it no longer seems stipulative to assume that the same type of movement, although string-vacuous, applies to focused nominals whose base position is leftmost within a DP or PP. Thus, despite appearances, agreement across DP/PP boundaries in Maithili does not in fact violate standardly-assumed locality conditions on Agree: it actually conforms to the predictions of phase theory.

4 Conclusion

This paper analyzed the complex interplay of person, honorificity, and focus in determining control of agreement in a variety of Maithili. First, we examined the distribution of single vs. double agreement. We argued for a modified version of

Deal's (2021) model of Agree, operating over a feature geometry which separates honorific features from dishonorific features. Second, we examined the apparent obviation of a locality restriction and of a ϕ-feature hierarchy restriction when the agreement controller bears a focus interpretation. We argued that these are due to movement- and agreement-triggering focus heads in the nominal and clausal peripheries respectively.

To our knowledge, we have provided the most comprehensive Agree-based account of Maithili agreement to date. However, there remain many issues we have not addressed. We conclude by highlighting some areas for future work:

Our discussion has centered on agreement in transitive constructions with one nominative and one accusative argument, as well as intransitives with a nominative subject and genitive possessor. It remains to be seen to what extent our analysis can extend to the full range of agreement patterns across all argument-structure and case-marking combinations – for instance, agreement in ditransitive constructions and constructions with a non-nominative subject.

Further, within all of these different constructions, it should be possible to insert focused material in various positions. We have proposed that all focused material is able to Agree provided that it is not separated from the probe by a phase boundary; we would like to see whether or not this prediction is actually borne out beyond the data presented in this paper. We also predict that it is possible for T to Agree with the subject and object and for the Focus probe to Agree with a third, focused element. In such cases, it is unclear whether the object or the focused element should control secondary agreement. In some data, the focused element appears to win out (e.g. Yadava et al. 2019:74), but we are not sure whether this is always true.

Finally, we have not attempted to provide a morphological analysis of the agreement suffixes, which should be an interesting project in itself.[13] For instance, the element *-nh* looks like a H/R marker, except it fails to appear in certain configurations with a 2H/R subject – a pattern which does not seem straightforward to account for.

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[13] We thank Yash Sinha for helpful discussion of this issue.

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