

Agree by minimal search: A case study of the antiagreement effect

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1 Minimal search, Labeling Algorithm, and Agree

This paper puts forward a revised version Chomsky's (2000 et seq.) probe-goal theory based on his recent view on Labeling Algorithm and minimal search (MS). In particular, I will argue for the following:

- (1) Phrases can probe.
- (2) Lower copies/traces are invisible for probe operations by MS.

These proposals are inspired by Chomsky's recent speculation that Labeling Algorithm and Agree should be reduced to MS. See the following excerpts:

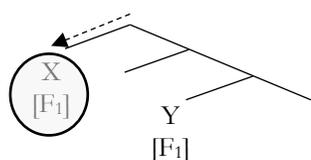
"...The simplest assumption is that L(abeling) A(lgorithm) is just minimal search, presumably appropriating a third factor principle, as in Agree and other operations." (Chomsky 2013:43)

"...There isn't any identifiable Probe [in the case of Labeling Algorithm]. There's just a search procedure, which is trying to find... It takes a look at a syntactic object and it's asking the question, "What are you?". Now you could formulate Agree that way. You could say there is no Probe, it's just that you're searching for some unvalued feature, and then if you find it, you look for something that will be valued by its relations to it. That's the Probe-Goal relation. But they're reduced both just to search." (Chomsky 2015b: 81)

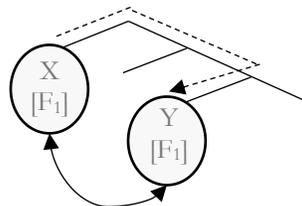
If we take the ideas expressed here seriously, Agree should not be an operation *triggered* by probes that are usually assumed to bear unvalued features. Rather, it should be understood as merely a simple, top-down search operation that attempts to match two syntactic objects with identical agreement features.

Based on this view, I propose that what have been called 'probes' and 'goals' are nothing but elements that get found by minimal search first and second, respectively, as shown in (3).

(3) a. MS finds X first



b. MS finds Y next. X and Y Agree for F₁



Furthermore, my proposal (1) states that what gets found by MS first (= probe) can be a phrase, or a head as standardly assumed.

My second proposal that lower copies are invisible for probe operations is in line with what Chomsky assumes for Labeling Algorithm. I propose that this condition also holds for the operation Agree because both operations are regulated by MS.

The purpose of this paper is to argue for these two proposals by showing that they provide a straightforward account of the so-called antiagreement effect (Ouhalla 1993).¹ The paper is organized as follows: In the next section, I will describe the antiagreement effect and its distribution. In section 3, an analysis of the effect based on the probe-goal system described above will be provided. Section 4 will show that the proposed analysis correctly predicts the distribution of the antiagreement effect. Section 5 will discuss cases in which the effect is triggered by a negative concord item. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2 The antiagreement effect

In what follows, based on the framework sketched in the previous section, I will argue that the antiagreement effect (AAE: Ouhalla 1993), which refers to the suppression of subject-predicate agreement induced by subject extraction, should be accounted for as an agreement intervention effect, in which an element with a certain feature intervenes between the extracted subject and T^0 . Focusing on the data from Berber, Breton and Kinande, it will be argued that ϕ -feature-bearing C^0 , which triggers so-called *wh*-agreement (Chung 1998; Watanabe 1996) with the extracted subject, is an AAE-inducing intervener in those languages. The proposed analysis can correctly predict the following facts: (i) there are AAE languages and non-AAE languages, (ii) the AAE is only induced by subject extraction, (iii) the AAE languages differ as to whether long subject extraction induces the effect or not, and (iv) the AAE can be undone in negative clauses in Berber and Breton. Finally, it will be shown that the intervention approach can be extended to a hitherto unaccounted for case of AAE in Berber: AAE induced by a negative concord item (Ouali 2005).

The following sentences from Berber (VSO; Afro-Asiatic) exemplify a typical case of the AAE. The finite verb agrees with the subject in the canonical VSO sentence in (4a). However, when the subject is extracted by A'-movement as in *wh*-

¹ In Kinjo (2015), I argued that this version of probe-goal theory can provide an account for an asymmetry between pre- and post-verbal subjects with respect to richness of the verbal agreement they control. I proposed that the asymmetry should be attributed to the different roles of the subject, depending on its relative position to T^0 : pre-verbal subjects act as probes, while post-verbal subjects act as goals for ϕ -agreement (see also Kobayashi (2014) for a similar account).

interrogatives (4b), relative clauses (4c) and clefts (4d), the verb has a special, non-agreement form, glossed as AAE.^{2,3}

- (4) *Quebliyeen Tamazight Berber* (Ouali 2011)
- a. *θɛla θamttut araw*
 3sgF.saw woman boys
 ‘The woman saw the boys.’
- b. *mani θamttut ag ɛlan/*θɛla araw? Wh-Q*
 which woman C saw.AAE/*3sgF.saw boys
 ‘Which woman saw the boys?’
- c. *θamttut ag ɛlan/*θɛla araw RC*
 woman C saw.AAE/*3sgF.saw boys
 ‘The woman who saw the boys.’
- d. *θamttut-a ag ɛlan/*θɛla araw Cleft*
 woman-this C saw.AAE/*3sgF.saw boys
 ‘It was this woman who saw the boys.’

This effect is also observed in Breton (VSO; Celtic) as in (5) and Kinande (SVO; Bantu) as in (6). Although they exhibit the AAE in all three environments discussed in (4), only *wh*-interrogative examples are shown here as a result of space limitations.

- (5) *Tregor Breton* (Borseley and Stephen 1989)
*petre paotreda a lenne/*lennent al levrioù*
 which boys C read.AAE/*read.3pl the books
 ‘Which boys read the books?’
- (6) *Kinande* (Schneider-Zioga 2007)
*IyOndI yO u-langIra/*a-langIra Marya*
 who₁ C₁ AAE-saw/*Agr-saw Mary
 ‘Who saw Mary?’

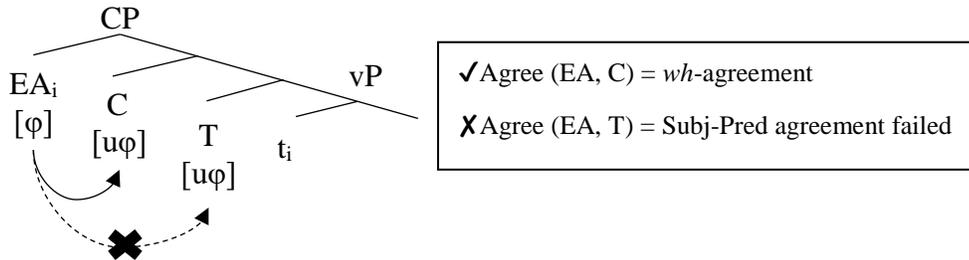
Based on the MS-based conception of Agree sketched out in section 1, I will argue that this effect is induced if there is a ϕ -feature-bearing element between the extracted subject and T^0 , which blocks subject-predicate agreement. It will be shown that in the three languages discussed above, C^0 has an unvalued ϕ -feature ($u\phi$) in subject extraction contexts, which triggers so-called *wh*-agreement (Chung 1998; Watanabe 1996 a.o.) with the extracted subject, and which blocks agreement

² Abbreviations used in this paper include: 1,2,3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person, 1,2,3,... = noun class, M = masculine, F = feminine, sg = singular, pl = plural, Nom = nominative, Neg = negation, C = complementizer, Agr = subject agreement form, EA = external argument.

³ Since there are significant dialectal variations within Berber and Breton with respect to the AAE (see Ouhalla 2005; Ouali 2011 for Berber, Borseley and Stephen 1989 for Breton), I specify the name of the dialect where possible. See also section 6.

between the subject and T^0 . I call this the intervention account of the AAE, as schematized in (7).

(7) The intervention account of the AAE



Before spelling out the analysis in detail, the following subsections summarize the distribution of the AAE to be explained under the proposed probe-goal mechanism.

2.1 AAE vs. non-AAE languages

The first important fact about the AAE is that there are languages with this effect as described in the previous section, and those without it. As shown in (8) and (9), English and Arabic, for instance, do not exhibit the AAE. Any satisfactory theory of the AAE is expected to explain the difference between the two groups of languages.

- (8) a. Which boy likes Mary? *English*
 b. Which boys like Mary?

- (9) *ʔayy-u tullabin wasal-uu/*-a ? Arabic*
 which-Nom students arrived-3pl/*-3sg
 ‘Which students have arrived?’

2.2. No AAE by non-subject extraction

The second fact is that this effect is only induced by subject extraction. The following examples from Berber and Kinande show that non-subject extraction cannot trigger the AAE morphology on finite verbs.

- (10) *Quebliyeen Tamazight Berber (Ouali 2011)*
 ma ag iswa/*swan *Mohan?*
 what C 3sgM.drunk/*drank.AAE Mohand
 ‘What did Mohand drink?’

- (11) *Kinande (Schneider-Zioga 2007)*
 ekihi kyO Kambale a-alangila/*u-alangila
 who₇ C₇ Kambale Agr-saw/*AAE-saw
 ‘What did Kambale see?’

2.3 AAE by long subject extraction

Thirdly, in some AAE languages the effect is sensitive to the locality of subject extraction. Berber is one such language. Observe the following Berber example in (12). In the embedded clause from which the subject is long extracted to the matrix clause, the finite verb agrees with the extracted subject, and hence there is no AAE. On the other hand, Breton exhibits the effect even in embedded clauses, as exemplified in (13). To summarize, long subject extraction does not induce the AAE in Berber, while it does in Breton.

- (12) *Quebliyeen Tamazight Berber* (Ouali 2011) No AAE by long ext
mani θaməttuti ag inna ʕli
 which woman C 3sgM.said Ali
 [θʕla/*ʕlan ti argaz-nəz]
 3sgF.saw/*saw.AAE husband-her
 ‘Which woman did Ali say saw her husband?’

- (13) *Tregor Breton* (Borsley and Stephen 1989) AAE by long ext
petre patredi a sonj deoc’h
 which boys C think to.2sg
 [a lenne/*lennent ti al levrioù]
 C read.AAE/*read.3pl the books
 ‘Which boys do you think read the books?’

2.4 Cancellation of AAE in negative clauses

Finally, in Berber and Breton, the AAE can be cancelled in negative clauses. In Berber, the AAE is optional – the finite verb can take either the subject agreement form or the AAE form as in (14). In Breton, finite verbs cannot appear with the AAE form but must have the subject-agreement form in negative clauses, as exemplified in (15).

- (14) *Tarifit Berber* (Ouhalla 1993) AAE is optional
man tamaghart ay ur tssn/yssn Mohand
 which woman C Neg 3sgF.know/know.AAE Mohand
 ‘Which woman doesn’t know Mohand?’

- (15) *Breton* (Ouhalla 1993) No AAE
*ar nugale ne lennent/*lenne ket al levr*
 the children Neg read.3pl/*read.AAE Neg the book
 ‘The children who did not read the books’

3 Analysis

The intervention account of the AAE is crucially based on the observation that in the AAE languages discussed so far, there is a complementizer-like element

immediately after the A'-extracted phrase (*ag/ay* in Berber, *a* in Breton, *yo/kyo* in Kinande). This phenomenon has been called *wh*-agreement in the literature (Chung 1994, 1998; Watanabe 1996 a.o.). What is particularly important for the current discussion is the fact that the *wh*-agreement complementizer in Kinande inflects for the noun class of the extracted phrase (1 = *yo*, 2 = *bo*, 7 = *kyo*, 8 = *byo*), as exemplified in (16).

- (16) *Kinande* (Schneider-Zioga 2007)
- a. *ekihi kyO Kambale a-alangila?*
 what₇ C₇ Kambale Agr-saw
 'What did Kambale see?'
- b. *IyOndi yO Kambale a-alangila?*
 who C₁ Kambale Agr-saw
 'Who did Kambale see?'

The *wh*-agreement facts in Kinande suggest that it is a kind of ϕ -feature agreement between the extracted phrase and C⁰. I assume that this is true of the other *wh*-agreement languages, even if they lack overt morphological inflection on the complementizer. The core insight of the intervention account of the AAE is that *wh*-agreement blocks subject-predicate agreement when the extracted phrase is the subject.

The account is based on the following assumptions:

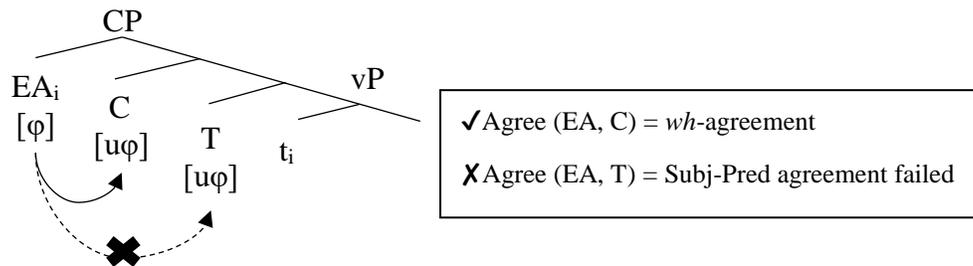
- (17) a. Subject movement to Spec CP cannot proceed via Spec TP (Rizzi 1990; Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007; Bošković 2008; Erlewine 2016).
 b. Agree takes place at the phase level (Chomsky 2007, 2008).
 c. Phrases can probe (Fujii 2001; Bošković 2007; Kato et al. 2014).
 d. *Wh*-agreement is ϕ -agreement.
 e. Lower copies/traces are invisible for probe operations by minimal search (Chomsky 2013, 2015a; Epstein et al. 2014), i.e. lower copies cannot be probed.

First, I assume that when subjects move to Spec CP, they have to move there directly, skipping Spec TP (17a). As I will discuss in 4.4, I adopt Erlewine's (2016) Anti-Locality constraint, which bans movements that are 'too short' in syntax. Secondly, following Chomsky (2007, 2008), I assume that the operation Agree takes place when the phase is complete (17b). In effect, T⁰ does not probe at the time of its introduction into the derivation, but instead it must wait until the CP phase is completed. (17c) and (17e) are the two core proposals to be defended in this paper as I stated in section 1.

Now let us consider the derivation of subject extraction in AAE languages, schematized in (18). First, the external argument (EA = subject) moves from Spec vP to Spec CP, without stopping in Spec TP (cf. 17a). Now, the CP-phase is completed, and Agree takes place (cf. 17b). The extracted subject probes (cf. 17c)

and agrees with the ϕ -feature of C^0 , producing a morphological realization in the form of a *wh*-agreement complementizer (cf. 17d). Because the subject is already in an Agree relation with C^0 , it cannot reach T^0 for subject-predicate agreement due to the minimality condition (Rizzi 1990). As a result, non-agreement or default morphology is assigned to T^0 , which forces the finite verb to be realized with what we call the AAE form. Note that this account does not prevent syntactic heads from probing. Still, since lower copies are assumed to be invisible for the probe operation, T^0 cannot probe for the subject as its goal (cf. 17e).⁴

(18) The intervention account of the AAE



In this way, under the proposed analysis, the AAE is predicted to arise when there is an agreement intervener between the extracted subject and T^0 . In the three languages discussed in this paper, C^0 with an unvalued ϕ -feature, which triggers *wh*-agreement, takes on this role. In the following section, I will show that the distribution of the AAE is naturally accounted for by (18). In section 5, it will be shown that *wh*-agreement is not the only AAE-inducing intervener, but negation-agreement between a negative concord item and Neg^0 can also trigger the effect in certain configurations.

4 Deriving the distribution of the AAE

4.1 AAE- vs. non-AAE-languages

I have proposed that the AAE is induced by *wh*-agreement in these three languages. Why then are there non-AAE languages such as English and Arabic? The intervention account provides a straightforward answer to it: In non-AAE languages, there is no ϕ -feature on C^0 , and hence no *wh*-agreement. If there is no ϕ -feature on C^0 , there is nothing to disrupt the ϕ -agreement between the extracted subject and T^0 , as represented in (19). Therefore, the AAE is predicted not to arise in such languages.

⁴ In the AAE languages discussed here, V-v is raised to T^0 , but crucially, should not to C^0 . If V-v is raised to C^0 along with T^0 , it raises the ϕ -features on T to C, which makes it possible for the extracted subject to probe for the ϕ -feature on T. I leave the implications of this possibility for future research.

- (23) *Quebliyeen Tamazight Berber* (Ouali 2011) No AAE by long ext
mani θaməttuti ag inna ʕli
 which woman C 3sgM.said Ali
 [θʕla/*ʕlan ti argaz-nəz]
 3sgF.saw/*saw.AAE husband-her
 ‘Which woman did Ali say saw her husband?’
- (24) *Tregor Breton* (Borsley and Stephen 1989) AAE by long ext
petre patred_i a sonj deoc’h
 which boys C think to.2sg
 [a lenne/*lennent ti al levrioù]
 C read.AAE/*read.3pl the books
 ‘Which boys do you think read the books?’

Under the intervention account, it is predicted that the presence of *wh*-agreement and the AAE are correlated. This prediction is borne out in embedded clauses in the languages under discussion. In Berber (23), the *wh*-agreement complementizer cannot appear in the embedded clause (Ouali 2011), and the AAE is absent. On the other hand, the embedded clause in Breton (24) exhibits the AAE, where the *wh*-agreement complementizer *a* must be present (Borsley and Stephen 1989). Kinande provides further support for this analysis. In this language, the *wh*-agreement complementizer is optional in embedded clauses. If it is present, the AAE arises (25a), but there is no AAE otherwise (25b).

- (25) *Kinande* (Schneider-Zioga 2007)
- a. *IyOndi yO Kambale a-kaBula*
 who₁ C₁ Kambale Agr-wondered
 [nga-yO ti u-kalangIra Marya]
 if-C₁ AAE-saw Mary
- b. *IyOndi yO Kambale a-kaBula*
 who₁ C₁ Kambale
 [nga ti a-kalangIra Marya]
 if Agr-saw Mary
 ‘lit. Who does Kambale wondered if __ saw Mary?’

These data provide strong supporting evidence for the intervention account of the AAE, which predicts a correlation between *wh*-agreement and the AAE. The manner in which this correlation manifests across the three languages discussed in this paper is summarized in (26).

(26) *Wh-Agr C⁰* and the AAE in embedded clauses

	Berber	Breton	Kinande	
<i>Wh-Agr C⁰</i>	NO	YES	YES	NO
AAE	NO	YES	YES	NO

4.3 Cancellation of AAE in negative clauses

Finally, consider the fact that the AAE can be undone in negative clauses in Berber and Breton. Remember that in Berber, the AAE is optional, and in Breton, it is obligatorily missing in negative clauses, as repeated here as (27) and (28), respectively.

(27) *Tarifit Berber* (Ouhalla 1993) AAE is optional
man tamaghart ay ur tssn/yssn Mohand
 which woman C Neg 3sgF.know/know.AAE Mohand
 ‘Which woman doesn’t know Mohand?’

(28) *Breton* (Ouhalla 1993) No AAE
*ar nugale ne lennent/*lenne ket al levr*
 the children Neg read.3pl/*read.AAE Neg the book
 ‘The children who did not read the books’

In order to account for this under the intervention approach, in light of the assumption that subject extraction cannot take place via Spec TP, I adopt Erlewine’s (2016) anti-locality constraint on A’-movements (29).

(29) Spec-to-Spec Anti-Locality:
 A’-movement of a phrase from the Specifier of XP must cross a maximal projection other than XP.

According to this constraint, if the subject first moves to Spec TP, and then to Spec CP, the second movement (from Spec TP to Spec CP), which is A’-movement, is prohibited because it does not cross a maximal projection other than TP, as schematized in (30). Due to this constraint, subject extraction cannot proceed via Spec TP because Spec TP and Spec CP are ‘too close’.⁶

(30) [CP EA_i C [TP EA_i T [v_p EA_i v ...]]]
 ↑ _____*_____ | ↑ _____|
 Too short!

The anti-locality constraint (29) implies that if there is another maximal projection between TP and CP, the subject can move to Spec TP on the way to Spec

⁶ The first movement (from Spec vP to Spec TP) is not subject to (29) since it is A-movement.

CP. This is exactly what happens in negative clauses in Berber and Breton if we follow Ouhalla (1991, 1993) in that NegP is located in between TP and CP in the two languages. When NegP is projected, subject extraction can proceed via Spec TP, because the movement from Spec TP to Spec CP is no longer prohibited by the anti-locality constraint due to the presence of NegP, as shown in (31a). Consequently, the subject can leave two higher copies: one at Spec CP and the other at Spec TP. The former agrees with C⁰ for *wh*-agreement, and the latter with T⁰ for subject-predicate agreement, as shown in (31b).⁷ Therefore, the AAE does not manifest here. I assume that EA's movement to Spec NegP is optional in Berber but obligatory in Breton.

- (31) a. [CP EA_i C [NegP Neg [TP EA_i T [v_p EA_i V ...]]]]
 \uparrow $\xrightarrow{\text{OK}}$ \uparrow
 Long enough!
- b. [CP EA_i[φ] C[φ][NegP Neg [TP EA_i[φ] T[φ][v_p EA_i V ...]]]]
 \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow
 Agree (X,C) Agree (EA, T)
 φ -Agr (=Wh-Agr) φ -Agr (Subj-Pred-Agr)

5 The AAE by NCI-subject

Before concluding the paper, I argue that the proposed analysis can be extended to account for cases AAE in which *wh*-agreement is not involved. Consider the following pair of sentences in Berber, in which the subject is the negative concord item (NCI), *agidge* 'no one'. In the canonical VSO word order as in (32a), the finite verb has the subject-agreement form. On the other hand, in the SVO sentence (32b), where the NCI-subject is placed sentence-initially, the AAE appears. These data are significant for the current discussion because they do not involve *wh*-agreement but still exhibit the AAE.

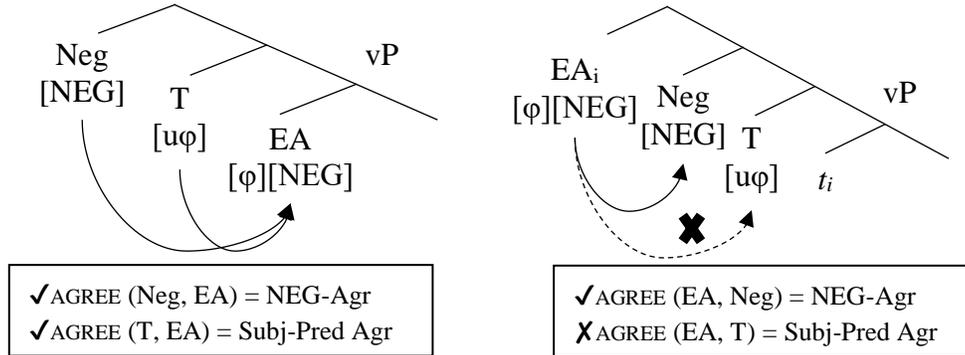
- (32) *Quebliyeen Tamazight Berber* (Ouali 2005)
- a *ur iddi/*iddin agidge* Neg > V > S: No AAE
 Neg 3sg.left/*left.AAE no one
 'No one left.'
- b *agidge ur iddin/*iddi* S > Neg > V: AAE
 no one Neg left.AAE/*3sg.left
 'No one left.'

The proposed analysis provides a way to account for these hitherto unaccounted for data in the AAE literature as further instances of agreement intervention. First, I adopt Zeijlstra's (2004) view that NCIs are licensed via Agree with Neg⁰ for their

⁷ Note that (17e) states that lower copies cannot *be probed*, but it does not prevent them from *probing*.

[NEG] feature (see also Haegeman and Lohndal 2010 and works cited therein). Secondly, I assume that NCIs have both [NEG] and φ -features. With these assumptions, consider the derivation of (32a) and (32b), represented as (33a) and (33b), respectively. Remember that NegP is projected above T in Berber (see 4.4).

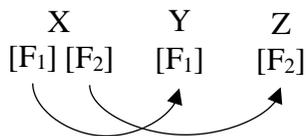
(33) a. Neg > V > NCI-Subj : No AAE b. NCI-Subj > Neg > T : AAE



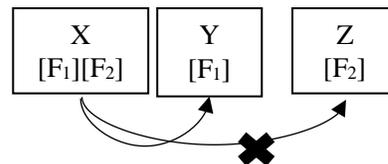
In (33a), where the subject is assumed to stay lower than T^0 , Neg^0 and T^0 initiate the probing operation for their [NEG] and φ -features, respectively. Their closest goal is the subject, which has two agreement features, and two agreement relations (NEG-agreement and φ -agreement) are therefore successfully established. Consequently, the AAE does not arise here. In (33b), on the other hand, the subject is raised higher than Neg^0 and T^0 . In this configuration, the probe is the subject. I assume that it probes for both [NEG] and φ -features, and first agrees with Neg^0 for NEG-agreement as it is the closest goal. Since the subject has already agreed with Neg^0 , it cannot probe T^0 for φ -agreement, resulting in the AAE.

What is assumed here is somewhat non-standard in probe-goal frameworks. It is implicitly or explicitly assumed that what initiates the probe operation is an individual feature, as represented in (34). In this model, given a situation, in which the highest element X has two agreement features, each feature probes for its matching feature within its search domain, and no intervention effect is expected in (34). However, in (33), it is assumed that what Agree establishes are relations between syntactic objects, rather than features. In this model, if the probe X has two features, it probes for a syntactic object which has those features, either one or both. X finds Y, which has one of the matching features with X, and they agree. Since X has now agreed with Y, it cannot initiate further probing, hence fails to agree with Z.

(34) Probing by features



(35) Probing by syntactic objects



6 Conclusion

In this paper, I defended a new version of the probe-goal theory of agreement. The main innovations of this version are (i) phrases can probe and (ii) lower copies are invisible for probe operations. I argued that this version of the probe-goal theory enables us to analyze the AAE as agreement intervention: AAE occurs if the language has an unvalued ϕ -feature on C^0 , which triggers *wh*-agreement with the extracted subject, blocking subject-predicate agreement between the extracted subject and T^0 . I showed that the analysis correctly predicts the following facts about the AAE:

- (36) a. Presence/absence of the AAE across languages
- b. Absence of the AAE in non-subject extraction constructions
- c. Presence/absence of the AAE in embedded clauses in AAE languages
- d. Absence/optionality of the AAE in negative clauses

Furthermore, I suggested that *wh*-agreement is not the *only* AAE-inducing intervener. The AAE data in section 5 indicate that NEG-agreement can also induce this effect in certain configurations. This raises the possibility that the proposed analysis may extend to AAE languages which appear to lack *wh*-agreement, such as Northern Italian dialects (Trentino and Fiorentino; Brandi and Cordin 1989).

Finally, it should be noted that the nature of the AAE is far more complicated than I have presented here (see Baier 2016) and this paper is not intended to provide a full-fledged account for every aspect of the effect. For instance, in some AAE languages, this effect appears to be ‘partial’ – person and gender agreement get lost while number agreement is retained (e.g. dialects of Tamazight Berber; see Ouhalla 2005). Also, in Bantu languages, the AAE is induced only by class 1 nominal phrases (see Henderson 2013 a.o.). I leave it to future research whether the intervention account can extend to such cases.

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